

↳ **Punctum**
26.07. – 21.09.
2014

Texts

↳ I was overcome with an ‘ontological’ desire: I wanted to learn at all costs what photography was ‘in itself’ ...

Roland Barthes
↳ Camera Lucida

Punctum is an exhibition exploring the nature of photography today. Consisting of fifty photographs and artworks chosen by artists, curators and writers, and including a series of lectures and a publication, *Punctum* takes its cue from the term “punctum” coined by Roland Barthes in his final book *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Barthes uses this term as a linguistic device to examine the meaning of photography. The term refers, for example, to a striking detail in the photograph that captivates or “wounds” the viewer, and completes the photograph as an object of reflection. Barthes goes much further than this, and ascribes a number of phenomenological considerations within the sphere of meaning that is “punctum.”

Since the publication of Barthes’ seminal book, this term has been referenced to and thrown around casually and subsequently employed by many authors on the subject of photography ever since. It has also sometimes been misused, misrepresented—and even rejected as romantic, and often today, as out-dated. The book was itself bound up with the recent death of the author’s mother, and thus became a personal soliloquy in one sense, sometimes smothering the philosophical ruminations with mournful prose. This tone applies well to Barthes’ ruminations. Indeed, Barthes asserts that, “if photography is to be discussed on a serious level, it must be described in relation to death.”

This exhibition takes this concept and term of “punctum” as a starting point for invited participants to select photographs that, for each of them, are emblematic of “punctum,” given today’s context for photography and our constant grappling with aesthetics. Accompanying each chosen photograph is a short text to complement and elucidate their decision. The backdrop to this project are ongoing ontological considerations for photography, especially now, long after its digitization and further universalization. Photography has always been a problematic medium, as a so-called indexical form, as a replacer of memory, as a manipulated device, as an instrument of surveillance, control and militarism, and even as an often-disputed art form. With photography’s evolution into the digital age, these problematics have arguably multiplied. Author Geoff Dyer, for example, argues that digital photography “seems devoid of any qualities of past time,” that it itself no longer holds the qualities that Barthes would have ascribed to it. According to Barthes, the photograph is the “living image of a dead thing” and thus has something of

“resurrection” to it. Would that sentiment hold today, when the photograph has become engulfed within the constant, ever-changing and unfixed flow of images? Would we today agree to refer to Barthes’ terms such as the “profound madness,” “shared hallucination,” or “the Intractable” as the elemental forms of a photograph? Today, we might ask, what is its ontological status?

Towards the end of his book, Barthes indicates (as he might ask of photography today, from the grave), that these sentiments arising from examining something such as *punctum* and the astonishment that they raise will disappear due to what was then a growing plurality of photography. This disappearance is the beginning point of this exhibition, which attempts to conjure up these questions, to pay respects to a dead author and his thoughts on photography, and to perform a brief séance, of sorts, in a time when photographic images have arguably reached a new height of abandon and meaninglessness. Amid today’s roar of images, *Punctum* invites audiences to step aside and consider taking part in a collective hallucination.

Accompanying this exhibition is a lecture series on topical subjects of photography today. A publication co-produced with Fotohof *edition* will be presented at the end of the exhibition. Lastly, a collaborative public response to *Punctum* is mounted during the exhibition’s duration. Visit [instagram.com/salzbuergerkunstverein](https://www.instagram.com/salzbuergerkunstverein) to participate.

Séamus Kealy,
Curator

Lectures:

Saturday, 26 July 2014, 4–6 pm
Boris Groys, Ruth Horak, Friedrich Tietjen

Saturday, 20 September 2014, 5–7 pm
Séamus Kealy, Francis McKee, Esther Ruelfs & catalog presentation

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- 27** Suzanne Lafont (F) 26
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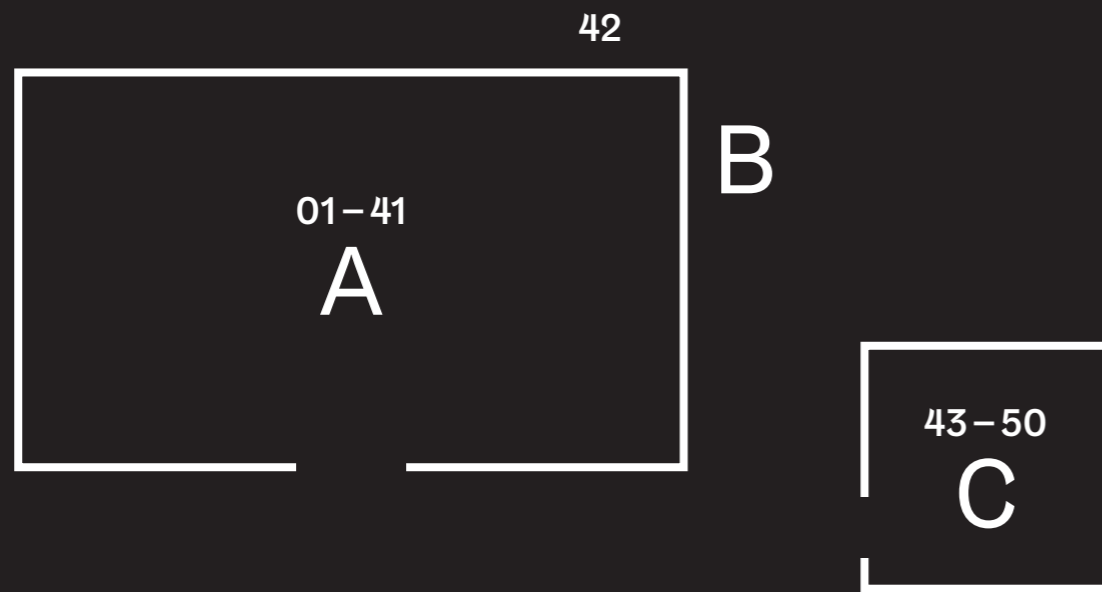
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→ Barbad Golshiri

FLOORPLAN

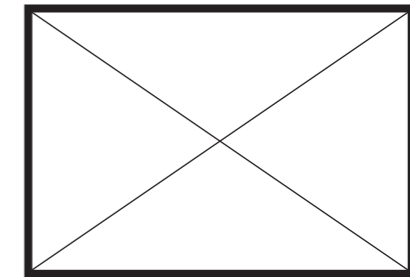


- A GROSSER SAAL
- B GANG / HALLWAY
- C KABINETT

LEGEND

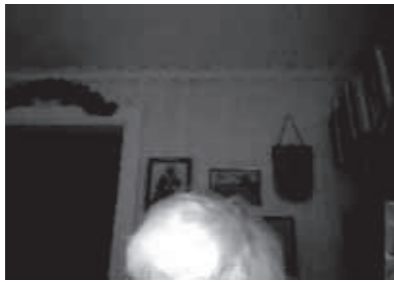
00 Participant /
Autor

(Text)



00

→ Artist / Photographer,
Title, Year, Technique, Size



01

→ Felix Gmelin, *Screen Shot 2014-04-27 at 21.41.58*, 2014, Fine Art print (exhibition copy), 24 × 34 cm, courtesy of Felix Gmelin



02

→ August Sander, *Peasant Child*, 1925–1930, gelatin silver print (1995), 26 × 17,2 cm, © Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur - August Sander Archiv, Köln/ Bildrecht, Wien



03

→ Gauri Gill, *Jogiyon ka Dera*, from the series 'Notes from the Desert,' 1999–2010, barytpaper (exhibition copy), 44,5 × 30 cm, courtesy of the artist

01 Felix Gmelin

Some people say Roland Barthes' book *Camera Lucida* is an eulogy for himself, as affected by the death of his mother.

This is my mother. She is 84 years old. This image comes from a Skype conversation we had on April 27, 2014. She is looking into a document and trying to tell me about the peace movement she is participating in. Seldom I see her entire face in our Skype conversations since she doesn't seem to want to move her screen and the webcam into the position where I can see her face entirely. Mostly I see only her white hair in our conversations. Behind her we see images of my great grandmother. She was a woman my mother admired since she dared to become a doctor in the age when only Switzerland accepted to educate female doctors within Europe. In the photograph on the right hand side, above my mother's head, we see her fencing with an épée with one of her colleagues. On the left hand side, we see her posing in a nice hat and dress. The handbag on the right belonged to my grandmother, a doctor who wasn't allowed to work in the Third Reich since she was half Jewish. My mother, a violinist who studied in Salzburg at the Mozarteum, wanted to become part of an orchestra ensemble. Since she was rejected by the Berlin Philharmonic, the Vienna Philharmonic and the London Philharmonic orchestras with the argument they didn't want women. Then we came to live in Sweden, where my mother found a job at the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra. Generations of feminist ambitions within my family occur in this simple screen shot from a Skype conversation.

Can "any photo taken out of a particular context that is usual to it be examined and presented as having *punctum*" as Séamus says? What is a "sting, speck, cut—and also a cast of the dice"? Are we talking about displacements or endings? What is the difference? What is that sting or little hole that is so 'poignant'? What does poignant mean? When I see that white hair on Skype, I sometimes worry if this will be the last image I see of my mother.

02 Martin Herbert

Facts break the spell, but I have almost none. I saw *Peasant Child*, assumedly part of the epic taxonomical *People of the Twentieth Century* project on which August Sander worked on from circa 1910 to the 1950s, in an exhibition in Liverpool in 2013, by chance,

while I was killing time after visiting the city on other business. Struck, I photographed it hastily with my iPhone, catching reflections in the non-museum-standard glass that covered it, and gazed at the rough snap repeatedly for weeks after, preferring it to clean jpegs already online, as if to photograph the image had been to clasp it to myself, as if to revisit it was to understand the hairline crack it had put in my heart. I can't even claim this photograph's spell as a private one, though maybe there's a circular logic there—if an image moves you, it's harder to see how it couldn't move others.

Still, *Peasant Child* seems so self-evidently like a constellation of *punctums* (*puncta*?): the errant lift of the fringe, plumpness of forearms, rickety arc of legs. It's easier to find the part that doesn't pierce. Catastrophically innocent and worldly as frozen immature faces sometimes are, the kid peers out onto whatever limited horizon awaits, and we know what larger social shifts awaited in Germany, in the 30s and 40s of this subject's early maturity. I fudge the gender because I'm not sure and the title doesn't help, only adds to a sense of lostness and instability in an image that already oscillates between the specific—Germany between the wars—and the general. That is, a single child of the past, yet to experience its bequest of contingencies, tragedies, happiness. Sander, of course, didn't know with what this photograph would come to be ghosted either. But he snared something that, for me, is wholly artful: sweet and sad, resolute and buckling, fathoms deep. The real peasant child, it occurs to me now, might just still be alive. The photograph unquestionably is.

03 Gauri Gill

A boy, playing with friends, outside newly built homes.

The twelve feet by twelve feet concrete houses were built with money provided through a government scheme. The previous old settlement of mud homes in this desert town was destroyed in a great flood. The ground here is hard and salty, and that year the water grew so tall that it swallowed the mud homes, leaving behind half-eaten shells.

He stops to strike a pose for the camera, a new game.

The homes are encircled by dry wood and bramble—kejri, kikar, taali—to keep intruders out, and to be used as firewood. Inside lie beds and trunks, possessions. No one may easily live in the spare structures, because although they provide a certain shelter, there

is no electricity, no running water, no kitchen, no latrine, nowhere to bathe in privacy. (No school, no hospital, no pucca road, no jobs, no land, no money to pay for any amenity). At night, in the summer, residents sleep outside on charpais under the stars. Often there is a hot lloo blowing. In the rainy season one must try and light cooking fires outside in the rain, or bring fire and smoke into rooms with little ventilation.

Children play around the homes. They jump from the rooftops to startle bystanders, raising dust; they roll on the ground; they roll their eyes back into their heads, they make grotesque faces; they stick flowers into their hair and play hopscotch. They play a gamut of games using sticks and stones.

The boy is of the Jogi Nath community. His people are nomads, now classified as SC/ST: scheduled caste/scheduled tribe. As landless, jobless people they must roam from town to town, village to village. When they travel they camp out in the sand, in the wilderness, on the fringes of towns and villages. Venturing into rural outposts they may receive grain, sugar, atta, milk, roti or sabzi; in the cities a rupee or two. Almost always there is an exchange involved; the request is made through a dance, or a song, an amulet or a prayer.

Punctum: the wound in a photograph through which we may enter. Is the *punctum* the concealed face, only half visible to us? Is it the boy who mirrors; the shadow who echoes? Is it the too large trousers and the scrupulous knot that holds them up, or the slightly menacing snakelike tyre rope near his feet? Is it the half raised arms—gesture of crucifixion, prisoners and scarecrows, all of which go through my mind retrospectively—or is he about to break into dance?

04 Vaari Claffey

Sometimes the mention of Jaques Lacan in a text about art is enough to make you shiver and look at your shoes.

There is a glorious photograph of Albert Einstein, taken in 1939. He is seated on a bale of hay and his somewhat wanton hair seems to fizz with ideas. His legs are lightly crossed and he is wearing a pair of size eleven women's sandals. The story goes that the sandals were the last pair in the shoe shop that would fit him and, after a previous misunderstanding caused by his accent, he was too embarrassed not to buy them. He subsequently wore them whenever he would go to meet his new friend, the shoe shop owner, who he had met for the first time when

he walked into his shop.

This photograph of a petrosphere was used as the invitation image for an exhibition I curated in Dublin in 2012. One of the artists, Alice Rekab, had sent it to me during her research around the show. The gallery got permission from the Peabody Institute to reproduce it and it was to be printed on a foldout brochure. When I showed Alice the mock-up, she breathed in sharply. "Why do the archaeologists have bananas in their hands?" she asked. "They didn't have bananas in the image I sent you." It seems there are two versions of the image of the petrosphere and the archaeologists in Costa Rica. There is one where they sit with their arms folded lightly across one another and then this; the one with bananas. The one with the bananas is the official image.

Jacques Lacan tells the story of the time when a Professor D. was staying at the same hotel as Lacan and his wife. Lacan could not believe it. "It's true," his wife said, "I've seen his shoes." Lacan shivered, horrified by the idea that the man whom he held in such great esteem, would be recognised by something as mundane as a pair of shoes. There is nothing special about a pair of shoes.

05 Eva Grubinger

The *topos* of the female nude as depicted from behind has been widely exploited, to the point of exhaustion, in art history. This version by Dutch photographer Ed van der Elsken strikes me—as a blonde woman sculptor born and raised in Salzburg, long escaped to the Berlin flatlands—with a simultaneously melancholic and humorous note: here the female nude is draped on a rustic veranda facing an impressive alpine panorama. The pastures have already greened, but the peaks are still covered in snow, disquietingly surrounded by dark clouds. Not only is the woman naked, but she is also rendered immobile by a massively plastered leg.

By linking the snowy mountains and the plaster through their unifying white colour, van der Elsken does not simply expose the nude, but hilariously uncovers the myth of innocence concerning nature itself, subtly turning the scenery into an allegory of chauvinism. Coming from the liberal flatlands of Amsterdam, van der Elsken—who started out as a sculptor himself—must have felt the suffocating constriction inscribed in the beauty of the Alps. At least that's what I hope, while thinking of Franz West, imagining the woman cutting off the plaster and using it as a tool for slapping the local hillbillies.



04

→ Paul Allen, *Samuel K. Lothrop and His Wife Eleanor Seated Before a Large Stone Ball*, 1949, Fine Art print (exhibition copy), 11,8 × 18,2 cm, courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, PM# 2004.1.391.1 (digital file# 98970057)



05

→ Ed van der Elsken, *Zwitserland*, 1966, color photograph, 41 × 60,5 cm, © Ed van der Elsken/Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam, courtesy of Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam



06
 → Unknown, *Françoise Hardy*,
 1962 – 1963, Fine Art print
 (exhibition copy), 29,7×42 cm,
 Karin Hanssen, courtesy of
 Robert Polo Gallery, Brussels



07
 → Francesca Woodman,
*Untitled, Providence, Rhode
 Island*, 1975 – 1978/2005,
 b/w gelatin silver print on
 barytpaper, 25,4×20,3 cm,
 © George and Betty
 Woodman, New York /
 SAMMLUNG VERBUND,
 Wien



08
 → Ines Doujak, *Untitled
 (Woman with Apple)*, 1994,
 C-Print on Forex, 95×148 cm,
 private collection

06 Karin Hanssen

Punctum. Prosthesis

To point out the *punctum* in a photograph appears to be simpler than it actually is. What is the *punctum* in a photograph?

To begin with: each photo is a form of *punctum* in itself because it reveals (past) time which is alarming to be confronted with, especially since we are all growing older and are going to die. In fact, it is not the photo that is growing old but us.

For my paintings, I use old found photographs as source material to reflect on the present. So my topics are the past, distance in time, reflecting on time, and looking back into time. I selected an old photograph that I used to make the painting of *Rosalind* (2007), for the series *As You Like It*.

The global *punctum* is that, although it is a public photograph representing a famous person (Françoise Hardy), we are immediately confronted with the old use of colors, the old-fashioned or vintage dress and we recognize past time itself rather than the person depicted. I am sure the photographer wanted us to recognize Françoise Hardy and that it was not her/his intention to give so much attention to the poppy in the foreground. A wound. Does something in the image wound me without it being the intention of the *operator*? A trauma. Is there a trauma I am confronted with? I looked at many pictures and was struck by the gaze of a blind man, but did it wound me? When I look at a photograph of my father's aunt, I see a picture of myself in the fragments of her mouth. I see genes. I miss my parents who have died many years ago when I was in my twenties. Since then, because of their deaths and my subsequent lack of family, family pictures have become places where I search for some kind of recognition. Is *punctum* really part of a picture or is it a psychological projection of fears and desires?

Back to the image of Rosalind/Françoise Hardy. When I first saw the picture, it was the one I needed for my series, the one that was still lacking. I found my Rosalind lying in a field. But the flower in front of her was immediately disturbing. Its color was blood and it cut her left arm in two pieces. Violence. As if the arm is a prosthesis. And that was not the intention of the photographer I presume. Did it prick me, hurt me, wound me? It might have. Or maybe it was her lying on the ground like a dead body that upset me. Maybe it was her hair dressed like a scarf around her neck, making her look like someone who was strangled, beheaded. Or was it her absence

of gaze, which is symbolic for death? Death is part of my life and photographs have therefore become more important in my life since they have become the surrogates for people that I miss. So maybe I need the distance of this image representing a famous woman but reminding me of Snow White and therefore of death, making it impossible for me to be confronted with the real *punctum*. Maybe that's why I prefer to show the sublimated one in Rosalind. The real *punctum* is in the picture that is carved in my memory. It is the picture of my mother when I found her dead, lying in her bed. The one that I share with you is the sublimated one.

07 Silvia Eiblmayr

This photo shows Francesca Woodman, and if one were to name the *punctum*, it would be the moment of irritation that it triggers: The spatially encapsulated situation in which the artist enters the photo is paradoxical. With exactly what kind of mirror, light, or camera direction she created this refined, architecturally symbolic scenario ultimately remains unanswered, leaving the self-portrait in an odd, enigmatic limbo between appearing and disappearing, between space and non-space, between real and imaginary—a fascination that runs through the work of Francesca Woodman.

08 Hildegund Amanshauser

A woman with an apple. What would one think of? Is it Eve who picks the apple from the tree of knowledge? Just before she and Adam are banished from the Garden of Eden?

No, it is an old woman who holds an apple right in front of her eyes, blocking her view. The actress is the artist's grandmother, a Slovenian and communist who fought with the partisans in Carinthia against the Nazi regime.

The photograph has a powerful presence and force. It offers many different interpretations and readings and also has something cheerful and optimistic about it. Why? Hard to say. *Punctum*?

09 Marc De Blicq

Flusser's hope

It was likely 2005 when Dirk Lauwaert, a respected and eloquent writer on photography, suggested that I visit the Kikirpa (Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage) to look at the

images of cultural heritage sites in Belgium of the “Collection Allemande.” All he knew then was that a German photographer had made them, and that the German government commissioned them during the occupation of Belgium in WWI. All five hundred glass plate negatives and vintage contact prints measured a generous forty by forty centimeters, their puzzling quality seemingly out of sync with the context in which they were made. With a load of glass plates and cumbersome equipment, the dignity of the subjects and the close proximity of the war all kept (the warfront being as close as eighty km) the photographer appeared unhindered to swiftly circumscribe a gothic Church or a neo-gothic town hall in a handful of sometimes poetic, albeit very costly photos.

The “Interior of the Saint-Jacobs Church in Ghent, 1918” is one of those prints that have become exemplary for the Collection for me. It is made from a position that is slightly off the axis from the building. Sloppy positioning, one might think, although otherwise everything is almost level and very sharp and the lens is skillfully shifted towards heaven. But why bring a lampshade within the frame and why does that lampshade obscure a crucifix? Why, if he wasn’t standing on the axis of the church to begin with, did the photographer not take an extra step aside? Why did he not make an alternate picture? Did he not have to legitimize his expensive work towards his commissioners? How did they value his aesthetic play, while others were fighting a war?

Taking a second look at his other photographs, I began to see recurring randomness, excessive perspective distortion, cut off church towers, streaks of light getting the same attention as stone and wood: Photographical skill combined with detachment or disrespect, dyslexia or naivety.

Regular documentary photos would have been instructive at best, but in these somehow skewed images I recognized my own position in many ways, and I wanted to find their author. I wanted to encounter his intentions and understand them. But my quest eventually brought me to a system, not a photographer. Around 1865 Albrecht Meydenbauer, an architect working in Prussia, found and perfected a method that he called photogrammetry, the ancestor of *Photosynth* and *Street view*. For Meydenbauer the major aim of “measuring with photos” was to compute 3D models from a combination of 2D photos in function of restoration and reconstruction. Anonymous photographers made a total of twenty thousand glass negatives following Meydenbauer’s set of procedures,

such as “never stand on the axis of a building, shift the lens upward as far as possible”... etc.

My untraceable, fellow photographer had operated the camera but he wasn’t the operator, or the author, he was just a functionary. Everything I can gather from his photos resides in the system that isn’t his; in circumstantial evidence, instructions, field notes and algorithms. It is not the lampshade obscuring Christ that “punctures the *studium*”; the *studium* exists solely outside the image. If such thing as *punctum* exists, it could only be the photographic image itself. My concerns while working as a photographer in the 21st century are many, but “Interior of the Saint-Jacobs Church in Ghent, 1918” reminds me not to worry. It says to me that any photograph has the potential to unexpectedly puncture the system that holds it.

10 Wilfried Lentz

This photograph was shot in 1861 by Carleton Watkins at Mariposa Grove, which is part of a larger area of what is now called the Yosemite National Park in California. The man at the base of the tree is the local guide Galen Clark. The tree was then over 2000 years old, a species of sequoia called the Grizzly Giant. This is one print out of a larger series of photographs of the then newly discovered area in the American West. In later years, Watkins visited Yosemite Park again and re-photographed the same tree with Clark. His later photographs reveal that the big branch in the foreground was at some point removed.

The prints (from so called Mammoth glass plates) were exhibited at the Goupil Gallery in New York about a year after they were shot. The exhibition was covered comprehensively in the press, and subsequent public recognition of this Apollonian landscape seemed to trigger sublimated ideas about landscape and national identity. These photographs also introduced the sublime idea that huge trees from the time of Christ were still standing. It could be purported that America thus had already a long history. These *God-given* monuments became of such importance that President Lincoln signed a legal act in 1864—during the civil war and the first of its kind—that set to protect the giant trees. The sequoias thus became one of the symbols for the new American republic. {1}

The print shown here is a later reprint by Watkins himself. He had to sell his glass plates because of bankruptcy and decided



09

→ Team of Albrecht Meydenbauer, Königlich Preussische Messbild-Anstalt, *Kerk Sint-Jacob*, 1918, gelatin silver print mounted on cardboard, 50 × 50 cm, courtesy of © KIK-IRPA, Brussels (Belgium), cliché F000348



10

→ Carleton Watkins, *Section Grizzly Giant, Mariposa Grove, California*, 1861, albumen print, 19 × 11,5 cm, private collection



11

→ Seiichi Furuya, *Graz 1983*, 1983, gelatin silver print, 26,5 × 39 cm, © Seiichi Furuya, courtesy of Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin



12

→ Anna Jermolaewa, *Untitled*, 2010/2014, digital print, 40 × 62 cm, courtesy of the artist and Kerstin Engholm Galerie, Vienna



13

→ Carlo Gentile, *Stouts Gulch Near Barkerville*, 1865, Fine Art print (exhibition copy), 39,5 × 32 cm, Uno Langmann Family Collection of B.C. Photographs, courtesy of the University of British Columbia Library, Vancouver

to make new negatives of a few of the 1861 Mammoth prints to be able to distribute his images again later on.

11 Tobias Zielony

In 1973, the young photographer Seiichi Furuya traveled from Japan to Austria and decided to stay. First in Vienna, later in Graz where he took a job in a photography store. In Graz he met his future wife, Christine Gössler. They had a son in 1980: Komyo. In the same year Seiichi Furuya and others started the magazine *Camera Austria*. Christine wanted to become an actress, but she suffered from depression as a result of developing schizophrenia. In 1980, Furuya wrote about his wife: “Two years have passed since I met her. The first film we saw together was called ‘Harakiri.’ One year ago I married her. I photographed her regularly from the very first day. In her I saw a woman who passes by me, sometimes a model, sometimes the woman I love, sometimes the woman who listens to me. I feel obliged to constantly photograph the woman who means different things to me. When I think about the fact that photography means capturing time and space, then this work, documenting a person’s life, is fascinating for me. By photographing her, looking at her in the picture, I find myself.”^{2} In 1984 Furuya was offered a job interpreting for a Japanese construction company in East Germany. The young family moved to Dresden and soon after to East Berlin. On October 7, 1985, the National Holiday in East Germany, Christine jumped from the eighth floor of their building in a *Plattenbausiedlung*, a prefabricated housing complex, and took her own life. It took the ambulance two hours to reach them due to the celebrations. Seiichi and Komyo Furuya stayed in Berlin until 1987 and then went back to Graz. Furuya often photographed everyday life in East Germany, the border of Austria and neighboring countries to the east, but especially his wife Christine. In retrospect, the photos also seem to be an attempt to make sense of what happened.

12 Anna Jermolaewa

The photo was taken in Samarkand at the entrance to a market in 2010. This market has a long and fascinating history, as Samarkand was a crossroads on the Silk Road. Three old, pastel-colored cars from the Soviet era seen here in a sort of choreography can still often be spotted in the former Soviet republics,

although they have completely disappeared from Moscow and St. Petersburg by now. There you mainly see expensive foreign cars in all shades of gray. Then there is the woman in the car, who is turned around looking directly at us, almost staring, and a young girl whose face we cannot see. This girl is the *punctum* of this photograph for me.

13 Scott Watson

I first saw this photograph in the Special Collections Library at the University of British Columbia a few months ago. The Librarian, Sarah Romkey, had graciously picked a few items from a large gift of old British Columbia photographs to show to my colleague John O’Brian and myself. It is not a field I know much about and one I didn’t think I would care about. As the past becomes more photographic, these images become more, not less intense. The picture that stood out for me among the several dozen we saw, was this one by Carlo Gentile, taken in 1865 in Stout’s Gulch, British Columbia.

Carlo Gentile was a strikingly intriguing figure. A Neapolitan professional photographer who decided to go to the American West, beginning his career there with four years spent in British Columbia. The picture is a textbook example of the sublime, depicting a man-made natural catastrophe—a huge mudslide on a de-forested hillside. The composition is beautiful. Gentile has taken the photo fairly high up on a facing slope. It has several *punctums*. The first for me was to notice the small figures at the bottom. Among a field of diagonals, trees scattered like match sticks, they stand erect, the men, the destroyers. They are the measure of all things and give the picture its truly grand scale. You might then notice there are “suits” and then apart, a bit below, someone else, dressed differently. Already an us to an “other.”

It’s a very modern looking image—a stack of layers, rather than a recession from foreground to distance. It is pressed against the surface without a horizon. This isn’t a landscape, it is an event.

I puzzled over the pipes spewing water and what looked like strewn built things among the timber. I was reminded of Robert Smithson’s images of Passaic County and his glue and asphalt pours—this image attaches to that genealogy in that this is a picture of an “earth-work,” a landscape modification. These pipes are—you can find this out by googling Stout’s Gulch—most likely from a gold mine.

Stout’s Gulch, I learned, is the birthplace of the British Columbia we know as a

modern jurisdiction. It is the heart of the 1860s Caribou gold rush that created the first settler political entities in this part of the world, and so is much celebrated by the settler state and much mourned by the original inhabitants.

Drawn to this picture for its sublime thrill—a thrill that announces itself when you see the figures—I arrived at a terrible recognition that the wanton destruction of nature for gold marks the birth throes of this jurisdiction, rendering the notion of place as nonsensical as a mudslide. The photograph reminded me, once again, that I live on a great nowhere which will never be a place, but will remain an extraction site for destroyers until the end of their reign, whenever that may be. *Punctum*.

14 Sabine Bitter & Helmut Weber

Present day processes of flexibility, re-regulation, and job insecurity have not only modified the conditions and forms of production, distribution, and circulation of goods, people, and images, but they have also destabilized Roland Barthes' 1980s division of the photograph into *studium* and *punctum*. Today Barthes' split has transformed into a set of questions: Can the readability, affective perception, and meaning of photographs still be fixed on one point?

Or has the *punctum*—as illustrated in our photograph—already been multiplied into many vanishing points scattered within and beyond the image that affectively organize particular perceptions and emotional experience that are dependent on the location and perspective?

Given that affectively charged images circulating in the media collapse the *studium* into the *punctum*, images become precarious, rendered, and available for a wide variety of interpretations.

To which specific, contemporary and historical reference systems could the *studium* of the “objective” photograph content be linked and how could the production of meaning be reorganized?

15 Louwrien Wijers

“We must make Eurasia happen,” Joseph Beuys kept telling me. “Our culture has forever moved from east to west over the Eurasian platform and from west to east.” When Joseph Beuys was born, 12 May 1921,

his name was written as Beuijs to clarify that he is of Dutch descent. He told me that his great-grandfather came from Friesland in the north of Holland to Groesbeek near the Dutch/German border, his grandfather moved to Geldern in Germany, his father moved to Kleve, where Jupp, as he was called, grew up. At school, according to National Socialist ideas of the 1930s in Germany, he read books on Genghis Khan and Attila the Hun, who came from Central Asia to Europe. “Our current democracy is decoration,” Beuys said in 1980 in Rotterdam, where this photo was taken. “For real democratic quality we should be able to travel like a hare from here to Beijing without showing a passport.”

16 Paolo Woods

I think it is pretty obvious what the *punctum* is in this photo. Well, if it is not, then it is not *punctum*. For me, it is the yellow rope that ties the men together. It is a strong symbol in Haiti. Many people have found the image disturbing. I recently showed it in a large, open-air exhibition of my work on the main square in Port-au-Prince. The print was three by three meters. I had not yet finished putting the photo up when the head of the presidential guards came to see me and told me it should be taken down. I promised I would remove it the next day, as soon as I got an alternative photo printed. That night they came around in a police car and tore it to pieces. The power of *punctum*.

17 Antje Ehmman

An unsettling image

In a city in India, I came across an artist-photography book that was produced here. An artist from the West had asked different people to think about what was their favourite place in the city and to explain it in a few lines. The director of a cultural institute (also from the West) wrote the following:

Sukoon (Meaning peace in Urdu)
—Private House

You come to that house from far away, to get access you pass a dark tunnel—at the end there are lights of a welcoming party. The way is slippery because of the fallen dead flowers. The noise of the streets gets more and more substituted by the pulse of electronic sounds.



14

→ Sabine Bitter & Helmut Weber, *Alltag in Wien, 16. Bezirk*, 2013, b/w photograph, half tone, barytpaper, 70×90 cm, courtesy of the artists



15

→ Cathrien van Ommen, *Joseph Beuys in Museum Boijmans van Beuningen*, 1980, Fine Art print (exhibition copy), 21×29,7 cm, courtesy of the artist



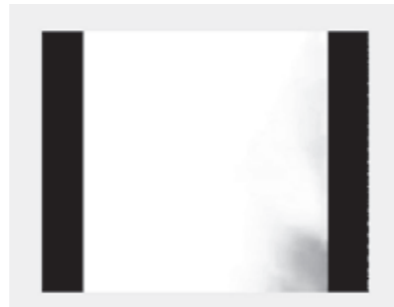
16

→ Paolo Woods, from the project STATE, 2013, Fine Art print (exhibition copy), 40×40 cm, courtesy of Paolo Woods/INSTITUTE



17

→ Antje Ehmann,
A Disturbing Image,
Bangalore 2013, Fine Art print
(exhibition copy), 14,8 × 21 cm,
courtesy of Antje Ehmann



18

→ Unknown, *That White*,
2011, Fine Art print
(exhibition copy), 40 × 50 cm,
courtesy of Rabih Mroué



19

→ Willie Doherty, *Incident*,
1993, Cibachrome mounted
on aluminum, 122 × 183 cm,
Edition 1/3, Collection Irish
Museum of Modern Art,
Dublin, Purchase 1994

Here the cultural institute director describes his own house as his favorite place in the city. The door is wide open, a party is being thrown—to the beat of electronic music.

I look at the photo of the house next to the text that the artist took in the absence of its owner. The door is indeed open, but not inviting, because a maid is standing in the doorway wearing a sari and sweeping the floor. The photograph conveys the ‘swish swish’ sound of sweeping, and I imagine how the owner of the house will walk barefoot across the clean tiles later on.

In this photograph, the house where festive parties are thrown becomes a sterile colonial villa with domestic servants. It should be that images react to texts in shifts; only these should not be shifts into stereotypes. For me, the *punctum* in this photograph is the woman with the broom.

18 Rabih Mroué

Photo by an unknown Syrian protester
Homs/Syria 01/07/2011

I.

I wonder if I ever saw that white; a white with neither past, nor present, nor future. No beginning. No end. No timeline; as if a life in a whole.

I wonder if I ever saw his white in their lives. Glances that became my own.

II.

Hiroshi Sugimoto decided to shoot a whole movie in one single frame, he fixed the shutter on wide open aperture, for the entire duration of the film. When the film was done, he clicked the shutter closed. The result was a white screen ...

III.

When I blacked out that night I saw that white. When the bullet pierced my skin I saw that white.

When I followed the white line I saw that white. When I saw only white in your eyes I saw that white.

When I saw my veins turn blue I saw that white.

When I thought I died I saw that white.

When I saw you on that big screen screaming for me to get you out I saw that white.

When the smoke filled the room I saw that white.

When there was no way out I saw that white.

When the city burns I see that white.

When I will have our fetus in my hands I will see that white.

When I fell in the shower I saw that white. When I lost my passport I saw that white. When you broke my nose I saw that white. When I saw you lying in my bed I saw that white.

When you told me you died I saw that white. On judgment day I saw that white. On the 7th day in my tiny cell I see that white. On the first day of spring I will see that white.

19 Duncan Campell

What strikes me now, writing this, is the time that has passed since I first saw Willie Doherty’s work *Incident*—or, to be completely accurate, a reproduction of it in his artist-monograph *Partial View*. It was during first my first year studying Fine Arts at the University of Ulster. In an unformed way I had felt drawn to Belfast. In a romantic way I was convinced that art should have direct force in the world. When I moved from Dublin these two instincts immobilised me. I realized quickly what a basic grasp I had of the situation in the North of Ireland. And besides, the condition of utility seemed difficult to reconcile with art that would endure: nothing could get your blood up like a political mural or rub in the sufferings of the wronged like a poster by the *People’s Democracy*. In both respects Doherty’s work was and is very important to me.

I think it is the sense that the rain has just passed that gives *Incident* its radiance. The vivid peach and grey marbling on the husk of the burnt-out car is crisp against muted and blurry colours of the landscape. The overall atmosphere of the image is one of a lull rather than incident—the road gently tapers away and the car, although it is burnt out, seems politely parked. There are traces of familiar narratives—the Troubles, the Irish pastoral—but suppressed by the overall stillness of the image, which for me is a kind of *punctum*. It is disconcerting for this and—to speak personally—makes me acutely aware of the connected and unconnected impulses and feelings become transferred onto representations of such narratives.

In another of Doherty’s works, *30 January 1972*, installed at the Douglas Hyde Gallery in Dublin in 1993, I remember standing next to a speaker to hear a man—a witness to *Bloody Sunday*—emotionally testify: “it was a bad day.” Like *Incident* it says so little and it says so much. That is the great power of this image for me.

20 Geoffrey Batchen

Rossiter's Lament

Punctum is perhaps one of the most misunderstood words in the photographic lexicon. Every student of Barthes's writing can repeat on autopilot that *punctum* is a detail in a photograph that pricks or bruises the individual viewer, the very opposite of the dull, coded conventions of a photograph's *studium*. But many of those students overlook the complexity of the terms, and especially of the interdependent relationship between the two.

Barthes, for example, points out that the *punctum* obeys a supplementary logic; "it is what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there.*" The consequences of this exchange are played out in the second half of *Camera Lucida*, when Barthes describes the infamous Winter Garden Photograph of his mother as a little girl. He tells us that this is the photograph that most powerfully consumes him with grief, but then refuses to reproduce it—because for us it would be nothing but *studium*. It seems the same photograph can induce both *punctum* and *studium*; the two entities turn out to be interchangeable and indistinguishable. Based on this insight, Barthes finds himself nominating another *punctum* that for him lies at the heart of every photograph—Time. He points to photography's activation of an anterior future tense peculiar to itself, a temporal laceration of our mortality enacted every time a photograph is taken or looked upon. For Barthes this everyday sublime represents a revolution in human consciousness. Offering a suspension of the distinction between life and death, photography is a phenomenon that pricks all of us.

How then to represent the multifaceted character of *punctum* in a single photograph, an exercise that would seem to be antithetical to Barthes's own project? I chose a photograph by the American artist Alison Rossiter under the series title *Lament*. A shiny rectangle of arbitrarily-induced monochrome tones on a two-dimensional surface, it is one of many such pictures this artist has produced by developing and then fixing a sheet of expired photographic paper. You might say that it is a photograph comprised of nothing, of nothing but its own *photographicness*. This particular one, inscribed *Velox T4, expiry date October 1, 1940*, displays a Rothko-like grid of pale impressions on a dark ground, these being the chemical traces left behind by the wrapping paper that once protected it from light.

All surface and no depth, this is an elemental kind of photograph, embodying a unique, volatile, unpredictable relationship of light and chemistry, without recourse to cameras or any outside referent. By mounting this object in a frame, Rossiter presents photography as something to be looked at, not through, and to be made, not taken. In the context of the digital disintegration of the photographic medium, this is a photograph, she insists, that is not of something; it *is* something. Placed thus within the inverted commas of historical distance and candid self-reflection, photography is here freed from its traditional subservient role as a realist mode of representation and allowed instead to become a searing index of itself, to become an art of the Real. Conjuring duration rather than an instant in the past, it no longer subjects me to the prick of an anterior future. It reflects, not on my own imminent death, but on the death of photography in general. It is *punctum's punctum*.

21 Moyra Davey

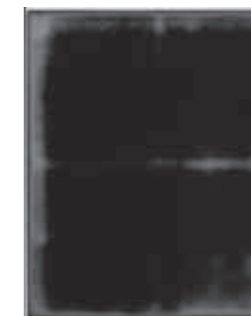
[She's] got a human look, wouldn't you say?
—Leon Trotsky

22 Eva Kotátková

I found this image in an old education book and was immediately struck by the scene it depicts. Later I discovered that such a motif—even though in a less powerful form (usually presented through a schematic drawing)—was repeatedly used among images shown to patients during interviews with psychiatrists to provoke and awaken their suppressed feelings, phobias and memories—various versions of a motif where it is not clear where one stands, if one is caged or if one observes the caged ones. The patient was to locate himself in the picture and explain his position in it and in relation to his surroundings. This image thus generated for me an infinite number of readings of the picture, as executed by a hypothetical doctor and his patient.

One such session might be like this:

Doctor: How would you describe this image?
Patient: A world is divided by a fence into two halves.
Doctor: Who inhabits which half?
Patient: It is not two different types of people. It is similar people but some accidentally live on one side of the fence while the others live on



20

→ Alison Rossiter, *Velox T4, expiry date October 1, 1940*, 2008, unique photographic print, 25,3 × 20,2 cm, collection of Geoffrey Batchen, New Zealand



21

→ Moyra Davey, *Bella*, circa 1996–2014, collage, 30,2 × 30,4 cm, courtesy of the artist and Murray Guy, New York



22

→ Eva Kotátková, *Untitled*, 2014, Fine Art print (exhibition copy), 25 × 18 cm, courtesy of the artist



23

→ Hiroshi Sugimoto,
Scottsdale Drive-In, Scottsdale, 1993,
 silver gelatin print, 50,8 × 61 cm,
 Edition 16/25, © Hiroshi Sugimoto,
 courtesy of The Pace Gallery, London



24

→ Pablo Guardiola, *Signal*, 2011, Fine Art print
 (exhibition copy), 25,4 × 38,1 cm,
 Edition 1/3, courtesy of the artist and Romer
 Young Gallery, San Francisco

the opposite side.

Doctor: Is one half of the world better than the other?

Patient: No. But the people from the opposite side do not know that. They keep dreaming about the world behind the fence ...

or:

Doctor: How would you describe this image?

Patient: People look at each other in the mirror but the reflections differ from the people posing.

Doctor: Where do you see the mirror?

Patient: Between the people. Where the rail is. People look into the mirror at themselves, but see two other people with different postures and grimaces. For some reason the reflection does not obey them.

or:

Doctor: How would you describe this image?

Patient: Animals are removed from their cages in the zoo and are replaced by people.

Doctor: Where are the animals now?

Patient: They are inside the people. They make them act strangely and play odd games, forgetting all good manners. Odd but more direct, without pretending.

or:

Doctor: How would you describe this image?

Patient: Children play games about who is imprisoned and who is free.

Doctor: What is this game good for? Is it entertaining?

Patient: Depends on whom. For those who are playing the supervisors, it is very entertaining indeed. They have the pretext to bully the "animals." The caged ones usually maintain their roles for the rest of their lives. Everything gets decided in children games ...

or:

Doctor: Where are you in this picture?

Patient: I am the rail.

Doctor: What is your role there?

Patient: I structure the view. I cut the images into stripes or squares. I cut them into fragments.

23 Peter Weibel

Photography—Traces of existence?

"Being" is the main concept of the Eleatic school of philosophy. Possible meanings of

the Greek word for "to be" are "being present, being something, being true." Parmenides' famous line can be understood from this semantic elective affinity: "(...) for thought and being are the same," that thought and being, truth and being are the same. The reasoning behind his theory, ontology, is both a theory of knowledge based on the idea that there are only two possibilities of knowledge, namely that something is and that something is not, and thereby explores the question of why there is something and not nothing. Therefore, this also applies to knowledge, that it is and is not. Photography is, on one hand, post ontological, because the photo neither claims the truth of knowledge nor the truth of being. What we see in the photo neither has to exist nor be true. On the other hand, photography is praised for its representational reproduction of reality. It is, therefore, an ontological promise. What you see is not there and what was there, you don't see. The present is the past, the past is the present; traces of existence?

24 Francis McKee

Barthes's notion of *punctum* often seems activated by the point of focus in a photograph or by the stray contingencies of the lens and the, sometimes, unpredictable dynamics of the captured light. At other times it's just a random detail that derails the intended image of the photographer (the *studium* as Barthes describes it).

In Pablo Guardiola's photograph, *Signal*, a dark, black and white photograph, a tiny compass is presented, couched between three fingertips, to the camera and to our view. The *punctum* here lies in the accuracy with which the fingerprints of the top finger are delineated. The prints appear not just as lines, but visible grooves on the fingertip. The compass, referring to navigation, mapping and direction across a landscape, is hijacked by the *punctum*. The fingertips present contour lines that shift the focus to the human body and the mapping of that territory. The geographies of the world are usurped by the more intimate geography of the human form. Think of John Donne's description of the exploration of his lover's body:

*Licence my roving hands, and let them go
 Before, behind, between, above, below.
 O, my America, my Newfoundland,
 My kingdom, safest when with one man
 mann'd,
 My mine of precious stones, my empery;
 How am I blest in thus discovering thee!*

*To enter in these bonds, is to be free;
Then, where my hand is set, my soul shall be.*
—Elegie XX, To His Mistress Going to Bed

The erotics of Donne's poem are bound up with a desire for empire, the navigator as explorer, a conqueror and exploiter of people and natural resources. The human body becomes a microcosmic terrain, its contour lines already marked up across the flesh and the compass diverted from its function in the world beyond ...

This leap to mapping and imperial desire may seem far-fetched. However, the *punctum* in *Signal* also points us towards the more direct connotations of the fingerprint itself, a classic (if unreliable) marker of presence and potential guilt. The early history of the fingerprint lies in art, though and not just in crime. In ancient Babylon, fingerprints were used to decorate walls and also as a means of leaving an artist's signature. By the 18th century, the fingerprint was understood to be a unique identifier of the individual and it's really only in the 20th century that it became an emblem of the criminal justice system.

In *Signal*, all of those allusions surface without any steer as to whether they should be absorbed into a reading of the image or discarded. They are, after all, prompted by the *punctum* and therefore possibly unintentional or accidental: rogue thoughts gate crashing the prescribed viewing procedure. But the ostensible subject of the photo is a small compass and so we are returned to the question of "where to next?"

25 Antonia Hirsch

433 Eros, Amor Group

"The starchy, tuberous crop from the perennial nightshade *Solanum tuberosum* {3} [displays...] skin with each of its folds, wrinkles, scars, with its great velvety planes [...], hard transparent skin under the heel, [...] perhaps there should be huge silken beaches of skin, taken from the inside of the thighs, the base of the neck. [...And] the palm, all latticed with nerves, and creased like a yellowed leaf, [...it] too belongs to the libidinal 'body,' like colors that must be added to retinas, like certain particles to the epidermis, like some particularly favored smells to the nasal cavities, like preferred words and syntaxes to the mouths which utter them and to the hands which write them.[...] It is not a part of the body, of what body?—the

organic body, organized with survival as its goal against what excites it to death, assured against riot and agitation—not a part which comes to be substituted for another part."^{4}

26 Simone Kappeler

While the driver, of whom we only see the right hand with an upright cigarette, is sitting calmly, the woman seems to be pulled to the left. It is as though a gust of wind coming through the open window is pushing her toward the middle of the car. Her shoulder is bare towards the neck; the yellow and light blue striped t-shirt seems to rise up along the border as though it were foaming surf against the woman's flawless skin. This is where I locate the *punctum* of this photograph: in the exposed shoulder area, which continues to the neck covered by the woman's blazing hair, while the t-shirt and the leather back of her seat cover the rest of her back. Leather, fabric, and hair and the sunlit island of bare skin in between, an idle, unspoiled, and promising island in the middle of the movement of the picture.

27 Suzanne Lafont

Situation:

Séamus Kealy, the new director of the Salzburger Kunstverein, has organized an exhibition surrounding Roland Barthes's book *Camera Lucida: Punctum*. For my contribution, I have chosen a plate featuring twenty-four portraits of the actors from the television series *Twin Peaks*. This document is taken from David Lynch's archives. The French version was published by *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1998 in a monograph devoted to the filmmaker. It can be found on page 130 of the publication. I have changed the document by hiding all the portraits, save the three in which appear the protagonists of my story. All of the information on the names of characters and those of the corresponding actors has been kept.

Action:

Audrey Horne: *beige crew neck sweater—short hair, a brown lock over her eye—lipstick—playful character.*

Dale Cooper: *white shirt, necktie, dark and sober jacket—FBI Special Agent—cautious and pragmatic character.*

Josie Packard: *black sweater with a plunging neckline—no hair in her face—lips*



25

→ Unknown, *Eros Showing Charlois Regio, Himeros, and Narcissus*, 2014, Fine Art print (exhibition copy), 29,5 x 37 cm, courtesy of NASA



26

→ Simone Kappeler, *Los Angeles*, 18.7.1981, Fine Art print (exhibition copy), 38 x 60 cm (further sizes: 80 x 120 cm and 120 x 180 cm), courtesy of the artist and Galerie Esther Woerdehoff, Paris



27

→ Suzanne Lafont, *A Dialogue About Punctum Between Three Characters of David Lynch's Series Twin Peaks*, 2014, Fine Art print (exhibition copy), 80 × 65,3 cm, courtesy of the artist and Cahiers du cinéma



28

→ Tom Wood, *Mirror Mersey*, 1989, analog print, 32,5 × 48 cm, courtesy of Galerie Albrecht, Berlin

painted bright red—shrewd and imaginative character.

Audrey Horne: "I'm Audrey Horne. In town, I'm called Sherilyn Fenn." She turns toward Dale Cooper, who is played by the actor Kyle MacLachlan: "It's fascinating! Everything that we have in our heads, memories, thoughts, motivations, intentions, waking dreams, nocturnal dreams, even other people's ideas that we project within ourselves! I'm thinking about all those things that don't have a place in the space between the table, the rug, and the chair!"

Dale Cooper: "Wrong! It's between the rug, the table, and the chair that everything happens. That's where the imagination is located. The world is a collection of disconnected pieces that you continually have to assemble and combine. Formulating ideas, being forced to abandon them, and sometimes, suddenly, the reward of a good connection: that process is very moving and intellectually exciting! Nothing is self-evident and nothing is isolated. Our thoughts, which words translate, draw objects closer or farther away from one another. It's a world of imaginary, logical, and technical correspondences, an enormous scenario that is mostly made up of missing elements."

Josie Packard chimes in: "Yes! Axioms, postulates, theorems, logical reasoning, philosophical propositions: these all give body to the scenario. They should be thought of as the provisional cement of phenomena. Let's imagine them as actors after the curtain has gone down: still dressed for the stage, they turn toward the audience to receive the verdict on their performance. They have one foot in fiction and the other in reality."

She adds: "The point (*punctum*) is the moment when the world attaches itself to fiction in order to find its coherence. Call me Joan Chen." She turns to look at the audience.

28 Declan Long

There's so much studious mirroring in Tom Wood's *Mirror Mersey*—almost too much. At first glance, his picture has the easygoing look of a fortunate first glance. It has the pleasing serendipity and taken-for-granted immediacy of an unpressured, unposed snap. But look again and the photograph intensifies as an involving matrix of intricate visual symmetries. Acutely observed and steadily handled, it's an image of impeccable compositional balance. Two young women on Liverpool's Mersey ferry sit facing each other: two pale presences on the boat's dark

benches. One has dark brown hair; the other's is yellowy-blonde. The blonde wears white; the brunette wears yellowy-brown. They've chosen near-identical outfits—one-piece jumpsuits with the sleeves and legs rolled up—in the committed way that close friends do. Everything *matches* here. The white handbag on the right-hand bench neatly corresponds to the white trainers resting on the left-hand bench. The chestnut hair and white t-shirt neck-line of the figure on the right are almost—in a moment of extraordinary photographic insight—a continuation of the wooden handrail and white painted barrier at the side of the boat. And note too how perfect her ensemble-completing earring is within this scene: an entirely fitting little circle of white and brown stripes that seems a bright, highlighted spot amongst the multiple intersecting diagonals of the boat's own white and brown fittings. Beyond, the city of Liverpool is itself a blurry medley of varied browns and off-whites—an uneven, not-quite-horizontal stretch of busy landscape between the twin planes of grey-blue sea and pale-blue sky.

At the centre of the photograph, within all this well-controlled formal composure and correspondence, an everyday human drama is quietly in progress. Between these neatly complementary female figures, something is occurring: something that might be nothing special; something that could be barely anything. Yet as our eye travels back and forth between them, we surely begin wondering about what they're saying, what they're thinking, where exactly they're travelling to. Most particularly, we might hazard guesses at the *meaning* of what the young woman on the left is holding and showing. And maybe, for a while, the modest mystery of what is passing between these two passengers on this short (and no doubt familiar) ferry journey might seem to be the main source of the photograph's singular presence and peculiar emotive power. This is a moment of quite ordinary interaction and intimacy, transformed through scrupulous and shrewd artistic framing. But, as we look again and again at the picture, it might be that other factors begin to intervene—other features of the photograph somehow interfere with our leisurely interpretation. For, more precisely, there is a certain something—a something that could be barely anything—in the expression of the young woman on the right that introduces a chill into the seeming warmth of the situation. And more precisely still, isn't it her deathly pallor that finally overwhelms? It's a skin-tone that is superficially 'at home' within the picture's balanced colour scheme,

but it's wholly *excessive* too, unsettling the sophisticated equilibrium of the image. This is a detail that might offer nothing much of meaningful consequence—but it hints at a force of human feeling that cracks the carefully crafted photographic mirror.

29 Geoff Dyer

Above all we must be careful not to foreground the *punctum* ...

In October 2011, the matador Juan José Padilla was gored—the word has never seemed more apt—through the eye by a bull. Through the eye in the opposite way to how we might expect. This was an exit wound. The horn came *out* of his eye having entered via his jaw. Served him right, of course, and one assumes he did not take it personally—unlike numerous bulls who took his previous ministrations so personally that they died of hurt. Five months later, he was back on that horse, as they say.

As this picture shows, he's still on it and at it, sporting an eye-patch and face-saving sideburns. Rather him than me—and rather him than the bull. I know next to nothing about bullfighting—which seems more than enough—so there are a number of details here whose significance escapes me. Padilla's outfit, for example, seems packed with symbolic meanings, many of them crustacean-related. And what's going on with his right hand? At first glance, I wondered if some fingers had been chewed off in another incident, which, compared with the facial goring, seemed barely worth reporting. But why, in the other hand, is he holding a chicken? Some kind of magic trick, like pulling a rabbit out of a hat? A variant of waving a red rag at a bull: a way of suggesting that said bull is yellow, that he is, of all things, a pussy? Or just a fowl bit of slapstick? That seems unlikely since the main thrust of Spanish culture insists that one maintain a serious expression at all times (easy enough while watching one of Pedro Almodovar's so-called comedies, easier still when the economy's gone belly-up).

Without the eye-patch Padilla's face looks like it was repaired by Picasso, a not inappropriate look for a tragic hero who has achieved the impossible: simultaneously embracing and surviving his fate. "I can't see," he shouted, Oedipus-like, after the accident. ("Well, what do you expect?" tough-minded responders might have replied. "You've got a bull's horn in your eye.") Or maybe, in the deeper ritualistic scheme of things, it's the

bull—unseen, looming in the photographic blind spot—who is the tragic figure. "What, then, is the bull's tragic flaw," as Martin Amis jokes in *Experience*, "That he's a bull?"

I dunno. It's all a mystery to me as, I'm guessing, it is to *aficionados* who go to bullfights for just that, for the enactment of a mystery. But I like the way that, along with the primal energies unleashed by this bloody *pas de deux*, it is, for one of the participants at least, not just a way of life but a job of work. Maybe the best summing-up is provided by Annie Dillard in *The Writing Life*: "In working-class France, when an apprentice got hurt, or when he got tired, the experienced workers said, 'It is the trade entering his body.'"

So yeah, Padilla is pretty tough. But check out the guy in the purple shirt, playing golf in the blurry background. Now that really takes some balls. {5}

30 Matthias Herrmann

Because there is nothing that doesn't see you.

Shortly after Séamus invited me to participate in this project, I came across this transparency while looking for material for collages I'm currently working on. And it actually did "shock" me briefly, not to resort to Barthes' arrow/pierce: at first I couldn't recall it at all and thought it was someone else's work. What initially confused me is the unusual shade (it is the color reproduction of a black and white photo, taken with a colored gel), which seemed like an alienating moment and distanced it from me. I still can't remember why I even took this photo (the distorted color reproduction, and on 4×5 inch positive material to boot). The original black and white photo was from a series used in an ad for an exhibition in the Karin Schorm Gallery in *Texte zur Kunst* in February 1995. In this work, for me, the *studium* ("dedication to a thing, appeal of someone") quintessentially intertwines with the *punctum* ("is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)"). Period.

31 Sabine Folie

Untitled (The Artist at Work) #17 by Klaus Scherübel is from a series of around 20 works that have been realized since 1994 dedicated to examining the present day conditions of artistic production. "Examination" suggests that this is more *studium* than *punctum*. However, in my opinion these two elements



29

→ Oscar de Marcos, *Spanish Bullfighter Juan José Padilla in Guadalajara*, 2013, Fine Art print (exhibition copy), 20,32 × 30,48 cm, © Oscar de Marcos/Demotix/Corbis



30

→ Matthias Herrmann, *Untitled (Punctum)*, 1995/2014, color reproduction of a b/w photograph, 20 × 25 cm, courtesy of Galerie Steinek, Vienna



31

→ Klaus Scherübel, *Untitled (The Artist at Work) #17*, 2008, Photo: Sara A. Tremblay, Chromira print, framing, caption on wall label, 50 × 63 × 3 cm (frame), total dimensions variable, courtesy of the artist



32

→ Unknown, *Untitled*, 2014, Fine Art print (exhibition copy), 32 × 19,5 cm, courtesy of Corin Sworn

come together in *Untitled (The Artist at Work)* in an exciting and ingenious way. First of all, it is clearly staged photography. These are not random snapshots with “blind spots” that hold you captive, because they are elements that would be unclear, would cause discomfort, disturbance, or fascination—a *punctum*. The tableaus are carefully arranged, although appearing surprisingly ordinary, and show the artist at work. But it is not work in a studio, rather a seemingly uneventful daily routine, showing the artist crossing the street, reading the newspaper in a café, during a break in a tennis match, choosing wine in a wine store, at the movies, or, like this, in the library browsing through some books, *Untitled (The Artist at Work) #17*. The contemplation takes place during everyday tasks and research, and these actually happen everywhere and all the time. There is neither a structured day for the artist, nor a structured place. In terms of his activities, a conclusion about the result of his contemplation or whether he is in the middle of leisure time or work, which are inseparable, cannot always be drawn from the outside. Actually, he paradoxically never rests and never works. To a certain degree, he embodies the paradigm of immaterial work in a post-material age.

In all literalness, the motif iconographically incorporates the genre of the interior, whose dimension cannot, however, be addressed in the brevity provided here. At the same time, the photo refers, beyond its factuality, to allegory: one involuntarily thinks of *The Art of Painting: The Allegory of Painting* by Jan Vermeer. But let’s stay with the title of the piece, which, in turn, argues a paradox. On one hand, it contains *Untitled*, wriggling out of providing information in the title, while on the other hand, it readily offers a description in parentheses: *The Artist at Work*. A title, as it essentially became an “obligatory” component of the photograph according to Benjamin, to establish its evidence. It is also crucial here that the legend is an integral component of the work, as it guides the photograph out of its vagueness and assigns it a certain iconographic topos. The technical declaration on the label confirms in a self-referential way that the legend is in no way optional, rather it is part of the work itself.

The tableaus and especially #17 are, therefore, intended more as a *studium*. However, a critical point is the frozen movement of both absorbed and directed attention that sparks the *punctum* that draws us into the photo and fascinates us, namely that which refers to what the artist might be

thinking, what he is working on, what he is conspiring. The introspection and absorption, the pathetic state of receptiveness that is not yet able to share a result aside from this state itself, is what captivates us and nourishes the eros of intellectual curiosity. But with all the old master absorption, there is also a nonchalant, idle dreaminess that mischievously holds the viewers in suspense.

For the context of the exhibition and the subject, one photograph was chosen that is consistent with the virtually standardized presentation format of documentary photography. The work itself also exists as an installation in which the motif is projected as an unchanging slide in cinema format, and chairs in front of it suggest a lecture situation. The statement of the work also changes depending on the dispositif.

32 Corin Sworn

Care in Critique or Missing the *punctum*

I am sitting at a sexual health center holding a laminated card with the number 53 printed on it. The intercom calls 21. A blond girl sitting across from me studies her phone, the man in the tracksuit next to her looks at the floor. I pick up a VOGUE magazine from the table.

In the first perfume advertisement, a woman gazes out from an image all pale rose, tobacco yellow and beige—the same colors as the waiting room. Despite its standard issue furniture, the clinic’s clandestine tension quickly eclipses the risqué promise of the model’s soft focus eyes.

I turn the page and a woman in her under-pants is caressing her naked thigh. Several areas across her legs have been circled and a loose cursive script reads, “too thin.” For a moment I am amazed at the advertisement’s self-consciousness and then I realize these marks are annotations left by some visitor before me. Amid the studied anonymity of the clinic, it’s a quick wink of understanding. I look up but nobody makes eye contact here.

Hoping for more marginalia, I begin to flip through the magazine. As I turn the pages, I feel a fluctuating sense of past pleasure and possible regret. And then I laugh again as the black scrawl of my unknown annotator illuminates the ambivalent care of this civic sex site. A woman is standing without clothes in a garden displaying her lingerie and the added ink reads - ye no cold hen?

33 Barbara Probst

What Could Have Been

We are quite familiar with the fact that certain details or moods in a photograph can touch us. They seem to connect us with an actual situation in the past. In contrast, painting cannot have the same effect on us because it is cued to the painter's intentions which are clearly inscribed in every brush-stroke as pure fiction. Works of photography rarely refer to their maker. They are too involved with referencing in the image what actually took place. And it is exactly because photography seems to give us a sense of how an event really was unfolding that we can be moved by it.

But what if we had been there when the shutter was released? Would we be hit by the same feelings? Would Roland Barthes have been so touched by the sister's sandals^{6} in the photograph of an American family if he had been standing next to the photographer? Or did this moving detail first come to light in the photographic image?

To be sure, in the continuum of life, we do not see the world like the camera when it freezes a fraction of a second. Odd details may be highlighted in a photograph, but we would likely miss them as an eye-witness. Yet, much more than a mechanism isolating a frozen instant, what we find here are the almost unlimited possibilities for the photographer to represent a subject. The photographer decides how reality will be transcribed in the photograph when he/she pulls the shutter release. When we look at a photograph we do not take this into account. We ignore the fact that every moment can be captured and represented in so many different ways, that any photograph is only one instance of a *what-has-been* ("that-has-been" ^{7}). The angle, framing, depth of field, aperture, and many other camera settings define the image, its legibility and mood. A particular head posture for instance, or a lighting effect, or a movement, may look strange from a particular angle but quite unremarkable from another.

In this perspective photography is detached from its aura of representing *what-has-been*. This is how it turns into a *what-could-have-been*, which opens up a field of endless possibilities. Possibilities that may or may not be imagined. In this equation the photographic images that we encounter everyday begin to lose their impact. Far from resorting to cynicism we are merely considering the phenomenology of reality and as a result we realize that a specific detail or

state of mind in a photograph can affect us because it is leading us—by a thread which is barely connected to reality—towards a mere photographic trace of a past moment rather than towards the past moment itself. Yet we are constantly inclined to overlook this fact in order to see in the photograph what we wish to see in it.

34 Friedrich Tietjen

It is not a good photo, at least not in the formal sense: the group of men stands like a dark arch between the snowy ground and the cloudy sky, so far away from the camera that the faces are recognizable, but not particularly detailed. Plus, the group is cut off on the left edge—maybe someone is missing there—while on the right there is a gap.

This gap ... perhaps this happened because the photographer put himself in the group after he set up the camera and pressed the self-timer. Therefore, this photograph shows—like any photography—more than just what the photographer saw and what he wanted to show. It is precisely this difference that ensures that a photo can become more than what it depicts. That is how photography can also become emblematic without the assistance of those involved, but rather through the circumstances of the shot. Like here: the men, Russian and Austrian soldiers stood on a field in Romania; the date is December 12th, 1917, as noted in the text. Just a couple of weeks earlier, the Bolsheviks overthrew the provisional government in St. Petersburg, seized power, passed the Decree on Peace, promptly started negotiations with the Central Powers, and declared a ceasefire. And while the delegations in Brest-Litovsk continued to meet, the soldiers on the front did what was so natural but had been unthinkable shortly before. After lying opposite each other for years with a gun in their hands, they climbed out of the trenches and dugouts and met in no-man's-land, drank, danced, smoked, chatted, and whoever had a camera took pictures of this and the groups that lined up for photos between barbed wire, on the ice of a frozen river, or in an open field.

Thus the photo itself documents dissatisfaction with the war. A few weeks later it became clear how short lived this was. As the negotiations in Brest-Litovsk faltered, the Central Powers pushed further into Ukraine without their troops rebelling, despite all the previous fraternization and group photographs. However, although this dissolves the hope depicted in the photo, it gains its emblematic character through a



33

→ Andreas Wutz, *Invisible Man*, 2012, Giclée print, ultrachrome ink on cotton paper, 32,5 × 48 cm, courtesy of the artist



34

→ Unknown, *Propaganda zw. Oest. u. Russ. Soldaten, Rum. 26-12-17*, 1917, 9,5 × 15 cm, archive Friedrich Tietjen, Leipzig



35

→ Unknown, *Walter Walsh—USA Today—May 7 2014, 2014*, newspaper clipping, 22 × 9 cm, courtesy of Philippe van Cauteren



36

→ Geoffrey James, *Brydon at Ile-du-Grand-Calumet*, 2011, archival inkjet print, 40 × 26,5 cm, courtesy of the artist

detail, the mistake, the gap. Because what it shows appears off-center and asymmetrical, breaching that canon of visibility with which the social order is usually represented. The photo has no material center that generates empathic meaning; instead, the meaning comes from a blank space in which a new and different order appears that suspends the old one. In an essay on the fifth anniversary of Franz Kafka's death, Benjamin writes that the distorted life will disappear "with the coming of the Messiah, of whom a great rabbi once said that he did not wish to change the world by force, but would only make a slight adjustment in it." This gap on the right edge of the photo: for the utopian moment of the shot, it was a trace of such an adjustment.

35 Philippe van Cauteren

Letter : to Séamus Kealy

Your invitation to take part in *Punctum* has from the very beginning been fascinating and challenging to me. I did not know exactly how to handle your question. Is there still a meaning to the photographic image in a world designed by an inflation of meaning? Is there still a possibility to guarantee photography's claim to truth? I am not the person who is capable in tracking down an answer to these complex questions, neither do I have the prophetic skills to foresee the future of photography.

My initial proposal for *Punctum* failed. Even if I did every effort to try to find a particular photograph back in my apartment, I did not succeed. But even though this image was missing, let me briefly describe it to you. The picture dated from approximately 2000 and was about fifteen by eight centimeters. The picture plane was divided in 20 equal parts, each having a portrait of me. The image was generated by an ID photograph machine somewhere in Brussels. So far there is nothing really that special about it, but was it not that the 20 black and white little photographs were as blurry and gray as in a Gerhard Richter painting? Any form of identification can be lost due to technical error. Instead of throwing this failed portrait away, I kept in for years in a drawer. And this would have been my answer and contribution if it would not have been lost. I have to admit that I was in doubt about what another contribution of mine could mean. On my flight from Brussels to New York on May 7th, I was reading *USA Today*. A combination of boredom and the need for information made me flip through this newspaper. At

a certain moment, I had what one calls an "Aha-Erlebnis." I was immediately struck by a little black and white photograph in an article about Walter Walsh. Walsh, a former FBI agent and olympic shooter, just died in 2014 and the article illustrated the exceptional shooting skills for the reader. Of course there is a link between shooting and photography. In its most obvious way, one has to think of the chronophotographic gun of Étienne-Jules Marey, but even further, reflections on the gaze and the precise moment generate plenty of associations between photography and shooting. I was fascinated by the complexity of the photograph in question.

The purpose of the image clearly functions as an example to show the extreme virtuosity of the shooting skills of Walter Walsh. By looking at the mirrored reality, Walsh was still capable to get his target. But there is more here. The layers of reality and the complex relation with what is happening outside of the picture almost makes this image into a metaphor for photography. Even if the picture can be dated somewhere in the mid fifties, nevertheless it articulates to me a universal thesis on the multifold and layered relation photography has with reality. It is almost as if the spectator of the picture is shot to death. It is as if this image is not a portrait of Walter Walsh, but as if it is a picture of any artist, any photographer, any spectator, anyone. In the end, I am happy and satisfied that having lost a picture brought me to finding this little enigmatic image.

36 Geoffrey James

Roland Barthes was more interested in *maman* than in photography, and in words rather than images: *La Chambre Claire* can be seen as an attempt to substitute words for images, and we never get to see the key photograph of his mother that he so movingly describes. In the *punctum*, Barthes sought the eidetic charge in a photograph, what was in it for him. The *studium* was what was left over—and of no particular interest: the photographer's intentions, the photographer's "tricks," etc. His approach was always eloquent, full of fine distinctions, but essentially solipsistic. Imagine the same technique applied to music, where the writer talks only about the effect a passage has on him, without acknowledging that there is a composer, harmonic and melodic tools, even a history of music. At least in the English-speaking world, Barthes' arbitrary and subjective categories have achieved the status of a workable theory, along with Walter

Benjamin's notion of the aura, which was rejected out hand by Benjamin's own hero, Berthold Brecht.

To be consistent I should not propose a photograph that demonstrates a notion I don't believe in. But in the spirit of Barthes, here is an informal photograph of a friend. One should always stick to what is in the picture: a man photographed from behind in a baseball cap and grey cotton pants and wearing a waistcoat—a dandyfied garment, backed in shot-silk of a surprising pink with a shirt of perfectly matched blue. Alec Guinness once said that he could learn a lot about someone's character by watching them walk unobserved. This man has his hands behind his back, one hand around his wrist as if taking his own pulse. There is a delicacy in the gesture, perhaps a hint of frailty that is at odds with the set of his shoulders, which hints at both interiority and a sense of determination. In the photograph, but not visible in reproduction, two buttons have made an imprint on the skin of his right arm. And not visible in the image is the front of the vest, made from a richly-patterned material designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. The man has been sitting by a river, watching others swim. He rarely speaks unless spoken to, but neither fact is evident from the photograph. We do know that he is walking on grass, towards a modest house. The place is rural Quebec, the year 2011; the rest is conjecture.

37 Meggy Rustamova

A man dressed in blue jeans is holding a stick. He stands next to a child. The child is holding two sticks. One small and one large stick.

Follow now the waterfall upwards. Do you see someone standing on the bridge? That's me.

This photograph originates from a tourist guidebook for Tbilisi, capital of Georgia and place of my birth. The guidebook exists in different languages and the version I have is French. The book was published in 1985, the same year I was born. I remember having this book since I was little as I spent many hours looking at its color and black and white photographs. The book did not escape my childhood vandalism, as I drew on it many pictures and filled empty spaces with pen doodles. But this particular photograph remained clean from any scribbles. Perhaps because it spoke to me this much, I did not feel the need for more decoration.

I remember looking at the characters in this photograph and imagining they were people that I knew or people I never have had the chance to meet. The man in blue jeans had the same hair color as my mother's best friend's husband. And the little boy looked exactly like their son. I recall thinking: "That must be them for sure." That is how I leafed through the whole book for years and gave every personage an identity. One day the photograph's atmosphere shifted irrevocably by the discovery of the figure standing on the bridge. Who is this individual? Is he male or female? Is there a connection to the man in blue jeans and the kid? Is it the mother substitute? Or simply a random person passing by? Why does this stranger on the bridge trigger me this much? Is this a symbolic representation of the all-seeing notion of God? Or a modern representation of Big Brother? Or is it perhaps the NSA, keeping in mind Edward Snowden's recent disclosures.

Even though this photograph is made by a complete stranger, at a location I am not familiar with, nevertheless this photograph is very personal to me. My fantasy about it became so authentic I cannot imagine reality existing otherwise. I wonder if the kid, the man in blue jeans and the figure on the bridge are still alive. The figure's presence cannot be ignored as the peaceful image alters with its appearance 'on stage' and brings a new layer to the whole. This new layer is uncanny and phenomenal at once. It withholds a duality between happiness and tragedy and its potential to occur.

I wonder if imagination is pure fiction and what determines facts of existence and how much of it is fictionalised in our mind. The person on the bridge is the impersonation of chance and the discovery of a new element that was not visible at first sight. A tension arises between the three characters and the narrator alias the viewer, comparable to an inert theatre piece. Though these characters are not merely performers, as long as what we see and hear is real.

38 Mark Sealy

The Sword 'Thief'? An act in three parts.

Part 1. *Stadium*

The defining aspects at work in Lebeck's photograph are symbolised in the two opposing but distinctive gestures displayed through the 'Thief's' left and right hands. The 'Thief's' right hand, "that has fingers that run straight to the soul of man" (8) is clutching the stolen ceremonial sword of the



37

→ Unknown, *A Man Dressed in Blue Jeans Is Holding a Stick*, 1985, Tbilisi guide illustré, Fine Art print (exhibition copy), 24,5 × 16 cm, courtesy of Meggy Rustamova



38

→ Robert Lebeck, *Leopoldville [Young Man Steals the Sword of King Baudouin I, During Procession with Newly Appointed President Kasavubu], Leopoldville, Republic of the Congo (Now Democratic Republic of the Congo)*, June 30, 1960, Fine Art print (exhibition copy), 28 × 42 cm, courtesy of Robert Lebeck—Leopoldville 1960

Life is Light between
V. Nabokov

39

→ Kader Attia,
*Life Is Light Between
Two Darknesses*,
V. Nabokov, 2014,
charcoal on wall,
7,5 × 200 cm, courtesy
of the artist



40

→ Tatiana Lecomte,
Leni, 2010, series
of 19 C-prints, each
19,5 × 25,7 cm,
courtesy of the artist



41

→ Natalia Nikitin, *Dmitri
Prigov*, 2002, Fine Art print
(exhibition copy), 90 × 60 cm,
courtesy of the artist

Belgium King Baudouin, and is caught not only in the act of stealing the sword but also in the act of making another and unwitting symbolic sign of independence, freedom and love, the Black Power salute. The 'Thief' caught in this moment by Lebeck's frame is visually transformed into a symbolic sign of African Liberation. The 'Thief's' black right fist is harmoniously set in total contrast to the brilliant whites of King Baudouin royal uniform. Reading this image from the position of the wretched ones {9}, the sword now performs a different function. It cuts the torso of the King in half and is now piercing the body of the would-be president, Joseph Kasavubu, thus suturing the conservative Kasavubu to his old colonial masters forever. At the same time as we look into the reflection of the 'Thief' holding the ceremonial sword in the King's open top, black, state car, we can read the stolen sword as if it is being aimed at the compliant head of the newly elected president of the Republic of the Congo.

Part 2. *Punctum*

The turbulence emitting from this photograph and that, which causes its sense of dis-ease, is centered in the 'Thief's' empty left hand, the hand of hate, {10} which he holds up to his face in anticipated defense. It is as if at the exact moment of stealing the sword he is in full acknowledgment of the futile nature of his rebellious act.

Part 3. *That Haunting*

The relationship to the ceremonial sword being held in the 'Thief's' right hand and the passive gesture expressed through his left hand emotively re-memorialises the tens of thousands of Congolese victims whose bodies as punishment for not meeting the quotas of rubber demanded from Baudouin's grandfather King Leopold II. The 'Thief's' open left hand occupies the centre of Lebeck's frame and claws back at Belgium's violent colonial past and positioning this violent as a vital part in this false dawn of independence. A violent past in which Patrice Lumumba, the elected prime minister of the new republic, would clearly and uninvitedly remind the Belgians of during the independence ceremonies the following day. An act of defiance that would ultimately seal his fate and lead to his assassination a few months later.

39 Kader Attia

Life is Light between two Darknesses.
—V. Nabokov

40 Ruth Horak

Not his turn yet, but already holding out his hand, the child looks neither at the camera, nor at the woman who looks so different from him. His eyes follow the outstretched arm with which the stranger—whose name, Leni Riefenstahl, means nothing to him—shares something from her bowl. Lecomte: "It is a gesture of giving that is associated with power—but what is given remains open."

The gaze and expression on the little face are so unexpected that you have to keep coming back to it. It doesn't show happy anticipation or awestruck gratitude, but rather disdainfully observes the event with childlike honesty.

By breaking down one photograph into several, Tatiana Lecomte alludes to our eye movement while successively registering *one* image through *many* images. But as overpowering as "Leni's" character is (from the large surfaces of white skin to her historical significance), it is the little face that draws wonder.

41 Boris Groys

A Poet in Hell

The photograph shows the Russian poet Dmitri Prigov during the preparations for his performance in Vienna (2002). Already at that time he was not doing well—he died in 2007. Prigov sits at the table and fixes a construction that has to elevate him from his chair. At the end of his performance, he shouts his texts hanging high on this construction—almost under the ceiling. Behind him one sees an assistant that will operate the construction. That is what the photograph shows. It is not quite what it conveys and suggests.

The whole scene looks like a scene of interrogation and torture. Prigov is under an intense light as if he is going to be interrogated. The device attached to him looks like a torture machine—and the guy in the background looks like a guard. One has an impression that Prigov will not read his poetry but instead emit inarticulate sounds in a high pitch. In fact, this is what will happen. During his last performances, Prigov produced shouts and cries forcing his voice as far as he could. In this sense, the photograph creates an atmosphere that perfectly corresponds to the atmosphere of Prigov's late poetry. And, yes, it is precisely this particular photograph that creates this atmosphere. The same scene could be photographed in a different way—and the

atmosphere would be also quite different. The gaze of the photographer was—consciously or unconsciously—informed by the filmic and TV scenes of forced interrogation. Prigov's reading technique was informed by the same scenes. Every age has its specific image of hell—light, poses, voices, mechanical devices. The photograph shows its protagonist in the middle of our contemporary hell—remaining quiet, concentrated and ready for everything that will come.

42 Ken Lum

I took this picture of the Roland Barthes boutique in Beijing in 2012. At the time, I was astounded by my discovery, which gripped me with hilarity. But I can now see that I should not have been so surprised. Over the years, I have taken many pictures that are akin in spirit. In Wuhan, China, there is an Amega watch store, the first A designed in sleight of hand fashion to resemble an O. Last year, several faux Apple stores shut down throughout China. I recall reading that several of the dismissed employees were convinced they were working in an actual Apple store! The devil is in the details but apparently the details were well attended to for the most part. During one of my first visits to China, I recall walking by a vendor selling signature Burberry scarves. On one table were Burberry scarves without the first "r." On another table was a sample Burberry scarf of the same design that was not for sale. The vendor told me that all the Burberry scarves came from the same factory as the Burberry scarf and were in every way identical. The vendor added that he could sell me a Burberry if I wanted one but it would be a lot more expensive and that it would not make sense to him since the Burberry was the same scarf (except, of course, for the Burberry and not Burberry tag). This reminded me of when I was on the famous slave disembarkation site of Goree Island off the coast of Dakar in Senegal. A vendor was selling paintings that he had done based on the configuration of slaves as they lay in the holds of ships. The paintings were done on thin cloth and quite meticulously rendered. The vendor wanted 100 US dollars per painting. I mentioned that I thought they were scarves at first and not paintings. The vendor did not object and offered to sell me the same painting as a scarf for 10 dollars. I asked him why the large discount in price and he replied that a work of art is special and should always be worth more than a mere article of clothing. I have other fashion-related encounters from

Peru and India, each encounter offering its own spin on the so-called developing world's profound understanding of the fashion system (of which Barthes' wrote of course a seminal book on fashion theory) and by extension the whole entangled world of signs and commodity exchange. I have no idea how it is that someone in China decided to name a clothing store after Roland Barthes. But it seems to me that someone in China (or India and elsewhere) understands in the deepest sense the nature of a *punctum* as not so much that which pierces the viewer but that which pierces the system.

43 Maria Fusco

Fingerprints illustrate that necessity is a small sort of violence. Compression and survival cannot be picked apart. Comprehension is a durational summons. No matter what the conditions, if just such a stroke of comprehension is denied (or even diminished) critical capacity may not be fully realised, for these tremors do not wrench, they mend. The removal of visible means of support presupposes survival. Presupposes survival by expressing a very particular fullness of capacity. Capacity extinguishing the impetus for legacy by presupposing survival. Oh!

44 Adam Budak

The absence in a horrifying presence. An accumulation of pain and trauma. Unbearable absence, in this case: a void (a silence; a regret, a possible anger). In fact: mourning of my own and a wound. Two portraits in uniforms (studio photographs by anonymous photographer). The only evidence: a (certain) youth; no trace of (any) childhood; no return (photography's granted virtue). A perfect crime: an absent *punctum*; rejected desire, or a *meta-punctum*. As an essence, *punctum* takes over; it is in charge to navigate through absence (hypothetically). A labour of mourning over. Myself. Barthes notes: "Mourning. At the death of the loved being, acute phase of narcissism: one emerges from sickness, from servitude. Then, gradually, freedom takes on a leaden hue, desolation settles in, narcissism gives way to a sad egoism, an absence of generosity." Epiphany as a temporary replacement of catharsis (an ultimate solitude). Earlier, yet another confes-



42

→ Ken Lum, *Barthes in Beijing*, 2009, Fine Art print (exhibition copy), 59,4 × 84,1 cm, courtesy of the artist



43

→ Unknown, *Untitled*, 1972, studio photograph, Fine Art print (exhibition copy), 16,7 × 12,9 cm, courtesy of Maria Fusco



44

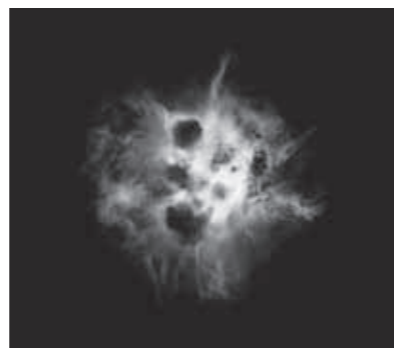
→ Unknown, *Untitled*, two studio photographs, 28 × 20 cm, courtesy of Adam Budak



45
 → Walker & Walker,
*Punctum By Proxy,
 an Account of a
 Photograph and a
 Photograph Without
 an Account*, 2014,
 offset print,
 24 × 22,5 cm, courtesy
 of the artists



46
 → Iñaki Bonillas,
*Despiden a Gelman
 entre aplausos
 [Farewell to Gelman—
 Between Applauses]*,
 2014, print on paper,
 7,7 × 11,5 cm, courtesy
 of Iñaki Bonillas



47
 → Spring Hurlbut, *Deuil II:
 James #5*, 2008, archival
 pigment print, 72,4 × 82,6 cm,
 courtesy of Georgia Scher-
 man Projects, Toronto

sion in a mourning diary: “Struck by the *abstract* nature of absence; yet it’s so painful, lacerating. Which allows me to understand *abstraction* somewhat better: it is absence and pain, the pain of absence—perhaps therefore love?” In this case.

45 Walker & Walker

Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see.

—Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

46 Iñaki Bonillas

What I find most irresistible of Roland Barthes’s *punctum* theory is its fallibility. I disagree with him about almost every example he gives in *Camera Lucida*. Apropos the James Van der Zee *Family Portrait*, for instance, Barthes admits to feel specially drawn to “the belt worn low by the sister (or daughter),” and also to her Mary Janes, when for me, the *punctum* resides somewhere else completely: on the white element that this same woman seems to be hiding from us (what is it? Somehow it looks more modern than the rest of the things in the room). And what to say about his blatant attraction to Bob Wilson in the Mapplethorpe picture? “Wilson *holds* me,” he says, while I look again at the picture—and again finding nothing there to grasp. The *punctum* seems to be, then, a very volatile and flimsy substance, totally dependent on one’s mood (or one’s inclinations). With this idea in mind, I spent a couple of months going through the photographic archive I inherited from my grandfather (an amateur photographer who took up the task of amassing the visual history of his family—an undertaking spanning more than a century of images carefully grouped into 30 folders and quite a few boxes of slides), trying to discover that fleeting element that would rise from the scene, shooting out of it like an arrow just to pierce me. I have to say that it happens to me with all the images where my deceased father appears that I cannot help but feel quite wounded. But it had to be something that pricked me for not such an obvious reason; something much more unexpected.

So I kept on looking. Until the day that, scrolling down a news web page, an image really struck me: in the center, a woman holding a box in her hands is crying (more than crying: she is showing all the signs of being literally heartbroken), and just one step

behind her there is a man smiling (more than smiling: giggling). “If Photography seems to me closer to the Theater,” Barthes observed, “it is by way of a singular intermediary: by way of Death.” I thought for a moment that I was in front of a scene from an ancient Greek play: this woman desperately carrying her husband’s ashes while she is being laughed at ... by whom? An enemy? Exactly what theater is about: drama. And are those not two heads, almost touching, on the picture the very masks of theater: tragedy and comedy? Tears and laughter? Life and death?

47 Doina Popescu

Spring Hurlbut’s work explores the subtleties of presence and loss, of the animate and inanimate. The photographic series *Deuil* (mourning) was influenced by her natural history museum projects. Out of their vast encyclopedic collections she conceptually arranged hundreds of archival items, breathing new life into them and opening up experiential spaces beyond those traditionally offered by contemporary collecting institutions. The artist’s intention, as Elizabeth McLuhan pointed out, was to exhibit “a final resting place for specimens and artifacts that had achieved immortality in their conservation and classification.” Her installations moved away from the museum as illusion of life with its simulated tableaux, towards the idea of the museum as a cultural mausoleum.

Similarly, *Deuil I* and *II* is a meditation on mourning and the essence of being. With the utmost respect and sensitivity, Spring Hurlbut documents the cremated remains of loved ones entrusted to her by relatives or close friends of the deceased. While acknowledging death as the natural extension of life, these deeply spiritual works reveal what Maia-Mari Sutnik so eloquently called “the fragile materiality of what remains of existence” and “the timeless incandescence of the luminous spirit.”

When first viewing the photograph entitled *Deuil II, James #5*, we are overcome by Roland Barthes’ notion of being pricked, wounded or disturbed by an un-nameable and powerful element in the image, which, as he writes, “rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me.” In this particular instance, the effect, which Barthes calls *punctum*, is not triggered by “an apparently irrelevant detail, extraneous to the picture’s intended purpose,” rather by something “certain but unlocatable,” something that “cries out in silence.” The essence of Spring

Hurlbut's photograph leaps out at us, entirely capturing our attention. The finely detailed, abstract image, set against the traditional documentary black background, seems animate, creating unexpected tension. The resulting impression is of a nebulous being emerging toward us from the void. The experience is unsettling, larger than life, at once personal and mysterious. Following this intense first encounter, the complex interplay of what Barthes refers to as *punctum* and *studium* begins to take us ever deeper into a dialogue between our intuitive reaction and our conscious parsing of the work.

The subject of *James #5* is the artist's father. The photograph reveals an animated dynamic between artist and subject, daughter and father, at once private and archetypal. Through the artist's actions of bereavement, death is visibly transformed into both vibrant memory and the palpable energy of existential forces beyond the material world. Our experience of the *punctum* is akin to Barthes' description of the beloved *Winter Garden* image of his deceased mother: "a certificate of presence," and "a reality one can no longer touch" except via the "treasury of rays" emanating from the photograph.

48 Martin Hochleitner

I read the book *Camera Lucida* by Roland Barthes for the first time in the summer of 1989. It was in the break after one year of studying Art History in Salzburg and I still remember that the subject of photography was not dealt with in any of the courses in the first two semesters. From today's perspective, it seems to me that the discussion about the artistic status of the medium at the university back then was not yet sufficiently explored. Looking back, I also think that I learned much from Barthes' *Reflections on Photography* for own my personal discoveries in photography.

I came across *Camera Lucida* entirely by accident. I was actually looking for a handbook on the history of photography to prepare to work as a guide at the Upper Austrian exhibition on graphic arts in Lambach in the fall of 1989. In commemoration of the 150th anniversary of Louis Daguerre's patent application in 1839, a major part of the exhibition was dedicated to the history of photography. I bought two books: *The Art of Photography* by Walter Koschatzky and Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, which was published as a paperback in German for the first time that year.

Only the latter have I read several times

since then with varying questions. I cherish it. It gave me a certain security in my work with art in a very special way. There are three main reasons for this: Firstly, it fascinated me that Roland Barthes consistently wrote his *Reflections on Photography* in the first person, especially because I was taught, early in my studies, that this personal approach was not scientific.

Secondly, I found it immensely likeable that Roland Barthes decided, to make the "appeal" that certain photos had for him the "guide" for his analyses, and he was also not afraid to address a "principle of adventure."

Thirdly, it seemed extremely remarkable to me how Barthes differentiated his personal encounter with photos with the two terms *studium* and *punctum*, and in doing so, opened up a new model through which I could understand art. While writing these lines I notice how much the *Camera Lucida* defined the way I look at photographs and think about photography and how present Roland Barthes—in the sense of his own conception of *operator* and *spectator*—has become as a *mediator* between image and theory. Thus, I always remember his statements when I look at the photographs that Barthes chose for his book. His words are inseparably linked to the 24 images in his text, and so I always think—following the first lines of his book—that *I see the photos that Roland Barthes saw*. Rainer Iglar's photograph is an expression of this chain of memories and my personal preference for "art about art" in the medium of photography.

49 Anja Manfredi

Photography as *punctum*

50 Barbard Golshiri

I could never agree with this sentence by Barthes: "to recognise the *studium* is inevitably to encounter the photographer's intentions,"^{11} yet while photographing Claudia Gian Ferrari's portrait, I was well persuaded that I was about to capture a last moment. Hence my intention did indeed weave a harmonious *studium*: the colorful collector of skulls and vanitas has deep wrinkles. She will not live long. Her hairstyle should reveal that she is battling cancer. The young woman's stare aside Claudia makes me fix my gaze again on Claudia's own portrait. Her hands frame the triangle of the face, tethering my gaze on her eyes even more (shortly those eyes will close and pain will



48

→ Rainer Iglar, *Punctum*, 2014, inkjet print on barytpaper, 49 × 60 cm, Edition 1/3, courtesy of the artist



49

→ Anja Manfredi, from the series "Studien einer künstlichen Sonne," 2014, used darkroom light, Dr. Fischer Photolamp, b/w barytpaper print, each 23,5 × 30 cm, courtesy of the artist



50

→ Barbad Golshiri, *Vanitas*, 2008–2010, installation, iron, lamp, lenses, bowl, liver, dimensions variable, courtesy of the artist and Collection of Ignazio Maria Colonna

disappear for good). All this is eventually crowned by a gilded vanitas ring made by the Venetian Attilio Codognato. The young woman on the left—in harmony with the liquor bar, wine, sweets and flowers in the background—serves life’s perishability like all to-be-perished elements in vanitas painting. Her horseshoe necklace with the ends pointing down emetically lays stress on bad luck.

All seem to convey the inevitability of death: *memento mori*. Nothing causes trouble and nothing vacillates the unity of the photograph, not even the yellow coat at the centre of the image; it rather places emphasis on an absent person, probably a woman. The photo is too “alive” and violence is implicit in my camera and I am aware of my being an agent of death, both in its Barthesian sense (that death is the *eidōs* of photography and all photographers are agents of death), and as the classical messenger of death.

The photo appears to be carefully staged (though it was nothing but a *trouvaille*). What surprises here, as Barthes would have said, makes the photo as docile as all vanitas gathered in the exhibition *Vanities; from Pompeii to Damien Hirst* at Musée Maillol. Artists of this genre have frequently *unlearned* ephemerality, death and decay, since they have mostly tried to create undying, imperishable works of art. I too failed to live up to promise of death. To disturb this “unary photograph” I turned it to a slide and put it inside an iron pipe with lenses inside, the slide is projected on a wall and the projector lamp, meanwhile, gradually cooks a liver^{12} I placed on the pipe. Little by little the liver burns, decays and turns to ashes. In each re-enactment *camera obscura* and *camera ardens* collide.

In its first projection (the exhibition *Punctum* is its second projection or performance for as a passion play it is being re-enacted) I had to decide whether I should make the front or the back out-of-focus. I decided to have the background blurred. With doing this I wiped out what disturbed my *studium*, the accident that pierced holes in the entirety of my conventional reading of the work, the *punctum* that bruised my orthodox vanitas: behind Claudia I see a customer’s hand that I cannot define. This hand and the waiter’s smile, that I have no word for, pricks me. The accident not only disturbs my *studium* but also my grieving for the loss I endured.

1 Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1995.

2 *Camera Austria*, Issue 1, Graz 1980.

3 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potato>

4 Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, pp.1–2.

5 “The Mystery of the Matador,” first published in *New Republic*, 21 October 2013, Vol. 244, Issue 17, p. 80.

6 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Hill and Wang, 1982, p. 43.

7 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 76.

8 *The Night of the Hunter*. Film directed by Charles Laughton, starring Robert Mitchum as the reverend Harry Powell. 1955.

9 Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la Terre* (The Wretched of the Earth), Maspero, Paris 1961.

10 *The Night of the Hunter*.

11 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 1981, p. 27.

12 The last gallery Claudia opens is her neighbour’s house. The neighbour had killed his wife and had thrown her liver into the courtyard. Claudia rents his house and turns it into a gallery. Later she donates her assets to museums, and then comes to Iran. Barbad Golshiri meets her. Claudia buys his *Handjob* (2004–08), an ephemeral work of art, a to-be-vanished writing on a crumpled paper (soon to be fingered by a lawyer butchering Claudia’s inheritance and assets and wondering if it is in fact a work of art). They decide to work together. Claudia goes back to Italy and realises that she’s suffering from pancreas cancer. Golshiri goes to Milan to visit her and decides to dedicate his solo at Claudia’s gallery to her last days. The work consisted of a large chunk of wax at the centre of the space on which Claudia is to engrave her presence in the presence or absence of the viewers. She would then receive her friends and the audience in gatherings where they could enter her house witness her last moments. Golshiri and the young woman we see in the picture visit Claudia when she is just back from a chemo session. She suffers from dry mouth, nausea and dehydration and cannot stand the smell of food, yet stands and starts to cook liver for them. Claudia cuts her hand with a knife. The blood doesn’t coagulate easily. Claudia doesn’t make it to the opening. She dies.

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In memoriam Robert Lebeck & Dermot Healy