(Dis)connecting dots, (un)making meanings: how images occupy (and are occupied by) language

Submission in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree Doctor of Philosophy (by Project) in the School of Arts & Humanities awarded by the Royal College of Art.

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Declaration

This thesis represents partial submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (by Project) at the Royal College of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared I have 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.

Cole Robertson, September 2023

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Acknowledgements

These people helped shape my work, life, and self, connecting dots and making meanings that ultimately ended up manifesting in my work. I'm very fortunate to have this network spanning two continents and many years. If I've left anyone out, please know your contribution was felt - it's just a question of character limits.

This work is dedicated to my mother Tonya Lovelace Robertson and my partner Peter Piatkowski.

My PhD supervisors Chantal Faust and Jo Stockham, for always challenging me to do better, and supporting me when I couldn't.

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Introduction & overview

Abstract

This practice-led research takes as its subject embodied discovery and the photographic object - its media, language, encounters, and systems of meaning-making. The fundamental questions of my research are these: how does embodied logic shape photographic meaning-making, and how can image encounters manifest this logic?

Periodically throughout this work I switch between personal, analytic, and pseudonymic voices. This is both to employ the concepts at hand in a practical way, but also to provide a method for additional questioning of texts - thus linking metaphoric structures are shown to pervade different writing genres and systems of communication.

The first chapter deals with the closest and most immediate of physical encounters - that of touch and the embodied haptic. Taking as its catalyst my work *touch piece,* a series of photographic child nudes by famous photographers and reproduced on plain paper, photocopy-style, with heat-reactive thermochromic pigments, this section unpacks the implications of the primary embodied metaphors 'intimacy is closeness', 'seeing is touching', and 'understanding is grasping'. Tracing the examples of these metaphors through texts by Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, WJT Mitchell, Marquard Smith, and Mark Paterson and visual works by Amber Hawk Swanson, Caravaggio, Jean-Léon Gérôme, and F. Holland Day, the conflation of physical proximity with emotional involvement ultimately manifests again in the *touch piece* work, implicating the viewer in an unsought, uncomfortable intimacy.

Progressively zooming out, the second chapter takes on many types and ramifications of networked images in the most expansive understanding of the term. It begins with my work

Toward a unified field theory of photography, an analogue image map of assorted pictures I've aggregated wrapping the wall, floor, and ceiling and connected by colour-coded lines indicating formal, conceptual, or content-based connections. Exploring the primary embodied metaphor 'similarity is closeness', this part brings together folk theories of contamination, proximity, and relational thinking regarding photographic networks, systems, and sorting devices. Chapter II analyses the psychologically networked image via Isabella Stewart Gardner's art collection and exhibition ethos, Lacanian optical device metaphors, and digital tagging systems, as well as the writing of Jean-François Lyotard, WJT Mitchell, Pierre Bourdieu, and Mieke Bal.

Moving out even farther (while simultaneously looping back to the immediate intimacy of the body) the third chapter deals with the spectre of timespace and death that grounds photography. Led by my works *All This and Nothing More*, a deep textural analysis of the surface patina of a Polaroid image of my late mother during the aftermath of cancer and the birth of her last child, and *Cenotaphs*, a series of Internet memes and clickbait detritus immortalised as bas-relief sculptures, this section engages works such as the 1954 George Cukor/Judy Garland film *A Star is Born*, Zeno's Paradox of the Arrow, and Stan Douglas's still and moving *Monodramas*. Tracing back the embodied metaphors 'time is motion', 'change is motion', and 'states are locations', this final chapter will wrangle with photography's ineffable connection to the infinite and encapsulation of human mortality.

Arguing for an expanded field of the photographic medium, this practice-led research forms the invisible and often unconscious 'connective tissue' that contributes to the image's facility to create meaning spontaneously. The (dis)connections in the title refer to my own efforts to slow or frustrate this unconscious facilitation in order to bring it to light, offering new ways of

understanding the stickiness of image objects and their attendant psychological and physical encounters.

What is this?

The purpose of this practice-led thesis is to show the connection between embodied metaphor, image creation, and image interpretation. Meaning-making through photography is the focus of my artistic practice, and expanding this endeavour into my written research is a natural progression of my work. In the three chapters of this work I've gathered myriad applications of embodied metaphors from various writers, theorists, artists, philosophers, and creators spanning 'high' and 'popular' culture, noting how widespread these figures of speech are and how they both figure speech and make it figure.

Many of the fundamental metaphors used to conceptualise relationships and knowledge are derived from embodied experience. Crossing cultures, languages, and epochs, these primary metaphors serve to ground abstract concepts in real-life situations that are broadly familiar (even to those who don't have the sensory modality in question). This metaphoric language is vernacular, ubiquitous, and fundamental to everyday communication, becoming so commonplace that it seldom registers as metaphoric at all. Many of these metaphors have a visual component, however, and often evoke mental images that help with their communicative use value. These fundamental linguistic components then influence image creation and interpretation in their turn, helping to support a type of visual shorthand that also renders itself ubiquitous and seemingly transparent. The goal of this work is to illuminate some of these connections; to make plain and obvious (sometimes via emphasis or deep analysis, other times via disruption or 'queering') what otherwise might go unnoticed.

As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's highly influential book *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* will form the springboard for many of the

arguments in this work, a brief overview of the text is necessary. Lakoff and Johnson posit that most communication and higher-level thinking take the form of metaphor. At the bottom of this system of communication is what is known as primary metaphor; that is, a metaphor that is irreducible to smaller component metaphors/metaphoric structures. These metaphors are generally embodied, in the sense that they stem from physical, embodied experiences (usually during infancy or childhood) of object manipulation, causality, time, movement, etc. The ubiquity of these experiences creates a shared system of meaning to draw upon when more complex thought becomes possible; hence the fact that many of these metaphors and systems of meaning cross cultures and languages. One of the clearest examples of this is outlined on p. 150:

> 'The Moving Time and Moving Observer metaphors are not limited to English. Although detailed studies remain to be done, a preliminary survey suggests that these metaphors are common in the world's languages. One could choose many examples, but we have chosen our examples from the Hopi... Ekkhart Malotki's classic, *Hopi Time* ... provides more than four hundred pages of Hopi time expressions, more than two hundred of which are time metaphors. Here are some examples that give the flavor of Malotki's findings.
>
> Hopi has a verb meaning arrive, which has a normal spatial sense, but can also be used for time. In the following case, time is conceptualized as something that moves and can arrive. It appears to be an instance of the Moving Time metaphor.
>
> pu' hapi a-w pitsi-w-iw-ta
> now EMPH 'REF' -to arrive-STAT-IMPERF-(temp. adv.)
> "Now the [appropriate time] for it has arrived."
> HT 22/1.2.1.1/ex. 1'

Two guiding works for this thesis are W. J. T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* and Mieke Bal & Sherry Marx-Macdonald's *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*. The Mitchell book relates in detailed and thorough fashion how visual materials or artefacts are not only shaped by theory, but literally picture it, becoming at once a manifestation of an idea as well as the idea itself. Bal and Marx-Macdonald's idea of the 'travelling concept' (that is, the idea/knowledge/figure that can slip between media and experience) was also

essential in understanding the types of knowledge transfer/slippage that occur between media. These works both exist at the nexus point between the visual and the verbal, occupying the grey area between what can be seen and what can be said - a position of critical interest to my research.

John Szarkowski's *The Photographer's Eye* and Jean-François Lyotard's *Discourse, Figure* are two sources that were instrumental in shaping my approach to the medium of photography. Szarkowski posits the Modernist approach to the photographic medium - that is, looking at the intrinsic characteristics (in his parlance, The Thing Itself, The Detail, The Frame, Time, and Vantage Point). While there is much to criticise in photographic Modernism (especially its sublimation of content to form), it is helpful to maintain focus on the techniques and technologies that distinguish the medium from others. Likewise Lyotard's 'Veduta' interlude at the centre of *Discourse, Figure* was particularly helpful in analysing the photographic frame and the ways in which it complicates the question of figure/ground. Lyotard's deep analysis into the psychology of signification is also alluded to in several parts of this work.

Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* connected to strategies I (previously) deployed intuitively in writing and artmaking. Halberstam's ideas about queering, failure, incompleteness, slowing down, and fucking up (whether deliberately or accidentally) as strategies to question and challenge prevailing norms very much connect to my own research, and have been instrumental for me to understand my approach to work. The twinned gestures of connecting/disconnecting create a dissonant space, one that doesn't just encourage reflection but practically forces it, calling into question the *how* and the *why* of works and clouding their transparency.

Vilém Flusser's *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* and Martha Rosler's *Decoys and Disruptions : Selected Writings, 1975-2001* both changed the way I engage with my chosen

medium. Flusser's work enabled me to interrogate photography's gestures and objects as philosophic signifiers, deepening my understanding of my own and other's work. Rosler's work on photography and the sociopolitical sphere of art have been instrumental in shaping my practice for 20 years, and particularly enabled me to think around expanded systems of photographic meaning.

The thesis consists of three chapters, each grounded in an element of my artistic practice and dealing with an aspect of embodied cognitive visuality. The first is the most intimate (Chapter I: Complicity), then the view zooms out to a more distant subject (Chapter II: Aggregation), finally bringing the reader to the most distant and abstruse of topics: time (Chapter III: Permanence). The organisation of these sections mirrors the process of embodied cognition itself, starting with the most intimate experience of the body and extrapolating outward to increasingly distant relationships. Throughout this thesis I employ several different writing styles, offering the reader multiple ways of engaging with the concepts at hand. This serves to illustrate in a more direct way something of the process behind embodied cognition, sharing with the reader intimate experiences and stories. In addition, this written and visual work owes its existence to extensive technological networks. The Internet has made sharing information as easy as breathing, and technological advances in smartphone technology have made text and image possession simple and cheap. This thesis lives in the world of the Internet, taking memes, books, articles, and sources and incorporating them into a polyglot form.

Chapter I deals with concepts of proximity, intimacy, and complicity. This section springs from my own work *touch piece*. This work consists of reinterpretations of child nudes by famous photographers such as Jock Sturges, Sally Mann, and Robert Mapplethorpe reproduced as small, photocopy-style screen prints on plain paper. The images are printed with thermochromic

pigment, however, and the places that come in contact with body heat (such as fingertips, hands, etc) disappear when the prints are held. These images sprung from my own (sometimes debilitating) discomfort in looking at these types of images. Nudity has been made uncomfortable through a variety of social, political, and economic mores; the nudity of children has become that much more charged. Adding photography and mass media creates an economy in these images that exists both above- and below-ground - that is, their cachet as art provides them with protection from censorship that allows them to serve other purposes. As someone who previously looked to the mens underwear section of the Sears catalogue for erotic inspiration, I understand to a disquieting degree how 'pornography' is a function of the viewer's use of and intent in looking at the image.

The first chapter deals with these images and words in an immediate and directly embodied way. A central aspect of embodied thought is proximity; that is, people make meaning from their immediate surroundings via direct, embodied experience. These experiences, especially the fundamental ones experienced during childhood (for example, living with family or placing like objects into containers) then go on to shape commonly used linguistic structures such as primary metaphors. These metaphors reflect an intimacy of experience, and two sources in particular helped clarify my understanding of intimacy, touch, the visual haptic[1], and the inevitable complicity that results from trafficking in (and touching, in every sense of the word) images of vulnerable bodies. C. Nadia Seremetakis's *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* is a collection of works on the anthropology of everyday life that clarified many points for me in my first chapter research, widening my understanding of the phenomenological as it pertains to

[1] I owe a great debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Chantal Faust, for inspiring and guiding my work on the visual haptic. See also: Chantal Faust, 'On Haptic Aesthetics', *The SKIN of the image: Photography and the Contemporary Imaginary*, (London College of Communication, University of the Arts London, 2015).

vernacular experience. Marquard Smith's *The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish* on the history and meaning of the erotic doll helped shape my own understanding of the psychological and physical intimacy that can exist between human and human-like objects, as well as the ways in which doll play provides space for actions and gestures that (if committed with/against living bodies) would otherwise be verboten.

Chapter II takes on the process of aggregation (that is, gathering *with purpose*), looking at devices (in the loosest sense of the term) intended to create and disseminate images. It leads off with my own aggregative device, an ongoing artwork titled *Toward a unified field theory of photography*. This site-reactive[2] work consists of 10x15 cm (4x6") druggist prints of images I've shot myself and others I've appropriated. These include street photography, news media images, advertising, media captures, memes, clickbait, archival images, and other types of visual information that flows past my eyes as I go through my day. The images are gathered with the purpose of re-presentation, undergoing an initial edit in the moment of choice, then further editing as I select which images to print, and even further winnowing down as I choose which ones to include in the moment when I begin installation. The prints are taped to the wall in a cloud formation, fitting into existing architecture and encompassing walls, ceiling, and floor depending on the vagaries of the environment. These images are then classified in the moment (and not always consistently between installations), and colour-coded lines of thin gaffer tape connect images based on conceptual, formal, or personal relationships between them. These lines wrap walls, ductwork, panelling, and other interior architecture details to manifest a directional device as well as a sculptural form. The

[2] The term site specific has been expanded over the past 30 years to encompass any work that fits itself into a space. I prefer the term site-reactive to refer specifically to works that fit a space into themselves. For more on this distinction and the work, see Chapter II.

resulting cloud becomes a product of its immediate time and the vagaries of its specific environment, never to be repeated.

Through writing and practice, this section deals with the question of similarity; a problem that has plagued art, history, religion, and magic. What is similarity? What are the standards for deciding two things are like? Is it a visual relationship? Physical proximity?

Michel Foucault's analysis of systems of categorisation in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of The Human Sciences* was instrumental in understanding my own artistic practice (in terms of the image classification, sorting, and physical grouping that shapes my work *Toward a unified field theory of photography*). Likewise, the collection of writing and analysis *Networks* (edited by Lars Bang Larsen) shaped my writing around *Toward*..., and my understanding of the ways in which structural devices both form and are formed by networked entities. Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* granted an extremely granular analysis of the concept of taste and how it not only signifies class and status, but replicates these systems (even when it purports to resist them).

In Chapter III I look into ways time can be conceptualised, specifically in regard to death and spatial relations. As permanence is at the heart of the photographic medium, the entanglement of timedeathspace becomes critical to understanding the stubborn power of images to wound and to heal. The chapter is led by two of my own works; *All This and Nothing More* and *Cenotaphs*. *All this*... is an object analysis of a Polaroid photograph of my mother. Taken just after my birth, the image remained concealed in her jewellery box for decades until her death. I carefully traced every crack, scratch, scuff, and mark on the surface of the image, blew up this matrix of timespace, and etched it into the picture frame glazing that houses the image like a modern reliquary. The object

then becomes a recursive study of the image object within, projecting its patina outward and casting it back onto itself via shadows and the play of ambient light. The second work, *Cenotaphs*, is much more lighthearted, consisting of memes, Internet clickbait, and other ephemeral image encounters that were never intended to be permanent or widely seen, yet nonetheless deserve to be remembered. These images are extrapolated into 3D models and output as roughly A3 size bas-relief sculptures that rest on the floor in the style of flat grave markers.

Thomas Nail's *Theory of the Image* outlines a kinetic materialist philosophy of the image that has expanded my own understanding of how photography works and what it does, specifically with regard to higher concepts (such as time and death) that can't be directly indexed by the medium. I then expand on these concepts via two case studies; the 1954 film *A Star is Born* (conceived and produced by Judy Garland and directed by George Cukor) and Stan Douglas's still and moving *Monodrama*[3] series of works. The Garland film was slashed down after its release, and long stretches of it were destroyed. In a loving 1983 restoration, film historian Ronald Haver substituted still images for lost moving sequences, a process he outlined in his book *A Star Is Born: the Making of the 1954 Movie and Its 1983 Restoration*. Douglas uses the same push/pull of the still and moving image in his piece *I'm not Gary*, which is analysed in depth by Mieke Bal in his 2014 eponymous monograph. These works exist in the gap between still and moving images, evidencing the function of kinetic vision. They also speak to material death, especially the Garland film with its lost sequences and painstakingly recreated still interludes.

[3] '*Monodramas*, 1991, Ten single-channel videos for television on LaserDisc, 30-60 seconds each, color, sound, video accompanied by ten photographs, overall dimensions variable' David Zwirner Gallery, *Stan Douglas: Survey*, website, 2023. <https://www.davidzwirner.com/artists/stan-douglas/survey> [accessed 3 September 2023].

How is this?

Methodology

At bottom, this work is concerned with the realm of the vernacular - ordinary images, plain (OK, plain-*ish*) language, and commonly used figures of speech. This approach allows me to analyse language and images at a macro- as well as micro level; to draw meaning from broad strokes as well as specific instances, and to seek wide patterns while appreciating individual marks. This ethos leads me to develop a magpie process of gathering, appropriation, collage, mosaic, and aggregation, ultimately working to synthesise disparate elements into a cohesive (if not always coherent) statement. In terms of writing, periodically I switch between personal, analytic, and pseudonymic voices in this work. These discursive spaces fold over one another like alternate dimensions, occupying the same timespace while remaining distinct. Assuming varied verbal guises enables me to express views that are either not entirely my own, or are indeed mine but are questionable enough to make it desirable to create some distance between text and author. The form of this thesis represents an attempt to survey the shared elements of these disparate methodologies by uniting them on a common topic.

'Anthropology of the self'[4]

On 28 February 2023 I attended a reading by filmmaker, anthropologist, and author Hugh Brody. Brody's wife, actor Juliet Stevenson, was reading passages from his latest book, *Landscapes of Silence: From Childhood to the Arctic*. Part anthropological work, part memoir, part ethnographic

[4] Hugh Brody, *Landscapes of Silence: from Childhood to the Arctic* (Faber & Faber, 2022), p. 5.

and autoethnographic research, many of the themes connected with my own written and visual research practice - particularly his use of family narratives as a way of understanding larger issues.

I cornered him at his book signing and peppered him with questions. Eventually we decided a longer conversation was in order; at his request I sent him some writing and we carried out a lengthy email correspondence. He very kindly agreed to a Zoom conversation that took place on 3 August 2023. During our meeting, we discussed what it is to write about grief and the ethics of engaging with - and writing about - subjects who have died or who are no longer able to provide their own accounts of events. We also spoke about what it is to write about your own mother and the ethics of doing so, particularly with regard to the slippages of experiences between two lives: that of the parent and that of the offspring and how this is entangled with Brody's concept of an anthropology of the self. This talk clarified many of my own ideas about the underlying impulse behind my own creative endeavours.

Ultimately this anthropology of the self is the driving force behind the creation of my written and visual research. My art practice uses many scientific or pseudoscientific anthropological methods (documenting artefacts photographically, gathering objects and sorting them according to typologies, diagramming structures and visualising data, studying vernacular objects embused with symbolic value for minute traces of wear and use, studying styles of everyday communication), as does my written practice. I seek to understand the world through myself and myself through the world. This work is ongoing and will most likely only end when I do.

Why is this?

Photography is a holistic, full experience - embodied with language and culture and history and feeling (real, true, deep feeling) and philosophy and truth and lies and all of it. Ultimately, it's the sheer, unadorned greed of the camera/photographer/viewer/system that entrances me - the constant clamour for more more more fucking more give it to me gimme gimme gimme not only do I want it all, I want it forever - ossified and permanently hoarded, a hedge against future want, loss, entropy... the index as a bulwark against death. Like Barthes, '...this disorder and this dilemma, revealed by my desire to write on Photography, corresponded to a discomfort I had always suffered from: the uneasiness of being a subject torn between two languages, one expressive, the other critical...'.[5] This work is my attempt to demonstrate that there aren't two languages, but rather one manifold and wildly complex one that encompasses images in thought and deed as well as spoken and written words. It's a greedy, polyglot experience that acknowledges the simultaneity of conscious and unconscious thought, accounting for (demanding, really) slippages between conceptual manifestations and sensorimotor domains.

[5] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage Books, 2000), p. 8.

Overview of practice

‘One should not look at anything. Neither at things, nor at people should one look. Only in mirrors is it well to look, for mirrors do but show us masks.’

Oscar Wilde, *Salome*[6]

I like photography — its histories, languages and endless ability to move between genres, functionalities and industries. I teach, write, work, play, curate and create among this imagescape; through transmutation, alteration, animation, destruction, etc. I disrupt the transaction between viewer and image, hoping through visual disconnect to provoke analysis and hinder absorption.

The totality of my practice lies on the uneasy boundaries between aesthetic pleasure, pure scholarship, and pedagogy. That is to say, I try to communicate my ideas about photography — its histories, practices, and peculiarities — through multiple media.

[6] Oscar Wilde, *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (HarperPerennial Modern Classics edition, New York: HarperPerennial, 2008).

touch piece

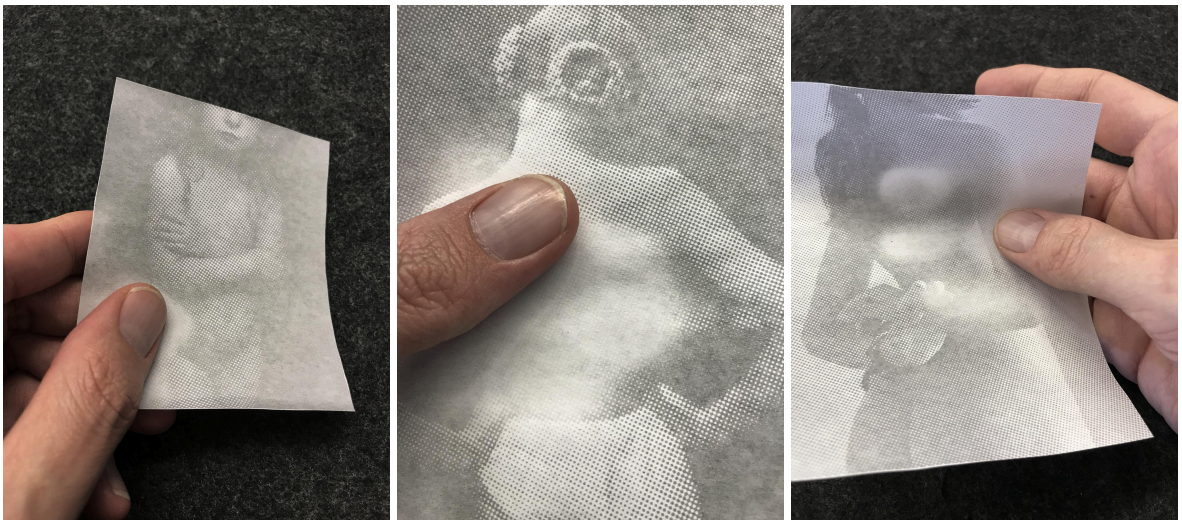


Figure 1. *touch piece*

Cole Robertson, thermochromic photo screen print on plain paper, 2017

An installation of small, photocopy-style prints of photographic child nudes by famous artists laid out on a table, the images are screen printed with thermochromic inks to disappear when handled and reappear when relinquished.

Dimensions: 10 x 15 cm each print, laid out on a 180 cm table.

Toward a unified field theory of photography

Cole Robertson, Photographic installation (drugstore prints, tape)

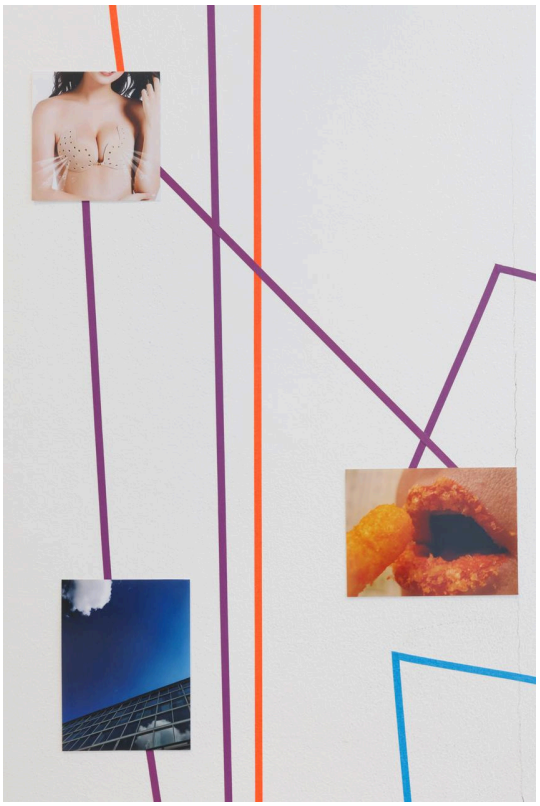
Dimensions variable and site-reactive, generally 4x12’ minimum space is needed

2017-present

Toward a unified field theory of photography is an ongoing body of work. This site-reactive installation functions as a mind map and a selective survey of my personal imagescape. Small prints are taped directly to the wall, with colour-coded tape reflecting technical, formal, conceptual, or arbitrary connections between images. Some of these images I shoot, others are happenstance (such as those created when I pause a video) while others are selected from an almost infinite continuum and deliberately recontextualized to create alternate realities. The series also includes image culture detritus like Facebook status updates, face tag prompts, etc.—moments of accidental juxtaposition that transcend their origins.

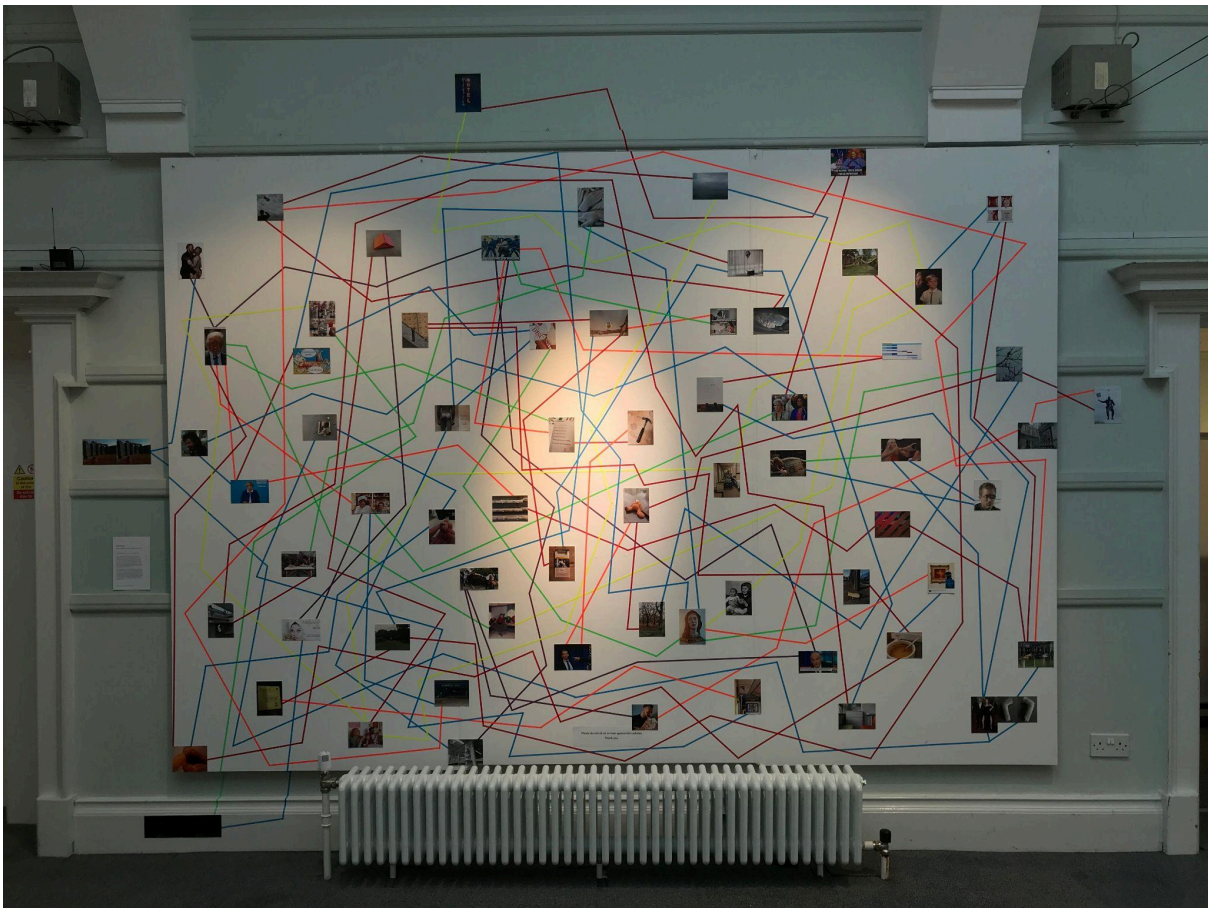
Figure 2. *The interface is the in your face*
A sample source image aggregated as part of *Toward a unified field theory of photography*, digital photograph, 2022

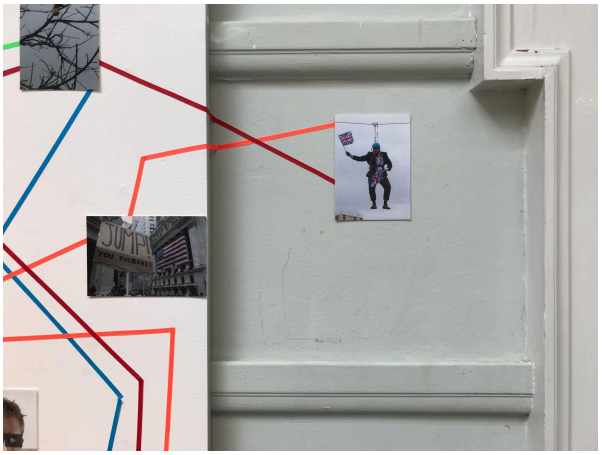
Installation view from *Unruly Encounters* (2022), Southwark Park Gallery, London.

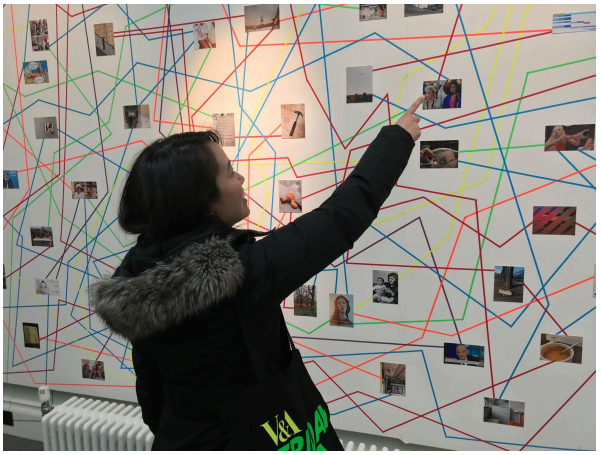


Figures 3-4. Installation views of *Toward*... at Southwark Park Gallery

Installation view from *Another Land* (2019), Kingston Museum, Kingston-upon-Thames.







Figures 5-7. Installation views of *Toward*... at Kingston Museum

All This and Nothing More

Cole Robertson, vintage Polaroid print, etched glass, bespoke walnut frame, 50 x 50 cm

2019

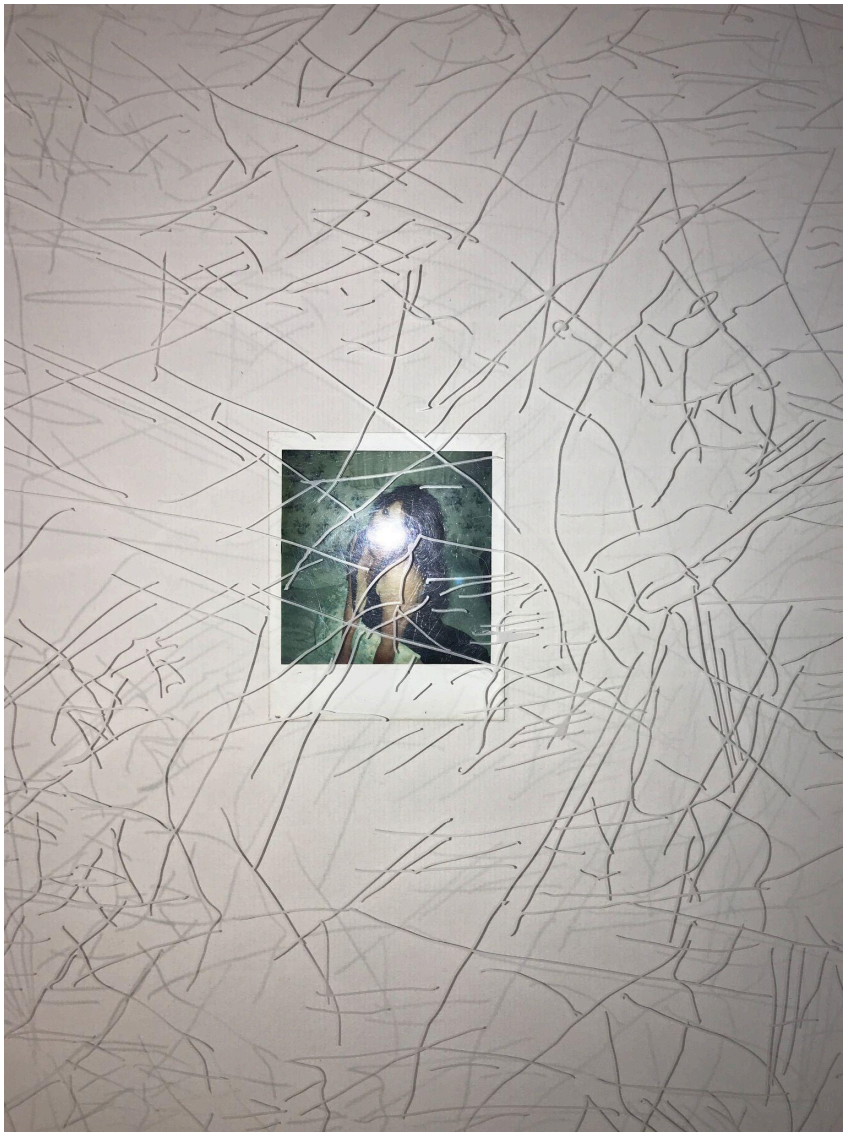


Figure 8. *All This and Nothing More*

Cenotaphs

Figure 9. Untitled, from the *Cenotaphs* series

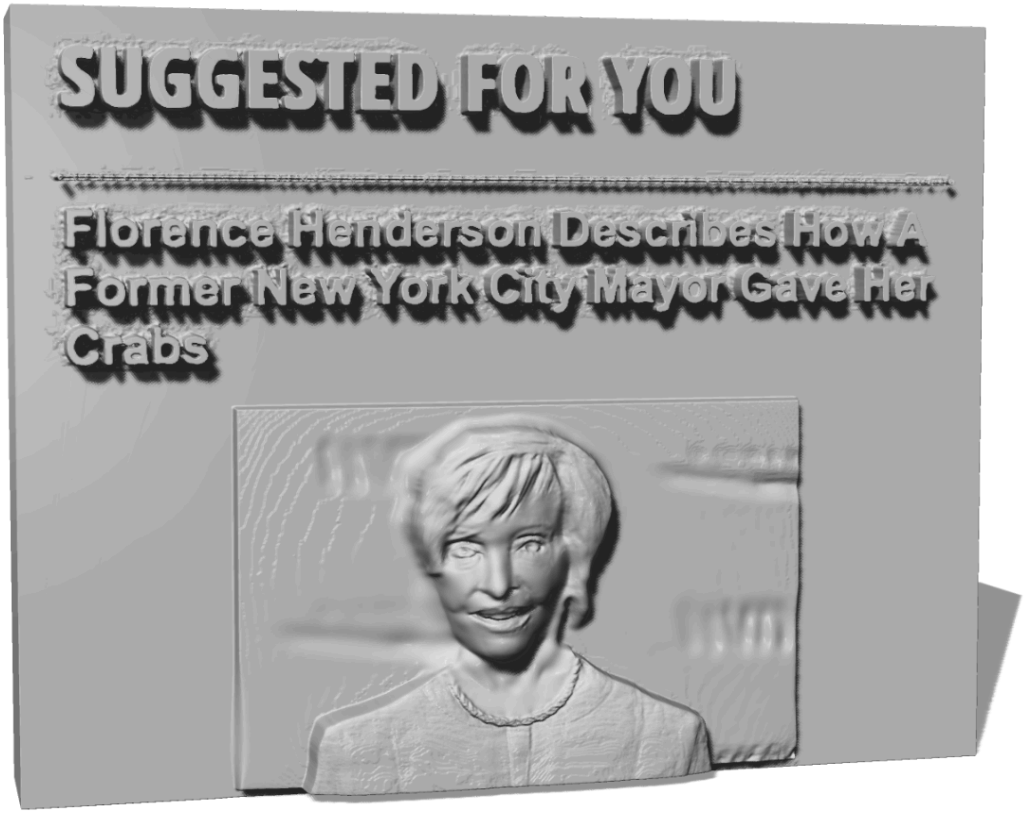


Figure 10. Untitled, from the *Cenotaphs* series

Figure 11. Untitled, from the *Cenotaphs* series

Chapter I: Complicity

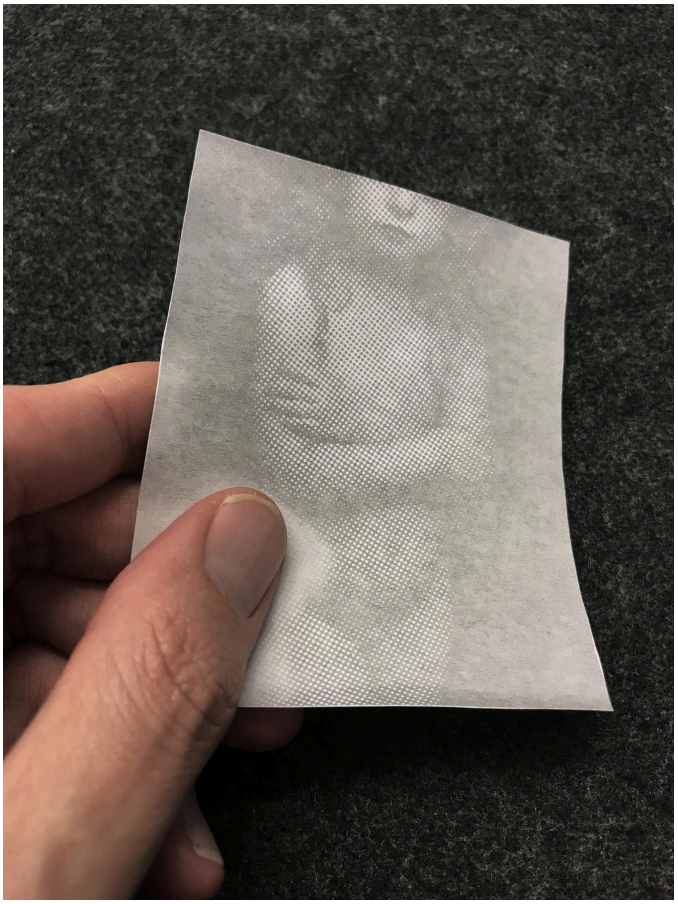


Figure 12. Cole Robertson, *touch piece*[7]

Thermochromic photo screen print on plain paper, 2017. Dimensions: 10 x 15 cm each print, laid out on a 2 m table.

An installation of small, photocopy-style prints of photographic child nudes by famous artists laid out on a table, the images are screen printed with thermochromic inks to disappear when handled and reappear when relinquished.[8]

[7] Appropriated image of Sally Mann's *Virginia, 1988*

[8] The work of Sally Mann, Jock Sturges, and Robert Mapplethorpe stirred controversy among the public from the moment it became known. Being a member of the public, I shared in the discomfort - even while defending these images on aesthetic and conceptual grounds. I never really shed my belief in the utter *wrongness*, not of the images, but rather the massive economies (financial, libidinal, informational, etc.) in which they function. This work was a way to visualise that discomfort.

Tactile words

'I was bored and (I realized years later) profoundly unhappy, so I looked for something to inspire escapist fantasies. My mother purchased individual volumes of a lavishly photo-illustrated encyclopedia set at the supermarket when there was money; we had volumes A-Mo. I spent many idle afternoons leafing through the images, exploring new worlds and letting the photographs spark my imagination. I was screaming into the void, and the void responded, quite unexpectedly, with pictures.'

Thomas Parke D'Invilliers, *Mirroring and Windowing*[9]

Tactile perception is one of the most immediate and misunderstood sensory modalities. *To touch* isn't necessarily interpersonal, but *being touched* does have that connotation - where one is touched in a literal, physical sense, a touch*er* is assumed. Thus, an intimacy is implicit in the language and concept; where touch (or, more specifically for this work, the haptic) is concerned, there exists the spectre of (an)other. A partner, an invader, or merely a careless passerby. The language of touch is telling, as well. Many well-known metaphors equate seeing and touching or understanding with grasping, revealing some of the assumptions around touch, touching, touchers, and the touched. These metaphors cross cultural and language divides, creating a type of *lingua franca*. This language is omnipresent, but is rarely analysed for the specific assumptions it both connotes and denotes - that is, its metaphors exist in a state of transparency as language that is colourful, but ultimately so clear and straightforward as to need no further explanation or investigation. In *The Senses of Touch* Mark Paterson (sociologist and researcher on the body, the senses, and space) inadvertently reiterates this concept in a telling aside,

> 'In 1994 Seremetakis, herself a Greek, re-examined the Greek origins of the word [aesthetic] while writing about the sensory content of memory. In her etymological reflections she notes that *aésthema*, which is "emotion-feeling", and *aesthetikí*, which comes to be

[9] Thomas Parke D'Invilliers, *Mirroring and Windowing*, (Tempe: Peephole Press, 1989), p. 3.

> "aesthetics", are both derived from *aesthénome* which she translates as "I feel or sense, I understand, grasp, learn..."'[10]

This *grasp*, tossed in at the end of a sentence that is itself a slight tangent from the main thesis of the work, is an example of the 'Understanding is Grasping' metaphor - one that equates getting information with grasping or manipulating an object. This metaphor, derived from a primary, embodied experience, is one that pervades epistemology - it recurs so consistently and is reiterated so frequently as to render itself seemingly completely transparent. Theorist Michel Foucault alludes to related metaphoric structures in *The Order of Things*: 'And 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 (emphasis mine).'[11] Here, Foucault has posited the Knowing is Seeing metaphor - that is, the fundamental, embodied equation of knowledge with sight that provides the basis for the image's rhetorical impact. Philosopher Jacques Derrida also employs this metaphor as part of a cascade in his groundbreaking survey of the philosophy of the sense of touch, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy:*

> 'What is one intent on doing by "having a word" and touching one's friend with it, for example on the subject of this or that, which might be touch, touching him or her, or quite simply a word, but for example the word "touching"? To friends we speak and in them we confide—briefly, elliptically, closely—so as to inform them, no doubt, to have a word with them and "touch on it"; often, however, in order to warn them, to put them on their guard, alert them ("Get in touch with him? Oh yes. I'll have a word with him and touch on this, should the opportunity arise, to find out what he thinks of this, and by the same token I'll tell him, in a word, how I see the matter at hand—I myself, so as to avoid saying foolish things, and also, as a reminder, to recall a little of this enormous memory, the stuffed belly of a library of touch."). How is one to have a word and touch on it?'[12]

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[10] Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2007), p. 84.
[11] Michel Foucault, *The Order Of Things: An Archaeology Of The Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 10.
[12] Jacques Derrida, trans. by Christine Irizarry, *On Touching—Jean-luc Nancy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 112.

This system is a bit more complicated, consisting of two primary metaphors combined. It begins with Knowing is Seeing, that is, the 'word' in Derrida's example becomes the stand-in for information, or knowledge. This knowledge is conveyed - transmuted - through the visual by the phrase 'how I *see* the matter myself' (emphasis mine). Derrida then employs the Seeing is Touching metaphor, generating a metaphor cascade that equates knowing → seeing → touching. Thus a link is pre-formed in the reader's mind, preparing them to understand his meaning with little prompting.

These examples (and countless others like them) underscore both how ubiquitous embodied cognitive metaphors are and yet how transparently they function, because of their ubiquity. How to make sense of all these metaphors of touch, touching, grasping, and handling? How to figure out the underpinnings of these layered structures?

Unpacking this concept of metaphoric touch, cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's groundbreaking work *Philosophy in the Flesh* lays out two main touch-based metaphors that permeate languages, functioning as a shared system of meaning-making that directly impacts the creation and understanding of visual information. These primary, irreducible metaphors pave the way for a direct mental correlation between vision, touch/object manipulation, and knowledge (or the presumption thereof). Primary metaphors then get collaged, combined, mosaiced, embedded, or otherwise compiled to create more complex ways of conceptualising the world. Thus, a link exists between primary metaphors as they begin to multiply onto each other.

These metaphors are part of the pre-existing coding viewers bring in their unconscious minds when they approach images. What, then, does this language get applied to, and how does it get applied? Some hints can be found in works like Paterson's *The Senses of Touch*, 'The aesthetic

body is comprised of physiologically apt figures, the two-dimensional pictorial surface of painting (skin), the three-dimensional volumes of sculpture (flesh), and the opening out into space of installations and architecture (body).'[13] This extended metaphor cascade equates creative media with specific aspects of embodied experience--in fact, it is a subtle deployment of the 'seeing is touching' system:

> 'Seeing is Touching
> Subjective Judgment: Visual perception
> Sensorimotor Domain: Touch
> Example: 'She *picked* my face *out of* the crowd.'
> Primary Experience: Correlation between visual and tactile exploration of objects.'[14]

These embodied concepts conflating touch and sight bring us firmly into the realm of the haptic.

The visual haptic

In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari defined the haptic as encompassing both literal, physical touch as well as metaphorical touch of the mind or the mind's eye (based on earlier, embodied experiences of touch and tactility): '"Haptic" is a better word than "tactile" since it does not establish an opposition between two sense organs but rather invites the assumption that the eye itself may fulfill this nonoptical function.'[15] In 1981 Deleuze expanded on this concept, writing: 'We will be able to speak of optical space only when the eye fulfills a function that is itself optical, depending on the prevailing or even exclusive relations of value. On the contrary, when relations of tonality tend to eliminate relations of value, as in Turner, Monet, or Cezanne, we will speak of a haptic space and a haptic function of the eye,

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[13] Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch* (New York: Berg, 2007), p. 81.
[14] George Lakoff & Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 54. Emphasis in the original.
[15] Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, trans. by Brian Massumi, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 492.

in which the planar character of the surface creates volumes only through the different colors that are arranged on it... It is no longer a manual space that is opposed to the optical space of sight, nor is it a tactile space that is connected to the optical. Now, within sight itself, there is a haptic space that competes with optical space.'[16] Thus, the haptic can be thought of as literal tactile interaction, but also as perceived tactility and the language in and around literal or imagined touch. Due to this conflation of language, sight, touch, and systems of meaning-making, the desire to expand the realm of the tactile into that of the haptic (and thus, beyond the limitations of a single sensory modality) is both widespread and complex. In this vein, educational science scholars Ann Merete Otterstad and Ann-Hege Lorvik Waterhouse wrote, '...we want to immerse ourselves in the photograph and to allow the photograph to be immersed in us so that haptic possibilities including much visual or auditory as tactical bodily sensory intra-relationalities. Together, in haptic space 'we', subject/object, can become entangled in a Deleuzian–Guattarian event (1987) where the real and the virtual are opened...'[17]

This schema is often observed and applied in the realm of visual art, but has not heretofore been connected with the realms of cognitive science and linguistics. Marquard Smith alludes to it in *The Erotic Doll*: '[T]*ouching as seeing*... is a familiar paradigm in which touching is usually *grasped* in the discourse of the senses that goes back (at least) to the thought experiments of Descartes' *La Dioptrique* (1637), whose blind man "sees with [his] hands", William Molyneux's "Letter to John Locke" [1693] and Denis Diderot's "Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those Who See" [1749] in which "the hypothetic blind man" reappears with his "seeing" sticks that extend beyond his own

[16] Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (London: Continuum, 2003), p. 133.
[17] Ann Merete Otterstad & Ann-Hege Lorvik Waterhouse, 'Beyond regimes of signs: making art/istic portrayals of haptic moments/movements with child/ren/hood', (*Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 2016), pp. 742-43.

bodily capability, proving that touch, while unique, is little more than an extension of seeing[18] (emphasis mine)."

To discuss how touch is reflected in language and image, it becomes necessary to discuss how it is most commonly represented in an art/cultural theory discourse. Generally speaking, in Western art tradition there are two major archetypes used to represent concepts of the haptic, all of which (coincidentally or not) seem to represent a grasping, needy, *demanding* touch that imposes itself on (or in) a supine, recumbent, inanimate, dead, or otherwise less than enthusiastically responsive subject. These archetypes both border on or reference paraphilia, that is '(Greek *para*, "besides", and *philia*, "love"), those perversions through which persons are sexually aroused by contact with non-responsive or non-consenting subjects or, more particularly... non-human or inanimate things.'[19] These metaphoric systems for understanding and analysing the concepts of touch fall into a broad erotic nexus point of penetration (exploration of the interior) and stroke (exploration of the surface), and are exemplified by two classic mythologies: the Christian story of doubting Thomas and the ancient Greek fable of Pygmalion. Both of these tales have the haptic at the centre of their themes, dealing with the disconnect between 'pure' vision (and its attendant concept, faith ['seeing is believing']) and the desire for a deeper, embodied truth. Both narratives also explore the darker edges of perceived intimacy, with their subjects insisting on engaging in evocative, deeply intimate touch with objects (literal or figurative) that either can't or won't insist on bodily autonomy.

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[18] Marquard Smith, *The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 115.
[19] Smith, p. 131.

i touch the dead. not literally, obviously, but i touch pictures, an 'artwork', and on some level they're all memento mori. i touch small prints on a table that appear to be photocopies, images that disappear when held. blood heat makes the pictures fade. my fingers on the back of the page cause the image on the front to seep away. they register me; i register them. their content - artistic nudes of children (girls) in various states of undress. pictures that are familiar... taboo, verboten, discomfiting in the extreme. i find myself glancing over my shoulder to see if i'm observed observing - a nasty, furtive twitch that belies the queasy discomfort underneath my art-viewing cool. i want somebody to know how not sexual this is; that i'm gay, and normal, and not a paedophile. but i can't help being implicated in this whole system of interconnected levers of power, profit, and control - i'm a part of all this, even as i comfort myself with stories of these children being photographed by their parents (and then published worldwide, naturally).

Figure 13. Cole Robertson, *touch piece*[20]

[20] Appropriated image of Sally Mann's *Vinland, 1992*, from the collection *Immediate Family*

The most commonly used image/metaphor for haptic interaction is by far that of doubting Thomas.[21] A classic New Testament motif, encompassing touch, sight, faith, and scepticism, this story has the added benefit of being a compelling visual representation - the visceral, disgusting image of Thomas sticking his fingers into Christ's gaping, bloodless wounds (really, having Jesus grip Thomas's wrist and guide his hand is the most charged component of the image, as it underscores Jesus's consent to penetration and obviates the viewer misunderstanding the gesture as a [sexual?] assault) . A brief synopsis: The disciple Thomas, piqued at missing the resurrection of his Lord and saviour, vows that he won't believe in Jesus's return until he sees him personally, touches the wounds on his hands, and even inserts his fingers into the spear wounds in his side. While disappointment in missing out on a group activity is understandable, this perhaps takes scepticism a bit far. When Jesus returns, he makes the offer, causing Thomas to proclaim the error of his doubting ways. The Gospel itself doesn't represent this touch - in fact, it seems to contradict it[22]. If we are to judge purely from the text, it took the mere offer to touch to evoke an exclamation of assurance of contrition and belief from Thomas, according to Most's reading of the early Greek. However, doctrinal differences between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Reformation made it expedient for the Catholic Church to represent the scene in propagandistic works of art as a direct, physical encounter in order to assert the risen Christ's corporeality. Dave Hickey[23] refers to probably the most famous of these works, Caravaggio's *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*[24] (although the specific work he references at the Uffizi Gallery is actually an early copy of the original, housed in the Bildergalerie Sanssouci in Potsdam).

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[21] Glenn Most, *Doubting Thomas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), Kindle edition, loc. 13-19.
[22] Most, loc. 751-54.
[23] Dave Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon,* 2nd edn. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 18-22..
[24] Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (Bildergalerie Sanssouci, 1601-02).

Thomas's equation of enlightenment with grabbing (and later Renaissance and Baroque interpretations of this concept) fall under the aegis of the 'Understanding is Grasping' metaphor system. The concept map is:

> 'Understanding is Grasping
> Subjective Judgment: Comprehension
> Sensorimotor Domain: Object manipulation
> Example: "I've never been able to *grasp* transfinite numbers."
> Primary Experience: Getting information about an object by grasping and manipulating it'.[25]

At this point it's helpful to look at a specific text - in this case, we can start with Hickey (and many others'[26]) primary example of the power of the haptic in visual art; Caravaggio's *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (1601-01). This painting, world famous both for its European Baroque aesthetic beauty, the nauseating pathos of its depiction of its subject, and (formerly) for its rhetorical value, becomes both a window and an evocative, tactile surface into the bundle of associated embodied experiences we label haptic. This work, with characteristic Caravaggesque naturalism and attention to detail (the contrite Thomas's eyebrows are raised in patent shock, corrugating his forehead with delicate folds of skin), depicts Christ displaying his wounds. The disciples are robed in rich (if worn), fleshy orange-reds, implying their corporeality, whereas Christ is draped in folds of soft cream that is darker than his (ahistorically) fair skin, underscoring his spiritual aspect while he goes to great lengths to demonstrate his own corporeality. It is a complicated dance of spirit, flesh, penetrating touch, vision, faith, and scepticism.

The *Incredulity* is used by critic Dave Hickey as an example of the confluence of his concepts of beauty, embodied thought, politics, and pleasure. He writes, 'the painting recruits us to

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[25] Lakoff & Johnson, p. 54.
[26] Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

be complicit spectators as the resurrected Christ calmly grasps the incredulous Thomas by the wrist and guides the saint's extended forefinger into the wound in his side. Two other disciples crowd forward, leaning over Thomas's shoulder to observe more closely; and we are lured as well, by the cropped, three-quarter-length format of the painting that, like a Baroque zoom, or like Christ's hand on our wrist, gently but firmly draws us into the midst of the spectacle... and we... must respond with honor, with trust, by *believing*...'

Surface experience of the image

Penetration

> 'My sister had just gotten a golden retriever puppy. A curious dog (and a terror to household linen), he ran up behind my mother while she was fixing dinner and stuck his nose up the back of her dress. My mother, ordinarily the gentlest and most "mothering" of women, whipped around and whacked him across the nose. The dog yelped, more in surprise than pain, but my sister howled as though *she'd* been hit. My mother looked at my sister and sighed. "I'm sorry I hit your dog, honey, but I've been raped too many times to feel something up the back of my dress and not react." I've always remembered that day - the question of bodily autonomy - what goes in, and whether it's allowed or merely endured - one I just assumed was asked and answered in the affirmative regarding each and every person I met, suddenly became more of a riddle. How many people, people I know, talk with, like (or not), have been invaded? How many people have to view their own bodies as citadels to defend, rather than playgrounds to enjoy? It's shaped the way I look at representations of women all my life.'
>
> Thomas Parke D'Invilliers, *Mirroring and Windowing*[27]

Thus Caravaggio's painting acts as an admonishment to its viewers, forcing them to disavow scepticism on pain of blasphemy and visceral disgust. It implicates them in a closed therapeutic system of haptic admonishment, where rehabilitation becomes the only moral option for the viewers and their surrogates in the work. This, then, is what comes of the promise written by Paul to the church at Corinth - 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face:

[27] D'Invilliers, p. 54.

now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known'[28] - that what can be perceived through indirect modes of sight, and hearsay, and language, will simultaneously be supplanted and supplemented through direct, embodied contact and the faith it both engenders and requires.

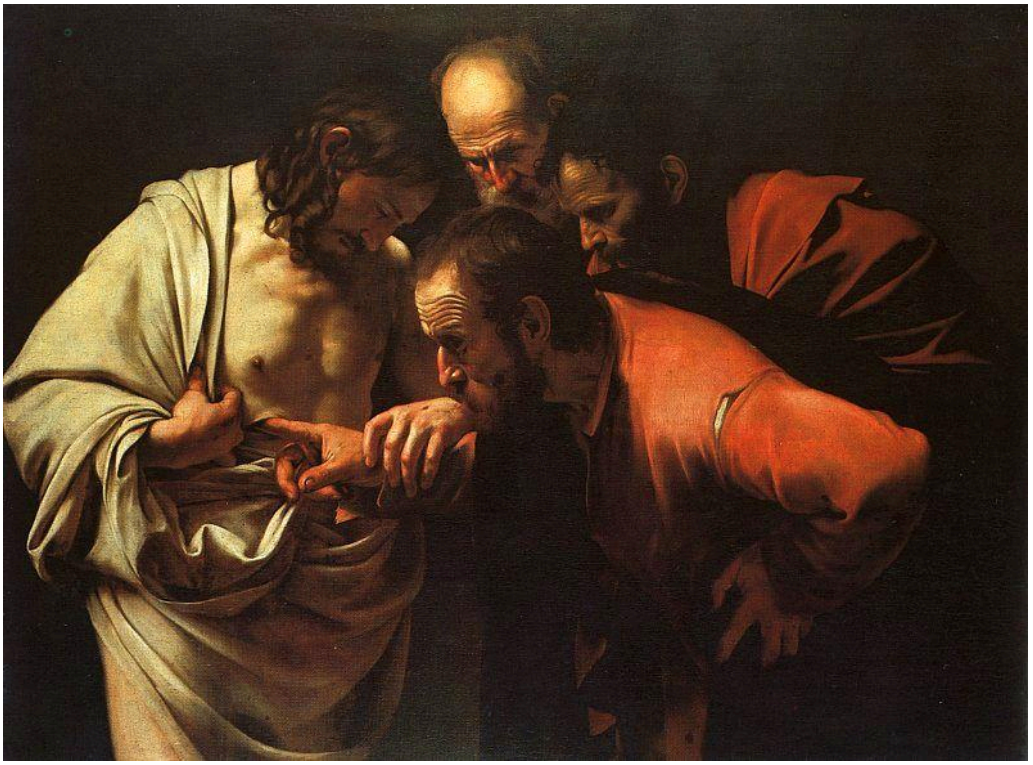
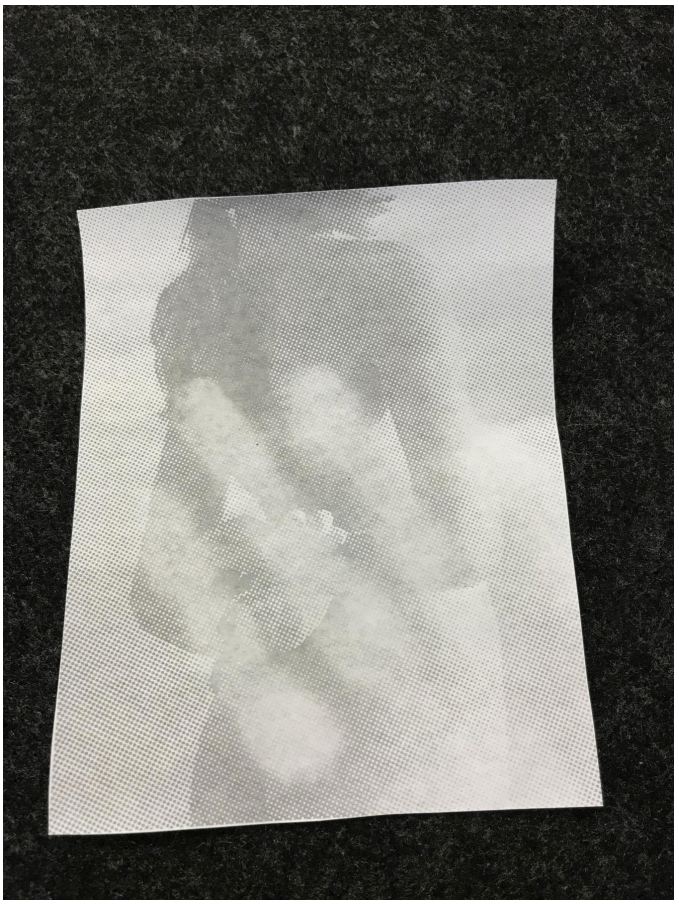


Figure 14. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*
Oil on canvas, *Bildergalerie* Sanssouci, 1601-02

[28] I Corinthians 13.12, *The Holy Bible, King James Version*. Cambridge Edition: 1769; *King James Bible Online*, 2018.



it's not that touch is wrong, per se, it's just that this touch feels wrong, personally. it feels wrong to touch these things; it's a violation of the things i believe and the things i want believed of myself. the hot lead feeling of transgression loosens my bowels a little bit - it's as visceral as a thomasian poke or a stroke of post-miracle galatea's humanised thigh. it's the feeling that spawns the thought that makes the change, when suddenly you're not a person so much as this person with this gut churning in this specific way. it starts and ends all with a touch but it never really ends where it should, because touches never really go away, do they? we carry their traces with us always, hot or cold depending on the experience, rough or smooth, violent or gentle. each person carries their marks, like some sweet ripe fruit thumped too many times in the shop. they're not exactly bruises, but more like a type of internal haemophiliac wound that never scabs over and certainly never heals but rather can be ignored until it can't.

Figure 15. Cole Robertson, *touch piece*[29]

[29] Appropriated image of Jock Sturges' *Fanny, Montalivet, France*, 1996

Paterson[30] assumes a similar structure, but through very different metaphoric means, hanging his discourse on the haptic on Ovid's story of Pygmalion and Galatea[31] from *Metamorphoses*[32]. In this fable, misogynistic sculptor Pygmalion, disgusted with the human women he sees around him, retreats to his studio to make the perfect woman for himself. He makes her, drapes her in flowers, shells, and fine clothing, and rests her 'head' on fine feather pillows. This image, carved from ivory with such skill as to fool its own creator into believing its illusion, is transformed into flesh after a prayer to the goddess Venus.

This myth of the artist as master of woman/work is a particularly pernicious one, as it deals with the traditionally touched (the feminine [literal] object) and the traditional toucher (the masculine subject). Playing Pygmalion in the early twentieth century, Oskar Kokoschka commissioned a life-size erotic doll of his former lover Alma Mahler (presumably, though never definitively proved, for sex). Kokoschka plays the artist/creator/puppeteer *through* a female artist, dressmaker Hermione Moos, thus shaping the creator and the creation, and doubly using women and objects and as tools. He couldn't even cede the form of the doppelgänger, dictating it from excessively abstract and subjective drawings rather than allowing Moos to interpret from an indexical record of Mahler's appearance like a photograph. Indeed, Kokoschka only seems to prize Moos for her 'feminine imagination' and ability to handle cloth - she is a mere tool (albeit one with inherent characteristics that make it more suited to purpose than another). In the process of using Moos as a human 3D printer, he makes her his erotic surrogate as well, as Marquard Smith writes: 'If the drawing is not quite clear as to the position of a muscle, to a tension [sic] or a bone, it is

[30] Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2007), pp. 49-51.
[31] 'The statue is anonymous. It was not until much later that it acquired a name, "Galatea", probably in the late 18th century. See Helen H.Law, "The Name Galatea in the Pygmalion Myth", *The Classical Journal*, 27, 1932, pp. 337-42...' Smith, p. 332.
[32] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by Henry T. Riley, 1851, Book X, Fable XII.

better not to consult a book of anatomy, but rather to examine the place on your own body, which you must move with your hand until you have the feeling of it warmly and distinctly. Often hands and fingertips see more than eyes.'[33] This charged image of control over the maker as well as the made object turns Kokoschka into a kind of double Pygmalion, allowing him to manipulate the artist as well as the form of his Galatea. Here Kokoschka recognizes the folk power of touch as talisman, representing methods of control: 'It is as if Pygmalion is trying to will his statue to life by touch, here both a marker of authoring and authenticating and a technique of animation, an erotic and diagnostic one as well. Pygmalion's relations with the statue have from the beginning a visual but even more so a haptic component to them: the ivory statue becomes a body, is given form, materialised, materialises, largely by way of touch.'[34] In an added note, Smith expands on this peculiar notion of the visual: 'This is no surprise since at this time vision's power was governed by the "laws" of extramission, where rays of light were emitted by or emanated from the eyes; a perfect instance of sight *as* touch and a proposition that was only finally overturned in the 11th century by the Arabian physicist Ibn al-Heytham's proof of intromission in his *Book of Optics* (1021). See David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-kindi to Kepler*, University of Chicago Press, 1976.'[35] This ancient conflation of vision and touch more than likely gave rise to the extended metaphor systems currently used in languages around the world.

[33] Smith, pp. 108-15.
[34] Smith, p. 37.
[35] Smith, p. 332.

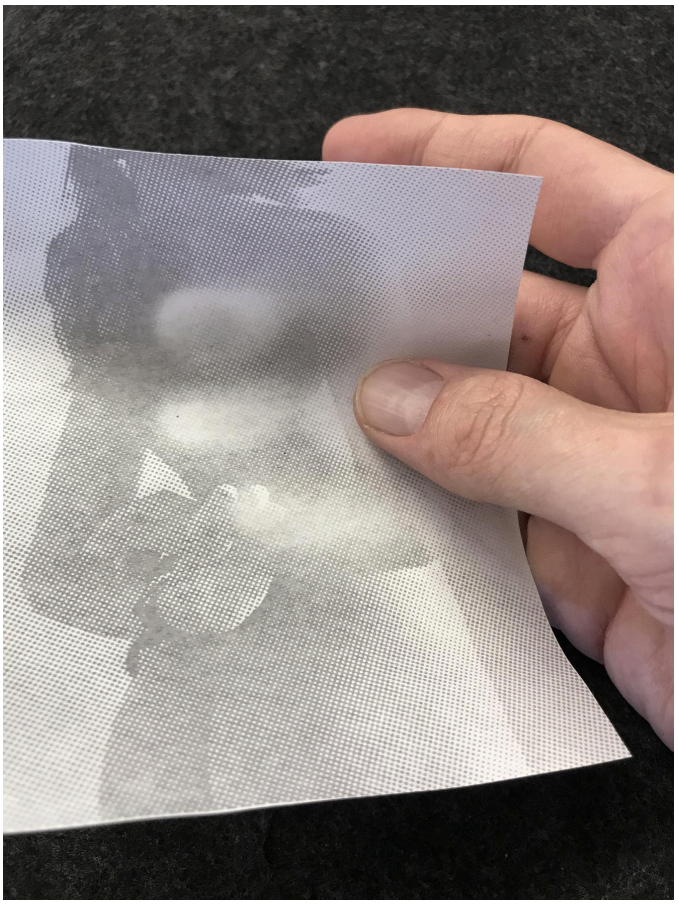
Stroke

> 'My mother had two little old family photos in pride of place on top of her bedroom television. Set into miniscule heart-shaped brass frames, they represented her grandmother and great-grandmother. They were tiny, tattered fragments of what were obviously once larger images, their grey faces trapped for decades under glass and forced to watch people watch TV. One night after a few too many drinks, riddled with doubt due to her mother's coldness and lack of affection, she opened the frames to assure herself that these were in fact the real, original family photos. That they also represented *trust;* that her mother trusted her with precious relics, and that, even though her own mother couldn't or wouldn't *express* love, it nonetheless lay like an afterimage in some silver and gelatin handed down in lieu of more tangible gestures. She cried when she touched the pictures and realized they were Xeroxes. "Just funny paper. Nothing but funny paper." I tried to console her, but she just put the frames back together and went into the kitchen.'
>
> Thomas Parke D'Invilliers, *Mirroring and Windowing*[36]

Less well-known (and well-regarded) than the Caravaggio, Jean-Léon Gérôme's late in life obsession with Pygmalion and Galatea inspired him to create multiple paintings of this scene from different perspectives, so that they function almost in the round (akin to a 3D scan of a sculpture); Galatea on the plinth, at the moment of her humanisation, finally able to return the kiss of Pygmalion down below. This painting, eschewing Caravaggio's dramatic chiaroscuro, is softly lit from above, the diffused glow gently illuminating the transition from Galatea's still-mineral (here, presumably, marble, ivory in the original myth) feet to the gradual flush upward of life-giving blood racing up her back and to her lips. Gérôme's painting might not look strange to an audience conversant with film and video, but it's definitely strange - a freeze frame of an action in the middle of its progression. In this way the artist reflects the relatively new medium of photography and its ability to capture and ossify action as it is in the midst of unfolding.

[36] D'Invilliers, p. 16.

Figure 16. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Pygmalion and Galatea*
Oil on canvas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, c. 1890



these may be memento mori, but they're certainly not the dead screens of most haptic photographs. they're not suffocated under layers of Gorilla glass and plastic shielding; and while they're not exactly alive either they definitely reflect the hot, pushy liveness of their interlocutors. are these images, which contain the spectre of death, more alive than other, even deader images? does it matter? the last thing a greedy image-seeker wants to consider is their own mortality; the second last, their complicity. making windows into haptic objects might seem like a cute stunt, but it also makes one hell of a mess.

Figure 17. Cole Robertson, *touch piece*

The history of photography continues these visual traditions, presenting the body that is both the vehicle for the expanded visualisation of touch or the bearer of the haptic's imprint.

Synthesis

> 'My brother called me unexpectedly on one of his periodic bouts of 12-stepping apologies. I listened with one ear (my brother, nearly twenty years older than I, was a lifelong addict,

> and I was accustomed to the rampant narcissism involved in his "making amends"). He paused for a long moment and asked, hesitatingly, "Did anything happen to you when you lived in the green house?" As I was four at the time, I barely even remembered the green house, much less its didoes. "Uh, not really. What do you mean?" "Well, I used to bring my friend around, and he would spend time with you. I always wondered years later if he was fiddling around with you." Suddenly, there was the awful spectre that I had been "fiddled" with - there was a double, an other I didn't know but who was inextricably linked with me, who might have been traumatised (according to one very unreliable witness). I couldn't leave it at that. "I honestly don't remember, but I don't think so." And I didn't think so. I didn't think.'
>
> Thomas Parke D'Invilliers, *Mirroring and Windowing*[37]

Where do these touches come together? How do doubting Thomas and Pygmalion find some/one/thing to believe in, one who both welcomes, comforts, and assuages feelings of doubt? Their faith, and ours, seems to start with nerve endings but needs to race through corridors of sight, language, and thought before it becomes complete. What image can possibly serve as a synthesis of these haptic encounters, penetration and stroke? What subject can combine the immediacy of Thomas's penetrating glance/touch with the impenetrability of Pygmalion's distasteful caress? I find myself hunting through the history of photography for clues.

Though the details of his sexuality remain elusive, the pictorialist photographer F. Holland Day's consistently homoerotic tableau images maintain the religious cover of *Thomas*'s man-on-man touch while transmuting its erotic subtext into text proper. Day's 1906 *St. Sebastian* - ostensibly a staged *tableau vivant*-cum-photograph of the martyr's ecstatic death - is, as so many religious icons are, a pretext for the socially-legitimised visual groping of a representation of a politely unclothed body. This image, a lovely platinum photographic print augmented with hand colouring on textured artist paper, imagines the saint as a beautiful (and very young) shaggy-haired man bound to a tree, lean torso bared, head thrown back, and lips parted in a blatantly sexual way,

[37] D'Invilliers, p. 103.

as though to anticipate the penetration to come and welcome it. This collapse of the sacred and the profane, this simultaneous anticipation, embrace, and rejection of the literal, metaphorical, and optical violences the bifurcated subject (the indexed semi-nude youth and the signified mythical saint) endures and predicts creates a haptic experience for the viewer that explores literal flesh while conjuring deeper engagement. 'Sebastian' simultaneously demands, anticipates, and rejects penetration, leaving the viewer in a limbo.

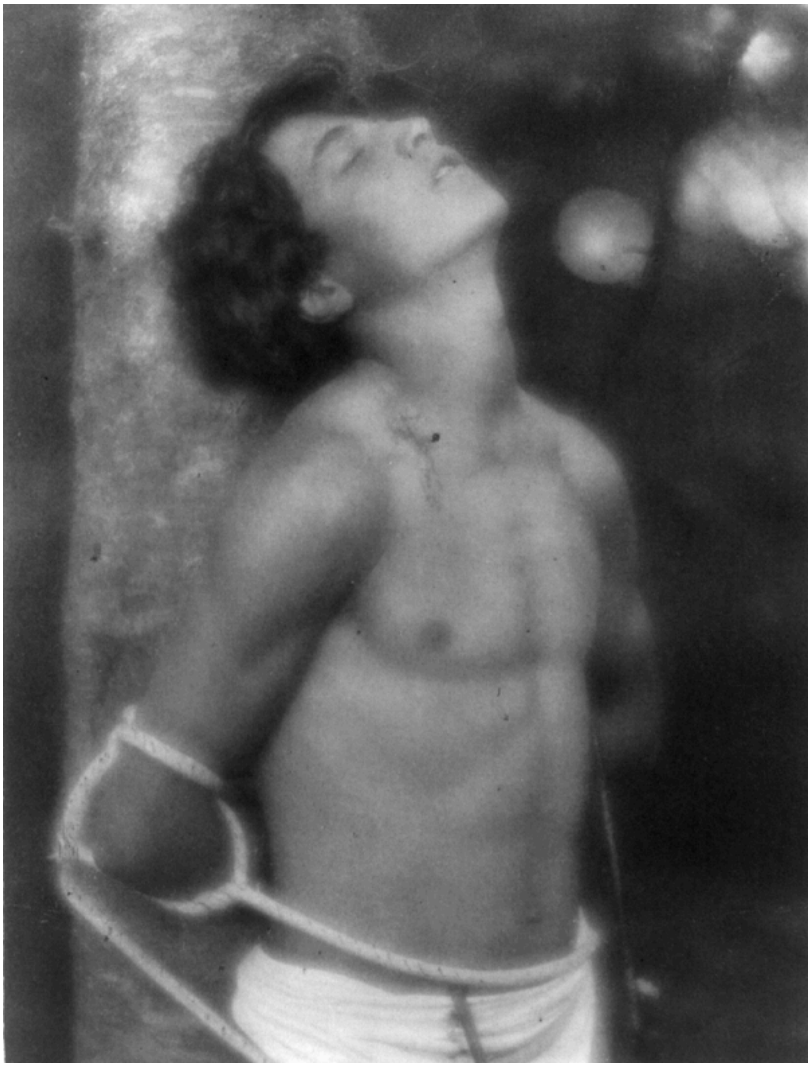


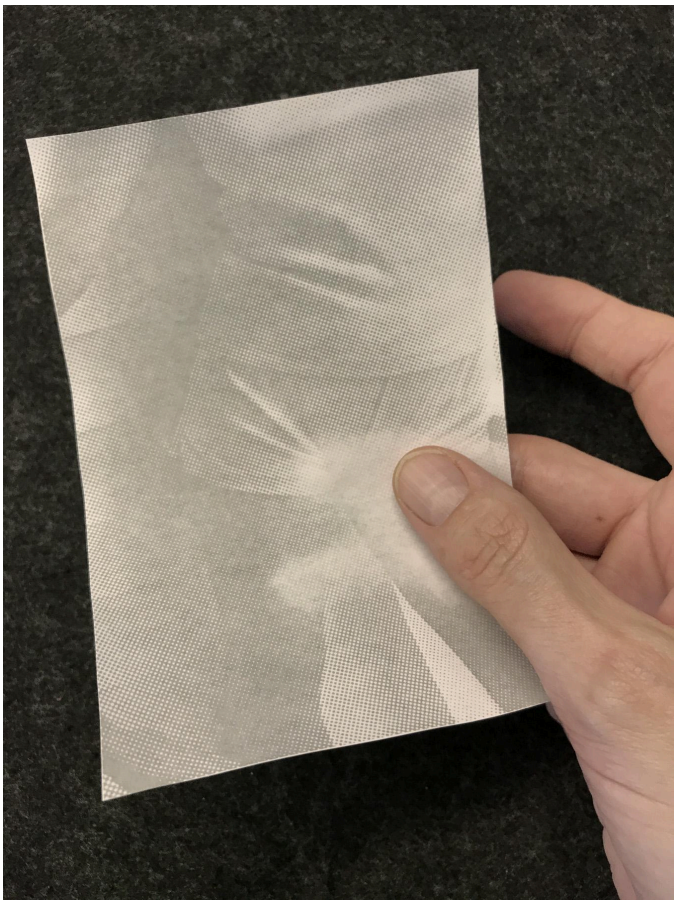
Figure 18. F. Holland Day, *St. Sebastian*
Platinum photographic print with hand colouring on textured paper, United States Library of Congress, 1906

One lesser known example that speaks to these concerns is mixed media artist Amber Hawk Swanson and her series of performative images/interventions, *The Amber Doll Project*: 'To Have, To Hold, and To Violate: Amber and Doll'. Swanson writes,

> 'I commissioned the production of a life-like sex doll, a RealDoll, made of a posable PVC skeleton and silicone flesh, in my exact likeness.
>
> My doll, Amber Doll, began as a Styrofoam print-out of a digital scan of my head. Her face was then custom-sculpted and later combined with the doll manufacturer's existing, "Body #8" female doll mold. After completing "The Making-Of Amber Doll" and "Las Vegas Wedding Ceremony" (both 2007), Amber Doll and I went on to disrupt wedding receptions, roller-skating rinks, football tailgating parties, theme parks, and adult industry conventions.'[38]

Figure 19. Amber Hawk Swanson, *Tailgate* (From the 'Amber Doll Project')
Inkjet print, collection of the artist, 2007

[38] Amber Hawk Swanson, *Amber Doll* <https://amberhawkswanson.com/Amber-Doll> [accessed 12 September 2018].



the paper has texture, as does the printing; tiny dots of pigment are ever so slightly raised off its surface. would i have noticed that in an ordinary photograph? would i alternately stroke and push and feel with what seems like my whole body, just to return the sensation of plain paper fibres and ink? the double indexicality of these pictures forces me not only to position myself in relation to them, but also in relation to myself (as i was before and will be after). i resist the urge to tear or punch holes in them. paper. ink. bumps. simple, except not very.

Figure 20. Cole Robertson, *touch piece*[39]

Swanson and Amber Doll represent the postmodern loop-de-loop of Pygmalion, Sebastian, and Thomas—a female artist, employing an image of herself in a deliberate gesture of queering and problematising, where the role of toucher and touched suddenly become far less clear. Swanson engages a misogynistic industry as a latter-day Pygmalion, shaping a 'perfected' (that is, embodied within the specifications of a sex doll factory that couldn't come close to replicating Swanson's actual measurements) version of her own self to love, and then, at last realising her vision, lugs it

[39] Appropriated image of Sally Mann's *At Twelve*

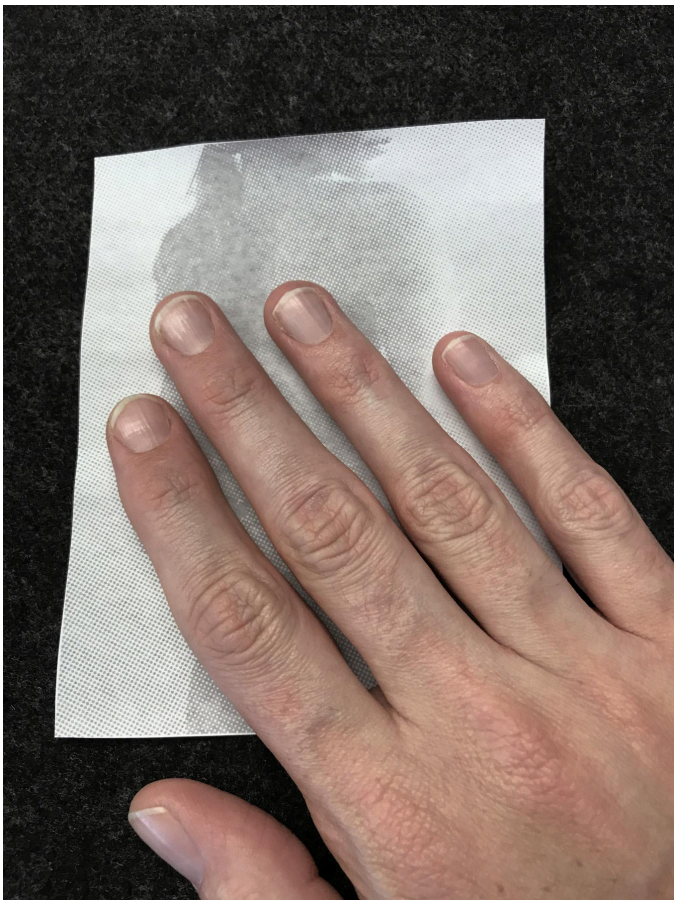
into the world to be prodded, poked, and paternalistically defended as a constant testimony to the corporeality it represents. Amber Doll suffers for our collective sins; she is both the resurrection and the life. If we can only bring ourselves to believe in her, if only we could take this gesture on faith, and *believe*, we might yet refrain from reenacting our sexual 'sins'. Do you believe this? It is a complex gesture, confounding in the ways it collapses narratives of scopophilia, paraphilia, and the sexual haptic.

Closer

Elucidating the broader effect of the work of Caravaggio, theorist Mieke Bal wrote: 'I wish to suggest that such works can be construed as theoretical objects that "theorize" cultural history. This theorizing makes them such instances of cultural philosophy that they deserve the name theoretical objects... By sharpening the difference between past and present, they make the conditions and implications of the merging of the two more visible.'[40] The embodied gaze of the viewer tacitly occupying each, what can these tactical circuits of touch, embodied cognition, and imagery teach us? What are the differences between a simple touch and a haptic touch system? Do embodied thought and metaphor help us to approach these concepts by granting us a pre-defined system of schema to apply to these concepts? As the previous textual archeology attests, I believe they do. Writing and thinking on these subjects tends to follow predetermined paths, not because writers or readers are unimaginative, but rather because communication relies on systems of shared meaning and, inasmuch as it is possible, experience. That's where primary metaphor comes in - these pre-packaged elements of language create a verbal shorthand (often at the cost of exclusion and erasure of difference), saving writers, artists, and audiences endless trouble and exhaustive

[40] Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 5.

explanatory texts that would only serve to dilute the original message. The purpose of this work is not to denigrate this system of meaning making and receiving, but rather to a) understand its workings better, and b) to celebrate it, in all its imperfection, as a type of common language that serves (imperfectly, of course) to reach beyond boundaries of language, culture, and politics.



at this point the hot paper has softened slightly in my hands, which i hope aren't but believe are in fact sweaty. my hands are more present now than i've ever known them to be - as if all of my nerve endings have sped like time-lapse video of growing ivy, twining and burrowing out of my core and down through my arms to fill and overfill and writhe within my fingertips. suddenly i've had enough of photographs that show not only their indices but also mine and drop the thing back onto the table where i found it. as it cools, the picture reverse-fades, sliding back into existence like some kind of sitcom special effect from the 70's. it is a restoration, a permanent resounding echo without the initial voice, an imago in the biological as well as the metaphoric sense. i hope the kids are alright. i might not be.

Figure 21. Cole Robertson, *touch piece*

Chapter II: Aggregation

'She did not want to deck herself with knowledge—to wear it loose from the nerves and blood that fed her action; and if she had written a book she must have done it as Saint Theresa did, under the command of an authority that constrained her conscience.'

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*[41]

'And what was the point of it all? Yes, to dream a home and clothe it with pictures, both for the pleasure and (quite literally) edification of others. But also to form the world of dreams and imaginings in reality – to manifest, to *flesh* it.'

Thomas Parke D'Invilliers, *Mirroring and Windowing*[42]

[41] George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Penguin, 2003), p 86.

[42] Thomas Parke D'Invilliers, *Mirroring and Windowing*, (Tempe: Peephole Press, 1989), p. 220.

Going 'back'

In 2002 I visited the east coast of the United States for the first time. As a geographic divide, the distance to what American westerners call 'back east'[43] didn't much signify anymore - air travel was fast and cheap, and even somebody in my circumstances could conceivably afford to move around the country. As a cultural divide, it was huge. In the USA, the east is presumed to encompass the best of the art, culture, and history the country has to offer. This wasn't true then, of course (and in fact never was), but the indelible image of sophisticated New Yorkers and Bostonians on television (mostly filmed in southern California) had left a definite impression on me. I couldn't wait to experience the art, architecture, and general panache of the big cities of the east. So less than a year after 9/11, a friend and I decided to see Boston and New York City for the first time.

For all its midsummer heat and humidity, Boston was a revelation, and my favourite place by far in the whole city was the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Purposely built to house the art collection of the late 19th century famed socialite and collector, the museum was designed along the lines of an Italian mansion, complete with stone sculpture and exquisite central courtyard garden. Carved over the lintel of the entry were the words '*C'est mon plaisir*' - It is my pleasure. The sentiment was reflected in the amassing and arranging of the works. The museum's collection contained some of the most prized examples of European easel painting, arranged not

[43] The term itself reflects an embodied spatiation - westerners are always presumed to be facing west, in constant pursuit (yet always East of) John Steinbeck's elusive Eden. This mapping reflects Lakoff and Johnson's Moving Subject metaphor of timespace, where the subject is presumed to be moving through a landscape (Life is a Journey), where the future (envisioned via Manifest Destiny as the western American frontier) is up ahead and the past (visualised as the older, decadent, corrupt eastern part of the country) falls farther and farther behind. Also used are the terms 'out west', 'up north', and 'down south', spatiation systems that both reflect and reinforce ideas of Eurocentrism and white supremacy. Alternatives to this system can be found in non-Western maps and globes as well as the practical wayfinding devices such as the map plinths of London, which render their environment orientated not to geographic north but rather to whatever direction their viewer is facing.

chronologically or thematically, but rather according to the taste and impulse of Gardner herself. Whereas she began collecting art simply for her own enjoyment, she created her museum as a place to share her love of art with the public.

I should have felt alienated. After all, this was an incredible mansion, created by the wife of one of Boston's wealthiest and most prominent citizens, housing a dragon's hoard of art treasure. Instead, I was delighted. I'd been to museums before, but never one like this. The works were arranged according to Gardner's idiosyncratic taste and ideas about what works 'went' together. It was a museum that gave the lie of museums while simultaneously embodying their truth - exposing the arbitrariness of their endeavour while embracing their mission wholeheartedly. For a museum doesn't just house and display its works, it also mythologizes them, curating a narrative (whether chronological, geographical, or social) that tells the story of the works and their creation.[44] Isabella Stewart Gardner's museum simultaneously connects and disconnects dots, while making and unmaking meanings - concerns that would come increasingly to the fore of my own work over the next two decades. Clearly more research was in order.

* * *

Whether it be a museum, archive, website, flip book, or psychological association, all images are eventually networked - this becomes readily apparent in the networks of galleries, social media, digital image distribution systems, or other economies trading in image creation, storage, and dissemination. Besides literal image networks, however, there are also other networks at play. For once image culture (broadly defined by Vilem Flusser as the post-technical image epoch, or roughly late Victorian-present[45]) took hold of the collective visual unconscious, individual images

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[44] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of The Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
[45] Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion, 2000).

ceased to be a possibility. Every image now carries with it an increasing number of echoes - that is, images, even when observed in isolation, can no longer be conceived of in anything remotely approaching isolation. Every portrait carries with it the attendant image culture of portraiture, including practically every image of a person or figure previously viewed by the viewer. As philosopher Henri Bergson noted, 'Perception is never a mere contact of the mind with the object present; it is impregnated with memory-images which complete it as they interpret it. The memory-image, in its turn, partakes of the "pure memory," which it begins to materialize, and of the perception in which it tends to embody itself: regarded from the latter point of view, it might be defined as a nascent perception. Lastly, pure memory, though independent in theory, manifests itself as a rule only in the colored and living image which reveals it.'[46]

As before, this chapter will be grounded in my artistic practice. Specifically, a long-term site-reactive[47] image cloud installation titled *Toward a unified field theory of photography*. Like Isabella Stewart Gardner, I found myself not just re-presenting for pleasure, but living *in* the pleasure of aggregating, juxtaposing, and sharing images; of using the works of others to tell stories to (and about) myself.

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[46] Henri Bergsen (trans. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer), Matter and Memory, (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p 133.

[47] The term site specific has been expanded over the past 20 years to encompass any work that fits itself into a space. I prefer the term site-*reactive* to refer specifically to works that fit a space into themselves. Early iterations of the *Toward*... install fit into their spaces, but largely did not take them into account structurally. The most recent manifestations of the work wrap, flow, and otherwise envelop particular elements of their environmental substrate - these pieces could not have the forms they do without the specific topology of the space they inhabit. American art and culture writer Jack Burnham outlined a similar distinction in 'Systems Esthetics': 'In the older context, such as lsamu Noguchi's sunken garden at Yale University's Rare Book Library, sculpture defined the environment, with Morris's approach the environment defines what is sculptural.' This differs from site specificity, as the reaction in question could potentially be triggered by a similar structure or encounter in a different space. See later parts of this chapter for installation images and descriptions of the piece *in situ*.

Aggregate demand

Like myself, Isabella Stewart Gardner came to art almost by accident. The daughter of a newly wealthy New York family, in 1860 she married Jack Gardner, a scion of one of Boston's old-money aristocratic families (locally known as Boston Brahmins). The arbiters of culture, politics, education, philanthropy, and finance in New England, this tight-knit group of families was descended from the highest-ranking early English and Dutch colonisers of what would become the United States. Traditionally, when someone not descended from one of the ruling clans married into this system, he or she would try their best to assimilate, assuming the trappings, tastes, and norms of the elite in an effort to pass (or at least remain inconspicuous). Isabella Stewart Gardner, on the other hand, felt the need to stand out. She pursued an interest in the arts, acquiring a rapid education in art history (then considered a masculine topic not suitable for young ladies) and summoned to her aid some of the most respected researchers in this burgeoning field. Indeed, Gardner's career seems to be a sequence of joyful acquisitions, paying for art, real estate, and even people with what would have been reckless abandon in someone less rich.

Gardner's *plaisir*, like my own, began with aggregation. Far from indiscriminate hoarding, aggregation is gathering *with purpose*. It starts with a preconception of type, even if the outcome of the aggregation is unclear at its outset. The impetus for Gardner's aggregation (according to lore[48]) was familial disappointment - she suffered a crushing blow with the death of her only child from pneumonia and a subsequent miscarriage. Told she couldn't have children, she poured her recuperative and mental energies first into the study of literature, then into art history. This highly gendered reading of her life doesn't take into account her strong intellect, ambition, and will - it's

[48] Louise Hall Tharp, *Mrs. Jack : a Biography of Isabella Stewart Gardner* [1st ed.] (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1965).

very unlikely Isabella Stewart Gardner would have been content only as a mother, if that role had been available to her[49]. However, I believe it was the precarity of her situation, the destabilisation of her formerly secure existence that sparked the need to gather, acquire, and hold. Not being a selfish person, she then turned to sharing her holdings with the city that had given her so much, eventually endowing her museum enough to allow free entry (a tradition that unfortunately doesn't continue today).

I understand this need to aggregate all too well. As a poor kid growing up in the desert, I yearned for beauty and the mental stimulation provided by aesthetic experience. My mother, who didn't have the opportunity to acquire a formal education, nonetheless valued learning above all else. She tried her best to support me, buying (on the rare occasion when we had money to spare) individual volumes of an encyclopaedia set at the supermarket. These were up-to-date, lavishly illustrated with high-quality photographic halftones, and I spent hours idly flipping through the pages of volumes A-Mo (we never were able to complete the set, so the lion's share of my trivia knowledge can be located between those letters of the alphabet). Cutting up or writing in books was strictly forbidden (a horror I carry today), and as I lacked a camera or copier, my acquisition of these images was purely mental, with some special images being laboriously (and imperfectly) copied into my notebooks. I kept a wide-reaching mental image bank, a rich mind palace replete

[49] Gardner did have a chance to experience motherhood, adopting her husband's three nephews upon the death of their father (her husband's brother) in 1875. As the eldest was 10 at the time, a close parent/child bonding might not have been possible; the children were left behind when the Gardners went on their frequent trips abroad. Her biographer (and director of her museum) Morris Carter wrote, 'It was therefore no easy task and no small responsibility that Mrs. Gardner was assuming, and her willingness, for her husband's sake, to take charge of three temperamental boys, gave evidence of a character with which few of her society friends had credited her. In the performance of her duty to these boys, she was faithful and conscientious.' Frank A. Gardner, *Gardner Memorial, a Biographical and Genealogical Record of the Descendants of Thomas Gardner, Planter, Cape Ann, 1624, Salem (Naumkeag), 1626-1674, through His Son Lieut. George Gardner / Compiled and Arranged by Frank Augustine Gardner* (Salem, Mass: [s.n.], 1933) p. 203.

with famous diamonds, priceless works of art, splendid temples and palaces, and picturesque landscapes that outshone my drab exurban desert surroundings.

Like Isabella Stewart Gardner, my aesthetic taste was formed by the dominant paradigms of Eurocentric art history and what bell hooks quite rightly deemed the 'white supremacist capitalist patriarchy' - a cascade of intersecting socioeconomic systems that reinscribe each others' power (via covert exclusion and overt violence) and are represented, in some form, in every cultural endeavour.[50] In his classic work *Distinction*[51] Pierre Bourdieu unpicks some of the ways in which taste is acculturated, and how the pressures of the dominant hierarchy compel adherence to its mores and aesthetic values. It was only later in life that I had the confidence to challenge some of these preconceptions. My aggregative image cloud piece is in part an effort to upend (and queer[52]) these strictures by placing value and care onto Internet ephemera, glancing moments of almost painful ordinariness, and the flow of everyday media consumption. I aggregate not the superlative, as Stewart Gardner did ('... don't you agree with me that my Museum ought to have only a few, and all of them *A no. 1.s.*'[53]), but the quotidian and mundane, finding aesthetic and anthropological worth in functional image objects that were not necessarily created with History in mind. Whereas Isabella Stewart Gardner was concerned (and sometimes obsessed) with specific paintings, for me

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[50] bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994). Resistance to these paradigms still reflects them; thus the very worthwhile work of questioning or outright destroying these systems still centralises their power.

[51] Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction : a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1984).

[52] Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) encapsulates an approach that is startlingly similar to my own (which developed in parallel), laying out a practice based system for failing (or incompletely succeeding) as a method for queering dominant systems of power. On page 88 he writes: 'This is a story of art without markets, drama without a script, narrative without progress. The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being.'

[53] Bernard Berenson, Isabella Stewart Gardner, Mary Berenson, and Rollin Van N Hadley, *The Letters of Bernard Berenson and Isabella Stewart Gardner, 1887-1924, with Correspondence by Mary Berenson* (Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1987).

the mass of collected imagery is what matters. Not undifferentiated collecting vs differentiated, but rather the wild passion evoked by objects presumed (via acculturation) to be inherently precious, vs the more philosophical (and thus, detached) fascination evoked by objects presumed to have very little inherent value or worth. Our two collecting principles, divided by time, technology, class, wealth, gender, and identity, nonetheless have in common the process of aggregation driven by desire. Our approaches to collection and re-presentation are representative of the fields of cultural and capital production that shaped us - she to buy, hold, and keep, I to copy, store, and recontextualise. Our strategies were also dictated by the prevailing technologies of our times; I exist in a world of free-flowing data, easy communication, and cheap (even free) storage. This shaped my worldview and approach to taking and keeping images, as the process is far less fraught than Gardner's. Even with her wealth and privilege, Gardner still had to send letters by ship to authorise the purchase of works, and wait for their arduous journey across the Atlantic before she could place them in her collection. How different from my own process! This ubiquity is why selection, taste, and the act of choice are so important to the work (these also link my process to that of Gardner herself). Anyone can harvest images without discrimination (as artist Evan Roth did, presenting 'the byproduct of his web browsing as a work of art with *Personal Internet Cache Archive* (May 6, 2011)'.[54] To aggregate rather than to scrape or indiscriminately harvest interests me far more as a process. We already have too much information; the challenge now becomes where we put it.

In the usual course of events, structures are created and artworks used to decorate or inhabit them. This holds for the overwhelming majority of domestic and public spaces, with only the most rarefied works being given bespoke environments. Thus physical structures (including

[54] Domenico Quaranta, *Collect the WWWorld : the Artist as Archivist in the Internet Age* (Brescia, Italy: LINK Editions, 2011) p. 42.

encounters of spatial proximity) predate the images that hang inside them. While much thought and care is obviously given to the arrangement and display of works in more traditional exhibition environments, the modular and temporary nature of these installations gives them an anodyne, standardised atmosphere; a viewer, even while in raptures over a magnificent work, could easily imagine another work in its place with no meaningful alteration to the environment. This impression is heightened by the once prevailing (now diminishing, if not extinct) gallery aesthetic - wide open spaces akin to religious or civic environments, didactic labels that use institutional power to interpret works for the viewer, and chronological linear organisation that forms a narrative of progress that can be quite absent from the works or artists themselves.[55]

Gardner's museum and my image cloud upend this process. Her museum began not as a building, but as an aggregated collection of fine paintings - the structure that would come to house them permanently (and forever in the sequence she dictated) wouldn't be completed till decades later. Taken in their entirety, both works derive their form through their contents - that is, they (museum and cloud) both originate with a *specific* aggregate content that determines (alongside other factors such as milieu, time, and the personal idiosyncrasies of their creators) their structure. As architectural and urban design critic and theorist Professor Kim Dovey notes, 'Built form can orient, disorient and reorient its subjects through the spatial framings of everyday life. It constructs

[55] A good example of this is the 2023 exhibition 'Hilma af Klint & Piet Mondrian: Forms of Life' at the Tate Modern Gallery in London, a mostly standard white cube museum show with some historical touches added via inevitable vitrines. Purported to be a didactic reconsidering of both artists' work, the show's premise falls apart before its mission statement is even finished: 'Although they never met, af Klint and Mondrian both invented their own languages of abstract art rooted in nature. At the heart of both of their artistic journeys was a shared desire to understand the forces behind life on earth.' This is a) not true and also b) so general as to become irrelevant as a curatorial device. This gets at the heart of what Hickey terms the 'therapeutic institution', one that insists on telling viewers what to think, rather than allowing them to feel. Assuming she liked the work, Gardner might have juxtaposed these artists with each other or even more unrelated works using formal or aesthetic relationships, rather than clumsily attempting to impose a conceptual connection between works and artists that have almost nothing in common. Tate Modern, *Hilma af Klint & Piet Mondrian: Forms Of Life*, <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/hilma-af-klint-piet-mondrian> [accessed 29 August 2023]

a cognitive map through which we imagine our world and give it our attention.' [56] The 'cognitive map' of the works in question is one that originates in a specific archive of images, and is predicated on the agglutination mapped onto them by the identities and whims of their creators.

What is behind this type of aggregation? What impulses lead people to acquire disparate objects with re-presentation in view? While there is an element of greed behind this gesture - indeed, Isabella Stewart Gardner's letters to Bernard Berenson (her art advisor and agent whose job was to travel Europe handling delicate purchase negotiations on her behalf) often radiate their writer's overwhelming desire to acquire works often for the sake of acquisition itself, as well as thwarting other collectors - she always comes back to her intention of making these works available to the public. This aggregation - not undifferentiated hoarding, but rather gathering *with purpose* - serves to build an archive with an aim to present its thesis to a prospective audience. Aggregation as a process therefore presupposes desire; to gather with purpose and intent transforms the selected materials into a physical manifestation of the will, taste, and values of the selector. Thus aggregation is formed of two interlocking phenomena; desire and purpose. Desire, resting somewhere between *want* and *need* and blurring the distinction between the two - a place where the desired object embeds itself in the psyche and generates a feeling so intense that it borders on the physical, sharing properties with other addictions - shapes the need to aggregate and forms its outcomes. Desire without structure, however, is just the sticky grasp of a hungry toddler, and the purposeful output inherent in the aggregative process keeps it from spiralling into gluttony. The goal-oriented nature of it also hangs its outcomes onto the ethos of its creator, as the act of choosing a preferred outcome figures the values of the progenitor. In WJT Mitchell's parlance, they

[56] Kim Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 15.

literally picture theory.[57] However, purpose is just a feeling or motive. When purpose takes form - through the advent of a device - it truly gains embodiment, for a device is both a plan (theory) and a structure (praxis).

Toward an end(s)

Figure 22. Appropriated image of iPhone storage overload

'I suppose the picture-habit, (which I seem to have) is as bad as the morphine or whiskey one—and it does cost.'

Isabella Stewart Gardner [58]

Since I first gained access to the Internet, I was an image hoarder. I would compulsively right click, drag-n-drop, screenshot, print, or otherwise grab pictures off the web, initially without any clear idea of *why* or *what for*. These technologies engaged my (and countless others)

[57]W. J. Thomas Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[58] Bernard Berenson, Isabella Stewart Gardner, Mary Berenson, and Rollin Van N. Hadley, *The Letters of Bernard Berenson and Isabella Stewart Gardner, 1887-1924, with Correspondence by Mary Berenson* (Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1987), p. 63.

acquisitiveness, exacerbating my impulses in order to generate advertising revenues and sales of hardware and later, cloud storage. The ephemeral nature of the Internet meant that whatever I saw and loved today might not be around tomorrow, while the ease of appropriation meant that preserving things for myself was a straightforward and pleasurable process. This inchoate hoarding first shifted to aggregation (that is, gathering with purpose) in the mid-2000s, when I began transforming gay cruising site profile photographs I found hot into what appeared to be aesthetically luscious studio figure studies. This work activated my existing image archive, but also was the first time I'd scoured the web for images with an outcome in mind; I found I rather liked it.

In 2014 the faintest glimmer of what would eventually become *Toward a unified field theory of photography* began to emerge. A year after my mother's death, I found myself still sorting through family photo albums and boxes. Being the photographer of the family, it was a given that I'd inherit the family image archive and scan pictures for my siblings and nieces. This constant perusal of childhood memories led to some unexpected discoveries; tattered fragments that could barely be called images anymore, racy Polaroids of my mother taken by my father, and our own childhood attempts at photography unfurled before me. These weren't only pieces of *my* history (indeed, many of them predated my existence), but rather a collective statement on the *us* of my family - an *us* I'd never fully believed in. Sorting this undifferentiated mass of images forced me to think more about my other undifferentiated mass of images, and how they all might connect. An idea began to emerge...

I began by drawing lines directly onto the wall. Directional lines, arrows, wayfinding aids, I tried many different types of marks and protocols to connect my dots. None was quite right, however, and none encompassed the primary question of the work: how can I physically manifest a

transitory and ephemeral psychological process of association? One that includes all the arbitrary messiness of the individual while still acknowledging the connectedness of the group? One that comes and goes, leaving not much in the way of physical traces, and has its body formed by environmental pressures and constraints, much like people do? Something that borrows a kind of authority, yet also undermines the idea of it? Something that interrupts the flow of images and forces a type of reflective analysis (an act that is discouraged, if not actually hindered, by digital technologies)?

Toward... emerged under the auspices of this PhD as an image cloud, a mind map, and a diagrammatic installation that deliberately never fully functions as any of these things. Ostensibly structured like (and bearing a superficial resemblance to) functional wayfinding devices like transit maps/diagrams, police investigation visualisation aids, and conspiracy theory diagrams, the work borrows the visual authority of these devices while subtly undermining them. For the gesture of the map is to visualise places in relation to each other, much like the diagram visualises the flow, proportion, or relative proximity of discrete entities and their relations to each other. These devices are assumed to *refer*, in the strictest sense, to some form of reality (the paranoiac's fevered conspiracy diagram is input with real-world entities, even if their relations are entirely imagined, and it borrows the authority of the map and diagram in much the same way I do).

The content of this aggregation of images is varied and doesn't seem to conform to much in the way of reason or order. A closer look does reveal certain patterns. These pictures, appropriated from news sites, social media, digital interfaces, videos, as well as photographs I've taken as part of the ordinary rhythm of my life, constitute a subjective archive united by a completely personal sensibility. The through line connecting all of these disparate elements is that

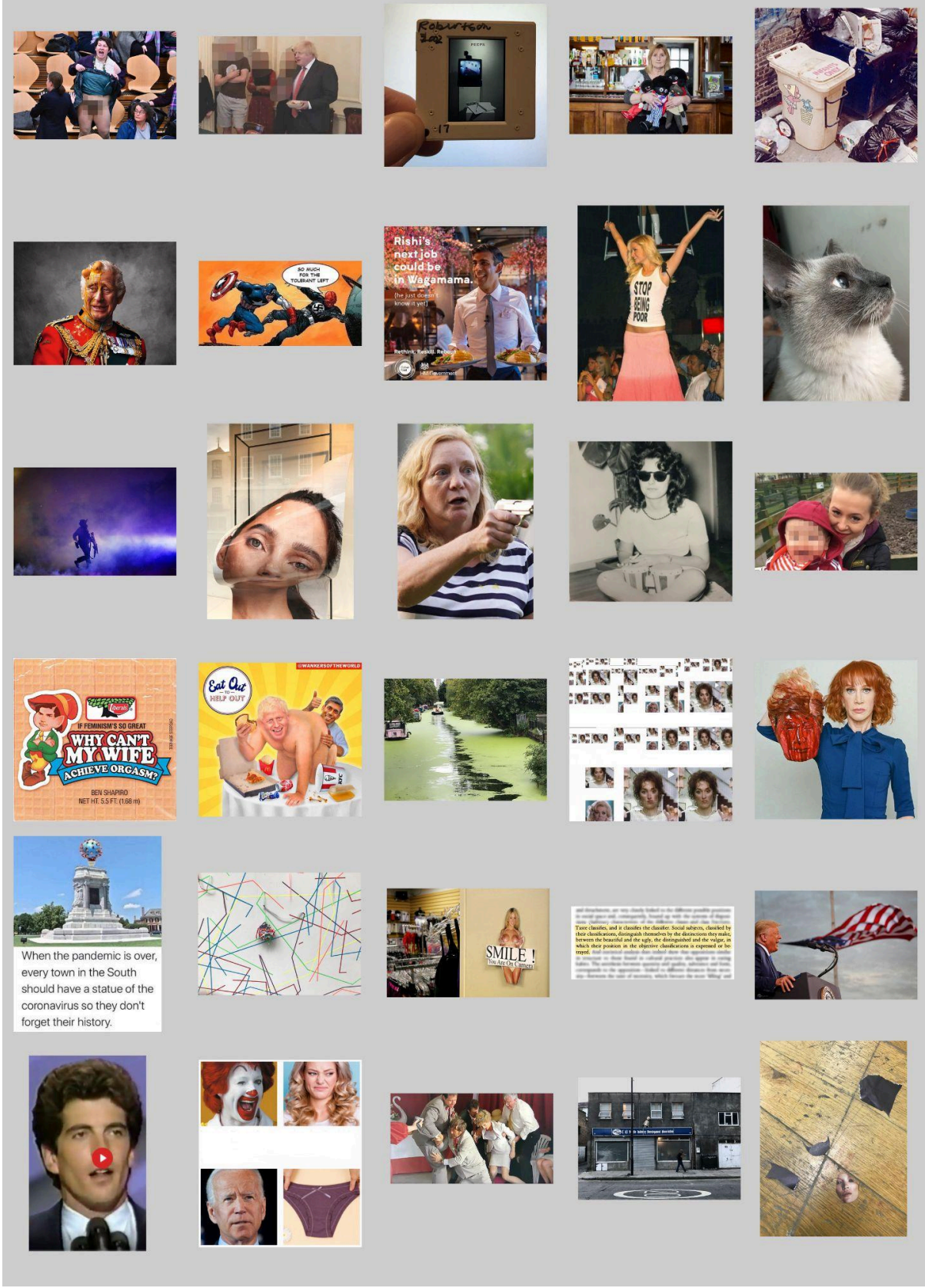
of taste, and of pleasure - on some level, these are all images that appealed to me, either because they encapsulated or distilled some element of contemporary social, political, or emotional reality. This sensibility led the impulse to acquire these images, with the aggregative element coming into play with the intent to re-present them in the context of the larger work.

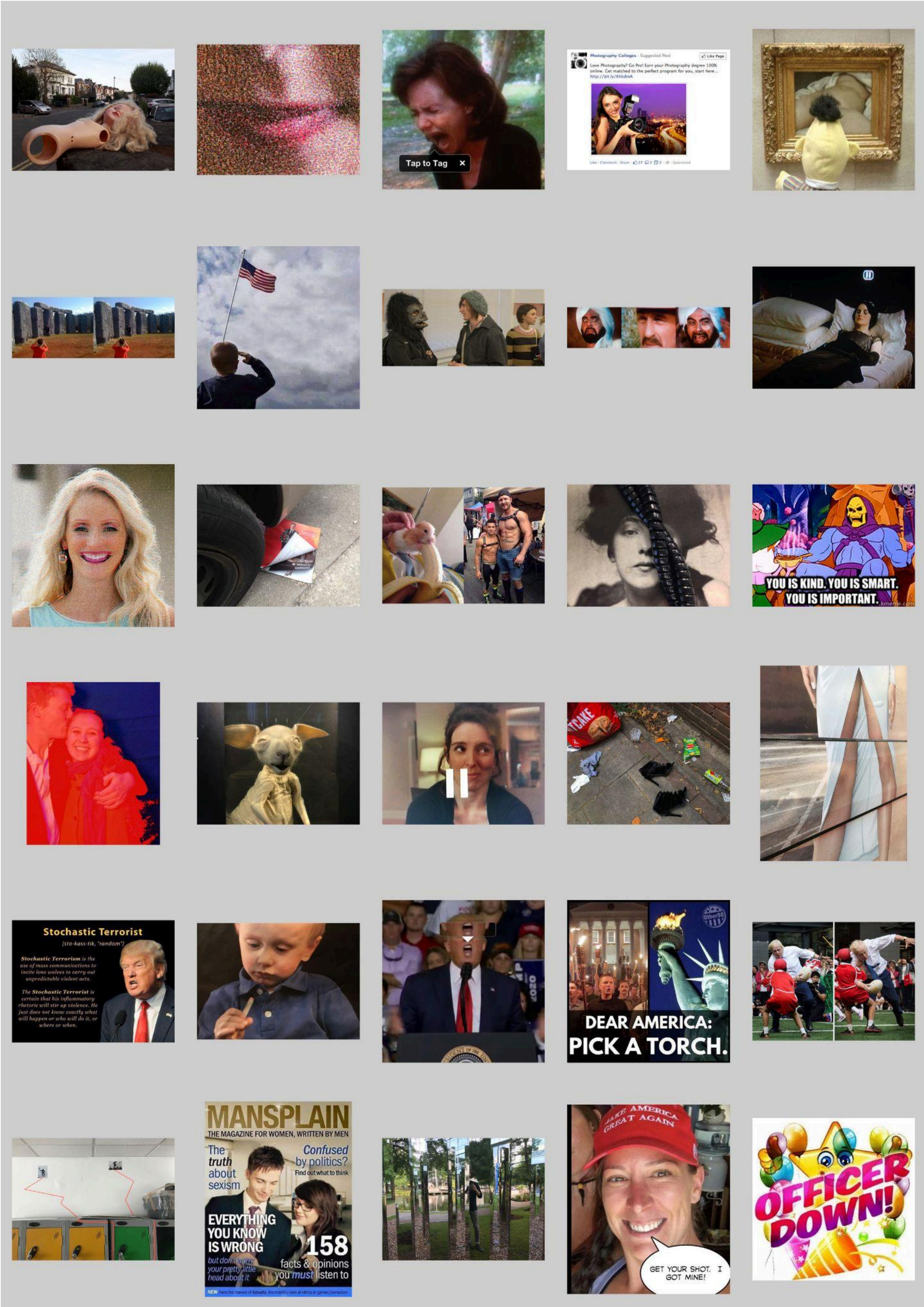
After aggregating this mass of images, I then undertake multiple editing processes. The first sorting occurs in my phone - potential *Toward...* images are designated as 'Favourites' (signified by tapping the 💙 button in the iPhone interface). This heart, the heart of the matter, the matter closer to my heart, becomes the first sorting device, designating the images to be aggregated from the exponentially greater undifferentiated horde stored in my pocket. The first level of editing complete, the second occurs when it's time to print out images for the piece. These edits filter out redundant, unclear, or confusing images (for example, ironic memes that would likely be misconstrued as sincere when stripped of context).

The selection of images is thoughtful, rigorous, and yet subjective - it's a process led first and foremost by *desire*. My desire to capture and hold tight to ephemeral images and moments, regardless of how futile it might be. My desire for beauty, or foolishness, humour, or simply sociological interest. My desire to document my own as well as collective experiences, both through photographs I've taken and ones I've taken over. This want is a driving force behind my work, and becomes sharp enough to feel like a need. Thus my mind becomes the first device to shape the piece.

Toward... images

Figures 23-30. Selected *Toward*... source images




Tap to Tag
YOU IS KIND. YOU IS SMART.
YOU IS IMPORTANT.
Stochastic Terrorist
[sto-kass-tik, "random"]
Stochastic Terrorism is the use of mass communications to incite lone wolves to carry out unpredictable violent acts.
The Stochastic Terrorist is certain that his inflammatory rhetoric will stir up violence. He just does not know exactly what will happen or who will do it, or where or when.
DEAR AMERICA:
PICK A TORCH.
MANSPLAIN
THE MAGAZINE FOR WOMEN, WRITTEN BY MEN
The truth about sexism
Confused by politics?
Find out what to think
EVERYTHING YOU KNOW IS WRONG
158
facts & opinions you must listen to
GET YOUR SHOT. I GOT MINE!
OFFICER DOWN!


EATING FISH TANK CLEANER IS SO LAST YEAR
THEY'RE TAKING LIVESTOCK DEWORMER NOW


Please respect our feelings during this difficult time.
TRUMP
FUCK YOUR FEELING
TRUMP
FUCK YOUR FEELINGS


GET IN, LOSER
YOU'RE GETTING VACCINATED

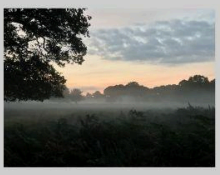

LIKE A HERO

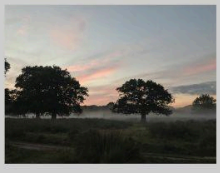

THIS AREA IS UNDER CONSTANT VIDEO SURVEILLANCE


AHHHH! AHHHH! AHHHH!


WE'VE TRIED NOTHING
AND WE'RE ALL OUT OF IDEAS


CITY MORGUE






TOURIST ATTRACTIONS


WWG1WGA

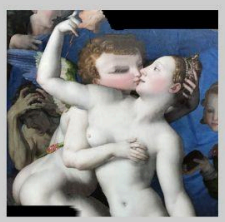

BECOME
ÜNGOVÈRNÄBLÈ


EPUBLICAN PARTY
LACK REPUBLICAN


BLACKS FOR TRUMP


BLACKS FOR TRUMP


I to this day, still can't believe KFC did this.
KFC
I hear you, I see you and I stand with you #BlackHistoryMonth

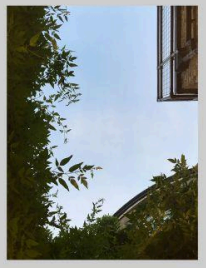


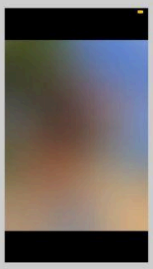

Opinion
I Am Not a Bedbug
And I'm telling your provost
By Bret Stephens

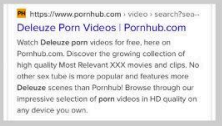

Miscentury Modern
Mid Retirement age


The Love Boat
CORONA VIRUS

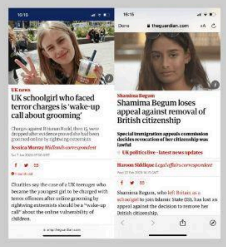

It was a gay restaurant






https://www.pornhub.com › video › search?sea...
Deleuze Porn Videos | Pornhub.com
Watch Deleuze porn videos for free, here on Pornhub.com. Discover the growing collection of high quality Most Relevant XXX movies and clips. No other sex tube is more popular and features more Deleuze scenes than Pornhub! Browse through our impressive selection of porn videos in HD quality on any device you own.


Are we there yet? Are we- (YWN)
Heh heh... finally! (YWN)


UK schoolgirl who faced terror charges is 'wake-up call about grooming'
Shamima Begum loses appeal against removal of British citizenship


F*ck Me Ups


I'M GOING
TO WIPE
MY HANDS
ON MY JEANS
I'M GOING
TO WIPE
MY HANDS
ON MY PENIS

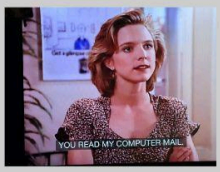

SHUT THE FUCK UP,
TERF


YES... HA HA HA... YES!
SICKOS


'WOKE'AGENDA ENDED MY SEX LIFE

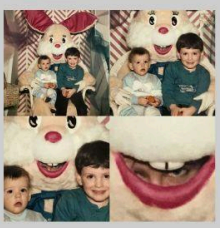

RESPECT MY TRANS HOMIES
OR I'M GONNA IDENTIFY
AS A FUCKING PROBLEM

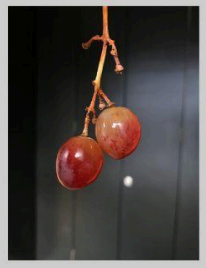

LUXX NOIR LONDON
Guys will post the most revealing thirst trap in their camera roll with the most random caption like "bagels make me want to buy a Nissan" and I'm kinda obsessed with that.
And I'd like examples in the replies <3
tyler oakley follows
Blair St. Clair @BlairStClair · 2h
I hate doing laundry.

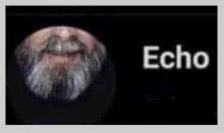

YOU READ MY COMPUTER MAIL

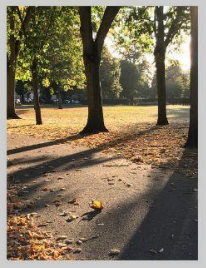

bottomless,

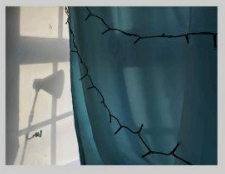

Save GRANDMA
Open Cheesecake Factory Again



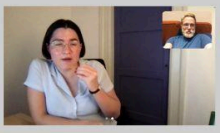



Echo



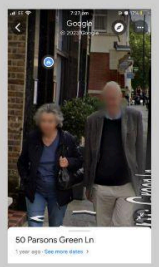



VACCINE RESEARCH
ANTI-VAX RESEARCH




Jewellery is a form of self-care


50 Parsons Green Ln

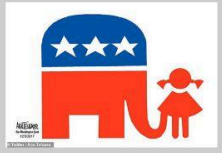

50 Parsons Green Ln


Donald Trump has been indicted
NEWS


You obviously don't respect yourself,
SO WHY SHOULD WE?


clio
@cliomcl
well do u know what margaret. i'm getting on a bus and you are dead. how about that
Tribune @tribunemagazine · 2d
'Margaret Thatcher once said anyone on a bus over the age of 25 is a failure.

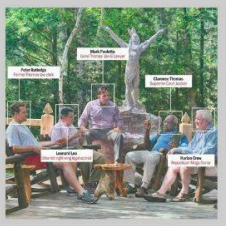

Do you think adults convicted of sexually assaulting children should go to
The Guardian Opinions



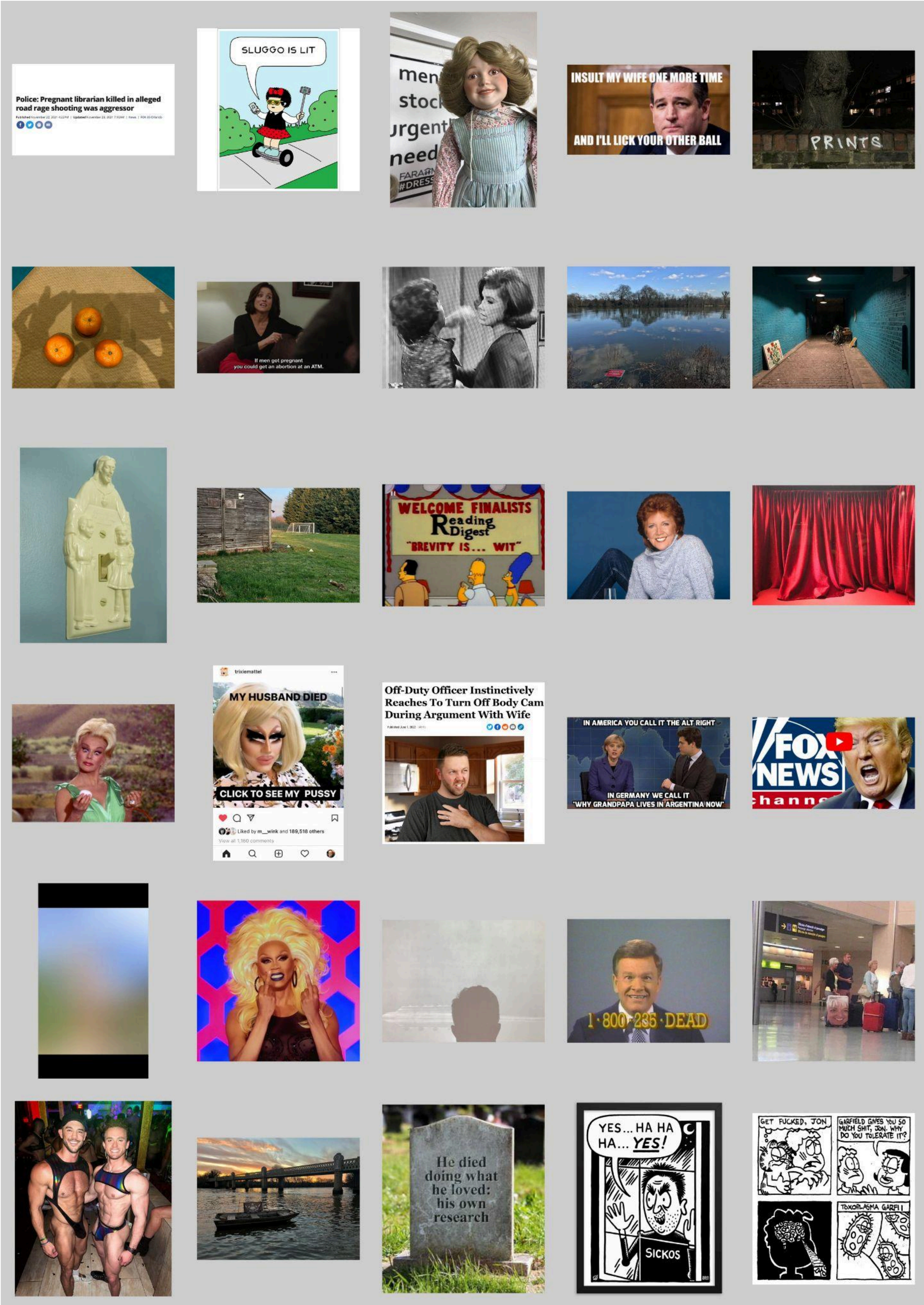

When you meme yourself
WHAT DOES RACISM LOOK LIKE?

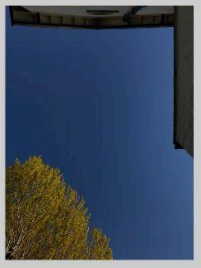

RCA
I TOLD YOU I NEEDED HELP.

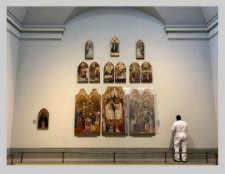

PORTUGUESE CUSTARD TARTS

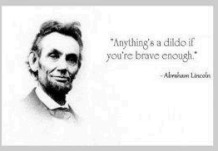



SEANIEEEEEEE @SRinaldi · 5m
5 guys doin some serious damage to my guts rn
laszlo cravensworth @BAT.. · 4m
6 when i get there
SEANIEEEEEEE @SRinaldi · 37s
what


Police: Pregnant librarian killed in alleged road rage shooting was aggressor
SLUGGO IS LIT
INSULT MY WIFE ONE MORE TIME
AND I'LL LICK YOUR OTHER BALL
PRINTS
If men got pregnant you could get an abortion at an ATM.
WELCOME FINALISTS
Reading Digest
"BREVITY IS... WIT"
MY HUSBAND DIED
CLICK TO SEE MY PUSSY
Off-Duty Officer Instinctively Reaches To Turn Off Body Cam During Argument With Wife
IN AMERICA YOU CALL IT THE ALT RIGHT
IN GERMANY WE CALL IT
"WHY GRANDPAPA LIVES IN ARGENTINA NOW"
FOX NEWS
1·800·235·DEAD
He died doing what he loved: his own research
YES... HA HA HA... YES!
SICKOS
GET FUCKED, JON
GARFIELD GIVES YOU SO MUCH SHIT, JON. WHY DO YOU TOLERATE IT?





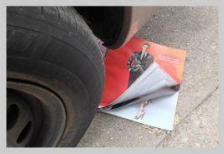

"Anything's a dildo if you're brave enough."
-Abraham Lincoln


China Ferrari sex orgy death crash


Age: 18
Headline: MAN
Age: 19
Headline: Teen
Both news stories on
@kcci8


FUCK HER RIGHT IN THE
PUDDING POP


NO GODS,
NO MASTERS.

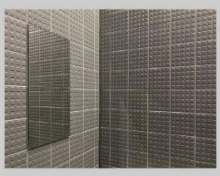



When you ride ALONE you ride with Hitler!
Join a Car-Sharing Club TODAY!


Liam Nissan™
@theliamnissan
The Betty Crackers set up a booth and everything
ASSHOLES CASSEROLES
1:09 PM · 7/16/23 from Earth · 65.5K Views
558 Retweets 28 Quotes

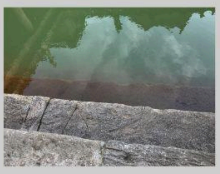

Man who donated his mother's body to an Arizona center for Alzheimer's research discovers it was sold on to the US Military for $6,000, strapped to a chair and blown up in 'blast test'
By Luke Kenton For Dailymail.com
00:35 31 Jul 2019, updated 06:57 31 Jul 2019

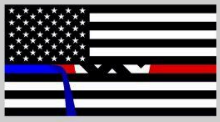

20 YEAR CHALLENGE
Two-bedroom fair market rent in Philadelphia.
2001:
2021:
$812/month
MINIMUM WAGE:
$7.25
$1,260/month
MINIMUM WAGE:
$7.25
This goes out to the "if they raise the minimum wage, things will cost more" crowd.



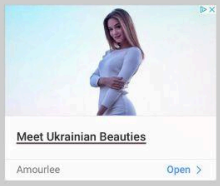

7WABC
Wat

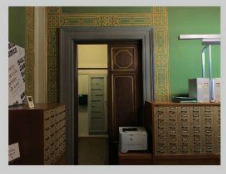

This content

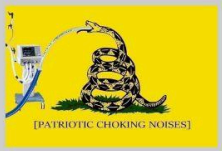




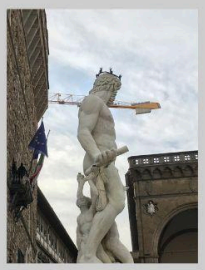

foreign policy

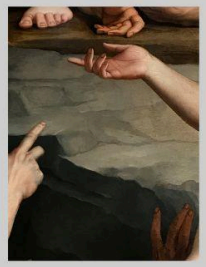

Meet Ukrainian Beauties
Amourlee
Open

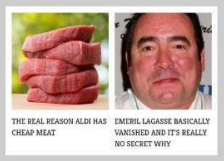


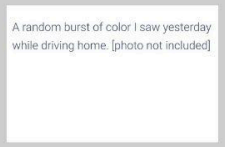

[PATRIOTIC CHOKING NOISES]


PROTECTING AND SERVING
THE SHIT OUT OF YOU

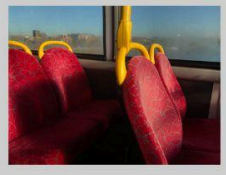


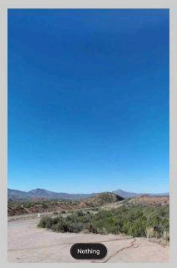



THE REAL REASON ALDI HAS CHEAP MEAT
EMERIL LAGASSE BASICALLY VANISHED AND IT'S REALLY NO SECRET WHY

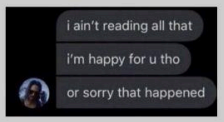

A random burst of color I saw yesterday while driving home. [photo not included]


Anarchy

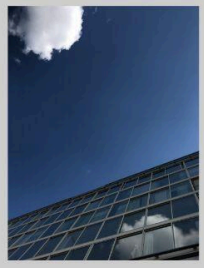




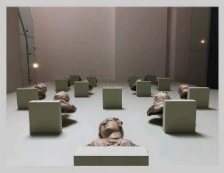

Anti-gay pastors
when no one is looking...
COCK


i ain't reading all that
i'm happy for u tho
or sorry that happened


DYSFUNCTION




TEAR THE BITCH APART !



When I've finally found the images I think are most suited to the work, I then upload the selected images for processing and printing.

The images in *Toward...* are output as snapshot-size 10x15 cm (4x6") drugstore chemical photographic prints from digital files. Primarily sourced from Boots and Costco, this technology represents the last remaining commercially viable chemical photographic printing process widely available. This process has the advantage of being cheaper, greener, and engaged with the massive print on demand industry. Chemical prints have many advantages over inkjet ones; they are more stable, more durable, stain and water-resistant, and have a uniform surface (as opposed to the relief effect of varied quantities of ink laid onto paper) and better aesthetic appeal. Thus the prints can be reused for many years in multiple iterations of the piece.

The final step in the editing process takes place in the moment of installation. *Toward...* is site-reactive, meaning it takes its form from the built environment that forms its substrate. Thus the selection of images happens at the nexus point of experience (encompassing my subjective mood and thoughts at time of install), space (reacting to the the specific quirks of whatever are I've been allotted), and external realities (the political, emotional, etc influences that shape my mood when I approach the creation of the piece). This final edit gives the piece its temporal presence, making it adapt to its circumstances.

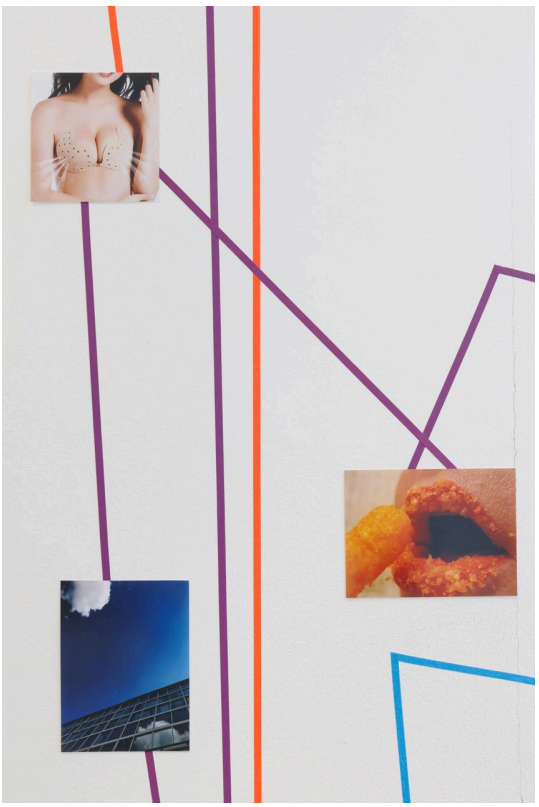


Figure 31. Installation detail of *Toward a unified field theory of photography*
Digital photograph, 2021

The installation begins when I tape the prints onto the wall. There is a rhythm and logic to this; the prints are placed with enough room between each to accommodate connecting lines. The arrangement is scattered, with some prints placed in deliberately awkward proximity with each other to frustrate the viewer's perception of pattern. Once the images are applied, I decide the general extent of the piece in response to spatial or exhibition limitations (for example, in a group show I demarcate a 'boundary' for the piece to avoid encroaching on other artists' work, or in a listed building I would avoid applying my work to historical objects or elements).

Once the parameters are established through print placement, I prepare to apply the tape lines that connect the images. In previous iterations of the piece I used narrow vinyl tape; this had the advantage of stretching and moulding into smooth contours on the wall, giving the piece the

look of a transit map. Supply issues forced me to switch to narrow gaffer tape, which doesn't stretch or contour. This compelled me to hinge the tape lines on sharp angles, giving the piece a more jagged, graphically sharp aesthetic that, combined with the broader colour choice of gaffer tape, made the piece more visually emphatic. The colours of tape are fixed before installation, but their significance is not. I have broad categories I repeat, but over all these shift depending on external conditions (much like image choice). The piece isn't explained, so it becomes a map without a key - one that forces the viewer into an encounter not only with this selection of images and their arrangement, but also with the thought process that led to their sorting and organisation.

Figure 32. Installation view of *Toward...* as part of *Unruly Encounters*
Group exhibition at Southwark Park Gallery, London, 2022

All together now: memory palaces and mental geographies

> 'Today we are going to talk about Left to Right. If I thought that I could say, "Things go from left to right," and all of you would grasp the weight of the situation then I would just say it and that would be that and we could just go home for today because, really, that's enough. No, too much for one day, actually. The best way would be to say, "Things go from left" on Tuesday, let it sink in, and then say "to right" on Thursday. And you know how you'd picture it? You'd picture Tuesday on the left, and Thursday on the right, and we'd be all set. In fact, why the hell didn't I do that? Damn. Too late.'[59]

Underpinning this process of organisation and juxtaposition are, like the first chapter, primary embodied metaphors. These cloud castles couldn't function without vernacular language undergirding their spatial functions - everyday metaphors that serve as the foundation for spatial recognition of types, orders, temporal sequencing, and visual narrative logic. Continuing with my previous exploration of the embodied cognitive linguistic transmutation to the visual, the works discussed here employ three broad metaphors to support their function; Similarity is Closeness, Organization is Physical Structure, and Relationships are Physical Enclosures. Each of these deals with a different aspect of physical space as a substitute for complex evaluations of likeness, design, and kinship.

Of these, Similarity is Closeness is perhaps the most fundamental. Its mapping is:

> 'Similarity is Closeness
> Subjective Judgment: Similarity
> Sensorimotor Domain: Proximity in space
> Example: "These colors aren't quite the same, but they're *close*."
> Primary Experience: Observing similar objects clustered together (flowers, trees, rocks, buildings, dishes)' [60]

In this way, viewers come predisposed to assume that objects in physical proximity to each other share characteristics or belong to the same type/classification. This is particularly useful when

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[59] Chip Kidd, *The Cheese Monkeys: A Novel in Two Semesters* (New York: Scribner, 2001).
[60] George Lakoff & Mark Johnson, Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 52.

uniting disparate elements, helping them to harmonise and cohere into a unified whole. Thus the rooms of Gardner's museum force her idiosyncratic juxtapositions to hold together, giving them a logic that they otherwise might not have. For example, Gardner riffed off a motif in her Europa by displaying a fragment (now replaced by a reproduction owing to the fragility of the original) of one of her fine Parisian gowns by renowned designer Charles Frederick Worth. This ecru silk satin was woven with a design of tassels in silver, which 'resemble the bull's bushy tail, which playfully grazes a cupid's head.' [61] While there is obviously visual similarity at play in this clever extension of the painted scene into the viewer's environment, its direct proximity to the painting (the fabric is aligned directly underneath the painting's gilt frame) both literally and figuratively underscores the connection between the two works, though they are separated by centuries, of different media, and serve very different functions. This is also part of the logic behind my image clusters - they hang together because they hang together. The images are disparate, drawn from many different sources and functions, yet their closeness, their shared space, and the lines drawn between them, induces the viewer to assume a logic and relationship between them, despite their content.

Likewise, Organization is Physical Structure creates an assumption of purposeful design behind structures, even if the logic eludes immediate understanding. Mapped thus:

> 'Organization is Physical Structure
> Subjective Judgment: Abstract unifying relationships
> Sensorimotor Domain: Experience of physical objects
> Example: "How do the *pieces* of this theory *fit together*?"
> Primary Experience: Interacting with complex objects and attending to their structure (correlation between observing part-whole structure and forming cognitive representations of logical relationships)' [62]

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[61] Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Garment Fabric, about 1885-1891, designed by Charles Frederick Worth (2023) <https://www.gardnermuseum.org/experience/collection/13361> [Accessed 24/7/23].

[62] Lakoff & Johnson, p. 52.

This metaphor relates to the psychology of part/whole relationships, deriving not only from *observed* structures but also creating the assumption of their existence. In the Gardner museum, the Blue Room in particular has an appearance of order and harmony that is totally at odds with the inventory of objects crammed inside. The north and south walls undulate, with partial walls intruding onto the vista from both ends. This allows for more wall space, of course, which allows more artworks to be hung within the same footprint. The deep solidity of the walls also serves to anchor the works, providing them not only with a literal solid foundation from which to hang, but also a visually solid one that *appears* sufficient to hold a wealth of art treasures. Each wall in this chamber holds 20-30 works of art:

> 'The Blue Room is a gallery brimming with objects that reflect Gardner's personal relationships. In the early days of the Museum the Blue Room welcomed concert goers, serving as the ladies' reception area. It displays the work of artists in Gardner's closest circle of friends. With its low ceilings, fabric covered walls, and well-lit alcoves showcasing paintings, furniture, books, and cases, the Blue Room invites visitors to explore the collection at close range and in an intimate space.' [63]

In such an intimate environment, the 100 objects and artefacts (according to the museum's own guide) could seem an incoherent jumble akin to an attic storage unit. Instead, its order and harmony comes from its physical armature. Similarly, my *Toward* installation gains coherence through architectural spatial organisation. The site-reactive work builds out from its surface, taking its backing into itself and borrowing the authority of its structure for my own (nefarious?) purposes. As Kim Dovey observes, 'The metaphoric content of built form enables it to simultaneously represent and yet mask its associations with power. A metaphor is a figure of discourse where one thing is represented as if it is, and yet simultaneously is not, another. Yet the

[63] Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Blue Room (2023) <https://www.gardnermuseum.org/experience/rooms/blue-room> [Accessed 24/7/23].

power of metaphor is linked to its subtlety; it is most powerful when least literal... Metaphor has the capacity to seduce and legitimize simultaneously while masking these very practices.' [64]

Finally, the Relationships are Physical Enclosures metaphor helps the two experiences make meaning. For mapping the concept of a relationship (that is, a connection beyond a surface likeness or similarity) onto an enclosure raises the spectre of both intimacy (see Chapter I) and the stifling feeling of emotional 'claustrophobia' (another extension of this metaphor). Lakoff and Johnson map the metaphor like so:

> Relationships are Physical Enclosures
> Subjective Judgment: An interpersonal relationship
> Sensorimotor Domain: Being in an enclosure
> Example: "We've been *in* a *close* relationship for years, but it's beginning to seem *confining*."
> Primary Experience: Living in the same enclosed physical space with the people you are most closely related to.

This metaphor deals not only with the likeness of the works, nor with grouping and organisation of objects, but rather their presumed type and meaning. The relationships posited here are deeper than the visual or superficial - they are more akin to familial relationships that are intuited and felt rather than stated outright. The enclosure of the works - the parcelling out of them into intimate, domestic-*like* space - creates the distinct impression of being closeted with old friends (a strange experience when dealing with Titian, Rembrandt, and Vermeer paintings). This enclosure (as opposed to the open vistas of more traditional art museums) serves to unite the disparate artworks together, as well as unite the viewer to the art. A similar phenomenon occurs with my own installation; it sprawls, but never to an overwhelming degree. At most it might fill the viewer's field of vision if she is looking closely at the small prints, thus generating a visual simulacrum of the type of architectural enclosure in the Gardner museum.

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[64] Kim Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 13.

My point in analysing the parallels between my practice and Isabella Stewart Gardner's is not to imply that we two exist in a vacuum, or that we form a discrete continuum. Rather, it's to look more closely at the ways two creative people can express themselves via image aggregation within the confines of their respective epochs, social spheres, and individual circumstances. Isabella Stewart Gardner might not have had the free time or energy to build her museum if she'd had a large family of her own, of course she couldn't have done it without her vast fortune, and surely her creative impulses were channelled by her identity as a 19th century woman: likewise, I wouldn't have activated my own collecting tendencies into art practice if art and higher education hadn't been made slightly more available to poor and working class people in the late 20th century, and if technological advances hadn't allowed for greater ease of image copying, storage, and printing. These developments exist at the nexus point of chance, history, timespace, and idiosyncrasy, and their outcomes are simultaneously entirely logical and yet often unpredictable.

Knowledge transference: Device and systemisation [65]

All images are networked.

For once we had something called 'image culture' (Flusser draws the distinction between pre- and post-technical image cultures, and this is an important fracture to explore, but for the sake of this work these can be understood as having more of an underlying flow of continuity than he allows, especially considering the [unknown at the time of his writing] advent of lens-based painting during the late Renaissance/early Baroque) the singular, autonomous image ceased to exist: 'Historically, traditional images are prehistoric and technical ones 'post-historic' ... Ontologically, traditional images signify phenomena whereas technical images signify concepts. Decoding technical images consequently means to read off their actual status from them.'[66]

This expanded concept of the networked image serves both as a type of data visualisation and systemic sublation - that is, the image alternately consumes and is consumed by the system(s)[67] it relies upon to make meaning in a constant process of recursive churn. The explosion of image-based media from the 19th to 21st centuries entailed a radical shift in the ways images were read and processed; for example, early Victorian photocollage foretold (in terms of creative impulse and fascination with the malleability of the mass-produced image) Pop and later Net-art, including meme and clapback/social media culture. This not only encompassed concepts such as multitasking (subjecting users to a constant low-key form of anxiety-inducing cognitive dissonance), but also saw the generation of niche communities with their own shorthands of verbal

[65] Mieke Bal and Sherry Marx-Macdonald, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002). This writing serves to contextualise the work, but also to counter (and in fact, undo, if we're applying Mieke Bal's 'travelling concept' that a work exists as *mise-en-scene*, and thus relies on the reader's engagement and participation in reading to truly fulfil the work's aim) the text itself; that is, it has the potential to be mis-applied as a substitute for reading the chapter itself, and thus undoing the work it is supposed to augment.
[66] Flusser, Vilém, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion, 2000), p. 14.
[67] These include technologies, social mores, economies, aesthetics, etc.

and pictorial nomenclature. Writer and theorist Patricia Lockwood provides one particularly apt example of this process at work:

> 'A subculture could spring up anywhere, even on the chat board where people met to talk about their candida overgrowth. You stumbled across it late one night when you were idly typing in searches: Why am I tired all the time? Why can I no longer memorise a seven-minute monologue? Why is my tongue less pink than it was when I was a child? ... You took up the candida overgrowth language; what began as the most elastic and snappable verbal play soon turned into jargon, and then dogma, and then doctrine. Your behaviour was subtly modified against humiliations, chastisements, censures you might receive on the candida overgrowth board.'[68]

French art historian Rainer Rochlitz observes this process in the writing of Walter Benjamin,

> '[T]he truth of knowledge [is linked] to the form of the fleeting *image*, not to the concept: "That in which the past and present join to form a constellation is an image" (*G.S.*, 1:1242). *The privilege of the image lies in its capacity to enter into correspondence with other images*. Furthermore, the image—according to an old theme of romanticism and German idealism—possesses the power to speak to everyone, while the concept is addressed only to the educated classes. Knowledge through images is more accessible, more universal, but it is also more ambiguous (italics mine).'[69]

Pertinent to this work, the 'networked image' can be conceived as operating along two distinct pathways; the first being the singular image that harks directly to other *specific*[70] images or tropes as a way of making meaning (what I visualise for convenience sake as *reflective devices*, or those that reflect their systems while simultaneously representing them), the other being the multifaceted image that combines disparate images into a new, visually coherent whole (termed here *refractive devices*, or those that posit new methods for systematising images).

The multivalence of the image is hardly a new concept. In *Matter and Memory* philosopher Henri Bergson touched on it via the literal and metaphorical afterimage:

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[68] Lockwood, Patricia, 'The Communal Mind', *London Review of Books*, pp. 11-14, 2019.
[69] Rochlitz, Rainer, trans. by Jane Marie Todd, *Disenchantment Of Art: Philosophy of Walter Benjamin* (New York City: Guilford Press, 1998)
[70] As opposed to the general state of the image within a larger image culture - that is, enmeshed in a more amorphous system of visual or conceptual connectivity.

> ‘If, after having gazed at any object, we turn our eyes abruptly away, we obtain an "afterimage" of it: must we not suppose that this image existed already while we were looking? ... It is true that we are dealing here with images photographed upon the object itself, and with memories following immediately upon the perception of which they are but the echo. But, behind these images, which are identical with the object, there are others, stored in memory, which merely resemble it, and others, finally, which are only more or less distantly akin to it. All these go out to meet the perception, and, feeding on its substance, acquire sufficient vigour and life to abide with it in space.[71]

Here Bergson posits vision not as mere sight, but as a constant push/pull process whereby the ‘viewer’ is actually reaching out to the thing newly perceived and meeting it with things previously perceived, often via the function of a literal or metaphorical device.

[71] Henri Bergson (trans. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer), *Matter and Memory*, (New York: Zone Books, 1991) pp. 102-3.

Our own devices

Devices. Drawn originally from the Vulgate Latin *divisare* (to divide), from there to the Old French *devis* (division, separation, disposition, wish, desire), and finally into Middle English as intent, desire, plan, artistic design, or later, mechanical contrivance.[72] The practice of aggregation (that is, gathering *with intent*) organically generates attendant deviced systems, including sorting mechanisms, mechanical aids, artistic design, and spatial organisation that, by extension, manifest desire. We shape devices, and they shape us in their turn. The story of humanity is one of cascading technologies, each of which shifts perception of how the world works and the individual's place within it. Left to our own devices, we might devise something more decisive, but of course these things are the outcome of widespread, collective processes too complex to unravel in the work at hand. We might, however, devise a means of understanding them better. These same forces (desire and purpose) shape the creation of devices, creating not a linear system of gathering and presenting, but rather a messy and complex push/pull whereby desire and purpose constantly modify the inputs and outputs of the system(s) they engender. Thus aggregation and deviced outcomes aren't static elements, but rather dynamic encounters that change according to physical and psychological stimuli. As theorist Jean-François Lyotard wrote, '...the articulation of discourse with the figural is in every way attached to the fate of desire, even in artworks.' [73] Desire drags the pupil from its normal course and onto its own object, literally embodying a push-pull of one of the fastest

[72] Oxford English Dictionary online, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/51464. See also: Oxford University Press's *OUP Blog*: https://blog.oup.com/2015/09/device-devisen-etymology-word-origin/.
[73] Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 164.

movements the human body is capable of making, the saccade.[74] For if this embodied desire drives aggregation, communication drives the devices needed to re-present the aggregated as a coherent statement.

C'est *notre* plaisir: Devices of space

If the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum seemed unlike anything I'd ever encountered, it was for very good reasons - it's a very unusual structure and collection. Gardner was first drawn to art collecting with a vague notion of sharing her love of aesthetic pleasure and appreciation of master works at some future date. In fact, her collecting was a form of aggregation, as the reason behind her collection was eventual exhibition to the public. Her early letters to Bernard Berenson refer to this. Exulting in her 1896 acquisition of Titian's *The Rape of Europa*, she wrote,

> 'I am breathless about the *Europa*, even yet! I am back here tonight (when I found your letter) after a two days' orgy. The orgy was drinking myself drunk with Europa and then sitting for hours in my Italian Garden at Brookline, thinking and dreaming about her. Every inch of paint in the picture seems full of joy. Mr. Shaw, Mr. Hooper, Dr. Bigelow, and many painters have dropped before her. Many came with "grave doubts"; many came

[74] The rapid movement of the pupil of the eye is known as the saccade. Behavioural and cognitive science researcher Prof. Victor Lamme provides a good overview of the concept: 'With every saccade—and we make about three per second— the eye lands on a new scene and the image is processed by the retina. In about 50 ms, this information has reached primary visual cortex, and from there on is distributed along a large number of other visual areas. ... The eyes can saccade towards a visual stimulus within 120 ms, manual reaction times can be as short as 180 ms. Tennis players can return a ball serviced at 130 mph (world record is 163 mph), implying a reaction time of 400 ms, which includes deciding between forehand or backhand, doing a backswing and hitting the right way.'
Victor A. F. Lamme, "Challenges for Theories of Consciousness: Seeing or Knowing, the Missing Ingredient and How to Deal with Panpsychism." *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 373, no. 1755 (London: The Royal Society, 2018), pp. 1–2. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26486407.
For more information (including analysis of the saccadic movements you've employed in reading this thesis, if you're sighted), see:
S. G. Abrams and B. L. Zuber, "Some Temporal Characteristics of Information Processing during Reading." *Reading Research Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (Newark, DE: International Literacy Association, 1972): 40–51. https://doi.org/10.2307/746979.
David E. Irwin, and Laura A. Carlson-Radvansky, "Cognitive Suppression during Saccadic Eye Movements." *Psychological Science* 7, no. 2 (Washington, DC: Association for Psychological Science, 1996): 83–88. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40062915.

> to scoff; but all wallowed at her feet. One painter, a general sceptic, couldn't speak for the tears! all of joy!!! I think I shall call my Museum the Borgo Allegro. The very thought of it is such a joy.' [75]

After the first flush of pardonable pride in ownership of such a transcendent work, her thoughts are immediately consumed with sharing it, both with friends and the public.

Yet Gardner's museum also subverts the presumed selfishness of great wealth - the building has all the hallmarks of a mansion or palace (mansionicity[76]), yet was designed and constructed particularly for the purpose of a bespoke art museum featuring her specific collection, with space that was, in scale and design aesthetic, more closely aligned to a rich and lofty kind of domestic architecture than comparable public-spirited exhibition spaces (that were largely designed along awe-inspiring, cathedral-like lines and intended to [literally and figuratively] edify the lower and middle classes via exposure to Art, Beauty, and Culture - the precursors to what Dave Hickey termed the 'therapeutic institution' [77]). Compare this to Kenwood House[78], an 18th century stately home, formerly the seat of the Earl of Mansfield, and in turn repurposed as a museum to house a comparable collection of old master paintings (works purchased by beer peer Edward Guinness, 1st Earl of Iveagh) not acquired by its original owners/occupiers, and after all its original contents had

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[75] Bernard Berenson, Isabella Stewart Gardner, Mary Berenson, and Rollin Van N. Hadley (ed.), The Letters of Bernard Berenson and Isabella Stewart Gardner, 1887-1924, with Correspondence by Mary Berenson (Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1987), p. 65.

[76] Roland Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', in *The Photography Reader: History and Theory*, ed. by Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 114-125. 'To tell the truth, this message itself can be decomposed further, for the sign Panzani yields not only the name of the firm but also, by its assonance, a supplementary signified which is, so to speak, "Italianicity"; the linguistic message is therefore double (at least in this image): of denotation and of connotation...'

[77] For more on this, see Dave Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon: Four essays on beauty,* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) and Martha Rosler, *Decoys and Disruptions : Selected Writings, 1975-2001* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press in association with International Center of Photography, New York, 2004). Hickey writes on the prioritisation of a presumed 'moral good' in art over its erotic and aesthetic aspects; Rosler uses social science tools to quantify the association of the museum environment (including its architectural design and purpose) and finds that professional class respondents were more likely to equate an art museum environment with a domestic one, whereas working class respondents felt it was more akin to a church or cathedral.

[78] https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/kenwood/

been sold. Thus it reads as a domestic environment rendered by someone who has only passing familiarity with them - the furnishings don't fit the spaces, and certainly don't tack with the originally designed purposes for the rooms.

Reflecting devices: images of systems

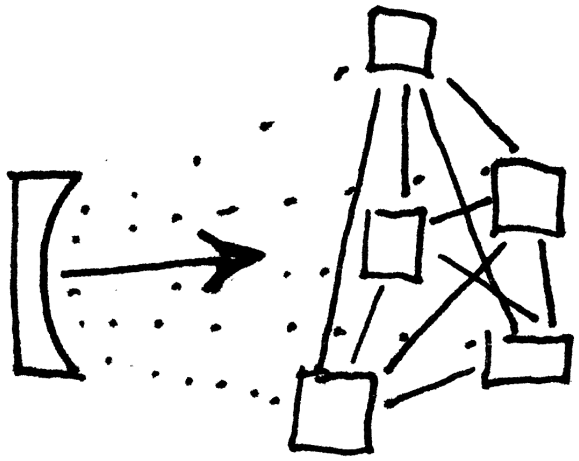

Figure 33. Rendering of the concept of the *reflector*
The image device that collates and reflects image culture back into a representation of itself. In this case, the curved mirror (an optical device used to aid painting) becomes a metaphor for the combination of image and psychological systems that serve to amalgamate images into each other. Cole Robertson, 2019.[79]

What are some examples of works that perform this function? What works can be understood as alternately sublating and being sublated to the systems they engage? One particularly apt subset of this type of image (and one that reveals most clearly its underlying structures) is that of what I term the systemic reflector - that is, the image that both relies upon a preconstructed system of other images for its meaning *and serves primarily to expose the workings, biases, or underpinnings of this system.*

[79] These diagrams, while not consciously influenced by Lacan's 'double mirror device', obviously employ the same metaphoric structure - that of equating an optical device with a system of meaning-making, and thus vision with knowledge. 'I *see* what you mean' is a ubiquitous figure of speech, one that, when examined closely, reveals a) the primacy of vision as a sense modality among human experience, and b) the ways in which vision serves as a direct analogue for more general concepts of information conveyance, or understanding.

A good starting point for a theory of this type of manifold image is critic, writer, and theorist W.J.T. Mitchell's concept of 'metapictures', outlined in *Picture Theory*:

> 'Perhaps the most obvious thing called into question by [a] metapicture is the structure of "inside and outside," first- and second-order representation, on which the whole concept of "meta-" is based. An image of nested, concentric spaces and levels is required to stabilize a metapicture, or any second-order discourse, to separate it cleanly from the first-order object-language it describes. Thus, most metapictures depict a picture-within-a-picture that is simply one among the objects represented. Even a picture-within-a-picture that duplicates its framing image (the effect of the *mise-en-abîme*) can, in principle, keep its levels, boundaries, and frames distinct... The infinite regress of simulation, duplication, and repetition does not blur the distinctness of levels, except at the vanishing point; one simply has *n*-levels of nested representation, each level clearly distinguished as an outside to another outside.'[80]

Mitchell pins most of his theory of the metapicture on the image-within-an-image or the doubling effect of the 'multistable' image - that is, the psychological trickery of the Gestalt optical illusion. He goes on to summarise this concept more succinctly: '...any picture or visible mark, no matter how simple... is capable of becoming a metapicture. Pictorial self-reference is, in other words, not exclusively a formal, internal feature that distinguishes some pictures, but a pragmatic, functional feature, a matter of use and context. Any picture that is used to *reflect* on the nature of pictures is a metapicture.' (emphasis mine).[81] It is just this reflection that reveals the manifold nature of the image - by taking the multiplicity of its pre-encoded images as its true subject, the metapicture thus serves a discursive function unrelated to its nominal subject, a rhetorical sleight of hand that forces the viewer into the uncomfortable role of participant as well as spectator. For what is the 'flip' but an immediate questioning (and thereby, positioning) of the viewer? What better way to force an onlooker to reconsider their role as a *specific* embodied experience, rather than one of clinical detachment?

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[80] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 42.
[81] Mitchell, pp. 56-7.

A prime example of an image *reflector* is Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Still* work. These images, ostensibly pulled from representations of women in cinema, rely on the rhetoric of film - its tropes of representation - to make meaning. Each ersatz film still pulls in multiple (dozens? hundreds?) of these representations into itself, focussing them into singular images through Sherman's grasp of aesthetic tropes and techniques as well as the presence of her own body (if not her 'self') in the frame. Discussing the recursive tension between the *Film Still*s and their (simultaneously actual and supposed) source material, critic and theorist Rosalind Krauss wrote:

> 'Did Sherman ever show real movie stills next to her own work? And if so, to what end? Since her own images manage to project an array of stereotypical Hollywood or New Wave heroines, along with the very atmospheres through which they are cast... Could it mean that with the stereotypes projected by these fictions, with regard to the creatures of this fantasized romance, could it mean that these boxes-within - boxes of seeming "memory" always produce what appears to be an authentic copy, even though there is no "real" original to be found? So that [Douglas] Sirk's copy and Sherman's copy uncannily overlap like two searchlights probing through the night toward the same vaguely perceived target?'[82]

This work has been the subject of almost unparalleled speculation over the 40 years since its creation (and Sherman herself is famously reticent to discuss its nuances), but Krauss gets to the heart of the work. Each *Film Still* serves as a reenactment of and reflection on the *system* of images it purports to be part of - that is, Sherman's masterful alchemy (in an indexical medium) of tropes into singular images has the effect focussing an otherwise amorphous cluster of types into indicative and concrete (if deliberately misleading) examples. Thus, each image becomes a metapicture of the cultural mores and tastes (including the economies around mass media imaging and cinema) that dictate its subject as much as the specific subject itself.

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[82] Rosalind Krauss, Norman Bryson, and Cindy Sherman, *Cindy Sherman, 1975-1993,* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), pp. 17-20.

It's this tension between the singular and the multiple that gives the work its intellectual heft. For when we compare the *Film Stills* to a work predicated on a similar process of aggregation - say the typological grids of Bernd and Hilla Becher - their rhetorical impact becomes clear. Both are typologies. Both are photographic works, and so come encumbered with the indexicality of the photographic image - they are not just pictures of water towers or women, but specific water towers and individual women. This specific, indexical imaging makes it difficult to generalise from a photograph. While ideas can be extrapolated from single images, they always come back to the original. The Bechers dodge the specific by grafting multiple images into grids, creating through consistent imaging technique and sheer numbers. In this way, an average or median can be formed from observing the grouped photographs - squint, and you can sense the ur-form that underlies the creation of all water towers, rock breakers, etc. Sherman, on the other hand, can confidently display the singular, specific image, as the 'original' is removed (or, in a sense, turns out to be a chimaera). Since there's no 'original' to be had in her cultural simulacra, there can't be a specific content to be argued with, and thus the images drift out into the world of archetypes and iconography.

Figure 34. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #15*
Gelatin silver print, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1978

Figure 35. Bernd & Hilla Becher, *Winding Towers*
Gelatin silver prints, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1966-97

Refractive devices: systems of images

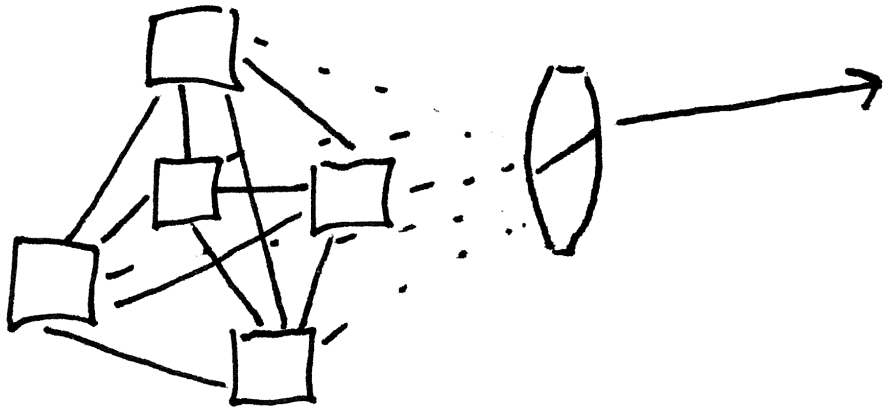

Figure 36. Rendering of the concept of the *refractor*
The image device that transmutes image culture into a representation of itself, Cole Robertson, 2019

Serving a related function, if through very different means, is the image *refractor* - that is, a variant deviced system of multiplied images that serves both to highlight the broader system that spawned it and to question the ways in which this system functions.[83] One series that exemplifies this mode of working is the collaborative work of Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, collectively titled *Most Wanted/Least Wanted Paintings*[84]. Launched online at the Detroit Institute of the Arts in 1995, this work started with an information gathering mission headed by a market research firm hired by the artists to find out what specific nations wanted (or didn't want) in a painting. Parameters included scale, colour, subject matter, levels of abstraction/representation, figures, etc. These paintings were then commissioned by the artists to represent the systems of taste, popular feeling, and cultural specificity of each of the 12 nations surveyed. These works represent the lowest common denominator in terms of taste, political engagement, and artistic discourse

[83] This was also one of the outcomes of Aby Warburg's Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg (KBW) and *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, which will be discussed later in this chapter.
[84] Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *Komar & Melamid: The Most Wanted Paintings on the Web*, (Detroit Institute of Art, 1995-7) <http://awp.diaart.org/km/intro.html> [accessed 29 August 2023] .

(pains were taken that each sample pool should be weighted to approximate its country's general population in terms of demographic representation). The resulting concepts described were then commissioned by the duo as physical works that were subsequently incorporated into a comprehensive online repository for the project. Reflecting on the work, Alex Melamid stated, 'It's interesting: we believe in numbers, and numbers never lie. Numbers are innocent. It's absolutely true data. It doesn't say anything about personalities, but it says something more about ideals, and about how this world functions. That's really the truth, as much as we can get to the truth. Truth is a number.'[85]

These snapshots of aesthetic priorities form a singularly odd body of images. *China's Most Wanted*, for example, is a wall-sized blue landscape pastiche of traditional Chinese and European painting styles. While distinct in its own right, it bears a striking resemblance to *USA's Most Wanted* and *Russia's Most Wanted* - all are large-scale, blue-heavy, representational landscapes featuring trees, water, and animals.

Figure 37. Komar & Melamid, *China's Most Wanted* (wall size) 1995

[85] Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *Komar & Melamid: The Most Wanted Paintings on the Web*, (Detroit Institute of Art: http://awp.diaart.org/km/intro.html, 1995-7).

Figure 38. Komar & Melamid, *Russia's Most Wanted* (television size)
1995

Figure 39. Komar & Melamid, *USA's Most Wanted* (dishwasher size)
1995

Each of these works amalgamates, through applied research practice, its society's view of what constitutes 'good art'. The works themselves serve both as Sherman-esque simulacra (as they are visual manifestations of taste and acculturation, rather than individual artistic vision or propaganda need) and Becher-esque conglomerates, their manifold nature being masked by their appearance as singular objects.

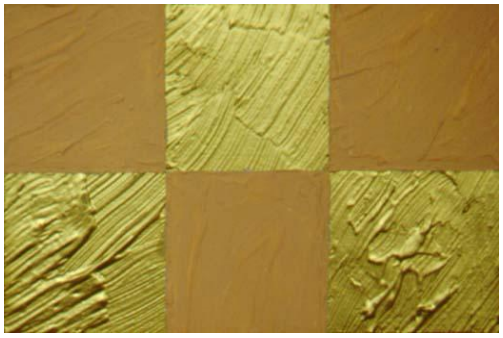

Figure 40. Komar & Melamid, *China's Least Wanted* (paperback size)
1995

Figure 41. Komar & Melamid, *Russia's Least Wanted* (refrigerator size)
1995

Figure 42. Komar & Melamid, *USA's Least Wanted* (paperback size)
1995

Sherman's *Film Still*s and Komar & Melamid's *Most/Least Wanted Paintings* both reflect on repressive aesthetics - representing ersatz examples of image types or systems of images that are vernacular, 'popular', and wholly governed by the tyranny of the majority - and push against these systems. The *Film Stills* interrogate a visual vernacular that flattened representations of women in film, while *Most/Least Wanted* made corporeal the banality and joy of popular taste. Conversely, *Toward* represents a liberation of the typology - one based not on science (or pseudoscience), or the tyranny of the majority, but rather a passionate questioning of the ways visual information is parsed

and synthesised into cohesive statements, structures, or meanings. *Toward* lives in the push pull between the individual and the collective - navigating the boundaries of visual communication and demonstrating, through trial and error, just how keen pattern perception is and how far it can be stretched before it snaps completely.

A problem of recall

The problem of sorting and reinscribing images isn't new. French biometrics researcher and police official Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914)[86] and art historian and cultural theorist Aby Warburg (1866-1929) both innovated distinctive systems for sorting and retrieving visual material.[87] Attempting to synthesise image and language, these indices marked early efforts to gather, store, organise, and retrieve mass image aggregations as needed based on specific usage requirements. Each system required its own elaborate housing; Bertillon's an enormous card catalogue filing system (underwritten by the French government) containing dossiers with shorthand verbal descriptions of known criminals as well as what would be dubbed 'mugshots', and Warburg's the purpose-built Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg (Warburg Library for Cultural Studies, built, as was Gardner's museum, with family wealth) with special elliptical reading room that would eventually house his magnum opus, the sprawling *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* (*Mnemosyne Atlas*).[88]

In his essay 'The Body and the Archive', theorist Alan Sekula described Bertillon's system as:

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[86] Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', *October*, Vol. 39 (Boston: The MIT Press, Winter 1986), pp. 3-64.
[87] E. H. Gombrich, 'Aby Warburg: His Aims and Methods: An Anniversary Lecture', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 62 (London: The Warburg Institute, 1999) pp. 268-282.
[88] https://warburg.sas.ac.uk/aby-warburg-bilderatlas-mnemosyne-virtual-exhibition

> '...the first effective modern system of criminal identification. His was a bipartite system, positioning a "microscopic" individual record within a "macroscopic" aggregate. First, he combined photographic portraiture, anthropometric description, and highly standardized and abbreviated written notes on a single *fiche*, or card. Second, he organized these cards within a comprehensive, statistically based filing system.'[89]

This secondary, massively built device allowed for the recall of previously stored archival records, enabling the identification of recidivists and greater efficiency and accuracy in efforts at policing 'deviant' behaviour (i.e. overt criminality, but also so-called 'antisocial'[90] acts such as vagabondage and vagrancy). In this way the system is manifested as device (cards, shelves, indices) that render its use possible. In practical terms, the Bertillon system required an elaborate set of bodily measurements (eleven in total, requiring police to engage in an intimate physical encounter with those deemed 'criminal', which was one of the objections to it) that were used as the organising rubric for the card files.[91] This device, consisting of a purpose-built environment and organisational method, relied on the physicality of a huge designated underclass as both its purpose and its raw material. Without the punitive and widespread criminal justice system implemented during the Second Empire and Third Republic, the Bertillon system wouldn't have been deemed necessary; without the need to organise and quickly recall specific records from a mass of undifferentiated embodied data (written and visual), it wouldn't have taken the form that it did. Thus the Bertillon

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[89] Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', *October*, Vol. 39 (Boston: The MIT Press, Winter 1986), p. 18.

[90] For a deeper explanation of my application of quotes in this work, see Martha Rosler, 'Notes on Quotes', from *Decoys and Disruptions : Selected Writings*, 1975-2001 (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press in association with International Center of Photography, New York, 2004), pp. 133-148.

[91] Sekula, p. 28.

device manifests as a built environment, but also embodies the social, political, and cultural milieu that formed it.[92]

In this way, then, Bertillon's device was predicated on the embodied distinction of the individual. It didn't offer a grand theory of criminality (as Sekula argues Galton's process of photographic averaging did), but rather provided a way to distinguish *one* specific 'criminal' form a horde of others. Though it used similar spatial devicing, it was the polar opposite of Aby Warburg's master work.

Systemic spatial devicing formed the foundation of Aby Warburg's Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg (KBW) and *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*. In its current reiteration under the auspices of the University of London, the KBW spans four floors of a purpose-built structure, with each floor being dedicated to a specific overarching theme in the collection. These broad organisational and conceptual themes are Image, Word, Orientation, and Action, and the sorting of works relies on what Warburg called 'the law of the good neighbour', described here by Gertrud Bing, Warburg's assistant and later Director of the Institute: 'The manner of shelving the books is meant to impart certain suggestions to the reader who, looking on the shelves for one book, is attracted by the *kindred* ones next to it, glances at the sections above and below, and finds himself involved in a new trend of thought which may lend additional interest to the one he was pursuing,'[93] (emphasis mine). This 'law of the good neighbour' is another way of

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[92] These efforts continue today, of course, due to the Panopticon effect of constant surveillance and the mass harvesting and storage of information across public and private entities. The only difference is that of device; server farms and computer infrastructure have taken the place of Bertillon's card catalogues. In fact, as I wrote this, I overheard a woman whose friend (employed by consultancy and wealth management firm Deloitte) received an award from the Metropolitan Police for digitising their records to facilitate easier tracking/transfer/capture of the populace. For more information on this instance of merging corporate and state-sanctioned power, see: https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/public-sector/articles/the-future-of-policing.html

[93] https://warburg.sas.ac.uk/library/about-library

restating the Similarity is Closeness metaphor - that is, the core embodied concept (previously outlined) that like objects generally share physical proximity. This was the basis of Bertillon's catalogue as well; *fiches* were filed according to the physical dimensions of their referents and were grouped into broad swathes of similarly-sized people. The problem with this, however, is that *the physical relationship imposed on the objects implies a conceptual one, whether or not there is a basis for such an assumption.* Placing two images together invariably prompts a viewer to invent a rationale for their placement; deliberately placing books next to each other ('good neighbours' invariably share socioeconomic status and/or other markers of identity) influences a reader into connecting material that might be wholly disparate. Conversely, sorting mechanisms that separate works along subject lines can serve to alienate them from one another.[94] Some version of the 'good neighbour' method is taken for granted today, but while most modern libraries have systems akin to this type of organisation (Library of Congress and Dewey Decimal System being the major schema that allow shelf reading on specific subjects), ancient libraries did not. For example, at its height the Library of Alexandria contained the equivalent to 100,000 books, arranged first by type of work (poetry, prose, drama, etc.), then sorted in alphabetical order by author name.[95]

[94] This can have very significant, real-world implications. As an undergraduate photography student in the school of art, art books were housed in the main library, which was within easy walking distance of the art department. Photography books (even photographic artist monographs) were categorised as science, and were housed in the science library - an intellectual rift that required a gruelling mile-long walk in the broiling desert sun.

[95] Lionel Casson, *Libraries in the Ancient World* (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2002), pp. 31-47.

FLOOR	MAIN TOPIC	OVERFLOW	PURPOSE
4	Action	Orientation	The survival and transformation of ancient patterns in social customs and political institutions
3	Orientation		The gradual transition, in Western thought, from magical beliefs to religion, philosophy and science
2	Word		The persistence of motifs and forms in Western languages and literatures
1	Image		The tenacity of symbols and images in European art and architecture
Ground	Reading room		
Basement	Image & Periodicals		

Building schematic of the Warburg library collection layout, including collection use and division ethos, as mapped onto floor levels.[96] The colours used are those employed by the Warburg itself, each being traditionally associated[97] with one of the four classical physical elements (air [yellow], water [blue], earth [green], and fire [red]), elements that are also represented in the reproduction of a woodcut from the Middle Ages used as the Institute's emblem.[98]

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[96] The overflow of Orientation materials into the space designated for Action demonstrates one of the main drawbacks to using the built environment as a device for spatial organisation of physical material information: its lack of elasticity. As the Warburg collection has grown and shifted - and ideas around accessibility have changed - over the 70+ years in its current space, it has become necessary to undermine its organisational rationale for reasons of practicality and convenience.

[97] Ancient cosmology linked different colours to the classical elements; the current scheme was created largely by the Victorian British occult society The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. This observation isn't relevant to the project at hand, except as it illustrates how many widespread notions of history and culture prove to be relatively new fabrications.

[98] 'The emblem, which appears above the door of the Institute, is taken from a woodcut in the edition of the *De natura rerum* of Isidore of Seville (560-636) printed at Augsburg in 1472. In that work it accompanies a quotation from the Hexameron of St Ambrose (III.iv.18) describing the interrelation of the four elements of which the world is made, with their two pairs of opposing qualities: hot and cold, moist and dry. Earth is linked to water by the common quality of coldness, water to air by the quality of moisture, air to fire by heat, and fire to earth by dryness. Following a doctrine that can be traced back to Hippocratic physiology, the tetragram adds the four seasons of the year and the four humours of man to complete the image of cosmic harmonies that both inspired and retarded the further search for natural laws.'
<https://warburg.sas.ac.uk/about-us/history-warburg-institute> [accessed 29 August 2023].

Warburg extended this spatial organisational system in his *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, creating a device that is part built environment and part extension of the pictorial plane into large, interconnected, multi-picture panels. Historian Christopher D. Johnson described Warburg's *Bilderatlas* as:

> 'A utopian project addressed to that chimerical creature the "good European," [in its final iteration] the Atlas consisted of sixty-three wooden boards, measuring approximately 150 x 200 cm, covered with black cloth. On each of these panels (*Tafeln*) Warburg, using metal clasps, added and removed, arranged and rearranged, black and white photographic reproductions of art-historical or cosmographical images. Here and there he also included maps, reproductions of manuscript pages, and contemporary images drawn from newspapers and magazines. As part of this combinatory process each panel would often then be photographed before another arrangement was attempted. The panels, in turn, were then numbered and ordered to create still larger thematic sequences.'[99]

When taken in its entirety the *Bilderatlas* becomes a comprehensive survey of a language of gesture and iconology in European art and culture. Warburg's defining work represented his belief in the interconnectedness of human endeavour, displaying in visual form his ideas about ur-gestures and figures that transcended the specificity of the cultures, languages, and histories that created them. Johnson further writes, 'Warburg wanted to make visible a genealogy of expression and gesture together with the Prozeß (process) of metaphoric transformation that makes such a genealogy possible... In brief, *Mnemosyne*'s panels show when and how metaphor (or "pathos formula" or "dynamogram") wins and loses a connection with what Edmund Husserl and Hans Blumenberg term the "lifeworld."'[100] In this way Warburg's efforts were ideologically aligned with modernist projects such as Edward Steichen's *The Family of Man*, and like Steichen, Warburg chose to ignore

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[99] Christopher D. Johnson, *Memory, Metaphor, and Aby Warburg's Atlas of Images* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2012), p. 9.

[100] Ibid, pp. IX-X.

the specificity of cultural history and heritage in his pursuit of an overarching grand theory of humanity.

One of the pivotal moments in this project was Warburg's 1895 encounter with the Hopi Native American people near Tuba City in northern Arizona.[101] The Warburg legend depicts his visit as an anthropological trek to cleanse his mind of the decadence of New York City, and records his delight in being admitted to view (and photograph) a dying, 'primitive' culture's sacred rite of worship in the form of the Hemis Kachina dance. This dance (and its supposed symbolic significance) would be related decades later in a lecture delivered by Warburg in order to prove his sanity and effect his release from a sanatorium for the mentally ill. As art historian (and former director of the Warburg Institute) David A. Freedberg observed:

> 'He remained blind to the intense and apparently obvious political dimensions of his topic, as well as to some of the basic elements of Pueblo art and architecture – which remain fundamentally different from, rather than similar to anything in the West... Despite the seductive parallels between the Snake Dance on the one hand and Laocoon and Asclepius with their snakes wrapping themselves round the bodies of the central figures on the other, there really is no parallel. When Warburg saw a snake, he saw excess; or rather figures with snakes posed the problem of excessive motion and emotion, as in the dancing maenads of antiquity. But Kachina is not Laocoon. There is no agony, no struggle in any of the dances of the Pueblo tribes, -- including the snake dance of the Hopi, which Warburg did not actually see, and the Hemis Kachina which he did. Warburg shared the all-too common need which Westerners seem to have to see the primitive not just as pagan, but as wild. But the dances are calm, rational and controlled. Like the architecture of the Pueblos and their ancestors the Anasazi[102] [sic], they bear an unparalleled unity with the earth itself. This is the whole lesson of Pueblo myth and Pueblo art."[103]

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[101] Arizona wasn't admitted to the USA as a state until 1912; when Warburg visited, it was Arizona Territory, which had been part of the Confederacy 30 years earlier during the American Civil War, supporting treason in defence of slavery. It's also important to note that successive discoveries of precious metals in the north (primarily silver and copper) incentivised the theft of Native lands by primarily white American colonisers, and many Native people made a living at this time by performing their culture as tourist attractions.

[102] 'Anasazi' is a Navajo word that means 'ancient enemies' and so is objected to by their descendants, the modern Pueblo.

[103] David A. Freedberg, 'Pathos at Oraibi: What Warburg Did Not See' - published as "Pathos a Oraibi: Ciò che Warburg non vide," in Lo sguardo di Giano: Aby Warburg fra tempo e memoria, ed. Claudia Cieri Via and Pietro Montani (Turin: N. Aragno, 2004), pp. 569-611. https://doi.org/10.7916/D89G5TH6

Thus one of the cornerstones of Warburg's work - that there is a cohesive, consistent 'primitive' condition that crosses cultures and histories - falls apart, and what remains is a mere visual resonance. That Warburg was mistaken in his recall of culturally sensitive information isn't surprising - cultural anthropology was in its infancy in the late 19th- and early 20th centuries. That Warburg was drawn to link these two tropes makes perfect sense, however - their visuality paved the way for an inference of a deeper relationship.

A failure of recall

As I write this, an international protest movement affirming the simple (yet revolutionary) concept that Black Lives Matter[104] is underway. This movement, founded in 2013 in response to the acquittal of vigilante George Zimmerman of the murder of unarmed teen Trayvon Martin, is a decentralised political and social organisation whose mission 'is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes'.[105] The idea spread, and founders Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi transformed what could have been a flash of 'slacktivism' into the most vital international protest movement of our time; one that unfortunately remains urgent and indispensable a decade after its founding.[106] While BLM now functions as a global organisation, it started as a simple hashtag and affirmation - underscoring, despite overwhelming hostility and violence, that the lives of Black people do matter, have value, and deserve protection.

The hashtags #blacklivesmatter and #BLM serve both to connect content that might otherwise be unrelated - #BLM links images of Black accomplishment, tragedy, political organising, compassion, and anger into a unified (not to say cohesive) polyglot story - and to give it self-identified political solidarity. If the tag is used on Instagram, for example, a viewer might see a new work of art by an emerging Black artist, police dash camera footage of an unarmed Black person being murdered, information on the time/day/location of a protest rally, and a confessional essay by a Black professional detailing how exhausting it is to navigate white supremacy. This multitude of voices, styles, and purposes serves to expand the scope of the project, thus moving

[104] Wikipedia contributors, 'Black Lives Matter', *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, 18 August 2023, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Lives_Matter> [accessed 29 August 2023].
[105] Black Lives Matter, 'About' <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/> [accessed 29 August 2023].
[106] Howard University School of Law, 'A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States: The Black Lives Matter Movement', 6 January 2023, <https://library.law.howard.edu/civilrightshistory/BLM> [accessed 29 August 2023].

beyond the mere statement that Black Lives Matter to proving its concept. This reach comes at a price, however, as message control is sacrificed to widespread inclusivity. BLM has harnessed this aspect of online organising, which might have otherwise ended in cacophony (a disaster for a political movement).

In response to the 2020 murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, Atlantic Records staff Brianna Agyemang and Jamila Thomas posted a statement under that hashtag #TheShowMustBePaused, calling for 'a day to disconnect from work and reconnect with our community' and 'an urgent step of action to provoke accountability and change.'[107] This reflected a good-faith effort on their part to hold to account a 'multi-billion dollar industry... that has profited predominantly from Black art. Our mission is to hold the industry at large, including major corporations and their partners who benefit from the efforts, struggles and successes of black people accountable.' Many musicians, record companies, and celebrities shared their statement, and 2 June 2020 became Blackout Tuesday. These high-profile users posted plain black squares to their social media accounts (many of which had millions of followers) and briefly turned their platforms into infinite scrolls of redacted imagery. This ultimately proved to be a failure, as the misapplication of the #BLM and #blacklivesmatter hashtags resulted in the erasure/destruction of discoverability of more vital content (including meaningful protests taking place online and in real life) As author Fatima Bhutto noted, 'At exactly the moment when power requires interrogation and urgent reckoning, social media users, celebrities and influencers rallied for silence... Whereas 24 hours earlier, users had been posting legal information, names of pro bono lawyers and bail funds, filming

[107] BBC, 'Blackout Tuesday: What is it and how are people taking part?', 2 June 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/52893017> [accessed 29 August 2023].

videos of wanton cruelty and abuses of power, now they were *shtum*, save for the sanctimonious black squares.' [108]

Back *Toward*

Keeping in mind this push/pull of communication and failure to communicate, of aggregation, device, and the sometimes razor-thin and sometimes ocean-wide chasm between text and image, Jack Burnham's 1968 essay 'Systems Esthetics' becomes a particularly apt way of understanding the work's mass-produced elements and meaning-making via object and spatial intervention: 'The specific function of modern didactic art has been to show that art does not reside in material entities, but in relations between people and between people and the components of their environment... In the context of a systems esthetic possession of a privately fabricated work is no longer important. Accurate information takes priority over history and geographical location.'[109] The aesthetic of *Toward* hovers somewhere between that of the scientific diagram and the crackpot conspiracy theorist's bedroom wall - a snarl of interconnecting lines that join seemingly unrelated and disjointed images. It wraps in and around its space, reacting to its environment, and its components are Internet image detritus corporealized as drugstore prints and thin, neon-coloured tape. It sticks to the wall the way a vine does - that is, with effort but not any sense of permanence. The piece is a low-fi representation of what Alexander Galloway defined as being '... a diagram, a technology and a management style. The diagram is the distributed network, a structural form without centre that resembles a web or meshwork. The technology is the digital computer, an abstract machine able to perform the work of any other machine (provided it can be

[108] Fatima Bhutto, 'As responses to George Floyd's death go, #BlackOutTuesday was embarrassing', *The Guardian*, 3 June 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/03/blackout-tuesday-george-floyd-social-media> [accessed 29 August 2023].

[109] Jack Burnham, 'Systems Esthetics', *ARTFORUM*, Vol. VII, Number 1 (1968), 30-35.

described logically). The management style is protocol, the principle of organization ... All three come together to define a new apparatus of control that has achieved importance at the start of the new millennium.'[110]

Toward serves both as reenactment and satire of this type of coercive system. It faithfully duplicates the tropes and mores of the image classification schema/cloud - that is, it employs a type of organisation that is familiar from its use in scientific and forensic realms (or their representations in popular culture). The title itself - *Toward a unified field theory of photography* - is based on an impossible premise, and thus the piece is destined (destines itself?) for failure before it begins. The title reinforces the futility of the effort it proposes. After all, as Burnham wrote, 'In an advanced technological culture, the most important artist best succeeds by liquidating his position as artist vis-a-vis society.'[111] While I certainly can't claim to be 'the most important artist', nor the one who 'best succeeds', I do believe it is vital to eschew the posture of the artist as superior, disinterested observer and instead engage enthusiastically with image culture while simultaneously critiquing it; to fail, purposefully and directly, and in that failure both learn and teach the scope (and futility) of 'success'.

[110] Lars Bang Larsen (ed.), *Networks* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014), p. 161.
[111] Ibid, p. 31.

Chapter III: Permanence

'...we have no fully fleshed-out concept of time-in-itself. All of our understandings of time are relative to other concepts such as motion, space, and events.'

George Lakoff & Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*[112]

'Time interval is a strange and contradictory matter in the mind. It would be reasonable to suppose that a routine time or an eventless time would seem interminable. It should be so, but it is not. It is the dull eventless times that have no duration whatever. A time splashed with interest, wounded with tragedy, crevassed with joy—that's the time that seems long in the memory. And this is right when you think about it. Eventlessness has no posts to drape duration on. From nothing to nothing is no time at all.'

John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*[113]

[112] George Lakoff & Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p 137.

[113] John Steinbeck, *East of Eden* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 47.

This chapter will deal with time, entropy, and death (collectively referred to in this work as timedeathspace) - how it can be conceptualised and spoken of through vernacular embodied metaphor, and how those structures are reflected in imaging technologies and interpretations. The constant process of expansion, entropy, and loss is observed not in itself, but rather in its effects, for much like the technology of photography (a technology that takes an imprint not of the thing itself, but instead of the light reflected by it), we can only perceive time through its traces and the language we use to communicate it.

In this chapter I will flit, as dreamers do, between different epochs and eras. I'll seek out instances of this most ephemeral of concepts, in both written and visual media. This magpie process seeks to show the ubiquity of the terms, metaphors, and gestures used to represent timedeathspace.[114] Taking as its lead two works from my own practice - *All This and Nothing More* and *Cenotaphs* - and multiple case studies (Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, the 1954 film *A Star is Born*, and Stan Douglas's moving and still image work), this chapter will explore the linkages (and slippages) between time, motion, language, the image, and ultimately death.

[114] Time in itself is such an overwhelming concept - in fact, it can be understood as the concept - that it would require several theses merely to scratch its surface. For the purpose of this work, I've chosen to focus on a particular aspect of corporeal chronological experience; that of the confluence of time, death, and space (truncated here as timedeathspace). This term folds in ideas of entropy, movement, and material death.

The language of time

This chapter can be expressed in one simple question: *Where does time exist?* As time itself doesn't have a form tangible to human perception, we seem to be stuck observing its echoes, traces, effects, or parallels - we 'see' it in the same way that we 'see' radar information, as a reflection. SO. The power of a photograph, then, is that it vivisects time, removing a slice from the flow of continuum and preserving it for future contemplation. BUT. As time is intangible, can't we posit that our perceptions of it must be rooted in the language and mental imagery we use about and around it? In short, don't our metaphoric structures (change = time = motion) shape the ways we view and talk about time-based, time-inflected, and time-centric media? We now have 'timelines', 'flashbacks', 'throwbacks', 'scrolls', and other time-ish GUIs as ways of sorting information along chronologically adjacent structures. How have we arrived at these types of language?

Timely practice:

Edina: '...My lifelines, my lifelines!'

Saffron: 'They look fine.'

Edina: 'They *end*.'[115]

Given enough time, the spectre of death hangs over every photograph. After all, a medium that indexes light bounced off a subject - capturing the actual photonic particle-waves[116] that reflect from the referent of the image (as opposed to a representation of it) will always function as a fetish

[115] *Absolutely Fabulous*, 'Death' - S2 E2

[116] Our understanding of light rests uneasily within its own contradictions - light functions both as particles and waves, depending on the parameters of the experiment performed and the measure of its outcomes. For more on wave/particle duality, see: Georgia State University, 'Wave-Particle Duality', *Hyperphysics*, <http://hyperphysics.phy-astr.gsu.edu/hbase/mod1.html> [accessed 29 August 2023].

object in lieu of more tangible interactions.[117] For as long as the subject is living and present, the deathly other[118] of the photographic remains indistinct - it's only when they are gone, either geographically, emotionally, or physically *gone*, that the indexicality of the photographic image becomes a shade of mortality in addition to a representation of life. These tensions are present in the processes and objects generated by my own artistic practice; pertinent to this chapter, I'll discuss two of these works, *All This and Nothing More* and *Cenotaphs*.

The work I would come to call *All This and Nothing More* started with a Polaroid image of my mother, taken just after I was born. This photograph was different because it was always stored in her jewellery box, rather than in the main family albums. It was a small scratched thing, battered from decades of earrings, necklaces, rings, and bracelets bouncing off and shuffling over its high gloss surface. The harsh flash of the Polaroid camera caught my mother in a crouch on a bed wearing a négligée, arching her back seductively for the camera (and presumably my father behind it - an extreme example of Barthes' '...terrified Photographer [who] must exert himself to the utmost to keep the Photograph from becoming Death').[119] The woman in the photograph was still dealing with cancer, a cancer she discovered in the same instant she learned about me - the doctors told her in the same breath, 'You're pregnant and you have cancer.' They advised an abortion, which she refused, and ultimately she had me two months prematurely in a very dangerous birth

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[117] Christian Metz, 'Photography and Fetish', *October*, Vol. 34. (Boston: The MIT Press, Autumn 1985), pp. 81-90. http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0162-2870%28198523%2934%3C81%3APAF%3E2.0.CO%3B2-H

[118] A good metaphor for the slipperiness and directness of this connection can be found in folk beliefs like the fetch, the apparition of a double of a living person that, if seen in the evening, presages their death. These folk beliefs were applied to new technologies such as photography when they were first encountered, both to make sense of the medium's newness and to fold it into an existing worldview. For more on the fetch, see: William Sayers, 'A Hiberno-Norse Etymology for English Fetch: "Apparition of a Living Person"', ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews, Vol. 30, No. 4 (London: Routledge, 2017) pp. 205-209, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0895769X.2017.1336073

[119] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage Books, 2000), p. 14.

that almost cost both of us our lives. The resulting hysterectomy also meant that I would be her last child. This was the story I was raised on, the story of a 'miracle child' – one who was wanted and who thrived despite the odds . The story I didn't hear, the one that would have a much greater impact on both of our lives, was the story of a young woman with three children and a shiftless husband. A woman who was facing imminent death and the loss of a pregnancy she very much wanted. In the photograph my mother is 36 years old. As I write this, I am 44 years old. The woman in the photograph who'd reconciled herself to dying is eight years younger than I am now.

She's thin in this image - too thin, really. For someone who struggled with her weight all of her adult life the way she did, this might be welcome. I remember toward the end of her life, when the resurgent cancer had really taken hold, the bright side she saw in it was the weight loss. 'I have cheekbones now,' she said. 'Look!' and pointed at them, her finger shaking slightly. Her cheekbones are more prominent in much the same way in the Polaroid image, her hair is wavy and dark – much darker than her usual copper red – and her bared skin looks tan and fit. She wears a black négligée and heavy eye makeup, and is leaning onto a pillow on the bed - a brief middle distance of white sheet with blue flowers and similar wallpaper radiates out from her, the flash or room light creating a spotlight effect centred on her and the bed. The effect is both wholly theatrical and completely without guile – a strange contrast between the posture/posturing of the subject and the materials, composition (or lack thereof), and lighting applied to the scene.

This image then was the starting point for *All This and Nothing More*. Taking the title from the Andy Gibb disco smash hit song 'Shadow Dancing' (the number one song on the charts at the time I was conceived), this work started with an extreme high-resolution scan of the Polaroid. Every scratch, bump, dent, and ding was meticulously documented and traced, providing an excuse

for me to spend hours in intimate contact with the surface of this doubled memento mori. I then blew up the marks and sandblasted them onto the glazing of the picture's new frame. When the piece is viewed, these marks are projected into the frame and back onto their source, creating a system of recursive entropy that folds time traces back onto themselves. A biscuit-coloured backing (the only shade I could find that harmonised with the dirty, much-handled, faintly grimy surface of the picture's margins and its muddy colours) gives the print room to breathe as it hovers, suspended in the archival, museum-grade oversized shadowbox frame of faintly greenish, 70s-toned dark wood. The effect is at once formally codified and faintly discomforting - a gesture of presentation and re-presentation that echoes the ones taking place inside the image.

Also leading this chapter is a series of works collectively titled *Cenotaphs*. These works are 3D renderings of Internet memes and clickbait trash - throwaway images meant to disappear after they cease to be useful. The images, transmuted into 3D models and output as small cast marble bas-relief plaques, become a collection of monuments both for images that have 'died' (that is, outlived their function) as well as the constant push/pull experience of encountering these images as they flit in and out of our online lives. These *Cenotaphs* - memorials without bodies - are an effort both to thwart and to embody entropy. They are an attempt to subvert the ephemeral nature of their source images, removing them from time and rendering them into a type of corporeal, deathly permanence.

Taken together, these two works represent the ridiculous and the sublime - the inevitable (and inevitably futile) impulse to *hold* and *keep*. The works leading this chapter encompass my attempts to cheat death, giving myself objects of increasing permanence to store, study, and remember.

A place in time: Roland Barthes chases an essence through *Camera Lucida*

Naturally I couldn't mention a photograph of my dead mother in a written work on photography without diving into Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*.[120] *Camera Lucida* and I came out roughly around the same time; we could both have been conceived at the same moment. It would also prove to be his final work; his end marked my beginning.[121] The second part of Barthes' pioneering work on photography deals with his sorting of his mother's photographs after her death. He finds himself searching for her in the ghostly images she's left him - attempting, in vain, to reconcile his understanding of her with the image of her that preceded his existence. He starts the chapter, 'Now, one November evening shortly after my mother's death, I was going through some photographs. I have no hope of "finding" her, I expected nothing from these "photographs of a being before which one recalls less of that being than by merely thinking of him or her (Proust).'[122] Barthes' writing about his mother is permeated by the concept of her 'essence' and his frustration at the individual image's capacity to convey it. 'According to these photographs, sometimes I recognized a region of her face, a certain relation of nose and forehead, the movement of her arms, her hands. I never recognized her except in fragments, which is to say that I missed her *being*, and that therefore I missed her altogether.... I dream about her, I do not dream *her*. And confronted with the photograph, as in the dream, it is the same effort, the same Sisyphean labor: to reascend, straining toward the essence, to climb back down without having seen it, and to begin all

[120] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage Books, 2000), pp. 63-82.

[121] The point of this is not to imply either connection or causation, but rather to underscore the very real human impulse to connect or forge connections between unrelated events that occur in temporal or spatial proximity.

[122] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage Books, 2000), p. 63.

over again.'[123] Here Barthes unquestioningly invokes what Lakoff and Johnson termed the folk theory of essences:

> '...we have a Folk Theory of Essences, according to which every object has an essence that makes it the kind of thing it is and that is the causal source of its natural behavior. There is also a version of the Folk Theory of Essences that applies to human beings: In addition to the universal essence of rationality you share with all humans, you, as an individual, have an Essence that makes you unique, that makes you you. It is your Essence that makes you behave like you, not like somebody else.
>
> We have in our conceptual systems a very general metaphor in which our Essence is part of our Subject-our subjective consciousness, our locus of thought, judgment, and will. Thus, who we essentially are is associated with how we think, what judgments we make, and how we choose to act. According to the folk theory, it is our Essence that, ideally, should determine our natural behavior.[124]

Barthes further expands his rich and complex metaphoric system by employing spatialisation: 'Thus the life of someone whose existence has somewhat preceded our own and encloses in its particularity the very tension of History, its division. History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it – and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it.'[125] It is these enclosures, these divisions of Barthes's that directly speak to the metaphors and metaphoric structures at hand in this chapter. For what is the 'division' in this quote but a manifestation of time as space? And what can be - or be in - his 'enclosure'? If Barthes's history 'constitutes', what exactly *does* it constitute? He goes on to write, '...this Winter Garden Photograph was for me like the last music Schumann wrote before collapsing, that first *Gesange der Frühe* which accords with both my mother's being and my grief at her death; I could not express this accord except by an infinite series of adjectives, which I omit, convinced however that this photograph collected all the possible predicates from which my mother's being was constituted and

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[123] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage Books, 2000), pp. 65-66.

[124] George Lakoff & Mark Johnson, Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 244.

[125] Barthes, p. 65.

whose suppression or partial alteration, conversely, had sent me back to these photographs of her which had left me so unsatisfied.'[126] Again and again Barthes seeks in the glimpse of a photograph something more profound, more prolonged; an essence. The essential, the affect of his lost mother, that never quite managed to be enclosed in any of the photographs he had left. *Camera Lucida* brims with metaphors of encapsulation, that is, the desire to *hold* and *keep*. Hold and keep what? The essential, ineffable quality of a person, the parts that don't reflect light onto film but do produce heat, of a kind. As Barthes documents chasing the elusive spectre of his mother down through years and various images, it's important to consider just what connects these disparate images - that is, how Barthes was able to form something of a mental continuum of his mother's experience with only the thin prompts of old photographs and his very active imagination.

[126] Ibid, p. 70

Material death and mental imaging

Zeno's Paradox of the Arrow, embodied

Film works on the principle of the afterimage - that is, multiple still images are flashed sequentially in front of the eyes, providing the illusion of smoothly kinetic, time-based representation. Where does this structure originate? How did the imagination make the leap from still images in sequence to moving images? As Lakoff and Johnson observe, this confounding of time and space is one of the major metaphors people use to understand and communicate about time. Their research traces these metaphors back to the ancient Greek philosopher Zeno, and his paradox of the arrow, a concept further outlined and greatly expanded by Thomas Nail into his concept of 'kinesthetics'[127].

'Zeno's paradox of the arrow can also be seen as pointing out the mistake of taking a metaphor to be literal (though he didn't understand it as such). Suppose, Zeno argues, that time really is a sequence of points constituting a time line. Consider the flight of an arrow. At any point in time, the arrow is at some fixed location. At a later point, it is at another fixed location. The flight of the arrow would be like the sequence of still frames that make up a movie. Since the arrow is located at a single fixed place at every time, where, asks Zeno, is the motion? Time, Zeno argues, is not divided up into instants. In our terms, the idea that time is a linear sequence of points is metaphorical, a consequence of times seen as locations in the Moving Observer metaphor. The mistake, once again, is to take what is metaphorical as literal.'[128]

What Zeno's paradox of the arrow does establish, however, is an unconscious understanding of time as a series of discrete, sequential images. This time/image/space unfolds as a

[127] Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Image* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
[128] Lakoff & Johnson, p. 157.

visual chronology - that is to say, it consists of pictures aligned in linear fashion and read as though the shift in what they represent (motion of the figure) equates to the passage of time. This folk theory of time creates a type of structural presupposition for a quasi-cinematic system of meaning-making. The functioning of this delicate system of image sequencing is laid bare in the restored version of the 1954 film *A Star is Born*, a work that, perversely, had its sequentiality destroyed through the combined effects of ham-fisted editing and time (suffering a very real material death in the process), then restored (inasmuch as this was possible) by a film historian and the audience's imagination.

A Star is Born was released to an incredible amount of fanfare. It is the third iteration of a story of the marriage between an up-and-coming star and the alcoholic husband who helps her be discovered - and ultimately eclipse his own fame.[129] It's an incredibly sad film, interlaced with riveting musical numbers and overproduced, exhausting dance routines that seem to go on forever ('Born in a Trunk', while entertaining, lasts for a gruelling, frenetic 26 minutes of non-stop singing, fast paced dancing, and eye-searing colour totally unlike the rest of the film's more modulated palette).[130] One of the first major motion pictures to employ the then new (and much hyped) CinemaScope process/format (essentially a way of condensing a widescreen into a laterally compressed one that would fit on existing film stock and then stretching it back out with bespoke projection lenses into an immersive visual experience) and stereophonic sound, the long musical sequences seem to exist as much to demonstrate these technical processes as Judy Garland's talent.

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[129] Eventually there would be five versions of the film (two straight dramas and three musicals): 1937, 1954, 1976, 1987, and 2018.

[130] Sonari Glinton, 'How 'A Star Is Born' Became One Of Judy Garland's 'Biggest Heartbreaks'', *Fresh Air*, 5 February 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/02/05/691610454/how-a-star-is-born-became-one-of-judy-garland-s-biggest-heartbreaks > [accessed 29 August 2023].

The film was meant to be Garland's big comeback after being fired by MGM four years earlier, and her husband Sid Luft produced the project in part as a love letter to his wife.

It was considered a cinematic triumph, but was not a financial one - cost overruns during production caused the budget to soar to an unheard-of $5 million USD. One problem with the distribution of the film was its running time: at nearly three hours, it simply couldn't be shown frequently enough to recoup its cost. Jack Warner, then a charismatic top executive at the Warner Brothers film studio, made the disastrous decision to cut the film down in the most economical way possible, by slashing two reels and splicing them together. This created continuity problems with the story as well as narrative ones, eliminating most of the exposition and emotional impact of the two lead characters' relationship. Since the film had already been distributed, the studio simply sent out directions for each projectionist to slash up the film reels and return the scraps (which were later processed for silver reclamation).

This created a strange situation where the audience at the movie premiere saw a different film than subsequent audiences. Word spread that the film had been cut, and fans were justifiably angry, feeling they'd been cheated of the three-hour extravaganza they were promised. From this time a mythology sprang up around the lost footage - it became an increasingly intense point of contention among film buffs. One of those was a young Ronald Haver, who would go on to become a noted film historian and preservation advocate. Haver was determined to restore (or in his words, *reconstruct*) *Star* to its original glory and began a 10-year detective process, first attempting to track down an intact master print from the studio (they didn't keep one), then attempting to locate mislabeled scraps from the Warner archives and stock footage libraries.[131]

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[131] Ronald Haver, *A Star Is Born: the Making of the 1954 Movie and Its 1983 Restoration* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1988), p. 229.

Haver was finally able to locate the entire audio track for the film, as well as some missing visual segments. He filled in the gaps with production stills, even going so far as to recreate a missing still himself (inadvertently echoing Cindy Sherman's most famous work in the process). When the restored film was released in 1983, a fan - enraged that the missing footage had been stolen years before from the Warner archives - reported the film 'collector' to the police, enabling the recovery of the 'Lose that Long Face' song and dance number (as well as a number of other missing films). The result is a film that is mostly intact - only short exposition scenes are replaced by 'pan and scan' still photographs that function as the most rudimentary kind of stop animation, giving viewers just enough visual information to fabricate the images in their minds based on previous scenes.

While their very nature - as replacement, make-do, substitute - ensures the viewer will gloss over the restoration scenes, for me they're some of the most fascinating parts of the film. In these moments, the audience becomes both the viewer, filmmaker, screen, and ultimately the film itself, taking in minimal information, extrapolating it internally, and producing a psychological cinematic experience that runs parallel to (and enhances) the literal one. This process takes the existing one of cinema (that is, sequential images that rely on fast-paced juxtaposition and afterimage to create the illusion of smoothly flowing temporal imagery) and pushes it beyond its breaking point - the sequences are so coarse it's impossible to *see* them flow. The film stops being a film and starts being something between a hallucination and a phantasm; a fitting state for a work that underwent a series of material deaths and imperfect resurrections. The film becomes something of a testament to Zeno's paradox of the arrow, one that shows not the infinite number of instances that constitute the continuum of what we call time, but rather one that proves the folk theory of time sequences via subversion. In the crudely restored parts of *Star*, we understand what's happening very well -

but we also understand just how few frames, and how little information, are required to generate a *mental* cinematic sequence extrapolated from given visual and aural input.[132] It's this experience - the making, unmaking, and partial remaking - that proves how much of what we call time is based on embodied perception. While it's true that from Steinbeck's 'nothing to nothing' is in fact no time at all, from *something* - nearly anything - to practically any other thing, no matter how visually degraded, fragmentary, or incongruous, *becomes* a timespace, a durational change that unfolds not in the strict chronology of the real world, but in the expressive and subjective chronology of the mind. This process is possible without prompts, of course, but the addition of prompts seats it much more firmly in the 'mind's eye'

Whereas Ronald Haver used this technique to reconstruct *Star in extremis*, other artists use it intentionally, even in a world of affordable and ubiquitous high quality video technology. Artist-filmmaker Stan Douglas's still iterations of his moving image series *Monodramas* illustrates this powerfully. The works in this series were ambiguous video shorts, without setup or resolution, that aired on Canadian television in between programming and commercials in the early 1990s. The same pieces were simultaneously envisioned as still gallery works consisting of an establishing shot and a short script. Douglas is as skilled a still photographer as he is a filmmaker; in fact the large format black and white establishing shot photographs that comprise half of the still *Monodramas* are so lush, carefully composed, and meticulously rendered as to appear like images out of 'New Topographics' (a grouping of works whose famous 'lack of style' became, in the intervening 15 years, a style of its own).[133]

[132] This psychological moving imaging process would of course be impossible for someone with aphantasia (the absence of mental visual imagery), but they would still be able to piece together a narration of the action via audio dialogue and still images.

[133] Robert Adams & William Jenkins, *New Topographics : Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* (Rochester, New York: International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, 1975).

Figure 43. Lewis Baltz, *Southeast Corner, Semicoa, 333 McCormick, Costa Mesa*
From the series *The new Industrial Parks near Irvine, California*, gelatin silver print photograph, 1974
https://collection.artbma.org/objects/4720/southeast-corner-semicoa-333-mccormick-costa-mesa

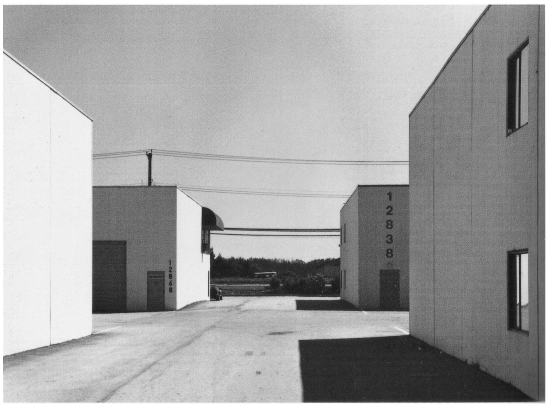

Figure 44. Stan Douglas, establishing shot for *Encampment*
From the series *Monodramas*, gelatin silver print photograph, 1991

This fact in itself sets them apart from their functional photographic reference, the cinematic scout shot, as well as their artistic conceptual photographic counterparts. These images are lovingly crafted with a large-format film camera, with perspective carefully corrected and compositions adhering severely to the norms and practices of architectural photographic imagery. Douglas has even gone so far as to lay a yellow or red filter on the lens to hold back the sky (a technique made famous by Ansel Adams). Likewise, the materials are deftly handled, so each exposure and print is precisely calibrated. These are no mere scouting snapshots.

Far from being a still iteration of a richer moving piece, they are skillfully and trickily crafted to function as their own autonomous works. In the video *I'm Not Gary*, Douglas established the friction of the scene by representing the characters visually; two men, one Black, the

other white.[134] Their interaction unfolds in the space of seconds, yet was centuries in the making, as its underlying text is the flattening and homogenising effects of white supremacy on social interactions. Writing about the film iteration, Mieke Bal observed, 'He knows, and makes us experience, that we always fill in context ourselves, with our knowledge of social situations and previous images - and the fragments Douglas creates for us to stage the past on behalf of the future. This not only points to the ubiquity of visual culture, but also to our own responsibility for what we do in and with that mediated world.'[135]

Whereas this dynamic can be more directly conveyed in cinema, it becomes far more difficult to communicate subtly in a still image with written text. The photograph is one of Douglas's luxe establishing shots, this one of an ordinary shopping strip seen from above and at a distance under a velvety grey sky frothing with brilliant white clouds, and the text is a short script for the piece that includes 'stage' direction, character descriptions, dialogue, and camera movements - the most critical of these being the character descriptions. What Douglas (a Black artist) has done in this laconic piece of writing is to upend the white supremacist assumption of whiteness as norm or ground and Blackness as other or figure. He describes the two characters as 'our protagonist' and 'a white man', immediately challenging the expectation that whiteness is un-raced and Blackness is perpetually so; Douglas hides a whole host of political, historical, and theoretical debates between the spare lines of ostensibly neutral extradiegetic description. He carefully avoids describing the white man as an antagonist (which he very much is in the context of the piece, and would more naturally be referred to as such in opposition to the protagonist),

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[134] Stan Douglas, 'I'm Not Gary', *Art Canada Institute*, 6 February 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/artcaninstitute/videos/im-not-gary-1991/1226747360695876/> [accessed 29 August 2023]

[135] Stan Douglas et al, *Stan Douglas* (Edinburgh: Fruitmarket Gallery, 2014), p. 122.

thereby staving off a backlash of white fragility on the part of his predominantly white audience.[136] The 'our' in 'our protagonist' also serves to bring the viewer into affinity with the (carefully unraced) character.

'I'm Not Gary'
A one-block market street. It might rain. Both characters no doubt have reasonably well-paying day jobs, but the second most likely has the day off.

1 An establishing shot presents the surrounding landscape and only a few people on the street shopping, going to and from work.
2 A tracking shot follows our protagonist, as he walks under the covered sidewalk: a white man walks towards him, grinning, and otherwise doing his best to make eye contact.
3 Reverse tracking shot: the protagonist approaches, and then issues one of those involuntary twitches that often derive from conceit, but more generally occur when one is attempting to ignore the fact that a stranger is looking at oneself. The second man is now very close as he hurries to remark, 'Hi, Gary.'
4 Return to shot 2. The two men, now about three metres apart, as the protagonist looks long at the face of the second.
5 A close-up of the interlocutor, smiling and saying, as one does to an old friend, 'How you doing?'
6 The protagonist is seen in a close-up; he is not entirely sure of himself but replies anyway, 'I'm not Gary.'

Figure 45. Stan Douglas, *I'm Not Gary*
From the series *Monodramas*, gelatin silver print photograph with script, 1991

[136] The 1991 Canadian census tracked national origin rather than ethnicity, and so counted people of British, French, German, Canadian, Dutch, Italian, and Ukrainian heritage as distinct groups but lumped all indigenous people together under the label 'Aboriginal'. While it's difficult to know for sure through official records, it's safe to assume most (if not all) of those responding with European heritage would also identify as ethnically white, and so then comprised the overwhelming majority of the country at the time. Statistics Canada, '1991 Census Highlights', *The Daily*, <https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2013/statcan/rh-hc/CS96-304-1994-eng.pdf> [accessed 29 August 2023].

When I first saw these works, I experienced the surreal feeling - almost a conviction - that when I glanced back to the image while reading it would have shifted, changed somehow, to reflect the altered narrative unfolding. The narrative was psychological, but it was carefully rooted in both the image and text prompts Douglas provided, drafting the cinema of my mind into the work as an unconscious combination of medium, participant, and partial collaborator.

In both of these works, the accidental one of *A Star is Born* and the very purposeful one of *Monodramas*, the collation of visual and verbal stimuli into mental imagery transforms the otherwise passive experience of viewing into the deeply engaged one of not only participating, but also of simultaneously being the medium, site, and producer of the work. This isn't to erase the artistry of either piece; the brilliance behind both is how they span the gap between what is seen, told, and *known*. In both cases the visual imagery might seem superfluous - after all, Haver and Douglas might have just given their viewers verbal text and left off the visual stimuli entirely. To do so would have done a great disservice to the experience of both works, however, for even the most capable and fertile of imaginations benefits from visual input to form the scope of its experience.

<u>An audience of 1+</u>

The prior works underscore my own pleasure in experiencing work as a viewer. In fact, I view my viewership as one of the primary drivers of my own artistic practice. My extreme pleasure in looking at the minutiae of the world and preserving it for later, closer scrutiny is evidenced most thoroughly in my work *Cenotaphs*. These are small bas-relief sculptures, scaled and positioned much like the flat headstones that mark modern grave sites. My *Cenotaphs* - graves without bodies -

are of the detritus of my online life. Comprised of clickbait, memes, ads, social media trash, and digital ephemera, these flat images are rendered into 3D sculptures, output as 3D prints, and then cast as faux stone grave goods. They begin as a flash in an eye, but end with a level of care and permanence afforded in previous generations only to those with high status or wealth. These sculptures are meant both to thwart and to embrace time, to slow down the streak of data and light to the speed of stone, to transform wave-particles to rock and hold them still for unlimited contemplation. Ultimately, this is the quality of photography I admire most: the contemplative nature of its stillness fills a deep-seated need in me to hold onto something (even the most crass or useless of things) to offer up some proof of my own existence to an indifferent universe. An image of Florence Henderson (who played beloved sitcom mother Carol Brady on the 1960s/70s television show *The Brady Bunch*. and my own televised companion during the long months of summer vacation when my mother was at work) hovering below her own anecdote about New York City Mayor John Lindsay giving her crabs was *suggested for me*. While many things are suggested for me on the Internet (and of course I know this isn't really the deeply personal affirmation it seems), I felt something of my own presence in all this. Was there some trace of me present in years of browsing history, some brick in the ever rising wall of my own algorithmic existence, *something* that might have given the Internet the idea that I would want to know about Carol Brady's STI? And in this way, does what I'm seeing become an index of who and where I am? Am I not only myself, but also the *fetch* of data stored on servers and silicon somewhere around the world? And has the endgame of all this - an unprecedented investment in technology and infrastructure - been just to trick me into clicking a link about an actor's crabs? I refused to click on

the link out of principle (or perhaps spite), but I confess I did discreetly search out the story later on to see if it were true.[137]

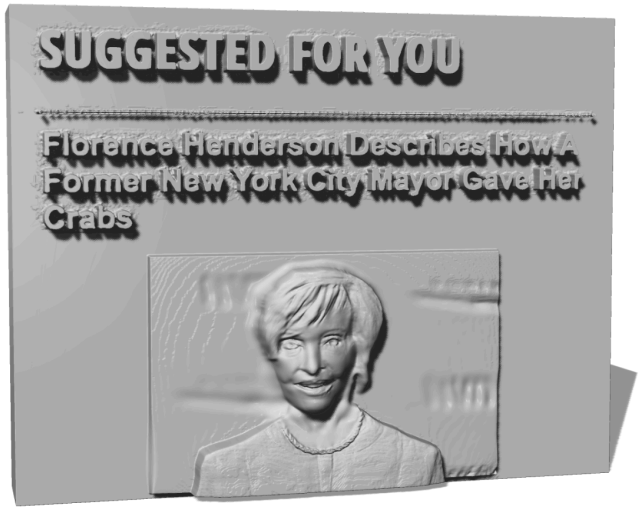

Figure 46. Cole Robertson, Untitled, from the *Cenotaphs* series
Cast jesmonite sculptural rendering of appropriated clickbait link, 2023

[137] It was. Dean Goodman, 'Brady Bunch mom got crabs in affair with NY mayor', *Reuters*, 25 June 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/people-henderson-idUSN1E75N1XG20110625> [accessed 29 August 2023].

All together now

‘One thing though, everyone suddenly looks so brave.
Do they?
Yes. They know it doesn’t last and yet…
And yet what?
They all carry on as if it did.’[138]

These dualities (between the fast grabby glance and the slow, searching *look*, between the partial visual input and the totality of the psychological output, between the desire to *hold* and *keep* in a world where this is not possible, between the living Mother and the vacuum her death leaves behind) all underscore how very fleeting and contradictory these experiences are. Timedeathspace isn’t precisely any one of its constituent concerns, but rather a shifting, amorphous experience that the eye and the mind fabricate according to need or desire. In short, it is a function of what is sought to begin with, which in turn is an index of desire and the measure of a set of values. Its experience eludes verbalisation, as it exists on the cusp of the liminal, shifting spending on which metaphor or what bit of language we use to express it. It is highly individualistic, yet shares certain characteristics that can resonate. It’s the space where we put our loved ones after they leave us, a chapel in the memory palace to hold sacred yet one that can’t be visited *too* frequently, as the pain of parting feels each time as fresh as the first time it was experienced. And this is the power of the photograph: not that it captures or contains an essence, but rather that it can catalyse a cascade of memories that allow us to pierce the barrier between the living and the dead and imagine, for a brief time, that she is back, and that in fact she never left, and never will. It’s not true, of course, but the merest flicker of that feeling is enough to keep us making and looking at photographs, all in the hope not that the photograph will cheat death, but rather that it will serve as an aide to recall life.

[138] Susan Minot, *Evening* (New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1999).

Conclusion

In the first chapter I looked at (and sometimes *into*) the aspect of complicity involved in the visual haptic. Connecting language, iconography, images, and gestures, this questioning of the confluence of touch and sight evoked the viewer not as passive observer, but rather as engaged agent mired in complicity, whether it be the stroke of a fingertip or the drift of a pupil. Leading with *touch piece*, this section unpacked what it means to 'have' a simulacrum of a body, and what uses these simulacra are often put to. In this case, the mute pictures are given a way to 'talk' back by registering the blood heat of their viewer. I then pursued this touch through art, writing, and language, analysing the 'seeing is touching' primary metaphor and its blurring the boundaries between touch and sight.

Chapter II provided a more distant view of embodied connectivity, illustrating the devices that connect aggregated material and the language that enables these connections to take place. As these devices tend to evade notice, my work *Toward a unified field theory of photography* works to undermine them, thereby bringing them under scrutiny. *Toward* has a level of arbitrariness built into it, as the categories are often formal or deeply personal. In addition, no key is provided to the viewer - they must decipher the significance of the coloured lines themselves by analysing the images. This deliberately disconnected system serves to muddle the flow of information, making it a conscious (and questionable) process.

The third chapter dealt with more amorphous concepts - time and death. These aren't tangible entities, and so are usually understood through metaphors of spatial relations, generally travel/distance or vacancy/absence. These abstruse concepts were explored via my works *All This*

and Nothing More and *Cenotaphs*, which represented attempts to analyse the flow of time through its marks and to arrest it via object permanence.

Reader, we have now come to a conclusion. Conclusion as end, finish, as well as conclusion as decision reached via reason. The conclusion reached in this case is quite a simple one: to embrace the chaos and manifold simultaneity that takes place as embodied metaphor and visual images inevitably occupy each other, and to maintain awareness of the concurrent connecting and unconnecting of the dots that figure this knowledge. These bits of vernacular language, located across fictive and nonfiction sources, tracked and documented inexorably, and connected to visual objects and experiences, form both an expansion and simplification of verbal/visual communication. They illustrate ways of meaning-making while concurrently undermining them; they model communication yet often thwart it. These processes exist somewhere between conscious thought and unconscious observation, drawing from both yet fully inhabiting neither. To paraphrase George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, they encompass a visuality *in the flesh*; that is, they take meaning from embodied thought, and no matter how abstrusely thoughts spin out beyond this source, the spectre of our own embodiment inhabits thoughts, deeds, language, and images.

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