Royal College of Art
Postgraduate Art and Design

Photography, Memory and Ekphrasis

Justin Coombes

Submission in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree
PhD (by Project), awarded by the
Royal College of Art

Submitted August 2012

Arts & Humanities
Research Council

Abstract: ***Recollected Places: Photography, Memory and Ekphrasis***

The practice component of my PhD, 'Recollected Places', consists of exhibitions combining my work as an artist in still photography, video and installation and books that combine text and the photographic image. My written thesis, 'Photography, Memory and Ekphrasis' looks at a number of artworks from the 1950s to the present day which employ the photography-ekphrasis relationship.

'Ekphrasis' is the verbal description of visual works of art, for example, Homer's imaginary evocation of Achilles' shield in *The Iliad*. It became the object of intense academic scrutiny during the 1980s, as part of cultural theory's emergent 'visual turn' and its attendant concentration upon image-text relations. *The Iliad's* extended description of the shield, and the world of peace that it describes, are noticeably different from the 'real' events of the Trojan wars described throughout the rest of the poem. However, the ekphrastic scenes, whilst being distinctly different in tone, are arguably as 'lifelike' as the rest of the action described. So, from this very earliest recorded instance of ekphrasis, we can see how the mode opens up fundamental ontological questions about art and its place in the world that would be highlighted by conceptual art almost three millennia later. What holds more presence? The physical work itself, or the *idea* of the work? In a similar fashion, the invention of photography raised questions that were not methodically articulated until the 1980s. Thus a body of research from the early 1990s onwards has addressed the relationship between ekphrasis and photography. However, the vast majority focuses on ekphrastic writing about photography: 'poems for photographs', in James Heffernan's phrase.

The small extant literature that focuses on photography's relationship to ekphrasis tends to emphasise the technical aspects of the medium. My research is both the first book-length study that I am aware of to examine ekphrasis's relationship to photography and the first such study that I know of to be written by a practising visual artist. I consider recent writing on ekphrasis through the prism of various psychoanalytic theories, particularly those from recent debates on photography and melancholia. I examine the absence of the 'lost object' that is both the very condition for ekphrasis and melancholia and a precondition of all photographs: simultaneously trace of the object and reminder of its absence.

Copyright Statement

This text represents the submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. This copy has been supplied for the purpose of research for private study, on the understanding that it is copyright material, and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgment.

<u>Contents</u>

p4	**List of accompanying material**
p5	**Preface**
p9	**Acknowledgements**
p9	**Author's declaration**
p10	**Chapter 1:** ***Words, Objects and Knowledge:*** **Introduction, with notes on methodology**
p17	**Chapter 2:** ***The lost artwork:*** **Ekphrasis from Homer to John Ashbery**
p31	**Chapter 3:** ***The lost object:*** **Melancholia and some theories of memory**
p47	**Chapter 4:** ***Erroneous Representations:*** **Explorations of memory and ekphrasis**
p73	**Chapter 5:** ***Writing off photography:*** **Conclusions**
p78	**Appendix 1:** ***Recollected Places:*** **A critique of my research by practice**
p88	**Bibliography and Sources**
p94	**Appendix 2: Illustrations**

List of accompanying material

All of the works that constitute the practice component, which are also a submission in partial fulfillment of the requirements of this PhD (by Project), are listed in chronological order below. Appendix 2 illustrations are listed in normal type below and are found at the back of this thesis. Examiners should also consider the accompanying artworks and documentation in the list. These are films (documented here as Quicktime movies) and books (documented here as PDF files), collected on a DVD and **highlighted below in bold text.**

- **6a 'Love's Knowledge (Inventory for N)', Looped digital video, 1min 21 sec, 2008, supplied here as a Quicktime file on DVD**
- 6b 'Love's Knowledge (Inventory for N)', Installation view at the exhibition, *A Light Divided,* Louise T. Blouin Institute, London, 2008
- **6c 'Grief Tree', Artist's book, 28 x 32cm, 2009, supplied here as a PDF file on DVD**
- 6d 'Grief Tree', transparencies in lightboxes (55 x 65cm), framed lightjet prints (100 x 140cm) and printed text handouts (dimensions variable), 2009: Installation view at Valentines Mansion, Ilford, Essex, 2009
- 6e 'Grief Tree': Installation view at Leighton House Museum, London, 2010
- **6f 'Couriers of Kite Hill', transparency in lightbox (120 x 450cm) and video installation (1min 44 sec, dimensions variable): Video component supplied here as a Quicktime file on DVD**
- 6g, h, i, j, k 'Couriers of Kite Hill', Installation views and details at the offices of *WilmerHale*, London, 2010
- **6l 'Hokkaido Postcard', Artist's book, 28 x 32cm, 2011, supplied here as a PDF file on DVD**
- 6m 'Hokkaido Postcard' Lightjet photographs mounted on aluminium (each 100 x 140cm) and screen printed texts on paper (dimensions variable), installation view at the Royal College of Art, London, 2010
- 6n 'Hokkaido Postcard' Installation view at group exhibition, 'A Man Asleep', *LM Projects,* Los Angeles, 2010
- **6o 'Halcyon Song', Artist's book, 28 x 32cm, 20102, supplied here as a PDF file on DVD**
- 6p, q, r and s 'Halcyon Song', Lightjet photographs mounted on aluminium (each 100 x 237cm) and vinyl lettering transferred onto wall (dimensions variable): Installation views at solo exhibition, *Paradise Row Project Space*, London, 2012

Preface

‘Ekphrasis’ is the verbal description of visual works of art, for example, Homer's evocation of Achilles' shield in *The Iliad* (see Fig 1a). The dialogue, the harmony and the battle between word and image are central points of enquiry in both the ‘practical’ and written components of this PhD. The written component introduces ekphrasis, memory and melancholia as areas of enquiry that are used to critique historical models for my research by practice: photo-books, films, novels and other art forms from 1948 to the present day. My research by practice, which I refer to as ‘Recollected Places’, includes books and exhibitions that combine the written word and photography. Whilst there are a number of overlapping themes and points of interest, there is *not* a direct relationship, in terms of the modes of enquiry, between my written thesis and my own creative practice, as detailed in the Appendix.

Ekphrasis became the object of intense academic scrutiny during the 1980s, as part of cultural theory’s emergent ‘visual turn’ and its attendant concentration upon image-text relations. *The Iliad’s* extended description of the shield, and the world of peace that it describes, are noticeably different from the ‘real’ events of the Trojan wars described throughout the rest of the poem. However, the ekphrastic scenes, whilst being distinctly different in tone, are arguably as ‘lifelike’ as the rest of the action described. So, from this perhaps very earliest recorded instance of ekphrasis, we can see how the mode opens up fundamental ontological questions about art and its place in the world. Does the artwork or its referent hold a greater presence, and a greater claim on the truth? In a similar fashion, the invention of photography created epistemological questions that remained largely unasked until the 1980s. Thus a body of research from the early 1990s onwards has addressed the relationship between ekphrasis and photography. However, the vast majority of writings focuses on ekphrastic writing *about* photography: ‘poems for photographs’, in James Heffernan’s phrase. The extant literature that focuses on photography’s relationship *to* ekphrasis tends to emphasise the technical aspects of the medium. In this study, I consider recent writing on ekphrasis (WJT Mitchell, TJ Clark, James Heffernan et al.) in the light of certain psychoanalytic concepts, as they are deployed in recent debates on photography and melancholia (Rachel Moore, Jacques Ranciere et al.). I examine the absence of the ‘lost object’ that is both the very condition for ekphrasis and melancholia and a precondition of all photographs: simultaneously trace of the object and reminder of its absence.

There is a need for a study of ekphrasis that is rooted not in comparative literature but in the fine arts. Whilst my close studies, in Chapter 4, of historical models for my own practice begins, chronologically, with a work that is predominately one of written fiction (Wright Morris’s *The Home Place*), the four later works that I critique could all be placed within histories of modern and contemporary art rather than literature. Of course, on one level, even to respect such a distinction between the ‘literary’ and ‘visual arts’ might be to go against the spirit of study that ekphrasis might entail. And it might not account for the truly heterogeneous ways in which contemporary art forms are now studied. But on the other hand, any

sustained enquiry needs boundaries, the literary/visual distinction still exists in academia, and it feels an appropriate one, in particular given my training and practice as fine artist who mostly produces visual works before he attempts to make any transition into words. Another important point regarding the limits of my enquiry is that of ekphrasis's relationship to the Internet and to digital multimedia in general. Although Sophie Calle and Broomberg and Chanarin, artists I study in Chapter 4, make extensive use of the world wide web in their research, and in the latter's case, even make direct use of it in the works I study, I would still place my study into an essentially 'pre-digital' historical period. There are several reasons for this: the first is simply a question of quality. There is a growing body of work, both online and in the gallery system, that uses digital media to enrich and complicate the viewer-artwork relationship in a number of fascinating ways. And in a much broader sense, if the Internet had DNA then the image-text relationship would be written into it. But based on the quite extensive research that I have been able to make up until this point, the works that combine the Internet specifically with *ekphrasis* in truly challenging, interesting ways do not yet exist. And so, rather than write half-heartedly about works that do not merit sustained critical enquiry, or to write speculatively about works that do not exist, I have opted to sketch out an essentially pre-digital, and necessarily highly personal and elliptical, mini history of 'ekphrasis in contemporary art'.

By engaging with this relationship by the *practice* of art production itself, I aim to make an informed contribution to discussions on the relationships between photography and text. The artworks that constitute 'Recollected Places' are both fictions and discourses on the nature of photography, memory and ekphrasis. I hope that my simultaneous discussion and *enactment* of ekphrastic technique (amongst other writing genres) will contribute to an understanding of how the apparently self contained descriptive spaces of photography and ekphrasis can enrich one another, and that this in turn can also contribute to various discourses on contemporary photography. The overarching goal of the project is to establish and explore relationships between photography, text and memory. The principal question asked when critiquing my 'key works' of influence are: 'what do the combination of word and image offer one another in these works?' In answering this question, I go on to make value judgments about their status as works of art.

Once this critical model is established, the principal questions I ask of my own practice is: 'How might the image-text relationships described in my key works be developed further?' And 'what makes the particular combination of images and text in my practice (across a spectrum ranging from the purely photographic to the purely written) particularly suited to describing and evoking certain models of memory and emotional states such as melancholia?' Once I have answered these questions, in the concluding section of Chapter 5, I argue for the use of ekphrasis as a powerful tool for a critical art practice, one that can be used again and again by myself and other artist-researchers that use the image-text relationship by capitalizing on the radical distinction between image and language.

For my work to be seen as making an original contribution to knowledge, two contentions must be accepted. Both of these are explicated in the first chapter and elaborated upon throughout the rest of my thesis. First, that an original work of art makes a contribution to knowledge. My critical practice puts me in the strongest position possible to make such a contribution. Second, that the current state of contemporary fine art production and the teaching of fine art at university level in the UK is polarized by its inheritance of the avant-garde's excesses from the 1960s to the present day, between practices that privilege the 'visual' over the 'conceptual' and others that form the opposite, equally fallacious prioritization. Examples of the former category are the 'post-conceptual' approaches of the 'Young British Artists': often neo Baroque confections with high 'production values:' think of the 1996 Jake and Dinos Chapman installation, 'Tragic Anatomies', for example (Fig 1b). At the other extreme, and perhaps more characteristic of recent years, are the supposed 'radicant' tendencies of those artists engaged in 'relational aesthetics', for example, Tris Vonna Michell's performances at the Tate Triennial, 'Altermodern' in 2009 (Fig 1c). This exhibition was curated and the terms coined by Nicolas Bourriaud, who is keen to distinguish today's avant-garde from their postmodern predecessors of the 1980s and 90s by emphasising the 'heterochronia' of their practices (they exist within many time zones simultaneously) and the rootlessness that the advent of the Internet has made possible, and in some cases, enforced:

> And if twenty-first-century culture was invented with those works that set themselves the task of effacing their origin in favour of a multitude of simultaneous or successive enrooting? This process of obliteration is part of the condition of the wanderer, a central figure of our precarious era, who insistently is emerging at the heart of contemporary artistic creation. This figure is accompanied by a domain of forms and by an ethical mode: translation, whose modalities and cardinal role in contemporary culture this book seeks to enumerate.[1]

To these categories, the YBAs and the 'Altermodernists' replacing them, we might add the growing numbers of artists engaged in 'art writing', a term I will expand on in Chapter 1. My research is important because it argues, both practically and theoretically, for a model which bridges these areas, for work that could only exist *as visual art* and is engaged with providing aesthetic pleasure but nonetheless remains challenging on a conceptual level. Image and word maintain a combative yet mutually supportive relationship with one another. Without this relationship, the work would not exist.

My art maintains ongoing critical relationships to the practices described above, and also to other practices related to conceptual art from the 1960s to the present day, specifically 'Romantic Conceptualist' approaches of the early 1990s[2]. Despite these relationships, the wellspring of my work is not a conscious engagement with any of them, but with the lyrical dimensions of the classical world and the Romantic era. I am perpetually seduced by image and language and I use both of these to create further seductions. For

---

[1] Bourriaud, Nicolas, *The Radicant: No. 17,* trans. James Gussen and Lili Porten, (Berlin, Sternberg, 2009) p24

[2] See Heiser, Jörg, Hiller, Susan and Schorr, Collier, *Romantic Conceptualism* (Kerber, Leipzig, 2007). Sophie Calle, whom I discuss in Chapter 4 (see also Figs 1d and 4n), falls into this category.

example, image begets text. Text then begets second image. Like a series of translucent Russian dolls of alternating colours, second image begets second text, and the two then combine to form a hybrid image-text work. My uses of theories of ekphrasis and psychoanalysis provide a lens through which to cover some critically neglected ground in art theory and art history, but also through which to view and renew my own practice.

Acknowledgements

There are a number of people and groups to whom I owe enormous thanks for their help with this research: My supervisors, Dr. Francette Pacteau and Professor Adrian Rifkin; everyone at the Royal College of Art, especially Professor Olivier Richon, Professor Yve Lomax, Dr. Elizabeth Price, Barbara Campbell-Lange, Jessica Potter, Martina Margetts, Alice Evans, Hephzibah Rendle-Short, Meg Rahaim, Professor Richard Wentworth and Esther Teichmann; in Devon, Anne, John and Giles Coombes; all at Paradise Row gallery but especially Nick Hackworth, Barbara Rodriguez Muñoz, Jessica Barker, James Cocksey and Manuela Villaescusa. From London, David Birkin, Douglas White, Nathaniel Rackowe, Rana Begum, everyone at Sunny 16 studio, Eloise Fornieles, Nemonie Craven Roderick, Dr. Shahida Bari, Professor Victor Burgin, Professor Julian Stallabrass, Michael Lightfoot, Tom Pounder, Jasper Joffe and Kim Angsatchaphong; from Japan I would like to thank in particular Enrico Catani, Laura Bygrave, Johnny Waka, Toshio Shimazu, Yukari Kishida and Mao Sawa; from Thailand, Prabhaporn Angsatchaphong and Ken Churchill; from the Ruskin School in Oxford, I thank Malcolm Bull, Peter Shenai, Alice von Maltzahn, Aislinn McNamara, and Jan Kaesbach. Others I particularly wish to thank are Fatema Ahmed and Dr. Brooke Lynn McGowan. Finally, sincere thanks to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for their grant and to anyone else who has helped with this project in any way.

Author's Declaration

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification.

The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Chapter 1

Words, Objects and Knowledge: Introduction, with notes on methodology

‘Think before you speak is criticism's motto; speak before you think is creation's’.

E.M. Forster, ‘The Raison d'Être of Criticism in the Arts’

A conversation I had at a party alerted me to a term that for several years had been central to my practice as an artist without my even being aware of its name. 'Ekphrasis' is a word that *I* now explain to people at parties along similar lines… *'At a stretch, one could call the weather forecast, or a football commentary, a work of ekphrasis….'*

Much of my work as an artist springs from photography and drawing: 'pre-verbal' modes, if you like, of representing the world. I like, sometimes to a pathologically precise level, to describe in words what will later become, for example, a photograph or a performance. And whether one likes it or not, describing one's own work *in words,* at parties, in an interview, dissertation or press release, to a potential collector, curator or lover, can be others' first, perhaps only, encounter with it. Practically all contemporary art discourse is shot through with ekphrasis. Rather than being the preserve of Diderot's *Salon of 1759,* the mode became more prevalent than ever after photography's invention and its irrevocable calling into question of certain notions of describing the world. In the latest copies of *Frieze* and *Art Forum* I could not find a single review or article that did not bear the heavy burden of representation that its subjects, often so self-consciously, seek to avoid. So rather than fighting shy of 'straight' description, perhaps some of us artists (and I am referring here only to those of us who are ready to fully accept the existence of photography, film and the digital world) should *embrace* it, in all its contradictions.

It is perhaps an inevitable consequence of the innate difficulties of teaching art, of the often confused and self-contradictory models that are on offer today,[3] that we artists paddle in the shallower waters of philosophical thought before, in most cases, retreating to the safer shores of what makes all children amateur philosophers and artists: a passion for the materiality of the world, and what might seem to others to be random information, 'useless' details. What became clear to me when I started reading about ekphrasis was this: here were details that might have much more than they at first seem to offer. In *Museum of Words,* James Heffernan writes of his scholarly attraction to ekphrasis that it is 'the unruly antagonist of narrative, the ornamental digression that *refuses to be merely ornamental*' (my italics).[4] This antagonist was clearly providing, for me at least, a means to make images as well. And perhaps the mode might also provide a certain model of research. Georges Didi-Huberman's *Questioning Images* proposes that art historians might find new ways of reading and seeing in illuminating details that shift their entire understanding of the work, like the splotches of colour imitating marble on the base of Fra Angelico's *Madonna of the Shadows.*[5] Perhaps we artists should look more closely at these details too.

My second chapter, *The lost artwork: Ekphrasis from Homer to John Ashbery,* considers various writers' definitions of the term 'ekphrasis' and then looks in more detail at James Heffernan, Stephen Cheeke and

---

[3] For a timely exploration of this issue, see Elkins, James, *Why Art Cannot be Taught: A Handbook for Art Students* (Champaign, IL, University of Illinois Press, 2001)
[4] Heffernan, JAW, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993) p5
[5] see Rancière, Jacques, *The Aesthetic Unconscious,* trans. Debra Keates and James Swenson, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2009) p63-64

Emmanuel Hermange's investigations into the relationship between ekphrasis, poetry and photography. Haunting several of the artworks that I have made throughout the course of my research is the figure of Simonides, the ancient Greek poet to whom is attributed the saying, *ut pictura poesis* ("as is painting, so is poetry"). He is also credited with the invention of the 'Art of Memory,' a central component of rhetoric, in widespread use through antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. Chapter 3, *The lost object: Melancholia and some theories of memory*, sketches some of these ideas. I then explore Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia' and later critiques of this essay, and its use in psychoanalytic theories of art and literature. Finally these ideas are compared and synthesized, and I indicate how they will function in tandem as models for the critiques of Chapter 4. Here, having outlined a number of different definitions of ekphrasis, memory and melancholia, I apply the most pertinent of them to my 'key works' of influence. I also ask of each piece a perhaps unfashionable question: 'what makes this a work of *art* as opposed to merely a cultural production? This chapter, *Erroneous Representations: Explorations of Memory and Ekphrasis,* uses my analyses of these works to propose a connection between the 'lost object' of melancholia and the 'lost art work' of ekphrasis. The first appendix, *Recollected Places,* looks in depth at my own art practice, using in part the theories developed in Chapters 2-4 to critique my work.

I will now clear the ground for the enquiry by presenting a very brief history of 'fine art as research' in Great Britain, and situate my works' place within, and outside of, this context. In 1974, the now dissolved Council for National Academic Awards validated the first honours and Masters degrees in Art and Design. This was followed by its validation of the first PhD in Fine Art in 1979. Art education in the 1980s faced institutional resistance from more established disciplines that echoed the struggles faced by the establishment of degrees in English Literature and Modern History earlier in the 20th and 19th centuries.[6] Added to these academic barriers remains the question of a *how* a practice-based doctorate can constitute 'an original contribution to knowledge'. Controversies over how art practice can address this question partially explain why the PhD in Fine Art remained relatively scarce until the 1990s. In 1993, Christopher Fraying published his highly influential article, 'Research in Art and Design', in which he outlined three categories of 'research by practice'. These are research 'through', 'into' and 'for'art.[7] Research 'through' art and design can broadly be seen as an extension of Art History. It is not unusual for PhDs in art to begin as exclusively 'theoretical', but to become practice based, as is the case with Nicola Brandt's project on photography, landscape and apartheid in Namibia (Fig 1e). This began life as a DPhil in Fine Art Theory at Oxford University, and was converted to a 'by practice' degree in 2011. Research 'into' art can be summarized as research that uses scientific methodologies in order to produce art. For example, Bridget Riley (Fig 1f), Victor Vasarely and their 'Op Arts' contemporaries built upon developments in optical theory in the production of their paintings. In so doing, they also arguably expanded the field of optical theory itself during the 1970s. Frayling has a particular problem with his final category. For him, research

---

[6] see The History of Education Society, *The History of Education in Europe* (London and New York: Routledge 2009) p35-45

[7] see Frayling, Christopher 'Research in Art and Design' from *Royal College of Art Research Papers*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1-5 (London: RCA, 1993/1994) p1-6

‘for’ art (see Fig 1g: he would later change the term to ‘as’ art[8]) should not qualify as doctoral research. Here, the outcomes of the research are, in some way, embodied entirely in the artefacts. For Frayling, whilst this activity might be research of one sort, it does not necessarily follow that that the artefact itself makes ‘an original contribution to knowledge’.

What is now known as the ‘artefact debate’ developed in response to Frayling’s questions, and in particular his objection to the notion of ‘embodied’ knowledge: To what degree is an artefact a *manifestation* of knowledge, compared to its being a trace, or outcome of some other set of knowledge? This issue is particularly relevant in those schools where the ‘Fine Arts’ are still clearly distinguished from those of ‘craft’ and ‘design’, for example, London’s Royal College of Art and the Edinburgh College of Art. However the first decade of the 21st century has seen the development of a new set of debates that might add a fourth category to complicate Frayling’s model, or perhaps collapse and replace his ‘through/for/into’ definitions all together. These centre upon the development of ‘art writing’ as a discipline in itself, and should not be confused with the concept of ‘artist’s writings’: manifestoes, articles, lectures, letters, and other miscellanea.’[9]

As a nascent field, ‘art writing’ is naturally hard to summarize, but I see it as follows: It is a genre of writing which merges fiction with theory and asserts that the written word be given as high a status within a *visual* artist’s arsenal of materials as graphite, paint, clay, glue, sound or pixels. Take for example the collections of short stories *The Mechanical Copula* (see Fig 1h) and *The Dark Object* by, respectively, Maria Fusco and Katrina Palmer. The latter grew out of the PhD thesis Palmer wrote under the RCA Sculpture department’s aegis. Over the course of her research, Palmer’s *practice* shifted from being that of an artist working with physical materials to that of an artist using the materiality of words. She crystallized these problems in the invention of her protagonist Addison Cole, the sole remaining, isolated student at ‘The School of Sculpture Without Objects’. Cole’s encounters with texts, objects, artists and philosophers form the narrative drive of each of the stories. Thus Palmer’s written thesis and the ‘practical’ components of her research were as one.

I also see ‘art writing’ as a delayed, but in some respects logical outgrowth of the ‘dematerialist’ tendencies that the 1960s and 1970s generation of conceptual artists championed.[10] In 1917, Marcel Duchamp bought a public urinal at an iron works in New York, took it back to his studio, signed it (using

---

[8] In a paper written three years later that revised some of his original points, Frayling changed his term ‘for’ to ‘as’. See Frayling, Christopher ‘Nourishing the Academy’ from *Drawing Fire, No.17, Winter 1996,* (Birmingham: UCE) p16-22

[9] see Wright, Karen and Gayford, Martin (eds.), *The Penguin Book of Art Writing* (London: Penguin, 1998), which, along with its art historical and art theoretical pieces, contains a number writings *by* visual artists (Sickert, Cezanne, Hirst, etc.) that were clearly not meant to be considered as artworks in themselves.

[10] For an illuminating, and in places highly critical, account of this period, see Lippard, Lucy, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997)

the pseudonym ‘R. Mutt’) and exhibited it at the Society of Independent Artists group exhibition (see Fig 1i). In her article ‘The Richard Mutt Case’, Louise Norton, complicit in Duchamp’s use of a ‘nom de guerre’, writes:

> *‘Whether* Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or *not* has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object.’[11]

This act and its critical reception heralded Duchamp’s concept of the ‘readymade’, which would gain enormous currency in art over the course of the 20th century. In some senses it reached an endpoint in the work of the Minimalist movement of the 1960s and 70s. As the artist Sol LeWitt (see Fig 1j) stated in a celebrated essay in *Artforum,*

> When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all (…) decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.[12]

Current exponents of art writing seem to share with their forebears from the sixties and seventies (LeWitt et al.) a set of left-wing sympathies, and resistance to the ‘commodification' of the art object’. Add to this the advent of home computing, the Internet and such phenomena as print on demand publishing and social media, and it is no wonder that the genre of ‘art writing’ has grown so rapidly in the last decade.

As we have seen, many of the debates around ‘contributions to knowledge’ in the field of the fine arts concern what status we give to the art object itself, as in the ‘artefact debate’ of the 1990s and 2000s. Recent developments in curatorial practice (see for example, Neil Macgregor’s British Museum / BBC collaboration *A History of the World in 100 Objects*) suggest that the notion that knowledge *is* embedded into materials themselves is gaining popular ground.[13] However, if we consider words themselves, or even ideas, as being ‘material’, of an even greater status than the object (as perhaps some of the sixties generation of conceptual artists did) then the ‘artefact debate’ might become irrelevant.

Both the ‘artefact debate’ and what I shall now tentatively refer to as the ‘art writing debate’, *are* relevant to what I do as an artist, and I address them throughout this thesis, particularly in Chapter 5, where I consider the material status of my artwork, in particular my photographs and my writing. However, my central point of reference regarding the question of a ‘contribution to knowledge’ will instead centre around the concept of *aletheia.* This ancient Greek word (ἀλήθεια) can be translated as ‘un-forgetfulness’ or ‘un-concealment’[14] and as Martin Heidegger points out in ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, it can also

---

[11] Norton, Louise, ‘The Richard Mutt Case’ from *The Blind Man,* Vol. 2, 1917 (New York: 33 West 67th Street) p5
[12] LeWitt, Sol, ‘Paragraphs on Conceptual Art’, from *Artforum, Vol. 5, no 10, Summer 1967* (New York: Artforum International Magazine) p79
[13] see http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/
[14] http://www.dictionary30.com/ Accessed 30th January 2011

mean sincerity, factuality or reality. I would like to conclude this chapter by considering Heidegger's reference and its implications.

Heidegger's primary concern in his early philosophical investigations was to explore the very essence of 'human-ness', and of our 'being in the world'. As Giorgio Agamben summarises, 'for Heidegger, (the) stone is worldless (*weltlos*); the animal is poor in world (*weltarm*); the man is world-forming (*weltbildend*).'[15] This 'world-forming' capacity we humans hold, is crucial to Heidegger's conception of art. In 'The Origin of the Work of Art', a distillation of some of his Frankfurt lectures of the 1930s, Heidegger makes a distinction between 'world' and 'earth'. The former represents that which is disclosed, the web of significant relations in which 'beings' exist. For example, the pair of shoes depicted by Van Gogh (Fig 1k) points to the wearer of the shoes, his labour, agriculture in France at the time, etcetera. All of these 'worlds' point to further things and further 'worlds'. 'Earth' is the background against which every meaningful 'worlding' emerges. Both 'world' and 'earth' are necessary components for an artwork to function. Art is privileged, because, 'in setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work is an instigating of this striving.'[16] The artwork is inherently an 'object of the world' as it creates a world of its own: it *opens up* other worlds, other cultures to us, such as that of the Ancient Greeks. But the very nature of art itself appeals to 'earth' because a function of art is to highlight the natural materials used in its constitution: the colours of the paint, the texture of the stone, the density of the language, etcetera. It also highlights that everywhere an implicit background (an 'earth') is necessary for every significant explicit representation. Art makes 'world' reveal the unintelligibly of 'earth'. This reminds us that concealment ('hiddenness') is the necessary precondition for *unconcealment:*

> What happens here? What is at work in the work? Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, is in truth. This entity emerges into the unconcealednesss of its being, the Greeks called the unconcealedness of aletheia, the unconcealedness of beings. We say "truth" and think little enough in using this word. If there occurs in the work a disclosure of a particular being, disclosing what and how it is, then there is here an occurring, a happening of the truth at work.[17]

Heidegger's thesis is that the work of art sets up a 'world'. Our capacity to be 'world-forming' is what distinguishes us humans from rocks and animals. Furthermore, each new work of art changes the world by virtue of adding to and complicating it. We could infer from this that each work of art contributes to knowledge. So if I make a work of art and can also recognize works of art by others, and justify them as such, then I will have made an original contribution to knowledge. What is my definition of a work of art? What distinguishes an artwork from a piece of craft or a mere cultural production? The practice of making work answers this question: each successive piece critiques its predecessors. And the question will also be

---

[15] Agamben, Giorgio, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) p238-239
[16] Heidegger, Martin, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', from *Poetry, Language, Thought,* trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2001) p48. The text I quote from was first published in 1960.
[17] Ibid., p35

answered by the process of critiquing the works of other artists in a written thesis, as I explained earlier, which of course affects how I myself make studio work.

As you can see in that last sentence, answering the question, 'what is art?' will entail my making value judgments about it, and for this I will need to draw on certain aspects of analytical philosophy. There may at first appear to be a rather arbitary use of theory in this thesis, but there is in fact a coherent strategy behind it. In my art practice, I build ideas for images and texts by drawing on a wide number of different and perhaps conflicting sources and influences during my initial period of research. But as I approach the final edit for a body of work, I generally discard the majority of these influences, whilst at the same time beginning to make value judgements about my own work as I approach a definitive seleciton. This is mirrored in my thesis writing by my use of 'continental' theory in tandem with 'analytical' theory. I do not see the rise in continental philosophy within art schools as a bad thing in itself, but I do object to the centrality its influence has assumed. So whilst I draw extensively on comparative literature and some work of major 20th century continental thinkers, some of my uses of analytical philosophy (see in particular the analysis of Joseph Kosuth's 'One And Three Chairs' in Chapter 4) are absolutely crucial to the whole enquiry. To use a gardening metaphor: continental thinking provides me with the divergent thinking, the expansiveness that a tree needs to grow; analytical philosophy are the shears that allow one to prune it back; to dictate the overall pattern of the thing and provide the convergence, the concision, that is necessary to make art.

TS Eliot wrote that 'to analyse a poem is to kill it, '[18] and yet as both a brilliant poet and a scholar of poetry, he was a living, breathing, writing refutation of his epigram. Let me amend it: to analyse a poem is to do physical harm to it. A strong poem (or song, photograph, installation etc.) will survive the blow: a weak one will not. Through some rigorous analysis, it is my hope that my own practice as an artist, though covered in scars, will be far tougher than practices with unblemished skin. Or, to give a less visceral metaphor to the form of my enquiry, perhaps one could unravel the rope of one's practice in order to see more clearly the colours of the different threads from which it is composed. Then, when one comes to put it together again, the threads can be more harmoniously combined.

---

[18] See Eliot, TS, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', from *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism (London: Faber and Faber, 1997)* p40

Chapter 2

The Lost Artwork: Ekphrasis from Homer to John Ashbery

‘What I wanted to do seemed simple. I wanted to create something alive and shocking enough that it could stand alongside a morning in somebody’s life. The most ordinary morning. Imagine, trying to do that. What foolishness.’

Michael Cunningham, *The Hours*

This chapter will summarise various writers' definitions of the term, 'ekphrasis'. I shall then look in more detail at James Heffernan, Stephen Cheeke and Emmanuel Hermange's enquiries into the relationships between ekphrasis, poetry and photography.

Let me first offer some of the ideas of WJT Mitchell. His 1986 book, *Iconology*, contains numerous ideas that are key to this thesis. [19] *Iconology* is a book about ideas of images, which asks what is at stake in the erasure of differences between images and words. Mitchell examines the ideologies that have informed the debates around 'image–text' (a term coined in the 1980s which has perhaps fallen out of use) and asks what have made them matters of polemical dispute rather than purely theoretical interest.

Through a close reading of key art historical texts of the last 250 years, Mitchell aims to show how images serve as a relay connecting theories of art, language and mind with conceptions of social, cultural and political value. By comparing twentieth century theories of the image (early Wittgenstein, Gombrich, Nelson Goodman) to the "classic" accounts of imagery these sought to replace (key texts by Lessing, Burke and others) Mitchell set out to produce a valid theory of the image but, by his own admission, instead wrote a book that became about the fear of images, a theme also explored in James Heffernan's *Museum of Words.*

Part Two of *Iconology* ('Image Versus Text: Figures of the Difference') focuses on the frequently antagonistic nature of the image-text relationship. Mitchell quotes Emerson ('the most fruitful conversations are always between two persons, not three') by way of his introduction to his discussion of the 'sister arts'. Simonides celebrated statement *Ut pictura poesis* ("As is painting so is poetry") was denounced by Gotthold Lessing in *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* as a conceit 'the inexactness and falsity of which we feel constrained to overlook for the sake of the truth they contain'[20]. Lessing asserts a fundamental difference between the two forms. Poetry is the art of conventional signs moving through time and space (in any poem, as in all verbal language, words 'stand-in' for those things which they describe). Painting is that of would-be 'natural' signs fixed in space.

Mitchell examines writers concerned, like Lessing, with contesting Simonides's assertion, and finally sides with Simonides. For Mitchell, there is no essential difference given for all time by the inherent natures of the media of poetry and painting. In addition, he claims that there are a number of differences in effect in a culture that allow it to differentiate its ensemble of signs and symbols. These differences are riddled with all the antithetical values the culture wants to replace or repudiate; the debate of poetry and

[19] see Mitchell, WJT, *Iconology: Image: Text: Ideology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986): in particular chapters 1, 4 and 6.
[20] Lessing, Gotthold, *Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (1766) (*Laocoon,* trans, Ellen Frothingham (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967) p4

painting is never just a contest between two kinds of signs, but a struggle 'between body and soul, world and mind, nature and culture.[21]'

The poetry-painting distinction finds echoes in the recent and more specific debates surrounding *ekphrasis.* The *Merriam-Webster* Dictionary gives the following definition of the term: 'a literary description of or commentary on a visual work of art'. Its root lies in the conjunction of the Ancient Greek *ekphrazein:* to recount, describe, and *phrazein:* to point out, explain. Such a work of art might be imagined, as is the case with Achilles' shield or actual, for example, William Carlos Williams's poem, 'The Corn Harvest'[22], which describes the Brueghel painting 'The Harvesters' (see also Fig 2a):

Summer!
the painting is
organized
about a young

reaper enjoying his
noonday rest
completely

relaxed
from his morning
labours sprawled

in fact sleeping
unbuttoned
on his back

the women
have brought him his
lunch
perhaps

a spot of wine
they gather gossiping
under a tree

whose shade
carelessly
he does not share the

resting
center of
their workaday world

The early twentieth century winessed the dawn of an era where space and time could no longer be conceived of as unrelated. Einstein's general theory of relativity, published in 1916, overturned this

---

[21] Mitchell, WJT, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995) p49

[22] Carlos Williams, William, 'The Corn Harvest', from *Selected Poems* (New Directions, New York, 1985)

concept and other aspects of classical Newtonian mechanics. Time was no longer uniform and absolute: physics could no longer conceive of it as being independent of space. Instead, an added dimension had to be taken into account: space-time.[23] This would refute Simonides's assertion, and add weight to the counter claims Lessing made in *The Laocoon.* I would summarize Lessing's argument as: *the image is spatial; the word is temporal*. The invention of film and other manifold forms of time-based art that grew out of theatre in the twentieth century are testament to this blurring of the distinction between spatiality and temporality.

It would seem on first reading that Mitchell does not want to take these contradictions into account: an acknowledgement of Einstein's discoveries is noticeably absent from *Iconology,* despite the rigour of its arguments. However, the writing Mitchell published on ekphrasis in the years following *Iconology* suggests a more nuanced understanding of ekphrasis in the modern era. For example, his 1995 essay, 'Ekphrasis and the Other' introduces his theory of the 'three phases of realization' in the subject's encounter with ekphrasis that account for its fascination as a rhetorical mode and for its disruptive mobility. He cites the example of the 1950's radio comedy duo 'Bob and Ray' (see Fig 2c). One of their most popular sketches featured Bob showing Ray photographs of his summer holiday, accompanying them with a deadpan commentary on the lush scenery described. Ray would usually reply with comments on the quality of the pictures and their subject matter and Bob would sardonically point out, 'I sure wish all you folks out there could see these pictures!' and other phrases to that effect.

Mitchell terms the first of his three modes, 'ekphrastic indifference'[24]: a recognition of the commonsense perception that ekphrasis is impossible. Herein lies the humour of the Bob and Ray routine: no amount of description can add up to a *depiction.* In the second stage, which Mitchell labels 'ekphrastic hope', that very impossibility is temporarily suspended and overcome by the subject's imagination. This is the moment we are reminded that written or spoken language can 'make us see', and is thus the point where Bob and Ray's 'radio magic' begins to take effect. We can picture mentally the photographs as they are slapped down on to the studio table. The third phase in the sequence is 'ekphrastic fear'. This is 'that moment of resistance, of counterdesire'[25] when we sense the difference between visual and verbal representation might collapse. The imaginary desire of ekphrasis might be realized literally and actually. *If* Bob and Ray's 'wish' that we could see the pictures were granted, their whole game would be spoiled. We *want* the photographs to remain invisible.

---

[23] see Will, Clifford, 'Space Time Continuum', 2010 from *Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia: www.grolier.com*

[24] Mitchell, WJT, 'Ekphrasis and the Other'. The essay was first published in his *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995) but I am citing here its reproduction in *On The Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci, by Percy Bysshe Shelley, A Hypertext Edition,* ed. Fraistat, Neil and Sites, Melissa Jo (http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/shelley/medusa/index.html, 1998), p2

[25] Mitchell, WJT, 'Ekphrasis and the Other', from *On The Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci, by Percy Bysshe Shelley, A Hypertext Edition,* ed. Fraistat, Neil and Sites, Melissa Jo (http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/shelley/medusa/index.html, 1998), p5

Having introduced these three modes, Mitchell suggests we see the subject's ability to '(overcome) otherness'[26] as central to the goal of 'ekphrastic hope'. He also suggests that 'ekphrastic fear' might lie in the fact that, unlike the verbal and visual representations of the mixed arts (concrete poetry, most forms of theatre, illustrated books, etc.) in the case of the ekphrastic mode, the *space* of reference cannot literally come into view. This is a point I shall return to in my third chapter, in particular in relation to Adrian Rifkin's riposte to Mitchell's linear sequencing of the ekphrastic appeal.

James Heffernan's *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* offers a detailed account of ekphrastic writing from classical Greece to the twentieth century. During the 1980s and 1990s, the study of the relation between literature and the visual arts became a major intellectual industry. Much of this industry is comparative, and in general tries to breach what Heffernan calls the 'rhetorical barriers placed between poetry and the visual arts'[27] that were set out by Lessing. The fact that ekphrasis *respects* these barriers is one of the qualities that Heffernan finds compelling. He cites three main reasons for its longevity as a rhetorical mode: The relation between the arts in an ekphrastic work of literature is 'not impressionistic… not something conjured up by an act of juxtaposition and founded on a nebulous "sense" of affinity. On the contrary, it is tangible and manifest; demonstrably declared by the very nature of ekphrastic representation'.[28] Because it evokes the power of the silent image even as it 'subjects that power to the rival authority of language',[29] it is intensely paragonal. Also, the contest it stages is powerfully gendered: a 'duel between male and female.'[30]

Heffernan compares and contrasts several different accounts of ekphrasis in order to arrive at a definition that he himself finds satisfactory. Murray Krieger's definition of the term in his essay, 'Ekphrasis and the Still Movement of Poetry, or Laocoon Revisited' seeks to evoke, *contra* Lessing, the 'generic spatiality of literary form.'[31] The plastic, spatial object of poetic imitation, symbolizes 'the frozen, stilled world of plastic relationships, which must be superimposed upon literature's turning world to still it.'[32] The problem for Heffernan with Krieger's theory is that it stretches ekphrasis to breaking point: to where it no longer serves to contain any particular body of literature and merely becomes a new name for formalism. He contrasts this position with that of Michael Davidson, who distinguishes the 'classical painter poem' from the 'contemporary painterly poem', replacing Krieger's model with a diachronic polarity between classical and contemporary ekphrassi that leaves us with no sense of the 'synchronic mode (…) that might contain them both.'[33] The weakness of these two theories of ekphrasis (the one too broad the other too polarized) help Heffernan to define what is needed: if ekphrasis is to be defined as a mode, the definition

---

[26] Ibid., p3
[27] Heffernan, JAW, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993) p1
[28] Ibid., p1
[29] Ibid., p1
[30] Ibid., p1
[31] Ibid., p265
[32] Ibid., p265-66
[33] Ibid., p3

‘must be sharp enough to identify a distinguishable body of literature and yet also elastic enough to reach from classicism to post-modernism, from Homer to Ashbery.’ [34] He proposes a definition, broader than those of most dictionaries, simple in form but complex in its implications: ‘ekphrasis is the verbal representation of visual representation.’ Heffernan underlines what this definition *excludes*: literature about texts, and two other means of mingling literature and the visual arts*: pictorialism* (which generates in language effects similar to those found in pictures, for example Edmund Spenser’s ‘The Faerie Queen’); and *iconicity,* a mode which embraces sounds and sets of relations as well as visual properties, such as a concrete poem. Both pictorialism and iconicity represent objects rather than works of art.

Heffernan goes on to explore the narrative qualities of ekphrastic literature. ‘From Homer’s time to our own, (it) reveals again and again (a) narrative response to pictorial stasis, this storytelling impulse that language by its very nature seems to release and stimulate.’[35] For example, in *The Aeneas,* Virgil turns the shield of Aeneas into a history of Rome. This emphasises the pervasiveness of narrative in the history of ekphrasis, as opposed to ‘the way Krieger treats it as a way of freezing time and space’[36]. Heffernan also disagrees with Wendy Steine

r’s definition of ekphrasis as a verbal equivalent of the ‘pregnant moment’[37] in art, because ‘it is dynamic and obstetric; it typically delivers from the pregnant moment of visual art its embryonic ally narrative impulse, and thus makes explicit the story that visual art tells only by implication. If ekphrasis “frustrates narrative movement”, it is anything but submissive… it is the unruly antagonist of narrative, the ornamental digression that refuses to be merely ornamental.’[38]

In the second chapter of the book, ‘Weaving Rape: Ekphrastic Metamorphoses of the Philomela Myth from Ovid to Shakespeare’, Heffernan reminds us of the root meaning of ekphrasis: ‘speaking out’ or ‘telling in full’: ‘To recall this root meaning is to recognize that besides representational fiction and the turning of fixed forms into narrative, ekphrasis entails prosopopeia, the rhetorical technique of envoicing a silent object.’[39] Philomela was raped and her tongue cut out to prevent her from recounting the crime. She reveals her story through weaving a tapestry. Heffernan cites the myth as an example of the gendering of the historical struggle for mastery between word and image.

In contrast to the broadly chronological survey of *Museum of Words*, Stephen Cheeke’s *Writing for Art: The Aesthetics of Ekphrasis* (2008) approaches the subject thematically. Two chapters in particular will be of relevance here: ‘The Moment’ and ‘Photography and Elegy.’ Cheeke introduces the book by

---

[34] Ibid., p3
[35] Ibid., p5
[36] Ibid., p5
[37] Steiner, Wendy, *Pictures of Romance: Form against Context in Painting and Literature* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991) p44
[38] Heffernan, p5
[39] Ibid., p6

commenting on the supposed impossibility, the ‘ultimate and inevitable failure’, of ‘writing for art.’ He asserts that ekphrasis thrives under the knowledge of that failure, and invokes the usefulness of the metaphor of the ‘sister arts’: ‘envy, rivalry, emulation, quarrelling, imitation -the ordinary human trouble of human kinship helps to make some sense of, even if it can never clarify, the awkward intimacy and reserve that we discover between poems and paintings’.[40]

Later in his introduction, the author explores, like Heffernan, the poetry-painting relationship not in terms of sisterly bonds but as one of power play, gendered politics, radical difference and alterity. However, the type of problems and questions that ekphrasis engenders, for Cheeke, belong along more philosophical lines than previous studies, including Heffernan’s, have acknowledged:

> In the strongest examples of ekphrasis there is always therefore a sense of extension or enlargement, but one which brings with it a pressure to discriminate and differentiate between the two media, the two kinds of experience. To help clear the ground of the aesthetic category for the plastic arts, philosophers sometimes distinguish an object or content-oriented approach from an affect-oriented emphasis –concentrating upon what the work is about as distinct from what reaction the work produces in the viewer or vice versa. With poetry of painting it is less easy to make such a distinction because the multidirectional lines of reception between poem and painting, reader, poet and artist, complicate this model. When we read a poem for a painting, what exactly is our object, and what is our affect? What, exactly, is being represented? The kinds of formal, rhetorical or generic characteristics I identify suggest that there are things in common to all poems of ekphrasis (…) but these characteristics cannot be separated from the notion of a reader, who may also be in this case a viewer of the artwork (as the poet may also have been a viewer.) In this sense the 'aesthetics' of my subtitle also indicates an affect-oriented enquiry (or multi-affect) and takes us back to the root meaning in Greek of an act of perception, a sensory response, literally a ‘breathing or taking in (aesthesis).’[41]

This ‘affect-oriented’ enquiry will be relevant to the critique of my own work in Chapter 5, and so I would like to touch here on Cheeke’s analysis of the problems ekphrasis offers to debates around ‘the real’, which medium (painting or poetry) comes closest to rendering the ‘real’ and how the very nature of the real is contested and described in the encounter between the two. Related to this is the problem of representing the reality of suffering (which for Cheeke lies at the centre of the problem of the ‘real’). Is there something profound to be understood about the nature of suffering in the kind of witnessing offered by pictures, and rewitnessing offered by ekphrastic poems? If poems for paintings are paradigms of aesthetic experience, then often this seems to follow the pattern of a fall into knowledge and experience. Cheeke expands,

> The poem knows something or tells (us) something that has been held back by the silent image. But there is also the notion of transgression, of crossing borders, of translation. Sometimes the encounter with alterity takes on a special charge when it is not merely an occasion for the discovery of difference but a place of relation and thereafter the possibility of exchange. As such it may be a model for a more positive revaluation of aesthetic experience in terms of recognition

---

[40] Cheeke, Stephen, *Writing for art: The aesthetics of ekphrasis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009) p2-3
[41] Ibid., p3

> or assent. What then do poems and paintings see in each other? What do they give each other? In what ways is the materiality of the painting an 'other' to language? …(Language) is more fundamentally constitutive of interiority than the world of appearance. Which is flesh to the other's spirit? [42]

This sense of a dialogue, exchange or encounter between two or more media will be examined in depth in later chapters. Having introduced various different accounts of ekphrasis and the potential associations and problems that it begets, I would like to turn now to two authors' examinations of the relationship between ekphrasis and photography. To begin, let us look at Cheeke's study of poems about photographs:

> The elegiac nature of photography has had a marked influence on modern poets- particularly elegists - largely because poems for photographs have reengaged the question of the relationship between representation and the 'real'. But at the same time the privileged relationship photography has with the 'real' has created some curious problems. Photographs both are and are decidedly not true memorials. There is always potentially an excess of pathos or irony in the photograph's 'moment', a sentimentality inherent to its calibration of loss, which is a challenge to the elegist. Paradoxically, this emerges out of the very objectivity of the medium when it comes to be written about. Can poets resist what seem to be the aesthetic imperatives of photography towards the bitterly, sweetly poignant? And do we discover in photographs of loved ones in particular an 'aura' resistant to verbal reproduction, one which recalls earlier cultic functions of the image –the transformation of which is routinely taken as a marker of modernity? [43]

The chapter, 'Photography and Elegy' scrutinises the work of three poets in order to address these questions. Cheeke cites Susan Sontag's *On Photography* and Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* as examinations of photography's immediate relation with time and death, with the ironies of knowledge and ignorance, which 'in turn (seem) to invite the modal strategies of ekphrasis'.[44] Beginning with Thom Gunn's 'Song of A Camera (for Robert Mapplethorpe)', Cheeke invokes the apparent lack of an organising artistic consciousness in photography:

> I cut the sentence
> out of a life
> out of the story
> with my little knife
>
> Each bit I cut
> shows one alone
> dressed or undressed
> young full-grown
>
> Look at the bits
> He eats he cries
> Look at the way
> He stands he dies
>
> so that another
> seeing the bits

---

[42] Ibid., p 6-7
[43] Ibid., p147
[44] Ibid., p149

and seeing how
none of them fits

wants to add
adverbs to verbs
A bit on its own
simply disturbs

Wants to say
as well as see
wants to say
valiantly

interpreting
some look in the eyes
a triumph mixed up
with surprise

I cut this sentence
look again
for cowardice
boredom pain

Find what you seek
find what you fear
and be assured
nothing is here

I am the eye
that cut the life
you stand you lie
I am the knife[45]

This impersonal quality in photography, perhaps the very opposite of the distinctive 'tone' or 'voice' to which many poets aspire, exerts a fascination for them, like the appeal of the 'cold pastoral' of Keat's Grecian Urn. Here is a kind of perfection that for Cheeke seems 'to taunt or tease the human'.[46] He continues:

> The dumbness of the photographic image, its refusal to speak, invites an act of response, but offers in return a silence thicker even than that of painting because the camera seems to dissolve the agency not only of the subject but of the photographer too, cutting life into 'bits' that resist assimilation, that seem not to be created but rather directly cut out of the 'real'. In this poem, however, the camera's clinical excisions are paralleled with the activity of writing ('I cut this sentence') and the 'song' itself becomes an example of something merciless, seduced by the coolness of the camera into discovering an analogous cruelty and economy within its own process. By the end of the poem, camera and song have become interchangeable and the paradox emerges of the impersonal photographic medium 'speaking' in the first person lyric-voice, directly, menacingly: 'I am the knife'. Again, the discovery seems to be that objectivity or indifference can never be merely neutral categories because, as William Carlos Williams saw in Brueghel's 'Icarus', (see also Fig 2b) they summon their own moral force and affect. And Gunn seems to want to connect this with the mode of the lyric poem itself. [47]

---

[45] Gunn, Thom, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber, 1993) p347-8
[46] Cheeke, p147
[47] Ibid., p148-149

Cheeke proceeds to consider the problems of nostalgia that photography throws up, as testified in two ekphrastic Philip Larkin poems, beginning with 'MCMXIV':

> Those long uneven lines
> Standing as patiently
> As if they were stretched outside
> The Oval or Villa Park,
> The crowns of hats, the sun
> On moustached archaic faces
> Grinning as if it were all
> An August Bank Holiday lark;
>
> And the shut shops, the bleached
> Established names on the sunblinds,
> The farthings and sovereigns,
> And dark-clothed children at play
> Called after kings and queens,
> The tin advertisements
> For cocoa and twist, and the pubs
> Wide open all day;
>
> And the countryside not caring;
> The place-names all hazed over
> With flowering grasses, and fields
> Shadowing Domesday lines
> Under wheat's restless silence;
> The differently-dressed servants
> With tiny rooms in huge houses,
> The dust behind limousines;
>
> Never such innocence,
> Never before or since,
> As changed itself to past
> Without a word – the men
> Leaving the gardens tidy,
> The thousands of marriages
> Lasting a little while longer:
> Never such innocence again.[48]

Cheeke questions whether the poet is thinking of 1914 itself, or a photograph of 1914, and whether there is a significant difference between the two in Larkin's consciousness of that moment. How would we go about telling one from the other, given the fact that photography is assumed to 'produce documentary evidence of inexpugnably objective value?' [49] If aesthetic considerations about the medium affect our way of reading such evidence, then the question of historical judgment becomes especially vexed. The confusion reveals the ways in which photography has, in Cheeke's phrase, 'got inside'[50] the elegiac mode

---

[48] Larkin, Philip, 'MCMXIV' and 'Lines on a Young Ladies Photograph Album', from *Collected Poems,* ed. Anthony Thwaite (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2004) p127-8
[49] Cheeke, p152
[50] Ibid., p153

Larkin employs. The ambiguity of the poem distorts historical understanding, and Cheeke speculates that this in turn produces a form of historical memory that is itself photographic.

In another work, 'Lines on a Young Ladies Photograph Album', Larkin seems more conscious of the dangers of such distortion. Here, photography might just as easily be taken as a model for faulty memory as for the 'literal and merciless' witness of Gunn's poem. Cheeke highlights how 'Lines on…' attests to the capacity for any kind of visual portrait to suggest thoughts about innocence and an ensuing fall into knowledge. Whilst this has always been something addressed by literature (c.f. Rossetti, Wilde *et al*), poems for photographs in the twentieth century embody the same kind of temporal crisis: 'the imminent oblivion or tragic knowledge which belongs to a captured image'. [51]

An anti-photographic aesthetic is also to be found in contemporary poetry, one that attempts to resist what Cheeke terms the 'elegiac tyranny'[52] of the photograph, and especially the allegory of lost innocence staged by the medium. A fine example of this is John Ashbery's 'City Afternoon':[53]

> A veil of haze protects this
> Long-ago afternoon forgotten by everybody
> In this photograph, most of them now
> Sucked screaming though old age and death
>
> If one could seize America
> Or at least a fine forgetfulness
> That seeps into our outline
> Defining our volumes with a stain
> That is fleeting too
>
> But commemorates
> Because it does define, after all:
> Gray garlands, that threesome
> Waiting for the light to change,
> Air lifting the hair of one
> Upside down in the reflecting pool

Here, there is no encounter between innocence and knowledge, and no fond memory stirred by the image. Instead the deterioration of the photograph, its stained outline, is presented as a metaphor for the process of memory, including larger historical memory. Memory, historical error, misrepresentation, all contribute to a process of adverse definition, the same kind of 'negative ontology'[54] that Cheeke finds in Ashbery's 'Self Portrait in a Convex mirror', an ekphrastic examination of the Parmigianino painting of the same name, which Heffernan discusses at length in *Museum of Words.* Here, the self is partly constituted by blank space and illusions. The final image in 'City Afternoon' is one requiring an effort of concentration

---

[51] Ibid., p153
[52] Ibid., p153
[53] Ashbery, John, '*City Afternoon'* from *Selected Poems* (Penguin, London 1986)
[54] Cheeke, p159

to visualise, ‘as if the reader must do the work of the brain in processing and correcting the image upon the retina… an image of inversion, of an optical trick perhaps, or a photographic negative’.[55]

For Cheeke, ‘City Afternoon’ refuses the temptations Larkin succumbs to, of discovering posthumous irony in the photographic image and by extension of mourning a loss of innocence and remaining beholden to the past ‘in an exemplifying or symbolising totality.’[56] The inevitable deathwards pull of the photographic image is acknowledged, but anonymously. For Ashbery, photography is a medium of faulty memory, of ‘haze and fine forgetfulness’, of blurred outline. In this, Cheeke concludes, ‘it is like language and like poetic elegy’. [57]

I would like to endorse Cheeke’s assertion by expanding a little now on ekphrasis’s affinites with the term *panegyric:* a formal public speech, or (in later use) written verse, delivered in high praise of a person or thing. Heffernan and Cheeke mention this connection briefly in their studies, but Sophie Lunn-Rockliffe, amongst others, have since explored it more deeply. In her 2010 paper, ‘Commemorating the Usurper Magnus Maximus: Ekphrasis, Poetry, and History in Pacatus' Panegyric of Theodosius’,[58] Lunn-Rockliffe points out that in the Ancient Greek, *ekphrasis* could also mean (as well as a description of a work of art), an account of a person or a thing, and in instances such as this by Pacatus, where the ekphrasis has eulogic qualities, the two terms can become synonymous.

Emmanuel Hermange expands on this distinction between the ancient and modern uses of the term ekphrasis in his essay ‘Aspects and uses of Ekphrasis in relation to photography, 1816 –1860’. For Hermange, the Ancient Greek conception of ekphrasis, is synonymous with what we now call hypostasis: a description so evocative that it creates the illusion the reader is witnessing the object itself. This contrasts with the modern conception of the term, which concerns itself with the verbal description of works of art. Thus for Hermange, to refer to ekphrasis in relation to photography is an opportunity to reopen this rift in the very definition of the term, but unlike Cheeke and Heffernan, with their emphasis on the connections between poetry and photography, Hermange explores the relationship between photography and the uses of ekphrasis in institutional contexts. For him, ekphrasis, like all rhetorical figures, is an area where language is indissociable from the Institution. Hermange cites examples of where, in the historical period under question, photographic ekphrasis was used by its early practitioners as a device to avoid ostracism from the Academy, drawing conclusions about the relationship between photography and language, and the significance of such writing in the historical process of photography’s acceptance as a fine art.

---

[55] Ibid., p160
[56] Ibid., p161
[57] Ibid., p161
[58] Lunn-Rockliffe, Sophie, ‘Commemorating the Usurper Magnus Maximus: Ekphrasis, Poetry, and History in Pacatus' Panegyric of Theodosius’*, Journal of Late Antiquity* Vol 3, No. 2, Fall 2010, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press) pp.316-336

> Because photography creates an epistemic fracture in the domain of images in the nineteenth century, there is no evidence to suggest that the age-old tradition of describing works of art extends to its productions. This observation is all the more valid since the depiction of paintings is indissociable from their explanation and interpretation (…) According to Michael Baxandall, the "interpretation of a painting depends on the point of view taken to describe it" and an "interpretation always starts with a description."[59] Vice-versa, there is an assumption that beneath every depiction of a work of art lies a hermeneutic intention. However, hermeneutic thought traditionally analyses hidden intentions, the artist, and especially his creation, his mark. This obviously poses a problem where photography is concerned, since it is precisely by eliminating the making of this mark in the space of representation that photography creates a fracture in the production and status of pictures.[60]

The author looks in detail at passages from letters Niécphore Niépce wrote to his brother Claude in 1818 describing his heliograph *View of Courtyard at Le Gras,* a key work in the technical history of photography. Aporia in the technically imperfect image Niépce has made are filled in by his verbal descriptions. The aviary and barn which existed in the physical scene before Niépce's camera but which are not distinguishable as such in the heliograph are described in some detail. Thus, verbal language completes the mimetic process. Hermange views this as a transitory stage in photographic history; in order to become 'real' photography, the image-imprint should separate from such language, and have a merely tautological relationship with it.

La Lumière was France's first photographic journal. Hermange draws comparisons between Diderot's writings on painting in the *Salons of 1759, 1761* and *1763* and the writing of Francis Wey and Ernest Lacan, amongst others, contributed to *La Lumière* on the photography of the 1850s. Whilst this writing lacked a critical lexicon outside of that of painting and the picturesque, Hermange contends that these *encomia* played an important role in the long but steady acceptance of photography as an art form.
In summary, I would like to briefly recap the various accounts of the poetry-painting distinction, and definitions of ekphrasis that I have examined in detail in this chapter, and which I shall apply to various artworks in chapters three and four.

Simonides's 'poetry-painting' equation was refuted by Gotthold Lessing, who made a distinction between the former's art of signs moving through time and space and the latter's tradition of using 'natural' signs fixed in space. In surveying twentieth century contributions to this debate, WJT Mitchell (contra Lessing, Gombrich, Wittgenstein and Goodman) finally agrees with Simonides's
original assertion. For each of these writers, the issue resolves around the relationship between time and space. The image is 'spatial' and the word is 'temporal' but the advent of quantum physics has perhaps permanently complicated this relationship.

---

[59] Baxandall, Michael, *Patterns of Intention,* (Yale, Yale University Press, 1985) p10
[60] 'Aspects and Uses of Ekphrasis in Relation to Photography, 1816-186O' *Journal of European Studies, Vol. 30, 2000,* p 4-5

In his historical survey of ekphrastic writing, *Museum of Words*, James Heffernan, having refined various discussions of the term ‘ekphrasis’ given by Murray Krieger, Michael Davidson and Wendy Steiner, amongst others, offers his own concise definition: ekphrasis is the *verbal* representation of *visual* representation. Stephen Cheeke, in his more recent, and more thematically driven survey, *Writing for Art*, is less concerned than Heffernan with offering his own definition of ekphrasis. Rather, Cheeke accepts the plethora of contradictions the term contains: there is an inevitable failure in any attempt at describing the visual in verbal terms. The author embraces this failure and the philosophical problems that it engenders: in particular, Cheeke is interested in the way in which ekphrasis blurs the distinction that is usually drawn between an affect-oriented and object-oriented aesthetic enquiry. Furthermore, he investigates what ekphrastic poetry gives to the ‘other’ of painting and in turn the questions this raises in relation to the philosophical question of alterity: that of the possibility of exchanging one's own perspective for that of the ‘other’. In looking at poems for photographs, Cheeke juxtaposes the apparent authorlessness of the photographic medium (its resistance to alterity) with the essence of the poet’s consciousness that so much poetry seeks to offer: Gunn’s ‘Song of a Camera’ being a striking exception in collapsing this distinction. In contrast, John Ashbery’s ‘City Afternoon’ treats photography as a medium of faulty memory and in this, for Cheeke, is like language itself. The poem is an elegy, which, like Gunn’s, manages to resist the poetic temptation of describing photography in sentimental terms. Philip Larkin, in the two poems Cheeke cites, offers no such resistance.

Whilst they have many points of agreement, the essential differences between Heffernan and Cheeke’s positions might be that the former is more interested in the dynamism of ekphrasis and perhaps has a more positive view of it. The latter is more drawn to its inherent failure: the impossibility of describing a work of art. I identify strongly with both positions, but it is Cheeke’s that will prove the more instructive to us here. Emmanuel Hermange’s interest in ekphrasis in relationship to photography is more historical than that of Heffernan or Cheeke: he is concerned with the way its birth (Niépce’s first heliograph) and the beginnings of its acceptance by the Academy, (the journal *La Lumière*) highlights a rift between the Ancient Greek conception of ekphrasis (hypostasis) and a contemporary understanding of the term, which for Hermange is synonymous with Heffernan’s: the verbal description of visual works art.

Chapter 3

The Lost Object: Theories of Memory and the Space of Melancholia

‘…a trick photo (of my father) taken ... during the Forties. There are several of him sitting around a table, each image shot from a different angle ... as if they have gathered to conduct a séance ... as if he has come there only to invoke himself, to bring himself back from the dead, as if, by multiplying himself, he has inadvertently made himself disappear. There are five of him there, yet the nature of the trick photography denies the possibility of eye contact. Each one is condemned to go on staring into space ... but seeing nothing, never able to see anything. It is a picture of death, a portrait of an invisible man’.

Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*

This chapter examines certain models of memory, in particular those that are pertinent to discussions around ekphrasis. I begin by exploring Sigmund Freud's essay, 'Mourning and Melancholia' from 1917.

The distinction between mourning and melancholia is important and one can begin to appreciate it by comparing Giotto's 'Mourning of Christ' with Dürer's 'Melencolia 1' (see Figs 3a and 3b). The fact that Freud's theories remain to a degree scientifically contested, is not my direct concern. As Darian Leader states in *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression (2008)* 'Although (his) ideas may today seem far-fetched or at best outdated (…) there is still much to learn from them'[61]. I will use Leader's book as a general guide in this chapter to the key difference between a number of writers' contrasting definitions of mourning and melancholia. I will examine their *poetic* potential and highlight their pertinence to, and influence upon, critical theory. Finally, once clear formulations of ekphrasis and melancholia have been compared and synthesised, I will indicate how they will function in tandem as models for the critiques of Chapters 4 and 5.

Freud does not provide new descriptions of the two conditions of mourning and melancholia in his essay. In summary of definitions already outlined by himself and Karl Abraham elsewhere, he offers some broad characteristics common to both. He is concerned to draw out what distinguishes the pathological condition of the melancholic from the universal situation of the mourner. Both are marked by losses of the ability to love and sustain an interest in the outside world. Mourning is a universal and unexceptional reaction to the loss of a loved one or other object (abstractions such as homeland). In this process, each individual memory by which the libido was connected to the object is adjusted. The subject will experience ambivalent feelings about the lost object, which include strong feelings of guilt and resentment. The mourning-work is completed at the point where the libido eventually detaches itself from the lost object and the ego is thus left free. The subject can live comfortably, if not happily, with the loss.

Melancholia, whilst also being characterised by ambivalence to the love-object, distinguishes itself from mourning by 'a reduction in the sense of self, expressed in self-recrimination and self-directed insults, intensifying into the delusory expectation of punishment'[62] and 'a great impoverishment of the ego.'[63] Other curious characteristics of the condition that Freud notes are how, in some cases, the subject is not even entirely clear what it is that s/he has lost: a confusion that Jacques Lacan, as we shall see, elaborates upon. There is also a bizarre overcoming of the biological drive to self-preservation, leading to suicide, or thoughts of it. Freud stresses, in the only prescriptive passage of the essay, that it should not be the analyst's concern to contradict the patient's self reproaches. Though they are clearly inaccurate, they have a very firm basis in reality. The melancholic's self-accusations suggest a temporary loss of the ego

---

[61] Leader, Darian, *The New Black: Mourning Melancholia and Depression* (London: Penguin Books, 2009) p7
[62] Freud, Sigmund, 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917), from *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 16,* trans. James Strachey (London; Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychoanalysis), p241
[63] Ibid., p241

altogether. There is a shock that the 'object-choice' has proved flawed: for example, rejection by the love object or the disillusionment the subject experiences by falling out of love. The self-reproaches mask reproaches against a loved object that have been shifted away from it onto the patient's own ego. In non-pathological situations, the libido would simply withdraw from the object and affix itself to a new one. Here, though, the free libido is instead drawn back into the ego, which then over-identifies with the abandoned object. In this way, in Freud's disturbing phrase, 'the shadow of the object (falls upon) the ego.'[64] Thus the patient's own ego is condemned as the abandoned object. The (it is hoped) temporary abolition of selfhood begins.

Having offered his theory, Freud proceeds to describe a number of preconditions necessary for melancholia. One of its contradictions is a strong fixation on the love object in combination with minimal resistance to the form of object investment. He cites his protégé Otto Rank: the original object choice has in these cases a narcissistic foundation. Hence, if the subject encounters difficulties in their object investment (a lover's quarrel) then s/he is able to regress to his or her original self love as a means of recompense. For the narcissist and the melancholic, this identification takes the place of love-investment, so that the love relationship, despite the conflict with the object, does not have to be abandoned. Love survives. In addition to this regression, the melancholic's love-investment moves back, in another conflict of ambivalence so central to love, to the 'sadistic stage'. For Freud, this sadism solves 'the mystery of the inclination to suicide which makes melancholia both so interesting and so dangerous.'[65] In the contrasting scenarios of extreme passion and suicide, the object overwhelms the ego, though in vastly different ways. Ultimately though, it is by taking flight *into* the ego that love escapes abolition. In a sense the process is a struggle wherein, if successful, the ego triumphs over the love object.

Freud then sketches out how melancholia often lifts during the evening, and usually passes after a time. These terminations cannot be fully explained psychogenetically and he concludes by highlighting the provisional nature of his enterprise. Leader notes in *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression,* that, after Karl Abraham's initial work on mourning, and Freud's response to it, there is notable dearth of material written by later generations that deals explicitly with either mourning or melancholia. Exceptions are the work of Melanie Klein, who made mourning central to her vision of psychical development in children and object relations theory, and some of the *écrits* of Lacan and his contemporaries Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. Leader's thesis, which he explores by reference to a large body of creative works, is that the literature he is searching for, the true critical writing on mourning and melancholia is simply *all literature.* By extension, he calls for a revival of societal emphasis on 'talking cures' and the emphasis on the specificity of a person's life experience: that which the drug

---

[64] Freud, Sigmund, 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917), from *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 16,* trans. James Strachey (London; Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychoanalysis), p245
[65] Ibid., p247

industry wants to suppress, but that psychotherapy and all forms of creativity, acknowledge and can explore in depth.

Leader's celebration of the way in which creativity is founded upon a lack is of particular pertinence to my thesis. Ekphrasis stages Leader's argument: it is an act of creation, of doubling, that is contingent upon an absence (the artwork). If it is to succeed, it must take advantage of the productive implications of that very absence.

The first chapter of *The New Black* elaborates on Freud's theory with numerous examples drawn from popular culture. Leader is especially concerned to point out the parallels between the suppressed anger that the melancholic experiences towards the lost object, and the way in which for example, funeral rites in certain cultures chastise the deceased for having abandoned the living. There is an authenticating function of such rites that is notable by its absence in contemporary Western societies. Psychoanalysis can go some way towards helping the subject acknowledge her rage, unblocking the patient's refusal to blame the lost object rather than herself. It can provide a private outlet for it in the absence of any socially legitimised public equivalent. I think here of the deeply affecting scene in Bernardo Bertolucci's film *Last Tango in Paris,* where Marlon Brando's character, Paul, confronts his recently deceased wife's corpse with proof of her infidelities, cursing her profanely at the same time that he declares his love. The whole scene shows a decidedly private act: it takes place in a darkened, closed room, and when Paul' soliloquy is disturbed by a neighbour's knock on the door, he is concerned to cover the shame of this anger and quickly composes himself. It might be acceptable for a widower in 1970s Paris to publically display his *tears,* but considerably less so for him to display the *anger* inherent in his grief.

Leader summarizes how Karl Abraham and some years later, Melanie Klein, both found Freud's polarization of mourning and melancholia too rigid. Abraham claimed that the internalisation of the lost one that Freud contends is exclusive to melancholia, is in fact a feature of all forms of mourning. Mourning is intrinsically, symbolically, cannibalistic: the subject wishes to incorporate the lost object through the mouth and there are countless ways in which this desire can manifest itself. Leader cites the example of a girl believing her largely absent father could be 'sealed in' during one of his rare visits home by the action of rapidly closing her eyes. Another theory propounded by Abraham that broadens Freud's model of self-reproach is that there is an ambivalence to lost objects in later life that always echo in some way, the subject's relationship to the mother, that original fulfiller and denier of our needs.

Abraham's ideas are consolidated by Klein, whose work is centred on the child-mother relationship. She emphasizes in particular how conflicts of emotion are not exclusive to psychological states of mourning: love and hate, from our very first relationships to our caregivers, are always directed towards the same people. Rather than ambivalence only being present in melancholia, there is actually a continuum between that state and both 'ordinary' and 'pathological' states of mourning. For Klein, any death or significant

loss undermines our secure possession of our internal objects (unconscious representations of other people) and heralds an inevitable return to earlier infantile separation anxieties. One's entire internal world must be reconstructed with each such loss. In our earliest relationships with our caregivers, we separate good from bad, for example, by relating to separate breasts and separate mothers. Only by recognizing this separation do we come to accept that good and bad can be attributes of one and the same object. Upon this realisation, the child experiences guilt for her aggression towards what she knows to be a loved object. A phase of sorrow follows this point: Klein termed it the *depressive position.* The state is repeated, in sublimated forms, with each subsequent significant loss in a person's life. She labelled the working process of trying to make amends for such confusing feelings, *reparation.* The melancholic or depressive is marked by her inability to complete such work.

Whilst broadly supporting the additions made to Freud's theories, Leader is also concerned to highlight what they continue to omit: the withering in the West of publically legitimized forms of mourning. He cites the anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer's 1965 survey, *Death, Grief and Mourning.* When placing the composition of Freud's paper in the context of the First World War, Gorer blames the mechanized death of this war, unprecedented in scale, for creating an impossibility of public mourning. Gorer's account finds an earlier echo in Theodor Adorno's famous remark of a later war: 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, and this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today.'[66] As Leader rephrases it, 'What sense would it make for a community to mourn each dead soldier when the corpses were hardly even countable?'[67] Jackie Kennedy's stoicism at the funeral of her husband (Fig 3c) is an example of how, two generations later, 'model behaviour' in the face of grief had become that of internalisation. And for Leader, writing a further two generations from this point, we have made no real progress since this historical regression.

Having identified this contemporary problem around public enactments of mourning, Leader offers another problem in contemporary attitudes towards grief. Although he does not explicitly cite it himself, Leader takes issue with the 'five stages' of grief model first outlined by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her book*, On Death and Dying.*[68] These are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Kübler-Ross herself points out that not all of these stages will necessarily be passed through or that they will take place in this order. What scholars such as Leader have taken particular exception to is not the existence of these stages *per se,* but the idea that they should take place within a clearly defined sequence. Leader instead offers a more detailed picture of four separate stages or elements of 'grief work' which were hinted at by Freud's notion of its being 'an exhaustion of representations'[69] and built upon by Klein, Lacan and others. These might happen simultaneously.

---

[66] Adorno, Theodor W., 'Cultural Criticism and Society', from *Prisms (Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought)*, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1983) p34
[67] Leader, p72
[68] Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth, *On Death* & *Dying*, (Simon & Schuster/Touchstone, New York, 1969)
[69] Freud, Sigmund, 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917), from *The Standard Edition of the Complete*

A crucial marker that *Trauerarbeit* has begun is the point where, rather than the subject's dreaming of the lost object, she begins to dream of *representations* of the object. As Lacan would later define it, this is the moment when the loss is beginning to be inscribed within a symbolic space. The conceptual photographer Thomas Demand constructs painstakingly detailed scenes of places of culturally significant sites of loss: for example, the apartment of serial killer Jeffrey Dhamer. There is a deliberate choice of banal, visually empty locations. The uncanny quality in the act of artificially reconstructing a scene that is barely distinguishable from its original, and the displacement of that scene through its being photographed, hint towards both the importance and ultimate impossibility of representing death. Leader cites Demand's work as an attempt to acknowledge (even if, by its nature, the acknowledgement can never be completed) this complex process within the mourner's mind.

Another element Leader draws particular attention to is a kind of symbolic 'second killing' of the dead in the subject's dream work. In Freud's account, as developed by Lacan, this is a disturbing but necessary transition for the subject: she is seeking reconciliation with the loss by mentally transforming the biological death into a symbolic one. The author cites here the recurring motif of the villain in film appearing to 'return from the dead' and be killed a second time in the final act before narrative closure can be attained.[70] He finds a similar split in the Christian tradition.[71] For Klein though, the act of mourning is demonstrating that we have *not killed* the dead.

The contradictions described above suggest to me a link between ekphrasis and its relationship to the art object. If certain art objects can be described as representations of inevitable death and decay (the *vanitas* genre is an obvious demonstration of this), then might the ekphrastic mode be a means for representing death *more authentically* than the original art object can? I would argue that this is one reason why a successful ekphrastic poem can carry a force greater than that of its referent. Let me cite Carlos Williams' poem after Brueghel, from Chapter 2, as an example. One of the challenges of mourning is to come to terms with what, as children, seemed an impossibility and shift our temporal experience of a person into the atemporal space of death. There is a significant parallel here with Lessing's refutation of *ut pictura poesis.* Brueghel uses the 'natural signs' of his paint to 'fix' the labourers in time and space under the tree. Carlos Williams' writing complicates that act by using the artificial signs of verbal language to reanimate the scene in the 'moving' time and space in which it would have originally occurred. These contradictions, native to the form itself of poetry, give a more accurate representation of the paradox of mortality than the

---

Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 16, trans. James Strachey (London; Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychoanalysis), p237

[70] Leader, p116

[71] Leader, p117, 'A major problem for Reformation thinkers was the question of what happens between death and the Last Judgement. Is the soul awake and active in this time, or asleep? What kind of life was there between these two poles?'

Brueghel painting can. This idea also relates to what Leader outlines as the third crucial element of *Trauerarbeit*: the *constitution* of the object, which we shall now examine.

For Klein, the 'constitution of the object' involves the subject's recognition that a 'good' and 'bad' object, for example, the frustrating and gratifying breast of the mother, can be in fact one thing. Lacan on the other hand, conceptualizes the constitution of the object as being a *psychical* registering of a space or lack: the internalisation not just of the parent, but also of their absence and the inevitability of their death. In Klein, constitution takes place in early childhood. For Lacan, it might be years later. For example, the rebellion against parental authority in a healthy adolescent could be understood as part of this internalisation of the object's (parent's) otherness. Whereas for Freud and Klein, mourning is fundamentally about restoring broken links to the lost object, for Lacan it is the opposite. It is crucial that the subject restores her links to an object as being fundamentally *lost* and *impossible.* For example, by placing flowers by the graveside of her relative, she is consenting to the loss rather than refusing it: the two losses add to one another to, in Leader's phrases, 'seal'[72] or 'positivise (the original loss)'.[73] The author cites here the absence of such an acknowledgement within Western philosophy: a vast literature is devoted to Aristotle's logic, yet the basic emotional problems he dealt with have been ignored. Debates around his famous syllogism, 'All men are mortal – Socrates is a man – Therefore Socrates is mortal' omit the fact that Socrates was a real, live human being with whom Aristotle had a powerful relationship, even if they never met. Such omissions prompt Leader to explicate the final element of grief.

The fourth element concerns the question of *who* it is that the subject is mourning *for.* Leader invokes here the figure Lacan terms the *objet petit a*: the unattainable object of desire: that which we seek in the other. Does this elude visualization? (see Fig 3d). In Leader's words, Lacan proposes that we 'use our own bodily experiences of loss, as if to find ways to situate it psychically.'[74] Since breast and excrement are separated from our bodies, they can be used to give substance to the idea of a loss. The anal object, for example, is at play if we oscillate between love and hate of our partner: 'like shit, shunned with revulsion and valued as a source of infantile interest.'[75] It is crucial to successful Lacanian grief work that we recognise not just what we have lost but that there is a part of ourselves (that which we find in the other) that was *always lost.*

Leader concludes his chapter with an historical illustration of the four elements of *Trauerarbeit*. It concerns the dreams of Giovanni Morelli, a Florentine born in 1372, whose eldest son Alberto died at the age of nine in 1406. Morelli had not been present at his deathbed, and his ensuing mourning was characterised by relentless self-recriminations. This included a day-dream of the devil: as Klein would put it, running though all of the previous slights and neglects that Morelli felt he had inflicted on his son. Thus

[72] Leader, p136
[73] Ibid., p135
[74] Ibid.,p133
[75] Ibid., p134

the man's neglect became, apparently, causally connected to the boy's death. A later dream features a bird flying towards the father singing sweet melodies. As Giovanni approaches it, the sounds become hideous and he flees. As he does so, a pig covered in boar's faeces attacks the bird. Two star-like lights appear and the man kneels down praying for an explanation. A cloud of birds approaches, one of them transforming itself into Alberto. Giovanni turns to the apparition and realising it can't be physically grasped, asks it, 'Am I the cause of your death?' to which it responds that he was not and that the father should 'not seek the impossible.'[76] The sequence illustrates the transformation into representational space of the lost object, the subject's constitution of that object, and a 'second killing' of sorts in Satan's imagined recriminations. There is eventually an acknowledgement of the existence of the *objet petit a,* in the final dream sequence featuring the birds. We could also frame these events as the recording of an absence, the running though of earlier losses, the placing of the subject in the position of the dead, and the appeal to a third-party to authenticate and alleviate the principal loss. Most crucially though, there is a separation of two registers in Giovanni's mourning: the image is prised apart from an alterity that lies beyond it. This process alleviates the mourner's suffering.

Leader concludes the chapter by drawing on a distinction made between a melancholic subject of his which he finds profoundly illuminating of the difference between mourning and melancholia. The patient, who had studied the philosophy of logic, drew on two terms from that field when trying to speak of the father he had lost in childhood. He distinguished the denial of a positive term from the affirmation of negative one. Logic can put a negation sign next to a particular term: (-(the man)), or it can emphasize a negative term: ((-the man)). In the *predicate negation* of the first case, the sign of negation is applied externally to the concept, (the man). In the *term negation* of the latter, the negation is included within the term itself: (the not - man). Mourning is the denial of a positive term: a recognition of loss. This is at odds with melancholia, which involves the affirmation of a negative term. The lost object becomes an ever-present void to which the melancholic cannot give up her attachment. In the philosophy of logic, predicate negation and term negation cannot be translated into one another: they are fundamentally incompatible. We find again an echo of *impossibility* that Leader has noted many times as a feature of melancholia throughout *The New Black.* In his conclusion, he suggests that it is less logic than poetry that can offer a release from this impasse: 'melancholic subjects require the poetic (in order) to deliver them.'[77]

The New Black's concluding chapter reprises Leader's initial criticisms of anti-depressant drugs, cognitive behavioural therapy and the healthcare industry's concentration on the symptoms of depression rather than its *causes*: '(Drugs) cannot affect personal, unconscious truth, which can only emerge through speaking.'[78] In other words, if expressing the impossible is so important to the melancholic's experience, then there must be a figure (such as an analyst or an artistic audience) to receive the communication. Such a figure

---

[76] Leader, p166, citing Trexler, Richard, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Academic Press, 1980)
[77] Ibid., p199, citing Wright, Elizabeth, *Speaking Desires Can Be Dangerous* (Oxford: Polity, 1999)
[78] Ibid., p206

will help the melancholic in her work of finding a new way to speak about a hole. I am brought back again to ekphrasis and James Heffernan's expression, 'poems *for* paintings'. The ekphrastic poem speaks about the hole that is the absent artwork. And thus a certain type of 'poem for a painting' articulates melancholia: that condition which is unique to the human subject. There is a notable exception to the body of literature on melancholia that Leader summarizes. This is the work of Julia Kristeva, and in particular her book, *Black Sun,* which taken as whole, acknowledges what Leader is at pains to point out through much of *The New Black:* the central relationship between the absence melancholics feel and their use of language both as recompense, and paradoxically, perpetuator, of this absence. Hence psychoanalysis's focus on the creative act, as exemplified in Kristeva's essay, 'Holbein's Dead Christ'. For Kristeva, melancholy itself catalyses Holbein's aesthetic activity: part of his achievement lies in his being able to 'overcome his (melancholic) latency whilst (keeping) its trace.'[79] In relation to Christianity, Holbein's significance is his ambivalent relationship to the Reformation and humanist discourses. *The Dead Christ* (and his portraits of Henry VIII's wives and courtiers) are 'heroes of modern times (…) straight-laced, sober, (…) as real as can be yet indecipherable. [80] But the greatest significance of the painting is how it enshrines a notion of severance: that of Christ from God, man from Christ and of one person from another in death: '(psychoanalysis) identifies and relates as an indispensable condition for autonomy a series of splittings (…): birth, weaning, separation, frustration, castration. Real, imaginary, or symbolic, these processes necessarily structure our individuation.'[81] As well as serving as testament to that severance (there is not 'the slightest suggestion of transcendence' [82] in the painting), Holbein's visual asceticism gives colour and form to the non-representable: death itself and nothingness.

Blacks Sun's case studies, 'Illustrations of Feminine Depression,' articulate the Kristevan position, which leads to the perhaps audacious historiographical leaps of imagination she makes in 'Holbein's Dead Christ'. But her views are given further weight by her essay, 'Psychoanalysis: a Counterdepressant'. Here, Kristeva builds on Melanie Klein's work on the death drive, in particular by stressing the significance of language formation as the infant's primary means of escape from the 'depressive position.' The 'work' of 'reparation' includes the unconscious processes of dreaming and the conscious attachment she will make to, for example, a favourite toy. You might remember from earlier in this chapter this is mirrored by the 'grief work' that mourners must temporarily repeat in adult life and depressives are doomed to repeat endlessly if not treated. Kristeva accepts Klein's hypothesis that the child produces or uses vocalizations that are the *symbolic* equivalents of what they are being separated from: the breast, for example. Later, beginning with the depressive position, the child registers the sadness that overwhelms it by inwardly producing elements alien to the outer world ('internal objects'). Kristeva characterizes this as a shift from early sign making to symbol formation, adding the observation that 'what makes this triumph over

[79] Kristeva, Julia, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (Columbia University Press, New York, 1989) p138
[80] Ibid., p138
[81] Ibid., p132
[82] Ibid., p110

sadness possible is the ability of the self to identify no longer with the lost object but with a third party – father, form, schema.'[83] For those who remain in, or return to, the depressive position, certain blockages of language and symbol-generating capacity retain particular significance. What the analyst deciphers in 'the blanks of (…) vocalization, rhythm or words that have been devitalized and need to be restored by the analyst on the basis of an apprehended depression'[84] are part of the subject's *discourse* of melancholia, which it is the analyst's job to learn. And if depression is a discourse, it is strictly speaking not a disease to be treated, but a language to be learned.

The above ideas are elaborated upon in Kristeva's subsequent essay, 'Life and Death of Speech', which draws further on the concepts of Freud, Klein, Abraham and Lacan that I mentioned earlier in this chapter. Kristeva characterizes depressive speech as being marked by 'a denial of negation'. Again, using the mourner/melancholic distinction, she asserts that for the former 'signs are arbitrary because language begins with a negation: I have found (e.g. my deceased mother) again in signs (…) since I consent to lose her, I have not lost her (that is the negation), I can recover her in language.' [85] Whereas for the melancholic, that very negation is disavowed: she nostalgically falls back on the real object (the Thing) of her loss, which is exactly what she does not manage to lose. Kristeva concludes her essay, in the section 'The Western Fate of Convergence' by asserting that the melancholic posits the existence of a 'primal object' or a 'Thing', which might be conveyed through and beyond a completed mourning. Western metaphysics, as opposed to Chinese civilization, for instance, has had the 'good luck and audacity' to at least attempt a representation of such an object. Earlier in the essay, Kristeva credits Immanuel Kant with the view of melancholic nostalgia as dependent on a time rather than a place: nostalgic persons do not desire the place of their youth but their youth itself: their desire is 'a search for the time and not for the thing to be recovered.'[86] Kristeva likens this to the Freudian notion of the 'psychic object' to which depressives are riveted. It is a 'memory event', belonging, à la Proust, 'to a lost time (…) from the start located not within a physical space but within the imaginary and symbolic space of the symbolic system'.[87] Here, the melancholic's loss is kept alive through another kind of 'denial of negation.' It is as if she preserves both the possibility and impossibility of an idealized period of her past precisely through making a kind of perverse category error. She insists on recognizing a moment not as a period of time as such but as a place. The impossibility of a return to such a non-existent place perpetuates her longing. And without the acknowledgement that there has been such a category error, such an assertion cannot be disproved. With this impossibility, a confusion of space and time, in mind, I would like to conclude this chapter by expanding its scope, moving outwards from the strictly demarcated definitions of melancholia to the more general field of the 'Art of Memory'.

---

[83] Ibid., p23
[84] Ibid., p25
[85] Ibid., p43
[86] Kristeva is referring to Kant's *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, as quoted by Starobinski, Jean, 'Le Concept de nostalgie', *Diogène* Vol 54, 1966 (Paris) p92-115
[87] Kristeva, p61

Frances Yates' *The Art of Memory,* first published in 1966, provides an historical survey of how the 'Art of Memory', inherited and recorded by the Romans from the Greeks, passed into the European tradition, and was revived, in occult form, during the Renaissance into various forms of 'syncretism': the attempt to reconcile disparate or contrary beliefs. Yates claims that the work of such Renaissance mystics as Giordano Bruno led directly to the search for method that Descartes, Bacon, et al. used to create the foundations of modern science. So one corollary of her assertion is a troubling of the very foundations of the Enlightenment. Yates' book is thus 'of its time' in post-structuralist thought, and it continues to exert a strong influence on memory studies. An apocryphal story, with which she opens the book (see also Fig 3e), offers a very literal 'troubling of foundations':

> At a banquet given by a nobleman of Thessaly named Scopas (…) Simonides of Ceos chanted a lyric poem in honour of his host but included a passage in praise of Castor and Pollux. Scopas meanly told the poet that he would only pay him half of the sum agreed upon for the panegyric and that he must obtain the balance from the twin gods to whom he had devoted half the poem. A little later, a message was brought in to Simonides that two young men were waiting outside who wished to see him. He rose from the banquet and went out but could find no one. During his absence the roof of the banqueting hall fell in, crushing Scopas and all the guests to death beneath the ruins; the corpses were so mangled that the relatives who came to take them away for burial were unable to identity the remains. But Simonides remembered the places at which they had been sitting at the table and was therefore able to indicate to the relatives who were their dead. The invisible editors, Castor and Pollux, had handsomely paid for their share in the panegyric by drawing Simonides away from the banquet just before the crash. And this experience suggested to the poet the principles of the art of memory of which he is said to have been the inventor. Noting that it was through his memory of the places at which the guests had been sitting that he had been able to identify the bodies, he realized that orderly arrangement is essential for good memory.[88]

Simonides infers that to train the faculty of memory, we must form *mental images* of the things we wish to remember and store those images in real or imagined places. Thus the order of the places preserves the order of the things. The images of the things will denote the things themselves. Cicero, in his *De oratore* cites this story in his explanation of memory as one of the five parts of rhetoric (along with invention, arrangement, style and delivery).[89] The Roman rhetors use the mnemonic of places and images (*loci* and *imagines*) as the foundation of their art. I would like to stress here a certain quality of displacement in Simonides's technique: it is not the guest themselves who are remembered, but their places at the table: the food and drink they chose to eat. Such a principle is at work in all of psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on uncovering the hidden meanings in dreams or our seemingly 'neutral' behaviour in everyday life. Just as the art of memory preserves the absent objects that its practitioner summons up through a mnemonic technique, so psychoanalysis is also *spatial* in part: it uses an investigation into displaced objects, situations and language to attempt to locate what is most important to a person.

With this sense of the *spatial* aspect of memory in mind, I would now like to return to WJT Mitchell's 'Ekphrasis and the other'. You will recall that Mitchell offered three 'phases of recognition' regarding the

---

[88] Yates, Frances, *The Art of Memory* (London: Pimlico, 2005) p1
[89] Ibid., p2

subject's relationship to ekphrasis: indifference, followed by hope, then fear. Adrian Rifkin's 2007 paper, 'Addressing Ekphrasis: A prolegomenon to the Next' takes issue with this linear chronology of ekphrasis's effects. His use of the word *prolegomenon*, is instructive here. The words means 'a preliminary remark' or a preliminary statement or essay, but Rifkin does not make any overt suggestion in his text that there is a further work to come, to which this paper is the *prolegomenon.* And the very structure of the paper seems to echo a hunt towards a definition that will remain elusive. Rather, Rifkin is concerned to '(accumulate) an improbable number of examples in a chiastic flow of possibilities (…) to float a kind of definition and resist yielding to it.' [90]

A chiasmus or chiasm, named from the Ancient Greek for 'cross' or 'x' is a repetition of ideas or grammatical structures in inverted order. For example, this widely quoted quip from Joey Adams, a comedian - contemporary of Bob and Ray's: *'Never let a fool kiss you or a kiss fool you.'*[91] Another example of a chiasm in the New Testament's book of John:

> *In the beginning was the Word, (A)*
> *and the Word was with God, (B)*
> *and the Word was God. (B')*
> *He was in the beginning with God. (A')*[92]

Oral literature is rich in chiastic structure. In his study of Homer, Cedric Whitman finds repeated examples of it, 'of the most amazing virtuosity'[93] performing simultaneously aesthetic and mnemonic functions in both *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad.* The chiasm permitted the blind poet to easily recall the basic formulae of his composition during performances. This 'X' structure is also a common compositional device in painting. Uccello's panel *The Hunt* (see Fig 3g) of 1470, for example, is a demonstration of the mathematician and painter's obsession with perspective. I would like to cite it as particularly helpful when thinking of the 'chiasmic' structure of Rifkin's text.

The Hunt's symmetrically arranged hounds, horses and riders converge upon the panicking deer at the centre of the scene. Though many of the dogs have temporarily lost the scent, the overall flow of movement is towards a central vanishing point, which we might expect to be the hunters' prey. But rather than resting on these animals, which are anyway occupying a tiny proportion of the picture space, the eye is led to a dark, blank space just above their heads, a chasm between the tree trunks. So the whole painting, rather than being any kind of meaningful depiction of the *object* of the hunt, is instead a virtuoso display of desire: the colourful pageantry of the riders and the looping, heraldic shapes of their dogs and

---

[90] Rifkin, Adrian, 'Addressing Ekphrasis: A Prolegomenon to the Next' from *Classical Philology Studies, Vol. 102, No 1, 2007* (Chicago: Chicago University Press) p72
[91] Quoted on title page of Grothe, Mardy, *Never let a Fool Kiss you or a Kiss Fool You* (London: Penguin, 1999)
[92] Anonymous, *The New Testament: Authorized King James Version* (New York: Random House Everyman's Library Classics, 1998) John 1:1-2
[93] Whitman, Cedric M., *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958) p18

horses converging upon a point of emptiness. Such is the case with Rifkin's *Prolegomenon*: the title of his essay seems to acknowledge that a definitive statement about ekphrasis will always elude us. We might catch a deer or two but others will escape into the forest, ready to mate and in turn keep us hunting in the future.

Essentially, Rifkin is 'uncomfortable in a discussion on ekphrasis with the given order of events… the relation between the written (or revealed) and never seen both as a regression and as transmission. That is, the recycling of an original of which discourse is the only trace, and which supposes the original is its dependent clause'. [94] Appropriately, he places this statement at the centre of his chiasmic essay, at the point where the two lines of his cross meet, or as Rifkin puts it, at the 'aporetic of the classical gesture; inverting the idea that founds it'.[95] In other words, when we try to locate the origin of many classical figures of rhetoric, we find only doubt or paradox. Another of his aims is 'to render the question of ekphrasis and its starting point more dense, but also to underline how (if all these starting points are in principle unserviceable), then ekphrasis may be thought of as a 'figure that straddles mourning and melancholy in uneasy balance'.[96] Another way to put this would be: the ekphrastic mode allows its user to 'let go' of her referent object, as is the case with successful, 'unblocked' mourning. But it simultaneously effects a kind of *introjection* of that lost object in the subject in her very act of writing. By introjection, I mean the process whereby the subject replicates in herself qualities of her surrounding world, such as subconsciously imitating a friend's pronunciation or speech patterns. Thus, the ekphrastic mode entails a kind of *keeping alive* of the lost object and is thus also on the side of melancholy at the same time as having affinites with mourning.

The author supports Heffernan's argument (1993) that ekphrasis cannot in itself be a masculine master discourse of the word over the feminine of images but 'only the conjectural and particular instance of such a relation.'[97] Charting his own intellectual development, Rifkin admits he was slower than most of his contemporaries in noticing the significance of the 'visual turn'[98] in cultural theory during the 1980s because he taught chiefly in art schools, where word and image enjoy a relation 'so imbricated, without a resolved priority' [99] that one is bound to notice that a 'good description '*has to be one that fails'*[100](my italics). The contradiction points him to one of his central art theoretical preoccupations: '"What does a theory or a concept look like?" How does it stand textually, historically, hermeneutically, in relation to its

[94] Rifkin, Adrian, 'Addressing Ekphrasis: A Prolegomenon to the Next' from *Classical Philology Studies, Vol. 102, No 1, 2007* (Chicago: Chicago University Press) p 78
[95] Rifkin, p81
[96] Ibid. p74
[97] Ibid., p74
[98] WJT Mitchell is one of the authors to whom the phrase 'the visual turn', a supposed development of the 'linguistic turn' is attributed. See for example, Rose, Gillian, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Methods* (London: Sage, 2006)
[99] Rifkin, p76
[100] Ibid., p76

object/subject?' [101] Rifkin characteristically uses a personal anecdote here: when he cranes his neck to look at the main vault of the *Gesu* in Rome, (Fig 3f), he does not see the Deleuze of 'Le pli, Leibniz et le Baroque', but instead the history of his own looking and learning about the Baroque, as historical epoch and philosophical concept. In Rifkin's case, he sees 'Deleuze writing on Foucault: that hypostatized and sublimated version of the fold'.[102] This in turn prompts Rifkin to invoke Walter Benjamin's celebrated ninth thesis from his Theses on the Philosophy of History:

> (…) (a) Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' (Fig 3h) shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, and his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him in to the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.[103]

Though clearly not Benjamin's aim, Rifkin finds the Angel useful in beginning to figure the (imagined) ekphrastic object: 'a representation of something that, like (Achilles's) shield has never been… something that was and is what Benjamin's Angel sees, and yet remains to be seen'. But rather than the Benjaminian pairing of the Angel with the Klee painting, Rifkin offers a 'constellation' of works that include Ingres' copy of Guilio Romano's *Mercury* from the ceiling of the *Villa Farnesina* (Fig 3i). A classical art historical interrogation of the Ingres copy would reveal the painting's inversion, along the Y-axis, of the winged messenger, and a flattening of picture surface from vaulting to canvas. But more pertinently for Rifkin, standing in front of the Ingres copy in 2003, it is to become 'melancholic in the absence of an historical continuum, broken by an image that cannot connect even to its own avowed source in the process of transcription.'[104]

To Rifkin's 'aporetic of the classical gesture', I would like to add a narrative concept: the 'MacGuffin', a plot device used since at least early Chinese and Finnish legend[105], but made well known over the last century by its use in film. Used a great deal in thrillers and suspense narratives, the 'MacGuffin', sets a story in motion, but whilst the plans, documents or secret must seem of great importance to the protagonists, to the narrator, they are of no importance whatsoever, and indeed may turn out to be non-existent. To invoke Uccello's *Hunt* again, the MacGuffin might be an animal that is already disappearing or that our heroes will never catch. Or take the use of a coded message contained in a piece of music in

---

[101] Ibid., p76
[102] Ibid., p77
[103] Benjamin, Walter, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' from *Illuminations,* trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992) p249
[104] Rifkin, p81
[105] See the ancient Finnish folk tale, 'Sampo'', collected in Lönnrot, Elias, *The Kalevala*, trans Keith Bosley (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 2008). Here, the sampo of the title is the MacGuffin: a legendary mill that made flour, salt and gold out of thin air.

Alfred Hitchock's *The Lady Vanishes* (Fig 3j). Interviewed in 1966 by François Truffaut, Hitchcock illustrated the term with another story:

> (the MacGuffin) might be a Scottish name, taken from a story about two men in a train. One man says "What's that package up there in the baggage rack?", and the other answers "Oh, that's a MacGuffin". The first one asks "What's a MacGuffin?". "Well", the other man says, "It's an apparatus for trapping lions in the Scottish Highlands". The first man says "But there are no lions in the Scottish Highlands", and the other one answers "Well, then that's no MacGuffin!". So you see, a MacGuffin is nothing at all.[106]

The MacGuffin is the engine that sets the story in motion. I find the concept useful in trying to frame Rifkin's argument. Word and image reflect back onto one another in a process of infinite regression. For example, a Metaphysical poem might be about a Renaissance painting whose source was a reference in Pliny, which might in turn be traced back to oral myth, etcetera. As with the MacGuffin, it becomes uncertain whether the point of origin actually even *exists.*

Common characteristic of all of the theories I have looked at so far have been that of *impossibility* and *infinity.* Unlike the mourner, whose grief work is finite, Freud's melancholic finds that her grief might be interminable, in some cases because her lost object might not be nameable, or even exist. In Lacan's theories, a crucial sign for the *healthy* mourner that *Trauerarbeit* has begun is the moment where loss is inscribed within symbolic space: where she stops dreaming about the lost object and instead dreams of *representations* of him, her or it. As Darian Leader has noted, this is a form of 'positivising a loss' (for example, placing flowers at the graveside). But for the melancholic, who seeks to *affirm a negative term*, no reconciliation is possible: predicate negation and term negation cannot be translated into one another because they are fundamentally incompatible. The melancholic must recognise that there is a part of herself (that which she seeks in the Other) that was *always lost.* There is a significant affinity here, between the melancholic's *always lost* object and with Lacan's *objet petit a,* that obscure object of desire, and also the 'non-place' that the nostalgic yearns for, on account of her spatio-temporal misconceptions. Julia Kristeva keeps many of these ideas in play in her writing. In her practice both as an analyst and a theoretician, she is concerned to keep alive and decipher the unique *discourse* of the melancholic, and this is done in large part through a focus on repetitions and gaps in the analysand's language. In each case, it is as if there are multiple, invisibile 'elephants in the consulting room,' which it is the analyst's role to identify. To the figures of impossibility and infinity that have marked these discussions around melancholia, I would finally add the concept of *invisibility*: the 'MacGuffin' of ancient legend and modern suspense, and the vanishing point of the chiasmus.

Simonides's invention of the art of memory is instructive because the very objects of the poet's mnemonic technique (the dinner guests crushed to death) become both 'lost objects', loved ones to be mourned or

---

[106] As cited in Gottlieb, Sidney, *Framing Hitchcock: Selected essays from the Hitchcock annual*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002) p48

become melancholy over, but are also (if we think of the original Ancient Greek usage outlined by Lunn-Rockliffe and Hermange) *ekphrastic objects.* Simonides's memory theatre is rooted in a faith in the reliability of human memory, and yet such a faith is particularly difficult to hold in the twenty-first century, when our brains cannot compete in many respects with artificial intelligence, and when we have lived for over a century with an uncertainty over the relationship between time and space that would have been in many respects alien to Ancient Greek culture. My object in this chapter has been in part to build a kind of palimpsest of uncertainties: most of the definitions I have cited have been intrinsically imprecise. Is the lost object of melancholia traceable? Is ekphrasis on the side of mourning or melancholia? Is it necessary to distinguish between a loss and an absence? For example, can we draw clear lines between *absent,* specifiable, finite objects (mourning work, Auden's ekphrasis of Brueghel, the MacGuffin in the Hitchcock story) and *lost* or untraceable ones (melancholia, Achilles's shield, etc.)? Perhaps these questions are unanswerable, but that I can raise them at all is, I think significant and I will put these tensions into play in my analysis of the artworks in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Erroneous Representations: Explorations of Memory and Ekphrasis

If photography does not give us the past, it tells us that perception must be thought in relation to what is no longer present, in relation to the structure of memory in general. To say this is to say that perception begins only at the moment when it begins to withdraw, when what is seen cannot be seen.

Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History*

I have outlined a number of different accounts of ekphrasis, memory and melancholia in my opening chapters. I will now apply the most pertinent of them to what I term five 'key' works that have influenced the course of my practice as an artist, both before and during the period of my research. As a result of this process, I will make some tentative judgements about their status as works of art. As well as proving to have been amongst the most influential to my own artistic practice of the ekphrastic works that I have researched, the significance of this selection lies in the fact that I have attempted to make a list that is broadly representative of how ekphrasis has been used by visual artists over the last sixty years. In the *photo-roman* of Wright Morris, I have chosen a work where the verbal wins out over the visual: in the *detourned* book of poem-collages that make up Broomberg and Chanarin's *War Primer 2,* I have concentrated on a work where the reverse seems to be the case, and the the visual wins the contest. In the case of Sophie Calle's 'Ghosts', the tension between the verbal and visual remains balanced. I have also selected two works of arguably iconic significanicance, particularly in relation to the respective milieux from which they emerged: Joseph Kosuth's 'One and Three Chairs' is paradigmatic of the first generation of conceptual art: Hollis Frampton's *(nostalgia)* arguably performs a similar role for structuralist film of the seventies. Calle's work is exemplary of the work that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s that exhibited the influence of artists such as Frampton and Kosuth. My selection of works is also a work of imaginary curation: a room featuring books to read, a chair so sit on (or look at), a film being projected onto one wall and pictures hanging on others. I shall return to this figure of the curated room in Chapter 5.

(nostalgia) by Hollis Frampton (Figs. 4a-h) is an important work in the history of avant-garde film. The work is shot on 16mm monochrome stock, lasts thirty-eight minutes, and as is the case with much of Frampton's oeuvre and structuralism film in general, is defiantly simplistic in its production values. The camera remains fixed for the course of the film, which consists visually of a series of still photographs being burned over an electric cooking hob. The narrator casually asks the camera operator if the film is rolling before announcing, "These are recollections of a dozen still photographs that I made several years ago…" [107] setting the tone for the rest of the piece: at once humorous and mournful, with each description offering some clue as to the narrator's eventual decision to abandon photography, and turn to film-making. Most of the reminiscences begin with an ekphrastic description. Some of them expand to offer a technical explanation of how the work was made; others offer memories and speculations about the subjects of the pictures. There is an emphasis on Frampton's relationships with them at the time (many of the artists had, by 1971, already become well known) and how these relationships subsequently developed.[108] Others still offer wry digressions about, for example, the vagaries of freelance life, with Frampton bemoaning underpayment from a creditor. It is clear from the first photograph shown that the accompanying commentary does not match the picture. In fact, each verbal description actually matches the *next*

---

[107] Frampton, Hollis, *(nostalgia)*, 1971, 16mm black and white, 38:21

[108] It is interesting to note this apparently factual piece's play with the truth. For example, the narrator, whom we might assume to be Frampton, as *(nostalgia)* is written in the first person, is actually his fellow filmmaker Michael Snow. Snow himself is depicted in one of the photographs, and regarding the fact that Snow dislikes the poster for which the photograph was used, Snow/Frampton remarks ironically, 'I wish I could apologise to him.'

photograph shown in the sequence (which in turn is accompanied by another, non-matching account). Each photograph is visually complex and the verbal explanation often equally dense. There is thus a doubly difficult task for the viewer both to comprehend the images in themselves and to disentangle them from one another. The narrator stays solemnly silent if the length of time taken for the print to burn exceeds that required by its explanation. But just as the viewer begins to disentangle the one from the other, in this short opportunity to take in what is being described, the next print and the next description appears. So there is a quite deliberate overburdening placed by Frampton upon the viewer in terms of the information that s/he is required to comprehend and digest, which increases exponentially with each subsequent image-text disjunction. This is compounded yet further by the way in which the objects in a scene become entangled with the narrative that is spun from each one. This technique is perhaps laboured by the final, melodramatic description (for me the only section of the piece that does not quite ring true), which is accompanied by the one found photograph of the sequence, that of a Texas farmer. The narrator rues the fact that he exposes 'fewer than fifty negatives a year now'[109] but was recently struck by the 'vagrant urge' to pick up his stills camera again. After hours of fruitless wandering, he does find a scene that he wishes to photograph, but the opportunity to do so is immediately ruined as a truck obscures it. The narrator takes the photograph anyway, and upon developing it and enlarging a detail, is appalled to find a piece of the scene that he had not noticed at the time. The reflection, in the rear view mirror of the truck, of an object from a factory window fills him 'with such fear and dread that I fear I shall never take another photograph. Here it is. Look at it. Do you see what I see?'[110] By this point, the photograph of the farmer has burned and we are left to contemplate ashes and think both forward and backwards to the first photograph in the sequence (that should supposedly accompany this description): not the street scene described, but a darkroom.

To burn an object is to treat it as rubbish, but to destroy any trace of it might also be to acknowledge its importance. The aggression and finality of this recurrent operation in *(nostalgia),* although it is prints, not negatives that are being destroyed, is typical of what Heffernan notes that ekphrasis commonly reveals in its producer: 'a profound ambivalence towards visual art, a fusion of iconophilia and iconophobia, of veneration and anxiety.'[111] In the case of this film, I will argue here that this very ambivalence is the motor of its narrative. If ekphrasis forms the skeleton of the film, then the meditations on temporality and memory that ensue from this ekphrasis form its flesh and blood. I would here like to introduce my own term, which will be instructive throughout the rest of this thesis: 'post-ekphrastic'. This refers to a verbal passage that is not ekphrastic in itself, but which might only exist in its specific form because of an ekphrastic passage that preceded it in composition. The ekphrastic passage might, by the time of publication, actually have been removed by the author. Or to put it another way, the 'post ekphrastic'

---

[109] Frampton, Hollis, *(nostalgia)*, 1971, 16mm black and white, 38:21
[110] Ibid.
[111] Heffernan, JAW, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993) p1

passage of writing is the child, and sometimes the orphan, of the passage of the ekphrasis from which it originated. For example, let us examine this passage in the narration:

> This photograph of two toilets was made in February of 1964, with a new view camera I had just got at that time. As you can see, it is an imitation of a painted renaissance crucifixion. The outline of the Cross is quite clear. At its foot, the closed bowl on the right represents the Blessed Virgin. On the left is St. Mary Magdalene: a bowl with its lid raised. The roll of toilet paper stands for the skull of Adam, whose sin is conventionally washed away by the blood the crucified Saviour sheds. The stairs leading up to the two booths symbolize Calvary. I'm not completely certain of the iconographic significance of the light bulbs, but the haloes that surround them are more than suggestive.[112]

The objective description here is obviously ekphrastic, and the humorous allegorical extrapolations are post-ekphrastic. So the warp and weft of these two different forms of writing create, in many passages of the narration, a very particular textual fabric.

Returning to Simonides et al, let us equate the photographs in *(nostalgia)* with Lessing's definition of painting ('natural' signs fixed in space) and the narrative and durational elements with poetry ('conventional signs moving through time and space'). One of qualities of the piece that is so disturbing is that it uses both elements so neatly against one another, pulling the viewer in two directions at once. It also distinguishes *(nostalgia)* from the other works that I consider in this chapter, in that the total affect and effect of the work is a result of a process that is both additive and reductive *at the same time.* The 'fixedness' of the photographs is undermined in the act of their burning (the obverse, perhaps, of a print slowly revealing itself in a developing tray), and the viewer's 'reading' of them is left ever more frustrated by the way in which their verbal counterparts do not match. This conceit in turn heightens an implicit suggestion of many of the individual commentaries: that these photographs, and perhaps *all* photographs, remain unknowable; that any attempt to truly grasp their essence is doomed to failure. It also pinpoints the blindness and irony inherent in the photographic act: the way in which photography promises plenitude and yet ultimately *tells* us nothing, remaining opaque.[113]

I would now like to return to the distinction Stephen Cheeke makes between an object-oriented and affect-oriented approach to aesthetics. Just as he contends that ekphrastic poetry confuses this distinction, I will claim here that Frampton's film draws some of its force from the same confusion. What is the object of *(nostalgia)*? And what is its affect? The voiceover might at first lead us to believe that the photographs themselves and the recollections presented ('these are recollections of a dozen still photographs….') form the object of the film. But at a point that is extremely difficult to place, these same recollections become the affect of the work. As the film's crescendo of doubt builds, certain descriptions deepen this object-

[112] Frampton, Hollis, *(nostalgia)*, 1971, 16mm black and white, 38:21

[113] For an eloquent account of this irony, see Sontag, Susan, 'In Plato's Cave', from *On Photography*, (New York: Penguin, 1977) p 23: 'Photography implies that we know the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is the opposite of understanding, which starts from *not* accepting the world as it looks. All possibility of understanding is rooted in the ability to say no. Strictly speaking, one never understands anything from a photograph.

affect confusion. For example, in the bathroom/crucifixion passage described above, there is an ironic gap between the sacred allegory that Frampton proposes in his word-picture and the profane materiality of human waste and its attendant technology that is depicted in the photograph we see thirty seconds later. This gap produces a sad, funny pathos. For this viewer at least, that sense of pathos, produced in part by the power of Frampton's words in my memory, muddies any attempt I might now make at an empirical interpretation of the picture.

I have argued that ekphrastic ambivalence acts as a motor for the propulsion of (*nostalgia)*'s discourse and affect. In her book, *Hollis Frampton: (nostalgia),* Rachel Moore finds other dualities that lend the piece its power. She invokes Walter Benjamin's concept of the 'dialectical image' in order to draw these characteristics out:

> (…) the dialectical image is like lighting; the past must be held like an image flashing in the moment of recognition. A rescue thus -and only thus- achieved can be effected on that which, in the next moment, is already irretrievably lost.[114]

Moore asserts that *(nostalgia)* contains such images: in the journey from photography to film that he describes, Frampton 'galvanizes their immanent antagonistic dynamics along with competing temporal registers in the service of activating nostalgia. Not by accident but because of the requirements of his historical task, he created what Benjamin called dialectical images in the process.'[115] Whilst I find this argument persuasive, I would also like to propose here that the film creates dialectal images not just by its photography/film relationship, but also by Frampton's use of photography in relation to text. By its nature, the dialectical image remains difficult for Benjamin to define and still more challenging for the reader to grasp. Here is another 'Benjaminian fragment', this time from his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' that helps me in my understanding of the idea: 'Every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably. (The good tiding which the historian of the past brings with throbbing heart may also be lost in a void the very moment he opens his mouth.)'[116] Benjamin also cites Theodor Adorno for clarity:

> As things lose their use value, they are hollowed out in their alienation, and, as ciphers, draw meanings in… subjectivity then takes control of them, by loading them with intentions of wish and anxiety… because the dead things stand in as images of subjective intentions, these latter present themselves as original and eternal.[117]

---

[114] Benjamin, Walter, *The Arcades Project,* trans. Howard Eiland, Kevin McLaughlin (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1999) p473
[115] Moore, p60
[116] Benjamin, Walter, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', from *Illuminations,* trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992) p247
[117] Ibid., p466

So let us think of the photographs in *(nostalgia)* as, to use Sontag's phrase, 'melancholy objects.'[118] By being loaded with (and in their combustion, temporarily freed from) such intentions of wish and anxiety, these photographs, these 'dead things', do indeed stand in as 'images of subjective intentions.' The ekphrastic and post-ekphrastic 'glossing' of the photographs dramatizes and makes more literal the way that, having lost their original use value, they now *falsely* present themselves as 'original and eternal'.

Before I move on to consider the melancholic aspects of the film, I would like to offer an illuminating addition to the notion of the dialectical image from contemporary philosophy. In *The Emancipated Spectator,* Jacques Rancière offers us his concept of the 'pensive image'; that which holds a tension between different modes of representation, such as documentary and fiction, art and non-art, or movement and stillness.[119] *(nostalgia)* certainly holds such tensions. There is also a play with photography and text and many other tensions between seemingly opposing modes in the film. Perhaps this is one of the qualities that make it a work of art? Far from being mutually exhaustive, these dichotomies enrich and recharge one another.

Shira Segal's essay, 'From the Private to the Public: Photography, Film and the Transmission of Cultural Memory in Hollis Frampton's *(nostalgia)'*, makes a defense of nostalgia as 'an authentic approach to perceptions about the self in the present and direction for actions and thought in the future.'[120] The article contains a number of points that are pertinent to my analysis of the film here. It argues for the vitality of structuralist film-making as a 'counter cinema' to dominant Hollywood ideologies and for *(nostalgia)* as an exemplar of this vitality. The section, 'Photography, Film, Memory' invokes a dialectic of presence (the new) and absence (the past) as being one of the prime tropes of the photographic medium. Segal cites Roland Barthes' *Plaisir du Texte* ('bliss may only come with the *absolutely new,* for only the new disturbs consciousness.'[121]) in relation to Frampton's attention to the physicality of the studios, scenarios and encounters he describes. She then addresses the malleability of the photographic image and how this quality is also ultimately evocative of absence. She quotes Roberta Rubinstein's definition of nostalgia as 'an absence that continues to occupy a palpable emotional space'.[122] The act of burning the prints ascribes to them an importance and validity both as image and artefact that signifies for Segal the defining characteristic of nostalgia: 'the absence of the longed-for object'.[123] But in Frampton's film, it is not just the burning of these signifiers that undermines the photograph's evidential force. *(nostalgia)* places a slightly greater emphasis on the narration than it does on the photographic images themselves. The voiceover is slow, clear, precise. There is no 'destruction' of the textual element other than the temporal

---

[118] Sontag, p51
[119] Ranciere, Jacques, *The Emancipated Spectator,* trans. Gregory Elliott, (London: Verso, 2009) p108-132
[120] Segal, Shira, 'From the Private to the Public: Photography, Film and the Transmission of Cultural Memory in Hollis Frampton's *(nostalgia)*, *Text, Practice Performance VI, 2005* p34
[121] Barthes, Roland, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975) p40
[122] Rubinstein, Roberta, *Home Matters: Longing and Belonging, Nostalgia and Mourning in Women's Fiction* (New York: Palgrave, 2000) p5
[123] Segal, p44

destruction inherent in the impermanence of any speech act. The photographs on the other hand, are visible only for a few seconds before flames engulf them. In making such a hierarchy, Segal argues, Frampton asserts the narrative (as opposed to the anticipated image) as being *the more authentic representation of memory*. In the section, 'Storytelling, structural film, cultural memory', Segal compounds this point: the structure of the piece emphasizes the viewer's longing for stories more than their desire for images. She concludes that yet another strength of the film is that it presents both the past and present as being constituted in narrative; always representation; always construction. Again, the dialectical image and perhaps also the pensive image, whilst obviously not mentioned by Segal (Rancière coined the latter term after Segal wrote the essay), are I think of relevance here. The final section of Segal's text, 'Closure', pinpoints *(nostalgia)*'s construction as being exemplary of structuralist film. The fixed camera position, the flicker effect and loop printing are three such characteristics. It represents the problem of linear time through 'the impossibility of fixing history, identity or memory.'[124]

Frampton's film deploys a number of strategies that I have outlined earlier in this thesis as being typical of ekphrastic discourse. Both in terms of individual narrations of photographs, but also in the overall narrative arc of the piece, WJT Mitchell's 'hope/indifference/fear' model is at play. We set out sharing Frampton's enthusiasm and hope for the photographic medium and his excitability about photographing his environment. But his uncertainty over what he sees is infectious, and if we do not experience indifference here, there is at least a profound ambivalence that slowly arises both towards the scenes and the reliability of the narrator. In particular, there is a preoccupation with the difference between what the photographer thought he was doing at the time, and what his achievement appears to have been in retrospect. On photographing a shop window he notes, 'I had thought my subject changeless, and my own sensibility pliable, but I was wrong about that.'[125] Finally, using his stills camera for the first time after a long hiatus, he is struck by a detail in his latest photograph that 'fills me with such fear, such utter dread and loathing, that I fear I will never make another photograph again.'[126] We should remember Stephen Cheeke's insistence here on the inevitable failure of the ekphrastic enterprise, and how this in turn lends it alterical power. Frampton's self-realisations are paradoxically the results of a perpetual self-alienation that grows the more he considers the discrepancy between his younger and middle-aged self.

For Shira Segal, the narration of *(nostalgia)'s* voiceover takes precedence over the descriptive power of the photographs. As I have noted already, even traditional Hollywood filmmaking complicates Lessing's distinction between the *diegesis* of the word and the *mimesis* of painting. The moving image, as opposed to the painting or photograph is not fixed in time and space, but also progresses through it, as language does. But, *(nostalgia)* offers another way of complicating this model. The images, whilst remaining static like all photographs, clearly exist as temporal objects (as witnessed by their burning) and are also half animated into the temporal realm by the narrative glossing: we can think here of Rancière's 'pensive

---

[124] Ibid., p36
[125] Frampton, Hollis, *(nostalgia)*, 1971, 16mm black and white, 38:21
[126] Ibid.

image', where an artwork effects a tension between two or more media. The narrator's recollections about his first intentions and what he had thought changeless are repeatedly undermined by hindsight. Furthermore, the photograph's force as sign is undermined by the fact that, should the viewer be able to recall the description he has just heard, she will realise that the photograph's description does not always fully match, and invariably glosses, what we can see ourselves. Like hearing a married couple arguing over the details of an anecdote, to watch *(nostalgia)* is to be caught up in an internal dispute over what constitutes the past, which of course creates an ambience of uncertainty about the present. As well as the tactics I have described above, another means Frampton deploys for this effect echoes what Shira Segal noted in the precedence narration takes over photograph. Whether the narrator is giving us details of the colours of the spaghetti mould that we cannot discern in his monochrome photograph, or telling us that the picture frame in the Carl Andre portrait makes an appearance in a later photograph that we are not shown, the narration constantly outdoes the image, providing extra details and opinions that the mute photographs could never provide.

(notalgia) echoes, in many different registers, the Kristevan notion of melancholia as *discourse:* between word and image, past and present, memory and evidence. But it does not respect any of these as truly binary oppositions. And by no means do the assertions the narrator can now make about the past mean he is able to make truly *stable* assertions about the present. His verbal attempts at reviving the past acknowledge their own inadequacies, and point, as with the *objet petit a*, only to more doomed attempts at representation and at fixing that which we wish to describe. Thus, even if these moments are rare, there are instances of Benjamin's dialectical image at work in the film, as the past, 'flashes like lightning' in front of our eyes. This quality renders *(nostalgia)* affecting and akin to lived experience whilst simultaneously capturing the impossibility of adequately describing that experience.

Having commenced my analysis of key works with one exemplary piece of avant-garde Americana, I would now like to look at another, with a less radical, though nonetheless extremely original structure. We will also move from the run-down artists' lofts of *(nostalgia)*'s bohemian New York in the 1960s to the Nebraskan farmhouses of Wright Morris'ss *The Home Place,*[127] first published in 1948. This is the same journey that Wright Morris, a native Midwesterner, took in 1947. By this point, already an established novelist in New York, Morris had begun to take a serious interest in photography and on his 1947 trip home, he produced a number of pictures of the family home with no intention of using them in a book. The function of this process could be seen as analogous to the verbal inventorying previously fulfilled by Morris's handwritten notes. Inspired no doubt in part by the publication of James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* Morris first used his photographs in combination with his text in 1946's *The Inhabitants. The Home Place* might also be described as an illustrated novella, a picture book and a novel with photographs.

---

[127] Morris, Wright, *The Home Place* (Lincoln, USA: University of Nebraska Press, 1999)

Morris'ss writing career was long and distinguished, and although he is now primarily remembered as a novelist (*Field of Vision* won the National Book Award in 1956) his use of photography is also well known and provided far more than a spur to his writing. After the relative commercial failures of his photo-texts *The Inhabitants* and *The Home Place,* his literary output was accompanied by his photography only at sporadic intervals. But in 1995, three years before his death, he embarked on a project in which the photographs from these works would be combined with his voice narrating the text on CD-ROM. The project was not produced, although the voice recordings were taped and a pilot was created. I would suggest that this final project points to how central the image-text relationship remained to the production of his works, if not always their final forms. He was conscious until the end of how he had not harmonized the text with the image at the level to which he aspired.

Jefferson Hunter's survey of the interaction of twentieth century photographs and texts, *Image and Word* contains a number of observations about Morris's *God's Country*, another of his photo-texts that are of some relevance here. For Hunter, Morris's essential subject is 'a time and place bound kind of looking, the act by which people reduce a locality to intelligible forms'. To do justice to his subject, 'he expands on it in words and pictures both.'[128] Working through some thoughts on these relationships (e.g. the deficiencies of an elderly woman's eyesight and the parallel idiosyncrasies of the photographer's technique), Hunter concludes his analysis as follows:

> Like everyone else in the place he comes from, (Morris) elaborately preserves simplicity. 'God's country', the last sentences of the book runs, 'is still a fiction inhabited by people with a love for the facts.[129]

The Home Place is clearly influenced by modernist fiction of the 1920s. One can see echoes of James Joyce's *Ulysses* in the simplicity of the plot structure: like *Ulysses* the action takes place within the space of a single day, and much of it serves merely as an armature on which to hang Morris's fascinating digressions about memory and its relationship to place, the occasional mythological parallel, and wider socio-political observations. Clyde Muncy, a native of the 'home place', Lone Tree, Nebraska, is visiting his elderly aunt and uncle on a break from his demanding life as a writer in New York, accompanied by his wife and two small children. His spouse Peggy feels decidedly ill at ease here. Although we are not made aware of her origins, she is clearly more comfortable in New York. Her discomfort is exacerbated by the hostile reception given her by the matriarchal Aunt Clara. For six-year-old Bobby and his younger sister Peggy Junior, their first visit to this farm is full of the wonders of childhood: these accounts are skilfully mirrored by Muncy's own recollections of growing up in the town. Clyde reveals to Peggy that since the recent death of his relative Ed, a lifelong bachelor, the neighbouring farmhouse is empty and there is a strong chance that the couple might inherit it. There is no mention of a will and the decision

---

[128] Hunter, Jefferson, 'The Work of Wright Morris's, from 'Chapter 2: Collaborations', in *Image and Word: The Interaction of 20th Century Photographs and Texts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987) p62

[129] Hunter, p63

appears to rest in Clara's hands. Clyde drifts through Clara and Harry's house, recalling nights he spent there as a boy. The reverie is disturbed by a tense exchange between Clara and Peggy in the kitchen: the latter undermining her niece-in-law's cooking skills. More relatives arrive: Ivy and his wife Potty are potential rivals as inheritors of the house. Clara, whose potshots at Peggy and Clyde might have led us to believe otherwise, makes it clear to Ivy and Potty that they are not as deserving a case as the younger couple: '"You got a place Ivy", she said, "and though it's not just what you want, it's a place, anyhow and roof over your head. Peg here don't have a thing."[130]

With the burning question of the inheritance off his mind, Clyde accompanies his uncle in the Model T Ford into town to collect grain. He takes Peggy Junior and Bobby for a haircut. The unnamed barber engages in some awkward badinage with Muncy while he cuts the boy's hair: like other Lone Tree locals, he seems intent on *placing* Clyde in the local genealogy: '"You're an Osborn. That's what you are. You're an Osborn"'[131], hinting at the mix of pride and resentment the whole town holds towards their 'creative native'. In a fine comic passage, the tension is deflated as Clyde steps outside of the shop to find his children, whom he had left in the care of Harry for a few moments, stuck together with flypaper. And so another contretemps, this time with his uncle, ensues. Further familiar uneasiness follows back at the house. Clyde is given the same kind of hostile treatment from his Grandmother Cropper that Clara had earlier directed towards him: '"There's no fool like an old fool, and now it turns out I'm the mother of all of 'em"'.[132]

The closing third of the book takes a radically a different tone from the tense social comedy of the first one hundred pages. Clyde and Peggy visit the 'home place', with the former enthusiastically outlining potential uses of each room. Long passages hint obliquely at the excesses of Ed's bachelor life. Peggy finds the house unsuitable for the family and her ominous silence is broken only by the children's arrival: '"The house is too small." I looked at her and she said, "Run along now and play with your Uncle Ivy. Tell him the house is too small for a boy like you."[133] The sequences leading up to this exchange are scored by a tentative optimism that Muncy and his family can effect a reabsorption of sorts into this community. But from Peggy's declaration onwards, Muncy's narrative retreats from close attention to details towards a more distanced, elegiac tone. The photographs show building views though screens, veils and curtains. The double page spreads become more striking as less text is used, leaving large gaps of white facing the photographs, which thus become more prominent.

The first picture in the book (Fig 4i) shows Uncle Harry facing us, standing in a barn doorway, his head obscured by shadow and the large peak of his cap as he looks down to repair the inner tube he is holding.

---

[130] Morris, p53
[131] Ibid., p87
[132] Ibid., p119
[133] Ibid., p143

This is accompanied by the question '"What's the old man doing?"'[134] The juxtaposition sets a standard for the rest of the book, with the text asking questions that the image does not fully answer. Each page is accompanied by a monochrome photograph, so that the reader is never witness to either writing or image in isolation. Landscape pictures are rotated unartfully on their side, requiring the reader to turn the book through ninety degrees to view them correctly. And where the format of the pictures does not match the dimensions of the page, allowing a full bleed, an unobtrusive white border along the bottom or side of the picture is provided. The physical relationship of word and image is very simple, but their interaction is anything but, and these complexities form my subject here.

The book opens with an epigraph from Henry James's *The American Scene:*

> *To be at all critically, or as we have been fond of calling it, analytically minded - over and beyond an inherent love of the general many-colored picture of things - is to be subject to the superstition that objects and places, coherently grouped, disposed for human use and addressed to it, must have a sense of their own, a mystic meaning proper to themselves to give out: that is, to the participant at once so interested and so detached as to be moved to a report of the matter.*[135]

John Hollander's essay 'The Figure on the Page: Words and Images in Wright Morris'ss *The Home Place'* offers a beautifully concise overview of the variety of ways in which the photographs work in tandem with Morris's text. But for all the sophistication of his analysis, Hollander offers no critique of the overall success of failure of the enterprise. It is my contention that *The Home Place* is a deeply moving, profound story that succeeds as a 'report of the matter'. However, as a fusion of text and image, and as a work of art, it is a failure. I will now look closely at a number of double page spreads and other passages that are representative of the wider whole to support this argument. Page 20 (Fig 4j) shows a view of cousin Ivy's bedroom, where Clyde would stay when he visited his aunt and uncle as a boy. Referring to the framed photograph of Ivy on the wall, Muncy states:

> That's my Fauntleroy he's wearing on the wall. He was also wearing my
> high button shoes, and my pink Omaha garters, which showed all right,
> but not in the photograph.[136]

The actual ekphrastic passage here is limited to a few words. The text then adds detail to the scene, both in terms of what is outside of the frame of the Ivy portrait, and beyond. The narrator sketches a psychological portrait of the infant Clyde and Ivy that we now bring to bear on the photographs. There is a neat repeated zoom outwards, from physical details that are not in the portrait, to the wider meaning of familial envy: Clyde's resentment of the younger favourite. Muncy and his rival thus undergo a kind of contest for the authority of depiction: In the photograph, Ivy appears dominant, a little lord in the lost domain of the childhood home. But in the rephotographing of the room (the belt hung casually over Ivy's

---

[134] Ibid., p1
[135] Ibid., p1
[136] Ibid., p20

frame), and the textual glossing that it is then subjected to, Clyde can claim supremacy. The writing here is the subtlest form of graffiti imaginable.

Page 66 (Fig 4k) shows a handcar, used for manual maintenance on railways. The horizontality of the scene (the flatness of the car echoed by the clean lines of the fields and horizon) is emphasized by its vertical placing on the page. No description accompanies this photograph, but the text before and after it refers in depth to stories and ideas for which this object serves as a metonym. As with almost all other photographs not accompanied by ekphrasis in the book, the text is far richer than the picture. The photograph has a minimalist simplicity to it (shades here of the frontality of much of Walker Evans's work of this time) and could have been used as a catalogue illustration. The text a few pages earlier eulogises the glory days of American rail travel, and Clyde's grandfather's place within this epic world:

> The story goes that Grandfather Cropper was tight in his breeches, and a railroad man, when boys like myself, any boy, that is, were in Sunday School. In the course of time, Grandfather Cropper was a Brakeman on the CB & Q, and a Fireman on the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe. He was killed in the Rockies, near some pass or other, when his boiler blew up. As I remember, he died a hero's death. All through school I was apt to confuse Grandfather Cropper with all the Greek heroes, who died, as I seemed to gather, in some kind of pass.[137]

In contrast to this sweeping vision, the words and photographs on pages 71-73 (Fig 4l) provide a comic interlude which again serve to undermine Clyde's local standing. As with the handcar passage, the hayrick is shown on its side, emphasizing its abstract qualities.

> "See that old tree?" the old main said (to the children). They nodded. "Your daddy hung up there - seat of his britches - till your Grandpa came along, with the hayrick, let him down."[138]

We might say that in the handcar and hayrick passages, the photographs do the donkeywork of description that frees up Morris'ss text to digress. But it is my conviction that they actually deaden the text. They might have served as literal and metaphorical platforms for Muncy's writing, but for the reader, they slow down the already challenging work she must do to unpick the evocative narration. The photographs jarringly break the spell of the text, and this is the pattern of the whole book. There are very few instances where this jarring quality works to the benefit of the whole. A notable exception is found on pages 138 to 139 (Fig 4m). In Ed's house, Peggy and Clyde come across an album of old newspaper clippings, each one providing an insight into something of the mysterious, perhaps shameful, bachelor existence of Clyde's Uncle. The inventorising that can provide a key to character (and which happens on a wider scale throughout the rest of the book) here comes accompanied by an image of the photograph that elicits it. As with other episodes in the book, tiny details indicate the wider whole, the Jamesian 'figure in the carpet'. They also serve as a starting point for profound ruminations on character. In the working notes for his

---

[137] Ibid., p64-65
[138] Ibid., p73

novel, *The Last Tycoon*, F. Scott Fitzgerald writes, 'character is action.'[139] For Morris, perhaps 'character is objects.' Ed's clippings give us an acute insight into his character, and the text and photographs are for once in harmony here as the one provides details denied by the other: single artefacts standing in for the whole (and the 'hole') of the home place.

The Home Place resists the 'poetic' temptations (to use Cheeke's phrase again) of using photography in a sentimental mode. However, Morris does not really allow for the apparent authorlessness of his pictures and consequently, they exert an oddly disruptive pressure on his evocative prose. The effect is a little like making love to one's partner whilst being repeatedly interrupted by a boring child. True to life maybe, but hardly conducive to the kind of immersive experience that lovemaking and the reading of literature can invoke, and which I strongly suspect was Morris'ss aim.

Morris refigures the Jamesian 'pattern in the carpet' throughout *The Home Place,* moving between evocations of the design on a piece of linoleum[140] to the traces left in the deceased Ed Muncy's house. These are the marks that the infinite sweep of humanity leaves on its environment, its home place. Morris'ss constant yet subtle allusions to the wider whole signified by such traces moves us, sometimes vertiginously, between the microscopic and macroscopic: from questions around the meaning of stories to the wider meaning of our lives: 'What is it that strikes you about a vacant house? I suppose it has something to do with the fact that any house that's been lived in, any room that's been slept in, is not vacant any more. From that point on it's forever occupied'.[141] I would like to reintroduce here the Kantian view of the melancholic's time/place category error, and expand on how this idea relates to *The Home Place.* The novella seems to follow a classic five-act structure of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and dénouement. The first four acts form a plot, through its increasing use of humour, and the gradual warming of the hostile natives towards Clyde and Peggy, that lead us to expect a positive dénouement. We expect our protagonist to settle for a second time in his childhood home. But the photographs all along have provided a counter-narrative: in their mournful, largely unpeopled form, they have suggested that Lone Tree is a series of empty stages that the narrator is returning to: that his youth is essentially unrecoverable As Morris'ss contemporary Thomas Wolfe put it in the title of his 1940 novel that anticipated *The Home Place* in sentiment and storyline, *You Can't Go Home Again.*

I accept the tradition of radical modernist experiment within which Morris was working: as Hollander remarks, at the time he was taking them, the novelist had not imagined a narrative fiction growing out of these pictures.'[142] But most of the photographs should have remained part of Morris'ss research for *The*

---

[139] Fitzgerald, F. Scott, *The Notebooks of F. Scott Fitzgerald,* ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli. (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/Bruccoli Clark, 1978) p332
[140] There is a typically subtle mismatch here between the photograph and the ekphrasis (Morris p40-41) noted by Hollander, p104
[141] Morris, p132
[142] Hollander, p94

Home Place. Whilst Hollander sees *The Inhabitants* as 'fascinatingly problematic'[143] his analysis suggests that these problems are somehow solved by *The Home Place* and Morris's later image-text works. Actually, the photographs, rigid, formal and sparse, succeed only, in most instances in sapping life from the text. The more ekphrastic the relationship between word and photograph, the less this is the case.

I have suggested that Lessing's refutation of Simonides is upheld by a work like *The Home Place.* The fixed and natural signs of Morris's photographs interrupt the flow through time and space of his poetic prose. There are instances where one could argue that such an interruption suits perfectly Morris's 'time and place bound (mode) of looking'. *The Home Place* has a great many strengths and like many works of art, its weaknesses are defensible. For example, the photographs, in their coldness, their formality and in their weakening effect on the prose, could be said to have a collective force as a kind of incantatory inventory: a sort of visual equivalent to Walt Whitman's poetry. In analysing the book, I have sometimes felt they are as resistant to explication, as opaque, as words in a foreign language. This is to Morris'ss credit: his pictures invariably hold a sophisticated relationship to his words, and there is no reason to assume that he necessarily wanted his text to fuse with his pictures. Indeed, I have claimed above that they contribute to the story's nostalgia by providing a solemn counter-point to frequent points of humour in the prose. I have no doubt that the entire enterprise strengthened the power of his oeuvre as a whole. But none of this weakens my opposition to David Levi Strauss's claim that Morris's prose '(combines) with the images to form something greater than the two parts.'[144] I conclude that *The Home Place* would have been a near perfect novella if, with a few exceptions, the photographs that propelled its creation had been excluded from it.

Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs*, (see Fig 4o) from his series *Protoinvestigations* (named after Ludwig Wittgenstein's' *Philosophical Investigations)* is a paradigmatic work of the conceptual art movement. It is an installation in which a real household chair sits on the gallery floor, flanked on one side by a monochromatic photograph of the same chair (shot *in situ* in the gallery) and on another by a photographic enlargement of a dictionary definition of a chair. Why is this a work of conceptual art? Kosuth offers an explanation in his 1969 essay 'Art after Philosophy': 'the art I call conceptual is such because it is based on an enquiry into the nature of art. That is, it is (…) a working out, thinking out, of all the implications of all aspects of the concept, art.'[145]

One and Three Chairs asks of us: if both picture and words describe a chair, how, besides the obvious fact that you cannot sit on them, are they different from the chair itself? And what does Kosuth's work do by combining these functions? What appears at first a tautology might, if we are so disposed, prompt us to

---

[143] Ibid., p94
[144] Aletti, Vince, Levis Strauss, David (authors), Roth, Andrew (ed.), 'The Book of 101 Books: Seminal Photographic Books of the Twentieth Century' (New York: PPP Editions, 2001) p122
[145] Kosuth, Joseph 'Art after Philosophy' from *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993) p94

embark on the basic thought processes which conceptual art demands of us. This entails not just a questioning of what constitutes a work of art, but of what we know of the world. And it might be more than coincidental that the Kosuth piece compliments a well-known passage in *The Problems of Philosophy,* by Wittgenstein's mentor, Bertrand Russell. In the chapter, 'Appearance and Reality', Russell questions what we can truly know of an object, in this case a table, through a series of observations that undermine our assumptions about its properties (size, material, etc.).[146] Russell asks increasingly broad questions concerning what we can truly say that we know of reality, finishing (though not agreeing with) George Berkeley's idealist position that only our minds, not tables or any other matter, can truly be said to exist with complete certainty. By the same token, how are we to be sure with any certainty that Kosuth's chair is not made of wood, but chocolate, or meringue? And if this were the case, with its function of supporting an adult's body weight gone, would it remain a chair? Despite the fact that it appears to have been taken *in situ* at the gallery, how can we know that the photograph is of the actual chair in front of it? From object (chair) to symbol (photograph) to sign (dictionary definition), the chain of meanings around what seems one of the most easily nameable man-made objects offers only increasing doubt.

In Kosuth's perhaps understandably inflated stance ('Art after Philosophy' was written when he was 25 years old), conceptual art inherits this responsibility of questioning the world from philosophy at the roughly contemporaneous invention of Marcel Duchamp's first readymade and of the publication of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.* In this work, Wittgenstein attempts to show how traditional philosophy rests upon a misunderstanding of 'the logic of our language.'[147] He argues that every meaningful sentence must have a precise logical structure. This structure may be disguised by the grammatical appearance of the sentence and may therefore require the most detailed analysis in order for it to be made evident. Wittgenstein claims that such analysis establishes that every meaningful sentence is either a truth-functional composite of another simpler sentence or an atomic sentence consisting of a linking of simple names. He argues further that every atomic sentence is a logical picture of a possible state of affairs. This state must have exactly the same *formal structure* as the atomic sentence that depicts it. This 'picture theory of meaning',[148] was used by Wittgenstein to form conclusions about the nature of language. Kosuth's work of the period might be seen as a 'thinking out', to use his term, of these ideas into physical form. For Kosuth, the only meaningful art after Duchamp is conceptual.

The short essays collected in the 2009 collection *Understanding Art Objects* support the Sotheby's model of 'object based learning': that the best way to know a work is to start with the object itself, and that the riddled history of art objects cannot be separated from the history of art itself. An exception to this tendency is offered by conceptual art, as exemplified by Kosuth. In one of the essays, 'Joseph Kosuth's

---

[146] Russell, Bertrand, *The Problems of Philosophy,* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1959), see http://www.ditext.com/russell/rus1.html

[147] As quoted by Tan, Eugene, 'Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs,* 1965', from Godfrey, Tony, Aldrich, Megan, Hutt, Julia (eds.), *Understanding Art Objects (Farnham, UK: Lund Humphries, 2009*) fn 14

[148] Ibid., fn 14

One and Three Chairs, 1965', Eugene Tan discusses and eventually agrees with Kosuth's assertion that the objects themselves within an artwork hold no intrinsic value. In a footnote to his 1989 essay, 'From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique (Some Aspects of Conceptual Art, 1962-1989)', Benjamin Buchloch questions whether any of Kosuth's *Protoinvestigations* were actually produced and physically existed in 1965, when Kosuth, then 20 years old, was still a student, and in turn questions their art historical value: i.e. such a work would have a far greater claim to originality if it were produced in 1965 than if it were made in the early 1970s. Kosuth's retort was that although he did not have the financial means to produce them physically in 1965, they were conceived of and finalised in thought in that year. The instruction cards kept for museum curators take this exact form, and since for Kosuth, 'all true art after Duchamp exists only conceptually,'[149] they could rightly be dated thus. His argument is supported by the fact that the piece goes through different iterations in different editions: for example, a simple, fold up picnic style in the New York MOMA collection: a more decorous, wicker version in a private collection in Genoa, etcetera. Thus the only unchanging elements of the work are its (unshown) instruction card and its dictionary definition. Whilst I do not wholly subscribe to it, I would like to use Kosuth's remark to propose 'One and Three Chairs' as being an ekphrastic artwork. This is not because there is any ekphrastic dimension to the dictionary definition as such, but because the work constitutes for the artist a product of *inner ekphrasis*: an idea I shall return to below.

To the thoughts of Kosuth, Buchloch and Tan I would like to add those of Michael Fried and Boris Groys. In his influential 1967 text, 'Art and Objecthood', Fried criticizes Minimalist installations, where the presence of the space between objects exerts a stronger presence than the objects themselves. There is thus a 'theatricality' in Minimalism that is hostile to art. For Fried, what lies between the artworks (or even between individual art forms) can only ever be 'theatre', because concepts of quality and value are meaningful 'only within the individual arts.'[150] Groys adds to a great number of writers who have taken issue with Fried's perhaps reductive formalism in his 1995 essay, 'The Mimesis of Thinking'. For Groys, what happens between artworks in a Minimalist installation (he uses the Kosuth piece as an exemplar of this tendency) is not theatre but 'a set of rules, a formal logic, an algorithm, which may generate an image but is not itself an image, '[151] and which performs the 'mimesis of thinking' of his title.

Perhaps Kosuth's *Protoinvestigations* serve only as *illustrations* of some of Wittgenstein's *Investigations.* And if that is so, such literalism would render the claims the artist makes in 'Art after Philosophy' (that art had in some way taken over from philosophy after Wittgenstein made the latter redundant), preposterous. But that is not to discredit the value of Kosuth's enterprise. Can a description of a work of art, its physical and conceptual properties, and the affect it produces be cleanly divided? Not in the case of 'One and Three

---

[149] Kosuth, Joseph 'Art after Philosophy' from *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993) p18
[150] Fried, Michael, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998) p164
[151] Groys, Boris, 'The Mimesis of Thinking', from Donna de Salvo, (ed.), *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c.1970* (Tate Publishing, 2005) p56

Chairs.' In such works, whilst it might be easy to distinguish between the physical objects from which they are composed (the chair, the description of the chair and the photograph of it), there is a mutability of meaning between and within the object and its two representations. 'One and Three Chairs' is a melancholy work. I would like to draw out the similarities between Kristeva's notion of melancholia as a *discourse* (wherein absences and reiterations of speech are of key importance) and Groys's assertion that 'One and Three Chairs' offers a mimesis of thinking. On a superficial level, Kristeva's insistence on the significance of reiteration in melancholic speech, of seemingly 'neutral' words, for example, is echoed in Kosuth's assertion that art is a tautology, and in the *chair/chair/chair* relationship of this work.[152] But we can expand this point to note that, as the melancholic's speech circles around her lost object, a tautology circles around Kosuth's chair without, finally asserting anything. Neither the idealist position (we cannot be certain that this is a chair) nor Kosuth's rigidly conceptual position (the objects themselves are of no importance) allow us the satisfaction of truly apprehending the object. And if we take Groys's model literally, having ascribed as much value to the negative physical space of the installation as the physical presences of chair, wall text and photograph, we still find the mind essentially turning around in circles. We come back to the point that for Kosuth, his own *inner ekphrasis* of the work, his statement of it to himself, constituted both genesis and completion. There is a 'mimesis of thinking' in the arrangement of objects in a museum, but the objects themselves have only symbolic value. And his act encourages the viewer to engage in their own work of inner ekphrasis. I would like to distinguish my expression here from Murray Krieger's 'internal Ekphrasis.' In the case of Achilles' shield, the battle scenes themselves, the warriors' clothing, etcetera, are external. The actual animation of the soldiers, where the scene is reached into to create a miniature story within the wider narrative of *The Iliad,* is an example of internal ekphrasis.[153] *Inner* ekphrasis is a third category, in which the artwork itself is redescribed by the viewer to themselves. If one criterion for the success of a work of art is that it remains memorable, then we could say that the inner ekphrasis that it has performed is successful. I shall return to this idea later in this chapter, by a phenomenological reading of a work by the contemporary artists Broomberg and Chanarin.

If my analysis of 'One and Three Chairs' suffers from a sense of removal from the work itself, then that is in part due to the fact that I have not been able to see the works at first hand. My use of the plural here is important: true to Kosuth's insistence on the physical presence of the work being secondary to its value as idea, there are multiple editions of the work residing in several different collections worldwide. Nor have I been able to view in person another museum piece I will now study. 'Hopper, House by the Railroad' (Fig 4p) is taken from the 1991 series 'Ghosts' by Sophie Calle, who describes the genesis of this series in *M'as tu vu(e)?,* the monograph that accompanied her 1993 Pompidou retrospective:

---

[152] See De Duve, Thierry, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge MIT Press, 1996) in particular the essay 'More Factual Reinterpretations', p 246: de Duve notes that Kosuth took the idea of art as tautology from Ad Reinhardt: 'one imagines that Reinhardt's "art in art" as "art as art" so easily became Kosuth's "art as idea as idea" because drawing from a text allowed him to bypass the pictures'.
[153] Krieger, Murray: *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992) p25

> In June 1989 I was invited to take part in an exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Bonnard's Nude in the Bath was out on temporary loan, and so, in front of the space left empty, I asked curators, guards and other staff members to describe and draw it for me. I then replaced the missing painting with these memories. In October 1991 I repeated the exercise at the Museum of Modern Art in New York with five paintings by Magritte, Modigliani, de Chirico, Hopper and Seurat.[154]

As was the case in the Bonnard piece, the Hopper work (see 4q) is replaced with a feint grey wall stencil, which forms a kind of watermark, the same size as the actual painting, on which is written in black type each staff member's description of the works. Each of these is punctuated, in the manner of a full stop, by much smaller drawings that accompany the verbal description immediately preceding them. I am struck by how easily the work can be read both through Mitchell's linear analysis of the ekphrastic appeal, and also through Rifkin's atemporal account. Indeed, it is tempting to think Calle might have even read Mitchell's theory, so readily does the sequence in which in she has chosen to place the statements adhere to Mitchell's model. The hyperbolic claim made by the first testimony immediately gives way to the indifference that the writer thinks would accompany us on the imagined train journey that would lead to a building such as Hopper's: 'Same houses, same gas stations, same McDonalds'. But the accumulation of details in the following three accounts builds up our interest in the subject of the painting, and not just Hopper's lavishly praised painterly style. This leads to the fourth and fifth accounts, possibly given by the most senior of the interviewees: 'I don't remember the frame. Let's assume it's a generic MOMA frame in dark walnut (…) I respect (the Hopper painting), but I'm not passionate about it'. At these most significant aporia, perhaps our ekphrastic hope really will take flight. Perhaps we *will* apprehend the missing object more fully in its absence. As the fourth interview asserts: '(The painting) looks better in reproduction'.

In the sixth description, we enter Mitchell's third stage, hope giving way to fear: Hopper's building is compared to the house in Hitchcock's *Psycho*. The final four descriptions underline the ekphrastic impossibility: we are brought back, not to indifference, but to a frustration at the absence that is ultimately evoked: 'It doesn't remind me of the house where I grew up (…) it doesn't remind me of a train trip I took (...) The train just passes by. There's no need to stop'. And the final word is not a neatly typed description but a hastily handwritten 'wrong', pointing up to a central point in the largest, watermarked drawing, which we can assume matches the first interviewee's statement. A snaking arrow, like an inverted question mark, leads from the word 'wrong' to a vortex at the centre of the picture, just as Frampton's *(nostalgia)* returned us in its final description, not to the darkroom that we saw in the first frame of the film, but to an image not shown that fills the narrator with such dread that 'I fear I shall never take another photograph'. And as is also the case in *(nostalgia)*, and in Calle's oeuvre as a whole, the lapidary style of writing, the piling up of facts, leads ultimately not to a reification, but an unravelling of meaning.

---

[154] Calle, Sophie, *M'as tu vu(e)?,* (Munich: Prestel, 2003) p393

Let us now read the same artwork, not with Mitchell's tripartite model in mind, but with Rifkin's chiasmic unfolding as a guide. Accounts 1, 2, 10 and 11 form the frame of the chiasmus, rich in local architectural detail. 3, 6, 7 and 8 offer possible narrativisations of the painting. I am reminded here of James Heffernan's insistence on the storytelling impulse 'that language by its very nature seems to release and stimulate.'[155] But it is not until we reach the centre of the chiasm, ready perhaps for that longed-for apprehension of the ekphrastic object that we find instead the blind spot created by its very art historical significance. As the fifth interviewee puts it, 'It's a very famous oil on canvas identified with the Museum, since it was the first painting donated to it in 1930. It has since become an icon of American Art'. And it is this fame, Calle suggests, rather than its physical absence that most prevent us from 'seeing' the painting.

I hope that, through this 'constellation' of two readings, (crudely put, the one temporal, the other spatial) of a work from 'Ghosts', I have provided another instance of ekphrasis's enduring appeal and its uncanny resistance to definition. As Shirley Ann Johnson puts it, Calle 'privileges the texture of memory and ritual recounting over the object itself,'[156] and it is testament to her skill that Calle's Hopper work, for example, sits as happily with a sequential reading as it does a chiasmic one.

To illustrate the point by another means, or perhaps to reverse an illustration, I'd like to end this discussion of 'Ghosts' by analogy rather than analysis, by quoting, in its entirety, 'His First Minute', by Glynn Maxwell, a poem I first encountered some 15 years before coming across the Calle work in her monograph. Here again, a view from a railroad track provides both a sequential and a chiasmic consideration of a house and an imagined life in it, that the poet's lover does not share:

> Over when spoken of, like any noon,
> Our thing had peaked and toppled from its poise.
> It doesn't need you both to fell the drain
> Of aftermath, the hollow in a voice,
>
> A vertigo as thrilling as it hurts.
> I as the one to feel it second, hadn't,
> And leant against her on a train through Herts,
> Pointing a house out looking fine in a garden.
>
> Near no others, well away from the gathered
> Cottages and spire an inn we might
> Frequent if this was where we were. I wondered
> What she thought of it, as she fell her height
>
> In bliss. She glanced back from her glance away

[155] Heffernan, JAW, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993) p5

[156] Jordan, Shirley Ann: 'Exhibiting Pain: Sophie Calle's Douleur Exquise', *French Studies Volume LXI, No 2 p8 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007):* Jordan is referring to a series Calle produced a decade after *Ghosts: Disparitions* (2002) was shown in the empty spaces of a Boston gallery after the paintings had been destroyed in a fire.

And reasoned in a smoke that it was fine
As country goes but small and anyway
Too near the railway. Yes, but if the line,

I murmured, wasn't there – I saw the small
Lake of our illogic trickle dry –
Then how could we have seen the house at all?
Not being here, she asked, and caught my eye.

As Maxwell's poem makes clear, home is as much a mental construct as it is a physical place. The works I have studied so far tap into the contradictions that any realistic depiction of home must capture. This is explicit in *(nostalgia)*'s live-work lofts, the Lone Tree of *The Home Place* and the Hopper house in Calle's 'Ghosts'. The relationship is perhaps more oblique in the case of Kosuth, but certainly present in the domesticity and familiarity of the chairs the artist selects for his multiple editions of this piece. In contrast, the final work I will discuss describes a zone that is perhaps home's polar opposite: that of war. *War Primer 2* is a 2011 book by the artist duo Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, a response to, and intervention into, Bertolt Brecht's 1955 photo-book *War Primer.* My argument will be that *War Primer 2* puts into practice certain aspects of Brechtian theory that are not fully present in the original work.

War Primer is a collection of newspaper clippings of World War II photographs, under which Brecht has placed his own quatrains: four line poems with an *abab* rhyme structure. A 'primer' is an elementary textbook that serves as an introduction to an area of study: Brecht clearly envisaged a didactic function for the book. A short passage from the article he wrote in the 10th anniversary issue of the Berlin-based *Worker's Illustrated News* in 1931 gives a good indication of his aims for the project. Brecht states that, in the hands of the bourgeoisie, photography has become a 'weapon against truth (…) The immense quantity of images that is spewed out daily from the printing presses and appears to bear the stamp of truth in fact serves merely to obfuscate the way things are."[157] J.J. Long asserts in his article, 'Paratextual Profusion: Photography and Text in Berthold Brecht's *War Primer'* that the majority of literature on this work takes the position that the book essentially provides a Leninist corrective to such obfuscation.[158] *War Primer 2* treats John Willett's English language translation of the original book as a sequence of ready-mades, layering onto Brecht's monochromatic pages a further series of full-colour images of the 'War on Terror' that the artists sourced from the Internet. But this is not simply a digital collage of the contemporary and original images. In this limited edition artists' book, the upper layer of images are printed on physically separate pieces of paper to the Brecht originals. The effect is to recall the scrapbook nature of Brecht's original compilation: whilst it is a slick, polished work, its actual construction invites us to consider it as we would consider all scrapbooks: provisional; unfinished; open to correction.

In *Museum of Words*, James Heffernan offers a very broad definition of ekphrasis: 'the verbal

[157] As quoted in Thomson, Peter and Sacks, Glendyr, eds., *Key Words in Brecht's Theory and Practice of Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p515
[158] As quoted in Long, J.J., 'Paratextual Profusion: Photography and Text in Bertolt Brecht's *War Primer'* from *Poetics Today* 29:1, Spring 2008, (Tel Aviv: Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, 2008), p6

representation of visual representation'.[159] Not every plate in the original *War Primer* uses ekphrasis, but in the same expansive spirit as Heffernan, I would like to propose here that if such a work is read as Brecht intended, *then the whole of the reader's experience,* and not just the author's original poetry, constitutes an extended form of ekphrasis. Whilst the reader's mind obviously takes in an image via its visual characteristics, if she is to 'read' an image in the way Brecht espoused, there will be a kind of parallel, verbal recital, an inner act of ekphrasis and critique that also takes place. Brecht's poems occupy varying registers, from that of omniscient narrator to a more playful envoicing of the figures within the pictures. As might be expected with a primer, the work is difficult to read in one continuous sitting: perhaps this is what Brecht intended. Although they loosely follow the chronology of the war, each photo-epigram easily stands alone. The affect of each page is more powerful in a single dose. David Evans, in his article 'Brecht's War Primer: The "photo-epigram" as Poor Monument', supports this approach of reading each plate as a singular work. He draws parallels between Brecht's quatrains and the uses the Ancient Greeks made of the epigram, or 'epigraph' in funerary rites, inscribing this laconic poetic form onto stone monuments. But to draw this parallel is also to acknowledge that Brecht's poems, in part through the very limits of their form, circumscribe his project in a way that was perhaps at variance with his intentions for it, and that short circuits the potential for any inner ekphrasis in the reader. I argue below that *War Primer 2* reopens the text, bringing it paradoxically closer to Brecht's aims than the original.

There are three ideas I would like to introduce before discussing *War Primer 2.* These are Jörg Heiser's concept of 'Romantic Conceptualism', Roland Barthes' theory of the 'studium' and 'punctum', and Brecht's own notion of *Verfremdung*, variously translated as the 'de-familiarisation' or 'estrangement' technique within his conception of theatre, and which extends to his work in poetry and collage. 'Romantichscher Konzeptualismus', which Heiser curated at the Kunsthalle Nürnberg in 2007, and his accompanying book of the same name, posited that a significant number of first generation conceptual artists engaged with the Romantic tradition. Heiser suggests that works by Warhol, Jan Ader, Smithson and others provide an 'emotional kick' where we might have expected only dry formalism. 'Emotional Rescue', an essay he wrote five years earlier, sets forth the germ of this idea: Andy Warhol's 1963 film *Kiss* is interesting because of the simple originality of its concept (a number of couples kiss in front of a fixed camera) yet gripping because of its details. We could compare this distinction to the 'punctum/studium' relationship that Roland Barthes proposes in *Camera Lucida.* For Barthes, for a photograph to be memorable, it must contain a *studium,* a general field of interest, such as location or genre, and a *punctum*, a point of rupture, a 'pricking' detail that galvanizes the viewer's attention.[160] To apply the idea to *War Primer,* we must necessarily extend the studium beyond the frame of the single photograph. And if we can extend the idea to moving images, the studium in Warhol's *Kiss* might be the act of kissing, whether considered from an anthropological, romantic, or any other viewpoint. Its puncta

---

[159] Heffernan, JAW, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), p3

[160] Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, (London, Vintage, 1990) p37

are the numerous unpredictable, human details Heiser enumerates: the ‘closed eyes and short, excited looks.’[161] Heiser proceeds to question Sol LeWitt’s assertion, in his essay, ‘Paragraphs on Conceptual Art’, that a conceptual artist’s work must be ‘dry’ (i.e. in opposition to the ‘emotional kick’ provided by Romantic and Expressionist art) in order to become ‘intellectually interesting’. As Heiser reframes it, ‘charging a concept with an emotional investment (…) might focus rather than distract.’[162] Heiser’s aim is not to undermine Conceptual Art’s claims to originality, but to argue that its roots lay in earlier European thought. For example, he points out that a concern with systemization was present from the inception of Romanticism. August Wilhelm Schlegel wrote at the turn of the 19th century, that art is ‘an intentionally determined utterance, or clearly thought delimitation’ but also asserted that it is ‘equally deadly for the mind to have a system and to have none.’[163] Schlegel was famously preoccupied with open process and fragmentation, but not at the expense of an overall sense of meaning. Mending this split, between chaos and order, or as Heiser puts it, ‘(adjusting) the mind to a contradictory order’, has been central to the Romantic project and, despite first impressions, has remained so to avant-garde practice.

There is a vast body of critical writing devoted to Brecht, and he wrote a great number of theoretical texts himself. For the purposes of this critique, I would like to offer only Peter Brooker’s definition of the term *Verfremdung*. In *Key Words in Brecht's Theory and Practice of Theatre,* he writes that ‘the term “alienation” is an inadequate and even misleading translation (…) The terms “de-familiarisation” or “estrangement”, (…) give a more accurate sense of Brecht's intentions. A better term still would be “de-alienation.”’[164] The jerky shifts in scene and exposition of the technical apparatus that we find in Brecht’s Epic Theatre have clear parallels in the *War Primer*. The mid-grey background onto which the epigrams and newspaper clippings are pasted are pointedly artless, suggesting a scrapbook or diary. The form provides a visual prompt for the reader to engage in the work of inner ekphrasis. To become de-alienated, she must, following Brecht’s example, repeatedly describe the image afresh for herself, and in so doing, keep that reading provisional, unfixed, alive.

Plate 24 (Fig 4r) of Brecht’s work shows a view of the Thames during the Blitz. A German bomber hovers ominously above an atmospheric view of Tower Bridge, impervious to the criss-crossing lines of searchlights below it. Underneath is the following quatrain: *What you see here, caught in your night defenses/These steel and glass cocoons for killing people/With tons of bombs, are just the consequences/For all, and not the causes of the evil.* Brecht warns us not to invest the machinery of war with too much significance and to consider the invisibility of power and of evil. Broomberg and Chanarin’s addition (Fig 4s) updates this vision of aerial warfare, underlining how the nature of that invisibility has changed. A still of CCTV footage from an airport security screening room replaces the

[161] Heiser, Jörg, ‘Emotional Rescue’, from *Frieze,* Issue 71, November - December 2002 (London, Frieze Publishing, 2002), p1
[162] Ibid., p1
[163] As quoted by Heiser, p2
[164] As quoted in Thomson, Peter and Sacks, Glendyr, eds., *Key Words in Brecht's Theory and Practice of Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p515

German bomber. We have shifted from an age where air travel is the preserve of the military and the very rich, to one where it plays a major role in tourism, and is fraught with post 9/11 paranoia. If plate 24 in *War Primer* is perhaps too pat, too self-contained, then the addition in *War Primer 2* of the CCTV overlay provides a suitably de-alienating effect. If we now recall how broad a definition the Ancient Greeks gave to ekphrasis (relating one art form through the means of another), then we might even say that there is not only the verbal/visual relationship at play here, but a visual/visual play operating as well. The means of production of the top image – stilled, digital, colour CCTV footage converted into offset printing – are markedly different to that of the lower: analogue, monochrome photography made using multiple negatives, converted into a digital file which is in turn made into offset printing. We are left hanging: Brecht's original is opened up. The knowledge we can bring to bear on the new collage (the stringency of contemporary airport security) floats the image between our understanding of its semiotic (but not spatial) sense, and our uncertainty regarding the evil that lurks behind it.

In plate 40 (Fig 4t) of the original, six studio headshots of Nazi leaders are placed side by side in a three-column grid. The epigram reads: *Here are six murderers/Don't turn away, and don't just nod and murmur, 'that's the truth'/Showing them up has cost us to this day/Fifty great cities and most of our youth*. Here, Brecht anticipates the reader's 'compassion fatigue' and the possibility of her ignoring the picture because the men, it would appear, can be so easily condemned. The gambit of *War Primer 2's* update of the plate (Fig 4u) might at first appear to be obfuscation. Whereas the *War Primer* gives us images loaded with Nazi insignia that we can place easily within a Manichean rubric, we now have no such recourse. The hands might belong to any political or business leader on earth. And Broomberg and Chanarin's crops suggest that there might be no essential difference between the signs given by an American senator or a Libyan terrorist. To read this work with Heiser's and Barthes's ideas in mind is instructive here. On a certain level, *War Primer 2*, even more than *War Primer,* has affinities with some of the key works of Conceptual Art: think of Ed Ruschas's 1963 book *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations,* for instance. The stations look practically identical: there is minimal variance from one page to the next. Here, seriality is used both as formal construct and as a suggestion of a political horizontality: the non-choice at the heart of capitalism. Although the hands in plate 40 are framed by a minimalist grid, the gestures themselves form a dancing, hypnotic screen, which we need to look beyond or above. For me, the punctum, the emotionally animating detail, here is the hand in the bottom left corner. It is poised, caliper-like to measure the negligible distance that probably exists between the multiple political positions that the other hands spell out.

Plate 45 (Fig 4v) in the Brecht work shows three men with the caption: 'Men at Work. Chairman Sol Bloom of the House Foreign Affairs Committee debates with isolationist George Holden Tinkham. Behind the…' The rest of the caption is cropped off. Below, it, Brecht's text reads: *behold us here, antagonists. See how/Each angry look is like a poisoned dagger. /A world of difference lies between us now. /The quarrel is: whose share's to be the bigger.* Over the faces of the American senators, Broomberg

and Chanarin have pasted a photograph of Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad (Fig 4w), a vehemently anti-Semitic leader known for his fervent denial of the Holocaust, kissing an Orthodox Jew. *War Primer 2'*s footnotes reveal the other man to be a representative of the 'Jews Against Zionism' group in New York, so the picture is less ironic than it at first appears. But the obvious suggestion made by the juxtaposition is that no significant progress has been made in the Middle East in the sixty years that separate the two photographs. To draw on Heiser and Barthes again, it is as if the studium that the text and images offer is the perhaps endlessly contested territory in the Middle East. As with the Warhol film, the punctum and emotional 'punch' of the composite picture lie in the shocking detail of the unexpected kiss. Momentarily, Ahmadinejad's eyes seem closed not because of icy, aloof diplomacy but in a genuinely sensuous apprehension of the kiss to come.

I would now like to reintroduce W.J.T. Mitchell's three phase model for the linear sequencing of the ekphrastic appeal: indifference followed by hope, then fear. All three responses can be easily evoked by war reportage, and if we think of the 'inner ekphrasis' that I mentioned above, it seems especially pertinent to the mixed, ambivalent feelings the viewer can be subjected to when confronted with such imagery. But whilst this might be a useful structure when considering individual photo-epigrams, I find the chiasmic structure that I have discussed elsewhere more useful when considering the overall form of *War Primer 2* and its implications for political thought and action. One does not read Brecht's *Primer* from Plates 1 through to 85, in a linear fashion. Rather, one dips into it, returning to particular passages that are pertinent to one's own experience. So the process might follow, for example, a loosely chiasmic pattern of 1, 85, 2, 83, 4, 80, etc. Of course, the realities of even the most docile reader's experience are likely to be more complicated than this. It might help here to think of the horizontal, rhizomatic thought structure that Deleuze and Guattari propose in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* whose 'antigenealogical'[165] nature they contrast to the arborescent structure, with its concern for end points, in use within Enlightenment thinking. Certainly, the rhizome would appear to parallel the structure of the Internet, and to some degree, by extension, map any user's experience of it. But in terms of the reading subject, she must retain some teleological sense of convergence, or end-point, for there to be any motive to reading in the first place. Even if one's aim shifts as one reads, one still needs an aim. And in ekphrasis, there is still a binary opposition at play: between image and text, or in the case of *War Primer 2,* multiple images and text. So it remains useful to think of the chiasmic structure, even if only as a base, with frequent diversions from this pattern. Reading is, for Brecht, a dialectical process. The engaged political subject uses the press not to reassert their unthinking beliefs, but to subject themselves to a continual process of renewal. She looks and reads, acts in the real world, returns to her reading and looking, and the cycle repeats itself. Images reflect text and experience in an infinitely receding and changing model of perceptual growth and refinement. By analogy, picture the effect created by two mirrors, one normal and one tinted red, when

---

[165] Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (New York: Continuum, 2004), p21

placed in front of one another. Each repeated reflection will be of an ever-varying shade of red. She thus modifies and recalibrates her point of view.

A number of photographic and textual fragments throughout each book could be said to provide the *puncta* or affects that activate the overall works. And if Conceptual Art places a strong emphasis on the notion of the viewer completing the work, then Heiser's point seems to be that an 'emotional kick' might be the very precondition needed for a sustained, sophisticated dialogue with, and hence, a completion of, a work of art. *War Primer 2* compounds a similar idea at the heart of the original *War Primer,* that the book itself is only a starting point for the reader. Through deceptively simple over-layering, Broomberg and Chanarin suggest that this process becomes perhaps more demanding, and all the more necessary, as time goes on. Heiser also brings his reading of Schlegel to bear on his interpretation of Conceptual Art. The modern subject, rather than expecting the work of art to enshrine classical ideals such as beauty or harmony, must instead adjust his or her mind to the inconsistencies and complexities proposed by it. We can find echoes of this sentiment in Brechtian *Verfremdung*, which is itself at play within *War Primer.* Brecht's project presents a continuous stream of images that have been 'corrected' by the dissident timbre of his quatrains.

As a formal exercise, *War Primer 2* might be considered rather slight: But as a reification of Brecht's imperative to treat images critically, Broomberg and Chanarin's book is exemplary. What Brecht's work suggests and Broomberg and Chanarin's compounds, is not that we discredit the role of the photographer in itself, but that we pay it the respect of subjecting it to critique: of keeping it alive, of reanimating it. Whilst the range of news media might already have felt comprehensive to consumers in the second world war (the radio, the newsreel, the newspaper) the advent of the Internet, 'rolling news' and 24/7 reporting makes the task of treating political imagery sceptically even more important, and even more challenging, today. How does one confront such a glut of images, without yielding to compassion fatigue? There might at first appear a laziness, or even a political naivety to many of the individual plates in *War Primer 2.* But the work is perhaps more than the sum of its parts. It highlights the very need for us political subjects to remain active and vigilant. In a sense, to update the *War Primer* is an impossible task: the dominant visual mechanics of war have changed and sped up to an almost unrecognizable level, and have of course shifted from print to screen-based media. But every user of a computer automatically creates a scrapbook in the form of their 'user cache' as they surf the web. The process is analogous to images lodging in the short-term memory, soon to disappear. *War Primer 2* augments Brecht's project, dramatizing the necessity that we all keep scrapbooks, mental or otherwise, ready to be added to or expanded. David Evans theorises that Brecht's photo-epigrams are 'poor monuments', whose very material flimsiness serves as 'an aid to critical remembering.'[166] But the lapidary nature of the texts also have the effect of sealing off the work as whole, so that the enterprise becomes perhaps more hermetic than Brecht intended, at odds with the

---

[166] Evans, David, 'Afterimage: Brecht's *War Primer:* the "photo-epigram" as poor monument' from *Afterimage,* March/April 2003, (New York: *Afterimage* Publishing, 2003), p6

scrapbook-like nature of its purpose and design. The service Broomberg and Chanarin do to Brecht's project is one of literal and metaphorical reopening. The imperative suggested by *War Primer 2* is that we remain aware of the scrapbooks we are all creating, both consciously and unconsciously, and that we keep them open, ever ready for adjustment.

Brecht's techniques suggest ways of picking apart images that are complemented by such theoretical strategies as those employed by conceptual artists and by post-structuralist writers like Barthes. Broomberg and Chanarin employ both here. 'War Primer 2', and in vastly different ways, the other four works that I have discussed through this chapter, remind us that we continue to need images, but we also need to keep looking behind and beyond them. And this need is highlighted and dramatized when we consider works that deploy the photography-ekphrasis relationship. My final chapter will summarize some of the different ways in which such 'dramatizations' are achieved and I will put forward my rationale for what makes the photography-ekphrasis relationship so pertinent to lived experience and to what we can expect of good art.

Chapter 5

Writing off photography: Conclusions

'The relation of languages to painting is always an infinite relation. It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted with the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other's terms: it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendour is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax'.

Michel Foucault, The order of things: archaeology

Words fail me and I fail words. Describing things well is difficult: the works that I have analysed here show that this seemingly simple enterprise can be as complicated and as philosophically vexed as analysis, argument or critique. If Foucault is right, if the relation of languages to painting cannot be reduced to the others' terms, then perhaps that irreducibility is something we should celebrate. The force of the works I have discussed in this study lie in their *not taking representation for granted*:

> What I wanted to do seemed simple. I wanted to create something alive and shocking enough that it could stand alongside a morning in somebody's life. The most ordinary morning. Imagine, trying to do that. What foolishness.[167]

These are the final words spoken by the poet Richard Brown in Michael Cunningham's novel, *The Hours,* just after he has received a lifetime achievement award and moments before he throws himself from the window of his friend's apartment block. Doomed though it might be, attempting such a representation, something to 'stand alongside a morning', as ekphrasis stands alongside its object, is as important as ever. It might not be a matter worthy of suicide, but it remains a crucial, political task as we enter a deeply uncertain century.

In the same spirit in which Simonides summoned up his memory theatre, I would now like to invite you into an imaginary 'memory gallery', a space in which are installed each of the five artworks I discussed in the previous chapter. Let us now consider this sample of ekphrastic artworks, not in the sequence in which I have written about them, but in the linear chronology of their production. Enter the space and sit down on a lone wooden chair to read the yellowing pages of 1948's *The Home Place.* Once you have finished, stand and observe the chair you were sat on: it is part of an artwork by Joseph Kosuth from 1965. Look at it alongside the photographic and verbal representations that combine with it to form the trinity of 'One and Three Chairs'. Sit down again to watch 1971's *(nostalgia)*, which is projected onto the wall in front of you. Rise again, turn to the right, and stand in front of Sophie Calles's 'Ghosts', from 1991. Where you might have expected another piece of American vernacular architecture that *The Home Place* describes so lovingly, this time, Edward Hopper's 'House by the Railroad', you will see something else instead. Calle presents us only with verbal descriptions and loose sketches of the Hopper work: a painting that many of those bearing witness to it assumed they knew very well. Her exhumation points to how fragile such knowledge is, and that the work of description is inexhaustible. Sit down again. The domesticity of 'One and Three Chairs' and *The Home Place,* and the melancholy of *(nostalgia)* and 'Ghosts' might have lulled you into a false sense of security, but you are brought back with a sharp shock into the present. Underneath *The Home Place*, there is another book, Broomberg and Chanarin's *War Primer 2,* a 2011 detournement of the 1955 Brecht original. *War Primer 2* prompts its audience to engage in a kind of *inner ekphrasis,* an internal dialogue about the images it contains, its antecedents, and the wider meaning of war. This in turn might prompt the philosophical reader to reflect on how she is always already engaged in

[167] Cunningham, Michael, *The Hours* (Harper Perennial, London 2006) p199

a fragmentary, incomplete act of description, both of herself and of the changing world around her: in short, that the act of inner ekphrasis mirrors subjectivity itself.

I have tried to refrain from making generalisations in this thesis, but to draw a conclusion, I feel I must make a few here. Each of the works I have discussed offers sensitive, nuanced reflections on art and image making, and in the case of *The Home Place* and *(nostalgia),* the human predicament itself. I have insisted on making value judgments because it was important to me to submit my works of influence to the same kind of questioning to which I submit my own artworks. The question 'is this good or bad work?' is not always the most important question that needs to be asked, and in some cases, even asking it might seem simplistic or naïve. But for me, it is the only question that *must* be asked of all works. Whilst the different value judgments I have applied might at first appear arbitary, this is because I have tried to judge each work on its own terms. For example, 'One and Three Chairs' seems to be concerned only with language and description, so it would be unfair to complain that it is a 'dry' work that does not engage with the emotions. Despite the above, I feel *(nostalgia)* stands clearly above the other works I have written about here, in being a masterpiece. As Rachel Moore has pointed out, this film succeeds in creating 'dialectical images' forty years after Walter Benjamin's formulation of the term. It comes as close as any work I have encountered to capturing my own experience of linear time. This entails the paradoxical acknowledgement that time cannot be reconstituted in a linear form, and that in turn it is impossible to fix history, identity or memory. Another feature common to each of the works, but most pronounced in Frampton's film, has been the use of ekphrasis as a paradoxically unraveling and binding force. Just as Frampton's multiple ekphrases contain each of the memories the narrator attempts to capture, they also prompt the viewer to digress on their own work of *inner ekphrasis:* both to extend the narrator's verbal accounts, but also to respond linguistically to the parallel world offered by the pictures. All photographs invite their witnesses to dream and to verbalize. In the case of *(nostalgia*), the structure of the film itself might be too dense and the experience too claustrophobic for the viewer to do such dreaming in the presence of the work. But there is thus a double prompt for the viewer to engage in reverie *after* viewing the film, viewing her everyday world with *(nostalgia)*'s whimsical, resigned ekphrases ringing in her ears

When I began the research towards 'Photography, Memory and Ekphrasis', I was expecting to find artworks, websites for example, that felt original in form: that seemed to extend the modernist concern with formal originality, however unlikely that enterprise might feel in the wake of postmodernism. I have been surprised to find that I was drawn instead to works that, on at least one level in every case, are formally straightforward: books; a film; a simple installation; a wall drawing. But each offers additional layers of reading to its content and form that deepens its meaning. This reaffirms to me how crucial the task of adopting a critical position is: as Didi-Huberman and Derrida, amongst others have outlined, we can experience the greatest insight through looking at *existing* structures, existing narratives, afresh. Another example of this is the use of 'sprung rhythm' in the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins, the Victorian poet whom I will mention in more detail in *Appendix 1.* Sprung rhythm is designed to imitate

the patterns of natural speech: it is constructed from a number of feet, in each of which, no matter how many syllables it is constructed from, the first and only the first, syllable is stressed. So for example, in Hopkins' best known poem, *Pied Beauty*, the first two lines read: 'Glory be to God for dappled things/For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;'[168]. One possible scansion of the poem might run like this: '|Glory|be to|God for|dappled|things—/For|skies of|couple-|colour as a|brinded|cow;'. So imagine the stress coming on *Glo, be, God, dap, things,* etcetera. Hopkins did not *invent* 'sprung rhythm', but he claimed to have discovered it in English folk verse, in Shakespeare and Milton. And this in turn enabled him to use it with a rare, original power in his own poetry. Again, the work of inner ekphrasis proves crucial here: that vast, unending inner bibliography of Hopkins's that he brought to bear on his own poetry.

I would like to cite once more Lessing's refutation of Simonides's *ut pictura poesis:* to remind the reader again of this fundamental mismatch: the spatiality of picture making versus the temporarily and the *linearity* of verbalization. Ekphrasis 'rephrases,' and so reconstitutes, privileged objects and actions within the world, through the means of art. In psychoanalysis, the melancholic's 'lost' object is neither found nor given up through its verbal reconstitution. Similarly, the original or imagined artwork of ekphrasis can gain presence and a quasi-reality through its repeated description, but the enterprise is doomed to fail: it is impossible. The melancholic attempts to find in *time* the *place* that they lack: even if the place did exist, her experience of it can only now be brought alive temporally, through the memory of a memory. And just as the melancholic object and the ekphrastic object can never exist, at the heart of the venture of making fiction is another deep paradox: poetic truth is gained through factual miscegenegation. Through making bastardized written or photographic accounts of our own worlds, we create new worlds, through which it is hoped we can capture the experience of subjectivity better than in the documentary form. This process is dramatized and made obvious by the ekphrastic artwork.

This enterprise has been necessarily dense with allusion and quotation, so I would like to conclude with two especially pertinent citations. The first is from a celebrated essay by TE Hulme, which underlines the challenge of art making. He writes in 1911's 'Romanticism and Classicism':

> The great aim (of poetry) is accurate, precise and definite description. The first thing is to realize how extraordinarily difficult this is (….) it is only by a concentrated effort of the mind that you can hold it (language) fixed to your own purpose.[169]

I would go further: writing poetry is difficult because truly precise description is impossible. It is this very impossibility that each of the ekphrastic artworks I have discussed embraces, and this in turn lends them a lyrical dimension, even in a work as formally stark as 'One and Three Chairs.'

---

[168] Manley Hopkins, Gerard, 'Pied Beauty': (www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173664, 1918)
[169] Hulme, T.E., 'Romanticism and Classicism' (http://www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/essay/238694, 1911)

‘Life must be understood backwards. But it must be lived forwards’. This is one of Kierkegaard’s best-known epigrams, but it is actually a truncation of a longer diary entry that I would like to quote in full here:

> It is quite true what philosophy says; that life must be understood backwards. But then one forgets the other principle: that it must be lived forwards. Which principle, the more one thinks it through, ends exactly with the thought that temporal life can never properly be understood precisely because I can at no instant find complete rest in which to adopt a position: backwards[170].

Of course, to speak in terms of ‘understanding backwards’ is itself a simplification of how we relate to the past. Models that I have put forward in this study such as the chiasmus and the memory theatre, whilst being themselves oversimplifications, at least begin to address the *spatial* dimension of how we must experience our pasts and futures. My study begins and ends with books: they themselves might be seen to hold a chiasmic structure (think of the grouped pamphlets in a classic binding), which is at odds with the manner in which most non-reference works are designed to be experienced: as chronologically linear. The myriad ways in which one can spatialize the Internet should be invoked here too because the web is anything but linear: but that is another thesis altogether. The ekphrasis-object relationship mirrors our own experience of life: its indeterminacy: its resistance to immediate conversion to narrative. We are doomed and frustrated to capture it through language, but language will never be equivalent to the manner in which we experience time and thought. Far from being an outmoded form of rhetoric, ekphrasis, with its troubling of the very foundational differences between words and images, could well remain a powerful mode of art making in this millennium. My research has asserted that its epistemologically explosive combination with photography has created some of the best and most philosophically challenging art of the last sixty years.

[170] Kierkegaard, Søren, *Journals and Notebooks, v 4* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) p696

Appendix 1

Recollected Places: A critique of my research by practice

Invisible Machine

Ekphrasis: invisible
machine. Makes pictures:
makes words; makes pictures.

Based in part on the conclusions of my thesis, I would like to offer a critique of some of my own works here. Each of the three works I will discuss in this appendix have their genesis in an absence: so the ekphrastic principle is always at play. This is a model for a *descriptive* practice that is not rooted in mimesis *per se.* I hope it demonstrates that ekphrasis is at once a conservative, radical and endlessly productive means to create. A vast number of contemporary artists across the world use combinations of image and text in their practice. Within this heterogeneous field, there are significant numbers who employ the ekphrasis-photography relationship, for example, the Mexicans Inaki Bonillas and Maruch Santiz-Gomez and the Chilean Alfredo Jaar. However, all of the practices I have come across so far use the relationship *incidentally* as part of a wider set of conceptual strategies. My work employs ekphrasis-photography as its conceptual *starting point.*

My piece *Love's Knowledge (Inventory for N)* (Looped digital video, 1min 21 sec, 2008: see Figs. 6a and b) was inspired by the idea of *(nostalgia),* although I think it is pertinent to note that, whilst I had read about Frampton's work several years earlier, I did not actually see his film until *after* my completion of *Love's Knowledge* in 2008. My piece also draws on the family slide show: a popular means for displaying transparencies in the 1970s and 1980s. *Love's Knowledge* is formed from a series of still photographs taken in a flat that had been shared by two lovers for several years. The pictures were taken on the day they began removing their possessions after separating. The careful framing of certain features in the flat (for example, the line of books featuring *Love's Knowledge* by the philosopher Martha Nussbaum), and the inclusion of certain details (a box of nappies, a child's rocking horse) suggest happiness and its shadow, a shared past and an uncertain future were latent in these rooms from the beginning. Perhaps the relationship was doomed from the start. As the pictures dissolve into one another, and at the exact point where the viewer can discern the details of the photographs, the next picture begins to materialise. Thus the film beckons the viewer into a still magical world of a sexual and mental union whilst denying us any attempt to truly 'see' or understand its particulars. I meant to create a kinetic shrine to the ethereality, or perhaps even the impossibility, of domestic love.

One starting point for this piece was the desire to synthesize two seemingly contrasting accounts that I wanted to give, not of a sexual relationship, but of its *scene.* How could one simultaneously inventorise the minutiae of such a scene and also give it poetic force? The home, as we all know, is a locus of thought, feeling and physicality. Naturally, it is also a prime 'target' for the disruption of these conditions. If we are to think of how an artist or dramatist could represent such a disruption, and a messy, protracted divorce, they might first define, before self-consciously mixing up, the three 'audience appeals' of rhetoric, that is, the *logos* ('reason'/'word'), *pathos* (emotion) and *ethos* (soul/being). These divisions were in my mind when I began work on the piece. Another starting point was a quotation of Robert Rauschenberg's I recalled at this time, that a friend paraphrased for me, where he spoke of his resistance towards photography as a medium because 'if I were to photograph *anything*, I would then want to photograph *everything*: every square inch of the entire world.' The ridiculousness of such a project (such

an enterprise, as Rauschenberg well knew, would run against the principle of exclusion that is central to photographic seeing) led me to think of the more modest, though nonetheless massive, problems inherent in representing a period of a person's life through photography. An inventory might at first seem to be a rather neutral form of such a representation and a *photographic* inventory the most neutral form possible, because of its lack of an organising singular consciousness, to borrow Cheeke's phrase again. Indeed, it might at first seem the very opposite of the encomium I sought to create. But I started to think of the incantatory effects of certain poems, and the skilful forms of listing one finds in James or Proust. My hunch from reading about it had been that *(nostalgia)* formed similar effects visually, and that some of the same technical effects might create the affect I was looking for.

The piece *does* capture a sense of melancholy, of time passing, and of the impossibility of forming any kind of truly coherent or comprehensive inventory of a life. Furthermore, because the succession of quite detailed images bleeding into one another is relatively rapid, I think it also captures how we struggle to make sense of experience as it passes before us, precisely because even recognising and naming the experience in the first place is difficult, before we can even *begin* to analyse it. Frampton's film contains a kind of counter narrative: a lack of synchronisation between word and image that means we are always struggling to reconcile memory with lived experience and description. This would be the case no matter how many times we watch the film: in some senses, the confusion increases with each viewing. But this does not happen in *Love's Knowledge.* The photographs fade confusingly into one another, but because the film loops, we can, after a second or third viewing, begin to place and understand each of these objects, in a manner that is never available to us in *(nostalgia).* Looking back at the piece, one way in which I might have paralleled Frampton's asynchronicity might have been to programme my piece in such a way that the sequence of images is randomized, suggesting an infinite variation of repetition: 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8 followed by 2,3,1,4,7,8,5,6 followed by 8,7,1,3,2,6,5,4, etc. As a result, the overlapping parts of imagery would not be so easy to 'decode' with each viewing as they would be placed with other, unfamiliar imagery each time. Although I did not realise this at the time, I think when I came to make the lightbox and video work *Couriers of Kite Hill* in 2010 (Figs. 6f -6k), by this time having seen *(nostalgia),* I was better placed to make a piece that did greater justice to a sense of asynchronicty, and the impossibility of fixing time in an artwork.

Couriers of Kite Hill an artwork split across two floors of a building, grew out of my thoughts on the relationship between the main subject of an altarpiece and its *predella* (the long horizontal structure at the 'foot' of an altarpiece). Such structures are usually painted with narrative scenes expanding upon the subject of the larger images above. I was specifically interested in Duccio's *'Maesta'* (1308-11), where a depiction of the Virgin occupies the largest panel. She is surrounded by smaller Bible scenes. Extant remains of the altarpiece no longer in Siena are divided among several other museums, and I was curious that the piece I had known and assumed to be a discrete work in itself, the *Annunciation* in London's National Gallery, was actually a fragment of a much larger whole. I wanted to draw on an idea I had had,

of the actual meaning of the *'Maesta'* (which would have served to illuminate the Bible for a largely illiterate congregation), being, in a sense, pulled apart by its physical dismemberment and of that meaning later existing across and *between* different countries. This anomaly in the *'Maesta's'* history seemed to me an interesting art historical exaggeration of the way in which meaning is already divided in altarpieces, to form a sometimes uneasy whole. This in turn fed into my desire to make a single piece of work that exists across two discrete rooms.

On the lower gallery floor, a panoramic photograph contained in a four metre wide light box depicts a night scene shot high from a raised viewpoint in parkland: recognisably the London night sky from the north, though with its view reversed on the vertical axis. Several figures in the foreground are using multi-coloured umbrellas to illuminate the technical activity they are engaged in. The video on the floor above, a slide show of still images cross-fading into one another, is composed of details from the photograph and stills from other sources (including an archival photograph of artist Christopher Welsby and a photograph I took in Japan) and a textual element overlapping the bottom of the frame, as with subtitles in a translated film, although this piece has no sound. This text, typed in *Courier* font by two of the fictional 'couriers' (M and L) that are depicted in the photographs, refers explicitly to the coincidence of two culturally significant moments that took place on or near this spot on Hampstead Heath. 'Kite Hill' is the location where Newton, a keen builder of kites as a boy, flew his inventions. This fact, and his work in optics (in particular his invention of the telescope and his discovery that white light is composed the colour spectrum) are alluded to in the panoramic photograph and explicated more directly, in the video component. In 1972, Christopher Welsby followed a long line of British artists by making landscape art on the Heath. Welsby's video held the distinction of being made without a person operating the camera. In 'Wind Vane', two tripods with wind vane attachments were positioned fifty feet apart. Both cameras were free to pan through 360 degrees in the horizontal plane. The movements of the two cameras, filming simultaneously, were controlled by wind strength and direction. I read the piece as a reflection on the way in which cinematic mechanisms (which could be a metaphor for industrial civilization) have affected mankind's relationship to nature. There is also a nice irony in the suggestion that whilst our machine-made world arguably enhances our experience of nature, we are also irretrievably alienated from it by our own creations. The text component of the video reads:

> *'Dear I and C,*
>
> *We celebrated last night. Thirty years since C made the wind-vane, and 350 since Isaac proved white light is composed of the colours of the spectrum. We visited the point where Isaac flew kites as a boy with our own hybrid wind vanes to pay tribute to both of you. Our umbrellas were the colours of I's prism. As our sails spun slowly and our video cameras edged jerkily across the horizon, I thought of each part of the spectrum's infinity of colour matching a place and time in London…carried to its spot by the breeze of 1971 and then the winds of every day before and since then: fierce; soft; undirected; crosswinds; migrant winds; the westerlies… Though we barely caught the feeble gusts last night, in my dream a few hours later, our umbrellas spun faster and faster, eventually exploding into the white light of I's prism. Invisible like the wind: every story that makes London impossible to describe: every film about it that never was. And*

beyond all of this… gardens and parkland across the world: rainbows arching across bridges in Istanbul, Tokyo and Pretoria…

Thanks to both of you,

M and L'

There is a rough synchronisation between the ekphrasis and the images shown, but there is frequently a slight delay between the two. Viewers need to read the local history I have described above (on a wall text located near the video component) and the ninety second loop needs to be watched several times, before the sequence of events described can be clearly understood.

Our experience of places is obviously affected by our knowledge or ignorance of their particularities. One can be overwhelmed by the visual sensuality of an unfamiliar place or overburdened by memory in a place known well. This knowledge is of course projected back onto a landscape when we revisit it so that one's relationship to landscape is always already unstable. I wanted this tension between naïveté and experience to be reflected in the work the viewer would have to do in moving between the two physical components of the piece: it can only be fully experienced by our moving between the two sites. The unfixable, shifting history of place, its ultimate opacity ('*every story that makes London impossible to describe'*) is echoed by the way in which the work cannot be physically experienced in one moment. This is of course a quality of any temporal work such as a film or a poem. *Couriers* expands this limitation placed on the viewer, both by the history painting scale of the panorama (its totality of detail impossible to grasp in one view) and by the physical dislocation of the video and photographic components.

One of the failings of the piece is that there is perhaps an insufficient level of asynchrony in the relay between image and text. At certain points, for example, as we are reading the text 'our umbrellas spun faster and faster', we are shown these same objects. Perhaps I lacked the editorial confidence to really exaggerate this non-simultaneity. I might have also made the formal separation of text and image more pronounced, for example by removing all slides and making the video component a sequence of texts merging into one another. Despite these formal failings, the work does successfully mimic a number of the semantic ironies of ekphrasis that *(nostalgia)* so deftly activates. Frampton's film goes some way to imitating consciousness in a more sophisticated manner than any 'straight' work of literature of film does. I borrowed many of the tropes I cited in Chapter 4 that *(nostalgia)* deploys to do this. For example, the subject/object dichotomy is explored in my work by the introduction of the fictional letter component into the video and its reference to a film that does not exist. I think I did succeed in a least hinting towards the complexities of our relationship to place. But *(nostalgia)* does this though a formal elegance and simplicity that my piece lacks. Even more of the source material could have been jettisoned (such as the details on the umbrellas in the video) without any of the dense psychogeographical references being lost. My problem at this point remained not knowing what to leave out.

I will conclude this study of a selection of my own works from the last four years by looking at my most recent body of work. *Halcyon Song* is a 2012 series of photo-text vignettes, which completes a trilogy of photo-text works, the first two being the 2009 exhibition and photo book *Grief Tree* and the 2011 photo book and (to be staged at some point the future, I hope) exhibition, *Hokkaido Postcard.* The latter, the result of an artist's residency I was given in Kyoto, took the fictional positions of various Japanese characters I invented. I combined photographs of or 'by' these characters with written narratives by them: poems, short stories; love letters. I wanted to sharpen the focus of that approach in *Halcyon Song.* So I limited myself to one 'voice' and one poetic form: the sonnet. Again, *Halcyon Song* has formed both an exhibition (see Figures 6p to 6s) and book (6o). A 'halcyon' is a mythical bird, often identified as a kingfisher, said to calm the wind and waves from its floating nest, and so was a natural choice of protagonist for my work, where I often fuse the fantastical and the everyday. Here, the pictures show the viewpoint of a female kingfisher as she searches for nesting sites along the length of London's Regents Canal. Each is preceded by a poem where I capture the bird's observations on her quest and her meditations on her place in the wider world. The canal runs along my commute from flat to studio. When I first conceived of the project, I was reading James Joyce's *Ulysses* and wanted to make a project that described a daily, familiar journey of some sort. From this, I developed the idea of the kingfisher's search for a nest taking place over the course of a day, and this day being a microcosm of her world and a longer-term search for home and for meaning.

As is the case with the video and light box work spread across two floors in *Couriers of Kite Hill,* the photographs and poems in *Halcyon Song* might appear at first to exist as independent entities. But as I have emphasised, it is important the viewer recognizes that the actual 'artwork' here is the combination of the two. So, for example the gallery floor plan when these works were exhibited clearly marks each work as being composed from 'photograph and text' even though they were placed on different walls. The ideal, perhaps 'purest' state I have found so far, for this combination of the text and the photographs has been the book form. Here, I feel more comfortable with how the viewer is less likely to question the physical difference between the printed work and printed image: both exists in the viewer's mind and can be, as it were, 'toggled' between as they turn from page to page, each time holding the memory of the image, or the previous poem, in their head.

As the thesis has made clear, I am also interested in finding parallels between the way one constructs a picture and a poem. In this project, I used the classical structure of the chiasmus that I first mentioned in Chapter 3: the cross-like repetition of a thing (ideas, words, numbers) in an inverted grammatical order. This is used as a rhyme structure in the sonnets that make up the textual component of *Halcyon Song: abba, cddc, effe, gg*. Gerard Manley Hopkins uses this in his 1871 poem, 'As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame', which was an inspiration for the series. Here is the first stanza of that poem, which you will notice uses the chiasmus spread over eight lines (*abcddcba*) rather than four:

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves — goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came*[171]

Combined with a second, final stanza, the spreading of the chiasmus across an entire verse has the effect of making the whole poem sound stretched, like a drawn-out bird song. I had always assumed this to mimic the sound of a kingfisher, but when I researched it, I was surprised to find that its call is actually short and repetitive, as in 'ri-ri, ri-ri, ri-ri'. This gave me the idea of using several chiasms, much shorter than the ones used by Manley Hopkins, spread across the whole poem. And the use of the Shakespearean (also known as the 'English' and 'Australian') sonnet form of *abba cddc effe gg* would also give the whole verse a sense of movement: that is, the call is not simply one of repetition (ri-ri), but true to my anthropological leap of imagination in these works, contains a narrative. In each case, the bird witnesses something momentarily and extrapolates a story from the snippet of life she has witnessed. But because she has only witnessed the event 'on the fly', must account for the provisional nature of the observation: hence the use of the volta, the Shakespearean 'turn in sentiment', which reverses or undercuts the original line of thought to take the poem's idea in a new direction. For example, in the case of 'Somewhere', (see pages 31-33 of Fig 6o), the 'she may have' of lines 1 to 8 is refuted in the 'but then again' of lines 9 to 14. I ask the reader to make the perhaps ludicrous leap of imagination that the bird would somehow be aware of local newspaper stories of a missing woman.[172] She looks upwards from her vantage point at canal level to the supposed last sighing of the woman as she gazes from a bridge:

She may have left behind a rising cloud of
unpaid debts, e-mails unsent,
no words or signs to friends that might have meant
she was tired of work or was falling in love.
Urban ghoul merchants can fill the vacuum
of her disappearance with the worst of
rape, dismemberment, tabloid curses of
imagined foeti in a sunken womb.
But if my 'last sighting' of her can claim
something of truth, I bet right now
she's out there somewhere and always knew how
seamless it would feel: new number; new name.

---

[171] Manley Hopkins, Gerard, 'As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame', from *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Selection of his Poems and Prose* (London, Penguin, 1953) p34

[172] In an unnerving case of life mirroring art, I heard the distressing news just four months after taking this picture, and two months after composing the poem, that the dismembered body of a woman was found in the canal, very close to where the photograph was shot. See: *http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2012/mar/14/gemma-mccluskie-brother-remanded-custody.* So this work needs the disclaimer: 'All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental'. But the same cannot be said of a number of the other characters in the book, and the kingfisher herself, all of whom *are* based on real people in my life.

> Beyond all this, we should be clinging
> to the hope she's happy somewhere: peaceful; singing.

The picture also uses a number of chiasmic structures. On the most formally obvious level, several of the buildings in the shot, the fence and the duckweed in the canal form diagonal crosses across the picture plane. But also, I hope that the viewer's sight will be drawn from the woman in the top left hand corner, diagonally across the page to the bottom right, to the darkest point of water, just below a suspiciously placed illuminated plastic bag. The poem's prompting might make the reader think of the woman's corpse being dropped in the water after an imagined abduction. On a smaller scale too, we can see cross shapes formed by the six windows of the central building, and by some of the reflections created in the water. On the largest scale of all, I repeated the figure of the chiasm though the structure of the book itself. As the kingfisher's search is built over the course of the day, we follow a chronological line from the dark of night through dawn to mid-day, afternoon sun, dusk and night again. So, whilst there is a chiasmus-like quality to traditional forms of book making (as I noted in Chapter 5: think of the way in which pamphlets are stitched together), there is also a chiasmus-like structure in the search itself for knowledge, or any object of desire. As Slavoj Žižek puts it, writing on Lacan, desire has 'an infinite metonymy: it slides from one object to another.'[173] The quest for knowledge is infinite: once we have learnt all we can from a book, we are drawn towards the infinitely receding vanishing point that is further knowledge and further books. In the case of the *Halcyon Song* book, it is as if the bird's search reaches a crescendo on the centre pages. But where she might expect to find the peace of a home, she finds only a kind of blinding brightness: the noon image (featuring seagulls) contains a number of lens flares and patches of 'foggings' on the photographic film. By the end of the book, the kingfisher has not found her nesting site and reflects on how the search will continue afresh the next day.

From my discussion of *ut pictura poesis* from Chapter 2, you might recall that I agreed with Lessing's refutation of Simonides. But it is the very disjuncture and incompatibility between words and images that keeps drawing me back to playing with the two simultaneously. So despite and because of the obvious reason of the numerous spatial and temporal inconsistencies between picture and image making, I was concerned in this series to mirror the 'chiasmic' rhyme structure of my poems with similar cross-like structures within the images themselves. There is a symmetry to the very form of the pieces: *Poem 1; Image 1: Poem 2; Image 2*, etc. I am also drawn to what some might consider 'anachronistic' literary forms, and for me, there is a parallel here with the history of picture making. When we use a camera we cannot avoid the huge tradition of representing the world through a rectangle: we see 'through' the history of the golden mean, for example. So my starting point for the poetry is to use a similarly 'naturalized' structure. Partly because the iambic pentameter mimics the rhythms of everyday speech, a good sonnet, even a rhyming one, often does not read to me like a poem as such. Although we might well recognise it as a sonnet, its structure becomes invisible, unlike in, for example, concrete poetry, where the shape of the poem is self-consciously part of the work. Where I fail, the poems seem like pastiche. But where the

---

[173] Žižek, Slavoj, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 2009) p81

conceit works, the 'anachronism' of the sonnet form disappears, the words and images in combination become something new and enter the ideal state I want my works to exist in: as a kind of hovering, intense memory in the viewer's mind. A good analogy here is of the intensity of Imagist poetry.

Obviously, in the spatial form of an exhibition, one cannot dictate a sense of chronological sequence quite so readily as one can in a book. And regarding exhibiting prints and texts in a gallery format, one is obviously presented with a whole host of problems that are also not present in a book. The installation I made at Paradise Row Project Space is the closest I have reached so far to the right balance: the poems are printed in vinyl lettering and pasted onto the wall. They are clearly more than captions or titles, having the same dimensions as small paintings. And yet the text is not large enough to appear to physically 'compete' with the photographs. The poems are put on adjacent or facing walls to their photographs, so the viewer is made to physically move around in order or take in the entire work. With the aid of the gallery plan, the viewer can see that the sonnets form a sequence from left to right: that their counterpart photographs, both sonnet and picture, have the same titles. So they can be 'read' as purely textual or visual sequences, but in the same way a reader might flick though a book or read it in reverse should they choose, the installation prompts them to perform a kind of physical and mental dance: between the images on the wall and their counterpart texts and back again.

I trained originally as a painter and still conceive of my images when I start a project as paintings: they are built up and made as much as they are 'taken'. My photographs tend to be landscapes but also have very specific details within them, which can be almost lost at small sizes. Therefore, the ideal presentation is often a large scale print: I love to see the viewer move close in to see specific details and then take several steps back to take in the whole view again. This suggests a work, which cannot be 'taken in' from a single, fixed position. Another reason for my desire to introduce text is to add a further obstruction: to decelerate the viewer's looking.

A final note regarding the figure of the chiasmus, and specifically its *mirroring* properties in the *Halcyon Song* series: I am interested in ideas around Britishness and the fact that the canal's original use as a trade route has for the most part disappeared. I am constantly struck walking by the canal of both its Victorian past and the very active manner in which people use it today. And as the mind wanders, it goes back further, to the beginnings of our relationship to water and to mythology. This multiple temporality is, I think native to photography itself: the medium often seems to acknowledge several different registers of time simultaneously. And this links in turn to an idea of capturing different consciousnesses, in this case that of a bird: the mirroring conceit of anthropomorphization.

One reason why this section of the thesis has been included as an appendix, rather than as a chapter in itself, is that I do not wish to suggest that I have consciously followed a 'master-student' structure in making my work, whereby the works of Chapter 4, for example, might be seen to directly influence my

own practice. But inevitably, there has been some level of influence of these works, and I am not alone in thinking that the process of artistic maturity is in part one of shedding 'the anxiety of influence' so that, even if one never shakes off ones' forebears, their mark is less obvious as one's practice develops. By that criterion, I would assert that there is a clear development, from 2008's *Love's Knowledge,* through 2010's *Couriers of Kite Hill,* both of which display the marked influence of Frampton's *(nostalgia),* to 2012's *Halcyon Song,* where no such direct influence is obvious. A strength of my work is that it juggles many influences at once and also keeps alive a number of separate, often contradictory ideas. The disadvantage of this approach is that the works can become over determined and break under the weight of my trying to achieve too many things at once. Again, I would contend that the most recent piece shows a clear development here, because whilst *Halcyon Song* actually contains perhaps the most formally and conceptually rigorous ideas, it actually has a formal simplicity that the earlier works (including those which I have not discussed here: 2009's *Grief Tree* and 2011's *Hokkaido Postcard*) lacked.

As I write this sentence it is almost twelve years to the day that I was first diagnosed with clinical depression, a condition I have struggled with intermittently ever since. Whilst it has been necessary of course to preclude this information from a strictly academic study, I feel it is essential to mention it here: my own work as an artist comes from a very personal place, and so not to declare this 'vested interest' in melancholia would feel a betrayal of my interest in it in the first place. The main insight regarding my work as an artist that I can put into words at the moment, from both my research, and subscription to psychodynamic counselling, that is both frightening and consoling by turns, is this: To be engaged in 'image-text' practice is, perhaps more obviously than in many other forms of artistic practice, to engage in dialogue for which there will never be a true resolution. I agree with Lessing, and with Foucault, on the fundamental incompatibility of the word and image and would like to invoke once more Adrian Rifkin's assertion that ekphrasis straddles mourning and melancholy in uneasy balance. It is as if the word is the 'lost object' of the image, and vice versa: to engage in trying to locate the other is a doomed but endlessly productive task. And so I will conclude this appendix as I began, with a short poem of my own: another chiasmus; this time a palindrome too:

<u>Never Quite Found</u>
Word is 'lost object'
of *image* as *image* of
'object lost' is *word*

Bibliography and Sources

- Adorno, Theodor W., 'Cultural Criticism and Society', from *Prisms (Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought)*, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1983)
- Agamben, Giorgio, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995)
- Aletti, Vince, Levis Strauss, David (authors), Roth, Andrew (ed.), 'The Book of 101 Books: Seminal Photographic Books of the Twentieth Century' (New York: PPP Editions, 2001)
- Anonymous, *The New Testament: Authorized King James Version* (New York: Random House Everyman's Library Classics, 1998)
- Ashbery, John, '*City Afternoon'* from *Selected Poems* (Penguin, London 1986)
- Auster, Paul, *The Invention of Solitude,* (London, Faber and Faber, 2005)
- Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, (London, Vintage, 1990)
- Barthes, Roland, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975)
- Baxandall, Michael, *Patterns of Intention,* (Yale, Yale University Press, 1985)
- Benjamin, Walter, *The Arcades Project,* trans. Howard Eiland, Kevin McLaughlin (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1999)
- Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations,* trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992)
- Bertolucci*,* Bernardo, *Last Tango* in Paris, 1972, 35mm colour film, 2:16
- Bourriaud, Nicolas, *The Radicant: No. 17,* trans. James Gussen and Lili Porten, (Berlin, Sternberg, 2009)
- Cabanne, Pierre: *Dialogs with Marcel Duchamp*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971)
- Cadava, Eduardo, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997)
- Calle, Sophie, *M'as tu vu(e)?,* (Munich: Prestel, 2003)
- Carlos Williams, William, 'The Corn Harvest', from *Selected Poems* (NY: New Directions, 1985)
- Cheeke, Stephen, *Writing for art: The aesthetics of ekphrasis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009)
- Clark, T.J, The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008)
- Cunningham, Michael, *The Hours* (Harper Perennial, London 2006)
- Davidson, Michael, 'Ekphrasis and the Postmodern Painter - Poem', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, no. 42, November, 1983*
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (New York: Continuum, 2004)
- De Duve, Thierry, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge MIT Press, 1996)

- Diderot, Denis, *Diderot on Art: Salon of 1765 and Notes on Painting Vol 1*, trans. John Goodman (Yale: Yale University Press, 1995)
- Didi-Huberman, Georges, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans. John Goodman (Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 2005)
- Duguid, Mark, 'The MacGuffin', from *Hitchock's Style,* from *BFI Screen Online* (http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tours/hitch/tour6.html, 2010)
- Dylan, Bob, 'Chronicles, Volume One' (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004)
- Eliot, TS, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', from *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism (London: Faber and Faber, 1997)*
- Elkins, James, *Why Art Cannot be Taught: A Handbook for Art Students* (Champaign, IL, University of Illinois Press, 2001)
- Evans, David, 'Afterimage: Brecht's *War Primer:* the "photo-epigram" as poor monument' from *Afterimage,* March/April 2003, (New York: *Afterimage* Publishing, 2003)
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott, *The Notebooks of F. Scott Fitzgerald,* ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli. (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/Bruccoli Clark, 1978)
- Foucault, Michel, *The order of things: archaeology* (London and New York: Routledge 2004)
- Frampton, Hollis, *(nostalgia)*, 1971, 16mm black and white film, 38 :21
- Frampton, Hollis, 'Notes on *(nostalgia)'* from *On the Camera Arts and Consecutive Matters: The Writings of Hollis Frampton* (Cambridge MIT Press, 2009)
- Frayling, Christopher 'Research in Art and Design' from *Royal College of Art Research Papers*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1-5 (London: RCA, 1993/1994)
- Frayling, Christopher 'Nourishing the Academy' from *Drawing Fire, No.17, Winter 1996,* (Birmingham: UCE)
- Freud, Sigmund, 'The Interpretation of Dreams' (1900), from *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 4,* trans. James Strachey (London; Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychoanalysis), *p149-151*
- Freud, Sigmund, 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917), from *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 16,* trans. James Strachey (London; Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychoanalysis), p237-258
- Fried, Michael, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998)
- Fusco, Maria, *The Mechanical Copula* (New York, Sternberg, 2010)
- Gottlieb, Sidney, *Framing Hitchcock: Selected essays from the Hitchcock annual*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002)
- Grothe, Mardy, *Never let a Fool Kiss you or a Kiss Fool You* (London: Penguin, 1999)
- Groys, Boris, 'The Mimesis of Thinking', from Donna de Salvo, (ed.), *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c.1970* (Tate Publishing, 2005)
- Gunn, Thom and Ander, *Positives,* (London, Faber and Faber, 1973)

- Gunn, Thom, 'Song of A Camera (for Robert Mapplethorpe)', from *Selected Poems,* ed. August Kleinzahler (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2009)
- Heffernan, JAW, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993)
- Heisler, Jindrich, Štyrskyal, Jindrich, *Sur Les Aiguilles De Ces Jours,* (Paris: Sirene, 1984)
- Hermange, Emmanuel, 'Aspects and Uses of Ekphrasis in Relation to Photography, 1816-1860' from *Journal of European Studies, Vol. 30, 2000 (*New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books)
- Healy, David *The Creation of Psychopharmacology* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2002)
- Heiser*, Jörg,* 'Emotional Rescue', from *Frieze,* Issue 71, November - December 2002 (London, Frieze Publishing, 2002)
- Heiser*,* Jörg*,* Hiller, Susan and Schorr, Collier, *Romantic Conceptualism* (Kerber, Leipzig, 2007)
- The History of Education Society, *The History of Education in Europe* (London and New York: Routledge 2009)
- Heidegger, Martin, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', from *Poetry, Language, Thought,* trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2001)
- Hollander, John, 'The Figure on the Page: Words and Images in Wright Morris's The Home Place', The Yale Journal of Criticism, 9.1, 1996 (Yale: Yale University and The John Hopkins University Press)
- Hulme, T.E., 'Romanticism and Classicism' (http://www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/essay/238694, 1911)
- Hunter, Jefferson, *Image and Word: The Interaction of 20th Century Photographs and Texts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987)
- Jordan, Shirley Ann: 'Exhibiting Pain: Sophie Calle's Douleur Exquise,' *French Studies Volume LXI, No 2* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007)
- Kierkegaard, Søren, *Journals and Notebooks, v4* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011)
- Kosuth, Joseph 'Art after Philosophy' from *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993)
- Kristeva, Julia, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (Columbia University Press, New York, 1989)
- Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth, *On Death* & *Dying*, (Simon & Schuster/Touchstone, New York, *1969)*
- Larkin, Philip, 'MCMXIV' and 'Lines on a Young Ladies Photograph Album', from Collected Poems, ed. Anthony Thwaite (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2004)
- Leader, Darian, *The New Black: Mourning Melancholia and Depression* (London: Penguin Books, 2009)
- Lessing, Gotthold, *Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (1766) (*Laocoon,* trans, Ellen Frothingham (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967)
- LeWitt, Sol, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', from *Artforum, Vol. 5, no 10, Summer 1967* (New

- Lippard, Lucy, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997)
- Lippard, Lucy, ‘In an Image’ from *The Lure of the Local: The Sense of Place in a Multicentred Society* (New York: The New Press, 2007)
- Long, J.J, ‘Paratextual Profusion: Photography and Text in Bertolt Brecht’s War Primer’ from *Poetics Today* 29:1, Spring 2008, (Tel Aviv: Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, 2008)
- Lönnrot, Elias, *The Kalevala*, trans Keith Bosley (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 2008)
- Lunn-Rockliffe, Sophie, ‘Commemorating the Usurper Magnus Maximus: Ekphrasis, Poetry, and History in Pacatus' Panegyric of Theodosius’*, Journal of Late Antiquity* Vol 3, No. 2, Fall 2010, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press)
- Manley Hopkins, Gerard, ‘As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame’, from *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Selection of his Poems and Prose* (London, Penguin, 1953)
- Manley Hopkins, Gerard, ‘Pied Beauty’: (www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173664, 1918)
- Maxwell, Glyn, ‘His First Minute’ from *Rest for the Wicked* (Bloodaxe UK, 1995)
- Mitchell, WJT, *Iconology: Image: Text: Ideology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986)
- Mitchell, WJT, ‘Ekphrasis and the Other’, from *On The Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci, by Percy Bysshe Shelley, A Hypertext Edition,* ed. Fraistat, Neil and Sites, Melissa Jo (http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/shelley/medusa/index.html, 1998)
- Mitchell, WJT, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995)
- Moore, Rachel, *Hollis Frampton (nostalgia),* (London: Afterall Books, 2006)
- Morris, Wright, *The Home Place* (Lincoln, USA: University of Nebraska Press, 1999)
- Morris, Wright, *The Inhabitants* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press (Facsimile of 1946 edition), 1975)
- The National Fine Art Collection Digital Collection: http://www.fineart.ac.uk/
- Norton, Louise, ‘The Richard Mutt Case’ from *The Blind Man,* Vol. 2, 1917 (New York: 33 West 67th Street)
- Palmer, Katrina, *The Dark Object* (London: Book Works, 2010)
- Rancière, Jacques, *The Aesthetic Unconscious,* trans. Debra Keates and James Swenson, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2009)
- Rancière, Jacques, *The Emancipated Spectator,* trans. Gregory Elliott, (London: Verso, 2009)
- Rifkin, Adrian, ‘Addressing Ekphrasis: A Prolegomenon to the Next’ from *Classical Philology Studies, Vol. 102, No 1, 2007* (Chicago: Chicago University Press)
- Rose, Gillian, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Methods* (London: Sage, 2006)
- Rubinstein, Roberta, *Home Matters: Longing and Belonging, Nostalgia and Mourning in Women’s Fiction* (New York: Palgrave, 2000)
- Russell, Bertrand, Problems of Philosophy, http://www.ditext.com/russell/rus1.html

- Segal, Shira, 'From the Private to the Public: Photography, Film and the Transmission of Cultural Memory in Hollis Frampton's *(nostalgia)*, *Text, Practice Performance VI, 2005 (*Austin, Texas: Americo Paredes Center for Cultural Studies at the University of Texas)
- Sontag, Susan, *On Photography*, (New York: Penguin, 1977)
- Starobinski, Jean, 'Le Concept de nostalgie'*, Diogene* Vol 54, 1966 (Paris)
- Steiner, Wendy, *Pictures of Romance: Form against Context in Painting and Literature* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991)
- Tan, Eugene, 'Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs,* 1965', from Godfrey, Tony, Aldrich, Megan, Hutt, Julia (eds.), *Understanding Art Objects* (Farnham, UK: Lund Humphries, 2009)
- Thomson, Peter and Sacks, Glendyr, eds., *Key Words in Brecht's Theory and Practice of Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)
- Thurschwell, Pamela, *Sigmund Freud* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2000)
- Trexler, Richard, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Academic Press, 1980)
- Whitman, Cedric M., *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1958)
- Will, Clifford, 'Space Time Continuum', 2010 from *Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia: www.grolier.com*
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge, 2001)
- Wright, Karen and Gayford, Martin, *The Penguin Book of Art Writing* (London: Penguin, 1998)
- Yates, Frances, *The Art of Memory* (London: Pimlico, 2005)
- Žižek, Slavoj, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 2009)

N.B. Cited dates are not necessarily dates of first publication.

Illustrations

John Flaxman, The Shield of Achilles, gold, 1821

The original ekphrastic object?

Fig 1a

Jake and Dinos Chapman, Tragic Anatomies, mixed media, 1996

The sleep of the 'Young British Artists' produces monsters...

Fig 1b

Tris Vonna-Michell, Leipzig Calendar Works (2005), Performance at Witte de With, 2007

An 'Altermodernist' at work

Fig 1c

Sophie Calle, ‘Hopper, House by the Railroad’ from the series ‘Ghosts’, mixed media, 1991

Fig 1d

Nicola Brandt, 'Break Free, Windhoek, Namibia', photograph, 2010

Research 'through' art and design

Fig 1e

John Goldblatt, Portrait of Bridget Riley, photograph, 1967

Christopher Frayling cites Riley's paintings as being exemplary of research 'into' art and design

Fig 1f

Kester Maputo, Throne of Weapons, decommissioned weapons, 2001

Research 'for' art and design?

Fig 1g

Maria Fusco, The Mechanical Copula, 2010

'Art writing'

Fig 1h

Marcel Duchamp, 'Fountain', porcelain and ink, 1917

'Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object'...

Fig 1i

‘The idea is a machine that makes the work of art’… the installation team working on Sol LeWitt’s ‘#1100 Concentric Bands’ acrylic paint, 2003 at Pearson International Airport, Toronto

Fig 1j

Vincent Van Gogh, Shoes, oil on canvas, 1888

'(…) in setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work (of art) is an instigating of (this) striving'
-Heidegger

Fig 1k

Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 'The Harvesters', oil on wood, 1565

Fig 2a

Pieter Bruegel the Elder, ‘Landscape with the Fall of Icarus’, oil on canvas, mounted on wood, c.1558

Fig 2b

‘Bob and Ray’: Bob Elliott and Ray Goulding, an American comedy team whose career spanned five decades: their format was typically to satirize the medium in which they were performing…

Fig 2c

Giotto di Bondone, ‘The Mourning of Christ’, fresco, c. 1305

Fig 3a

Albrecht Dürer, Melencolia I, Engraving, 1514

Fig 3b

(above) Abbie Rowe, 'Jacqueline and Rovbert Kennedy, John Jr., Caroline, and Peter Lawford depart the U.S. Capitol after a lying-in-state ceremony for John Fitzgerald Kennedy', photograph, 1963

(below) Lacan's Objet petit a (object little-a): the unattainable object of desire, sometimes called the 'object cause of desire'.

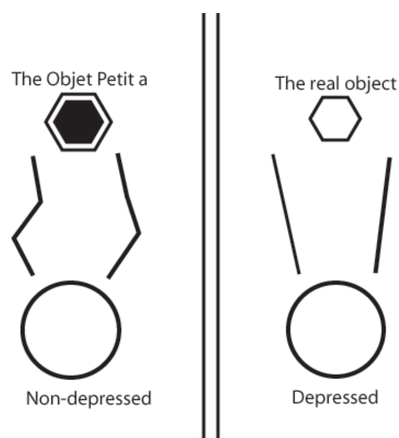


Fig 3c, 3d

(above) Anonymous, Simonides invents the Art of Memory, etching, undated

(below) Giovanni Battista Gaulli with Gianlorenzo Bernini, The Worship of the Holy Name of Jesus, fresco, 1676–1679

Fig 3e, 3f

Paolo Uccello, The Hunt, oil on wood, 1470

Paul Klee, Angelus Novus, watercolour, 1920

'Where we perceive a chain of events, (the Angel of History) sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet' -Benjamin

Fig 3h

(above) Raphael and workshop (Giulio Romano), Mercury, fresco, c. 1520

(below) Poster for Hitchcock's 'The Lady Vanishes' (1938). Like many of Hitchcock's films, 'The Lady Vanishes' contains a MacGuffin: an element that catches the viewers attention or drives the plot, but which might turn out to be empty or meaningless.

Fig 3i, 3j

HOLLIS FRAMPTON: (NOSTALGIA)

16mm black and white film, Copyright 1971 by Hollis Frampton

These scans taken from Moore, Rachel, *Hollis Frampton (nostalgia)*, (London: Afterall Books, 2006)

(nostalgia) Soundtrack

Blows into microphone: *Is it alright?*
Voice off mike: *It's alright.*
Pause.
Reads: *These are recollections of a dozen still photographs I made several years ago.*
Pause. Blows into microphone.
Pause. *Does it sound alright?*
Voice off mike: *Yes, yes, perfectly. It's fine.*
Pause.

Reads: *This is the first photograph I ever made with the direct intention of making art.*

I had bought myself a camera for Christmas in 1958. One day early in January of 1959, I photographed several drawings by Carl Andre, with whom I shared a cheap apartment on Mulberry Street. One frame of film was left over, and I suggested to Carl that he sit, or rather, squat, for a portrait. He insisted that the photograph must incorporate a handsome small picture frame that had been given him a year or so before by a girl named North.

How the metronome entered the scheme I don't recall, but it must have been deliberately.

The picture frame re-appears in a photograph dated March 1963, but there isn't time to show you that one now. I discarded the metronome eventually, after tolerating its syncopation for quite a while. Carl Andre is twelve years older and more active than he was then. I see less of him nowadays than I should like; but then there are other people of whom I see more than I care to.

I despised this photograph for several years. But I could never bring myself to destroy a negative so incriminating.

Fig 4a

16mm black and white film, Copyright 1971 by Hollis Frampton

These scans taken from Moore, Rachel, *Hollis Frampton (nostalgia)*, (London: Afterall Books, 2006)

I made this photograph on March 11, 1959. The face is my own, or rather it was my own. As you see, I was thoroughly pleased with myself at the time, presumably for having survived to such ripeness and wisdom, since it was my twenty-third birthday.

I focused the camera, sat on a stool in front of it, and made the exposures by squeezing a rubber bulb with my right foot.

There are eleven more photographs on the roll of film, all of comparable grandeur Some of them exhibit my features in more sensitive or imposing moods.

One exposure records what now looks to me like a leer I sent that one to a very pretty and sensible girl on the occasion of the vernal equinox, a holiday I held in some esteem. I think I wrote her some sort of cryptic note on the back of it. I never heard from her again.

Anyhow, photography had obviously caught my fancy. This photograph was made in the studio where I worked. It belonged to the wife of a friend. I daresay they are still married, but he has not been my friend for nearly ten years. We became estranged on account of an obscure mutual embarrassment that involved a third party, and three dozen eggs.

I take some comfort in realising that my entire physical body has been replaced more than once since it made this portrait of its face. However, I understand that my central nervous system is an exception.

This photograph was made in September of 1960. The window is that of a dusty cabinetmaker's shop, on the west side of West Broadway, somewhere between Spring Street and West Houston.

I first photographed it more than a year earlier, as part of a series, but rejected it for reasons having to do with its tastefulness and illusion of deep space.

Then, in the course of two years, I made a half-dozen more negatives. Each time, I found some reason to feel dissatisfied. The negative was too flat, or too harsh; or the framing was too tight. Once a horse was reflected in the glass, although I don't recall seeing that horse. Once, I found myself reflected, and my camera and tripod.

Finally, the cabinetmaker closed up shop and moved away. I can't even remember exactly where he was anymore.

But a year after that, I happened to compare the prints I made from the six negatives. I was astonished! In the midst of my concern for the flaws in my method, the window itself had changed, from season to season, far more than my photographs had! I had thought my subject changeless, and my own sensibility pliable. But I was wrong about that.

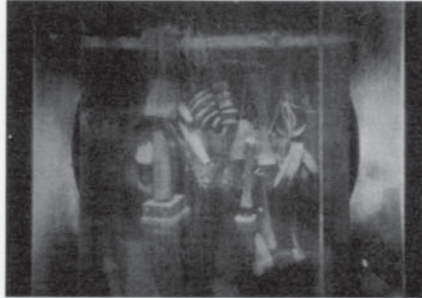
So I chose the one photograph that pleased me most after all, and destroyed the rest. That was years ago. Now I'm sorry. I only wish you could have seen them!

Fig 4b

HOLLIS FRAMPTON: (NOSTALGIA)

16mm black and white film, Copyright 1971 by Hollis Frampton

These scans taken from Moore, Rachel, *Hollis Frampton (nostalgia)*, (London: Afterall Books, 2006)



In 1961, for six or eight months, I lived in a borrowed loft on Bond Street, near the Bowery.

A young painter, who lived on the floor above me, wanted to be an Old Master He talked a great deal about gums and varnishes; he was on his way to impastos of record thickness.

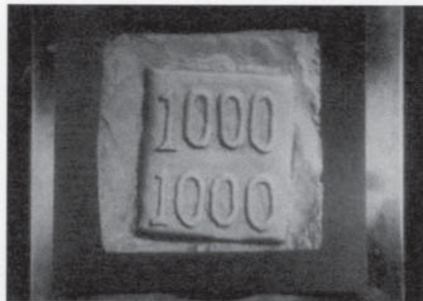
The spring of that year was sunny, and I spent a month photographing junk and rubble, in imitation of action painting. My neighbour saw my new work, and he was not especially pleased.

His opinion upset me... and for good reason. He lived with a woman (I believe her father was a Brazilian economist) who seemed to stay with him out of inertia. She was monumentally fair and succulent and indifferent. In the warm weather, she went about nearly naked, and I would invent excuses to visit upstairs, in order to stare at her

My photographs failing as an excuse, I decided to ingratiate myself in the household by making a realist work of art. I carved the numerals you see out of modelling clay, and then cast them in plaster

The piece is called A Cast of Thousands. *The numbers are reversed in the cast, of course, but I have reversed them again in printing, to enhance their intelligibility.*

Anyway, I finally unveiled the piece one evening. I suppose the painter was properly horrified. But the girl, who had never said a dozen words to me, laughed, and then laughed outrageously, and then, outrageously, kissed me.



Early in 1963, Frank Stella asked me to make a portrait. He needed it for some casual business use: a show announcement, or maybe a passport. Something like that. I only recall that it needed to be done quickly. A likeness would do.

Fig 4c

HOLLIS FRAMPTON: (NOSTALGIA)

16mm black and white film, Copyright 1971 by Hollis Frampton

These scans taken from Moore, Rachel, *Hollis Frampton (nostalgia)*, (London: Afterall Books, 2006)

I made a dozen likenesses and he chose one. His dealer paid me for the job.

Most of those dozen faces seem resigned, or melancholy. This one amuses me because Frank looks so entirely self-possessed. I suppose blowing smoke rings admits of little feeling beyond that.

Looking at the photograph recently, it reminded me, unaccountably, of a photograph of another artist squirting water out of his mouth, which is undoubtedly art. Blowing smoke rings seems more of a craft.

Ordinarily, only opera singers make art with their mouths.

I made this photograph of James Rosenquist the first day we met. That was on Palm Sunday in 1963, when he lived in a red brick building at number 5 Coenties Slip. I went there to photograph him in his studio, for a fashion magazine. The job was a washout, but Rosenquist and I remained friends for years afterward.

He rented two floors in the building. The lower floor, where he lived with his wife Mary Lou, was cool, neat and pleasant. Mary Lou was relaxed, cool, neat, very tall and extremely pleasant. Rosenquist was calm. It was a lovely, soft, quiet Sunday.

We talked for a while and then went upstairs to his workroom. I made 96 negatives in about two hours. This was the last. It is unrelated to the others.

Rosenquist is holding open a copy of an old magazine. A map of the United States shows the distribution of our typical songbirds. I admire this photograph for its internal geometry, the expression of its subject, its virtually perfect mapping of tonal values on the grey scale. It pleases me as much as anything I did.

James Rosenquist and I live far apart now, and we seldom meet. But I cannot recall one moment spent in his company that I didn't completely enjoy.

This photograph was made at about 3 o'clock on the morning of June 6, 1963, in lower Manhattan. It may even have been Wall Street.

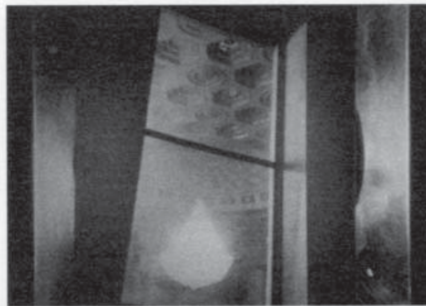
Fig 4d

It is seen from the sidewalk, through the window of a large bank that had been closed for renovation and partially demolished inside. A big crystal chandelier is draped in a dusty, translucent membrane that recalls the tents of caterpillars. Someone has written with a forefinger, on the dusty pane, the words 'I like my new name'

This seemed mysterious to me. At that time, I was much taken with the photographs of Lartigue, and I wanted to make photographs as mysterious as his, without, however, attempting to comprehend his wit.

All I learned was that the two were somehow bound together Anyway my eye for mystery is defective, and so this may be the only example I'll ever produce.

Nevertheless, because it is a very difficult negative to print, I find that I do so less and less often.

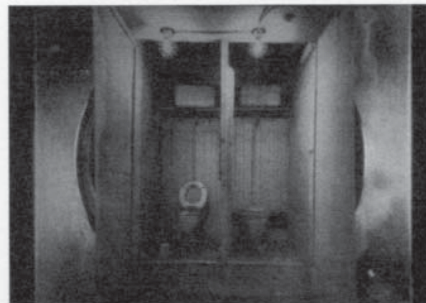


This photograph of two toilets was made in February of 1964, with a new view camera I had just got at that time.

As you can see, it is an imitation of a painted renaissance crucifixion.

The outline of the Cross is quite clear At its foot, the closed bowl on the right represents the Blessed Virgin. On the left is St. Mary Magdalene: a bowl with its lid raised. The roll of toilet paper stands for the skull of Adam, whose sin is conventionally washed away by the blood the crucified Saviour sheds. The stairs leading up to the two booths symbolise Calvary.

I'm not completely certain of the iconographic significance of the light bulbs, but the haloes that surround them are more than suggestive.



Late in the fall of 1964, a painter friend asked me to make a photographic document of spaghetti, an image that he wanted to incorporate into a work of his own.

I set up my camera above an empty darkroom tray, opened a number 2 can of Franco-American Spaghetti, and poured it out. Then I stirred it around until I

HOLLIS FRAMPTON: (NOSTALGIA)

16mm black and white film, Copyright 1971 by Hollis Frampton

These scans taken from Moore, Rachel, *Hollis Frampton (nostalgia)*, (London: Afterall Books, 2006)

saw a suitably random arrangement of pasta strands and finished the photograph in short order

Then, instead of disposing of the spaghetti, I left it there, and made one photograph every day. This was the eighteenth such photograph.

The spaghetti has dried without rotting. The sauce is a kind of pink varnish on the yellow strings. The entirety is covered in attractive mature colonies of mould in three colours: black, green and white.

I continued the series until no further change appeared to be taking place: about two months altogether The spaghetti was never entirely consumed, but the mould eventually disappeared.

This photograph was made in Michael Snow's studio, sometime in 1965. It was made into a poster announcing a show of his Walking Woman *works at the Poindexter Gallery in that year*

As many as possible of the pieces are seen, by reflection or transmission, in a transparent sheet of acrylic plastic which is itself part of a piece. The result is probably confusing, but no more so than the show apparently was, since it seems to have been studiously ignored.

If you look closely, you can see Michael Snow himself, on the left, by transmission, and my camera, on the right, by reflection.

I recall that we worked half a day for two or three exposures. I believe that Snow was pleased with the photograph itself, as I was. But he disliked the poster intensely. He said I had chosen a typeface that looked like an invitation to a church social.

I regret to say that he was right. But it was too late. There was nothing to do about it. The whole business still troubles me. I wish I could apologise to him.

Fig 4f

HOLLIS FRAMPTON: (NOSTALGIA)

16mm black and white film, Copyright 1971 by Hollis Frampton

These scans taken from Moore, Rachel, *Hollis Frampton (nostalgia)*, (London: Afterall Books, 2006)

This posed photograph of Larry Poons reclining on his bed was made early in 1966, for Vogue *magazine.*

I was ecstatically happy that afternoon, for entirely personal reasons. I set up my camera quickly, made a single exposure, and left.

Later on, I was sent a cheque for the photograph that I thought inadequate by half. I returned it to the magazine with a letter of explanation. They sent me another cheque for the amount I asked for: $75.

Months later, the photograph was published. I was working in a colour-film laboratory at the time. My boss saw the photograph, and I nearly lost my job.

I decided to stop doing this sort of thing.

I did not make this photograph, nor do I know who did. Nor can I recall precisely when it was made. It was printed in a newspaper, so I suppose that any patient person with an interest in this sort of thing could satisfy himself entirely as to its origins.

The image is slightly indistinct. A stubby, middle-aged man wearing a baseball cap looks back in matter-of-fact dismay or disgruntlement at the camera. It has caught him in the midst of a display of spheres, each about the size of a grapefruit, and of some nondescript light colour. He holds four of them in his cupped hands. The rest seem half-submerged in water, or else lying in something like mud. A vague, mottled mass behind the crouching man suggests foliage.

I am as puzzled and mildly distressed by the sight of this photograph as its protagonist seems to be with the spheres. They seem absolutely alien, and yet not very forbidding, after all.

What does it mean?

I am uncertain, but perfectly willing to offer a plausible explanation. The man is a Texas fruit-grower. His orchards lie near the Gulf of Mexico. The spheres are grapefruit. As they neared maturity, a hurricane flooded the orchard and knocked down the fruit. The man is stunned by his commercial loss, and a little resentful of the photographer who intrudes upon his attempt to assess it.

On the other hand, were photography of greater antiquity, then this image might date from the time of, let us say, Pascal; and I suppose he would have understood it quite differently.

Fig 4g

HOLLIS FRAMPTON: (NOSTALGIA)

16mm black and white film, Copyright 1971 by Hollis Frampton

These scans taken from Moore, Rachel, *Hollis Frampton (nostalgia)*, (London: Afterall Books, 2006)

Since 1966 I have made few photographs. This has been partly through design and partly through laziness. I think I expose fewer than fifty negatives a year now. Of course I work more deliberately than I once did, and that counts for something. But I must confess that I have largely given up still photography.

So it is all the more surprising that I felt again, a few weeks ago, a vagrant urge that would have seemed familiar a few years ago: the urge to take my camera out of doors and make a photograph. It was a quite simple, obtrusive need. So I obeyed it.

I wandered around for hours, unsatisfied, and finally turned towards home in the afternoon. Half a block from my front door, the receding perspective of an alley caught my eye ... a dark tunnel with the cross-street beyond brightly lit. As I focused and composed the image, a truck turned into the alley. The driver stopped, got out, and walked away. He left his cab door open.

My composition was spoiled, but I felt a perverse impulse to make the exposure anyway. I did so, and then went home to develop my single negative.

When I came to print the negative, an odd thing struck my eye. Something, standing in the cross-street and invisible to me, was reflected in a factory window, and then reflected once more in the rear-view mirror attached to the truck door It was only a tiny detail.

Since then, I have enlarged this small section of my negative enormously. The grain of the film all but obliterates the features of the image. It is obscure; by any possible reckoning, it is hopelessly ambiguous.

Nevertheless, what I believe I see recorded, in that speck of film, fills me with such fear, such utter dread and loathing, that I think I shall never dare to make another photograph again.

Here it is!

Look at it!

Do you see what I see?

Fig 4h

WRIGHT MORRIS: THE HOME PLACE

Photo-text, Copyright 1948 by Wright Morris

THE HOME PLACE

"WHAT'S the old man doing?" I said, and I looked down the trail, beyond the ragged box elder, where the old man stood in the door of the barn, fooling with an inner tube. In town I used to take the old man's hand and lead him across the tracks where horses and men, little girls, and sometimes little boys were killed. Why was that? They didn't stop, look and listen. We did.

"Is he planting melons?" Clara said.

"No, he isn't planting melons," I said. Clara put her hand over her glass eye, drew down the lid.

"If he isn't planting melons it would be nothing useful," she said.

"He's fixing his inner tube," said the boy.

"Thanks son," I said, and put my hand on his head. After the girl I wanted a boy so I could stand with my hand on his head, or his shoulder. But you can't. Try it sometime. I took my hand off his head and put it on the cool handle of the dipper, pressed on the handle, and skimmed off three drowned flies. I showed them to the boy and said, "Sprinkle them with salt and they'll be as good as new ones."

"How's that?" said Clara.

"I was just telling the boy to feed flies like that to the chickens." I opened the screen, and tossed the water into the yard. Four or five seedy leghorns ran through the shadows, scratched for them. "You see that, son?" I said.

"I told him to bring fresh water," she said, "but I don't think he's got around to it. He's eighty-one. He don't get around too much."

"You're not so young yourself," I said.

"I'm a farmer's wife," she said, and pulled a green stocking cap low on her head. My Aunt Clara is a raw-boned woman, a little over six feet tall, flat as a lath, and with the stalking gait of a whooping crane. In the early morning she wears a bright green stocking cap. She's been doing that for at least thirty years —against the night air, as she calls it—the tassel dangling over the

1

20 THE HOME PLACE

"If she left you here with her beets, all I've got to say is you better be here."

"Hmmm—" she said.

"If you can just control yourself," I said, "I'll have you a nice little place in the country But you leave it to me. Just try and control yourself." I took a quick look at the stove, to see if anything was burning, then I went upstairs to change my clothes.

The stairs are right behind the range, in something like a steep chute—one of the reasons you can't live up there in the summer time. I could feel the heat right through the plaster wall. As a boy I had the room at the head of the stairs, where the ceiling slopes down over the bed, but on hot summer nights I slept on the floor. The windows were low, and there was sometimes a breeze down there. As my own boy is about that age—eight next October—I had an odd feeling when I got to the top of the stairs. Put it this way—for a moment I wondered who I was. Since we left New York, a week ago, I'd been trying to tell my boy, whenever he'd listen, what it was like to live on a farm. You can't do it. You can't tell a city kid anything. But I had talked a good deal to myself, and lay awake thinking about it, which might account for the feeling I had. I was Spud Muncy, sometimes known as "the little fart."

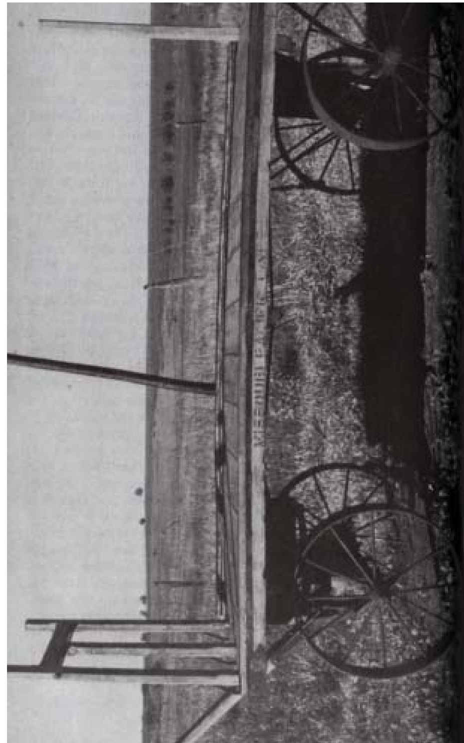
Whoever I was, I was facing Viola's room with its flower-cluttered wallpaper, and the handcolored photo of her skinny brother, Ivy Ivy had been seven that summer, but he was not a little fart, in any respect, so he had been able to wear my clothes. That's my fauntleroy he's wearing on the wall. He was also wearing my high button shoes, and my pink Omaha garters, which showed all right, but not in the photograph. I sat in the buggy and thumbed my nose at him. I was wearing his cast-off rompers, with the drop-seat and the dark brown stains, and while thumbing my nose I was smoking licorice cigarettes. A good deal of my spit was there on the buckboard, beside the old man's.

I was facing Viola's room, and Ivy, but when I turned on the stairs the door to the old man's room—their room, that is—stood open. All of the upstairs rooms are dark, as the windows are low, floor level, and the blinds are usually drawn against the heat. All the light was on the floor—I used to lie there and read. Mid-

Fig 4i, 4j

WRIGHT MORRIS: THE HOME PLACE

Photo-text, Copyright 1948 by Wright Morris



THE HOME PLACE 67

to me when all the Croppers, the boys, that is, took to railroading. They were men, and they wanted to lead the hero's life. I wanted to lead it myself, but the last time I saw Grandma, as I say, was thirty years ago.

"What's Kermit doing now?" I said.

"He's on the Streamliner—" said Clara. "He's on the run between Omaha and North Platte."

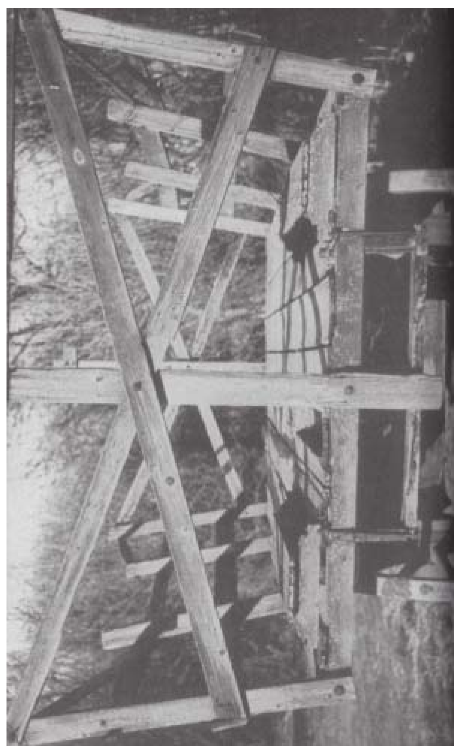
"Ohhh is that an engine—" said the old man, "shooos along there about a hunderd miles an hour—" he watched it roar by, "but I think he liked that old mountain engine best." He tipped back his head, blinked his eyes, "—had one with nine big wheels on a side, and two of them big pistons, just a-pushin' an' a-pullin' Said it would pull anything. Said if he threw a rope round one of them mountains he'd pull it away" My boy came around in front to look up at him. "Yes sireee—" said the old man, "nine of them big wheels, higher than a man, and two of them big pistons, a-pushin' an' a-pullin' A purty sight." He raised his right hand over his head. "Nine of them big drivers on each side, half a block long with no more than the tender, but just nothin' for a stack," he put up his thumb, "just a pimple," he said. We looked at him. "So she'd look streamlined, take the wind." The boy swallowed, and the old man went on, "Well, says I, why don't you hitch her up to Madison county an' tow us over there, say around Colfax, where it rains a little more? Well, says he, if I knew where it was it rains like it should, that's what I'd do. An' bygolly he would. Off we'd go a-pushin' an' a-pullin', the smoke a-pourin' out of the stack, an' the whistle flat—" he wiped the whistle flat with his hand, "at hunderd mile an hour you can hear it, hardly see it at all."

I've never been able to explain to my wife what it is I dislike about electric engines, since they were so clean, so powerful, and made so little noise. I looked at her. She was impressed all right, but not favorably

"Is the whistle for the crossing?" the boy said.

"What it used to be for," the old man said, "but at a hunderd mile an hour says he's sometimes there before the whistle is." He took his hat from the dipper handle, put it on his head.

"Bobby—" my wife said, "would you like to have your hair cut?



THE HOME PLACE 73

at him and he said, "Guess I still get so excited, when I'm drivin', I can't seem to remember anything." He turned the spark down and we sat there, brooding, and after a while our yellow dust came up and went by

I couldn't go through that again so I said, "Suppose we take it in tomorrow, Harry? Clara said we had better be back by five o'clock."

"Tomorrow's Sunday," the old man said.

"What about Monday?"

"Now that's an idea—never thought of that." He makes these cracks, as I said, with such a dead pan, his faded eyes blinking, that you don't know whether you're being ribbed or not.

"I'll have to run in for Peg," I said, "so why don't we wait and go Monday?"

"You got an awful smart daddy," the old man said. "Yes sirreee." He looked at the kids and they nodded, swallowing.

I felt pretty relieved, so I said, "Wasn't it around here that I used to ride? I used to ride that old mare with the green eyes."

"She was blind as a post," the old man said.

"You're tellin' me?"

"Had to tell you then, more than likely have to tell you now"

"Well, she could find her way home," I said.

"A good thing," he said, and leaned out of the seat to point. A dead branch, without a strip of bark, hung across the road. "See that tree?" the old man said. They nodded. "Your daddy hung up there—seat of his britches—till your Grandpa came along, with the hayrick, let him down."

"Now that isn't quite true," I said, and leaned forward to get in a word. "Old Bess left me there, all right, but I climbed down, walked home by myself."

"Think mine is the prettier story," he said. "What you fellas think?" They agreed. "Point is—your daddy was hooked by his britches in the tree."

When you have two kids who were born and raised in an apartment, on East Fifty-third Street, something like that, about their daddy, is interesting. I found it interesting myself. I don't

Fig 4k, 4l

Photo-text, Copyright 1948 by Wright Morris

138 THE HOME PLACE

Backward, turn backward, oh,
Time, in your flight, and give us a
maiden dressed proper and right.
We are so weary of switches and
rats, Billie Burke clusters and peach
basket hats, wads of just hair in a
horrible pile, stacked on their—

"Well, you can read it," I said. I had got that far before I sensed something was wrong. "What little gem have you found?" I said, and read another stanza, in my best manner, before Peg turned from the table and walked away. To make it clear I didn't feel anything that she might be feeling, I read the fifth stanza very spiritedly—

I'd be a single man,
Jolly and free,
I'd be a bachelor,
With a latch key

Now, only a grave man, with a full heart, would have said jolly instead of happy, joyous, or some such frippery. I stood there, looking at the page, doing my best to ignore the fact that I felt more and more like some sly peeping Tom. I put my hand up to my face, as it occurred to me, suddenly, how people look in a *Daily News* photograph. A smiling face at the scene of a bloody accident. A quartet of gay waitresses near the body slumped over the bar. God only knows why I thought of that, but I put up my hands, covering my face, as if I was there, on the spot, and didn't want to be seen. I didn't want to be violated, that is. The camera eye knows no privacy, the really private is its business, and in our time business is good. But what, in God's name, did that have to do with me? At the moment, I guess, I was that kind of camera.

Was there, then, something holy about these things? If not, why had I used that word? For holy things, they were ugly

176 THE HOME PLACE

Out here you wear out, men and women wear out, the sheds and the houses, the machines wear out, and every ten years you put a new seat in the cane-bottomed chair. Every day it wears out, the nap wears off the top of the Axminster. The carpet wears out, but the life of the carpet, the Figure, wears in. The holy thing, that is, comes naturally. Under the carpet, out here, is the floor. After you have lived your own life, worn it out, you will die your own death and it won't matter. It will be all right. It will be ripe, like the old man.

Nothing happens to a man overnight but sometimes what has been happening for years, every day of his life, happens suddenly. You open a door, or maybe you close it, and the thing is done. It happens. That's the important thing. I watched the old man in his nautical hat cross the yard like one of his harrows, the parts unhinged, the joints creaking under a mat of yellow grass. He stopped near the planter to suck on his pipe, tap the bowl on the seat. On the spring handle of the gear was a white cotton glove, with the fingers spread, thrust up in the air like the gloved hand of a traffic cop. The leather palm was gone, worn away, but the crabbed fingers were spread and the reinforced stitching, the bib pattern, was still there. The figure on the front of the carpet had worn through to the back.

Fig 4m, 4n

Joseph Kosuth, ‘One and three Chairs, mixed media, 1965

Fig 40

(above) Sophie Calle, Detail from 'Hopper, House by the Railroad' from the series, 'Ghosts', mixed media, 1991

(below) Edward Hopper, 'House by the Railroad', oil on canvas. 1925

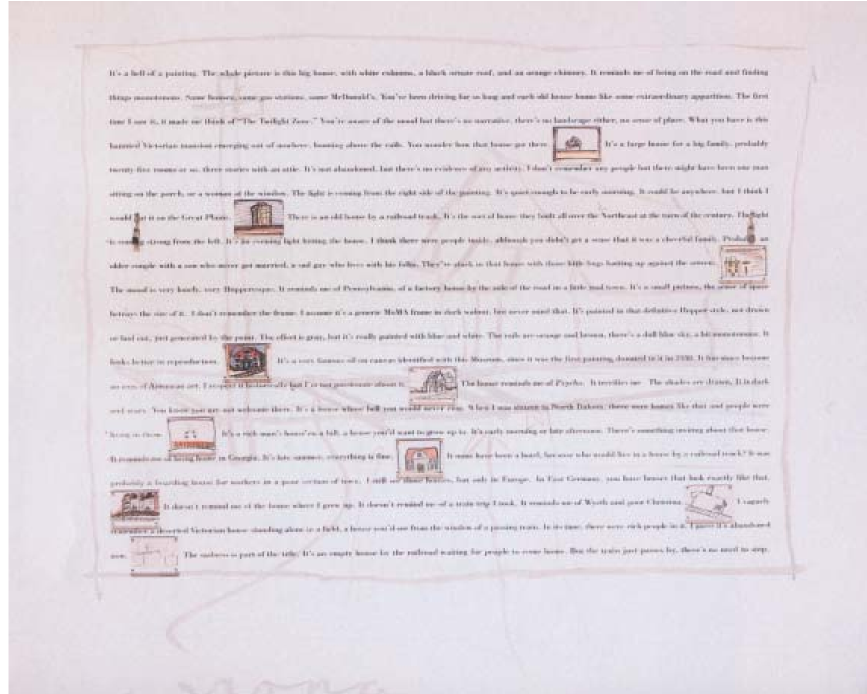


Fig 4p, 4q

Photo-text, Copyright 1955 by Bertold Brecht

These scans taken from Brecht, Berthold, *War Primer,* trans. John Willets, (London: Libris, 1998)

Strålkastarspel

Vi återge här en bild från Associated Press, Berlin, framställande ett tyskt stridsplan, utsatt för engelska „strålkastarbatteriers" eld.

What you see here, caught in your night defences
These steel and glass cocoons for killing people
With tons of bombs, are just the consequences
For all, and not the causes of the evil.

ADAM BROOMBERG & OLIVER CHANARIN: WAR PRIMER 2

Photo-text, Copyright 2011 by Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin

These scans taken from Broomberg & Chanarin, *War Primer 2*, (London: Mack, 2011)

Fig 4s

BERTHOLD BRECHT: WAR PRIMER

Photo-text, Copyright 1955 by Bertold Brecht

These scans taken from Brecht, Berthold, *War Primer,* trans. John Willets, (London: Libris, 1998)

Fig 4t

ADAM BROOMBERG & OLIVER CHANARIN: WAR PRIMER 2

Photo-text, Copyright 2011 by Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin

These scans taken from Broomberg & Chanarin, *War Primer 2*, (London: Mack, 2011)

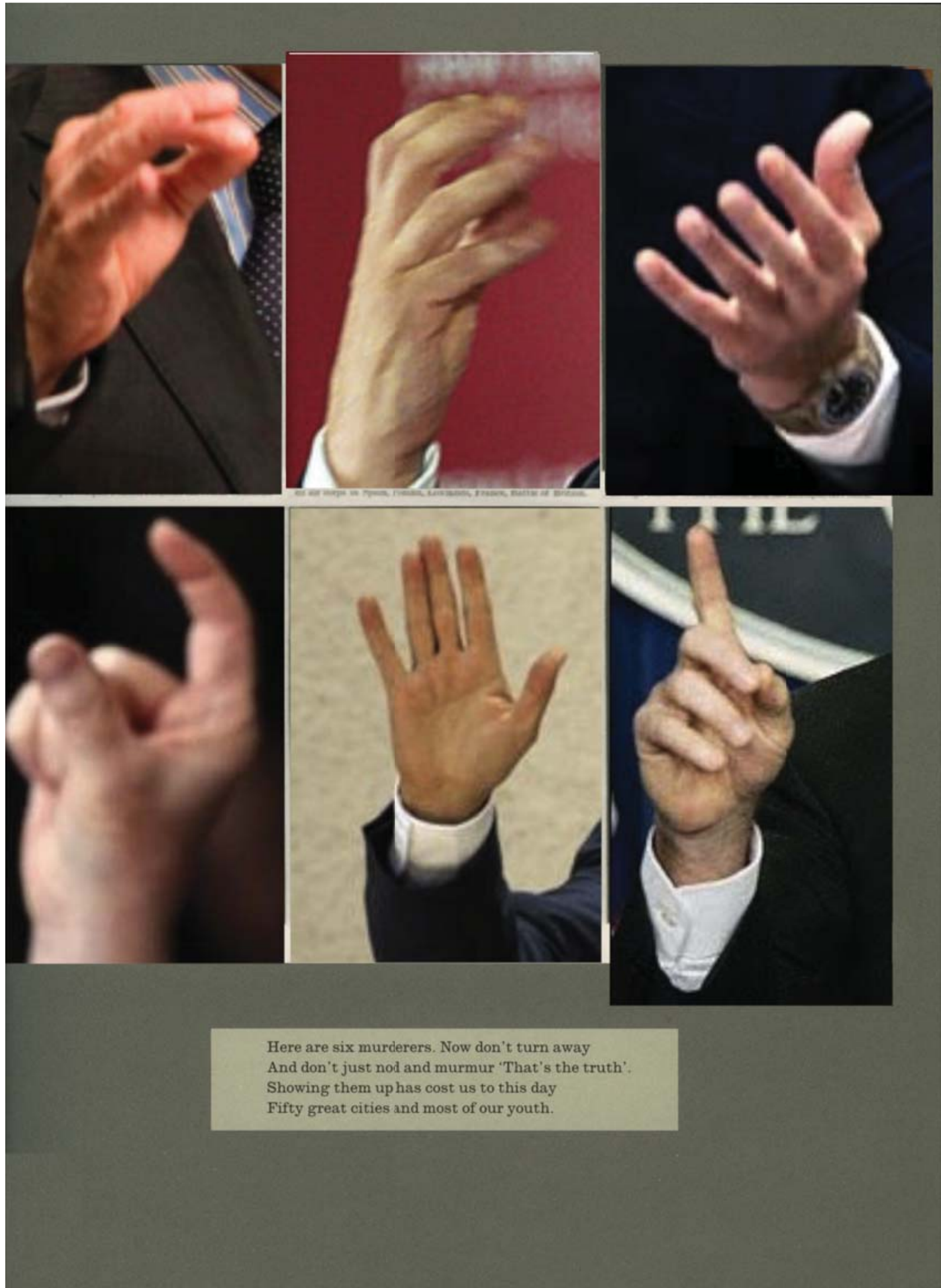


Fig 4u

BERTHOLD BRECHT: WAR PRIMER

Photo-text, Copyright 1955 by Bertold Brecht

These scans taken from Brecht, Berthold, *War Primer,* trans. John Willets, (London: Libris, 1998)

Fig 4v

Photo-text, Copyright 2011 by Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin

These scans taken from Broomberg & Chanarin, *War Primer 2*, (London: Mack, 2011)

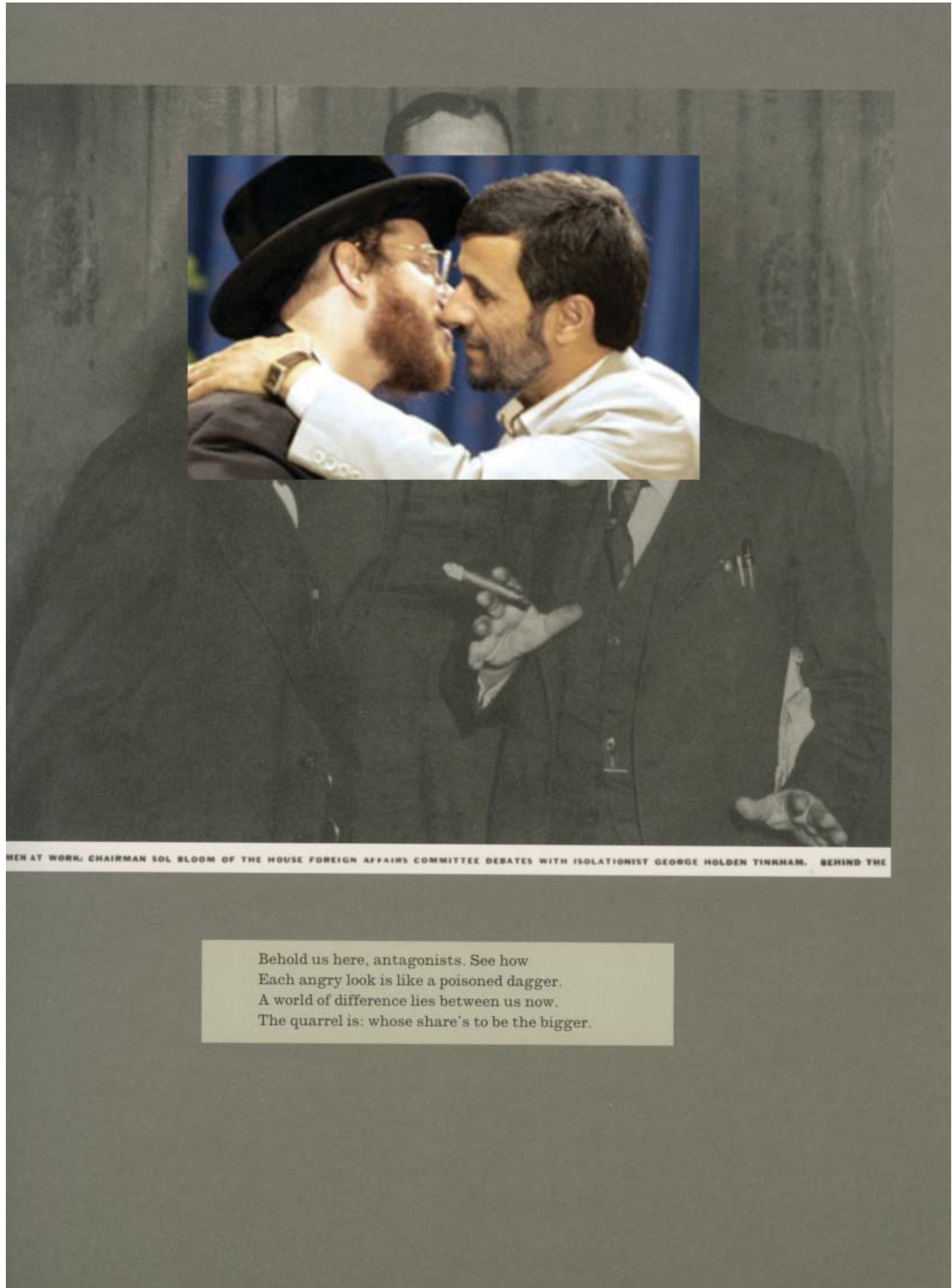


Fig 4w

JUSTIN COOMBES: LOVE'S KNOWLEDGE (INVENTORY FOR N)

Looped digital video, 1min 21 sec, 2008

Installation view at the exhibition, *A Light Divided,* Louise T. Blouin Institute, London, 2008

Fig 6b (for 6a see accompanying Quicktime Movie file)

JUSTIN COOMBES: GRIEF TREE

Transparencies in lightboxes, framed lightjet prints and printed text handouts, 2009
Lightboxes: 55 x 65cm, Prints 100 x 140cm
Installation views at (above) Valentines Mansion, Ilford, Essex, 2009
(below), Leighton House Museum, London, 2010

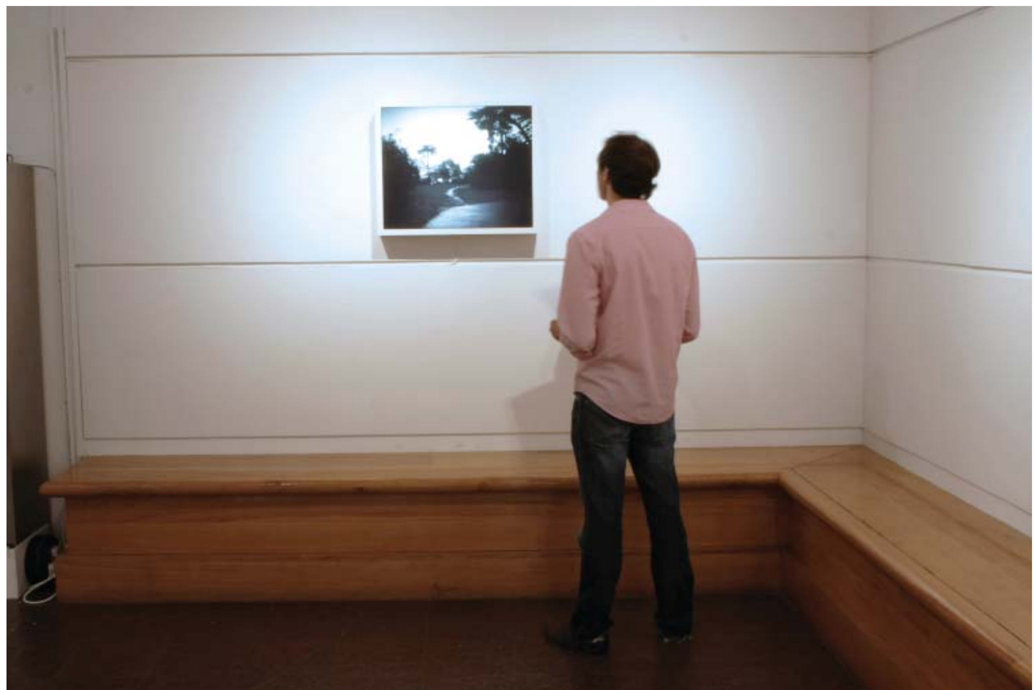


Fig 6d, 6e (for 6c see accompanying book)

JUSTIN COOMBES: COURIERS OF KITE HILL

Transparency in lightbox and video installation, 2010
Lightbox: 120 x 450cm, Video 1min 44 sec, dimensions variable
Installation views at the offices of *WilmerHale*, London, 2010

Fig 6g, 6h (for 6f see accompanying Quicktime Movie file)

JUSTIN COOMBES: COURIERS OF KITE HILL

Transparency in lightbox and video installation, 2010
Lightbox: 120 x 450cm, Video 1min 44 sec, dimensions variable
Details from lightbox

Fig 6i, 6j, 6k

JUSTIN COOMBES: HOKKAIDO POSTCARD

Lightjet photographs mounted on aluminium, each
100 x 140cm and screenprinted texts on paper: dimensions variable
Installation views at (above) *Royal College of Art,* London, 2010
(below), *LM Projects,* Los Angeles, 2010

Fig 6m, 6n (for 6l see accompanying book)

JUSTIN COOMBES: HALCYON SONG

Lightjet photographs mounted on aluminium, each 100 x 237cm and vinyl lettering transferred onto wall: dimensions variable
Intallation views at solo exhibition, *Paradise Row Project Space*, London, 2012

Fig 6p, 6q (for 6o see accompanying book)

JUSTIN COOMBES: HALCYON SONG

Lightjet photographs mounted on aluminium, each 100 x 237cm and vinyl lettering transferred onto wall: dimensions variable
Intallation views at solo exhibition, *Paradise Row Project Space*, London, 2012

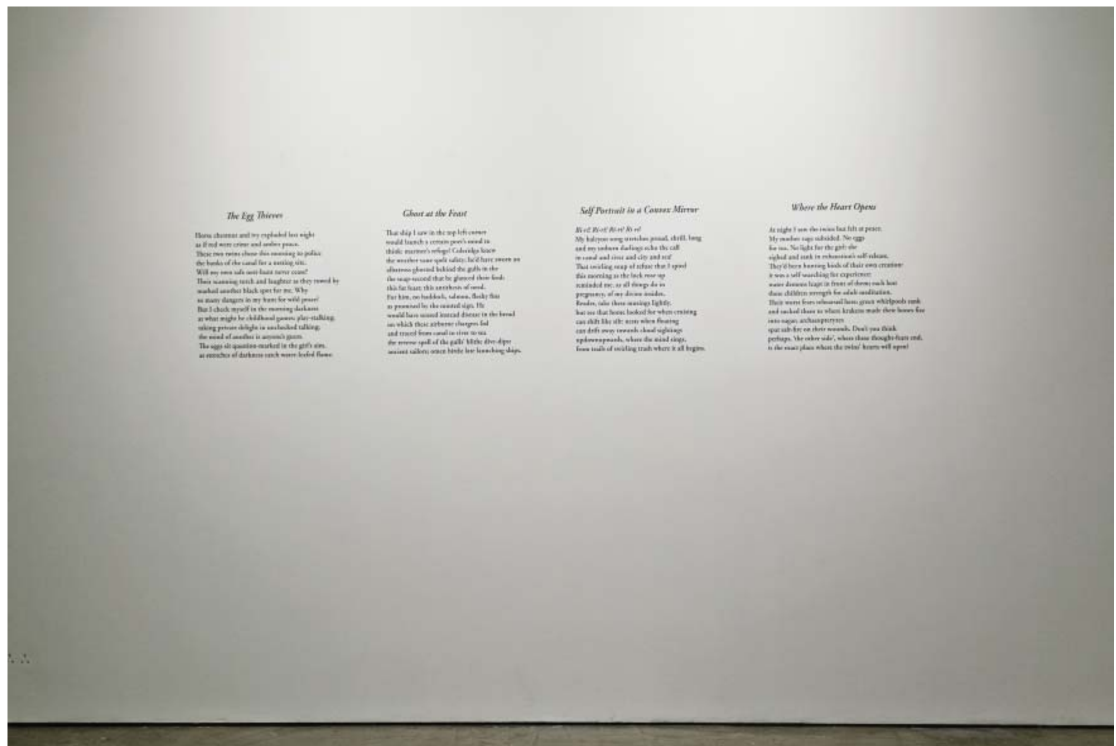


Fig 6r, 6s