NEW GHOST

ENTERTAINMENT—ENTITLED

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Exhibition
David Askevold, Stephan Dillemuth, Paul Gellman, Frauke Gust, Judith Hopf, Annette Kelm, Alice Könitz, Cristóbal Lehyt, Julie Lequin, Marriage (James Tsang/Math Bass), Reza Monahan, Arthur Ou, Katrin Pesch, Fredrik Strid, Stephanie Taylor, Michaela Wünsch
Or Gallery Vancouver, Canada, October 14 - November 11, 2006

Film program curated by Madeleine Bernstorff
Films by David Askevold and Shohei Imamura as part of the exhibition
Films by Fredrick Marx, Ken Jacobs, Joyce Wieland and Karlheinz Martin with music selection by Julian Göthe
Pacific Cinémathèque, Vancouver, Canada, October 14, 2006, 7:30pm

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I came across the title for this project, probably an announcement for a magic lantern or phantasmagoria show, in a book about media history on the reproduction of a poster by the Royal Polytechnic Institute in London, an institution devoted to technical and scientific education. These public events, complex specter-shows with great entertainment value date back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. They came to popularity exactly during the post-Enlightenment attempt to ban the supernatural from everyday life, thus mediating ambiguously between rational and irrational imperatives, and thereby relocating the uncanny via optical illusion into the realm of human experience.

New Ghost Entertainment-Entitled developed out of the research for the film The Uninvited (2005, video, 15 min, in collaboration with Judith Hopf), which uses ghosts to address current political events and their representation in the media.
The Uninvited takes place in various locations in the ghostly world of Berlin's "New Center" - a setting that needs to be kept under surveillance and secured constantly. The camera follows a family on an ordinary day through different places of transmission - places that serve the mediation of news or so-called information.
In this environment two ghosts appear who can be seen as personifications of social unease.

Further research brought into play mediumistic practices and ghost stories as both a specific kind of news transmission and a particular historic example of the interweaving of ghosts and politics. The wave of spiritualism in Europe and America in the second half of the nineteenth century can be seen in direct relation to modern reproduction and communication technologies such as photography, telegraphy and wireless radio. Seen from today's point of view, a phenomenon like spirit photography shows the overlap between the question of being a witness and photographic documentation. In its own time Modern Spiritualism was recognized as both an experimental science and a popular religious movement, with close links to political reform movements in the United States such as abolitionism and the early women's rights movement. At the same time nineteenth century ghost stories could function as a vehicle to disseminate feminist or utopian ideas. Here the trope of the ghost can stand as a symbol for invisibility and the personification or staging of the unspeakable.

Today, again, ghosts are in great demand: Not only have they haunted the theoretical discourse, most famously in the writings of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida - numerous dissertations and publications from literary and film scholars as well as the fields of postcolonial, queer and gender studies look at the social meaning of specters and phantasms from multiple perspectives. Also within the realm of art and filmmaking ghosts have experienced a renaissance, and they appear frequently in exhibition titles, articles, films and TV shows.

This led to the idea to bring together writers and artists, whose works seem to conjure up ghosts as a point of reference. A film program curated by Madeleine Bernstorff presents films in a new ghost mood. It's about another world, specters being symptoms of unresolved relationships, of disorder and injustice. New Ghost Entertainment-Entitled poses the question of whether the engagement with spiritualism and ghost stories can be a contemporary approach to invent - or reinvent - artistic and political forms of expression and if ghosts as a medium can add a dimension to the critical engagement within social and political realities.

A variety of specters make their appearance these days and often they seem to go hand in hand: The specter of security, the specter of oil shortage, the revival of nationalism, the new right and an increasingly neoconservative stance regarding international politics to name but a few. At the same time military and geopolitical phantasms of power determine the current political debate. While it is not the goal of the project to give a full account of these complex problems, these frightening social developments provide the context for New Ghost Entertainment-Entitled.

Katrin Pesch, September 2006

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Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America

Molly McGarry

Ghosts of Futures Past examines nineteenth-century American Spiritualism, a popular religious practice conducted through communication with the spirits of the dead. It traces a spiritual movement born of a particular historical moment, yet the questions of love and loss that animate the project have been persistently revivified in the contemporary public sphere. While Spiritualism may appear at first glance to be a fringe religion that rose and fell in the United States during the nineteenth century, this history entwines fundamental problematics of mourning and memory to our own.

The political predicament of how grief might be given collective voice took on ethical urgency during the height of the U.S. AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s, a time in which many of us wanted desperately to conjure the dead, to return those to the living who had left too soon. For AIDS activists in the age of Reagan and Bush I, to call forth the dead was a demand not only for treatment and research funding but also an insistence that these Presidents utter the word publicly and thus acknowledge the massive casualty that dominant culture denied as its own. The public silence in response to this disease rendered those communities living with HIV and AIDS as socially dead; activists' deployment of the dead as a call for speech and action was not merely a practice of remembrance but a praxis to resuscitate a moribund nation, one which was willing to excise parts of its own body politic. As cultural practice, carrying coffins through the streets of lower Manhattan or dumping funereal ashes on the White House lawn was a performance, in Douglas Crimp's words, of mourning as militancy. More than a demonstration of grief, these and other public events were designed to intervene in the highly mediated relationship between mourning and politics in contemporary culture. Central questions that ground this project were theorized and articulated out of this time: What is the relationship between mourning and militancy? How might a single death be transformed from an individual occurrence into an occasion for collective praxis? How can the dead speak through the living as something other than the haunting, seething presence of absence?

The political terrain in which these questions might be asked changed radically post-9/11. In the wake of the tragedy of September 11th, the relationship between politics and mourning was forced to the public forefront as an inescapable, national concern. In contrast to the years of media silence and inattention in the face of the catastrophic and increasingly global AIDS pandemic, this attack produced an immediate outpouring of grief and remembrance. Beginning on September 15, 2001, The New York Times published memorials and photographs of those killed in the World Trade Towers. Times reporters initially culled these portraits from the handmade missing posters that papered the city for months. Termed "portraits of grief," the obituaries ran daily through the year, training the eyes of the nation on the specificities of each individual life lost. Hundreds of newspaper articles celebrated the everyday heroism of many who died that day at Ground Zero, the Pentagon, and aboard Flight 93, from firefighters and office workers to airline passengers and crew. Biographies and remembrances flooded from publishers, offering stories and faces to give flesh to the statistics of mass death. Let's Roll, the national bestseller among these books, was written by the widow of Todd Beamer, a passenger on United Flight 93, the hijacked flight that did not hit its target because the passengers and crew fought back against the terrorists, downing the aircraft in the process. Beamer's purported last known words, "Let's roll," became a battle cry, taken up in speeches by President George W. Bush as a tag-line for masculine bravery and a new twenty-first-century form of militancy as retribution. While the American nation mourned it also readied itself for war.

After the almost immediate offensive in Afghanistan, the Bush Administration channeled the momentum of war and sustained public grief over 9/11 into an invasion of Iraq. As war dead were returned from the battlefront to the United States, the government banned news coverage and photographs of flag-draped coffins. This policy of representational blackout stands in sharp contrast to every U.S. war since the Civil War, in which viewing the coffins of fallen soldiers was both a ritual of collective mourning and a means of marshalling support for the nation's military cause. If this tradition of honoring the living nation through the literal containment of the dead already substitutes casket for casualty and drapery for death, the disappearance of this ritual indicates a current national anxiety about how mourning might be mobilized to constitute or reconstitute a nation at war.

I begin with these three very different moments from recent U.S. history to index a range of political strategies for deploying loss, mourning, and memory. [...] Juxtaposing the historically specific public forms of collective mourning associated with the late twentieth-century AIDS epidemic, September 11th, and the Iraq War reveals not only distinct and divergent manifestations of collective grief but also the ways in which, as Judith Butler has argued, only "certain forms of grief become nationally recognized and amplified, whereas other losses become unthinkable and ungrievable."[1]

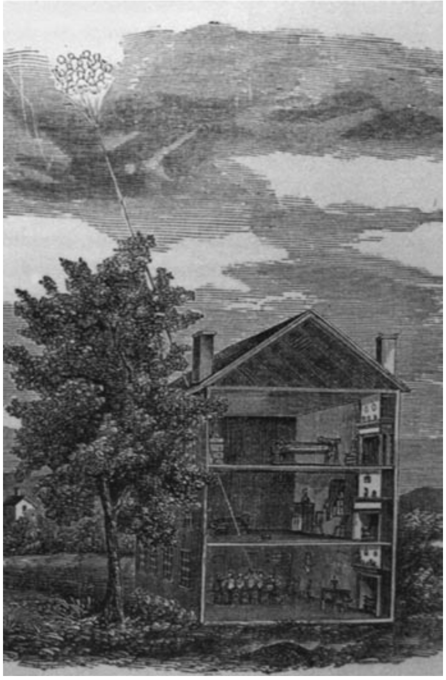
Some dead get to stand in for the nation while others are disavowed and denied as part of the body politic.

In the wake of death, massive death on a national or global scale or the often private and lonely grief attending the death of a loved one, mourners have developed historically specific performances and practices that refuse the encryption of loss, bringing the dead into an active engagement with the living. Recently, a growing number of scholars have insisted, seemingly counterintuitively, on the very productive possibilities of loss in reconstituting both an ethical relationship to the dead and to history in our, at once, necrophilic and necrophobic culture. Yet despite this renewed interest in the politics of mourning, dominant scholarship has largely followed a narrative, first charted by Philippe Ariès in a series of classic studies, in which mourning as shared, community practice declines and the dead are displaced from the public sphere to the private by the advent of the twentieth century. Commenting on the loss of rites of collective mourning, one writer notes that it is the absence of these practices "rather than their presence that has merited scrutiny."[2]

In these accounts, mourning declines for a variety of reasons. In particular, technology, both in Ariès's formulation and in critiques of it, is given the magical power to banish both mourning and death, and seemingly community, from the world. Critic Alessia Ricciardi counters Ariès's thesis of privatization and decline and instead notes the "displacement" of mourning "from the sphere of ritual or sacred activity to the larger context of society in general, which now primarily consists in mass culture."[3] It seems that if the public sphere is haunted at all, it is now primarily through spectral reemergences in representation: The photograph keeps company with death by marking stopped time; the flickering film screens the phantasm of technology. Implicit in these arguments is a modern mystification of technology that takes place as a sublimation of what refuses demystification from a past world of sacred ritual. The ghost has become not just the ghost in the machine but the ghost of the machine.

Here I would ask whether these discussions are not actually haunted by the unexamined assumption that our secular moment has, or should have, left the sacred and the supernatural in the past. As secular subjects, we are no longer literally haunted, but we seem haunted by the idea of haunting. Spectral metaphors of ghosts and hauntings have been particularly compelling to film and literary scholars as well as social theorists in the last quarter century. Spectrality has become a means to explain the social status of marginalized subjects as well as a powerful way of understanding memory and identity. What is lost in using the imagery of specters to depict, among other things, alienated subjectivity and an alienated relationship to history is an alternative possibility realized in an historical moment in which communing with ghosts offered the potential for affective connection across time, personal transformation, and utopic political change. In Avery Gordon's words: "Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as transformative recognition." In taking the lived experience of being haunted seriously, one arrives at an historical appreciation for "a very particular way of knowing."[4]

In the nineteenth-century, many Americans took literally the possibility of conjuring the dead. Gathering around séance



„Spiritual Telegraph", from: Andrew Jackson Davis, The Present Age and Inner Life, 1853

tables in darkened rooms, Spiritualists reenchanted technologies of modernity - from spiritual telegraphy to spectral photography - for spiritual contact and connection. Unlike other religions in which faith was a necessary prerequisite for belief, Spiritualists asked only that one become an "investigator," attend a séance under "test" conditions, analyze "evidence," and weigh whether or not to believe. Spiritualists described theirs as a "religion of proof."[5] An alchemical combination of science and magic cloaked in the language of popular positivism, Spiritualism called into question the very categories of the material and immaterial, knowledge and belief, the living and the dead.

In 1867, an editorial writer for the Nation marveled that the numbers of Spiritualists seemed to be growing with each passing day. Wondering if the popularity of this faith was due to a kind of "sublimated mysticism," a "natural reaction from the intense materialism of the age,"[6] he concluded that, in the end, Spiritualism was newly popular because the Civil War decade was one of profound loss in the United States. [...] Nineteenth-century Spiritualism was a movement of consolation that grew out of, and eventually away from, middle-class Victorian cultures of mourning. American Victorian's obsessive attention to death is rife in the literature, theology, and advice manuals of the period as it is in the antebellum material culture of memento mori. Black crepe strewn funerals, elaborate mourning costumes, and black trimmed notecards became de rigeur for the grieving upper and middle classes; lockets with cameo death portraits inside were treasured objects for the working poor. Mourning manuals dictated specific dress and corresponding obligations as genteel ritual, guiding the choice of appropriate outer emblems to reflect the inward bereavement process. These intricate rituals of middle-class sentimental culture effectively shifted the social focus from the dead to the living, from those who were mourned to the mourners themselves.

With their refusal of death as the ultimate loss, Spiritualists' direct communication with the afterlife obviated the need for mourning at the same time that it performed a materialist critique of the aestheticized pageantry of sentimental culture. Spiritualists saw this commodified Anglo-American culture as a form of solipsism that arrested the social, political, and spiritual development of nineteenth-century America. Spiritualism gave believers a community of mourners who could take them beyond personal grief and the domesticated, sentimental rituals of middle-class mourning, offering instead new possibilities for life. Indeed, a faith in Spiritualism and the experience that the dead continued to be in relation to the living allowed some nineteenth-century Americans a new way of being in the world.

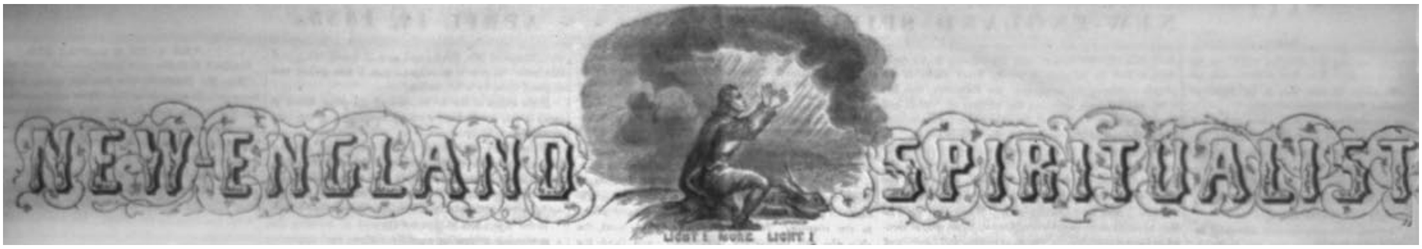
Spiritualist optimism, born of the faith that this world and the next were merely two stages in an unbroken process, produced a Spiritualist reform politics. That many Spiritualists would move from their own personal loss to a belief in the prospect of the reformation of personal and political life is less than intuitively obvious. Yet it is in this connection between a relationship to the dead and a transformative politics of the living that Spiritualism might be understood as something other than either magical melancholy or a form of "spurious consolation."[7]

Though belief in personal communication with the spirit world has historical antecedents dating back to the ancient world, nineteenth-century American Spiritualism was born of a particular set of historical and cultural confluences. Nourished in the religious and cultural climate that historian Jon Butler termed “the antebellum spiritual hothouse,” Spiritualism blossomed alongside other pre-Civil War religious and utopian experiments.[8] Spiritualism found its place amidst the popular utopianism that Henry James dubbed the “Puritan carnival.” This was an era of sectarianism and revivalism, one in which “farmers became theologians, offbeat village youths became bishops, odd girls became prophets.”[9] The antebellum period saw a broad interest in supernatural phenomena and the rise of a religious syncreticism that wedded popular supernaturalism to a Euro-American Protestantism. African religious practices, including conjuring and faith healing, shaped both black and white evangelical Christianity in the South. The widespread popularity of religious movements like Swedenborgianism, Shakerism, and Mesmerism laid the groundwork for the growth of nineteenth-century Spiritualism in the white, Protestant Northeast. [...]

1848 was a kind of talismanic year in which revolution swept the world, reform movements flourished throughout the United States, and revivals burned through Central New York. John Humphrey Noyes moved his utopian community from Putney, Vermont to Oneida, New York, the center of the “Burned-Over District” and a hotbed of utopianism and religious communitarianism. In July of 1848 in nearby Seneca Falls, the first convention for woman‘s rights met, drafting a “Declaration of Sentiments” proclaiming the “self-evident” truth that “all men and women are created equal.” Democratic revolutions swept Europe, from France to Germany to Italy. In this same year, Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels published the Communist Manifesto, the first line of which read, “A specter is haunting Europe - the specter of communism.” And in Hydesville, New York, two young girls heard communications from a different sort of specter, giving rise to a quite different kind of revolution.[10]

In the context of such a year, the founding of the Spiritualist movement may appear as deserving of approximately the same amount of attention as the retail marketing of chewing gum, a development which also occurred in 1848. Yet by the 1850s, Spiritualism had become a popular phenomenon offering more than a faddish after-dinner pastime. In 1854, fifteen thousand people signed a petition, which Illinois Senator James Shields introduced to the United States Congress, urging an official investigation of the new spiritual sensation. Although the petition was tabled, it created even more publicity for the movement. Writing as a believer and participant observer, the medium Emma Hardinge in her 1869 History of Modern American Spiritualism estimated the number of Spiritualists worldwide at 100 million. A New York neurologist and Spiritualist debunker, Fredric. R. Marvin writing in the 1870s, countered with the more conservative count of four million. While the actual number of Spiritualists -- curious or convinced -- was probably considerably less than either of these totals, it remains true that Spiritualism, which has been relegated to something of a cultural footnote in standard histories of the nineteenth century, was hardly a marginal practice in its day. [...]

In nineteenth-century culture, Spiritualism had an importance that both contemporaries and historians might easily overlook. It was a religion that had no churches, no participant membership rolls, and no formal governing body until well into its waning years. Though it boasted a lively lecture circuit, the practice of Spiritualism most typically took place in sitting rooms and parlors, around tables in dimly lit rooms. The séance, or spirit circle as it was typically called, was more a private than a public event. At the same time, through speaking tours and a flourishing national and regional press, Spiritualists created a public community that brought together scattered participants who would have otherwise convened their spirit circles in isolated domestic settings. Many Spiritualist freethinkers were united in their belief in the “family of reforms,” including abolition, temperance, and women‘s suffrage. The connection between Spiritualism and reform culture was apparent to many nineteenth-century commentators. White abolitionist Gerrit Smith remarked in 1859 that the Spiritualists he met in “tours through the state last fall, were nearly all reformers. . . . I have no doubt that, in proportion to their numbers, Spiritualists cast tenfold as many votes for the Abolition and Temperance tickets as did others.”[11] Spiritualists were not only abolitionists and Suffragists but also in some cases advocates of dress reform or Free Love. Indeed, in reading the Spiritualist press, as well as the



Spiritualist Newspaper, Boston, 1855

writings and speeches of prominent Spiritualists, what emerges is a picture of a large group of Americans who found impetus in their spiritual life for their political beliefs and work and who were deeply embedded and involved in reforming the world.[12] Actively involved in a politics of the body and the body politic, Spiritualism encompassed a set of utopian practices and imaginings that, when understood together, provide a history uniquely linking many of the disparate political movements of the day. [...]

Historians have not entirely ignored the Spiritualists. Spiritualists and anti-Spiritualists began to write their own histories of the movement only moments after its birth and continued to do so into the early twentieth century. There has been a minor rediscovery and renewed historical interest in Spiritualism in the United States and a number of studies have been published in the last thirty years. Yet in the wider cultural field this movement remains largely understood as an easily parodied parlor game or apolitical and marginal mysticism.

The best work on the subject, Ann Braude's Radical Spirits, documents Spiritualism's relationship to antebellum reform efforts, especially women's rights, examining the nature and extent of the overlap between these two movements. In retrospect, Braude argues that one of the most difficult "sells" of her book has been its fusing of Spiritualism and Suffrage, religion and politics. Braude has traced a contemporary inability to think religion and feminism together from receptions to her work on nineteenth-century Spiritualism to recent histories of second-wave feminism. She finds "a certain squeamishness," especially among feminists, in imaging that religion might be a reasonable font for politics and that religious feminists might be rational, political actors rather than women suffering from false consciousness.[13]

I would argue that this impasse has everything to do with the politics of secularism. If secularization is a progress narrative that culminates in the freedom from religion, religion can only function as an anachronistic invasion in public life that logically aligns with conservative and reactionary "returns" to moral values. Hence a liberal humanist secularism has become the naturalized ground of opposition to right-wing religious dogma. Yet this analytic erases significant structures of belief that, historically, have sustained progressive politics. Excavating a narrative in which secularism does not simply inevitably triumph over an anti-modern or atavistic religion not only provides a more nuanced understanding of the past but also a more complicated politics of the present.

That this broadly popular movement has been marginalized in standard histories of the nineteenth century tells us more about historiography and the history of secularism than it does about religious life in the nineteenth-century United States. Scholars have long contended that in the last half of the nineteenth century, Americans shifted their faith to science and placed their belief in an ordered public sphere. The generation between 1850 and 1880 was a pivotal one, with 1848 standing at the beginning of the span as a revolutionary moment of possibility and 1877 as radical retreat. After this point Americans seem, at least to historians who have chronicled a dominant, white Protestant culture, "less religious, less optimistic, more concerned than ever to embody their cultural values in institutions.[14] These narratives accord with the historiography of the end of the Reconstruction period, which similarly positions this era as marked by failed radicalism and exhausted reform, an “age of incorporation,” a society in “search for order.” [...]

In contrast to this narrative of religious decline and consolidation, I have found that Spiritualism not only continued to thrive but also continued to integrate social questions with an ongoing inquiry into spirit through the 1870s and beyond. Through the 1860s, 1870s, and into the 1880s, the Spiritualist press reported packed lecture halls and lively conventions and camp meetings. Invoking and reworking the notion of Reconstruction, one speaker at a gathering in 1872 argued that Spiritualism could be “a grand revolutionary movement: a vast scheme for social, political, and religious reconstruction; a new dispensation of divine truth and power, for the liberation, civilization, and spiritualization of mankind.”[15] [...]

Spiritualists felt the burden of the present and the call of both the future and the past as a mandate that was always both religious and political. In narrating the cultural formations of modernity, scholars too often ignore such religious imaginaries, which themselves offered historiographic techniques of remembrance and theories of affiliation that challenge basic assumptions about secular history. Whereas linear secular history demands the transcendence of the past, Spiritualist practice collapsed time and refused to accept the past as over. Spiritualists, then, can only ever seem out of time. Listening uncritically to an aging generation of reformers describe loss and decline in a new culture of skepticism, historians have literally ventriloquized Spiritualist detractors and debunkers. I would argue that the movement did not decline so much as it became illegible amidst a new culture. Subcultures of a dominant ordering culture are often seen as taking on an order-defying, anti-rational romanticism. Refusing this binary reveals a more complicated history, one which elucidates the ways in which insides and outsides, cultures and subcultures, both depend on stable demarcations at the same time that they refuse this opposition, showing themselves as each containing the defining characteristics of the other. Spiritualists did not see themselves as antimodernists. Mystical Spiritualists drew their language from popular tracts on scientific empiricism, invoking a secular optimism and faith in human, material progress. They believed in science and progress and the possibility of making “all things new” again. In this sense, Spiritualists were as profoundly American and central to their culture as they were countercultural.

In some ways Spiritualism is a distilled manifestation of many of the seemingly paradoxical combinations of modernity and belief inhabiting the moment of the Victorian crisis of faith. [...] Nineteenth-century consumerism transmuted the mystical into the prosaic as Americans purchased stereocards of cemeteries and photographs of dead loved ones in record numbers. The uncanny found its way into sitting rooms as consumers played with objects that were not what they seemed. Americans collected money-boxes disguised as books, painted walls into false doorways, and purchased uninhabitable “floating” chairs cast of paper maché. Furniture did not only levitate during Spiritualist séance; the materialism of the Victorian home was itself haunted. The cultural fascination with the supernatural extended to reading practices as well. More ghost stories were written during this period than any time before or after. American Protestants did not merely replace or reject the religious impulse; they sublimated and diffused it into the everyday.

This transformation was intimately connected with what historians have termed “the feminization of American religion.”[16] During the middle of the nineteenth century, Protestant culture slowly rejected a harsh Calvinism for more liberal theologies like Unitarianism and more feminized practices like Spiritualism in which women were central as mediums, speakers, and investigators. The feminization of religion produced more genteel, less rigid institutions and increased the prominence of women in religious organizations as leaders and laypersons. Many deplored this turn. Whether domesticated or feminized, replaced by older religions or new beliefs, the Victorian crisis of faith appears to be not so much a mass secularization as a widening of a search for answers on newly crafted theological terms.

The continuing attraction of Spiritualism for many nineteenth-century Americans points to the resiliency in American culture of the seemingly nonrational commitments to belief, devotion, magic, folk lore, and faith healing. It begs the question as to why historians, particularly American historians, have so resolutely chronicled what Max Weber termed "disenchantment" in the face of the continued refusals of the world to be disenchanted. The resilience of Spiritualism, then, brings into focus the historical specificities of the marginal and local forms by which dominant practices were resisted, deflected, or shown to be imperfectly constituted.

In a formulation that depends upon what it purports to explain, European historians typically record the long secularizing tide brought on by the Enlightenment as the cultural force behind this religious transformation. In a characteristic argument, from the latter half of the seventeenth-century, rationalist and positivist currents in the European temperament grew increasingly skeptical as to the existence of an array of nonmaterial entities: fairies, goblins, and ghosts; devils and wood demons; the powers of astrology, witchcraft and magic; the hermetic "world soul;" and perhaps even Satan and Hell themselves.[17] [...]

In his magisterial history, Religion and the Decline of Magic, Keith Thomas argues that the radical paradigm shift from magic to science would not have been predicted at the beginning of the seventeenth century because magic and science had originally advanced side by side. Mystical- magical astrology fed developments in scientific astronomy; heliocentrism birthed Copernican-Keplerian planetary models. Here he follows Thomas Kuhn in arguing that sometime in the seventeenth century, the partnership between magic and science collapsed. [...]

Historians have documented flourishing belief in the occult not only among the English working classes but also among the English and American middling and upper classes well into the twentieth century. Given these counter-histories, the question remains: Does magic decline or does it just seem that way to academics? And if so, why? Anthropologist Hildred Geertz has provocatively commented that Thomas "takes part in the very cultural process that he is studying" by accepting the categories of the actors and using them "as analytical categories to develop his own casual hypothesis of decline." She argues that "It is not the 'decline' of the practice of magic that cries out for explanation, but the emergence and rise of the label 'magic.'"[18]

The work of the word "magic" in the mouth of moderns has the ideological effect of relegating a series of affective and ritualistic practices to the temporal past, to a spatial periphery, or to a narrative of underdevelopment. Max Weber describes "the elimination of magic from the world" as "that great historic process in the development of religions," which "repudiated all magical means to salvation as superstition and sin" and culminated in the "worldly asceticism" of Reformed Calvinist Protestantism.[19] If Weber's model of developmental religion and increasing societal rationalization leaves magic as modernity's remainder, an atavistic trace preserved by culture's various others, "belief," a less obviously charged term, can be similarly impervious to secularism's analytics. Belief is not equivalent to magic but, within developmental narratives, survives as the indivisible remainder of religion minus magic, a recalcitrant reminder of the past in our putatively rational present.

A generation of anthropologists and postcolonial theorists has bemoaned "the social sciences' view of the world as disenchanted" and pointed to, in Dipesh Chakrabarty's words, "a certain kind of intellectual bankruptcy, a paralysis of imagination, and a certain spell of reductionism" in scholarly attempts to understand religious practices and beliefs.[20] [...] Beyond accounting for how religion has come to appear "spurious" in the secular mind, Guari Viswanathan has argued that, although the various ideological and political investments that underwrite intellectual engagements with belief cannot be collapsed or conflated, "the ultimate significance of such work lies in its being a vehicle for secular intellectuals to express the difficulties of communicating the idea of religious belief – as distinct from religious ideology – in and for a secular community."[21] Rather than imagining a dissolution of the divide between belief and ideology, these critics underscore what is lost in refusing to recognize belief as a continuing source of knowledge production.

Returning to Spiritualism in the context of these recent interventions, we must ask if we can think of consolation as other than spurious. It has been suggested that the very rationalization of society and its "desiccating effect" on everyday life is the inducement to older forms of belief, vestiges of ancient myths, arcane lore, a backward search for new sources of power. In this formulation religion remains counter to a larger culture and unthreatening to the social system, an escape from ennui, much like entertainment or consumer culture, the very thing Spiritualism was accused of being.[22] Yet can religious belief be understood as new or progressive, as opposed to always already revivalism or what has come to be recognized as reactionary fundamentalism? Spiritualism in American history might be understood as the old New Age, not a restitution of old institutions or beliefs but a transcultural and transtemporal expansion, heralding a "new dispensation." Whether an escape from a dominant order or a continued belief in the ability to craft a new one, Spiritualists denied the warfare between science and religion, disavowed the divide between fact and fantasy, and most importantly refused the idea of the past as irretrievable and the future as the inevitable result of calcified sociopolitical structures. If a "ghost is precisely an intermediary 'apparition' between life and death, between being and non-being, between matter and spirit, whose separation it dissolves," Spiritualism ghosted nineteenth-century American culture.[23] Rather than countering that emergent culture, Spiritualism, specter-like, refused to acknowledge and honor its deepest divides.

Excerpt from the introduction to the forthcoming book Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2007).

Endnotes

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5 See for example, Epes Sargent, The Proof Palpable of Immortality; Being An Account of the Materialization Phenomenon of Modern Spiritualism (Boston: Colby & Rich, 1876).
6) "Concerning Things Spiritual," The Nation, January 17, 1867, 53.

7 I take this term from Talal Asad, Geneaologies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 46.

8 Jon Butler, Awash in A Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 225-56.

9 Sydney E. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 475.

10 The story of the Fox sisters begins nearly every recounting of the history of Spiritualism. Though the story is never told in quite the same way each time, befitting its role as mythic origin story and legend, the basic narrative remains roughly consistent in each telling: Late one night, Kate and Margaret Fox, while sleeping in their family farmhouse, heard mysterious noises. They soon discovered that the knockings were unearthly communications from beyond, produced by the spectral presence of a murdered peddler who had died in the house years earlier. Questioning the spirit, who rapped in response, the Fox Sisters realized that they could operate a sort of "spiritual telegraph," allowing them to receive cryptic messages from the spirit world.

11 Gerrit Smith, Lectures on the Religion of Reason (Petersboro, NY: C.A. Hammond, 1864), 39-40.

12 The nineteenth-century "Spiritualist press" was vast. I rely most heavily upon the following newspapers: the Banner of Light [Boston], 1857-1907, Luther Colby, John W. Day, Epes Sargent, eds.; The Spiritual Telegraph [New York], 1852-1857, Samuel B. Brittan and Charles Partridge, eds.; the Religion-Philosophical Journal [Chicago], 1865-1907, S.S. Jones, John C. Bundy, Thomas G. Newman, eds.; and, to a lesser extent, The Shekinah [New York], 1851-1853, Samuel B. Brittan, ed. and the Carrier Dove, [San Francisco], 1884-1893, Elizabeth Lowe Watson, Julia Schlesinger, eds. Many of the writers, editors, and featured speakers in these publications also published longer works in book or tract form.

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14 Daniel Walker Howe, "Victorian Culture in America," in Victorian America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), 13.

15 Banner of Light, September 21, 1872.

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19 Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2003), 105 and Chapter 4, "The Religious Foundations of Worldly Asceticism," 95-154.

20 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Radical Histories and Questions of Enlightenment Rationalism: Some Recent Critiques of Subaltern Studies," Economic and Political Weekly, 8 April 1995, 752.

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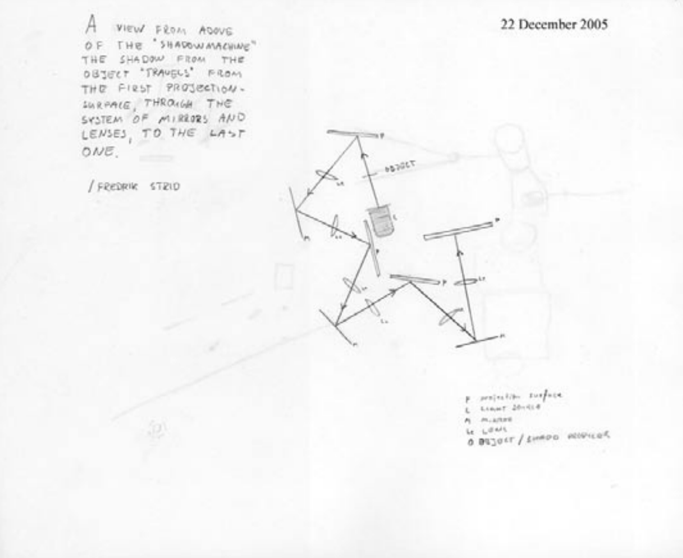
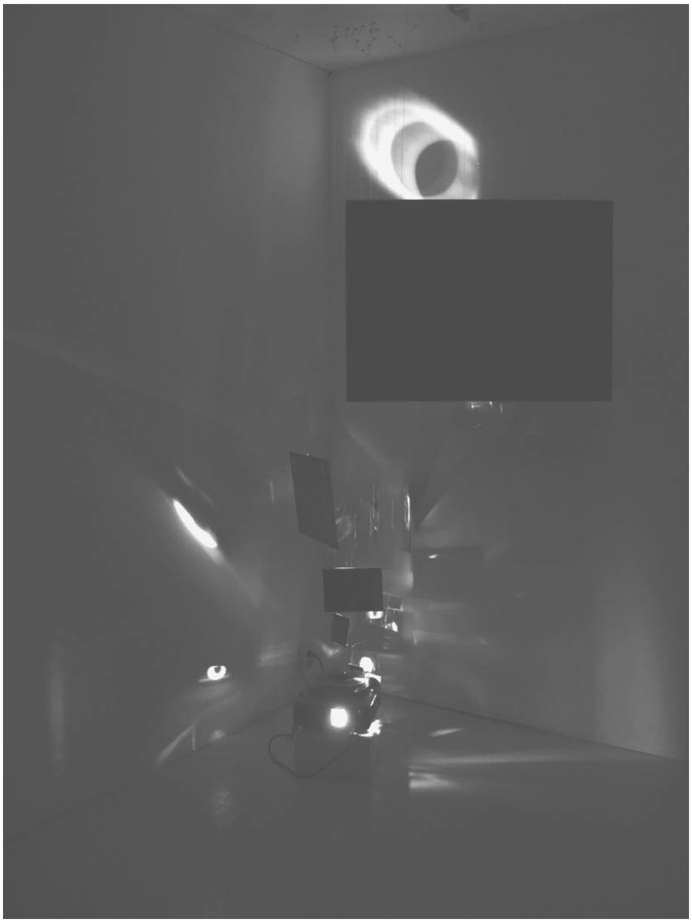

A VIEW FROM ABOVE OF THE "SHADOWMACHINE" THE SHADOW FROM THE OBJECT "TRAVELS" FROM THE FIRST PROJECTION-SURFACE, THROUGH THE SYSTEM OF MIRRORS AND LENSES, TO THE LAST ONE.
/FREDRIK STRID
22 December 2005
OBJECT
P projection surface
L light source
M mirror
Le lens
O OBJECT / SHADOW PRODUCER

a solar eclipse projected through a set of mirrors that are hanging from the ceiling



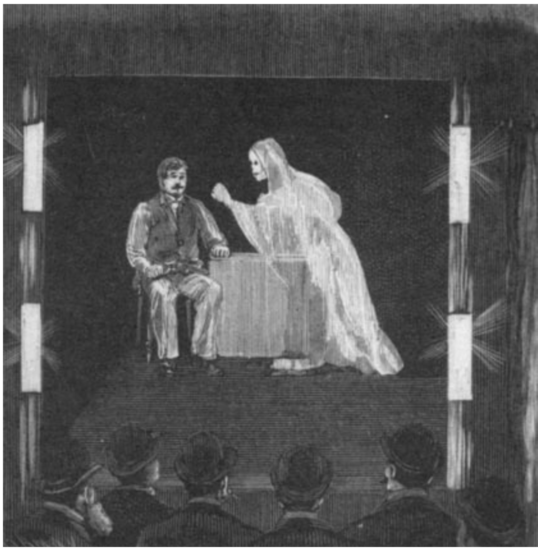
My ghosts are gone away: I cannot relax.

Sladja Blazan

Like any wannabe rebel caught up in the academic world of theory, I'm interested in the peripheral, the clandestine, that which seemingly goes against the grain and yet is clearly defined as such: pornography, punk, war, vegan food. At some point vampires and ghosts necessarily get added to the list. "Do you collect hearts?" asks the cashier at Kaiser's.[1] No, I'm interested in ghosts. Peripheral beings grant a sense of security, via a diffuse longing for identification, difference and decadence. I only came to this realisation recently, namely when I began to work on research into the motif of ghosts. Before then I was able to respect phantoms, spirits, ghosts, vampires, and all other sorts of the domestic uncanny on grounds of their evilness and estrangement from the real world. They have since turned into the complete opposite, which in view of their flexibility is perhaps not quite so surprising. I would now like to explain how this has come about.

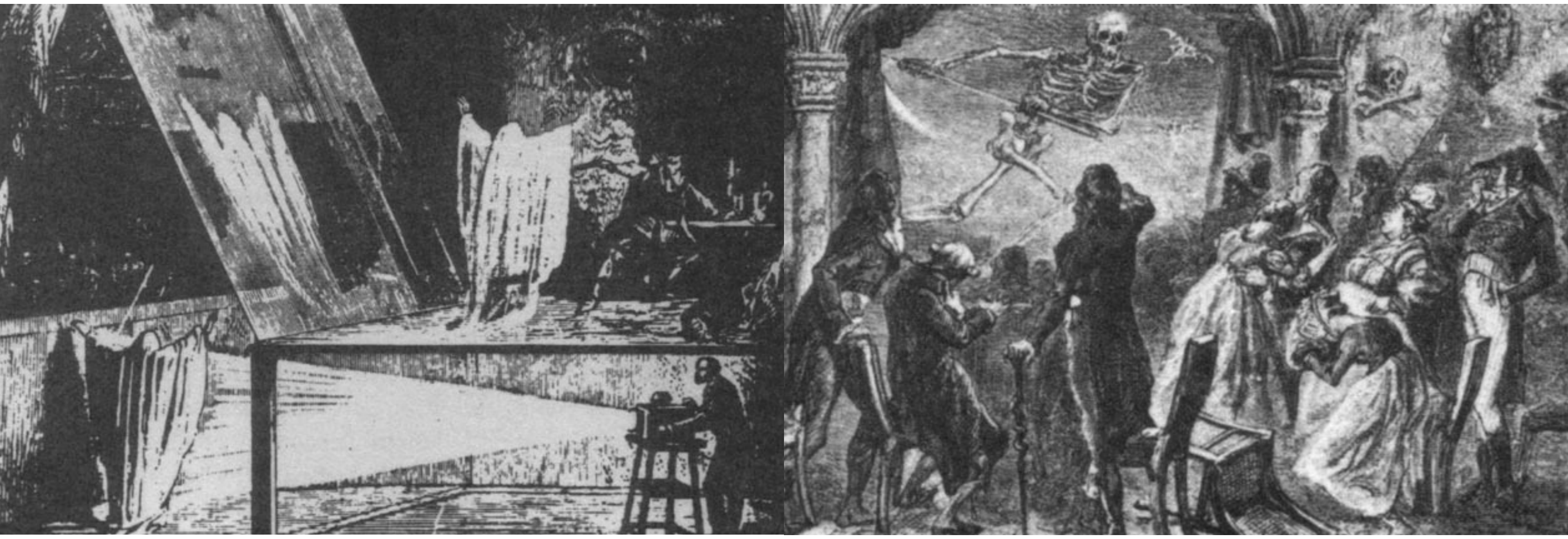
When recently a friend decided he wanted to be a ghostseer, and told of the Uninvited appearing to him in his dreams, the majority of his listeners clamoured for more information about the apparition. Its sex, what it was wearing on its head, questions about its clothes, and the colour of its skin - all had to be detailed thoroughly. However, the fact of the nocturnal presence's invisibility was never questioned. The ghost was there, but it was also not really there: the presence was a matter of feeling. And everybody was spooked. The friend turned into a hero, and toast of the evening. This led me to think of 'Phantasmagoria' shows, which at that time I knew only as frightening and fascinating, strange and intimate events practised by travelling showmen at the end of the 18th century. In his openness in the face of the contradictory expectations of his listeners, my friend was able - without assistant or instrument - to conjure ghosts, just like a phantasmagoria showmen. The next day I ran to the library to find out more about phantasmagoria—not least to pathetically brush up on my topic of conversation for the next party.

And this is what I discovered: Etienne-Gaspard Robert, later Etienne Robertson, who lived in Paris in the 1790s was, and remains to this day, the most famous phantasmagoria artist in the world. Many settled upon the description "popular phantasmagoria show," which might describe the process but in no way does it justice: it was primarily what couldn't be seen that was marvelled at here. Basically, they were highly complex "one man shows" put on at fêtes and Christmas markets, in which artificial representations of ghosts were produced by means of light, a projector, decorated glass, smoke and who knows what else. A kind of magic lantern in which ghosts found asylum before the invention of television and film. Robertson recognised the connectedness of ghosts with places and even secured his own free theatre, putting on spook shows in abandoned Capuchin crypts in Paris. The most important conjuring utensils were an enclosed space and an audience. It must have been the beginning of the modern commercialisation of spirits (phantasms). Only very few would forego the moment of sublime horror. Because of their immense popularity phantasmagoria artists lived exalted and extravagant lives. Unless they ended the show with suicide, as in the case of the Leipzig café owner Johann Schröpfer, who killed himself in 1774 at the height of his spirit-summoning career, reportedly in response to the summons of one of his own creations.



Contemporary illustration from „Pepper's Ghost" illusion, Royal Politechnic Institute, London, 1860s

At exactly this time, in the age of the Enlightenment, ghosts were banned from the public sphere. Reason affirmed them as



Contemporary illustrations from „Pepper's Ghost" illusion, Royal Politechnic Institute, London, 1860s and Étienne Gaspard Robertson's „Fantasmagorie".

nonsense overnight: there are no ghosts. The scientist's arts of exorcism, however, aren't up to scratch. The ghosts remained, albeit at the price of their invisibility. In that they were confined to the human body, it was the cheapest solution; they got new names like hallucination or hysteria, according to the sex of their carrier. This exile from the real world into the realm of the thoughts also took place through popular forms of entertainment - phantasmagoria shows. It is possible to draw a neatly-formed arc between then and today at this point; their two hundred year-long incorporation into the present seems to have reached its completion. Contemporary ghosts appear over and above all in human form (see for example the series The Ghost-Whisperer or the film The Others) and, furthermore, predominantly thanks to our own amusement machines.

This connection between extreme love of life and pathological desire for death in ghosts enables the opening of a new discourse of boundaries. This discourse fulfils the modern tendency toward viewing boundaries as permeable, constructed and thereby vulnerable, with the simultaneous belief that they are not so. A boundary is marked that is not what it is; that is, a system of connection based on division. Suddenly I see before myself open margins; dead people integrated into life. The only halfway reliable source of information on that score is provided by the spirits. Actually, by the ghosts: a spirit always has something traditional about it, something which has taken root through the course of the centuries. From now on I will attempt only to pursue ghosts; its focus on interruption, the moment, not the continuity leads to this decision.

First, ghosts distinguish themselves because they are able of passing through the boundary between life and death, and therefore also that between the past and the present. As time travellers and shapeshifters they appear on the one hand functional, on the other simply and utterly fascinating. But because they are indefinable, unpredictable and alien, they purportedly provoke fear. We answer with exorcisms, ignoring them and functionalising them according to status and vocation: So much on collective ghost beliefs. (I don't know either who 'we' is.) But what, then, when the spook serves nothing more than to discover or clean out places dwelling spaces for ourselves? To think one's way into the past, to take an active role for oneself in this way, and to seem important enough to be able summon the dead into the world of the living seems to be extremely desirable. We attain this authority through memory.

When the ghost bestows memory upon a body, we must bear in mind that this may be malleable and see through, in some way dead although not really. The same attributes in relation to memory enable its revision according to one's own needs. I think that this reconstruction of the past - of history - is always extraordinary about ghosts, however, and that it only allows this kind of interpretation. As a consequence, even sedimented knowledge gets stirred up. Ghosts are primarily mixers, diffuser; if musicians, then hip hoppers.

It is interesting to see how they have pressed themselves to the fore. If you think of the power of the absent on the film screen, the not-represented/unrepresentable, the forceful presence of the absent in the sense of imaginary/fantastical/unreal, it begs the question why ghosts should appear downright trivial as humans. They don't even try to provoke fear, knowing well that after five minutes' roaring on the screen even the most terrible monster will inevitably become a household pet. They therefore affect to linger peacefully among us. They are present, without leaving much to the imagination. How close the ghost has got to the living.

Tsvetan Todorov was probably the last of the literary field to address the ghostly problematic seriously. In his opinion the decision of whether to view an extraordinary incident as a product of the imagination or of otherworldly rules unknown to us is a personal one. He locates the fantastic moment in insecurity. Furthermore, he says we should differentiate between the uncanny and the marvellous. The fantastical in a narration tips either into the uncanny (explicable) or into the marvellous (inexplicable).

I can't agree with that. On the one hand I find the marvellous often completely comprehensible and the uncanny not always easily explained but, much more importantly, the fantastical cannot lie only in insecurity. The belief that gods turn into demons is uncanny, fantastic, and marvellous. I want to argue that the moment of reliability is fantastic. In the end, ghosts are at least always straightforward—that is, reliable. Or are there also lying and conniving ghosts? And they are always there for you.

If you look at what was debated through the theme of the ghost in 19th century literature - domestic violence, sexual abuse, child abuse, incest, property rights, isolation, women's issues, friendship - you can only pull off your hat. Who or what else managed, in the thick of Victorian prudery, to actively agitate against social circumstances without putting on kid gloves. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman (1852-1930), Harriett Prescott Spofford (1835-1921), Edith Wharton (1862-1936), Kate Chopin (1850-1904), Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935), Mary Hunter Austin (1868-1934), Mary Louise Alcott (1832-1888) and Cornelia P. Comer (1869-1929) were all American authors who attached a psychological and sociological dimension to the theme, and in this way formed the image of the so-called "new woman." They were writers who recognised an epistemelogical hole in the image of the ghost as real or illusory. The dualistic world of their masculine colleagues, who thought in binary categories of rational/irrational, science/spirituality, consciouness/unconsciouness, natural/supernatural, were simply brought face to face with a world steeped in ghosts. This gender specific moment also follows through today in less Eurocentric narratives.

Ever since the travels of the first phantasmagorical artist, ghosts have raised the demand to look for roots in the past. The future begins in the past. They deliver answers to the questions: Why am I here now today and not anywhere else? And even those who don't ask these questions still receive an answer. Uninvited ghosts come in from the cold to linger now among us. Even just looking at a few films, it is astonishing in what a fine manner ghosts have created places for themselves, and with what elegance and security. They seize the new house owner to write a never-ending book, as in The Ghost and Mrs Muir, come to live a little bit more fun ice skating in Central Park, as in Portrait of Jennie, entertain lonely little girls, as in Cat People II, occupy their old homes in order to help lonely widowed women find their way to new love, as in Truly, Madly, Deeply, or spirit around because no one has guessed that they're dead, as in The Others or in numerous epides of The Ghost Whisperer. They linger not only in film, literature, art and theatre; diverse contemporary patterns of belief base conflict solutions on the presence of ghosts, and everyday situations are solved only by means of ghosts. I don't know whether it was always so, but ghosts are definitely there. Now we just have to recognise them.

From Marx to Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer and on to Derrida, many theorists have called for the integration of ghosts into our everyday vocabulary. Why has it still not happened? Or is it already happening as I write these lines? And what does that say beyond my own world? The world of, that's how I imagine it, the living. It looks as though the frenzy toward the future, commitments, continually new jobs, new lovers, new cities, new hobbies, new representations of self and new accumulations of knowledge could be brought to a standstill. And that's with the help of the revenants, those who return. They come without ever having really gone away. The question is, whether we are already back again. Now, it is called shutting yourself away in a room and waiting for the ghosts. Emily Dickinson wrote "One need not be a chamber to be haunted". Well, somehow, one does.

Promotional photograph of illusionist Henri Robin with one of his specters by Eugène Thiébault, 1863

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1 Campaign by the supermarket Kaiser's. The shopper is rewarded with a gift after they have collected a certain number of Hearts.

CHEAP and Vaginal Davis:
It Happened to Me, a revolutionary horror ride

Hebbel am Ufer Theater 1, Berlin, September 23-4, 2005
Technical Advisor: Cecile Bouchier
Lights: Fred Pommerehn
CHEAP Collaborator: Koen Claerhout
Make-up: Andreas Bernhardt
Video documentation: Michel Balagué

Shortly before her death in 1961, Ruth Fischer was shopping for shoes in the not-yet-chic Marais district of Paris, when she suddenly spied a young black American woman whose shoes caught her attention. She was somewhat shy about approaching the woman, but eventually she got up the nerve to invite her for a coffee. They went to a quiet little café and started chatting, but the young Angela Davis was a little put off by the older communist's decidedly anti-Soviet streak. Suddenly, a rather unattractive man and a woman entered the café, obviously trying to remain incognito. Ruth whispered conspiratorily to Angela, „On y vas!" and whisked her out of the café before she had time to think. Outside, Angela looked at Fischer for an explanation. „Sprechen wir Deutsch," she said. „Es ist sicherer." Angela nodded in agreement, though her German was not yet as good as her French. They ducked into the métro and when they came out, they were in an open area on the outskirts of town that Angela didn't recognize from her guidebooks. Now that Fischer was certain they weren't being followed, she began to explain, but suddenly she was drowned out by a large explosion that seemed to have hit very nearby. The two of them looked for somewhere to hide, but the only place in sight was an abandoned carnival ground. They took cover under a gigantic roller coaster as night fell. What happened over the next three days is a strange and curious tale of friendship and conflict between an aging German communist and a young American revolutionary, a story that has rarely been told. When Angela returned to Frankfurt where she was studying philosophy, she confided to her roommate,
„It happened to me and it could happen to you."

DUNK THE JEW

Ghosts and Numbers, and the Real

Alan Klima

The film is a story of the Nextworld, of ghosts and numbers in postcrash Thailand, a story about something missing, about debt and haunting: about the insistence of a strange hollowness, palpable yet invisible, for the most part. This non-thing that debt and haunting share.

What I mean by that which is missing, yet present, is not like the status of reality in fiction, the missing bit of reality in an otherwise convincing fictional world, that shadowland where we suspend our disbelief and therefore experience the strange light of the unreal real. It is easy enough to imagine that money has no value apart from that fictionally ascribed to it in a system of convention, commodities, or so-called "fetishism." This absence of substance, with all the effects of being substantial, might be comparable to, or even serve as the mirror image of, the spirit world, at least from a certain anthropological perspective. There too, it is said, the fictions of spiritual entities are formed in systems of conventions, shared beliefs, language and media.

But all that social construction, you see, is only one side of the story. The whole world can seem to be understood with only that side of the story. Money, persons, the whole world can fit this picture of social construction, with all its people and animals, its forests and seas, its global connections and disjunctures, its dreamworlds and beliefs, its wired and wireless networks of information and values circulating over the surface of the earth. I, too, see that world. I can also see the other.

Film poster, Ghost and Numbers - Migrant Lottery, Neoliberal Dreams and the Spirit World in Thailand, Alan Klima, 2005

Beyond the Digital Real

Ghosts and Numbers is, at least on one level, a documentary in the social realist mode of observational cinema. It has, in part, the classic subject/protagonist of observational cinema: an unfortunate and oppressed person struggling against a system that is the critical focus of the documentary. In this case, the subjects are rural ex-farmers in Thailand who can no longer support themselves working the land, and must instead work the abstract realm of numbers to earn their survival, touring the country selling government lottery tickets. For one large swathe of the rural countryside, selling lottery numbers is the sole income for almost every able-bodied person. Twice a month, everyone clears out for a journey to Bangkok to buy wholesale tickets, and then fans out across the towns of the entire country to sell tickets in a long hard march through the very popular trade in numbers that has grown significantly in the years since the financial crash of 1997. The film situates this transition--from material land-based production to migrant trade in abstraction—within the larger context of the neoliberal shift in global economics and its devastating after-effects in Thailand. With that, we understand it all.

Or perhaps not: that is why ghosts are in the film. The realist, observational aspect of the film, shot purposively in that over-used style, is intercut with a less prosaic and less tangible filmic presence of ghost stories, some haunting and others more playful, as well as some fabulous interest in winning numbers expressed in idioms of the spirit world. The world of Thai spirits is represented in visual allegory as well as directly recounted in tales of encounter with the next world by an ambiguous narrator who represents, herself, perhaps the solution to all of our problems if only we could understand her redemptive power. Counterposed with this other world is the Nextworld of the neoliberal imaginary, a digital futureworld enacted in the current politico-cultural dreamwork of Thailand in the postcrash era. And, finally, mediating between these worlds of ghosts and numbers is an ardent Thai gambler who interacts with spirits and spirit mediums as well as divines for herself the otherworldly significance of numbers in her eternal quest for winnings.

By contrast with these worlds of possibility, there is, perhaps, an incorrigible capitulation at work in most critical thought about capital and its effects, thought which always seems to lend itself to a prosaic view of the world where we can always understand what is at stake in the transformations of capital, all around the world and among all of its people, in a secular and politically sound template of judgment.

To be honest about confronting this conceit, we must of course confront the specter of Marx, and the images he conjured of men chasing, interacting with, speaking to, and finally bowing down before animated fantasies of value, without seeing that they were in fact their own creations. Of course in Marx's view, there is a certain sense in which the ardent capitalists are imagining nothing, but in fact accurately perceive the real state of value under a regime of commodity fetishism. But what they lack is a sense of the fantastic, of the human creation and ordering of this codification of desire. Or that is how I would prefer to phrase it. One could also draw on the colonialist frame of "fetishism," the thoughtworld of the "primitive," for a trope (or rather isn't it meant almost literally?) which can represent the lack of enlightened perception into things as they are. This racist territory that Marx has enlisted, the colonialist imagination of so-called primitive fetishism, seemed to serve critical functions by exposing capitalists as new pagans with occult, and therefore occluded, vision.

This legacy lives on in current thought about abstract monetary form, in theoretical reflection on the increasingly digitized and globalized realm of financial communication, and the space, time, territory, and sovereignty it reforms and deforms. There is a building momentum in critical thought for thinking about the digital and electronic communication of economic values in terms and figures of the spirit world. You may have noticed the sort of assertion that, particularly in these days, we have entered a regime of value which is spectral, occult, spiritual, millennial, and/or ethereal. These assertions tend to dovetail with the classic, but often overlooked, economic ghost story which is the master ghost narrative that informs the sense of horror in economics. Even Adam Smith propagated this fear in his story of money, and its evolution out of barter and trade into equivalency devices of valuable objects such as gold. However, that is all back-story: the real story begins to move at the point where one has to be sure that the gold in the coin was pure and was actually the weight claimed. And in order to make this certain, the sovereign would place his stamp and face upon the gold to certify its proper value. Eventually however, what happened was that the stamp began to become more important than the gold, and the face on the gold became, with paper currency, value in itself, representing a deposit of gold held elsewhere. Adam

Film still, Ghost and Numbers, Alan Klima, 2005

Smith feared the day when value would become all stamp... the face of the sovereign divorced from its material embodiment like a ghostly visage and trace seen but not bodily present in the full. At that point of rupture with the body...
an invitation to the wildest speculations... breaks with gravity...
...without limits, material constraints, while we here down on earth are compelled to live, still in our body, and the value we have created is granted a freedom we can never have...
...even the face disappears and only the number remains, virtually without form...
...and therefore a freed human imagination could have the power of return, to insert itself into the very fabric of the most utilitarian aspects of human exchange, and stake its claim...

The Marxist version of the horror story, however, does not open into limitless and terrifying possibilities. Ground down in the Marxist sensibility is the lesson that the money form has an animated spirit that arises from a specific, and very real, locality: from the sacrifice of qualitative value to quantitative value in the sacrifice of labor, which lets loose the fetish of value which then propels the very real realm of abstract exchange. This is the spirit of capital and the animated spiritual substance let loose from a prior and secret, or at least secreted, violence. But there are two products, aren't there? The fraternal twin to the commodity fetish is the very real class of people produced by this process, which cannot be revoked. That is to say, the force that animates the realm of abstract capital is the same force that is assembling itself, seeking itself out, gathering from fragments and amassing into a wholly new specter, the "spectre haunting Europe" of the communist manifesto, a singular specter that will overpower the pagan and animist multiple gods, casting them out with its inviolable monotheism, its one God.

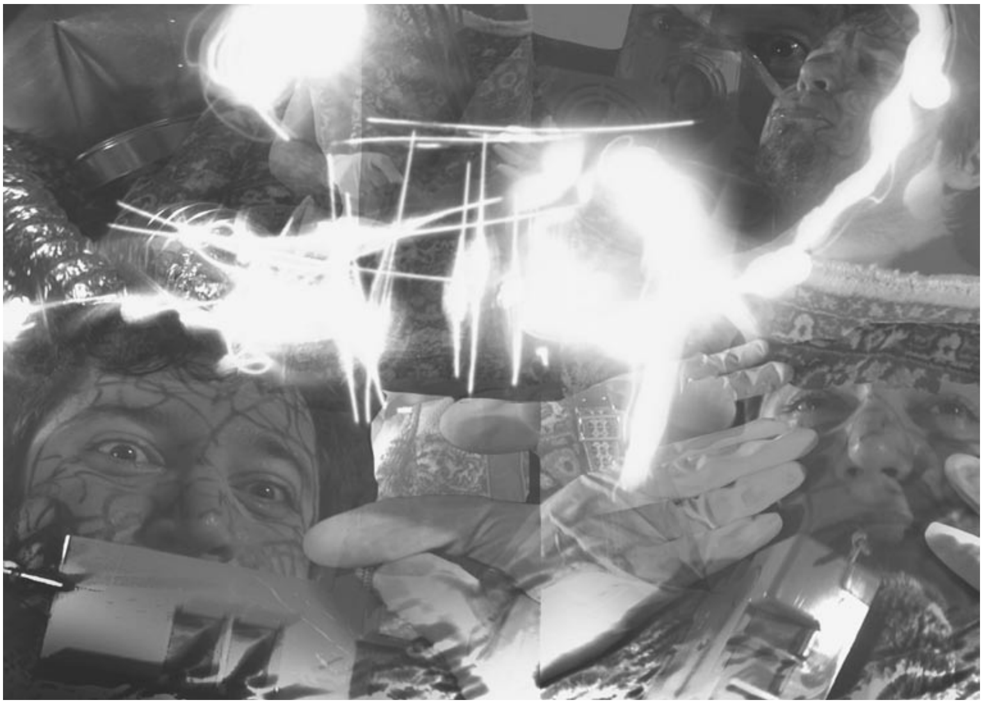
The anti-paganism in Marx, on this level, may not just be an innocent borrowing of the metaphors of fetishism and primitivism but an activist monotheism that intends to exert its God's force and rightful place in the world. The capitalists are not only animists because of their inferior insight into the nature of reality, nor is it only that they are modern equivalents of the superstitious "primitives," but also because they really do propitiate their gods, since there is a very real connection between the abstract values of capital and real sacrifices made on the level of the exchange of qualitative value for quantitative capital, of work for labor power. It is human sacrifice, ultimately. Could an animist critical economics be a fantastic response to this speculative story of The One, or would it only represent another expression of the pagan order of commodity fetishism? An "otherwise" to critical realist and social realist monotheism may indeed be difficult to imagine.

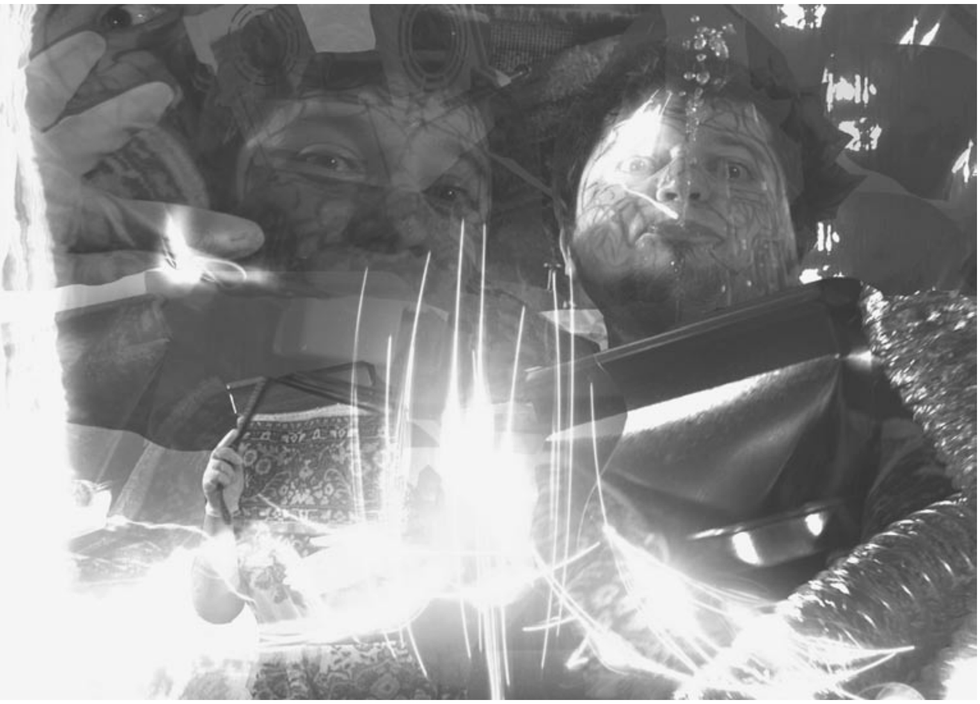
But certainly were it imaginable, it might require not only a fall from The One but a different attitude and a different starting point than the extractive analytics of the "spiritual ether" as merely a metaphor for evoking the networks of global abstract value.

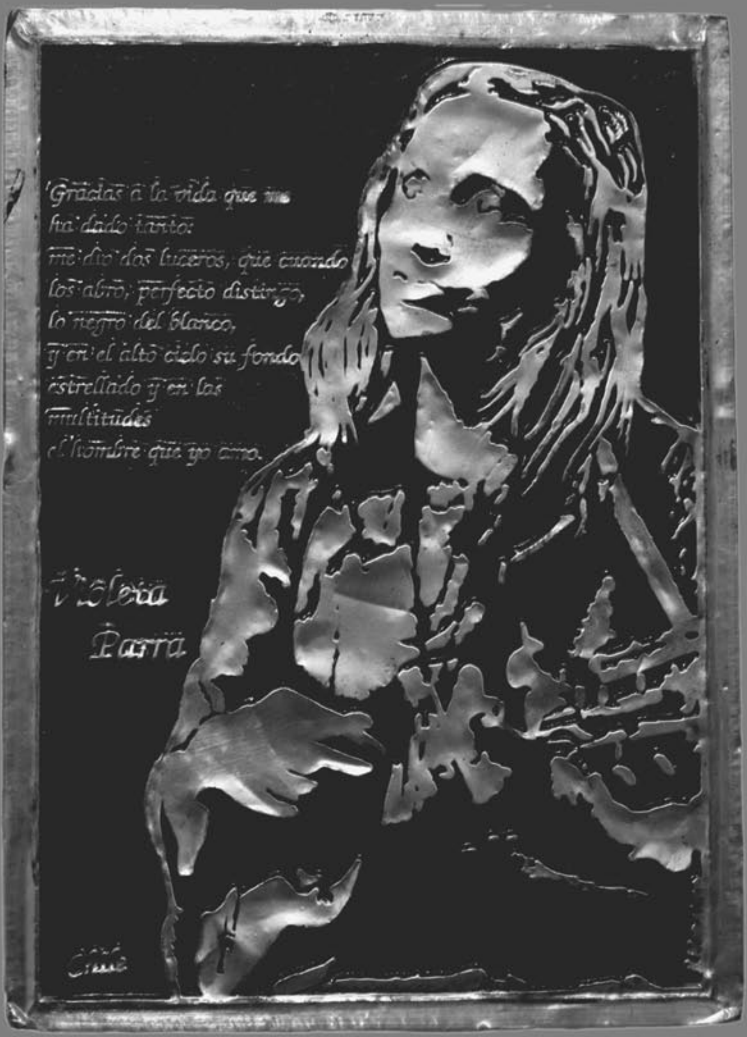
The Debt of Theory

What if the wired and wireless network really was of spiritual consequence, rather than just a metaphor for critical theorists to seize as they see fit, with no obligation to the worlds from which they draw their metaphors? How would one be able to see the possibility that the spiritual consequence of neoliberalism is real? Ghosts and Numbers is a visual and aural exploration of that possibility. The film does not completely abandon prosaically understood life situations of its protagonists, but refuses to let it remain abstracted from a wider field of stories, a field of possibility and play that might open new critical heuristics, or at least spur a heightened self-consciousness of the limitations of world-view among those who cannot or will not see another way.

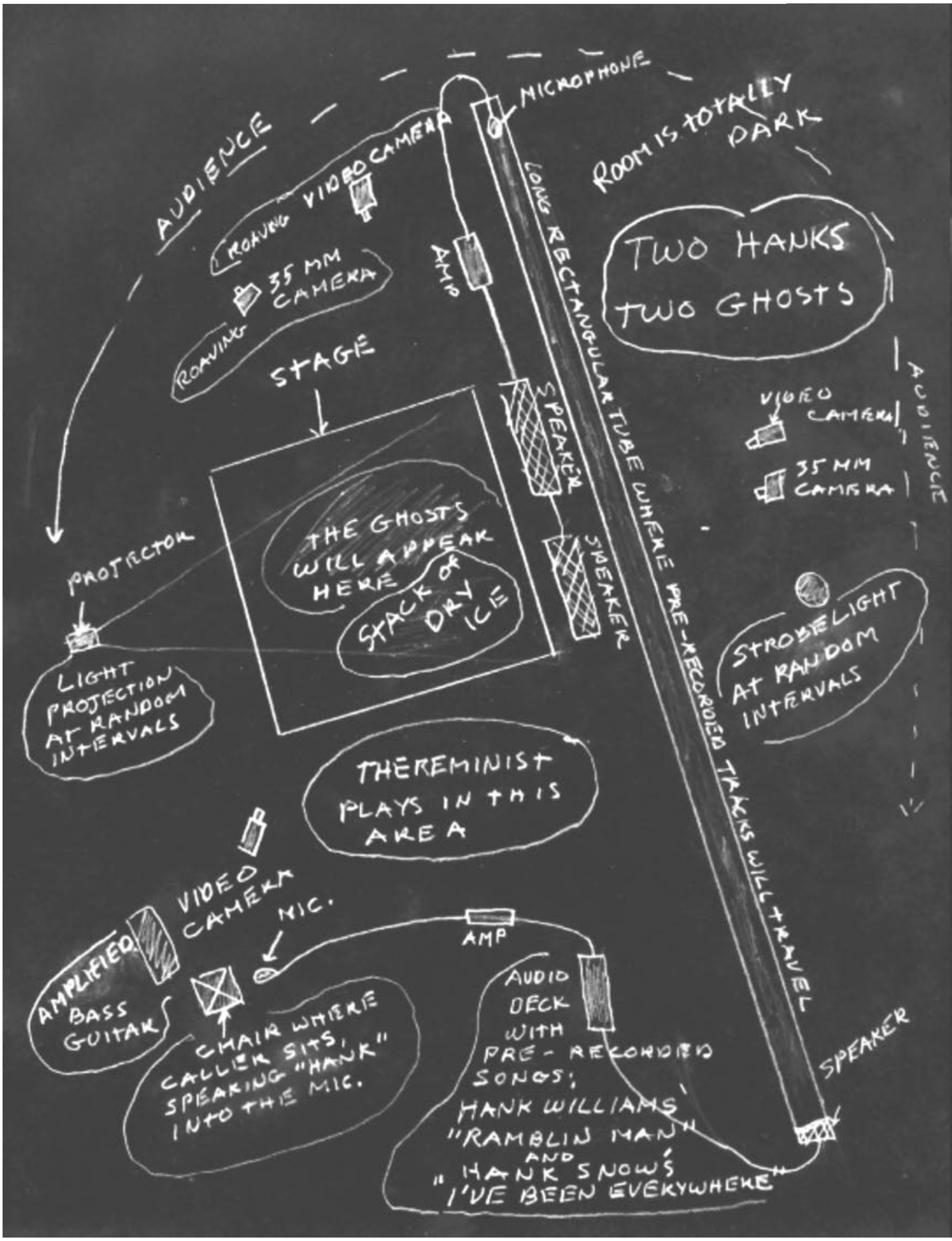
The film is also, not coincidentally, a comment, if only on the level of juxtaposed styles, on the contemporary rebirth and proliferation of observational cinema in documentary (above all, in ethnographic documentary). This rebirth and spread of realist observational cinema has quite clearly been carried upon the wings of digital video and computer editing. It is an apparent irony that the explosion of numbering technologies and the wide-spread availability of documentary technology has led to a narrowing of filmic styles in the greater part of the rapidly expanding herd of filmmakers. But this narrowing of possibility, this narrowing of the real, spurred by the wide spread of abstract numbering, is no irony, nor is it a coincidence. It makes perfect sense. Please consider this.



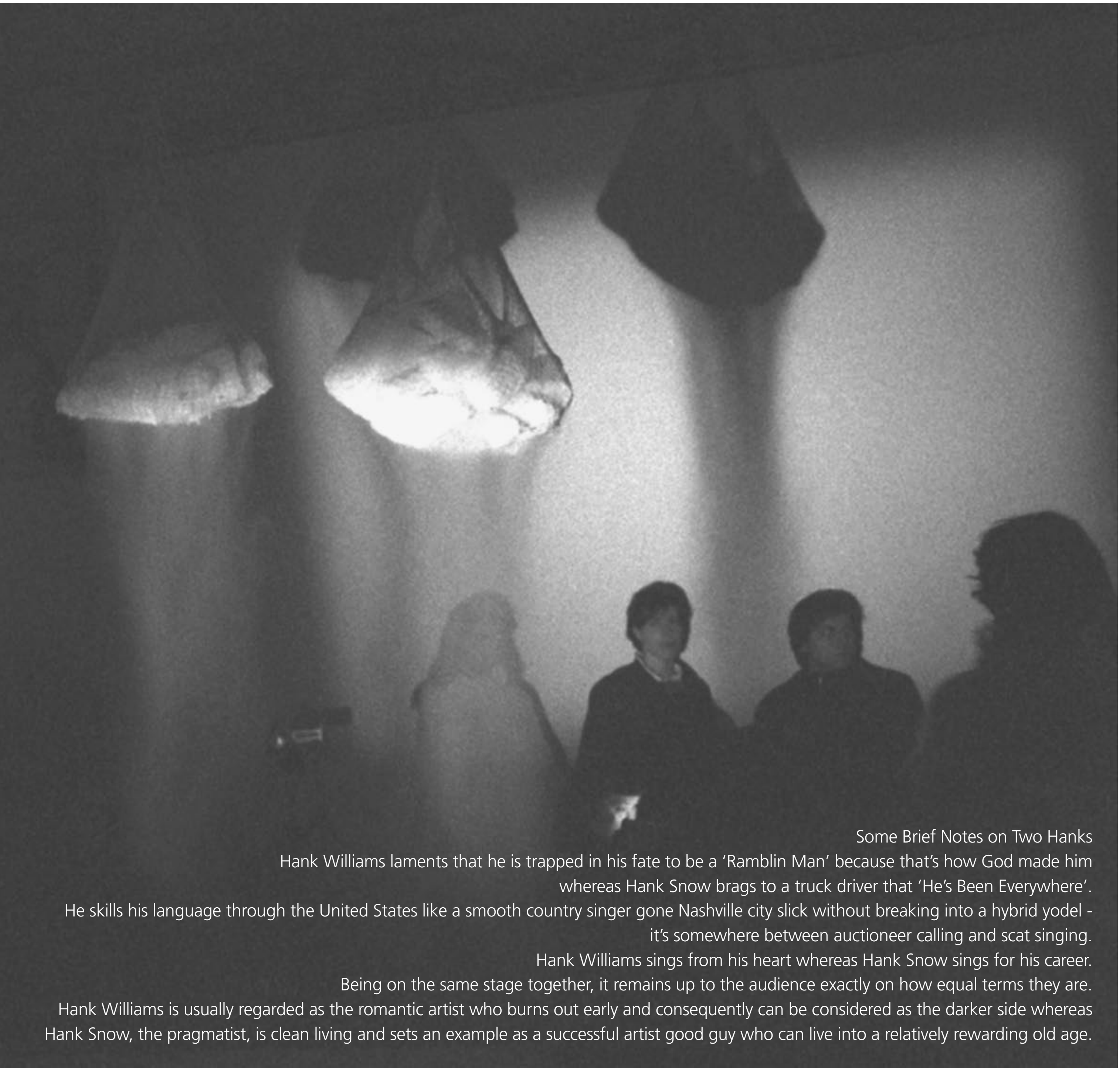



Gracias a la vida que me
ha dado tanto:
me dio dos luceros, que cuando
los abro, perfecto distingo,
lo negro del blanco,
y en el alto cielo su fondo
estrellado y en las
multitudes
el hombre que yo amo.
Violeta
Parra
Chile

Thanks to life, that has given me so much.
It gave me two eyes that when I open them
I perfectly distinguish black from white
And in the high heavens, the starry depths,
And in the crowd, the man I love.


AUDIENCE
MICROPHONE
ROOM IS TOTALLY DARK
ROAVING VIDEO CAMERA
LONG RECTANGULAR TUBE WHERE PRE-RECORDED TRACKS WILL TRAVEL
ROAVING 35 MM CAMERA
AMP
TWO HANKS
TWO GHOSTS
STAGE
SPEAKER
VIDEO CAMERA
AUDIENCE
35 MM CAMERA
THE GHOSTS WILL APPEAR HERE
SPEAKER
PROJECTOR
STACK OF DRY ICE
STROBE LIGHT AT RANDOM INTERVALS
LIGHT PROJECTION AT RANDOM INTERVALS
THEREMINIST PLAYS IN THIS AREA
VIDEO CAMERA
MIC.
AMP
AMPLIFIED BASS GUITAR
AUDIO DECK WITH PRE-RECORDED SONGS;
HANK WILLIAMS "RAMBLIN MAN" AND HANK SNOW'S "I'VE BEEN EVERYWHERE"
CHAIR WHERE CALLER SITS, SPEAKING "HANK" INTO THE MIC.
SPEAKER

David Askevold



Some Brief Notes on Two Hanks

Hank Williams laments that he is trapped in his fate to be a ‘Ramblin Man’ because that’s how God made him
whereas Hank Snow brags to a truck driver that ‘He’s Been Everywhere’.
He skills his language through the United States like a smooth country singer gone Nashville city slick without breaking into a hybrid yodel -
it’s somewhere between auctioneer calling and scat singing.
Hank Williams sings from his heart whereas Hank Snow sings for his career.
Being on the same stage together, it remains up to the audience exactly on how equal terms they are.
Hank Williams is usually regarded as the romantic artist who burns out early and consequently can be considered as the darker side whereas
Hank Snow, the pragmatist, is clean living and sets an example as a successful artist good guy who can live into a relatively rewarding old age.

Invisible Visibility Colin Powell before the UN Security Council

Odila Triebel

We usually take what we see in photos and television for granted. And we don't ask. And we don't laugh. Not even at a second glance. Colin Powell before the UN Security Council-- a phantom image, an uncanny image. The medium strikes back. Printed on front pages, posted on the internet, shown on the evening news, this photo, which was working its way through the international press at the time, interests me. In the photo, you see Powell seated, slightly hunched over, left hand raised with a small closed vial in his hand. In one version of the photo he's smiling at it. The former US Secretary of State said, "It could be Anthrax." Outside a vial, inside a subjunctive. The photo and the conjunctive traveled around the world. And not many laughed.
Let's think back--anthrax and the letter attacks in Washington and New York in 2001. Anthrax, the powder that was sent to Senator Tom Daschle and Patrick J. Lealy, among others also played a role in the speech that US Secretary of State Colin Powell gave before the UN. Anthrax and Iraq's biochemical weapons. The former US Secretary of State gave a speech before this body on February 5, 2003, in which he presented materials which were supposed to prove that Iraq was in possession of weapons of mass destruction and was not going to allow them to be viewed by inspectors. "To deceive, to hide, to keep from the inspectors."
Let's come a little more into the present: Two and a half years later, on September 10, 2005, Colin Powell said that he regretted many of the statements in this speech. But the speech, in which he suggested connections between Iraqi substances and the powder attacks in America, still exists.
Do you believe in anthrax? In Powell's speech, Iraq was first positioned as aggressor against its own population in order to justify a democratizing mission from the outside. Besides this, however, Iraq was also positioned as an international aggressor in order to legitimatize an attack on the part of the USA as self-defense. The argument that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction was intended to serve this purpose. Powell had prepared a whole collection of proofs for these accusations: satellite photos of buildings that were supposed to be secret factories and photos of airplanes expelling clouds of smoke which were supposed to be the biochemical attacks of converted bomber planes. Audio tapes were played that were supposed to reveal secret plans. It wasn't possible to identify the speaker in these tapes, indeed, all the materials presented to the Security Council were very difficult to verify. This was also true for the vial. A test on the substance, a chemical analysis, was not forthcoming in the meeting. But unlike the photos and the audio tapes, here the corpus delicti seemed to be present in Powell's very hand.

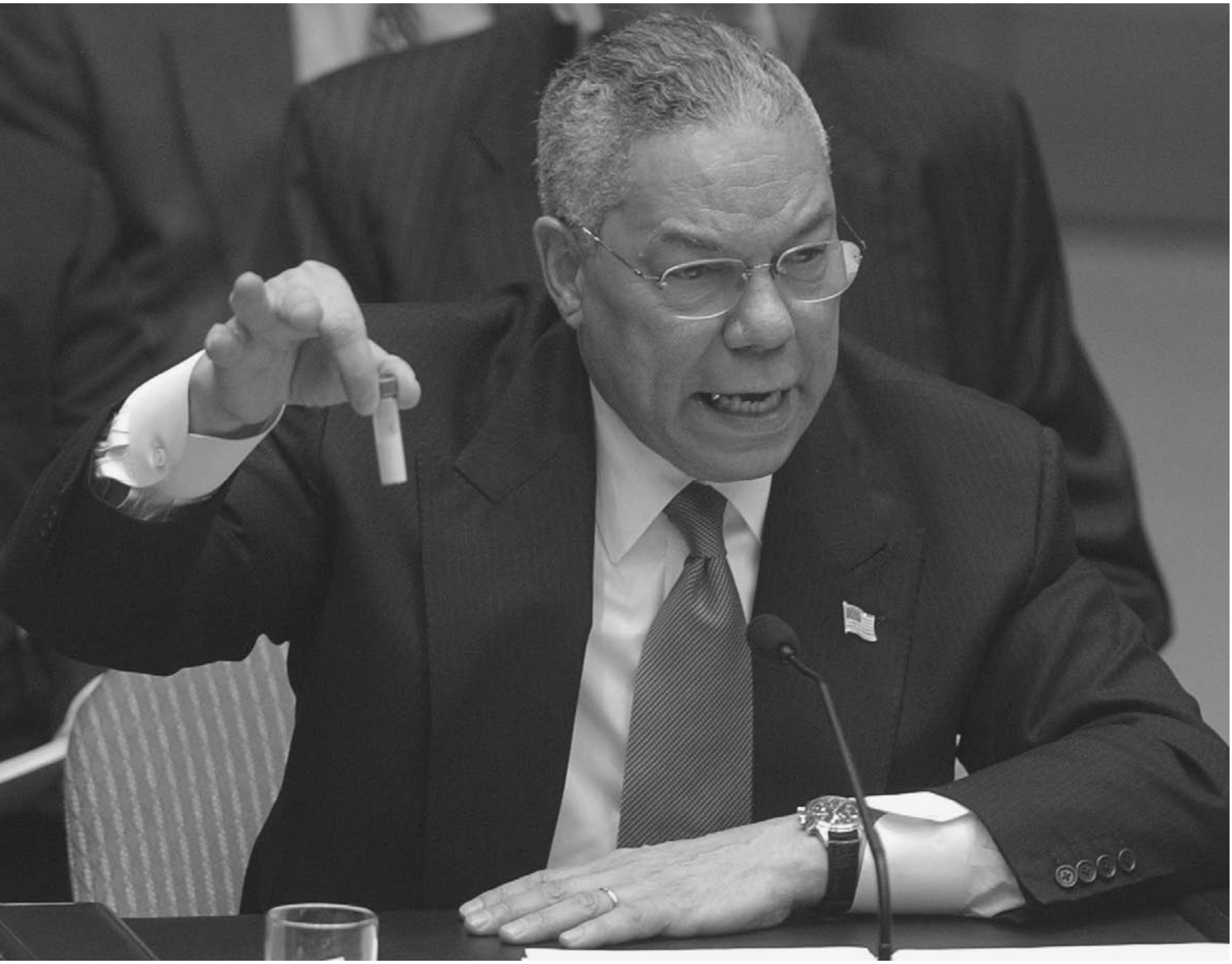
And even more, the casus belli seemed immediately present: that of the impending danger that would legitimatize self-defense. A photo of a poison attack in Iraq could not have achieved this. Besides, it would have been too difficult to differentiate between this and the shots that would soon be coming out of the war. A photo of buildings taken from satellites would be hard to identify or a photo of masked informants who were supposed to have worked in the secret service? An immediate danger could not have been presented with photos,but here, the poison in my hand. Threat. Fear. Self-defense is a casus belli, and even better, a legitimate one. Was there threat and fear even among those present at the UN? But: outside a vial, inside a subjunctive. The vial in the US Secretary of State's hand only works as a picture. But an uncanny power is at work: It could contain anthrax. The uncanny old man. A sorcerer!

Do you believe in anthrax? One might just as well ask if you believe in dinosaurs? Once at a party in Texas a young woman suddenly asked me between sandwiches, "Do you believe in dinosaurs?" I hesitated, "What"? "Do I believe in dinosaurs"? Coming from the German language I think of the phrase believing with the preposition in-- only in God. Dinosaurs. In. What did she mean? Do you believe in dinosaurs? Do you believe that they have any relevance for us? Do you believe that they're good for us? Do you judge your actions by whether or not they existed? Should they have any relevance for us? Then I got it: Do you believe that they existed? After a brief moment, however, a new lack of understanding slipped in: That they existed? "Yeah, sure," I said. "I've seen the skeletons." "They made it up," she said. This was the answer I got. "Who are they?" "They, who do believe." Acts of faith in front of skeletons. The bones bore no evidence for her. Scientific proof was not within her parameters. Obviously she was guided by what she'd seen in television, where the skeletons in museums must have seemed like skeletons on a screen. If there is no further data for verification, one has to believe the museum as well as the screen in the question of existence–or perhaps not. "Well," I turned to the woman at the party again in the hopes of being able to convince her with my personal experience. "I saw footprints at a ranch in New Mexico. Three steps in a field. It impressed me a lot. A lofty impression, we would say in German. I could put my foot into the footprint. Time stands still from time immemorial, and yet, right now it is in front of me." "How did I know that the footprints were from dinosaurs?", asked my acquaintance. I told her that the steps were more than 2 meters apart from each other, and the print was really big and had none of the forms we know today like claws, paws, or hoofs. I faltered and kept the last argument to myself. The rancher also said they had had the traces confirmed by experts. . . A hint of doubt came over me. What did I know about prehistoric research? How did I get to my knowledge?

Was everything of Powell's then just for show? On the one hand, we have just a calculatedly presented proof, on the other, a calculated representational maneuver. They made it up! The former CIA director George Tenet later stood up for Powell. He was convinced. Others in the service had known that the sources were not reliable. And they hadn't said anything. But what was Powell convinced of? That weapons of mass destruction existed in Iraq? That they were currently in production there? Or was he convinced of a political threat against the USA by Iraq, a threat for which the yet to be found weapons of mass destruction were meant as a metaphor? Perhaps he was convinced that an attack on Iraq was necessary for the USA anyway? Or at least that it clearly stood in the interests of protecting the USA? At the time, Powell also said that if the Security Council did not approve of the impending war, it ran the danger of condemning itself to insignificance. What he did not say was that American troops were already in the Persian Gulf. A unilateral decision had long since been reached. The audience for the maneuvers during the UN meeting was therefore probably not really the heads of state gathered there, rather, the American public. And this public could only be reached through the media. The question, however, remains: What was Powell convinced of? Of the veracity of the materials that he had brought or of the necessity of presenting a casus belli?

This ambiguity is eerie. Was there proof in this vial of Iraqi chemical weapons production, or was it just pretend? Did this posturing put a real danger into play? In a certain sense these questions about rhetoric repeat themselves in those about media. Sometimes it is contended that the media only produce artificial worlds of appearances. At other times, the persuasive power of the media is stressed. In the first case, we recognize only appearance. Here you see a vial with poison (maybe) inside. We can recognize the deceptive maneuvers: The poison itself is invisible. We only see a vial. They made it up. In the second case, we only see persuasion. Here. This poison is dangerous. No one among you could want such poison in such a vial to get out! So do something about it! We can see through this media discussion, and we can recognize the intentions in this argumentation strategy: in the one case only appearances, in the other, seduction. We are familiar with the wariness associated with this. And still, these arguments simultaneously suggest a kind of security, in the sense that it could be different, that there are, outside the media, certainties that we could call pure facts. A pure poison: yes or no and with no context. Was there anthrax or wasn't there? Then we could forget about the daily images in the news and instead read facts and analyses. But the images draw us in.

It's really not a matter of "material vials and the content in the subjunctive." It's not a matter of the problem of a media critique that would be analogous to an argument about "the trappings of language combined with potentially misleading contents." It's not about this binary. The vial, empty or not, is staged for a press photo. And it



Colin Powell before the UN Security Council, February 5, 2003, AP Photo works. You don't see anything. Nevertheless, you see. But perhaps something other than what you think.

Phantoms? Fabrication? Fiction? Not really. The being of phantoms is their lack of being. A paradox. They exist, and they don't exist. What's special about media phantoms is furthermore an uncanniness that increases the being of indecisiveness. This uncanniness stems from an unknown of which we don't even know that it's unknown to us. Media phantoms are uncanny. They search for us in our homes and alienate themselves from ourselves. It is uncanny when we perceive something known in the unknown maybe even precisely at the point when phantoms can also look so real.

The parts of Powell's speech that were retained and passed on in the image are in fact uncanny. After all, what was passed on was one of the most unsure moments in the speech. Do you believe that there could possibly have been anthrax in this vial? Do you believe that Powell could have passed undetected through the security measures at the UN building with a sample of anthrax in his briefcase? Do you believe that the security personnel would have let him through had they discovered it? Would Powell have enjoyed so much trust? It wouldn't even have to have been an intentional attack on the collected statesmen. The poisonous vial might simply have slipped out of his hand. Trust in Powell. He means no harm. And even if he does, not against the statesmen gathered there. Trust again: He is sovereign. He's got everything under control. He's not going to drop anything. Nothing's going to be taken away from him. He won't forget anything. Could he have enjoyed so much trust at the Security Council building? Do you really believe that there was anthrax in that vial?

Maybe the USA's reasons for war were completely different. Maybe there was no proof whatsoever in Powell's various documents. Many were skeptical. But many skeptics still believed this image in a certain way. The image works. It has an uncanny power. It could contain anthrax. The uncanny old man. A sorcerer! The statesmen in the room: his prisoners! But who asked this question? Many didn't notice anything. The image: proof of authenticity. Maybe the stuff doesn't even come from Baghdad. Maybe it's not even anthrax, but there's definitely some stuff there. It could well be poison. The vial is going to stand for something or other. What you see in the picture, though, is a farce. And it is a disguised one.

The world that appears to us by means of television doesn't seem strange to us, but rather natural. And even if it is strange, it is still taken for granted. Even when everything is seen with reservations, the rumor that the Americans never landed on the moon is still circulating. And now (Schwäbisches Tageblatt from July 16, 2006) even the original recordings have disappeared. They made it up! But this isn't about being purely constructive. Powell might have lied. The vial might very well have been empty. The photograph might have lied. The image itself, however, doesn't lie. But then, what does it represent? What does it prove? What draws us in when we look at it?

In her book on photography, Susan Sontag pointed out that an image attests to the fact that someone was at a particular place and that something happened there. The image, however, doesn't say anything about how something should or could have been. It doesn't evaluate. There is no opinion about facts. No conclusion will be made visible from the facts. The photo (and this is no less true for the digitally synthesized image) only opens the question of whether or not it is the reflection of a true piece of space-time. The photo has no grammar, no syntax, no before and after of a meaningful context. The photo is cut out of context. The borders are therefore random. Anything can be separated from everything. You only have to frame it differently. What Colin Powell has in his hand, the vial, proves nothing in and of itself. And through the illustration that is cut out of the context of his speech, it once again becomes without context. Why was this photo staged then?

What do we see in the image: A man with a furrowed brow and a concerned look into the distance? We see a pin of the American flag on his lapel. Intentionally or not, the flag's colors and their arrangement are doubled in the composition by Powell's tie and his chair. Somewhat removed, the lighter point of the pin creates a diagonal in the photo pointing to the small vial that he has raised in his right hand. Powell's left arm is resting on the table. It is the pos-

ture of a president who might be making a speech to the nation from his desk. The background is dark. The room appears empty, but we can imagine that we see the torsos of one or two men in the back. We see no audience. We see nobody listening to the speech or watching the drama. They are, rather, witnesses to the event and as a further witness, to that of the image captured by the camera. We see a man holding a small vial in the air. Why aren't we laughing? The uncanny old man. A sorcerer! And we, the spectators: his prisoners! This did exist, the thing that was photographed. But what is that? Anthrax? Empty. Powell who is no longer Secretary of State. The speech? It's over. And not only that. The speech has been retracted. But there's still the image. The phantom can return. And return again. Shortly before his death, one of the most famous show masters in German television, Rudi Carell, is supposed to have said that he would live on for a while in reruns. Is that also true for an image? The image of Powell before the Security Council is actually not repeatable. We can show it again, view it again, but not repeat it. Something about the image becomes the past in the moment that the lens clicks. But something is also retained. We know something about the world of this image which is actually already the past. We take it in. We don't laugh. Not even at a second glance. It's a phantom quality at that. With its unclear outlines, its shadowy quality, one can't observe a phantom for very long. It disappears like a gust of wind. Appears only momentarily–and makes a lasting impression in our memory. How is that possible?
This image verifies what it actually doesn't want to verify. The image is as empty as the vial. The phantom has escaped the sorcerer, and still, it's remarkable that we don't laugh.

According to Neil Postman, television has so thoroughly marked perception within the paradigm of entertainment that there is no longer a need to conceal anything from the public. This diversion has so completely numbed us that everything can be reported without consequence. In the first place, disinformation, not necessarily wrong information, is broadcast as irrelevant, fragmentary, and misplaced information. The spectator should be stimulated by change, novelty, movement, and action. The discontinuity created by the quick succession of news and the interruptions by commercials results in the fact that reports on atrocity and death are perceived as exaggerated. At any rate, they should not be taken seriously, and you don't have to seriously engage them. Images are, according to Postman, constantly amusing and do not have to document the core of a report. They justify themselves through their entertainment value. Something that is presented is always bound up with its medium. A tap-dance on the radio or a ventriloquist in a book are meaningless. But unfortunately, says Postman, thinking is not a performative art.

So do we simply take the images in? But then why can't they stay in the memory? The attacks of 9/11. Were they made up? Not that it's fictional, in the sense of only happening in the imagination. No, but in the sense of created, caused. They made it up! Ghosts are brought in and then get out of control. This is why, relatively soon after 9/11, conspiracy theories started to circulate, suspecting that it was no act from "outside," but rather that the attacks were "violence from within." Who was it? Were media representations used as a perspective? The media allowed this spectral view to become ordinary, a view in which you don't know what you're seeing. And you no longer know who's looking. Me? The spectator? The camera or the cameraman? Only one certainty is suggested: the overall being in time and space. Television gives rise to a communal body that sees collectively endangered and strong. The endangerment even grows despite the increase of seeing. Speech is past. The image conserves this past. Looks at us: this is how it was. And it is further imagined to be in the present. The body is endangered and strong. The speech has long since been retracted. The war, however, is nowhere near an end.
Sam Weber has written that television is so successful not only because of its power to produce sound and vision, but also in its power to present to us the seen and heard. What we see through the medium is separated from an individual body that sees and hears. Through television, we see someone or something else. we see the way he or it sees. But what we see is no longer separable from this further vision of what he or it sees. This separation, according to We-

ber, is not overcome, but simply invisible. Television, even more so than photography, connects the separation from one's own body as the body of perception with a distant present that is normally associated with sense perception. What's far away is brought before us and seems continually to be pushed away. The more modern technologies move things to their places, the more all things become replaceable. The media are not only prostheses that help us get over our own bodily limits, but what they re-present looks to us like something presented. Just like the view of the dinosaur skeleton appears through media, we see them through something else and no longer through our own perception. Information, according to Weber, is no longer in any verifiable relation to what one sees. Separation and invisibility are the effects of the medium "television."

Sometimes, however, what we don't see is all the more there precisely because we don't find it. We don't see the poison. We don't know if there even was any poison. But, somehow, it's there. Something was there and comes back. Paul Valéry is supposed to have said that one of the criteria for historical veracity is whether a fact, as it is told, can also have been photographed. Media reality and political reality get increasingly close to one another. Just as political behavior is more and more brought into line with the rules of the media, politics is increasingly only experienced second hand. So you have to believe the mediator–or not. This exploits the phantom and at the same time doesn't care. Where is the anthrax? Where are the real proofs? Who is threatened?

According to Sam Weber, transportation and communication can only have changed and reached the current speed because they also changed perception and self-perception. This changed perception of space and time by television, radio, and internet attests to our acceptance of no longer perceiving ourselves. Our perception is not the perception of our bodies. In a certain way, this has a prehistory in the nineteenth-century. The metaphors of reflection and mirroring were increasingly spectrally seen in the light of epistemology and subject philosophy. In one of the stories by the late Romantic writer E.T.A. Hoffman, the protagonist meets a vendor at a fair who offers him various wares but especially "nice mirrors, sir, nice mirrors." Completely confused as to his self-perception as subject, who no longer knows what and who he is because he can only perceive himself indirectly in a mirror image, the protagonist enters a dark house in which he had previously glimpsed a beautiful woman in the window. The door opens, and he comes face to face with a man. And then, lost to himself, this Theodor or whatever he might be called finds this flashing through his head: "The old man: a sorcerer! The beautiful woman: his prisoner!"

This doesn't negate the horror of the acts of violence on 9/11, nor the fear that these attacks unleashed. The inability to know if something similar was in preparation somewhere else: unsuspected, possible at any moment, right next to me. It is the terror, the network, ubiquitous yet still invisible until the next attack. With this as a backdrop, the image works: The USA thought they had a casus belli. In order to infer this message from the image, I don't have to see the poison. I don't believe that there was anthrax in the vial. The fear is present in the world, and the USA had decided to start a war. And it didn't matter what was in the vial. This brings the image precisely to representation.

The image manipulates our fear through absent presence or the fear that usually has nothing immediate to do with the everyday perception of our own bodies. A fear that is still present. The uncanny power of the media works in this place of the unknown known. We're familiar with this fear. The imagination of the global village produced by television separates us from our own bodies which then are perhaps even more afraid. Maybe, next to fear, there is a secret perverse desire to look at a man playing with a dangerous little vial. All too familiar. All too strange. Uncanny. Phantomlike. The old man: a sorcerer! The statesmen present: his prisoners! Why didn't we all burst out laughing?

someone in transe in Manchester

in the past, the present, and the future

us read, and another write

- think of morphia

the note-book marked ‘III’

175 million dollars

on the head of the earth

poisoned

botanist, and meterological assistant

darkness and distraction

spring was with us

with two mock-moons

sparkling meteor-stones

or magnetic phenomena

mixed with regions of milk

always from West to East

a brown cloud,

I was in an Arabian paradise

odour of peach blossom

Anyone? Anyone?

liquid air in crisp weather

Ming Tombs, but rising and sinking

- a dry, mad laugh.

westward by boat

a little patch of purple ash

minute crystals of potassic ferrocyanide

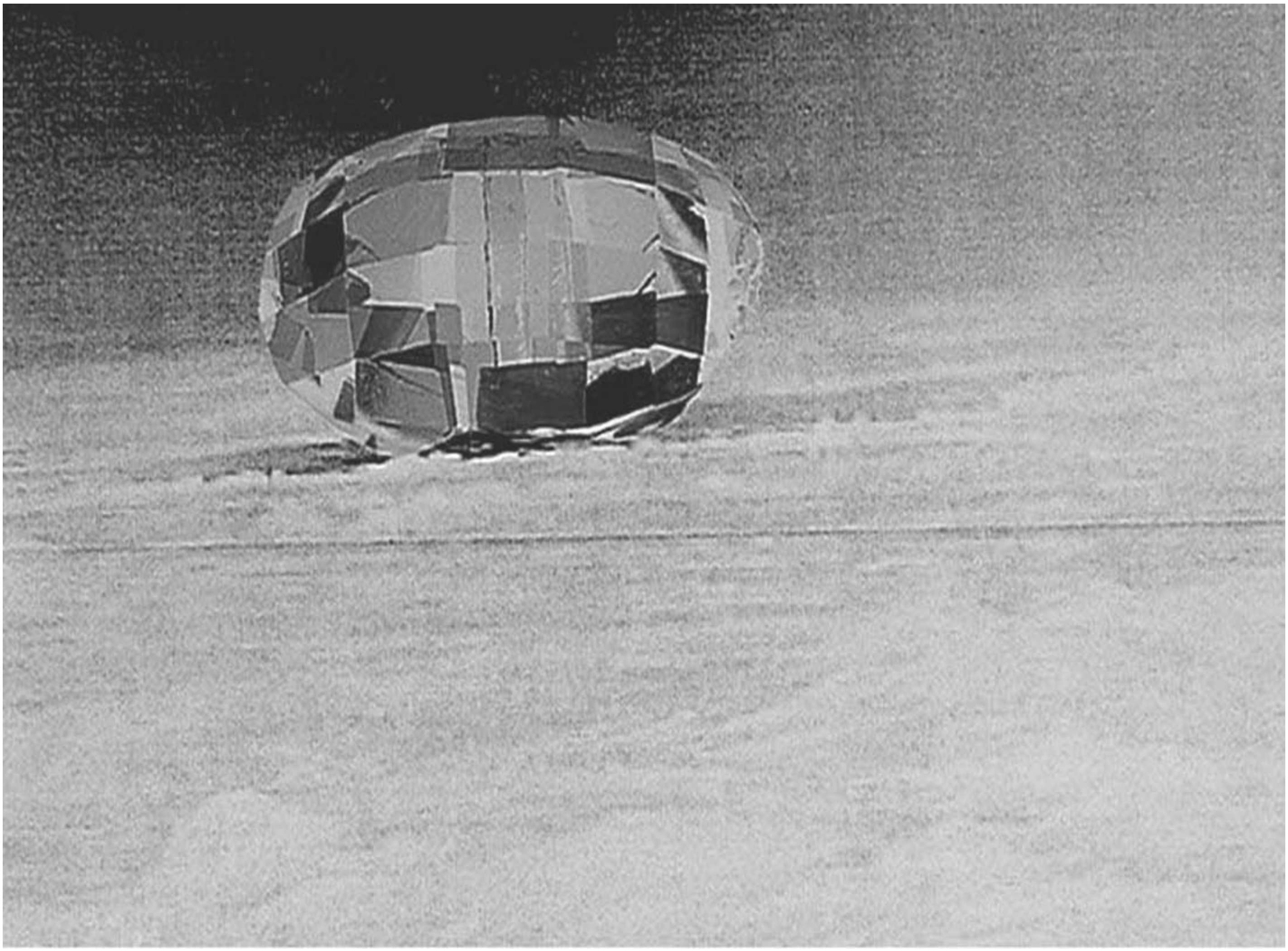
changing the color of the sun

the tail of the earthquake

transformed into a tree, or a snake, or a tiger

sensitive mimosa, fuchsia, palm

Marie Jager

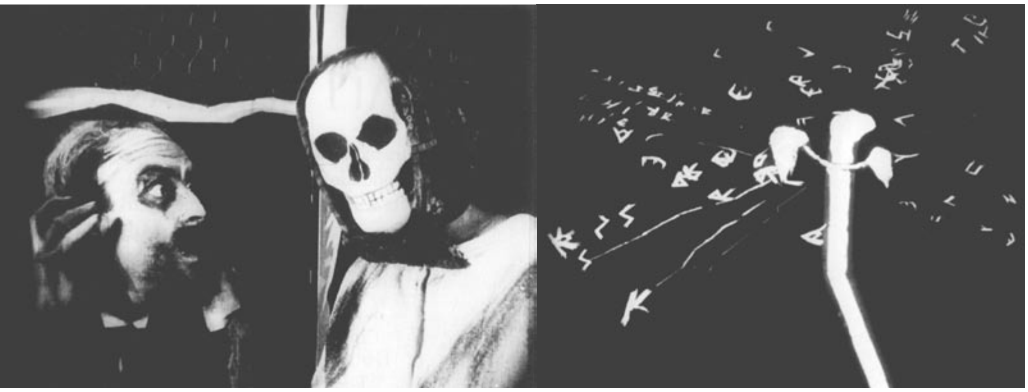


Film Program
Madeleine Bernstorff

We are presenting films in a new ghostly mood. Our intention is to confront these films with a particular model of thinking, to address social events and their media representations .It is all about another world, spectres being symptoms of unresolved relationships, of disorder and injustice. They indicate that something is off-kilter and needs be brought back into line. Most often, it is victims who return as ghosts, embodying the guilty conscience of a society marked by unequal relationships. Thus we also speak, as modern cinema does more and more, of loss and memory. History and representation: which and whose history can or cannot be told, from what perspective, and in what ways is the story itself shaped by narration? Regarding the many attempts to portray the unportrayable, we are concerned not with authenticity or false representations of realities in the past, but with how history became a battlefield of representation that constitutes our current symbolic, economic and political realities.

VON MORGENS BIS MITTERNACHTS (From Morn to Midnight), by Karlheinz Martin, with Ernst Deutsch, Erna Morena, Set design: Robert Neppach (1920, b&w, silent, 75mins, DVD, music selection by Julian Göthe)
The cinema of the 1920s succeeded in establishing very overt contact with the unconscious, the hallucinatory and the paranoid. The still unfamiliar technical miracle of film with all its possibilities of light and shadow, the bright and the occult, invited such subjects. The literary tradition of Romanticism and the discoveries of psychoanalysis also did their bit. The frightful visions (Siegfried Kracauer) went hand-in-hand with the undigested horrors of the First World War and the dramatic and existential uncertainties that followed. Quite early on, screenplays dealt with experiments in suggestion, madness, family curses, psychological distress of all kinds, and the living dead. The films of Expressionism, "Caligarismus", tread this same ground, impressing us with their gloomy decor through which the characters pass like zombies and sleepwalking by-products of the sets. The film VON MORGENS BIS MITTERNACHTS is a strange and non-canonical example of cinema as drawings come to life. Georg Kaiser's 1912 play VON MORGENSBIS MITTERNACHTS premiered in Munich in 1917 and was filmed on a low budget in 1920/21 by the theatrical director Karlheinz Martin with a small team of friends during lulls at the theatre. The unexpected encounter with a woman of the world who tries to withdraw money without the proper identification shakes a bank teller out of his dull official existence. He steals 60,000 marks from the till. Left to his own devices, and driven by a longing for "real life," from morning to midnight the bank employee, whom desperation and yearning have turned into a wanderer, experiences, in symbolic condensation, a day of typical existential situations, ending in death. The events at a six-day race, in a nightclub and at a meeting of the Salvation Army only intensify his disgust with the world. The film was shown only once in Germany in 1921, to the press. The critic Willy Haas panned it, and then the film went to Japan, where it readily found a place in avant-garde circles. One Japanese critic considered it the best Expressionist film, far more interesting than CALIGARI.

Film stills Von Morgens bis Mitternachts (From Morn to Midnight), by Karlheinz Martin (1920)



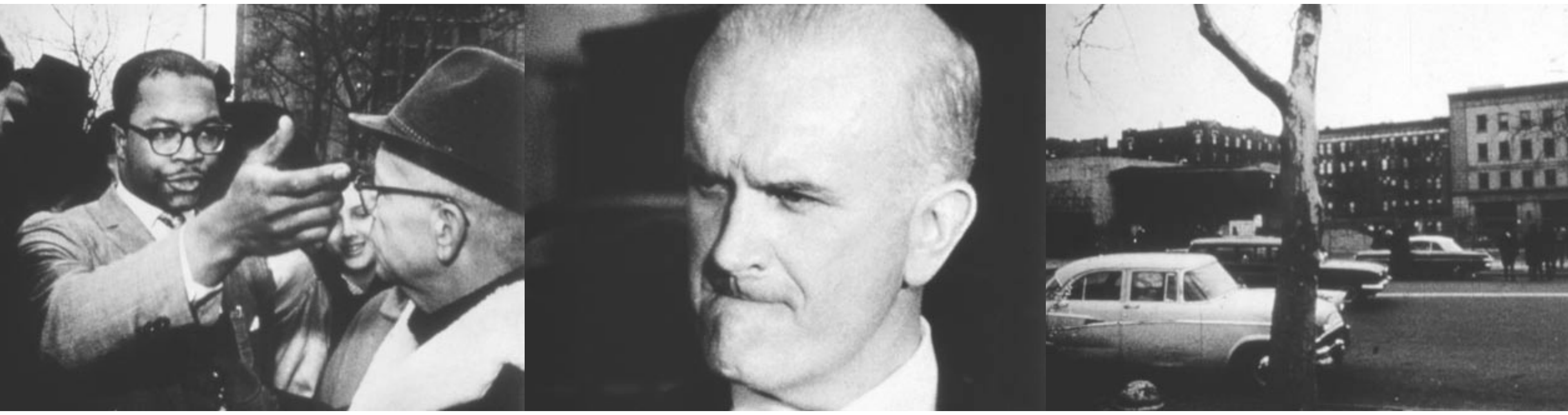
Film stills Handtinting, by Joyce Wieland (1967-8)

“Martin’s directing makes the film lively, sharply detailed representations everywhere, no scene is ineffective.... The static and kinetic elements always form a good contrast and the individual discrete scenes follow each other smoothly and create a process whose rapid tempo renders the film effective.” The critics of the day also spoke of “fitting” intertitles, which were however no longer present in the copy purchased from Japan by the Munich Film Museum in 1985. Students in Frankfurt found the present typographical solution for the titles during the restoration of the film, basing them on the rediscovered censorship file. A recurring motif, in contrast to the play, is that the face of (nearly) every woman the rampageous bank teller meets turns into a skull at some point, an uncanny memento mori, an indicator of the abyss, an anachronistic male fantasy? The real abyss is not money, and what it does to the poor harried man, but Woman.

Three short films introduce the Expressionist silent film VON MORGENS BIS MITTERNACHTS. All three films develop very different strategies for undermining the chasm between the present and the past and invoking the invisible, the ineffable and the ephemeral. Spectral presences, often more sensed than tangible, are part of the energy of the past and influence the present: The specific experiential mode of film as a permanent presence of what is already past.

HANDTINTING, by Joyce Wieland (1967-8, colour, silent, 5 mins, 16mm)

Joyce Wieland’s HANDTINTING (1967-68) is the result of an unsuccessful production commissioned by Xerox and filmed at a vocational training centre. The company found the material too vulgar: “girls swearing and talking about their feelings.” Wieland 1971: “The center was about eighty percent black kids who had come from everywhere. They were lonely, rebellious, funny, restless and hopelessly poor. What they were offered in the way of education was humiliating to me, some rooms with typewriters, and a machine that spoke to them as they typed.... It was a corporation pacification program. ... I took some of my own outs from the film – some of which were genuine old-fashioned cutaways, and which I felt strongly about, and began to make HANDTINTING.” A pan, brief shots of dancing black women, of others watching them, the changing rooms at a swimming pool, diving, laughter. Joyce Wieland handtinted the shots and mounted them in non-metric repetitions, gestures are often abruptly curtailed, and constructed a silent film in an almost audible and physical rhythm, in which the locked in nature and institutional constriction of the locations remain tangible. The physical-apparative bases of (our) film perception come to the fore.

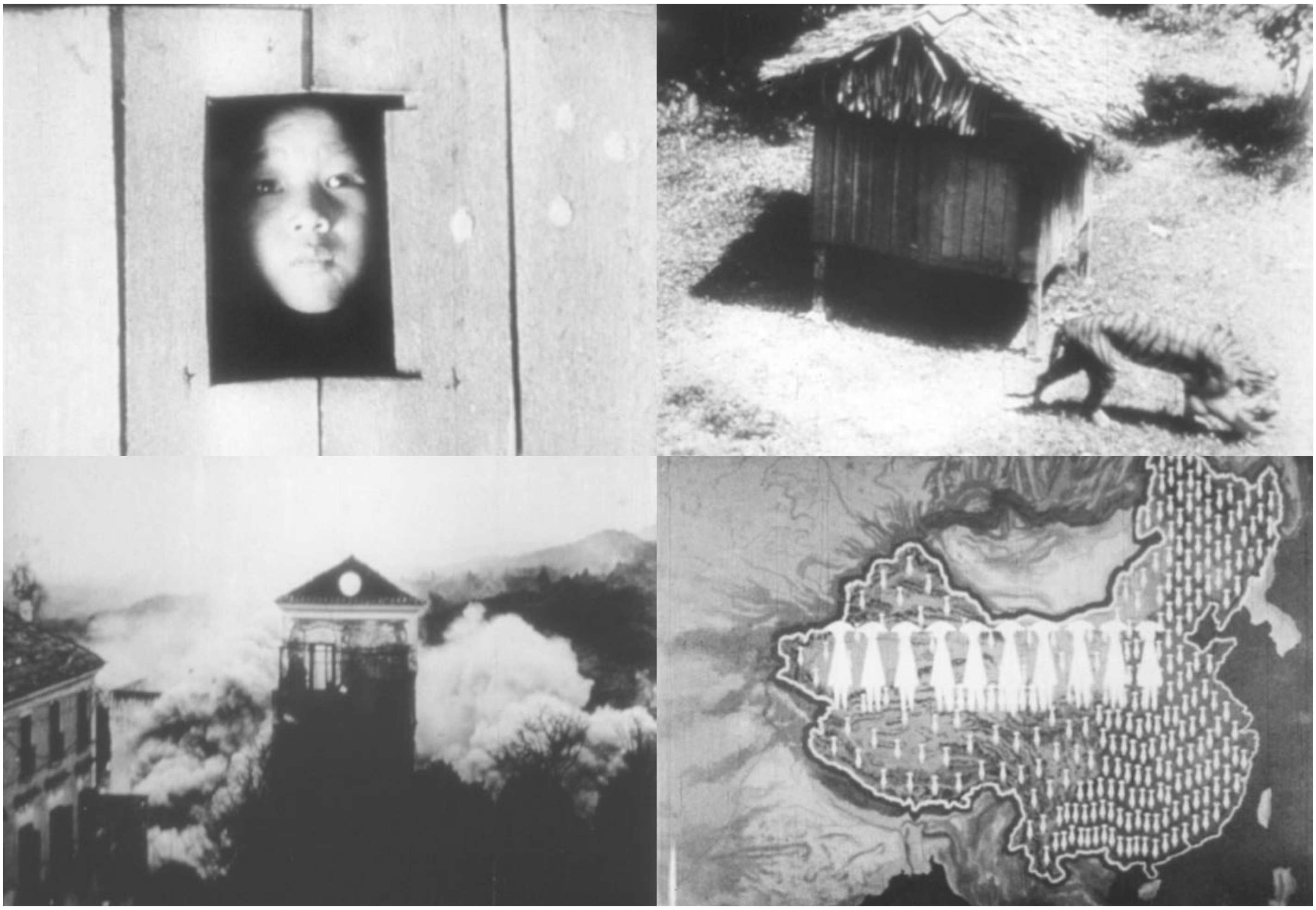


Film stills Perfect Film, by Ken Jacobs (1986)

PERFECT FILM, by Ken Jacobs (1986, b&w, 22 min, 16mm)
Ken Jacob's PERFECT FILM is an unedited assemblage of film rushes produced in 1965, which Ken Jacobs reportedly found in a Canal Street garbage can in 1986. Ken Jacobs left the outtakes of a television newscast made right after the assassination of Malcolm X on 21 February 1965 uncut and raw, his only intervention to improve the sound quality for better comprehension. We see repeated interviews with an African-American reporter, whose eyewitness account becomes more practiced and elaborate each time, then black leader, and then the test footage of the police chief's interview. He bites then purses his lips before reading the official facts to the camera with icy calm and lowered gaze. Then sequences of black leader. The camera pans upward, showing a long shot of the police barricades and crowds, and another interview with a neighbour who says that this assassination was as terrible Kennedy's. We see spectators who press into the frame, and ominous looking men – perhaps FBI agents – who closely observe the whole thing with an air of power, and others in Nation of Islam garb who discreetly move out of camera range.

According to Ken Jacobs, film as an art form is sometimes the conscious search or grappling for something that cannot be expressed in words. Something inside us thrives on and revels in such offerings. His throwaway films, he says, meet such criteria. And he calls this an "exercise in folded temporality".

DREAM DOCUMENTARY, by Fredrick Marx (1981, b&w, 5 mins, 16mm)
White leader and everyday sounds. The tiger prowling the village; the woman bringing her children into the hut in a panic of terror. The strong, deep shadows. The baby playing alone outside the hut. Close-up of the tiger. Black leader slows the forward motion. Emblematic images of colonial and other violent histories create a surreal and threatening landscape full of ruptures, pauses and associative picture fragments without narrative causality. The unintended connections between two pictures evoke new meanings. The condensations and displacements, however, appear to refer not to a personal dream-day, but rather to imperialist dream-decades. With the pauses, the fragile coherences of meaning remain suspended. The narrative is a phantom. "Even in the best interpreted dreams, there is often a place that must be left in the dark, because in the process of interpreting one notices a tangle of dream-thoughts arising which resists unravelling but has also made no further contributions to the

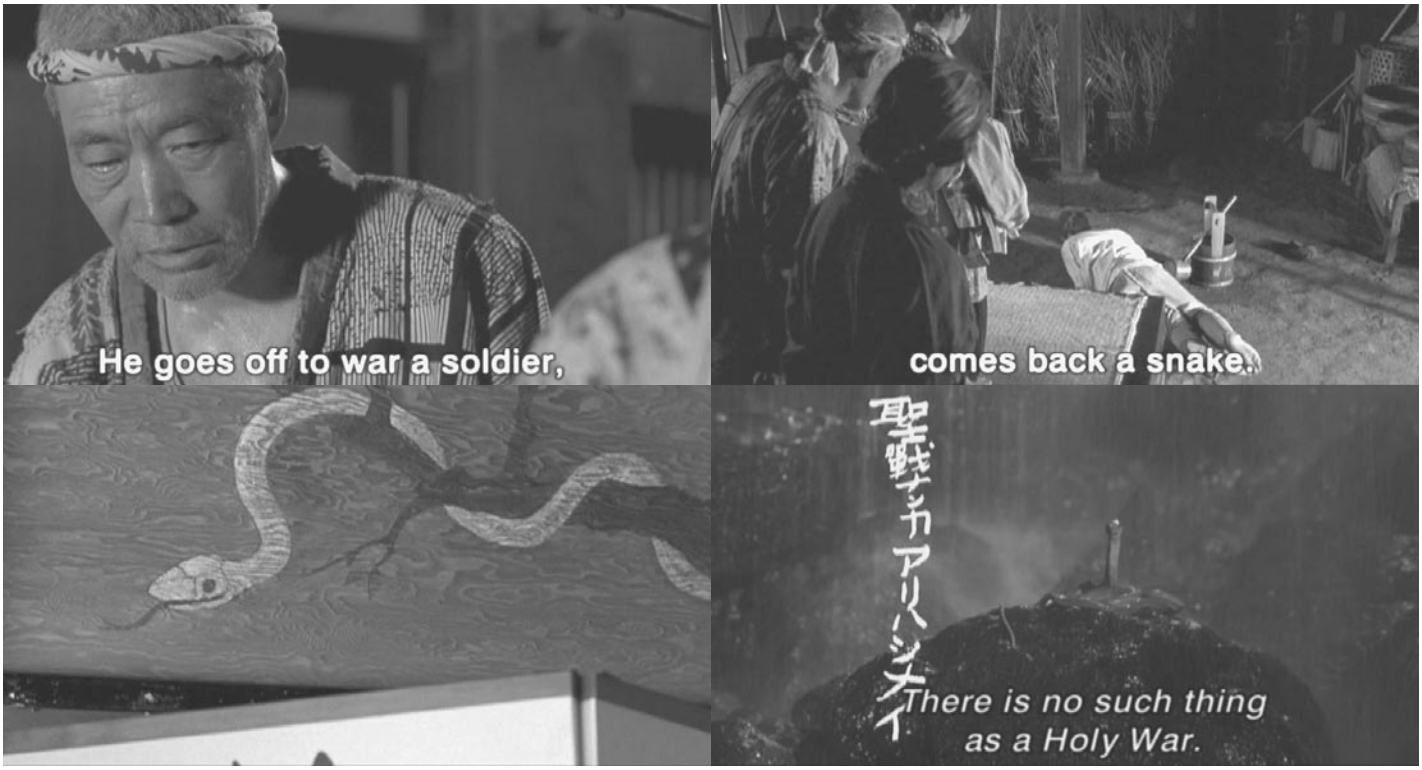


Film stills Dream Documentary, by Fredrick Marx (1981)

dream-content. This, then, is the navel of the dream, the place where it straddles the unknown.” (Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams)

The night of trauma is a theme in two films shown as part of the exhibition.

In David Askevold’s1973 video MY RECALL OF AN IMPRINT FROM A HYPOTHETICAL JUNGLE, a sketchy figure rolls towards the camera horizontally and with aching slowness through a latticework of plant shadows. Haltingly, a male voice tells of his struggle for survival in the jungle war, and a camera flash whistles each time it recharges.


He goes off to war a soldier,
comes back a snake.
聖戦ナンカアリハシナイ
There is no such thing as a Holy War.

Film stills 11’9”01 September 11 episode, by Shohei Imamura (2002)

Shohei Imamura’s eleven-minute contribution from the episodic film 11’ 09” 01 - SEPTEMBER 11 is set sometime shortly after the Second World War. A man who fought as a soldier in the Japanese imperial army and survived the atom bomb attack on Hiroshima returns to his village, but on his belly, for he has become a snake. His relatives cannot stand him this way and reject him. “I would like to make disorderly films,” said Imamura, who died in 2006 at the age of eighty. His subjects are proletarian, realistic and body-oriented, as spectacular as they are subversive, and filled with inscrutable apparitions, who form part of darkly incomprehensible but very effective spectral world. “Bush appealed to national solidarity and proclaimed his love of his country against the backdrop of the national flag. This image seemed somewhat excessive to me. I thought it would be a long war,” noted Imamura, describing his thoughts at the time when he was planning the film.

This is the lumberjack. He is one of the four characters who starred in my project “The Flying Wool Slipper”. The other personas are the Grand-Ma, the Flight Attendant, and the Singer. Layers of each of the characters were borrowed and inspired from regional myths, anecdotes, or family legends. The lumberjack was vaguely inspired by a French Canadian folk tale called “La Chasse-Galerie”.
That is an event that happened in the early 1900’s, in the north of the province of Quebec where a small group of lumberjacks were working hard, cutting wood and cleaning forest. It was a hard life. One night, a few of them decided to do a deal with the devil and to fly home - in a canoe - for one night. The devilish trap was that while they were out the travelers couldn’t drink or have too much of a good time with their families and girl friends.
In one of the videos of “The Flying Wool Slipper”, the lumberjack, played by a woman, retells her experience with the slipper.

About A Series of Photographs made in the Former Iraqi Embassy to the Former GDR

Walead Beshty

Photographs operate something like ruins, they are available to a multitude of narratives; they slip effortlessly between them. They suggest and beg cultural assumptions: small details, happenstance, become the bedrock of fact, an invitation to the projection of elaborate explanations, not because of their ability to describe in volumes, but their capacity to do so with complete muteness. The Parthenon, for example, contains evidence in excess, yet our ability to gain some semblance of access to the culture it was a part of, the lives it was keyed into, is only available if a script is in place. A more extreme ideological example is the boulevard named Unter den Linden in Berlin, repeatedly renamed, and recast depending on the particular sovereign power that happened to claim it at the time, it has occupied an array of conflicting meanings. Berlin is a constellation of these negotiations with history, everything has had a multitude of names. Like a patchwork, stories (nationalist or otherwise) help to pave the way between objects and meaning, making inscrutable evidence digestible. Ruins, abandoned spaces, are particularly conducive to their insertion into a nationalist, or cultural lineage, the absence of active social exchange within them, their stasis, creates an opening for narration, and fantasy.
This had always bothered me about photographs, they seemed unable to think, to describe their own process; they have always behaved as answers to non-existent questions.

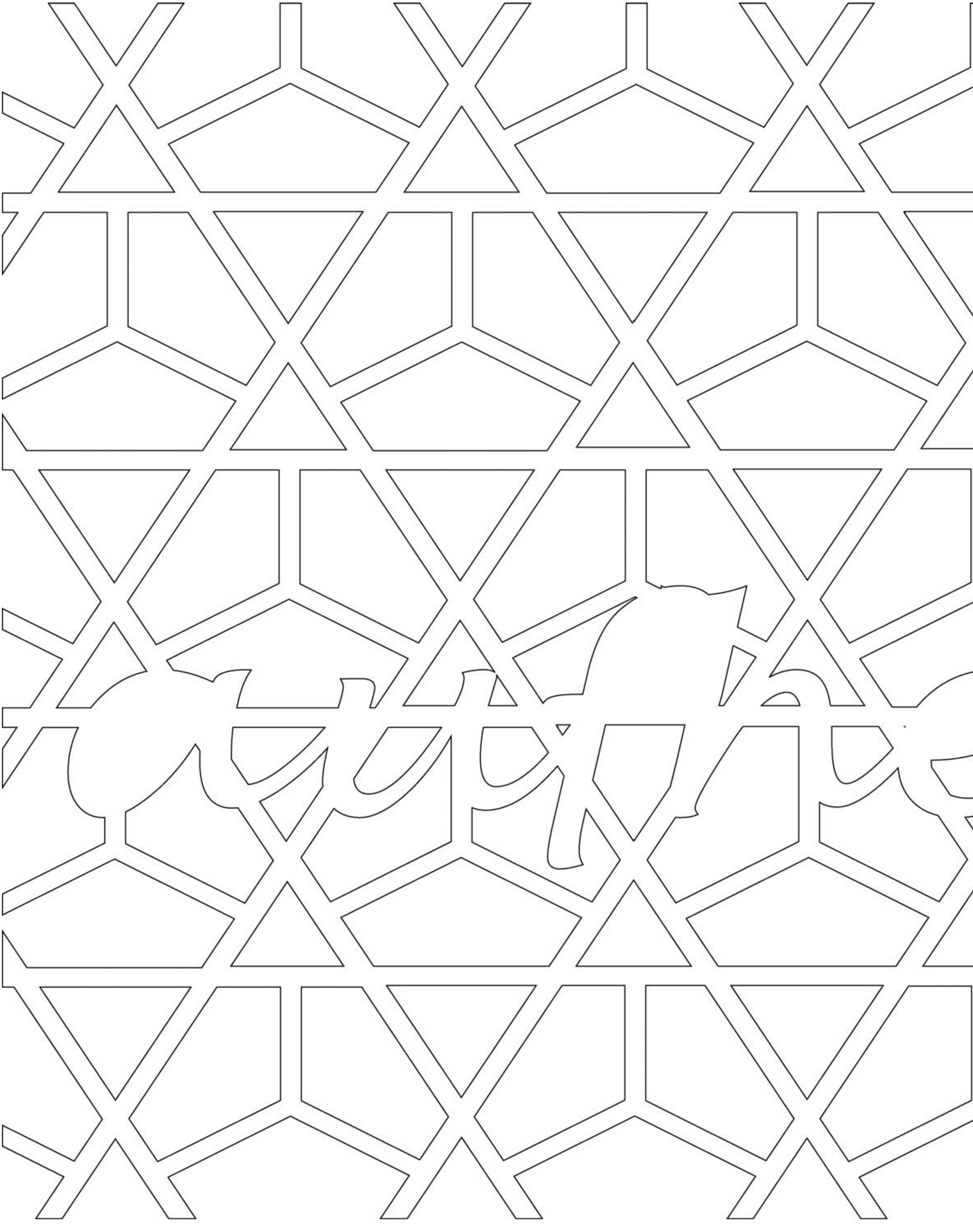
Between 2002 and 2004, I completed a suite of 60 photographs made on successive trips to the former Iraqi Diplomatic Mission to the now defunct Deutsche Demokratische Republik. The mission has laid dormant in the Pankow district of East Berlin in an innocuous corporate office park, neighboring dentist offices, and architecture firms (all occupying former mission buildings) since the first gulf war.The situation of the mission is unique, Iraq was given the land by the DDR in perpetuity, so when the treaties of the DDR were dissolved in 1991 (precipitated by German reunification in 1990), the soil on which the mission is located continued to be sovereign territory of Iraq, barring any intervention on its ground according to Article 22.2 of the Geneva Convention. This was unlike any of its former neighbors whose lands returned to the ownership of the reunified Germany in 1991. In 2003 the Republic of Iraq ceased to exist, leaving the slowly molding building in an even more complicated limbo, a relic of two bygone regimes, unclaimable by any nation: a physical location marooned between symbolic shifts in global politics, and a displaced representation of the turmoil of the nation to which it is abstractly linked. While it persists as a physical place, its location, the very definition of it as a place, was completely uncertain. When one enters this limbo, despite having underwent no physical change, one is radically transformed. One ceases to be a citizen, as there is no national sovereignty to guarantee it, one becomes essentially invisible, a ghost. It is easy to forget that we are constituted as an individual by the state, our rights and freedoms define our sense of self, until, that is, we move into a space where such guarantees, although close by, are momentarily suspended. This detachment from personhood usually occurs when one is in direct conflict with an authority. The sovereign power's ability to grant rights are constituted in the ability to deny them (our right to privacy is acknowledged as a gift from the state when it is temporarily suspended, for example when we are searched by the police, or in airport security). In the abandoned embassy, what is truly unique is that this suspension occurs in a vacuum, in the absence of any centralized authority. It is the ultimate violence of the state, its ability to turn on and off its guarantees, without the state itself. The Iraqi embassy's odd circumstance is an expression of autonomous power, autonomous form: ideology without the state.

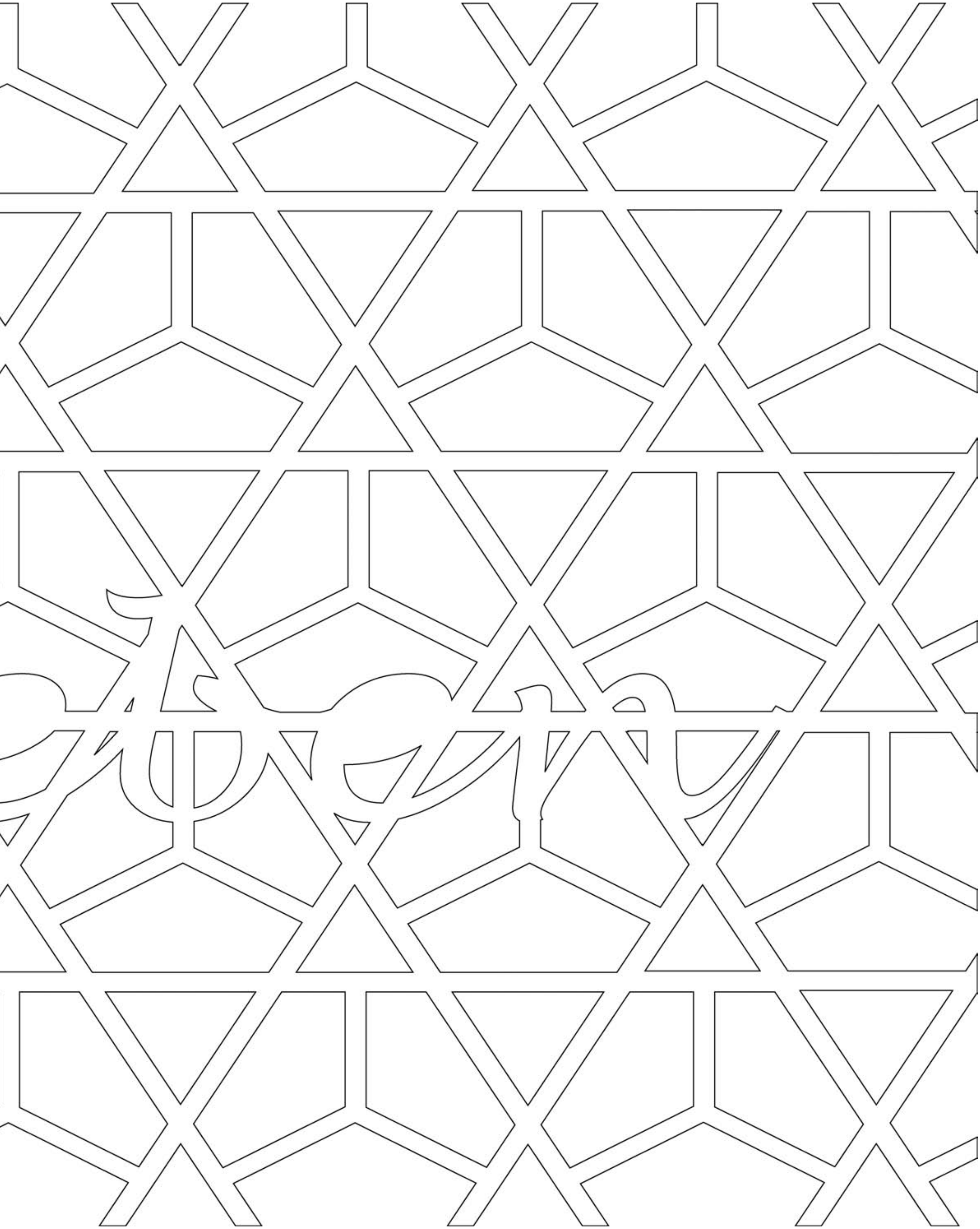
During my initial trips to the site, several over the years since 2001, I produced images that were conventional note taking, formally composed pictures of the site, which for me were the equivalent of dirty secrets. I returned to it over and again because I found the experience of it completely strange, and making documentary pictures of a conventional form reminded me that the site still existed, that it was an open question, but they were not art to me, meaning they were unspecific, un-reflexive, and this was a thorn in my side. The banality of the embassy's molding books, abandoned desks, and assorted debris was completely at odds with the complex of political abstractions, and life and death issues that circled around it. Yet the space, and its decay was average, the building had met what was a common fate for bureaucratic structures in the East abandoned after the wall came down. Its indeterminacy extended to the politics of the place, its banality was extended into a bureaucratic stasis, maintained by rules governing social relationships. In 2006, I was approached about exhibiting these photographs on their own, and immediately was uncomfortable with the idea. On their own they could not begin to provide insight into the problems posed by the space. In fact, they proposed a much more problematic outcome if left to "speak for themselves."

One month before the show, I booked a flight back to Berlin out of desperation. My other proposals to the museum were rejected for various reasons, some logistic, some because of internal politics; the conversation returned to these images. It became clear to me that these institutional negotiations were an extension of the same problem I was grappling with in photography, and the embassy itself. The trips there and back were particularly excruciating, missed flights brought on by the multiple connections required by my discount tickets, lost bags, surly and beleaguered employees. The sensation was of complete impotence; there was no one to get angry at, everyone was trapped in the limbo of air travel, at the wrong side of an invisible bureaucratic apparatus, in front of terminals, in call centers, behind counters, in uniforms that guaranteed no control: no one was to blame.

I realized that what had been missing from the original images was this process of travel, the alienating isolation of it. The initial set of photographs covered this up, obscured this transition, as most photographs do; they were resolute in their performance of stability. I've heard that the reason one is more likely to cry while watching a schlocky movie on an airplane is due to the implicit trauma of air travel, i.e. fear of death, of crashing. But the trauma of air travel is constituted in a more basic, existential threat. Air travel offers a literal confrontation with the tenuous grasp one has on autonomy, on a sense of personhood, on being. It constitutes a complete loss of control (in this, death is only one aspect). When we lose this sense of autonomy, we seek out places where we can make choices, even if they are completely minor. Perhaps this is why shopping has become one of the main attractions of the contemporary airport, having been sifted through security llike cattle, and confined within terminal awaiting departure, we find solace in our ability to acquire small goods of our own accord. The purchase of a pack of gum, a magazine, a bottle of liquor, constitutes a reacquisition of unique selfhood, of freedom, albeit in a marginalized form.

I returned to Berlin to reactivate the site, to try to open it up for business, or at least camp out for a few days (I had done this before). I set up a phone line, using the original embassy answering service message I found on a tape at the site. I resumed photographing the site when I arrived, and continued to collect materials in the hopes reacquainting myself with it. I had put my film through the high-powered baggage x-ray machines in the airport without thinking, realizing only after I arrived in Berlin that the film would be ruined. As I was about to throw it out, I realized that this was the mark of travel photographs usually repress, it indicated the problem of translation, and I came to understand that the film recorded its own picture of international airspace, of national borders, of security, which were the basis for the perplexing tensions that were drawing me back to the embassy. I photographed the site with this film and allowed the film to travel, unprotected on my return trip as well. The marks on the film produced abstractions that were an index of the ideological partitions I felt were left invisible in the previous images. They formed a veil underneath which the more banal snapshot images of the site were rendered as faint echoes. The forms were not only the accumulation of the movement across borders, the traces left by the x-rays, but also the accumulated aggression that my bags received from employees trapped in this system, registered in the film itself, displayed as light leaks, color shifts, and streaking.





The Specter of the Nation

Niels Werber

"Our achievement, our hard won success, and one we can be proud of regardless of individual views of the Iraq war, will be to have given a desperate, hopeless and brutalized people the opportunity to make Iraq a free, prosperous and democratic nation state." In a speech on 7th February 2006 to the Foreign Press Association in London, British Defense Secretary John Reid declared the transformation of the Iraqi population into a nation to be the primary objective of occupying forces. The "specter" of this anticipated "success," he elaborated, was "feared" by the "terrorists" ranged against Iraq. The nation, at least from the perspective of those who fear it, is a specter.

Specters are ambivalent figures. Karl Marx deployed the metaphor of the specter as early as the 1848 Manifesto of the Communist Party. The famous opening lines of this text read: "A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this specter: Pope and Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies." Communism in Marx' view, of course, is no more a specter than the nation considered from the perspective of Defense Secretary Reid. One is cast as a specter in order to be hunted and exorcised. "Where is the party in opposition that has not been decried as communistic by its opponents in power?" Marx the enlightener believes it is thus "high time," to "meet this nursery tale of the specter of Communism with a manifesto of the party itself." It is not Communism that is undead, a restless zombie. On the contrary Communism is an historical youngster, a new force just setting foot on the political stage with a manifesto. It is in fact the spirit hunters who demonstrate their obsolescence at the moment they apprehend Communism as a specter. The only accuracy in this characterization lies in the dread and horror that Communism strikes into the hearts of these "powers of old Europe." From the point of view of these doomed powers, the Communist Party can only be a specter, one that old Europe dreads while precisely this fear confirms that historically, the dawn of a new epoch is nigh. Naturally the manifesto has a postnational alignment, because Communism, according to Marx, will "point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality." The political notion of the sovereign state conceived amidst a climate of warring nations will be transcended because, "in proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end." The nation of old Europe thus becomes an untimely specter now only evoked with the aid of magical spells. As Jacques Derrida has shown, "nation, blood, territory" were among Marx' specters.[1] The specter of Communism is thus in reality the specter of the nation, a communist specter generated by nationalism.

John Reid is fully aware of the ambivalence of the metaphor of the specter. He knows that the specter of the nation that haunts Iraq stirs anxieties that must be placated. The Iraqi people, just freed of the chains in which specters rattle around haunted castles, have to be convinced that the specter of the nation is a horror story being spread by those old powers of the Middle East whose pre-modern outlook condemns them to oblivion. The same tale of progress that drives Marx' manifesto is continued by the British Defense Secretary when he assumes that no power in the world can resist the advance of democratization, free market economics, and modernization for long. It is clear to Reid that this very "progress" might be viewed from an Iraqi perspective as a specter that fans fear and terror. He professes this specter, just as Marx did, to be a myth:

"Our purpose in Iraq has never been to create a mirror-image of our own nation. That would never work, and it is not what Iraqis want. Our purpose has been to give Iraqis the tools to build the kind of nation they want. It is not for us to say how that nation should look. That is for Iraqis to decide. We must not lose sight of the fact that Iraq is a vastly different nation to our own in almost every way. It has never, and probably will never, look like a western European country."

The accusation that Anglo-Saxon nation building in Iraq is hegemonic is dismissed as an old wives' tale. Specters are either summoned or exorcised.

In his cheerful, anti-British, good-vibrations patriotic treatise Wir Deutschen (We Germans), Spiegel writer Matthias Matussek confesses that he is “aghast” over “the German self-hatred that rejects the formation of a unified nation.” Christine Hohmann-Dennhardt, a Federal Judge aligned with Germany’s Social Democratic Party, is presented as exemplary of this national disposition. She recently pronounced that “the specific and for long periods dismal history of Germany” does not allow “for a call for the salvation of the nation, the national,” which in plain language, as Matussek observed with Patrick Bahners, means “that the nation is beyond remedy.” Matussek quite rightly pours scorn on a Federal Judge who reduces the concept of the nation to the Third Reich. With polemical barbs, Matussek explicitly aligns himself with the “evocation of the nation” against Ms. Hohmann-Dennhardt. [2] For present purposes, I am not the least bit interested in Matussek’s founded or unfounded criticism of the reduction of German history to a period of 12 years. Once again, I am interested in the metaphoric. The national - it must be “summoned” like a specter. Matussek even coins the term the “Nation-Beschwörers” (Nation-charmers, p. 153). The way this is achieved was recently demonstrated by the advertising campaign “Du bist Deutschland” (You are Germany). Cheered on by the constantly rehearsed incantation “You are Germany,” this campaign resurrects the nation as a community sharing the same culture and destiny. The individual was implored through the media and on countless billboards to see themselves as a part of the national whole. This whole is more than the sum of its parts. The parts must therefore integrate or subordinate themselves to it. This is precisely a concept of integration in the sense of a restriction of degrees of freedom. Since antiquity this hegemonic discourse of the whole has been based on a mastery of its constituent parts.[3] There are no prospects here for a strong concept of the individual or an aesthetic of fragments. “You are Germany” promotes an emphatic and voluptuous dissolution of the individual into the community of the nation: “You are a part of everything. And everything is a part of you. You are Germany. [...] There are 82 million of us. [...] There are 82 million of you. You are Germany.” In campaigns of this nature the “fragmentation of society”[4] that is perceived as such a menace is vanquished by collective symbols. “Because your flag will become many flags and your voice will become an entire choir.” What is evoked here is a national community akin to that recently portrayed by Phillip Roth as an American nightmare. Let’s take a closer look:

Du bist Deutschland
Kampagnen-Seite
Du

You Are Germany, campaign web page

When Charles Lindbergh became the president of the US in 1940 and signed cooperation agreements with the German Reich, he appointed a Rabbi as part of his government and declared the integration of the Jewish population as one of the priorities of his domestic policy. Still living together in almost homogenous and therefore “ghettoized” city neighborhoods, the Jewish population would end their self isolation and with the aid of subsidies, disperse themselves evenly across all the states of the union and take up hitherto atypical occupations in sectors such as agriculture. Of course it would be difficult to buy Kosher products in small town middle America, but the integration of the Jews would extend to them relinquishing such extravagancies and finally putting an end to their own segregation. Soon there would not be any more areas of the city, nor local branches of companies with corresponding concentrations of Jewish personnel. No city district would function as a ghetto any longer, and along with the disappearance of associated urban infrastructure, the category of ghetto Jew would vanish too. The third generation Newark, New Jersey family of Roth, the Jewish insurance broker, experienced this politic as an attack on their cultural identity even though their new Italian neighbors, the ones continually replacing their old Jewish friends, were pleasant enough. In a fictionalized account of his family history, Phillip Roth’s magnificent novel depicts a national politics of integration one with the aim of dissolving all differences between white immigrant ethnicities experienced as a prelude to an anti-Semitic extermination policy. Jews, we learn in The Plot against America, covet their equality in the eyes of the law and the equal opportunity afforded them by the American dream, but they don't want to allow themselves to be dissolved in the American "melting pot". They reject any integration that robs them not just of their ghettos, but of the very possibility to be different.

Current German integration policy regards the ghettoization of immigrants as one of its "grave problems" to cite from the Premier of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia's foreword to the handbook "The Task of Integration." Produced by the Ministry for Integration, this guide for local authorities expressly advises to "avoid concentration in particular areas of the city" when allocating accommodation to "new immigrants." Absolutely no concentration, at all costs. Rather, the physical dispersal of immigrants is an aspect of the "support of the integration of families." It is the "intention of the state government to prevent ethnic segregation because it works against the goal of the integration of immigrants and their participation in German society," according to the 3rd report of the state government on immigration and integration. Indeed, the Ministry for Integration in North Rhine-Westphalia finds it important to state that the purpose of integration is not the "assimilation" or "adjustment" of immigrants, rather their "connection" to the "existing system of socioeconomic, judicial and cultural relationships." Integration is an "open" process of exchange between "equal partners," as if it were about making German football more Brazilian, or German cuisine more Italian. The list of negatives is more explicit. As "warning indicators" of failed integration we find the "increase of ethnic concentrations in the housing market, the stability of intra-ethnic social contacts (understood as the emergence of parallel societies)" as well as the "absence of identification with the host nation which persists through generations." Ethnic concentration leads to parallel societies, and where these provide a stable cultural framework there can be no identification with the "host society's dominant culture." Integration therefore means identification with Germany. By definition this fails to occur where immigrants create ghettos which therefore should not be tolerated. For the consequences of such ghettoization are not authentic Middle Eastern cuisine or an authentic headdress, but a "rise in delinquent behavior (problems with addiction, drugs, violence and/or criminal activities)." Quite apart from any current "increase in ethnic concentration," the concept of the ghetto is viewed so negatively that it seems advisable to disperse immigrants as widely as possible throughout Germany's "social space." The resultant diffusion effects will be advantageous for the process of "cultural adjustment," resulting in the immigrant's "willingness to identify" with their host national, regional and local communities.

It is not enough to comply with your school or military obligations, to work in your uncle's business, pay taxes, refrain from torching cars on 1st May and live in the parallel society of your own neighborhood - there is more at stake than obeying the law and declaring allegiance to the free and democratic basic order of the Federal Republic of Germany. Not shooting your homosexual brother, or your sister for wearing Western-style clothes, and respecting the "monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force" of the German state - as the scandalized discussion guidelines developed by Stuttgart's Interior Ministry requires of Muslims wishing to become naturalized citizens - has to do only with a willingness to conform to the law, not with an identification with the nation. In contrast, the new politics of integration require an active integration into precisely that German community that has just been so vehemently evoked in the multimedia "You are Germany!" campaign. To abide by the law and leave "acculturation" to tourists and folklore groups is no longer enough when "willingness to identify" is required. Instead of remaining a subculture of society immigrants should become a part of the whole. "You are a part of everything. And everything is a part of you." Only a "weak" culture contents itself with the inclusion of immigrants into society, writes Federal Judge Udo di Fabio in Die Kultur der Freiheit (The Culture of Freedom). Instead, a "vital" community has "great capacities for integration" at its disposal, for its "power" attracts "new arrivals to culturally orient themselves to it." Germany has the potential to be such a "vital" community - on this point the celebrities from the “You are Germany!” advertisement agree with di Fabio. The “new power” in, for and as Germany will emerge if the people stop wondering what the state can do for them and instead ask themselves what “they themselves can do better.” It is JFK’s legendary question. “Ask not what others are doing for you. You are the others.” Whoever poses it doesn’t just live here, they are German. Occasionally described as a systems theorist because he cites Niklas Luhmann, the famous sociologist, Di Fabio values a “society organized according to social functions” as efficient, however such a sociotechnical “ensemble” produces neither a “community ethos” nor “a system of values that also encompasses positive content.” Society leaves people “disconnected” and alone, the “autonomy” of the system has become a “hefty burden.” Luhmann’s cool description of modernity is thus in important respects revised: the individual as a whole, ignored and observed only in terms of their functions by systems theory, is to be reintegrated. Because a differentiated society is interested in the taxpayer, patient, client, customer or user, but not interested in “the people” behind these roles, the community should embrace the essence of a person as their constituent part. It is as if the functional differentiation of modern society has split the individual across the spectrum of a prism and fragmented them into a plurality of functional roles and facets. This splintering of the whole person into spectral shards leads simultaneously to their disengagement from the living community. In Di Fabio we read of the “naturalness of a human community” (p. 9), and repeatedly, of its “vital powers” (p. 41, 61, 89, 102, 126, 142, 144, 162, 183, 261, 275). That which is not vital, is dead. Out of the spectral fragments or specters of modern society, the “vital” people of a “living” nation are to rise again. Their “naturalness” is opposed to the artificiality of “Western society.” In Germany the wholesome “foundations of the community have been eroded,” which is why our culture has lost its “capacity for integration.” To renew it Germany must once again become a “vital and self-assured” community that “through the model of good, strong life” convinces every immigrant or whiner to become German, while at the same time reconstituting every haunted, disconnected person from their plurality of roles into one whole individual again. This is precisely the goal of, in their own words, the “largest social marketing campaign in the media history of the Federal Republic.” The specter of the nation is evoked in stereotypical formulae. “There are 82 million of us.” “There are 82 million of you.” But not a single ghostbuster in sight.

1 Cf. Jacques Derrida, Specters of Marx, tr. Peggy Kamuf, London: Routledge 1994, pp. 142-146.

2 Matthias Matussek, Wir Deutschen. Warum uns die anderen gern haben können, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer 2006, p. 152.

3 Cf. Michel Foucault, The Order of Discourse, tr. Ian McLeod in R. Young, ed., Untying The Text: A Poststructuralist Reader (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 48-78.

4 Udo Di Fabio, Die Kultur der Freiheit, München 2005, p. 183.

You can declare a work
KW 5

KW 5

Media and Ghosts in Contemporary Japanese Horror Films

Michaela Wünsch

The image of a girl appears to come to life as she exits the television frame and moves slowly toward the viewer. Her long black hair conceals her face, until she lifts her head revealing an eye wide opened. Her feet leave dripping wet tracks as if she just arose out of the water, not from a sterile television. This scene from Nakata Hideo's Ringu (1998) is composed of many elements that mark a trend in recent horror films from Japan and elsewhere: femininity, a technical medium (such as a video player, a television, a telephone or a computer) and water. However all three of these elements should be understood under the single concept of "medium." It is in this sense that this wave of "Asian" horror films can also be called "media horror." Sadako returns as media ghost for vengeance. The figure of the female ghost seeking revenge can be traced back to the Noh and Kabuki theaters, as well as earlier ghost films such as Tanaka Tokuzo's Kwaidan (1964), Shindo Keneto's Onibaba (1964) or those of Nakagawa Nobuo.

Film still Ringu, by Nakata Hideo (1998)

According to Freud, fearing the return of the dead is generally an expression of concern that one owes the dead a debt or has not properly buried them. However, it is also closely related to the nexus of media history, belief in ghosts and scientific experiments, which has arisen in Europe, America and Asia. The cinematic narrative of Ringu itself deals with this nexus. Sadako's mother was known as a woman with para-psychological capabilities; she was a medium, clairvoyant and could transmit thoughts. Ever since the rise of technical recording media, there were experiments in recording thoughts and messages from ghosts with the aide of new media. Often women were used along with recording media to "receive" messages from the beyond because they were regarded as particularly "receptive" due to their "electrical constitution",sensitivity and nervousness. Many women saw in spiritualism a liberation from rational thought, which was considered "masculine." As a medium, a woman would have the 'opportunity' to express herself openly. In Ringu, however, the capabilities of Sadako's mother did not result in social recognition. Instead, she was driven to death. Sadako herself is thrown into a well. This well at first appears to explain her wet feet and her connection to water. Yet, in Ringu II, Sadako is portrayed not as the daughter of a scientist, rather as the child conceived by a water demon. The sea in Ringu appears as an ideal place for spirits and demons because of its uncontrollability and breadth. And as in European Romanticism, women appear to have a particular affinity for it.

Film stills Ringu, by Nakata Hideo (1998)

From her more than cramped realm of the dead within the well, Sadako records a video cassette with scraps of her memories along with a curse. The latter states that those who watch the cassette will die after seven days, unless they make another copy of it. This form of technical reproduction is sometimes coded as "female."

Hideo Nakata's Film Honogurai mizu no soko kara (Dark Water, 2002) evokes similar associations of female genealogy, water, and media. A young woman moves into an apartment in which a water spot spreads eerily. The female spirit, who makes herself known through this water spot, is the revenant of a girl who drowned in a water tank on the roof. But messages from

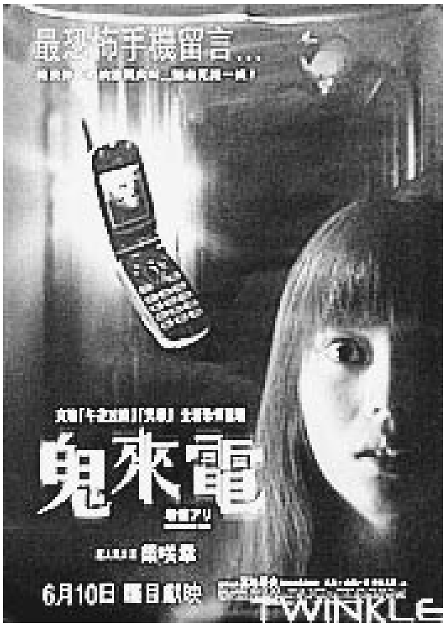
This is just a magic show!

this ghost are not only conducted by water. She also makes herself known through telephone calls as well as visible through surveillance cameras and in the elevator. The house haunted by this ghost is dilapidated; the elevator hardly works, and the water spot is not a surprise at first. Instead of reproduction, everything points to decay and the lack of durability of modern, quikkly constructed buildings, which are just as quickly worn out.

As a single working mother, Yoshimi Matsubara (Hitomi Kuroki) cannot afford a better apartment. The film encourages a reading in which modern Japan is threatened by the decline of the family and traditional structures. The home, which previously appeared as the center of a happy, heterosexual family life, is portrayed in the film as being doomed without a male presence and through female irrationality. The familial relations and the state of the house in the film can be interpreted as a critique of modernity, but also as a reflection upon the passing of time, which neither proceeds linearly in the film nor promises further development or progress. The return of the dead breaks the progression of time, makes it circular, and forces people to dwell in the past. While the spirit of the dead girl insists upon not being forgotten, Yoshimi is being haunted with images from her own childhood. The events threaten to repeat themselves: there is neither a progressive development nor the cathartic effect of the crisis or a saving escape, neither out of the apartment nor out of the hallucinations of the mother, who dies at the end. Even the state of the house goes against the hope for renewal. Rather, it shows that things can be worn out. Or, as Jacques Derrida writes in Specters of Marx: “Everything, beginning with time, seems out of kilter, unjust, disadjusted. The world is going very badly; it wears as it grows“ (p. 77 - 78).

Although the films reject belief in progress and growth, they cannot be called culturally pessimistic and anti-modern. Instead, they much more express interest in the connection between spectral, supernatural forces and media technology. These films also ask what communications technology can do and if transmission is restricted to conscious human communication. In Miike Takashi’s Film Chakushin ari (One Missed Call, 2003), teenagers receive cell phone message on their voicemails sent from the future from themselves.

At the moment the messages are sent, they are about to die. Also in the South Korean film Phone (Dir. Ahn Byeong-ki, 2002), the cell phone transmits messages from the beyond. In a certain sense these messages of death contradict the idea behind the



Film poster Chakushin ari, by Miike Takashi (2003)

communication of and transmission of messages by cell phone. These messages have in fact no recipient, rather those who receive these messages, attain their very own messages, which they however did send. Thus, a closed, circular movement takes place, departing from a sender-receiver model. After the shock of receiving the message, the second shock occurs when that which the message foretold actually occurs. The teenagers die precisely in the way and at precisely the same time they were informed. In this way the desire directed at media is erased: that what they transmit is not truth, rather something else is actually believed or hoped for. If one realizes what one already knows, then one is led to death, i.e.

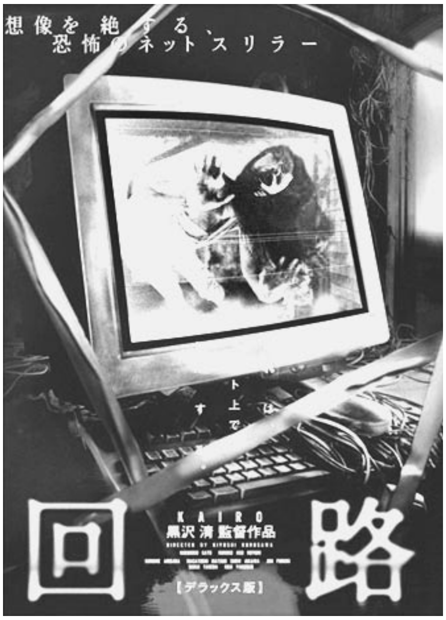
to a cessation of all desire.

That the telephone is able to transmit the voices of spirits can be explained from the technology itself. The telephone divides the voice from the body, space, and time. Uncertainties are introduced precisely through the “mobile“ telephone: the location from which one is called; text messages often reach the recipient late; and the uncanny effect of hearing one's own voice is known to all since at least the introduction of the answering machine. The voice without a body simultaneously has an uncanny presence and fleetingness. It is relieved of the mortality of the body and therefore cannot per se be ordered unambiguously in either the realm of the living or the dead. The voice often represents that which survives the mortal body, the soul or the spirit. Michel Chion calls this disembodied voice “accousmatic.” He stresses that this voice is attributed with magical or evil forces. Since the source of the voice is not visible the impression arises that the speaker could see or control the listener. To this extent, the disembodied voice can be attributed either to God or the figure of the mother. In Miike's film in fact, a mother is under the suspicion of sending uncanny messages. The mother is said to have abused her children in order to appear especially caring (the so-called Münchhausen-Syndrome). Although in the end it is discovered that the ghost is not of the mother. An ambivalent mother-daughter relation stands at the center of the curse.

In Tomie (Dir. Ataru Oikawa, 1999), a ghostly relation between two women is not about a mother and a daughter, but about repressed lesbian desire. Tomie (Miho Kanno) not only drives men to insanity but also Tsukiko (Mami Nakamura), who becomes a witness of murder to Tomie and who not only represses this but also her desire. But Tomie cannot be killed; she renews herself since millennia from at least one body part. Tsukiko's quarrel with her desire is confronted with Tomie's monstrously appearing, unsettling compulsion. In the end, Tsukiko herself becomes Tomie.

In the ghost film Kairo (Pulse, 2001) by Kurosawa Kiyoshi, in contrast, technology and media stand in the forefront. In Kairo the Internet turns into, as a kind of third space, a space-in-between in which spirits settle. Although there is a kind of “over-population” in the realm of the spirits, they attempt to reach the living in order, apparently, to escape loneliness, which is the dominant theme of the film, for the living equally search not only contact in the Internet but also in the world of ghosts, risking even their own death. To this extent this film draws an analogy between the threat of loneliness in the infinite depths of the spectral universe and the loneliness in the depths of a megapolis devoid of people at the end of the film.

Film poster Kairo, by Kurosawa Kiyoshi (2001)


想像を絶する、
恐怖のネットスリラー
KAIRO
黒沢清監督作品
DIRECTED BY KIYOSHI KUROSAWA
回
路
【デラックス版】

Kurosawa's Film Seance (2004) begins with a discussion of a student's essay on experiments of recording ghosts, such as the “electric-voice experiment“ or Edison's “spiritual communicator,“ which Edison actually tried to develop in the 1920s. The student attempts to bring experiments with ghosts together with psychology and raises the idea that both deal with the invisible or non-materially demonstrable.

From the eighteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century, research on ghosts, new media, and natural scientific psychology were not clearly divided. In his earlier film Cure (1997) Kurosawa goes back to eighteenth century mesmerism, an occult theory that supported the existence of electromagnetic and hypnotic forces. It was connected to the belief in ghosts to the extent that it supported the supernatural but tried to find scientifically and technologically assured evidence for it. Through neurology and psychoanalysis, parts of its theory and praxis, such as hypnosis, found its

You hear me, don't you?

Film still Cure, by Kurosawa Kiyoshi (1997)

way into broader science. In the film, a student uses hypnosis to gain entrance into the people's wishes and to bring them to murder. "Spiritual" forces not so much tied to "spirits," than that the soul is conceived as a psyche that is researched in the film. The film also thematizes the idea that cinema can also hypnotize the audience. The lighter's flame, which the student uses to hypnotize, his victims is also directed at the audience. Even this (female occupied) force of technical media to cast a spell on the audience, was and is apparently explained with the supernatural and the spectral.

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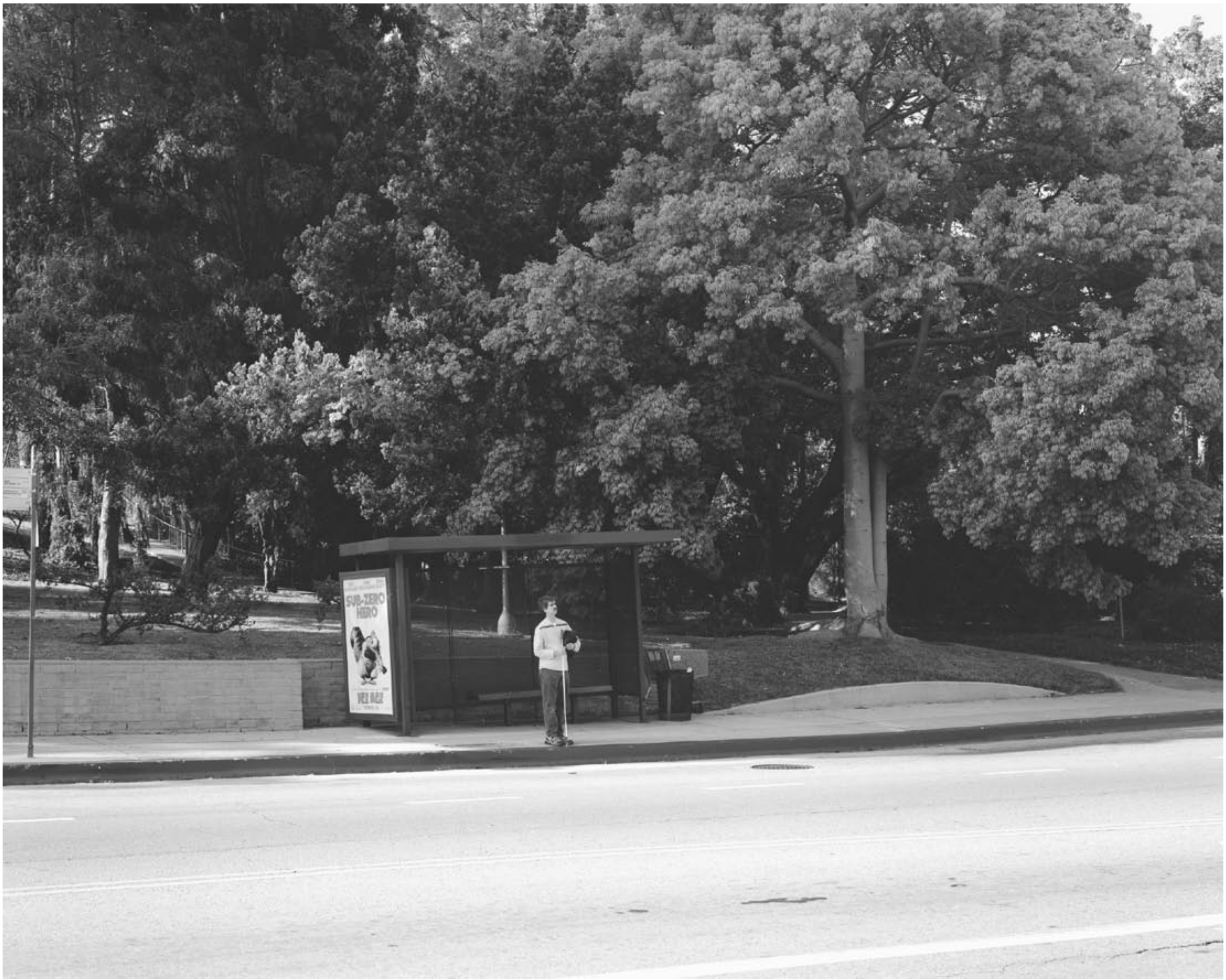
Michael Rashkow


SUB-ZERO HERO

Whose House is this?
Jan Tumlir

1. As opposed to dogs who are known for their devotion to us, cats are said to choose the house before its owner. The cat belongs to the house, or maybe it is the other way around, which would suggest that cat-lovers are merely the tenants of their pet's property. At the extreme, one might say that cats inspire devotion from their owners who feel privileged just to be near them. Similar stories have been told about ghosts. When someone relates a "real-life" experience with ghosts, they must be prepared to brave incredulity as well as the ridicule that comes with being perceived as superstitious, and perhaps slightly less evolved. A person who claims to have been haunted, actually, will come to occupy an unstable position within their own account of the events: The encounter with this vague entity renders them abject and sublime in equal measure. Just as a cat can be seen as both a lesser life-form and a greater one, ghosts are virtual emblems of instability. This instability "rubs off" on contact.

There are various degrees of otherness that we can ascribe to the animals. Yet in order to be authentically other-than, a creature must manifest some measure of the same-as, but in upside-down, backward or inverse proportions. This is effectively what cats do, claiming a place among the like animals, or those animals we believe to be most like ourselves, while undermining this belief at every opportunity. Familiarity is perhaps only a foil for strangeness, as the transparency of those needs that connect humanity with its dogs, for instance, here becomes clouded by the workings of desire. The feline is uncanny, which allows us to use it as foil, in turn, for the ghostly.

Cats are mythically linked to the underworld, the after-life. They travel freely between dimensions profane and sacred, the temporal and the eternal. They are said to have nine lives, only one of which they share with us. In this way, we imagine them keeping watch over the houses we lived in, even after we're gone. And if the house in question is older than we are, then perhaps so too is the cat. In that the animal keeps coming back to the house, or else never leaves, it behaves much like a ghost. And, for its part, the ghost behaves much like a cat.

The haunted oeuvre of that early auteur of the low-budget fantastic, the producer Val Lewton, is basically comprised of films about cats (Cat People (1942), The Curse of the Cat People (1944) and The Leopard Man (1943)) and films about ghosts (The Ghost Ship (1943), I Walked with a Zombie (1943)and Isle of the Dead (1945)). There are, of course, many points in all of these films where the categories cross-over. In a famously "moody" sequence from Cat People, the hero, a well-adjusted American man, admits to a female co-worker that his marriage to the beautiful but forlorn immigrant from Mittel-Europa, played by the brooding Simone Simon, is on the rocks. He unburdens himself in a restaurant in the course of a secret rendez-vous, but his wife is on to him; moreover, she has come to see her husband's co-worker as a rival. We are shown the wife "climbing the walls" of her small apartment and then slipping out; interspersed with shots of the local zoo at night, the big cats restlessly pacing their cages, we sense a gathering tension and looming potential for violence. Finally, in an accelerating flurry of cross-cutting between point-of-view shots and reverse shots, the co-worker, convinced that she is being stalked, begins to exude the desperate, naked fear of a trapped animal. At one point, she says, "I felt like a cat walked over my grave," which is certainly one of the oddest expressions in the English language, yet perfectly apt in this particular context.

On the face of it, this expression turns in on itself somewhat absurdly: After all, how could the speaker who is not yet dead and buried feel any such thing? It is only when we begin to consider the possibility that the speaker is herself a ghost, that she has only just realized that her experience on earth is merely the dream of a person who is dead,

Film stills Cat People, by Jacques Tourneur (1942)

that it starts to make sense. But where then does the cat come from, this cat that is not part of the dream, not a ghost and thereby not dead? The cat is a figure of the real, in this case, but only in the most fantastic manner, because its function is effectively to bend all that surrounds it toward the condition of the unreal. It is almost as if it were traveling at the crest of a dissembling wave that washes away everything in its wake, rendering the world behind it ghostly.

There is, of course, a more straightforward explanation for the saying in the film: The co-worker has sensed that she is being stalked by a cat, or rather a cat-person. She knows already that this night will not end well, as do we, the audience. The saying therefore makes a particular sense for this film, but then it also makes a more general sense for film in general, as film is comprised of moments that we experience now, but that have been recorded earlier. What is the condition of a character in a film once they “project” themselves outside its given spatio-temporal coordinates in this way? By claiming that “a cat walked over my grave,” this character appears for a moment to rejoin the actor who plays her on the “other side” of the screen, leaving her filmic record behind like a sloughed off skin, or better, a phantom image. The same image that we, in the theater, experience as if it were a living body is thereby rendered not simply insubstantial, but ghostly. That is, we now see the image for what it “really” is; the cat reveals its punctum which, as Roland Barthes reminds us, is its mortal wound. As an entity that travels between dimensions, both preceding and ensuing the moment that we share with it, the cat is in a unique position to demonstrate to us that images are (also) dead things.

2. One imagines that a ghost should be able to demonstrate this on its own, but it cannot. Ghosts, being all soul and spirit, are defined by the opposite lack and thereby bear a different relationship to the animals and to us. In a number of recent Horror films from Japan and Korea, especially Takashi Shimuzu’s The Grudge (2004) and all its sequels and derivatives, this relation is proposed as a complexly convoluted but wholly credible ecology. Here, alongside the ghost, we encounter once more the terms we began with: a cat and a house.

As noted, both serve to articulate, to picture, to shape what is essentially insubstantial, but in very different ways. The house is the ghost’s literal container, both its context and place of origin. That is, while we may understand our own houses as extensions of ourselves – like our clothing, a second, or perhaps third, skin – ghosts are more like extensions of their houses. In this, ghosts are very much like cats, but then cats, being embodied – being, moreover, all-body – are also foils for ghosts. They are same and other: carnal in direct proportion to the ghosts spiritual being. In the houses that belong equally to both, the ghost enacts a transformational narrative whereas the cat, with its “nine lives,” simply repeats.

The great structural innovation of The

Grudge is to link the episodic "omnibus" mode developed by the UK's Hammer and Amicus production houses with a La Ronde style narrative. In such "omnibus" films as The House that Dripped Blood (1970) or Dr. Terror's House of Horrors (1965), a series of discrete shorts are linked thematically by way of a consistent motif, a running gag, or simply a narrative voice to make up a singular full-length film. In La Ronde, the point of connection is instead an actual thing that is tracked chronologically through a succession of otherwise quite-distinct narrative situations.

In The Grudge, it is not at all clear, at first, that it is a La Ronde structure that we are following, as the film does not appear to conform to its demand for a straightforward time-line. If, initially, we experience this film more as a short-story style "omnibus," it is because its segments are discontinuous to the point of wholly diverging. It is only once we begin to notice the reappearance of certain key elements that an alternate time-line becomes evident, almost as if the sequential order of events has been fanned-out like a deck of cards and then randomly reshuffled. This is not done for strictly aesthetic effect; rather, the aesthetic reconfiguration of time according to a logic that is not just non-linear, but non-human, ghostly, is largely what this film is about. Access to this logic depends on one's ability to draw connections across time, because while The Grudge is a relatively conventional feature-length film and must present its various story-lines in temporal succession, in the ghost-world that it wants to describe these story-lines are all occurring simultaneously.

Each individual segment of The Grudge narrates the encounter between a being from our own space-time continuum and a being from the "other side." Upon contact, the living are pulled into the orbit of the dead, effectively a loop, and condemned to relive this same narrative the same way into perpetuity. Every one of the film's multiple story-lines is ostensibly happening over and over again, which renders any attempt to sort out the before and after of it all close to pointless. That said, there is an overarching system of cause and effect at work here, and it can be charted, but more as a spatial diagram than a temporal one. At the center of this diagram is the point of emergence of the titular "grudge," a malign energy that radiates forth from the site of an original trauma; in this case it is the house in which a man, driven insane by jealousy, has slain his wife, son and the family cat. As victims of the very definition of a crime against nature – a simultaneously sub- and supernatural act that, destroying the family, inverts its purpose as a mode of human self-perpetuation – the entire household becomes pinned to place, forever to chase each others' tails as ghosts. In this house that will in turn become the objective focus of a La Ronde style system of relations, these ghosts are condemned to ceaselessly repeat their tragedy even as new tenants move in, friends, neighbors and service-people stop by, and so on. Accordingly, the film's entire cast of characters will at some point either visit the house or else be visited by someone or something from the house. One after another, all will be absorbed into the eternal loop of the ghost-world.

Film stills The Grudge, by Takashi Shimizu (1998)

3. As in almost every haunted house film from The Uninvited (1944) onward, the ghosts in The Grudge are essentially "made of" memory and are thereby related to the materiality of film itself. More to the point, they are filmic when they are on film; when they are "captured" on audio-tape, as in the famous white-noise experiments of Dr. Konstantin Raudive, for instance, they are aural. This both figural and literal link between ghosts and the various media that allow them to appear answers to those lingering animistic anxieties that haunt the emergence of every new information technology. Against the backdrop of accelerating technological change, ghosts remain put, constant; they are figures of the persistence of the most archaic part of ourselves. At the same time, every incremental step and turn in the evolution of info-tech will be automatically registered, profound-

ly effecting the shape, form and substance of ghosts "as such." This duality is played out in a peculiar way in The Grudge, and probably the majority of J-Horror films, which, in their earnestly melancholic ambience, recall nothing so much as the films of Val Lewton. The resemblance is striking but also somewhat misleading.

No doubt, the current popularity of J-Horror has to do with its strict refusal of the sort of ironic, genre-savvy machinations that characterize the US horror films of the eighties and nineties. Unlike the hyper-self-conscious kids featured in the Scream cycle, for instance, those that comprise these more recent imports do not seem to have any cultural foreknowledge of their predicaments. They do not seem to recognize ghosts as cultural constructs; in effect, they do not seem to recognize them at all. Again, their apparently guileless dispositions are reminiscent of older, more "innocent" models, almost as though these films were cutting a swath right through the recent history of horror to reconnect with its point of origin. To see a ghost in film as anything other than a filmic construct, that is, one would have to see it as if for the first time, as if in the first film.

In The Grudge, it is on this "as if" that everything hinges. The ability to see the ghosts and to occupy the space of the first film unironically, "as if" for real, is a symptom of our current condition, the very latest stage in the evolution of information technologies. What The Grudge never allows us to forget, even as the majority of its characters do, is that while ghosts may occasionally take the form of film, their substance is memory, information. Loss within repetition, the incremental corruption of memory with every turn of the loop, is in this way carefully distinguished from original experience, whether this be related to the first time or the first film. Ghosts appear to be real only because they are increasingly shrouded in forgetfulness, and forgetfulness, for its part, overextends the technology of recollection. Accordingly, one gets the sense that the ghosts in The Grudge are becoming too numerous and, like bits of data stored too close together, are starting to merge. A particularly disturbing scene carried over in the US remake suggests that the ghost-boy and his cat are undergoing a process of mutation. A concerned passerby stops in at the house and, finding the boy in a semi-feral state, subjects him to a barrage of questions: Where are his parents? Is he alone? Who should be contacted? Throughout it all the boy maintains a distant, uncomprehending stare, and then opens wide – too wide – his mouth to release not words, but a kind of feline mewling. This is just one concretely rendered effect of disintegrating memory; but whose memory is this exactly?

Within the classic regime of the haunted house film that these newer films superficially recall, this question comes closer to finding a satisfying, if not conclusive, answer. That is, even if we remain to the end unable to confirm the existence of ghosts one way or the other, at least we know that this question is itself framed by the question of subjectivity – the subjectivities posited within the film in relation to our own subjectivities as viewers. In The Haunting (1963) – still the gold-standard of the haunted house genre, directed by the Val Lewton "trained" Robert Wise – the ghosts remain invisible to us, but this does not mean they are not "there"; it only means that they are invisible to us. In one way or another, the film's principal characters all respond to them, thereby forcing the audience into the position of final arbiter. Are these ghosts the product of group-think, auto-suggestion, mass-hysteria? Is it the influence of the "spooky" location on these people who have in fact been assembled to corroborate the existence of ghosts? As with so many haunted house films, the characters in The Haunting are predisposed to "see things." They are themselves superstitious or else scholars of superstition; either way, they serve the ghost-world as mediums.

In The Haunting, the ghosts remain caught within a language system; never visualized, they are communicated inter-subjectively in the specific terms of a ghost story. In effect, the garish fiasco that is the Jan DuBont remake could be seen as an object lesson in the stubbornly unyielding nature of ghosts with respect to their sources in media. Wise's Haunting remains the superior version because it is sensitive to the nature of its ghosts as originating in a literary context, the Shirley Jackson novel that it is based on. As the products of the human imagination, of fantasy shaped by words, these ghosts do not readily translate into images. Instead, the film limits itself to showing us a group of people gathered together in a house. Their perceptions of this place and of each other are continuously narrated, commented upon and argued over. The ghosts, precisely because they are invisible, become a motivating principle: they are both what is spoken about and what is speaking.

The characters in The Haunting are all mediums, as mentioned, they announce and interpret the supernatural, ghostly presences that surround them as either benign or malign. In The Grudge, conversely, there is very little speaking at all. Here, it is not mediums, but regular, everyday people who are drawn into the vortex of the haunted house. Unannounced, uninterpreted, the ghosts simply appear; no longer specifically tethered to thoughts and to words, they take shape unambiguously as images. Certainly we have seen images of ghosts before, but what is new here is the lack of any mediating figure within the space of the film, and thereby also any acknowledgement of the ontological questions that have for so long accompanied the appearance of ghosts into our world. Setting apart the one who is haunted as a test study in the tenuous nature of all worldly experience – perception, consciousness, memory – this was once the ghost's raison d'etre. What now?

4. The savage intentionality of the original family slaying, as the generative act in The Grudge, spirals outward, taking hold of every incidental and arbitrary occurrence in its midst, and twisting these to suit its own twisted logic. The narrative structure at work in this film is spatial. As in so much contemporary crime drama where the forensic model of investigation has basically displaced the psychological one, The Grudge devotes very little attention to questions of motive, which may be traced to certain readily accessible genre conventions. Instead, it is the formal dimension of the crime as a diagram or drawing in space and on place that counts here. In forensic crime dramas like the TV show CSI, one

Film stills The Grudge, by Takashi Shimizu (1998)

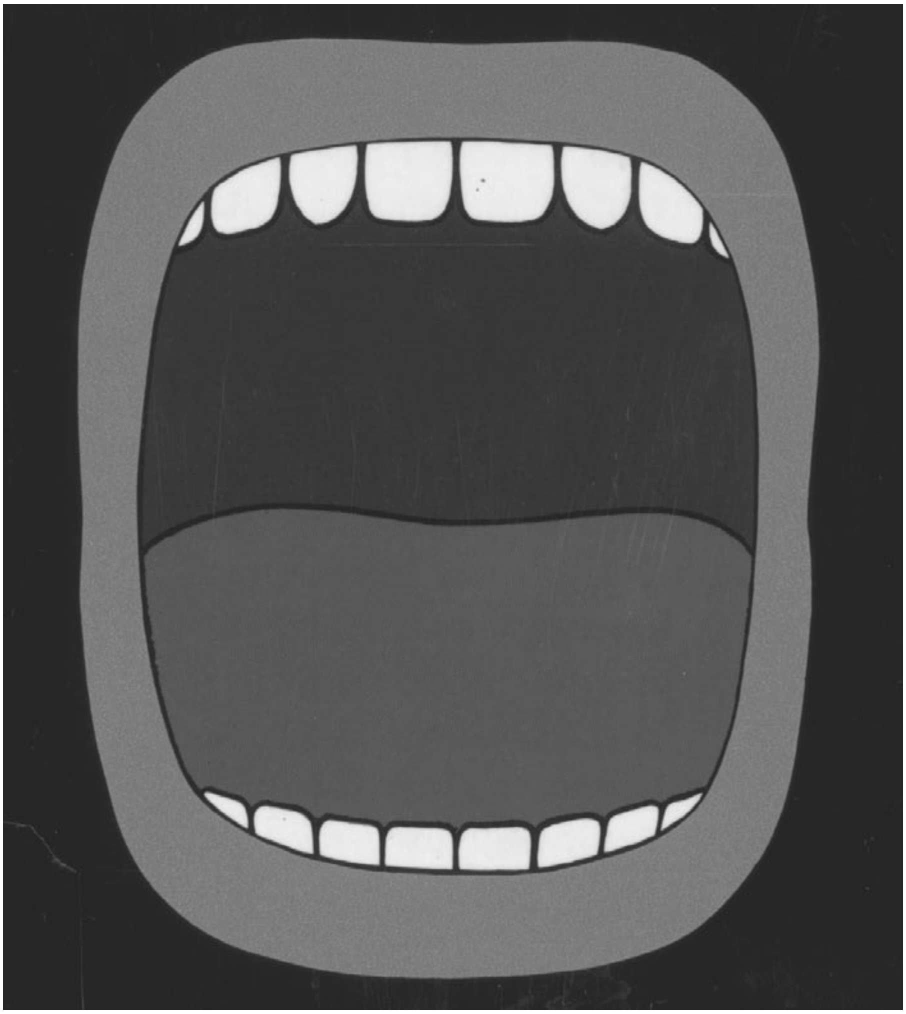
attempts to reconstruct the event of the crime, and then all the events that lead up to the crime, from its residual traces – a frozen forensic “tableau.” The Grudge takes up the same model but then inverts it, beginning with what are either causes or effects of the crime (in forensics, it is notoriously difficult to tell these apart), before moving on to the crime as such. And it is only after all the secondary events have been subsumed to the primary one that an underlying pattern comes into view.

As mentioned, The Grudge is structured around a central vortex which is objectively framed by a house. Within this house there lives a family of ghosts and their pet cat. All are sole witnesses to the crime that killed them off as living beings. They are “left behind” as ghosts, as unredeemed spirits, to seek justice in the world. As ghosts, however, they have no legal authority – a classic dilemma. In this way, the call for justice that is the ghosts’ primary motivation becomes perverted; instead of producing justice, they manage only to reproduce the crime.

Following a forensic logic, The Grudge begins to describe the relations that link the source-crime to a steadily broadening range of negative repercussions via a series of viral pathways. It is the same sort of general pattern that charts the spread of contagious diseases and/or digital information. Because the informational energy that has gathered within the house is never converted into a proper message, it can only turn in on itself. A fearful face only breeds more fear; loops spin-off still more loops. In the absence of a viable medium, a figure to announce their appearance and to prepare their message for public consumption, a ghost will be forced to mediate itself. In The Grudge, this is the cause of a great deal of confusion. Those former ghosts that subjugated their own form, whatever this might be, to the technical demands of the apparatus that was to disseminate their story are here replaced by a mutant strain, no longer able to make much medium-specific sense. Those ghosts that would become only voice for the telling, or else transparent within the space of the “old, dark house” like film passing through the projector, now appear in the form of the actors that portray them – fully dressed human figures that tend to blend in with the society of humans. In effect, it is simply because they mistake the ghost-world for “reality” that the characters in The Grudge are pulled out of their lives, one by one. Compared with the crime that sets everything into motion, this really is not so egregious, and yet all ghosts, from the first to the last, are made to suffer equally.

Many other J-Horror films tend to support this same premise that in the contemporary condition of ghosts we can make out the first signs of a larger cosmic cataclysm. Accordingly, ghosts may be linked to a whole panoply of social ills, from urban anomie (Kairo aka Pulse, 2001) to the breakdown of the family (Ringu aka Ring, 1998). More interestingly, though, they have also developed a kind of autonomy, an independent volition that began to take shape alongside the evolution of information technologies, in slavish imitation of the given forms of mediation, only to break away, at some point, and spin off in a whole new direction. What exactly they want, these new ghosts, is hard to tell; it would seem that they don’t know it themselves. All negotiations between our spiritual being and technological promise have been stalled, perhaps discontinued. The only thing that is clear in the blankly indifferent stares they point our way is that they are well past caring.

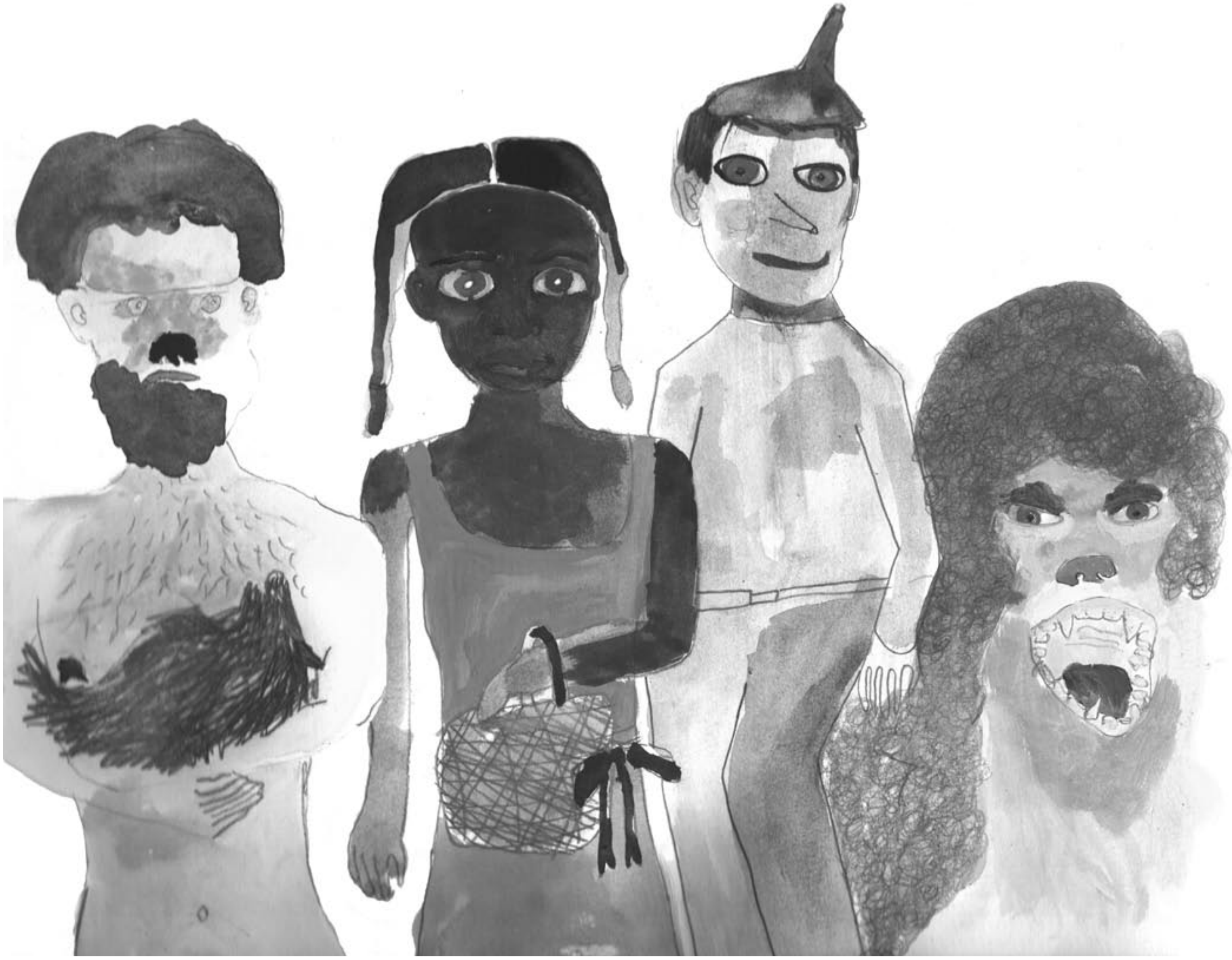
Frauke Gust/Michaela Wünsch



Interview with a Scream Queen
An Audioplay

While Skyping a reporter accidentally meets the voice of the ghost of scream queen Fay Wray, who became famous in 1933 with the film King Kong. A conversation develops about the existence of ghosts in the Internet, the so-called 'scream-point' in movies and when women and men scream. The reporter learns why zombies articulate themselves differently than other undead and that in the face of these undead the human subject actually does not have a say.

Marriage (James Tsang/Math Bass)



Marriage is a collaboration between Math Bass and James Tsang that is based in music, video, and performance. We use a very specific language to engage with the genre of queer theater. Our interdisciplinary approach incorporates many influences that constitute a modern queer experience. We are less interested to deconstruct it, but instead to elaborate upon it to find its limits and greater freedoms. We have presented our work in an array of settings such as theaters, galleries, academic conferences, queer film fests, and punk rock living rooms. We have also participated in collective artistic projects, such as LTTR, and Pilot Television.

Currently, we are making a series about comic death. The first work, called ‚Dead in the Desert' is a 3-minute video: history collapses in this operatic fantasy of failed utopias and the new queer dawn. The second work, ‚A small and devastated stage,' is a new performance entrenched in the image and text of video-music. (Video-music is our own experiemental form of karaoke.)

We articulate several comic deaths: memorializing she-wolves and tragic movie stars, while under the unmanageable weight of costume.

The Mirror and the Green Teapot.

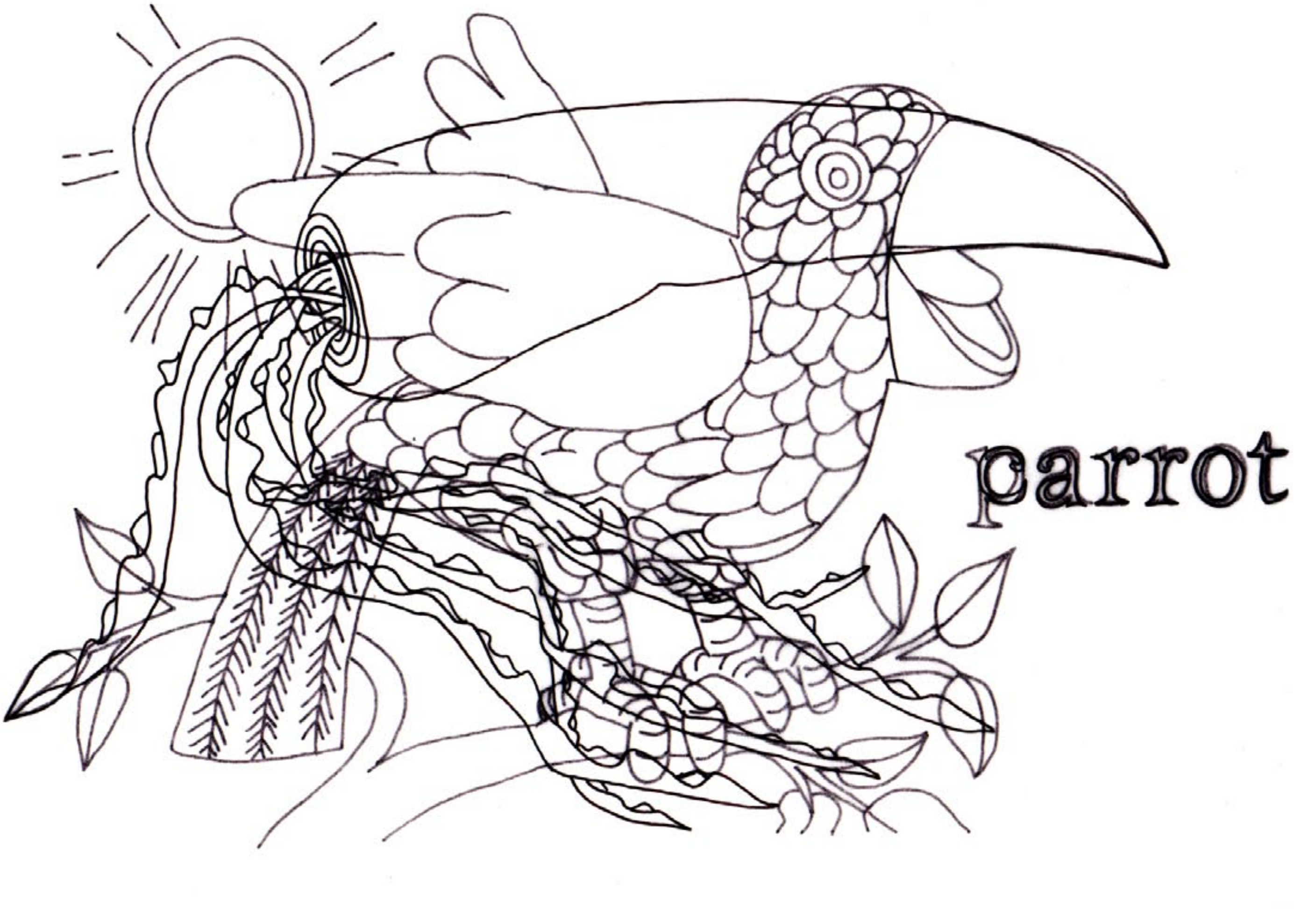
Josef Strau

Kneeling on the kitchen floor, I put a little of the most expensive cat food in my mouth but didn't swallow it. The cat was beside me because of the smell of food. I put the mush back on the floor and the cat immediately ate it. Then I tried to stand up again, but I had drunk too much. It was December 24th. Beside me was the bench. I lay on it. Then it occurred to me that in the last few days I was trying to make something of an unpleasant sentence but hadn't got anywhere with it. Only a stupid compulsion to keep repeating it plagued me, so I said, „Prussia, wake up, wake up, but wake up only in me." In the morning, after just getting up, I caught sight of myself in the round mirror and for the first time saw something really unusual. I saw not the normal face which now and again had perhaps just got a bit older. This time it was a quite new, unknown face. And I knew, this looks like a bohemian, this is the face of a ghost of a bohemian. But that's something I certainly never wanted to be, never yet, never had I thought that I myself would ever experience the vie de bohème or anything like it, and far less, it's certain, did I think then, that I myself would suddenly assume the face of a bohemian in the mirror.

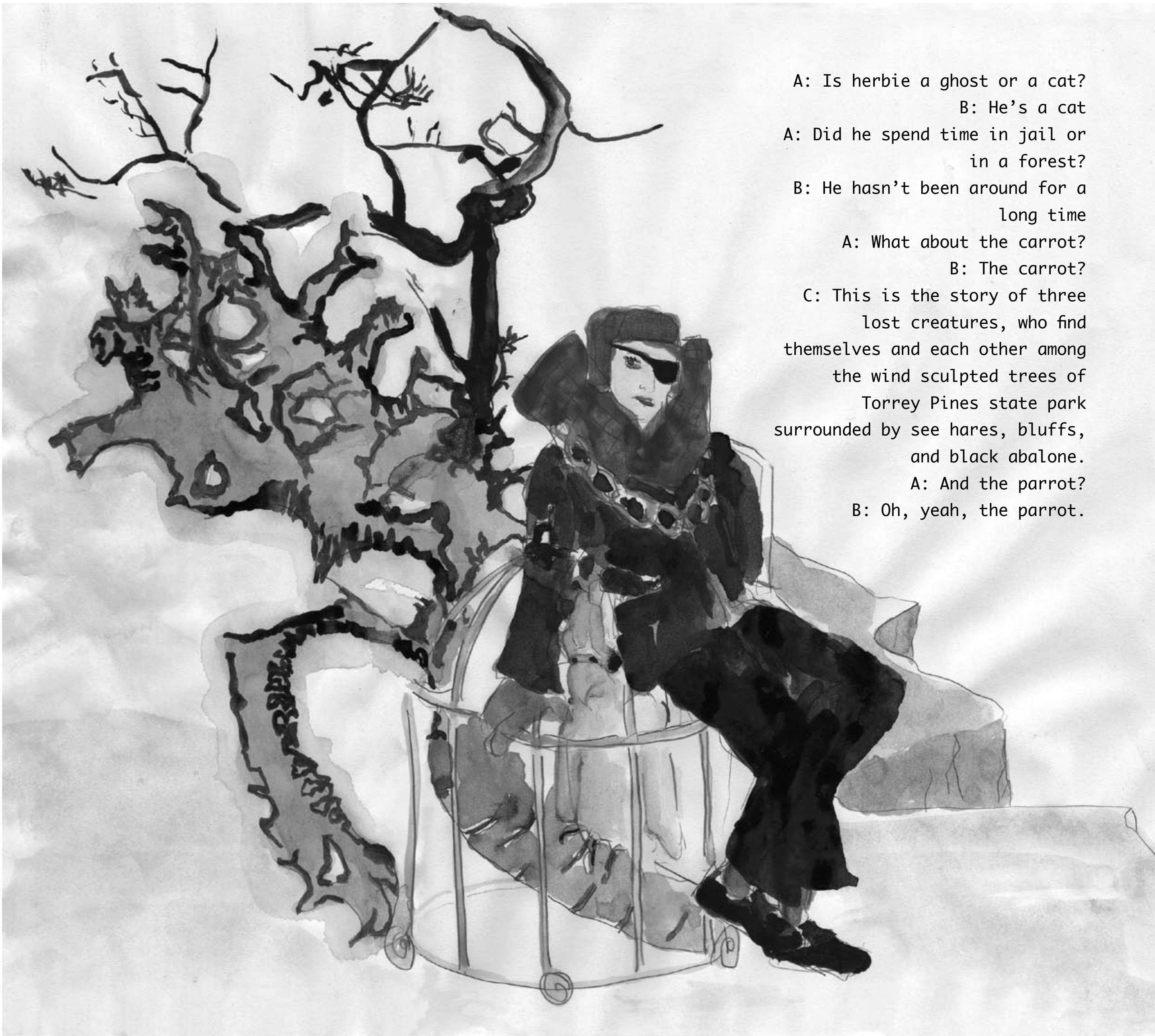
After my Christmas encounter with the mirror which showed, as if in a photographic moment, not my present but my past, an "inner" biographical past which I had suppressed, as if in a prolonged state of fatigue and lack of close self-observation, I decided I would from then on do all I could to ensure that the bohemian in the mirror was suppressed, and become invisible again for the future. Unfortunately I just tried to extinguish the results of the past not within myself, but at least from my face, by leading an ordered, regular life.

Seemingly for no good reason, that meeting in the mirror makes me think of that critical moment, which, nonsensical as it may sound, may have a great deal to do with a fundamental aesthetic approach to photography. It was like an uncanny pose not struck by me, but invented by my mirror image. It was just as Roland Barthes says, "that photography offers me the pose's perfect past, it places death for me in the future. I shudder at a catastrophe that has already happened." People say that mirrors and photography are closely connected. Like photographs the mirror image pursues us and, according to Barthes, mediates through the feeling of decay and time past. Till now I could never understand why, and I found the connection somewhat strained and stupid before, that photos are capable of offering some kind of evidence, the evidence of a mirror of our past in the eye of that essence of photography. For that organic essence there is only time, aging, and decay. There is no present.

My photographic mirror experiences have however not subsided since, quite the contrary. So now I live with the ghost of an officer from some old days. The first time he confronted me was in an article. A typical inhabitant of the country, it said, was for some people still something like a mysterious, highly educated officer, who went for walks along the conifer lined coastline of the Baltic. After reading this, I thought at first, I had totally forgotten this vision of this past officer, but when the shop assistant in a tea merchant's later in the day held out some Japanese leaf telling me in an language of order to sniff, it was as if examination panic prevented me from naming the aroma, which I normally might have been able to. So I looked at the tea in the packet, and it appeared in color and form to resemble dark pine needles, so I said it smelt like conifers in a forest. "No," the assistant shouted at me, „it smells like the sea coast." And so in that moment suddenly he stood in front of me again, in the same (almost photographic) moment, the uncanny gray officer. It was only back home, drinking the new tea from the new green teapot that my officer developed his full flavor. I'm still trying to get rid of him. Or if that doesn't work, to justify him. That naturally works even worse. Then I have to think whether his ghost doesn't come from me myself, whether his stupid, compulsive repetitiveness might be a sort of recurrent self-portrait from an earlier time, rigidly programmed before the vie de bohème. I conclude that he has rightly become too uncanny, and that my growing affection for the mirror image is very banal and represents a no longer available, “decayed“ past. Could there somehow, in this affection, be contained a possible reflection? And if so, the political reaction would have to be satisfaction at having vicariously overcome this officer in myself. In which case I would have to enter into a state of competition. What can he do that I can‘t? Did he speak a better French, a better English, could he play the piano better than me? It‘s disappointing, this fairy-tale unfolding within my own four walls. There the cold, gray strips of coastline without much light hang in white frames with round mounts, round like the organic round eye of the camera, but just without the ghost of the uncanny officer in the green teapot.



A bunny with a drug problem meets an animal trainer with an attiude, in a hallucination he sees,
maybe all things he sees are in his mind.
Maybe the trainer is he, the parrot is transformed by his own echo; he is song.



A: Is herbie a ghost or a cat?
B: He’s a cat
A: Did he spend time in jail or
in a forest?
B: He hasn’t been around for a
long time
A: What about the carrot?
B: The carrot?
C: This is the story of three
lost creatures, who find
themselves and each other among
the wind sculpted trees of
Torrey Pines state park
surrounded by see hares, bluffs,
and black abalone.
A: And the parrot?
B: Oh, yeah, the parrot.

The Butterfly Man
Doris Chon

Das wahre Bild der Vergangenheit huscht vorbei.
Walter Benjamin[1]

The movement of butterflies is characterized by a lingering indeterminacy. Rarely still, they flutter from point to point, ever departing and only intermittently arriving in one place for long. Visually following their aleatory paths through space may be difficult, and capturing one in a net - effectively arresting its movement - can prove even more challenging.

Such a preoccupation with capturing a butterfly in flight belongs to Henry Selwyn, the first of W.G. Sebald's four protagonists in Die Ausgewanderten: Vier lange Erzählungen (The Emigrants, originally published in 1992).[2] The natural world of plants and animals has become an obsession for him in the latter part of his life, and he is counting blades of grass when the book's narrator first encounters him. Only over the course of several years of friendship does the narrator eventually learn that Selwyn, a Lithuanian-born Jew, fled his native country at the age of 7 and inadvertently ended up in England, where he would establish a new life. Anglicizing his name, he lived in denial of his cultural heritage for several decades. Then the events of the Second World War and its aftermath, which he describes as a "bad time" and a topic about which he "could not say a thing even if [he] wanted to" ultimately lead him in 1960 to sever all connections with the "real" world (p. 21). In the last years of his life he dwells in a hermitage in his garden and makes the occasional nature expedition.

In spite of his stark efforts to isolate himself from the reality of his own personal history, however, he finds oddly enough that certain "images" [Bild] of his own long-forgotten past return to him in his old age, while others remain out of reach. Memories of his childhood exodus at the turn of the twentieth century resurface as vibrant, detailed images laden with emotion, through which he is able to relive his own past. This is in marked contrast to his experience of World War II, which he curiously describes as "blinding" in its inaccessibility (p. 21). Far from returning as vivid recollections, his wartime experiences remain not only stubbornly absent, but by his own account hinder the faculty of vision as remembrance.

In light of this predicament in which Selwyn finds himself haunted by certain overwhelming memories while other images remain ungraspable, his pastime as a butterfly hunter seems especially poignant. Voluntarily divorced from what he calls the real world of interpersonal relationships and with a will to forget the complexities of his own past, he directs his full attention to the natural world for solace and escape. He occupies himself with the pursuit of insects that flutter through the air, often hovering just out of reach. Bearing an airy net attached to a long pole, Selwyn chases after them in the hope of arresting their movement, to capture the butterflies in flight and bring them into closer proximity.

This figure of Selwyn as the butterfly man appears not only in a verbal description, but perhaps more significantly in the form of a black-and-white photograph, one of countless such images reproduced in the pages of Sebald's books (p. 16). Not dissimilar from the function of a butterfly net, the photographic camera too arrests the spatiotemporal motion of its subject, allowing it to be later reproduced in frozen stillness as a print. Out of the continuum of lived experience, the photograph crystallizes an enduring event in into a single image.

Upon seeing the photograph of Selwyn in the mountains with his butterfly net, the narrator remarks on the striking resemblance it bears to an image of the Russian author Nabokov that he had clipped only days earlier from the pages of a magazine. While this pastime of Selwyn's is not elaborated as such any further in the text, in remarking this visual correlation between the two photographs the narrator effectively highlights one instance of an interconnectedness between images and personages. This theme continues to be developed across the narratives that make up Sebald's Emigrants, particularly around this recurring image of the butterfly man.

Ambros Adelwarth is the subject of another of Sebald's narratives and an uncle of the book's narrator, who has his own peculiar encounters with the butterfly man.

A series of departures - from Germany first to Switzerland, London, and then finally to New York state - structure his life as a series of constant adjustments. Despite the ease with which he is able to transition between cultures and adopt new languages, according to the narrator's Aunt Fini, Adelwarth as a private man ceases to exist. Reduced to surface decorum, he exhibits no interest in talking about the past until he reaches retirement, when he begins to cautiously allow himself access to what turns out to be an infallible memory. The narrating of his past, however, in the end has a paradoxical effect upon him. For while relieving himself of the burden of his memories functions as a means of self-preservation, Aunt Fini claims that at the same time he is "mercilessly destroying himself" (p. 100). Unable to sustain this contradiction, Adelwarth eventually enters into a profound depression and finds himself unable to speak. Soon thereafter, he checks himself into a sanatorium, where he spends his remaining days receiving the electroshock therapy that dulls his faculties of cognition and memory and eventually leads to his death.

Adelwarth's encounters with the butterfly man occur through the window of his room in the sanatorium and seem to be a regular occurrence that in its final instance, is almost fortuitous. Visiting him one morning, Aunt Fini is astonished to witness a middle-aged man holding a "white net on a pole" and taking the occasional "curious jump" (p. 104). Adelwarth, unmoved, responds matter-of-factly, "It's the butterfly man, you know. He comes around here quite often" (p. 104). The narrator later learns from one of the sanatorium's doctors that his uncle had his final sighting of the butterfly man on the day of his death. While waiting for him to pass by the distant marshlands outside the window, Adelwarth nearly misses his final fatal appointment.

When Max Ferber's and the butterfly man's paths cross in another of Sebald's four narratives of emigrants, the meeting is undeniably more fortuitous. A solitary painter living in Manchester when the narrator befriends him, Ferber was originally born in Munich and sent alone to England by his parents in 1939, at the age of thirteen. The sole survivor of his family when his parents are deported to concentration camps two years later, Ferber's knowledge of his parents' death is delayed and he spends the remainder of his life grappling with his limited memories of his family and childhood. From this point onward his native country becomes "frozen in the past" that remains an "incomprehensive murmur" (p. 182). He attributes this condition to a loss of the German language and an uncontrollable forgetting of any recollections beyond the age of eight or nine. His memories are limited to "fragmentary scenes" that tend to be "obsessive in character" (p. 181).

As an adult, Ferber finds the concept of transit in almost every form inconceivable, though he does make a trip to Lake Geneva. Some three decades following the original trip with his father, he returns alone in a harrowing effort to retrace his childhood memory of climbing Mount Grammont together. Overcome by anxiety upon his

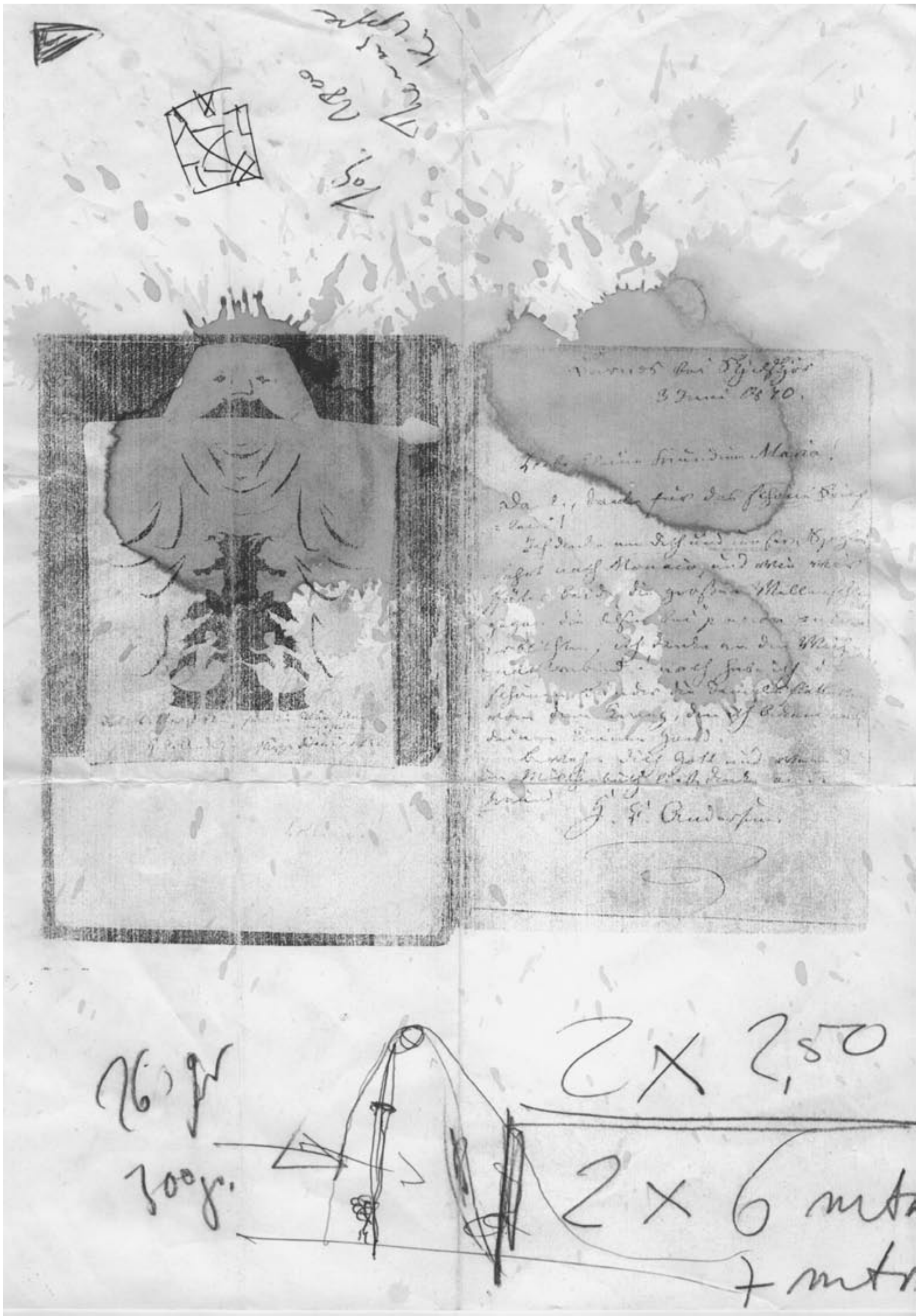
The Butterfly Man, photograph from „Die Ausgewanderten: Vier lange Erzählungen" by W.G. Sebald, 1992 arrival, he climbs to the peak of the mountain nonetheless and finds the view from above unchanged from his memory of it. The view of the valley below attracts him so deeply that he is about to jump down when an old man in his sixties appears out of nowhere bearing a large butterfly net and reminds him that he ought to be descending the mountain in time for dinner. While the butterfly man who inadvertently interrupted his demise remains ingrained in his mind, he tells the narrator that he has no recollection of his descent or return journey to Manchester, which remains a mystery to him. Upon his return to the studio he begins the yearlong, agonizing endeavor of painting Man with a Butterfly Net, a faceless portrait with which he remains perpetually dissatisfied. He destroys, burns, and restarts the painting multiple times because it "convey[s] not even the remotest impression of the strangeness of the apparition" to which it refers (p. 174). These three successive nouns (impression, strangeness, apparition) reiterate the haunting effect of seeing the butterfly man, whose fragmentary impressions linger with the painter long after their strange encounter.

The butterfly man's link to Ferber has yet another dimension, as the narrator discovers when he peruses the memoirs of Ferber's mother. Unable to bear the heart-wrenching effect they have on him, Ferber entrusts them to the narrator before they part for the last time. They meticulously recount her childhood and youth, including her first meeting with Ferber's father in a meadow where they notice a young Russian boy, aged about ten, "chasing butterflies" with an "upraised net" (p. 213). He is on the scene again years later, when Ferber's father proposes to his mother in the very same meadow. She distinctly recalls seeing the leaping boy with his butterfly net as a "messenger of joy" signaling her "final liberation" (p. 214). The butterfly man thus precedes Ferber and later at a pivotal moment, manages to sustain him, even as an incomprehensible apparition.

The image of the butterfly man - as photograph, verbalized recollection, and a faceless painting given to countless reiteration - functions as an extraordinary moment of correspondence that becomes legible across the experiences and memories of several disparate characters in Sebald's The Emigrants. While each of the emigrants remains haunted by the specter of an (ir)recoverable past, the repeated appearance of a figure chasing butterflies with a net attached to a long pole somehow relieves or transforms their burden, taking it far afield from a quest to recuperate facts or truth. The instances of the butterfly man's appearances form a constellation in which past experiences and present fantasies are intertwined, demonstrating the role of imagination [Einbildung] in the pursuit of historical memory.

1 "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (V)

2 W.G. Sebald. The Emigrants (trans. Michael Hulse). New York. New Directions, 1997. All parenthetical page references from this title are from this edition.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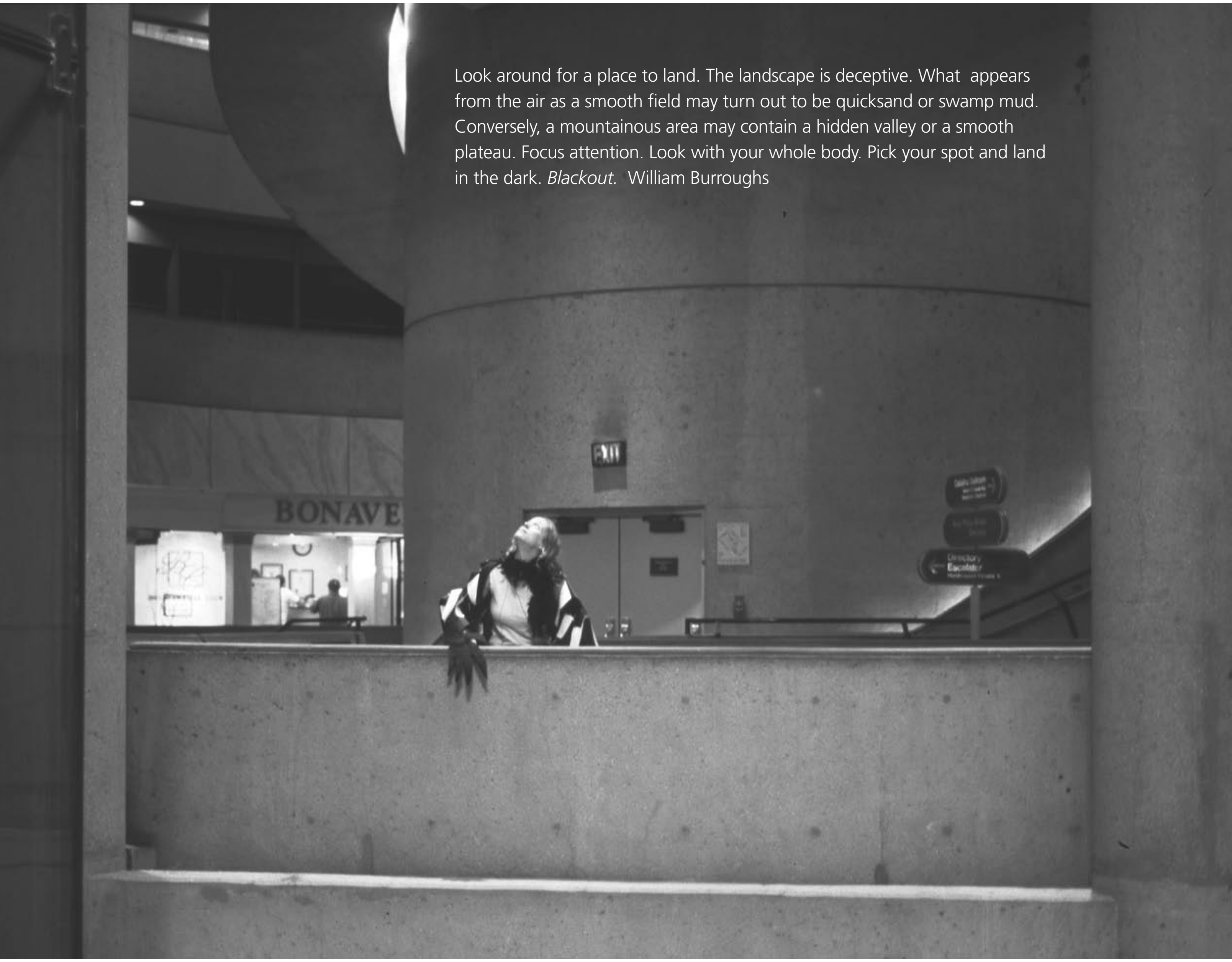
Paul Gellman/Alice Könitz/Katrin Pesch



Look around for a place to land. The landscape is deceptive. What appears from the air as a smooth field may turn out to be quicksand or swamp mud. Conversely, a mountainous area may contain a hidden valley or a smooth plateau. Focus attention. Look with your whole body. Pick your spot and land in the dark. *Blackout.* William Burroughs

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This magazine is published and produced by Kunsthaus Dresden, Municipal Gallery of Contemporary Art Dresden, Germany and Or Gallery Vancouver, Canada on the occasion of the exhibiton project New Ghost Entertainment-Entitled. The exhibtion will be on view at Or Gallery from October 14 - November 11, 2006 and at Kunsthaus Dresden from December 9, 2006 - February 11, 2007. A German edition will be published on the occasion of the exhibition at Kunsthaus Dresden.

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Cover: Katrin Pesch

Inside cover: Annette Kelm

Design concept/Layout: Katrin Pesch

Printed by: American Foothill Publishing, Tujunga, CA

Thanks to: Michele Faguet, Christiane Mennicke and all the authors and artists, as well as Scott Marvel Cassidy, Doris Fischer-Pesch, Matthias Mühling, Marian Stefanowski und Gabriele Wegener - Freunde der deutschen Kinemathek, Nanna Wülfing, videodrom.com Berlin, Klaus Volkmer - Filmmuseum München and Florian Zeyfang

New Ghost Entertainment-Entitled is a project developed as a cooperation of Kunsthaus Dresden and Or Gallery, funded by the Federal Cultural Foundation of Germany. The Or Gallery gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the BC Gaming Commission, the Province of BC through the BC Arts Council, the City of Vancouver, and all our members and volunteers.

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BRITISH COLUMBIA ARTS COUNCIL
Supported by the Province of British Columbia
CITY OF VANCOUVER

Distribution in co-operation with:
Verbrecher Verlag
Labisch & Sundermeier GbR
Gneisenaustrasse 2a
10961 Berlin
Germany
Tel: + 49 30 283 85954
Fax: + 49 30 283 85955
Mail: info@verbrecherei.de
www.verbrecherei.de

ISBN: 978-3-935843-80-5

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