

ON WRITING WITH PHOTOGRAPHY

KAREN BECKMAN AND LILIANE WEISSBERG, EDITORS

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Introduction

KAREN BECKMAN AND LILIANE WEISSBERG

WHAT DOES IT MEAN to “write with photography”? In what variety of contexts does this long-standing but ever-evolving collaboration take place? What kinds of material support has it required or generated over the course of its now-long history, and what difference do these locations and materials make not only to how we understand the nature of the interaction between writing and photography, but also to how this interaction mediates the world? These are the central questions that preoccupy the authors gathered together here. Though this volume is obviously not the first to have considered the important relationship between writing and photography, *On Writing with Photography* aims to energize the existing conversation in a number of ways. First, at a moment when critical studies of photography repeatedly focus on the digital turn and the way this technological shift affects our theorization of contemporary photographic practices, this volume considers the recent explosion of interactions between writing and photography in relation to the history of such interactions over more than a century. Second, though existing critical discussions of the interaction between writing and photography have tended to focus on texts that easily fall into the category of literature, primarily fiction or autobiography, this volume takes a much broader view of what writing might mean, and in doing so, it makes room for different media, genres, registers, and practices that have hitherto been somewhat overlooked. Children’s books, photo-essays, films, diaries, practical training manuals, postcards, photo-journalism, and art installations—these are just some of the little-analyzed

areas of interaction between writing and photography that we hope this volume brings to light in order to generate new directions for research and thought. Similarly, though existing studies have tended to privilege specific geographic regions, most prominently France, Germany, and Great Britain, when considering how writing and photography interact, a focus that in part reflects the location of some key (and mostly male) figures and movements in this conversation (including Lewis Carroll, Walter Benjamin, W. G. Sebald, Roland Barthes, Marcel Proust, André Breton, Dada, and surrealism), we have tried to solicit essays that extend existing conversations about these more familiar figures as well as explore the interaction between writing and photography through less familiar works in order to engage different kinds of authors and spaces. This expansion of both site and genre in turn invokes the involvement of readers and audiences that differ from either the literary reader or the museum visitor, highlighting the importance of, for example, children, women, workers, and indigenous people as key players in the evolution of the interaction between text and photograph.

On Writing with Photography builds on and is inspired by numerous studies that have addressed how photography has shaped the literary text, and, more occasionally, how the literary text has in turn shaped photography, over the course of the medium's development. Before elaborating on the particular interventions of this volume, we want first to highlight some of the key voices shaping our current understanding of the complex dance between writing and photography. Nancy Armstrong, Daniel Novak, and Jennifer Green-Lewis have all helped us to understand how photography has shaped nineteenth-century writing, mainly with reference to realist fiction. Armstrong, for example, emphasizes the rise of pictorial thinking and mass visuality in the Victorian novel, while Novak reveals how photography marks the bodies of characters in nineteenth-century fiction, as when he notes the way that Mrs. Monarch, an artist's model in Henry James's short story "The Real Thing" (1892), seems to have physically internalized something of photography, being "only able to reproduce herself consistently and mechanically as the same subject."¹ Moving into the twentieth century, Michael North argues not only that modern technologies made new sensory experiences available, inspiring writers, photographers, and

filmmakers, but also that the theoretical apparatus we use to discuss the text–photography relationship today has its roots almost exclusively in modernist and postmodernist practices. Addressing one of photography’s most important theorists, Eduardo Cadava’s *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (1998) illuminates the extent to which Walter Benjamin’s conception of history would be literally unthinkable without the language of photography. In the art historical context, Rosalind Krauss demonstrates that surrealist and Dadaist photographic experiments must be thought of as a new mode of writing. And Sara Blair’s important study, *Harlem Crossroads*, argues that post–Harlem Renaissance literary experimentation emerged through extensive conversation with documentary photographs such as those found in the Farm Security Administration archive, as well as images of the civil rights movement. Two other authors, Linda Haverty Rugg and Timothy Dow Adams, have further shaped the debate by focusing on the specific intersection between autobiographical writing and photography. While Rugg foregrounds the impact photography has had on how we picture ourselves by looking closely at four literary autobiographers (Mark Twain, August Strindberg, Walter Benjamin, and Christa Wolf) whose reflections on self-image are filtered through the lens of photography, a conversation to which Marcy Dinius in this volume will contribute, Adams finds in autobiographical writing a literary parallel for two aspects of photography: its inescapable reference to the “real world,” and its uncertain relation to the categories of fact and fiction.

Though the new medium of photography may once have threatened to displace the realist novel, like the realist painting, with its more instantaneous and accurate snapshots of the world, today, as we move deeper into the twenty-first century, some critical narratives cast photography alongside more traditional forms of writing, such as the novel, the essay, and the newspaper, as all but obsolescent in the face of new media forms that are now repeatedly described, as photography once was, as being more immediate, more democratic, more interactive, and more flexible than earlier modes of representation and expression. Peter Aspden, for example, writes in his recent review of Jonathan Franzen’s novel *Freedom* (2010), “[Franzen] is acutely aware of his responsibility to write books that are compelling enough to compete with the new media that have taken over the world.

That, he says, is the prime challenge for the contemporary novel, rather than the attempt to develop radical new forms. It is as if Twitter, Facebook et al. have conspired to return the novel to its most basic function: to provide a world that cannot stop picking things up and casting them aside with the gift of unputdownability.”²

The focus of this volume is not whether or how photography will continue to interact with writing in the current new media climate of blogs, hypertext, video games, and online news. This question surely needs addressing, but it is the topic of another volume. But the selection of essays represented in *On Writing with Photography* is designed as a productive counterpoint to the nostalgic paradigm offered above in Aspden’s discussion of Franzen, where the novel is presumed to have once had, and now be in danger of losing, a clear and “basic function.” Resisting this narrative, we provide instead a complex, hybrid, and even unavoidably meandering historical foundation for future studies of the word–photograph interaction in a multimedia environment. We hope to show that the daring literary experiments of the twentieth century were certainly not the result of a privileged moment in which fiction writers could challenge the limits of readers, secure in the knowledge that they had the undivided attention of an audience undistracted by a multimedia environment. For as this volume demonstrates, as long as there has been photography, writers have been writing with it, and writing has been challenged, complicated, and enriched by it. Photography never simply illustrated a novel assured of its task. Instead, the coexistence of writing (including but certainly not limited to fiction writing) and photography, and the efforts of these two already hybrid modes of representation to articulate their identities in relation to each other, has always generated a kind of uncertain energy, the kind of energy we find in the realm of the experiment, the crossed border, and the bastard outcomes of surprising encounters.

On Writing with Photography aims to highlight some of the key vortices of this energy and to foreground the wide range of creations that have emerged in this intermedial space. Through our title, we hope not only to conjure up the expansive and imaginative ways in which our authors understand the act of writing with photography, but also to offer a reminder that writing with photographs constitutes not a minor subset of

literary practice, but rather a foundational aspect of the modern reading experience. In the remainder of this introduction, we will highlight some of the recurring preoccupations of the essays gathered in this volume, overlapping concerns that constitute new areas for discussion, including the following: the author's body; the question of how a photograph might be framed by writing, whether by a written text or by the material form of the book, which, arguably, generates a certain kind of narrative, even in the absence of words, both through spatial layout and the seriality of the pages; the construction of fantasy and/or memory in the interstices of word and image; the challenge of representing the real and the unknown; and the complex role of genre in photographic writing.

As if pursuing the negative image of Rugg's work on literary autobiography and photography, Marcy J. Dinius explores what it means to write, to be an author, in the knowledge of photography through two fictional author-characters who refused to be photographed: Pierre from Herman Melville's eponymous novel of 1852, and Bill Gray from Don DeLillo's 1991 novel, *Mao II*. Dinius provokes a number of important questions: What does it mean for a modern author to write in resistance to, rather than in collaboration with, photography? Has the mass mediation of the author's face through photography fundamentally altered the author function and rendered writing as a practice more visible, more corporeal, more intimately tied to the physical being of a historical, embodied subject? Has the omnipresence of photography for the writer generated different character possibilities or types, such as the fictionalized author in flight from photography Dinius discusses, and if so, how might these characters open out onto new networks of relationship among texts?

The problem of the author's body, and the central relevance of autobiography to the practice of writing with photography, recurs in other essays and across quite disparate genres. In "Playing Doll," Liliane Weissberg examines a series of children's books from the 1950s featuring a lonely doll, written by former model and photographer Dare Wright. Specifically, Weissberg analyzes the text-photograph relationship in Wright's books alongside biographical studies to demonstrate how photography doubles, miniaturizes, and mobilizes the body and psychic life of the author through the figure of the doll in a way that draws critical attention

to the disciplinary rituals and spectacles in which women participate in the usually private and only semivisible realm of the family home.

This family home is, for many, the first site of encounter with the practice of writing with photography in the form of the children's book, but home also both produces and houses a different kind of photobook, the family album, which, through the spatialization of images, functions as a form of personal narrative visually rendered. However, this private mode of storytelling and remembering takes on a public afterlife as albums and photographs circulate among future generations, and this afterlife becomes particularly complex when the private images involved also contribute to, and perhaps challenge, public memory and the historical record. Marianne Hirsch helps us understand the relationship between public and private photographs, as well as the way images move between public and private space, through a close analysis of how public photographs are privatized and vice versa in Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus*. This genre, of course, depends upon a never-ending interaction between words and images, and Hirsch's essay highlights both how photography haunts not only writing but also drawing even in the absence of actual photographs, and also how the graphic trace of missing photographs becomes the bearer of much more significant absences and losses.

At the center of Hirsch's essay on Spiegelman and the family album stands the image of the absent mother, a figure who, through Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, already possesses a privileged relationship to photography per se. For Xiaojue Wang, writing in a different context, the family album also brings to the foreground the question of how visual images of the female body are activated within public and private histories in the work of Zhang Ailing, whose work at the intersection of writing and photography Wang compares with that of W. G. Sebald. As Zhang's *Mutual Reflection* (1994) quivers between words and photographs, we encounter once again, this time in autobiographical rather than fictional form, the elusive presence of the author.

We might usefully here remember Adams's argument that autobiography bears a structural resemblance to photography in both its referentiality and its uncertain relation to truth and fiction. The essays in this volume make clear that the uncertain relation to truth created by the multifaceted

act of writing with photography offers a crucial resource to writers attempting to capture and respond to not only personal but also collective history. For several of the authors represented here, to write with photography is to acknowledge the difficulty of accessing the real, of reading or writing history responsibly and truthfully, as well as the necessity of attempting to do so in spite of the seeming impossibility of the task. Writing with photography, then, seems particularly to attract authors grappling with phenomena that are unknown and at times unknowable, and these elusive phenomena can take many forms, referencing, for example, the slippery realms of gender, sexuality, and fantasy (Adrian Daub and Weissberg), memory and trauma (Hirsch), geography and ethnicity (Roderick Coover, Leah Rosenberg, and Wang), the nature of the object (Janine Mileaf), and war (Hirsch and Karen Beckman).

Several essays here remind us that the presence of a photograph, with its indexical qualities, necessarily yokes a trace of the world into the text in which it appears, regardless of whether we would categorize that text as fact or fiction. Yet though this photographic presence may therefore confound the possibility of pure fiction, it is still no simple thing, as these essays show, to simply extract the truth of that real from a photograph. Photographic presence, it seems, does not have to be legible. Furthermore, as Tyrus Miller makes clear in his essay on Guy Debord, the image that separates us from the experience of everyday life in the “society of the spectacle” may also help to generate alternative modes of writing with photography, where writing with photography is not a reflection of reality but rather an attempt at living it, or of actively engaging it.

We find an analysis of one such attempt of actively engaging the spectacle of war through war photographs in Beckman’s discussion of artist M. Ho’s methodical erasure of the text from newspaper specials covering the Iraq War. In this essay, Beckman compares the kind of news we can extract from photographs with the news William Carlos Williams locates not in factual prose narratives such as those we find in the paper, but rather in poems. Although few have remarked upon the fact, it is rather rare to encounter poetry in discussions of the practice of writing with photography, which have tended to privilege realist fiction and autobiographical narrative. Yet for several authors in this volume, poetry offers an important

resource for those attempting to write with, through, and in response to photography. Indeed, it is perhaps one of the striking features of this volume that the authors collected here take for granted neither what we understand by the word “writing” in the phrase “writing with photography” nor the nature of the relationship between the two terms. Daub, for example, refuses as a false dichotomy the binary of full interpenetration of photography and text *or* the domination of one medium over the other; as he shows us in his essay, there are other, subtler and queerer, ways to understand the range of possibilities implied by the word “and.” Daniel Magilow makes us ask what *kind* of language the photo ushers in rather than simply asserting that the photograph can function like a language, and Stuart Burrows continues this investigation by arguing that James Agee’s poetic metaphors are not a turn away from the prosaic truth of the photographs he writes about, but rather the only possible way into them. It is in this spirit, one that goes in search of something other than the prosaic truth of a photograph, that we have broadened our vision, taking an interdisciplinary, multigenre, and international approach, and making space for different kinds of texts, images, and voices. Postcards, photo-essays, children’s books, newspapers, films, graphic novels, memoirs, and poems—these have been the catalysts for our own writing with photography; we hope that our own photo-essays might stimulate you in similar ways.

Notes

1. Novak 36.
2. Aspden 11.

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From the Birth of Photography to the Death of the Author

MARCY J. DINIUS

THIS ESSAY BEGINS NOT with an epigraph but with a photograph—
or rather a pair of photographs—that serves a similar function. The
photograph and the epigraph both stand as signs of a captured essence—
the former iconically, the latter metonymically. That select words and images,
taken out of context, could carry such representational weight, that they
regularly stand in for complex ideas and individuals, is a central concern of

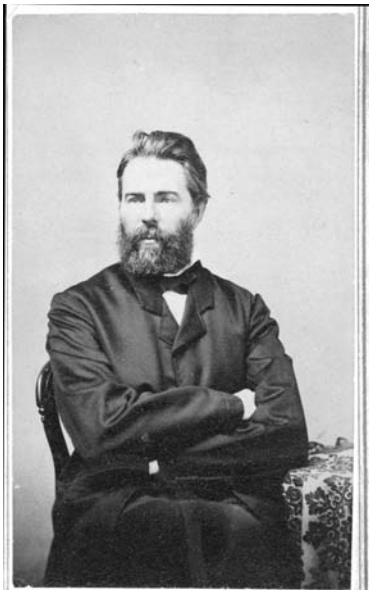


Figure 1.1. Herman Melville, 1861.
Photograph by Rodney Dewey.
Courtesy of the Berkshire Athenaeum,
Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

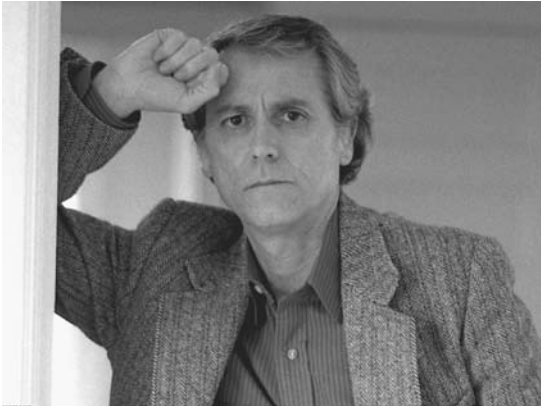


Figure 1.2. Don DeLillo. Photograph from the back flap of the jacket of the first edition of *Mao II*. Copyright Joyce Ravid; all rights reserved.

Herman Melville's 1852 novel *Pierre* and Don DeLillo's *Mao II*, published in 1991. As bookends to the photographic age (*Pierre* was published during the rise of the daguerreotype and *Mao II* in the last decade of film photography), both novels feature reclusive, obsessive writers who are not merely camera shy but avowedly cameraphobic. In what follows, I want to situate historically this writerly anxiety about being photographed and consider theoretically the cultural authorities of the author and of the photographic image. I do so neither to position *Pierre* as a potential source for *Mao II* nor to suggest that Melville anticipated DeLillo in exploring the relationships of photography and identity and art and mass culture. Rather, I examine how and why photography has been understood to authorize literature and writers from the daguerreian age through the digital age.

As *Pierre* may be unfamiliar to many readers (it isn't widely read, even among scholars of nineteenth-century literature), a brief overview of the narrative might be helpful. Melville's first novel after *Moby-Dick*, *Pierre* was supposed to be a "regular romance," free of the metaphysical wanderings that critics and the public found so distracting in his disappointing tale of the white whale.¹ Instead *Pierre* tells the convoluted tale of a young man who is supposed to inherit his ancestral estate and continue his family's proud legacy, but who ends up marrying his possible half sister and living in squalor. As one reviewer in 1852 put it, playing on the novel's alternate title, *The Ambiguities*, *Pierre* is "one long brain-muddling, soul-bewildering

ambiguity.”² Filled with rambling digressions about love, truth, beauty, and other ideals that do little, if anything, to advance the troubled narrative, *Pierre* eventually becomes a metanarrative meditation on writing itself as a philosophical problem.

Some twenty-seven chapters into the novel, we learn that the title character is a writer—or, at least, that he has written and published some love sonnets and “little sketches of thought and fancy” produced during his idle times as a young gentleman.³ The narrative voice informs us that Pierre has met with much success as such, with offers to publish a collected edition of his works arriving daily. Yet when we read what critics and publishers have to say about his works, we see that there is little substance to their praise and that they are more concerned with profits than profundity.⁴ Ever the romantic, Pierre marries his illegitimate half sister as a misguided means of incorporating her into the family. Subsequently disowned by his mother and thus kept from his claim to the family fortune, Pierre comes to write out of necessity instead of leisure. In doing so, he decides to capitalize on his prominent name as an author, not by accepting one of the standing offers to publish what he has already written, but instead by pledging a novel in return for a few meager advances from a publisher. Reduced to a cold, hungry, and generally miserable existence, Pierre sheds his youthful naïveté and struggles to become a serious Author. He spends his days locked away in a tiny room, writing a metaphysical epic of “Truth” (the narrative always represents it in all of its majuscular majesty) until he renders himself almost completely blind. Eventually, his publishers charge him with defaulting on his promise of a “popular novel” and instead writing a “blasphemous rhapsody” that they’ve rushed to press without reading (Melville, *Pierre*, 356). At the same time, his cousin informs him that he will be seeking retribution for the shame that Pierre has brought on the family. Using these letters as wadding paper for his gun, Pierre kills his cousin and ends up in jail. The final scene brings both Pierre the character and the novel to a Hamletesque conclusion—his jealous half sister/wife poisons his ex-fiancée, Pierre drinks the poison himself after discovering his wife’s cruelty and coming to doubt that she is his sister, and she takes the final fatal drink upon exclaiming, “All’s o’er, and ye know him not!” (362).

Photography makes a brief but significant appearance in this unruly narrative. The same chapter that introduces us to Pierre's early, qualified successes as an author tells of his frequent solicitation by editors and publishers for a daguerreian portrait to be copied by engraving and printed with his works. In one particularly aggressive instance, he is accosted on the street by the editor of the *Captain Kidd Monthly*, "who suddenly popped upon him round a corner," saying "Good morning, good morning;—just the man I wanted:—come, step round now with me, and have your Daguerreotype taken;—get it engraved in no time;—want it for the next issue" (Melville, *Pierre*, 253–54). When Pierre declines the abrupt invitation, the editor responds, "Pooh, pooh—must have it—public property—come along—only a door or two now." With this rough treatment, Pierre's reluctance hardens into resistance, and the encounter concludes with his malediction, "To the devil with you and your Daguerreotype!" (254).

As the photographic image is commonly thought to capture real life realistically, so too this scene in *Pierre*. In early 1851, Evert Duyckinck, one of the editors and publishers of *Holden's Dollar Magazine*, wrote to request a story and a daguerreotype as Melville's contribution to a planned series on emerging young American writers. In his reply, Melville stops short of cursing Duyckinck, yet he is no less blunt than Pierre in refusing the editor who is also his friend: "As for the Daguerreotype (I spell the word right from your sheet) that's what I can not send you, because I have none. And if I had, I would not send it for such a purpose, even to you."⁵

In this light, Pierre (and Melville) bears a striking resemblance to Bill Gray of *Mao II*, another writer whose refusal to be photographed is essential to his understanding of himself and to the integrity of his works. Voicing the terms of these hostile public relations, Gray declares, "Don't stare at me, don't ask me to sign copies of my books, don't point me out on the street, don't creep up on me with a tape recorder clipped to your belt. Most of all don't take my picture."⁶ Significantly, he makes this declaration as he is allowing himself to be photographed for the first time in thirty years, giving in to what he describes as the "weariness" of knowing that people "make so much" of his public invisibility (DeLillo 36). But we never see these images published in the course of the narrative. As one character remarks after Gray subsequently disappears in the Middle East as the plot

turns from novelists to terrorists, “Bill had his picture taken not because he wanted to come out of hiding but because he wanted to hide more deeply, he wanted to revise the terms of his seclusion, he needed the crisis of exposure to give him a powerful reason to intensify his concealment” (140).

In their hostility toward photography, both Pierre and Bill Gray resemble J. D. Salinger and Thomas Pynchon, the supposed sources for DeLillo’s eccentric and elusive novelist-protagonist.⁷ For Pynchon especially, his insistent public invisibility in the image-saturated late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has made him the type of the hermetic genius in the eyes of the public; inevitably, this invisibility has made his photographic likeness the elusive trophy of legion fans and paparazzi. In 1997, after being tracked down and filmed by a CNN camera crew on the streets of New York, Pynchon officially announced his policy to those seeking to capture his image: “Let me be unambiguous. I prefer not to be photographed.”⁸

From whence, then, this unusual yet not uncommon authorial animosity toward photography? Is it merely a coincidence of idiosyncrasies? Is it only a particular expression of a more general authorial vanity? Or could it be a symptom of an enduring cultural condition? In this story of doubles and doppelgangers, as I have structured it thus far—Gray and Pynchon, Pierre and Melville, *Mao II* and *Pierre*, the photographic image and subject—perhaps it is inevitable that the answer, as I see it, is twofold. First, as we can see in Pierre’s and Gray’s refusals to be photographed (and as we can probably assume of Pynchon’s), there is a distinct distaste for mass culture. For these writers, to refuse to be photographed is to resist subjecting one’s image to wide and potentially uncontrollable public circulation. As *Pierre* makes visible, it is also to decline the opportunity to join the indistinguishable masses, all of whom have been individually photographed. Secondly, as we learn through Gray’s and Pierre’s photographic and textual struggles with their identities as authors, there is a profound distrust of such a culture’s unwillingness to allow any degree of complexity or ambiguity in an individual, an image, a novel, or any other kind of text.

The origins of this anti-mass animus and the related desire to set the terms for how one’s text and image alike should be read, I propose, can be located in the mid-nineteenth century. Here, Pierre’s reasons for refusing to be daguerreotyped are enlightening. As the narrator explains, Pierre

considered with what infinite readiness now, the most faithful portrait of anyone could be taken by the Daguerreotype, whereas in former times a faithful portrait was only within the power of the moneyed, or mental aristocrats of the earth. How natural then the inference, that instead of, as in old times, immortalizing a genius, a portrait now only *dayalized* a dunce. Besides, when every body has his portrait published, true distinction lies in not having yours published at all. (Melville, *Pierre*, 254)

Behind this economically and intellectually elitist logic is a conservative defense of literature, portraiture, and the author at the beginning of the age of mechanical reproduction. As the narrative acknowledges, daguerreotypy made portraiture available to the masses for the first time in history. An 1849 essay from the popular magazine *Godey's Lady's Book* confirms, "A few years ago it was not every man who could afford a likeness of himself, his wife or his children, these were luxuries known only to those who had money to spare; now it is hard to find the man who has not gone through the [daguerreian] 'operator's' hands."⁹

The same age that saw the advent of photography also saw the rise of the modern publishing industry, as technologies for manufacturing and distributing texts more cheaply and quickly than ever before were introduced. The resulting flood of books, magazines, and newspapers into the antebellum marketplace significantly affected the status of the author in American society. In the early national period, very few American writers achieved the level of financial success and professional respect afforded to their British peers. In time, though, publishers became increasingly willing to take chances on American writers who could be paid little and published widely without significant financial risk. As a result, the ranks of authors and readers alike expanded dramatically.¹⁰ Thus, when *Pierre* returns to writing, the title of Author carries much less of the distinction and the authority that it had earlier in his lifetime.

Publishers and writers alike had good reason to reestablish both, and daguerreian portraiture provided a primary means of doing so. At first, only the most prominent authors were daguerreotyped for engravers who translated their portraits into frontispieces for novels and collections of poetry. These portraits were also used as illustrations for authors' biographies in

antebellum literary magazines. All of these illustrated texts sold at higher price points than unillustrated editions. By the time of *Pierre*, however, the practice had lost its power of designating authorial prominence. As the costs of daguerreotypy and engraving decreased, and as the encounter with the editor of the *Captain Kidd Monthly* illustrates, the portrait of the author became ubiquitous—another marketing commonplace in the business of literature.

What began, then, as a special visual feature of texts quickly became the new standard for the author's public visibility in an increasingly image- and celebrity-obsessed culture. As Frederick Douglass put it in 1861, "No man now thinks of publishing a book, without sending his face to the world with it. He may be handsome or homely, manly or otherwise, this circumstance makes no difference, the face, the inevitable face must be there to meet the admiring smiles, or to confront the aversion of his readers."¹¹ One hundred and thirty years later, on the inside back flap of the dust jacket of *Mao II*, Don DeLillo supplies the demand that Douglass describes (Figure 1.2). In a photograph by Joyce Ravid, DeLillo meets readers with his right fist to his forehead and a furrowed brow, as if challenging smiling admirers to read his bleak message more deeply or beating averse readers to the punch. Either way, the posture, facial expression, and wardrobe all type DeLillo as the serious Author. The review from the *New York Times* cited immediately above the portrait confirms as much—we are assured that the man in this necessarily mute image possesses "one of the most ironic, intelligent, grimly funny voices to comment on life in present-day America."¹² In discussing the consolidation of the formal conventions of modern author portraits, Terence Byrnes has compared the "dust jackets in a bookstore" to a "curious little museum of poses and anti-poses"—images in which "formality is either ignored, as in the carefully understudied snapshot, or the writer is lionized and pinned in place by devices such as the Arcadian touch at the forehead, or the chin resting on lightly curled fingers."¹³ And Richard Ford has suggested that, as a genre, author portraits are "not so much studies as advertisements, averrals that the pictured author of the book that you hold in your hand (and who's schoolmarmish enough to resist peeking at the author before reading the book?) is a person handsome, interesting, dramatic, weird, friendly,

possibly even forbidding enough to have written something you simply won't be able to put down."¹⁴

The specific case of DeLillo's photo-portrait and the seeming affectation of his pose are all the more striking at the end of a novel that so deliberately thinks through the public image and role of the author. In *Mao II*, when Bill Gray finally decides to come out of hiding, he invites a professional photographer, Brita Nilsson, to his remote home. As the narrative voice observes of Gray during the shoot, "He didn't seem to be putting across his own picture, his idea of what he wanted to look like or who he wanted to be for the next hour or two. It was clear he hadn't bothered to think it out" (DeLillo 38). Just the opposite would seem to be true of DeLillo in his dust-jacket portrait. DeLillo's fictional photographer, however, is particularly well qualified to draw such a conclusion about Gray as an unaffected subject: she is neither the equivalent of the daguerreotypist only two doors down, as in *Pierre*, nor his publisher's house photographer. Rather, she is a freelancer whose exclusive subject is the Author. Nilsson explains, "I frankly have a disease called writers. It took me a long time to find out what I wanted to photograph" (24). After years of imaging "city faces, eyes of city people, slashed men, prostitutes, [and] emergency rooms" only to find them all "so fucking pretty," Nilsson decides, "I will just keep on photographing writers, every one I can reach . . . I am on the prowl, so to speak" (24–25).

Yet the motives behind her pursuit are more those of the archivist than of the paparazzo—and this is precisely why Gray has chosen her. She explains, "I think this is a basic reference work. It's just for storing. Put the pictures in the basement of some library. If people want to look, they come and ask" (DeLillo 26). At once puzzled by and sympathetic to public interest in such pictures, she asks Gray,

I mean what's the importance of a photograph if you know the writer's work? I don't know. But people still want the image, don't they? The writer's face is the surface of the work. It's a clue to the mystery inside. Or is the mystery in the face? Sometimes I think about faces. We all try to read faces. Some faces are better than some books. (26)

Indeed, that an audience would rather read an author's face than his words or that readers would come to think of the embodied form of the author as the key to understanding his writing is the fear that ultimately motivates Pierre Glendenning and Bill Gray—two writers who can only see themselves in sentences, as Gray explains of himself¹⁵—to withhold their photographic likenesses from the public. That the public would come to put such faith in these images is not only an effect of the photograph's indexical relationship to the subjects it represents, but also a consequence of representations of that indexicality. With this term I mean to suggest that the popular view of photography as unmediated truth or reality comes as much from the written word as from the image itself—from the very medium in which these authors work and not just from the medium that they have so assiduously avoided. Since its beginning, photography has been promoted in print as making “perfect copies from Nature,” as “nature itself,” and as representation perfected.¹⁶ These claims have their origins in the popular press's initial attempts to represent the unprecedented degree of detail achieved in the photographic image before most people were able to see one.¹⁷ The resulting and lingering faith in the truth of photography was, and remains, an irresistible subject for another class of writers—those interested in informing the public that such visible truths are themselves illusions, and potentially dangerous ones at that.

Which brings us to Roland Barthes, another writer whose keen interest in the illusion of truth, particularly with respect to both photography and the author, helps to theorize the likeness of *Pierre* and *Mao II*. Barthes's now-canonical structuralist analyses of photography as “at once ‘objective’ and ‘invested,’ natural and cultural” are certainly relevant to what I want to suggest here about the written word's reification of the truth of the photographic image.¹⁸ But here I want to turn instead to his controversial “killing off” of the author as a better means of seeing through the photophobia of Pierre Glendenning, Bill Gray, and, finally, Thomas Pynchon.

The answer to Brita Nilsson's rhetorical question, “what's the importance of a photograph if you know the writer's work?” can be found in “The Death of the Author.” “The *explanation* of a work,” Barthes observes, “is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always

in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* ‘confiding’ in us.”¹⁹ As *Pierre* and *Mao II* illustrate, the author and his likeness alike are reduced to little more than metonyms for, and icons of, their works by such reading practices. In refusing to be photographed, I want to suggest, Pierre Glendenning and Bill Gray effectively commit public suicide on Barthesian terms—the unimaged author is as good as a dead one. What I mean here is that each refuses to allow his readers “to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing,” as Barthes explains of the author function (“Death of the Author,” 147). With the death of the author, he observes, we

know now that the text is not a line of words releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message” of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. . . . His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. (146)

And as Gray echoes in his theory of the author’s public invisibility, “When a writer doesn’t show his face, he becomes a local symptom of God’s famous reluctance to appear. . . . The writer who won’t show his face is encroaching on holy turf. He’s playing God’s own trick” (DeLillo 36–37).

By the late 1990s, Thomas Pynchon had been playing this divine trick for nearly fifty years. The only available images of the author are a couple of high-school yearbook photos and another taken during his time in the Navy. With the publication of his novel *Mason & Dixon* in 1998—the year after CNN bowed to Pynchon’s preference not to be photographed by broadcasting footage in which he is indistinguishable in a crowd—James Bone, the London *Times*’s New York correspondent, set out to expose Pynchon once and for all.

Like the editor demanding Pierre’s daguerreotype as “public property,” Bone represents himself in his story as the “people’s proxy” in his pursuit of Pynchon. Of his reasoning behind the moment of their ostensible encounter he explains,

it struck me that there was something massively silly about a grown man mounting such a charade. I stepped boldly forward, aimed—aware that in this instant a charge would leap between our two opposite poles, not a thunderbolt, nor the force of Gravity's Rainbow, but something more profound than the simple ray of light that entered my \$30 lens.

As the story goes, Pynchon plays the role in which Bone casts him and in which he has cast himself, initially attempting to turn away from the camera, then acting nonchalant. "Pynchon was agitated," Bone tells us. "He looked forlorn. . . . I extended my hand to placate him, a gesture of reassurance. At last, the great novelist spoke: 'Get your fucking hand away from me,' he bellowed. 'I don't like people taking my picture!'"

Bone's story ends with this now-familiar refrain. Yet, as we see in *Mao II*, the significance of being imaged is most fully realized when the author voluntarily submits to the photographer. As Nilsson is taking his picture, Gray says,

something about the occasion makes me think I'm at my own wake. Sitting for a picture is morbid business. A portrait doesn't begin to mean anything until the subject is dead. This is the whole point. We're doing this to create a kind of sentimental past for people in the decades to come. It's their past, their history we're inventing here. . . . The deeper I pass into death, the more powerful my picture becomes. Isn't this why picture-taking is so ceremonial? It's like a wake. (DeLillo 42)

In thus seeing his own death in the future anterior, the author most clearly comes to understand himself, as Barthes's ideal reader understands him, as a textual effect instead of a coherent self. From this perspective, he is able to move beyond seeing himself as captured by the photographic image and his own identity as something he can control, to understanding himself as a node in a complex network of time, space, and experience and to embracing the ambiguities therein.

Notes

1. Herman Melville to Richard Bentley, April 16, 1852, reprinted in *Correspondence*, 226.

2. *New York Herald*, September 18, 1852, quoted in Leon Howard and Hershel Parker, Historical Note, in Melville, *Pierre*, 382.

3. Melville, *Pierre*, 245.

4. For example, a solicitation from an illustrator named Peter Pence begins with praise, quickly followed by the pitch: "Sir: I approach you with unfeigned trepidation. For though you are young in age, you are old in fame and ability. I can not express to you my ardent admiration of your works; nor can I but deeply regret that the production of such graphic descriptive power, should be unaccompanied by the humbler illustrative labors of the designer" (Melville, *Pierre*, 248).

5. Herman Melville to Evert A. Duyckinck, February 12, 1851, reprinted in *Correspondence*, 180.

6. DeLillo 45.

7. For more on Salinger and Pynchon as sources, see Passaro and Simmons.

8. "Where's Thomas Pynchon?" CNN.com, June 5, 1997, <http://cgi.cnn.com/US/9706/05/pynchon/>. In Pynchon's refusal, we hear an echo of *Bartleby's* infuriating refrain, "I prefer not to," in Melville's 1853 story "Bartleby, the Scrivener."

9. Arthur 352.

10. For an overview of the changing status of the author in relation to the industrialization of publishing, the antebellum market, and celebrity, see Williams.

11. Frederick Douglass, "Life Pictures," 1861 holograph, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress, microfilm accession no. 16377, reel 14, frame 396.

12. In itself collapsing representation and real life, author and his fictional surrogate, the dust jacket slightly misrepresents the review that it cites. The quotation comes from Jayne Anne Phillips's review of DeLillo's *White Noise*, yet the voice to which she refers is not DeLillo's, but rather that of the narrator of *White Noise*, Jack Gladney. See Phillips BR30.

13. Byrnes 4.

14. Richard Ford, Foreword to Ettliger 6–7.

15. Of the relationship between his writing and his identity, Gray explains, "I've always seen myself in sentences. I begin to recognize myself word by word, as I work through a sentence. The language of my books has shaped me as a man" (DeLillo 48).

16. See, for example, "The New Art; or, 'The Pencil of Nature,'" *National Intelligencer*, March 7, 1839, and "Editor's Table: The 'Daguerreotype,'" *Knickerbocker* 14 (December 1839): 560.

17. Such writings, I contend in my book, effectively set the literal and metaphorical terms by which now-canonical nineteenth-century authors such as Melville,

Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Frederick Douglass took up daguerreotypy in their narratives.

18. Barthes, "Photographic Message," 20.

19. Barthes, "Death of the Author," 143.

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2

Picturing the Great Unknown

John Wesley Powell and the Divergent Paths of
Art and Science in the Representation of the
Colorado River and Utah Canyonlands

RODERICK COOVER

HOW DOES ONE PICTURE an unknown territory? In the map drawn by the 1841 U.S. Exploring Expedition led by Charles Wilkes, a band of text describes a large blank area in the center of the arid American

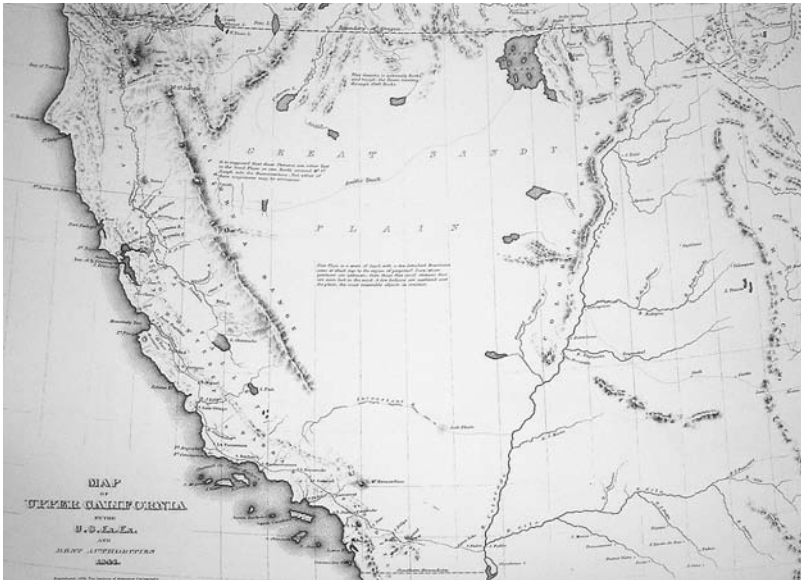


Figure 2.1. U.S. War Department Exploring Expedition Map, 1841. Published in *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition* (Philadelphia: Lea Blanchard, 1844).

West as a “waste of sand.” A limited number of pioneer routes—mostly following Native American pathways—cut across the vast dry landscape that lies between the Midwestern plains and the California coast. Literally and metaphorically, the new nation turns inward to define what is, perhaps, its final frontier. Early and quasi-scientific explorations of the desert West, including the expeditions of the Colorado River and Utah canyonlands being led by Major John Wesley Powell—the topic of this chapter—struggle with this fundamental question of representation; in this moment when artistic and scientific sensibilities merge and diverge, their choices will impact how the land is thought of and used in the years to come.

In his book *Canyons of the Colorado*, Powell casts his journey in grand and dramatic terms, as in this passage about entering the Grand Canyon:

AUGUST 13.— We are now ready to start on our way down the Great Unknown. Our boats, tied to a common stake, chafe each other as they are tossed by the fretful river. They ride high and buoyant, for their loads are lighter than we could desire. We have but a month's rations remaining. The flour has been resifted through the mosquito-net sieve; the spoiled bacon has been dried and the worst of it boiled; the few pounds of dried apples have been spread in the sun and reshrunken to their normal bulk. The sugar has all melted and gone on its way down the river. But we have a large sack of coffee. The lightening of the boats has this advantage: they will ride the waves better and we shall have but little to carry when we make a portage.

We are three quarters of a mile in the depths of the earth, and the great river shrinks into insignificance as it dashes its angry waves against the walls and cliffs that rise to the world above; the waves are but puny ripples, and we but pigmies, running up and down the sands or lost among the boulders.

We have an unknown distance yet to run, an unknown river to explore. What falls there are, we know not; what rocks beset the channel, we know not; what walls rise over the river, we know not. (Powell, *Canyons*, 247)



UNTIL POWELL'S 1869 EXPEDITION down the Colorado River, the closest any survey team had come to visualizing the Utah canyonlands was an expedition led by Lt. Joseph Ives. His expedition of the War Department's



Figure 2.2. Upper Cataract Creek near Big Cañon, Colorado Exploring Expedition, 1857–58, General Report Plate VIII (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1861).

Corps of Topographical Engineers, 1857–58, departed from the mouth of the Colorado at the Sea of Cortez and traveled past Fort Yuma through the Mojave Valley and on to the Colorado plateau and along the South Rim of Grand Canyon high above the river, before continuing on to Fort Defiance, Colorado, where the survey ended. In what surely must have served as a model for Powell's reports, Ives's text includes an adventuresome illustrated narrative followed by scientific expositions. His narrative is full of dramatic encounters with natives and grizzlies and descriptions of all sorts of physical challenges, which are made all the more difficult by the heat of the western sun. Ives writes dramatically, "as the great globe of fire mounted the heavens its rays seemed to burn the brain" (111). His description of a descent into the Grand Canyon reads: "We were deeper in the bowels of the earth than we had ever been before" (107). For officials in Washington who did not have other means to picture the frontier, the stories provide a personal, human view of the new lands and created heroes out of the adventurers who went to these places and wrote about them; of course, many others were heading west as prospectors, hunters, and settlers, with far less prospect of fame. In

the reports, the personal lens helped to attribute accountability; however, in reports like Ives's and Powell's, capturing the essence of a voyage and the places it surveyed may have been more highly valued than factual detail.

In the above image (Figure 2.2), two lone figures stand on a precipice in an engraving by J. J. Young, based on a sketch by F. W. Egloffstein who, along with Edward Möllhausen, created illustrations during Ives's voyage. Perhaps the presence of these unidentifiable figures indicates (Euro-American) man's arrival in the Great Unknown—a testament to Euro-American man's exploratory feats. Certainly, the figures are reference points by which to measure the scale of the surrounding landscape and its apparent lack of other human life—that is, in human terms, its emptiness. The presence of the lone explorers and the concept of emptiness become common motifs in images of the West; this is a land yet to be filled by humans, as Powell will indicate on the day of his departure from Green River City.



ON MAY 24, 1869, a thirty-five-year-old, one-armed Civil War veteran, Major John Wesley Powell (1834–1902) and nine crewmembers begin an

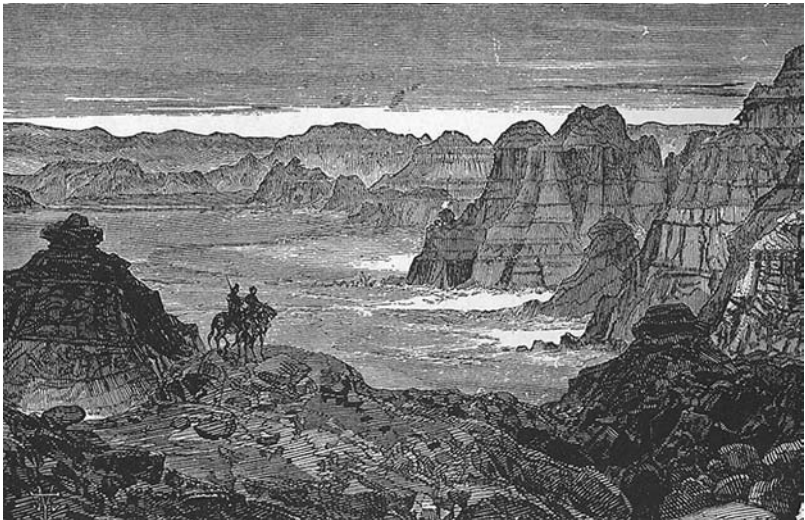


Figure 2.3. Two silhouetted figures appear in “Bad Lands” in J. W. Powell's *Canyons of the Colorado*.

exploring expedition of the Green and Colorado Rivers. The novel expedition launches from below a train trestle near Green River City, Wyoming. About one thousand miles and ninety-nine days later, the expedition concludes at the mouth of the Virgin River in southwestern Utah, although a few of the crewmembers decide to float onward down the calm and better-known waters of the lower Colorado toward Yuma and the Sea of Cortez. Powell's voyage is mostly funded by private money. Crewmembers are promised a modest payment and additional income for animal pelts they hunt en route; it is unclear if this becomes one of the sources of discontent on the troubled voyage, but what few opportunities arise for hunting are mostly oriented around finding food after many of the rations are lost and destroyed in river wrecks.

Perhaps with rushed plans, the major seizes on the moment to make this historic journey. The exploring expedition corresponds closely with the joining of the first transcontinental railway lines just two weeks earlier at Promontory Point, Utah. Rail service was opening the desert West (it also facilitates the delivery from Chicago of Powell's four boats). By 1869, Powell is hurrying to beat others to the task of exploring the Colorado River and its canyons.¹ In a similar vein, Ferdinand Hayden is putting together a team to explore—and picture—Yellowstone, accompanied by the young artist Thomas Moran, who will later figure in Powell's story.

Powell publishes a day-by-day chronicle of the journey in his report to the U. S. Congress (*Exploration of the Colorado River*, 1875); including the narrative had been a requirement of the congressional funding to publish the report of his findings.² This chronicle is serialized in *Scribners' Monthly* (1875), which also supports the cost for producing some of the illustrations. Later it will become the centerpiece for *Canyons of the Colorado* (1895), a book Powell publishes near the end of his career.

As with Ives's report, Powell's adventuresome although supposedly non-fictional, day-by-day chronicle of the voyage is accompanied by scientific expositions, particularly on the topics of geology and ethnology. Powell's report differs in its range of imagery as well as in its focus on native cultures. The images include maps, panoramic drawings, photographs, and illustrations such as those that largely support the narrative account; it is a multimedia work.



THE START FROM GREEN RIVER STATION.

Figure 2.4. "The Start from Green River Station," etching by Thomas Moran in J. W. Powell's *Canyons of the Colorado*.



THE BOATS DEPART FROM A TRAIN TRESTLE near Green River City. Powell's brother describes the experience of waiting to depart: "We were thoroughly tired of our sojourn at Green River City, which is situated in a desolate region, surrounded by sandy barren bluffs"; and Colton Sumner even less kindly describes Green River City as a "miserable adobe village" (Ghiglieri 84). The morning of the departure, Sumner suggests, the crew are hung over and not the merriest of men. The major is more circumspect in his description, noting in his letter to the *Chicago Tribune*, "The

good people of the city came to see us off. This does not indicate a great crowd, as the cities here lack people . . . there are plenty of vacant lots yet” (ibid.). The image that is commonly associated with the launch of the journey depicts ten men crowded into three large white boats with onlookers waving goodbye.

Thomas Moran’s etching (Figure 2.4) represents this historic departure in both official and popular documents. However there were no artists or photographers on the first trip, and the image is probably based on a photograph taken on a little-discussed second voyage that took place in 1871–72 using different boats. It is almost like a child’s game to spot the differences between the illustration of the Wild West and the photo it came from. Bushes become trees, spires appear where none belong, and a vast scenery is compressed into a single dramatic and romantic vision. One might wonder what was wrong with the photo, which is itself strange, beautiful, and remote. Or, ironically, given the fabrication of the illustration, did it matter that the photo did, *actually*, document a second departure while the almost identical etching is timeless?



Figure 2.5. Lining of boats through a rapid at Ashley Falls. U.S. Geological Survey, Department of the Interior. Photograph by E. O. Beaman.

THE FIRST TRIP BEGINS BADLY. The selection of the rudderless Whitehall boats (not pictured in the departure illustration) on the first voyage was perhaps not the best choice for the challenges of a river run (see Ghiglieri 51–66). Although these boats are stable, they would not have been easy to navigate through the tight and rocky rapids. Within two weeks, the team loses one of their four boats at a site that became known as Disaster Falls. Thereafter, a great deal of time is spent lining the boats through the rapids by pulling them through with ropes instead of speedily running through the aquatic turbulence and falls. This must have added to a level of frustration and exhaustion that Bradley describes in this passage from June 11: “Have been working like galley-slaves all day. . . . The rapid is still continuous and not improving. Where we are tonight it roars and foams like a wild beast. The Major as usual has chosen the worst camping-ground possible. If I had a dog that would lie where my bed is made tonight I would kill him myself and burn his collar and swear I never owned him” (Ghiglieri 120).

In the above photograph (Figure 2.5), crewmembers are shown lining the boats through Ashley Falls.³ The photos are recorded in stereo. When placed in a viewer the images create the illusion of a three-dimensional world. The viewing device offers a kind of virtual travel to an unfamiliar place. That stereographic images were commonly sold as postcards contributes to this spirit of travel; form ironically connects with content in that the stereoscopic postcards depict places where there are no post offices or mail services.

Movement becomes blurred. The white water of a rapid is transformed into an evocative, velvet surface. With the exception of a few photographs of Powell, most individuals pictured in the photographs are unidentifiable, and they are commonly dwarfed by the canyon landscape.



THESE ILLUSTRATIONS (Figure 2.6a–d) depict a world of natural splendor, fearsome, prehistoric forms, strange shapes, and terrible rapids as well as a place of calm beauty and serenity coupled with an invitation to take a seat in the empty boat at water’s edge.

Most of the crewmembers on the first voyage are, like Powell, veterans of the Civil War and most are hunters and trappers living in the Rockies.⁴



HORSESHOE CANYON.

a



MUKUN'TUWEAP CANYON.

b

Figure 2.6. Illustrations from J. W. Powell's *Canyons of the Colorado*. (a) "Horseshoe Canyon"; (b) "Mukun'tuweap Canyon"; (c) "Gunnison Butte, Gray Canyon"; (d) "Noonday Rest in Marble Canyon."

c



GUNNISON BUTTE, GRAY CANYON (2,700 FEET HIGH).



NOONDAY REST IN MARBLE CANYON.

d

The crewmembers are rarely pictured in the many images that accompany Powell's description of the expedition. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the etchings are made from photographs from a second trip. But even in the photographs of the second trip, crewmembers are mostly anonymous (and, to their dismay, the crewmembers of the second trip are largely ignored in Powell's reports of his canyon research). The facelessness heightens the impression of this being a generalized story in the emerging American tradition of man (an everyman often alone or in a small group) overcoming the challenges of wild nature—a nature he will eventually tame and settle. Such myth-making representations are complemented by a vague sense of time that the mishmash of visual sources advances.



Figure 2.7. "The Rescue" from J. W. Powell's *Canyons of the Colorado*.

ONE OF THE ILLUSTRATIONS by A. Muller in Powell's *Canyons of the Colorado* depicts a dramatic moment when the one-armed major becomes stuck on a precipice while taking scientific measurements and is rescued by a crewmember (Figure 2.7). Powell writes:

June 18.— We have named the long peninsular rock on the other side Echo Rock. . . . Looking about, we find a place where it seems possible to climb. I go ahead; Bradley hands the barometer to me, and follows. So we proceed, stage by stage, until we are nearly to the summit. Here, by making a spring, I gain a foothold in a little crevice, and grasp an angle of the rock overhead. I find I can get up no farther and cannot step back, for I dare not let go with my hand and cannot reach foothold below without. I call to Bradley for help. He finds a way by which he can get to the top of the rock over my head, but cannot reach me. Then he looks around for some stick or limb of a tree, but finds none. Then he suggests that he would better help me with the barometer case, but I fear I cannot hold on to it. The moment is critical. Standing on my toes, my muscles begin to tremble. It is sixty or eighty feet to the foot of the precipice. If I lose my hold I shall fall to the bottom and then perhaps roll over the bench and tumble still farther down the cliff. At this instant it occurs to Bradley to take off his drawers, which he does, and swings them down to me. I hug close to the rock, let go with my hand, seize the dangling legs, and with his assistance am enabled to gain the top. (Powell, *Canyons*, 168–69)

Crewmembers' accounts, which recently have been published by Michael Patrick Ghiglieri in *First through Grand Canyon: The Secret Journals and Letters of the 1869 Crew Who Explored the Green and Colorado Rivers* (2003), raise questions about the accuracy of Powell's reports. Take for example the above passage from Powell's narrative in *Canyons of the Colorado*. The crewmembers' original diary notes make little mention of such an event on this date, although a seemingly similar event is described as occurring at another time and place. On June 18, the date of the event above, the crew is stationed near Echo Rock for a couple of days to do observations. Bradley comments on the good fish he is catching, and Howland writes about the severity of the conditions. Did Powell confuse this date with a similar event that happened later and at another location despite having

logs at his disposal? Or, as with the illustrations by Moran and others, did Powell recombine elements of the overall experience for the sake of his story? And, if so, why might a story about hanging from a cliff be better than reflections on his scientific process?



THE ETCHING BY THOMAS MORAN of the departure at Green River City (Figure 2.4) was probably based on this photograph (Figure 2.8) that shows the departure of Powell's second exploring expedition (1871). Compare the 1871 photo of the launch site with the illustration by Moran used to introduce Powell's chronicle. The trees are in fact mere bushes both near and far. There are no mountains and pinnacles on the horizon, and the details do not fade into a romantic soft light down river on the left-hand side. The picture of the launch is made by E. O. Beaman, who had been hired on the recommendation of E. and M. T. Anthony Photographic Supply Company of New York (Fowler 18). Beaman is the first of three photographers on Powell's 1871 voyage.

At its launch, Powell's first trip is a minor affair—a little-heard-of private expedition by a self-taught scientist from a small Midwestern university. It



Figure 2.8. Departure at Green River City. U.S. Geological Survey, Department of the Interior. Photograph by E. O. Beaman.

gains national attention when, on July 8, a con artist named John A. Risdon announces to newspapers that he is the sole survivor of a boat wreck that killed Powell and the rest of the crew. The newspapers take up the story of this tragedy in the great unknown; the news complements the popular narratives of the desert West as a savage and dangerous place where men confront death. Dramatically, just a few days later, a letter sent by Powell from the Uinta Tribal Center arrives, and newspapers announce that Powell lives! The story transforms a little-mentioned private expedition into a national story not for Powell's death, but for his survival. Risdon's fantastic tale of tragedy in the end calls attention to the heroism of the crew, and their letters from the trip become widely published. Powell's serialized written and illustrated account of the journey in *Scribner's*—from which many of the images in his report to Congress were derived—builds up this same sense of drama.



Figure 2.9. Frederick Dellenbaugh is seated and reflected in the water at the Heart of Lodore, Green River. U.S. Geological Survey, Department of the Interior. Photograph by John Hillers.

POWELL MUST HAVE BEEN KEENLY AWARE of the need for documentation and image-making on this second trip both to support his scientific goals and to make money in mass culture. Part of the arrangement with Beaman is to share profits from sales of stereoscopic photographs of the region. It takes time to carry the materials to viewpoints and to prepare the plates, shoot the images, and process them in a portable darkroom for developing the collodion wet-plate negatives; between the photography and scientific studies, the second voyage would be a slow one. Beaman and his makeshift assistants on the crew make over four hundred negatives during the survey from Green River City to Lee's Ferry at the end of Glen Canyon.

Beaman's images construct the romantic narrative of the (male) explorer in the pastoral setting (Fresonke 156). The explorer is most often seen from afar, as a substitute for the viewer perhaps, is pictured in a routine moment of passing time, or is absent, as with moored boats, as if waiting for the viewer to take his spot. While the photos document the river experience, their tone shifts toward narrative painting and story, a tendency that, as Kris Fresonke points out, endures in his writing. When the crew winter over in a Mormon village, Beaman quits the trip and sets out to tour the canyonlands with a Native American guide. He publishes several popular accounts of his travels.

When Beaman quits, Powell's relative Clem attempts to produce photos but fails to master processing techniques, and the major quickly hires a local photographer named James Fennemore to take over. An Englishman working as an assistant in Charles Savage's photographic gallery in Salt Lake City, Fennemore serves as the photographer for several months, particularly on short photographic land expeditions in the canyonlands with the oarsman John "Jack" Hillers while Powell is away raising funds. Hillers is a German immigrant who had fought in the Civil War as a teenager and then worked in the Brooklyn Police Force and in the Teamsters. He had been hired for his strength as a boatman. However, the boatman takes a strong interest in photography, launching an important career as a photographer of the Western lands and peoples. Being able and willing to carry the heavy equipment over the difficult terrain, he takes on the role of assistant to photographers Beaman, Clem, and Fennemore. Fennemore is generous in teaching Hillers photographic and processing techniques and even shares

credit with his assistant for the photos they shoot together (Current 91). When Fennemore quits due to illness, Powell appoints Hillers as the voyage photographer. They work well together, and Hillers follows Powell on his rise. He is hired as the official photographer on a third voyage Powell makes in 1873, and as Powell is made leader of one of four geographic surveys of the West and later the U.S. Geologic Survey's national director, Hillers becomes one of the agency's most important photographers.⁵



POWELL'S WEST IS A PLACE OF GRANDEUR as well as danger; a place of sublime moments and strange encounters; a place for the discovery and the recovery of time lost. In this image (Figure 2.10a), illustrators have created an anthropomorphic totem from Sentinel Rock (Figure 2.10b). The artists exaggerate the human-like attributes of the rock, enlarging the "head" and narrowing the "legs," which have also been elongated. The radically altered perspective miniaturizes the onlookers standing at their peaceful riverside camp under the majesty and mystery of the full moon.

But, then, how to capture the moods of a moonlit night that cannot be photographed, or the differing rhythms of the days, as the boats float along, not always in high adventure or scientific enterprise? Writing about the second trip, Frederick Dellenbaugh recalls a song (a poem by Isabel Athelwood) that Major Powell would often sing as they boated along—not with the finest voice but with passion:

I love it, I love it, the laugh of a child.
 Now ripping, now gentle, now merry and wild.
 It rings through the air with an innocent gush,
 Like the thrill of a bird at the twilight's soft hush,
 It floats on the breeze like the tones of a bell,
 Or music that dwells in the heart of a shell.
 Oh the laugh of a child is so wild and so free
 'Tis the merriest sound in the world to me. (Dellenbaugh 73)⁶

There is no one mode of expression sufficient for all uses—some things are better expressed in the rhythms of a song or the colors of a painting.



ISLAND MONUMENT IN GLEN CANYON.

a

Figure 2.10. Etching and photograph of Sentinel Rock in Glen Canyon. (a) "Island Monument in Glen Canyon," *Canyons of the Colorado*, by J. W. Powell. (b) U.S. Geological Survey, Department of the Interior. Photograph by E. O. Beaman.

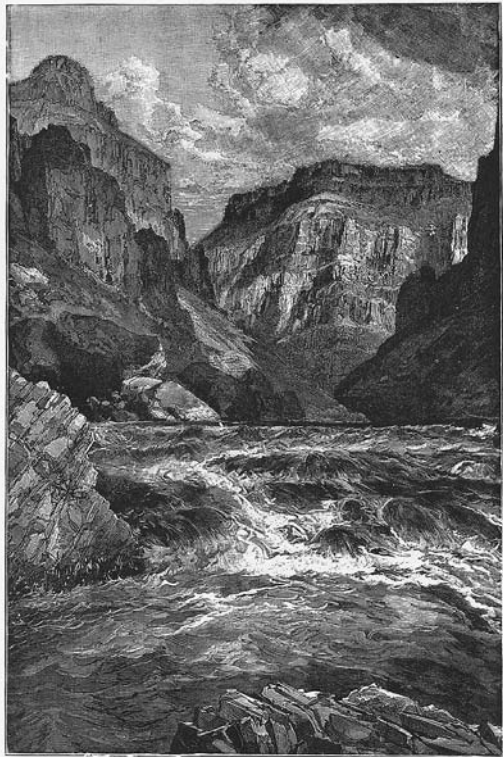
b



But lessons lie in the accuracy of these details in art as in science. The poetics of a vast rock and its relation to its surroundings are likely quite differently perceived on a full moon night and on a moonless one. Moon calendars indicate they would have had at most a half moon on the first trip and a new moon on the second trip when the expedition reached Sentinel Rock. Although Moran stresses the importance of precise knowledge in his 1903 essay, "Knowledge a Prime Requisite in Art," the illustration indicates the fanciful imagination of an illustrator, probably back East, imagining a canyon night based on a daytime image. In illustration, as later in cinema, the West becomes a place of dreams.



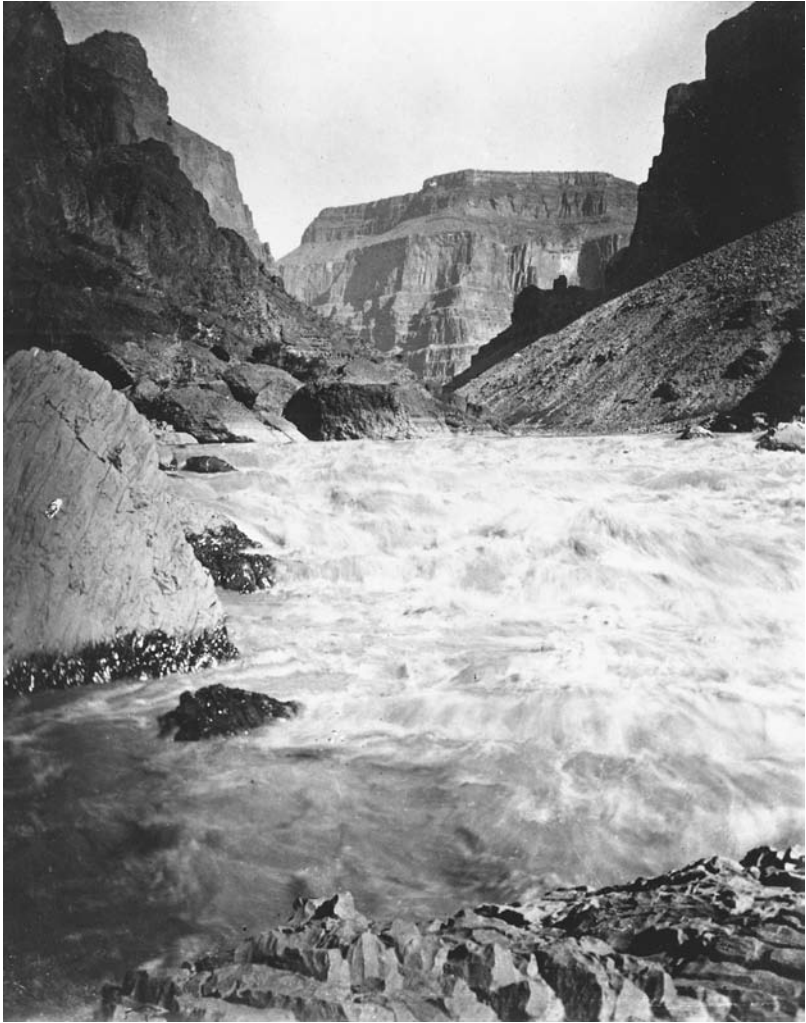
a



THE INNER GORGE.

Figure 2.11.
 (a) Dellenbaugh's
 etching of Lava
 Falls from *Canyons
 of the Colorado*,
 by J. W. Powell,
 based on (b) a
 photograph
 presumably by
 John Hillers, U.S.
 Geological Survey,
 Department of the
 Interior.

b



THE SEVENTEEN-YEAR-OLD FREDERICK DELLENBAUGH is the graphic illustrator for the second voyage, and the global traveler and founder of the Explorers Club later writes one of the most popular accounts of early travels in canyons. Powell already keeps scant notes, and Dellenbaugh points out that a significant set of those from the later part of the first voyage are

lost when three of the crew are murdered in the canyon hills. The three—Dunn and the Howland brothers—had just abandoned the trip at what became called Separation Rapids. The lack of notes may explain some of the inconsistencies in Powell's reports that are noted by Ghiglieri.

Although Powell's diarist account of the journey is primarily accompanied by Moran's illustrations, the etchings come from many hands including C. Bogert, W. J. Linton, A. Muller, H. H. Nichols, and others. Dellenbaugh creates the etching above (Figure 2.11a) from a photograph shot on the second journey by John Hillers (Figure 2.11b). Except for a few fleeting glimpses late in the journey, the crewmembers on the first voyage report almost no encounters with native inhabitants. Mostly they see remnants of native activities on the shoreline if at all, and sometimes the crew steal some food from meager Native American farm plots near the river.



a

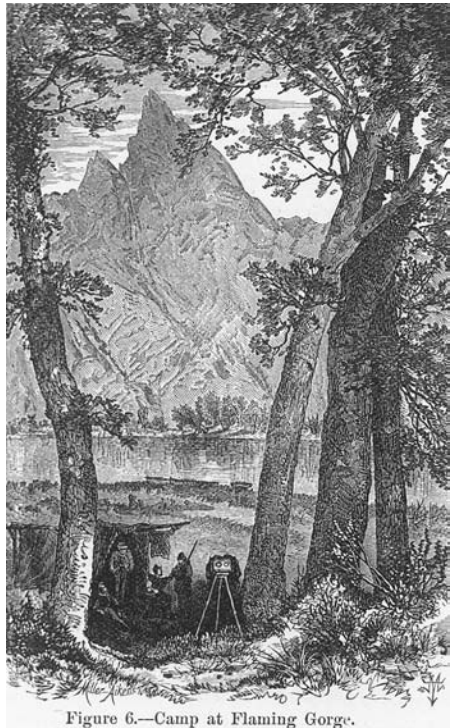
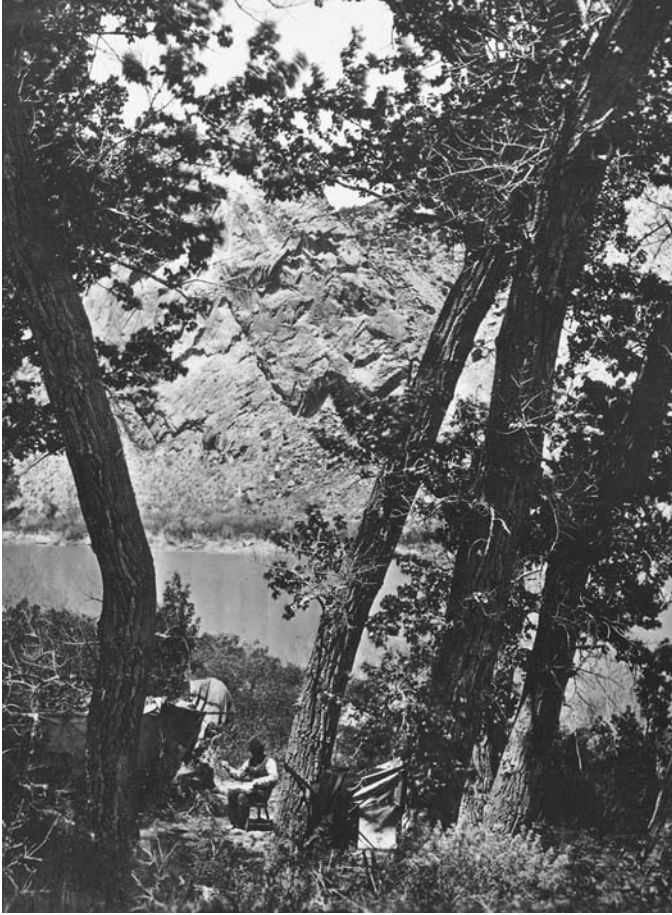


Figure 2.12. Camp at Flaming Gorge. (a) The illustration from *Canyons of the Colorado*, by J. W. Powell, based on (b) a photograph by E. O. Beaman, U.S. Geological Survey, Department of the Interior.

Figure 6.—Camp at Flaming Gorge.



b

IN THIS ILLUSTRATION OF A CAMPSITE at Flaming Gorge (Figure 2.12a), a stereographic camera is improbably placed within the image highlighting the process of its production. A crewmember sewing is replaced by a man carrying a pole or gun, and a geometrically sound lean-to is added. Perhaps for the sake of our visual pleasure, trees have been cut back to reveal a peak that rises in the background. Small trees are added to the far bank, which is stretched back to magnify space and grandeur, while vast imaginary canyons are added to the front region of the mountain, significantly increasing its apparent height.

The exploration narratives of the great unknown transform it into an imaginable place—one where others will soon come and perhaps settle. The surveys therefore serve both political-cultural agendas and quasi-scientific ones. What is lost between? The singing captain that Dellenbaugh describes? The light of night in desert canyons? Encounters with traces of native cultures? The song of a canyon wren and its relation to local groves of willows? What is excluded is an overall sensory experience that these and many other qualities of a canyon journey are a part of. The diverse media that Powell collects suggest such a world. Yet, in its final presentation many diverse elements are cut, and more limited, linear narratives and expositions are instead presented. However, there is a contradiction; the limited narratives serve immediate agendas of political expansion, but they are insufficient to stand up to the greater tasks of development and settlement. For Powell and for the explorers of the West in general, artistic and scientific activities diverge. While pictures of a romanticized West—of the unknown territory—decorate government offices and postcard racks, the known land awaits division into borders, territories, use categories, and deeds. As a geographer Powell attempted to slow the expansion of the West that his stories seemed to play into; his reasoned assault on unsustainable settlement was rejected.



IN 1873, POWELL INVITES THOMAS MORAN to join a third expedition, this one a land expedition via the Virgin River and Kenab to the Grand Canyon. Moran comes for seven weeks with his own funding from *The Aldine*, *Appleton's Journal*, and *Scribner's Monthly*,⁷ and many of the etchings in Powell's publications carry his name. Art and science blur. As described earlier, Moran had been a member of Hayden's exploration of Yellowstone around the time of Powell's first Grand Canyon voyage. He was not, however, the official artist nor was he originally invited (Truettner 241); rather, the Pennsylvanian had joined with a friend's letter of recommendation and with funding from Scribner and the Northern Pacific Railroad with the charge of producing watercolors for them. The easterner becomes enamored with the desert West and by the experience of outdoor adventure.



Figure 2.13. Thomas Moran, *Chasm of the Colorado*, 1873–74. Department of the Interior Museum, Washington, D.C.

In 1872, Moran's painting *Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* is purchased by Congress for an astonishing \$10,000, and two years later Moran receives another \$10,000 for his painting of the Grand Canyon, the *Chasm of the Colorado* (Figure 2.13). The painting must have captured a spirit of the time, at least within the halls of Congress. William Truettner (247) suggests that Powell's adding Moran to his journey might have been a benefit in raising funds, and more broadly Powell held great admiration for the work, work that Powell claims "not only tells the truth . . . it displays the beauty of the truth" (Truettner 248).

In her essay "Time's Profile: John Wesley Powell, Art, and Geology at the Grand Canyon," Elizabeth Childs suggests that Powell likely believed that using paint instead of photographs would elevate the status of his journey (21). This possibly also extends to his choice to use illustrations over photographs in his congressional report. In working with Moran, Powell embraced the romantic aesthetic of the moment to weave a personal journey into a national narrative. Childs writes:

A painter of the Grand Canyon could help legitimize Powell's endeavors by linking fine art with that of elite science. Painting offered public celebration,

commemoration, poetic commentary, and the aura of uniqueness in a way that survey photography could not. Painting also opened the doors to elite social and political spaces—gallery shows, museums, the halls of Congress—the domains of the educated and the powerful. (21)

Decorating political institutions, parks, and travel materials, Moran's images invoke classical themes of Western dominion.⁸ Powell's works participate in this narrative and draw clear ties with Moran's sensibilities, perhaps at the expense of greater range. While several crewmembers kept diaries of the first voyage, these are largely ignored in the narrative and report, which combines a memory of one trip with documentation from another. Powell relies on dominant approaches to writing and representation (with images, photos, maps, etc.) that subsume expressions of a Great Unknown into relatively singular sensibility. Yet, facing issues of settlement and law over exploration and adventure, times are changing.



THE PHOTOGRAPHERS EMPHASIZE the human relation to landscapes, the aesthetic beauty of views, and the adventures of Powell's crew. Artists rendering the first voyage into illustration seize on these aspects. However, the marriage of an artistic aesthetic and political agenda begins to unfold. The initial pictures offer Eden-like images of natural splendor—a mythic heritage for a nation. As new waves of settlers arrive, geological survey teams with scientifically trained cartographers redraw the Western territories. In 1880, Clarence Dutton initially hires both Moran and William Henry Holmes to participate in the latest U.S. Geological Survey. The style of the latter, a trained geologist, dominates—the aesthetics and goals have changed (see Childs 32–33).

The self-trained Holmes was mentored under paleontologist F. B. Meek at the Smithsonian in drawing shells and learning methods of lithography.⁹ There he also met members of Hayden's 1871 Yellowstone expedition that Moran had joined, and through the Smithsonian connections he was able to join later ones (Nelson 263–65). His chromolithograph panoramas offered an approach that was very different from painting or photography. Nelson writes, "Holmes conveyed specific strati-graphic, structural, and geomorphic

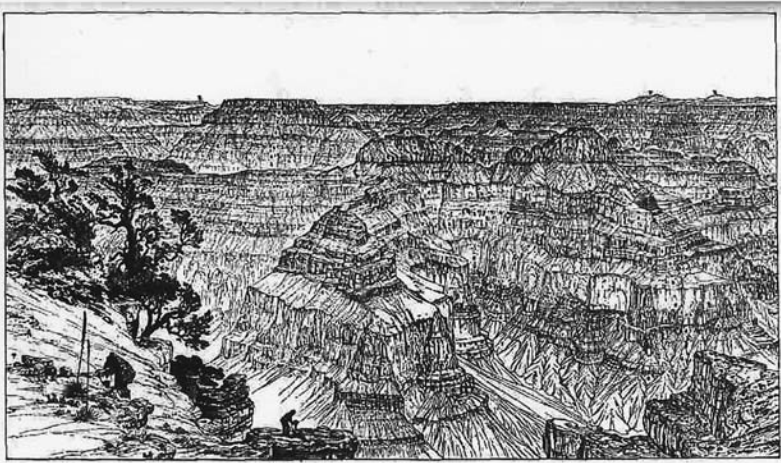


Figure 2.14. Geographic drawing by William Henry Holmes from J. W. Powell's *Canyons of the Colorado*.

information in a way that no contemporary camera could reproduce, even those of Jack Hillers. . . . The panoramas themselves seem timeless; no diurnal or seasonal effect of light or shadow obscures any portion of the views" (274–75).

Lines define contours and boundaries. Names and numbers mark peaks and canyons. The empty space of the map is filled with fact, order, structure, lineation, and limitation. All the information that is necessary to locate boundaries is visible, codified, and timeless. This is land that will be bought, owned, used, subdivided, reclaimed, irrigated, mined, developed, and/or dammed and flooded. Creative, scientific, and legal agendas no longer coincide. This separation of imagery into separate domains of art and science—one that runs parallel with the rise of scholarly disciplinary divisions—marks a fundamental transformation. A West constructed in romantic imagery and narrative language is quickly fading into the stuff of history and legend, of popular media and imagination, while the practices of the local actuality are drawn in lines and grids and written out in deeds and laws, preparing a very differently imagined landscape for a future that awaits it.¹⁰

Notes

1. Powell first visited the area two years earlier in 1867, when, as a professor of natural sciences at Illinois State Normal University, he led a group of amateur geologists and students to collect rock samples in Colorado. He set his ambitions on returning to explore the waterways of the Colorado River, which he began mostly with limited funding from sources in Illinois and his own salary (deBuys 12).

2. Ghiglieri (5) points out that Ohio Representative James A. Garfield, who was chairman of the Appropriations Committee, had told Powell that he would only be granted funding for his explorations if he promised to include an account of his 1869 exploration in his report. This is an interesting point, in that it reaffirms a congressional interest in including both narrative and scientific representations, as had been the case in prior reports such as Ives's; it also corresponds with the integration of differing kinds of imagery, of both graphic and artistic natures, during this period.

3. Lining is the process of dragging boats along with ropes. Crewmembers despaired at Powell's insistence, following accidents such as the wreck of the *No Name* at Disaster Falls, of performing this tedious task.

4. For more on the accomplishments before, during, and after their participation in the Colorado River Exploring Expedition of 1869 as well as some discussion of conflicting views of their relationship to Powell and each other during the voyage, see Ghiglieri, which is dedicated, in part, to the crewmembers (and, notably, not the expedition leader).

5. The bond endures Powell's rise and fall, and Hillers serves as a pallbearer at Powell's funeral in 1902 (Fowler).

6. Isabel Athelwood, "The Laugh of a Child." The poem is published in Bal-four. This along with the poetic selection in the naming of the Canyon of Ladore offer evidence that poetic language and sensibility impact the voyage.

7. The circumstances described by Thomas Moran (Bassford and Fryxell 41–42) are further discussed in Childs 22.

8. Curiously, Moran's painting of the Grand Canyon is less successful than his painting of Yellowstone because it does not fill the proper myth of the West. It is critiqued in the *New York Times* and *Atlantic Monthly* for expressing the West as a barren wasteland—a place of nightmares not dreams (Truettner 249–50).

9. For more on Holmes's work at the Smithsonian, see Kubler 157–58 and Nelson 255–64. In a curious twist, Holmes largely discontinues making stratigraphs after the surveys lose funding in the 1880s, and he develops a curatorial career, eventually becoming the first director of the National Gallery.

10. The relationship between Powell's exploration narrative and its representation is addressed further in my interactive work, *Voyage into the Unknown*, which is part of the *Unknown Territories* project, <http://www.unknownterritories.org>.

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“Watch How Dem Touris’ Like Fe Look”

Tourist Photography and Claude McKay’s Jamaica

LEAH ROSENBERG

Green mancha mek fe naygar man,
It mek fe him all way;
Our islan’ is banana lan’,
Banana car’ de sway.
—Claude McKay, “King Banana”

CLAUDE MCKAY LAUNCHED HIS LITERARY CAREER with creole poems written in the voice of peasant speakers, detailing their quotidian experiences and existential crises. Printed and performed in Jamaica and published as two volumes, *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads* (1912), in England, McKay’s dialect poetry constituted some of Jamaica’s first self-consciously national literature; it was part of Jamaica’s emergent cultural nationalism, which in addition to advocating for improved economic opportunity and justice from the British colonial government, promoted a Jamaican literature centered on the peasantry.

Despite its historical significance and the high praise it garnered when first published, McKay’s early poetry has received little scholarly attention, becoming the subject of extended study only in the 1990s and early 2000s. In the first decades of Caribbean and African American literary studies, scholars lauded McKay’s choice to portray black subaltern Jamaicans but often criticized McKay’s language and poetic form as marked by colonial stereotype and mimicry. They were disappointed by a national literature that included an ode to climbing peas (“Me Bannabees”) and homoerotic

love poems but little overt colonial or racial critique. Mervyn Morris dismissed all of McKay's poetry as "deficient in basic poetic skills: all too often weak rhymes and stale poetic diction coincide" (36). Kamau Brathwaite, who advocates that Caribbean poetry be written with the sound and rhythm of creole language, criticized the iambic pentameter and rhyming couplets of McKay's dialect verse as forms of "literary colonialism" (275n17). Maureen and Rupert Lewis faulted McKay for failing to articulate a systematic critique of Jamaica's class hierarchy and for placing black folk culture outside the arena of politics (45, 43).¹

Since the 1990s, scholars have returned to McKay's dialect poetry, unearthing clearly anticolonial poems and finding political significance by placing it in a number of new contexts: the early twentieth-century political and economic landscape of Jamaica (James, Rosenberg), the role of race and dialect in high modernism (North), and the socialist and horticultural beliefs of his mentors, the governor of Jamaica, Sydney Olivier, and the English aristocratic author and folklore collector, Walter Jekyll (Gosciak).² I build on this scholarship by placing McKay's portrayal of the Jamaican peasantry also in relation to tourist photography of the early twentieth century, which, as art historian Krista Thompson has recently demonstrated, produced a new and powerful imperial way of representing the Caribbean that Thompson calls "tropicality." The similarity in subject matter combined with the radical difference in the manner of representation make clear that McKay's early verse and his novel *Banana Bottom* comprehensively challenge the tropicalizing iconography of early tourist photography and, as an alternative, offer an empowering national vision of the peasantry. Paradoxically McKay articulated his challenge and alternative vision in the language of Victorian gardening, a tradition very much part of British colonialism. As a result, the radicalism of McKay's work remained unrecognized. This essay illuminates how McKay used the colonial tropes and concepts of British race ideology and gardening to challenge the then new forms of imperialism, tourism, and corporate agriculture, both already dominated by the United States.

At the turn of the twentieth century, emergent Jamaican nationalism and tourist photography both presented the peasantry as symbols of the country. Jamaican literary authors, foremost among them McKay, depicted

peasants as industrious, intelligent human beings, evidence of Jamaica's distinct culture and potential as a modern people. By contrast, tourist photographs reduced Jamaica to a fixed series of images: quaint and docile "natives," exotic fruits and vegetables, palm-lined beaches, and rushing waterfalls—images that marketed the region as a primitive and fertile Eden safe for tourists and foreign investment (Thompson 5). Jamaicans were presented as natives just waiting to serve tourists, as comic figures ignorant of Western modernity, and perhaps above all as a people who fundamentally transgressed and inverted British norms of gender and sexuality. The women were strong, the men dependent, and the children born out of wedlock. Thompson has illustrated that tropicality has shaped the representation and the material realities of the Caribbean ever since the 1890s, as governments, corporations, and individuals shaped the landscape to conform to this tropical ideal with results that continue to undermine national sovereignty and citizenship. By the early 1900s, Jamaican photographers, shopkeepers, and the elite were active in the industry. Tropicality was ubiquitous; Jamaican writers could not represent the peasantry or the countryside without engaging it and to some degree absorbing its iconic images.

McKay engaged with tropicality by reordering the dynamics of the tourist gaze. In contrast to tropicality that focused on black working women and presented Jamaicans as silent servants or speakers of a comic dialect indicative of their ignorance, McKay's early poetry features strong black peasant men, who express incisive critiques of the new economic and representational order and do so in Jamaican creole. Thus, the speaker of McKay's poem "Peasants' Ways o' Thinkin'" asserts, "Time's come for *our* talk" and dismisses newspaper and other representations because they "Don't show de sort o' way we think" (McKay, *Complete Poems*, 9, 11). While tropicality relegated Jamaica to ahistorical primitivism, McKay's peasant speakers make clear that the hardships they face are ultimately the result of a particular phase of modernization and specific colonial policy. Calling on the government to end tariffs on cloth used by peasants and taxes on the thatch they used to roof their homes, the speaker of "Peasants' Ways o' Thinkin'" attacks Jamaica's regressive tax system that had laboring classes supplying "70 to 80 percent of government revenue" (James 15). McKay's peasants complain that plantation wages are so low—"Whole day

ninepence for a man!" (McKay, "Christmas in de Air," *Complete Poems*, 8)—that men are forced to emigrate to the Panama Canal Zone "where a better pay we'll get" (McKay, "Peasants' Ways o' Thinkin'," *Complete Poems*, 11). Depressed wages and unemployment resulted from colonial policy that subsidized plantations' use of indentured labor and did little to protect labor against the United Fruit Company and other corporations.

Tourist photography presented Jamaica for the tourist's pleasure and consumption. The landscape, rivers, and waterfalls were pristine and empty unless they held the comic or the sexualized native. By contrast, McKay's peasant speakers take pleasure in the landscape and in each other as McKay's many love poems assert. The speaker of "Sukee River," for instance, describes the beauty of the river and the sensual pleasure of it flowing over his body. He calls on it repeatedly to "Kiss my naked breast / in its black skin drest" (McKay, *Complete Poems*, 127).

If McKay's early verse has an overarching theme, it is the daily hardships and injustices peasants faced. "De' mo' me wuk, de mo' time hard," exclaims the speaker of "Hard Times"—his wife is sick, his taxes high, his children hungry, and his crops dying (McKay, *Complete Poems*, 41–42). The speaker of "Whe' fe do?" expresses the sentiment of many of McKay's poems, by asserting the principle that he will face adversity, to "try an' live as any man, / An' Fight de wul' de best we can" (27). In short, McKay's early verse is so rife with struggle and suffering that it almost seems designed to disprove the paradise myth Jamaica's tourist industry sought to promote.

McKay may have engaged so thoroughly with the tourist vision of Jamaica because tropicality developed during the two decades between McKay's birth in 1890 and his first publications in the 1910s and because tropicality was integral in producing the harsh realities it obscured. Between 1890 and 1914, Jamaica saw not only the emergence of cultural nationalism, but also the rise of the banana and tourist industries. Jamaica's peasant proprietor class was widely acknowledged as the engine of Jamaica's post-emancipation economy in part because peasants had developed the banana as a crop (Blake 541). In the 1870s, their economic success inspired Lorenzo Baker, cofounder of United Fruit, to enter into the banana trade (Holt 349). By the early twentieth century, the United Fruit Company dominated the industry. Its rise to power plunged Jamaica's peasant farmers into a

multinational, corporate industry of large-scale plantations. While some profited, many lost their land and became wage laborers, often emigrating to work on United Fruit plantations in Latin America.

At the same time, the colonial government sought to encourage Jamaica's tourist industry and foreign investment. It organized the Great Exhibition of 1891 to showcase the country's resources, and it constructed tourist hotels (with public taxes). The exhibition galvanized Jamaica's photography industry, which quickly became one of the most prolific and influential in the region (Taylor 59; Thompson 30–32). By the early 1900s, United Fruit was dominant also in tourism, building hotels, commissioning photographers and writers, and transporting both fruit and tourists in its Great White Fleet.

As a black peasant family that became prosperous during this time of hardship, the McKay family was somewhat of an anomaly in Jamaica where light skin often correlated with higher class and education levels. Thus, as a highly educated black peasant, McKay was in the rare position of embodying the national symbol while being also an intellectual, able to fashion that symbol. By contrast, most participants in early Jamaican nationalism belonged to the brown-skinned middle classes and saw themselves as more modern, potential leaders of the peasantry.

McKay probably encountered tourist photography and tourism in a number of contexts. From 1907 to 1909, he apprenticed as a carpenter in Browns Town, the small capital of St. Ann's Parish and home of James Johnston, one of Jamaica's most prolific tourist photographers and author of *Jamaica: The New Riviera* (1903) (Cooper 22). Later McKay worked as a constable in Kingston, the location of many tourist and photography shops that were well known to writers as they were also the main distributors of Jamaican literature. His experiences in Kingston may have alerted McKay to the ill effects of tourism because his fellow policemen not infrequently arrested Jamaicans for selling souvenirs or otherwise interfering with tourists while Kingston hotels introduced U.S. segregation (James 76; Thompson 15).

Critics have not recognized McKay's critique of tourism and photography because his work appeared to many to reproduce rather than revise the colonizing gaze. Consider the potentially nationalist and anti-imperial

assertion of “King Banana,” whose final stanza serves as epigraph for this article. The poem is a praise song for a Martinican variety of banana, which served as a principal starch, like yam and potato, in the peasant diet. The poem’s peasant speaker announces proudly that the banana is “Mek fe naygar man . . . all way” indicating both the lasting nature of his ownership (always) and its comprehensive nature (in all ways) (McKay, *Complete Poems*, 29). Outlining the planting process from the burning of land to the careful transportation of the fruit, he asserts that nothing can beat the peasants’ “Good ole-time cultivation”—certainly the white man’s plantation had nothing to teach. Moreover, he is proud to own his banana-producing nation; “Our islan” is, he asserts, a “banana land” where bananas are king because they support the economy (29). It is an assertion of the manhood of Jamaica’s peasantry; it also asserted that peasantry’s ownership of the country’s most valuable crop and of the country itself. This challenged both Britain, which owned the country, and the United Fruit Company, which acted as if it did (Gosciak 32).

Yet McKay’s degrading language and simplistic form seem to undermine any empowering or nationalist reading. When McKay claims the banana, he does so as a “naygar man”—a term that denoted a person of little status or worth—and he reduces Jamaica to a banana land, hardly the image one might choose for a modern nation. In “My Native Land,” McKay claims Jamaica in even stronger terms. Rejecting the assertion that Afro-Jamaicans were merely deracinated Africans, a “no-land race,” he claims Jamaica as “home,” in yet more derogatory terms as “de nigger’s place” (McKay, *Complete Poems*, 57).

“Naygar man,” “banana land,” “de nigger’s place”—these were the expressions of the minstrel show and white southern writers who wrote dialect “as an imaginative defense against the demise of plantation life” (North 101).³ Moreover, McKay produced his early poetry in a classically colonial relationship—under the mentorship of the English aristocrat Walter Jekyll, who encouraged McKay to write dialect poetry but publically stated that mature poets would outgrow it (McKay, *My Green Hills*, 66–67; Jekyll, “Dialect Poetry,” 13). Jekyll edited and selected McKay’s poems for publication; he paid for printing *Constab Ballads*; his footnotes literally defined McKay’s meaning; and his introduction to *Songs of Jamaica* describes creole

in emasculating terms as "the feminine version of masculine English" with "the nature of a pretty lisp" (Jekyll, "Preface," 5).⁴

Yet, as Michael North has argued, McKay challenged Jekyll and colonial relations through his use of dialect, and, as a corollary, I would add that McKay challenged the then new colonial vision of tourism by reproducing the very same figures and scenes featured in tourist photography.⁵ North reads "Quashie to Buccra," the opening poem of *Songs of Jamaica*, as McKay's counter to Jekyll's introduction couched in a confrontation between a peasant, Quashie, and a white man, Buccra. As Buccra peers into Quashie's field, Quashie tells him: "You tasé petater an' you say it sweet, / But you no know how hard we work for it" (McKay, *Complete Poems*, 18). In other words, the rich white man likes the taste of his food, but he is ignorant of the extent and value of the peasants' labor that produced it. Quashie concludes by asserting his pride in the beauty of his field and the pleasure he takes in his crop. His industry and pride challenge a powerful myth with a long history. Thomas Carlyle invoked the fertility of the soil in his 1849 call for a return to forced labor. Caribbeans, he asserted, would not work on plantations when they could eat pumpkins that popped from the ground. In making this claim, he borrowed from proslavery writers of the early 1800s. In the early twentieth century, the myth was resurrected yet again by tourist photographs of natives and local produce. North suggests that McKay's poem is self-reflexive. It simultaneously disabused Jekyll and the reader of their romantic vision of the peasantry, warning them that dialect verse no more sprang effortlessly from his peasant mind than did potatoes from peasants' fields (North 106).⁶

I would add that McKay expressed this challenge to the plantocracy and assertion of cultural creativity not simply in creole but in the terminology of colonial stereotype and racial division featured both in Victorian arguments for increased colonial control in the Caribbean and in racial caricatures marketed on tourist postcards (see below). For Afro-Jamaicans, "buccra" was a generic term for white authority; used without further elaboration, it usually defined the person by their color and position, much as did "quashie" when used by white authorities to refer to Jamaican workers. Not too distant from "naygar," "quashie" was frequently used in English writing on the West Indies to refer to "any male negro" often with the added

sense of “country bumpkin” or “stupid person” (Cassidy and Le Page 370). Carlyle used it to make his case for forced labor, arguing that

if quashee will not honestly aid in bringing out those sugars, cinnamons, and nobler products of the West India Islands, for the benefit of all mankind, then I say neither will the powers permit quashee to continue growing pumpkins there for his own lazy benefit. (21)

Tourists and United Fruit were the new buccra of the early twentieth century: tourists assumed the privilege of planters and were courted as agricultural investors; tourist guides included trips to plantations; tourist photographs captured plantation labor. In short, the poem might well be read as a confrontation also between the peasant and the tourist—North in fact assumes Buccra is a “white tourist” (107). Therefore, I suggest that we read “Quashie to Buccra” as McKay’s revision of an iconic image of early Jamaican photography: black Jamaicans holding up yams and other exotic produce for the pleasure of the tourist (Figure 3.1). In McKay’s version of this image, the peasant is given a voice to make his labor and personhood visible, and thus to dismantle the tourist myth of Jamaica as Eden.

In “Fetchin’ Water,” McKay yet more directly addresses tourism. The poem’s speaker condemns the tourist gaze because it both erases and exploits his daughter’s labor to pleasure the tourist. He complains,

Watch how dem touris’ like fe look
Out ’pon my little daughter,
Wheneber fe her t’un to cook
Or fetch a pan of water:
De sight look gay:

The father cautions, only the man who does not know hard labor can find it sweet. In his words:

’Nuff rock’tone in de sea, yet none
But those ’pon lan’ know ’bouten sun. (McKay, *Complete Poems*, 35)

Like "Quashie to Buccra," "Fetchin' Water" reprises a typical tourist photograph, in this case the image of young women carrying water pans, such as those featured in "No. 12, Water Carriers" (Figure 3.2). This photograph presents four young black women. One has a water pan hoisted on her head; a pan or tin sits in front of another. The photograph is painted in such a way that emphasizes the white of the women's eyes, producing an effect reminiscent of minstrelsy. Their mismatched colorful dresses, their bare feet, the oversized straw hat, and the water pans all mark them simultaneously as comic and as the antithesis of modern women.

In contrast, McKay's "Fetchin' Water" presents water carriers as complex, independent men and women. They complain and resist. One young man must be beaten by his father before he takes the water pan; young Sarah Jane throws down the pan, strikes her mother, and insults her cooking before finally accepting the work. Even the proverb McKay uses he reappropriates from tourist postcards and guidebooks. In "Fetchin' Water," the proverb, "Nuff rock'tone in de sea, yet none / But those 'pon lan' know



Figure 3.1. Fruits and vegetables of the island. From James Johnston, *Jamaica: The New Riviera* (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1903).



Figure 3.2. "No. 12, Water Carriers." Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica.

'bouten sun" highlights the false perspective of tourists who see peasant labor as picturesque. The proverb also featured in a tourist postcard series illustrated with drawings by Vivian Heaven and published by the Jamaican entrepreneur Aston W. Gardner.⁷ While Heaven highlighted the contrast between the working black man and the wealthy planter in his carriage kicking up dust in the working man's face, she also portrayed the peasant in a way that suggested his vanity and indolence. He leans on his pickaxe with self-conscious ease and makes a show of wiping sweat from his brow. Further, he wears his shirt with style, open to the waist and tucked into

what looks to be a cummerbund. This aspect of the drawing is more in keeping with the planter's rhetoric of workers' laziness than the workers' assertions of the planters' privileged ignorance.

In "Fetchin' Water," McKay asserts a particularly patriarchal voice, that of the father desiring to shield his daughter from the gaze of tourists. This patriarchal assertion and the phallic, patriarchal nature of "King Banana" reflect McKay's broader strategy of countering the feminization of men in tourist photography. That McKay employed iconic images, racial terminology, and proverbs featured in tourist photography and guides suggests that McKay felt he could redefine the peasantry through these tropes as national symbols rather than tourist icons. It suggests that McKay may have made a conscious compromise when he chose to write in dialect, knowing that it was an imperfect medium. His peasant speakers assert a similar principle in "Whé fe do?" and "Hard Times"—they will carry on their work knowing well the injustices they face and the limitations on their success. McKay addresses aesthetic compromise specifically in "Peasants' Ways o' Thinkin'," in which the speaker expresses his preference for writing "prose cut n' dry" but accepts that he could "do worse // Dan dish i'up in rhymin' s verse" (*Complete Poems*, 9).

Writing in dialect verse limited McKay by classifying him as a black and peasant poet in terms that Jekyll defined, and it prevented him from writing in standard English, which he wanted to do in order to prove himself to Jamaica's literary clubs and no doubt the world beyond Jamaica (McKay, *My Green Hills*, 86–87). However, the gardening philosophy to which Jekyll introduced McKay endowed his apparently apolitical poetry about peasant peas, bananas, and flowers with internationally recognized political significance. Further, Jekyll, after reading just one poem, had assured McKay that his dialect verse would sell (McKay, *My Green Hills*, 67), and McKay most likely prepared his 1912 collections with the knowledge that the influential journal *Garden* edited by Jekyll's sister would review them positively (which it did), providing him with a large readership that would understand his dialect verse as political and important because of his agricultural detail and peasant dialect (Gosciak 87).

Gosciak makes a strong case that McKay's use of horticulture in his early poetry reflects the gardening philosophy advocated by Jekyll and his

sister Gertrude, a leader in the Arts and Crafts and gardening movements (72–98). In fact, Gosciak asserts that, “because of Jekyll’s persistence, much of McKay’s poetic meaning is about or developed through nature, even in poems that seem racial” (61). Walter Jekyll introduced McKay to the work of his sister, Gertrude Jekyll, who was editor of the prominent journal *Garden*, for which Walter wrote a column on Jamaica. She saw the agricultural and other cultural practices of the peasantry as inextricably linked; her influential study of the peasantry of West Surrey in England was a model for Walter’s *Jamaica Song and Story* (Gosciak 72–98). Both Jekylls rejected the formal tradition of English gardening and its artificial techniques of accommodating exotic plants. Gertrude in particular advocated and designed gardens that combined traditional peasant food production and modern horticulture and integrated native plants, hardy exotics, and hybrids. These gardens were self-conscious works of art and models for cultural diversity (Gosciak 78–79). In their conception, they erased borders between art, politics, and horticulture—much as did McKay’s dialect poetry. In fact, both Jekylls saw peasant culture and these gardening practices as oppositional art, “pockets of resistance” against industrial modernization, urbanization, and colonial war (Gosciak 76). Their peasant-centered philosophy complemented Jamaican cultural nationalism’s deployment of the peasantry and was well suited to challenging the linked forces of tropicality and U.S. corporate agriculture.

In the context of England, the Jekylls’ horticulture-centered politics was both radical and conservative. The Jekylls advocated equitable working conditions and alternatives to mass production; they sought peaceful cultural diversity, not violent colonialism. However, their embrace of the peasantry was a form of nostalgia for a period in which their class had greater power and possessed power over the peasantry that they now sought to celebrate. Moreover, their collecting of specimens from colonized territories participated in the larger colonial project of classifying the world’s flora and fauna (Gosciak 79). However, their philosophy lost much of this contradiction when McKay appropriated it and transplanted it in Jamaica where the leading force of modernization encroaching on the peasantry was the United Fruit Company, and the person protesting that encroachment was a peasant.⁸ Thus, one might describe McKay as self-consciously

refashioning one form of colonial discourse, Victorian gardening, to counter another, U.S. corporate imperialism—and also to enhance the Jamaican nationalist project of constructing the peasantry as national symbols.

In contrast to the antimodern gardening movement, tropicality gained much of its strength from the modern technology of photography that promised objective truth (Thompson 32, 6, 8). It was further aided by the invention of the picture postcard at the turn of the century and the postcard's extraordinary popularity (Staff 64–65). Between the 1890s and 1914, postcards carried countless thousands of tourist photographs of Jamaica throughout Europe, its colonies, and the Americas (Taylor 13–36). Easily available at affordable prices, postcard photographs gave the less privileged classes of Britain and the United States (and elsewhere) new access to empire. They could collect and keep images of colonized territories and people, arranging them in albums as they saw fit (Landau 144). Postcards of the Caribbean in general and Jamaica in particular were surprisingly prominent in collectors' albums (Gilmore v).

The authority of tropicality derived also from photography's role in ethnography and anthropology (Landau 141–43; Poignant 63). These disciplines were at the core of the late nineteenth-century colonial enterprise of race science, and photography provided data used to produce the hierarchy of races (Poignant 45; Street 122). Tourist photography borrowed some of its poses and authority from this tradition. As a result, its images of natives often promised ethnographic truth and bolstered Eurocentric conceptions of racial superiority. Moreover, tourist photographs were prescriptive images that reinforced ethnographic types and promoted subservient behavior among Jamaican peasants and workers. A colonial racial hierarchy and the presence of a docile servant class were essential because the tourist industry marketed nostalgia for a mythic plantation past when enslaved people were loyal and the master was served in elegance (Thompson 23, 67). Tourist literature invited tourists to play the role of the new planters. Shot from vistas overlooking harbors and cities and often featuring natives holding—or offering—fruit and vegetables, tourist photographs presented the Caribbean to viewers as if they were both tourist and master of the land (Thompson 53–57). Powered by the modernity of photography, the accessibility of the postcard, and the romance of colonial privilege, tropicality

rapidly became the dominant vision of the Caribbean in North America, the British Empire, and to no small degree within Jamaica itself.

Tourist photography used this scientific and technological authority to refashion tropes from Victorian travel narratives that feminized and sexualized Jamaica and Jamaican men. I illustrate this process by examining two of its prominent tropes, the banana and the market woman. Combining both, “Banana Carriers” (Figure 3.3) was published in Adolphe Duperly and Sons, *Picturesque Jamaica* (1904) and belongs to the original canon of tourist photographs produced for the 1891 exhibition. “Banana Carriers” depicts five black women standing under a large breadfruit tree. Each balances a stem of bananas on her head. At the rear and head stands a man; there is also a donkey, loaded with baskets. The image privileges the women. They are center stage; we can see their faces. In it, the men stand at the margins.

A stark contrast to McKay’s portrayal of outspoken, manly peasants as masters of agriculture, Duperly’s image presents women as mute features



Banana Carriers

Figure 3.3. “Banana Carriers.” From Adolphe Duperly and Sons, *Picturesque Jamaica with Descriptive Text of the Island* (Kingston, 1904).

of the natural landscape. The bananas and the large breadfruit tree with its striking leaves present the island's plenitude of tropical fruit; hanging over the women and appended to their bodies, tropical tree and fruit blur the boundaries between women and nature; nature becomes female and the women become part of nature (Thompson 103–10). Yet these women are probably agricultural workers as they lined up in orderly fashion, characteristic of common photographs of United Fruit's carriers loading the company's ships. The emphasis on nature in "Banana Carriers" obscures corporate agriculture, and in depicting black Caribbean women carrying heavy objects on their heads, the image participated in a discursive tradition that emasculated Afro-Caribbean men and denied the region self-government.

Victorian authors such as Anthony Trollope, James Anthony Froude, and William Pringle marveled at the power and beauty of market women as they strode to market with baskets overflowing with fruit and vegetables on their heads; they wondered at their economic freedom, they imagined their sexual freedom, and they were awed by their physical strength. As a consequence, they presented these strong women as indices of the failure of Afro-Caribbean manhood. Real men would perform this hard labor themselves and prevent their women from doing it. The fact that black women carried heavy loads meant that black men had failed either to support or to control their women. Peasant and working women thus were the real men of the region. Froude joked that if Jamaica were to get the vote, it should be given to these "black Amazons" (198). The message: Britain needed to rule the British West Indies directly and to avoid the dangers posed by representative government in its colonies where white people or Europeans were the minority.

In featuring market women, tourist writers and photographers adapted this British colonial trope to legitimate U.S.-dominated corporate agriculture and tourism. Much like Froude and Kingsley, tourist writers described indefatigable market women. In his booklet *In Fair Jamaica* (1907), W. Bellows is typical in marveling at "the fine build and the splendid carriage of the Jamaica woman, as she puts mile after mile behind her, with a load of fruit or vegetables beautifully balanced upon her head, are matters of which the island may feel proud. Distance seems nothing to her" (7).



Figure 3.4. "A Jamaica Lady."
Courtesy of the
National Library of
Jamaica.

Photographs of market women abound in tourist books and postcards, ranging from apparently candid shots to clearly staged images, and were embedded in a colonialist logic of negative definition. Market women, like their enslaved foremothers, were presented as the antithesis of genuine ladies. This may not be evident in the apparently candid snapshots of groups of market women. However, it becomes more apparent in the carefully posed and staged images such as "A Jamaica Lady" by Gardner (Figure 3.4).

The detailed profile highlighting ethnic clothing in "A Jamaica Lady" mimics poses used in ethnography and criminal anthropology to present an individual as an exemplar of a type. In this case, the madras kerchief, the woven basket on her head, and her black skin define her as an example of authentic Jamaican womanhood and distance her from real, English womanhood. This is signaled by the insertion of the value-laden word "lady" in the caption that blurs the discourse of colonial anthropology to racial caricature. This "Jamaica Lady," as all Jamaica ladies from Bertha Mason of *Jane Eyre* to the obeah woman Calypso of Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean*, is the antithesis of an English lady.

Photographic postcards were sold alongside line drawings and caricatures, which acted as a yet more direct vehicle for translating Victorian race ideology into tourist iconography. Among the most striking of these is Aston W. Gardner's postcard "Jamaica Beauty Show." A line drawing painted in bright colors, "Jamaica Beauty Show" depicts a line of Afro-Caribbean men, barefoot and in brightly colored ragged clothing, each with a basket balanced on his head (Figure 3.5). "Jamaica Beauty Show" makes sense as a caption for a lineup of men with baskets on their heads only



Figure 3.5. "A Jamaica Beauty Show." Courtesy of the University of West Indies Library, Mona.

in a context in which the people who carry loads on their heads are by definition women. Early tourist photography did much to define black Caribbean women in this way. For instance, Johnston's book of photographs, *Jamaica: The New Riviera*, presents such a high percentage of black Jamaican women with loads on their heads that the rounded shape of baskets and the rectangle of water pans gain the semblance of natural appendages. Thus, the fact that the men in this drawing are carrying objects on their heads signifies that they are really women—the Jamaica lady was really a man. The logic of the image suggests that tourist photographs of market women continued to participate in the rhetoric of gender inversion so prominent in the Victorian travel narratives from which they derived.

Tourist images of bananas make clear that tropicality's vision of gender transgression was closely linked to sexual exoticism and excess. Bananas were so prevalent in visual images of Jamaica, tucked in behind the native hut or next to the peasant worker, that one could, with little exaggeration, assert that bananas coded an image as a picture of the Caribbean. In fact, Aston Gardner, proprietor of a prominent Kingston tourist and photography shop, sought to establish an image of banana workers as Jamaica's stamp in 1900 because they constituted "a really typical view of our island" (cited in Thompson 48). What was quintessentially Jamaica was quintessentially exotic. In *Conquest of the Tropics* (1914), Frederick Upham Adams described the banana as "the tangible, living, and expressive symbol of the far-distant and mysterious tropics" (21). Even as guidebooks such as Mary Bradford's *Side Trips in Jamaica* advised tourists to visit vast and orderly corporate banana plantations, they presented photographs of bananas growing wild, evidence of the natural exoticism of the tropical landscape.

Tropicality presented the exotic chaos and excess of bananas as reflective of the sexual excess and gender chaos of Jamaica's population. "A visit to another planet would not be more unlike our home," remarks United Fruit travel writer Mabel Caffin (cited in Thompson 51). Jamaica was out of this world because it had outsized fruit and bodies. The United Fruit Company was not shy about making use of the banana's phallic proportions in its advertising (Chapman 15–16). Fruit and fruit plants have been traditionally defined in feminine terms in European discourse, but with its phallic fruit, the banana plant crosses and confuses gender boundaries. Its

enormous purple-brown buds and its plentiful bright yellow phalluses made it, in regard to symbolism, hermaphroditic and monstrous. Thus, the banana plant embodies the gender perversion and hypersexuality writers had so long attached to Jamaica's population.

The postcard "Greetings from Jamaica: Banana Blossoms and Fruit" (Figure 3.6) illustrates the hyperbolic and gender-bending sexuality attributed to the banana. Here the focus is the banana "blossom": its leaves peeling back from an apparently engorged blossom to reveal teeth-like baby bananas invoke a threatening image of female sexuality while holding out

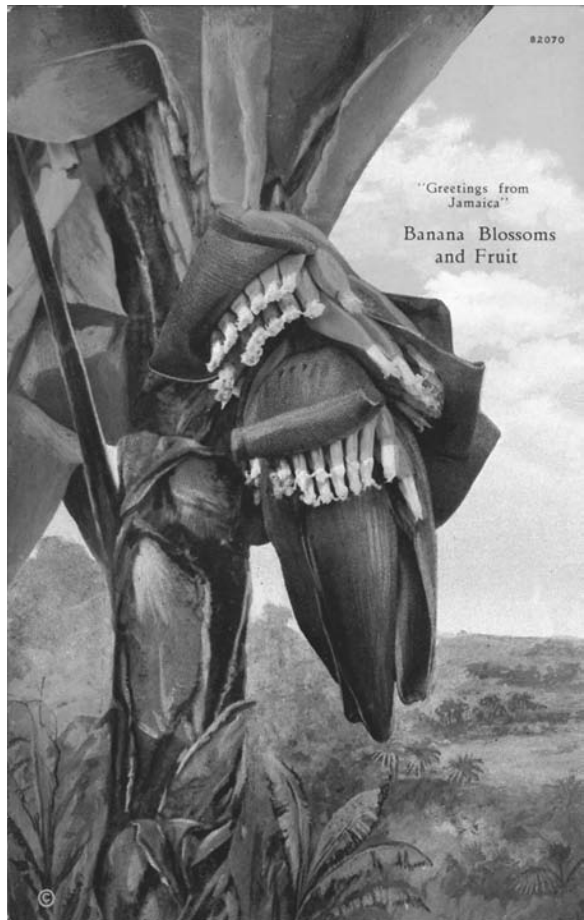


Figure 3.6.
"Greetings from
Jamaica: Banana
Blossoms and
Fruit." Author's
collection.

the promise of full-grown phallic fruit. In this image, the oversized sexual bud dwarfs the island. Behind and under it, one sees a small meadow in soft focus surrounded by undifferentiated greenery and tiny palm trees. Jamaica is reduced to this perverse and otherworldly sexual fruit.

A parallel logic is at work in Gardner's "Jamaica Banana" (Figure 3.7); here people and country are subsumed under the sign of the banana. This staged photograph presents two black Jamaican men and one woman, dressed in tattered clothing and posed in a courtyard filled with weeds. Behind them is a stone building, to the side a chained door to a sugar mill or old plantation house? An old man leans against what appears to be a crate, eating a banana; his pants are patched, his legs splayed open toward the camera. What appear to be the ends of several bananas stick out from a gap between the buttons of his shirt as if he has stolen a bunch and half-heartedly hidden them there. This would echo the proslavery propaganda that all slaves were thieves.⁹

The exaggerated ruin of the circumstances may overshadow but hardly erases the association of the banana with the island's stereotyped reputation for phallic sexuality. Displaced phalluses, the bananas poke out directly



Figure 3.7. "The Jamaica Banana." Courtesy of the University of West Indies Library, Mona.

above the man's crotch and his open legs. Next to the older man, a woman holds a banana in her hand, about to pull it from the stem that rests just below her waist. A young man holds out his hand, ready to receive it. The scene seems rife with sexual displacement and gender confusion: the woman grasps a banana near her crotch; a young man holds out an empty hand in front of his and has a cigarette in his mouth. "The Jamaica Banana" combines two threads of tourist photography—Jamaica as the primitive other, and Jamaica as the hypersexualized and gender-bending other—to render laughable the very idea of Jamaican manhood, modernity, and sovereignty.

McKay responded to tropicality's feminization of Jamaican men by portraying strong male peasants who embody traditional British masculinity: physical strength, familial responsibility, and independence. In fact, in "Two an' Six" and *Banana Bottom*, these strong men bring their family's produce to market, literally replacing the market women so prominent in tourist photography and Victorian travel writing. Cousin Sun, the protagonist of "Two an' Six," is a married man and father of six who has worked all week grinding sugarcane in the heat and in the rain only to find when he arrives at market that the price of sugar has fallen to two shillings six pence. McKay emphasizes that Cousin Sun is a loving husband and father, driven by his responsibility for an "ailin' wife" and the "seben hungry mouths to feed" (*Complete Poems*, 60). The wife, though sick, cheers him when he returns with a profit of "a princely two-an'-six"; she won't mind the hard work and deprivation so long as the children's "belly full." Happy in their love for each other, man and wife fall asleep "free from all de grief an' strife" (62). By emphasizing the strength of this marriage and its traditional gender roles, McKay asserts the manhood and womanhood of the peasantry that tropicality so thoroughly denied.

In his 1933 novel *Banana Bottom*, McKay again redressed the colonizing and hypersexual vision of tourism but did so by embracing and redefining the sexual and gender transgression so prominent in tourist postcards and photographs. Even in this carnivalesque narrative, the Jekylls' influence is clear. A "virgin backwoods," "inaccessible to travelers" and thus untouched by camera and plantation, the village of Banana Bottom embodies their ideal of diversified, small-scale agriculture and of artistic gardening (McKay, *Banana Bottom*, 171, 185) and produces a veritable cornucopia of peasant

foods—"yams twining upon poles, coffee, cocoa, cassava, arrowroot, ginger, and *erect all over the banana*" (50; my emphasis). Erect and ubiquitous, the banana is a marker of the village's manhood, much as in "King Banana," but it is the diversity of the farming that saves the community when a hurricane strikes; communities that grew only bananas for export lose their crops and ultimately their farms because bananas are vulnerable to high winds (293).

Banana Bottom is a bildungsroman; its protagonist, Bitia Plant, is the dark-skinned daughter of a successful peasant proprietor in Banana Bottom. Though she is our heroine and distinguished by the narrator as superior to her peers, Bitia's progress to womanhood is shaped by acts of apparently excessive and perverse sexuality. At thirteen, Bitia is raped by a mentally deranged musical genius, Crazy Bow. The rape inspires white missionaries to adopt her, in order to rescue her virtue and prove the quality of her race. As a result, Bitia attends an elite girl's school in England. She returns to the mission and becomes engaged to a hyperrespectable black theological student, but escapes the match when her fiancé is caught in flagrante with a goat. Bitia's growth as a character is marked by her rejection of the hypocritical and racist morality of the church and her acceptance of Afro-Creole peasant culture. Her journey to womanhood is complete when she returns to Banana Bottom, where she has sex (next to her father's corpse) with a laborer who embodies strong black manhood. The novel ends happily in a perversion of the conventional happy ending. Bitia marries her beloved one year after their child has been born.

Tourist photography reduced Jamaican peasants to feminized and sexualized extensions of the natural world. By contrast, *Banana Bottom* links peasants to fruit as a means of restoring their humanity. McKay's protagonists are the Plant family: the father, Jordan; the daughter and protagonist, Bitia; Aunt Naomi; and Naomi's son Bab. Their identity is expressed through plant metaphors. Jordan Plant is "rooted" in the soil; Bitia is a "transplanted" African peasant (McKay, *Banana Bottom*, 27, 11). Crazy Bow is "the color of a ripe banana"; Bab is as "ripe as a banana" (4, 52). Hopping Dick, Bitia's would-be suitor is "banana-bark-brown" and Father Delgado, the senior deacon in the Banana Bottom congregation, has "skin like dried banana leaf" (39, 162). When Bitia finally accepts herself as black and

beautiful she is described as having skin "firm and smooth like the sheath of a blossoming banana"; her breasts are pomegranates, and her hair grows from "thick fibrous roots" (262).

Like the British and U.S. descriptions of market women, McKay's plot centers on an empowering inversion of gender roles. A young peasant girl, Bitá faced a future as a market woman. Instead she becomes an intellectual married to a peasant. Bitá owns the land and the house; Jubban works the land and does all the marketing. They have their first child before marrying and suffer no ill effects. In contrast to Victorian travel narratives and tourist photography, this inversion of roles occurs without making Jamaican women manly and Jamaican men feminized. Bitá remains a beautiful wife and mother, Jubban a manly man who saves her every time she is in danger and has a singular skill as steward of the land. Thus, McKay presents a liberating new image of the Jamaican peasantry by employing the very same tropes that tourist photography used to deny its humanity and modernity: the banana, the market peasant, and the tropical cornucopia.

In Banana Bottom, people of European and African descent form a community and culture largely outside of the colony's oppressive racial and class hierarchy; they represent a model for a national community and mirror Gertrude Jekyll's horticultural model for cultural diversity and peace. Banana Bottom's liberating social order is embodied in the garden of Bitá's aunt and adoptive mother, Aunt Naomi, "who loved flowers and had a wonderful hand with them, but . . . had no sense of space and patterns in a garden, so the flowers grew all ways, struggling and blooming over and under one another" (McKay, *Banana Bottom*, 51). The correlation between the anarchic garden and the social freedom of Banana Bottom is reinforced by the narrator's comparison of soil to society in the comment that "the culture of soil was so like the culture of humanity" (275). People and plants compete for limited resources, opportunity and sunlight respectively. The symbolic nature of Aunt Naomi's anarchic garden is embedded in the double entendre of her nickname Aunty Nommy (Antinomy). Antinomianism was an early Christian rejection of the laws of Moses and the church. Her diverse garden and Banana Bottom are a successful pocket of resistance against U.S. and British Empire and their imposition of modernization and materialism.

A casualty of the Great Depression, *Banana Bottom* was not a commercial success when originally published, nor have scholars read it as a critique of tropicality and tourism although it was published in the United States, then Jamaica's largest tourist market, and during a period of aggressive advertising of Caribbean cruises. By contrast, McKay's dialect verse reached critical audiences in both England and Jamaica, and it did so because of the prominence of Caribbean tourism in England and of cultural nationalism in Jamaica, both of which featured representations of the Jamaican peasantry. But McKay's choice to use dialect was also critical. It gave McKay's *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads* entrée to horticulturalists, who saw in it both antimaterialist culture and horticultural information, and to consumers of tourist narratives, who expected images of the peasantry and often peasant proverbs. Tourist guidebooks, postcards, and magic-lantern lectures promoted Jamaican tourism and foreign investment in the early twentieth century. Such texts trained even those readers with little wealth or prospect of travel to see Jamaica through the eyes of wealthy tourists. Guide books and lectures guided readers and audiences in the second person, as if they were in fact tourists arriving by steamship, choosing their hotel, looking down at Port Antonio or Kingston's crowded streets (Johnston, *Optical Lantern Lectures*, passim). Because McKay's poetry circulated in and among these tourist texts, it reached precisely the audience he critiqued, the new master of early twentieth-century Jamaica: the tourist who also had the wealth to invest in Jamaican agriculture. Such tourists might have been both the "buccra" and the "touris" McKay's poetic speakers challenged so energetically. One might even conceive of Quashie's confrontation with Buccra and touris' as anticipating Jamaica Kincaid's confrontation of American tourists in *A Small Place* (1988).

In Jamaica, McKay's first two volumes also circulated alongside tourist photography and literature as Aston Gardner's photography shop was the sole distributor of McKay's *Songs of Jamaica*. Gardner produced many images of tropicality, including the postcards "A Jamaica Lady," "A Jamaica Beauty Show," and "The Jamaica Banana" and it sold "New Books and Guides of every description" (De Lisser, back matter). That McKay's *Songs of Jamaica* was exclusively sold at a shop that produced some of the most dehumanizing images of tropicality was characteristic of the literal and

figurative place of Jamaican literature at the turn of the century. On these shelves, McKay's depictions of the peasantry were juxtaposed with tourist photographs; they confronted tourists but they were also available to Jamaican readers—proud of their newly emerging literature.

In the study of Caribbean literature and tourism, critics have generally focused on contemporary writers who criticize tourism and its aesthetics as reproducing the discourse of colonialism and slavery. They examine the work of such authors as Derek Walcott, V. S. Naipaul, Jamaica Kincaid, Dany Laferrière, and Oonya Kempadoo. However, McKay's dialect verse and *Banana Bottom* make clear that, in Jamaica, this criticism and critique began as soon as Jamaican writers took up the project of building a national literature. Thus, for over a century, Jamaican writers have had to contest a tourist vision of the Caribbean in order to create national literature. The role of tourist photography in this contest has not been small. Anthony Winkler's *The Lunatic* (1987) opens with Inga, a German tourist, struggling to capture both the erect penis of a napping Rastafarian and a hummingbird in one snapshot. The prominence of the camera in Inga's consumption of Jamaica suggests that the line between Winkler's carnivalesque critique of tourism, photography, and postcolonial Jamaica and McKay's carnivalesque critique of tourism, photography, and colonial Jamaica may not be straight, but the connection is nonetheless strong.

Notes

1. For other criticism of McKay's *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads*, see Hansell 129 and 138.

2. In *A Fierce Hatred of Injustice*, Winston James reprints McKay's more radical poems not included in *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads*, such as "George William Gordon to the Oppressed Natives," "Passive Resistance," and "Peasants' Ways o' Thinkin'." They are also in the *Complete Poems* (2004).

3. Critical also is the question of meter, rhythm, and sound as Kamau Brathwaite has viewed iambic pentameter itself as a form of colonial alienation, forcing creole language into an alien rhythm and order. For a discussion of sound and meter in McKay's early poetry, see Brathwaite 274–76.

4. For further discussion of Jekyll's introduction and of his racial characterization of McKay, see North 103 and 105–6.

5. This challenge is important even though North would ultimately conclude that the young poet could not escape Jekyll's definition of creole as the language of a feminine childlike people (North 110).

6. McKay recalled that fashioning Jamaican creole as a poetic language required significant effort (Gosciak 58).

7. This postcard is part of an Aston Gardner proverb series, now in the Cousins-Hereward Postcard Collection, West Indian Collection, University of the West Indies Library, Mona, Jamaica (available in the UWI Mona Digital Collection at <http://library-contentdm.mona.uwi.edu/index.php>). Heaven's sketches were featured in the 1891 exhibition, so this image, though undated, is likely to have been in circulation in Jamaica during McKay's youth ("The Exhibition," 4). William Bellows includes the same proverb in his tourist pamphlet, *In Fair Jamaica* (15), and the Jamaican author Herbert de Lisser uses it to cast aspersions on the morality and industry of Jamaica's servants in *In Jamaica* (103).

8. Gosciak (79) sees McKay as writing against plantation agriculture but does not identify United Fruit.

9. Postcards employed bananas in reproducing the stereotype that black workers were thieves. See, for instance, Violet Heaven's postcard "I tief you to-night, please god!" in the Cousins-Hereward Postcard Collection.

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Captured Things

Man Ray's Object Photography

JANINE MILEAF

AMONG HIS MANY ARTISTIC OCCUPATIONS, Man Ray is known for assembling objects and for making photographs. As bricoleur of three-dimensional things, he produced some of his most celebrated works: *Lampshade*, *Cadeau*, and *Object to Be Destroyed* among them. Yet he is probably most uniformly embraced as a photographer, with an output that ranges from glamorous spreads in fashion magazines and portraits of his fellow artists to seemingly uninflected copy photographs or the oneiric frames that helped define surrealist visuality. A key, yet overlooked, component of his photography is that which records his assemblages. In the essay that follows, I consider how certain of Man Ray's object assemblages have been mediated by the photograph, and subsequently deployed on the printed page. While it is undeniable that Man Ray valued his assemblages as three-dimensional works, many of them circulated most noticeably as photographs in journals and books, and in some cases, took form solely for the camera.

Having been accepted as straightforward documents of anterior creations, such photographs have rarely been treated as primary objects of study. But as I will argue, their very efficacy in the task of documentation has elided a secondary effect of supersession that in fact comprises the greater part of their function. These photographs, in their ability to perform *for* the object, have in effect taken the place *of* the object, subverting any generative relationship between the source and its image. This operation thereby complicates the paradigm of indexicality against which much photography

has been theorized. Almost without exception, the works of Man Ray's object art that we accept today as inventions of the interwar years are known through reproductive means—the originals having disappeared long ago. Both replicated as three-dimensional works and circulated in the pages of print media as photographs, these objects generate series of coequal likenesses that undermine a strictly indexical reading of their significance. Instead, the photograph works in tandem with the object, as each forces the other out of view, while simultaneously depending upon its authority.

Man Ray's photographs of objects take a number of formats. Some, like the celebrated image of a dangling eggbeater, which has been titled *Man* and *La Femme* (Woman) in different contexts, were conceptualized as

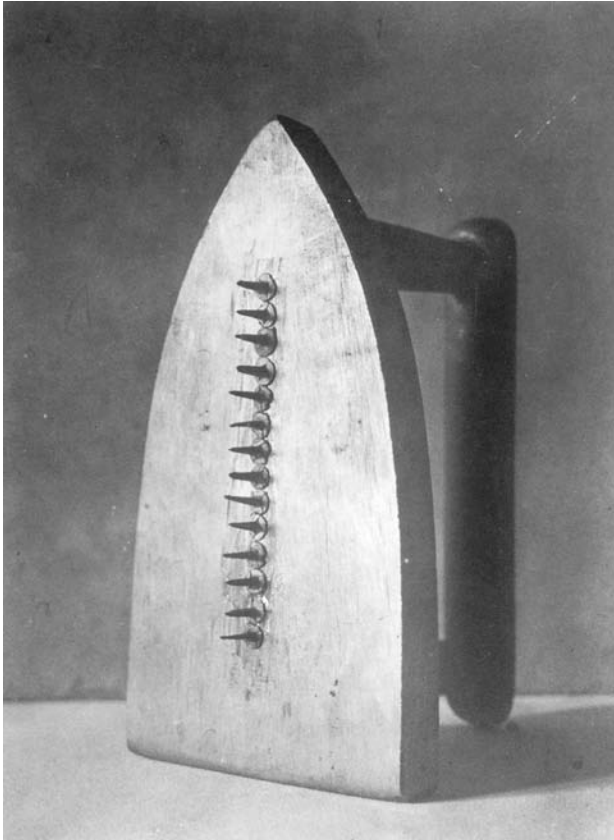


Figure 4.1.
Man Ray,
Cadeau, 1921.
Gelatin silver
print. Private
collection.
Copyright
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Rights Society
(ARS), NY /
ADAGP, Paris.

photographs. Man Ray never titled or exhibited an actual eggbeater as art, so its image has been securely placed within his photographic oeuvre, appearing in contexts reserved for that medium.¹ In contrast, the very well-known photograph of the assemblage *Cadeau* (1921), or Gift, a flatiron with metal tacks upended and glued to its surface, has always been viewed transparently as a record of its subject (Figure 4.1). Until recently, this likeness of *Cadeau* was never exhibited as a gelatin silver print—that is, in the physical form of a photograph. It was therefore received as the sort of copy print that Man Ray regularly made for hire—an uninflected document of an independent work. Between these two extremes of copy photograph and autonomous creation lie images that capture assemblages in varying degrees of permanence. In what follows, I will consider this range of production as “object photography,” those images that operate in relationship to Man Ray’s assemblages, whether conceived as temporary arrangements or enduring works of art.



BECAUSE IT MARKS ONE of the most complex demonstrations of the relationship between Man Ray’s assemblages and their photographic portrayals, the case of *Cadeau* requires elaboration. Typical of his early works, the assemblage begins with a household object—the iron—and brings to it a sense of danger and seduction through the addition of an incongruous element—the tacks. Combining the domestic femininity of the curvaceous iron and the implied sensation of heat with the destructiveness of the shredding tacks, this work at once doubles the female form and suggests her potential mutilation. Named as an offering, or gift, it further marks an exchange that establishes a relationship between artist and viewer.² The familiar story that Man Ray tells about the fabrication of *Cadeau* takes place at the opening of his first exhibition in Paris, which was held at the avant-garde bookstore Librairie Six in 1921. On that day, Man Ray went to a housewares store with the composer Erik Satie and constructed this so-called gift on the spot as a belated submission to the exhibition. Intending to offer it to his new Dada colleagues, Man Ray was thwarted in his generosity when the work apparently disappeared “during the afternoon,” as he explained in his autobiography (*Man Ray, Self Portrait*, 96–97).

Despite *Cadeau's* prominence in Man Ray's oeuvre, there is hardly a record of it before the 1950s and 1960s. The work's exhibition history supports its early disappearance. No three-dimensional version that I know of was exhibited between the Librairie Six exhibition and the Museum of Modern Art's 1961 *The Art of Assemblage* (Seitz 49). Hence, *Cadeau* is not listed in any of the catalogs to the few important early exhibitions of Man Ray's work, including one at the Galerie surréaliste in 1926.³ Beginning around midcentury, Man Ray authorized the replication of *Cadeau* in a number of formats. It was editioned at least three times, and a handful of individual copies circulated.⁴ The earliest known extant copy, from around 1958, is now held by the Museum of Modern Art. Another early version, now lost, appeared in Robert Motherwell's 1951 Dada anthology. According to an inscription on a photograph that is now held by the J. Paul Getty Museum, this ovoid, updated iron with tacks was fabricated in the 1940s and "destroyed" soon after (Figure 4.2) (Motherwell 100).⁵ Neither of these known versions conforms to the morphology of that shown in *Cadeau's* most famous and earliest likeness, the photograph reproduced first by Herbert Read in his 1936 *Surrealism* and then not again until 1957 in George Hugnet's *L'Aventure dada*.⁶ This image, which has now been reused in countless monographs and exhibition catalogs (see, for example, Schwarz 147 and Rubin 35), records an indeterminate version of *Cadeau*.

If the first *Cadeau* assemblage disappeared within hours of its manufacture, and no extant version of the object matches that depicted in its most familiar representation, where does the 1936 photograph come from? And more importantly, why has this question not been asked in any substantive way before now? The actual photograph has been just as elusive as its subject. It was not until 2008 that any vintage copy of the photographic print found its way to exhibition (Mundy 122, 235). Yet this photograph has been the image of choice for conveying a sense of authenticity to the assemblage. In the 1961 *Art of Assemblage* catalog, for example, the 1936 photograph was used even though an alternative version of the assemblage was on display in the galleries.⁷ Many have assumed therefore that the photograph shows the 1921 version of *Cadeau*. As a short answer to the question of *Cadeau's* derivation, this would mean that the original survived longer than Man Ray claimed, at least long enough to be photographed (and that the



Figure 4.2. Man Ray, *Cadeau*, 1944. Gelatin silver print. Sheet: 16.2 x 11.6 cm (6 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 4 $\frac{7}{16}$ inches). Mount: 20 x 15.2 cm (7 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 6 inches). The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Copyright 2011 Man Ray Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris.

negative might also date from 1921). Although such a conclusion does not account for the work's absence from early exhibitions, it may be true. Man Ray claimed as much (without resolving his conflicting statements) when he responded to a MoMA questionnaire in 1966.⁸ Billy Klüver and Julie Martin, among the very few writers who have noted the contradiction, refrained from interrogating the photograph.⁹ In the catalog to the Tate Modern's 2008 exhibition where a vintage copy finally surfaced, however, the authors conclude that the photograph could not record the original because of its earlier disappearance (Mundy 122).

In fact, Man Ray tells anecdotes about the habitual destruction or vanishing of nearly all of his early assemblages. This pattern of loss enabled the artist to disseminate replicas as equivalents and, as he saw it, to resist fetishization of the singular work. He explained: "Fortunately, upon demand, it was simple enough to reconstruct these objects despite the disapproval of those who valued only originals. Is a book or a bronze an original? I leave such considerations to well intentioned collectors and amateurs of the rare" (*Man Ray*, 28). To Man Ray, then, this line of inquiry was irrelevant and should be left to collectors. Yet I argue that these particularities are not merely the concern of the market or connoisseurs, but rather essential to understanding the process of signification that has taken place with regard to *Cadeau*.

The answer to my second question—why have we not questioned the origin of *Cadeau's* photographic incarnation—thus exceeds the particularities of Man Ray's storytelling and suggests that the photograph points toward an assumed subject with no need for verification. Man Ray circulated copies of his assemblages in a manner that mirrored early twentieth-century understanding of photography. In his day, there was no market for vintage prints or negatives; there was no distinction made between early and late printings, or singular prints that had been used for particular purposes. This specialization of the field did not crystallize until around the 1970s. For Man Ray's contemporaries, the fundamental replicability of a photographic negative trumped any valuation of particular examples. Thus, Man Ray followed a photographic ethic of multiplicity in refusing to retain (or claiming to misplace) his original assemblages. In turn, as we will see, he deployed his object photographs as seamless equivalents to their

multiplied and missing subjects. The photographs themselves escape attention in their implied subservience to those absent referents.

A longer answer to the question about *Cadeau's* elusive source, therefore, would have to involve some recognition that the photograph in question has eclipsed its past, while at the same time profiting from an implied relation to an origin. That is to say that the photograph, although received as the document of an autonomous work of art, has independently colored interpretations of the object. The transparency of the photograph—that is, its ability to go unremarked as an object in and of itself—is evidenced by the captions to its reproductions. In all but two cases that I have seen, the caption refers to the 1921 object, rather than to the photograph itself.¹⁰ Yet, through its vintage cast, soft lighting, and uncluttered composition, this image exudes its authority over the object. Displacing the function of the presumably lost original, proliferating copies of the photograph have ensured *Cadeau's* iconic status within Man Ray's oeuvre.

It may have been expediency that led Man Ray to use the 1936 photograph rather than staging and shooting a new one for Hugnet in 1957 or the MoMA catalogue in 1961, as he evidently did in the 1940s for Motherwell.¹¹ However, the choice has been repeated many times, suggesting that it was more than just convenience that led to its ubiquity. In this seemingly uninflected photograph, which draws upon the conventions of studio photography, the iron with tacks takes on a singularly nostalgic air. Isolated in a stark setting, its form is sharper, but also more old-fashioned, than in the Motherwell photograph, for example. Its silvery flat surface contrasts with the darker coloration of its sides and handle. The handle is straight, with rounded edges. Fourteen tacks, which are not quite uniform, create a jagged line down the iron's center. Some of the tacks stray a bit from parallel; others pivot and seem to vary in thickness. A dark shadow falls on the handle and into the background. Filling most of the photograph's frame and shot from a three-quarter angle, the diminutive iron takes on a monumental scale.

If we accept the image first published in 1936 as representing the original *Cadeau* from fifteen years earlier, we have to wonder about Man Ray's decision to resurrect this photographic image in the 1960s, just when he was editioning the object itself. Although he never matched his later tack-studded irons exactly to this photograph, he did use the photograph

to represent the idea of *Cadeau* in print. Why would Man Ray assert the disappearance of the original while at the same time circulating an image that rests upon its authority? This question is at the heart of my understanding of these photographs. They traffic in the supposed veracity of documentation, while keeping their own origins undocumented. Man Ray insists upon the destruction of the original in order to equalize the value of all existing copies, but at the same time, he uses the photographic record to instill a sense of authenticity. The dialectic relationship between original and copy is here deployed with cunning as Man Ray understands that neither can exist without the other.



THE PHANTOM DOCUMENTATION carried out with regard to *Cadeau* begs comparison with one of the most famous photographs of a misplaced object in modern art. Destined for exhibition, Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* was hijacked on its way to the *First Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists* in 1917 and made its mark instead in the pages of a journal. As photographed by Alfred Stieglitz in front of a heraldic oil painting by Marsden Hartley, the urinal displays a potential for visual transformation. As is well known, the photograph was requested from Stieglitz for *The Blind Man*, a publication that Duchamp and his cohorts were producing in order to publicize the story of the failed entry. Stieglitz's version of *Fountain* has engendered much speculation about the relationship between an object and its photographic portrayal. Received as an intervention, the photograph has been read as favoring an aesthetic interpretation of the ready-made, one that tries to elevate the found object to art through formal attributes.¹² In the pages of the journal, it supports related claims for the beauty of American industrial design and the Madonna- and Buddha-like shape of the urinal: "As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges" (Duchamp 5). Man Ray's photographs of his own assemblages, on the other hand, have never been credited with altering our perception of their subjects. Perhaps because a third-party photographer was never introduced, the images and objects have been received as seamless, one standing in plainly for the other. The photograph of *Cadeau* has at once relied upon its association with an

origin, while making it difficult for viewers to recognize the impossibility of the facts relating to that origin given the existence of the photograph. If the story had taken place as Man Ray tells it, then this photograph could not exist.

The circumstances surrounding the production of Stieglitz's photograph of *Fountain*, like those of Man Ray's *Cadeau*, remain uncertain. Stieglitz evidently had the urinal in his gallery long enough to take the picture, but the object was ultimately discarded or misplaced. It is probable that Duchamp understood that his urinal would never enter the Independents exhibition and felt that its documentation in an alternative format was an equally acceptable result. Although he, like Man Ray, authorized late-life replicas of his readymades, Duchamp undoubtedly considered Stieglitz's photograph a satisfying endpoint for his gambit. The actual urinal signed by R. Mutt may well have returned to its former occupation, collecting liquid excretions from men in public restrooms, yet the impact of *Fountain* was not dependent upon the continued presence of the physical object. The photographic documentation of the work was at least as important to its final status as vaunted *refusé* as was the actual urinal. And yet the photograph gained its power in relation to the sequence of events—it was more than a mere invention. The success of the 1917 scandal rested in part upon the disappearance of the object; and yet the total erasure of the urinal from the visual domain would have confined the story to hearsay and myth. With the combination of photograph and anecdote circulating in print, *Fountain* became more than just a hoax. It became an icon that occupied the space between nonart and aesthetic object, visibly verifiable but not reducible to a disposable piece of hardware nor so easily elevated to the status of art, despite Stieglitz's "plea." In fact, Stieglitz did not himself consider this photograph a work of art, and he missed thereby the single greatest chance to complete the parallel (which only he would have accepted) between his status in promoting photography and Duchamp's in promoting a urinal; nor could one expect the general public to see this photograph as an artwork, any more than they would have accepted the object it depicted.¹³

Man Ray may have been moved to photograph the first *Cadeau* during its brief life in 1921, or to restage it soon after its initial disappearance, because of his knowledge of this prior scandal. The importance of the

photograph in marking the existence of an otherwise ephemeral gesture was likely not lost on him. To register his work as a photograph was to manipulate its legacy; the photograph acted as evidence, while unobtrusively crafting a view of the object itself. Unfortunately, however, the parallels end there since *Cadeau*, as outlined above, did not appear in any publication of its time, but rather remained in reserve for later celebrity. The vagaries of *Cadeau* compel a look at others of Man Ray's photographs of objects to see how they worked in contemporary publications. In both Dada and surrealist contexts, Man Ray used journals as a primary medium for the circulation and exchange of ideas. The journals, which are themselves multiple and ostensibly disposable (despite the fact that they have since become collectors' items), add yet one more layer to the reproduction and dispersal of the eclipsed original.

Before leaving the United States for Paris in 1921, Man Ray published a telling variation on the object photograph in the single issue of the journal *New York Dada*. Captioned "Dadaphoto" (Figure 4.3), this image asserts the temporary nature of Man Ray's assemblages by combining a commercial object with a human figure. The Dadaphoto, later known as *Coatstand* (1919–20), shows a woman, nude except for one stocking, standing behind the eponymous object. Tightly constrained and effaced by the humanoid coat stand, the woman's head is hidden by the mawkish grin of a painted figure. Man Ray uses the photograph here to record a temporary arrangement of person and thing in a manner that both asserts the corporeal nature of all of his assemblages and points toward the operation of documentation that takes place throughout his object photography.¹⁴ Recording a moment that will certainly pass as soon as the shutter closes, the photograph nonetheless preserves this relationship as ongoing. Framed by the image, the nude woman could never walk away or expose her face from behind the coat stand, thereby becoming more subject than object. Instead she is forced to "keep smiling," as reads a placard on the page of the journal beneath her, no matter what her actual facial features might express. The journal *New York Dada* characterizes the assemblage as a promotional object. Accompanied by a text by Tristan Tzara that treats Dada as a form of brand name, the Dadaphoto promotes the idea of an eroticized engagement with household things. The use of the nude female at once ensures

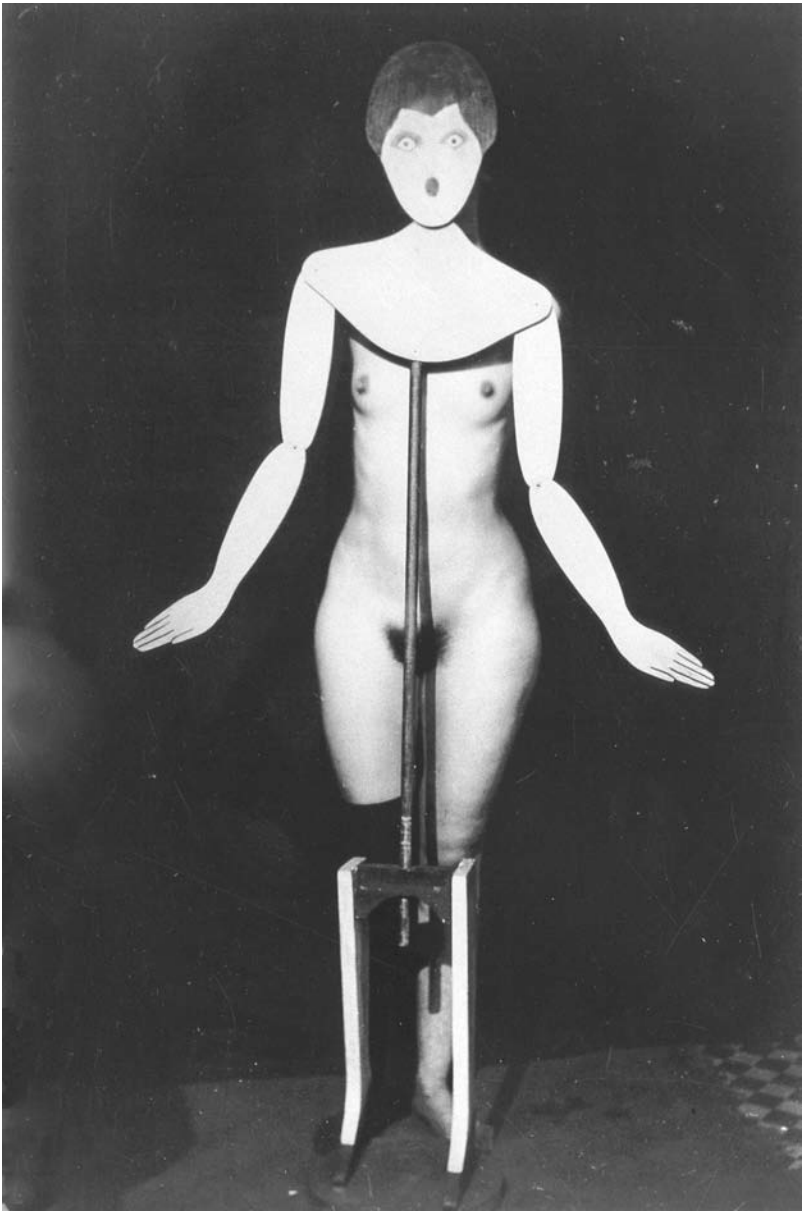


Figure 4.3. Man Ray, *The Coat-stand* (*Dadaphoto*), 1920. Gelatin silver print. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France. Copyright 2011 Man Ray Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris.

her reification as commodity and hints at her transient presence. This sense of the fleeting nature of the depicted subject permeates Man Ray's object photography, even when it purports to document a stable work of art.



AS THE PARISIAN DADA MILIEU in which Man Ray first exhibited *Cadeau* gradually gave way to surrealism, Man Ray continued to find through photography new interpretive contexts for both his old and new object works. For the debut issue of the surrealist journal *La Révolution surréaliste*, Man Ray contributed two object photographs, along with a few group portraits and some other artistic photographs. On the first page, amid a field of text, appeared a photograph of an unidentified bundle—a coarse blanket covering a mountainlike form tied with rope (Figure 4.4). Reproduced without a caption and with no specific authorial credit, the image ran without direct commentary. The photograph's eventual title, *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse*, refers to a stanza of poetry by the symbolist Ducasse, who was better known by his pseudonym Le Comte de Lautréamont. The verse extolled the disruptive effects of happenstance and juxtaposition: “beautiful like the chance encounter of an umbrella and a sewing machine upon a dissecting table” (Ducasse, *Les chants de Maldoror*, 327). This phrase has since become a standard refrain in surrealist visual theory. It celebrates the mysterious power of coincidence and recontextualization. Excerpts from Lautréamont had been published in a Dada journal in 1919, so it is possible that Man Ray had encountered his poetry at that early date, inspiring him in 1920 to produce this picture of what are presumed to be a sewing machine and umbrella wrapped up in the blanket.¹⁵ Nonetheless, it is quite remarkable that he would have carried the photograph with him across the Atlantic and had it available for reproduction in the very first issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, given the eventual importance of this particular stanza to later surrealist thought.

Unlike *Cadeau*, the photograph known as *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse* did not correspond to any preexisting work of art. Until it was editioned in the 1960s, the combination of rough blanket and hidden objects was considered an ephemeral assemblage brought together for the purpose of the photograph and dismantled thereafter. Given the bulky nature of the

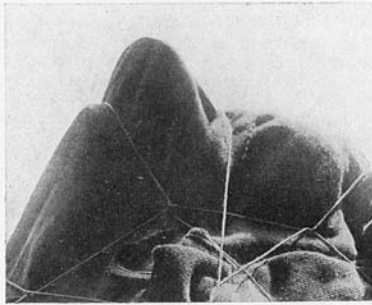
PREFACE

Le procès de la connaissance n'étant plus à faire, l'intelligence n'entrant plus en ligne de compte, le rêve seul laisse à l'homme tous ses droits à la liberté. Grâce au rêve, la mort n'a plus de sens obscur et le sens de la vie devient indifférent.

Chaque matin, dans toutes les familles, les hommes, les femmes et les enfants, S'ILS N'ONT RIEN DE MIEUX A FAIRE, se racontent leurs rêves. Nous sommes tous à la merci du rêve et nous nous devons de subir son pouvoir à l'état de veille. C'est un tyran terrible habillé de miroirs et d'éclairs. Qu'est-ce que le papier et la plume, qu'est-ce qu'écrire, qu'est-ce que la poésie devant ce géant qui tient les muscles des nuages dans ses muscles ? Vous êtes là bégayant devant le serpent, ignorant les feuilles mortes et les pièges de verre, vous craignez pour votre fortune, pour votre cœur et vos plaisirs et vous cherchez dans l'ombre de vos rêves tous les signes mathématiques qui vous rendront la mort plus naturelle. D'autres et ce sont les prophètes

dirigent aveu- forces de la nuit, l'aurore bouche, et le s'épouvan te Le surréalisme tes du rêve à qui la nuit est réalisme est le enchan- te- meil, de l'al- de l'éther, de cocaïne, de la mais il est aussi chaines, nous pas, nous ne nous ne fu- ne prisons pas,

piquons pas et nous rêvons, et la rapidité des aiguilles des lampes introduit dans nos cerveaux la merveilleuse éponge défléurie de l'or. Ah ! si les os étaient gonflés comme des dirigeables, nous visiterions les ténèbres de la Mer Morte. La route est une sentinelle dressée contre le vent qui nous enlace et nous fait trembler devant nos fragiles apparences de rubis. Vous, collés aux échos de nos oreilles comme la pieuvre-horloge au mur du temps, vous pouvez inventer de pauvres histoires qui nous ferons sourire de nonchalance. Nous ne nous dérangeons plus, on a beau dire : *l'idée du mouvement est avant tout une idée inerte* *, et l'arbre de la vitesse nous apparaît. Le cerveau tourne comme un ange et nos paroles sont les grains de plomb qui tuent l'oiseau. Vous à qui la nature a donné le pouvoir d'allumer l'électricité à midi et de rester sous la pluie avec du soleil dans les yeux, vos actes sont gratuits, les nôtres sont rêvés. Tout est chuchotements, coïncidences, le silence et l'étincelle ravissent leur propre révélation. L'arbre chargé de viande qui surgit entre les pavés n'est surnaturel que dans notre étonnement, mais le temps de fermer les yeux, il attend l'inauguration.



glément les nuit vers l'ave- parle par leur monde ravi ou se félicite. ouvre les port- tous ceux pour avare. Le sur- carrefour des ments du som- cool, du tabac, l'opium, de la morphine ; le briseur de ne dormons buvons pas, mons pas, nous nous ne nous

* Berkeley

Figure 4.4. Man Ray, *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse*, 1920, as published in *La Révolution surréaliste* 1 (December 1924). Copyright 2011 Man Ray Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris.

rope-tied bundle and Man Ray's precarious economic status and peripatetic lifestyle in his early years as an artist, it makes sense that he would not have tried to store such a creation, but rather would have thought of it as a temporary enactment directed toward the ultimate format of the photograph. Yet the temporary nature of *The Enigma* is repeated even when economics was not a motivating factor. *Cadeau* also existed between ephemerality and permanence. Briefly exhibited as an object, it endured as an image that referred to a fleeting configuration of disparate elements.

Centered on the page and surrounded by an inaugural "Preface," *The Enigma* interacts suggestively with the journal *La Révolution surréaliste*, even as it goes unmentioned in its texts. The "Preface," cosigned by Jacques-André Boiffard, Paul Éluard, and Roger Vitrac, announces surrealism's intention to "open the doors of dreams" and to be a "breaker of chains" (1). Other essays relate the content and importance of dream imagery, while Man Ray's photograph suggests a related scene of covert meaning. The wrapped bundle invites imaginative undoing that could lead to any number of revelations. And while Man Ray actually did use a Singer sewing machine to form the bundle, he leaves this information invisible in the photograph in order to allow alternative associations.¹⁶ As argued by J. H. Matthews, the photograph operates in the journal as a form of secret handshake—obvious in its reference to Lautréamont to initiates of the surrealist method and mysterious, inscrutable to those outside the fold. But regardless of one's knowledge about the specific reference, the photograph would still do its work of suggesting mystery and encounter without recalling a preexisting sculpture. Its impact is not based on the believability of the image, but rather upon its relative inscrutability.

The Enigma, like the Dadaphoto, was enacted specifically for the photograph. In an image, rather than a three-dimensional assemblage, Man Ray could control the atmosphere and visual frame around the objects. The moodiness and mystery of the photograph was therefore not achieved in the late-life replica, which presents the bundle without photographic mediation. This example thus suggests how the contemporary photograph of *Cadeau* would later determine the reception of the assemblage, even as it pointed toward the absence of the original. In both cases, the photograph eclipsed its ostensible subject, becoming more compelling than the absent

source toward which it pointed. The idea of the chance encounter, enacted by the configuration in *The Enigma*, was enhanced by the bundle's ephemeral status—which was witnessed by the photograph. In the case of *Cadeau*, the photograph also added an atmospheric quality to the assemblage, which may account for Man Ray's repeated submission of this vintage image to catalogs, rather than new ones that would match the variants that were being exhibited.

In the pages of *La Révolution surréaliste*, photographs linked up to form an overall impression of the strangeness of reality. If the texts did not describe the photographs, their presence in relationship to one another had a cumulative effect. Turning the pages past *The Enigma*, one would find a quintessential surrealist photograph of a nude female torso with doubled pairs of breasts, an image of a chair with a pair of hands floating in its backrest, and a deadpan photograph of another of Man Ray's assemblages. Surviving as both an object and a photograph when Man Ray made his transatlantic crossing, the pictured assemblage *New York* (1920) consists of a glass cylinder filled with ball bearings and labeled with its title. The flicker between manipulated prints and seemingly uninflected documents in the pages of the journal tested the reader's grasp on the nature of reality. In succession, the photographs read as alternately mysterious and straightforward, making each reflect in the others. The photograph of *New York*, for example, was likely inscrutable on its own; the components may have been legible given the clarity of the image, but their meaning as a Dada assemblage was likely lost on most. In combination with texts that celebrate the richness of the unconscious, an image of a chair made translucent by a pair of floating hands, or the disturbing, yet erotic, doubled torso, the glass cylinder begins to assert its own mystery.



IN HER LANDMARK ESSAY on the operations of photographs within surrealism, Rosalind Krauss famously argued for their unique capacity to do the surrealist work of transforming reality into representation. Maintaining that “photography is an imprint or transfer off the real,” Krauss contended that the indexical capacity of photographs enabled the surrealists to present the real as fictive, or written (“Photographic Conditions,” 26–28).

Krauss's important insight has held ground as a singular observation about the nature of the surrealist photographic for the past quarter century.¹⁷ However, her analysis presumes the photograph's "special connection to reality" and the ultimate suggestion of the referent within the photographic frame. As she put it elsewhere, indexes "are the marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify" (Krauss, "Notes," 70). While the truth-value of the photograph is indeed essential for understanding the impact of Man Ray's object photographs, the particular nature of the photographic index needs to be reconsidered. For as I have begun to outline, the original in these cases is all too elusive.

As defined by C. S. Peirce, the index is a sign produced by contact: "it is in dynamical (including spatial) connections both with the individual object, on the one hand, and with the senses or memory of the person for whom it serves as a sign, on the other hand" (170). The index—a footprint or a shadow, to give two well-known examples—translates directly from the referent and also compels the attention of the subject toward the referent.¹⁸ In asserting the indexicality of the photograph, Krauss puts undue emphasis on the generative nature of the subject. Instead, I believe these photographs gain their immediacy through the fading presence, or even disappearance, of that source. It might be more helpful then to think how the photograph acts to supplant its origin, even while pointing toward an originary authority. Man Ray's photographs of objects act in a dialectical manner, both signaling the referent and obscuring it from view.

The idea that Man Ray conceived his object photographs as covalent expressions that would in some ways keep the referent at bay is upheld by his own statement about one of his earliest Dada works. Again, furnishing an anecdote about its accidental disposal, Man Ray conceded that his early *Lampshade* (1919) found its greatest expression not in person, but in film. In a proposed, but unpublished, scrapbook of his object assemblages, Man Ray wrote that although this unraveled cylinder of paper was "generally regarded as something to be discarded, it does not thereby lose its importance as a springboard for what may be considered more valid productions." He then cited his film *Return to Reason* (1921) as an example of the destination for such an object (Man Ray, *Objets de mon affection*, 29). This

two-minute film combines previously shot footage with cameraless passages of exposed film. Here, Man Ray shows the spiral of the lampshade spinning on its axis. It catches the light, implying unceasing vertical motion. This moving spiral does not make explicit reference to the deformation of the lampshade as an assemblage. Indeed, the activation of the form on film is not dependent upon a viewer's knowledge of its derivation. Not only is the object animated here, but it also comes framed by the rest of the film, which places it in a context of images that cannot be reproduced in person. The spiraling lampshade is juxtaposed with other spinning, dancing, and revolving forms that cumulatively speak about the cinematic animation of everyday things.

Like the text and succession of images appearing on the pages of *La Révolution surréaliste*, the film *Return to Reason* provides a context of meaning that figures the object as part of the surrealist terrain. This assertion may seem to imply that Man Ray's photographed objects were entirely destined for reproduction. But I want to insist that they were neither fully independent from nor supplementary to the objects themselves. Ultimately, it is a combination of the supersession of the depicted subject and reinforcement of its prior existence that causes these photographs to resonate in the pages of print, or frames of film.

The sense that Man Ray's photographs gained value from the displacement of the subject, while still making reference to that subject as an indication of preexisting reality, was articulated by one of his contemporaries. Czech avant-gardist Karel Teige, who was shown Man Ray's photographic work in Paris in mid-1922, commented extensively on Man Ray's photographs in an essay written that December called "Foto, Kino, Film." Noting that Man Ray had begun to photograph his own "metamechanical constructions," he extolled the results as a new realm of creativity based precisely on this play between indexicality and the removal of the referent. His text is worth quoting at length:

[Man Ray] soon realized that photography of these constructions was more beautiful than the constructions themselves, meaning that it faithfully interprets their objective beauty and photo-plastic, material expressivity, which is not, however, of an artistic kind, nor is it fully due to the author. And here

he stood before the birth of a new branch of creative art: photography that becomes creative art, truly creative photography, true art, because it almost stops being photography and becomes something like painting and graphic [art]; something different than common, pseudo-artistic studio photography . . . : photography acquires here an independent language, autonomous and fully its own. Photography can never leave reality, not even here, but it can become *surrealistic*. (Teige 159–60)

Teige argued in favor of an *aesthetic* value for photography that is not particularly my concern here, but he did so in terms that are extremely relevant. “Photography can never leave reality,” he wrote, but it could stress the *transience* of that real. Indeed, Teige constituted surreality as precisely the eclipse of the source of the image.

In a later passage, Teige referred to an image of *Lampshade*, without naming it, as “a paper spiral hung on a stick,” suggesting that he was unaware of its Dada referent. And then he described it as “a transient reality whose beauty is conveyed in Man Ray’s photograph. Only this photograph, developed in the darkroom while its real-life subject perhaps no longer exists, can become art” (160). Teige thus stressed that it was when the subject receded into the past and ceased to assert its existence that the photograph attained the status of art. Teige’s sense that the real-life object disappears when the photograph moves into the realm of art confirms my sense that these photographs were acting not as indexes, but rather as supersessions of the real.

Like Teige, André Breton lauded Man Ray’s ability to exceed the apparent limitations of the camera through his painterly approach to the medium. He exclaimed that discoveries were to be made within Man Ray’s shadows: “The caves are full of roses,” he wrote (Breton 32–33). For it was not verity that Breton sought from a photograph, but its transformative capacity: “despite the fact that [the photographic print] is endowed with a special power of suggestion, it is not in the final analysis the *faithful* image that we aim to retain of something that will soon be gone for ever” (32). To his peers, then, Man Ray’s object photography was neither fully independent of its duplicating capacities nor negligent of the inventive work of the image. At the same time, it was neither self-conscious art nor dry document. Its

power lay in a relation to the real that could somehow be effaced. Dependent upon its believability, Man Ray's object photography worked to eclipse the original. The subject both echoed and receded as the photograph made its way.

The implications of this analysis extend beyond the confines of the Dada and surrealist frame. Speaking of his own turn to magazine pages as a venue for art projects in the 1960s, the conceptual artist Dan Graham explained a similar recognition. For Graham, the photograph in print not only recorded otherwise ephemeral events or objects, but promoted those subjects to the status of art through the operations of the institutional frame. His magazine pages sidestepped the original and aimed directly at the site of distribution. Following a discussion of the readymade, he wrote:

Through the actual experience of running a gallery, I learned that if a work of art wasn't written about or reproduced in a magazine it would have difficulty attaining the status of "art." It seemed that in order to be defined as having value—that is, as "art"—a work had only to be exhibited in a gallery and then to be written about and reproduced as a photograph in an art magazine. Then this record of the no longer extant installation, along with more accretions of information after the fact, became the basis for its fame, and to a large extent, its economic value. (Graham 12)

Although Graham acknowledged the economic power of reproduction in an art magazine, he stressed that it is *more* than this sort of value that concerned him. Indeed, by referring to the readymade, he stated that the magazine frames the object as art. It is through its reproduction and deployment within varying frameworks that the object acts as art, an observation made early on by Walter Benjamin in his historic essay on reproductive technologies.

Similarly recognizing the importance of media circulation for registering a conception as art, Robert Smithson journeyed through the Yucatan in 1969 with a series of mirrors that he staged in photographs at various locations. This remote art adventure was conceived as an article for the pages of *Artforum* magazine; the journey was thus enacted for the purposes of reproduction. As Smithson explained, "For the mirror pieces, there is no

audience, yet if the work is strong enough, and photographed properly, it is fed back into a mass distribution situation" (Toner 235). Readers of the magazine are at once made aware of the actuality of Smithson's trip, his engagement with the landscape, but also estranged from it as he isolates the mirrors from interaction with contemporary Mexican culture. These photographs enact an equivocal relation to the real—we sense that they register a journey, but at the same time realize that the journey was contrived for reproduction and distribution.

Man Ray's object photography similarly replaces and interprets the absent original, whose intangibility is not only required but also *caused* by the compelling nature of the image. The temporary disappearance of *Cadeau*, as both assemblage and photograph, was eclipsed by its own presence. The photograph may thereby be understood as properly indexical, in that it makes present the lost original, but at the same time it has usurped the authority of that original, becoming for the new replicas an origin in itself (even if the shape and form of the copies were never an exact match). As Man Ray constructed facsimiles in three dimensions, he circulated a photograph that upheld a story of a brief lifespan that it negated by its very existence. Yet the photograph was never received as an independent object. Instead, it was read as a transparent representation of a thing that perhaps never existed in the way we have been made to understand it.

Man Ray's photograph of Duchamp's *Bottlerack* (1914) offers one final example of this dialectic between photograph and replica, index and origin. Duchamp purchased his first bottle rack long before he had formalized the idea of the readymade. It sat in his Paris studio as he left for New York in 1915. When he finally realized the object's potential, he wrote to his sister to retrieve it, but she had already thrown it out. The original was discarded even before it was named as readymade.¹⁹ When Duchamp was ready to exhibit *Bottlerack* in the *Surrealist Exhibition of Objects* at the Galerie Charles Ratton in 1936 (that is, twenty years later), he wrote to Man Ray and asked him to buy another one, which Man Ray did. He then photographed his purchase. The new *Bottlerack* was exhibited at the Ratton show in Paris, while a few months later, the *photograph* by Man Ray was exhibited in New York at Alfred Barr's *Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism*.²⁰

The photograph of *Bottlerack* later made its way in miniature into Duchamp's *Box in a Valise* (1935–41), a work of art that, like Man Ray's photographs of objects, mimics the role of documentation while generating independent meanings. These two replacements thus became equivalent expressions of the idea of *Bottlerack*. Whatever knowledge or ideas it produced derive first from Duchamp's concept, which is realized in equal measure by its three-dimensional and photographic incarnations. The photograph thus documents an original while engaging in an independent flow of ideas. When circulating photographs of objects, neither Man Ray nor Duchamp required that the viewer reconstruct an indexical relation to an autonomous work of art—even as their photographs asserted a reproductive function. *Box in a Valise*, a miniature traveling museum retrospective comprised of both photographic prints and three-dimensional replicas, now displaces the function of the printed page to portray a collection of reproductions that speak to an ephemeral but also verifiable past. Duchamp's insight that he could simulate an entire career through boxed reproductions echoes in Dada and surrealist object photography. These photographs made way for a trajectory of art that exists first as fleeting event, then as image fixed within the salts of photographic emulsion, and ultimately as grainy off-set reproduction circulating in the pages of print. In their play between staging, disappearance, and distribution, they prefigure strategies of art that would explicitly oppose modernism decades later.

Notes

I would like to thank Adrian Sudhalter for an exchange of information and ideas, and Matthew S. Witkovsky for ongoing collaborations.

1. See, for example, Krauss and Livingston 121; and L'Ecotais and Sayag 209.
2. This reading, which is indebted to the theory proposed by Marcel Mauss, is elaborated in my book *Please Touch*.
3. Galerie surréaliste, Paris, *Man Ray et objets des îles* (March 26–April 10, 1926); Also see Pasadena Art Institute, *Retrospective Exhibition 1914–44: Paintings, Drawings, Watercolors, Photographs by Man Ray* (September 19–October 29, 1944), Julien Levy Gallery, New York, *Man Ray Exhibition* (April 1945); and The Copley Galleries, Los Angeles, *To Be Continued Unnoticed* (December 1948–January 1949).
4. "About the 'Cadeau,' iron with tacks: I have already sold one to Rosenthal a couple of years ago, and for traveling I simply brushed the tacks off and told him to paste them on with some strong glue. It is necessary to draw a pencil line down

the middle, right angle to the base, as a guide, and dip the head of the tack on some glue on a piece of paper—let dry for a couple of days. To facilitate handling, place the iron upside down between two piles of several books. Schwarz of the Milan Gallery has made an edition of ten irons signed and numbered, and I'm not supposed to make any more for 5 years!" Man Ray to Naomi and David Savage, Paris, April 28, 1965, Getty Research Institute, Box 2 930027, I.2.I. Also see the catalogue raisonné Man Ray, *Objets de mon affection*, 43, 142.

5. With thanks to Virginia Zabriskie of Zabriskie Gallery and Virginia Heckert of the J. Paul Getty Museum for helping me to locate this photograph. Another currently unlocated photograph dated to 1934 was exhibited at the Zabriskie Gallery in 1985. *Man Ray: Objects of My Affection*, unpaginated. William Camfield, among those authors who assumes that the classic image illustrates the 1921 version of the assemblage, discusses its reincarnation in Motherwell's book. Camfield, "Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*," 158–61, 176, n. 44. Camfield was unaware of the print now held by the Getty Museum.

6. Read, illustration section between pages 208 and 209. Hugnet, illustration section between pages 96 and 97. It is also interesting to note how this object slips easily into histories of both Dada and surrealism.

7. The replica included in *The Art of Assemblage*, which belonged to the Morton G. Neumann Family collection, comes closest to that seen in the classic photograph. Yet it departs in two significant ways—it is painted uniformly black, and its straight handle does not have rounded edges (Carmean 44).

8. Regarding the reproduction in Arturo Schwarz's monograph on Man Ray (147), the artist responded that it was "of the one original and was made in the 20s." Artist's questionnaire, July 18, 1966, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Also see Umland and Sudhalter.

9. "This incident [of *Cadeau*] may not have taken place at the opening, however. There is a photograph of *Cadeau* dated 1921, which indicates that Man Ray either had time to photograph the object before it disappeared, or that he replicated it soon thereafter" (Klüver and Martin 133, n. 34).

10. In addition to the Tate catalog mentioned above, the exception is a reference to a 1955 print in Guignol 22, 264.

11. Man Ray's decision to use this image in the 1960s, but not in the 1940s, may have had to do with his relocation to the United States during World War II. The original photograph may have been left in Paris and then recovered after the war.

12. William Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*, 33–38, provides a detailed account of the vagaries in *Fountain's* appearances. On the role of Stieglitz, see Duve, "Given the Richard Mutt Case," 203–8.

13. Despite suppositions to the opposite, Stieglitz was an enthusiastic supporter of Man Ray and Duchamp's Dada efforts. In response to the appearance of the journal *New York Dada*, he wrote, "It's quite a marvel—the N.Y. Dada.—The

cover is a delight.—That Dada photo a wonder . . . most amusing—And Tzara's letter a real message—It's all good.—Heartiest congratulations." Alfred Stieglitz to Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, April 17, 1921, Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet, fonds Tristan Tzara, Paris. With thanks to Armelle de Girval of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, for helping me locate this letter. See manuscript no. 918 in Le Bon 596.

14. Against Krauss's theory of the index, discussed further below, George Baker has read the so-called Dadaphoto as operating within a "chain of signification," powered by the functions of desire. Baker 191–219.

15. See Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, 44. Ducasse, "Poésies." As Francis Naumann has noted, Man Ray would likely have been aware of these issues since an ad for *Littérature* ran on the same page as an ad for Man Ray's TNT in *Dada*, nos. 4–5 (May 1919). Naumann 87, n. 40.

16. "The original was a Singer of 1920. I spent a week last year looking for one for a replica for the Stockholm museum's show. There are no others, I think. I have this replica but the blanket is not the same. It was dark grey rough wool or heavy cotton." Man Ray to Arturo Schwarz, January 12, 1971, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.

17. Margaret Iversen has recently contributed a compelling revision of Krauss's theory of the index, arguing for a performative operation of the photograph within surrealism and later conceptual art. In a group of essays, she puts forward the theory that the surrealist photograph "follows the event, not knowing the conclusion in advance" (Iversen, "Following Pieces," 94). Also see Iversen, "Readymade," and "The Surrealist Situation."

18. Using the example of someone pointing in the direction of a fire, Peirce writes that one of the distinguishing characteristics of indices is "that they direct the attention to their objects by blind compulsion" (171–72).

19. Marcel Duchamp to Suzanne Duchamp, January 15, [1916], New York. Reprinted in Naumann and Ludion 43.

20. "Readymade, 1914. Photograph by Man Ray of a bottle-drying rack signed by the artist and sent to an exhibition. Lent by Christian Zervos" (Barr 261).

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Photography's Linguistic Turn

On Werner Graeff's *Here Comes
the New Photographer!*

DANIEL H. MAGILOW

IN 1932, THE GERMAN PHOTOGRAPHY ANNUAL *Das Deutsche Lichtbild* (The German photograph) published a tongue-in-cheek yet revealing one-act play among its images. Written by the editor and critic Hugo Sieker, the eight-page skit, "Photograph and Personality: A Discussion Concerning the Current Photographic Situation," featured a magazine photo editor and an art critic as its protagonists. The photo editor proposes that the art critic review a New Photography exhibit at a local art gallery, but the art critic vehemently objects. Their disagreement quickly turns into an opportunity to voice arguments about photography at a pivotal moment in the medium's history.

The art critic claims that displaying photographs as art is just a commercial ploy. Photography, he claims, is a mechanical process devoid of authentic artistic expression. Galleries exhibit photographs as a gimmick, and as examples of such aesthetic chicanery he cites several forms, novel at the time, that most histories of photography now count among the most important innovations of interwar photography. These include photomontage assembled from newspapers, trick photography, and images shot from unorthodox perspectives. Responding to these objections, the photo editor fires back that photography is an applied art, like ceramics or woodworking. Utility, expressive power, and aesthetic value are not mutually exclusive. Photography's value lies less in what it is and more in what it does. The art critic and the photo editor bandy accusations back and forth, and their discussion deteriorates into an argumentative stalemate.

Suddenly, a third character, a freelance photojournalist, arrives in the editor's office. As the photojournalist walks in, the photo editor announces the new arrival: "Here Comes the New Photographer!" ("Es kommt der neue Fotograf!"). By the time this "New Photographer" has left the office, the art critic has changed his mind and agrees to review the amateur exhibition, all of which invites the following questions: Why exactly did the photojournalist's arrival spark such interest? What did he say to win over the art critic?

The answer lies in the book whose title the photo editor cites: Werner Graeff's 1929 *Here Comes the New Photographer!* (*Es kommt der neue Fotograf!*). By 1932, when Hugo Sieder's play appeared, *Here Comes the New Photographer!* had achieved such renown in photography circles that Sieder could announce the photojournalist's arrival simply by citing the title of Graeff's work. Readers needed no other hints to catch the reference to this popular book, whose five-thousand-copy first edition quickly sold out when it appeared in 1929 in connection with the German Werkbund's *Film und Foto* or *FiFo* exhibition. By more closely examining how Graeff and the *FiFo* exhibition explicitly and implicitly defined the New Photography and the New Photographer, one can more clearly see why the art critic in Sieder's play changed his mind and how this change of mind signaled an important shift in the history of photography.

This key moment in photographic and media history corresponded to a key moment in modern aesthetics, as it concerned photography's reorientation in relation to the written word. Critics have long noted how interwar photographic avant-gardes and the *FiFo* exhibition of 1929 helped photography achieve aesthetic legitimacy and institutional recognition in galleries, museums, and journals (see Bertrand). "Photograph and Personality" is, in fact, set up around this figurative coming of age as an affirmative answer to the well-rehearsed debate "is photography art?" Yet the invocation of *Here Comes the New Photographer!* points at the same time to an equally significant but less examined phenomenon. As photography began to make inroads as museum-worthy art, it also began to colonize areas of public discourse that had henceforth been almost exclusively the domain of written language. Photographers began to embrace photography's linguistic character and rhetorical potential more fully when they arranged images in

specific sequences and layouts, all the while exploiting the radical formal strategies that Sieker's art critic deems "commercial gimmicks." In Central Europe in the late 1920s, photographs became more than just a tool to illustrate or supplement text. Instead, they eroded existing text-image distinctions and made it necessary to reconceptualize them entirely. Photographs *became* the text by adopting the functions of written and spoken language. In new forms, they took on tasks now taken for granted: they narrated stories, argued polemics, and intervened in key political and aesthetic controversies.

Here Comes the New Photographer! provides a useful starting point through which to historicize this new relationship of modernity, photography, and language, for in it, Graeff consciously and self-referentially recasts photography as a form of persuasive rhetoric. As evidence of this repurposing of photography, it is instructive to examine how *Here Comes the New Photographer!* invokes three genres, all traditionally associated with written text, and refits them with photographs. First and foremost, *Here Comes the New Photographer!* is a manifesto of one of the signature moments of Central European photographic avant-gardes in the 1920s and 1930s: the New Vision (*Neues Sehen*). Second, it is a training manual, modeled on a reading textbook, for the New Photographer. And finally, as a work that itself requires text and images for its argument, *Here Comes the New Photographer!* exemplifies a new type of work unique to modernity: the photo-essay, a hybrid text-image form that shifts the burden of representation from images to language and the burden of interpretation from author to reader. By mimicking genres conventionally associated with words and by refitting them with images, *Here Comes the New Photographer!* makes a compelling case for photography's linguistic value, which resides in its flexibility as a means of persuasion. The question, in other words, is no longer "is photography art?" but rather, "is photography language?" and if so, what kind of language is it?

Film und Foto

Language depends on context for meaning, and it is also the case that understanding *Here Comes the New Photographer!* demands that one understand the immediate aesthetic and institutional contexts in which it originated.

The book was published for the 1929 *FiFo* exhibition, a massive show that has been widely understood as the coming-out party for one of the key interwar photographic movements: the New Vision. The historian of photography Christopher Phillips has defined the New Vision as, “part of a wider, utopian project that aimed to teach men and women to contend with the unprecedented demands of an increasingly urban, mechanical age” as well as a “desire to break with the perceptual habits and the pictorial customs of the past” (xiii). The New Vision is associated first and foremost with László Moholy-Nagy, the artist, photographer, and teacher affiliated with the Bauhaus, where Werner Graeff studied in the early 1920s. In the early and mid-1920s, Moholy-Nagy articulated his opinions on photography’s true function in texts now widely considered the New Vision’s canonical manifestos, notably his 1922 essay “Production-Reproduction” and his 1927 book *Painting Photography Film*. To Moholy-Nagy, photography should facilitate new sensory relationships with the world. Images should construct reality rather than just represent it mimetically. In making such a claim, Moholy-Nagy challenged conventional wisdom that had long esteemed photography for the camera’s ability to reproduce the world with a high degree of fidelity. Against this aesthetic of mimesis, Moholy-Nagy argued instead that photographs should allow one to see what previously was invisible. In so doing, they can reveal what needs to be changed. To this end, Moholy-Nagy championed aerial photography, x-ray photography, microscopy, and photographic forms unique to modernity as exemplary tools for seeing that which has been obscured either by nature or, more significantly, by second nature, those myths and beliefs that have become so familiar as to seem ahistorical.¹ He labeled such genuine forms of seeing “production.” At the same time, however, he disparaged images that simply rehearse known relationships as mere “reproduction.” Here Moholy-Nagy leveled a less-than-subtle critique of the popular pictorialist style of art photography that tried to make photographs look like paintings. With their soft-focus aesthetic, pictorialist images sought to reproduce the subtly hazy quality of human vision in a manner akin to impressionism. To Moholy-Nagy and Werner Graeff as well, pictorialism reduced photography to an art form for the technically incompetent as a kind of mechanized painting by numbers.

By privileging production over reproduction, Moholy-Nagy drew attention to the new ways viewers interact with images in modernity, where photographs are typically embedded in specific discursive contexts, including books, newspapers, posters, and advertisements. In such settings, photographs function as speech acts. Like phrases such as “I apologize,” “I pronounce you man and wife,” or “You’re fired,” speech acts do more than just describe the world. They constitute and accompany acts with ethical and legal consequences. Productive photography is ideally a kind of speech act because one rarely separates a photograph from the pragmatic intentions that its context dictates. Advertising photographs are the most obvious examples, but Moholy-Nagy’s theory of productive photography also reflected a broader desire: to use photography to revolutionize the senses and, eventually, revolutionize society and politics as well.

If Moholy-Nagy’s theory of productive photography demanded that mechanically (re)produced images take the lead in shaping human interaction, it comes as no surprise that he believed that photographs should, like the dialects of human language, come in all shapes and flavors. Throughout the 1920s the photographers of the New Vision developed a new lexicon of visual techniques, which Graeff catalogs thoroughly in *Here Comes the New Photographer!* By the end of the 1920s, these signature techniques had spread well beyond their origins in radical leftist circles into politically mainstream and even radical right-wing illustrated newspapers. These visual strategies today comprise a recognizably familiar visual vocabulary. At the time, however, techniques such as radical close-ups, unconventional shooting angles, nonrectangular cropping, photomontage, retouching, and other forms of image manipulation challenged the status quo of art photography, which privileged unretouched (and ostensibly authentic) visual impressions. The techniques of the New Vision made photography useful in a greater variety of communicative contexts, particularly those traditionally considered the province of the written word.

By 1929, the Deutscher Werkbund, an organization of architects, designers, and craftsmen who sought to bridge the gap between art and industry, organized a traveling exhibition about the New Vision and its impact. The exhibition catalog of *Film und Foto* described the show’s purpose thusly:

the development of photographic equipment, the invention of cinematography, and the perfection of image-reproduction technology have created an enormous, worldwide field for its range and influence. This development came about so surprisingly that, strangely enough, until today nowhere has the attempt been made to consider this field in its entirety, to clarify its sphere of influence, and to demonstrate the potential for its development by showing its best and newest achievements. (Deutscher Werkbund 10)²

At the time when the idea for the *FiFo* retrospective was germinating, Werner Graeff was a press secretary for the Werkbund. In the late 1970s, he located the origins of *Here Comes the New Photographer!* in a conversation he had in 1929 with Gustav Stotz, the Werkbund's business manager. Stotz commissioned Graeff, not yet thirty years old, to develop two companion volumes for *FiFo*: *Here Comes the New Photographer!* about photography, and a second volume, coauthored with Hans Richter, called *Filmgegner von heute—Filmfreunde von morgen*, loosely translated as *Film Haters Today, Film Lovers Tomorrow*. In Graeff's words, "Stotz wrote me several times that I should—no must—do a book about the exhibit. But that was exactly what I didn't want to do, in that I myself seldom photographed and was also no critic" (Graeff, "Nach einem," 5).

In spite of these reservations, Graeff took on the assignment and produced a work that relies on clever turns of language at the same time as it argues for photography's status as a kind of language. With its untranslatable "existential there" construction, the German title *Es kommt der neue Fotograf!* does not merely focus on the fact that the New Photographer is coming. It takes his arrival for granted. Photography is not something that will have to be reckoned with in the future. Rather, it is a fact, a given of everyday life, made even more so by the legitimizing gesture of an art exhibition. Consequently, the title *Here Comes the New Photographer!* remains a bit of a misnomer.

It is more accurate to say that as a popularizing of Moholy-Nagy's theories, Graeff's book heralded not the arrival of photography as art, but the concretizing of new roles for photographs in society entirely. *Here Comes the New Photographer!* encourages one to think of photography less as an aesthetic medium that, depending on one's definition of good art, copies

nature, imitates human vision, expresses the existential frustration of the human condition, rejects bourgeois institutions, and so on, and instead operates as a medium per se, like language itself, that lends itself to myriad purposes beyond the explicitly aesthetic. This linguistic character reveals itself in the back and forth that takes place in *Here Comes the New Photographer!* between photography and more traditionally text-based rhetorical forms, which Graeff imitates and expands upon. The first and most conspicuous of such forms is the political manifesto.

Here Comes the New Photographer! as a Manifesto

As a polemical statement of the New Vision's reconceptualizing of photography as language, *Here Comes the New Photographer!* takes on the trappings of the manifesto form. In her essay "The Poetics of the Manifesto: Nowness and Newness," Mary Ann Caws describes several relevant characteristics of this form. Manifestos, as Caws defines them, are self-contained documents, statements of belief, and deliberate attempts to manipulate the public. They make manifest certain principles and beliefs, often by juxtaposing them with accepted conventions (Caws xx). Caws suggests further that a manifesto "builds into its surroundings its own conditions for reception" (xxiii) and thereby instructs its audience how to respond.

By this definition, *Here Comes the New Photographer!* is from its opening sentence a manifesto, not only for photographers, but also for those who read photographs: "The goal of this book," Graeff begins on the first page, "is to destroy barriers—not to erect them" (*Es kommt*, 4). Graeff polemically implies that everything one need know about how to make and understand photography lies within the pages of his book. Only photo credits—and not, for instance, footnotes, bibliography, or an academic apparatus—situate the book within its historical context. As a manifesto, it is a polemical form of rhetoric. It constitutes its own authority.

One can summarize this manifesto's major argument through recourse to the dichotomy of prescriptive versus descriptive linguistics. Extreme prescriptivist linguistics is the normative realm of educators, publishers, and connoisseurs, who standardize and value certain forms of language and decry nonstandardized forms as incorrect, degenerate, and corrosive. Descriptive linguistics, on the other hand, sees its task to describe rather than proscribe.

Graeff argues that one should judge photography dynamically and historically, on the basis of what it does, not on the basis of how well it adheres to certain preexisting rules. In making this claim, he implies that photography, like language, has different dialects, none of which is better or worse than others. Photography, like language, can be normalized and standardized, but those who would dictate rules do so in the service of particular agendas.

A key aspect of Graeff's project is to expose the agendas behind received understandings of photography and image production in general. This project notably resonates with the broad-based critique of mimesis in modernity and, more specifically, of attempts to historicize the ostensibly ahistorical rules of art. In his 1927 classic *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (*Die Perspektive als symbolische Form*), for instance, the art historian Erwin Panofsky argued that, for all its pretensions to verisimilitude and transcendental truth, rectilinear perspective arose as a distinctly historical phenomenon, a convention of Western painting. Rectilinear perspective uses a variety of devices, such as vanishing points, horizon lines, and the regular diminishment in the sizes of objects, to represent three-dimensional spaces on two-dimensional surfaces (see Wood). It negotiates a relationship between viewing subject and viewed object. By implicitly claiming to represent space accurately as an infinite, homogeneous whole, Panofsky argued, rectilinear perspective masks diverse symbolic and ideological agendas behind the ostensibly innocent project of simply reproducing the world as it is.

Panofsky's critiques resurface in *Here Comes the New Photographer!* albeit in a far more populist guise. Like Panofsky, Graeff attacks the established assumption that photography was simply a kind of painting for the untalented, albeit still one with rules that can be mastered. Graeff sets up as argumentative straw men overgeneralized rules like the ones in works such as *Techniques of Photography* (*Technik der Lichtbildnerie*) by Heinrich Kühn, a leading pictorialist and arguably the most important art photographer in German-speaking Europe in the early twentieth century. As late as 1921, Kühn could write with no irony whatsoever:

Without a doubt, there are by all means laws, generally valid aesthetic demands on visual composition. A strongly emphasized slanted line requires

in all cases a counterweight; otherwise the image loses its bearing and collapses. Every image must have a middle point, a central motif; otherwise it is not an image, but at most, a view. Light and shadow must be concentrated on the image's most important positions. Exact symmetry of the image's halves is unbearable. The image may not contain two motifs, even those of equal value. (Kühn 410)

Kühn's schema of rules—which continues long beyond this excerpt—superimposes the conventions of academic painting onto photography. His list ends with the haughty statement: “But such things needn't be told to a person of taste. They are to him self-evident” (410). To Kühn, photography is first and foremost an art form, but one that can only be defined through the terms of preexisting media such as painting.

By the early 1920s, such dogmas had already begun to lose their stranglehold over photography, and throughout *Here Comes the New Photographer!* Graeff contrasts stale images made according to the rules with visually striking ones that violate them. The effect of this juxtaposing is obvious. Images that incorporate close-ups, aerial views, photomontage, intentional over- or underexposure, and other avant-garde techniques convey information effectively not in spite of the fact that they violate convention, but precisely because they break the rules. If traditional rules and visual protocols encourage one to evaluate an image solely on the basis of its intrinsic qualities and the extent to which it accords with convention, Graeff responds that photographs be used for particular purposes, that they do something. A good image is not simply one that resembles an impressionist painting, as did photographs of the soft-focus pictorialist style popular in Europe in much of the early twentieth century. Rather, a photograph's value depends on its ability to communicate a specific message in a specific context. By referring to the many lucid examples he includes, Graeff shows how images considered flawed according to traditional aesthetic standards communicate information in effective and compelling ways.

“Ah, the Renaissance painters!” one example begins with characteristic sarcasm. “They caused this strange confusion amongst today's photographers! Their teachings about perspective!” (Figure 5.1). Then, above a picture of a city promenade that stretches unobstructed to a vanishing point,

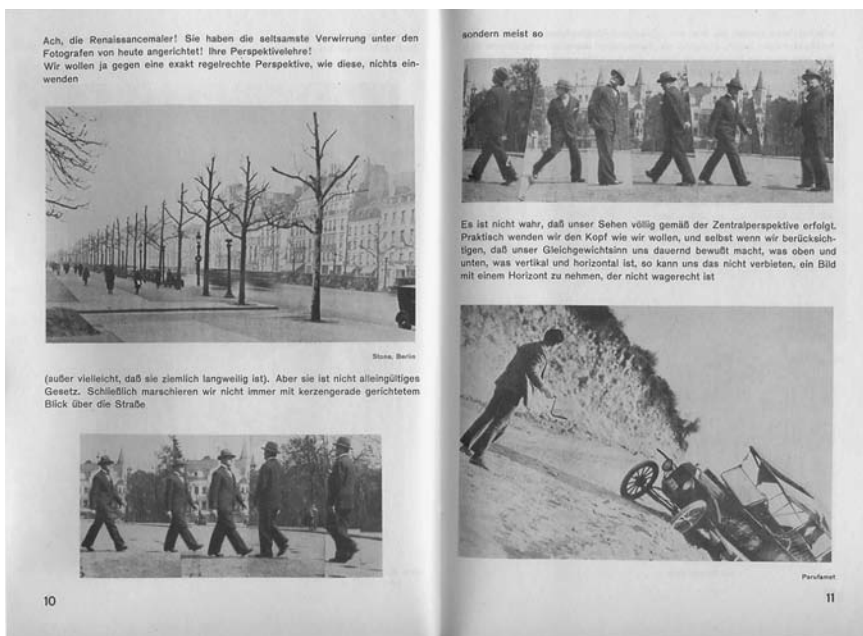


Figure 5.1. Werner Graeff, *Here Comes the New Photographer!* 10–11.

Graeff adds, “We don’t have any objections against precisely regulated perspective like this.” Below the picture, however, he adds in a snide parenthesis, “(except for maybe that it’s rather boring). . . . Ultimately, we do not always march down the street with a gaze that is as straight as an arrow.” One then sees a playful photomontage—without any vanishing points—that represents this point visually (Graeff, *Es kommt*, 10–11). In it, the same man appears to walk in multiple directions at the same time. With this photomontage of his own creation, Graeff alludes to the ways that modern aesthetic representation (modernism) has responded to industrialization and rationalization of everyday life (modernity). The image resonates with the concerns of Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin about the effect of urban life on the human psyche. Simmel wrote of the metropolis as a distracting site where nervous stimulation intensifies. Benjamin investigated modernity’s disorienting effects on perception and posited the flâneur as an archetypal modern type. This aimless urban wanderer also avoids

walking like a straight arrow. Graeff's photomontage thus shows the novel ways that modern representation can respond to the sensory overload of the metropolis. A new age requires that one develop new rules, or at least make the existing ones less restrictive.

When Graeff rebels against photographic tradition, he implicitly repudiates other sacred cows, notably traditional understandings of gender roles. A few images after the photomontage, he positions two more clichés for attack: "Hands should be lit more softly than the face," he quotes, and then adds parenthetically with a kind of mocking sarcasm, "(You are also free to try the opposite)." Below appears a photograph by Sasha Stone, an avant-garde photographer also affiliated with the G group (Figure 5.2). As if mocking this rule, the woman in the image holds a cigarette, and her hands are more emphatically lit than her face (Graeff, *Es kommt*, 27). Then Graeff lists another rule: "One should avoid at all costs that hands or legs be stretched out towards the camera." Below, in another photograph by Stone, a woman provocatively stretches out both her hands and feet towards the camera (28). The women in both photographs strongly resemble the trope of the New Woman, a cosmopolitan figure with short hair, masculine clothes, and a blasé mien (see Buerkle). Whether by sporting a cigarette, a symbol of urban sophistication, or by wearing a short skirt and showing her legs, these women both contrast starkly with the traditional gender roles of "Kinder, Küche, Kirche" (children, kitchen, church). Although to conservatives the New Woman embodied the ways that ideas such as women's liberation—and modernity in general—threatened established societal and gender hierarchies, Graeff's position on the issue is unambiguously progressive. The photo is a striking visual statement, an image that could be used effectively in any of the diverse political, commercial, informational, and critical contexts that regularly appropriated the trope of the New Woman. The New Woman breaks the old rules, and so does the photograph of her.

Graeff's manifesto against convention goes beyond the aesthetic rules that govern photographs' appearance. It questions even the underlying assumptions about the material status of photographs themselves. Several triangular and polygonal images show, for instance, that a photograph need not be rectangular. Or as an overly elongated photograph of trombonists

„Die Hände sind gedämpfter zu beleuchten als das Gesicht . .“ (Sie dürfen ruhig auch mal das Gegenteil versuchen)



Slane, Berlin

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Figure 5.2. Werner Graeff, *Here Comes the New Photographer!* 27.

shows (Figure 5.3), customized shapes can harmonize form and content (Graeff, *Es kommt*, 69). Nor is it unacceptable to manipulate negatives or retouch and montage positives. Several experimental photograms, images created by placing objects directly onto photographic paper and then exposing them to light, dispense with cameras altogether (47–49). In the book's final chapter, Graeff implores manufacturers of photographic equipment to build new cameras and accessories that allow one to work in unusual settings, photograph from strange angles, use lenses to create new effects, and so forth. If the *New Photographer* is to photograph a new world, the task demands new tools (123–24). Today, imaging technologies as diverse as endoscopes, electron microscopes, sky cams, spy satellites, and fiber optics all show that Graeff's call, with its lucrative implications, did not go unheeded. Graeff foresaw a future in which photographs would not simply illustrate words or decorate walls. He recognized that unconventional images fulfilled a need still felt today.

Here Comes the New Photographer!
as a Training Manual

Consciousness of photography's linguistic dimension became so central to critical understandings of photography that throughout the 1920s, new slogans and catchphrases entered public discourse, of which "Here Comes the New Photographer!" was only one example. Writing in the art magazine *Das Kunstblatt* (The art paper) in March 1928, the painter, graphic artist, and educator Johannes Molzahn commanded his readers to "Stop Reading! Look!" ("Nicht mehr lesen! Sehen!"). László Moholy-Nagy's comment "the illiterate of the future will not be the man who does not know writing, but who does not know photography" has become one of the most cited phrases of interwar photography, aided largely by Walter Benjamin's citation of it in his essay "Little History of Photography" (527). These slogans both suggest that in the modern era, photography has begun to replicate, complement, and even replace written language altogether. But these changes demand that audiences develop a new skill set. They must learn how to read images. This broad-based concern with literacy and reading points to a second key genre that *Here Comes the New Photographer!* evokes, the textbook or training manual.



Mitro-Goldwyn

Figure 5.3. Werner Graeff, *Here Comes the New Photographer!* 69.

For all of its antiestablishment claims, novel formal techniques, and pronounced desire to break with the past, *Here Comes the New Photographer!* strongly suggests a centuries-old text-image form: the *Fibel* or *Bilderfibel*, an illustrated primer or children's spelling book. A *Fibel* is a didactic text, a first reader or A-B-C book that combines signifiers (the word "apple") with images of the signified (the edible red fruit). Although the precise German etymology is unclear, *Fibel* very possibly derives from *Bibel* (Bible). Until reading primers began to incorporate secular material in the seventeenth century, they excerpted the Bible, the canonical moral text and often the only available book in preindustrial households.

Like a *Bilderfibel*, *Here Comes the New Photographer!* also addresses its audience as illiterates. This illiteracy is not, however, of the conventional variety. Graeff reiterates a common sentiment amongst thinkers, writers, and publishers in Weimar Germany when he suggests that as photomechanically produced images proliferate, people must learn to read anew. They are visual illiterates who do not yet understand the complex rhetorical codes of mechanically reproduced images. This sentiment encompassed diverse political backgrounds. Karl Robert Langwiesche, the conservative-nationalist publisher of the popular *Blue Books* series, remarked that these photobooks about traditional topics might serve as "training manuals" that would re-educate the masses about the richness and beauty of Germany's art, culture, and landscape (see Rittelmann 41). On the opposite end of the political spectrum, Walter Benjamin described August Sander's 1929 photobook *Face of Our Time* (*Anlitz der Zeit*) as a training manual for reading faces.

The concern with visual literacy and with photography as a kind of language led to numerous attempts to rethink books amongst European avant-gardes, particularly at the Bauhaus and amongst constructivist avant-gardes. The Russian photographer, graphic designer, and typographer El Lissitzky, who like Werner Graeff shared close links with the Bauhaus, undertook just such an experiment with the innovative poetry collection *For the Voice* (*Dlia golosa*) in 1923. The book's abstract shapes, colors, and fonts and its affinities to useful objects like subway maps and address books articulated El Lissitzky's constructivist aesthetic that books and artwork in general not simply record a cultural heritage, but that they participate as active agents for political change (see Bois and Hubert).

Werner Graeff shared such concerns with reimagining books and literacy, and *Here Comes the New Photographer!* clearly grew out of these interests. He explicitly addressed the matter in a 1927 article for the Dutch publication *De Stijl*, with the appropriately pointed title “We No Longer Want to be Illiterates” (“Wir wollen nicht länger Analphabeten sein”). In this essay Graeff proposed a standardized set of visual codes to help regulate the chaos that arose around another modern innovation: the automobile. Graeff argued that modernity has introduced new forms of illiteracy and reduced people to children:

We have again become illiterates. In Holland, in Finland, in Czechoslovakia, in Russia, Hungary, Japan, and Argentina we stand helpless, like children at train stations. We see an immense number of signs that direct, warn, and clarify, but we cannot read them. We need an international language of traffic symbols. For the most important traffic needs, clear and unambiguous signs have to be developed that can be used the same way in all countries. (“Wir wollen”)

Drawing equally on his experiences as a Bauhaus student, his experience after his student years as the owner of a drivers' education school, and his own drivers' education books *One Hour Auto* (*Eine Stunde Auto*) and *Driving a Car and What One Needs to Know About It!* (*Autofahren und was man dazu wissen muß!*), Graeff proposed an international language for traffic signs. True to Bauhaus principles, these signs would rely on basic shapes (circles, squares, and triangles) and primary colors (red, blue, yellow, plus black and white). The proposal for a kind of traffic Esperanto reflects an enormous optimism and enthusiasm for technology's potential to, in Graeff's words, “sweep aside the anarchy that has ruled until now” (“Wir wollen”).

As a text that attempts to sweep aside the dogmatic standards inherited from academic painting, *Here Comes the New Photographer!* can be understood as the proposal for a set of road signs for photography. But where street signs help prevent traffic jams and automobile accidents, a rulebook for photography has more flexibility. As a textbook or grammar intended to help regulate, control, and develop a new technology, *Here Comes the New Photographer!* encourages photographers to use photography constructively,

as an agent for social change in all realms of life. To those ends, anything goes. The most important rule about photography is that it do something, not that it be something.

Here Comes the New Photographer! as a Photo-Essay

As it announces a new kind of photography and provides a training manual for New Photographers, *Here Comes the New Photographer!* is also a heavily self-reflexive example of the New Photography's goal to engraft photography into the very fabric of modernity and language. When it performs the rhetorical tasks that it sets out for all photographers, it marks itself as a photo-essay, one of the unique contributions of Central Europe interwar photographic culture to the history of photography. The photo-essay, a hybrid text-image form that flourished as never before in the interwar period, belongs to the class of texts that the scholar and novelist Umberto Eco has defined as "open" works. According to Eco, the more open the work, the more it depends on readers to fill in the blanks (see Eco). The lack of complete narrative, at least in the received sense of narrative closure, corresponds to the oft-theorized fragmentation of experience in modernity. As image sequences, photo-essays imply intention and trajectories, but how discrete photographs convey meaning depends largely on the presence or absence of adjacent images, accompanying captions, and readers' interactions. As part of the project of spurring readers to political action, photo-essays are often constructed in ways that demand extensive audience interaction.

This gesture toward involving readers in *Here Comes the New Photographer!* reveals itself in the hybrid text-image character of Graeff's sentences. As fundamental parts of the text and not mere supplements, the photographs cannot and do not appear in an appended section of plates and illustrations, as they often did in photography textbooks. When it integrates words and images in this way, *Here Comes the New Photographer!* attempts to practice what it preaches. Images are not subservient to texts, nor texts to images. Rather, each illustrates and describes the other. Throughout the book, images are part of the very syntax. Images often interrupt words mid-sentence. One exemplary sentence in chapter 3 that demonstrates techniques of the New Photography inserts thirteen photographs before it reaches a period. By contrast, the opening and closing chapters stand out because

they are the only ones with extended paragraphs of texts without the percussive interruptions of photographs.

In a September 1978 obituary for Werner Graeff published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Hans Georg Puttnies recognized the interdependence of text and image in the book as its most important contribution. Although Puttnies stressed that *Here Comes the New Photographer!*'s primary importance resides in its attack on photographic convention, he nevertheless claimed that its role as a manifesto and polemic forms only a small part of its legacy. It also innovated as a form of narrative akin to yet different from cinema. In Puttnies's words:

Werner Graeff's book would only be valuable as ephemera if it did not itself present a work of book art [*Buchkunstwerk*]. It is the first successful attempt at a narrative unity [*Erzähleinheit*] of photography and language. Halves of sentences give way to photos that continue the argument. The text, the choice of images, and the layout create a symbiosis that otherwise only films, which were also on their way up at the time, had accomplished.

As a form of narrative photography, *Here Comes the New Photographer!* participated in a broader trend that Germany's *Illustrierten* (photographically illustrated magazines) had begun in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to experiment with photographic narratives in their photo-reportage. In such texts, whose direct descendants include the photo-essays of postwar magazines such as *Life* and *Look*, the photographs still played the role of illustration. By including examples of photo-reportage from popular weeklies such as the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, the *Kölnische Illustrierte Zeitung*, and *Der Weltspiegel*, all of which incorporate techniques of the New Photography, Graeff alludes directly to the mass media's central role in photography's emergence as a language.

In the mid-1920s, photo-narratives were also appearing independently of magazines as book-length texts. Notable examples, many considered today valuable art objects, include Erich Mendelsohn's *America: An Architect's Picture Book* (*Amerika: Bilderbuch eines Architekten*, 1925), Albert Renger-Patzsch's *The World Is Beautiful* (*Die Welt ist schön*, 1928), August Sander's *Face of Our Time* (1929), and Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold's *Photo-Eye*

(*Foto-Auge*, 1929), which like *Here Comes the New Photographer!* appeared in connection with the *FiFo* exhibition.³ Many photos in *Here Comes the New Photographer!*—Renger-Patzsch's *Adderkopf* being a notable example—also appeared in those same photobooks. With their reinscription into Graeff's photobook, the malleability of photography and the photo-essay form, as well as the self-referential quality of *Here Comes the New Photographer!* all become even more conspicuous as Graeff reinscribes such images into his own photo-narrative.

The Critical Reception and Legacy of *Here Comes the New Photographer!*

Here Comes the New Photographer!'s warm reception by popular audiences and initial commercial success corresponded to a similarly enthusiastic critical reception amongst academics and professional circles. With only a few exceptions, Renger-Patzsch foremost among them, critics welcomed the *New Photographer* with open arms. One review, a 1930 essay by Klaus Berger in the *Journal for Aesthetics and General Art History* (*Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*) merits attention as much for the books with which Berger associated *Here Comes the New Photographer!* as for its opinions about Graeff's book itself. Berger discussed the text alongside several other seminal interwar texts about film and photography, each a major accomplishment in its own right. Berger recognized that for all of their different interests and approaches, these works together captured a fundamental shift in thinking about photographic images. Mechanically produced images must be defined and criticized on their own terms, with attention to their own specific traits, and not always held up against painting and conventional arts. Aside from Hans Richter's *Film Haters Today*, *Film Lovers Tomorrow* (the companion volume to *Here Comes the New Photographer!*) Berger also reviewed the second edition of Moholy-Nagy's *Painting Photography Film*, the German translation of Vsevolod Pudovkin's *Film Technique*, Béla Balázs's *Visible Man* (*Der sichtbare Mensch*), and Renger-Patzsch's *The World Is Beautiful*. He described Richter's and Graeff's books as "brothers," a notable point given the extent to which the two collaborated on the projects. Berger noted their shared techniques: "Image and word arise from the same source . . . the rules of art as typically taught and from

which such well-mannered, correct, and stiff images arise, are picked apart one by one" (331).

An anonymous review in the popular photography magazine *Photography for Everyone* (*Photographie für Alle*) echoed the sentiments of the more academically oriented *Journal for Aesthetics and General Art History* (see Review of *Here Comes the New Photographer!* 20). Unlike Berger's review, however, it stressed that the accomplishment of *Here Comes the New Photographer!* was to unify avant-garde photographic strategies that were widely used and widely recognized but not yet codified in one book. The use of avant-garde perspectives and photographic manipulation evinced, in the reviewer's mind, a remarkable and ongoing reeducation of the senses. *Here Comes the New Photographer!* was both the evidence of this shift and a means by which to encourage it further.

Nevertheless, not everyone responded so enthusiastically to *Here Comes the New Photographer!* Yet those who objected did so in predictable ways. Writing in *Cinema Technology* (*Die Kinotechnik*), the official organ of the German Cinema Technology Society (*Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft*), a semi-anonymous reviewer, "Kb.," remained oblivious to the massive changes in art, and in so doing encapsulated in a nutshell the conservative critique of the avant-garde: "No one would want to genuinely doubt that the 'Rules of Art,' that is, the laws of spatial composition, treatment of tonal values, advantageous perspective, etc. etc. that are splendidly executed in well-known primers and propagated in the academies, still retain today their enormous value and will do so forever." Kb. further described Graeff's many examples taken from newspapers, magazines, and advertisements as "grotesque" and "sensational." His point that Graeff oversimplifies when he groups the rules of art into an undifferentiated mass is accurate, at least in some respects, but it fails to recognize the purpose of Graeff's populist, playful, and self-consciously demagogic tone. Graeff bundles these rules into a monolithic whole. *Here Comes the New Photographer!* is not simply an argument built through rhetorical straw men. It is concurrently a polemical manifesto that strengthens its own argument by performing the very explicitness that it demands of photographs. Of course, Graeff does not want to dispense with all of the rules of art entirely. He in fact regularly admits that some of the rules are appropriate in certain situations. His point is

simply the more restrained one: those rules are not universally valid for every context. Kb., however, fails to recognize how Graeff has packaged a nuanced and restrained argument in a loud and polemical package. Even so, Kb. points to the paradox of Graeff's programmatic tone: a programmatic carries with it the risk of promulgating new orthodoxies and of falling into the same prescriptivist discourse that it so harshly criticizes.

Perhaps the ultimate indicator of *Here Comes the New Photographer!*'s critical legacy, or at least its continued ability to strike a chord with the reading public, was the decision of Walther König, the Cologne-based art bookstore and publisher, to reprint and reissue the German edition in 1978. That same year Graeff died unexpectedly while visiting the United States. Writing in an introduction to the reprint, Graeff seemed flattered. "A new edition now after such a long period of time?" he wrote, "We must no longer follow the obsolete rules for art that until the end of the 1920s had a constraining effect—at least not in German speaking areas; they have long since become meaningless" (Graeff, *Es kommt*, 5). By the year of his death the techniques that Graeff cataloged and the revolution he announced had already become so accepted as to seem almost totally unrecognizable. Indeed to this day, one can scarcely look at a newspaper, book, television screen, or computer monitor, or any other site of the language of the modern world, and not see what the New Photographer brought along.

Notes

1. Georg Lukács discusses the idea of "second nature" in the chapter "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" in *History and Class Consciousness*.

2. The exhibition titled *Internationale Ausstellung des Deutschen Werkbunds. Film und Foto* was shown from May 18–July 7, 1929 in the Ausstellungshallen, Interimstheaterplatz, Stuttgart.

3. The two-volume series *The Photobook*, by Parr and Badger is an important catalog of some of the most important titles of illustrated books, including those of the interwar period.

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6

The Power of What Is Not There

James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*

STUART BURROWS

No man can quite make himself a camera.

—Sherwood Anderson, “A Note on Realism”

JAMES AGEE'S DENSE, INTERMITTENTLY LYRICAL, occasionally opaque 1941 photo-text *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*—his infamously long and largely unread study of three tenant families in Alabama—has been repeatedly characterized as the attempt to render in prose the justly famous Walker Evans photographs that open the book. To a large degree, Agee himself is responsible for this situation, having punctuated *Praise* with a series of tributes to the representational power of the camera, which he dubs “the central instrument of our time.”¹ The most famous of these pronouncements seems to leave little doubt as to Agee's view of the unequal relation between writing and photography:

If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and of excrement. . . . A piece of the body torn out by the roots might be more to the point. (10)

Critics have tended to take Agee at his word, characterizing the formal experimentation and detailed description of *Praise* as the ironic result of

Agee's attempt to translate into words the economy and simplicity of Evans's images.² It is important to note, however, that Agee's claim that *Praise* would be better if it were all photographs is not only strangely self-canceling—in that it collapses the distinction between representation and the world necessary for representation to exist in the first place—but puzzlingly redundant, since it comes just a few pages after the uncaptioned Evans photographs that make up book 1. For if Agee truly wanted what he says he wants, all he need do is write nothing. "If I could do it," Agee says, when to do it he has only, so to speak, not to do it.

The critical insistence on the literalness of Agee's constant complaint that language is not literal enough fails to take account of the fact that the text constantly contradicts its own declared shortcomings: Agee apologizes for being unable to write seriously of bareness and space, before embarking on some of the lengthiest descriptions of emptiness ever published; he insists on the superiority of the camera, only to enumerate precisely those sensations—odors, sounds, tastes, texture—unavailable to photography; he declares that he would rather produce a book of photographs, only to produce a list of all the other objects such a book should include. Rather than ensuring the evidential status of the photographs, these objects testify to the inevitable insufficiency of the image, its failure to be "a piece of the body torn out by the roots." The supplementary logic of Agee's list should, I think, counsel us to read *Praise's* exhaustive annotation of the tenant farmers' houses, clothes, and possessions as a challenge to rather than as an approximation of the referential plenitude of photography. How else, after all, can we explain Agee's insistence on describing in minute detail objects depicted in Evans's photographs, such as the utensils in the Gudger kitchen?

The minute descriptions that make up most of *Praise* raise the possibility that Agee does not fully trust the camera to represent its subjects.³ This might explain why he rarely draws the reader's attention to Evans's photographs. And even when Agee does do so, during a somewhat obsessive catalog of the calendars, advertisements, and magazine covers that litter the living room of one of the tenant farmers, he refers to images that the reader cannot see:

These are in part by memory, in part composited out of others' memory, in part improvised, but do not exceed what was there in abundance, variety, or kind. They are much better recorded in photographs for which there is no room in this volume. (176)

Agee defers to unseen, absent photographs, denying the reader the chance to make an explicit comparison between text and image. His apology for the fact that there was no room for these photographs, moreover, is itself rather telling, since Agee *does* make room for more than four hundred pages of experimental, unedited, at times infuriatingly purple prose. Indeed, considering the fact that the excluded photographs must themselves have been of images—Agee's descriptions are principally of the eclectic illustrations that decorate the tenants' walls—language here substitutes for the very thing photography would seem most equipped to record: photographs themselves.

What Agee's extraordinarily detailed descriptions suggest is not a writer who wishes he were a photographer, but a writer who believes that his prose can substitute for photography. Such is the profile suggested by Agee's "Notes for a Moving Picture: The House," a piece he composed just weeks after returning from Alabama. The essay describes a proposed film shot by shot, detailing not just every camera movement but the duration of each image: "Camera flashes into position two: the shadowed sidewalk; its concentration on buildings along sunlit side of street. Hold six seconds. Camera swings into one down center of sidewalk. Hold four seconds."⁴ This is not a letter of abdication to the camera, but a model for the camera. The same might be said of *Praise*, especially when we consider the promise made by Agee's preface—a promise the text's critics have ignored—that text and photographs will be "coequal, mutually independent, and fully collaborative" (xi). They are coequal because Agee places rather more faith in language than he at times admits. And they are collaborative because Agee's theory of what language can and cannot do exposes the failings of photography as much as it celebrates its achievements.

The best place to begin to map Agee's theory of language is in the final section of *Praise*, "Shady Grove: Two Images," in which Agee does not so much express the desire to imitate the camera as insist that language is in

fact a form of photography. “The last words of this book have been spoken,” he tells us, “and these that follow are not words; they are only descriptions of two images” (389). Yet when we look closely at Agee’s “descriptions of two images” of the tenants—one of Squinchy Gudger and his mother, one of Ellen Woods asleep—what we find are images in the metaphorical rather than in the photographic sense. Ellen Woods sleeps, Agee observes, immersed in a “gigantic light”:

this center and source, for which we have never contrived any worthy name, is as if it were breathing, flowering, soundlessly, a snoring silence of flame; it is as if flame were breathed forth from it and subtly played about it: and here in this breathing and play of flame, a thing so strong, so valiant, so unvanquishable, it is without effort, without emotion, I know it shall at length outshine the sun. (390)

Not only does Agee’s description feature devices more associated with poetry than with supposedly photographic prose—alliteration, assonance, apostrophe, simile—it relinquishes designation altogether in favor of a somewhat opaque metaphorical schema of flowers and flames.

Many critics have faulted Agee for such images, the most anguished critique being voiced by Jonathan Morse, who insists that “metaphors have a constitutive reality in *Let Us Now Praise*; they, finally, and not the Woodses, Rickettses, and Gudgers, are what the book is about.” As Morse puts it, deliberately imitating Agee’s highly metaphorical style:

Agee’s metaphors do not record or evoke a reality; they abolish its terms of existence and recreate them, in another image, in a purely esthetic domain. Having been immortalized, the Gudgers cannot be affected by bringing electricity to rural Alabama. Blazing with counterfeit life through Agee’s expanding nebula of metaphors, they have no more substantial reality than the star whose light an astronomer sees a million years after it has ceased to exist.⁵

For Morse, as for so many critics of *Praise*, Evans’s stark unsentimental portraits of the tenant farmers stand in profound contrast to Agee’s convoluted figures and anguished self-consciousness. There is no denying that *Praise*

is obsessed with metaphor; as James Lowe concisely expresses it, a thing becomes more itself for Agee as it becomes more like other things. This is not, however, for the reason Lowe puts forward—an insistence on repudiating art in favor of actuality—but instead for quite the opposite: an extended demonstration of the unbridgeable gulf *between* representation and reality.⁶ This explains why so many of Agee’s metaphors are themselves figures *for* metaphor—images of sunflowers, references to sunlight, accounts of composition.

The meaning of these images can be explained not with reference to themselves alone but according to the theory of metaphor outlined by I. A. Richards, Agee’s college teacher, mentor, and friend. In *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, published in 1936—the same year Agee and Evans set off for Alabama—Richards makes the case for why “metaphor is the omnipresent principle of language.”⁷ In order to make sense of the world, Richards observes, we are forced to generate meaning from what he terms “recurrent likenesses of behavior” (36). The patterns of recurrence and repetition that constitute daily life are necessarily arbitrary and conventional, but also fundamentally metaphorical, since they work not only through substitution but through likeness: “we all live, and speak, only through our eye for resemblances” (89). Indeed Richards goes further still: “*Thought* is metaphoric, and proceeds by comparison, and the metaphors of language derive therefrom” (94). Richards’s theory of the metaphorical nature of language is grounded in the idea that meaning is formed not only from the context of the sentence—the interaction of each word with every other word—but also from the innumerable unspoken but unavoidable contexts with which each word is associated. We understand what words say only because we have previously understood similar words; equally, however, “Most words, as they pass from context to context, change their meanings; and in many different ways. It is their duty and their service to us to do so” (11). Meaning is thus a product of the interaction between the context in which we encounter a word and the many other absent contexts in which we previously did so, rendering them, in Richards’s formulation, “substitutes exerting the power of what is not there” (32).

Agee praised the “beauty, strength, symmetry, greatness” of Richards’s thought as early as 1931, in a letter to his confidant Father Flye. And

despite the fact that a 1938 letter to Father Flye expresses a desire for a law “which interdicted the use of all words to which the reader cannot give a referent,” *Praise*, in keeping with Richards’s model, seems committed to a contextual rather than to a referential theory of meaning.⁸ Agee’s work can also, however, be seen as turning this model inside out, in the sense that it is committed to multiplying the number and variety of contexts in which certain words appear to the extent that words actually begin to lose their likeness to the things for which they substitute—to what Richards called “what is not there.” Agee’s extravagant metaphors do not reveal likenesses between things we had previously thought unlike—the Aristotelian definition of metaphor—so much as they place side by side the most unlikely things, a recognizably modernist technique of juxtaposition. His repeated lists, for example, place nouns, phrases, and quotes in new and often unexpected contexts. One of the book’s closing sections, “A Definition,” opens by emphasizing the importance of accuracy—insisting that the families are not sharecroppers but tenants—before offering a long list of “anglosaxon monosyllables” (403). The point of this seemingly interminable series of proper names—which would seem to be as far from metaphor as it is possible to imagine—is precisely to show how context determines meaning: objects, people, and artistic movements are placed next to one another in order to reveal new correspondences between them. Even nouns, then, can operate metaphorically. Consider what happens to one of these nouns, photography: “surrealism, photography, photographer, documentary, work, van gogh, dali, picasso, shakespeare, critic” (404). Photography is placed next to surrealism, the artistic movement that used the camera to question the very notion of photographic referentiality.⁹ As a number of critics have pointed out, surrealism was very important to Agee, who admitted to Father Flye to being “very much moved” by the Dada and surrealism show at the Museum of Modern Art in 1937.¹⁰ His 1946 introduction to *A Way of Seeing*, a volume of photographs by his close friend Helen Levitt, returns to his belief in a link between photography and surrealism:

in much of her feeling for streets, strange details, and spaces, her vocabulary is often suggestive of and sometimes identified with that of the Surrealists. The general feeling is rather that the surrealism is that of the ordinary metropolitan

soil which breeds these remarkable juxtapositions and moments, and that what we call “fantasy,” is, instead, reality in its unmasked vigor and grace.¹¹

Praise could be said to anticipate Levitt’s “remarkable juxtapositions” in its assortment of words, quotes, names, and images drawn from the tenants’ lives.¹²

Agee’s insistence on recontextualizing everything he sees accounts for the text’s repeated references to figures from American literary history, from Hawthorne to Huckleberry Finn. “A Country Letter,” for example, ends with every member of the Gudger family wishing one another good night—a restaging of T. S. Eliot’s restaging in “The Waste Land” of Hamlet’s repeated good nights to his mother—while Agee admits in his “Notes and Appendices” that “Detail of gesture, landscape, costume, air, action, mystery, and incident [owe much to] the writings of William Faulkner” (397). Agee’s language certainly bears Faulknerian traces. Evans takes pictures, we are told, “in the high glittering dusty Sunday late morning heat of sunlight” (23), a description that recalls the “long still hot weary dead September afternoon” that opens *Absalom, Absalom!* (Faulkner 3). *Praise* takes a delight in Faulknerian paradox and metaphor: fields are “of earth denatured” (130); the South wears “the trapped frail flowers of its guardian of faces” (7). The most important of Agee’s literary debts, however, is to *King Lear*, a work that obsessed Agee throughout his career. Shakespeare is the only writer in the list I quoted above—“surrealism, photography, photographer, documentary, work, van gogh, picasso, shakespeare, critic”—and it is no accident that he is sandwiched between “work” and “critic.” Agee’s description of himself and Evans as two spies in the opening to *Praise* is surely based on Lear’s enigmatic suggestion to Cordelia that the two of them make a home for themselves in prison “As if we were God’s spies.”¹³ Indeed, the first words that appear in *Praise* are from *Lear*:

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe’er you are
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your loop’d and window’d raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? (xii)

Besieged by the elements on the heath, Lear's all-consuming self-pity finally turns outward, allowing him to see the suffering of others for the first time. Lear moves from a vivid description of actual homelessness to a series of metaphors of the human body as a dilapidated home that also allude to the idea of metaphor as a "borrowed dwelling." The self-consciousness of Lear's image licenses the reader of *Praise* to read Lear's speech as a reflection on both the content of Agee's text—the gathering storm engendered by social injustice—and its form, his digressions, countless new beginnings, and generic instability exemplifying Lear's "loop'd and window'd raggedness."¹⁴ This raggedness is a sign of the gulf between the literalness of the tenants' suffering—"the literal symmetry of the literal disease of which they were so literally a part" (202)—and the form in which that suffering can be conveyed.

Agee reprises this theme in a poem of his own composition describing the moment when Edgar fools his blind father Gloucester into thinking that he has survived a fall from a great height. Edgar's deception of his father can obviously be taken as a model for Agee's relationship to the reader. The reader is presumed to be as blind to the tenants' suffering as Gloucester is to Edgar's identity, and Agee will make us see just as Edgar confers vision upon his father. The analogy is more intricate than this, however. For just as Edgar's vision is obscured by his tears, so Gloucester's is only "part wakened" (4) in the sense that he can only see metaphorically. The poem suggests the limitations of Agee's faith in his ability to make the reader see, but also his sense that language rather than vision is what is needed. As Agee put it in his introduction to *A Way of Seeing*, though the camera might be "unique in its power to develop and to delight our ability to see . . . we are all so deeply caught in the tyranny of words, even where words are not needed, that they have sometimes to be used as keys to unlock their own handcuffs."¹⁵ The way that language can escape its own fetters is by insisting on its arbitrariness. As Richards notes in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*: "The view that meanings belong to words in their own right . . . [is] a branch of sorcery, a relic of the magical theory of names" (71). It is this thinking that leads Agee to insist that "the cleansing and rectification of language, the breakdown of the identification of word and object, is very important" (*Praise*, 209). Doing so allows the reader to see the world

for what it is: “a fabric of conventions” (41) in Richards’s words, since it is composed out of nothing more than “recurrent likenesses of behavior” (36).

The text’s commitment to debunking “the identification of word and object” led Lionel Trilling, in his well-known 1942 review, to declare *Praise* “an inevitable failure, for failure alone can express the inexpressibleness of his [Agee’s] matter.”¹⁶ To refuse to engage with the formal complexity of *Praise*, according to Trilling, was to refuse to engage with the tenants themselves. For all that Agee assures his readers that *Praise* is “a book only by necessity. More seriously, it is an effort in human actuality” (xi), critics have typically followed Trilling in reading *Praise* as a demonstration of a book’s failure to be part of “human actuality.”¹⁷ For some critics, such as Susan Hegeman, Agee’s celebration of his own failure renders *Praise* “contradictory and frustrating,” in that it seems to signal the impossibility of the documentary form.¹⁸ Other critics, however, champion Agee’s recognition of his own failure. For T. V. Reed, Agee’s account of the failure of words to be things offers “a detailed political allegory about the relations between those of us with the power to represent others and those we claim to represent.”¹⁹ The text’s incessant exposure of its own techniques allows it to register the gap between the tenants’ and the readers’ lives. For Jeanne Follansbee Quinn, meanwhile, this gap represents “the shared experience of failure.”²⁰ The text embraces failure so as to prevent the reader’s sympathy for the plight of the tenants from degenerating into identification, which, Quinn contends, Agee saw as the primary crime committed by Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White’s 1937 photo-text of the South, *You Have Seen Their Faces*. Agee’s achievement, as Quinn sees it, was to discover “an alternative rhetoric that could confound sentimental identification by representing the sharecroppers as *both* human like us *and* utterly different from us.”²¹

Like Reed and Quinn I read *Praise* as a kind of demonstration of the necessary failure of representation. Where I differ from critical tradition, however, is in regarding Agee’s declarations of photography’s superiority with the same skepticism as Agee himself regarded representation. The author of *Praise* is adamant that the representation of suffering has very little to do with either the experience or the amelioration of suffering; the problem with the camera, as close attention to the bewildering complexity

of *Praise* helps us to see, is that the precision, immediacy, and irrefutability of the photograph—what Roland Barthes identifies as the “having been there” of the photographed subject—tempts the viewer into thinking that seeing suffering represented is somehow the same as doing something about it.²² In this sense Morse is right: *Praise* is as much about metaphors as it is about the tenant families. He is wrong, however, to suggest that this is because Agee is more interested in his metaphors than in his subjects. Rather, Agee’s point is that our only access to these tenants is through representation, and that language’s power is that it—unlike the photographic image, in which, in Barthes’s words “nothing can be refused or transformed”—allows the reader to understand that this is ultimately no access at all.²³

The difference between language and photography is that writing can reflect on its own failures, while the camera must be necessarily blind to them. Agee’s interest in demonstrating this point explains, I think, the text’s bewilderingly contradictory attitude toward the task of describing the lives of the tenant families. The Preface to *Praise* assures the reader of Agee’s intention “that this record and analysis be exhaustive, with no detail, no matter how trivial it may seem, left untouched” (x). Later in the text, however, Agee declares that “‘Description’ is a word to suspect” (210). Since “Words cannot embody; they can only describe” the writer is left with the task of having to “continually bring words as near as he can to an illusion of embodiment” (210). Here again Agee seems to be following Richards’s mandate. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* declares that “Words cannot and should not attempt to ‘hand over’ sensations bodily” since “they have much more important things to do” (130). What these important things are in *Praise* has to do with what Agee means by “illusion.” For what is indicated by the text’s compendium of representational forms—a brief survey of which would include stream-of-consciousness narrative, poetry, drama, direct address, and finally, a long list of nouns—is not the belief that representation and experience can be made identical, since this would suggest that there is no essential difference between all these various representational forms, but an investment in the experience of representation itself. We might call this the embodiment of illusion rather than the illusion of embodiment.

This investment in experiencing representation *as* representation accounts for why Agee counsels his reader to

Get a radio or phonograph capable of the most extreme loudness possible, and sit down to listen to a performance of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony or of Schubert's C-Major Symphony. But I don't mean just sit down and listen. I mean this: Turn it on as loud as you can get it. Then get down on the floor and jam your ear as close into the loudspeaker as you can get it and stay there, breathing as lightly as possible, and not moving. . . . Concentrate everything you can into your hearing and into your body. You won't hear it nicely. If it hurts you, be glad of it. As near as you will ever get, you are inside the music; not only inside it, you are it; your body is no longer your shape and substance, it is the shape and substance of the music. (16)

This well-known passage offers itself as yet another model for how to read *Praise*. But what is being described here is not the achievement of being inside another's head, but of being inside representation; the listener's body might be one with the music, but that does not mean that the music is one with the world it depicts—the experience Agee describes is only possible, after all, with recorded music. The key to understanding what Agee believes such an experience has to teach the listener is in a term he makes repeated use of throughout *Praise*: performance. According to Agee, great art solves human and spiritual problems “in every performance” (204), since art is re-created anew each time it is performed—but also every time that it is read. *Praise* thus wants to be treated neither as material object nor as historical record, but as an event in time, as a performance shaped by the interaction between writer and reader; as one of the frontispieces baldly states, “Performance, in which the whole fate and terror rests.”²⁴

Performance is what allows art to be “both nearer the truth and farther from it than those things which, like science and scientific art, merely describe” (210). Photography is closer, by this definition, to science than to art, since for Agee the camera, when “handled clearly and literally in its own terms”—that is, as near to objectively as possible—“is, like the phonograph record and like scientific instruments and unlike any other leverage of art, incapable of recording anything but absolute, dry truth” (206). The

difference between the phonograph and the photograph is that the former can be experienced as a performance. Agee's point, even if it is made somewhat obscurely, is that the self-reflective and highly repetitive form of *Praise* offers the "one way of telling the kind of truth I am here most interested to tell" (219):

[Since] a falsehood is entirely true to those derangements which produced it and which made it impossible that it should emerge in truth . . . an examination of it may reveal more of the true "truth" than any direct attempt upon the "true" "truth" itself. (203)

It is this possibility of falsehood that grants language the freedom "to do or to tell anything within human conceit. That is more than can be said of the instruments of any other art" (208). Because the kind of experience Agee undergoes in Alabama is transformative in every sense, it results in a kind of derangement: of consciousness, of perception, and thus, inevitably, of language. And because fiction is a kind of derangement of the truth, it is better suited to capturing this experience, paradoxically, than those instruments that simply record "absolute, dry truth."

Not only is fiction rather than truth better suited to Agee's ends, truth itself can *become* fictional in the attempt to describe with the kind of exhaustiveness promised in the preface to *Praise*:

Trying, let us say, to represent, to reproduce, a certain city street, under the conviction that nothing is as important, as sublime, as truly poetic about that street in its flotation upon time and space as the street itself. Your medium, unfortunately, is not a still or moving camera, but words. You abjure all metaphor, symbol, selection and above all, of course, all temptation to invent, as obstructive, false, artistic. As nearly as possible in words (which, even by grace of genius, would not be very near) you try to give the street *in its own terms*. . . . You hold then strictly to materials, forms, colors, bulks, textures, space relations, shapes of light and shade, peculiarities, specializations, of architecture and of lettering, noises of motors and brakes and shoes, odors of exhausts: all this gathers time and weightiness which the street does not of itself have: it sags with this length and weight: and what have you in the

end but a somewhat overblown passage from a naturalistic novel; which in important ways is the opposite pole from your intentions, from what you have seen, from the fact itself. (208)

According to Susan Stewart, “To describe more than is socially adequate or to describe in a way which interrupts the everyday hierarchical organization of detail is to increase not realism but *the unreal effect of the real*.”²⁵ For Agee, however, the problem with exhaustive description is not that it makes visible the unreal effect of the real, but that the more it approximates the real the more unreal it becomes. Exhaustive description accrues “time and weightiness which the street does not of itself have,” the time it takes to note all the “materials, forms, colors” of the street. There is also, of course, the time that elapses between writing and reading—in the case of *Praise*, for example, more than four years elapsed between Agee’s trip to Alabama and the text’s publication—not to mention the time it takes to read the passage itself. Agee’s task, then, is to find a form of representation that will not sag under the weight of these multiple temporalities. The name for this form is performance. Unlike in the theater or the auditorium, however, where the audience and the actors inhabit the same time, the text can never achieve simultaneity with either its subject or its reader. This forces Agee to focus on the act of recording itself, to identify where the tenant families are at the moment he is documenting their lives so as to insist on the gap both between their existence and his and, more importantly still, between them and the reader. As he notes, “problems of recording . . . are an organic part of the experience” (215).

Agee’s insistence on recording his own acts of recording suggest that *Praise* is less an approximation of the camera eye than a reflection upon that eye. This explains the text’s preoccupation with light—a trunk is described as “a box of tamed sunlight” (140), objects blink in a “new and uneasy” (139) light—and indeed its fondness for photographic metaphors: the Gudger house is a series of “dark and shuttered rooms” (164) penetrated by sunlight that “is restricted, fragile and chemical like that of a flash bulb” (168); a child is described as a “photographic plate, receiving” (64); rooms emerge out of darkness “like a print in a tank” (78). There is something strangely tautological about a vision that has supposedly modeled

itself after the camera representing objects, people, and buildings as if they were themselves photographic. The reason for this is that the camera determines the world Agee depicts in *Praise* to the extent that every person and place in it can be described as operating photographically; as Siegfried Kracauer memorably put it in 1927, “the world itself has taken on a ‘photographic face.’” According to Kracauer, the modern media aims at “the complete reproduction of the world accessible to the photographic apparatus.” Ironically, however, the very popularity of the photo magazines of the period—*Life*, *Look*, *Click*, *Focus*, *Foto*, *Photo*, *Picture*, *See*—led to a diminishment rather than an increase in vision. “In the illustrated magazines,” Kracauer grandly declared, “people see the very world that the illustrated magazines prevent them from perceiving.”²⁶ This was particularly true of the world of the sharecropper. William Stott notes that so much had been written and filmed about the sharecropper that by 1937 when the appropriately named *You Have Seen Their Faces* appeared “the problem it treated was known to virtually everyone who read the book.”²⁷

What Agee finds compelling about the lives of the poor, Stott suggests, is “the *visibility* of their lives.”²⁸ Agee depicts a world in which the tenants are exposed to both the eye of the sun “enormous in the unsteady sky, fastened above them in all they do like the eyes of an overseer” (289) and the eye of the camera; hence upon the Gudger house it is as if “the whole of heaven is drawn into one lens; and the house itself, in each of its objects, it, too, is one lens” (120). The Gudger house can be photographic subject and instrument all at once because the tenants inhabit a world we already know, a world whose faces we have already seen. This world is a product of the camera, “the central instrument of our time.” It is a world viewed according to a pre-existing visual script, the contours of which are clearly laid out by Margaret Bourke-White in her account of how she and Erskine Caldwell came to choose the subjects of the images offered in *You Have Seen Their Faces*:

Flash bulbs provide the best means I know, under poor light conditions, of letting your subject talk away until just that expression which you wish to capture crosses their face. . . . It might be an hour before their faces or gestures gave us what we were trying to express, but the instant it occurred the scene was imprisoned on a sheet of film before they knew what had happened.²⁹

Unable to choose the way in which they appear before the camera, these subjects are also unable to choose how they are identified, being captioned with made-up quotes—"It ain't hardly worth the trouble to go on living"³⁰—rather than with their actual names. Practices such as these lead Agee to accuse the camera of having "spread so nearly universal a corruption of sight that I know of less than a dozen alive whose eyes I can trust even so much as my own" (9). He returns to this charge in his introduction to *A Way of Seeing*:

It is probably well on the conservative side to estimate that during the past ten to fifteen years the camera has destroyed a thousand pairs of eyes, corrupted ten thousand, and seriously deceived a hundred thousand, for every one pair that it has opened, and taught.³¹

Opening eyes cannot be a matter of imitating the camera, since it is photography that is responsible for having robbed the world of vision in the first place. Hence Agee chooses to indicate the extent of our metaphorical blindness—as in his poem about Edgar and Gloucester—through metaphors of blindness, all of which involve an act of self-blinding through looking at the technology that allows one to see. This accounts for Agee's otherwise puzzling attention to the way in which "surrounding objects are masked by looking into a light" (37). In one of the few childhood memories recounted in *Praise*, Agee describes standing in a springhouse of plain wooden boards, "the place . . . shut behind me, but slit through with daylight, but the lighting comes as from a submerged lamp, that is, from the floor of the spring" (347). Significantly, Agee focuses not on what this accidental camera obscura allows him to see but on the light streaming in from underneath him. The memory is perhaps triggered by the act of writing. Agee composes *Praise*, he tells us, late at night by the light of a coal-oil lamp in the shuttered dark room of the tenant house in which he is staying: "with my right hand I am from time to time writing, with a soft pencil, into a school-child's composition book; but just now, I am entirely focused on the lamp, and light" (44). Obviously, at the moment he is writing he is writing, not looking at the lamp.³² If we read the image metaphorically rather than literally, however, what it suggests is that this is a text profoundly concerned

with the blindness that comes from looking at what Agee describes as “the cruel radiance of what is” (II).

Agee’s conceit that composition takes place at the same moment as looking at the light by which he composes introduces a peculiar time lag into the act of composition itself, allowing him to disavow writing as he writes. This is an example, I think, of words being “used as keys to unlock their own handcuffs.” The moment should counsel us to be skeptical of Agee’s tendency to decry the belatedness of writing, the necessary time lag between word and act. He happily admits to envying the instantaneity of photography, regretting the fact that *Praise* cannot be written “all in one sentence” but must instead take shape “only one word at a time” (III). Yet Agee chooses to foreground the fact that the text is written at different moments through his accumulation of false starts, scattering of colons, and series of open parenthesis. The price the photograph pays for instantaneity is not being able to show more than one moment in time. A sequential form such as writing, however, though it sacrifices immediacy, can explore different temporal moments. Agee makes full use of writing’s ability to place different temporal moments side by side by reversing, repeating, and reproducing events from page to page. Explaining his decision to narrate Emma Gudger’s departure from her family home before he describes the night before she leaves—“But as yet this has not happened, and now she sleeps, here in this next room” (62)—Agee tells his reader “you mustn’t be puzzled by this, I’m writing in a continuum” (62). What Agee means by a continuum is that any one moment of *Praise* is related to every other:

let me hope the whole of that landscape we shall essay to travel in is visible and may be known as there all at once: let this be borne in mind, in order that, when we descend among its windings and blockades, into examination of slender particulars, this its wholeness and simultaneous living map may not be neglected, however lost the breadth of the country may be in the winding walk of each sentence. (98)

Language, like the landscape it describes, allows both writer and reader to move backward and forward from event, to narrative moment, to the time of reading. Agee’s metaphor extends Richards’s contextual theory of

meaning, by which words mean through calling up a “combination of general aspects” (93) outside the text, to every possible combination of words within the text itself.

Agee’s strategy of shuttling between different temporal moments is mirrored in his description of the words he chooses to describe these moments. During his moving account of finding shelter at the Gudger’s near the end of *Praise*, Agee remarks that in the room in which he is to sleep

The furniture stood . . . sober and naked to me in the solemn light, and seemed as might the furnishing of a box-car, a barn. This barn and box-car resemblance I use, it occurred to me then and since, as an indication of the bone-like plainness and as if fragility of the place; but I would not mislead or miscolor; this was a room of a human house, of a sort stood by hundreds of thousands in the whole of a country; the sheltering and home of the love, hope, ruin, of the living of all of a family, and all the shelter it shall ever know, and since of itself it is so ordinary, so universal, there is no need to name it as a barn, or as a box-car. (370)

Here we see Agee disavowing the process of metaphorical comparison I have placed at the center of *Praise*. Strikingly, however, his loss of faith in resemblance as a means by which to know and to convey the lives of the tenants does not provoke him to rewrite or discard the numerous metaphors he has already used in the course of writing the text. Indeed, he does not even discard the very resemblance that has provoked the crisis he describes. If “there is no need to name” the room barn or box-car, why retain the comparison? We have seen this rhetorical formula before, in Agee’s insistence that “If I could do it, I’d do no writing at all here. It would be photographs.” Statements such as these need to be understood not literally, nor even metaphorically, but instead as demonstrations of language’s ability to contradict itself, made possible by the simple fact that, unlike photography, writing exists in “a continuum.”

What provokes Agee’s renunciation of a resemblance he has just offered between the Gudger’s bedroom and a barn is the fact that the room “is so ordinary, so universal.” The question of the tenants’ universality takes us to

the heart of Agee's difficulties in *Praise*. Agee describes the text as "the effort . . . to recognize the stature of a portion of unimagined existence, and to contrive techniques proper to its recording" (x). Yet the fact that this existence is unimagined does not stop Agee from claiming that it is universal. Agee observes that, although he and Evans "found no one family through which the whole of tenantry in that country could be justly represented" (ix), they finally settled on "three representative white tenant families" (x). The tenants are thus both representative and never before represented. The contradictions in Agee's account spring in part from his determination to avoid the method practiced by Caldwell and Bourke-White, who cheerfully insist that the sharecropper is necessarily representative:

When a great many individuals live and work side by side, performing more or less the same tasks, their lives in general conform to a pattern. The uniformity of their lives is all the more noticeable when their education, earnings, and environment are similar.³³

Agee, by contrast, agonizes before such demarcations. Addressing the tenants he declares that "each of you is a creature which has never in all time existed before and which shall never in all time exist again . . . how am I to speak of you as 'tenant' 'farmers,' as representatives of your 'class,' as social integers in a criminal economy" (88). The problem with insisting on the particularity of the tenants, however, is that representation can only proceed by way of general types and categories: "particularities, and matters ordinary and obvious, are exactly themselves beyond designation of words . . . yet in withholdings of specification I could but betray you still worse" (88). Hence what we find in *Praise* is a continual oscillation between the typical and the particular, so that the Gudger house can be described as "the sort of house a tenant family lives in, furnished and decorated as they furnish and decorate" (118) while George Gudger himself is represented as "a human being, a man, not like any other human being so much as he is like himself" (205).³⁴ The most important thing about Gudger is that "he is exactly, down to the last inch and instant, who, what, where, when and why he is" (205); hence Agee notes that "Much of the time I shall want to tell of particulars very simply, in their own terms" (216). Yet as he

immediately admits, “from any set of particulars it is possible and perhaps useful to generalize. In any case I am the sort of person who generalizes” (216).

What is at stake in the question of whether to represent the Gudgers in terms of their typicality or their particularity once again has to do with the relation between writing and photography. The defining feature of photography, according to Barthes, is that it depicts “the absolute Particular,” the real thing, reality in a past state.³⁵ Allan Sekula, however, argues that it was precisely what he calls the “messy contingency” of the photograph—together with the extraordinary proliferation of photographic images in the decades following the invention of the camera—that “transform[ed] the circumstantial and idiosyncratic into the typical and emblematic.”³⁶ In order to make sense of the profusion of images, in other words, the photographic viewer necessarily imposes general categories upon them. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison’s extraordinary essay “The Image of Objectivity” offers a compelling account of the stakes of the process of typification. They identify the prevailing forms taken by the supposedly objective image over the past three centuries—the typical, the ideal, and the characteristic. The typical works through hearkening back to some underlying archetype from which individual phenomena could be derived. The archetype does not, however, transcend experience, being derived from and tested by observation. This is also true even of ideal images, illustrations of perfect rather than actually existing specimens, since these images were seen as having “equivalent ontological warrant to particulars.”³⁷ Ideal images were minutely detailed, being the product of “minute acquaintance with the particular in all its details”; indeed they were seen as providing more detail than actually existing examples, since “no image of a mere particular, no matter how precise, [could] capture the ideal” (91).

These notions were eventually superseded by the characteristic, which locates the typical in an actual individual. The transition from the typical to the particular represents the fact that mid-nineteenth-century science was “considerably more anxious about the subjectivity implicit in judgments of typicality” (96) and thus “images of individuals came to be preferred to those of types” (98). Paradoxically, however, “individual depiction by no means precluded essentialist typologies” (95) since individual variation still

pointed to an underlying type. By the late nineteenth century scientists were beginning to be uncomfortable with the entire notion “that a single representation could stand in for the myriad of variations found in nature” (107). But as the mission of the scientific textbook was precisely to present the typical, atlases began to include

a scatter of individual phenomena that would stake out the range of the normal, leaving it to the reader to accomplish intuitively what the atlas maker no longer dared to do explicitly: to acquire an ability to distinguish at a glance the normal from the pathological, the typical from the anomalous. (117)

Single images were thus little more than “a signpost, announcing that this or that individual anatomical configuration stands in the domain of the normal” (107). The aim was to “evoke a class of patterns in the mind of the reader” (117) transferring the burden of recognition from the image to the viewer. Rather than comparing the image with its object, the modern viewer began to compare one image with another.

This model of comparison is exemplified by *You Have Seen Their Faces*. The reader of Caldwell and Bourke-White has already seen the faces of the subjects pictured both because he or she lives in a world of photographic images—a world that wears a “photographic face”—and because the reader makes sense of that world through comparing one photographic image with another. Being already familiar with “a class of patterns” of the rural poor, the reader of *You Have Seen Their Faces* recognizes the subjects in Bourke-White’s photographs and accepts that the captions offer the kind of things these subjects typically say. In *Praise*, by contrast, Agee questions the entire process of comparison—and, in the process, the role photography plays in constructing how we know the world. He does so partly through using comparison against itself, as it were (his elaborate series of metaphors for metaphor), partly by insisting on the inevitable failure of representation (his insistence on blinding himself by looking at what allows him to see), and partly by expanding the context in which words mean so as to emphasize the temporal discontinuities intrinsic to writing. The clearest example of this final strategy is Agee’s oft-discussed commitment

to repetition. In the section “Work” Agee insists that the endless suffering of the families, the deadening repetition of each working day, demands equally repetitious modes of composition:

I have said this now three times. If I were capable, and I wish I were, I could say it once in such a way that it would be there in its complete awefulness. Yet knowing, too, how it is repeated upon each of them, in every day of their lives, so powerfully, so entirely, that it is simply the natural air they breathe, I wonder whether it could ever be said enough times. (282)

As Quinn sees it, Agee is here trying “to create prose to make readers feel what it’s like to pick cotton.”³⁸ This reading would seem to be in keeping with Agee’s preoccupation with how the tenants’ lives are

to be made so real to you who read of it, that it will stand and stay in you as the deepest and most iron anguish and guilt of your existence that you are what you are, and that she is what she is, and that you cannot for one moment exchange places with her. (283)

Agee’s concern that the lives of the tenants be made real to these readers is not, interestingly enough, a matter of somehow giving those readers the illusion that they are standing in the tenants’ place, but quite the opposite—the realization that “you cannot for one moment exchange places with her.” There is no atoning for the tenants’ suffering, and no sharing of it either. And it is this realization that I think Agee means when he states that what he wants is for the day-to-day drudgery of tenant life to “be there in its complete awefulness.” This is accomplished, that is, not by having his readers feel what it is like to pick cotton, but by having them understand that reading about picking cotton is as far from the experience of actually picking cotton as one experience can possibly be from another. Repetition, in other words, makes the experience of the tenants real precisely by teaching the reader that there can be no way of sharing this experience, no matter how many times it is described.

One way of understanding Agee’s commitment to repetition might be to expand the context in which we read it. To that end I want to contrast

his use of repetition with that of a contemporary writer who also worked long into the night and believed her work was best understood when read aloud: Gertrude Stein. Nothing could seem further from the political indignation of Agee than the political complacency of Stein. Yet despite the gulf between their political views, Agee was an admirer of Stein's work. He had reviewed *Geography and Plays* for the Marxist weekly *The Masses* in 1936, and though his article contains no actual quotes from this notoriously unreadable text, Agee defends it, insisting that "Such work is important whether it frees the Scottsboro boys or not."³⁹ Yet although Agee's fascination with repetition could well be called Steinian, she herself declared that there was no such thing, there is only what she called insistence: "There is only repetition when there are descriptions being given of these things not when the things themselves are actually existing."⁴⁰ Insistence does in fact seem closer to Agee's model than repetition, since what matters to him is not description—which, as we have seen, he distrusted—but actual existence. Stein was equally uncomfortable with description, associating it with what she called successivity, in which there is a "beginning middle and ending." In place of such linearity Stein offered the concept of simultaneity, in which "a thing is not accreted through time but composed instantaneously of its various, interchangeable, equally important parts."⁴¹

Stein's definition of substance is not unlike Rosalind Krauss's definition of photography: "Photography's vaunted capture of a moment in time is the seizure and freezing of presence. It is the image of simultaneity, of the way that everything within a given space at a given moment is present to everything else."⁴² In depicting everything happening at a given moment indiscriminately, the photograph, in Krauss's definition, partly fulfills Stein's call for a representation equal to the variety of the present moment. Through returning to certain formulations, situations, and desires over and over again—a matter of insistence rather than repetition—Stein shows how life is constantly moving, never quite the same. Agee, by contrast, believes things and people are "accreted through time" and that words can bring such moments together in a continuum—in a way that photography cannot. Yet in his use of repetition—or, to use Stein's term, insistence—Agee ends up outlining his own notion of simultaneity, one very different from what either Stein or Krauss means. Near the beginning of the text Agee

urges his reader to “Leave this room and go very quietly down the open hall that divides the house” (67). From here we move “past the bedroom door, and the dog that sleeps outside it, and move on into the open, the back yard, going up hill: between the tool shed and the then house (the garden is on your left), and turn left at the long low shed that passes for a barn” (67). Agee, who uses the second person repeatedly in *Praise* to refer to himself, here uses it to confuse himself and the reader: “You may or may not waken some dogs: if you do, you will hardly help but be frightened” (67). Yet the effect is not to place the reader within the moment, but to emphasize that the reader is *not* there, that there are no dogs.

If words, in Richards’s account, are substitutes for “what is not there,” Agee’s interest is not in how language might bring us closer to these things, but in how it might make us aware of how distant we are from them. At one point in *Praise* Agee reflects on the fact that while the Gudgers sleep people in Europe are getting ready to begin their day, and that “we are so blindfold by local fact that we cannot even imagine this simultaneity” (219). He has already tried to imagine a different form of simultaneity during his secret tour through the Gudger house:

In any house, standing in any one room of it, or standing disembodied in remembrance of it, it is possible, by sufficient quiet and passive concentration, to realize for a little while at a time the simultaneity in existence of all its rooms in their exact structure and mutual relationships in space and all they contain. (161)

The point of this insistence on recording these “mutual relationships,” whether between the near-identical rooms of the Gudger house or the very different lives led in Europe and Alabama, has to do with Agee’s investment in the gap between the lives of the tenants and those of his readers. Agee aims to make the reader experience the horrifying simultaneity of the situation he describes: while Agee writes, the tenants work; while we read, the tenants work. There is no possibility of exchanging places with the tenants, either literally or metaphorically. All that we have, in place of “a piece of the body torn out by the roots,” are words, substitutes for what is not there that serve to remind us that neither are we.

Notes

1. Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 11. Further references in parentheses in the text.

2. In the words of Peter Cosgrove, Agee is a victim of “aesthetic envy” (330). Variations on this theme have been provided by J. A. Ward, who suggests that Agee wished writing could be photography; Jonathan Morse, who contends that Agee’s imagination works as Evans’s camera; Jefferson Hunter and Paula Rabinowitz, who argue that Agee’s prose can be classified as one long caption to Evans’s images; and Carol Shloss, who sees Agee’s prose as a “fictional reenactment of Evans’s photographic techniques” (191). The most recent example is Kaja Silverman, who identifies photography as “an ideal to which he [Agee] aspires” (130). Silverman’s position is in many ways the most interesting in that she reads *Praise* as much as a model for the camera as an imitation of it. She notes that Agee’s work “abounds in passages instantiating the kind of looking he associates with the camera” (130) rendering the text “the prototype from what it purports to imitate” (132).

3. Mark Durden is one of the few critics to challenge the notion that *Praise* unquestioningly favors the camera over the pen, contending that “Agee’s reflexive, engaged, and impassioned writing alerts us to the limits of Evans’s modernism” (29).

4. Agee, *Collected Short Prose*, 153.

5. Morse 311, 312. Morse’s assertion that Agee’s metaphors destroy rather than document the world of the tenant farmers is challenged by Larry Shiner, who claims that Agee’s highly metaphorical passages “achieve a feeling of reality” (170) and Cosgrove, who comes closest to my own position by arguing that Agee attempts “to displace the authority of the photograph by creating a metaphorical relation between writing and the camera” (335).

6. See Lowe’s *Creative Process of James Agee*.

7. Richards 92. Further references in parentheses in the text.

8. Agee, *Letters to Father Flye*, 47, 95.

9. Agee anticipates by forty years Susan Sontag’s famous judgment in *On Photography* that America is “the quintessential Surrealist country” (48) and photography “the only art that is natively surreal” (51).

10. Agee, *Letters to Father Flye*, 86.

11. Levitt xi.

12. As Juan A. Suárez notes in *Pop Modernism*, Agee’s text reads like “a catalog of surrealist raves, particularly because of his intention to use found materials and his awareness of the unconventional, disorienting poetry embedded in them” (249). For more on Agee’s relation to surrealism, see Davis. Michael E. Staub offers a very different account of the peculiar form of the text in *Voices of Persuasion*,

where he contends—very persuasively—that *Praise* “is, in its outlines, a burlesque of [a] government report’s structure” (37).

13. Agee’s 1959 film script of the life of Paul Gauguin, “Noa Noa,” ends with the painter reciting Lear’s lines.

14. Silverman contends that Evans and Agee are concerned “to provide something like a representational abode for those who were without a home of their own” (128).

15. Levitt x.

16. Trilling 101.

17. Agee’s declaration leads Miles Orvell to declare, somewhat feverishly, that the text represents “the limit of the writer’s effort to arrive at a total reproduction of reality, the logical conclusion of the modernist drive to produce ‘Not “realism” but Reality Itself” (272).

18. Hegeman 186. Hegeman echoes Alfred Kazin’s view of *Praise* as the “documentary book to end all documentary books” (178).

19. Reed 157. Reed points out that the fact that Agee’s first encounters with the tenant families form the final narrative of *Praise* deliberately leaves the reader at the beginning of this relationship, reminding us that we have only just begun to know the tenants.

20. Quinn 359.

21. Quinn 339. Quinn notes that *Praise* actually builds to a moment of misidentification, in which Agee is briefly mistaken for a black man by one of the tenants.

22. Barthes 40.

23. Ibid.

24. To that end Agee’s title page offers a list of “Persons and Places” to be encountered in *Praise* that reads like a dramatis personae, a format that prepares us for the text’s repeated theatrical similes: “the dust sunken about like sucked-back smoke of magic,” the air tense like “wide hands armed with cymbals” (348). In *New Deal Modernism* Michael Szalay argues that “Agee embraces an aesthetics of performance [so as to] seem more like a sharecropper than a landowner” (27). Szalay offers a useful account of the importance of the concept of performance to movements as different as pragmatism and Dada, though his reading of the centrality of the term to *Praise* as an indication of Agee’s bad faith—“his [Agee’s] commitment to performance disavows his control of the means of production that sustain him” (27)—strikes me as willfully simplistic.

25. Stewart 26–27 (emphasis original).

26. Kracauer 59, 58.

27. Stott 218.

28. Ibid. 273.

29. Caldwell and Bourke-White 51.

30. Ibid. 185.
31. Levitt v.
32. In his "Foreword" to the 1960 reissue of *Praise Walker Evans* observes that "Night was [Agee's] time. In Alabama he worked I don't know how late. Some parts of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* read as though they were written on the spot at night. Later, in a small house in Frenchtown, New Jersey, the work, I think, was largely night-written. Literally the result shows this; some of the sections read best at night, far in the night" (vi). Evans seems to be saying that readers can tell the difference between texts written during the day and texts written at night, as if language bore the traces of the moment of composition.
33. Caldwell and Bourke-White 28.
34. Quinn succinctly diagrams Agee's oscillation between the general and the particular through the example of the tenants' work-clothes, which though mass-produced eventually take on the exact shape of the person wearing them, a process lovingly detailed by Agee.
35. Barthes 4.
36. Sekula 17, 7.
37. Daston and Galison 91. Further references in parentheses in the text.
38. Quinn 338. This strategy of attempting to reproduce for the reader the time of labor through repeated descriptions of that labor can be traced back to *Walden*: "Consider the intimate and curious acquaintance one makes with various kinds of weeds,—it will bear some iteration in the account, for there was no little iteration in the labor" (Thoreau 451).
39. Agee, "Art for What's Sake," 51.
40. Stein 290.
41. DeKoven 24.
42. Krauss 107.

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Playing Doll

LILIANE WEISSBERG

Bodies that experience violence are simply dolls.

—Christian Jankowski, *Lycan Theorized*

Telling Pictures

In 1957, Dare Wright published her first book, a children's story, *The Lonely Doll*. The book brings together text with photographs Wright had taken, and it had an immediate commercial success. Wright wrote other picture books that followed the life and adventures of the lonely doll, Edith, and published *Holiday for Edith and the Bears* in 1958, *The Doll and the Kitten* in 1960, and *Edith and Mr. Bear* in 1964. Indeed, by 1981 Wright had published nineteen books that could be included in the "Lonely Doll" series or that were similar text-and-photograph children's books.¹

At the time of *The Lonely Doll's* publication, Wright was forty-two years old, unmarried, and had already pursued a career as a model and fashion photographer. She had appeared in 1950 and 1951 sparsely clothed for Maidenform underwear in the advertisement series, "I dreamed I had . . . in my maidenform bra" (Figure 7.1).² She was even featured on the cover of *Cosmopolitan* magazine.³ In the following years, Wright was hired as a photographer for *Good Housekeeping* and other journals. The Maidenform bra advertisement introduced Wright as the prospective "film actress Sally Starr," who dreamed of the big screen, and Wright herself later compared the work on her first book with that on a film script: "You need a story line, a shooting script, and a wardrobe department."⁴ Wright's first book was initially titled "Spring Fever," and it placed her doll, Edith, in the foreground. In creating the book, Wright viewed story writing, picture taking, picture

*I dreamed I had
a screen test in my
maidenform bra*

"Lights! Camera! Action! I never felt so
like a star...and all because my Maidenform
bra plays my best supporting role!
See why Maidenform and I make such
a rare-notice picture? See why Maidenform
is your dream in a cone true!"

Shown: New Jersey Maidenette-Delecty.
Wear it with straps, without straps, with strap,
and halter-fashion - and always decollete.
White rayon sheer and marquisette, 3.00
Send for free style booklet, Maidenform, N.Y. 15
There is a Maiden Form for every type of figure

The advertisement features a central illustration of a woman wearing a large, wide-brimmed hat and a white bra with a dark skirt. She is sitting on a director's chair that has 'SALLY STARR' written on the backrest. She is holding a script in her right hand and has her left hand near her face. Surrounding the central figure are four smaller, identical illustrations of the same woman in various poses: one in the top left corner, one in the top right corner, one on the left side, and one on the bottom right corner. The background is a light, textured grey.

Figure 7.1. Dare Wright,
modeling for Maidenform,
1950-51.

selecting, and the choice of costumes for the doll as equally important, and while these activities were similar to working on a film, it was perhaps a specific kind of film: an already antiquated black-and-white oeuvre. Wright's use of text, too, inspires comparison to the intertitles in silent movies.

From the beginning, Wright's stories tried to create the look of film. She reproduced her images in various formats and placed them creatively on the page. They appeared above, under, and next to the text, and sometimes without any text whatsoever. Photographs seem to disrupt the format of the individual page and at times were spread across a double page. The overall effect was one of movement. Pictures were printed in sequences that seem to set them into motion, and each individual image gained a different meaning and weight from the next. The rhythmic style simulated a variation of time through the succession of images and text, and even independent from the text, the pictures seem to produce a narrative plot on their own (Figure 7.2).

Here, however, a paradox emerges. It was precisely a dearth of movement and an absence of any kind of action that was the starting point for *The Lonely Doll* and Edith's story. The doll finds herself at home alone and feels bored. In this context, however, boredom does not simply stem from a lack of activity. Edith bears a loneliness that seems to lie deeply buried within her and is never quite explained. At the beginning of the story the doll has neither family nor friends, yet we never learn how this situation came to be. She is simply named the "Lonely Doll"; and while the reader gets to know her as "Edith" or simply "Edie," she does not seem to have an owner or—as it is central to a child's perception of the doll—any parents. Thus, she lives alone in a brownstone furnished according to upper-middle-class standards, a one-family home that appears to be located in New York. In a city of apartment buildings, such a domicile is in no way common.

Edie's loneliness is stated but just as suddenly and abruptly ended. Two teddy bears visit her. Initially they are unknown to her, but they are ready to move into her building and become her surrogate family. The larger bear assumes the position of father and is politely named "Mr. Bear." The smaller, "Little Bear," becomes a kind of younger brother who wants to play with the doll and seduces her to undertake adventures. There are no female family members here, and none appear in the other books either. Mr. Bear



"I bet this was a pirate's boat," said Little Bear.
"I bet pirates had lots of boats."

Figure 7.2. Dare Wright, *Holiday for Edith and the Bears* (New York: Doubleday, 1958).

has three male cousins who make an appearance in books like *Edith and Big Bad Bill*. Mr. Bear, Little Bear, and the doll Edith form a group that quickly assumes all qualities of a middle-class family. Mr. Bear spends the days away from home, presumably at work. He establishes house rules, reads the newspaper, spansks the children when necessary, and speaks of his long life experience. He educates the doll and Little Bear, and Edie (Figure 7.3), as the female family member, must also care for the household. These are the well-known roles of a small family in the 1950s, which allow the lives of the three to seem quite familiar to the reader.

But such familiarity circumvents questioning. There is no explanation, for example, of the fact that the doll would live alone in a house or for the absence of people, although the realistically photographed scenes reveal human scale and traces of human work. There is no allusion to the history of the two bears, to where they came from and why they would settle down in the doll's house and try to manage her life. Not only the familiarity of family roles, but also the narrative progression of the pictures communicates a sense of connection and continuity that cover up any logical gaps in the story itself. Dolls, bears, and possibly children are ready for adventure in this world, but the premises for these adventures remain unclear. The photography aligns itself moreover with the curious logic of a dream, where dresses seem large but change in size to fit a doll. Even unlikely events can seem to be obvious and self-evident occurrences.

Already shortly after moving in, Mr. Bear regularly leaves the house for work, although the kind of work or career he pursues remains unknown. As a "father," he must work, but adult work remains unfathomable. With Little Bear at her side, the doll Edie is, however, no longer alone and can pursue her own kind of work: she can play, and they can play together. In *The Lonely Doll*, Little Bear invites the doll to look around in the bedroom or dressing room and try on a grown-up woman's—the mother's?—clothes, jewelry, and makeup, while the adult owner is permanently absent. The doll seats herself before a mirror and dresses up. She tests out the makeup that is lying on the vanity. Edie plays the role of a woman for the seemingly absent eye of a camera—Wright's camera, however, is continually present. And while Edie dresses herself and changes her looks, Little Bear writes in lipstick on the mirror that the absent Mr. Bear is silly. The

sentence is barely written when Little Bear and the doll view in horror the reflection of Mr. Bear, the father figure, in the mirror as he enters the room (Figure 7.4). This moment depicts a peculiar mirror stage. Edie does not only see herself in the mirror as a dressed-up adult other, but upon seeing Mr. Bear's reflection she also instantly returns to seeing herself, the doll, as a little, naughty child.



Figure 7.3. Dare Wright, *The Lonely Doll* (New York: Doubleday, 1957).

Mr. Bear demands that Edie and Little Bear clean up the dressing room immediately, and he spansks them both. As he lays Edie over his knee, she promises him that she really will do anything so as not to be abandoned by the bears. Loneliness seems clearly to be the greater punishment for Edie. With this, the story of the lonely doll ends on a doubly happy note: Edie is no longer lonely (in a sense, the “lonely doll” loses her name), and she



So on went the lipstick! But in the mirror Edith saw
Mr. Bear watching!

Figure 7.4. Dare Wright, *The Lonely Doll*.

receives the promise, even oath, of an enduring happy ending. In future, too, her new family will persist.

Change of Wardrobe

As a young girl, Dare Wright received the doll that would play the main role in her first book as a gift from her mother. It was a Lenci felt doll, made in Italy, and rather expensive; it promised, however, to be rather life-like. Wright named the doll after her mother, Edith Wright. Dare Wright's parents split up after a few years of marriage, and she and her brother were separated after the divorce. She was raised by her mother, while her only brother, Blaine, grew up with their father. Wright had no contact with her father or brother during her childhood and saw her brother again only as a young woman. Wright's relationship to her mother, in contrast, was perpetually close.

Wright and her mother lived for many years in Cleveland, where Edith Wright was, after a difficult beginning, a successful portrait painter. She was commissioned by well-situated families in Cleveland and, along with these private customers, by businessmen and politicians who wanted to decorate their offices and boardrooms with their portraits. In later years, Edith Wright discovered photography and always chose the young and youthful appearing Dare as her preferred object. Indeed, she concentrated on two sets of motifs. The first showed Dare Wright in varying poses modeling clothes that, in part, the daughter had sewn herself and probably even designed for those photographs.⁵ These pictures seem quite theatrical. They are never snapshots; she appears in these pictures in poses similar to those in which she is photographed as a model by others. Dare Wright also appears in some of them in the process of dressing up or applying makeup at her vanity.⁶

The second series of photographs consists of holiday pictures taken on Ocracoke, a small island on the East Coast, on which mother and daughter spent their shared vacations by the sea. When Dare Wright moved to New York to pursue her career in fashion, Ocracoke became a preferred family meeting point, and later on, Wright also visited the island with her brother and friends. Dare Wright's photographs of the island, of windswept houses

and beaches, were published posthumously.⁷ In Edith Wright's pictures taken on Ocracoke, her daughter presents herself as part of the natural landscape, covered in sand and mussels or caught in a fishing net. In most of them, she is featured nude.⁸ It is unclear whether these photographs circulated beyond the boundaries of the intimate relationship between mother and daughter. They seem to have enforced this relationship, however, and reflect Edith Wright's artistic interests.

When Dare Wright decided in the mid-1950s to photograph her doll, Edie, and to create children's books with these images, she also decided to alter her Lenci doll. This was made easy by the doll's felt construction. The doll Edie obtained a new wig, new clothes, and new makeup. For certain shots, Wright also closed the doll's eyes or changed her mouth's expression. With her newly blond hairstyle and new features, Edie looked like a Wright doppelganger. Wright created a new wardrobe for the doll that resembled her own, but she also sewed herself cotton dresses that matched Edie's doll clothes—she was photographed in one of them for the magazine *Good Housekeeping*. The fashion of the fifties, with its wide petticoats and baby-doll dresses, made it possible to erase the boundaries between a young grown woman and a doll. In the decade just past, not only have some of Wright's books been newly published, but also a new Lenci doll has been created using Edie's features—and turning Wright's artisanry into mass reproduction.

It was not only the relationship between Wright and her doll Edie that was significant, nor just the relationship between Wright and her mother. Mother (Edith), daughter (Dare), and doll (Edie) formed a love triangle in which the doll would reflect both mother (by name) and daughter (by looks). Dare Wright became the creator of the new Edie, who, at the same time, became her doppelganger; Wright assumed the position of mother and daughter concurrently. Thus, for example, Wright also began to write letters in the name of her doll and to sign them with "Edie." There is one photograph, moreover, that shows a double portrait painted by Edith Wright of mother, Edith, and daughter, Dare, next to Edith Wright standing with the doll that has been reproduced by Jean Nathan. Edith, Dare, and Edie form a new, unique family in which the object doll assumes a peculiar life.

A Doll Is Being Beaten

The intimate relationship between mother, daughter, and doll hardly appears to be troubled in the so-called reality of their shared life. It bridges even the geographical distance between Cleveland and New York, as mother and daughter cease to live in the same house or city. Jean Nathan's biography of Dare Wright reveals an ambitious mother who fostered her daughter's career as a model, photographer, and writer, who prefers to limit her daughter's private relationships, and who also refuses contact with her son, even when Dare wants to resume her relationship with her brother. Nathan depicts a subtle power dynamic that gives the daughter little room as a grown woman.

Wright, in turn, writes children's books in which any mother is absent and only a brotherly play friend appears along with Mr. Bear, a father figure. Edie, the doll, receives from this father not only directions and life rules, but also occasional punishment that she always accepts and views as deserved. In the absence of a mother, the authority of the father as a sole parent is never questioned. Actually, corporal punishment is always shown as a preparation for a happy end and could be seen as its precondition.

The kind of punishment offered, physical discipline, was considered questionable as a parenting tool even at the time of the publication of Wright's books. It is integrated into the book as a matter of course, and the early readership accepted it without question. Already in the unpublished first version of *The Lonely Doll*, "Spring Fever," Mr. Bear lays Edie over his knee while Little Bear covers his eyes and does not want to watch the punishment. The photograph published in the book shows Mr. Bear and Edie, who is being spanked, in a similar position; here, however, her delicate lace panties are now visible (Figure 7.5). And this scene of corporal punishment is by no means an isolated one. In a later book, *Edith and Mr. Bear*, Edie is again ready to be punished (Figure 7.6); in *The Doll and the Kitten*, Mr. Bear is pictured spanking Edie in an open field (Figure 7.7).

Teddy bear and doll might make the act of being beaten and the fact of physical punishment appear harmless, and the scene seems to tie in with a tradition of animal sculptures in which animals, bears included, are personified. The sculptures by Christophe Fratin (1801–64), for example,

“I may be a silly,” Mr. Bear answered, “but I know when a naughty little girl needs a spanking.”

Little Bear couldn't watch. He was afraid his turn was next.



Figure 7.5. Dare Wright, *The Lonely Doll*.



Figure 7.6. Dare Wright, *Edith and Mr. Bear* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1964).



That didn't seem the right moment!

Figure 7.7. Dare Wright, *The Doll and the Kitten* (New York: Doubleday, 1960).

were popular in the mid-nineteenth century and viewed in Parisian salons; his work shows smoking or reading bears, but also larger bears that slap smaller ones.⁹

For Wright, however, this form of chastisement gains further significance by its repetition. In *Edith and Big Bad Bill*, the theme is varied. In this book, Bill is a bad bear who lives in the forest; he is rumored to be dangerous. Edie and Little Bear look for him despite the warning of Mr. Bear and his three cousins. Bill captures Edie, ties her to a tree, and even gags her. The restraints do not initially appear as punishment for a misdeed, but rather as the arbitrary act of a bad bear. Mr. Bear will reprimand Edie later for having gone with Little Bear alone into the forest and having placed herself and Little Bear in such danger. But Bill sees his action as simple self-defense. For him, the continuously talking and arguing doll had turned into a nuisance and annoyance of which he tried to rid himself. Thus, Bill is an inversion of the lonely doll, he is a bear who prefers to remain alone. Loneliness and manliness seem to go hand in hand.

Once Bill has captured Edie, Little Bear tries to intervene. He tells Bill that all girls are loud, talk a lot, and disrupt conversation and life, but should not be automatically tied up and gagged because of it (Figure 7.8). Restraints and gagging are not simply self-defense, but in this light, they turn into a general punishment for girls. As being a girl appears to be unalterable and cannot and must not be controlled this way—although possibly in other ways—Bill should let Edie go. Little Bear, who declares Bill to be his masculine role model, is able to gain freedom for Edie with his plea. And after her release, Edie is able to turn into a role model herself, this time for female housekeeping. The once disruptive girl makes order and behaves like a helpful housewife who is capable of transforming the hut of a wild bear into a middle-class idyll. Little Bear, whom Bill impressed with his wild, manly ways, observes this civilizing process sorrowfully. Bill in turn welcomes this development; he has now learned that it may be good to have friends. A punishment then is, accordingly, not only the consequence of a misdeed or of a general power struggle. It has gender-specific causes and can serve to control girls or women and assist in defining their social roles. The boundaries between the woman and the child are fluid; Edie the doll is clearly both.

**“Stop that,” ordered the big bear, snatching off his neckerchief.
He gagged Edith with it!**



**Instead of running, Little Bear walked right up to the big bear and said, “You let her go!”
“You’re a mighty small bear to be giving me orders, by thunder,” growled the bear. “Why should I let the noisy little thing go, or you either? You’re a pair of nasty, spying brats.”**

Figure 7.8. Dare Wright, *Edith and Big Bad Bill* (New York: Random House, 1968).

Big Bad Bill uses a rope to restrain Edie, and this rope appears several times in Wright's books. It is not only an instrument to tame Edie, but it is also used by her. While Bill would like to tie up Edie, she attempts to use the rope to tie up others—primarily animals. The rope with which she wants to catch and/or tie them is part of Wright's inventory of props and is used often and repeatedly. In *The Doll and the Kitten*, Edie tries to lure a kitten with a basket and a rope, to rescue and play with it. In *Edith and Midnight* (1978), she wants to capture a wild black horse. In both cases, Edie attempts to integrate that which she has made captive into an already existing household, to control and domesticate an animal. The result of these maneuvers is a confirmation of the middle-class family order within the house, though not necessarily of the forest.

Time and again, a sort of happy end is effected by the use of force and/or punishment. Nevertheless, the repetition of scenes in which the doll Edie is laid on Mr. Bear's knee or gagged by Big Bad Bill did not provoke negative commentary by the books' early readers. Only on the occasion of the reissue of *The Lonely Doll* in 1998 did voices of readers who found Edie's punishment disturbing emerge. And especially after the publication of Nathan's biography in 2004, actual comments appeared on the Web site of book distributors about the books—*The Lonely Doll* was in its tenth hard-cover edition already by then.¹⁰ One reader, Robert P. Beveridge, remarks, for example, that while the doll may not initially provoke any nightmares,

what does get a little odd is the storyline itself, which is tailor-made for years and years of therapy, with parental abandonment, sexual repression, and willful disobedience all wrapped up into a stew that is liable to give any young children it's read to deep-seated issues. But the damage will not be short-term; you don't have to worry about buying this for your kids and them not being able to sleep the next night. (Suicide attempts and alcoholism later on down the road, though, are likely possibilities.)¹¹

“Spanking. Petticoats. Oddly staged photographs. The whole kershmozzle feels remarkably out-of-date but still weird enough that you can't look away,” another reader, E. R. Bird, writes. “It's like watching a train wreck. A beautifully staged, hideously entrancing train wreck.”¹²

Not simply the scenes of violence are problematic for some of the book's readers now, but the doll Edie's reaction to her punishment as well. "After reading it a few times," R. Walton writes, "We half-joked that after being spanked by the father bear, the Lonely Doll practically tells him, 'Do anything you want, just don't leave me!' This bothered us enough that we put the book away and no longer read it to our daughter."¹³ And a reader calling herself "Alice" writes even more explicitly: "[This book] should not be marketed for children, ever, at all."¹⁴

If some of the reviewers and also Nathan, Wright's biographer, refer to possible psychoanalytic explanations for these scenes, this may, indeed, be due to the history of psychoanalysis itself. Already in 1919, Sigmund Freud concerned himself in an essay with the phenomenon of being beaten, although it is not a doll, but a child, who turns out to be object and victim of this punishment. Freud's essay, "A Child Is Being Beaten," is noteworthy for both psychoanalytic theory and Freud's oeuvre as a whole. In contrast to Freud's previous essays, such as the analysis of hysteria in the case of "Dora" or the case study of "Anna O." (written with Josef Breuer), "A Child Is Being Beaten" does not concentrate on a single patient and his or her treatment. Instead, Freud refers to six case studies. Not all of the patients mentioned are women, although four are young girls, as Freud would confirm. With "A Child Is Being Beaten," Freud thus replaces the model of an intensive individual analysis, or an individual case study, with a structural model that derives from the study of several cases. And although Freud includes two male patients in this study, "A Child Is Being Beaten" does not concentrate on the experiences of men. Indeed, it is the rare case of an essay that foregrounds a description of the female psyche.

In his other works, Freud concentrates on the sexual development of men and speculates on the complementary development of women. This is, for example, the case in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, written between 1915 and 1917.¹⁵ There, a rendering of the Oedipus complex with a male child's fear of castration dominates the description of human sexuality. Freud's schema of development in "A Child Is Being Beaten" is somewhat different, however. Here, he not only places female sexual development in contrast to male development, but deals with it on the same level. Freud notices that, like men, women reference a scene of being beaten

in their analyses, and he refers to these reports. Indeed, such scenes seem often described in analysis. In earlier writings he had already questioned the reality of reported seductions in childhood and defined the trauma of such a seduction as that of an imagined event that would turn crucial for the development of hysteria. Now Freud declares the stories of being beaten to be fantasies rather than real events.

The fantasy of being beaten would relate to the Oedipus complex. As the story of having been beaten as a child would be told by many of his female patients, Freud proceeds to differentiate a number of stages in the female development that he puts into a chronological order:

1. The child believes that her brother is being beaten by the father; this means that the father really loves the child or loves the child more than her brother.
2. The father beats the child, a stage that is often repressed by the patient.
3. The child turns into a spectator, and the father becomes a general authority figure. For instance, he turns into a teacher.

Due to his identification with the father within the Oedipus complex, the earlier stages of this fantasy seem to be lacking in a boy.¹⁶

Freud's essay "A Child Is Being Beaten" is a further contribution to his theory of sadomasochism, as developed in essays such as "The Economic Problem of Masochism" of 1924. Freud does not refer to fin-de-siècle Viennese culture in "A Child Is Being Beaten," although corporal punishment in children's rooms or classrooms was deemed acceptable at that time, and often depicted in literature as well. Freud referred to the contemporary Viennese environment earlier, when discussing the seduction theory, especially in the earliest version when he still argued the reality of violence in families to which young girls fell victim. But just as Freud would revise his seduction theory to focus on imagined relationships instead, the child of his 1919 essay becomes a victim or witness of imagined violence only.

And in contrast to the earlier cases of young, seduced women, the female child here no longer stands alone. "A Child Is Being Beaten" was released shortly after the end of World War I. Hysteria was no longer a disease of women, for countless men had returned from the war with shell shock and hysteric symptoms. Freud was also moved by personal experience. Two of

his sons as well as his son-in-law had just returned from the war; his son Martin had spent the last months in an Italian prisoner-of-war camp with Freud not knowing his whereabouts. Freud had also acquired a special patient, the "Wolfman," to whom he would refer in "A Child Is Being Beaten" as well. The Wolfman was a Russian aristocrat who had shown symptoms of hysteria before the war; he would return from Russia impoverished in 1919, to place himself in Freud's care once more. Freud would later dedicate a longer study to the Wolfman's case and discuss his fantasies of being beaten in more detail.¹⁷ One of the female patients Freud refers to in his study seems important to be identified here, however. It is his youngest daughter, Anna, who suffers from the "daydream" of being beaten. This daydream emerged as a problem in her analysis with Freud and obligated her to enter a second analysis. Indeed, it may have been his daughter Anna's case that prompted Freud to discount the scenes of being beaten described by his patients as mere fantasies.

Yet for Freud's daughter Anna, the fantasy of being beaten was more than a record of her analysis. Without doubt, it complicated her relationship to the man who was both her analyst and her father. At the time of her first treatment with Freud, Anna was, moreover, professionally at a loss. She did not know whether she wanted to be a teacher or a psychoanalyst.¹⁸ In the course of her first treatment, she chose the profession of an analyst, turning her treatment into a first step toward certification, her teaching analysis. Her first professional contribution that qualified her as a lay analyst was a lecture that Anna gave in 1922 before the Viennese Psychoanalytic Society. That lecture concentrated on the fantasy of a child being beaten.¹⁹

Because Anna Freud did not have patients of her own yet, she must have had to relate to material from her own analysis to be able to write this paper. This is also what Elisabeth Young-Bruehl notes in her biography of Anna Freud.²⁰ In so doing, Anna actually followed her father's lead as he, too, had used personal material in his *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899/1900), a book that resulted from his self-analysis. In her lecture, Anna was writing as a patient as well as analyst, much as Freud did before her.

Clearly, Anna's lecture was of significance for her as well as her father. In his letter to Max Eitington, Freud notes his nervousness before the professional debut of his daughter, which he would have to attend as the head of

the Psychoanalytic Society. In this letter, Freud compares himself to Brutus, the founder of the Roman Republic, who had to be a judge at a tribunal and also pass judgment on his own son: "Anna returned from Goettingen with a plan for a test lecture in the Society. I will try to arrange for the lecture at tonight's meeting. Then, on Wednesday the 31st of this month, I will feel like Junius Brutus the elder when he had to judge his own son. Perhaps she is going to make a decisive step."²¹ In the context of this reference, not only does Anna become Freud's son—as may be a fit position considering her entrance into the psychoanalytic profession. Freud performs a further dislocation in regard to his own position. Freud wrote M. Junius Brutus, yet alluded to Lucius Junius Brutus, who had to serve as a judge to his own sons and vote against them. He had to sentence them to death.²² In the current scenario, however, it would be Anna who had to take the "decisive step."

Freud's nervousness regarding Anna's scholarly debut is more than understandable. After all, the situation was complex: The father, who had analyzed his daughter, has to appraise a lecture in which the daughter reports on the fantasy of having been beaten by the father. Her lecture and his appraisal, moreover, are necessary for her to become a psychoanalyst—and thus take on her father's professional position. Freud's essay "A Child Is Being Beaten," to which Anna refers in her talk, refers to her as a patient. And it is an essay that would deal, after all, with the role of women as well—even that of the silently present mother. Thus, Martha Freud, absent in most of Freud's or Anna Freud's work, takes an invisible stand here as well, as Freud and his daughter discuss the different development of boys and girls.

Sometimes it seems that life itself produces examples not only for a theory of sadomasochism, but also for its very poetics. In this case, it is produced by Anna Freud herself. While she was undergoing analysis with her father, Anna wrote poetry. One such poem is entitled "Error" ("Irrtum") and Young-Bruehl quotes from it in her biography:

Where we are living, I would be busily
Building a little world for myself,
Made within my own power, in miniature.²³

Dare Wright created exactly such a world “in miniature” for herself and her doll Edie.

A Maladjusted Doll

Walter Benjamin begins his philosophical “Theses on the Philosophy of History” with the story of a chess-playing automaton, a Turkish doll that was ostensibly able to win every game. Behind that contraption, however, a dwarf would hide. The automaton evoked both fascination and horror with every move and simultaneously put the purpose of man into question. The chess-playing Turk was, however, only one instance in a long history of dolls and human replicas. Gabrielle Wittkop-Ménardeau traces their history in her “short cultural history for collectors and lovers of dolls,” and she gives an overview of fashion and anatomical dolls, jointed and children’s dolls, marionettes and automatons. The anatomical doll was no simple doll, but rather a complicated object. The automaton in turn would resemble an animated statue and find a perfect representation in Frankenstein’s monster.

The automaton of the eighteenth century was the apex of innovation, though an uncanny human doppelgänger that produced much anxiety. It seemed to be able to replace human beings. As a type of golem, it could carry out human work—and even intellectual work, like playing chess. But automatons and artificial people with their human forms did not only rival their creators. These creators acted as followers of the mythic Pygmalion in shaping artificial figures that could be brought to life. Many of those were female, such as Olimpia in E. T. A. Hoffmann’s tale “The Sandman” (1817). Because of her female perfection, Olimpia made women appear deficient, or as automatons themselves. Auguste Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s protagonist in his novel *Eve of Tomorrow* (1886) is a similar construction. But unlike Olimpia, she is not the work of a suspect spectacle vendor, magician, or alchemist, but Thomas Edison’s technical invention. And like Hoffmann’s Olimpia, Villiers’s Hadaly is much admired in its perfection and an object of sexual desire.

The doll as automaton puts most clearly Enlightenment concerns into question—primarily that of man’s self-determination. Heinrich von Kleist’s essay “On the Marionette Theater,” for example, can be read as a commentary on Kant’s work. While Kant has called for men to become masters of

their actions, Kleist's marionettes are handled by scarcely visible strings. Children's puppets, too, fall into the category of objects that are expected to gain animation—even if only limited within the setting of child's play. Hoffmann's "Nutcracker and Mouseking" (1816) thus features not only acting mice, but also a personified, animated nutcracker.

The photography of the late nineteenth century did much to domesticate and gentryify female dolls as well as young girls.²⁴ Dolls and girls were made to stand still so that the fixed image could be produced, and it was more often than not produced within a studio setting that followed the fantasy of a bourgeois interior. Yet in the early twentieth century, the Enlightenment fear regarding man's lack of self-determination arises again, and very clearly. Now, not only automatons appear to act as human beings, but also human beings surface who seem to act as automatons. Men have been affected by new forms of labor and by the invention of the production line. The surrealist movement, among others, dealt with this phenomenon extensively. Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, and others created mechanical bridges and artificial figures, while turning photographs and representations of men into mechanical look-a-likes. Charlie Chaplin's film *Modern Times* (1936) deals with this issue. Now, it is no longer the doll that seems the result of some human achievement, such as Frankenstein's monster or the perfect product of a clock master. The human being itself appears as an automaton and as such becomes the ideal figure of the industrial age.

Thus, the boundary between subject and objects is further questioned. Objects desired are reflections of their subjects, but these are mirrored by the objects in turn. Dolls were not simply described, but also constructed: Oskar Schlemmer created artificial-seeming figures via elaborate costumes for his Triadic Ballet; Hannah Höch formed puppet sculptures that were shown at Dada exhibitions. The puppets were copied in turn, the production documented photographically, and the photographs traded as works of art. Thus, László Moholy-Nagy photographed the doll as a found object, but worked light and shadow to give it a life-like presence. Hans Bellmer assembled doll limbs to create imaginary female bodies that were photographed as well. His first collection of doll images goes back to the year 1934. The sequence of photographic images was edited and enhanced by him many times; in 1962 an extensive series of photographs was published

together with an introductory theoretical text and many sketches.²⁵ For Bellmer, the object of artistic expression is not one produced of wood and plaster (largely constructed by his brother). The work of art is actually that of the second transformation into the photographic shot that depicts the technical-mechanical work. Katharina Sykora calls a photograph of such a doll the result of a “Pygmalion process of a second degree.”²⁶ Birgit Käufer writes about a “doubled confusion of perception” through dolls as well as photography.²⁷ Not only the doll appears as a doppelgänger of the human being here; the photographic image causes further simulation.

More than doppelgänger, these dolls as female objects are objects of desires as well, created for a masculine gaze. This is perhaps most poignantly true for Oskar Kokoschka’s creation. Kokoschka had a doll made that was meant to remind him of his former lover Alma Mahler. The end product, however, a life-size fabric and felt structure photographed as well, disappointed him to such a degree that he destroyed it.²⁸ While Kokoschka’s doll was meant to re-create a specific woman and present her as the ideal object, Bellmer’s constructions lack the qualities of specific individuals and are not even anatomically correct. They are anonymous, abstract female body parts and installations. His photographs create an even greater distance from the objects. Each photograph offers the promise of a perfect body and the disappointment of failure to represent it. This failure may be included in the disappointing use of the medium of photography itself. The “suture nature” of photographs underlines the constructedness of the objects depicted.²⁹ A photograph can only show an excerpt of reality, a clip, a particular perspective.

Cindy Sherman’s self-stylizations of the 1980s—her portraits photographed as tableaux vivants, film stills, or riffs on well-known paintings—continue Bellmer’s project from a feminist perspective. In these photographs, the artist stages herself; the woman turns herself quite consciously into a doll. This becomes most obvious in Sherman’s series of photographs entitled *Fitcher’s Bird*, a series that is based on the Grimms’ fairy tales. In these images, Sherman reproduces doll limbs and parts after arranging them into body landscapes.

Dare Wright’s work takes its place in this tradition of doll construction and photographic representations. Indeed, while the reprinting of Dare

Wright's books sparked much discussion about the appropriateness of her text and images as children's literature, it also initiated a new appraisal of her books and photographic work as works of art. The fashion designer Anna Sui confessed to a reporter from the *New York Times* that she had searched for a copy of *The Lonely Doll* for many years. When she finally found a second-hand copy, she instantly called a friend, the photographer Steven Meisel, to let him know about it: "I found [the book], I found *The Lonely Doll!*"³⁰ For Sui, Wright's book was a longed-for, felicitous find and an inspiration for her work. Sherman in turn suggests that Wright's work could be seen as a forerunner for her own artistic production. Regarding the relationship between Dare Wright, her mother Edith, and her doll, Sherman points to a lineage that would also include herself: "In reference to obsession and role-playing, the similarities between our work are uncanny."³¹ Sherman even conceived of a plan to serve as curator for an exhibition that would focus on Wright's work.³²

That Sui, who designs fashion, or Sherman, whose photography concentrates on self-portrayals, would be interested in Wright's work may seem obvious in hindsight. Wright's photographs are carefully composed and detail oriented; they reflect the world of fashion and of film to which Sui and Sherman relate. Nevertheless, there arises a fundamental paradox. Bellmer's doll images play with female objecthood and the male gaze. And aspects of Bellmer's aesthetic can be found in Wright as well, for example, the isolation and loneliness of her doll, the manipulation of positions, the violence done to the female body, the sexual appeal. But Bellmer's dolls insist on the fetish nature of objects that are brought to life in and as works of art. Freud's early understanding of the fetish, as put forth in his essay on "Fetishism," does not allow women to have such a fetish. Which position can Wright's doll then assume for her and for the female viewers and readers?

In his essay on "Fetishism," Freud begins his explanation of the fetish with a description of the different sexual development of man and woman. He describes an imaginary scene that is not much different from that of Wright's lonely doll: the discovery of one's own image in the mirror. But the little boy and the little girl are also able to view each other naked. The little boy believes he recognizes the loss of a penis upon the sight of the girl's

body; he views the girl as “not complete.” The little girl, in turn, sees the boy’s male genitalia and realizes that he owns something that she does not possess. As a result, the boy develops castration anxiety; he is afraid that he, too, may lose his body part. The girl develops penis envy—she desires to own what she does not have. According to Freud, the fetish functions as an object that would be able to counteract man’s fear of castration. It is able to negate female castration: “To put it more plainly: the fetish is a substitute for the woman’s (the mother’s) penis that the little boy once believed in and—for reasons familiar to us—does not want to give it up.”³³ A man who becomes a fetishist wants simultaneously to preserve and give up his perception; he wants to prevent a possible loss by clinging to an object instead:

In the conflict between the weight of the unwelcome perception and the force of his counter-wish, a compromise has been reached, as is only possible under the dominance of the unconscious laws of thought—the primary processes. Yes, in his mind the woman *has* got a penis, in spite of everything; but this penis is no longer the same as it was before. Something else has taken its place, has been appointed its substitute, as it were, and now inherits the interest which was formerly directed to its predecessor.³⁴

The paradox of the castrated yet still phallic woman appears in the fetish. And fetishism, as the neurotic clinging to the fetish, is not only reserved for men, but becomes further evidence for the existence of the castration complex. Like the splitting of the ego, it offers “opposed psychic postures which can exist next to each other, without dialectical relationship among themselves.”³⁵

Freud’s essay on “Fetishism” can thus be viewed as complementary to his essay on “A Child Is Being Beaten.” While Freud would deny women the fetish in the first essay, the fantasy of the beaten child is reserved for them. Bellmer’s doll can assume the role of a fetish for his creator, but the lonely doll is unable to do this for Wright—if she would, indeed, insist on her female position. Wright’s images would give evidence of a desire within the sadomasochistic realm instead. In a peculiar way, Wright’s doll is not only socially maladjusted in regard to a bourgeois, middle-class family structure;

it is also maladjusted within the context of an artistic tradition. That Dare Wright's images can nevertheless show the way from pictures of female subordination to the emancipatory irony of Cindy Sherman's photographs proves the unique path of a set of children's books into the art world of adults. And it creates a commentary on the books' success.

Notes

I would like to thank Melanie Adley for her assistance in preparing this manuscript for print.

1. The following books belong to the "Lonely Doll" series: *The Lonely Doll*, *Edith and Mr. Bear*, *A Gift from the Lonely Doll* (all three of which are available in new editions); also *Holiday for Edith and the Bears*, *The Doll and the Kitten*, *The Lonely Doll Learns a Lesson*, *Edith and Big Bad Bill*, *Edith and Little Bear Lend a Hand*, *Edith and Midnight*, and *Edith and the Duckling*.

2. Nathan 127.

3. *Cosmopolitan* May 1951: title page.

4. Wright, quoted by Nathan 160.

5. Nathan 135–55.

6. This and similar images are included in Nathan.

7. Wright, *Ocracoke in the Fifties*.

8. These images are included in Nathan.

9. See, for example, Payne; compare also Arenski, Daniels, and Daniels 77.

10. See Colman.

11. Robert P. Beveridge, "Paging Dr. Freud," November 15, 2005, <http://www.amazon.com/Lonely-Doll-Dare-Wright/product-reviews/0395899265/>.

12. E. R. Bird, "A doll that other fellows cannot steal," May 3, 2005, <http://www.amazon.com/Lonely-Doll-Dare-Wright/product-reviews/0395899265/>.

13. R. Walton, "A little disturbing," February 3, 2005, <http://www.amazon.com/Lonely-Doll-Dare-Wright/product-reviews/0395899265/>.

14. Alice, "Not For Kids," August 3, 2006, <http://www.amazon.com/Lonely-Doll-Dare-Wright/product-reviews/0395899265/>.

15. See Freud, "The Sexual Life of Human Beings."

16. See Novick and Novick and Mahoney.

17. Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis."

18. See Young-Bruehl.

19. Freud, "Beating Fantasies and Daydreams."

20. Young-Bruehl 104–9.

21. *Ibid.* 108.

22. See Welwei.

23. Young-Bruehl 83.
24. See Wittkop-Ménardeau.
25. Ibid.
26. Sykora 73.
27. Käufer 9.
28. See Gallwitz and Mann.
29. Compare Käufer 38–39.
30. See Colman.
31. This concerns a comment for the advertisement of Nathan's *Secret Life of the Lonely Doll*, which is reproduced on the dustcover of the book.
32. See Colman.
33. Freud, "Fetishism," 152–53.
34. Ibid., 154.
35. Compare Pontalis 14.

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Situating Images

Photography, Writing, and Cinema in
the Work of Guy Debord

TYRUS MILLER

THE QUESTION OF THE IMAGE occupied a central place in the writing, political activity, and cinematic work of the founder of the Situationist International, Guy Debord.¹ In Debord's most influential work, for example, his thesis-like dissection of "the society of the spectacle" in the book and film bearing this name, he virtually translated Marx's "capital" into "image," as the linchpin of a whole set of social relations, structures of feeling, and historical developments. Thus, toward the beginning of Guy Debord's 1967 book *La Société du spectacle* (The society of the spectacle)—a passage also read in voice-over in his 1973 film version—the following proposition is set forth: "The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images" (Debord, *Oeuvres*, 767). Yet precisely because the image plays such a crucial conceptual role for Debord, what an "image" actually is and how it relates to the network of borrowings and inventions, alliances and breaks, practical interventions and theoretical concepts that made up Debord's lifework cannot be taken for granted. From a superficial examination of this work, it might easily be concluded that Debord was simply contradictory or inconsistent, again and again denouncing the spectacle of contemporary capitalism yet just as constantly drawn to the employment, for his theoretical and autobiographical productions alike, of the imagistic ensemble put so deliriously at his disposal by that same spectacle.² And mirroring Debord's own difficult search for a cutting edge between critique and complicity with his material,

readers of his work may grope to find the dialectical pivot or criterion of differentiation between the fallen imagery of the spectacle and those chosen images that may have been, through deliberate diversion or fortuitous escape, redeemed from its glaring shadow.

Was it even possible for Debord to use images to expose the spectacularity of the spectacle, while taking critical and—in light of the heavily autobiographical content of his work—*existential* distance from the spectacle's effective operations? This theoretical problem regarding his oeuvre was also, reflexively, a key practical and compositional problem within it. As in theoretical writings such as *The Society of the Spectacle*, this problem of the status of the image pervades his most manifestly autobiographical works, including his early short film *Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps* (On the passage of a few persons through a rather brief unity of time, 1959), his late film *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (We turn around in the night and are consumed by fire, 1978), and his valedictory books *Panegyrique* (Panegyric) 1 and 2 (1989, 1997). To refer only to the last, we confront the fact that Debord's final major work before his suicide—the second volume of his *Panegyric*—is composed almost exclusively of photographs and related graphics, chronologically arranged, mostly captioned, and interspersed with quotations from literary texts, works of strategy, and other memoirists. It would be too hasty, in my view, to argue that this searing iconoclast and skeptic about the truth-value of the images of the age entrusted, in a second innocence of last days, the memory of his life to images that might signify and communicate its meaning. Nonetheless, with *Panegyric's* gallery of blurry, vague black-and-white photographs before us, seducing us into a desire to see more—or better, to *have already seen* more, back when we were elsewhere and all this was still invisible to us, that we might now take these images as an invitation to remember something whole that took place long ago—we are compelled to conclude that Debord found at least a meaningful pathos in the interrupted gesture toward unity that these images make toward his readers.



THE BEST COMMENTATORS on Debord's life and work, including Vincent Kaufmann, Greil Marcus, and Thomas Levin, have taken as their starting

point his brief, fraught involvement with the Lettrist movement's avant-garde provocations in poetry, experimental cinema, and performative scandal. Centered upon the charismatic personality and thinking of its leading figure, the Romanian émigré Jean-Isidore Isou, the Lettrists constituted a training ground in the politics of scandal and sectarian struggle that would mark the breakaway groups that Debord would soon lead, the Lettrist International and the Situationist International. Isou and his Lettrist followers—including the nineteen-year-old Guy Debord—had a brief blaze of public *succès de scandale* in 1951, with their intrusion of Isou's four-hour experimental film *Traité de Bave et d'Éternité* (Treatise on Spittle and Eternity) upon the Cannes Film Festival audience and judges (among them Jean Cocteau, who was at least persuaded into compliance by Isou's Elvis Presley-like good looks if not by the artistic quality of the young man's film). Isou's film, though in many respects mawkish and otiose, did introduce a wide range of technical experiments that have rightly been seen as a matrix of means used extensively by underground and experimental filmmakers of the 1960s. These include direct intervention into the film stock by scratching and other physical manipulation, destruction or mutilation of the photogram, inversion of images, deframing and defocusing, rapid irrational montage, separation of image and sound track, as well as the incorporation of other avant-garde manifestations such as sound poetry. Of greatest interest for our purposes, however, is the theoretical idea that animates Isou's film practice, the idea of "discrepant cinema": the radical divergence of word and image in the cinema, conceived as an attack on the domination of cinema by photography.

Cinema, Isou argues, should be liberated by word and sound, approaching the freedom of modern poetry. This idea is spelled out at length in the theoretical musings offered by the protagonist and Isou-acted "Daniel" in the voice-over soundtrack of *Treatise on Spittle and Eternity*. The special screening of *Treatise* for journalists at Cannes was in fact a presentation of the sound track alone, since the image track had not yet been finalized; Isou suggests that the film only showed up at the last minute, so that there were questions about whether it even existed or was only a premise for a Lettrist performance of scandal to be staged noisily in the theatrical framework of the film festival (Levin 345–46). In the full version, however, we watch the

Lettrist filmmaker Daniel stroll down the Boulevard Saint-Germain-des-Près while the soundtrack carries the café debate that has continued on following his departure from a Cine-Club. Daniel rhapsodically asserts his ideas about the aesthetics of cinema to a skeptical and increasingly hostile, mocking audience.

Above all, his proclamations center upon the necessity of destroying the connection between word and photographic image in the cinema, which the more conventional cinephiles who surround him take to be an essential characteristic of the medium they love:

We must break that natural association that makes the word the *correspondent of vision*, the *spontaneous commentary engendered by the photo*. I would like to separate the ear from its cinematographic master: *the eye*.

I want to paste on the filmstrip a screaming word unrelated to the scenes on the screen. The unfolding of the images must be made indifferent with respect to the terrible sonorous story that is projected, hurled, into the darkness of the room. The connection must be severed with the succession of images, perhaps coherent in themselves, but in every way incoherent with the topic of the noises. (Isou 16, emphasis original)

The negative aspect of Daniel's cinema aesthetic is concentrated in his aggressive attack on its photographic basis, which he seeks to destroy in a veritable "sadism of the photo" (Isou 20), as Isou colorfully describes the violence the Lettrist carries out on the physical tissue of the film. Yet this negativity, disrupting and dissolving the image, dispelling by the most direct means its physical and phenomenological "transparency," is only a step toward a larger, more violent interaction of the elements of cinema, with the irrational resources of the poetic word taking dominance over other cinematographic means:

In my films, it would be a matter primarily of making the word a *genuinely supplementary dimension* to the photo, as if the sound were added from outside and not born . . . from the internal necessity, from within, from the womb of the image. The sound would no longer come from the screen in order to coincide with the sequence, but perpetually from somewhere else, as

if concretely and visibly, it were a *surplus* unrelated to the organism, a *necktie of spittle tied to an ivory tooth*. As if, endlessly, the image strolled on an invisible field, supernatural and inhuman, from which a voice indifferent to human matters pronounced their oracles! Thus adding the *4th dimension to the photo*, but a *4th dimension of such force as to subordinate* the other three, oppressing them, flattening them, destroying them! (Isou 21, emphasis original)

Evidently, there is a considerable amount of iconoclasm that animates Daniel / Isou in his programmatic pronouncements—and cinematographic exemplifications—of the aesthetics of “divergent cinema.” Yet understood more properly, the image is not simply destroyed by the “sadism of the photo”; its dismembered parts rather enter into a new constellation, at once perverse and utopian, with the word, the letter, and the vocal sound, forming a new artistic complex in which figure and discourse are graphically entangled. The photograph, through its destruction as an image restricted to representational or visual functions, is elevated by Lettrist techniques into an ever-expanding repertoire of picto-ideographic signs, which can combine in unprecedented signifying configurations. Similarly, the relation to the *cinematic* medium and the genre of the narrative fiction film exists purely on the negative side. Beyond the disintegration of existing cinema lies not so much a new cinema as the overcoming of cinema itself in a new supergeneric, supermedial poetics no longer defined by genre- or medium-specific artistic materials.

As presented by Isou, this avant-gardistic overcoming of an artistic form (mimetic or narrative cinema) remains for the most part an *artistic* vision. While Isou had a keen intuitive sense of the transgression of social mores as a performative medium, and hence successfully orchestrated avant-garde scandals to his own ends, these ends nevertheless remained lyrical and aesthetic rather than social in a fuller sense. Accordingly, though replete with aesthetic theorization and at times advanced from a technical point of view, Isou’s aspirations toward a supergeneric artistic language remain relatively impoverished in their reach toward an analysis of that language’s social constraints and contexts.³

In certain key respects, Debord took over from Isou’s Lettrist cinema the formal project of iconoclastically demolishing the restricted image and

reincorporating its elements into a language-like generalized graphic communication embracing text, sound, picture, and drawing. Yet already before he had made his earliest and most orthodox “Lettrist” film work, *Hurlement en faveur de Sade* (Howls for Sade, 1952), he had already begun to displace the accent away from artistic questions toward socially laden questions of rhetorical address and effect. Thus in a statement entitled “Prolegomena to All Future Cinema,” published in the April 1952 issue of the journal *Ion* along with the first screenplay version of his film, he emphasizes the social meaning of his radicalized application of Isou’s techniques:

The chiseling of the photo and the lettrism (given elements) are here envisaged as an expression in themselves of revolt.

The chiseling blocks certain moments of the film that are closed eyes on the excess of disaster. The Lettrist poetry howls for a smashed universe.

The commentary is put in question by:

The censored phrase, where the suppression of the word . . . denounces the forces of repression.

The spelled-out word, rough draft of a more total dislocation. (Debord, *Oeuvres*, 46)

This connection of communicative means and social meaning is even more consciously formulated in a late film such as *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (Figure 8.1). Here Debord, like Isou much earlier, expresses his contempt specifically for the images of which the film is composed and treats them with an attitude of compositional cruelty, which in turn metonymically refers to the photograph of cinema viewers that confronts the spectator of Debord’s film at the outset. The film script describes the opening image thus: “A contemporary movie audience, staring fixedly before themselves, face to face in a perfect counterpart to the spectators, who thus see only themselves on the screen” (Debord, *Oeuvres*, 1334).

By contrast, consider an illustration published in *Internationale Situationniste* in 1960 depicting the situationist group eccentrically framed against a white cinema image, which projects shadows behind them and crops their bodies in surprising ways; individual members of the group look off in every direction, some posing artificially, others regarding each other, still

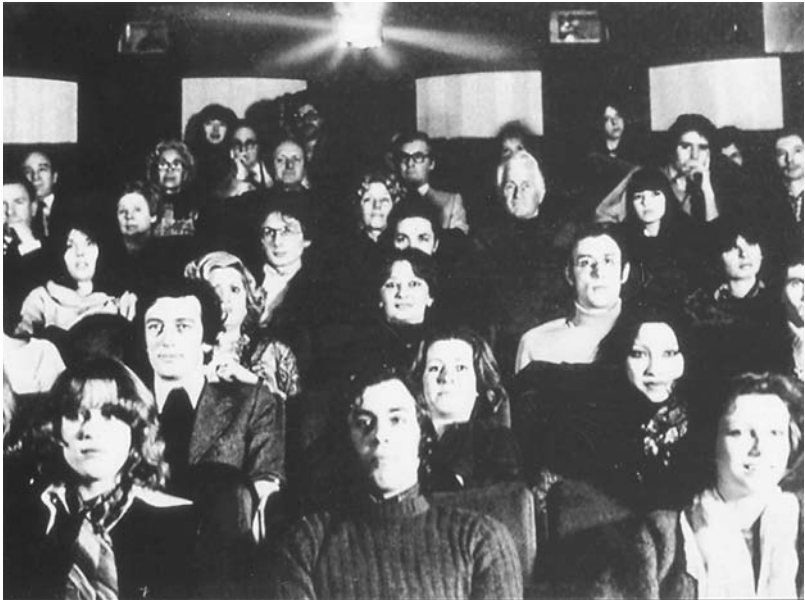


Figure 8.1. From *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (1978).

others with their faces turned, obscuring their features (Figure 8.2). The caption reads: “London, September 1960. The situationists at the cinema.” The white screen, a negative self-citation or signature referring to Debord’s *Howls for Sade*, which had played to great scandal at London’s Institute of Contemporary Arts in May 1957, here opens a postcinematic space of play and performative expression for Debord and his associates.⁴

Some minutes into *In girum imus nocte*, in the voice-over, against scenes from a Zorro film and footage of a World War II troop landing, we hear further explication of the filmmaker’s stance of cruelty toward his artistic materials:

Here is, for example, a film in which I am only stating a few truths over some images that are trivial or false, a film that disdains the image-dust of which it is composed. I do not wish to preserve the language of this outdated art, except perhaps the reverse shot of the only world it has observed and a tracking shot across the fleeting ideas of an age. I pride myself on having made a

actuel d'une propagande de la consommation, la mystification fondamentale de la publicité est d'associer des idées de bonheur à des objets (télévision, ou meubles de jardin, ou automobile, etc.), et d'ailleurs en rompant le lien naturel que ces objets peuvent entretenir avec d'autres, pour leur faire constituer avant tout un milieu matériel d'un « haut standing ». Cette image imposée du bonheur constituant aussi le caractère directement terroriste de la publicité. Cependant, le « bonheur », tel moment heureux, dépend d'une réalité globale qui n'implique pas moins que des personnages en situation : des personnes vivantes et le moment qui est leur éclairage et leur sens (leur marge de possible). Dans la publicité, les objets sont traités comme passionnants, sur le mode passionné

(« comme la vie doit être transformée quand on possède une merveilleuse voiture comme celle-ci »). Mais rien de ce qui serait plus digne d'intérêt ne peut être traité sans mettre en péril le conditionnement d'ensemble : quand la publicité s'occupe d'une passion réelle, il ne s'agit que de la publicité d'un *spectacle*.

L'architecture encore à faire doit s'écarter des préoccupations de beauté spectaculaire de l'ancienne architecture monumentale ; au profit d'organisations topologiques commandant une participation générale. *Nous jouerons sur la topophobie et créerons une topophilie*. Le situationniste considère son environnement et lui-même comme plastiques.

La nouvelle architecture pourra commencer ses premiers exercices



Londres, septembre 1960. Les situationnistes au cinéma.

film out of whatever was at hand; and I find it amusing that people will complain about it who have allowed their entire lives to be dominated by every trifling thing. (Debord, *Oeuvres*, 146)

But as the opening scene and this quote already suggest, the accent for Debord has shifted from Isou's pulverizing of images in pursuit of a specific artistic effect in favor of a socially precise rhetorical expression of critical disdain as a means of provoking resistance from the audience. Likewise, the constraints on the communicative possibilities of the cinema, which for Isou spur him to expand the expressive resources of art, for Debord pose from a particularly apt perspective the problem of the social order in which the existing forms of cinema find their economic and cultural context. Formal and expressive concerns, while not irrelevant, are secondary to this primary object of analysis and practical transformation. Thus, against the image backdrop of a kiss in close-up, the voice-over asserts:

Dramatized anecdotes have been the stones from which the whole edifice of the cinema was constructed. Nothing other than the old characters of the theater is encountered there, though on a more spacious and mobile stage, or of the novel, but with more directly visible costumes and settings. It is a society, not a technology, that has made the cinema like this. It could have been historical analyses, theories, essays, memoirs. It could have been the film I am making at this moment. (Debord, *Oeuvres*, 1348–49)

Debord thus took over the Lettrist project of attacking communicative constraints and expanding the expressive possibilities of artistic languages. But he extends it well beyond the domain of art and literature, into a broader social analysis dwelling on the devitalizing effects of commodity fetishism, the reification of social relations, and capitalist division of labor in everyday life.



RECIPROCALLY, however, even as Debord extended the subjective, lyrical revolt of Isou's Lettrism toward a social critique centered on the constrained, manipulated nature of communication in everyday life, he also

took up the impact of this problem on the life of the individual, on the texture of his experience and the structure of his memory. It is this reflexive aspect of the developing problematic of the spectacle that turns even Debord's most autobiographical works into intimate explorations of the spectacle in other terms. For example, the short film *On the Passage of a Few Persons Through a Rather Brief Unity of Time* (1959) was characterized by Debord as documentary "notes" on the origins of situationism, "notes which, in consequence, evidently contain a reflexion on their own language" (Debord, *Oeuvres*, 488). Within these more personal works, both textual and filmic, photographic images have a special role to play. Throughout his oeuvre, as Vincent Kaufmann and others have emphasized, Debord returns to a few key photographic documents again and again, many of them dating from the 1950s, when the ideas that would constitute "international Lettrism" (Debord's schismatic break from Isou) and situationism were being formed in seemingly endless but in reality fleeting nights of drink, wandering, argument, danger, and youthful intensity. Taking a hint from the evocatively discursive title of Debord's first *court-métrage* *On the Passage of a Few Persons Through a Rather Brief Unity of Time*, we might say that photography is a key means of registering and rendering visible the *passage* of time (photography as trace), a technology for segmenting time into brief *units* (a flash, an instant, an event), and a process that expresses facts *through* time-bound contexts in which they become meaningful (a kind of image-speech, or, taken in an open sense, cinema).

In *On the Passage*, Debord explores all three of these interleaved functions of photography in an extraordinary sequence early in the film. Utilizing a photograph of Debord, the Danish painter Asgar Jorn, Debord's first wife Michelle Bernstein, and another woman (probably Colette Gaillard) somewhat drunkenly disarrayed around a bar table, Debord explores the details of the scene through a series of pans, zooms and pullbacks, and reframings of the same photograph. The photograph appears in its normal scale at the beginning and end of the sequence, showing Debord, with a cigarette in one hand and his arm around Gaillard's shoulder; he appears to be in a pause in the midst of a discourse he has been spinning out (Figure 8.3). While his eyes are turned down in midthought, the woman next to him gazes directly toward the camera, but with an unfocused look of

abstraction indicating the latent presence of embodied affect—drunkenness? boredom? irritation? sleepiness?²⁵ So too, from the left side of the image, Asgar Jorn also looks straight at the camera with eyebrows raised in irony and perhaps a bit confrontationally, with a dissonantly melancholy droop of the mouth. Bernstein, turned away from the camera and captured in profile, appears to be intently concentrated on Debord; she even reciprocates the gesture of his cigarette-holding hand with her own relaxed but raised hand holding a cigarette pointed at him across the table.

This photograph, however, does complex work in the film, through its juxtaposition with music and text, and through the activity of the camera and the montage in its treatment of the document. The latter, in particular, is worthy of further consideration. The photograph of Bernstein, Jorn, Gaillard, and Debord is lingered over for a minute and a half, while the camera scans, takes in close-ups, reframes, zooms, and pulls back; two different voices (Jean Harnois and Guy Debord) offer a voice-over commentary, oddly combining an authoritative tone with an obliquely allusive content. The full text of the voice-over during the exploration of the photograph is as follows:

Here systematic doubt towards all the diversions and works of a society was put in practice, a global critique of its idea of happiness.

These people also scorned the pretense of subjective depth. Nothing interested them except a satisfactory expression of themselves, concretely.

Human beings are not fully conscious of their real lives . . . they proceed tentatively; their acts trail behind them, overcome them with the consequences; at each moment, thus, groups and individuals find themselves faced with outcomes they hadn't intended. (Debord, *Oeuvres*, 470–71)

The voice-over thus accentuates the potential gaps between the photograph as an objectified document of this time and place and the consciousness of the actors depicted in it. Its meaning in the present might not be that which they originally intended or believed, but rather one of those unexpected outcomes. At the same time, this very possibility renders the significance of the photograph problematic for the film camera and the viewer



Figure 8.3.
*From On the
Passage of a
Few Persons
through a
Rather Brief
Unity of Time
(1959).*





of the film in which it appears. A certain negative communication begins to open up, potentially at least, between the viewers of Debord's film and the individuals depicted in the photograph (the filmmaker-author himself, among them). Just as the circle of friends around Debord had put into practice "systematic doubt" toward society's offerings, so too the viewer may be drawn into doubt about the image being presented and explicated as a document.

In addition to this image-voice interaction, music from Handel is heard during the scene, which is credited as being derived from the ballet suite *The Origin of Design*. Interestingly, however, although the title appears plausibly baroque and allegorical, it nonetheless does not appear in the catalog of Handel's own works. Instead, it was the title given an arrangement of Handel pieces into a ballet suite by the English conductor Sir Thomas Beecham, which appeared on a celebrated 1932 recording with the London Philharmonic Orchestra.⁶ Thus, rather than sublimating the photograph through its juxtaposition to courtly music of the eighteenth century, Debord's use of film music instead offers the more precise comparison of the photograph to a second-order product of the culture industry's "high culture" niche, so that the technical media of photography, sound recording, and cinema are discrepantly rhymed in the short film. Moreover, the music's phenomenal qualities allegorically underscore the increasing decrepitude of this cultural market; by the time Debord employed the Beecham recordings as film music, the hisses and crackles of a historic recording had become evident, providing a kind of dialectical counterpoint to the stately melodies. If Beecham's Handelian confection lays claim to recall and record, in music and dance, the "origin of design" (with its implication of graphic marking, drawing), the designer product itself is already showing signs of wear and obsolescence. Nevertheless, it is precisely with its less authorized sounds that the filmmaker's sympathies might secretly lie. The noisy flaws amidst baroque splendor express a kind of underground solidarity with Debord and his friends, harmonizing in their inharmoniousness with the artless contingency of the café snapshot, the drunken disorder of its subjects with the spilled wine, the cigarette butts and matches lying around the ashtray, and the clumsy jarring of the film camera that is evident at one point in the sequence.

Thus through his juxtapositions of the photographic image with both voice-over and music track, Debord makes negativity and dissonance paradoxically function as a communicative channel between viewer and the (technically) registered subject of the image. The complex interaction of sense and the destruction of sense that the film stages becomes a mimetic space, assimilating the viewer's experience of the film to its subject not through manifest representation, but through other more subterranean connotations of medium and material effect. A letter to André Frankin dated January 26, 1960, discussing *On the Passage*, confirms that Debord designedly intended to realize this negative communication, reflexively undermining the film's apparent meaningfulness and the author's capacity to express his autobiographical experience coherently:

You have noticed quite well in the correspondence of the commentary to the image the differences between the first and second parts of *Passage*. . . . My schema was the following: the film begins as an ordinary documentary, technically moderate. It goes gently towards the less clear, towards the deceptive (which would above all be a manifestation of the "ideological" pretense concerning a clear subject) since the text appears increasingly inadequate and emphatically crude with regard to the images. The question is thus: what, then, is the subject of the film? Which is, I believe, a break with the habit of the spectacle, an irritating and disconcerting break. With the appearance of the first blank frame, the film begins to deny itself along all its lines—and thus becomes *more clear*, its author *takes sides against himself*. It is at the same time, explicitly enough, a negative "art film" [*anti-film d'art*] about the unmade artwork of the age, and a description, realist in the end, of a mode of life deprived of coherence and of importance. The form corresponds to the content. (Debord, *Oeuvres*, 489)

When Debord writes that this negative relation to meaning is ultimately "realist" and suggests that through his schema form is led to "correspond" to content, he is not arguing for any simple representational identity or illustrative effect. Rather, Debord's correspondence of form and content implies a nongeneric lettered and post-Lettrist conception of communication, in which the reality to be realistically described appears mostly in the

gaps and intervals, the time of waiting,⁷ between the author and the correspondent addressed.

In the scenario, this scene is introduced along with the following note: "A photograph of two couples, drinking wine at a café table, is studied by the camera in the style of a film about art" (Debord, *Oeuvres*, 470). This "style" of representing the Left Bank café scene is explicitly contrasted to other filmed café scenes appearing shortly after, which, the scenario notes, are identified as "A sequence in the style of cinematographic or televised reportage: café tables in Saint-Germain-des-Près" (Debord, *Oeuvres*, 472). While in certain respects, the camera style in the earlier sequence resembles that of the art cinema developed by the French New Wave and by cinema *auteurs* such as Godard and Antonioni, Debord has another more immediate artistic object of stylistic *détournement* in mind: the art documentary, with its functions of generating, for a popular audience, an attitude of respectful awe about masterpieces of visual art and the creative geniuses that create them. As he noted in a 1964 text, "André Mrugalski [Debord's cameraman for the film] is the *auteur* of the photo filmed in detail in the sequence detourning the 'document of art'" (Debord, *Oeuvres*, 488). The artwork that is being scrutinized by the camera as a document of artistic genius, in the style of an art documentary, is thus a photograph of the nightlife, drinking, friendship, and discussion of the artists. Is Debord thus claiming, à la Marcel Duchamp, that the artist *can't help* making art, even when he just talks (Debord), even when he just stares in silence (Jorn); that even when he just has dinner with friends, even when he tosses another cigarette in the ashtray and spills wine on the oilcloth, it can become a work of art that can stand among the Kandinskys and Mondrians, the Pollocks and Rothkos (as the "snare pictures" of the Fluxus artist Daniel Spoerri, which elevated the utensils, plates, and debris of dinners with friends to the art gallery wall, would assert at just this same moment in which Debord was making his film)? Not exactly: Debord was not particularly interested in the argument that would be so important for the trajectory of the arts in the 1960s onward and that would retrospectively situate Duchamp at the center of the broader history of twentieth-century art.⁸ It was not that the existence of artists necessarily entailed works of art, irrespective of whether their means were traditional fine arts media or singular readymade finds

such as Spoerri's dinner parties. Rather, for Debord, it was the problematic social role of artists as a product of the division of labor that was the object of his critical interrogation. Thus not: Is this which the artist has touched, signed, drunk, loved, or just looked at, also an artwork? But rather: Can there be artists at all in this social world?

In a sequence that follows shortly after the exploration of the café photograph, the voice-over (Debord's voice) thus explicitly asserts not the necessary, even involuntary genesis of the artwork, but rather its socially necessary *absence*:

The era had attained a level of knowledge and technologies that made possible, and increasingly necessary, a *direct* construction of all the aspects of a mentally and materially liberated way of life. The appearance of these superior means of action, though they remained unused because of the delays in the project of abolishing the commodity economy, had already revealed the obsolescence of all aesthetic activity, whose ambitions and powers had both dwindled away. The decay of art and of all the old codes of conduct had formed our sociological background. The ruling class's monopoly on the instruments we needed in order to implement the collective art of our time had left us completely outside the official cultural production, which was devoted to illustrating and repeating the past. An art film on this generation can only be a film about its lack of real creations. (Debord, *Complete Cinematic Works*, 18–19)

This voice-over accompanies two key topics on the image-track. First, images of direct social force and violence: "Violent confrontation between Japanese workers and police. A series of medium-length shots of the same event. The police slowly gain ground." This documentary footage is then followed by the abolition of the image itself: "THE SCREEN BECOMES BLANK WHITE" (Debord, *Complete Cinematic Works*, 18–19). Because the photograph that was earlier given art-film treatment includes not just self-conscious Lettrist-Situationist postartists such as Debord but also the recognized painter Asgar Jorn, Debord is clearly saying something more than that his generation hung out in cafés talking rather than getting into the studio and working. It is rather present-day society's equal consignment

to irrelevance of those who work and those who don't, those who make works of art and those who create nothing, that is the point of Debord's critique. The underlying system of social valuation, which supported the distinction between work and nonwork, is rapidly disintegrating into a battle of raw force that breaks through the desperate attempt of the spectacle to turn even the violent defense of its own existence—"the police slowly gain ground"—into a consumable image.



I HAVE UP TO THIS POINT concentrated especially on Debord's interrogation of the photographic image within a larger multimedial, transgeneric complex called cinema, however much situationist film differs from what conventionally goes by this name. Debord, however, was not only a filmmaker, he was also a prose writer and a composer of hybrid books in which texts played a central role. Even the films, in crucial respects, were extensions of Debord's practice as a writer. Thus, as Thomas Levin has suggested, with the withdrawal of Debord's films from distribution following the murder of his friend and supporter Gérard Lebovici in 1984, the films circulated mostly in the form of scenarios in print; "the study of Debord's antispectacular cinema," Levin writes, "is forced to take recourse to the only available traces, the appropriately nonspectacular *textual* scenarios" (335). The intimate connection between Debord's writings and the voice-over mode of the films, most perfectly realized in his filming of *Society of the Spectacle* (book 1967, film 1973) and *Réfutation de tous les jugements, tant élogieux qu'hostiles, qui ont été jusqu'ici portés sur le film "La Société du spectacle"* (Refutation of all the judgments, pro or con, thus far rendered on the film "The Society of the Spectacle," 1975), as well as the circulation of his films as scenarios, suggests that the boundary between his film and prose was highly permeable. Nevertheless, there are two key autobiographical works where the photographic image functions in an explicitly textual and graphic environment, in the medium and form of the book, rather than in a cinematographic one; it is to these that I turn in conclusion.

The first is Debord's now-celebrated *Mémoires*, which assembled into a collage-narrative an array of passages cut from printed sources, juxtaposed with both graphic and photographic images, and given an "armature"

(*structure portante*) by Asgar Jorn's strokes and drips of paint across the pages. *Mémoires* was published in 1959 in Copenhagen, which makes it contemporaneous with the short film *On the Passage*, and was originally given away, Debord claims, to friends and acquaintances in a spirit of sumptuous potlatch.⁹ Its text, while claiming to represent the author's memory of the period June 1952 until September 1953, the Lettrist days of youth in Saint-Germain-des-Près, filters these highly personal experiences through a preformed language of literary and journalistic texts, literally cut out of their original contexts and diverted from their original function, tone, and meaning.¹⁰

I will only consider in detail one page, which appears in the section dated December 1952. Unlike many of the pages, which are dramatically streaked or blotched by Jorn's paint, this page has a somewhat anthropomorphic or ideogrammic figure in blue occupying the center space of the page and sectioning out the space at its edges to strips of text, an architectural graphic at the bottom right, and a photograph of three people in a café at the top left (Figure 8.4). The uppermost text reads: "The story starts, stops, restarts, never finishes. It has the logic of nightmares or perhaps of those memories of the ill who are going die." Notably, however, this passage was, as Debord revealed in his 1986 identification of the sources of the quotes, cut from a film review: its apparently self-reflexive reference thus equivocates between identifying *Mémoires* as a prose text or a work of cinema. The photograph simply compounds the problem of generic identification. It shows—Debord notes—acquaintances of that time, "P.-J. Berlé, Elaine Derumez, and Jacqueline Harispe." What Debord does not remark in his notes, however, is that the photograph is by the Dutch photographer Ed Van Der Elsken, who published the photograph in 1956 in his cult classic photography book *Love on the Left Bank*. A comparison with the original photograph (Figure 8.5) shows that the photograph in Debord's *Mémoires* has been significantly cropped, limiting its drama and restricting its legibility.

In *Panegyric*, the photograph is once again reproduced (2:100), with a *different* cropping (Figure 8.6). The cropping might be taken to indicate the selective character of memory, marking the difference between the publicly available document that was Van Der Elsken's photograph and the subjective memory of the author who has put his signature on it by cutting



— L'histoire commence, s'arrête, reprend, ne finit pas. Elle a la logique des cauchemars ou peut-être de ces souvenirs des malades qui vont mourir

— Nous avons perdu les meilleures années,
Bientôt, le jeu sera fini pour toujours

et, dans les cas les plus désespérés, sortir par la fenêtre

PASSER LA NUIT

tels sont les faits : chacun est libre de les interpréter

comme le temps des vacances

après la fièvre convulsive de cette vie, il dort bien

Figure 8.4. From *Mémoires* (1959).



Figure 8.5. From Ed Van Der Elsken, *Love on the Left Bank* (1956).



Figure 8.6. From *Panegyric 2* (1997).

more than half of it away. But it also has a further implication: the image is treated materially in the same way as the text in the construction of *Mémoires*. Text and image exchange their signifying qualities, with the written passages highlighting their character as pasted-on, visible *images* of language, while the photographic images appear clipped and cited like the fragments of speech.

Van Der Elsken's book provides a further clue that Debord is building up another of his transgeneric montages, analogous to what he projected in his Lettrist and situationist cinema: the photograph was shot at the Place de l'Odéon. The Odéon, of course, raises the spectre of another art form: the theater, in which the various denizens of Left Bank *bohème* gathered to play their roles. Finally, the etymological basis of Odéon, the classical odeum, suggests the ode lies behind this image; one might say that the low-life drama captured by the photograph is the dregs of a ceremonial poetry in the last stages of its disintegration into Lettrist noise and disorder. This reading is further reinforced by the fact that the passage at the bottom comes from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* ("After life's fitful fever he sleeps well"); the theatrical narration of this photograph is mutilated, mute, "told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

In conclusion, I turn to Debord's last books, *Panegyric 1* and *2*, of which the first volume is a brief prose memoir and the second a chronological presentation (thus resembling the earlier *Mémoires*) of captioned photographs and other graphics, along with selected quotations from literary sources. These short but lucidly composed books would bear much closer analysis than I can do here. I can only suggest how Debord, in a lapidary and classicist style, once again takes up as the formal theme of his remembered life that "mimesis of incoherence"¹¹ he had earlier explored through the self-reflexive, transgeneric idiolect of his films.

In the first section of volume 1, Debord quotes General Gaspar Gourgaud, an aide-de-camp of Napoleon at Waterloo, from Gourgaud's critique of Philippe de Ségur, another figure in Napoleon's Hundred Days return in 1815 and a writer of histories and memoirs. From the outset, with this quotation, Debord thus establishes the themes of strategy, of historical fate, of the exemplary life, and of the potential incoherence of memory; Gourgaud writes of Ségur:

As to his plan, we flatter ourselves we can demonstrate that he has none—that he writes almost at random, mingling facts and bringing them together without connexion or order; confounding the affairs of one epoch with those belonging to another; disdainingly to justify his accusations or eulogies; adopting without examination, and without that critical spirit so necessary to the historian, the false judgments of prejudice, of rivalry or of enmity, and the exaggerations of spite or bad feeling; attributing actions to some, and language to others, incompatible with their stations and characters; never quoting any witness but himself, nor better authority than his own assertions.¹²

The quotation signals from the outset Debord's ironic authorial stance: as he stated in connection with *On the Passage*, he takes sides against himself, which is given a further twist by his Rousseau-like assertion a little later that "In any case, it is easy for me to be sincere" (Debord, *Panegyric*, 1:6). But the irony is not just tonal, but also temporal and metahistorical: Debord quotes a century-and-a-half-old critique of a memoir of Napoleon, while *anticipating* the future reception of his own soon-to-be-published memoirs, which, he suggests, must provoke the same uncomprehending response, the same charges of arbitrariness and incoherence.

In the opening pages of the text, Debord appears to accept these charges in advance, taking them on reflexively as the central problem of writing a life, of organizing memory into a coherent story, in a period in which a precipitous acceleration of history has demolished the exemplary models that allowed continuity within change:

Because of the subject's many difficulties, it has always been rare for someone to set out to give a precise account of what the life he has known actually was. And this will be perhaps even more precious now, in an era when so many things have been changed at the astounding speed of catastrophes, in an era about which one can say that almost every point of reference and comparison has suddenly been swept away, along with the very ground on which the old society was built. (Debord, *Panegyric*, 1:6)

In section III, dedicated to his passion for alcohol, Debord introduces a complementary, but opposite theme of decline that he took up in his theoretical

writings and films as well: the denaturing of the objects of pleasure and taste—such as wine and beer and food—due to the industrial standardization of them as commodities. Here, he suggests a connection between the broad social horizon in which he writes, the generalized society of the spectacle, and the specific relations between memory and photographic images:

The majority of the wines, almost all the spirits, and every one of the beers whose memory I have evoked here have today completely lost their tastes . . . with the progress of industry as well as the disappearance or economic re-education of the social classes that had long remained independent of large industrial production. . . . The bottles, so that they can still be sold, have faithfully retained their labels; this attention to detail gives the assurance that one can photograph them as they used to be—but not drink them. (Debord, *Panegyric*, 1:34)

The labeled bottles, to draw out the logic of the metaphor, relate to the living spirit once imbibed with friends in the fleeting days of his Lettrist youth, the way that photographs, bearing their identifying caption, petrify into mournful masks of the living people and events they record. Both are traces of an entropic process, of a loss of differentiation and meaning.

This observation is an important guide to grasping properly the significance of *Panegyric 2*, in which photographs explicitly take over the discursive and documentary role that prose carried out in the first volume. In his author's note, Debord comments on the value of the images he will present, acknowledging the seeming irony that a legendary iconoclast would so thoroughly deliver his memoirs over to the powers of the image:

The second volume contains a set of iconographical evidence. The reigning deceptions of the time are on the point of making us forget that the truth may also be found in images. An image that has not been deliberately separated from its meaning adds great precision and certainty to knowledge. Until very recently, no one has ever doubted it. I intend, however, to provide a reminder of it now. An authentic illustration sheds light on true discourse, like a subordinate clause which is neither incompatible nor pleonastic. (Debord, *Panegyric*, 2:73–74)

I cannot offer any extended reading of the photographs, their selection and arrangement, and their juxtapositions with quotes and other graphics. But I wish to suggest that Debord's repetition of the café scene from Van Der Elsken's photograph, which, as already mentioned, appeared in Van Der Elsken's own book, Debord's *Mémoires*, and *Panegyric*, each with different framings, represents something like a diachronically telescoped version of the ninety-second scanning of the photography in his *anti-film d'art* *On the Passage*, now spread across thirty years of life and work. Or to put it in the strategic discourse that increasingly became Debord's favored idiom, writing and photography may become cinema by other means—and vice versa. I conclude by reproducing the concluding two pages of *Panegyric 2*, which depicts a subtitled scene from Orson Welles's *Mr. Arkadin*, the cover of *Panegyric 1* (the prose volume), and a quote from Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (Figure 8.7). At this valedictory moment presaging his own suicide (in the

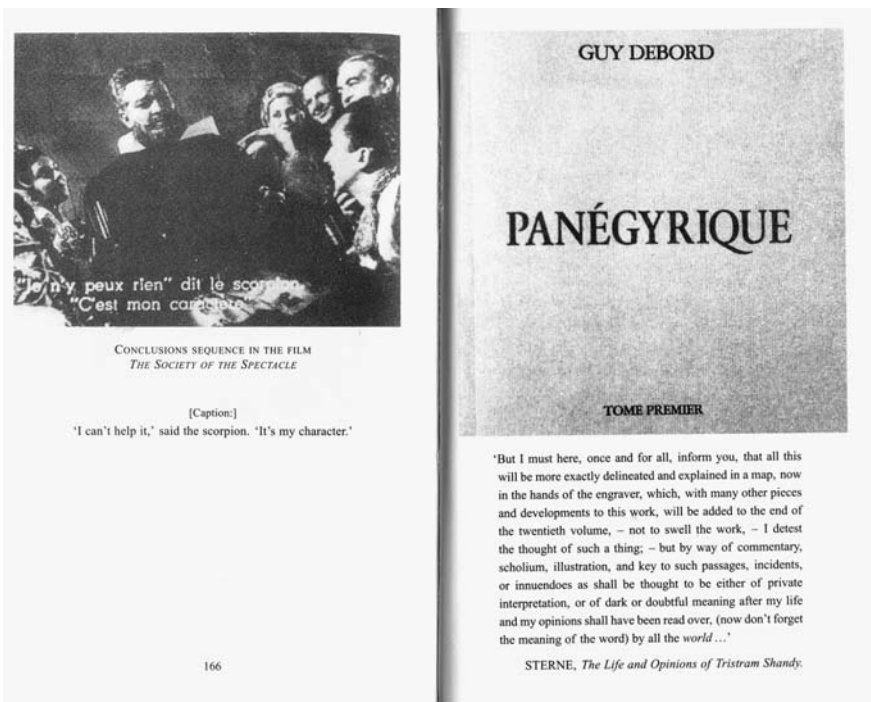


Figure 8.7. From *Panegyric 2*.

story Welles narrates, a scorpion stings the frog carrying him on his back and drowns, because that's his character), Debord once again returns to the multimedial complexes of photographic image, writing, and speech that he had once called cinema.

At the end of Guy Debord's life's work, and at the end of his last major work, the cinema was never more present or more complex than on the pages of a book.

Notes

1. For another consideration of the topic of the image in the Situationist International, with rather different conclusions than mine, see Apostolidès.

2. This is, in essence, the conclusion of Craig Dworkin's tour de force "radical formalist" close reading of Debord's collage collaboration with Asgar Jorn. After suggesting that "one might read the structure of *Fin* as a model for anarchist soviets," Dworkin nevertheless concludes that Debord betrays this radical promise by his capitulation to "the conventional understanding of the page as 'a sort of enclosed space.' . . . The layout of pages even in *Fin de Copenhague* ultimately enacts the very structures Debord critiques" (29–30). As I hope to have demonstrated by the end of this essay, I do not share Dworkin's conclusion. In my view, it follows from excessive credence in the containing force of a given medium—the form of the book—and insufficient emphasis on the centrifugal force of Debord's handling of language and image, which pushes them beyond the boundaries of medium-specific constraints. In this regard, and at least in this instance, Dworkin's embrace of the "formalist" label is neither solely ironic nor inaccurate: in his reading of Debord, he presupposes, as all consistent formalists do, on specifically constraining and facilitating qualities of artistic media, however avant-gardistic the works under his critical gaze might be. I contrast this view with a summary anticipation of my conclusion: that for Debord, the book becomes cinema and the cinema, book. This significant difference of views registered, however, I wish to express my gratitude to Craig Dworkin for inspiring many thoughts in this essay, even if, in some cases, through opposition.

3. In the sense that Apostolidès gives the term, Isou's Lettrism remains rooted in the "field of the imaginary" (Apostolidès 728). Isou remains wedded to the aspects of surrealism that pertain to this hypertrophic expansion of the imaginary. Where I would differ from Apostolidès would be in seeing surrealism's thought as entirely comprehended by these elements. In contrast, I believe that surrealism's theme of the overcoming of the division of labor adumbrates a key element of the situationist *social* critique. Though implicit in many surrealist texts and activities, this theme emerges most articulately in Breton's 1932 book *Communicating Vessels*:

"Surrealism, as many of us had conceived of it for years, should not be considered as extant except in the a priori nonspecialization of its effort. I hope it will be considered as having tried nothing better than to cast a *conduction wire* between the far too distant worlds of waking and sleep, exterior and interior reality, reason and madness, the assurance of knowledge and of love, of life for life and the revolution, and so on" (86).

4. *Internationale Situationniste* 5 (December 1960): 9; in the facsimile edition of *Internationale Situationniste*, 154.

5. Compare the formally somewhat analogous, but affectively quite different photograph reproduced in Debord, *Oeuvres*, 494, showing Debord and Gaillard at a May 1959 exhibition in Paris of Jorn's paintings.

6. "In 1932 Sir Thomas recorded 11 movements from *The Origin of Design*, this being one of his many clever Handel arrangements. It was also the first recording he made with his newly formed LPO which caused such a sensation with its high standard of performance" ("The Beecham Collection," Somm Recordings, <http://www.somm-recordings.com/somm/beechem.php>).

7. Debord was extraordinarily sensitive to the social as well as the individual implications of time. Thus, against the typical emphasis of the 1960s New Left on the present moment, the "abstract will to immediate efficacy," Debord argued that "the critique that can go beyond the spectacle must *know how to wait*" (Debord, *Oeuvres*, 859). Cf. Debord's depiction, in his final book *Panegyric*, of the passion for alcohol that would lead to his terminal illness: "At first, like everyone, I appreciated the effect of mild drunkenness; then very soon I grew to like what lies beyond violent drunkenness, once that stage is past: a terrible and magnificent peace, the true taste of the passage of time" (Debord, *Panegyric*, 1:30–31).

8. On this trajectory and the reasons for Duchamp's central role in it, the work of Thierry de Duve is particularly instructive. See Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism and Kant after Duchamp*.

9. See Debord's 1993 "Attestations" included in the facsimile publication twenty-five years after the original publication of *Mémoires*.

10. For a detailed explication and annotation of *Mémoires*, see Donné.

11. This is Thomas Levin's useful term (360).

12. General Gourgaud, *Napoleon and the Grand Army in Russia; or, A Critical Examination of Count Philippe de Ségur's Work*, quoted in Debord, *Panegyric*, 1:1.

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The Generation of Postmemory

MARIANNE HIRSCH

The guardianship of the Holocaust is being passed on to us. The second generation is the hinge generation in which received, transferred knowledge of events is being transmuted into history, or into myth. It is also the generation in which we can think about certain questions arising from the Shoah with a sense of living connection.

—Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge*

The Postgeneration

The “hinge generation,” the “guardianship of the Holocaust,” the ways in which “received, transferred knowledge of events is being transmuted into history, or into myth” (Hoffman xv)—these, indeed, have been my pre-occupations for the last decade and a half. I have been involved in a series of conversations about how that “sense of living connection” can be, and is being, maintained and perpetuated even as the generation of survivors leaves our midst, and how, at the very same time, it is being eroded. For me, the conversations that have marked what Hoffman calls the “era of memory” (203) have had some of the intellectual excitement and the personal urgency, even some of the sense of community and commonality, of the feminist conversations of the late 1970s and 1980s. And they have been punctured, as well, by similar kinds of controversies, disagreements, and painful divisions. At stake is precisely the guardianship of a traumatic personal and generational past with which some of us have a living connection and that past’s passing into history. At stake is not only a personal/familial/generational sense of ownership and protectiveness, but also an

evolving theoretical discussion about the workings of trauma, memory, and intergenerational acts of transfer, a discussion actively taking place in numerous important contexts outside of Holocaust studies.¹ More urgently and passionately, those of us working on memory and transmission have argued over the ethics and the aesthetics of remembrance in the aftermath of catastrophe. How, in our present, do we regard and recall what Susan Sontag has so powerfully described as the “pain of others”? What do we owe the victims? How can we best carry their stories forward, without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to ourselves, and without, in turn, having our own stories displaced by them? How are we implicated in the crimes? Can the memory of genocide be transformed into action and resistance?

The multiplication of genocides and collective catastrophes at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, and their cumulative effects, have made these questions ever more urgent. The bodily, psychic, and affective impact of trauma and its aftermath, the ways in which one trauma can recall or reactivate the effects of another, exceed the bounds of traditional historical archives and methodologies. Late in his career, for example, Raul Hilberg, after combing through miles of documents and writing his massive 1,300-page book *The Destruction of the European Jews*—and, indeed, after dismissing oral history and testimony for its inaccuracies of fact—deferred to storytelling as a skill historians need to learn if they are to be able to tell the difficult history of the destruction of the Jews (Lang 273). Hilberg is recalling a dichotomy between history and memory (for him, embodied by poetry and narrative) that has had a shaping effect. But, fifty years after Adorno’s contradictory injunctions about poetry after Auschwitz, poetry is now only one of many supplemental genres and institutions of transmission: the now numerous and better-funded testimony projects and oral history archives, the important role assumed by photography and performance, the ever-growing culture of memorials, and the new museology are all testaments to the need for aesthetic and institutional structures that might be able to account for what Diana Taylor calls “the repertoire” of embodied knowledge absent from the historical archive (or perhaps merely neglected by traditional historians). For better or worse, these supplemental genres and institutions have been grouped

under the umbrella term “memory.” But, as Andreas Huyssen has provocatively asked, “What good is the memory archive? How can it deliver what history alone no longer seems to be able to offer?” (6).²

If “memory” as such a capacious analytic term and “memory studies” as a field of inquiry have grown exponentially in academic and popular importance in the last decade and a half, they have, in large part, been fueled by the limit case of the Holocaust and by the work of (and about) what has come to be known as “the second generation,” or “the generation after.” Second-generation writers and artists have been publishing artworks, films, novels, and memoirs, or hybrid “postmemoirs” (as Morris has dubbed them), with titles like “After Such Knowledge,” “The War After,” “Second-Hand Smoke,” “War Story,” “Lessons of Darkness,” “Losing the Dead,” “Dark Lullabies,” “Fifty Years of Silence,” “After,” as well as scholarly essays and collections like “Children of the Holocaust,” “Daughters of the Shoah,” “Shaping Losses,” “Memorial Candles,” “In the Shadow of the Holocaust,” and so on. The particular relation to a parental past described, evoked, and analyzed in these works has come to be seen as a “syndrome” of belatedness or “post-ness,” and has been variously termed “absent memory” (Fine), “inherited memory,” “belated memory,” “prosthetic memory” (Lury, Landsberg), “*mémoire trouée*” (Raczymow), “*mémoire des cendres*” (Fresco), “vicarious witnessing” (Zeitlin), “received history” (Young), and “postmemory.” These terms reveal a number of controversial assumptions: that descendants of survivors (of victims as well as of perpetrators) of massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation’s remembrances of the past that they need to call that connection *memory*, and thus that, in certain extreme circumstances, memory *can* be transmitted to those who were not actually there to live an event. At the same time, this received memory is distinct from the recall of contemporary witnesses and participants. Hence the insistence on “post” or “after” and the many qualifying adjectives that try to define both a specifically inter- and transgenerational act of transfer and the resonant aftereffects of trauma. If this sounds like a contradiction, it is one, and I believe it is inherent to this phenomenon.

Postmemory is the term I came to on the basis of my autobiographical readings of works by second-generation writers and visual artists. The “post” in “postmemory” signals more than a temporal delay and more than

a location in an aftermath. Postmodern, for example, inscribes both a critical distance and profound interrelation with the modern; postcolonial does not mean the end of the colonial but its troubling continuity, though, in contrast, postfeminist *has* been used to mark a sequel to feminism. We certainly are, still, in the era of “posts,” which continue to proliferate: “postsecular,” “posthuman,” “postcolony,” “postwhite.” Postmemory shares the layering of these other “posts,” and their belatedness, aligning itself with the practice of citation and mediation that characterize them, marking a particular end-of-century/turn-of-century moment of looking backward rather than ahead, and of defining the present in relation to a troubled past, rather than initiating new paradigms. Like them, it reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture. And yet postmemory is not a movement, method, or idea; I see it, rather, as a *structure* of inter- and transgenerational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is a *consequence* of traumatic recall but (unlike posttraumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove.

As Hoffman writes: “The paradoxes of indirect knowledge haunt many of us who came after. The formative events of the twentieth century have crucially informed our biographies, threatening sometimes to overshadow and overwhelm our own lives. But we did not see them, suffer through them, experience their impact directly. Our relationship to them has been defined by our very ‘post-ness’ and by the powerful but mediated forms of knowledge that have followed from it” (25). Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth, or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic events that still defy narrative reconstruction and

exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past but their effects continue into the present. This is, I believe, the experience of postmemory and the process of its generation.

I realize that my description of this structure of inter- and transgenerational transmission of trauma raises as many questions as it answers. Why insist on the term “memory” to describe this structure of transmission? Is postmemory limited to the intimate embodied space of the family or can it extend to more distant, adoptive witnesses? Is postmemory limited to victims or does it include bystanders and perpetrators, or could one argue that it complicates the delineations of these positions, which, in Holocaust studies, have come to be taken for granted? What aesthetic and institutional structures, what tropes, best mediate the psychology of postmemory, the connections and discontinuities between generations, the gaps in knowledge that define the aftermath of trauma? And how has photography, in particular, come to play such an important role in this process of mediation?

For me, it was the three photographs intercalated in Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* that first elicited the need for a term that would describe the particular form of belated or inherited memory that I found in Spiegelman’s work (Hirsch, *Family Frames*). Indeed, the phenomenology of photography is a crucial element in my conception of postmemory as it relates to the Holocaust, in particular.³ To be sure, the history of the Holocaust has come down to us, in subsequent generations, through a vast number of photographic images meticulously taken by perpetrators eager to record their actions, and also by bystanders and, often clandestinely, by victims. But it is the technology of photography itself, and the belief in reference it engenders, that connects the Holocaust generation to the generation after. Photography’s promise to offer an access to the event itself, and its easy assumption of iconic and symbolic power, makes it a uniquely powerful medium for the transmission of events that remain unimaginable. And, of course, the photographic meaning of “generation” captures something of the sequencing and the loss of sharpness and focus inherent in postmemory.

As memory studies have become an interdisciplinary, or postdisciplinary, formation par excellence, the site where historians, psychoanalysts,

sociologists, philosophers, ethicists, scholars of religion, artists and art historians, writers and literary scholars can think, work, and argue together, it seems a good moment to scrutinize some basic assumptions. In doing so in this essay, I propose to use the Holocaust as my historical frame of reference, but my analysis relies on, and I believe, is relevant to, numerous other contexts of traumatic transfer that can be understood as postmemory.

In what follows, I will look critically, and from a feminist perspective, at the conjunction of three powerful and prevalent elements of the transgenerational structure of postmemory in the aftermath of the Second World War—memory, family, and photography. I will analyze one trope in particular: the trope of maternal abandonment and the fantasy of maternal recognition that is pervasive in Holocaust remembrance. I use this trope to show how postmemory risks falling back on familiar, and unexamined, cultural images that facilitate its generation by tapping into what Aby Warburg saw as a broad cultural “storehouse of pre-established expressive forms” in what he called the “iconology of the interval,” the “space between thought and the deepest emotional impulses” (Warburg; Didi-Huberman, “Artistic Survival”). For the post-Holocaust generation, these preestablished forms in large part take the shape of photographs—images of murder and atrocity, images of bare survival, and also images of “before,” that signal the deep loss of safety in the world. As preestablished and well-rehearsed forms prevalent in postmemorial writing, art, and display, some of these photographic images illustrate particularly well how gender can become a potent and troubling idiom of remembrance for the postgeneration and suggest one way in which we might theorize the relationship between memory and gender.

Why Memory?

“We who came after do not have memories of the Holocaust,” writes Eva Hoffman, as she describes this “deeply internalized but strangely unknown past” (6). She insists on being precise: “Even from my intimate proximity I could not form ‘memories’ of the Shoah or take my parents’ memories as my own” (6). In his recent book *Fantasies of Witnessing*, Gary Weissman objects specifically to the “memory” in my formulation of postmemory, arguing that “no degree of power or monumentality can transform one person’s

lived memories into another's" (17). Both Weissman and Ernst van Alphen refer back to Helen Epstein's 1979 *Children of the Holocaust* to locate the beginnings of the current use of the notion of memory in the late 1980s and 1990s: in contrast, they indicate, Epstein had described the "children of the Holocaust" as "possessed by a *history* they had never lived" and she did not use the term "second generation," which, van Alphen observes, implies too close a continuity between generations that are, precisely, *separated* by the trauma of the Holocaust. Epstein spoke of the "sons and daughters of survivors." Objecting to the term "memory" from a semiotic perspective, van Alphen firmly asserts that trauma cannot be transmitted between generations: "The normal trajectory of memory is fundamentally indexical," he argues. ". . . There is continuity between the event and its memory. And this continuity has an unambiguous direction: the event is the beginning, the memory is the result. . . . In the case of the children of survivors, the indexical relationship that defines memory has never existed. Their relationship to the past events is based on fundamentally different semiotic principles" (van Alphen, "Second-Generation Testimony," 485–86).

Nothing could be truer or more accurate: of course we do not have *literal* memories of others' experiences, of course different semiotic principles are at work, of course no degree of monumentality can transform one person's lived memories into another's. Postmemory is not identical to memory: it is "post"; but, at the same time, it approximates memory in its affective force. Hoffman describes what was passed down to her thus: "Rather, I took in that first information as a sort of fairy tale deriving not so much from another world as from the center of the cosmos: an enigmatic but real fairy tale. . . . The memories—not memories but emanations—of wartime experiences kept erupting in flashes of imagery; in abrupt but broken refrains" (6, 9). These "not memories" communicated in "flashes of imagery" and "broken refrains," transmitted through the language of the body, are precisely the stuff of *postmemory*.

Jan and Aleida Assmann's work on the transmission of memory clarifies precisely what Hoffman refers to as the "living connection" between proximate generations and thus accounts for the complex lines of transmission encompassed in the inter- and transgenerational umbrella term "memory." Both scholars have devoted themselves to elucidating, systematically,

Maurice Halbwachs's enormously influential notion of *collective* memory. I turn to their work here to elucidate the lines of transmission between individual and collective remembrance and to specify how the break in transmission resulting from traumatic historical events necessitates forms of remembrance that reconnect and reembody an intergenerational memorial fabric that has been severed by catastrophe.

In his book *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, Jan Assmann distinguishes between two kinds of collective remembrance, "communicative" memory and what he calls "cultural" memory.⁴ Communicative memory is "biographical" and "factual" and is located within a generation of contemporaries who witness an event as adults and who can pass on their bodily and affective connection to that event to their descendants. In the normal succession of generations (and the family is a crucial unit of transmission for Jan Assmann), this embodied form of memory is transmitted across three to four generations—across eighty to one hundred years. At the same time, as its direct bearers enter old age, they increasingly wish to institutionalize memory, whether in traditional archives or books, or through ritual, commemoration, or performance. Jan Assmann terms this institutionalized archival memory "kulturelles Gedächtnis."

In her recent elaboration of this typology, Aleida Assmann extends this bimodal distinction into four memory "formats": the first two, individual memory and family/group memory, correspond to Jan Assmann's "communicative" remembrance, while national/political memory and cultural/archival memory form part of his "cultural" memory (A. Assmann). A fundamental assumption driving this schema is, indeed, that "memories are linked between individuals. Once verbalized," she insists, "the individual's memories are fused with the inter-subjective symbolic system of language and are, strictly speaking, no longer a purely exclusive and unalienable property. . . . they can be exchanged, shared, corroborated, confirmed, corrected, disputed—and, last not least, written down" (36). And even individual memory "include[s] much more than we, as individuals, have ourselves experienced" (40). Individuals are part of social groups with shared belief systems that frame memories and shape them into narratives and scenarios. For A. Assmann, the family is a privileged site of memorial transmission. The "group memory" in her schema is based on the familial transfer

of embodied experience to the next generation: it is intergenerational. National/political and cultural/archival memory, in contrast, are not inter- but transgenerational; they are no longer mediated through embodied practice but solely through symbolic systems.

Jan and Aleida Assmann's typological distinctions do not specifically account for the ruptures introduced by collective historical trauma, by war, Holocaust, exile, and refugeehood: these ruptures would certainly inflect their schemas of transmission. Both embodied communicative memory and institutionalized cultural/archival memory would be severely impaired by traumatic experience. Within the space of the family or proximate group, survivors, as Hoffman indicates, express not exactly "memories" but "emanations" in a chaos of emotion. They would be compromised as well by the erasures of records, such as those perpetrated by totalitarian regimes. Under the Nazis, cultural archives were destroyed, records burned, possessions lost, histories suppressed and eradicated.

The structure of postmemory clarifies how the multiple ruptures and radical breaks introduced by trauma and catastrophe inflect intra-, inter-, and transgenerational inheritance. It breaks through and complicates the line the Assmanns draw connecting individual to family to social group to institutionalized historical archive. That archive, in the case of traumatic interruption, exile, and diaspora, has lost its direct link to the past, has forfeited the embodied connections that forge community and society. And yet, the Assmanns' typology explains why and how the postgeneration could and does work to counteract this loss. Postmemorial work, I want to suggest—and this is the central point of my argument in this essay—strives to *reactivate* and *reembody* more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression. Thus less directly affected participants can become engaged in the generation of postmemory that can thus persist even after all participants and even their familial descendants are gone.

It is this presence of embodied experience in the process of transmission that is best described by the notion of memory as opposed to history and best mediated by photographic images. Memory signals an affective link to the past, a sense, precisely, of an embodied living connection. Through

the indexical link that joins the photograph to its subject—what Roland Barthes calls the “umbilical cord” made of light (*Camera Lucida*, 80)—photography, as I will show in more detail below, can appear to solidify the tenuous bonds that are shaped by need, desire, and narrative projection.

The growth of the memory culture may indeed be a symptom of a need for inclusion in a collective membrane forged by a shared inheritance of multiple traumatic histories and the individual and social responsibility we feel toward a persistent and traumatic past—what the French have referred to as “le devoir de mémoire.”

Why the Family?

“But they also spoke,” Eva Hoffman writes, denying that survivors were “wrapped in silence”:

how could they help it?—to their immediate intimates, to spouses and siblings, and, yes, to their children. There they spoke in the language of family—a form of expression that is both more direct and more ruthless than social and public speech. . . . In my home, as in so many others, the past broke through in the sounds of nightmares, the idioms of sighs and illness, of tears and acute aches that were the legacy of the damp attic and of the conditions my parents endured during their hiding. (9, 10)

The language of family, the language of the body: nonverbal and non-cognitive acts of transfer occur most clearly within a familial space, often occurring in the form of symptoms. It is perhaps the descriptions of this symptomatology that have made it appear as though the postgeneration wanted to assert its own victimhood, alongside that of the parents.

To be sure, children of those directly affected by collective trauma inherit a horrific, unknown, and unknowable past that their parents were not meant to survive. Second-generation fiction, art, memoir, and testimony are shaped by the attempt to represent the long-term effects of living in close proximity to the pain, depression, and dissociation of persons who have witnessed and survived massive historical trauma. They are shaped by the child’s confusion and responsibility, by the desire to repair, and by the consciousness that her own existence may well be a form of compensation

for unspeakable loss. Loss of family, home, a feeling of belonging and safety in the world “bleed” from one generation to the next, as Art Spiegelman so aptly put it in his subtitle to *Maus I*, “My father bleeds history.”

And yet, the scholarly and artistic work of these descendants also makes clear that even the most intimate familial knowledge of the past is mediated by broadly available public images and narratives. In this image from the 1972 three-page “The First Maus” (Figure 9.1), for example, the son can only imagine his father’s experience in Auschwitz by way of a widely available photograph by Margaret Bourke-White of liberated prisoners in Buchenwald.

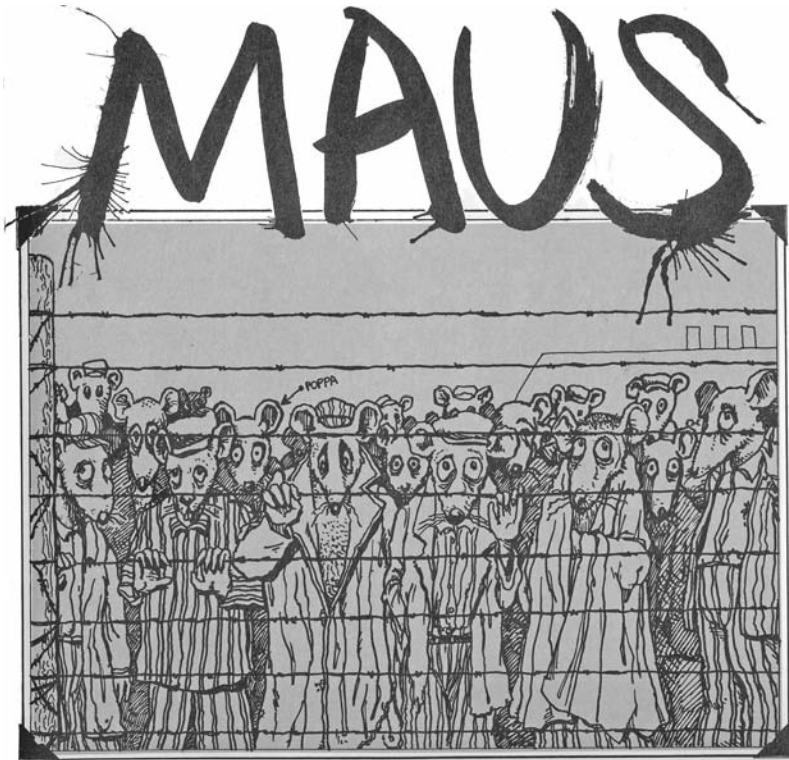


Figure 9.1. Art Spiegelman, “The First Maus,” 1972. First published in *Funny Animals*. Courtesy of Art Spiegelman.

The photo corners at the edges of Spiegelman's drawing show how this public image has been adopted into the family album, and the arrow pointing to "Poppa" shows how the language of family can literally reactivate and reembody a cultural/archival image whose subjects are, to most viewers, anonymous. This adoption of public, anonymous images into the family photo album finds its counterpart in the pervasive use of private, familial images and objects in institutions of public display—museums and memorials like the Tower of Faces in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, or certain exhibits in the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York—which thus construct every visitor as a familial subject. This fluidity (some might call it obfuscation) is made possible by the power of the idea of family, by the pervasiveness of the familial gaze, and by the forms of mutual recognition that define family images and narratives.⁵

Even though, for those of us in the literal second generation, as Eva Hoffman writes, "our own internal imagery is powerful" and linked to the particular experiences communicated by our parents, other images and stories, especially those public images related to the concentration and extermination camps, "become part of [our] inner storehouse" (193). When I referred to myself as a "child of survivors" in my writings on memory and postmemory, for example, it never occurred to me that my readers would assume, as Gary Weissman has done in his book, that my parents were Auschwitz survivors (16–17). I would argue that, as public and private images and stories blend, distinctions and specificities between them are more difficult to maintain, and the more difficult they are to maintain, the more some of us might wish to reassert them so as to insist on the distinctiveness of a specifically familial second-generation identity.⁶

In my own writing, however, I have argued that postmemory is not an identity position but a generational structure of transmission deeply embedded in such forms of mediation. Family life, even in its most intimate moments, is entrenched in a collective imaginary shaped by public, generational structures of fantasy and projection and by a shared archive of stories and images that inflect the transmission of individual and familial remembrance. Geoffrey Hartman's notion of "witnesses by adoption" and Ross Chambers's term "foster writing" acknowledge a break in biological transmission even as they preserve the familial frame (Hartman 9; Chambers

199ff.). If we thus *adopt* the traumatic experiences of others as experiences we might ourselves have lived through, if we inscribe them into our own life story, can we do so without imitating or unduly appropriating them?⁷ And is this process of identification, imagination, and projection radically different for those who grew up in survivor families and for those less-proximate members of their generation or relational network who share a legacy of trauma and thus the curiosity, the urgency, the frustrated need to know about a traumatic past? Eva Hoffman draws a line, however tenuous and permeable, between “the postgeneration as a whole and the *literal* second generation in particular” (187, emphasis added). To delineate the border between these respective structures of transmission—between what I would like to refer to as “familial” and as “affiliative” postmemory⁸—we would have to account for the difference between an intergenerational vertical identification of child and parent occurring within the family and the intragenerational horizontal identification that makes that child’s position more broadly available to other contemporaries. Affiliative postmemory would thus be the result of contemporaneity and generational connection with the literal second generation, combined with structures of mediation that would be broadly appropriable, available, and, indeed, compelling enough to encompass a larger collective in an organic web of transmission.

Familial structures of mediation and representation facilitate the affiliative acts of the postgeneration. The idiom of family can become an accessible lingua franca easing identification and projection across distance and difference. This explains the pervasiveness of family pictures and family narratives as artistic media in the aftermath of trauma. Still, the very accessibility of familial idioms needs also to engender suspicion on our part: does not locating trauma in the space of family personalize and individualize it too much? Does it not risk occluding a public historical context and responsibility, blurring significant differences—national difference, for example, or differences between the descendants of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders? Constructing the processes of transmission, and the postgeneration itself, in familial terms is as engaging as it is troubling. My aim is precisely to expose the attractions and the pitfalls of familial transmission.

Why Photographs?

For me, the key role of the photographic image—and of family photographs in particular—as a medium of postmemory clarifies the connection between familial and affiliative postmemory and the mechanisms by which public archives and institutions have been able both to reembody and to reindividualize cultural/archival memory. More than oral or written narratives, photographic images that survive massive devastation and outlive their subjects and owners function as ghostly revenants from an irretrievably lost past world. They enable us, in the present, not only to see and to touch that past, but also to try to reanimate it by undoing the finality of the photographic “take.”⁹ The retrospective irony of every photograph, made more poignant if violent death separates its two presents, consists precisely in the simultaneity of this effort and the consciousness of its impossibility.

In C. S. Peirce’s tripartite definition of the sign, photographic images are more than purely indexical, or contiguous to the object in front of the lens; they are also iconic, exhibiting a mimetic similarity with that object. Combining these two semiotic principles enables them also, quickly and perhaps too easily, to assume symbolic status and thus, in spite of the vast archive of images the second generation has inherited, a small number of specific images, or kinds of images, have shaped our conception of the event and its transmission.¹⁰ The power of the intercalated photos in *Maus* can serve as illustration: the images of Anja and Richieu function as specters reanimating their dead subjects with indexical and iconic force. The photograph of Vladek in his concentration camp uniform, of Anja with her son, of Richieu as a young boy, together reassemble a family destroyed by the Holocaust and consequently fractured in the artist’s stylized drawings of mice and cats. They not only refer to their subjects and bring them back in their full appearance, but they also symbolize the sense of family, safety, and continuity that has been hopelessly severed.

Whether family pictures of a destroyed world or records of the process of its destruction, Holocaust photographs are the fragmentary remnants that shape the cultural work of postmemory. The work that they have been mobilized to do for the second generation, in particular, ranges from the indexical to the symbolic, and it is precisely their slippage within this range

that needs to be scrutinized. In his controversial recent book *Images malgré tout*, the French art historian Georges Didi-Huberman describes the double regime of the photographic image: in it, he argues, we simultaneously find truth and obscurity, exactitude and simulacrum. Historical photographs from a traumatic past authenticate the past's existence, what Roland Barthes calls its *ça a été* or "having been there," and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they also signal its insurmountable distance and "de-realization" (Didi-Huberman, *Images malgré tout*). Unlike public images or images of atrocity, however, family photos, and the familial aspects of postmemory, would tend to diminish distance, bridge separation, and facilitate identification and affiliation. When we look at photographic images from a lost past world, especially one that has been annihilated by force, we look not only for information or confirmation, but for an intimate material and affective connection. We look to be shocked (Benjamin), touched, wounded, and pricked (Barthes's *punctum*), and torn apart (Didi-Huberman), and photographs thus become screens—spaces of projection and approximation, and of protection.¹¹ Small, two-dimensional, delimited by their frame, photographs minimize the disaster they depict and screen their viewers from it. But in seeming to open a window to the past, and materializing the viewer's relationship to it, they also give a glimpse of its enormity and its power. They can tell us as much about our own needs and desires (as readers and spectators) as they can about the past world they presumably depict. While authentication and projection can work against each other, the powerful tropes of familiarity can also, and sometimes problematically, obscure their distinction. The fragmentariness and the two-dimensional flatness of the photographic image, moreover, make it especially open to narrative elaboration and embroidery, and to symbolization.¹²

What is more, we could argue that, in Paul Connerton's useful terms, photography is an "inscriptive" (archival) memorial practice that, one could argue, retains an "incorporative" (embodied) dimension: as archival documents that inscribe aspects of the past, they give rise to certain bodily acts of looking and certain conventions of seeing and understanding that we have come to take for granted but that shape, and seemingly reembody, render material, the past we are seeking to understand and receive (Connerton 72–74). And sight, Jill Bennett has argued, is deeply connected to "affective

memory”: “images have the capacity to address the spectator’s own bodily memory; to *touch* the viewer who *feels* rather than simply sees the event, drawn into the image through a process of affective contagion. . . . Bodily response thus precedes the inscription of narrative, or moral emotion of empathy” (Bennett 36).

Two images, drawn from Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (Figure 9.2) and W. G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz* (Figure 9.3), will serve to illustrate this performative regime of the photograph and the gazes of familial and affiliative postmemory.

Why Sebald?

The cultural postmemory work that Art Spiegelman and *Maus* did in the late 1980s/early 1990s, the recently deceased German writer W. G. Sebald and particularly his 2001 novel *Austerlitz* did in the first decade of the new millennium. Both works have spawned a veritable industry of critical and theoretical work on memory, photography, and transmission, and thus the differences between *Maus* and *Austerlitz* are a measure of the evolving conversations of and about the postgeneration. My comparative discussion here aims to bring out some of the elements implicit in these conversations—the continuing power of the familial and the indexical, and, at the same time, a less literal, much more fluid, conception of both that characterizes our turn-of-the-century remembrance as illustrated by Sebald.

Maus and *Austerlitz* share a great deal: a self-conscious, innovative, and critical aesthetic that palpably conveys absence and loss; the determination to know about the past and the acknowledgment of its elusiveness; the testimonial structure of listener and witness separated by relative proximity and distance to the events of the war (two men in both works); the reliance on looking and reading, on visual media in addition to verbal ones; and the consciousness that the memory of the past is an act firmly located in the present. Still, the two authors could not be more different: one the son of two Auschwitz survivors, a cartoonist who grew up in the United States; the other a son of Germans, a literary scholar and novelist writing in England.

The narrators of *Maus* are father and son, first and second generation, and their conversations illustrate how familial postmemory works through the transformations and mediations from the father’s memory to the son’s



Figure 9.2. From Art Spiegelman, *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale; My Father Bleeds History*. Copyright 1986 by Art Spiegelman. Reprinted by permission of Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

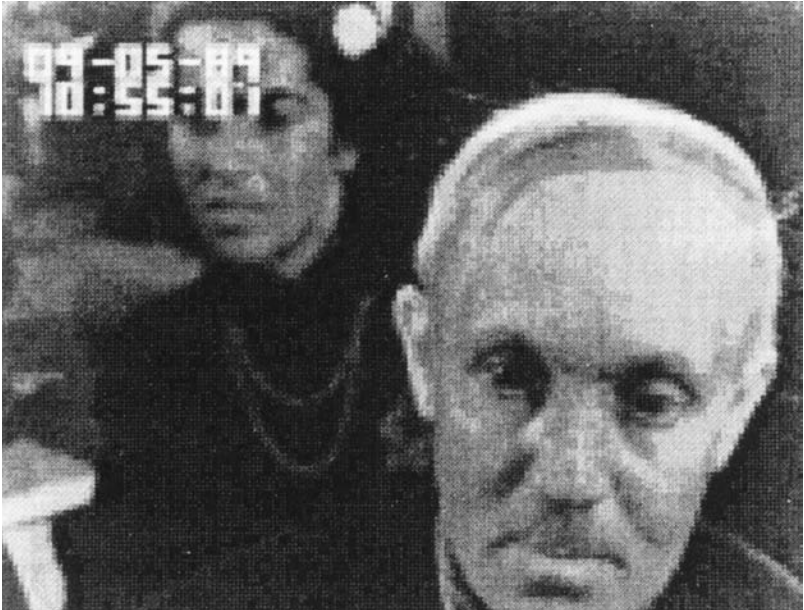


Figure 9.3. From W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 251.

postmemory. The generational structure of *Austerlitz* and its particular kind of postmemory is more complicated: Sebald himself, born in 1944, belongs to the second generation, but through his character Austerlitz, born in 1934 and a member of what Susan Suleiman terms the “1.5 generation,” he blurs generational boundaries and highlights the current interest in the persona of the child survivor. Austerlitz himself has no memory of his childhood in Prague, which was erased and superseded by the new identity he was given when he arrived in Wales and was raised by Welsh adoptive parents. The conversations in the novel are intragenerational conversations between the narrator and the protagonist who (we assume) were both young children during the war, one a non-Jewish German living in England, the other a Czech Jew. For them, the past is located in objects, images, and documents, in fragments and traces barely noticeable in the layered train stations, streets, and official and private buildings of the European cities in which they meet and talk. Standing outside the family, the narrator receives the story from Austerlitz and affiliates with it, thus illustrating the

relationship between familial and affiliative postmemory. And, as a German, he also shows how the lines of affiliation can cross the divide between victim and perpetrator postmemory.

Maus, while trenchantly critical of representation and eager to foreground its artifice, remains, at the same time, anxious about the truth and accuracy of the son's graphic account of the father's prewar and wartime experiences in Poland. Indeed, in spite of its myriad distancing devices, the work achieves what Andreas Huyssen has called a "powerful effect of authentication" (135). That authentication, and even any concern about it, has disappeared in *Austerlitz*. The loss and confusion of Sebald's character, his helpless meanderings and pointless searches, and the beautiful prose that conveys absence and an objectless and thus endless melancholia, all this combined with blurry, hard to make out photographic images, speak somehow to a generation marked by a history to which they have lost even the distant and now barely living connection to which *Maus* uncompromisingly clings.

While *Maus* begins as a familial story, *Austerlitz* only becomes so half-way through: familiarity anchors, individualizes, and reembodies the free-floating disconnected and disorganized feelings of loss and nostalgia that thereby come to attach themselves to more concrete and seemingly authentic images and objects. Still, the world around Sebald's character does not actually become more readable, nor his connection to the past more firm, when he finds his way back to a personal and familial history, to Prague where he was born and where he spent a very few years before being sent to England on the *Kindertransport* and to the nurse who raised him and knew his parents.

The images Austerlitz finds, I want to argue, are what Warburg calls "pre-established expressive forms" that amount to no more than impersonal building blocks of affiliative postmemory. "Our concern with history," Austerlitz says, quoting his boarding school history master André Hilary, ". . . is a concern with preformed images already imprinted on our brains, images at which we keep staring while the truth lies elsewhere, away from it all, somewhere as yet undiscovered" (Sebald 72). This passage perfectly encapsulates the perils of postmemory and the central point I want to make in this essay. The images already imprinted on our brains, the tropes

and structures we bring from the present to the past hoping to find them there and to have our questions answered, may be screen memories—screens on which we project present, or timeless, needs and desires and that thus mask other images and other concerns. The familial aspects of postmemory that make it so powerful and problematically open to affiliation contain many of these preformed screen images. What more potent such image than the image of the lost mother and the fantasy of her recovery?

In *Maus*, the photograph of mother and son, a postwar image embedded in the inserted “Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case History,” anchors and authenticates the work (Figure 9.2). As the only photograph in the first volume, it solidifies the mother’s material presence even as it records her loss and suicide. Maternal recognition and the maternal look are anything but reassuring: in fact, when the artist draws himself wearing a concentration camp uniform, he signals his complete transposition into his parents’ history and his incorporation of their trauma in Auschwitz activated by the trauma of his mother’s suicide.¹³ Still, there is no doubt in the work that this photo is a photo of Anja and Art Spiegelman. Taken in 1958, it shows not the war but its aftermath. Through the angle at which it is drawn, it breaks out of the page, acting as a link between the comics medium and the viewer, drawing the viewer into the page and counterbalancing its many distancing devices (the multiple hands holding the page and the photo, the expressionist drawing style that yanks the reader out of the comics style of the rest of the book, and the human forms that challenge the animal fable to which we have become habituated in our reading, to name but a few). The maternal image and the “Prisoner” insert solidify the familiarity of Maus’s postmemorial transmission and individualize the story. At the same time, Anja’s suicide in the late 1960s can also be seen as a product of her post-Auschwitz historical moment—a moment at which other Holocaust survivors like Paul Celan and, a few years later, Jean Améry also committed suicide.

The two maternal images in *Austerlitz* function quite differently: rather than authenticating, they blur and relativize truth and reference. After following his mother’s deportation to Terezin, Austerlitz is desperate to find more concrete traces of her presence there. He visits the town, walks its streets, searches the museum for traces, and finally settles on the Nazi

propaganda film “The Führer Gives a City to the Jews” as the last possible source in which he might find a visual image of his mother. His fantasies revolve around the extraordinary events of the Red Cross inspection of Terezin, in which inmates were forced to participate in performances of normalcy and well-being that were then filmed for propaganda purposes: “I imagined seeing her walking down the street in a summer dress and lightweight gabardine coat, said Austerlitz: among a group of ghetto residents out for a stroll, she alone seemed to make straight for me, coming closer with every step, until at last I thought I could sense her stepping out of the frame and passing over into me” (Sebald 245). The fantasy is so strong that, against all odds, Austerlitz does succeed in finding in the film an image of a woman who, he believes (or hopes), might be his mother. The film to which he finds access in a Berlin archive is only a fourteen-minute version of the Nazi documentary, and after watching it repeatedly, he concludes that his mother does not appear in it. But he does not give up: he has a slow-motion hour-long copy made of the excerpt, and he watches it over and over, discovering new things in it, but marveling also at the distortions of sound and image that now mark it. In the very background of one of the sequences contained in these distorted slow-motion fragments of a propaganda film of fake performances of normalcy, Austerlitz does eventually glimpse a woman who reminds him of his image of his mother (Figure 9.3). In the audience at a concert

set a little way back and close to the upper edge of the frame, the face of a young woman appears, barely emerging from the back shadows around it. . . . She looks, so I tell myself as I watch, just as I imagined the singer Agáta from my faint memories and the few other clues to her appearance that I now have, and I gaze and gaze again at that face which seems to me both strange and familiar, said Austerlitz. (Sebald 251)

Far from the fantasy of recognition and embrace Austerlitz spun out for the novel’s narrator—“she alone seemed to make straight for me, coming closer with every step, until at last I could sense her stepping out of the frame”—the woman’s face is partially covered by the time indicator showing only 4/100 of a second during which it appears on screen. In the foreground of

the image, the face of a grey-haired man takes up most of the space, blocking the backgrounded woman from view.

In the novel, this picture can at best become a measure of the character's desire for his mother's face. It tells us as little about her and how she might have looked, what she lived through, as the photo of an anonymous actress Austerlitz finds in the theater archives in Prague. His impression that this found image also looks like Agáta is corroborated by Vera who nods, but the link to truth or authentication remains equally tentative and tenuous. Austerlitz hands both images over to the narrator along with his story, as though for protection and dissemination. What, with this precious image, is the narrator actually receiving? Even for the familial second (or 1.5) generation, pictures are no more than spaces of projection, approximation, and affiliation; they have retained no more than an aura of indexicality. For more distant affiliative descendants, their referential link to a sought-after past is ever more questionable. The images Austerlitz finds, moreover, are in themselves products of performances—his mother was an actress before the war, and, what is more, in the propaganda film in Terezín, all inmates were forced to play a part that would further the workings of the Nazi death machine. Unlike the picture of mother and son in *Maus*, which was probably taken by the father, the presumed image of Agáta in the film inscribes the gaze of the perpetrator and thus also the genocidal intentions of the Nazi death machine and the lies on which it was based (see Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*). The numbers in the corner, of course, recall the Auschwitz numbers, and thus anticipate the fate of the Terezín prisoners. They overpower the figures who shrink beneath the fate that awaits them. But who are these figures? Has Austerlitz, has the narrator, found what they were seeking?

Austerlitz's description of the film still throws ever more doubt on the process of postmemorial looking. Austerlitz focuses on one telling detail: "Around her neck, said Austerlitz, she is wearing a three-stringed and delicately draped necklace which scarcely stands out from her dark, high necked dress, and there is, I think, a white flower in her hair" (Sebald 251). The necklace, I believe, connects this image—whether deliberately or not—to another important maternal photograph, that of Roland Barthes's mother in *Camera Lucida*, perhaps the image exemplifying the trope of

maternal loss and longing and the son's affiliative look that attempts to suture an unbridgeable distance.

The necklace appears in Barthes's discussion of a picture by James van der Zee not so much as a prime example of Barthes's notion of the punctum as detail, and of the affective link between the viewer and the image, but of how the punctum can travel and be displaced from image to image. Barthes first finds the picture's punctum in the strapped pumps worn by one of the women; a few pages later when the photograph is no longer in front of him, or of us, he realizes that "the real *punctum* was the necklace she was wearing; for (no doubt) it was this same necklace (a slender ribbon of braided gold) which I had seen worn by someone in my own family" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 53). In a brilliant reading of Barthes's notion of the punctum, Margaret Olin takes us back to the initial image to expose Barthes's glaring mistake: the women in van der Zee's image wear strings of pearls and not "slender ribbon[s] of braided gold." The slender ribbon of braided gold, she argues, was transposed from one of his own family pictures that Barthes had reproduced in his *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* and entitled "the two grandmothers."¹⁴

Olin uses this example to call into question the very existence of the famous winter garden photo of Barthes's mother in *Camera Lucida*, showing how some of the details in his description might have been drawn from another text, Walter Benjamin's description of a photograph of the six-year old Kafka in a "winter garden landscape" (Benjamin 206). The mother's picture may instead be one that is indeed reproduced in *Camera Lucida*, "La Souche" (the stock) (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 104). These displacements and intertextualities, which Olin delineates in fascinating detail, lead her usefully and yet dangerously to redefine the photograph's indexicality: "The fact that something was in front of the camera matters; what that something was does not. . . . What matters is displaced," she provocatively states (112). In her conclusion she proposes that the relationship between the photograph and its beholder be described as a "performative index" or an "index of identification," shaped by the reality of the viewer's needs and desires rather than by the subject's actual "having-been-there" (115). I believe that the maternal image in *Austerlitz* can be inserted into the intertextual chain Olin identifies, especially since, amazingly, Austerlitz also makes a mistake

about the necklace that, in the photo, only has two strings and not three as he claims. To call reference into question in the context not just of death, as with Barthes's mother, but of extermination, as with *Austerlitz*, may be more provocative still, but this is indeed how photographs function in this novel. As *Austerlitz* shows, the index of postmemory (as opposed to memory) is the performative index, shaped more and more by affect, need, and desire as time and distance attenuate the links to authenticity and truth. Familial and, indeed, feminine tropes rebuild and reembody a connection that is disappearing, and thus gender becomes a powerful idiom of remembrance in the face of detachment and forgetting.

In her recent reflections on the transmission of Holocaust memory, Claire Kahane writes: "Literary representation of the Holocaust attempts a textual mimesis of trauma through tropes that most potently capture, and elicit in the reader . . . primal affects contiguous with the traumatic event" (163). Kahane illustrates her point through a critical analysis of the trope of maternal loss and mother-child separation, arguing that trauma at its most fundamental has been defined as a break in the maternal object relation (163). Kahane disagrees that the trauma of the Holocaust can be reduced to one particular psychic structure, and thus she urges us to remain skeptical of the ubiquity of the figure of maternal loss in Holocaust representation. She asks: "doesn't the focus on that relation in traumatic narratives itself become a kind of screen, a cover-up for the terror of confronting the nihilistic implications of the Holocaust?" (164).

As the foregoing shows, I want to join Kahane's call that we scrutinize carefully the dominant tropes of Holocaust representation, such as the figure of maternal loss. At the same time, I have argued that the generation of affiliative postmemory needs precisely such familiar and familial tropes to rely on. As feminist critics, it is particularly important to perceive and expose the functions of gender as a "pre-formed image" in the act of transmission. The photograph of the mother's face is a preformed image at which we stare while, as *Austerlitz* says, "the truth lies elsewhere, somewhere as yet undiscovered" (Sebald 245); at our generational remove that elsewhere may never be discovered. Thus the maternal image in *Austerlitz* provokes us to scrutinize the unraveling link between present and past that defines indexicality as no more than performative.

And yet, for better or worse, one could say that for the postgeneration the screens of gender and of familiarity, and the images that mediate them, function analogously to the protective shield of trauma itself: they function as screens that absorb the shock, filter and diffuse the impact of trauma, diminish harm. In forging a protective shield particular to the postgeneration, one could say that, paradoxically, they actually reinforce the living connection between past and present, between the generation of witnesses and survivors and the generation after.¹⁵

Notes

1. On the notion of generation, see esp. Weigel and Suleiman, "The 1.5 Generation." Other contexts besides the Holocaust and the Second World War in which intergenerational transmission has become an important explanatory vehicle and object of study include American slavery, the Vietnam War, the Dirty War in Argentina, South African apartheid, Soviet and East European communist terror, and the Armenian and the Cambodian genocides.

2. For a critical take on the current surfeit of memory, see esp. Huyssen and Robin.

3. See also the work of art historian Andrea Liss who, around the same time, used the term "postmemories" in a more circumscribed way to describe the effects that some of the most difficult of Holocaust photographs have had on what she termed the "post-Auschwitz generation" (86).

4. Assmann uses the term "kulturelles Gedächtnis" (cultural memory) to refer to "Kultur"—an institutionalized hegemonic archival memory. In contrast, the Anglo-American meaning of "cultural memory" refers to the social memory of a specific group or subculture.

5. On the familial gaze, see Hirsch, *Family Frames* and *The Generation of Postmemory*.

6. See Bos for a series of distinctions between familial and nonfamilial aspects of postmemory, and Bukiet for a strictly literal interpretation of the second generation.

7. See Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory* for a theorization of nonappropriative identification based on Kaja Silverman's distinction between idiopathic and heteropathic identification.

8. It is useful, in this regard, to recall Edward Said's distinction between vertical filiation and horizontal affiliation, a term that acknowledges the breaks in authorial transmission that challenge authority and direct transfer.

9. See esp. Sontag (*On Photography*) and Barthes (*Camera Lucida*) on the relationship of photography and death.

10. Certainly witness testimony is an equally pervasive genre transmitting the memory of the Holocaust. But, I would argue that the technology of photography, with its semiotic principles, makes it a more powerful and also a more problematic vehicle for the generations after. The technologies recording witness testimony, the tape recorder and video camera, share the promises and the frustrations embodied by the still camera and the photographic images that are its products.

11. For the relationship of visually to trauma see esp. Baer, Bennett, Hornstein and Jacobowitz, *Zelizer (Remembering to Forget)*, Hüppauf, and van Alphen (*Art in Mind*).

12. See Horstkotte for a discussion of this aspect of photography and postmemory.

13. On transposition, see Kestenbergr.

14. But Olin is also mistaken, as Nancy K. Miller pointed out to me in a personal conversation (October 2005): the English translation leaves out the more specific description in the French where the necklace is described as being "au ras du cou," rather than long and hanging down as in the image of the "two grandmothers."

15. This essay appeared in an issue of *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (2008) on "Photography and Fiction." It appears in substantially revised form in my book *The Generation of Postmemory*. Thanks to Silke Horstkotte, Alice Kessler-Harris, Nancy K. Miller, Nancy Pedri, Leo Spitzer, and Meir Sternberg for invaluable suggestions.

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Picturing the Specter of History

Zhang Ailing's Visual Practice

XIAOJUE WANG

EVER SINCE THE INTRODUCTION of photography, and shortly thereafter, film, to China in the mid- to late nineteenth century, the new visual media have probed the formation of modern Chinese culture. The oft-discussed episode of Lu Xun's slide-viewing incident is a good example of how verbal and visual modes of representation joined forces at the launching moment of Chinese literary modernity. In the preface to his first short story collection, *Nahan* (A call to arms, 1922), Lu Xun, the founding father of modern Chinese literature, wrote about his early experiences as a medical student in Japan. During one class break, the instructor projected lantern slides of recent news events. One of the slides shows a public execution of an alleged Chinese spy by Japanese soldiers during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5), surrounded by his Chinese compatriots. Shocked by the apathy of these onlookers at the execution, as Lu Xun narrated, he realized that it was more important to cure the Chinese spirit rather than their physical diseases. This visual experience triggered his determination to convert from medicine to literature (Lu, Preface to *Nahan*).

Recent scholarship has questioned the primary attention May Fourth intellectuals such as Lu Xun himself gave to literary writing at the expense of the significant new force shaped by visibility. In *Primitive Passions*, Rey Chow starts her study of contemporary Chinese cinema by revisiting Lu Xun's conversion story at the advent of modern Chinese literature. Chow criticizes modern Chinese intellectuals for uniformly celebrating this episode strictly as a literary event, thereby overlooking the impact of "technologized

visuality" that was significantly grounded in the founding narrative of modern Chinese literature. What Rey Chow seeks to challenge is May Fourth intellectuals' "habitual privileging of the literary" in its paramount role assigned by classical Chinese tradition (*Primitive Passions*, 7). By abiding by such a principle in an age of literary decline, these writers may actually not have been as culturally iconoclastic as they claimed to be. Chow is surely not alone in theorizing the complicated interconnections between written words and visual images at a time when the impact of visual literacy was increasingly felt. In her study of nineteenth-century British fiction, Nancy Armstrong points out that the onset of pictorialism, which Georg Lukács considered so deplorable in naturalist novels by Zola and Flaubert, indicates a major shift taking place in the relationship between visual and verbal modes of signification. In her anatomy of the link between seeing and writing, Chow also observes that the first generation of modern Chinese writers kept a conspicuous distance from film and regarded it as a form of low- or middlebrow entertainment, which perpetuated the Chinese scholarly tradition's primary focus on written words.

In the case of May Fourth Chinese intellectuals, what the lack of enthusiasm for the new culture of images and spectators bespeaks, I would argue, is not so much an anxiety about the competition of visuality with the traditional codes of writing. This suspicion about new visual media was not so much an insensitive ignorance or denigration but rather an admonition that the newly emergent technologized visuality might easily be deployed to mutilate the May Fourth enlightenment project that was of primal significance at the time. The awareness of the power of new visual media among May Fourth writers entailed growing concern and anxiety about their untamed cultural and political forces. In this regard, the caution expressed by these early Chinese modern intellectuals about visual representation is part of the intellectual discourse on photography and film with regard to the construction of the modern subject in China.

In his satirical essay on the practice of photography in China, written in 1924, Lu Xun conveys his concern and ambivalence about its social, cultural, and ethical value. He regards photography as a form of "sorcery." This idea doesn't simply stem from early superstitious beliefs that the camera would steal the "spiritual aura" (*weiguang*) out of a living body (Lu, "Lun

zhaoxiang zhilei," 182–83). Lu Xun is more concerned about photography's capability of preserving, and thus perpetuating, images. He questions in particular the mass reproduction and dissemination of stage photos of Mei Lanfang, the celebrated Peking opera star best known for his masterful performance of female roles. Just as the female impersonator evokes a phantom sex that marks "the opposite sex for both sexes" in the practice of Chinese gender aesthetics, the fixation and circulation of its image in the vision of the public conjures a phantom image that is forever on display in "the windows of photo studios" as well as in "the hearts of the Chinese people" (187). Once it is processed by the uncanny "sorcery-like" photographic apparatus and has taken on a spectral, substantial form within the frame of a photograph, it has a separate life of its own. Such a photographic practice, according to Lu Xun, generates an effeminate, decadent national image of China, hindering the enlightenment agenda to reestablish a strong, masculine, modern national image. Therefore, within a larger cultural framework of the May Fourth Chinese enlightenment discourse, the social and ethical implications are unmistakably at issue. Lu Xun seeks to highlight the relationship between the corporeal dimension of the new visual media and the national body politic.

In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," one of his major essays of the 1930s, Walter Benjamin reflects on the inevitable changes in the conditions of art creation resulting from the new technology of production and reproduction. Benjamin embraces this change and the consequent decline of the "aura" of the artwork, for he senses in mass culture the potential to democratize not only access to culture but also cultural production itself. Benjamin's Chinese contemporary Lu Xun, however, is far from sanguine about this new media force. What worries him about a similar process of technological reproduction of images in early twentieth-century China is its negative impact of creating a new type of iconography through the fetishization of a mass-media image in the mind-set of the Chinese masses, who were yet to be enlightened in the iconoclastic nation-building project.

While the account of the slide-show incident accentuates Lu Xun's moral anxiety in relation to the Chinese national character, his denunciation of the public display of a photograph of a Peking opera female impersonator

reveals his skepticism about the power of the increasingly prevailing mass medium of photography, both in technological reproductions and in psychological reflections. Lu Xun warns of the social and ethical implications of this new technology of image preservation and perpetuation, which might be detrimental to the building of a modern national subject. He calls for a practice of exorcism at the national level to disperse the dark force of the traditional culture and self-image and let in the light of the new culture and new ideas. Therefore, it is precisely a keen awareness of the unprecedented power of visual media that motivated Chinese intellectuals of the early twentieth century to keep a cautious distance from these new forms of representation.

While Lu Xun as the vanguard of the May Fourth enlightenment project sought to exorcise the specter evoked by photography, Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang, 1920–95), the quintessential explorer of cosmopolitan Shanghai of the 1940s, embraced the spectral character of photography and other visual media enthusiastically. By incorporating a pictorial practice into her literary writing, Zhang creates a mesmerizing matrix of textuality and visuality.

Among modern Chinese writers, Zhang Ailing is characterized not only by her exploration of sensuous, feminine, and material details and her deep penetration into human frailty and historical contingency, but also by her almost seismographic response to the visual culture of her day. Issues of vision and visuality that are anything but merely optical phenomena are central to her aesthetic and historical representations.

Zhang Ailing's writings are always ingrained in the fabric of transitions, or better still, of deterritorialization. She won her literary fame in the fallen city of Shanghai under the Japanese occupation between 1943 and 1945. Focusing on characters as specters of a bygone era haunting a modern age, her early works established an aesthetic of everyday life marked by desolation. Although Zhang's current literary significance is based primarily on a body of work she produced in Shanghai during a relatively narrow three-year period, her reputation has undergone many transformations. Zhang was virtually erased from mainland Chinese literary histories even before she left Shanghai for Hong Kong—and eventually for the United States—shortly after the great historical divide in China in 1949. In his influential

1961 study, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, however, C. T. Hsia famously devoted an entire chapter to Zhang (see 389–432), thus endowing her with a canonical position in modern Chinese literature. In fact, Hsia dedicates more attention to Zhang than he does to any other author, including the archcanonical Lu Xun. More than any other single factor, Hsia's attention served as a catalyst for a subsequent flurry of academic research on her in Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as abroad, which was followed by the resurrection of Zhang's work in mainland China in the 1980s.

From the very beginning of her literary career in wartime Shanghai, Zhang's writings have interwoven sketches, old photographs, and prose fiction. Her essays collected later in *Liuyan* (Written on water) are interspersed with figure sketches she drew herself. Her meteoric literary career in this period was characterized by her fascination with material culture in the cosmopolitan port city, in particular its visual spectacles. In 1943, Zhang published an English essay, "Chinese Life and Fashions," for *The XXth Century*, one of the leading English-language journals in Shanghai, which she then rewrote in Chinese with the title "Gengyi ji" ("A Chronicle of Changing Clothes"). Written in occupied Shanghai during the Sino-Japanese War, this meticulous meditation on various changes in clothing styles from the Qing dynasty to the 1940s Republic of China seemed an untimely undertaking. In Zhang's analysis, fashion in China is not "an organized, planned business venture" ("Chronicle of Changing Clothes," 73); therefore, it does not generate the "commodity phantasmagoria" described by Benjamin in his study of nineteenth-century Paris. Rather, Zhang argues that costumes, which seem to be superficial—"The ancient hero Liu Bei had this to say on the matter of clothes: 'Brothers are like one's hands and feet; wives and children are like clothes that can be put on and taken off'" (74)—should be considered as part of the social and historical conditions. She thereby concludes that "In a time of political chaos, people were powerless to improve the external conditions governing their lives. But they could influence the environment immediately surrounding them, that is, their clothes. Each of us lives inside our own clothes" (71).

When "Chinese Life and Fashions" was first published, Zhang included twelve sketches, drawn herself, of tall, slender female figures with distinctive clothes, hairstyles, and mannerisms to show the latest fashions. Zhang

was a passionate reader of both highbrow and popular literature, and her drawings show the influence of both late Qing Chinese lithographic illustration such as in *Dianshizhai Pictorial* and European graphic design art nouveau. What she seeks to represent is not merely fashion per se but also a pictorial psychoanalysis of the mentality of modern China. Thus fashion, as superfluous and irrelevant as it may appear, offers a unique window into the cultural and social conditions of a historical time. Just as her exploration of the quotidian details of everyday life deconstructs the grand narrative of nationalism, patriotism, and revolution of the 1940s, Zhang's employment of sensuous and trivial pictorial fragments in her writings effectively pierces the dominance of the written text. Through one of her earliest practices of combining visual and textual elements, Zhang not only creates an intriguing theory of fashion in modern China but also forges a significant mode of composition in words and images to articulate layered and finely grained relations between the cultural history and the material history of fashion, of fabrics, textures, and colors.

Zhang's fascination with visual images takes on yet another dimension as she applies muted pictorial elements and cinematic language in her narrative strategies. In her attempt to convey narrative visuality, the still image, be it a portrait or a photograph, becomes a central trope for a living image, the subjectivity, separated from the actual subject in the confines of a two-dimensional frame. Such pictorial disembodiment bespeaks the dilapidation of life as it is severed from the living body and pressed into a flat facade.

One evident example is to be found in her 1943 short story "Moli xiangpian" ("Jasmine Tea"). To describe the gradual withering of life of a young woman, Feng Biluo, after she fails to marry the man she loves and has to settle down into an arranged marriage, Zhang writes:

As for Biluo's life after her marriage . . . She wasn't a bird in a cage. A bird in a cage, when the cage is opened, can still fly away. She was a bird embroidered onto a screen—a white bird in clouds of gold stitched onto a screen of melancholy purple satin. The years passed; the bird's feathers darkened, mildewed, and were eaten by moths, but the bird stayed on the screen even in death. ("Jasmine Tea," 92)

The sensuous fabric and sumptuous colors used to depict the exquisitely embroidered screen only enhance the uncanny image of an incarcerated demise. As Biluo lives an ordinary tedious life in the loveless marriage, her once passionate and vigorous self inevitably decays. Zhang's narrative suggests that the vitality of the heroine is distinguishable from her body and becomes her living image. Sucked into the facade of the lifeless screen, this living image goes through a process of degeneration stage by stage, as if the live model were transformed into a pictorial work fixed in time while the representational image imprisoned on the screen were the living being.

The analogy between a shackled image and the atrophy of life is further explored in Zhang's favorite visual construction of women in traditional dress stranded like ghosts, or better still, undead, in modern China. Such images convey the status quo that was caught between the traditional and the emergent modern society. Suffice it to look at the ending sequence of her novella "Jinsuo ji" ("The Golden Cangue"), published in the same year as "Jasmine Tea," to illustrate the antiquated ghostly presence. "The Golden Cangue" is a story that explores the destructive personality of a woman named Ts'ao Chi-ch'iao, who marries an invalid of a wealthy family at the expense of youth and passion. By the time she inherits a portion of wealth after her husband dies, the embittered Chi-ch'iao has not only been victimized to a living dead but has also turned into a victimizer herself by inflicting torture and abuse on her own children. To incarcerate her daughter Ch'ang-an in the same shadowy world surrounded by "ghosts, ghosts of many years ago or the unborn of many years hence" (Zhang, "The Golden Cangue," 205), Ts'ao Chi-ch'iao schemes to destroy Ch'ang-an's only marriage chance. The sequence ends with an uncanny moment when Chi-ch'iao, like an apparition, appears in a "blue-gray gown of palace brocade embroidered with a round dragon design" standing on the top of the staircase that leads up "step after step to a place where there was no light" (231). Critics have duly noted Zhang's capability of spotting apparitions haunting the modern age (Tang, D. Wang, Chen).¹ This passage, as David Der-wei Wang maintained, betrays influences from the Western Gothic romance as well as Chinese traditional ghost tales represented by *Liaozhai zhiyi* (Strange tales from Liaozhai) by Zhang's beloved author Pu Songling (1640–1715)

(D. Wang 224–28). Indeed, it is at such moments that Zhang best captured uncanny spectral images in a familiar present world. Zhang observes, the woman “would disappear under the weight of these layers on layers of clothing. She herself would cease to exist, save as a frame on which clothing could be hung” (“Chronicle of Changing Clothes,” 66). This weightless, exquisite, antiquated dress disembodied from a corporeal subjectivity, eerily floating in the modern world, is the best metaphor for the phantom of history haunting the present. However, with the dress turned into a shell of the life, the vanishing subject does not simply cease to exist. Rather, it continues to exist as something else, something invisible—in other words, it is transformed into a ghost.

Speaking of Chinese society at the threshold between the old and the new, Zhang Ailing ruminates, “In this age, old things are crumbling and new things are growing. . . . People feel that things in their daily lives are just not right—even to the point of terror. They live in this age, but this age is sinking like a shadow, and people feel themselves abandoned” (“Writing of One’s Own”; trans. Lee 282). The pathos of a transitional period is exactly captured in this ghostly circulation between life and death. Conveyed here is not only a new notion of temporality signifying a reconfiguration of the old and the new, but also a unique form of visibility—a photographic double exposure. This technique places one exposure on top of the other on a single frame, to create a visual image like an apparition. In double exposure, photography goes beyond its imputed mimetic power of realistic image making. By summoning the invisible, it becomes, as Terry Castle has called it, “the ultimate ghost-producing technology” (61). In Zhang Ailing’s imagery, old and new things overlap. It’s hard to tell whether the modern was superimposed over the traditional or the old intruded into the modern reverie. The history, pressing yet occulted, lingers on the discrepancies between the past and the present, a state that Zhang often describes as a spectral presence: “And this gives rise to a strange apprehension about the reality surrounding us. We begin to suspect that this is an absurd and antiquated world, dark and bright at the same time” (“Writing of One’s Own,” 18). By means of verbal and visual double exposure, Zhang sought to carve the outline of history onto the present, in the shadowy space between the visible and the invisible.

Such an attachment to images lingering between light and shadow seems to underscore photography's spectral character. In discussing the development of photography, Walter Benjamin observes that the necessary long exposures and posing endowed early portrait photographs with an obscure, mysterious, and impressive aura that dissipated later when photography was perfected by representational technologies. The aura of early photography vanished as new techniques of reproduction helped create the "absolute continuum from brightest light to darkest shadow" (Benjamin 282). In his reading of Benjamin's reflection on photography, Eduardo Cadava pointed out that the myth of photography lies in its "ghostly or spectral character" (13). Photography's perfection in faithful production of realistic images conditioned its ultimate decline.

And for Zhang, embedded in the obscure phantom image evoked by photography were the remnants of a bygone past, a history that would not be buried by modernity's storm of progress. While the vintage dress with the caged ghostly body in modern society amounted to a shell of a withered life, the photograph was its counterpart in the magic world of light and shadow. Zhang observed, "Photographs are fragmentary shells of life. As time goes by, the kernels have been eaten up, the taste of which only one oneself knows. All that one keeps to show the others are only the black-and-white shells thrown on the floor" (*Lianhuantao*, 68–69). This reflection on the linkage between photography and perished life shells echoes the ending moment of her short story "Hongmeigui yu baimeigui" ("Red Rose, White Rose") when the husband alone at midnight suddenly spotted a pair of slippers of his abandoned wife, "lying in the middle of the floor at cross angles, one a bit ahead, the other a bit behind, like a ghost that was afraid to materialize, walking fearfully, pleadingly toward him" (312). As the photographic fragmentary shells of life preserve images of a living body pressed into the surface of a paper, disparate items of clothing, shoes, or accessories serve as dismembered body remnants of a deserted life. Both attest to the idea of death and mortality. As Susan Sontag observed, "All photographs are *momento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt" (15).²

While the vintage garment with an indistinct subject and the spectral photographic image both conjure ghosts, ruins, and disembodied shells of life, they also visualize history in a unique form, in which history was *re-membered* and *em-bodied*. Zhang's conception of history, however, distinguishes significantly from the dominant notion of history made up of revolution, modernization, and nation-building as promoted by the May Fourth grand narrative of Chinese enlightenment. Rey Chow observed that Zhang Ailing's work is characterized by a distinctive attention to apparently irrelevant, female details. She defined these details as "the sensuous, trivial, and superfluous textual presences that exist in an ambiguous relation with some larger 'vision' such as reform and revolution, which seeks to subordinate them but which is displaced by their surprising returns" (Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity*, 85). Accordingly, Zhang's narrative of fragmented, feminine details challenges and deconstructs the concept of history as totality. I would further call attention to the crucial linkage between Zhang's discourse of femininity and that of spectrality, which together inform Zhang's unique conception of history: a spectral history; as if it were only by means of spectral, negative images or images of double exposure that the spectral history of the modern could be evoked.

Zhang's ghost-producing practice in the war-ridden mid-twentieth century has been carried further by a series of important writers and artists in the Sinophone world. In his article "Nu'zuojiā de xiandai 'guì'hua: Cong Zhang Ailing dao Su Weizhen," David Wang constructed a genealogy of female "ghost talks" initiated by Zhang Ailing up to the point of the 1989 Tiananmen Incident. If one looks at the post-cold war topography of Chinese ghostlore, the installation art of Wang Jin adds yet another important dimension to the ghost-producing cultural practice and provides a unique reflection on an alternative spectral history to the grand view of postsocialist or, using Ackbar Abbas's term, "posthumous socialist" modernization.³

One of the most innovative experimental artists in contemporary China, Wang Jin presented "A Chinese Dream"—a long-running project that explores the complex process through which objects acquire cultural authenticity—between 1997 and 1998 as part of his efforts to deal with the ruins and relics of cultural tradition. This project produced a number of Peking opera costumes by faithfully retaining the artistic details of construction

but changing the very fabric of the costumes. Skilled rural seamstresses replaced the original silk or satin with translucent plastic sheets (PVC) and the original silk or gold threads with nylon fishing line to create the embroidery. Wang Jin by no means sought to restore an authentic historical imagery. For him, any attempt at cultural redemption with a claim of authenticity was suspicious. In fact, his work purported to question this kind of nostalgic reconstruction of an apparently original tradition. According to his interview with Wu Hung, the main purpose of creating the plastic opera costumes was to ponder the fate of traditional culture such as Peking opera in contemporary China, caught up in the trends of commercialization and globalization. His translucent plastic opera costumes rendered a sense of emptiness and weightlessness. The exquisitely embroidered patterns on this lucid surface enhanced the impression of a dreamlike illusion. The bluish translucent superficiality constituted a compelling symbol of the invented cultural authenticity in contemporary society. Indeed, as Wu Hung observed, “its preindustrial design and industrial material allude to different historical moments and aesthetic sensibilities and signify simultaneous attachment to and detachment from a particular cultural tradition” (116). Indeed, using the industrial material to duplicate a preindustrial form, this project mocked and disavowed the notion of cultural authenticity in the process of commodifying cultural heritage.

Whereas this art project deconstructed the vision of authentic culture, it did provide an alternative representation of history and tradition. The translucent plastic garment conveyed an image that was both there and not there, both visible and invisible. It thus constructed a forceful trope for a tradition that was interwoven in the fabric of modernity, for a history that haunted the present, thus perishing yet continuing to live. After the series of catastrophes in modern China, any effort to imagine history and salvage tradition would at the same time conjure its apparition. Instead of reproducing an original image, Wang summoned its phantom among historical ruins. For him, this bluish, ghostly gown embodied the traditional culture and history in its most visible and invisible form.

Some of the “Chinese Dream” gowns were sold at art auctions, some were collected in contemporary art museums, and the others were circulated in international exhibition tours.⁴ More important, Wang Jin’s costumes

became widely known as photographic images in exhibition catalogs and on art Web sites. After his project was acknowledged, a number of photographers took the gowns to various historical sites to make still images. The best-known set of photographs exhibited and published so far was produced by An Hong in the imperial Forbidden City in Beijing.⁵ Hanging on the decrepit red wall of the imperial city, the transparent gown without a body created the visual effect of a photographic double exposure and therefore evoked the phantasmagoric vision of history at a location of its absence and presence.

One year after the creation of the first “Chinese Dream” costume, Wang Jin gave a performance wearing one of his plastic opera garments at the historic site of the Ming Imperial Tombs in Beijing. This photograph (Figure 10.1) was taken when he was dancing in the gateway of the tomb tower. The picture best conveys the contrast between the shimmering gown and the dark body filling this shell of life, between the dark gateway and the light outside. The superimposition of an indistinct body upon a virtually transparent gown achieves a powerful visual double exposure. Twirling between light and shadow, between the past and the present, the artist seems to be performing a ritual to summon the dead, or to be himself transformed into the phantom of history.

While Wang Jin employed an insubstantial vintage gown that covers and simultaneously unveils an ambiguous body to materialize the specter of history, Zhang Ailing was the performer of the ghost summoning ritual in her daily life as well as in her work. Like her female protagonists, whose Qing dynasty-style clothes often evoke a pathological anachronistic presence in the Chinese Republic, Zhang herself made her stunning appearance in Shanghai during the Japanese occupation in such vintage dresses. She was surely familiar with the lure of visual representation, particularly that of photography, and consistently drew on it in the course of her self-stylization. Her photographs were published along with her writings in the most popular magazines. They appeared on the cover pages of the second edition of her work *Chuanqi* (Romances) and the essay collection *Written on Water*. As posters, they flooded bookstores and newsstands in the fallen city of Shanghai. Furthermore, she was an inveterate enthusiast for the emergent medium of film. She not only contributed movie reviews to Chinese and English



Figure 10.1. Wang Jin, *A Chinese Dream no. 2, Shen Lu* (The site of the Ming Imperial Tombs), Beijing, China, 1998. Wang Jin danced in the gateway of the Ming imperial tomb tower in his own artwork, a Peking opera robe made in polyvinylchloride and hand embroidered with fishing line. Photograph by Shi Xiaobing. Copyright Wang Jin.

journals in Shanghai but also wrote screenplays for a number of popular movies in Shanghai and later in Hong Kong during her diasporic years.

Zhang presented her most intriguing visual discourse and practice in her last book, *Duizhao ji: kan laozhaoxiangbu* (Mutual reflections: reading old photographs, 1994),⁶ in which the symbolic circulation between literature, photography, and the spectrality of history is most powerfully manifested. After leaving Hong Kong in 1955, Zhang Ailing spent the rest of her life in the United States, leading a reclusive life. In 1994, after an almost twenty-five-year silence, Zhang published her selection of family photographs with autobiographical narratives.⁷ The following year, she was found dead on the floor of her apartment in Los Angeles, the city where she had lived incognito for the final twenty-three years of her life. This last work can thus be viewed as an anticipatory “visual memorial ceremony” arranged by herself; it triggered the most zealous wave of “Zhang Ailing legend” in the fin-de-siècle Chinese-speaking world. Like Roland Barthes’s final work, *Camera Lucida* (1981), which provides influential meditations on the nature of photography, Zhang’s *Mutual Reflections* not only reflects on loss and death but also uncannily anticipates the author’s own death.

Comprising fifty-four family photos paired with text of different lengths, this autobiographical narrative is both visual and textual. Some of the captions consist of just one short sentence, noting when and where the picture was taken, while others are miniature essays, reminiscent of Zhang’s early autobiographical essays. To collect photos, no matter how blurred or grainy they may look, in an autobiography appears to serve a straightforward purpose, that is, to illustrate and supplement the writing. However, the relationship between pictures and texts functions in a much more complicated manner in this book. W. G. Sebald, the contemporary German writer who was also fond of using photographs in his work, once remarked that both photography and fiction writing seem to act as tokens of authenticity. Yet, since they can be deduced, forged, and constructed, they “arrive at the truth on a crooked route” (Green; quoted in Adams 188). Sebald foregrounds the ambiguous nature of both media, dancing on the border between fact and fiction. Indeed, as Zhang’s *Mutual Reflections* demonstrates, the interactions between texts and images often intensify the ambiguity of both codes of representation.

Zhang's remembrances of her grandparents, especially of her grandmother, the daughter of the legendary Qing statesman and general Li Hongzhang, constitute one of the most significant parts of this family album. To corroborate two photos, figures 22 and 23 in the album, Zhang wrote a seven-page-long essay (*Duizhao ji*, 33–42). Her grandmother died long before Zhang was born, and it is via photograph that she knows what the grandmother looked like. In his ruminations about the famous absent “winter garden” picture, Barthes observes that any photograph is the memorial or relic of the person whose image it preserves (96). Hence, a photograph documents the absence of the departed rather than his or her factual representation. As I have argued elsewhere, Zhang's reflection on the grandmother's photograph underscores both Barthes's and Siegfried Kracauer's respective approaches to photography (see X. Wang). Like Barthes, Zhang is fascinated by the *punctum* experiences of lived presence (*ça a été*) conveyed by the photographic images of her grandparents. However, Zhang also betrays anxiety about photography's retrospective fetishization, reminding us of Kracauer's reflection on the connection between photography and death. As Kracauer argued, photography is incapable of representing the “actual history” of the original object because the photograph is inevitably a spatial fixation of a past moment (51).

Furthermore, Zhang's remembrances of her grandparents are entirely based on her reading of the 1905 historical novel *Niehai hua* (Flowers in a sinful sea), which depicts the social conditions in the collapsing Qing dynasty. Therefore, her account of her grandparents originated from neither her lived individual memories nor generational memories recounted by her parents or other family members. This only reinforces the ambiguity between fabrication and fact inherent in the practice of image preservation and memory construction. Zhang's obsession with this imagined memory serves yet another purpose. Upon closer inspection, one notices that she was reading stories of the grandparents during her school years, which she refers to as her “awkward age” (*Duizhao ji*, 54). During this time she experienced her parents' divorce and her stepmother's abuse, which forced her to finally escape from her father's house and never return. While these traumatic experiences are elaborated in her early autobiographical essays, they are suspiciously missing from this family album arranged before her

death. It seems that the happy stories of the grandparents extrapolated from her cross-textual and visual reading helped to shield her from her own spiritual wound.

A similar endeavor to retrieve imagined memories of a lost family member through creating visual texts was undertaken at the beginning of her literary career. In Zhang's early fiction "Jasmine Tea," the protagonist Nie Chuanqing gazed at a photograph of his dead mother Feng Biluo, which showed her as a young girl before marriage, trying to rediscover his mother. His mother passed away when he was four years old and he only knew her from her photographs and her collection of books. In a moment of hallucination, he thought he saw his mother's reflection on the windowpane. "He had felt, for a moment, like an old-time portrait photographer, his head thrust into a tunnel of black cloth: there in the lens he'd caught a glimpse of his mother" (Zhang, "Jasmine Tea," 89–90). Through the camera obscura, he fabricated his mother's anguished life, waiting for news about her lover that would never come. It was a private moment of memory and mourning, which Zhang herself underwent when she sought to construct the photo-essay about her grandmother.

Nowhere is history-as-specter more evident than in Zhang's last visual self-portrayal in her family photo album. Two particular pictures in this book are worth noting. The photograph on page 68 was taken in 1944, when Zhang arguably reached the peak of her literary career, and was one of her favorites. Like most of the shots collected in this album, it was a carefully edited studio photograph. She chose it as one of the cover pages for her essay collection *Written on Water*, and the cover design of the same book is a self-portrait based on this very photograph. She wears her famous Qing-style dress, standing with her back against the wall. The dress is a capacious jacket with a low collar and huge sleeves, with broad edging patterned with "coiled clouds." She leans so close to the wall that her shadow seems like a spectral presence pressing on her from the back. The ominous message of catastrophe and death is already written on this wall. Fully aware of the gaze of the camera lens, she has turned her face slightly to one side, and her eyes stare at something somewhere far away, beyond the frame. The sharp contrast of light and shadow between her face and her vintage-style dress gives her face a gloomy appearance.

Figure 10.2. This photograph of Zhang Ailing was taken in 1944 at the roof terrace of her apartment building in Shanghai and later colored by her friend Yan Ying. Copyright Roland Soong and Elaine Soong through Crown Publishing Company, Ltd.



The theme of spectrality is further emphasized in the thirty-third picture (Figure 10.2). The photograph shows Zhang Ailing's head colored in ghostly green intruding abruptly into the picture frame. The background is a sunlit balcony with a rough cement wall and floor. The sun and the shadow of a chair, contrasted with the green profile, only enhance a nocturnal spectral presence. This ghostlike, disquieting intrusion echoes the cover design of the extended edition of *Romances*, which was designed and drawn by Zhang's friend Yan Ying (Figure 10.3). It depicts the profile of a modern woman leaning into a window of a boudoir, where a Qing-dynasty lady is playing card games. The modern woman has a disproportionately large

upper torso, and her countenance is hidden behind a mask. According to Zhang's description, the head should be light green, indicating a ghostly presence. In her own words:

The cover was designed by Yan Ying, with some borrowing from a late Qing portrait painting. It shows a woman seated languidly playing solitaire mah-jong, with a nanny holding a child. It looks like the most common domestic scene after dinner. But from outside the fence, most unexpectedly, a disproportionate human figure appears like a specter. It is the modern person, peeping curiously into the boudoir scene. If there is anything unnerving about the picture, it is precisely the atmosphere I hope to create. ("You jiju hua tong duzhe shuo," 1)

The disturbing quality of the vision is also conditioned by the fact that the woman in the inner chamber doesn't seem to notice this trespass in the background, and thus is unaware of the vulnerability of the apparently everlasting idle life of traditional interiority.

Zhang's response to the visual cultures of her day lies at the center of her aesthetic self-development. In the 1940s, she caught the trend of fashion through her conscious self-staging by evoking the lure of photography; then, in the 1990s, by composing the visual narrative in her family album, she captured the fashion of nostalgia, a visual hunger best expressed in the boom of reproductions of pre-1949 vintage photos. Whether or not she was aware of it in her reclusive life in Los Angeles, Zhang had successfully transplanted her version of vintage photos, a family album from the private sphere, to the public realm. Via a diversity of media, ranging from print culture, television, film, dance, theater, and CDs to the Internet, these photographs have swept the cultural market of the Chinese-speaking world since their first publication by Crown Press in Taipei, thus constituting one of the most brilliant spectacles in the memory culture of fin-de-siècle China.

While the vision of death and departure pervades this elaborately constructed family album, it has been turned into the most splendid *lieu de mémoire*⁸ in the Chinese mnemonic landscape. Ironically, the figure of Zhang Ailing across various historical junctures as phantasmal apparition between the visible and the invisible helped increase her prominence. Visibility, as

Laura Kipnis states, is “a complex system of permission and prohibition, of presence and absence, punctuated by apparitions and hysterical blindness” (158). The hysterical blindness was evidenced in the unquenchable public desire for visuality, the desire to see, to see more, to see more closely, which obviously could not be satisfied by Zhang’s visual presentation in these old photographs. In this context, visibility is filtered through the lenses of enchantment and exorcism.

Between March 1 and March 29, 1997, Crown Press—in a most sarcastic twist to the dialectic of visibility and invisibility—curated a memorial exhibition dedicated to Zhang Ailing, with the title *Huali yu cangliang: Zhang Ailing jinianzhan* (Splendor and desolation: a memorial exhibition of Zhang Ailing). To reveal the “real Zhang Ailing” to the public, her personal things, ranging from scrap papers, clothes, and shoes to cosmetics and even wigs, were collected and put on display.⁹ If the vintage dress in Zhang’s imagery is meant to expose the indistinct outline of history, the



Figure 10.3. Front cover of the extended edition of *Romances*, published in 1946 by Shanhe Publishing House in Shanghai. The cover was designed by Zhang’s friend Yan Ying.

looming specter of a bygone age, then the exhibition of Zhang's costumes amounted to the cruelest manner of exposure. In this display meant to enhance her visibility, the figure of Zhang Ailing was ultimately disembodied and exorcized under the bare lights of the exhibition hall, and thus rendered forever invisible.

Notes

1. In a recent article, "Zhang Ailing chuanqi yu qihuan xiaoshuo de xiandaixing," Jianhua Chen argued that some of Zhang's stories can be read as modern dramatizations of classical Chinese ghost fantasies restaged at the age of the modern. "Red Rose, White Rose," for instance, can be interpreted as a modern version of the mid-Tang dynasty work *Huo Xiaoyu zhuan* (The tale of Huo Xiaoyu), a story about the ghost of an abandoned wife seeking revenge through the circle of reincarnation.

2. In their reflections on the essential feature of photography, both Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes comment on the connection between photography and death. However, while Barthes's thought on photography is marked by a philosophical and psychological focus, Sontag shows a deeper social and ethical concern. In this light, her approach comes closer to Lu Xun's ambivalent stance on photography at the beginning of Chinese literary modernity.

3. Cf. Ackbar Abbas's keynote speech delivered at the International Conference "Space and Time in Chinese-language Cinema" held on November 5–6, 2010, at the University of California, Davis, "Spectral Histories, Spectral Images," in which he discussed the spectral spatial unconscious in the age of socialist market economy as represented in contemporary Chinese films.

4. One of these plastic costumes was shown in the exhibition *New Chinese Art: Inside Out* at the Asia Society and Museum in New York between September 15, 1998, and January 3, 1999 (later also at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, February 26–June 1, 1999). It was the first major international exhibition of contemporary Chinese art, curated by Gao Minglu. A picture of it was collected in the catalog of this exhibition. Wang Jin, "The Dream of China: Dragon Robe, 1997," polyvinyl chloride, fishing line (78 × 70+ × 15 in. [198 × 180 × 38 cm]). Collection of the artist. Plate 32).

5. The photograph by An Hong was exhibited in *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* at the David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago in 1999.

6. Zhang Ailing, *Duizhao ji*. In the same year that it was published by Crown Press in Taipei, the mainland edition appeared as one of the nine volumes of *Zhang Ailing wenji*, published by Huangcheng Press of Guangzhou. The press of

Guangming Daily published a new photo album entitled *Chongxian de meigui* (Risen rose) in 1999. This is an extended edition of *Mutual Reflections* and includes a large number of quotations from Zhang Ailing's works and many more photographs of Zhang and of various places in Shanghai and Hong Kong where Zhang lived and that she described in her writings. It even includes photographs of her two husbands, Hu Lancheng and Ferdinand Reyher, who are absent in *Mutual Reflections*, as many critics have pointed out. See for instance, Hsia, "Yiduan kudu-oleshao de zhongmei yinyuan."

7. The last full-length novel published before *Mutual Reflections* would be *Yuan nü*, her own Chinese translation of *The Rouge of the North* (1967), published by Crown Press in Taipei in 1968.

8. I am using Pierre Nora's term "lieu de mémoire," created in his ambitious and seminal seven-volume work *Les Lieux de mémoire*, an attempt to rewrite the history of France in symbolic terms, namely, through constructing and interpreting all the sites of collective heritage, French national symbolism, and mythology. This work appears in English translation as *Realms of Memory*.

9. Some of the photos of Zhang Ailing's personal belongings were collected in Zhou, *Kongque landiao*.

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Sphinxes without Secrets

W. G. Sebald's Albums and the Aesthetics of
Photographic Exchange

ADRIAN DAUB

YEARS AGO, I visited an elderly couple in suburban Pennsylvania, fugitives from Hitler's Germany, who had been, during his lifetime, friends of the writer Winfried Georg Sebald (1944–2001). The two were avid collectors, in particular of photographs, and the novelist, fascinated and possessed of similar impulses, had borrowed some of their keepsakes for possible inclusion in a new novel. Sebald had died in a car accident shortly before I first met the elderly couple, and the novel that might have housed their snapshots was never written. During one of my visits, a misunderstanding arose due to my own poor English and their increasingly poor hearing. I thought I was being offered a doughnut (an offer that I politely declined), but in fact I was being asked about Robert Donat, the British heartthrob from the 1930s. Agitated, my hostess stalked out of the room only to return with a dusty album that contained, on page after page, an exacting collection of clippings and cutouts from various magazines, teen or otherwise, of Robert Donat in all possible poses and attire. A bit of a schoolgirl crush she had developed while in England, she explained, perhaps an attempt to fit in in a new country, a new *Heimat*. I forgot to ask whether Sebald had ever seen the Donat album, and even if he had, he seems to have gravitated toward the couple's family snapshots and post-card collections. But I imagine that Sebald knew quite well what I realized that day: albums used to hold a lot more than snapshots. What came as an epiphany to me is something that Sebald's books, which themselves

look like albums, though not just photo albums, have made an aesthetic principle.

Today, most photo albums, at least those maintained by adults, contain snapshots of friends and family; and the many albums that Sebald's narrators hunch over with their owners focus on those kinds of pictures as well. But the novels draw on motifs that exceed the family snapshot, but that an earlier age would have thought quite worthy of albumization—like the collected clippings of Robert Donat. Only the trading card album, for example for baseball cards, remains today of a long tradition of post-card albums, celebrity albums, portrait albums, and albums for newspaper clippings. Collection in albums is clearly concerned with a certain kind of domestication and encyclopedism. There is something dangerous in mass-produced pictures (or texts) that needs to be harnessed, something in their circulation that threatens us, so that we are content only once their ceaseless exchange is arrested and they are on those white pages, as if wriggling on a pin. And yet, no matter how much we may caption, label, explain, alphabetize, or otherwise systematize them, albumized pictures stay in, and boldly announce, their purely contingent connection. The very notion of an album, etymologically a white space waiting to be filled with just about anything, already betrays the fact that these pictures, autographs, stamps, clippings remain arbitrary.

At first blush, a photo album and a novel would seem to be characterized by an exactly reversed relationship of photograph to text. And while recent work, in particular by W. J. T. Mitchell, has complicated the simple privileging of one over the other to the effect that texts and photograph coconstitute a photo-text, W. G. Sebald's texts have continued to perplex, precisely because they are both albums and novels. Many of those who have argued that Sebald's photographs are not mere illustrations have tended to highlight the dynamic interactions instituted between Sebald's writing and the photographs with which it is interspersed. To some extent, this opens up a false dichotomy: perfect interpenetration of word and image on the one hand, versus absolute privileging of the written word on the other. This false dichotomy considers it a mere surface occurrence that in Sebald's text the first impression is often just the opposite, namely that text and image persist in relative autonomy side by side. And it turns the

task of the critic into a sounding out of the intricate connections between text and image that lie beneath the compartmentalized surface.

But what would happen were we to take seriously the surface awkwardness, the compartmentalization of word and image, characteristic of Sebald's photographic style? Sebald's strange pictures irrupt into the text without clear reason, be it semantic or lexical. They persist side by side with the text, neither illustrative nor otherwise supplemental, but their seeming self-sufficiency does nothing to clarify their relationship to the text. Seizing this opacity in the relationship of image and text hermeneutically would mean thinking through how the text can mobilize the contingency, the album-character of its self-presentation semiotically—that, in other words, *only* such a deeply puzzling and unresolved relationship between pictorialization and textuality can make certain historic and political configurations aesthetically presentable. The album's ability to do so derives from the fact that specific modes of collusion between word and photograph were a central part of those historical phenomena in the first place—the relationship between word and image does not become a documentary medium for the expression of historical fact, but rather the very way in which word and image function as documents becomes historicized. Not only does Sebald's archeology proceed by means of word and image, it also seeks to unearth historic configurations of word and image as its specific objects.

In the following, I will try to make this case for a particular text of Sebald's. In the third part of *The Emigrants*, Sebald follows his great-uncle's biography, which stands out in the greater context of both the novel and Sebald's oeuvre as a whole: the section concerns the only non-Jew among his protagonist/informers, and the only homosexual. This is where I hope the approach I suggested above would prove fruitful: I want to argue that Sebald engages with the pictorialization of homosexuality as a dialectic between promise and catastrophe through a visual and historically structured intertext to arrive at an ethic of making visible. This involves explicitly thematizing the exact nature of the photographs' "documentarity";¹ it requires thinking through the dynamic "separation of vision and being-seen" (Bischof 83) opened up historically in photography. First, then, we will concern ourselves with photographs that are part of albums; more

precisely, they are part of albums consisting of what I will call *thetic* photographs. As we shall see, while the photographs' presentation in the text (albumization) allows their reading in gendered terms, their pragmatic history opens them up to a reading in terms of sexuality. This reading will yield the outlines of a peculiar ethic that characterizes Sebald's use of the thetic image in this section. If Roland Barthes declares in *Camera Lucida* that "I want a History of Looking" (12), then Sebald might be said to call for an *ethics* of looking.

Photography, Description, and the Verbal Album

In an interview he gave in 1998, Sebald addressed the role of photographs in his fictional "technique" (Sebald, "Der Schriftsteller").² Sebald speaks of "replacing" ("subplantieren") a paragraph of text with one of these pictures. At one point he claims that the photographs are "simply documents of found objects, something secondary." Sebald thus suggests that in his texts (a) text and photographs are interchangeable and (b) the text is primary and the "documents" are its function. Stefanie Harris has shown in detail that Sebald's texts are by no means so straightforward, and that indeed the distinction Sebald makes between "picture" and "text passage" is much more complicated than a cursory reading may suggest (see Harris).

There is something cheeky about Sebald's suggestion that his technique consists of "replacing a text passage" with a picture, for it is not clear what kind of text passage that would be. If he means to suggest that his pictures double for description (see for example Beaujour), then that may be true in some cases, but many of his pictures either illustrate something that does not need describing, or follow a passage that already provides an exhaustive description. This is already admitted in Sebald's second formulation: If his pictures are indeed "true *documents* par excellence,"³ then they need to do little work beyond certifying that the object described really exists and does not spring from the author's fancy (Sebald even speaks of "verification" in this regard).

It seems clear that the two interpretations of the images offered here by the author himself are in fact at variance. This variance, as we shall see, opens an avenue into understanding the inner working of (at least some of) Sebald's photo-texts and coincides with the doubleness in the meaning

of the Latin word *evidentia*: on the one hand *verification*, on the other *description* (Beaujour 29).

These two meanings may be made comprehensible by taking recourse to Kant's claim that *existence is not a predicate* (567, or A 626). Within the photographic judgment (a metaphor to which we shall return), the latter sense of evidence involves precisely the predication of a subject (x is a , b , or c), whereas the former involves simply thethetic certification of the subject's existence (x exists). Or, returning to the visual register, the same distinction is involved in the difference between a mug shot ("the suspect is described as . . .") as opposed to a still from a security tape ("can you deny that this is you?"). Both operations are evidentiary; in fact they are precise mirror images or flip sides of each other: the evidentiary status of description depends on its singling out or identifying a particular, just as the identification can proceed only from the obvious presence of distinctive descriptive markers. And, as Barthes points out, desire moves naturally from one pole to the other: "Since Photography . . . *authenticates* the existence of a certain being, I want to discover that being in the photograph completely, i.e., in its essence" (107).

Among Sebald's photo-textual oeuvre (encompassing his four novels as well as a number of essays), it is in particular the third section of *The Emigrants* that thematizes and puts to work aesthetically the tension that exists, and the desire that circulates, between description and verification in photographic indexicality. Among the quartet of stories that together make up the novel, "Ambrose Adelwarth" stands out for two reasons: it alone concerns an unforced émigré, and the emigration is only tangentially related to Nazism and holocaust. The section tells the story of the narrator's great-uncle Ambrose, as related by a number of relatives and through documents, photographs, and a diary, left by Ambrose. Born into the same Bavarian milieu as the narrator, Ambrose Adelwarth leaves Germany for Switzerland, embarking on a decades-long sojourn around the world, first in the service of an "unmarried legation counselor" (Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 115), then in the employ of the Solomon family, wealthy New York Jews whose son, Cosmo, Ambrose comes to serve as a valet. The text strongly suggests a sexual relationship between Cosmo and Ambrose, whom the narrator's relatives identify as "of the other persuasion" (88);

when Cosmo lapses into despondence brought on by the European catastrophe, Ambrose becomes his caretaker. After Cosmo's death, he remains in the family's service until all his employers are dead; he then returns to the mental hospital in which Cosmo died, submitting willingly to electroshock treatment, which eventually leads to his death.

This story is related through an account of the narrator's own travels that allow him to research his uncle's odyssey. This journey has three legs—East Orange, New Jersey, Ithaca, New York, and Deauville on the Normandy coast. In the United States, the narrator mostly relates the stories told by those who knew Ambrose Adelwarth, while his stay in Deauville concludes with an extended dream that centers on the mysterious relationship between Cosmo and Ambrose: Adelwarth feeds a lobster to Cosmo under the watchful eyes of an entire hotel. As though to somehow solve this riddle, the text subsequently reproduces (both textually and photographically) several pages from Ambrose Adelwarth's diary, chronicling his and Cosmo's trip from Italy, via Istanbul, to the Dead Sea.

Sebald's narratives do not deploy images to one particular and invariant end; rather, they constitute variations on the interrelation of word and image, varying and grouping pictures in terms of number, spacing, motif, genre, and function. When it comes to the individual narratives gathered in *The Emigrants*, each section uses images differently from the others. The "Ambrose Adelwarth" section stands out as easily the most heavily reliant on pictures—twenty-six grace its pages, usually in clusters of three or more. But the different sections of *The Emigrants* also differ with respect to the genres of pictures on which they rely: The "Paul Bereyter" section relies more heavily on family snapshots, written material, and maps than any other, for instance. The section telling the story of Uncle Ambrose, on the other hand, relies most heavily on postcards and similar conventional images (the top of the Empire State Building, for instance, which might either be a postcard or a snapshot emulating a postcard). Fully half of the section's pictures fall into this category; snapshots, by contrast, are underrepresented, and most of the ones that do occur in the text pertain to the narrator's travels rather than Ambrose's (as opposed to the "Bereyter" section, where the family snapshots are mostly from Bereyter's own album). The section is thus dominated by pictures that are purely conventional motifs,

which, by their very nature, render the photographic reproduction a simple verification of what is already known to exist (what Sebald terms their “tautological” character).

This reliance on postcards, *cartes de visite*, and occasional photography means that writing attains an entirely different relationship to the picture. They require writing for captioning and relay, for integration into a circuit of exchange, in ways that those of other sections of *The Emigrants* do not. The section is one of the few in Sebald’s oeuvre that engages (albeit implicitly) with questions of (homo)sexuality and history. Homosexuality is a condition of Sebald’s text, but one that infiltrates his pictures as well, especially the conventional motifs mentioned above. It reverses the pure index, that which simply identifies, turning it into an instance of social control by reading. The photographs’ descriptive features reenter the picture as disciplinary forms of diagnostic scrutiny. The simple, obvious tautologies of the portrait photographs, the triteness of the postcards, the carefully covered handwriting, all revert into symptoms, features outside of the control of the object being depicted, features to be scrutinized, deciphered, controlled. The guiding question in the following sections is basically whether there is a reason why the section of *The Emigrants* that deals with homosexuality is also the one to rely on postcards, on conventional and stock photography more heavily than all the others. If Sebald varies his approach to the image-text from book to book, from section to section, or even within a section, does he do so in dialogue with the material being presented?

It is clear from the outset that if there is such a dialogue, it is not necessarily aimed at rendering more explicit either the text or its images. Instead, the pictures and the secret story they represent seem to mystify any simple documentary, and thus disciplinary, control. The text is in some strange collusion with the pictures to construct, to maintain, and even to flaunt a secret. In an interview, Sebald emphasized that, in interspersing his texts with photographs, he was interested in the concrete materiality of the photographic, as well as of the photographed signifier. Sebald views the photographs as verification of the existence of something (the kind of judgment that testifies that “x exists/existed”), but this evidentiary quality tends to destabilize rather than stabilize his narratives. After all, what the x is that

exists/existed is thematized only in fiction, a story told by a narrator named W. G. Sebald. Moreover, the text may actually fictionalize (put under suspicion, make readable literarily) its photographs, a danger of which Sebald was himself aware. In an interview he noted:

All kinds of possibilities arise from these kinds of constellations, all of which one can think about. And you can verify them only by a picture that was taken at the time. Otherwise the reader may think, well that's just another bit of writerly extravagance, who invented this, or who extended the lines of whatever happens in real life, in order to produce something with a certain meaning or symbolism. But in truth, those images are simply there. (Sebald, "Der Schriftsteller")

The photographic document, whether this be in the expansive sense or the limited sense, by virtue of its being-there, helps curb suspicions of authorial "extravagance" that the reader might entertain. This extravagance is clearly an extravagance or excess of meaning, more precisely a surfeit of connotation.

It is centrally important that the "Ambrose Adelwarth" section's most pivotal episode, the return to Ithaca (N.Y.), deploys exactly this kind of surfeit of connotation as a kind of trope; whatever the text claims is "simply there" wears on its sleeve the fact that it is fictive construct. The symbolism against which the verification provided by photographic evidence was supposed to serve as guardrail asserts itself against and almost comes to overwhelm the photographs themselves. The signifier Ithaca contains, in a strange but telling reversal of the conventional term, a veritable *effet d'iréel*: pure connotation overwhelms denotation; the text, which always underpins its seemingly documentary narrative with uncanniness, doubling, and overt montage, here explicitly forgoes all traces of reference in favor of a literary sleight of hand so ostentatiously and so outrageously artificial that any supposed documentarity is, at least for a moment, drained from the text. Our suspicions, nourished by Ambrose Adelwarth's odyssey, itself so fantastical as to beggar belief, are finally born out in the too-clever-by-half conceit to have that odyssey conclude, of all places, in Ithaca, New York.

That the Ithaca in New York, alongside the many place names Sebald lists in recounting his drive upstate, is an unmoored signifier par excellence that in turn stands in relation only to other signifiers (Rome, Utica, Syracuse, Ilion, Geneva) seems to set up the upstate area as a pure text without referent. By “going to Ithaca,” the object of the bourgeois quest for self-coincidence (Adorno and Horkheimer 64), Adelwarth enters instead into a world of pure textuality, giving up his tragic sojourn for a literary joke. Adelwarth follows Cosmo around the world because he wants to; he goes to Ithaca because he is a character in a novel.

The trip the narrator takes to Ithaca in Ambrose’s footsteps constitutes the first of the text’s albums, albeit a linguistic one. Sebald himself noted the album-like, anthologizing, and fetishistic aspect of, for example, Stifter’s details (Sebald, “Bis an den Rand,” 27), and Jan Cuppens has in turn observed that Sebald’s “Detailbesessenheit” (preoccupation with detail) gives his writing an enumerative (see Mainberger), archival quality (Cuppens 246). Sebald recounts his trip upstate with an almost suspicious attention to detail: He enumerates his route up State Highway 17, “Monroe, Monticello, Middletown, Wurtsboro, Wawarsing, Colchester and Cadosia, Deposit, Delhi, Neversink and Niniveh” (Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 153). In its fetishistic litany of names, the trip to Ithaca recalls young Marcel’s obsession over the stops along the 1:22 train to Balbec: “the train stopped at Bayeux, at Coutances, at Vitré, at Questambert, at Pontorson, at Balbec, at Lannion, at Lamballe, at Benodet, at Pont-Aven, at Quimperlé” (Proust 419).

But Proust’s fetishistic attention to the *noms du pays* relies on an inherent meaningfulness (albeit entirely subjective) of the signifier—“Vitré, whose acute accent barred its ancient glass with wooden lozenges” (Proust 422)—while the towns along Route 17 strike Sebald’s narrator as “an oversized toyland, whose place-names had been haphazardly gleaned from the ruins of another world by an invisible giant child” (Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 153). While, in keeping with a certain Proustian “cratylism” (see Genette), the names along the route of the 1:22 train are necessary, those of upstate New York are arbitrary. The trip to Ithaca is not so much a trip into the uncanny, even though each city here is another name’s double, but rather one into an archive, an album, where signifiers neighbor one another for no reason other than that they are names.

A second text shadows Sebald's list of names: the "colored hearing" young Vladimir Nabokov entertains in chapter 2 of *Speak, Memory* (see McCulloh), which links up every sound to a material or color, suggesting, counterfactually, as it were, what names ought to be naming rather than what they do (the word for "rainbow," for example is *kzspygv*). Young Vladimir shares his "private language" with his mother: "We discovered then that some of her letters had the same tint as mine" (Nabokov 382). Again, Sebald's names are not necessary, but moreover they are in no sense part of a private language. Albumized, these names certify the impossibility of collusion, of a privacy of meaning, but assert rather a sort of globalized signification, in which Rome can be on the Tiber or on the Mohawk (or indeed on the Etauwah).

Sebald's motherless code highlights the pure textuality of the section, so much so that it comes to infect the photographs. As though to bear out the very fears about authorial fancy, the section's documents become more literary, more symbolic precisely because of the section's high and self-conscious literariness. For instance, the "note" Uncle Ambrose leaves for the narrator proclaiming that he has "gone to Ithaca," which is reproduced in the text, would probably pass muster as the real thing, were it not for the text's outrageous symbolism, which destabilizes this otherwise perfectly plausible referent. This actually eases the scrutiny Sebald's narratives at times solicit for the images included in them; after all, the reader is given to understand that this story is fictive and that the documentary weight it assigns to its pictures is likely to be a fictional sleight of hand as well. This effect springs from an impulse diametrically opposed to that expressed by Sebald the documentarian. It is almost as though Sebald were trying to protect these images from prying eyes by integrating them in so flamboyantly literary a fiction. And it is already clear exactly how those eyes would pry: Proust's and Nabokov's reading of names is diagnostic; Sebald's albumization is pure thaumaturgy—in keeping his names obvious and motherless, he paradoxically guards their secret.

The Photo Album, the *Carte de visite*, and the Traffic in Photographs

Sebald's writings often thematize explicitly the fate of the pictures included in the texts: in many cases (for instance, those of *The Emigrants's* Max

Aurach and Austerlitz's Jacques Austerlitz) photo albums and life stories come into the narrator's possession at the same time; in yet others photographs influence and direct the stories unfolded. These gestures rely on a divide between the public and the private: either a private object is surrendered alongside its interpretation, or a public image is provided with its real meaning (which is always private). The privacy of the photographic image is perhaps most explicit in *The Rings of Saturn's* travel photographs, which, starting with the disquieting image of a hospital window, are introduced as direct projections of the narrator's subjectivity, the interpretation of which the narrative is called in to provide. As we have noted, the section of *The Emigrants* dealing with Ambrose Adelwarth is atypical in this respect, insofar as it relies almost entirely on conventional motifs (in particular in the form of postcards) of exceedingly well-documented places (a colorful assortment of hotels, casinos, and public buildings). Even when it appears to dip into a private photo album, the novel presents pictures that have been taken, much like postcards, with exchange, circulation, or publication in mind, and that most likely adorn the albums of many travelers besides Ambrose Adelwarth.

In an essay on the photorealist painter Jan Peter Tripp, Sebald writes that "the photographic image turns reality into a tautology" (Sebald, "Wie Tag und Nacht," 178). The photograph's documentariness comes at the price of making its referent ultimately fungible; it can say *ça a été*, as Roland Barthes has put it, but what it is that "has been" becomes problematic. When Sebald claims for Tripp's pictures a different effect, he does so based on Tripp's valorization of the detail, which allows the things depicted "to stare back at us" (Sebald, "Wie Tag und Nacht," 174). Tripp's paintings, which eschew focus, contrast, and other hallmarks of natural vision in the interest of a hyperreal "regard préhumain,"⁴ thus transcend the tautological precisely through the predicative register we discussed above. By contrast, the pictures Sebald provides in the "Ambrose Adelwarth" section of *The Emigrants* tend to veer in exactly the opposite direction: they do not return the gaze, but pliantly solicit it; they simply testify that whatever "that" was, it was once there.

The kinds of photographs Sebald is relying on are extremely commercial and conventional; this exacerbates the double problem of a blind

positivism (what Sebald terms their “tautological” character) and arbitrariness (which he in an interview identifies with today’s “inflation” of the image; Sebald, “Der Schriftsteller”). What these pictures can say to the uninitiated is simply that there once was this person, or that there is a hotel in Deauville. What matters for our purposes is that this kind of pliancy is at once a kind of reticence: these pictures surrender their meaning (x, y, z existed) all too readily, but in doing so they prevent us from looking any closer at what are after all entirely conventional motifs. Imagine receiving a postcard of the Eiffel Tower, only to notice that *La dame de fer* has a loose screw! Even the portraits presented within the text, to which we shall soon turn, stage this kind of photographic pliancy: When the narrator’s picture as taken by Uncle Kasimir (a picture, as it happens, identical with a picture of the writer W. G. Sebald) is reproduced in the text (Figure 11.1), it appears so dark and underexposed that we can determine little from it—all we can do is take on faith the axiom that this dark shape is indeed the narrator. And as for a return of the gaze, the terrible reproduction has robbed the dark figure of its eyes—“Sebald” does not face us with eyes, but rather as a man-in-raincoat-shaped hole in a seascape photograph. The narrator’s self-portrait is nothing but a mute, tautological, ritualistic pointing. The what of his existence is quite literally shaded out by its that.

Pictures whose that matters far more than their what are important to us primarily because of the rituals in which they are embedded. Both postcard and portrait are characterized by exchange, and what we have identified with Sebald as their tautological character highlights their performative aspect. If the picture itself repeats the real world like a magic formula, afraid to get any syllable wrong, it also functions as a token for a particular praxis. In fact, what is lost to us in reading these pictures is the community between a sender and an addressee that was once instituted by these pictures. This becomes evident even in the episodes of giving and finding of photographs or whole albums that abound throughout Sebald’s texts. The narrator’s photograph appears only as a gift: the narrator’s uncle Kasimir takes the narrator’s picture, “of which he sent me a copy two years later” (Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 130). It is almost as though the only condition under which the narrator (or his outline) can appear in his own story is to receive this picture from someone else as some sort of token.



Figure 11.1. The narrator's picture taken by Uncle Kasimir. From W. G. Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten*.

But to focus on such a praxis means thematizing not just the history that these pictures document (wars, natural disasters, the “European catastrophe”), but rather the history of documentarity itself—the history of how and what in reality photographs were (supposedly) documenting. While the photographs interspersed in Sebald’s text are almost exclusively read as insistently historical or documentary, their documentarity itself is usually not historicized: that they have a place in the history of the photographic medium as well as a place in the history that they mediate is thus often bracketed. Since there can be no one history of documentarity, reading

Sebald's work in terms of a history of the medium can be at best a local undertaking. My object in what follows is therefore to put in relation the story of Ambrose Adelwarth and the pictures that accompany his story. The different photographic genres Sebald includes in his novelette constitute a distinct semiotic layer, one that inflects and refracts the story.

Just as the text includes this snapshot of the narrator only in an almost magical positing gesture (this picture is this picture), just as it identifies only in this contingent sense (rather than, say, through a caption or hermeneutic cues within the picture), another crucial portrait enters the text by virtue of ritual and circulation. In the case of this picture, the first portrait we get to see of Ambrose Adelwarth himself, it is precisely owing to genre, to documentary history, that ritualistic and exchange-character enter the frame. Sebald reproduces a "foto-portrait in Arab costume" from Jerusalem (Figure 11.2). The photographer's imprint ("Ch. Raad, photographer") at the bottom of the picture clearly identifies the portrait as a *carte de visite*.⁵ The *carte de visite*, a type of albumen print popular in the second half of the nineteenth century, consists of a photograph, usually a portrait, mounted on a piece of cardboard the size of a visiting card. Since its dimensions aren't immediately apparent, the picture Sebald reproduces might also be a so-called cabinet card, larger in size and usually narrower than the *carte de visite*. It is worth noting that these exchange images constitute the central photographically mediated social practice before lighter cameras allowed for the introduction of the snapshot. This photograph, then, by its very nature is always already integrated into an economy of pictures—it is meant to be exchanged, meant to be collected in albums. And it is also anything but a snapshot, but rather the picture itself is, like its subject, in costume, concerned with a certain publicity, but at the same time withdrawing from this publicity.

However, unlike, for example, the famous studio photograph of Walter Benjamin and his brother as "alpinists,"⁶ the costume in which Ambrose appears in this studio picture is strangely redundant. The fez, the caftan, the hookah, and the backdrop all combine to suggest the very place where it was taken. Like the boys posing in lederhosen before an alpine backdrop in some Berlin studio, the Ambrose in the *carte de visite* is carefully staged to create the illusion that the picture was taken in the Middle East—as it



Figure 11.2. The "foto-portrait in Arab costume" reproduced by Sebald in *Die Ausgewanderten*.

in point of fact was. The tautological character that attached to Sebald's self-portrait-by-proxy has here moved into the picture itself. It of course only heightens the mystery of the portrait: When Sebald presents another picture of Ambrose a few pages later, many a reader will have flipped back and wondered whether this man, so perfectly immersed in his Arab costume, could really be the same man as the one sitting awkwardly on a stoop. Is he not perhaps rather an Arab haplessly smuggled into the text to pose as a European in drag?

While the costume and the tautological obviousness raise the question of drag, the photographic form itself raises questions of mechanisms of identification: the image's orientalism, if indeed it shows a European in costume, represents an identifiable self taking a vacation from itself, the self dabbling in being the other. It can do so as a function of power, of global capitalism, a privileged European inscribing himself into the fantastic space of "the Orient." At the same time, the orientalism of this picture and this disguise is redolent with the sexualization of the racial other. There is a desire tied up in this picture, either in its subject's disguise and posing (if indeed they are a disguise and a pose) or in the gaze solicited by the picture.

Much like the holiday snapshot today (and like the postcard in its own day), the *carte de visite* was collectible in albums. Like a calling card, it was traded as a token—Queen Victoria and Emperor William II bestowed their pictures upon their fans the way rock stars today give autographs. The mid-century inflation of *cartes de visite* allowed the middle classes to emulate these regal gestures. Elizabeth Anne McCauley has gone so far as to suggest that they constitute a profanation of the famous, the sacral, the auratic (and thus an obscenity). But while this type of print "democratizes portraiture" (Smith 216), it also changes its character. Since it is meant to be exchanged with a great number and wide range of people, it can no longer communicate with as circumscribed an intent as, say, a marriage portrait. If, according to Barthes, the photograph in general can do no more than say *ça a été*, then the *carte de visite* can really say little more than *bonjour, j'existe*. Any picture, any pose, any apparel and accoutrements can characterize the *carte de visite*—what is legible is primarily the *me*-ness of the picture. This effect is comparable to the fact that an indefinite number of motifs can stand in for a location on a postcard.

Insofar as the cartes' pictures invite detailed readings, they actually point beyond themselves and pretend to be unproblematic reproductions of external reality. What is read in or into a *carte de visite* is not (or pretends not to be) a matter of photographic technique or style, but rather inheres in the features, position, and gestures of the persons depicted themselves. This is the flip side of the democratizing gesture of the *carte de visite*—there is a disciplinary, anthropological, physiognomic gaze solicited by these pictures.⁷ We scan these portraits for the shape of the faces, for beauty and ugliness, for good or bad posture, for ethnic markers (Lalvani 81). Since the “I” presented to us in the *carte de visite* is in fact a picture, we can only read this I diagnostically—the identity of the person, as we will see, is entirely symptomatic, hidden behind the surface of the card. We will not know this I's personal identity, but we will deduce from its features a pathological persona, a nexus of different registers of power.

In this context, the fact that the *carte de visite* shows Uncle Ambrose in Arab clothes assumes even greater importance, tying the picture into ethnographic knowledge produced in the nineteenth century of both the “exotic” and the “other at home” (the cretin, the criminal, the degenerate; Pick 109ff. esp. 124–25) in and through the photographic portrait. While there is certainly a sense of agency in the costume in which Ambrose chooses to disguise himself here, he thereby willingly submits to scopic regimens of control, ways of looking with a view to identification, to discipline, to diagnosis. Desire and visual pleasure can be dangerously reversed. Is he costumed or the real thing? What are his motives for the costume? Is he slipping up somehow, allowing us to decide one way or the other?

For the *carte-de-visite* photograph shares another of the postcard's perplexities: for something seemingly so concrete and individual it is surprisingly hard to personalize, both in the extended sense of taking semiotic control over the picture, and in the simple sense of inscribing it with something that would explain the picture's *ça*. The front of the card usually has the albumen print and on the bottom, almost as a caption, the name of the photo studio where the card was made. Unless one were to write directly on the picture (which smacks of impiety even for us, let alone the photo worshippers of the nineteenth century), one cannot caption this photograph

at all; one cannot tell the onlooker, for whose benefit the *carte de visite* has been produced in the first place, just who this someone was, who was at one time someone enough to both have his or her picture printed on a card and hand it out to friends and acquaintances, but who was not quite sufficiently someone to be immediately recognized for who they are. The crowned heads of Europe and other assorted celebrities bestowed upon their subjects (and bequeathed to the twentieth century) a veritable flood of instantly recognizable or clearly identifiable pictures; the flip side to these celebrity photos are the hundreds of personal *cartes-de-visite* photographs whose anonymous subjects stare dumbly out of cartons in the corner of an antiques store at a shopper who has no idea who they are.⁸

At first blush, it may not seem strange that the *carte de visite* affords no space for personalization. For one, avid collectors could purchase albums (similar to those used for postcards) in which to caption these photographs. Moreover, personalizing a personal picture seems oddly redundant. If I were to hand you a photograph of myself and label it with my name, the gesture would surely seem strange to you. The very fact that I am handing you the photograph implies that you know what I look like and thus just who is depicted on the photograph. And yet, the pictures are made with a posterity in mind (though probably not that of the collector rifling through cartons of old postcards in a thrift shop), are forget-me-nots of a most emphatic kind: they entrust their subjects' memory to another person. The *carte de visite* always has an addressee and, as in the case of a postcard, that addressee is often identified on the back of the card.

I have reproduced the reverse side of a *carte de visite* made in the atelier of Fred Boissomas in Geneva (Figure 11.3): "En souvenir de ton amie Hermine compagne de la même terrible prononciation du français." Identification of the picture's subject requires an address to the nameless friend: Hermine has found a way of slyly captioning her image while dedicating it to someone else. On another reverse side (Figure 11.4), the boy immortalized on the card's albumen print has captioned himself—an affecting, gawky gesture not just because of his handwriting, but in its utter redundancy. Who is Herbert Sowinski identifying himself to? For what purpose? When I was young, I used to cover my school notebooks with my

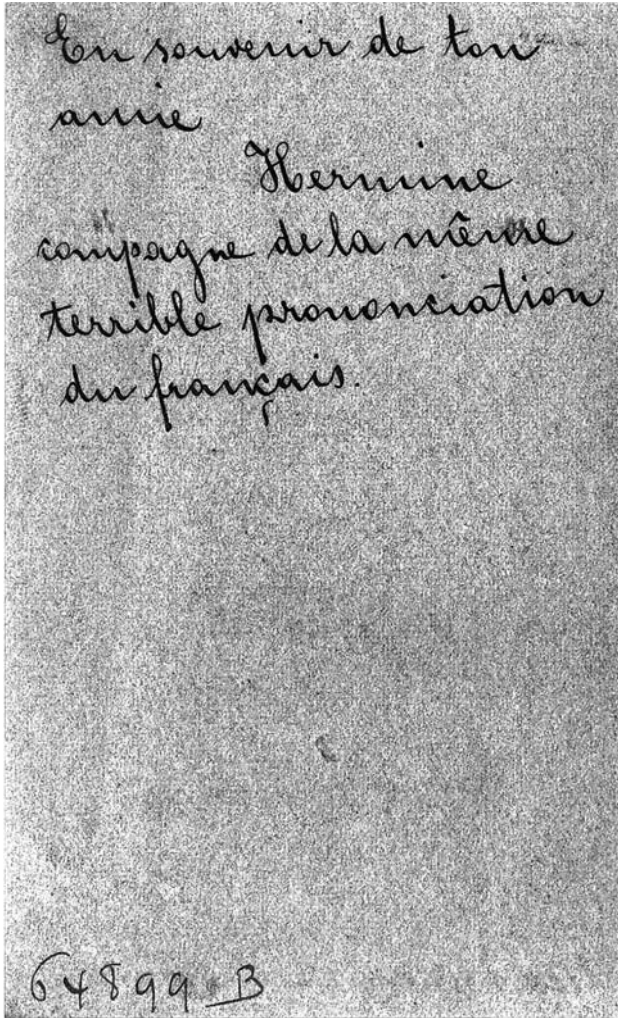


Figure 11.3. Reverse side of a *carte de visite*, early twentieth century, Geneva. Author's collection.

own name: one name was required, of course, so the teacher could keep our notebooks apart; I added the rest simply out of a strange joy at my own name. Maybe Herbert Sowinski had a similar instinct.

The third *carte de visite* (Figure 11.5) shows a young man, almost a boy, whom the card stages as a student: he is holding a book and a uniform cap, and on the table behind him lies a stack of papers. But all the picture's

PHOTOGRAPHIE.

J. FUCHS

G · M · B · H

· BERLIN ·

N · REINICKENDORFERSTR · 4 ·

· NEUKÖLN ·

BERGSTR · 151/52 ·

FILIALE · SCHLOSS-ATELIER

UNTER DEN LINDEN 25 ·

DIE PLATTE BLEIBT FÜR NACHBESTELLUNGEN
- UND VERGRÖßERUNGEN AUFBEWAHRT ·

Herbert Sowinski

Figure 11.4.
Reverse side of a
carte de visite,
early twentieth
century, Berlin.
Author's
collection.



Figure 11.5. Front and reverse side of a *carte de visite*, Berlin, 1919. Author's collection.

Zur freundlichen Erinnerung
an meinen Freund
Walter Feilicke

Eingerechnet 7. 9. 1919.

caption on the card identifies is the table, which stood, at some unidentified time, in Rudolf Obigt's photo studio on Reinickendorferstraße 2 in Berlin. Only once we turn over the card do we find some trace of the photograph's subject and its addressee. The identification of this card is handwritten on the back: "Zur freundlichen Erinnerung an Deinen Freund Walter Feibicke," as well as the penciled note "Eingeseget 7.9.1919." Whoever the boy in the picture, this is his handwriting—and here our troubles begin, as the handwriting is not very legible. The text might just as well read: "Zur freundlichen Erinnerung an meinen Freund Walter Feibicke." In this case, Walter Feibicke would be the picture's addressee and not its subject.

Looking closer yet, we notice that there are three separate hands present on the back of the card: "Zur freundlichen Erinnerung . . ." is in a different, more adult hand than the stilted, somewhat schoolboyish signature Walter Feibicke. Where the "freundlichen" betrays an experienced writer who is unfazed (or doesn't even notice) when the ink stops flowing for the loop of the small "f," the "k" and "e" of "Feibicke" are clearly a late addition and comparatively maladroit. The signature's attempt to reproduce the first hand's style without any hope of acceding to its fluency suggests that perhaps the text on top was written by a parent and the name could individuate either as a signature (the child signing off on his parent's text) or as an address of sorts (a technique invitations to children's birthdays or elementary school valentines sometimes take recourse to).

The third bit of writing, probably a collector's or a descendant's (or an album keeper's?), is clearly posthumous and external to the exchange—its belatedness is identical with its outsider status. The person who notes "Eingeseget 7.9.1919" is neither subject nor addressee, but someone who is not quite confident he or she will remember when and on what occasion the picture was taken. Its interests are not communicative but rather curatorial—the handwriting of forgetfulness and of forgetting. It certifies the demise of the obviousness of the pictorial transaction. It admits that the pragmatic knowingness, that which at one point went without saying (whether the picture is Walter Feibicke or was given to him by a school friend), now has to be put into writing—and thus all the information it can provide us with is always too little. As the identification of the young boy who is either Walter Feibicke or else his friend makes clear, once the

obviousness of the referent of a tautological, or thetic, picture has waned, we are thrown back into a much thicker kind of description. In the last few pages, I have donned the hat of a graphologist, a detective, a logician, and a memoirist to make sense of the young boy's identity. His fellow *Konfirmanden* would have shrugged off that question with a simple "Why, that's Walter"; now it requires powerful diagnostic and analytic tools, as well as the power of writing to pin down even partially. The reticence of the thetic picture that we found characterizing the postcards in the previous section has an uncanny way of soliciting rather than shutting out diagnosis. The "Ambrose Adelwarth" narrative that captions Sebald's thetic images similarly reminds us that, although they pose as just indices, as postcards, as cartes de visite, they could and perhaps should be scrutinized as diagnostic tools. At least their availability as such is raised again and again throughout the narrative. As the narrator reports, his dreams in Deauville are filled with "a constant murmur, which had its origins in the rumors that circulated about Cosmo and Ambrose" (Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 183)—the written word reminds us that the images may not be as thetic and self-evident as they pretend to be. I will now turn to the question of writing, at times an amorous gesture, certainly one of trust, however one that always invites, submits, and surrenders to reading.

Postcard Albums: The Obvious Secret

In illustrating Ambrose Adelwarth's world travels, Sebald is claiming to draw on "a postcard album left behind by Uncle Ambrose" (*Die Ausgewanderten*, 113) stowed away in the drawers of his aunt Fini's bedroom. And indeed, while some of the hotels, estates, and casinos mentioned in the text warrant a postcard, others do not. One of the first postcards he presents is that of the Hotel Eden at Montreux (Figure 11.6), a strangely over-insistent picture, a picture so transparent in its reference that it has to mark itself as itself several times over. Not only does it depict a clearly identifiable building from a vantage point that allows the camera to encompass the entirety of the object and nothing more, the object is itself labeled. And just in case the neon letters spelling out "Hotel Eden" on the roof of the grand hotel were not enough, the postcard is itself captioned: "Montreux—Hôtel Eden et le Mont Cubli." Whether this postcard was simply kept by

Ambrose for integration into his album, or whether he sent it and subsequently retrieved it, is impossible to tell, as Sebald reproduces the triply redundant image without its now-hidden reverse side.

When Jacques Derrida began interrogating the kind of publicity instituted by the *carte postale*, he was interested in a physical postcard that has some kind of conventional motif on the one side and a brief (usually equally conventional) written text on the other. It is of course central that the postcards Sebald reproduces for us are, at least *prima facie*, stripped of that second side. If they ever had writing on the back, their very inclusion within the narrative has obliterated that writing. Seeing as the last act of the story of Ambrose is almost fetishistic in its faithful reproduction of the very handwriting that we would expect on the back of the various postcards, it is clear that in turning to the role the postcard plays in Sebald's text we will also address the question of writing. In this section, I want to consider the amputated postcards that Sebald presents throughout his text, images that are entirely pure in their commerce and in their traffic.

A postcard, more yet than the *carte de visite*, is a pure tautology, whose only value (for the narrative as for the narrative's subjects) is constituted in



Figure 11.6. Postcard of the Hotel Eden at Montreux, reproduced by Sebald in *Die Ausgewanderten*.

its circulation. They say, to paraphrase Sebald paraphrasing Sontag, nothing more than that there is a hotel in Montreux and that it looks like a hotel in Montreux (Sebald, "Wie Tag und Nacht," 178). A postcard is in some sense quite obscene: it makes public the handwriting that the letter covers carefully. And its pictures are obvious, in-your-face rather than withdrawn and mysterious. Unlike Barthes's pictures, paradigmatically of course the famous winter garden photograph, which is so private that it cannot be reproduced (Barthes 73), the pictures (and even the writing) on a postcard are public property, taken to be reproduced, meant to be circulated ad nauseam. And if Barthes, as Liliane Weissberg has put it, "prefers the suggestive and the veiled in contrast to the exposed and pornographic image" (113), then the postcard verges precisely on the obtrusiveness, the obviousness, and the exposedness of pornography.

While it thus veers dangerously into the excessively public, the postcard's publicity is simultaneously depersonalized: it doesn't have a return address, and it often lacks a proper signature. While the letter is marked by a pronounced secret (clearly demarcating inside/outside), the postcard is pure surface without interiority, though, as we will see later, it is of course constituted of a double surface (Ripert and Frère 146–47). Either surface, suffice it to say for now, is at once a site of indiscretion, of incontinence, and a mask, a cover—the picture for an experience that it only can provide the vaguest of intimations of, and the text for a secret text that is to follow. Each postcard has a secret, but that secret is perfectly obvious. The postcard can mean something only insofar as it is integrated into a larger text, promising a secret to come, or hearkening back to a secret safely and privately in the past.

The two sides of a postcard are not as straightforwardly related as, say, a picture and its caption, or visual icon and textual *ekphrasis*. Paradoxically, this is because the two sides are more similar than picture and caption. As W. J. T. Mitchell has pointed out, a picture that appears on the scene with some claim to representational transparency inevitably presents itself as an object of contemplation. It is a given, *vis-à-vis* the contingent, *ex-post-facto*, and therefore subjective description, interrogation, or commentary that an accompanying text can submit to it. "Submit" is of course not an accidental choice of term, as the structure of the gaze, that is to say both its

possessor and its object, is explicitly gendered in Western culture (see Mitchell, *Iconology*). It is the role of the feminine to be presented (rather than present itself under its own flag), to flaunt itself for analysis, an analysis that will be carried out in writing, stabilizing some inherent instability in the picture—an inconstancy of reference, a promiscuity of interpretation that the male principle of the text needs to harness.

The postcard eschews this dialectic of the gaze paradoxically because on it, writing and picture have become extremely similar, not only because they are both equally public in the sense that they can be seen by all, but in a more particular sense, namely that they can be read and interpreted by all. Both sides of a postcard go without saying, are purely gestural, and require no private knowledge or language to decode. Postcard pictures are suitably chosen only if they have a patently obvious referent, and if that referent is ever in doubt (say, in the case of a beach with palm trees) it is often labeled. The picture is thus perfectly transparent, and the visual pleasure in looking at a postcard (insofar as it does not derive from the performative dimension) lies in precisely this perfect transparency. In this sense the postcard of a woman's backside with "I ♥ Miami" tattooed on her skin may well constitute the essential postcard-picture.

Postcard texts, at the same time, are strikingly pictorial (Ripert and Frère 146–58). They too solicit a meaning that goes without saying, and they often enough do so in a visual fashion. Decorously or chaotically arranged within the tiny space allotted to the text on the back side of the postcard, and dipping deep into the public well of worn phrases and clichés, they always call for and often require a more careful iconographic examination than the pictures with which they are twinned. How many of us have pored over strange postcards, baffled not by their point of origin (be it because that point was helpfully labeled or be it because the Arc de Triomphe is difficult to confuse), but rather by just whose terrible penmanship, tired remarks about the weather, and illegible signature graced the back of the card. Neither side of the postcard contains privileged information; rather, both sides make spectacles of themselves, their secret constituted by their obviousness.

If there is a mystery to postcards, it is the fact that text and picture often have so little to do with one another. Much like Sebald's captionless texts

and their images, image-side and text-side persist parallel, but with only marginal points of tangency. These points, in Sebald's texts as much as on a postcard, are usually indexical, but that indexicality tends to render the excess of text mysterious and the redundancy of the picture vaguely claustrophobic. I have been to the Taj Mahal, a postcard may certify, and the Taj Mahal looked like the Taj Mahal. The two sides of a postcard are of the same gender and their relation is ambiguous, as opaque as it is trivial.

Sebald intersperses the "Ambrose Adelwarth" section of *The Emigrants* with a veritable postcard album of precisely this kind: famous sights, in particular hotels, resorts, and casinos, of which these pictures can assert precious little beyond the fact that they once existed. However, in introducing these pictures into his albums, one side of the card, the text, disappears from view. The idea of a postcard album forecloses the doubleness of the postcard's superficiality, but highlights it at the same time. The central gesture in reading a postcard is flipping it over to ascertain (if possible) who is writing and from where. In a postcard album, that gesture is constitutively stymied and the act of reading changed accordingly. When we encounter a postcard in an album, the medium has undergone a double erasure: the written text, which constituted its untoward publicness, is now covered up, suppressing whether the postcard was written on at all, its postal route, its "mailing history" (Simon 100). Has it been mailed? Has it arrived at its destination? Or is its recipient its sender? All these questions become all of a sudden unanswerable.

This has the strange effect that all of a sudden there is privileged information to a postcard—a secret, hidden side—although that hidden side is always again just another surface. In the case of the postcard of the Hotel Eden in Montreux, that secret side even enters into the picture itself. Thanks to the rather dull reproduction, the picture has a strange visual imperfection in the upper middle. What, on closer inspection, turns out to probably be a flag of Switzerland flying on the hotel's main flagpole (it flies one of similar size in more recent pictures), looks like a tear in the postcard's surface, a trace of the postal route, the "mailing history," or of its albumization. Would the white center of that tear be the novel's page piercing through the pictorial surface albumized on it? Would it be a part of the page uncovered with writing? And if the denotative censorship that it is just a Swiss

flag were to foreclose any such speculation, would not the surface meaning of the postcard, itsthetic obviousness, have reclaimed what may have been an unwritten text? The negative picture, the lack in the picture, would reveal the lack in the written text, a negative space in the novel's pages.

The photographic image, in particular the stock image, has often been tied into the idea of a fetish. Christian Metz ties the fetish-character of the photograph to the fact that it is always already framed, that it has a *champ* that presents itself to the gaze and the *hors-champ* that is constitutively excluded from the field of vision. Mitchell locates pictorial fetishism in the picture's necessary relationship to writing (*Picture Theory*, 155). In the sense that the written (but pictorial) surface is now hidden from view, the postcard's integration into an album opens up a new dimension for this fetishism.

Of course, as we noted, the photograph on a postcard is in some sense already albumized: it persists alongside its flipside as two metonymic signifiers, whose relation is, in the true sense of the word, contingent, predicated solely on the fact that they occupy abutting spaces, just like the towns of upstate New York in Sebald's odyssey to Ithaca. Visually the two sides of a postcard never can occupy the same space, and it is in the register of visuality that Sebald's integration of the postcard into his text constitutes something of a prohibition. The album is distended laterally, as it were, but that distension pronounces a prohibition on the ritual of flipping a postcard over that is essential to its praxis. Sebald's albumization reads into spatial distance (between picture-postcards, or better, postcard-pictures in the text) what was once a practical, even ritualized coexistence in one space of two entirely separate signifiers.

This spatialization of ritual causes a corresponding distension of desire. Arraying postcards without reverse sides means prostrating desire, curbing scopical pleasure (albeit in the interest of a different, displaced kind of scopical pleasure); yet the same gesture solicits desire insofar as it institutes a secret the gaze wants to penetrate, not only optically, but epistemically as well. After all, reducing the postcard from an act of photographic exchange to a mere indexical appendage to an interloping printed text submits the pictures to questions of veracity and facticity that no postcard would have to stand up to. What went without saying before assumes instead what Carlo

Ginzburg might call an “evidentiary” quality (118): the document ceases to function as a transparent icon and becomes legible as the symptom of its other side, the (repressed) unconscious constituted by the reverse-side of handwritten text. At the same time, the picture becomes a site of amputation: the very fact that it is embedded in an album means that it cannot speak for itself; the fact that it is imbedded in a verbal album (Sebald’s novel) makes its lack of back side transparent. Sebald has taken on the role of the “invisible giant child” that has littered the countryside along Route 17 with the amputated signifiers of “another world” (“Ruinen einer anderen Welt”).

It is exactly at the point at which the text goes to Ithaca that the repressed handwriting makes its reappearance. Sebald first introduces Ithaca through a visiting card, though this one does not have a picture. It is a simple typed business card, for once a card not with the addressee’s name and address, nor with that of some third party, but rather Uncle Ambrose’s “real” address. On the visiting card, Ambrose has left the handwritten note, “Have gone to Ithaca. Yours ever, Ambrose” (Figure 11.7). In introducing what I earlier identified as the most insistently literary and artificial episode in the entirety of *The Emigrants* (culminating in the cameo appearance by the “butterfly man” Vladimir Nabokov), Sebald thus relies on the most concrete kind of evidence—a handwritten note. Of course, like a passport photograph, handwriting does not individuate so much as identify, but here we have a piece of paper that the elusive uncle, of whom we have (at this point in the novel) yet to see a picture, signed himself.

In an interview, Sebald has acknowledged the business card as one of the several fakes deployed throughout *The Emigrants*. In an earlier article, I suggested another one (see Daub): in *The Rings of Saturn*, Sebald provided a newspaper clipping that appears to be a fake. Just like the business card reproduced here, the supposed document seemed designed to undergird a story that did not seem to need support. In the case of the newspaper clipping, Sebald further authorized the fake by noting its purported date of appearance in his own hand and in his own idiosyncratic style on the document itself. In the case of Uncle Ambrose’s calling card, the fake works the opposite way: The address on Ambrose Adelwarth’s business card (“123 Lebanon Drive, Mamaroneck, New York”) does not exist, which obviously

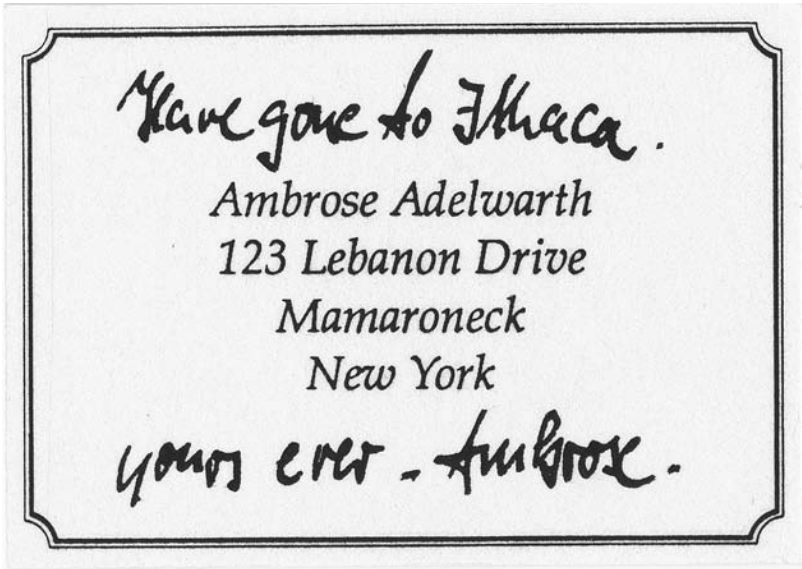


Figure 11.7. A simple typed business card with Uncle Ambrose's "real" address. Ambrose left the handwritten note "Have gone to Ithaca. Yours ever, Ambrose." Reproduced by Sebald in *Die Ausgewanderten*.

raises questions about just who held the pen that added the lines about "going to Ithaca"—is it a montage, the hand of some editor, or perhaps that of the author himself?

The authenticity of the card depends on the hand not being Sebald's, but rather on its constituting a first trace left by Uncle Ambrose. The handwriting suggests, and Sebald later confirmed, that the message was indeed written by Sebald himself ("Wer ist W. G. Sebald?"). The secret side instituted by the albumization of the postcards reproduced in this section, the handwriting the reader is made to fetishize, appears twice—once on the phony visiting card and several times on pages from Uncle Ambrose's diary extensively reproduced in the text. All these handwritten texts were written by Sebald himself. The authentication the postcards' back sides are supposed to provide reveals itself as but another instance of careful authorial construction. The reader's fetishistic hope that maybe these reverse sides might provide something real to ground the dizzying montage and *mise en*

abyeme that characterize Sebald's narratives leads him only into another uncanny hall of mirrors.

The real that is always retreating is the mystery of Ambrose Adelwarth, which is as obvious as it is opaque. Just as in the case of the postcard, which becomes strange precisely because it goes without saying, Ambrose's odyssey solicits our analysis, or perhaps better our diagnosis. In a text from "Documents" ("La figure humaine," 181ff.), Georges Bataille thematized early photography, in particular the portrait, as a site of control: the subject, its head held erect by mechanical contraptions, its eyes wide open for minutes and minutes, the face's shocked contortion at the brightness of the flash—all this registers an ugliness and a violence of the photographic act that today's camera-phone snapshots suppress. That violence consists precisely in photography's diagnostic character: the deviations from the norm that photography allows us to register as ugly or monstrous are pathologized through the pictorial cataloging that occupied much of the nineteenth century. Difference in a photograph is diagnosable the same way it is in handwriting: it allows a canny reader to understand the person depicted in ways they could never hope to know themselves, to identify them as deviant, cretinous, or inverted.

That the photographs point (as their secret) to handwriting only furthers the diagnostic, pathologizing gaze solicited by the text's pictures. Postcards invite us to consider writing graphically, we might even say physiognomically. The basic ritual of flipping that every postcard invites, and from which we are constitutively barred in Sebald's postcard-album, thus involves precisely the reversal of the simplethetic indexicality that at first glance characterizes the section's pictures into descriptive evidence. What once simply insisted on tautology now collapses and submits to reading in terms of symptoms, to a secret depth more real than and motivating than surface. And yet, that it is the author's own hand that has created this latest illusion seems to also play with and frustrate any such symptomatic reading: All we are invited to do is puncture the text and reach directly at the author, leaving the text's characters strangely untouched.

Photographic Back Sides

Nary a critical gloss on the story of Cosmo and Ambrose fails to notice the shadow thrown by the Holocaust over the entire story: Cosmo's visions

of the European catastrophe, and the exclusively Jewish provenance of Ambrose's employers, his doctors, and his lover. Yet I am not aware of any commentary pointing out that Uncle Ambrose's slow and tortuous decline in an Ithaca sanatorium eerily echoes the medical treatment of homosexuals. Wracked by depression, in Aunt Fini and Uncle Kasimir's telling, Ambrose undergoes, with a willingness that frightens his doctors, a brutal electroshock therapy. I will now try to point to a more explicitly queer intertext with which the "Adelwarth" section is in dialogue with the help of its pictures. After all, if nothing else, Sebald relies on, and we have been discussing, two kinds of pictures that, in order to fully understand them, one has to flip over to scrutinize their back sides. This queer intertext does not relate primarily to the words or images of Sebald's text, but rather the historic functions of the words and texts Sebald represents: The intertext depends on specific historic rituals that accompanied these pictures, the kind of historic scrutiny they elicited (and maybe still elicit), rather than on anything they document.

And indeed, Ambrose solicits a peculiar kind of scrutiny, one that transmits itself from the narrative onto the pictures that are interwoven with it. Coming to terms with unknowable characters is at the heart of the narrator's quest in each of *The Emigrants's* segments. But Ambrose is unique: The knowledge he solicits is diagnostic, both from Uncle Kasimir, from the narrator, and from the medical establishment. As Mark McCulloh has pointed out, Ambrose "recognizes his depression not as an existential despair, but as a pathological condition" (37), and he seeks medical and disciplinary remedies by surrendering to the control of the doctors at Samaria Sanatorium. If all of Sebald's characters are enigmas asking to be deciphered, Ambrose is asking to be deciphered by diagnosis. Sebald's narrator realizes as much in his Deauville dream, in which he encounters a room united in the anguished scrutiny of Cosmo and Ambrose sharing a lobster: "Nevertheless I sensed that all the world had trained their eyes straight [*unverwandt*] on the two lobster-eaters, about whom I heard it said from various corners that they were master and servant, a couple of friends, relatives [*anverwandt*], or even brothers" (Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 184). Sebald's juxtaposition of "unverwandt" and "anverwandt" seems to suggest that the kind of scrutiny brought to bear on the two men allows for no kinship or

identification: the two men may be somehow *anverwandt* to one another; the people looking at them are *unverwandt*. This is an unsympathetic, distancing, and slightly sadistic gaze, one very much opposed to the one practiced by the narrator whose interest in his great-uncle is rooted in their relatedness.

Characteristically, Sebald's text treats the matter of Uncle Ambrose's sexuality quite elliptically. It is made explicit only once, when Uncle Kasimir expresses his conviction that Ambrose was "of the other party" ("von der anderen Partei"; Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 129). But, as we have seen, the circuitous route of Sebald's investigations itself gives clues to, or stands in dialogue with, Ambrose's sexuality. It lives off of pictures that are either banal (they are tautologies) or require diagnosis (they are symptoms), or even more frequently oscillate between those two options. Similarly, the narrator's search for meaning oscillates between simply arraying album-like reports of fact (*ça a été*) and soliciting the reader to make connections between the facts. The reader cannot be entirely sure what the "Ambrose Adelwarth" section of *The Emigrants* asks of its reader: Does the narrator think there is a big secret to be spotted behind the facts, and he is just too squeamish or tasteful to make it explicit? Or are we supposed to take Uncle Kasimir's diagnosis as precisely missing the point of Adelwarth's story—that nothing quite so obvious and all-explaining as sexuality may have lain behind the uncle's strange trajectory in both life and death?

What compounds the sense that there is something to be diagnosed behind Uncle Ambrose's story are the pictures that accompany it. When Uncle Kasimir identifies Ambrose as gay, he adds "as anyone could easily see" (Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 129), but the images that interrupt the text throughout this section both solicit and frustrate the gaze, making it hard to say whether Kasimir is right that Ambrose's sexuality could be easily seen. They are, as we noted, more tautological, more self-evident than those of other sections of *The Emigrants*; they are more often concerned with relay, circulation, and commerce, and thus with conventional motifs rather than personality. Beyond the idea that their very superficiality may have something to hide, however, Sebald chooses to include in the section a whole array of images that refer to particular rituals or practices concerning photographs and their exchange, practices that furnish a homosexual

intertext for the Adelwarth story. Postcard, *carte de visite*, and snapshot are deployed here as markers of gay photographic practices, of a specifically sexual history of the photographic medium. Just as in the example of “Ithaca,” Sebald’s narrator brings the reader to the edge of that realization, only to then hide behind the plausible deniability of the supposed documentarity of these pictures: Do the photographs that represent Adelwarth and his travels really just represent a cross-section of pictures that certify this individual’s existence? Or are their genres and their motifs chosen to guide a historically informed diagnosis?

The uncanniness of Sebald’s photographs has not, by any measure, escaped critical notice. Pictures double, return, and behind them lies always again another double; as we have seen, often enough that double bears Sebald’s own handwriting. Just like Freud on the Italian plaza (or Sebald on the Viennese one) the reader can feel downright trapped and claustrophobic. In the case of *Vertigo*, John Zilkosky has proposed a link between the uncanny as it figures in Sebald’s narrative on the one hand and homosexuality on the other (Zilkosky 104–6). Although Zilkosky is not referring to Sebald’s photographs, his characterization may well ring true for the exasperated photo-detective as well. *Vertigo*, he claims, centers around the narrator’s attempts to “lose his way,” an attempt that is always again thwarted by an uncanny encounter with the same. Much as Freud’s famous walk through an Italian city, the narrator’s peregrinations deliver him again and again to the place of uncanny, ghostly recurrence—the place that for Freud ultimately stands for the uterus. Clearly, that frustration is akin to that felt by the reader who at last believes herself confronted with actual traces left by Ambrose Adelwarth (a trace of the other, of something that would exceed the text), only to discover that behind this new and as yet interpretable document hides nothing but the author’s puppetry.

Vertigo, Zilkosky shows, offers homosexuality as a way to prevent this return/recurrence. Sebald, he suggests, is in active dialogue with the Freudian tradition on the uncanny, arguing “that homosexuality might offer a way out of a system of eternal heterosexual return,” a way of losing one’s way, a “perversion” (106). Throughout his travels, the narrator encounters desire between men, seemingly desiring the others’ desire (McCulloh 94). He does not, however, seem to desire this desire for himself, in the reciprocal

sense of the Lacanian *désir*, but rather in the fetishistic, entirely Proustian way of wishing the object of desire to be paradoxically self-sufficient. Just as Proust's Marcel wishes for the letter he would write to himself but in Gilberte's hand (Proust 402), the narrator of *Vertigo*, much like that of *The Emigrants*, seems attracted to the two men's relationship precisely because he cannot (or will not) probe its opacity.

The Proustian structure of this desire is all the more significant since Adelwarth actually crosses literary paths with Marcel Proust in *The Emigrants* (see Loquai). Sebald has Adelwarth and Cosmo visit the town of Deauville "in the summer of 1913" (*Die Ausgewanderten*, 135). Deauville lies right across the river Touques from Trouville-sur-mer (as Sebald's narrator himself notes, 172), the town that Proust visited at the same time and that (together with Cabourg) became the model for his imaginary Balbec. In fact, Proust lived with his mother in Les Roches Noires, a former hotel that Sebald's narrator visits during his quest for Adelwarth and Cosmo (Gallo; Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 174) and a postcard of which is reproduced in the book. The "chauffeur Gabriel" (180) who makes an appearance in the narrator's dream of Deauville may well be an allusion to Alfred Agostinelli, Proust's driver, confidant, lover, and the model for the figure of Albertine.

As Brassai has pointed out in his essay on Proust and photography, Proust had a certain *faible* for the exchange of portrait photographs, resorting to precisely the kind of albums for cartes de visite we have previously discussed. He enjoyed having his own picture taken and conscientiously, even aggressively, pursued the portraits of others. Even as an adolescent, Proust exchanged pictures with Jacques Bizet and Lucien Daudet, the Duc d'Albufera (one of the models for the character Saint Loup in *À la recherche du temps perdu*), as well as with his love interests Willie Heath and Edgar Aubert. He agonized when he thought himself to have sent an unflattering, wrong picture of himself, he fussed over the right personalization, and he got quite catty in his pursuit of the portrait of Robert de Montesquiou (later the model for another photo-collector, the infamous Baron de Charlus). The case of Proust highlights the pleasure of the traffic in pictures, consisting of the joyous submission to the lure of the imago, the queasy thrill of self-surrender,⁹ and the anal-obsessive enjoyments of collection and retention, gifting and soliciting inspection.

But libido is at the heart of the phenomenon in yet another way: as Brassã points out, the giving and receiving of pictures is an important erotic, or at least amorous gesture: the tokens exchanged are markers of courtship and pursuit, and their subsequent analysis (of which Proust provides many in the often derisive portraits of Saint Loup and the old queen Charlus) is determined by a libidinal gaze, no matter how much it accouters itself with the trappings of science. The relationship pursued—pursuer runs through the analysis of the pictures as much as through their exchange; though Proust and his fellow *invertis* swapped portraits, they were portraits that were markers of something concealed, surfaces that did not, dared not speak, legible only in their utter lack of traditional authenticity. And, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has famously shown, being able to read for the clues these portraits left, being one of the cognoscenti, meant being in some sense oneself suspect (69–78). How incomparably more private does this gesture become once what is traded is the most inauthentic of photographs, the mere puzzle piece that is a postcard, a postcard moreover, the written side of which is constitutively hidden from the observer. The first time the hand in which that writing ought to appear, the hand of Ambrose Adelwarth, makes its appearance in the novel, it does so in the form of a forgery in the service of a clever literary joke. This appearance thus extends rather than punctures the surface aesthetic, which speaks eloquently only of that which it hides, into a structural principle of Sebald's own text.

Georges Bataille has pointed to the norming of *la figure humaine* performed by photography, in particular portrait photography. The heterogeneity of human forms is subsumed into an ideal, fungible, collective essence, and any divergence is recast as deviance (Bataille 181ff.). Bataille's text allows us to understand the photograph not as the index of a violation, but rather as a violation in itself. Photographic violence functions both via the subsumption of the heterogeneous under the pictorial ideal and by submitting the depicted body to mechanisms of social control and observation, not least of all self-control and self-observation (as in the case of Baudelaire's dandy). For photographs like the *carte de visite* not only democratized portraiture, they also allowed physiognomists and others to establish norm faces and to establish and interpret deviations from it. The individual (photographed) face could be compared to all other faces, which

rendered its particularity legible, usually in pathological terms. Francis Galton's composite albums and Cesare Lombroso's albums of criminal's faces establish a finely honed sense for what could be diagnosed from a photographed face (and, by extension, hands, posture, gestures, etc.) (Pick 124). That Nazi physiognomists, such as Hans F. K. Günther, would soon give this diagnostic gaze a genocidal dimension was something that Sebald was all too aware of.

Before it became quite so ominous, this gaze was cultivated by Proust, an enthusiastic diagnostician and master physiognomist; and in the case of *The Emigrants* it is Sebald the author who engages in this kind of reading. In fact, Sebald presents us with three genres of documentation that would solicit diagnosis: he provides portraits that can be read physiognomically, snapshots that invite careful iconographic scrutiny, and several writing samples as though challenging the hobby graphologists among his readers. But what does he want them to look for? In his interview with Carole Angier, he explains how he came to write the story of his uncle Ambrose: "I had known about this uncle, I had met him as a boy, but I couldn't make sense of him. But then, the moment I saw that photo, I knew the whole story" (Sebald, "Wer ist W. G. Sebald?"). "The whole story" is surely not an accidental locution in this context. The desire that animates the narrative of Cosmo and Ambrose turns precisely on the fact that "I knew the whole story." There is no secret to Ambrose's picture; to those who know how to read it, it speaks clearly. And yet the narrative makes use of the picture but not the knowledge (or knowingness?) that goes along with it. Rather, it disperses that knowledge, imputes the certainty that Ambrose was "of the other persuasion" to Uncle Kasimir, constructs an elaborate and richly allusive literary *parcours* that intersects with Proust and Nabokov, stages a beautifully and sublimely improbable dream sequence, and, not least of all, includes pictures that provide a homoerotic intertext for the story that is, after all, known whole already.

Somewhere, then, in spinning his web of literary flourishes and carefully chosen and arranged documents, Sebald the narrator loses the knowledge of the whole story that Sebald the author claims to possess. *The Emigrants's* narrator still cannot "make rhyme or reason" of Ambrose, and the pictures that tell Sebald the author the whole story become much more ambivalent

once embedded in the text. This is most centrally because they frustrate the diagnostic gaze Sebald the author so cavalierly avails himself of: in *The Emigrants* no photo exists that would tell us the whole story, or if it does, the text labors to dissimulate rather than strengthen the whole story that it tells. In this, Sebald's text cannily recapitulates the relationship between homosexuality and the photographic image; but he also suggests an ethical valence dictated by that relationship. There is something queer about these pictures (and nothing more so than that they won't settle on clear or obvious queerness), but the way their queerness is staged, the way this queerness is allowed to remain elusive and amorphous, hints toward an ethical horizon as well.

The Ethics of Taking

I have traced a photographic intertext of albums that illuminates a particular history of documentarity, with pronounced attendant ethical valences. Sebald's image-texts thematize the role of photography not merely historically, relying on the history of the *carte de visite* to add a semiotic layer to the narrative, for instance, but furthermore in terms of photography's involvement in the phenomena that run thematically through *The Emigrants's* quartet of stories—the role pictures played in the European catastrophe, in the Holocaust, or in the persecution and treatment of homosexuals. Each of these photographs documents some historic fact, but the mode of its documentarity also has an ethical aspect. What I propose is that Sebald's image-text institutes an ethics of taking as well as an ethics of depiction of photographs. These two correspond to the two kinds of indexicality I described above: taking a picture involves the ethical question of pointing the camera at something and certifying that it has been (*ça a été*; Barthes 115); depicting something photographically means submitting it to a lexical or textual construct, making it readable and integrating it into context, making it signify, potentially against its own will or knowledge.

This ethical turn puts the tautological muteness the echoes of which we have traced through the "Ambrose Adelwarth" story on entirely new footing. As I have tried to suggest, the tautological insistence, the decorous preoccupation with surfaces, the unwillingness to penetrate ritual and praxis (exchange or sexual) is thus nothing but, or at least is also, a gesture

of respect, of self-restraint. The photo-text institutes a relationship or a circuit from which it constitutively excludes itself. As we have seen, however, this gesture is itself of only limited success. The tautological monoliths Sebald distributes throughout the section are always again under threat, always ready to collapse into legibility, and thus into historical and hermeneutic methods of social control. For a while, the reader may be blinded by the brilliant obviousness of the portraits, the postcards, and the diary pages; eventually, that reader will once again become one of the cognoscenti, the detective searching for clues, or the physiognomic diagnostician rifling through Sebald's albums. Sebald's images and text enact that dialectic, relapsing into it half by necessity and half by design, by the author's guile.

This guile, however, is essential. In such gestures as supplanting his own handwriting for Ambrose's, Sebald seems to be gesturing, if only at an escape mechanism from this dialectic. The most beautiful example of such authorial guile lies in the only pictorial appearance the mysterious and central Cosmo Solomon makes in Sebald's albums. "The only picture of Cosmo Solomon in my possession," as Aunt Fini explains, comes directly from Uncle Adelwarth's "postcard album." According to Aunt Fini, whose explanation of the picture the narrator accepts unquestioned, the picture depicts Cosmo receiving a trophy won in a polo match at the Hippodrome of Clairefontaine.

The picture in question (Figure 11.8) suggests neither in framing nor in *mise-en-scène* which one of the men is Cosmo Solomon, of whom this is "the only picture." Excluding the man on the extreme left, who appears to be a manservant, as well as the man wearing a fur coat, which would make playing polo extremely difficult, there remain three candidates: a man in a straw hat standing to the left and holding an object that could be a trophy of some kind but might well be just a pipe; a man holding a coat who appears to be a companion to the only woman in the picture, whom Aunt Fini identifies as the Comtesse de Fitz James; and the strongest contender, a hatless man standing at the very center of the picture. But while his central position seems to suggest that this is indeed the man being honored, he is standing substantially behind the other people in the picture, surely an odd position for the nominal subject of a photograph. Thus each of the men, if he is Cosmo, in some way withdraws from being the subject of this picture.



Figure 11.8. "The only picture of Cosmo Solomon in my possession." Reproduced by Sebald in *Die Ausgewanderten*.

Here, then, we have a picture of Cosmo Solomon that cannot show us definitively either (a) that Cosmo existed or (b) what he looked like. This Cosmo can deny that this is him and this suspect cannot be described. The Cosmo of whom this picture is, is somewhere in it, but Sebald's montage technique has forever hidden him from the reader's prying eyes. The whole story conveyed to Sebald the author in dulcet tones by a simple photograph remains entirely elusive, because the picture can settle on neither thethetic nor the descriptive mode, but rather is doomed to circulate endlessly between the two.

Notes

1. As Heiner Boehncke has posited: "Sebald verwendet das Bildmaterial nicht nach den Regeln der Foto-Ästhetik, sondern als Dokumente, Fragmente, Fundstücke" (43).

2. Radio interview with Christian Scholz, aired February 16, 1999 as part of a radio feature titled "Der Schriftsteller und die Fotografie" on Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR); excerpts from the interview were later published in the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*.

3. “Die Photographie ist das wahre Dokument par excellence. Von einer Photographie lassen sich die Leute überzeugen” (ibid.).

4. This concept is derived originally from Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *L’Oeil et l’Esprit*, which is the gaze the thing returns “seeing” the spectating subject.

5. On the history of the *carte de visite*, see Wells 128.

6. Or the picture effectively captioned “Die Theres, der Kasimir, und ich,” reproduced on p. 108 in the Fischer edition of Sebald’s *Die Ausgewanderten*, that shows the three as children in a similar alpine landscape.

7. On the role of the *carte de visite* in popularizing the idea of photography as a direct representation of nature, see Tucker 34.

8. Sebald mentions being a passionate flea market and antiques shopper in the radio interview conducted by Christian Scholz (“Der Schriftsteller”): “Ich habe schon viele Jahre hindurch auf eine völlig unsystematische Art und Weise Bilder aufgefunden. Man entdeckt solche Dinge einliegend in alten Büchern, die man kauft. Man findet sie in Antiquitätengeschäften oder Trödeläden.”

9. If we think of the German *Selbstaufgabe*, we may be reminded that *aufgeben* is also what one does to a letter or a postcard; self-surrender would thus also be a self-posting or self-*envoi*.

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Nothing to Say

The War on Terror and the
Mad Photography of Roland Barthes

KAREN BECKMAN

Theory and Photography

The current “war on terror” highlights, yet again, the stakes of the debate surrounding photography’s role in shaping history, our memories of events, and our responses to events and images of events.¹ The widely circulated photographs of the World Trade Center’s fall and of the people who died in it; the easily transmitted and more easily suppressed digital photographs of the torture of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. and British soldiers; the forbidden photographs of caskets returning home, and of Iraqi and American dead: these images and the controversies associated with them call upon us to revisit the question of photography’s relation to war, history, politics, and death. But after more than 150 years of contemplating photographs of war, what is left to say? What have we learned and what must be unlearned about the relationship among photography, language, and violence, of how words and photographs (or the lack of them) could have functioned, did function, and continue to function in times of war? How does the newspaper photograph differ from online versions of the same image and its surrounding articles, and how do these differences impact our reception of news photographs? Given these changes in the dissemination of news photographs, of what use to us are earlier theories of the news photograph? Can we and should we try to escape or turn away from earlier theories, given that, as Margaret Iversen succinctly stated in a recent roundtable on the topic, “Digital photography is a new medium, and there is not yet a fully developed discourse around it” (Elkins, *The Art Seminar*, 193).

The struggle to expand this underdeveloped discourse has produced a double, and at times contradictory, gesture. On the one hand, contemporary discussions of photography betray a growing, if muted, frustration with what seem to be automatic rhetorical turns to the usual suspects: figures such as Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, and Susan Sontag; and concepts such as “the *punctum*,” “thanatography,” and “aura.”² One response to this feeling might be simply to dispense with terms or theories that seem over-used or no longer useful given the changes in the medium, a position advocated by James Elkins, for example, who has recently described *Camera Lucida* as being “of limited value in the history or criticism of photography,” noting its exclusive interest in vernacular photography and its neglect of the materiality of the photograph, ultimately declaring that “There is perhaps no better evidence of the disarray of contemporary theorizing on photography than the fact that a book as problematic as *Camera Lucida* is still read and cited as a source of insights about photography” (“Critical Response,” 939–40, 944–45). Yet this tendency is accompanied by an equally strongly felt insistence on the need to keep Barthes in the picture, exemplified by Rosalind Krauss, who, in her response to Elkins’s “Art Seminar” photography theory, simplifies and summarizes Barthes’s major contributions to the discourse of photography, excusing herself in the following way: “If I have descended into baby Barthes here, it is because I think the panel members should have been more familiar with the major theorist of the subject (and its medium specificity). . . . Barthes’s work on photography cannot be ignored whether one is summoning Pierce or Benjamin. It remains magisterial and devoted to the index, to the ‘nothing to say’” (Krauss, “Notes,” 342).

Though theory is under no mandate to surprise or entertain us with novelties, we might usefully remember in the midst of these conversations that *Camera Lucida* grows out of Barthes’s observation that, above all else, the photograph resists what he describes as the “hardening” of language. For Barthes, the desire to write on photography corresponds to a “discomfort,” a multilayered uneasiness that reveals him as a subject “bearing witness to the only sure thing that was in [him] (however naïve it might be): a desperate resistance to any reductive system.” He continues, “For each time, having resorted to any such language to whatever degree, each time I felt it hardening and thereby tending to reduction and reprimand, I would

gently leave it and seek elsewhere: I began to speak differently” (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 8). To “speak differently” from Barthes about photography, then, might not necessarily entail a turning away from Barthes, even at those moments when changes in photographic technologies demand that we develop a new vocabulary to describe different temporalities, materialities, and image–world relationships. For to be motivated to speak differently by the photograph is also to think alongside, and after, Barthes.

The contemporary ennui with Barthes may in part be attributed to the fact that, although *Camera Lucida* itself enacts a “desperate resistance to any reductive system,” sound bites from this complex text often come to stand in for the whole, perhaps in reaction to the text’s lack of a singular, coherent theory. Yet by recalling both Barthes’s own resistance to the kind of textual petrification represented by these sound bites, as well as the simple inadequacy of a handful of overfamiliar photographic terms, I am not suggesting that we now discard Barthes (or Benjamin or Sontag) like a pair of old socks and replace him (or them) with something merely newer and fresher. Rather, Barthes’s own experience of writing about photography usefully prompts us to examine where the photograph now produces discomfort or uncertainty as we participate in the ongoing experience of photography theory. Theory is, after all, “a living experience of concepts, their borrowings, their derivations, their straying or wandering,” and it seems we now need to allow the concept of photography a greater range (Laplanche 118). In the essay that follows, I will take the newspaper collages of M. Ho as a provocative starting point for an inquiry into the continued importance of Barthes for the contemporary theoretical rethinking of photography, focusing in particular on the legibility and temporality of news photographs in the rapidly mutating landscape of the contemporary media.

Strike (2003)

Might we also die from our failure to grasp what is to be found in the photograph? Why, when thinking of photography’s relation to language, have we focused so exclusively on narrative prose, to the exclusion of other kinds of language, such as the elusive language of poetry, with which the photograph may ultimately have more in common? Photographs, and documentary photographs in particular, seem to want to tell us something. They

proffer but ultimately withhold the news, and this broken promise taints the photograph with an aura of bad taste or even immorality. But is it unreasonable to expect photographs to convey the kind of knowledge that the word “news” implies? What is photography’s relation to narrative knowledge and information, and what do we presume about the value of such knowledge and its ability to move us toward ethical and political action? Photographs often tell us nothing, and in turn we are frequently left with nothing to say about them. This mutual aphasia has long stood at the core of photographic theory, but does this “nothing to say,” this absence of language, constitute the moral failure of the photograph, or could this mute exchange actually constitute the site of the medium’s ethical possibilities? Although the Dadaist and surrealist use of spacing and doubling, as Krauss has argued, robbed photography of its claims to transparency and reality, thereby deconstructing the “and” that maintained the distinction between photography and writing, this “and” has returned in contemporary discussions of the politics of the news photograph, and so we need to turn our attention once again to this space of encounter (Krauss, *Originality of the Avant-Garde*, 112).³

Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003, the artist M. Ho has systematically explored how we read and look at wartime newspapers through a series of collages. The first series, *Strike* (2003), uses the *New York Times*’s “Nation at War” supplements of that year and maintains the integrity of the original page layout. Her second and ongoing series of untitled *New York Times* collages focuses exclusively on front pages, and in this series the artist takes more liberties with the location of photographs, moving images from remote locations within the paper to the front page, from above to below the fold or vice versa, disrupting the implied and often unexamined grammar, hierarchies, and tempo of the *Times*’s structural codes. Ho’s collages provoke us to reexamine what we think we know about the relationship between words and photographs, photography and war, and of the intersection of visual and rhetorical strategies in the *New York Times*. Furthermore, in these works’ insistence on the material of paper at a time when many of us read the newspaper and its images online, Ho’s collages cause us to reflect on the undertheorized issue of the extent to which theories of photography are dependent on specific material contexts: flimsy, grainy,

hand-staining newspaper; the thick, sensuous (even pornographic) quality of the glossy magazine; the serious, high-quality, black-and-white reproductions of photographs in scholarly books. Not surprisingly, in the context of the reevaluation of Barthes and the question of the relationship between past and present theories of photography, this issue of materiality has come to the fore. Michael Fried recognizes that Barthes “comes to understand himself as commenting on an image-making or perhaps more accurately an image-consuming regime that is all but defunct” (562). But this understanding, Fried notes, stems less from Barthes’s possessing a prescient sense of future changes than from the changes in the world that Barthes saw photography provoking in his own time. Yet this first observation leads Fried to note that digitalization does constitute one of the worldly transformations that Barthes predicts will render him one of the “last witnesses” of the *that-has-been* of photography (Fried 561–62). Fried notes, “In fact two such material alterations were either on the way or currently taking place: digitalization, which by the 1990s would thoroughly transform the ontology of the photograph, and a considerable increase in the size of art photographs” (562).

Elkins takes Fried’s observations one step further when he writes in response to Fried’s article, “In ‘Barthes’s *Punctum*’ the physical presence of photographs is important, but not such things as the inevitable gloss of a photograph’s water-resistant surface, the slight depth of its layers of grain, and the heft of its paper backing (or the translucency and thickness of the plastic support, in the case of a light box). The stuff that comprises photographs gets a bit lost” (Elkins, “Critical Response,” 945). If this exchange between Fried and Elkins emphasizes the importance of the relation among the material form of the photograph, the temporality of the photograph, and the temporality of photographic theory (past, passé, contemporary, oracular), the collage work of M. Ho foregrounds photography’s internal differences through its insistence on the materiality of paper, emphasizing the irony of the quality of obsolescence that has always haunted the news and framing the swift electronic circulation and displacement of our daily images in relation to past time, memory, and materials. Working solely with the *New York Times*, Ho cuts both thin strips and thick blocks of brightly colored and sometimes floral glossy paper with scissors and then

pastes these delicate strips over every single line of text on each selected page, including the paper's name, the date, and the page numbers, until only the photographs remain. Ho developed rules for the project, which she compares to the domestic and feminized craft of quilting: (1) she may work only within the horizontal form of the line of the newspaper text; (2) individual articles will retain some integrity as discreet aesthetic fields; (3) all words must be erased, including the names on maps; and (4) only words that appear within the context of a photograph may remain. She may or may not bend these rules in the course of finishing each piece.

What are we to do with these photographs—some of which clearly depict aspects of the war on terror, while others challenge our powers of recognition—that Ho leaves suspended amid a blaze of color? How do these works challenge our theories of photography's relation to writing and reading, what are we to make of Ho's insistence on the paper object of the newspaper in relation to the issue of digitalization, and how do these works differ from other works that have activated the tension between text and image on the newspaper page? Ho's collages stand in direct contrast, for example, with Gerhard Richter's engagement with the German press coverage of the Iraq War, *War Cut* (2004), a glossy book published by Walter König Verlag in which 216 photographic details of Richter's abstract painting no. 648–2 appear alongside 216 text-only articles from the March 20 and 21, 2003 (marking the launch of the war in Iraq) issues of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.⁴ The articles are laid out as normal prose, without columns, headlines, or authors, losing all formal association with the medium of the newspaper. While Ho eradicates the text of the *New York Times* completely, Richter foregrounds the text, celebrating the clarity and transparency of the war coverage and seeing his work as extending the life of the reports' insights.⁵ At the same time, he describes the book as a celebration of chance juxtapositions and states that as he made *War Cut* he read the articles not as news but "as literature":

When the war started, I heard all these conflicting opinions. I thought the newspaper reports were salutary—impotent and ineffectual as everything else in the face of catastrophe—but their plain presentation of facts consoled me. . . . I read most of the texts only after I placed them with the pictures. I



Figure 12.1. *Strike* (detail), 2003. Courtesy of M. Ho.

read them as literature, which was very pleasing . . . the texts now survive longer than the single day when they were in the newspaper. . . . The real gift for me was the fact that chance could bring about wonderful combinations. (Thorn-Prikker)

Although Richter admits that, “war is upsetting,” he remains largely uncritical of the war, stating, “I certainly don’t think the war is unnecessary. Otherwise it wouldn’t happen” (Thorn-Prikker). While Ho’s collages repetitively provoke questions about the masked text’s relationship with the newspaper photograph as well as about individual photograph’s relationships to other photographs on the page, Richter dispenses with the newspaper photograph altogether, asking us instead to consider how the unmarked text of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, presented as literature, interacts with color photographs of details of his own abstract painting no. 648–2 (1987).

More useful, perhaps, for a contextualization of Ho’s work, is Sarah Charlesworth’s series that uses newspaper front pages from around the world, *Modern History* (1977–79), and Nancy Chunn’s *Front Pages*, 1996. The similarities between these three series are as important as the differences among them, especially with regard to the word–image relationship that each piece establishes. Charlesworth’s *Modern History* series, which she made in the wake of a trip to China that left her frustrated and disillusioned with “left-wing tyrannies,” follows the migration of a series of single photographs across the front pages of the international press in the context of particular events, including the Red Brigade’s kidnapping of Italian prime minister Aldo Moro.⁶ Like Ho, Charlesworth masks all text from the front page to focus the viewer’s attention on the remaining photographs. Yet her work differs from Ho’s collages in a number of ways. First, while Ho eradicates all text from the newspaper, Charlesworth allows her reader to be historically and geographically oriented by leaving the dates and mastheads unmasked. Second, while Ho masks the newspaper text with single strips of multicolored glossy paper, making texture, color, and the differences between various photographic materialities an important part of her work, Charlesworth masks the text in white and then rephotographs the front page, producing within a single newly made photograph the spaces

between photographs that Ho creates through collage within the frame of the newspaper page. Both practices resonate not only with the postmodern appropriation of the Pictures generation but with earlier Dadaist and (occasionally) surrealist uses of photography and spacing, which, as Krauss has demonstrated, robbed photography of its reality effect and reconstituted it as a kind of writing.⁷ Yet, to conflate these two series because of their structural similarities would be to ignore the historical specificity of each work. In the case of Ho, this specificity has at least as much to do with the shift from the printed to the digital transmission of news as it does with the specific use of images during the contemporary war on terror.

Though Ho's *New York Times* front pages bear some clear resemblances to Nancy Chunn's *Front Pages, 1996*, a year-long series in which Chunn added words and images (using rubber stamps, ink, and pastels) to each front page of the *New York Times*, Ho's work cannot be said to engage in the kind of "talking back" to the *Times* that was attributed to Chunn's work.⁸ On the contrary, Ho's work suggests a kind of muteness and silence in the face of various newspaper photographs robbed of their textual support. Do these images still emerge through their use of spacing as a kind of writing? Can they, robbed of their textual support, still participate in the discourse of history, as Charlesworth's dated collages do, or do these collages leave us bereft in the unstable temporality of photography? We exist in the midst of a network of violences that come together under the umbrella of the war on terror, at a moment when, as Simon Leung has recently argued, the "most compelling works activating a challenge to war" are those that "contemplate the vicissitudes of daily life held hostage by masculinist drives toward domination" and "tend to frame another order of time within our time of war, and simultaneously trace the violence of war in the everyday. They tend to slow down violence, which nevertheless does not 'end.'"⁹ As we consider Ho's collages, stripped of dates and captions, what kind of time frames begin to emerge, and does the time of the photographic collage work here in politically or ethically significant ways?

If we follow Sontag's logic, Ho's eradication of text threatens to empty the images of their political potential, and worse, to aestheticize the suffering depicted in some of the images on view. In response to this critical position, one can offer a number of politically reassuring readings of Ho's

collages, and although ultimately these interpretations run the risk of blinding us to, or defending against, the most interesting and daring aspect of this work, outlining some of the most obvious ways in which Ho's collages resist a depoliticized aestheticization of war is worthwhile, if only in order to distinguish this line of thinking that relies upon photographic legibility from the one that I will develop in the second part of this essay.

First, Ho mobilizes color to signify in both critical and moving ways. In *Strike*, the list of names of American dead that appeared alongside a photograph of a floral, heart-shaped wreath topped with a photograph of one of the dead disappears under delicately cut, individual strips of purple paper. As we move between the list-like form now inhabited by the color purple and the floral heart of the photograph, word-image associations emerge like traces of a dream: purple strips become purple hearts, one for each soldier that died. But this handmade gesture of honoring the dead simultaneously exposes such war medals as worthless as paper in the face of death. These purple strips formally enact the process by which the dead men are vanished by the discourse of heroism, moving them—strangely—into a shared space with the Iraqi dead who will not be counted, never mind named or photographed, but whose lost lives have left their trace on the desolate faces of the men depicted on the opposite page.

Though we may squirm uncomfortably at the sight of war news blocked out by glossy photographic flowers cut from gardening magazines, the decorative, static, and sensory quality of which sharply contrasts with the aggressively narrative quality of journalistic photographs, these flowers both bring the war into the space of our everyday image consumption, recalling the juxtapositions of war and fashion in Martha Rosler's series, *Bringing the War Home* (1967–72), and transform the discardable newspaper into a memorial space. Through her floral patterns, Ho evokes the orderly grids of flowers on display in U.S. military graveyards, now freshly stocked with young corpses, but by extending these patterns across the pages of the newspaper, moving from George W. Bush to the nameless men with their faces pressed to the ground, her work challenges viewers to connect the dots between war news and everyday events.¹⁰ These works refuse the newspaper's confinement of the war's dead and its memorial gestures to single articles and special sections. Instead, they let the silence of the dead

and their floral mnemonics smother every line and provoke us to image alternative and more dispersed frames and interconnections for thinking about and resisting the violence of which the proliferating wars are only symptoms.

Though we may retreat guiltily from the sight of these documentary photographs stripped of their informative textual supplements—fearful, perhaps, of being caught gawking—these collages can be seen as an intensely personal and critical commentary on the act of reading the news. Ho’s gestures of covering up convey a sense of shame about the stories contained within the news, make visible one person’s desire to scratch out this chapter from the annals of history, to begin again, or to turn away, overwhelmed by the volume and content of news traffic. They simultaneously draw attention to the *New York Times’s* own enthusiastic participation in



Figure 12.2. *Strike* (detail), 2003. Courtesy of M. Ho.

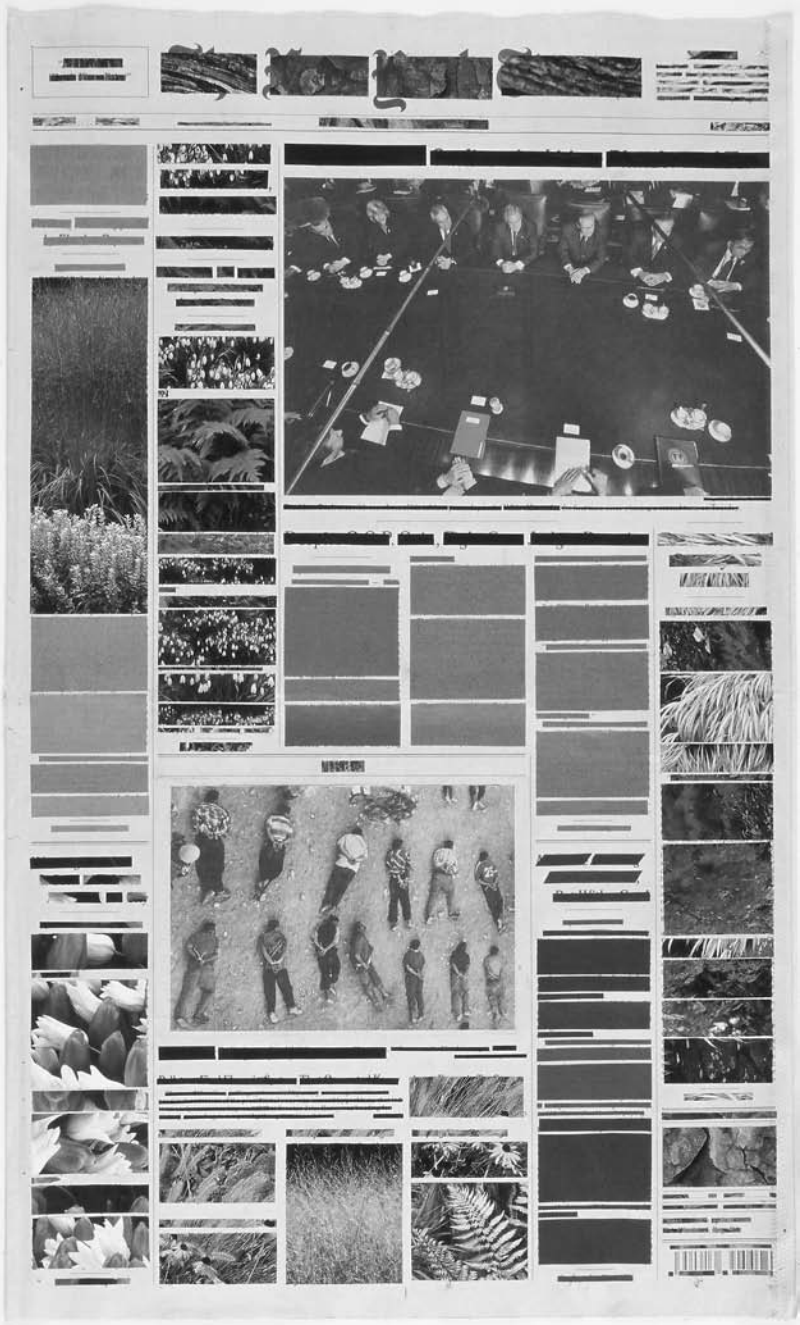


Figure 12.3. Untitled, 2005. Courtesy of M. Ho.

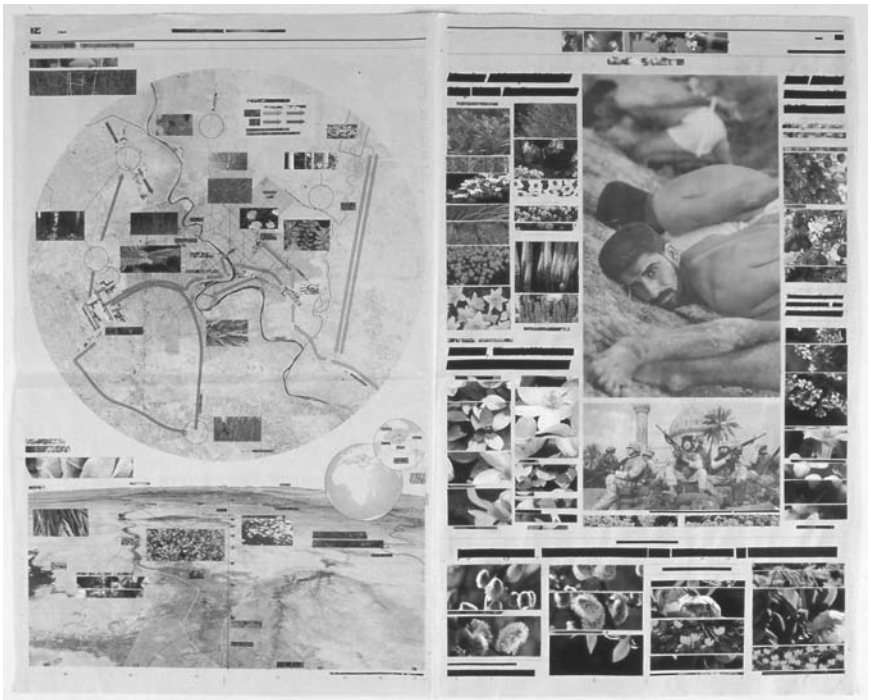


Figure 12.4. *Strike* (detail), 2003. Courtesy of M. Ho.

the war against terror, protesting the erasures and elisions that have taken place through the criminal actions and manipulation of information by Judith Miller and the censoring effect of “embedded reporting” (recalled by the collage’s formal similarity to censored documents), which gives us only the rosiest image of the war and leaves those of us wanting to understand having to “read the illegible,” the space—highlighted by colored strips—that lies between the lines.¹¹ Such erasures might also be read as challenging the paper’s right to speak for the war dead by transforming the paper into a memorial offering to the dead that renders the paper’s voice silent.

As we view the hidden columns and struggle to recall what we see depicted in these images, we become aware not only of how much we overlook in our daily scans of the newspaper, but also of how reading, as much

as not reading, can function as an act of erasure: do we read the news in order to be able to throw it away? Countering the speed of the media's circulation of information, indeed overwhelmed by a sense of "information overload" that Ho says left her understanding nothing of what was happening, she offers us a decelerated temporality of reading, a meditative and corporeal process in which the reader measures and runs a finger over each line, like a Braille user, and covers up in order to remember, like a child learning to spell. Using nothing but paste and paper, Ho creates a space where thinking and writing can be imagined differently. Yet however compelled I am to read these critical gestures in the collages, a troubling element remains that I do not want to explain away or repress. It lies in the touch of madness we find in this series, a madness palpable in the repetition and systematicity of Ho's childlike acts of shredding, pasting, covering over. But perhaps we may read in this madness something like a radical refusal of, or a visual rupture in, our contemporary epistemological frame, a madness that returns us to the specific challenges and possibilities of the photograph. Like Barthes, but especially the Barthes of *Camera Lucida*, Ho rejects the image as it meets us burdened "with a culture, a moral, an imagination" (Barthes, "The Photographic Message," 26) and instead seeks to unleash its excess, which, should we open to it, might reflect our own: "I am a primitive, a child—or a maniac; I dismiss all knowledge, all culture, I refuse to inherit anything from another eye than my own" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 51). Barthes warns that "Society is concerned to tame the Photograph, to temper the madness which keeps threatening to explode in the face of whoever looks at it" either by "making it into art, for no art is mad," or by generalizing, "gregarizing" it, destroying those places that would allow it to "assert its special character, its scandal, its madness" (117–18). Using nothing but the flimsy and transitory materials of paper and paste, Ho resists this taming of the image. Instead, her work marks out the years of her own life spent pressing down thousands of delicate paper strips, each one methodically refusing, breaking, the coherent narratives we are offered, making space and time in which to respond differently to the enigmas and the scandal of these photographs and the traces of historical violence contained within them. Though much of the existing writing on the relationship among words, photographs, and violence asserts a line from knowledge

to narrative to understanding to political action and change, Ho's work challenges us to explore the limits of this trajectory and asks us to consider the ethical possibilities that we might glimpse in the madness, rather than the knowledge, of the photograph.

The Photographic Message

Behind our visceral reactions to Ho's work lies a series of assumptions about photography's relationship to language and politics that these collages both illuminate and dislodge. What are these assumptions? How do they shape and limit our contemporary thinking about words and photographs? How are these limits enforced and policed? And why might we need to move beyond them?

Although the spectacle of news photographs without words disturbs us, it may be worth remembering that when Barthes asks, in "Rhetoric of the Image" (1964), "Is there always textual matter in, under, or around the image?" he concludes that "in order to find images given without words, it is doubtless necessary to go back to partially illiterate societies, to a sort of pictographic state of the image" (37–38). Refuting the notion that we inhabit a "civilization of the image," Barthes insists in the essays of the early 1960s that every photograph has a linguistic dimension, whether at the level of the words surrounding an image—"a title, caption, accompanying press article, film dialogue, comic strip balloon" (38)—or within the photograph itself, where we find two different kinds of "writing" or "information," which he names "denoted" and "connoted" messages.¹² Though Barthes's assertion of this double message structure will likely not be news to anyone reading this essay, as we try to grapple with Ho's collages, we need to pause and clarify what we have inherited, rejected, or ignored from Barthes's foundational writing.

In "The Photographic Message," Barthes claims that the press photograph, more than any other type of photograph, is dominated by the "denoted message," the analogical message without a code, because it "profess[es] to be a mechanical analogue of reality." Yet, having made this claim, Barthes immediately goes on to recognize that his view of the press photograph's "denotative" status has "every chance of being mythical" ("The Photographic Message," 19), and the essay then highlights the simultaneous

presence of the connoted or culturally constructed messages. Having recognized the presence of connoted messages, Barthes outlines the difficulty of trying to read these culturally constructed messages, telling us that we have not yet learned the “language” of photography, a language that depends upon the “reader’s ‘knowledge,’” is “intelligible only if one has learned the signs,” and is in need of “a veritable decipherment” (28, 20). Yet Barthes also identifies another challenge facing the reader of the press photograph, one that precedes his discussion of how to read the connoted message and that has received less attention than it should. For Barthes, the coexistence of connoted and denoted messages, the tension between legible and illegible messages within the photograph, constitutes an ethical problem: “The structural paradox coincides with an ethical paradox: when one wants to be ‘neutral,’ ‘objective,’ one strives to copy reality meticulously, as though the analogical were a factor of resistance against the investment of values . . . how then can the photograph be at once ‘objective’ and ‘invested,’ ‘natural and cultural?’” (19–20).

Crucially for our project of trying to locate the limitations of the contemporary discourse on the relationship between language and photography, Barthes warns readers away from trying to “look for the signifying units of the first-order message” (“The Photographic Message,” 20) because such units do not exist. Instead of then grappling with how we might respond to this nonsignifying aspect of the photograph, he encourages readers to focus on learning to read the connoted message, which, he tells us, “may take us a very long way indeed” (28). Following Barthes’s lead (and he does lead us down this path, rarely returning to the denoted image in this essay), much of our theoretical writing on photography has subsequently tried to establish “mechanisms of reading” for these connoted photographic messages and to understand how these potentially legible messages within photographs interact with the textual apparatus surrounding them (captions, articles, etc.).¹³

But what then happens to the ethical paradox revealed by the coexistence of the enigmatic, denoted message and the connoted message? While attempts to read connoted messages continue to be important to the project of understanding the aesthetic, political, and ideological function of photography, especially at this time when the material base of photography

is in a permanent state of transition, the time has come to reengage the question of how to respond to the denoted message in spite of, or even because of, its illegibility and suspension of language (Barthes, "The Photographic Message," 30). If, for Barthes, the ethical paradox of and challenge posed to us by photography lies in the simultaneity of denoted and connoted messages within a single image, then we cannot afford to ignore either aspect. Although this leaves us having to account for "the photograph about which there is nothing to say," which is "by structure insignificant: no value, no knowledge" (31), we need to expand the critical and political possibilities of the photograph beyond the knowledge or information gained from reading the connoted messages that are written in a language that has become increasingly more familiar to us. By erasing the text surrounding the *New York Times's* photographs, Ho brings to the fore this denotative aspect of the photograph and asks us to respond to its lack of a political narrative and its incoherence, to reflect on the war through the lens of photography's apparent failure to speak.

In "Rhetoric of the Image," Barthes describes the text surrounding a press photograph as serving an "anchoring" function, and he links this function to the question of social responsibility and morality, both of which seem to demand a certain simplification or ordering of the image's internal complexity.

The text is indeed the creator's (and hence society's) right of inspection over the image; anchorage is a control, bearing a responsibility—in the face of the projective power of pictures—for the use of the message. With respect to the liberty of the signifieds of the image, the text thus has a *repressive* value and we can see that it is at this level that the morality and ideology of a society are above all invested. (Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 40)

Yet, if, as Barthes suggests in "The Photographic Message," the imbrication of the continuous and enigmatic message alongside the connoted (and potentially intelligible) message reveals the ethical paradox of the photograph to us, what might we gain from putting aside, if only temporarily, the texts that anchor photographs, that hide from view those things we cannot know or understand? We may feel obliged to resist—in the name of social

responsibility and morality—this call to unanchor the photograph from its textual apparatus and liberate its silent madness. But if our historical moment is marked by acts of violence done precisely in the name of modes of responsibility and morality that assert themselves in part through this interaction of words and images, then perhaps it is only by unleashing the illegibility of the photograph that new, less bloodthirsty forms of responsibility will be able to emerge.

Narrating the Pain of Others

In recent years, no book has put more faith in the moral value of legibility, has more clearly traced a path from narrative to knowledge to understanding to ethical action, than Susan Sontag's final work, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003). For Sontag, the moral capacity of the photograph is repeatedly defined by its relative ability to confer knowledge and understanding on the viewer. Photographs, she tells us, "are not much help if the task is to understand. Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us" (Sontag 89). Photographs, she tells us, need captions, narrative supplements, because alone they don't "tell us everything we need to know" (90), a statement that assumes not only that such knowledge will guarantee the morality of the photograph but also that this knowledge is readily available. For Sontag, with photographs, unlike narrative, we remember but do not understand, we feel compassion but rarely translate that knowledge of another's suffering into action.

While Sontag almost never wavers in her denunciation of the "ignorance," "amnesia," and "moral defectiveness" of human beings and their failure to act on what they see (114–15), in her penultimate chapter she allows, tentatively, almost grudgingly, that thinking may be an appropriate action in the face of those events and images that leave us not knowing how to act: "There's nothing wrong with standing back and thinking" (118).¹⁴ Having established the possible utility of photographs as "secular icon[s]," Sontag then searches both for the "equivalent of a sacred or meditative space in which to look at them" (119) and for a way to overcome her temporal prejudice against the photograph's presumed instantaneity: "a narrative seems likely to be more effective than an image. Partly it is a question of the length of time one is obliged to look, to feel" (122). Only in the final

three pages of her last work is she able to locate a single photograph in the space of the art museum that affords her both the time and the space to look and feel: Jeff Wall's "Dead Troops Talk (A Vision after an Ambush of a Red Army Patrol near Moqor, Afghanistan, Winter 1986)." Although this last chapter seems to writhe as Sontag struggles to break free of her own elevation of narrative understanding over the ethically paradoxical photograph (to which throughout her life she had been compulsively drawn), her chosen image, a "Cibachrome transparency seven and a half feet high and more than thirteen feet wide and mounted on a light box," depicting Wall's fictional construction of an ambush, is both "the antithesis of a document" and at odds with the nonnarrative temporality of the photograph, resonating instead with the narrative and cinematic time of *tableaux vivants*, wax displays, dioramas, and panoramas (Sontag 123).¹⁵ In ending with this image, Sontag leaves open the question of whether a documentary photograph of proportions like those we find in the newspaper, or a narrative devoid of narrative content, might be capable of serving a similar meditative function.

Giving an Account of Photography

Judith Butler's reading of *Regarding the Pain of Others*, "Photography, War, Outrage," usefully challenges Sontag's polarization of thinking and feeling, disputes her claim that photographs necessarily "fail to make us understand," and questions her assertion of narrative as the only vehicle capable of creating the kind of understanding that will ensure in us "a moral response" (Butler, "Photography, War, Outrage," 824). Yet this essay ultimately retreats from taking photographic theory into the radical place Butler opens up in her sustained meditation on moral philosophy, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), in which she unfolds a paradigm of ethics that begins from the acknowledgment of human fallibility and inhumanity and grows out of a space where the complex workings of desire are acknowledged and where judgment and denunciation have been suspended. Recognizing the opacity of the self, and the limits of knowing and narrative, *Giving an Account of Oneself* offers a powerful model for trying to make sense of the more radical ethical challenges of Ho's collages. Like Ho, Butler starts from "the disorientation at the heart of moral deliberation" and sees that "the 'I' who

seeks to chart its course has not made the map it reads, does not have all the language it needs to read the map, and sometimes cannot find the map itself" (*Giving an Account*, 110).¹⁶ Yet in order to open these philosophical insights onto the space of the photograph, we need first to understand why Butler withholds from building a bridge between her two texts, both written in the same year.¹⁷

Butler's critique of *Regarding the Pain of Others* is generous, emerging alongside both her obvious admiration for Sontag's "honest and public criticism" of the war in Iraq and of the Bush administration's use of torture (Butler, "Photography, War, Outrage," 826) and her own attempt to understand how embedded reporting shapes the media's use of photography. Although Butler notes the way Sontag "faults photography for not being writing" (824), she seems less concerned to disrupt the relationship Sontag assumes exists between coherent narrative and ethical responsiveness than to show how the photograph, like narrative, is involved "in framing reality, is already interpreting what will count within the frame" (823). Rather than engaging the ethical paradox of the photograph that stems from the structural coexistence of legible and illegible messages, however, Butler's political critique of embedded photography focuses almost entirely on what these legible codes reveal about the perspective from which the photograph is taken. Echoing Barthes's discussion of the legible procedures that occur at the level of the production of the photograph, Butler notes how press photographs become "interpretive" through framing, as well as through "the effects of angle, focus, and light." She continues:

For our purposes, it makes sense to consider that the mandated visual image produced by embedded reporting, the one that complies with state and defense department requirements, builds an interpretation. We can even say that the political consciousness that moves the photographer to accept those restrictions and yield the compliant photograph is embedded in the frame itself. We do not have to have a caption or a narrative to understand that a political background is being explicitly formulated and renewed through the frame. In this sense, the frame takes part in the interpretation of the war compelled by the state; it is not just a visual image awaiting its interpretation; it is itself interpreting, actively, even forcibly. (823)

At the end of the essay, Butler adds, “perhaps our *inability* to see what we see is also of critical concern. To learn to see the frame that blinds us to what we see is no easy matter. And if there is a critical role for visual culture during times of war, it is to thematize the forcible frame agreeably and eagerly adopted by journalists and photographers who understand themselves aligned with the war effort” (826, emphasis in original). According to this logic, it is possible, if not easy, for us to read the frame that blinds us to what we see, finally to see what is there to be seen in the photograph, to “read the interpretation compelled and enacted by the visual frame, coercively and consensually established” (827) in order, finally, to refuse that interpretation of reality.

Although embedded reporting aims to elaborate and validate the perspective of those “actively involved in the perspective of the war” (Butler, “Photography, War, Outrage,” 822), the political action proposed here—reading the administration’s interpretive visual frame in order to be able to refuse it—might at least stand in tension with, and perhaps even blind us to, the more radical ethical and political possibilities offered to us by war photographs such as the ones Butler considers. In *Excitable Speech*, Butler provocatively argues that the harmful intentions driving hate speech might be derailed in the moment of utterance, giving rise to the agency of the victim of these words. Though photography may not function in the same way as a sign, we still need to open up similarly daring spaces within the discourse of photography and take issue with interpretations that assert the singularity of a given photograph’s meaning and effects. The embedded photographs Butler describes may well participate in a war that morally outrages us, but the images themselves may not be—indeed, may not be capable of being—as fully in line with the perspective of the war effort as she suggests, and this inability may be strategically useful for those of us looking for alternative spaces and times to the spaces and times offered by the war-on-terror paradigm.

How do we begin to reconcile this “learn[ing] to see the frame that blinds us to what we see” with the structural paradoxes within any photograph, the enigmatic messages that cannot be read? Do these illegible messages help to make the intended frame, the visual rhetoric Butler describes, more legible? Throughout “Photography, War, Outrage,” the exposure of

the frame that blinds us depends upon the outraged viewer's ability to recognize and read the connoted messages consciously employed in the service of a particular interpretation of the war. But this critical strategy leaves aside the role played by the illegible, denoted messages that Barthes claims take precedence in press photographs. Furthermore, without attending to the coexistence of denoted and connoted messages, we lose sight of photography's ethical paradox. Whereas *Giving an Account of Oneself* begins from the failure of narrative, "the limits of knowing," and the inability of the subject to fully account for herself (Butler, *Giving an Account*, 40–42), in her discussion of photography Butler only hints at the existence of incoherent modes of understanding and never elaborates on the consequences of this incoherence for a photographic ethics: "Photographs lack narrative coherence, in [Sontag's] view, and such coherence alone can supply the needs of the understanding. Narrative coherence might be a standard for some sorts of interpretation, but surely not for all" (Butler, "Photography, War, Outrage," 823). And, yet, the need to extend Butler's moral philosophy into the realm of photography seems crucial. For while reading the frame that blinds us may at one level enact a rejection of a morally outrageous photograph and its interpretation of the war, on another level this strategy may prevent us from seeing how the messages of the photograph always exceed the forceful frames Butler describes. But how do we account for this excess?

At times we may feel compelled to negate the enigmas of the photograph, feel morally obliged to recognize and assert the transparency of an image, and this compulsion is particularly strong when dealing with images of atrocity. In such instances, we hope that we will have the moral fortitude and perspicacity to read the photograph's message with ease in order to demonstrate our own moral clarity. But what if our demonstrations of visual literacy ultimately repress rather than release the ethical force of the photograph in the name of morality? What if these moments when the photograph's message seems most transparent are in fact the moments of greatest danger?

Discussing the *Here Is New York* show of amateur and professional photographs documenting the destruction of the World Trade Center, Sontag makes an unusual exception to her belief that photographs need text. She writes:

The crowd of solemn New Yorkers who stood in line for hours on Prince Street every day throughout the fall of 2001 . . . had no need of captions. They had, if anything, a surfeit of understanding of what they were looking at, building by building, street by street—the fires, the detritus, the fear, the exhaustion, the grief. But one day captions will be needed, of course. And the misreadings and the misrememberings, and new ideological uses for the pictures, will make their difference. Normally, if there is any distance from the subject, what a photograph “says” can be read in several ways. (Sontag 29)

Sontag’s rhetoric of exception functions here as a kind of tribute to the spirit of New Yorkers during the fall of 2001, a spirit of unity many felt was wasted as a discourse of revenge took over. Yet, this idealized description of a New York looking at itself with total comprehension fails to understand the impossibility of New Yorkers’ fully understanding the traumatic event that they were looking at. Furthermore, it rests on the erasure of the opacity of the self and other and posits those incapable of understanding what they saw as existing outside of this historical narrative. Although Sontag celebrates this moment of unified and coherent understanding as an exceptional triumph of photographic interpretation and clarity, her fiction of a disturbingly undifferentiated and omniscient (and therefore unquestioning) mass subject overlaps uncomfortably with the totalitarian conception of community that Jean-Luc Nancy calls “the communion of the community” (58).

Refuting the notion that any photograph can be fully understood and homogenized in this way, with or without text, Ho’s collages explore how the mass media’s use of photography might function as a useful tool in resisting rather than affirming this unquestioning mass or individual subject. By displaying the medium’s ethical paradox (the simultaneity of enigmatic and legible codes), her work both reveals our own illegibility to us and reminds us that if photography produces the mass subject, it may also function as a tool through which to think critically about the various forms that this mass subject might take. Through the discomfort and uncertainty these works provoke, Ho challenges us to consider what an ethics of the photograph might look like if it withheld from repressing, out of a misguided

sense of moral propriety, the concept of photography in all its scandalous complexity.¹⁸

Photographic Responsibility

In *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (2002) Ulrich Baer begins a project of embracing photography's internal complexity in the service of ethics by explicitly rejecting the idea that any photograph can convey a singular perspective. He then explores the ethical consequences of this rejection, as well as our moral discomfort with it, through a discussion of a series of photographs taken by Walter Genewein, an Austrian Nazi official who was the chief accountant in the Łódź ghetto. Driven by Benjamin's imperative to historicize "against the grain," to produce "history from below," and following Benjamin's suggestion that "the technical media harbor revolutionary potential" (Baer 129), Baer refutes the arguments of those who regard Genewein's slides as being either "wholly determined by a particular aesthetic" or as "depriv[ing] viewers of the possibility of seeing anything the Nazis did not want them to see."¹⁹ Although the content of traumatic images, content that is shaped by what we know of the fate of many of the people depicted in them, may make us feel morally obliged to denounce such photographs, Baer courageously suggests that by suppressing what we know theoretically, conceptually, of photography, we may inadvertently blind ourselves to the alternative historical and ethical paradigms photography makes available to us, both of which stand opposed to the violence of totalitarian epistemologies.

After noting that photography "breaks with the pretechnological modes of representation in which such complete authorial control might have existed" (Baer 138),²⁰ Baer argues that, like all photographs, "[Genewein's] photographs . . . register details that are contingent and extraneous to such a perspective, and those details let us see beyond the Nazi's construction of a hermetically sealed Holocaust universe" (139). If we bring this intervention back to bear on the scene of embedded reporting in Iraq, although we must protest the Bush administration's attempt to control completely the perspective on the war offered by photography, we need simultaneously to understand the impossibility of it doing so and, in the manner Butler

suggests, to exploit the ethical possibilities of the contingencies that necessarily exceed the “forcible frame.”

We should not underestimate the importance of Baer’s insistence that we keep the paradoxical nature of the photograph in view when addressing the question of how to respond to ethically troubling photographs and that we consider photography as a future-oriented medium that resists oblivion alongside the more persistent thanatographic view of the medium. While I am compelled by the possibilities Baer opens up through this intervention into our paradigms for thinking about the ethics of the photograph, his argument rests on a reading of Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* that the text of *Camera Lucida* may actually resist.

The Responsibility of Desire

Baer turns to *Camera Lucida* rather suddenly to claim that this work, “in spite of its arguable sentimentalism . . . proves relevant to the analysis of photographs taken in sites of systematic traumatization and destruction” (145). He argues:

In his reflections on photography, Barthes emphasizes the viewer’s desire to discern something beyond the image, something that seems to live on. In certain contexts, I would add, this desire becomes a responsibility. “When we define the Photograph as a motionless image,” Barthes writes, “this does not mean only that the figures it represents do not move; it means that they do not *emerge*, do not *leave*: they are anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies. Yet once there is a *punctum*, a blind field is created (is divined) . . . the *punctum*, then, is a kind of subtle *beyond*—as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see.” (144; emphasis original)

When we look at photographs taken by those who are overwhelmingly dominant over those they picture, the Barthesian wish to see “beyond what it [the image] permits us to see” assumes an ethical dimension.

Baer’s observation that the “contingent and extraneous” details that exceed the dominant perspective of Nazi photographs allow us to recognize the existence of a world beyond the Nazi perspective is, for him, crucial to

opening up the photograph as an ethical space or tool. Yet in the moment Baer equates the *need* to read these contingencies in the photograph with the *desire* to see beyond the image generated by the punctum, we run into the disturbing question—which lies at the heart of *Camera Lucida*—of how to reconcile desire and ethical responsibility. Indeed what Baer negates, in this moment of asserting a certain desire as a responsibility, is precisely the aspect of the human that provokes the need for ethics in the first place according to Butler: the opacity of the subject and the inability of that subject fully to understand or control its own desires. If desire emerges, as Butler (via Laplanche and Levinas) suggests, “from the outside and in overwhelming form” and retains “this exterior and foreign quality once it becomes the subject’s own desire” (*Giving an Account*, 72), then to denounce the subject for its failure to experience in certain contexts the kind of desire-to-see-beyond that the punctum provokes is, ultimately, to condemn the subject for being human.

Barthes was more than aware of this problem, which persists throughout *Camera Lucida*. Though critics have tended to posit a break between Barthes’s earlier writing on photography and his later work (a tendency we can find traces of in Baer’s claim that *Camera Lucida* has value for his project “in spite of its arguable sentimentalism”), I follow Douglas Crimp in resisting the tendency to see *Camera Lucida* as a sentimental “repudiation of Barthes’s ‘position’ against the authorial voice, the voice of an irreducible subjectivity,” as a turn toward a Barthes made “self-present to himself,” and as a text that is “not about photography” (Crimp, “Fassbinder,” 71, 65).²¹ Rather, I suggest that we read *Camera Lucida* as a text in which we find Barthes exploring how the photograph is implicated in the subject’s contradictory and divided relation to the world as that subject struggles to move responsibly between the private and the universal, among desire, ethics, and politics.

According to Baer, Barthes’s punctum lies in the details, and the contingencies registered by these details become levers to open up a “beyond,” a space of futurity that allows him to “avoid the thanatographic and principally melancholic perspective adopted by many theorists” (Baer 129).²² In part one of *Camera Lucida*, the punctum does indeed launch desire, a movement toward the beyond of the photograph that creates a blind field,

allowing a closed-eyed look at the unknowability of the other. Yet throughout this first section, Barthes persistently shows that the desire provoked by the punctum cannot be willed by a guilty conscience alone, by the feeling that one should, perhaps, be pricked by certain details. Referring to a photograph of two soldiers and two nuns on a ruined street in Nicaragua, Barthes writes, "Did this photograph please me? Interest me? Intrigue me? Not even. Simply, it existed (for me)" (*Camera Lucida*, 23). For Barthes, "the harshness of the subject" of a photograph cannot guarantee the desire to see the "beyond" of the image, and such images, which for him are often "invested with nothing more than *studium*," may well leave the viewer with a mere sense of "polite interest" (27).

Though critics have dismissed *Camera Lucida* for its sentimentalism, this caricature of the text is blind to Barthes's refusal of a sentimental politics of photography that would repress rather than foreground his honest response to the spectacle of the news photograph and its depiction of human suffering, including

wretched un-uniformed soldiers, ruined streets, corpses, grief, the sun, and the heavy-lidded Indian eyes. Thousands of photographs consist of this field, and in these photographs I can, of course, take a kind of general interest, one that is even stirred sometimes, but in regard to them my emotion requires the rational intermediary of an ethical and political culture. What I feel about these photographs derives from an *average* affect, almost from a certain training. (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 26)

Though Baer would like to transform Barthes's desire to see the blind field of the beyond provoked by the punctum (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 59) into ethical responsibility, Barthes makes clear that this type of desire cannot be summoned at will, even by atrocious images. Furthermore, he sees news photographs as being the ones most likely to leave him "unpricked," to belong to the realm of the *studium*, which is characterized by a kind of emotional indifference: "The *studium* is of the order of *liking*, not of *loving*; it mobilizes a half desire, a demi-volition; it is the same sort of vague, slippery, irresponsible interest one takes in the people, the entertainments, the books, the clothes one finds 'all right'" (27).

The scandal of *Camera Lucida's* first part lies here in Barthes's alignment of the interest he experiences when looking at images of corpses with the "irresponsible" interest one feels toward clothes that are just "all right." While Baer wants to generalize the punctum and the desire and love it provokes into something that would simply be demanded of us by traumatic photographs as an ethical obligation, Barthes shows us, as Butler later does, that we need ethics in the first place because our love is unevenly distributed, freely given, but only to some, and for reasons that we cannot fully explain.²³

At the end of part one of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes acknowledges the limits of his desire and subjectivity and grants that his "pleasure [is] an imperfect mediator, and that a subjectivity reduced to its hedonist project [cannot] recognize the universal." In order to find "the evidence of Photography, that thing which is seen by anyone looking at a photograph," Barthes tells us that he will "have to make [his] recantation, [his] palinode" (*Camera Lucida*, 60). But where are we to find this recantation in *Camera Lucida*? Though subsequent theories of photography frequently display an over-familiarity or even boredom with Barthes's concept of the punctum and its location in the detail, our apparently firm critical grasp of this term often rests on the repression of Barthes's identification of a second punctum in part two of *Camera Lucida* that has nothing to do with the detail or the image content. This second punctum emerges as Barthes attempts to transcend the division he has identified between those photographs that prick him and others that simply exist: "I now know that there exists another *punctum* (another 'stigmatum') than the 'detail.' This new *punctum*, which is no longer of form but of intensity, is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* ('that-has-been'), its pure representation" (96).

But if Baer seeks a way to generalize the responsibility of finding the punctum in each of the Nazi photographs he discusses, why does his argument rest on an invocation of Barthes's first, more capricious punctum that follows the opaque desire of the subject rather than the second, temporal version of this concept that can be experienced with every photograph? Baer betrays his textual proximity to this second, generalizable punctum when his invocation of the first punctum is immediately followed by a citation of a line from the same page in *Camera Lucida* where we find the second

punctum: "Every photograph, Barthes maintains, causes the viewer to 'shudder over a catastrophe which has already occurred'" (Baer 145, emphasis in original). Yet the shift from first to second punctum and the consequences of this shift are not engaged. This universal "shudder" will not, as Baer implies, be caused by the prick of a detail, by the contingent traces found in every photograph, because, as Barthes argues in *Camera Lucida*, we find no unity in our desires, only in the way those differing desires remain opaque to each of us, like the photograph.

Though Baer specifically identifies his own critical intervention into the discourse of photography as avoiding the thanatographic perspective, this avoidance ultimately becomes possible only by repressing from view the relationship Barthes asserts between the generalizable punctum Baer hopes to mobilize in the service of a photographically driven ethical responsibility, and death: "But the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 96). Baer invokes Barthes's reference to photography's "anterior future" as a kind of antidote to the "unsurpassable imprint of death" he finds in other works of photographic theory, yet his argument suppresses the ubiquity of death in Barthes's discussion of the anterior future:

This will be and this has been; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake . . . the photograph tells me death in the future. . . . In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe. (Barthes, Camera Lucida, 96, emphasis in original)

To deny the thanatographic aspect of photography, therefore, is to tame the madness of photography, to negate the possibility of a photographic ethics grounded in the recognition of our unevenly distributed care for the other to whom we are opaquely bound in our emergence as subjects and in our death. Though the thanatographic discourse on photography may seem to have exhausted itself, to have become hardened through repetition, as we try to respond creatively in this moment of discursive and material transition we have yet to outrun the demands of the photograph:

that we learn to speak differently and that our speech be marked by the immanence and opacity of death.

Notes

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1. Following 16Beaver's response to *October's* recent questionnaire exclusively addressing the war in Iraq, I use the phrase "war on terror" both to gesture toward "the infinite and all-encompassing dimension of what we are confronting" and to recognize the way in which M. Ho's work, which I discuss in this essay, intervenes in the pages of the *New York Times* in order to refuse the separation of an individual war from what Paige Sarlin of 16Beaver calls "business as usual for the system we are operating under" (16Beaver 149, 153).

2. Michael Fried expresses a sense of this in his own recent and careful engagement with Barthes when he prefaces a quotation from the passage in *Camera Lucida* where Barthes introduces the concept of the *punctum* with "And then (introducing the second term [the punctum], one that has proven almost as popular as Benjamin's *aura*)" (Fried 542).

3. For Krauss's discussion of the photograph as a form of writing, see especially "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism." Thanks to Michael Leja for raising the question of surrealism's importance to Ho's project.

4. George W. Bush announced the invasion of Iraq on March 19, 2003.

5. Richter also includes reports on sporting and cultural events, finance, and so on.

6. Other events followed by Charlesworth in this series include a solar eclipse, the pope's visit to Auschwitz, and the murder of ABC newsman Bill Stewart on film. For a more in-depth analysis of this series, see Phillips.

7. For Rosalind Krauss's essential discussion of the use of spacing in Dadaist and surrealist practice, see "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism." Although Krauss states that surrealist photographers rarely used photomontage or the imitation of its effects through combination printing, their primary interest being in the incorporation of spacing into "the seamless unity of the print" (107), she highlights André Breton's use of photomontage as an exceptional example of the

surrealist use of this practice and sees the practice of juxtaposing already-printed forms as an important parallel to the internalization of spacing within the body of a print that appears “intact” (109).

8. See Heartney 105–6; and Frankel 106.

9. Leung 103–4.

10. This imperative to connect the dots and to refuse the separation of the Iraq War from the activities and understanding of daily life is central to 16Beaver’s response to the *October* questionnaire: “It is good to talk about the war on Iraq, but why only focus on Iraq? Where do we place Afghanistan? Guantanamo Bay? The Patriot Act? The occupation of Palestine? Or last year’s war on Lebanon? . . . How do we discuss the large-scale dispossession being carried out in the name of development and ‘free markets’ across the globe?” (149).

11. In this sense, Ho’s collages evoke for me a practice of reading similar to the mode of reading illegible (cancelled, overwritten, erased) poetry described by Craig Dworkin in *Reading the Illegible*.

12. These terms are used throughout “The Photographic Message” (1961). See “The Photographic Message,” 17.

13. My own recent article on press photographs of death row inmates is an example of this approach to the photographic message, but I am suggesting in this essay that this approach may ultimately limit our ability to see what the photograph, any photograph, can show us. See Beckman.

14. Sontag’s evaluation of images through the actions they may or may not provoke stands in stark contrast to Coco Fusco’s recent opposition to the category of “effectiveness”: “Number one, stop making ‘effectiveness’ the foremost concern of artistic and intellectual engagement with the political. It makes much more sense to be concerned about creating and maintaining an oppositional sphere. Some struggles take a long time to produce results and some of them are never-ending. . . . I want my own performances and teaching to make people *think* about war. To think about how we are all implicated in the actions of the government that represents us and acts on our behalf. Then they can decide if they want to do anything” (Fusco 62).

15. Though Sontag herself compares Wall’s image to these late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century spectacles, she does not establish a connection between them and a cinematic temporality. For a discussion of contemporary photographs that have taken on a narrative dimension and a cinematic temporality, including those of Wall, see Baker.

16. Here Butler is specifically drawing on Theodor Adorno’s recognition of this disorientation as being at the core of moral deliberation.

17. My question about the relationship between Butler’s writing on Sontag and her writing on ethics is not meant to suggest that Butler *should* develop theories

that are consistent with one another across works but merely to explore what the difference between the two texts illuminates. Butler herself explains why such an expectation of a fully coherent author function would be fundamentally at odds with her work in “Reply from Judith Butler to Mill and Jenkins.”

18. For a discussion of the role of traumatic photography in consolidating the mass subject, see Foster. The ethical model I am pursuing here would require a reconsideration of the ethical possibilities of Warhol’s use of film and photography, such as that we find in Douglas Crimp, “Coming Together to Stay Apart.” While Sontag denounces Warhol as “that connoisseur of death and high priest of the delights of apathy,” she reads his apparent indifference to the violence in his illustration of that violence’s “opaqueness” and “banality” (Sontag 100, 101). For Butler in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, the space where the opacity of the other is recognized and judgment and denunciation are suspended is the space in which the possibility of ethics emerges. See, for example, Butler, *Giving an Account*, 44–46.

19. Baer 138. Here Baer specifically takes issue with Gertrud Koch’s discussion of “fascist aesthetics” in *Die Einstellung ist die Einstellung* and with Claude Lanzmann’s claim in “Le lieu et la parole” that “the camera exercises absolute control over its subjects” (quoted in Baer 138).

20. Photography also retrospectively reveals the impossibility of complete authorial control in those pretechnological modes, fundamentally transforming how we read the notion of authorship.

21. Here, Crimp specifically argues with Tzvetan Todorov and J. Gerald Kennedy.

22. Hal Foster frames the punctum in a similar way: “In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes is concerned with straight photographs, so he relates the *punctum* to details of content” (73). Yet, how Barthes’s photograph or its content could ever be “straight” is hard to see. Photography is, for Barthes, an “unstable art,” a “weightless, transparent envelope” of contingency that “turn[s], as milk does,” and is never self-same (*Camera Lucida*, 5, 6).

23. See Butler’s discussion of the consequences of trying to transform the love of the other into an entitlement not a gift in *Giving an Account*, 102–3.

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