

Seeking the After-Image: Swan Songs, Place, and the Photographic Image

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Abstract

Seeking the After-Image: Swan Songs, Place, and the Photographic Image

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Seeking the After-Image: Swan Songs, Place, and the Photographic Image is a practice-led research-creation initiative located at the intersection of photography, art history, and continental philosophy. The three fields of study do not seek to illustrate or justify one another, but rather act as unique contributors to a multifaceted investigation. As an initiative that reflects a crossing of disciplinary boundaries, *Seeking the After-Image: Swan Songs, Place, and the Photographic Image*, contributes to both contemporary art production as well as cultural and social criticism by means of a critical and reflexive engagement that intertwines studio practice and scholarly research. The doctoral study is undertaken with the conviction that a creative impulse is implicit to both scholarly research and studio praxis, and that these endeavours have the potential to stimulate and enhance one another.

The thesis consists of two complimentary components, distinct in means but integrally connected in content. This includes the realization of a comprehensive body of artwork, as well as a written thesis of critical, creative, and theoretical content. The conceptual underpinnings that inform the realization of the body of artwork act as the departure point for the written thesis. The body of artwork realized for this study, *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, is a series of photographs that document the landscapes and architectural sites associated with the swan songs of a selection of artists and intellectuals. My interest in how these swan songs continue to agitate, activate, or even haunt the present informs the emergence of the central concept of the after-image. The after-image embodies the notion that the past inhabits the present in very real ways, and acts as a philosophical tool to engage in dialogue with revenants that continue to populate the present. This concept binds the seemingly disparate chapters together, and emerges as a constant thread throughout the thesis.

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Table of Contents

List of figures	xi
Image Sequence: The After-Image (Swan Songs)	1
Introduction: Exotic Matter	18
Chapter 1 The After-Image (Swan Songs)	36
Chapter 2 Consider Death: The Concept of Life	54
Chapter 3 Go to those Places: palimpsestic landscapes	75
Chapter 4 Record Them: Light, Time & Liquid Intelligence	106
Conclusion: Shooting Arrows	136
Bibliography	141
Appendix 1: The After-Image (Swan Songs)	149
Appendix 2: Celestial Measures	157

List of Figures

- Figure 1 Fiona Annis, *Swan Song (Woolf) - River Ouse, Sussex, 2009*
C-type print, 100 cm x 100 cm
- Figure 2 Fiona Annis, *Swan Song (Woolf) - River Ouse, Sussex, 2009*
C-type print, 100 cm x 100 cm
- Figure 3 Fiona Annis, *Swan Song (Woolf) - River Ouse, Sussex, 2009*
C-type print, 100 cm. x 100 cm
- Figure 4 Fiona Annis, *Swan Song (Thomson) – Hemlock Grove, Algonquin Park, 2009*
C-type print, 100 cm x 100 cm
- Figure 5 Fiona Annis, *Swan Song (Thomson) - Canoe Lake, Algonquin Park, 2009*
C-type print, 100 cm x 100 cm
- Figure 6 Fiona Annis, *Swan Song (Woolf) - River Ouse, Sussex, 2009*
C-type print, 100 cm x 100 cm
- Figure 7 Fiona Annis, *Swan Song (Pasolini) - A erodrome, Lido di Ostia, 2010*
C-type print, 100 cm x 100 cm
- Figure 8 Fiona Annis, *Swan Song (Lennon) – The Dakota, NYC, 2010*
C-type print, 100 cm x 100 cm
- Figure 9 Fiona Annis, *Swan Song (Ader) - 150 miles off the most westerly tip of Ireland, 2009, C-type print, 100 cm x 100 cm*
- Figure 10 Fiona Annis, *Swan Song (Lombardi) –Williamsburg, New York, 2010*
C-type print, 100 cm x 100 cm
- Figure 11 Fiona Annis, *Swan Song (Benjamin) - Cross-border route, France/Spain, 2010*
C-type print, 100 cm x 100 cm
- Figure 12 Fiona Annis, *Swan Song (Jamieson) - l' glise du Bon Pasteur, Lyon, 2010*
C-type print, 100 cm x 100 cm
- Figure 13 Peter Greenaway, *A Zed and Two Noughts*, film still, 1985
- Figure 14 Fiona Annis, modified Graphic View camera used for *Celestial Measures*, photo documentation, 2013
- Figure 15 Fiona Annis, modified Holga used for *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, photo documentation, 2012

- Figure 16 Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920, India ink, coloured chalk, and brown wash on paper, 32 x 24 cm, Israel Museum, Jerusalem
- Figure 17 Caspar David Friedrich, *Monk by the Sea*, 1809-1810, oil-on-canvas, 110 x 171.5 cm, Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin
- Figure 18 Bas Jan Ader, *In Search of the Miraculous*, July 1975. Bulletin, Art and Project Gallery, Amsterdam, Collection Estate of Bas Jan Ader
- Figure 19 Sol LeWitt, *Black Form (Dedicated to the Missing Jews)*, Platz der Republik, Hamburg-Altona, Germany, 1989. Photo: Kulturbehörde Hamburg.
- Figure 20 Caspar David Friedrich, *Sea Shore in Moonlight*, 1835-36, oil-on-canvas, 134 x 169 cm, Louvre, Paris
- Figure 21 Robert Smithson, Instruction card for *400 Seattle Horizons*, 1969
- Figure 22 Gábor Ösz, site documentation: observation post (English Channel at Fécamp, France), 1999
- Figure 23 Gábor Ösz, site documentation: interior of observation post, 1999
- Figure 24 Gábor Ösz, *No. 5 Mers les Bains, (France) 19.9.1999*, 1999
Camera obscura (exposure time: 5 h 30 min), ciba chrome, 126 x 230 cm
- Figure 25 Ori Gersht, *Drawing Past* (from the series *Liquidation*), 2005, c-type print, 80 x 100 cm
- Figure 26 Ori Gersht, *Galicja* (from the series *Liquidation*), 2005, c-type print, 150 x 180 cm
- Figure 27 Sally Mann, *Untitled #8, Antietam*, 2002, gelatin silver enlargement print from original wet-plate collodion negative, 96.1 x 122.7 cm
- Figure 28 Erik Kessels, *24 Hours in Photography*, 2013, installation, Contact Photography Festival, Toronto
- Figure 29 Michael Wesely, *5.4.1997 – 3.6.1999 Potsdamer Platz, Berlin*, 1997-1999, C-print, 125 x 175 cm
- Figure 30 Roger Fenton, *Fenton's Photographic Van*, 1855. Photographic print: salted paper, 17.5 x 16.5 cm. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 31 Fiona Annis, *Untitled Hesitation (the empty form of time 1- 4)*, 2013
4 c-type prints mounted on aluminium, 102 x 127 cm each

- Figure 32 Fiona Annis, *Matter imprinted with its echo (No. 1-6)*, 2013
6 etched anodized aluminum plates. 30 x 61 cm
Text source: Jeanette Winterson, *Gut Symmetries*
- Figure 33 Fiona Annis, *Celestial Measures*, 2013, c-type enlargement of wet-plate
collodion (ferrotype), 152 x 127 cm
- Figure 34 Fiona Annis, production image (Gaspésie), 2013
- Figure 35 Fiona Annis, *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*
La Galerie McClure, Montréal, Québec. March 2011

Image Sequence

The After-Image (Swan Songs)



Figure 1

Swan Song (Woolf) - River Ouse, Sussex



Figure 2

Swan Song (Woolf) - River Ouse, Sussex

les géographies solennelles des limites humaines ¹

¹ Paul Eluard, *Les Yeux Fertiles*: Paul Eluard, *Les Yeux Fertiles*. Paris: Guy Lévis-Mano, 1936. p. 42.



Figure 3

Swan Song (Woolf) - River Ouse, Sussex



Figure 4

Swan Song (Thomson) – Hemlock Grove, Algonquin Park



Figure 5

Swan Song (Thomson) - Canoe Lake, Algonquin Park



Figure 6

Swan Song (Woolf) - River Ouse, Sussex

qui font qu'un corps ou un mot ne s'arrêtent en aucun point précis²

² Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Mille Plateaux*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980. p. 138.



Figure 7

Swan Song (Pasolini) - Aérodrome, Lido di Ostia

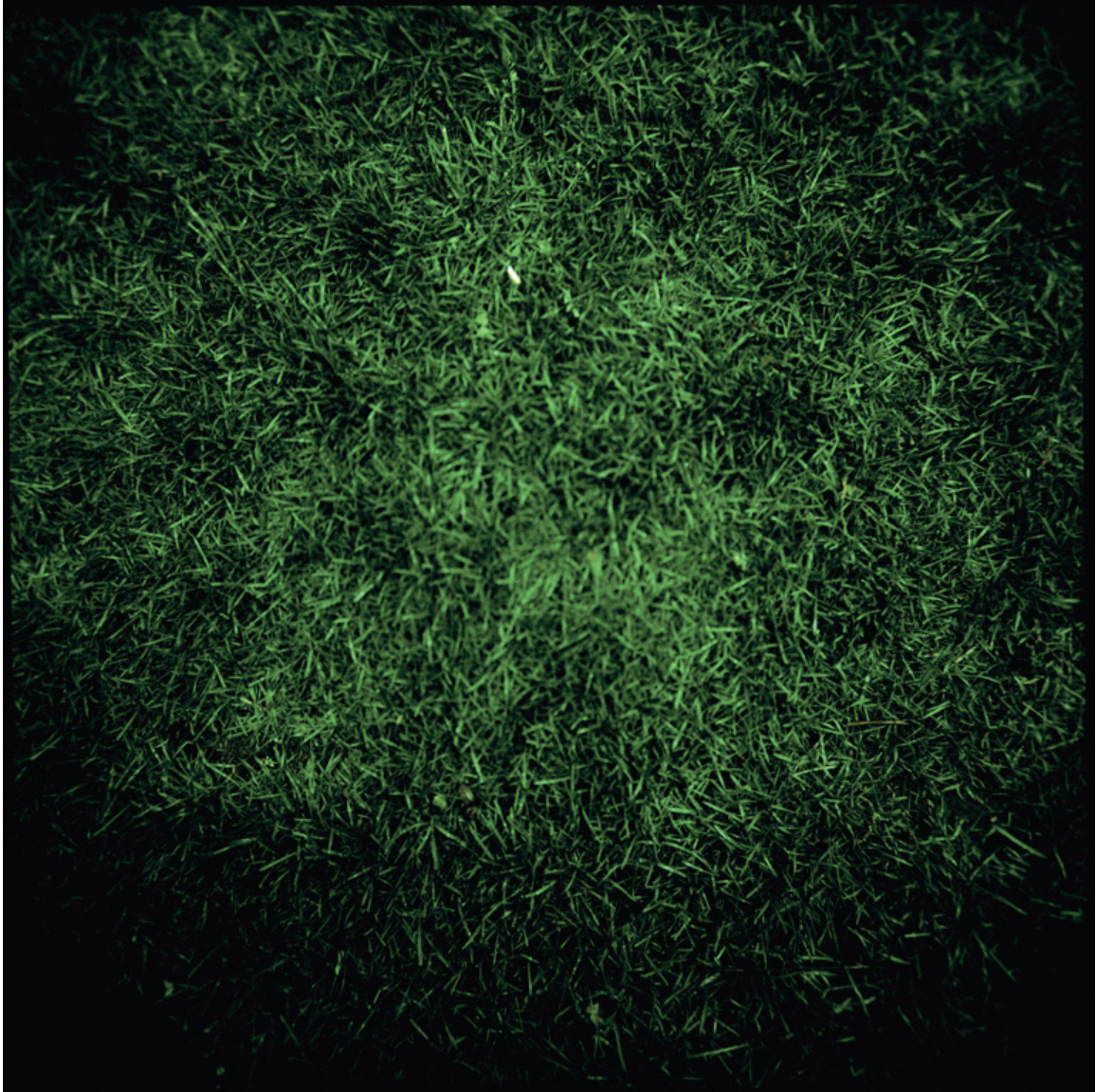


Figure 8

Swan Song (Lennon) – The Dakota, NYC



Figure 9

Swan Song (Ader) - 150 miles off the most westerly tip of Ireland

la première grande libération concrète d'un temps non pulse ³

³ Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Mille Plateaux*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980. p. 329.



Figure 10

Swan Song (Lombardi) – Williamsburg, NYC

on ne cesse pas et on n'en finit pas de mourir⁴

⁴ Blanchot, Maurice. *L'Espace Littéraire*. Paris: Gallimard, 1988. p. 107



Figure 11

Swan Song (Benjamin) - Cross-border route, France/Spain

you - are stone, desert, and death.⁵

⁵ Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Desert Grows" *Dithyrambs of Dionysus*. 1st ed. Black Swan Books, 1984. p. 19.



Figure 12

Swan Song (Jamieson) - l'Église du bon pasteur, Lyon

Introduction

An Exotic Matter: Material Links Between the Past and the Present

What is it that you contain? The dead, time, light patterns of millennia, the expanding universe opening in your gut.⁶

The effort of light, travelling at enormous speed, crosses distances so vast that it can take sometimes tens of thousands of years for the light of a star to reach the Earth. Hence, when you look at the stars in the night sky, the past is your present. You are witness to the light of stars now dead. And this residue, what is left behind - the corpse of a star - is an exotic matter. Physicists tell us that these violent explosions created almost every atom of the human body; that our world is essentially produced from stardust. We are an after-image of time and space discreetly located for a flashing instant before we are once again star-flung.

This project explores how the past is made manifest through creative praxis. This is considered both within my own studio-based initiatives, as well as through the work of other artists who draw from historic material as a source of inspiration. In this field of investigation I place an

⁶ Jeanette Winterson, *Gut Symmetries* (London: Granta Books, 1997), 212.

emphasis on photography, with a specific interest in how photographs can act as material links between the past and the present. To explore this territory both theoretically and artistically, my doctoral study begins and ends with the creation of a body of artwork. These two cycles of artwork are intimately linked and also radically distinct, in the sense that they both share my concern for how the past inhabits the present, but as will become evident, they do so in very different ways.

One month prior to beginning Concordia University's Interdisciplinary PhD program two seemingly unrelated events occurred. Firstly, I went to visit the place where a dear friend and former lover had committed suicide several years earlier. I spent time there, in that barn, listening, thinking, and feeling. I took several photographs. In the space of the same week, I also watched the film, *A Zed and Two Noughts*, by none other than the magnificent director Peter Greenaway. The opening scene of the film is a car crash caused by a collision with a swan. As a consequence of these two events, I was introduced to the expression 'swan song.'



Figure 13 Peter Greenaway, *A Zed and Two Noughts*, film still, 1985

The After-Image (Swan Songs)

The expression ‘swan song,’ is derived from the Greek myth that swans are mute, but burst into song just before they die. Over the ages the legend was embraced by poets and came to mean a person’s last eloquent words or performance: a final farewell appearance. This expression is the departure point for what has, overtime, developed into my doctoral project. This project began with the creation of a new body of artwork, *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, which explores the swan songs of a series of artists and intellectuals, who produced remarkable final works that are intimately connected with their deaths. This includes for example Virginia Woolf, Bas Jan Ader, Tom Thomson, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Walter Benjamin, as well as less known artists such as Shannon Jamieson and Mark Lombardi. The consistent attribute amongst the various figures selected for the project is that their swan song bears a poetic and often political resonance that continues to generate dialogue in current social and cultural milieus. The body of artwork that was generated from this exploration consists of a cycle of sixteen large-format photographs that document the landscapes and architectural sites associated with the swan songs of the selected artists. In an exhibition setting, the photographs are accompanied with various citations related to the life-death relation.⁷

My interest in how these swan songs continue to persist in the cultural landscape contributes to my central premise that the past inhabits the present in very real ways. This premise is developed throughout the written thesis, and elaborated with the analogy of the after-image. First and foremost, the after-image is used to describe ways in which the past lingers. Because

⁷ The exhibition is comprised of sixteen large-format c-type prints (100 x 100 cm each) interspersed with vinyl text. Please see the appendix for installation images, text citations, as well a complete list of where this body of artwork has been exhibited.

the after-image functions as a form of *survivance*, it further acts as a philosophical tool to engage in dialogue with revenants that continue to populate the present. These ideas are explored in the four principle chapters of the thesis, which include: an account of the process guiding the realization of the body of artwork; a philosophical consideration of the life-death relation; an art historical investigation of the link between place and memory; as well as a sustained meditation on photography with a particular emphasis on the medium's poignant relationship to the passage of time. This final chapter is accompanied with the realization of a new series of images.

Photography, both in practice and theory, is a central component of my doctoral project. To further extend my knowledge of the medium, I undertook a six-month research fellowship at the Center for Alternative Photography in New York City.⁸ This is a unique organization dedicated to preserving antiquated photographic processes through creative and conservation practices. Here, I began a historic and material investigation of photography's origins and genealogical developments. This period of research and creative exploration contributed enormously to my knowledge of photography and also led to the development of a second body of artwork, *Celestial Measures* (2012-2014). *Celestial Measures* sustains the concerns examined in the thesis, as well as brings forward new research directions to pursue.

Celestial Measures

During my research fellowship at the Center for Alternative Photography, I had the opportunity to learn various historic photographic processes, including wet plate collodion, platinum, albumen, gum bichromate, and cyanotype. With newfound appreciation for the idiosyncrasies of

⁸ This research fellowship was supported by le Fonds Québécois de la Recherche sur la Société et la Culture.

each of these techniques, I eventually came to focus my attention on the wet plate collodion process. Developed in 1850, wet plate collodion is a chemically complex and technically demanding process for which a defining attribute is the preparation of a light sensitive chemistry that requires a liquid state. Due to the unpredictable nature of working with a wet process, the technique is very unlike the dry precision of contemporary digital photography. It is fluid, hard to control, and the mark of the hand is very evident. It is like painting with light and time.

In contrast to *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, which explores history by means of place, this new study explores history by means of material engagement. Through a hands-on discovery of the technology and techniques of previous eras, I gained an embodied understanding and familiarity with photography's history. This contributed enormously to my knowledge of the medium, and for the first time I began to see the relationship between photography, alchemy, and astronomy. This is evident in that photography emerged in part from alchemical investigations in the transformation of matter, and the development of lens-based optics respectively.⁹ By investigating photography's origins, I also began to sense the strange and eerie qualities of a medium that, because it has been so prevalent in my lifetime, I tend to perceive as quite ordinary, even banal.

In tandem with my deep interest in learning antiquated photographic techniques, it is also important to note that my desire to eventually create new work with these processes did not necessarily mean that I aimed to replicate them exactly. Rather, I was interested in revisiting historic processes while simultaneously investigating ways of combining them with

⁹ These ideas are further explored in chapter four, "Record Them: Light, Time & Liquid Intelligence."

contemporary methods and techniques. My interest was in thinking towards how antiquated formulas could be integrated and put to use in a contemporary context.

To work with the wet plate process, I first mix a light sensitive chemistry according to 19th century recipes. This includes a curious combination of ether, collodion, alcohol and silver nitrate, along with other equally exotic compounds for development. Aside from continuing to employ historic recipes for the chemistry, I made significant modifications to other aspects of the process. For example, rather than working with a traditional wet plate camera, which is a wooden sliding box with a brass lens, I acquired a 1940s Graphic View monorail.¹⁰ This is a solid, and very heavy, large-format camera usually used with celluloid film. Due to its weight and analogue function these cameras are now obsolete, although because they were once relatively popular they are not too difficult to acquire. After some experimentation I decided to pair this camera with a contemporary lens. What is lost in this choice is the otherworldly distortions obtained from a brass period lens, however the benefit is that the aesthetic quality of the image is the result of the photographic process itself. This aids to distinguish the visual attributes of an antiquated lens from the technique. To register an image, I bring my equipment into an ice-fishing tent draped with light-blocking cloths, which functions as my portable darkroom. Here I pour the liquid chemistry onto a prepared plate; while this surface would traditionally be glass or blackened tin, I use aluminium typically employed for trophy plaques.

¹⁰ There are a small number of specialized crafts people who continue to produce contemporary replications of wooden sliding box cameras for wet plate enthusiasts. The majority of the original cameras used in the 1850's are destroyed due to the erosion of the interior of the camera caused by the wet chemistry.

Once the chemistry settles into a thin wet membrane, I slide the plate into a modified film holder. A folded credit card keeps the plate in place as it is inserted into the camera body.¹¹



Figure 14 Fiona Annis, modified Graphic View camera used for *Celestial Measures*, production image, 2013

Initially, because the process requires an on-site darkroom, I was limited to working in a studio environment. In contrast to *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, which took me to specific places, I needed to bring the world to my camera. With this constraint, my first sequence of images nonetheless involved a classic photographic study: clouds.¹² For many years I have, whenever

¹¹ McGill University professor Matthew C. Hunter drew my attention to some of these idiosyncrasies in a review he wrote after bringing a graduate student class to my studio for a demonstration of the wet plate process. See: Matthew C. Hunter, "Risky Business, Business as Usual," *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* November 19, 2012 <http://sanfordsanchez.blogspot.ca/2012/11/risky-business.html> (accessed May 7, 2013).

¹² Until the 1920s most photographic emulsions were orthochromatic, which meant they were primarily sensitive to light on the blue end of the spectrum. This made photographing clouds particularly difficult because the sky would appear very light and the clouds would be lost against it. Notable historic examples of photographers who embraced this technical challenge include for example Belgian photographer Léonard Misonne (1870–1943), who was noted for his black and white photographs of heavy skies and dark clouds. American photographer Alfred Stieglitz (1864–

possible, photographed the sky when I pass over a bridge. This has resulted in a personal archive of digital photographs; usually low resolution thumbnails taken from cell phones. I selected several images from this collection and had them printed at a local office supply store for a dollar each as black-and-white, poster-size photocopy reproductions. I then re-photographed these noisy, low-fidelity images in the studio using the wet plate process.



Figure 15 Fiona Annis, *Bridge Meditations (No. 3)*, c-type enlargement of wet-plate collodion (ferrotype). 102 x 81cm, 2012

1946) also created a series of photographs of clouds, called *Equivalents* between 1925 and 1931. *Equivalents* is groundbreaking because it's viewed today as one of the first examples of utterly abstract photographic art.

Experimenting with different ways of working with the antiquated process was a necessary technical step of my inquiry. However this also contributed to the theoretical development of my central premise that the past inhabits the present in very real ways. That is, the notion of simultaneous endurance and change was brought to my attention by means of working through the modification of the process to incorporate contemporary concerns and methods. This notion of simultaneous endurance and change is critical because when I propose that the past inhabits the present, I do not mean to suggest that the past remains unchanged. Rather, I aim to call attention to both the persistence and the transformation of an item over time. Whether I am addressing an artefact, a technology, a place, or even an idea, the notion of both continuity and change is at the heart of my concerns.

Methodology

By intertwining creative material-based explorations with scholarly research I situate this inquiry as a practice-led research-creation initiative. By this I mean that working through the creation of a body of artwork mobilizes questions and ideas that I then also pursue through a scholarly lens. In this way, the artistic practice functions as a catalyst for historical, theoretical and philosophical inquiry. As such, my doctoral study is undertaken with the conviction that a creative impulse is implicit in both theoretical research and artistic praxis, and that these endeavours have the potential to stimulate and enhance one another.

The inter-connection between creative practice and scholarly research is a central subject for practice-led initiatives. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt describe practice-led methodologies as a relatively new species of research that specifically highlights the crucial relationship between

theory and art practice, as well as the relevance of philosophical paradigms for contemporary art practitioners.¹³ They suggest that the subjective and interdisciplinary tendencies common to practice-led methodologies have the potential to extend the frontiers of research. Artist and educator Roy Ascott has also contributed to the development of practice-led discourses, and in parallel with Barrett and Bolt, he suggests that until recently non-artists have traditionally defined research in academia. With the emergence of practice-led initiatives, artists are now engaged in defining what constitutes research within the fields of fine art, new media and design. Ascott attests to the value of this mode of inquiry and indicates how it contributes to the cultural landscape:

Art research is speculative, anticipatory and visionary. It involves thinking out of the box, seeking to move the mind, the senses, and the arena of action beyond the initial frame of inquiry... Art research must produce its own protocols; the artist as researcher must engage with knowledge in new ways, creating new language, new frames of reference, new systems and behaviour. It must be non-linear, associative, risky, connective, transformative as well as intellectually, artistically and even spiritually challenging.¹⁴

I frame my particular practice-led initiative as the encounter of ideas and different forms of knowledge. It is important to note that because this project was carried out in the context of an interdisciplinary program, I was not locked within a single field, but rather encouraged to construct a diagonal axis across domains. I benefited enormously from the feedback that I received from my three supervisors as well as the dialogue generated amongst my colleagues.

¹³ Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 56. Other valuable references on practice-led research-creation include: Carole Gray and Julian Malins: *Visualizing Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design*; Graeme Sullivan: *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*; Julia Kristeva: *Institutional Interdisciplinarity in Theory and in Practice: An Interview*; as well as *After Method* by John Lockel.

¹⁴ Roy Ascott, "Speculative Research," *MutaMorphosis Art & Science Event*. (Prague, CZ; November 1, 2007), conference keynote.

This productive framework exposed me to different perspectives and concerns that ultimately expanded the scope and depth of this project.¹⁵

Within this interdisciplinary framework, my study is located at the intersection of photography, art history, and continental philosophy. The three fields of study do not seek to illustrate or justify one another, but rather act as unique contributors to a multifaceted investigation. As a practice-led research-creation initiative that reflects a crossing of disciplinary boundaries, *Seeking the After-Image: Swan Songs, Place, and the Photographic Image*, contributes to both contemporary art production as well as cultural and social criticism by means of a critical and reflexive engagement that intertwines studio practice and scholarly research.¹⁶ The outcome of the thesis consists of two complimentary components, distinct in means but integrally connected in content. These two components include the realization of a comprehensive body of artwork, as well as a written thesis of critical, creative, and theoretical content. The conceptual underpinnings that inform the realization of the body of artwork act as the foundation and departure point for the written thesis. The textual component does not seek to describe or analyze the body of artwork I created, but rather pursues a distinct theoretical, philosophical, and art historical trajectory. The two inquiries run in parallel, acting as complimentary components of a research-creation study.

¹⁵ The following essay by Julia Kristeva offers interesting insights regarding the benefits and challenges of interdisciplinary programs of study: Julia Kristeva, "Institutional Interdisciplinarity in Theory and in Practice: An Interview," in *The Anxiety of Interdisciplinarity, De-, Dis, Ex-*, eds. Alex Coles and Alexia Defert (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1997), 3-21.

¹⁶ Research-creation is typically defined as projects that integrate a creative process, experimental aesthetic component, or an artistic work as an integral part of a study. For further insight see: Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, "Research-Creation: intervention, analysis and 'family resemblances'," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37, no. 1, (2012). As well as: "Definitions of Terms," *The Government of Canada Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council*, <http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programmes-programmes/definitions-eng.aspx#a22> (accessed May 16, 2014).

Due to the relationship forged between studio-based praxis and academic research, both textual and non-textual elements are considered as fundamental components of the doctoral thesis.¹⁷ To further amplify the relationship between the textual and visual components, the written thesis is composed in a way that mirrors the process of creating the first body of artwork. In this way, both the body of artwork and the accompanying thesis share parallel concerns, although, they are pursued with different means and yield distinct outcomes.

Conceptual art strategies

Throughout the creation of *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, I kept a research log that records the process of realizing this practice-led initiative. The research log includes critical, philosophical, visual, and historical material, as well as my reflections on the development of the project.¹⁸ This method is analyzed in *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* by Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt who suggest that practice-led output is often associated with a route-map, which renders the research-creation process accessible, and also acts as a document in which one can critically reflect on the research process.¹⁹ It was while compiling the research log in preparation for public presentation that I began to describe the creation of this body of artwork as the execution of the following set of instructions:

¹⁷ Documentation of the public exhibition of the two studio-based components are included in the appendix, and small format reproductions of the photographs that comprise these two bodies of artwork are integrated directly into the written thesis.

¹⁸ Components of the route-map are accessible online: Fiona Annis, "Thesis Instructions," *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*. May 21, 2012, <http://chantducynge.blogspot.ca/> (accessed May 30, 2014).

¹⁹ Barrett and Bolt, *Practice as Research*, 56.

1. Consider death
2. Go to those places
3. Record them

To realize *The After-Image (Swan Songs)* I essentially followed these three instructions, and in turn, these instructions aided in communicating the basic premise of the project. Perhaps most importantly, the instructional modality associated with the creation of *The After-Image (Swan Songs)* emerged as a method not only of creating a body of artwork but also as a compositional tool for scholarly investigation. In this respect, the structure of the written thesis follows the same set of instructions as the creation of the body of artwork.

This instructional method is informed by Conceptual art strategies found for example in the “event scores” frequently employed in the 1960s by such artists as John Cage, George Brecht, Yoko Ono and other members of the Fluxus art group.²⁰ These event scores were typically written texts that contained instructions to realize performances, happenings, and artworks. The scores often involve a set of directions for the unfolding of actions, the communication of ideas, and/or the use of objects from everyday life that are then recontextualized as an event.²¹ It is not without reason that an event score suggests musicality, because like a piece of music, event scores can go through countless realizations as they are interpreted and performed by others, which leaves them open to variation and change.²²

²⁰ A diverse selection of event scores can be found in: Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Do It* (New York: e-flux, 2004).

²¹ For further insight see: Ken Friedman, Owen Smith and Lauren Sawchyn, *The Fluxus Performance Workbook* (Performance Research e-Publications, 2002).

²² Instructional procedures find precedence with Andre Breton and the Surrealists, as demonstrated for example in the rules of play for the *Exquisite Corpse* and *écriture automatique*. Another forerunner would be the operational

Within this practice-led initiative, I repurposed the instructional score as a method for interdisciplinary study, that is, to launch a system into action. While such a strategy has, to the best of my knowledge, not yet been framed as a research-creation method, I nonetheless see a strong link between Conceptual art instructional scores and speculative research. An example of how instructional scores can act as an instigator for novel exploration is Yoko Ono's book *Grapefruit*, which is a compilation of instructional performances to be completed in the mind of the reader. In the following *Map Piece*, Ono succinctly describes the experimental reality of interdisciplinary research, which often calls for inquiry in realms where knowledge is hidden, hard to reach, or unknown:

Draw an imaginary map. Put a goal mark on the map where you want to go. Go walking on an actual street according to your map. If there is no street where it should be according to your map, make one by putting the obstacles aside. When you reach the goal, ask the name of the city.²³

Typical of Ono's work, the score is open-ended and subject to interpretation, and further highlights the importance of process over outcome.

Because the "instructional" approach that I employed for the creation of *The After-Image (Swan Songs)* emerged as a method not only for the creation of a body of artwork, but also for structuring the thesis, I would like to draw attention to how this finds precedence in the work of the composer, author and philosopher, John Cage. I point specifically to Cage because he has a

instructions of Guy Debord and the Situationists. Conceptual artists that carry on this legacy include for example Robert Smithson's *Instruction card for 400 Seattle Horizons* (1969). For further reference see: Bruce Altshuler, *Art by Instruction and the Pre-History of do it* (New York: Independent Curators, 1998).

²³ Yoko Ono, "Map Piece," *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions + Drawings* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), No pagination.

history of applying compositional strategies to his lectures and essays that are analogous to those that he employs in the field of music. For example, John Cage's *Lecture on Nothing* is written with the same rhythmic structure that he employed in his concurrent musical compositions of the time, including *Sonatas and Interludes* and *Three Dances*.²⁴ This informs the highly experimental nature of his lectures and publications, while also creating coherence between his practice and theory.

Outline of the chapters

The sequence of images that initiate the written thesis are derived from the first body of artwork realized within this study, *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*. This set of images paves the way for the first chapter, which is a narrative account of the conceptualization and realization of this body of artwork, and further introduces the questions, concerns and revelations arising from this photographic exploration. This chapter includes an exploration of the origins and evolution of the Greek myth from which the body of work draws its title; as well as a reflection on the selection of the swan songs that I followed and how these swan songs continue to inform the direction of subsequent chapters. While many of the swan songs explored in the context of *The After-Image (Swan Songs)* are linked to suicides, it is important to note that the thesis does not seek to explain or interpret the psychological or biographical motivations for these predetermined deaths. Rather, the study questions and demonstrates how these swan songs continue to persist in the cultural and social landscape. My interest in how these swan songs continue to act upon the present contributes to the unveiling of the central concept of the after-image. This concept binds the seemingly disparate chapters together, and emerges as a constant

²⁴ For further elaboration see: John Cage, *Silence* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1961).

thread to explore how the past inhabits the present.

Beginning with the second chapter of the thesis, I return to the original set of instructions guiding the realization of *The After-Image (Swansongs)*, and continue to employ this Conceptual art strategy. The instructions are taken as a set of imperatives, to explore both philosophical and art historical perspectives. As such, the written thesis continues to reflect the conceptual underpinnings of the creative process to inform its structure, content, and complexities.

1. Consider death
2. Go to those places
3. Record them

These three imperatives correspond to the following three chapters, which examine the life-death relationship, the intersection of place and memory, and the spectral nature of photography.

Consider death

In the context of the creation of *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, the first instruction, *consider death*, was conceived of primarily as a meditation on final acts and their site of articulation. In the context of the theoretical orientation of the thesis, this proposition is developed into a philosophical reflection on the distinction between the death of the individual and a concept of life that exceeds mortality. The chapter begins with an analysis of the death of Socrates (as recounted in Plato's *Phaedo*) to consider how ancient philosophy entailed a form of training to overcome the fear of death. This introduction is followed by an exploration of what Michel de Montaigne proposes as the practice of death wherein an intimacy, even an alliance, is fostered

with mortality. Montaigne's reflection opens onto a further consideration of the work of Maurice Blanchot, whose work resonates with a deep meditation on death and dying. I focus on his book *The Space of Literature*, in which Blanchot proposes a distinction between two kinds of death: the personal and the impersonal.²⁵ I discuss this along with Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return, as well as the last essay published by Gilles Deleuze before his death, "*Immanence: A Life...*"²⁶ Here Deleuze develops the impersonal concept of *a* life, wherein for example he suggests, "while organisms die, Life does not."²⁷ In this regard, this chapter elicits the concept of the after-image by means of a reflection on life as a continuous force co-existing yet distinct from the individual life to which it corresponds.

Go to those places

The subsequent chapter is prompted by the instruction *go to those places*, which initiates a reflection on the intersection of place and memory. Here I investigate how memory is inscribed on landscape, and how places act as anchors for narrative. I question how artists, and more specifically photographers, contribute to the recollection of past narratives by revisiting and representing certain places. Because these questions are bound up with the representation of place, the art historical genre of landscape is also important to this discussion. To pursue this link with landscape, the work of such artists as Caspar David Friedrich, Bas Jan Ader, and Robert Smithson is considered, with an emphasis on their innovative methods of addressing the gap between experience and representation. This discussion relies on the insights of Joseph Leo

²⁵ Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982).

²⁶ The essay was first published in the journal *Philosophie* two months before Deleuze's death. See: Gilles Deleuze, "Immanence: une vie..." *Philosophie* 47 (1995): 6.

²⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), xv.

Koerner, in the book *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape*, where he addresses the radical shift in the representation of landscape during the Romantic era. To conclude the chapter, I explore the work of three contemporary photographers for whom place and memory are core concerns: Gábor Ösz, Ori Gersht, and Sally Mann. Throughout this chapter the notion of “place” is crucial, and I draw on the subtle but important distinctions between site, place and space made by phenomenologist Edward S. Casey, whose research reveals the shifting history of the theoretical and cultural conceptions of place.

Record them

The thesis draws to a close with the final chapter, “Record Them: Light, Time & Liquid Intelligence,” which is a theoretical, philosophical and art historical reflection on photography with a particular emphasis on the medium’s poignant relationship with the passage of time. The concept of the after-image culminates in this final chapter with a treatment of photography as a tangible reminder that the past is continually unfolding itself in the materiality of the present.²⁸ The work of art historian Geoffrey Batchen plays a central role in the development of this chapter, as does the French literary critic Roland Barthes, whose final book, *Camera Lucida: reflections on photography*, illuminates the fact that all photographs, whether taken moments, years, or decades ago, are spectres of the past. I also draw on Bergson’s concept of duration and time to trigger a series of questions on how the past and the present may coalesce in a still-image. In this chapter I also reflect on the second body of artwork I created, *Celestial Measures*, which completes the doctoral dissertation, and additionally indicates future research-creation trajectories to pursue.

²⁸ Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001).

Chapter One

The After-Image (Swan Songs)

If I were a maker of books, I would make a register, with comments, of various deaths.²⁹

The expression 'swan song' is derived from the Greek myth that swans are mute, but burst into song just before they die. Over the ages the legend was embraced by poets and came to mean a person's last eloquent words or performance: a final farewell appearance. The legend of the dying swan's melancholy song first appeared in 458 B.C. in the Greek tragedy *Agamemnon*, wherein the doomed prophetess Cassandra, after singing her last fatal lament, is compared to a swan.³⁰ The expression reappears in Plato's *Phaedo* (84 e-85) when Socrates is made to say that although swans sing in earlier life, they never do so as beautifully as at the approach of death. According to Socrates, this last melodious song is joyful, for the dying bird, sacred to Apollo, knew that it would soon be joining its master.³¹ Apollo, the god of poetry and song, was fabled to have been changed into a swan, and in this way, the souls of all poets were at one time thought to pass into the bodies of swans after death: Shakespeare was called the Swan of Avon; Homer

²⁹ Michel de Montaigne, "That to philosophize is to learn to die," in *Complete Essays* (California: Stanford University Press, 1958), 63.

³⁰ Aeschylus. *Agamemnon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 1444 f.

³¹ Geoffrey W. Arnott, "Swan Songs," *Greece & Rome* 24, no. 2 (1977): 149.

the Swan of Meander, and Virgil the Mantuan Swan. The myth of the swan song has since continued to be associated with the final works of poets, artists and musicians.

The After-Image (Swan Songs)

In 2009 I began to work towards the realization of a body of artwork that explores the swan songs of a series of artists and intellectuals, ranging from widely recognized to relatively unknown people, who produced remarkable final works that are intimately connected with their deaths. Initially, the swan songs that I followed belong to artists whose practice has informed my own creative development. This selection diversified and evolved organically as I pursued the project, and was greatly informed by my ongoing conversations, encounters and research. In this regard the range of artists included in the project is diverse, with swan songs spanning various eras, disciplines, and genres. While there is a specific reasoning behind each selection, there is no immediately obvious coherence amongst the swan songs that I followed. Instead, each swan song bears a particular poetic and often political resonance, while this resonance continues to generate dialogue in current social and cultural milieus.

The body of artwork that was generated from this exploration is comprised of a cycle of photographs I made, of the places connected to these swan songs. The study spans rural and urban landscapes, and includes swan songs that are linked with both predetermined deaths as well as instances of persecution. The first four places that I travelled to within the framework of *The After-Image (Swan Songs)* include: the River Ouse where Virginia Woolf took her life; the most westerly tip of Ireland where the capsized sailboat of Conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader was found; Canoe Lake where Canadian landscape painter Tom Thomson mysteriously drowned; and

the former studio of Mark Lombardi, a contemporary artist based in Williamsburg, New York who hung himself at the height of his career. The series was then extended to include documentation of such landscapes and architectural sites as the cross-border route between France and Spain that the Jewish-German intellectual Walter Benjamin took in his attempt to escape the Nazi occupation; an uncultivated field on the outskirts of Rome where Pier Paolo Pasolini's body was found shortly after completing his controversial film *Sàlo*; as well as a derelict church in Lyon, France, where Montréal-based artist Shannon Jamieson realized her last complete body of work.

The theoretical development of the thesis also took into account some swan songs that do not appear as photographs in the body of artwork. Barthes' last book, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, written shortly after the death of his mother, interweaves the author's reflections on death with a profound meditation on the nature of photography. Barthes died almost immediately after *Camera Lucida* was published.³² I also explore the last essay by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, *Immanence: A Life*. Here, Deleuze makes a philosophical distinction between *the* life of the individual, in contrast to *a* life, which is understood as an impersonal and nonorganic force. This distinction informs the elaboration of a concept of Life that exceeds the limitations of the mortal body. Deleuze's concept of Life contributes to the theoretical development of this thesis by extending the initial focus on the swan song as a final act, to also include a meditation on how death is concerned with life-living.³³

³² The discussion on *Camera Lucida* is elaborated in chapter four "Record Them: Light, Time & Liquid Intelligence."

³³ This line of thought was put in motion by a question that Dr. Erin Manning posed to me: "how can we think of death in a context that defies the Heideggerian Being-toward Death (how is death concerned with life-living where life is always in some sense beyond the human)?" For further elaboration on this direction of thought see chapter two: "Consider Death: the Concept of Life."

Swan Song (Woolf): River Ouse, Sussex

When initially considering the different swan songs to pursue I intuitively turned to Virginia Woolf as the point of departure for the creation of this body of work. Woolf was a committed artist and avant-garde writer, who took her own life when she seriously doubted her ability to continue living and writing coherently. In relation to such authors as James Joyce and T. S. Eliot, Woolf was initially relegated only a minor position in the Modernist canon. However, a transition occurred in the 1970's and 1980's as her full diaries, letters, and memoirs were published, along with shorter fiction and essays that were previously neglected. The depiction of Woolf as a troubled woman gave way to other interpretations: that of a great writer who contributed not only to new forms of fictional prose but also to the discourses of feminism, radical subjectivity, and modernist understandings of knowledge, language and art.³⁴

Returning to my notes that were taken during the realization of this project, the following sketchbook entry was composed shortly after visiting the rural town where Woolf lived and the River Ouse where she took her life:

Due to misreading a backcountry walking map (namely my interpretation of what was actually miles as kilometres), I arrive by foot on the outskirts of Rodmell, the small town where Virginia Woolf once lived, much later in the day than I had anticipated. The sun is setting, and I am concerned I have lost any chance of realizing an image due to the lack of light. Nonetheless, I continue on towards the

³⁴ Virginia Woolf was further able to successfully sustain a practice of writing strong political and cultural criticism while concurrently creating works of fiction that engages language in such a way that it becomes art. In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari praise Woolf's ability to glean the very heart and marrow of the daily and transform it to a higher power, as is perhaps evident when they remark that Woolf raises "lived perceptions to the percept and lived affections to the affect." For further reference see: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 169.

*river where Woolf drowned, and in the ditch that runs along the path from Woolf's former home to the riverside is a swan. I photograph it, an unexpected and welcome coincidence. I also photograph the River Ouse, as well as details of the rippling surface of the water. Lastly, I photograph a patch of sky; a choice influenced by the text that I travel with, a short essay written by Woolf in which she seeks to establish illness as a serious subject of literature.*³⁵

When I return to Montréal and develop what I anticipate may be a roll of entirely black film, my temperature rose five degrees upon deciphering the whisper of an image. The photograph of the swan submerged in murky reeds is unexpectedly haunting. This photograph is consequently the first image that I took in this body of work and has since become an anchor of the project (See Figure 1). Incidentally, my miscalculation of time and distance, which resulted in arriving at the River Ouse much later than anticipated, has since evolved into an imperative for documenting all subsequent swan songs – that is, to photograph at dawn or at dusk. In this way, I came to forge a conceptual alliance with the notion of the in-between (articulated as neither day nor night) in the recording of moments of passage (appearances and disappearances); or as Canadian novelist Timothy Findley succinctly describes: “Twilight. The best of times. The time between.”³⁶

Prior to undertaking the project *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, my previous photographic work had been entirely digitally based, a choice informed primarily by availability and accessibility. I consider both celluloid film and digital photography to possess their respective attributes, each

³⁵ In this essay Woolf writes: “in illness we cease to be soldiers in the army of the upright; we become deserters. We float with the sticks on the stream, irresponsible and disinterested and able, perhaps for the first time in years, to look round, to look up – to look, for example, at the sky.” See: Virginia Woolf, *On Being Ill* (Ashfield, Mass.: Paris Press, 2002), 12.

³⁶ Timothy Findley, *Pilgrim*. (Toronto: Harper Flamingo Canada, 1999), 91.

better suited for certain endeavours than the other. For this particular project I consciously migrated to film so as to work with a procedure that is becoming a relic of the past. One unexpected attribute that I gained in the shift away from digital is the element of anticipation owing to the necessary lapse of time between capturing an unknown imprint and seeing a visible image on the developed film. Despite travelling long distances and negotiating entry into hard to access places, over the course of realizing this body of work I came to appreciate the uncertainty of not knowing what had been captured until long after I had left the site.³⁷ This anxiety over what visual record had been attained was eased by my understanding that it would somehow be fitting for the recording of a swan song site to yield a roll of entirely black film, in attestation of the challenge of generating a photographic image that could address the notion of absence that a swan song implies. By means of questioning and reflecting on the attributes particular to the photographic medium, I have come to think of *The After-Image (Swan Songs)* as an attempt to document the intangible and the nonphysical. This is an odd operation to perform with a media renowned for its indexicality, and yet, perhaps this posed the most interesting challenge of the project.

The camera I used for this particular project resulted in an antiquated aesthetic due to the soft focus and the vignetting that appears around the edge of the frame, which is created by the convex lens. Initially, I had in mind that I would achieve this with the bellows of a 4x5 camera, however I quickly came to realize that the weight of even a 4x5 field camera, combined with

³⁷ Conceptual artist David Horvitz has also commented on this particular feature of film as a defining attribute of the process, as he describes: “waiting to see what is on the roll of film while the film develops and the prints are made. Waiting in the dark room as the print slowly appears onto the paper in the tray of developer. Waiting for the Polaroid to develop, for the photo-booth picture to drop out. These vacuous moments, these really beautiful moments—they are lost.” Josiah Hughes, “David Horvitz: Giving it All Away,” *XLR8R: Accelerating Music and Culture*. 03/24/2009. <http://www.xlr8r.com/features/2009/03/david-horvitz-giving-it-all-away> (accessed Nov 2, 2013).

film holders and a tripod, was above and beyond what I could conceivably carry to remote places, particularly as some of the sites were walk-ins of up to ten miles. As an alternative, I was introduced to the Holga. The Holga is light as a feather, as it is nothing more than a toy plastic camera. Designed and engineered in a factory in China, the Holga was initially introduced to the Chinese public in 1981 as an inexpensive camera designed for use with the most popular film at the time: 120 medium format film.³⁸ At that point, China was just beginning to open its doors to the world, and photography was skyrocketing in popularity. Unfortunately, no one could have predicted the enormous impact 35mm film would have on the Chinese market and after only a few short years smaller format competitors overwhelmed the Holga.³⁹

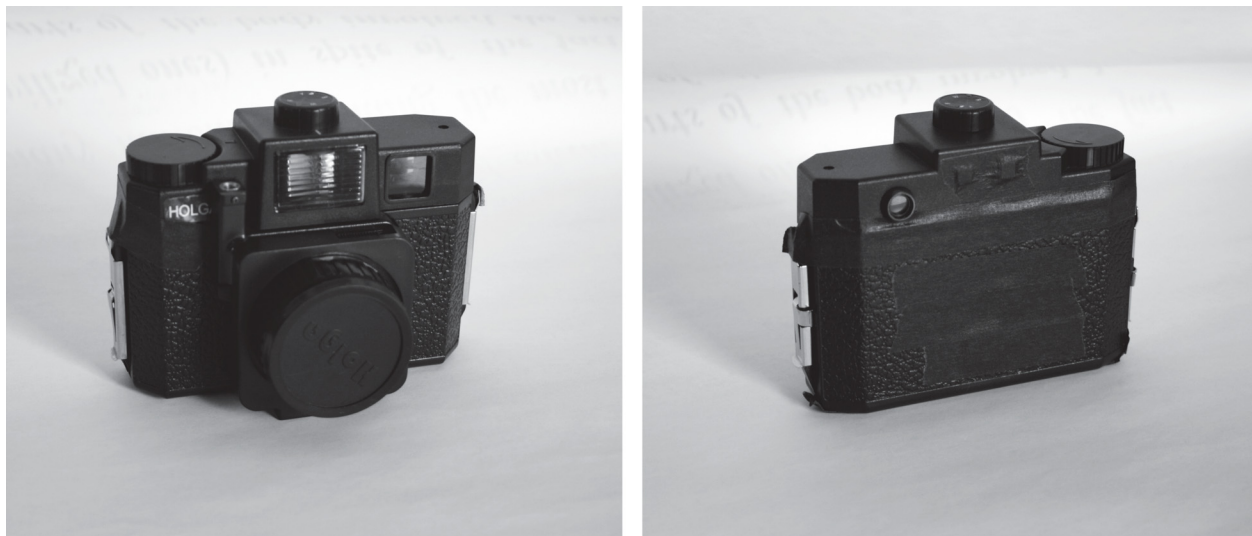


Figure 15 Fiona Annis, modified Holga used for *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, photo documentation, 2012

³⁸ At its time the Holga was marketed as ‘the people’s camera’ and sold for about 2.25\$ apiece. Today, the Holga is readily available for approximately fifteen dollars.

³⁹ The Holga is however still in circulation today, with an abundant supply of used cameras, as well as an ongoing production of various Holga models, albeit for a much smaller public.

Prior to documenting the first swan song, I worked my way through several rolls of film in an attempt to familiarize myself with the variable light leaks as well as the discrepancy between the viewfinder and actual film imprint; two attributes characteristic of this cheap plastic camera. With mysterious shutter speeds, minimal aperture range, no focusing control, and a high possibility for damage to occur to the inserted film, I found that there was little to nothing that was predictable with the Holga. However, once I completed a small handful of modifications to the camera body and became accustomed to the frequently taping the camera seams, I began to sense the potential of the plastic imperfection. Full of aberrations, the contingency of the camera resonates with the content of the series, for which the objective was not necessarily to produce an exact referent.

My technique for working with the Holga is an approach that takes into account my knowledge of the camera's anomalies while concurrently embracing the serendipitous nature of chance. Photographer and educator Christopher James went so far as to describe photographing with the Holga as requiring "something akin to a sniper accounting for wind and distance."⁴⁰ Moreover, I appreciate the potential of using atypical tools so as to challenge the myth that the use of great equipment will result in great photography. Instead, I would argue that aligning concept, means, and method to produce noteworthy work does not always require the most advanced or sophisticated tools. In stark contrast to the optical perfection of modern cameras and lenses, I particularly appreciate the visual attributes specific to the lens of the Holga, which is modelled

⁴⁰ Christopher James, *The Book of Alternative Photographic Processes* (New York: Delmar, 2008), 512.

after the earliest type of photographic lenses available: the single element lens, the meniscus of which accounts for the spherical aberrations that the lens produces.⁴¹

Swan Song (Benjamin): Cross-border route, France-Spain

I walk the smuggler's trail in the reverse direction starting in Port Bou, Spain and finishing in Cerbère, France. The path is not always clearly defined and early in the day I wander far off-track. Realizing my mistake, I reverse and continue the ascent. Nearing the summit I turn and photograph the trail behind me as thunder rumbles in the distance. On my descent I find myself wandering through vineyards, thieving a handful of grapes here and there. I have met no one during the crossing and I am dusty and tired, marvelling at the ridiculousness of traversing a mountain pass in my sandals, the only shoes I travel with.⁴²

In 1940 Walter Benjamin traversed Rumpiso Pass, a cross-border route between France and Spain, in an attempt to evade Nazi persecution in occupied France. The evening he arrived in Port Bou, a small Catalan village just south of the French border, Spanish authorities were under the order to reject incoming exiles and Benjamin was told that he would be deported back to France the following morning. That night in his small hotel room Benjamin overdosed on morphine. The following morning the regulations were changed and the two companions he travelled with were given passage. Benjamin travelled to Port Bou with a briefcase containing an unknown manuscript that has never been recovered. As such, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” is one of Benjamin’s last known essays, which presents a collection of fragmentary

⁴¹ The history of optical camera lenses is one of an ongoing development of perfecting technology to make the presence of the lens unperceivable. By traveling backwards into the past more and more aberrations emerge, and depending upon one’s preference, one may encounter certain generations when the “flaws” are at their best. For a more detailed account on the history of lenses see: Carey Lea, *A Manual of Photography* (Philadelphia: Benerman & Wilson, 1868).

⁴² Fiona Annis, *Swan Song (Benjamin)*. Research log. July 2011.

meditations on the concept of history. It is in this context that Benjamin famously interprets *Angelus Novus*, an intaglio print by Paul Klee:

This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.⁴³

When the Jewish-German intellectual wrote these words the Nazi program of ethnic cleansing had proclaimed its rationale as logically necessary: genocide executed under reason's name. As a thinker in his time and of his time, Walter Benjamin was capable of interpreting the global catastrophe even as it was happening and despite its imminent threat had the elegance and courage to address it poetically. Klee's angel becomes an avatar for Benjamin himself, and he reminds us that what is blindly perceived as progress is nothing less than disaster.⁴⁴



Figure 16 Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920, India ink, coloured chalk, and brown wash on paper, 32 x 24 cm, Israel Museum, Jerusalem

⁴³ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the philosophy of History," *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 257.

⁴⁴ Hannah Arendt, "Walter Benjamin 1892-1940," *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 1-58.

Swan Song (Ader): 150 miles off the most westerly tip of Ireland

Arriving in Ireland, I seek out the most prominent westerly shoreline, The Cliffs of Moher. The immense beauty of this place overwhelms me. I begin to realize that the desire to place the dead, to make a burial site, is to give the dead a dwelling place. Lost at sea, Ader's body is forever irretrievable, and the site of the disappearance remains ambiguous.⁴⁵

Bas Jan Ader was a Dutch-born, American-based Conceptual artist whose work in the 1970's emphasized such central themes as falling and failure through physical and emotional vulnerability. In the American context, Ader's work was somewhat of an anomaly in that it combined the starkness commonly associated with the conceptual movement with a sense of sentimentality. Educated in art and philosophy, his work oscillates between the intellectualism of text and documentation, and the visceral amplification of the body. Because Ader systematically positioned his own body and emotional states as the object of his study, curator and critic Jörg Heiser draws a link between Ader's predominantly Conceptual practice and Romanticism, which tends to emphasize the centrality of personal experience and subjectivity, as seen for example in the work of the Romantic landscape painter Casper David Friedrich. The most prominent theme common to both Bas Jan Ader and Casper David Friedrich is the wandering tragic hero on the quest for the sublime.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Fiona Annis, *Swan Song (Ader)*. Research log. August 2009.

⁴⁶ The Romantic tendencies identified in the work of a selection of Conceptual artists informs Heiser's positioning of Romantic Conceptualism as an emerging territory of contemporary art.



Figure 17 Caspar David Friedrich, *Monk by the Sea*, 1809-1810, oil-on-canvas, 110 x 171.5 cm, Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin

The Romantic ideal of a solitary figure that passes beyond the limits of polite society into the unknown is exemplified in Ader's final cycle of work, *In Search of the Miraculous*. Here, Ader literally embodied this key motif, which resulted in his final and perhaps most romantic fall. This work was first initiated in 1973 as a night-time walk through the city of Los Angeles, beginning in the Hollywood hills and ending on the shore of the Pacific Ocean. Entitled *In Search of the Miraculous (One Night in Los Angeles)*, Ader recorded the walk with a series of eighteen black-and-white photographs, in which he is depicted traversing the urban landscape and arriving by the sea at dawn.⁴⁷ One year later, Ader announced his intention to continue this work as a three-part piece. The second component of the triptych, *In Search of the Miraculous (Songs for the North Atlantic: July 1975-)*, was conceived of as an epic voyage: to traverse the Atlantic Ocean in a quixotic solo crossing. Ader then intended to close the project with a final night-time walk through Amsterdam, effectively mirroring the former Los Angeles piece.

In 1975 Ader set sail from Cape Cod in a thirteen-foot one-man yacht with a tape recorder and a still camera. Ader had originally sailed to the United States as a deckhand, and to sail back to his homeland, to both arrive and leave by sea, was a poetic finale for the triptych. However, Ader disappeared at sea; the wreckage of his boat was found 150 miles off the west coast of Ireland nine months after his departure. He failed in crossing, but as Conceptual artist Tacita Dean reminds us: “for Bas Jan Ader to fall was to make a work of art. Perhaps not to have fallen would have been failure.”⁴⁸ In this way, not arriving was the most coherent conclusion of his final work – a work in which Ader came to embody the role of the romantic tragic hero in an unexpected and irrevocable way.



Figure 18 Bas Jan Ader, *In Search of the Miraculous*, July 1975. Bulletin, Art and Project Gallery, Amsterdam, Collection Estate of Bas Jan Ader

⁴⁸ In 1996 Tacita Dean began a series of artworks collectively entitled *Disappearance at Sea*, all inspired by remarkable stories of personal encounters with the sea, for which a decisive reference is Bas Jan Ader. The "refictionalizations" that Dean staged account for her position as archivist, detective, narrator, and filmmaker of tragic fates and ruinous moments. During this period Tacita Dean also wrote on Ader's final work, see: Tacita Dean, *And He Fell into the Sea*. www.basjanader.com/dp/Dean.pdf (accessed Nov 16, 2011).

In response to the intricacies of Ader's last work, critic, curator and educator Jan Verwoert suggests that to treat the work simply as a conceptual piece would betray the existential loss it entailed. However, to portray it solely as a work "sealed by the artist's death and therefore to disregard its speculated conceptual dimension would equally do neither the work nor Ader himself justice."⁴⁹ Verwoert warns that the artist's disappearance lends itself to the cult-like tendency of glorifying a romantic death and yet we cannot deny what Ader sacrificed in the realization of this work. Here Verwoert describes one of the greatest challenges of dealing with final works that are linked with untimely deaths. On the one hand there is the danger of suffocating a last work with the erroneous belief that artists gain ultimate authenticity only if they make the extra sacrifice of their life, and yet one does not want to dismiss how certain works continue to resonate with a poignant, if not mythic quality, attributed specifically to a life that risked everything. How is it possible to address the complex dimensions that are implicit in a final work without simply venerating the epic tragedy that is interwoven in its inscription?

In his last work, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain*, Edward W. Said examines a selection of authors and composers including Theodor Adorno, Thomas Mann, Richard Strauss, and Jean Genet, whose work, near the end of their lives, acquired a new idiom; a quality that Said calls 'late style'. Said goes on to describe how this distinct lateness produces "a special ironic expressiveness well beyond the words and the situation."⁵⁰ The manner in which Said frames lateness is particular, in that while he acknowledges the expectation that late works simply crown a lifetime of aesthetic endeavour; Said instead explores artistic lateness in

⁴⁹ Jan Verwoert, *Bas Jan Ader: In Search of the Miraculous* (London: Afterall Book, 2006), 8.

⁵⁰ Edward W. Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 7.

works that are filled with “intransigence, difficulty and unresolved contradiction.”⁵¹ As Said states, what is of most interest are artists whose late work reopens the questions of meaning, success and progress.

Said’s work was revelatory for me as his ideas resist the inclination to present late works as concise conclusions that neatly punctuate a lifelong meditation. Rather, Said investigates how such late works throw new light and unexpected perspectives that contribute, and at times complicate, all that came before. I found Said’s approach relevant as I confronted a rather obvious question: what was Woolf’s swan song? Stated otherwise, what was Woolf’s final work and why is it noteworthy? After researching obvious possibilities such as her suicide note and final diary entries, as well as her memoir, *A Sketch of the Past*, and her last published novel, *Between the Acts*, I couldn’t help but feel that my attempt to pin down a specific text as her swan song was contrived. That is, my attempt to assign to a single document the pinnacle of her life’s work was to aspire to the type of conclusion that Woolf’s writing resists. Not only that, but the preliminary framework of delineating her “famous last words” was too explicit, particularly as my intention is not to seek out premonitions of her suicide, nor to analyze or explain the cause of a complex choice. Instead, I sought to explore the linkage of place, life and death as a departure point to investigate traces, displacements, and renewed presences: in short, how things of the past continue to bear weight in the present. The concept of a swan song initially captured my attention as a powerful articulation that could cut across time. In this way, my interest in final acts is not a motion towards glorifying tragic deaths, nor as Edward Said warns, to present late

⁵¹ Here, Said is indeed extending the work of Adorno, who particularly developed the term late style in respect to the work artists who in their lateness move beyond what is acceptable and normal; Adorno poignantly elaborates this in that, “in the history of art, late works are the catastrophes.” See: Theodor W Adorno, *Essays on Music* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2002), 567.

works as a coherent outcome that harmoniously concludes a lifetime of achievement. However, in contrast to the biographical emphasis that Said undertakes in his exploration on late works, I only briefly present the historical details surrounding the swan songs that I pursued for the creation of *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, while the subsequent thesis deals not with a factual account and analysis of these last works, but rather explores the concept of the after-image as a symptom of how the past continues to inform the present.

The After-Image: Conversations with ghosts

An after-image, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is the impression retained by the retina of the eye, or by any other organ of sense, of a vivid sensation, after the external cause has been removed.⁵² An after-image can be thought of as an impression or contact that lingers, and in this sense, it is a way of experiencing latency: the interval between one thing and another. The desire to work with the concept of the after-image emerged during my exploration of swan songs in that I became curious about how certain works continue to agitate, activate, or haunt the present. Brian Massumi illuminated this path when he suggests that a particularly vivid concept or artwork has the potential to create a “plateau of intensity” that leaves “afterimages of its dynamism that could be re-injected into still other lives, creating a fabric of heightened states between which any number of connecting routes would exist.”⁵³ Here, Massumi describes the after-image as a form of haunting, not so much as the return of an unresolved malaise, but rather as the persistence of matter that is imbued with a potential that exceeds its immediate context and

⁵² Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵³ Brian Massumi, “Pleasures of Philosophy,” in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xiii.

carries relevance beyond its immediate milieu.

In a similar spirit, in his book *Archive Fever*, French philosopher Jacques Derrida observes that the “afterlife [*survivance*] no longer means death and the return of the spectre, but the survival of an excess of life which resists annihilation.”⁵⁴ In this respect, the after-image as a form of *survivance* acts as a philosophical tool to engage in dialogue with revenants that continue to populate the present. This approach could be thought of as a desire for history and as a means for the recuperation of the past. Within the context of *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, this desire is navigated through the photographic medium, which is recognized not only as a tool for cataloging and preserving, but is also associated with the physical and chemical properties of light and time. What Roland Barthes referred to in his final work as a “death apparatus,” photography indeed provides evidence of the “what-has-been,” moments that are irrevocably lost, and yet, that simultaneously persist.⁵⁵ In this sense, photographic imprints are spectres of the past: they are traces that carry the residue of time’s wreckage, an image that remains after the fact.

The notion of the after-image can be expanded further yet by thinking through the last essay written by Gilles Deleuze, entitled *Immanence: A Life*.⁵⁶ Here Deleuze makes a distinction between *the* life and *a* Life, and proposes that while mortal organisms may die, Life does not. It is in this way that I hope to propose that a body of work seemingly fixated on death is also

⁵⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Archive fever: a Freudian impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 60.

⁵⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Noonday Press, 1981).

⁵⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2001).

simultaneously very much concerned with life-living. This line of thought will be further elaborated in the next chapter “Consider Death: The Concept of A Life,” which explores a philosophical conceptualization of Life that exceeds that of the individual, and rather, as Deleuze suggests in his swan song, considers the potential of Life as an impersonal and nonorganic power.

In short, it is in search of what philosopher Theodor Adorno describes as “a trace of what might be more than mortal: inextinguishable experience in disintegration” that gave rise to the creation of a cycle of photographs documenting places where swan songs occurred.⁵⁷ By means of this sustained engagement with the spectral potential of photography, *The After-Image (Swan Songs)* subsequently yields a philosophical and art historical meditation on the linkage of place, life and death. The following account will now perform an operation that traverses these various territories of scholarly thought, guided by means of a series of instructions.

⁵⁷ Theodor W. Adorno cited in Edward W Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 28.

Chapter Two

Consider Death: The Concept of Life

“There is life, constantly escaping from the forms it inhabits, leaving behind its shell.”⁵⁸

The imperative, *consider death*, is the first of three instructions employed to execute *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, a body of photographic work that acts as the departure point for this study. Considered independently, this studio-based exploration is a meditation on final acts and their site of articulation. In this way, the focus fell on the landscapes associated with the death of certain artists and intellectuals. In an exhibition setting, the photographic images of these places are interspersed with text, which is mounted as vinyl lettering affixed directly to the gallery wall. These excerpts are citations from various thinkers, including Michel de Montaigne, Friedrich Nietzsche, Virginia Woolf, Maurice Blanchot and Gilles Deleuze, each of whom dedicated a period of their work to the subject of death.⁵⁹ In this way, these quotes (as extracts, fragments, or ready-mades) act as prompts to trigger a reflection on death, and more specifically a questioning of the Life-Death relation. Various assertions on the subject are gathered in the exhibition space, including, for example, Maurice Blanchot’s proposition that there is an inherent tension between

⁵⁸ Jeanette Winterson, *Gut Symmetries* (London: Granta Books, 1997), 212.

⁵⁹ In an exhibition context I draw from: Michel de Montaigne’s *That to Philosophize is to Learn to Die* (1574), Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Maurice Blanchot’s *The Writing of the Disaster* (1982), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), as well as Virginia Woolf’s *The Death of the Moth* (1942), Julia Kristeva’s *Approaching Abjection* (1982) and Michael Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1996). Please see the appendix for documentation of the exhibition installation.

life and death. Blanchot describes this tension as a “reversible belonging” that gathers together what tends to be regarded in opposition.⁶⁰ By means of reconfiguring an opposition into a continuum, Blanchot transforms the dualistic understanding of life in contrast to death (Life/Death) into an essential Life-Death couple. It is with this philosophical foundation that, when we seek to inquire about the nature of death, we need to simultaneously ask: what is life?

When considered individually, the selected quotes act as propositions. Brought together in the exhibition space, the various citations generate a dialogue, each fragment contributing an insight to a larger conversation. Considered as a group, it becomes clear that these thinkers share an alliance: namely a proximity, an intimacy, and as I hope to demonstrate, a singular interpretation of death. This can be seen for example in how these thinkers diverge from a Socratic position, which promotes a transcendent rationalization of death and emphasizes the segregation of the mind from the body. Instead, we bear witness to Montaigne’s deeply embodied method of practicing death, so as to live in the full embrace of life, and further yet the immanent philosophy of Nietzsche, Blanchot and Deleuze, who underscore death as yet another form of becoming, an affirmative phase in an ongoing cycle of realizations and annihilations. It is with this preliminary framework that I return to the original set of instructions guiding the realization *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, and continue to employ this Conceptual art strategy for the unfolding of a parallel inquiry, into the first imperative: *consider death*.

Despite the straightforward nature of responding to a sequence of instructions the first imperative, *consider death*, is nevertheless ambiguous. Does it entail a contemplation of the prospect of death in general, the specificity of one’s own death, or an encounter with the death of

⁶⁰ Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 90.

another? Does such an inquiry imply solely the impending awareness of an unknown but certain death, or does it also take into consideration that we have the potential to take our own lives? Or further yet, as a singular event, is it even possible to consider death? Because death is unrepeatable, it is impossible to know death with the same degree of intimacy as having experienced it. I do however propose that there are ways of approaching the territory of death to build a familiarity with it.

The contemplation of mortality is an age-old consideration, despite the current social climate that tends to emphasize the quest for eternal youth and the development of technologies aimed at prolonging life. The distancing of death in the occidental world is further pronounced by the institutionalization of death, for which the dying body and the dead body become increasingly aseptic, remote, and dealt with strictly by professionals.⁶¹ In this sense, while contemporary society has opened up to many formerly unmentionable subjects, death remains a taboo subject.⁶²

In contrast, philosophy is a discipline with a history of fostering a readiness for death; a readiness that as some philosophers agree, is necessary for the possibility of happiness and freedom. In this regard, I will now introduce various thinkers who devoted a section of their work to a consideration of death, while this in turn also sparked a reflection on the practice of

⁶¹ Beginning in the first half of the 20th century, with the development of modern healthcare, western society's attitudes towards death and dying changed dramatically. This change is described in an article in *The Journal of Advanced Nursing* wherein Stella Mary O'Gorman states that the ultimate professionalization of death removed western society away from the process of death. Further, her analysis revealed that "contemporary society has endangered health by being unable to discuss death." See: Mary O'Gorman Stella. "Death and dying in contemporary society: an evaluation of current attitudes and the rituals associated with death and dying and their relevance to recent understandings of health and healing," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 27 (1998): 127–135.

⁶² To this end, scholar Donald Heinz calls for the reinvestment of dying as a process to work through. By surveying the rituals that once gave spiritual and social meaning to death throughout history Heinz demonstrates how the arts might lend a renewed reverence to death. With this in mind, Heinz explores processes around death and dying that extend beyond institutional protocols and religious narratives. See: Donald Heinz, *The last passage: recovering a death of our own* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

living. In particular I am interested in the Deleuzian understanding that death is not simply a return to inanimate matter, but rather, can be considered yet another form of becoming. It is in this way that I respond to the question of how death is concerned with life-living, by means of a concept of life that exceeds the mortal body.

Vigilance: a philosopher's training

We have inherited from Greco-Roman antiquity the suggestion that philosophy is concerned with the wisdom to confront death. A classic example of this thematic is Cicero's axiom that "to philosophize is to learn how to die."⁶³ For when one has lost one's fear of death, one has truly liberated oneself to live well. Stoic wisdom returns a century later in the philosophy of Seneca, who, in addressing the brevity of human life, proposes that "he will live badly, who does not know how to die well."⁶⁴ As such, the task of the philosopher is to cultivate a philosophical perspective that addresses the uncertainty and fear associated with the mortality of sentient life.

The historic exemplar of this perspective as cultivated in ancient philosophy is Socrates, who was condemned to die by the Athenian state for impiety to the Gods and corrupting the youth of Athens. In this way, as Simon Critchley reminds us, the early history of philosophy is marked with a political act of assassination for blasphemy, which prompts a philosophical account of encountering death.⁶⁵ This encounter is recorded in Plato's dialogue, *Phaedo*, which presents the discourse generated between Socrates and his followers immediately prior to his death. In Plato's account, Socrates is remarkably unconcerned about his impending death and rather the

⁶³ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, I.xxx.74.

⁶⁴ Seneca, *On the Shortness of Life* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 92.

⁶⁵ Simon Critchley, *The Book of Dead Philosophers* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), xvii.

core of the dialogue concentrates on a series of arguments regarding the immortality of the soul. While the existence of the soul in relation to the living body is taken for granted, the focus of the dialogue instead questions whether the soul survives the death of the body. Over the course of the dialogue Socrates presents a series of arguments in support of the immortality of the soul.

In brief, Socrates reasons that the training of the philosopher entails separating the soul from sensations, which are located in the realm of the body, so as to free the soul to ascend into direct engagement with pure forms. In this regard, a common interpretation of Socratic metaphysics is that in addition to the empirical world there is also a realm of pure forms with which the soul may commune. The soul is said to converse with pure forms, which are stable and eternal, unlike the “rolling” of the empirical world. In the context of the *Phaedo*, one of Socrates’ arguments concludes by suggesting that because the soul can commune with eternal forms, the soul is therefore of the same order as eternal forms, and there is thus cause to believe in the immortality of the soul. As such, the soul not only survives the death of the body but also cannot be destroyed. In this account, the philosopher’s training is to separate the soul from the empirical body so as to free the soul to grasp the immortal realm of pure forms. This is made evident in the *Phaedo* when Socrates refuses to accept the mortality of the soul and instead advises that:

The truth of the matter is very different. Let us suppose that a soul departs in a state of purity, trailing nothing bodily after it inasmuch as during life it has had as little connexion as possible with the body, has shunned it and gathered itself together to be by itself – a state it has always been training for, training itself, in fact, to die readily: which is precisely what true philosophy consists in.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Plato, *Phaedo* 80e 1-2.

The dialogue ends with the enduring descriptive image of Socrates freely drinking the hemlock elixir. This iconic death has since come to symbolize how true philosophers make dying their profession, so that, if one has learnt to die philosophically then dying may be faced with control, serenity, and courage. By positioning the confrontation death as the ultimate criterion for evaluating the powers of a philosophy or system of thought, the *Phaedo* continues to elicit response and commentary in the present day.⁶⁷

There are, however, philosophical positions that question the Socratic quest for a serene death born from the powerful clarity of rationality. Maurice Blanchot, for example, proposes that what may be absent in such a philosophy is the potential knowledge that is to be gleaned by conceding to the unknown.⁶⁸ As Blanchot suggests, the value implicit in the indefinite, the unidentifiable and the unknowable, may be best encountered as an intensely rich problematic that resists resolution. Blanchot effectively questions the grace of Socrates' death in that it is born from the solace provided by grasping death intellectually. "What faith in reason!" Blanchot provocatively declares.⁶⁹ Instead, Blanchot emphasizes the drawback of concretizing the mysterious, and challenges the long-standing philosophical ideal of the transcendence of the body in favour of the contemplative life.

Jacques Derrida also examines how the mystery of death is rationalized in his book *The Gift of Death*. He describes how Platonism shifts the gaze away from the dark mystery of the cavern

⁶⁷ Andre Pierre Colombat, "November 4, 1995: Deleuze's Death as an Event," *Continental Philosophy Review* 29.3 (July 1996): 235–249

⁶⁸ Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 49.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 230.

and redirects it towards the intelligence of the “good” sun. As Derrida proposes, this shift is poignantly illustrated in the death of Socrates, as it is a death that he is given and accepts by means of a discourse that “gives *sense* to death.”⁷⁰ Derrida further unveils how the care and concern for the soul in the Platonic regime is inextricably linked with responsibility. This is evidenced by the Platonic assertion that the immortality of the soul is inseparably bound up with its own achievement. This achievement is the outcome of the philosophical training, or “practicing (for) death” as referred to in the *Phaedo*, by way of safeguarding the purity of the soul from the desires of the body. In this regard, a further outcome of Plato’s doctrine is that immortality is conceived of as *individual* immortality, in that individuals are effectively responsible for the immortality of their own soul.⁷¹

In this way, the Socratic preparation for death is presented as a vigil over the very possibility of death, through the promise of the ascent of the soul. Freedom, in this case, is less concerned with the acknowledgement of mortality, than with the training and discipline to *overcome* death. In Plato’s doctrine, the individual immortality of the soul is the result of the victory of a responsible subject. Responsibility triumphs over the mystery of death, which it incorporates as a subordinate moment. As such, Platonic rationalism bestows the individual with the responsibility to supersede death, and indeed presents death as a moment without mystery. Or rather, as Derrida notes, the mystery of death has been “enslaved, subordinated, and incorporated,” and further, that the Greco-Platonic provenance refuses its own mortality, which it

⁷⁰ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), (my emphasis), 12-13.

⁷¹ As Derrida describes, the soul “only returns to itself” and that by recalling itself to itself “it becomes individualized, interiorized.” *Ibid.*, p. 16.

“denies in the very experience of triumph.”⁷² While Socratic rationality sought to overcome the fear of death by insisting on the transcendence of the body in favour of the stability of pure forms, over the ages other philosophies have emerged that respond to the question of death without insisting upon either transcendence or rationality.⁷³

The practice of death

In the short essay, *Reading Montaigne*, philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests that Michel de Montaigne’s life’s work is comprised of an ongoing exploration of the self. This self, however, is not a static, fixed, or rational entity but rather an ambiguous self: “the place of all obscurities, the mystery of all mysteries.”⁷⁴ In this way, Merleau-Ponty proposes that for Montaigne, self-understanding is undertaken by means of an ongoing dialogue with the self, or rather, a questioning addressed to an opaque being, for which a response is stimulated through the practice of writing. In this vast process of “essaying” or “experimenting” with the self, one of Montaigne’s ongoing preoccupations is a consideration of death and dying. Montaigne says that this preoccupation is motivated by a desire to foster an intimate proximity with death, so that the fear of death may be addressed. Death can even be befriended, and therefore transformed.

⁷² Ibid., p. 20.

⁷³ Contemporary philosopher Giorgio Agamben affirms this shift when he suggests that the transcendent consideration of death has been dislocated onto a new plane of immanence. See: Giorgio Agamben, “Absolute Immanence,” in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 239.

⁷⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Reading Montaigne,” in *Signs* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 198.

As Montaigne suggests in his short essay, “Of Practice,” experience can cultivate insight and inform the capacity to act with wisdom. But as for dying, which Montaigne proposes is the greatest task we have to perform, “practice cannot help us.” Not only is death an event that we face alone, it is also unrepeatable, and as such “we are all apprentices when we come to it.”⁷⁵ Despite the impossibility of duplicating this singular event, Montaigne nonetheless suggests that there are modes of familiarizing oneself with death with the aim of forging an alliance with it. As Montaigne attests: “people will tell me that the reality of death so far exceeds the image we form of it that, when a man is faced with it, even the most skilful fencing will do him no good. Let them talk; beyond question forethought is a great advantage.”⁷⁶ In this regard, Montaigne goes on to recount his own experiences that share an affinity with death-like states. These experiences range from the state of sleep, which as Montaigne suggests, “from the start of life presents to us the eternal state that she reserves for us after we die,” to the recounting of a near death experience.⁷⁷ These practices acquaint Montaigne with death, and lead him to conclude that he would rather die on horseback than in his bed. As I shall examine in the following chapter, death is one type of event that is often remembered by others by means of the place where the death occurred. In this sense, the place of death is a part of death and it is telling that Montaigne would rather experience this on his horse than in bed. In this respect, Montaigne advocates to resist living in a defensive posture of self-preservation, but rather in full embrace of intense life.

⁷⁵ Michel de Montaigne, “Of Practice,” in *Complete Essays* (California: Stanford University Press, 1958), 267.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 268.

Montaigne also emphasizes an embodied approach to knowledge, as evident for example in his declaration that he has: “formed the habit of having death continually present, not merely in my imagination, but in my mouth.” This modality of localizing the practice of death not only on a conceptual plane but also in and through the body suggests an affinity with the phenomenological philosophy of embodiment by Merleau-Ponty. And despite the visceral intonations of keeping death inside the very intimate cavity of the mouth, Merleau-Ponty nonetheless insists that Montaigne’s intent is not to taint life with the pathos of death. Rather, as Merleau-Ponty proposes, Montaigne aims to acknowledge the certainty of death, “in all its nakedness,” so as to know life “laid wholly bare.”⁷⁸ As Montaigne himself affirms: “it is my impression that death is indeed the end, yet not the aim of life; it is its extremity, yet not its object. Life should have itself as its aim and design.”⁷⁹

For Montaigne, a consideration of death is simultaneously a study of knowing how to die freely. Here freedom is not the denial of death, nor the speculation of a quintessential after-life, but rather the acknowledgement and confirmation of mortality. The very possibility of freedom lies in accepting that existence is bound by the certainty of demise, and further, that what gives shape and meaning to sentient life is in part its temporal duration. It is in this regard that death becomes that which sets a boundary to our projects, and so delimits our lives as our lives.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 201.

⁷⁹ Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 99.

⁸⁰ One year before Pier Paolo Pasolini was murdered he stated in an interview that “death makes an instantaneous montage of our life: that is, it chooses ones really significant moments and it puts them in succession, making of our never ending, instable and unsure present and so linguistically not describable, a clear, stable, sure past, and so linguistically describable. Only thanks to death, our life is used by us to express yourself.” Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Empirismo eretico*, Garzanti, Milan.

Michel de Montaigne thus contributed a philosophical perspective on death that is articulated with a degree of subjectivity previously unforeseen. In contrast to the segregation of the mind and the body, the practice of death as proposed by Montaigne is described as a profound engagement with embodied experience. Furthermore, Montaigne's focus is not oriented towards the anticipation of a divine communion with pure forms, but rather on how to best live life. As such, Montaigne proposes to foster a readiness for death, which he suggests is necessary for the possibility of happiness and freedom in one's life-living; for as Montaigne describes of death: if our fear did not give it weight, it would be among the lightest of our concerns.⁸¹

In affinity with Montaigne, Benedictus de Spinoza suggests in Book IV of the posthumously published *Ethics* that, "a free man thinks of nothing less than death, and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death."⁸² Spinoza further proposes that to be free is to overcome the fear of death, yet with an attention oriented towards life and towards joy. Life and joy, which are described in the *Ethics* as the knowledge of nature, are simultaneously understood to be the intellectual love of God. The traditional dualism of God and nature is rejected, as Spinoza proposes that there is only one substance that informs the universe. In this immanent philosophy, Spinoza does not seek the liberation of transcendence, although he remains committed to the concept of eternity by constituting nature as a continuous force. This continuity is not static but rather in a state of perpetual renewal. In this way, Spinoza's philosophy differs from Socratic metaphysics in the sense that the eternal is not conceived of as the stability of ideal forms, but rather as an ongoing process of transformation that accounts for and integrates the rolling of the empirical world. This philosophy of immanence informs the

⁸¹ Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 99.

⁸² Benedictus de Spinoza, *The Ethics*. Part IV, Prop. 67. (California: J. Simon Publisher, 1981).

work of Friedrich Nietzsche, who also conceives of the eternal not as ever-the-same but rather as the return of difference.

A re-conceptualization of death

One of the key concepts of the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche is that of the eternal return. It is within his fifth book, *The Gay Science*, that the pronouncement of the eternal return first appears, articulated as a formula for which, “the eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again.”⁸³ The eternal return, however, is not put forward without angst; for as Nietzsche describes, the concept can provoke either a crushing weight in light of the repetitious burden of existence, or in contrast, a fervent desire for nothing more than this “ultimate confirmation and seal.”⁸⁴ Despite such apprehension, Nietzsche nonetheless assumes the task: “we have created the weightiest thought – now *let us create the being* for whom it is light and pleasing!”⁸⁵ This departure point propels the realization of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which is frequently cited as his most significant work. Here Nietzsche brings to fruition Zarathustra’s teachings on life, suffering, and the circle; otherwise known as the threefoldedness of the will to power, the tragic, and the eternal return. Bestowed with these insights, Zarathustra is the exemplary figure who speaks the language of the dithyramb and who will guide the passage that traverses the dogmatic image of thought and crosses the void of nihilism.⁸⁶

⁸³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Random House, 1974), 194.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁸⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche cited in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999), 116.

⁸⁶ The dithyramb is an ancient Greek hymn sung and danced in honor of Dionysus.

In the context of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche continues to account for both the disturbing and restorative nature of the eternal return. On the one hand, by announcing the death of God, one is confronted with the devastating loss of immortality and the consequential obliteration of the ideals of transcendence and the redeeming saviour. In the face of this loss, the eternal return may be interpreted as a nihilistic condemnation of human existence, as nothing more than wretched repetition without salvation. Nietzsche however does not conceal his repulsion of the ascetic ideal of living in preparation for an after-life, and instead urges a consideration of how the eternal return may be conceived of as a source of joy.⁸⁷ In this regard, Nietzsche argues for the reappraisal of values, and unveils the eternal return as an affirmative formula in stark contrast to the pervasive Christian ideologies.

The rejection of God and the immortality of the individual soul does not limit Nietzsche's concept of death solely to a qualitative and quantitative return of the body to inanimate matter. Rather, death is conceived of as the source of beginning-again. As Keith Ansell-Pearson confirms, the revaluation of death presented by Nietzsche constitutes a fundamental inversion by which we are to treat death "not as the opposite of life but as its true womb."⁸⁸ Indeed, the kind of death inherent to the eternal return is characterized as a passage or "true becoming" in distinction to a positivist perspective, which limits death to a function consigned solely to the restricted economy of the organism. It could be said that Nietzsche's concept of death is informed by the image of the Phoenix, that is, as an open-ended transformation of forces; for as

⁸⁷ As Nietzsche attests, "I would very much like to do something that would make the thought of *life* a hundred times more worth being thought." Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 61.

⁸⁸ Keith Ansell-Pearson, "The Death of Eternal Return," in *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 8.

Nietzsche declares: “how could you become new, if you had not first become ashes!”⁸⁹ As a concept of death without reference to final ends, Ansell-Pearson positions the eternal return as an attack on philosophies that regard the future and the past as “calculable functions of the present.”⁹⁰ Instead, the death implicit to the eternal return offers the potential to overcome the *ressentiment* of transient existence and the aversion to time passing by means of a dynamic and processual understanding of death.

In the context of *Difference and Repetition*, Gilles Deleuze also interprets the eternal return as an affirmative concept of death, in that it provides the condition for difference and acts as the pro-generator of repetition. Deleuze clarifies that the reoccurrence inherent to the eternal return is not the reoccurrence of same, but rather of repetition with difference.⁹¹ As Deleuze proposes, it is not “the Whole, the Same, or the prior identity that returns,” but rather the extreme and the excessive, “which pass into something else.”⁹² Deleuze elaborates that death is the fatal combinations of the dice throw: an outcome that unites chance and destiny. However, as the eternal return suggests, the throw will be called back. What is called back, however, has no prior constituted identity. It is not the same individual who will return, but rather a different actualized expression of the field of virtual forces that are ancient and infinite, joyful and terrible. As such, the eternal return is emphasized as a concept that extends beyond the memory

⁸⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “Of the Way of the Creator,” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. A. Tille (London: Dent, 1933), 89.

⁹⁰ Henri Bergson cited in Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Dead or Alive: On the Death of Eternal Return*, 4.

⁹¹ This distinction is paramount to understanding Deleuze’s philosophy of becoming. Becoming is not meant as a becoming-similar or becoming-equal, but rather a becoming-other. For further reading see: Brian Massumi, “Becoming-Other” in *A User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT, 1992), 92 – 141.

⁹² Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 41.

of human (all-too-human) experience; or as Deleuze summarizes: “it is an attempt to make life something more than personal, to free life from what imprisons it.”⁹³

French intellectual Maurice Blanchot also conducted a close reading of Nietzsche’s concept of the eternal return, and further elaborates this concept by distinguishing between two types of death, namely the ‘personal’ and the ‘impersonal.’ The personal death is of the order of the ‘I’ and is characterized by what Blanchot refers to as the “inevitable and inaccessible death.” That is, the death of the ‘I’ is put forward as an unavoidable negation that is objectively represented as a return to inanimate matter, precisely because the ego will not survive death.⁹⁴ The other kind of death, the ‘impersonal’ death, is described by Blanchot as a “state of free difference,” that is “no longer subject to the form imposed by an ‘I’ or an ego.”⁹⁵ The eternal return acts as the connective tension that relates the personal and the impersonal death, in that the eternal return actualizes the death of the ‘I,’ which will not return in its previous configuration, but rather undergo a process of transformation. In this respect, the death of the eternal return demonstrates that although the ‘I’ will meet a negative death, that is a death that negates the ego, it is nonetheless impossible to die “*once and for all.*” Rather, as Blanchot suggests, “we never cease and we never finish to die.”⁹⁶

⁹³ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, xv.

⁹⁴ As interpreted by Deleuze, this first kind of death is the personal disappearance of the subject, or the “annihilation of *this* difference represented by the I or the ego.” Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 112 -113.

⁹⁵ Maurice Blanchot cited in *Difference and Repetition*, 112 -113.

⁹⁶ Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, (italics in original), 154-5.

Deleuze affirms Blanchot's two-folded perspective of death when he suggests that, although individuals as mortal organisms may die, Life does not.⁹⁷ For it could be said that what returns eternally are the intensive forces and becomings of life itself. In this respect, the eternal return is an impersonal and nonorganic power, and further, that the personal death is interwoven in the ring of the eternal return as an exceptional element that contributes to the greatest diversity with the greatest unity. In this way, Nietzsche and his successors position the notion of death not as finality nor transcendence, but rather as yet another form of intense becoming.

The Concept of a Life

The narrative account of a near death experience prompts a profound meditation on the concept of life in the last essay published by Gilles Deleuze.⁹⁸ In this essay, entitled *Immanence: A Life...*, Deleuze elaborates his notion of immanence in combination with this very particular understanding of life.⁹⁹ Deleuze begins to establish this concept by examining a literary passage in *Our Mutual Friend* by Charles Dickens. Here Deleuze draws attention to an excerpt in which a seedy character by the name of Riderhood nearly drowns:

A disreputable man, a rogue, held in contempt by everyone, is found as he lies dying. Suddenly, those taking care of him manifest an eagerness, respect, even love, for his slightest sign of life. Everybody bustles about to save him, to the point where, in his deepest coma, this wicked man himself senses something soft and sweet penetrating him. But to the degree that he comes back to life, his

⁹⁷ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, xv.

⁹⁸ The text appeared in the journal *Philosophie* two months before Deleuze's death. See: Gilles Deleuze. "Immanence: une vie..." *Philosophie* 47 (1995): 6.

⁹⁹ Deleuze succinctly defines his perspective in that: "we will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE and nothing else." Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, 27.

saviors turn colder, and he becomes once again mean and crude. Between his life and his death, there is a moment that is only that of *a* life playing with death.¹⁰⁰

This literary passage acts as a departure point for what Deleuze characterizes as a distinction between personal and impersonal life. As Deleuze has previously suggested, terminology is the poetry of philosophy, and in this essay *a* life (in distinction from *the* life) functions as a technical term imbued with the wealth and ambiguity necessary to express Deleuze's concept of life. Deleuze clarifies the distinction between *a* life and *the* life by means of associating *the* life with the individual it corresponds to. This can be understood as *the* personal life of *the* individual. In contrast, *a* life gives way to an impersonal concept of life that is not restricted to the economy of the organism. As suggested by the Charles Dickens passage, *a* life is apprehensible only when it is momentarily disassociated from direct identification with that which hosts it.¹⁰¹ Here the indeterminacy of *a* life is illuminated.

This phenomenon is particularly evident in the manner that Dickens distinguishes the quality of character that Riderhood inhabits on a day-to-day basis from the "spark of life within him." As Dickens describes:

Riderhood has been an object of avoidance, suspicion and aversion; but the spark of life within him is curiously separable from himself now, and they have a deep interest in it, probably because it *is* life, and they are living and must die.¹⁰²

The literary passage describes a voyeuristic scene in which those present witness an instant during which Riderhood's personal attributes are temporarily suspended and the indefinite force

¹⁰⁰ Dickens cited in Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*. (Italics in original). 27.

¹⁰¹ Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, 28.

¹⁰² Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 443.

of *a* life is revealed. The spark of *a* life temporarily eclipses the afflictive qualities normally associated with Riderhood, and further suspends moral evaluations of his character. In this respect, the impersonal quality of *a* life is beyond good and evil.

To conclude the philosophical exploration of this literary passage, Deleuze nonetheless cautions that the concept of *a* life should not be restricted to the moment when individual life confronts universal death.¹⁰³ In this way, Deleuze aims to demonstrate how the impersonal force of *a* life is not only felt at the brink of death, but also coexists *throughout* the life of an individual at varying degrees of intensity. Deleuze insists that “*a* life is everywhere,” as a virtual force that also carries with it “the events or singularities that are merely actualized in subjects and objects.”¹⁰⁴ As such, *a* life and *the* life are contemporaneous, yet also distinct, in that *a* life corresponds to the realm of what Deleuze terms the virtual, in contrast to *the* life, which is associated with the order of the actual. In respect to the relation between these two orders, as Deleuze suggests, it is the contractions of the virtual that inform the process of actualization. That is to say that the virtual is associated with the indeterminate, the impersonal and pre-consciousness.¹⁰⁵ It is not yet concrete, not yet realized, not yet actualized. In contrast, the actual could be thought of as artifacts or expressions of the virtual that have been made manifest. The actual is apprehensible; it is located in space and time. Because Deleuze’s concept of *a* life is coupled with the order of the virtual, it is also prior to memory, individuation, and personal

¹⁰³ Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, 27.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁰⁵ Here the virtual carries no association to digital virtual realities, as is commonly ascribed to the term today.

identity. And yet, the indefinite and infinite force of *a* life intimately informs the actual, in that the virtual and the actual “make and unmake each other” in an ongoing circuit of reciprocity.¹⁰⁶

A Passage to the Limit

It is in respect to the immanent forces of the virtual that Deleuze’s concept of *a* life can be considered as a perpetually constant inhuman force that is not subject to death. This may be elaborated in that while Deleuze concurs that biological life is limited, in his last essay he nonetheless puts forward an ontological position that expresses an aspect of life that is an eternal virtual force. As such, Deleuze proposes that *a* life is not only irrepressible, but also *co-existent*, as a force that emanates “in all the moments that a given living subject goes through.”¹⁰⁷ In this way, life flows forth as an infinite movement, persisting and embodied continuously. As such, the eternal quality of *a* life is not sacrificed in the biotic as something to be obtained only after death, but is instead intimately interwoven, variously articulated in an ongoing cycle of realizations and annihilations.

It is only when the eternal is perceived as corresponding to *the* life of the individual, described for example as the immortality of the soul that a conflict arises. The profound radicality of what Deleuze is proposing is that the impersonal order of *a* life is pre-individuation. In this respect, the immanent nature of *a* life has no proper subject, and yet, as Deleuze states, because

¹⁰⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, "The Actual and the Virtual," in *Dialogues II* (London: Continuum, 2002), 148.

¹⁰⁷ Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, 29.

“immanence is immanent only to itself,” it consequently captures everything.¹⁰⁸ In other words, the eternal quality of *a* life is a power that surges through the organic in an infinite cycle. By extension, this philosophy of life corresponds to a notion of death not as a negation, but rather as one phase of an ongoing continuum. Deleuze outlines this perspective in *Difference and Repetition*, when he states that:

Death is not a material state; on the contrary, having renounced all matter, it corresponds to a pure form – the empty form of time... it is neither the limitation imposed by matter upon mortal life, ... death is rather, the last form of the problematic, the source of problems and questions which designate this (non) being.¹⁰⁹

Rather than contrasting life and death in a dualistic nature of opposition, Deleuze instead proposes difference. In this framework, life and death are not conceived of as oppositional states, but rather as a paradox in which one can locate, “the affirmation of both senses or directions at the same time.”¹¹⁰ The concept of death as negation, as either a failure of life to support and maintain itself or as an accusation of life’s weaknesses and impotence, is transformed. Instead death is revealed as an affirmation in the continuity of an ongoing cycle. As Deleuze himself proposes, death is not finality but rather:

A passage to the limit or flight from contours in favour of fluid forces, flows, air, flight, and matter, such that a body or a word does not end at a precise point... A matter more immediate, more fluid, and more ardent than bodies or words.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 40-45.

¹⁰⁹ Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition*, 148.

¹¹⁰ Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 3.

¹¹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. p. 138-9.

This notion of death is made possible by a concept of life that both encapsulates and exceeds the boundaries of sentient life. In a state of free difference, *a* life is no longer subject to the form imposed by an I or an ego, but rather transformed by the very condition which a subject must pass through in order to encounter, as Deleuze suggests, “the first great concrete freeing of non-pulsed time.”¹¹² It is in this way that *a* life is a form of non-being that attends to all becomings.

¹¹² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 269.

Chapter Three

Go to those Places: palimpsestic landscapes

The stars we are given. The constellations we make. That is to say, stars exist in the cosmos, but constellations are the imaginary lines we draw between them, the readings we give the sky, the stories we tell.¹¹³

Following the instruction, *consider death*, is the imperative: *go to those places*. In the case of realizing *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, this was undertaken by visiting the places related to the swan songs included in the project. My initial desire to visit these sites was intuitive: I felt that to study a swan song also meant to anchor it in a place. And yet, I came to question the impetus to geographically situate an event that transpired in the past. Why does it matter where the swan songs occurred, and why is it important to go there? And once at the site, what was I looking for and why did I photograph it?

Despite the fact that events are by nature unrepeatable, my project nonetheless asks what traces might remain of this disappearing act. In this sense, visiting the places where swan songs occurred was an attempt to situate an event that belongs to another time. It is this departure point that prompted my inquiry on the link between place and memory. I am interested in how

¹¹³ Rebecca Solnit, *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics* (Berkeley: California University of California Press, 2008), 165.

narratives are inscribed on the land, and how landscape acts as an anchor for these narratives. In this respect I ask how artists, and more specifically photographers, contribute to the act of recalling past events by revisiting and representing certain places. This entails asking how certain photographs can animate memories that are harboured in place. Because these questions are bound up with the representation of place, the art historical genre of landscape is also important to this discussion. To pursue this link with landscape, the work of such artists as Caspar David Friedrich, Bas Jan Ader, and Robert Smithson are considered, with an emphasis on their innovative methods of addressing the gap between experience and representation. To conclude the chapter, I explore the work of three contemporary photographers for whom the relationship between place and memory is a core concern: Gábor Ösz, Ori Gersht, and Sally Mann. Finally, it is by means of investigating the work of these three photographers that I ask how the past and the present may coalesce in a still-image.

The relationship between memory, landscape and place is a vast territory of exploration to which many scholars have contributed. In this chapter, before turning to my case studies, I address the concept of the palimpsest, according to Laurent Olivier's *Le Sombre Abîme Du Temps: Mémoire et Archéologie* and Sarah Dillon's *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory*. The notion of "place" is also crucial, and I draw on the subtle but important distinctions between site, place and space made by phenomenologist Edward S. Casey, whose research reveals the shifting history of the theoretical and cultural understanding of place. I discuss the art-historical genre of landscape through the insights of Joseph Leo Koerner, whose book *Caspar David Friedrich and the subject of landscape*, specifically contributed to my interest in the radical shift in the representation of landscape during the Romantic era. To develop my focus on photography, I turn to the work of

Martha Langford, with a specific interest in her reflection on how photographic images function as repositories of collective memory, found in *Scissors, paper, stone: expressions of memory in contemporary photographic art*. Finally, the link between photography and historic events is further drawn out with insights from Ulrich Baer's *Spectral Evidence*, wherein Baer describes how certain photographs act as "a mode of witnessing" that situate us in relation to something that cannot be accounted for solely by material or documentary evidence.

Palimpsest: the link between place and memory

Place is distinct from space, in part, because space is conceived of as unending and limitless. With indefinite boundaries, space generally fails to locate things or events other than as positions on a geometric or cartographic grid.¹¹⁴ In contrast, place is experienced by the body and it resonates with identity, character, nuance, and history.¹¹⁵ These attributes transform the impersonal nature of space into places imbued with significance. In this respect, place implies a certain familiarity, and yet, as a living landscape, place is also constantly accruing new associations over time. Because places are reworked day in and day out, they have what cultural theorists Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar call a palimpsestic nature, wherein the surface design of any place may obscure deeper, less accessible layers of meaning.¹¹⁶ In this sense, the palimpsestic nature of place refers to how traces of past events continue to persist over time.

¹¹⁴ Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: a Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 210.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, xiii.

¹¹⁶ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, eds., *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 73.

Palimpsest, from the Greek *palimpsestos*, is a term that describes a support material on which different layers of information have successively accumulated. The term originates from a time when, prior to parchment, the value of a writing surface was so great that it was sometimes necessary to erase manuscripts in order to inscribe a new text. The accumulation of multiple layers of inscription on a single surface is thus referred to as a palimpsest. In 1845, Thomas De Quincey published a short essay, 'The Palimpsest,' which refers to the palimpsestic structure as an "involved" phenomenon where otherwise unrelated texts are interwoven, competing with, and infiltrating one another. As literary scholar Sarah Dillon observes, De Quincey's essay transformed the palimpsest into a figurative entity, investing it with metaphorical value that extended beyond its status as a palaeographic object.¹¹⁷ The term palimpsest has since been applied in the fields of physical geography, archaeology and psychoanalysis.

In physical geography, a palimpsest landscape is one where, in any given region, the different landforms that make up the landscape are not of the same age.¹¹⁸ Surface landforms tend to be very young because they are being shaped at the present time, although even some of these are estimated to be millions of years old.¹¹⁹ Landforms that are no longer developing under current circumstances are termed 'relict', because they were formed at some point in the past when conditions, processes or environments were different or operated at a different magnitude. Landscapes are composed of a mosaic of active and relict landforms of different ages. Each

¹¹⁷ Sarah Dillon, "Reinscribing De Quincey's Palimpsest: The Significance of the Palimpsest in Contemporary Literary and Cultural Studies," *Textual Practice* 19.3 (Fall 2005): 243-263.

¹¹⁸ Jasper Knight, "Development of Palimpsest Landscapes," *Vignettes: Key Concepts in Geomorphology*. University of the Witwatersrand, 2012, <http://serc.carleton.edu/68942> (accessed April 15, 2014).

¹¹⁹ Arthur L. Bloom, "Teaching about relict, no-analog landscapes," *Geomorphology* 47, no. 2 (October 2002): 303-311.

successive episode of change is considered to be a different layer laid almost like a blanket across the surface of the landscape.¹²⁰ In this way, geological changes are evident in the accumulation of successive episodes of landscape-changing events over vast periods of time. This is how palimpsest landscapes reveal the deep time of the Earth's past.

The palimpsest has also been used as an analogy in reference to memory, as the palimpsestic processes of superimposition, effacement, recovery, and repetition are also the signature motifs of memory at work.¹²¹ Sigmund Freud first developed this analogy by describing the unconscious as a psychic support on which memory is inscribed. To illustrate how unconscious psychic memory accumulates, Freud drew parallels between the way the city of Rome evolved in stages and compared that to psychic memory.¹²² Freud suggests that Rome can be thought of as an entity in which each successive stage of evolution continues to inform the present day configuration. In this way, Freud urges the reader to consider how earlier phases of development continue to persist in the current one. Here the focus is not only on the surface appearance of the city, but rather on the underlying spatial systems that inform the structure. Freud argues that the interconnections between the various layers that compose a city are like the conscious and unconscious memories in the human mind: dynamic and intimately informing the current reality. In this way, the palimpsest has acted as an analogy not only for geophysical processes, such as the accumulation of landforms over vast periods of time, but also for such intangible processes as the working of memory.

¹²⁰ Geoff Bailey, "Time perspectives, palimpsests and the archaeology of time," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 26, no. 2 (June 2007): 198-223.

¹²¹ Laurent Olivier, "Palimpsestes et objets-mémoire," in *Le Sombre Abîme Du Temps: Mémoire et Archéologie* (Paris: Seuil, 2008).

¹²² Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its discontents* (London: Hogarth Press: and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1973).

In various fields of cultural studies, the tangible and intangible aspects of the palimpsest analogy have recently coincided in relation to how places act as anchors for the memories of past events. As interdisciplinary researcher Iain Biggs suggests, the palimpsest can be used as an illuminative metaphor for understanding place as a series of erasures and over-writings.¹²³ In this way, place is conceived of as an continuous overlaying of traces, or as social scientist Doreen Massey emphasizes: place is an “ongoing production rather than pre-given.”¹²⁴ Sarah Dillon has also contributed to the understanding of the temporal aspect of the palimpsest when she notes for example that because the palimpsest accumulates and transforms over time it represents what Jacques Derrida describes as a “non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present.” That is to say that the present tense palimpsest is constructed by the presence of traces of the past as well as the potential of future inscriptions. Therefore, the palimpsest embodies what Dillon calls “the spectrality of any present moment” by gathering elements of the past, present and future simultaneously.¹²⁵ In this sense, the palimpsest analogy addresses how places are shaped by conditions that are no longer present, in the sense that the residue of past inscriptions may persist across successive layers, even as new associations begin to accrue. With this in mind it is possible to think of physical places as anchors for the accumulation of personal, cultural, and historic narratives.

In places where the physical traces of remembered events have disappeared, I ask if the memory associated with these places also evades representation? This question is particularly relevant to

¹²³ Iain Biggs, “Landscape - Narrative, Palimpsest, Metaphor?,” *LAND2: Symposia*. Bristol. November 10th, 2007.

¹²⁴ Doreen Massey, “Landscape as a Provocation: Reflections on Moving Mountains,” *Journal of Material Culture* (2006): 34.

¹²⁵ Sarah Dillon, *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory* (London: Continuum, 2007).

places marked by traumatic events. Here I recall for example Conceptual artist Sol LeWitt's Holocaust monument, a black rectangle titled *Black Form Dedicated to the Missing Jews*, which is so affecting precisely because of its abstraction. Composed of a large block of black stones, LeWitt represents absence itself to address the unspeakable and incomprehensible events that the monument commemorates. Art critic Lucy Lippard reminds us that there is no coincidence that the scale and strategic placement of the monument effectively blocks the full view of an ornate official Germanic edifice.¹²⁶ The monument was first installed in the middle of the plaza in front of the Münster Palace as part of Germany's *Skulptur Projekte 87*. The monument generated a great deal of criticism, citizens primarily objecting to the way it "spoiled the aesthetic integrity of an expensive new plaza."¹²⁷ The monument was demolished in March 1988, less than a year after its installation. After much debate, the Cultural Authority of the city of Hamburg invited Lewitt to rebuild a monument in a new location. In November 1989, a larger version of *Black Form* was unveiled in the Platz der Republik, opposite the town hall in Hamburg-Altona. The monument stands in the place of what no representation can adequately show; that is, the abyss opened by the actual events that occurred half a century earlier. The monument suggests that the challenge of representing certain events is the challenge of mediating that which is missing in relation to place.

¹²⁶ Lucy Lippard, "Tragic Tourism," in *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art and Place*. (New York: New Press; London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 129.

¹²⁷ James E. Young, "The counter-monument: Memory against itself in Germany today," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (Winter, 1992): 267-296.

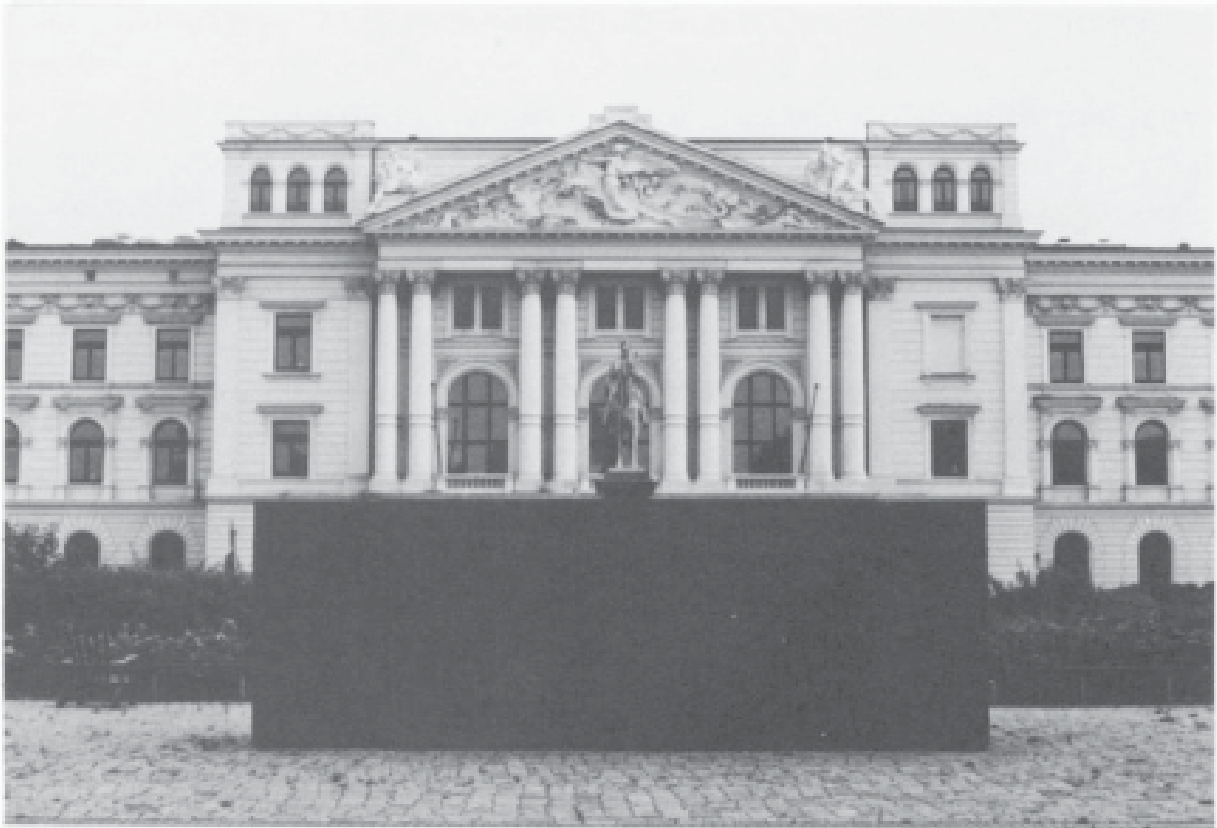


Figure 19 Sol LeWitt, *Black Form (Dedicated to the Missing Jews)*, Platz der Republik, Hamburg-Altona, Germany, 1989. Photo: Kulturbehörde Hamburg.

Place: a cut that both includes and excludes

Phenomenologist Edward S. Casey has made an enormous contribution to the understanding of place and the importance of reviving what he calls the special non-metric properties and virtues of place. As Casey suggests, in contrast to the abstract nature of space, place implies a singularity, a specificity that distinguishes it from its surroundings.¹²⁸ In this framework, qualitative traits such as identity, character, nuance, and history inform the creation and

¹²⁸ Cultural theorist Rebecca Solnit also asserts this in her provocative collection of essays, *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics*, when she suggests that place implies a discreet entity: “something you could build a fence around.” See: Solnit, *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics*, 9.

understanding of place.¹²⁹ What is specific to place is the capacity to hold and situate things. Casey terms this holding action as the “holding-locating” properties of place, and in this sense, place is considered as a palpable ground on which attachments can be formed.¹³⁰ As such, place is not only the framing of space, but also an eventful intersection that situates past events.

In realizing the project *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, my initial focus was on the physical sites where swan songs occurred, that is, in travelling to locations that I pinpointed on a map. These locations were not random or chosen by the circumstances of chance, but rather I identified them for reasons that correspond to the events that had transpired there. I was interested not simply in geographical positions, but rather in specific places that are imbued with distinct attributes and histories. Often unmarked, undefined and frequently hard to get to, it was my research that determined where I was supposed to go, that is, my research indicated where these places were.

Initially, all of these places were unfamiliar to me, but by visiting them in person, they gained what Casey describes as “intensive magnitudes and qualitative multiplicities.”¹³¹ In other words, the affective properties of place are experienced through the body in complex ways and with complex effects. Furthermore, by documenting these places they become *represented* places. Casey describes this conversion as a process whereby an initially experienced place is transformed by processes of identification and representation to become a place-of-

¹²⁹ Casey, *The Fate of Place*, xiii.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

representation in an artwork.¹³² That is, through the process of visiting, experiencing and finally documenting these places, they become landscapes that are represented in a new material form.¹³³ Casey elaborates on the relocation of landscape from the actual to the represented, by contrasting two different approaches to representation. First, Casey describes the common understanding of *representation* as mimesis, inferring that the subject is simply duplicated in another medium to create a copy of the original. However, Casey complexifies this by suggesting that to *represent* is not only to create a likeness or imitation, but also to evoke a “*phantasma* or phantom thing in a nonfantastic sense.”¹³⁴ This phantom thing is what Casey terms the re-implacement of something experiential in a different order; that is, to transpose it to an “enframed place-of-representation” that “stands in for the place-of-origin; it stands in its place.”

Reinventing landscape

The representation of subjective experience was a radical move in the art historical genre of landscape that continues to impact contemporary art practices. For centuries, landscape was merely a ground for the depiction of historic or mythical events. Romanticism effectively broke with this tradition and instead presented vacant landscapes often free of human activity. This is evidenced in the desolate landscapes of the 19th century painter Caspar David Friedrich. The notions of the faraway and indistinct are portrayed in paintings shrouded in fog and darkness as seen for example in *The Abbey in the Oakwood*, *The Sea of Ice*, and *Sea Shore in Moonlight*.

¹³² Edward S. Casey, *Representing place: landscape painting and maps* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 23.

¹³³ Landscape, which literally translates as “shape of the land,” is a word deriving from the Dutch *landschap* that signifies a vista or cut of the perceived world.

¹³⁴ Casey, *Representing place: landscape painting and maps*, 282.



Figure 20 Caspar David Friedrich, *Sea Shore in Moonlight*, 1835-36, oil-on-canvas, 134 x 169 cm, Louvre, Paris

Friedrich was surrounded by a circle of Romantic scholars including Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel, Novalis, and other members of the early Jena School. In this circle, many classical motifs and methods were discarded, and in their place, new tendencies emerged such as the celebration of subjective experience and representation. Friedrich was a pioneer in this movement, as evidenced by the solitude of his barren landscapes that depict an unprecedented emptiness. Art historian Joseph Leo Koerner observes that this rupture with the tradition of landscape, as specifically linked to the classical depiction of legendary myths or historic events

in favour of the unique view of the artist, is symptomatic of the Romantic aesthetic.¹³⁵ This break introduced a new genre of landscape painting based on the depiction of a particular experience. And yet, the uninhabited landscapes pioneered by Friedrich beg the question: the experience of what? As Koerner proposes, Friedrich's paintings portray the psychological and affective encounter with landscape as experienced and interiorized by the artist. In this way, Friedrich sought to de-narrativize landscape, and in doing so he fundamentally changed the role of landscape as solely a background for the re-interpretation of significant events, whether historical, biblical, or mythological. The consequence of the Romantic revaluation of landscape is that unremarkable scenes are rendered momentous: mundane forest clearings, forgotten ruins, and unmarked vistas become places of importance.

The artistic license claimed by Romantic artists is significant. In abandoning the tradition of history painting, it was instead the artist who delved into landscape via subjective apprehension and representation. The Romantic artist effectively came to be seen as a seeker of profound experiences in uncharted places. Indeed, some Romantic landscape painters went to great lengths to capture this raw first-person experience. There is a popular account of British painter J.M.W. Turner, who was so fascinated by the violent power of the ocean that he had himself tied to the mast of a ship during a snowstorm so as to fully sense the force of high sea. As one might imagine, Turner's paintings forgo realism in favour of a passionate celebration of light and movement that both shocked and awed the audiences of his time. It was within the radical era of Romanticism that the status of the artist shifted from stressing traditional technique and craftsmanship, to instead emphasize the innovative genius of original creation. As a seeker and

¹³⁵ Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the subject of landscape*, 2nd ed. (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 6.

mediator of sublime experiences, the fundamental Romantic task was to serve as what Jean-Francois Lyotard describes as “an expressive witness to the inexpressible,” and further, to represent this ineffable experience.¹³⁶ The value of Romantic originality over convention paved the way for new artistic freedoms, and the influence of Romantic motifs continues to be evident today.

Recently, the genre of “Romantic Conceptualism” has been proposed as an emergent field of contemporary art.¹³⁷ Artists in this context are those with a Conceptual art practice, yet nonetheless demonstrating Romantic tendencies; in other words, artists who employ Romantic motifs and methods, in conjunction with a theoretical aesthetic. A strong example of a contemporary Conceptual artist whose work resonates with the Romantic legacy is the Dutch artist Bas Jan Ader. Ader was born in Holland in 1942 and came to the United States as a young adult. Themes that reoccur across the trajectory of his work include falling, failure, and restless searching.¹³⁸ In 1975, Ader proposed to undertake a solo ocean-crossing that resulted in his final and perhaps most romantic fall. Setting sail from Cape Cod in a thirteen-foot sailboat with a tape recorder and a still camera, Ader planned to cross the Atlantic to complete the second component of a triptych, *In Search of the Miraculous*. Ader had originally sailed to the United States as a

¹³⁶ Jean-Francois Lyotard, “*The Sublime and the Avant-Garde*,” in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. C. Cazeaux (London: Routledge, 2000), 455.

¹³⁷ In 2007 critic and curator Jörg Heiser formally introduced the pairing of these two terms, when he mounted an exhibition and accompanying catalogue that located the Romantic as not just a negligible, minor aspect of the Conceptual, but central to it. The exhibition, *Romantic Conceptualism*, was presented at Kunsthalle, Nürnberg, as well as the BAWAG Foundation, Vienna.

¹³⁸ In 1970 for example, Ader completed a series of performances in which he fell in various public settings. This series includes *Falling I (Los Angeles)*, a short film of Ader repeatedly falling off a chair that is precariously perched on the roof of his home, rolling down the incline and finally colliding with the ground. *Falling II (Amsterdam)* is another short film that shows Ader riding a bicycle, loosing his balance, and falling into the canal.

deckhand, and to sail back to his homeland, to both arrive and leave by sea, is symptomatic of the lyrical composition of the triptych. Ader disappeared at sea, not completing the crossing. Nine months after his departure a Spanish fishing vessel recovered the remnants of his boat 150 miles off the west coast of Ireland with no trace of his body. While Ader did not complete the crossing, Conceptual artist Tacita Dean nonetheless recalls that, “for Bas Jan Ader to fall was to make a work of art. Perhaps not to have fallen would have been failure.”¹³⁹ In his pursuit of the sublime, Ader risked the possibility of death, and fell for it. By performing the Romantic desire to abandon oneself to nature, emotion, and the body, Bas Jan Ader chose not to depict the sublime experience but to live it. In this regard, the epic adventure of the lone artist encountering the vastness of nature is not only represented but also performed.

It is interesting to contrast Bas Jan Ader’s final work to the landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich, in that it raises questions related to the transposition of experience to representation. While Bas Jan Ader performs and documents the Romantic experience of landscape, Caspar David Friedrich’s paintings were executed from memory in the artist’s studio. Embedded in the process of transposition is the loss of what was once tangible but no longer immediately present. The representation is not identical to experience, but rather a belated transposition of what was once witnessed. Koerner proposes that this gap between experience and representation informs the element of yearning so prominent in the Romantic genre. This is felt in that Romantic representations tend to produce a sense of nostalgia related to an epic experience of landscape now past and gone.

The work of Conceptual artist Robert Smithson is also significant for how it addressed the gap

¹³⁹ Tacita Dean, *And He Fell into the Sea*, www.basjanader.com/dp/Dean.pdf (accessed Nov 16, 2012).

between experience and representation. Smithson was an American artist who became recognized in the 1960s for realizing large-scale land art pieces at various sites around North America. Smithson's practice frequently involved the mediation of actions executed at the site of creation into what he conceived of as the non-site of the gallery; this was a way of questioning the relationship between documentation and the actual site of activity. Smithson used maps, photographs, diagrams, descriptive texts, and raw materials derived from art actions executed on-site to emphasize the gap between the place of experience and the place of representation. In this way, Smithson's process-based inquiry negotiated the interaction of the "site" of creation and the artificial "non-site" of the gallery. By proposing a dialectics between site and non-site, Smithson responded to the limits of representation by exploring how the transposition of material from the site of creation may come to stand-in for the site itself when displaced in the gallery.¹⁴⁰

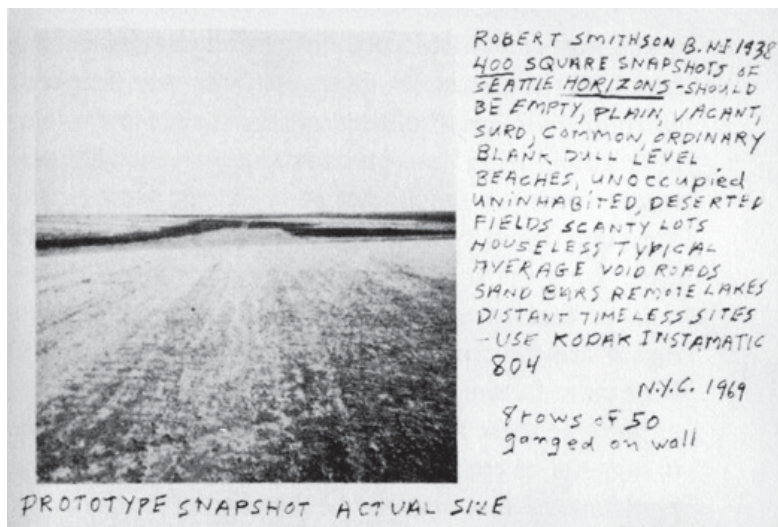


Figure 21 Robert Smithson, Instruction card for *400 Seattle Horizons*, 1969

¹⁴⁰ Jack Flam, "Reading Robert Smithson," in *Robert Smithson: the Collected Writings* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), xviii.

Smithson's practice relates to Caspar David Friedrich's landscapes in the sense that both Smithson and Friedrich negotiate the transposition of actual experience by means of representation. Indeed, Smithson continues the Romantic legacy by experimenting with how to relay something experiential in a different order. A distinction, however, is that Smithson's work interrogates the tension of what is gained and lost in the process of mediation. That is, one of Smithson's primary concerns is what the document is unable to resolve or bear. Conscious of the artificial isolation and framing of a not readily accessible landscape, the artifacts that Smithson incorporates in the exhibition context refer not only to the site, but also contribute to a critical reflection on the process of transposition and re-contextualization.

Place, memory and photography

This evolution of a common concern traced through the work of Caspar David Friedrich, Bas Jan Ader, and Robert Smithson situates the emergence of what I see as a novel type of landscape representation today. That is, while photography tends to be associated with the capturing of the current moment, some photographers seek to recall events that have already transpired. If memory is the only surviving residue of an event that once occurred at a particular place, then how can photographers imprint representations with this phantom thing? Or rather, how can representations re-inscribe memories associated with certain places when the physical traces are absent? As we will see in the following case studies, this emergent type of photography reinvests landscape with a sense of historicity, in conjunction with the Romantic legacy of the depiction of unpopulated vistas. Also present is an ongoing concern for how personal and collective memory is evoked in the representation of place.

Historically, documenting events in retrospect was not a conceptual or expressive measure, but rather a technical necessity of early photography. Throughout the nineteenth century, heavy equipment and slow exposure times inhibited photographers from capturing dramatic events as they happened. However, as technologies developed, photographing action in real-time has since come to be the convention, as epitomized, for example, by the classic war photographer. And yet, in certain instances there continues to be an interest in representing events long after the action is over. This is particularly true of places associated with traumatic events, as there is an impetus to gather traces of that which continues to psychologically haunt the present. In such cases the places where events occurred become doorways to revisit the past.

Poignant examples of photographers who investigate the link between place and memory include the pinhole photographs that contemporary Hungarian artist Gábor Ösz made using the residual military architecture of the Atlantic Wall; as well as the long exposure photographs by Ori Gersht of landscapes underwritten by Holocaust events; and Sally Mann's employment of antiquated photographic processes to document battlefields of the American Civil War. A parallel between these three case studies is that each of them, in different ways, manipulates photography in order to achieve that elusive goal of uniting memory and place.

Liquid Horizon is a series of photographic images realized by contemporary Hungarian artist Gábor Ösz. Between 1999 and 2002 Ösz employed the residual military architecture of the Atlantic Wall, a fortification constructed by the Nazis during the Second World War, to create haunting photographs. The series consists of twenty-eight large-scale images of the vistas viewed from inside the various bunkers that span the coast of Norway and France. Formerly

used as control and command posts, this type of military defence structure was built with the purpose of observing the boundless ocean horizon.¹⁴¹



Figure 22 Gábor Ösz, site documentation: observation post (English Channel at Fécamp, France), 1999

As Ösz recounts, it was initially the exterior architectural form of the derelict bunkers that interested him. However, after spending time on-site and gaining access to the interior of the bunkers, Ösz discovered the potential of situating the camera internally with a view that peers-out through the narrow slit of the bunker. This composition informed his decision to use the architectural structure itself as a camera obscura. As Ösz elaborates: “I discovered the possibility of producing an image inherent in this location.”¹⁴² That is, by turning the interior of the bunker into a camera obscura; the bunker itself could take a picture of the landscape, the

¹⁴¹ Gábor Ösz, *The Landscape of the Atlantic Wall*, www.gaborosz.com (accessed Dec 1, 2012).

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, no pagination.

observation of which had been its designated function. By establishing an intimate connection between the landscape and the military structure, Ösz brought back into focus the unrelenting gaze, which issued commands to an entire system of operation. However, in contrast to its original function, Ösz diverted the military aim of appropriating landscape for the purpose of controlling territory and instead deploys the architecture as a means for creating photographs.

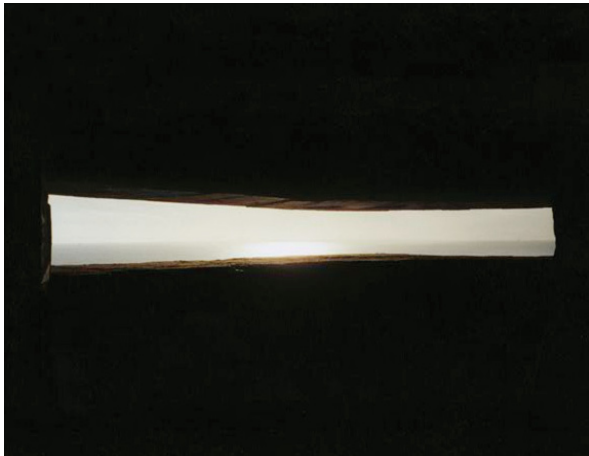


Figure 23 Gábor Ösz, site documentation: interior of observation post, 1999

The realization of the large-format pinhole photographs required long exposure times of between four to six hours. The accumulation of time on the surface of each photograph creates the subtle obscurity of the image. They are legible as landscapes, but hard lines are softened, contrasts are muted, and the scenes depicted are vacant of human activity. As Ösz describes, “there is a sense of tension of the things that have disappeared; the aesthetic of the void; the process of blurring; of changes, of space emptying out.”¹⁴³ What remains is a faint trace of the horizon line and the occasional visible overhang of the bunker around the edge of the photograph to further situate the image as an interior view peering-out.

¹⁴³ Ibid., no pagination.

The combat situation that once forcefully occupied this place is now beyond the reach of the lens. But by employing the military structures as a recording device, Ösz's eerie photographs nonetheless bear witness to the past by re-inventing the use of these structures. That is, the residual architecture itself is used as a framing device to enable the creation of a contemporary landscape informed by historic events. Here the past intertwines with the present, and like the accumulation of time on the surface of each image, the photograph itself brings forth a complex constellation of past events. These events not yet effaced but recalled in memory and inscribed in place.¹⁴⁴



Figure 24 Gábor Ösz, *No. 5 Mers les Bains, (France) 19.9.1999, 1999*
Camera obscura (exposure time: 5 h 30 min), ciba chrome, 126 x 230 cm

¹⁴⁴ Here I do not address the kind of memory referred to as "photographic," as in the exact, factual and self-conscious recollection of past event, scenes, or texts. Instead the type of recollection of interest is akin to an extended act of remembrance, as Geoffrey Batchen so eloquently suggests in *Forget Me Not*, as a state of reverie.

Born and raised in Tel-Aviv, contemporary artist Ori Gersht also explores historically significant sites as demonstrated in his series of photographs *Liquidation*. Following an autobiographical impulse, in 2005 Gersht made several journeys into rural Galicia, a region in southwest Ukraine from which his family-in-law originated. Here the Eastern European vistas are underwritten by the Holocaust events that took place sixty years earlier. The landscapes Gersht photographed resonate with historical weight, as seen for example in *Drawing Past*, one of the eleven images that compose the series. The photograph depicts a tranquil wooded winter horizon at dusk. This view is also the site of a mass grave where Nazi officials shot three quarters of the local Jewish community in a single afternoon. The history that underscores the image effectively transforms it, or as Ori Gersht describes in his artist talk: “once you know the history of a place, you never look at it the same way again.”¹⁴⁵



Figure 25. Ori Gersht, *Drawing Past* (from the series *Liquidation*), 2005, c-type, 80 x 100 cm

¹⁴⁵ Ori Gersht, *Ori Gersht Artist Talk*, Gambier, Ohio: Gund Gallery, January 25, 2013, <http://client.stretchinternet.com/client/kenyonadmin.portal#> (accessed July 21, 2013).

Gersht recounts that when visiting these places he travelled with a text written by his grandfather-in-law that describes in a very matter of fact way what had happened during the occupation. As Gersht sought to locate the places referred to in the memoir, he describes the discrepancy between reading the horrific stories and viewing the pastoral landscapes. Speaking on this aspect of the work Gersht comments:

When I was looking at the landscape in the Ukraine I was seeing all these houses and trees that were there sixty years before and are living there now with total indifference to the human horrors that took place but somehow bear within them the memory of those events. Our sense of time as human beings is limited to seventy or eighty years but all these landscapes spread over a cosmic or geological perception of time. Some of the trees are hundreds and hundreds of years old, they bear with them the memory of all previous events and at the same time keep a certain silence and are impenetrable.¹⁴⁶

Gersht further relates his challenge of capturing on film the disparity between the immediate physical landscape and the memories associated with that place. Gersht explains that while photographs are very good at recording detail, to convey subjective associations with the use of a mechanical medium is less obvious. This discrepancy is what provoked Gersht to explore the thresholds of photography.

While photography is usually understood as a rupture that pierces the continuity of time, Gersht found that the use of long exposures was one method of bridging the temporal gap he struggled with. This method is particularly poignant because it disturbs the notion of the photograph as a flashing instant that is limited to capturing the here and now. Technically, a photographic exposure can be described as the accumulation of light and time on a single frame. A long exposure is a process wherein light that initially hits the film is registered as information,

¹⁴⁶ Camilla Jackson, *Interview with Ori Gersht* (The Photographers Gallery in London, 2006).

however as more and more light is allowed to enter the camera through the open shutter, new information is being recorded on top of the preliminary registration and begins to overlay or even erase previous information. For this series, the long exposure emerged as an interesting method of capturing beyond what is intended, precisely because the dialectical process of recording and erasing can be compared to the experience of remembering and forgetting. In this way, the photographs that compose the *Liquidation* series cross the threshold between the past and the present by intertwining the duration and memory by means of a process-based exploration.



Figure 26 Ori Gersht, *Galicia* (from the series *Liquidation*), 2005, c-type, 150 x 180 cm

In this series of images Gersht holds two worlds in tension: the overwhelming gravity of remembered events collides with the current reality of the places in question. The motif of how the past bleeds into the present is one of the primary animating forces in Gersht's work, as is evident for example in his previous projects such as *Being There*, which documents the contested territory of the Judea dessert on the outskirts of Jerusalem, or *Ghost*, a sequence of photographs of ancient Palestinian olive trees. In the case of *Ghost* the olive trees are photographed under the height of the midday sun. The intensity of the light at this hour introduces flares, halos, and various effacements; all indicative of the type of violence Gersht exposes his film to. In all of these instances Gersht's photographs capture the experience of absence; there may be the trace of some former ambiguous human presence: a tire track, a railroad tie, but nothing else.¹⁴⁷ Instead, landscape is used to call forth the past, and Gersht devotes his attention to evoking this presence.

The work of another photographer that recalls traumatic events is Sally Mann's extraordinary wet plate collodion photographs that document the battlefields of the American Civil War. This series of photographs, entitled *Last Measure*, is one of the five components that compose her recent cycle of work *What Remains*.¹⁴⁸ *Last Measure* was initiated in the summer of 2000, when Mann began visiting various Civil War battlefields including Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Appomattox, the Wilderness, and Manassas.¹⁴⁹ These places are not unfamiliar to Mann, as indeed many of them lie within a two-hour drive from her home in the Shenandoah

¹⁴⁷ "I realized I was capturing absences – which in turn captures the real experience I had here." Ori Gersht, "Katharine Stout in conversation with Ori Gerst," in *Afterglow* (Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2002), 140.

¹⁴⁸ The title of this body of work comes from a line in Linchon's *Gettysburg Address*: "for which they gave the last full measure of devotion."

¹⁴⁹ John B. Ravenal, "Last Measure," in *Sally Mann: The Flesh and the Spirit* (Richmond, Virginia: Virginia Museum of Fine arts, 2010), 54-55.

Valley, Virginia where she has lived and worked most of her life. The practice of invoking the historical aura that clings to certain places is also not foreign territory but rather a motif Mann developed three years prior in her series *Deep South*, comprised of images of Mississippi and Louisiana landscapes particularly touched by slavery and racism. In both these instances Mann turns her attention towards the historical context of specific places to recall past events.

Using the same photographic process employed in the 1860's to document the Civil War, Mann executed *Last Measure* with the labour-intensive process of wet plate collodion.¹⁵⁰ Unlike her 19th century predecessors, however, Mann's intentions were not to record the faces and ravages of the war, but instead to capture these sites in the absence of human activity. Summoning the landscape as a repository of intangible traces, these photographs clearly exceed a factual description of the physical landscape. This is in part attributed to the random accumulation of matter and marks particular to wet plate collodion, which is further amplified by the warped perspective of an antique brass lens. Upon closer examination of the series as a whole it becomes evident that the horizon level of many of these photographs is remarkably high, often with only a suggestion of sky in the top quarter of the image. This compositional strategy, which emphasizes the weight and darkness of the land, does not go unfelt.

¹⁵⁰ Collodion, a combination of cotton nitrate and ether, has a unique involvement in the Civil War. The primary ingredient of the solution is cotton nitrate (gun cotton), which is the highly explosive component of the gunpowder ammunition that fought the war. Simultaneously, the collodion solution was discovered in the world of medicine as an effective treatment for wounds, as the liquid collodion solution would form a thin flexible skin that would seal open wounds. That same skin was discovered as a viable support for silver nitrate, which gave birth to the wet plate collodion process. In this way the Civil War was fought, treated and documented with this principle chemical base.



Figure 27 Sally Mann, *Untitled #8, Antietam*, 2002, gelatin silver enlargement print from original wet-plate collodion negative, 96.1 x 122.7 cm

In a recent film documentary Sally Mann specifically addresses *Last Measure* by indicating her interest in how landscapes touched by a massive number of deaths may affect the perception of place. Mann speaks to the process art plays in the sanctification of hallowed ground: “the earth doesn’t care where death occurs, its job is to efface and renew itself. It is the artist who makes that earth powerful and creates death’s memory. The land isn’t going to remember but the artist will.”¹⁵¹ With this narrative instinct Mann induces the scarring, pitting and streaking of the wet

¹⁵¹ *What Remains: The Life & Work of Sally Mann*, directed by Steven Cantor (USA: Zeitgeist Films, 2006), DVD.

plate collodion process that impinges the field of vision and suggests duress: the deformations of the image suggestively recall the nature of past events.

These three instances of work by Gábor Ösz, Ori Gersht, and Sally Mann all share the common reference to past events by situating them in place. This impulse attests to the need to revisit certain places and also indicates how place can act as a locus of memory. In this way, these photographers effectively tap into the holding-locating properties of place to recall events from another time. In parallel with the bleak events that are associated with these places the photographs are cloaked in obscurity: the architecture of the military bunkers informs and frequently hinders the sight lines of Gábor Ösz's pinhole images; the long exposures of Ori Gersht's photographs attest to the accumulation of time not only on the surface of the photograph but between the time that the images were taken and the event that they address; and Sally Mann's unrelentingly dark images are further veiled with the residual marks specific to wet-plate collodion.¹⁵²

The photographic images of these three artists also carry forward the Romantic legacy of depicting barren landscapes, which attest to the subjective and immersive experience of being in place, while also evoking the history associated with those places. This can be felt for example in Ori Gersht's negotiation of how the trauma associated with places of atrocity may continue to be felt in the same place sixty years later on a quiet and sunny day.¹⁵³ Rather than portraying past

¹⁵² Echoing this tendency, photographer Drex Brooks attributes his snapshot approach in *Sweet Medicine*, a book of photographs that commemorates massacre and treaty sites of First Nations people across the United States, by reasoning that memory has an out-of-focus feel to it.

¹⁵³ Joel Sternfeld, whose recent book *On this Site* documents the locations of significant murders across the United States describes how upon visiting Central Park to find the site of the Jennifer Levin homicide, "it was bewildering to find a scene so beautiful... to see the same sunlight pour down indifferently on the earth." Lippard, *On the Beaten Track*, 131.

events as literal re-enactments, each of these artists pursue other methods to connect place and memory. One such strategy is not unlike how Robert Smithson negotiated the transposition of site and non-site; that is, by means of incorporating supporting material to bridge the latency between the event and the photograph. For example, while the photographs of the Civil War battlefields by Sally Mann are immensely poignant and infused with a sense of the foreboding, the specific history linked to each landscape is nonetheless only known when accompanied by supporting information. The locations of the photographs are indicated by means of title, and the publications and interviews that surround the work aid to further contextualize the event that underwrites the image. In a similar spirit, Gábor Ösz makes available descriptive texts and documentation that details his process of realization as well as the history of the landscape. Captions and artist statements similarly inform the viewer of the historical context of the landscapes that Ori Gersht presents. In this way, the contextualizing information further facilitates a transition between the felt encounter with the photograph and the rational apprehension of how the landscape is embedded with deep historical traces.

Each with their respective means, these three artists all create a link between place and memory: it is evident in these images that something happened here. In this way these photographers contribute to place-making, or what philosopher David Morris describes as the mutual complicity necessary for a place to come into being:

Place, although it gives rise to life, approaches what is not living, it approaches movement over and done with; or rather place gives rise to movement only in relation to living beings; place is not place on its own, but is place in relation to those moving beings that animate place... place stands as place in relation to life and moving bodies; even a buried body is *in* place only through those who mourn it.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ David Morris, *The Sense of Space* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 181. (Italics in original).

As Morris suggests, while place anchors and orients people and events, the memories bestowed on place are sustained not by place itself but by people in relation to place. While place provides an edge, a limit, and a concrete situatedness for the recollection of past events, it nonetheless necessitates participation.

These photographs share a relationship with memorials in that they mark the sites of human tragedy and call attention to the unburied past. By revisiting these places the photographer stands in for the absent and invites estranged viewers to be witness to the memories of others. However, while these photographs commemorate the dead, the ambiguity of the photograph nonetheless sets them apart from public monuments erected with often literal and sometimes trivializing depictions of past events. Critic and curator Lucy Lippard warns that certain types of memorials are consigned to do our memory work for us; they serve not only as reliquaries, but also as repositories for memories we prefer not to carry.¹⁵⁵ Memorials, at their best, do more than deposit the memory of a cruel past, but also address the current moment. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest, a true memorial does not commemorate something that happened, but rather “confides to the ear of the future the persistent sensations that embody the event: the constantly renewed suffering of men and women, their re-created protestations, their constantly resumed struggle.”¹⁵⁶ These types of memorials are not limited to the actualities of one event, but address how the past interweaves with the present-day. James E. Young echoes this when he expresses a contemporary shift to what he terms as “counter-monuments,” that is, memorial spaces

¹⁵⁵ Lippard, *On the Beaten Track*, 133.

¹⁵⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 176.

conceived to challenge the very premise of the monument.¹⁵⁷ These types of monuments often employ a language of absence to counteract what art historian Martha Langford describes as an aversion to monolithic histories.¹⁵⁸

It is in this spirit that the photographs addressed in this chapter find both an affinity with and distinction from memorials. Rather than offering a comprehensive or consoling meaning, these vacant landscapes recall much more than meets the eye. In this respect, they are closer to what Ulrich Baer describes as “a mode of witnessing” that is “prior to all efforts at commemoration, explanation, or understanding.” Baer elaborates that unlike most post-war images of the Holocaust, photographs that contain no evidence of the former occupation force us to observe that there is *nothing* there to see. That is, these types of images recall that there is something in a catastrophe as vast as the Holocaust that remains “inassimilable to historicist or contextual readings.” Instead, these kinds of photographs situate us in relation to something that cannot be accounted for solely by material or documentary evidence. In this sense, the deliberate exclusion of historical markers does not explain the abyss opened by the Holocaust, but rather places the viewer in relation to it.¹⁵⁹

In a similar vein, the photographs of Gabor Ösz, Ori Gersht, and Sally Mann draw attention to past events and further recall that landscape is never empty. This type of work exemplifies what Langford terms “place memory,” by making a link between place and event to underscore that

¹⁵⁷ James E. Young, “The Counter-Monument: Memory against itself in Germany today,” *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (Winter, 1992): 267-296.

¹⁵⁸ Martha Langford, *Scissors, Paper, Stone: Expressions of Memory in Contemporary Photographic Art* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 190.

¹⁵⁹ Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 66-67.

something happened here, in this place.¹⁶⁰ These images testify that these histories still matter and that they survive in collective memory. This practice challenges the notion of photography as solely a record of observable reality and instead invites a consideration of how the medium may be employed as a tool to seize hold of memories that are bound to place. In keeping with Edward Casey's emphasis on rethinking place as a fluid presence capable of implacing things in complex manners and with complex effects, these photographers invite us not only to explore the anonymous vistas of significant places, but also to seek the less accessible layers of memory inscribed in place.

To conclude, the photographs discussed in this chapter attest to how the representation of place can revivify and strengthen its holding-locating properties, for indeed places do not remain places on their own but rather persist through an ongoing desire to situate meaning and memory. By mobilizing place as a means to summon events retroactively, these photographs do not so much fix a moment in time, as act like memory itself. In this way, they participate in the process of remembering events past and gone, but still felt. As such, they contribute to the way we see and understand the ever-accumulating past. Furthermore, by engaging the present moment to access the past, the past is no longer conceived of as a distant and sealed moment in history, but rather as Olivier Laurent reminds us, "*le passé n'est pas autre.*"¹⁶¹ Symptomatic of the *survivance* of the past, the holding-locating properties of place allows memory to persist like the interval between the death of the star and the cessation of its light, signifying that the present is not constituted without the past.

¹⁶⁰ Langford, *Scissors, Paper, Stone*, 274.

¹⁶¹ The past is not other: "Le passé n'est plus le siège exclusif de l'histoire, comme il l'est dans l'histoire conventionnelle, cette histoire des histoires. Il ne l'est plus car, bien que radicalement différent du présent dans sa conformation, le passé n'est pas autre." See: Olivier, *Le Sombre Abîme Du Temps*, 210.

Chapter Four

Record Them: Light, Time & Liquid Intelligence

Avec la trace de la lumière, un événement passé laisse un aspect visible de lui-même - comme ces étoiles que nous pouvons voir encore alors qu'elle n'existe plus. L'image de la chose se propage dans le temps et dans l'espace grâce au voyage de la lumière (le photographique est un mode de propagation de la lumière). Le "phénomène" passager qui continue de nous apparaître alors qu'il a disparu acquiert ainsi, par sa trace disponible, une nouvelle forme de présence.¹⁶²

Following the instruction *go to those places* the last and final imperative for the completion of *The After-Image (Swan Songs)* is the instruction: *record them*. To realize this aspect of the project, I performed this instruction by photographing the places that correspond to the swan songs. Documenting those places brought to light the holding-locating properties of place. By this I mean that the execution of the project provoked a consideration of not only how places give rise to future events, but also how place may act as a locus of memory to retrospectively recall past events. Because place acts as an anchor for events that have passed, going to certain places became a method to revisit the past. In this respect, the palimpsest emerged as an analogy for how memory is inscribed in place, with an emphasis on how the past bleeds into the present. What remains undone is a deeper questioning of photography itself.

¹⁶² Sylviane Agacinski, *Le passeur de temps: modernité et nostalgie* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2000), 102.

In light of the instruction *record them* the focus of this chapter falls on the photographic medium, and more specifically, on photography's signature attribute of time. While an emphasis on time indicates a definitive jump from the concept of place, place nonetheless acts as an interesting departure point for this leap. As Edward S. Casey demonstrates in his profound exploration of place, there is "no grasping of time without place" because time "arises from places and passes away between them."¹⁶³ As Casey elaborates, without place time would not appear as time at all. And yet, how does time appear? What is the experience of time? And how can this contribute to new understandings of the unique relationship between the passage of time and the photographic medium?

A time-based medium

Photography, along with film, video and sound art, is categorized as a time-based medium. However in contrast to film, video and sound art, which possess a more obvious temporal dimension in that they are watched or listened to over a certain duration, a photograph is an unchanging still-image that can apparently be absorbed in a single moment's viewing; and yet it is conceived as so intimately connected with time that it is understood as a time-based media. The integral link with time is certainly evident in photography's propensity for cataloguing and preserving discrete moments. Indeed, the nature of photography has often been identified by a special relationship between a thing and its indexical trace, that is, we anticipate that a photograph depicts some thing or person at a particular time at a particular place.¹⁶⁴ But is this the only attribute that informs the medium's ultimately unique relationship with the passage of

¹⁶³ Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-world*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 13.

¹⁶⁴ Geoffrey Batchen, *Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 266.

time? And how do the ongoing developments in photographic technology question this indexical status?

Today we are bombarded with photographic images: they blanket the cities we live in, permeate the vast majority of communication media, and record the experiences we seek to remember. In short, the contemporary moment is saturated with photographs. An artwork that reflects this super abundance is the installation by Erik Kessels, *24 Hours in Photography*. Kessels printed all the photographs uploaded to Flickr in a single 24-hour period - about one million images, and then floods the exhibition space with them. Visitors are encouraged to wade through the sea of photographs, a somewhat intimidating proposition in light of the sheer quantity. Curiously, this volume of images represents barely a fraction of the approximately 530 million photographs being uploaded to the Internet everyday.



Figure 28 Erik Kessels, *24 Hours in Photography*, 2013, installation, Contact Photography Festival, Toronto

Arresting time

The ubiquitous nature of photography today suggests a strong desire for the medium, however I also suspect that we have become so accustomed to the photographic image that we no longer notice the eerie ways in which it is capable of unsettling time. The history of photography tells us that at its inception, the shock of the photographic image was immensely strong. However with the current proliferation and immediacy of photography, the initial awe surrounding the photograph is now absent. Is the strangeness of photography a forgotten phenomenon, something relegated to the past?¹⁶⁵

Scholars have pointed out that the inception of photography is intertwined with alchemy, revealed through the shared interest in the transformation of matter, as well as with astronomy, as seen in the corresponding exploration of light, time and optics. In this respect, the origins of photography emerge in concert with disciplines dedicated to the investigation of the mysterious and the unknown.¹⁶⁶ At its discovery, photography was received as a phenomenal invention. For example, by freezing time, photography could reveal a reality unperceivable to the human eye. One of the primary examples of this is Eadweard Muybridge's *Motion Studies*, developed in consequence of a bet as to whether or not a horse lifted all four legs off the ground at a full gallop. Because this motion is too fast for the human eye to decipher, advances in photographic technologies were necessary to capture this discrete movement. In this way, new innovations in photography were effectively driven by the desire to dissect motion, and for an image that

¹⁶⁵ This line of inquiry is further reflected in the current interrogation of photography, evidenced for example in the emergence of such events as the major symposium *Is Photography Over?* held at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in April 2010.

¹⁶⁶ Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning With Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1997).

provided evidence of this action.¹⁶⁷ In consequence, photography has been long thought of as a medium that arrests time, the act of taking a photograph being akin to taking a scalpel to time, or freezing a cut of time infinitely.¹⁶⁸ This attribute of arresting time distinguishes photography from all other systems of representation and contributes to one of its most elusive qualities. Photographs thus appear to interrupt the flow of time and reveal a past now gone. It is with this in mind that we may begin to question how a medium that is understood to arrest time may also exceed chronological time.

The legacy of the photographic medium is so intimately linked with the photograph's potential to unsettle time that this attribute appears again and again in discussions. Thirty years ago, Barthes went to so far as to define photography as a death apparatus, in that it provides evidence of what he calls the "what-has-been," in other words, a moment forever past and gone. As noted earlier, *Camera Lucida: reflections on photography*, was written shortly after his mother's death, and so the author's reflection on the capacity of photography to authenticate what is irrevocably lost is intertwined with mourning. In this context Barthes emphasizes the fact that all photographs, whether taken moments, years, or decades ago, are spectres of the past. As such, photography is positioned as a "death dealing apparatus," or otherwise a medium that "produces Death while trying to preserve life."¹⁶⁹ In Barthes' view, the photograph's attestation of a reality-now-past suggests that the subject is already dead, or as he describes: "a certificate of presence of a reality

¹⁶⁷ Rebecca Solnit further discusses the implications of the emergence of photography on the concept of time in: *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West* (New York: Viking, 2003).

¹⁶⁸ Cutting edge digital photography continues the extraordinary legacy of revealing a world that is too quick, too distant, or too small for the naked eye to perceive; such as probing the vast reaches of outer space or the incredibly complex structures of the microscopic world.

¹⁶⁹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Noonday Press, 1981), 92.

one can no longer touch.”¹⁷⁰ The melancholy associated with certain photographs is the result of a false sense of proximity to a past that is ultimately inaccessible.

Barthes’ analysis is further amplified by his selection of photographs, which are almost exclusively portraits. Because Barthes focuses on portraiture, which is simultaneously linked to the ‘I’ that will die, the forceful exertion of time is felt by insinuating the viewer’s future death. That is, by presenting images of absent people photography not only presents ghosts, but also reminds the viewer of their own mortality. This reminder contributes to Barthes’ complex concept of photographic time as a temporal oscillation that hinges not only on the “what-has-been” of the past, but also contains a “this-will-be.”¹⁷¹

In this way, while photography’s link with time is attributed to freezing a given moment, the photograph also cuts through time: a sliver of the past arrives abruptly in the present moment. In this sense, while photography is intimately linked to a discrete instant, we could also say that it exceeds that instant. This suspension of time is what Barthes indicates as the ecstasy of photography, as well as its madness. So while the passing of time implicit in all photographs is irrevocably bound up with loss, Barthes also indicates how photography disrupts linear time by gathering the past and placing it in the present. Therefore, while photography historically tends to be conceived of as a medium that provides evidence, authenticates truth, and attests to an observable reality, we might also ask how photography also facilitates, as Geoffrey Batchen

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 79.

¹⁷¹ This interpretation is greatly indebted to Geoffrey Batchen’s profound study of Barthes. See: Batchen, *Photographing Degree Zero*, 267.

suggests: “our own desire to transcend time and space by means of the magic of the photograph.”¹⁷²

Following Barthes’ profound meditation on photography’s intimate link with the past, photographic theory tends to continue this legacy. However, as Batchen suggests, we can also ask in what other ways photographs might engage differently with time. Rather than presenting discontinuous moments - fragments of time cut and divided - is it possible that certain photographs may contain within themselves anterior and future moments? How might the past, present, and future collide within a photograph? In other words, how might a still image contain duration within itself?

Duration

Spatial models frequently arise in discussions of time. For example, time tends to be defined and measured by uniform periodic motion, whether it is the pendulum swing of a clock or the rotation of the earth, in both cases it is a precise calculation of travelled distance that makes and keeps time. Spatial representations of time are also common to most almanacs, calendars, charts and graphs, for which lines are used to depict time in a chronological order, suggesting that time unfolds in a string like succession.¹⁷³ Language used to describe temporality is also often dominated by spatial figures: we speak of a “long” or a “short” time, as though we traverse time like we do physical distances. Other descriptive terms we unthinkingly apply to time that are

¹⁷² Geoffrey Batchen, “[hyphen] Americans,” in *On a Wet Bough: Keliy Anderson-Staley* (Indianapolis: Waltz Books, 2014), unpaginated.

¹⁷³ Daniel Rosenberg and Anthony Grafton, *Cartographies of Time* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010), 13.

nonetheless spatial in character include a “stretch” or “interval” of time, and is further evident when we refer to events in time as “before” or “after,” which invokes the spatial distinction as for example when one object is said to be placed “before” or “after” another.¹⁷⁴ Literary critic W.J.T. Mitchell affirms this when he suggests that spatial forms are the perceptual basis of our understanding of time, in so far as: “we cannot ‘tell time’ without the mediation of space.”¹⁷⁵ And yet, despite the prevalent tendency to measure and spatialize time, this does not necessarily correspond to the way in which time is experienced. Because time can be felt as both uniform and arbitrary, measured time relates only to the part that is uniform. In this respect, a vast majority of temporal experience connects only artificially to measured time. In spite of this, time continues to be envisioned in measured terms, that is, as a sequential orderly flow.

Henri Bergson was critical of the tendency to conceptualize and represent time uniquely in terms of space, that is, as a homogeneous standardized unit measured for example by a clock. Questioning the common tendency of understanding time as instants strung out in a succession, one minute passing away as the next begins, Bergson instead formulated a concept based on the *experience* of time which he terms duration (*la durée*).¹⁷⁶ While spatialized time is composed of discrete differences, or numerical distinctions, duration is composed of intensive differences, or ordinal distinctions. Bergson elaborates the difference between spatialized time and duration by associating spatialized time with quantitative attributes: it is measured, calculated and accounted

¹⁷⁴ Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 12.

¹⁷⁵ W.J.T. Mitchell. “Spatial Form in Literature: toward a General theory,” in *The Language of Images* (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1980), 274.

¹⁷⁶ Duration is akin to what Deleuze would later term the virtual, a concept that came to distinguish Deleuze’s philosophy a whole, which was initially developed in his close study of Bergson. If we think of the past through the lens of duration (virtual past) in contrast to spatial time (which would imply the actual past or otherwise as the history of spatialized discrete events), we would instead see the virtual past as dynamic movements and tensions. See: Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism* (New York: Zone Books, 1988).

for. In this way, Bergson demonstrates that spatialization effectively breaks down and fragments time, and further, that this results in a tendency to artificially arrest events as distinct occurrences. For this reason, Bergson associates spatialized time with such attributes as objective reasoning and classification. In contrast, duration is defined as a qualitative experience of time. Bergson argues that time, when perceived as duration, is not simply a chronological succession of units, but rather involves the virtual *coexistence* of the past and the present.¹⁷⁷ Bergson clarifies this by suggesting that “the following moment always contains, over and above the preceding one, the memory the latter has left it.”¹⁷⁸ In other words, the past is indivisible from the present.

In his book *Creative Evolution* (1911) Bergson uses the analogy of instantaneous photography, which isolates specific moments of a larger movement, to discuss the distinctions between modern and ancient science. Bergson suggests that rather than seeing movement as a single mass or undivided period of duration, photography “sees nothing but phases succeeding phases, forms replacing forms.”¹⁷⁹ This example is used to illustrate how, in the same way that photography artificially arrests time, modern science seeks what Bergson calls “stopping-places” or “immobilities.”¹⁸⁰ However, Bergson warns that there is a difference between isolating a discrete instant of time and studying a movement:

That life is a kind of mechanism I cordially agree. But is it the mechanism of

¹⁷⁷ Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual: Bergson and the Time of Life* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 35.

¹⁷⁸ Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind* (New York: Philosophical library, 1946), 193.

¹⁷⁹ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (New York: Random House, 1911), 361.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 361.

parts artificially isolated within the whole of the universe, or is it the mechanism of the real whole? The real whole might well be, we conceive, an indivisible continuity. The systems we cut out within it would, properly speaking, not then be *parts* at all; they would be *partial views* of the whole.¹⁸¹

In contrast to the artificial isolation or ‘partial views’ that are derived from dividing time, Bergson proposes that what is real is the continual *change* of form in movement. Because form itself is only a snapshot view of a transition, a fixed image is misleading in the sense that it portrays a stable view of instability.¹⁸²

Bergson suggests that with the precision of photography what is lost is the idea that the trajectory of a movement is created in one single stroke.¹⁸³ Instead, fragmenting a movement into a series of dissected instants results in the idea that “movement, *once effected*, has laid along its course a motionless trajectory on which we can count as many immobilities as we will. From this we conclude that the movement, *whilst being effected*, lays at each instant beneath it a position with which it coincides.” In other words, because photography offers evidence of the discrete positions of a trajectory, the movement itself is perceived as isolated fragments in succession. Bergson nonetheless argues that a movement is in fact indivisible. This is clarified when Bergson states that a movement’s trajectory cannot be divided because it is an act in progress and not a thing:

To suppose that the moving body is at a point of its course is to cut the course in two by a snip of the scissors at this point, and to substitute two trajectories for the

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 36.

¹⁸² Ibid., 328.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 336.

single trajectory which we were first considering. It is to distinguish two successive acts where, by the hypothesis, there is only one.¹⁸⁴

Bergson effectively argues that duration (regarded as flux or dynamic movement) escapes the hold of modern scientific knowledge, and by extension, also escapes the hold of the photographic image. In this sense, Bergson was sceptical of photography's capacity to exceed the type of time measured and defined by the clock, because like the clock photographs divide time into segmented instants. In this respect, Bergson's critique of photography is based on the medium's tendency to capture discrete events, rather than affirming dynamic movements and tensions. The gravest philosophical error, he proposed, is to imagine that we seize the world as a series of static tableaux or snapshots of the passing reality.

A changing set of conditions

Taking into account Bergson's note of caution, could we nonetheless consider how a still image may exceed its classification as an index of a discrete arrested event? Do certain photographs have the potential to fold the past into the present? How might photography give material life to the immaterial? How might the spectral nature of photography tap into the subtle matter of duration?

These questions are related to the creation of *The After-Image (Swan Songs)* in that I was seeking to photograph the intangible survival of the past. This was examined in the preceding chapter, by means of an exploration of photographers such as Ori Gersht, who uses long exposures to bridge the temporal gap between the time that a photograph is taken and the event that he seeks

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 366.

to address. Another photographer who pushes the use of long exposures to an extreme is Michael Wesely, who employs camera techniques that allow for a single exposure of up to twenty-six months. This compression of time into a single image creates uncanny photographs: ghostly buildings melt like ice, and streaks of light reverberate across the sky, tracing the repeated trajectory of the sun's path across the seasons.¹⁸⁵ Long exposures are an interesting technical example of how photographs can gather spans of time in a still image, but I want to suggest that an exploration of the material properties of photography may further contribute to this consideration.

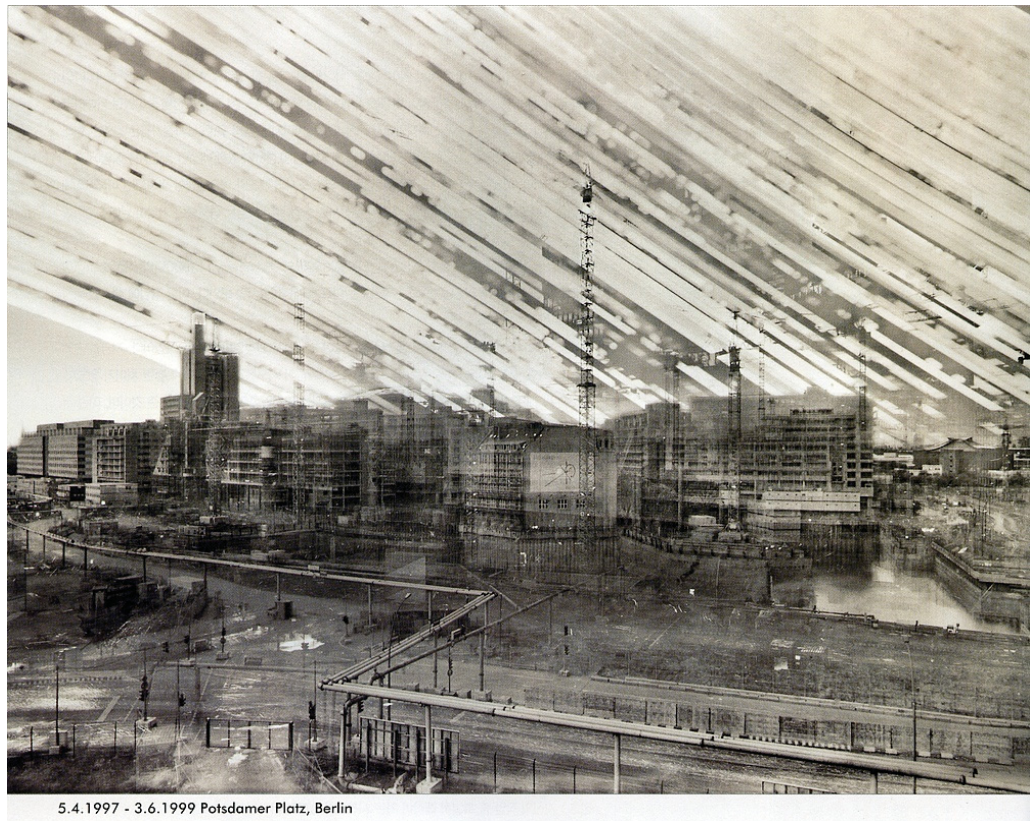


Figure 29 Michael Wesely, *5.4.1997 – 3.6.1999 Potsdamer Platz, Berlin*, 1997-1999, C-print, 125 x 175 cm

¹⁸⁵ Jeff Wall, *Between Times: Instants, Intervals, Durations* (Madrid: La Fabrica Editorial, 2010).

Liquid intelligence & the chemical signature of light

Jeff Wall's 'Photography and Liquid Intelligence' (1989) is a short, perceptive essay that introduces what a material-based knowledge of photography may offer.¹⁸⁶ Here, Wall contrasts what he defines as the wet and dry aspects of photography. The dry is associated with optics, geometry, ballistics, certainty, and precision, while the wet is associated with the atavistic, the chaotic, and the unpredictable. In this respect, the mechanical accuracy of the camera's operation and the instantaneity of the shutter are contrasted to the fluid flows of liquid. This is further clarified with the reminder that in traditional analogue photography water and other liquids are crucial components of the processing of photographs, the various chemical baths and washing being key steps of darkroom protocol. While the wet component of photography is tightly monitored within a controlled system, Wall nonetheless argues that the liquid aspect of the process connects photography to the past and to time. This is elaborated when Wall states that the wet component embodies the "memory trace of archaic processes" in that the wet procedure historically connects photography to a vast array of practices involving chemical transformation like dyeing and bleaching.¹⁸⁷ Wall then contrasts the encounter of the wet and the dry in photography as a confrontation between what he terms "liquid intelligence" and the relatively dry character of "optical intelligence." For Wall, photography is the meeting of a cold, wet, incalculable intelligence and a dry rational interface. Photography's particular cleverness is then positioned at a conjunction where the fluid immersive liquids meet dry projectile tools.

¹⁸⁶ Jeff Wall is a photographer with a background in art history. The essay was first published in a major group exhibition in which Wall's work was shown alongside that of Robert Adams, Bernd and Hilla Becher, and Thomas Struth. See: Jeff Wall, "Photography and Liquid Intelligence," in *Jeff Wall* (London: Phaidon, 1996), 90-93.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

In the concluding paragraph of the essay, Andrei Tarkovsky's classic film *Solaris* (1972) is invoked. *Solaris* is a film that deals with time, how memory intersects with the present, what dreams are, and above all, an argument for the primacy of the poetic imagination. As Wall describes of the film, scientists are studying an oceanic planet with typically scientific techniques. But the ocean is itself an intelligence that is studying them in turn. Here it becomes evident that, for Wall, the fluid, sentient and improvisational nature of liquid intelligence undermines the dry rationality of optics and mechanics:

The planet Solaris experiments on the experimenters by returning their own memories to them in the form of hallucinations, perfect in every detail, in which people from their pasts appear in the present and must be related to once again, maybe in a new way. I think this was a very precise metaphor for, among many other things, the interrelation between liquid intelligence and optical intelligence in photography, or in technology as a whole. In photography, the liquids study us, even from a great distance.¹⁸⁸

Art historian Matthew C. Hunter has recently set the concept of liquid intelligence back in circulation. Using Wall's essay as a departure point, Hunter questions how liquid intelligence can be deployed as a broader category of art-historical investigation. That is, Hunter not only affirms that Wall established an interesting link that connects photography to a longer history of wet techniques and practices, but also to a longer history of what he perceives as a liquid imagination. In this respect, Hunter moves beyond the photographic framework and instead situates liquid intelligence within a broader aesthetics of fluidity to reconsider how "the pull of liquids" maybe detected in an expanded field of creative visual production.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸Ibid., 93.

¹⁸⁹ In 2012 Matthew C. Hunter developed the graduate seminar: *Liquid Intelligence: Thinking the Watery Image in the Long Eighteenth Century* (McGill, Winter 2012), as well as directed the McGill Art History Conference: *Liquid Intelligence and the Aesthetics of Fluidity*. Montreal: McCord Museum, Oct 25, 2013.

My own interest in liquid intelligence stems from the realization that many of the attributes of the Holga camera that I used for the creation of *The After-Image (Swan Songs)* tend towards what Wall describes as the wet side of photography. The convex lens and total lack of optical precision bestows the camera with an unpredictable nature. Furthermore, my instruction to go to certain places in an attempt to commune with the past, positions the creation of a photograph as a fluid co-production between the photographer, the place, and the camera. More often than not, it is the accidental images, the ones that were taken somewhat haphazardly, after I thought that the actual work was done, that ended up being the images I chose to work with. This method of working is quite different from street photography or life reportage, for which the photographer is constantly on the alert for “the decisive moment.” The premise of this style of photography is that the photographer captures, in a fraction of a second, the significance of an event. The crucial moment is but a flashing instant, and as Henri Cartier-Bresson described this model, if you miss that precise expression, it is gone forever.¹⁹⁰ In contrast, for me the appeal of liquid intelligence hinges on its potential to exceed the indexical aspect of photography and instead engage with Bergson’s notion of fluid duration. In other words, liquid intelligence can act as a prism through which we may investigate the temporal axis of photography. These provocative attributes of liquid intelligence motivated the development of my subsequent research-creation inquiry.

An archaeology of historic lens-based technologies

The material and theoretical engagement with photography that was present throughout the development and execution of *The After-Image (Swan Songs)* led me to further investigate

¹⁹⁰ The term, originates from Cartier-Bresson’s book *Images à la sauvette* (1952), whose English edition was titled *The Decisive Moment*. In the preface, Cartier-Bresson took his keynote text from the 17th century Cardinal de Retz: “Il n’y a rien dans ce monde qui n’ait un moment décisif” (“There is nothing in this world that does not have a decisive moment”).

photography's origins and genealogical developments. Working with the thesis that history inhabits the present in very real ways, I sought to revisit historic photographic techniques to discover how antique technologies may continue to illuminate the present. To pursue this path, I completed a six-month artist residency at the Center for Alternative Photography in New York City. This is a unique organization dedicated to the preservation of, and experimentation with original 19th century photographic processes and 20th century emulsion-based photography. In this context I was introduced to the historical and technical aspects of a spectrum of photographic processes that span the conception of photography to contemporary darkroom techniques. After gaining basic familiarity with many of these processes I came to focus my attention on the wet plate collodion technique. Developed in 1851, wet plate collodion is a chemically complex and demanding process for which a defining attribute is the use of a light sensitive concoction in a liquid state.

Learning the wet plate technique entailed the trials and tribulations implicit in an impressively temperamental process. Inert chemistry, unexposed plates, over-developed plates, and inexplicable pitting, scarring and streaking were amongst a few of the many variables I encountered, each with their respective cause and chemical fingerprint. While I slowly came to understand the source of these unanticipated irregularities, they nonetheless continued to intrigue me both aesthetically and theoretically. I encountered the aberrations of wet plate collodion with an inquisitive eye, and this curiosity informed how I approached the creative process. In the place of control and technical perfection, I was inclined to foster a dialogue with the unanticipated errors. And most importantly, I became increasingly aware of the manipulation and interaction of the primary properties of the process: the impact of light on chemical

compounds over varying periods of time. This transformation of matter, instigated by the intangible elements of light and time, acquired an alchemical resonance.

While *The After-Image (Swan Songs)* and the new body of work *Celestial Measures* differ dramatically in many ways, I nonetheless perceive certain affinities. Firstly, they both employ marginal production techniques: the use of an unpredictable plastic camera in the case of *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, and an antiquated photographic process in the case of *Celestial Measures*. Both of these ways of working entail surprises that necessitate a degree of improvisation in the execution. Another distinction is that for the realization of *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, the photographs were executed in a more conceptual, almost clinical manner, following a series of instructions. In contrast, for this new body of work I adopted a very different approach that foregrounds experimentation with the formal properties of a technical process. By relinquishing control over materials and not anticipating specific results, I became more attentive and more receptive to the unfolding of a fluid process with unforeseen outcomes. I began to think of my role in this process as a facilitator, setting a series of conditions in motion and participating in a process of creation.

My working knowledge of photography grew to encompass an understanding of the juxtaposition of wet and dry processes, the wet component necessitating less control and more facilitation. This could be described as the subtle distinction between acting *upon* materials to acting *with* materials, to foster a flexibility and responsiveness that is more like a dance than a mission. I became attentive to what Geoffrey Batchen describes as the “wondrous intercourse of

object, light and chemical reaction that is the photographic process.”¹⁹¹ In this sense, my use of photography was transformed from being a precise mechanical execution, to becoming more akin to what photographer Peter Joel Witkin describes as the process of making the breath of latent light visible.¹⁹² In consequence, my studio work began to emphasize the making visible of intangible processes and relationships.

The wet plate collodion technique is one of many historic photographic processes developed over a long period of experimentation with light sensitive materials. While 1839 historically marks the race for the official recognition of the invention of photography (with the primary contenders of Daguerre, Talbot, and Bayard) the origins of photography could nonetheless be said to coincide with the much earlier discovery of the light sensitive properties of certain compounds, and can be traced to the alchemic quests of Johann Heinrich Schulze (1687-1744). Schulze accidentally uncovered and observed the darkening effects of light on silver when he mixed silver contaminated nitric acid with calcium carbonate.¹⁹³ This discovery led to ongoing experimentations with light sensitive compounds, including for example chemist Jean Hellot’s (1685-1766) development of a dilute silver nitrate solution employed as a method for spies to deliver secret codes and messages.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not: Photography & Remembrance* (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum; New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 73.

¹⁹² Joel-Peter Witkin, *Joel-Peter Witkin* (California: Twelvetees Press, 1985), unpaginated.

¹⁹³ Schulze was attempting to make a phosphorescent compound associated with the study of alchemy called *aluminous stone* or *Baldewein’s Phosphor*.

¹⁹⁴ Christopher James, *The Book of Alternative Photographic Processes*. 2nd ed. (New York: Delmar, 2008), 36-41.

With this foundational knowledge of the light sensitive properties of silver nitrate, in 1802 Humphry Davey and Thomas Wedgwood succeeded in producing the first Photogram, an image made not with a camera, but rather by placing objects directly on a light sensitive substrate and exposing it to light. Because a method to fix and stabilize the image had yet to be invented, Davey and Wedgwood were faced with the paradox that the light needed to create an image would also destroy the image. As such, to publicly formalize their discovery, the two collaborators exhibited the work by candlelight. It was not for another thirty years that a method of fixing would be established. Another milestone in the history of photography came in 1841 when William Fox Talbot developed the calotype, which is the first silver-based process to yield a negative, a remarkable feat in that the negative provided a matrix for the production of multiple images. In this way, Talbot's paper negative unveiled what is now a defining attribute of the photographic medium: the creation of a reproducible image. However, due to the enthusiastic quest for further refinements to the picture-making process, the calotype was a somewhat short-lived discovery, followed by the advent of Frederick Scott Archer's wet plate collodion process in 1851.

The invention of wet plate collodion is indebted to the discovery of nitrated cotton, popularly known as *guncotton*, made by soaking cotton fibres in a mixture of sulphuric and nitric acids. This concoction yielded an unstable and flammable material that was initially used solely as an explosive. Ironically, in 1847, a young medical student by the name of John Parker Maynard formulated an ingenious medical dressing called *collodion*, made by dissolving the explosive nitrated cotton in a mixture of equal parts of sulphuric ether and alcohol.¹⁹⁵ The result of

¹⁹⁵ The name collodion is taken from the Greek word *kollodes* meaning to adhere.

Maynard's action was a clear and viscous fluid that dried to a durable and flexible skin and was used to treat the wounds inflicted by explosives made from the same chemical derivative. The collodion dressing was applied as an adhesive to keep injuries clean and protected from infection in a battlefield environment. Curiously, the clear, flexible binding agent also appeared as the perfect vehicle for holding a light-sensitive silver halide solution on a glass substrate.

In March 1851, Frederick Scott Archer published the technique and formula for the application of iodized collodion on sheets of glass for the purpose of making glass plate negatives.¹⁹⁶ In this process, the collodion formula is poured onto a glass plate to form a thin flexible membrane. The plate is then submerged in a bath of silver nitrate wherein small particles of silver adhere to the collodion forming a light sensitive skin. When the plate is withdrawn from the silver bath it is ready for exposure. Because the entire process of coating, exposing, and developing the plate must be done before the liquid membrane dries, the process necessitates an on-site darkroom. Historically, this would mean travelling with a portable darkroom.¹⁹⁷ The advantages of the wet plate collodion process were immediately evident: the process provided a sharp glass negative that permitted exposures that were dramatically faster than the existing daguerreotype or calotype technique. At a fraction of the price of the daguerreotype, wet plate collodion was as finely detailed, but also reproducible.

¹⁹⁶ Not without proper tragic irony, the explosives, medical dressing, and photographic documentation of the American Civil War all originate from the same chemical compound. Contemporary artist Sally Mann made this poignant point in her recent series *Battlefields* wherein she used the wet plate collodion to re-document landscapes associated with the greatest traumas of the Civil War. See previous chapter for further insight.

¹⁹⁷ Contemporary wet plate photographers such as Sally Mann and Lisa Elmaleh have transformed the back of their trucks into darkrooms. For my work I use an ice-fishing tent as a portable darkroom.



Figure 30. Roger Fenton, *Fenton's Photographic Van*, 1855. Photographic print: salted paper, 17.5 x 16.5 cm. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

The tintype is an American variation on wet plate collodion process that was introduced in 1855, and it continued to be widely used until the 1930s, making it one of the most enduring of photographic processes. The innovation of the tintype was to substitute a blackened tin plate for the sheet of glass. Because the tintype is a collodion negative developed on a plate of black lacquered metal, the image has the appearance of a positive print but without the possibility of being reproduced in multiple manifestations. In contrast to the wet plate negative produced on glass, each tintype is a unique object.¹⁹⁸ Because tin was less expensive than glass, the tintype was a relatively inexpensive undertaking, and for the first time in the history of photography there was a process that was affordable for various classes of society. In this way the tintype is celebrated as the democratization of photography.

With the advent of photographic film however, the wet place collodion process had all but disappeared by the early twentieth century. And yet, despite the fact that the process is incredibly labour intensive and chemically complex, wet plate collodion has nonetheless been revived. In

¹⁹⁸ An underexposed wet plate collodion negative, when laid on a dark background appears as a dull positive.

the last ten to fifteen years there has been a demonstrated interest in historic photographic processes in general, and in wet-plate collodion in particular.¹⁹⁹ In contrast to other analogue film processes, wet plate continues to be made from scratch, mixed according to 19th century recipes. As such, it presents an interesting option with respect to the current widespread disappearance of film stock.²⁰⁰ Wet plate also presents the advantage of aesthetically differentiating itself from the conventions of the sharp digital image we have grown accustomed to. Photographer Ellen Susan elaborates on this distinction by calling attention to the paradoxical appeal of the wet plate collodion process today: it is “simultaneously celebrated for its ability to describe a subject in minute and exquisite detail and for the way it can also completely or partially obscure the subject with its own process artifacts.”²⁰¹ In this respect, the formal aesthetic qualities of the process are at the heart of its intrigue. Canadian artist Stan Douglas, celebrated for working with a wide range of both obsolete and cutting edge lens-based technologies, echoes this perspective when he describes the aesthetic quality specific to antiquated photographic technologies. Douglas uses the analogy of language implying that just as you can say things in French that you cannot say in any other language, you can do things with antiquated processes that could not be realized any other way.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Initially, the wet-plate process was more or less a lost technique except to a small community of civil war re-enactment enthusiasts. More recently however there has been a small irruption of interest, evidenced for example in the emergence of art education centres including: *The Center for Alternative Photography* (NYC), *Luz* (Victoria, BC), and *The Rayko Art Center* (San Francisco, California). This tendency is further reflected in the work of contemporary artists working with wet plate such as: Sally Mann, Lisa Elmaleh, Joni Sternbach, and Maryse Goudreau; as well as new journals dedicated to the diffusion of antiquated processes such as *Diffusion: A Proclamation for Unconventional Photography*.

²⁰⁰ Two invaluable sources that immensely aided my understanding of the wet-plate process include: John Coffey's *Doer's Guide to Wet Plate Collodion Photography*, as well as J. Towler's *The Silver Sunbeam: A Practical and Theoretical Textbook on Sun Drawing and Photographic Printing* (1864).

²⁰¹ Ellen Susan, “Artist Talk,” *The Center for Alternative Photography* (New York City: March 21, 2011).

²⁰² Stan Douglas, "The Archive," *Lecture and Conversation Series Contemporary Art Between Time and History*. Montréal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, (Montréal: March 13, 2013).

Remediate: the return of antiquated photographic processes

As I approached the exploration of wet plate collodion, I began by means of an immersion in the materiality of the process in search of unexpected images. Rather than striving for technical perfection, I explored the anomalies, with particular interest in the liquid nature of the chemistry itself. Initial experiments involved subtle manipulations of light and time on prepared plates, exposed and developed in the darkroom without ever being introduced to the camera body.²⁰³ This method of working is particularly evident in the sequence of images, *Hesitation: the empty form of time (no. 1- 4)*.

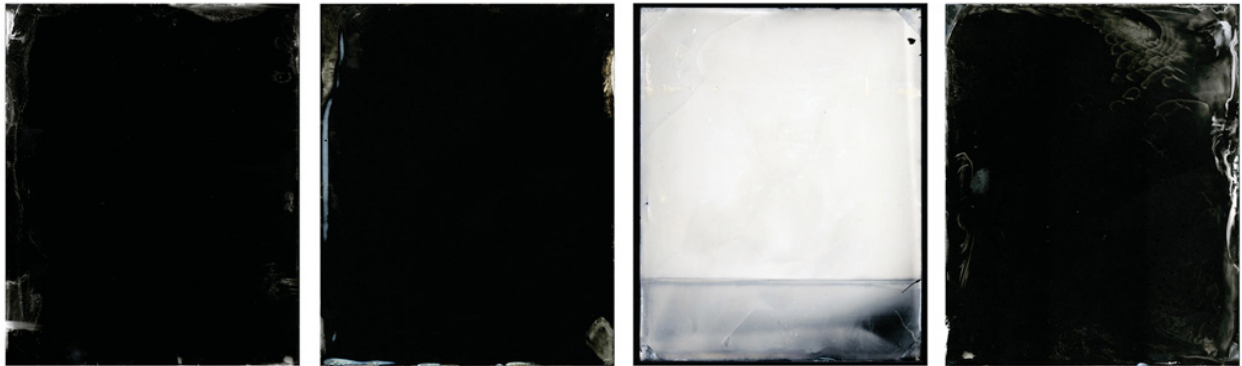


Figure 31 Fiona Annis, *Hesitation: the empty form of time (no. 1- 4)*, 2013
4 c-type enlargements of wet-plate collodion (ferrotype), 102 x 127 cm each

Three of the images in this series are derived from plates used in my improvised darkroom to monitor light leaks and the effects of temperature variation on the processing chemistry. The resulting imperfect blacks record the rebellious light entering the darkroom and exposing the sensitized plates, the consequence of which is often but a whisper of an image. Because these photographs are tangible manifestations of intangible properties they can be associated with the

²⁰³ This process introduced me to the world of camera-less photography. Artists practicing in this realm include for example Alison Rossiter and Garry Fabion Miller.

phenomena of spectres: ghostly manifestations that give material presence to the immaterial and the impermanent.

In continuation of my search to gain a familiarity with the process, the third plate in the series is also the result of an aberration. Usually classified as an error, the sensitized plate was temporarily paused while only partially submerged in the silver nitrate tank. The resulting horizontal line inscribed on the plate is a record of this hesitation.²⁰⁴



Figure 31. Fiona Annis, *Hesitation: the empty form of time (no. 4)*, 2013
C-type enlargement of wet-plate collodion (ferrotype), 102 x 127 cm

²⁰⁴ Because the pause that leads to a hesitation line can be so slight, normally the photographer would be unaware of the hesitation, and would continue to expose and develop the plate, only to realize that they have the undesirable line running through their image. Usually the plate would be thrown away. However, in this case, I didn't expose the plate after introducing the error, and in this way that plate becomes a record of the hesitation itself.

While this series was completed within the interior of windowless studio environment, the allusion to landscape is nonetheless present. However, the accidental nature of the appearance of landscape is in sharp contrast to *the After-Image (Swan Songs)*, for which I purposely sought to document specific places. In this new work, unintended abstract landscapes emerge for which, aside from the hint of a horizon, there is an absence of identifying reference points. And yet, the suggestion of landscape is evident. In light of this juxtaposition, the title of this body of work, *Celestial Measures*, borrows its name from an all but forgotten navigational method of geographically situating oneself in relation to celestial bodies. The original meaning of *Celestial Measures* becomes wistfully paradoxical when applied to a selection of photographic images wherein the possibility of discerning a specific location is obscured. Rebellious light, pitted voids, and other process-based irregularities completely or partially overshadow concrete subject matter. In the absence of reference points, how do we locate ourselves, what are the means of establishing familiar ground?

Once equipped with a portable darkroom I had the possibility of bringing my camera out of the studio and into the world. I intuitively moved in the direction of the Gaspésie, a peninsula along the south shore of the Saint Lawrence River in Québec. I went at the end of August, a period during which, at the beginning and end of the day, the solidity of the bedrock foundation disappears into mist and fog. I had never previously been to the Gaspésie, but I imagined it to be a land outside of time, a fictional place, as though surrounded by a magic circle. I decided to go there because I wanted create landscapes no longer associated with the significance of past events. I wanted these landscapes to be unknown mysteries, to function as the first few powerful

words of an extraordinary tale. I wanted them to hover on the edge of what is known and what is myth; to be places seen as though in a dream.

I drove to Gaspésie from Montréal in a borrowed car. Arriving at midnight, I had a key for the residency house associated with the artist-run center *Vaste et Vague* in Carleton-sur-Mer. The following morning was overcast and the fog lay heavy in the wooded hills. I headed out to explore without a specific destination in mind. I drove along the winding road that traces the coastline and after sometime I turned onto a side road and headed into the rugged interior. I passed a small rudimentary hunting lodge, and continued up an unmarked road with a steep incline. I winced at my ill treatment of the borrowed 1993 Volkswagen on the rough unfinished road. Arriving at the summit I unpacked my ice-fishing tent and set up my darkroom next to the power-line.



Figure 34 Fiona Annis, production image (Gaspésie), 2013

This was the first time I was photographing outside of a studio, and working on the uneven ground, in combination with the pollen and bugs that landed on the wet plates I prepared, added new elements to the image-making process. Several hours later I held in my hands an image I was happy with.



Figure 33 Fiona Annis, *Celestial Measures (this is where it happened)*, 2013, c-type enlargement of wet-plate collodion (ferrotype), 152 x 127 cm

In contrast to *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, which documented specific places in an attempt to recall what was no longer there, *Celestial Measures* sought to capture a sense of wonder in

unexpected and unidentifiable places. In both cases I was interested in exploring something that is beyond straight photographic representation. This way of working, which embraces accidents, spills, and unconventional technical treatment signals a major difference between my interpretation of liquid intelligence, in contrast to an artist such as Jeff Wall. While it is his essay that brought the concept to my attention, I see the way in which this idea is reflected in our respective practice as remarkably different. Jeff Wall's photographs are the epitome of technical precision, and his images tend to be flawless reconstructions of specific events. In Wall's treatment of photography I see a correspondence with Tarkovsky's *Solaris*, in the way that the oceanic planet appears to be making contact with the scientists who are studying it by providing replicas of people from the scientists' past. The existence of these uncanny replicas calls into question the notions of reality, memory, and time. Because Wall's photographs typically reinsert specific past events, memories, and art historical references into the contemporary moment, like *Solaris*, he questions and complicates how we relate to the past. In my own practice, I see a correspondence with liquid intelligence in the way I approach making work, in that I tend to foreground intuitive and imaginative means rather than dealing with a medium or subject matter in purely instrumental ways. This is expressed in my attempt to cultivate a way of working that metaphorically and methodologically embraces the poetry of uncontrolled spills, as well as searching to give form to things on the cusp of perception.

The prefix re-

Celestial Measures is the first project in which I worked with a historic process and obsolete equipment. By breathing new life into antiquated technologies, this anachronistic method aims to contribute to the recuperation, the remediation and the reinvention of techniques that are on

the verge of being forgotten. I see the intertwining of historic and contemporary technologies as a rich territory to explore, not only for the compelling aesthetic qualities that result, but also for the conceptual and theoretical value these techniques bring to my project. By re-contextualizing analogue practices and re-evaluating the so-called obsolescence of non-digital processes, *Celestial Measures* responds to the ongoing dematerialization of the image in the digital era. Ultimately, I aim to preserve a rare form of knowledge, while also reinvesting it with contemporary approaches and methods. In this pursuit, the research undertaken to realize this project included a material engagement that ultimately contributes to the formation of a highly specialized skill set that participates in the renewal of knowledge and expertise.

In different ways, both *The After-Image (Swan Songs)* and *Celestial Measures* demonstrate a sustained interest in how the past inhabits the present. Looking back at the writing surrounding both of these projects, it is interesting to note that the prefix *re-* is in constant use: *return*, *revenant*, *remediate*, *reinvent*, and *residue* all reoccur again and again. The prefix *re-* appropriately indicates a return, or a motion looping backwards. As I discussed earlier in the exploration of Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return, this notion does not necessarily refer to the repetition of the same, but rather to a repetition with difference.²⁰⁵ In a similar spirit, Bergson's proclamation that 'the universe endures' in the opening address of *Creative Evolution* is not uttered as a cautionary moralistic statement, but rather, he says: "the more we study the nature of time, the more we shall comprehend that duration means invention, the creation of new forms, the continuous elaboration of the new."²⁰⁶ With this in mind, the concept of the persistence of the past as explored in this thesis in no way implies a fixed permanence, but rather

²⁰⁵ This was elaborated in the second chapter of the thesis, "Consider Death: the concept of life."

²⁰⁶ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 14.

a presence that is constantly varying. As such, we may encounter the past not as a dead weight to tediously conserve, but rather as a vital force that animates and is intimately interwoven in the present moment.

Conclusion

Shooting Arrows

The past is never dead, it not even past ... this past, moreover, reaching all the way back into the origin, does not pull back but presses forward, and it is, contrary to what one would expect, the future which drives us back to the past.²⁰⁷

This thesis was developed in tandem with the set of instructions employed to create a body of artwork. While each chapter is a distinct meditation, dynamic connections and productive tensions emerge between these diverse territories of thought. With this in mind, I have explored how death can be conceived of as another form of becoming; how photographers contribute to the act of recalling past events by revisiting and representing certain places; I also investigated the unique relationship between the passage of time and the photographic medium to question how the past, present, and future might collide within a still image.

The concept of the after-image is an undercurrent that runs throughout the study, which is inspired by the insight that history inhabits the present in very real ways. This concept was initially motivated by a reflection on how swan songs have the potential to cut across time, and

²⁰⁷ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 10-11.

further, to act on the future. The after-image also appears in the instruction-driven chapters, which are discussed in concert with the life-death connection; the palimpsestic nature of place; and the notion of duration within the field of the photographic medium. I see this thesis and the accompanying body of artwork as a way to foster links between past, present and future. Without question this impulse is indebted to Walter Benjamin's practice of reviving forgotten and discarded remnants of the past, and to illuminate the present

One sacrifice that was made in the execution of the thesis and the accompanying body of artwork is that the specific details of each swan song remain unaddressed. In the exhibition context, the singular nature of the individual swan songs was not explored due to my decision to present a series of photographs of uninhabited landscapes without providing a narrative description of the related events associated with each image. In the written thesis, rather than presenting a biographical or historical account of the swan songs I instead pursued ideas that surfaced during the execution of this project. In this way, what initially began as an investigation of very specific events eventually came to explore the broader question of how the dead co-habit the world of the living. Arising from this inquiry, both the academic and artistic components of my doctoral study aim to creatively engage the past.

In this pursuit, a recurring reference for me is a suggestion put forward by Virginia Woolf. In the 1970s many of Woolf's previously ignored correspondence and diaries were published, including a letter addressed to a young struggling poet who approached her for counsel. Woolf's response included the suggestion to:

Think of yourself rather as something much humbler and less spectacular, but to my mind far more interesting - a poet in whom live all the poets of the past, and

from whom all poets in time to come will spring. You have a touch of Chaucer in you, and something of Shakespeare, Dryden, Pope, Tennyson - to mention only the respectable among your ancestors - stir in your blood and sometimes move your pen a little to the right or to the left. In short you are an immensely ancient, complex, and continuous character, for which reason please treat yourself with respect.²⁰⁸

Over the years I have returned to this quote again and again, and what continues to resonate as significant is Woolf's assertion that creative and often solitary practices are nonetheless opportunities to participate in processes larger than oneself. In this respect, Woolf situates writing as an affective modality, in that she describes it as a method of connecting to others, and to other situations. Even more striking, is that for Woolf this involves calling forth the past to inform new creative processes. By extension, Woolf frames creative praxis as a dialogue between the dead and the living, and indicates that this dialogue need not be based on an allegiance of duty or obligation, but can instead be approached as a dynamic co-production. As such, she effectively suggests that the past can actively participate in shaping the future in novel and unexpected ways.

The fruitful exchange between the living and the dead that Woolf highlights as a contributing ally in the generation of culture is an interesting counterpoint to the servitude to history that Friedrich Nietzsche warns against. In his essay, *The Use and Abuse of History*, Nietzsche cautions that an excess of history is damaging, and even detrimental, in that it can reinforce what he calls the dogmatic image of truth and reason. The heart of this concern arises from the notion that an excess of historicity conditions and restricts the imagination to repeating what has already been done without discarding or reinventing certain motifs. Nietzsche argues that it is important to cultivate a certain "unhistorical fog" – a slight degree of forgetfulness – in order for life to be

²⁰⁸ Virginia Woolf, *A Letter to a Young Poet* (Folcroft, Pa.: Folcroft Library Editions, 1973), 10.

lived creatively rather than based solely on historical precedents. This is not to say that Nietzsche advocates consigning the past to oblivion, but rather he insists on the importance of using history in the service of life, that is “for life and for action.”²⁰⁹ He advocates transforming history “into blood” in such a way that it may function as a vital motor for the present. It is in this way that the pulse of the past may propel itself into the future.

In a recent analysis of Gilles Deleuze’s last complete book, *What is philosophy?*, Isabelle Stengers suggests that Deleuze’s final message imparted a vision that specifically addresses how the past participates in the formation of the future.²¹⁰ Within the realm of philosophy, Stengers observes that one way to conceive of this is as a relay wherein philosophical concepts are passed from one generation to the next. The principle of passing forward to future generations is further elaborated with the image of an arrow shooting into the future:

If I dare to speak about Deleuze’s last message, it is because what is produced, as a definition of philosophy, is like an arrow, thrown with the trust that it can be picked up by others he will not know: maybe later, maybe quite elsewhere. Deleuze loved the Nietzschean image of the arrow thrown as far as possible, without knowing who will pick it up, who will become a relayer. His last book addresses relayers, or more precisely puts them in the position of feeling addressed as eventual relayers.²¹¹

With the analogy of the relay, Stengers also recalls Deleuze’s concept of difference and repetition by emphasizing that each time a concept is recuperated and put to use it undergoes a

²⁰⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Use and Abuse of History,” in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 61.

²¹⁰ *What is philosophy?* is co-authored with Felix Guattari and positions philosophy as a creative discipline, that is, as a practice engaged in the creation of concepts. See: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

²¹¹ Isabelle Stengers, “Deleuze and Guattari’s Last Enigmatic Message,” *Angelaki Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 10, no. 2 (August 2005): 152.

process of metamorphosis: a continuity with change. In other words, to pick up an arrow is not a matter of explaining or of using prior philosophical concepts, but of receiving and contributing to the ongoing development of ideas, processes and exchange. Stengers elaborates on this principle when she describes how the transmission of the relay implies both handing over and taking over: “the take over is always a creation, but the act of handing over also requires a creation, the creation of an arrow.”²¹² In this way, the picking up of an arrow is coupled with the potential to also produce arrows, contributing to the continuity of a dialogue perpetually in the making. Once again it is by cultivating a radical engagement with past that the present may become more complex.

²¹² Ibid., 157.

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Appendix I: The After-Image (Swan Songs)

Project Description

1. Consider death
2. Go to those places
3. Record them

The expression ‘swan song,’ is derived from the Greek myth that swans are mute, but burst into song just before they die. Over the ages the legend was embraced by poets and came to mean a person’s last eloquent words or performance: a final farewell appearance. In the context of my current cycle of work, I am exploring the swan songs of a sequence of historical, or otherwise atypical artists and intellectuals, who produced remarkable final works which were intimately connected with their deaths. The body of work is realized as a cycle of photographic encounters with the landscapes and architectural sites connected to particular swan songs, selected for their poetic and political resonance. In this sense, *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, seeks to record echoes etched in landscape, and acts to engage the physical locations of these swan songs as a point of departure for a sustained meditation on final acts and their sites of articulation.

The first cycle of images realized within the framework of the ongoing project is a sequence of large format c-type prints, which document the site of death of four artists, including: the River Ouse where Virginia Woolf took her life; one-hundred miles off the most westerly tip of Ireland where conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader’s sailboat was found capsized; as well as Canoe Lake where Canadian landscape painter Tom Thomson mysteriously died; and also the former studio of Mark Lombardi, a contemporary artist who was based in Williamsburg, NYC. The series was then extended to also include the documentation of the landscapes and architectural sites connected to such swan songs as: the cross-border route between France and Spain that the German intellectual Walter Benjamin took in attempt to escape Nazi occupation; an uncultivated field in Lido di Ostia where Pier Paolo Pasolini’s body was found shortly after realizing what would be his last work, the controversial film *Sàlo*; as well as a derelict church in Lyon, France where the Montréal-based artist Shannon Jamieson executed her last complete body of work. *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, spans across rural and urban landscapes, and explores swan songs

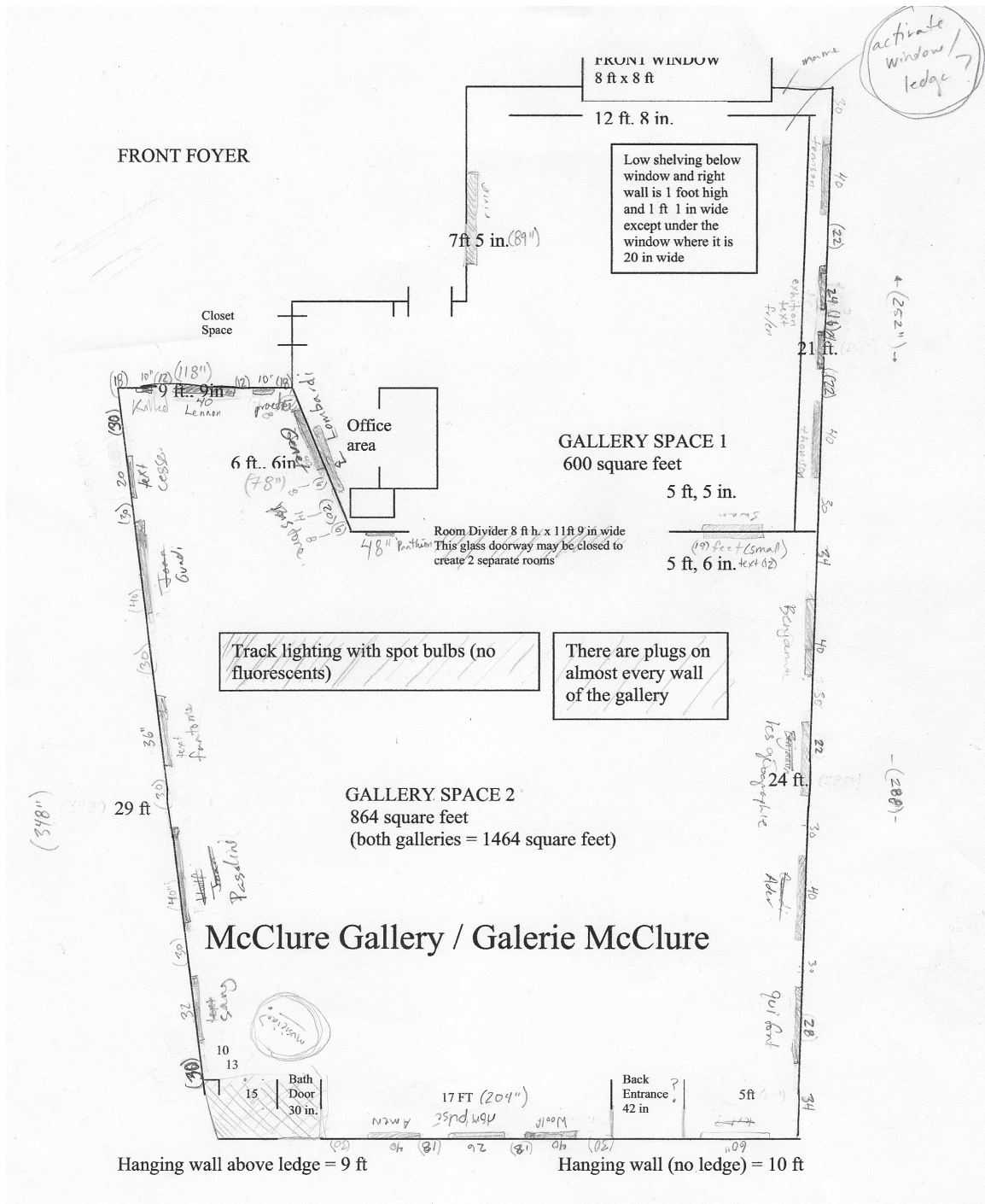
that are linked with both predetermined deaths as well as the consequences of persecution. In an exhibition setting, the photographic images are interspersed with text, which is mounted as vinyl lettering directly onto the gallery wall. The texts consist of citations from such works as: Michel de Montaigne's *That to Philosophize is to Learn to Die* (1574), Julia Kristeva's *Approaching Abjection* (1982), as well as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). The texts quoted in the exhibition setting include a variation of both French and English sources with the translation available in the corresponding label for the work. By incorporating the citations only in fragmentary form, it is my aspiration that the exhibition components elicit more questions than provide answers, and that the work retains a degree of ambiguity that is further developed in publications and artist talks.

Exhibition installation and floor plan

The After-Image (Swan Songs) consists of a sequence of c-type prints interspersed with text-based works. The prints, each measuring 40" x 40", are mounted in scorched basswood frames and the text-based pieces are realized as vinyl lettering affixed directly to gallery wall. Variable configurations allow for flexibility in response the exhibition space.

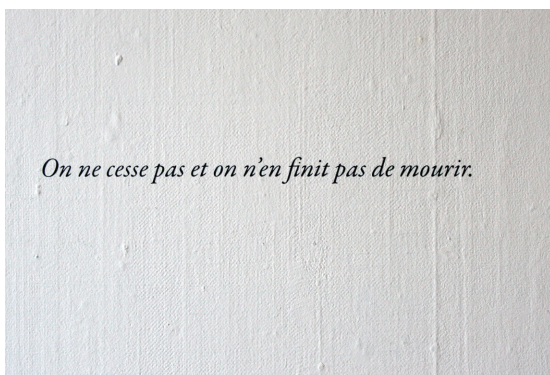
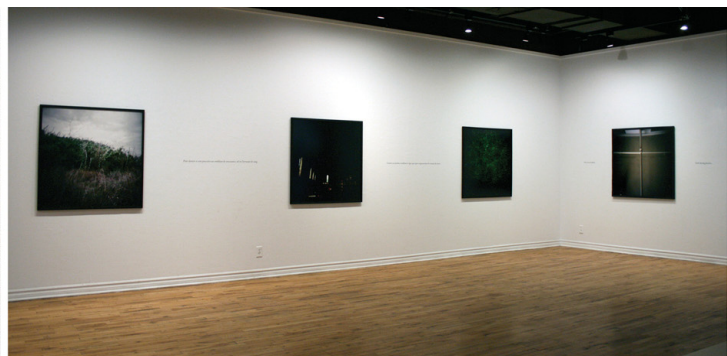
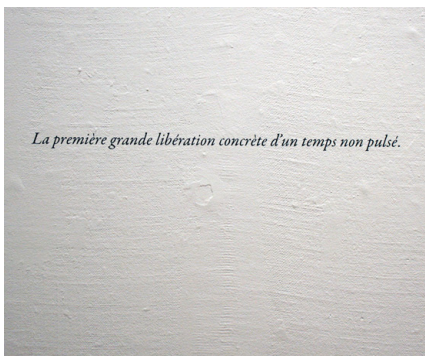


Installing *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*, AKA Gallery, Saskatoon. October 2012



Exhibition floor plan, *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*. The McClure Gallery, 2011

Exhibition Documentation



The After-Image (Swan Songs, McClure Gallery, (Montréal). March 2011



The After-Image (Swan Songs), AKA Gallery, (Saskatoon). October 2012



The After-Image (Swan Songs), FOFA Gallery, Montréal. October 2010

Solo Exhibitions

- 2012 AKA Gallery. *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*. Saskatoon, Canada.
- 2011 The Harcourt House Arts Center. *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*. Edmonton, Canada.
- 2011 The McClure Gallery. *The After-Image (Swan Songs)*. Montréal, Québec.
- 2010 FOFA Gallery. *Swan Songs (into the cold)*. Montréal, Québec.

Select Group Exhibitions

- 2013 RayKo Photo Center. *Plastic Camera Show*. San Francisco, U.S.A.
- 2012 The AC Institute. *Still Life?* New York City, U.S.A.
- 2011 Galerie Lilian Rodriguez. *Question d'espace: entre ambiguïté et fiction*. Montréal

Critical Reviews

BlackFlash Magazine. "Fiona Annis: The Wound Incarnate." Hall, Matthew. November 2012
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Verb Magazine. "The After-Image." MacPherson, Alex J. Issue S217. Nov 23-29. 2012
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Edmonton Journal. "Exploring a Narrative through a Body of Work." Ryan, Janice. May 12, 2011

Le Devoir. "Hommage aux artistes-cygnés." Delgado, Jérôme. March 19, 2011
<http://www.ledevoir.com/index.php/culture/arts-visuels/319096/hommage-aux-artistes-cygnés>

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Publications & Exhibition Catalogues

Theory of Clouds. "Fiona Annis / Swan Songs." Takeki Sugiyama. July 2013.
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Still Life: Philosophy and the Arts Conference Journal. "The After-Image (Swan Songs)." Jose Rosales & Timothy Cuffman (editors). Manhattan: Stony Brook University, 2012.
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LETTRES/LETTERS. Mariane Bourcheix-Laporte & Anne-Marie Proulx (editors). Éditions: MAAM, 2010. http://www.palindrome-s.ca/fr/publications_lettres.php

Interviews


CBC: The Afternoon Edition. "Interview with Fiona Annis." Lederhouse, Craig. Nov 2, 2012

Shaw TV. (Television interview). "Fiona Annis: Swan Songs." Kincaid, Carly. April 28, 2011

FOFA Gallery. "The After-Image (Swan Songs)." Video interview with Jake Moore. Oct, 2010

On-line research log

Throughout the duration of this project, I kept a research log that records the process of realizing this practice-led initiative. The research log includes elements of the critical, philosophical, visual, and historical material I have been engaging, as well as my reflections on the development of the project.



2/06/2011


Romantic conceptualism

Excerpt from a conversation between Mladen Stilinović and Ariane Daoust, Zagreb, June 2009


AD: You make a distinction between your practice and that of Western Conceptual art. Boris Groys has coined the term "Romantic Conceptualism" to describe this kind of art in your part of the world. What do you think of it?

MS: It's just another approach to art. Conceptual art in the West references reason and philosophy, whereas here it also references literature, poetry, everyday language, emotions and many other things besides. This difference is cultural, and is explained by a different attitude or state of mind. You can't say that Conceptual art pertains to the Romantic spirit or to poetry in the West. In fact, these words are hated because Conceptual artists are cold, rigid and innocent.

http://www.voxphoto.com/english/expositions/stilinovic_mladen/stilinovic_mladen.html

0 COMMENTS 

ARCHIVE

- ▶ 2008 (3)
- ▶ 2009 (43)
- ▶ 2010 (7)
- ▼ 2011 (3)
 - ▶ 1 (1)
 - ▼ 2 (2)
 - Pedagogy
 - Romantic conceptualism 

On-line research log: <http://chantducynge.blogspot.ca/>

Appendix II

Celestial Measures

Artist Statement

Common threads in my work include the use of instructions, time-based media, and esoteric technologies. This is paired with an ongoing interest in how the past inhabits the present. In this respect, the prefix *re* is in constant use: *return*, *revenant*, *remediate*, *reinvent*, and *residue* all reoccur in the writings that describe my various projects. Most recently, the impulse to riffle through discarded or disavowed material objects is interwoven with an exploration of obsolete lens-based technologies. The process of working with antiquated photographic techniques led me to reflect further on the ethereal nature of photography. Because photographs are tangible manifestations of intangible moments they can be associated with the phenomena of specters: ghostly manifestations that give material presence to the immaterial. With this in mind, I investigate how photographic imprints act as an echo of matter - a manifestation of time's wreckage. This anachronistic method of working explores an alchemical territory, the result of which is often but a whisper of an image.

Project Description

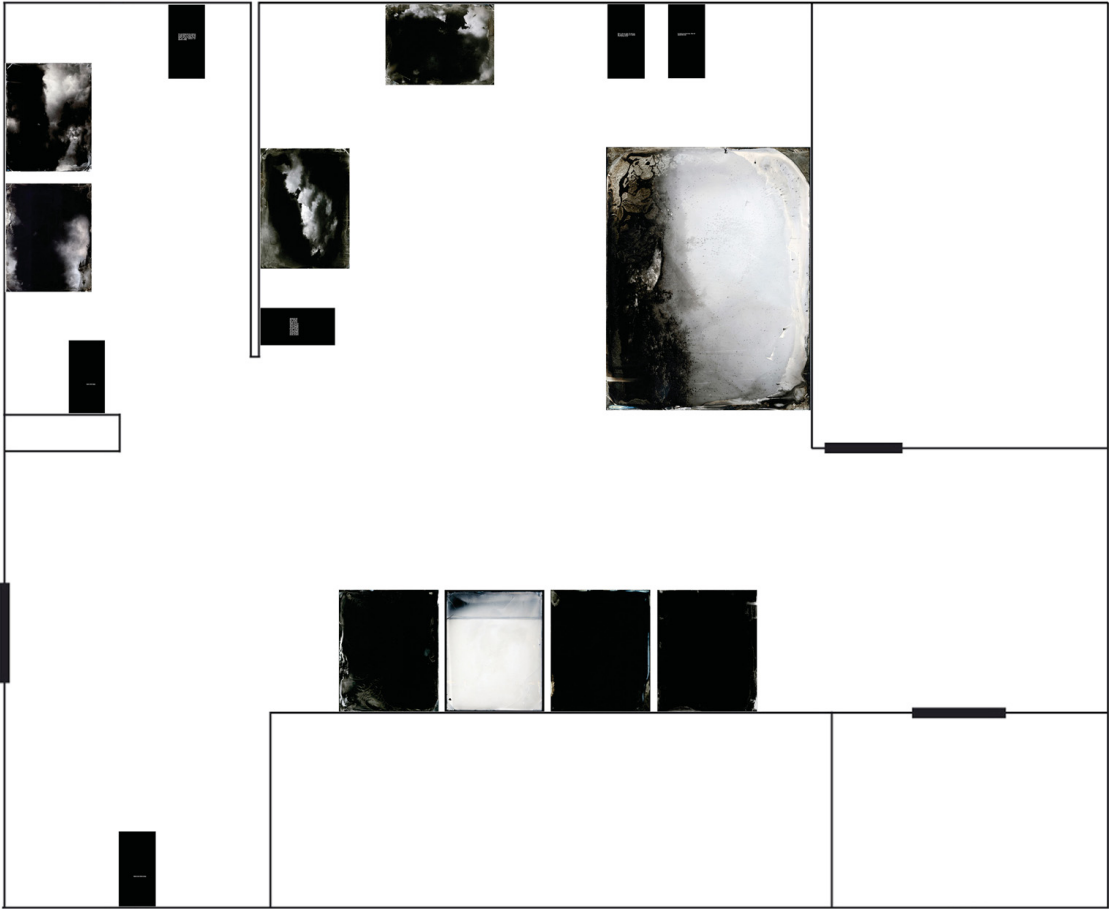
Celestial Measures describes an all but forgotten navigational method of geographically situating oneself in respect to celestial bodies. The original meaning of *Celestial Measures* becomes wistfully paradoxical when applied to a selection of photographic images wherein the possibility of discerning a specific location is obscured. Rebellious light, imperfect blacks and other process-based aberrations completely or partially overshadow concrete subject matter. In the absence of reference points, how do we locate ourselves, what are the means of establishing familiar ground? The photographs are coupled with a text-based work engraved on multiple anodized aluminum plates interspersed throughout the exhibition space. The fragments of text are composed of citations relating to cosmological and quantum theories. In this respect, *Celestial Measures* explores phenomena particular to the instability of matter, the speed of light, and the duration of time.

Research Context

I am working with the thesis that history inhabits the present in very real ways, and I therefore seek to revisit obsolete technologies to question how they may continue to illuminate the contemporary context. During a six-month artist residency at the Center of Alternative Photography in New York City I was introduced to the historical, chemical, and technical aspects of several photographic processes that span from the conception of photography to contemporary darkroom techniques. Through this study I came to focus my exploration on the wet plate collodion process. Developed in 1850, wet plate collodion is a chemically complex and demanding process for which a defining attribute is the use of a light sensitive concoction that requires a liquid state.

Celestial Measures combines the wet plate collodion process with contemporary inflections by employing hybrid production techniques that cross-pollinates the 19th century process with digital tools. Each image is initially captured as a wet-plate positive on a black aluminum plate coated with chemistry that I mix according to 19th century recipes. These unique plates then pass through several stages of analogue-digital conversion. I see the intertwining of historic and contemporary technologies as a rich territory to explore, not only for the compelling aesthetic qualities, but also for the conceptual and theoretical value. By re-contextualizing both digital and analogue practices, this project responds to the ongoing dematerialization of the image in the digital era by reevaluating the so-called obsolescence of non-digital processes. As such, this project aims to preserve a rare form of knowledge, while concurrently introducing contemporary approaches and methods.

Exhibition floor plan



Exhibition floor plan, *Celestial Measures*. Galerie Lilian Rodriguez, November 2013

Exhibition Documentation



Tu respirez le temps et la ruine du temps. La matière empreinte de son écho.



Celestial Measures. Galerie Lilian Rodriguez, November 2013



Celestial Measures. Galerie Lilian Rodriguez, November 2013



Real things do not dream long. Main & Station. Parrsboro, Nova Scotia 2013



Celestial Measures. Platform Gallery. Winnipeg, Manitoba 2014

Solo Exhibitions

- 2015 Caravansérail. *Mesures célestes*. Rimouski, Québec (forthcoming Jan 2015)
2014 VU Photo. *Celestial Measures*. Québec, Québec
2013 Galerie Lilian Rodriguez. *Celestial Measures*. Montréal, Québec

Select Group Exhibitions

- 2014 The Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba. *Upshot*. Brandon, Manitoba
2014 Segal Centre. *Constantine's Condition*. Montréal, Québec
2014 Platform Gallery. *Upshot*. Winnipeg, Manitoba
2013 Main & Station. *Real things do not dream long*. Parrsboro, Nova Scotia

Critical Reviews

Winnipeg Free Press. "Point and shoot?" Steven Leyden Cochrane. February 20, 2014
<http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/arts-and-life/entertainment/arts/point-and-shoot-246285191.html>

Blogue sur l'Art et la Science. "Mesures célestes." Linda Moussakova. November 2013

Montréalismement: Belgo 6. "Fiona Annis : Mesures célestes." Normand Babin. November 2013
<http://montrealismement.blogspot.ca/2013/11/belgo-6.html>

Publications & Exhibition Catalogues

Platform Centre for Photographic Arts. "Upshot." Anastasia Hare & Natalia Lebedinskaia (exhibition essay) February 2014

Cordite Poetry Review. "Fiona Annis: Celestial Measures in Ferrotypes." Issue 45: Silence. February 2014
<http://cordite.org.au/artworks/celestial-measures-ferrotypes/>

Magenta Foundation for the Arts. "Flash Forward 2013: emerging photographers from Canada, Great Britain and the United States." 2013
<http://www.magentafoundation.org/publications/flash-forward-2013/>

Rangefinder: fine art issue. "Everything Old is New Again." Theano Nikitas. Vol 62. N 04. April 2013
<http://digitalmag.rangefinderonline.com/rangefinder/201304?pg=45&pm=2&fs=1#pg52>

Interviews

No More Radio. "The Belgo Report #8 • Starlight, Polaroids, and Time." Bettina Forget. December 15, 2013
<http://www.nomoreradio.com/thebelgoreport/belgo0008/>