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Love Poems for Photographs and Other Writings

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LOVE POEMS for PHOTOGRAPHS and OTHER WRITINGS

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature

Annandale-on-Hudson, NY
December 2016

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LOVE POEMS for PHOTOGRAPHS and OTHER WRITINGS

or

My Life in Photographs in Words

or

The Enunciation of the Artist

or

Real and Imagined Ekphrastic Writings on Photography

or

Every Photograph is Nonfiction, or How I Remember the Truth

D E D I C A T I O N

For those who have taught me how to see–

“I know that the accident of my being a photographer has made my life possible.”

Richard Avedon

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I. INTRODUCTION/PARATEXT

Criticism as Autobiographical: Art that Tells You Where It Came From

In his dialogical essay, "The Critic as Artist" (1891)[1], Oscar Wilde presents ideas about criticism that stood in contrast to the general understanding of the function of the medium at the time of its publication. Wilde's assertions radically challenged the notion that there was a distinction to be made between fine art and criticism by arguing that criticism is independent of the art object upon which it is focused. Criticism is made parallel with any other art form: the claim being that, just like any piece of art or literature, criticism is provoked by some external idea, object, experience, or event, but the medium simply necessitates an increased level of transparency regarding its source.

Criticism, then, is not to be understood simply as a passive response to a work of art, but rather as something active and with independent artistic value. For Wilde, it is not what the critic has to say about an artist, but rather it is in *how* she says it that is of importance. He asks: "Who cares whether Mr. Ruskin's views on Turner are sound or not? What does it matter? That mighty and majestic prose of his… is at least as great a work of art as any of thee wonderful sunsets that bleach or rot on their corrupted canvases in England's Gallery."[2] Wilde argues here for the authority of the critic. To assert that it matters whether Ruskin's views on Turner are "sound" is to narrow the potential meaning of a work, to imply that there is some ultimate and singular explanation put forth by the artist, to be found by the viewer.

[1] Wilde, Oscar. "The Critic as Artist." *Intentions: The Works of Oscar Wilde*. New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2009. pp. 95-150. Print.
[2] ibid, p. 141

For Wilde, criticism "… is the only civilised form of autobiography,"[3] indicating that the form is grounded wholly in the self before all else. Not only does the form consider the critic, but it so much as points back to her. Earlier views on the role and function of criticism, put forth in part by the likes of critic Matthew Arnold, who previously described criticism as "the endeavour…to see the object as it really is,"[4] would have largely disregarded the biography of the critic in the effort of objectivity. It mattered not who she was or how she took her place in relation to a work, except that she was qualified to speak on the subject; criticism was put forth as the illusion of objectivity.

The notion of objectivity shifted with Wilde at the end of the 19th century. The extent to which truth was then regarded as subjective can be seen in his very word choice: it is not the biography of the artist-critic – a term which still supposes some sort of objective reality or truth– but the *auto*biography, as told by the subjective self, not some capital-A Author who writes externally and objectively. No attempt is made to disguise subjectivity; the critic can be an artist only *because* of subjectivity– because her autobiography is not only relevant but necessary to her writing. Indeed, Wilde claims that "criticism's most perfect form…is in its essence purely subjective."[5] To be truly objective would only produce a reflection of what is (already) in the work, awarding all authority to the artist. The notion of the critic as objective became obsolete, as it is impossible to know what "caused" an artwork–how it came to be and what that means to the work. But because meaning is unfixed– the (reader, viewer, or) critic has authority, which is ultimately what allows criticism to exist as an independent art.

[3] ibid, p. 140
[4] Arnold, Matthew. "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time." *Blackmask Online.* 2001. Web. 2 December 2016.
[5] Wilde, p. 141

Criticism, then, is the artist's self-reflection, rather than a reflection; it is a musing of her thoughts and ideas as she encounters the world, and necessarily, as she encounters art. It is not an uncovering and reiteration of the artists' intentions. Surely, if all that criticism contained were descriptions of colors and textures– things visible, "undeniable"– it would not *do* anything. (And even then, it could be understood as subjective). It would be of no value, for any suggested deviation from the artists' intentions would be invalid. If criticism only held a mirror to a work, it would not only be uninteresting but empty– it would only name it– which would not do anything at all.

While criticism begins with an artwork, it moves outward to make something that is new. Wilde writes that criticism "treats the work of art simply as a starting-point for a new creation. It does not confine itself…to discovering the real intention of the artist and accepting that as final. And in this it is right, for the meaning of any beautiful created thing is, at least, as much in the soul of him who looks at it, as it was in the soul who wrought it."[6] Indeed, there is infinitely richer value to be found in the subjective experience of art that presents itself as such, that makes no stake or claim to be a higher authority on a work. The form of criticism takes authority as a direct result of its deep embrace of subjectivity. After all, if Barthes' landmark essay, "Death of the Author" (1967) should be extended to include the visual arts, authority over meaning-making lies not with the artist but with the viewer, and the viewer who speaks is known as the critic. (For who can trace the whole, genuine origins and intentions behind the artworks they produce? –not even the maker themselves!)

*

[6] ibid, p. 143-44

John Ashbery's poem, "Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror" (1975), and John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1820) both function as meditations on artworks– ekphrastic gestures– that undoubtedly expand, taking on lives of their own, independent of and beyond the works that cause them. Ashbery's poem, which quite literally takes its title from Parmigianino's late Renaissance painting of the same name, can be acknowledged both as a musing on the artist's painted self-portrait, as well as an expression of the writer's own self. The artworks only mean what they do because of the self; it is essential and cannot be disregarded or made invisible.

In much of the same tradition, Frank O'Hara wrote many works that explicitly noted their source inspiration, often in their titles, which the text itself may or may not have clearly reflected. (For example: "On Seeing Larry Rivers' *Washington Crossing the Delaware* at the Museum of Modern Art" or "Ode to Willem de Kooning.") His poem "Favorite Painting in The Metropolitan"[7] (1962) exemplifies Wilde's ideas about art criticism and the importance of the individuality of the critic. O'Hara's poem does not present itself as an objective authority on the work in question; although a singular painting is apparently indicated in the title, at no point in the poem does he definitively identify *which* painting it is that he is referring to.

Formally speaking, the main stanzas of the poem are interrupted by quoted sections of speech: assumedly, partial transcripts of what is heard by the speaker (the "I" of the poem) as he physically moves through the space of the museum. The poem alternates between these sections of speech– these external voices– and O'Hara's own voice. The dialogue is isolated formally or visually, always neatly constrained to its own miniature stanzas, but it is also isolated from the greater conversational contexts from which it is being pulled, and never attributed to a certain

[7] O'Hara, Frank. "Favorite Painting at the Metropolitan." *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, edited by Donald Allen, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995, pp. 423-424.

voice (or set of voices). Some of the quotes seems to allude to art, such as those which reference the artists Houdon and Breughel, or the "Madonnas". While other transcribed parts of conversations do not reference art, for instance: "'let's go by my place before the movies,"[8] they both equally affect the reader's experience of the poem, just as hearing them once affected the viewer's experience of the works in the museum.

In alternating between these two types of stanzas, the poem moves in and outside of viewing the works in the museum. The main stanzas, critically, contain the questions or issues at stake for O'Hara, while the dialogue works to contextualize them. The poem reads like a record of influence: O'Hara's experience in the museum and the things that he heard there provoked the content of the poem at least as much as did the actual art that he saw there.

In some sense, the poem says little about the work in the museum outright. However, some reference is made to specific artists or works, such as when he writes:

> no we love us still hanging
> around the paintings Richard Burton
> waves through de Kooning the
> Wild West rides up out of the Pollock[9]

The "us" in the first line indeed refers to the speaker and another anonymous figure. In addition to describing how the paintings interact with each other in the space, O'Hara quite literally inserts himself into the museum, describing himself as "hanging/around the paintings." In the following lines, he compares the pink smile of a Fragonard to the left ear of the anonymous

[8] ibid, p. 423
[9] ibid, p. 423

("you") figure of the poem in size and color,[10] indicating that he is imagining his own life in relation to the paintings, and vice versa.

Besides naming painters and vaguely suggesting at how the works move about the space, the stanza says little about the content of the works, about what O'Hara thinks about them. Rather, it deals with what he is thinking about and seeing and hearing in the space which also, necessarily, contributes to what he makes of the artworks.

The poem is less directly critical so much as it is an expression of the fact of being in *this* museum at *this* moment, (as this person) and what that means to the experience of viewing the art. "Favorite Painting in The Metropolitan" reflects the effects of context on the viewer's perception and understanding of art. O'Hara treats himself and the things happening around the art with as much regard as he does the work itself; the quoted sections and regular stanzas almost say equal amounts about the art in explicit terms. The factors contributing the way that he views the art are weighed equally against what is "in" the art itself in the process of meaning-making.

By including snippets of overheard conversation as well as what are perhaps some of his internal thoughts not entirely or literally related to the museum, O'Hara paints a more complete picture of viewing the art, even though in the end we still cannot be certain exactly what it was that he was viewing. It is unclear exactly how, but somehow it *does* matter to hear: "'oh shit! a run'"[11] whilst viewing an artwork; though it is impossible to say exactly how or to what end, it does affect what is seen and understood in the work, as does the internal self. The works are situated in time and the individual; the purpose of O'Hara's criticism is not to assess the value or

[10] ibid, p. 423
[11] ibid, p. 424

success of a work, but to explain what viewing art feels like. O'Hara both adds and removes context from the experience, effectively making art about art, or rather, art *because* of art.

The poem is not without criticism, though it is perhaps rather implicit in comparison to the ways that we tend to think of criticism: that which we read in the *New Yorker* and which definitively tells us whether a gallery opening was good, or frugally assigns a certain number of stars to a new film. In the third-to-final stanza, O'Hara writes:

> "so if we take it all down
> and put it all up again differently
> it will be the same elsewhere
> changed as, if we changed we would
> hate each other so we don't change
> each other or others would love us."[12]

Perhaps when read out of the context of art criticism, this stanza could be interpreted as referencing the speaker's relationship to someone else (the other indicated by his use of the pronoun "we"), but if read with issues of criticism in mind, it can function as a commentary on art and art-viewing practices.

Read in this light, the "it" could refer to the artworks referenced in the poem, suggesting that there is something constant about them, that changing the way they are hung won't change them inherently. And inherently, it doesn't– but perhaps of more interest is what actually does change. In his essay, "Art Chronicles,"[13] O'Hara writes:

[12] ibid, p. 424
[13] O'Hara, Frank. *Art Chronicles, 1954-1966*. G. Braziller, reprint ed. 1975.

> "New York gallery-goers are used to feeling that no matter what they are looking at, the institution in question will dish it up to them with the appropriate importance so far as installation goes, hence the accusation that the Guggenheim makes certain paintings look inferior to their intrinsic quality. This is of course a fallacy: position in installation and lighting has nothing to do with esthetic importance."[14]

This assertion, however, is likely only true in an ideal, in the ways that we imagine viewing art. Ideally, we should form an opinion and value judgement of art independently of the context and conditions under which we are necessarily viewing it, but the reality is that we don't. To some immeasurable degree these external factors– from the way it is hung, to the other things (art-related or otherwise) seen or heard in the space of the museum– all affect our experience of seeing and process of meaning-making.

By approaching art-writing as he does, O'Hara lends a sense of activity to criticism, acknowledging the fact that although the artwork itself is unchanged, it is never still, because everything around it is moving, changing, becoming. We may ask how O'Hara's poem can be considered criticism if we don't even know what is being talked about or considered. In "Favorite Painting in The Metropolitan," O'Hara effectively writes criticism about the project of criticism, turning the medium in on itself. In the same sense that variances in the way that an artwork is displayed change the way that it is experienced, criticism metaphorically alters a work by seeing it in a particular way, by using it to build outwardly.

O'Hara considers the context of an artwork in a viewer's understanding of the work, but also the viewer in themselves as a type of context. Even for the same viewer, seeing the same

[14] ibid, p. 2

painting in the same place twice will produce a different result. New things will be noticed; new meaning will be made, because the self has changed, and looking at art involves seeing the inner self in the external world. The painting itself has not changed– its surface and its materials are constant– but the way it is seen and felt is new, undoubtedly.

In an Editor's Note to *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, Donald Allen writes, "that Frank O'Hara tended to think of his poems as a record of his life is apparent in much of his work,"[15] and indeed, "Favorite Painting in The Metropolitan" is as much about O'Hara as it is about art or anything else, just as was the case with Ashbery and Keats.

Criticism, then, need not tell you what the critic thinks about the art and whether she likes it or not– after all: what does it matter what the critic thinks of the art? The genre of criticism can be expanded to be understood as art that is about other art, and by doing away with the notion that it aims to make definitive claims or value judgements about artworks, it gains more authority in being a work of its own. As Wilde asks, who "…cares whether Mr. Pater[16] has put into the Monna Lisa something that Lionardo never dreamed of?"[17] Indeed, works are given new and extended lives, for the critic is an artist.

*

Just over a year or so ago, I was first introduced to the genre of art criticism, and with it, the notion that this kind of writing could be more than solely responsive, that it could be a valuable and productive kind of creation in its own right. This has been the single most important

[15] Allen, Donald. Editor's Note. *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, by Frank O'Hara, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995, p. v.
[16] "Mr. Pater" refers to Walter Pater, an English critic of literature and art, who published a famous essay about the *Mona Lisa* in a collection entitled, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873).
[17] *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, p. 142

and even so much as revelatory understanding in my work thus far; it is from here that this project could begin.

I began with research (since that's what you do when you're writing, a lot of research so you can fill it in, make it stand up). I read the Barthes and Sontag, an honest number of the necessary "foundational" texts on photography. I found that, unsurprisingly, a lot of writing about photography starts where a lot of writing in general starts: at the beginning, of course.

Before even sitting and beginning to write I was writing in my head. I knew some of the things that I wanted to discuss: the knowledge-space of photography, notions of performance, the fragment. I didn't know how to talk about them, though. I needed images through which I could approach or consider my ideas, in which I could walk around.

The problem was in how to begin, how to choose a single first image through which to speak about a topic. The approach that appeared to me to be the least arbitrary and (therefore) the most genuine, is that in which I (foolishly, to no avail) attempted to trace my own history, my own beginnings with the medium. Perhaps there are two ways of being an artist-critic: to write criticism that is art, *is* in of itself, or to function as the critic of my own work.

The purpose was to speak about photography not in a vacuum– not about what it is and does and *means* objectively, in and of itself (if such a thing could even be done)– but to embrace the instability and flexibility of meaning and, simultaneously, the authority of the viewer, and to situate myself in relation to this art. That is: the source material is photography, photographs, but it is also the self because it is always the self.

Montaigne said that "each man bears the entire form of man's estate;" [18] the self is the center of the universe; everything is seen and understood only in relation to it. Starting with my own images or with myself allows me to introduce an almost diaristic, quiet narrative structure within writing that ultimately aims to deal with larger theory and criticisms. I am trying to create a level of self-reflexivity, like the way that Barthes cited his sources by annotating his own work, his own words, perhaps in what would be an inexhaustible attempt to trace the sources of his own ideas. Maybe the notes were just for him, the various little names or abbreviations in the margins, providing no elaboration on their connection to the content. They do not relate to Barthes's writing in any direct or explicit manner, and it is through this gesture I am reminded of the authority of the reader and of the ambiguity of not just this, but any text.

The following writings make use of various gestures in what is ultimately an effort to speak about my life in photography. These are my questions of the medium, this is what I know and what I do not know. The work is intended to function both as homage– as exclamations of love, so to speak, for photography– as well as work that extends beyond its source, to exist and to live a life of its own. I am writing about art, about photography, and I am also making art– tracing, to the best of my ability, where it comes from. I am trying to find new ways of thinking about images on the page. My embrace of the literary fragment is rooted in the this: it is here that I find writing (language) and photography to best coincide. I am trying to consider myself in relation to the medium, to approach Barthes's question: "What does my body know of Photography?"[19]

Here is what matters to me, and, so here it is that I AM:

[18] Montaigne, Michel de. *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*. Translated by Donald M. Frame. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958. p. 611
[19] Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida*. Hill and Wang, reprint ed. 2010. p. 9

II.

On Photographs as Necessary Fragments, which (regrettably) weren't in that show at the Met

1. Photographs have A History, necessarily, but a photograph (a singular event, a singular image) does not have a history, it carries no record of its being made. It carries a record of being made only in the sense that I know it to be from or of the world, that it started there (necessarily–it is from it, can't be without it–) and was made into a physical object both smaller and larger, a thing; inevitably, a photograph is a record but it does not record the photographer's particular set of choices, it is only and always a final product, it is surface, it is always finished.

Minor White said something about his desire to photograph not for what is there but for what else is there. The photograph records no more than what is there–in fact it is deductive–but the image itself is extra, amounts to something more than just what it shows plainly and at present.

A photograph is only a piece of a thing– a two-dimensional, superficial representation of the world it was made in. Except that it isn't "only" because it's a piece of a thing but still a complete thing in itself, which is a fragment, which is something partial that can be seen and understood as something whole.

A PHOTOGRAPH IS BOTH FINISHED AND FRAGMENTED.[20]

[20] see: III. "Cutting up J.M.W. Turner: A Photo Essay" p. 26

2. A show opened at the Met recently entitled, “Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible,” which included numerous works all related by the fact (alone) that they were each unfinished in one way of thinking or another: the artist died before having completed the work, or the piece dealt conceptually with the idea of being unfinished or incomplete.

I told you I wanted to write a piece about the show, because there were no photographs, I said. You gave a slight smile and remarked that it would be kind of hard to have an unfinished photograph.

Which is correct, of course: every photograph is over and already.

3. A Reasonably Complete Assessment of the Reasons Photographs Must Be Finished:

In art there are certain marks that indicate that something is done: a matte or frame, a signature, a title. It is in an album, above the fireplace, in a museum, or hangs on the exposed-brick walls of a local coffee shop. It has physicality. When we call something “*Untitled”* or unfinished, it actually does leave the realm of the incomplete and no longer lives within it, only calls back to it. Maybe a lot of art nowadays is called “untitled landscape 1” or “untitled nude” or something else to that effect because of a hesitation to make the work finished, to call it a particular name and make it (ceremoniously) complete. Possibly, this is also a somewhat annoying trend in contemporary art, just for the sake of being so.

Finishing a photograph is different than finishing a painting or a sculpture or a poem or really anything else because it is either finished or it doesn’t exist, which is why you smiled

at me that way, because there's no question of when to stop or when it is done. There is nothing and then the shutter and then there is something.[21]

So since it is either finished or it doesn't exist at all a photograph is finished exactly when it is made, even if it's really terrible and I would never show it to anyone. If it takes me seven tries, the first six still count. They are the same except for one more pleasing than the rest, but materially, they are equivalents.

I do not mean finished in the sense that it is done. No, it is not done until one decides exactly how it should be shown, it is only a negative, a skeleton of a thing, but I guess not a skeleton exactly because it's all there is, there's nothing beneath it. I mean finished in the sense that the frame cannot show how I decided whether the frame should be here or there, it does not show the things I took back. (Painting sometimes shows the things taken back but if it shows them they are probably not really taken back anyway; writing *must* show the things taken back or the concept is absent entirely). The deliberately unfinished *are* finished.

Making the final photograph is not additive, except for in my head as I figure how to make the picture. A single photograph cannot show the history of how it was made, the decisions and hand of the maker, in the same way that a painting can make visible its underpinnings. To this end, it is both more and less mysterious.[22]

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[21] The counter argument in regards to the photograph is, of course, that one can manipulate it in post-production: this is especially relevant with the advent of massive digital capabilities. This is true, but ultimately not what is at stake here. As it is "post"–happening after– it is of less concern because it does not deal with the negative, the original, with that which cannot be reduced.

[22] I wonder if it could be possible to see the changes made to a photograph before it is taken in a singular image, whether there ever actually is any evidence of an image's history inside of itself. Plainly, I think that there isn't: for this, a sequence of images is necessary.

(But how can a photograph have any mystery if what it shows is a fact?)

The photograph shows only what I have decided, whether instantaneously or at last, whether or not it shows my original intention, whether or not I like what it shows, in the end. It cannot show things taken back because things cannot be taken back, only done over again in the same way which is not actually the same way (which is why Barthes was probably so fixated on death, which we will come to, eventually). Reflecting upon and responding to what I have made must involve making a new picture entirely, as everything is already spun: I can never go back. The image cannot proceed anywhere.

4. I read an article once about this technology that allowed us to see beneath the surface of a painting, to analyze the process and decisions of the painter rather than only the final product. It was like an x-ray of the painting, which a photograph, of course, doesn't have. If there's something unsatisfactory about a photographic image you can say "I wish you'd taken this a bit to the left," or "this part of the image is distracting and I wish it weren't

In analog photography, in which every click of the shutter is made permanent, a contact sheet provides a narrative sequence, perhaps the closest we can come to understanding the conditions under which an image was made: the trials, the movements. Roll film provides the more reliable context: it is numbered– thirty-six images exactly– thirty-seven if you're exceptionally efficient at loading the camera.

It is curious to see something like a Winogrand contact sheet, I can tell he shoots quickly, makes images with seemingly little regard for wasting film. (After all, he did leave some 2,500 undeveloped rolls of film behind when he died, though as death approached he only made pictures more furiously, completely neglecting to develop, much less print the images). He almost always makes multiple exposures of any one subject. These shots have been made visible more as historical reference objects rather than as claims of valuable artworks. The contact sheet is the closest thing in photography to a draft, an underpainting, but each image is still complete, finished. The final image is selected, not changed or added to.

there." But it's always a wish because it can't be made again, even if you write down the exact conditions; light at least is an independent variable.[23]

I'd imagine the discussion of a painting would happen differently. A painter can add things or take them away (usually by adding more on top– even the "deletion" of a painting is additive). A painting can progress because it is made in time, over time. Photography is inextricably related to time, but everything is compressed on that single, final surface, just once and all at once.

In printing, a photographer can add or subtract light, I suppose, which is adding or taking away, but a new sheet of paper is needed. And as for the image itself, well, we know it is already too late for that. Indeed, it is too late even as it is being made.

5. A PHOTOGRAPH IS NEVER FINISHED, BECAUSE IT IS UNLIKE A PAINTING, WHICH CAN ONLY SHOW WHAT THE ARTIST HAS SEEN.

PHOTOGRAPHERS CAN ONLY MAKE IMAGES OF THINGS THAT THEY HAVE SEEN, BUT THEY CAN ALSO MAKE IMAGES OF THINGS WHICH THEY HAVE SEEN BUT NOT ACCOUNTED FOR, WHICH THE PAINTER CANNOT.

6. At the show I wrote:

This hand soap smells like

[23] I was talking with someone once about the sort of interesting, sort of unsurprising thing that happens when you give several people a camera and (literally) the same thing to photograph: they all return with distinct images. She responded by saying she'd often wondered what would happen if a tripod were introduced to the scenario, so a number of people would approach a camera on a tripod, pointed at a motionless subject, and press the shutter. Her suspicion was that the images would be different, still. I am not so sure about this, but maybe she meant it in the spiritual sense.

bubblegum and that I can see
the black edge of the D. Arbus negative,
but she's dead so nobody minds

I write, "Klimt always makes me smile," he says
he would have never thought him to have been so disorganized.

unfinished Monet looks like that Steichen picture I don't remember anymore and the Baroque
is kind of boring. I'm not supposed to get too close to the Corot
or it's ruined I guess Matisse
signed his work before it was done

I would hang the unfinished Picasso
in my house if I had a house and a Picasso to hang
and also if the ceilings were high enough, (good luck)

7. As far as I can tell, the only artists who have been included in the "Unfinished" exhibition have had ordinary, completed work shown at the Met or other notable institutions. I am not surprised; it is the Met. A familiarity with the finished work of an artist lends a specific way of looking at that which is incomplete; assumedly and in the ideal, we know more about the finished work by the ability to see where it has been, more about the unfinished by the ability to imagine where it would go.

Even before going to the Met, I wrote that I expected that there would not be any unfinished work by names that we did not all know already, since we value most the whole thing and we value in the incomplete thing the potential to be great, the chance to see what we expect would have been a rather beautiful painting-in-progress; is it possible to see a fragment as a whole– complete unto itself in its form– what if all paintings are like diaries anyway: never finished, only abandoned.

THE PHOTOGRAPH IS A NECESSARY FRAGMENT

Since it either does not exist or it is finished, since it is finished but it is not the whole thing, since its form is entirely distinct from the thing which it references and to this end it does not refer back to it at all.

8. A Reasonably Complete List of Types of Unfinishedness:

I. the artist stopped working on the piece, but finished other works that we have deemed valuable

II. the artist died before completing the piece; assumedly they intended to (but who knows, maybe they actually just hated it)

III. a call on the viewer to participate, to make; the piece gives instructions for its completion: a symbol missing a known part, visual instructions, a paint-by-number

A. Andy Warhol, *Do It Yourself (Violin)*, 1962.[24]

B. Jasper Johns, *Target*, 1971 (dated 1970 on sheet)[25]

[24] see Appendix, Figure 1, p. 93
[25] see Appendix, Figure 2, p. 94

IV. the piece denies the "artificiality of an 'ending'"

A. Jackson Pollock, *Number 28, 1950,* 1950[26]

V. a visual expression of the concept of unfinishedness, infinity

A. Roman Opalka, *OPALKA 1965/1-* ∞, 1965-2011[27]

B. the work cannot be finished because its materials are in a constant state of change (all materials, technically speaking)

1. Janine Antoni, *Lick and Lather*, 1993-4.[28]

9. Some more Ordinary Criticism(s):

"Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible," was perhaps more interesting conceptually than visually, which is something I find more often than I would prefer. Although the works varied in the way that they were unfinished, the "genuinely unfinished" fell into one of two broader categories of interest: that is, the work was interesting in the *way* that it was unfinished, or, the work was interesting because of the fact that it was unfinished. (There were also works that employed a *non finito,* or intentionally unfinished aesthetic).

The latter were not always especially pleasing to the eye, they often read as one-note, simply incomplete. A painting called, *Altar in a Baroque Church* (1880-90) by Adolph Menzel,[29] is stranger than most to see in its gold-lacquered frame. The image is mostly geometric lines, lacking depth and detail. It looks like a modern blueprint for a building. The top right corner is one of the only parts of the image sporting actual paint. All in all, it's rather ugly. It's included because Menzel made a lot of other, nice paintings, and

[26] see Appendix, Figure 3, p. 95
[27] see Appendix, Figure 4, p. 96
[28] see Appendix, Figure 5, p. 97
[29] see Appendix, Figure 6, p. 98

because it lends insight into his process. It's of interest in this regard, but to my way of looking there's nothing notably curious about the parts of it which are completed or not. It makes the work apparently more genuine, it really is unfinished, in the simplest definition. If I actually expected my unfinished work to be viewed by the masses I would inevitably and even subconsciously work differently; those which are both genuinely unfinished and visually compelling are as such by chance alone.

The former, those that *are* interesting in the way that they are left unfinished, are appealing because we imagine them as finished works in their current states, we are curious of what that means in terms of their content. In Anton Raphael Mengs's *Portrait of Mariana de Silva y Sarmiento, Duquesa de Huescar (1740-1784),* 1775,[30] a seated woman is pictured. Her dress, the corners of her chair, the backdrop and a velvety shawl draped over her shoulder all rendered in vivid detail. Her face, however, is ghostly. There appear to be faint traces of her facial features, but it is as if someone has smudged over them in circular motions. Her pulled-back gray hair also lacks the detail of the rest of the painting, but is not as obscured as her face. On her lap sits the crude outline of what is most likely a small dog, but this portion of the canvas has not been painted at all yet, giving it the appearance of being cut out and removed from the image.

Perhaps the smearing of the figure's facial features serves as a comment on the experience of being a woman, the erasure of the female sex from history, or the history of oppression. None of these interpretations feel especially far-fetched. This read of the image, however, is inextricably tied to the eyes of a contemporary viewer. Perhaps it does suggest these meanings, but if in fact it is true that the artist simply died before finishing

[30] see Appendix, Figure 7, p. 99

the portrait, it does not actually mean anything that the face of the woman is left empty, we only make it mean something. (Though there is symbolism in what is left undone, there is psychology in what we save for last.) We can read the image this way as it is no longer hard to see an image without a face– if one didn't know when the painting was made, it might have been thought a work from the post-WWI Dadaist movement– but it is unfamiliar to see a painting of a much earlier period in this way.

Lastly are the works that are technically considered finished but deal with the idea of unfinishedness: for instance, Jackson Pollock's *Number 28*, 1950, which, "Even if Pollock stopped painting," according to Allan Kaprow, "our imaginations continue [the work] outward indefinitely, as though refusing to accept the artificiality of 'an ending'"[31] This type of unfinishedness involves the audience as part of the work, negotiating between what we think we see or imagine and what is actually there. Then there is the innumerable series, in which "though each canvas may seem complete, it is but a detail in the overall project…it was this necessary failure to fulfill the project that brought it to completion… the finality of [the] work [is] in its unfinishedness." These works, while each valuable in their own right, in the context of the show are a compromise: the choice of *this* Pollock over another, similar painting is arbitrary.

10. There were no photographs in the exhibition because they are fragments and there were no fragments in the exhibition.

[31] Kaprow, Allan. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life.* University of California Press, revised edition. 2003. p. 5

I thought that I would use the show for an exploration of the fragment and the photograph, but the opening wall text definitively declared that the show would not deal with the fragment, as it would be a different issue entirely: "We have eliminated from consideration two related but distinct subjects–the fragment and the preparatory sketch– and have focused instead almost exclusively on objects designed as independent works of art, meant to be evaluated in their current form."

The question of whether to include the fragment in this exhibition can be seen dually, depending on the way the form is understood. In the language of the show itself, it seems to be meant as: a stanza in a poem, one image in a series, a part of a whole. One thing taken from the entire thing. Indeed, this would not align with an exhibition concentrated on unfinished work, because a fragment here is a part of a finished work– not unfinished in itself, just excerpted.

However, if the exhibit claims to focus on "objects designed as independent works of art," the fragment should fall into this category, for the fragment has a life much beyond that which is described above; indeed it is a piece of a thing, but it is nonetheless entirely settled, not part of anything larger like a single plate from of a full set of dinnerware. There is nothing that it refers back to, nothing it is missing or missing from. The fragment is "meant to be evaluated" in its current form: this is its "ultimate" form.

The fragment lives in some alternate space between finished and unfinished. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan; or, A Vision in a Dream: A Fragment" (1816),[32] exists in this space as a result of the way that the poem came to be. In a Preface to the

[32] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. "Kubla Khan." The Norton Anthology of English Literature. 9th ed. Deirdre Shauna Lynch and Jack Stillinger. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012. 459-462. Print.

poem, written in the third-person, Coleridge explains that the poem came to "the Author"[33] in an opium-induced dream that he experienced after falling asleep reading about Xanadu, the capital of Kubla Khan's empire, in *Purchas's Pilgrimage*.[34]

He describes being interrupted by a knock at the door for over an hour, causing him to forget the lines he had intended to write. He waits, powerlessly, in hopes of returning to his dream in order to finish the poem, but he is unable, leaving him with only "vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision."[35] The poem is a fragment because of the way that it came to Coleridge: in a state to which he cannot return. The "transcribed" poem itself is a fragment, but in Coleridge's gesture of including paratext, he effectively collages fragments as to instructs the reader on how to approach the work.

If the curators did understand the fragment as something complete, it may have only been a better reason for its exclusion, as the exhibition was meant to be about unfinished work. But whether or not Coleridge's poem– or any work considered a fragment– is finished, is ultimately unresolved. The terms "finished" and "unfinished" do not exactly apply, are not completely useful to understanding the fragment.

We might then return to the question: Is the photograph excluded because it is finished or because it is a fragment and how are they the same?

11. Proposal for an Unfinished Photograph:

[33] ibid, p. 459
[34] It is worth noting here that Coleridge, in the same spirit of art criticism as previously discussed, is explicitly noting his source as a part of the content of his work.
[35] ibid, p. 460

Since now I have progressed through and it seems essentially exhausted the ways in which a photograph must be finished I propose the following, to an imaginary show of unfinished works which would include the medium of photography:

In 1855, a process for color photography was imagined, as based on the Young-Helmholtz theory that the human eye can perceive color because of three types of cones on the surface of the eye, sensitive to red, green, or blue light respectively. The varied stimulation and intermingling of these cones was said to then create the impression of all imaginable colors.

In 1861, Thomas Sutton took a photograph of a tartan ribbon using the framework outlined in this theory. He made three separate black-and-white photographs, identical except for the fact that each was taken through either a red, green, or blue filter. The resulting slides would then be projected through the same filters, and when superimposed, all of the colors present in the original scene would be made visible.

The color of the resulting projection would not actually exist in the film (not that it ever does, as color in the world just corresponds to fabricated dyes); the final image would not be complete in so far as it could not exist as any sort of physical object, but could only be experienced through the combined projection of the negatives, each a part of the whole.

I would propose to display images in this manner: incomplete both in their physicality and very conception. This method of image-making resists the idea of a photograph as singular and final, and as any sort of physical object. Though the slides have physicality, the whole image cannot have physicality as it is reductive, transitory. (Something akin to contemporary digital imaging technologies). The “finished” slides are incomplete: they are

each missing entire color fields of information, but this imagined proposal would still necessarily fall into the “compromise” category: the image still lives in the realm of the fragment. This is the only method I can presently imagine that could have the ability to take apart a photograph, but I will of course continue to reflect on it.

III.

Cutting up J.M.W. Turner: A Photo Essay

19

- Victorian art critic John Ruskin so loved Turner's paintings–those golden yellow and lavender seas and skies, spilling circularly, endlessly into one another–that he dedicated much of his life to defending and celebrating the painter's work, apparently even cataloguing some 20,000 of Turner's sketches after his death.
- Of Turner's most-celebrated painting, *The Slave Ship* (1840), Ruskin wrote:
  "I believe, if I were reduced to rest Turner's immortality upon any single work, I should choose this. Its daring conception, ideal in the highest sense of the word, is based on the purest truth, and wrought out with the concentrated knowledge of a life; its colour is absolutely perfect, not one false or morbid hue in any part or line, and so modulated that every square inch of canvas is a perfect composition; its drawing as accurate as fearless; the ship buoyant, bending, and full of motion; its tones as true as they are wonderful; and the whole picture dedicated to the most sublime of subjects and impressions… –the power, majesty and deathfulness of the open, deep, illimitable sea."[36]
- Ruskin's assertion that painting is so complete, so wonderful that "every square inch of canvas is a perfect composition" may be tested by cutting the work into many squares and assessing whether each one still feels whole in and of itself (though breaking it into one-inch squares may be a bit dramatic).

[36] John Ruskin, The Lamp of Beauty: Writings on Art (London: Phaidon, 1995). p. 17.















- One day, I asked a question which I can no longer recall, and in response AL read me an e-mail that had been sent to her, which asked something like: “If you take a photograph and cut it up into pieces are each of the pieces still photographs?” The question was followed by the assurance that the writer was “…being serious.” Initially, my thought was *of course*. They are in the material of photography. What else could they be? But the issue of whether the pieces would feel complete is not exactly what is at stake in the question here, in the same spirit of Ruskin’s claims of Turner’s paintings. The question is not whether a resulting piece would feel complete, but rather whether it *is*, as a photographic image.

- Photographer David Hockney made a series of composite polaroids in the early eighties, which consisted of grids (and some of more organic, overlaid arrangements) of polaroid photographs that, when pieced together like a haphazard puzzle and viewed at once, would reveal the whole image. The works have a Cubist, painterly feeling to them; parts of figures or objects appear distorted when the images are seen collectively, as the images show them from various focal points and at inconsistent distances. The effect is not unlike viewing a Picasso, wherein on a single surface many views of the same subject are represented as one combination. Hockney effectively worked backwards in terms of the gesture outlined above, figuratively “cutting up” his pre-visualized image before taking the pictures. When viewed singularly, the interest of the image is random, depending entirely on what happens to reside in the frame.

- However, the question still is not whether they feel complete but whether they *are* complete photographs.

David Hockney, *Nicholas Wilder Studying Picasso.* Los Angeles 24th March 1982.

- When I posed the question to him, SS definitively told me that a photograph requires the following: a frame, a subject, and light. If this is true, then any image that results from cutting up a photograph is still a photograph. It still has a frame, except rather than the frame imposed by the mechanical instrument, it is imposed by the maker, who is always the one imposing it anyway. No matter how they are made photographs always have frames, are always contained. (I think this is the reason that at Pace/MacGill gallery on E. 57th Street, which has a floor that exclusively shows photographs, the gallery walls are always painted colors in place of the standard white gallery; once I saw a show in which they were dark grays and rose. It is not a question, as it is with works of sculpture, how much space in a gallery a photograph requires and uses beyond itself. The boundaries of the image are always evident. All photographs are readymades.)

- The images that result from cutting up a photograph have these three requirements but something is still problematic, they are still photographs but weren't made with the same intentions of the frame. The question ultimately reduces to whether the frame– the mechanical action of the camera– is essential to what makes a photograph. (Cropping an image is a different question than I am asking here, as it is a conscious decision in hopes of making a better composition, deeply concerned with the edges of the frame, which this question is not.)

- In poetry, the only way you can make pictures is by relations or among things, but it is not possible to look at a single photograph without having a kind of narrative. In the simplest sense, it declares that it is of the world. To this end, photographs can never truly be illogical. When you cut a photograph up into smaller rectangles whether they feel complete is random, just like if the Mars Rover takes a picture at a pre-determined interval it may or may not happen to be looking at something useful. A photograph can be boring or uninteresting but it is always complete, since no picture exists before it is done.

- If the action of cutting up a photograph is systematic, if it does not intentionally consider the resulting frame(s), then these are pieces of photographs and not photographs in themselves.

IV.

Lucy Lippard's Bad (Horrible, Antifeminist) Idea, or: Photographs by Men as Seen by a Woman

> "2. Historically, the discourse of absence is carried on by the Woman: Woman is sedentary, Man hunts, journeys; Woman is faithful (she waits), man is fickle (he sails away, he cruises). It is Woman who gives shape to absence, elaborates its fiction, for she has time to do so; she weaves and she sings; the Spinning Songs express both immobility (by the hum of the Wheel) and absence (far away, rhythms of travel, sea surges, cavalcades)."
>
> Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, pp. 13-14

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Sometime before November 2011, an early version of the correspondence between Lucy R. Lippard and Antony Hudek is published in *Flash Art,* according to a footnote.

Sometime before November 2016, I read "Lucy R. Lippard in correspondence with Antony Hudek" in *From Conceptualism to Feminism*. I do not know who Antony Hudek is. The discussion focuses on Lippard's "Number Shows"[37] and the role of the curator. I read:

"It was entangled with the original idea for *I See/You Mean*, which was going to be nothing but descriptions of photographs with an index."

I think this is a very interesting and curious idea. A sentence later, Lippard follows with:

[37] "Number Shows" refers to a series of exhibitions staged by Lippard between 1969 and 1974. The numerical title of each show corresponded with the population of the place where the show was staged: "557,087" for Seattle, "2,972,453" for Buenos Aires, and so on.

“Horrible idea– thank goodness feminism dragged me away from that kind of obfuscation in the guise of ‘experimental’ writing, although *I See/You Mean* is difficult enough.”

I am slightly embarrassed at falling for the trick (–I am a feminist)! I look up “obfuscation” in the OED, which I find does not have any listed synonyms.
I am slightly offended at that thing about feminism but I still think it is not such a horrible idea.

*

I.

There is only a woman’s body. I know it is a woman’s body because it is always known, I see the thick veins of her hand, swollen to suggest she is holding tightly to her side, her arm stretched horizontally across the belly. I think about what it feels like (no matter how thin you are or the world has made you or you have made yourself, you can pull the skin away, reach beneath and grab on, try to touch your fingers together, hold tightly to yourself in fleshy handfuls).

Someone once told me that the way that I stood with my arms crossed each way over my body indicated that I was subconsciously defensive.

Her other limb folds, elbow nearly touching the hipbone, pressing up along the body, probably squeezing enough to make her lower stomach round outward. This hand extends up to her collarbone and rests, mostly covered by her head which is a half-moon looking down; only the brow bone is legible, her features are mostly obscured or blended together, made unintelligible in hazy grays. A band of light feels its way across the top of her head, separating the strands of her hair. The distortion makes her shoulders into points, pulling them upward to

the corners of the frame, stretched as if they were the pliable edges of cloth, the wings of a bat. They appear to hollow toward the middle where her head rests like a shadowed valley, falling forward. The warping makes her hips look especially narrow. The points of her shoulders make an overlay in the shape of a triangle with her pelvic bone as the third corner. The whole picture is rather laden with hard geometry, forming various paths round the image, despite the blurring distortion, and also despite the fact of the female nude as a subject, which is largely regarded as soft.

II.

Half of the picture is filled by the photographer's body, which is pictured from the waist down, half a man, lens pointed straight at his feet on the grass below. There are deep creases in his trousers– perhaps they are too long. A tiny part of his striped shirt has crept into the corner of the image. He looks down at a woman, sitting in the short grass against his legs, knees pulled in, one cheek tilted toward the sky, her profile outlined against strands of long dark hair. Her expression is uncertain, but the corner of her mouth seems gently pulled upward, her left eye squinted, appearing only as a dark line, perhaps also looking upward. She knows that she is being photographed. I think they are in a park somewhere and also I think they are in love.

One of the man's shoes partially covers a lightly-colored leaf, which is a most important part of the picture, holding the top corner of the frame.

III.

There is mostly the continuous sky.

I guess that's why they call it the "Land of the Big Sky" or something like that. A few white clouds are scattered, sitting on the plane of the image rather than inside of it. In the next layer there is a mountain; the light falls on it in that way that confuses the scale or depth and

makes the trees look like mossy ground-covering. The range is interrupted by a perfect square that sits slightly off-center. Beneath the mountain there is a picket fence– at least it looks like one but really it just looks like stripes; everything converges on the white square in the middle. The mid-section is like those cross-sectional diagrams of sedimentary rock, the forms flattened against one another like the ocean and dirt in each of their neat boundaries, intersecting but not appearing to interrupt one other. A number of poles stand erect, covering the foreground, but organized as such that they too are contained to their own cell of the image. They are placed at various, seemingly random distances but each are given their own space, like repetitive ticks, bouncing around. Tick tick tick tick. Everything extends from the square, except for the big sky.

I have never been to the west, well not this west anyway; in an adjacent picture there is a house which looks just like every other house, even blocks of even shades, all organized in rows touching one another; tick-ticks covering the landscape.

IV.

Half a man, lying sprawled on a pink quilted sheet, layers of flowers– small patterns of colored flowers arranged into formations of larger, geometric flowers. His arms stretch above his head, the soft belly below his ribcage falls in because he is thin and also because he is breathing, making rhythms of rise and fall. This moment is probably a fall, a hollowing, an out-breath. His mouth falls open, too. He looks at the camera. A woman's hand locks to his forearm, his upturned hand wraps awkwardly around her elbow. She lies beside him, half a woman, wearing a striped shirt which she gathers over her with her other hand. Their uncovered body parts all meet at the middle of the image, an organized row of tanned limbs. A wrinkled blue-bleached pillow rests, deflated in the background, with white blotches like clouds. It is probably his shirt. She

probably does not know she is half a woman, headless; a white hat rests on the bed, covering his hands.

It had been almost a year exactly since we had last seen each other or even spoken. We had already climbed into his bed, which was lofted much too close to the ceiling, above the kitchen table. I wore a borrowed shirt, changing from my own day clothes in private although he had seen me naked many times over.

We both lay on our sides, his chest pressed against my back. Familiar and unfamiliar. He ran his hand back and forth between his hip and mine, comparing the heights, taking in the ways my body had filled over the year. My hip now rounded above his narrow one; we didn't fit together the same way. He could barely wrap his leg around me. He proclaimed: "You're a woman now!"

V.

Four thin lines extend in opposite directions, barely misaligned, joined in the middle to form the shape of a cross. They are thickest at the center and gradually fade as they move outward toward the edge of the image, eventually becoming shadow instead of hard line. They have the gentlest of bends, as if one were trying to draw a line in pencil very slowly, which is the only thing that seems to let on to their being of the body.

How little information an image can contain, and even with so little how I still, always, inevitably know that it is of the physical world and the physical body.

VI.

Two people are pictured: partners, lovers, I suspect given the way he pulls her hand up and presses the back of it against his mouth. His gesture pushes the gauze bandage on her forearm up against the soft crinkled muscle of her bicep. They do not hold tightly to one another,

but cup their hands lightly together. Two needles are still taped in at the crease in her inner arm, but not screwed into any tubes running thick fluids through her veins. Old tape marks have left their residual, sticky outlines around the bandage.

It's odd, isn't it, the way that after the needle is inserted you eventually stop feeling the prick in your skin and it just rests there inside of you.

Her face is tilted down, the hard light of the flash carves out her cheek, digs shadowy craters into her down-turned eyelids. She wears just a towel folded over to reveal her sunken breastbone, the splintered ribs of her chest. Her skin falls away as if it is too roomy for her bones. They both wear wedding bands.

The hair on his brows and eyelashes is blonde or white, and it is thin. They are not young (even though no one who is sick is young, in a way). His half-moon eyes look toward the camera; one is mostly obscured by the shadow of her face. It is difficult to tell whether they are hopeful, but they are both especially aware of the weight of their bodies in a way that is only felt when one is chronically ill, which means that even when one is not sick, they are still sick.

VII.

There are no people, no bodies, except I imagine they are all down there somewhere– they must be. The image is taken from the sky, which cannot be seen in the photograph. (I have never before considered that the sky is always there but depending on where you stand also always not-there). There are many little quadrants of organized land, claimed and marked off for one purpose or another. It all has that smooth sheen of water when the light is such that it no longer looks reflective, you can't see inside of it and the surface is foil, reflecting light in one unmitigated layer, instead of broken into various distinguishable objects. There are thin, crisscrossed etched lines that stretch toward the edges of the frame, muddy and dark. The middle

is bright by comparison, full of channels that lead somewhere or nowhere. The objects appear both immense and microscopic simultaneously, maybe since the relative distance between me and the very big or very small is the same.

There are no people, no bodies but there is something bodily, of course, about all of this building and un-building.

*

How do I choose a single first image in the sea of images when I will never see them all, not even close– no there are hundreds of millions, surely, by now.

I described only pictures which I had already seen– those which have stayed with me, either by memory or because I so-loved them that I tacked them to the wall so that I could see them each day and so that they could see me back, or I dragged them into various digital folders, knowing that they would eventually resurface. I chose images of which I do not tire of looking.

I do not intend this as a guessing game. I am sorry that the photographers are all men I am sorry this is what I know this is what there is that I know, mostly this is what I love I am not sorry.

(Am I being oppressed or am I oppressing, and if I am being oppressed how do I know? How to make sure I do not disappear.)

They say: every photograph is a self-portrait (though nobody really seems sure about who said so in the first place). But a self-portrait of who? I assumed the photographer, but it is also the viewer because they project themselves, they find themselves within the image so they love it or they can't love it at all. All of the images are connected because it is I who sees them, who

looks upon them; because something inside of me connects deeply, inextricably, to what I see in the world.

How do you choose a single first image when I will never see them all, how do I choose the best place to start since there are too many images and I don't know why I chose the ones that I did, and what if I change my mind? What does the space for an image look like if it is not good but it is important because of what it shows and what it was and I took it and I can never go back?

Barthes asks: "why choose this object, this moment…"[38] for which I can only provide the non-answer: because we must.

There is a logic to starting with the earlier photographs, but I am less interested to read and to know about Talbot's works, even though I know they are so important to the beginning. To my mind it doesn't make sense to begin there because I didn't really begin there at all. That is: I am not interested in an objective beginning, only of my own.

I am sometimes afraid for what I do or do not put out into the world and I wonder if you'd think I look different because I am.

If women are not loud will we be heard?

What is the space for me if I am not good but important? There are hundreds of millions by now, surely, already. Is it important just because I point my camera at it and say it is, even if I don't know how to say why?

how to not

make sure I do not

disappear .

[38] Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida.* Hill and Wang, reprint ed. 2010. p. 6

V.

Reproduction and Death in the Imaginary Spaces of the Museum and the Photograph

Photography has long played a role in the arts, both in its own right and as an immensely capable tool for the historicizing of innumerable works of painting and sculpture, both individually and in exhibition. Just as the emergence of the museum revolutionized the way that art was viewed, so too did the discovery of photography. In the form of photographic reproductions in print media (and later, of course, on the internet), works became widely accessible to those for whom it was not possible to view them in person. It also became possible to view disparate works (separated by location or time) in conjunction with one another– reproduced side by side on the page. Photography's equalizing effects allowed the potential for new relationships to be understood between works that wouldn't otherwise have been considered. It also revealed details of individual works that may have otherwise gone unnoticed had the works only ever been viewed in their "original" state in the museum.

The relationship between the innate function of the photograph– that is, the way that it works, whether or not it is being used as a tool for documenting and as a mode of viewing existing, irreproducible art– and that of the museum is both deeper and more meaningful than it appears at the surface in the ways that they respectively act upon the objects that they employ. By their very nature, both are simultaneously reductive and reproductive, as well as involved with the figurative death of those who enter or look upon them.

In "Museum Without Walls,"[39] André Malraux describes (the limits of) the museum as the

[39] Malraux, André. "Museum Without Walls" *The Voices of Silence.* Translated by Stuart Gilbert, Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1953.

established and dominant place for viewing art. While to a degree, museums bring artworks out of hiding and into a public realm, hung on the various walls of the white galleries, works are removed from their respective contexts, and "…estrange[d] from their original functions."[40] By being decontextualized, they are brought (back) into a different kind of isolation by being forced into unnatural relations with one another. For instance: a Pollock is not understood in the context of Pollock's larger body of work but instead in the context of whatever else is hung up in the adjacent space.[41] When a work of art is removed, quite literally, from its original context and placed within the walls of a museum, it is effectively or ceremoniously reproduced despite it being an "original"; in its new home, it is reduced to a sign of its former self in "…a place where a work of art has no longer any function other than that of being a work of art…"[42] The work itself has not changed, but it is reduced and reproduced in the context of the museum.

That said, it is not entirely clear what Malraux means when he refers to works being removed from their "original functions" in the museum, for, except in the case of the altar piece (or other similar works), what is the original function of a painting apart from being hung on a wall? Likely, Malraux is speaking here about a situation of greater intimacy that would exist outside of the museum– for instance, private ownership, in which a portrait would be hung in the house of its subject, thus more directly connected to its circumstances of being.

As a resolution to the problems that Malraux takes up with the museum, he proposes the "museum without walls"– (or, as originally intended and perhaps more accurately: "Le Musée Imaginaire"– imaginary museum). The discrepancy between the English translation and the

[40] ibid, p. 14
[41] This is not to say that it is not, of course, valuable to view works by various artists and styles together: indeed it is in part by creating compare/contrast relationships that we can begin to understand works more deeply. They should be looked upon in conjunction, and not situated "against each other" (17), as the museum pits them.
[42] ibid, p. 15

original (Museum without Walls and Le Musée Imaginaire, respectively), makes it unclear exactly what Malraux was proposing in place of a traditional museum. Malraux intended to describe an imaginary museum– not *just* one that was without walls– making it seem as if he were suggesting that the ideal "museum" would be in one's head, (without walls in the literal sense), and a book containing photographic reproductions was to be a kind of "middle ground." However, because looking at photographic reproductions of art necessarily involves the imagination of the viewer– negotiating between what the photograph shows and what they imagine it has left out (either in framing or in what is inevitably lost in translation from three-dimensional reality to the two-dimensional image), the book which photographically reproduces artworks or exhibitions is, ultimately, imaginary.

The involvement of photographic reproductions of works of art in Malraux's imaginary museum resolves many of his expressed concerns with viewing art in the context of a "traditional" or physical museum. By looking upon the works in this manner, pieces that could never be viewed in conjunction– for quite literal reasons, such as ownership, time, and geographic location– can finally come to converse with one another in a way that is less strict and more equalizing than museums. Beyond freeing artworks from these limitations, for Malraux, the appeal of the imaginary museum is that wherein the museum creates unnatural relationships, unjust comparisons, and hierarchies between works, photographic reproductions have instead the effect of equalizing the works, consequentially "impart[ing] a familial likeness to objects that have actually but slight affinity. With the result that such different objects… when reproduced on the same page, may seem part of the same family."[43] The likeness, created by the

[43] ibid, p. 21

camera's democratic vision– one that indeed contains "a loss of memory and tactility alike[44]– allows the viewer to see the works in ways never possible before, both confusing and clarifying their mental schema of them.

Looking at photographic reproductions of artworks in place of viewing them in museums is, then, problematic as much it is useful. Malraux's assertion that reproduction "rescues" art from isolation[45] is valid in that both the (non-literal) reproduction of works in the spaces of museums, and their (literal) photographic reproduction increases visibility and accessibility. However, they only become attainable in the physical sense: no longer hidden away in un-documented obscurity.

In particular, photographic reproduction is isolating in the fact that (though at times useful) it fundamentally "eras[es] the differences between its elements."[46] Whatever purposes they were made for and in whatever time, photographs are equalized in their *being* photographs, all more or less equally representing the objects within them, turning those objects into signs. Photographs consistently refer back to themselves as photographs; this fact of the medium is inescapable. Indeed, "the photograph, being an artefact, applies its own laws of artefaction to the material it documents…"[47] In a sense, the materials of photography are added to those of the original work in the process of representation, but those materials come to supersede the old.

The reproduction of the work by the photographic medium ultimately creates similar problems to those observed in the museum because photography is a semiotic form. In the

[44] Kitnick, Alex. "The Brutalism of Life and Art" OCTOBER 136, Spring 2011, p. 78.
[45] Malraux, p. 42
[46] Kitnick, p. 78
[47] Banham, Reyner. "Parallel of Life and Art," *Public Photographic Spaces: Propaganda Exhibitions from Pressa to The Family of Man, 1928-55*, edited by Jorge Ribalta, Museu D-Art Contemporary de Barcelona (MACBA), 2009. p. 414

museum, by removing an art object from its original contexts, it is liberated by being made visible, but, by its being reproduced, it is reduced to a sign– portraits become "pictures," and "sculptures" become statues.[48] Ultimately the objects in the museum come to signify "art," just as the objects in the photograph are employed by their being in the photograph, all reproductions.

The effect of the museum on the objects within it is undoubtedly similar to the effect that a photograph has on the objects it employs. In photographic reproductions of a work of art, the art in question is invariably changed.[49] While mechanical reproduction means that the resulting images are duplicates– essentially indistinguishable from one another– the act of reproduction itself (representing a physical object in a photograph in the first place) is not without variation. Malraux notes that the particulars of how a work is photographed (distance, angle, focus, etc.) may "strongly accentuate something…[the artist] merely hinted at."[50] Museums, though, have the potential to do the same thing. Just as the nature of a photograph, being that it must place a frame around a scene and in doing so necessarily suggest relationships and affinities that perhaps do not or did not actually exist in the world, in the space of the museum the same kinds of superficial lines are drawn between works.

Beyond suggesting relationships between various objects within a singular image by the placement of a frame, photography can also suggest affinities *between* photographs which may in some regards have even less in common than the objects appearing in the same space in a single photograph. This is what Malraux notes in the way that reproductions of, say, "…such different

[48] Malraux, p. 14-15.
[49] In addition to being changed by the way that the photographic image is both more and less than the objects it shows, works of art are changed by their ability to exist, simultaneously, in any number of places. This has increased exponentially due to the speed and ease with which images can be reproduced via the internet: making for endless reproductions in endless contexts. (see: John Berger, *Ways of Seeing)*
[50] Malraux, p. 21.

objects as a miniature, a piece of tapestry, a statue and a medieval stained-glass window…"[51] can suddenly, when viewed as reproductions, appear kindred spirits. The surface of the paint, for instance, is superseded by the surface of the photograph. But separate photographs of even more widely varied subjects, and even those with distinct visual styles can be seen together, because of the mechanical sight of the camera, because of the materiality that it projects onto them. Every photographic reproduction is equidistant from its origin; they all "happen" at the same time.

A case of the extent to which photographic images function as signs (as well as what can happen to them in the context of museums) can be observed in the 1953 exhibition, "Parallel of Life and Art."[52] The show was staged by five members of the Independent Group at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London. The group first emerged in postwar Britain and sought to introduce mass and popular culture into the realm of high art.

The exhibition was composed of 122 photographic panels, arranged as such to make use of all of the surfaces in the museum for display: that is, the ceiling and floors in addition to the walls. Materially, everything was equalized: everything is a photographic rendering, seemingly reproduced on the same type of surface.[53] Beyond this, the images differ widely. They are made

[51] ibid, p. 21.
[52] see Appendix, Figure 8, p. 100
[53] Looking at the images of the exhibition feels a bit like seeing inside an artist's studio, a space which might include found images of any sort for reference or inspiration, as well as both completed and in-progress works of the artist. There is nothing democratic about the way things are hung: they vary in size, some images obscure a clear view of others, at times even overlapping one another. Some work it "well-lit," other falls in shadow. It reads as an installation rather than a series of images, to be taken as a whole and in combination rather than as its isolated parts: this is where the meaning is found. Indeed, the show was intended to "open the floodgates" (cite) and embrace the variety of ways and purposes for image-making, acknowledging the fact that the vast majority of photographs have lives and serve purposes outside of art. Walking through it might feel akin to scrolling through a stream of images online, where one can stop and take time and focus on a single image, but everything else is still on the peripheral, and there's not any clear rhyme or reason to stopping at one over another, or in which order they might call out to be viewed. There would be as much logic to methodically looking from one image to the next as there would be to look at the first few, move to one on another wall that catches one's eye, and then return to the first wall and repeat looking at those images again in the reverse.

with x-ray machines, with various sorts of cameras and lenses, from the camera as an (attached) extension of the eye to aerial images taken at rapid speeds. Some images compress or capture extensions of time into their singular surface, some show realities imperceptible by eyesight alone, whether by extreme speed or extreme magnification. Some reproduce parts or wholes of existing works of painting or sculpture. As much as the group seemingly avoided traditional methods of display, they challenged the idea that an exhibition must have a single coherent theme.[54] As articulated in the show's Memorandum, one particularly important aspect of the exhibition was the drawing and essentially the equalizing of "low art" and mass or popular culture and production into the realm of high art– an endeavor made possible largely by the use of the photograph. It a consequence of both the nature of the museum "with walls" and of photography that such widely disparate images can not only "go together," but that they can all signify "art." This exhibition made use of the sign-making habits of the medium and the space in order to convincingly bring images from popular culture or low art into the realm of high art.

Indeed, as evidence of photography's semiotic form is the ease with which photographs can be made synonymous despite their variety, in that they are all photographs. Though evidenced in some photographs more than others, objects in photographs are no longer objects but references to their real-world counterparts. While it is true that the photograph is an object in itself, separate and distinct from what it pictures, it is inevitably connected to the physical world from which it is made. This is inescapable. But the photograph is undoubtedly *more* than the sum of its parts. The form of the photograph is the signifier, distinct from its (signified) meaning, and not something *actually* visible within the image. That is, the meaning of the photograph is

[54] While the images lacked a theme in terms of their content or signified meaning, the theme of the exhibition can be understood as that of photography itself, of course.

greater than the contents that it describes.

Thus, if works in museums are reduced to signs of "art," and photographs are signs, what are they reduced to? For Roland Barthes, at least, the answer is that they signify death. Barthes famously writes of the relationship between photography and death in *Camera Lucida,*[55] which acts simultaneously as a theoretical text about photography and an inquisitive tribute to the death of his own mother. Barthes muses over a portrait of his mother (notably, one *not* reproduced within the text), realizing that her death insinuates his own, and eventually deciding that every photograph signifies death: that which no longer exists, that which has already been. He writes, "But the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*. I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is at stake."[56] The "he" refers to a figure in a particular photograph, but the pronoun also calls on Barthes, as if the photograph were speaking the words to him. Photographs, necessarily, show what has died for its moment has passed, and in doing so, call out to the viewer and remind them of the prospect of their own.

There is also, unsurprisingly, a "death" happening in the space of the museum as a result of it being, while not an "empty" space, one that is essentially void of history. Brian O'Doherty's "Inside the White Cube"[57] is primarily concerned with the notion that the museum or gallery space is not one of neutrality; rather, it is one in which certain aspects of the art become "symbolically annulled."[58] That is, the gallery *itself* is not a passive, empty, "non-space," but rather it is one governed by particular methods of rule. Thus, while not neutral in themselves, the

[55] Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida.* Hill and Wang, reprint ed. 2010.
[56] ibid, p. 96 (emphasis in original)
[57] O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space.* University of California Press, expanded ed. 2000.
[58] McEvilley in O'Doherty, p. 8.

white walls have this effect on the artworks that they bear.

Foremost, in the gallery space, works become isolated from a sense of time. We already know that they are isolated from *their* time (in regard to their context, as Malraux describes). O'Doherty likens the museum to the Egyptian tomb chambers– while notably different types of spaces, both are concerned with protecting the objects within their walls and with presenting an "ersatz eternity."[59] (Here, the works are only further removed– isolated from time *itself*. Indeed, the viewer becomes isolated from even an awareness of the outside world.

The isolation felt by the viewer, together with the notion of eternity "gives the gallery a limbolike status; one has to have died already to be there. Indeed the presence of that off piece of furniture, your own body, seems superfluous, an intrusion."[60] The body is an intruder, for the physical body is undoubtedly connected with time in a more intimate sense than is the mind: one cannot image being aware of the physical body without also being acutely aware of the time and space in which it necessarily exists. O'Doherty goes on to explain that once the viewer is released from a sense of time, the body, and the outside world, "The Eye and the Spectator are all that is left of someone who has 'died'… by entering the white cube."[61] In the gallery, it is the viewer who has died– not the works or images themselves, though one could reasonably argue for their death (for how can something so removed from time be alive?). Alternatively, in the terms outlined by Barthes, it is the photograph itself– the work– which signifies the death of the viewer. It does so, however, not by removing them from a notion of time entirely but instead by making them acutely aware of its passing. Photographs, with their common materiality, have the

[59] O'Doherty, p. 9.
[60] ibid, p. 15.
[61] ibid, p. 9.

effect of making everything "happen" at the same time.

If works in the museum "with walls" are made to function as signs (signifying "art"), and photographs also function as signs (signifying death), while the question does air on the side of being a little too "meta," it is worth asking what is at stake as a result of the doubling of these signs that occurs in photographs made not of individual works but of exhibitions. Malraux states that, "For the last hundred years… art history has been the history of that which can be photographed,"[62] begging the question, of course, of exactly what kind of art it is that cannot be photographed. While there could indeed be a discussion to be had, particularly in an era that embraces conceptual art (i.e.: the *idea* of the art as the art itself), regarding the kinds of art that cannot be photographed, what is perhaps more relevant is what cannot be photographed in the less-literal sense. Yes, the museum exhibition can be photographed, but as we already know, doing so is both reductive and inventive. An exhibition shot, necessarily removed from time both by the absence of the viewer and the nature of the photograph, cannot tell us what it was actually like to be there. It cannot *actually* tell us what an exhibition looked like at all. The issue of how we remember past exhibitions is directly connected to the use of photography in remembering them.

If the project of art history is involved entirely with the project of remembering, it is also involved with imagining. And in that the activity of remembering exhibitions as aided with photographs, something entirely new is created. As a result of the reliance on the photograph to historicize art exhibitions, the notion of remembering an exhibition becomes– since photographs, of course, do what they can to both remember and restage– deeply involved with the imaginary, and involves the creation of something new. Thus, as soon as it is photographed, even an

[62] Malraux, p. 30

exhibition staged in a “museum with walls,” is transformed, entering for itself the realm of the imagination, perhaps taking the entire discourse of art history along with it. When involved with the project of remembering, all museums become “imaginary museums.”

VI.

On the Photographic Function: From Memorial to Visual Communication, (From Saved to Sent)

The first real memory that I have of photography is of being on the side of the camera to which I am, for my part, unaccustomed: that is, of being photographed.[63] The memory is one of salt; my mother says that I cried each year, reliably, on the day that they took our class pictures.

I remember a deep and inherent anxiety, though I'm not sure where it came from. I can't imagine I was quite yet old enough to feel a self-consciousness, an ambivalence of permanence that would cause my mouth to tighten, my shoulders to become stiff. It was as if the uncertainty, the skepticism of the image were somehow ingrained in my person.

The distress that being photographed caused me proved a problem, as there has perhaps never been a time in my life in which people wanted to take my picture as much as when I was a blue-eyed, blonde, baby-faced thing.

Almost all of us make pictures– particularly in the age of the ever-improving, ever-present camera phone[64]– and it seems that to some degree, we share in the instincts to make the same kinds of pictures; we desire to remember the same things. Our families and friends, (ourselves), birthdays and weddings, cute animals, scenic vacation spots, exquisite-looking foods, the sunset. Blue-eyed, baby-faced children.

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[63] It is commonly assumed that most photographers are not in a lot of pictures themselves– a maxim that often does hold true.

[64] It has never been truer than it is today that *everyone* has a camera attached to their being. Photography is no longer the sport of the elite, and certainly it hasn't been for some time. Picture making is, undoubtedly, becoming both easier and more accessible. For my part, at least, I would not be surprised if in some not-so-far-off future landscape, picture making was something of a universal activity.

From its very onset, photography has been used as a method of documenting and memorializing, perhaps no better exemplified than in the tradition of postmortem photography, which was widely practiced in the 19th and early 20th centuries.[65] At photography's advent, people so much as rushed to photograph the elderly before they died, but if they couldn't, they would commission a photograph to be made of the person post-mortem, often surrounded by their most-valued worldly belongings. It was also common for pictures to be made of stillborn babies or infants who had died. There would have been no already-existing photographs of these people, of course, (though for different reasons), so sometimes the only existing photographs of an individual were taken after they had died. However, the practice has an extensive history–one much too long and detailed for these pages– beyond its use to make portraits of infants and the elderly. It has taken various forms and made use of different modes and methods of representing the dead.

Though changes have taken place in both our funerary practices and cultural relationships to death, to the surprise and intrigue of many, some form of the practice still exists today. Indeed, as Dr. Stanley Burns of The Burns Archive (credited with "rediscover[ing] the normalcy of postmortem photography") notes in his book: "…we are accustomed to images of death as part of our daily news; but actual death, as a part of private lives, has become a shameful and unspoken subject."[66] The practice has changed in accordance with our cultural relationships and notions of death, but after all, an elaborately-staged photograph of a deceased person is not entirely distinct from a photograph of the deceased taken at an open-casket service. Rather than surrounded by their worldly possessions, the deceased are pictured surrounded by bouquets of

[65] see Appendix, Figure 9, p. 101
[66] Burns, Stanley B. *Sleeping Beauty: Memorial Photography in America.* Twelvetrees Pr, 2nd ed. 1990.

flowers and framed pictures or handmade collages showing them at various occasions over the course of their life.

Postmortem images of the past were perhaps made as they were in an effort to imagine the person in life, as opposed to the wider shots of the funerary scene made today, which serve the purpose of documenting and commemorating the event itself, rather than the individual. Postmortem photography today– whether taken at a funeral service or of a couple holding their infant child, stillborn or having died in the early days after birth– often includes or even focuses on those who are grieving. It includes the activity of mourning itself in the very image.

Postmortem photographs are important in so far as they are the final images made of an individual. They also play an important role in the grieving process: in the past, small photographs were often carried on the body as a way of remembering the dead. It is common to carry photographs of deceased loved-ones today, but typically it is a favorite picture, selected from their life, as opposed to an image made postmortem for the specific function of memorial.

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In so far as photographs serve as a method of remembrance, the things that we choose to photograph show us what we value, what we want to hold on to, what we feel is worth documenting and remembering. The photograph, especially when it exists as a physical object, is largely thought of as permanent. As time moves forward, as our loved ones age and notable events pass us by, we will always have the photograph to hold onto. It fixes the moment on paper, and is always there to remind us– whether or not we want to be reminded.

The anxiety of being photographed– the innate need we feel to perform for the camera– is involved with feeling a lack of control over how we are represented, and necessarily with the fact

that we perceive this representation as permanent. It denies us the ability to imagine ourselves in a particular way. This anxiety seems to affect almost all of us, and if the camera does not make us anxious, at the very least it compels us to perform. Posing for the camera is as much a result of the desire to control the resulting image as it is a technical necessity for ending up with a clearly focused picture. Performing allows us some authority over the way we are seen; taking photographs ourselves allows us to control, to manage, the way that we want to see the world.

The invention– or discovery, as many prefer to think of it– of photography changed the world inimitably and in a number of ways: largely, it became a method of proof, a teacher about the physical world. It demonstrated that no two snowflakes are identical and for a moment, all four of a horse's hooves leave the ground while running. Most humanly accessible things on our planet had already been photographed as early as a century ago. Indeed, we have far surpassed the point of having an excess of photographic information. However, it doesn't seem to matter that we live in a time when we've already photographed "everything," as surely the desire or even instinct to make pictures still exists. It may be revealing, then, to look at what it is that we still make images of.

As photography shifted from existing as a tangible medium to one that was largely comprised of digital pixels on backlit screens, the idea of the photograph as a permanent object of remembrance began to experience a shift as well. My own life and experience in photography only extends as far back as the digital age. I don't remember a time in which photographs existed only as physical objects in the world: the actual record of light touching the surface of silver, revealing its forms by way of chemical reactions. But to some extent, I can imagine how significantly digital imaging has changed not only the way that we photograph, but also *why* we photograph. That is: the drive to make pictures is no longer rooted in the function of

remembering. Armed with digital cameras and the ability to take countless pictures without taking up physical space, we take images that we might never look at again, that exist, unaccounted for, somewhere in cyberspace.[67]

Take, for instance: at present, when I scroll to the bottom of my iPhone's camera roll, little red-colored letters warn me that, of the 4,439 photos and 149 videos currently on my phone, 2,300 of those items have not yet been backed up– meaning that if I were to accidentally send my phone through the wash, I would lose 2,300 photos, since my backup system is full.

I may have taken the pictures for any number of reasons, but what they all have in common is that someday soon, I will free up space on my phone for new pictures by saving them elsewhere, figuratively disposing of them. If the photos were actually lost, I would certainly be in distress, even though I have not accounted for them. I don't really know what I would be losing, but I feel deeply that I would be losing *something* that I know I can never get back**.** Thus, although I may never look back at them– doing so is rather stressful, actually, as the sheer quantity is overwhelming, and although I want to organize them I know I likely never will– to some extent I am still involved with the desire to memorialize. I don't know what I have, exactly, but I must keep them, and continue to collect more.

Thus, while the interest in the individual photograph as memorial and the notion of the permanence of the image have undoubtedly changed with the onset of digital imaging, the desire to hold on to the pictures that we make surely still exists. However, one photo-based social media app stands to contradict many of the ways that we understand the function of the image in terms of performance, control, and permanence.

[67] While for many of us, our perception of digital information is that it exists in some non-physical, limitless, space, hard drive and storage manufacturers have identified what they call a "global data capacity gap," referring to the fact that the world is running out of drive space, an issue essentially explained by the fact that generating data is much faster and easier than manufacturing storage.

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Snapchat is a popular mobile app[68] which allows users to send pictures and short videos to each other, which can then only be viewed for a few seconds before disappearing. The question of function reemerges: it becomes unclear where the desire (or even the instinct) to make pictures come from when we know that they will disappear, as if they were never made to begin with. It is evident that here, image-making must be about something other than memorializing.

In the earlier days of photography, one can imagine that due to the physical limits of reproduction (i.e.: while it was mechanical, it was neither immediate nor readily accessible) the reach of an image was certainly smaller than it is today, wherein the means of reproduction are available to the masses. An image would have been reproduced a finite and "counted" number of times. Today, there is almost no way to know how many times an image is reproduced, or where that image ends up. This is especially true when they wind up on the internet, as so many do.[69] Even the notion of "ending" is something of a falsity– it is impossible to trace the ongoing lives of the pictures we make, impossible to know who sees them, when, where, or under what conditions. How many "versions" of the *Mona Lisa* would you suppose there are? How many

[68] "Popular" is an understatement: nearly 9,000 photos are shared every second.

[69] As my mother once cautioned me, likely in hopes of minimizing the possibility that I might share, via the internet, a less-than-dignified photo of myself (assumedly with some relentless teenaged boy): "everything on the internet is permanent." I'm not sure whether this is actually true (even though once I heard that every tweet is archived in the Library of Congress), but what I do know is that I *don't* know what happens to the images that I share online after I do so. My mom meant that we can't take images back once we've shared them. We can delete the original, but we have no control over where else the image surely already exists, in a life that it lives beyond and unbeknownst to us– entirely separate from its maker.

days, how many times, has the Eiffel Tower been photographed? How many times have you unknowingly ended up in the background of other people's pictures?

While our participation in most of social media necessitates that we in turn surrender some control over what happens to our posts, to our pictures, the same is not entirely true of Snapchat. The appeal of the app seems to be tied in with the ability to maintain a degree of control over the images we make. This control can be exhibited by exercising power over where exactly our photographs end up. When sending an image over Snapchat, the user decides exactly how long the recipient will be able to view the image: anywhere from one to ten seconds. After that, the photograph disappears. Neither the recipient nor the sender can view it again.[70]

When you open the app, your phone's camera is immediately activated, and you are faced with a small version of the view in front of your phone. (Or, if you last used the front-camera in the app, you will, unsuspectingly, peer into your own, often rather bemused mug). The camera is oriented vertically (as opposed to the traditional horizontal orientation of the camera's frame) in accordance with how the phone is held. You take a picture– say it's of you and a friend. Next, you can utilize any number of the app's image-enhancing features. You can add a filter, making your image discolored like an old antique photograph. You can add an overlay that displays the time, speed, or location in which the photograph was taken. You can add text and, yes, you can

[70] No sooner than it was released, users discovered that there are, in fact, ways to save images sent through Snapchat– either with the use of a third-party app or by taking a screenshot of the photograph before its allotted time runs out. However, Snapchat makes every effort to shut down these third-party apps, and at least to increase transparency when it comes to saving images by way of taking a screenshot. Now, in later updates, if the recipient of an image takes a screenshot, a message automatically notifies its sender that this has happened.
Further, given that the app is geared toward privacy and temporality, the question has arisen over whether photographs shared through Snapchat are saved somewhere on the company's servers, even after they appear to self-destruct. Like most involved in the business of social media, although the company says it deletes images from its servers once they have been opened, it is not completely clear the extent to which they maintain the right to, at times, save these images.

add emojis to your heart's fullest desire. You can use your finger like a pen to write or draw in any color of the rainbow: glasses to show you are hard at work, red devil's horns, dramatic tears, a fancy mustache– ad infinitum.[71] You can tack on whatever you so wish to effectively communicate your message, even if said message is just that you're bored or desperate to procrastinate whatever it is that you should be doing.

Since they are programmed to automatically delete, there's no real way to take stock of what kinds of images are shared over Snapchat. I don't personally use the app very often, but last weekend I drunkenly shared a number of dark, shaky, and largely unintelligible videos while I was out celebrating a friends' birthday at a club I don't remember the name of in Manhattan's Lower East Side. These make me seem fun and serve as a reminder to others that I have an exciting social life, but my parents won't see them and they won't interrupt my Instagram, which exclusively presents carefully curated, well-framed pictures, which instead serve as reminders to others that I am, in fact, a serious photographer.

Snapchat does, at least in more recent versions of the app, give users the option to save images to their own camera rolls. These are sent into their own little folder. I am surprised to find that I have 85 of them, but I suppose that my use of the app is in bursts: I am most likely keeping myself occupied, either bored at work or intoxicated with friends. The images are mostly humorous in nature, assumedly saved to again experience the hilarity that ensued when we looked on, with equal parts horror and pleasure, at how hideous we were with the other's face

[71] see Appendix, Figure 10, p. 102

pasted on our own.[72] Although they were shared, these images were mostly created for our own personal entertainment.

In my saved folder of Snapchat images, there are also a number of photographs of myself in which I look especially attractive, or stylish, which served as reminders to others that I am especially attractive and stylish, but which I do not post on Instagram or Facebook because doing so would appear too self-involved. On Snapchat, it seems one is permitted as many "selfies" as they so desire without being perceived as vain. These images are saved so that I might, from time to time, privately admire myself.

Noticeably absent from the 85 saved images are landscapes, still lives, and any real aesthetically-considered, "art"-type images. All of the photographs are of people; 46 of them are of or include myself. And this is just what I've chosen to save, for later amusement or admiration.

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Performance, which is undoubtedly a facet of control, is exhibited doubly in the world of Snapchat: we make these images ourselves (and *of* ourselves), performing for the camera, and then we perform them for each other. Though it has always been a method of conveying information, no longer tied to the project of memory, the function of the photograph shifts; it is liberated, made instead into a utilitarian method for communicating with others, like a short-hand or a visual language. As a method of communication, it shows us not what we feel is worth holding onto, but what we feel is important to share with others. In other words, rather than

[72] One of the app's newer features allows users to add a variety of amusing filters over their own faces in real-time. One may add heavy makeup, while others may drastically distort your facial features, cut them out and switch them with those of a friend, or make you look like some odd, digital hybrid between a human and a deer.

making images to, quite literally, hold onto–to keep– we are making images with the intent to share them, to send them to others.

The concern of Snapchat's founders was not with the ability of the user to save, sort, search, and view the images they took, but rather to create, share, and interact with others by using the image as a form of *experience.* In essence, Snapchat functions as a way of saying "too much" to the complete excess of photographs in existence, to the fact that we have so many that we don't know what we have (and it doesn't, at this point, seem feasible to even attempt to find out). We are too busy creating and sharing more, new images, to take the time to sort through the old.

One distinct and significant feature of Snapchat is that images can only be posted on one's "story" or sent as a message[73] in the time that they were taken, meaning that images are always immediate, or shared in real-time. You cannot take a photograph one evening and share it the next. Thus, despite their often-heavy embellishing, Snapchat images give the impression of being more "genuine" than ordinary photographs do, since viewers know they are posted in real-time. This makes them seem unfiltered and like they are direct reflections, rather than recreations of experience.

This notion is reflected in Snapchat's catchphrase: "Life is more fun when you live in the moment!" The idea that pausing to take pictures helps one to "live in the moment" contradicts

[73] A Snapchat "story" is a collection of photographs and videos taken during your day that is posted publicly rather than sent as a message to an individual. This means it can be viewed by all of the people you're connected with in the app. The story expires piece by piece, as each upload reaches its maximum 24-hour lifespan. You can also view who has watched your story, giving you the ability to know exactly who has seen or interacted with the content you share– something not possible through apps like Facebook, which indicate only who has elected to interact with what you share, and not who has simply *seen* it. Alternatively, messages that are sent privately to individuals can sit, unopened, in the recipient's inbox for an indeterminate amount of time, but once opened, will cease to exist after their pre-determined viewing time is reached.

the commonly-held opinion that the preoccupation with taking photographs, rather than just experiencing an event, is the exact *opposite* of living in the moment. I remember hearing about or reading some article that presented criticism over "millennials'" preoccupation with taking pictures: at concerts, museums, and events. People were making pictures, it claimed, in place of actual experience. They were so distracted by trying to take a good photograph that they "missed" the experience.[74]

But with Snapchat, the idea is that we're simply sharing while we're experiencing, in a manner that is less curated and less artificial than most of the ways that we share images with one other.[75] Although we may (quite extensively) embellish the photographs we make though the app, we're not taking our experience during the day and then sitting back in the evening to carefully and selectively recreate it for our social media personas. We are "living in the moment" whilst simultaneously uploading that experience.[76]

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In some sense, a photograph or video that only exists for a pre-determined amount of time could feel more akin to being there, since it can be experienced just once by the viewer. Further, every photograph shared in Snapchat is more like a video, since it plays out over time

[74] Snap, Inc. recently announced the release of "Snapchat Spectacles," rechargeable sunglasses outfitted with a camera that links to your Snapchat account. The glasses can record 115-degree video, and the wearer need only press a button on the glasses to record a 10-second clip, which will then be automatically uploaded to their "story," making them even more immediate and unfiltered.

[75] As if in support of the characterization of Instagram as a place for sharing carefully curated images, the app has recently rolled out its own version of the impermanent image to compete with Snapchat. Users can share temporary pictures and videos, which appear separately of their other photographs as to not disrupt the more "serious" images.

[76] The argument could certainly be made that the ability to take a photograph and share it later actually allows one to be more present in the experience. Snapchat recently released an update that allows users to select and send or post old photos from their camera roll; however, these images are marked as "memories." The real-time quality of Snapchat is central to the idea that by using the app to share images with others, we are not only living in the moment, but that the images being shared are more representative of the moment than a carefully selected and edited image uploaded later would be.

and has a pre-determined life span. The images become about the performance in the moment rather than about the memory. We use social media platforms to perform our lives for one another, and each of us can sit back at the end of a day and watch the day go by again, not as it did for ourselves but as it did for others (or, at least, as they present it). Snapchat makes this performance immediate, since images have to be posted at the time they are taken– essentially making them live updates rather than reports. These images are not taken many times over (you have to delete the first image in order to take a new one– it is not possible to take many and then select the best one); they are not cropped or color-corrected. And, as in life, the images in Snapchat can't be replayed. We cannot take time to ponder, analyze and reflect on them.

Just as the "stakes" of an image were lowered with the onset of the digital camera (users no longer had to, quite literally, pay for each individual image), when an image ceases to exist after it is viewed, it becomes unclear how to locate the stakes of that image, and whether there might be any at all. Where does the desire to take a photograph come from, if it is not in the interest of preservation and memory? These images are not made for photo albums– to some degree they are hardly even made to be looked at. After all, what can really be taken from an image in no more than ten seconds?

To this degree, they are not actually considered *as* photographic images– S.S. asks why he should then bother to look at them. Their function is not concerned with the image itself so much as what is communicated by that image. They serve as quick one-liners: here I am, here is my life.

The anxiety of being photographed is tied up in the permanence of the image– the worry that it will not show us in the way that we want to be seen–the expectation that it will outlive us. With the inherent impermanence of Snapchat, we can recreate the way that we imagine ourselves

and our world many times over, a process involved with our continual self-preservation, with immediate proof. It is a way of asking to be seen without being perceived as too attention-seeking.

Photographs will always likely serve as memorials, but our primary concern may no longer be with memory. We have accumulated a complete excess of photographic information, (indeed, we already had long ago), but the drive to make pictures still remains, indicating that its most primary function is of communication, and not involved instead with remembrance and historicizing. Our primary concern is with reminding others and not with our own remembering.

The discovery of photography brought into question the role of painting, leaving some to question whether the medium had by consequence been rendered "unnecessary." The more productive view, however, was that photography liberated painting, freed it from its function as an illustrative form. It was no longer needed for the purpose of showing figures, objects and events with accuracy– indeed it was much inferior the photographic mechanism in this regard. I hesitate to say (read: deeply detest the notion) that something as infantile, as unsophisticated as Snapchat could have similar meanings for the role of photography, but certainly the idea of an impermanent photograph does– *must*. Not only does it rid us of our anxieties surrounding the seemingly-immortal photograph, but it frees photographic images from their role in memorializing, or at least extends the potential of their use. The impermanent photograph gives us the ability–the right– to forget. It allows us to make casual pictures that communicate their message without the pressure to consider them in regards to the conventions or expectations of the medium. It builds a space and purpose for the images that we desire to make that are not "good": that are not necessarily *about* their being an image, but the camera's ability for efficient

expression. Indeed, it has long been said that more can be said with photographs than with words.

VII.

The Photograph as a Document of Performance: or, nothing is true (so), everything is true

Even though people have been fiddling with the concept that photographic images display the unmediated, uninterrupted truth for nearly as long as the camera has existed– such as Hippolyte Bayard, one of the principle founders of photography and subject of his image entitled, *Self Portrait as a Drowned Man* (1840)– there was a time in which photographs were regarded as largely objective. This notion is still reinforced today in their use as evidence: whether or not we regard them as truthful, we employ them as if they were.

However, the mechanics of the camera are not at all the same as the mechanics of the human eye. Although the camera itself is a neutral machine, the human operator inflects it invariably and without exception. It is and never has been used neutrally.

Moreover, here are some ways in which the camera does not show objective reality:

I. this assertion operates upon the assumption that there is a singular, objective reality to be shown
II. the camera translates the physical world into a two-dimensional representation
III. the camera TRANSLATES
IV. the image REPRESENTS
V. the photographer, who operates the camera, has a particular, distinct way of seeing
VI. though we all might agree that, scientifically speaking, the color red exists and occurs because the red object is not red at all but just reflecting red light and absorbing blue and green, and we all linguistically agree that the object is the color red, does not actually mean

that we all visually experience red in precisely the same way. Sometimes it takes years until people find out that they have had colorblindness all this time

A. in June, a chemist reportedly discovered a new pigment of blue– YInMn blue, the first new blue in over 200 years– which looks the same as any regular blue to me but I suppose I'm not a chemist

B. I've heard that speakers of languages with more words available to describe subtle variances in color can see more colors, so what can be seen depends upon what can be named

VII. the camera is both superior and inferior to the human eye:

A. I have never observed anything that took 1/8000th of a second to occur, start to finish– alternatively, someone told me once that they worked in this strange greenhouse where the tomato plants would grow a foot per day and I don't know whether that's true but I think even if I watched it for the entire day I am not sure that I would witness it getting any taller

B. if our eyes had megapixels apparently there would be 576 of them, (most DSLRs today boast fewer than 50), but eyes don't have megapixels. Anyway they say that if everything were flattened hypothetically you could see the flicker light of a candle in the distance some 30 miles away, not that it could ever be proven since the world is assuredly not flat

VIII. the photographer places a frame around a scene, and holds it exactly there and forever, everything else is gone, and then it is gone too

Even with an awareness of some of the many limits of the photograph in terms of truth-telling, we still regard these images as containing reality, as somehow being indexically connected to their real-world referents. The resounding question then becomes: what is left of the truth?

*

ON DOCUMENTS:

There are three basic ways in which a photograph can be a document (which is understood as a truthful record) depending on the nature of the intervention:

I. To notice something in the world and to intervene only by framing what is seen through the lens of the camera (a necessity of the medium) if it isn't touched, the resulting image is a document. This is true especially if an attempt has been made to show the contents with the same weight that they have in the world, to show them democratically. The "un-altered" image would qualify as photojournalistic, as it wouldn't violate any of the ethical considerations associated with the genre.[77]

II. To notice something in the world– some coincidental arrangements of objects on a table– and touch it, move something in the frame left or right as to make an organized composition, as long as the important meaning of the picture hasn't been altered, it is a document. It is no longer a photojournalistic one, but a document all the same.

[77] The debate about what constitutes photojournalism is ongoing; today, the Associated Press Code of Ethics for Photojournalism begins with the largely problematic: "AP pictures must always tell the truth."

III. The more problematic and interesting framework is that in which something is made in the world, when objects are deliberately constructed and placed before the camera. While neither the image or its goals are journalistic, it is still a document of sorts, though the parameters shift significantly from those outlined above. (Cézanne was a painter, but do you really think he just found all those apples lying there so gracefully?)

The resulting image is a document but it doesn't carry the same meaning as the others. It's a document of a staged scene, but this only changes its implications and not the fact that the contents of the image once EXISTED in the world in the specific way that the photograph records, just as the objects in the "found" images.

Roger Fenton's *Valley of the Shadow of Death* (1855)[78] was a record, not of what it claimed to be, but a record of an event, a second event, a reenacting, all the same,. There are entire websites dedicated to "debunking" photographs: outing them as "fake" images. Fenton's picture was indeed staged– he moved the cannonballs– but the notion that a photograph can be fake is a falsity. Images deemed "fake" are not fake at all, but just show re-enactments or altered scenes, both of which really had to exist as they did in order for the photograph to be made.

ON PERFORMANCE:

"Give me like ten hickeys," I requested, half-jokingly.

Later, he obliged.

[78] see Appendix, Figure 11, p. 103

Later, I rearranged the furniture in the cluttered room which functioned as both a kitchen and living room at the time, and made a number of images of my neck and upper chest.

I wore a scarf for most of the following week and borrowed a turtleneck from a friend. My housemates laughed at me, but with a fondness at it all. I got my film back later that week, pleased with the results.

The once-deep red marks faded eventually, and it was no longer embarrassing when someone asked me whether the figure pictured in the image tacked to the wall was me, since it no longer was.[79]

There are performances important to the photograph that both precede it and take place in front of the camera. There are three basic ways in which photographs can serve as records of performance. The first two are as follows:

I. "NOT THE ART": Photographs can record performances– document their occurrence. Images that portray theater or performance art indeed show performances, but these photographs are not the *result* of the performance– they are not the "art" itself. While often striking, they serve simply as records of the event,

[79] see Appendix, Figure 12, p. 104

useful after the fact for referential purposes. In the case of still images taken during a play, the picture is, simply, not the point.[80]

II. "THE ART": Photographs can serve as records of performances that are done only for the camera. These performances are not intended to have lives outside of the photograph. Sculptures that are made only to be photographed, which are then often disassembled as they are not meant to be seen as three-dimensional objects, also fall into this category.[81] Photographs in this category may show the performance– the act itself– or they may show the remnants of the happening.

So the pictures I made are a document or record of the performance–of wet, warm mouth on pale, papery skin– but they are ambiguous documents: they tell only that the marks were made but not how or why. I do not know whether it matters to you if they were made for the camera. Would you think it was better? A relief? Or would you think worse of me that I chose to subject myself to it? Would you think me a liar or in bad taste?

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[80] In 1974, Serbian artist Marina Abramovic staged a six-hour performance called *Rhythm 0*. For the duration of the performance, Abramovic stood still– the "object"– while the audience was invited to choose from 72 objects on a table to be "used" on the artist as desired. According to art critic Thomas McEvilley, present at the time, the performance began tamely: someone turned her around. Another offered her a rose. By the third hour her clothes had been cut from her body with razor blades; eventually her hand was wrapped around a gun loaded with a single bullet, causing a fight to break out amongst the audience. In "restagings" of the performance, such as that at the Tate, replications of the original 72 objects are displayed on a table while 69 slides are projected onto the wall above. While they are powerful in their own right, the photographs in this case serve to historicize the original performance, to make it available to audiences beyond those present for six hours in 1974. They are useful in remembering the event, but they are not the work itself.

[81] Artist Sara VanDerBeek is known in part for her photographs involving various sculptures and assemblages she has created, which sometimes include photographs or images then re-photographed as part of her sculptures. These works are often destroyed after the photographs are made. VanDerBeek also exhibits works of sculpture, consciously deciding when the objects should exist in three-dimensions or as images. These photographs are not made in order to remember the sculptural works that VanDerBeek has made: they are the works themselves, in their final intended form.

What if the marks were made in a bad way– if we weren't all laughing about them?

Or what if they look like they were made in a bad way but they weren't, I just made them for the image, would you think that was sort of fucked up of me to do that? Would you find the ambiguity amusing in the slightest?

A better example, perhaps: another photograph made around the same time, this one of bruises and cuts, now healing, the blood dried brittle and dull, delicate lines drawn in red, soft printed blues. All limbs in a line, unintelligible, skin all washed out.[82]

Whether they were made like those marks in Nan Goldin's pictures in Ballad of Sexual Dependency, *(which of course were undeniably violent documents of real abuse, and no one was laughing), or if I asked someone to help me make them on purpose, the marks are exactly the same. They hurt the same amount but they mean something different. (The sport of rugby inevitably just leaves you a little beat up, sometimes.)*

I am not sure how it matters if the markings were made for the camera, if they were made innocently or brutally, but I feel deeply that it does, they are the same but they are unquestionably not the same–

Intervention occurs in the world, in the body, whether it is purposeful and whether it is meaningful or not. The camera intervenes, in so far as the way that it frames the world is a kind of intervention, and framing is an innate function of its mechanics.

The preparations for the photograph–the making of the marks on skin–while not art in itself, was a performance.

[82] see Appendix, Figure 13, p. 105

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Lastly, there is the way in which every photograph shows a performance because things change upon being looked at:

III. Everything that the camera can capture, everything you can imagine is a performance, in so far as things exist in the precise way that the image shows them for just a moment and never again. There is a significant and perceptible difference between a photograph that functions as a record of a performance and a photograph that shows a record of a performance because all photographs must. The performance is for the camera, as everything changes, even if imperceptibly so, when being looked at.[83] The camera only describes what's there, it doesn't touch it. But even if the photographer doesn't touch it either, it is changed, since the sound of the shutter is an action and must then cause a reaction. As Barthes writes: "I transform myself in advance into an image.

[83] There's an episode of *Sex and the City* in which Carrie (native New Yorker, central character, narrator, sex-columnist extraordinaire) describes the anxiety she feels around her partner: "I'm not like me," she agonizes, "I'm, like, Together Carrie. I wear little outfits: Sexy Carrie and Casual Carrie. Sometimes I catch myself actually *posing*. It's just–it's exhausting." When being looked on by another, Carrie transforms into archetypes of herself, of a thirty-something woman living, working and dating in New York City. The same type of performance happens with the image, but such is the case even without the presence of the figure of the photographer. That is: whether someone is actually looking doesn't matter. It's Foucault's Panopticon, it's the security camera that stopped working long ago and no one has bothered to fix; we self-modify our behaviors, we change, we perform, and whether it is only the machine– the camera– that is looking, there is the assumption of an operator. The camera's presence is the only machine for which this is true, the only thing that changes us on even the chance alone that it is active, that it could capture us forever.

The photograph is always a document, then, and what it documents is inevitably a performance. Every photograph is for the photograph.

A photograph is kind of like a diary because you know it's real since it has to be "real": I had to be there, I had to make the picture, the things in the image– *they* exist without qualification or question, or at least they did. They are both documents of performances.

In a diary, only certain things get written down, and those details come to represent the whole thing, just as a photograph acts as an erasure. What is selected to be recorded becomes what is remembered; that which is not written down and that which falls outside of the camera's frame are as if they did not exist, like the tree falling in a forest.

Even though what's written or photographed is real, as the reader or viewer, you don't get to know how much is real, exactly, since you can't know what's true because I don't tell you (because I don't know, because I can't know) exactly how much is there and how much I made up, even though I didn't know I made it up since the way I see things isn't actually and completely what's there to see but it is the only way I can see, and so it is, actually and completely, the only thing that matters.

(In my high school psychology class, my teacher told us that our brains essentially just fill in the blanks of memory and so how do I know what happened and what I just filled in and does it even matter if it's all the same, if I made all of it up.)

The kind of truth in a photograph is one that is often false, but it is still the best thing that I have. Every story has a frame– every picture, every poem– but stories are all we have and so

they have to count. Images are stories: every object is typified, a stand-in, a symbol. Photographs can only describe facts, they cannot tell of their nature, their histories of being made.

The thing that the photograph shows *happened*. The objects looked that way in the world–they must have– and so the image still functions as a document– even though I know it always shows performance, which are by nature pretend. For however ingenuine, it still happened in the world, even if only for the camera. It tells– or at least it claims and tries, desperately– to tell you the truth about the way that something was. (And even if it doesn't, it still tells you that IT WAS).

For the photograph exclaims, ceaselessly, I AM, I AM, I AM–

VIII.

László Moholy-Nagy's "New Vision" and Drone-Imaging

László Moholy-Nagy was a prominent Hungarian photographer, painter, and sculptor during the Surrealist movement. Much of his photographic work involved the making of abstract, geometric images that often spoke to the intersection between technology and art.

In 1928, whilst acting as an instructor in the metal shop at the Bauhaus school in Germany, Moholy-Nagy made a particular image in the style of much of his work from this time called *Berlin Radio Tower.*

The image is black and white and made using the gelatin silver process, which by this time had largely pronounced its dominance over other photographic printing techniques. While the title of the image is descriptive, matter-of-fact, and suggests at a document of sorts, the image itself is much beyond this. The image is not simply a photograph of a radio tower (if any image is ever a photograph of *just* what it pictures): the concern is first with its visual structure and second with the fact that it is a radio tower. While the tower itself stands as a symbol of the present age of technology, the photograph is not about the radio tower at all.

The photograph is taken from the top of the tower and looks at the scene below from a birds-eye view. The tower takes up more than a third of the space of the image, receding into the distance, ending slightly left and above the center of the frame. It is something like looking at a one-point perspective down a street, except that instead of looking out at the horizon we are looking to the ground. Everything in the image becomes flattened against this surface: the white umbrellas at a café below read as circles, the streets as a grid. The shadow of the radio tower, likely extended dramatically by a late afternoon light, has an equal weight in the image as the objects (such as the umbrellas) which have a physical weight in the world. This is due both to the

way in which the camera democratizes that which it is made to look at, as well as the use of the birds-eye perspective, which has the effect of nearly making the various structures in the image appear to be on one surface. The image is disorienting in that the perspective is somehow both flattened and extended simultaneously. If the viewer does not immediately recognize the forms as being grounded– worldly– the radio tower can appear just as a flat construction of intersecting lines in space. The lines made by the shadow of the radio tower and the lines of the streets are not distinguishable in the image itself, but only in our knowledge of what they are in the world: the inescapable awareness of the fact that one is a solid object and one is a transitory projection.

Berlin Radio Tower does not clearly declare its subject; rather, Moholy-Nagy appears to be concerned with the whole of the geometric form created both by the vantage point and light of the scene, and ultimately, with the interaction between these forms. As Moholy-Nagy describes in an essay regarding his views on photography: "Here the separate picture loses its identity as such and becomes a detail of assembly, an essential structural element of the whole which is the thing itself."[84] But the viewer, inevitably, *does* recognize the scene, and consequently, the location of the photographer. The perception of depth in the image is greatly influenced by this knowledge. We know that the image must have depth not because we perceive it as such, but because every photograph necessarily points back to the photographer: we imagine how it was made and where its maker stood. The two ways of seeing continually conflict, however: the issue of flatness is not settled. The image cannot be viewed either as a straight representation of the scene, nor can it be viewed as a completely flat, geometric abstraction. For the viewer, the result

[84] Moholy-Nagy, László. "From Pigment to Light" reprinted in Goldberg, p. 345.

is one of a "new experience of space" which "almost amounts to a psychological transformation of our eyesight."[85]

In viewing the image, everything can be broken down into smaller and smaller geometric shapes, all contained inside of one another, distinguished by their tonal values. The image is broken up by darks and lights into quadrants, and when seen from a distance, it would likely first be perceived as a flat collage of sorts: perhaps a photomontage or photogram. It is only upon further investigation that the viewer can begin to sort the contents of the image into familiar, worldly spaces, as Moholy-Nagy not only makes use of an inhuman perspective, but also arranges the picture as such that the shadows give "tangible shape to light though in a transposed and …almost abstract form."[86]

Moholy-Nagy called the kinds of abstractions that he made, either through employing various de-familiarization techniques in "straight" photographs, or by making photomontages and photograms, a "new vision." His "vision" was one founded in the culture of technology of the 20th century. He believed that photography could create a way of seeing that the human eye was not capable of. In his biographical text, *From Pigment to Light*, Moholy-Nagy explained that, "a new vision could be created only when photography was practiced for its own inherent qualities, not as an imitation of painting."[87]

The new vision would employ a number of what Moholy-Nagy described as "de-familiarization techniques," including, but surely not limited to: tilts, extreme angles, and microscopic close-ups, all utilized in an attempt to confuse and complicate habits of perception.

[85] ibid, p. 345.
[86]Marien, Mary Warner. *Photography: A Cultural History*, 3rd ed, p. 246-7.
[87] ibid, p. 245

He anticipated that new cameras would allow for the operator to have more control in manipulating perspective.

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The earliest cameras were not attached to the human eye in the literal sense of the word: they did not have viewfinders. For some, like the view-camera, it was a functional necessity that the photographer not actually be viewing the image in the moment it was being taken. (Or even those few moments before, as after a composition was made, the film holder had to be inserted, thereby blocking the ground glass and making the photographer look to the scene being photographed, rather than what the camera was seeing, to determine when to press the shutter.)

Moholy-Nagy's "new vision" was concerned, among other things, with removing the human eye from the camera's way of seeing. As with *Berlin Radio Tower*, there has been a long history of images made from an aerial perspective– the first taken from a tethered balloon in 1858 by Nadar. Until relatively recently, however, these cameras were still known to be attached to a person, who was, assumedly, in an airplane or looking down at the world from a high vantage point. Though they did not represent the world in the ways in which we are conditioned to seeing it, the knowledge that they were taken by someone– that someone existed behind the lens, operating the camera– was present.

When we look upon an image, we are also involved in imagining what is taking place behind it: where the photographer stands, how she is making the picture. (Apparently, photographer Alfred Stieglitz said that one should look at photographs upside-down in order to evaluate their structure, as this was the best way to divide from the recognition of the subject, since we look at it and you see it differently because we know what it was in the world, and we

turn back and we know where the photographer was, and we reminisce in our imaginations about what is beneath the surface.

Berlin Radio Tower is intentionally rotated and instead oriented vertically, placing the tower on the right side, in what is likely an attempt by Moholy-Nagy to further remove the viewer, it takes longer to recognize the scene because it is more difficult to locate the photographer. But indeed, the scene is still eventually recognized. In the photographic image, the viewer can never fully remove themselves from what is shown.**)**

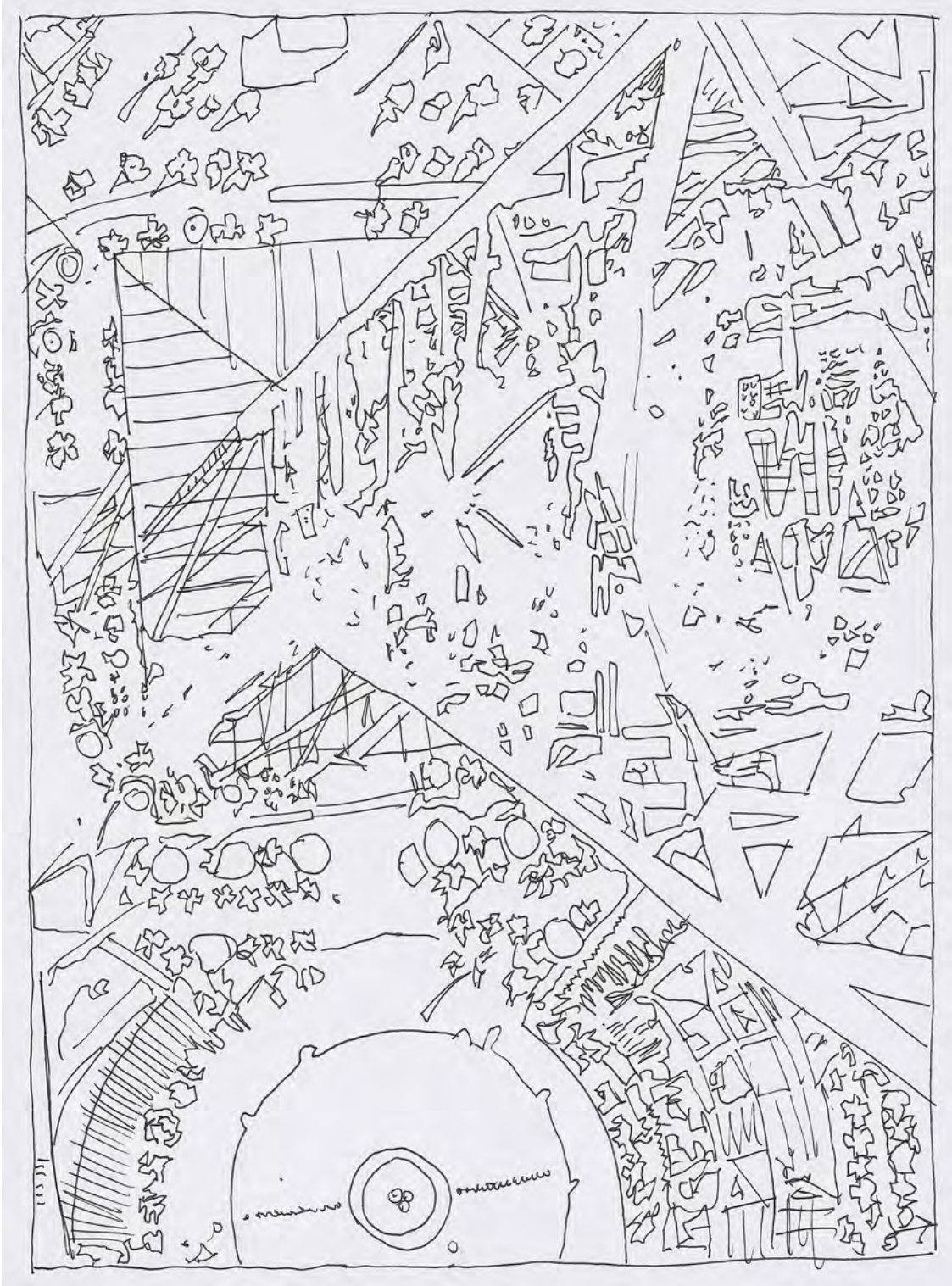
With the onset of drone technologies and aerial reconnaissance imaging, however, how we schematize what is happening behind the camera– who is there, where they are standing– is experiencing a shift. The drone operator experiences an extension of their sight, an exaggeration or inflation of their experience, as they maneuver the camera. The drone can also feasibly make photographs where it is impossible for anyone to stand– where there is no ground-based structure. The resulting picture no longer exists as a method of proof– it no longer declares that the maker was *there,* or works to confirm the existence of the photographer. The photographer artificially experiences a point in time in a place that they did not experience in a physical manner, however maintaining some autonomy as they are in control of what the drone sees.

Not only is the camera no longer an attached extension of the human eye, but the picture-maker, operating the drone as it flies and sees the world from above, only ever sees and experiences a picture in two dimensions. The photographer cannot alternate between viewing the scene in the camera and in the real world to determine where the frame should be placed or how to best make the picture. Some level of choice is removed from the operation– as in Google's "Street View"– as the operator doesn't know what the camera will pick up. The photographer's

view is limited to the edges of the frame, and the entire picture must shift for the operator to assess what else is there.

Thus, even if the photographs look similar, an aerial photograph made by a photographer in a plane or at a high vantage point, and an image made with a (human-operated) drone are fundamentally different images in the way that they refer back to the world. The first is still tied to a human-centric way of seeing because the photographer must be physically present to make the picture, but the second is not. Drone-imaging can be regarded, then, as a new "new vision."

Moholy-Nagy, *Berlin, Radio Tower (Berlin, Funkturm)*, 1928-36, Gelatin silver print



Berlin Radio Tower Tracing

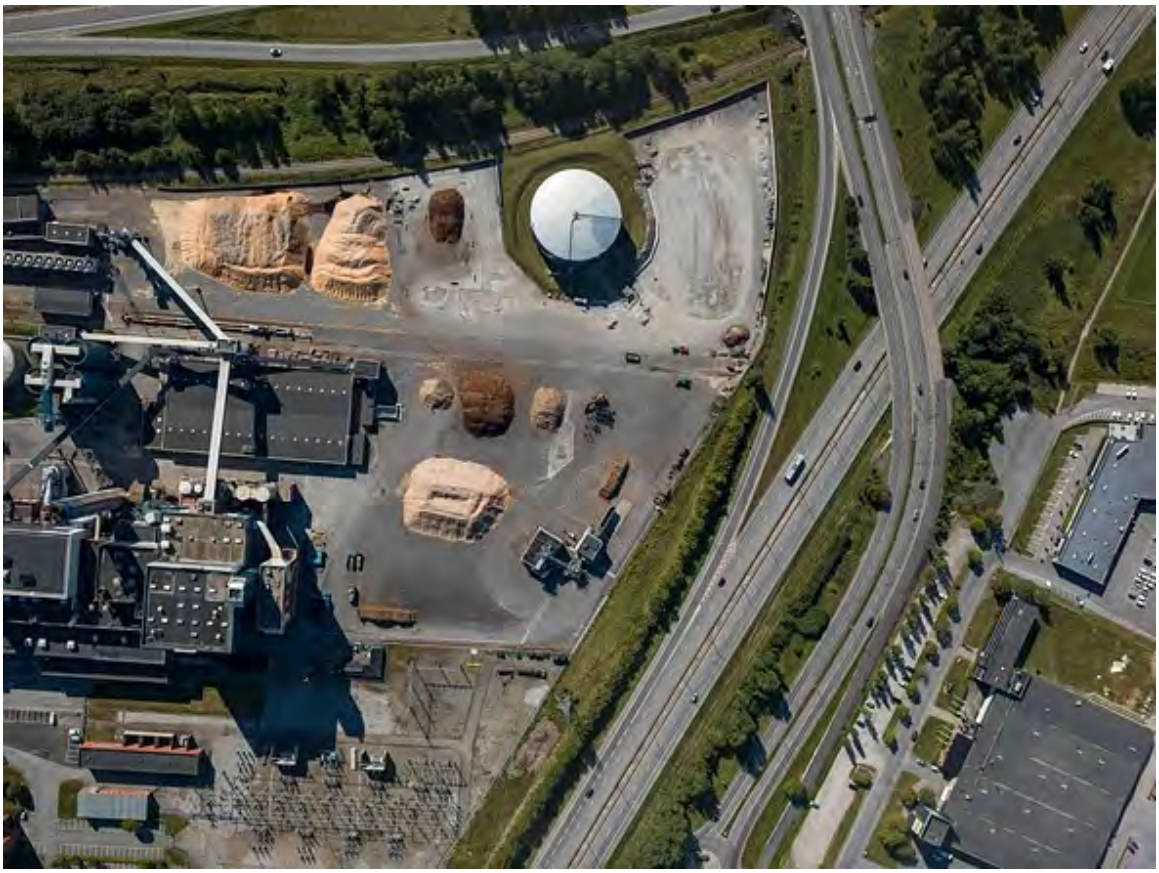
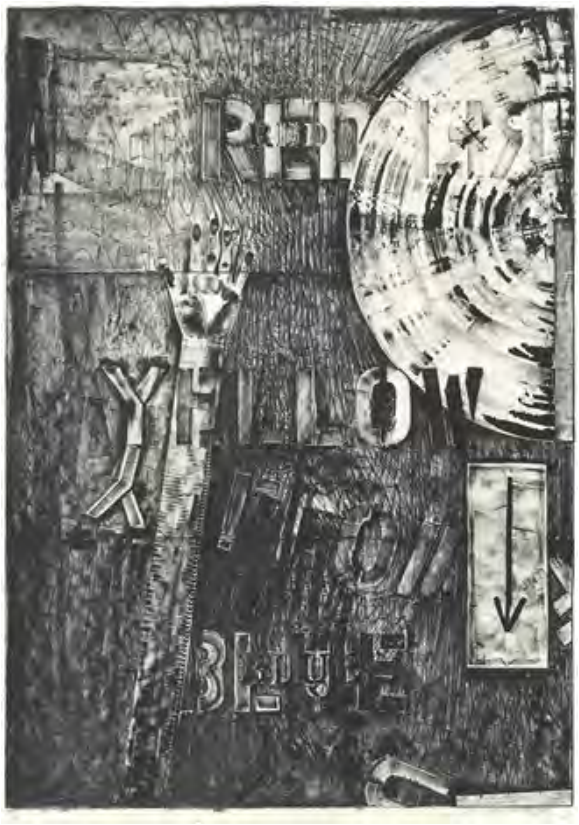


Image from Hasselblad and DJI’s M600, 50MP medium-format drone kit

Emmet Gowin, *Old Hanford City Site and the Columbia River, Hanford Nuclear Reservation, near Richland, Washington, 1986.* Gelatin silver print.

Emmet Gowin, *Copper Ore Tailing, Globe, Arizona, 1988*. Toned gelatin silver print.



Jasper Johns, *Land's End*, 1978, lithograph, on Kurotani paper

Google image search results using Jasper Johns's *O* from *Color Numerals 0-9*.

IX. AFTERWORD

A LOVE POEM FOR PICTURES, AND ALSO FOR YOU, MY LOVE

ON JUNE 24 I WROTE that
for all of O'Hara's talk of impermanence, the best way I can think of to say is that
you make me feel that all of this
(whatever it is that this is, if it even is something)
is both very short
and very long, lingering,
at the same time I expect
that I'll never be finished

what needs to be seen? (everything, everything)

sweet boy, on the day of the summer solstice, and the strawberry-fruit colored moon,
(which my own, unassisted eyes do not see well
which I will never see again, even though I will never see
any ordinary moon the same over
again)
Anyway, I remembered that show I wanted to see at the Met
I wanted to see it with you but most likely I won't
it's only unfinished works so I know there won't be any photographs

"nothing repeats"
except for this, in itself, from somewhere that I don't recall,
! of course it does

There are certain things that I know that I don't know
how I know,
so maybe you sang it in a song-story or
maybe I saw a picture of it once

is it still a history if you don’t know where it came from?
it’s terrible to stare at that backlit blue before bed but I do
mostly to read about secret government facilities and data leaks
except later I can’t remember where I learned it
but pictures have weight, even if they’re just imaginary digital pixels
produced by some series of zeros and ones

but I wonder whether I’ve already told you the same stories
if I’ve asked you the same questions over and forgotten the answers
or I just want to hear them again, anew,
the kind of things that a picture won’t remember, won’t remind me

already I feel missing parts, so I write:
AUGUST 22, past midnight you declared we would sleep in my new apartment, finally so
we loaded the car and unloaded again two minutes away,
surprisingly the best night of sleep in days especially
because the mattress deflated as we slept, we sunk
together in the middle toward morning

time seems cumulative, at least
I hope that it all adds up to something
it’s weird isn’t it that as I get older I’ll collect more stories to tell
but then I’ll tell the same ones
increasingly, having forgotten
I am not sure where things go when they go away.

and I think you will tire of these repeated pieces—
as if i were a tiny poem that you would repeat to yourself for a while and then forget.

what does looking back look like?

eyes have memory, like if you look at the sun too long and still see it ringing when you close them, but the camera does not remember

someday I will forget everything
but the body remembers, reminds me
and I am still always learning to live in,
to affirm to love the fact of my smallness
still always learning that I am also

ALLOWED TO
TAKE UP SPACE

mostly I feel resilient since
technically I have survived everything that has ever happened to me
then I found out that figure skaters have to be really careful
if you cut this one part of your leg you'll bleed out in like three seconds,
but I am not a figure skater

once an x-ray dated my bones as at least two years advanced, I think it's slowed
since then, but who knows about that
butterfly part of the body–
Anyway I've heard that it regenerates itself entirely every seven years
so that's exciting, again I am
here at the beginning but already so tired

will parts of me expire like baby teeth? and what happens to us when we tire of ourselves, since the distance is fixed?

he said:
photographs have to nurture the things most people hide away,
that they have to love everything they photograph
even if they don't really
love it at all

well I like the way that you know your way
around these back roads where I'm probably just a visitor, your roots are so deep and it's far too soon to wonder if you'd go with me but I do wonder, anyway

I don't like my photograph taken but I wish you'd make more pictures of me
then I would know for sure that you'd like to keep me, always

(every poem) every picture is a fragment, since it says exactly what it means but not fully so
except for Frost asked whether he should he say it worse
so now I am writing you a poem.

I just know that I need to hold it, not as it was but as its image.
Every photograph is for the photograph
and you as you are and as you ever were

everything is cyclical, in pictures I return
turn back to the world what it gives to me, something good and heavy
here I am just
making things into stories so that they become our own story

X: Appendix

On Photographs as Necessary Fragments, which (regrettably) weren't in that show at the Met

Figure 1: Andy Warhol, *Do It Yourself (Violin)*, 1962, Synthetic polymer paint and Prestype on canvas

Figure 2: Jasper Johns, *Target*, 1971 (dated 1970 on sheet)

Figure 3: Jackson Pollock, *Number 28, 1950*, 1950, Enamel on canvas

Figure 4: Roman Opalka, *OPALKA 1965/1- ∞, Détail 993460-1017875*, 1965-2011. Acrylic on canvas.

Figure 5: Janine Antoni, *Lick and Lather*, 1993-1994, Chocolate and Soap

Figure 6: Adolph Menzel, *Altar in a Baroque Church*, 1880-1890, Oil and blue pencil on oak

Figure 7: Anton Raphael Mengs, *Portrait of Mariana de Silva y Sarmiento, Duquesa de Huescar (1740-1784)*, 1775, Oil on Panel

Figure 8: Installation shot of the exhibition, “Parallel of Life and Art,” 1953

Figure 9: Anonymous postmortem photograph

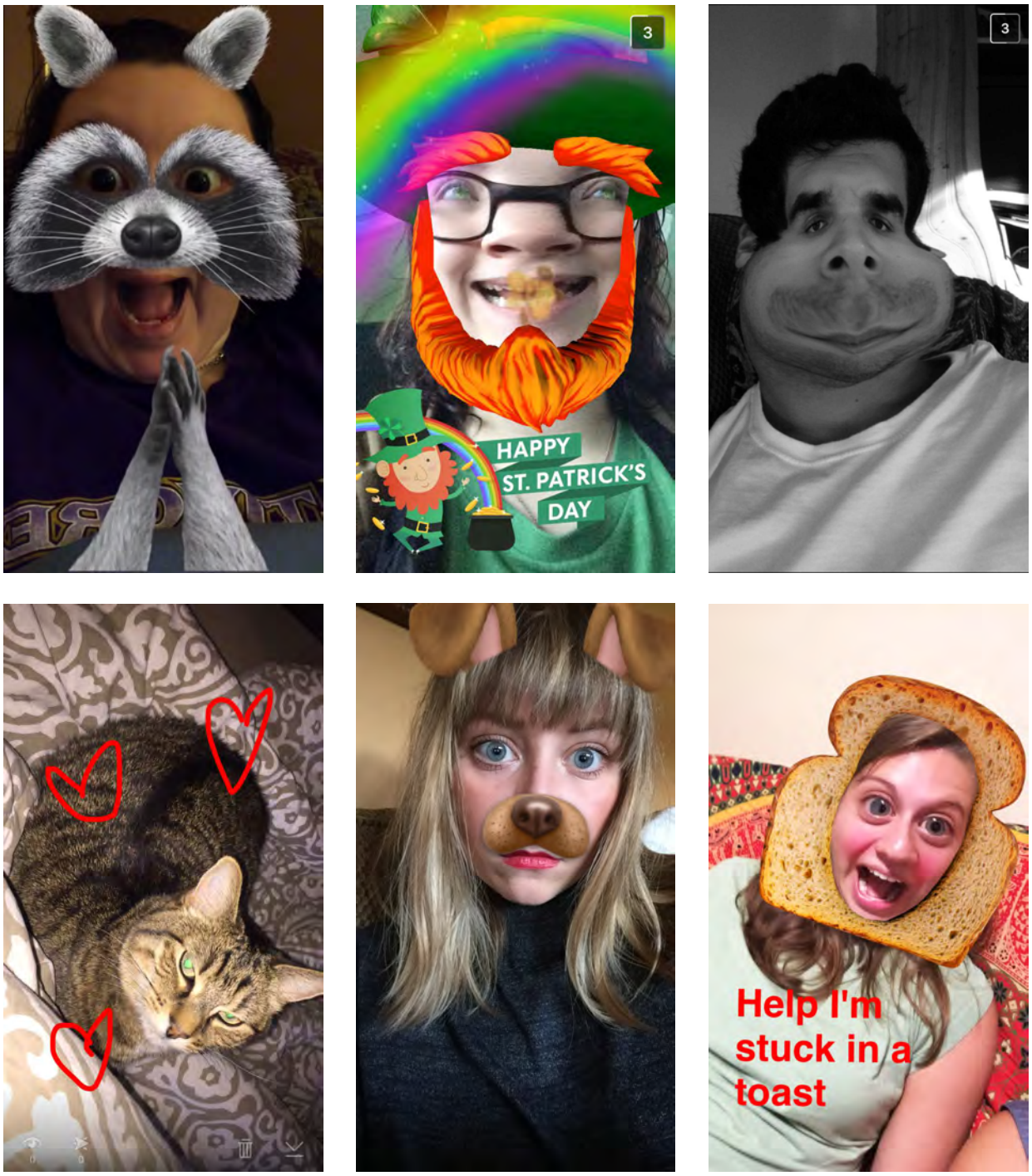


Figure 10: Snapchat screen shots

Figure 11: Roger Fenton, *Valley of the Shadow of Death*, April 23, 1855, Salter paper print

Figure 12: Erin O’Leary, 2015.

Figure 13: Erin O’Leary, 2015.

XI: References

In the spirit of "art that tells you where it came from," the following is an inevitably incomplete list of works that were or were not referenced explicitly in these pages, but which have equally contributed to its existence:

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*
Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*
Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author"
Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*"
Susan Sontag, *On Photography*
Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation*
Clarice Lispector, *The Hour of the Star*
John Ruskin, *The Lamp of Beauty*
Oscar Wilde, *The Critic as Artist*
Frank O'Hara, "Favorite Painting in the Metropolitan"
Frank O'Hara, "Why I am Not a Painter"
Frank O'Hara, "Having a Coke with You"
John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*
John Berger, *Another Way of Telling*
Kaja Silverman, *The Miracle of Analogy or, The History of Photography, Part 1*
László Moholy-Nagy, *From Pigment to Light*
Walther Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"
Stephen Shore, *The Nature of Photographs*
Ann Lauterbach, *The Nancy Book*
Marvin Heifermann, *Photography Changes Everything*
Jean Genet, *Fragments of the Artwork*
Robert Adams, *Why People Photograph*
etc

XII: Acknowledgements

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With love, all the rest.