Collaboration recording its own condition (*3 years, 5 works, 3 mirrors*) [*]

Simon Baker

Je me voyais me voir, (I saw myself seeing myself, or, I saw me see me) a remarkable, quotable line from Paul Valery's 1917 poem *La Jeune Parque.*[1] Doubly remarkable in fact, provoking comment first from the surrealist Louis Aragon in his 1928 *Treatise on Style* and then, channelling Aragon, Jacques Lacan returns to the same phrase in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* in 1973.[2] Lacan, for his part, signals this interpolation at the start of the book, recalling lines from Aragon's 1963 poem *Le Fou d'Elsa*:[3]

> *I am that wretch comparable with mirrors*
> *That reflect but cannot see*
> *Like them my eye is empty and like them inhabited*
> *By your absence which makes them blind*

Lacan borrows Aragon's image of an eye inhabited by the absence of another; mirrors that remain sightless (and therefore useless) until engaged by a viewer, to evoke an associative complex of sight, reflection and wholeness. Having long since identified the mirror 'stage', Lacan continues to recognise and elaborate upon its effects:

> *I saw myself seeing myself*, young Parque says somewhere…We are dealing with the philosopher, who apprehends something that is one of the essential correlates of consciousness in its relation to representation, and which is designated as *I see myself seeing myself*…What isolates this apprehension of thought by itself is a sort of doubt, which has been called methodological doubt, which

concerns whatever might give support to thought in representation…*I see myself seeing myself.* The privilege of the subject seems to be established here from that bipolar reflexive relation by which, as soon as I perceive, my representations belong to me.[4]

Aragon, for his part, long before he became a poet whose romantic sophistries inspired psychoanalysts, was a cynic of impressive wit and verve. There are then, it would seem, two very different Aragons present in Lacan's text, as irreconcilable to their latter-day audiences as they would have been unrecognisable to one another, seeing themselves. For the unsentimental surrealist Aragon, Valery's 'I saw myself seeing myself' is no enigma, on the contrary, it is a clumsy mistake:

> What remains, as far as the eye can see, is Valery alone in front of his mirror, making no discovery, and having only a banal and repetitive glimpse of himself: *je me voyais me voir*, - he could just as easily have said, *je me voyais, me voyais*, which, like certain streets, goes only one way. Very similar to I screwed myself, screwed myself, screwed myself.[5]

The pedantic distinction that Aragon implies between 'I saw myself seeing myself' (a reflexive action) and 'I saw myself, saw myself' (a repetitive tic), it might be argued, lies at the heart of the individual practices of both collaborating artists, John Hilliard and Jemima Stehli, although, it must be added, for completely different reasons. Their relations to this critical difference might, in fact, be described as absolute mirror opposites.

Fig. 1: John Hilliard, *He Sat Gazing At the Mirror*, 1976.
Image courtesy of the artist.

Hilliard, has, since the early seventies, insisted on a rigorous attention to the phenomenology of photographic practices and processes, carefully and self-consciously contriving a series of schemes or conceits with their own inbuilt repetitive components: from early works like *Camera Recording Its Own Condition* (1971), *He Sat Gazing At the Mirror* (1976) or *X* (1982), to his most recent multiple exposures, overlaying several backgrounds around a repeated central image, subject or object (Fig. 1).[6] Stehli, for her part, in series of works like *After Helmut Newton's 'Here They Come'* (1999), *Standing Nude/Studio Nude* (2001) (Fig. 2) and *Mirror*, (2001) has returned again and again to the uncomfortable subject position that Aragon assigns Valery, 'alone, in front of the mirror' so to speak, risking both banal *and* repetitive glimpses of herself, in order to bring about the conditions for a genuine reflexive *affect*.[7] So although they may seem to have mirrors and cameras in common, and although it may appear that these blind objects have been facing comparable subjects, there is no reason to think that their collaboration would be straightforward. Following the Aragon quote to its conclusion; each enters the one-way street of the other's practice (and see themselves, see themselves, see themselves) from the opposite direction.

Being introduced into the way of seeing of another can be an uncomfortable experience, and it is only relatively recently that art historians and theorists have sought to understand the resistance implicit in the process, most usefully in relation to the practice of portraiture.[8] Although Gertrude Stein had long since succeeded in characterising the problem (in a proto-Lacanian sense) through an analogy with the operation of language. Explaining her portrait by Picasso, the result of eighty long sittings (and a crisis of confidence/stroke of genius, depending on your reading of his replacement of her face with a mask) Stein wrote: 'I was and I am happy with my portrait, for me, it is I, and it is the only reproduction of me which is always I, for me.'[9] Stein's calculated division of her own subjectivity (into 'me' and 'I') accompanies the process by which she was incorporated into her portrait through a series of exchanges with the artist. The theory of the transactional nature of the portrait (applied to this situation with

Fig. 2: Jemima Stehli, *Standing Nude/Studio Nude*, 2001
Image courtesy of the artist.

great effect) means, as Stein implies with her account of the relevance of the process of sitting, that the agency of the sitter somehow be incorporated into the interpretation of the resulting image. And if the Lacanian aspect of this transaction theory (since elaborated by both art historians and literary theorists) has anything to teach us, it is that we recognise the relative structural positions of the two active protagonists: the subject of the image and the artist whose gaze they are subject to (the imaginary gaze that they attribute to the artist).[10] 'The gaze I encounter' Lacan says, 'is not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other', and the nature of this gaze is bound up in the confusion at the heart of that same, hypnotic, reflexive phrase (*je me voyais me voir):* exemplary and illusory at the same time.[11]

> From the moment this gaze appears, the subject tries to adapt himself to it, he becomes that punctiform object, that point of vanishing being, with which the subject confuses his own failure...The gaze is specified as unapprehensible. That is why it is, more than any other object, misunderstood, and it is perhaps for this reason, too, that the subject manages, fortunately, to symbolize his own vanishing and punctiform character, in the illusion of the consciousness of *seeing oneself see oneself*, in which the gaze is elided.[12]

Now, one might argue, neither Hilliard nor Stehli make portraits in any conventional sense in their individual practices. Even when collaborators are called into the production of work they are very likely assuming assigned positions that are schematic or structural, rather than personalised. In the series *Strip* (1999), for example, Stehli has people she knew more or less well and who would have been quite easily identifiable (Matthew Collings, Adrian Searle) become 'critics' (Fig. 3). Their apparent participation is however, fundamental to the complex way that the images work. In the first instance they see the 'strip' in a way that the viewer does not, the implication being that they enjoy some privileged point of view. But they also picture the strip for the viewer, releasing the camera shutter to document the artist's action. One might say that they

Fig. 3: Jemima Stehli, *Strip* (Adrian Searle, Matthew Collings), 2001
Image courtesy of the artist.

thereby enact the process of seeing themselves seeing in a thoroughly alienated way. *I saw myself seeing*, the critic might say, *and yet it's not really me looking: this is not how I usually look: the representation is not mine*. The illegitimate nature of the self-image that results is further complicated by the emphatic presence of the artist (signifying the author's power within the work) and its position within a series (signifying a wider authorial rhetoric).

This distinctly uncomfortable position arises from a work that hedges its bets somewhere between a contrived, directed action, imagined by the artist, and the spontaneous reaction of the invited participant. But in selecting as participants art-world figures who would remain themselves (albeit as tropes or characters: curators, critics, writers) Stehli also signals an attitude to the choice of visual material with which she will work. Working with, or through, pre-existing works by photographers (Helmut Newton, Bert Stern), sculptors (Allen Jones, Larry Bell) or painters (Francis Bacon), Stehli has adopted a practice that is neither fully collaborative nor entirely parasitic. In contrast to the more widely adopted systems of appropriation within contemporary art, Stehli

attempts a genuine re-working of subject positions and authorial agency by implicating herself as an artist within the structural, aesthetic regime or even process, of another. In a way then, far from exerting pressure on, or overhauling a pre-existing image (in the way we might associate with artists like Louise Lawler, Sherrie Levine or Richard Prince) Stehli is constantly forcing herself to see herself from, or within, an adopted point of view.

Her series of works *After Helmut Newton's 'Here They Come'* (1999) best exemplifies this aspect of her practice (Fig. 4). To realise these works, Stehli deliberately set out to recreate as closely as possible a single element of one of Newton's most iconic images. In fact, Stehli restaged this single part (the figure on the left) of two of Newton's works, the pendant pair *Sie Kommen I & II*, (1981) which show, side by side, the same four models advancing together, naked and clothed.[13] It would be easy to misread Stehli's gesture here, to set it within the framework offered by gender politics as an attempt to re-claim or even overturn Newton's (and by implication the fashion world's) exploitative, scopophilic attitude. This, however, would be to overlook the extent to which Stehli's work is concerned with, and has as its subject, practice itself: the way in which images are constituted by a particular process. The stake in *After Helmut*

Fig. 4: Jemima Stehli, *After Helmut Newton's 'Here They Come'*, 1999
Image courtesy of the artist.

Newton's 'Here They Come' is not some abstract politics of the body (although this may well be invoked by the result) it is the more quotidian business of agency and artistic production. What is startlingly clear in a comparison of Stehli's work with Newton's original is the extent to which the aim of the piece was to follow precisely its artistic direction, and thus Newton's artistic vision: the model's appearance and pose, progress through the picture field, cast shadow, in fact every repeatable aspect of the composition has been reproduced as closely and as carefully as possible. This, it goes without saying, will have taken time; even the few published contact sheets for this work suggest a mind-numbing process of staging, looking, re-thinking, re-doing, repetition *ad* (almost) *infinitum*. Although this is something any fashion model might experience on a daily basis, it is also a creative process, the logic of which would be, at the very least, at odds with the experience of posing. By making herself the model in *After Here They Come*, Stehli's intervention takes place at the level of production, inhabiting (after the fact) the position that Newton's original model was given, she situates herself precisely within a framework that Newton imagined (and then realised) for someone else. By also, at the same time, adopting the role of the photographer (a position underlined by the shutter release cable left visible in the frame), Stehli also assumes another position, this time Newton's own: but even while taking his place and thereby adopting a degree of authorial agency, she is still subject to his (tacit) oversight. After all, for the work to succeed in giving her the experience of adopting the model's position, she must follow Newton precisely and absolutely.

This sense of inhabiting a pre-organised, pre-determined pictorial situation, is equivalent, I would suggest, to that offered to the participants in *Strip*, and the effects are broadly similar: following both Newton, and his model into the frame of *Here They Come*, by inhabiting both positions but leaving them subject to the authority of an original ideal, Stehli effectively contrives to *see herself seeing herself* from the point of view of another. It is for this reason that it makes sense to think of this activity in terms of the realisation of a fantasy scenario: actually getting inside a Helmut Newton photograph. Entering the kind of 'Perverse Space' sketched out by Victor Burgin in his discussion of Helmut Newton's *Self-*

portrait with wife June, and models, Vogue studio, Paris, 1981.[14] By any standards a photograph of virtuoso construction, it too, has been the subject of re-workings by Stehli. But it is the sense of Newton's pictorial space as an impossible fantasy for the viewer that is interesting here. The conundrum of Newton's self-portrait is that he somehow manages to both have and see, the experience of photographing a 'statuesque' nude model. It is a stunning and confusing work, which fetishises even as it dramatises that same process of fetishisation. Rather than trying to revisit Burgin's brilliant reading of this work, however, I would point instead towards its implicit fetishisation of Newton as an exemplary alternative within the post-conceptual discourse on photography. Through Burgin's text, Newton, like Allen Jones, has been placed in a peculiar relation to contemporary practice, having been evoked in a disinterested, even utilitarian way, for the purposes of a theoretical account of the problem of looking.[15] Newton is ideally outside the discourse of conceptual art, and is only dragged in, by his ear, when there is a problem within it, that his work somehow dramatises.

For Stehli then, whose work is entirely directed towards, and focused on, the politics of practice (and sometimes seems as concerned with iconography as Newton with gender politics) the decision to 'work with' Newton was a particularly awkward one. Not only in the sense that Newton is a formidable technical photographer whose work would be fiendishly difficult to replicate, but in the sense that assuming his position was likely to mean stepping through the looking glass and beyond the bounds of criticality. Furthermore, to fetishistically attempt to both inhabit and re-direct Newton's work, risked retracing his steps to the mirror: to see oneself, and catch oneself, reflected in the process of looking as Helmut Newton may have intended. In a bizarre reversal of the original Lacanian concept of one's own ideal imaginary other, what looks back is an ideal imagined by another, standing obstinately in your place. Perhaps, however, we are back at the point of understanding the moment of crisis that Lacan describes: 'From the moment this gaze appears, the subject tries to adapt himself to it… [symbolizing] his own vanishing and punctiform character,

in the illusion of the consciousness of *seeing oneself see oneself*, in which the gaze is elided.'[16]

If there are such risks for Stehli in being implicated in the work of another artist in this way, in acceding to the imaginations of Helmut Newton or Allen Jones, how should we understand a collaboration between Stehli and Hilliard, within which, at different times and in very different ways, each of the participants inhabited and directed the other within both their own and each other's work? The first of their collaborative works, *Triple Exposure* (Fig. 5)*,* is a case in point,

Fig. 5: John Hilliard and Jemima Stehli, *Triple Exposure (black and white)*, 2001
Image courtesy of the artists.

Fig. 6: John Hilliard, *X*, 1982
Image courtesy of the artist.

being a re-working of ideas in several of Hilliard's earlier works (principally *Code* and *X* from 1982 (Fig. 6), but also to an extent at least, *Display* and *AKA* from 1994) with Stehli taking the places of the female models.[17] Although *Triple Exposure*, it can be argued, is a more elaborately structured work than its precursors, overlaying three moments in time (signified by the three points of light hitting Stehli's body), it remains, because of this, very much in the spirit of Hilliard's career-long exploration of the ways in which photography directs perception. As a collaborative work then, it would appear to offer very little agency to Stehli as an artist inhabiting the place of the model. Perhaps, however, this is the point: after all, in her engagement with Newton's work, her concern was to follow precisely the pictorial markers that Newton set out in the original image. Working with Hilliard, who was physically there to set up and take the photograph might be regarded as a triumph of sorts. The question for Hilliard, on the other hard, was what the stake was in having a living, breathing artist implicate herself within, and inhabit, a structure that had previously been his to direct and control. In an equal collaboration, Hilliard was not forced into the unhappy position of the critic, or curator in *Strip* but he did remain dramatically present in the work as its photographer, in a way that, although unusual within his own practice, finds a perfect analogy in Newton's *Self-*

Portrait. Triple Exposure might, on the face of it, resemble an attempt to re-work a Hilliard image, but it also (in both process and appearance) evokes Stehli's discomforting re-working of Newton. That, perhaps, is why both artists claim it as the collaboration that is closest to their own work.[18]

It is here that the notion of fantasy, so appropriate to Stehli's work with Newton (and so crucial to Burgin's reading of *Self-portrait with wife June and models*) becomes an issue within the collaboration itself: a series of creative double-binds within the processes of which they are simultaneously making one work (their own) and inhabiting another (their collaborator's). It is no coincidence, then, that mirrors, the most literal means of both producing and representing this characteristic splitting and doubling of roles, were so central to the collaboration; featuring in *Triple Exposure, This Picture* and *Double-Up*.

This move into fantasy, orchestrated in the collaboration through the mirror (or looking-glass) corresponds in nature to the potential transformation that is always possible in Stehli's practice (following the 'banal and repetitive glimpses' that Aragon ascribed to Valery's *Jeune Parque*). In the preparatory material for *This Picture*, for example, the status of the mirror within the studio is clear and straightforward, with Hilliard joining Stehli in the unfamiliar position of *seeing himself seeing.* In a businesslike studio environment, Stehli stands naked behind a large camera on a tripod aimed square at the viewer: the image seen is the one she is taking. To the right of this activity, in various positions as the series develops, we see Hilliard; looking first into the mirror on which a small image has been stuck; and then down at the same photograph as he holds it in front of Stehli's lens. The photograph, which, initially at least, it hard to make out, is a black and white image of Stehli standing naked in what looks like the same studio: so far so 'banal and repetitive'.

Fig. 7: John Hilliard and Jemima Stehli, *This Picture*, 2002
Image courtesy of the artists.

The shift in the operation of this work occurs in the selected frame, the image that finally becomes *This Picture* (Fig. 7). For here, Stehli the photographer has gone, replaced by Hilliard bending over one tripod with another camera poised to the left under a studio light. The photograph has returned to the surface of the mirror but is no longer as obviously attached in the way that it had been. The mirror is now more obviously the whole of the picture plane, with the photograph centred within it. Now it is clear that this is indeed the same studio, a black and white miniature double of the space in which the two photographers have been working. This inset image, the mirror's image, is the ideal (fantasy) scenario. Stehli stands alongside her camera, shutter-release cable in hand, addressing the lens calmly and steadily. Her body is carefully lit, she is classically posed, poised and very much in control: this is her space, her work, her representation.

Meanwhile, back in the real world, the space squeezed around the edge of this picture within a picture, the light is harsh and raking, striking the side of Hilliard's face and the sleeve of his shirt. He looks intense; hunched and absorbed; anything but relaxed. In a kind of visual pun, as well as taking the picture, he seems to be looking down into the space that he is photographing. In the right-hand side of this framing space we see Stehli again, this time from behind, still naked, leaving the studio space. This time, however, she seems strangely disconnected from the production of the work, as though she has been found surplus to requirements, superseded by the presence of her ideal imaginary other. The effect of this doubling/splitting is uncanny: disconcerting and yet strangely familiar.

This Picture conjures a host of associations in Stehli's work, Hilliard's work, and of course, references the internal iconographic structure of Helmut Newton's *Self-Portrait with wife June and models* (the last word in reversible full-frontal fantasy). *This Picture*, in a way, shows Stehli walking out of the open door in Newton's Paris studio: turning her back on both her own fantasy, and that of the photographer (whether it be hers, Hilliard's or Newton's). Hilliard's presence in this dramatisation of fantasy and its vicissitudes completes this series of referential reflections: this is a collaboration *staging itself staging itself*, recording its own condition; its effects and affects. As Stehli leaves the studio, and Hilliard photographs her photograph, we are left with Aragon's lines: *'that wretch comparable with mirrors, that reflect but cannot see, like them…empty and like them inhabited, by [the] absence which makes them blind.'*[19]

[1] 'Je me voyais me voir, sinueuse, et dorais/De regards en regards, mes profondes forêts.' Paul Valéry, *La Jeune Parque*, Paris, 1917.

[2] For more on the complex and nuanced relationship between Lacan and surrealism, particularly his interest in and use of theoretical texts by André Breton and Salvador Dalì, see chapters 3 & 4 of Margaret Iversen's excellent book *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes*, (Penn State, 2007).

[3] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. A. Sheridan, (London: Hogarth Press, 1979), p 17.

[4] Ibid., p 81.

[5] Louis Aragon, *Treatise on Style*, trans. A. Waters, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), pp 77-8.

[6] See John Hilliard et al., *John Hilliard*, (Manchester & Heidelberg: Wunderhorn), 1999.

[7] See David Burrows (ed.), *Jemima Stehli*, (**Birmingham: Article Press, 2002**).

[8] I am thinking here of the work of Harry Berger Jr., Robert Lubar and David Lomas, which has revolutionised the way the so-called 'portrait transaction' has been described in terms of intra-subjective and inter-subjective transactions. See H. Berger, Jr., *Fictions of the Pose: Rembrandt Against the Italian Renaissance*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000; R.S. Lubar, 'Unmasking Pablo's Gertrude: Queer Desire and the Subject of Portraiture' *Art Bulletin*, vol. LXXIX, no. 1, March 1997, David Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psycho-analysis, Subjectivity*, Yale: Yale University Press, 2000. For a summary of their positions see Simon Baker, *Surrealism, History and Revolution*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp 263-7.

[9] Gertrude Stein, *Picasso*, (London: Batsford, 1939), p 8. Stein's portrait is the focus of Robert Lubar's essay, cited above.

[10] See H. Berger Jr., 'Lacan on the Narcissism of Orthopsychic Desire', op. cit., pp 155-169

[11] Lacan, op. cit., p 84.

[12] Ibid., p 84.

[13] Both original images are reproduced in D. Burrows (ed.), *Jemima Stehli*, (op. cit.)

[14] Victor Burgin, 'Perverse Space' in B. Colomina, (ed.), *Sexuality and Space,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1992, pp 219-240. See also Burgin, 'Newton's Gravity', in C. Squires (ed.), *Overexposed: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, (New York: The New Press, 1999), pp 48-55.

[15] I am thinking here of Laura Mulvey's 1973 essay, 'Fears, Fantasies and the Male Unconscious or 'You don't know what's happening, do you Mr Jones?'' available in L. Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London: Macmillan, 1989, pp 7-13.

[16] Lacan, op. cit., p 83.

[17] All of these works are reproduced in John Hilliard (op. cit.)

[18] See 'Collaboration recording its own condition (2 interviews, 1 editor)' originally published in Simon Baker et. al. *Arguments: Jemima Stehli, John Hilliard* (Milan: Artra, 2009), reproduced in *Rebus: Journal of Art History and Theory*, Summer 2010.

[19] Lacan, op. cit., p 17 (author's version).

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COLLABORATION RECORDING ITS OWN CONDITION[*]
(2 interviews, 1 editor)

Jemima Stehli, John Hilliard, Simon Baker

Starting

When I first asked about making a work J. seemed resistant to the idea, to the point where I became more and more intrigued about the possibility of doing it. There was a long process of discussion and it took a year before we had a proper conversation about it, and then we spent a day together where s/he really questioned me about what I wanted to do and I convinced J. that it was a good idea.

The initiative for the collaboration was definitely coming from the other direction. I can't imagine embarking on the collaboration for my own reasons, and in fact I was quite resistant to the idea when it was first proposed, and it took about a year of persuasion and mentioning it every time we saw one another, and eventually we had a meeting and we had a discussion about it and we did some preliminary drawings to draft out ideas and that's how it started: the agreement was that we would try something together and see how it went, and in the event it went quite well and we decided to continue.

In those very first discussions s/he immediately took it to a level that I wasn't expecting. That was quite challenging because although I've played around with ideas of collaboration or, rather, implication (putting somebody else in my work, or getting them to play a role), I'd never actually made a collaboration. Collaboration, in a way, was very hard to contain within the ways that I'd set up of understanding what I was doing in my own practice.

The most difficult thing was to get over that first hurdle of accepting the reality of working collaboratively with someone else and relinquishing a lot of what I call my authorial decisions. I was no longer the sole author. I was the co-author and I wasn't used to sharing. I wasn't used to that. I work in more of a kind of selfish way, so that was one hurdle to get over, but clearly I did get over that hurdle, and was very comfortable having made that move. The second thing was really that approach to a way of working but I think that again once I'd conditioned myself to a rather more fluid approach to making decisions about how work would progress, again I became quite comfortable with that.

It was hard to deal with those things because of the way that s/he structured things so carefully. So even though I could see the photograph happening, if I wasn't quite happy it was hard to affect that. Although that changed over the course of the collaboration and, in fact, the one of those works that I like out of that series is the one with the shadow across the card: that was the one where I said, just leave it, and it happened and I liked it, because for me the photograph is about what happens in that moment of taking the photograph. So if something's overly structured beforehand it doesn't do that for me. I want the photograph to be the moment where something appears.

Resistance

I think maybe part of my initial resistance to the collaboration was that within my own working history there is a body of work that deals specifically with the voyeuristic dimensions of photography. I received a lot of negative comment, especially from a feminist perspective, about the work I was doing. It's not that I was susceptible to that criticism to the extent that I would be deterred from my own agenda: I wasn't; but if you like I'd moved on from examining that particular facet of photography and in a way once this collaboration was proposed I thought it would put me back in that position again and its not something that I would have particularly sought. On the other hand, if I felt there was a reason to be in that position. I would go there regardless of the prospect of any further adverse comment.

I wanted to challenge J. about earlier works that s/he'd made because subsequent works became very formal, and in fact, although during the collaboration, I became more interested in those works, at this point I was interested in what I thought had happened previously where s/he'd seemed to censor their subject matter in the light of external criticism. I think that those works were quite risky from J's point of view, in terms of what s/he was exposing about ways of looking. That's what I thought was interesting about them; what they had in common with what I was doing.

Criticism

I think power is a term that has been really over-used in relation to my practice. I think this comes from a misunderstanding of feminist arguments and I have problems with oversimplified versions of such ideas. Whereas responsibility, on the other hand, does play a part in the way the work is made and how it might be understood. In the action of making the work, the responsibility of the artist is to create a situation where the audience is asked to consider its response: it's very important for things to be left open, although there's a danger in that too.

I don't think the collaboration has changed the way I think about my own work although perhaps what it did do was remind me how I thought about it. As I understand J's position I'm not sure there is a big distinction because I think s/he's very forthright in admitting a critical awareness of the female body as the camera's victim but at the same time admitting a certain degree of pleasure in being in that position, or in looking at those kind of images, and I think my position in the past was somewhat comparable. It certainly was a critical position: pointing out an awareness of the problem of the body as the camera's victim but at the same time, admitting my own visual pleasure in images of the body as seen through film and photography. Through my actions, but not by choice, I invited a great deal of criticism; clearly what I was doing was construed as adding to an existing problem of the objectification of the body. But my own position was never so rigidly moralising. I think there was a moral dimension to it, but the flipside of that was that I was admitting a certain degree of pleasure, and it seemed to me that a lot of feminist writing of the 1970s wanted to deny

the pleasure of images of the body and I was always interested in examining my own responses, and my own behaviour, and making admissions about my own position. In fact, I think my own position then was not particularly different from the kind of position that people have now.

The difference in the 80s was that there was more of a sense of working for the good of something, but there's more of a question now about what is 'good' in terms of a good way of looking. Those works that s/he made came out of that film analysis of looking, and was treated as a very analytical investigation of images and ways of looking in men and women. And then s/he suffered a backlash where people became very concerned about what was being exposed. For me, that's the point that things become interesting, precisely because it's exposing things. If it wasn't, it wouldn't be interesting in the first place. These are still live issues: the images s/he made, and works by Allen Jones and Helmut Newton, still raise live issues. They don't have to be controlled and put into the past as a problem for feminist argument. We've seen the work in that way and now we can look again and see what it tells us about fundamental things about looking at objects and images. If this series of works can do that, then that would be a great thing to have happened.

Drawing

In terms of a working practice it was a hybrid because I'm the kind of person who does a lot of preparation by drawing, writing, making lists, diagrams: I have very specific objectives. Relatively speaking, J's practice is rather more spontaneous so I think s/he had to adapt to the rather more prescriptive elements of my practice and I had to adapt to their rather more spontaneous imperatives. I think it's probably like the difference between a band that writes material and then goes into the studio to record it, having rehearsed it, and a band that just books studio time and then makes it up as they go along. I'm clearly in the first category and I don't think I could have let go of that way of working completely to the extent that the two of us entered the studio without any idea of what we might do and then played around and did it. The suggestion when we first met to talk about the collaboration was that we should

each bring our cameras and take photographs, and I flatly refused to do that. I said I can't do that, I can't work like that. What we should do is meet and talk about some ideas and draft some ideas on paper, which is actually what we did. But although in that first phase of working together I was laying down the law a bit, subsequently there was a drift in the other direction: there was a lot of give and take. That first insistence of mine didn't persist and in fact I can't remember to what extent there were drawings for the final piece

The first thing that was odd to me was J's insistence on drawing. The way that s/he would work would be to first sit down and make a drawing, which was really convincing but was totally alien to my way of working, and left me thinking, 'what planet are you from?' For me the first thing would normally be to start taking lots of Polaroids, so that you could start to see the image, the starting point, which you then manipulate as much as you need to until you've got what you want from it. One of the things that was always an issue was that my way of working is quite extravagant, you're straight in there taking pictures when you don't really know what you're doing. It's really hit and miss but I really enjoy that process; not over-determining the result. For me, the photograph is this thing that I'm trying to figure out as I go along, and I never know how it's going to work, whereas J. has a lot of confidence in the idea that if s/he sets something up it will mean something specific. I'm much more sceptical about things translating in that way within the work, in fact, I think that actually, that structuring of the image is like an avoidance tactic for what the image might actually mean.

Triple Exposure

I think that the first work we made, Triple Exposure, was closely related to an earlier work of mine, and indeed was based very specifically on one of those works. It wasn't my idea to make it but once we had agreed on that as a starting point then we both made contributions.

Probably the first work, Triple Exposure, is the most like one of mine, because it looks like one of mine, but actually it isn't, because the thing that makes my work my work is the thing about agency, and I'm not holding the

cable release and there's this other photographer in it. I think the conceptual aspect of this change is more interesting when you get to the more abstract works.

White Card/Brown Card

The next pieces we made were called White Card and Brown Card. I think they were truly a hybrid between work I was doing at that time, which deliberately sought to block out the majority of the spectator's view, the majority of the picture's area, and also J's work because that blocking screen was then punctured at three points by viewing panels which allowed you to see parts of her/my body. So that tension between revealing a view of oneself and concealing a view was very much a hybrid of those aspects of our individual works.

What the collaboration started to do was pull apart our identities. When you took the Tit Card image, which became White Card and Brown Card, there were differences in how each of us saw them. What s/he liked about them for example, was where the body comes through the card: s/he saw that as like being a picture. For me it was the absolute opposite, for me it was like taking a part of the body like the breast, a part of the female body which is often represented as a flat image, and turning into an object again, a thing in the world. But s/he was turning things back into pictures, so that was really uncomfortable for me, and I still have mixed feelings about that work, although some of the things in it come from me, such as the fact that it's in the studio, and the performative aspect; stretching to hold the board; and the ridiculousness of it, with feet coming out the bottom.

Double Up

Within the collaborations there is an element of cross-direction, of saying why don't you do this, or that: certainly in Double Up I was being quite strongly directed. I was always, in these works, in the position of the photographer and

s/he was more in the position of the photographed. But in Double Up as in, probably, all the other works, even though I was taking the pictures s/he was also directing because we were communicating with each other and s/he was telling me what to do. S/he's used to being in both positions at once and I would say in these collaborative works s/he was also in both those positions whereas my own position is somebody who's usually behind the camera: I'm not normally in those two positions at once. And I'm much more likely to be the one issuing directions, both to myself but also to those I'm photographing; if there are models, also issuing directions to models but it's not that I'm resistant to the model saying why don't we try this, and of course very often those suggestions are the ones that generate very interesting results.

Double Up was probably the most uncomfortable work to make: I mean physically, for J., it was uncomfortable because s/he was in that position for days at a time, and also because of the position that I'm in, physically. But also because s/he uses models a lot (which I don't often do). S/he often had ideas and said, this is a work that I made thinking about the collaboration, although actually it's not a collaborative work. That work (Double Up), in contrast to Table, which was a genuinely collaborative work, was a remaking of a previous work from 2002, called 'Untitled'. I had thought about the two sides within the image, which in the first version are just bits of card, but I'd always thought about them as being somebody's legs. I liked the idea that by making the legs those of the person taking the photograph, the outside and inside were flipped over. But that was a very awkward work to hand over because it was already a complete piece of work in my mind. In a way, what I really wanted was for J. to do it and it to be my work, but in the end I became much less interested in it as a piece than I was with Table, for instance. Both Double Up and Table were made in the last summer of working together and they were both the most difficult to make, in different ways.

Table

Sculpture was an ingredient in all of this work which I think was very much in J's mind, and it's interesting that it was my background in making sculpture which

led to working with photography, so it fits quite neatly into the scheme of things. Even though it was only made of card, Table turned out to be a fully functioning table which J. used in the studio and put very heavy objects on. In the first instance it was a kind of prop and I've certainly been very much in the habit of making props for my own work so the hands-on, practical side of making things akin to sculpture has continued for me in that way and I think in terms of the sort of spatial thinking it has also continued as well.

I insisted that we made the table. I felt that it was about something that was present in my work but that had not really been looked at: the formalisation within the work. People mention it but actually it's a really important part of how my work is constructed. When we decided to make the work with a table that could be photographed from four directions I was really insistent that we made the table. It's an idealised, sculptural version of a table, not a real table, so there's a play between the real, and the aesthetic or imagined, and it's also very much more about the studio space. Although it's interesting too, that the work that s/he liked best that came out of that process was the one where you can see all my works in the background on the walls, where my figure is present, whereas for me I preferred the more abstract versions because they offer more of an opportunity to think about ideas of structure, and place more emphasis on the object in space, and light, and so on, without the body: for me, the body is implied.

Contact Prints

Invariably we liked different contact prints; there wasn't usually a ready agreement. I think that that's interesting: it's almost as though we entered the collaboration from two distinct positions and we exited it from two distinct positions. When we were looking at the results of what we'd done we definitely had different preferences: but there were also overlaps where we agreed about which one to make.

We spent four or five days taking the photograph and had hundreds of contact sheets as a result. J. thought that that was unnecessary. In the end, we had all these contact sheets and spent days putting them all up on the wall and

deciding which we'd enlarge, and we ended up with a huge selection of enlargements, which is something that s/he would do, but not to that same degree. Then I'd look at the contact sheets and say 'it's not right yet' and s/he'd look at it and say 'but this one's a perfectly good photograph', which it was, but it wasn't quite right for me, it wasn't quite there yet, so s/he'd have to go through this physical ordeal, bending over taking photographs, again. But in the end we got the image I wanted.

Afterwards

One of the first works I made subsequently was a work that I had designed as a collaborative piece where J. would be the model, so probably the degree of collaboration would have been less than in the truly collaborative works. It would have been a work with J. more conventionally there as a model rather than as a contributor. But nevertheless it was coming from work that we had done together. I wanted to make it in J's studio, but s/he declined partly because s/he didn't want me to inhabit that space for my own individual work and secondly because s/he had some other plans for using that space at the time so it would have been inconvenient. But nevertheless I went ahead and made that work in a different location and with a different model but it is a work made in an artist's studio environment and I've made a number of works which are either located in an art school environment or an artists studio environment, and we could say that the models in the work are effectively being themselves. Either as professional models employed in art schools or as art students and artists.

What happened afterwards was that I used the collaboration to shift my work towards wider concerns about form and space. And then in my own work I started to make works like Photo Performance with a Larry Bell sculpture (and others in relation to Dan Graham's work too) that were about looking and not looking. With Photo Performance I think I took liberties, as I was working with an artist whose practice isn't yet visible. With J. our positions were quite safe, and although I still find some of the work awkward, I don't think they're settled, and that's what makes them challenging: you can still take our works separately

or take a few of those works in the frame of the collaboration. But in Photo Performance piece I was taking liberties. From my point of view I took bigger risks, because it was framed within my practice I could allow much bigger risks in terms of what happened.

Echoes

It's very hard to quantify, after a certain point, what the echo of the collaboration is: I think I'm more likely to settle back into my previous way or working than not, although there are the obvious examples of the works that have as their location a studio space and possibly they might not have happened without having gone through that collaboration. How it goes on from there I'm not sure. I don't honestly think the collaboration has made me think differently about my own previous work and that's probably a reflection of a rather willful, single-minded personality. And actually the way I'm working at the moment is if anything rather the reverse of that rather more open collaborative practice.

Magically, by the final collaboration process we ended up being much more generous. J. had just started doing these four-sided works, and I didn't have to have my identity in the work so clearly. I began enjoying the process of making the work, without thinking about how it made sense in terms of the trajectory of my own work or the meaning of that, but just enjoying the process of making a photograph. It's only once you bring it into the collaboration that it causes you to think about that problem of where it's going. The thing I still think about is the fact that the collaboration made me implicit in my own work in a way that I've made other people implicit in my work before and that's something which is still quite odd for me. It's also clear to me that although collaboration was something I'd always talked about in relation to my work, I now have a much better understanding of what it really means. I used to talk more about implication, like a seduction. Now I see there being very subtle distinction between something that is genuinely a collaboration, and something that isn't, and how the authorship of the work determines the meaning of it. What I'm really concerned about is what happens when you stand in front of a piece of work, and what happens in that relationship with it. When I've brought other

people into the work it's not so much about implication but about trust; and being able to see where that experiment, or experience takes you.

REMEDIATING GENOCIDAL IMAGES INTO ARTWORKS: THE CASE OF THE TUOL SLENG MUG SHOTS

Stéphanie Benzaquen

The Phnom Penh-based Tuol Sleng prison is certainly the most infamous institution of the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979). Formerly a school, it became, in the hands of the political police of Democratic Kampuchea, a torture and execution centre were more than 14,000 Cambodians lost their lives. The inmates were photographed as soon as they were brought in, and their picture attached to their confession file. When Tuol Sleng was transformed into the Museum for Genocidal Crimes in 1980, these photographs were put on display. Over the years this administrative record of extermination has been globally circulated through all kinds of media and into various settings. The black and white mug shots have become icons of the Cambodian Genocide. My paper looks at their re-appropriation into contemporary artworks. Since the late Nineties, several artists, Cambodians and non-Cambodians alike, have created artworks (multimedia, video, installation, performance) using the mug shots. My paper examines the visual and material strategies by which they try to undermine 'the monocular seeing that conflates the camera with a weapon' and to create less tainted forms of bearing witness and remembering. Drawing on Thierry de Deuve's the notion of 'genocidal images' and its significance within the aesthetic realm, my paper reflects on how art helps clarify the formation of iconic images and the way such process affect forms of memory, production of historical knowledge, and identity politics.

"You, guy! What's your name? What did you do during the Sihanouk regime? The Lon Nol regime?" They'd already asked us these questions when we got off the truck. Why were they asking us again? Every prisoner was interrogated again and then it was my turn. Afterwards, I felt someone undoing my blindfolds. At first my eyes were out of focus but then my vision cleared. In front of me was a chair with a camera set across from it.
"Go sit on that chair", the guard said, pointing at me.

The others handcuffed to me went with me but they sat on the floor as I was photographed. The guard took a picture of the front of my face, and then the side. Another guard measured my head and then they made an ID card. After me, they photographed the other people attached to me. Then they put our blindfolds back on.[1]

The Vietnamese army reached Phnom Penh on 7 January 1979 after a two-week blitzkrieg in Cambodia. Their arrival in the capital city marked the end of Democratic Kampuchea, the regime established by the Khmer Rouge in April 1975. In less than four years, Pol Pot and his comrades had starved, worked to death, and massacred hundreds of thousands of their fellow countrymen. While exploring the desolated streets of Phnom Penh on that day of January 1979, two Vietnamese photojournalists came across a barricaded high school. It was S-21 (the other name of Tuol Sleng), the prison where the *santebal* (Khmer Rouge state security police) had jailed, tortured, and executed about fourteen thousand Cambodians. Inside the buildings, the two men discovered several bodies, recently killed, and torture instruments. The walls were covered with blood.[2] There were also tens of thousands of pages of summaries, entrance forms, torture reports, signed execution orders, daily execution logs, and confessions that the S-21 commander Kaing Guek Eav – better known as 'Duch' – and his staff had left when fleeing the city.[3]

Black and white mug shots of terrified men, women, and children were attached to the confession files. The photography unit of Tuol Sleng took pictures of each inmate who was brought in. The first-hand account – quoted above – of the Cambodian artist Vann Nath, one of the few people who survived S-21, depicts the procedure that Nhem En[4], the Khmer Rouge in charge of the photography unit, and his colleagues followed. The fact that many of the prisoners were actually high-ranking Khmer Rouge cadres arrested during purges explains why the prison personnel had to thoroughly record its criminal (Duch would have said investigative) activities. Industriousness was key to hunting interior enemies – a thriving business in the paranoid leading circles of Democratic Kampuchea. As proven by the archival fragments and remnants of physical structures scattered throughout the country[5], Tuol Sleng was not the only Khmer Rouge interrogation-torture-execution centre, Yet it is by far the most infamous – a sinister reputation it owes in part to these portraits.

S-21 was turned into the Tuol Sleng Museum for Genocidal Crimes in 1980 under the guidance of Mai Lam, a Vietnamese officer himself, and an expert in museology. The mug shots were put on permanent display in case Cambodians would recognize relatives, thereby helping identify the victims (fig. 1). It was only in the late Nineties that Western audiences became familiar with the pictures. In 1993, as the Kingdom of Cambodia had just been established following UN-monitored elections, two American photographers, Douglas Niven and Christopher Riley, found six thousand original negatives in an old cabinet of Tuol Sleng. They set up the Archive Project Group with the aim of preserving and cataloguing them.[6] Twenty-two of these negatives were presented in an exhibition entitled *Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields*, first shown in the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1997.[7] They were displayed in Gallery Three, next to rooms dedicated to the museum's permanent photographic collection and a retrospective of American photography between 1890 and 1965. They had no labels and were loosely contextualized by a few paragraphs summarizing, altogether, the history of Tuol Sleng, the discovery of the negatives by Niven and Riley, the production of the prints, and the funding of the Archive Project Group.[8] Such lack of information with regard to the history of the Khmer Rouge regime or the involvement of the United States in Cambodia subjected, according to the anthropologist Lindsay French, the photographs to two main kinds of readings. One was formal and aesthetic, the other was a 'kind of heroic, allegorical' reading. Turned into observers of suffering, visitors who wanted to escape such voyeuristic position had no choice but look at the pictures as conveying 'something more abstract or general', our condition of being human.[9] Since then, the mug shots have been globally circulated in various media and settings, from book covers to tourists' blogs, and even to a Thai horror movie (*Ghost Game*, Sarawut Wichiensarn, 2006), to such an extent that the anthropologist Rachel Hughes, conducting interviews with Western tourists at the Tuol Sleng Museum in 2000, stressed 'the significant number of tourists who professed a familiarity with the S-21 prisoner photographs'.[10] Once scrutinized in utmost secrecy, since Duch handed over the confession files only to a restricted number of Khmer Rouge leaders (mainly Pol Pot and Nuon Chea), the black and white portraits can now be seen worldwide. It is this administrative record of extermination, the very symbol of

Khmer Rouge's absolute power, which has become the icon of the Cambodian Genocide.

Over the past ten years several artists, Cambodians and non-Cambodians alike, have created pieces incorporating the Tuol Sleng mug shots. Appropriating such a specific kind of photograph into artworks raises a number of issues. Are they not, first and foremost, evidence of the crimes perpetrated at S-21? It bears recalling that some of the pictures had been shown during Duch's trial at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia in 2009. The particular context offered by art settings for looking at such images makes it compelling to ask to which extent aestheticization affects the evidential status of these images. It is a recurring issue in discussions on artistic representation of mass atrocity. In her analysis of beauty and the sublime in Holocaust-related artworks, Janet Wolff underscores the risk that 'visual pleasure negates horror by aestheticizing violence and atrocity, by proposing redemption in the face of outrage or by providing consolation in the encounter with beauty'.[11] Her concern resounds all the more strongly when related to what Riley and Niven declared in

Fig. 1: View of Tuol Sleng, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
Photograph by W. Noud. 17 (Creative Commons)

a 1997 interview in *The Village Voice* regarding their selection of pictures for the exhibition *Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields*: 'Even though they were of horrible subject matter, with horrible stories, we saw the possibility of making beautiful photographs'.[12]

However, one cannot but acknowledge that the evidential status of the mug shots has already been seriously undermined as their reception in widening geographic and cultural circles charged them with new meanings. Captions on blogs or comments in television news stories make this clear: S-21 photographs have been turned into emotional portraiture, icons of atrocity and injustice that make us feel and even project ourselves into such suffering. This transformation, obscuring the reality of Tuol Sleng (e.g. actual identity of the victims, procedures of control) has far-reaching historiographic consequences. It impacts on forms of remembrance and identity politics. Indeed, of all the issues raised, the fact that our empathy for the victims stems from portraits made by their very murderers is not the least puzzling. Against such a backdrop, artistic remediation might well help to clarify the processes (and traps) of emotional commodification and shed light on the cultural construction of our gaze when facing such photographs.

The notion of 'genocidal images', coined by the art critic Thierry de Duve in a recent article discussing the exhibition *S-21* by Christian Caujolle (founder of the photo agency VU) within the framework of the 1997 Rencontres Photographiques d'Arles, proves most relevant to such discussion. De Duve argues that images produced by perpetrators are generally considered in terms of ethics and politics: they are de-aestheticized in the contexts of 'duty of memory'.[13] With the notion of 'genocidal images' he aims to open up an aesthetic perception of such pictures because 'calling the photographs the name of art… is just one way, the clumsiest certainly, of making sure that the people on the photographs are restored to their humanity'.[14] The way such a category is reflected upon by artists who have appropriated Tuol Sleng mug shots is what my paper analyses in relation to the following artworks: *The Texture of Memory*, by Dinh Q Lê (2000-01); *Messengers* by Ly Daravuth (2001); *88 out of 14,000*, by Alice Miceli (2004); *In the Eclipse of Angkor: Tuol*

Sleng, Choeung Ek, and Khmer Temples, by Binh Danh (2008); and *Discovering the Other. Tuol Sleng. After All Who Rewrites History Better than You*, by Despina Meimaroglou (2008).

Genocidal images present artists and spectators with a painful challenge. Are we able to escape what Holocaust scholar Marianne Hirsch defines as 'the monocular seeing that conflates the camera with a weapon'? 'Unbearably', Hirsch argues, 'the viewer is positioned in the place identical with that of the weapon of destruction: our look, like the photographer's, is in the place of the executioner'.[15] Regaining another form of bearing witness and deconstructing the perpetrator's aesthetics and ideology, which still impregnate these images – in other words: restoring the victims' humanity – are thus core issues in the artworks concerned.

The artists resort to two kinds of strategy, often combined, to counter Hirsch's 'monocular seeing' and produce – to quote Ulrich Baer – 'corrective captions' for the mug shots. Presentational strategies that aim to modify the viewer's position, thereby making it possible 'to re-see images of victimhood from positions that break with the photographer's perspective of mastery'[16], and material strategies that reconstruct the narratives associated with the mug shots by creating 'very different embodied experiences of images and very different affective tones or theatres of consumption' through addition and medial intervention.[17] For each of the five artists, these strategies mean bringing the spectator into interaction with the image and initiating active forms of reception. Watching the mug shots is no longer a voyeuristic act framed by the perpetrator's gaze. It becomes a gesture of respect toward the victims, their memory, and toward history, too, as the spectator engages in critically viewing the images 'instead of responding to them ritualistically with fear, outrage, or pity'.[18]

Dinh Q Lê's *The Texture of Memory* (the eponymous title refers to James Young's book on Holocaust monuments and memorials) is a series of portraits of Tuol Sleng prisoners. It is not the first work in which the artist remediates the mug shots. His 1998 piece *Cambodia: Splendor and Darkness* merges them

with images of Angkor Wat's wall carvings through a process of photo-weaving, thereby underlining cultural connections between the Temple of Angkor and the Cambodian tragedy, the human cost of the construction of the Temple echoing Pol Pot's references to the glorious Angkor era. To manufacture *The Texture of Memory* Lê worked with women from Ho Chi Minh City. He drew sketches of several portraits. The outlines were then embroidered by the women on thick white cotton, white threads on white sheets stretched over a bamboo frame like a painting. The artist states that,

> It is a little hard to see until you are near, then the portraits emerge. Viewers are encouraged to touch these portraits, like reading Braille. I hope over the years the viewers' touch will stain the embroidery and make the portraits more visible. Like the carvings at Angkor, where the more people touch, the shinier it gets and the more visible it becomes. In a way, the more people who participate, the more these memories will become alive.[19]

Blindness appears as a paradigm for traumatic memory in Lê's work. It is displayed at several levels: the blindfolded prisoners brought to the Tuol Sleng photography unit; the nature of the Khmer Rouge regime itself, secretive and conspirational, keeping the Cambodian population in the dark while it was watching everything ['The *Angkar* – the Organization – has the eyes of the pineapple', the infamous slogan went]; and the story, mentioned by the artist, of Cambodian women survivors who resettled in Long Beach, California in 1982, who had all witnessed the execution of their husband and/or their children, and, traumatized by what they had seen, suffered from 'hysterical blindness'.[20]

Sight proves to be an unreliable, impaired, and misleading sense when it comes to remembering such atrocities. It must therefore be supplemented, even replaced, by another one – that of touch. The passage from scopic to haptic as performed in *The Texture of Memory* materializes in most concrete terms Jill Bennett's notion of 'sense memory'.[21] The latter, Bennett writes, is 'not so much *speaking of* but *speaking out of* a particular memory or experience – in other words speaking from the body *sustaining sensation*'.[22] As the spectator's

fingers run over the embroidered threads, the picture in turn touches 'the viewer who feels rather than simply sees the event and is drawn into the image through a process of affective contagion'.[23] It is how sense memory de-familiarizes the iconic and re-affects people who have become so familiar with images that they no longer see them. The portraits forming *The Texture of Memory* are 'productive' rather than 'representational' images.

Making the act of looking a transformative memory experience is also central to the work of Binh Danh. In *In the Eclipse of Angkor: Tuol Sleng, Choeung Ek, and Khmer Temples*, the artist mingles daguerreotypes of Tuol Sleng victims with daguerreotypes of his own photographs of contemporary Buddhist monks and ancient Cambodian temples. It is not the first time, either, that Danh deals with the mug shots and develops complex photography techniques for re-presenting them. Danh has a conception similar to that of Lê regarding the active engagement of the viewer in making memories alive. In *In the Eclipse of Angkor* the spectator cannot identify the images from afar because the daguerreotypes look like framed silver mirrors. Thus, the viewer must get closer and stand in front of them so that the negative image of the daguerreotype reflects her silhouette and turns positive, visible (fig.2).

Fig. 2: Binh Danh, *Skulls of Choeung Ek*, 2008, daguerreotype, 45 x 60 cm, Eleanor D. Wilson Museum, Hollins University, VA, USA. Courtesy the artist.

In the Eclipse of Angkor fuses different kinds of image: afterimage, an image that both remains on the retina and shapes our mediated experience of traumatic memory[24], trace and icon (fig.3). Ghost-image: a remnant, a partially recorded picture. The idea of the ghost takes on further signification in the context of Buddhism. Cambodians believe that the ghosts of suffering victims still haunt places, especially where no proper burial has been conducted such as killing fields and memorials. It is this haunting presence that the image captures. Latent image: the not-yet-visible image waiting for both the artist's creative gesture (exposing the silver plate) and the viewer's movement. Afterimage, ghost image, latent image express the limits of traumatic memory: fragmented, incomplete, vanishing, and shaped by the outside.

As the spectator stands in front of the daguerreotype, she is captured, merged with the victim in the same frame, the same time – neither past nor present – and the same space. The idea that viewers might literally and physically reveal the dead and that remembering means making victims 'alive' again was already an integral part of *Ancestral Altars* (2006), an earlier series of Danh's dedicated to S-21 inmates which was based on his own chlorophyll printing method [25]:

Fig. 3: Binh Danh, *Ghost of Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum # 2*, 2008, daguerreotype, 30 x 24 cm. Courtesy the artist.

They [the victims] all have stories to tell and are asking the same question as they peer out to the viewer: How could this happen? I wanted to give these portraits voices so they can teach us... I hope they will be alive in us as we remember them and in return we give them life.[26]

This conception is anchored by Danh's Buddhist beliefs. There is a cycle of life in which we all take part and have to fulfil some task, which is another way to say that each of us is responsible for the memory of the victims. 'The portraits become the spectators, holding us accountable for the genocide that took place'.[27] Moreover, it is a reciprocal movement. While 'the identity recorded in the photograph is extended and enhanced, revealing a form of inner self'[28], the daguerreotype image becomes visible and another side of the viewer's identity is revealed in the process. This victim, the reflection seems to imply, could be you if you had lived in another epoch and place; In that sense the portrait is a reminder that such events might happen at any time, ensnaring those who least expect them to.

The works of Binh Danh and Dinh Q Lê deny the spectator the possibility of merely glancing at the mug shots. By integrating time and duration into the processes of both making and looking at the works, the two artists undo the gaze of the perpetrator. When Nhem En and his colleagues photographed the inmates one after another, at a fast pace, they hardly looked at them. The prisoners were mere objects, deprived of individuality. En said in an interview that he considered the prisoners as already dead. This is no surprise considering the psychological mechanisms at play in situations of mass violence. Taking pictures supplies the perpetrator with a protective shield. Victims are objectified and circumscribed within the unreality of the camera's lens. In other terms, they are de-humanized.

According to the historian Bernd Hüppauf, such de-humanization marks a continuity between images produced by modern technology and the scopic regime that was developed during World War II, which he describes as the:

mutation of the abstraction and emptiness of the fascist version…
[T]echnology… makes it possible for the distanced and cool gaze
to watch how advanced techniques of destruction transform living
beings into elements of electronically manipulated games of
violence… Images of dying and killing produced by advanced
technology are sufficiently empty to be forgotten.[29]

The constellation formed by technology, violence, and modernity (which has
been analysed by Zygmunt Baumann for example[30]) explains why Lê and
Danh resort to, respectively, traditional crafts (weaving) and old photographic
techniques (daguerreotype) for dealing with the mug shots. Both 'neutralize' a
technology that has at times served heinous objectives.

Is there a possibility of reclaiming technology against de-humanization when it
comes to genocidal images? It seems so, as *88 out of 14,000* (fig.4), the video
work by Brazilian artist Alice Miceli, demonstrates. In Tuol Sleng, the artist
selected the portraits of inmates for whom the dates of both arrest and
execution were available: eighty-eight people. She projected the portraits onto a
black space, chronologically, onto falling sand. One day of survival means one

Fig. 4: Alice Miceli, *88 out of 14,000*, 2004, exhibition view, Phoenix Halle,

kilogram of sand, or four seconds of visibility (fig.5). In her video, Miceli reverses the objectification inherent in the act of picture taking. (Re)-shooting becomes a means of rescue as the artist injects life (the life of the prisoner) into the document.: more than blurring the distinction between life and death, *88 out of 14,000* points out the danger that lies in looking at the mug shots as icons of death only. In doing so, Miceli emphasizes the period that comes after the moment of shooting, beyond the static vision of the photograph and the photographer, because things did not stop on the chair in front of En's camera. The mug shot, although it is the last image we can see of the prisoners alive, was for the victims only a prelude to days or weeks of suffering, of being chained, starved, and tortured. However fragile and near to their end, these are lives that are represented via the contracted temporality of *88 out of 14,000*: people who demand that we think about what they endured. By proposing such movement – or allusion thereof – Miceli unfreezes Tuol Sleng's 'instances of humiliation'.[31]

In *Discovering the Other. Tuol Sleng. Who after all Rewrites History*, the Greek artist Despina Meimaroglou shows similar concerns. The installation is comprised of two parts. The first part is a replica of a cell in Tuol Sleng, realized

Fig. 5: Alice Miceli, *88 out of 14,000*, 2004, exhibition view, Phoenix Halle,

by the film and stage designer Lorie Marks on the basis of pictures Meimaroglou had taken in the museum (fig.6). The photographs on the walls are pictures from the book she published in 2005 following her travels in Southeast Asia. Meimaroglou describes her experience in Tuol Sleng Museum,when she entered the cells as overwhelming to the point of physical pain. The idea of re-creating one of the cells in the exhibition space (the Contemporary Art Centre of Thessaloniki) was born out of her observation that 'most of my fellow travellers [visiting Tuol Sleng] refused to come along because they wanted to avoid the discomfort'.[32] With the replica, the artist wants to force the viewer to enter the room, to feel as uneasy and distressed as she felt then.

The reconstructed cell constitutes the entry point to the second part of the installation, *Me Instead of Them*, a series of five 'portraits'. Meimaroglou scanned five different people and printed each head in life-size on a paper bag. After putting the bag on her head –blindfolded as the victims were just before being photographed– the artist tries to imagine a position reflecting the facial expression of each individual and to reproduce it with her own body (fig.7).

Fig. 6: Despina Meimaroglou, *Discovering the Other. Tuol Sleng. After All Who Rewrites History Better than You*, 2008, multimedia, in collaboration with Lori Marks, 350 x 250 cm, National Museum of Contemporary Art of Thessaloniki, Greece. Courtesy of the artist

By vicariously experiencing the physical visit of the museum, the spectator finds herself involved in the process of remembrance, accessing the victims through the body of the artist. In this process, the viewer is no longer a passive recipient of Meimaroglou's interpretation, but takes part in the transmission of memory. *Discovering the Other. Tuol Sleng. Who after all Rewrites History* offers an additional approach towards the notion of 'sense memory'. In Meimaroglou's installation, the bodily experience of sustaining sensation is that of the physical encounter with the mug shots as artefact and as evidential document. In that sense, the artist opens up a reflection on the infrastructures – in this case the museum – through which the memory of the Cambodian genocide is represented and conveyed. At the same time, the installation encourages the viewer to look beyond the memorial display and think about the feelings of the inmates at the moment they were photographed. In other words, to replace the dead face of the mug shot with that of the individual, terrified but somehow alive.

Fig. 7: Despina Meimaroglou, *Me Instead of Them*, 2008, photograph, 120 x 80 cm, National Museum of Contemporary Art of Thessaloniki, Greece. Courtesy the artist.

The ways in which forms of mediation affect the politics of remembrance and identity politics is at the core of Ly[33] Daravuth's work. *Messengers* was presented for the first time in 2000 in Phnom Penh in a show entitled *The Legacy of Absence: a Cambodian Story* (which he co-curated with Ingrid Muan). Ly's installation brings altogether portraits of children of present-day Cambodia and "messengers", children who carried messages to Khmer Rouge cadres. The photographs are manipulated so that they all mimic Tuol Sleng mug shots, the more recent pictures having been deteriorated through various artificial means. Khmer Rouge songs play in the background (fig.8).[34]

In *Messengers* Ly and Muan underscore that the installation questions the mechanisms at play in the interpretation of historical and evidential documents, namely, the context of their presentation. What are the preconceptions of the viewers? And what is the role of visual encoding in shaping interpretations?

Ly states that,

> Because of the blurred black and white format and the numbering
> of each child, we tend to read these photographs first as images

Fig. 8: Ly Daravuth, *Messengers*, 2001, photography, Reyum Gallery, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Courtesy of the artist.

of victims, when they are "really" messengers and thus people who actively served the Pol Pot regime. The fact that upon seeing their faces, I immediately thought of victims, made me uneasy. My installation wishes to question what is a document? What is "the truth"? And what is the relationship between the two?[35]

The 'immediate recognition of victimhood'[36] that Ly tries to interrupt with *Messengers* raises the issue of narrative and memory tools that have been given to Cambodians for building their post-Khmer Rouge identity, and the role that Tuol Sleng as a memorial-museum institution has played in that context.

Commenting on the museum which S-21 had become in 1980, the French journalist and researcher Serge Thion stresses that:

> the masters of the new Cambodian regime, in early 1979, commissioned some Vietnamese experts, trained in Poland, to refurbish the interrogation centre called Tuol Sleng... [in order to] attract part of the sinister charisma of Auschwitz.[37]

Why posit such a connection? The Vietnamese had obvious reasons for linking the Cambodian tragedy to the Holocaust, and presenting the Khmer Rouge as a fascist rather than a communist regime – a far more acceptable version of events, one which made it superfluous for Cambodians to ponder for too long the relationship between, on the one hand the 'Pol Pot and Ieng Sary' clique, and on the other hand the new Vietnamese-sponsored government (composed of former Khmer Rouge who had defected as late as 1978) and the Vietnamese *tout court* who had supported the Communist Party of Kampuchea for many years.

Moreover, the international community, considering the new leaders of the People's Republic of Kampuchea as nothing but a puppet government, blamed Vietnam for its occupation of Cambodia. There were both humanitarian and economic consequences (not to mention the fact the Khmer Rouge retained for years their seat at the UN as actual representative of Cambodia!). The

Vietnamese had to justify their presence in Cambodia by tugging at the heartstrings of European and American leaders and by soliciting public opinion to attract Western sympathy. Consequently, the official version of events cast the Cambodians as victims of a fascist clique that had perverted Communist ideals; As a result, the forms of memory made available to Khmers in Tuol Sleng Museum were shaped by both Vietnamese ideological interpretations and Western representations of mass atrocity and mourning.

Ly recounts that during the exhibition local visitors asked him whether they could make CDs from the Khmer Rouge songs playing in the background to take them home. Nostalgia? For Ly and Muan, the installation, because of its ambiguity, allowed some visitors 'to begin to care to recast themselves as, perhaps, former Khmer Rouge'.[38] *Messengers* conveys a 'grey zones'-riddled picture of Democratic Kampuchea and its poisonous legacy. By underlining the uses and abuses of memory in Cambodian society (so well epitomized by the Tuol Sleng photographs) the artist stresses the danger of collective victimhood for the Cambodians. How can there be any social healing if everyone claims to be a victim of the Khmer Rouge and escapes liability? To such a question,*Messengers* answers that the mug shots might play a significant role in reconciliation and truth finding and provide the Cambodian society with keys for self-reflection on condition that all levels of complexity making up the history of Democratic Kampuchea and its aftermath are represented.

It is a process in which contemporary art might be a chosen actor. The range of aesthetic treatments and interpretations in the works of Ly Daravuth, Dinh Q Lê, Alice Miceli, Despina Meimaroglou, and Binh Danh show that genocidal images are to be assessed in a continuing process of production, exchange, usage, and meaning. As Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart so aptly put it: '[photographs] are enmeshed in, and active in, social relations, not merely passive entities in this process': changes of ownership, physical location, and relationships are ascribed to photographs.[39] Genocidal images are thus reconfigured through a long chain of remediation and transformation, integrated within multiple social realms of remembrance, resounding in other contexts, signifying differently, sometimes at the expense of their original meaning. These

are complex processes in which affect and understanding – emotional and epistemic regimes – combine and merge. Both sides operate together to produce 'a dynamic encounter with a structure of representation' and to put 'an outside and an inside into contact'.[40] It is through such encounters that genocidal images can reverberate at many levels (cultural, psychological, political, historical) and in widening circles: it is how they contribute as an aesthetic category to deepening knowledge of the criminal events (and their perpetrators). They clarify the role visualization plays in the context of political terror and atrocity on the one hand; and reconciliation, healing, and commemoration on the other.

And yet... In April 2009, Nhem En, the chief photographer of Tuol Sleng, announced that he was putting the camera he used in S-21 (with a pair of sandals that belonged to Pol Pot) for auction for a price of half a million dollar. [41]

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[1] Vann Nath, A Cambodian Prison Portrait. One Year in the Khmer Rouge's S-21 (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1998), 40

[2] Paul Williams, 'Witnessing Genocide: Vigilance and Remembrance at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek, in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 18, no.2 (2004): 234-254 (p.237)

[3] David Hawk, 'The Photographic Record', in Karl D. Jackson (ed.), *Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death*, Princeton University Press, 1989, 210

[4] Nhem En was recruited by the Khmer Rouge at the age of nine and sent to China to study photography. Back in Phnom Penh, he was assigned to S-21. He was at that time sixteen. After the Vietnamese army overthrew the regime of Democratic Kampuchea, he fled with the Khmer Rouge. He defected in 1995 under governmental amnesty. Since then, he has become deputy district governor at Anlong Veng (former Khmer Rouge stronghold). He has not been prosecuted but has testified against Duch at the Khmer Rouge trial.

[5] David Hawk, 211

[6] Niven's and Riley's initiative was not the first of its kind. In the early Eighties David Hawk, a human rights activist, researched the Tuol Sleng archives. A few years later Cornell University was granted permission and assistance to carry out a project for the preservation of the documentation and its transfer into microfiche. Mentioned by Rachel Hughes, 'The Abject Artefacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia's Genocide', in *Media, Culture, and Society*, vol. 25, no. 1 (2003): 23-44, 27

[7] It toured afterwards in the United States and abroad: Ansel Adams Centre in San Francisco, Photographic Resource Centre in Boston, Museum for Design in Zurich, Museet for Photokunst, Odense (Denmark), and Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney. Lindsay French, 'Exhibiting Terror', in Mark Philip Bradley and Patrice Petro (eds.), *Truth Claims. Representation and Human Rights*, Rutgers State University, 2002, 133-134

[8] Lindsay French, 134-135

[9] Lindsay French, 138-139

[10] Rachel Hughes, 24

[11] Janet Wolff, 'The Iconic and the Allusive: the Case of Beauty in Post-Holocaust Art', in Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobowitz (eds.), *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust*, Indiana University Press, 2003, 165

[12] Thierry de Duve, 'Art in the Face of Radical Evil, in Art, Theory, Criticism, Politics, no. 125 (2008): 3-23 (p.11)

[13] Thierry de Duve, 15-18

[14] Thierry De Duve, 23

[15] Marianne Hirsch, 'Surviving Images: Holocaust Photograph and the Work of Post-Memory', in Barbie Zelizer (ed.), *Visual Culture and the Holocaus*t, Athlone Press, 2001, 232

[16] Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence. The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 2002), 22

[17] Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, *Photographs Objects Histories. On the Materiality of Images* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), 5

[18] Ulrich Baer, 150

[19] Email of Dinh Q Lê to Moira Roth, 11 December 2000, quoted by Moira Roth, 'Obdurate History: Dinh Q. Lê, the Vietnam war, Photography, and Memory', in *Art Journal*, vol.60, no.2 (2001): 38-53

[20] Ly Boreth, 'Devastated Vision(s): The Khmer Rouge Scopic Regime in Cambodia', in *Art Journal*, vol.62, no.1 (2003): 67-81 (p.76)

[21] It is derived from the notion of 'deep memory' coined by Auschwitz survivor Charlotte Delbo ['sense memory' as affect opposes 'common memory' as representation, narrative and communicative memory] combined with that of *imago agens* [active image: image that possesses the capacity to move the subject]. The latter refers to medieval conceptions of (devotional) images with respect to memory processes: memory is best stimulated by visual means; memory itself is constituted by visual means; visualization is the key to fixing memories.

[22] Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 38, Bennett's emphasis

[23] Jill Bennett, 36

[24] James Young, At Memory's Edge: Afterimages of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture, (New haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 3-4

[25] The leaves are sandwiched with digital negatives under glass and exposed to sunlight. The image areas that are blocked by the emulsion fade (which creates the light areas) while the areas where photosynthesis has continued retain their dark pigment. The photosynthetic contact prints are then pressed and blotted dry and coated with several layers of resin, after which they are mounted and framed.

[26] Quoted in Robert Schultz, "Faces in the Leaves: Killing Fields, Memory, and Art", *Annual President's Forum, "Verdict(s) of History? Collective Memories of the 20th Century"*, Roanoke College, Salem, Virginia, 30 January 2009. roanoke.edu/Documents/Schultz.pdf

[27] Binh Danh, personal communication, 16 February 2010

[28] Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, 14

[29] Bernd Hüppauf, 'Emptying the Gaze: Framing Violence through the Viewfinder', in *New German Critique*, no.72 (1997): 3-44 (pp.43-44)

[30] Zygmunt Baumann, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989)

[31] Ulrich Baer, 178

[32] Despina Meimaroglou, personal communication, 4 July 2009

[33] In Cambodia, a person's surname precedes their last name. While the other Cambodian artist's referred to thus far have Westernized their names, Ly Davaruth has not. For the sake of consistency, he will be referred to by his last name from this point onward.

[34] 'Music, or more specifically songs and dance, were among the sites of signifying power recognized by the Khmer Rouge leaders', Toni Samantha Phim writes in 'Anthropology of the Khmer Rouge, Part I. Terror and Aesthetics', Working Paper GS06, Cambodian Genocide Program, Yale University, 1998. Revolutionary songs were omnipresent: at work sites, in the communal eating hall, while packed in trucks during relocation. They were played on radio transistors, loudspeakers, or sung by workers, 2-3

[35] Ly Daravuth quoted by Sarah Stephens, 'The Legacy of Absence. Cambodian Artists Confront the Past', in *Persimmon: Asian Literature, Arts, and Culture* (2000) <http://www.asianart.com/exhibitions/legacy/messengers.html>

[36] Rachel Hughes, 34

[37] Serge Thion, *Watching Cambodia. Ten Paths to Enter the Cambodian Tangl*e, (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1993), 181. It bears recalling that at that time the Holocaust denial positions of

Serge Thion, a leftist militant involved in anti-colonial struggles throughout the Seventies, were not yet known.

[38] Oliver Urbain, Music and Conflict Transformation. Harmonies and Dissonance in Geopolitics, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 33-34

[39] Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, 4

[40] Jill Bennett, 31

[41] See Andy Brouwer's blog, entries 20 April 2009 and 17 June 2010. Available at: http://blog.andybrouwer.co.uk

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Exacting Photography: Self-imaging and its frustration in contemporary art photography

Benedict Burbridge

This article examines the use of physically and psychologically exacting conditions to frustrate efforts at self-presentation in a number of contemporary photographic portraits. I argue that, through these strategies of distraction, recent artists have worked against the conventions traditionally defining the portrait as a genre, bringing their work closer to the experimental techniques encountered in early scientific photography, particularly the work of Duchenne de Boulogne and Jean-Martin Charcot. It is my contention that such links as far from incidental, and I identify a shared distrust of the subject as an uncontrolled performative presence as the key factor informing the manufacture of the exacting environments in both contemporary art and nineteenth-century science. I conclude that the recent work recommends a shifted role for the portrait within art photography, responding to post-modern theorizations of subjectivity and the conscious acts of self-fashioning endorsed by late capitalist consumer culture: its authority no longer determined by the artful consolidation of a projected self-image, but in photographing aspects of behaviour that lie beyond the subject's conscious control.

As frozen images—in advertisements or style magazines—become the models from which people design their living spaces or themselves, extreme alienation sets in. One becomes, by definition, increasingly uncomfortable in one's own skin.[1]

It is very true that certain people, comedians above all, possess the art of marvellously feigning emotions that exist only on their faces or lips…But it will be simple for me to show that there are some emotions that man cannot simulate or portray artificially on the face: the attentive observer is always able to recognise a false smile.[2]

A distinct strand has emerged within contemporary art photography, in which people are depicted in uniform series, usually individually, and positioned centrally within the frame.[3] The series vary in terms of their subject, location, and the precise circumstances in which the photographs are made, but share in their manufacture of physically or psychologically exacting environments. Exposed to extremes of heat,

drenched by rain, or seemingly oblivious to the presence of the camera, the photographed subject is shown to struggle to present the self-image they might usually hope to display. Projects by Rineke Dijkstra, Bettina von Zwehl, Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, Phil Collins, Marjaana Kella, Oliver Sieber and Albrecht Tübke can all be counted as prominent examples of this mode.

As such failures at self-imaging emerge as a manifest theme of the work, so the recent strain is notable for its turning away from the historical conventions defining the portrait as a genre - namely, the demonstration of artistic originality through consolidating the self of the portrayed. Rather, this contemporary mode might be more closely linked to early scientific applications of photography, particularly those in which various stimuli were deployed to artificially simulate expressive forms of behaviour, for example, in Duchenne du Boulogne's well-known photographic studies of various facial expressions, published in his 1862 book *The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression*, and Jean-Martin Charcot's photographs of female patients diagnosed with hysteria at the Salpétrière Hospital in Paris.

What might these potential scientific parallels imply with regards our understanding of the contemporary work? This essay offers two suggestions. By opening a dialogue between the nineteenth-century scientific photographs and recent examples of art photography, I want to first establish a series of methodological links: considering *how* the various strategies of distraction encountered in contemporary art draw on, mimic or reproduce aspects of those deployed by Charcot and Duchenne. So the nineteenth-century material will serve as the locus around which different examples of contemporary art photography are drawn together, revealing a methodological uniformity in the recent work through the identification of these common approaches. Secondly, I want to consider the reasons behind this uniformity, to explore *why* artists may have adopted such strategies in the making of their portraits. To do so, I turn again to the work of Charcot and Duchenne, identifying a common distrust of the photographed subject as an uncontrolled performative presence within their efforts to replicate and document aspects of human behaviour for the purposes of scientific analysis and illustration. I aim to link this distrust to the similar suspicion displayed by contemporary artists in relation to their subjects, tied this time to post-modern

theorizations of subjectivity, and the conscious acts of self-fashioning endorsed by late-capitalist consumer culture.

On Method

Duchenne described his approach to the face as a form of 'animated anatomy': the application of small electrical charges initially conceived as a means of isolating and analyzing the individual action of specific muscles that, when stimulated in combination, could 'like nature herself, paint the expressive lines of the emotions on the face of man.'[4] It was as much the use of photography to document and disseminate these experiments that set his book apart from previous scientific studies of facial expression – as the author suggested in his introduction, each picture taught 'a thousand times more than extensive written description.'[5] The additional benefit of Duchenne's electrophysiological method lay in allowing him to stage, and to hold, the usually fleeting expressions of the face for a period long enough to accommodate the exposure times demanded by early photographic technology (fig. 1).[6]
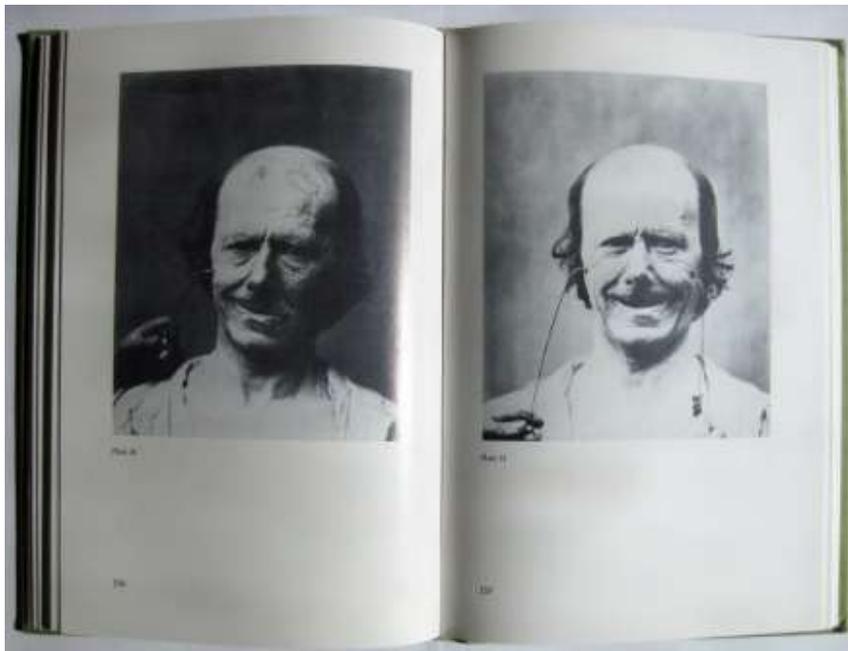

Fig. 1: Duchenne du Bolougne, *The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression*, 1862 (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Where Duchenne's images aimed to document a universal language of facial expression, the forms of expressive behaviour clinically photographed by Charcot and his staff at the Salpétrière were of a more specific order. As such, these photographs respond to a different, and more specific, set of problems. Hysteria had not yet acquired much status as a respectable object of medical science when Charcot was completing his medical studies just after 1850.[7] The photographs of patients experiencing hysterical attacks aimed to provide what he regarded as an essentially neurological condition with permanent visual form, in order to further affirm its existence. So, as Georges Didi-Huberman has described, 'by freezing in time putative phases of the hysterical attack, the camera identified, analysed and ultimately reified clinical events that had seemed too elusive to investigate.'[8] Charcot established a studio within the Salpétrière dedicated to photographically documenting the hysterical subject, its output published in three volumes under the title *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpétrière*.[9] As much as these photographs aimed to document and so to prove in positivist terms the existence of hysteria, Charcot also voiced concerns regarding the 'malingering' tendencies he saw as characterising the condition: an 'intentional, willed deception, in which the invalids exaggerate their real symptoms or indeed meticulously create an imaginary array of symptoms.'[10] It was suggested, furthermore, that the likelihood of this performance was increased by the presence of medical staff. Charcot's patients were 'more prone to do so when they think they are being observed and admired' and, particularly, 'when the victim of deceit happens to be a physician.'[11]

A number of writers have subsequently acknowledged the ambiguous status such sentiments lend the photographs produced by the Salpétrière, particularly those published in the first two volumes of the *Iconographie Photographique*, which purport to document the various stages of an hysterical attack.[12] Whilst the captioning of these images insisted on the veracity of the phenomena they claimed to represent, the necessary presence of the camera—a double for the physician-observer—in producing the photographs, must have, by Charcot's own account, increased the likelihood of an alternative, simulated form of hysteria. As a mechanical recording device, the camera was impotent to distinguish the symptom from its performance. It is in the third volume of *Iconographie Photographique*, published in 1888, that these

concerns appear to have been addressed: its illustrations drawing on a collection of photographs documenting Charcot's various experiments with hypnosis, and the application of stimuli to induce forms of behaviour equivalent to those constituting the different phases of hysterical attack.[13] A 'hypnotic sleep' was used to induce an initial state of hysterical 'lethargy', following which, a bright light or the vibrations of a tuning fork were shown to turn the subject 'instantly cataleptic'. The sudden extinction of the light or the silencing of the tuning fork stopped 'the catalepsy instantly' (figs. 2 & 3).[14] Thus 'by stimulating the mind of the patient', Charcot aimed to 'bring back the symptoms of hysteria', his 'artificially induced paralysis' considered 'an exact reproduction of the previous symptoms.'[15]
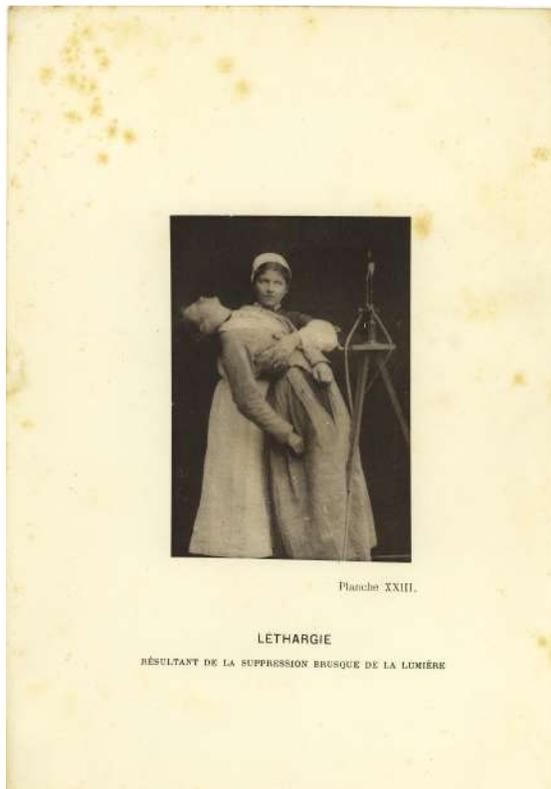
Fig. 2 (Left): Paul Regnard, 'Lethargy resulting from the abrupt suppression of light'
First published in *Iconographie photographique de la Salpétrière* Vol III, 1880.
Courtesy of the Waring Historical Library, MUSC, Charleston, S.C.
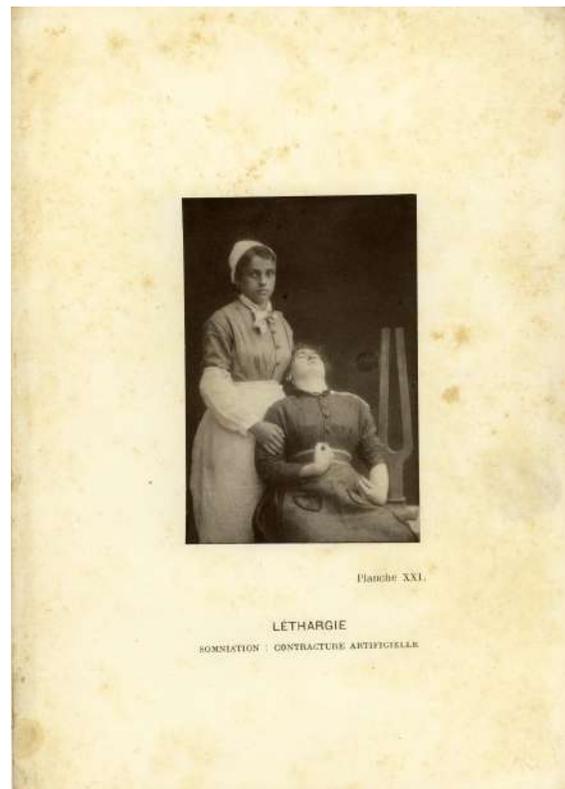
Fig. 3 (Right): Paul Regnard, 'Catalepsy provoked by the sound of a tuning fork'.
First published in *Iconographie photographique de la Salpétrière* Vol III, 1880.
Courtesy of the Waring Historical Library, MUSC, Charleston, S.C.

The methodological links that tie such images to a number of the strategies of distraction encountered within contemporary portraiture are clear. In Rineke Dijkstra's photographs of young mothers after childbirth (1994), matadors after bull fights (1994-2000), and Israeli conscripts after military training exercises (1999-2000), the residual traces of these extreme forms of physical exertion are harnessed as a means of disrupting her subject's efforts at self-presentation.[16] The pseudo-laboratory style conditions manufactured by Bettina von Zwehl in her three *Untitled* series (1998-9) attempt something similar, the artist photographing her sitters as they wake from sleep, after strenuous exercise, or asked to hold their breath (fig. 4).[17] In a related vein, Phil Collins slaps his subjects in the face moments before they are photographed, for his series *You'll Never Work in this Town Again* (2004-ongoing).[18] In each case, a tension is established between the subject's efforts at self-presentation and the physical discomfort they are shown to experience. Much as Duchenne's subjects appear conscious of the camera—which they confront directly with their gaze—whilst the electrical charges induced expressions over which they had little or no control, here, the subject's direct gaze into the lens suggests an awareness of the self as image, whilst the signs of their exertion implies a consciousness of their physical presence before the camera, and how this might undermine any such efforts at composure.[19]
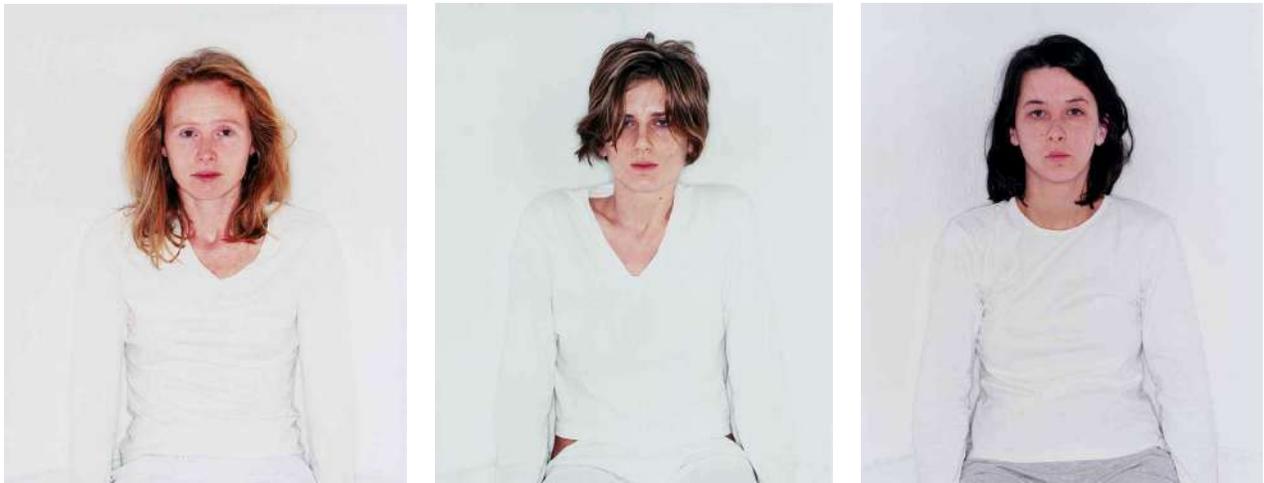

Fig. 4: Bettina von Zwehl, from *Untitled I*, 1999. Courtesy the artist.

Fig 5: Bettina von Zwehl, from *Alina*, 2004. Courtesy the artist.

Alternatively, stimuli are applied in such a way that the subject is shown to forsake control over self-presentation, signalled by their inability to look at the camera directly. This is the case with von Zwehl's series *Rain* (2003), which shows women drenched by the heavy downpour produced by a rain machine, and *Alina* (2004), in which a bright flash is used to momentarily illuminate women sat in a darkened room listening to music (fig. 5).[20] A similar point holds true for the majority of the photographs in Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin's project *Trust* (2003).[21] Here, the artists first approached subjects to request permission to photograph them before waiting until they became engrossed in, or overwhelmed by a variety of elements,

Fig. 6:. Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, from the series 'Trust', 2001.
Courtesy the artists.

Fig. 7: Oliver Sieber, *Anja, Duren 2002*,
from the series 'Die Blinden'.
Courtesy the artist.

Fig. 8: Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin,
from the series 'Trust', 2001.
Courtesy the artists.

including computer games arcades, sports events, and beauty and dental treatments
(fig. 6). In Oliver Sieber's series *Die Blinden* (2003), a clinical gaze is turned onto a
cast of blind people.[22] The artist's interest in these subjects resides in the fact that,
owing to their disability—particularly their lack of any prior exposure to either
photographs or mirrors—their appearance also lacks the usual forms of conscious
control (fig. 7).[23] In the case of the hypnotised sitters in Marjaana Kella's *Hypnosis*
series (2000) and the images of anaesthetized patients which conclude Broomberg
and Chanarin's project, the subjects are shown to lose consciousness altogether
(figs. 8 & 9).[24] Much like Charcot and his use of hypnosis, magnesium flashes and
tuning forks, such photographs offer serial depictions of subjects unable to control
self-presentation, owing to the conditions sought out or manufactured by their maker.
These efforts at manipulation and control can also take on more subtle forms. Talking
about his 2004 series *Citizens*, Albrecht Tübke, has described his interest in 'the big
gap between what my subjects think they are and what is finally visible,' whilst
Dijkstra likewise suggests her well known series of beach portraits (1992-8) aimed 'to
strike that balance between what people want to show, and what they show in spite
of themselves.'[25] In both cases, the 'gap' opened or exploited by the photographers
results from a similar combination of elements, as Tübke has explained:

> The first thing I would tell them is not to smile. I am not interested in a
> typical smiling face in a photograph. And when I told them I am not

interested in them smiling, the situation of photographing the people changed immediately. People become aware that this is not a simple photograph, that this is something more. It immediately becomes a very strange situation, but the people have already said yes, so they can't really escape. So it becomes a very energizing situation, because people sometimes get scared of what it is all about. This is a good moment, because people's visual expression changes a lot. People have this attitude of being very visible in what or who they are. It is a mixture between their real identity and their public construction of what they are. This is the situation I want to organize. [26]

In both *Citizens* and Dijkstra's beach portraits, the strangeness of the fleeting photographic encounter and the single instruction not to smile combine with the sustained period of stillness demanded by the photographer's large format cameras, to create an environment within which subjects, again, become conscious of their physical presence before the camera, often prompting an awkwardness that impedes

Fig. 9: Marjaana Kella, *Hypnosis, Ritva 3*, 2000. Courtesy Van Zoetendaal Photography

Fig. 10: Albrecht Tübke, from the series 'Citizens', 2001. Courtesy the artist.

their efforts to project a confident self-image. The fact that this aspect often appears more pronounced in Dijkstra's work than in Tübke's is largely due to the particular nature of these conditions and the subjects they have chosen to photograph. Shown fully clothed in various urban settings, Tübke's adult cast prove relatively articulate in the languages of self-fashioning when contrasted with the half-formed identities of Dijkstra's semi-clad adolescents (fig. 10).

Although in a less overt manner than those projects which parade their various strategies of distraction, even these more subtle forms of manipulation might be likened to Duchenne's electrodes or Charcot's bright flash. Applied in a uniform fashion, irrespective of the individual sitter and their character, the various methods seek to draw forth distinct forms of behaviour which lie beyond the subject's conscious control, undermining measured acts of self-presentation with an alternative set of poses determined, at least in part, by choices made by the photographer well in advance of the specific photographic exchange.[27] It is one thing to identify the existence of such similarities, and another to try to explain them, to offer some suggestions as to why recent artists may have adopted the manipulative role of the nineteenth-century clinical scientist in relation to their subjects. One reason may relate to changed understandings of the nature of subjectivity; such formal and methodological parallels hinting at a shared distrust of the subject before the camera as an uncontrolled performative presence.

Anatomy of Control

The theatrical staging and manipulation of the subject evident in the photographs produced by Charcot and Duchenne relate to what Elizabeth Edwards describes as 'a growing trend in nineteenth-century laboratory practice to replicate the actualities of the physical, empirically experienced world in controlled conditions which allowed for their analysis.'[28] In Charcot's photographs, this replication took two forms. Whilst the third volume of *Iconographie Photographique* sought to replicate the hysterical symptom through hypnosis and the application of various stimuli, the first two volumes brought together images within which the genuine symptom was indistinguishable from its uncontrolled and performative replication by the hysterical

patient. The movement towards a totalising form of control, exercised over this simulation, and played out across the three volumes of *Iconographie Photographique*, thus bears the marks of Charcot's distrust of the latter, potential replication, rooted in what he regarded as the 'malingering' tendencies of the hysterical subject.

A similar concern emerges within Duchenne's publication, when he presents the reader with a series of photographs aimed at verifying the naturalism of his artificially induced expressions. As he explained:

> My experiment could not be complete without comparing natural expressive movements with those produced by localized electrisation. The muscles that move the eyebrows, of all the expressive muscles, are least under the control of the will; in general, only the emotions of the soul can move them in an isolated fashion. Unfortunately, the old man referred to above was of too low intelligence or too poorly motivated to produce the expressions that I have produced artificially on his face. Happily, I met a subject who, after much practice, could perform a large range of eyebrow movements. He was an artist of talent and at the same time an anatomist who was interested enough to undergo this study on himself. By calling on his feelings, he could produce perfectly most of the expressions portrayed by each of the muscles of the eyebrow.[29]

The photographs, and the manner in which Duchenne discusses them, serve a dual function. Firstly, they are used to testify to the accuracy of his own artificially induced expressions through a series of visual comparisons (fig. 11). Secondly, Duchenne's insistence on the general physiological difficulties preventing most people from convincingly conveying the emotions at will, implies a subtle prioritisation of his own, electrically produced simulations, over those his subjects could ordinarily perform. In this sense, the actor is presented as the exception proving the rule. Although the ability to simulate and hold expressions for long enough to take a photograph was a secondary benefit of Duchenne's electrophysiological method, the implication of such

a sentiment is that the resulting photographs constitute a more accurate portrayal than the alternative, more uncontrolled form of simulation that the long exposure times of early photographic equipment would have demanded. So, whilst Duchenne suggested 'there are some emotions that man cannot simulate or portray artificially on the face: the attentive observer is always able to recognise a false smile,' he insisted that 'in spite of…the unfortunate presence of the electrodes and the hands which held them in my plates, my artificial expressions remain grippingly true.'[30]

In a general sense, both Duchenne and Charcot looked to photography as a means of permanently documenting and publicly disseminating aspects of expressive behaviour: the captioning and analysis of their images foregrounding the communicative potential of the face and the body as indices of inner emotional or psychological states.[31] In each instance, however, these phenomena—as they occurred in nature— lay beyond the bounds of early photographic possibility. As a result, the production of the photographs demanded a form of simulation. The preference suggested in each case for those simulations over which the investigator could exercise an often-totalising form of control reflects a wider debate, concerning the scientific value of early photography. In their influential 1992 essay, 'The Image of Objectivity', Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison identified objectivity as a distinct and
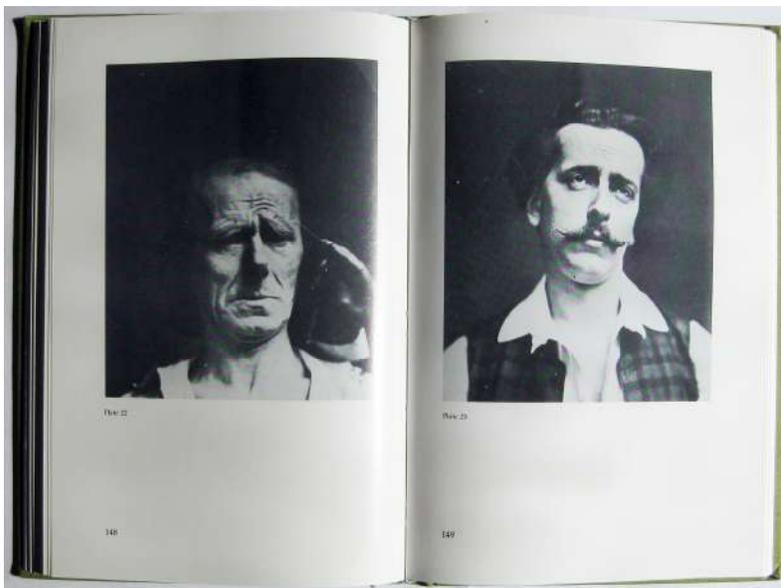

Fig 11: Duchenne du Bolougne, *The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression*, 1862 (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

historically unstable representational trope, fundamentally altered by the invention of the photograph.[32] Until this point, scientific illustration had derived its authority from the interpretive presence of the scientist, who sought to tame anomalous aspects of the natural world through the creation of idealised forms of representation and the creation of representative types.[33] Photography promised a new and unmediated form of illustration, producing 'not just more observations, but better observations,' and so resulted in what is described as a paradigm of 'mechanical objectivity'.[34] For the authors, such a shift was of a moral, as well as a scientific order, the self-conscious efforts to guard against subjective distortion chiming with the cultural themes of self-purification through self-abnegation resonant in late nineteenth-century Europe.[35]

The controlled simulations of Charcot and Duchenne—produced between 1862 and 1880—stand at a historical threshold, representing a somewhat awkward transition within the formulation of objective scientific protocol with regards the uses of photography: the particular authority of their simulated evidence drawing on two, conflicting, factors.[36] The evidential value of these images derived from the verisimilitude promised by the new medium, and the mechanical objectivity the camera seemed to guarantee. But the interpretive and controlling presence of the scientist is rarely concealed within them. Just as the electrodes are present in each of Duchenne's images, so Charcot photographed the flash bulb and the tuning fork. As such, these photographs also look back to an earlier period, deriving an alternative form of authority from the aesthetic and ontological judgments made by the scientist regarding the necessary elements constituting an 'accurate' representation. So the photographer intervenes in the image and sculpts the photographic subject to replicate the specific phenomenon the picture is intended to convey. This continued investment in the controlling presence of the clinician-photographer also manifests itself conversely, through the distrust or uncertainty these figures expressed in relation to more uncontrolled types of performance or simulation: in Charcot's uncertainty regarding the malingering hysterical patient, and in Duchenne's insistence on the physiological impossibility of controlling the muscles in isolation, and the related difficulties of simulating the emotions at will.

The methodological links that tie these early experiments with the efforts at control and distraction within contemporary art photography are thus far from incidental, for post-modern theorizations of subjectivity and identity have also stressed their performative character, challenging traditional notions of the subject as an autonomous, self-conscious being.[37] According to this logic, people are inseparably actors, who perform actions, and interpreters, who elaborate social meanings by exchanging signs, which are the form action takes when it is caught up in flows of relations on which people seek to confer meaning.[38] It is therefore in interaction, where they are subject to interpretation, that these qualities are invested with meanings; and meanings, depending on relation, vary as we pass from one to another.[39] So, for the French sociologist Michael Maffesoli, writing in 1988, 'whereas the individualist logic is founded on a separate and self-contained identity, the person (persona) can only find fulfilment in relation with others.'[40]

In their 2005 book, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello suggest that these recent theorizations of a performative subjectivity have fed the 'materialistic hedonism of consumer culture'. The fluidity of what the authors term our contemporary 'paradigm of the network', along with its lack of any overarching representation, means that 'actions in it are always embedded in the contingency of the present situation.'[41] As a result, new emphasis is placed on 'the ability to control and alter self-presentation' or on what Stuart Ewen has described as 'a sense of self that was malleable and sensitive to the power of surface.'[42] Such thinking has fed a vast industry built around the means to fashion the self through clothing, adornment and surgery, along with a commercial image world offering a variety of templates for such performances.[43] Indeed, when subjectivity is reduced to self-fashioning in this way, every posture might be understood as a form of simulacrum, reflecting those prescribed by a spectacular image world.[44]

So it is that recent portraiture also proceeds from a distrust or uncertainty regarding the photographed subject as an uncontrolled and performative presence. As such, the uniform efforts to manipulate or control the subject, to work against or undermine self-presentation, represent a distinct change to the conventions historically governing the portrait as a genre. Where the value of the portrait was once defined

by the artist's ability to visually consolidate the self of the portrayed, such projects propose an alternative criteria – their interest or "authenticity" founded on an ability to disrupt and undermine such performances, to seek out aspects of behaviour which fall outside the subject's conscious control.[45] If the sitters' projected self-images result from the internalisation, combination and re-enactment of a vast proliferation of images, many of them peddled to the consumer by mass media and advertising, the strategies of control and distraction seek out aspects of behaviour and appearance which appear to resist commodification: foregrounding unconscious gestures, instinctive physical reactions to various stimuli, and the biological facts of the body as a physical organism. Yet through this process, the previously uncommodified aspects of the subject and their appearance are arguably packaged and sold by the artists in series, *precisely as a counterpoint* to the standardised image practices of the commercial media and more conventional forms of portraiture. So the photograph seeks its value as contemporary art through its seeming resistance to, and distance from, the medium's commercial applications within mass culture.

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[1] Stuart Ewen, 'Marketing Dreams: The Political Elements of Style' in Alan Tomlinson (ed.), Consumption, Identity, Style: Marketing Meanings and the Packaging of Pleasure (London: Routledge, 1990): 51.

[2] Duchenne du Boulogne, The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression, 1862, trans. R. Andrew Cuthbertson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 30.

[3] Julian Stallabrass, 'What's In a Face? Blankness and Significance in Contemporary Art Photography', October no. 122 (Fall 2007): 71.

[4] Duchenne: 8-10.

[5] Duchenne: p. 37.

[6] Philip Prodger, 'Photography and the Expression of Emotions' in Darwin, The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals (London: Penguin, 2009): 405.

[7] Christopher G. Goetz, Michael Bonduelle & Toby Gelfand (eds), Charcot: Constructing Neurology, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995): 172.

[8] Georges Didi-Huberman, Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the photographic iconography of the Salpêtrière, trans. Alisa Hartz (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003): 185.

[9] Désiré Magloire Bourneville (ed.), Iconographie photographique de la Salpétrière Vol III, (Paris: Salpétrière,1876-80).

[10] Jean Martin Charcot, Oeuvres Complétes: Lecons sur les Maladies du Systéme Nerveux, (Paris: Delahaye & Lecronsnier, 1886): 282. Translated from French for the author by Max Leonard.

[11] Jean Martin Charcot, 'De l'influence des legions traumatique sur le dévelopement des phénomenes d'hystérique locale', Photographie Medicale, (May 4, 1878): 335-8 cited Goetz et al: 172 and J. M. Charcot, 'De l'ischurie hysterique', Oeuvres Complétes: 255.

[12] See Didi-Huberman, pp. 107-82 and Ulrich Baer, Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005): 25-61.

[13] Ulrich Baer, Spectral Evidence: 25-9.

[14] Désiré Magloire Bourneville (ed.), Iconographie photographique de la Salpétrière Vol III, (Paris: Salpétrière, 1880): 174-7. Charcot's pupil, Paul Richer, provided a similar description in his Etudes

Cliniques sur l'hystéro Epilepsie ou Grande Hystérie, (Paris: Delahaye & Lecronsier, 1881). See also Baer: 30-9.

[15] Charcot, Oeuvres Complétes: 92.

[16] Rineke Dijkstra, Portraits (London: Schirmer/Mosel and Art Data, 2004).

[17] Rebecca Drew (ed.), Bettina von Zwehl, (Gottingen: Photoworks/Steidl, 2004).

[18] Clare Bishop and Mark Sladen, Double Agent (London: ICA, 2008). Although Collins warned his subjects of his intention to slap them, the surprise and pain they exhibit is real. Speaking about the project, he has explained, 'I always tell the person that I will count to three before I slap them, but I always do it on two to catch them out.' Francesca Martin, 'Turner nominee slaps 28 people', The Guardian, (23 January 2008).

[19] See any of the plates in Duchenne's Mechanism.

[20] Bettina von Zwehl.

[21] Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, Trust (London: Westzone Publishing, 2001).

[22] Oliver Sieber, Die Blinden (Koln: Schaden, 2006).

[23] Sieber has explained that it is often the sitters' relatives who 'tried to give them a visual appearance, that is sometimes not to their own taste. So the visual codes that appear in fact come from someone else.' Oliver Sieber, email correspondence with the author (3 December 2009).

[24] Marjaana Kella, Marjaana Kella (Amsterdam: Van Zoetendaal, 2002).

[25] Albrecht Tübke interviewed by the author (21 October 2009). For Citizens see Albrecht Tübke, Portraits (Nürnberg: Verlag Moderne Kunst, 2006); Sarah Douglas, 'Rinike Dijkstra: the Gap Between Intention and Effect', Flash Art no. 36 (October 203): 78.

[26] Tübke interviewed by the author. Dijkstra has likewise suggested, 'when I photograph somebody, especially with the full body, it always makes them wonder 'oh, what am I going to do with my hands, etc.' And I think, retrospectively, I really used that more or less in the beach photographs.' Jessica Morgan 'Interview [with Rinike Dijkstra]' in Rinike Dijkstra: Portraits (Boston, 2001): 76.

[27] Von Zwehl is particularly lucid in discussing her work in these terms: 'I thought…How can I distract the sitter? How can I remove this kind of photographic mask?...How can I go beyond that and create something else that is maybe another kind of pose, but is, at least, not the same one you always get?' Bettina Von Zwehl interviewed by the author (4 November 2009).

[28] Elizabeth Edwards, 'Ordering Others: Photography, Anthropologies and Taxonomies' in Chrissie Iles and Russell Roberts (eds), In Visible Light: Photography and Classification in Art, Science and the Everyday, (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1997): 58.

[29] Duchenne, Mechanism: 30.

[30] Duchenne, Mechanism: 30-43.

[31] Duchenne explained that 'these lines and folds are precise signs, which in their various combinations result in facial expressions.' Duchenne, Mechanism: 1.

[32] Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, 'The Image of Objectivity', Representations no. 40 (Autumn 1992): 81-128. This thesis is expanded by the authors in their book Objectivity (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

[33] Daston and Galison, 'The Image of Objectivity': 84-90.

[34] Daston and Galison, 'The Image of Objectivity': 83.

[35] Daston and Galison, Objectivity: 93-4.

[36] Prodger has suggested that Darwin's publication 'could not conform to rules about scientific objectivity because it was part of the creation of those rules.' See Prodger, 'Illustration as Strategy': 141.

[37] Luc Boltanski & Eve Chiapello, The New Spirit of Capitalism, Trans. Gregory Elliot, (London & New York: Verso, 2004): 145-7.

[38] Boltanski & Chiapello: 147.

[39] Boltanski & Chiapello: 147.

[40] Michael Maffesoli, The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society, Trans. Don Smith (London: Sage, 1988): 10.

[41] Boltanski & Chiapello: 152.

[42] Boltanski & Chiapello: 152; Ewen: 46.

[43] Boltanski & Chiapello: 96-7.

[44] Jean Baudrillard, Simulations (New York: Semiotext(e) Inc., 1983).

[45] Ernst van Alphen, 'The portrait's dispersal: concepts of representation and subjectivity in contemporary portraiture' in Joanna Woodall (ed.), Portraiture: Facing the Subject (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997): 239.

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The Performance Space of the Photograph:
From 'The Anti-Photographers' to 'The Directorial Mode'

Catherine Grant

ABSTRACT

Focusing on work in the 1998 exhibition *Sightings: New Photographic Art*, ICA, London, the emergence of narrative photography in the 1990s and the tension between the documentary and the fictional within these contemporary works will be explored through the concept of the performance space of the photograph. Two articles from one issue of *Artforum*, in September 1976 – AD Coleman's 'The Directorial Mode: Notes Towards a Definition', and Nancy Foote's 'The Anti-Photographers' – allow for a consideration of the histories of narrative photography and conceptual art that jointly inform this contemporary practice with images by Jennifer Bornstein, Sharon Lockhart and Annika von Hausswolff providing this paper's focus.

'The Anti-Photographers' and 'The Directorial Mode' are titles of two articles published in a special issue of *Artforum* in September 1976. This issue focused on photography, with other articles on Nadar, Marey and recent photography books, alongside AD Coleman's article 'The Directorial Mode: Notes Toward a Definition' and Nancy Foote's 'The Anti-Photographers'. In Coleman and Foote's articles, the writers set out theoretical and historical groundings for contemporaneous photographic art, with Coleman's article focusing on the history of photography, whilst Foote considers the use of photography in conceptual art. In both articles, the authors consider the uneasy status of photography in art, with the works they discuss presenting challenges to modernist and realist notions of photography.

Common to both Coleman's and Foote's arguments is the importance of the photograph as documenting a performance – whether this is a staged scene in the tradition of the Victorian tableaux, or the trace of an ephemeral event, such as Richard Long walking a line. I am going to focus on this idea of the photograph as a performance space to explore the ways in which these two articles can help us to consider the more recent trend of narrative photography

in the 1990s. Often characterised as cinematic, with the prevalence of large-scale, colour works, I want to consider these works within a history of photography, to see how conceptions of the photographic and traditions of art photography are replayed in these fragmented narrative scenes. The focus on the cinematic, I would argue, obscures this work's relationship to a history of photographic art, with the challenges presented to modernist photography by conceptual art artificially confining the historical context to after conceptual art, missing out a rich photographic history, which already engages photography with both painting and cinema. To discuss this performance space in contemporary narrative photography, I will look at the 1998 exhibition at the ICA in London, *Sightings: New Photographic Art*. This was one of a number of exhibitions taking place internationally during the late 1990s and early 2000s that attempted to map out the popularity of photography in contemporary art.[1] By looking at *Sightings*, I want to see how the rise of large-scale, colour photography in the art gallery has reframed issues of photographic conventions and expectations that have been the material of much postmodern art. Focusing particularly on works by Jennifer Bornstein, Sharon Lockhart and Annika von Hausswolff, I want to consider how previous models of photography are re-animated in their work – primarily the portrait and the documentary image. By taking genres such as the portrait, and restaging them in a way that both acknowledges the challenges of postmodernism and conceptual art, as well as embracing the visual pleasures normally associated with painting and cinema, these works articulate a sense of history dragging on the medium of photography. By considering their works in this exhibition as being in dialogue with the concerns of both Coleman's concept of the directorial mode, and Foote's concept of the anti-photographers, I will propose links with staged photography in the broader historical context than the usual postmodern points of comparison such as the work of Jeff Wall, Cindy Sherman or Richard Prince. I want to stage the emergence of narrative photography in the 1990s in the context of this fertile moment in the 1970s, with the theorising of the history of photography and the use of photography in art; a moment in which the long and diverse history of photography was being revisited and re-evaluated.

During the mid-1970s, photography had become a key medium for experimentation in conceptual art, whilst its status as a fine art form was only just being consolidated in the museum and the market. This ambiguous status – as a medium almost 150 years old, with a history of art photography that was only recently being assimilated into the history of art – is one that colours the different reception and conceptualisation of photography presented in the two articles by Coleman and Foote. Whilst Coleman sees his project as unearthing a hidden photographic history that stretches back into the nineteenth century, Foote stages the use of photography by conceptual artists as being somehow 'unphotographic'. During this period debates around the photographic, and the relation of the history of photography to the history of art intersect with the dematerialisation of the art object, with the photograph being a way to subvert the notion of an art object by operating in the margins of documentation. Definitions of the photographic varied widely, with much at stake in its theoretical construction. My interest here is the exchange between vernacular uses of photography coming into art as 'anti-photography' and art photography that remained outside of fine art. By exploring similarities in these two areas, I hope to show some commonality to their definitions of the photographic, as related to the performance space of the photograph. During the 1970s photography had been embraced by the museum in certain guises – primarily modernist and personal documentary, as championed at the Museum of Modern Art, New York by John Szarkowski – however these two articles described approaches to photography that were not seen as part of its identity in the museum.[2]

The Anti-Photographers

Nancy Foote's article 'The Anti-Photographers' presents an argument that is familiar to many art historians interested in conceptual art and the position of photography within postmodernism. She starts by describing the discrepancy between 'fine art photography' and the use of photography in conceptual art. Whilst 'fine art photography' is seen as not quite fine art within the New York gallery system (she tells the reader how fine art photography is sold alongside prints at Castelli gallery), there is no question that photography in conceptual art

should not be seen as fine art. As she ironically puts it: 'For every photographer who clamors to make it as an artist, there is an artist running a grave risk of turning into a photographer.'[3] She then rehearses a now well-worn argument, that whilst photography is 'crucial' to conceptual type work, the main use of photography is as 'documentation', although she admits that 'it can be argued that photograph offers certain specific qualities and possibilities that have done much to inform and channel artistic strategies and to nurture the development of idea-orientated art.' She goes on to say 'Despite its dependence on photography, however, conceptual art exhibits little *photographic* self-consciousness, setting itself apart from so-called serious photography by a snapshot-like amateurism and nonchalance...'(46).

Foote then cites Alfred Stieglitz's 'pr campaign' for photography in the early decades of the twentieth century, giving the modernist terms against which these 'anti-photographers' are working against: namely the focus on 'the unique photographic print' and 'abstract formal values', which for Foote conceal the photograph's 'unique ability to gather, preserve, and present outside information' (46, 48).[4] She then contrasts Stieglitz's conception of modernist photography with the Duchampian approach to the photograph as ready-made seen in this new generation of artists (I'm putting aside for the moment the argument that photograph becomes a modernist art form through this reappraisal of photograph in the 1960s)[5]. She tells how these 'Duchampian underpinnings strip the photograph of its artistic pretensions, changing it from a mirror to a window. What it reveals becomes important, not what it is.'(48) This shift from 'a mirror to a window' follows the logic of conceptual artists using photography as straightforward documentation. However, this idea of photography operating as a window belies the range of photographic styles that are shown in the illustrations for this article. Whilst Foote's comments are illuminating for many of the conceptual works she refers to, this thesis does not cover the theatricality of Eleanor Antin's *100 Boots*, the mock-heroic landscapes of Hamish Fulton, or the precision of the Becher's typologies. To explore the tensions within Foote's construction of the 'anti-photographer', which I will argue

come from situating their practices only in relation to a Stieglitz-style modernism, I want to consider a few of the artworks illustrated in the article.
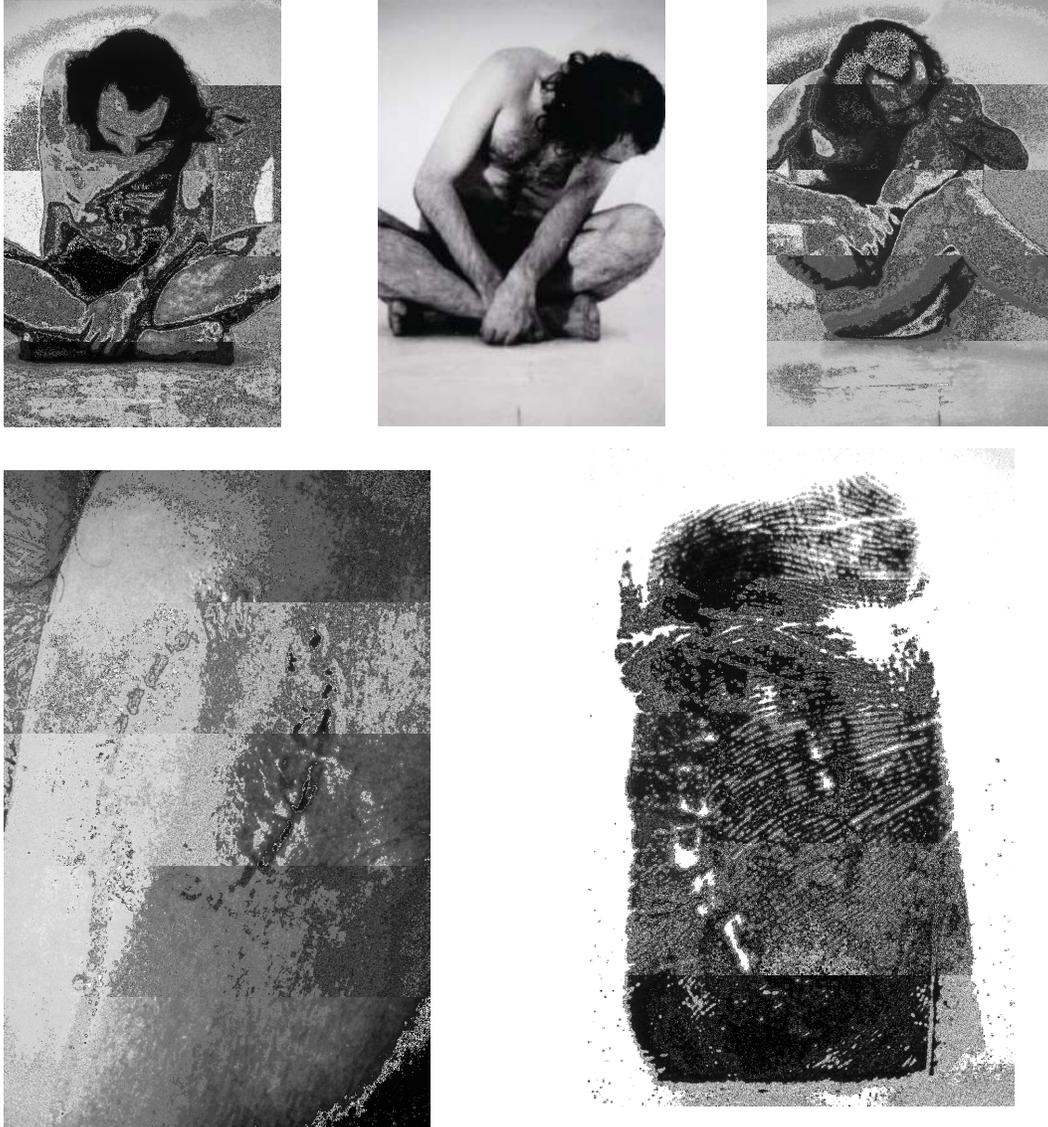
Fig. 1: Vito Acconci, *Trademarks*, 1970. Copyright Vito Acconci. Bottom left image was used as an illustration for the article 'The Anti-Photographers'.

The opening image, from Vito Acconci's *Trademarks*, 1970, seems to support her argument, with the trace of his teethmarks on his arm neatly fitting the focus on indexicality that dominates discussions of this kind of work (fig. 1). The full series is a combination of text, photographs and prints made from Acconci's

body, circulating around the ephemeral performance that took place in front of the camera. The text that accompanies this project reads:

> Sitting naked on the floor, and biting myself: Biting as many parts
> of my body as my mouth can reach.
> Printer's ink is applied to each bite; bite-prints are stamped, like
> finger-prints.

We are told that the photographer is Bill Beckley, with the photographs showing Acconci biting himself, and the marks made on him. The photographing of these traces on his body, which are then inked and printed onto paper, can be argued to reveal a photographic self-consciousness, in that the piece can be read as the body of the artist generating parodies of the indexical photograph with the indexical prints. Although the prints are not displayed in this representation of the work, the imagined, smudged image tells the viewer little about its making, rendering the transparency of the photograph into an incomplete trace of an event that the viewer is no longer privy to.[6] In this piece, key characteristics that Foote identifies are shown: the use of photographs in series, the use of photographs with text, the use of photographs to collapse a long performance into a few frames, and equally to collapse distance in the bringing into the gallery evidence of a distant action. Whilst I do not want to contest the importance of documentation and the consideration of the photograph's indexicality, to simply see the use of photography as 'unphotographic' ignores the sophisticated and disparate uses of photography by conceptual artists such as Acconci. (A different, humorous meditation on the indexical could be seen in the illustration of one of John Baldessari's photographs in which his finger literally points in the photograph, the index materialised, details from the work *Choosing: Green Beans*, 1971).[7]

Robert Smithson's *Nine Mirror Displacements*, Yucatan, 1969, like Acconci's *Trademarks*, also plays with the absent presence of the artist and the action presented in the photograph. From the spread in the magazine, the amateurism of the photographs and their 'nonchalance' might be supported. However, when

the colour slides that these images are taken from are viewed, a rather different impression of this work is given (fig. 2).

The lushness of Smithson's images, with the mirrors glinting in the light, reflect back to the viewer a magical scene, a mirage rather than an artwork, a moment in time concretised as a space within the photograph. As Smithson writes in his essay 'Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan', 1969,

> If you visit the sites (a doubtful probability) you find nothing but memory-traces, for the mirror displacements were dismantled right

Fig. 2: Robert Smithson, *Yucatan Mirror Displacements (1-9)*, 1969.
Nine cibachrome prints from chromogenic 35mm slides.
© Estate of Robert Smithson/DACS, London/VAGA, New York 2010.
Image courtesy James Cohan Gallery, New York.

after they were photographed. The mirrors are somewhere in New York. The reflected light has been erased. ... Yucatan is elsewhere.[8]

Through the combination of photographs and text, the viewer is presented with a scene that plays with a teasingly impossible closeness, a relationship to a performance that can never be more than an imagined encounter. Here, as in Acconci's work, the photograph's potential for documentation is played with as being not simply 'a window', but as a site of fantasy that requires the viewer's complicity in believing and constructing the scene being viewed, apart from any notion of factual completeness. This construction of a scene can also be found in Eleanor Antin's marauding boots, which are photographed by Philip Steinmetz, with the accuracy of the titles – for example *100 Boots in the Market*, Solana Beach, Calif., May 17, 1971, 9.30am – ironically attempting to tie down these fantasised scenes which appear more like film stills than a documented reality (fig. 3).[9] In these examples, the performance space of the photograph is emphasised for the viewer, as both a scene that we can take part in, a particular moment in time, and a staged scene for the camera.

The Directorial Mode

Fig . 3: Eleanor Antin, *100 Boots in the Market,* Solana Beach, California.
May 17, 1971, 9:30 am (mailed: June 7, 1971). Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

To consider the ways in which the photographs in Foote's article are using photographic forms that extend beyond documentation, I will now turn to AD Coleman's article 'The Directorial Mode: Notes Toward a Definition'. There are key terms that cross over with Foote's article, although at first glance, the illustrations may seem to point to a very different set of concerns, with images ranging from OG Rejlander and Julia Margaret Cameron to Duane Michals and Ralph Eugene Meatyard. Yet, as Coleman explains, his essay was intended to focus on contemporary photography, including conceptual uses of photography, but has ended up tracing a history due to what he calls a lack of awareness about the directorial tradition. His coining of the phrase, 'the directorial mode' has been reprised in the 1990s in relation to a new generation of artists using photography, and therefore it is useful to consider his argument in some detail. Although it has sometimes been conflated with the cinematic, as in the director of a film, Coleman's use of the term has to do with photography, its histories and concerns.

Like Foote, Coleman begins by discussing Stieglitz's support of photography as a High Art, from pictorialism to modernism. He describes how the qualities of 'sharpness of focus and realism' (55) were used to define the medium's inherent characteristics, rather than what he calls photography's 'almost infinite adaptability to any style of expression' (55). With this focus on realism, Coleman then describes three approaches to photography, with the quest for realism being posed as a religious endeavour, whether this is in 'documentary' photography or 'straight/pure' photography. This first mode, a quest for purity or realism, is termed 'theistic' (56), and is then contrasted with an 'agnostic' approach, in which 'the image-maker openly interprets the objects, beings, and events in front of the lens' (examples of artists being Robert Frank, Brassai, Henri Cartier-Bresson) (56). The third approach, the 'atheistic branch of photography' (56) is Coleman's directorial mode. 'Here the photographer consciously and intentionally *creates* events for the express purpose of making images thereof.'(56) Coleman continues:

Here the "authenticity" of the original event is not an issue, nor the photographer's fidelity to it, and the viewer would be expected to raise those questions only ironically. Such images use photography's overt veracity against the viewer, exploiting that initial assumption of credibility by evoking it for events and relationships generated by the photographer's deliberate structuring of what takes place in front of the lens as well as in the resulting image. (56)

Coleman describes these directorial photographs as 'falsified "documents"', with his definition being broad: 'Such falsified "documents" may at first glance evoke the same act of faith as those at the opposite end of this scale, but they don't require the permanent sustaining of it; all they ask for is the suspension of disbelief.'(56). Coleman's use of religious metaphor points to the importance of veracity in the definitions of photography, and the difficulty of assessing photography that plays with photography's documentary capacity. For Coleman, the directorial mode runs through the history of photography, but the emphasis on realism has meant that its importance has been missed, with the moralism of purism and realism in photography concealing thread of the directorial that runs through the spectrum of photography: with documentary at one end and the directorial at the other. To support his argument, Coleman uses as examples Alexander Gardener moving the body of a Confederate soldier, Arthur Rothstein's FSA portrait of a father and son, in which he asked the son to drop back to create a better composition, and Edward Weston's Shell and Rock (Arrangement), 1931. Coleman then focuses on the tradition of directorial photography, which he sees as appearing with the stereoscopic photographs of fictitious scenes around 1850, and developing through explicitly directorial genres of photography, including erotic, advertising and fashion photography. The compulsion to endorse photography's purity of realism can be seen in Coleman's own difficulty in wholeheartedly supporting his directorial photographers, with the description of Julia Margaret Cameron's work as 'sentimental', with its 'blend[ing], for better or worse, current literary themes and attitudes with the visual conventions of Pre-Raphaelite painting.' (58), revealing

an unease in completely endorsing this mode. After running through examples of photographers working in the directorial mode from the nineteenth century upto the 1960s, Coleman concludes his article by discussing photographers who work within an art context, focusing on Duane Michals and Les Krims. Michals is also discussed by Foote in her article, and forms a bridge across the two pieces, with Ed Ruscha also being mentioned by both authors.

Coleman, however, is scathing about the new generation of conceptual artists that use photography, as he sees it, in the directorial mode. He counts Krims and Michals as pioneers, who are 'reference points for the current generation of younger photographers and are obvious sources for much of the mediocre directorial photography which passes for "conceptual art" nowadays.'(59) Whilst I wouldn't agree with Coleman here about the 'mediocre' nature of conceptual art, his article does position the work of the conceptual artists shown by Foote in a rather different historical light. Whilst Foote poses the anti-photographers as having 'little *photographic* self-consciousness', in the light of Coleman's article, it becomes clear that these conceptual artists are anti documentary and high modernist (as in Stieglitz) photography, not the photographic in general. The fact that a number of Foote's anti-photographers haven't taken the photographs themselves does not mean that they are not engaging with the language of photography, although this is a key difference with many of Coleman's examples. Coleman concludes his article by trying to draw together the contemporary split between 'art photographers' and 'artists who use photography':

> whether or not they consider themselves 'photographers' or 'artists' or whatever, these individuals and many others are exploring the same field of ideas. That field of ideas is built into and springs from the medium of photography itself; it has a history and tradition of its own which is operative on many levels of our culture. There is no direct equation between ignorance of history and originality.... The time would seem to be ripe for them to acknowledge their common sources and mutual concerns; their

real differences will make themselves apparent in due time. (60-61)

The images illustrating Coleman's article present performances for the camera – like the artists I've discussed in relation to Foote's piece – but with more emphasis on the fantasy of a scene, rather than a documented reality, however fictional that documentation might be. An example of this can be seen in Duane Michals 'Things are Queer', which seems to support Foote's description of Michal's work (fig. 4):

> Duane Michals reverses photography's usual method of showing an overall view and details of varying closeness, gradually dispensing additional information about his subject by moving farther and farther away. Tableaux which at first appear to contain bizarre discrepancies in scale reveal their true identities as the camera recedes, clarifiying by degrees the structure of the scene. (52)

Fig. 4: Duane Michals, *Things Are Queer*, 1973.
© Duane Michals. Courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York.

In Michals's work, an engagement with photography's 'documentary' character is used in a more narrative style, so its inherent malleability is assumed, rather than interrogated, as in many of the conceptual artists' play with realism. Michals' photographs are obviously staged in a way that is presented differently in the documentation of performances in work by Acconci and Long, with their focus on indexicality. By considering this directorial work alongside that of conceptual artists, what comes into view is the use of different styles and genres of photography, which can be forgotten in the focus on the use of photography as a 'window'. Whilst the anti-photographers often use these styles as 'ready-mades' in a way that isn't seen in the work of photographers such as Michals, the differences between the anti-photographers and the directorial mode is one which blurs in the middle. While I do not want to simply collapse the two sets of artworks together, the mutual interests in the 'falsified' document and the performance space of the photograph create a lineage that is instructional in relation to work made in the 1990s.

Sightings

After the re-evaluation of photography's relation to art in the 1970s, the presence of photography in the museum was discussed by many commentators in relation to photography's importance to postmodernism and to its newly acquired status as hot art commodity. To discuss the narrative photography seen in exhibitions such as the ICA's *Sightings: New Photographic Art* requires an understanding of this radical shift in photography's status. Whilst the strategies of the conceptual artists and directorial mode are seen in this new art photography, the scale and presence of this work is very different: with large-scale, glossy colour prints dominating the art world. Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson are already wary of photography's new commodity status in the art world in the special issue on Photography in *October*, Summer 1978:

> Earthworks, performance, cinema, video, all pose problems to the
> dealer insofar as they infinitely expand and thereby revise the
> spatio-temporal données of commerce. Performance and video

have now invaded Soho and the galleries of Western Europe as lively forms of enterprise, difficult to assimilate to the market structure. The solution seems to lie in the small, flat surface of the photograph, with its equivocal and ambiguous temporal aspect, inflatable, of course, to painterly dimensions.[10]

Krauss and Michelson point to the paradox in the use of photograph by conceptual artists. By dematerialising the art object, the materiality and marketability of the photograph comes to the fore. In Douglas Crimp's seminal essay 'The Museum's Old, the Library's New Subject', he explores the incorporation of photography into the museum. He argues that photography is made into a modernist art form in the 1960s and 70s, using curator John Szarkowski as his example: 'For if photography was invented in 1839, it was only *discovered* in the 1960s and 1970s – photography, that is, as an essence, photography *itself*.'[11] Discussing how photography from across the New York Public Library was collected and recatalogued so that images that might have been previously filed under 'Egypt' were now under the photographers' names, such as 'Auguste Salzmann', he says, dramatically:

> Thus ghettoised, it will no longer primarily be *useful* within other discursive practices, it will no longer serve the purposes of information, documentation, evidence, illustration, reportage. The formerly plural field of photography will henceforth be reduced to the single, all-encompassing *aesthetic*.[12]

This idea of photography's *use* being supplanted by an *aesthetic* is one that polarises the practice of photography in art that I have been discussing in relation to Foote and Coleman's article. Here the pictorial and the conceptual seem to be on different sides of a divide that cleaves the history of photography. Crimp's argument, in simplified form, acts to minimise the history of art photography, to simply see photography as a non-art that became an art in the 1960s, to start with its integration into the history of art, and ignore the experiments that took place since photography began in the potential for

photography as an art form, a performance space that could be utilised for fantasy as well as documentation.[13] Whilst Crimp's argument is more subtle than my summary, there is a way in which this version of the history of photography has become accepted within the history of art, so that photography is born as a postmodern art at the moment of its acceptance as modernist.[14] By returning to the history presented in 'The Directorial Mode', with Coleman's focus on the malleability and hybridity of photography as a medium, I suggest that it is possible to point beyond this moment of photography's petrification in the museum. With the development of postmodern uses of photography in contemporary art, from the late 1970s onwards, an understanding of photography's different genres with their different histories and conceptions that don't simply fall under the category of documentation, or usefulness, is necessary.

Returning to Crimp's quote in relation to *Sightings: New Photographic Art*, I want to suggest that one way to read the trend for large-scale, colour prints, confidently taking up the space of the gallery, is as an ironic enactment of his pronouncement of the photograph's flattening and aestheticisation. In *Sightings* the various photographic genres of documentary, portraiture and tableaux, now joined by the new category of photography in conceptual art, or performance documentation; all used as various styles which are re-enacted by this new generation in a way that constantly acknowledges the weight of photography's history; felt in the elaborate, static nature of many of the images. From Sharon Lockhart's *Goshogaoka*, 1996, to Rineke Dijsktra's *Buzz Club* portraits, 1995, here the performance space of the photograph is one that is also a ready-made, to be re-inhabited with the clear acknowledgement of the previous performances that each photograph references.[15] In reviews of the exhibition, the focus was on the merging of fact and fiction in the photographs on display, with Mark Durden splitting the exhibition into two types: 'Contemporary photographic practice is marked by two distinct characteristics: on one hand are those artists who variously stage, construct and manipulate their photographic images; on the other hand are those continuing in a more classic tradition of portraiture and documentary. *Sightings: New Photographic Art* mixes both uses

of photography.'[16] As I have been arguing here, I would see that there is more blending than Durden suggests, with a focus on an event is staged for a camera – the performance space of the photograph – being articulated in very different styles. Even with apparently 'straight' portraiture projects, such as Dijkstra's photographs of teenagers in a Liverpool nightclub, the emphasis is on the capturing of this encounter in a photograph, foregrounded by her use of a white studio space, detaching her subjects from their noisy, crowded surroundings.

This tendency to divide photographic practice is not new, and was enacted contemporaneously to Foote and Coleman's articles by John Szarkowski's exhibition *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography Since 1960*, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1978. In the exhibition catalogue Szakowski unites photography ranging from the screenprints of Andy Warhol to the documentary snapshots of Garry Winogrand by defining two trends: photography as self-expression (mirrors) and as exploration (windows). Whilst it might be tempting to ascribe the anti-photographers as approaching photography as a window (as Foote does), and the directorial mode approaching photography as a mirror, as I hope to have already shown, a focus on the performance space of the photograph dissolves this opposition. Abigail Solomon-Godeau opens her essay 'Photography After Art Photography' with a discussion of Szarkowski's exhibition, noting how many commentators saw that there was much cross-over between the two categories.[17] Solomon-Godeau's essay is an influential account of the centrality of the photographic to postmodernism, in counter-narrative to Szarkowski. This exhibition, staged in 1978, two year after the issue of *Artforum* I've been discussing here, created a divide in approaches to photography that still barely acknowledges the work discussed by Foote and Coleman. The few artists and photographers to cross this museum-endorsed photographic canon and the two articles are Ed Ruscha, Duane Michals and Ralph Gibson. As Solomon-Godeau discusses, the inclusion of artists such as Ruscha who are associated now with postmodernism, challenged the version of photographic modernism that had been promoted by MOMA. In *Sightings* there are examples which also appear to ironically enact this divide: as in Elisa Sighicelli's work, *Las Vegas Curtain*,

1997, the 'window' of Foote's article and Szarkowski's documentary style is veiled, with the image mounted on a lightbox which illuminates the concealed window, so that the curtain becomes the screen of fantasy, a refusal to see photography as transparent recorder (fig. 5). Like Smithson's mirrors, Sighicelli's work plays with the clichés of photographic styles, making an image about the expectation of what a photograph can show us.

Equally, in Annika von Hausswolff's *Attempting to Deal with Time and Space,* 1997, the use of photography as either a mirror or a window is thwarted (fig. 6). In this series of photographs the artist grapples with a large balloon, so that the space between her and camera is literalised by this amorphous, obtrusive

Fig. 5: Elisa Sighicelli, *Las Vegas Curtain*, 1997, partially backlit photograph mounted on purpose-built light box, 80 x 80 x 10 cm. © Elisa Sighicelli. Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery.

Fig. 6: Annika von Hausswolff, *Attempting to Deal with Time and Space II*, 1997, laminated c-print mounted on Dibond, 110 x 80 cm. From a series of seven. Courtesy the artist and Collection Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall.

object. Here a portrait (of the artist) becomes a performance, with any attempt to see around the balloon frustrated, the artist's body held away from the camera's gaze. The title of this series points to photographic concerns – the capturing of time and space – and humorously enacts this futile endeavour. Rather than a mirror or a window, this series leaves the viewer with the space of the photograph as paradoxically full and empty, with an anticipation of the balloon's puncture and the 'revelation' of the scene implied by the artist's manipulations of its unwieldy mass. Hausswolff's work beyond what was exhibited in *Sightings* also blurs any neat categories of anti-photographer versus directorial mode, as her work includes both images that stylistically borrow from conceptual art, as in *Attempting to Deal with Time and Space*, as well as obviously staged photographs that are more theatrical, in the directorial mode, such as the series *Back to Nature*, 1993.[18] In *Back to Nature* large colour images of landscapes are punctuated by nude female bodies which appear corpse-like, ironically reworking the tradition of the nude in the landscape. Here

the lushness of the large-colour print references both the traditions of painting as well as photographic genres such as crime scene photography, again playing with the ability of the photograph to document a performance which cannot be easily pinned down.

A recurring anxiety about this narrative photography is its difference in scale and technique from the conceptual practices of the 1960s and 1970s, moving from the books of Ruscha and the postcards of Antin to the glossy prints that dominate the gallery space. Whilst I don't want to ignore the commodification of the photograph that occurs in these gallery-size prints, to see this shift as simply an effect of the market is to put aside conversations about the photographic generated by this work, to make this new generation of artists using photography as 'unphotographic' as their conceptual art forebears. In the exhibition catalogue, Simon Morrisey discusses this work as being made within the context of an image-culture in which fact and fiction blur. His essay opens with a girl reading the disclaimer at the beginning of a novel: 'This work is wholly fictional. Any resemblance to the objective present or past is gratuitous, and similarly resemblance to any actual event or character is accidental and not intended.'[19] His protagonist then goes on to watch TV, with both media giving rise to a contemplation of the blurring of fact and fiction. Here the photographs in the exhibition are linked to simulacral nature of popular culture. This focus on the everyday uses of photography conceals the conversations that take place in this work with the history of photography and art, a history that I would argue is more illuminating than a focus on television, cinema or literature. The reviews of the exhibition in the art press reference the influence of artists such as Cindy Sherman and Jeff Wall, seeing the work as a new generation of postmodern photographic practice, again focusing on the photograph as a space for the dissolution of boundaries between fact and fiction, photography and cinema, art and popular culture.[20]

In the light of Coleman and Foote's articles, I would argue that what is shown in the exhibition is work that is heavily dependent on the histories of photography in art, coming from both conceptual art and art photography: the anti-

photographers and the directorial mode. Key to this new generation of artists using photography is an acceptance of the debates around the photographic and postmodernism, so photography becomes of interest because of its fallen status as a medium of realism and as an agent of dematerialisation, but rather than embracing the simulacrum as many earlier postmodern artists, this new generation explore the remnants of the belief in photography's veracity, as described through Coleman's religious metaphor. Whilst I don't have space to consider the entire range of photography in the exhibition, this sense of decayed or reanimated photographic concerns and genres is taken up across the range of photographs: from landscape, to documentary, to staged scenes. What unites the disparate work in this exhibition, and is used here to stand in for a more general trend in art photography at this moment, is a heightened sense of the photographic, with all of its references and borrowings from other medias and specific genres, rather than 'the photographic' conceived in a modernist sense. In these large, serial images the performance space of the photograph is emphasised by the re-enactment of 'useful' photographic categories in a way that unravels their 'documentary' quality and reveals the fantasy, from Jörg Sasse's digitally manipulated found photographs, to Rut Blees Luxemburg's long exposures, to the staged scenes by Anna Gaskell and Hannah Starkey.

The performance space of the photograph

In the double portraits of Jennifer Bornstein, the strategy of the anti-photographers is replayed in a post-identity politics setting, as Bornstein poses with members of the public, a recurring presence which initially doesn't register as she seems to blend with the scenes and characters (figs. 7-10). Acknowledging the influence of artists such as Douglas Huebler, as well as August Sander and TV sitcoms, Bornstein's work explicitly engages with the performance space of the photograph, with the depiction of identity turned into an unstable performance.[21] Discussing the series, Bornstein says: 'I made these photographs in the early nineties, at time when identity politics and gender theory were the dominant forms of discourse. I chose people of all races

Fig. 7: Jennifer Bornstein, *Self-Portrait with Kid (Poinsettia Recreation Center)* (from *Projector Stand #3* series), 1996, colour photograph.
Image courtesy of the artist and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles.

Fig. 8: Jennifer Bornstein, *Self-Portrait with Kid (Poinsettia Recreation Center)* (from *Projector Stand #3* series), 1996, colour photograph. Image courtesy of the artist and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles.

Fig. 9: Jennifer Bornstein, *Self Portrait with Mail Man* (from *Projector Stand #3* series), 1996, colour photograph. Image courtesy of the artist and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles.

Fig. 10: Jennifer Bornstein, *Self Portrait with Senior Citizen, Farmer's Market, 3rd Street and Fairfax Avenue, Los Angeles* (from *Projector Stand #3* series), 1996, colour photograph. Image courtesy of the artist and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles.

and classes because I wanted to confuse the politics – to turn things on their head – albeit respectfully.'[22] Like von Hausswolff's series *Attempting to Deal With Time and Space*, Bornstein enacts scenes that cannot hold readings as either portraits or documentary images in Szarkoski's mirrors and windows schema, but instead focuses all attention onto the performance space of the photograph, with its potential to be read in many different ways. As Bornstein is shown posed with a mailman, a senior citizen and a couple of kids, her presence in each image stalls any straightforward narrative, requiring a double take from the viewer to catch her presence as she often blends with the characters she poses with. In its original incarnation, the portraits are part of an installation that includes two 16mm films which are played at the viewer's request by a union projectionist, and a bench on which the viewer must sit (fig. 11).[23] Here the photographs are one register in a work that focuses almost entirely on the experience of watching and being watched, the physical and psychic impact of human interaction. When asked by *Creative Camera* 'In your still photography are we seeing portrait of Jennifer Bornstein or something else?' she replied 'That's exactly what I'm interested in.'[24] The snapshot style

Fig. 11: Jennifer Bornstein, installation shot from *Projector Stand #3* series, 1996. Image courtesy of the artist and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles.

and serial format of the anti-photographers is redeployed to bring the performance of the artist *and* the viewer into focus. As I've discussed in relation to Foote's article, here photographic documentation undoes its own supposed transparency, turning what appears to be a window into an uncertain fantasy space. As Bornstein herself puts it: 'I would say that what I am doing is staging random interventions into people's daily lives and documenting the resulting performances, the brief interventions. The photographs are the residue of these small, forgettable interactions.'[25]

The scale of Bornstein's prints are that of a magazine page, or a small TV screen: 35.5 x 28 cm. When seen on the gallery wall, the viewer is encouraged to look between the images, to find the narrative linking the scenes. The narrative that emerges is that of the artist's presence, and implicitly, the presence of the camera, with the series following *Projector Stand #3* placing the artist alongside young boys, her own small stature and boyish appearance emphasising her strange disappearance within the scene she has staged (some commentators note that at first they thought Bornstein was a boy).[26] Rather than telling us anything about Bornstein the artist, or the characters she photographs herself alongside, her work instead focuses on the expectations of the documentary photograph and the portrait, with her repetitive appearance acting like the obstructing balloon in von Hausswolff's series. Here the conventions of the portrait snapshot or documentary image are the subject of her work, with the expectation of certain information to be generated by such photographs disrupted by her continual reappearance.

The performance space of the photograph is staged rather differently in the portraits by Sharon Lockhart in her series *Goshogaoka Girls Basketball Team* (fig. 12). Taken in a Japanese high school, the photographs re-enact action shots from sports magazines, replaying the performance of particular photographs, rather than the performance of playing basketball. If Bornstein borrows from the vernacular image world explored by the anti-photographers, Lockhart's images sit more easily alongside the obvious staging of the directorial mode, but as I have explored in relation to Bornstein's series,

Fig. 12: Sharon Lockhart, *Goshogaoka Girls Basketball Team: Kumi Nanjo and Marie Komuro, Rie Ouchi, Atsuko Shinkai, Eri Kobayashi and Naomi Hasegawa*, 1997. Three framed chromogenic prints from a series of twelve. 32 5/16 x 27 3/8 inches each, installed dimensions variable. Images courtesy of the artist and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles.

Lockhart is also taking as her subject the conventions of portrait and documentary photography. Like Coleman's 'falsified documents' Lockhart's models re-stage photographs, literally re-performing images of basketball players that inspire and mould their own identities as athletes. Once again, the window of the documentary photography is replayed as the mirror of fantasy, channelling images from popular culture through these schoolgirls' performances. Neither portraits nor documentary shots of action, here the scenes played out are as fictional as Eleanor Antin's *100 Boots* progressing across the American landscape or Duane Michals' tableaux.

The photographs are one part of a project that also includes a film, designed to be seen in a cinema setting. Like Bornstein's installation, at *Sightings* Lockhart's photographs were exhibited separately, with her film shown in the ICA's cinema. Both artists are interested in the specificity of photography and film, with their use of 16mm film referring primarily not cinema but to artist and home-made movies.[27] More cinematic are the size of Lockhart's images, which are approximately one meter by three meters, dominating the gallery space and focusing attention on their choreographed elegance. However, cinema here acts as a pointer to the staged notion of action played out here, using the frozen time of the photograph to bring out the artifice of the scene. The scale of these photographs make the viewer pay attention to their large, glossy surfaces,

surfaces that do not reveal truths about their models, but instead reflect back the coding of the performance played out for the camera. Like Bornstein, Lockhart plays with conventions of photographic documentation: these are photographs of girls who *do* play basketball, we are told each of their names in the photographs titles, as if they are documentary images, but the images are not believable as documents of action. The creation of movement through a stilled image creates a paradoxical effect, as the stylisation of the photograph embalms the moment, heightened by the otherness of Lockhart's Japanese subjects, so cultural vocabularies stutter for the Western viewer: are we meant to understand something about Japaneseness, or adolescent girls, or basketball, or is the subject of the photographs irrelevant to the construction of a particular type of image? All these questions can be pursued, but only with the feeling that each is short-circuited.

By foregrounding the photograph as a performance space, the works of Bornstein, Lockhart and their contemporaries emphasise the encounter that takes place both in front of the camera and in front of the finished photograph. Whether their images are explicitly fictional, or play with realistic conventions of portraiture and documentary, this contemporary practice focuses on the weight of the histories that their photographs reference, and the expectations that these histories place on their images. Like von Hausswolff's balloon, in Bornstein and Lockhart's portraits we are left with only partial information about the scene in front of us, left to uncertainly fill in the gaps. In this way the viewer takes part in the performance space of the photograph as much as the artist and models, bringing her own weight of expectations to these ambiguous scenes. Lockhart's Japanese schoolgirls are not captured by our gaze anymore than Bornstein's slippery appearances, but the heaviness of Lockhart's photographic staging reminds the viewer of the history of the Western exoticising gaze that cannot be separated from her images. Similarly, the slippage between Bornstein's images deny the impaling of the documentary subject by the camera, as theorised in relation to images from the nineteenth century onwards by theorists from Allan Sekula to Roland Barthes. Rather than trying to construct alternative 'positive' representations, Lockhart and Bornstein

point to the gaps and fantasises within the project of photographic representation itself, whilst still engaging with the belief in photography to tell some kind of story, as described by Coleman. This is perhaps the reason many women artists have embraced narrative photography as a platform to question the politics of representation in relation to gender, race, age and nationality, as a performance space in which identity can be destabilised and interrogated; employing techniques learnt from both the conceptual play of the anti-photographers and the fictionalised scenes of the directorial mode.

In Joanna Lowry and David Green's essay on conceptual artists using photography, they consider the importance of the performative in these works, saying: 'The very act of photography as a kind of performative gesture which points to an event in the world is thus itself a form of indexicality.'[28] Whilst the focus on the performative illuminates many conceptual uses of photography, it does not always help to understand the static, heavy nature of the narrative photography in the 1990s. My focus on the performance space of the photograph includes elements of the performative, but the term performance is more apt here to describe the oscillation that occurs between performing the self or a scene, a self-conscious presentation of reality, and the psychic space of encounter that is performed both by the viewer and the photographer. Coleman's description of photographs taken in the directorial mode as being 'falsified documents' sums up this interest in both the ways in which the photograph remains believable as the presentation of an event, whilst the viewer and photographer is complicit in the suspension of disbelief that has to occur to enter this event. The seductive colour and scale of this contemporary work re-invests the photograph with its problematic history, pitched between usefulness and aestheticism, refusing to narrate the conceptual use of photography as straightforwardly anti-aesthetic. From the anti-photographers to the directorial mode, contemporary photographers exhibited in the *Sightings* exhibition play with the long histories of photography as a narrative form, one which takes photography's assimilation into the museum not as a fall from grace, but as an opportunity to reconsider the many different attempts to bring

photography into the realm of fine art, with all the attendant problems this brings.

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[1] Other exhibitions include *Stills: Emerging Photography in the 1990s*, Walker Art Center, 1998; *Unheimlich: Uncanny*, at the Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland, 1999 and a couple of years later, two big photography shows in London – *Settings and Players*, White Cube and *I am a Camera*, Saatchi Gallery – which attempted to situate this 'new photographic work', but received a lukewarm critical reception.

[2] See Christopher Philips, 'The Judgement Seat of Photography', *October*, vol. 22, Autumn 1982: 27-63 for a discussion of the role of the MOMA's Department of Photography in defining the roles for photography in the museum across the twentieth century.

[3] Nancy Foote, 'The Anti-Photographers', *Artforum*, September 1976: 46-54, 46. Following references to this text are given as page numbers in the text.

[4] Obviously, this use of the term modernist photography in relation to Stieglitz is different to the use of modernist photography by commentators such as Jeff Wall, and Douglas Crimp, who see the use of photography in conceptual art formulating photography as a self-reflexive medium – the real beginning of photography as a modernist art form.

[5] For a survey of photographic debates taking place during the 1970s, see the exhibition catalogue *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography 1960-1982*, Douglas Fogle (ed.) (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2003).

[6] The title 'Trademarks' implies the reading of this performance as dematerialising the work of art, with the trace of the body becoming like a signature, a work of art.

[7] The use of the photograph's indexicality is explored in an American context in this essay. The focus on indexicality is explored differently by the various artists illustrated in Foote's essay. I am not discussing the entire range of approaches posed by artists involved with conceptual uses of photography, with potential differences coming from cultural as well as personal investigations: i.e. the difference between the use of the photograph by the American artist discussed here and the British use of photograph in conceptual practices by artists such as Victor Burgin. Thanks to the anonymous peer reviewer for making these distinctions.

[8] Robert Smithson, 'Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan' (1969), in *Robert Smithson, The Collected Writings*, Jack Flam (ed.) (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996): 119-133, 132-33.

[9] Foote uses the example of Eleanor Antin employing a photographer to take the images in her *100 Boots* series as proof of this 'nonchalance'.

[10] The Editors, 'Photography: a special issue', *October*, vol. 5, Summer 1978: 3-5, 4.

[11] Douglas Crimp, 'The Museum's Old, The Library's New Subject', *On The Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993) 66-83, 74. Crimp explains how Szarkowski's formulation of photographic modernism is different from Stieglitz: 'it has taken Szarkowski and *his* followers to bestow retrospectively upon *photography itself* what Stieglitz had thought was achieved by only a very few photographs.' 77. Jeff Wall makes a similar argument in 'Marks of Indifference', reprinted in *The Last Picture Show*.

[12] Crimp, 'The Museum's Old, The Library's New Subject', 75. Italics in the original.

[13] Crimp's essay also points to the paradox of photography's status as a modernist art form precipitating the beginning of postmodernism (77), going on to discuss the ways in which photography has contaminated other media such as painting and sculpture, as well as categories of art and non-art.

[14] See Abigail Solomon-Godeau, 'Photography After Art Photography' (1984), reprinted in *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions and Practices*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1991 for one of the best accounts of the importance of the photographic to postmodernism.

[15] This approach to the photograph as a 'ready-made' is where the comparison between my examples from the 1970s with work from the 1990s gains a particular purchase on the contemporary use of narrative photography. Comparisons with photographic constructed imagery from the 1980s would allow for an emphasis on a more overtly theatrical staging of the photograph.

[16] Mark Durden, 'Sightings', *Art Monthly*, no. 214, March 1998, 30-32; 30.

[17] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, 'Photography After Art Photography', 103.

[18] This series was also shown at the ICA, in the exhibition *Belladonna*, 1997, a year before *Sightings.*

[19] Simon Morrissey, "The End is the Beginning is the End", *Sightings: New Photographic Art* (London: ICA, 1998), np.

[20] As Chris Morgan stated in his review of the exhibition: '... the strength of the exhibition lies in the fact that the artists seem to have taken the older generation's arguments as read, and then set out towards an explanation of the whole range of new possibilities which have been facilitated by the demise of society's obsession with the indexical photograph.' '... this rather timely exhibition forces us to confront is, in the words of one critic "who gives a shit about the real and the fake, now that they are the same?"' Chris Morgan, 'Sightings: New Photographic Art', *Contemporary*, issue 18, 1998, 71.

[21] 'My aims [in making *Projector Stand #3*] were multifaceted. They were populist (I wanted to give everyone a chance to be in a picture – reflected in the choice of hiring a union projectionist to inhabit the piece during its exhibition); revengeful (against the blossoming internet and the architecture of the city I live in – Los Angeles – which make chance, face-to-face interactions among people almost impossible); sociological (reflecting in form and content the photographs of August Sander, who was a huge influence on me); sculptural (I was aware of the fact that I am a small person, and wanted to make size-studies of people of different sizes standing next to one another); and documentary (I was interested in Huebler's work, and in the definition of a documentary photograph. The photos in this project are both documents of who happened to be in a location at a certain time, and choreographed – I was influenced by TV sit-coms at the time – that is to say, they are set up in the loosest, most spontaneous sense of the word.)' Jennifer Bornstein, email to the author, 28 March 2008.

[22] Jennifer Bornstein, email to the author, 28 March 2008.

[23] '*Projector Stand #3* was a body of work that was made up of five photos, two 16mm films, a projectionist, and a large bench for the projectionist to sit on. It was originally shown at UCLA in 1996, in my student studio; then it was shown for three days at Blum and Poe in LA in 1996; and afterwards for a month at Studio Guenzani in Milan, in 1997.' Jennifer Bornstein, email to the author, 21 March 2008.

[24] 'Q+A Jennifer Bornstein', *Creative Camera*, February/March 1998, issue 350, 20-27; 26.

[25] Jennifer Bornstein, 'Q+A Jennifer Bornstein', 27.

[26] See for example, Simon Morrissey, 'What's in a Lie?', *Contemporary Visual Arts*, issue 22, 1998, 34-39; 36. Morrissey discusses Bornstein's series in relation to Christian Boltanski's *Ten Photographic Portraits of Christian Boltanski 1946-1964.*

[27] For a discussion of Lockhart's film see Bérénice Reynaud, 'Goshogaoka', in *Sharon Lockhart: Goshogaoka*, exh. cat. Los Angeles and Tokyo: Blum & Poe and Wako Works of Art, 1998.

[28] Joanna Lowry and David Green, 'From presence to the performative: rethinking photographic indexicality', in *Where is the Photograph?*, ed David Green, Brighton: Photoforum/Photoworks, 2003, 47 – 60; 48. This is quoted by Margaret Iversen, in her essay 'Following Pieces: On Performative Photography', in James Elkin ed., *Photography Theory*, New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, which also pursues the idea of performativity in relation to a number of conceptual artists' work.

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Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Specific Objects without Specific Form*, **Fondation Beyeler, 22 May – 29 August, 2010.**

Specific Objects without Specific Form is a travelling show of work by Felix Gonzalez-Torres curated by Elena Filipovic that has now reached the Fondation Beyeler on the outskirts of the Swiss city of Basel. The basic set-up of this show is highly intriguing: Fondation Beyeler is the second of three locations that will hold this retrospective of Gonzalez-Torres' works. For each manifestation of the show, the local curator has a relatively freehand as to how the works are installed and which ones are selected. At a midpoint through each exhibition an artist will be invited to re-curate the show at each location. They would be allowed to present the works differently, select some and deselect others, and impress their own stamp upon the exhibition in general. Overall, the aim of the travelling retrospective is to defy 'the idea of the exhibition as fixed and the retrospective as totalizing'.[1] And this is done in order to identify this peculiar curatorial practice with 'the oeuvre of an artist who put fragility, the passage of time, and the questioning of authority at the centre of his artwork'. The show started at WIELS Contemporary Art Centre in Brussels (January to April 2010), and was rearranged by Dahn Vo; it's current stop, as mentioned is the Fondation Beyeler (May to August 2010), where it will be restaged by Carol Bove; the final stage on its itinerary will be the Museum Für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt am Main (January to April 2011), and Tino Seghal will this time intervene midway through the exhibition. Choosing these artists in particular has been a careful decision insofar as for all three Gonzalez-Torres is a crucial reference point for their respective practices.

In its current form (at the time of writing this review the exhibition had yet to be artistically reinstalled by Carol Bove), the exhibition is interspersed amongst the main collection for the most part rather than secluded within its own dedicated space. The juxtapositions this creates are striking and extraordinarily effective. Step into one room, and you find light bulbs—*Untitled (For Stockholm)*, 1992—hanging from the ceiling in a downwardly orientated cascade, thereby casting electric illumination into a room within which large

canvases by Barnett Newman and Jackson Pollock hang (fig. 1). The combination is carefully judged; too much light could have obscured these canvases, drowning their darker painterly surfaces beneath a reflected glow. In another room, in which paintings by Claude Monet and Gerhard Richter are displayed, there is a stack of posters. Visitors are invited to take a poster from the stack home with them. Gallery attendants are on hand to give each visitor a rubber band so that the poster can be carefully rolled up and then secured in position. In various rooms are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of sweets, generally laid out flat on the floor in the shape of a rectangle (the rectangles vary in size. The viewer is invited to take a sweet from the pile; but rather than gradually diminishing the pile, the pile is always maintained at the size—or rather, the weight—set by Gonzalez-Torres), but on one occasion they are piled against the wall. Most of the time the sweets are in silvery cellophane wrapping; on one occasion—the occasion that they are piled against the wall—they are wrapped in different colours, with each colour representing a different flavour.

Fig. 1. Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled" (For Stockholm), 1992. Light bulbs, porcelain light sockets and extension cords. Overall dimensions vary with installation. Twelve parts: 42 ft. in length with 20 ft. of extra cord each. © Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation. Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. Barnett Newman, Here II, 1965, Core-Ten Steel, 305.50 x 200.00 x 129.50 cm. Jackson Pollock, Number 11, 1951, Enamel on canvas, 146.00 x 352.00 cm. Daros Collection, Switzerland. © Pollock-Krasner Foundation / ProLitteris, Zürich. Barnett Newman, The Way II, 1969, Acrylic on canvas, 198.5 x 152.5 cm. Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel © 2010 ProLitteris, Zurich. Photo: Serge Hasenböhler. Installation view of *Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Specific Objects without Specific Form* at Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, 2010.

Not everything in this show is for the taking, however. A room given over to Francis Bacon paintings and Alberto Giacometti sculptures is split in two by a curtain made from gold beads that must be passed through in order to reach

the other side (fig. 2). The work, dated 1995, is simply titled *Untitled (Golden).* Nonetheless, a certain embodied engagement on the part of the beholder is required; the beholder must use his hands to part the hanging strands of the curtain in much the same way that he must reach down to pick up a sweet. A different embodied response is demanded in another room: on the walls hang paintings by Cézanne and Picasso, but high above them, near the ceiling and stretching along the four walls of the room are words accompanied with dates: Mother 1986, Beyeler 2010, VCR 1978, Dad 1991, Bay of Pigs 1961, D-Day 1944, etc. This work is one of Gonzalez-Torres' word portraits, which refuse the depiction of the face as definitive of the supposedly individualizing portrait and instead posits our memories as the locus of portraiture—words and dates available to everyone in their own way, that nobody has ownership of, which have the power of conjuring personal images or recollections in the mind of the beholder. In the corridor that leads to the downstairs section of the Fondation Beyeler there is a video on a small television. On a black background words written in white text appear and then are replaced by other words. Again, this is another of Gonzalez-Torres' portraits, but this time utilizing a different medium.

Fig. 2. *"Untitled" (Golden),* 1995 Strands of beads and hanging device. Dimensions vary with installation. ©The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation. Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. Francis Bacon, *Lying Figure*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 198,00 x 147,50 cm and *Portrait of George Dyer Riding a Bicycle*, 1966, Oil on canvas, 198 x 147.5 cm, Alberto Giacometti, *Homme qui marche II, Grande femme III, Grande femme IV*, 1960. Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel © The Estate of Francis Bacon/ ProLitteris, Zurich. © FAAG/ 2010, ProLitteris, Zurich Photo: Serge Hasenböhler Installation view of *Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Specific Objects without Specific Form* at Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, 2010

The downstairs section proffers a different mode of curatorial arrangement, using two large rooms and two corridor spaces. In the first of the corridor spaces (through which one must pass in order to access the other downstairs rooms) are three stacks—placed at different heights—of rubber welcome mats. Here the beholder is stymied: although their arrangement is similar to the takeaway posters upstairs, the beholder is actually not welcome to take from the pile; a sign warns that this work isn't to be touched. Inside the first of the large rooms is *Untitled (Placebo)* from 1991, another pile of sweets placed in the form of a rectangle, but here occupying a greater floor area than the other works in the show that are of the same ilk (fig. 3). Its wall label gives the basic sense of this work: 'Bourbons in silver cellophane. Endless supply. Ideal weight—454-544kg'. On the wall is *Untitled (31 days of Bloodworks)* which is comprised of 31 canvases, each one being 50.8 x 40.6cm, and made from an admixture of acrylic, gesso, graphite, and photographs on paper. Despite the motley of materials, however, each canvas resembles an Agnes Martin painting, with their delicate grids contiguous with the planar surface of the canvas.

Fig. 3: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *"Untitled"*, 1991-1993. Billboard. Two parts: dimensions vary with installation and *"Untitled" (Placebo)*, 1991. Candies individually wrapped in silver cellophane, endless supply. Overall dimensions vary with installation. Ideal weight: 1,000 - 1,200 lbs. Photo: Serge Hasenböhler © Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation. Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. Installation view of *Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Specific Objects without Specific Form* at Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, 2010.

The next corridor that adjoins the two rooms is actually a viewing space that looks into a room set aside for the restoration of artworks. The idea is that visitors can occasionally witness experts restoring Matisse's *Acanthes* (1953) through a large glass window. Placed subtly inside the restoration room on the left-hand wall are two silver-plated brass rings (42cm diameter) that touch each other. This is another work by Gonzalez-Torres, part of an edition of twelve produced in 1995 that are simply called *Untitled*. Contrasting with the rest of the works shown in this exhibition, this work doesn't share the same space as the beholder, but is instead separated from the viewer through the imposition of a glass window. This glass window, however, doesn't just physically demarcate the viewer from the work, but also creates a transparent boundary that segregates public and private (professional) spaces and, furthermore, displays this segregation. To that degree, *Untitled* is placed within a location that is normally institutionally private, but has been made visually observable to the public.

Out of all the spaces used in this exhibition, the final space is the dimmest with regard to lighting. Placed directly upon the floor is a serpentine line of forty-two light bulbs, called *Untitled (Summer)*, made by the artist in 1993. The low-wattage light emanating from these bulbs, barely enough to lighten the space, is reflected by two 75 x 25.5 inch mirrors placed on the wall, titled *Untitled (Orpheus, Twice)* (1991). The cumulative effect is almost to suggest that these works—light bulbs, on the one hand; mirrors, on the other—are a single piece. On the other two walls there are photographs. Overall, the cumulative effect of this room is very powerful, even if the photographs seem—perhaps intentionally—to disappear almost into darkness.

This retrospective as it currently stands, then, exists in two distinct but interlinked halves (it is essential, I think, to keep reminding oneself that each arrangement of the exhibition is only momentary, and hence ephemeral). On the one hand, we have works that are distributed amongst the permanent collection and disrupt that collection. Indeed, the fact that we are permitted to not only touch but also take away the sweets and posters renders the works

in the permanent collection somewhat aloof, untouchable, and resistant to the viewer's presence; this underscores a kind of '*noli me tangere*' quasi-spiritual logic common to traditional modes of address in exhibition displays. In comparison to Gonzalez-Torres, even Richter's *1024 Colours* and the photo-paintings seem to take on a social-experiential quality that they are famed for manifestly resisting: namely, the auratic.[2] This seems to me an almost brave decision insofar as the disruption of the largely modernist collection of paintings and sculptures by an artist associated with the heyday of postmodernism is, to an extent, a critique of the assumptions and narratives incorporated within modernist art production.

On the other hand, however, the second half of the exhibition is more self-contained, and it's interesting to note that—with the exception of *Untitled (Placebo)*—there is nothing that can be touched or removed here. The combination of rubber welcome mats and an exhibition label exhorting us not to touch those mats sets the tone for the second half of the present exhibition. When we step into what is more or less the 'final' room of the exhibition (the exhibition as a whole, though, is not arranged according to chronological narrative and artistic development like most retrospectives; and works sharing the same space are generally not contemporaneous), its dimmed lighting, which contrasts with the well-lit rooms throughout the rest of the exhibition, gives the space as a whole a rarefied atmosphere akin to a crypt beneath a cathedral (that one needs to descend to the lower floor of the Fondation Beyeler to reach this room probably helps to generate this perception).

We have, then, a significantly complex exhibition that demands a range of different types of engagement from the viewer. We might, for instance, consider the basic corporeal engagement required of the viewer: it's notable that sometimes the viewer is asked to bend down, other times to crane his neck upwards, sometimes to roll a poster, sometimes to unwrap a sweet, sometimes not to touch, sometimes to read, sometimes to look. And as it stood when I saw it, there appeared to be a relatively clear-cut division between the disruptive strategies and the more classical single-artist retrospective approach (which I described as the two halves of the exhibition)

in the pre-reinstalled exhibition. And this dynamic would potentially change when Carol Bove performs her role. But this dynamic is largely specific to the manifestation of the exhibition at Fondation Beyeler. After all, WIELS has no permanent collection, preferring to style itself as a laboratory for different contemporary art exhibitions, while the Museum Für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt am Main does have a permanent collection mostly dedicated to contemporary—basically starting with 1960s Pop, Minimalism, and Conceptualism, and then tracing their legacies to the present—and emerging artists (the Museum has connections with the prestigious Städelschule Art Academy), meaning that their collection has a significantly different impetus to that held by the Fondation Beyeler.

No matter how much I enjoyed the exhibition, though, there are fundamental weaknesses in this showing of Gonzalez-Torres' works and, more precisely, in the way they are threaded through the main collection of the Fondation Beyeler. One such weakness is that the opportunity—or, even, the necessity—to self-reflexively analyse at a curatorial level this weaving together of Gonzalez-Torres and these icons of modernism has not been taken in any explicit sense. What does it mean to divide a room displaying bronzes by Alberto Giacometti and canvases by Francis Bacon through the insertion of a gold bead curtain produced by Gonzales Torres? In responding to that question, one could speculate, for instance, that the playfully almost tawdry curtain made up of golden coloured beads comments upon the high economic values ascribed to Giacometti and Bacon by the conjoined historicization of modernism and the art market. Or we might suggest this curtain somehow undercuts the existential pathos associated with these two giants of twentieth-century art. Or we could take an alternative approach—or perhaps rather an additional approach—and note that the gold curtain renders somewhat difficult that mode of gallery-based embodied visual scanning that seeks regularities or logical juxtapositions amongst artworks that have been purposely gathered within a single determinate space—regularities and logical juxtapositions that guarantee the cogency of bringing these particular works together. The golden beaded curtain serves as a veil that not only divides but

also obscures, and, in line with the general function of beaded curtains, simultaneously permits and prevents access.

Such self-reflexivity should be carried out within this curatorial context not simply because self-reflexivity in itself is a desideratum, but also for the subdivision of a space by a gold beaded curtain not to appear a mere formal or even arbitrary decision. That is not to contend that the curators must determine every critical effect in the way they have staged this show; beholders must carry out their share of the work, too, and beholder and curator alike should be alive to unexpected transactions and correspondences deriving from these combinatory procedures. It is important, though, that the curators should play a greater or more explicit role in facilitating the beholder's capacity for artistic and critical reflection than they seem to do so here. But there is a further reason why a degree of greater explicit self-reflexivity would arguably be beneficial here: given that one of the key elements of this travelling exhibition is that it would be rearranged by an artist midway through each showing, then it's certainly arguable that the full significance of the work *after* it has been rearranged—or even the significance of the rearranging— may not be apparent if the prior arrangement has not been discursively analysed first. Likewise, it becomes more difficult to consider the particularity of this travelling show momentarily residing at the Fondation Beyeler in theoretical relation to the other spaces this show has travelled to when that self-reflexive examination has not been carried out.[3] Although, to be sure, it is entirely possible that the initial state of the exhibition can only become open to the level of explicit self-reflexivity I am advocating here only after the artist's displacement of the show or after the exhibition has completed all its stages.

Another unfortunate oversight is the inadequate contextualization of Gonzalez-Torres' works themselves. His involvement in Group Material is mentioned, but the nature of that involvement and the political responsibilities it entailed remains undeclared. Any beholder encountering Gonzalez-Torres' work for the first time, or broadly unfamiliar with the political situation of North America circa 1988-1995—the era of the so-called "culture wars" typified by fierce debates over the state funding provided by the National Endowments of

the Arts, and negative discriminatory attitudes towards gay subjectivity and rights brought out by the AIDS crisis—may leave him or her with a heavily skewed perspective upon Gonzalez-Torres' oeuvre. For example, the beholder might view being allowed to take from the 'endless supplies' of sweets and posters from a generalized locus of relational aesthetics whereby specific and concrete political invention is masked by a wider concern for social networks and participation as such. By the same token, the viewer may well not realize that the weight of the sweets is keyed into the weight of Gonzalez-Torres' lover, Ross, whose body was being eaten away by AIDS. With the sweets functioning as metaphors for the human body, by removing a sweet we contribute to the body being eaten away. And yet, the sweets, in being an 'endless supply' also serve as a psychological defence mechanism: we can eat the body away in the manner that AIDS does, but that body will continuously regenerate itself. In not knowing this, it might be contended that a vital emotional dimension of the artwork is rendered invisible. Along similar lines, the hypothetical viewer would surely struggle, perhaps, to decode fully the red poster they have picked up from the room where Picasso and Cézanne paintings are hung; the words emblazoned on that poster—"Helms," "Hope," "Hate"—might strike the viewer as free-floating signifiers rather than being attached to particular contexts. And indeed, this lack of contextualization can actively preclude or merely reduce any potential interpretative reading of these red posters in relation to the Picasso and Cézanne canvases residing in that space rather than initiate any such reading..

This is where the conjunction of three larges canvases by Jean-Michel Basquiat and Gonzalez-Torres' sweets in the foyer of the Fondation Beyeler seems like a great opportunity to contemplate their respective oeuvres in tandem with each other, but once again this has not been taken. Basquiat (born 1960) and Gonzalez-Torres (born 1957), though very close in age, are not quite perfect contemporaries insofar as Basquiat's career ends in 1988 just as Gonzalez-Torres' is generally recognized to have properly started. But in any case their proximate time frames, the fact they both worked in New York and came from ethnic groups different from the white middle class New

York artworld, and their early deaths (Basquiat died in 1988 from a heroin overdose; Gonzalez-Torres in 1996 from complications arising from AIDS), demands some address. Importantly, such an analysis would not only locate commonalities but also significant divergences between the two artists. For instance, one might make hay with the old postmodern conflict between post-conceptual art practices and painterly or expressive forms; or one might explore the relation of graffiti's shift from an oppositional urbane subcultural aesthetic to its acceptance within commercial galleries to Gonzalez-Torres politicized engagements with public and gallery spaces. And so on and so forth.

This lost opportunity has many explanations. It is certainly apiece with Fondation Beyeler's tendency of juxtaposing two artists within a single space without a justificatory explanation stating why these two artists have been brought together. For the most part these juxtapositions are perfectly obvious to an art-historically literate crowd. There's nothing peculiar at all in paintings by Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman being roommates, and while the co-presence of Giacometti and Bacon is slightly less immediate, then their linkage in this context is fairly cogent; much less clear is Gerhard Richter, whose conceptualist *1024 Colours* hangs opposite a horizontally long Monet canvas, or, in another room, Richter's *Feldweg* and *Abstrakt Bild* occupying a wall near a Van Gogh's *Champ aux meules de blé*, (1890). But it is also partly the case that the foyer itself where Basquiat and Gonzalez-Torres are shown together evinces a degree of uncertainty in its conception. Whether or not one has come to visit Fondation Beyeler in order to see the Basquiat retrospective as well as the Gonzles-Torres show, these three canvases positioned in close proximity to Gonzalez-Torres are the first Basquiat canvases the viewer confronts. And yet, the foyer is expressly—if the map of the Fondation Beyeler is anything to go by—not the first room, the last room, or even considered part of the Basquiat exhibition as such. Instead, the foyer is a kind of 'taster'— literally when it comes to Gonzalez-Torres' sweets—for the two exhibitions running concurrently. Admittedly, the foyer does introduce by means of wall text and takeaway information sheets the Gonzalez-Torres exhibition, but the introduction ultimately serves to take us into the main collection, thereby

generating the consequence of virtually disassociating Gonzalez-Torres from Basquiat.

All that being said, perhaps another reason why the exhibition lacks manifest curatorial self-reflexive analysis is surely that the exhibition is not simply a retrospective as such (to that extent, the Basquiat retrospective happening under the same roof is something of an object lesson in what constitutes a traditional retrospective); rather, it is an intervention *in* or *amongst* a pre-existing collection of mostly modernist paintings and sculptures in which the categories of painting and sculpture are normally seldom challenged.[4] *Qua* intervention, Gonzalez-Torres' works are aligned with some of the more subtle types of institutional critique strategies; think, for instance, of Daniel Buren, or Michael Asher's famous displacement of the *George Washington* statue for the 73rd American Exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1979. And indeed, Gonzalez-Torres' career intersects with artists whose oeuvres belong, more or less, to the second generation of institutional critique practices (Louise Lawler, who Gonzalez-Torres worked with, might be considered the bridge straddling the first and second generation; Andrea Fraser, Julie Ault, and Renée Green belong to the same approximate generation as Gonzalez-Torres). Yet, having died in 1996, the intervention is not Gonzalez-Torres' own, but rather the curatorial team at the Fondation Beyeler. Thus in deciding to exhibit these works the way that they have done, it might be contended that they have taken upon themselves a certain discursive responsibility to account for the curatorial decisions rendered by them. Within a show determined by a high level of curatorial involvement, both in its concept and implementation, as well as the artist's obvious absence, then it's almost as if the name "Felix Gonzalez-Torres" itself serves as an 'author function' that normalizes the curator's role and masks the curator.[5] And insofar as the impetus of Gonzalez-Torres' work is not solely orientated towards institutional critique but is also responsive to the AIDS crisis and battles over gay rights, and insofar as these remain ongoing issues across the globe, then the near decontextualization of this work is deeply disappointing indeed and, at worst, morally questionable. That is to say, I worry that there is inherent within this mode of display facets which nullify and render almost invisible political issues

of AIDS, sexuality, and censorship in such a way that contingently dovetails with the attempts of some on mostly the rightwing of politics to make these issues invisible (generally by burying them underneath a normative morality premised upon straight sexuality).

However, these are all issues that are not entirely at odds with Gonzalez-Torres' practice and, moreover, the actual analysis of the exhibition looks set to happen retrospectively. With regard to the first point, Gonzalez-Torres frequently took an intensely subtle and poignant approach to AIDS activism that distinguishes him from the considerably more forcefully direct presentations by ACT UP.[6] For example, as part of his exhibition *Projects 34: Felix Gonzalez-Torres* held at MoMA the artist placed twenty-four billboard posters around New York in 1992. Each poster was a photograph of pillows and sheets on a double bed; the sheets were rumpled and imprinted traces of the heads that rested upon those pillows were legible. Because the posters were unadorned without any kind of textual explanation, anybody passing by might not have comprehended the billboard as an artwork connected to an exhibition at MoMA, or even understood the billboard's meaning. Double beds designate an intimate space that can be shared in sleep, in togetherness, in love making. This particular bed, though, is Gonzalez-Torres' own; one pillow is his, the second belonging to his lover Ross. Tragically, Ross had died from AIDS in 1990; the imprinted trace of his body upon the bed, betokening an absence, stems not so much from him having arisen from sleep but from his death. His traces remain, but he will never return to his lover's bed again.

The second point will come into action after the completion of the final stage of the exhibition in Frankfurt near the end of April 2011. A catalogue is planned that will document the six manifestations of the exhibition and include interviews with the artists who have participated in restaging the works. To a large extent, the curatorial experiment performed by this exhibition has correspondences to the tripartite exhibition of Sigmar Polke works that was held at the Hamburg Kunsthalle between March 2009 and January 2010. Because of the format of the exhibition, in which the curators analysed and displayed Polke's little discussed *Wir Kleinbürger* works produced while

staying at the Gaspelshof—a farm-cum-commune near Willich—from three successive perspectives (Part One: Clique, March to June 2009; Part Two: Pop, July to October 2009; and Part Three: Politics, October to January 2010), with each perspective bringing the works together in different combinations and with different effects, the curators found it impossible to create an accompanying catalogue until near the end of the nine-month exhibition. Any such catalogue would have ossified the works themselves and the essentially dynamic and experimental curatorial process in a manner that would have thoroughly betrayed those works and that process. The same problematic, then, seems to stand for the present Gonzalez-Torres exhibition.

Nonetheless, even though that on the basis of this curatorial format that to make a catalogue now would go at against the grain of the intentions of this exhibition, I still feel that each particular version of the exhibition can address some of the issues I have raised here from its own localized vantage point. After all, each version of the exhibition has to work on its own terms, within its own situation, as well as within its long term process. Such a process is both exciting and frustrating. And I await the endpoint with plenty of eagerness. In the meantime, there is much to enjoy in this present exhibition of work by a major artist whose career was cut far too short.

However, in having said all this, it's important to acknowledge there is a structural problem with my own review of this exhibition. Because the exhibition is premised upon the refusal of totalization and the traditional conventions of the retrospective, because the actual showing of Gonzalez-Torres' work is staged as *series* rather than *event*, then this review is at best a snapshot arresting a moment in time, thereby representing the perspective of a relatively singular experience. Under that light, it's evident that this review, while hopefully responsive to a particular stage and staging of the exhibition, is nonetheless condemned to a certain failure in matching the concept and ambition of this exhibition as series. Indeed, the current stage of the exhibition under review here gains considerable significance from both its previous two stages in Brussels and the three that are yet to come, and without being able to prejudge how the exhibition continues, and without possessing direct

experience of its previous arrangement, then it's difficult to gauge the adequacy of this specific review process. In conclusion, then, it is hoped that this review will elicit a postscript of sorts within *Rebus: A Journal of Art History and Theory* after the completion of *Specific Objects without Specific Form* in Frankfurt in 2011 and after the release of the catalogue, with different authors reflecting upon and reviewing different manifestations of the show.

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[1] These statements are taken from the wall text in the exhibition space.

[2] See Walter Benjamin's oft-quoted statement that 'We define the aura . . . as the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be'. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility' in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938 -1940*, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Belknap Press/ Harvard University Press, 2003): 255.

[3] This is quite important, one might argue, especially insofar as the travelling exhibition is common to curatorial practice. For example, also on show in Basel at the Kunstmuseum and at the same time as the Gonzalez-Torres exhibition is a mid-career retrospective of Gabriel Orozco. This show originated in New York at the Museum of Modern Art, then arrived in Basel. After that it will travel to the Pompidou in Paris and then will end its journeys in London's Tate Modern. To a degree, although the travelling Orozco exhibition is in line with the artist's own peripatetic lifestyle, the notion of a 'travelling show' is not being considered as such. But in the Gonzalez-Torres exhibition, the fact that it is travelling, and that it is intentionally responsive to local contexts, means that it should be able to not only thematize and analyse its own structure of identity and difference that it generates through travelling and site-specific interventionism; it should also be capable of exposing what is at stake in other travelling exhibitions.

[4] Embedded within this are questions about the historical and conceptual relationship between modernism and postmodernism exemplified by positioning Gonzalez-Torres works within gallery spaces housing quintessentially modernist painting and sculptures. These questions are further extended when one considers that the first and final locations for the exhibition are in institutions that have a commitment towards contemporary art, or, more broadly, the contemporary. Given that in recent months the notion of *contemporary* art or *contemporaneity* has been a matter of sustained critical debate in the pages of *Texte zur Kunst*, *October*, and *e-flux*, as well as in Terry Smith's *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009) and Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nancy Condee (eds.), *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008). Within these debates 'contemporaneity' seems to have become a third term in the historio-chronological sequence 'modernism, postmodernism, and contemporaneity' (or, in some quarters, a suggested replacement for the term and concept of postmodernism *tout court*), then we might comprehend the various stages of *Specific Objects without Specific Forms* as tapping into these rather large issues. See *Texte zur Kunst* 74, June 2009; *October* 130, Fall 2009; e-flux 12, December 2009, downloadable at http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/96; and *e-flux* 12 (part two), January 2010, downloadable at http://www.e-flux.com/journal/issue/12.

[5] The concept of the 'author function' is discussed by Michel Foucault in 'What is an Author?' in Donald Preziosi (ed.), *The Art of Art History* (Oxford and New York: University of Oxford Press, 1998): 299-314.

[6] Interviews with Gonzalez-Torres evince the importance for him of Roland Barthes' 'The Death of the Author', open-ended notions of textuality, and the foundational role of the viewer

and gallery. Regarding the viewer, he remarks to Hans Ulrich Obrist in 1994: 'In the same way, I tell the viewer, "you are responsible for the final meaning of this piece of paper that is part of this stack." And that's problematic on many levels, because what is the piece? Is the piece the simple sheet of paper or is the piece the stack? Well, it could be both, and I never define which one is which. I like that "in-betweenness" that makes the work difficult to define, hopefully'. See Hans-Ulrich Obrist, *Interviews, vol. 1*, ed. Thomas Boutoux (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2003): 313.

Art and Incarnation:

The Sacred Made Real: Spanish Painting and Sculpture 1600-1700

National Gallery , London, 21 October 2009–24 January 2010

National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 28 February-31 May 2010

The Sacred Made Real: Spanish Painting and Sculpture 1600-1700 is an exhibition comprised of works in two mediums, oil on canvas paintings and polychromatic sculpture. The paintings are by prominent artists whose names will be recognizable to many, while both the sculptures and their creators will almost certainly be less familiar. This exhibition sets out to introduce them to the viewer, and to show their role in the development of Spanish art. Therefore, as the exhibition itself asserts, the juxtaposition of the two mediums stands to teach us quite a lot about how we understand not only the tradition of Spanish art, but also how we understand religious art more generally.

The stated thesis of the exhibition has two parts: the first primarily historical and the second sociological. The historical part begins in the working conditions of medieval Spain when the strict guild system in place ensured the separation of labour, including that labour which produced sacred art. Therefore, when the guild of sculptors was commissioned by the Church to create a statue—the kind of life-like polychromatic sculpture which reside in churches, and are carried through the streets during Holy Week in Spain even to this day—they were only allowed to carve and whitewash them. The task of painting was reserved for an artist trained by the guild of painters. This system thrived as the Church recognized the value of such art to inspire devotion in the people as directly connected to the realism of the figures, particularly in scenes of the passion. By the 17th century, the high demand for such polychromatic sculpture meant that Spain's young painters were gaining extensive experience in creating an exacting sculptural realism. The claim of the exhibition itself is that this experience gave rise to the explicitly sculptural kind of painting on canvas found in seventeenth century Spain. This exhibition makes this claim clearly by juxtaposing polychromatic sculpture with works of Zurbarán and Velázquez's as

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well as Alonso Cano and Francisco Ribalta. We will return to this claim and the question of its success shortly.

The second, and admittedly less important claim, is that the role which polychromatic sculpture played in the development of painting was largely overlooked because the significant surviving pieces have not been housed in museums but in churches—where they are still very much an active part of the worship and procession. Re-conceiving the period which became the Golden Age in light of these sculptures allows us to see a specifically Spanish element in the development of realist painting, thus offering a contrast to the frequent comparisons with Caravaggio and the more idealized Italian tradition. I would go on to add that apart from merely nationalistic concerns, this fact does allow us to recognize contemplative and devotional aspects in the Spanish paintings that are suggestively different than their idealized Italian and cerebral Dutch contemporaries.

To illustrate this, consider the first piece of sculpture displayed in the exhibition, Juan de Mesa's Christ on the Cross (1618-1620)—probably the model for his much larger contemporary piece of the same name (not in this exhibition). At a height of one hundred centimetres, this crucifix is the only piece of sculpture in the exhibition which could not be considered 'life-size' in its dimensions. For this reason, it is also the sculpture which evokes the most aesthetic, and therefore the least immediately human reaction. All of the excellent detail of musculature and matted hair only bring the viewer to reflect upon how much the sculpture looks like a person. The human form in these proportions keeps us at a distance, a distance at which we can view it at once, as a work of art or even as an artifact. Only the sharp distended profile of shadow which de Mesa's piece casts upon the wall can approach the effect of nearly all of the life-sized pieces. And that effect is striking. Indeed it is one of the ends towards which these sculptures were made: their uncanny ability to appear human to us, even to evoke empathy in us.

To be sure, it is not that the life-size pieces fool us into thinking they are real; they don't. Yet they demand that we don't treat them like just any other piece of art, and certainly they cannot be treated like the bits of wood that they are. In other words, our knowledge of the sculptures as mere wooden objects stands in tension with the way that their presented form strikes us. That same tension—between our knowledge of some object as inanimate and our uncanny feeling in its presence—is seen in Ovid's explanation for Pygmalion falling in love with his creation, that 'his art concealed his art', and in Donatello's curse of 'Speak, speak, damn you, speak!' to a statue he was struggling to complete, and even in Tom Hanks' character painting a face on a volleyball in order to befriend it in the film Castaway. In each of these cases the creator of the piece has no delusions about the material substance of his work, yet each brings forth, or strives to bring forth from that material substance some human quality which cannot be denied.

Thus, as this exhibition displays these tensions in sculptures of Christ and the Saints, the title, *The Sacred Made Real*, is a fitting one. Yet there is something of a puzzle about this notion of 'made real'. Certainly 'real' in the title cannot mean the opposite of 'unreal'. For, unless we are prepared to project our twenty-first century scepticism into the seventeenth century, we must acknowledge that in the eyes of the sculptors the subjects of their religious art were in some sense very real before being sculpted. How then are we to understand the 'real' in The Sacred Made Real? Well, if we understand the title as an allusion to Christ—himself the sacred made real—then we can see that it implies a parallel between the work of the painters and sculptors whose work is presented in the exhibition and the incarnation. Keeping in mind that it is a point of Christian theology that Christ existed eternally before the incarnation, then we can understand the act of making real as a kind of 'bringing near' or 'making accessible'. And this is exactly what the sculptures have done so very well.

This is seen most clearly in the pieces about the Passion. Gregorio Fernández's *Ecce Homo* shows Christ having just been mocked and scourged. Christ is portrayed with mouth open, eyes of glass partially rolled back, hands bound in

front, and nude save a loin cloth (Fig. 1). The scourge lacerations are fresh; the blood trickles down, not yet clotting. The wounds themselves have shape, smooth and ragged ends, and there are even portions of skin torn away. This figure creates such a sense of venerability that one feels drawn to cover it. In the sculpture vulnerability is brought near. If Fernández's *Ecce Homo* is the embodiment of vulnerability then his *Dead Christ* (1625-30) brings near death

Fig. 1: Gregorio Fernández and an unknown polychromer, *Ecce Homo*, before 1621, polychromed wood, glass and cloth, 182 x 55 x 38 cm.
Museo Diocesano y Catedralicio, Valladolid. Image courtesy National Gallery, London.

and loss of hope (Fig. 2). This sculpture represents Christ laid out on a bier. His head is sunken to one side with his mouth agape, and his legs awkwardly turned to the side. His skin is pallid, almost blue, and his wounds are open; Fernández has used painted cork tree bark to show the blood congealing. Christ is presented alone; by omitting the mother Fernández's sculpture has none of the sorrow and loss which mark the *pietà*. There is no living figure represented here; it is only death with the loss of hope and possibility which accompany it. The impression given is similar to Prince Mishkin's response to Holbein's painting *The Body of Dead Christ in a Tomb* (1520-2) in Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*. He says, "a painting like that could have a crushing effect on any man's faith'. Clearly, in both of Fernández's figures aspects of the passion narrative are made real for the viewer. Elements of the passion narrative, which might otherwise pass by in adjective form, are brought near and made undeniable by the presence of these sculptors. Yet if we recognize between the incarnation and the polychromatic sculpture an analogy of 'making real', then how are we to understand the seventeenth century painting which

Fig. 2: Gregorio Fernández and an unknown polychromer, *Dead Christ*, c. 1625-30, polychromed wood, horn glass, bark, and ivory or bone, 46 x 191 x 74 cm.
Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. Image courtesy National Gallery, London.

the exhibition claims was influenced by that sculptural tradition? The sculptures bring within our grasp that which might otherwise be too abstract or to ethereal, and as a result, slip away. Their ability to do this successfully accounts for their popularity in religious processions to this day. Paintings on the other hand accomplish something different; something which cannot be displayed by marching them though the street. Paintings are able to show us possibility. In other words, they are able to bring into consideration that which cannot be made present. To be clear, this is not merely to say that paintings can show us fantastic things like unicorns or even invisible things like electrons. Rather it is to say that paintings can show us something from a perspective which is not now our own. In other words, most paintings do not thrust themselves into our space, and thereby into our own perspective; instead they give us a window onto a space which we don't currently occupy. The result is a kind of temporal dynamism of interaction in viewing a painting that is not present in the

Fig. 3: Diego Velázquez, *Christ after the Flagellation contemplated by the Christian Soul,*
1628-9, oil on canvas, 165 x 206.4 cm. Image courtesy of the National Gallery, London.

sculptures. For example, if Fernández's *Ecce Homo* forces us to think about what it would be to behold the historical event of a scourging, then Velázquez's *Christ after the Flagellation contemplated by the Christian Soul* (1628-9) —a painting which shows an angel leading a small child to inspect the wounds of Christ after the flagellation— causes us to meditate on those same events without being transported historically (Fig. 3). This dynamic effect is dramatic in the paintings and serves to highlight the sculptural qualities related to the theme of the exhibition.

The centrepiece of the exhibition— directly visible as you enter the National Gallery exhibition in London —is Zurbarán's *Christ on the Cross* (1627) (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4: Francisco de Zurbarán, *Christ on the Cross*, 1627, oil on canvas, 290.3 x 165.5 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago. Image courtesy of the National Gallery, London.

It is a life-size painting of the crucifixion, and it represents the strongest version of the central thesis of the exhibition. The image simply refuses to stay flat. The cross beam runs behind the upright beam, thus the arms appear to be pinned back while Christ's torso appears to be pushed forward, while his head slumps more forward still. The nail heads in the hands and feet are shown as circles with no profile, as if seen from directly in front. In actual space, this is of course highly unlikely given the height difference between the nails in the hands and the feet, but the effect is that there is no point from which the image does not seem to project forward toward the viewer. The sharp lines and angles of folds and shading of the loincloth provide a clear contrast with the rounded soft shadows of Christ's gaunt musculature.

Zurbarán's own signature is asserted by a ragged piece of paper pinned to the bottom of the cross before it disappears into shadow at the bottom of the painting. Painted for a chapel altar in the Dominican priory of San Pedro in Seville, the chiaroscuro image was lit by two high windows on the right, which Zurbarán imitated in the painting. Originally the painting would have been displayed in an arched alcove which would have rounded off the painting close to the top of the cross. The squareness of the frame thus hidden from the viewer, and with no portion of the figure reaching to the edge of canvas, Christ would have appeared to have been suspended there in the shadows. Appearing sculptural at first, the painting calls the viewer to the spectacle of crucifixion with all the shame of this public but isolated form of execution. Like the polychromatic sculpture in the exhibition, the first impact is to move the viewer to react with empathy, or perhaps even disgust in turn. Yet when the painting reveals itself to be flat, as all flat things must, the viewer is also moved out of her own immediate perspective. The event depicted returns to proper historical distance and the empathy subsides. For this historical distance is unbridgeable by our own action. For example, we could imagine a particularly pious person finding comfort in the act of wrapping a cloak around one of the statues of Christ, for then his nakedness is clothed. On the other hand, if the viewer acknowledges that Zurbarán's Christ is actually a painting of the crucifixion, then no relief can be found in covering the figure, for to do so would

only be to alter the image and not the subject of the painting. Thus the viewer is left to contemplate her own relation to the subject, without the denial of temporal distance demanded by the presence of the sculpture. Zurbarán's Christ on the Cross brings out a backward-looking sense of temporality —one that stretches from the subject through the church in which it was displayed, through the tradition of the painter, preserved through to its place before the viewer. But this is not the only temporal structure; as we shall see, other paintings can also thrust the viewer forward.

The final room of the Nationally Gallery exhibition in London displays only a single painting (Fig. 5). Entering the long dark narrow room, a single light illuminates Zurbarán's *Saint Serapion* (1628) on the far wall. Even in approaching the painting down the long room provides several moments of study. After John the Baptist and Jesus, Saint Serapion is the only figure of the exhibition depicted in death. The painting shows the martyrdom of the saint,

Fig. 5: Francisco de Zurbarán, *Saint Serapion*, 1628, oil on canvas, 120.2 x 104 cm. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford Connecticut, The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund. Image courtesy of the National Gallery, London.

which seems to have only just occurred. Yet in stark contrast to the exhibition's many depictions of Christ, there is no sign of blood. Saint Serapion's heavy white habit appears to be newly clean and full. It falls down in elaborate folds from his limp figure. The robes are held away from his body by his arms outstretched in crucifixion, so that his slight frame is only just perceptible under their bulk. His cowl has fallen back off his head, enveloping his neck entirely. Only the position of his head, awkwardly slumped to the right and completely supported by his shoulder, bears witness to his gruesome martyrdom. Tradition has it that the English-born saint was partially beheaded. Unlike the rest of the exhibition the room is otherwise empty; this painting has no sculptural pairing, no immediate model for its inspiration. In this room the direction of the exhibition is reversed, we stand as the three-dimensional forms informed by the painted canvas.

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