Klaus Wehner

ON POSING

Notes on Imageness

PhD Art

Goldsmiths, University of London

2012

Abstract

The overarching theme is an investigation of the concept of *imageness* and ultimately its relationship to the body or the *corpo-real.*

The text establishes its specific notion of *imageness* and of the *posed object* by comparing the perceived *imageness* of the photographic image and of exhibited objects. Comparing the artifice inherent in both the curatorial and the photographic composition, employing aspects of museology, leads to a re-visiting of some basics of photography theory, resulting in criticism of the field, which is dominated by non-practising art historians, from my point of view as an active photographer / artist. The concept of 'indexicality' is criticised; in a revised form, as the 'real index', its relationship to the body is examined. This leads to the transposition of Roland Barthes' *punctum* to posed objects in museums with a real indexical link to the body. My visual work (www.museumclausum.org) consists of photographs taken in museum spaces, making deliberate use of lens-specific visual artifice, drawing attention to the artifice of the photograph itself. I also produced some museum-style installations, where exhibition labelling conferred real indexical links to absent / dead bodies on the objects.

The claim that Barthes' *punctum* is a pointer to the body remains central as it is applied to the idea of *imageness* rather than the photographic image. This is corroborated by a critical re-reading of *Camera Lucida* and subsequently applied to an examination of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. This is followed by a further look at exhibition culture with a focus on the differentiation between 'art' and 'artefact' and observations around the exhibition of human remains. In conclusion, it is observed how the imageness of posed objects reflects on and becomes part of the imageness of the posing subject as a labour that ultimately camouflages human *corpo-reality*.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

TAB. XXIII.

GENESIS cap. I. v. 26. 27. I. Buch Mosis Cap. I. v. 26. 27.
Homo ex Humo. Erschaffung und Zeugung deß Menschen.

I. A. Fridrich sculp.

On Posing

The empty place of the absent as a place that is not empty: that is the image.

Jean Luc Nancy[1]

[1] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (Fordham University Press: New York, 2005), 68.

Abbreviations:

The following frequently quoted texts will be referenced in text using abbreviations:

CL   **Roland Barthes,** *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, translated by
Richard Howard, first published 1980 (Vintage: London, 2000).

CC   **Roland Barthes,** *La Chambre Claire: Note sur la photographie*,
first published 1980 (Gallimard Seuil: Paris, 2009),
all citations credited CC are my own translation.

TiV   **Thomas Mann**, *Der Tod in Venedig,* first published in 1912,
in: *Die Erzählungen: Band 1* (Fischer Verlag: Frankfurt, 1980),
all citations credited TiV are my own translation.

DG   **Oscar Wilde,** *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, first published 1890,
The "Lippincott's edition" (Creation Books: London, 2000).

Yes, I'm considerably in favour of 'punctum', in the sense of the singularity of the object at a given moment. Or the singularity of the instant outside of its interpretative context, at the point where things have no meaning – or do not yet have meaning – but appear all the same.

Jean Baudrillard[2]

Foreword

The 2009 publication of a collection of old and new essays on Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, entitled *Photography Degree Zero*[3], edited by Geoffrey Batchen, is evidence of the fact that some 30 years after its initial publication, *Camera Lucida* and the idea of the *punctum*, which goes hand in hand with a theorisation of photography through the concept of indexicality, remains a prominent issue in theoretical photography discourse. The prominence of this subject and the fact that opinions on the usefulness of the concept of 'indexicality' and the *punctum* are disparate is also well documented in *Photography Theory*[4] (2007), a recorded round table discussion preceded by a collection of essays and followed by subsequent evaluations by a long list of well-known writers on the subject of photography theory (some of whom also contributed to *Photography Degree Zero*). Whilst some theorists keep indexicality at the core of their investigations, others completely reject 'the index' as a useful concept to theorise photography, or oppose the usefulness of the idea of the *punctum*, and yet others debate details relating to the origins, exact interpretation and application of either or both concepts.

 Other publications on the *punctum* in recent years include Jay Prosser's essays 'Roland Barthes's Loss' in his *Light in the Dark Room*[5] (2005), Margaret Iversen's *Beyond Pleasure*[6] (2007) which republishes 'What is a Photograph', Michael Fried's

---

[2] Jean Baudrillard interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg, 'The Ecstasy of Photography' in *Art and Artefact*, edited by Nicholas Zurbrugg, (Sage Publications: London, 1997), 39.
[3] Geoffrey Batchen (ed.), *Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Roland Barthes's* Camera Lucida (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England, 2009).
[4] James Elkins (ed.), *Photography Theory* (Routledge: New York & London, 2007).
[5] Jay Prosser, 'Roland Barthes's Loss' in *Light in the Dark Room* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2005), 19-52. Another essay by Prosser, 'Buddha Barthes: What Barthes saw in Photography (That He Didn't in Literature)' is published in *Photography Degree Zero*.
[6] Margaret Iversen 'What is a Photograph' in *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes* (Pennsylvania State University Press: Pennsylvania, 2007), 113-29. 'What is a Photograph' was originally published in *Art History* 17: 3 (September 1994), 450-64, and is also included in *Photography Degree Zero.*

'Barthes's *Punctum*' republished in his *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*[7] (2008) and also Jacques Rancière's 'The Pensive Image' in *The Emancipated Spectator*[8] (2009) and his reflections on Barthes in *The Future of the Image*[9] (2007). Most recently, James Elkins' 2011 publication *What Photography Is*[10] also contains a critical 'railing' about *Camera Lucida* in the form of a dedicated response, a writing 'against' *Camera Lucida* – and his book begins with a foreword similar to mine, outlining the ubiquitous presence of Barthes' 'little book', as he called it himself. The extent of this not all-comprehensive list of recent publications leaves no doubt that the idea of the *punctum* continues to inspire much thought and debate for writers of a wide variety of approaches.

Somewhat self-consciously, the *Photography Theory* panel acknowledges the fact that most participants come from an art historical background and only rely on a relatively small bibliography of theory as well as on a limited selection of examined photography/photographers. Further, Jan Baetens acknowledges that 'it is telling that there are no practicing photographers around the table'[11]. The other publications listed above largely confirm this predicament. As an actively practising photographer I have often found that certain points of view of theoretical thought on photography betray a symptomatic lack of experience and practice of using a camera and purposefully *creating* – not *taking* – photographic images. When Barthes in *Camera Lucida* proclaims to 'take [himself] as mediator for all Photography' (CL 8) he not only promotes his own subjectivity at the price of excluding the photographers' subjectivity, but he also privileges the *reception* of a photographic image at the price of a near-total exclusion of any camera-specific issues related to its production. Not only does he exclude the image-making subject, but his exclusive focus on the chemistry of the imprint also neglects aspects of the optical apparatus that is a camera which in turn aids the fact, as Rancière reminds us, that Barthes identifies 'the optical relationship with a tactile relationship'[12]. For the Barthes of *Camera Lucida*, the author of the photographs is truly dead and technical aspects of the creation of photographic images are transparent because 'affect … is what [he] ought to reduce the Photograph *to'* (CL 21).

---

[7] Michael Fried, 'Barthes's Punctum' in *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, (Yale University Press: Yale, 2004). Also included in *Photography Degree Zero*.
[8] Jacques Rancière, 'The Pensive Image' in *The Emancipated Spectator* (Verso: London & New York, 2009), 107-32.
[9] Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* (Verso: London & New York, 2007), 10-31.
[10] James Elkins, *What Photography Is* (Routledge: London & New York, 2011).
[11] Elkins, (ed.), *Photography Theory*, 172.
[12] Rancière, *Future of the Image*, 110.

All photography theory I know of is based on a heavy if not exclusive slant towards the reception of photographic images, thereby neglecting important aspects that are modes of the creation and – to rescue a term often specifically reviled due to its link to the 'pictorial' and the 'connoisseurial'– the *composition* of a photograph. Simple photographic subject terminology such as camera angle, focal length, depth of field or *in-camera* manipulation are far too seldom found in writings on photography theory, even though these technical aspects are not negligible but *dominate* what is seen in a photograph and how what is seen is caught, composed together and re-presented as the photographic picture. An acute awareness of these issues also determines any possible theorisation of photographic images. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes expresses how certain 'contortions of technique: superimpositions, anamorphoses, deliberate exploitation of certain effects (blurring, deceptive perspectives, trick framing)' do not 'convince' him (CL 33), thus he excludes such photographs from his search for the essence of photography. As such, *Camera Lucida* is a paradigmatic example of a text on photography that focuses on limited – compliant – types of photographic images, or indeed just looks at compliant aspects of used images, choosing not to include those types of photographs that would expose blind spots at the base of certain arguments. This exclusive selectiveness certainly also extends into the production of photographs in different areas such as contemporary photography, which today is accepted and promoted in galleries and museums in correspondence to what Joanna Lowry very cogently describes as the 'overdrive' of a 'cultural system … protecting the program of the apparatus (as Flusser would put it), and creating forms of photography that obey conventional rules and are rooted in fixed discourses of production and reception'[13].

This issue will be outlined in more detail in the text when it will also be pointed out how both photography and the museum tend to re-present their object but remain in relative transparency as a medium themselves. This is addressed in a visual way in my photography of museum spaces. Here, I deliberately employ lens-based visual artifice such as a low depth of field in order to draw attention to the photograph itself. In a deliberate contrast to photographs showing conventional 'neutral' 'reproductions' of artefacts that would be expected in a collection catalogue (as discussed in Chapter I.) is the project *Freud's Study*. This is a series of photographs of the figures of Sigmund Freud's large collection of antiquities. The photos often focus on reflections and use foreshortening of spaces to create new juxtapositions of

---

[13] Joanna Lowry, 'Desiring Photography' in Elkins (ed.), *Photography Theory*, 316.

objects. The framing and cropping of images deliberately aims for fragmentation. In all other projects, the presence of people is deliberately included to draw attention to the photographic moment and also to emphasise the temporality of the (encounter with the) museum space. In the case of the series *Soane Mania*, photographed in Sir John Soane's Museum in London, I also deliberately juxtapose different styles of photography. Photographing museum spaces always creates an immediate hall of mirrors effect as the two re-presentational systems reflect on each other. The 'reflexivity' of museum photographs will also be discussed in Chapter I. As an overall result, these collections of photographs deliberately create and present a different imageness of the museum spaces than what visitors to the museum would experience.

Some of this work can be seen at the website www.museumclausum.org. This website, also features documentation of some museum-style installations, where I deliberately harvest the 'alchemical force of the pose' that I discussed in Chapter IV. By this I mean that the museum-style posing of objects under glass on a plinth together with 'information' as supplied by an exhibition booklet transforms the objects from one thing into another. In these installations, I also create some invented real indexical links to absent/dead bodies. The exhibition booklets can be downloaded as pdf files from the website.

Returning to *Camera Lucida*, I must assert at this point that, completely unexpectedly, nearly two decades after having read the book for the first time as an undergraduate student of Photography, I have found myself drawn into a close rereading of this text and discovered in it an outstanding contribution to the investigation of our interrelationship with photography, with 'signs' in general, and further, with our being *in representation*. This roughly outlines the trajectory of *On Posing*.

A text that stands as a significant supplement to *Camera Lucida*, in the Derridean sense, is Jacques Derrida's own 'The Deaths of Roland Barthes'[14] – to such a degree that it could be recommended that one should not be read without the other. In addition to a number insightful remarks on the nature of photography, another important aspect of Derrida's text is his observation that: 'All differential precautions

---

[14] Jacques Derrida, 'The Deaths of Roland Barthes' in H. J. Silverman (ed.), *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy since Merleau Ponty* (Northwestern University Press: Evanston, Il, 1997), 259-96. Cited hereafter as 'Barthes'.

being taken, it will not be a reduction of what [Barthes] says about the photograph specifically to find it pertinent elsewhere: I would even say everywhere'[15]. Derrida's text, is acutely aware of the position of *Camera Lucida* in the trajectory of Barthes' writings, and also 'knows' that the emphasis on the 'that-has-been' is not what it seems at face value, but in his idiosyncratic style, part of which is to refuse to provide any 'face value', means that Derrida's remarks remain somewhat open and oblique and his text does not stand as a clarifying 'interpretation' or 'analysis'.

The English translations of Jacques Rancière's writings have established in our vocabulary the use of the word 'imageness', which he describes as 'a regime of relations between elements and between functions'[16] or a 'particular regime of articulation between the visible and the sayable'[17]. As a native German speaker I miss in the English language the ease with which in everyday speech one can use words like *Bildhaftigkeit* and *Bildmäßigkeit* which literally translate as 'image-like' or 'image-likeness' and which the dictionary translates as 'pictorial' yet I prefer to translate as *imageness*. Therefore, I use this term coming from a different perspective, and thus my use of the term does not refer to Rancière's.

When Barthes states that: '[e]very photograph is a certificate of presence [and this] certificate is the *new gene*[18] which its invention has introduced into the family of images'[19], and also describes the photograph as an 'anthropologically new object' (CL 88) whose 'force is … superior to everything the human mind can or can have conceived to assure us of reality' (CL 81), he asserts that the occurrence of photography has irreversibly altered not only the nature of signs but also, in tandem,

---

[15] Ibid., 275.

[16] Rancière, *Future of the Image*, 4.

[17] Ibid., 11.

[18] CC 135, my emphasis. My French edition says 'gène'. Ironically, Richard Howard has confused 'gène' (gene) and 'gêne' (embarrassment) and thus translated this passage into: 'This certificate is the new embarrassment which its invention has introduced into the family of images' (CL 87). Secondary literature on *Camera Lucida* is brimming with criticism of Howard's English translation and also additional editorial decisions (some have occurred over time). One shortcoming of the actual translation is that it often omits indirect references to other writers, especially Lacan, giving for instance 'partial object' instead of 'part-object' for 'objet partièl', and also translating 'regard' as 'eye' instead of 'gaze'.
See: 'Chapter II, *Camera Lucida: That*-must-*have been*' for more details.

[19] In 'Rhetoric of the Image', in *Image, Music, Text* (Fontana Press: London, 1977), 44, Barthes also proclaims that: 'The type of consciousness the photograph involves is indeed truly unprecedented, since it establishes not a consciousness of the being-there of the thing (which any copy could provoke) but an awareness of its having-been-there. What we have is a new space-time category: a spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority, the photograph being an illogical conjunction between the here-now and the there-then'.

by virtue of introducing a new type of imageness, the human perception of the world. In *Snap to Grid,* Peter Lunenfeld suggests that semiotics could only be developed after the mechanical apparatus of photography had broken up the dichotomy between poetry (symbolic) and painting (iconic):

> It is hard to imagine a science of signs, especially Peircean semiotics, developing in a pre-photographic age. The classical aesthetic dichotomy divides poetry and painting. A science of signs develops only after technology adds a new dimension to the signscape of the symbolic representations of literature and the iconic representations of painting. … Only after the mechanical photographic apparatus ruptures the dichotomy developed between writing and painting – between the symbolic and the iconic – is semiotics developed. The mechanical apparatus of photography vastly expands the realm and power of the indexical sign[20].

A consequence of this must be that any theorisation of the ontology of photography reveals something about the nature of the perception and the *production* of representation and the way we perceive ourselves and the world around us *in representation*. Therefore, when dealing with the theory of the photographic, what finds symbolical encoding in the concepts of '*punctum'* and also 'indexicality' – both intertwined with the singularity that is opposed to the gravitas of generality of any representation – must be able to be transposed and applied onto different areas of perception/representation. This in turn will show that these underlying issues actually originate in areas of representation and perception other than photography. This is why *Camera Lucida's* 'torchlight' approach, which leaves so many aspects of the discussed images in the dark, should be considered to be a part of the performance of the book to *name* with the *punctum* an issue that is an undercurrent not only of photographic images but of all signs or images or symbolic *imageness* as a whole. This issue, in its last instance, is that the dynamic of perceived 'disembodiment', resulting from the force of generalisation that is part of all symbolic representation, is in tension with the unique, singular, real, non-symbolisable being *in* and *as* a body. Photography is a privileged medium to reveal this issue: this is the reason why naming it with this 'concept' of the *punctum* proves such a stubborn

---

[20] Peter Lunenfeld, 'Digital Photography: The Dubitative Image' in *Snap to Grid: A Users Guide to Digital Arts, Media, and Cultures* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England, 2000), 59.

presence in photography theory, and also why photography theory has come to be at the core of *On Posing*. What I value about *Camera Lucida* is not that its 'notes on photography' lead to a revelatory 'theory of photography' but that its emphasis on mood and feeling, what in academic abstraction we call 'affectual response', in its wider sense is an emphasis on the real that is the body's unresolved place within the network of symbolic representation. *Camera Lucida* engages fragments of a diverse range of outright 'incompatible' methodologies (if that term can be used at all with regard to the book), facilitated by its distinctly personal 'non-academic' style. Yet, even though the text is dedicated to Sartre's *L'Imaginaire*, which rejects the idea of the unconscious, references to psychoanalytic theory are prominent and clear in the text. The first margin note of the French text references the chapter 'Tuché and Automaton' of Lacan's *Le Seminaire VI*[21], in which Lacan writes that: 'No praxis is more orientated towards that which, at the heart of experience, is the kernel of the real than psycho-analysis'[22] further describing the *tuché* as *'the encounter with the real'*[23] and later adding: 'The real may be represented by the accident, the noise, the small element of reality, which is evidence that we are not dreaming'[24]. Thus, a string of authors have linked the *punctum* to the Lacanian real, with Margaret Iversen describing *Camera Lucida* as a 'mediation' of Lacan's *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*[25]. However, it would be better to say that *fragments* of such a mediation are a (major) part of the composition of *Camera Lucida*. In preserving its avoidance of engaging one clear methodology in correspondence to Barthes' 'desperate resistance to any reductive system' (CL 8), and also accepting that Barthes lists psychoanalysis as a discourse with which he is ultimately dissatisfied (CL 8), there still can be little doubt that the main force at work in the text is the encircling of a self-consciously impossible 'science of the subject' (CL 18) or '*the impossible science of the unique being*' (CL 71) that the absent Winter Garden photograph 'utopically' 'achieved' for Barthes. Photography has become the subject of the book, due to photography's 'gene' which, amongst the family of images/signs, results in a privileged relationship to the

---

[21] CC 15. The side note refers to pages 53-66 of Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XI* (Éditions du Seuil: Paris, 1973).
[22] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Alan Sheridan (ed.), Alan Sheridan (trans.), (W. W. Norton & Company: New York & London, 1981 [First published in French 1973]), 53.
[23] Ibid., 53, original emphasis.
[24] Ibid., 60.
[25] Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure*, 139, and also '[T]he real value of Camera Lucida lies not in its excavating "the essential nature of photography" but in its communicating to a large audience a particular idea of our fascination with the image that was formulated by Lacan in *The Four Fundamental Concepts*', 132.

impossible science of the unique being, via its intertwined relationship with the idea of causation or 'indexicality' and its link to singularity.

When Geoffrey Batchen points out that Barthes' 'turn to the personal is also in keeping with Charles Sanders Pierce's theory of the index'[26], he reminds us of the important yet often sidelined fact that Peirce's analysis of 'the index' places emphasis on the fact that the index 'is a a sign, or representation, which refers to its object … because it is in dynamical (including spatial) connection 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'[27], which should remind us that '*[p]sychologically*, the action of indices depends upon *association* by contiguity'[28]. This psychological aspect of the index is crucial for any application of the concept – as well as for a reading of *Camera Lucida*.

Another important issue when examining 'the index' is that there are two diverse types of indexicality that the English word *index* conflates into one, yet which Romance languages differentiate as *indice* and *index*. This corresponds to Roman Jakobson's surprisingly rarely used distinction between 'Indexes' and 'Indexical Symbols', which will be explained further on. At this point, however, I will claim that an absence of this differentiation together with the neglect of its psychological aspects leaves 'the index' an ill-defined concept, causing ongoing misunderstandings and confusions that are partly to blame for the rejection of this paradigm for photography theory.

● ● ●

---

[26] Geoffrey Batchen, 'Another Little History of Photography', in Batchen (ed.), *Photography Degree Zero*, 265.
[27] Charles Sanders Peirce, 'Logic As Semiotic: The Theory of Signs' in Justus Buchler (ed.), *The Philosophy of Peirce: Selected Writings* (AMS Press: New York, 1978), 107, my emphasis.
[28] Ibid., 108, my emphasis.

Chapter I begins by summing up and re-examining some basic issues around photography and introduces the concepts of the 'pose', 'imageness' and the adaption and transposition of the *punctum,* whilst establishing as an analogy the older 'sibling' of photography, the display of art and artefacts in the context of museums, collections and display/exhibition culture in general, in the form of the 'posed object'. By first looking at implications of curatorial object compositions, the text applies these to the photographic composition. This observed analogy provides a natural ground for the transposition of the *punctum* away from the exclusive context of the photographic image.

This part of the text is the most directly concerned with photography and photography theory. This necessarily includes going over some territory as old as photography (theory) itself – yet still forever hotly debated, namely the 'nature'/'culture' or 'art'/'technique' debate and also, as already mentioned, a focus on the lack of clarity of the concept of 'the index'. In tandem with this poke into photography theory, from my viewpoint as a practising photographer comes a criticism of many theorists, including Barthes, for ignoring the effects of photography's powerful manipulative mechanisms, which can be summarised as the interplay between the elements of the triad of 'pre-photographic', 'in-camera' and 'post-photographic' manipulation.

Further to establishing the concept of the 'pose' and its importance for photography and posed objects, part of the main conclusion of this chapter, which also forms the basis for the following parts, is the examination of a parallel between the pose in the photograph and in the posed object to the pose of the body *in representation* in daily life, adopting from Barthes the use of the term *corpus* for the body *in representation* opposed to the term 'body' for the materiality of the organism.

In summary, Chapter I forms the main argument of this text, the core of which is that the *punctum* is a disturbance of imageness that can occur *anywhere*. Whilst the affectual reaction that is triggered by a detail that becomes a *punctum* is a distinctly individual and subjective experience, real indexical references to the (absent) body have a privileged potential to cause such a *tuché*, both when looking at a photograph and when looking at (posed) objects.

Slightly differing in style from the first part, which establishes the theory of the argument in a more academically written style, the following chapters are dedicated

to a somewhat playful application of the trope of the *pose* and its imageness to a variety of fields. Firstly, **Chapter II**, '*Camera Lucida*: This-*Must-Have*-Been' turns back to Barthes' text by re-applying these concepts to certain aspects of the very text which helped to develop them. One contention that is made here is that all of Barthes' examples of a *punctum* can ultimately be seen as pointers to the singularity of the body: a piercing of the imageness of the *corpus*. This is very clear and obvious in some of Barthes' examples and can be established as a matter of transference in other cases. In the '*punctum* that is time', this link to the body establishes itself in the analogue between the pose of the *corpus* in daily life and the pose in the photograph. *La Chambre Claire* contains a number of riddles that put a question mark on the obvious content, many of which are missing from the English edition. The well-known 'that-has-been' is Barthes' term equivalent to the 'indexical' nature of the photograph, which he emphasises so vehemently as 'pure contingency'. Yet a close reading of *Camera Lucida* (following a number of existing publications), which also includes connections to Barthes' earlier texts, especially *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, establishes clearly the degree to which Barthes' readings and experiences of a *punctum* are subject to projection on his behalf, and this must reflect on the concept of (the perception of) indexicality. Thus the title: 'This-*Must-Have*-Been'.

Changing the focus to a different type of literature, in **Chapter III**, the occurrence of the *punctum* in the pose of the self and self-representation is examined by analysing two classic pieces of literature in which art and the imageness of perfect beauty play an important part, Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* and Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*. In both novels (photographic) imageness is an underlying main theme and all protagonists are caught in, and determined by, their relationship to ideas of beauty and imageness. The famous painting of Dorian Gray – the proverbial 'picture in the attic'– is specifically examined in terms of photography and indexicality. In both novels the imageness of youth and 'perfect' beauty is set as desired ideal in opposition to the ageing and decay of the body. Thus this chapter continues the theme of the body *in representation*, the imageness of the corpus, as opposed to the real of the organism together with a focus on the (failing of the) insertion of the self into a desired pose of 'perfection'.

In **Chapter IV** we return to the exhibition of objects. Initially looking at objects in the museum, it is pointed out how context and ideology determine the classification and reading of, and bestow meaning on, posed objects, the paradigmatic example being

the differentiation between objects considered as 'art' and objects considered as 'artefacts' – which extends to the old theme of the perceived dialectic between art and science. Returning to the theme of the real index of the body that is established in Chapter I, observations are made regarding cultural conventions governing the display of human remains in the context of art or science.

Following this, and in conclusion, **Chapter V, '**Posing Objects Posing Subjects' establishes the reciprocal or circular dynamic of the pose, and its meaning for the imageness of the *posed subject* is examined. Baudrillard's classic 'System of Objects' plays a major part, as a system of objects is also a system of posing objects and examining its reciprocal dynamic leads back again to the theme of the body *in representation* and a look at the pose of the self in everyday life via observations of media culture.

A short **Glossary Of Terms** is added at the end of the text (pages 210-12) which sums up my use and understanding of the main terms as also outlined in the main text.

● ● ●

I adopt, in an expanded way, from Barthes the strategy of a 'silent' juxtaposition of elements which may not find any mention in the actual text. We know that *Camera Lucida* avoids the conventions of academic writing in favour of a 'novelistic' style. Seen through the lens of my artist's frame of mind, this 'silent' juxtaposition of elements such as the frontispiece, the Marpa quote, the bibliographical side notes, not to forget the section titles 'hidden' at the back of the (French) book, the dedication to Sarte's *L'Imaginaire* – and also the posing of apparent contradictions – are an integral part of what is clearly a strategy of 'art' in that they present the viewer with signs that solicit 'explanation', which is open to interpretation. The placing and resulting context of the sign is the artist's/author's way of hinting at an interpretation, which, however, at the same time actively courts arbitrariness and resists a resolved 'explanation'.

Please note: In the printed version some of the left pages of the bound text are used to juxtapose images and quotes opposite the main text. For this electronic version, theses pages are inserted using additional 'a' page numbers: For example page 69a is meant to be opposite page 69. For this reason, text page numbers do not correspond to the page numbers of the pdf file.

CHAPTER I

Photography – Museum:
on Posing, Imageness and the *Punctum*

Man … requires something like that lustre of the wood of the True Cross which could make a church truly holy, some kind of talisman – a shard of absolute reality, ensconced, enshrined at the heart of ordinary reality in order to justify it.

Jean Baudrillard[1]

---

[1] Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, translated by James Benedict, first published 1968 (Verso: London & New York, 1996), 84.

> [A]ll images are polysemous … Polysemy poses a question of meaning
> and this question always comes through as a dysfunction … Hence in
> every society various techniques are developed intended to *fix* the
> floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of
> uncertain signs.
> Roland Barthes[2]

Museum Photography

The appointment of Roger Fenton in 1854 to be 'Photographer to the British
Museum' – the first ever official photographer to any museum – marked the
official beginning of the ongoing interrelationship between photography and
the museum. Since then, museums have come to employ photography in two
main ways: to record the objects of their own collections for archives and
dissemination (i.e. catalogues) and to supply photographs of contextual
locations and objects/subjects not physically present in the museum. Elizabeth
Edwards' *Raw Histories*[3] provides an enlightening in-depth critical analysis of
the field, which includes a wealth of references to previous studies. Based on
the notion of the polysemic nature of both photographs and objects, Edwards
applies the idea of a social biography to both. Further, she also refers to a
certain 'merging'[4] of displays of objects and photographs.

This analogy between photographic images and exhibited objects deserves
reinforcement, initially, via a detour that examines the effect of turning the
camera around: instead of supplying photographic image material into the
museum, treating the museum itself as the subject of photographs.

One issue that is prominent in the perception of all photographic projects
devoted to museums is the fact that the viewer of the resulting photographs, by
virtue of being positioned as 'external', looks at the depicted museum space *as
an image*, as opposed to the actual museum visitor who focuses on individual
exhibits and for whom the museum itself retains a certain degree of
transparency. This applies to museum photographs that would be considered to
be 'art', such as those of Louise Lawler or Hiroshi Sugimoto to name only two

---

[2] Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', 38-39.
[3] Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photography, Anthropology and Museums* (Berg: London, 2001).
[4] E. Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 63.

very prominent photographers in this vast field, as well as to images considered to be 'documentary', such as the collection of historical museum photographs collated by the artist and photographer Vid Ingelevics into a series of exhibitions entitled *Camera Obscured*[5].
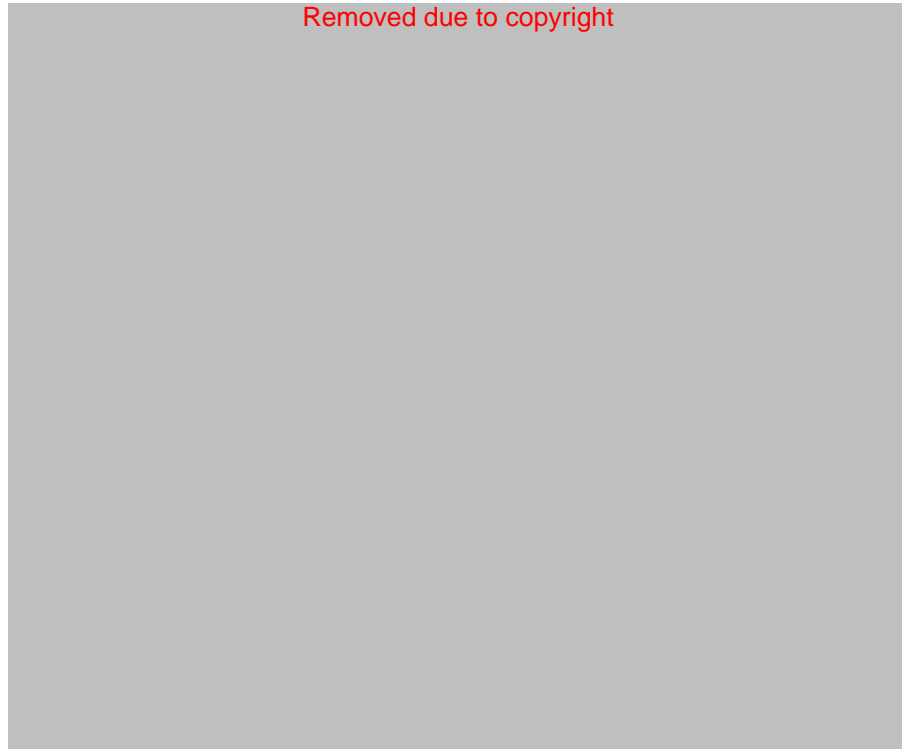
Julius Kirschner: Dr. James L. Clark and unidentified technician with lion group in preparation, Akeley African Hall, American Museum of Natural History, New York, 1934.
From: Vid Ingelevics' *Camera Obscured*.

Camera Obscured is a collection of photographs featuring museum workers in the process of setting up dioramas and other displays, painting backgrounds, transporting objects etc. These are what could be called 'in house' photographs and the photographer is rarely recorded and credited. A review of this exhibition by Georgina Born, in response to one of the first exhibitions of *Camera Obscured* held at the Photographers' Gallery in London in 1998, is one of the rare published comments on the effect of photographing museum spaces I know of. In her essay 'Public Museums, Museum Photography, and the Limits

---

[5] The exhibition is curated by artist and photographer Vid Ingelevics. On his website a selection of images from *Camera Obscured* can be seen: http://www.web.net/artinfact/CameraObsc.A.htm (accessed September 2011).

of Reflexivity'[6] (1998), Born states how the 'museum photographer cannot help but produce critique'[7] and further, that this produces a 'reflexivity … which the museums seem officially to resist'[8].

However, this default critique/reflexivity is not restricted to such 'behind the scenes' images. It occurs in the same way when photographing 'complete' gallery spaces. In all cases, the photographic mediation causes the viewer of the photograph to 'take a step back', and as a result, brings the museum itself into prominence. This effect subsequently 'cannot help' but emphasise what can be seen as the main predicament that is at the base of all collecting and curatorial practice: the contrived artifice of display through the conscious staging and juxtaposing of objects produces a *composition* whose contemporaneous whole is in tension with the individual objects' historic ontology as these are incorporated. In other words, looking at photographs of exhibition spaces causes an increased awareness of the artifice that is the *curatorial composition* by presenting an image that visually emphasises the fact that all efforts of staging and juxtaposing objects produce a sum that is by definition greater than its parts.

---

[6] Georgina Born, 'Public Museums, Museum Photography, and the Limits of Reflexivity: An Essay on the Exhibition *Camera Obscured: Photographic Documentation and the Public Museum*' (Journal of Material Culture, 1998, Vol. 3), 223-54. Cited hereafter as 'Museum Photography'.
[7] Ibid., 244.
[8] Ibid., 233.
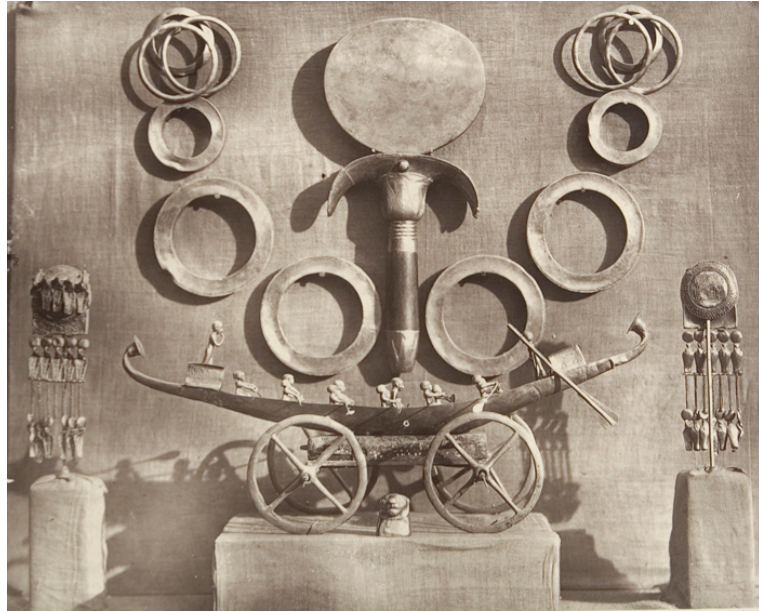
Credited to Hippolyte Délié and Henri Bechard: Images from the 'Album Du Musée Du Boulaq', published in 1872.
With many thanks to the Wilson Centre for Photography.

In cases where early photographers of museum objects, using photographic processes that required high levels of light, moved artefacts outdoors into the sunlight, the work of curating on the part of the photographer becomes specifically obvious as the photographers created contexts through temporary arrangements for the photographs. However, even when the photographer of a museum does not physically rearrange objects in order to photograph them, the mere act of finding a viewpoint and using an appropriate focal length which together *positions* certain exhibits within the image and excludes others, the act of focusing on and enlarging details, in short framing, is a process that is analogous in its nature to curating.

Klaus Wehner: The British Museum, March 2008.

Additionally, due to the fact that the photographic image always shows a *moment* of immobility that has irreversibly passed, in photographs of exhibition spaces this inevitable pastness of the photographically recorded and preserved moment also pushes the temporality of the photographed curatorial composition into prominence. To emphasise this temporality is another reflexivity that the institutional dynamic of the museum resists, as it propagates a certain mythical timelessness over its temporality. Avoiding this reflexivity on composition and temporality may well be the reason for the fact that museum and exhibition catalogues traditionally exclude photographs of exhibition spaces in favour of the neutrally set up still life photograph of individual objects in front of backgrounds perceived as neutral.

Klaus Wehner: 'Child Hiding behind Mask' also described as 'False Love', sculpture attributed to Bartolomeo Cavaceppi, 1799.
Collection T. Longstaffe-Gowan and T. Knox.

This type of image excludes anything that would overtly indicate the *moment* of the image's coming into being. Also avoided are, today, obvious arrangements of multiple objects, as in the historical photographs of Egypt, that would indicate the artificiality of the staging for the camera. Further, this type of image certainly avoids any visual elements specific to photographic images such as low depth of field or the results of an unusual camera angle or of a focal length that would be considered noticeably distorting – a theme which will be discussed below. As a consequence the image largely denies the artificiality as well as the temporality of the photographed set-up. The photographic moment, and even the photograph itself, recedes into invisibility in favour of a mythical

Photography has no rules. It is not a sport. It is the result which counts, no matter how it is achieved.
(Bill Brandt)

a-temporality of the pseudo-neutral 'reproduction'. Thus this type of image, as a medium, is subject to the same type of transparency as the museum: it represents the object but hides itself. Consequently, exhibition and museum catalogues traditionally feature series of these neutral still life photographs as a record of the collection, whereas images of exhibition spaces, which are temporary curatorial compositions, are mostly (in)conspicuously absent.[9]

● ● ●

Joel Snyder: You know, Eastman Kodak produces books on how to photograph overweight people, how to photograph cross-eyed people, how to photograph people with dark skin or light skin. There are all sorts of ways of getting around what you might see as —

Margaret Iversen: — if you go to a professional, sure.[10]

Right or Wrong Photography: On the Invisibility of the Optical Anamorphic
During an interview with Angelo Schwarz, Roland Barthes professed: 'I have no practice in photography. I don't know what it is to photograph. I am purely a consumer of the photographic product'[11] and in *Camera Lucida* he needs to 'imagine (this is all I can do, since I am not a photographer)' the 'essential gesture' of a photographer (CL 23). As already noted in the introduction, a distinct lack of experience and practice of actually using a camera for creating photographic images is evident in the work of many photography theorists.

---

[9] Regarding temporary exhibitions, it needs to be acknowledged that a practical reason for this is that catalogues are usually produced in advance, before the exhibition is set up. It is also worth noting that when it comes to the exhibition of new, contemporary art the photograph of the artwork *in situ* of a museum or gallery is often prominently included in catalogues, presenting photographic proof of the insertion of the artwork as accepted into the public and institutionalised=canonised discourse of art.
[10] Elkins (ed.), *Photography Theory*, 133.
[11] 'Sur la photographie', Roland Barthes interviewed by Angelo Schwarz and Guy Mandery (1235 - 1240), in Barthes, Roland, *Oeuvres Complètes: Tome III, 1974-1980*, (Éditions du Seuil: Paris, 1995), 1236.

"I recognize with my whole body,
the straggling villages I passed through
on my long ago travels
in Hungary and Rumania…"

Kertész: The Violinist's tune. Abony, Hungary, 1921.

(CL 48[12])

For example, Barthes asks: 'How would Kertész have "separated" the dirt road from the violinist walking on it?' (CL 47) as for him the dirt road's 'texture gives [him] the certainty of being in Central Europe' (CL 45). An experienced user of a camera would know that even from the point from which Kertész took the photograph, a lower camera angle could have made the house/fence the main background; a step to the right or left combined with a very low camera angle might even have resulted in the sky as background, which would thus have 'separated' the dirt road from the violinist. Kertész's photograph is quite visibly taken with a lens of a relatively short focal length with camera+photographer at a subtly raised position close to the violinist. This results in the inclusion of a wider view of the surrounding environment, which is shown as the top view of said 'dirt road'. If Kertész had bent down slightly or put the camera even close

---

[12] All images from *Camera Lucida* are reproduced with the caption as given by Barthes.

29

to the ground the camera would have 'looked up' at the violinist. A lower camera angle combined with a longer focal length, with the camera/photographer necessarily placed at a longer distance, could have still shown the same violinist at the same instant with his child companion but the dirt road could have become a thin horizontal sliver, whereby the violinist could be isolated – separated – from the background either through a low depth of field or by simply showing less environment. All I want to establish here is that it was the photographer's decision to include the top view of the 'dirt road' so prominently in the image's composition.

Brassaï: 'Involuntary Sculptures', Crumpled Bus Ticket, 1932.

In another example, where Rosalind Krauss pronounces the operations of the photographic frame as working through 'point of view, as in the Man Ray, or focal length, as in the extreme close-ups of Brassaï'[13], the reader is left to assume that Krauss equates a close-up with a short focal length, which means we have a case of a theoretician (and subsequently a number of academic reviewers) simply misunderstanding what focal length is, a factual error already published

---

[13] Rosalind Krauss, 'Photography in the Service of Surrealism' in *L'Amour Fou: Photography & Surrealism*, exhibition catalogue (Hayward Gallery, Arts Council of Great Britain: London, 1986), 53.

in the first version of the essay several years previously.[14] Focal length is not the distance between the lens and the photographed object but the distance between the lens and the recording medium, film or sensor. A close-up can be achieved either with a long or with a short focal length and it depends on an individual lens where the area of focus closest to the front of the lens begins. The fact that Brassaï's 'Involuntary Sculptures', which are photographs of small objects such as a rolled up bus ticket, a piece of bread or a blob of toothpaste, appear undistorted whilst nearly filling the frame of the image we see means that they must either have been taken with a longer focal length or, if taken with a shorter focal length, cropped out of a more encompassing negative whilst enlarging. Photographing an object from a close distance with a short focal length causes a very noticeable anamorphic distortion.

Inside the *camera*, the lens *projects* (the camera lucida is an optical instrument of projection) an image onto the film or sensor and the nature of this projection is controlled and manipulated by the lens – especially the lens's focal length – and thus the camera produces *anamorphic* images that are subject to optical distortions that differ, more or less noticeably, from naked human eyesight. This depends on the focal length used: it cannot be considered unimportant to remember that each camera format, in correspondence to the size of its recording medium, film or sensor, will have a 'normal' or 'standard' focal length (50mm with the classic 35mm film SLR camera) that produces an image in correspondence to the perspectival perception of normal human eyesight (already transformed from binocular to monocular vision). A shorter focal length (wide angle) will show objects further away and smaller in relation to the image ratio and a longer focal length (tele-photo), will show objects closer and larger which in either case produces an image of a perspective different to human eyesight.

'Professionals' know this and know how to make use of focal length for subtle *in-camera* image manipulation. The term 'in-camera' almost never appears in photography theory, yet is common amongst 'professionals'.

For example it is standard practice in fashion photography to use a very long tele-photo lens and to place the camera at the necessary long distance very close to the ground when taking full-length shots (as most professionals call it) as this

---

[14] Rosalind Krauss, 'The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism' in *The Originality of the Avant Garde* (MIT Press: Cambridge Massachusetts & London, England, 1986 [essay dated 1981]), 115.

will make people appear taller. The opposite of this is often found in Diane Arbus' portraits which are mostly taken with a short focal length, the camera and Arbus being close to the photographed people, which even from eye level will produce the slightly distorted shortened view that is characteristic of many of her images. Estate agents will also always use wide-angle lenses to make interiors appear more spacious than they are. When changing the focal length but preserving the same scale of a main subject, e.g. a head and shoulders portrait, the *perspective* – and what else is seen in relation to the head – will change drastically.

It appears that in our visual culture there is a relatively high tolerance threshold before a lens-based image is noticed and described as distorted[15]. Bill Brandt's well-known distorted nudes embedded in landscapes or interiors are the result of the use of an extreme wide angle together with a large depth of field, and these images are likely to be described as distorted. In contrast, as just mentioned, Arbus' photographs, whose aesthetic is also largely dependent on the use of a more subtly distorting short focal length with a slightly raised camera angle, will rarely be discussed as distorted. Subtle optical distortions routinely get 'overlooked' and remain in relative transparency. Further, the effect of optical/perspectival distortion occurring automatically in lens-based images also receives little attention in photography theory, which emphasises the reception of photographic images over important technical aspects of their creation. Focal length or high/low depth of field are rarely sufficiently credited to influence the reception of a photographic image, although these technical determinants dominate what is seen and how what is seen is caught, composed together and re-presented as the picture.

Compliant with this transparency of the optical anamorphic, photography that exceeds the tolerance threshold and prominently shows lens-caused anamorphous effects or extreme plays of low depth of field are mostly excluded both from academic analysis in photography theory and from exhibition in museums and galleries. The postmodern 'deadpan' aesthetic does not allow for noticeable lens-caused artifice. Some exceptions such as Rodchenko's 'avant-garde' 'constructivist' architectural images that use wide-angle distortion together with a slanted camera angle are treated almost as historically peculiar one-off examples of this type of

---

[15] Another indicator for such tolerance threshold can be observed in the currently ubiquitous wide screen televisions. Across living rooms, entrance halls, pubs and also museums and art galleries, image material will simply be stretched to fit, resulting in grotesquely widened people and sceneries.

photographic image. Bill Brandt's distinctive nudes receive surprisingly little acknowledgement in the academic canonisation and analysis of photography and surrealism.

Removed due to copyright
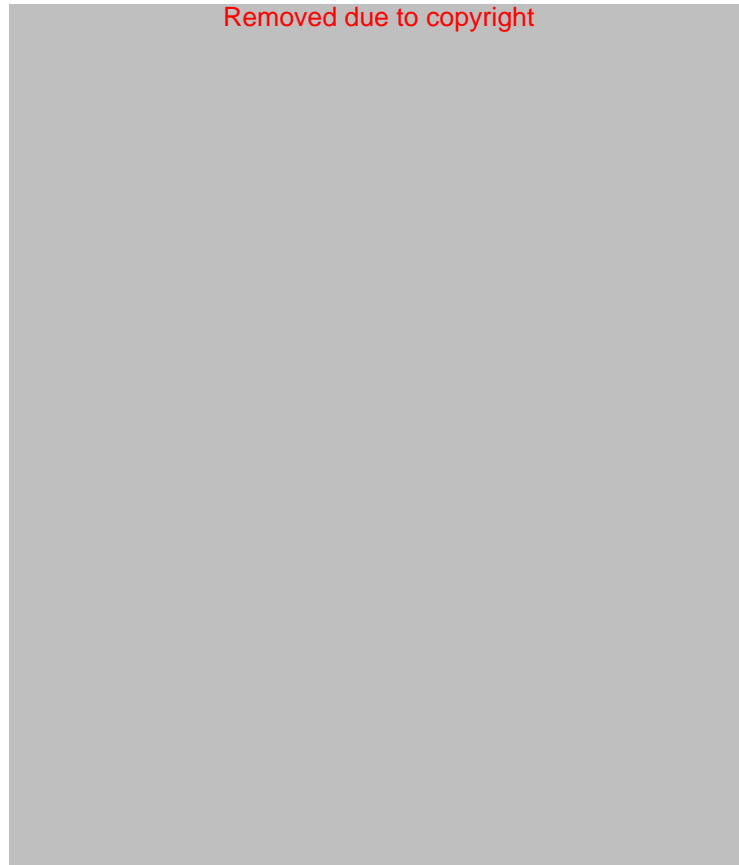
Bill Brandt: *Nude, London*, 1956.

In the earlier version of her essay[16], Krauss uses one of Brandt's images (*Nude, London*, 1956) that, like so many others of his nudes of that period, shows distortion resulting from the use of an extremely short focal length[17]. Krauss only discusses the multiple exposure without any mention of the obvious effect that leaves the hand of the model larger than her head, which also appears to be in an extended distance. None of Brandt's other iconic nudes are included in Krauss' essay on surrealist photography even though these show a paradigmatic aesthetic of distortion that I would call surrealist.

[16] Krauss 'The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism', 109. Brandt's works seem to fall out of the date bracket that is applied to *L'Amour Fou*.
[17] Brandt achieved this by using a large format camera with a very short, wide-angle lens, which often made it impossible for him even to see the image on the camera back, so that he could only judge results once the negative was developed and printed. Here is a clear example of an image *created* – certainly not captured 'as it is', nor 'automated' by the camera – through the photographer's creative use of the triad of photographic image-making.

In contrast, distortion has a huge presence in the non 'fine art' and non-academic world of amateur photography, and the effect of focal length is explained in every beginner's guide to photography and most camera manuals.

The invisibility of the optical anamorphic, resulting from the transparency of the 'mild' optical anamorphous together with the rejection and keeping out of sight of the ostentatiously optical anamorphous, is a dynamic that preserves a realist aesthetic[18] for the photograph by confirming the camera as a 'neutral' machine that merely 'mechanically' records what a person would have seen if they were in that place at that time. The result is a belief in an analogue to a human gaze, described by Hans Belting as a 'migration' of a gaze: 'We see the world in another gaze, but we trust that this gaze could be our own'[19].

When Barthes claims in 'Rhetoric of the Image' that 'the photograph, although it can choose its subject, its point of view and its angle, cannot intervene *within* the object (except by trick effects)'[20], not only does he turn a blind eye to the subjectivity of the photographer who needs to decide when, how and where to operate the camera in order for the photograph to do anything at all – but what Barthes really says is that the *photographer* should stick to the rules that leave a photograph suitably realistic to appear as analogue to a human gaze (as is evident in his choice of image for *Camera Lucida*).

Krauss is another case of a prominent art historian operating on the assumption of the camera as 'neutral' machine. In her essay, dated 1981, 'The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism', she states: 'The photograph carries on one continuous surface the trace or imprint of *all that vision captures in one glance*. The photographic image is not only a trophy of this reality, but a document of its unity as that-which-was-present-at-one-time'[21]. Instead, it should be said that the photograph is a document that creates an illusion of unity, as it com*poses* discontinuous elements into a seemingly continuous surface.

In 'Corpus Delicti,' a slightly later essay on the same subject[22], Krauss further states the following:

---

[18] In continuing, when using the term 'realist' or 'realist aesthetic'when talking about photographic images, I mean to refer to images that avoid the optical anamorphic.
[19] Hans Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (Wilhelm Fink Verlag: München, 2001), 216. *Bild-Anthropologie* is not translated into English, hence all subsequent quotations are translated by myself.
[20] Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', 43.
[21] Krauss, 'The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism', 107, my emphasis.
[22] Rosalind Krauss, 'Corpus Delicti' in Krauss, Livingston, *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism*, 57-112.

> 'The surrealist photographers were masters of the *informe*, which could be produced, as Man Ray had seen, by a simple rotation and consequent disorientation of the body'[23]

and later:

> 'There is a device, then, that produces this image, a device that the camera makes simple: turn the body or the lens; rotate the human figure into the figure of fall. *The camera automates this process, makes it mechanical*. A button is pushed, and the fall is the rest.'[24]

These two accounts are astonishingly negligent of the complex network of technical choices such as film/paper/print influencing contrast, allowing shadows to make body parts disappear. The differentiation between 'turning the lens', whilst the camera 'automates this process' and 'makes it mechanical' is a remarkable overlooking of the network of manipulations that create the dominant *effects* of many of the discussed images. 'Turning the body or the lens' is a pre-photographic act of creating an effective (in the truest sense of the word) viewpoint that produces vision from a distinctly different perspective to that of everyday 'normal' vision and this is the exact definition of the anamorphic. This is not 'automated' by the camera but is a chosen manipulation, making use of and incorporating automated functions of the camera, by the photographer.

---

[23] Ibid., 60.
[24] Ibid., 60, my emphasis.

Man Ray: *Untitled*, 1933, often called 'Minotaur'.
Gelatin silver print 15,2 x 23,1cm, dated in pencil on the reverse '1933', stamped in ink with photographer's credit "Man Ray 31bis, Rue Campagne Premiere Paris XIVe" (from the website: www.raederscheidt.com/Man_Ray_collection.htm)

One photograph discussed by Krauss, Man Ray's 'Minotaur', is a perfect example for an image where far more is at stake than a 'button that is pushed'. Rather than having been *captured*, it should be described as having been *created* through photography as a result of the interplay of the triad of photographic image formation, which consists of the amalgamation of the setting-up or the mise-en-scene that is part of the *pre-photographic*, the optical choice that determines the projection *in-camera* (the actual photo-graphing of the set-up) and the image developing or processing that is part of the *post-photographic.* Here, the result is an image that certainly looks very different to what the eye of Man Ray would have seen in front of him when he photographed this man. Apart from the obvious transformation into grey tones and the crop by the frame of the print, the harsh lighting from above that creates the high contrast between light and shadow (part of the pre-photographic set-up) is a main factor. Contrast is influenced by the choice of film, how the film gets exposed and developed and the grade of gelatin silver paper used for a print as well as the way each individual print from the same negative is exposed in the darkroom. As those who have practice in making prints in a darkroom know, it can often be difficult to get it 'right' and individual prints are subject to

significant differences (post-photographic = image development) that can result in showing more or less detail, in addition to the fact that photographically recorded images generally have a lower contrast tolerance than the eye. In the case here, this means that the exposure was made to correctly expose the bright body parts, leaving the shadows *underexposed*, which is what allows parts of the body to disappear in darkness. The image as reproduced in *L'Amour Fou* has a much higher contrast than the one used above. The print reproduced above even looks to me as though a subtle softener has been used in the darkroom whilst printing which results in the extra soft edges and leaves black/dark tones bleeding or 'shining' into the bright areas (a constant feature in many of Robert Mapplethorpe's black and white prints, but one about which I have never come across any comment whatsoever). Brassaï's 'Involuntary Sculpture' photographs are also distinctly indebted to the use of a strong lighting direction together with a hard contrast with the same resulting effect as just described for the 'Minotaur'. If these were photographed exactly the same but using a combination of low contrast film/paper and even non-directional light, the result would be some very different images. The degree to which Krauss overlooks this catalogue of visual transformations is evident in the fact that she refers to these as 'unmanipulated'[25].

The *in-camera* manipulation of the 'Minotaur' consists of the combination of a standard to short focal length from a close distance and a slightly lowered camera angle, which results in a subtly enlarging distortion especially towards the image edges, here affecting the arms. Altogether the image shows a real indexical trace of this body but the way we see it is highly encoded (more on the term indexical below). This is not 'automated' by the camera. The image is the result of a complex network of manipulative choices, which have been skilfully and deliberately employed to create an altered visual appearance of (part of) the man who modelled for the image.

Remembering the museum catalogue photograph of 'Child Hiding behind Mask' (page 27), here the opposite approach is required: in the context of a catalogue, such an onslaught of manipulated vision would be unlikely to go unnoticed and further would be considered 'artificial' and wholly unacceptable. As its mediality is to be hidden, complicit with the museum's dynamic to

[25] Krauss, 'Photographic Conditions of Surrealism', 115 and 'Photography in the Service of Surrealism', 35.

represent the object but hide itself, visual artifice that would draw attention to the photograph is not allowed. When I photographed the sculpture, knowing the purpose of the photo was the inclusion in an exhibition catalogue, I aimed at a 'neutral' image that reproduces, not *the sculpture*, but *the way I see it with my bare eyes* as close as possible: I placed it on a neutral background, lit it evenly, chose a suitable angle and used a small aperture to ensure that no part of the sculpture would be out of focus. The result is indeed a more realist (and doubtlessly for this purpose more suitable) representation of its photographed subject than is the *Minotaur*. Both images are encoded, but in Man Ray's image a visual transformation is more obvious, thus pointing more noticeably to its mediation. Comparing these two cases brings to attention how both the production and reception of photography – its *use* and what we *expect* from it – are in an interrelationship embedded in immensely diverse ways within different areas of cultural production.

Returning to Krauss, all her essays on photography are marked by this distinct non-awareness of the effects of technical aspects of the discussed photographs' creation, and the reason for pointing this out here is that it is symptomatic within art criticism and photography theory to discuss photography on the base of fostering the myth of the camera as a 'realist' medium, a neutral machine that 'automates' the taking of photographic images[26], thus overlooking the magnitude of its inherent artifice.

Krauss remains here in perfect congruence with the post-modern view (that is a currently lasting legacy) which understands photography – that is acknowledged as 'contemporary art'– as captured or 'found' images of the world, similar to the Duchampian readymade, and Krauss' writing on surrealist photography is an art historical labour to include, not to say to shoe-horn, surrealist photography into this post-modern discourse[27]. Whilst I find the logic of the 'found' image misguided even when a photographic image looks realistic, in the case of surrealist photography this approach is particularly

---

[26] Krauss is also another case of a photography theorist who examines only one particular type of photograph, in her case mainly those emerging from 'art'. It may be worth noting here that the German anthology 'Das Fotografische: Eine Theorie der Abstände' collates several of Krauss' texts on photography and has thereby established a strong presence of Krauss in German photography theory.
[27] See: Kelly Dennis, 'Benjamin, Atget and the 'Readymade' Politics of Postmodern Photography Studies' in J. J. Long, Andrea Noble, Edward Welch (eds), *Photography: Theoretical Snapshots* (Routledge: London & New York, 2009), especially page 118 with footnote 18.

flawed as it overlooks what I see as the main force not just regarding 'Minotaur' but in most surrealist photography, which is to make *effective* use of the manipulating powers of the triad of photographic image production. Much surrealist photography uses the pre-photographic set-up to specific effect, in order to harvest photography's claim of a correspondence to the real, to present *as if found* a 'reality' that the photographic image has altered or added to – and which is thus truly sur-real.

Kelly Dennis also describes how 'conceptual works by artists such as Ed Ruscha, Robert Smithson, Bernd and Hilla Becher, and Mel Bochner used photography as a framing or recording device for Duchampian "found" images in the world'[28]. This view is also at the base of Douglas Crimp's claim as articulated in *On the Museum's Ruins*, where he suggests that allowing photography into the art museum constituted a rupture through the fact that 'the "world outside" is allowed in, and art's autonomy is revealed as fiction'[29]. More recently, Nicholas Bourriaud in the glossary to his *Relational Aesthetics* defines the readymade as follows:

> **Ready-made**
> Artistic figure contemporary with the invention of film. The artist takes his camera-subjectivity into the real, defining himself as a cameraman; the museum plays the part of the film, he records. For the first time, with Duchamp, art no longer consists in translating the real with the help of signs, but in presenting this same real as it is (Duchamp, the Lumière brothers…)[30]

All of these views clearly subscribe to the idea of the photographic, like the readymade, being a continuous 'found piece of the real'. However, I hope my above observations demonstrate that it is clearly not the case that the photograph – or the readymade for that matter – presents this real 'as it is' without 'translating' it. Instead it presents *fragments* of the real already in a meaning-producing syntagm. (We will return to the comparison of the

---

[28] Ibid., 115.
[29] Douglas Crimp, 'Photographs at the End of Modernism' in *On the Museum's Ruins* (MIT Press: Cambridge Massachusetts & London, England, 2000 [1993]), 14.
[30] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Les presses du reel: Dijon, 2002), Glossary entry: 'ready-made', 112.

photographic and the readymade, extending it to other exhibited/staged objects.)

This debate, of course, is as old as photography itself and has already had an implicit but significant presence in the whole argument: is photography 'nature' or 'culture'?

Nature – Culture

Returning to the perceived dichotomy of 'documentary' versus 'art' raised previously regarding museum photographs, it must be noted firstly that the privileging of the photograph's realist aesthetic paradoxically does not go hand in hand with regarding the photograph as 'unmediated truth'[31]. The realist aesthetic of the photographic icon still leaves the photograph open to the much-discussed issue throughout the history of the critical reception of photography, which always has been, and still continues to be, centred on the question of whether the photograph is an objective, unmediated document, a pure and truthful reproduction of reality, famously proclaimed by the Barthes of *Camera Lucida* to be 'pure contingency [which] can be nothing else' (CL 28) which 'does not invent; it is authentication itself' (CL 87) or if the photograph is by default subjective, artificially composed, and as much an artificial interpretation of reality as a painting: in short, if photography is 'document' or 'artifice', 'technique' or 'art', 'nature' or 'culture'[32]. This debate in its wider sense also determines the discussion in *Photography Theory* and what becomes evident in this discussion is the fact that participants seem to feel compelled to take a position on one or other side of the fence.

It appears undeniable that both arguments have validity but at the same time are also equally simply unable to negate the respective opposing view. The

---

[31] For example, one of the few influential authors on photography theory who is also a practising photographer/artist using photography, Victor Burgin, mainly produces photographic imagery (still and moving) of a realist aesthetic, strictly avoiding camera-specific visual elements, yet his view of photography as expressed in his writings is dominated by a focus on its use and reception in culture.

[32] Geoffrey Batchen also examines the issue in depth by discussing the exclusive focus on 'culture' in postmodern photography theory (i.e. Burgin) versus the exclusive focus on 'nature' in formalist photography theory (see especially chapters 1 and 5). Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (MIT Press: Cambridge Massachusetts & London, England, 1997).

For another clear and brief summary of this subject see also Steve Edwards, *Photography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press: Oxford & New York, 2006). Cited hereafter as *Photography.*

above comparison between curating and the labour of framing on the part of the photographer, taking into account the anamorphic aspect of lens distortion – noticed or not – exemplifies this position. Man Ray's *Minotaur* shows a real indexical trace of the man that was in front of the camera but the way we see him is highly manipulated and thus encoded. Therefore it is not useful to debate whether photography *is* pure contingency or *is* always coded[33] because the photographic image is *always at once both*: what it shows has its genesis subject to the forces of the manipulative triad through which the photographer includes, excludes and creates juxta-positions – and com-poses image components together – that nevertheless will be realistic imprints of objects that 'have-been-there', to use Barthes' expression here.

Another example: Hans Belting discusses one of Tomas Struth's *Museum Photographs* and says*:* 'The *composition* is here the result of one possible selection out of the contingency, which the real space in fast pacing change presents to the camera'[34]. However, Belting here talks about the composition created by the flow of the temporary positions of museum visitors in relation to the museum exhibits and, in tune with the above observed blind spot, neglects to acknowledge the artifice of the composition resulting from Struth's choices. This should be rephrased to say: The composition is here the result of one possible selection out of the contingency, which the flow of visitors in the real space in fast pacing change *adds* to the composition that is the result of the carefully set-up perspectival choices, camera angle and crop. In other words, Struth set up a carefully arranged 'photo trap' which is out to catch 'contingency' in order to embed it into the composition as created pre-photographically and in-camera by the photographer (before also subjecting it to post-photographic image development).

This is an important core fact to acknowledge and it is in no way an attempt to find a 'compromise' but rather, if anything, this *dual* ontology, *being two things at once*, is specific to photo-graphy in all its applications: what the photographic image shows (if its exposure results in realist iconicity) is this amalgam or

---

[33] Barthes himself states in *Camera Lucida*: 'To ask whether a photograph is analogical or coded is not a good means of analysis. The important thing is that the photograph possesses an evidential force, and that its testimony bears not on the object but on time. From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation' (CL 88-89).

[34] Hans Belting, 'Photography und Malerei, Museum Photographs, Der Photographische Zyklus der "Museumsbilder" von Thomas Struth' in *Thomas Struth: Museum Photographs*, (Schirmer/Mosel Verlag: München, 1998), 5-27, 19.

composite of real contingency by default embedded in com-posed syntagmatic artifice.
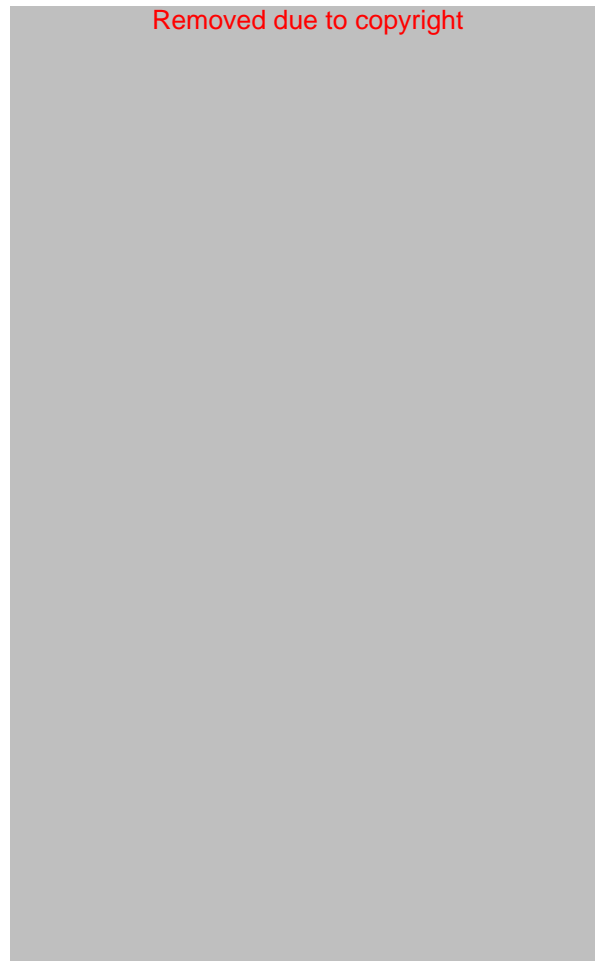
Robert Doisneau: *Helicopters, Tuileries Gardens*, 1972.

This has been beautifully expressed by Steve Edwards, taking as an example a Robert Doisneau photograph, *Helicopters, Tuileries Gardens*, 1972, in which four military helicopters are seen in the sky above three sculptures which are covered in bird excrement:

> These things are contingent and unrelated, but the frame binds them together, establishing a powerful association. The effect is to prompt the viewer to transfer the values of one thing to the other. In this case, we can't help feeling that the military 'birds' have crapped on classical sculpture. *With the choice of the frame, the photographer actively makes the picture rather than simply recording pre-existing things.*[35]

---

[35] S. Edwards, *Photography*, 107, my emphasis. Edwards uses the term 'pro-filmic' rather than 'pre-photographic'.

Sally Man: *The Terrible Picture*, 1989.

Brought to its logical conclusion, this point of view also underlies Jacques Rancière's discussion of Martha Rosler's photomontages 'Bringing the War Home'[36], putting them on a par with a photograph by Josephine Meckseper showing American anti war demonstrators with a bin overflowing with consumerist rubbish showing in the foreground:

> We can understand what the image said by relating the tension between the political placards and the dustbin to an artistic form […] – collage. The photograph of the demonstrators is not a collage in the technical sense of the term, but its effect exploits the elements that account for the artistic and political success of collage and photomontage: the clash on the same surface of heterogeneous, if not conflicting, elements.[37]

Whilst in both examples, the helicopters above the sculptures and the bin in front of the demonstrators, we may not be looking at 'collage in the technical sense of the term', it is still clear to see that the photograph presents a choice of juxtaposition of diverse elements of contingency that the frame of the image combines in one composition whose sum is greater than its incorporated parts. To quote Steve Edwards again:

> While photographs are copies of their pro-filmic moment, they are never unmediated copies of it. … Photography is then always a doubled or paradoxical form: the image is a transcription of a bit of the world, and at the same time a picture shaped by the determinants of the apparatus and the choices made by the photographer. Maintaining this double focus requires effort and attention; failing to do so gets the viewer [and theorist!] caught up in all sorts of problems.[38]

Thus every photograph is an amalgam of 'nature' and 'culture', as different image elements are montaged together in one frame – every photographic image shows a photo-montage.

---

[36] Martha Rosler, 'Bringing the War Home' is a series worked on between 1967-72 (with a re-visitation of the theme in 2004). The earlier photomontages insert photographic imagery of the Vietnam War into photographs showing idealised American domestic scenes. The 2004 series repeats this montage/juxtaposition with images from the Gulf War.
[37] Rancière, *Future of the Image*, 26.
[38] S. Edwards, *Photography*, 117.

In his 1964 text 'Rhetoric of the Image', already quoted above, Barthes seminally explores exactly this double aspect of the photograph in terms of 'denotation' and 'connotation' whereby, as Batchen beautifully sums up, he 'describes the image as a perverse enfoldment of denotation within connotation'[39]. Yet in his establishment of the 'two iconic messages' that make up this enfoldment, Barthes demonstrates the same insistence on the photograph as a truthful 'recording' of the real that, nearly two decades later, was to become the basis of *Camera Lucida*. In his well-known analysis of the Panzani advert, Barthes identifies that apart from the linguistic message, by which he means text such as on the labels *in* the image, there are two types of iconic message, the 'non-coded iconic message' which he also calls the 'literal message' or the denoted message, and the 'coded iconic message', which he also calls the 'symbolic message' or the connoted message. In the case in question a coded iconic message is in the colours of the vegetables suggesting 'Italinicity', and the products' place in a net suggesting 'shopping of fresh produce from the market'. Introducing the 'non-coded message' he poses the question:

> 'If all these signs [the caption and the labels on the products] are removed from the image we are still left with a certain informational matter … the signifieds of this … message are constituted by the real objects in the scene … What defines [this] message is precisely that the relation between signified and signifier is quasi-tautological; no doubt the photograph involves a certain arrangement of the scene (framing, reduction, flattening) but this transition is not a *transformation* (in the way coding can be); we have here a loss of the equivalence characteristic of true sign systems and a statement of quasi identity. In other words, the sign of this message is not drawn from an institutional stock, is not coded, and we are brought up against the paradox … of a *message without a code*.[40] …
> [O]f all the kinds of image only the photograph is able to transmit the (literal) information without forming it by means of discontinuous signs and rules of transformation. The photograph, message without a code,

---

[39] Batchen, *Burning with Desire*, 192.
[40] Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', 35-36.

must thus be opposite to the drawing which, even when denoted, is a coded message.[41] …

In the photograph – at least at the level of the literal message – the relationship of signifieds to signifiers is not one of 'transformation' but of 'recording', and the absence of a code clearly reinforces the myth of photographic 'naturalness.'[42]

These quotes should remind us that whilst 'Rhetoric of the Image' uncovers the twofold aspect of the photograph, one part of the dichotomy as identified by Barthes is rooted in a view of the photograph as non-coded, as 'recording' not 'transforming', which results in a 'literal message' – 'without a code'[43].

In favour of establishing the un-coded message of the photograph, Barthes mentions 'a certain arrangement of the scene' yet he sidelines the massive weight of this pre-photographic event. Where Steve Edwards describes 'the conflation of the photographic image with the pro-filmic event [which] leaves the viewer open to propaganda of all kinds'[44], he gives the appropriate credit to this amalgamation of the artifice of the mise-en-scène into its perceived naturalisation as photographic image. As established above, placing objects in a photographic image com-position is not dependent on physically arranging real objects as when setting up a still-life, for instance. Thus if the photographic image is simply unable to re-present outside of a syntagmatic composite, there can be no absence of code. The act of flattening is a *recording in a transformation*, not one exclusive of the other. Rather than speaking of a literal 'message' one should speak of literal *fragments* embedded in a composite, a photo-montage, a

---

[41] Ibid., 43.

[42] Ibid., 44.

[43] When Barthes says that: 'connotation is only system, can only be defined in paradigmatic terms; iconic denotation is only syntagm, *associates elements without any system*: the discontinuous connotators are connected, actualized, "spoken" through the syntagm of the denotation, the discontinuous world of symbols plunges into the story of the denoted scene as though into a lustral bath of innocence' (51, my emphasis) he closely follows Saussurian *classification* of 'syntagm' and 'paradigm'. Barthes classifies syntagm in the first instance as 'associating elements without any system' and thus prior to meaning-producing, which however is a state that is utopian: in its most 'Edenic state … cleared *utopianically* of its connotations, the image would become radically objective. … The *utopian character of denotation* is considerably reinforced by the paradox … that the photograph (*in its literal state*) *seems* to constitute a message without a code. Here, however, *structural analysis must differentiate,* for of all the kinds of image only the photograph is able to transmit the (literal) information without forming it by means of discontinuous signs and rules of transformation' (42-43, my emphasis).

[44] S. Edwards, *Photography*, 114.

discontinuous sign. Therefore it is impossible for the photograph to be a 'message without a code'. It is not the 'absence of a code' but *the myth of* 'the absence of a code [that] reinforces the myth of photographic naturalness'[45]. This myth originates in the belief of the photograph being an 'analogue' to a human gaze. Rather, in its most 'Edenic state … cleared utopianically of its connotations'[46], the photograph would remain an encoding without a message.

It is evident that the view of photography that underlies Krauss' essays discussed above is largely an exact adoption of that of Barthes. On this basis, Krauss differentiates photomontage from photographs through (Derrida's) concept of spacing. Regarding a cut and paste photo-montage Krauss claims: 'It is spacing that makes it clear … that we are not looking at reality, but at the world infested by interpretation or signification, which is to say, reality distended by the gaps or blanks which are the formal precondition of the sign'[47]. This statement implies that Krauss follows Barthes when she describes the photographic image as a 'continuous' sign, showing 'reality', and that cutting and pasting a photograph results in interpretation and signification. As an active user of a camera, my view is that choosing a viewpoint that freezes the objects shown in a photograph into a certain com-position to each other (Doisneau's helicopters, Mekeseper's bins) is also already an act of cutting and pasting. Any photograph that shows a realist iconic representation of fragments of the world is a trace of the type of reality I visually perceive in daily life, yet is also discontinuous and infested by interpretation and signification because its com-position of reality is already in a syntagm that *adds* meaning. It therefore can be said that what the photographic image shows is quite literally always sur-real.

Returning to the analogy between the photographic and the curatorial composition, the nature–culture debate extends in the same way to collections of objects, as these too consist of elements of true singularity which, to paraphrase Steve Edwards, are 'bits of the world and at the same time a com-position (*Zusammenstellung*) shaped by the determinants of the display and the choices of juxtaposition made by the curator'.

---

[45] Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', 44.
[46] Ibid., 42.
[47] Krauss, 'Photographic Conditions of Surrealism', 107.

Klaus Wehner: *Archaeological Museum, Naples, 6 August 2007*

In both cases the viewer is confronted with the result of an act of selecting, therefore excluding, juxtaposing and framing. Consequently, when a photographic image re-presents an exhibition space, we are inevitably led into a hall of mirrors, as the two media reflect on each other.

• • •

Posed Objects

This comparison between the photographic and the curatorial com-position has already extended observations of the parallel between the photographic and the readymade away from the specific context of 'art', and this deserves to be expanded further. Regarding Duchamp's readymade, Krauss points out:

> The readymade's parallel with the photograph is established by its process of production. It is about the physical transposition of an object from the continuum of reality into the fixed condition of the art-image by a moment of isolation, or selection.[48]

The parallel to the photograph is obvious as the photographic image always constitutes a rupture from the continuum of time 'into the fixed condition of the image by a moment of isolation [through] selection'. As the readymade is simply an object chosen (or collected), subject to the act of being staged and exhibited, this observation must apply to any object exhibited, even if not as (an act of) art.

To extend this argument further I will introduce the wider concept of the *posed object* by suggesting that in any exhibition context, the museum or collector's act of exhibiting objects for visual contemplation, which allows for looking but (usually) not touching, stages the objects on display themselves as an *image* and

[48] Krauss, 'Notes on the Index: Part 1', in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (MIT Press: Cambridge Massachussetts & London England, 1986), 206. I should mention here that whilst I am critical of the way Krauss applies 'the indexical' to photography, the merit of the two parts of 'Notes on the Index' remains in her seminal application of Peirce's concept to exhibited objects, though this remains limited to the art that she examines, which was made clear in the original titles as published in *October* : 'Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America'.)
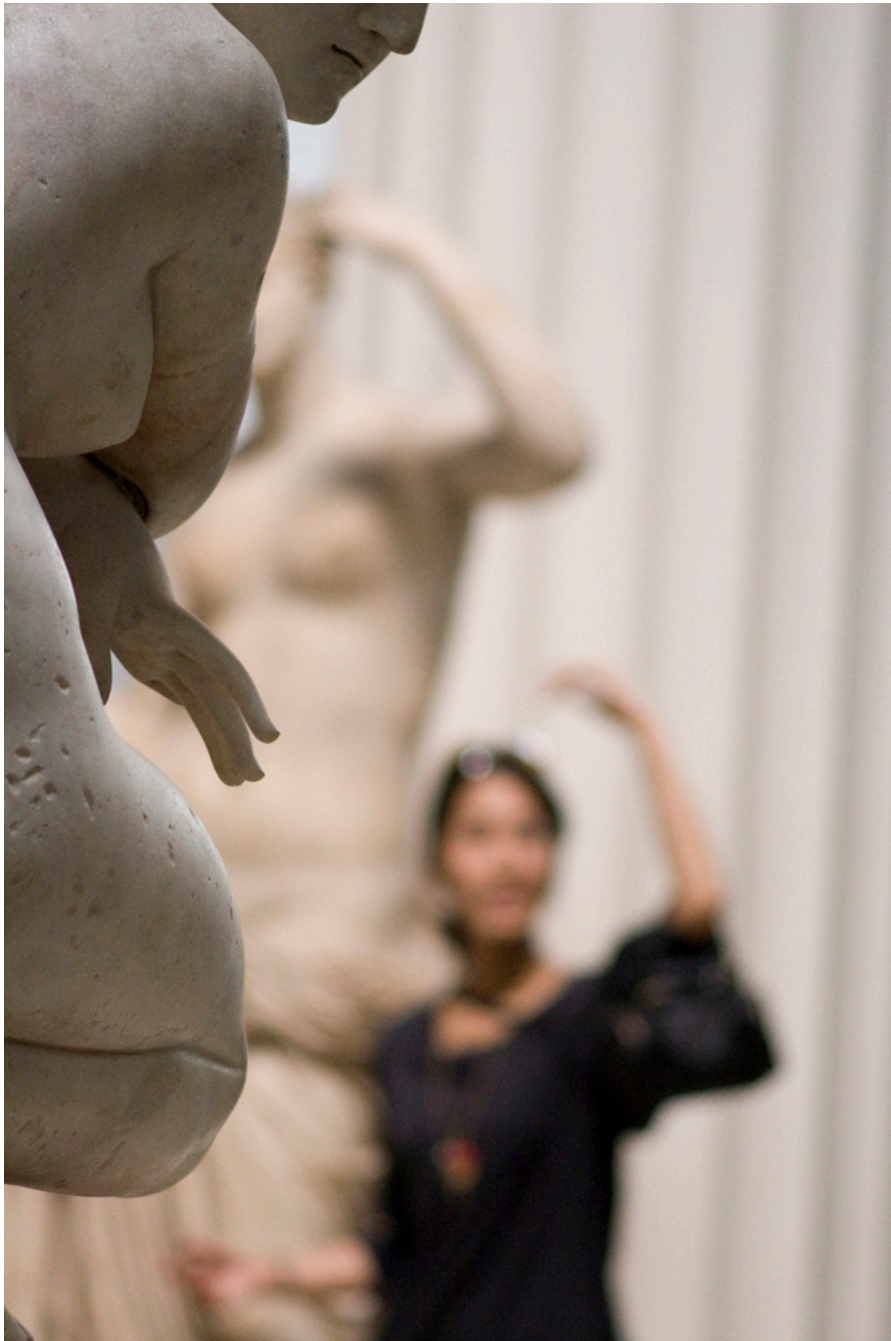
Klaus Wehner: *The British Museum, London, 24 March 2008*

[W]hat founds the nature of Photography is the pose (CL 78).

Photography transformed subject into object, and even, one might say, into a museum object: in order to take the first portraits (around 1840) the subject had to assume long poses under a glass roof in bright sunlight (CL 13).

that an extended examination of the ontology of the object-staged-as-image confirms the analogy to the ontology of the photographic image. The viewer temporarily beholds the staged object and takes away a visual impression. In the museum, if photography is possible and allowed and the object deemed of sufficient interest, often viewers make a photograph of the staged object.

In *Bild-Anthropologie (Image Anthropology)* Hans Belting presents a proposal for an anthropology of the image or an image-science, which investigates the human relationship to images rather than art and which is based around a triangle established by Belting as *Image – Body – Medium*[49]. Belting's use of the word medium, here, is understood as the material 'carrier' of an image such as canvas and oil pigment, or indeed the marble that a sculpture is carved of, as Belting follows established art historical tradition when he investigates three-dimensional portrait sculpture as 'image'. Belting himself points out that the German word 'Bild' does not allow for the same differentiation as do the English words 'picture' and 'image'. He refers to W.T.J. Mitchell, who presents a definition of this difference whereby he defines pictures as the 'concrete representational objects in which images appear'[50], yet Belting goes on to say 'I would prefer to talk of media to find a term for the *embodiment* of images'[51]. On another occasion he uses a somewhat old fashioned yet still common German term for sculpture, *Bildwerk*, which awkwardly translates into English as 'image-piece' or 'image-work', and on this occasion it is worth pointing out that the German language also calls sculptors *Bildhauer*, which translates as 'image-carver'. Thus Belting discusses two and three-dimensional mimetic representation as 'image', whereas he calls the physical material that the image is made of the 'medium'. Adopting Belting's use of these terms to the posed

---

[49] Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie*, especially 11-57.

[50] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1994), 4, quoted by Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie*, 15. Mitchell footnotes this sentence with the following: 'In common parlance, "picture" and "image" are often used interchangeably to designate visual representations on two-dimensional surfaces, I will sometimes fall into this usage. In general, however, I think it is useful to play upon distinctions between the two terms: the difference between a constructed concrete object or ensemble (frame, support, materials, pigments, facture) and the virtual phenomenal appearance that it provides for a beholder; the difference between a deliberate act of representation ('to *picture* or depict") and a less voluntary, perhaps even passive or automatic act ("to *image* or imagine"); the difference between a specific kind of visual representation (the "pictorial" image) and the whole realm of iconicity (verbal, acoustic, mental images)' 4.

[51] 'Ich würde lieber von Medien reden, um für die *Verkörperung* von Bildern einen Begriff zu finden' (Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie*, 15, my emphasis).

object would mean describing the actual object that is posed as the 'medium' of its image. However, the word 'picture' (in Mitchell's sense) can be used to make the following distinction: The object-staged-as-image is an object that is posed for a gaze – to be *perceived*, visually imprinted and memorised as image; it is not a picture. The picture uses media such as pigment or silver crystal to produce a mimetic image, 'a mental representative', that refers to an object that is not actually present:

> The real object … present to perception [the picture = i.e. silver crystals of different shades on paper] is, 'an "analogue" of another object', and no more or less an analogue than is a purely *mental* "representative" of the absent object of "intention".[52]

It follows that pictures are always made to be posed, as pictures present a 'mental representation' that has no existence in the world without a human gaze.

In contrast, the posed object incorporates actual objects *as medium* in what could be called a *sculptural composition* (a *Bildwerk*) that, in its *distinct* totality, becomes a visual sign of its object, which – whilst the real object is present – always metonymically refers to something additional, beyond this actual object. The act of posing an object transforms it into *part of* a visual sign, which is subject to the same issues of presence and absence as those connected to images.

Philippe Dubois also discusses the parallel between the readymade and the photograph:

> In the ready-made all distance is abolished. The referent becomes a sign, the real object itself receives the status of a piece of art, solely through the gesture of the artist, who lifts objects from their environment, puts them

---

into stasis and makes them into a relic. In this case the object is in perfect coincidence with its own image.[53]

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes reflects on the *pose*, describing his feeling in a moment when he himself is about to be photographed:

> Now, once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of "posing," I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image (CL 10).

Hence, for Barthes, the *pose* – a moment of apprehension ready for the inscription of an image – *is* image. The moment Barthes transforms himself into an image is a momentary temporal arrest, a conscious pause/pose in the person's usual non self-conscious positioning within the everyday flow of time and space: through *posing*, Barthes extracts himself 'from the continuum of reality into the fixed condition of the (art-) image' or achieves 'perfect coincidence with his own image'. Thus, analogous to the pose of the person is any object that is exhibited, be it an object that constitutes a piece of art or craftsmanship, an everyday object that receives special attention due to its link to a certain history, a piece of 'nature' or indeed, in the words of Susan Pearce[54], any 'lump of the physical world to which cultural value is ascribed'. In all cases, the object in question will be subject to a similar temporal arrest due to its removal from its customary environment and use. The act of posing an object transforms it into part of a coded, visual sign, which implies issues of absence and presence, or as Elisabeth Edwards has put it: 'It is … pertinent … that both photographic and display forms work to transform objects and construct meanings through their presentation as *visual spectacles*'[55]. The object is placed into a particular stasis that is distinct from the everyday flow of utility and mobility in time and space, and thus the object is *posed as image* for the viewer's gaze and visual memory.

● ● ●

---

[53] Phillipe Dubois, *Der Fotografische Akt, Versuch über ein theoretisches Dispositiv* with a foreword by Herta Wolf, (Verlag der Kunst: Amsterdam and Dresden, 1989), 92, my translation.

[54] Susan Pearce, *Museums, Objects & Collections* (Smithsonian Publishing: Washington, 1993), 5. Cited hereafter as *Museums*.

[55] E. Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 63, my emphasis.

Collection

The above view can be seen as homologous to Susan Pearce's insightful analysis of collecting and collections, and the following quote once more cements the equation of the readymade in art with other posed objects such as a collection of natural specimens:

> The crucial semiotic notion is that of metaphor and metonymy … [what the collector chooses for his collection] … bears an intrinsic, direct and organic relationship, that is a metonymic relationship, to the body of material from which it was selected because it is an integral part of it. But the very act of selection adds to its nature. By being chosen away and lifted out of the embedding metonymic matrix, the selected collection now bears a representative or metaphorical relationship to its whole. *It becomes an image of what the whole is believed to be*, and although it remains an intrinsic part of the whole, it is no longer merely a detached fragment because it has become imbued with meaning of its own. … [The collection] … retains its intrinsic or metonymic character, but the process of selection has given it also a metaphorical relationship to the material from which it came.[56]

To use one of Pearce's examples[57], the fish collected by a biologist from the Indian Ocean genuinely is a metonymical part of the natural world and of the Indian Ocean, and at the same time the posed collection of fish becomes a metaphorical image for 'Indian Ocean'. Despite the fact that actual objects are real and present the com-posed display refers to something additional, beyond the actual objects: the viewer is faced with the same issues of presence and absence that characterise the image. Furthermore, observations regarding 'collecting' can be applied to any one posed object in general, even if it is not part of a 'collection' proper and even if not posed in a museum or collection (as will be discussed in Chapter IV). The posed object is always 'chosen away and lifted out of the embedding metonymic matrix', and thus the posed object is by default 'collected', if not to say it is always part of the grand collection of posed objects.

● ● ●

---

[56] Pearce, *Museums*, 38, my emphasis.
[57] Ibid., 38.

In it resemblance, the thing is detached from itself. It is not the "thing itself" (or the thing "in itself"), but the "sameness" of the present thing as such.

The thing *as* image is thus distinct from its being-there in the sense of the *Vorhanden*, … its simple presence in the homogeneity of the world … What is distinct in being-there is being-image …

Jean Luc Nancy
(The Ground of the Image, 8 + 9)

Imageness

In summary, what has been observed so far is that both the photograph and the posed object present a curatorial syntagmatic composite resulting from the unavoidable dynamic of de- and re-contextualising through choosing and excluding, juxta-posing and framing. This insertion of objects into syntagm transforms these into *fragments of the composite*: both the photograph and the posed object re-present real, fragmented elements and both are simply unable to do so outside of a syntagmatic framework of constructive meaning – a framing display – which 'adds to its nature'[58]; or to quote Elisabeth Edwards: 'works to transform objects and constructs meanings through their presentation as visual spectacles'[59]. Born, too, uses the word spectacle when speaking about museum photographs that show the in-progress setting up of dioramic sets: 'This is the construction of mere display as spectacle'[60]. Further, she describes the building of sets as 'iconic technique'[61].

In other words, in both cases – the photographic image and the posed object – the 'visual spectacle' is what hides the contingency, materiality and its polysemic arbitrariness underneath the appearance of the syntagmatic set-up of constructed/constructive meaning, the iconic wholeness, if not to say the simulacral, of the represented, its appearance and its meaning as spectacle – or image. As mentioned in the introduction, as a native German speaker, I miss in the English language the equivalent to the use of words like *Bildhaftigkeit* and *Bildmäßigkeit* which I will translate as 'imageness', and I will continue to use this expression when referring to the above described iconic wholeness within the syntagmatic visual spectacle/appearance – which is subject to a dynamic of a certain detachment from the materiality of the objects.

Returning to the photography of the museum and the photographs of *Camera Obscured*: in these images the photographed 'incomplete' museum displays are denied their iconic wholeness or their complete imageness. In other words, the photographs present a different imageness than the one that the museum would present. Whilst in this case this happens more or less by default, this can be identified as the deliberate strategy of a project such as Louise Lawler's

---

[58] Ibid., 38.
[59] E. Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 63.
[60] Born, 'Museum Photography', 228.
[61] Ibid., 230.

Louise Lawler *Big* (2002-2003)

museum photographs, as she often photographs artefacts that are in storage or resting on the floor or in the process of being installed, or, if she photographs 'complete' exhibition spaces, her strategy consists of crops and a focus on arbitrary details of the set-up. In all cases her photographs emphasise the materiality and objecthood of the artefacts and thereby deny the iconic wholeness/imageness that the photographed objects would present to a gallery visitor if they were viewed 'properly' posed. A diametrically opposite strategy is to be found in Hiroshi Sugimoto's photographs of museum dioramas and also his series of portraits of Madame Tussaud's wax figures. In these images the photographed objects look more realist than the actual objects do when encountered in the gallery. His images re-present *the pose* of the photographed set-ups with such perfection that the resulting *mise en abyme*, instead of denying the objects' imageness through fragmentation, multiplies it to such an extent that all the same it uncovers its bottomless simulacral artificiality.

•••

Anamorphic II

Another scholar of museology who has likened photography and the museum is Donald Preziosi. He has written about the Crystal Palace exhibition of 1851 in a number of his publications[62] and returns to it in the short essay 'Plato's Dilemma' published in an anthology of essays on photography[63]. For Preziosi, the Crystal Palace exhibition is the birth moment of the modern museum and he describes it as a paradigm of: 'a disciplinary order and image of *what the real world should be*'[64] and further: '*It was the embodiment of the principle of photography*

---

[62] See: 'The Crystalline Veil and the Phallomorphic Imaginary' in Donald Preziosi, *The Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity* (University of Minnesota Press: Mineapolis, 2003), 92-115.

[63] Donald Preziosi, 'Plato's Dilemma' in Long, Noble, Welch (eds), *Photography: Theoretical Snapshots*, 146-58.

[64] Ibid., 155: '*what the real world should be*' is a quote from a long poem dedicated to the Crystal Palace exhibition, Caroline Leigh Smith Gascoigne, *Recollections and Tales of the Crystal Palace*, (Shoberl: London, 1852)

Alex J. Rota: Working on Flying Bird Group, Sanford Hall, American Museum of Natural History, New York, 1947. Included in Vid Ingelevids *Camera Obscura*.

Hiroshi Sugimoto: *Gemsbok*, 1980.

itself: of artifice as anticipatory illusion'[65]; 'The Crystal Palace was in essence an anamorphic optical device – like photography itself'[66].

An issue of considerable magnitude that is introduced into the argument via Preziosi at this point is the stress on the viewer's anticipation, as Preziosi describes what I would call the imageness that is presented by both photography and the museum, as 'anticipatory illusion'. Elisabeth Edwards too, when discussing photographic genres, reminds us via a quote from Berger and Mohr that 'in every act of looking there is an expectation of meaning … Prior to any explanation an expectation of what appearances themselves may be about to reveal.'[67] In her assessment of the *Photography Theory* discussion, Abigail Solomon-Godeau criticises the panel (and the discipline in general) for not picking up on any notion of anticipation, and mentions as possible starting points Iversen's 'investment' and also the 'imago' as the image's 'psychic representative' that is opposed to its 'material incarnation'[68]. Apperception is the concept as used in psychology and philosophy which broadly speaking refers to the assumption that all perception happens 'through the lens' – a metaphor most frequently used in summing up apperception or the imago[69]– of a subject's previous experiences. (This metaphor is obviously based on the fact that a lens is not 'objective' but distorts, and thus is an anamorphic optical device.) This issue has a much more distinct presence in the field of philosophy (Jean Luc Nancy distinguishes between the 'eye of the body' and the 'eye of the mind'[70]) but is neglected in semiotics. *Camera Lucida* contains a distinct redressing of this neglect when Barthes speaks of the '"eye that thinks"[which makes him] add something to the photograph' (CC 77), a point often ignored when discussing the book, even though it is dedicated to Sartre's *Imaginaire*, which is an extensive investigation of perception as animated by knowledge and affective response[71]. Without venturing in detail into any related theory, and without approaching the realms of cognitive science, what needs to be acknowledged is that imageness consists in part of the viewer's anticipation

---

[65] Ibid., 152.
[66] Ibid., 157.
[67] E. Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 184, quoting John Berger and Jean Mohr, *Another Way of Telling* (Granta; London, 1989 [1982]), 117.
[68] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, 'Ontology, Essences, and Photography's Aesthetics: Wringing the Goose's Neck One More Time' in Elkins (ed.), *Photography Theory*, 258.
[69] See entry: 'Imago', in Dylan Evans, *Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (Routledge: London & New York, 2010 [1996]), 84.
[70] Nancy, *Ground of the Image*, 73.
[71] The significance of this aspect of *Camera Lucida* will be discussed in Chapter II.

(through context together with pre-existing knowledge) of iconic wholeness and meaning.

• • •

Anamorphic II: Readymade

To describe both photography and the museum as 'anamorphic optical devices' pays due to the fact that both systems of re-presentation present a visually mediated imageness of real objects – as any optical device would do. The result of this mediation, the 'realist' presentation of objects through the lens of transparent meaning-producing (*sinngebend*) syntagm, either as inserted into photographic or curatorial com-positions, is by default anamorphic. Whilst this cannot be clearly separated, the anamorphic distortion here relates to the presented meaning rather than the lens-specific visual distortion discussed above in regard to the photograph, which, however, is the source of the metaphoric use of the term here. Ultimately this use of the word is a slippery slope as the interplay between (ap)perception and representation can in the end never be outside the anamorphic. It can thus be added to the observations on posing that the pose is always an anamorphic presentation. Therefore, taking up Preziosi's observation that both photography and the museum present an anticipatory illusion of 'what the actual world should be', what the photographic image and the posed object have in common, due to the force resulting from the fusion of materiality with symbolic meaning, is not so much the way they re-present the world, but the way the presented imageness actually con-*templates* on the world of the viewer. This is evidenced in everyday figures of speech such as a landscape being 'picturesque' or a person being 'pretty as a picture' ('malerisch' and 'bildschön' in German) or, on the other hand, someone being 'no oil painting'. In other words, though images re-present (parts of) the world, the world's imageness is measured against its images.

Establishing the pose as an anamorphic representation also reflects on the way the readymade should be evaluated. If we remember Nicholas Bourriaud's definition it is obvious that he sees the impact of the readymade as an 'artistic-figure' that – just like film and photography – consists of re-presenting selected

bits of 'this same real *as it is*', and thereby neglects to take into account the impact of its being amalgamated into the culture of the pose. Posing a bottle rack as art or indeed as artefact i.e. in a design museum (more on that differentiation below) is just as much a translation of the real, through transforming the object into a posed sign, as any other artistic practice such as a painting would be: there is no such thing as presenting something 'real as it is', as any act of re-presenting is already somehow different to 'as it is' – adds meaning – produces an anamorphic representation. This is not to deny that there is a huge difference between a painting of a bottle rack and an actual bottle rack chosen and posed. The rupture introduced into art by taking an existing, mass-fabricated object and presenting it as art is in the evacuation of the artist's skill or craft (and with that the link to the artist's body). The readymade proclaims that any object can be art, but it does not proclaim this to be the re-presentation of a bit of the real 'as it is'; it rather enforces the acknowledgement of the impossibility of doing so[72]:

> The artists extracted the bottle rack from the real world … displaced it on another level to confer on it an indefinable hyperreality. A paradoxical acting-out, putting an end to the bottle rack as a real object, to art as the invention of another scene and to the artist as the protagonist of another world.[73]

Here, Baudrillard clearly acknowledges the magnitude of the *transformation* of the object as a result of its being chosen and posed. At the same time, his proclamation of the end of art as 'invention of another scene and to the artist as the protagonist of another world' acknowledges the insertion of pieces of the real into the realm of art and this sums up what is crucially important to acknowledge: neither photographs nor posed objects present the real 'as it is', but both present pieces of the real always already as fragments of a translation into a syntagmatic meaning-producing re-presentation – or hyper reality.

---

[72] As Solomon-Godeau reminds us: 'In contrast to any notion of the art object as inherently and autonomously endowed with significance, meaning, or beauty, Duchamp was proposing that the identity, meaning, and value of the work of art were actively and dynamically constructed'. 'Photography after Art Photography' in Wallis, Brian (ed.), *Art After Modernism* (The New Museum of Modern Art: New York, 1984), 76.

[73] Jean Baudrillard, 'Aesthetic Illusion and Virtual Reality' in Zurbrugg (ed.), *Art and Artefact*, 21.

Klaus Wehner: *Museum für Angewandte Kunst Frankfurt, August 2006*

The dish helped Aenne Saekow to survive the camp. It privileged her towards
others in the imposed battle of survival within the camp hierarchies. As object
of memory, the simple aluminium dish becomes a sign of victory with all its
connotations … In its simplicity and its traces of use it is simply a tool of
survival. Through it speaks the importance of an issue as elementary as
nourishment. (Exhibition label, text reproduced in *Der Souvenir* (Museum für Angewandte Kunst:
Frankfurt, 2006), 256, my translation.

We pose things in order to drive them out of our minds.[74]

I took this photograph (opposite) in the Museum für Angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt during August 2006. The image shows a battered tin dish (mess tin) exhibited in an otherwise empty, spacious vitrine. A reflection in the glass refers to an adjunct unidentifiable exhibit. The blurred shape of a museum visitor whose back is turned to the mug is visible in the background, which increases a sense of the forlorn. However, it is not this photograph that is the focus here but the exhibited object itself – employing the photo as documentation.

I photographed the dish because I was particularly fascinated by it. The label informed me that the object was an important 'tool of survival' for Aenne Saekow, a Ravensbrück concentration camp inmate in 1945. I was touched and disturbed by the thought that this dish shows 'traces of use' which came into being through the handling of, and thus direct contact with, the body of this tortured concentration camp inmate, who must have been at any moment an inch away from sudden violent death; that it was held by her hands and touched her lips as she consumed life-preserving drink and food out of it, fighting to survive, surrounded by grime, blood and utterly depersonalising violence. Though no biological traces of food or lip imprints have survived on the dish itself, I know that such *traces-have-been-there*.

---

[74] My paraphrase of Franz Kafka's quote: 'We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes' (quoted in Barthes, CL 53).

Some Notes on 'the Index'

> Indexicality is the principal representational/ideological technique of the museum: the bringing of 'original', 'natural' or exemplary (part-)objects within the museum's space, and their framing and setting such that they speak, metonymically, of the wider practice/environment/ species/oeuvre of which they form part.[75]

As already noted in the foreword, when looking at indexicality an important distinction in the use of the word will make its use and application much clearer, which should also confirm its usefulness as a concept to investigate or theorise photography. Initially it must be remembered when using the model of C. S. Peirce's[76] triad of indexical, iconic and symbolic aspects of signs, that all these aspects are present – never one exclusive to another – in varying degrees in all signs. It is therefore never useful to proclaim any sign as '*being an* index' or '*being an* icon'.

Peirce's own use of the term 'index' is not entirely clearly defined and this applies to most applications of his concept. Across much semiotic theory a sign pointing to an emergency exit as well as a footprint in the sand will be described as an 'indexical sign', but there is a crucial difference between the two. The emergency exit sign points *at* its object by deliberately employing the *idea* or concept of (pointing) indexicality. Of the same type is the pointing finger and also the linguistic index, a 'shifter' like 'this' or 'I', which is an 'empty' signifier that receives meaning through purposeful use within specific contexts. This index is always intentionally deployed, and thus posed. It is based on concept and cultural consensus and it includes arbitrary, *symbolic* elements such as the running green man and arrow indicating an emergency exit. This difference has been noted by Roman Jakobson in his 1957 paper, 'Shifters,

---

[75] Born, 'Museum Photography', 229.
[76] The triad was outlined initially by Peirce in: Charles Sanders Peirce, 'Logic As Semiotic: The Theory of Signs' in Justus Buchler (ed.), *The Philosophy of Peirce: Selected Writings* (AMS Press: New York, 1978).
The use of the triad constitutes an extraction from Peirce's wider elaborations that include prolific amounts of concepts and classifications that do not usually receive much attention.

Verbal Categories and the Russian Verb'[77], in which he came to use the phrase *indexical symbol*, and it is surprising that this differentiation has been overlooked by so much literature exploring and making use of 'the index'[78].

In contrast to the *indexical symbol*, a footprint or a bullet hole is a residue or a trace and it is a natural sign that, resulting from a moment of material contiguity, carries a *proof* that the object that it refers to *was* there and is now absent. Therefore, this index has one very crucial distinguishing attribute and that is the *element of time*. A trace or an imprint always also refers to a *specific singular moment of coming into being*, which must by definition be in the past, and therefore it is always 'historic'[79].

This difference also corresponds to the fact that the English language does not make a distinction between the *indice* and the *index* as is found in Romance languages. For example in German, the word *Indiz* is commonly used as synonymous to 'proof' or 'evidence' and would not be translated into English as 'index' by a dictionary. In *Philosophy of Photography*[80] Henri Van Lier refers to this issue, also stating that Peirce himself covers both divergent concepts with the word *index* but in his later writings only means the *indice*[81].

Two other recent texts that I am aware of, one by Martin Lefebvre and another by David Green and Joanna Lowry, detect this differentiation in somewhat different parameters. Lefebvre proposes a corresponding distinction between '*direct and indirect indexical relations*' in 'The Art of Pointing: On Peirce,

---

[77] Roman Jakobson, 'Shifters, Verbal Categories and the Russian Verb' in *Selected Writings*, Vol. II, *Word and Language*. See also the entry: 'Shifter' in Evans, *Dictionary*, 182.

[78] This includes Krauss' well-known essays 'Notes on the Index, Part 1 + 2', even though Krauss actually quotes from Jakobson's 'On Shifters and Verbal Categories' in 'Notes on the Index, Part 1'.

[79] This temporal distance becomes a temporary co-existence of cause and effect in the case of symptoms such as fever indicating disease or heat indicating a fire. These 'life' effects only exist while their causes last and are therefore different to the trace as they disappear with the ceasing of the cause.

[80] See: 'Peirce and Photography' in: Van Lier, *Philosophy of Photography* (Leuven: Leuven, 2007) 117–22. This is a short afterword to his book, in which he actually disputes the usefulness of the idea of 'the index according to Peirce' to conceptualise photography.

[81] To this it should be added that it would have been a major intervention for translations of Peirce's texts from English into Romance languages to have altered this conflation, and thus the term index is used in the same conflated manner in all Romance language translations and secondary literature I know of. Subsequently most writings on photography investigating indexicality usually mean mainly the indice but frequent slippages between the two are often the cause for confusion.

Indexicality, and Photographic Images' in *Photography Theory*[82]. In 'From Presence to the Performative: Rethinking Photographic Indexicality'[83] Green and Lowry also distinguish between two forms of indexicality: 'the one existing as a physical trace of an event, the other as performative gesture that points towards it'[84]. Further, they argue that Peirce 'demonstrated that the indexical sign was less to do with its causal origins and more to do with the way in which it pointed to the event of its own inscription'[85].

In any case, whilst Peirce's writings supply an elaborate analysis of 'indexicality', the above distinction is not clear in his texts, and what must be remembered, for the purposes of my definition and continued use of the term as follows below, is that the 'concept' of indexicality is not tied to a Peircean methodology. I did not think about 'indexicality' when I was touched by the mug from Ravensbrück. With or without Peirce, the term is a naming, for the sake of theoretical analysis, of what is an apparent *fascination with the idea of trace and touch*, which is a cornerstone of our sign system and culture.

I have recently been reminded of the origin of the importance of reading real indexical traces for negotiating our environment in a less man-made and thus less mediated world than we are used to in western culture, during some guided walks through a nature reserve in Africa. The guide could read from every animal track as well as from animal dung which creature left the trace. The size, depth and freshness of the trace would also tell the guide about the age and the size of the animal and how long ago it was there – in the case of a dangerous predator a potentially life-saving skill. Similarly he could read from damage on plants exactly which herbivore and how long ago had been feeding there or just walked past breaking foliage. Nervously running herds of certain animals could indicate the presence of a predator nearby, vultures circling in the air would indicate a fresh kill and thus the vicinity of a predator. I was even

---

[82] Martin Lefebvre, 'The Art of Pointing: On Peirce, Indexicality, and Photographic Images' in Elkins (ed.), *Photography Theory*, 220-44. Lefebvre also quotes a undated text by Peirce in which he outlines how he differentiates between *designators* and *reagents,* a distinction he sees as 'roughly speaking' corresponding to his differentiation between 'direct' and 'indirect'.
[83] David Green and Joanna Lowry, 'From Presence to the Performative: Rethinking Photographic Indexicality' in *Where is the Photograph* (Photoforum / Photoworks: Brighton, 2002), 47-60.
[84] Ibid., 48.
[85] Ibid., 48.

more startled when I realised how the guide applied his acute awareness of such signs to myself and the small group of my fellow hikers. On one occasion getting very close to a group of rhinos, he eventually startled the animals into charging away from us by throwing a stone. Later he told us that he did this because he noticed from our breathing that we were getting too scared!

Such a connection with our environment through an alert reading of real indexicality is vastly reduced and suppressed in our highly mediated (experience of the) world and it suggests itself that here is the origin of our fascination with real indexicality which, for example, is evident in the value we put on relics or memorabilia not only of historic or popular celebrity culture but also on souvenirs from our own private lives or, further, on 'hand-made' objects, authentic (art) objects and so on. We have a fascination with and desire for, to use Baudrillard's words, this 'shard of absolute reality, ensconced, enshrined at the heart of ordinary reality in order to justify it'[86].

Returning to the issue of the photographic image being an amalgam of 'pure authentication' and artificial interpretation, the following quote by Van Lier is pertinent:

> [P]hotographs can … be defined quite rigorously as *possibly indexed indices*. *Indicial* then refers to the natural and technical aspects of photonic imprints, while *indexical* refers to the side of the subject (the photographer) who chooses his frame, film, lens, developers and prints.[87]

This means that the *index* is of the realm of syntagmatic, symbolic imageness whereas only the *indice* is of the realm of real materiality and contingency. Van Lier's 'frame', of course, refers to the chosen camera angle that com-poses – or *indexes* – the images of things that are contingent and more or less unrelated into one frame. What Van Lier calls the 'side of the subject' is the triad of photographic image production that *indexes* the *indice*.

With reference to the analogy between the photographic and the curatorial composition, the dish from Ravensbrück will make a good example. To state

---

[86] Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 84.
[87] Van Lier, *Philosophy of Photography*, 118.

the obvious, initially, within the exhibition set-up the posed object, the dish, will no longer be used for its original purpose. It has been inserted into a purely visual display, removed through the glass of the vitrine into a different space beyond the viewer's own, which is visible but not physically accessible, thus the object cannot be touched. The viewer can only gaze into this segregated space of representation and this is part of the sculptural composition of this posed object[88].

Without any further information, any visitor will wonder about the dish's significance, as in the context of a museum for applied arts a simple dish like this one is unlikely to be displayed for its merit as object of beauty or craftsmanship. However, the exhibition title and theme, 'The Souvenir – Memory in Objects from the Relic to the Keepsake'[89], clearly sets the path for expectations, as this exhibition happens actually to be self-reflective on memory through objects, and the information panel makes clear that it is the mug's *history* that is the reason for its display in this context. As mentioned already, the dish was used by Aenne Saekow while she was interred in the Ravensbrück concentration camp in 1945. The accompanying label tells the story of the dish and one excerpt reads:

> The dish helped Aenne Saekow to survive the camp. It privileged her towards others in the imposed battle of survival within the camp hierarchies. As object of memory, the simple aluminium dish becomes a sign of victory with all its connotations.[90]

It follows that the posed object that is the dish, whilst present as an actual and real object, refers to an absent yet vast matrix of meaning – all evoked through the staged artefact[91]. The dish itself, through its quality as *relic*, is a real material

---

[88] Baudrillard's observations on glass, regarding consumer goods, are also valid for the posed object in museum vitrines: 'Glass … allows nothing but the *sign* of its content to emerge,' (*System of Objects*, 43) and could be paraphrased to 'The *pose* allows nothing but the imageness of its object to emerge'.
[89] My translation of *Der Souvenir - Erinnerung in Dingen von der Reliquie zum Andenken*.
[90] My translation of 'Der Napf hat Aenne Saekow geholfen das Lager zu überleben. Im aufgezwungenen Überlebenskampf der Lagerhierarchie privilegierte er sie gegenüber anderen. Als Errinnerungsstück wird aus dem unscheinbaren Aluminiumbecher ein Siegeszeichen, mit all seinen Konnotationen.' Museum für Angewandte Kunst, *Der Souvenir - Erinnerung in Dingen von der Reliquie zum Andenken*, exhibition catalogue (Wienand Verlag: Frankfurt, 2006), 256.
[91] Following this, two 'levels' of meaning of this posed object can be identified. Firstly there is this particular and personal story within a well-known history, evoked by the

trace, thus *indice of* the murderous horrors of the Holocaust. Within the set-up that comprises the posed object and accompanying (indexing) textual information the *indice* (of the past) is posed (indexed) and made to point (in the present) *at* a whole, which is this case will be: Ravensbrück = Nazi Concentration Camps = Holocaust, rather than 'tin dishes'.

Thus like the photograph, the posed object can be described as *indexed indice*. Where in the photograph *indexical* 'refers to the side of the subject (the photographer) who chooses his frame, film, lens, developers and prints', in the posed object, *indexical* refers to the side of the subject, here the curator, who chooses plinths, cases, vitrines, lighting etc.

In addition to the visual *indexing*, both the photograph and the posed object usually work in tandem with (con)textual *indexing*. As is obvious, only once I knew the mug's history, having read the label, could I be touched by its presence.

And this is the second vital issue to be aware of regarding a clearer concept of 'the index'. The paradox of the photograph, the amalgam of *indicial* truth and artificial composition indeed resides already in the reception of all *indiciality* itself. Whilst a bullet hole is a true *indicial* trace as 'there is a hole there, whether anybody has the sense to attribute it to a shot or not'[92], still I do need to *know* (thus be able to 'read' with all its subjective implications) what a bullet hole looks like in order to recognise it as such. The index according to Peirce is 'a sign, or representation, which refers to its object … because it is in dynamical (including spatial) connection 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'[93].

The *indice* itself already depends on knowledge of the 'reading' and interpreting mind, and both the photographic image and the posed object are already amalgamated 'nature' and 'culture' even before additional (con)textual knowledge is supplied in tandem with the pose. What becomes paradigmatically evident with regard to faked or mis- and reattributed artefacts

---

object which in this case is set up to cause viewers to feel horror, empathy and sorrow and also admiration for the human grandeur of the victims in question. On a larger and complex political level, this object, which has been transformed into '*a sign of victory with all its connotations*', connotes amongst many other things the institution/state's political awareness of the horrors of the Holocaust and exhibits an anti-fascist stance. I will return to these two planes of meaning, which are more or less prominently present in all posed objects, in Chapter V.

[92] Peirce, 'Logic as Semiotic', 104.
[93] Ibid., 107, my emphasis.

is the fact that such information can lack any relationship to facts. Even if the information is not altogether false, it can ultimately never be provided nor perceived outside of a discursive system, and thus is prone to anamorphic distortions of varying degrees.

The historic object is a real *indice* but apart from the visual syntagmatic elements of the pose, it is dependent on the additional symbolic discourse in language, which supplies information in addition to the existing physical object. The mug's physical presence alone does not 'show' the trace, and in this particular case there will be thousands of mugs of this kind in existence; hence this type of mug is not per se an *indice* for 'Holocaust'. This *indiciality* is based on the knowledge *this*-mug-was-there-at-the-time-and-is-here-now, which is the auratic base of all objects we describe as relics. In the relic, the specific moment of coming into being that characterises the *indice* can be based on the (knowledge of a) specific time of use in the past. Hence in the case of the dish the *indiciality* is not one of cause and effect (like smoke indicating fire) but one of (the idea of) trace *across time*.

Therefore, the *indiciality* of the relic is based on the *knowledge* of material continuity across time and this is also the case regarding the *indiciality* of the photograph. Having established the twofold aspect of the *indexed indice* in the relic and the photograph, it can be observed that this applies to all posed objects considered 'historic', and since all objects that are posed become at once historic, *indiciality* across time is always an element of any one posed object. The totality of the object-staged-as image is always a composition *containing indiciality*, at which point the analogue to the photographic image becomes apparent again, as photographs too are compositions, which *contain indiciality* embedded within a composition of symbolic indexicality.

To acknowledge this twofold aspect of 'the index' serves to clarify issues regarding both the posed object and photography: the distinction between *indice* and *index* together with the observation that both are part of the photographic image resolves the confusion over 'pointing' that is evident in the *Photography Theory* discussion and further solves criticism of 'the index' such as Joel Snyder's, who vigorously disputes the usefulness of the concept: 'What I fear about the causal stuff is that it stops you from seeing the photograph as

pictures'[94] or: 'The problem with attempting to discuss photographs in terms of *the* index is that the notion is so thoroughly unspecified'[95].

Apart from this unclear use of the term, another fact that leaves 'the index' to appear as an inadequate concept to theorise photography is that its most prominent proponents, like Barthes and Krauss, promote the indexical (Barthes' 'that-has-been' and his emphasis on the chemical) at the total exclusion of the other formative elements within the triad of photographic image-making of which *indicial trace* is merely a part. Remembering the discussion of the 'Minotaur', the 'inscription' or 'imprint' – what the chemical reaction recorded – doubtlessly does have a correspondence to what was in front of the camera, i.e. the man who posed, but an awareness of the manipulating forces, to realise that what the image shows looks very different to what Man Ray saw in front of him when he operated the camera, makes it impossible to call this 'the order of the natural world that imprints itself on the photographic emulsion'[96]. Instead, what the photographer makes the camera imprint is an anamorphic *projection* produced by the lens of the pro-photographic set-up which, before it can be seen, will already be subject to choices of image 'developing'. Barthes and Krauss leave the *indexing* of the *indice*[97] out of the picture.

For clarity, as the word *indices* is also commonly used as plural of *index*, in continuing I will refer to the *indice* as '*real index*' and to the *index* as '*symbolic index*'. The real index depends on material contiguity and is a trace of the moment of its coming into being. The symbolic index is deliberately posed to point by employing conventional symbolic elements. The reading of both is dependent on knowledge 'in the mind of the viewer' and where I want to make this aspect clear I will refer to the *idea* of the real index.

Both photography and the posed object always present an imageness which is an amalgam of the *indice* and the *index* and thus both always constitute an amalgam of nature and culture. The pose that is the essence of both re-presentation systems inserts selected fragments of contingency into

---

[94] Snyder in Elkins (ed.), *Photography Theory*, 155.
[95] Ibid., 369.
[96] Krauss, 'Notes on the Index, Part 2', 59.
[97] To be correct, it should be noted that it is only at the point of the photographic image production that Krauss neglects to take this *indexing* into account, whereas in both parts of 'Notes on the Index' she emphasises how the indexical in the art she discusses is always necessarily accompanied by contextual information.

symbolisation by way of the *indexed indice.* In continuing, if I use the term *indexical* (in italics) on its own I specifically mean to refer to the *indexed indice* or, in other words, the posed real index.

● ● ●

Matter-reality

Acknowledging the posed object in the museum as *indexed indice* may further help to reflect on and relativise critique of the museum as being a discourse that constitutes its subject, which ultimately must be understood as there being no pre-discursive 'facts'. There is truth in the observation that the discourse of posing that is the museum is constitutive of its subject insofar as the museum, like any other representational system, is unable to present any meaning outside of a syntagmatic, thus discursive/meaning-producing, context. However, even though we need to know it to *read* it as such, the fish from the Indian Ocean *is* a real index of the area of sea that we name Indian Ocean, which would also be there if no human was there to name it. Whilst the posed collection is somewhat formative of the concept 'Indian Ocean' and this concept resides in anamorphous imageness, it is an act of naming, without which no meaning could be made of the material world at all.

The twofold nature of *indexicality* – the real that must be *indexed* in order to be perceived by a human subject – shows that 'nature' and 'culture' can never be separate to human perception. When Derrida reminds us that for Peirce, '[f]rom the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. We *think only in signs*'[98], this still does not negate the fact that, outside of meaning, there is no material world that we are part of and that is subject to forces of contingency that are external to any discursive system – a matter-reality. Human beings just cannot grasp matter-reality without imbuing it with 'culture' – without

---

[98] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Corrected Edition (John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore & London, 1997 [1967]), 50 (partially quoted by Batchen, *Burning with Desire*, 198).

Sinngebung, which can only grasp aspects of our being in it in discourse and syntagm – that is constitutive of 'the world' as we understand it.

Returning to the mug from Ravensbrück, part of constituting this real indexical link to the historic past from which the object originates is also a perceived real indexical link to the physical bodies of Holocaust victims. The label and catalogue entry itself refer to this as follows:

> In its simplicity *and its traces of use* it is simply a tool of survival. Through it speaks the importance of *an issue as elementary as nourishment.*[99]

The mug's 'traces of use' are a real index which came into being through the handling of, and thus direct contact with, the users' bodies. Even though no biological traces of food or lip imprints visibly have survived on the mug itself, the *idea* is in my mind that such *traces-have-been-there*. Additionally the mug 'speaks of the importance of an issue as elementary as nourishment', a reference to the real corpo-reality of the inmates and subsequently of the viewer. In proceeding, it is the *idea* of this real indexicality that is linked to the body which will remain in central focus.

---

[99] My translation of: 'In seiner Einfachheit und mit seinen Gebrauchsspuren ist er schlicht ein Instrument des Überlebens. Aus ihm spricht die elementare Bedeutung der Ernährung'. Museum für Angewandte Kunst, *Der Souvenir,* 256 (my emphasis).

As a young child, I was taken by my mother to the Senkenberg Museum in Frankfurt. The memory I have of this visit is limited to a few exhibits. Apart from the seemingly gigantic dinosaur skeletons I remember only two other objects, but those have left a lifelong impression on me. One of these exhibits never to leave my memory is a shrunken human head (Ein echter Schrumpfkopf!). A shrivelled, shrunken, wrinkled little dead face. A real cut-off head of a dead person - with long black hair!

The second exhibit equally burned into my memory was that of an unwrapped Egyptian mummy. I remember asking my mother to confirm that this really was a real dead person. A small child-like human. Having been in a dark tomb for thousands of years, now lying here… Dead. Dark, dry, wrinkled skin. Hair. Toes. Arms. Hands. Fingers. Behind glass – I can stare unashamedly. A real dead human (ein Toter!) in a glass vitrine, *really close in front of me*!

Klaus Wehner: *The British Museum, London, 8 May 1999*

It was many years later as I browsed through the British Museum in London that I walked into the gallery where I encountered the desiccated body of 'Ginger', a naturally preserved pre-dynastic Egyptian mummy. He is placed in a large glass cube in the centre of the gallery surrounded by grave-goods originating from the period of his lifetime. There was a school class in the gallery and I took a few photographs of the scene, one of which can be seen on the opposite page.

This happened about a decade ago and I have always since credited this particular image with being the starting point of my ongoing fascination with photographing museum spaces and the related subsequent research that eventually led to my writing this text. In retrospect, and due to the familiarity I have now (but didn't have then) with the concept of the *punctum*, I realise that this photograph has a detail that was always a *punctum* to me since seeing the print: it is the disembodied hand at the left edge of the image, holding a pencil in an unusual way, as one would hold a dart. Whenever I think of this image when it is not in front of me, I think about this hand first. It touches me with its randomness and the feeling of its being 'out of place' to this scene – but is not everything in this scene 'out of place'?

I also think now that the image as a whole constitutes another *punctum* for me, in that it recalls in me my own childhood encounter with that mummy in the Senkenberg Museum – in a way this photograph is to me an analogue to an image of myself, at that age and in that situation, a moment that was never captured in a photograph.

Once this analogue is diagnosed, I must admit that it is most likely not actually this photograph that is to be credited with my fascination with photography and death in the museum, but that the origin is the childhood memory of an encounter that has deeply shaken me and has left a deep impression on me.

By taking a thousand differential precautions, one must be able to speak of a *punctum* in all signs (and the repetition and iterability structures it already), in any discourse, whether it be literary or not.

Derrida[100]

Punctum

In the context of the posed object in museum galleries, recalling my own childhood memory but also having observed countless scenes involving other museum visitors, I will adopt and extend Barthes' concept of the *punctum*, away from the photographic image, to the fascination we have with posed objects that are human remains or objects that otherwise constitute a real indexical reference to an absent body, to physical violence – including entropy – and death[101].

I cannot count the occasions when individuals I asked for their impression of certain exhibitions or museums have spoken immediately about the exhibits that, I would say, constituted their personal *punctum* – which most frequently related to violence to the (absent) body or, more immediately, human remains. To me the dish from Ravensbrück in its spacious vitrine – due to the knowledge supplied by the label – is such an object. To name just a few more examples, I recall several people I asked about a major exhibition of Aztec artefacts at the Royal Academy in London in 2002 immediately mentioned the 'cruelty', referring to the exhibited carved stone vessels that – labels informed us – were used to hold blood and other body parts of human sacrifices (blood-has-been-there). I myself remember from a visit to the Museum of East Asian Art in Bath quite some time ago just one specific object, which I encountered in a display cabinet well and truly cluttered with miscellaneous 'applied arts' artefacts. The object that became my *punctum* was an ancient nose clip made of jade which, the label informed me, was once used to keep the nostrils of a corpse closed as part of a burial custom to seal all body orifices.

On a recent visit to Pompeii, I witnessed visitors' reactions to encountering the famous casts of the cavities left by the ancient victims' bodies: 'There are real

---

[100] Derrida, 'Barthes', 289.
[101] Much secondary literature stresses the fact that there is no such thing as '*the punctum*', that it is impossible to define or even that it is not a 'concept'. However, as will be discussed, whilst what I propose here is an adaption and expansion of his concept, it is based on what I see at the core of Barthes' use of the term.

bones in there!' I overheard an excited conversation next to me. After my own visit, asking a 16-year-old acquaintance of mine if she had ever been to Pompeii, the first and only thing she mentioned were the 'dead people in the glass cases'. When I take school groups to the British Museum and later ask their impression, the mummies are almost always mentioned first – I have never forgotten my first encounter with the mummy in the Senkenberg Museum.

Klaus Wehner: *Pompeii, 9 August 2008*

A London listings magazine featuring Apsley House, a collection brimming with a large number of historical paintings, sculpture and furniture, lists 'Best Exhibit: Wellington's death mask' (Time Out London, 7 June 2006) – a paradigmatic example of a real index of the body of a historical legend.

The mother of all shipwrecks has many homes–literal, legal, and metaphorical–but none more surreal than the Las Vegas Strip. At the Luxor Hotel, in an upstairs entertainment court situated next to a streaptease show and a production of **Menopause the Musical***, is a semipermanent exhibition of Titanic artefacts brought up from the ocean depth by RMST Titanic, Inc., the wreck's legal salvager since 1994. More than 25 million people have seen this exhibit and similar RMST shows that have been staged in 20 countries around the world.*

I spent a day … wandering around the Titanic relics: A chef's toque, a razor, lumps of coal, a set of perfectly preserved serving dishes, innumerable pairs of shoes, bottles of perfume, a leather Gladstone bag, a champagne bottle with the cork still in it. They are most ordinary objects made extraordinary for the long, terrible journey that brought them to these clean Plexiglas cases.

Hampton Sides, 'The lights are finally on' in *National Geographic*, April 2012, 86-99, 88.

This specific com-position of posed objects, the actual coat in the vitrine in front of the painting of it depicting the moment that begins the coat's transformation into a relic, confers a type of mythically migrated real indexical truth and potential *punctum* effect from the objects onto the painting.

Our culture has a fascination with the real index of the body (which always has the potential to, but not always does trigger a *punctum effect*). In everyday consumerist life this is evident in the appreciation of the 'hand-made'. I once bought a small Victorian terracotta planter on a junk market which the stallholder praised by pointing out that 'you can see the finger marks of the guy who made it' in its inside. I have a very good friend who is an opera singer with a passionate love for early baroque music and art. During a trip to Venice he happened to see some exhibited letters written by Michelangelo. My friend later told me of his fascination with these letters, which he found 'special in a different way to Michelangelo's sculptures'. I would say the letters were a *punctum* to him because of the real indexical presence related to an object more private and mundane than the sculptures in the public domain. The handwriting is a real index of a body which, belonging to a different era of our culture, is temporally extremely remote and is only known to us as the imageness that is the legend of the great Michelangelo. I was recently similarly fascinated by an exhibited notebook of Leonardo da Vinci, even though I have seen many of his drawings and paintings in various exhibitions before. The notebook had something more 'raw' about it. I also have a notebook of similar size. It was the *idea* that this small item was frequently handled and must have been carried cherished and well-protected for a prolonged period of time – by this man 500 years ago – that made it stand out for me in a different way to the framed drawings.

Still on the same trip, on another day when I phoned my friend in Venice, the first thing proudly proclaimed to me was: 'I touched the font in which Vivaldi was christened!' The *idea* of touch – he touched the font that once touched the temporally extremely remote naked baby-body of 'Antonio Vivaldi' – and material contiguity, of real indexicality (in this case even without a discernible trace), is obviously at the core of this fascination and this *idea* is also what we apply to photography. As Susan Sontag put it: 'Having a photograph of

Shakespeare would be like having a nail from the True Cross'.[103] This same friend of mine on more than one occasion also told me of his utter fascination with the fact that a photograph exists of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's widow, Constanze Mozart, taken in 1850 when she was 78 years old. The last time he again mentioned this photograph I deliberately asked back if there were also any photographs of Wolfgang Amadeus? His prompt reply was 'No, of him there are only locks of hair and fingernail clippings', which, I then found out, he has seen as a child in the Mozart House in Salzburg. Here is another example of an unforgotten childhood encounter – a *punctum* in the form of a real index of the absent body of a historical, temporally remote legend. Apart from this, the spontaneity of his answer to my question about the photograph shows that in his mind too, the hair and nail clippings are a similar trace of the body of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, as a photograph would be. Regarding the photograph of Constanze Mozart, here the astonishment over its existence, which I share, derives from the fact that the life of Mozart is deeply associated with a pre-technological age in which photography did not exist. Fascinating! I looked at eyes that looked at Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Print from Daguerreotype by unknown photographer: Constanze Mozart, the widow of Wolfang Amadeus Mozart (first left), photographed in 1850 with the family of the composer Max Keller

---

[103] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Penguin Books: London, 1979), 154.

My fascination with this photograph is not diminished by the fact that I downloaded a digital reproduction from a website[104] which was scanned from a print from the original Daguerreotype, nor by the fact that there is even dispute as to whether the photograph really shows Constanze Mozart. I might thus be fascinated by the wrong photograph; its *indexicality* might be all in my head – based on my believing in a real index that is false.

At this point, another issue needs to be pointed out that applies to *indexicality*. The paradox of the photograph, the amalgam of real indexical trace in artificial composition, indeed resides already in the recognition and reception of any real index itself. Just like in a photographic image, even before any (con)textualisation, this shard that is the real index is already embedded in a syntagm of perception. The bullet hole is *in* a coat, in a specific spot of that coat and the coat has specific qualities from which I conclude what kind of coat it is. The paw print of a lion is *in* the sand, of a specific depth and age, in a specific position in a specific area of a specific bush-land.

Further, whilst the bullet hole in Nelson's coat is a real indexical trace of the bullet that penetrated and killed the body that was Admiral Nelson, as 'there is a hole there, whether anybody has the sense to attribute it to a shot or not'[105], still I do need to *know* (thus be able to 'read' with all its subjective implications) what a bullet hole looks like. In addition, in this case, I need to know that this is Nelson's coat, plus I need to know the story of the battle of Trafalgar to appreciate the significance of that hole – and to possibly experience it as a *punctum*. In the case of the mug from Ravensbrück, the sacrificial Aztec stone dishes and any other relics, I need to know the history of these objects. The *punctum*-effect related to these examples is based on knowledge the viewer has gained through discourse in language, and through *knowledge of contact* and what constitutes contact, and thus the *idea* of real indexicality. Not only the real index that is false is all in my head.

The same applies to photography. To state the obvious, the subjective element that is at the base of the *punctum* includes knowledge. Barthes can only feel that Lewis Payne 'is going to die' because he knows the circumstances of the

---

[104] See: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/5157200.stm
[105] Peirce, 'Logic as Semiotic', 104.

photograph (discussed further in Chapter II). Therefore, by default the *punctum*-effect can be based on false knowledge.

A good example would be the much-quoted passage of Walter Benjamin's 'Short History of Photography'[106], which is not included in *Camera Lucida*'s bibliography but is understandably often credited with being a major influence on Barthes' development of the concept of the *punctum*.

Karl Dauthendey: Self-portrait with his fiancée Miss Friedrich, St Petersburg, 1857.

Benjamin's reaction is in response to a double portrait of the photographer Karl Dauthendey and his fiancée whom, years later, after the birth of their sixth child, he will find dead in her bed having killed herself by cutting her arteries open:

> In spite of all the photographer's skill and the controlled pose of the
> model, the viewer feels an irresistible compulsion to search such an
> image for the minute spark of an accident, here and now, with which
> reality almost burns through the imageness; to find that inconspicuous

---

[106] Walter Benjamin, translated by P. Patton, 'A Short History of Photography' in Alan Trachtenberg (ed.), *Classsic Essays on Photography* (Leete's Islands Books: New Haven, Connecticut, 1980), 199-216.

detail, in which the 'being-so' of that long bygone minute embeds the 'after', still today, with such eloquence that we, looking back, may discover it.[107]

The total correspondence to Barthes' *punctum* that is time[108] caused by knowledge of the future anterior (of a bloody death) is obvious to see. However, as Herta Wolf points out in a footnote to Iversen's text[109], it has now been established that the photograph in question is actually the portrait of Dauthendey and his *second* wife, and thus Benjamin's response was really felt, yet based on false facts.

An inverse case of a distinction between the knowledge of something being real or false based purely on the assumption of its being real or false is in our reaction to photographic images and film footage of violence. On any average day or evening of television programmes we will, without fail, be faced with a number of scenes that show the last minutes of the life of a screen drama's protagonist. More often than not, the death will be caused by violence, which, dependent on the time of day of broadcasting and the type of programme, will be more or less graphically shown. We are used to seeing such scenes. I was amused the other day when I saw an afternoon repeat of an episode of *Midsomer Murders* in a semi public space on a TV without sound. Over the course of the hour, half a dozen or so people were shown to meet their death in several gruesome manners. As it happened, later that day, I spoke to a friend who agitatedly told me his absolute horror about the fact that a TV broadcast reported and showed the real footage of a 17-year-old Pakistani boy being shot dead. My friend told me that he just about managed to switch the channel before actually 'having to see this' and voiced his outrage about the fact that

---

[107] My (tendentious) translation of: 'Aller Kunstfertigkeit des Photographen und aller Planmässigkeit in der Haltung seines Modells zum Trotz fühlt der Beschauer unwiderstehlich den Zwang, in einem solchem Bild das winzige Fünkchen Zufall, Hier und Jetzt, zu suchen, mit dem die Wirklichkeit den Bildcharakter gleichsam durchsengt hat, die unscheinbare Stelle zu finden, in welcher, im Sosein jener längstvergangenen Minute das Künftige noch heut und so beredt nistet, daß wir zurückblickend, es entdecken können.' Walter Benjamin, 'Kleine Geschichte der Photographie' in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 2.1 (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1977 [1931]), 368-85.
[108] CL, Section 39, 'Time as *Punctum*', 94-97.
[109] Margaret Iversen: 'Was ist eine Fotografie' in Herta Wolf (ed.), *Paradigma Fotografie: Fotokritik am Ende des fotografischen Zeitalters* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt, 2002), 115-16. Wolf refers to a footnote by André Gunthers to a new edition of 'Petite Histoire de la photographie', footnote 30, 115-16. In the republications in Iversen's own *Beyond Pleasure* and in *Photography Degree Zero* this fact is now pointed out as well.

such images are shown on television at all[110]. Even when acknowledging that *Midsomer Murders* is a particularly camp staging of often hilariously imaginative homicides, clearly, our normal reaction (shock or indifference) is based on the *idea* of what we see being either real or staged. Be it Benjamin's reaction to the future anterior of the photograph of Dauthendy and his bride or an exhibition visitor's reaction to a stone vessel that 500 years ago was used to hold the mutilated body parts of human sacrifices, the *potential* for a *punctum* effect originates in projection through knowledge which is 'what I add to the photograph' (CL 55) or to the imageness of the posed object. Such knowledge is a trigger of an involuntary affect – of a *tuché*. Whilst the *idea* of real indexicality to the (absent) (dead) body is privileged to cause a *tuché,* what exactly triggers it is entirely in the mind of the beholder.

● ● ●

The Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see. (CL 4)

Contrapuntal – Corpo-real – *Punctum*

In its last instance, but not always directly, this trigger relates to the body[111]: Elisabeth Edwards begins *Raw Histories* with the description of a *punctum* she experiences in a photograph taken in the Solomon Islands in 1873 as 'the carefully tied knots in the lashings of a bamboo palisade', which for her evoke 'a sense of presence – of fingers that had tied those knots in other times'[112]. Here the imageness of 'bamboo palisade' is pierced by the singularity of the real index of '*fingers* that had tied *those* knots'. One of Barthes' own examples is a photograph of Andy Warhol hiding his face behind his hands, and for Barthes the *punctum* is 'the slightly repellent substance of those spatulate nails, at once

---

[110] This happened on 10 June 2011 in Karachi and made news around the world. A camera team happened to be present when the boy was held on suspicion of robbery by a team of Pakistani paramilitaries and shot dead in front of running cameras despite being unarmed.
[111] I will cement this argument when looking at *Camera Lucida* in Chapter II.
[112] E. Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 1.

soft and hard-edged' (CL 45). Again the generality of the imageness: 'portrait of the artist Andy Warhol' is pierced by pointing to the singularity of the (imperfect) matter-reality of the body – the corpus Barthes needed turned out to be the body he saw. Barthes actually mentions nails and also teeth several times: 'What I stubbornly see are one child's bad teeth' (CL 45), 'Tzara's portrait … the *punctum*, is Tzara's hand resting on the door frame: a large hand whose nails are anything but clean' (CL 45), '… one of them holds a gun that rests on his thigh (I can see his nails)' (CL 25). Earlier he also observes that 'many of the men photographed by Nadar have long fingernails' (CL 30).

In everyday life too it occurs that one experiences bad teeth or fingernails if these are unexpectedly dirty or painfully short or look bitten to be *contrapuntal* to the imageness of a person. I will continue to use the word *contrapuntal* where I want to refer to a *highly dynamic potential* for a possible *punctum* effect to be triggered through a piercing of imageness[113]. Identifying this potential may seem contrary to Barthes' emphasis on the individual and personal, yet he himself identifies such potential on more than one occasion, most obviously in the '*punctum* that is time' which is a trigger that is potentially experienced in a similar way by many individuals. To know that Dauthendy's bride will die by cutting open her arteries is contrapuntal to the imageness of the dressed-up couple in a moment of happiness, looking forward to a future together.
A good example of a deliberate aim for the contrapuntal is a recent TV advertisement for a mouthwash, which begins by showing a beautiful young blond woman in a stereotypical country-summer-field scene bathed in golden sunlight. The camera slowly moves closer and zooms into her face. In the final shot she opens her mouth for a smile and a large gap in the row of her front teeth destroys the perfection of her imageness of beauty.

In summary, regarding the idea of imageness presented by both the photograph and the posed object, the *punctum* is an element or detail that pierces (the generality of) perceived apprehensive imageness by way of pointing to contingent matter-reality and singularity which in turn – more or less directly – points to the body's uncertain position within this – its corpo-reality. (Apart

---

[113] See also Derrida's use of the contrapuntal in 'The Deaths of Roland Barthes'. For Derrida, 'this apparent opposition (s*tudium/punctum*) does not forbid but, on the contrary, facilitates a certain *composition* between the two concepts', 266.

from the 'detail' that becomes the *punctum*, the affectual reaction, the *tuché* that is beyond control is a pointer to my corpo-real existence).

As Collette Soler reminds, in Lacan's early phase, he considers that to make a 'body' what is needed is a living organism plus an image[114]. The position of the body and the self as/in a body remains ultimately incomprehensible as its 'nature', underneath the matrix of imageness, remains real – and subject to the contingency of the real – in the Lacanian sense: 'it is real precisely, in Lacan's definition, in so far as it is impossible to apprehend by means of the signifier'[115]. Instead, in the pose, the body becomes the corpo-real medium for (dis)embodied imageness. Thus signs *read as* real indexes of absent bodies have a contrapuntal dynamic because of the special status of the body within the meaning-producing matrix of signification through which we comprehend the material world.

This allows us to conclude that photography and posed objects reflect (on), or mirror, the imageness of the self because they share with it this 'existence' of contingent matter-reality *in the pose*, or in other words, the 'body' too is subject to the nature—culture dichotomy. It is corpo-real but can only be grasped in imageness.

● ● ●

A Little Piece of the Real

In *Bildanthropologie*, Hans Belting suggests that the corpse is in fact the very ur-image, as it becomes a representation of the deceased who is no longer there, no longer one, with the body. Belting further suggests that when the absent deceased is represented through an image, the image's medium becomes a stand-in, a replacement, which then is an analogue to the absent body, which as Belting puts it, while alive as performative body is the visible medium that

---

[114] Colette Soler, 'The Body in the Teaching of Jacques Lacan', translated by Lindsay Watson, published online: http://ebookbrowse.com/the-body-in-the-teaching-of-jacques-lacan-colette-soler-pdf-d292924351
[115] Ibid., 121.

Klaus Wehner: *The British Museum, London, 5 March 2008*

In Photography, the presence of the thing (at a certain past moment) is never metaphoric; and in the case of animated beings, their life as well, except in the case of photographing corpses; and even so: if the photograph then becomes horrible, it is because it certifies, so to speak, that the corpse is alive, as corpse: it is the living image of a dead thing. (CL: 79)

represents the 'soul' or the 'self' and his or her role and status in society, to others[116].

Applying the trope of posing, what Belting refers to as the 'representation' of the soul/self corresponds to what I would describe as the pose and the imageness of the self. This expands the concept of the pose/imageness from the actual static posing for the immediate visual onto the social role-play of everyday life, which will be explored further in the following chapters. For now, to continue to adapt Belting's observation, it is important to note that imageness is presented by both a living human being and the dead matter of an image's medium in the sense of Belting's use of the word. For Belting all representation is ultimately rooted in (human's encounter with) death – or the actual impossibility to represent death, as in a portrait of a deceased person the image's medium replaces (as analogue) the person's absent body.

The corpse, described by Belting as ur-image and by Barthes as being 'the living image of a dead thing', and called a 'little piece of the [Lacanian] real'[117] by Žižek, is the ultimate and at the same time most incomprehensible and real conflation of image and referent – if not the purest real index there is. The person is absent and present at the same time: the body *is* the person it refers to – yet the person is no longer there. It is also pure singularity. It is never *a* – but always *this* person. Hence the corpse is a conundrum of representation. It is an image yet it is the most brutal piercing of imageness, as the person who – *is?* or *was?* – that corpse, no longer poses as that person. Whilst the traumatic shock force of this conundrum is the strongest if we deal with the body of a recently deceased loved person, its power lessens through various instances of mediation – mainly anonymity, temporal remoteness and posing in a context considered scientific. Bones and skeletons are the most depersonalised[118].

The posing of human remains in an art context remains one of western society's unbroken taboos and this will be commented on below. 'Scientific' posing too has strong opponents and is subject to a network of (changing) unwritten rules

---

[116] Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie*, especially: 'Bild und Tod', 146-88.

[117] Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, (An October Book, MIT Press: Cambridge Massachusetts & London, England, 1992), 31. (It should be remembered that the living body itself is also (a little piece of the) real.)

[118] Julia Kristeva, in her exploration of the 'abject' in *Powers of Horror*, describes the corpse as the ultimate abject. In fact, if one gives the *Powers of Horror* a reading through the concepts of pose and imageness a parallel between the abject and the *punctum* becomes apparent. Kristeva defines as abject that which crosses the borders of the body and thereby points to the instability of its wholeness. Interpreting the *punctum* as a pointer to the corpo-real facilitates seeing it as the abject of imageness.

that make the display acceptable. Historically, human remains from non-western cultures were deemed acceptable, the infamous 'Hottentot Venus', whose remains were displayed in France until the mid 1970s, being just one paradigmatic example. Temporal remoteness is another factor that commonly makes human remains acceptable in museums of human culture such as the British Museum. In any case, the exhibition of human remains depends on the mediation of the display, the sculptural composition that makes up the posed object. Even though 'Ginger' might have died 5000 years ago, if I encountered his body on my living room floor, I would have a distinctly different reaction to it than when seeing it in its glass case in the exhibition halls of the British Museum. In a dedicatedly 'medical' context the tolerance towards more contemporary bodies from within our own culture is increased where its value is seen as educational.

Another much rarer context of public display of whole bodies or body parts is found in Catholic churches. Here the body parts are classified as 'relics' that, in opposition to the anonymity in the science context, will always distinctly refer to a specific person, a saint, and the purpose of being in the presence of the remains is to be closer to the saint and to God. As these relics 'enshrine the identity of God or that of the soul of a dead person within an object'[119] they are thus perceived as real index – a metonymical part object that is a physical link to the invisible Divine. Such relics will always be stored and displayed in highly ornate shrines often made from precious metals and adorned with precious stones. The most common forms of reliquaries are in the shape of caskets or body parts and the indexical power of the relic transfers to the reliquary or '"slides" from the one to the other, and the reliquary … becomes the unmistakable signifier of authenticity, and hence more effective as symbol'[120].

Despite the ubiquitous presence of various symbolic depictions of death and the dead in most churches that hold such relics, where the real remains are visible they are always distinctly *contrapuntal* to the imageness of the splendour of their surroundings, and as a child I had the same fascination with these as I had with bodies in museums (and indeed I still have).

Human remains as posed objects and objects that are a real index of the human body within this set-up of discourse and mediation pierce the ubiquitous matrix

---

[119] Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 84, footnote 8.
[120] Ibid.

of signification by brutally referring to the instability of the corpo-reality of the viewer's self and the temporality of the posed imageness that endows this corpo-reality with meaning. The corpo-real instability of the self is the single most imperious truth of the forces of the matter-real which is independent and external to the symbolic that allows humans to make sense of 'the world'. Therefore, to paraphrase Barthes, the perceived real index of the (dead) (absent) body is an 'imperious sign of my future death that … challenges each of us, one by one, outside of any generality'. (CL 97)

The posing of 'lumps of the material world that share this nature with ourselves' is thus a labour to insert matter – hence ourselves – into meaning, or in other words to cover real contingency with a matrix of signification. Therefore, the nature that lumps of the physical world share with us is not only the shared base matter-reality but also the fact that both, lumps of the physical world as well as our embodied selves, 'exist' in the chain of signification as paradoxical amalgams of matter and pose, or (dis)embodied meaning.
The pose always hovers between real materiality and our perception in mental representation. Piercing the imageness of the pose is ultimately akin to piercing the imageness of 'having a body' (symbolic), by pointing to 'being a body' (real), and thus it points to the relationship between the matter-reality of the biological body and the mental image in representation of the social body – the corpus I need.
The photo-graphic image and the posed object are twins because the nature of both modes of re-presentation is the alchemical power of the *pose*, which inserts (fragments of real) contingency into symbolic imageness (syntagmatic anamorphic). The pose as such is the essence of the human subject's riddle of *having* or *being* a body – or an object.

Chapter II

Camera Lucida: That-*must-have*-been

(Moving through, extending beyond, and exploiting the resources of phenomenological *as well as* structural analysis, Benjamin's essay and Barthes's last book could very well be the two most significant texts on the so-called question of the Referent in the modern technological age.)

The word *punctum*, moreover, translates, in *Camera Lucida*, one meaning of the word "detail": a point of singularity that punctures the surface of the reproduction – and even the production – of analogies, likenesses, and codes.

… [I]t is the Referent which, through its own image, I can no longer suspend, while its 'presence' forever escapes me.

Jacques Derrida[1]

---

[1] Derrida, 'Barthes', 264.

Gleb Garanich: A man cries as he cradles the body of his brother following the bombardment by Russian forces of Gori in Georgia on 9 August 2009.

Having been immersed in thinking about and analysing the *punctum* for a long time now, I have often suspected that my consciousness of it has caused a certain anticipatory frame of mind that actually makes the occurrence of a *punctum* into a rare event. I do remember some instances of recent years. One related to a photograph of the World Press Photography Prize 2009, which I visited when it was exhibited in the Royal Festival Hall in London with a group of A-Level photography students. As always, the exhibition abounded with images of human misery and cadavers (First Prize! Second Prize!…) which made my teenage photography pupils occasionally gasp (and ask me if this is 'real'?) but left me with little more than the usual curiosity for the abject – together with a strong feeling of unease over the presentation of awards and prizes. One image that surprisingly touched me was taken by photographer Gleb Garanich in Georgia in 2009 after a bombing by Russian warplanes. The image shows a young man screaming in agony whilst cradling his dead brother on a field of rubble with a burning block of flats in the background. The body of the dead brother looks truly lifeless and is somewhat grotesquely contorted through the embrace of his screaming brother. The contortion is emphasised though the camera angle and the use of a short focal length from close by – which makes me think that the photographer must have been quite close to the brothers when he made this exposure. The grieving man's facial expression and the embrace of the naked arms touches me, as I seem to feel the animated rocking movement he bestows on the lifeless body of his brother. The photograph also shows very clear detail in the clothes that could be seen just like that on the streets of London: jeans, chinos, checked shirt, trainers and a golden tooth of the surviving brother – part objects of self representation, futile and meaningless at this moment of all-encompassing affect, disjointed from their usual pose in imageness. I feel the grotesque violence that has killed a young man and has left another in unspeakable grief over this sudden unbelievable loss.

Another moment of a *punctum* occurred when I was channel surfing the television and, for barely a minute, got immersed in a documentary about an ethnic conflict in Africa. I was struck by the fact that the presenter's voice trembled with emotion as he spoke about a village well filled with corpses. Then the camera briefly went into the well and I got a glimpse of a body part covered with crawling white maggots. I did not want to see any more of this

and quickly switched to another channel – but soon realised how touched I was by this glimpse into the programme as I kept thinking back about it, and then consciously decided that at some stage I might report it for this text.

Though Barthes proclaims that 'the *punctum* could accommodate a certain latency (but never any examination)' (CC 88) I will subject my experiences to some examination here. Both these instances clearly relate to dead bodies, photographs of which – real or realistically staged – I am used to seeing on a near daily basis with little or no overtly affectual involvement. In both cases in question here, there seems to be a combination of an element that pierces the usual distance to the mediation/imageness 'corpse' (a glimpse of crawling maggots; a lifeless cadaver, dressed in clothes familiar to me, rocked as in a lullaby) in addition to an element that pierces the imageness 'affected witness/bystander' (a trembling voice fighting for self-control, all-encompassing grief, naked arms rocking the cadaver of the beloved, a gold tooth).

Necessarily, some 'examination' and also 'naming' of the *punctum* is a precondition of thinking and writing about it. After all, naming what causes an affectual reaction does not 'explain' nor represent that affect, which can at most be insufficiently described through words[2]. Derrida remarks on this subject that the examination 'must content itself … with turning around the point', whereby *tourner autour du point* is a play on *tourner autour du pot*, the English equivalent to which would be 'to beat around the bush'[3].

Returning to my reaction to the photograph of the Georgian brothers and the snippet of the documentary programme, both cases were subject to what Barthes calls 'a certain latency': 'Nothing surprising then, in that sometimes, despite its clarity, the *punctum* does not reveal itself until after the strike (*coup*), when the photo is away from my eyesight, and I think about it again. It happens that I may know better a photo that I remember than a photo that I look at' (CC 87). Whilst the sight of the maggots on the rotting flesh appalled

---

[2] It is as impossible to represent an affect as it is to represent corporeal pain but in both cases it is possible to represent the existence through a real index of it, e.g. a photograph of a face contorted in an all-encompassing scream or film/audio recording of a trembling voice.

[3] Derrida, 'Barthes', 286, and translator's footnote 9, 342.

Klaus & Helmut Wehner: accidental exposure.

me and made me switch the channel, being appalled is never necessarily a *punctum* and it happens frequently with all sorts of TV programmes. I only realised later that the image wouldn't leave my mind and I kept thinking about the trembling voice of the presenter. Similarly, as I walked through the World Press Photo exhibition my mind was preoccupied with the tension between the award culture's praise of 'successful' images contrasting with and exploiting the depicted human misery: '*Spot News > Gleb Garanich > Ukraine, Reuters > 3rd Prize Singles*'[4]. Whilst I certainly studied the Garanich photo intently I only realised later, when getting back to the catalogue, that this was the only image I remembered clearly and wanted to see again.

In contrast to this latency, on another occasion I was using the computer to browse through some folders of photographs when suddenly an image appeared on the screen that instantly caused me one of those indescribable stomach sensations that went through me like a flash. Though for sure, 'In it for you, no wound' (CL 73) and this is the reason why, in a very deliberate opposition to Barthes' Winter Garden Photograph, I *do* show the image here (opposite) as I want to flout its banality and thereby pave the way for the thoughts on *Camera Lucida* that follow below. For anyone other than me, the image is truly prosaic and of little inherent interest. Yet for me, the memory of the moment and the way the photograph was taken made its surprise appearance cause a strong affectual reaction. It was after a hospital stay following a fall that I visited my elderly father in a rehabilitation unit for the aged. His own state was particularly fragile and this unit cared for a lot of specifically hard cases in need of long-term care. It was a gut-wrenchingly sad place to visit. Since my father was a lifelong passionate hobby photographer who gave me my first cameras, I took my new digital SLR camera with me and as expected he was interested to see and explore this piece of new technology. He was very weak and the camera very chunky with a heavy tele-photo lens attached and he was barely able to hold it. At some time during the handling of the camera between him and me the shutter was accidentally pushed whilst the tele-photo lens aimlessly pointed to a window of the room, and with the auto exposure and auto focus switched on, the camera took this crop of part of the window with the focus on those 'happy birds' stuck on the glass. I deliberately

---

[4] *World Press Photo 09*, (Thames & Hudson: London & New York, 2009), 52.

kept the file since I had noticed these and other decorations more suited to a child's room as, to me, a specifically sad attempt to brighten up the facility (a radio was playing classical music) but forgot about the image until that moment when it flashed up on my computer screen some months later.

Very clearly here, my reaction relates to my knowledge and memory of the image's coming into being. Obviously, the image itself does not directly show human misery but in a manner of a souvenir, in my mind the image is irrevocably linked to that moment of compassionate pain. It does not matter that the image is encoded into the zeros and ones of the digital binary system as opposed to being the result of a chemical imprint on light sensitive material. *What the photograph shows*, to me, is a real indexical trace of my experience of that moment and my own and my father's being in that horrible room on that horrible morning.

The Theory of the photo as an analogue of reality has been abandoned, even by those who once upheld it – we know that it is necessary to be trained to recognize the photographic image. We know that the image which takes shape on celluloid is analogous to the retinal image but not that which we perceive. We know that sensory phenomena are transcribed in the photographic emulsion, in such a way that even if there is a causal link with the real phenomena, the graphic images formed can be considered as wholly arbitrary with respect to these phenomena … [E]verything which in images appears to us still as analogical, continuous, non-concrete, motivated, natural and therefore 'irrational,' is simply something which, in our present state of knowledge and operational capacities, we have not yet succeeded in reducing to the discrete, the digital, the purely differential.

Umberto Eco
('Critique of the Image' in Victor Burgin (ed.), *Thinking Photography*, 34.)

It is the fashion nowadays, among Photography's commentators (sociologists and semiologists), to seize upon a semantic relativity: no "reality" (great scorn for the "realists" who do not see that the photograph is always coded), nothing but artifice: Thesis, not Physis; the Photograph, they say, is not an analogon of the world; what it represents is fabricated, because the photographic optic is subject to Albertian perspective (entirely historical) and because the inscription on the picture makes a three-dimensional object into a two-dimensional effigy. This argument is futile: nothing can prevent the photograph from being analogical; but at the same time, Photography's noeme has nothing to do with analogy (a feature it shares with all kinds of representations). The realists, of whom I am one and of whom I was already one when I asserted that the Photograph was an image without code–even if, obviously, certain codes do inflect our reading of it–the realists do not take the photograph for a "copy" of reality, but for an emanation of past reality: a magic, not an art. To ask whether a photograph is analogical or coded is not a good means of analysis. The important thing is that the photograph possesses an evidential force, and that its testimony bears not on the object but on time. From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation.
Roland Barthes (CL 88-89).

Camera Lucida I: The Photograph Unclassifiable[5]

> Photography never lies: or rather it can lie as to the meaning of the thing, being by nature *tendentious*, never as to its existence. (CL 87)

Preceding *Camera Lucida*, Barthes had written three key texts that explicitly deal with photography, all republished in sequence in *Image Music Text*[6]: 'The Photographic Message' (1961), 'The Rhetoric of the Image' (1964) and 'The Third Meaning' (1970). As we have seen when discussing 'Rhetoric of the Image', even with his focus firmly on the cultural aspects of the photograph Barthes' analysis is based on an insistence on the photograph as being a pure analogue. This insistence is most emphatically expressed in *Camera Lucida*, where the stress is on what Barthes calls the 'pure contingency' of the photograph: 'Photography is essentially (a contradiction in terms) only contingency, singularity, risk' (CL 20); 'Since the Photograph is pure contingency and can be nothing else' (CL 28); 'Since every photograph is contingent (and thereby outside of meaning), Photography cannot signify (aim at a generality) except by putting on a mask' (CC: 61); 'the Photograph is indifferent to all intermediaries: it does not invent; it is authentication itself (CL 87).

Thus in Barthes' texts the analysis of the photograph is always based on the notion of an unmediated 'imprint' recording an 'emanation' of the object: 'What I intentionalize in a photograph … is neither Art nor Communication, it is Reference, which is the founding order of photography' (CL 77). However, 'Rhetoric of the Image' also supplies a seminal analysis of the cultural codes that 'obviously … inflect our reading of it': denoted and connoted messages are intertwined, purely denotational syntagm is utopian[7]. In an interview Barthes gave in 1977, only two years before writing *La Chambre Claire*, which he dated '15 April - 3 June 1979' at the end of the text[8], he said the following in distinct contradiction to his position as displayed in *Camera Lucida*:

---

[5] 'The Photograph Unclassifiable' is the title of section 2 of *Camera Lucida*. The book consists of a string of often very short sections, numbered from 1–48, all individually titled. Yet, like endnotes, the titles appear only in the contents pages.
[6] Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath, (Fontana Press: London, 1977).
[7] See Chapter I
[8] CC 184, omitted from the English edition.

On the other hand, the object that is photographed is only seemingly realistic, as this Referent, in reality has been chosen by the photographer. The optical system of the camera, is one system chosen from other possible systems and it is based on the optics of the Renaissance. *All this accounts for ideological choices in view of the represented object.* In short, the photograph can simply never be the mere transcription of the object, that appears realistic, because the image is flat and not three-dimensional[9].

This interview opened with the following question and answer, which summarises Barthes' view of photography, both in his early and his late texts:

> Angelo Schwarz: *It has become customary to define photography as a language. Isn't this in some ways a misleading definition?*
>
> Barthes: To say that photography is a language is wrong and right. It is wrong, in its literal sense, as the photographic image, as analogue reproduction of reality, does not contain any discontinuous element that could be described as *sign*: literally, a photograph features no equivalent of a word or a letter. But it is right regarding its structure and its composition, the style of the photograph functions as a secondary message which informs about the reality and the photographer: that is called *connotation*, and connotation belongs to language. The photograph always connotes something different than what it shows at the level of *denotation*. Paradoxically, it is through style, and only through style that the photograph is a phenomenon of language.[10]

The fact that *Camera Lucida* presents the relationship between *studium* and *punctum* as subject to what Batchen calls the 'political economy [of] their poststructural inseparability'[11] still means that Barthes' analysis of the photograph remains rooted in its categorisation as 'analogon', as defined in 'The Photographic Message', which was published in 1964, the same year as *Elements of Semiology*. In this text, Barthes outlines his view of the photograph, and what Martin Jay described as Barthes' 'discrimination between an

---

[9] Barthes, Schwarz, Mandery, 'Sur la photographie', 1236-37, my translation and emphasis.
[10] Ibid., 1235, my translation.
[11] Batchen, 'Another little history of photography', 268.

analogical, denotative dimension of photography and its connotative, socially constituted overlay'[12] is clearly formulated in the section of the text under the heading 'The Photographic Paradox':

> Certainly the [photographic] image is not the reality but at least it is its perfect *analogon* and it is exactly this analogical perfection which, to common sense, defines the photograph. Thus can be seen the special status of the photographic image: *it is a message without code*; from which proposition an important corollary must immediately be drawn: the photographic message is a continuous message. …
> [A]ll … 'imitative' arts comprise two messages: a *denoted* message, which is the *analogon* itself, and a *connoted* message, which is the manner in which a society … communicates what it thinks of it.[13]

Yet later he goes on to say:

> This purely 'denotative' status of the photograph, the perfection and plenitude of its analogy, in short its 'objectivity', has every chance of being mythical (these are the characteristics that common sense attributes to the photograph). In actual fact, there is a strong probability (and this will be a working hypothesis) that the photographic message too – at least in the press – is connoted … .
> The photographic paradox can then be seen as the co-existence of two messages, the one without a code (the photographic analogue), the other with a code (the 'art' or the treatment, or the 'writing', or the rhetoric of the photograph).[14]

In continuing, 'The Photographic Message' concentrates on the analysis of the cultural codes of connotation, mainly focusing on press photography. In contrast to this, twenty years later in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes shows himself to be so ignorant of cultural codes such as the photographer's choices that result from the pre-photographic set-up and the photographer's editing, that it may well seem to the reader that Barthes has absolutely no awareness of them at all. For now it could be summarised that Barthes' analytical view of the photograph has

---

[12] Martin Jay, 'The Camera as Memento Mori', in *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1994), 442.
[13] Roland Barthes, 'The Photographic Message' in *Image Music Text*, 17.
[14] Ibid., 19.

remained quite rigidly rooted in structuralist semiology – and thus categorisation – throughout the four texts, and that only the focus of his response has changed. To expand this photographic metaphor, in *Camera Lucida*, he focuses on different aspects and correspondingly leaves others out of focus. It seems pertinent here to quote the following passage from *Elements of Semiology*:

> To undertake this [structuralist semiological] research it is necessary frankly to accept from the beginning (and especially at the beginning) a limiting principle. This principle … is the principle of relevance*: it is decided to describe the facts which have been gathered *from one point of view only*, and consequently to keep from the heterogeneous mass of these facts, only the features associated with this point of view, to the exclusion of any others (these features are said to be relevant).[15]

What I want to remind on with this brief summary is, to extend the photographic metaphor further, that whilst in Barthes' writing the paradox of the two aspects of the photograph, 'culturally coded' and 'purely contingent', is prominently 'in the picture', his focus is always on either side of it leaving other areas in the frame yet blurred and out of focus. We know that Barthes has an excellent ability to analyse the manipulating power of cultural codes, yet in *Camera Lucida*, he conspicuously leaves this out of the picture. But even the contradictions are not clear-cut. To say that photography supplies 'a collection of part objects' (CC 54) is in disagreement with the claim that 'the photographic image, as analogue reproduction of reality, does not contain any discontinuous element that could be described as sign'[16], even though both views allow Barthes to perform his insistence on the photograph's contingency. Barthes' writings on photography reflect the paradox of the photograph itself. The Barthes of *Camera Lucida* has ostentatiously decided on a limiting principle of relevance.

---

[15] Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (Hill and Wang: New York, 1984), 95. (First published in French in 1964.)
* footnote: 'Formulated by A. Martinet, Élements…, p. 37 Elements of General Linguistics', 40.
[16] Barthes, Schwarz, Mandery, 'Sur la photographie', 1235, my translation.

Each time I would read something about Photography, I would think of some photograph I loved, and this made me furious. Myself, I saw only the referent, the desired object, the beloved body; but an importunate voice (the voice of **scientia***) then adjured me, in a severe tone: "get back to Photography. What you are seeing here and what makes you suffer belongs to the category 'Amateur Photographs,' dealt with by a team of sociologists; nothing but the trace of a social protocol of integration, intended to reassert the Family, etc." Yet I persisted; another, louder voice urged me to dismiss such sociological commentary; looking at certain photographs, I wanted to be a primitive, without culture. So I went on, not daring to reduce the world's countless photographs, any more than to extend several of mine to Photography: in short, I found myself at an impasse and, so to speak, "scientifically" alone and disarmed.*

3

Then I decided that this disorder and this dilemma, revealed by my desire to write on Photography, corresponded to a discomfort I had suffered from: the uneasiness of being a subject torn between two languages, one expressive, the other critical; and at the heart of this critical language, between several discourses, those of sociology, of semiology, and of psychoanalysis–but that by ultimate dissatisfaction with all of them, I was bearing witness to the only sure thing that was in me (however naïve it might be): a desperate resistance to any reductive system. 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.

(CL 7-8, marking the end of Section 2 'The Photograph Unclassifiable' and the beginning of Section 3, 'Emotion as Departure')

Camera Lucida II: Emotion as Departure

> [M]y phenomenology agreed to compromise with a power, *affect*; affect
> was what I did not want to reduce; being irreducible, it was thereby what
> I wanted, what I ought to reduce the Photograph *to*. (CL 21)

> Such are the two ways of the Photograph. The choice is mine: to subject
> its spectacle to the civilized code of perfect illusions, or to confront in it
> the wakening of intractable reality.
> (CL 119)

These are the words with which Barthes concludes *Camera Lucida*. The
photograph is *spectacle*; what I *confront in it*, the dialectic: nature – culture,
remains poised and the *choice* is mine.
The Barthes of *Camera Lucida* seems to have made his choice, yet close
examination reveals that the text presents some more obvious and some less
easily detectable stumbling blocks that leave the dialectic between perfect
illusion and intractable reality far from resolved – or even decided. Nothing in
Camera Lucida should be taken at face value.
When reading *Camera Lucida* superficially one might be 'blinded' towards
certain inconsistencies in the ostentatious emphasis on the 'pure contingency'
and the 'that-has been', but at its core the book presents what Geoffrey Batchen
poetically calls a 'continuous implosion of binary terms'[17] which, less
sympathetically, could be described as being outright contradictory. The 'pure
contingency' of the 'that-has-been' *is* there but what the other audacious
emphasis of the book – the affective emotional response to the *perceived* that-
has-been – lays bare, is that the power of the real index is in the *fusion* of the *idea*
of material contiguity external to the symbolic – the *knowledge* of how a
photograph is made, which is already nature *and* culture – *plus* what is
supplemented[18] to it through personal *affects of a viewer's Innenwelt* or 'affective
consciousness' (CL 55). This is why *Camera Lucida* is dedicated to Sartre's
L'Imaginaire as '[d]epiction … is for Sartre a matter of animating an analogon, or
representative matter [what we called medium so far], on the basis of our

---

[17] Batchen, *Burning With Desire*, 267.
[18] Batchen remarks that Howard's translation from 'supplément' into 'added' does not
carry the possible reference to Derrida's 'supplement' (*Burning With Desire*, 268).

knowledge and our affective responses'[19]. The power of the real index lies in its *reading*: Barthes' phenomenology of the photograph compromises with the power of *affect*.

This aspect of 'indexicality' in *Camera Lucida* has received additional emphasis by the suggestions of deliberate displacements following Diana Knight and Margaret Olin, which I will pick up on below[20]. When I used the word 'blinded' quite deliberately, I might speak for myself but observing my own response to *Camera Lucida* over time, I feel that the poetic style is responsible for the fact that as reader I was initially lulled into taking more at face value than Barthes may have intended. In my opinion this is one reason why so few commentators have noticed or explored the riddles that, I now have no doubt, were deliberately posed by Barthes. The editorial interventions of the English edition have eliminated the image from the front cover, the Boudinet photograph as a frontispiece, the signature of a writing date at the end of the text ('15 April – 3 June 1979', CC 184), the Zen Buddhist quote on the back cover, and, most incredibly, the margin notes and the bibliography (references to authors have instead been introduced into the text with the loss of specific publication and page references). What all these elements have in common, together with the section titles which are only found at the back of the book, is that they receive no mention whatsoever in the actual text, which must have facilitated the ignorant decision to remove them. However, it is a mutilation of the text that alters its composition as it increases its novelistic character and influences its reception and interpretation.

What the collection of essays of *Photography Degree Zero* shows is that the fragments of heterogeneous methodologies that are composed together in *Camera Lucida* facilitate the fact that different authors will pick up on some selected fragments which become the main focus for their investigation, such as Buddhism or Lacan, or other issues such as history of photography, racism, (anti)theatricality etc. Sartre receives surprisingly little attention despite the prominent dedication to *The Imaginary*. A potential shortfall of any academic response to *Camera Lucida* that concentrates on only one of these aspects or

---

[19] Jonathan Webber, 'Philosophical Introduction', in Jean Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary*, new translation by Jonathan Webber (Routledge: London & New York, 2004) XVII.
[20] In slightly different parameters, this 're-evaluation' of Peircean indexicality is also at the core of Geoffrey Batchen's *Burning with Desire*.

methodologies is that it robs the work of its deliberate composition of diverse fragments, and Victor Burgin suggested long ago that Barthes finds a synthesis of 'radically heterogeneous discourses (for example, psychoanalysis and phenomenology) … not at the level of theory (which would be impossible), but at the level of *literature*'[21].

My own approach will focus on bringing full circle my transposition of the *punctum* based on interpreting it as a pointer to the corpo-real and its resulting link to real indexicality linked to the body. This focus, due to the choice of images Barthes presents and how he responds to these, comes in tandem with a poke into the glimpses of those aspects of his *Innenwelt* that betray his relationship to the imageness of femininity, masculinity and race.

Jacques Rancière claims that '[t]he theory of the *punctum* intends to affirm the resistant singularity of the image. But it ultimately ends up surrendering this specificity by identifying the production and effect of the photographic image with the way in which death or dead people affect us'[22]. Rancière further criticises Barthes for 'produc[ing] a short-circuit between the past of the image and the image of death. Yet this short-circuit erases the characteristic features of the photograph he presents to us, which are features of indeterminancy[23] . Whilst this 'short circuit' cannot be disputed, it is simply the effect of the *punctum*, as its nature is a selective spot focus. The affectual response produces this short-circuit that bypasses – even eradicates – indeterminancy *at that moment*. If I step on a nail that pierces my foot as I enter a greenhouse, at the moment of pain, I will not be able to ponder the plant life. Indeed, this short-circuiting resulting from a 'spot focus' on a *moment* of perception or is the very core strategy of *Camera Lucida*. Since 'affect … is what [Barthes] ought to *reduce* the Photograph *to'* (CL 21, my emphasis), the indeterminancy is left out of focus.
Another criticism of the *punctum* that has been voiced is claiming that as soon as one talks about a *punctum* it becomes *studium*[24]. Whilst some literature on the *punctum* may well deliver it to the 'average affect, almost a certain training' (CL

[21] Burgin, 'Re-reading *Camera Lucida'*, 43.
[22] Rancière, *Emancipated Spectator*, 112.
[23] Ibid., 113.
[24] See '*Camera Lucida*: The Impossible Text' in Graham Allen, *Roland Barthes* (Routledge London & New York, 2003), 125-32, especially 127.

26) of the *studium*, this is the result of a superficial interpretation and application of its 'theory' that forgets that talking *about* the real core of it cannot be more than a beating about the bush: how can the way the death of a loved one *affects me* be a 'surrendering of specificity'? I can tell you that my foot hurts because it was pierced by a nail, you may feel compassion but you will not be able to *feel* my pain. Like pain, an affect can only be reported in language but not reproduced. Affect and pain are always 'resistant singularity'. A reference to an affect or to a pain or the identifying of what *potentially* causes an affect cannot make any reader *suffer* it.
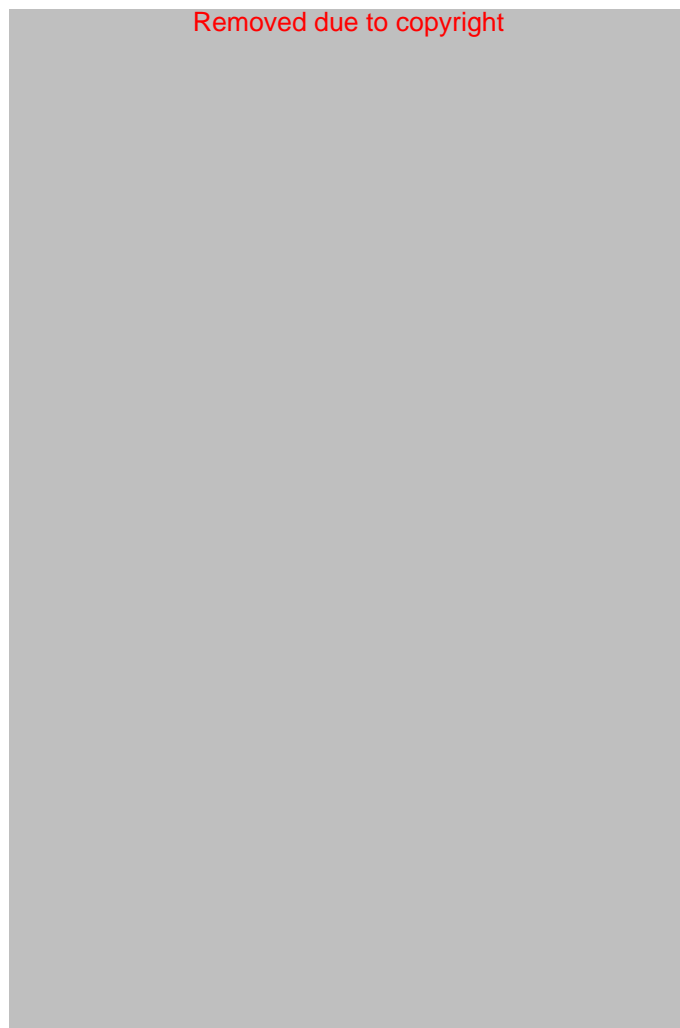
"… the sheet, held by the crying mother
(why this sheet?)…"

Koen Wessing: Nicaragua. Parents discover the cadaver of their child. 1979.

(CC 45[25])

---

[25] All photographs included here from *La Chambre Claire/Camera Lucida* are reproduced with the caption as given by Barthes. As in the rest of this text, where I preferred to provide my own translation I reference *La Chambre Claire* (CC).

Many of the instances of a *punctum* experienced by Barthes can directly be linked to references to (absent) (dead) bodies. Barthes initially introduces the two concepts of *studium* and *punctum* when speaking about two photographs taken by Koen Wessing in war-torn Nicaragua in 1979. One of these shows a group of grieving adults in a ruined urban setting. On the ground in front of them lies a corpse – the child of one of the photographed women. It is covered by a sheet leaving the feet sticking out which indicates that the body underneath must be dead, as a living person's face would not be covered. Barthes introduces the concept of the *studium*, the field of cultural knowledge, which in this case is:

> [R]ebellion, Nicaragua … ruined streets, corpses, grief, the sun … 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 a certain training. (CL 26)

Barthes proceeds to introduce the *punctum* which:

> [W]ill break (or punctuate) the *studium*. This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. (CL 26)

He describes what is the *punctum* for him in the image from Nicaragua:

> Here, on a torn-up street, a child's cadaver under a white sheet; the parents and friends surround it, desperate: a scene unfortunately banal, but I noted certain interferences: the cadaver's one exposed foot, the sheet held by the crying mother (why this sheet?), a woman in the background, a friend no doubt, holding a handkerchief to her nose. (CC 46)

This *punctum* in a photograph is triggered by a seemingly accidental, random detail that a viewer perceives as incongruent to the depicted scene as it is embedded in its *studium*: 'why this sheet?' This type of incongruous detail has been embedded by the arrest of the photographic moment onto the scene and it is the immobility of the still image that '*fills the sight by force*' (CL 91) and allows a viewer to detect, linger and reflect on such details that in the normal flow of time and space are likely to escape conscious notice and be 'overlooked'. Such details are *contrapuntal* to the 'average effect', the anticipated generality of the imageness '(as I *invest* the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness)' (CL 26, my emphasis) and thereby expose the singularity of *this* depicted moment.

Barthes mentions as 'interference' (this is the lead up to introducing the *punctum*) the exposed foot (*pied déchaussé*), the sheet carried by the mother and the handkerchief of the friend. The exposed foot (to me, even more the shoe standing beside it which half covers the ex-posed foot, leaving just a bit of skin visible) is proof of the grotesque force of violence that was inflicted on the – otherwise not visible – body, mercilessly annihilating the person it was[26]. The foot is a fragment and thus a part-object that refers to a whole that is in the picture yet not visible. 'This sheet' also matches the one that covers the corpse – it touches the corpse and she touches this sheet. The handkerchief of the woman in the background is another white piece of cloth, pressed against a body. Victor Burgin has already pointed out the importance of displacement in 'Re-reading *Camera Lucida*'[27] and this kind of displacement – obvious or implied – occurs often and in different ways in the text. In view of Barthes' response to this image, the 'interference' is triggered by objects that, directly or by transference, spark the *idea* of touch with – and thus are perceived as a real index to – a dead invisible body.

---

[26] Such a detail has just the same potential to be a *punctum* when/after encountering a corpse in real life. The German poet Feridun Zaimoglu recalls: 'The first corpse of my life was a revolutionary executed by comrades: he lay on his back in the garden of an old people's home in Ankara. … The shot revolutionary never left my mind. I was awake for hours and began to remember. On his right foot, shoe and sock had slipped off the heel. Why?, I wondered, how could that have happened? Perhaps during his last convulsions? … This image, a retrospectively tinted snapshot from my memory, touched me specifically. I had come too close to the dead man.' ('An einem heissen Sommertag', *Zeit Literatur No 45, Krimi Spezial*, November 2011, 8-15: 9-10)
[27] Burgin, 'Re-reading *Camera Lucida*', 41-42.

What Barthes experiences as a *punctum* is related to a disturbance of the potential for the imageness of generality, that renders an image 'banal'. In the case in question, the detail is a real and a displaced index to a cadaver which is in the image, yet not seen.

What is also important to point out is that Barthes' formulation:

> this time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me (CL 26),

obscures the fact that the occurrence of the *punctum* too must be the result of an investment, resulting from an unconscious recognition – beyond the subject's sovereign consciousness – of a pointer to the real. This investment occurs unconsciously, which leaves it to *appear* as if rising *from* the scene. Whilst 'I invest the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness' (CL 26) the object that becomes the *punctum* is invested by my (Freudian) unconscious.

The strapped pumps

James Van der Zee. Family Portrait. 1926.

(CL 45)

Le *Punctum* : Trait Partiel[28].

Barthes describes another instance of a *punctum* which appears to be a detail in the image triggering personal memories individual to his own history. He experiences this case in relation to a historical portrait of a black American family, showing three adults, taken by James Van Der Zee in 1926. Barthes, eventually – in retrospect when remembering the photograph a good number of pages after initially discussing and reproducing it (after talking about another triple portrait which will be discussed below) – realises that the *punctum* for him is the necklace worn by one of the female family members:

> [T]his photo has worked within me and later on I realised that the real *punctum* was the necklace she [the woman on the right] was wearing; for (no doubt) it was this same necklace (a slender ribbon of braided gold) which I had always seen worn by someone in my own family, and which, once she had disappeared, remained shut away in a box of old family jewellery. (CC 87-88)

Thus this retrospectively realised 'real *punctum*' again refers to an *object* – in this case an object of actual familiarity to Barthes' own life. Remembering his aunt through a necklace he 'had seen worn' by her means to remember her through an *object* that is a real index of an absent body. The necklace was kept in the family box whilst the aunt 'had disappeared'. In times of acute bereavement objects of use belonging to the lost loved one – a real index of the absent body – are often strong triggers of emotion[29]. After a while such objects serve as relics and memorabilia of the departed.

---

[28] This is the French title of section 19, which discusses the photograph as below. The English translation 'Partial Feature' does not carry the reference to Lacan's translation of the Freudian 'Einziger Zug' into 'trait unaire', the English 'unary trait'.

[29] Susan Pearce also points out: 'in a bereavement, grief is the most accurately stirred by the sight of the raincoat the dead person used to wear', Pearce, *Museums*, 23.

Photographer unknown: photograph as reproduced in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, 13.

But there is more at stake in Barthes' presentation of this *punctum* to his readers. In 'Touching Photographs, Roland Barthes's "Mistaken" Identification'[30], Margaret Olin points out what is actually clear to see yet has been surprisingly little remarked on (and what I have myself noticed but ignored until I read Olin), that the woman in the Van Der Zee photograph (no doubt!) wears a pearl necklace, not a 'slender ribbon of braided gold', meaning that Barthes' recognition of this *punctum* in retrospect adds another level of displacement. Following Diana Knight, Olin further refers to a portrait of Barthes' own family of a very similar composition in which said aunt – wearing a prominent necklace – poses in the same place in the image composition as the aunt in Van Der Zee's portrait. This photograph was published in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* in 1975. Olin convincingly argues that the *punctum* felt by Barthes actually relates to *this* portrait, which would also account for the fact that in Van

---

[30] Margaret Olin, 'Touching Photographs, Roland Barthes's "Mistaken" Identification', in Batchen (ed.), *Photography Degree Zero*, 75-89. Cited hereafter as 'Touching Photographs'.

*'What I cannot stop looking at
is the stand behind the woman on the right
holding a strange box.'*

103a

Der Zee's portrait *this* pearl necklace and not its identical counterpart worn by the woman in the centre of the composition has become Barthes' *punctum*[31]. Barthes' account of the black family when initially speaking about the photograph is eye-wateringly condescending:

> The *studium* is clear … it utters respectability, family life, conformism, Sunday best, an effort of social advancement in order to assume White Mans' attributes (an effort touching by reason of its naïveté). The spectacle interests me but it does not prick me. What does, strange to say, is the belt worn low by the sister (or daughter) – by the nurturing negro woman [ô négresse nourricière] – … and above all her *strapped pumps* (Mary Janes–why does this dated fashion touch me?)[32]

Thus, Barthes presents a string of displacements: from the belt to the pumps when initially discussing the photograph, to the pearl necklace that memory replaced with a golden necklace in retrospect. It becomes a *punctum* because the actual object, the 'slender ribbon of braided gold … which, once she had disappeared, remained shut away in a box of old family jewellery' (CC 87-88), was kept and (was possibly still) there now but was also *there-then*. Therefore, via displacement, the real *punctum* is the memory of this actual *object*.

---

[31] The reproductions of this photo and all others in my editions is of low quality, and quite dark and with increased contrast which eliminates a lot of detail (I can barely even make out the 'Mary-Janes'). As a result, both necklaces blend into the womens' bleached skintone, which may even partially account for the usual overlooking of the fact that these are pearls and not braided gold. Looking at a better reproduction, the echoing of the two identical pearl necklaces is as prominent as that of the two similar necklaces in Barthes' family photograph.
Another note on new discoveries in this better reproduction: I was never able to see the the telephone on the right nor the fact that the backdrop ends on the left edge of the image, (which surely was meant to be cropped), thus is shown as artificial. Until I saw the better reproduction I didn't even realise this was a studio portrait. An even more surprising detail betraying the artifice of the studio set-up, which, since I spotted it, I cannot stop looking at ('I stubbornly see', CL 45), is that behind the aunt is a studio stand with a strange box on it that I cannot identify. Is it part of a bracket that helped to hold sitters still in place for the duration of the exposure? Certainly a prop that is incronguent to the presented imageness.
[32] CL 43. This is Howard's translation but I have taken out his 'solacing mammy'. See Carol Mavor, 'Black and Blue: The Shadows of *Camera Lucida*' in Batchen (ed.), *Photography Degree Zero*, 212 and her footnote 5 for more comments on both Barthes and Howard, which strangely do not mention what is my most immediate association with Barthes' expression, which is with a reference to a wet nurse. It should be acknowledged that at the end of the 1970s the words nègre and négresse in French were in common use.

This displaced *punctum*, that is obvious (not) to see yet is posed without any resolve in the text, is part of Barthes' strategy of 'art' as opposed to academic analysis, based on a deliberately unresolved presentation and juxtaposition of fragments of (doubtful) facts without making a fixed meaning explicit in an 'academic' manner, leaving the reader to make sense of it. As Slavoj Žižek reminds us, this is also the strategy of Lacan's *Écrits*[33]. Barthes' prominent reference to the *tuché* has already been mentioned and many more or less direct allusions to Lacan's work are to be found throughout *Camera Lucida*. Barthes has also used this style previously in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. Since this book was very successful, and was only published four years previous to his writing of *Camera Lucida*, he may well have deliberately left it to chance for readers or critics to discover (or not) this second level of displacement, from the Van Der Zee to his own family portrait, and how his reader will interpret this. In fact *Camera Lucida* can easily be regarded as being somewhat sequential to *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. He begins this book with the handwritten words: 'It must all be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel.'[34] Olin makes a distinction between Barthes the author and 'Barthes' the narrator of *Camera Lucida*. No doubt, Barthes must have had an intention when posing such a clear displacement, a *punctum* triggered by a detail that is not to be seen in the image other than by a replaced object.

I will pick up a thought by Shawn Michelle Smith (similarly expressed by Olin), that it is Barthes' racism that facilitates this transference as he 'subsumes [the black people in the photograph] under himself, under his own personal history'[35]: this is responsible for the fact that he 'disregards an African American woman's [and family's] self-representation'[36]. Seen through the lens of his condescending viewpoint, for Barthes, the '*spectacle*' of the 'Sunday best', the appearance that is presented by the three posing people through their clothing does not 'work' by fusing into expected/projected or

---

[33] Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, (Granta Books: London, 2006), 129.
[34] Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux: New York, 1989 [1975]), 1.
[35] Shawn Michelle Smith, 'Race and Reproduction in *Camera Lucida*' in Batchen (ed.), *Photography Degree Zero,* 246.
[36] Ibid., 245.

accepted imageness. For Barthes, it is a masquerade – the objects of clothing that are the 'dated fashion' remain disjointed part-objects that remind him of his own family and thus do not really 'belong' to the people who wear them[37].
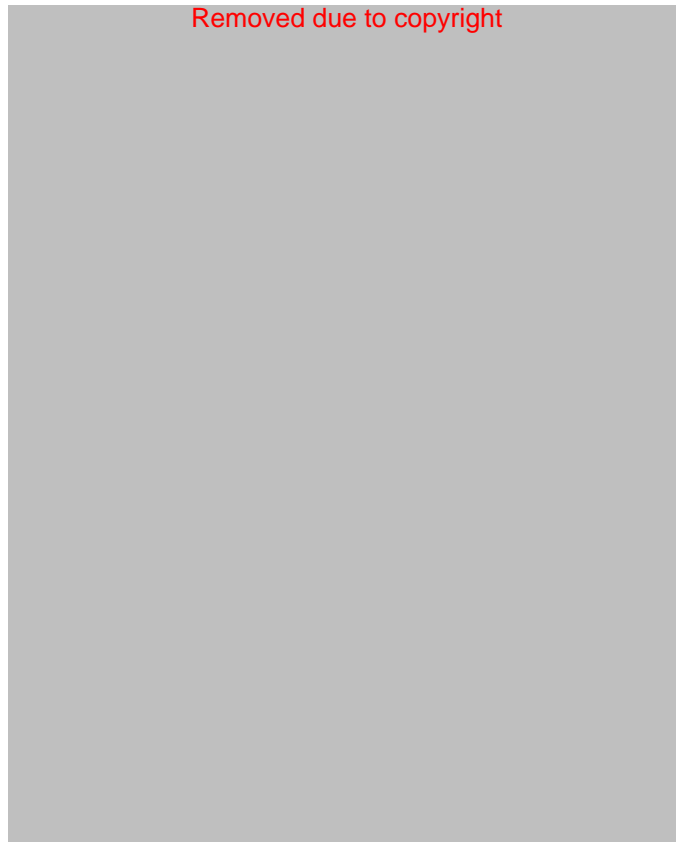
"the mask is meaning,
by way of being absolutely pure…"

R. Avedon: William Casby, born enslaved, 1963

(CC 62)

Shawn Michelle Smith also observes Barthes' racism as being the reason for the fact that, regarding the Richard Avedon portrait of William Casby, Barthes speaks about the 'mask': 'the essence of slavery is here laid bare: the mask is the meaning, insofar as it is absolutely pure' (CL 34). This section begins with the words: 'Since every photograph is contingent (and thereby outside of meaning), photography can not signify (aim at generality) except by putting on a mask'

---

[37] A few more facts should be added to this thought. Looking through a published collection of Van Der Zee's photographs brings to attention that the portrait in question is one of the less theatrical studio stagings. Posing in one's 'Sunday best' or even in a borrowed Sunday best just put on for the occasion of the photograph was part of the democratisation that studio photography delivered to portraiture. A certain 'dressing-up' was part of these occasions regardless of race – which does not change the observation of Barthes' condescending viewpoint.

105

(CC 60-61), by which he means, as I understand it, by (re)producing stereotypical imageness. To this, Smith remarks that 'Barthes collapses William Casby under the sign of slave, seeing in this portrait not a man who must have lived most of his life as an autonomous subject but instead "the essence of slavery laid bare" … the category of the photographed that signifies slave'[38]. As typical for theoreticians, neither Barthes nor Smith stop to consider the way this actual photograph portrays the face of William Casby and how technical and image composition choices on the part of the photographer determine a viewer's perception. To state the obvious, the association with a mask is facilitated by the fact that this is a close-up portrait; we only see the front view of the face not the side or back of the head; the face fills nearly the whole frame in front of a background which presents no environment. The all-sharp close-up view of the face emphasises *surface*[39] almost pornographically: as in the pornographic photograph, the subject is denied self-presentation in the form of a posed imageness of self in favour of a visual close-up fragmentation and fetishisation of body parts. Avedon's choices have produced a photograph that has already transformed Casby into an object. Thus, the way the photograph – that Barthes selected – is taken facilitates the denial of self-presentation and Barthes' association with/projection of the imageness of a mask that corresponds to his imago of slavery.

To me, this is a point in *Camera Lucida* where, to put it mildly, I can the least relate to Barthes' contradictory comments. My own fascination with this image is initially in the chain of real indexicality across time, to the history of slavery of the west. Photographed in 1963 in a modern-day advertising photo studio – a man who was born a slave! That fascinates me in a similar way to the photograph of Constanze Mozart as, in my mind, the history of western slavery seems temporally more remote. Barthes shows exactly this fascination with photographic evidence of slavery when he later discusses an older photograph of a slave market he found as a child in a newspaper (that he discusses from memory as it is lost) [40].

A paragraph away from the proclamation that every photograph is contingent and therefore outside of meaning Barthes continues: 'As in the portrait of

---

[38] Smith, 'Race and Reproduction', 246 + 247.
[39] This emphasis on surface was made into a deliberate strategy in 'art' in the larger than life portraits by Thomas Ruff, which show heads in close up with a deliberately 'bland' expression.
[40] CL 80. See also Smith, 'Race and Reproduction', 247-48.

William Casby, photographed by Avedon: The essence of slavery is here laid bare: the mask is the meaning, insofar as it is absolutely pure (as it was in ancient theatre). This is why the great portrait photographers are great mythologists: Nadar (the French Bourgeoisie), Sander (the Germans of pre-Nazi Germany), Avedon (New York's "upper crust")' (CL 34). At this point any alert reader is left to wonder *when* any one photograph of these 'mythologists' is 'contingent' and 'outside of meaning', as their photographs 'put on a mask' which I understand as (re)producing mythological, fabricated, stereotypical imageness. Again Barthes' insistence on the pure contingency is a utopian reference. Is not this Avedon-style studio set-up potentially one of the 'unary' photographs that Barthes so dislikes as it certainly aims for (stereo)typical imageness and avoids accidents that could become a *punctum*? Whilst this occurs at the expense of Casby's self-representation, what I am given by the photographer, the stare of the sage old eyes – which stare at *me* (what have they seen in their lifetime?) and the detail of the aged wrinkled face, a real index of *this* body that lived a long human life – born a slave or not – to me actually hints at a contingency that manages to transcend the artificial set-up[41]. This aspect of the image results in the fact that I see a body. But because this body is so marked by real traces of life, paradoxically I feel 'led back' to the corpus, the person who is this body, William Casby, whose surface I see in 'enforced' vision.

Barthes has chosen another Avedon portrait for *Camera Lucida*, taken in the same Avedon trademark style (these pictures are the only two of their kind in the book), and again it is a portrait of a black man, Philip Randolph, who in his lifetime was the leader of the American Labor Party. Barthes uses it whilst speaking about the 'air' of people that comes across in certain photographs, and he finds it in this Avedon shot: 'I read an air of goodness (no impulse of power: that is certain)' (CL 110). Barthes' response is certainly again facilitated by what is given by Avedon, as the image does show what I would call a benign facial expression. Did Barthes choose this image because the 'air of goodness' does not correspond to his imago of a powerful famous historical black leader? Is it not very peculiar that Barthes proclaims Avedon's 'mythology' to portray New

---

[41] This contrast between the sterile studio set-up on a white background and the super crisp detail of a sitter's face surface is an ongoing strategy in many of Avedon's portraits.

York's 'upper crust' and presents two images of black men who hardly fall into this category?
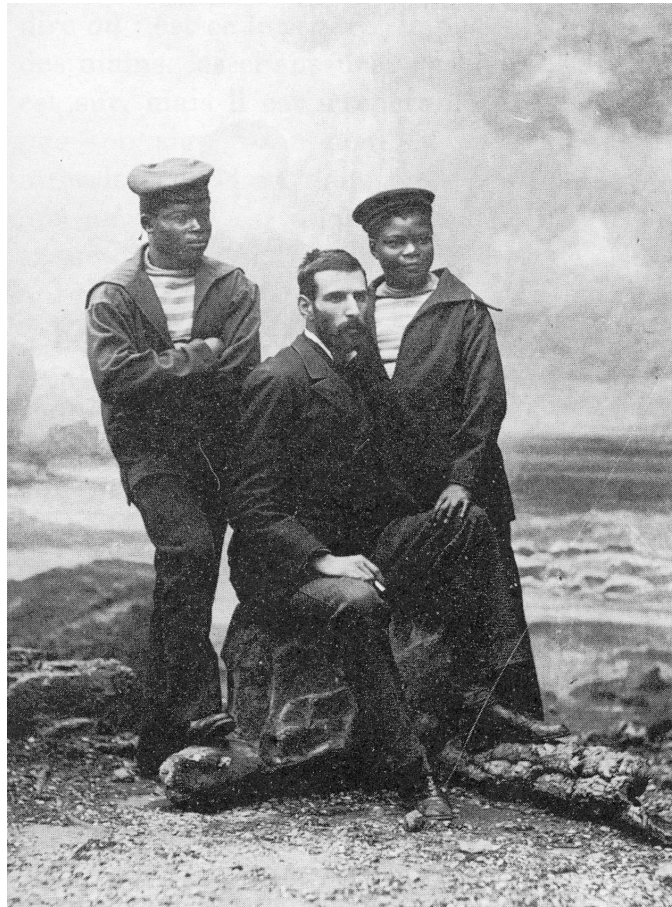
"The punctum for me is the crossed arms of the second boy."

Nadar: Savorgnan de Brazza, 1882.

(CC 85)

In contrast to these two images, which Barthes describes but in which he does not find a *punctum*, he does experience a *punctum* in another image showing the French Italian colonial explorer Savorgnan de Brazza:

> between two young negroes dressed in matelots; one of the ship's boys, bizarrely, has placed his hand [á posé sa main] on Brazza's thigh; this incongruous gesture has everything to arrest my gaze, to constitute a *punctum*. However, it is not a *punctum* for, whether I want or not, I immediately code the posture as "quirky" (the *punctum* for me are the crossed arms of the second boy) (CC 84).

What is of paramount interest to note, firstly, is that Barthes here acknowledges that a detail that is *'incongruous'* to the imageness that he expects has the *potential* to constitute a *punctum*. Here Barthes clearly himself acknowledges a structure to the *punctum*.

That Barthes finds this gesture of familiarity between the black boy and the white colonialist 'bizarre' and 'incongruous' is certainly due to the fact that the different social status between a black ship's boy and a white colonialist in those times usually would forbid such a tender gesture of closeness. Brazza was known for his enigmatic personality in tandem with his extremely good looks (as evident in many other photographs in existence), which would not have been unnoticed by Barthes. The gesture – physical contact between the two male bodies that would probably also be noticed as unusual or tendentiously homoerotic if the boy were white – also is a direct reference to the two bodies. However, Barthes can 'immediately code' this gesture as 'quirky', delivering it from becoming a *punctum*, which he finds instead in the crossed arms of the second boy. This also implies an aspect of temporality for the *punctum*. 'Coding' the detail means bringing to consciousness what is unconsciously perceived as 'incongruous' about it and this means that there is a time before and after the coding. The crossed arms remain a *punctum* as they do not get 'coded'. Crossed arms are a well-known gesture of defensiveness and in this case, to me, the boy's posture becomes a pose that declares a certain self confidence and pride; thus this is a gesture that lacks the expected servility of a (black) ship's boy and is therefore 'incongruous' to the imageness Barthes expected. Is the fact that the gesture is posed 'behind the back' of the white man, thus potentially lacking the approval that must be taken as granted for the touching of his thigh, the reason that Barthes is unable to 'code' this pose as 'quirky'?

Barthes here presents an obviously fragile line between being able to 'code' a detail and thus deliver it from being a *punctum* and its being? remaining? occurring as? a (moment of?) a *punctum*. Barthes simply states (in brackets) what is his *punctum* and then swiftly moves on with the text to say 'What I can name cannot really prick me. The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance' (CL 51). This swift moving on after referring to the *punctum* is an ongoing strategy or one could say a performance of *not* examining: 'the *punctum* could accommodate a certain latency (but never any examination' (CC 88). Would a pause and a rethink and an attempt to name the motives behind his own thinking eliminate the *punctum* for Barthes? Here it becomes evident that

the occurrence of a *punctum effect* is a *moment* of disturbance that may or may not get 'coded' and thus resolved.

Regardless of race, simply by way of the power relationship between the three, both gestures actually are remarkable for such a photograph of that period as ship's boys are amongst the lowest ranks in a marine hierarchy. Yet Barthes' response is again marked by a distinct display of total ignorance of any consideration of the photographer's intention and the pre-photographic set-up. Is it not most likely that Brazza was keen to present himself as close friend of these self-confident looking Africans? Whilst the image title 'Savorgnan de Brazza' relegates the two Africans to being secondary 'props', it is also conceivable that in the situation as it was, the two boys themselves liked to present themselves as friends of Brazza, as he was not wholly unpopular in his lifetime. There was little accident in sitters' poses in Nadar's time of few and long exposures.

Removed due to copyright

'Pierre Savorgnan Brazza, Original caption: Pierre Savorgnan Brazza (1852-1905), French sailor and explorer of the Congo with two sailors. Undated photo by Nadar.'

Image and caption from the photo library CORBIS

111a
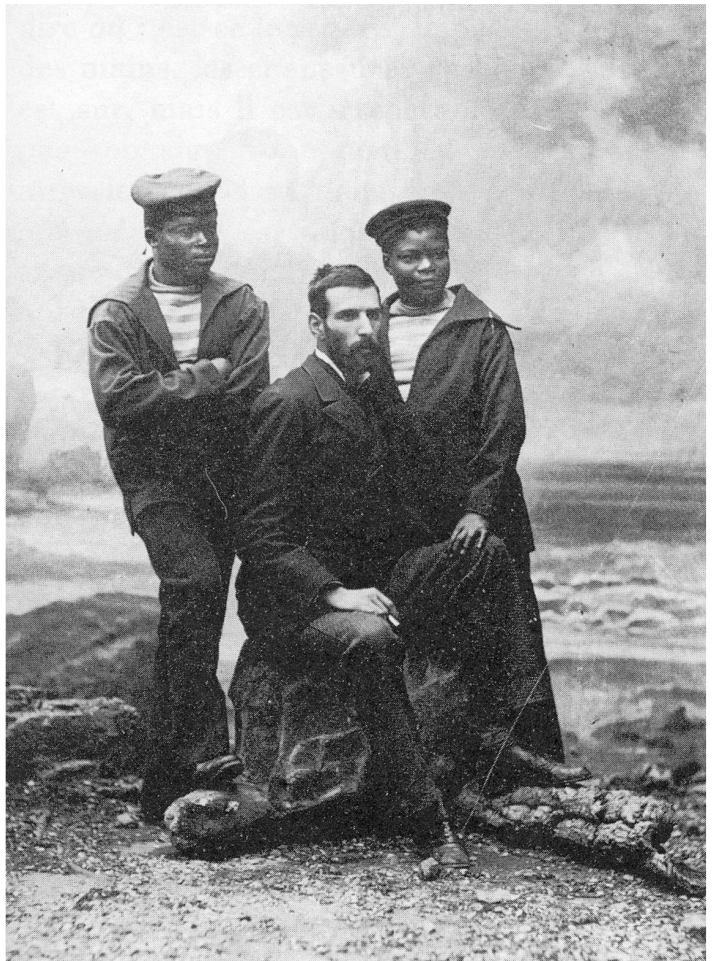
There exists a second photograph of the three obviously taken at the same *session* which shows a slightly different, yet equally friendly and familiar pose between Brazza and the boy on the right, whereas the boy on the left poses with the same crossed arms (page 110). To see this alternative pose clearly demonstrates the contrived nature of the set-up (where is the pure contingency here?). Even without knowing of this alternative image and regardless of the degree of control of the black boys over their part of the image, considering Barthes' analyses in *Mythologies*[42], what is bizarre are not the 'incongruous' gestures but the fact that, as in regard to the Avedon images, Barthes shows himself ignorant of the obviously contrived ideological intentions encoded in the photograph by the photographer, who in this case most likely works under the instructions of (one of) his subject(s) who wants to record this pose of a particular imageness of himself.

One last remark on this photo, and maybe a supplementary reason for the fact that the *punctum* of the crossed arms could not be coded as quirky: it is immediately after his treatment of the Nadar/Brazza image that Barthes 'remembers' what the real *punctum* is for him in the Van Der Zee portrait – both images showing a group of three sitters. The young black boy with his self-confident pose, expressed through his crossed arms that become Barthes' *punctum*, is in the same position relative to the other sitters as the older black man in Van Der Zee's portrait who gets no mention whatsoever from Barthes but is totally subsumed under Barthes' observation of the maternal female. I would describe his pose as similarly 'benign' to the pose of Philip Randolph ('No impulse of power: *that is certain*' (CL 108)). In the Barthes family portrait which seems to be the source of the *punctum* that is the displaced necklace, the same position is also held by the male paternal figure. Is it this contrast between the imageness of the boy and that of two paternal family men that caused the *punctum*? I imagine what the Van Der Zee portrait would look like if the man had posed with his arms crossed in front of his chest, staring into the distance – or indeed how the Nadar portrait would change if the boy had posed in a similar fashion to the man in Van Der Zee's image.

---

[42] See 'Myth Today' in Barthes, *Mythologies* (Vintage Books: London, 2009 [1957]) 131-87.

Removed due to copyright

*"The photographer teaches me
how the Russians dress:
I note a boy's big cloth cap,
another's necktie,
an old woman's scarf around her head,
a youth's haircut…"*

William Klein: May Day in Moscow, 1959

(CL 29)

We have already noted the significance that items of clothing in photographs play for Barthes in the Van Der Zee and in his own family photograph. Clothes are a crucial element of a person's imageness and, through direct touch, hold a relationship of the real index to a person's body. Objects of clothing are mentioned several more times by Barthes, not always but often as details that become his *punctum*. For example in the picture by William Klein, taken in Moscow in 1959 Barthes observes that the image for him:

> 'yields up those "details" … William Klein … teaches me how Russians dress … I *note* a boy's big cloth cap, another's necktie, an old woman's scarf around her head[43], a youth's haircut … [Photography] allows me to accede to an infra knowledge; *it supplies me with a collection of part-objects*' (CC 52-54, my emphasis).

---

[43] [No mention of the strange mean expression of 'la vieille'.]

112

*"I dismiss all knowledge,
all culture … I see only
the lad's huge Danton Collar,
the girl's finger bandage… "*

Lewis Hine: Retarded Children in an institution, New Jersey, 1924.

(CC 83)

Another item of clothing becomes such a part object for Barthes in a photograph by Lewis Hine showing 'two retarded children at an institution in … 1924' (CL 51). Barthes sees 'only the lad's huge Danton collar, the girl's finger bandage; I am a primitive, a child – or a maniac; I dismiss all knowledge, all culture. I abstain from inheriting anything from another gaze than my own (CC 82)'[44].

---

[44] Earlier, in section 2, Barthes proclaimed that 'looking at certain photographs, I wanted to be a primitive, without culture' (CL 7). Remembering that the book is dedicated to Sartre's *Imaginary*, this must be seen as a (blatantly failing) attempt to submit himself to an epoché-like experience, in which 'bracketing' aims to exclude knowledge and assumption. However – and this is a hypothetical thought game – if all knowledge and culture were dismissed (and the ability to read a photographic image would remain) there would be no *studium* and hence no *punctum* could occur. (Husserl/Sartre's) epoché would mean the loss of all *studium.* This would mean the loss of the anticipation that is part of all imageness and 'makes sense' of the visual. Again, this would make it impossible for a *punctum* to appear as it pierces sense and wholeness which the epoché would have annihilated – leaving *everything* 'at the point where things have no meaning – or do not yet have meaning – but appear all the same' (Baudrillard, *Art and Artefact*, 39). Instead, as Rancière criticises, Barthes' affectual reaction is a 'short circuit' that eliminates the context that is Hine's focus on people at the fringes of American society (Rancière, *Emancipated Spectator*, 111).

Again, here due to Barthes' condescending viewpoint towards the 'retarded' (débile), in another instance of a denial of self-representation, the piece of clothing is disjointed from the imageness of which it is usually expected to be part. It does not 'work'; it does not integrate and become a (transparent) part of the boy's imageness but remains a disjointed part-object – that touches the boy's body. The bandage on the girl's finger hides a wound, and thus is a direct reference to the real body of the girl. (Both the collar and the bandage also refer to the absent carers: someone must have *put on* this collar, someone must have *put* the bandage on this finger – what was the accident that caused the wound?) In 'The Pensive Image' Rancière also identifies the two details as corresponding to the Lacanian notion of the part object[45] and further he makes a link with the fact that Danton is a person who was decapitated: 'The *punctum* of the image is in fact the death evoked by the proper noun Danton'[46]. To this could be added that the bandage too could be linked to decapitation: apart from hiding an actual wound (a cut?), the expression 'la poupée au doigt' (CC 82) (rhymes with 'coupée') refers to a finger doll – a head stuck on a finger. Emphasised through the way Hine composed the children in the photograph, their heads are the real extraordinary subjects of this image: through their physiognomy and difference in size they are the markers of the real that is the children's physical corpo-real otherness. Both their heads seem *disjointed* with the bodies. Barthes becomes a 'primitive, a child – or a maniac' (CC 82) when looking at two retarded children and develops 'an eye that thinks' when looking at a blind person. It appears that the imageness of corporeal otherness in a photograph imposes itself on Barthes' affectual responses.

There is another instance – though not described as a *punctum* – where Barthes explicitly expresses a perceived disjuncture between fashion and the person wearing it:

> [H]ere around 1913, is my mother all dressed-up [en grand toilette de ville] – hat, feathers, gloves, delicate linen at wrists and throat, her "chic" belied by the sweetness and simplicity of her expression. … [M]y attention is distracted from her by accessories which have perished;

See also Burgin, 'Re-reading *Camera Lucida*', 37.
[45] Rancière, *Emancipated Spectator*, 111.
[46] Ibid, 112.

for clothing is perishable, it makes a second tomb [tombeau] for the
beloved being. (CC 101)

Here the imageness of a 'chic' young woman does not correspond to his own
imago of the 'sweetness' of his mother: Barthes' attention is *distracted by
accessories*. Again, for Barthes items of clothing appear 'put on', do not 'gel' into
the transparency of the wearer's imageness: 'There is a kind of stupefaction in
seeing a familiar being dressed *differently*' (CL 64) – there is stupefaction in
seeing a familiar being present a different imageness.
Barthes is clearly affected by female imageness and objects and clothes that
refer to it and his knowledge of Lacan means that Barthes must be familiar with
Lacan's thoughts on female mimicry. Whilst Barthes does not describe these as
instances of feeling a *punctum* he returns to memory through seeing *objects* of
use that also belonged to his dead mother *in a photograph*:

> In order to "find" my mother, fugitively alas, and without ever being
> able to hold on to this resurrection for long, I must, much later, discover
> in several photographs the objects she kept on her dressing table, an
> ivory powder box (I loved the sound of its lid), a cut-crystal flagon, or
> else a low chair which is now near my own bed, or again the raffia panels
> she arranged above the divan, the large bags she loved (whose com-
> fortable shapes belied the bourgeois notion of the "handbag"). (CL 64)

The handbag is a paradigmatic accessory of female fashion and Barthes likes
the fact that his mother uses bags that de-base (*demonter*) this imageness.
Barthes seems to be a gay man who does not share the adoration of 'camp',
over-the-top female imageness that is part of much of gay culture and which is
perpetuated and celebrated by a plethora of gay fashion designers such as Jean
Paul Gaultier – who introduced his perfume *Femme* by explaining that he
created it so it would have the scent he experienced as a child, of his
grandmother's powder.

"Queen Victoria, entirely unesthetic..."
(Virginia Woolf)

G. W. Wilson: Queen Victoria. 1863

(CL 56)

Another treatment of female imageness and related objects of clothing is to be found in Barthes' reflections on a photograph of Queen Victoria:

> Here is Queen Victoria photographed (in 1863) … she is on a horse and, dignified, her skirt covers its back. … beside her, attracting my gaze, a kilted groom holds the horse's bridle: this is the *punctum* … I can see his function clearly: to guard the horse's tame behaviour: what if the horse suddenly began to rear? What would happen to the Queen's skirt, *i.e.*, to *her majesty*? (CC 91)

Victoria poses as Queen and part of the female majestic imageness is her equestrian position on the animal and the skirt covering its back. Barthes does not 'subscribe' to her presented female imageness, he finds it '*entirely*

116

unesthetic'[47]. The kilted groom becomes Barthes' *punctum* because his 'function' is to uphold the artifice of her imageness that, without him, would simply collapse: the skirt *is* her majesty – a man is needed to keep it in place. Returning to the theme of displacement, I cannot help to note that this man who *attracts* Barthes' gaze wears a 'skirt' himself as he upholds the queen's pose in what is a typically phallic male position. Equally, what is on most people's mind immediately when seeing a man in a kilt is that it should be worn without underwear, thus this attractive looking man should be naked underneath his kilt.

Regarding the two 'skirts', what springs to my mind is Lacan's interpretation of female mimicry, this double deception that is a masquerade that pretends to hide a mystery – which does not exist: Queen Victoria's skirt is such a mimicry that hides that there is no penis/phallus to hide, whereas the groom's kilt hides a real penis[48].

Sure enough, Barthes proceeds directly from this photograph to outline, whilst discussing a self-portrait of the young Robert Mapplethorpe (page 119), that for him the erotic (as opposed to the pornographic) photograph, that is suggestive but 'does not make the sexual organs into a central object; it may well not show them at all' (CL 59), introduces a 'blind field' into the image: something that is not seen, which 'takes the spectator outside its frame, and it is here that I animate this photograph and that it animates me' (CL 59). Therefore, the 'erotic' (that is seeing the image of a person that the viewer finds sexually attractive) has its own strong contrapuntal potential – because it is an affectual reaction to the visual representation of a body/corpus, which has its own specific nature-culture tension[49].

---

[47] This is one of the captions (as reproduced here with the photograph) that Barthes places without any further mention in the text.
[48] See: Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, 114-16 for a summary on mimicry, redoubled deception and appearance in Lacan.
[49] See Jane Gallop, 'The Pleasure of the Phototext' in Batchen (ed.), *Photography Degree Zero*, 47-56: 'For Barthes, pornography is pure *studium* whereas the erotic occurs when there is a *punctum*', 51.

*"… the hand at
the right degree of openness,
the right density of abandonment …"*

Robert Mapplethorpe: Young Man with arm extended

(CL 58)

With the Mapplethorpe photograph Barthes chose an image in which the careful composition and crop make this tease into the deliberate main subject. In contrast, other instances in *Camera Lucida* only suggest that the erotic – finding the subject of an image sexually attractive – is at the base of Barthes' response to images by way of being more incidental, not anticipated or even 'inappropriate' to the *studium*, as in the image of Brazza, the kilted groom, and, still to come, the young Lewis Payne.

This penultimate section of the first part of *Camera Lucida* actually comes close to Barthes' identifying what could be called a general aspect of the *punctum*: 'Last thing on the *punctum*: … the *punctum,* then, is a kind of subtle *beyond* – as if the image launched desire *beyond what it permits us to see'* (CL 59, my emphasis) – or beyond the imageness the photograph presents and we *anticipate* seeing.

The *punctum* is triggered by involuntary *association* (sometimes via displacement) or by what could be called an involuntary cathexis that is

118

projected (besetzt) onto the detail, which becomes a fragment or part-object by way of being *isolated* by thought. Remembering an aunt's necklace is not dependent on seeing one exactly alike, but can be triggered by association by way of similarity, which could be of subject matter or image composition. In all cases, either by perceived direct contiguity or by metonymical displacement, this 'subtle beyond' refers to the absolute singularity of a body that exists or existed external to the trace left within the photograph's frame and of whose existence the photographic image is *thought to hold* a real trace. The *punctum* may be a detail *in* the image but it refers to what is *not* seen in the image, or better *who* is not seen in the image – even if the imageness of his or her corpus may be visible as perfect realistic icon. The *punctum* is a 'trait partiel' or an 'objet partiel'[50]. The detail's partial feature betrays the imageness that the photograph shows to be an incomplete, non-whole and dead fragment of a real trace that, without subjective identification and investment, is nothing but code without a message – which leaves a lot to be desired.

●●●

[50] To entitle this section 'Trait Partiel' and to begin it with 'Very often the *punctum* is a "detail", that is to say a part-object' (CC 73) is a typical strategy of *Camera Lucida* as Barthes clearly refers to psychoanalytical methodology but at the same time avoids engaging it fully. The part-object in Lacan is not simply a part of a whole (as it is defined by Klein). For a brief summary see the entry: 'part-object (*objet partiel*)' in Evans, *Dictionary*, 134-35).
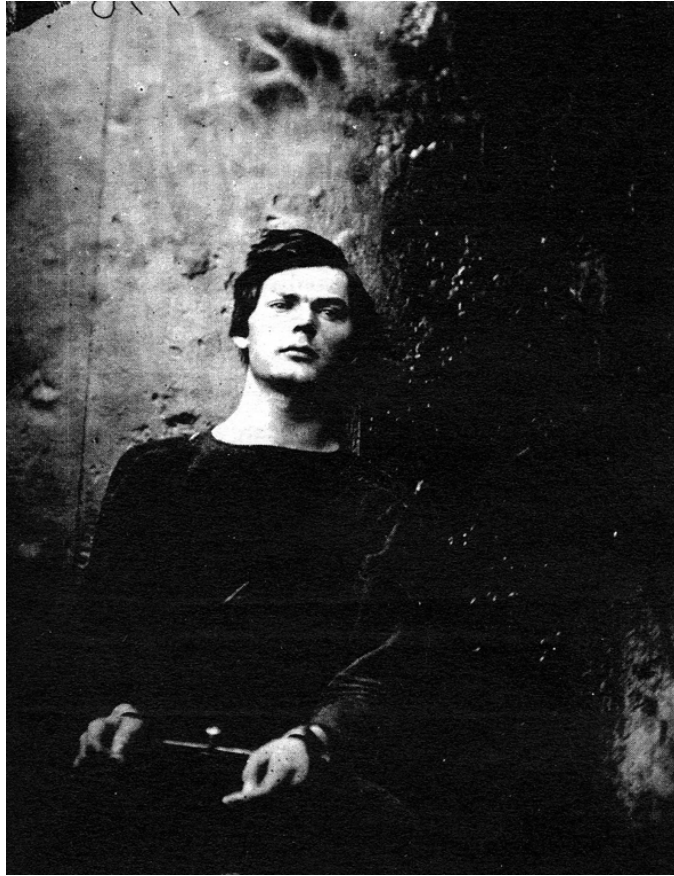
"He is dead and he is going to die."

Alexander Gardner: Portrait of Lewis Payne. 1865.

(CC 149)

Camera Lucida is divided into two parts and in the second part Barthes proceeds to describe what we have already touched on via the photograph of Dauthendy and his bride, which Barthes calls 'another *punctum* … than the "detail" … which … is Time' (CL 96). Barthes introduces this while discussing the photograph of the imprisoned Lewis Payne, taken in 1865, whilst 'waiting to be hanged' (CL 96) for the attempted assassination of Secretary of State W.H. Seward:

> The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the *studium*. But the *punctum* is: He *is going to die*. I read at the same time: *This will be and this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. What *pricks* me is the discovery of this equivalence. In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder … *over a catastrophe which has already*

120

occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe. (CL 96)

As Barthes informs his readers, he has written *Camera Lucida* shortly after his mother's illness and death (and we know that he himself died only three years after his mother). A trigger for the development of the new, different *punctum* is Barthes' 'finding' of a photograph showing his mother aged five together with her brother, then aged seven, which he describes as follows:

> The photograph was very old. Mounted, the corners blunt, of a pale sepia tone, it just managed to show [elle montrait à peine] two young children standing together at the end of a little wooden bridge in a Winter Garden that was a glassed-in conservatory. My mother was five at the time (1898), her brother seven. He was leaning against the bridge railing, along which he had extended one arm; she, further back, shorter than he, facing the camera; one could feel that the photographer had said "step forward a little, so one can see you"; she had joined her hands by holding one finger in the other hand, as children often do, in an awkward gesture. The brother and sister, united as I knew, by the discord of their parents, who were soon to divorce, had posed side by side, alone, in the foliage of the palms of the conservatory (it was the house where my mother was born in Chennevières-sur-Marne). (CC 106)

This 'Winter Garden Photograph' becomes the central image of *Camera Lucida* yet it is not reproduced in the book, as Barthes explains to his readers: 'it would only interest your *studium*: period, clothes, photography; but in it for you, no wound' (CL 73). For Barthes, this photograph was unlike many others he had of his mother which 'were merely analogical, provoking only her identity, not her truth; but the Winter Garden Photograph was indeed essential, it achieved for me, utopically, *the impossible science of the unique being*' (CL 71).

The Stock

Author's [Barthes'] Collection

(CL 104)

Following a suggestion by Diana Knight[51], Margaret Olin[52] continues the argument that the Winter Garden Photograph could well not exist at all, but that the image captioned: 'La Souche' / 'The Stock', reproduced towards the end of the second part of the book, is the 'real' Winter Garden Photograph. Unlike almost all other photographs in the book, where in each case Barthes usually adds a response to the image in quotation marks, this photograph is simply *titled* 'The Stock'. In fact, this exceptional caption links the image to the Van Der Zee portrait – the other image subject to transference and misattribution – as this too has such a title caption: 'The Strapped Pumps' (CL

---

[51] Diana Knight, *Barthes and Utopia: Space, Travel, Writing* (Clarendon Press: London, 1997), 265-66. Also: 'Roland Barthes, or The Woman Without a Shadow' in Jean Michel Rabaté, *Writing the Image After Roland Barthes* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 1997),132-143, 138.

[52] Olin, 'Touching Photographs', 75-89.

122

44). The two photographs are also similar in that they both show a family portrait of three people. Therefore these two photographs (together with two others[53]) receive a distinctly different treatment to all others from Barthes. Surely Barthes the semiologist, whose texts interrogate the relationship between text and image, must have had an intention when he stamped these images with a title rather than juxtaposing the emotional voice of personal response. Even though the metaphorical titles, 'The Strapped Pumps' and 'The Stock', are obviously based on a personal response as well, the different treatment nevertheless *subsumes* the photographs into the author's projective discourse and through this Barthes marked these images as different from all others used.

The only direct reference to 'The Stock' in the text is in the lines: '[W]hat relation can there be between my mother and her ancestor, so formidable, so monumental, so Hugolian, so much the incarnation of the inhuman distance of the Stock?' (CL 105) Without Barthes actually confirming this, the flow of the narration certainly suggests that we should think of the boy in the picture as her brother and the man as their grandfather. James Elkins is of the opinion that Barthes' posthumously published *Mourning Diary*[54] proves that the Winter Garden Photo does exist, as he describes the moment of finding it[55]. This means to accept that the author of these diaries is Barthes and not 'Barthes', meaning is less 'novelistic'? In my view, Barthes must have expected or at least gambled on the fact that these diaries would eventually be published. In any case, it remains a fact, created by Barthes, that in the midst of a part of the book whose centre is the absent Winter Garden Photograph, the viewer is confronted with 'The Stock', showing his mother and brother at a similar age, posing almost exactly as described, but without mentioning the similarity, not comparing the two, not mentioning why the reproduced photograph should be one of the type that is 'merely analogical, provoking only her identity, not her truth' (CL 71). Diana Knight suggests a likeness to Edgar Alan Poe's 'Purloined Letter', which is

---

[53] There are two other images that have titles, and these are the only images in the book that do not show any people: Niépce's 'The Dinner Table', (1823) captioned 'The First Photograph' (CL 86), shows only (posed) objects – layed out by, and for, an absent person. Similarly, the frontispiece is titled 'Polaroid' and again features a strong sense of absent people.

[54] Roland Barthes, *Mourning Diary*, translated by Richard Howard (Hill & Wang: New York, 2010).

[55] Elkins, *What Photography Is*, 7.

obvious to see yet gets overlooked[56], and it could be added that this applies to the necklaces as well, and that Lacan has discussed the Poe story in a seminar which was published as the opening text of *Écrits*, where Lacan's treatment emphasises that the object must be overlooked in order to preserve the rules of the symbolic.

This does not necessarily have to mean that the Winter Garden Photograph does not exist. Knight contends that it is invented, Olin suggests that this actually does not matter; I think what matters is that Barthes has intentionally given his readers the option to question its material existence. Once more, he repeats a game of displacement extended to his reader whom he leaves to discover and interpret this. Even just being left to wonder if that photograph exists materially[57], or only in Barthes' mind, certainly impacts on a reading of the remaining text, particularly in the short section 30, entitled 'Ariadne', here quoted in full:

> *30*
>
> *Something like an essence of the Photograph floated in this particular picture. I therefore decided to "derive" all Photography (its "nature") from the only photograph which assuredly existed for me, and to take it somehow as a guide for my last investigation. All the world's photographs formed a Labyrinth. I knew that at the center of this Labyrinth I would find nothing but this sole picture, fulfilling Nietzsche's prophecy: "A labyrinthine man never seeks the truth, only his Ariadne." The Winter Garden Photograph was my Ariadne, not because it would help me discover a secret thing (monster or treasure), but because it would tell me what constituted that thread which drew me towards Photography. I had understood that henceforth I must interrogate the evidence of Photography, not from the viewpoint of pleasure, but in relation to what we romantically call love and death.*
>
> *(I cannot show the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the "ordinary"; it cannot in any way constitute the*

---

[56] Knight, *Barthes and Utopia*, 266.
[57] It is also worth noting that the Winter Garden Photograph is the only *photographic print* that receives a short yet somewhat poetical description of its materiality: 'The photograph was very old. Mounted, the corners blunt, of a pale sepia tone, it just managed to show two young children together' (CC 106). Barthes compensates with a verbal description of the material carrier for the absence of 'what the photograph just manages to show'.

visible object of a science; it cannot establish an objectivity, in the
positive sense of the term; at most it would interest your studium: period,
clothes, photogeny; but in it for you, no wound.)[58]

Regardless of whether it exists materially or not ('I *cannot show* the Winter
Garden Photograph. *It exists only for me … it cannot* in any way constitute the
visible object of a science'), the fact that here are posing Barthes' mother and
brother at a similar age as described at length for the said image, together with
the different treatment through the title, certainly must make this photograph
of outstanding importance for the flow of the book. Barthes shows us a
photograph in which the light and airy winter garden – a *chambre claire / camera
lucida* – is replaced by the towering father figure on whom the two children are
literally leaning. The section to which the image is juxtaposed is entitled
'Lineage'. It contains quotes from two different Proust biographies that both
investigate autobiographical truths in Proust's writing[59]. 'La Souche' translates
as 'ancestry' or 'lineage'[60]:

> The Photograph gives a little truth by way of its quality to fragment the
> body [á condition de morceler le corps; 'morceler' = to divide, to
> fragment, to segment; 'corps', like body, is the word for both body and
> corpse]. But this truth is not that of the individual, who remains
> irreducible; it is the truth of lineage (CC 161). The Photograph is like old
> age: even if splendorous, it 'defleshes' the face [elle décharne le visage],
> manifests its genetic essence. (CC 162)

Here again, Barthes clearly finds pointers to the matter-reality of the body in the
photograph as it 'sometimes makes appear what we never see in a real face … a
genetic feature, the fragment of oneself or of a relative which comes from some
ancestor' (CL 103). By 'defleshing' the face the photograph leads the corpus
Barthes seeks back to the body he sees (CL 4) or in other words, the anticipatory
imageness of the corpus is pierced by a reference to the matter-reality of the

---

[58] CL 73. I have only changed: 'I cannot reproduce' to 'I cannot show' from 'montrer'.
[59] G. D. Painter, *Marcel Proust, A Biography* and Leon-Pierre Quint, *Marcel Proust: His
Life and Work*.
[60] Barthes uses the word 'Le Lignage' as the title for this section and captions the image
as 'La Souche'.

body. (The thought of) genetic lineage is also a real index of the body to the past.

Above, I have deliberately stated that Barthes replaces the winter garden with the towering figure of the grandfather, but, should the Winter Garden Photograph really not exist, this replacement would of course have happened the other way round. Since Barthes made himself 'the measure of photographic "knowledge"' (CL 9), his subjectivity is the main theme of *Camera Lucida*. His relationship to the maternal and the paternal is an obvious part of this. When describing the Winter Garden Photograph, Barthes tells the reader that the children are *alone* as their parents are soon to divorce. 'La Souche' and 'The Stock' also translates as 'tree *stump'*, a remnant, a trace of a tree that no longer stands. Divorce at the beginning of the last century would not have been common and probably created a difficult social reality for the woman and her children – a certain desertion by the father. Barthes' own father, as we are told in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, 'died very early (in the war)' and 'was lodged in no memorial and sacrificial discourse. By *maternal intermediary* his *memory* – never an oppressive one – merely touched the surface of childhood with an almost silent bounty'[61]. And when he asks 'what relation can there be between my mother and her ancestor, so formidable, so monumental, so Hugolian, so much the incarnation of the inhuman distance of the Stock?' (CL 105) it will not seem far fetched to suggest that he feels that same distance from this *male ancestor*, from this *'incarnation of the inhuman* distance of the Stock', to himself.

Again it does not matter whether the Winter Garden Photograph materially exists or not, as the fact remains that when encountering 'The Stock', the similarity of the children's pose within the flow of Barthes' narration insinuates a swap between the father figure and the palms of the bright and airy winter garden of the house where his mother was born – a *chambre claire*[62] – thus replacing a phallic paternal figure with a womb-like maternal space[63].

The short section that immediately follows 'Lineage' is called 'La Chambre Claire', and thus, carrying the title of the book, the section must be seen as specially highlighted. In it we read that:

---

[61] Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, (Farrar, Straus & Giroux: New York, 1989 [1975]), 15, my emphasis.
[62] Knight, *Barthes and Utopia*, 266.
[63] Olin calls it a 'nurturing Winter Garden', 'Touching Photographs', 82.

126

127a
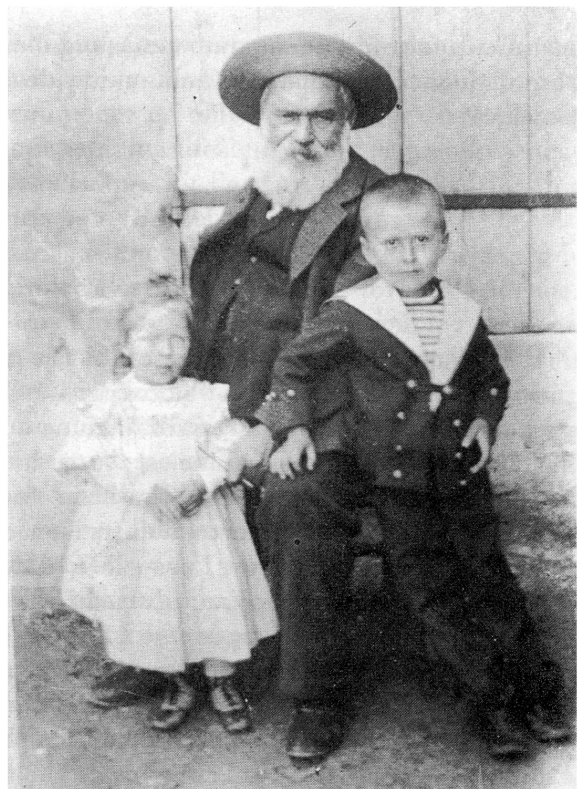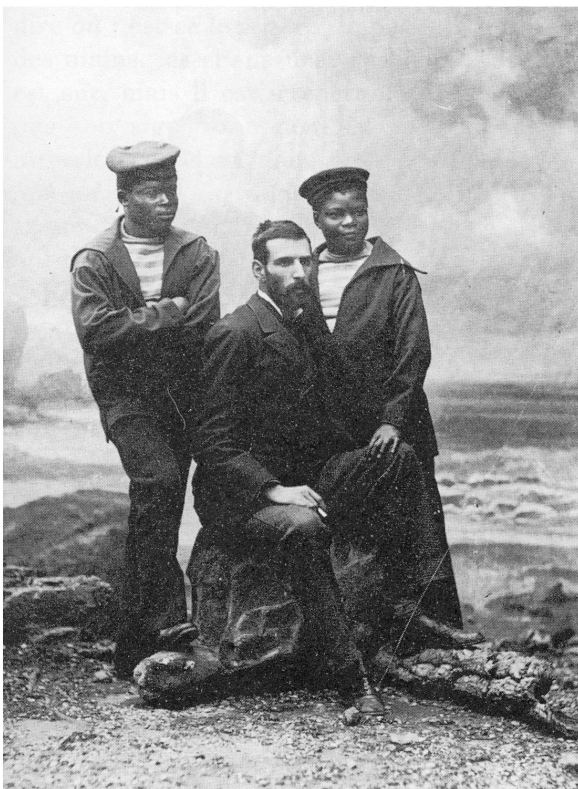
I must therefore submit to this law: I cannot penetrate, cannot reach into the Photograph. … It is a mistake to associate Photography by reason of its technical origins, with the notion of a dark passage (*camera obscura*). It is *camera lucida* that we should say (such was the name of the apparatus, anterior to Photography, which permitted drawing an object through a prism, one eye on the model, the other on the paper); for, from the eye's viewpoint, "the essence of the image is to be altogether outside, without intimacy, and yet more inaccessible and mysterious than the thought of the innermost being; without signification, yet summoning up the depth of any possible meaning; unrevealed yet manifest … " (Blanchot) … If the Photograph cannot be penetrated, it is because of its evidential power. In the image, as Sartre says, the object yields itself wholly, and our vision of it is *certain*. … This certitude is sovereign because I have the leisure to observe the photograph with intensity; but also, however long I extend this observation, it teaches me nothing. It is precisely in this *arrest* of interpretation that the Photograph's certainty resides: I exhaust myself realizing that *this-has-been*; for anyone who holds a photograph in his hand, here is a fundamental belief, an "ur-doxa" nothing can undo, unless you prove to me that this image *is not* a photograph. But also, unfortunately, it is in proportion to its certainty that I can say nothing about this photograph. (CL 106-7)

At the same time as Barthes proclaims as 'ur-doxa' the certainty of the *this-has-been* (the real indexical nature of the photographic image) he also proclaims that 'we should say' *camera lucida* not *camera obscura*. The camera lucida is after all an optical instrument of *projection*, which is opposed to Barthes' insistence on the chemical aspect of the imprint. Even more importantly, 'one eye on the model, the other on the paper', beyond doubt, inserts subjectivity into the process of inscribing the image – the camera lucida amalgamates mechanic projection with subjective recording.

Did Barthes (re?)create the misidentifications regarding the family portraits as a reflection of something that may have actually happened to himself as different instances of similar mis-rememberments? Surely we can assume that Barthes

has looked through the boxes of photographs in which he finds the Winter Garden Photograph before the event he describes in *Camera Lucida*. Remembering that 'It appears that I may know better a photograph that I remember than a photograph that I am looking at, as if direct vision oriented language wrongly, engaging it in an effort of description which will always lack the point of effect, the *punctum*' (CC 87), could it be that the replacement of the scenery has actually happened long before Barthes' search through the photographs and that he had an old *memory* of the 'Winter Garden Photograph' which turned out to be false?

I personally have often experienced that the memory I had of certain family photographs which I hadn't seen for a long time sometimes turned out to be spot-on for certain parts but showed other details that were very different from my memory. Another example here is that, some time after writing my introduction to that part of the text, I was eventually able to find and watch in full the documentary I described earlier that, I know now, looked at religious killings in Nigeria[64]. I was surprised to find that, whilst the presenter did seem to struggle to retain composure at some point, the trembling voice I remembered so well actually belonged to a survivor who lost his immediate family and countless friends. He guided the film team to several sites where dumped bodies remained rotting, resulting in a short shot of a rib cage crawling with black flies. No sign of the white maggots that I saw so clearly in my memory.

Could an encounter with relentless facts in the images that did *not* correspond to either Barthes' memory of photographs he may have seen or the image in his mind of e.g. his mother, be the actual source of Barthes' insistence on the 'ur-doxa of the *that*-has-been', the proclaimed inability to 'penetrate' the photograph? Is there another *punctum* in the encounter with facts that do *not* correspond to my memory once the photograph 'has worked within me' (CC 87), as is the case with Barthes' replaced necklace? Is this the evidential force that somewhat relentlessly establishes that 'the essence of the image is to be altogether *outside*, *without intimacy*, and yet *more inaccessible and mysterious than the thought of the innermost being ... unrevealed yet manifest*', and hence that it is in

---

[64] Channel 4, Unreported World: Nigeria's Killing Fields. See: http://www.channel4.com/programmes/unreported-world/4od#3074082 (accessed October 2011).

response to his discovery of these mis-rememberments that he so emphatically stresses the *that-has-been* as its certainty brutally does *not* correspond to his memory?

At the very least what Barthes says through his riddles is that the enforced vision of the photograph might show 'reality in a past state' (CL 82) but just as reality itself 'will work within me', the subject's 'eye that thinks' (CC 77) will add or subtract something from the (memory of the) photograph'.

●●●

One last thing on the Winter Garden Photograph: having discussed the *punctum's* quality to pierce imageness and Barthes' ambivalent relationship to female imageness, which is marked by a melancholic fascination with the *objects* related to female masquerade on one hand which seems in contrast to Barthes' tendency not to like 'chic' imageness of femininity on the other hand, it is not surprising that he finds what for him is his mother's essence in a photograph of her as a young child, since here a minimum of the imageness of 'woman' is presented. Remembering his dislike for the photograph in which she looked 'chic', it is evidently her 'innocence' and 'naïvete' which provide a sufficiently blank screen for Barthes' projection: he sees her as being there 'without either showing or hiding herself' (CL 69); she has not 'transformed herself into an image' (CL 10); she does 'not sup*pose* herself' (CL 67).

"Marceline Desbordes-Valmore
reproduces in her face
the slightly stupid virtues of her verses."

Nadar: Marceline Desbordes-Valmore. 1857

(CC 158)

Going through the images of *Camera Lucida* with an eye on represented female imageness, I observe that Barthes dislikes not only his mother to be 'chic'. We have seen how he resists the pose of the 'complete' imageness of a woman in Van Der Zee's family portrait and Wilson's photograph of Victoria. Nadar's 'mother or wife' shows a woman in a child-like pose reminding me of an infant's sucking of a blanket or finger. The camera is also looking down at her – she is looking up at the viewer. The only other image chosen by Barthes in which a woman poses outright for the photograph (as opposed to being caught without posing like 'la vieille' in Klein's photo whose bizarre expression goes unmentioned) is also by Nadar and it shows the French Romantic poet Marceline Desbordes-Valmore who, for Barthes, 'reproduces in her face the slightly stupid virtues of her verses' (CC 158) – which deal with distinctly feminine issues around family, motherhood and female autonomy.

130

*"How can one have an intelligent air
without thinking of anything intelligent?"*

A. Kertész. Piet Mondrian in his studio. Paris, 1926

(CL 112)

In contrast, another photograph by Kertész, a posed portrait of Piet Mondrian, is captioned: 'How can one have an intelligent air without thinking of anything intelligent?' (CC 173) No *punctum* for Barthes in this pose as besuited white man of intellect. Juxtaposing the two photographs also clearly shows that, like Nadar's mother, Desbordes-Valmore is photographed from a raised camera angle so she is looking up, whilst Mondrian is allowed to look down on the viewer – the old, simple yet effective *in-camera* 'trick' of the portrait photograph that, subtly, rarely noticed, adds much to how a sitter is 'seen'.

Barthes' specific relationship to women and to men, to female and male imageness, is certainly reflected in his choice of images and also his responses including his experiences of a *punctum*. What all this means for 'photography' is clearly in the picture here: the power of the real index which Barthes calls the 'that-has been' is in an interplay with Barthes' *Innenwelt*, part of it thus firmly residing in the mind of the viewer:

131

If the immense power of the photograph does not come from that which was in front of the camera, it lies elsewhere. … A reading of *Camera Lucida* suggests that the most significant indexical power of the photograph may consequently lie not in the relation between the photograph and its subject but in the relation between the photograph and its beholder, or user, in what I would like to call a "performative index," or an "index of identification."[65]

Victor Burgin has already pointed out that '*Camera Lucida* is, like Sartre, concerned not so much with the general phenomenon of the photograph as such, but rather with the yearning "intentionality" of the imagination'[66]. To Burgin's comment about the synthesis of contrasting methodologies at the level of literature it could be added that a central synthesis is in the fusion of (fragments of) phenomenology and (fragments of) psychoanalysis, or in other words, that *Camera Lucida* has combined the unconscious and its relationship to the real with the self of phenomenology. From this perspective, *Camera Lucida* features a literary interrogation of the *that-has-been*, 'the evidence of Photography, not from the viewpoint of pleasure, but in relation to what we romantically call love and death' (CL 73), in other words, from the viewpoint of the corpo-real being that is subject to emotion in the face of life's shocking catastrophes such as the death of a much loved person or the realisation of one's own mortality.

As it happens, the author who presents this investigation is a homosexual man who has not found a lasting life partner and who returns to live with his mother, the most beloved person in his life. Surely this relationship is an important element in Barthes' specific relationship to female imageness.

---

[65] Olin, 'Touching Photographs', 84 + 85.
[66] Burgin, 'Re-reading *Camera Lucida*', 38.
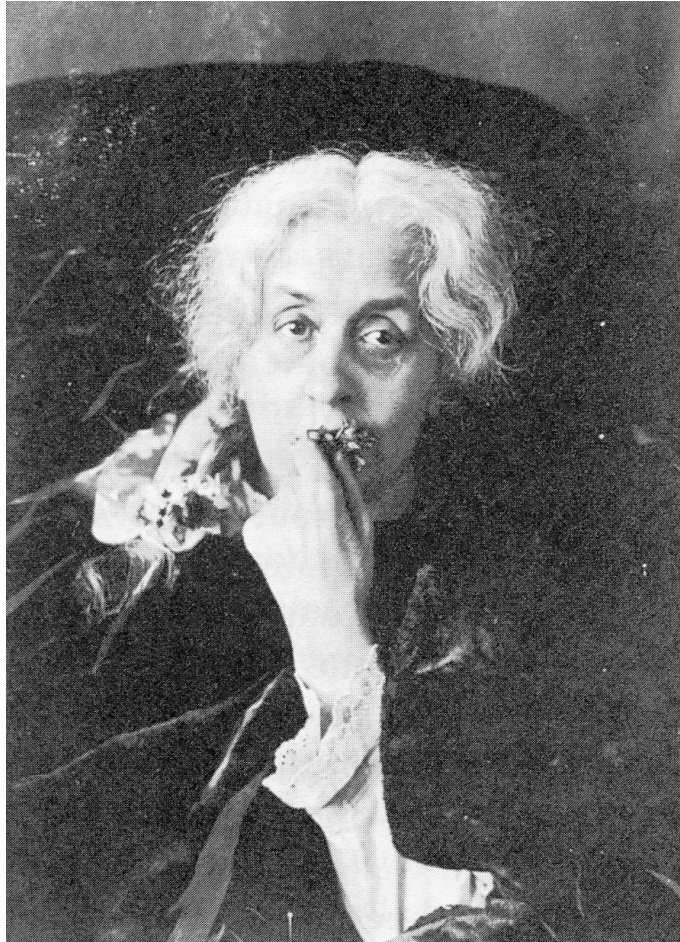
*"Who do you think is
the world's greatest photographer?"
"Nadar"*

Nadar: The Artist's Mother (or Wife)

(CL 68)

The photograph mentioned earlier, showing a grey haired woman, Nadar's 'mother or wife', in a slightly child-like pose, her hand by her mouth, looking up at the viewer with big melancholic eyes, is juxtaposed to the section in which he describes the finding of, and his reaction to, the Winter Garden Photograph which, as we know, 'cannot be shown'. Knight suggests that this is part of Barthes' strategy of a 'confusion of generations'[67] as also evident in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. But more immediate for me is the obvious link to the fact that Barthes lives with his mother as if with a wife (which does not mean to indicate a sexual relationship). Barthes writes *Camera Lucida* in the

---

[67] Knight, *Barthes and Utopia*, 262.

133

period of intense mourning after his mother's death[68] – following illness during which Barthes nursed his mother at their home. As I know from my own experience, seeing a beloved person utterly incapacitated and transformed by disease is a harsh and all-encompassing experience, a brutal intrusion of corpo-reality into the gloss of the posed (dis)embodied imageness of daily life. The dis-eased is deprived of pose and self-representation. Such horror shatters the division of nature and culture that governs the pose of our everyday lives. The beloved person is there yet (s)he is *different* to the person one knew.

When describing the Winter Garden Photograph, Barthes saw the quality of photography to 'deflesh' a face. Did the features he saw in the child's face become a *punctum* because they recalled the emaciated face of the dying mother? The diseased dying mother's corpus dis-integrated and yet the beloved person was still there. The body that was Barthes' mother became subject to the matter-real that 'culture' can investigate and describe as 'disease', but which remains beyond its grasp. To experience such horror brings home a truth that renders any philosophy about 'cultural codes' and 'reality' farcical. The hidden centre of our real 'universe' is the real that is the 'biological' body – the organism we are. 'Culture' is needed to begin to grasp this and at the same time it produces a 'symbolic universe' whose dynamic immediately negates the corpo-real. The 'stupefaction' that is in 'seeing a familiar being dressed differently' (CL 64), is nothing to the stupefaction of seeing a beloved person incapacitated and no longer being the person (s)he was. As Barthes says himself: 'I lived in her weakness (it was impossible for me to participate in a world of strength, to go out in the evenings; all social life appalled me)' (CL 72). At this moment Barthes was so affected by the intrusion of the real that social posing seemed futile.

Equally, it was impossible for Barthes to return to a philosophy that examines 'cultural codes' in the framework of a distinct mind—body separation in which 'the body' is always an abstracted concept that camouflages corpo-reality, of which affect is a part. From this results the emotional and affectual style of *Camera Lucida*. The impossible science of the unique being is the im*posable* science of the corpo-real being.

---

[68] The intensity of his grief is well documented in the posthumous publication of Barthes' diary as *Mourning Diary*, translated by Richard Howard (Hill & Wang: New York, 2010).

After his mother's death, after her body had gone, Barthes *retrieves* the imageness of her corpus – 'the truth of the *face* [he] had loved' (CL 67, my emphasis) *before* disease disintegrated its imageness and delivered it to the real – in a photograph of her as a girl:

Roland Barthes' mother:
she is dead
and she is going to give birth
to Roland Barthes.

Daniel Boudinet: Polaroid, 1979

Camera Lucida III: The Photograph Tamed: Super-Illusion

As a frontispiece, *La Chambre Claire* opens with its only colour reproduction, which gets no mention in the text at all. It is a photograph by Daniel Boudinet captioned '*Polaroid*, 1979'. It shows a drawn green curtain illuminated by the light behind it with a small opening through which one can see nothing apart from a lighter area and which just about illuminates the edge of a bed inside. The function of a frontispiece, like an overture to an opera, is to introduce and reflect on the content of what is to follow. *Polaroid* places the viewer of the image into a dark *camera* illuminated only by light penetrating the curtain and its opening. Following a suggestion by Margaret Iversen[69], my reading of this picture in this place is through Lacan's treatment of the ancient Greek story of Zeuxis and Parrhasios in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, another Lacanian treatment of redoubled deception. The two painters competed to establish which one would be able to paint the most convincing illusion. Zeuxis painted a bunch of grapes so realistic that birds came to pick at his image. Parrhasios painted a curtain on a wall that looked so real that, when he presented it to Zeuxis, he asked Parrhasios to open the curtain and show what was painted behind it. To this Lacan responds:

> Parrhasios makes it clear that if one wishes to deceive a man, what one presents to him is the painting of a veil, that is to say, something that incites him to ask what is behind it … The picture does not compete with appearance, it competes with what Plato designates for us beyond appearance as being the Idea.[70]

The difference is that Zeuxis' painting presents an illusion that is so convincing that it is mistaken for the real thing, whereas in Parrhasios' painting, the illusion of the object presented, the curtain, is equally perfect but is redoubled by an illusion of a hidden truth behind it: '[I]n Parrhasios' painting, the illusion resided in the very notion that what the viewer saw was a humdrum curtain screening the hidden truth.'[71]

---

[69] Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure*, 127-29.
[70] Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 112.
[71] Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (Granta Books: London, 2006), 115.

Illusion is also the theme of another unmentioned juxtaposition to the text (also omitted from the English edition) which is placed on the back cover of the book:

> Marpa was very shaken when his own son died, and one of his disciples said to him: 'You have always said that everything is an illusion. Is not the death of your son an illusion as well?' And Marpa responded: "Certainly, but the death of my son is a super-illusion."

Thus, in this way Barthes has literally framed *Camera Lucida* with two references to illusion – or super-illusion. Still we can be sure of one thing: in between, Barthes has chosen a literary treatment of affectual consciousness to universalize himself utopically – in order to *confront* the intractable reality that he finds reflected to him in the photographic image.

● ● ●
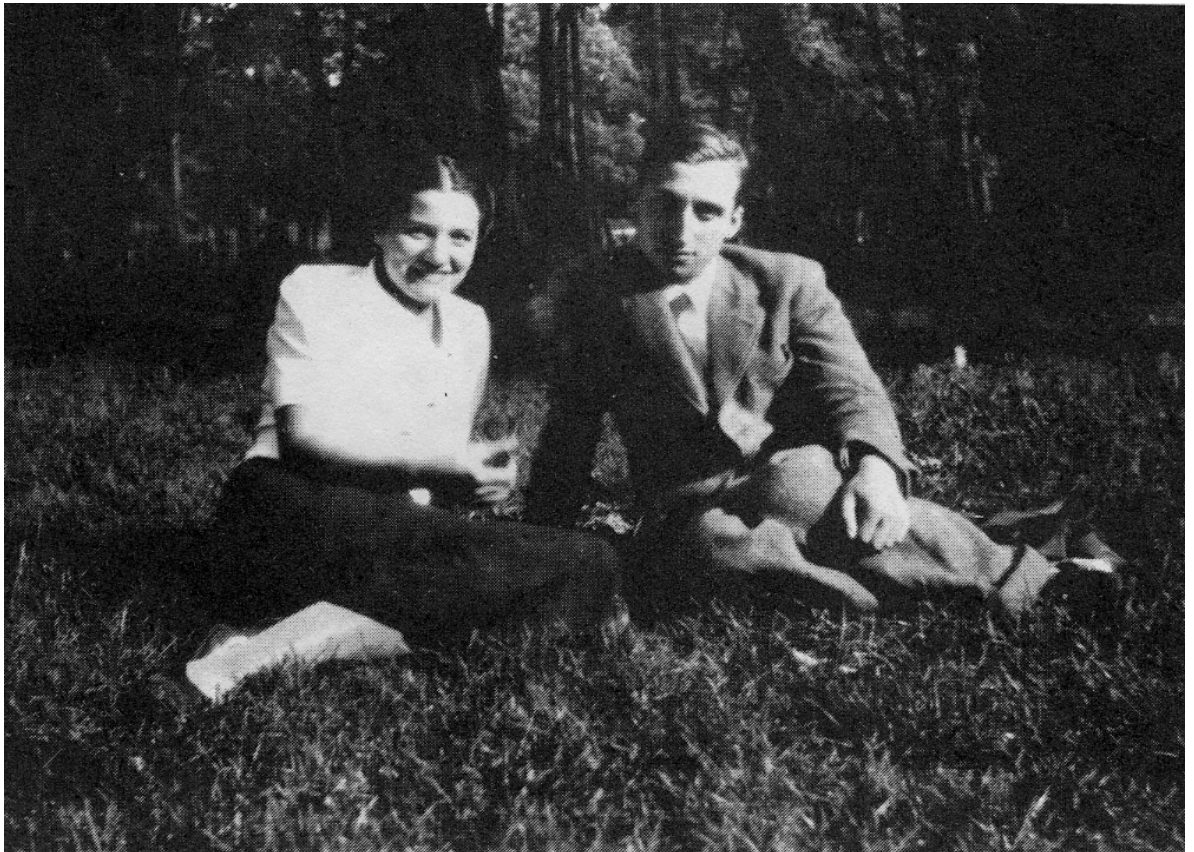
Where does this expression come from? Nature? Code?

Photographer unknown: Roland Barthes and his mother. Photograph and caption from *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (34)

"Your cynicism is simply a pose."

"Being natural is simply a pose, and the most irritating pose I know."

(Oscar Wilde[1])

---

[1] Conversation between the painter Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton, DG 18-19.

Print after Carlo Caliari (1570-1596), 'Vanitas'

Chapter III

On Art, Beauty, Love, Imageness, and the Death of the Corpus

For the subject – and many will consider this to be the hallmark of its humanity – often succeeds, frequently at the cost of almost incalculable efforts, in annihilating its singularity, in existing utterly within the limits of the law and of its identity. It is hoped that this success is never absolute, that this crime is never perfect.

Photography, among other forms of 'estrangement', can help to reveal this massacre, this process by which the subject exterminates its own alterity – *Selbstentfremdung*. A process in other words, by which one simultaneously expropriates and eradicates oneself.

Jean Baudrillard[2]

---

[2] Baudrillard, *Art and Artefact*, 31.

Resting one arm on the railing he watched … the passengers who had come aboard. A group of youths formed a party on the upper deck. … They were making a considerable exhibition of themselves … chattering, laughing, fatuously enjoying their own gesticulations, leaning overboard and shouting glibly derisive ribaldries … One of the party, who wore a light yellow summer suit of extravagant cut, a scarlet necktie and a rakishly tilted Panama hat, was the most conspicuous of them all in his shrill hilarity. But as soon as Aschenbach took a slightly closer look at him, he realised with a kind of horror that the youth was a fake. He was old, there was no mistaking it. There were wrinkles around his eyes and mouth. The faint carmine of his cheeks was make-up, the brown hair under the colourful straw hat was a wig, his neck was flaccid and scrawny, his small stuck-on moustache and the imperial on his chin were dyed, his yellowish full complement of teeth, displayed when laughing, was a cheap artificial set, and his hands, with signet rings on both index fingers, were those of an old man. With a spasm of distaste Aschenbach watched him as he kept company with his young friends. … Aschenbach covered his forehead with his hand and closed his eyes, which were hot, since he had slept too little. It seemed to him as if not everything was quite as usual, as if a dreamlike estrangement began, as if a deformation of the world into the bizarre occurred, which possibly could become arrested by covering his face for a while, and then looking around again.
Thomas Mann, **Death in Venice**[3]

---

[3] Thomas Mann, 'Death in Venice' in *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, translated by David Luke (Vintage Books: London, 1998), 210-11, translation altered.

The Death of Imageness – in Venice

Encounter

We have noted several occasions in *Camera Lucida* where details of the body perceived as 'imperfect', such as fingernails or teeth, have become a *punctum* for Barthes in photographs he viewed. Adopting Barthes' vocabulary, these details have led him back from the 'corpus he needed' – or anticipated – to the body he saw. I have observed similar experiences in daily life, without the static '*arrest*' of the photograph that '*fills the sight by force*' (CL 91) – for example when noticing dirty or particularly short or bitten fingernails on a person where this is in contrast to an otherwise 'well kept' appearance.

The fact that the 'body' is in a cultural construct does not only refer to our perception of it in representation but must imply that an integral part of our being in daily life is self representation – the posing of my corpus, as self, in imageness.

Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* is a beautiful literary example through which to examine both the *punctum* that relates to the body and the posing of the self. The novel, set in the early 1900s, describes the journey of the successful writer Gustav von Aschenbach from his home in Munich to Venice. Aschenbach is introduced as a man who lives an ordered, regulated and truly bourgeois life as a valued, even celebrated member of society, who has just been awarded the title 'von' for his literary achievements. Yet, during the journey from Munich to Venice and his stay there, he has a number of brief, mainly visual, encounters with figures he experiences as being of distinct alienation or otherness to himself. These are often interpreted as *Todesboten* (messengers of death). Not contradicting this interpretation, as the *punctum* can always be seen as a *Todesbote*, I would describe these encounters as experiences of a *punctum* to Aschenbach's day-to-day being in the imageness of the bourgeois artist. Further, it can be observed that this disturbance of Aschenbach's posed imageness in all cases originates in Aschenbach's – or rather Mann's – relationship to masculinity and to repressed homosexual desire. All *Todesboten* are male, but apart from Tadzio, who is boyish, young and beautiful, represent a distinctly rough and alien, foreign or strange (*fremd*) masculinity. The first of these encounters is the event that marks the beginning of the whole process that is Aschenbach's sudden change. In the heterotopic environment of a cemetery

in Munich, he encounters a vagabond whose appearance Mann describes in great detail:

> The man was moderately tall, thin, beardless and remarkably snub-nosed … He was quite obviously not of Bavarian origin … His head was held high, so that the Adam's apple stood out stark and bare on his lean neck where it rose from the open shirt … whether it was because he was dazzled into a grimace by the setting of the sun or by reason of some facial deformity, the fact was that his lips seemed to be too short and were completely retracted from his teeth, so that the latter showed white and long between them, bared to the gums … A minute later he had put him out of his mind. But whether his imagination had been stirred by the stranger's itinerant appearance, or whether some other physical or psychological influence was at work, he now became conscious, to his complete surprise, of an extraordinary expansion of his inner self, a kind of roving restlessness, a youthful craving for far-off places, a feeling so new or at least so long unaccustomed and forgotten that he stood as if rooted, with his hands clasped behind his back and his eyes to the ground, trying to ascertain the nature and purport of his emotion.[4]

Through this encounter with a figure of great otherness to himself, a desire to travel is awakened. This encounter has the *punctum's* quality of appearing as part object and its metonymical power of expansion ('an extraordinary expansion of his inner self') refers to a beyond of that which is visible. Similar to the 'kilted groom' for Barthes[5], this *punctum* originates in an affect of a certain sexual desire or fascination with an 'other' where it is in conflict with the conscious treatment of what is seen, and thus repressed: for Aschenbach / Mann[6] this is an encounter with an *other* type of man, a less 'refined,' less 'cultured,' more 'raw' masculinity. As a result, the travelling vagabond becomes an encounter with Aschenbach's repressed sexual desire, which

---

[4] Mann (Luke), *Death in Venice,* 199.
[5] See Chapter II, 117-18, though Barthes did not repress his homosexuality.
[6] The homosexual dynamic of *Death in Venice* is as clear as can be (and so is the parallel between Aschenbach and Mann). While the novel is considered an undisputed classic of twentieth-century German literature, discussion of Achenbach/Mann's homosexuality still remains absent from many interpretations. I myself read the novel in German classes in school where homosexuality was never mentioned once.

awakes a desire (*Reiselust*) to deviate from his routine stay in his summerhouse, and travel instead to Venice[7].

Here he encounters a different type of masculinity other to himself: the young boy Tadzio who, with his family, is staying in the same hotel as Aschenbach. His youthful beauty causes an infatuation in Aschenbach that this time not only results in deviation from his itinerary but also causes a profound change in his behaviour and whole being. His infatuation also leads to his ignoring the obvious fact that Venice is ravaged by cholera, of which, the reader is left to conclude, Aschenbach eventually dies on the beach whilst observing Tadzio. Facilitated by a wealth of such expressions in the German language, Mann abundantly uses vocabulary referring to imageness (Bildhaftigkeit) throughout the novel, especially when describing Tadzio: 'a Greek statue' ('ein griechisches Bildwerk', TiV 357), 'this god-like sculpture' ('dies göttliche Bildwerk', TiV 373), 'the noble human image' ('das edle Menschenbild', TiV 364), 'a precious sculpture made by nature' ('ein kostbares Bildwerk der Natur', TiV 362), 'the head of Eros' ('das Haupt des Eros', TiV 375), 'like the Thornpuller' ('wie beim Dornenauszieher', TiV 357)[8]. Aschenbach at one point finds himself in the lift close to the boy whom he has so far only observed from a distance: 'He stood very close to Aschenbach; for the first time he was so close that the latter, instead of seeing him as a distant image [nicht im bildmäßigem Abstand], could perceive and comprehend the boy in all the details of his humanity' (TiV 364), which in one published English translation becomes: 'Aschenbach, for the first time so close that the latter perceived and observed him not as a work of art that one views at a distance, but with precision, studying the details that made him human'[9]. Then Aschenbach notices that Tadzio has got bad teeth and, in his thoughts, diagnoses the boy to have ill health and to be likely to die young.

---

[7] During the journey and in Venice, the other such encounters are with the old man who masquerades as a youth, and the paymaster of a boat, as well as a gondolier and a street musician who are described as noticeably similar types to the vagabond (beardless, red-haired with a large Adam's apple).

[8] A note on translation: Mann's beautifully crafted, elaborate language is a challenge to translate and inevitably demands poetic licence on behalf of the translator. *Death in Venice* is available in a number of English translations, which can often produce very different results for the same passage. Where I credit a translation 'with alterations' I have merely changed a few expressions but don't find any benefit in adding lengthy notes about my reasons for doing so. All TiV page references are my own translation of: Thomas Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig* (first published in 1912) in *Die Erzählungen: Band 1* (Fischer Verlag: Frankfurt, 1980).

[9] Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice*, translated: Stanley Appelbaum (Dover Thrift Editions: New York, 1995), 27.

Physical proximity has eliminated the distance that made it possible for Aschenbach to project his *imago* of the corpus of perfect beauty onto Tadzio. For Aschenbach, the teeth are the *punctum* of death that has pierced the imageness (Bildmäßigkeit) of the corpus of 'Tadzio' that Aschenbach projects on the boy. This *punctum* points to the matter-reality of the body and its future death – and thus also to the future death of Aschenbach himself[10].

As I will outline below, his death is in fact hastened by the *expansion* of the *punctum* into a piercing of the imageness that constitutes the symbolic framework of Aschenbach's whole life. 'Tadzio' becomes this *expanded punctum* and is thus Aschenbach's ultimate Angel of Death.

De-basement

Mann himself described the novel as a 'tragedy of debasement' (Tragödie einer Entwürdigung[11]) and interpretations of the novel predominantly focus on Aschenbach's loss of the discipline that has ruled his life thus far and which breaks down through his total desire for the 'god-like beauty' he sees in the boy Tadzio. Earlier in the text, Mann's beautifully elaborate language paints a character picture of Aschenbach that introduces his personality as dominated by creativity that is governed by self-control and discipline. The reader learns that for Aschenbach 'all that is posed as great, is posed as "in spite of", in spite of distress and torment, poverty, abandonment, weakness of the body, vice and passion'[12]. Mann has a literary critic describe the typical hero of Aschenbach's books as being of 'an intellectual and youthful masculinity that clenches its teeth in proud modesty and stands by calmly while its body is pierced by swords and spears' (TiV 345). This leads Aschenbach to contemplate that: 'the figure of Saint Sebastian is the finest symbol ('das schönste *Sinnbild*'[13]) if not of art as a whole, then certainly of the art contemplated here [literature]. Looking into this narrated world [i.e. Aschenbach's novels] one saw: the elegance of self-

---

[10] On another occasion Aschenbach interprets Tadzio's breathing as indication of a probable 'constriction of the chest' which leads him to think: 'He is sickly. He will probably not get old,' which 'filled his heart with sheer concern but also at the same time a certain unrestrained satisfaction' (TiV 389).

[11] Thomas Mann, *Lebensabriss* (Fischer: Berlin, 1930).

[12] My (tendentious) translation of: 'alles Große, was dahstehe, als ein Trotzdem dahstehe, trotz Kummer und Qual, Armut, Verlassenheit, Körperschwäche, Laster, Leidenschaft' (TiV 344).

[13] *Sinnbild* is also often translated as 'allegory'. *Sinn* means 'meaning', 'sense', 'mind'; *Bild* means 'image' or 'picture'.

control concealing from the world's eyes, until the very last moment, a state of inner disintegration and biological decay' (TiV 345). Amongst his oeuvre is a 'passionate treatise' on 'Spirit and Art' ('Geist und Kunst', TiV 342). In Venice, on two occasions, Aschenbach daydreams on the beach: 'And out of the intoxication of the sea and the blazing of the sun a delightful image was woven in him' (TiV 373). This mental image presents a scene of classical Greece (a dialogue between a young and an old man), during which the elderly Sokrates lectures the young Phaidros on 'desire and virtue' (TiV 374). These two passages provide a reflection to Aschenbach's struggle between beauty, art, youth and spirit – or matter-reality and the imageness of 'perfection'. Here we read that: 'beauty alone is divine and visible' (TiV 379) and 'beauty alone … is both at once, worthy of adoration and visible: it is … the only form of the spirit that we can perceive and endure with our senses' (TiV 374).

Therefore, it appears that beyond a superficial focus on self-discipline versus 'debasement' and also beyond a focus on repressed sexual desire, 'Aschenbach's' demise is a parable of the subject's more general struggle with desire between the forces of matter-reality versus imageness. What is de-based (ent-würdigt) is not com*posure* in discipline but the life-preserving *belief in the transcendental meaning of the pose* of 'discipline' and 'perfection'– the belief in the *Sinnbild* of Saint Sebastian. Until the beginning of the novel, Aschenbach's life was determined by a distinct obsessiveness with the imageness of 'beauty,' 'perfection' and discipline 'in adversity,' in two interrelated ways: firstly the pose of the self-controlled man whose self-discipline 'in spite of' has earned him critical acclaim, wealth and fame; and secondly through creating and posing art as a writer, as prose and poetry are posed language. He has lived his life in the pose of the suffering, yet disciplined, artist in an interrelationship with his narrated world, in which he poses characters of the same self-discipline, which he creates and poses as model/mirror to himself. In his lived life and his narrated creations, Aschenbach strives for perfection, as 'only beauty … is *Divine and visible at the same time* [and thus it is] the path of the artist towards Spirit' (TiV 397). He equates 'perfect' form and beauty with the idea of the *transcendental*: Spirit and the Divine. In this imaginary imageness of perfect beauty, matter-reality is *transcended* by being *disembodied* in the pose of beauty, and thus meaning, and at the same time this meaning is *embodied and can be seen*. This imaginary imageness gives meaning to the struggle of the 'in spite of' as it is the seemingly physical appearance of 'the one and pure perfect

wholeness that lives in the mind' / 'die eine und reine *Vollkommenheit* die im Geiste lebt' (TiV 373).

Vollkommenheit

Aschenbach is caught in the relentless pursuit of imaginary *Vollkommenheit* when the encounter with the vagabond becomes the *punctum* that marks the initiation of the breakdown of the imaginary framework that upholds his subjectivity by uncovering a desire for a 'beyond' of that framework and for something other than *Vollkommenheit*. This purely visual encounter with a stranger in the distinct environment of a cemetery becomes a desire to travel to another distinct environment[14], which is Venice. Here Aschenbach encounters Tadzio, marking a deadly turn in his pursuit of the imageness of beauty in perfection. No longer is his struggle balanced by performing and actively creating the constitutive posed imageness of the 'in spite of', of the Saint Sebastian of his characters. Instead he irrevocably becomes a *passive spectator*, unable to write any more, who is left to gaze at this countenance that reminds him of a 'Greek sculpture of the noblest era which in its pure completion of perfect form was of such unique personal charm that the *gazer* (der *Schauende*) felt that, neither in nature nor in art, has ever encountered anything as consummately accomplished' (TiV 357, my emphasis). At the same time as 'Saint Sebastian' has lost his grip on Aschenbach, he shifts from posing a *Sinnbild* to posing a visual imageness that he passively allows to be put on him:

---

[14] For those familiar with the term as outlined by Foucault, it is interesting to note that *Death in Venice* is set almost entirely into *heterotopic* environments, meaning distinct environments in which normal time is partially suspended. (See Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', 1967, published online: http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html)

Like any other man in love, he desired to please and bitterly dreaded that he might fail to do so. He added brightening and rejuvenating touches to his clothes, he wore jewellery and used scent, he devoted long sessions to his toilet several times a day, arriving at table elaborately attired and full of excited expectation. As he beheld the sweet youthful creature who had so entranced him he felt disgust at his own ageing body, the sight of his grey hair and sharp features filled him with a sense of shame and hopelessness. He felt a compulsive need to refresh and restore himself physically [körperlich]; he paid frequent visits to the hotel barber. Cloaked in a hairdressing gown, leaning back in the chair as the chatterer's hands tended him, he stared in dismay at his mirror image.

'Grey,' he remarked with a wry grimace.

'A little,' the man replied. 'And the reason? A slight neglect, a slight lack of interest in outward appearances, very understandable in persons of distinction, but not altogether commended, especially as one would expect those very persons to be free from prejudice about matters such as the natural and the artificial. If certain people who profess moral disapproval of cosmetics were to be logical enough to extend such rigorous principles to their teeth, the result would be more than a little disgusting. After all we are only as old as we feel in our hearts, and sometimes grey hair is actually further from the truth than the despised corrective would be. In your case, signore, one has the right to the natural colour of one's hair. Will you permit me simply to give your colour back to you?' …

'Now the only other thing,' he said, 'would be to just freshen up the skin of your face a little.' … Aschenbach … saw his eyebrows arched more clearly and evenly, the shape of his eyes lengthened, their brightness enhanced by a slight underlining of the lids; saw below them a delicate carmine come to life as it was softly applied to skin that had been brown and leathery; saw his lips that had just been so pallid now burgeoning cherry-red; saw the furrows on his cheeks, round his mouth, the wrinkles by his eyes, all vanishing under face cream and an aura of youth – with a beating heart he saw himself as a young man in earliest bloom.[15]

---

[15] Mann (Luke), *Death in Venice*, 262-63, translation altered.

Erkenntnis

The artist for whom 'beauty was the path towards the spirit' is dealt a fatal double blow. Firstly he seems to have encountered perfection that he never found before in art or nature – thus including his own art – which strove to pose constitutive meaning. 'He was more beautiful than words can say, and Aschenbach felt painfully, as often before, that words could only praise beauty, but could not reproduce it' (TiV 379).

The *punctum* is here also in the recognition that 'transcendental' beauty appears as the product of contingency and not the labour of creating and self-discipline. And at the same time as he thinks he has found his ideal object, he also realises it to be a body, like himself, as 'false' as the 'youth' he encountered on his journey to Venice, who 'wrongly posed as a youth'[16], and as false as the 'insignificant adjustment'[17] he allows the barber to put on himself. Even though Tadzio's youth is real, as the object of the desire for perfection he becomes himself a *punctum* of death, as the spectating Aschenbach recognises that the object is there, yet at the same time the object that is there does not correspond to the *imago* of the object that exists in his mind – it is not *Vollkommenheit*. The *punctum* here is beyond a detail that disturbs the wholeness of anticipated imageness, the *punctum* is in the cognition (*Erkenntnis*) that desired wholeness is an illusion that can never be attained; the imageness of transcendental perfect beauty is nowhere but in an imaginary *moment of perception* that never lasts longer than the inevitable appearance and recognition of the object's matter-reality.

Mann has Sokrates tell Phaidros that: 'knowledge [Erkenntnis] … is the abyss.' (TiV 397). Since 'desire is the product of a lack of knowledge' (TiV 378), for Aschenbach, the cognition that his object of desire is an illusion means, to borrow an expression from Barthes, the *undialectical death* of all desire including the desire to live. 'What meaning have art and virtue left in the face of the advantages of chaos?'(TiV 392).

As if to confirm the mortal corpo-real beneath the beloved imaginary imageness of perfection one last time, Aschenbach observes Tadzio on the beach being wrestled to the ground with his face violently pushed into the sand by his friend, so long that Tadzio, convulsive and twitching, appears to suffocate –

---

[16] My (tendentious) translation of: der 'zu Unrecht einen der Ihren spielte' (TiV 350).
[17] Mann (Luke), *Death in Venice*, 262-63.

shortly before Aschenbach himself collapses dying in his beach chair whilst nearby:

> 'A photographic apparatus, apparently abandoned, stood on its tripod by the edge of the sea, and the black cloth, spread across, flapped with a slapping sound in the chilly wind' (TiV 398).

On another occasion he took up the study of jewels, and appeared at a costume ball as Anne de Joyeuse, Admiral of France, in a dress covered with five hundred and sixty pearls. He would often spend a whole day settling and resettling in their cases the various stones that he had collected … He discovered wonderful stories, also about jewels. In Alphonso's 'Clericalis Disciplina' a serpent was mentioned with eyes of real jacinth, and in the romantic history of Alexander he was said to have found snakes in the vale of Jordan "with collars of real emeralds growing on their backs". There was a gem in the brain of the dragon, Philostratus told us, and "by the exhibition of golden letters and a scarlet robe" the monster could be thrown into a magical sleep, and slain. According to the great alchemist Pierre de Boniface, the diamond rendered a man invisible, and the agate of India made him eloquent. The cornelian appeased anger, and the hyacinth provoked sleep, and the amethyst drove away the fumes of wine. The garnet cast out demons, and the hydropicus deprived the moon of her colour. The selenite waxed and waned with the moon, and the meloceus, that discovered thieves, could be affected only by the blood of kids. Leonardos Camillos had seen a white stone taken from the brain of a newly-killed toad, that was a certain antidote against poison. The bezoar, that was found in the heart of the Arabian deer, was a charm that could cure the plague. …

The King of Ceilan rode through his city with a large ruby in his hand, as the ceremony of his coronation … Marco Polo had watched the inhabitants of Zipangu place a rose-coloured pearl in the mouth of the dead. A sea-monster had been enamoured of the pearl that the diver brought to king Perozes, and had slain the thief, and mourned for seven months over his loss. … Henry II wore jewelled gloves reaching to the elbow, and had a hawk-glove set with twelve rubies and fifty-two pearls. The ducal hat of Charles the Rash, the last Duke of Burgundy of his race, was studded with sapphires and hung with pear-shaped pearls.

How exquisite life had once been! How gorgeous in its pomp and decoration. Even to read of the luxury of the dead was wonderful.
Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray***, 127-29**

> And Beauty is a form of Genius – is higher, indeed, than Genius, as it
> needs no explanation. … People say sometimes that beauty is only
> superficial. That may be so. But at least it is not so superficial as Thought.
> To me, Beauty is the wonder of wonders. It is only shallow people who
> do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the
> visible, not the invisible. (DG 37)

Encounter

Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* is best known for bequeathing to our
culture the iconic figure of speech the 'picture in the attic' – a phrase that has
become synonymous with a person who does not 'look their age'. Beyond a
focus on youth and morality, the themes of love and also knowledge or
Erkenntnis as well as the imageness of beauty viewed as equated with spirit or
'Genius' play similar roles as in *Death in Venice.* In fact, *The Picture of Dorian
Gray* could well also be described as a tragedy of debasement and just as in
Mann's novel, the debasement that occurs in the narrated action of the
protagonist means a de-basement of constitutive imaginary imageness.
The novel begins in the studio of the painter Basil Hallward who is about to
finish 'the best thing [he] has ever done' (DG 16), the portrait of the young
Dorian Gray, when Lord Henry Wotton appears for a visit. He remains a
central character and in the guise of cynical 'dandyism', it is through Lord
Henry that Wilde presents the abundance of sarcastic, seemingly shallow, yet
often poignant and deep *bon mots* that are a characteristic of the novel:

> "But beauty, real beauty, ends where an intellectual expression begins.
> Intellect is in itself an exaggeration, and destroys the harmony of any
> face." (DG 17)

During this first meeting between the two, Henry deliberately corrupts Dorian's
innocence with remarks about the brevity of his youth and the horror of the
forthcoming decay that will destroy his beauty. Immediately afterwards,
Dorian resumes his pose on the platform and Basil finishes the painting
'conscious … that a look had come into the lad's face that he had never seen
there before' (DG 33), addressing Dorian: '"I don't know what Harry has been
saying to you, but he has certainly made you have the most wonderful
expression"' (DG 35). When Dorian sees the finished picture:

A look of joy came into his eyes, as if he had recognized himself for the first time. … The sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation. He had never felt it before. … Then had come Lord Henry with his strange panegyric on youth, his terrible warning of its brevity. That had stirred him at the time, and now, as he stood *gazing at the shadow of his own loveliness, the full reality of the description flashed across him*. Yes, there would be a day when his face would be wrinkled and wizen … the grace of his figure broken and deformed. … As he thought of it, *a sharp pang of pain struck like a knife across him*. (DG 40-41, my emphasis)

Even though the picture captures the *moment* of the involuntary corruption of Gray's youthful innocence as a photograph would, the painting does not feature any accidental details of contingency (that a photographer could not *not* photograph) that would disturb the wholeness of its flawless imageness of youthful beauty. Instead, Barthes' '*punctum* that is time' is felt through the *knowledge* that the represented corpus of perfect beauty is 'Dorian', yet at the same time is nothing but a moment of a body posed – 'a shadow of his own loveliness'. Barthes' *punctum* that is time, resulting from the knowledge of a *future anterior* that is a catastrophe that has already occurred, in Dorian's case is caused by the prediction of a future that is yet to happen. The *punctum* is felt through the *Erkenntnis* that the image presents a posed corpus at a frozen, fleeting moment in time and that the body in time will be subject to the violence of entropy and death.

De-basement

Almost impossible here, not to think of the Lacanian mirror stage: 'Like a revelation' at the same moment as Dorian recognises himself as in a mirror that presents to him the imageness of perfect beauty, he is alienated from this imageness as it is fragmented through the knowledge of its instability.
'Words! Mere words! How terrible they were! … Was there anything so real as words?' (DG 34)
It is after this first viewing of the picture that Dorian repeatedly utters the fateful wish which then comes true, that he could always stay as young and beautiful as this picture and that the picture should age instead of himself:

"I am jealous of everything whose beauty does not die. I am jealous of the portrait you have painted of me. Why should it keep what I must lose? Every moment that passes takes something from me, and gives something to it. Oh if it was only the other way! If the picture could change, and I could be always what I am now! Why did you paint it? It will mock me some day – mock me horribly!" (DG 42)

Shortly afterwards, Dorian finds himself feverishly in love with the actress Sibyl Vane (vain) whom he sees on stage in a theatre which he visits daily to see her performing in different roles.

"Well, I can't help going to see Sibyl play, even if it is only for an act … and when I think of the wonderful soul that is hidden away in that little ivory body, I am filled with awe. … To-night she is Imogen … and to-morrow night she will be Juliet."
"When is she Sibyl Vane?"
"Never." (DG 57)
…
"She had all the delicate grace of [a] Tanagra figurine … I have been right, Basil, haven't I, to take my love out of poetry, and to find my wife in Shakespeare's plays? Lips that Shakespeare taught to speak have whispered their secret in my ear. I have had the arms of Rosalind around me, and kissed Juliet on the mouth (DG 66-67). … I love Sibyl Vane. I wish to place her on a pedestal of gold, and to see the world worship the woman who is mine." (DG 68)

Despite Gray's "not wanting to know her" (DG 56), they get introduced. When she describes Dorian as 'a prince', he later comments to Henry that "She regarded me merely as a person in a play. She knows nothing of life." (DG 56) At a further meeting in her dressing room, he declares his love, they kiss and get engaged to be married. The following evening, when Dorian takes Basil and Henry to the theatre so they can see Sibyl perform, her acting has become so bad that most of the audience leave. After this performance she professes to Dorian that she can no longer act because of the love she feels: "Before I knew you, acting was the only reality of my life … The painted scenes were my world. I knew nothing but shadows, and thought them real … You taught me

what reality really is. … I am sick of shadows. You are more to me than all art can ever be. … I hate the stage." (DG 76) After this scene Dorian loses all interest in Sybil: "You have killed my love. You used to stir my imagination. Now you don't even stir my curiosity. You simply produce no effect. I loved you because you were wonderful, because you had genius and intellect, because you realised the dreams of great poets and gave shape and substance to the shadows of art. … What are you without your art? Nothing." (DG 76-77) Dorian leaves the distraught Sybil Vane in her dressing room. At home the following day, as he hears that she has committed suicide he notices for the first time that the expression of his face in the portrait has changed, and has it taken from his salon into the attic.

The figure of Sibyl Vane shares many similarities with that of Aschenbach. Both have spent their lives previous to the events described in the respective novel posed within a symbolic network that, to paraphrase Baudrillard, 'annihilated their singularity, in existing utterly within the limits of the imageness of the law and of its identity'. Their 'success was nearly absolute, their crime nearly perfect'[18]; Sibyl Vane 'never really lived' (DG 92). In both cases the symbolic framework that was actively created as *art* – a narrated/performed world whose artifice existed entirely 'within the limits of the law and of its identity' – was posed as mirror of constitutive imaginary wholeness. This set-up is de-based through affect, when both respectively suddenly feel *love* for an imaginary imageness of the type that was always part of their own symbolic framework – 'perfect beauty' and 'the prince' – but which is *embodied* thus posed by an other. The desired and loved imageness replaces the one thus far actively created and performed as *art*; both become passive and unable to create. Yet in both cases, the imageness that is loved and desired turns out to be illusion. The corpus of perfect beauty that is Tadzio is but a *moment* of imageness posed by an imperfect body that will die; 'Prince Charming' is desired projected imageness 'embodied' by a subject who shows himself as cruel and emotionless. Thus an unexpected real alterity is encountered beneath the desired imageness of an other. As this alterity is encountered in an imageness that – though external – is also part of the characters' own respective symbolic matrices, this reveals the 'massacre by which the subject exterminates its own alterity – *Selbstentfremdung*'. In other words, through uncontrollable real

---

[18] Baudrillard, *Art and Artefact*, 31. See page 139 of this text.

affect, both encounter their own hitherto hidden alterity, which de-bases the symbolic imageness that thus far 'annihilated their singularity'; for Aschenbach and Vane, the *Erkenntnis* that their object of desire, the imageness of an other, is as utopian as the imageness they have posed themselves means the *undialectical death* of all desire including the desire to continue to pose, to continue to live.

Dorian Gray too experiences that the imageness he loved turned out not to be what he desired but, of course, he is magically different. He loves Sibyl Vane the actress but, as Henry remarked, he 'will always be in love with love' (DG 51) and as he is confronted with the alterity beneath the imageness 'Actress Sibyl Vane' it kills his love but not himself. He simply moves on to love loving other people – or objects, as we will see shortly. He loved to love Sibyl Vane *because* she had never lived. He loved her imageness which 'gave shape and substance to the shadows of art' as long as it was posed 'on a pedestal of gold for the world to see'; he would have made her 'famous, splendid, magnificent. The world would have worshipped [her], and [she] would have belonged to [him]' (DG 77), because: "Ordinary woman never appeal to one's imagination. … No glamour ever transfigures them … There is no mystery in one of them. They are quite obvious. But an actress! How different an actress is!" (DG 54) Thus Dorian desires nothing but *art*ifice, which he appears to have found in the redoubled imageness of an actress – a pose that hides another pose – a syntagm of discrete fragments of imageness[19]: Rosalind, Juliet, Imogen… He might be 'filled with awe' when he thinks 'of the wonderful soul that is hidden away in that little ivory body' (DG 57) but his *imago* of a 'wonderful soul' is only part of his desire for imageness. When he encounters real, uncontrollable alterity beneath such imaginary imageness, it does not reflect to him his own alterity, as its power is extricated by his portrait.

The actress *poses* an image of an image, Dorian himself *is* redoubled imageness. He is literally 'pretty as a picture' as he is the image of Dorian Gray on that day in June; he *is* imageness and can only love imageness. He wants Sybil Vane to be an *object* (a *trophy* wife, a femme *objet*) that he can display and that would thus reflect his own perfection in beauty. What he loves in Sybil is only himself because he makes himself perfect in the worship of beauty, but he has no need

---

[19]'In the love relationship the tendency to break the object down into discrete details in accordance with a perverse autoerotic system is slowed by the living unity of the other person.' Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 108.

to create it himself as he *is* an artwork himself – as Henry knows well: "I am so glad that you have never done anything, never carved a statue, or painted a picture, or produced anything outside of yourself! Life has been your art." (DG 172)

Lord Henry is somehow equivalent in Wilde's novel to Mann's figure of Socrates. Both Mann and Wilde use their respective characters to insert into the text those reflections that go beyond the advancement of the narration. Henry's cynical *bon mots*, beyond appearing to be shallow and flippant, show him to be resistant against 'the limits of the law and its identity' as he resists 'the terror of society, which is the basis of morals' (DG 33). He is always open for a 'new sensation' and he is open to 'sin'. "Sin is the only colour element left in modern life." (DG 44) 'Sin' plays an important role for both Dorian and Henry. In its link to the 'senses', 'sensation' and 'passion', it is affect which originates in the corpo-real but shows itself in the imageness of the corpus: "Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's face. It cannot be concealed." (DG 141-42) Thus metaphorically, 'sin' is a transgressive resistance for which a price is to be paid with the body.

Henry poses as a dandy but he *knows* it is a pose. Henry 'had begun by vivisecting himself, [and] he had ended by vivisecting others. Human life – that appeared to him the only thing worth investigating' (DG 60). Whilst 'few people had ever interested him so much as Dorian Gray' (he owns 27 photographs of Dorian) he sees Dorian as an 'interesting study' (DG 59) and 'a *thing* to wonder at' (DG 61, my emphasis) and he wonders repeatedly, thinking of 'Dorian Gray's young fiery-coloured life … how it was all going to end' (DG 62).

Henry is the *eminence grise* of the novel and on two distinct occasions he 'poisons' Dorian through words – words that irreversibly pierce Dorian's symbolic framework of being at the time – firstly when he conjures up Dorian's future physical decay at the moment Dorian recognises his beauty for the first time, which makes him utter the fateful wish, and secondly, exactly at the moment after Dorian recognises that his wish has come true and has the painting safely stored away from sight in the attic – the moment he knows he has become image – Henry sends Dorian a book:

> It was the strangest book he had ever read. It seemed to him that … the sins of the world were passing … before him. Things that he had dimly

dreamed of were suddenly made real to him. Things of which he had

never dreamed were gradually revealed. …

The book's hero, a young man in nineteenth-century Paris:

spent his life trying to realise … all the passions and modes of thought

that belonged to every century … The life of the senses was described in

the terms of mystical philosophy. One hardly knew at times whether one

was reading the spiritual ecstasies of some mediaeval saint or the morbid

confessions of a modern sinner. It was a poisonous book. …

For years, Dorian Gray could not free himself from the memory of this

book … The hero, the wonderful young Parisian, in whom the romantic

temperament and the scientific temperament were so strangely blended,

became to him a kind of prefiguring type of himself. And, indeed, the

whole book seemed to him to contain the story of his own life, written

before he had lived it (DG 116-118) … Dorian Gray had been poisoned by

a book. (DG 138)

Consequently, Henry enforces Dorian's acquaintance with the two real forces
that are corrupting to the imageness of 'his beautiful face, and his beautiful
soul' (DG 61) – the imageness of the corpus. What Henry does not know, in
Dorian's case, is that the corruption *shows* on the portrait in the attic, but not on
Dorian's own body: 'sin' does not write itself across Dorian's face. It writes itself
across his image in the attic. The portrait in the attic is the real index of the thus
expropriated traces of Dorian's life *in time*. He has become the mask-like static
imageness of a *moment* and whilst his body *is* graphed *in corpore* in imaginary
wholeness, his alterity inscribes or exposes itself on the canvas in the *camera*.
When Dorian visits the attic and compares the image of the painting with his
image in the mirror that he has placed next to the painting he wonders 'which
were the more horrible, the signs of sin or the signs of age?' (DG 119). Thus to
return to Baudrillard, this portrait is the form of 'estrangement' that reveals to
Dorian 'this massacre, this process by which [he] exterminates [his] own alterity
– *Selbstentfremdung*. A process in other words, by which one simultaneously
expropriates and eradicates oneself'[20]. It is the real *contrapuntal* to Dorian's
lived imageness as photo-graphed by/in/on his own body as medium on that
'particular day in June' (DG 41) on which Basil finished the painting as Dorian
posed on the platform of the artist's studio when Henry had just pierced his
innocence of not-knowing (*Unkenntnis*). The painting in the attic is the

---

[20] Baudrillard, *Art and Artefact,* 31.

impossible picture. It does not re-present a *that-has-been* but shows a *this*-**is** *because-of-what-has-been*, which – unlike a mirror image – has no visible source that it reflects.

Vollkommenheit

But Dorian not only poses the imageness of the corpus of youthful beauty, he also lives in the perfect pose of wealthy dandyism:

> Indeed, there were many … who *saw, or fancied that they saw*, in Dorian Gray the true realisation of a *type* of which they had often dreamed … To them he seemed to belong to those whom Dante describes as having sought to "make themselves perfect by the worship of beauty". Like Gautier, he was one for whom "the visible world existed" (DG 120, emphasis added).

Dorian's wealth enables him to perform a perfect '*visible* world'. His 'worship of beauty' leads Dorian to become an obsessive collector with a changing focus of objects, from scents to musical instruments to precious stones to historical embroideries. (The elaborate and improbable stories he learns about some of his objects are astonishing and recall those of the fantastic inventory that is Sir Thomas Browne's *Musaeum Clausum*.) For Dorian these objects play exactly the same role as they do for any collector or collection or that posed objects do in general. The objects are real indexes, metonymical parts of more or less temporally and spatially remote times and stories. Like the western museum, he has both objects that refer to an other and objects that refer to an ideal of western culture.

Yet what is special to Dorian Gray, who once proclaimed that he was 'jealous of everything whose beauty does not die' (DG 42) is that now, in contrast, he is 'almost saddened by the reflection of the ruin that time brought on beautiful and wonderful things. … No winter marred his face or stained his flower-like bloom. How different it was with material things!' (DG 129)

For these things, and everything that he collected in his lovely house, were to be to him means for forgetfulness, modes by which he could escape, for a season, from the fear that seemed to him at times to be almost too great to be borne. Upon the walls of the lonely locked room where he had spent so much of his boyhood, he had hung with his own hands the terrible portrait whose changing features showed him the real degradation of his life, and had draped the purple-and-gold pall in front of it as a curtain. (DG 132)

Erkenntnis

Dorian lives in a set-up between two opposed types of objects' imageness. There are his collections of precious artefacts displayed in his house, and there is the 'terrible portrait' covered up and hidden in the attic – which in a way is an involuntary 'collection' of the traces of Dorian's sins and decay. Regarding his collection of artefacts the following Baudrillard quote is most poignant:

The object is thus in the strict sense of the word a mirror, for the images it reflects can only follow upon one another without ever contradicting one another. And indeed, as a mirror the object is perfect, precisely because it sends back not real images but desired ones. … *That is why everything that cannot be invested in human relationships is invested in objects*. That is why regression of his type is so easy, why people so readily practise this form of retreat.[21]

If Dorian's collection reflects '*images* not of what is real but of what is desirable[22]' then the portrait in the attic does the exact opposite: it *shows* what is real – as extracted from Dorian himself. This means that the alterity to his imageness is magically expropriated and thus his own '*real wholeness*' is destroyed in favour of the hollow *simulacral wholeness* of his imageness.

[21] Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 96. 'The perfect mirror that sends back not real images but desired ones' is a paraphrase of Maurice Rheims, in *The Strange Life of Objects*, which Baudrillard has quoted earlier.

[22] This is how Cardinal translates this passage in: Jean Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting' in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (eds), *The Cultures of Collecting* (Reaction Books: London, 1994), 11. The two translations differ considerably in places.

Therefore he is in love with posing the love of imageness – of objects or people – which reflects 'not what is real but what is desirable' and which leaves him unable to engage with what Baudrillard calls another subject's 'integrity as a living being'[23], including his own. Instead, he invests in the objects of his collection (and in the imageness of the people that for him are nothing but objects) what he finds impossible to invest in human relationships.

As a result, the picture in the *camera* is not the only ugly trace of Dorian's sins. His sociopathic conduct, which drove Sibyl Vane to suicide, results in a string of other short-lived 'friendships' which leave those he befriends with various degrees of emotional injury, although the reader is never told how exactly this occurs. Henry is the only friend of Dorian's who does not turn against him at some point, which is no surprise as Henry himself sees Dorian as 'a thing to wonder at' whose life has been his art – and after all: 'All art is at once surface and symbol' and 'Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.'[24]

---

[23] Baudrillard (Cardinal), 'The System of Collecting', 20.
[24] From the preface to the 1891 edition, DG 180.
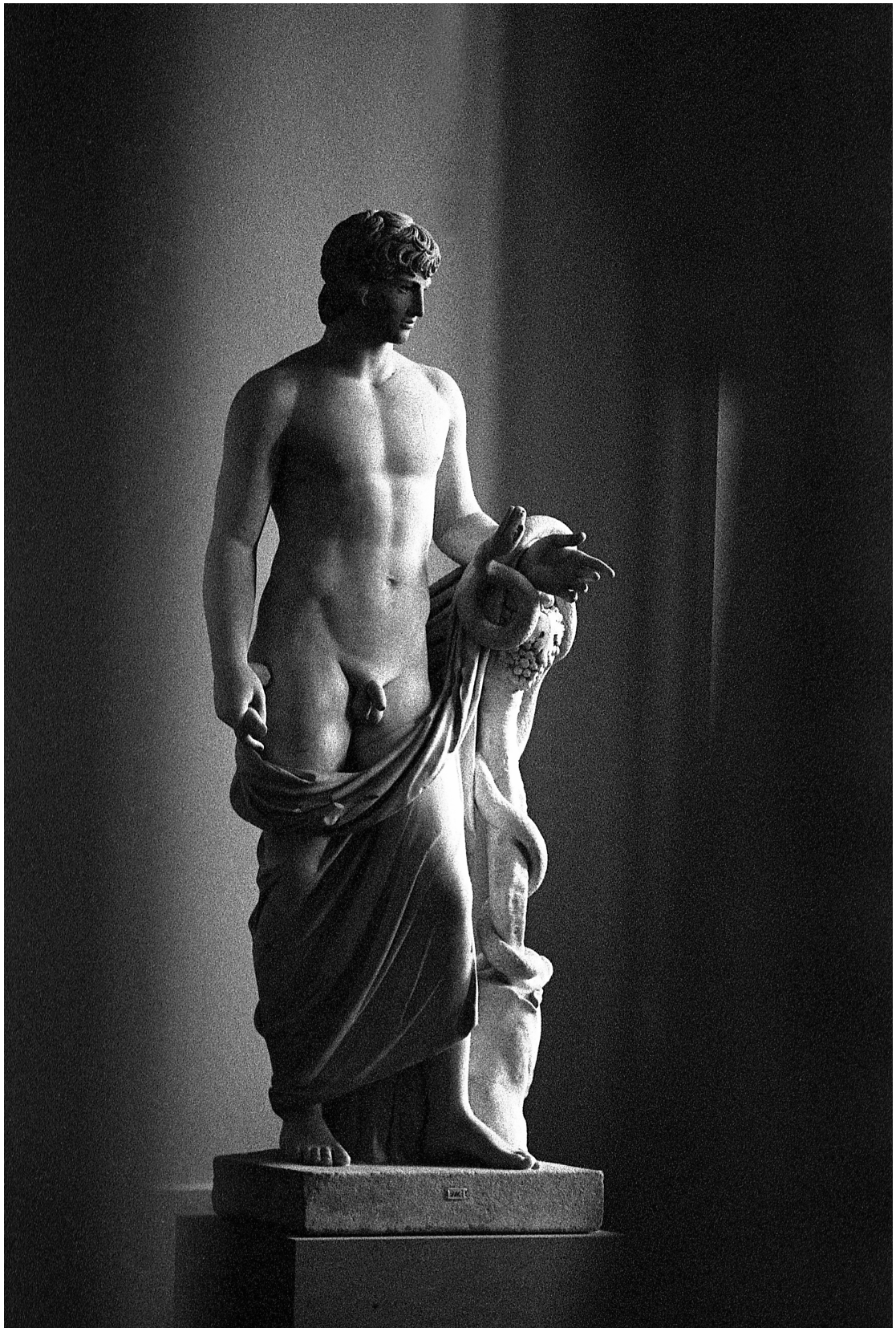
Klaus Wehner: *Collection of Classical Antiquities, Berlin, 11 June 2007*

Photographer not credited: *The Golden Calf*, Sculpture by Damien Hirst, 2008.
Calf, 18 carat gold, glass, gold-plated steel, silicone and formaldehyde solution with Carrara marble plinth, © Damien Hirst.

Chapter IV

On the Alchemical Force of the Pose

In any case, there will be a title, a tag, even if only the negative "untitled." Somewhere there will be an indication that there is what one calls a "work." The minimum of discourse is the word *work,* or some other designation or deictic (a pointing finger, a pedestal) with the same function. *Work* then means not so much the product of a setting-into-work, not so much a particular piece of work, as the following indication: freeze frame here. A still image, meaning also a still text, a fixed point and a cut of the weave in process, an immobilized needle, an eternalized movement.

Jean-Luc Nancy[1]

---

[1] Nancy, *Ground of the Image*, 71.

There is also a big difference between an artifact and art. An artifact is first of all useful, and it does not relate to anything more vitally than its use. It is not isolated in its momentary meaning, and it is easily reproduced. It is not an original. So much contemporary art should be really seen as artifact; but then so should some of the objects in Freud's collection. Is a little Tanagra statuette from the Greek period a real embodiment of that civilisation? These figures were made by the thousands, from moulds … They are not symbols today. … A toy is fine, but it's only a toy. It's not a reality. Art is reality. The artifact is a manufactured object; a work of art is a language. The artifact has only an educational or sentimental value. The work of art has an absolute value.

Louise Bourgeois
('Freud's Toys' in *Artforum*, January 1990, 111-13)

Posing Objects in the Museum: Art or Artefact

> An object no longer specified by its function is defined by the subject.
> Jean Baudrillard[2]

Com-posed

During the winter of 2007/08 a comprehensive Louise Bourgeois retrospective was on display at Tate Modern[3]. As usual for such exhibitions, it was organised into a string of individual rooms/spaces with a relatively clearly set path to follow from the entrance to the exit. Throughout, the exhibition showed groups of works together which varied from drawings and prints, to sculptures made from various found materials to beautifully finished carved marble or cast bronzes, as well as a large number of 'Cells'. The last room was organised and announced by the curators as 'a kind of "cabinet of curiosities"'[4], and it featured a collection of small-scale Bourgeois objects in glass display cases.

On one occasion, I visited the Bourgeois exhibition immediately after a visit to Sir John Soane's Museum, which marked the moment when I began to think about the Tate show other than by just focusing on individual exhibits in succession. Much more than most usual artist's retrospectives, because of the extraordinary variety in the styles and materials used in Bourgeois' sculptural objects, the exhibition reminded me strongly of an eclectic 'collection' or a 'museum' in itself, not at all dissimilar to the eccentric and crammed Soane spaces.

In particular there are some remarkable similarities between the Cells and parts of the interiors of Sir John Soane's Museum, specifically the area added to the back of the house that Soane himself called his *Museum* (as opposed to today's visitors thinking of the entire house as the Soane Museum), which is a space across two/three floors crammed full with mostly fragmented sculptures and architectural fragments. One room of the Soane family home that is directly

---

[2] Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 92.
[3] *Louise Bourgeois*, Tate Modern, London, October 2007-January 2008.
[4] http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/louisebourgeois/rooms/room10.shtm (accessed December 2011).

adjacent to it is the Breakfast Parlour from which, through several internal windows, parts of the *Museum* are prominently visible.

Both Soane and Bourgeois present the viewer with architectural spaces that hover between the domestic and the public. In both cases there is a distinct play with spaces of different accessibility and visibility, some intended to be entered, whilst others are only there to be looked into from a distance through certain carefully created viewpoints. Also particular to both is the use of mirrors that extend the play of the visibility of (inaccessible) spaces. And further still, both spaces feature a carefree juxtaposition of fragments of strong real indexical/reliquary value and objects that would be considered of high genuine originality with objects of lower value/originality. In the case of the Soane collection, there are ubiquitous juxtapositions of casts contemporary to Soane with original ancient fragments (a feature which remains largely undetected by most of today's visitors due to the absence of labels and the fact that all objects are now covered with patina). In the case of Bourgeois' Cells, objects that are carefully crafted by the artist – that would stand recognisably as a 'Bourgeois' without the context of the Cells – are juxtaposed with objects such as bottles, pieces of furniture or pieces of fabric, 'found' and appropriated into the installation. The absence of labels in Soane's *Museum* also aids the comparison to the Cells; it facilitates seeing it as 'installation' in the sense of the word used for modern art. Most visitors to the Soane will not go there in order to see specific individual objects; instead it is the cluttered space as a whole, combined with the knowledge that it remains as originally arranged by Soane some 180 years ago, that is the main attraction[5]. To sum this up by stating the obvious, in both cases, the sum of the object composition outweighs the importance of any one incorporated object.

Another similarity between Sir John Soane's Museum and the Bourgeois exhibition is the above-mentioned 'cabinet of curiosities', an equivalent to which could formerly be found at the Soane in the 'Link Passage', a corridor space created by the curators in the attached neighbouring house on the way to the temporary exhibition gallery[6] in which some display cases have shown a

---

[5] The fact that there was a curator between 1878-92, James Wild, who implemented many additions and changes and whose plan was actually to dismantle Soane's installation and re-display the objects in ordered display cases, indicates that the appreciation of the space was not always as it is today.

[6] This was added in 1994 but has now been removed as part of a major project to restore those (mainly domestic) Soane spaces that over the years had become used for museum administration (to be completed in 2014).

variety of small-scale objects from Soane's collection as well as some memorabilia relating to the life of the collector.

As evidenced by the opening quote, Bourgeois herself has a strong opinion on the 'work of art' as opposed to an 'artifact'. Given her ingenious mixing of crafted objects of high finish with found fragments that would be deemed rubbish were they not posed, we must conclude that Bourgeois considers the objects she poses, whether crafted or found, as being transformed into 'works of art'. The quote in question is taken from a short text in which Bourgeois responds to an exhibition of Sigmund Freud's collection of ancient sculptures, held in New York in 1990, and Bourgeois clearly classifies 'some of the objects in Freud's collection'[7] as artefacts . Cultural conventions will of course be responsible for the fact that many viewers share Bourgeois' view and will perceive any exhibits/environments of the kind described here so far with different presumptions mainly based on knowledge regarding their respective *creators*, and I will try and rattle the conventions of classification by analysing the different exhibits/environments through the concept of posing.

The Bourgeois exhibition clearly presents the viewer with different planes of posing. The curators posed the environment that is the exhibition as a whole and that felt to me like a 'Bourgeois Museum'. Within it there are posed installations created by the curators through assembling similar objects, such as a room filled with *Personages* neatly arranged in a grid in a space not accessible to viewers, separated by a barrier. Then there are the *Cells*, object compositions arranged and posed by Bourgeois, which are considered an artist's 'installation' and which curators will pose in correspondence to the artist's instructions. These *Cells* are again juxta*posed* in groups by curators. In addition, curators also pose a 'cabinet of curiosities' that they created in order to facilitate the display of a selection of Bourgeois' small-scale objects. Some of Bourgeois' art objects such as *Couple IV* also incorporate (found) glass cases. Here the display case is considered part of the work of art, as evinced by the inclusion of its materials in the listing of media on the exhibition label. Thus we clearly distinguish between the (juxta)pose created by the curator and the (juxta)pose created by the artist, despite the fact that the result is the same. Similarly, even though such posed environments are very similar, we make a clear distinction between an artist's installation and an environment created by a collector such as Sir John Soane, whereby we see the collector on a par with curators. Giving Soane's *Museum* a

---

[7] Bourgeois, 'Freud's Toys', 113.

'reading' of the type that would be applied to a 'work of art' that is a contemporary artist's *installation* would easily produce interpretations determined by the topography of height, light, beauty, life on the upper floor which is brightly lit through a glass dome and dominated by a large sculpture of Apollo faced by a bust of Soane, versus depth, darkness, beauty, death in the 'Crypt', which is dimly lit, features a skeleton and is dominated by the large alabaster sarcophagus of Seti I[8]. Even without such a reading, Soane's *Museum* and house can certainly be seen as instrumental in, and at the same time a monument to, a social transformation of its creator, this presence of the autobiographical being another similarity to Bourgeois' *Cells*[9].

---

[8] Donald Preziosi has given a reading based on a journey from dark to light, which he suggests to be symbolical for the Freemason's idea of death and rebirth, in the chapter 'The Astrolabe of the Enlightenment' in Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's* Body, 63-91.

[9] Both Soane and Bourgeois in different ways rework their origin. Soane does so by giving his work as architect and also himself a classical heritage (in Baudrillard's sense of the collection as a 'myth of origin' (*System of Objects*, 78), as museums do on a national level). In contrast, instead of giving herself a 'new' heritage, Bourgeois actively reworks her own childhood trauma.

Not Every-body is an Artist. Not Every-body Knows 'Art'.

What Bourgeois' statement paradigmatically exemplifies is that the differentiation most often made remains pinned on the concept of the 'artist' (as somehow differentiated from the non-artist) as a mythological agent whose creative skill produces objects of encoded meaning ('absolute value') that can be read as texts can ('a work of art is a language') and that have the power to communicate a truth that may reflect on, but is thought of as distinct from, everyday life. This belief has survived any attempts to evacuate the artist/author from the artwork. By choosing industrially manufactured objects for his readymades, Duchamp has famously evacuated the emphasis on the artist's craft and skill from the art object. This has potentially severed any real indexical link to the body of the artist, such as brush strokes or marks of carving. The readymade has elevated the simple act of posing objects to an artist's strategy.

This means, however, that the viewer must be familiar with the practice in order to appreciate the art object. One example I witnessed where the viewer's knowledge did not suffice to appreciate the posed object as art was a visitor to Tate Modern who drew the attention of a friend to Damien Hirst's *Forms Without Life*, a wall mounted glass vitrine with a number of shelves on which a collection of shells is displayed in an ordered grid, by proclaiming that 'There are some rather nice shells over there!' The visitor in question simply viewed this shelf in the same way that a viewer would if it was encountered in a natural history museum. Speaking of Damien Hirst, here is an artist whose oeuvre is a distinct legacy to the blurring of the distinction between posing seen as curating and posing seen as an act of art, as Hirst mainly poses (ready)made objects with the additional twist of having them specifically fabricated for this purpose. (I dare to guess this is the type of contemporary art that for Bourgeois 'should be really seen as artifact'.) The difference between a patron of art commissioning an artist to produce a work of art according to his or her wishes and an artist like Hirst commissioning a fabricator to make a work of art according to his wishes is entirely in the eye of the beholder. The fabricated 'readymade' is an ironic legacy of the (al)ready-made, yet after all, embraced by Duchamp himself as he 'authorised' (had fabricated) a number of 'exact' replicas of his *Fountain* in 1964 – after the photograph taken by Alfred Stieglitz.

Artist's 'interventions' into museum spaces are another case where the knowledge of the viewer is crucial for the appreciation of the artist's message. As part of introducing awareness of the role of slavery in the development of eighteenth-century British prosperity, and thus its art and culture, in 2007, the Victoria & Albert Museum staged the exhibition *Uncomfortable Truths* (February to June 2007) interspersed in some permanent galleries. One of artist Keith Piper's *Lost Vitrines* showed an old/original looking folder displayed in a glass case in the British Galleries, opened on a page showing the illustrated 'instruction' 'A Gentleman's Guide to the Restraint of Negroes'. I had just admired what to me seemed an intervention of subtle appearance yet great effectiveness when I witnessed two teenagers intently studying the book then giggling and pointing out to each other how 'it used to be'. Not only was the effect of the intervention that the artist aimed for reserved for those visitors who had the knowledge to understand the practice, but where this subversiveness was not perceived, the authority of the museum actually 'naturalised' this artefact.

Installation

As is the case with all cultural practices that originate in an aim for subversion and that eventually get embraced by the culture that was the target of the initial subversion, some museums have themselves embraced and adopted certain strategies of 'intervention' – without the help of 'artists'.

The Kolumba Museum in Cologne is one of the bolder examples I have come across: its employment of posed environments can deservedly be called dramatic, in newly created purpose-built architecture with an approach to curating which is based on the immediate juxtaposition of historic objects with contemporary art. To give just one example, in 2010 (the display changes annually) one large windowless very high-ceilinged room with stark grey concrete walls and soft even lighting, which reminded me on a prison cell or indeed a tomb, contained only two exhibits: on a square plinth, just above knee height, was placed a medieval 'Johannesschüssel' (page 169) and on one of the walls was juxtaposed an abstract painting of different grey tones.

Lothar Schnepf: Room 19 in the Kolumba Museum, Köln, 2010.

Johanneschüssel, early 16th Century, wood carving and brass dish. Painting by Jürgen Paatz, Untitled, 1972/73. With many thanks to the Kolumba Museum for supplying the image.
© Kolumba Museum Köln, Photo by Lothar Schnepf.

The effect of this dramatic installation is certainly far removed from the previous more 'traditional' settings in which I have seen the Johannesschüssel in the Museum's former location. How would this installation be viewed if it were made by a contemporary artist who had these objects fabricated? In the Kolumba Museum, the effect of the juxtaposition and dramatic installation is certainly reciprocal: the medieval artefact is more likely to be viewed as a 'work of art' rather than an artefact and at the same time the modern art is posed as being of the same value as the historic object, whose cultural value and 'heritage' is more solidly established. This transformation has been achieved by the curators. I have come across another dramatically posed life-sized Head of Saint John the Baptist (Juan de Mesa c1625) in 2010, during the exhibition *The Sacred Made Real* (October 2009 – January 2010) in the National Gallery in London. Here the exhibit was displayed on a chest-height black plinth in a glass

169

case in a largely black room with a strong, directed spotlight illuminating the head. The entire exhibition was staged in this style. Its curatorial focus was on the astonishingly life-like polychrome painted sculptures of seventeenth-century Spain, in order to redress the art historical neglect of these objects in favour of paintings. The sculptures were all posed in dimly lit galleries with dark walls and dramatic spotlighting on the objects. The curatorial composition of this exhibition was extraordinary and no less subjected to dramatization than the room in the Kolumba Museum. Some of the exhibits on pose as part of this installation had actually never left the original sacral interiors they were made for, where they are, as the directors remind us in the foreword to the catalogue, 'to use the anthropologist's term, "in worship"'[10]. Whilst these sculptures have deliberately been made to be posed, the de- and re-contextualising of the National Gallery exhibition is a mediation and transformation of considerable magnitude, which becomes evident in the exhibition catalogue, where some exhibits are shown in their usual setting. Art critic Richard Dorment wrote in the *Telegraph*:

> Apart from royal and aristocratic portraiture, the imagery in most Spanish painting and sculpture during the Counter Reformation is religious. It is therefore not 'art' in the modern sense because it was made neither for visual delight or aesthetic contemplation but as an aid to devotion.[11]

Apart from the fact that it is most questionable that an aid for devotion cannot also be a visual delight or be aesthetically contemplated by a worshipper, Dorment's classification here is clearly on a level with Bourgeois' differentiation between art and artefact. However, the dramatized staging of the National Gallery clearly aims to pose the objects as works of art, which is complicit with the aim to redress their art historical neglect. Interestingly, another installation at the National Gallery in 1999 was astonishingly similar to the installation of *The Sacred Made Real*. Resulting from the Associate Artist Scheme, Anna Maria Pacheco's installation *Dark Nights of the Soul* employed exactly this aesthetic of

---

[10] Penny, Nicholas, Powell III, Earl A., 'Directors' Foreword', Xavier Bray et al, *The Sacred Made Real: Spanish Painting and Sculpture 1600-1700* (National Gallery Company: London, 2009), 7.

[11] Telegraph 3 Jan 2010 by Richard Dorment, online at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-reviews/6375890/The-Sacred-Made-Real-at-the-National-Gallery-review.html (accessed, December 2011).

dark walls and spotlights in an otherwise unlit space, while her sculpture groups, although aiming less for realism, showed the same biblical themes as *The Sacred Made Real*. Even though in both cases the skill and craft of the makers is a major point of interest, it is cultural convention that the dramatized posing of the *curated* composition remains in a certain transparency (there is no mention of it in Dorment's article) whereas in the installation of the *artist* it is considered part of her artistic skill in creating an 'installation' and thus an integral part of the work's meaning.

What all this makes evident is that the perceived meaning of any posed object is entirely dependent on the viewer's knowledge and presumptions based on cultural conventions.

Evidently, in museums, the alchemical force of the pose remains largely hidden in favour of an object fetishism that is based on the presumption of an object's 'intrinsic' meaning. Whilst objects that are evidently crafted and highly finished and recognisably figurative would more easily be recognised as art – if for example found discarded in a dusty shed – the way these are posed in exhibitions still determines their con*temporary* meaning. The less crafted and the more abstract an object is, the more it depends on the pose to be recognised as and be read as having the imageness of a work of art. Any piece of furniture as posed and incorporated into one of Bourgeois' Cells, if found in a shed would obviously not have any meaning as work of art. Due to its highly finished and figurative nature a piece like "Nature Study" (1984) would probably be recognised as a piece of art when found out of context, not least because this particular sculpture actually consists partly of a plinth, and also as no other obvious use other than to be posed would be known for such an object.

It can be seen as symptomatic of the previously discussed dynamic of the museum to preserve the transparency of its mediality, to deny this importance of the pose by covering it with object fetishism supported by the *idea* of real indexicality to grant 'intrinsic' and 'fixed' meaning. In the case of science or natural history museums this is the metonymic power of the part object extracted from its origin as discussed above. In the case of the art museum this is based on the mythical artist's touch – a real indexical link to the artist's body – and also his or her thinking *mind* which, as already mentioned, has well survived any attempts to subvert it and evacuate the artist/author from the artwork. Where it cannot be attained, a perfectly exact 'authorised'

reproduction is considered second best. The very best example of this failure to detach the *idea* of the artist from a 'work of art' is Duchamp's very own *Fountain*. The 'original' is lost, yet painstakingly fabricated exact hand-made reproductions, *authorised* by the artist, are considered second best to the original. It is in these reproductions – and all fabricated works of art – that the link to the artist's body is the most remote, as the original pissoir would be subject to the reliquary value of the real index, resulting from the fact that it was actually found and handled by Duchamp. Yet the reproductions too are seen as real 'Duchamps'. This constitutes a – commercially motivated – subversion of the initial subversive act, which emphasised the pose over the object[12].

Sinngebung

To conclude this part of the argument, in all examples mentioned here the viewer encounters environments of objects juxta*posed* as image. Whilst the presented imageness is often com-posed identically, cultural conventions determine very different readings depending on the object's known origin. *Installation* remains in the relative transparency typical of the museum's mediality that, though much observed in museological studies, remains in place. Objects posed by artists are viewed with very different presumptions and if the artist poses object compositions, the installation is considered part of the (meaning of the) work of art.

Whilst the installation of the Johannesschale in the Kolumba Museum or of *The Sacred Made Real* were good examples to discuss as they displayed a distinctly high dramatic labour of what Preziosi calls the stagecraft[13] of the museum, we

---

[12] The implications for the view of the readymade as a 'piece of the world', discussed earlier, are clear to see. Much more can be said on this issue and it must be assumed that Duchamp was acutely aware of the inversion of the concept of the readymade. Francis Naumann claims that finding new urinals would have been an act of repetition unacceptable to Duchamp. 'But if you accept the concept of a readymade … that caused you to change your definition of art. What Duchamp forces you to do in 1964 [the year the reproductions were made] is to accept another definition of Duchamp, not of art, but of Duchamp … After all when you think about it, this is artifice, this is trompe l'oeil, this is an illusion.'
Art historians Francis Naumann and Michael Taylor discuss the reproduction of Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) in relation to the artist's concept of the readymade. Source: http://www.sfmoma.org/multimedia/videos/148#ixzz1C9cYO7kj, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (accessed September 2011).
[13] Donald Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis & London, 2003).

have seen previously that in any case, even in a display considered to be 'traditional' or 'neutral', the museum is unable to present objects outside of a meaning-producing (*sinngebend*) syntagm, which, by metonymically re-presenting real part objects with an authentic origin, 'adds to their nature'. The imageness that is presented hides the polysemic arbitrariness underneath the appearance of the syntagmatic set-up and its constructed meaning as spectacle – or imageness.

Where the strategy of posing differs between the modern artist and the curator is that the artist poses objects and environments that actively court arbitrariness and this arbitrariness is linked to the unique subjectivity of the artist, whereas the curator simply re-presents meaning supposedly inherent in the objects without any perceived input on behalf of the curator's subjectivity. The artist acts strictly in the realm of art, the curator partakes in science. The artist's strategy embraces its *Sinngebung* (art), the curator's strategy (traditionally) disavows it (science).

A shelf of shells in the natural history museum is an act of ordering and classifying the material world and thus provides a scientific understanding of our position in it. The shelf in the art museum can be read as contemplation on the practice of classification amongst a myriad of other possible reflections. Bourgeois' and Pacheco's works of art present a non-realist and abstracted iconicity that is also deliberately open and arbitrary. Similarly to a text, all these works of art are considered to have an encoded yet arbitrary meaning. Still, the curators of the Bourgeois exhibition have com-posed her objects in displays that insert these into a further level of meaning-producing syntagm, which in this case, following the artist's 'development', confirms the art historical canonisation of Bourgeois' lifelong career. Within this *scientific* discourse their supposed 'absolute value' is subject to the curatorial syntagm and the objects therefore receive a certain 'educational or even sentimental' value as the alchemical effect of this pose transforms the works of art into artefacts of the curator's discourse…

Art and Science

What all this shows is that the distinction commonly made between 'art' and 'artefact' is entirely *ideological* in the mind of the beholder. It is based on transparent / un-noticed (evolving) cultural conventions and consensus, which in order to function require the viewer to be initiated – have knowledge of either practice. The ideology behind the classification 'art' or 'artefact' is in the end hinged on the separation between science and art. The artefact refers to 'objective' scientific knowledge; the work of art refers to subjective thought, which remains based on the lasting myth of the *artist* to whom alchemical powers are granted in regard to objects. Artists' names that have been canonised through the relevant institutions (galleries, museums, art-historical interpretation) bestow alchemical force on almost every object the artist produces. The huge letters of an artist's name on top of Tate Modern are surely one of the ultimate awards a living modern artist can achieve. We go and see 'Louise Bourgeois' and not 'Human Trauma'. Once an artist, alive or dead, has achieved such success, their sketches and even detritus can become (financially valuable) art, even though an art historian's and / or curator's input – and their labour of posing – in some cases constitutes a massive addition to the resulting 'works'. A good example of recent years is the Eva Hesse exhibition *Eva Hesse: Studiowork* that was researched, sourced and exhibited by a scholar of her work, Brioni Fer, and which I saw at the Camden Arts Centre in London (February to June 2007). Some of the exhibits, which Hesse called 'test pieces' and which Fer 'collectively renamed' as 'studioworks', had been left in Hesse's studio, others 'sold or given to friends' in her lifetime[14]. Some were quite distinguishable 'Hesse' objects clearly reminiscent of known pieces. Thus we are talking about experiments or maquettes, in short, the 'sketches' of a sculptor. Whilst it is not unusual to devote exhibitions to artists' sketches, the naming of these objects as 'studioworks', together with their display in a distinctly sterile spacious white cube environment in curated compositions on substantially sized white plinths, has posed the objects as finished 'Studioworks' (and there is clearly a strong awareness of this issue, as the press release describes the objects as 'evad[ing] easy definition' and 'studioworks' is kept in a lower case). Still, the white cube treatment had clearly transformed and elevated the objects to finished pieces of

---

[14] All quotes: Camden Arts Centre website:
http://www.camdenartscentre.org/exhibitions/?id=100746 (accessed September 2011).

art, if not *completed* the artwork, and it is obvious to see that this process of completion was undertaken by the curator, not the artist.

Duchamp's refabricated urinal even though only a reproduction will be considered art and to be 'authentic' as it was 'authorised' by the artist. The same urinal in a museum for applied arts or a design museum would be an artefact of design or the history of hygiene and we might be informed about the designer, possibly even the factory of origin, but the relationship between object and 'maker' is vastly different.

Nevertheless, whilst seen though the lens of the concept of 'the pose' the classification of objects as 'art' or 'artefact' potentially dissolves, the ideology that upholds the differentiation is after all a symbolic, cultural consensus the type of which is the base of all signs and hence communication. The differentiation is part of the separation between 'art' and 'science'. Posed objects considered 'art' are a different kind of sign that demands different codes of reading – or a different de-coding – than posed objects considered 'science'. The ideological difference is that the lump of the physical world that is posed by the artists is afforded total polysemy, which thus can embody any meaning the artist is thought to confer on the object; and this meaning (even if arbitrary and encoded) is then deemed to be sealed and fixed to the object – or inherent to it. And this is also what separates the artefact from the art. A urinal in a design museum, a shell in a natural history museum or a cast of an architectural fragment in Soane's collection of art are not afforded total polysemy and are deemed to have an inherent meaning or truth value – and a resulting educational and ultimately scientific value – to start with. The same is the case with objects once these have left the alchemical hands of the artist. In both cases, art or artefact, the presumed inherent and fixed meaning naturalises and renders transparent the curator's composition as a neutral act of display.

A Little Piece of the Real II

Returning to thoughts about the presence of human remains in posed objects, bearing in mind the earlier observation of its contrapuntal potential, the singularity afforded to body parts is seen as such an inherent absolute that it does not allow for the total polysemy afforded to lumps of the physical world in the hand of the artist, and I would argue that this is the reason for the ongoing taboo on inserting human remains into pieces of art and for carefully

separating and preserving any display of body parts into the realm of science[15]. Gunter von Hagen's hugely popular and much debated *Bodyworlds* exhibitions are a good example of this cultural sensitivity. Individually, his prepared corpses are clearly based in an eighteenth-century Vesalius-aesthetic, and thus originate in a cultural period when 'art' as in our contemporary understanding did not exist and 'art' and 'science' were not seen as separated as today but worked in unison – artistic skill was integral to the illustration of scientific knowledge. Yet as a whole, *Bodyworlds* exhibitions are always carefully staged to avoid looking like 'art'. I visited a *Bodyworlds* exhibition about 10 years ago, and the overall set-up successfully avoided any suggestion of an art context as the space was filled with an overwhelming quantity of large pot plants to the degree that it felt like entering a greenhouse[16]. The sensitivity towards right or wrong modes of display is evident in the following quote, taken from the essay 'Should we display the dead?' which is divided into the three sections, 'Yes', 'No' and 'Sometimes': the quote is from the author arguing 'Sometimes':

> The Hunterian Museum and *Bodyworlds* can also be compared in their presentation of human foetuses. In *Bodyworlds* these are accorded a different treatment to the rest of the human remains. Lying on pillows of black velvet may be an attempt to acknowledge their humanity or some respect to the unborn child, but what it does is to turn them into art objects, each with their own spotlight much as jewellery is on show in art museums, or even high class jewellers. Compare this to the outright medical display of the Hunterian, where the body as medical specimen elucidates a far greater understanding of development within the womb.[17]

---

[15] It could additionally be argued that this taboo also preserves 'art' as an autonomous realm separate from the real, in the way Crimp argued that photography, seen as real, has already undermined.

[16] A decade later, I have very little memory of any individual objects but remember very well the greenhouse atmosphere. To me, the effect of the plastination, which makes the exhibits seem to be made of plastic, constituted a near absolute abstraction of the corpses. Still, I distinctly remember the artificiality was pierced by a *punctum* which related to a piece of skin with hair.

[17] Samuel Alberti, Piotr Bienkowski, Malcolm J. Chapman, 'Should we display the dead?' in *museum and society*, Nov. 2009, 133-49, ISSN 1479-8360. http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/museumsociety/documents/volumes/alberti2.pdf (accessed November 2011).

Photograph: JRABX on flickr.com

Another controversy of interest in this context occurred in London in early 2011 around the installation of a memorial sculpture that was meant to mark the tenth anniversary of the 11th September 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center . The New York-based artist, Miya Ando, intended simply to erect some of the steel girders left from the destroyed buildings, which are given by the Port Authority of New York to several cities around the world for similar projects. Yet relatives of British victims of the attack objected, and one told the *Guardian* that she 'was dismayed that anyone could think of turning steel that had "bodies strewn on them" into a work of art. "I feel very strongly that the girders should not be used in this way," she told the Guardian. "I find it quite disturbing"'[18]. Before this, when it was announced, it was already described as '"violent" … "It's so in your face that people won't be able to pass by or overlook it. It's not something that promotes peace — it draws attention to violence."'[19] *Guardian* art critic Jonathan Jones points out that girders like these have been exhibited in the New York 9/11 Memorial Museum, which caused no objections[20], and the Imperial War Museum in London later also exhibited some girders on the occasion of the ten-year anniversary. Clearly, by both sides, the girders are seen as objects with a strong real indexical link to dead bodies and to this particular act of atrocious violence which caused the death of those bodies. The objection is also caused by the fact that the girders are presented in 'a provocatively "raw" way'[21] – for a piece of art (in the Imperial War Museum they were also displayed in a distinctly 'raw' way – even for a 'scientific' display[22]). Thus it is again the fact that the objects with their strong indexical link to the violated body are to *become* 'art' through the simple transformation into a sculpture that encounters strong opposition.

---

[18] *Guardian*, 8 March 2011 by Mark Tran. Online:
http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/mar/08/september-11-london-sculpture-on-hold/print (accessed November 2011).
[19] *Evening Standard*, 20 Dec 2010, Ruth Bloomfield and Miranda Bryant, 'Ten years on, New York donates 9/11 girders to make London sculpture'. Online:
http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23908394-ten-years-on-new-york-donates-911-girders-to-make-london-sculpture.do (accessed November 2011).
[20] Jonathan Jones, ON ART BLOG,
http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2011/mar/10/9-11-sculpture-public-art-miya-ando?commentpage=1#comment-9903050 (accessed November 2011).
[21] Jonathan Jones, ON ART BLOG, weblink as above.
[22] This display distinctly avoids any dramatic staging: the girders were placed on the floor with a museum rope running very closely around them, located in front of the entrance to a slide show display of a photographic project devoted to photographs of debris as stored in an aircraft hangar.

Both the 'scientific' display in the memorial museum as well as the display of the 'artwork' are acts of narration and symbolisation. The difference is that the memorial museum is seen to present a narration of true facts in correspondence to the meaning seen as intrinsic to the object, whereas the artist is seen as potentially violating this intrinsic meaning – partially as an act of self-promotion – and to produce a non-factual, arbitrary narration. Just like actual mortal remains, objects with such a *strongly felt* real indexical link to body parts must remain in the realm of the scientific artefact and are not allowed to be inserted into the openly polysemic dynamic of the work of art.

Chapter V

Posing Objects Posing Subjects

[I]t is thanks to their discontinuous integration into series that we put objects at our sole disposition, that we own them. *This is the discourse of subjectivity itself, and objects are a privileged register of that discourse.* Between the world's irreversible evolution and ourselves, objects *interpose* a discontinuous, classifiable, reversible screen …

Apart from the uses to which we put them in any particular moment, objects in this sense have another aspect which is intimately bound up with the subject: no longer simply material bodies offering a certain resistance, they become precincts over which I hold sway, *they become things of which I am the meaning … .*
Jean Baudrillard[1]

---

[1] Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 100-01 and 91, my emphasis.

Posing Objects *not* in the Museum: Utilised or *Pose*ssed

The phenomenon of collecting has received considerable academic attention over recent decades in tandem with extensive investigations around museums. Earlier, we have established via some of Susan Pearce's observations regarding collecting that any one posed object can be seen as 'collected'. Baudrillard's earlier text, the already much quoted classic *The System of Objects*, provides an analysis of our relationship to objects particularly suited to be adapted to the idea of the posed object. Whilst Baudrillard's focus is on consumerism and the domestic with one chapter dedicated to private collecting, his observations regarding personal possession and collecting prove just as to the point when expanded to an analysis of communal or public collecting, not only objects in museums but also other objects posed *in* and *as* public, such as monuments and (monumental) architecture.

In his analysis of objects in the domestic environment Baudrillard uses the distinction between 'functional objects', which he opposes to 'marginal' or 'mythical objects' (such as antiques)[2]. This is continued when he looks at collecting, where he distinguishes between everyday objects that are 'utilised' and collected objects that he describes as 'possessed'. Baudrillard uses the example of a fridge, which he finds 'is defined in terms of a practical transaction':

> If I use the refrigerator in order to refrigerate, it is a practical transaction: it is not an object but a refrigerator. In that sense I do not possess it. A utensil is never possessed, because a utensil refers me to the world. What is possessed is always the object that is *abstracted from its function and thus brought into relationship with the subject*. In this sense all objects that are possessed partake of the same *abstraction*, and refer to one another only inasmuch as they all refer solely to the subject. These objects thereby constitute a system, on the basis of which the subject strives to construct a world, a private totality.[3]

---

[2] Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 'I. Marginal Objects: Antiques', 77-90 and 'II. A Marginal System: Collecting', 91-114. The latter chapter has also been published as 'The System of Collecting' in a translation by Roger Cardinal in: John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (eds), *The Cultures of Collecting*, (Reaction Books: London, 1994), 7-24.
[3] Baudrillard, *Système des Objets*, 103-04, my translation.

It is the *abstracted* object's 'referral to the subject', this system on the basis of which the subject strives to construct a world – a private totality which by default must be defined against a public totality – that, in conclusion, I will pick up and observe in regard to the pose and its imageness.

The similarity between Baudrillard's object 'abstracted from its function' and the definitions discussed earlier of the readymade in art and the posed object in general is apparent. The 'posed' is thus equivalent to Baudrillard's 'abstracted' and 'possessed', as the act of posing an object is always also a posing of the possession of the object: the object is thus *pose*ssed; the subject who poses the object is the *posessor*.

As noted, in the distinct environment that is the museum or gallery, an environment whose sole purpose is to pose objects, the meaning that is bestowed on any posed 'lump of the physical world' is dependent on sets of cultural consensus. In the museum-*system*, the same object abstracted from its function can be inserted into and become a constitutive part of different types of discourse, namely that of 'art' or that of 'science' (whereof the borders can also be blurred). This is why the museum has been a privileged site to observe the workings of the alchemical force of the pose and its dynamic of *Sinngebung*, but it is apparent that this dynamic is just as all-powerful *outside* the museum. For both individuals and social communities, the posing of objects is an integral part of the way we com*pose* our entire environment. We arrange and relate to all objects around us subject to the dynamic of a *polarity between the posed versus the used*: The posed object is set-aside for a beholding gaze. Its imageness is emphasised which solicits the contemplative reception of its meaning. Its transformation into a sign is thus subject to a degree of negation of its matter-reality in favour of its imageness. On the other end is the object that is barely noticed as it is subsumed in its utilisation and functionality in the daily negotiation of our selves in our environment. Remembering Pearce, the 'used' extends to the actual material environment and the posed is what is 'collected', 'chosen' and 'lifted out'[4]. The used object's imageness is subsumed together with its matter-reality, both being subject to a degree of transparency in favour of the completed 'transaction'.

---

[4] Pearce, *Museums*, 38.

As typical for Baudrillard, whose thought is always marked by a distinct disregard for the corpo-real, his observation that the utilised object 'directs me back to *the world*' whereas 'possessed' objects 'refer back to the subject' is to the point, yet made in such abstracted terms as to constitute a cerebral camouflaging and negation of the body. Instead it should be stressed that the used object in its function of transparent servile matter-reality is an analogue – or extension – of the transparent servile *matter-reality of the body*: the referral to 'the world' is a referral to the *body*, or in other words to the body's matter-real position embedded in 'the world'. The posed object, on the other hand, is an analogue or extension, and thus part of *the imageness of the corpus and the posed self*.

It follows that the polarity *posed—used* structures the (object) world into the same polarity that is the basis of the pose of the self: the *body* too is 'used' to fulfil functions that in everyday life are barely consciously noticed (or are systematically hidden). I don't think about my fingers whilst I type this. However, I might pose the position of my hands at the moment in which all activity gets suspended and I transform myself into a *corpus* presenting my imageness – in order to be recorded or simply being aware of another's look or posing for myself.

Beyond the immediate visual imageness of such specific *moments* of relative stasis, the trope pose/imageness extends to the subject's performative social role in daily life, which has been previously observed in the discussion of *Death in Venice* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The fact that the character of Dorian Gray is a collector has already led to some observations on the function of posed objects in creating and posing the subject's social role, and this issue deserves a closer look.

In domestic or semi-public spaces, typical 'everyday' posed objects range from the empty Chianti bottle on the wall of an Italian restaurant or in the home as the souvenir from a summer holiday, to the collection of shells or stones on the bookshelf, to baby's first shoes, to the framed graduation photograph, the museum replica, to the antique candelabra in the sitting room, the old print on the wall, to pieces of art or craft, to Sigmund Freud's collection of antiquities arranged on his desk: all are objects posed as image for a contemplative gaze, and are just as typical of the 'collection' in being metonymical and metaphorical at the same time.

These examples can be roughly distinguished as coming from two areas of origin: those external to the subject's own life and being of cultural origin or cultural heritage, and those being aide-memoirs, souvenirs of the individual's own life, having been actively extracted from use to be preserved and posed. Baudrillard finds that the two functions of the object, utilized or possessed, 'stand in inverse ratio to each other'[5] (which Cardinal translated as 'mutually exclusive'[6]), but applied to the idea of posing it is preferable to use the term polarity between posed and used objects, leaving space for an in between that is subject to both forces, since outside the distinct space of the museum the division is often far from clear-cut: in between the two poles, the borders are fluid, and in domestic and public environments objects of use are also often posed. In fact, it is in the areas where use and pose converge that the 'referral to the subject' receives a specific immediacy.

Consumer Culture

One cultural field that feeds ostentatiously on promoting objects that are used and posed at the same time is that of modern-day consumerism. For example, the car is of major utility in transporting people and objects but is at the same time an object to be posed as it demonstrates taste, lifestyle choices and financial prowess – or indeed an owner's indifference to these matters – and is thus an instance of posing social status through (the imageness of) a utilised object.

Baudrillard himself speaks about the 'automobile-*object*'[7] as he observes how the fins, once fashionable on American cars, are '*purely* a sign'[8] the allegorical character[9] of which transforms the whole car into a sign of the 'natural'. In the section 'Form as Camouflage'[10], Baudrillard observes how the 'articulation of forms'[11] of a utilised object mediates the object through the *idea* that the form refers to. For example, the car fin's association with a shark results in the connotation of the 'natural'. This, according to Baudrillard, confers on the object

---

[5] Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 92.
[6] Baudrillard (Cardinal), 'The System of Collecting', 8.
[7] Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 62, my emphasis. Baudrillard looks at the car at length, 62-64 and 69-74.
[8] Ibid., 62.
[9] Ibid., 63.
[10] Ibid., 64-66.
[11] Ibid., 64.

a '*finality*'[12], and he claims that: '"Vulgar" objects – objects that dissolve [s'épuisent] in their function do not have this finality … For a long while crude attempts were made to impose such a finality: sewing machines were decorated with flowers and not long ago Cocteau and Buffet "dressed up" refrigerators.'[13] More than forty years after this publication it is evident that consumer culture continues to bestow such invented finalities with relentless fervour. The 'natural' remains very much desired and technology in the form of 'high-tech' has also been embraced as a desired connotation. What Baudrillard treated as 'form' has established itself as 'design' and 'design' may well aim to connote the 'natural' but also often does quite the opposite: to take Baudrillard's own example, with the establishment of (re)designed 'white goods' some fridges have become *objects* of pride in the contemporary designer kitchen as they come in bold colours and styles, 'high-tech' or 'retro', and are subject to value and status through their 'look' – and the brand name on the door. My impressive stainless steel fridge connotes 'technology' and it is an object that is utilised as well as posed – I *posess* it.

This 're-designing' together with the ostentatiously placed brand label or indeed the prominent integration of a logo into the actual design of objects has become a staple of contemporary consumer culture's ferocious dynamic to transform the most 'vulgar' consumables and tools of use into objects to be *posessed.* (The alchemical force of the mark of the brand – the label – is thus not dissimilar to the museum label as it provides accompanying (text-) information that gives value to the object.) In addition to form or design, what Baudrillard calls 'finality' is also bestowed on the object via invented links to *ideas* (in the sense that Baudrillard described) arbitrarily created through advertising[14] – forever employing the mythical naturalisation of the photograph as in 'a lustral bath of innocence'[15]– resulting in the same transformative fusion between utility and pose. From vacuum cleaners to ironing boards to cleaning products to toilet paper to wall paint, the list is bottomless.

However, this is not the place to interrogate consumer culture further. The point that is of interest to note is its mechanism that bestows invented imageness (in its metaphorical form) on all types of 'vulgar' objects. This way,

---

[12] Baudrillard, *Système des Objets*, 74 (my translation). Benedict translates it as 'goal-directedness' and 'purposiveness' (*System of Objects*, 65)

[13] Baudrillard, *Système des Objets, Système des Objets: La consommation des signes* (Denöel/Gonthier, Editions Gallimard,1978 [1968]), 74 (my translation).

[14] See: 'Advertising', *System of Objects*, 178-215.

[15] Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', 51.

consumer culture exploits and perpetuates what originates in what Baudrillard described as 'objects' privileged register in the discourse of subjectivity itself'[16]: what is at issue is the fact that the metaphorical imageness of posed objects reflects on and becomes part of the metaphorical imageness of the *posessing* subject – who owns and poses the object as part of creating their own 'private totality'. Consumer culture bestows invented imageness on objects which in turn delivers the promise of a (purchasable) transformation of the imageness of the *posessing* subject.

Being Posed

Predating the product *design* suited to the mass production of consumer culture is the field of 'decorative' or 'applied' *art* which produces objects that are to be used and posed at the same time. 'Applied art' is always defined as distinct from 'fine art'[17]. The fine art object is never to be 'used', whereas applied art specifically concerns the ornamentation or aesthetics of objects of utilisation. An ornate silver sugar pot and a fine set of china will be used to serve tea, yet at the same time are posed objects, evidence of a dynamic that inserts objects of use into a distinct pose as part of social transformation or confirmation of social status.

What can be observed in the private sphere is that (as with the appreciation and/or making of all art) the body's basic needs must be looked after before I can even contemplate posing anything in my environment. From here it is easily apparent that the more wealth an individual has at their disposal, the more important it becomes to present both distinctly posed objects of culture and *posessed* objects of utility for a confirmation of the pose of social status[18]. The landowner poses a stately home as the central symbol of power and ownership of the land. Hence, such a home not only fulfils the function of providing a comfortable environment to its owner-inhabitant. It also confirms its owner as a person of wealth, taste, culture and aristocratic lineage. In fact, the stately home

---

[16] See page 172.

[17] Interesting to note in this context that the guidelines of an annual open submission for current Fine Art students states that 'Graduates of applied arts courses are not eligible. "Applied Arts" here refers to the application of design and aesthetics to objects of function and everyday use.' (Bloomberg New Contemporaries, Submission Guidelines 2012)

[18] See 'The Present as Privilege', *System of Objects*, 162-64, on the relationship between class and status-related objects.
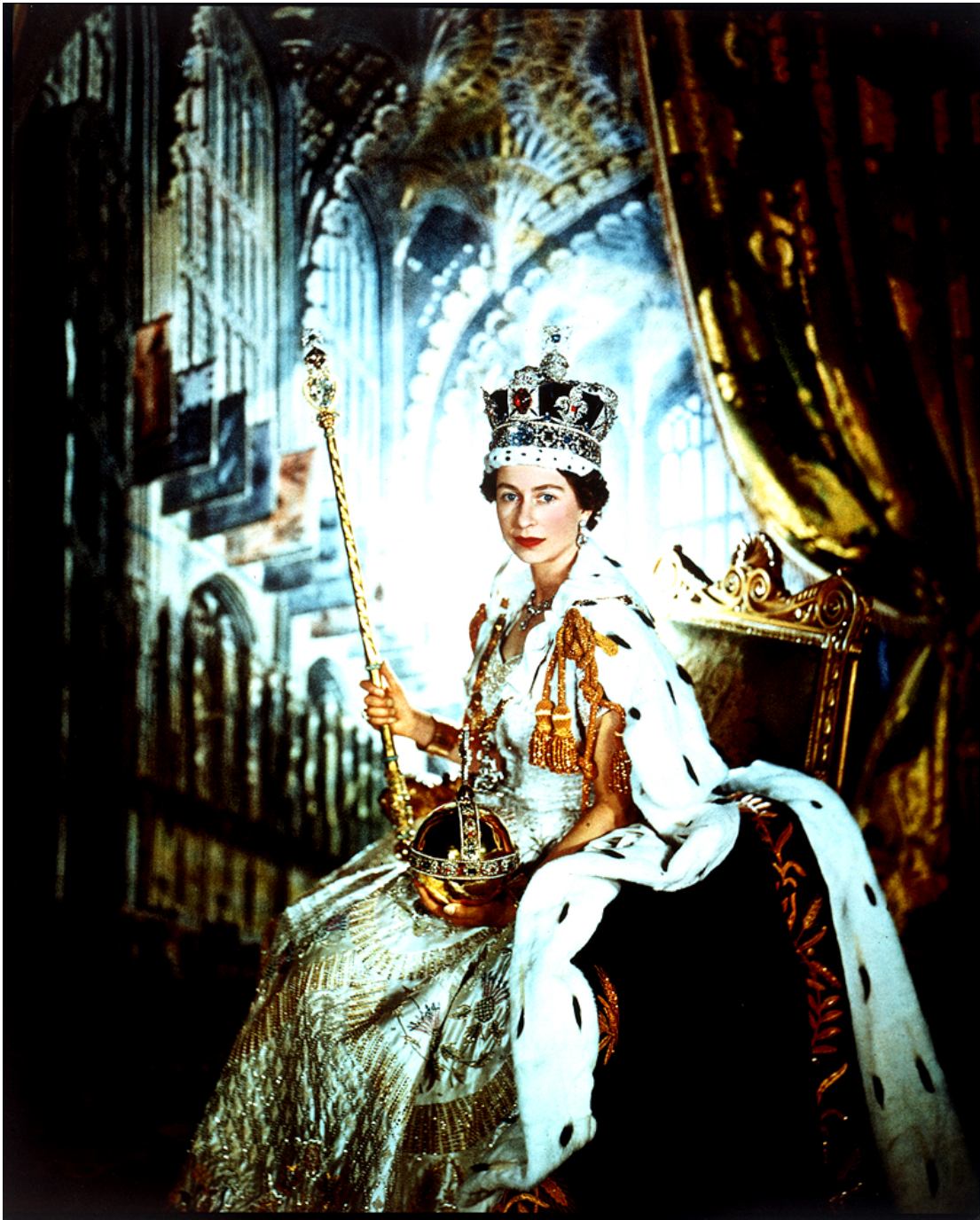
Cecil Beaton: Queen Elisabeth II in Coronation Robes, June 1953.
© V&A Images

poses its owner as a member of the ruling class just as a throne and a state palace poses their owner as a monarch. Both examples, the stately home and the throne, are objects that are used and posed at the same time, and these examples make specifically clear how the imageness of posed objects 'refers back' to the *posessing* subject by becoming part of and thereby *posing the subject's imageness*.

Again, it is clear regarding the pose of the self that the concept of the 'pose' and its 'imageness' is expanded beyond the immediate visual imageness of a lump of the physical world as posed in stasis. In fact, in relation to people the word 'image' is often used (in German too, the English word 'image' is used in the same way): if I dye my hair and wear different clothes I change my 'image'. Beyond this visual reference it is also used to describe a 'type' – or what I will continue to call 'imageness' of a person. For example it could be said: 'Gustav von Aschenbach cultivated the *image* of the successful bourgeois artist', or 'Dorian Gray had the *image* of a wealthy dandy'. The cultivation of this 'image' of the self is certainly grounded in the visual imageness as presented by the corpus but in addition depends on a not entirely visual network of actions and representations – including an environment shaped by *posessed* objects.

Posing objects is therefore an operation with a reciprocal dynamic: Dorian Gray poses extravagant fashionable clothes (more on clothes below) and collections of art in his sizeable townhouse, which in turn pose himself as (the imageness of) a wealthy 'dandy'. I might pose an antique sculpture or a piece of modern art in my living room, which in turn poses me as belonging to a class of the cultured. In the domestic environment this extends to furniture and the overall style of a home. A super modern urban loft fitted out with sleek designer furniture poses its owner as a wealthy modern cosmopolitan personality. The less wealthy a person is, the less effort can be spent on representational posing (the less is *posessed*) and the more will a home be dominated by functionality whereby most posed objects (if there are any) will be souvenirs of the proprietor's own life. Baudrillard notes that modern strictly practical furniture has been stripped of the 'moral theatricality of the old furniture [of the bourgeois family home]'[19]. Yet simple and practical furniture has long been a distinct style in itself, just one that poses a different imageness than that of the bourgeois family tradition that Baudrillard refers to. A home that avoids

---

[19] Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 16.

extravagance and is filled with practical furniture, possibly sourced second-hand, may be a necessity to some but may be posed by others in order to pose themselves as unpretentious, non-bourgeois and resistant to the terrors of capitalist consumerism[20]. However, as we know, being natural is simply a pose[21].

Posing Out of Sight

The reciprocal dynamic of the pose means that, in public and in private, inside or outside of the museum, posed objects produce two reciprocally intertwined 'levels' of meaning that reflect on each other (see page 63, footnote 90). One is linked to the (meaning of the) *represented imageness*: what is depicted, in the case of pictures, or the message or meaning of a work of art, or the story 'told' by the mug from Ravensbrück, or the scientific knowledge about the fish and the Indian Ocean. The other relates to the *posession* of the *artefact*: Who owns and poses it and how this reflects on the imageness of the *posessor*.

The alabaster sarcophagus of Seti I is a real metonymical part of ancient Egyptian culture and its hieroglyphs are a rich source of information about its time of origin. In the 'Crypt' of Sir John Soane's *Museum* the sarcophagus becomes a 'centre piece' of *his* collection. *He* is in turn posed as a serious individual collector whose financial power beat that of the British Museum[22]. Beyond this immediate instance, Soane created a collection which, as part of establishing his neo-classical style of architecture, poses the imageness of a classical cultural heritage – which in turn becomes a part of the *posessor*'s own image(ness). Or to tranpose Baudrillard's term, Soane's own imageness has been imbued with the finality of the 'classical heritage' as posed by his collection.

---

[20] Here the concept of posing supplies a distinctly different point of view from Baudrillard's as he writes: 'Every functional object is overdetermined in its power, but such overdetermination is minimal in the spheres of household management and home ownership. Moreover, the house as a whole, except to the extent that it achieves self-transcendence by virtue of status or fashion, is not a recipient or bestower of value. (In fact a basic problem for couples is the common failure of the home to catalyse any such reciprocal valorization.)' (*System of Objects*, 71-72)

[21] As evident from the text, I do not contend that subjectivity is nothing but pure pose, as the whole discourse around the *punctum* circles around uniqueness (what Baudrillard abstracts to a subject's 'singularity' and 'alterity') and what could be described as a core 'personality', even though this 'personality' has its genesis and can only be communicated in a syntagm of posing, both to the self and to others.

[22] Soane bought the sarcophagus in 1824 after the British Museum refused to pay the high price that was asked for it.

A TV programme on the 10 most expensive sales of art[23] (all paintings by some 'household' names of western art: Rubens, Bacon, Klimt, Picasso, van Gogh) showed that many of these were bought by individuals who remain anonymous and that many of the paintings correspondingly have not been seen in public since their respective sales. What is specifically prominent in such pieces of art is their uniqueness (the artists are dead and cannot produce any more works) to which is added that: '[the collected object's] absolute singularity … arises from the fact of being possessed by me – and this allows me, in turn, to recognize myself in the object as an absolutely singular being'[24].

One of these sales was of a well-known Francis Bacon triptych that has not been publicly displayed since its auction. Its represented imageness, in keeping with all of Bacon's works, is an artistic reflection on the knowledge of the perils of being a human corpo-real being. As *artefact*, it is posed by the owner who thus *posesses* a truly unique piece, one of western art's top highlights that any (national) museum would covet, and whose 'absolute singularity' is sealed through the fact of his ownership, which in turn poses himself[25] – in front of himself and a select few – as an absolutely unique refined man of culture paired with financial prowess matching that of a state.

Thus we return to an issue already touched upon in the discussion of the Bourgeois exhibition, detecting several 'planes' of posing, noting how the art works became artefacts of the curator's discourse. It follows that in the discourse of the *posessor*, the work of art, just like any other posed object, becomes transformed into an artefact which, in its last instance, becomes a fragment of the imageness of the *posessor*'s self.

Public Posing: Museums and Monuments

Having mentioned the 'state', the circular dynamic of the pose is the same when it comes to posing in or *as* public. Museum studies of recent years have illuminated in great depth the way museums construct and present knowledge

---

[23] BBC One, 'The World's Most Expensive Paintings', broadcast: 1 September 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b012lsx3 (accessed October 2011).
[24] Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 97.
[25] All known or suspected buyers of these ten pieces were male, though of course there are prominent female collectors.

Associated Press: Queen Elisabeth II. visits the Neue Wache in Berlin, a monument to victims of war and tyranny.

and especially 'heritage' and my thought is clearly embedded in these studies. In terms of the idea of posing, just as described in the case of individual *posessors*, this means that the social community, in the form of the state, poses objects of cultural heritage in the museum, thus posing (the ownership of) the museum, which in turn poses the *posessing* society as embedded in the cultural heritage that is presented in the museum.

The accumulation of high-profile works of art in the newly created museums built by the most famous architects of the moment in countries such as Dubai and Qatar clearly shows an effort to insert modern and cosmopolitan cultural heritage into the imageness of the countries in question. Since the making of *The World's Most Expensive Paintings*, several sales have altered this 'Top 10', one of which, breaking all records, has (for now) created the highest price ever paid for a painting. The Qatary royal family has bought one of Cezanne's *Card Players* for $250 million, the others from the series residing in institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Courtauld Institute, the Musée d'Orsay and the Barnes Foundation.

Returning to some of the earlier examples, the exhibition of the mug used by a concentration camp victim in Ravensbrück reflects the imageness of German society as historically aware and anti-fascist. London's Imperial War Museum exhibits steel girders of the destroyed World Trade Center. The immediate level of meaning is the attack that happened in 2001. The fact that it is posed by the museum in turn poses the state's anti-terrorist stance[26]. At this point, it is worth remembering that the Imperial War Museum was founded in 1917 to house material relating to the First World War which at the time was still raging and killing thousands of British soldiers on distant soil. It was opened in 1920 with 'The Great Victory Exhibition'. All three examples, the mug from Ravensbrück, the steel girders from the World Trade Center and 'The Great Victory Exhibition', are acts of the symbolisation of a communal trauma. The museum poses this symbolisation and in return the *posessing* community/state is posed as being 'in control' of the traumatic events by posing itself as an active part of the symbolisation process.

---

[26] Imageness was a major part of the World Trade Center attack as is the case with most contemporary terrorist attacks. Apart from the matter-real destruction of human life and infrastructure, what increased the impact was its photographically transmitted imageness of destruction, perfectly timed for live broadcasting: the world could see the annihilation of the imageness of the World Trade Center which posed the US and New York as *posessing* World economic power.

Outside the museum, monuments and architecture – often merged into one – provide the main arena of the community's posing of its history, power and wealth. Most capital cities will have monumental spaces equivalent to Trafalgar Square in London, an arranged collection of monuments which commemorate military victories, overlooked by a palatial edifice, the National Gallery, housing some of the nation's most precious art. The state poses these monuments, which in turn pose the country as militarily powerful, victorious, wealthy and with a rich cultural heritage.

Architecture in general is an arena where the used and the pose paradigmatically converge. Architecture produces environments that fulfil a crucial function of usage – yet that are posed – as well as distinctly posing its owners or inhabitants, both as individuals and as communities. This is clearly evident in most museum buildings, which are utilised to house and display collections and which are at the same time posed monuments to the *posessing* communities.

A recent research project by historian Gwendolyn Leick[27] provides a series of luscious examples that specifically demonstrate the reciprocal aspect of posing at state level. Leick has researched 'Tyrant's Tombs' of different ages. What most of these have in common is a truly *monumental* architecture that, like a reliquary shrine, encases the mortal remains of a leader whose reign in most cases was dependent on a totalitarian personality cult. Noticeably, in several tombs, most famously Lenin's in Moscow, the body remains on visible display (in several cases the preservation proved unsuccessful and the body had to be removed from display after an initial period). Leick also brings to attention how the architecture often predisposes visitors to such a tomb to experience their visit as a quasi religious ritual, even in a country such as North Korea where all religion is banned. The tombs quite literally pose the deceased leader, visible or not, as still present amongst the living – as a tangible presence – which clearly aims to lay claim to the power that the leader used to hold. His successor or succeeding government poses the (ownership of the) monument and in turn is posed itself as heir of and as *posessing* the dead leader's powers.

---

[27] Gwendolyn Leick, *Tyrant's Tombs* [working title], (Reaction Books: London, publication planned for 2013).

Johannes Jacob Scheuchzer: 'Vestis Corporis Clypeus' / 'Clothes, the shield of the body' from the *Physica Sacra*, 1735.

'Love getting dressed, love feeling when you leave the house that you've got your armour on, your magical suit that will see you through.'
(Robbie Williams[28])

Shield of the Body

The merging of use and pose, the role of posed objects as fragments of the imageness of the self, and thus the interrelationship between posing and being posed is at its most ubiquitous and paradigmatic – and literally most closely related to the body – in objects of clothing. Apart from its obvious function, to support the body's regulation of its temperature, this 'shield' or 'armour' of the body is at the same time the main medium of the subject's imageness as we have already touched upon in Chapter II. All is said in the German saying, 'Kleider machen Leute' (or Mark Twain's 'Clothes maketh the man'). Professional uniforms make this specifically clear. The policeman will be posed as policeman by his uniform. Deliberately im*posing* is the appearance of a judge who poses wig and gown (which retain a distinctly 'put on' look of a masquerade) on a throne-like seat, which in turn poses her as powerful judge. In civil life I may pose expensive haute couture outfits, which in turn pose me as moneyed and fashion conscious. I may pose distinctly simple jeans with an equally simple t-shirt to pose myself as someone who does not care much about consumerism or fashion. However, the 'simple' jeans and t-shirt 'look' has also been adopted by high fashion and can be posed with 'designer' jeans and t-shirts, which will feature corresponding labels. Whilst there is no disputing that taking care of visual appearance is more important to some people than to others, *not* taking much care of appearance is just the same a choice – and a pose. This becomes evident in the fact that individuals who habitually pose a 'low maintenance' look will emphatically refuse to wear any pieces of clothing that look too elegant or expensive or are otherwise incoherent to their usual look. The pose of the corpus and its imageness of self-representation is dependent on (posed) objects of clothing.

We have seen when discussing *Camera Lucida* how for Barthes certain clothes did not 'work' on certain people – remained disjointed from Barthes' imago of the person's imageness: the black people's 'Sunday Best', his mother's 'chic'

---

[28] Williams was interviewed on the occasion of the launch of a clothes line 'devised by Robbie Williams', for the *Times Magazine*, 01.10.11, 46-49.

look and the retarded boy's collar, which was literally 'put on' the boy as he does not present his own self-imageness. Personally, in contemporary life I find myself often observing similar cases, for example when a certain fashion is being adopted by someone who, in my eyes, does not manage to 'carry off' the whole 'look'. I remember a young girl I met as part of my teaching activities who was at the time in her late teenage years. Every day, she appeared dressed in different visibly expensive, distinctly traditional 'high class' designer clothes, head to toe with all matching details, accessories and handbags which to me, never 'worked' as I found all the outfits too 'conservative' and 'old' for the young girl. (In my memory the clothes even grew oversized like those of a child that wears the clothes of an adult, which, my reason tells me, could not have been the case.) Just as we have seen it to be the case for Barthes, in my perception, the clothes did not become a successful part of the imageness the person aimed to present. In such cases, the clothes are prevented from dissolving into that certain transparency that would occur if I accepted them as a successful part of a whole. Instead, the clothes look 'put on' and remain disjointed unconnected part-objects[29].

Paparazzi Shots

On the subject of clothes that do not 'work,' pointing out fashion 'disasters' of those 'in the public eye' has long been a major staple of the tabloid press. Thinking about the cult of the 'famous', 'rich and beautiful' or 'celebrities' in this context is interesting because not only pop-stardom but celebrity cult in general is a cultural field that in a very ostentatious way is based on posed imageness which in turn is based on a desire for idol or model personalities. This role-play presents personalities as spectacle, which, remembering Debord's thinking[30], refers to a gap or separation between the visual representation and the real underneath. I once read in a newspaper about a woman who was so obsessed with a well-known young English actress that the fan(atic) underwent a number of plastic surgery procedures in order to look like her idol. I am quoting from memory but apparently when the actress heard

---

[29] This does not mean to say that these are instances of a *punctum* (though especially in a photograph there would be a potential for that). Barthes' mother's 'chic' styling was observed by him but not described as *punctum* either.
[30] See Guy Debord, 'Separation Perfected' in *The Society of the Spectacle* (Black & Red: Detroit, 2010 [1967]).

Jessica Craig-Martin: *Southampton 2006 (Air Kiss)*, 2008.

about this, her horrified reply was something along the lines of: 'That poor woman – I don't even look like this myself!' In any case, the cult for stars and other famous people is based on photographic imagery, which is manipulated by virtue of the previously discussed triad of photographic image production resulting in a highly fabricated spectacle. The undiminished presumptions regarding the realist nature of photography naturalise the posed masquerades, to paraphrase Barthes, as though emerging from 'a lustral bath of innocence'[31]. Paradoxically, at the same time as a media machine creates the celebrity imageness, it is also hungry for paparazzi *shots* that pierce its perfection. Apart from capturing 'scandalous' behaviour, considered inappropriate to the celebrity's image, catching a star 'off guard' with a peculiar un-posed facial expression, without make-up or in scruffy clothes, looking 'fat', showing cellulite or the notorious 'upskirt shot', all are aimed to disturb the star-imageness by showing an unsettled pose, which ultimately points to the corpo-reality of the corpus who / which is posed as the spectacle celebrity in question. We have seen how the 'in-house' museum photographs collected as *Camera Obscured* 'could not help' disturbing the imageness the museum usually aims to present[32]. Further, it was noted that this has become a deliberate strategy of art at the base of many of Louise Lawler's photographs of art objects, which are denied their 'proper' imageness in order to emphasise their matter-reality. The same strategy is at the core of Jessica Craig Martin's photographs of various members of western 'high society'. Her images often crop into arbitrary details that look 'wrong' and isolate part-objects that are contrapuntal to the stylised imageness of the subjects of her photographs.

---

[31] Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', 51.
Another note on this 'lustral bath of innocence': The lasting power of the belief in photography's realism is evident in the fact that, even though heavy retouching of photographs including the alteration of body shape has existed as long as photography itself, in recent years there have even been calls for legislation to label photographic images according to the degree of retouching they may have been subject to. As part of her fight against anorexia a member of the French National Assembly, Valérie Boyer, proposed that images be labelled: 'photograph retouched in order to alter the physical [corporelle] appearance of the model' because 'these images can drive a person to believe in realities, which often do not exist'*.
*'Lutte contre l'anorexie : proposition de loi visant les photos retouchées'
http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gsQLP_FW4prN4jcR8hWr4OdE_bHA (accessed November 2011).
[32] Discussing the images, Georgina Born also refers to Barthes' earlier notion of the 'third' or 'obtuse meaning', which is often seen as a type of precursor of the *punctum* within Barthes' oeuvre. See: Roland Barthes, 'The Third Meaning' in *Image, Music, Text* (Fontana Press; London, 1977), 52-68.

Remembering Barthes' feeling a *punctum* in the form of the 'spatulate nails, at once soft and hard-edged' (CL 45) in the portrait of Andy Warhol, which I earlier described as a piercing of the imageness 'portrait of Andy Warhol' by pointing to the singularity of the (imperfect) matter-reality of the body of the person who poses as 'Andy Warhol', it could well be said that this type of paparazzi shot aims for a *contrapuntal* disturbance to the star's imageness of perfection. At the same time as we need the corpus of the star, we have a desire for it to turn out to be the body we see. In a wider sense this expands to the constant 'digging for dirt' of the 'rainbow' press, photographically or otherwise. We need the imageness of the 'model' person as much as we need to know that it is *unvollkommen* – we have a desire to see those shots that betray the desired perfection as *moments* of total spectacle.

It is as if the paparazzi shot sets out to produce a certain 'estrangement' in Baudrillard's sense[33]. The paparazzi shot is a mild dose of the poison of the real that killed Sibyl Vane and Gustav von Aschenbach. As is well known, some poison, when administered in small doses, can have medicinal purposes: paparazzi shots are the type of photography that uncovers the process which 'exterminates alterity', and hints to the viewer that desired imageness is a false spectacle. *At the moment* a viewer looks at such a photograph the resulting *Selbstentfremdung* does not relate to the subject depicted in the photograph but, by reflection, to the viewing subject that is caught as admiring spectator of the spectacle as in a mirror.

A different pointer to the matter-reality of the body of the celebrity is memorabilia. The object used and touched by the celebrity is seen as a real indexical link to the body of the absent star. 'I wonder if David Bowie touched this frame?' I overheard someone saying during a charity auction in which a picture donated by Bowie was exhibited.

Depending on the degree of the fan's admiration, meeting an 'idol' in the flesh can cause a considerable affectual response from exuberantly agitated jumps and screams to tears, and such meetings can make for a lifelong memory. On occasion, the star may shake hands with the fan – which may well lead to the fan wishing never to wash that hand again…

The autograph, possibly with a personalised dedication, is often the souvenir of such a meeting. The autograph is generally the most accommodating object to

---

[33] See page 140.

distribute/attain that is a real index of the 'star'. The reason for outlining all this here is that the 'celebrity' is a paradigmatic example of (dis)embodied imageness, meaning embodied by a real body and disembodied as a corpus in imageness. In different ways, both the paparazzi *shot,* the memorabilia and the idea of direct touch are contrapuntal to the abstraction of the star's disembodied imageness by pointing to the idol's real body. Paradoxically this 'shard of absolute reality' then becomes a 'proof' – confirms as 'real' the star's usually mediated presented imageness.

TV Art Historian Andrew Graham-Dixon introduces the programme *Treasures of Heaven*, made on the occasion of an exhibition of medieval reliquaries of the same name at the British Museum in 2011:

The impulse to keep a memento of a departed person is both ancient and profound; even the smallest thing can generate a powerful emotional connection. It might be a connection to someone you've known personally, perhaps even a celebrity but it could also be a connection to a saint who has the power to protect and heal you – spiritual power – that might still be present in a fragment of fabric they once wore, or even in their physical remains. They were known as relics and for centuries they lay at the centre of Christian devotion. They were held to work miracles and they defined the relationship between Christians and their God.

During the programme Graham-Dixon and James Robinson, the curator of the exhibition, witness the opening of a reliquary containing some hair of St John the Baptist. A few strands of visibly blond hair emerge. Graham-Dixon is amazed and remarks:

It's the same colour as the hair of St John the Evangelist in Leonardo's Last Supper … In all those depictions of the Last Supper, John has got his head on the shoulder of Christ — so, that hair would have actually touched Christ!
…
Robinson: What a wonderful thought!

From TV historian Dan Cruickshank's foreword to *Panoramas of Lost London*, a publication of more than 300 historical photographs of London taken between 1870 and 1945:

Photographs can weave a magic spell that transports us through time; they can capture, tantalise and inflame the imagination. And few photographs are more powerfully evocative than those of lost buildings of great cities. The photographs in this book … invariably showing buildings that are no more – have astonishing emotional power and appeal. Looking through the pages I feel overwhelmed – thrilled, delighted … These photographs are, like all memorials to lost lives and lost beauty, heartbreaking documents, poignant and moving; but photographs by their nature offer something more, something hard to define. By capturing and framing with clinical precision a fleeting moment in time they keep that moment alive for eternity. They allow us, as if in a time machine, to travel back, to re-inhabit long-lost streets, to look into the faces of those long dead. It is extraordinary, haunting. Photographs, in their rich and varied detail, offer us an intimate yet almost tangible connection with the past.

Epilogue

Investigating the nature of the posed object in the museum, a space specifically dedicated to posing, has established that the posing of 'lumps of the material world that share this nature with ourselves' is an act that amalgamates matter into meaning, or in other words covers real contingency with a matrix of symbolic signification. This 'shared nature' is not only the mutual base matter-reality but also the fact that both lumps of the physical world as well as our embodied selves in human perception 'exist' in the paradoxical amalgam of matter and pose that is (dis)embodied meaning *in representation*, which is subject to a negation of matter-reality. Thus, the posing of objects – indeed the posing of any representation – is at the same time a mirror to, and an extension of, the posing of the self. Therefore, piercing the imageness of any symbolic representation is ultimately akin to piercing the imageness of 'having a body' (symbolic), by pointing to 'being a body' (real) and thus it points to the relationship between the matter-reality of the biological body, its *corpo-reality*, and the mental image in representation of the social body – the corpus I need. Posed objects and posing subjects share the dual ontology (being two things at once) of the matter-*real* and of imageness, or in other words of *being in* 'nature' and 'culture' at the same time.

Photography has been at the core of this thought process, because in its own way, it partakes in the same dual ontology of the real and the symbolic: *what the photograph shows*, the realist – yet virtual – photographic image, is the result of, and thus *contains* the result of a *that-has-been* – a shard of absolute reality – which cannot be outside syntagmatic *com-posed imageness*. The 'new gene' that photography has introduced into the family of pictures is in the fact that photographically produced imageness re-presents a real trace of a *pose* as it was in the past. This confronts the viewer not only with an irretrievably lost *moment* of the past but potentially transforms the viewer into a 'knowing' subject of a future anterior to the depicted moment. This reflects on the viewer's own being in time (though we have seen that a painting can have the same effect). For Barthes this future anterior becomes the '*punctum* that is time', which thus originates in the knowledge of the fleeting nature of the momentary pose that covers the corpo-real. Unlike the posed object, the photographic image preserves that past moment of the pose, but not the object or subject that is the 'medium' of that pose. The corpus promised by the photograph refers to the

body whose momentary pose is re-presented but which no longer exists in the moment the photograph shows.

Different to the photographic image, the enigma of the posed object results from the fact that it *is* here-now and at the same time refers to a *that-has-been* in the form of the *idea* of having-also-been-there-then. Its potential reference to a moment of the past is countered by its continuous presence. I rescued a set of ornate coffee porcelain from the possessions of my aunt after her death, because I remembered how much I loved using the dishes as a child when visiting her. It was her 'good' porcelain and she kept it throughout her life in a glass fronted display cupboard in her living room, using it only on special occasions (it was thus both posed and used). I also know that the crockery was part of her dowry when she got married to a man who went to war some days after the wedding and never returned. Still, whilst her wedding photograph, which remained prominently displayed on the wall of her living room for the rest of her life, always held this association with the tragedy that was to follow, I do not feel any sense of a future anterior related to these dishes that are now in my display cupboard. Whilst they are relics, a 'survival' of a past life (a heritage to me), they also have 'lived' through this life, past the moment of the giving of that dowry.

Because the (posed) object *is here now* its reliquary *presence* only remotely harbours the *idea* of a future anterior. It could be emphasised through exhibitionary stagecraft. If the porcelain were to be exhibited in an enclosed vitrine with the information: 'This set of porcelain was part of the dowry given to Erika Wehner on 8 May 1944 on her wedding to Herbert Wunsch. Three days later, he was drafted into the war and never returned from the battlefields', the display would dramatise that moment or 'snapshot' of the object's history through information (the full withdrawal from use is needed). Nevertheless, the pose would be in the present as opposed to the pose that the wedding photograph continues to show, which remains in its perpetual reference to *that* past moment in time and its future anterior.

In these different ways of reference to the past, photography and the posed object are again a reflection of the posed subject: whilst I am essentially here now, all I am (both corpus and body) is the result of a string of also '*having-been-then*'. Photography and posed objects refer to past moments and as such hold a

198

mirror to the subject's own existence as perceived in a conundrum that is the body's (corpus') existence (posed) in a string of (dis)continuously passed and passing moments.

Posed objects and the photographic image are both modes of representation that incorporate (dead) shards of the real as a *real trace of life in time*, and it is crucial not to overlook the fact that this link to the past is 'made' through knowledge in the mind of the viewer. Therefore *indexicality* is real and symbolic at the same time. It should also be remembered that *indexicality* is a concept that helps to analyse our distinct fascination with material causality, with metonymical, reliquary 'trace' and 'touch', which can also be discussed without the use of this abstracted trope.

<p style="text-align:center">● ● ●</p>

Even though Barthes places such emphasis on the fact that the photographic image – that is now called 'silver-based', 'film photography' or 'analogue' – is a chemical imprint he is not at all interested in the actual materiality of photographs or photographic prints. Many of the images he looks at are present to him – and again to us as readers of his books – only as the result of a long string of prints from prints, a feature which is never worth a mention to Barthes. Fact is that printed photographs in newspapers and books are rasterised into *dots* – a binary system that is a total translation of the originating silver crystal image material which initially produced *grain*. That I downloaded the image of Constanze Mozart as a digital file from the internet does not lessen the fascination I have with it. Somehow, the *that-has-been* survives these steps of copying and this is taken as a silent given in the vast majority of discussions of photographs and photography theory. Where then is the fundamental difference to photographic images that are immediately digitally encoded, pronounced by many theorists?

As an example from everyday life, the fact that traffic wardens in London use digital cameras to catch parking-law breakers before they can drive away once

Andrew Grassie: *First Hang: Tate Modern, 2001,* Egg Tempera on paper.

With kind permission by the artist.

a warden's presence is noted, clearly tells us that the evidential force of the photographic image is not at all diminished through its being immediately digitally inscribed. Quite the contrary is the case. Amongst my A-level photography students who use digital SLR cameras with a high resolution, it has become a joke to take a headshot of a fellow student and then zoom into details on the computer screen that expose the tiniest skin irregularities or hair or even random particles stuck to the skin almost microscopically enlarged. Make-up artists who work with High Definition technology are facing new challenges as the super high-resolution image shows previously unknown detail and coloration. Previously, the recording of the photographic image as film grain always created a certain screening that subtly eliminated some detail. 'Professionals' of 'analogue' photography always knew, that to deliberately use a film with slightly increased grain, possibly in combination with a subtle softener on the lens, was a standard treatment to even out skin tone and/or hide applied make-up.

Of course, there is a significant difference between a digitally *recorded* photographic image and a digitally *generated* image that looks like a photograph. The latter is just the same as a photo realist painting. Because it *looks like* a photographic image, it will trick me until I know better. Even when I do know better, it is difficult to 'convince' myself that I am not looking at a photograph. Equally this applies to a very *heavily manipulated* digital photograph and without doubt, within what I called the triad of manipulation of photographic image production, the digital image is more readily accommodating to convincing looking post-photographic manipulation – though this was always possible.

This whole debate comes back to the psychological aspect of what constitutes 'trace', the effect of a cause through material contiguity, a chain of touch. Barthes feels animated by looking at eyes that have looked at the Emperor (CL 3) because he *assumes* that the origin of the photograph he looks at corresponds to his *idea* of what constitutes a photographic image. For Barthes, apparently, this knowledge had to include the certainty that the image *initially* was chemically recorded; for me, an active camera-user whose career saw an adoption of the digital processes, this is unimportant. It may be indicative of a certain perception of digital photography that the term 'analogue' has

established itself for the use of film-based image recording, but fact is that both, types of cameras are 'analogue' cameras: the sensor reacts to shades of light just as silver crystals do and what the sensor records is the same projection through the lens to the back of the camera than the film records in its place when I put that same lens on my film camera. In either case I have the same relationship to *the image the photograph shows.*

But there is more to Barthes' example, which he chose as the opening to *Camera Lucida*, and that is the extension of the chain of linked contiguity beyond the chemistry of the photographic image to the 'I am looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor'. Though Barthes immediately adds that no one seemed to share or even understand his amazement about this, I feel reminded of another scene from the *Treasures of Heaven* TV programme. The curator of the museum of Stonyhurst College has just explained the gruesome details of being hung, drawn and quartered which included the slitting open of the convicted person in order to 'draw' out the entrails which were then burnt in front of the victim, who was skilfully left alive as long as possible. One of the relics in the museum is the right eye of the Blessed Edward Oldcorne who was hung, drawn and quartered in 1606. This leads the presenter to say that he 'can't help thinking that *that is* the eye that watched the process as he was tortured to death – that watched the entrails leaving the body'. To this the curator answers that 'it's a very tangible link' and that she has 'never seen anyone look at this and not be moved – shocked. There is always a reaction, there is always a human reaction'. In the chapter 'The Intolerable Image' Jacques Rancière discusses a photograph of a pair of eyes. It is part of an installation by the artist Alfredo Jaar. The installation is set up in such a way that the viewer first has to read the story of *The Eyes Of Gutete Emerita*: a victim of a Rwandan massacre, she has witnessed the slaughter of 400 fellow Tutsi, including her husband and children. Rancière discusses the image in terms of its metonymical qualities 'in place of the spectacle of horror'[1]. The image is also reproduced on the front cover of the book and I found myself subject to a hint of guilty unease once, as I held the book in my hand whilst entering a particularly glossy inner-city supermarket. Clearly in all these cases, stirred through knowledge, *in the viewer's imagination*, the (image of the) eyes is imbued with this metonymical character that relates to the history of what these eyes are supposed to have seen, which itself is not

[1] Rancière, *Emancipated Spectator*, 98.

represented in the image or the artefact. In the artist's installation, this metonymical stirring of imagination has become a deliberate strategy to confront the viewer with an evocation of intolerable violence inflicted on the unrepresentable corpo-real.

On Art and the *Corpo-real*

Baudrillard's observation that through creating objects and through culture 'man makes himself into the transubstantiator of nature'[2] is in perfect congruence with the observed labour of the pose to transform matter into meaning. The museum is a paradigmatic cultural mechanism that transubstantiates 'nature'. This includes the symbolisation of trauma, and Jaar's installation and also reliquaries are further examples to those discussed earlier. This symbolisation extends to the subject itself: through *posing* the subject makes itself into the transubstantiator of its own (traumatic) corpo-reality and the *punctum*, in its last instance, is a moment of the failing of this transubstantiation.

In the observations around the imageness of public personae who live in the public eye, the artifice of the publicly presented imageness is specifically clear. However, the subject of everyday life is equally subject to the posing of an imageness of self, which is the basis of all social intercourse and which in part consists of posed objects and of the posed corpus. A friend recently told me about a memory he has of his grandmother who instructed him never to show too much of a big grin nor too much of a displeased face: 'Always look composed!' she said. This in turn reminded me of a contemporary phenomenon equivalent to the 'deadpan' or 'poker-face': 'pro-tox', referring to professionals, mainly courtroom lawyers, who paralyse still some facial muscles not merely to hide tiredness and look young but in order better to hide visible emotional responses such as surprise in their faces.

Whilst the posing of social roles and status is a main function, at all different social strata, a subject's imageness is subject to the hiding of overt emotion and affect as part of the dynamic of the denial of its corpo-reality. In addition to the negation of emotion and affect, in western society, children will usually be

---

[2] Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 27.

brought up 'sheltered' from getting to know anything much about the core issues of their own body's corpo-real being, namely sex, birth and death. Freud's famous 'primal scene' can be seen as a contrapuntal disturbance to the imageness – or *imago* – the child has of its parents, which the parents have elaborately fostered in their child – and which constitutes the main part of the child's 'world'. I have a distinct childhood memory of the shocked and violently outraged reaction of a girlfriend (we must have both been around 9 years old) whom I told about the miscarriage suffered by one of our primary school teachers. As a teacher, I often encounter surprise reminders of the extent of such estrangement from the corpo-real into teenage years (and beyond). Even the sight of a pronounced vein can cause a repulsed reaction and might be described as 'disgusting'. Bodies are 'embarrassing'.

Bizarrely, these teenagers who grow up in a world that is well and truly saturated with both the hyper-mediated imageness of the corpus in idealised beauty and (photo)graphically staged imageness of its opposite – bodies subject to mutilation, death and decay – often surprise me in their reactions to certain pieces of art: I was astonished to see one of my 16-year-old pupils turn away 'in a spasm of disgust' when I showed him a photograph of Anna and Bernhard Blume in which one of them is seen theatrically projectile vomiting. On another occasion I witnessed a similar reaction by another 16-year-old to a Francis Bacon painting. Both these teenagers are surely used to seeing (photo)graphically staged violence in large and small screen dramas and we have seen how the perception of such realistic imagery of violence is eased through the knowledge of its being faked. It is peculiar how the mediation that results in these non-realistic depictions in art causes a strong reaction. One reason may simply be that the two teenagers in question are not regularly exposed to this type of art. Nevertheless, paradoxically, the endless spectacle of realistically staged and photographed mutilated bodies presented by the entertainment culture – which at the same time perpetuates the imageness of perfection and beauty – does not reflect on the corpo-real in a meaningful way. This imagery has little potential to deliver a touching counterpoint.

The pose delivers an interesting angle from which to look at Bacon's paintings: often working from 'wrong' photographs showing blur and other technical 'mistakes', he exactly deprives the subjects of his paintings of a pose of the

'proper' imageness of their self. The bodily shapes are in dissolution of their corporeality and accordingly their selves – the corpus has disappeared in corpo-reality. Additionally, via my museum photography I have long come to view Bacon's 'cages' as remnants of vitrines, which causes an interesting tension: the subjects are denied self-posing yet are being posed in that state in a display case.

As is well known, Bacon was a masochist who sought to be corporeally violated. The masochist has an urge to relinquish all posing in moments of all-encompassing painful corpo-reality. In a manner specific to himself, Bacon reflected this urge for such moments that are contrapuntal to everyday life in his paintings. The paintings deny their painted subjects any hint of the pose of idealised beauty. The fact that his work has been canonised in western art history, and that his paintings are posed in major art institutions around the world where they are loved and admired by an audience whose lives mostly will not be determined by an urge personally to experience such extreme corporeal experiences, is an indicator of the same cultural dynamic that produces idealised public personae as well as the paparazzi shots that betray their perfection as false. We have detected a treatment of the same subject matter –the dis-illusion of perfect imageness equated with the 'Vollkommenheit of the spirit' or 'genius'– in two classic pieces of literature that are each considered to be a highlight of their respective eras and cultures.

The *Wunderkammer* (originating in a time where art and science were not separated) has always featured objects of beauty juxtaposed to objects of 'curiosity'. The skeleton in the 'Crypt' of Soane's *Museum* or the two prepared 'corpses' in the Capella San Severo in Naples are as distinctly contrapuntal to the beauty and perfection of the art that surrounds them as are the bodies of saints in Catholic churches.

As mentioned previously, Louise Bourgeois' *Nature Study* is a good example of a work of art that distinctly aims to amalgamate beauty with the idea of a non-idealised corpo-real in one object. Her work is often discussed in terms of Kristeva's concept of 'the abject', which I have referred to above. The expansion of the *punctum* to the *contrapuntal* referral to corpo-reality cements the parallel to the abject. 'Abject Art' is dedicated to producing art deliberately aiming for an unveiling of – and for a distinct reflection on – the corpo-real which is usually abjected in everyday life and also mostly absent from sight in art that, separated from science, celebrates craft and beauty.

In our museums, abject art and other works like Francis Bacon's paintings could well be regarded as our symbolic 'pictures in the attic' – on open display. More distinctly and more self-consciously than other areas of cultural production, art produces instances of both the pose of perfection and its counterpoint.

To call this a cultural 'dynamic' or 'production' leaves space for individual preference and response. Not every artist directly reflects on becoming and unbecoming, not everybody admires Bacon's paintings. In fact, they are specifically disliked by many people because of their subject matter, often described as 'ugly' or 'bleak'. There is a fascination with the reference to corpo-reality in art but it also strongly rejected by some individuals.

Whilst 'Art' deliberately solicits reflection and imagination and asks for a reading that incorporates thought around being human, I often 'find' the same thought in the contemplation of 'artefacts'. *Erkenntnis* can also unmask beauty and perfection as a pose that is nothing but a *moment* of perception.

Such are the two ways of the imageness of the pose. Whether it is Art or artefact, the choice is mine: to admire its spectacle that is a moment of perfection and illusion, or to confront in it the wakening of my own intractable corpo-reality.

Klaus Wehner: *Egyptian Museum, Berlin, 11 June 2007*

*"Through my museum photography
I have long come to view Bacon's 'cages'
as remnants of display cases."*

Afterword:

PUNCTUM…

On Posing has been a journey with many unexpected turns. What began with a personal fascination with the encounter of exhibited human remains led to a fascination with photographing museum spaces. The resulting series of photographs were the starting point of this thesis, which I expected to become an investigation of museology. However, thinking about the hall of mirrors effect that is inherent in these re-presentations of re-presentations naturally facilitated the parallel use of aspects of theorising museums and theorising photography. Emerging from the latter, the adoption of the *punctum* has proved a valuable 'concept' –a naming– of personal, emotional, affectual reactions, initially observed in response to both, posed objects or photographic images.

Secondary literature as well as feedback on my text in various stages of progress from various sources has taught me that 'the' *punctum* means different things to different people – many will be adamant in saying that there is no such thing as 'the' *punctum* and that it is not a 'concept'. The understanding of the term *punctum* is as personal as the *punctum* itself, and so is my own. Nevertheless, whilst speaking about a *punctum* can never escape a certain beating around the bush, I *have* made a somewhat generalising claim about it, which is that in any case, it is a disturbance of partially anticipatory imageness which is ultimately a pointer to the real that is the body. This claim may also help to consolidate one issue that *Camera Lucida* seemingly leaves obstructive towards a 'clear' definition of the *punctum*, which is whether the term means to refer to the trigger, that actual detail such as dirty fingernails, that causes the reaction or if it refers to the affectual reaction itself. Though I have sometimes used the term *punctum effect* where I clearly wanted to refer to the affect itself, the source of the occurrence of a *punctum* is in the inseparability of the two – the 'trigger' with the involuntary affect.

Posed objects as collection or exhibition, as part of a domestic or a public interior – as art or as artefact; posing subjects as literary figures, as mediated 'celebrity' personalities or the immediate pose of the subject's everyday life presents to perception aspects of 'the world' posed and thus transubstantiated

207

into symbolisation – as imageness. The pose is at the intersection between matter-reality and imageness. In any case this generalised imageness can be ruptured, punctuated, disturbed by a referral to the corpo-real of the body, a point of singularity that disturbs the dynamic of generalisation of all imageness. To continue this investigation it might be useful to introduce another term for such rupture to leave the 'baggage' of Barthes' *punctum* and behind. Further, whatever such term would become, its connection to the corpo-real deserves a closer look at extending links to Kristeva's treatment of the *abject* as referenced in the text.

The photographic image too presents to perception aspects of 'the world' as imageness. Like the material world itself photographic imageness is full of 'detail' and at the same time opaque and meaningless until meaning is made – through projection on behalf of a knowing subject. The question of the real material existence of the Winter Garden photograph has been resolved with the posthumous publication of Barthes' *Mourning Diary*. In it we see reproduced a photo of Barthes sitting by his desk with the Winter Garden Photograph framed on the wall behind him:

Photo of the Winter Garden:
I search desperately
to find the obvious meaning.

(Photo: powerless to say what is obvious. The birth of literature)

(Caption: Mourning Diary, 168. Photo: Mourning Diary, 118-19)

Glossary of terms

Whilst outlining these terms is a major part of the main text, this glossary gives some short, necessarily limited, summaries. Page references are not exhaustive.

Imageness:

My use of this term originates in the absence of an English language equivalent to German words like *Bildhaftigkeit* and *Bildmäßigkeit*, which literally translate as 'image-like' or 'image-likeness' and which the dictionary translates as 'pictorial' yet I prefer to translate as *imageness*. By using the term the *imageness* of any material object I mean to refer to the object's perceived, visual, part-anticipated iconic wholeness, which is subject to a dynamic of a certain detachment from its materiality (page 52).

However, the use of the term expands beyond a subject or object's visual imageness to encompass what in common parlance would also be called 'image' in a metaphorical way, for example the image(ness) of the successful bourgeois artist or of a wealthy dandy (page 186). The artifice of such imageness becomes obvious in the example of celebrity culture (pages 192-95). The movement towards the imageness of a concept rather that a visual becomes clear in an examples such as the imageness of 'Indian Ocean' (page 51) or 'femininity' (pages 114-17, 130).

Whilst based on visual imageness, metaphorical image(ness) or the imageness of a concept are clearly elements of generalising representation. This also means that imageness is in tandem with anticipation – or *ap*perception, and thus is *in perception*. Imageness is both at the same time: constructed and constructive – through anticipation.
In this wider sense, imageness is at the intersection between the matter-real and our perception of it in representation.

See also just below:	**Posed Objects / the Pose**
See especially section:	**Imageness**, pages 52-53,
	also page 13 for a reference to Rancière's use of the term

Posed Objects / the Pose

Inextricably interlinked to the concept of imageness, in the most literal sense, the pose is an arranging or staging –or posing– of an object or subject's imageness. Like the concept of imageness, the use of the term expands from the posing of a purely visual static imageness to the posing of a metaphorical image(ness): Barthes transforms himself into an image when he poses for a photograph (page 50) and Dorian Gray poses the image(ness) of a wealthy dandy (page 186). A collection of shells presents the visual imageness of 'shells' as well this becomes part of the imageness of 'Indian Ocean' (page 51). Chapter V outlines the interrelationship between posing objects and subjects.

See especially section: **The Posed Object**, pages 47-50
A Little Piece of the Real, page 80-3
Chapter V, Posing Objects Posing Subjects
pages 179-195

Matter-real / Corpo-real

With a nod to aspects of the Lacanian Real, this term is used to refer to the uncontrollable contingent forces of what could be called the raw matter that forms the 'world' beneath any human discursive system and beyond any comprehension of it in representation – as imageness. **Corpo-real** is used where the matter-real specifically refers to the human body to emphasise that the body is part of and subject to the matter-real.

See especially section: **Matter-reality,** pages 66-7
and **Contrapuntal – Corpo-real – *Punctum*,** pages 78-80

Index / Indice / *indexical* / Real index

As a necessity, to establish the use and usefulness or terms, the text explains at length the difference between the *index* and *indice* in Romance languages and the implications of the fact that the two terms get inflated into one in most English texts. To make the distinction instead of *indice*, I use the terms 'real index'.

When using the term *indexical* in italics, I deliberately mean to refer to the *indexed indice* or the *indexed* real index.

As a physical trace the real index has an element of contingency and of the absolute unique or of singularity. As such it is a pointer to the matter-real. There is a cultural fascination with this type of trace (with or without a referral to Peirce's terminology). The real index –especially when it is a real index of a (absent) body– has the *potential* to pierce imageness and become a *punctum* (see below).

Photography and the museum are re-presentational systems that incorporate real indexicality, whereby its element of contingency is in tension with the potential generality of representation.

See especially section: **Some Notes on 'the Index',** pages 58-66

Punctum / Punctum Effect / Contrapuntal:

Whilst acknowledging that 'the *punctum'* cannot be clearly defined, a core claim of the text is that its ultimate origin is a piercing of imageness through a referral to the forces of the corpo-real. The term *contrapuntal* is used to identify a *potential* to cause a *punctum effect*. Where it is necessary to make this distinction, the term *punctum effect* is used to differentiate the actual affectual reaction –that can be reported but not fully communicated– from the object or detail that triggers it.

The *punctum effect* – the *tuché* – which is an *affect*, is a disturbance of apprehensive imageness, a fragmentation of the expected generalised wholeness and meaning; it is a reference to *singularity* that can occur in any representational system or sign. Signs *read as* containing a real indexical trace are privileged to cause a *punctum effect* in the mind of a viewing subject. This is because the contingency that is inherent to the idea of causation or indexicality will always retain a strong aspect of the absolutely unique or of singularity.

See especially section: **Contrapuntal – Corpo-real – *Punctum*,** pages 78-80
Chapter II. *Camera Lucida*: That-*must-have*-been, pages 84-137

Bibliography:

Alberti, Samuel, Bienkowski, Piotr, Chapman, Malcolm J., 'Should we display the dead?' in *museum and society*, Nov. 2009, 133-49, ISSN 1479-8360. http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/museumsociety/documents/volumes/alberti2.pdf

Allen, Graham, *Roland Barthes* (Routledge London & New York, 2003), 125-32.

Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida*, translated by Richard Howard (Vintage: London, 2000 [1981]).

Barthes, Roland, *La Chambre Claire: Note sur la photographie*, (Gallimard Seuil: Paris, 2009 [1980]).

Barthes, Roland, *Elements of Semiology* (Hill and Wang: New York, 1984).

Barthes, Roland, *Mourning Diary*, translated by Richard Howard (Hill & Wang: New York, 2010).

Barthes, Roland, *Mythologies* (Vintage Books: London, 2009 [1957]) 131-87.

Barthes, Roland, *Image, Music, Text*, essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath (Fontana Press: London, 1977).

Barthes, Roland, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, translated by Richard Howard (Farrar, Straus & Giroux: New York, 1989 [1975]).

Barthes, Roland, interviewed by Schwarz, Angelo and Mandery, Guy, 'Sur la photographie', (pp. 1235 - 1240), in Barthes, Roland, Oeuvres Complètes: Tome III, 1974-1980 (Éditions du Seuil: Paris, 1995), 1236-1237.

Batchen, Geoffrey, 'Another Little History of Photography' in Batchen (ed.), *Photography Degree Zero*. 259-273.

Batchen, Geoffrey, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (MIT Press: Cambridge Massachusetts & London, England, 1997).

Batchen, Geoffrey (ed.), *Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Roland Barthes's* Camera Lucida (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England, 2009).

Baudrillard, Jean, *Art and Artefact*, Zurbrugg, Nicholas (ed.), (Sage Publications: London, 1997).

Baudrillard, Jean, 'The System of Collecting', translated by Roger Cardinal in Elsner, J., Cardinal, R. (eds), *The Cultures of Collecting* (Reaction Books: London, 1994), 7-24.

Baudrillard, Jean, *The System of Objects*, translated by James Benedict (Verso: London & New York, 1996 [1968]).

Baudrillard, Jean, *Système des Objets: La consommation des signes* (Denöel/Gonthier, Editions Gallimard,1978 [1968]).

Belting, Hans, *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (Wilhelm Fink Verlag: München, 2001).

Belting, Hans, 'Photography und Malerei, Museum Photographs, Der Photographische Zyklus der "Museumsbilder" von Thomas Struth' in *Thomas Struth: Museum Photographs*, (Schirmer/Mosel Verlag: München, 1998), 5-27.

Benjamin, Walter, 'Kleine Geschichte der Photographie' in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 2.1 (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1977 [1931]), 368-85.

Benjamin, Walter, 'A Short History of Photography', translated by P. Patton in Trachtenberg, Alan (ed.), *Classsic Essays on Photography* (Leete's Islands Books: New Haven, Connecticut, 1980), 199-216.

Born, Georgina, 'Public Museums, Museum Photography, and the Limits of Reflexivity: An Essay on the Exhibition *Camera Obscured: Photographic Documentation and the Public Museum*', (Journal of Material Culture, 1998, Vol. 3), 223-54.

Bourgeois, Louise, 'Freud's Toys' in *Artforum*, January 1990, 111-13.

Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Relational Aesthetics*, translated by Simon Pleasance & Fonza Woods with the participation of Mathieu Copeland (Les Presses du Réel: Paris, 2002 [1998]).

Bray, Xavier, et al, *The Sacred Made Real: Spanish Painting and Sculpture 1600-1700* (National Gallery Company: London, 2009).

Burgin, Victor, 'Re-reading *Camera Lucida*' in Batchen (ed.), *Photography Degree Zero*, 31-46.

Crimp, Douglas, *On the Museum's Ruins* (MIT Press: Cambridge Massachusetts & London, England, 2000 [1993]).

Debord, Guy, 'Separation Perfected' in *The Society of the Spectacle* (Black & Red: Detroit, 2010 [1967]).

Derrida, Jacques, 'The Deaths of Roland Barthes' in Silverman H. J. (ed.) *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy since Merleau Ponty* (Northwestern University Press: Evanston, Illinois, 1997), 259-96.

Derrida, Jacques, *Of Grammatology*, Corrected Edition (John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore & London, 1997 [1967]).

Dubois, Phillipe, *Der Fotografische Akt, Versuch über ein theoretisches Dispositiv* with a foreword by Herta Wolf, (Verlag der Kunst: Amsterdam & Dresden 1989).

Dylan, Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, (Routledge London & New York, 1996).

Edwards, Elizabeth, *Raw Histories: Photography, Anthropology and Museums*, (Berg: London, 2001).

Edwards, Steve, *Photography: A very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press: Oxford & New York, 2004).

Eco, Umberto, 'Critique of the Image' in Victor Burgin (ed.), *Thinking Photography* (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 1982), 32-38.

Elkins, James (ed.), *Photography Theory*, (Routledge: London & New York, 2007).

Elkins, James, *What Photography Is* (Routledge: London & New York, 2011).

Fried, Michael, 'Barthes's Punctum' in Batchen (ed.), *Photography Degree Zero*, 141-69.

Gallop, Jane, 'The Pleasure of the Phototext' in Batchen (ed.), *Photography Degree Zero*, 47-56

Green, David and Lowry, Joanna, 'From Presence to the Performative: Rethinking Photographic Indexicality' in *Where is the Photograph (*Photoforum/Photoworks: Brighton, 2002), 47-60.

Iversen, Margaret, *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes* (Pennsylvania State University Press: Pennsylvania, 2007).

Iversen, Margaret, 'Was ist eine Fotografie' in Wolf, Herta (ed.), *Paradigma Fotografie: Fotokritik am Ende des fotografischen Zeitalters* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt, 2002), 115-16.

Jakobson, Roman, 'Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb', reprinted in *Selected Writings, Vol. II, Word and Language* (Mouton: The Hague, 1971 [1957]). 130-47.

Jay, Martin, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1994).

Kelly, Dennis, 'Benjamin, Atget and the 'readymade' politics of postmodern photography studies' in J. J. Long, Andrea Noble, Edward Welch (eds) *Photography: Theoretical Snapshots* (Routledge: London, New York, 2009), 112-24.

Knight, Diana, *Barthes and Utopia: Space, Travel, Writing* (Clarendon Press: London, 1997).

Krauss, Rosalind, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (MIT Press: Cambridge Massachussetts & London England, 1986).

Krauss, Rosalind, 'Photography in the Service of Surrealism' in Krauss, Rosalind, Livingston, Jane, *L'Amour Fou: Photography & Surrealism*, exhibition catalogue (Hayward Gallery, Arts Council of Great Britain: London, 1986), 15-42.

Rosalind Krauss, 'Corpus Delicti' in Krauss, Rosalind, Livingston, Jane, *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism,* 57-100.

Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, translated by Leon Roudiez (Columbia University Press: New York, 1982).

Lacan, Jacques, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Edited by Jacques-Alain (W. W. Norton & Company: New York & London, 1998).

Lefebvre, Martin, 'The Art of Pointing: On Peirce, Indexicality, and Photographic Images' in Elkins (ed.), *Photography Theory*, 220-44.

Lowry, Joanna, 'Desiring Photography' in Elkins (ed.) *Photography Theory* (Routledge: London, 2007), 313-18.

Lunenfeld, Peter, *Snap to Grid: A Users Guide to Digital Arts, Media, and Cultures* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England, 2000).

Mann, Thomas, *Der Tod in Venedig*, first published in 1912 in: *Die Erzählungen: Band 1* (Fischer Verlag: Frankfurt, 1980)

Mann, Thomas, 'Death in Venice' in *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, translated by David Luke (Vintage Books: London, 1998).

Mann, Thomas, *Death in Venice*, translated by Stanley Appelbaum (Dover Thrift Editions: New York, 1995).

Mann, Thomas, *Lebensabriss* (Fischer: Berlin, 1930)

Mavor, Carol, 'Black and Blue: The Shadows of *Camera Lucida*' in Batchen (ed.), *Photography Degree Zero*, 211-241.

Mitchell, W. J. T., *Picture Theory* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1994).

Museum für Angewandte Kunst Frankfurt, *Der Souvenir– Erinnerung in Dingen von der Reliquie zum Andenken*, exhibition catalogue (Wienand Verlag: Franfurt, 2006).

Nancy, Jean-Luc, *The Ground of the Image* (Fordham University Press: New York, 2005).

Olin, Margaret, 'Touching Photographs, Roland Barthes's "Mistaken" Identification' in Batchen (ed.), *Photography Degree Zero*, 75-89.

Preziosi, Donald, *Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity* (University of Minnesota Press: Mineapolis & London, 2003).

Preziosi, Donald, 'Plato's Dilemma' in Long, Noble, Welch (eds), *Photography: Theoretical Snapshots*, 146-58.

Pearce, Susan. *Museums Objects & Collections* (Smithonian Publishing: Washington, 1993).

Peirce, Charles Sanders, 'Logic As Semiotic: The Theory of Signs' in Buchler J. (ed.) The Philosophy of Peirce: Selected Writings (AMS Press: New York, 1978), 98-119.

Prosser, Jay, *Light in the Dark Room* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2005).

Rancière, Jacques, *The Future of the Image*, (London: Verso, 2007).

Rancière, Jacques, *The Emancipated Spectator* (Verso: London & New York, 2009).

Sides, Hampton, 'The lights are finally on' in *National Geographic*, April 2012, 86-99.

Smith, Shawn Michelle, 'Race and Reproduction in *Camera Lucida'* in Batchen (ed.), P*hotography Degree Zero*, 243-258*.*

Soler, Colette, 'The Body in the Teaching of Jacques Lacan', translated by Lindsay Watson, published online: http://ebookbrowse.com/the-body-in-the-teaching-of-jacques-lacan-colette-soler-pdf-d292924351

Solomon-Godeau, Abigail, 'Ontology, Essences, and Photography's Aesthetics: Wringing the Goose's Neck One More Time' in Elkins (ed.) *Photography Theory*, 256-69.

Solomon-Godeau, Abigail, 'Photography after Art Photography' in Wallis, Brian (ed.), *Art After Modernism* (The New Museum of Modern Art: New York, 1984), 75-86.

Sontag, Susan, *On Photography* (Penguin Books: London, 1979).

Van Lier, Henry, Philosophy of Photography (Leuven: Leuven, 2007).

World Press Photo 09, (Thames & Hudson: London & New York, 2009)

Webber, Jonathan, 'Philosophical Introduction', in Sartre, Jean Paul, *The Imaginary*, new translation by Jonathan Webber (Routledge: London & New York, 2004), xiii-xxvi.

Zaimoglu, Feridun, 'An einem heissen Sommertag' (*Zeit Literatur No 45, Krimi Spezial*, November 2011), 8-15

Žižek, Slavoj, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, (An October Book, MIT Press: Cambridge Massachusetts & London, England, 1992).

Žižek, Slavoj, *How to Read Lacan*, (Granta Books: London, 2006).

Appendix

Photography – Museum: On Posing, Imageness and the *Punctum*

As published in:

Sandra Dudley, Amy Jane Barnes, Jennifer Binnie, Julia Petrov and Jennifer Walklate (eds), *The Thing About Museums* (Routledge: London & New York, 2012)

6 Photography – museum: on posing, imageness and the *punctum*

Klaus Wehner

Museum photography

The appointment of Roger Fenton in 1854 to be Photographer to the British Museum – the first ever official photographer to any museum – marked the official beginning of the ongoing interrelationship between photography and the museum. Ever since, museums have come to employ photography in two main ways: to record the objects of their own collections for archives and dissemination (i.e. catalogues) and to supply photographs of contextual locations and objects/subjects not physically present in the museum. Elizabeth Edwards' *Raw Histories* (2001) provides an enlightening in-depth critical analysis of the field, which includes a wealth of references to previous studies. Based on the notion of the polysemic nature of both photographs and objects, Edwards applies the idea of a social biography to both. Further, she also refers to a certain 'merging' (Edwards 2001: 63) of displays of objects and photographs.

This chapter aims to reinforce an analogy between photography and exhibited objects, initially via a detour that examines the effect of turning the camera around: instead of supplying photographic image material into the museum, treating the museum itself as the subject of photographs. An examination of the resulting effect will supply enlightening reflections on both media. The analogy is cemented by way of the concept of the 'posed object' and the assertion that both media, by default, present constructed meaning as 'imageness'. In conclusion, a theoretical concept usually applied to photography, Roland Barthes' *punctum*, is applied to the posed object.

For several years, my own activity as practising visual artist has largely been subject to a passionate attraction to museums of all kinds and as a result I have visited and photographed many dozens of museum exhibitions across Europe.[1] What the resulting images always share with the long-standing tradition of photographic projects devoted to museums is the fact that the viewer of the photographs, by virtue of being positioned as 'external', looks at the depicted museum space *as an image*, as opposed to the actual museum visitor who focuses on individual exhibits and for whom the museum itself retains a certain degree of transparency. This applies to museum photographs that would be considered to be 'art', such as those of Louise Lawler or Hiroshi Sugimoto, as well as to images considered

to be 'documentary', such as the collection of historical museum photographs collated into a series of exhibitions entitled *Camera Obscured*.[2] Georgina Born has commented on this effect in her essay: 'Public museums, museum photography, and the limits of reflexivity' (1998), in response to one of the first exhibitions of *Camera Obscured*, many images of which feature museum workers in the process of setting up dioramas and other displays, painting backgrounds, transporting objects, and so on. Born states how the 'museum photographer cannot help but produce critique' (Born 1998: 244) and further, that this produces a 'reflexivity . . . which the museums seem officially to resist' (Born 1998: 233).

However, this default critique or reflexivity is not restricted to such 'behind the scenes' images. It occurs all the same when photographing 'complete' gallery spaces. In all cases, the photographic mediation causes the viewer of the photograph to 'take a step back', and as a result, brings the museum itself into prominence. This subsequently immediately emphasises what can be seen as the main predicament that is at the base of all collecting and curatorial practice: the contrived artifice of display through the conscious staging and juxtaposing of objects produces a *composition* whose contemporaneous whole is in tension with the individual objects' historic ontology as these are incorporated. In other words, looking at photographs of exhibition spaces causes an increased awareness of the artifice that is the *curatorial composition* by presenting an image that visually emphasises that all efforts of staging and juxtaposing objects produce a sum that is by definition greater than its parts.

In cases where early photographers of museum objects, using photographic processes that required high levels of light, moved artefacts outdoors into the sunlight (Figures 6.1 and 6.2), the work of curating on the part of the photographer becomes specifically obvious as the photographers created contexts through temporary arrangements for the photographs. However, even when the photographer of a museum does not physically re-arrange objects in order to photograph them, the mere act of finding a viewpoint that *positions* certain exhibits within the image and excludes others, the act of focusing on and enlarging
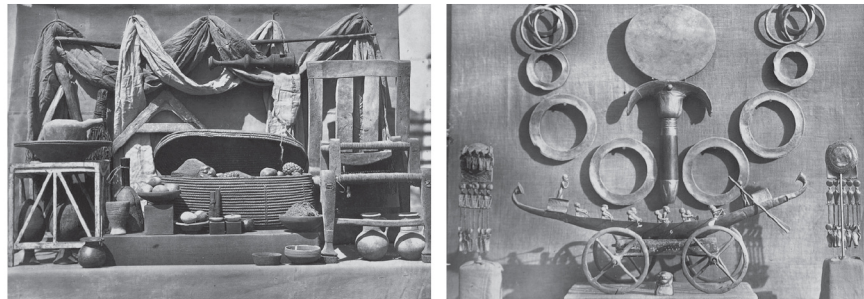
Figures 6.1 and 6.2 Images from the *Album Du Musée Du Boulaq* credited to Hippolyte Délié
and Henri Bechard, published in 1872, courtesy of the Wilson Centre
for Photography.

Figure 6.3 The British Museum, March 2008. Photographs © Klaus Wehner, image reproduction for non-commercial purposes, courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

details, in short framing, is a process that is analogous in its nature to curating (Figure 6.3).

Additionally, because a photograph always shows a frozen moment of immobility that has irreversibly passed, in photographs of exhibition spaces this inevitable pastness of the photographically recorded and preserved moment also pushes the temporality of the photographed curatorial composition into prominence. To emphasise this temporality is another reflexivity that the institutional dynamic of the museum resists, as it propagates a certain mythical timelessness over its temporality. Avoiding this reflexivity on composition and temporality may well be the reason that museum and exhibition catalogues traditionally exclude photographs of exhibition spaces in favour of photographs of individual objects in a studio set-up in front of backgrounds, perceived as neutral.

This type of image excludes anything that would overtly indicate the frozen moment of the image's coming into being (Figure 6.4). As a result, the image largely denies the artificiality as well as the temporality of the photographed set-up. The photographic moment, and even the photograph itself, recedes into invisibility in favour of a mythical a-temporality of the pseudo-neutral reproduction. Thus, this type of image, as a medium, is subject to the same type of transparency as the museum: it re-presents the object but hides itself. Consequently, exhibition and museum catalogues traditionally feature series of these neutral still life photographs as a record of the collection, whereas images of exhibition spaces, which are temporary curatorial compositions, are mostly (in)conspicuously absent.[3]

Figure 6.4 Child Hiding behind Mask, also described as *False Love*. Sculpture attributed to
Bartolomeo Cavaceppi, 1799, Collection T. Longstaffe-Gowan and T. Knox.
Photograph © Klaus Wehner.

Returning to the perceived dichotomy of 'documentary' versus 'art' raised
above, a much-discussed issue in the history of the critical reception of photo-
graphy always has, and still continues to be centred on the question of whether
the photograph is an objective, unmediated document, a pure and truthful re-
production of reality, described by Roland Barthes (in *Camera Lucida*) to be 'pure
contingency' (Barthes 1984: 28) which 'does not invent; it is authentication itself'
(Barthes 1984: 87) or if the photograph is by default subjective, artificially com-
posed, and as much an artificial interpretation of reality as for example a painting.
In short, if photography is 'document' or 'artifice', 'technique' or 'art', 'nature'
or 'culture'.[4]

It appears undeniable that both arguments have validity but at the same time
are also equally unable to negate the respective opposing view. Above, I compared
the labour of framing on behalf of the photographer to curating and this exem-
plifies my position and this is also the reason for raising the issue here. It is not
useful to debate whether a photograph *is* pure contingency or *is* always coded.
The photograph is always both at once. The subjective, coded, artificiality is the
default result of the chosen moment of the taking of the image and the camera
viewpoint, which includes, excludes and arranges image components which never-
theless will be realistic imprints of objects that 'have-been-there', to use one of

Barthes' expressions. To quote Hans Belting as he discusses one of Thomas Struth's *Museum Photographs*: 'The *composition* is here the result of one possible selection out of the contingency, which the real space in fast pacing change presents to the camera' (Belting 1998: 19, my translation, emphasis added). Once again, the parallel to a curatorial composition becomes apparent as it shares with the photograph the quality of being a composition that, nevertheless, is made up from truthfully re-presented elements. In both cases the viewer is confronted with the result of an act of selecting and excluding, juxtaposing and framing. Consequently, when a photographic image re-presents an exhibition space, we are inevitably led into a hall of mirrors, as the two media reflect on each other.
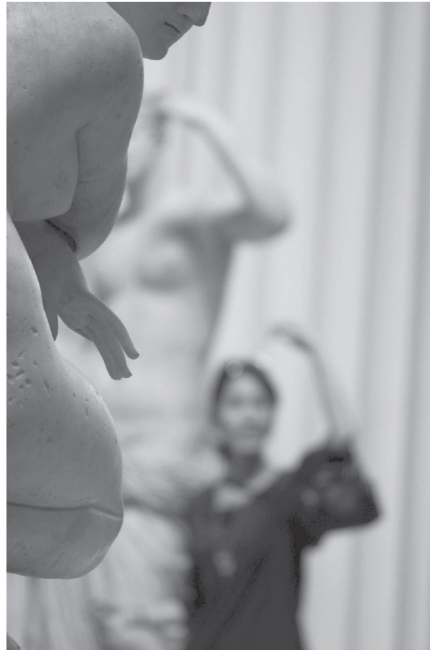

Figure 6.5 The British Museum, March 2008. Photograph © Klaus Wehner, image reproduction for non-commercial purposes, courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

[W]hat founds the nature of Photography is the pose.

(Barthes 1984: 78)

Photography transformed subject into object, and even, one might say, into a museum object: in order to take the first portraits (around 1840) the subject had to assume long poses under a glass roof in bright sunlight.

(Barthes 1984: 13)

223

Posed objects

Following the observation of the analogue between the curatorial and the photographic composition, I will extend this argument by introducing the concept of the *posed object*, which will remain the central theme of this investigation. I suggest that the museum or collector's act of exhibiting objects for visual contemplation, which allows for looking but not touching, stages the objects on display themselves as an *image* and that an examination of the ontology of the object-staged-as-image uncovers a strong analogy to the ontology of the photographic image. The viewer temporarily beholds the staged object and takes away a visual impression, or if photography is possible and allowed and the object deemed of sufficient interest, a photograph of the staged object.

Marcel Duchamp's readymade has attracted similar thoughts,[5] which to my knowledge have never been expanded in-depth nor applied beyond the readymade in 'art'. Regarding Duchamp's readymade, Rosalind Krauss points out:

> The readymade's parallel with the photograph is established by its process of production. It is about the physical transposition of an object from the continuum of reality into the fixed condition of the art-image by a moment of isolation, or selection.
>
> (Krauss 1977: 78)

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes reflects on the *pose*, describing his feeling in a moment when he himself is about to be photographed:

> Now, once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of 'posing,' I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image.
>
> (Barthes 1984: 10)

Hence, for Barthes, the *pose* – a moment of apprehension ready for the inscription of an image – *is* image. The moment Barthes transforms himself into an image is a momentary temporal arrest, a conscious pause/pose in the person's usual non-self-conscious positioning within the everyday flow of time and space. Through *posing*, Barthes extracts himself 'from the continuum of reality into the fixed condition of the (art-) image'. Thus, analogous to the pose of the person is any object that is exhibited, be it an object that constitutes a piece of art or craftsmanship, or an everyday object that receives special attention due to its link to a certain history or be it a piece of 'nature' or indeed any 'lump of the physical world to which cultural value is ascribed' as Susan Pearce has referred to it (Pearce 1993: 5). In all cases, the object in question will be subject to a similar temporal arrest due to its removal from its customary environment and use. The object is thus placed into a particular stasis that is distinct from the

everyday flow of utility and mobility in time and space, and so the object is *posed as image* for the viewer's gaze and visual memory. This means that the act of posing an object transforms it into part of a coded, visual sign, which implies issues of absence and presence, or as Edwards has worded it: 'It is . . . pertinent . . . that both photographic and display forms work to transform objects and construct meanings through their presentation as *visual spectacles*' (Edwards 2001: 63, emphasis added).

Collection

This view can be seen as homologous to Susan Pearce's insightful analysis of collecting and collections, and the following quote further cements the equation of the readymade in 'art' and other posed objects such as a collection of natural specimens:

> The crucial semiotic notion is that of metaphor and metonymy . . . [what the collector chooses for his collection] . . . bears an intrinsic, direct and organic relationship, that is a metonymic relationship, to the body of material from which it was selected because it is an integral part of it. But the very act of selection adds to its nature. By being chosen away and lifted out of the embedding metonymic matrix, the selected collection now bears a representative or metaphorical relationship to its whole. *It becomes an image* of what the whole is believed to be, and although it remains an intrinsic part of the whole, it is no longer merely a detached fragment because it has become imbued with meaning of its own. . . . [The collection] . . . retains its intrinsic or metonymic character, but the process of selection has given it also a metaphorical relationship to the material from which it came.
>
> (Pearce 1993: 38, emphasis added)

To use one of Pearce's examples (1993: 38), the fish collected by a biologist from the Indian Ocean, genuinely is a metonymical part of the natural world and of the Indian Ocean and at the same time the collection of fish becomes a metaphorical image for 'Indian Ocean'. Regarding the collection of fish as a posed object, this shows that despite the fact that actual objects are real and present, the posed composition refers to something additional, beyond the actual objects. Thus, the viewer is faced with the same issues of presence and absence that characterise the image. Furthermore, it can be concluded that observations regarding 'collecting' can be applied to any one posed object in general, even if it is not part of a 'collection' proper. The posed object is always 'chosen away and lifted out of the embedding metonymic matrix', thus the posed object is by default 'collected' if not to say it is always part of the grand collection of posed objects.[6]

Imageness

In summary, what has been observed so far is that both photography and the posed object produce a curatorial composite resulting from the inevitable dynamic of de- and re-contextualising through choosing and excluding, juxtaposing and framing. Both media re-present real fragmented elements or (part-)objects, yet both media are simply unable to do so outside of a syntagmatic framework of constructed meaning – a framed display – which, 'adds to its nature' (Pearce 1993: 38); or in Edwards' words: 'works to transform objects and constructs meanings through their presentation as visual spectacles' (Edwards 2001: 63). Born, too, uses the word spectacle when speaking about museum photographs that show the in-progress setting up of dioramic sets: 'This is the construction of mere display as spectacle' (Born 1998: 228). Further, she describes the building of sets as 'iconic technique' (Born 1998: 230).

In other words, in the cases in question – photography and the posed object – the 'visual spectacle' is what hides the contingency, materiality and its polysemic arbitrariness underneath the appearance of the syntagmatic set-up of constructed meaning, the iconic wholeness, if not to say the simulacral, of the represented, its appearance and its meaning as spectacle – or image. As a native German speaker, I miss in the English language the ease with which one can use words like *Bildhaftigkeit* and *Bildmäßigkeit* which literally would translate as something close to 'image-like' or 'image-likeness' and which the dictionary translates as 'pictorial', yet I prefer to translate this as 'imageness', and I will use this expression when referring to the above described iconic wholeness within the syntagmatic visual spectacle/appearance that is separated from the materiality of the objects.[7]

Concluding the look at photography of the museum, and returning to the photographs of *Camera Obscured*: in these images the photographed 'incomplete' museum displays are denied their iconic wholeness or their complete imageness. In other words, the photographs present a different imageness from the one that the museum would present. Whilst in this case this happens more or less by default, this can be identified as the deliberate strategy of a project such as Louise Lawler's museum photographs as she often photographs artefacts that are in storage, resting on the floor, in the process of being installed or if she photographs 'complete' exhibition spaces her strategy consists of crops and a focus on arbitrary details of the set-up. In all cases her photographs emphasise the materiality and objecthood of the artefacts and thereby deny the iconic wholeness/imageness that the photographed objects would present to a gallery visitor if they were viewed 'properly' posed. A diametrically opposite strategy is to be found in Hiroshi Sugimoto's photographs of museum dioramas and also his series of portraits of Madame Tussaud's wax figures. In these photographs the photographed objects look more realist than the actual objects do when encountered in the gallery. His images re-present *the pose* of the photographed set-ups with such perfection that the resulting *mise en abyme*, instead of denying the objects' imageness through fragmentation, multiplies it to such an extent that all the same it uncovers its simulacral artificiality.

Figure 6.6 Museum für Angewandte Kunst Frankfurt, August 2006. Photograph © Klaus Wehner.

We pose things in order to drive them out of our minds.[8]

During a visit of the exhibition The Souvenir – Memory in Objects from the Relic to the Keepsake (my translation) in the Museum for Applied Arts in Frankfurt in 2006, I was particularly fascinated by the posed tin dish (mess tin) as seen in Figure 6.6.[9] The label informed me that the object was an important 'tool of survival' for Aenne Saekow, a Ravensbrück concentration camp inmate in 1945. I was disturbed by the thought that this very dish, which shows 'traces of use' that came into being through the handling of, thus direct contact with, the body of this tortured concentration camp inmate, who must have been at any moment an inch away from sudden violent death; that it was held, by her hands and touched her lips as she consumed life-preserving drink and food out of it, fighting to survive, surrounded by grime, blood and utterly depersonalising violence. Although no biological traces of food or lip imprints have survived on the dish itself, I know that such *traces-have-been-there*.

Indexicality is the principal representational/ideological technique of the museum: the bringing of 'original', 'natural' or exemplary (part-)objects within the museum's space, and their framing and setting such that they speak, metonymically, of the wider practice/environment/species/oeuvre of which they form part.

(Born 1998: 229)

Index

Because indexicality is used widely in theorising photography as well as museums and the idea of the real physical trace is central for the continuation of the argument, an important distinction in the use of the word needs to be made clear. Across much semiotic theory a sign pointing to an emergency exit as well as a footprint in the sand will be described as an 'indexical sign' yet there is a crucial difference between the two. The emergency exit sign is a sign that points *at* its object by deliberately employing the *concept* of indexicality. Of the same type is the pointing finger and also the linguistic index, a 'shifter' like 'this' or 'I', which is an 'empty' signifier that receives meaning through purposeful use within specific contexts. This index is always intentionally deployed, thus posed. It is based on concept and cultural consensus and it includes arbitrary, *symbolic* elements such as the running green man and arrow indicating an emergency exit. This has been observed by Roman Jakobson in his 1957 paper, 'Shifters, verbal categories, the Russian verb',[10] in which he came to use the word *indexical symbols.*

   In contrast, a footprint or a bullet hole is a residue or a trace and it is a natural sign that carries a *proof* that the object that it refers to *was* there and is now absent. Therefore, this index has one very crucial attribute and that is the element of time. A trace or an imprint always also refers to a *specific singular moment of coming into being*, which must by default be in the past, and therefore it is always 'historic'.[11]

   This difference corresponds to the fact that the English language does not make a distinction between the *indice* and the *index* as is found in Romance languages. In *Philosophy of Photography*[12] Henri Van Lier refers to this issue also stating that Peirce himself covers both divergent concepts with the word *index* but in his later writings only means the *indice*.[13] Considering the issue of whether the photograph is pure authentication or artificial interpretation, the following quote by Van Lier is pertinent:

[P]hotographs can . . . be defined quite rigorously as *possibly indexed indices. Indicial* then refers to the natural and technical aspects of photonic imprints, while *indexical* refers to the side of the subject (the photographer) who chooses his frame, film, lens, developers and prints.

(Van Lier 2007: 118)

This means that the *index* is of the realm of syntagmatic, symbolic imageness whereas the *indice* is of the realm of real materiality and contingency. Applied to

the analogy between the photographic and the curatorial composition, the posed dish from Ravensbrück too is an *indexed indice*, as the object functions as real material *trace*, thus *indice of* the murderous horrors of the Holocaust. This *indice* (of the past) is posed and made to point (in the present) *at* a whole, which in this case will be: Ravensbrück = Nazi Concentration Camps = Holocaust, rather than 'tin dishes', which is dependent on interpretative information to be either supplied at the same time as viewers encounter an exhibit or presupposed to exist in viewers.[14] Thus, the posed object in general, like the photograph, is always an *indexed indice*.[15]

For some clarity of language use I will refer to the *indice* as 'real index' and to the *index* as 'symbolic index'. As we observed, both photography and the posed object always present an amalgam of the two. Both media insert selected fragments of contingency into symbolisation.

> By taking a thousand differential precautions, one must be able to speak of a *punctum* in all signs.
>
> (Derrida 1997: 289)

Punctum

In proceeding, it is the real index of the body that touched me when encountering the dish from the concentration camp – the idea and (supplied) knowledge of touch, and the fascination this holds over many museum visitors, which will be of specific interest. I propose to adapt and apply to this real index of the body in the posed object, Barthes' notion of the *punctum*, which he developed in *Camera Lucida* as part of a quest to search for 'the essence of photography'.[16] A vast amount of literature exists on the *punctum*[17] and this complex and self-consciously paradox concept can only be crudely summed up here as a detail in the photographic image, which 'pierces' the viewer by causing a strong individual and emotional reaction that could be described as being incongruent to the viewer's perception of the *studium* of the image. The *studium* is the wider cultural context of what is seen in an image, for example the *studium* of the photographs in this essay would be: museums, exhibitions, culture, valued objects, museum-visiting, etc.

Regarding the *punctum* that would be the real index of the body, I cannot count the occasions when individuals I asked for their impression of certain exhibitions or museums have spoken immediately about the exhibits that, I would say, constituted their personal *punctum* – which most frequently related to violence to the (absent) body or, more immediate, human remains. To me the dish from Ravensbrück (in the context I saw it) is such an object. To name just a few more examples, I recall several people I asked about a major exhibition of Aztec artefacts at the Royal Academy in London in 2002, immediately mentioned the 'cruelty', referring to the carved stone vessels that – labels informed us – were used to hold blood and other body parts of human sacrifices (blood-has-been-there).

On a recent visit to Pompeii, I witnessed visitors' reactions to encountering the famous casts of the cavities left by the ancient victim's bodies (Figure 6.7):

*Figure 6.7* Pompeii, August 2008. Photograph © Klaus Wehner.

'There are real bones in there!' I overheard an excited conversation next to me. Asking a 16-year-old acquaintance of mine recently if she had ever been to Pompeii, the first and only thing she mentioned were the 'dead people in the glass cases'. When I take school groups to the British Museum and later ask about their impressions, the mummies are almost always mentioned first.

I remember myself at a very young age staring at and studying intently a shrunken head and an unwrapped Egyptian mummy in the Senkenberg Museum in Frankfurt, a memory that has never left me since – and which I credit with being the trigger for my ongoing fascination with museums. A London listings magazine featuring Apsley House, a house collection brimming with a vast number of historical paintings, sculpture and furniture, lists as 'Best Exhibit: Wellington's death mask' (*Time Out* 2006) – the most paradigmatic example of a real index of the body of a historical legend.

A display at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich shows the coat worn by Nelson during the Battle of Trafalgar on 21 October 1805, during which he received a fatal shot wound (Figures 6.8 and 6.9). The hole left by the bullet is clearly visible on the left shoulder. The coat and also the stockings on display in the case show bloodstains which are Nelson's and also 'probably of Nelson's secretary John Scott who was killed earlier in action' (text from label). Also inside the case is Nelson's hair in a pigtail as cut from his head after his death. Here the real index of the dying body of a historical legend is specifically strong. If you linger nearby this display case, you will inevitably hear numerous strong responses from visitors of all ages.

> The Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see.
>
> (Barthes 1984: 4)

By way of outlining the implications of transposing Barthes' *punctum* to the posed object, I should point out that I follow those interpretations, too numerous to list here, that have linked the *punctum* to the Lacanian real and this is the base of my transposition of the concept. Regarding the idea of imageness presented by both the photograph and the posed object, I suggest that the *punctum*
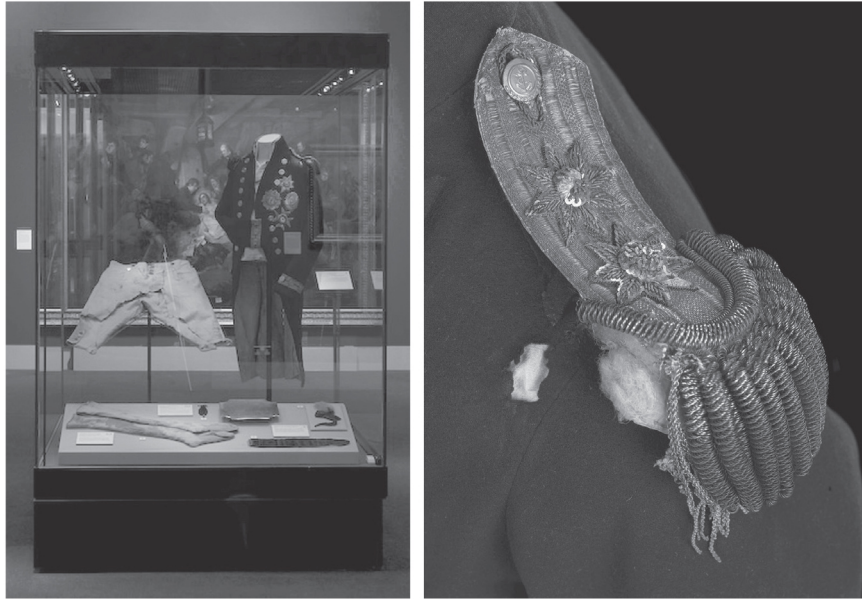
Figures 6.8 and 6.9 The display of Admiral Nelson's coat. Courtesy of the National Maritime
Museum, Greenwich, London. Photographer anonymous.

is an element or detail that pierces (the generality of the) perceived imageness by
way of pointing to pure materiality, contingency and singularity. Or in Lacanian
terms, the *punctum* is what points to the real as it is hidden under the matrix of
signification of the symbolic.

Often, but not always directly, this pointer relates to the body. Edwards begins
Raw Histories with the description of a *punctum* she experiences in a photograph
of 1873 as 'the carefully tied knots in the lashings of a bamboo palisade', which
for her evoke 'a sense of presence – of fingers that had tied those knots in other
times' (Edwards 2001: 1). Here the imageness of 'bamboo palisade' is pierced
by the singularity of the real index of '*fingers* that had tied *those* knots'. One of
Barthes' own examples is an image by Andy Warhol hiding his face behind his
hands, and for Barthes the *punctum* is 'the slightly repellent substance of those
spatulate nails, at once soft and hard-edged' (Barthes 1984: 45). Again the
generality of the imageness: 'portrait of Andy Warhol' is pierced by pointing to
the singularity of the (imperfect) materiality of the body – the corpus Barthes
needed turned out to the body he saw.

In her reflections on *Camera Obscured*, Born actually refers to Barthes' earlier
notion of the 'third' or 'obtuse meaning', which is widely seen as a precursor of
the *punctum* within Barthes' oeuvre (Barthes 1977). As discussed, these photographs
disturb the imageness of the museum set-up. As a whole image or image collec-
tion (rather than a detail within an image) they could thus be described as a
punctum to the museum's imageness.

Returning to posed objects, human remains and objects that are a real index of the (absent) (dead) body, by way of their absolute singularity, constitute a piercing of imageness because of the special status that the human body – alive or dead – holds within our matrix of signification and perception of ourselves and the objects around us. To paraphrase Barthes, the real index of the (dead) (absent) body within the posed object is an 'imperious sign of my future death that . . . challenges each of us, one by one, outside of any generality' (Barthes 1984: 97).

The posing of 'lumps of the material world that share this nature with ourselves' is thus a labour to insert matter – hence ourselves – into meaning, or in other words to cover the real with a matrix of signification. The pose always hovers between real materiality and our perception in mental representation. Piercing the imageness of the pose is ultimately akin to piercing the imageness of 'having a body' (symbolic), by pointing to 'being a body' (real) and thus it points to the relationship between the materiality of the biological body and the mental image in representation of the social body – the corpus I need.

Photography and the posed object are twins because the nature of both media is the *pose*, which inserts (fragments of real) contingency into symbolic imageness. The pose as such mirrors the human subject's riddle of *having* or *being* a body – or an object.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 Samples of these images can be seen on www.museumclausum.org in the section: *Wundercamera.*
2 *Camera Obscured* is curated by artist and photographer Vid Ingelevics. On his website a selection of the photographs can be viewed at: http://www.web.net/artinfact/CameraObsc.A.htm (Accessed June 2011).
3 Regarding temporary exhibitions, it needs to be acknowledged that a practical reason for this is that catalogues are usually produced in advance, before the exhibition is set up. It is also worth noting that when it comes to the exhibition of new, contemporary art the photograph of the artwork *in situ* in a museum or gallery is often prominently included in catalogues, presenting photographic proof of the insertion of the artwork as accepted into the public and institutionalised = canonised discourse of art.
4 See: Geoffrey Batchen (1997) *Burning with Desire: the conception of photography,* especially chapters 1 and 5 in which Batchen discusses the exclusive focus on 'culture' at the base of postmodern photography theory versus the exclusive focus on 'nature' at the base of modernist, formalist photography theory. For a different clear and brief summary of the nature–culture subject see also Steve Edwards (2004) *Photography: a very short introduction.* As example of the continuous currency of these themes as hinged on the idea of 'the index', which is discussed below, see James Elkins (ed.) (2007) *Photography Theory.*

5 For another discussion of the readymade as 'photograph' see also Dubois (1989: 92–3).

6 Whilst any further discussion would exceed the scope of this essay, this also means that the concept of the posed object is by no means restricted to the museum. This will be discussed in depth in my PhD thesis *On Posing*, currently in preparation.

7 The English translations of Jaques Rancière's writings have established the use of the word 'imageness' into our vocabulary, which he uses to refer to 'a regime of relations between elements and between functions' (Rancière 2007: 4) or to a 'regime of articulation between the visible and the sayable' (Rancière 2007:11).

8 My paraphrase of Franz Kafka's quote: 'We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes' (quoted in Barthes 1984: 53).

9 The photograph I took (Figure 6.6) emphasises the fact that this battered tin dish is exhibited, in an otherwise empty, spacious display cabinet. A sense of the forlorn is increased through the fact that the blurred shape in the background suggests a visitor to the gallery whose attention is elsewhere as his or her back is turned toward the exhibit. However, it is not this photograph that is the focus here but the exhibited object itself – employing the photo as documentation.

10 Roman Jakobson (1957). See also the entry: 'Shifter' in Dylan (1996: 182).

11 This temporal distance is a temporary co-existence of cause and effect in the case of symptoms such as fever indicating disease or heat indicating a fire. These effects only exist during their moment of coming into being and are therefore different to the trace as they eventually disappear with the ceasing of the cause.

12 See 'Peirce and photography' in *Philosophy of Photography* (Van Lier 2007: 117–22).

13 To this should be added that it would have been a major intervention for translations of Peirce's texts from English into Romance languages to have altered this conflation and thus the term index is used in the same conflated manner in all Romance language translations I know of. I am aware of two other recent texts that point out corresponding different types of indexicality in somewhat different parameters also arriving at different interpretations of Peirce. Martin Lefebvre (2007) proposes a distinction between 'direct and indirect indexical relations'. David Green and Joanna Lowry also distinguish between two forms of indexicality: 'the one existing as a physical trace of an event, the other as performative gesture that points towards it' (2002: 48). Further, they argue that Peirce 'demonstrated that the indexical sign was less to do with its causal origins and more to do with the way in which it pointed to the event of its own inscription' (2002: 48).

14 This reliance on supplied information naturally implies that such information can be distorted, ideologised or altogether false and invented such as in the case of faked or misattributed artefacts.

15 The fact that the photograph is this *indexed indice* also means that writings that rely heavily on the concept of indexicality might in places be confusing but are not to be discredited. However, the distinction and acceptance that both are always present in the photograph could solve criticism of 'the index' in photography such as Joel Snyder's, who vigorously disputes the usefulness of the concept during the round table discussion recorded in *Photography Theory*: 'What I fear about the causal stuff is that it stops you from seeing the photograph as pictures' (Elkins 2007: 155); or 'The problem with attempting to discuss photographs in terms of *the* index is that the notion is so thoroughly unspecified' (Elkins 2007: 369).

16 Strictly speaking, 'Barthes' notion of the *punctum*' is problematic to define and any attempt will constitute an unjust simplification. Therefore, my premise is that what I propose here is an adaption and alteration of the concept but it is based on what I believe to be at the core of Barthes' uses of the term as is explained below.

17 For a recent publication of collected old and new essays on the *punctum* see Batchen (2009). The *punctum* is also debated in Elkins (2007).

233

Bibliography

Barthes, R. (1977) 'The third meaning', in *Image Music Text*, London: Fontana Press, pp. 52–68.

Barthes, R. (1984) *Camera Lucida*, reprinted (2000), London: Vintage.

Batchen, G. (1997) *Burning with Desire: the conception of photography*, Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press.

Batchen, G. (ed.) (2009) *Photography Degree Zero: reflections on Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida*, Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press.

Belting H. (1998) 'Photography und Malerei, *Museum Photographs*, Der Photographische Zyklus der "Museumsbilder" von Thomas Struth', in *Thomas Struth: Museum Photographs*, München: Schirmer/Mosel Verlag, pp. 5–27.

Born, G. (1998) 'Public museums, museum photography, and the limits of reflexivity: an essay on the exhibition *Camera Obscured: Photographic Documentation and the Public Museum*', *Journal of Material Culture*, 3: 223–54.

Derrida, J. (1997) 'The deaths of Roland Barthes', in H.J. Silverman (ed.) *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy since Merleau Ponty*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, pp. 259–96.

Dubois, P. (1989) *Der Fotografische Akt, Versuch über ein theoretisches Dispositiv*, with a foreword by Herta Wolf, Amsterdam and Dresden: Verlag der Kunst.

Dylan, E. (1996) *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, London and New York: Routledge.

Edwards, E. (2001) *Raw Histories: photography, anthropology and museums*, London: Berg.

Edwards, S. (2004) *Photography: a very short introduction*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Elkins, J. (ed.) (2007) *Photography Theory*, London and New York: Routledge.

Green, D. and J. Lowry (2002) 'From presence to the performative: rethinking photographic indexicality', in D. Green (ed.) *Where is the Photograph*, Brighton: Photoforum/Photoworks, pp. 47–60.

Jakobson, R. (1957) 'Shifters, verbal categories, and the Russian verb', reprinted in *Selected Writings*, Vol. II, *Word and Language* (1971), The Hague: Mouton, pp. 130–47.

Krauss, R. (1977) 'Notes on the index: seventies art in America', *October*, 3 (Spring): 68–81.

Lefebvre, M. (2007) 'The art of pointing: on Peirce, indexicality, and photographic images', in J. Elkins (ed.) *Photography Theory*, London and New York; Routledge, 220–44.

Museum für Angewandte Kunst Frankfurt (2006) Exhibition Catalogue: *Der Souvenir – Erinnerung in Dingen von der Reliquie zum Andenken*, Frankfurt: Wienand Verlag.

Pearce, S. (1993) *Museums Objects and Collections*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Rancière, J. (2007) *The Future of the Image*, London: Verso.

Time Out (2006) 'London's best unsung museums', in *Time Out* (London), 7 July 2006.

Van Lier, H. (2007) *Philosophy of Photography*, Leuven: Leuven University Press.