VIA FOTOGRAFIA: APPEARANCE AND APPARITION

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Royal College of Art for the

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Abstract

This PhD thesis addresses an artistic research practice based on the ontology and phenomenology of the photographic image. Part I presents a series of photographs entitled *Midnight in Mumbai*, and Part II considers the act of photographing by examining the phenomenological aspect of photography arising directly from my artistic practice. By looking into the prehistory of photography, foregrounding the early developments of the nascent medium, I first consider notions of photography before the medium's actual materialisation in the 1830s; these emerged alongside the latent desire to see the world as a picture 'true to nature' which predominated in literary fiction and experimental scientific texts. It informs us about how the medium was initially understood, discussed and defined, and offers a valuable insight into the ontology of the illuminated image ('Photography before Photography').

Expanding upon André Bazin's essay 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', I consider the discourse of the early history of the medium to be vital in informing the ontological questions developed in the thesis.

Taking photography's early history as a point of departure, my research looks into the possible manifestations of thinking photographically, and asks whether we can only photograph what we know already. This relationship of the photographic image to the world frames my enquiry into the domain of photography. I talk about my photographic work by answering the questions: Can I only see what I name? ('Naming') How do I learn how to look? ('Echo') and Where can I find the photographic picture? ('Doubt').

The title of the thesis refers to the speculative history of the medium and to my own photographic work. Like the nineteenth-century photographers who tried to photograph the spirit of a human being, my photographs aim to allude to what might not be apparent by evoking a vision of seeing things that are invisible. The expression 'via fotografia' is used as a method of making phenomena visible photographically. As a medium based on reality that can reflect the world, however visible or invisible that might be, photography continuously questions our perception of such reality ('Picturing Thoughts'). Do we photograph what we see, or what we think and imagine? This is not to suggest that the acts of photographing and thinking are the same, but rather to propose that they are not separate from each other. Photographs, in that sense, are not experienced in terms of their appearance, but in terms of their continuous appearing.

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Author's Declaration

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Signature _	 	
Date	 	

Philosophy announces that a Cosmos is a "shot" and announces itself as this creative shot of the World. Heraclitus' child at play would, in the end, have been nothing but a photographer. And not just any photographer: a "transcendental" photographer, since in photographing the world, he produces it; but a photographer with no camera, and perhaps for that very reason destined ceaselessly to take new shots of that first flash—consigned to extinction—constrained thus to comment interminably on that first shot by taking yet more, to engage himself in a unlimited-becoming-photographic—so as to verify that the flash, the World, the flash of the World—that is to say, philosophy—really has taken place, and was not just a trick of the senses.¹

François Laruelle

¹ François Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, translated by Robin Mackay, (New York, NY: Sequence and Falmouth: Urbanomic), second revised edition, 2012, pp. 1–2.



Tanja Verlak, from *Midnight in Mumbai*, 2012–2017, silver gelatin print, 82 x 82 cm 2

 $^{^{2}}$ Courtesy Mest
na galerija Nova Gorica / City Gallery Nova Gorica, Nova Gorica.

Introduction | To photograph is to reflect

In 1859, an American polymath, Oliver Wendell Holmes, made a remarkable proposition suggesting that the world itself is a picture, and once its 'surface' has been captured in a photograph the world as such becomes obsolete. 'Form is henceforth divorced from matter. In fact, matter as a visible object is of no great use any longer, except as the mould on which form is shaped',³ Holmes announced. 'Give us a few negatives of a thing worth seeing, taken from different points of view, and that is all we want of it. Pull it down or burn it up, if you please'.⁴ This outrageous claim views photography as an instantaneous – and a spontaneous – reference of everything there has ever been. It suggests that the visible world can be taken over by a photographic representation, which can replace all that is apparent and orient us in the world. It further suggests that a photographic image can only be made of the visible world.

However, knowing the world via photography alone does not presuppose that only the visible constitutes one's reality – rather it presupposes quite the opposite: namely, that the visible world is a mere projection of all the things and phenomena that can be made visible. Because we cannot see the thing itself, our visual perception depends on the reflected light of the illuminated object, which shows us its properties, such as colour and shape. Building on Holmes' ideas, such a merging, of the world into the image and of the image into the world, rests upon the possibility of the image becoming the world itself. We could even say that the world makes itself visible to us photographically, and that all that we can see is therefore a photograph; 'a 'brute photograph (frontal and clear)', 5 as Barthes has it, but a photograph nonetheless. In other words, the world is continuously and constantly in production and the photographer is here to inform us of this production. The photographer produces the world by photographing it.

Midnight in Mumbai, however, deals with the visible and the invisible reality by making concepts and phenomena seen photographically. While photographing I do not insist on just what is in front of me; I am interested in the world as I see it and in reality as I experience it. This is the reason why I do not title individual photographs. 'To define is to limit,' Oscar Wilde writes in his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Giving a name is an act of fixation, whereas

³ Oliver Wendell Holmes, 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph', 1859, reprinted in: Alan Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays on Photography*, (New Haven, CT: Leete's Island Books, 1980), pp. 71–82, pp. 80–81. Italics used in the original citation.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Roland Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', in: Stephen Heath, ed., *Image, Music, Text*, (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 44.

⁶ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. with an Introduction and Notes by Joseph Bristow, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 165.

the point is to show the state of things, or rather to keep showing the state of things that have never existed before. In this sense, I try not to use photography to reproduce what I see, but rather to see what I document. By naming it, I would impose a certain idea, or a concept, on the photograph, which has otherwise appeared primarily as a picture. For me, however, naming a photograph is not the same as titling a literary work.

Besides, research into the domain of the photographic picture suggests that it is simultaneously given and taken: it is given to us as a 'scene' and it exists as a thought, which renders this scene possible at all. Hence, photography as we know it, be it silver or digital, can only ever be 'analogue': 7 it depends on the reflective nature of the world; it is referential. In this sense, my work depends on the idea that, whereas photographically an image does make itself, the photographer is needed for an image to make itself at all. Likewise, the photographs by different artists are chosen to support my theoretical arguments developed in the thesis.

The introductory chapter of the thesis, 'Photography before Photography', considers the reasoning behind Holmes's observations and discusses examples from the history of photography to show that there has never really been a time without photography. In 1839, soon after the French government gave the daguerreotype patent to the world as a gift, this fascinating process, which simultaneously held both a positive and a negative image of the world, quickly spread around the world. Chapter 1 goes on to highlight rarely considered archival material and overlooked examples from the nineteenth-century photographic press, which offer numerous valuable insights into a speculative history of photography and emphasize the scientific function, social purpose and artistic value of the medium.

The early photo-graphing experiments emphasized the links between photography and other 'mediums', highlighting the connections between photography, reflections and ideas of the soul; links which seem to have been present in many cultures throughout the history of optical appearances. The then-nameless medium, or rather, the medium without an agreed or fixed name, seemed to open up the question about the nature of the illuminated image and asks whether the illuminated image was an appearance or an apparition.

Importantly, the allusion to magic was common when photography was spoken of. Both pioneers of the medium, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre and William Henry Fox Talbot,

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⁷ According to the etymology of the word, the term 'analogue' was used in English as the 'word corresponding with another' and, chronologically corresponds with the invention of photography. Accessible at: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=analogue (June 14, 2017)

used expressions such as 'natural magic', 'white magic' and 'magic mirror',⁸ and even 'black arts', when talking about photography. The haunting spell of words designating the idea of photo-graphing before John Hershel coined the word 'photography' in 1839 implies a different type of photographic history, which offers a valuable insight into the ontology of the illuminated picture and informs us about how the medium was initially understood, discussed and defined. The superstitions and fears, which were often associated with the early practice of photography, were clearly reflected in the terms chosen to discuss it.

Indeed, the early 'sun-worshippers'9 embraced the mechanical novelty, along with the mystery it implied, by addressing the medium according to their own professional interest. The nineteenth-century enthusiasts, scientists, artists and thinkers, referred to what was yet to become photography using various terms. Certain names emphasised the relationship with light, such as 'medium of light'; an 'illumination'; a 'spectrum'; ¹⁰ a 'sun print'; a 'solar picture' and a 'silver picture'; ¹¹ a 'reflection'; a 'mirror that shows the future'; ¹² 'heliography', a 'retina', a 'sun painting' or a 'sun picture'; ¹³ a 'pencil of light' and a 'pencil of fire' ¹⁴; 'the method of "reflecting a portrait with a mirror" ¹⁵ or 'writing with shadow' and a 'photogenic drawing' ¹⁶, whereas others emphasised the connection to already established art forms and saw photography as a 'copy', a 'double', an 'imprint', a 'painting', an 'engraving' ¹⁷; an 'index'; a 'trace', an 'image', a 'picture', a 'drawing'; ¹⁸ an 'immediate action' and an 'absolute fixation'; ¹⁹ an 'impression' ²⁰; a 'view point'; an 'apparent image'; a 'view', 'tu' [picture] ²¹ or

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⁸ William Henry Fox Talbot, 'Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing, or, The Process by Which Natural Objects May Be Made to Delineate Themselves without the Aid of the Artist's Pencil', 1839. In: Beaumont Newhall, ed., *Photography: Essays & Images*, (New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 1980), p. 25. The poem 'The Magic Mirror' is published in *Legendary Tales in Verse and Prose*, collected by H. Fox Talbot, (London: James Ridgway, 1830), pp. 1–21.

⁹ Charles Baudelaire's notorious response to the early practitioners of photography in his essay 'The Modern Public and Photography', 1859, reprinted in: Trachtenberg, 1980, pp. 83–89, p. 87. ¹⁰ 'Spectrum' is Latin for 'appearance'.

¹¹ Thomas Wedgwood's and James Watt's expressions to designate early attempt at what was later known as photography. Accessible at:

 $http://www.wedgwoodmuseum.org.uk/learning/discovery_packs/pack/classical/chapter/photograph\ y-pioneer\ (7\ September,\ 2012)$

¹² Yi Gu, 'What's in a name? Photography and the Reinvention of Visual Truth in China, 1840–1911', *The Art Bulletin*, 95:1, (March 2013), pp. 120–138, p. 124.

¹³ Nicéphore Niépce's expressions for early photographs.

¹⁴ Kaja Silverman, *The Miracle of Analogy, or The History of Photography, Part 1*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 109.

¹⁵ Zhou Shouchang, the Beijing-based official, names photography as a 'magic device' in 1846; in 1876 he calls it 'the method of 'reflecting a portrait with a mirror.' In: Yi Gu, 2013, p. 124.

 $^{^{16}}$ David Brewster, 'Photogenic Drawing, or Drawing with the Agency of Light', \textit{The Edinburgh Review}, LXXVI:154 (1843), pp. 309–344.

¹⁷ Silverman, 2015, p. 87.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 44.

²⁰ Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, 'Daguerreotype', reprinted in: Alan Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays on Photography*, Leete's Island Books, New Haven, 1980, pp. 11–13, p. 12.

'New Art' and 'skiagraphy'.²² Other names emphasised mechanical aspects, referring to the medium as 'la machine Daguerre';²³ a 'machine' to 'immobilise' the subject;²⁴ yet others implied magical connotations; these included the terms 'magic device'²⁵ and 'black magic'²⁶; even 'xienzhen' [transcribing truth]²⁷ and finally, a 'photograph'.²⁸ In Latin, Barthes writes in Camera Lucida, "photography" would be said "imago lucis opera expressa"; which is to say: image revealed, "extracted", "mounted", "expressed" (like the juice of a lemon) by the action of light'.²⁹ A contemporary discourse in photography also refers to it as a 'solar language'.³⁰

The second chapter, 'Picturing Thoughts', continues to explore the relationship between the visible and the invisible in relation to photography. In 1839, just after the world witnessed the announcement of photography, Paul Delaroche purportedly declared that the painted image might die and that a mechanical, vulgar version of rendering the visible world would replace it.³¹ Luckily, however, that was not the case, and soon after the first vistas of fleeting images through the windows were made permanent, the new medium was used to render anything but the visible. Tellingly, mental processes and psychic realities were among the earliest concerns that interested nineteenth-century photographers. Their ambition very early on was to photograph people's thoughts, ideas and even souls leaving the body at the moment of death. The introduction of 'spirit photography' in 1861, for instance, was largely a commercial outcome of a more genuine interest into the invisible and otherworldly.

Considering photography as a medium of observation in the third chapter, 'Naming', I ask whether the photograph can show something that I did not see for myself. Or, can I only see

²¹ Yi Gu, 2013, p. 124, p. 125, p. 128.

²² Talbot's original term for photography.

²³ Michel Frizot, 'Light Machines: On the Threshold of Invention', quoted in: Michel Frizot, ed., *A New History of Photography*, (Cologne: Könemann, 1998), pp. 15–21. Italics used in the original citation.

²⁴ Dagguerre quotes in: Bates Lowry and Isabel Barrett Lowry, *The Silver Canvas: Daguerreotype Masterpieces from The J. Paul Getty Museum*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), p. 45.

²⁵ Yi Gu, 2013, p. 124.

²⁶ Henri Cartier-Bresson, The Decisive Moment, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1952)

 $^{^{27}}$ Yi Gu, 2013, pp. 120–138, pp. 130-131. Japanese word designating photography since the 1850s; pronounced *shashin*.

²⁸ The expression 'photographed' was first used in a letter from John Herschel to Talbot, on February 28, 1839. In: Lucia Moholy, *A Hundred Years of Photography 1839–1939*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1939), p. 27.

²⁹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, *Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2000), p. 81.

³⁰ Eduardo Cadava, Words of Light, Theses on the Photography of History, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 5.

³¹ In his book on Paul Delaroche's work Stephen Bann questions the attribution of this famous statement to Delaroche, noting that the painter is '[c]redited apocryphally with the exclamation – on seeing his first daguerreotype – that "from today painting is dead",' and that 'Delaroche was the very academician to whom Arago turned for an authoritative opinion on the artistic validity of Daguerre's invention in 1839'. In: Stephen Bann, *Paul Delaroche: History Painted*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), p. 9.

what I know already? Am I only able to see my (own) thoughts? And if so, do I see via language? As photography is part of technical imagery, and thus based on language, however abstract that may be, it suggests that saying a word is equivalent to looking at the world. Indeed, if it were not for the optical and chemical principles of the photographic image the world may not be fully visible, and 'shooting ideas' may not be fully possible.

Understanding the medium as a dichotomy between the 'natural' and the 'cultural', technical images, which photography initiated fully, belong to the latter: photography was invented, or at least scientifically and academically advanced, via writing. In light of this, can we see photographing as a form of thinking, and the photograph as a formalised thought?

The fourth chapter, 'Echo', focuses on the phenomenological aspect of photography and approaches the medium as a sensorial, as well as a cognitive experience. It considers how the world shows itself to me. Referring frequently to Maurice Merleau-Ponty throughout the chapter, I use the philosopher's idea 'that the world is *what we see*, and that nonetheless, we must learn to see it'.³³ Is this to say that we only photograph our own response to the world around us? Does photography, then, have less to do with the world we see than with how we see it? Is it our look, the unity of mind and eye, which creates the world as we see it?

By questioning the world as it shows itself to us, the last chapter, 'Doubt', foregrounds the ontological notions of reality and the real in photography. The perceptual perplexity between apparent and apparitional, which exists between the world as we see it and our reality as we experience it, teaches us to look at something while knowing that the subject is not there at all. If, as established by neurological studies, the distinction between the real and the imagined is hard to draw clearly, there is no direct approach to reality and our response to the world is constantly mediated. Moreover, due to its scientific nature, the photographic camera can only disclose a programmed reality, and this inevitably limits our vision.

Photography, as I am hoping to show throughout the thesis and through my photographic work, is concerned with many seemingly contradictory affinities between the visible and the invisible. The latent, invisible image, for instance, is made by light, while the developing of the visible photographic picture is carried out in the absence of light. Metaphorically speaking, the world must be illuminated to be seen. There are other affinities between the apparent

³³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, edited by Claude Lefort, translated by Alphonso Lingis, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 4. Italics used in the original citation.

³² Joan Fontcuberta's lecture, entitled 'The Revenge of Images', was presented at the international symposium *The Itinerant Languages of Photography* at the Princeton University Art Museum (November 21–23, 2013) Accessible at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LV2_yMG-VI8 (14 June, 2017)
³³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, edited by Claude Lefort, translated by Alphonso

(visible) and the apparitional (illusory). Throughout the history of the advancement of photography, photographers and scientists alike spoke openly about their ambition to photograph thoughts and to make the invisible visible. Joan Fontcuberta, a photographer and a researcher of the photographic image, speaks of contemporary attempts at projecting our neurological realities by employing experimental neuroscientific methods. In order to visualise the formation of thoughts and dreams, and to look at those in pictures, our mental processes are (again) being transformed into pictograms by configurations of thinking, which forms a kind of image. This ambition, Fontcuberta suggests, is twofold: while we will be able to visualise our inner lives, the machine, which will project those hidden realms, will inevitably be able to control them.³⁴ Thus, we may ask again, is the photographic image a reflection, a perception, a thought or a projection?

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³⁴ Joan Fontcuberta's lecture, entitled 'The Revenge of Images', was presented at the international symposium *The Itinerant Languages of Photography* at the Princeton University Art Museum (November 21–23, 2013) Accessible at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LV2_yMG-VI8 (14 June, 2017)

PART I

MIDNIGHT IN MUMBAI³⁵

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 $^{^{35}}$ Midnight in Mumbai is a series of 42 black and white and colour photographs: 2012–2017, middle format camera, silver gelatin prints, c-type print, 102 cm x 82 cm, 82 cm, 82 cm, 60 cm x 50 cm, 50 cm x 60 cm, 50 cm. Personal archive, if not otherwise stated.

NOTHING THAT I CAN IMAGE WOULD MAKE SENSE IN PHOTOGRAPHY













































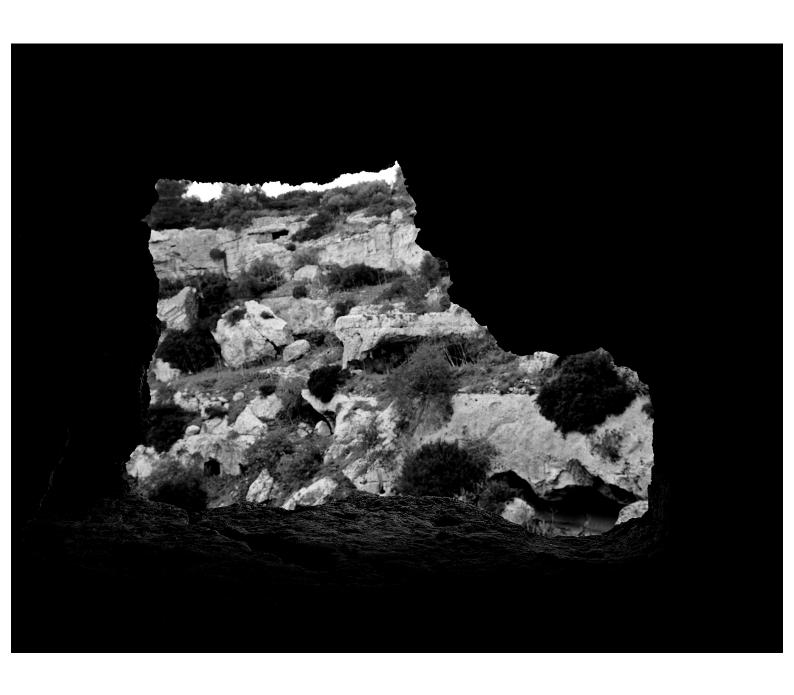












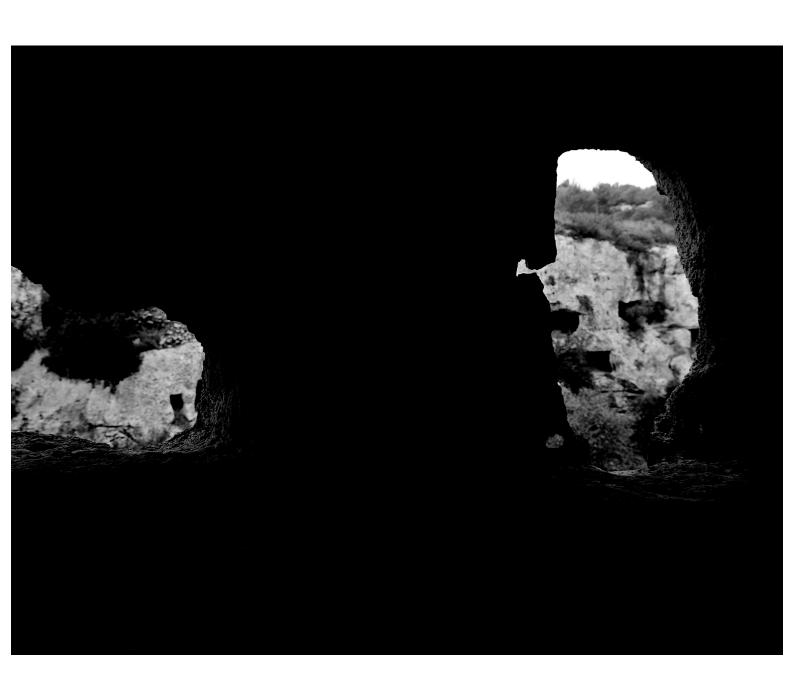












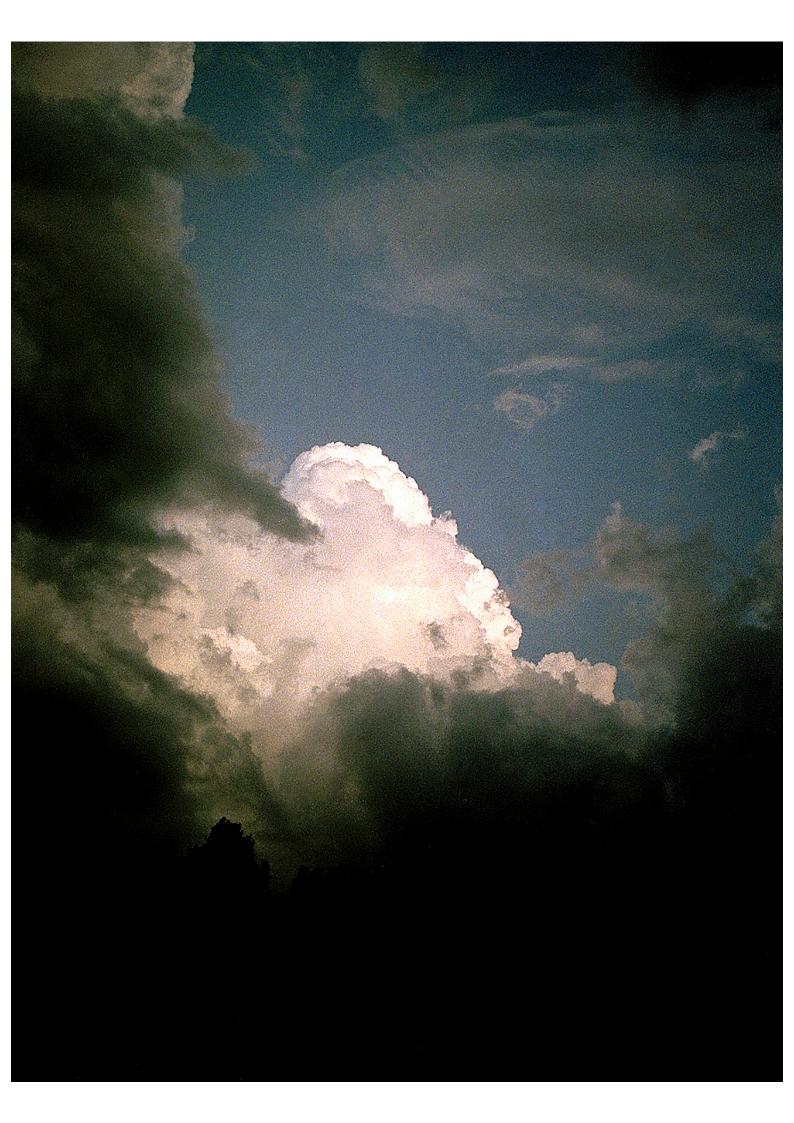














PART II

1. PHOTOGRAPHY BEFORE PHOTOGRAPHY

I promise to raise from the clay of Human Science as it now exists, a Being made in our image, and who, accordingly, will be to us WHAT WE ARE TO GOD. 36
Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam

³⁶ Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, *Tomorrow's Eve*, translated by Robert Martin Adams, (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p. 64. The novel, known for popularizing the term 'android', was

first published in 1886.

The history of photography seems to emerge from the space between visible reality and invisibility. The evolution of an image primarily formed by light places the medium half in the physical world and half out of this world, in a non-physical or imagined reality. Composed by optical, but not yet chemical, action, the first reflections of reality made by sunlight, such as reflections on water or shadows on walls, were no doubt mesmerising in their appearance, but these fleeting impressions were not photographs at all. Naturally, then, we have no pictures of 'photographic' ideas in past ages, but a number of literary and visionary texts, legends, myths and archeological findings indicate that a direct and permanent transcription of reality created in a blink of an eye has been a long-held aspiration.

There is a great deal of evidence in the history of science and art that supports this proposition of the idea of photography existing for centuries before its actual invention. The extent to which these documents report genuine endeavours towards the discovery of photography is, in a sense, unimportant. The scientific and fictional accounts listed in this chapter are not used to assume that photography indeed originated, advanced and vanished in the past, only to be rediscovered in 1830s Europe, but rather to suggest that there has never been a time without photography. By thinking photography centuries before its actual manifestation, early researchers and writers alike pointed to the possibilities of faithful pictorial transcriptions of not only the visible, but also the cognitive realities that were present for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

One of the earliest descriptions in literature of an image, or process, that closely resembles photography, occurs in the fascinating fable *Une Voyage Suppose*, written in 1690 by the French theologian François Fénelon. By describing a fictional character on an imaginary journey, Fénelon looks into the 'black box' universe and vividly foretells the advent of photography, which was at that time still in the distant future. A passage from Fénelon's book, which appears in William Jeremy Harrison's extensive account of the history of photography, entitled *A History of Photography written as a practical Guide and an Introduction to its latest Developments*, reads:

There was no painter in that country; but if anybody wished to have the portrait of a friend, of a picture, a beautiful landscape, or of any other object, water was placed in great basins of gold or silver, and the object desired to be painted was placed in front of

that water. After a while the water froze and became a glass mirror, on which an ineffaceable image remained. 37

At the beginning of their book *The Magic Image*, Cecil Beaton and Gail Buckland sum up Lucia Moholy's³⁸ intriguing speculations about the origins of photography by hinting at a prehistory of the medium found in early writings from many cultures:

[t]wo thousand years ago china plates heated chemically were made sensitive to light. Among the ruins of Nineveh, Egypt and Pompeii lens-shaped pieces of glass have been unearthed; Euclid and Aristophanes were acquainted with the "burning lens"; and a thirteenth-century Franciscan friar, Roger Bacon, considered by his contemporaries to be a wizard, used lenses and mirrors to produce "visible pictures". [Leon Battista] Alberti invented a camera obscura which he described as a miracolo della pittura; Leonardo da Vinci's scientific manuscripts contain detailed descriptions of his "darkroom"; while the Neapolitan, Battista Porta [Giambattista della Porta], in his book, Natural Magic [Magia Naturalis], described how he exhibited a facsimile of the view from his room on the opposite wall by means of a pin-hole in an otherwise blacked-out window.³⁹

Another prediction, perhaps the most prophetic, although also literary, of 'nature printed' pictures is found in the enigmatic book *Giphantie* written by Charles-François Tiphaigne de la Roche in 1760. The fantasy novel predicts the advent of photography a century before the idea of chemical imaging was slowly beginning to be realised. The story of photography before photography depicts a string of wonders anticipating future discoveries, which may

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³⁷ William Jerome Harrison, A History of Photography written as a practical Guide and an Introduction to its latest Developments, (s. 1.: Scovill Manufacturing Company, 1887), p. 11. Accessible at: https://archive.org/details/historyofphotogr1887harr (4 August, 2016)

Published also in: Helmut Gernsheim and Alison Gernsheim, *The History of Photography, from the earliest Use of the Camera Obscura in the Eleventh Century up to 1914*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 26–27.

³⁸ In her 1939 book, *A Hundred Years of Photography 1839–1939*, the Czech-born photographer and philosopher Lucia Moholy lists all the above examples of a photographic prehistory (Chapter 1, pp.11–14). A prominent German historian of photography, Helmut Gernsheim, made a similar observation regarding the history of photography, saying that, 'the greatest mystery in the history of photography' was that 'it was not invented earlier.'

³⁹ Cecil Beaton and Gail Buckland, *The Magic Image*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), p. 9. Italics used in the original citation. A thorough study of transmission of light and nature of vision implying the origins of photography can be found in: Josef Maria Eder, *History of Photography*, Chapter 2: 'From Aristotle (Fourth Century before Christ) to the Alchemists'), translated by Edward Epstean, (New York: Dover Publications, 1972). Accessible at:

https://archive.org/stream/EderHistoryPhotography/aa045%20-

^{%20}ederHistoryPhotography#page/n3/mode/2up (17 July, 2016)

well have seemed incredible, if not bizarre, to eighteenth-century reasoning, but which nevertheless relatively soon became a reality.

In de la Roche's book, *Giphantie*, an anagram of the author's name Tiphaigne, is an idyllic island inhabited by 'elementary spirits', who guard the lives of humans. The narrator, supposedly the protagonist of the tale, embarks on a journey of invention by means of glass, mirrors and optical devices. The traveller is taken by a hurricane to an unfamiliar land, where the 'native ganii' show him the art of transforming nature into image. The story gives a detailed description of 'fixing the transient images' of nature, without the intervention of the human hand, and of the making of mirror images that are permanently captured on a canvas. For the image to remain visible forever, the canvas, covered with a 'viscous matter', must be placed into a dark room where the necessary development of the latent image can take place.

In the chapter entitled 'The Storm', the Prefect guides the traveller's attention to the window, through which the latter observes the most improbable scene of a storm at sea in the African desert. Aware of the strangeness of the scene, the traveller tries to get closer to the window and by doing so he 'knocked [his head] against something that felt like a wall.'40 The Prefect explains to the traveller: 'That window, that vast horizon, those tick clouds, that raging sea, are all but a picture.'41

⁴⁰ Charles-François Tiphaigne de la Roche, Giphantia: Or, A View of What Has Passed, What is Now Passing, and, During the Present Century, What will Pass, in the World, (London: Robert Horsfield, 1761), p. 94. Accessible at: https://archive.org/stream/giphantiaorviewo00tiph#page/n103/mode/2up (July 27, 2015). The book, entitled Giphanitie, was originally published in 1760 (Paris: Babylone).

⁴¹ Gernsheim and Gernsheim, 1955, p. 26.



Lee Miller, Portrait of Space, 1937, silver gelatin print, 37 x 26.2 cm $^{42}\,$

 $^{^{42}}$ Courtesy The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Accessible at: http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/45342/lee-miller-portrait-of-space-american-1937/ (10 November, 2015)

'You know,' the Prefect continues,

that the rays of light, reflected from different bodies, form a picture, and paint the image reflected on all polished surfaces, for instance, on the retina of the eye, on water, and on glass. The elementary (sic) [elemental] spirits have sought to fix these fleeting images; they have composed a subtle matter, very viscous and quick to harden and dry, by means of which a picture is formed in the twinkling of an eye. They coat a piece of canvas with this matter, and hold it in front of the objects they wish to paint [object to be taken]. The first effect of this canvas [cloth] is similar to that of a mirror; one sees there all objects, near and far, the image of which light can transmit. But what a glass cannot do, the canvas by means of its viscous matter, retains the images. The mirror represents the objects faithfully, but retains them not; our canvas shows them with the same exactness, and retains them all. This impression of the image is instantaneous, and the canvas is immediately carried away into some dark place. An hour later the impression is dry, and you have a picture the more valuable in that it cannot be imitated by art or destroyed by time. [...] The correctness of the drawing, the truth of the expression, the stronger or weaker strokes, the gradation of the shades, the rules of perspective, all these we leave to nature, who with a sure and never-erring hand, draws upon our canvasses images which deceive the eye.⁴³

The presence of the world via an image is apparently linked to the natural medium of light, but can be carried out by a mechanical apparatus, which gives a direct and true-to-nature picture. 'Such images,' the narrator says in the book, 'are equivalent to the things themselves'. '44 Commenting on de la Roche's story in his book, Harrison concludes that after reading such a prophecy about an event in the century yet to come, one can hardly help but think that de la Roche 'must have conceived the idea after viewing the pictures shown with Porta's "dark chamber," a contrivance which was then, as we know, in vogue'. '45

Giphantie makes no direct reference to the use of lenses in the process of image-making, and the exact historical origins of lenses, as optical devices, are not known.⁴⁶ The disputed origins of lenses is illustrated by an article in an 1892 issue of a British journal, *The Amateur*

⁴³ This novel is often quoted and used in books and publications on history of photography. Here in: Gernsheim and Gernsheim, 1955, p. 26. Also in: Newhall, 1980, pp. 13–14; Harrison, 1887, pp. 11–12; *The Photographic News*, IV: 109, 9 (October 5, 1860), pp. 274–275.

⁴⁴ Tiphaigne de la Roche, 1761, p. 98.

⁴⁵ Harrison, 1887, p. 12.

⁴⁶ In 1840, an Austrian mathematician, Joseph Max Petzval, developed a prototype of the modern photographic lens. 'As a consequence of the belief in the special relation of referentiality between the mirror image and reality, when lenses were brought to China in the fifteenth century (mainly for use as eyeglasses), the term "lens" was translated as "eye mirror [yanjing]".' In: Yi Gu, 2013, pp. 124–125.

Photographer, where we read that '[a]lthough Sir David Brewster states that a piece of rock crystal of plano-convex form, now in the British Museum in the Assyrian selection, and the date of which is about 720 B.C., was designed for magnifying, we have no satisfactory proof of it'.⁴⁷ The article nonetheless continues by pointing towards a possible account of the origins of lenses, stating that:

Mr. H. G. Hanks, in a paper before Astronomical Society of the Pacific, quoted the following extract from the works of Henry Cornelius Agrippa, who lived in the early part of the sixteenth century:— "So we read as Coelius in his ancient writings relates, that one Hostius, a person of an obscure life, made a sort of glass that made the object seen far greater than it was; so that one finger should seem to exceed the whole arm both in bigness and thickness." The exact date of Coelius is uncertain, but there is evidence that he lived prior to Livy, B. C. 59, and therefore Hostius was still earlier.⁴⁸

A year later, however, the same journal offered a sceptical, if not slightly mocking, account of such discoveries:

There seem to be a considerable truth in the [...]⁴⁹, "There is nothing new under the sun." The invention of photography is generally looked upon as one of the numerous evolutions of the genius and civilizations of the nineteenth century; but lo and behold! we are now solemnly informed that the ancient Egyptians were the real fathers of photography. It is stated that whilst digging operations were being carried on amongst the ruined temples of Upper Egypt, an iron box to which was attached a suspicious-looking glass object was recently brought to light. These articles were eventually pronounced to be a camera and lens!

Perhaps if these digging operations were only carried a little deeper some embalmed specimens of the work of this ancient camera might be discovered also. We might then have the pleasure of feasting our eyes upon some priceless sun pictures of the features of the beautiful Cleopatra, and the collection of the British Museum might be enriched with addition of some snap-shots, taken by an Egyptian amateur, of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *The Amateur Photographer*, Volume XVI, Number 414, June to December 1892, (September 9), p. 168. Sir David Brewster stated that this was used for magnifying purposes, but its actual purpose, as per the article, remains a mystery.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ The text in the article is illegible.

⁵⁰ The Amateur Photographer, Volume XVII, Number 454, January to June 1893, (June 16), p. 396. In her book, On Photography, Susan Sontag writes: 'Between two fantasy alternatives that Holbein the Younger had lived long enough to have painted Shakespeare or that a prototype of the camera had been

The nineteenth-century novelist Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam projects photographic ambitions further by suggesting that

it would have been delightful to possess good photographic prints (taken on the spot) of Joshua Bidding the Sun Stand Still, for example. Or why not several different views of The Earthly Paradise, taken form the Gateway of the Flaming Swords; the Tree of Knowledge; the Serpent; and so forth? Perhaps a number of shots of The Deluge, Taken from the Top of Mount Ararat? (I'll bet that busy Japheth would have carried a camera with him into the Ark, if that marvelous instrument had been available to him.) Later, we would have had photos of The Seven Plagues of Egypt, of the Burning Bush, and the Passage of the Red Sea (with shots before, during, and after the event). There would have been the Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin of Belshazzar's Feast, the Funeral Pyre of Sardanapalus, the Standard of Constantinople, the Head of Medusa, the Minotaur, etc.; and we would rejoice today in postcards of Prometheus, the Stymphalides, the Sybils, the Danaids, the Furies, etc., etc.

And all the episodes of the New Testament—what prints they would provide! All the anecdotes of eastern and western history—what a collection! The martyrs, and all the examples of tourture, from that of the Seven Maccabees and their mother to those of John of Leyden and Damiens, not forgetting the chief episodes of Christians set agains wild beasts in the arenas of Rome, Lyons, and other cities!

One would want, too, all the scenes of torture, from the very beginning of social life down to recent events in the prison of the Holy Inquisition, when the Monks of Redemption, equiped with their instruments of iron, spent their leisure time over the years in massacring Moors, heretics, and Jews. And the cruel interrogations that have gone on in the prisons of Germany, Italy, France, the Orient, everywhere, why not those too? The camera, aided by the phonograph (they are near of kin), could reproduce both the sight and the different sounds made by the sufferers, giving a complete, an exact idea of the experience. What an admirable course of instruction for the grade schools, to render healthful the intellligence of modern young peope—perhaps even public figures! A splendid magic lantern!

invented early enough to have photographed him, most Bardolators would choose the photograph. This is not just because it would presumably show what Shakespeare *really* looked like, for even if the hypothetical photograph were faded, barely legible, a brownish shadow, we would probably still prefer it to another glorious Holbein. Having a photograph of Shakespeare would be like having a nail from the True Cross.'

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And the portraits of all the great founders of civilization, from Nimrod to Napoleon, from Moses to Washington, from Confucious to Mohammed! Pictures of all the famous women, from Semiramis to Catherine the Great, from Thalestris to Joan of Arc, from Zenobia to Christina of Sweden!

And photographs of all the beautiful women, icluding Venus, Europa, Psyche, Delilah, Rachel, Judith, Cleopatra, Aspasia, Freya, Maneka, Thais, Akedysseril, Roxalana, the Queen of Sheba, Phryne, Circe, Dejanira, Helen, and so on down to the beautiful Pauline Bonaparte! to the Greek veiled by law! To Lady Emma Harte Hamilton! And of course we'd have all the gods as well, and all the goddesses, down to and including the Goddess Reason, without neglecting Mr. Supreme Being! Life-size, of course!

Well now, isn't it a shame we don't have photographs of that entire crowd? What an album it would make!

[...] Alas, the vision is lost forever!⁵¹

Josef Maria Eder, an Austrian scientist with an interest in the chemistry of photography, writes about a lens in his encyclopedic exploration of the prehistory of photography of 1905, entitled *Geschichte der Photographie* (History of Photography). The lens, which was used to draw a reflected image onto a surface, is of ancient origin, contests Eder, and he goes on to say that quartz crystals, glass and convex lenses were well known in the ancient world. Writing after Harrison,⁵² although apparently unaware of him, Eder briefly mentions the optics found at the ruins of the ancient city of Nineveh and those found in Pompeii and elsewhere.⁵³ Often it is assumed that these 'seeing devices' were used as magnifying or burning glasses; however, this was not always the case, as 'the emerald through which, according to Pliny, the Emperor Nero viewed the gladiatorial combats, was not used as a spectacle or device to aid vision, but undoubtedly [...] as protection against the glare of sunlight.'⁵⁴

Moreover, in a collection of poems, *Silvae*, by the Roman poet Publius Papinius Statius (45–96 AD), Eder identifies a precursor of the daguerreotype in the poem entitled 'The Hair of Earinus'. In verses 90–100, a boy, carrying a powerful mirror of gold, offers the precious and unusual gift of one's own reflection, saying:

⁵¹ Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, 2001, pp. 22–23.

⁵² Harrison, 1887, p. 7.

⁵³ Eder, 1972, p. 2. The lens is now part of the British Museum collection.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

"This also let us give to the temples of our fathers, no gift will be more pleasing, and it will be more powerful than gold itself. Do you only fix your glance upon it and leave your features here." Thus he spoke and showed the mirror with the image caught therein.⁵⁵

Archaeologists at Olmec sites in Mexico⁵⁶ have also found early optical devices and polished concave mirrors of crystalline haematite, which have been seen as precursors to Alexander Wolcott's daguerreotype mirror cameras.⁵⁷ Another discovery, which may have led to the development of the daguerreotype process, was a document found in the library of the Dionysian Monastery, on Mount Athos. In 1864, a Greek scholar, Constantine Simonides, drew attention to a document written by the monk Panselenus around 500 AD. The document convinced Simonides 'that Daguerre may have seen this document when he visited Mount Athos to make paintings for his diorama.'58

As often mentioned, Daguerre's own obsession with 'seizing the light, arresting its flight'59 made the successful scene-painter neglect his daily business to the point that his wife began to question the sanity of her otherwise caring husband. Being curious about his far-fetched ambition, Madame Daguerre 'was not, perhaps, much comforted by the assurance of the men of science whom she consulted that the object of her husband's researches was "not absolutely impossible!"'.60 Despite Madame Daguerre's misgivings, in 1838, after years of experimenting, Daguerre placed a weakly exposed photographic plate in a cupboard full of chemicals, intending to reuse the plate after he had cleaned it. When the photographer opened the cupboard the next day, a perfect image, seemingly miraculously, appeared in front of his eyes. After eliminating the chemicals that had made the picture clearly visible one by one, Daguerre deduced that it was the vapouring mercury that had caused the image to

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁶ Most archaeologists believe the Olmec civilization arose along the Mexican Gulf coast, sometime before 1200 BC.

⁵⁷ Alexander S. Wolcott was an American scientist. In 1840 he patented his mirror camera, which did not have a lens. Instead, Walcott used a concave reflecting mirror, which reduced the exposure time from thirty minutes to only five minutes.

⁵⁸ The Amateur Photographer, XXXIX: 1028, (June 16, 1904), p. 466.

⁵⁹ 'I have seized the light, I have arrested its flight', is a famous quote by Daguerre in a letter to his friend Charles Chevalier in 1839 when he succeeded in capturing the photographic image using mercury vapour. In: John Ingledew, Photography (Portfolio), (London: Laurence King Publishing in Association with Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design, 2005), p. 23.

⁶⁰ Harrison, 1887, p. 22.

appear. Daguerre immediately repeated the process and after twenty-four hours in the 'magic' cupboard, the invisible, latent images became visible by fuming them with mercury vapour.⁶¹

Another angry wife wrote a lengthy letter in 1900 to *The Photographic News*, complaining that her 'unfortunate' husband, too, was 'stricken with the amateur photographic plague' and that, up to that time, she had 'always considered him reasonably sane'. She goes on protesting about the conditions that the family must cope with; the mess in the house, the smelly chemicals, the restricted access to the bathroom, the cost of the hobby and her husband's bad temper. What is more, she continues, one day she wanted to wash the baby in the basin, which was filled with what apparently was water. The liquid 'looked clear enough', but instead of water, to her horror she realised, the basin was filled with a silver solution 'that turned the baby jet black'. Yet another day, the poor woman reports, the cat drank milk from a pot that had been used for 'something or other of potassium' and it 'just curled up and died'.62

In the early days of the medium, the daguerreotype process was, perhaps not surprisingly, spoken about as if it were black magic, and Talbot, indeed, saw the medium as a kind of alchemical form of the black arts. The allusion to black magic was possibly due to Thomas Wedgwood's first 'silhouette images', which, unless kept in a dark place, did not stop reacting to light and eventually turned black.⁶³ Using a camera obscura and silver nitrate particles, Wedgwood had made considerable conceptual advancements towards the photographic image, but could not fix it once it was exposed to light. Likewise, Nicéphore Niépce's early

⁶¹ Daguerreotype was given to the world as a 'gift' by the French and introduced worldwide in 1839. Richard Beard, however, bought the patent for the daguerreotype for the United Kingdom and controlled the copyright.

⁶² All the quotes in the paragraph are from *The Photographic News*, February 14, 1900, pp. 130–131. 63 Thomas Wedgwood, arguably the 'first photographer', attempted to obtain a photographic image between 1790 and 1802. The records of the experiments were written by Humphry Davy and collected in 'An Account of a Method of Copying Paintings upon Glass, and of Making Profiles, by the Agency of Light upon Nitrate of Silver. Invented by T. Wedgwood, Esq.', published in Journal of the Royal Institution. Other historians have considered Giambattista della Porta, who popularised the camera obscura, to be the first photographer; or Hippolyte Bayard, who claimed to have invented the photographic process in France before Daguerre. Bayard's 1840 photograph Self Portrait as a Drowned Man has been seen as the commentary on having his idea stolen. Moreover, as argued in Richard Buckley Litchfield's book Tom Wedgwood, the First Photographer: An Account of His Life, His Discovery and His Friendship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, by Herr Schiendl, the author of Geschichte der Photographie from 1891, Schiendl 'entirely agrees' with Eder, that Johann Heinrich Schulze is the first photographer, 'for no one before him knew the effect of light (as such) on silver-salts, and he was without dispute the first who made use of the operation of light to produce light-pictures, evanescent though they were, means of silver-salts through patterns (negatives).' According to this logic, the position of the first photographer would belong 'to whoever first noticed the fading of a curtain under sunlight', because 'the discoverer of a fact is also the discoverer of whatever knowledge that fact may ultimately lead to.' In: Richard Buckley Litchfield, Tom Wedgwood, the First Photographer: An Account of His Life, His Discovery and His Friendship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, (London: Duckworth and Co., 1903), p. 226. Accessible at: https://archive.org/stream/tomwedgwoodfirst00litcrich#page/226/mode/2up (3 February, 2015)

images simply turned black if exposed to sunlight for too long. Contemplating the idea of correctly exposed permanent images, while still using a camera obscura, Talbot remarked: 'how charming it would be if it were possible to cause these natural images to imprint themselves durably, and remain fixed upon the paper!'⁶⁴ The very light needed to photograph the natural world was sabotaging the visibility of the image and fixing, or 'bitting', ⁶⁵ the fleeting images would remain the major obstacle in the development of photography until 1839, when hyposulphite of soda, or hypo, was successfully used to fix the photographs. ⁶⁶

A charming legend regarding the visibility and invisibility of images describes a picture with a miraculous character. A Chinese emperor, reigning in about 1000 BC, was puzzled by an image of an ox, which disappeared in the daytime, but reappeared as a glowing image at night. Asking the mandarins about the unusual phenomenon, the court scholars could not provide a satisfactory answer. All they knew was that 'every morning the ox came out of his frame, and went to graze in the meadows, returning at night to resume his place in the frame, where he remained quietly until the next morning'. 67 In search of the answer as to what makes an image miraculously disappear and then reappear, an old priest recalled the Japanese 'art of treating oyster shells in a certain way, and mixing them with various pigments so as to form colours which were invisible by day, but became visible by night'. 68 The answer to the miracle seemed to lie in the light-sensitive chemicals that the Japanese used to make images appear and disappear under certain lighting conditions. The priest's conclusion was that the wandering ox was painted with these colours 'and as the figure became invisible by daylight, it needed no great credulity—for a Chinaman—to imagine that the animal had temporarily joined the flocks feeding in the neighboring pastures'. 69

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⁶⁴ Letter written by Talbot, in: Ann Thomas, *Beauty of Another Order: Photography in Science*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 29.

⁶⁵ Harrison, 1887, p. 17.

⁶⁶ In 1819 John Herschel discovered sodium thiosulfate, a fixing agent known as hypo. The fixing agent was properly in use from 1839, when Herschel informed both Talbot and Daguerre about it. However, Antoine Hércules Romuald Florence, a French-Brazilian inventor working in the 1820s, applied the theory of ammonia as a fixative agent and successfully used his own urine to prove the case.

⁶⁷ The Photographic News, XXXIII: 1616, (August 23, 1889), p. 547.

⁶⁸ Ibid. The Egyptians had a similar belief, believing that the soul or consciousness (Ba) 'flew off to heaven during the day' and was reunited with the mummified body (Ka) at night. In: Mark Pendergrast, *Mirror* | *Mirror*, *A History of the Human Love Affair with Reflection*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2003), p. 5.

⁶⁹ The Photographic News, XXXIII: 1616, (August 23, 1889), p. 547. An analogy may be drawn with a belief in former Yugoslavia (Podrima) 'that a person has two souls, and that when he sleeps, one soul wanders about (Vukasinovic [1958], 24). This seems to be a way of accounting for the fact that, during sleep, people may be visited by the images of other people—that is, dream about them—yet these other people may survive the temporary loss of their soul.' In: Paul Barber, Vampires, Burial, and Death: Folklore and Reality, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 184.

The capacity of sunlight to darken materials was well known to European alchemists and ancient scholars. The search for the legendary alchemical substance, known as the philosopher's stone, which was supposedly able to manifest the essence of things, prompted alchemists to discover that horn silver, or luna cornea, quickly turned black if exposed to sunlight for even a short period. As early as 1556, Fabricius (De Rebus Metallicis) 'assures us that, by means of a lens, an image of any object can be obtained upon horn-silver (chloride of silver)'. To In her book *A Hundred Years of Photography 1839–1939*, Lucia Moholy mentions the Chinese scholar Hun-tsi-kwan, who argues that the main principles of photography were known in China from the earliest times. According to Moholy, the scholar 'claims to have found traces of China plates, made sensitive to light by a chemical process 2,000 years ago. These plates, he says, might have been turned into negative pictures if used in combination with camera obscura'.

A German polymath, known also as 'the Columbus of photography', Johann Heinrich Schulze, made fleeting photographic copies of writing as early as 1727. Knowing that silver salts, especially the halides, reacted strongly to light, he placed letter stencils upon a surface coated with a solution of chalk, silver and nitric acid, which formed silver nitrate; where the rays of light passed through, the sun darkened the silver on the translucent paper and where the rays could not reach the silver beneath, the white copy letters appeared on the surface.⁷²

An English mathematician, chemist and astronomer, John Herschel,⁷³ came to a similar conclusion from the opposite direction, discovering that a photograph saturated in a solution of mercury chloride for a few minutes makes the image disappear. After the bleached image was washed, dried and immediately soaked in a solution of sodium thiosulphate, the image would reappear.⁷⁴ The outcome of this experiment was reversed in 1866, when the invisible

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⁷⁰ The Photographic News Almanac, Third Edition (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, 1862), p. 51.

⁷¹ Moholy, 1939, p. 11. Yi Gu mentions another Chinese scholar, rediscovered by Liang Qichao, who claims that Zou Boqi preceded his Western colleagues and was the sole inventor of photography. Based on Zou's article, which includes his notes on camera obscuras, Liang's essay 'Notes on the Machine for Seizing Shadow' concluded that 'he [Zou] made a "machine for capturing shadow" (shying qi) by himself. According to the text and illustration, [his shying qi] is certainly primitive and laughable, if compared with the new machines of our modern times that keep surpassing the refinement of the previous ones. Nonetheless, fifty years ago, Zou created it without following anyone. How can we not call Zou a hero?' In: Yi Gu, 2013, p.130.

⁷² This experiment reminds me of Richard Avedon's anecdote recounting when, as a child in Long Island, he placed a negative on his sister's shoulder and the sun provided him with a positive picture.

⁷³ On March 14, 1839, John Herschel read his paper 'On the Art of Photography; or the Application of the Chemical Rays of Light to the Purpose of Pictorial Presentation' to the Royal Society. In the paper Herschel used the terms 'photography' and 'emulsion' as they are understood today. Herschel is, moreover, often credited with coining the words 'positive' and 'negative'. Again, according to his Brazilian colleague's notes, Florence used the French word 'photographie' in 1834, which is five years before Herschel coined the word 'photography' in English.

⁷⁴ John Harvey, *Photography and Spirit*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), p. 119.

photograph became a 'fashionable craze'.⁷⁵ Two hundred thousand of the so called 'magic photographs',⁷⁶ which revealed their images only after being immersed in water, enhanced in tobacco smoke, or exposed to any of the recommended substances, were produced in Berlin alone.⁷⁷ Moreover, Talbot himself saw the 'Photogenic Drawings',⁷⁸ as he named his images, as a process of 'appearing' or 'becoming', as indeed suggested by the term itself.

Until 1839, when Herschel's hyposulphite of soda, or hypo, became widely used, photographs were largely fixed by table salt, which partly, though not completely, stopped the light acting further on sensitized paper. With this use of salt and water, Talbot was among the earliest researchers to succeed in what he called a 'preserving process', whereby the image became resistant to continuous exposure to sunlight and retained 'its perfect whiteness', even when exposed to light. In his first paper on photography, presented to the Royal Society on January 31, 1839, Talbot described his process of the 'art of fixing a shadow' as having 'the character of the *marvellous*', 79 and further explained that:

The most transitory of things, a shadow, the proverbial emblem of all that is fleeting and momentary, may be fettered by the spells of our 'natural magic,' and may be fixed for ever in the position which it seemed only destined for a single instant to occupy. [...] Such is the fact, that we may receive on paper the fleeting shadow, arrest it there and in the space of a single minute fix it there so firmly as to be no more capable of change, even if thrown back into the sunbeam from which it derived its origins.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Moholy, 1939, p. 127.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

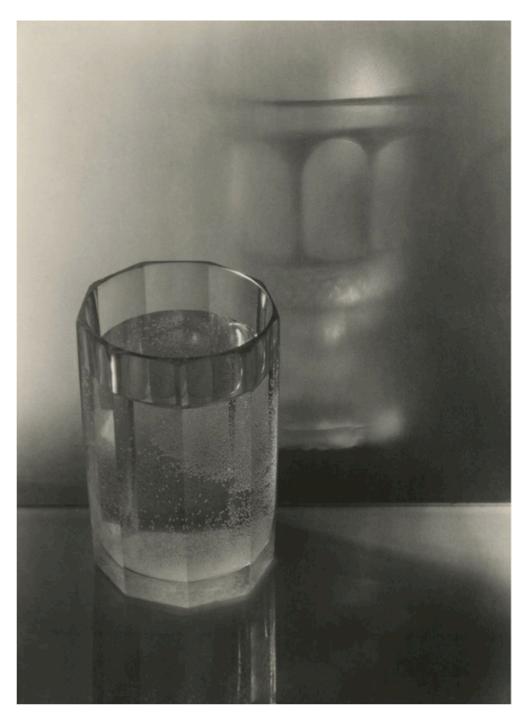
⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, 1844) ⁷⁹ All the quotes in this paragraph are from the essay by William Henry Fox Talbot, 'Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing, or, The Process by Which Natural Objects May Be Made to Delineate Themselves without the Aid of the Artist's Pencil' (1839), republished in: Newhall, 1980, pp. 23–31. Italics used in the original citation.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 25. Italics used in the original citation.

'He who works without salt will never raise dead bodies.'81

 $^{^{81}}$ Thomas Moore, ed., \textit{The Essential James Hillman, A Blue Fire, (Abingdon: Routledge 1990), p. 125.



Josef Sudek, Still life Glass and Reflection, ca. 1952, silver gelatin print, 22,8 x 15, 2 cm $^{\rm 82}$

 $^{^{82}}$ Courtesy Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York. Accessible at: http://www.howardgreenberg.com/artists/josef-sudek/featured-works?view=slider#13 (5 January, 2012)

It is interesting to note Talbot's description of the process above and his use of the verb 'receive'. In *The Miracle of Analogy* the American art historian and critical theorist Kaja Silverman writes about the terminology used by the early photographers, saying that, 'it wasn't until the 1880s that the verb "to take" decisively replaced the verb "to receive". ⁸³ The dilemma over whether an image was received from the outside or projected by us had long occupied scientists and philosophers alike, who wanted to have a clear answer about the formation of an image. They wanted to know whether a perceived image comes to us from the outside, or whether is it we who project it. Is the image given or taken? Does the world reflect its visible nature or character, or do we see our projected thoughts? Does a photographer discover, or make an image? Does an image penetrate the eye, or is it my potent gaze, which creates things anew? ⁸⁴

The analogies between the world and how it may appear to us – either it is 'given' or 'taken' – might become clearer when we look at the language that pre-empts the nineteenth-century development of photography. In his book *Vampires*, *Burial*, *and Death*, the cultural historian Paul Barber writes that in some languages the same word is used for the idea of a soul, a form and a photograph. 'In many countries,' Barber writes,

especially in some of the northern Eurasian cultures, the shadow and the mirror image are both unmistakably associated with the soul. [...] This is most clear in the Tungusic language family, where the same word is often used for "soul", "shadow" and "reflection". [...] among the Mordvins the same word is used to designate "soul" (or spirit), "form," and "photograph".85

Barber goes on in his discussion of nomenclature to state that in certain cultures a word for image may not distinguish which type of image is being referred to, and gives as an example the Kiwai Papuans of New Guinea: '[f]or soul the Kiwais use the word *wio*, which also means shadow, reflection in the water and any kind of picture or drawing'. 86 The Kiwais also use the same word, *wio*, to speak about ghosts, and similarly when the Etruscans referred to the soul,

⁸³ Silverman, 2015, p. 70.

⁸⁴ Henri Cartier-Bresson, for example, believed that the act of photographing is a reversed process: 'a photograph is neither taken nor seized by force. It offers itself up. It is the photo that takes you; one must not take photos.' In: Geoff Dyer, *The Ongoing Moment*, (London: Abacus, 2007), p. 213 (footnote). In *Photography and Spirit*, Harvey writes that Cartier-Bresson's belief may have been influenced by the 'spell' put upon the photographer's first camera, the popular Kodak Brownie, which was introduced in 1900 and named after 'a good-natured, helpful, invisible brown elf or household goblin that haunted farmhouses and other country dwellings in Scotland.' In: Harvey, 2007, pp. 25–26.

⁸⁵ Barber, 1988, p. 188.

⁸⁶ Ibid. Italics used in the original citation.

they spoke about an 'image reflected in a mirror'.⁸⁷ Furthermore, Barber writes that '[m]any Siberian peoples considered "the other world" quite literally a mirror reflection of the world. Everything was upside down when compared with this life'.⁸⁸

A telling union between soul, image and water is found in the human desire for eternal life, which photography seems to embody by remembering everything in the past via images. The ancients believed that any reflective surface would arrest not only the image of their physical likeness, but also their soul. Egyptians, Indians, Chinese, Mayans, Incas and Aztecs 'buried their dead with magical metal or stone reflectors, to hold the soul, ward of the evil spirits, or allow the body, before taking the final trip to the afterlife, to check its hair'. Aztecs, for instance, made their mirrors from obsidian, 'a naturally occurring volcanic glass', which they believed to be linked to the deity known as the Smoking Mirror, who used mirrors to cross between the earthly realm and the underworld.

There are many similar examples from around the world; Greeks placed mirrors in tombs, and the graves of those who died young were decorated with reflective surfaces and mirrors that would enable their souls to have an uninterrupted journey to the afterlife. However, in Central Europe and the Balkans mirrors were covered with a thick cloth or turned to face the wall when someone died. In the Jewish tradition the same gesture of mourning is practised in order to prevent the souls of the living being taken with the deceased, or to stop the soul of the deceased becoming trapped in the mirror, and so obstructing their final passage to the afterlife.

In his extensive research into the history of optical reflections, the scholar Mark Pendergrast writes about similar phenomena in ancient India and ancient Greece, where people avoided looking at their own reflections in water. The ancient Greeks even 'regarded it as an omen of death if a man dreamed of seeing himself so reflected. They feared that the water-spirit would drag the person's reflection or soul under water, leaving him soulless to perish'.⁹⁰

A belief that souls dwell in water, which could arrest a person's reflection and retain it, was widespread and might be the reason why in parts of southern Europe any dishes of water found in the room where a person died must be emptied and the windows be opened in order

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⁸⁷ Pendergrast, 2003, p. 9.

⁸⁸ Barber, 1988, p. 182. Today mirrors are made of aluminium powder, while the Egyptians used polished copper, which was associated with Hathor, the goddess, who presides over beauty, cosmetics, love, sex, fertility and magic.

⁸⁹ Pendergrast, 2003, Introduction.

⁹⁰ James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: a Study in Magic and Religion* [1890], Abridged ed., (New York: The Macmillan Co, 1922), p. 192.

to allow the soul of the deceased to leave. ⁹¹ The supposed ability of water to hold a soul is why in Macedonia a jar full of water is left in an empty grave after exhumation, whereas conversely in Bulgaria a bowl of water is left at the grave in order to prevent the soul from returning. ⁹² To ease the departure of souls, certain European folk customs practise 'pouring water between the corpse and the location where the person died. In some areas, including eastern Prussia, for example, the *Leichenwasser* – the water used to wash the corpse – was poured out between the coffin and the house as a funeral procession set out to provide a barrier to death, and then its container was broken, perhaps against the possibility of the soul having remained in it'. ⁹³

A soul might have been viewed as hydrotropic because it was believed to be a reflection of one's likeness, which naturally copies itself onto any available standing water, turning everything in front of it into an image. There is also a belief that spirits cannot cross water, which is why the Slavs and the Wends in Lausitz returned from burials through water to ensure that the soul of the dead person stayed among the dead, once it had embarked on its journey to the afterlife. To prevent souls from returning, they also buried their dead on islands.⁹⁴

Images, Holmes suggested in 1859, 'may be seen in one of their aspects in any clear, calm sheet of water, in a mirror, in the eye of an animal by one who looks at it in front, but better still by the consciousness behind the eye in the ordinary act of vision'. They appear spontaneously on water, mirrors, dark surfaces and glazed photographs. Water turned into nature's mirror and ice into its lens.

Another telling example of the designation of early photography in Chinese culture is the development of glyph characters to denote photography. The glyphs are formed by denoting an action, such as 'reflecting a portrait with a mirror'97, the craft of 'seizing light' and 'seizing shadow'98, 'making someone to be afraid of' and even 'taking essence from', and combining it with one for 'casting light', 'documenting', 'reflecting' or 'mirroring'.

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⁹¹ Barber, 1988, p. 180.

⁹² Ibid., p. 181.

⁹³ Ibid. Italics used in the original citation.

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Oliver Wendell Holmes, 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph', 1859, reprinted in: Trachtenberg, 1980, p. 72.

⁹⁶ Michael Zhang, 'These Portraits were shot with a Water Drop as a Lens', *PetaPixel*, 19 June, 2017, https://petapixel.com/2017/06/19/portraits-shot-water-drop-lens/ (accessible at: 26 September, 2017)

⁹⁷ Yi Gu, 2013, p. 128.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

In her essay 'What's in a Name? Photography and the Reinvention of Visual Truth in China, 1840–1911', Yi Gu, a scholar of twentieth-century Chinese art, suggests that the idea of a mirror, being bound up in the naming of photography, comes from Eastern religious traditions such as Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, and quite naturally indicates a representation of reality. There are numerous examples of the term for mirror being used in connection with the photographic process. The seemingly inextricable link between photographic reality and the reflection of the visible world, Yi points out, can be seen in the verses of a nineteenth-century poem written by the head of Ministry of Justice at the time, which reads: 'when you hold an "illuminating mirror [...]", the land and the universe cannot hide from you'.99 In his travelogue from 1846, a Chinese writer, Zhou Shouchang, describes the process of daguerreotype as 'a mirror [which] is positioned and the magician takes a shadow from the sun'.100 Futhermore, '[i]n 1854 Lou Sen explained the daguerreotype as "holding a mirror toward the sun to paint the reflected image"'.101 Another Chinese writer described the 1851 wet collodion process¹⁰² as 'taking a reflection from a mirror'.103

Yi writes about the Chinese 'process of linguistic consolidation' in the years between 1840 and 1911, when 'more than a dozen appellations' promoted photography in China. Referring to photography in the decades after its announcement in 1839, the Chinese used the terms which stood for portrait painting, ¹⁰⁴ and it was only in the 1870s, according to Yi, that the term 'zhaoxiang' ('reflecting a portrait with a mirror') was widely used by the Chinese to denote photography.

In his 1911 essay 'A Brief History of the Invention of Photography and Its Current Methods', ¹⁰⁵ Du Jiutian used the word 'sheying', which 'implied semantically the scientific principles of photography', ¹⁰⁶ and, in a way similar to Hershel in the West, gave the medium its name. However, while Hershel arguably coined the word photography, Du took a term which meant 'chasing the shadow of the sun' and which was already in use in pre-modern China. As the use of photography in China quickly exceeded the bounds of portraiture, an increased interest in a scientific understanding of photography dictated the medium's change in name. ¹⁰⁷ Hence, in 1911 'sheyingshu' ('the craft of seizing shadow'), and its abbreviation,

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⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 125.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

 $^{^{102}}$ The wet collodion process is a photographic technique, which was invented in 1851 by an Englishman, Frederick Scott Archer.

¹⁰³ Yi Gu, 2013, p. 125.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 120. Yi Gu mentions the terms: yingxiang, xiaozhao, huayig.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 128.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 128.

'sheying' ('seizing shadow') became the standard way to describe photography. Today the word is still used: 'In modern-day standard Mandarin, sheying is used as a formal term for photography, while zhaoxiang remains confined to the context of studio photography'. ¹⁰⁸

In 'Early Visions of Photography', a chapter of Harrison's 1888 book, his approach aligns with the understanding of the medium outlined above, namely its relationship to the shadow, saying that '[a] Chinese tradition credits the sun with sometimes producing pictures of the neighboring objects upon the ice-covered surfaces of lakes and rivers'. ¹⁰⁹ Harrison's observation, however, is not merely apocryphal, but rather a natural phenomenon noticed by the nineteenth-century British photographer David Winstanley, who saw the 'ice-images' himself while wintering in Wisconsin between 1863 and 1864. During the period of 'cold spells', as the northern Americans call intense cold, when the temperature falls way below zero, 'the leaves and flowers of the carpet' were being 'distinctly and unmistakably traced upon the glass', and the mesmerised photographer began experimenting with 'pictures [created] by the action of cold'. Winstanley recognized the possible use of 'thermal pictures', or 'frigerography', as he termed the process, in military investigations and nocturnal photography. Unfortunately, however, we have no record of Winstanley's practice, but in his 1888 article 'Pictures by the Action of Cold' he writes:

Under the clear canopy of a nocturnal sky terrestrial objects radiate their thermal energy into the depths of space, and on to other bodies colder than themselves. If I expose a pinhole camera to a landscape subject [...], and my plate is colder than the picture (visible or invisible) projected on it through the aperture, it is certain that that picture is not merely a mathematical conceivability like the celestial equator, but it is a physical fact, and the temperature of my plate varies in its parts with the radiating power of the objects to which it is exposed. It contains upon its surface as true a thermal picture, even in the night, as the ground glass of a common camera contains an actinic picture in the light of day, and a picture assuredly as capable of development. [...] "Frigerography" is not only an actual natural phenomenon, but it is one which in its essence is capable of artificial reproduction in the camera. 110

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¹⁰⁸ Yi Gu, 2013, p. 120.

¹⁰⁹ Harrison, 1887, p. 11.

¹¹⁰ All the quotes in the paragraph above are from the essay by David Winstanley, 'Pictures by the Action of Cold', published in *The Photographic News*, XXXII: 1563, (August 17, 1888), pp. 517–518.

Invisible Operator

'Is it true the natives think the camera steals their souls?'

'Some of them. The sensible ones.'111

Pat Barker

¹¹¹ Pat Barker, *The Ghost Road*, (New York: Viking Press, 1995), p. 86.



Josef Sudek, Water Glass, 1951, silver gelatin print, 17 x 12,7 cm $^{\rm 112}$

 $^{^{112}}$ Courtesy Phillips. Accessible at https://www.phillips.com/detail/JOSEF-SUDEK/UK040213/96 $(5\,January,\,2012)$

In the article 'Facts and Photographs: Visualizing the Invisible with Spirit and Thought Photography', the Portuguese photography theoretician Margarida Medeiros mentions the phenomenon of 'window images', or 'images-on-the-glass', referencing the anthropologist Barbara Allen's essay 'Ghosts Left their Photographic Traces on Glass and Paper'. Moreover, this fascination with ghostly images appears in the short story *Le Horla* (The Horla), written in 1887 by Guy de Maupassant. Looking one day in a mirror in front of him, the hero is surprised that his image is not reflected therein:

The mirror is empty, clear, and full of light. But, although I was facing it, I was not there. [...] I didn't dare to move in its direction. Feeling that he was in between us, he, the Invisible one, and that he was hiding me. [...] His imperceptible body absorbed me.¹¹⁴

Fear that souls would be swallowed by a reflective surface and trapped in it forever underline the superstition that it is a bad omen if a mirror is broken – an idea possibly originating in the belief suggested above, namely that the mirror can indeed contain one's soul in the form of a reflection. The Romans, for instance, believed that a broken mirror brought seven years of misfortune and poor health, due to the seven-year cycle of a person's well-being. This superstition is still present in Europe, and even though contemporary reasoning softens the dramatic effect, there are few of us who would break a mirror deliberately.

A photograph's mirror-like precision is a form of a reflected image itself. Writing in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1859, Holmes aptly named the first daguerreotypes 'mirrors with a memory'.

Indeed, a dead person, or rather the spirit of a dead person, is often remembered as an image. A photographic picture reminds us that a person's image, their likeness and their reflection, belongs to the immortal soul as opposed to the mortal body. Hence it is not the body that forms an image, but the soul. The body, however, carries the soul and thus it carries the

¹¹³ Barbara Allen analysed late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographic press reports from the Henry Splitter Collection (UCLA Archive of California and Western Folklore), and found transcripts concerning photographs that appeared on windows. In: Margarida Medeiros, 'Facts and Photographs: Visualizing the Invisible with Spirit and Thought Photography', *communication+1*, *Occult Communications: On Instrumentation, Esotericism, and Epistemology*, 4 (2015), pp.1–21.

¹¹⁴ Medeiros, 2015, pp.1–21.

¹¹⁵ The ancient Greeks, Romans, Gypsies, Aztecs, Incas, Mongolians, Siberians, Australian aborigines, Zulus, Congolese, Ethiopians, Papuans, Japanese, Tahitians and early Christians, as well as some occult traditions such as neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, Hermeticism, Kabbalism and various traditions of alchemy 'peered into magic mirrors, crystals, and waters to gain supernatural knowledge. Roman scryers were called *specularii*, after speculum, the Latin word for "mirror".' In: Pendergrast, 2003, pp. 33–35.

image. In other words, if a photograph is based on a reflective image, a soul inhabits one in the first place.

For this to happen, the darkroom liquids keep the subject's soul in the emulsion, as 'water was intended to capture souls', and moreover, 'without salt [one] will never raise dead bodies'. Through the 'conjuring up' or 'raising' of the dead, whenever we look at their emanated pictures, photography could be seen as a form of 'resurrection'. 'I am truly becoming a specter,' Barthes exclaims at the beginning of *Camera Lucida* and further reminds us, that photography is not 'a "copy" of reality, but [...] an emanation of *past reality*: a *magic*, not an art'. It is, we read a few lines earlier, 'like the ectoplasm of "what-had-been": neither image nor reality, a new being, really: a reality one can no longer touch'.

Each silver-based photograph is made visible only when immersed in water, as if the image has indeed absorbed the soul, only to bring it back to us whenever we look at it. For nothing dies until one remembers: 'the image preserve[s] him [the subject] from a second spiritual death,' André Bazin writes in his highly influential text 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image'. 120

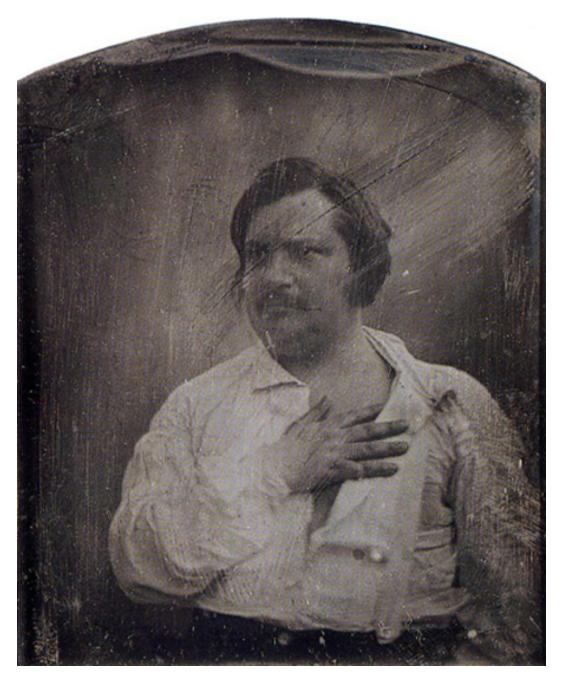
¹¹⁶ The Golden Tract, in: Moore, 1990, p. 125. The photographs are first sensitized with salt and later fixed with kitchen salt (Talbot). Apparently Secondo Pia's photograph of the Turin Shroud only became visible after being soaked in water and developed in photographic solutions.

¹¹⁷ Barthes, 2000, p. 14.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 88. Italics used in the original citation.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 87.

 $^{^{120}\,\}mathrm{Andr\acute{e}}$ Bazin, 'The Ontology of Photographic Image', 1945, reprinted in: Trachtenberg, 1980, pp. 237–244, p. 238.



Louis-Auguste Bisson, $Honor\acute{e}$ de Balzac, 1842, daguerreotype, 8,3 x 6,7 cm 121

 $^{^{121}}$ From: Le daguerréotype français. Un objet photographique, exhibition catalogue Musée d'Orsay, Editions de la Réunions des musées nationaux, Paris, 2003)

Yet, however skilful, early photography terrified the public. Its reflective surface was believed to be able to steal souls and keep them trapped forever. People did not feel at ease being photographed and were suspicious of its mysterious and lengthy procedure. A photographer was seen as 'a wolf in sheep's clothing' or 'a spy'. 122 Indeed, photographers sometimes teased the frightened sitters with little jokes. Marina Warner writes about the French photographer Maxime du Camp, who, travelling to Egypt with Flaubert, said to the boatmen 'that if they did not obey him and hold still, the machine he was wielding was a cannon which would vomit a hail of shots'. 123 It was also common in distant countries for photographers to tempt the sitters into their provisional studios with alcohol and, as one account explains, by the time they 'have him [the sitter] placed on a chair [...] the whiskey has already done its duty'. 124

In *Der Geist meines Vaters* (The Spirit of my Father), the poet Max Dauthendey, son of the well-known 1840s German photographer Karl Dauthendey, remembers the mistrust present in the early encounters with his father's work and his father's advice to always examine the pictures carefully:

We didn't trust ourselves at first to look long at the first pictures he developed. We were abashed by the distinctness of these human images, and believed that the tiny little faces in the picture could see *us*, so powerfully was everyone affected by the unaccustomed clarity and the unaccustomed fidelity to nature of the first daguerreotypes.¹²⁵

In Lucia Moholy's history of photography Max Dauthendey explains further that:

[e]ven adult persons had the most absurd ideas about it [...] some believed that my father wanted to collect the sunlight for the purpose of making gold; others imagined that healing powers emanated from the camera which may cure certain diseases. [...] That particular summer being hot and dry, there were some who suggested that the

¹²² The Year-Book of Photography and photographic News Almanac, 1888, p. 161.

¹²³ Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria, Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-first Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 192.

¹²⁴ The Year-Book of Photography and photographic News Almanac, 1888, pp. 600-601.

¹²⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', 1931. In: *Selected Writings, Volume 2, 1927-1934*, Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, eds., translated by Rodney Livingstone [et al.], (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 512. Italics used in the original citation.

On another note, Bates Lowry and Isabel Barrett Lowry write about human vanity, which was often tested, because '[u]nlike the brush, the camera was not a flatterer'. Women, especially, we read, 'would not submit themselves to the merciless lens of the camera for the fear of destroying their wishful ideas about their appearance.' Interestingly, 'account books of some practitioners often bear the words *rejected* or *not accepted*. In fact, the word most commonly used to describe the earliest portraits was *horrible*.' In: Lowry and Barrett Lowry, 1998, p. 48, p. 47.

confounded camera brought about the drought by attracting too many sun rays. [...] My father used to tell us, that many children seemed to have believed that he called up a spirit under his black cloth ... and when he reappeared from under it, with his hair standing on end, they thought he had been wrestling with the mystic spirit under the cover. They fled with terrified screams every time he reappeared. 126

A well-known example of doubt concerning the innocence of photography was Balzac's resistance to being photographed. Fearful that photography would take his soul away in 'layers', the novelist did not allow his portrait to be taken. In 'My Life as a Photographer', Nadar writes about his friend's 'intense fear' of being photographed, and the reason for Balzac's suspicion:

According to Balzac's theory, all physical bodies are made up entirely of layers of ghostlike images, an infinite number of leaf-like skins laid one on top of the other. Since Balzac believed man was incapable of making something material from an apparition, from something impalpable—that is, creating something from nothing—he concluded that every time someone had his photograph taken, one of the spectral layers was removed from the body and transferred to the photograph. Repeated exposures entailed the unavoidable loss of subsequent ghostly layers, that is, the very essence of life.127

The invisible diminishing of 'layers' then eventually transforms one's personality, and Balzac's fear might have been a fear of losing his soul. Indeed, in the only known daguerreotype of Balzac, he tellingly covers his heart with his hand as if indicating or illustrating the danger of photographic depictions. The early superstition that photography is able to take someone's soul is still present today. A more contemporary example is Jacques Derrida, who, in a filmed interview, states that up until 1979 he absolutely forbade his image to appear in public. 128 Sidestepping all reason, a kind of 'metaphysical fear' 129 took over Balzac and Derrida, who expressed their reservation towards a photographic likeness of themselves for different reasons, and yet both would seem to suggest that one cannot see, if oneself is being seen.

¹²⁶ Moholy, 1939, pp. 32–33.

¹²⁷ Gaspard-Félix Tournachon – Nadar, 'My Life as a Photographer', 1900, translated by Thomas Repensek, October, 5, 1978, pp. 6-28, p. 9. Nadar owned the only known daguerreotype of Honoré Balzac, which he purchased from the caricaturist by the name of Gavarni.

¹²⁸ Jacques Derrida on Photography. Accessible at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RjLOxrloJ0 (23 January, 2011)

¹²⁹ Warner, 2012, p. 193.

The counterpart to Balzac's fear of being peeled like an onion, by each click of the camera's shutter, can be found in Michel Tournier's short story 'Les suaires de Véronique' ('Veronica's Shrouds'). 130 Veronica, the devouring photographer, discusses the effect of a 'decapitated' photograph: the narrator says that such 'radical procedure [...] should kill the photo, whereas on the contrary, it gives it a more intense, a more secret life. You might almost think that all the soul that the head contained has flowed back from the severed head into the body [...] caressed and modelled by water and sun'. 131

Determined to transform her male model Hector into the photographic image itself, Veronica photographs him daily. The increasingly transparent Hector begins to feel powerless, and decides to leave the obsessive photographer. In his farewell letter, he writes:

Veronica darling,

[...] You have stolen my image twenty-two thousand two hundred and thirty-nine times. [...] Twenty-two thousand two hundred and thirty-nine times, some part of myself has been stolen from me and put into your little image trap, as you call it. [...] I've got thinner, tougher, become desiccated, not through any diet or exercise, but because of what has been taken from me, because of the daily removal of some of my substance. [...] And now I am empty, exhausted, tormented. [...] don't bother to try to look for me. You won't find me anywhere [...] because I have become diaphanous, translucid, transparent – invisible.

With love

Hector¹³²

Yet, as much as he tries, Hector cannot escape Veronica – his 'true image', ¹³³ and after a short separation he returns to his guardian photographer. This time Veronica decides to take his image 'without a camera, without a film, and without an enlarger'. ¹³⁴ Using the technique of 'direct photography', in contrast to her nineteenth-century colleagues, she immerses Hector

¹³⁰ Michel Tournier, *The Fetishist*, translated by Barbara Wright, (London: Methuen, 1978), pp. 94–109. ¹³¹ Jane M. Rabb, ed., *The Short Story and Photography*, *1880's–1980's*, (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), pp. 238–239.

¹³² Tournier, 1978, pp. 94–109. Marina Warner references Tournier's story and the analogy with the name Véronique in: Warner, 2012, p. 201.

¹³³ In the Christian tradition Saint Veronica is the patron saint of photographers. Vero-icon: 'true' or 'real' image.

¹³⁴ Rabb, 1998, p. 245.

himself in 'metol, sulphate of soda, hydroquinone and borax', ¹³⁵ as though to demonstrate the impossibility of escaping one's own real image.

A form of discomfort was common in sitters when photography was first introduced to the world. People viewed it as a form of magic that conjured up an image of their likeness in a moment, but which kept their soul trapped forever. These early subjects did not trust the photographer and were suspicious of the idea that images so true to nature could be captured by nothing but a 'black box'. In this chapter I provide examples to show that various cultures around the world established linguistic and visual analogies between the medium of photography and the afterworld. These analogies implied that the notions of the visible and the invisible, namely a reflection and the human soul, are synonymous to photography. This belief in photography's connection to the soul seemed to deepen the mistrust of the photographic image and perpetuate a fear of being photographed in the decade after the invention of photography, and is well documented in the nineteenth-century photographic press.

The significant and rapid advancement in the fields of optics and chemistry, however, made the often abstract ideas of photography somewhat more real. The fact that photography became established as part of the nineteenth-century world gradually changed people's perception and drove a curiosity to see what was otherwise impossible to see with the unaided eye. As further discussed in the next chapter, the investigations into the realm of the immaterial continued and scientists, photographers and the public were fascinated by the possibility of photographing the unreal. Moreover, the belief that the afterworld could be photographed, which was held by the spiritualist movements in the United States and quickly spread elsewhere, made photography a perfect servant of spiritualist practices common in the middle classes in the nineteenth century.

135 Ibid.

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Josef Sudek, Mirror with Reflection from Labyrinths, 1948–1973, silver gelatin print, $27.3 \times 21.3 \text{ cm}^{136}$

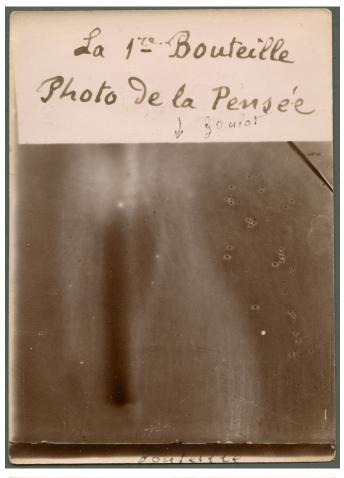
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 $^{^{136}}$ Courtesy Phillips. Accessible at: https://www.phillips.com/detail/JOSEF-SUDEK/NY040110/232?fromSearch=mirror&searchPage=3 (23 July, 2012)

2. PICTURING THOUGHTS

You could have sworn that things were thoughts which stopped half way...¹³⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre

 $^{^{137}}$ Jean Paul Sartre, Nausea [1938], Introduction by James Wood, translated by Robert Baldick, (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 193.





Louis Darget, thought photographs, 1896¹³⁸

¹³⁸ John Toohey, '10 Bizarre Scientific Photographs from the 19th Century' (10 March, 2013), *Listverse*, accessible at: http://listverse.com/2013/03/10/10-bizarre-scientific-photographs-from-the-19th-century/ (15 March, 2014)



Louis Darget, Fluidic Thought, photographs of thoughts and dreams, 1896139

Left: Inscribed: 'Photo... of thought. Head obtained by Mr. Henning, having a plate wrapped in black paper on his forehead while he played the piano. Opposite him on the piano was a portrait of Beethoven. Could this be that [same] portrait reflected by the brain onto the plate through the black paper. Comt. Darget'

Right: 'Photograph of a Dream: The Eagle.' 25 June, 1896. Inscribed: 'Obtained by placing a photographic plate above the forehead of Mme Darget while she was asleep.'

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¹³⁹ Ibid.

Photography's impulse to capture invisible phenomena has been present from its beginnings. Among the earliest scientific research carried out in the field of photography were, in fact, investigations into making the immaterial – thoughts, ideas, souls and spirits – visible photographically.¹⁴⁰ If one considers that in the biological system, or structure, of human perception, decisions are made a few seconds prior to our actions, it is perhaps no wonder that there have been attempts to photograph thoughts and to view images as manifestations of the mental processes.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the idea of picturing thoughts was discussed by the American inventor and photographer Georg Gardner Rockwood, whose report was published under the title 'Brain Pictures: A Photo-Physiological Discovery.- Is the Brain a Recording Camera? A Frozen Slice from the Cranium of a Dead Scientist Reveals Wonderful Things'. 141 The article draws upon the idea of 'retina images', suggesting that even human thought can be made visible posthumously by photo-micrographing a person's brain. The initiative was first performed on a portion of the brain as part of an autopsy on a dead polyglot, and formed characters recognizable as linguistic symbols. The photographer's scientist friend, who himself was a philologist, confirmed that 'the images [which were taken in the autopsy], so unintelligible to ordinary eyes, were in truth characters in the Ethiopic, ancient Syriac and Phoenician languages'. 142 Gardner Rockwood concludes his article by hoping that

[...] if, for instance, future literary executors shall be able to extract from the distinguished dead posthumous poems, suppressed opinions, the contents of "burned letters," family secrets or the mysteries of life that are buried-it will be a truly remarkable achievement of science [...] now that I have suggested its possibilities, there are without doubt others who will eagerly explore this hitherto unknown realm.¹⁴³

As early as the 1850s, a German baron, Karl Ludwig Freiherr von Reichenbach, was among the first to share Gardner Rockwood's interest in visualising psychic or mental processes.

¹⁴⁰ Johan August Strindberg, a Swedish novelist and painter, used the term 'Celestograph' in the 1890s. By laying down photosensitive plates on the ground, Strindberg was hoping 'to draw from heaven'. As

the plates were not treated, to be exposed by the night sky, Strindberg finally created a kind of "chemigrams", which are images created by chemical interaction with photosensitive emulsions. ¹⁴¹ Georg Gardner Rockwood, 'Brain Pictures: A Photo-Physiological Discovery.— Is the Brain a Recording Camera? A Frozen Slice from the Cranium of a Dead Scientist Reveals Wonderful Things', December 28, 1887. In: Anthony's Photographic Bulletin, XIX: 3, (February 11, 1888), pp. 76–79. Georg Gardner Rockwood began photographing in 1853 and introduced cartes-de-visite in the United States of America four years after they were introduced in France.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁴³ Ibid..

Following up Rockwood's research into the mysterious force called 'od', ¹⁴⁴ other scientists around the world ¹⁴⁵ began photographing psychic energy, which was known variously as the 'vital fluid', a 'psychic aura', a 'digital effluvia, or 'Y-rays'. As the scientists involved in this work believed that the invisible energy would manifest itself directly, it was important to 'fluid photographers' to obtain the results by photographic techniques without technical aids, such as those that required no camera. Insisting on so called 'direct photography', ¹⁴⁶ they produced images by simply placing a photo-sensitive plate directly onto the skin, and it was believed that the developed plate would reveal the indisputable confirmation of the mental, psychic presence. ¹⁴⁷

In 1911, Louis Darget, influenced by the discoveries into the intangible and the invisible, ¹⁴⁸ attempted to photograph 'human radiation', which he saw as emanating from his wife's thoughts and dreams. During the exposure of the photographic plate in complete darkness, Madame Darget was instructed to hold the plate about an inch in front of her forehead. The developed plate revealed a smudgy form, which made Darget believe that 'thoughts are creative, radiating, almost tangible, forces'. ¹⁴⁹ Moreover, he suggested that 'when the human soul produces a thought, it sends vibrations through the brain, the phosphorus it contains starts radiating, and the rays are projected out'. ¹⁵⁰

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¹⁴⁴ 'Od' also translated as 'odic force' or 'odyle'. In the fourteenth century, Chinese judges wore glasses with lenses of dark quartz during trials in order to hide their thoughts from the people present in the hall.

¹⁴⁵ Among others, Jacob von Narkiewicz-Jodko, a Polish geophysicist studying cosmic radiation; Louis Darget, a Frenchman fascinated by the occult; Julian Ochorowitz, a Polish [sic] psychologist; Jules Baraduc Luys and Hyppolite Baraduc.

¹⁴⁶ Medeiros, 2015, p. 14.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., pp.1–21.

¹⁴⁸ Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen discovered x-Rays or Röntgen in 1895; Nikola Tesla made a breakthrough in the modern alternating current electricity supply system and believed that he discovered a 'thought camera'. 'Tesla's "Thought Camera" Was to Project the Brain's Thought onto a Wall, But...', *Science Vibe*, (11 August, 2016), accessible at: http://sciencevibe.com/2016/08/11/teslas-wackiest-ideas-of-all-time-starting-with-the-thought-camera/ (28 March, 2017). In 1939 Seymon Kirlian, a Russian inventor, discovered that an object on photographic plate or film which is connected to high-voltage source produces an image. The photographic technique is called Kirlian photography, or Kirlianography.

¹⁴⁹ Chidambaram Ramesh, *Thought-Forms and Hallucinations, Some Curious Effects of the Holographic Mind Process*, (Chennai: Notion Press, 2014), p. 76.
¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Snap me deadly



Nadar, Victor Hugo on his Deathbed, 1885, woodburytype, 18.7 x 24.4 cm $^{151}\,$

 $^{^{151}}$ Courtesy The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Accessible at: http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/47421/nadar-gaspard-felix-tournachon-victor-hugo-on-his-deathbed-french-1885/ $(15~{\rm May},\,2014)$



Man Ray, Marcel Proust on his Deathbed, 1922, silver gelatin print, 15.1 x 19.8 cm $^{\rm 152}$

 $^{^{152}}$ Courtesy The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Accessible at: http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/46827/man-ray-marcel-proust-on-his-deathbed-american-november-20-1922/ (15 May, 2014)

A similar idea of capturing the 'vital force' seems to have fascinated Ernest William Hornung, whose 1911 novel *The Camera Fiend*¹⁵³ is a hair-raising fictional tale of a scientist caught up in the paradox of taking human life in order to prove that life is eternal.

The protagonist of the story, Dr. Baumgartner, is a manic scientist obsessed with the idea that 'a man's soul may be caught apart, may be cut off from his body by no other medium than a good sound lens in a light-tight camera'. Dr. Baumgartner, bewitched by the idea of capturing the human soul in a picture, encounters a young photographer, called Pocket, just setting out on his career, who is sleepwalking in London's Hyde Park. A moment before their meeting, a person is murdered and Baumgartner, despite having committed the murder himself, falsely accuses Pocket of the shooting. The young somnambulist is confused about the turn of events and believes Baumgartner's deception; under the pretense of an ensuing friendship, Baumgartner uses the boy for his future deadly photo-experiments. The scientist invites Pocket to be his guest until the boy can clear his mind and decide how to proceed with the unfortunate matter. Pocket, at the mercy of his new friend, accepts the invitation and follows the scientist to his home, where they continue their conversation and share their common enthusiasm for photography.

Pocket grows fond of the scientist and his odd ideas regarding photography and human existence. He tells Dr. Baumgartner that he owns an old camera and is keen to print his own images in a darkroom. Debating the pleasures of the camera, Dr. Baumgartner asks Pocket rhetorically: 'You don't merely press the button and let them do the rest?' The boy, who finds the whole conversation 'too fantastic for serious consideration', dared not make a mistake by saying something that would upset 'those inspired eyes burning fanatically into his'. 'You take portraits of your friends, perhaps?' 'Yes; often,' Pocket replies. 'In the body, I presume?' the doctor continues. 'You only take them in the flesh?' 'Of course,' answers the boy. 'Exactly! I take the spirit,' says the doctor; 'that's the difference'.

Dr. Baumgartner explains to Pocket that in order to continue with his life's ambition, he has asked for, yet has been denied, admission to 'hospital deathbeds, even to the execution-shed in prison'. Having been refused access to both, Baumgartner now wanders the park, taking chances with dreaming men and hoping to capture their souls in the moment of waking. This, according to the doctor's reasoning, is the moment when the 'fleeting soul' returns to its 'human envelope'.

¹⁵³ Ernest William Hornung, *The Camera Fiend*, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1911). Hornung, Arthur Conan Doyle's brother-in-law, was close to his famous relative and influenced by Doyle's novels featuring the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes.

¹⁵⁴ All quotes are from: Hornung, 1911, p. 44, p. 41, p. 45, p. 45, p. 41, p. 42, p. 46, p. 214.

Reliving the victorious moment of photographic inception by 'arresting light, arresting its flight', ¹⁵⁵ the doctor believes that it is necessary to capture 'the flight of the soul' to prove his hypothesis that the otherwise invisible soul can be seen photographically. Experiencing difficulty in proving his idea, Dr. Baumgartner questions whether the human derelicts he had so far chosen for his experiments had a soul to be photographed at all? The tale concludes with Baumgartner deciding on a drastic course of action; he will shoot himself and photograph his departing spirit in the moment of death. The exposed plate can only be developed after death, and the doctor entrusts this task to the younger man, who forgets to do so and the plate remains undeveloped.

The sensationalist tale of *The Camera Fiend* and Baumgartner's fatal experiment draws together many of the theories and ideas that surrounded photography in the nineteenth century. In France, the real-life physician Hippolyte Ferdinand Baraduc conducted a similarly macabre experiment in an attempt to prove that the unity of mind and soul can be exposed photographically, as it leaves the body at the moment of death. In order to prove his ambitious claim and show that the immortal soul is being carried, as if by a mistral wind, towards the actinic and timeless archive of the photographic universe, the determined physician decided to photograph the 'vital force' of his dying wife and son, as their forces departed into space. A photographic plate, placed onto the bodies of his family in a completely dark room, 'received an impression from the vital forces three hours after death'. According to Baraduc, the developed photographic plate made the misty substance actually visible and, even though posthumously, provided them with the 'light of life'. Baraduc presented the results of his photo-scientific experiments to the Société universelle des études psychiques (Society of Psychic Sciences) in Paris, claiming to have illuminated the human soul photographically, and wrote:

I always see the same subtle force in man, either because he moves a needle that indicates his own movements, after crossing substances, not letting electricity or heat pass through, or because he impresses a sensitive plate with his light radiations. 158

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¹⁵⁵ Referring to Daguerre's famous quote when he made the first photographic image: 'I have arrested light, I have arrested its flight!' In: John Ingledew, *Photography (Portfolio)*, (London: Laurence King Publishing in Association with Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design, 2005), p. 23.

¹⁵⁶ The British Journal of Photography, June 26, 1896, p. 412. Also in: The Photographic Review, Volume 2, Number 1, January, 1897, p. 19.

¹⁵⁷ Another of Baraduc's experiments with the same expectation involved a pigeon, tied to a board and with a photographic plate strapped to it. After Baraduc had cut the pigeon's throat, he wrote that we could observe 'the picture of its death agony taking the form of curling eddies'. For more photographs see: Hippolyte Ferdinad Baraduc, *The Human Soul, its Movements, its Lights, and the Iconography, of the fluidic invisible,* (Paris: G. A. Mann, 1913)

¹⁵⁸ Medeiros, 2015, p. 14.

Even though the experts saw nothing in Baraduc's photographs but technical accidents, the 'effluvists' continue their experiments to the present day.¹⁵⁹

The precedents for Baraduc's photographic ambitions can be traced back to the 1860s, during the period of the industrialisation of portrait photography, when the so-called 'deathbed photographs' were introduced. Three decades later, in the 1890s, this *memento mori* imagery took a dramatic turn and photographers offered commercially available post-mortem photographs, produced from 'the substance of the subject'. In a process known as 'photocinisography', a photograph taken during a person's life was later reprinted by mixing the ashes of the deceased with a light-sensitive substance, which was brushed onto the paper. 160

¹⁵⁹ Ted Serios claimed to be able to project his thoughts directly on film. In the 1960s a psychiatrist Jule Eisenbud published a book about his psychic powers believing to be genuine. Please see: Jule Eisenbud, *The World of Ted Serios: Thoughtographic Studies of an Extraordinary Mind*, (New York, NY: Morrow, 1967). ¹⁶⁰ Rosalind Krauss, 'Tracing Nadar', in: *October*, 5, 1978, pp. 29–47, p. 37.



Hippolyte Ferdinand Baraduc, a photograph of his dying wife Nadine, 1909¹⁶¹

 $^{^{161}}$ Baraduc believed that the misty substance visible on the photograph is Nadine's soul leaving her body. The photograph accessible at: http://rationalwiki.org/w/images/c/ce/Soul_Photograph.jpg (15 March, 2014)

Along with these dubious demonstrations of capturing brain imagery, the established Victorian author and photographer Lewis Carroll, as early as 1855, wrote about a mechanical apparatus pertinently named 'a psychographic machine'. In his 1855 text 'Photography Extraordinary', Carroll spoke of this 'telepathic' apparatus, which can transcribe the invisible mental domain onto a light-sensitive recording surface:

The machine being in position, and a mesmeric rapport established between the mind of the patient and the object glass, the young man was asked whether he wished to say anything; he feebly replied "Nothing." He was then asked what he was thinking of, and the answer, as before, was "Nothing". The artist on this pronounced him to be in a most satisfactory state, and at once commenced the operation. The paper had been exposed for the requisite time, it was removed and submitted to our inspection; we found it to be covered with faint and almost illegible characters. 162

Carroll's machine is clearly a prototype photographic camera, and this is, moreover, indicated at the beginning of his 'futurist' text:

The recent extraordinary discovery of Photography, as applied to the operations of the mind, has reduced the art of novel-writing to the mere mechanical labour. We have been kindly permitted by the artist to be present during one of his experiments; but as the invention has not yet been given to the world, we are only at liberty to relate the results, suppressing all details of chemicals and manipulation.¹⁶³

Around the same time, in the 1850s, a curious incident happened: Nadar himself received a letter requesting a telepathic photograph of M. Gazebon, wishing his portrait to be taken in Paris while he himself prefers to remain in Pau. 164 By then, however, photographing thoughts had become a lucrative business and early photographic studios soon took the possibility of photographing mental imagery one step further by offering 'long-range photography (photographie à distance)'165 and photographic psychic readings. Not only was it claimed that a photograph could decipher secret thoughts of a person at the moment of death, but also that photography could now be used as a mind-reading device, predicting the future of the living. The notorious link to the invisible had, moreover, been emphasised by the press, which often

¹⁶² Lewis Carroll, 'Photography Extraordinary', 1855, reprinted in: Vicki Goldberg, ed., *Photography in* Print, Writings from 1816 to the Present, (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), pp. 115-118.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Nadar, 1978, p. 11.

¹⁶⁵ Krauss, 1978, p. 33. Italics used in the original citation.

used the word necromancy – a manner of communication with the dead in order to predict the future – to describe early photographic techniques. The reflection in the mirror was believed to be able to surpass human vision, and a daguerreotype was henceforth seen as 'a mirror that shows the future'. ¹⁶⁶ A new profession emerged, that of photo-astrologer, for which advertisements appeared daily:

Your future husband or wife's true carte-de-visite.—The celebrated French astrologer will send the true C.D.V. of your intended, with age and date of marriage, for 16 stamps; three questions answered for 2s. 6d. State age and sex. Send stamped directed envelope to ———, Greek Street, Soho, London. 167

However, forays into photographic fortune-telling did not always end successfully, and police investigations were carried out to arrest these opportunistic photographers. Photographs might not only show the invisible, but also that which might not wished to be seen. Moholy, for instance, writes about an incident in which a photograph destroyed domestic bliss. A man who had commissioned a photograph of his estate was devastated when he saw the resulting image, and exclaimed:

But Sir, I wanted a photograph of my estate—and now—what a shame—what does this mean—the damned neighbour at my wife's window! [...] Your daguerreotype is an infernal invention—one does not make such things public—it is an insult—an outrage!¹⁶⁸

Whether or not the afore mentioned texts are fictional or scientific, they show that the desire for an automated, or objective, record of the imperceptible, such as photographs of thoughts and ideas, was a common fantasy from the earliest days of the photographic medium. Photography, which has always been undeniably associated with a presence of the world via the image, is perhaps then a medium for disclosure rather than creation?

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¹⁶⁶ The expression 'a mirror that shows the future' is taken from Yi Gu's article, 'What's in a name? Photography and the Reinvention of Visual Truth in China, 1840–1911', where the scholar refers to the use of mirrors in Eastern religious and mythological traditions. In: Yi Gu, 2013, pp. 120–138, p. 124.

¹⁶⁷ The Photographic News, March 29, Thomas Piper, London, 1866, p. 156.

¹⁶⁸ Moholy, 1939, p. 101.

Weegee Board¹⁶⁹

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¹⁶⁹ Usher Felling (1899–1968), born in the then Austro-Hungarian Empire, emigrated to New York in the 1909 and his first name was changed to Arthur. Felling worked as a notorious street photographer, known for having a police radio installed in his car and being informed about an emergency or event occurring in the city at the moment the authorities themselves were notified about it. This often enabled Felling to arrive at the scene within minutes of the event having taken place, as though he were able to predict the future; hence his pseudonym, Weegee (a phonetic version of the Ouija board / ˈwixdʒə, bxd/).

The ghost in the machine is as important as the soul in the body. 170

Cecil Beaton

 $^{^{\}rm 170}$ Beaton and Buckland, 1975, p. 17.



Héctor García Cobo, Fotógrafo de pecados (Photographer of Sins), 1950, silver gelatin print¹⁷¹

 $^{^{171}}$ Courtesy Throckmorton Fine Art, New York. The camera Kodak Flash Batman is from the late 1940s or early 1950s. The photograph exhibited at the exhibition *The Camera Exposed* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (23 July 2016 – 5 March 2017). Accessible at: https://www.artsy.net/artwork/hector-garcia-fotografo-de-pecados (23 July, 2016)

The belief that both, souls and the processes of the brain, could be photographed was common in the nineteenth century and French scientists were not alone in their beliefs. In the age that simultaneously promoted science and spiritualism, photography established a curious but firm connection between the practice itself and that of the spiritual medium. In fact, it was only a few years after Niépce had washed off the 'bitumen of Judea', ¹⁷² as the light-sensitive substance was then known, from his photographic plates that a commercial version of the pioneering experiments became a lucrative business.

In March 1861, a Boston engraver, William H. Mumler, intending to photograph himself in a friend's studio, focused the camera on an empty chair, uncapped his camera lens and rushed to sit on the unoccupied chair. When the plate was later developed it revealed a surprising scene of a young girl sitting on Mumler's knee. The startled photographer showed the plate to his friend, who explained that he had probably used an old and previously exposed sheet of glass which had not been properly cleaned, and therefore the negative underneath was still partly visible. 173 'This theory,' said Mumler, 'was at the time, with my limited knowledge of photography, acceptable, and when asked by my employers and others how the picture was produced, the above statement was given'. 174 However, not giving up on his wish to believe that the image was a result of a less mundane occurrence, Mumler decided to show his ghostly portrait to a follower of spiritualism, who passed it on to the New York newspaper *Herald and Progress*, which then printed the photograph and thus altered Mumler's career. 175 After the publication of the image, Mumler was thought to have the powers of a medium, and the genre of spirit photography began to develop. 176

In the mid-nineteenth century, people practising spiritualism, which followed shortly after the arrival of photography and coincided with the introduction of magnetism and electricity,

¹⁷² The material was also known as 'Jew's pitch' or Syrian asphalt.

¹⁷³ Similar ghostly apparitions frequently occurred due to the cost of the photographic glass plates, as the plates were often used for multiple sittings without being washed properly between the sittings.

¹⁷⁴ Louis Kaplan, *The Strange Case of William Mumler, Spirit Photographer*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 70.

¹⁷⁵ Medeiros, 2015, pp.1–21.

¹⁷⁶ The term 'spirit photography' was coined by Andrew Glendinning in 1874, whereas the first spirit photographs were taken in 1851. In: Harvey, 2007, p. 159. In his book, *Seizing the Light: A Social History of Photography* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education, 2008), Robert J. Hirsch writes that '[s] tories later surfaced that Mumler hired a man to remove photographs of deceased relatives from homes, bring them to Mumler to be copied, and then return the pictures. This agent then directed the relatives to Mumler's studio, where through a combination of double exposure and manipulation Mumler produced the desired results—a spirit image of their dead loved one.' (p. 133). Helping mourners to cope with tragic losses in American Civil War (1861–1865), spirit photography was in the ascendant by 1870s. Its revival occurred from the time of the First World War throughout the 1920s and even after World War II.

believed that the visible originated in the invisible. The so-called 'phantasmatic entities' found on photographs confirmed the spiritualists' beliefs and 'demonstrated' that the immaterial could, indeed, be photographed. James Coates, a member of the Society for the Study of Supernormal Photography, spoke favourably of differing realities and stated in his 1911 book *Photographing the Invisible*: 'I view photography as applied to the visible, the material invisible and the immaterial invisible or the psychic'. ¹⁷⁷ Spiritualists were further convinced that the invisible was in the service of spirit photography, showing the invisible in the scientific sense and beyond what we can see with the naked eye. 'Surely,' Coates continues, 'this is photographing the invisible. [...] Clairvoyants [...] have sometimes seen the spirit form in the room before it has been photographed'. ¹⁷⁸

Soon after the announcement of photography in 1839, spiritualists took the medium's technical possibilities one step further, manifesting Balzac's fear, and 'created something from nothing'. The available technology made spiritualists' endeavours convincing, and the 'medium of light', one of the names photography was appropriately given, highlighted the idea that no image is 'itself', but is always numerous and in layers. Light imprinted ideas as spectrums and could be seen to connect the spiritual domain with the material substance. Spirit photography made apparitions credible photographically; that is, indexically. As early as 1882 a British artist and spiritualist medium, Georgiana Houghton, published a comprehensive report of séances, entitled *Chronicles of the Photographs of Spiritual Beings and Phenomena Invisible to the Material Eye*, 180 providing a number of spiritualist photographs.

The point of such 'possessed photographs' seemed to be that they were impossible to reach by the human senses alone. Instead, photography entwined the natural with the supernatural and showed the supposedly everlasting union between the spiritual life to aspire to and the mundane one presented by reality. The apparent photographs of ghosts and apparitions acquired the characteristics of Jacob's Ladder, in which the immortal souls slid between planes of existence, making themselves eternal on a piece of glass and paper at will.

The limits of paranormal photography were reached in the 1870s, when the Scottish photographer John Beattie declared that his images were more than photographs of spirits because, in fact, they were 'made by spirits', or by some kind of 'invisible workers' operating

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¹⁷⁷ James Coates, Photographing the Invisible: Practical Studies in Supernormal Reality, Script, and Other Allied Phenomena, (London: L. N. Fowler, 1911), p. 1.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p.p. 3, 8.

¹⁷⁹ Nadar, 1978, p. 9.

¹⁸⁰ Georgiana Houghton, Chronicles of the Photographs of Spiritual Beings and Phenomena Invisible to the Material Eye, (London: E. W. Allen, 1882).

the photographic plates themselves. Like Coates, Beattie viewed the resulting imagery as 'a new branch of photography, namely the possibility of photographing forms invisible to the common vision'. A later attempt at photographing psychic processes was carried out by an Australian journalist, Madge Donohoe, whose 1930s 'photographs of thoughts', or 'skotographs', were mostly blurred and shadowy illustrations of her purportedly telepathic contact with the photo-sensitive plates, though she carried them out in the belief that her 'dark images' enhanced the invisible domain of the mental processes. In a similar way to Baraduc, Donohoe made her images with no camera, by merely 'overlapping the plaque next to her face or head and letting the messenger imprint his message'. 182

Acting as a psychic medium, photography could be seen to occupy the middle ground between the human and the mystical, between pure perception and pure imagination; not yet spiritual in being but nevertheless in form. John Harvey emphasises this analogy when he writes that one of the first books of photographs, Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature* (1844–1846), 'summons up the idea that photographs, like Veronica Veil and the Turin Shroud, were images made not by human hands, but by mysterious external forces'. ¹⁸³ Talbot himself writes in the book that the 'Photogenic Drawings' are

obtained by the mere action of Light upon sensitive paper. They have been formed or depicted by optical and chemical means alone, and without the aid of any one acquainted with the art of drawing. It is needless, therefore, to say that they differ in all respects, and as widely as possible, in their origin, from plates of the ordinary kind, which owe their existence to the united skill of the Artist and the Engraver.

They are impressed by Nature's hand [...] a first attempt to exhibit an Art of so great singularity...¹⁸⁴

Talbot's theories are indicative of the early years of photography, when photographers appeared to step aside so that 'spirits' of nature, such as light and colour, form and shape, could manifest themselves without first being filtered through an artist's perceptions and emotions. Puzzled by how spirits appeared in pictures, Trail Taylor, president of the Photographic Society of London for several years, asked himself: 'Pictorially they ['psychic

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¹⁸¹ John Beattie, 'Spirit Photography', *The British Journal of Photography*, (July 11, 1873), p. 325. ¹⁸² Medeiros, 2015, p. 14. So called 'thought photography', known also as 'projected thermography', 'psychic photography', 'nengraphy' or 'nensha', is a contemporary phenomenon. The practice is based

^{&#}x27;psychic photography', 'nengraphy' or 'nensha', is a contemporary phenomenon. The practice is based on a psychic ability to 'burn' images from one's mind directly onto a photo-sensitive surface telepathically.

¹⁸³ Harvey, 2007, p. 26.

¹⁸⁴ Talbot, 1844.

figures'] are vile, but how they came up there?'185 In the same article, published in the 1893 issue of the *British Journal of Photography*, Taylor even complains that 'psychic figures behaved badly':

Some were in focus, others not so; some were lightened from the right, while the sitter was so from the left; some were comely, others not so; some monopolized the major portion of the plate, quite obliterating the material sitters; others were as if an atrociously badly vignetted portrait, or one cut out of a photograph by a can opener, or equally badly clipped out, were held up behind the sitter. But here is the point. Not one of these figures, which came out so strongly in the negative, was visible in any form or shape during the time of exposure in the camera. 186

However, the apparitions that miraculously imprinted themselves onto the photographic plates during their exposure had less to do with technical aspects of a camera, such as the shutter and lens, and more to do with the chemical sensitising of the plates before the half-provisional exposure with the sitter took place. It is documented in the photographic press that it was requested that a sitter who wished to participate in visualising the spiritual domain should send the photographic plates to the studio a few days beforehand so that the 'invisible operator' could 'pre-magnetise' the plates before the photograph was taken. The logic of the camera's executing shutter interrupting linear time was thus disturbed by the chemical hocuspocus, ¹⁸⁷ or rather *hocus-focus*, being performed directly onto the photographic emulsion prior to exposure.

The necessary 'pre-magnetisation' appeared to soften the realities between the worlds of the living and the dead and, more than an exercise in photographic optics, the developed plate was seen as a hyper-responsive screen, in the service of two images reaching out from opposite viewpoints to touch. Ectoplasm, the apparent materialisation of spiritual energy, was only one of the mysterious possibilities spirit photographers used for the successful materialisation of the ethereal realm. Perceived as a milk-like substance, ectoplasm 'was feminine, moist and labile and often smelt of the bodily fluids to which it was imagistically related to (because it was usually chiffon secreted in the medium's vagina, or ingested by her before the séance)'. 188 This ectoplasm turned a body into a photo-sensitive agent encouraging the otherworldly creatures

¹⁸⁵ Trail Taylor, 'Spirit Photography with Remarks on Fluorescence', *The British Journal of Photography*,

⁽March 17, 1893).

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Although the origin of the phrase hocus-pocus is not clear, it is believed to come from the Christian tradition: 'Hoc est corpus meum.'

¹⁸⁸ M. T. Jolly, *Fake Photographs: making Truth in Photography*, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, (Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney, Sydney, 2003), p. 175.

to manifest themselves among humans. When soaked in chemicals, the gauze-like substance became one with the gelatinous photographic emulsion, which turned the invisible image into the visible one.



Photograph of Eva C showing ectoplasm made from a Paris newspaper, $Le \, Miroir$, 1912^{189}

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¹⁸⁹ Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, *Phenomena of Materialisation: A Contribution to the Investigation of Mediumistic Teleplastics*, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1923).

A famous defender of spiritualism, the British novelist and the creator of the notorious detective *Sherlock Holmes*, Arthur Conan Doyle, known as 'the St. Paul of spiritualism', described ectoplasm as:

a viscous, gelatinous substance, which appeared to differ from every known form of matter in that it could solidify and be used for material purposes, and yet could be reabsorbed, leaving absolutely no trace even upon the clothes which it had traversed in leaving the body. 190

Ectoplasm frequently embodied the dead, and in some accounts walked around the séance room and even flirted with guests. A lack of light was of course crucial to the séance room, and, like analogue photography, spiritual mediums could most often manifest themselves under a ruby-red-coloured light or in complete darkness. In *Photography and Spirit*, Harvey explains why the chance of a successful image was more likely to happen in dark spaces:

[p]hotographing spirits involved the collaboration of two mediums – a Spiritualist sensitive and a light-sensitive plate. In both the photographer's darkroom and the dark room of the séance practitioners conducted their business, often under a ruby-coloured light. Red is a spectral wavelength [...], which, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was believed to be conducive to concentrating the apparitional image both inside the shadowy chamber of the medium's cabinet and onto the camera's dark slide.¹⁹¹

The montaged entities of spirit photographs, or 'extras' as they were called, were a peculiar merging of imagined, though culturally determined, visions, which interrupted the common sense of seeing-is-believing and miraculously transformed believing into seeing. Once again, faith was illuminated in order to be framed. This combination of the observed and the imagined was not an original moment in the history of art; the kinship between the visible and the imagined can be seen to date back to the cave paintings of Lascaux, yet it was, nonetheless, seen as the first authentic testimony to the existence of things that are ordinarily not seen. Long before Barthes' time, the photographers of the paranormal seemed to adopt one of the theoretician's most important dictums, namely that 'Photography never lies: or

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¹⁹⁰ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Edge of the Unknown*, (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1930). Arthur Conan Doyle was a firm believer of spiritualism and spirit photography. In 1922 he published an essay 'Case for Spirit Photography' in defence of the spiritualist practice. Similarly to de la Roche, who referred to light-sensitive matter as the 'viscous matter in 1760, Doyle used the same term for ectoplasm, i.e. a 'viscous matter.'

¹⁹¹ Harvey, 2007, p. 26.

rather, it can lie as to the meaning of the thing, being by nature *tendentious*, never as to its existence'. ¹⁹² In spirit photography, thus even indexical proximity could be invented: 'henceforth the past is as certain as the present'. ¹⁹³

By the early twentieth century, the belief in otherworldly entities had diminished and science had explained away the supernatural mania as a neurological disorder of sorts, defusing the situation with a pathological explanation rather than a supernatural one. Positive science had rationalised the ghostly apparitions as feverish manifestations of delirium, illusion and fraud. The capricious apparitions of spirit photography were therefore often no more than collective projections of human conditions:

[...] spirits have no innate form: they are cultural projections of human needs and emotions. Such as primal fear and loathing, fetish and neurosis, cruelty and prejudice, uncertainty and anticipation, and longing and idealism; they reflect belief systems, cosmologies and world views; and are influenced by literary, oral and pictorial accounts, past and present. Images of spirits in photographs are no different in this respect. 195

In other words, via photography you can make people believe anything. For the practitioners of spirit photography, and their audience, the photograph 'was a voodoo or votive object passed between spirit, medium and sitter in the private ritual of portrait sitting. The authenticity of the psychic photograph was not based on how closely it laminated itself to an anterior event, but how strongly it effected affect in its users.' 196 The question therefore remains: how far can we take the quest for testimonial truth in photography? And what would such truth say of the world, which is nothing but an appearance, a hunch? 197

In his essay 'Depictive Traces: on the Phenomenology of Photography', Mikael Pettersson offers an answer by saying that 'the phenomenology of photography seems to *depend* on what

¹⁹⁴ After the 1920s, spiritualism evolved in three different directions: syncretism, the spiritualist church and psychical research. All of these directions exist today; among the most recognisable is the Society for Psychical Research established in 1882 in London.

¹⁹² Barthes, 2000, p. 87. Italics used in the original citation.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 88.

¹⁹⁵ Harvey, 2007, p. 157.

¹⁹⁶ Jolly, 2003, p. 169.

¹⁹⁷ One of the (rarer) French editions of Barthes' *La chamber claire: Note sur la photographie (Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography)*, has a Tibetan Buddist writer discussing the response of a lama to the loss of his son. 'Marpa was very upset when his son was killed, and one of his disciples said, "You used to tell us that everything is illusion. How about the death of your son? Isn't it illusion?" And Marpa replied, "True, but my son's death is a super-illusion". Roland Barthes, *La chamber claire: Note sur la photographie*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1980).

we believe about the images we look at'.¹⁹⁸ The mind believes what the eyes see. Authenticity is thus not present in terms of indexical testament, but rather in the photograph's emotional affect that supersedes its representation of 'reality'. Or, as seen by Barthes, '[f]rom a phenomenological viewpoint in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation'.¹⁹⁹ Photography 'bears the effigy to that crazy point, where affect (love, compassion, grief, enthusiasm, desire) is a guarantee of Being'.²⁰⁰ Photographic reality is thus true less to appearance than to presence. Seen like this, photography might be more a matter of being than of resemblance. The power of photographs derives from this compelling illusion of presence, which seems real whenever we look at them. It is perhaps more through this sense of a continuous appearing, than for their appearance per se, that photographs exert their power.

Indeed, denying the invisible when considering photography has never seemed to be an option. As an inventor of photography, Talbot dealt with the invisible with scientific zeal, and understood it not as something paranormal, but rather as a part of nature that the human eye alone was unable to 'see'. The photography pioneer worked towards and openly speculated about the future possibility of being able to photograph 'invisible radiations', and therefore recognised the photo-graphic potential to see beyond what the human eye can perceive. In *The Pencil of Nature*, Talbot further explains his vision of this optical phenomenon (the apparatus), which would reveal the realm of reality beyond the human scope of ability:

Among the many novel ideas which the discovery of Photography has suggested, is the following rather curious experiment or speculation. [...] When a ray of solar light is refracted by a prism and thrown upon a screen, it forms there the very beautiful colored band known by the name of the solar spectrum.

Experiments have found that if this spectrum is thrown upon a sheet of sensitive paper, the violet end of it produces the principal effect: and, what is truly remarkable, a similar effect is produced by certain *invisible rays* which lie beyond the violet, and beyond the limits of the spectrum, and whose existence is only revealed to us by this action which they exert.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Mikael Pettersson, 'Depictive Traces, On the Phenomenology of Photography', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 69: 2, (2011), pp.185–196. Italics used in the original citation.

¹⁹⁹ Barthes, 2000, p. 89.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 113.

²⁰¹ Krauss, 1978, pp. 29–47, pp. 40–41. Italics used in the original citation.

Soon after the technical processes of photography were mastered, the early researchers seemed to move away from what was apparent in the world and turned their photographic experiments towards the speculative and the imaginary in human life. While those among them with commercial aims were led by the desire to profit from the illusion and to provide sitters with proof of the afterworld, others looked for ways to establish that the universe of the invisible could be accessed photographically.

3. NAMING

The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to
point. ²⁰²
Gabriel García Márquez

 $^{^{202}}$ Gabriel García Márquez, $\it One~Hundred~Years~of~Solitude~$ [1967], translated by Gregory Rabassa, (London: Pan Books, 1978), p. 9.



Timothy H. O'Sullivan, Steamboat Springs, Washoe, Nevada, 1867, albumen silver print, $21.3 \times 28.1 \text{ cm}^{203}$

 203 Courtesy George Eastman Museum, Rochester.

According to Ralph Waldo Emerson, a nineteenth-century poet and transcendentalist, [a]ll things in nature have a language and a soul and the role of an artist is to contemplate and portray this inner character, particularly of the human subject'. 204 This perceptual wonder between presentation and representation, between cognition and recognition, which is to say between what is seen and what is known, even between seeing and saying, poses a phenomenological question, which is: can a photograph show something that I did not see for myself? Can one see what one does not yet know? Or does seeing axiomatically suggest that we already know that, which we are looking at?

Now, if what one sees is a matter of attention, and what one notices a matter of expectation, one sees what one knows. This proposition goes both ways, and one could equally say that knowledge comes as an experience, while the image is an experience itself. Thus knowledge comes from the image. This, however, is not to negate Jean-Paul Sartre's claim that there is nothing in an image but what one puts in it, as the philosopher is clearly right as far as the interpretation of images is concerned: we do not see what we do not know. Or rather, we see it differently. An image, Sartre claims, is a mere consciousness of a represented object; it is defined by what I know of it. 'I can keep an image in view as long as I want: I will never find anything there but what I put there', writes Sartre at the beginning of *L'Imaginaire* (The Imaginary). 'In a word,' he continues:

the object of perception constantly overflows consciousness; the object of an image is never anything more than the consciousness one has of it; it is defined by that consciousness: one can never learn from an image what one does not know already.

[...] origin [of an object] cannot be deciphered from the image: in the very act that gives me the object as imaged is included the knowledge (connaissance) of what it is.²⁰⁷

Roland Barthes, who wrote *Camera Lucida* in homage to Sartre's book, would seem to agree with Sartre when he suggests that 'there is no perception without immediate categorization [...] the photograph is verbalized in the very moment it is perceived; better, it is only perceived verbalized'.²⁰⁸ Both claims are apt; being introduced to lived reality is nevertheless being introduced to the way of seeing. Barthes' and Sartre's observations in turn engender many questions. What kind of knowledge is Sartre referring to, and could this knowledge ever

²⁰⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Nature', 1836, quoted in: *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by Brooks Atkinson, (New York, NY: Modern Library, New York, 1968), p. 15.

²⁰⁵ 'We know not through our intellect but through our experience.' Maurice Merleau-Ponty

²⁰⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary* [1940], (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2010), p. 9.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 9–10. Italics used in the original citation.

²⁰⁸ Roland Barthes, 'The Photographic Message', 1961, reprinted in: Susan Sontag, ed., *A Roland Barthes Reader*, (New York, NY: Vintage, 1993), p. 207.

spill over into an individual's reality? Can a photograph act unpredictably? Would we be able to see without language, or do we see only what we can name already? Does language form a thing? It certainly recognises it: to say a word is to look at a thing. Is that to say that we define by naming, but we name by looking?

When Rabindranath Tagore was once asked why he travelled extensively, he answered: 'to see properly'. To see properly, however, refers to cognitive abilities as well as visual: I can see a man standing in front of me, but I can also understand what he is saying, for *I see*. If, for instance, I, as a photographer, were asked a question about my peripatetic habits, I might have given a similar answer, saying: 'I photograph in order to show the world as it has never existed before. I photograph to see properly.'

Noticing a form that has never existed before, I imagine, is to name. We name things in order to make them 'happen' and to make them 'present'. Indeed, what is nothing if not the presence of an unidentifiable thing? To name is to give a word to that which has previously been pointed at with a gesture. To say a word is to look at the world, and vice versa: to look at the world is to pronounce a word. Moreover, to know the name is to possess the thing. 'I have called you by name; you are mine,' God says to the Israelites in The Old Testament.²⁰⁹ Ancient societies, for instance, believed that the person one became was prophesied by the name one was given. To name a person in the ancient world was to call forward that individual's character, their lineage, their spirit and their qualities. It was the name that carried the person, and not the other way around. To know the name of someone was to know the essence of that person. With naming the general was lost. In this sense, the ancients believed in the magic of manifestation, be it verbal or pictorial. Later, in modern times, one of the earliest daguerreotypes (the photographic process christened after the inventor himself), Boulevard du Temple, enchanted two men into the picture. Who are these men, known as the first individuals captured on a photographic plate? Without a name, they are anybody. Anybody is nobody in particular. Like the latent image, or an unspoken word, they still exist in potentia.

In his 1985 essay 'Fotografieren als Definieren' ('To Photograph is to Define'), Vilém Flusser suggests that '[t]he final purpose of the operation of defining is to get at a concept that has an extent of "one and one only" and with an infinite content'.²¹⁰ Flusser links his reasoning to

²⁰⁹ Isaiah 43: 1–21, *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version.

²¹⁰ Vilém Flussser, 'To photograph is to define', 1985, reprinted in: *Philosophy of Photography*, 2:2, (2011), pp. 202–204, p. 202. The essay, written in 1985 and titled 'Fotografieren als Definieren / To photograph is to define' was first published in *European Photography* 55, edited by Andreas Müller-Pohle, 1994, pp. 49–50.

photography, saying that the '[c]oncepts that have an extent of "one" and a content of "infinity" are called "proper names" [...] The photo camera is a tool to produce proper names'.²¹¹ Flusser illustrates the idea of this singularity, yet infinite potential, with the example of a table:

For instance: "This particular table" is a concept that means a unique phenomenon with an infinite content: it is round, brown, made of wood, it is antiquated and so forth, ad infinitum, which renders it impossible to enumerate all the contents of the concept.²¹²

By applying this idea of a content value to photography, Flusser seems to suggest that a photograph renders the world around us, but that this particular photograph, which is 'one and one only', carries an infinite number of inexhaustible interpretations.

However, the philosopher further notes that the concrete world of names is 'necessarily confused, because "concrete" and "confused" are synonymous: both "con-crescere" and "con-fundere" mean "to entangle",' whereas the 'photo camera is a tool to dis-entangle our confusion'. By saying a tree, a conifer, a pine tree, everyone imagines what they have seen already. Having a photograph of a tree, one sees the unimaginable – this very (a specific) tree, conifer, pine tree. The photograph takes the concrete into particular and general into specific.

Even though nothing seems simpler than to lay out one proper name from the other: 'John' may be something other than 'Fred', Flusser explains that this is not the case. 'The proper name "John" has an infinite content and so has the proper name "Fred" and, in order to delineate the one from the other, one would have to enumerate everything that is contained within these two contents'.²¹⁴ In order to separate one from the other, Flusser seems to suggest, one would need to list all their content, all their being. It is therefore impossible to define the 'concrete world' of 'John' or 'Fred'. To identify that which separates one proper name from another would take an infinite time, because a separation between different concepts can only be recognised through first recognising similarities.

A clear divide between proper names, between one concept and another, is therefore impossible. At the beginning of *The Imaginary*, in which Sartre considers the role of imagination in human consciousness, he writes: 'there is, at every moment, always infinitely

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²¹¹ Ibid., p. 202.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid., p. 203.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

more than we can see; to exhaust the richness of my current perception would take an infinite time'.²¹⁵

The attempt at naming, at raising something 'proper' and infinite out of nothing, is the reason why photography cannot copy the world. Due to the world being continually in production, reality always precedes us. Reality also precedes our immediate encounter with the latent, with that which is not yet shown but nevertheless present. The photograph, therefore, has nothing to reproduce, as it gives an image anterior to the copy, as well as to the narrative.

Sartre's statement in turn poses further questions: does image come before language, or is image the abstraction of language? Is the search for meaning a search for an image? Does meaning lie in image or in language? Generally speaking, the image follows the object – we see and only then do we imagine. We therefore imagine what we have seen already. For we are born into a certain social and cultural reality, which always precedes us, we can only imagine what we know. Finally, as Silverman writes, we might see what we are 'told' to see:

Every culture attempts to colonize the field of vision—to determine who is visible, who is invisible, who is "allowed" to see, and what visibility, invisibility, and vision signify. This colonization has real consequences; we are psychically and socially constrained by the visual categories into which we are slotted.²¹⁶

That is to say that not only do we see what we know, but also that we see the presence of things, as we know them.²¹⁷ The materialistic approach to language supports this proposition and argues that our perception is in line with what we know about that which is in our view. 'Gestalt', for example, 'has long shown how, when we look at a confusing image, the fact that someone tells us that it represents a man seated on a chair or a half-opened can of food is sufficient for us to see those things'.²¹⁸

By contrast, however, let us remember Alfred Stieglitz's photograph of Marcel Duchamp's ready-made work from 1917. The artist, or his female alter-ego Rrose Sélavy, adopted the then-fashionable avant-garde interest in mystical dicta in a highly provocative manner.

²¹⁵ Sartre, 2010, p. 9.

²¹⁶ Silverman, 2015, p. 149.

²¹⁷ We see within a certain context, which sometimes means that material objects are invisible to us. The Inuit, for example, 'see' many different types of snow, which the others do not. Likewise, certain social groups can become 'invisible': the long-term unemployed, for instance, become invisible, even statistically.

²¹⁸ Tiqqun, *This is not a Program*, (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2011), p. 157. Italics used in the original citation.

Duchamp's *Fountain*, or 'the Buddha of the Bathroom'²¹⁹, as Guillaume Apollinaire liked to call it, is an example of the opposite way of conceiving: the object in front of us is a urinal, yet we refuse to look at an object and prefer to see the idea. A similar disregard in relation to our conditioned eye happens with sacred images. Certain religious traditions turn their deities into images, which, in some cases then become deities themselves.²²⁰ Could we take this further and say that in the 'natural' world we see with our eyes, thus seeing comes before language, whereas in the 'cultural' world we see with language? Paradoxically, then, using language to turn 'nature' into 'culture', we are able to *see* only what we know.²²¹

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²¹⁹ The term 'Buddha of the bathroom' was first used by a poet Louise Norton in 1917 and it was later taken up by Apollinaire.

²²⁰ In the Orthodox tradition, the believers close or cover their eyes at the moment when they step in front of the icon of a saint. In: John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, BBC, Episode 1, broadcast 1972. Accessible at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pDE4VX_9Kk&t=3s (20 October, 2012) One of the meaning of icon is 'an image in the mind'. An example of the opposite is 'darśana', an 'auspicious sight' of the Hinduism, which literally means a 'glimpse' or a 'view'; it is a blessing a believer receives from the deity through an image of the deity.

²²¹ Eugene Richards articulates the perceptual dilemma between the visual and the verbal in photography saying that: 'Naturally you get more skills. But the danger with more skills is you have to be very careful that your skill doesn't out-reach what you are really feeling. We as photographers have kind of preordained ideas about what everything is — from happiness to tragedy. Look at the media, and happiness is clothing, cars or kisses, which is not necessarily happiness, and sadness isn't necessarily the grieving mother over the casket. But as you get more adept at a language, sometimes you fall into cliché.' In: James Estrin, 'Eugene Richards: A Life in Photography', *The New York Times*, (20 April, 2017). Accessible at: https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2017/04/20/eugene-richards-a-life-in-photography/?smid=fb-share&_r=0 (26 September, 2017). Italics used to indicate a double meaning of the verb 'to see' in English: it refers to vision (a perceptual quality) and to cognition (a cognitive ability to understand).

There is a delicate form of the empirical which identifies itself so intimately with its object that it thereby
becomes theory. ²²²
Johann Wolfgang Goethe

 $^{^{222}}$ Walter Benjamin, 'A Short History of Photography', 1931, reprinted in: Screen, 13:1, (March 1, 1972), pp. 5–26, p. 22.



Alfred Stieglitz, Fountain (photograph of assisted readymade by Marcel Duchamp), 1917 silver gelatin print, $23.5 \times 17.8 \text{ cm}^{223}$

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 $^{^{223}}$ Courtesy Georgia O'Keeffe Museum/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Accessible at: https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2010/originalcopy/works05.html#1 (3 May, 2015)

Inasmuch, then, as thinking influences the way we see, observing influences that which is being observed. Following this analogy, one changes the world merely by thinking about it, or indeed, by looking at it. Does this blend of looking and thinking make the act of photographing the act of thinking itself? Can we see photography in the service of thought?²²⁴ Is to photograph to theorise? – it is nonetheless to observe.

Flusser concludes his 1991 essay 'Die Geste des Fotografierens' ('The Gesture of Photographing') by recognizing a link between the act of photographing and what the ancient Greeks called 'theoria', or a 'gesture of seeing'. Indeed, in its original, pre-Cartesian sense, the etymology of the word theoria evokes photography, as it means 'observing', 'contemplating', 'speculating', 'beholding', 'gazing at', 'looking at', 'being aware of'.225 Furthermore, theoria stands for 'a spectacle' or 'that which is viewed'.²²⁶ Because these are all conscious acts or gestures,

it is necessary to describe his [photographer's] gestures in philosophical (reflexive) terms. [...] That is the case for any human gesture, but for the photographer's gesture in particular. The gesture of photographing is a philosophical gesture, or to put it differently: since photography was invented, it is possible to philosophize not only in the medium of words, but also in that of photographs. The reason is that the gesture of photographing is a gesture of seeing, and so engages in what the antique thinkers called "theoria", producing a picture that these thinkers called "idea". 227

Flusser's claim makes the photograph an image of a concept. In 'Fotografieren als Definieren' (To Photograph is to Define'), Flusser further explains the link between thinking and photographing:

[...] if the camera is a fascinating tool for philosophical contemplation, it is so because it is a machine for the production of concepts. Not because it is a new kind of brush, or a new kind of sword, but because it is a new kind of brain. Cameras are so fascinating, not because they help us to see better, or to act differently, but because they make us

²²⁴ As emphasised in the previous chapter and earlier in this one, a thought, as a photographic motif, has been present since photography's beginnings in the nineteenth century.

²²⁵ Etymology of the word 'theory' accessible at: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=theory (1 September, 2017)

²²⁶ Etymology of the word 'theory' accessible at

http://classic.studylight.org/lex/grk/view.cgi?number=2335 (28 August, 2017)

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 286.

think more properly. Or they at least give us the opportunity of thinking more properly, when used as logical tools for defining.²²⁸

Photography makes us think properly, yet some philosophers suggest photographers do not think, because they cannot think. Flusser, in contrast to his arguments cited above, but in line with his overall understanding of the medium, and François Laruelle, for instance, talk about the necessity of a photographer's non-ability to think. The former extends this idea to suggest that a photographer is nothing but an agglomerate of lucky coincidences; one, who, more than anything else, believes in 'truth', and says: 'Photographers try to be phenomenological, Husserlian people [...] Of course they do not succeed: the image-makers, they don't think, they cannot think – thinking is anti-image'. ²²⁹ By contrast, Laurelle talks about 'naivety' as a form of photographic thinking, and treats naïveté as a conscious decision, 'which, inversely, makes possible an almost absolute disenchantment, like a disinterest for the World at the moment when the photographer adjusts the lens'. ²³⁰ In *Camera Lucida* Barthes speaks of a similar photographic moment, which 'separates attention from perception, and yields up only the former, even if it is impossible without the latter [...] *noesis* without *noeme*, an action of thought without thought'. ²³¹

These observations are pertinent; looking for an image involves a certain kind of wonder, and often relies on all the senses as opposed to sight alone. The photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, for example, speaks of that kind of 'thinking', which 'should be done beforehand and afterwards – never while actually taking a photograph'.²³² Minor White's understanding of the photographic act provides a slightly different proposition, suggesting that the photographer's mind is not simply blank, but rather that its focus is on what will happen at any moment now. In his essay 'The Camera Mind and Eye', White writes:

The state of mind of the photographer while creating is a blank. [...] I must explain that this is a special kind of blank. It is a very active state of mind really, a very receptive state of mind, ready at an instant to grasp an image, yet with no image preformed in it at any time. We should note that the lack of a pre-formed pattern or preconceived idea of how anything ought to look is essential to this blank condition.

²²⁸ Flusser, 2011, p. 204.

²²⁹ 'Television Image and Political Space in the Light of the Romanian Revolution', lecture by Vilém Flusser. April 7, 1990, Kunsthalle Budapest. Accessible at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFTaY2u4NvI (23 January, 2013)

²³⁰ Laruelle, 2012, p. 14.

²³¹ Barthes, 2000, p. 111. Italics used in the original citation.

²³² Nathan Lyons, ed., *Photographers on Photography, Foundations of Modern Photography*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966), p. 41. An interview, 'Henri Cartier-Bresson on the Art of Photography', by Yvonne Baby, was published in *Harper's Magazine*, November, 1961, p. 74.

Such a state of mind is not unlike a sheet of film itself – seemingly inert, yet so sensitive that a fraction of a second's exposure conceives a life in it.²³³

To photograph – or better, to observe – a form that has never existed before is an attempt at looking at the world afresh. Dorothea Lange, for instance, believed that 'to know ahead of time what you're looking for means you're then only photographing your own preconceptions, which is very limiting'.²³⁴ She continues: 'I certainly wouldn't criticize a photographer who works completely without plan, and photographs that to which he instinctively responds. [...] to be like a piece of unexposed, sensitized material. [...] You force yourself to watch and wait'.²³⁵ Robert Frank shared Lange's method of photographing, stating in his 1954 Guggenheim Fellowship application letter, which he wrote with Evans' help, that '[t]he project I have in mind is one that will shape itself as it proceeds, and is essentially elastic'.²³⁶ In other words, nothing that one can envision already would make sense in photography.

That impossibility of predicting the 'photographable' is due to the idea that a photograph is often burdened with an attempt to credibly copy everything, which seems real at that certain moment, and that it is only what we overtly look at. However, according to Barthes, '[w]hatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see'.²³⁷ Inasmuch, then, as philosophising is thinking without proving, photography is observing without presupposing. Everything visible has a copy of the invisible, and photography is a domain of the latter; it belongs to a state where language has not yet been applied, to where there is no knowledge before experience. 'The force of the photograph resides in its capacity to fascinate us and to leave us defenseless because photography,' we read in Eduardo Cadava's and Paola Cortés-Rocca's essay 'Notes on Love and Photography', 'does nothing else than point toward the very center of the Real, toward the place where we remain without words or without a gaze. This is why we so often remain mute in front of an image: it is as if, for a fleeting second, we are viewing what cannot be named.²³⁸

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²³³ Minor White, 'The Camera Mind and Eye', Magazine of Art, 45:1 (January 1952), pp. 16–19.

²³⁴ Milton Meltzer, *Dorothea Lange: A Photographer's Life*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), p. 140.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Caroline Blinder, 'Its Beautiful Visual Entirety', Kerouac's Introduction to Frank's *The Americans*', in: David Cunningham, [et al,], 2008, p. 118.

²³⁷ Barthes, 2000, p. 6.

 $^{^{238}}$ Eduardo Cadava and Paola Cortés-Rocca, 'Notes on Love and Photography', $\it October,\,116$ (2006), pp. 3–34, p. 19.

The perceptual dilemma between seeing something in the world and the ability to make something visible to the world is perhaps central to photography. The proposal made in this chapter, namely that the gesture of photographing is a gesture of thinking, will be further discussed in the following chapter, which foregrounds the photographer's task to look at the world anew and to expose photographically the states of things that have never existed before.

4. ECHO

I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, and I think. 239

Roland Barthes

²³⁹ Barthes, 2000, p. 21.



John William Draper, Moon, 1840, daguerreotype²⁴⁰

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 $^{^{240}}$ Courtesy Getty Images. Accessible at: http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/daguerrotype-of-the-full-moon-taken-in-1840-one-of-the-news-photo/613468640#daguerrotype-of-the-full-moon-taken-in-1840-one-of-the-first-ever-picture-id613468640 (3 November, 2015)

We tend to think about the world in terms of *is*. Being certain about its presence we say, 'that which is, is that which exists'. There is no need to question the obvious, evident world as it gives itself to us. If we see a man, there is a man and if we see a street, there is one. Such a direct, phenomenological proximity is at the heart of analogue photographic images. A photograph is always a reality of something, which exists. Or, as Barthes writes in *Camera Lucida*: 'Every photograph is a certificate of presence'.²⁴¹ However, if the only certainty was the certainty of that which is foreseen, thus the certainty of that which we cannot but take subjectively and emotionally, how could we know of any relations to the 'real'?²⁴² The world performs differently for 'me' than it does for other people, and such an absolute certitude would be nothing but an illusion. Instead, lived reality is a curve whereby everything only becomes anything in relation to something else. That is to say that even though we all might look at the same man and the same street, it is the relationship between the two, which makes it one's particular reality.

'If we were alone in the world, there would be no communication between these "selves," and our non-identity would be a source of perpetual unhappiness,' writes Silverman about the relationship between the world and a person within it. 'Since, however,' she continues,

we share this world with others, who also see and are seen, and touch and are touched, they provide the "rejoinder" for which we would otherwise wait in vain, and we do the same for them. We see because they are visible, and we are visible because they see us. Through their gaze, we are also able to see our own, and when gazing at them, to experience our own visibility.²⁴³

Focusing on the world and a person in the world is not to suggest a division between the two, but rather to propose that we are not detached from that at which we look. By seeing the *other*, one is made visible to the *other*, because a thing and its likeness always already inhabit or possess each other. By looking, we affirm our phenomenological kinship with what there is and bring forward the visible by what we see. 'It is time,' writes Minor White, 'we recalled that "man seen" or "man found" is […] "man made".²⁴⁴ This presence or absence of a gaze creates the world as we see it. It is our potent gaze, the unity of mind and eye, which creates the world as it appears to us. Does this then suggest that there is no separation between

²⁴¹ Barthes, 2000, p. 87.

 $^{^{242}}$ I use the term 'real' as that, which expands beyond the imaginable and escapes both the concrete experience and perception.

²⁴³ Silverman, 2015, p. 88.

²⁴⁴ White, 1952, pp. 16–19.

subjective and objective, just as there is no divide between the inside (our perception of the world) and the outside (the world)?

In his last published essay, 'Eye and Mind', Maurice Merleau-Ponty emphasised the importance of our experiential relationship with the visible world, saying that:

We must take literally what vision teaches us: namely, that through it we come in contact with the sun and the stars, that we are everywhere all at once, and that even our power to imagine ourselves elsewhere—"I am in Petersburg in my bed, in Paris, my eyes see the sun"—or to intend [viser] real beings wherever they are, borrows from vision and employs means we owe to it. Vision alone makes us learn that beings that are different, "exterior," foreign to one another, are yet absolutely together, are "simultaneity": 245

Paraphrasing another of Merleau-Ponty's essays, 'The Intertwining—The Chiasm', photography too may be seen as the medium of relationships, as the philosopher notes:

The look, we said, envelops, palpates, espouses the visible things. As though it were in a relation of pre-established harmony with them, as though it knew them before knowing them, it moves in its own way with its abrupt and imperious style, and yet the views taken are not desultory—I do not look at a chaos, but at things—so that finally one cannot say if it is the look or if it is the things that command.²⁴⁶

The idea of the potent gaze is similar to the act of looking through Robert Hooke's 1694 'picture box'²⁴⁷, by which the world disappears or becomes invisible if no one is looking at it. A photograph happens in the same way. At the beginning of *Camera Lucida* Barthes writes that 'the Photograph is never anything but an antiphon of "Look", "See", "Here it is"'.²⁴⁸ Yet, eyes alone do not suffice to see. They cannot do without the mind; it is the mind that sees. Biologically, seeing is thinking, as eyes are part of the brain, whose functioning is vital for

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²⁴⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind', in: *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art History and Politics*, edited with an Introduction by James M. Edie, translated by Carleton Dallery, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 159–190, p. 187. Italics used in the original citation.

²⁴⁶ Merleau-Ponty. 1968, p. 133.

²⁴⁷ An English philosopher, Robert Hooke (1653–1703), introduced his 'picture box' in a paper to the Royal Society in 1694. He described a portable cone-shaped camera obscura as device that 'take[s] the draught or picture of anything'. Although not very comfortable to use, as a user had his head and shoulders inserted in the device, the tool enabled a sketch of a scene to be made with astonishing accuracy.

²⁴⁸ Barthes, 2000, p. 5.

sight. Images, for instance, continue to appear when we are asleep or have our eyes closed. Images also keep appearing to people who lose their sight later in life. One way of understanding the relationship between the world and a person within it is thus to suggest that vision is developed, and that one learns how to look.

In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty writes about the connection between a reality that reveals itself to us and our perception of that reality, emphasising that 'the world is what we see [...] It is at the same time true that the world is what we see and that, nonetheless, we must learn to see it'.²⁴⁹ He seems to suggest that as an act of observation, photography has little to do with the things you see and everything to do with the way you see them, continuing:

We see the things themselves, the world is what we see: formulae of this kind express a faith common to the natural man and the philosopher—the moment he opens his eye; they refer to a deep-seated set of mute "opinions" implicated in our lives. But what is strange about this fate is that if we seek to articulate it into theses or statements, if we ask ourselves what is this we, what seeing is, and what thing or world is, we enter into a labyrinth and contradictions.

What Saint Augustine said of time—that it is perfectly familiar to each, but that none of us can explain it to the others—must be said of the world [...]

This is the way things are and nobody can do anything about it. It is at the same time true that the world is *what we see* and that, nonetheless, we must learn to see it—first in the sense that we must match this vision with knowledge, take possession of it, *say* what *we* and what *seeing* are, act therefore as if we knew nothing about it, as if here we still had everything to learn.²⁵⁰

In photographic terms, according to Merleau-Ponty, an image is not independent from that which the photographer thinks he sees, because what he sees might be a matter of what he notices, and what he notices may depend on what he expects to see. An observer, after all, is always an observer of himself first: 'I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, and I think', ²⁵¹ as Barthes summarises the attempt at *looking properly*. The idea of a picture waiting to be discovered is also reflected by Minor White, who sees the photographer as one who is in search of an allusive or concealed image; as the one who

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²⁴⁹ Merleau-Ponty, 1968, pp. 3–4. Italics used in the original citation.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. Italics used in the original citation.

²⁵¹ Barthes, 2000, p. 21.

[o]ften [...] passes a corner, saying to himself, "There is a picture here", and if he cannot find it, considers himself the insensitive one. He can look day after day – and one day the picture is visible! Nothing has changed except himself; although, to be fair, sometimes he had to wait till the light performed the magic.²⁵²

We could say then, that by knowing how to see, we look at what is not there. By looking at a tree in a distance, for instance, or even walking around it, one does not see the line separating the tree from the ground and the sky, but one constructs it intellectually. In his essay 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph', Holmes argues that, since perspective – the depth of our vision – is produced by the brain on the basis of stereo vision, the image perceived might be part of an 'optical illusion', and as such no more than a mere 'appearance of reality which cheats the senses with its seeming truth'. Hence, we are 'to believe that the appreciation of solidity by the eye is purely a matter of education'. Considering photography itself as a formation of the mind, the surrealist Salvador Dalí stretches the notion of the educated eye further by suggesting that '[k]nowing how to look is a completely new system of spiritual surveying. Knowing how to look is a means of inventing'.

Trying to make sense of what we see, either literally or metaphorically, we nonetheless depend on that, which meets the eye. 'It is only shallow people,' Oscar Wilde says provocatively, 'who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible'. ²⁵⁶ Photography, however, partially confirms Wilde's claim, for the medium reflects the world according to the light spectrum chosen, and not everything that can be seen in the picture is necessarily visible by the unaided eye. In fact, as early as in the nineteenth century ghostly forms were sketched on white backgrounds by the means of sulphate, and, although they were invisible to the eye, they were visible on a negative. Moreover, some photographic

[e]xposures are taken without visible light; we can photograph a hair on a fly's tongue, a microbe in close-up, lockjaw, diphtheria, a sound picture of a thrush's song, images formed by heat, even the photograph of smell. [...] Billions of stars never seen before

²⁵² White, 1952, pp. 16-19. In 1952 Minor White was a co-founder and an editor of the photographic magazine *Aperture*. The magazine was established by a group of American photographers including, Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange, Barbara Morgan and photo-historians and curators Beaumont and Nancy Newhall.

²⁵³ Holmes, 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph', 1859, reprinted in: Trachtenberg, 1980, p. 74.

 $^{^{255}}$ Salvador Dalí, 'Photography: Pure Creation of the Mind', in L'Amic des Arts (Sitges), 18 (30 September, 1927), pp. 90 ff.

²⁵⁶ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, [1890], edited with an Introduction and Notes by Isobel Murray, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 18.

by the human eye have been photographed on film. [...] Through radiography and infra-red photography, the invisible becomes visible.²⁵⁷

Similarly, Lucia Moholy writes about the idea of latent photographic information, saying that even Talbot

had a notion, fantastic to himself, of "certain invisible rays which lie beyond the limits of the spectrum," an apartment filled with these invisible rays [...] and "a number of persons in the room [...] no one would see the other: and yet, nevertheless if a camera were so placed as to point in the direction [...] the eye of the camera would see plainly where the human eye would find nothing but darkness."²⁵⁸

Light engages us in various ways, intellectually and emotionally. It is the basis of visual perception and a decisive element for both, the chemical and optical aspects of photography. In a note to Daguerre, Niépce writes that 'in the process of composing and decomposing, light acts chemically on bodies. It is absorbed, it combines with them and communicates new properties to them [...] This, in a nutshell, is the principle of discovery'.²⁵⁹

Every photograph is therefore a moment of newness, an occurrence *par excellence*, and, as such, it is never in the world already. In the very moment when one recognizes a situation as meaningful or even 'truthful', 'valuable', in Jeff Walls's words, ²⁶⁰ when order is made out of disorder, one has accepted an invitation to participate and to observe. This, however, is less a matter of pure accident than of a conceptual arrangement of a kind. After all, '[t]here is no such thing as a naïve, non-conceptual photography,' Flusser reminds us, and continues: '[a] photograph is an image of concepts'. ²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ Beaton and Buckland, 1975, p. 26.

²⁵⁸ Moholy, 1939, p. 30. 'Nothing seems too fantastic nowadays to be true,' Lucia Moholy writes in her book, 'Even a smell can be photographed. "Photographs of a smell," from Professor H. Devaux's experiments taken by F. Breitenbach of Paris, were exhibited in the Annual Exhibition of the Royal Photographic Society in London in 1938.' (p. 96) The author gives another examples: 'Even the registration of sound-photography […] was forecast in 1841! The "Phonotyp" […] consisted of a daguerreotype plate which was to receive light impressions. These were regulated by the vibrations of a diaphragm, set in motion by a sound. Early attempts were made between 1870–1880 to transform music into a sort of writing by means of light. The idea of re-transforming light-writing (photo-graphy) into tone followed naturally.' (p. 98.)

 ²⁵⁹ Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, translated by Julie Rose, (London: British Film Institute and Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press; Later Printing edition, 1994), p. 19.
 ²⁶⁰ Jeff Wall Interview: Pictures like Poems. Accessible at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HkVSEVlqYUw&t=380s (23 July, 2016)

²⁶¹ Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), p. 36.

As there cannot be identical situations, we always observe anew; everything that we see, or better still, experience, has never been seen or experienced before. In other words, all that we see is a vision, which cannot be seen by anyone else. Speaking of his relation to the photographic picture, Walker Evans notes that: 'It's as though there's a wonderful secret in a certain place and I can capture it. Only I, at this moment, can capture it, and only this moment and only me'. ²⁶² The view, however, is in constant flux, in a knot of doubt, for the world, and therefore I within it, cannot stay still. Nothing is inert or asleep or motionless, 'for the world is movement,' writes Henri Cartier-Bresson, 'and you cannot be stationary in your attitude toward something that is moving. [...] You must be on the alert with the brain, the eye, the heart; and have a suppleness of body'. ²⁶³

Photography therefore seems to be in kinship with the tradition of existential phenomenology, where the observer is placed firmly in the world. Or, as Merleau-Ponty points out, vision is rarely shared because:

[t]he superficial pellicle of the visible is only for my vision and for my body. [...] the depth beneath this surface contains my body and hence contains my vision. My body as a visible thing is contained within the full spectacle. But my seeing body subtends this visible body, and all the visibles with it. There is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other.²⁶⁴

The distinction between the person who sees and the sight which is seen or observed is thus not easily drawn because: 'my body is at once phenomenal body and objective body'. ²⁶⁵ This fusion of phenomenological and objective bodies explains the mutuality of vision whereby 'the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen'. ²⁶⁶ Merleau-Ponty continues: 'It is not *I* who sees', 'or *he* who sees', but rather vision in general that sees, and that 'inhabits both of us'. ²⁶⁷ Furthermore, *I* who see cannot possess the visible unless *I* am possessed by it, unless *I* am of it. ²⁶⁸ The world and a photograph belong to each other just as the 'I' belongs to me.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 139.

²⁶² David Featherstone, ed., *Observations, Essays on Documentary Photography*, (Carmel, CA: Friends of Photography, 1984), p. 56.

²⁶³ Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment*, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1952). [unpaginated]

²⁶⁴ Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 138. My emphasis.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 136.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 142. Italics used in the original citation.

²⁶⁸ 'It suffices for us for the moment to note that he who sees cannot posses the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he is of it...' In: Merleau-Ponty, 1968, pp. 134–135.

This then, is another kind of chiasm, a photographic chiasm, whereby the world acts from inside out and the turning point is impossible to define. Inasmuch as we initiate the view taken up, the view initiates us. There is a reciprocity of looking, so that everything looks upon everything else and no gaze is ever in vain. In the essay 'Eye and Mind', Merleau-Ponty speaks further about this perceptual reversal, or reciprocity between the world and the artist. By proposing a 'magical theory of vision', he suggests that the natural, visible world is seen because the artist makes it visible, and that we are visible because the world returns the gaze and looks back at us. Speaking of the painted image, Merleau-Ponty writes:

The painter, whatever he is, while he is painting practices a magical theory of vision. He is obliged to admit that objects before him pass into him or else that [...] the mind goes out through the eyes to wander among objects; for the painter never ceases adjusting his clairvoyance to them. [...] He must affirm [...] that vision is a mirror or concentration of the universe or that [...] the idios kosmos opens by virtue of vision upon a koinos kosmos; in short, that the same thing is both out there in the world and here in the heart of vision – the same or, if one prefers, a similar thing, but according to an efficacious similarity which is the parent, the genesis, the metamorphosis of Being into his vision. It is the mountain itself which from out there makes itself seen by the painter; it is the mountain that he interrogates with his gaze.²⁶⁹

He goes on to consider the many artists who have believed that things look at them, rather than that they look at things:

many painters have said that things look at them. As André Marchand says, after Klee: "In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me. [...] I was there, listening. [...] I think that the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it. [...] I expect to be inwardly submerged, buried. Perhaps I paint to break out". ²⁷⁰

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²⁶⁹ Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 166. Italics used in the original citation.

²⁷⁰Ibid., p. 167.

Trusting the Picture



Olivier Richon, fumifugium, from Arcadia, 1991, c-type print, $54 \times 80 \text{ cm}^{271}$

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 $^{^{271}}$ Olivier Richon, fumifugium, from Arcadia, 1991, c-type print, 54 x 80 cm. In: Real Allegories: Olivier Richon, Ute Eskildesn, ed., (Göttingen: Steidl, 2006)

A cognitive vacuum between the visible and the invisible is additionally highlighted in the slippage between language and what it denotes, as for example when one repeats a word until it frees that very thing of its denotation and enables it to exist with no name. Freed of the usual relationship of word to object, I then ask myself, what do I see? What do I hear? The letters used to give meaning may just as well be different at that very instant and they would again mean *nothing*. It is as if words would take the meanings of things with them. 'Things have broken free from their names,' writes Sartre in his 1938 philosophical novel *Nausea*; 'I am in the midst of Things, which cannot be given names'.²⁷² A similar detachment can also occur when we observe an object for a long period of time and a new order of seeing emerges that asks more questions; in such an instant a predetermined view does not exist, and every difference becomes a likeness, too.

The artist Wassily Kandinsky comments on the detachment of meaning by suggesting that

[t]he apt use of a word (in its poetical meaning), repetition of this word, twice, three times or even more frequently [...] will not only tend to intensify the inner harmony but also bring to light unsuspected spiritual properties of the word itself. Further than that, frequent repetition of a word (again a favourite game of children, which is forgotten in after life) deprives the word of its original external meaning. Similarly, in drawing, the abstract message of the object drawn tends to be forgotten and its meaning lost.²⁷³

In a similar way, a photograph does not remain in, or try to act from, its epistemological framework, but rather against it; it has to abstract the visible as much as this is possible and discard itself as a purely pictorial engagement. Once, however, the intellectual maze between the object and language, is broken through, there is nothing but an image. If, and when, this happens, the photographs, which are inexhaustible rather than confined, for they have neither an end nor a beginning, run 'parallel to the world' as we know it. 'The immanent photographic process is not of the nature of a photographic decision,' Laruelle writes, but 'it *lets things be*, or frees them from the World'.²⁷⁴ This, then, is close to the idea of 'open', but with one single possible solution: to enter into the moment, to connect the visible with the invisible and to leave the event as if nothing has happened. Such oscillation between the particular and the general offers secret sensations, and for this, metaphorically speaking, we give ourselves to photography over and over again.

²⁷² Sartre, 2000, p. 180.

²⁷³ Wassily Kandinsky, 'Concerning the Spiritual in Art', (Courier Corporation, 1914), reprinted in: Nadia Choucha, *Surrealism and the Occult*, (Oxford: Mandrake, 1991), p. 40.

²⁷⁴ Laruelle, 2012, p. 55. Italics used in the original citation.

Emphasising the relationship between a photographer and the photographable, Laruelle suggests that a photographer is not 'throwing' himself into the world but placing himself firstly in his body – in a 'stance', as opposed to a 'position'. The stance of a photographer, the philosopher explains,

consists less in situating oneself in relation to the World [...] than in abstracting oneself from it—in recognizing oneself from the start as distant [...] even; and hence, not in returning to the World, but in taking it as a simple support, or as an occasion to focus on something else—what, we do not yet know. [...] The photographer does not think the World according to the World, but according to his most subjective body, which, precisely for this reason, is what is most "objective", most real in any case, in the photographic act.²⁷⁵

The philosopher seems to suggest that a picture, after all, is not only a reflection, and therefore impersonal, but that it is precisely our view that makes the image visible and clear. Hence, as André Bazin writes in 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', '[t]he personality of the photographer enters into the proceedings [...] in his selection of the object to be photographed and by way of the purpose he has in mind',²⁷⁶ as there is no image without this kind of attachment, and this kind of belonging between a photographer and the world. It is a photographer – particularly, 'what is making itself seen within him'²⁷⁷ – who transforms perceptual impressions into a visible image. A photographer, the 'sensing agent',²⁷⁸ must sense the world into a scenic character of whatever is in the world already. In other words, while photographically speaking an image does make itself, a photographer is needed for an image to make itself at all.

The view that photography is simultaneously part of the mind and its immediate surroundings is shared by many practitioners. According to Antoine Claudet, a nineteenth-century French photographer who lived in England, '[p]hotography indeed can invent, create, and compose as well as copy. In fact [...] the machine copies what the true artist has invented, created, and composed, which could never have been copied or represented if the photographer had not

²⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 13–14. (Stance: to be held within one's own immanence; to be rooted in oneself.) ²⁷⁶ André Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', 1945, reprinted in: Trachtenberg, 1980,

pp. 237–244, p. 241.
²⁷⁷ Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 167.

²⁷⁸ Ignaz Cassar, 'Imagining the Image: Photography, Psychoanalysis and the Affects of Latency', *photographies*, 5 (2012), pp. 33–50.

possessed genius'.²⁷⁹ The author Joachim Gasquet compared himself to a 'sensitive plate and a 'recording machine'²⁸⁰ and the artist Sigmar Polke has observed that 'a negative is never finished.' The contemporary photographer Jeff Wall gives a similar rationale for the photographer's work, proposing that '[o]ne can start writing a report on a subject, but because of what he is, it will end up in a poem'.²⁸¹ John Szarkowski, moreover, saw photography either as 'a mirror, reflecting a portrait of the artist who made it, or a window, through which one might better know the world'.²⁸²

The 'gap' between how the world is in itself and how it appears or presents itself to us indicates that things are indeed hidden from view. In *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, Flusser writes that images hide what happens. By seemingly doubling the visible, or capturing the 'skin'283 of the world, in Holmes's articulation of the apparent, photography loses what it aims to hold. 'What this ultimately means', to quote Merleau-Ponty, 'is that the proper essence [...] of the visible is to have a layer [...] of invisibility in the strict sense, which it makes present as a certain absence'.²⁸⁴ This paradox of absence in the form of a ghostly presence would seem to be the condition of the photograph itself, for even though every scene is created by the act of seeing, we cannot see the thing itself. All that we perceive is our individually modelled projection upon that which already exists. In photographic terms, we see an illuminated object. The world makes itself visible to us photographically, and all that we see is therefore a photograph — a 'brute photograph (frontal and clear)',²⁸⁵ as Barthes suggests, but a photograph nonetheless.

Moreover, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the visible forms itself within the human eye by light, whereas light itself is not an object, and cannot be seen as such. The thing itself exists as a quality of what it is made of; it is its own radiance. Hence, we only grasp the visible world through its properties, such as shapes, colours, lengths, weights, etc., for things themselves cannot be captured. This reflective, photographic character of the world is indicated by Merleau-Ponty's claim that 'it is as though our vision were formed in the heart of the visible,

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²⁷⁹ Steven Edwards, *Photography: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 41.

²⁸⁰ Joachim Gasquet, *Joachim Gasquet's Cézanne: A Memoir with Conversations*, translated by Christopher Pemberton, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), p. 150.

²⁸¹ Scholl Lecture Series: Jeff Wall in Conversation with Tobias Ostrander. Accessible at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBTZD3YgCTc&t=1628s (9 February, 2015)

 $^{^{282}}$ John Szarkowski, Mirrors and Windows, American Photography since 1960 [exh, cat], (New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 1978)

²⁸³ Holmes, 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph', 1859, reprinted in: Trachtenberg, 1980, pp. 71–82.

²⁸⁴ Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 187.

²⁸⁵ Barthes, 1977, p. 44.

or as though [...] the vision we acquire of them seems to us to come from them'.²⁸⁶ Merleau-Ponty expands on this point in 'Eye and Mind', saying that:

Light, lighting, shadows, reflections, color [...] are not altogether real objects; like ghosts, they have only visual existence. [...] In the world there is the thing itself, and outside this thing itself there is that other thing which is only reflected light rays and which happens to have an ordered correspondence with the real thing; there are two individuals, then, bound together externally by causality. [...] the resemblance belongs to thought.²⁸⁷

Hence, as much as photography deals with the apparent by necessity, we may say that it deals with it by choice. The proposal that photography makes the world visible can be developed further, by saying that photography makes the world visible as 'a testimony', a sign or a picture of itself. Talbot, for instance, emphasised this shortly after photography was announced in 1839, saying that 'it is not the artist who makes the picture, but the picture which makes ITSELF'.²⁸⁸ When Paul Strand was asked how he chose the images that he photographed, he answered: 'I don't. They choose me'.²⁸⁹ Diane Arbus expressed this similarly when she said: 'I don't press the shutter. The image does'.²⁹⁰ Cartier-Bresson also preferred to see photography as something that 'is neither taken nor seized by force. It offers itself up. It is the photo that takes you; one must not take photos'.²⁹¹

Moreover, in his 1839 treatise entitled 'Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing', Talbot writes:

I constructed one [a camera obscura] out of a large box, the image being thrown upon one end of it by a good object glass fixed in the opposite end. This apparatus, being armed with a sensitive paper, was taken out in a summer afternoon and placed about one hundred yards from a building favourably illuminated by the sun. An hour or two afterwards I opened the box, and I found depicted upon the paper a very distinct

²⁸⁶ Merleau-Ponty, 1968, pp. 130–131.

²⁸⁷ Merleau-Ponty, 1964, pp. 165–170.

²⁸⁸ Steve Edwards, 2006, p.p. 69, 70. In 1816 one of the pioneers of photography, Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, wrote to his elder brother Claude, dominiscend in England, about the 'artificial eye', which he had made from 'Isidore's ring box and a biconvex glass'. The 'apparatus', as the inventor called his camera obscura, was soon improved with the lens of a microscope and, a decade later, made 'the first picture copied from nature.' This was the photograph taken from Niépce's bedroom window and documenting the rooftops over Saint-Loup-de-Varennes.

²⁸⁹ Dyer, 2007, p. 213.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 213 (footnote).

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 213 (footnote).

representation of the building, with the exception of those parts of it which lay in the shade. [...]

In the summer of 1835 I made in this way a great number of representations of my house [...] And this building I believe to be the first that was ever yet known to have drawn its own picture.²⁹²

Here Talbot emphasises the autonomy of the photographic medium. The early nineteenth-century wonder was thus praised not only for its alchemical and optical magic, but also for the ability to enchant the world into its image, or into the image of itself. This 'natural magic', as Talbot termed photography, has ever since been its very own authority of this, which is one part science, the other observation.²⁹³ Indeed, Paul Valéry asks:

[w]hat would become of philosophy, if it did not have the means of questioning appearances? Mirages, sticks that break the moment they are immersed in water and miraculously straighten out when they are withdrawn from their bath, all the tricks that our eye accepts have figured in this memorable and inexhaustible enumeration.

[...] is there any emotion more deeply philosophical than the one we experience as we anxiously await—beneath that rather diabolical red light which turns a glowing cigarette into a green diamond—for the emergence to visibility of that mysterious *latent image*, on the exact nature of which Science has not yet made up its mind?²⁹⁴

The moment of neither pure perception nor pure imagination is the reason why, when looking at a photograph, we first encounter that which escapes language. In Ludwig Wittgenstein's words, '[t]here are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical'.²⁹⁵ Mystical, the philosopher seems to suggest, will nevertheless manifest itself in the visual.

Considering photography from a metaphysical perspective does not automatically place the medium in the realms of the unrepresentable, nor is it an attempt to negate the Wittgensteinian conviction to 'pass over in silence' what one cannot express in words. If

²⁹² Talbot, 'Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing', 1839, reprinted in: Goldberg, 1988, pp. 36–48. Italics used in the original citation.

²⁹³ By founding the Société Héliographique in January 1851, Benito R. de Monfort announced that the aim of the association was to be 'exclusively artistic and scientific.'

²⁹⁴ Paul Valéry, 'The Centenary of Photography', 1939, reprinted in: Trachtenberg, 1980, pp. 191–198, pp. 197–198. Italics used in the original citation.

²⁹⁵ Jay Prosser, 'Buddha Barthes: What Barthes saw in Photography', in: *Photography and Literature in Twentieth Century*, edited by David Cunningham, Andrew Fisher, Sas Mays (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), pp. 145–159, p. 147. Italics used in the original citation.

anything, thinking about photography from a speculative viewpoint suggests that the photographic character of photography rests in its own self; that a photograph is as it is in its own wholeness, and that perhaps the representational likeness is there only to 'amuse' us. The elusive character of the medium might be necessary because a photograph is an image of an image; it is a reflection of a reflection, and the distance from its source enables such a choice. A mirage of a kind is inevitable because in the moment we look at the image we lose it. Or perhaps we have lost it just because we have seen it, as Orpheus lost his beloved Eurydice when he looked back to confirm her presence? Saying, then, that things projected one way do not take the same route back is similar to an observation that the view itself is often different from its photograph. A phenomenological view is thus uncertain, unpredictable, a kind of a mystical view. Being conscious of the world, by some miracle, separates you from it. This 'gap' between the photographic image and its source poses the question: does the world reveal itself differently to me than it does to the camera?

A picture, an image of likeness, is 'true' in its phenomenological sense, in the sense that it is when it is (here and now), though it is defined through language and meaning. To look at a photograph is therefore a certain kind of exchange of otherwise meaningful but varying realities. It is a fascinating secret – always and entirely out there, in the world, but reluctant to explain anything. The world shows different sides of itself to different views. If, then, the world reveals or opens itself up differently to different looks, we can see only what it permits us to see, and the camera, or the apparatus, is above all the limit to human vision. This is to say, as Vilém Flusser explains in his book *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, that '[i]n the act of photography the camera does the will of the photographer but the photographer has to will what the camera can do'.²⁹⁶ Overcoming the vision of the camera is simply not possible: my vision is the camera's vision, but the camera's vision is not my vision. In that sense the act of photographing itself is a 'phenomenological doubt'.

According to Flusser, the core of this 'phenomenological doubt' is twofold. 'First,' he notes,

Photographers' practice is hostile to ideology. Ideology is the insistence on a single viewpoint thought to be perfect. Photographers act in a post-ideological way even when they think they are serving an ideology. Second: Photographers' practice is fixed to a program. Photographers can only act within the program of the camera, even when they think they are acting in opposition to this program.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ Flusser, 2000, p. 35.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 38.

Testimonial truth in images is therefore not to be found, but to be recognised within the limits of given relations. Because the world precedes us, meanings as such are never simply in the image; instead, they are discovered, if not in all, invented. 'Truth', in other words, cannot be exemplified. Yet, the paradox of this situation is that photography, if anything, is the example of this negation. To stay out of, or act against, an ideological corset, Flusser's dancing photographer acts similarly by trying to catch as many points of views as possible. By dancing around the event, a photographer gathers what, from then on, belongs together. 'The moment you get out of politics', Flusser says,

you can see that every event has got as many possible points of view, none of which is correct, and what you can do is to multiply points of views; you dance around the events. And more points of view you have, more you collect, the better is your image [...] the photographer dances around the event [...] and by doing so he destroys the ideology, which is insistence on one point of view. You hear political people speaking; they say: "my point of view is the right one and yours is the wrong one." But if you listen to a photographer, he says: "every point of view is the same, the problem is, how many points of view I can collect". ²⁹⁸

The philosopher further proposes that this makes a photographer a player, rather than a worker. Photographers, he argues, are not working, as they do not want to change the world, but they are playing, as they

wish to produce states of things that have never existed before; they pursue these states, not out there in the world, since for them the world is only the pretext for the state of things that are to be produced, but amongst the possibilities contained within the camera's program. To this extent, the traditional distinction between realism and idealism is overturned in the case of photography: It is not the world out there that is real, nor is the concept within the camera's program – only the photograph is real.²⁹⁹

By dancing around the event 'the man is possessed by the external world and, in turn, possesses it. It obeys him, because he has submitted to it'. Moreover, by photographing the world from any number of viewpoints, photographers do not want to change, or fix, the world, but rather fix the ever-changing situation, or observe the state of things in which they

²⁹⁸ 'Television Image and Political Space in the Light of the Romanian Revolution.' Lecture by Vilém Flusser. 7 April, 1990, Kunsthalle Budapest. Accessible at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFTaY2u4NvI (23 January, 2013)

²⁹⁹ Flusser, 2000, p. 37.

³⁰⁰Vilém Flusser, 'Mythical, Historical, and Posthistorical Existence', 1981, in: Ströhl, 2002, p. 120.

find themselves.³⁰¹ The point seems to be to see the whole by means of a detail. It is impossible to photograph all that there can be photographed. Vision is impossible to exhaust.

Hence, if we wish to look for a photograph, where will we find it? Flusser suggests two ways of entering the world; one of them is through image and the other through language.

Consequently, Flusser suggests that there are two types of consciousness. One corresponds to image – 'magical' or 'mythical' consciousness – whereas the other, which corresponds to linear writing, he calls 'historical' or 'political' consciousness. Accordingly, the difference between 'magical' or 'scenic' and 'historical' or 'processional' vision, is that in the scenic world things 'happen', while in the linear world nothing ever happens because everything is a constructed 'event'. In Flusser's view, an event is an example of an indirect consciousness, and always directed against the image. In the event of history, the philosopher continues, nothing ever naturally repeats itself; everything has a cause and will have an effect. Because historiography is inescapably linear, in the political world of events everything has already happened and can be rationally explained. The linear world in this sense is a retrospective world, and this kind of reality is a symptomatic reality.

Within magical consciousness, by contrast, the world acquires a scenic character; here the world is a spectacle. Seen through magical consciousness images transform the world into a scene wherein things relate to each other and show context instead of separate realities. The proposition seems to suggest that in the political narrative, which follows a linear or progressive logic, sense becomes apparent at the end, whereas in the magical realm the sense is there throughout. This idea of sense being present at the photograph's inception could be seen to mirror the photographic technique itself, for when a negative is developed into a positive, what is there at the end of the process was already there in the beginning.³⁰² 'Every image', the philosopher argues, 'is strongly magically loaded. […] It is absolutely impossible to see the image outside magic. […] There is a voodoo character in every image'.³⁰³

Flusser defines magic as 'a form of existence corresponding to the eternal recurrence of the same'. 304 The world of magical circumstances is a world of constant repetition and 'magical content. It is a world of the eternal return of the same, in which everything lends meaning to

³⁰¹ Vilém Flusser, 'Die Geste des Fotografierens' ('The Gesture of Photographing'), 1991, translated by Nancy Ann Roth, *Journal of Visual Culture*, 10, (2011), pp. 279–293, p. 285.
³⁰² Cassar, 2012.

³⁰³ The first images from Lascaux had strong magical meaning: they were meant to orient people in the world, for example to show rituals, dancing and hunting. Vilém Flusser, *Television Image and Political Space in the Light of the Romanian Revolution*', lecture, 7 April, 1990, Kunsthalle Budapest. Accessible at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFTaY2u4NvI (23 January, 2013).

³⁰⁴ Flusser, 2000, p. 84.

everything else and anything can be meant by anything else. It is a world full of meanings, full of "gods". 305 This is a state of mind full of meaning, full of values. Space is 'valuable,' the philosopher says, 'so that "above" is also "sublime", "below" is also "infernal", "right" is also "right", and "left" is also "sinister". 306 The domain of magical happenings is a chaotic world where everything can become anything else by the means of endless repetition.

Imitating medieval scryers, who looked into reflective surfaces to predict the future, photography acts as a remembrance or warning of something that has happened, but also something that will happen again. Not only is such a return a photograph's 'life', but it is also its destiny, for nothing without a past can make itself visible photographically. Even though a picture never shows the (whole) 'truth', for it could not show the 'truth', even if it was concerned with 'truth', the photographic image exposes phenomena that are, for the time being, not yet clearly recognisable. Like a psychic medium, a mediator, the photograph prophetically exposes that part of the real that would perhaps wish to remain hidden, since the photograph often derives from the world of concepts and patterns, re-evaluated only in surpluses (a surplus that is never separated from repetition). Re-evaluation in this sense defines itself in relation to that which is always changing, whereas the surplus is the repetition itself. In other words, an image completes itself by its relation to what repeats itself indefinitely and thus cannot fade away.

Flusser's argument, proposed throughout his theory on (technical) imagery, is that there is no direct access to reality, and that images are mediators between people and the world. To orient oneself via appearances thus seems to suggest that the return to the magical in the photographic image has less to do with things we see and more to do with how we see them. An artist, for instance, unlearns the routine of seeing the world as it 'really' is and learns to see it as it appears. To cultivate the look beyond the visible, as suggested at the beginning of the chapter, Merleau-Ponty proposed a 'magical theory of vision', which grants the perception of realities different to the empirical one. The idea of photography being simultaneously considered as an appearance and an apparition is further discussed in the last chapter, which continues the discourse on the representational real in photography as defined in this chapter.

³⁰⁵ Vilém Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, Introduction by Mark Poster, translated by Nancy Ann Roth, (Minneapolis, MN; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 13.

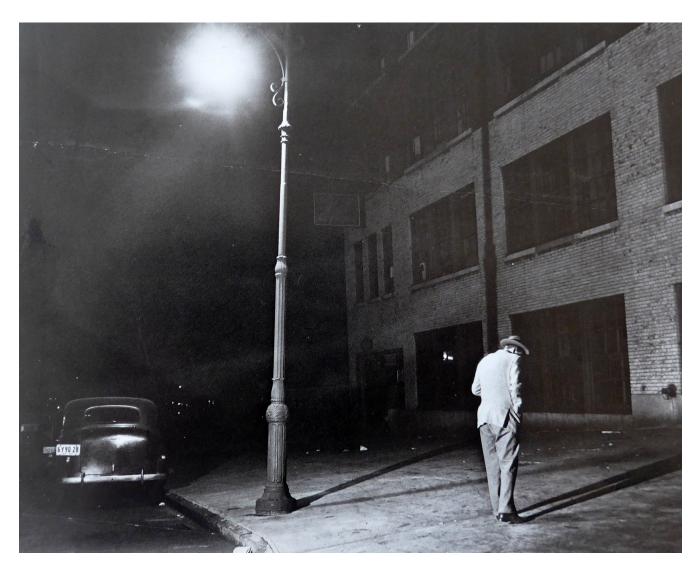
5. DOUBT

Never trust general impressions, my boy, but concentrate yourself upon details.³⁰⁷

Arthur Conan Doyle

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 $^{^{307}}$ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* [1887–1927], (New York: Dover Publications, 2009).



Weegee³⁰⁸

 $^{^{308}\ \}textit{Weegee}\ (\mbox{Aperture Masters of Photography}),$ (Cologne: Könemann, 1997), p. 27.

Considering what is thought of as the 'real' of the photographic, we all soon encounter the proverbial connection of photography to the notion of the objective and, by implication, to the notion of the apparent. Seemingly occupying a privileged relation to the physical world because it can technically capture appearances in detail and with precision, photography is frequently equated only with the visible. This conception of photography as a primarily and overly visual medium contradicts a notion of photography as something that exposes ideas, values and concepts, and which repeatedly finds itself in the phenomenological world. What, in terms of human judgement, is objective; what is real? And what is fact? According to Friedrich Nietzsche, 'facts are precisely what is lacking, all that exists consists of *interpretations*. We cannot establish any fact "in itself". ³⁰⁹ In photographic terms, a picture discloses what can happen within the frame, but the four edges around it inevitably change those facts.

If we think of photography from its predestined moment, so that it does not only record the visible but also articulates what we see;³¹⁰ Bazin notes that 'the fact that this movement toward the real can take a thousand different routes, the apologia for "realism" per se, strictly speaking, means nothing at all'.³¹¹ Moreover, Paul Valéry makes a similar comment when writing about photography, which he describes as 'the art of lying'. In his 1939 essay 'Centenaire de la Photographie' ('The Centenary of Photography'), Valéry writes:

The more we are tempted to see some underlying connections between the phenomenon called "Realism" and the phenomenon called "Photography," the more we must beware of exploiting a coincidence. [...] It is far from certain that objects close together on a photographic plate have anything in common beyond their nearness.³¹²

The distinction between the real and reality can be seen in the sense that the real is proven but not demonstrated, whereas reality is demonstrated but not proven. The photographic real is thus defined by the photographer's stance in relation to that which is always alive (time) and therefore indefinite (space). This is how photographs negotiate our idea of reality: they carry

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³⁰⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will To Power – An Attempted Transvaluation Of All Values.* Vol II Books III and IV [1901], (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1924). Here in: Thomas Kent, *Paralogic Rhetoric: A Theory of Communicative, Interaction*, (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1993), p, 8. Italics used in the original citation.

³¹⁰ Many theoreticians and artists understand photography as a form of an articulation of the visible. In a note from 3 March 1839, Talbot names the medium of photography 'words of light'. In his book *Words of Light* Eduardo Cadava speaks of 'solar language'. Similarly, Olivier Richon writes that 'the camera is akin to a typewriter, used to produce a visual manifesto about the appearance and disappearance of objects.' In his essay 'To Photograph is to Define,' Vilém Flusser suggests that 'a photo camera may be considered to be [...] a tool that may be used to produce definitions.' ³¹¹ André Bazin, *Jean Renoir*, translated by W. W. Halsey II and William H. Simone, edited by François Truffaut, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1973), p. 85.

³¹² Paul Valéry, 'The Centenary of Photography', 1939, reprinted in: Trachtenberg, 1980, p. 194.

infinite numbers of realities and infinite numbers of 'truths'. A photographer, after all, often keeps one eye open and shuts the other when taking a picture. By this gesture alone, he surrenders partly to the mystery of what he is facing at that very moment, as half his vision is obscured. The Greek verb *myo*, from which the word mystery derives, means exactly that: 'to have eyes shut', or 'to keep silent'.³¹³ One way or another, everybody holds their breath during the moment of exposure. According to Giorgio Agamben, this is precisely why we cannot formulate our desires out loud; they are images, and images cannot be explained in words.³¹⁴

Barthes sees the action of closing one's eyes as a way to see more clearly:

Ultimately—or at the limit—in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes. "The necessary condition for an image is sight," Janouch told Kafka; and Kafka smiled and replied: "We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes." The photograph must be silent […] Absolute subjectivity is achieved only in a state, an effort, of silence (shutting your eyes is to make the image speak in silence) […] to shut my eyes, to allow the detail to raise of its own accord into affective consciousness.³¹⁵

It is not commonly thought, however, that by shutting one's eyes one is able to see more. Meditating on the origin of the photographic image, Dalí seems to dismiss the idea of closing one's eyes to see images: 'Closing your eyes in an anti-poetic way of perceiving resonances [...] Let us be content with the immediate miracle of opening our eyes and being adept in the apprenticeship of looking properly'. Yet, as soon as one leans back and closes one's eyes images appear, instantaneously, as if by some miracle, informing us of our past, even when we might be thinking of our future. (Is this because we can only imagine our future by using remnants of our past?) Frequently we close our eyes when trying to remember or imagine something – to 'picture something', to use an English expression. The ancient Greeks, moreover, believed that blind people see what is invisible to the sighted. We could hardly say, then, that closing one's eyes is a gesture of eliminating the visible.

A more dramatic account of 'seeing with closed eyes' is an unusual use of photographic technique dating from the latter half of the nineteenth century and reported in the

³¹³ Sebastjan Vörös, *Podobe neupodobljivega: (Nevro)znanost, fenomenologija, mistika*, (Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta Ljubljana, 2013), p. 26.

³¹⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, translated by Jeff Fort, (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2007), p. 53.

³¹⁵ Barthes, 2000, pp. 53–55.

³¹⁶ Dalí, 1927.

photographic press at the time. It was commonly believed at the time that when a person died, the eyes retained the last image they had seen.³¹⁷ The contemporaneous British journal *The Photographic News* reported that if a person were murdered, the police would photograph the victim's eyes and look carefully at the victim's retinas with a magnifying glass to discern the outline of the murderer, who had involuntarily left their image behind.³¹⁸

The first attempt to use retinal images for criminal investigation was made by the British photographer William H. Warner. Investigating the murder of Emma Jackson in April 1863, Warner

immediately sent a letter to detective-officer James F. Thomson at the Metropolitan Police Office, Scotland Yard, informing him that "if the eyes of the murdered person be photographed within a certain time of death, upon the retina will be found depicted the last thing that appeared before them, and that in the present case the features of the murderer would most probably be found thereon".³¹⁹

The detective replied: 'on the behalf of the Metropolitan Police Office [...] photographing the eyes of a murdered person "is of the highest importance". ³²⁰ However, the detective had taken advice and he had

conversed with an eminent oculist four years earlier and was assured that unless the eye was photographed within twenty-four hours after death no result would be obtained. [...] the object transfixed thereon vanishing in the same manner as undeveloped negative photograph exposed to light.³²¹

The distinct boundaries between the real and the imagined, as conceived of in everyday thought, have been brought into question by neurological study, which proved that the same neurological centres are active in our brains if we look at a thing or if we imagine that object. The rational distinction, or separation between what we see in the world (image, appearance)

³¹⁷ 'The process of developing the retina's last images was called optography, and the images themselves optograms'. Marissa Fessenden, 'How Forensic Scientists Once Tried to "See" a Dead Person's Last Sight', *Smithsonian.com*. Accessible at: http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/how-forensic-scientists-once-tried-see-dead-persons-last-sight-180959157/ (12 January, 2017)

³¹⁸ A photograph of the image on the retina of a dissected beetle's eye was published by William Fitzgerald, *Strand Magazine*, 9, (1895), 53–54. Niepce's 1816 experiments to capture the view from his studio window on many negatives vanished soon after he removed them from the camera obscura. He called these fleeting images 'retinas'. In: Silverman, 2015, p. 41.

³¹⁹ The Photographic News, (May 8, 1863), 226. Even as late as 1948 'the subject was being treated with respect, at least by some scientists and police organizations.'

³²⁰ Ibid. pp. 226–227.

³²¹ Ibid.

and what we imagine in our minds (imagination, apparition), tends to disappear, and the line between the real and the imaginary suddenly seems more imaginary than real.³²² A photograph, too, can be seen in light of this perceptual confusion; it creates a present from the past, the near from the far, a positive from a negative, black from white, red from green, space from time and eternity from instantaneity. The ungraspable real expands beyond the imaginable and the very absence of what we expect to see sets up relations, which continue in life beyond the frame of the image. Of this confusion, we may ask ourselves, what are these moments promising, when the subject is not yet there, or there no longer?

Evidently, photography is an example that shows that the link between the physical presence of an object and reality is not mandatory, because the photographed object can be real but not present any more, or it is no longer, but nevertheless present. In his 1931 essay 'A Short History of Photography', Walter Benjamin writes about the everlasting presence immanent to the medium in his discussion of the 1857 engagement photograph of Karl Dauthendey and Fraulein Friedrich. Even though Benjamin was born three and a half decades after the photograph was taken, he insists on his encountering Friedrich via the photograph, because, according to Benjamin, '[t]he procedure itself taught the models to live inside rather than outside the moment'. Benjamin sees the long photographic procedure, which was common at the time, as having made Friedrich grow into the picture, thus making her posthumously present.

Kendall Walton gives another example of such photographic 'presence'. Claiming (contrary to my previous arguments) that photographs are transparent, because '[w]e see the world through them,'324 Walton's influential text on the philosophy of photography observes that 'through' photography 'we can also see into the past. We see long deceased ancestors when we look at dusty snapshots of them. [...] we see, quite literally, our dead relatives themselves when we look at photographs of them'.325

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³²² Our visual experience depends on receiving photonic messages by light coming from outside to inside our bodies. The information is then collected at the rear of our eye by the retina. The eye transforms light into electrochemical impulses, which are transmitted to the brain by an optical nerve. The nerve interprets received electrochemical information and establishes 'neural constructs', which eventually form images. Our vision and the cognitive abilities to render the visible depend on this functional relationship between light, eye and brain. 'Because of the finite speed of light and the delay that occurs as light is transformed into electrical impulses that move through the brain, we always sense the recent past.' Jai McKenzie, *Light and Photomedia, A New History and Future of the Photographic Image*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), p. 10.

³²³ Walter Benjamin, 'A Short History of Photography', 1931, *Screen*, 13:1, (1 March 1972), pp. 5–26, p. 17.

³²⁴ Kendall Walton, 'Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism', *Critical Inquiry*, 11: 2 (December, 1984), pp. 246–277, p. 251. Italics used in the original citation.

³²⁵ Ibid., pp. 251–252. Italics used in the original citation. Talbot saw photographs to be about 'similarity', not 'sameness.' In: Silverman, 2015, p. 91.

Another relationship between real and reality, between the 'proven' and 'demonstrated', opens up a prophetic, visionary domain of photography in relation to language. Through the grammatical structure of the future perfect—I will have imagined—we realise that as soon as we get closer to the truth, this is no longer the truth; this no longer can be the truth. As we tend to consider truth as something static, we automatically lapse into dogma, whereas, as George Bataille writes in *Inner Experience*: 'If I said decisively: "I have seen God", that which I see would change'.³²⁶ In the moment when things appear as fixed, or when one experiences them as still, they become distorted.

The grammatical tense of the future perfect reminds us of the liquid character of the empirical, because the reality of the future perfect does not yet exist, whereas at the same time it has passed already. By the logic of the future perfect, we orient our experiences towards uncertainty and speculation. This, I believe, is the reality of photography. The photographic time, the middle time (the time in between), the 'medium' time, arises as a neutral time. Here, nothing happens as an absolute beginning or an absolute end. Indexical images, and photographs in particular, are messengers of an instant that carry with them this promise of eternity.

Talbot points to similar photographic logic, arguing that '[i]n a space of a single minute', space becomes time, and time, space. Telephotographs of extinct stars, for instance, are literal examples of this claim, because we see their emanated light long after they themselves have ceased to exist. Once again reality becomes mystery, by linking the past to the present, and consequently the present to the past, enabling time to fold back on itself. A reviewer of Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature* referenced a similar phenomenon as early as 1845, when he observed that 'photography has [...] enabled us to hand down to future ages a picture of the sunshine of yesterday'.³²⁷

One of the principles of photographic representation is knowing that the object is not there, and the power of photography is derived from this compelling illusion, which makes the object seems real whenever we look its representation. Without a specific effort, photography is a site of something, of anything, being present while absent; it is 'in effect', but not 'in fact'. The perfect doubling of the photograph 'hypnotises' everyday reality so that every absence becomes presence. This 'alchemy of the world', to use Hugo Ball's expression, suggests that we may look at the photographic image in the light of magic.

³²⁶ George Bataille, *Inner Experience*, translated, with an Introduction by Leslie Anne Boldt, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 4.

³²⁷ The Athenaeum (February 22, 1845).

The reality of the photographic image seems to lie in what we believe about what we are looking at in the image. Such reality can be viewed as a constant return of things in their observable or visible nature, and in the belief that we are able to see and interpret. The opposite of this reality is not the unique world of appearances that Laruelle writes about in The Non-Philosophy of Photography, where he says that 'the photo represents the World – in a specular manner, and through its content; but it reflects its own essence in a non-specular manner, it reflects vision-force without ever reproducing it',328 and that the photograph is 'an indivisible process that one cannot recompose from the outside, even partially, like a machine. It is a new thought – and it is so by virtue of its mode of being or its relation to the real, not its aesthetic or technological determinations'. 329 What the philosopher may be referring to is the mesmerising notion of the return within the picture, which will never be fully revealed, because there is no need to tear apart something that from now on belongs together. Just like a moment of amazement, a photograph is an event in itself and it is complete rather than divided. Such a photograph is no less a photograph than a fern is a fern. To take the argument even further, perhaps, every photograph can be seen as 'an authentic chapter in the history of the world'.330

In that sense, giving yourself to an image is to walk into a time and space of magic, which always introduces a reality, which differs from an empirical one. Such a photograph may take Plato's shadows as the reality to be surpassed, if not skipped altogether. Even though photography is not possible without appearances, as nothing happens if the thing, being or event itself does not happen too, it would not be legitimate to claim that there is nothing beyond the momentary image. For now, however, silver photography belongs to the surface, 'the thickness of flesh',³³¹ 'the skin of the world',³³² which either reflects or projects the light so that the presence is never metaphorical. That is to say, whereas the magical realm is given but ineffable, it is the empirical reflection of light that makes this magic visible at all. However, while a photographic negative absorbs the light, which an object reflects so that 'a pipe is

³²⁸ Laruelle. 2012, p. 27.

³²⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

³³⁰ David Brewster, 'Photogenic Drawing, or Drawing with the Agency of Light', *The Edinburgh Review*, LXXVI:154 (1843), pp. 309–344. This anonymous essay is attributed to Brewster in: Helmut Gersheim, *Incunabula of British Photographic Literature: a Bibliography of British photographic Literature, 1839–75*, and British Books illustrated with original Photographs, (London: Scolar Press in association with Derbyshire College of Higher Education, 1984).

³³¹ 'The flesh is at the heart of the world. [...] the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeality; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication.' In: Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 135.

³³² Oliver Wendell Holmes, 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph', 1859, reprinted in: Trachtenberg, 1980, p. 81.

always a pipe',³³³ the photograph nevertheless originates in that which can be made visible regardless of any possible detachment from such a world.

The adjusted reality of phenomena made up by chaos and sensations forms the world, which to us is unimaginable in its entirety. The astute and intuitive observation of natural phenomena, which is unconstrained visually and otherwise, shows us the process of something becoming visible and opens up the perceptual relation in which we are no longer able to discern what is visible and what is invisible, not even photographically. As a medium based on immediate reality, however visible or invisible that might be, photography continuously questions our observational pursuit of such reality by asking, what are we seeing when looking at the world? In other words, the notion of photography as a visual medium would seem to exclude this aspect of photography, which is stimulated by the idea that there is nothing as obscure than the fact precisely expressed. In light of this proposal, the idea of photographic reality and 'truth' may lie in seeing the photographic image not in terms of its appearance but in terms of its continuous appearing.

³³³ Barthes, 2000, p. 5.

CONCLUSION

It's as though there's a wonderful secret in a certain place and I can capture it. Only I, at this moment, can
capture it, and only this moment and only me. ³³⁴
Walker Evans

³³⁴ David Featherstone, ed., *Observations, Essays on Documentary Photography*, (Carmel, CA: Friends of Photography, 1984), p. 56.

To photograph the world as it appears at every given moment may be to consider the reality of García Márquez's universe, which is so recent and so new that objects and phenomena cannot yet be called upon and need to be pointed out in order to be seen or be rendered visible. The such a senseless and formless world one has to observe and be conscious in order to comprehend the phenomenal world and to create knowledge, but one needs an awareness at the same time that there is vast amount of knowledge created without ever knowing what consciousness is, or how it operates. The idea expressed in the thesis, namely that nothing that I can imagine already would make sense in photography, foregrounds a similar attempt at observing this in things, which is fully visible but cannot be named. This often unattainable, but not impossible, visual contemplation of seeing the world anew points towards the photographic image, which is encountered halfway between knowing and sensing, between perception and sensation, that is to say between light and dark, or waking and dreaming. To consider the reality outside language that could nevertheless be seen photographically one must replace the habit of seeing things as they really are and learn to see them as they appear.

When I photograph, I try to look for that which I cannot identify in advance but which I notice suddenly as this unidentifiable thing returns its gaze and looks back at me – identifying as revealing. In this moment of perceptual estrangement the picture shows its face and turns towards me, as if the things that are interesting to consider visually repeat over time and finally reveal themselves, their form, through language. The photographer, in this sense, defines or even produces the world by photographing it.

The light that illuminates things and then forms the image causes the transformation of the invisible into the visible. This subtle phenomenon of change axiomatically suggests the character of the magical in the photographic image, a characteristic which has been considered part of photography since its invention. As proposed in the opening chapter of the thesis, the language used to discuss photography in its origin offers an ontological insight into the photographic image and informs us about how the medium was first discussed and understood in the words chosen to speak about it. This, however, often considered photography to be synonymous with magic.

An understanding of the medium as something that in its original sense exceeds the visible was a great ambition of the early researchers of the medium. Niépce, Talbot, Daguerre and Herschel, among many others, made investigations beyond the spectrum of visible light to

³³⁵ Referring to the opening quote by Gabriel García Márquez of the third chapter, Naming: 'The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point.' In: Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* [1967], translated by Gregory Rabassa, (London: Pan Books, 1978), p. 9.

expand the ability of human vision and visual perception. Even though their experiments were rarely a success, this did not lessen their ambition to expose perceived reality photographically. It was via photography, after all, that we were introduced to the realms of existence kept naturally by the light spectrum but hidden to the unaided eye.

Another form of transformation from ideas to things is beautifully observed in an essay by Minor White, in which the photographer describes a 'small crash in the kitchen' as an event that formed an object, which gave birth to an idea and finally became the photographic image. White saw '[t]he death of the bowl [to be] the birth of an object' and expressed a wish for birth and death to be always as close. 'Actually they are', he continued, 'birth always explodes from death as fast as the splinter from the bowl—only those of us who feel the need of sleep close our eyes too long.' The photographer concludes his text by feeling pleased about the accident, which turned to be a kind of visionary explosion rather than a mere crash. 'As one porcelain bowl died a thousand thoughts were born,' he writes, 'a score of unexplained photographs were seen to be, not accidents, but photographs that found themselves. By my discipline of seeing I put myself where photographs can find themselves.³³⁶

I recognise through my eyes, which are always both open and closed, that there is no seeing which is not also darkness, hesitation and doubt. The instant between the visible and the invisible is also the moment of the opening and closing of the shutter, which can be seen as a form of revealing, as speech instead of silence. Understanding photography as above all a medium of observation, I wonder if photographing what one does not really see is to photograph at all? As an artist who nevertheless works with the outside world and unceasingly learns how to look, I use 'a discipline of seeing' to be in touch with the thing that I photograph without determination and without ground. This point of indifference is at the service of the unknown, and is aimed at the unidentifiable presence that repeats itself or at the repetition that appears as something unknown. By way of photographing the states of things as they show themselves to me, they may leave their trace. I need only to remind myself to use my camera when I am captivated by light.

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³³⁶ All the citations in this paragraph are from: Minor White, 'Found Photographs' (1957), in *Photography: Essays & Images*, edited by Beaumont Newhall (London: Secker & Warburg, 1981), pp. 307–309.

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- Histoires de fantômes pour grandes personnes (Ghost Stories for Adults), curated by Georges
 Didi-Huberman and Arno Gisinger, Le Fresnoy, Studio national des arts
 contemporains, 5 October 30 December 2012
- *L'apparition des images* (Apparition of Images), curated by Audrey Illouz, Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, Paris, 29 January 9 March 2013
- Ana Mendieta: Traces, Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre London, 24 September –
 15 December 2013
- Joan Fontcuberta: Stranger than Fiction, Science Museum London, 23 July 9 November 2014
- Qui a peur des femmes photographes? 1839 à 1919 (Who's Afraid of Women Photographers? 1839–1919), Musée d'Orsay and Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris, 14 October 2015 – 25 January 2016
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