Re-Presenting Historical Trauma: Art-Making and the Affective Imagination

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Documentation of my exhibition *Knowing and Un-Knowing: The Affective Relations of Images* (2023) can be viewed at: www.dalewashkansky.co.za

There is no surer way of evading the world than by Art; and no surer way of uniting with it that by Art.

(Goethe. 1908:176)

Abstract

Starting with an inquiry into what I speculate to be a portrait family photograph from 1941 taken amidst one of Nazi Germany's mass murder operations in Liepāja, Latvia, I encounter a young girl who looks to the ground and hides her face. Due to this visual obfuscation I direct a plea for her to look up and meet my gaze. The question as to why this photograph was taken shortly before their execution looms large. My yearning to see the young girl's face and know more, coming to some understanding about the circumstances and the people therein, was the impetus to my artistic response – the work of imagining beyond the frame to explore its hauntingly grievous impact. By deploying certain strategies, art, I argue, can offer a novel means to reposition traumatic historical events outside the determinisms associated with conventional practices of historiography, which quell their disruptive temporality, so that they can enter the ambiguous realm of subjective inquiry, where they remain contingent, indeterminate, and open-ended. In search for strategies, I analyse a selection of artworks by Penny Siopis and Anton Kusters that respectively utilise the mediums of film and photography. I discuss how their artworks challenge conventional representations of historical traumas by rousing the forces of the imagination and affect so that each viewer becomes a participant within the indefinite process of making meaning. Crucial strategies that I identify include: activating the vibrant opacity of materiality, haptics, discontinuous narratives, and the dialectics of montage, all of which emphasise particularity, where the subjective imbricates with the historical, social, and cultural. I argue that these strategies demonstrate how the image is never fully formed or static for observational interpretation, but always relational and orientated towards an anterior future, engendering an encounter with heterogeneous, multi-directional time that problematises and disrupts causal chronological logic. Following which, by applying these strategies within my own artistic practice, I demonstrate how the plea, the original point of obfuscation, is thus transformed by my practice from a desire to see into a highly generative re-discovery of the photograph's affective relationality, thus arguing for art's capabilities to potentialise knowledge from un-knowing.

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Introduction

The Work Actioned by Art

We close our eyes to the surprises offered by the gaze: we arm ourselves in advance with categories that decide for us what to see and what not to see, where to see and where to avoid looking. Our eyes forget to what extent the words used to account for what we see, and even to choose what we look at, are ambiguous words, layered in history, formed within one discursive field and deformed within another – generally within academic disciplines – words in the end introduced into current vocabulary with an often-stupefying lack of historical precision and philosophical coherence.

(Didi-Huberman, G. 1995:1)

Centring the Image for Artistic Praxis-Based Research

Sorella, please look up at me.

Several years ago, I discovered a photograph that has affected me with a haunting presence, one that, rather than subsiding over time, has become increasingly grievous and incomprehensible. The photograph, printed in my tattered copy of Gerhard Schoenberner's *The Yellow Star* (1969), was presumably never intended for public viewing. Even though the photograph has subsequently been widely distributed, it is my copy printed in this book that captures and haunts me. It shows Sorella – a young girl with whom I presume to be her mother, grandmother and two elder sisters – standing slightly behind her mother, looking down to the ground. Her refusal to look up and show her face compels my plea: *Sorella, please look up at me.*

The Yellow Star provides minimal historical background about this photograph. It is in historian Nadine Fresco's *On the Death of the Jews: Photographs and History* (2021) which explains that it was taken in 1941 at Skede beach, a small fishing village north of Liepāja, Latvia, moments before this family were to be executed along with women, children and the elderly from their community by auxiliary Latvian troops under the orders of the Nazi SS. Having been ordered to pose, the family looked at the photographer and now meet my gaze, obligating me to respond to their silent, interminable, incomprehensible and grievous address that reaches me beyond the certitude of their deaths.

Rather than conducting only a historical analysis of this photograph, my research primarily focuses on the affective qualities it engenders that requires close attention to the particularity of my encounter. My approach draws on philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman's seminal text *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz* (2012), where he argues for the generative potential that comes from approaching the photograph as an image, with its attendant visual and virtual qualities and its relational existence to other images, both real and imagined. Whereas the visible is associated with the transparency of evidence, of what can be clearly identified and deciphered, the visuality and virtuality of the image are those enigmatic and opaque dimensions that ward off the determinacy of meaning and knowing. They attest to the experiential, dynamic forces of the image that confront

the viewer in the present, revealing the image as an event – the image as something that is far from static and independent, but rather necessitating action from the viewer to imagine beyond the frame. He proposes that these qualities 'move' a viewer, affecting each person in unique ways that cannot be readily delineated by meaning. They come forth with the power of indeterminacy, compelling the viewer to imagine for themselves.

While paying close attention to the visual dimensions of the Liepāja family photograph, I also bring about the intimate haptics of imagined familial affiliations and attachments. Although not a photograph of my family, by imagining that it could be, my desire to know who they were is amplified and becomes a pressing matter, compelling me to probe beyond the very limits of the imaginable and the possible. I find myself entangled with them. It is as though by coming to know who they were, I might discover something intrinsic about myself. By intentionally producing this familial image, I construct a situation from which to critically inquire into the ensuing relationality, sensed as somehow essential, precarious and urgent. However, these affiliations and attachments are disconcertingly disrupted by Sorella's defiant act of looking down at the ground and delinking her arms with the rest of her family. Her defiant pose precipitates a force that thwarts my presumed achievability for understanding the photograph, compelling me to think otherwise by redirecting my focus on what may come from an extended inquiry into the unseen and the unknowable. Questions gather within and beyond the frame. What were the circumstances surrounding this moment? What emotions did they feel? Why did Sorella delink arms with her mother and look down? The photograph withholds definitive answers, pointing instead to the ineffability and interminability of grief and the unknowable.

My inquiry into the un-knowable is pursued as an art-making praxis-lead endeavour that attends to the affect of historical trauma encountered in the Liepāja family photograph and Sorella's refusal, contextualised by the photographs printed alongside it.

After a comparative investigation into the methodologies of a selection of artworks by South African artist Penny Siopis and Belgian photographer Anton Kusters in Chapter II, I found strategies for formulating my own creative response to the Liepāja family photograph and Sorella's refusal to look up and meet my gaze. In Chapter III, I detail my response which took the form of an exhibition, *Knowing and Un-Knowing: The Affective Relations of Images* (2023). The research question that I attend to with artworks by Siopis, Kusters, and my own,

is: how might art, by deploying certain strategies of aesthetic mediation, offer a generative means for responding to the unimaginability and incomprehensibility of historical trauma? In other words, how might art strategically deploy the imagination and affect to open up an inquiry into the realm of un-knowing? I use the term un-knowing not only to indicate the finitude of the unknowable but also how knowing is undone. I argue that this inquiry into un-knowing opens up a distinct category of knowledge, one uniquely tied to the potentials of art when it mobilises the dynamics of particularity, contingency and relationality. Un-knowing, I propose, is a process of going beyond specificity in order to find meaning within the ambiguous spaces between what might seem discrete and disparate, where, as Didi-Huberman argues with his dialectics, clashes are as generative as connections.

The strategies that I identify that work together to activate this potential include: the vibrant opacity of materiality, haptics and the discontinuous narratives produced by the dialectics of montage. On account of these strategies, I argue that artistic praxis can become a novel form of theoretical investigation, because they enable the artwork to be approached as a participatory experience akin to an event. The generative un-knowingness that ensues from the affective, relational dynamics of the imagination shift and even upend the conventional relationship of the active subject over the passive object of theoretical exposition. Rather than arriving at a definitive resolution, the viewer/participant is invited to maintain the open-ended work of critical inquiry.

I advocate for Didi-Huberman's paradoxical proposition that artistic praxis, when activating affective responses from the viewer's imagination, can be a means for attending to the unimaginable. Certain modalities of art-making can, therefore, unveil what cannot be expressed through conventional theoretical inquiry and philosophical critique.

Therefore, I argue that certain strategies of art-making enable an artwork not only to act and effect change in the world but that its effects cannot be predetermined or mastered by theoretical or philosophical scrutiny alone. Perhaps an essential feature of this formulation of an artwork is its enigmatic elusiveness and opacity – that which keeps it alive and keeps us enthralled in questioning how it acts and what it does.

In Chapter I, where I inquire into my encounter with the Liepāja family photograph, I draw primarily on black feminist theorist of visual culture and contemporary art Tina M. Campt, and comparative literature theorist Mirianne Hirsch, to discuss how this familial speculation

draws me into an affiliative relationship. While negotiating the photograph's documentary capacity to preserve a moment from the past and its ability to render presence concomitant with absence, I confront the haunting irreconcilability of closeness with distance. Through Campt and Hirsch, I come not only to a fuller understanding of Sorella's refusal, but also how the familial photograph is an aspirational performance that enables me to begin imagining the impossible – the potentiality of futurity.

In this chapter, I propose that although a photograph is a record of the past, a mere instant and fragment, certain photographs demand prolonged looking and compel us to return, time and time again, continuing to conjure images in the mind's-eye. These are images that develop in perpetuity. While investigating my affective responses to this photograph, I rely on political and visual media theorist Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's hypothesis in *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008) of how the photograph precipitates an *event* founded upon a conjunction of gazes (often heterogeneous in nature) and her substitution of the passive act of looking with the more participatory act of *watching* to challenge the assumption of the photographic frame as a form of capture that consents to transparent exposition. Azoulay thereby re-orientates the documentary photograph from its supposed pastness to a politics predicated on a speculated anterior future, which avails it to ongoing contention from diverse viewers. I go on to discuss how this photograph's persistent opacity, which Martiniquan essayist, novelist and poet Édouard Glissant postulates as a resistance to meaning and capitulation to objectification, presents an opportunity to re-look and rethink the past. Although I am unable to come to know the family recorded in the photograph or understand the circumstances surrounding the event, which might heal and alleviate my sense of grief, I become attentive to Campt's haptic approach to photographs that extends beyond the reliance on the ocular for knowing. Her haptics advocates for listening to images in order to gain a renewed sense of who the subjects photographed might have been, particularly when it comes to photographs that subjects could not refuse, which were taken under various conditions of duress. I then turn to critical theorist and philosopher Judith Butler's politics of grief postulated in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2006) to elaborate on the precarity and vulnerability of relationality. Consequently, my prolonged consideration of this historical family photograph enables an interrogation into the relational dynamics of certain images, leading to a critical exploration of how the documentary photograph can engender a specific encounter for re-approaching, re-considering, and re-presenting traumatic historical events. I end the chapter by bringing together a discussion on Didi-Huberman's assertion that the imagination, activated by the image's inherent deficiencies, paradoxically offers a means for approaching the unimaginable because it probes the limits of the known and comparative literature and political theorist Eduardo Cadava's notion of the image in ruins, a hypothesis on how every image, of which the photograph is exemplary, can divulge how space and time have been shattered, which means the end of the representational image. I propose that both theorists argue for the profundity engendered by my postulation of un-knowing and re-presentation that I then take inspiration from as a means for investigating the workings of specific artistic methodologies.

In Chapter II, I identify strategies for formulating an artistic response to the Liepāja family photograph's impenetrable opacity and traumatic history. To do this, I bring a selection of films by South African artist Penny Siopis, (namely: *The Master is Drowning* (2012), *Communion* (2011) and *Obscure White Messenger* (2010))[1] into conversation with Belgian photographer Anton Kusters' photographic installation *One Thousand and Seventy-eight Blue Skies* (2018).[2] This installation, exhibited with Ruben Samama's audio work *The Tracking of One Thousand and Seventy-eight Blue Skies* (2018), is collectively titled *The Blue Skies Project* (2018). Through an in-depth analysis of their artistic strategies of attending to historical trauma, I develop the critical, methodological, and theoretical direction of my creative praxis, which I discuss in the following chapter.

Each of the films by Siopis that I focus on centres around a person from South Africa's past who, for various reasons, resists the metanarrative of national history. Therefore, their stories remain ambiguous and politically charged. Siopis sources analogue 8mm and 16mm film footage to obliquely represent these historical events, reassembling them with emotive audio tracks and first-person subtitles narrated in the 'voice' of the deceased subject. Kusters' *The Blue Skies Project* (2018) documents a five-and-a-half-year excursion. It is exhibited as a monumental grid of 1,078 instamatic 8 x 10cm photographs of blue skies, each taken at a former Nazi concentration camp. The GPS coordinates and the recorded number of victims of the respective camps are blind-stamped onto the individual photographs. Accompanying the installation is Samama's soundtrack, astonishingly thirteen-years in duration, composed of varying pin tones to memorialise the individual victims of the camps. In their work, Si-

opis, Kusters, and Samama attend to historical events that refuse closure and continue to impinge upon the present as potential disruptors. They raise the pertinent question of how to remember historical traumas. Their artworks appeal for personal acts of remembrance rather than formulating representations for collective public memorialisation.

I begin by situating Siopis's and Kusters' artistic praxis within the scheme of concentrationary art, an aesthetic-political theory and strategy postulated by French surrealist poet, novelist, and publisher Jean Cayrol and developed by art historian and cultural analyst Griselda Pollock and literary and cultural theorist Max Silverman. The concentrationary elucidates how and why both artists negotiate certitude with indeterminacy, and territorialisation concurrent with the de-territorialisation of an elsewhere. This discussion develops the socio-political impact of their strategies, which deploy audio-visual elements to activate resonances extending beyond the specificity of the events referred to in their artworks. When encountering their artworks, one must piece together meaning from what is seen, tangentially suggested and withheld from view, thus entering the realm of the imaginable, viewers are invited to probe the limits of the unimaginable.

I then discuss Siopis's 'poetics of vulnerability', which foregrounds relationality. This artistic practice emphasises the opacity of materiality, which, in her publication *Material Acts* (2018), she connects to political theorist Jane Bennett's hypothesis of vibrant matter – matter imbued with dynamic life forces that exceeds human intention or containment. These forces, in which we are intricately implicated, engender socio-political effects. This excess of material force is also postulated by Bennett as a semiotic excess, which Siopis proposes evokes affective, embodied responses from the viewer. In both Siopis's and Kusters' work, an awareness of embodied presence is crucial to the development of the participatory and the open-ended aspects within their artworks. I argue that this allows thought to think anew, to think the unknown, and thus imagine the unimaginable.

With their respective mediums of film and photography, Siopis and Kusters negotiate the certitude of historical events while questioning how these events came to be known, challenging determinate representations of history. Art historian and cultural critic T. J. Demos's observations of documentary-fiction, an artistic strategy that problematises historical narrativity and representation, inform how their artworks do not forgo truth but suggests the truth-bearing capacity of imagination. Demos draws on philosopher Jacques Rancière who

re-conceives feigning as an act of forging, challenging the opposition between fiction and non-fiction and validating the imagination's socio-political dimension.

In light of the workings of the imagination, I return to discuss materiality in reference to philosopher of new media and film Laura U. Mark's notion of haptic visuality. This type of visuality touches the surface of the image rather than seeking meaning from depth decipherment. It privileges the embodied nature of affect and relates to Didi-Huberman's conceptualisation of the figural – that which, while resisting figuration, renders the unfigurable present. This moves beyond the representational into art's power of presentation. Siopis's and Kusters' artworks embody this approach – they do not attempt to re-represent history with a critique of its selectivity (inclusions, exclusions, and suppressions, particularly within nationalist narratives intent on social cohesion). Instead, they re-present an encounter with history, open to the potentialities of the present and future, no longer solely anchored in the past.

I conclude the chapter with a discussion of how imagination functions in this context, referencing Didi-Huberman's dialectics of montage and philosopher Gilles Deleuze's category of montage in what he terms as the *time-image*. I focus on two key aspects of their conceptualisations of montage: Firstly, how juxtaposing two actual images produces a third indeterminate virtual image, and secondly, how discrete images brought together create a clash rather than an association across difference, rupturing temporal continuity and causality. I propose that their artworks engender the restless and disruptive dynamics of 'the interval' and betweenness – the incommensurable co-existence of fact and fiction, narration and silence, the seen and the unseen.

In light of the aforementioned, in Chapter III, I revisit the Liepāja family photograph to delve deeper into my entanglement with it, its enigmatic depth, and the complexities it evokes. This exploration guided my own artistic practice and culminated in my exhibition, *Knowing and Un-Knowing: The Affective Relations of Images* (2023), consisting of an installation of Polaroids and audio-visual artworks. Documentation of the exhibition can be viewed at: https://dalewashkansky.co.za.

Recognising the interconnectedness of affect, history, materiality, and montage, I sought to move beyond the photograph's immediate historical context and explore broader resonances between seemingly disparate historical events that bear upon one another in how I

might formulate an expressive and critical response. Using a Polaroid camera, I photographed documentary and journalistic footage displayed on a screen, capturing moments from the Holocaust, the downfall of South Africa's apartheid era, Israel's 1948 War of Independence, which Palestinians refer to as the Nakba (the Catastrophe), and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By re-imaging and therefore re-imagining these historical events, I aimed to challenge the notion that they are fixed in the past, as their complexities and interrelationships continue to shape our present. Within the exhibition, I intentionally withheld specific details such as location and date from most Polaroids – only a few were stamped with the dates of the original footage, but none of the places were given. It is my contention that such an absence could allow the photographs to become unencumbered by delimiting information, challenging the assumption that the act of seeing, which the photograph transposes, bespeaks knowing.

In the exhibition's audio-visual environment, the Polaroid was presented as a principle for questioning how we rely on documentary photographs to understand history and the world around us. The instantaneous nature of Polaroid's technology, one that produces a unique image-object, allowed me to quite literally get *in touch* with a particular depiction of the past. I argue that the Polaroid's small size and square format visually embody the concept of the image-as-fragment, exposing the inherent limitations of perspective and knowledge that frames impose. Drawing on Butler's hypothesis of the inherent instability of the frame, I explore how frames attempt to create coherence through repetition but ultimately become susceptible to disruption and fracture.

I also discuss the significance of the Polaroid's physical attributes; it doesn't just produce an image but also an underside of darkness – a blank or contentless frame. While this emptiness and opacity isn't physically present in other photographic mediums, I argue that it is an implicit and inherent quality of every image. Here, I reference Azoulay's postulation that this is an originary darkness that challenges and even threatens what the image has brought to light. The design of my Polaroid installation rendered this concept explicit: the linear (albeit non-sequential) selection of Polaroids were displayed upside down, with their images reflected in mirrors and the blank underside facing the viewer.

Within the exhibition, I intentionally arranged Polaroids by formal similarities rather than chronology to bring out a sense of Didi-Huberman's dialectics of montage and Deleuze's

time-image, activated as the viewer moved through the gallery space. Through this, I argue that an image's knowledge potential emerges from imagined spaces between images – the potentialities within the interval that appeal to the restless searching of the imagination. I then propose that the exhibition as a whole was arranged to evoke a Deleuzian *any-space-whatever*, a space of pure potential. This space gives rise to encounters with Butler's concept of precarity and Glissant's poetics of Relation – a being-with heterogeneity, multiplicity, and difference that destabilises linear time. Here, historical trauma resonates with the power of un-knowing.

In the Conclusion, I explain how my research and artistic praxis is also guided by Didi-Huberman's hypothesis of position-taking, which finds socio-political value in ambiguity and indeterminacy. This ties into Azoulay's idea of potentialising history – seeking opportunities within the ever-present past, rather than solely seeking for the new. By bringing these two notions together, I argue for a praxis capable of potentialising time, utilising art to envision future potentials of the past. This relies on the contingencies and particularities of affect, resisting constraints from disciplinarity or political rhetoric – a vital approach in such politically divisive times.

The Question of Theorising the Artistic Event and its Potential Emergencies

Attending to how an artwork can act and affect changes in the world in non-deterministic or quantifiable ways requires bringing multiple sophisticated voices across numerous disciplines into conversation. In what follows, I will mention some preeminent voices to create the lens of requisite scholarly care that, while moving towards new insights regarding the theorisation of artworks, returns the lens back on the viewer and the particularity of the workings of affect. These theorists are therefore attending to the dilemma proposed by Didi-Huberman in the epigraph, how words can veil, detract and impede what images present to the eyes and the senses.

In *Empathic Vision* (2005), art historian and visual theorist Jill Bennett claims that conventional theoretical interest in art endeavours a *reading of* the artwork as an object of critical inquiry; however, she notes, "We have rarely asked what it might mean to derive theory *from* the visual" (Bennett, 2005:150). Novelist, critic and writer Susan Sontag elucidates on

how one might achieve such a theory. "What is needed is a vocabulary – a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, vocabulary – for forms" (Sontag, 2001:12). She elaborates, "Equally valuable would be acts of criticism which would supply accurate, sharp, loving descriptions of the appearance of a work of art" (Sontag, 2001:13). She then proposes, "In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art" (Sontag, 2001:14). Related to this charged erotic interaction between the seen, the hidden, speculation, anticipation, and the withheld, Sontag also suggests approaching an artwork as an event, which pertains to art's capacity to prompt non-prescriptive responses from the viewer that unfolds spontaneously during the encounter. "A work of art encountered as a work of art is an experience, not just a statement or an answer to a question. Art is not only about something; it is something. A work of art is a thing in the world, not just a text or commentary on the world" (Sontag, 2001:21). On account of the artwork's distinctness from the world of ordinary things, Sontag proposes that it "is also a vibrant, magical, and exemplary object which returns us to the world in some way more open and enriched" (2001:28).

One can detect philosopher Walter Benjamin's influence on Sontag from his essay *The Task of the Translator* (originally published in 1923). Although Benjamin is primarily discussing literary works, his insights can be applied to the process of interpreting works of art in general. He proposes that an artwork's "essential quality is not statement or imparting of information. Yet any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information – hence, something inessential. This is the hallmark of bad translations" (Benjamin, 1978:69). He describes this essential untranslatable quality of an artwork as "the unfathomable, the mysterious" (Benjamin, 1978:70). However, Benjamin then proposes, "Translatability is an essential quality of certain works, which is not to say that it is essential that they be translated; it means rather that a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability" (1978:71). Benjamin describes the relationship between the original and the translation as "a vital connection" (1978:71), which, rather than intent on likeness, or the translation's fidelity to the original, the original, "in its afterlife – which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living – the original undergoes a change" (1978:73). He is proposing that the value of translation is not the reproduction of meaning in another language, but in its power to express the relationality of languages; how languages renew themselves and express more than what was intended or possible in isolation.

Benjamin discusses how even though they have a vital connection, the intention of the original differs to that of the translation, so although the latter aims towards the former they can never attain unity. The translation can only produce "the echo of the original" (Benjamin, 1978:76). Translation can therefore undo the isolated fixity of meaning, which denies it the lifegiving and transformational forces of relationality that expands the realms of the unfathomable and the mysterious, because what is essential in the original is found to reside somewhere between the original and the translation. Benjamin alludes to this when he writes, "A literal rendering of the syntax completely demolishes the theory of reproduction of meaning and is a direct threat to comprehensibility" (1978:78). To which he adds, "it is self-evident how greatly fidelity in reproducing the form impedes the rendering of the sense. Thus no case for literalness can be based on a desire to retain the meaning" (Benjamin, 1978:78). Paradoxically, it would seem that the greater the intended veracity of the translation to the original in aiming at its essence, its success can be gauged by the greater the opening up of difference.

Vietnamese filmmaker, literary theorist, writer, and composer Trinh T. Minh-ha lays out a similar challenge to theorising about artworks, highlighting the infinite relation between words and images. "The marking (with words) shows its limit, which are always at work in the speech-text. Words as words cannot speak for or be subordinate to the image. They can, however, deploy their own logic to indicate a direction, to bring into relief a landscape … they render audible and readable the multiplicity of the interpretive process itself" (Minh-ha, 1999:xi). Minh-ha is describing the highly complex relationship between words and images. While interpretation opens up an artwork, and can make us see it differently, any praxis-based research that endeavours a critical and theoretical inquiry of an artwork risks foreclosing and subduing the vital forces of artworks and images – their material affectivity that is irreducible to conceptual analysis and exposition. She compellingly asks: "With scrutiny, what thing, event, or person does not ultimately fall to pieces and return to dust?" (Minh-ha, 2005:154). Similarly, Sontag warns against the interpretive impulse in art criticism that she associates with translation. "The interpreter says, Look, don't you see that X is really – or, really means – A? That Y is really B? That Z is really C?" (Sontag, 2001:5). According to Sontag, rather than multiplying the perspective of the artwork's potential landscape,

interpretation can delimit a singular view by instituting an authorial assessment over and against the artwork. She contends that "To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world – in order to set up a shadow world of 'meanings'" (Sontag, 2001:7). For Sontag, the drive to interpret art is motivated by a desire to make it "manageable, comfortable" – a process that inevitably "tames" the artwork, constraining its affective potentialities (Sontag, 2001:8). I acknowledge the stances of Benjamin, Sontag and Minh-ha, which caution against the desire to definitively understand a work of art, to translate its meaning which, in the words of Benjamin, curtail the essential freedom of what he terms pure language, "which no longer means or express anything but is, as expressionless and creative Word, that which is meant in all languages – all information, all sense, and all intention finally encounter a stratum in which they are destined to be extinguished" (Benjamin, 1978:80).

Informed by Benjamin's notion of pure language, I interpret Bennett's visual theorising, Sontag's erotics, and Minh-ha's landscape of multiplicity as referring to the affective and relational forces of art that arise from attention directed at its materiality and its accompanying opacity, rather than from an interpretive approach predicated on the visible, which is aimed at resolving its meaning and ends up restraining and diminishing an artwork's vitality. Critical theorist and philosopher of art Andrew Benjamin proposes that this excess of force imbued within an artwork stems from "the interplay of the ideational and the material, what can be described as the work's mattering" (2017:25). He claims that this 'more' is "the excess which allows a work's material presence not to be reduced to its empirical presence" (Benjamin, 2017:25). Consequently, attending to an artwork's opaque unconstrainable materiality is integral to encountering its affective dynamics. In *Politics of Affect*, political theorist, writer, and philosopher Brian Massumi discusses philosopher Baruch Spinoza's concept of affect, emphasising that Spinoza "places affect in the space of relation: between an affecting and a being affected. It focuses on the middle, directly on what happens between. More than that, it forbids separating passivity from activity" (Massumi, 2015:91). Affect, Massumi adds, is "a differential of forces at a point of encounter… It is thoroughly eventful, it derives structure from event" (2015:92). This means that affect "opens a problematic field rather than ending in a particular solution" (Massumi, 2015:50). He then explains, "Affective politics, understood as aesthetic politics, is dissensual, in the sense that it holds contrasting alternatives together without immediately demanding that one alternative eventuate and the others evaporate" (Massumi, 2015:68). Because affect is a relational and dissensual process always-already underway towards a not-yet future, it always exceeds the required distance and non-intervention of observation by engendering a haptic encounter with embodiment and between bodies. Communications theorist Gregory J. Seigworth and cultural studies theorist Melissa Gregg elaborate:

> *[Affect] is integral to a body's perpetual becoming (always becoming otherwise, however subtly, than what it already is), pulled beyond its seeing surface-boundedness by way of its relation to, indeed its composition through, the forces of encounter. With affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself – webbed in its relations – until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010:3).*

Given these dynamics of betweenness and relationality, Seigworth and Gregg propose, "There is no single, generalizable theory of affect: not yet, and (thankfully) there never will be" (2010:3). What is pertinent to these notions is that affect is essentially social and public. The manner in which these forces of acting and being acted upon meet and interact, with varying degrees of ease and resistance, renders affect highly political.

Because I prioritise particularity, which foregrounds the subjective and the relationality of the affective encounter, this text will feature noticeable shifts in registers: the more distanced approach of the theoretical and the self-reflectivity of the personal. I follow Bennett's methodology of "focussing on affectivity in art – on *what art itself does*" (2005:150) to unpack its socio-political effects, so that "we can distinguish a process by which art might shift perception and thereby engender a new way of thinking" (2005:152). Importantly, when approaching artworks, Bennett proposes that affect "ultimately renders perception itself the object of inquiry" (2005:43). Accordingly, Bennett argues that affective images engender what she terms the ethics of *empathic vision*, which "promotes a form of thought that arises from the body, that explores the nature of our affective investment, and that ultimately has the potential to take us outside the confines of our character and habitual modes of perception" (2005:44). She therefore describes empathic vision as "a modality of seeing" (Bennett, 2005:69) that emphasises an awareness of embodiment but is not a direct act of identification. To engage in empathic vision, one must negotiate an untransferable distance between one's body and another's. It is precisely because of this distance that sym-

pathy (which can displace the other's experience through overly simplistic identification) is replaced by the more complex ethical demands of empathy and criticality.

While Bennett argues for the politics and ethics of empathy, my focus is directed more towards the dissentual politics and dialectics of relationality. Although ethics is undoubtedly a factor, the encounters that I discuss emphasise accountability, which is predicated on the complexity of ambiguity: an image's power to exceed the restrictions of meaning that would otherwise render it a docile and compliant object. Within this process, I argue that the particular is essential because it expands the potentiality of the fraught relation between words and images by taking them into uncharted territory to approach the truly unexpected. Associated with this endeavour, Minh-ha writes:

> *To keep the relation of language to vision open, one would have to take the difference between them as the very line of departure for speech and writing, rather than as an unfortunate obstacle to overcome. The interval, creatively maintained, allows words to set in motion dormant energies and to offer, with the impasse, a passage from one space (visual, musical, verbal, mental, physical) to another" (Minh-ha, 1999:xi).*

My research and artistic praxis are informed by Minh-ha's notion of the interval to contend with the irreconcilable betweenness of things, a space where, I argue, the particularity of the imagination is set in motion and at work in the search for meaning by exploring relations – a pursuit that acknowledges its limits, yet remains uncompromising and unceasing. Because betweenness is an indeterminate and ambiguous space, it is also a space of potential emergence. As Benjamin proposes, by thinking of an artwork as inherently existing within a network of relations, "it is in a continual state of construction and thus always open to radical reconstruction. The static and the given cede their place to both relationality and potentiality" (2017:25).

In Walter Benjamin's essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (originally published in 1936) he investigates modern art's relationship to politics. Benjamin argues that the age of mechanical reproduction has eroded art's unique ritual function, its cult value, "its original use value" (1978:224) and its attendant enigmatic aura, and replaced it with its exhibition function, which is "the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent towards overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction" (1978:223). He defines the aura of

natural objects as "the unique phenomenon of distance, however close it may be" (Benjamin, 1978:222). Benjamin explains the new spatial and temporal quality of artworks: "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (1978:220). Building on Benjamin, Azoulay, in *Death's Showcase* (2001), suggests that the 'original' is primarily defined by its specificity of place and time – the here and now – rather than being an issue of mechanical reproduction, in which the copy undermines the original's uniqueness. Azoulay suggests that Benjamin's lament over the artwork's lost 'aura' should not only refer to technological advancements in reproduction and circulation but also extend to the self-referentiality of disciplinary knowledge. This is when art became capable of reproducing itself as a consolidated and coherent class of unique objects that could be ordered within its own history of development and progress and displayed within its own distinct space – the art museum. Elaborating on this notion, Azoulay proposes,

> *The establishment of unique shrines in effect sentenced art to the production of original objects that would justify the existence and the claim of the museum space. From the moment art was limited almost entirely to a single mode of activity – the production of original objects – it was sentenced to building unique shrines for itself. Either way, it was doomed each time to experience anew the loss of the aura of these objects (Azoulay, 2001:22).*

Stressing the disparity between the ritual function (the cult value) and the exhibition function, Benjamin writes, "Today the cult value would seem to demand that the work remain hidden" (1969:225). Benjamin describes how the ritual function of art began to decline during the Renaissance when art became more secularised, concerned with aesthetics, and then three centuries later "the first deep crisis befell it" (1978:224). He proposes: "With the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of production, photography, simultaneously with the rise of socialism, art senses the approaching crisis … This gave rise to what might be called a negative theology in the form of 'pure' art" (Benjamin, 1978:224). He then explains that "the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics" (Benjamin, 1978:224). Curiously, this means that when art became autonomous and an object that affords the viewer the pleasure of disinterested

aesthetic judgement, rather that becoming apolitical, it became insidiously politicised. "The logical result of Fascism" Benjamin writes, "is the introduction of aesthetics into political life" (1978:241). He then warns that "All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminates in one thing: war" (Benjamin, 1978:241). He concludes the essay by writing that humanity's "self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicising art" (Benjamin, 1978:242). Although in the essay Benjamin does not elaborate on what this Communist politicisation of art might entail, being highly influenced by Marxism, it can be assumed that he is calling for a return to take cognisance of the material production and fabrication of the artwork. This would involve paying close attention to affective materiality that would displace it from the plethoric realm of commodities where disinterested enjoyment conceals the injustices of the class struggle.

Philosopher, visual theorist and historian Susan Buck-Morss explains that "Benjamin is saying that the sensory alienation lies at the source of the aestheticisation of politics, which fascism does not create, but merely 'manages'. We are to assume that both alienation and aestheticized politics as the sensual condition of modernity outlive fascism – and thus so does the enjoyment taken in viewing our own destruction" (1992:4). She adds that Benjamin is demanding that art "*undo* the alienation of the corporeal sensorium, *to restore the intrinsic power of the human bodily senses for the sake of humanity's self-preservation*, and to do this, not by avoiding the new technologies, but by passing through them" (Buck-Morss, 1992:5).

Buck-Morss (1992:6) proposes that Benjamin's hope for a new aesthetics was informed by a return to the original etymology of the ancient Greek *Aisthitikos* (which, it can be assumed that Sontag, via Benjamin, was also evoking with her erotics), meaning "perceived by feeling". Buck-Morss explains that "*Aisthisis* is the sensory experience of perception. The original field of aesthetics is not art but reality – corporeal, material nature … It is a form of cognition, achieved through taste, touch, hearing, seeing, smell – the whole corporeal sensorium" (1992:6). She describes how the corporeal sensorium is extraordinarily open, where the boundaries between the internal and external world, oneself and the environment, is a porous and fluid "synaesthetic system", an "aesthetic system of sense-consciousness"

where "external sense-perceptions come together with the internal images of memory and anticipation" (Buck-Morss, 1992:13). She explains that the corporeal sensorium encounters

> *the world prelinguistically, hence prior not only to linguistic, but to meaning as well. Of course all of the senses can be acculturated … all of this is a posteriori. The senses maintain an uncivilised and uncivilizable trace, a core of resistance to cultural domestication. This is because their immediate purpose is to serve instinctual needs … they remain part of the biological apparatus, indispensable to the self-preservation of the individual and the social group (Buck-Morss, 1992:6).*

Aesthetics in the modern era underwent a radical reversal of meaning where it was "conceived as a kind of safety valve for irrational impulses" (Buck-Morss, 1992:7). Buck-Morss (1992:10) describes this autonomous modern subject, who, rather than a passive receiver within nature, was a rational unified self-creator above nature, idealised in the active male, the warrior, as "sense-dead" which therefore associated the aesthetic with war and the desensitisation of the masses. Buck-Morss (1992:16) elaborates how Benjamin, informed by psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's insights regarding trauma, perceived shock as the essential experience in the modern age of technological industrial production. The shock of the everyday required that consciousness shield itself from this excessive stimulation that flooded the senses. As a result, Buck-Morss proposes that the synaesthetic system "reverses its role. Its goal is to *numb* the organism, to deaden the senses, to repress memory: the cognitive system of synaesthetics has become, rather, one of anaesthetics" (1992:18). The system of anaesthetics is characterised by "the simultaneity of overstimulation and numbness" (Buck-Morss, 1992:18) Thus, as "a way of blocking out reality", it "destroys the human organisms power to respond politically even when self-preservation is at stake" (Buck-Morss, 1992:18). Buck-Morss goes on to explain how beginning in the nineteenth century reality became a phantasmagoria, a "technoaesthetics", a "reality that tricks the senses through technical manipulation" (199:22). Most significantly, she argues, "their effects are experienced collectively rather than individually. Everyone sees the same altered world, experiences the same total environment … the phantasmagoria assumes the position of objective fact … becomes the social norm. Sensory addiction to a compensatory reality becomes a means of social control" (Buck-Morss, 1992:23). Buck-Morss' reading of Benjamin suggests that the loss

of the artwork's aura, where the artwork became a commodity within the phantasmagoria, there was a simultaneous collective numbing of pain, one's own and the perception of another's, which availed the masses to collective instrumentalisation.

In *The Emancipated Spectator* (2011), Rancière envisages a means of reversing the aesthetics of anaesthetics by arguing for the political potential of indeterminacy and ambiguity: "The images of art do not supply weapons for battles. They help sketch new configurations of what can be seen, what can be said and what can be thought and, consequently, a new landscape of the possible. But they do so on condition that their meaning or effect is not anticipated" (2011:103). In *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (2010), Rancière, in a Benjaminian manner, investigates how politics and art, though separate and distinguishable, are interrelated domains. He identifies three regimes of art, not strictly chronological, but corresponding to different modes of how art engages with the sensible, each regime affecting a redistribution of the sensible. The first regime is the ethical regime of images, which is similar to Benjamin's ritual function, where art and life are more intertwined and art occupies a specific utilitarian role within social and cultural life. Here, art is judged according to its pedagogical truth value, rather than its aesthetic value, and does not exist within the autonomous place of art as such. It is the regime where art and non-art are indistinguishable. In the representative regime, the second regime, reminiscent of Benjamin's exhibition function, art is classified as a distinct category of autonomous objects within the exclusive domain of 'fine arts', where art is associated to mimesis – not merely the copying of reality, but the imposing of form on matter and the establishment of a hierarchy of genres and conventions dictating appropriate modes for representing certain subjects. These two regimes are predicated on norms of consensus, whereas the third regime, the aesthetic regime, is predicated on dissensus, which Rancière describes as "a conflict between sense and sense," relating to "a conflict between a sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it, between several sensory regimes and/or 'bodies'" (2010:139). In the aesthetic regime, art, while still autonomous, is paradoxically heteronomous and has come to play a part in social life, enlivening a new realm within the social by disrupting normative suppositions and hierarchical judgements. Rancière, to quote at length, explains in *The Future of the Image* (2007) that in the aesthetic regime of art:

> *Everything is equal, equally representable. And this 'equally representable' spells the ruin of the representative system. Contrasting with the representative scene of visibility of speech is an equality of the visible that invades discourse and paralyzes action. For what is newly visible has very specific properties. It does not make visible; it imposes presence. But this presence is itself singular. On the one hand, speech is no longer identified with the gesture that makes visible. It exhibits its particular opacity, the under-determined character of its power to 'make visible'. And such under-determination becomes the very mode of material presentation specific to art. At the same time, however, speech is invaded by a specific property of the visible: its passivity. The performance of speech is struck by this passivity, this inertia of the visible that comes to paralyze action and absorb meanings (Rancière, 2007:120-121).*

Consequently, within the aesthetic regime, nothing is designated as unrepresentable because, due to the paradox of autonomy and heteronomy, Rancière proposes that while it establishes, it also abolishes "the mimetic closure separating the rationale of fiction from that of facts, the sphere of representation from other spheres of existence" (2007:123). Within the indeterminate and open-endedness of the aesthetic regime of art, cause and effect can no longer be anticipated, meaning that its contingency offers potentialities for emergence. The aesthetic regime of art, Rancière writes, "grounds the autonomy of art, to the extent that it connects it to the hope of 'changing life'" (2010:116). Thus, he suggests that art is capable "of producing its own politics, proposing to politics re-arrangements of its space, re-configuring art as a political issue or asserting itself as true politics," which he terms its "metapolitics" (Rancière, 2010:119). Contrary to Benjamin's warning against the aestheticisation of politics and Buck-Morss' anaesthetics, metapolitics is founded upon a return to the heterogeneity of the sensible that breaks apart the unity of the masses, meaning that the aesthetic regime of art re-prioritises the particularity of the viewer, with each individual capable of renegotiating and re-actualising the terms of the sensible. Rancière argues, "Aesthetic art promises a political accomplishment that it cannot satisfy, and thrives on that ambiguity" (2010:133). He describes the image's ambiguous position as both "a raw material presence" and "as discourse encoding a history" (Rancière, 2007:11), proposing that the image is paradoxically a cipher of history and its interruption (Rancière, 2007:25). By situating the artworks of Siopis, Kusters, and myself within the aesthetic regime, I suggest that our artistic practices hold historical significance through disrupting historical causality, engen-

dering not fixed new histories, but ambiguities that remain open to further potentiality.

Taking inspiration from Martin Heidegger, philosopher Santiago Zabala in *Why Only Art Can Save Us* (2017) develops an argument for art's emergent capacities by discussing artworks that respond to social, cultural or ecological crises that have not been given due attention. His argument can be framed within the dissensus and political indeterminacy of Rancière's aesthetic regime of art. As Buck-Morss' reading of Benjamin elucidates, Zabala also proposes that the present emergency is precisely the lack of emergency – that we are failing to truly acknowledge the emergencies that surround us. However, Zabala argues that art can save us by serving as a site from which these neglected or overlooked emergencies can emerge, advocating for a Heideggerian ontological capacity for art to bring about changes to how we perceive and respond to the world. Similarly, in *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (2012), Azoulay discusses photography's capacity (particularly documentary and journalistic photography) to bring what she terms regime-made disasters into awareness. Regime-made disasters are "perpetrated without them being acknowledged as such by those citizens who live under its reach" (Azoulay, 2012:2). Two concurrent acts of violence are inflicted under regime-made disasters, which Azoulay proposes are conditions for their "appearance/disappearance" (2012:2). First, there is the violence of the disaster itself inflicted upon those of the governed population not entitled to full citizenship rights and, second, there is the denial or refusal to acknowledge the disaster by those privileged with citizenship who are 'blind' spectators, numb and anesthetised, failing to act against the explicit violence done to others. These regime-made disasters are the ones that my praxis attends to, ones that Azoulay (2012:2) describes as resulting in a civil malfunction, where citizens within a nation-state fail to acknowledge the rights of all within a shared world. Although they might not be directly involved in the state's violence against non-citizens or those with a precarious relationship to citizenship, they are, by proxy, perpetrators of violence.

Echoing Rancière's aesthetic regime of art, to actualise an artwork's emergent capacities, Zabala proposes that "aesthetics must twist free from representations, allowing alterations and difference to disclose themselves through works of art" (2017:23). He suggests, "The alterations produce disruptions that require interpretation, response, and intervention instead of contemplation … Static cultural expressions – art without emergency – make stale beauty's indifference" (Zabala, 2017:23). According to Zabala, we must forego aesthetic contemplation or judgement of artworks that implicate them in the emergencies of our times, namely, the lack of emergency itself. Emphasising the participatory nature of artworks that enable emergencies to emerge, he proposes, "We cannot simply observe, describe, and understand emergencies without being part of them" (Zabala, 2017:112). These artworks, he adds, "enact tensions and events that we cannot control" rather than serving as "representational objects to be contemplated and experienced as we please" (Zabala, 2017:112). This implies that "the goal of interpretation is not to understand the work better but to retrieve what is concealed" (Zabala, 2017:113-114). Within this aesthetics of emergency, Zabala argues, interpretation is never resolved and remains an ongoing, open-ended task. Stressing the ontological implications, he writes, "The shock we experience when we confront works of art that thrust us into essential emergencies is not attributable to the immediacy with which something 'real is grasped'; rather, the shock is an 'event of understanding' that concerns our existence" (Zabala, 2017:123). Rancière's political observations within the aesthetic regime of art sheds light on Zabala's aesthetics of emergence. Rancière explains that this form of politics:

> *invents new forms of collective enunciation; it re-frames the given by inventing new ways of making sense of the sensible, new configurations between the visible and the invisible, and between the audible and the inaudible, new distributions of space and time – in short, new bodily capacities … It begins when they make the invisible visible, and make what was deemed to be the mere noise of suffering bodies heard as a discourse concerning the 'common' of the community. Politics creates a new form, as it were, of dissensual 'commonsense' (Rancière, 2010:139).*

As artworks that can be located within the aesthetic regime, and as evoking the aesthetics of emergence, Siopis, Kusters, and I, develop certain strategies for critical political effect. In Rancière's words, our artworks are "not so much a type of art that reveals forms and contradictions of domination as [they are] an art that questions its own limits and powers, that refuse[s] to anticipate its own effects" (2010:149). Our artworks "accept their insufficiency" (Rancière, 2010:149), thereby resisting "the dominated and [promise] a liberty and an equality to come to the very extent that [they affirm their] absolute resistance to engaging in any compromise with the tasks of political militantism or of the aestheticization of forms of

daily life" (Rancière, 2010:178). According to Rancière, art's political value paradoxically lies in its indifference, its refusal to be instrumentalised by politics; thus, it can offer an image, albeit perpetually deferred, of an emancipated future free from political domination, determinism or semiotic delineation. Positioned paradoxically between autonomy and heteronomy, art, Rancière proposes in *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, can become a "germ of a new humanity, of a new form of individual and collective life" (2009:32). In the aesthetic regime of art, art's metapolitics is founded on this paradox where "art is art insofar as it is also non-art, or is something other than art … The work's solitude carries a promise of emancipation. But the fulfilment of that promise amounts to the elimination of art as a separate reality, its transformation into a form of life" (Rancière, 2009:36). He therefore describes the politics of aesthetics as "a dialectic of the 'apolitically political'" (Rancière, 2009:42).

Following on from Zabala's art of emergence and Rancière's aesthetic regime of art, my theoretical and visual research is strongly influenced by Azoulay's hypothesis of the "political imagination," which relates to "the ability to imagine a political state of being that deviates significantly from the prevailing state of affairs" (Azoulay, 2012:3). She explains that the political imagination "is a form of imagination that transcends the single individual alone and exists *between* individuals and is shared by them … The description of the imagination as political is an ontological description that presents it as the shared experience of human beings" (Azoulay, 2012:5). The political imagination, Azoulay claims, "leaves its imprint on history when it breaks boundaries," which is "a breaking of the boundaries of the imagination" (2012:7). As such, the political imagination enables us to imagine the unimaginable. Azoulay argues that the political is not "an attribute of the image," and "is incompatible with the individual attributes of any given image or any individual person" (2012:54). Rather, the political is directly related to the heterogeneous plurality of the public domain and the social condition of being-together that the proliferation of photography evinces. Given this proliferation, in *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008), Azoulay proposes that we have entered into a tacit civil agreement to have our photographs taken. Although the power relation between the photographer and the photographed may well be unequal, she argues that the photograph cannot be owned by anyone; it refutes sovereign control, which implies that its meaning cannot be delimited. This contract, Azoulay explains:

> *organises political relations in the form of an open and dynamic framework among individuals, without regulation and mediation by a sovereign. Although individuals do indeed renounce their exclusive right to their own image and consent to becoming an image, such renunciation … is not in favour of a sovereign that would have the exclusive power to produce an image out of them (Azoulay, 2008:110).*

"The civil gaze," she argues, "doesn't seek to control the visible, but neither can it bear another's control over the visible. In particular, it cannot consent to the rule of the visible while seeking to abolish the space of plurality" (Azoulay, 2008:97). Photography has, therefore, been instrumental in providing a space where civil rights can be defended. Azoulay proposes:

> *Whereas the nation-state is based on the principles of sovereignty the citizenry of photography, of which the civil contract of photography is the constitutional foundation, is based on an ethical duty, and on patterns of deterritorialization. In principle, photography is an instrument given to everyone, making it possible to deterritorialize physical borders and redefine limits, communities, and places (processes of reterritorialization). The citizenry of photography is a simulation of a collective to which all citizens belong (Azoulay, 2008:128).*

Azoulay conceptualises the civil contract of photography by postulating that all people are primarily governed subjects. As such, we constitute a virtual community that surpasses the sovereignty and territorial boundaries of nation states. This shared condition of being governed obligates us to protect and safeguard the rights of citizenship, with the citizen's civil duty being to defend the rights of sub-citizens and noncitizens, whoever and wherever they might be. Azoulay explains:

> *The institution of citizenship constantly produces a residue of noncitizens alongside the citizen population. This residue – which is huge and scattered across the face of the globe – taints all of the world's citizens with the epidemic of noncitizenship and threatens to undermine their own citizenship. A citizen is someone who is treated like anyone else. As a matter of principle, and in the strictest sense of the term, under a regime in which hordes of noncitizens live besides citizens, there are no citizens at all (Azoulay, 2008:78).*

After delving into a discussion of my encounter with the Liepāja family photograph, Sorella's refusal, and my refusal to see through the lens of their photographer-cum-execution-

er, my research identifies strategies in artworks by Siopis and Kusters, which I draw upon in my own artworks that actualise art's emergent and ontological potentials in relation to the civil imagination and the duties outlined in the civil contract. Viewers of our artworks are encouraged to contend with their privileged position as spectators entrusted with the task of re-membering history, which involves re-forming and re-formulating history, which is re-presented within the event of visually experiencing the artworks. As Katarzyna Bojarsk and Krystyna Mazur suggest, because our artworks respond to historical trauma, our intention "is not to heal or soothe, but to reformulate, to transpose, to cross the boundary of pain, of the chasm dividing the past from the future" (2013:201). They propose, "If aesthetics is a theory of sensual impressions, the aesthetics of trauma would have to be concerned with a veritable shock to the senses" (Bojarsk & Mazur, 2013:198). I will discuss how Siopis, Kusters and my artworks shock the senses, not by inducing trauma or creating a pseudo traumatic encounter, but by enlivening the particularity and dissensual affect of the senses, engendering embodied haptic events that thwart a viewer's reliance on the ocular for deciphering visual signs to attain meaning and knowing. Our artworks employ mediation and distance to offer an opportunity to imaginatively re-encounter the missed or repressed encounter of historical trauma through the affective relationality of material presence.



Literature Review

Re-Presenting: The Art of Questioning Historical Continuity

The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised and is never seen again … For every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.

(Benjamin, W. 1978:255)

Trauma and Historical Materialism

Having stated that my inquiry focuses on how certain artistic strategies can re-present traumatic historical events, thereby troubling disciplinary and nationalist metanarrative inscriptions that order time chronologically, a key question remains: What are the characteristics that define a traumatic event? In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (originally published in 1920) Sigmund Freud claims one of the primary factors that induces the trauma is fright, which "emphasises the element of surprise; it describes the state that possess us when we find ourselves plunged into danger without being prepared for it" (2003:51). Fright, rather than fear, does not have an object in mind, therefore, fear protects one from fright. The other factor pertains to its psychic dimension. Freud explains that "if any physical wound or injury was suffered at the same time, this generally inhibited the development of the neurosis" (2003:50). In her theorization of trauma, and reading of Freud, literary theorist Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) postulates trauma as:

> *a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind … the wound of the mind – the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world – is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that … is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor (Caruth, 1996:3-4).*[3]

Being unavailable to consciousness, Caruth aptly describes trauma as an unclaimed event, which, following Freud's hypothesis, accounts for the latency and repetition associated with trauma. Trauma is ready to break away from its location in the past and reappear, spontaneously bursting through into the present. Discussing Freud's example of a victim involved in a crash, Caruth states that trauma is not quite the forgetting of the event, because, "the victim of the crash was never fully conscious during the accident itself" (Caruth, 1996:17). The event was therefore never originally experienced and can only be experienced belatedly. Caruth explains:

> *The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself. The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all (Caruth, 1996:17).*

The shock of trauma, Caruth writes, "is thus not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely in the missing of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced in time, it has not yet been fully known" (1996:62). According to this hypothesis, trauma is an event that is without a determinate and intelligible reference. Although undeniable, it was missed at the time of its occurrence, or rather, not consciously registered. Therefore, it can only be experienced psychically via belated repetition. Katarzyna Bojarsk and Krystyna Mazur explain that because trauma is unassimilated and unassimilable, it "creates wounds in the psychic web thus destroying the individuals sense of cohesion and continuity" (2013:194) They describe this unknowable, secret, and hidden realm as a "a no-man's land towards which, however, a substantial part of the individual's symbolic field begins to weigh" (Bojarsk & Mazur, 2013:194). Trauma is therefore not only a disruption and rupture of time but also of the subject's experience of self. The very notion of the self as cohesive and existing within causal time is fractured.

Caruth indicates the paradox of trauma: "that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness" (1996:91-92). The psychic repetition of the event is not a return of the past, which could be anticipated and become frightening, but is experienced each time as an original appearance. As such, the experience of trauma is an encounter with the differential nature of repetition. Jill Bennett proposes that Caruth therefore elucidates how traumatic memory is "resolutely an issue of the present" (Bennett, 2005:40). Mirela Lapugean further explains this curious temporality, writing that because trauma cannot be remembered, "it cannot be recalled, it cannot be revived. Trauma is relived over and over again as if it were still happening in the present. The mind of the individual is caught in a present continuous, failing to understand the pastness of trauma" (2015:85). Paradoxically, although trauma cannot be remembered, understood, or voiced, it is "impossible to forget" (Lapugean, 2015:87).

It is worth noting the similarities and differences between the psychic wound of trauma and the physical wound of the body. Literary scholar Elaine Scarry proposes that "the most crucial fact about pain is *its presentness*" (1985:9). Scarry explains that although pain is undeniable, the experience can never be fully communicated to another, making it unshareable in its entirety and introducing an element of doubt within the observer. Somewhat paradoxically, pain is the experience par excellence of something undeniable being shrouded in doubt by others who bear witness. Because it is impossible to truly know another person's experience of pain, it poses a challenge to the very foundation of language – its purpose of connectedness and communicability. It is in pain that we discover ourselves to be fundamentally separate from others. This situation also applies to the psychic wound of trauma. As Bojarsk and Mazur explain, "Traumatic experience is not so much a missed sublime encounter with death as an experience of rupture, a disruption in the matter of human communication" (2013:199-200). However, Scarry proposes that physical pain does not merely disrupt or resist language "but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language" (1985:4). She adds, "for physical pain – unlike any other state of consciousness – has no referential content. It is not *for* or *of* anything. It is precisely because it takes no object in that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language" (Scarry, 1985:5). She contrasts pain, described as being "wholly without objects," with the imagination, which is, "wholly its objects" (Scarry, 1985:162). "There is in imagining no activity, no 'state,' no experienceable condition or felt-occurrence separate from the objects: the only evidence that one is 'imagining' is that imaginary objects appear in the mind" (Scarry, 1985:162). Contrary to physical pain, with trauma there is the possibility for communication and finding means for representation, even though it might prove impossible to find the most appropriate form. With trauma, the imagination can circle around the event but never attain access to the event itself. The imagination must confront its essential deficiency while its necessity never abates.

The latency and repeatability that Caruth (and Freud) attribute to trauma means that it appears as a quasi-presence and, due to its psychic dimension, appears wholly within the imagination. Although pain and trauma are undeniable and not knowable as such, trauma, contrary to pain, is a desperate searching for its objects. "Imagining is," Scarry writes, "in effect, the ground of last resort. That is, should it happen that the world fails to provide an object, the imagination is there, almost on an emergency stand-by basis, as the last resource

for the generation of objects" (1985:166). While trauma, as with physical pain, appears to be inflicted upon one, it is by no means passive. Rather, the imagination, Scarry continues, "provides an extra and extraordinary ground of objects beyond the naturally occurring ground; it actively 'intends,' 'authors,' or 'sponsors' objects when they are not *passively* available as an already 'given'" (1985:167). Even though Scarry does not discuss trauma directly, her discussion on the imagination elucidates how every repetition of the traumatic event is an original appearance – a conversion of internality to externality. The mind desperately utilises all of its resources to pursue objectification despite its inevitable failure to do so.

But how do we move from the individual's experience of trauma to attend to the collective experience of historical trauma? How do these notions of latency, belatedness, repetition and the imagination function on a collective scale, especially since history, as the public project for remembering the past and dependent on a causal ordering of events, supposedly cannot accommodate the repeated re-appearances of an unclaimed psychic event?

Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (originally published in 1942), quoted in the epigraph, pertinently postulates history as an image that flashes in an instant of recognition, where it can be seen, read or interpreted, only to never be seen again. History emerges within the same instant that it vanishes. The true image of history therefore closely resembles the workings of trauma, as Caruth, in a Benjaminian manner suggests, "a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence" (Caruth, 1996:18). The true image of history, history-as-trauma, is conceptualised by Benjamin not as something that comes from without, an external wounding force that disrupts the order of things, but a force that comes from within, a destructive yet originating force. Benjamin expounds how repressions, suppressions and negations of other potential histories are necessary for official history to take its shape as a coherent progressive narrative. He proposes that the authors and custodians of causal, or progressive history, what he terms historicism – which refers to the chronological spatialization of time – are narratives perpetuated by the conquerors or victors, who "participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate" (Benjamin, 1978:256). Historicism negates the history of the conquered or the oppressed, a denial or wilful forgetting of its own violent past.

Following Benjamin, in *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (2019), Ariella Aïsha Azoulay argues that we must constantly challenge the convention of approaching history and politics as distinct disciplines because this perpetuates the violence of domination,

especially the continuous violence involved in negating violence. When history and politics emerged as new academic disciplines, she writes, "they became crucial in naturalizing the exclusions of the many from arenas where the meaning of history, political theory, politics, and consequently of freedom was shaped" (Azoulay, 2019:326). Azoulay warns that we therefore need to challenge historians whenever they "take pride in acting from an a posteriori position that relieves them of the burden of participating in politics, exercising direct violence, and taking dramatic decisions where they themselves would have to decide whether a person is a member of a community or should be kept 'undocumented'" (2019:339). "History," she goes on to argue,

> *is not just an academic discipline or a profession, nor is it merely a genre of narration. As a form and as a body of knowledge, but above all, as a technology of rule, history is an imperial invention that was central to the exercise of imperial violence well before it was institutionalized in the nineteenth century as an academic discipline (Azoulay, 2019:559).*

Likewise, Benjamin proposes: "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another" (1978:256). He terms these paradoxical documents or objects, most of which reside in archives and museums that attest to civilization's barbarism as "cultural treasures" from which the historical materialist can access the latency of forgotten or repressed traumatic events or histories which historicism negates. Therefore, central to Benjamin's critique of historicism is its proclamation of historical progress, which, he writes, "cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time" (1978:261).[4] It is the historical materialist who approaches history as "time filled by the presence of the now" (Benjamin, 1978:261).[4] This now blasts "out of the continuum of history" (Benjamin, 1978:261). The time of the now explodes time. He describes this now as a critical method where, "thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad" (Benjamin, 1978:262-263). The historical materialist takes cognizance of this monad "in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history – blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework. As a result of this method the lifework is preserved in his work and at the

same time cancelled; in the lifework, the era, and in the era, the entire course of history" (Benjamin, 1978:263). Eduardo Cadava explains that the monad

> *discloses the breaks, within history, from which history emerges. Focussing on what is sealed or hidden within an image, on the transitoriness of events, on the relation between any given moment and all of history, Benjamin's historical materialist seeks to delineate the contours of a history whose chance depends on overcoming the idea of history as the mere reproduction of the past (Cadava, 2001:53).*

History, Cadava then argues, "begins where memory is endangered, during the flash that marks its emergence and disappearance. It begins where representation ends" (2001:54). When the image of history emerges, when history can be read – meaningful and affective – it is not found within the narrative of causality and progress, its representations, but in these monads, which are points of latent trauma of those who have been subjugated and negated. These cultural objects are therefore charged with the eruptive, unstructured potential of the now that can trigger not only socio-political disruptions, but, Benjamin implies, revolutions.

The Problem of Progress and the Imaginary in the Archives

Philosopher Jacques Derrida argues that the archive does not merely record the past, but it does so "as an anticipation of the future" (1996:18). The archive orders the past for an expectant future, to stabilise time, structuring time within a causal and rational continuum. Like Azoulay, Derrida discusses how this ordering of time is an exertion of authority and despotic power and challenging this authorship and custodianship of time remains a crucial socio-political necessity.

Taking up Benjamin's critique of progress, Azoulay argues, "The pursuit of the new defines imperialism" (2019:17). "Progress," she writes, "is both the reason and the excuse for destruction and its remedy, the preferable way to deal with the wreckage left behind while producing ever-increasing ruination" (Azoulay, 2019:18). She discusses how this ruin is maintained by various institutions, such as colonial archives and ethnographic museums that, whilst proclaiming to preserve objects of the past, continue the violent destruction of the life worlds from which they were extracted by positioning these objects as relics of the past. However, these life worlds have not passed and thus continue unrelentingly to resist

imperialism. Azoulay warns us that "By seeking new modes of opposing imperialism, we risk acting as promoters of its progressive campaign for the new" (2019:20). She advocates for unlearning to potentialise history, which, rather than falling back into the imperial trap of progress and the new, involves

> *returning to that initial refusal of dispossession and the world out of which it emerged and bringing that moment into our present rather than looking for future, better anti-imperialisms … Potential history's assumption is that progress is not just an idea but more importantly a destructive force, a movement, a condition embedded in temporal and spatial structures that in the course of a few hundred years has shaped the way we relate to the common world and narrate our modes of being together. We must not pretend we need to progress past "progress" – that is the temporal problem imperialism has devised for us (Azoulay, 2019:21).*

Azoulay elucidates:

> *The task and challenge of potential history is to refuse the axioms of progress and resist the way progress turns modes of life, practice, and experience into a disposable past … Politics is institutionalized as the vehicle for the new, and the new is conceptualized as that which gives license to destroy other options and make them appear outmoded, archaic, anachronistic, defunct (Azoulay, 2019:344).*

Scholar and critical theorist Homi K. Bhabha also refers to Benjamin's hypothesis of historicism versus historical materialism to develop its potential socio-political implications. As with Azoulay's unlearning imperialism, he proposes that the disruption and deconstruction of causal or progressive time is a pivotal strategy for decolonization. "The struggle against colonial oppression not only changes the direction of Western history, but challenges its historicist idea of time as a progressive, ordered whole," which "challenges the transparency of social reality, as a pre-given image of human knowledge" (Bhabha, 1994:59). The result, he claims, is a disturbance of, "the social and psychic representation of the human subject" (Bhabha, 1994:59). Édouard Glissant likewise evokes the violence of homogeneous progressive time. "For centuries," he writes, "'generalizations,' as operated by the West, brought different community tempos into an equivalence in which it attempted to give a hierarchical order to the times they flowered" (Glissant, 1997:62). What ensues is that, "Either the other

is assimilated, or else it is annihilated. That is the whole principle of generalization and its entire process" (Glissant, 1997:49).[5]

The Western Eurocentric proclamation of progressive historical time – historicism – must be dismantled by the historical materialist monadic approach into heterogeneous and irreconcilable yet coexistent times, which is not merely a critique of the discipline of history, but, as Glissant, Bhabha, and Azoulay argue, it is a critique of the exclusionary domain constituting the human subject. The human is not a universal generality, but has and continues to be differentiated hierarchically, constituted in relation to those humans that have been designated as sub-human and non-human. "The 'human'," Azoulay writes, "is the universal effect of the long-lasting denial of historical violence exerted against people in order to make their dispossession a matter of fact and its origins obscure" (2019:449)[6]. In agreement, Bhabha proposes, "For the very nature of humanity becomes estranged in the colonial condition and from that 'naked declivity' it emerges not as an assertion of will nor as an evocation of freedom, but as an enigmatic questioning" (1994:60). Glissant concurs: "One of the most disturbing consequences of colonization could well be this notion of a single History, and therefore of power, which has been imposed on others by the West" (1989:93).

It is from this decolonial and anti-imperial ardour that South African Premesh Lalu, who describes himself as a recovering historian, investigates the colonial archive's storehouse of cultural treasures. He argues that for post-apartheid South Africa to actualise its post-ness, its promise of democracy, it must contend with apartheid's roots in colonialism. Problematising Benjamin, Lalu questions whether the colonial archive's cultural treasures can be deployed as monads for historical redress by the historical materialist. This requires not only challenging the power structures from the past, how the cultural treasures themselves are paradoxically evidence civilisation's barbarisms, but in Lalu's view, they are also fallacious and fictitious from the start. Lalu asks: "how could forms of evidence once used to cover up acts of violence be depended on to offer us an escape from the violence of the apartheid past?" (2009:6). Likewise, Azouly writes: "Studying the history of imperial destruction from what is in the documents preserved in archives aids in keeping the destruction of diverse and incompatible political formations and forms repressed and unnoticed" (2019:186). Azoulay argues, "The masquerading of the archive as a collection of documents is the basis of the conflation of ontological violence with epistemological violence. The regime of the archive

shapes the world, not just distorts the way it is perceived (its representations)" (2019:171). She affirms that the imperial and colonial archives are "a synergetic machine of imperial violence through which this very violence is abstracted and then extracted from the passage of time. Imperial archives continued to be established, under the same guise of neutrality, after the end of empires, now necessarily for progress" (Azoulay, 2019:43).

However, Azoulay insists, "we must recognize these objects as relics of destroyed worlds and in them inscribed rights that can be actualized in the presence of those from whom they were separated or from their descendants" (2019:142). She strongly reaffirms that "The materialization of violence on bodies, objects, and environments is the inaugural imperial archival act" (Azoulay, 2019:172).

Derrida also ascertains an originary violence in the archive, the Freudian destructive death drive that not only destroys, it destroys its own traces of destruction; "its silent vocation is to burn the archive and to incite amnesia" (1996:12). He therefore argues that "The archive always works, and *a priori*, against itself" (Derrida, 1996:12). It is the oppositional forces between the conservation drive and the destructive or death drive that Derrida terms "*archive fever*" (1996:19). Derrida also proposes that "The archive produces as much as it records the event" (1996:17). What the archive produces, what it repeats and negates is violence. As mentioned, Derrida suggests that this is not merely an aspect that pertains to the past, it is a question of the future. The archive ensures of violence to come. However, because this violence leaves no trace, its suppression and negation paradoxically ensure its traumatic return. Derrida thus proposes, "There is not one archive fever, one limit or one suffering of memory among others: enlisting the in-finite, archive fever verges on radical evil" (1996:20).

Lalu proposes that the first step in accounting for this enduring violence is by paying critical attention to historicism's imaginary structure. This requires the discipline of history to be critical and suspicious of its own methodology, scrutinising its reliance on modes of evidence for the knowledge it announces, and how disciplinary knowledge is entangled and implicated in colonialism's dehumanising power relations. The challenge, Lalu affirms, is "the impossibility of disentangling evidence from the grammar of domination" (2009:41). If history is to attest to anything, Lalu proposes, it must confront and contend with the discipline's own epistemic limitations and modes of systemic subjugation which aid in human debasement and oppression (Lalu, 2009:12). From this perspective, maintaining the integrity of disciplinary methodologies necessarily maintains the power structures of the colonial past. Lalu

writes:

> *Historians who have been working with official documents and colonial archives have mostly been aware of the fact that the colonial archive is far from being a neutral storage place, but consists rather of rules of formation which establish hierarchies, labels and categories. However, most historians fail to recognise that they are deeply implicated in this discursive formation. The colonial archive constitutes a pervasive system of knowledge combining poetics and the exercise of power, which acts upon individuals and regulates their statements (Lalu, 2009:30).*

It is due to the exercise of power within the archive that historian Carolyn Hamilton, like Derrida, observes that "there is as much forgetting as there is remembering" (Hamilton, 2011:121). She discusses how archives are not static storehouses but continue to be shaped and re-shaped by how the needs of the times interpret and apply evidence. Consequently, she argues, "Every record warrants – as do the archives in which it is deposited – the investigation of its own life history" (Hamilton, 2011:121). Because of the contextual dependency of interpretation Lalu (2009:18) argues that in the archive, the evidentiary and the imagination, or what he terms history and historiography, imbricate to the degree of indiscernibility. Attending to this imbrication can be highly generative. The archive is therefore a powerful resource, because, as Hamilton proposes, it, "at once produces and destabilizes the nation" (2011:138). Lalu argues that the fallacious distinction between history and historiography, as supposedly incommensurable structures of narrativity, implies temporal dissonance – the presumption of historical causality versus the temporal vacillations and variabilities of historiography. Neglecting to problematise, challenge, and rupture this distinction maintains the epistemologies of historical imperialism, thwarting the possibilities of socio-political redress and reformation. Contemporary historians embarking upon re-representing colonial histories must approach archival materials as useful, Lalu writes, "in describing everything around the event except the event itself" (2009:37). This means that the historian must work with the imaginary not only as a valid and viable form of evidence but also a form of evidence capable of disrupting the disciplinary conditions that designate the evidentiary.[7] However, Lalu adds, "dismissal of colonial records as biased limits the possibilities of understanding the interior logic and effects of domination, and unnecessarily suggests the possibility of an objective history" (2009:37). Expanding on this point, he writes that the colonial archive "should be approached, rather, as a mode of evidence in which one can discern the social process for the subjection of agency. As an apparatus that activates and assigns subjects, even fabricates these, the archive specifies a level of facticity indistinguishable from an obscured, but necessary, technique of narrativity" (Lalu, 2009:42). Literary theorist Hedley Twidle makes an analogous claim that "the whole question of non-fiction is inseparably bound up with power, racialised difference and the particular forms of knowledge production that took shape in the colonial contact zones" (2019:15).

The evidentiary and the transparency of facticity must therefore be interrogated to bring to bear the imaginary and opaque elements that fundamentally structure intelligibility. Lalu states that his intention is to shift the engagement with the archive from that of a source to a discourse, so that it "should not be seen merely as composed of technologies of governmentality but as a narrative strategy in its own right," which can therefore "point out the inconsistencies in the story of colonialism and to mark them as sites where another story may have taken place" (Lalu, 2009:62). Working with the indiscernibility of the imagination and the evidentiary will, therefore, excavate repressed and forgotten histories.

According to Lalu, if the post-apartheid and post-colonial is to signify more than a temporal development – that is, to be a tactical and systematic re-constitution of the terms of national identity and initiate potentials for subjects to emerge from subjugation – this necessitates not merely a re-writing of history, but a concerted effort at challenging the disciplinary modalities and methodologies of history. "The colonial and nationalist texts," Lalu writes,

> *generally share a commitment to historicism, even though an insurgent nationalism arrives bearing the baggage of culture and deeply suspicious of colonial history. In turn, historicism reduces the debate on the past and the present to the lexicon of truth and lies. Reading in a framework of historicism – in terms, that is, of a linear view – is to envisage a past incessantly reworked to sustain a political claim in the present (Lalu, 2009:187).*

Relying on this lexicon inevitably fails to arrive at a new grammar for emergence and merely repeats and mimics the violence of the past. As Lalu reiterates: "In its relation to disciplinary reason, nationalism merely results in the further subjection of agency" (2009:188).

Maintaining the Particularity of Memory-Work

Analogous to Benjamin, Azoulay and Lalu, South African aesthetics and political theorist Heidi Grunebaum argues that when history is co-opted and instrumentalized by a nationalist project to consolidate and homogenise the meaning of the past (akin to historicism), it intentionally severs the past from the present and the future. Similar to Benjamin's historical materialist approach, Grunebaum postulates that memory-work, which focuses on individuated experiences of the past, becomes a crucial site for actualising historical redress. "As a fluid, future-orientated labour," she writes,

> *memory-work could provide meaningful and regenerative social energies, igniting the social imagination and invigorating new visions, ideas and possibilities for the future. In this view, memory-work offers a resource for hope and meaning-making. However, when memory-work becomes focussed on and fixed in the past, and in a past inscribed within a narrative of historical rupture or break with the present, its regenerative social energies become sapped and depleted (Grunebaum, 2018:10).*

According to Grunebaum, the latency of alternative histories can be activated by considering the complexities of individual experiences, specifically within the everyday realities of life under an oppressive and violent regime. Lalu also discusses the importance of including the narratives of individual experiences into the grand-narrative of post-apartheid. "The archive of apartheid rule," he writes, "obscures more than it tends to reveal about the intricate workings of state ideology, disciplinary reason and discourse. This is because the archive, by virtue of its constitution, understates the orchestration of an exercise of power that permeated everyday live" (Lalu, 2023:27). This power over the everyday he terms petty apartheid. Lalu explains,

> *While grand apartheid is plotted in the familiar architectonics that combines metaphors of architecture and social engineering, the seemingly intractable and elusive character of petty apartheid, which mostly goes unnoticed, may yet teach us something about the enduring and persistent problem of race and modernity. Unless rethought and extended beyond, this deceptively benign strand of petty apartheid is likely to bring a long-brewed idea of race full circle (Lalu, 2012:2-3).*

Consequently, petty apartheid continues to affect a haunting presence as "a wound inflicted on the life-affirming aspects of sense perception in the guise of a narrative aimed at obscuring the contradictions and instabilities of the lived experience of race" (Lalu, 2023:27). Lalu proposes that by shifting focus to the insidious and pervasive aspects of petty apartheid, which, rather than seeking transcendence, which is doomed to failure due to the irrational mythos of apartheid having co-opted and corrupted scientific reason and rationalism, offers the means of unlearning and re-educating the senses that apartheid took hold of. He argues that an aesthetic education, by "exciting the senses" offers the possibility for imagining a future beyond the grips of petty apartheid (Lalu, 2023:21). Lalu's argument is therefore founded upon a belief in the affective capacity of the aesthetic, predicated on indeterminacy that necessitates participatory responses from each individual, thereby positioning art as a preeminent site for memory-work.

However, Grunebaum alerts her readers that "In the passage from the personal to the collective what has to be forgotten is as significant as what is remembered" (2001:199). She emphasises the continuous challenge of balancing collective memory with the disruption brought about by the diversity of the particular. Without this disruption, she argues, efforts at recovery, even those with the potential to reshape and reform collective history, risk becoming a "re-covery" – "a covering over again, of a reburial, a concealment" (Grunebaum, 2001:199). Referring to the dominant sentiment of peaceful reconciliation during the mid-1990's burgeoning new democracy in South Africa, Grunebaum discusses how various institutional strategies deployed for public healing and nation-building affected "silencing and displacement" (2001:208).[8] "In displacing the real bodies of the nation in order for the imaginary one of the unified nation to take their places," she writes, "the official custodians of memory reduce life stories and testimonies to a pre-inscribed archive" (Grunebaum, 2001:208). Memory-work and the work of the historical materialist have to resist being assimilated into history proper, which would quell their potential powers for engendering emergence and re-educating the senses.

How the Artwork can Resist Imperial Shutters

This brief discussion about history and the colonial archive is relevant to my inquiry, because, as Azoulay claims, "From the beginning, art has been one of imperialism's preferred terrain[s]" (2019:58). "Imperial violence is not secondary to art but constitutive of it" (2019:59). "The word *art* as it emerged in the mid-to-late eighteenth century," Azoulay explains,

> *was linked to the imperial conquest and mastery of time, as if time were not something shared in common, but a divisible thing to be allocated. The mastery of time is a key aspect of imperial violence that separates objects from people and places them in a progressive, linear timeline ('art history' is paradigmatic) in which colonized people and colonizers occupy different positions and different roles. Under a unified idea of art, this image could be concretized in and through the accumulation and displayed art objects (Azoulay, 2019:60).*

Azoulay argues that what we have come to know of as art within a homogenizing Western Modernist context, which relates to Rancière's representative regime of art and Benjamin's postulations of when art acquired it exhibition function, has its origins in colonial plunder and looting. Indeed, the extraction of cultural objects from the colonies and the ensuing destruction of their lifeworlds was concomitant with these objects' entry into new structures within the West, notably the ethnographic museum – created for the very purpose of housing these objects by tearing them away from their original social function and instituting an amnesia regarding their violent extraction. This new category of transcendental objects valued and evaluated by aesthetic judgement – looted cultural objects from the colonies transformed into artworks in the West – and the multitude of professional disciplines and institutions that emerged to secure and safeguard these objects as such, was initiated in an attempt to fully sever these objects from the sociality of their prior lifeworlds and occlude this colonial violence. Modern Western conceptualizations of art, therefore, cannot be considered as a class of objects detached from their ongoing complicity in imperial violence. The implications, Azoulay argues, are substantial, because art is therefore implicated not only in the destruction of worlds "here and there" but also in the continuous "destruction of the world as a shared place that cannot and should not be appropriated, and first dissected into appropriable objects" (Azoulay, 2019:102-103).

However, Azoulay, in a Benjaminian historical materialist manner, proposes that these objects retain a memory of their pre-colonial existence. With the work of potentialising history, it becomes possible to actualise this existence – acknowledging that this prior existence is resolutely not past. Though not in Azoulay's specific terminology, this prior existence lives on symptomatically. By paying attention to the symptom, potentialising history doesn't seek out the new. Instead, it returns to the persistence of the past to find solutions for restitution and reparations, thereby acknowledging that these lifeworlds that were intended for absolute ruination have found means of survival. Azoulay explains that potentialising history does not retrieve histories; rather, it is

> *an active mechanism that seeks to maintain the principle of reversibility of what should not have been possible, a refusal of imperial shutters closing in the first place. Potential history does not mend worlds after violence but rewinds to the moment before the violence occurred and sets off from there (Azoulay, 2019:10).*

Azoulay's use of the term "imperial shutters" highlights photography's complicity in imperial violence – how "the camera made visible and acceptable imperial world destruction and legitimated the world's reconstitution on empire's terms" (Azoulay, 2019:7). This involves the manner in which the shutter takes, detaches, and divides a single moment from the flow of time, rendering it sharp and legible; a process that ultimately forecloses potential meanings. The imperial shutter, she writes,

> *commands what sort of things have to be distanced, bracketed, removed, forgotten, suppressed, ignored, overcome, and made irrelevant for the shutter of the camera to function, as well as for a photograph to be taken and its meaning accepted. What is suppressed and made irrelevant is exercised by the shutter. In the technological and historical discussion of the shutter, the only elements that matter are the quality – precision, clarity, recognizability – of images, the end product, and the erasure of any trace of the shutter's operation (Azoulay, 2019:2).*

However, as mentioned, Azoulay argues that these shutters never wholly capture their object and never erase their operations. Thus, strategies for potentialising these histories remain possible. "Unlearning imperialism," she proposes, "refuses the stories that shutters tell … unlearning imperialism becomes a commitment to reversing the shutter's work" (Azou-

lay, 2019:7).

Azoulay's historical analysis of Modern Western art's inherent connection to imperial violence elucidates how it is entangled with historical trauma. However, this means that art – when disengaged from pure aestheticism and reconnected to its active participation in material culture – has the potential to unlock negated histories by disrupting linear, progressive conceptions of time. For Azoulay, the question of temporality is therefore central to art and how the modern discipline of art history has endeavoured to repress historical trauma, which is never total – the artwork itself retains a force that can disturb and disrupt chronological temporality.

Thinking with the Symptom and Montage

Georges Didi-Huberman offers insight into how to activate the latent, yet inherent, disruptive temporality of art by adopting the methodological approach of a historical materialist and applying it to art history. He therefore critiques and challenges the discipline of art history by focusing on its object of inquiry – the artwork – and by drawing attention to its material, affective, and symptomatic qualities as it flashes into view and then withdraws into obscurity. Didi-Huberman implies that the artwork has the innate potential to become a Benjaminian monad that can disrupt historicism. The fundamental challenge, he proposes, is "of broaching the inventive power of a discourse over the object that it purports to describe" (Didi-Huberman, 2005:87). Instead of a blind fidelity to the past context of the artwork's creation, he advocates for a dialectical inquiry: "viewing the past with the eyes of the present would help us to clear a hurdle, and literally to plunge into a new aspect of the past, hitherto unperceived, an aspect buried since then" (Didi-Huberman, 2005:39). In a gesture akin to potentialising history, Didi-Huberman argues that art history should be re-conceptualised as a subjective practice that maintains the elusiveness and paradoxes of artworks, rather than an objective discipline intent on full exposition. "The image," he writes, "is not a closed field of knowledge: it is a whirling centrifugal field. It is not a 'field of knowledge' like any other; it is a movement demanding all the anthropological aspects of being and time" (Didi-Huberman, 2004:13).

Didi-Huberman was deeply influenced by art historian Aby Warburg's concept of *Nachleben* – the afterlives and survivals of images – images as anachronisms from the past that break through into the present, although they return with a different sense. The image is re-conceptualised as a *symptom*, akin to the unclaimed, belated event of trauma, capable of disrupting the very intelligibility of the present, and as such, enlivening the Benjaminian critical presence of the *now*.[9] "A surviving image," Didi-Huberman writes, "is an image that, having lost its original use value and meaning, nonetheless comes back, like a ghost, at a particular historical moment: a moment of 'crisis,' a moment when it demonstrates its latency, its tenacity, its vivacity, and its 'anthropological adhesion,' so to speak" (2005:xxii). The *Nachleben* of images challenges the discipline of art history by hypothesising how images refuse to be situated in history, refusing the rationalisations of progress and therefore the continuity of chronological time. Rather, Didi-Huberman proposes that Warburg, "pursued, as a counterpoint or counterrhythm to influence and fact and chronology, a *ghostly and symptomatic* time" (2003:274). "*Whereas art has a history*," Didi-Huberman writes, "*images have survivals* – survivals that discredit them, banish them from the sphere of accredited high art. In return, the history of artistic styles (the history credited by high culture) holds their survivals in contempt" (2003:275). Consequently, Didi-Huberman suggests that art history, in its pursuit of specialisation and self-reference, required art to function as evidence of progress. This necessitated subduing the complex temporality of images, which he describes as "a dialectic of rhizomes, repetitions and symptoms" (Didi-Huberman, 2003:284).

Warburg's notion of the *Pathosformel*, or 'pathos formula', is integral to the *Nachleben* of images. Griselda Pollock explains that Warburg postulated images "as preservers and transmitters of such mythical cultural memory … formulations of passion which deal with life and death … Images carry out the incessant work of a formulation of archaic passions" (Pollock, 2012:66). *Nachleben* suggests that the image is a symptom, capable of reappearing after a period of latency and carrying with it powerful affective passions. According to art historian and philosopher Phillipe-Alain Michaud, this formula is "used in art to form a mute language freed from discursivity. The analysis of expressive gestures opens up an unusual path to the figures of the past and allows one to identify their recurrence in contemporary imagery" (2004:270-271). One cannot simply look to the past to understand a reappearing symptom. Due to this process of transformation, the symptom impedes meaning and disrupts retroactively what we thought we knew. As discussed, the art historian embarking on interpreting an artwork, should strive to convey the artwork's more elusive, affective sense – the very

quality that eludes direct interpretation itself.

Referring to this conundrum, Didi-Huberman argues that the symptom, which is an instance of the "permanence of culture," is not "a global sign or archetype," but rather "an exceptional feature, as a displaced thing" (2002:63). He explains,

> *For Warburg the surviving form does not triumphantly outlive the death of its competitors. On the contrary, it symptomatically and phantomatically survives its own death: disappearing from a point in history, reappearing much later at a moment when it is perhaps no longer expected, and consequently having survived in the still poorly defined reaches of a 'collective memory' (Didi-Huberman, 2002:68).*

Didi-Huberman concludes his argument by reaffirming that Warburg "decisively broke with notions of 'progress' and historical 'development'" (Didi-Huberman, 2002:69). He achieved this by developing a theory and praxis devoted to what Didi-Huberman describes as "a knowledge-movement of images, a knowledge in extensions, in associative relationships, in ever renewed montages, and no longer knowledge in straight lines, in a corpus, in stabilised typologies" (2004:10). Michaud agrees that "Warburg favoured displacements and ruptures over the transmission of forms ... Warburg's motto is primarily a methodological prescription signifying that the work is not a closed totality but a juxtaposition of elements in tension, which interpretation should not blur and might even presume to reveal" (Michaud, 2004:80). Didi-Huberman elaborates that Warburg exceeded the epistemological framework of traditional art history, which allowed him:

> *to gain access to a world open to multiple extraordinary relationships, dangerous even to consider ... This excess no less than this access contains something dangerous, something I would call symptomatic. It is dangerous for history itself, for its practice and for its temporal models: for the symptom diffracts history, unsettling it to some degree, since it is in itself a conjunction, a collision of heterogeneous temporalities (time of the structure and time of the rending of the structure) (Didi-Huberman, 2004:12).*

"To create a *knowledge-montage*," Didi-Huberman adds, "was therefore to reject the matrices of intelligibility, to break through the age-old guardrails. This movement, with its new 'allure' of knowledge, created the possibility of vertigo" (2004:13). Therefore, according to Didi-Huberman, those seeking to understand an image must contend with the troubling

realisation that the symptom cannot be fully known. One is confronted by the unthinkable. "So an economy of doubt," he writes, "is put into place with the thought of the symptom. The symptom effectively requires of me that I be uncertain about my knowledge of what I see and what I think I grasp" (Didi-Huberman, 2005:181).

Warburg's atlas of images titled *Mnemosyne* (1924-1929), which he was still working on before his death, visually demonstrates his theoretical inquiry into the *Pathosformel* of *Nachleben* and the dynamics of bringing images-as-symptoms together, which rather than building a narrative of progress, creates a spatio-temporal shattering. A wide range of reproduced images of artworks and schematic drawings from Antiquity and the Renaissance, as well as personal photographs, maps, and newspaper clippings, were collected and exhibited on large panels covered in black cloth. Warburg, Michaud writes,

> *sought to interpret the past in the light of the faraway, producing a collision between two levels of reality unknown to each other ... These violent associations, which over time would lose their intuitiveness and become structural, arise not from simple comparison but from rifts, detonations, and deflagrations. They seek not to find constants in the order of heterogeneous things but to introduce differences within the identical ... To grasp what Warburg meant by the "iconology of the intervals," one must try to understand, in terms of introspection and montage, what binds, or, inversely, separates, the motifs on the irregular black fields that isolate the images on the surface of the panels and bear witness to an enigmatic prediscursive purpose ... In arranging the images on the black cloth of the panels of his atlas, Warburg was attempting to activate dynamic properties that would be latent if considered individually (Michaud, 2004:253).*

Crucially, Warburg's atlas lacked textual support or explanation. Michaud suggests that it "is based on a cinematic mode of thought, one that, by using figures, aims not at articulating meanings but at producing effects" (2004:278). Images-as-symptoms have similar properties to monads, both approaches capable of enabling an encounter with the vertiginous, traumatic quality of time – an aspect that the traditional discipline of art history, with its focus on iconographical and iconological interpretations, was unable to subdue. Therefore, analysing an artwork through its symptomatic afterlives demands attention to particularity, a heightened awareness of its affective qualities, and a willingness to recognise the knowl-

edge granted from un-knowing – a deliberate and critical unlearning of epistemological conventions and frameworks. Perhaps, by jolting the artwork out of its historical context, the symptom can rejuvenate its latent aura, enabling it to reappear in the here and now. I will discuss how Siopis, Kusters and my own artworks implicitly draw upon the Warburgian 'image-as-symptom' and the work of 'thinking-in-motion' that ensues from the dialectics of montage – the indeterminate betweenness of the interval. Rather than focusing solely on the past, we utilize montage to foster disjunctive connections where heterogeneous spatio-temporalities intertwine, thereby opening new relational potentialities. In conjunction with other aesthetic strategies, this approach allows us to activate the critical powers of the now.

The Now of Contemporaneity

Shifting from a discussion on history and art history to the practice of art-making, because Siopis, Kusters and my own artworks share an interest in disrupting causal or progressive temporality, our practice can be situated within the context of contemporary art. As art critic, media theorist, and philosopher Boris Groys explains, contemporary art "does not simply designate art that it produced in our time" (2008:71). Rather, implying Benjamin's hypothesis of the criticality of the *now*, it relates to "the act of presenting the present", differentiating itself from both future-focused Modern Art and Postmodern art's (self-)reflective stance (Groys, 2008:71). Cultural theorist Nikos Papastergiadis echoes this emphasis on the *now* within contemporary art, proposing that its key task is "to introduce different ways of being in the world" by expanding the parameters of art itself (2008:364). Invoking Jacques Rancière's observations of the aesthetic regime of art, Papastergiadis rejects the notion of art as existing above life. He ascertains that the two are intrinsically linked: "The idea that the place of art is above life is an illusion that no longer has much meaning" (Papastergiadis, 2008:364). He then proposes, "art no longer aims to be an elevated or a belated response to events already staged in the sphere of everyday life. On the contrary, there is a dual level of commitment to the aesthetic and the political'' (Papastergiadis, 2008:365). The artworks that I discuss by Siopis, Kusters, and my own all follow this commitment – specifically, the intention of bringing into the world re-presentations of the past that make no overt didactic or representational claims, but instead favour affective participatory encounters. These

affective interactions can be powerful and impactful precisely because they avoid explicit political assertions. Their subtlety, ambiguous complexity, and open-endedness allow for emergent potentialities. "The power of the poetic gesture in art is revolutionary," Papastergiadis argues, "in that it acts as a circuit breaker in the closed system of habituated equivalences between signs" (2008:369). "The dynamic interaction," he adds, "means that the communicative system does not proceed in a fixed trajectory but is instead enabled by the rendering of the boundary between art and life as permeable" (Papastergiadis, 2008:378).

Nigerian curator, art critic, writer, and poet Okwui Enwezor refers to this contemporary milieu as "the postcolonial constellation" (2008:208). "The current artistic context," he proposes,

> *is constellated around the norms of the postcolonial, those based on discontinuous, aleatory forms, on creolization, hybridization, and so forth, all of these tendencies operating with a specific cosmopolitan accent. These norms are not relativistic, despite their best efforts to displace certain stubborn values that have structured the discourse of Western Modernism and determined its power over Modernisms elsewhere in the world (Enwezor, 2008:209).*

Enwezor continues, "Any critical interest in the exhibition systems of Modern or contemporary art requires us to refer to the foundational base of modern art history: its roots in imperial discourse, on the one hand, and, on the other, the pressures that postcolonial discourse exerts on narratives today" (2008:209). In other words, for contemporary art to be truly critical – that is, to avoid repeating colonial and imperial power structures – it must account for its own complicity in colonial violence and attempts to suppress certain non-Western cultures. This requires a continuous scrutiny of history and its structuring of temporality as progressive. As Azoulay (2019:58-79) argues, contemporary art can no longer claim self-referentiality or autonomy, existing as a transcendental category of objects immune to socio-political forces. Therefore, while Siopis, Kusters, and my own artistic praxis might not overtly articulate a postcolonial critique, our artworks exist and function within this contemporary constellation that challenges dominant narratives and power structures.

However, contemporary art (including Siopis, Kusters, and my own) does not fully break with history, as Enwezor warns: "The paradox of a disjunctive innovation that simultaneously announces its allegiance and affinity to the very tradition it seeks to displace is a com-

monplace in the entire history of Modernity, especially in the discourse of the avant-garde" (2008:211).[10] Like Azoulay, Enwezor (2008:211-212) discusses how even the confrontational encounter that occurred between European art and African and Oceanic sculptures was ultimately "assimilated and subordinated to modernist totalization", failing to effect a true rupture. "Nor should we forget," he continues, "that these non-Western objects in question were required to shed their utilitarian function and undergo a conversion from ritual objects of magic into reified objects of art. The remarkable import of this conversion is that the historical repercussion of the encounter has remained mostly confined to formal effects and thus formalist aesthetic analysis" (Enwezor, 2008:212).

Despite artists working within the postcolonial constellation, Enwezor affirms that these modernist assimilative effects persist today, corrosive and pervasive. However, he expresses optimism that such colonial legacies also provide "many artists with an important point of disputation, and hones their capacities for figuring new values of truth within the field of contemporary art" (Enwezor, 2008:223). He reaffirms, "The conditions of production and reception of contemporary art evince a dramatic multiplication of its systems of articulation. This has occurred to such a degree that no singular judgement could contain all its peculiarities" (Enwezor, 2008:223).[11] Contemporary art that strategically negotiates the paradox of autonomy and heteronomy inherent to the aesthetic regime therefore embraces the antagonisms emerging from this relational social field of plurality, multiplicity, and heterogeneity.

Implicit in Warburg's postulation of the image-as-symptom and Azoulay's and Enwezor's Benjaminian critique of imperial progress, lies a key feature of contemporary art: the temporal turn as described by art historian Christine Ross. Here, contemporary art holds the potential to challenge modernism's conception of time as progressive and linear and "endeavours to *presentify* the modern regime of historicity" (Ross, 2012:6). Ross argues that such art "activates the inconsistencies and vicissitudes of temporal passing to remove the future from its modern role – the role of initiator of change – and make room for the re-imagining of the future" (2012:6). Within this aesthetic framework – the constellation in which I situate the artistic practices of Siopis, Kusters, and myself – differential experiences of time are acknowledged by forgoing a universal model of temporality. Ross elaborates that "Contemporaneity refers to the unfolding of contemporary experiences of temporal passing within a globalized epoch of coexisting multiple worlds. It is a perspective that emphasizes the confluence of temporal relations between contemporaries, as well as the simultaneous temporalities of our time" (Ross, 2012:49-50).

Siopis, Kusters, and my own artworks employ a variety of strategies that disrupt the linear flow of time. As Ross proposes, they, "insist on the productivity of temporalizing the spectator's perception – to stimulate perception as duration but also to break with its optical wholeness as well as its binding and recognition faculties" (2012:12). In the words of Ross, our artworks therefore "set into play a series of 'post-optical' strategies, which partake of a marked depreciation of the modern paradigm of pure opticality" (2012:12).

Departing from pure opticality involves a more haptic, corporeal synesthetic approach to perception that enables perceiving via the fullness of an affective, embodied encounter. This problematizes the conventional reliance on optical empiricism for making knowledge claims that inevitably position the perceiving subject and perceived object within an asymmetrical power dynamic. Rather, what ensues with haptics is the a renewed sense of theat relational ontology of the affective event, a mutually precarious coming-into-being. Therefore, Ross (2012:40) argues that we must reconceptualise historical time as experiential rather than progressive, so as to uncover history's affective, haptic dimensions. I will explore how the artworks of Siopis, Kusters, and myself offer an experience of Ross's proposition that "The past persists in the future" (2012:14). The unclaimable historical events that we attend to within our artworks are reactivated and reappear anew.



Chapter 1

Historical Trauma: Discovering a Family Photograph in the Depths of Oblivion

For if I am confounded by you, then you are already of me, and I am nowhere without you. I cannot muster the "we" except by finding the way in which I am tied to "you," by trying to translate but finding that my own language must break up and yield if I am to know you. You are what I gain through this disorientation and loss. This is how the human comes into being, again and again, as that which we have yet to know.

(Butler, J. 2009:49)

Encountering the Un-Imaginable Photograph

It is within my worn copy of Gerhard Schoenberner's *The Yellow Star* (1969) (Figure 1.1) that I discovered the Liepāja family photograph – a photograph taken mere moments before they were to stand before their executioners.[12] It was a discovery concomitant with loss. This, indeed, is the pathos of photography – the rending present of those who are absent. As evoked by Judith Butler's concept of precarious humanity in the epigraph, it was a discovery that continues to be laden with a sense of loss, because, when we realise how inherently connected we are to one another, while finding ourselves, we concomitantly lose ourselves – we lose our sense of being a discrete singularity. This means that the self is not merely in relation with others; it is essentially always-already relational. The self is always in a state or position of unfolding or becoming. Encountering the Liepāja family photograph thus revealed something previously unknown yet essential about myself: I was, in a way, somehow already bound to this photograph.

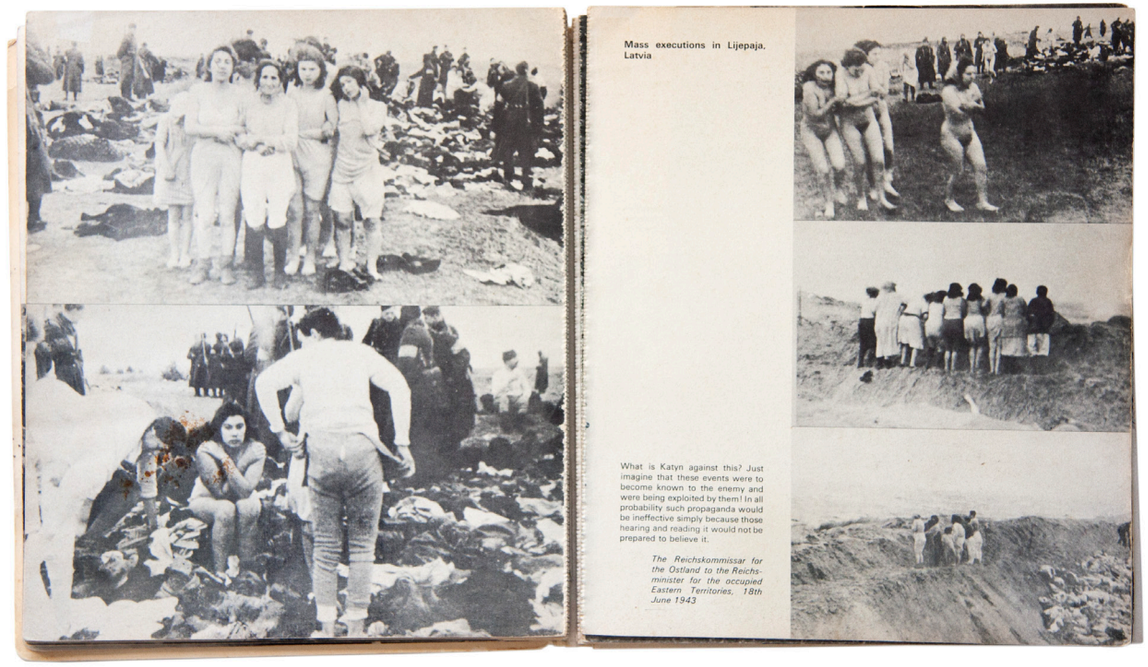
In the Liepāja family photograph, the horrific mass murder of the elderly, women, and children is not overtly evident within the photograph itself. In fact, this picture is horrifying for me precisely because it does not 'capture' the horror. Its initial appearance is somewhat benign, and it is due to its mimicry of the quotidian genre of family portraiture that it becomes poignantly shocking. Rather than being compelled to look away, I can never look long enough. "Harrowing photographs," Susan Sontag proposes, "do not inevitably lose their power to shock. But they are not much help if the task is to understand. Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us" (2003:80). This statement encapsulates the haunting power the Liepāja family photograph has over me and the frustration that I still feel at never coming to understand why it was ever taken. However, this failure of narration and understanding, I will argue, can be generative of a new kind of knowing that comes from searching the infinite outer limits of un-knowing.

One of four photographs printed on this double page spread, a brief title printed on the top right page locates the event – *Mass Execution: Liepāja, Latvia* (Figure 1.2). The photographs document the sequence of events taken moments before the mass murder. Although the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau have become the iconic symbol of dehumanisation and modern industrialised mass murder during the Holocaust – characterised by the



1.1 Cover of Gehard Scoenberner's *The Yellow Star* (1969).

The book is a photographic overview of the Holocaust with only supplementary text to expand upon certain historical details. It documents the discrimination and persecution of Jews beginning in 1930s Germany, from which proceeded the establishment of ghettos, executions in the Eastern-occupies territories, deportations to concentration camps and death camps and lastly the liberation of these camps in 1945.



1.2 Double page spread showing the Liepāja family photograph printed on the top left page.

unnerving detachment between victim and executioner – the ferocious firing squads which followed the Nazi Wehrmacht troops in mid-1941 as they advanced into the eastern territories of the Soviet Union were no less effective in their killing.[13] The executions documented in these photographs, ordered by the Nazi SS and carried out by Latvian auxiliary troops, provide disturbing evidence of how executioners were required to focus on each individual victim. Nadine Fresco explains: "In all these photographs, only men in Latvian uniforms are visible – uniforms of the police and of the Latvian members of the SD (Security Service). The Germans are not in the photographs. They are photographers. As murder-witnesses, they are watching and getting on film what they are in the process of carrying out" (2021:53).

The material qualities of the book intensify my encounter with the images by suggesting a personal, or rather familial, attachment. The book bears the marks of time. Its cover is frayed, its fibrous pages stained mustard-yellow. Sections and individual pages are detached from the glue binding, and the whole book is infused with a thick scent of dampness. Notably, on the book's inside cover, signed in blue ink, is the signature of my paternal grandmother, Anne Washkansky. Whenever I think about this family photograph, it emerges from this aged and vulnerable body of the book.

Beyond the personal resonances relating to the book's materiality, my encounter with the Liepāja family photograph is also shaped by my own history and that of South Africa. South Africa, my country of birth, provided refuge to my ancestors who escaped an increasingly hostile anti-Semitic Eastern Europe.[14] Indeed, my grandmother, to whom the book belonged, left Lithuania for the Cape with her family in the 1920s as a young girl. South Africa was at once a place of safety for those fleeing persecution elsewhere and a place where legislation systematically dehumanised and exploited its 'second-class', non-white citizens. I cannot view the past captured in *The Yellow Star* without reflecting on this incongruity – the parallel, discordant histories of a country marred by deeply destructive racial segregation while simultaneously offering a vital refuge for many Jewish immigrants.[15]

The Liepāja family photograph (Figure 1.3) is distinctly different from all the others in the book, which are more traditionally documentary in nature – the photographers remaining unseen by their subjects, standing back as witnesses to document and record the events as they unfolded. Here, however, the family stands together, facing and looking at the photographer. The photographer, by not standing back as a witness, momentarily halted and



1.3 The Liepāja family photograph. (1941)



1.4 Photograph of women and children undressing.

intervened in the event. However, the photograph, having preserved a moment of mutual recognition, means that I am brought disarmingly close to this family. They now face and look at me. Art historian and art critic James Elkins' words resonate profoundly: "To see is to be seen" (1996:51). Although I know for certain that this family, along with so many others, was murdered on the day that this photograph was taken, here they are – a family appearing very much alive. Perhaps because of this irreconcilability and the unimaginable circumstances of this event, the effect the photograph has on me has not diminished over time. On the contrary, it has become increasingly grievous.

The family gathers at the centre of the photograph, arms linked, wearing only their undergarments. Behind them are large piles of discarded clothes left by those who have already been ordered to strip and move towards the execution site. In the background, beyond the girl on the right, a woman crouches with her head tilted forward to her chest. A soldier stands in front of her with his right arm outstretched. Whatever order he has given is lost in the photograph's silence. What unfolded between them can only be imagined.

The photograph printed below (Figure 1.4) is a closer shot of a young woman, who sits just off centre to the left of the frame. Her feet are buried beneath a pile of clothes. She leans forward with her elbows on her bare thighs, her arms crossed over her chest. Looking out, her gaze just misses mine. Her face is expressionless. Who or what was she looking at? To the right, a boy turns his back while undressing. In the background, soldiers stand about nonchalantly.

The top photograph on the right page shows a group of naked women, frozen in the act of moving across the picture plane (Figure 1.5). Three are huddled together, while another advances in front of them. All have their arms crossed over their chests. It was the middle of winter – the sea breeze must have been bitterly cold. It was customary to allow the elderly and women with their children to remain in their undergarments, and this is evident in the two pictures below, where we see two groupings with their backs to the camera standing on the ridge of the execution pit (Figure 1.6). The bottom photograph, taken from a greater distance, reveals a dark, undefined mass. I know, without clearly seeing, that this mass is the entangled bodies of the dead. The women and children in these last two photographs stand waiting eternally in their final moment at the edge of death. Their torment is inconceivable and unbearable. How long should I continue to look – waiting – waiting for all of time to see what has already happened?

At the bottom of the page is an unexpected quote from the Reichskommissar for the Ostland to the Reichsminister for the occupied Eastern Territories, dated 18 June 1943:

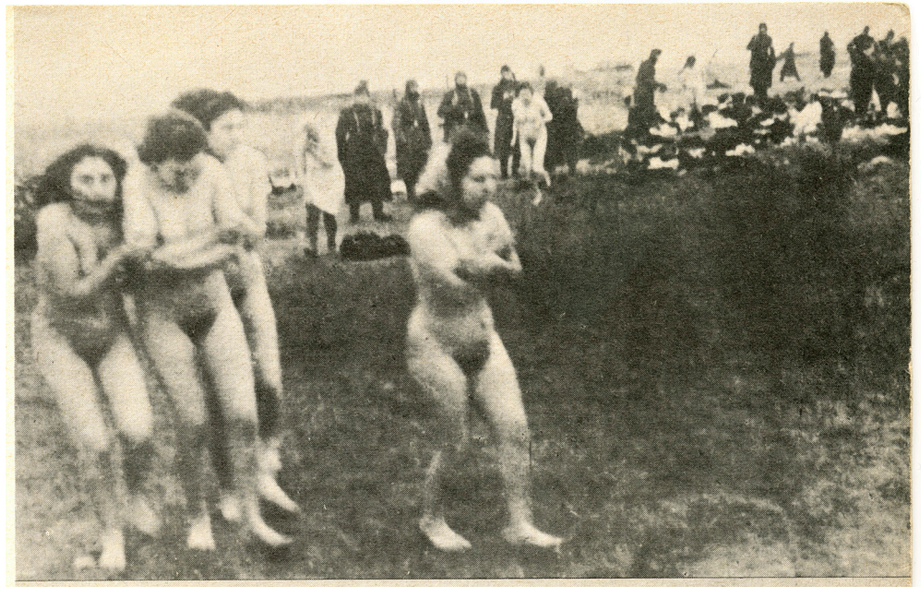
> *What is Katyn[16] against this? Just imagine that these events were to become known to the enemy and were being exploited by them! In all probability such propaganda would simply be ineffective because those hearing and reading it would not be prepared to believe it (1969:97).*

Rather than providing details of the event, the quote questions the ability of witnesses to convey such horror in a comprehensible manner. Language, it implies, reaches its limit, falters, and fails. Philosopher Giorgio Agamben explains that bearing witness to such an atrocity is necessarily paradoxical as it requires contending with a constitutive gap, which "calls into question the very meaning of testimony and, along with it, the identity and reliability of the witness" (1999:33). He goes on to write:

> *[L]anguage, in order to bear witness, must give way to a non-language in order to show the impossibility of bearing witness. The language of testimony is a language that no longer signifies and that, in not signifying, advances into what is without language, to the point of taking on a different insignificance – that of the complete witness, that of he who by definition cannot bear witness (Agamben, 1999:39).*

Agamben implies that even survivors cannot fully convey their experiences through language. Consequently, he interprets the trauma of survival as imposing an insurmountable barrier to communication. Agamben proposes that because no one survived the gas chambers, a unique horror of the Holocaust, he draws the conclusion that no true witness of the Holocaust exists. As such, Agamben overlooks how the imagination can intervene, however imperfectly, striving to fill this gap of the incommunicable and retrieve, even if necessarily deficient, second-handed and meagre, something that the exterminated might have witnessed.

The decision to print the quote alongside these photographs may suggest that documentary photography carries the gravitas of the evidentiary and is therefore capable of overcoming the linguistic impediment of the human witness. Alternatively, it could be intended to problematise the photographic evidentiary, as the fragment of what we see in the photographs must surely fail to convey the full extent of the event. The photographs could, there-



1.5 Right Page showing women being ordered to move to the execution site.



1.6 Women and children standing at the execution site.

fore, have been used to demonstrate that the full extent of the event will never be known.

In her book *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012), comparative literature theorist Marianne Hirsch explores the use of photographs as a means of addressing the absence of a historical interlocutor. She argues that photographs can serve as conduits for what she terms as "postmemory" – the traumatic remembrances passed down from one generation to the next, transmitting images and texts through time. These events, though rooted in the past, reverberate into the present moment (Hirsch, 2012:5). The 'post' in postmemory, she emphasises, "signals more than a temporal delay and more than a location in an aftermath. It is not a concession simply to linear temporality or sequential logic" (Hirsch, 2012:5). Hirsch views postmemory as "a structure of inter- and transgenerational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience" (2012:5-6), reflecting a complex oscillation between continuity and rupture. In *Family Frames: Photographs, Memory and Postmemory* (1997) Hirsch elaborates:

> *Postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. This is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past. Postmemory characterises the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of previous generations shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated (Hirsch, 1997:22).*

This distinction is further emphasised by postmemory's reliance on what Hirsch terms as "the performative index" where the focal point centres around "affect, need, and desire" and less on causal links to "authenticity and 'truth'" (2012:48).

Identifying the Liepāja family photograph as a family portrait is a performative, imaginative and creative act, intimately connecting me to it. This enables me to encounter a sense of familial resemblance, fostering the need and desire to know why this photograph was taken. However, as Hirsch notes, "The work of postmemorial reading entails juxtaposing two incommensurable temporalities, and exposing and keeping open the devastating disjunction between them" (2012:63). Although my need and desire can never be met, they never abate.

Even as I performatively insert myself into a familial position of recognition, they remain resolutely unrecognizable – I cannot retrieve them from the past.

My postmemorial encounter with the photograph is, as Hirsch writes, "fundamentally an interpretive and narrative gesture, a fabrication out of available pieces that acknowledges the fragmentary nature of the autobiographical act and its ambiguous relation to reference. Photographs are fragments of stories, never stories in themselves" (1997:83). She elaborates that photographs are significant for their potential to engage in a process of symbolisation and act as mediated forms of identification, occasions for postmemory, because of "the photograph's capacity to signal absence and loss and, at the same time, to make present, rebuild, reconnect, bring back to life" (Hirsch, 1997:243). As such, these photographs, and the Liepāja family photograph in particular, permit my oblique and imperfect return to the past, yet I can never transcend the distance between us.

Alluding to the capacity of photography to transmit the transgenerational trauma of postmemory, literary scholar Ulrich Baer proposes that "photography can provide special access to experiences that have remained unremembered yet cannot be forgotten" (2002:7). Because postmemory is essentially deficient – composed of mediated fragments that can never be pieced together to form narrative cohesion – it inspires a continued searching and imaginative construction, which can never be resolved. Inasmuch as this failure can never be overcome, the potential and obligation for communicability, albeit perpetually deferred, urgently persists. It is due to this potential that I remain resolute, guided by Baer's argument that "Photographs can then become a potentially open-ended form of testimony to, and a call for, a new way of seeing" (Baer, 2002:182). Contending with this new way of seeing – one requiring the imagination's activity – is pivotal to my inquiry and my refusal to believe that the photograph succumbs to the tragedy of impending absence: the factuality of their death.

However, if, as literary theorist, semiotician, critic and philosopher Roland Barthes proposes in *Camera Lucida* (2000:94), the essential feature of photography is encountering the *punctum* – something poignant, piercing, wounding, and grievous – whereby one encounters the simultaneity of "*This will be and this has been*" when observing, "with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake," will I inevitably succumb to merely apprehending the finitude of death? Death, Barthes seems to despair, is "a catastrophe which has already

occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe" (2000:96). Barthes senses his own mortality, writing, "Every photograph always contains this imperious sign of my future death" (2000:97). However, between the certitude of the past and the future, of *this will be and this has been*, lies a sense of mutual precarity and relational vulnerability between the viewer and the subject photographed – the shared certitude of death. I propose that this inevitability of death does not overtake the photograph but rather breaks open the present, exposing how relationality extends far beyond the social realm of lived beings to those we may never know from the past and the future. It is during the photographic encounter that we can experience the extent to which the dead bear upon the present and upon ourselves. As Hirsch argues, "The indexical of the photo intensifies its status as a harbinger of death and, at the same time, its capacity to signify life. Life is the presence of the object before the camera; death is the 'having-been-there' of the object – the radical break, the finality introduced by the past tense" (2012:134). "In its relation to loss and death," Hirsch continues,

> *photography does not mediate the process of individual and collective memory but brings the past back in the form of a ghostly revenant, emphasizing, at the same time, its immutable and irreversible pastness and irretrievability. The encounter with the photograph is the encounter with two presents, one of which, already past, can be reanimated in the act of looking (Hirsch, 2012:134).*

However, Barthes seems to revise his propositions when he describes discovering a photograph of his recently deceased mother as a five-year-old girl. The *punctum* – his postulation of the essence of photography – appears to be a powerful force of reanimation, which alleviates his grief, allowing him to exclaim that he has found his mother, albeit in a photograph bearing no resemblance to her as he knew her. Barthes strongly connects his conceptualisation of the essence of photography to particularity, so much so that he does not publish the photograph, suggesting that for the viewer, it would merely be seen as another generic family photograph, devoid of the power of presence.

I, however, agree with Hirsch that the photograph maintains an essential, unyielding pastness while paradoxically possessing the power of presence and indexing an anterior future. It is, therefore, inconsequential whether I show the Liepāja family photograph, as I am not intent on an essential discovery, retrieval, recovery, or revelation. What concerns me is how the particularity of the photographic encounter obliges me to imagine and speculate on its future impacts and affects – the potential afterlives of this photograph.

I continue to be haunted by the following question that keeps the photograph animated via its inexplicability: How does one present oneself and pose for one's last photograph while standing in front of the photographer-cum-executioner? While contemplating this inconceivability, I begin to imagine the impossible – that by posing, this family is granted a moment of reprieve, time gained against death. They will always exist here, standing together in this photograph. The intimacy of their gestures and their familial closeness amid destruction and annihilation lives on. They exist paradoxically, forever alive and long-dead.

Seeking additional information, I learned that these five photographs were taken sometime between December 15 and 17, 1941, six months after the German Wehrmacht captured Liepāja from the USSR on June 29, 1941. Approximately 2,749 Jews were murdered within those three days.[17]

These photographs were taken by SS Commander Karl-Emil Strott, who worked at the German Security Service office. It can, therefore, be presumed that rather than being actively involved in the executions, he was present as a spectator. David Zivcon, a captive Jew employed as an electrician repairing the wiring in Commander Strott's office, found four rolls of film. Holding the negatives up to the light, he was horrified by what he saw. Zivcon promptly and secretly had prints made, then returned the rolls of film to the Commander's office. He buried the photographs in a metal box and only retrieved them after the Germans were driven out of Liepāja. Had he not done so, these photographs would have likely been lost to history, destroyed by retreating Nazis when the Third Reich fell.

I also discovered that the women and children gathered in this portrait may not have been immediate family members. Historians and surviving community members have tried to identify them. The youngest girl on the left, lowering her head and standing partially behind who I presumed was her mother, might have been ten-year-old Sorella Epstein. The woman next to her could have been her mother, Rosa Epstein (aged 47), or Paula Goldman. The 'grandmother' standing in the middle might have been Fruma Purvie. The girl next to her could be Mia Epstein (aged 18) or Naomi Yankelowitz. Or, Mia Epstein could have been the girl beside her on the far right.



1.7 Close up of the family photograph showing Sorella standing partially behind her 'mother' and lowering her head.

What, I wonder, is a name without certainty? How do we remember the unnamed?

Despite this uncertainty, I continue to regard the photograph as a family portrait. I continue to look intently, hoping for a shift that will reveal more, but the image remains uncompromisingly silent and still. All my attempts to discover a sense of who they were – who they were in this moment – seem utterly futile and flagrantly reductive. It is this not-knowing that keeps me looking, waiting, and yearning to know.

I find my attention disconcertingly drawn to Sorella[18] Epstein, the youngest girl on the far left, who, by standing just behind the woman I regard as her mother, breaks with the familial union of linking arms and with the conventional performativity of the pose – visibly presenting oneself to be seen by the camera (Figure 1.7). By shielding herself from the camera and the gaze of Commander Strott, she also refuses to look up at me. How am I to make sense of Sorella's refusal to meet my gaze? How am I to make sense of being refused the sight of her face, from which I might intuit even the slightest expression of personhood?

Sorella's refusal to meet my gaze is particularly destabilising, revealing an unknowingness within. A shift in approach needs to occur, from interpretation to a description of the unfolding relation between myself, Sorella, and the photograph.

Centring the Photograph to Begin Watching the Past

By placing the Liepāja family photograph as the entry point of my research, I am employing Tina M. Campt's method of writing through photographs, which is when "we make the photograph the centre of, rather than an illustration or documentary supplement to, historical writing" (Campt, 2012:7). This method, she proposes, "necessarily forces us to examine both exactly what we believe we see in the photograph and the frameworks through which those depictions become meaningful social representations" (Campt, 2012:7). Writing through photographs challenges these socio-political systems and conventions that pre-empt and delimit what we believe we see, thus affording the possibility to see otherwise. According to Campt, the challenge to see otherwise enables us to bear witness to the agential aspirations of people who refused to be essentialised, objectified and victimised by the confines of historical framing – those socio-political frameworks deployed to validate the radically differential partitioning of human life into the human, the sub-human, and the non-human. Campt proposes that writing through photographs can uncover evidence that contradicts or

directly opposes the intended evidence that the photograph was deployed to produce, which is especially significant when it comes to photographs taken against the subject's consent. Consequently, Campt argues that we can bear witness to acts of refusal within those photographs that could not be refused. Therefore, despite the intention to objectify, photography cannot be assumed to effect objectification because its effects cannot be delimited by its instrumentalization.[19]

Crucially, Campt gives value to the recuperative capacity of belatedness. Understanding a photograph must, therefore, not be restricted to historical analysis of its instrumentalization. The desire for certainty is relinquished in pursuit of critical exploration of the speculative that welcomes the uncertain and the unknown. The endeavour of writing through photographs affords not only the multiplicity of histories to emerge but also co-existent incommensurable histories. Likewise, curator and cultural historian Mark Sealy argues that "When we choose over time to put the photograph back to work, its original dominant meaning could become redundant, allowing a secondary reading to surface more clearly. The photograph then becomes enabled to do different cultural work" (2019:70).[20]

Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's postulation of a new ontological-political approach to photography – the civil contract of photography – also re-thinks the supposed limitations of belatedness and requires repositioning photographic inquiry away from the subject-object method of observation and interpretation that confines the photograph to the past. This approach, she argues, "takes into account all the participants in photographic acts – camera, photographer, photographed subject, and spectator – approaching the photograph (and its meaning) as an unintentional effect of the encounter between all of these. None of these have the capacity to seal off this effect and determine its sole meaning" (Azoulay, 2008:23). Azoulay insists that this necessitates forgoing the act of looking, orientated towards the supposedly knowable past, for the act of watching, orientated towards an unfolding, expectant future – the *event* of photography. She adds, "a photograph is never the testimony of the photographer alone, and the event of photography, unlike the photographed event, continues to exist despite all other considerations … The event of photography is never over" (Azoulay, 2012:25). Watching the event of photography not only accounts for the certainty that someone was there, but, according to Azoulay, "in addition, they are still present there at the time I'm watching them" (2008:16). "Introducing the dimensions of time and movement into the act of watching stills," she writes,

> *is the foundation for the ethics of the spectator. This ethics is based on a series of assumptions: photographs do not speak for themselves. Alone, they do not decipher a thing. Identifying what is seen does not excuse the spectator from 'watching' the photograph, rather than looking at it, and from caring for its sense. And the sense of the photograph is subject to negotiation that takes place vis-à-vis a single, stable, permanent image whose presence persists and demands that the spectators cast anchor in it whenever they seek to sail toward an abstraction that is detached from the visible and that then becomes a cliché (Azoulay, 2008:27).*

Watching takes place within the plurality, multiplicity and heterogeneity of the public, where "Every gaze is always exposed to the gaze of the other and its sense changes in accordance with their reactions" (Azoulay, 2012:68). Because watching operates within the citizenry of photography, its sense or meaning cannot be controlled or fixed. It is a means to challenge how photographs have been deployed "for purposes of representation," which "has become one of the most prevalent uses of photography in the political regime to which we are subject, itself grounded on polar relations of inside/outside, citizen/non-citizen, governed/not-governed" (Azoulay, 2012:223). By watching, one must contend not only with the socio-political relations of the photographed past but also those of the present – relations in which one participates that influence what one might see next. "Considered as an event," Azoulay proposes, "photography invites the gaze to wander beyond what the photograph frames, and for individuals to display interest in, responsibility and concern for what they see, in the recognition that each is in turn exposed to a gaze that sees what they cannot or do not want to see" (2012:107). Consequently, a photograph, Azoulay writes, is "always engaged in an ongoing present" (2008:94), where the past is still negotiable – the past as orientated towards an open-ended future. As such, Azoulay proposes that "the entanglement of actions in others' actions constantly pulls the initial actions away from what might be perceived as their irreversible results" (2008:138). Ulrich Baer concurs, writing that "the [photographic] image carries its referent into the uncharted future," which means that the referent is never defined by and within the conditions of the original photographic context (2002:23). "Every photograph," he states, "is addressed to a beyond that remains undefined" (Baer, 2002:182).

Watching a photograph is, therefore, an imaginative and speculative act not only of reconstructing the past but activates futurity.

Emphasising the participatory and particularity of the event of photography, Azoulay explains; "On its own the photograph is incapable of conveying the event to which it attests. The photograph is thus only a point of departure for the reading carried out by whoever stands before it, for who decides to look and to watch. It is the spectator who transforms what is photographed, what happens, into an event" (2008:356). Viewers, Hirsch concurs, "become part of the network of looks exchanged with the image and beyond it. The viewer both participates in and observes the photograph's inscription in its gazes and looks that structure it" (2012:136). Participants who watch become sceptical and critical whenever the evidentiary appears as a neutral carrier of information. However, when it comes to photographs taken by perpetrators, Hirsch begins to doubt this potential of seeing otherwise or beyond their original instrumentalisation. She suggests that "When we confront perpetrator images, we cannot look independently of the look of the perpetrator" (Hirsch, 2012:137). Following Campt and Azoulay, I reject her reductive proposition of the "lethal gaze" and that with these photographs, "All is touched by the death that is the precondition of the image" (Hirsch, 2012:138). Commander Strott is but one participant within the event of the photograph, and so with my act of watching, I am able to see and witness that which he was blind to. I, therefore, also refuse Hirsch's association of the camera with the impending gun and her suggestion that these women and children "are shot before they are shot" (Hirsch, 2012:136).

It is by centering the Liepāja family photograph, writing through the photograph, that I am able to watch it, introduce the force of futurity, so that the certainty of death is transformed into the necessity of re-affirming life – the afterlives of this family with whom I am entangled.

The Emergence of Haptic Sentience

Campt develops her method of writing through photographs to acknowledge an unfolding haptic dimension, which expands on Azoulay's notion of watching into a more intimate yet no less socio-politically charged encounter or event. She states that she uses the term affect to "attend to how certain photographs move people, and why they catalyse forms of emotion, sentiment, meaning and value as objects of feeling and relation, desire and aspiration. I use affect to describe the excess of what registers in and through photographs beyond the visual" (Campt, 2012:16). Moving beyond the visual, she suggests, facilitates a more profound sensorial encounter – an embodied encounter – engendering an opportunity to "explore how these images register at two additional sensory levels: the haptic (touch) and the sonic (sound)" (Campt, 2012:18). Art historian and cultural theorist T.J. Demos also describes affect as an "uncoded sensation and bodily response prior to their structuring and narration" (2013:196). Such encounters are experienced somatically, rather than consciously, meaning that they are effectively indeterminate. Demos proposes that affect "can thus remain non-instrumentalised, open, subjective, and undetermined, rather than moralizing, operationalised, and ideologically directed" (2013:196). Likewise, Jill Bennett writes that affect "produces a real-time somatic experience, no longer framed as representation" (2005:23). It is due to this uncoded somatic quality of affect that enables an opening up of perception, of being attuned to more than what is seen – attuned to the unregulated potentials of what is still to come.

Pertinently, Campt proposes that haptics enables one to encounter "registers through which these images enunciate alternative accounts of their subjects" (2017:5). Haptics challenges our understanding of the past because one can begin to bear witness to lives that were lived and continue to live beyond and despite the intended subjugating determinations of the frame, allowing for the cohabitation of irreconcilability. The haptic relationality of affect enables one to 'see through' the reductive lens of the framed past and be guided towards the expansive field of imagined lived experiences. According to Campt, haptic images are "objects whose effects are structured by a tripartite sense of touch – an indexical touch, a physical touch, and an affiliative touch. It is a touch that suffuses both the composition of the image and our responses or relation to it" (2012:43). She goes on to suggest that "more than demanding a literal touch, they are objects we literally and figuratively grasp and fasten onto" (Campt, 2012:44). To become attentive to the affective registers, Campt proposes listening to images as a method that engenders the haptic dynamics of the sonic. Despite photographs being visual objects, they are by no means silent. Quiet, Campt states, "must not be conflated with silence. Quiet registers sonically, as a level of intensity that requires focused attention" (2017:6). Sound, she continues, "need not be heard to be perceived. Sound

can be listened to, and, in equally powerful ways, sound can be felt; it both touches and moves people. In this way, sound must therefore be theorised and understood as a profoundly haptic form of sensory contact" (Campt, 2017:6). Jacques Rancière compellingly proposes that silent speech is "more truthful than any discourse proffered by a mouth" (2007:13). What I hear in the Liepāja family photograph is my plea for Sorella to look up, repeated over and over in my mind, which goes unacknowledged. Sorella's quiet is, therefore, by no means passive; rather, her refusal reverberates with an intensity that cannot be silenced – a refusal that refutes linguistic form and remains defiant as pure, unstructured, potential qualities of expression

The photographed subjects that Campt pays attention to in her writings could be considered by Butler as "ungrievable lives", those "that cannot be lost, and cannot be destroyed, because they already inhabit a lost and destroyed zone; they are, ontologically, and from the start, already lost and destroyed" (Butler, 2010:xix). However, Campt's concept of haptics suggests that photography is capable not only of rendering these lives grievable, spectral, or present-in-absence, but paradoxically present despite being absent – refusing the zone of the non-human, the already destroyed. The somatic intimacy of haptics can, therefore, challenge what Butler describes as "The epistemological capacity to apprehend a life is partially dependent on that life being produced according to norms that qualify it as a life, or, indeed, as part of a life. In this way, the normative production of ontology thus produces the epistemological problem of apprehending a life" (2010:3).

Yet Butler elaborates on the contingency and instability of norms, how they require continuous reiteration to actualise and stabilise, thus continuously producing exposure to contestation:

> *Subjects are constituted through norms which, in their reiteration, produce and shift the terms through which subjects are recognised. These normative conditions for the production of the subject produce an historically contingent ontology, such that our very capacity to discern and name the "being" of the subject is dependent on norms that facilitate that recognition. At the same time, it would be a mistake to understand the operation of norms as deterministic. Normative schemes are interrupted by one another, they emerge and fade depending on broader operations of power, and very often come up against spectral versions of what it is they claim to know (Butler, 2010:4).*

According to Campt, the haptic approach of listening to images is a means of "refusing the very terms of photographic subjection they were engineered to produce" (2017:5). It is a method, she suggests, "that reckons with the fissures, gaps and interstices that emerge when we refuse to accept the 'truth' of images and archives the state seeks to proffer through its production of subjects posed to produce particular 'types' of regulated and regulatable subjects" (Campt, 2017:8). Haptics disrupts the conventions and representational frames that aid in producing normative regimes of knowledge and ontologies, enabling the possibility to perceive realities beyond the frame by challenging the photograph's presumed evidentiary and transparent nature.

Connecting haptics to Azoulay's postulation of the photograph as an event, Campt writes that haptics "have multiple temporalities" (2012:34). When reflecting on the Liepāja family photograph, I find myself listening to the unspoken and watching for the unseen – attentive to what is yet to come, not merely what might be revealed within the frame, but the affects beyond in the lived here and now.

The Family's Imagining of Impossible Futures

The intimacy of haptics, with its capacity to break away from established beliefs, repudiate the photograph's pastness, and its ensuing emanation of temporal multiplicity, necessitates a return to reconsidering the implications of the familial which builds on the photograph's futurity. To recap: Describing the Liepāja photograph as a family portrait, alluding to such a supposedly quotidian genre, is wholly incongruous with the circumstances in which it was taken. However, by doing so, I imaginatively take up a position of inclusion within the fold of kinship. Hirsch proposes that recognising a photograph as familial elicits "a specific kind of readerly or spectatorial look, an affiliative look through which we are sutured into the image and through which we adopt the image into our own family narrative" (1997:93). The familial or affiliative look is, therefore, not limited to one's own family photographs. It describes any photographic encounter that affects a viewer's sense of self and belonging by evoking intimate connection with others, however propositional, suppositional, or imaginary. Accordingly, the familial relation I adopt means that I am inquiring into an instance of intimate relationality. Within my inquiry, I will be heeding Campt's proposition that the familial sensibility with a photograph is not merely genealogical or descriptive; rather, it accounts for

how these photographs evoke a "crucial sensibility that registers in these images at multiple sensory and affective levels. It is a sensibility that begins with vision and sight, with what we see, but it certainly does not end there" (Campt, 2012:13).

In their respective discussions of how family photographs offer a mimetic performance of an image of the family, Hirsch and Campt propose that family photographs are by no means merely records of private events. Rather, they are often idealised representations informed by historically specific cultural and social norms – a politicised performance that reveals the aspirations of the times. These photographs, Hirsch writes, sustain "an imaginary cohesion, even as [they exacerbate] them by creating images that real families cannot uphold" (1997:7). Family photographs, she goes on to state, "can more easily show us what we wish our family to be, and therefore what, most frequently it is not" (Hirsch, 1997:8). Campt concurs that family portraits are what she terms a performative practice, "records of intentions," which reflect "who these individuals aspired to be; how they wanted to be seen; what they sought to represent and articulate through them; and what they attempted or intended to project and portray" (2012:6). Because family photographs were made to be viewed by the family themselves, Campt proposes that as outsiders looking at these private performative moments, we can "engage these images as sites of articulation and aspiration; as personal and social statements that express how ordinary individuals envisage their sense of self, their subjectivity, and their social status; and as objects [that] capture and preserve those articulations in the present as well as for the future" (2012:7). Hirsch and Campt are suggesting that historical family photographs, particularly portraits, do not only show or depict a moment from the past but provide insight into how these people from the past imagined the future, or rather, what kind of future they sought to actualize in the present. Looking at such photographs, one needs to ask: What aspirations were the family performing for themselves when they arranged themselves to be seen photographically?

Socio-cultural critic and activist bell hooks reflects on how snapshot family photographs, those private images made by and for black American families during the era of racial segregation, were not merely aspirational performances but acts of political resistance against racial stereotypes. She states, "When we concentrate on photography, then, we make it possible to see the walls of photographs in black homes as a critical intervention, a disruption of white control of black images" (hooks, 1994:47). "The sites of contestation," hooks continues:

> *were not out there, in the world of white power, they were within segregated black life … Significantly, issues of representation were linked with the issue of documentation, hence the importance of photography. The camera was the central instrument by which black folks could disprove representations of us created by white folks … More than any other image-making tool, it offered African Americans disempowered in white culture a way to empower ourselves through representation (hooks, 1994:48).*

These family photographs testify to the fact that the private domestic space was where the desired future of the public realm was not merely imaginatively performed, but enacted and lived. The domestic space of the socio-politically disenfranchised must, therefore, be acknowledged as a potential site of radical resistance. The supposed mundaneness of these images proves to be evidence of extraordinary defiance. hooks attests:

> *Contrary to colonizing socialization, internal racism, they [family photographs] announced our visual complexity. We saw ourselves represented in these images not as caricatures, cartoon-like figures; we were there in full diversity of body, being and expression, multidimensional. Reflecting the way black folks looked at themselves in those private spaces, where those ways of looking were not being overseen by a white colonizing eye, a white supremacist gaze, these images created ruptures in our experience of the visual (hooks, 1994:50).*

The actualization of the aspirational that hooks observes in these family photographs means that the future, or more accurately, what was at the time an impossible future, was lived privately in the present.

How might I apply this notion of the aspirational to the Liepāja family portrait in *The Yellow Star*? Troubling questions arise. Is it possible to conceive of this photograph as aspirational, or evidence of a performed future, when it was taken moments before their execution? How could they believe in a future when facing the abyss? Despite the actual circumstances, it is this seeming impossibility to which I now watch and bear witness that continues to haunt me. My reflections return to Sorella, the young girl who, by standing partially behind her mother and looking down, refuses to look at the photographer – and who now refuses to meet my gaze. This break from conventional posed portraiture becomes particularly troubling because it initially seems to disrupt and impede the futurity of the aspirational.

Sorella's act of refusal is elucidated by Campt when she turns her attention to photographic archives of those who have been photographed against their will. As mentioned, these archives, too often presumed as evidence of the subjects' oppression and dehumanisation, reveal instances where Campt witnesses, albeit retroactively, enactments of what seemed impossible – escape. She writes that attentive sensitivity to the aspirational enables the viewer to encounter the photographed subject's refusal to be confined and determined by the historical circumstances of the photograph's production. "It is a refusal," Campt states, "I equate with a striving for freedom" (2017:32). Campt claims that these refusals are acts of fugitivity which, "highlights the tense relations between acts of flight and escape, and creative practices of refusal – nimble and strategic practices that undermine the categories of the dominant" (Campt, 2017:32). The fugitivity witnessed by Campt is spatial and temporal – a refusal to exist within the framed past of the photograph. For the fugitive to remain free, they must always be on the move and transient, somewhere unknown – elsewhere. By hiding her face, Sorella escapes the gaze, the delineating photographic frame, the constricting orientation of pastness and the fact of impending death.

Édouard Glissant's theorisation of opacity offers insight into how refusal and fugitivity are deployed as strategies and tactics of resistance, explaining how Sorella's refusal to look up at me paradoxically becomes the means by which I encounter her liveliness and ineradicable presence. "Opaqueness," Glissant writes, "is a positive value to be opposed to any pseudo-humanist attempt to reduce us to the scale of some universal model. The welcome opaqueness, through which the other escapes me, obliging me to be vigilant whenever I approach" (1989:162). Sorella's act of hiding her face creates a moment of visual opacity within the photograph, but it is also a moment in which she enacts an ontological opacity that begins to suffuse the photograph, engendering an equivocal un-knowingness.

Glissant developed his theory of opacity by observing the linguistic strategies of Creole in the Caribbean, which developed as a necessary means of covert communication between captive African slaves who worked on the sugar plantations of French colonialists. The African slaves tactically dismantled the linguistic structures of French so that, as Glissant states, "No one could translate the meaning of what seemed to be nothing but a shout … So the meaning of a sentence is sometimes hidden in the accelerated nonsense created by scrambled sounds. But this nonsense does convey real meaning to which the master's ear cannot have access" (1989:124). Linguist Celia Britton adds that "Creole thus developed as a subversive language whose purpose from the start was not simple to communicate but also to conceal meaning, thereby turning the master's language against him" (1999:25).

By transposing the tactics of opacity to my encounter with the Liepāja family photograph, what first appears as an act of compliance and cooperation – posing for the photographer-cum-executioner – is transformed into an act of refusal against his annihilating gaze and my desiring gaze for understanding and knowing. The latter would enact a further violation by reinforcing the photograph's presumed power of capture.

However, despite Creole's subversive opacity, Glissant claims it "falls short of its potential …. Creole is also a concession made by the Other for his own purposes in his dealings with our world. We have seized this concession to use it for our own purposes… but having seized it does not make it into a means of self-expression" (1989:166-167). Glissant terms Creole's fraught ambiguous formation as a counter-poetics or forced poetics, which he explains as "any collective desire for expression that, when it manifests itself, is negated at the same time because of the *deficiency* that stifles it, not at the level of desire, which never ceases, but at the level of expression, which is never realised" (1989:120). It is a strategy that "exists where a need for expression confronts an inability to achieve expression … created from the awareness of the opposition between a language that one uses and a form of expression that one needs" (Glissant, 1989:120-121).[21]

While bearing witness to refusal and the aspirational, I cannot eradicate SS Commander Strott's gaze, through which I too see, resulting in a complicated cohabitation fraught with tension, conflict, and counter-poetics. To reiterate, Azoulay proposes that the photograph lends itself to such various relational and antithetical modes of seeing. She writes, "we must assume that the photographed subjects also have the ability to use force at the moment of photography and can undermine, though paradoxically in cooperation with the photographer and with the mediating assistance of spectators – the explicit aims of the photographer and those who sent him" (Azoulay, 2008:172). The ambiguous counter-poetics of these kinds of photographs keep them open to changing interpretations, ongoing watching, complex, and even paradoxical imaginings that continue to impact and inform the ever-changing past and present. Butler corroborates that "the indefinite circulability of the image allows the event to continue to happen" (2010:86). Photographs are unique instances where the past is endowed with futurity, albeit an imaginary futurity, which not only has profound reverberations in the present, but in experiencing the relational folding and unfolding of the

past, present, and future that shatters time. Sorella and her family were indeed murdered on that day, but they continue to enact a haunting presence upon me, and it is my obligation to be attuned to what this haunting does and how it impacts my sense of being-in-the-world.

Sorella's breaking of the conventional performance of familial portraiture, by refusing to look up, is a lively, affecting, and wounding counter-poetics. She creates an opening – an aperture of injury – which obligates me to contend with interminable injurious grief. I sense my own embodied vulnerability and precarity. "I am wounded," as Butler writes, "and I find that the wound itself testifies to the fact that I am impressionable, given over to the Other in ways that I cannot fully predict or control" (2006:46). All I can do is silently plead, *Look up, Sorella. Please look up at me.*

The Becoming and Unbecoming of Relationality

Butler proposes that the personal experience of grief can be activated on an expansive socio-political scale, allowing the foundational vulnerability, haptic relationality, and interdependency of the embodied human condition – and life itself – to be perceived. It is in the experience of grief that we encounter our own un-knowingness. "Something," she writes, "takes hold of you: where does it come from? What sense does it take? What claims us at such moments, such that we are not the masters of ourselves? To what are we tied? And by what are we seized?" (Butler, 2006:21).

As mentioned, Butler questions the normative, in other words, the exclusionary conditions that constitute the human: which lives are grievable, and which lives are ungrievable – those expunged from the human, where violation and violence are normalised to the extent of often becoming unperceivable. Her hypothesis of the political potential of vulnerability and grief resonates with the affective dynamics of haptics. "What grief displays," Butler writes,

> *is the thrall in which our relations with others hold us, in ways we cannot always recount or explain, in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to provide, in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control … the 'I' is called into question by its relation to the Other, a relation that does not precisely reduce me to speechlessness, but does nevertheless clutter my speech with signs of its undoing (Butler, 2006:23).*

Subsequently, Butler proposes, "we are not only constituted by our relations but also dispossessed by them as well" (2006:24). The relationality of the human condition is therefore grounded upon the shared experience of precarity and the originary condition of being entangled with others – the grievable and more significantly the ungrievable, who impinge upon our sense of self by returning to disclose the violence done by the exclusionary domain of what constitutes the human. Precariousness, Butler writes,

> *implies living socially, that is, the fact that one's life is always in some sense in the hands of the other. It implies exposure both to those we know and to those we do not know; a dependency on people we know, or barely know, or know not at all. Reciprocally, it implies being impinged upon by the exposure and dependency of others, most of whom remain anonymous. These are not necessarily relations of love or even of care, but constitute obligations towards others, most of whom we cannot name and do not know, and who may or may not bear traits of familiarity to an established sense of who 'we' are" (Butler, 2010:14).*

With the Liepāja family photograph, an image of those who were considered ungrievable, I discovered such a relation – intimate and familial, yet concomitant with irreparable loss and resolute unknowing, whom now, because of this photograph, I am obligated to grieve. Fittingly, Butler writes, "this sphere of dispossession is precisely the one that exposes my unknowingness, the unconscious imprint of my primary sociality" (2006:28).

I take up Butler's proposition that, on account of dispossession and the discovery of unknowing, "we might critically evaluate and oppose the conditions under which certain human lives are more vulnerable than others, and thus certain human lives are more grievable than others" (2006:30). I also heed the impasse that Butler apprehends within her politics of grief and vulnerability due to the fact that "vulnerability is fundamentally dependent on existing norms of recognition if it is to be attributed to any human subject … We cannot posit this vulnerability prior to recognition without performing the very thesis that we oppose (our positing is itself a form of recognition and so manifests the constitutive power of the discourse)" (2006:43). "It would seem," Butler suggests, "that I am as much constituted by those I do grieve for as by those whose deaths I disavow" (2006:46).

As stated, the murder of Sorella, her family, and community was one such instance of historical disavowal. This disavowal necessitates an exploration of how my life is intrinsically tied to others from different places and times – those that have been and continue

to be disavowed. It is within Butler's politics of vulnerability that we discover the intrinsic phenomenon of relationality – our becomings and unbecomings and how our humanity is predicated on our own inhumanity. It is also because of my experience of grief that I must go in search of meaning elsewhere. As Bennett writes, grief "must be thought of in terms of an unfolding into the world that must be remade in the aftermath of tragedy" (2005:68). My encounter with the family photograph and Sorella's refusal has rendered the world strange, engendering a sense of placelessness, of being somewhere between here and there, self and other, that forcefully disrupts my sense of spatio-temporal stability. Space and time are not only opened-up, but shattered – ruined. Thus, my encounter with the photograph has necessitated a re-orientation and re-articulation of being-in-time.

Imagining for Myself

In *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz* (2012), Georges Didi-Huberman provides a framework that guides my inquiry into the Liepāja family photograph and Sorella's refusal and assists in identifying methodologies for an artistic response. He argues that the four photographs in question (Figures 1.7 & 1.8), despite their lack of clarity, bear witness to an unimaginable and unthinkable atrocity: the *Sonderkommando*, the 'special squad' of prisoners who worked in the gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau. According to Didi- Huberman, their obscurity – the large black frames in the first two photographs and even the abstracted birch trees in the fourth photograph – rather than failing to provide visual evidence, testifies to historical truth: the impossibility of photography at Auschwitz-Birkenau that these photographs paradoxically affirm while disputing. These elements that obstruct the visible are vital visual factors, conveying the danger surrounding the moment the photographs were taken and the necessity to imagine the circumstances surrounding the event.[22]

The *Sonderkommando* photographs and the Liepāja family photograph can therefore be situation in what Eduardo Cadava terms "the image of ruins" (2001:35), which are images that not only show ruins, the destruction of what was, but show how every image is essentially one of ruin – every image participates within a process of self-ruination. He proposes that every image "bears witness to the enigmatic relation between death and survival, loss and life, destruction and preservation, mourning and memory … This is why the image of ruin … so often speaks of the death, if not the impossibility of the image" (Cadava, 2001:35). Cadava therefore argues that the image brings to bear "the entire logic of the world" (2001:36). He explains:

> *Like the world, the image allows itself to be experienced only as what withdraws from experience. Its experience … is an experience of the impossibility of experience. The image tells us that it is with loss and ruin that we have to live. Nevertheless, what makes the image an image is its capacity to bear the traces of what it cannot show, to go on, in the face of this loss and ruin, to suggest and gesture toward its potential for speaking (Cadava, 2001:36).*

The image, Cadava goes on to write, "nevertheless shows and bears witness to what history has silenced, to what, no longer here, and arising from the darkest nights of memory, haunts us, and encourages us to remember the deaths and losses for which we remain, still today, responsible" (Cadava, 2001:36). Because images of ruin bear witness to their very impossibility, their own ruination, they convey an unbearable truth regarding not only the past, but our being-in-the-world that we, as belated viewers of these snatched fragments, are obligated to confront.

With the *Sonderkommando* photographs, Didi-Huberman challenges the assumption that for a photograph to provide valuable historical information, it must be visably clear, presenting identifiable and describable scenes. He proposes that it is not only erroneous but reckless to presume that a photograph can offer itself up for full exposition and convey the totality of an event – the *all image* that imparts the *all of knowing*. However, photographs remain crucial, hence his insistence on "images *in spite of all*" (Didi-Huberman, 2012:3). Evoking Cadava's image in ruin, Didi-Huberman expresses a necessary paradox: to appreciate the power of images, one must "try to understand their necessity through their very function of remaining deficient" (Didi-Huberman, 2012:45). "An image," he provocatively states, "is not 'the denial of absence' but, rather, it's very attestation" (Didi-Huberman, 2012:163). "Effacing what it inscribes", Cadava concurs, "the image bears witness to the impossibility of testimony. It remains as a testament to loss" (2001:49). What are we to make of these seemingly conflicting statements that a photograph is capable of bearing witness in spite of all whilst attesting to absence? Cadava, refers to the critical instant of Walter Benjamin's conceptualisation of the now, the fleeting moment when the image of history is read, which postulates this conflicting moment of emergence and withdrawal as innate to images and



1.8 Photographs I - IV of the Sonderkommando from Auschwitz-Birkenau. (August 1944).

The photographs were supposedly taken by a Greek Jew called Alex, whose family name remains unknown.

The first two photographs taken from inside the gas chamber show the cremation of gassed bodies in open-air pits behind the gas chamber of crematorium V. In the bottom left-hand corner of the third photograph women are being pushed towards the gas chamber. In the fourth photograph the camera was pointed upwards and records the birch trees.

Didi-Huberman, G. 2012. Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz. Lillis, S.B. Trans. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 12-15



1.9 Cropped photographs II & III of the *Sonderkommando* from Auschwitz-Birkenau. (August 1944).

Didi-Huberman, G. 2012. Images in *Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*. Lillis, S.B. Trans. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 35 & 37.

to history itself. "The possibility of this dissolution", he writes, "belongs to what makes an image an image, and, in particular, to what makes an image a genuinely historical image" (Cadava, 2001:38). It is precisely because the photograph testifies to what has been lost or destroyed that it compels us to bear witness, underscoring its historical imperative, particularly for those traumatic events that were meant to be suppressed and forgotten. As with the *Sonderkommando* photographs, the Liepāja family photograph and the others within the series were rescued from oblivion; therefore, we are obligated to bear witness in spite of the impossibility of knowing all. Hence Didi-Huberman's provocative claim "In order to know, we must *imagine* for ourselves" (2012:3). We cannot rely on what is pre-given. To know, we have to turn inwards to imagine, to create, and bring forth the unknown, which involves the dialectics of un-knowing.

However, in *Confronting Images* (2005), Didi-Huberman raises an ensuing quandary regarding the oppositional nature of knowledge and the imagination: "If the image is what makes us imagine, and if the (sensible) imagination is an obstacle to (intelligible) knowledge, how then can one know an image?" (2005:xvii). Didi-Huberman urges us "to think the element of not-knowledge that dazzles us whenever we pose our gaze to an art image" (2005:7), proposing that the desire to know, decipher, or interpret an image can distance the viewer from it. Conversely, by focusing on the image's materiality, opacity, and affect, those qualities that are presented rather than represented, one is drawn back to the image itself, becoming more attentive to the variability and particularity of sense perception and the imagination.

Although the statements from *Confronting Images* refer to artworks, Didi-Huberman's claims become even more pertinent when applied to his inquiry into documentary photographs. The evidentiary of photography is not merely a question of the past, showing the thing that was there in a specific time and place, but situated ambiguously in the dialectic of time, where chronological time is shattered and ruined. This is because attending to what lies beyond the frame and envisioning the invisible before and after, past and future, is crucial for bearing witness to an event captured only fragmentarily within the photograph. Such a relationship between the visible and invisible – past, present and future – is especially pertinent to photographs capturing traumatic events, where the imagination and knowing seem impossible, a situation Didi-Huberman describes as a "lacunary necessity" (2012:45). He

appeals to his readers: "Let us not shelter ourselves by saying that we cannot, that we could not by any means, imagine it to the very end. We are obliged to that oppressive imaginable" (Didi-Huberman, 2012:3). It is this oppressive imaginable that compels my inquiry into the Liepāja family portrait – I have to know in spite of all.

Regarding traumatic events that invoke the unimaginable, the unthinkable, or the unsayable, Didi-Huberman writes that the image "suddenly appears where thought – or 'reflection' – seems impossible, or at least where it appears to be at a standstill: stunned, stupefied" (2012:31). He reiterates that "imagination is not a withdrawal to the mirages of a single reflection, as is so often thought. It is instead a construction and montage of various forms placed in correspondence with one another" (Didi-Huberman, 2012:120). Didi-Huberman's extensive argument posits that the value of images and the knowledge they grant cannot be achieved by isolated scrutiny, as images never exist alone. They possess a power of expansion that defies any attempt to confine their meaning and symbolisation through definitive interpretations. He further asserts that we must place images "*in time*" to avoid oversimplifying them (Didi-Huberman, 2011:94). Discussing Benjamin's conceptualisation of the now, Didi-Huberman proposes:

> *Historical knowledge only [comes] about through the 'now', that is, through a state of our present experience from which emerges, from amongst the immense archive of text and images or testimonies of the past, a moment of memory and readability that appears, and this is essential in Benjamin's conception, as a critical point, a symptom, a sense of uneasiness within tradition, which up until then painted a more or less recognisable picture of the past (Didi-Huberman, 2011:87).*

Likewise, Cadava, informed by Benjamin, claims that for an image to be intelligible, "this 'Now,' composed, like the present, of all the possible images that are synchronic with it, is never simply 'Now.' It is never separable from the 'Then'" (Cadava, 2001:38-39). He then explains, "This is why the historical index of an image always claims the image for another time – for another historical moment (itself plural, and composed of several other moments) and for something other than linear, chronometric time" (Cadava, 2001:39). Referring to Benjamin's theorising of the image's historical index, he continues that it therefore "cannot be understood as either indexical or referential: it can never index or refer to a single historical

moment or event" (Cadava, 2001:39). To understand an image, one must imagine, and bring into relation, the innumerable other images that bear upon one another, even those images that were never made or impossible to make, while remaining cognisant of the impossibility of knowing all. In this way, montage, the breaking up and re-composition of time, offers a process of availing oneself to the openness, vulnerability and uncertainty of un-knowing. It is a process of rupturing, breaking away from, and going outside the known, bringing the outside in: suturing, re-cutting, and rearranging with tireless curiosity. This process is not motivated by obtaining a resolution, or the finitude of knowledge, but is dedicated to acknowledging the contingency of our claims to know. As such, Didi-Huberman proposes that "the multiplication and the conjunction of images, however lacunary and relative they may be, constitute just as many ways of showing in spite of all what cannot be seen. The first and simplest way to show what escapes us is to make a montage of its figural detour by associating several views or several time periods of the same phenomenon" (2012:133-134). According to Cadava, this breaking away is necessitated by image itself, which offers "us the truth of time, tells us that history is something to which we can never be present" (2001:40). Cadava therefore seems to challenge my claim that the image can re-present historical trauma. My argument for re-presentation also does not propose that the image becomes present, a stable representation that becomes intelligible, because, by coming forth symptomatically, it comes forth with its unknowability and with all its potential for knowing. Re-presentation is when the infinite potentiality of the now comes into view, when one can sense the full force if its explosive temporality.

For Didi-Huberman the photographic image maintains a fragment of truth, which seems in opposition to Cadava's claim that the image of history can never being present, but both are arguing around a very similar point. Because Didi-Huberman's fragment of truth still requires montage and the imagination to recreate a sense of the event, his postulation of the photograph's temporality is comparable to Benjamin's now, which Cadava explains, demonstrates "the noncontemporaneity of the present, the absence of linearity in the representation of historical time, and therefore the fugitivity of the past and the present" (Cadava, 2001:42). It is because the instant of an image's readability is fleeting 'like a flash of lightning', illuminating and incinerating, that Didi-Huberman insists on montage, which is not a defence, but an amplification and energising of the system to keep flashing. It is an attempt

at constantly supplying images to keep the fires of history burning. Despite all this burning, this fire and ash, Cadava affirms that "we must learn to read the past, and in particular, the irretrievable images of the past, in a way that knows how these images threaten to disappear as long as we do not recognise ourselves in them – but ourselves as the ones who, touched by the ruins of time and history, are no longer simply ourselves" (2001:60).

It is from within this moment of ruin that I attempt to understand and bear witness to the Liepāja family photograph. My inquiry has involved not only seeking additional historical information but also engaging with the personal affective and haptic dimensions, which originated from the specificity of the book itself and my familial investment or sentiment. This personal aspect then expanded to a more generalised conception of the familial, prompting the investigation into how the familial schema influences the image, and in what ways it activates the image differently than historical information alone. I began to perceive the impossible – an irrepressible futurity. Through this process, I disconcertingly found myself as always already having been lost. I found myself within an essential originary entanglement – somewhere between here and elsewhere – always already other to myself.

In preparation to respond and explore where Sorella's refusal and the photograph's futurity leads to and the task of finding methodologies to know by imagining for myself in spite of all, the plea returns: *Look up Sorella. Please look up at me.*

Chapter II

Art-Making: The Art of Participatory History



The image is not the duplication of a thing. It is a complex set of relations between the visible and the invisible, the visible and speech, the said and the unsaid. It is not a mere reproduction of what is out there in front of the photographer or filmmaker. The image is always an alteration that occurs in a chain of images which alter it in turn.

(Rancière, J. 2011:93-94)

Art in Conversation

I now turn my inquiry to a selection of artworks by Penny Siopis and Anton Kusters to identify strategies for formulating a creative response to the Liepāja family photograph – the becomings, un-becomings and un-knowings affected by it. This response also addresses Sorella's refusal to my plea to look up and meet my gaze. My inquiry is less thematic, as it does not primarily seek to draw parallels between the socio-politics of historical events. Instead, it is more methodological, focusing on the philosophical and critical theorising that emerges from Siopis's and Kusters' creative praxis. While their work has socio-political implications, they manifest in a non-determinate way. I will show how a complex socio-political constellation embedded in their artworks is engendered by particularity, which is how the viewer is obliged to participate in the emanation of meaning by imagining for themselves. Discussing the experience of viewing Siopis's films, but equally applicable to Kusters' artwork, artist, filmmaker, curator and theorist John Akomfrah states that one surrenders "to the impossibility of knowing" (2024:271), "groping in the space of not-knowing for some sense of clarity" (2024:275), which, to reiterate Georges Didi-Huberman, we are therefore obliged to imagine for ourselves in spite of all (2012:3).

Jacques Rancière's statement in the epigraph regarding the image's relationality is crucial to the following discussion of artworks by Siopis and Kusters. This relationality exists between discrete images, between what is visible and invisible, and between what can be said and what remains not only unsaid, but unsayable. Their artworks mobilise what Rancière describes as the political effect of aesthetic experience:

> *What it produces is not rhetorical persuasion about what must be done. Nor is it the framing of a collective body. It is the multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world they live in and the way in which they are 'equipped' to adapt to it. It is a multiplication of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible. As such, it allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective enunciation (Rancière, 2011:72).*

Siopis and Kusters engage with this political potential of aesthetic experience which, Rancière continues, "occurs under the condition of an original disjunction, an original effect, which is the suspension of any direct relationship between cause and effect" (2011:72-73). Addressing the ethical implications, Rancière states, "An image never stands alone. It belongs to a system of visibility that governs the status of the bodies represented and the kind of attention they merit. The issue is knowing the kinds of attention prompted by some particular system" (2011:99). In their artworks, Siopis and Kusters respond to this question of attention by employing strategies that do not necessarily compete with historicity but instead shift the focus to the work of re-membering, which is related to embodied encounters, where notions of memory and history are particularised, its effects undetermined and suggestive of Walter Benjamin's critical moment of the now.

By bringing Siopis's and Kusters' artworks into conversation, the scope of what can be seen and said about each artwork expands, revealing insights that isolated inquiry might not uncover. It will also become evident how their artworks offer us an understanding of "how *seeing* and *being in time* are inseparable and are even mutually grasped" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:xv). Christine Ross's term *intertemporality* accounts for this process where the spectator becomes aware of the temporal dimension of perception, "so that perception may be part of the process by which potentiality unfolds" (Ross, 2012:119). Thus, she proposes that film (and, by extension, photography) is as much about perception as it is about time. Through the discussion of Siopis's and Kusters' artworks, I will argue how, rather than simply coming to an understanding of the past, the past is re-presented, where the potentiality exists in actualising what might seem impossible and unimaginable. As T. J. Demos writes, "Past events are revealed to be infused with 'potentiality', which names more than the merely possible, as in its irreducibility to the actual" (2013:59-60).

How Specific Artistic Strategies Work in Responding to Traumatic History

The artworks under discussion by both Siopis and Kusters attend to traumatic historical events where the image exists in contradistinction – absence and profusion, respectively. In both cases, they employ strategies that highlight the opaque dimensions of images, challenging representational fixations and undermining essentialist notions associated with

filmic or photographic evidence and objectification. The subjects of their artworks remain, at their core, external to the frame. How, then, do their artworks function in relation to the past or remembering the past, if, as James Elkins proposes, "seeing and memory go together" (1996:202)? Rather than being visibly present, the subjects of their artworks emanate an affective presence, one that is virtually apprehended, thus remaining ambiguous. This un-knowability, Demos suggests, is "a sign of potentiality" (2013:145).

Analogous to Didi-Huberman's lacunary necessity, Griselda Pollock's "negative knowledge of the unknowable" elucidates on the difficult but necessary task of imaging traumatic events so that one can encounter their traces and symptomatic afterlives .

> *Historical trauma and suffering should not be aestheticized. Yet it is perhaps only through the modes of knowing and feeling incited or engendered by aesthetic practice as formulation – at once giving form and reshaping meaning affectively for an unassimilated event – that trauma can be riddled into critical consciousness and transformed (Pollock, 2024:89).*

I am in accordance with Pollock's opinion that art has the potential to create an *event*, a moment of emergence, "a *belatedly originary* site … so that we *intimate* traumatic residues without reducing them to a representation that cannot but be evaded because of its inevitable inadequacy" (2024:89). Jill Bennett also proposes that artworks can deploy aesthetic affect to "mimic the sudden impact of trauma, or the quality of a post-traumatic memory, characterised by the involuntary repetition of an experience that the mind fails to access in the normal way" (2005:11). It will become evident how Siopis and Kusters strategically employ the embodied experience of affect to convey the sense of trauma by inviting viewers towards what Pollock (who draws on post-trauma artist and theorist Bracha L. Ettinger) terms a *self-fragilisation*, where one is open "to share in the ethical, co-humanising burden of the *impossibility of not-sharing* the trauma of the Other and the world" (Pollock, 2024:91). Echoing Pollock, Bennett suggests that such artworks are not merely introspective investigations, but engage in "a transformative process that impacts on the world as much as on bodies" (Bennett, 2005:12). She claims that it is due to this presence or *force* that "visual art presents trauma as a *political* rather than a subjective phenomenon. It does not offer us a privileged view of the inner subject; rather, by giving trauma extension in space or lived *place*, it invites an awareness of different modes of inhabitation" (Bennett, 2005:12). Applying Bennett's observations, Siopis's and Kusters'

artworks "are not didactic images, mediating a message, but inclined towards the expressive in the way they play on a certain affective quality of space and objects to evoke modes of subjective experience, and specifically of loss" (Bennett, 2005:151). Mirela Lapugean elaborates on this notion of loss, proposing that "traumatic representation is a negative representation, since it refers back to an absence, to a loss. In representing trauma, absence becomes a signifier" (2015:87). Because the subjects of Siopis's and Kusters' artworks remain obscure, opaque, and visually absent, they can move beyond the historical specificity of place and time, thereby impacting a far larger socio-political landscape across national historical narratives, whereby their artworks invoke the spatio-temporal destabilisations of the symptom.

In Siopis's films, each of which revolves around a specific person from South Africa's past, visuals are sourced to supplement the absent image of the historical subject to imaginatively and obliquely represent these events. This imagery is then re-assembled with emotive audio tracks and first-person narration in the form of subtitles. For Kusters, despite the enormity of archival records from Nazi Germany's concentration camps, the images and documents remain insufficient and incapable of configuring the historical event as 'knowable'. The historical subjects of his artwork are an unknown multitude. Kusters likewise deploys images outside of the historical event, coupling them with GPS coordinates that mark the location of the concentration camps. His photographs are exhibited within a resonant audio environment, allowing information to overlay and intertwine with the obscure and the emotive. By using audio-visual materials that have no direct correlation to the historical events dealt with in their artworks, both Siopis and Kusters compel the viewer to actively search for meaning between disparate elements. Trinh T. Minh-ha advises on taking such an indirect approach. "It is important to remember that if one goes directly to an object, if one tries to seize it, one would always somehow lose it, and this is for me one way to live truth … a creative event does not grasp, it does not take possession, it is an excursion" (Minh-ha, 1999:33). Siopis and Kusters take the viewer on excursions that are as much about how we remember the past as about how we live with the past in the present and into the unknown future. This indirect approach, Minh-ha continues, "allows oneself to get acquainted with the envelope, that is, with all the elements that surround, situate or simply relate to it" (1999:34). She adds, "when you let things resonate and approach them indirectly, you are opening up a space in which absence and presence never work as mere oppositions" (Minh-ha, 1999:38). By working with

the dialectic of absence and presence, Siopis and Kusters confront Didi-Huberman's assertion that the deficiency and ensuing necessity of images is one of socio-political import and historical responsibility.

I will be focusing on three of Siopis's films, all of which utilise found footage of home movies salvaged from charity stores, thrift shops, and flea markets from South Africa and abroad, filmed on outmoded analogue 8mm or 16mm film.[23] This footage, historian and political theorist Achille Mbembe writes, "do not only tell stories, they themselves have histories" (2024:215). Siopis explained to Mbembe that "The material speaks as much as the image" (Siopis, 2024:217). Siopis also states that the physical properties of the footage "become potential characters in the film, each acting a role as might any representational subject … It exposes the lie of representational transparency. And also allows me a way of working with concepts of opacity" (2024:273). I will discuss how Siopis's approach to filmmaking is not merely illustrative, but how the materiality of the aged and damaged footage has its own narrative capacities that take us closer to the event, and at other times take us away from it. Siopis edits together disparate sequences of found footage, filmed by and featuring anonymous people, to tangentially portray personal retellings of history. While the footage is evocative of the bygone era of home movies, associated with a sense of nostalgia, sentimentality and domesticity, Siopis's method undercuts these qualities without erasing them. "Through the interplay of familiarity and uncanniness", Sinazo Chiya, writer and director at Stevenson gallery, suggests that Siopis's films "enable the viewer's retrieval of pathways to alternative, faded or forgotten facets of the self. The person perceiving is made to question and seek, and through that, they are invited to find" (Chiya, 2024:405). As mentioned, rather than being didactic, they therefore "draw the spectator into a collaborative relationship of meaning-making" (Chiya, 2024:407). This allows personal and private memories to imbricate with the political and historical, and the specific to intertwine with wider concerns. "All the stories," Siopis writes, "have an elemental quality that speaks to larger narratives beyond their specific historical circumstances and that seeks to capture a consciousness of displacement and movement shared by millions across the globe" (2012:45).

In each film, the subjects (whose identities are withheld until the end in two of the films) address the viewer from beyond the grave through first-person subtitles, creating the illusion that these past events are unfolding in the present moment. This effect induces a



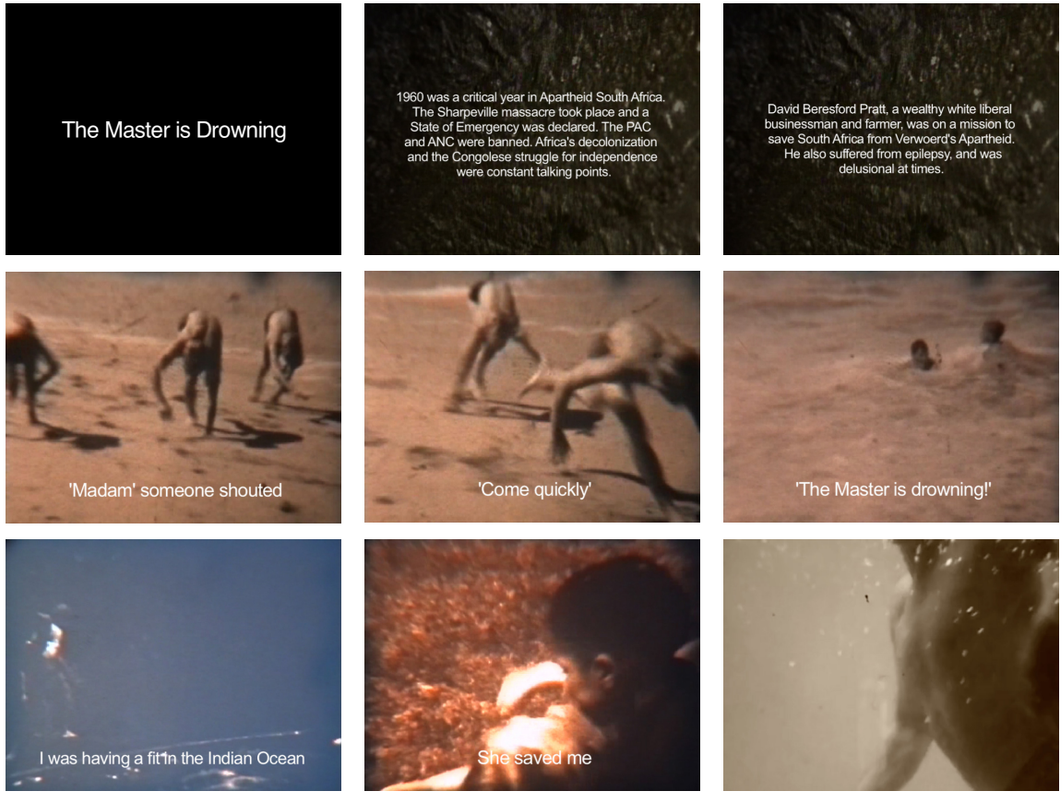
2.1 Stills from *Obscure White Messenger,* by Penny Siopis (2010). Digital video, sound. Duration 15 min 7 sec. (Images courtesy of the artist).

Available: https://vimeo.com/190829849/d2df05cfee?share=copy

sense of temporal confusion and disorientation, destabilising the viewer's habitual mode of observing and contemplating the past from spatio-temporal distance. Siopis explains that she is "almost literally giving life to dead matter through animating it and through shaping a new story from the people caught in the footage, who you can assume are now dead and gone" (2014:205). Remarkably there is a surprising serendipity. Despite only being able to see what has been filmed on these found rolls of film once they are digitised, Siopis mentions that the footage frequently includes scenes that closely resemble the narrative of the film she is creating. Attuned to the suggestive and implicit, she disregards the more obvious associations, preferring the evocative, suggestive, and obscure, which piques the curiosity of the viewer's imagination. Cultural theorist Irene Enslé Bronner argues that by crafting "surprising congruences between image and text," and "deliberate disjunctions," "new and multiple meanings continually play across and in the viewer's consciousness" (2023:39).I would extend this notion to encompass the viewer's subconscious and unconscious, where a multitude of meanings, not yet fully formed, can evoke powerful and affecting responses precisely because of their obscurity, latency and repression. I am therefore in agreement with Chiya who observes that the films "follow an affective logic rather than choreography" (2024:417).

Siopis's film *Obscure White Messenger* (2010) (Figure 2.1) explores the 1966 assassination of South African Prime Minister H. F. Verwoerd, who was stabbed in Parliament by Demitrios Tsafendas. Siopis recounts that "it was forbidden to take photographs of anything to do with the assassin. [A story in the Cape Times newspaper] showed how words could create a picture when an image was not possible" (2014:201). Having been diagnosed with schizophrenia, the assassination was publicised as a bout of madness. Additionally, Tsafendas' supposedly long-standing affliction by a giant tapeworm was also reported on as having impacted his mental rationality which called into suspicion as to whether his actions were politically motivated. Although these claims have subsequently been challenged and disproved, to this day, Tsafendas remains an enigmatic character.[24]

Siopis builds on this sense of strangeness right from the opening scene, which centres on an octopus in a fish tank. The subtitles commence by inquiring into a murder, yet the viewer is left wondering about the identities of the victim and the perpetrator, as well as the motive behind the crime. The connection between the captive octopus and the unfolding narrative



2.2 Stills from *The Master is Drowning,* by Penny Siopis (2012). Digital video, sound. Duration 10 min 25 sec.
(Images courtesy of the artist).

Available: https://vimeo.com/50357030/87ff829a41?share=copy

remains unclear. The opening scene's audio track features traditional Turkish music, with the haunting, echoing sound of string instruments evoking an uncanny relation to place and time. By employing these audio-visual and textural elements, Siopis immediately creates enigmatic intrigue, crafting a narrative that, as it unfolds, defies a chronological ordering of events. Siopis (2012:54) delves into the mysterious ambiguity surrounding Tsafendas, noting that although his actions constituted what she describes as "a history-altering event," the fact that he acted alone jeopardised his place in public memory, particularly within the context of post-apartheid history. She states:

> *An aspect of Tsafendas's story that became intriguing is the marginal status it occupied in the narratives of both apartheid and the struggle for liberation. It was in fact Nelson Mandela who called him "that obscure white parliamentary messenger" after he got word on Robben Island about the murder. Mandela was keen to distance the ANC from political assassinations. In this keenness, he misidentified Tsafendas — he wasn't white*[25]*, and his job as a parliamentary messenger was a mistake. Tsafendas's life was a series of mistakes, starting from his so-called illegitimate birth. Nobody had any use for this oddball outsider, sometimes communist, drifter, who spent most of his life at sea — literally and figuratively. No country would give him citizenship (Siopis, 2014:201).*

In *The Master Is Drowning* (2012) (Figure 2.2), Siopis also addresses the attempted assassination of Verwoerd in 1960 at the Rand Easter Show in Johannesburg. Verwoerd was shot twice in the face by David Beresford Pratt, a white liberal farmer and businessman. At the time, reports indicated that Pratt suffered from mental illness and epilepsy, which, as with Tsafendas' schizophrenia and his tapeworm, rendered Pratt's intentions and actions politically ambiguous. However, Siopis presents us with an image of Pratt as incensed by South Africa's racial injustices. Through subtitles, Pratt silently addresses us: "I felt the violent urge to shoot apartheid, the stinking monster that was gripping the throat of South Africa." The film opens with Frederic Chopin's solemn *Sonata No.2, Op.35: Funeral March* performed by Arthur Friedman. The subtitles state: "I have always loved Chopin. The same piece always open on my piano." The audio then abruptly shifts to an African woman singing when the subtitles exclaim: "'Madam' someone shouted. 'Come quickly. The Master is drowning!' I was having a fit in the Indian Ocean. She saved me." The piece of music is "This is the Land"

from *Wait a Minin!* performed by Dana Valery. Siopis constructs a soundtrack that alternates between Chopin's orchestral music and African songs as we learn about a man who expresses his love for South Africa yet is deeply troubled by its racial injustices. During her extensive research on Pratt, Siopis began to expand the film's historical reflections to encompass the broader political climate. She writes:

> *seeing all the other stories of the historical moment that reflected the decolonization of the rest of Africa, was part of the process and worked its way into the film. As did South Africa's imminent push for independence from the Commonwealth, British liberalism vying with white minority nationalism, violence in the Belgian Congo. In my mad urge to get every bit of information about Pratt, I was taken to other places! I became more interested in Patrice Lumumba through Pratt (Siopis, 2014:204).*

Lastly, Siopis's *Communion* (2011) is a disturbing account of the brutal murder of Irish nun and doctor Sister Aidan Quinlan by a mob of anti-apartheid protesters at Duncan Village in the Eastern Cape on November 9, 1952. The protest was held in defiance of the government's ban on group gatherings, and when police arrived at the scene and opened fire, a violent clash ensued. Sister Quinlan was driving through the village when she was suddenly besieged by the enraged mob. Siopis constructs a notably restrained narrative, with Sister Quinlan remaining impassive and refraining from any judgement while relaying the unimaginable horror of being violently murdered. As with Siopis's other films, Pollock writes that Siopis "effects *aesthetic transformation* of the event's rumbling legacy retracted from records whose truth no documents can contain and no sociological-anthropological reconstruction will secure" (Pollock, 2024:87). The film's engagement with ambiguity is apparent from its opening sequence (Figure 2.3), where we are presented with footage of a white woman watching black African women and children dancing in traditional garb. The subtitles state: "The people would need my care, my ministering, my healing. I delivered their babies, defended them in court and in the veld." In the next image, two African women, accompanied by a teenager and a child, walk along a dirt road ahead of the white woman, with subtitles continuing: "My life was theirs. They loved me. I loved them." Despite Sister Quinlan's declarations of mutual affection, the viewer's reaction is complicated by the knowledge of the role missionaries played in advancing the justification of colonisation. Conversion to



2.3 Stills from *Communion*, by Penny Siopis (2011). Digital video, sound. Duration 5 min 30 sec. (Images courtesy of the artist).

Available: https://vimeo.com/94036020/bc2f996963?share=copy

Christianity and schooling in English were enforced as part of the 'civilising' program that was intended to alienate and sever Africans from their religious, cultural, traditional and cosmological practices. Mark Sealy writes, "The missionaries actively worked to erase that which they considered unholy," and they could not "accommodate a sense of value in the alterity of the Africans' humanity" (2019:39). He adds that the missionaries' objectives were "the pacification and control of the African body and, more importantly, its soul" (Sealy, 2019:57).

The opening scene therefore suggests the intrusiveness of the lone white woman, out of place and out of time. With this knowledge, the supposedly benign footage becomes discomfiting. Siopis overlays the footage with a found audio composition of an African lullaby. As the scene progresses, the repetitive rhythm builds, and other instruments join in, creating an ominous atmosphere that mounts with trepidation. The subtitles have already briefly alluded to a violent event: "The police ordered the crowd to disperse, then opened fire." As with Siopis's other films, the narrative jumps back and forth in time, and it is only later that we are provided with information that reveals we are being told a first-person account of the narrator's own murder.

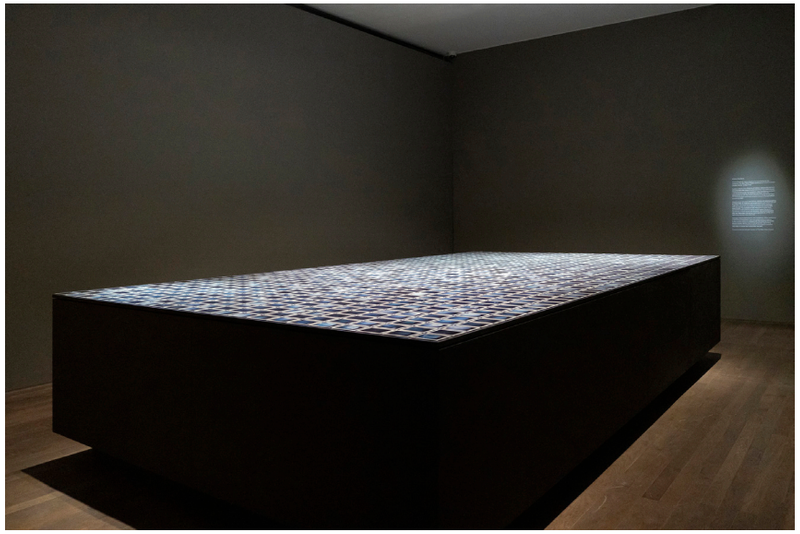
The Blue Skies Project (2018), a collaboration between Kusters and Ruben Samama that took five and a half years to complete, consists of 1,078 instamatic 8 x 10cm peel-apart photographs of blue skies, all taken by Kusters at former World War II Nazi Germany concentration camps (Figures 2.4 & 2.5). Blind-stamped onto each photograph are the GPS coordinates of the respective camp and the approximate number of unnamed victims (Figure 2.6).

During an online conversation with curator and writer Ella Finer (Kusters, 2020), Kusters discusses the personal impetus for this project. In 2011, after decades of silence, his mother informed him that his grandfather, who had already died in 2007, narrowly escaped capture by the Nazi SS in 1943. Considering that Kusters' grandfather was not Jewish and did not work for the Belgian resistance, the reason why he was pursued by the SS remains unknown. However, Kusters suddenly had a personal connection to this monumental history. Curious as to what might have transpired had his grandfather been apprehended, Kusters journeyed to Auschwitz. Recalling the experience, he stated that he instinctively and despairingly looked up at the sky, finding some "solace [in] that endless landscape," and took only one photograph (Kusters, 2020). He then visited the Auschwitz Museum and saw an extensive map with the locations of all the documented concentration camps across Europe (Figure 2.7). This startling discovery, which he stated, "broke everything that I thought I knew," became the impetus for the project (Kusters, 2020). As he travelled to all these concentration camps, the project evolved from being solely about his grandfather to "trying to understand how commemoration is happening" (Kusters, 2020).

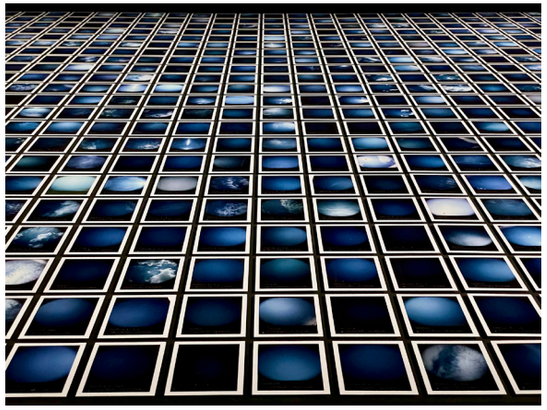
The rectangular peel-apart instamatic photographs are all surrounded by a uniform white border, with a circular black vignette encroaching upon the blue summer sky – the invisible encroaching upon the visible. This darkness, an effect from the camera's wide-angle lens, is the camera's own physical presence recorded as a dark chamber within the image. The photographs are displayed in a monumental grid, accompanied by a soundtrack composed by Samama, titled *The Tracking of 1,078 Blue Skies* (2018). Remarkably, the duration of the soundtrack is thirteen years, the same length of time that the camps were operational. The sound is affecting in its simplicity, obscurity, and seemingly endless length – a varying mournful ping for each victim of the Nazi concentration camps. The openness and emptiness of the sky, coupled with extensive data collection, rather than attempting to fill in the absences of historical records, facilitates reflection on the impossibility of representing a complete and intelligible history. In email correspondence, Kusters expands on his intentions: "The work shows nothing concrete inside the images, yet the constellation of skies and numbers is quite exact, as far as we can possibly know through history. In a way, the work shows exactly how far that knowledge goes, and exactly how much we cannot quantify" (email correspondence, February 10, 2023).

Specificity with its Elsewhere Re-Presented by the Concentrationary Image

Siopis's and Kusters' artistic strategies share resonances with the methodologies of concentrationary art which provides insight into how their respective praxis creates encounters with temporal and spatial relationality – territorialisation in conjunction with de-territorialisation, specificity with its elsewhere.[26] This pertains to how both artists use audio-visuals that are not sourced from the respective historical events they address, allowing their artworks to resonate far beyond their specificity. It also relates to how they both approach traumatic historical events by finding strategies for *re-presenting the dead*. As the discussion



2.4 Installation view of *The Blue Skies Project* (2018). *One Thousand and Seventy-eight Blue Skies* (2018) by Anton Kusters. 1 078 peel-apart instamatic peel-apart photographs mounted on aluminium sandwich panel and wood. Installation: 987.6 x 145 x 85 cm. Real-time generative audio track by Ruben Samama, *The Tracking of 1 078 Blue Skies* (2018). Duration: 4 432 days.
(Citadellet, Landskrona, 2020; Image courtesy of the artist).

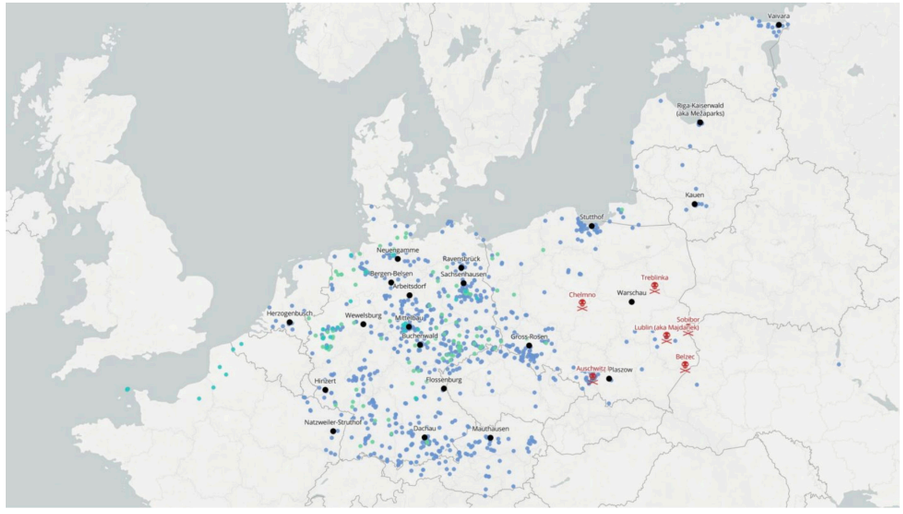


2.5 Close-up of installation of *The Blue Skies Project* (2018). *One Thousand and Seventy-eight Blue Skies* (2018) by Anton Kusters. 1 078 peel-apart instamatic peel-apart photographs mounted on aluminium sandwich panel and wood. Installation: 987.6 x 145 x 85 cm. Real-time generative audio track by Ruben Samama, *The Tracking of 1 078 Blue Skies* (2018). Duration: 4 432 days.
(Citadellet, Landskrona, 2020; Image courtesy of the artist).

Available: https://antonkusters.com/the-blue-skies-project



2.6 Anton Kusters' typewriter used to blind-stamp GPS coordinates of former Nazi concentration camp and the recorded number of victims from the site onto one of his instamatic peel-apart photographs.
(Image courtesy of the artist).



2.7 Map showing the extent of concentration and death camps throughout Europe.
Available at: https://antonkusters.com/the-blue-skies-project

unfolds, it will become clear how the concentrationary weaves through their artistic praxis.

French surrealist poet, novelist, and publisher Jean Cayrol, a survivor of the Nazi concentration camp Mauthausen[27], in Austria formulated the notion of concentrationary art, which he also refers to as Lazarean art. Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman conceptually develop Cayrol's literary works to elucidate how, although the concentrationary artform originated from his experience of internment, it is a politico-aesthetic strategy that extends beyond this historical moment.[28] Silverman proposes two major principles that underpin Cayrol's notion of concentrationary art: "art as a reminder and warning against forgetting, and art that can draw together the concentrationary reality and the post-war world of renewed 'normality' to show their interconnections" (Silverman, 2019:5). He adds, "Concentrationary art is not a political or ideological manifesto for our times; rather it is a subtle and ambivalent political aesthetic that makes visible the ways we can be unknowingly stripped of our humanity and urges us to pursue the continual struggle to define what it is to be human" (Silverman, 2019:20). Consequently, Silverman and Pollock theorise the concentrationary as "a new politics of representation" (2011:4).[29]

Recalling Cayrol's experience in the concentration camp elucidates how concentrationary art becomes a theoretical and critical reflection of the lived experience:

> *Everything was now in rupture with the real, true world – the world that we had left a few months or a few thousand years ago, we could no longer tell which. We attempted to exist in two universes that contradicted and deformed one another: the savage and incoherent universe of the Camp was seen in a certain light because we still had one foot in the real world, thanks to the subterfuge of our memories and our dreams; and the real world to which we aspired, when in contact with concentrationary reality, took on a mysterious and confused ardour and flung us back into the extreme scenes of our reveries.*
>
> ...
>
> *We ended up, as a result of this internal rupture between two universes, living equally between two universes, without ever completely joining them, and this left us even more, and perhaps evermore, feeling as though we were wavering, in a state of mental vagrancy and rootlessness.*
>
> *Our real world only became real to us in our heart of hearts when performing its amazing miracles of reincarnation, in a prototype and unimaginable life where we were not sure we really existed (Cayrol, 2019:37).*

This lived experience of returning from an "un-real" world, a world structured for imminent death, implies the figure of Lazarus.[30] The Lazarean being, Cayrol writes, "lives on two distinct planes, distinct but nevertheless joined by an invisible thread, the plane of terror, and the plane of exaltation, that of exhilaration and that of detachment" (2019:53). "In its initial articulation," Pollock explains,

> *the Lazarean refers to the subjective condition of those who have passed through a form of death that leaves them both alive and dead; their humanity has been pressed to a point of being destroyed while they have not been allowed a human death. They are brought back from this elsewhere they have seen and suffered ... Liberation from the camps is not resurrection; the prisoners are in effect brought back with their shroud, their deadliness clings to them, ever co-present in all its vividness (Pollock, 2019:111).*

"Cayrol's Lazarean art," Silverman elaborates, "is one in which time and place are haunted by an elsewhere, and life is permanently haunted by death" (2011:200). The Lazarean as a returnee, as one who was never meant to return, Pollock adds, "brings back not only intimate contact with a death-place, a tomb-world, but also a gaze on the present from that place" (2019:94). She proposes that because the biblical Lazarus in the Christian Gospel of John "*signifies an encounter with death that is carried back to a continuing but ever-tainted life,*" Cayrol must have perceived a correlation with his own survival: "the concentrationary experience *as persisting beyond liberation as a perpetual state and as an agonizingly piercing perception of the deathliness in the living world to which he returned*" (Pollock, 2019:98). Pertinent to this analogy, Pollock explains, Lazarus did not transform into a deity having returned from death or conquering it, rather, his experience was that of a mortal human who was dead for four days.

'Speaking' to us from beyond the grave, Siopis's filmic subjects are Lazarean figures that have experienced the unimaginable and, as a result, possess disquieting knowledge. In *Obscure White Messenger* (2010), Siopis conveys Tsafendas' 'un-belonging' – not only his lack of national identity but also his existence *between* multiple spaces, implicitly between the living and the dead. To achieve this, she includes footage filmed in South Africa, Greece, Portugal and indeterminate places in her retelling of his life. Siopis explains that she uses Tsafendas's



2.8 Stills from *Obscure White Messenger*, by Penny Siopis (2010). Digital video, sound. Duration 15 min 7 sec.
(Images courtesy of the artist).

story "to explore a state of statelessness in a world where citizenship and belonging all too often establish and legitimate what it means to be fully human" (2012:52). In scenes taken from a ship, the viewer looks out at the vast, undulating ocean – the non-place, or the place between. Siopis elaborates on her use of this footage: "In the film the deck of a ship becomes his forced habit, a kind of floating isolation, thwarting his restless search for a community, a solid place where he could anchor his life" (2012:55). Reflecting on Siopis's use of footage of the sea, Mbembe states that "the sea also conjures the idea of formlessness and instability … The sea is beyond the constraints of the land. It is marked by depth and unknowability. It cannot be stabilised. Such too is the condition of statelessness" (2024:221). The 'exotic' audio of an atmospheric flute amplifies the scene's sense of placeless-ness, while interior shots of a dark, lonely, and isolated cabin further emphasise Tsafendas's alienation (Figure 2.8). The subtitles read: "I am a man without a country," and then inquire, "Where was home?" The next shot, filmed from a ship approaching Cape Town harbour, pans from Devil's Peak to Table Mountain before fading to black. A reply appears: "South Africa, the country of my mother Amelia Williams." However, the footage cuts back to the ship, casting doubt on the reply. The subtitles ask, "Have you been a citizen of any country?" and we are offered the response, "I have lived everywhere, mostly on ships." The image of Tsafendas that appears to us is of someone who remains isolated and at an obscure distance – abandoned, landless, placeless, time-less, and even formless. He exists within the subterranean plane of latency – an image that has not yet become an image.

In Kusters' and Samama's *The Blue Skies Project* (2018) it is the viewer who begins to sense that they might be Lazarean. As we look at these images of the sky, armed with the knowledge of where they were taken, we come to possess the unbearable realisation that, because this happened once, it can happen again, anywhere and at any time. Addressing this possibility, or rather, probability, Silverman proposes that "Cayrol's theory gives us a powerful way of reading the hidden forms of disfigured and transformed humanity in the world today" (2019:3). Kusters' blue skies serve as both beautiful and terrible warnings from history. Their shocking terror resides within their beauty. A terrible knowing ensues from not seeing.

Silverman expands on these notions of distortion, disfiguration, and warning, explaining that concentrationary art is an art of disruption that complicates spatial and temporal specificity. It relates to formal strategies rather than content, and is "premised on the idea of

the present as haunted by a past that has not passed, the present as hiding another reality that is present but not visible, the notion of 'doubling' that captures this uncanny co-presence of the normal and the strange" (Silverman, 2019:5). Furthermore, he describes it as "an imaginative approach that allows one thing to be spoken or seen through another while simultaneously abolishing the frontiers that would keep them apart" (Silverman, 2019:11). Silverman and Pollock reiterate that the concentrationary "connects the living to the dead, past to present, here to there in order to shock us out of comforting dichotomies that would keep the past 'over there'" (2011:2). In both Siopis's and Kusters' artworks, the past remains an open question – unresolved, haunting, affecting, and implicating. Didi-Huberman proposes the notion of the *tear-image*, which is concentrationary in nature, to describe what he terms the *dual system* of images, in that they "are able to produce an effect *along with* its negation. They are, in turn, fetish and fact, vehicle of beauty and site of the unbearable, consolation and the inconsolable. They are neither pure illusion nor all of the truth, but a dialectic stirring together *the veil with its rip*" (2012:80). The artworks under discussion by Siopis and Kusters rip the veil of the familiar, allowing us to see *through* them into a concentrationary opening of spatio-temporal indeterminacy – an ambiguous realm where we, as viewers, are not merely charged with the responsibility of remembering the past but also sense incrimination in the corruption of the human. This incrimination is far too ambiguous to be moralistic; instead, it elicits the apprehension of our own entanglement in the deformation of the familiar, from which there is no exoneration because we are always already unwitting participants. The question that Siopis's and Kusters' artworks bring to bear is how to remember the past, which is also a question of how the past is re-embodied. This implies that the past is not something that can be known through contemplative measures alone but must be acknowledged as a participatory, lived, sensorial affectivity. Emphasising the discordant particularity of affect Brian Massumi states, "There is no sameness of affect. There is affective difference in the same event" (2015:56). This difference of affect is not merely sensed as operating between particularities, but within particularity. Affect does not unify the sensorium, rather one senses the disunity, discord and dissensus within. The particularity of participatory remembering the past does not cohere as a representation, it re-presents within the affective heterogeneity of the event of un-knowing.

Siopis's use of found home movies to represent personal accounts of historical events by her deceased subjects effectively enables this speaking and seeing through concentrationary

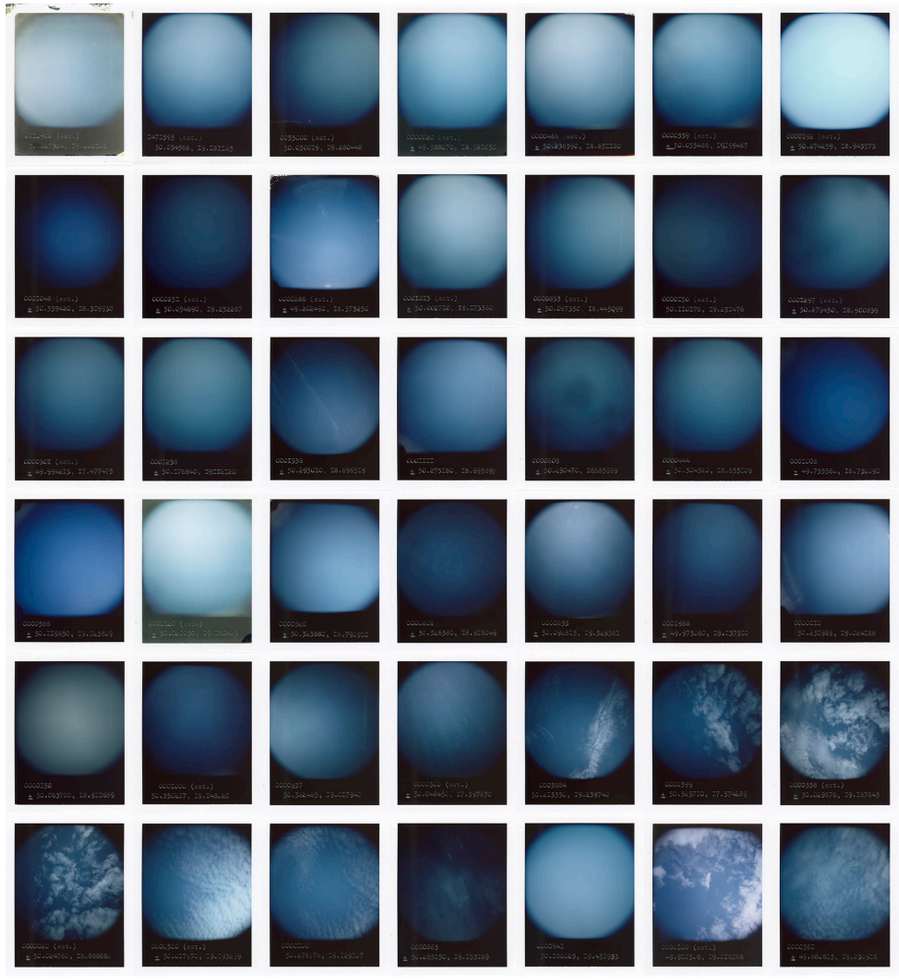
supplementation. As Bronner writes, Siopis's films "present anew film fragments from the 1950s and 1960s, allowing for a contemporary viewer's critical engagement with the socio-historical events depicted in the original footage and, specifically, I propose, with how implications of commemoration may be conceptually unpacked" (2023:37). By re-framing these home movies from the past, Siopis shifts the viewer's perspective of the vernacular, implicating it in the injustices of South Africa's apartheid past. She draws attention to what the footage excludes, what remains overlooked and unseen. The seemingly benign moments captured in the footage undergo a process of discomforting concentrationary deformation – the familiar becoming unfamiliar, perceiving the unseen within the seen.

In a scene from *Obscure White Messenger* (2010), Siopis challenges the supposition that Tsafendas' actions were a result of madness.Simultaneously, she employs the concentrationary defamiliarization of the familiar so that we can see through the rip of the veil (Figure 2.9). The film's subtitles pose the question: "Who are you against now?" The answer given: "Verwoerd. He's a foreigner, a Nationalist, he hasn't got the people behind him. I see no progress for the African people. I thought this thing has gone too far. They have made an ideology of it, the sexual part of it too, the Immorality Act, telling who you can't marry." This exchange appears over footage of white male teenage lifeguards whose performance on a beach is initially military in nature but becomes increasingly more intimate as they engage in competitive games. The introduction of drums in the audio-track amplifies the militaristic quality, investing the teenagers' actions with an ominous undertone. With the mention of the Immorality Act (first legislated in 1927, prohibiting sexual relations between whites and blacks, then amended in 1957 to include other sexual acts deemed immoral) the play between these scantily clad young white men is suddenly perceived as curiously homoerotic. We begin to see the subversive effects of what was a forbidden and repressed desire. Alluding to the concentrationary quality of this scene, Bronner writes:

> *There is so much white skin and ridiculous behaviour on display that while the absurdity of whiteness as an overbearing, performative signifier of racist superiority and power is asserted from a critical, temporal distance, the sinister realities of the 1950s and 1960s in apartheid South Africa are evoked through water sports and beach games and relay races performed in period-appropriate bathing suits at segregated beaches and swimming pools (Bronner, 2023:37).*



2.9 Stills from *Obscure White Messenger*, by Penny Siopis (2010). Digital video, sound. Duration 15 min 7 sec.
(Images courtesy of the artist).



2.10 Kusters Contact sheet Auschwitz, from *The Blue Skies Project*, by Anton Kusters (2018). (Image courtesy of the artist).

Kusters's blue skies undergo a similar concentrationary deformation. The skies show what cannot be seen or contemplated despite the specificity of place and statistics – the enormity of these places of death that occurred within the concentration camp system (Figure 2.10).

Also central to the theorization of the concentrationary was French political prisoner David Rousset's text *L'Univers concentrationnaire* (1945) (The Concentrationary Universe), in which he reflects on his internment at the Nazi camp Buchenwald in Germany. Pollock and Silverman propose that, according to Rousset, the concentration camp "was itself symptomatic of an extended political logic not confined within it," hence the emergence of the *concentrationary universe* (2011:18). They continue:

> *Rousset's notion of a concentrationary universe invokes a political system of terror whose aim was to demolish the social humanity of all its actual and potential victims within and beyond the actual sites. Enclosed within the camp, the concentrationees experience its brute violence and pain directly in their bodies. They directly witness the terrifying novelty where 'everything is possible'. As the laboratory of limitless possibility the camp functions, paradoxically, as the heart of the totalitarian society that creates it at once as a 'world apart', utterly other to the everyday world beyond its barbed wire enclosures and as an emblem of total domination infecting and destroying all political life in the apparently 'normal' world around it. From experience inside the camp, Rousset argues that the camp is a symptom of the concentrationary as an infection of the entire social fabric (Pollock & Silverman, 2011:18).*

Pollock and Silverman then quote Rousset: "The existence of the camp is a warning … Under a new guise, similar effects may reappear tomorrow. There remains therefore a very specific war to be waged" (2011:19). Having a direct experience with the *concentartionary universe*, Cayrol's literature and poetics offer a representational strategy for concentrationary art. Elucidating this point, Pollock writes:

> *Beyond figuring the condition of the subject, the concentrationee, this art also has seen in the camp both an aberration or perversion of society at its most sadistically uncontained. It witnesses the deeper logic of modern society itself, revealed there in ways invisible and veiled to the ordinary people outside its fences who are not thereby safe from that logic (Pollock, 2019:112).*

Deploying affective strategies of re-presenting, Siopis's and Kusters' artworks demonstrate how the concentrationary is a potentiality that exists everywhere and at any time – a latent and parallel universe. Consequently, the existence of the familiar has itself become an aberration – a veil that obscures and attempts to hold the concentrationary at bay. Through their artworks ripping of the veil, we are obliged to consider that, because the human is predicated on those jettisoned from the human, humanity itself is a kind of barbarism inaugurated by violence. This implies that the human has to be radically re-thought and reconstituted. The following discussion of their artistic methodologies and strategies will inform how their artworks suggest such a re-conceptualisation of the human, which draws upon the concentrationary and the Lazarean.

Materiality, Affect, and Relationality

Judith Butler's theorisation of precarity as the shared vulnerability inherent to the embodied nature of being, which is essential to the sociality and relationality of the human condition, elucidates the socio-political dimensions of Siopis's and Kusters' artworks. It also suggests how the concentrationary obligates us to remember those who were deprived of their humanity and how this deprivation inevitably corrupts the very notion of the human. Butler illuminates that, due to our social dependency on others, even our own bodies are not entirely our own:

> *Constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, it bears the imprint, is formed in the crucible of social life; only later, and with some uncertainty, do I lay claim to my body as my own, if, in fact, I ever do. Indeed, if I deny that prior to the formation of my 'will,' my body related me to others whom I did not choose to have in proximity to myself, if I build a notion of 'autonomy' on the basis of the denial of this sphere of a primary and unwilled physical proximity with others, then am I denying the social conditions of my embodiment in the name of autonomy? (Butler, 2006:26).*

Siopis expands on Butler's notion of precarity and the sociality of our bodies as always-already given over to others, specifically addressing the relationality between artists and their materials. She theorises a *poetics of vulnerability*, a *practice* of acute attentiveness to the vulnerability required for any relational encounter – the betweenness of becoming and thus

becoming otherwise. This practice involves engaging with materials without the intention of delimiting or authorising sensible form, attune to their affective opacity. Siopis (2007:n. p.) proposes "some kind of merging of personal and social vulnerability" that "emphasises as much the materiality of the image as its content or concept". Siopis explains that working with the poetics of vulnerability, the material properties of an artwork are not merely transparent or neutral carriers of the artist's intended communication; rather, a material is imbued with its own opaque potentiality that exceeds the constraints of signification. Édouard Glissant elucidates the socio-political implications, writing that "The poet's truth is also the desired truth of the other," implying that "poetics aims for the space of difference – not exclusion, but rather, where difference is realized in going beyond" (1997:82). Consequently, Glissant claims that "The highest point of knowledge is always poetics" (1997:140). Siopis's poetics of vulnerability elucidate how her artworks, as well as Kusters', are situated within Jacques Rancière's aesthetic regime, where art is constituted by the duality of thought and non-thought, "of an activity of will that wishes to realize its idea and of a non-intentionality, a radical passivity of material being-there" (Rancière, 2007:119). The semiotic indeterminacy and presence of materiality – the productive tension between form and formlessness – is central to both Siopis's and Kusters' practice and its socio-political import within a contemporary milieu where art's affective value is predicated on its contingency and non-instrumentality.

Discussing the poetics of vulnerability, Siopis, in *Material Acts* (2018:11), actively invokes Jane Bennett's postulation of vital or vibrant matter which hypothesises matter, or the realm of the nonhuman as consisting of "vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them. Never entirely exhausted by their semiotics" (Bennett, 2010:5). Bennett posits that materiality is "itself heterogeneous, itself a differential of intensities, itself a life. In this strange, vital materialism, there is no point of pure stillness, no indivisible atom that is not itself aquiver with virtual force" (2010:57). Bennett's text unseats the hubris of the human over the non-human world and de-anthropomorphises matter, suggesting that it possesses independent agency not subservient to human intention. The human is thus re-conceived as merely one actant among a vast world of heterogeneous actants. As Bennett writes, "An actant never acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces" (2010:21). In a similar way to Siopis's poetics of vulnerability, Bennett's vibrant matter is highly attuned to the socio-political forces of materiality; matter as something that affects changes in the world and, consequently, impacts how we must navigate these changes that are, to a greater or lesser extent, exerted upon us. This vibrant force implies that matter is not only constantly undergoing dynamic transformation, but also effecting a transformation of the human in the process. Our bodies are also of the world of vibrant matter, as Butler argues, other to ourselves, undergoing relational transformations that we cannot entirely control or predict.

Materiality is postulated by Siopis and Bennett not as an observable description of physical properties, but rather as a dynamic and unpredictable *event* in which one participates as a force within an ecosystem of differential forces. Within the openness and indeterminate relationality inherent to the poetics of vulnerability and vibrant matter, artworks enact their own *becoming* form, never attaining the static or fixed coherence of being form. Mbembe, in agreement with Siopis and Bennett, writes, "Matter is not inert. It is an active agent. Time has to pass through matter for it to act in a certain way, to flow, to dry, then crack. Matter manifests the passing of time and time the passing of matter, its becoming something else, that is, its permanence under a different form" (Mbembe, 2014:39). Mbembe suggests that becoming and un-becoming are synchronous processes, always oscillating within the liminality between emergence and collapse without a definitive moment of origin or finitude. Implicit in this notion of betweenness, where form is always under threat of collapsing into formlessness, is the concentrationary deformation of the familiar and the suspicion that the familiar is always-already a deformation – what has become coherent, or semiotically stable, in fact veils the corrupt deformation upon which form is predicated.

By being attentive to vibrant matter, the artist who practises Siopis's poetics of vulnerability relinquishes control, allowing matter and meaning, formlessness and form, to coexist within a tense, vacillating relation of differential forces. Siopis states, "There's something in this tension … that hooks what can't be spoken of in language" (2014a:140). Crucially, this means that an artwork can engender a knowingness that belongs to the sensible – a knowingness that is particular and essentially incommunicable. Siopis proposes that this "becomes a model for thinking about the uncertainties in the larger world with which we are implicated and engaged, and questions of power" (2018:216). Responding to Siopis, aca-

demic and diplomat Gerrit Olivier states that this tension disrupts habitual ways of looking, which "signifies, philosophically speaking, an interest in ideas of becoming. It is the unstable moment where form contends with formlessness that we recognise our own participation in matter, our own incompleteness and the contingency of our own individual and social lives" (2014:31). For Siopis and Olivier, as well as for Butler, Bennett, and Mbembe, the inquiry of being and identity, which includes the personal and the collective, as a pursuit of stable determination, must be replaced by critical investment in the unfolding uncertainties of relationality. This requires cognisance of one's sociality, which necessitates acute awareness of the politics of vulnerability and precarity. Similarly, Demos states that due to this creative strategy of defying capture and isolation, "the form of being becomes an ephemeral sign, which inevitably resonates with those outside itself" (2013:50-51).

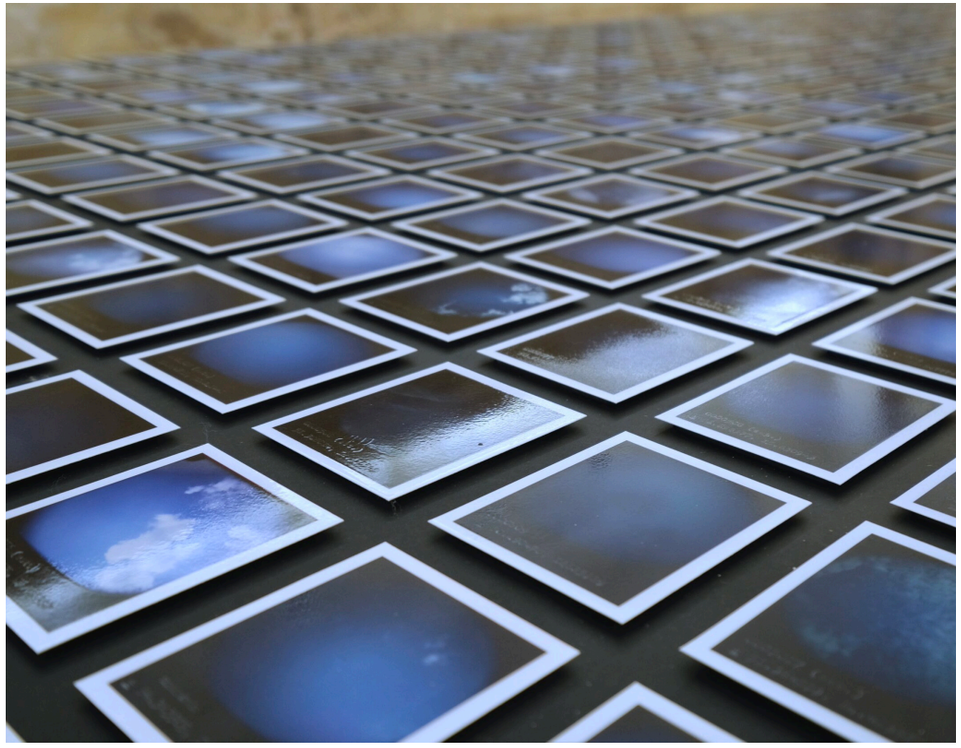
For Siopis and Kusters, the artist, although the maker of an artwork, does not dictate meaning. Their artworks remain opaque, materially vibrant and semiotically indeterminate, requiring personal engagement from viewers. Siopis primarily renounces control by creating open-ended associations between image, sound, and textual narration that the viewer attempts to connect and decipher; however, it is ultimately impossible to arrive at secure intelligibility, as cognitive knowing gives way to somatic affect. Kusters, on the other hand, used a plastic Holga camera with a Polaroid back, which has a set shutter speed and only a three-step aperture adjustment, providing him with minimal control over the images. His relinquishment of control extends to the display of the photographs, as he states, "the sequence that the skies are displayed in is random but fixed: the very first time, a random order was computer generated, and this order has since always been followed" (email correspondence, September 19, 2021). Furthermore, due to the instability of the photographic print from an instamatic camera and its susceptibility to deterioration from light exposure, Kusters leaves the decision of whether to display the original photographs or copies up to the curator. Displaying the originals will accelerate their deterioration, and over time, the images will fade, leaving only the blind-stamped GPS coordinates and recorded numbers of victims. In email correspondence (September 19, 2021), Kusters stated:

> *The goal during the creative process was to remove as much as possible any artistic intervention whatsoever. In this way, the process for the entire project became determined by things I had no control over. This is a key element to the project: that the work is still alive and continuously must be taken care of, even after I am gone. Just like we should take care of our collective memory. "Letting go" of this control is the easy part, because, for me, it is only then that the work can become complete. The work is not vulnerable to erasure, I would say; rather, I would call it aging, bearing the scars of where it has been (Kusters, 2021).*

Kusters' act of stepping aside and away from the process, while reminiscent of the presumed non-intervention or minimal intervention associated with conventional notions of documentation and record-keeping, draws attention to the socio-political implications of our relationality with vibrant matter and how this then relates to the personal responsibility of historical remembrance. Kusters also materialises the challenges of remembrance through the glossy surface of the photographs, which reflects the environment's light. This reflection interferes with the viewing of the images, partially obscuring them, creating an obstruction that shifts and moves with the viewer, following their movements (Figure 2.11).

It is pertinent to note that although *The Blue Skies Project* (2018) has been exhibited in various locations, Kusters and Samama (2020) stated in their online conversation with Finer that their ambition for the work is to have it exhibited at one location for thirteen years. This would allow Samama's soundtrack to be played for its full duration, and by displaying the original photographs, they will begin to fade in 'real time'. They imply that the artwork has only ever existed in part and will only be fully realised when they step away, giving way to the agency of vibrant matter. The actual artwork has only been imagined, but by stating their intentions, Kusters and Samama have enabled the artwork to exist in the minds and imaginations of others. Although this happens in the imagination, the original images are imbued with vulnerability, slowly fading away. Therefore, the imperative to remember becomes an urgent matter, set against a forgetting and erasure that is already underway.

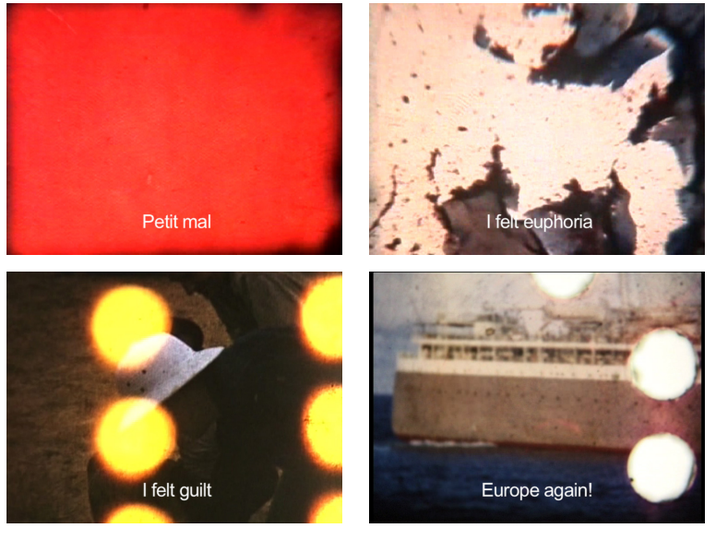
Siopis's films also bear the scars of their past. Sourced from discarded home movies filmed during the 1950s and 1960s, the films have been physically damaged by age and abandonment. Siopis uses these markings and scars for their affective and vibrant qualities (Figure 2.12 & 2.13). As Jennifer Law suggests, "the moment of violation – the wound – is located through the disruption of the trajectory of the everyday" (2014:75). These woundings, which disrupt the narrative, are central to Siopis's films and Kusters' photographs. The events they re-present remain imbued with the latency of traumatic re-appearances and



2.11 Close-up of installation of The Blue Skies Project (2018). One Thousand and Seventy-eight Blue Skies (2018) by Anton Kusters. 1 078 peel-apart instamatic peel-apart photographs mounted on aluminium sandwich panel and wood. Installation: 987.6 x 145 x 85 cm. Real-time generative audio track by Ruben Samama, The Tracking of 1 078 Blue Skies (2018). Duration: 4 432 days.
(Citadellet, Landskrona, 2020; Image courtesy of the artist).



2.12 Stills from *The Master is Drowning* showing light flair, by Penny Siopis (2012). Digital video, sound. Duration 10 min 25 sec.
(Images courtesy of the artist).



2.13 Stills from *The Master is Drowning* showing the films sprocket holes, by Penny Siopis (2012). Digital video, sound. Duration 10 min 25 sec.
(Images courtesy of the artist).

concentrationary hauntings – disruptive charges that impinge upon the everyday, threatening to rupture national and collective resolutions of meaning and representations of these historic events.

According to Demos, the materiality of Siopis' films interferes with the convention of representing history as transparent and self-evident, inviting the viewer to imagine alternatives. He states: "[The] history of filmic physicality leaves us with the ghostly trace of a past severed from meaning and context, marooned in time and place, which indicates a reality beyond what representation can capture, a realm that is *more than* and *other to* the meaning and significance of language" (2014:211). Demos then proposes that the materiality of Siopis's films "connects us to the materiality of the past" (2014:216), bringing forth a tangible and visceral sense of history – history felt and acting in the present. Similarly, the glossy surfaces of Kusters's photographs not only reflect the environment's light but also the viewer. As the viewer meets their own gaze while looking at the photographs, the present overlaps and is superimposed onto the past. This effect draws attention to the personal responsibility of remembrance mentioned by Kusters. These photographs inhibit transparent viewing because the present environment and the viewers themselves interfere with the act of looking. As a result, one becomes highly attuned to the embodied nature of looking and must contend with fundamental limitations – the impossibility of seeing all and knowing all.

When Temporal Certitude of the Past Coexists with the Openness of the Event

Siopis's poetics of vulnerability and Bennett's vibrant matter resonate, perhaps unexpectedly, with the mediums of film and photography, both of which provide evidential certitude that something was there. Siopis states that her films want to be true, which pertains not only to content but to "how the celluloid is an ineluctable physical trace of events which we take to have actually happened [and] of people (now dead) caught in a moment of life" (2014c:199). Kusters, by taking photographs of the sky at each former concentration camp, the sky, even though it is a content-less or object-less 'form,' still provides us with evidence of having been at these specific locations, as specified by the GPS coordinates. Ariella Aïsha Azoulay offers an explanation:

> *Photography's critics tend to forget that despite the fact that the photograph speaks falsely, it also speaks the truth. A photograph does in fact attest to what 'was there,' although its evidence is partial, and only in this sense is it false. What was there is never only what is visible in the photograph, but is also contained in the very photographic situation, in which the photographer and photographed interact around a camera. That is, a photograph is evidence of the social relations which made it possible, and these cannot be removed from the visible 'sense' that it discloses to spectators who can agree or disagree on its actual content (Azoulay, 2008:126-127).*

In Azoulay's postulation, the evidentiary is a necessary fragment of truth, a piece of what was there and continues to be there, around which the participants of the photographic *event* gather to negotiate and dispute its meaning. Demos also raises the question of photographic indexicality, writing that the photograph "constitutes an opaque surface whose coding can only be ambiguous, a condition that disqualifies interpretation based on referential certainty" (2013:141). This implies that the truth value of the referent is temporal and not transferable to any claim of observational certitude. Demos elucidates the politics of this ambiguity: "By accepting the fundamental uncertainty of photographic meaning, one then challenges the dominant regime's representation of the hierarchical structure of social relations" (2013:141). Through their use of film and photography, Siopis and Kusters question how we come to know the past from images, and which pasts have been preserved or exiled in these images. This involves grappling with the dialectic of temporal certitude – the fact of *having been there* – and the indeterminacy of the event – the uncertainty of *what was there*. In other words, one is confronted with a past that remains unresolved, perpetually deferred to the future – to the relational unfoldings and becomings of a poetics of vulnerability.

As discussed, this dialectic applies to trauma theory and the experience of traumatic memory. Drawing on Cathy Caruth's theorisation, Ulrich Baer writes, "Traumatic events exert their troubling grip on memory and on the imagination because they were not consciously experienced at the time of their occurrence" (2002:8). Similarly, psychoanalyst Dori Laub reaffirms that trauma "precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out, malfunction" (Laub, 1992:57). Laub then alludes to a connection between trauma and photography, echoing philosopher Giorgio Agamben, stating that "the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma … does

indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence" (Laub, 1992:57). As Azoulay and Baer (as with Walter Benjamin, Didi-Huberman and Eduardo Cadava from the previous chapter) suggest, photography, in a homologous way to trauma, testifies to an absence – that which has been – without providing certainty about what is seen as having been there. For photography to offer any information, its preservation of an instant in time requires narrative. However, this narrative, to varying degrees, is always speculative and therefore open to continued dispute.

Invoking Benjamin, Baer argues for the connection between photography and traumatic memory, writing that photographs "can capture the shrapnel of traumatic time. They confront us with the possibility that time consists of singular bursts and explosions and that the continuity of time-as-river is another myth" (2002:7). Elaborating, he proposes:

> *Memory cannot replay an incoherent scene in order to re-examine it more closely as incoherent; it either surrenders to the craving for meaning or shatters under the impact of trauma. This odd circumstance – that human perception, unlike a camera, views reality as coherent, except when it has suffered a devastating shock – points to the hidden matrix linking trauma and photography. (Baer, 2002:170)*

Encapsulating the similarity, Baer reaffirms that photography and trauma "both mark a crisis not of truth but of reference" (2002:181). This is where Siopis and Kusters step in, activating affect and the imagination as a means to search for meaning within the incoherent open-endedness and interminability of traumatic historical events.

While not questioning the truth of the historical event, Siopis and Kusters foreground the issue of the referent by insisting on the viewer's participatory and interpretive role in piecing together meaning from what is seen, what is suggested, what can only be imagined, and what remains inaccessible and unknowable. As viewers of their artworks, we occupy a position similar to Laub's description of the listener to traumatic testimony: "the blank screen on which the [traumatic] event comes to be inscribed for the first time" (Laub, 1992:57). Thus, the traumatic event only comes into being relationally and belatedly through mediation. It is important reiterate that Siopis's films and Kusters' photographic installation are not representations of historical events; instead, they give rise to originary encounters with the past

– re-presenting the past. Rather than revising history, Siopis and Kusters engage in what Silverman and Pollock term "concentrationary memory", which, according to Silverman:

> *institutes a notion of memory as the haunting (and hence disturbance) of the present, a site of the in-between, of doublings and overlappings, of an uncanny superimposition of the visible and the invisible … memory in the wake of the camps is not psychological memory (that is, centred within the 'known' psychology of the individual) but de-individualised, de-temporalised and de-spatialised. Concentrationary memory is never there where it finds itself, both here and elsewhere, the present disfigured, tainted permanently by the presence of death and oblivion (Silverman, 2011:200-201).*

The filmic and photographic evidential certitude of the past – a territorialisation – coupled with its indeterminacy in the present as an event – a de-territorialisation – renders these mediums particularly suited for the concentrationary's diffusive, latent and disruptive symptomatic nature, its existence spanning both space and time, a potentiality to suddenly emerge that resides in the past, present, and future.

Reading and Presenting Absence with Textural Specificity and Audio-visual Indeterminacy

Similarly to Campt's haptics, Didi-Huberman challenges the reliance on the ocular for interpreting images. "Images tell us nothing; they lie to us or remain obscure like hieroglyphs until we make the effort to *read* them, which means to analyse them, decompose them, reassemble them, interpret them, and distance them from any verbal clichés they arouse as visual clichés" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:27). Philosopher Gilles Deleuze also suggests that "To read is to relink instead of link; it is to turn, and turn around, instead of to follow on the right side: a new Analytic of the image" (2005b:235). Laura U. Marks, a philosopher and scholar of new media and film also proposes, "To read/hear the image, then, is to look/listen not for what's there but for the gaps … to look for what might be in the face of what is not" (2000:31). This means that each viewer must create "new combinations of words and things that cannot be read in terms of existing languages of sound and image, but calls for new, as yet unformulated languages" (Marks, 2000:31). Discussing Siopis's artworks (specifically the relationship between her films and ink-and-glue paintings) Chiya writes that they are "ultimately

never completely knowable, because they are indexes of flux, and jolting visual events that host the viewer's shifting perceptions. As we move through time, gathering states, sensations, worries and memories, the plasticity of the works enables new experiences of their meanings. They expand with us in the same way vocabularies are extended by further reading" (Chiya, 2024:427). In Siopis's and Kusters' artworks it falls upon the viewer to create a new grammar and a new way of making meaning between the non-congruencies of image, text, and sound. However, as the previous discussion on Benjamin's conceptualisation of the now of an image's readability elucidated, because the viewer senses the dynamic plurality of these languages there is no coherence of a fully intelligible grammar. Reading, therefore, rather than a passive reception of the given, is the incision of the interval, the act of breaking apart due to a distrust of the given that then must be reassembled. Because reading is itself a dialectical process that mends while it breaks, emerging while withdrawing, it expands the potentiality for diversity.

I agree with Chiya that viewers of Siopis's films are "given the room to recognise the interiorities of others" (2024:429), however, I disagree with her proposition "the reader wholeheartedly 'remakes' the works according to their personal lexicon of experience. Any sense of our otherness in relation to the text is dissolved – it becomes ours as we make it … To be given a new vocabulary of forms provides ever new ways of locating ourselves in the world and experiencing it" (2024:427). I perceive Siopis's and Kusters' artworks as maintaining an unassimilable alterity. Reading maintains the insurmountable gap between oneself and another as well as activating the sense of an otherness within as one fails to bring the elements together to formulate coherent meaning so that it never becomes wholly ours while we make it.

Didi-Huberman proposes that one of the primary acts of readability is its "pedagogical task" of learning about the inhumanity of humanity (2011:109). By reading the image, one therefore has to contend with the Lazarean – the one who returns from the dead with terrible knowledge. Artist and academic Benjamin Hannavy Cousen argues that "the Lazarean is the moment of direct witness" (2019:176). It is not:

> *bound in endless classification to the past but can be brought back to life in the moment when it exists again. It is not merely a ghostly trace that petitions for redress. Any Lazarean image would, therefore, also have features of a particular quality of 'nownness' and presence, but is not detached from history and memory … The Lazarean image or disturbance is a kind of representation that directly becomes 'presence' as a living memory (Cousen, 2019:176).*

Cousen further proposes, "The fugitive nature of the *Lazarean* image makes it very difficult to describe; perhaps it is only known when it is encountered" (2019:187). Crucially, "in our encounter with it, we will recognise ourselves as also Lazarean" (Cousen, 2019:187). Through the act of reading the image in Siopis's and Kusters' artworks, we are compelled to disassemble and deconstruct what is given and known, confronting our own disfiguration in the process – becoming de-familiar and estranged from ourselves, obliging us to confront the precarious temporality of the human.

Siopis's Lazarean method of utilising first-person text, which renders the deceased subject present-in-absence and audible only through the viewer's inner voice, offers a complex engagement with the participatory role of the viewer, who becomes both listener and reader of the image. In conversation with Mark Gevisser, Siopis (2019) states that because viewers read rather than watch the films, they are no longer passive in the conventions of ocular spectatorship and must renegotiate their relation to the films. Siopis (2019) discusses how, while reading the first-person subtitles of her films, viewers although performing the voice within their own minds, it is still a separate voice, the unheard voice of her filmic subjects. Akomfrah states that the audio in the films becomes a kind of voice/s so that "there are other voices" (2024:293). Viewers of Siops's films begin to realise that they are in the company of others who are only present as traces so that, as theorist of film and screen media, Laura Rascaroli observes, viewers are, "haunted by a voice that is always on the point of coming together, of breaking apart" (2024:83). Samama's audio in *The Blue Skies Project* (2018) works in a similar manner, the intermittent pings presenting haunting traces of the subjects that emerge only briefly to then be carried away by the passage of time. Consequently, in these artworks the subjects escape representational capture, remaining defiantly indeterminate and opaque. This creates a curious encounter – apprehending subjects who are so insubstantially present that they have to be intuited through fragmented images, scant text and intriguing soundscapes. Although not identifiably present, they emerge within the dynamics of affect, within the sensorial, emotive, and felt qualities inspired by the artworks.

In *Obscure White Messenger* (2010), Siopis further complicates the relationship between the film's subject and the viewer. She explains, "I use a question and answer format, which I drew from the psychiatrist's report of the interview he had with Demitrios Tsafendas, immediately after the murder. In the beginning of the film it is not easy to work out who is talking: who's the 'you' and who's the 'I'?" (Siopis, 2014c:200). This causes the viewer to become both the addresser and the addressee, leading to a disconcerting slippage and overlap between oneself and another. One senses the disheartening fragmentation of the self as a unitary subject, becoming precariously entangled with unknown others from unknown places and times. Commenting on this curious situation, Bronner writes:

> *[It] is the disembodied, witnessing narrator who offers at least the invitation towards a loosening of the bounds of individuated subjectivities in the imaginative inhabiting of the narrators "I"... It becomes apparent not only that "I" and "you" exist in relation to each other, but that each can only exist through reference to the other. The slide along the I/you axis repeatedly demonstrates the instability of other discursive boundaries, including that between self and other (Bronner, 2023:34).*

Twidle's comment about *Obscure White Messenger* (2010) is highly relevant here, as he notes that the film "is able to leave his [Tsafendas] message poised between sense and incoherence, at once utterly clear and terminally open" (2019:45). This observation holds true for all of Siopis's historical subjects, who remain visually and audibly elusive and obscure representational fugitives. It is precisely due to this fugitivity that they maintain their role as political actants.

As mentioned, Samama's soundtrack, rather than representing, also hauntingly presents the voiceless and the nameless – the multitude of those who cannot testify, who are too numerous to even imagine, but whom we must remember. Although visibly absent, they are present in ephemeral, transient, aural abstraction – fugitives to form itself.

Not only does one read the image in Siopis's and Kusters' artworks, but both artists use text which works with and against the audio-visuals. Siopis offers an observation that also pertains to *The Blue Skies Project* (2018) when she states that the text, allows the films "to hook contingency with fact" (2012:45). For both artists text is used to locate the artworks to a specific historical event while the audio-visuals open the event to potential elsewheres.

Akomfrah states that because Siopis uses subtitles to stand-in for the voice of the deceased subject "The authorial voice has somehow been ventriloquised by text, which is standing in for it, saying it's the voice – but actually, it's not; it's really part of the image" (2024:293). Artist Zineb Sedira describes how the text also works as an image in Siopis's films so that it circumvents the authorial voice. "At times it feels bold and at other times it looks so fragile. The font almost disappears in some sequences, making the reading difficult but alluding to oblivion, void, silence" (Sedira, 2024:293). As much as the textural subtitles index presence, it concurrently indexes absence. The subjects' presence in the artworks are imbued with vulnerability and precarity, the viewer responsible for the impossible task of holding them present in their minds while they are continuously slipping into the past. Reading text becomes as transitory and displaced from its referent as reading the image.

In Kusters' *The Blue Skies Project* (2018), without prior knowledge of what the blind-stamped information indexes, the artwork would be incomprehensible. "Except for our crucial knowledge of their meaning," curator Martin Barnes writes, "the numbers are as innocent as the skies" (2020:2). In each image, by presenting the spatial and formal indeterminacy of the sky alongside the spatial specificity of the blind-stamped GPS coordinates, the viewer must grapple with the concentrationary schism of anywhere and somewhere. Kusters states that the seemingly non-analogous relation between image and text was aimed at "creat[ing] a disruption in the interpretation and understanding of what the viewer is seeing. The abstraction of the sky and the specificity of the number creates a fracture, where introspection and contemplation become possible" (email correspondence, September 19, 2021). Commenting on Kusters' method of bringing together the facticity of data and the poetic, Barnes writes, "Together, they form an axis of distant but connected poles, between objective data and suggestive resonance" (2020:2). By including both the measurable and the immeasurable, Kusters "aims for a point between abstraction and specificity" (Barnes, 2020:3). Moreover, it is in this 'between' space that Kusters problematises such dichotomies. "These places," Barnes adds:

> *even if they can be accurately located, refuse to be contained, and cannot be encompassed by a single point of view. The artist has chosen to witness at the spot of the event's vanishing and most intangible residue in the form of reflected light. Yet between the fractures of evidential specificity and the abstracted trace, a space is opened up for reflection. This*

is a space to judge, grieve, remember, learn, and perhaps to understand (Barnes, 2020:4).

Within *The Blue Skies Project* (2018), specificity seems to be threatened by a collapse into abstraction, while knowing is cut through by un-knowing. The specificity of place opens up to encompass the potential for every space, implicating all spaces in history's atrocities. Spatial uncertainty prompts temporal uncertainty, compelling one to ask: When did this happen? The remoteness of the past enacts the traumatic concentrationary breach into the present and beyond. Baer (2020) proposes: "The sky captured in his Polaroids is timeless, in the sense of not belonging to a human notion of history. This allows Kusters to open with each image our present moment onto the past, rather than commemorating the past as a sequence of events that leads in a straight line to our present but is irretrievably lost." Therefore, with Kusters and Siopis, the more we think we know, the more information their artworks convey, this discovery is concomitant with an equal degree of loss.

Imagining History Between the Documentary and the Fictional

Siopis's (2012:45) comment about using text to hook contingency with fact, contending with determinacy and indeterminacy, or specificity with its elsewhere, also resonates with what Demos terms "documentary-fiction". This strategy involves "throwing documentary conventions into crisis" by "interweave[ing] the factual and the imaginary registers of the image for critical and creative effect" (Demos, 2013:xvi). Demos notes, "That this may express a certain level of contradiction – as a form of documentary that deconstructs its own relation to reality – is precisely the point" (2013:50). With documentary-fiction, Demos adds, "the real surrenders to representational uncertainties and the image takes on material properties; combined, the sensible and the intellectual remain creatively indistinguishable" (2013:62). His postulations draw from Rancière's challenge to the conventional contradistinction between the narrative forms of fiction and non-fiction. Rancière informs his reader:

Originally, fingere doesn't mean "to feign" but to forge. Fiction means using the means of art to construct a "system" of represented actions, assembled forms, and internally coherent signs … The real difference between them isn't that documentary sides with the real against the inventions of fiction, it's just that the documentary instead of treating the real as an effect to be produced, it treats it as a fact to be understood (Rancière, 2006:158).

Demos connects his concept of documentary-fiction to Rancière's notion of "film fables", which is "a type of cinematic construction that links the camera's objective capturing of the visual field and the artist's subjective vision, making for a cinematic form of the 'heterogeneous sensible' capable of remaking the conditions of history … Fiction, in other words, identifies the material and sensible components used to construct reality and history" (Demos, 2014:211). Documentary-fiction deploys the formal strategies of objectivity and subjectivity within the same work of art, entangled to the point of fraught indeterminacy.[31] Demos proposes that "the deepest engagement with reality necessarily verges on the fictional" (2013:54) and poses the following: "If all documentaries involve an element of fiction, subjective motivation, and imaginative supplement, then it is because fiction may very well be the site where reality is forged" (2013:172). Consequently, in documentary-fiction artworks, "truth can no longer be assumed – yet neither can its existence be abandoned" (Demos, 2013:174).[32]

Demos further argues that fiction, or the imaginary, is by no means devoid of socio-political and historical force. It can, and must, be activated to contest institutional fields of study that claim mastery and ownership of knowledge, a process whereby the production of truth becomes an effect of power – indeed, that of disciplinary power. He affirms that "aesthetics forms an essential feature of the political, which designates the process of reorganizing the perceptual field and the interruption of politics as usual" (Demos, 2008:137). Demos contends that the indeterminacy of subjective imagining and "the politics of aesthetics" can "reconstitute the terms of politics," while "prevent[ing] the assumption of an objective, transcendental truth, and challeng[ing] the belief that truth must be inextricably rooted in a homogeneous notion of identity. In its place, the practice of criticality, reason, imagination and storytelling indicate the elevation of the subject's individual agency" (2013:200). Also arguing against strict differentiation between fiction and non-fiction, Twidle writes, "questions of narrative non-fiction can never be divorced from those of narrative power: who has the ability to write about whom; which stories are told across history; what comes to be heard or forgotten, and why" (2019:4). He further asserts that "when History has been demythologised and revealed as a text among other texts, there exists a whole spectrum of different narratives and writings competing for legitimacy and primacy, making their different claims on the real" (Twidle, 2019:12).

Documentary-fiction therefore relates to Siopis's and Kusters' artworks in how, as mentioned, the text holds the factual, while the image and sonic elements seem to break away and how the filmic and photographic mediums retain a facticity of their own, records of having-been-there. Due to both these strategies, the factual and the fictional imbricate to the degree of indiscernibility. Twidle suggests, these *experiments with truth* "gesture toward a documentary poetics able to access histories and structures of feeling not easily available to more literal or directly representational modes" (2019:214).

At first glance, Kusters' act of looking up and photographing the sky might seem to be an act of intentionally looking away, averting his eyes and shielding himself from knowing. However, rather than using the camera to record something that remains, or even the destruction and absence of evidence, he captures the sky – an indifferent and silent witness to human history. Baer (2002) argues that nothingness is an empirical and historical fact of the Holocaust, which means that Kusters' archive of the unseen holds evidential worth. He refers to a report by American war correspondent Meyer Levin, who arrived at the recently discovered Nazi concentration camp Ohrdruf in Germany in early April 1945. In the publication of his war diaries, *In Search: An Autobiography*, Levin (1950:129) observed that despite the horror that awaited him at the camp, there was a concurrent, albeit radically contradictory, empirical encounter with nothingness. Baer claims that "Levin's testimony tells us that the site's significance consists in its disclosure of nothing" (2002:75). This nothingness has been associated with the characteristics that mark the Holocaust as a limit point: the unthinkable, ineffable, unimaginable, un-representable, and unbelievable. However, Baer elucidates that nothingness is not merely what one must confront in the wake of the event; instead, it was experiential – the evidentiary void internal to the event itself. He writes, "For the nothing to be 'translated' into sight, it must be shown as nothing, rather than as the absence of something we could know" (Baer, 2002:75). Kusters describes his own experience of this nothingness (email correspondence, September 19, 2021):

> *I attempted to look at nothing because there is nothing left to see. Yet there remains that powerful experience of place, even two generations later, and even if there is nothing visual that remains. I actively choose to look up at the sky, as an engagement, as a potentially rebellious act of seeing. Showing that same sky that has witnessed everything below, then and now. The viewer knows what lies beneath, and is expected to use this knowledge to reflect (Kusters, 2021).*

Rather than representing absence, ruin, or erasure from which one can attempt to imagine what was or might have been, Kusters' photographs *present nothing*. Baer (2020) describes the project's dialectics between the visible and the invisible as "an archive of the unseen", and, therefore, by implication, it is an archive of trauma. Baer writes that by including "even those camps to be indexed which official history has forgotten, Kusters' typological project shows that even emptiness, even loss, is never the same" (2020:3). The viewer has to address Didi-Huberman's lacunary necessity: thought obligated to think the unthinkable, the imagination obligated to imagine the trauma of the unexperienced actuality of the event. Kusters proposes that "the nothingness and vastness is shown in a very framed and organised way, and that is where the breaking point lies" (email correspondence, February 10, 2023). Kusters breaks the frames that separate the poetic from the factual and the beautiful from atrocity and this breaking of frames means that observation is no longer possible, we are placed in the impossible position of bearing witness to a terrible nothingness.

Deploying a contrary strategy, in a startling move, Siopis includes archival footage of Verwoerd's shooting at the end of her film *The Master Is Drowning* (2012) (Figure 2.14). It is the only moment in her films where an image directly corresponds to the historical event. This shift is first indicated by the footage cutting to monochrome, followed by the soundtrack fading out and Verwoerd's voice becoming audible. This is also the sole instance in Siopis's films where the subtitles correlate to a speaker's voice. As Pratt resumes to 'speak', the audio track of a trumpeting band plays over footage of marching men. Abruptly, the audio stops, and the footage jostles around, though the gunshots remain unheard. The footage then cuts to Verwoerd, with bleeding nose and mouth agape, clasping a gushing wound on the side of his face. The footage holds the shot for an extended period as the anthem *Nkosi Sikel' iAfrica/Die Stem,* performed by Dan Moyane, begins to play. Siopis (2019) states that it was necessary to show not only the fact of Verwoerd's bleeding face but also the symbolic face of apartheid injured. In this scene, the non-fictional collides with the fictional, and the shock from this archival puncture is experienced as surreal – a disruption that is all too real, from which we can imagine what ought to have been. Apartheid should have died that day. Thus, the viewer is given an opportunity to imagine an alternative world.



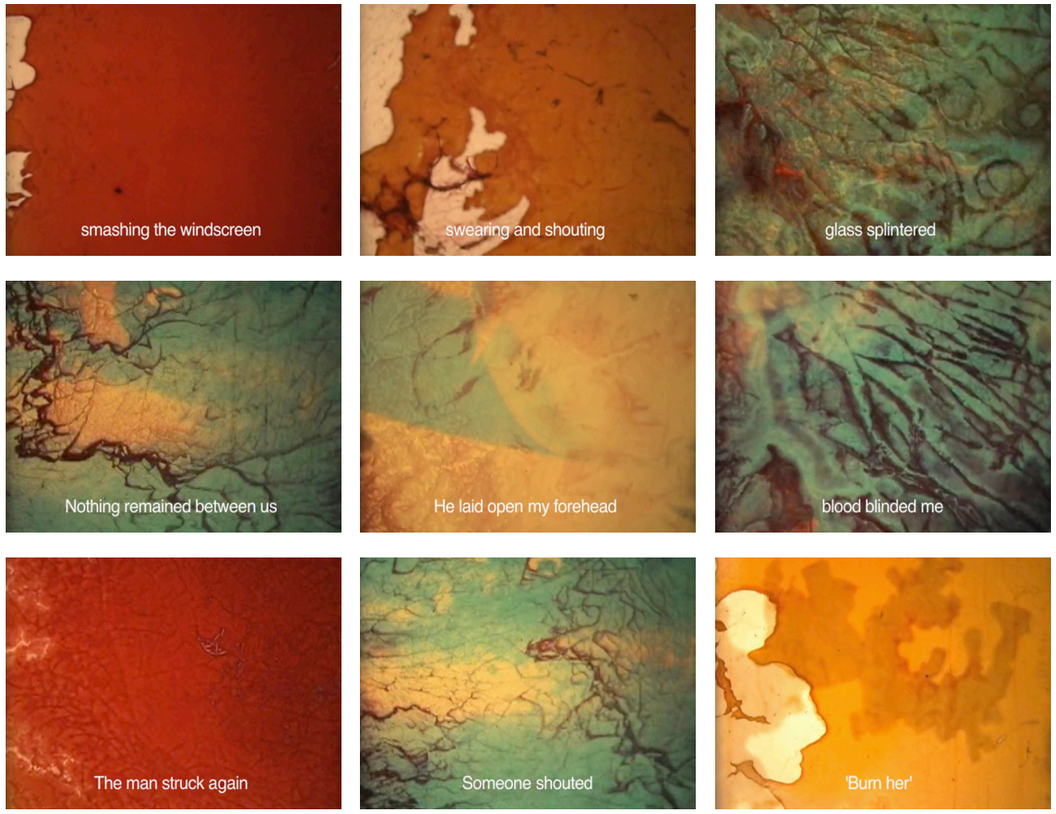
2.14 Stills from *The Master is Drowning*, by Penny Siopis (2012). Digital video, sound. Duration 10 min 25 sec.
(Images courtesy of the artist).

The Haptics Presence of Non-Representational Images

By arguing that the artworks by Siopis and Kusters engender affective encounters or events that far exceed the reductive approach of visual interpretation, the viewer participates in what Marks terms "haptic visuality".[33] Marks writes, "Senses that are closest to the body, like the sense of touch, are capable of storing powerful memories that are lost to the visual. Senses whose images cannot be recorded … are repositories of private memory" (2000:130). Haptic visuality opens up the public dimension of images and their socio-political encoding to encounter the fullness of their private dimensions. Artworks that engender haptic visuality "trouble the relationship between vision and knowledge. Pointing to the limits of visual knowledge, they frustrate the passive absorption of information, instead encouraging the viewer to engage more actively and more self-critically with the image" (Marks, 2000:133).

Marks explains that "while optical perception privileges the representational powers of images, haptic perception privileges the material presence of the image. Drawing on other forms of sense experience, primarily touch and kinesthetics, haptic visuality involves the body more than in the case of optical visuality" (2000:163). Likewise, in the words of Bennett, their artworks "conceptualise the manner in which sensation might be understood to engender forms of knowing" (2005:12). With haptic visuality, the viewer remains cognisant of the opacity of vibrant matter and is therefore required "to work to constitute the image, to bring it forth from latency" (Marks, 2000:183). Marks describes the unfolding relation as intersubjective, with the viewer and the image "capable of mutual recognition" (2000:183). However, she clarifies, "The point of tactile visuality is not to supply a plenitude of tactile sensation to make up for a lack of optical image" (Marks, 2000:192). As discussed in relation to other strategies, this act of bringing forth is predicated on loss, requiring the sustained work of memory and the imagination in constituting an image that will always retain an unresolvable deficiency.

Haptic visuality's intersubjectivity therefore emphasises relationality and how these images emerge between the artwork and the viewer – virtual and indeterminate. In Siopis's and Kusters' artworks, haptic visuality becomes a means to belatedly re-engage and re-activate traumatic historical events while enabling a sense of knowing that is not determined by the



2.15 Stills from *Communion*, by Penny Siopis (2011). Digital video, sound. Duration 5 min 30 sec. (Images courtesy of the artist).

evidence associated with ocular perception. As haptic images, Marks proposes, they "can give the impression of seeing for the first time, gradually discovering what it is" (2000:178). With Siopis's and Kusters' artworks, one is always engaged in this process of discovery; although moments of emergence are encountered, there is never a moment of having achieved arrival. These moments of emergence that activate sensorial responses are always on the move – affective and affecting. Referring to the somatic affect experienced by viewers of Siopis's films, which also applies to viewers of *The Blue Skies Project* (2018), Rascaroli suggests that the viewer is able to sense "an event without representation" (2024:77).

Mbembe discusses how the haptic visuality of Siopis's filmic materiality – those markings and scars of vulnerability and age – comes to stand in for an absent image. He observes that "elements are retained which would normally have been discarded: sequences of broken scenes, dusk specks, light flares. Segments and sequences of images that have nothing to do with the unfolding narrative make the film into a thing – a thing to be looked at rather than looked through" (Mbembe, 2014:40). Siopis explains that such material effects "help create ruptures in the narrative and, as 'abstract' form, can stimulate affect" (2014c:200). On account of this rupture and affect, Marks writes that the viewer must relinquish mastery, possession and knowing, "making [them]self vulnerable to the image, reversing the relation of mastery that characterises optical viewing" (2000:185). Siopis reminds us, "The physicality of the film has a history that is often as compelling as the events pictured in the film, story, or sound" (2012:46). It becomes evident that haptic visuality is associated with Siopis's poetics of vulnerability and Bennett's vibrant matter, with an emphasis on how haptic visuality is a strategy of affective embodiment utilised for presenting an image, albeit an image that is always deficient as an all image.

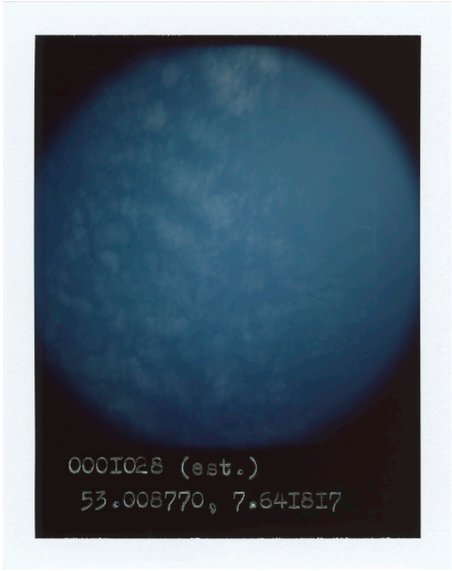
A particularly disturbing encounter with Siopis's haptic visuality occurs in *Communion* (2011) (Figure 2.15). Siopis states, "The film actually burns as the narrative speaks of the nun being burnt, but there's nothing in the burning film itself to actually signify anything of this" (2014b:253). She adds, "It becomes, in your mind, your witness to something actually burning and an image of something burning" (Siopis, 2014b:258). Rather than being represented externally by the image, by witnessing the film itself burning, this horrific event is imagined virtually, happening within the viewer's mind, placing one disconcertingly close to the event. The safe distance of spectatorship and ocular perception is impinged upon by seeing and



2.16 Stills from *Obscure White Messenger*, by Penny Siopis (2010). Digital video, sound. Duration 15 min 7 sec.
(Images courtesy of the artist).

sensing the physical materiality of the representational medium itself burn. There is a horrifying truth in seeing the medium burn that is more affecting than seeing a shocking representation of someone being burnt alive because we are placed more closely *within* the scene. Consequently, we must confront an event where the representational image cannot go; we must confront the unimaginable – the experience of being burnt alive. But since such a horror remains unimaginable, one is then forced out of the scene – a witness to nothing and therefore the true witness to horror.

In *Obscure White Messenger* (2010), Siopis constructs an evocative slippage that subverts identification and embodied sensory affect. The film opens with close-up footage of an octopus in a fish tank, revealing only its squirming tentacles and leaving the viewer to wonder if this might be the obscure white messenger. The subject of the film, the visually and audibly absent Demitrios Tsafendas, becomes apparent only towards the end. From the first moments of the opening sequence, the image of the octopus works its way into the viewer's subconscious. Commenting on this compelling image, Mbembe writes, "The octopus has no relation to the text itself. It is the emblem of something else, something deeper, a dreamscape whose origins are located in primordial time. It is something beyond language, that which is better apprehended viscerally" (2014:39). As the film progresses, the octopus comes to suggest the tapeworm that supposedly plagued and tormented Tsafendas both physically and psychologically, becoming something other than itself, strange and alien (Figure 2.16). Siopis disconnects signifier from symbol, preventing reliance on ocular identification to understand the image and instead encourages a somatic encounter.[34] Marks writes, "To be able to value this kind of knowledge, it is necessary to think [of] the skin as something that can distinguish, know, and remember" (2000:118). Bennett terms this *sense memory*, "a process experienced not as a remembering of the past but as a continuous negotiation of a present with indeterminable links to the past. The poetics of sense memory involve not so much *speaking of* but *speaking out of* a particular memory or experience – in other words, speaking from the body *sustaining sensation*" (2005:38). Bennett observes that in artworks visualising the permeability of skin, or wounded skin, this strategy evokes the permeability and affect of sense memory, whereby "the past seeps back into the present, as sensation rather than representation" (2005:42). Alluding to its association with trauma, she writes, "To be in the grip of sense memory is, by definition, to remain haunted by memory that



2.17 Detail from *The Blue Skies Project*, by Anton Kusters (2018). 0034_Early-camps_034_Eserwegen-IKL_0001028_20180201 A. (Image courtesy of the artist).



2.18 Detail from *The Blue Skies Project*, by Anton Kusters (2018).0113¬_Auschwitz_002_Auschwitz-II-Birkenau_1471595_20180124_A. (Image courtesy of the artist).

resists cognitive processing" (Bennett, 2005:57). Siopis's films work in this manner, and in Obscure White Messenger (2010), the octopus, by becoming something other than itself, is transformed into a symptomatic force. As the representational collapses, haptic and private sensorial forces are released. The octopus, Mbembe writes, "Watery and corporeal, with its tentacles and its movements, it choreographs its own story, the story of multiplicity, of different states of being" (2024:221). It is "an invitation to crossing the borders of consciousness, to the turning liquid of the real" (Mbembe, 2024:221).

Similarly, to evoke sense memory, Kusters decided to photograph the sky on clear summer days to minimise interference from clouds that could grant perspectival orientation, the differentiation between object and background space. Due to the images' austere flatness, the spatial indistinction between foreground and background, representation is taken to the precipice of abstraction. It becomes uncertain whether, while looking at these photographs, one can apprehend their sky-ness and their blueness simultaneously. Openness and vastness are flattened, becoming a formless blue surface, so that optical identification slips into the haptic affect of colour (Figure 2.17 & 2.18).

When these two seemingly opposing aspects of form and formlessness enfold, Didi-Huberman proposes that the image undergoes a transformation from an interpretive object to one that manifests presence. Inquiring further into this paradoxical quality of images, its affecting self-evident yet not-knowable resonances, Didi-Huberman uses the term, the *visual*, which, he explains,

> *isn't nothing, because it reaches us without our being able to grasp it, and because it envelops us without our being able, in our turn, to catch it in the snare of a definition. It is not visible in the sense of an object that is displayed or outlined; but neither it is invisible, for it strikes our eye, and even does much more than that. It is material … it indeed belongs to the world of representation. But it intensifies it beyond its limits, it deploys something else, it reaches its spectator by other paths… But it is very difficult to name it as one would a simple object (Didi-Huberman, 2005:17).*

Rather than being locatable or identifiable as an object, Didi-Huberman proposes that the visual is more akin to an event, and being indeterminate, it exists in the realm of the virtual (2005:17-8). The virtual,

> *never gives a direction for the eye to follow, or a univocal sense of reading. Which does not mean that it is devoid of meaning. On the contrary: it draws from its kind of negativity the strength of a multiple deployment; it makes possible not one or two univocal significations, but entire constellations of meaning, of which one must accept never to know the totality and the closure, constrained as we are simply to make our way incompletely through their virtual labyrinth … it is situated at the junction of a proliferation of possible meanings, whence it draws its necessity, which it condenses, displaces, and transfigures. (Didi-Huberman, 2005:18-19)*

With the virtuality of the visual, the viewer discovers the dynamics of transjective relationality that disposes of the exegesis of images for attentive participation in their affective dynamics. These images, therefore, enable what Didi-Huberman describes as a "opening up [of] a logic," an opening whereby "the structure will be rent, breached, ruined at its centre as the crucial point of its unfolding. The 'world' of images does not reject the world of logic, quite the contrary. But it plays with it, it creates spaces there, spaces from which it draws its power, which offers itself there as the power of the negative" (2005:142).

Didi-Huberman's discussion of his encounter with the multicoloured zones in Fra Angelico's frescoes at the convent San Marco in Florence (circa 1440), which are supposedly decorative and devoid of narrative, is informative of how Kusters' blue skies and Siopis's damaged films engender the affective presence of haptic visuality. Confronted with these multicoloured zones, Didi-Huberman states, "We do not discern a great deal; if there is meaning, it is veiled, plurivocal, and not to be found in any manual of iconography. These zones are acts of negation of the common notion of the figure; they introduce the mystery, 'the unfigurable in the figure'" (1995:56). He proposes that the unfigurable figure, or what he terms figura, is "a critical figure, the introduction of a crisis into every semblance" (Didi-Huberman, 1995:56). Semblance is therefore "in a perpetual dialectic movement" with dissemblance – the unfigurable figure (Didi-Huberman, 1995:56).

According to Didi-Huberman, dissemblant figures are not abstract; rather, they are "signs that are at the same time presences … It is as if the element of presence required the sign's nonresemblance to its referent" (1995:35). Dissemblance is the power of materiality to present the un-representable and visualise the mystery of the invisible. The dissemblance of Kusters' blue skies, by presenting the un-representability of nothingness, manifests a sense of the unforgettable trauma of an un-rememberable past. Likewise, the film 'burning' in Siopis's *Communion* (2011) presents us with the un-representable and unimaginable experience of being burnt alive. Didi-Huberman writes, "The seeing at issue is certainly paradoxical in itself, without any perspective or closure: it looks both beyond and within … Since there is nothing to be discerned, there is everything to be contemplated" (1995:100). Kusters' blue skies and Siopis's filmic deterioration are, as Didi-Huberman would describe them, "surfaces of contemplation" (1995:100).

To paraphrase Didi-Huberman (1995:122), the traumatic nature of the events imaged by Siopis and Kusters are not unfigurable; they are only figurable – presenting the un-representable. Accordingly, their artworks constitute "an aesthetics of limits, interminably aiming towards its object, its term: the image, the invisible image. It would be an aesthetics of the image to come, an aesthetics that knows itself and even … shows itself to be imperfect" (Didi-Huberman, 1995:49). The imperfection of the visible is necessary to activate the visuality and the virtuality of dissemblance. Pertinently, Didi-Huberman adds that dissemblance evinces "that a visibility can acquire all its value not from what it shows but from the expectation of a visibility it does not show" (1995:76). One can therefore discern the compelling and evocative force of futurity in both Siopis's and Kusters' artworks – pasts that are still unfolding – the interminable process of emerging and becoming.

Imagining Future Pasts with Montage

Haptic visuality and dissemblance are both concerned with the question of what "might become visible," which prompts Didi-Huberman to inquire, "Will it then be with passing time that we might reopen the question of the image?" (2005:141). He writes, "Imagination is work," and "that work time of images acting one upon the other by collision or fusion, by ruptures or metamorphoses – all of these acting on our own activity of knowledge and thought. To know, one must therefore imagine for oneself: the speculative work table does not go without an imaginative montage table" (2012:116-119). Didi-Huberman reiterates that "to *show through montage*" is to show "through the dismantling and re-composition of everything" (2018:78). He adds, "Montage makes these heterogeneous forms rise to the surface and connect by ignoring any order of grandeur or hierarchy, that is to say, by pro-

jecting them onto the same plane of proximity" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:79). Regarding "the knowledge value" of images and the imagination, Didi-Huberman states:

> *It could not be intrinsic to one image alone, any more than imagination might consist in passively enfolding oneself in a single image. On the contrary, it is a question of putting the multiple in motion, isolating nothing, showing the hiatuses and the analogies, the indeterminations and the overdeterminations.*
>
> *The imagination is not a withdrawal to the mirages of a single reflection, as is so often thought. It is instead a construction and montage of various forms placed in correspondence with one another (Didi-Huberman, 2012:120).*

Pertinent to Siopis's and Kusters' methodology, Didi-Huberman writes, "*montage intensifies the image* and gives the *visual* experience a power that our *visible* certainties or habits have the effect of pacifying, or veiling" (2012:136). "What we cannot see must therefore be made into a montage so as to encourage, as far as possible, thinking about the differences between certain visual – separated, lacunary – monads, in such a way as to know in spite of all even that which remains impossible to see entirely, that which even remains inaccessible as an *all*" (Didi-Huberman, 2012:137-138). Therefore, montage is "the art of *making the image dialectical*", which involves the critical and inquisitive work of putting thought in motion (Didi-Huberman, 2012:138).[35] To critique dialectically, Didi-Huberman proposes, is to make the individual elements clash (2018:54). He affirms that dialectics brings "different points of view into confrontation around the same question", adding that the "*dialectics of the montage-maker*" is "the one who dys-poses, separating and then re-joining its elements at the point of their most unlikely relationship" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:85). With the dialectics of montage, differences are never resolved; rather, they are intensified and multiplied, thereby opening up a multiplicity of potential meanings.

The dialectics of montage is relevant to Siopis's and Kusters' artworks in how they disrupt chronological historical time, allowing an emerging, non-linear past to be encountered. Elucidating montage's temporality, Didi-Huberman writes that it "is an exposition of anachronies inasmuch as it proceeds from an explosion of chronology. Montage contrasts things that are normally combined and connects things that are normally separated. It therefore creates a jolt and a movement" (2018:125). Montage therefore becomes a crucial methodology for evoking the concentrationary. Silverman proposes that in concentrationary art, rather than a chronological representation of time, there are:

> *overlapping and superimposed 'layers' or 'sheets' of time, not a teleology which allows us to talk of 'past' and 'present' as separate categories or the present as the major organising principle of time … This temporal dislocation matches visual and spatial dislocation: centred visual and spatial fields (the distinction between objective and subjective points of view and between here and there, inside and outside, respectively) are disrupted by a similar 'coexistence of sheets' which denies the specificity and singularity of each. The haunting quality of the Lazarean derives from the repetitions and similarities that cut across demarcated temporal, spatial and scopic regimes (Silverman, 2011:202-203).*

The dialectics of montage relates to Siopis's and Kusters' methodology of imbricating specificity and indeterminacy which creates the spatio-temporal clashes of the concentrationary and Lazarean – the 'here' contemporaneous with the elsewhere – engendering a disconcerting un-knowingness. Therefore, what is here and what is elsewhere cannot be distinguished. Chronological time shatters into overlapping fragments. Everything we thought we knew is called into question, necessitating that one attend to Didi-Huberman's imperative of imaginatively constructing for oneself by creating a dialectical montage from the disjointed fragments.

This form of montage can be further explored within Deleuze's concept of the time-image, which, he states, "no longer asks how images are linked, but 'What does the image show?'" (Deleuze, 2005b:40). Deleuze's cinematic inquiry first appears to plot a history of cinema. *Cinema I: The Movement-Image* (2005a) explores the development of classical cinema and the formulation of a montage of causal linkages intent on narrative cohesion. Following the ruin of World War II, the irrational montage of modern cinema emerged, which Deleuze investigates in *Cinema II: The Time-Image* (2005b). However, these two books should not be read as successive, which would insert the very logic of historicity that Deleuze challenges.[36]

In Deleuze's inquiry, these two forms of montage enable a philosophical inquiry into two modalities of perceptual thinking, which Rancière describes as the "two logics of the image" (2006:114). One logic desires order, while the other thinks with disorder – a reflexive and self-critical logic that de-centres itself. Rancière proposes, "More than artistic ideology,

what is expressed here is a whole regime of how to think about art that expresses also an idea of thought. Thought is no longer understood as the faculty of impressing its will upon its objects, but as the faculty of becoming one with its contrary" (2006:117). Rather than plotting a history of cinema, Deleuze is intrigued by how these two logics of the image are dialectical, the one always-already at work within the other. Deleuze's inquiry into cinema explores what happens when perception is de-centred and mediated. He writes, "And if cinema goes beyond perception, it is in the sense that it reaches to the *genetic element* of all possible perception, that is, the point which changes, and which makes perception change, the differential of perception itself" (Deleuze, 2005a:85). This occurs not only because of the mechanical eye of the camera but also due to the structuring of images – montage, which "is undoubtedly a construction, from a point of view of another eye, it ceases to be one; it is the pure vision of a non-human eye, of an eye which would be in things" (Deleuze, 2005a:83).

Deleuze's time-image – in contrast to what he terms the "sensory-motor schema," the logic of actions and reactions attributed to the movement-image – is composed of pure optical and sound situations, what he terms "opsigns" and "sonsigns" (2005b:6). He argues that "it is no longer a motor extension which is established, but rather a dreamlike connection through the intermediary of the liberated sense organs. It is as if the action floats in the situation, rather than bringing it to a conclusion or strengthening it" (Deleuze, 2005b:4). Pertinently, he argues that in the time-image:

> *We run in fact into a principle of indeterminability, of indiscernibility: we no longer know what is imaginary or real, physical or mental, in the situation, not because they are confused, but because we do not have to know and there is no longer even a place from which to ask. It is as if the real and the imaginary were running after each other, as if each was being reflected in the other, around a point of indiscernibility (Deleuze, 2005b:7).*

As discussed, this moment of indiscernibility is central to Siopis's and Kusters' artworks, where we can no longer distinguish between form or meaning with its material affect, fact and fiction, the visible with its virtual visuality, the familiar with its deformation, or the 'here' with its 'elsewhere'. Deleuze's explanation of the time-image above alludes to how it can be a strategy for the concentrationary and how the concentrationary works dialectically – something always being threatened by the haunting of its inverse. Consequently, there is no

position from which to fully interpret what is shown; rather, one encounters how an artwork remains within a process of becoming, the dynamic position of particularity, contingency and indeterminacy.

Deleuze proposes that the representation of time within the movement-image is indirect because "it flows from the montage which links one movement-image to another. This is why the connection cannot be a simple juxtaposition: the whole is no more an addition than time is a succession of presents" (Deleuze, 2005b:33). He adds, "Each movement-image expresses the whole that changes, as a function of the object between which movement is established. The shot must therefore already be a potential montage, and the movement-image, a matrix or cell of time. From this point of view, time depends on movement itself and belongs to it" (Deleuze, 2005b:34). He then elucidates on how montage de-centres perception:

> *What makes this problem as much a cinematic as a philosophical one is that the movement-image seems to be in itself a profoundly aberrant and abnormal movement ... The movement-image does not reproduce a world, but constitutes an autonomous world, made up of breaks and disproportion, deprived of all its centres, addressing itself as such to a viewer who is himself no longer centre of his own perception (Deleuze, 2005b:35).*

Whereas, "the aberration of movement specific to the cinematographic image sets time free from any linkage; it carries out a direct presentation of time free from any linkage; it carries out a direct presentation of time by reversing the relationship of subordination that time maintains with normal movement" (Deleuze, 2005b:35). Therefore, within the direct representation of time – the time-image – the sensory-motor scheme, he writes, "is shattered from the inside," which means that:

> *a reversal is produced: movement is no longer simply aberrant, aberration is now valid in itself and designates time as its direct cause. 'Time is out of joint': it is off the hinges assigned to it by behaviour in the world, but also by movements of the world. It is no longer time that depends on movement; it is aberrant movement that depends on time... False continuity of shots are the non-localizable relation itself (Deleuze, 2005b:39).*

Deleuze proposes that with the time-image, the break between images – the cut – wields its own affective and vital force. "Instead of one image after another," Deleuze writes, "there is

one image *plus* another, and each shot is deframed in relation to the framing of the following shot" (2005b:206). He states:

> *The fissure has become primary, and as such grows larger. It is not a matter of following a chain of images, even across voids, but of getting out of the chain or the association … It is the method of BETWEEN, 'between two images', which does away with all cinema of the One. It is a method of AND, 'this and that', which does away with all the cinema of Being = is … The whole undergoes a mutation, because it has ceased to be the One-Being, in order to become the constitutive 'and' of things, the constitutive between-two of images … it is the radical calling into question of the image. (Deleuze, 2005b:174)*

This explains the connection between the time-image and Didi-Huberman's dialectical montage that contests and warns against the knowledge of the all-image that curtails the critical inquiry of the knowledge engendered by the imagination. Echoing Didi-Huberman's argument for dialectics, Deleuze continues, the irrational cut of the time-image "puts thought into contact with an unthought, the unsummonable, the inexplicable, the undecidable, the incommensurable. The outside or the obverse of the images has replaced the whole, at the same time as the interstice or the cut has replaced association" (Deleuze, 2005b:206). Elaborating on this notion, Rancière writes: "Each image, thus split off from other images, opens itself up to its own infinity. Thenceforth, what creates the link is the absence of the link: the interstice between images commands a re-arrangement from the void and not a sensory-motor arrangement" (2006:108).

The time-image's suspension of sensory-motor faculties does not mean that images pass by in random, incomprehensible sequence. Rather, the viewer is prompted to re-think the very potentiality of thought with the image – to imagine for themselves and to imagine otherwise. Following on from this point, Trinh Minh-ha proposes that if cinema "is the art of the cut rather than of the suture, then filmmaking is no more the putting together than the pulling apart of fragments. Less a question of consolidating power through unity and coherence, than of transforming at the base with incisive cuts, instinctive distractions and sharp discontinuities" (1999:7). While viewing Siopis's and Kusters' artworks, one therefore has to imagine the missing image between the given discrete textural, visual, and sonic elements that would facilitate meaning. This creates a discordant whole of multiple contemporaneous heterogeneous spatio-temporalities. Appealing to the imagination, the viewer pulls in any possible image that could bridge the break. But the dialectical clash prevents the virtual image from supplementing what is not there. What ensues is an enfolding multitude of virtual images where we can imagine the impossible, thereby activating the potentiality of the past, because the past remains unknowable, deferred to the future.

Drawing on philosopher Henri Bergson's theories on time in *Matter and Memory* (1896), Deleuze hypothesizes a form of time-image to account for a mode of being-in time, which he terms the *crystal-image*. This image "may well have many distinct elements, but its irreducibility consists in the indivisible unity of an actual image and 'its' virtual image" (Deleuze, 2005b:76).[37] Therefore, within the crystal-image, "The two modes of existence are now combined in a circuit where the real and the imaginary, the actual and the virtual, chase after each other, exchange their roles and become indiscernible" (Deleuze, 2005b:123). Deleuze writes, "Having lost its sensory-motor connections, concrete space ceases to be organized according to tensions and resolutions of tension, according to goals, obstacles, means, or even detours" (2005b:125). He goes on to argue that with the crystal, there is not an absence of relations, but rather a:

> *new type of relation, a relation of very precise incommensurability … an incommensurable or 'irrational' relation which connects them to each other, without forming a whole, without offering the least whole. It is a resistance stemming from the collapse of the sensory-motor scheme, and which separates the visual image and the sound image, but puts them all the more into a non-totalizable relation (Deleuze, 2005b:246).*

He later describes this relation as "a *fusion* of the tear" (Deleuze, 2005b:257), which is evident in both Siopis's and Kusters' artworks. In Kusters' *The Blue Skies Projec*t (2018), due to his camera's fixed exposure, the blue shifts in tonality depend on the lighting conditions at each site. Commenting on "the enormously fine gradations of blue above each former camp", Baer (2020) proposes that "our longing for an overarching explanation that envelops everything and for a historical narrative that contains all past events, is an illusion". The varying tonalities of blue are instances of time, of having been there to bear witness to a nothingness that does not amalgamate into a cohesive representation or narrative totality. This dialectical relationship of the singular to the whole, whereby each fragment of the sky

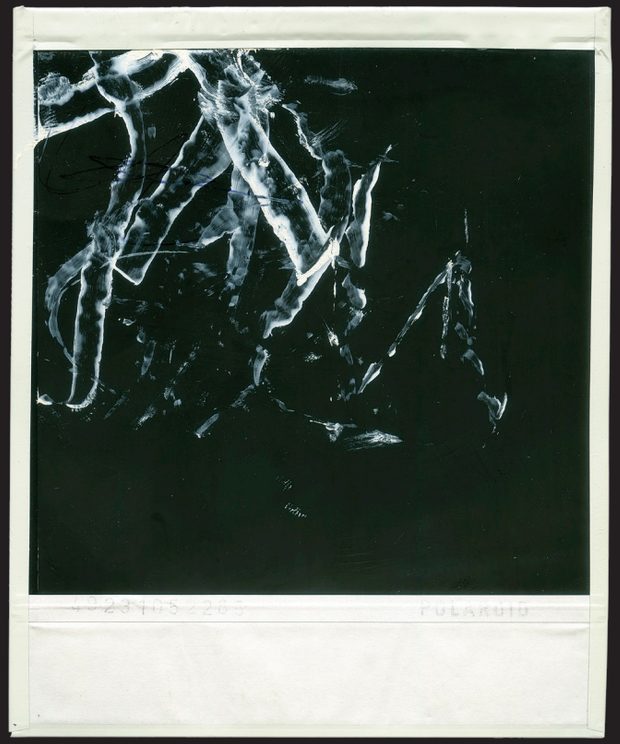
is whole in itself, while distinguished by the particularity of place – a particular record of time overlaid with spatial determinacy and indeterminacy – collapses space and forms the crystalline image.

The crystalline image in Siopis's films results from how the deceased subject narrates events within the 'present', albeit in non-chronological order. The viewer cannot discern what is past, present, or future. Mbembe writes, "In Siopis's work, splitting time is a way of throwing the future open to new lines of development. The open-ended but relentless force of futurity undoes all stability and identity. Nowhere is the force of futurity more clearly manifested than in the relation of matter and form" (2014:39). Siopis's utilisation of the film's damaged and aged physicality as vibrant matter, not merely as a representational medium but as an actant within the narrative itself, amplifies the affective dimension of the crystal's spatio-temporal imbrications and indeterminations by simultaneously presenting the past, present and future. This amplification requires the participatory work of the imagination.

On account of the crystal being a "false continuity of shots" (2005b:124), Deleuze elucidates how this impacts history:

> *A new status of narration follows from this: narration ceases to be truthful, that is, to claim to be true, and becomes fundamentally falsifying. This is not at all the case of "each has its own truth", a variability of content. It is a power of the false which replaces and supersedes the form of the true, because it poses the simultaneity of incompossible presents, or the coexistence of not-necessarily true pasts ... the falsifying narration ... poses inexplicable differences to the present and alternatives which are undecidable between true and false to the past (Deleuze, 2005b:127).*

Siopis and Kusters present us with artworks that radiate powers of the false, enabling us to imagine for ourselves in spite of all. This imaginative potentiality is attributed to the particularity of incompossible future pasts. Encountering their artworks, as Didi-Huberman states, one begins to realise that "the more I look, the less I know – and the less I know, the more I need to know ... knowing quite well all the while that the answer to this need to know will never resolve completely" (2005:182). "We are bound to imagine, as a way of knowing it in spite of all. It is also a way of knowing that we will certainly never grasp it in its exact proportionality" (Didi-Huberman, 2012:162). Within the radical open-endedness of betweenness, the cut, the fissure, and the interval, we can directly experience aberrant time and the powers of potentiality. It is here that the imagination brings us into contact with the un-known, not as a cognitive abstraction that renders the unknown manageable, but as an experiential actuality that obligates us to know otherwise. By undertaking Didi-Huberman's imperative – in order to know, we must imagine for ourselves – Siopis and Kusters expose the necessity and futility of trying to know, creating openings for impossible histories and impossible futures to emerge. As a result, their artworks crystallise time. Deleuze writes, "What we see in the crystal, is always the bursting forth of life, of time, in its dividing in two or differentiation" (2005b:88). He continues, "Thus it is that the past which is preserved takes on all the virtues of beginning and beginning again: it is what holds in its depths or in its sides the surge of the new reality, the bursting forth of life" (Deleuze, 2005b:89). This bursting forth of life is the time of the *now*, the indeterminacy of all unfolding events, where one finds and loses oneself in the becomings and unbecomings of relationality – the being-in-time with others. It is within this moment, engendered by Siopis's and Kusters' artworks, that we experience a de-centering of the self – the Lazarean self, who is other to itself, who is simultaneously here and elsewhere, burdened by a truth that remains unknowable – a truth that threatens to falsify all that is supposedly known so that all knowing is vulnerable to the un-doings of un-knowing. It is because viewers of Siopis's and Kusters' artworks become Lazarean and meet the Lazarean figures of history that they are able to bear witness to the now's shattering of time when the image of history is broken free from its representations and pastness and re-presented in the fullness of its potentiality.



Chapter III

Affective Imagination: Forming a Response to the Liepãja Family Photograph

What is it like to 'forget yourself'? What is it like to be in such a frenzy that you possibly no longer know who you are or what you are doing? Yet you cannot say afterwards that someone else did it. It was you. It remains you.

These questions bring close to you the real prospect of your own capability, my own capability, to participate in evil. And when you become aware of that capability, you might recognize yourself in those who did something unspeakably wrong sixty years ago. Suddenly, they become human in ways you may never have suspected. And when they become human, they begin to live again. Your imaginary participation in their deeds has resurrected them. So we contemplate their humanity in its worst moment. We contemplate our humanity in its worst moments.

(Ndebele, N. 2014:222 & 224)

Theorizing Artistic Praxis

I now return to re-think the affective dynamics of the Liepāja family photograph and the unimaginable horror of being ordered to pose for a photograph moments before one's execution. Disconcertingly, I find myself and lose myself by sensing my own implication in this and other horrors. As writer Njabulo Ndebele exclaims in the epigraph, I am obligated to contemplate humanity in its worst moments, moments when my humanity is called into question.

The artistic praxes of Penny Siopis and Anton Kusters elucidated a way of working through the Liepāja family photograph. Highly attentive to the territorialisation and de-territorialisation of the concentrationary, affect, materiality, haptics, the in-between of truth and fiction, the dialectics of montage, the time-image and the crystal-image, which all activate the clash of diverse times that collapsed causality and the interplay of knowing and un-knowing, enabled me to re-enter and re-imagine this traumatic historical event. Furthermore, their practices provided me with tools to re-imagine my relation to time and place, and in doing so, explicate the injurious affect of my encounter with the family portrait, particularly Sorella's persistent refusal to look up and meet my gaze. Acting upon Georges Didi-Huberman's proclamation, "In order to know, we must imagine for ourselves" (2012:3), I began to take Polaroid photographs that would form the foundation of my exhibition Knowing and Un-knowing: The Affective Relations of Images (2023) held at the University of Cape Town's Michaelis Gallery. A substantial selection of these Polaroids was displayed upside down and non-sequentially on LED lit mirrored structures placed against the gallery walls so that the Polaroid images were only visible as reflections, for the most part, requiring the viewer look down onto the structures. Accompanying the Polaroids within the dim lighting of the gallery were several lightbox images as well and numerous audio-visual works, either projected onto the walls or displayed on a variety of TVs.

When I picked up my Instamatic SX60 Polaroid camera, it was not the immediate present world that I looked to, but past events that have been recorded by others. I moved virtually through time and place, watching journalistic footage from a TV that had been posted online by news agencies or screened in documentaries, footage filmed anonymously by either professionals or amateurs. The digital dissemination of this footage, having been

posted online and made available for mass distribution, creates an opportunity for collective witnessing and collective memory. However, the interpretation of the footage and its effects on viewers cannot be assumed to be cohesive. Susan Sontag questions to this potential: "Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as collective memory – part of the same family of spurious notions as collective guilt. But there is collective instruction" (2003:76). She continues, "Ideologies create substantiating archives of images, representative images, which encapsulate common ideas of significance and trigger predictable thoughts, feelings" (Sontag, 2003:77). I, however, maintain that these recorded events remain sites of contested realities, even though Jacques Rancière, in line with Sontag, claims that these images have been selected by global news agencies and presented in a manner that directs information and meaning, he does not perceive this community of watching or witnessing as invulnerable and consensual. Rather, his hypothesis of the emancipated spectator (similar to Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's conceptualisation of the civil contract of photography and the event of photography) is predicated on spectatorship being composed of individuals who have the "shared power" of exercising the "unpredictable interplay of associations and dissociations" (Rancière, 2011:17). It is usually within the domestic realm where world events reach us and their socio-political framing comes into contact with the personal that a given framing can meet resistance and is exposed to fracturing. This realm, far from being apolitical, is where such contestation often occurs.

Rancière uses the term emancipation to acknowledge "the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look; between individuals and members of a collective body" (2011:19). He adds, "An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators" (Rancière, 2011:22). I will discuss the strategies I deployed within the exhibition that, by not foreclosing meaning, does not declare a clear political stance, which I see as maintaining the open-endedness of the emancipated community. The viewer was invited to explore for themselves by finding meaning between associations and disconnections, the seen and the unseen and within the betweenness of the cut or interval.

By photographing found footage and re-picturing elements of these events, I disrupted their given signification or system of information, re-framing not only their physical visibility, but their affective visuality. This allowed me to critically work through the seen and the unseen, and inquire into the potentials of mediated and belated witnessing. Although Sontag might disagree and argue that spatial and temporal distance induces greater degrees of

desensitisation towards photographs, her statements on memory suggest that re-exposure to events through photography can reframe their original signification by evoking the particularities of memory. As Sontag writes, "Remembering *is* an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself. Memory is, achingly, the only relation we can have with the dead" (2003:103). This implies that memory's socio-political efficacy lies in its particularity, which, to varying degrees, can evade prescribed political rhetoric.

Rancière challenges the notion that we are flooded by images of horror that desensitise us. Rather, he writes, what we do see is "too many nameless bodies, too many bodies that are an object of speech without themselves having a chance to speak … The politics specific to its images consists in teaching us that not just anyone is capable of seeing and speaking" (Rancière, 2011:96). To interrogate the broader visual field, which is always heterogeneous, it was essential for me to begin by interrogating my own situatedness and biases that influence what is seen and what goes unseen, what is heard and what goes unheard. By re-framing and translating these events into Polaroid photographs, my intention was not to re-define the object or the original event, but to redirect attention in a way that the event re-appears ambiguously so that it can be re-opened to further inquiry and questioning. Critical ambiguity is salient during times of war or conflict (which were moments that I turned my camera towards), because the war image, as proposed by cultural and visual theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff, "functions properly when its supporters simply accept it" (2005:77). To which he adds that the war image,

> *comes guaranteed by the full faith and credit of the sanctioning government that allows it to be seen. It is an event that creates a sense of identification or disidentification. In short, the representation of war as global culture reconfigures individuals in history by means of visual images. Refusing that representation requires relocating both our sense of individuality and of history in negotiating visual representation (Mirzoeff, 2005:77).*

I sought to questing how war images are given or transmitted within a framing that attempts to render them transparent, prescribing meaning for a community of viewers, by literally making my act of watching (a particularity which is inevitably biased, drawn to certain moments, while others are ignored) present in the Polaroids, which took the form of a *star of light* resulting from the automatic flash that reflected off the glass surface of the TV screen. This flash of light, visible in each Polaroid, appears to sit above the image, physically mani-

festing the surface of the image as a screen – that which simultaneously shows and conceals, revealing while obscuring. This reflected light, implying the image-as-a-screen, suggests that making these Polaroids becomes an opportunity for critical self-reflection.

I attempted to carry this critical self-awareness into the exhibition's display by making viewers physically aware of their position in relation to the images. Viewers had to shift their positions to see the partially obstructed and reflected images, withholding full visibility and therefore complete knowing. In doing so, I invited the viewer to become aware that they were within a space promoting an emancipated community that respects opacity and difference, as Édouard Glissant advocates, "Distancings are necessary to Relation and depend on it" (1997:157).

Working and thinking relationally, I selected footage from roughly three spatio-temporalities that come to bear upon the affective dimensions of my encounter with Sorella's refusal in the Liepāja family photograph, namely: events pertaining to the Holocaust (c. 1936-1945), the time leading up to and including the fall of apartheid in South Africa (c. 1956-1994), Israel's 1948 War of Independence, which Palestinians refer to as the Nakba, the Catastrophe (the forced exile of approximately 800,000 Palestinians, a catastrophe which is ongoing, because return remains prohibited), and what seems the interminable Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By selecting mostly historical events to photograph, my intention was to confront the relational within; the duality and difference within myself as both the historically oppressed and the oppressor. Because I affirm that these events are not consigned to the past and continue to affect powerful changes in the world, the relationality of my dichotomies is a dynamic process; ever-changing, requiring continuous critical self-reflection. This refutes any certitude of self-narration or self-perception. The question of being is supplanted by questions pertaining to the with whom of relationality.

My decision to bring photographs from these events into contact within the exhibition was informed by Marianne Hirsch's notion of "connective histories," which "aims to think divergent histories alongside and in connection with each other" (2012:21). She writes that this approach explores, "affiliative structures of memory beyond the familial, and I see this connective memory work as another form of affiliation across lines of difference" (Hirsch, 2012:21). Being connective rather than comparative, this approach, she suggests, "eschews any implications that catastrophic histories are comparable, and thus avoids the competition over suffering that comparative approaches can, at their worst, engender" (Hirsch, 2012:206). She proposes that connective histories offer an opportunity to acknowledge "transnational interconnections and intersections in a global space of remembrance" (Hirsch, 2012:247). It was this connective relational space of remembrance and grievability that was paramount to the exhibition's explorations and evocations.

As with Siopis and Kusters, my display strategy was also a means to engage with the concentrationary, the here with its elsewhere, the seen haunted by the unseen, and the always present potentiality for concentrationary atrocities to re-emerge anytime and at any place. Within the exhibition, I attempted to design a space where the concentrationary's defamiliarisation of the familiar was experiential. By bringing photographs, which are fragmented moments of these events into contact, it became indiscernible which image pertained to which event. The presumed familiarity of these events was therefore disrupted.

The first Polaroids that I took, which were not included in the exhibition but were printed in my artist's statement handout, were a triptych of ocean shorelines taken from Google Maps. I travelled virtually to take a photograph of the beach at Skede outside of Liepāja, Latvia where the family portrait was taken, as well as Sea Point in Cape Town situated at the southwestern coast of South Africa where I grew up, and the beach in the As-Siafa region of northern Gaza (Figure 3.1). My reasons for photographing the shoreline were twofold. Firstly, it was the last view that the women, children and elderly saw on that fateful day when they were massacred at Skede beach in 1941. The shoreline, therefore, became a means of connecting to the Liepāja family portrait. Secondly, the shoreline is the place where spatial determinacy and indeterminacy meet and where the eye can look out as far as possible. The shoreline, therefore, became a place to think about limits and imagine what could lie beyond.

The images themselves appear visually similar. It is only by indexing place that they are differentiated. These were the only Polaroids on which I stamped the reference of place. All the Polaroids within the exhibition were presented without spatial specificity, although, on occasion, I stamped the date of the original footage. There were also Polaroids where place and date appeared to have been 'censored' or redacted. This overt withholding of information was intended to frustrate the presumption that the photograph conveys reliable descriptive information – that seeing imparts knowing. Throughout the exhibition, this strategy of withholding indexical information was intended to make viewers aware of how they













3.1 Front and backs of Polaroids taken of shorelines from Google Maps (2021).

were formulating or building meaning from fragments, making meaning, as Didi-Huberman urges, by imagining for themselves. He argues that images, therefore, "make manifest the fact that politics is first of all a matter of subjectivation and imagination, of desire and memory" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:xxii). Trinh T. Minh-ha illuminates the necessity for re-making meaning, because, "throughout history the battles for human rights have always been battles carried out because of the way meanings are imposed and perpetuated. Hence, the need to question the fixity of these meanings as well as the way they are construed, appropriated, and naturalised, defined on terms other than our own or the ones we would like to explore" (Minh-ha, 1999:61). My strategy was, therefore, intended to re-open history for alternative emergences, offering the opportunity for historical narratives to become participatory – a process of un-making that enables the potential for continuous re-making.

The Polaroid's Life, Death, and Rebirth

Art historian W. J. T. Mitchell writes that the medium of an image "is more than [the] materials of which it is composed. It is … a material social practice, a set of skills, habits, techniques, tools, codes and conventions" (2005:203).[38] In discussing a brief history of the Polaroid I intend to uncover salient aspects of its social dimensions, which informed my decision to utilise it as a means to critically engage with its image-producing mechanics and physical properties, thereby enabling a specific kind of critical thinking, not merely of images, but with images. While Polaroid's automatism appealed greatly to amateur photographers, facilitating the mass production of photographs, its unique physical features and material qualities appealed to some artists, however, professional photographers largely derided its automatism. The following outline of Polaroid's history will recount its ambivalent reception, an ambivalence that continues to resonate within my work.

The Polaroid Corporation was founded in 1937 by the inventor Edwin H. Land at Cambridge University. At first, the company manufactured an array of polarizing filters and film. It was only a decade later that the Polaroid camera was launched. The origin tale goes that, in 1943, after Land took a photograph of his three-year-old daughter, she inquired why she could not immediately see the image. In the era of analogue photography, it could take several days to have one's film professionally developed and the photographs printed from the negatives. The question Land's daughter posed prompted his pursuit of one-step photographic technology, a watershed endeavour of delivering photography to the masses and a harbinger of photography's digital future that would render his invention technically redundant. In 1948, the Corporation launched its first Polaroid Land camera, the first step towards a fully automatic technology that required no technical expertise (Figures 3.2 & 3.3).

By 1972, with the technological development of the SX-70 Polaroid camera, one simply had to look through the lens and push the shutter, which automatically ejected the Polaroid. It is this model that most people associate with Polaroids and for good reason, because, as critical theorist of visual culture, modern drama, film, and photography Peter Buse recounts, it was the widest-selling camera in history during the late 1970s and early 1980s. He refers to anthropologist Richard Chalfen who recorded that in 1987, "46.3 percent of American households contained a self-developing camera" (Buse, 2007:33).

The Polaroid Land camera revolutionised photographic technology, yet its reception was highly ambivalent. For professional photographers, technological proficiency had long been the means for elevating photography as a credible and unique artform. Buse explains, "Polaroid, a company and technology that, after Kodak and prior to digital, contributed most to the mass-amateurisation of photography and therefore, one might expect, to its cultural devaluation" (2008:221). Recalling how early advertising for the Polaroid Land cameras described the process as "fun" and "a thrill," Buse recounts that Polaroid was "primarily promoted as a kind of frivolous diversion for leisure classes unskilled in complex camera work" (2009:375) (Figures 3.4 - 3.6). Professional photography in the post-war decades continued to be a predominantly male-dominated field, and the Polaroid Corporation took advantage of this by marketing their products to non-professionals and the domestic market, namely women and children. They also began manufacturing cameras at more affordable prices, but this merely reinforced the critics' derision. With the release of the SX-70 in 1972, and various other models between the late 1970s and early 1980s, Buse proposes that "Polaroid had abandoned the myth of masculine competence with technology, or, rather radically reconfigured it … it was now the male expert who was dispensable, an endangered being" (2008:229). These photographers, Buse continues, "implicitly recognized the threat the camera posed to the very terms of their expertise" (2008:229). The threat was by no means minor, as Azoulay writes, "The emergence of a photographic canon depended on the distillation of a tiny corpus of photographs that were the work of photographers held by the

discourse of art to possess 'artistic' talent over and above the mechanical capacity to click a button on the camera" (2012:81). "Despite further technological advancements to attract professional clientele," Buse proposes, "the original doubts of the experts stuck and Polaroid continued to be thought of as an extremely clever manufacturer of photographic toys" (2008:226).[39]

However, some critics and professional photographers were enamoured by Polaroid's aesthetics and praised its technological innovations, notably, and perhaps unexpectedly, Ansel Adams.[40] With his technical rigor and mastery of analogue photography, Adams was an exemplar of aesthetic formalism.[41] Adams was hired by the Polaroid Corporation in 1948 and became a long-standing consultant in product development. Commenting on the unlikely championship of Polaroid by Adams, Buse writes in reference to the automatism which freed the photographer from the technical skill of analogue exposure and printing, who was now only responsible for the selection and framing of the subject.

> *Polaroid did away with the darkroom, or at least miniaturized it and made it portable, eventually excluding all possibility of the photographer's intervention in the developing process by producing in 1972 a camera that mechanically ejected a sealed print that developed in the light: the SX-70. However, far from being some sort of special case or exception to the rule, Polaroid's relationship with Adams simply crystalizes a problematic value that runs right through the history of instant photography: its simultaneous associations with both high and low levels of social and cultural distinction (Buse, 2008:222).*

Whilst popularising and democratising photography, the Polaroid Corporation was also instrumental in contributing to the rise of photography as an artform, notably in its financial support of *Aperture* magazine, which was pre-eminent in establishing fine art photography in the USA.[42] Additionally, the company also launched The Artist Support Program, inviting artists to test technological developments. The company acquired these photographs, which was the beginning of the Polaroid Collection launched in the late 1960s, amassing over 20,000 photographs. "Technological inquiry," Barbara Hitchcock, the Director of Cultural Affairs of the Polaroid Collection writes, "occurred on the one hand while creative inquiry flourished on the other. Stimulated by each new Polaroid invention, talented artists sought fresh and unusual ways of expressing their visions on instant film" (1999:9). The compa-



3.2 Polaroid Land Camera Model 95 and Polaroid Land Film Type 40. Polaroid Corporation Records. Photographed by Susan Young. Baker Library, Harvard Business School. https://www.library.hbs.edu/hc/polaroid/research-links/archival-collection/ Accessed:05.01.2024



3.3 "It's easy to make finished pictures in a minute" brochure, ca. 1948. Polaroid Corporation Administrative Records.. Baker Library, Harvard Business School. https://www.library.hbs.edu/hc/polaroid/taking-the-product-to-market/impact-of-the-new-medium/ Accessed:05.01.2024

Academic Peter Buse recounts that with the Polaroid Land camera;

> *the camera operator was still responsible for timing the development of the film, pulling it out of the camera to bust the 'pod' of developing reagent, and peeling the useless negative away from the finished print. Only after 25 years of research in chemistry, optics and electronics did Land achieve his ultimate aim, in the form of the SX-70 technology, which mechanically ejects from the camera a white-bordered image that develops before the eyes of its user. For those who remember Polaroid picture-taking, it is usually this second generation of cameras that define the experience of Polaroid use (Buse, 2010a:217).*



3.4 Polaroid Corporation Annual Report 1954. Polaroid Corporation Administrative Records. Baker Library, Harvard Business School.

https://www.library.hbs.edu/hc/polaroid/assets/imgs/large/238A.jpg

Accessed:05.01.2024



3.5 Newspaper advertising copy for Polaroid Land Camera sold at Jordan Marsh, Boston, Massachusetts, November 26, 1948. Polaroid Corporation Administrative Records. Baker Library, Harvard Business School.

https://www.library.hbs.edu/hc/polaroid/assets/imgs/large/092.jpg

Accessed:05.01.2024



3.6 "Sensational New Polaroid Land Camera" advertising copy, 1948. Polaroid Corporation Administrative Records. Baker Library, Harvard Business School.

https://www.library.hbs.edu/hc/polaroid/taking-the-product-to-market/medium-of-artistic-expression/#

Accessed:05.01.2024

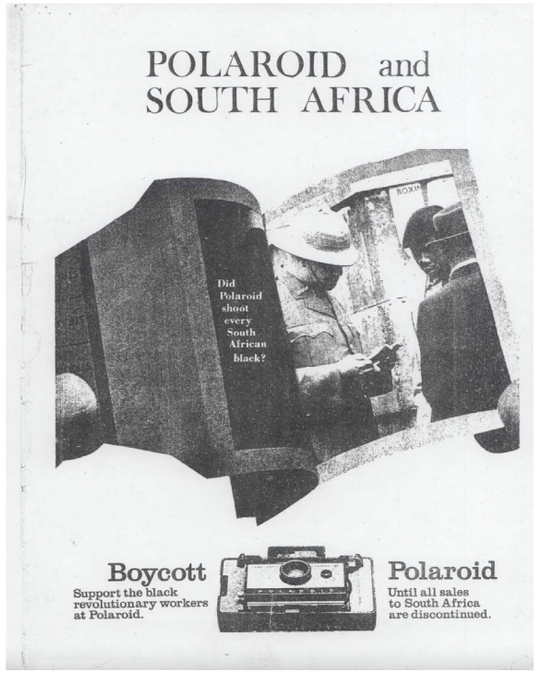
ny, Deborah Martin Kao informs, "encouraged artists to probe the physical and conceptual boundaries of Polaroid materials through the loan and donation of products and through direct grants" (1999:16).

In 1950, there was a notable shift in Polaroid's promotional strategy. In the November issue of the publication *The Camera*, the company's advertisement featured a portrait taken by Adams of Doddy Warren, who, along with Adams, was one of the founding members of *Aperture*. "The textural support for the image," Buse states:

> *moves from the standard 'there's no thrill like seeing your pictures on the spot at the very moment they mean the most, while everyone is there to share the fun' to the decidedly more ambitious claim that 'Photographers everywhere are finding in the Polaroid … camera a powerful new medium for artistic expression … in brilliance of highlights and depth of shadows, the new black and white film gives results that challenge comparison with expert darkroom production (Buse, 2009:357).*

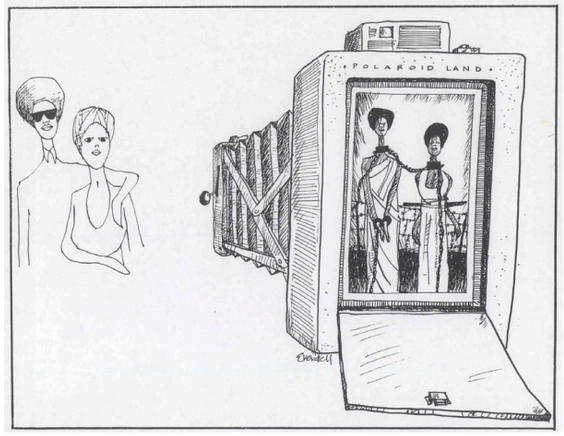
This advertising campaign, although short-lived, featured the artistic potential of the Polaroid camera in the hands of an esteemed master photographer, not merely for amusement, but for facilitating an artist's unique creative expression. Perhaps this indicates that despite the majority of the Polaroid Corporation's advertising focusing on the fun, thrill, and ease of their cameras, the aesthetic potential of their technology was of paramount concern in all their product developments, perhaps indicative of an aspiration for art-making to become a public endeavour.[43]

In South Africa, however, Polaroid has a more sinister history, embroiled in the racism of its apartheid regime. Polaroid and other photographic technologies were most often developed for the exposure of white skin. However, Polaroid's I.D-2 camera was distributed to South Africa because it had a boost function to amplify the flash so that it could record black skin. The camera was therefore used to photograph portraits of black citizens for the notorious pass books, which they had to carry with them at all times when moving outside of the so-called 'bantu homelands'. Failure to present a pass book with the signature of an employer that would 'legalise' their movements into cities and designated white areas would result in immediate detainment (Figures 3.7 & 3.8). When US-based employees at the company's headquarters in Cambridge, Caroline Hunter and Ken Williams, made this discovery in 1970,



3.7 Image available at: http://kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/50/304/32-130-1F7-84-african_activist_archive-a0a8g3-b_12419.pdf

Accessed:05.01.2024



3.8 Image available at: http://kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/50/304/32-130-1F7-84-african_activist_archive-a0a8g3-b_12419.pdf

Accessed:05.01.2024

they formed the Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement (PRWM) with a number of other employees. As black Americans, they were enraged at unwittingly working for a company that was supporting apartheid and contributing to racial segregation and dehumanisation. Their intention was to get Polaroid Corporation to completely divest from South Africa. They also called on Polaroid to publicly denounce apartheid and to donate its profits from sales to South Africa to African liberation movements. PRWM was the first anti-apartheid boycott of a U.S. corporation. When their demands were not met, on 27 October 1970, they rallied to call for a worldwide boycott of all Polaroid products. Williams resigned in protest the day after the rally, and Hunter's employment was terminated in 1971. Michael McCanne explains:

> *Polaroid prided itself on its progressive record. It was known for focusing on diversity in its hiring practices, especially with African Americans and women, and for its internal upward mobility. (Williams, for example, started at the company as a janitor and rose to become a photographer.) The PRWM's accusation that Polaroid products were being used to oppress black people in South Africa battered this image (McCanne, 2020).*[44]

Polaroid initially denied that it was selling its I.D-2 products to the South African government. However, as Eric L. Morgan recounts, "It had failed to acknowledge that its South African distributor, Frank and Hirsch, was selling Polaroid's system to agencies in the South African government, such as the Bureau of Mines and the army and air forces, and was also engaged in discriminatory employment practices" (2006:526).

After the Polaroid Corporation conducted a "fact-finding mission" in South Africa, the outcome, McCanne (2020) writes, was that they:

> *would continue to do business in South Africa but push for changes, making the argument that it could do more good in the country than it could if it pulled out. The company announced it would no longer sell its products to the apartheid government and made its South African distributor, Frank and Hirsch, institute wage increases and promotions for black workers. Polaroid also backed educational initiatives and job-training schemes for black South Africans. These measures had some effect in improving the salaries of black workers at the distributor, but largely ignored the legal nature of apartheid. Black South Africans could not vote in general elections or move freely throughout the country. Measures to make working conditions more equal were hampered by racist laws and racist officials (McCanne, 2020).*

PRWM continued to find worldwide support from anti-apartheid groups. PRWM's efforts finally succeeded on 22 November 1977 when Polaroid announced that it would divest from South Africa. Polaroid, Morgan writes, "had been the first major American corporation to condemn apartheid openly and to attempt to change the system from within. Six years after the experiment began, Polaroid became the first American corporation to sever its South African ties because of its disagreements with apartheid" (2006:545).[45] Although this proved to be a pivotal moment, McCanne (2020) informs:

> *It would be several more years before other American corporations followed Polaroid's path and joined the boycott. In parallel, universities divested from companies doing business in South Africa, and athletes and musicians boycotted the country. Finally, in 1986, Congress passed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act over President Reagan's veto, imposing sanctions on the South African economy. Pressure from the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement helped topple the apartheid regime, which fell in the early 1990s (McCanne, 2020).*

Within the global arena, Polaroid's popularity began to dwindle with the advent of digital photographic technology. The Corporation filed for bankruptcy protection in October 2001, with the production of their film set to be discontinued by the end of 2008.[46] Digital cameras had made Polaroids obsolete. However, instead of resigning the Polaroid to its obsolescence, the tenacity of a group of Dutch entrepreneurs, aptly naming their endeavour the Impossible Project, resuscitated the manufacture of instant film. When acquiring one of the manufacturing premises in the Netherlands, although the machinery was still there, the patents to the chemistry and dyes were not, so they had to reinvent the process. In 2010, the Impossible Project succeeded in launching its first Impossible Instant Film – the PX 100. In 2017, they rebranded as Polaroid Originals and then, since 2020, they have been going by the brand name Polaroid and continue to develop and improve technological advancements. Although presently widely available, due to the expense of Polaroids, its use has been limited to the fine art realm. However, it is within this realm that curious explorations are underway into the unique material properties that Polaroids have to offer.

My use of the Polaroid to photograph documentary and journalistic footage was informed

by its historical ambivalence as an amateur technology associated with fun, frivolity, and domesticity in the U.S., as well as its bureaucratic use by the racial segregationist policies of the South African apartheid government. By photographing this footage with the Polaroid camera, I intended to transform the digitally mobile and accessible moving image into a unique image-object to be displayed as artworks within the exhibition context, while also transforming its materiality and temporality. Within the particularity of this space, there was a somewhat troubled meeting of aesthetics and politics, as well as the private and the public.

In what follows, I will investigate how the Polaroid, when positioned with the context of art, and with certain display strategies, can reveal something about ourselves, a novel spatio-temporal awareness that can re-active emergences of the past.

Questioning the Image with the Particularity of the Polaroid

As with Siopis and Kusters, T. J. Demos's observations on the strategies of documentary-fiction illuminate how my exhibition problematised truth claims without completely rejecting truth, instead demonstrating how truth is forged and how it simultaneously reveals and conceals. Discussing her practice of incorporating the documentary form within fictional cinema, Trinh Minh-ha states that despite it being a "claim to representative truth and information," this "does not mean that in order to bring about change, one has to banish it and adopt another, more adequate, forms. When handled creatively, repetition is a way of affirming difference" (1999:23). One is thereby able to "shift a centre, to lighten the burden of representation, to displace a form from its settled location, and to create new passages through the coexistence of moments" (Minh-ha, 1999:23). Minh-ha adds, "Such an approach allows one to unsettle the terms of established hierarchies and to continually re-inscribe history while apprehending it in its hybrid dynamic, its density, and multi-layered thickness" (1999:23). By presenting photographs of documentary imagery in a gallery setting, detached from their indexical support, the viewer was obliged to renegotiate the politics of aesthetics. These images, once presumably associated with transparency due to their original context and function, became troublingly opaque when presented in the exhibition. Although the documentary or journalistic origins of the images were not disclosed within the exhibition, photographic indexicality played a crucial role in prompting viewers to question the nature of the image itself, challenging the very notions of indexicality and

narrativity. Viewers were encouraged to reflect on the following questions: What does the photograph reveal when detached from its textual support, and can the visible be trusted to convey information and knowledge?

Despite the automation of Polaroid technology, I argue that the Polaroid image – which physically and conceptually demonstrates various qualities of images in general – does not stop developing and reach a staid, inert state even after initially appearing. As discussed, images are always oriented towards an indeterminate, anterior future rather than settling into the past and becoming inactive. Therefore, the events that I photograph from the screen, treating the past as if unfolding before me, offered a means of getting *in touch* with renewed representations of the past, rendering a present-ness to the past. By photographing found footage, I re-imaged and re-presented these events, inviting further reinterpretations. Creating still images from the footage, I fragmented the events even further and, by not disclosing the events themselves, detached them from their known outcomes. Because of this injection of uncertainty and indeterminacy, the past was returned to the process of speculation and becoming. Discussing the Polaroid's particular physical properties, curator Nat Trotman observes:

> *These pictures have interiors, viscous insides of caustic gels that make up the image itself. Users are warned not to cut into the objects without protective gloves – these photographs can be wounded, violated. Their frame protects them like clothing around a vulnerable body.*
>
> *And if the frames are clothing, then they are uniforms. Every photograph has the same white border, wider at the bottom, a space for holding, for writing. Turn the Polaroid over and that same space keeps the spent pod, emptied of its seminal jelly when ejected from the camera. Above that ubiquitous black square negates the image like some dark doppelganger, a reminder of the eventual death of the picture on its obverse, constantly re-inscribing the preciousness of this unique object. The frame itself enlists as aesthetic of minimalist seriality. Its uniformity organizes a sort of collective ongoing project that could encompass all Polaroids – taken anytime, anywhere, by anyone (Trotman, 2002:3).*

As Trotman observes, the chemical composition of Polaroid photographs renders them susceptible to deterioration and fading over time, implying the instability and vulnerability in-

herent to all images. As such, our responses to images themselves can never be definitive or permanent. Every viewing or mental conjuring requires memory-work, speculation, and imagination – the further removed from the actual event shown in the photograph, the greater the reliance on these processes.

The Polaroid's distinctive properties as well as its physical presence as a unique image-object, pronounce it as showing a mere fragment of what existed in front of the camera. This means the space beyond the frame, its exclusions, bear upon the image. As Buse suggests, "This off-frame effect is intensified by the small size of the image and the shallow focus which makes close-ups optimal for image quality. What is more, the very materiality of the frame, stubbornly emphasizing the photo as object not just image, amplifies the crisis of off-frame absence" (2010b:203). Perhaps this crisis poses a dilemma that pertains to what Trotman described as "the collective ongoing project", the more Polaroids one takes, the more the off-frame effect intensifies, enacting greater degrees of fragmentation and shattering of vision. As Buse goes on to suggest, "If the single Polaroid image tells us too little, is far too small, too partial to signify, then the multiplication of images and borders merely splinters and fractures vision further" (2010b:204).[47] What is made visible by the Polaroid is always impinged upon by what is excluded and left unseen. It demands attention to its frame, to what lies beyond, and the impossibility of bringing this outside into the image – the failure of any single image to encapsulate all.

My process of photographing documentary and journalistic footage posted online using a Polaroid camera was also intended to draw attention to the frame's selection, and fragmentation, inherent to representations of any kind. Judith Butler argues that the frame "functions not only as a boundary to the image, but as structuring the image itself. If the image in turn structures how we register reality, then it is bound up with the interpretive scene in which we operate" (2010:71). Butler proposes that this interpretive function is a question not only of what is shown but also of how something is shown. "The 'how' not only organises the image, but works to organise our perception and thinking as well" (Butler, 2010:71). Perception's intelligibility relies upon what is pre-given, those re-representations that habitualise, normalise, and stabilise the empirical. James Elkins argues that "seeing is irrational, and undependable. It is immensely troubled, cousin to blindness and sexuality, and caught up in the threads of the unconscious … No matter how hard we look, we see very little of what we look at" (1996:11). He continues, "Ultimately, seeing alters the thing that is seen and transforms the seer. Seeing is metamorphosis, not mechanism" (Elkins, 1996:11-12). He therefore claims: "There is ultimately no such thing as an observer or an object, only a foggy ground between the two … There is no such thing as a pure self, or a pure object apart from that self" (Elkins, 1996:44). Perception, therefore, is an act of assembling framed fragments, which involves the imagination filling in the spaces between the parts that are given and those that are overlooked or hidden from view. Elkins states, "Each act of vision, mingles seeing with not seeing, so that vision can become less a way of gathering information than avoiding it" (1996:201). Thus, "human sight is not merely partial blindness or selective seeing, but a determinate trading of blindness and insights" (Elkins, 1996:202).

The Polaroid's ability to produce an image in mere minutes, the act of watching the image emerge, and the transformation of the actual into an image with specific mediating qualities, renders Elkins' observations regarding the selectivity of seeing, which is both biological and a sociological wilful blindness, explicit. It also makes explicit how the empirical always arrives belatedly to representation and meaning and, therefore, is always partial and impoverished. Although the Polaroid's frame is uniform, by producing a unique image-object each time – a mere fragment that indexes the infinite space of what lies off-frame and how the actual has always-already moved on from its perception – it implies that all images and representations retain this sense of uniqueness and particularity, the indeterminacy of interpretation.

The artist, however, can work within and against the selectivity of the frame, transforming it into a space that struggles with itself. Siopis argues that "the bounded field gives a space to experience change as particular, as immediate physical transformation, and through it, imagine a relation to change within a wider world" (2018:9). Even though my Polaroids, as well as artworks and images in general, have a boundary, an edge, or a frame, it is within this delineated space that one can imagine a different world and a different way of being. My method of photographing existing images is associated to the critical strategy of what Butler phrases as "to frame the frame," an act that calls the frame into question, which is:

> *To show that the frame never quite contained the scene it was meant to limn, that something was already outside, which made the very sense of the inside possible, recognizable. The frame never quite determined precisely what it is we see, think, recognize, and apprehend. Something exceeds the frame that troubles our sense of reality; in other words,*

something occurs that does not conform to our established understanding of things (Butler, 2010:9).

Elucidating this notion, Butler also refers to Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935), where he argued that dominant media outlets, in their reporting and coverage of global events, necessarily utilise global distribution networks. However, while gaining authorization of how these events are portrayed, they also begin to lose control. Butler writes, "The technical conditions of reproduction and reproducibility themselves produce a critical shifting, if not a full deterioration of context" (2010:9). To determinately frame something, the frame relies upon repetition and reproduction, which paradoxically requires:

a constant breaking away from context, a constant delimitation of new context, which means that the 'frame' does not quite contain what it conveys, but breaks apart every time it seeks to give definitive organization to its content. In other words, the frame does not hold anything together in one place, but itself becomes a kind of perpetual breakage, subject to temporal logic by which it moves from place to place. As the frame constantly breaks from its context, this self-breaking becomes part of the very definition. This leads us to a different way of understanding both the frame's efficacy and its vulnerability to reversal, to subversion, even to critical instrumentalization (Butler, 2010:10).

When a frame breaks with itself, Butler adds:

a taken-for-granted reality is called into question, exposing the orchestrating designs of the authority who sought to control the frame … As frames break from themselves in order to install themselves, other possibilities for apprehension emerge … the norm functions precisely by way of managing the prospect of its undoing, an undoing that inheres in its doings (Butler, 2010:12).

When I photographed the footage, it was impossible to capture everything. I had to make decisive selections, choosing moments within the footage that interested me or 'captured my eye'. Because the aspect ratio of the Polaroid differs from that of the screen, I not only selected a particular moment from the footage to photograph but also a detail within that moment. The Polaroid, therefore, makes explicit a truth, often implicit, as Azoulay has argued, that watching is never passive or observational but always an active participatory event. These Polaroids are visual evidence of my selective watching, offering insight into my positionality at the moment of watching. Physically manifesting the particularity of watching establishes a connection to Butler's proposition that with the self-breaking dynamics of the frame comes "a new trajectory of affect" (Butler, 2010:11). Butler states that affective responses, such as grief or outrage, "are highly regulated by regimes of power and sometimes subject to explicit censorship" (2010:39). By bringing together fragments of already framed events, mediating them even further, my intention was to activate these new trajectories of affect, new relations and symptoms that break away from the determinations of the pre-given frame and that, by showing that duplication is improbable, because it always involves a degree of difference, shows the inherent vulnerability of the frame.

Returning to the Polaroid's chemical properties, watching the image slowly appear from the murky blue chemistry never fails to feel magical. It is during this moment of coming-into-being, of visible aliveness – Jane Bennett's postulation of vibrant matter – that the Polaroid is most fragile and vulnerable. During this emergence, I interfered with the developing process by standing on the Polaroids and crushing them onto the ground, scratching the black plastic backing, or crumpling them in my hands. Some of the white irritant chemistry would squeeze out of the back seams (Figure 3.9). These destructive acts, while bringing the material chemistry to the fore, prevented the image from developing uniformly, resulting in a sense of fluidity. It is as though the clear plastic front became a transparent skin, revealing the corporeal insides of the image. As such, they rendered the politics and poetics of vulnerability at a material level.

I could not immediately see these effects or predetermine the outcome and the extent of damage to the image. I had to wait for the image to develop before the impact of injury became apparent. Due to the Polaroid camera's imprecise lens, the images are all slightly out of focus, with hard edges that delineate forms and objects from space becoming softened. In conjunction with the aggravated materiality, form was threatened by formlessness. In some instances, the image's reference was completely destroyed, overtaken by formless texture (Figure 3.10). Although I included images of violence, the predominant violence was inflicted on the images themselves. The images were violent because they had been violated to varying degrees. This process also rendered Eduardo Cadava's image in ruins on a material

level – the image suspended between emergence and collapse, birth and death. The images were violent because they had been violated to varying degrees. As much as these images have been damaged, they, in turn, become damaging.

These interferences during the development process continue to leave the Polaroids' chemistry in a heightened state of instability, making them highly sensitive to heat and sunlight. If left exposed, the image will bleach and burn out – the very element enabling the image will erase it (Figure 3.11). All the Polaroid images are therefore slowly fading away. Eventually they will return to their prior state of formless chemistry, although they will no longer carry the potential of the image. With the referent erased, they will exist as mere formless matter, a memory that has faded away. This chemical instability implies, as argued, the instability inherent to images in general. What they show is not stable or determinate but contingent and vulnerable to the passage of time. While photographs record a moment, preserving an instant, they remain subject to time, materially and semiotically.

Knowing and Un-Knowing: The Affective Relations of Images

In what follows I will discuss how I staged the Polaroids and other audio-visual artworks within my exhibition *Knowing and Un-Knowing: The Affective Relations of Images* (2023). My intention is not to over-determine what happened when the viewer encountered the artworks, but how its presentation and publicness was intellectually formulated and strategised.

The first image one encountered within the exhibition was a looped video of the title scrolling on a square box TV. The maroon-coloured video, which, after a ping and a flash of an image of a compass, counted down from six before the title appeared and scrolled up the screen, flickered from within the darkened entrance of the gallery (Figure 3.12). The title video introduced viewers to the experience of entering a space where images were 'on the move', therefore encouraging their thinking to be 'on the move'.

Proceeding past the TV through a doorway, one entered a corridor where three black structures were placed against the right-hand side of the gallery's walls (Figure 3.13). A selection of Polaroids was displayed on ten of these 2-meter mirrored LED lit structures. On the first and the last structures, I placed two substantial piles of upside-down Polaroids, indicating that what was shown was but a minor selection (Figure 3.14). The piles visualised the numerous, yet unrealised, potential relations within the exhibition. On the first structure, I placed several Polaroids showing images of barbed wire and watchtowers taken from the three sites of interest (Holocaust concentration camps, apartheid South Africa and Israel-Palestine), so that the viewer's first impression was in reference to the concentrationary universe, where the human had suffered from systems of dehumanisation (Figure 3.15).

On eight of the mirrored structures, the Polaroids were placed serially upside down on individual Perspex stands and lit from below by LED strips (Figure 3.16). Turning the Polaroids over was a subtle allusion to Sorella's haunting refusal, her turning away from my inquiring gaze, and the opacity of not-knowing that ensued, which sustains my grievous plea: *Sorella, please look up at me.*

The mirror was also useful because, as Andrew Benjamin proposes, reflection pluralises the image. "Rather than enjoining a structure of simultaneity it may be understood as a process of pluralization" (Benjamin, 2017:28). By literally using mirrors to reflect the images of the Polaroids, each image was opened to the relational interplay of internal differences so that even within each framing there was a self-differentiating dynamic at work that opened each image to visual plurality. My decision to show the black square undersides of the Polaroids, was also a strategy intended to physically manifest how every image, actual or virtual, is attached to its impenetrable opaque double – the threatening presence of the invisible, the un-imaginable, and the unknowable. Recalling Elkins' problematisation of vision, the insidious pervasiveness of blindness, "also happens alongside seeing – that is, it happens while we are seeing. Blindness is like a weed that grows in the very centre of vision, and its roots are everywhere" (1996:205). Alluding to the instability of vision, he writes, "The field of vision appears to be seamless, but it is shot through with holes" (Elkins, 1996:206). Challenging the conventional associations between vision and knowing, he goes on to ask a provocative question: "What if blindness held the key to both thought and vision?" (Elkins, 1996:224). Within this inquiry:

> *Blindness would be all around. Every image would be a light in the darkness, and seeing or thinking would take place against a backdrop of blindness. In this way of setting the problem, blindness is the precondition and constant accompaniment of vision. It cannot be fully seen, but it must always be present wherever there is sight (Elkins, 1996:225-226).*

Developing this notion in relation to the image, Azoulay proposes, "All images issue from







3.9 Backs of damaged Polaroids (2021-2022).













3.10 Polaroids where the referent was obscured to the point of abstraction (2021-2022).

an act of erasure. Whenever there is erasure, the image aspires to arise. The erasure doesn't precede its appearance; it inheres in it and is the condition of its possibility. For an image to appear, something else has to be erased" (2001:93). To recall, Trotman suggested that the Polaroid's black underside makes this erasure explicit, "a reminder of the eventual death of the picture on its obverse" (2002:3). An image that denies erasure and purports its fixity, veracity, and transparency, Azoulay terms the oppressive image, whereas the critical image exposes the power relations that make an image's appearance possible by showing the conditions of visibility (Azoulay, 2001:94). Therefore, Azoulay's critical image has associations with the concentrationary image as one that shows and problematises how visibility is predicated on an original invisibility, connected to its hidden elsewhere that threatens to rupture and corrupt what is seen and known.

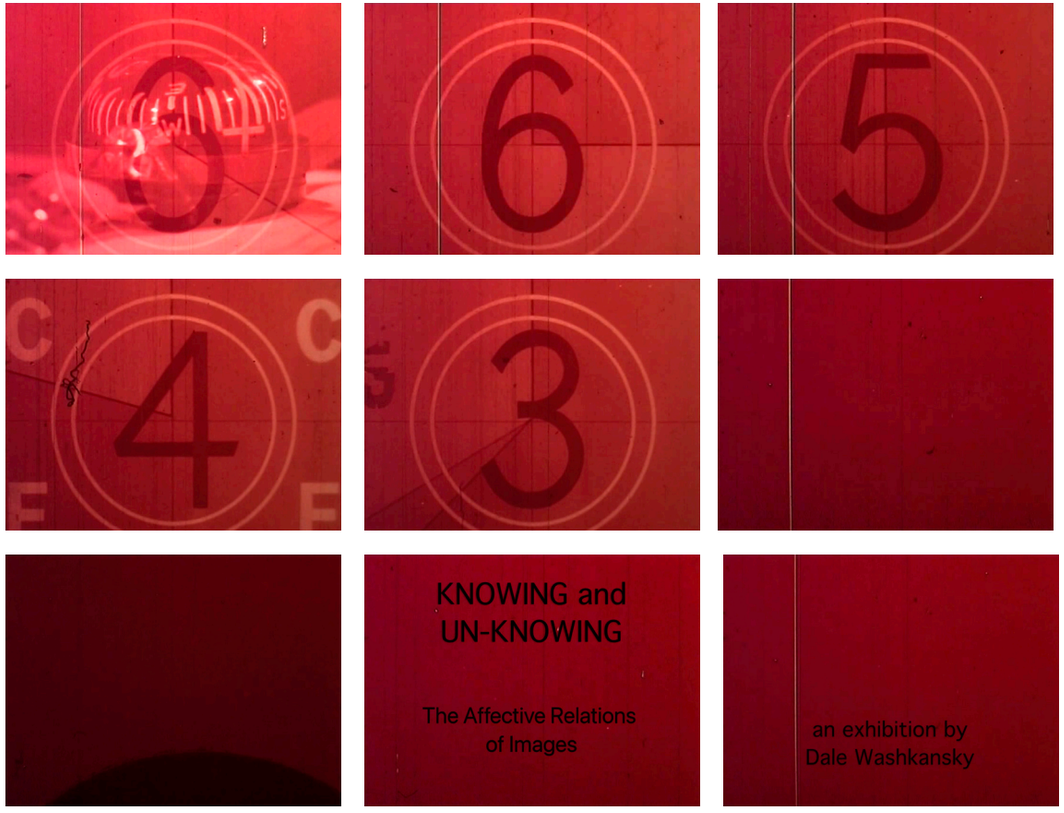
On account of the Polaroids' backs interfering with seeing the reflected images, I endeavoured to manifest encounters with the critical image. The viewer had to shift position, step slightly back from the display structures, and tilt their head to find a place for optimal viewing (Figure 3.17). By moving up close, the backs blocked out the reflection. The viewer had to move between looking at the physical object, which withheld the image, and the mediation of the reflection, which offered only an obstructed view. My intention with this presentation, which simultaneously showed and obscured, was for viewers to become aware of their physical presence in relation to the images. Although viewing is never passive, there was a heightened awareness of physical space and the active space between oneself and the image. Having viewers physically negotiate a relationship between closeness and distance was a strategy to activate conceptual thinking about how one deciphers images. Accordingly, Didi-Huberman proposes: "Nothing can be known in pure immersion … of being *too close*." Likewise, "Nothing can be known either in pure abstraction … being *too far away*" (2018:4). Therefore, "To know, we must take a position, which involves ourselves and constantly assuming the responsibility of such movement" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:4). Distancing, he claims, "is the ideal position-taking … To distance does not simply mean to place far away; by moving far away we lose sight of things, while distancing means, on the contrary, that we sharpen our gaze" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:56). "Often," he adds, "the faraway element assumes an unreachable *sameness*; distance, on the other hand, appears to give us access only to *alterity*, to the interplay of differences" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:57). Referring



3.11 The effect of exposure to sunlight. Polaroids taken of the sky and then rubbed onto various surfaces during development. Polaroids taken a year part spliced together (2021 & 2022). Cropped digitised images of the Polaroids used in *Untitled Diptych* (2023) video.



3.13 Structures placed against the galley's walls with mirror tops upon which a selection of Polaroids were displayed upside down on individual Perspex stands lit by LED lights.
(Image courtesy of Claire Hesom).



3.12 Video stills of exhibition Title. (2023)





3.14 The two piles of Polaroids that were placed on the first display structure. (Image courtesy of Claire Hesom).



3.15 Scans of Polaroids from the first structure that introduced the theme of the concentrationary.

to playwright and poet Bertolt Brecht's proposition that "to *distance* is to *show*," which critiques the deception of the complete image by showing its incompleteness – "showing that we are showing" – means, he writes, "not lying about the epistemic status of representation: it is to make the image a question of *knowledge* rather than an *illusion*" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:57-58). What ensues, he proposes, is that "By foiling the illusion, the showing that is undertaken destroys the unity of the image with the magic of apparition" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:58). By distancing the image, something else appears, not only external to the image but internal to it – the workings of concentrationary defamiliarization.

It was, therefore, because of these methods of distancing – re-framing, selection, exclusion, re-mediation, and affording only a reflected partial view of the image – that I was able to invite the viewer to an inquiry into relationality and position-taking, the critical pursuit of contending with sameness and difference, the seen and the unseen, the known concomitant with the unknown. "In distancing," Didi-Huberman adds:

> *it is the simplicity and unity of things that become faraway things while their complexity and their dissociated nature are brought to the fore. This is what Brecht calls an 'art of historicization': an art that breaks the continuity of narrations, takes away their differences, and, compiling these differences together, restores the essentially 'critical' value of all historicity (Didi-Huberman, 2018:58).*

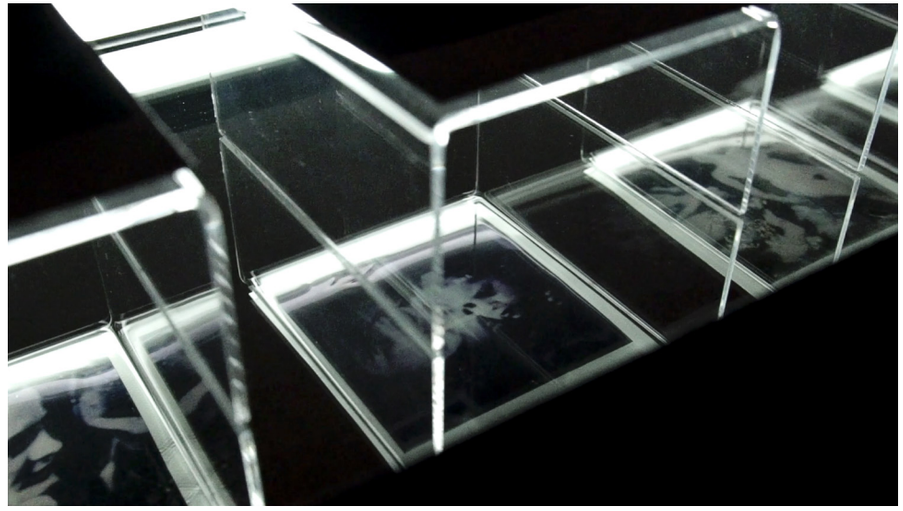
My strategy for questioning the chronology of historicity and manifesting the experience of critically attuned relationality between closeness and distance was developed by the seriality of the display and then disrupting the ability to see the reflected images in a series. By standing back, one could only see the black undersides of the Polaroids in a series. The display encouraged viewing the reflected images individually. The serial display created an expectancy of chronology. However, because the selected Polaroids were brought together and arranged according to formal relationships, often a dominant colour, this expectancy was disrupted, hindering decipherment. The desire for understanding had to give way to the affect of the visual. The display was intended to physically allude to the politico-aesthetic of the concentrationary, whereby, as Max Silverman explains, "Mixing and splitting, rather than historical verisimilitude, are both aesthetic and political strategies: they interrupt the self-presence of the present by making visible its hidden elsewhere … they make the unimaginable part

of our normalised reality, and they give us the means to read a buried history" (2011:208). My intention with the display was, therefore, to problematise the visible and prompt viewers to consider the hidden relations behind and between the images, which Didi-Huberman describes as a "virtual expanse," asking viewers to "heuristically multiply their viewpoints. It is therefore a vast moving territory, an open-air labyrinth of detours and thresholds" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:51). This virtual expanse is implicit in Silverman's proposition that "Concentrationary memory denies specificity by showing us how the particular is always haunted by its absent other" (Silverman, 2011:208). This absent other, as Azoulay proposed, was not some abstraction or conceptual thought experiment within the exhibition but was made visible as the physical underside of the Polaroids that presented each Polaroid with its hidden elsewhere and the oblivion that threatens to destroy every image.

Within the display, I therefore deployed two strategies of distancing: firstly, between the actual photographic image and its reflection, and secondly, between the individuated serial images. By physically negotiating these distances and intervals, the display physically manifested the dialectical workings of montage, encouraging the viewer to consider not only what was presented but also the spaces between. "To distance," Didi-Huberman proposes, "is to show by showing the relationships of things shown together and connected according to their differences. There is therefore no distancing without a work of montage, which is a dialectics of de-montage (dismantling) and re-montage (reassembling), of the de-composition and re-composition of everything" (2018:60-61). What ensues, he continues, is "a *dialectical tableau* that attempts to articulate not-knowledge with comprehension, particularity with generality, contradiction with historical development, discontinuity of the jump with 'unity of contradictory terms'" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:61). It is the dialectics of montage that "reveals the discontinuities at work in every historical event" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:51). By physically referencing the dialectics of montage, placing images from different historical events next to each other, those events were fragmented, and remained disorderly. The attempt at reassembling was unresolvable, which began to disassemble the known. Even if the viewer could intuit that an image pertained to a specific event or place, the array of fragments introduced doubt. Montage, Didi-Huberman writes, is a "re-disposition of things that make us see them 'as though for the first time' but consequently makes them appear unusual … there is a non-coincidence in resemblance, a new knowledge that blurs all recognition" (2018:64). Resemblance, therefore, overlapped with dissemblance, often to the



3.16 Installation view. Polaroids displayed serially on structures against the gallery's walls. (Image courtesy of Claire Hesom).



3.17 Installation view. Close up of Polaroid images reflected off a mirror. (Image courtesy of Claire Hesom).

point of indiscernibility. Consequently, Didi-Huberman argues, distancing "leaves the world around us with the possibility of seeing itself reframed and reassembled in other ways; in short, the possibility of eliciting a new experience and an *other* knowledge" (2018:217).

Within the exhibition, this new experience that brings forth an *other* knowledge was a knowledge engendered from affect, relating to Laura U. Marks' notion of haptic visuality. Although experienced directly or empirically, it was at a cognitive distance, lacking the coherence of an all-encompassing image that would grant the totality of knowing. The viewer, therefore, had to grapple with the following questions: When the indexicality of the photograph is shown as unreliable or faulty, what happens to our perception of the world? What happens when representations that frame the world for us, to enable us to know the world and ourselves in relation to it, inhibit readability? Although the viewer was looking at static images, the images were encountered with their affective vitality of becoming form, somewhere between form and formlessness, with the haptics and opacity of vibrant matter manifested in each image due to the aggravated surfaces of the Polaroids.

Upon entering the gallery, one could hear a female voice repeatedly asking, "Papa, can you hear me?" After moving past the first structure with Polaroids, one encountered a doorway into a darkened room where a moving image of an enlarged face was projected high up on the wall that made eye-contact with the viewer. Upon entering the room, a second, seemingly duplicated face then came into view (Figure 3.18). Both were miming the words from the recorded looped audio, a filmed performance where I sat in a darkened space for approximately seven hours with a candle, repeatedly mouthing, "Papa, can you hear me?" [48] Although unbeknownst to the viewer, the plea was suggestive of the one I continue to direct at the Liepāja family photograph: "Sorella, please look up at me". This plea, the very impetus for the exhibition's inquiry, I propose, although unuttered, was suffused virtually throughout the exhibition. To reiterate, the exhibition was organised around this virtual image, an absent yet resonant image of an unheard plea and Sorella's refusal to acknowledge my yearning for her gaze to meet mine so that we may share in a moment of mutual recognition. Perhaps, implicitly, all the images within the exhibition were asking the viewer if they could be seen and recognised.

On account of wearing black clothing during the filming of the performance, my face appeared to be disembodied and suspended above the candle, with only my hands occasionally coming into view. The main visual relationship was between the two faces and the two candles, at times appearing synchronous before a shift revealed the face on the right was a phrase ahead of the face on the left. Although the projection was monumental in scale, the repetitive gentle tone of the looped female voice and the faces' inquiring expressions when mouthing the appeal lent a sense of vulnerability, contrasting with the large scale. The height of the projection was emphasised by placing two benches in the room, inviting the viewer to sit, look up at the projected faces, and spend time with the video. Encountering two faces, the viewer had to choose which face to look at and make eye contact with, thereby ignoring the other face's appeal. The unanswered plea, "Papa, can you hear me?" echoed rhythmically, perhaps mournfully, throughout the gallery and could be heard above the more jarring audio from videos in the main gallery room, and even faintly outside the gallery.

Depending on the moment encountered, the expressions in the performance were either subdued or strained due to fatigue setting in. The 'real' emotion caused by physical discomfort began entering the performance. The artwork thus posed the question of whether even a contrived, repetitive performance could produce differentiation rather than becoming more mechanical with equivalent copies. Although the recorded looped voice's tone remained constant, the faces' expressions varied with each appeal. Here, I find Minh-ha's words illuminating. "What seems very recognisable at first, is necessarily displaced with the steps we take as we affirm difference through repetition" (Minh-ha, 1999:25). Difference through repetition, alluding to the workings of trauma, was a strategy used throughout the exhibition in various forms – often with images re-appearing and re-mediated in other artworks.

Several questions were in mind when creating the video: Is there a moment within the tiresome miming of someone else's words that they become your own? Can repetition and miming engender the new? Does one always speak with one's own voice, and if not, whose voice does one speak with? Is there a moment when one can experience the blurring of the self with an imagined other? Butler, referring to Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy of ethics, which argued for ethics as first philosophy, predicated on the paradox of alterity within the face-to-face encounter, the projection aimed to imply that:

> *The structure of address is important for understanding how moral authority is introduced and sustained if we accept not just that we address others when we speak, but that in some way we come to exist, as it were, in the moment of being addressed, and something*

about our existence proves precarious when that address fails. More emphatically, however, what binds us morally has to do with how we are addressed by others in ways that we cannot avert or avoid; this impingement by the other's address constitutes us first and foremost against our will or, perhaps put more appropriately, prior to the formation of our will (Butler, 2006:130).

The double not only visualises the subject as split but also splits the seemingly endless, unanswered repetition of the filial plea directed at the unitary, authoritative 'father' figure. By remaining unresponsive, silent, and absent, his status remains purely virtual – situated between belief and disbelief. Questions arise: Does the fear of never being heard or seen maintain faith? If repetition is a sign of devotion, how does one account for the difference within repetition? What would happen if one were to lose faith? I also reflected on Butler's proposition that, "No one controls the terms by which one is addressed, at least not in the most fundamental way. To be addressed is to be, from the start, deprived of will, and to have that deprivation exist as the basis of one's situation in discourse" (2006:139). I suggest that during the performative video, the enunciative "I" renounces originality and singularity, posing questions about the origins of selfhood. The "I" speaks from an indeterminate space, both from within and from without, where the enunciative act coexists with absence despite proclaiming presence. This paradoxical mixture of externality and internality implies a fracturing into 'elsewheres' – differentiated spatio-temporalities and the alterity of others, the ungrievable, to whom the self is innately connected, predetermined, and ethically obligated.

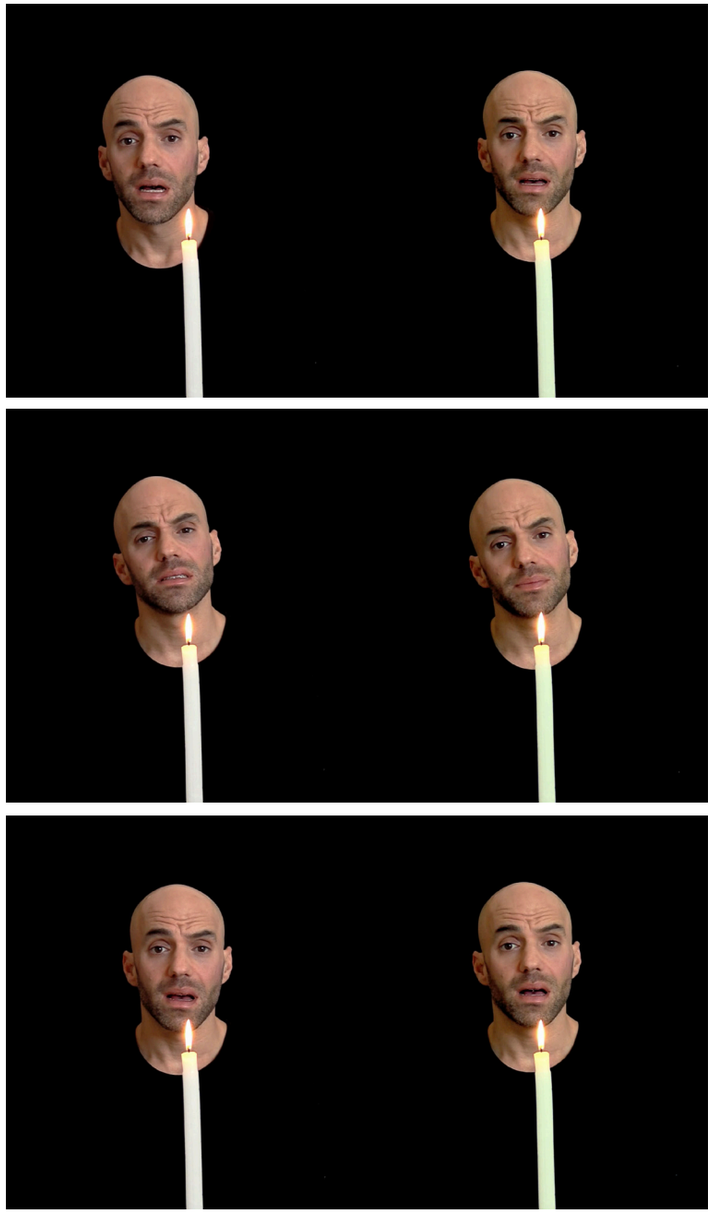
The viewer had to decide how long to look, at what moment to turn away from the plea and walk away, implying the question: How long can an image, even one directly appealing to the viewer, retain attention? This brought forth in the viewer the aesthetic-ethical dimension of looking at images, particularly those representing the pain of others.

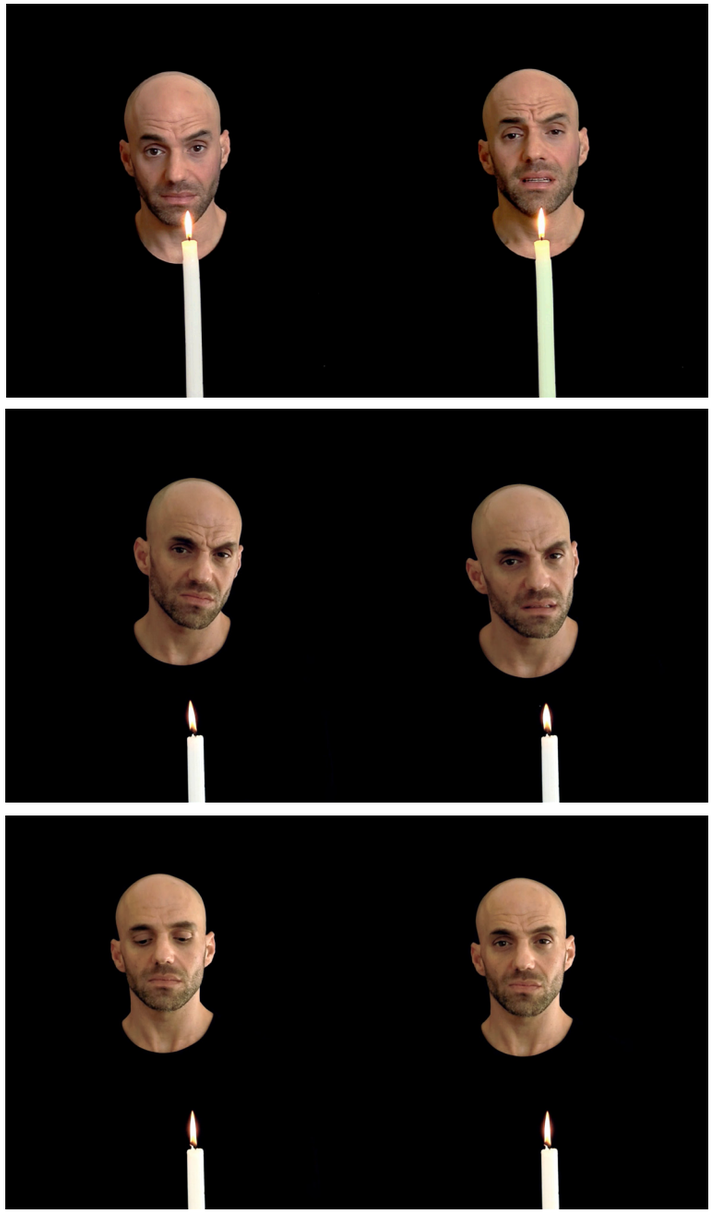
The intention behind doubling the face and duplicating the plea was not only for viewers to sense the precarity of being addressed yet unable to respond to a seemingly indefinite plea, but also to inquire into the representation of time.[49] The candle, burning down during the performance, was the sole marker of duration, whereas the voice was an unvarying looped recording. I intended for the video to visualise the concentrationary enfolding of temporalities, the imbrication of differentiated repetition associated with traumatic time within linear, progressive time. While time was progressing forward, it was, in a way, also folding back upon itself.

In the darkened projector room, a lightbox in the far corner displayed a blue-toned image made from a scanned Polaroid of the video performance (Figure 3.19). The image was cropped, enlarged, and digitally printed, with the faces faintly appearing from the sides of the image, frozen in mid-sentence. As with all the other Polaroids, there is a flash of light in the centre of the image that was digitally doubled. Including this photograph of the video alongside the projection reflected my inquiries into mediation, fragmentation, and transformation, asking not only how photographic representation transforms an event, but how the event itself is transformed by being available to photographic capture. This is a question that relates to the citizenry of photography, how every event is available to transformations and contestations affected by the distillations and condensations of representation.

This process of condensation and distillation returns to the question of the frame's vulnerability and montage. "All framing," Gilles Deleuze writes, "determines an out-of-field" (2005a:17), and "A closed system is never closed" (2005a:18). As discussed, within his inquiry into cinematic montage, Deleuze elucidates the dynamics of two off-frame effects. In the first, what is off-frame is indexed – though not visible, it is visual, a mental image. These frames can extend indefinitely, referring to the larger frame that contains all the smaller partial frames. The relation between the frames is spatial, the causal progressive image-linking pertaining to the movement-image. In the second scenario, the frame is more closed off, spatially disconnected. Paradoxically, the off-frame effect is greater because what connects these images are not visible or visual but virtual, opening up to the whole. The whole in this instance is open-ended and indeterminate, temporal and durational – the illogical linking of images that pertains to the time-image.

Deleuze writes that "when the unit of measurement is variable, the imagination quickly runs up against a limit: beyond a short sequence it is no longer capable of *comprehending* the set of magnitudes or movements that it successively apprehends" (2005a:47). With this aspect of time, "it is no longer the interval as variable present, but the fundamentally open whole as the immensity of future and past. It is no longer time as succession of movements, and of their units, but time as simultaneism and simultaneity" (Deleuze, 2005a:48). When the imagination confronts its limitations, this engenders "pure thought of a quantity of absolute movement which expresses its whole history or change, its universe" (Deleuze,





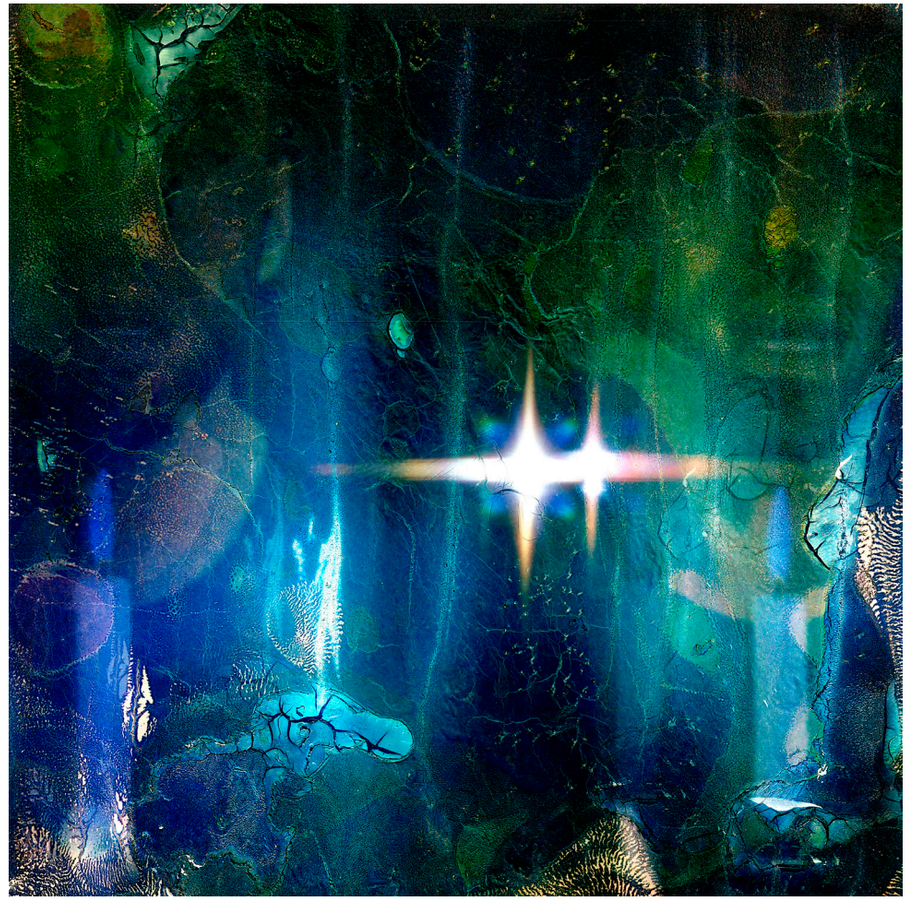
3.18 Stills from projection *Papa, Can You Hear Me?* (2023). Digital video, sound. Duration 7 h, 19 min and 30 sec.

2005a:48). Although individual shots are arranged linearly in cinema, with the time-image these connections remain highly unstable. Deleuze's time-image also informed the structure of the exhibition, designed to activate an encounter with this eruptive temporality. While the linear Polaroid display implied the filmic time-line, the images were animated not by machine but by the viewer's movement through the gallery. As they looked and thought on the move, viewers produced their own dialiectic and time-image montage, becoming aware of the betweenness of the cut or interval, and the virtuality of the off-frame effect as an imaginative, participatory, unfolding event. By participating in making meaning for themselves, each viewer negotiated the contingent dialectics between the actual and the virtual in relation to a mobile, infinitely open-ended, and indeterminate whole.

After exiting the projection room, two more Polaroid structures continued around the corridor's end, where a large silent video projected onto the wall, bent and distorted as it extended into the corner (Figures 3.20 & 3.21). The footage was sourced from an 8mm film of the unveiling of a railway line, which was edited from scenes of a moving pastoral landscape taken from a train. Inverting and overlaying opposite motion rendered the video disorienting. Occasionally, a supine open-mouthed human figure (an image of myself) briefly appeared at the bottom of the frame.

My intention was to invert the presumed relation between the active human and the passive landscape, challenging linear perspective and its association with forward movement and progress. Due to the landscape's rapid counter movement, the human figure is rendered immobile. The figure, not so much in the landscape as within it as an ephemeral presence, was suggestive of an inner landscape – a vertiginous dreamscape. The sepia tone of the video, with occasional flashes of mauve, combined with the rapid speed at which the landscape moved, enhanced this sense of a dreamscape, a vague yet familiar place – *a place that one cannot quite place* (Figure 3.22). As Demos writes, "Mobility designates a ruptured psycho-geography of fundamental ambivalence, calling up the longing for home and the embrace of an elsewhere … migration is antithetical to any unified meaning" (2013:4). As stated, this question of territorialisation, or home, coupled with the de-territorialisation of an 'elsewhere', was a concentrationary thematic carried through the exhibition to destabilise spatial, temporal, and semiotic certitude.

As the viewer walked towards the projection, the image blurred into a rush of motion, filling the viewer's field of view and generating a brief moment of immersion. This immer-



3.19 *Double Portrait.* (2023)
Lightbox. 33 x 33 cm,

sion was enhanced by the rush of horizontal motion, which, rather than offering a sense of moving through space, created a sense of being within a mobile, perspectiveless, and unconstrained environment. Christine Ross offers insight into this experience, suggesting that "to lateralize perspective is to allow for a connection with an environment considered as an end in itself – a connection that depreciates futuristic regimes of modernity in which the environment is reduced to a mere means" (2012:65). She proposes that the spectator can "occupy creatively – temporality as it were – the gap between past and future opened up by modern historical time" (Ross, 2012:65). In this context, the video functioned as a kind of gap, or rather, the transitory image within the gap, a transitional space between the corridor and the main gallery space.

Turning right at the corridor's end, the space opened into the expansive main gallery room. Here, the concentrated viewing of individual images gave way to a more cacophonous experience, with sounds and images overlapping and surrounding the viewer. One had to readjust how to look and engage, as the dialectics of montage and the time-image began to envelop the viewer within this immersive environment.

The first video encountered in the main gallery was *Untitled Diptych* (2023), consisting of two flat-screen TVs attached to opposite sides of a low plinth (Figure 3.23). Although the viewer could not see both videos simultaneously, they could occasionally hear the other, with jarring crackling audio occurring when an image flashed on the screen. Due to the slight asynchronicity of the audio between the videos, the viewer could potentially anticipate the unseen image.

Each video in the diptych was over twelve hours in duration, created using a systematic process. On a chosen day, a year apart, I took a Polaroid of the sky every hour for twenty-four hours.[50] While the Polaroids were developing, I made frottages by rubbing them onto domestic surfaces, creating imprints that disrupted the developing process. The meeting of the open, formless space of the sky with the particularity of an object created abstract textures of formless materiality. After splicing the Polaroids from the two years together, they were exposed to sunlight and periodically scanned to document their deterioration. During the course of an hour, the deterioration of the two spliced Polaroids from sun exposure played out. At every hour, scans from all the Polaroids that I took flashed for a mere second, accompanied by harsh audio recordings of human neurons firing, thereby rendering thought audible. These images appeared to float behind close-up footage I recorded of the Liepāja family

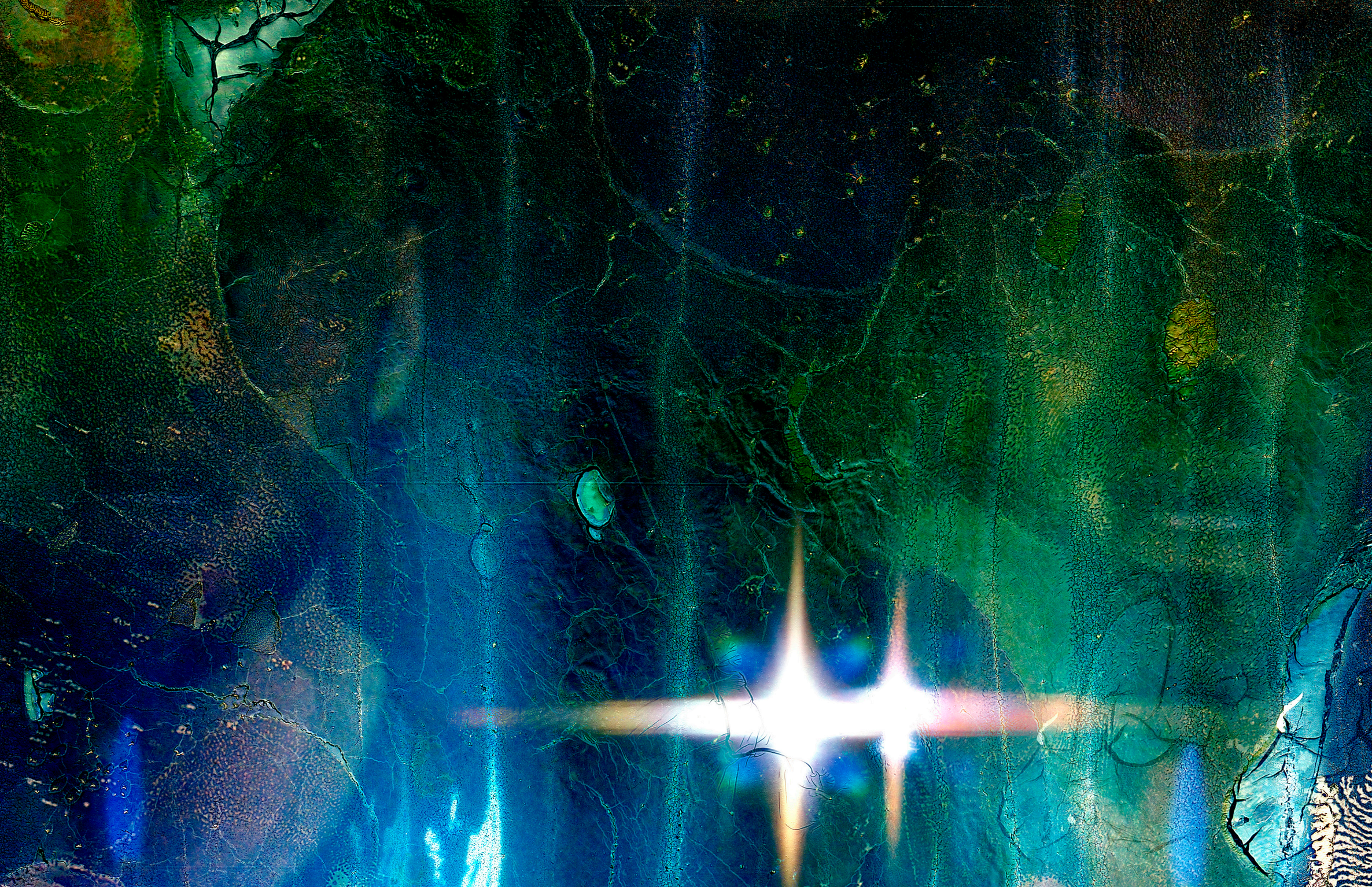
photograph while it was displayed on a TV screen. The scrutiny of the digital eye broke the image into square pixels. Because the 'background' moves while the 'foreground' is static, this video also unsettled the conventional relationship between the mobile object and the static ground (Figure 3.24).

I regard this video as a digital archive of the Polaroids within the exhibition. It is an archive that is split in two and cannot be seen simultaneously, one that flickers and repeats, that moves and is still. More importantly, it is an archive that existed within a particular self-referential space, allowing the viewer to witness the process of digitised mediation, transformation, inclusion, exclusion, and obfuscation obfuscation – the dual processes of conservation and destruction.

In the centre of the far large wall, which I painted red, hung a flat-screen TV playing the video *A Little White House* (2023) (Figure 3.25). The video drew inspiration from the Polish folk song sung by Simon Srebnik, one of only two survivors from the Nazi death camp Chelmno in Poland, in the opening scene of Claude Lanzmann's nine-hour documentary *Shoah* (1985).[51] In this scene, a forty-seven-year-old Srebnik is rowed up the idyllic Narew River as he sings a haunting melody that translates as follows:

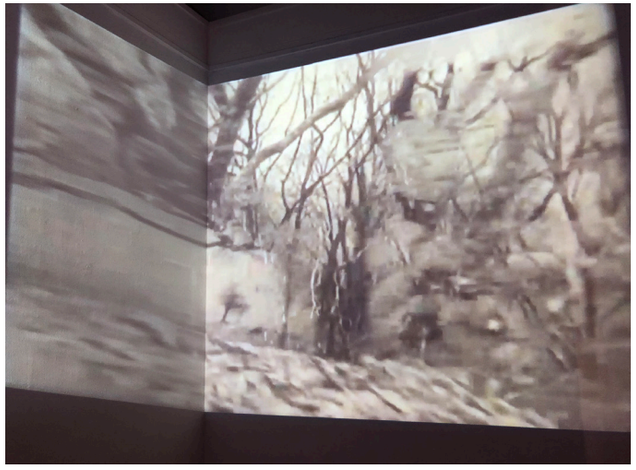
A little white house
Lingers in my memory.
Of that little white house
I dream each night.
The windows of that little white house
Beautifully shine in the sun
As if someone's eyes
Were filling with tears.
There was so much happiness in that little white house
And so many joyous days.
When I remember those blissful moments
My heart trembles…

In *Shoah* (1985), Lanzmann deliberately excluded archival footage, relying solely on eyewitness oral testimonies from survivors, bystanders, and perpetrators. He believed the voice





3.20 Installation View.

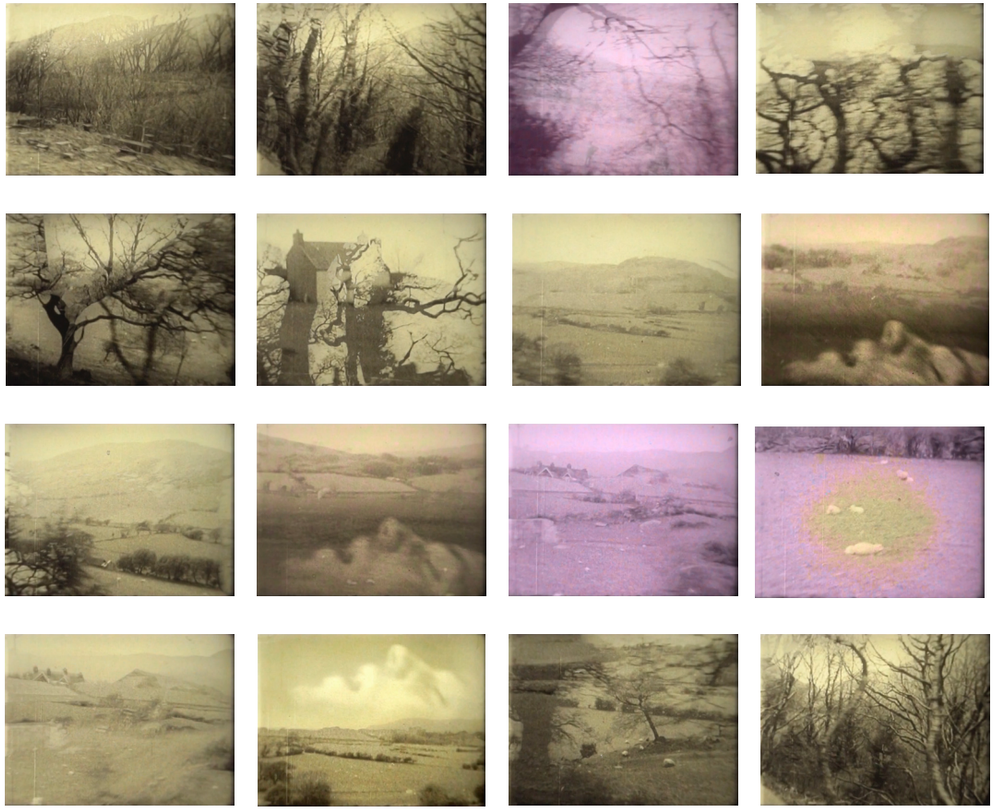


3.22 Installation view of video projection *Moving Past* (2023). Digital video. 2min, 52 sec.

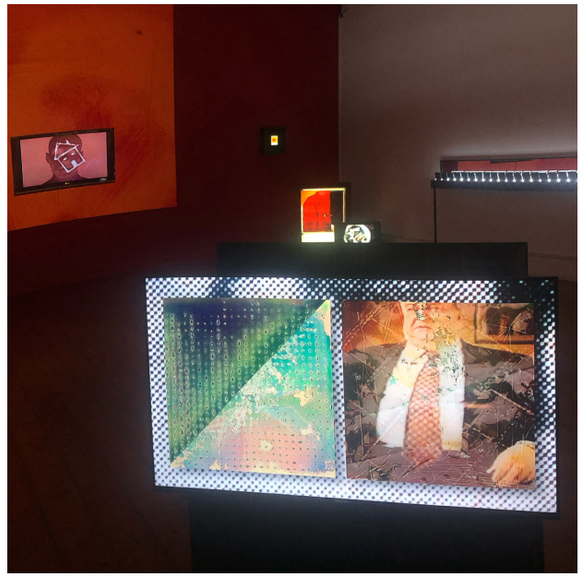
conveyed truth more reliably than images, considering the documentary as fulfilling an original act of witnessing. According to Lanzmann, the image was not merely inadequate but dangerously misrepresentative and falsifying, as its partial view of an event could misleadingly confer upon the viewer an impression of 'knowing all'. His focus, however, was not on the concentration camps themselves, but rather on the sites of extermination and the wake of absence and erasure – the Holocaust. This explains why he returned to present-day sites that revealed nothing of the atrocity and refrained from using any archival footage that could falsely fill the void left by the absent image of genocide. The images of piles of corpses and emaciated individuals that have come not only to 'represent' the Holocaust but have become iconic images of it, were in fact captured by photographers accompanying allied forces during the liberation of concentration camps abandoned by the westbound retreating Nazis. These images are therefore misleading, as they do not directly represent the genocide of the Holocaust and the sites where it occurred – the death camps. Sontag proposes that the problem is "not that people remember through photographs, but that they remember only through photographs. This remembering through photographs eclipses other forms of understanding, and remembering" (2003:79). Lanzmann maintained that the Holocaust must remain exceptional and unknowable, an absolute limit of human cognition.

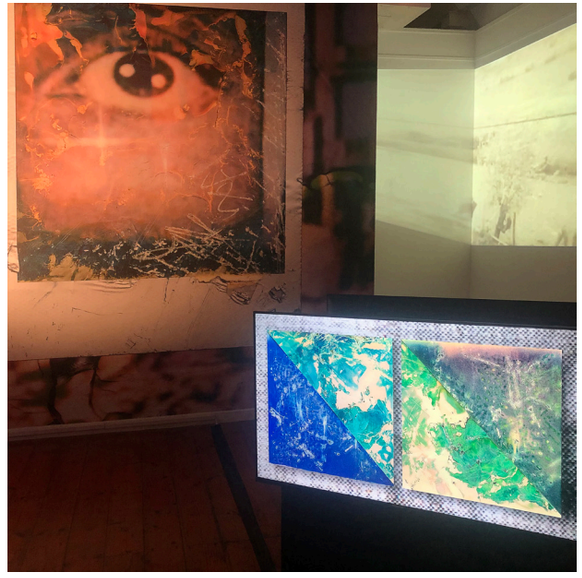
Curiously, alongside the actual place of Chelmno and its present-day tranquillity, *Shoah* (1985) opens by evoking an imaginary place, an imagined elsewhere – a little white house – which transports the viewer back to the unimaginable horror of the past. Surprisingly, the viewer is told by Srebnik that in the past, while the horror of genocide was unfolding, the landscape was equally tranquil and idyllic, evoking the concentrationary enfolding of horror and beauty. While Lanzmann was determined to present the specificity of the sites of genocide and demonstrate the effects of erasure, he begins by evoking how, even within the depths of the actual event, there existed a virtual presence of somewhere else, not just a vague place, but the memory of home, a severed sense of being-at-home, expressing the impossibility of return. The artwork *A Little White House* aimed to evoke this concentrationary universe, where the living are forever haunted by death, and humanity is perpetually perverted and contaminated, in a world where unthinkable and unimaginable horrors are possible everywhere.

The concentrationary also informed my treatment of the image, how this "brute violence

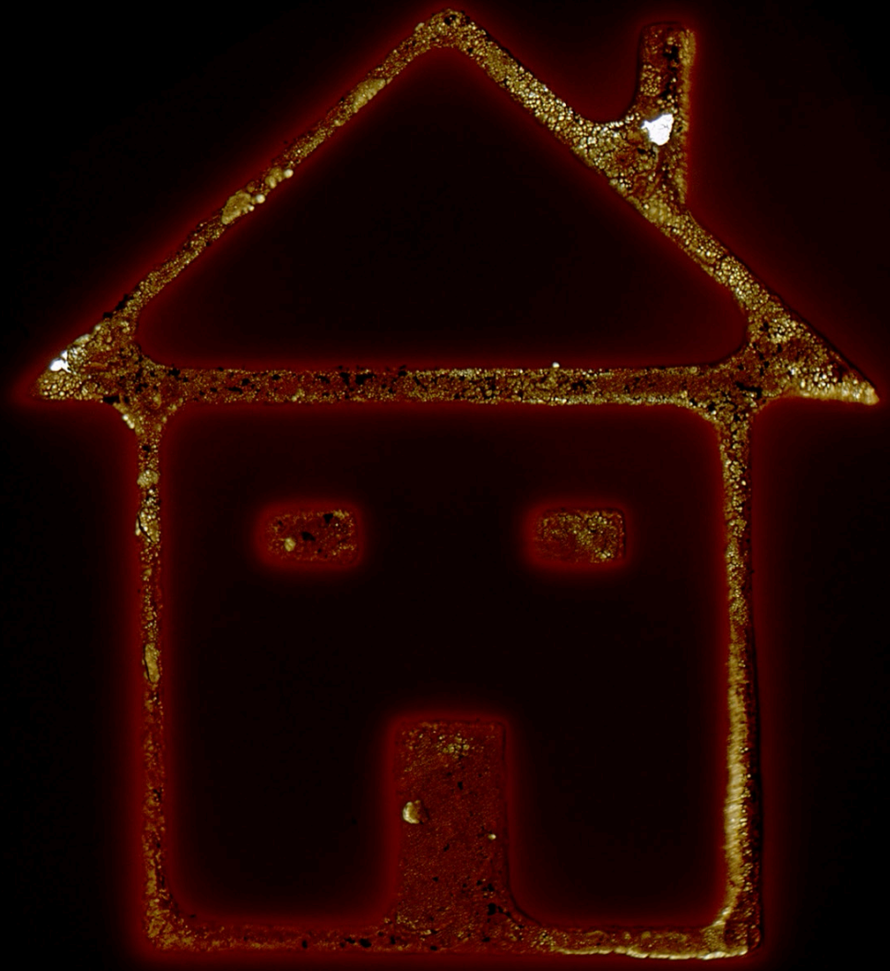


3.22 Stills from video projection *Moving Past* (2023). Digital video. 2min, 52 sec

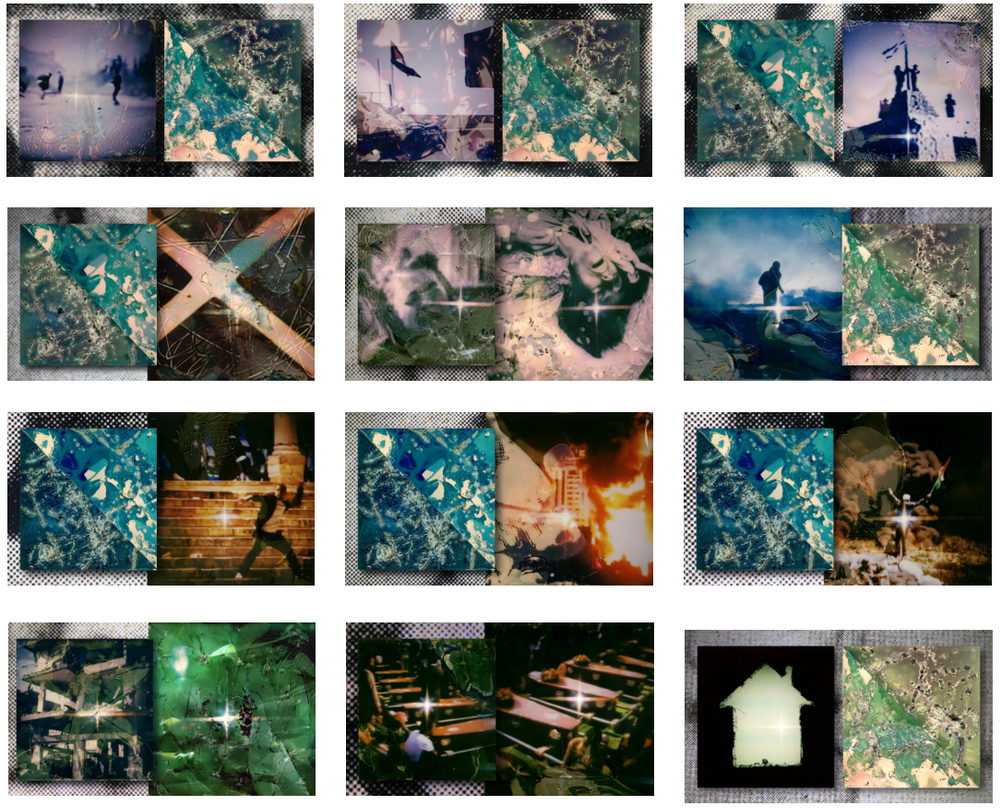




3.23 Installation view showing the reverse sides of the video *Untitled Diptych* (2023). Digital video, sound. Duration of each video 12h, 7min, 43sec.







3.24 Video stills from *Untitled Diptych* (2023). Digital video, sound. Duration of each video 12h, 7min, 43sec



3.25 Stills from *A Little White House* (2023). Digital video, sound. 3min, 45 sec.

and pain" is experienced directly on the body (Pollock & Silverman, 2011:18). The images in this video were produced by heating a metal stamp with a schematic illustration of a house which I pressed onto exposed sections of 35mm photographic negatives. During the scanning process, I chose not to convert the negatives into positive images, causing the burnt-through negatives to glow white. This technique allowed the scans to retain a more direct correlation to their original materiality, visualising the unseen inverse of the photographic image. Additionally, I included figurative and architectural images upon which I applied splatters of black ink and mercurochrome, a red solvent used to heal cuts. This evoked not the healing of a wound, but rather the infliction of injury and an unhealable wound – the psychological wound of trauma.

The video conveys the affective development and dialectics of time-image montage rather than a narrative movement-image. Composed of still images, it begins slowly with the house floating in an empty dark space and gradually gains momentum with the introduction of the nude male figure, once again, in the form of self-portraits. I then incorporated architectural images primarily from Western antiquity, the ruins of a past civilization, and occasionally images of concentration camps, suggesting a visual connection between the column and the crematorium chimney – the barbarism of Western civilization. By using self-portraits in this video, I aimed to reference the workings of postmemory, how the body remembers not only personal experiences but also collective and distant historical traumas that bear upon one's sense of self – those memories that, although not one's own and cannot be remembered, cannot be forgotten.

Creating this video also involved engaging with the materiality of the image, the image as a thin, fragile surface. By breaking through the surface of the image, what might one discover? The video suggests that there is nothing, just empty space, not the expected void of blankness, but a blazing white light that threatens to obliterate everything, where even the imagination cannot project an object. If the image is destroyed, perhaps, instead of finding the actual, there is an absolute nothingness. The image and the actual, rather than being opposed, are implied as collaborating in forming the empirical and sensible world, beyond which there is the abyss of nothing.

On the far right of the red wall, I hung a lightbox titled *Negative Family Portrait* (2023) (Figure 3.26), featuring the Liepāja family photograph. The image was a scanned Polaroid

negative, reproduced in its original size, created by cutting open the Polaroid and washing away the emulsion to reveal the red and yellow toned negative. Using the same scanned negative, I made a video that was projected off-centre onto the red wall. I digitally zoomed in to examine the image's surface closely. The movement from the digital eye animated the wall. As with other images presented in the exhibition, the act of moving in close to see details, rather than enabling one to see more and possibly know more, abstracted the image – form gave way to material formlessness. The ghostly residue of the image that remained on the Polaroid's clear plastic front was exhibited on the end structure in the main gallery. Because the image was reflected off a mirror, the viewer's reflection overlapped with the ghostly residue (Figure 3.27). As mentioned, a filmed scan of the Liepāja family photograph was also used in the video *Untitled Diptych*, meaning that it appeared in four different mediated forms dispersed within the exhibition, not converging to 'show' the image, but rather serving as an enigmatic, haunting, symptomatic, postmemorial, and concentrationary presence.

Below the *Negative Family Portrait* lightbox, I placed two additional lightboxes on the floor. The first, titled *Portrait Error* (2023) (Figure 3.28), was a digital enlargement of a Polaroid featuring an obscured self-portrait. A large area of red masks the portrait, and upon closer inspection, one can faintly discern that the eyes have been cut out. This image was created by photographing a scanned negative with a Polaroid camera, a negative that was subsequently used in the video *A Little White House*. The second lightbox, *Burnt House* (2023) (Figure 3.29), was displayed within a plastic TV frame. This image was also created during the process of making the images for *A Little White House*. The grouping of these lightboxes subtly alludes to how the Liepāja family photograph engendered postmemory – those traumatic familial re-memberings that rely upon mediation and creative imagination to gain representational form, yet never attain completion or find secure intelligibility, thereby destabilising one sense of being-at-home and one's sense of self.

On the wall to the viewer's right, two structures displaying the Polaroids featured an altered design. Rather than being horizontal, which would require one to look down at the Polaroids' reflected images, the Polaroids stood upright, allowing the viewer to observe the reflections vertically (Figures 3.30 & 3.31). The Polaroids were also placed closer together, and the backs interfered less with viewing the images, making it easier to perceive them as a series. Instead of examining the images individually, there was a greater sense of movement, a

somewhat virtual animation of the still, as the viewer's gaze could move back and forth more freely. However, despite this freedom of movement enabling a greater degree of interpretive narrativity, it was once again subverted by the arrangement being informed by formal concerns rather than chronology, resulting in a more pronounced slippage and seepage between space and time.

On the opposite wall, an enlarged reproduction of a Polaroid depicting a disembodied framed eye floating above a ruined landscape was printed on wallpaper (Figure 3.32). Positioned high on the wall, the eye gazed out disinterestedly, unblinkingly staring at nothing in particular. The following question was implied: Could this be the all-seeing eye of the 'father' that refuses to hear, that looks on as an impassive and unresponsive witness, refusing to become the interlocutor of trauma that would grant form to the tumult of the formless?

In the corner, placed directly on the gallery floor, I clustered seven TVs of various sizes. These videos, which I refer to as video textures, are experimentations with materiality and time, created by physically manipulating found film footage or digitally altering found VHS videos (Figures 3.33 - 3.39). The videos lacked a narrative structure, with the majority consisting of fragments and overlaid images. They frequently flashed, and with their harsh, crackling audio, they competed for the viewer's attention. To varying degrees, the videos related to the three events referred to in the Polaroids. The videos remained a collection or cluster of fragments, an expanded encounter with the opsigns and sonsigns of the time-image. By stacking several of the screens on top of one another, the display referenced the ruined buildings seen in the wallpaper installed behind them. Minh-ha offers an explanation of my process: "Surface is not equated with superficiality, and depth is not equated with truth. There's no hierarchy involved when depth, like surface, is just another dimension. Working intensely with the material limit of a surface can open up an infinitely new sense of depth" (Minh-ha, 2005:70). By engaging with the material limits of the surfaces of film and video, I intended to evoke haptic visuality and the depth of indeterminate knowing that arises from the embodied sensations of haptic affect that, although uncommunicable, resounds with a greater truth.

Mobilising Any-Space-Whatever to Manifest the Power of Potentiality

Within the exhibition's multifaceted audio-visual environment, consisting of Polaroid installations, lightboxes, large-scale projections, a large wallpaper-printed image, and a cluster of videos, viewers were encouraged to navigate between the immersive and the specific, distance and closeness. The exhibition's installation drew inspiration from Deleuze's notion of *any-space-whatever*, which he suggests emerged from the ruinous landscape of post-war World War II Europe, giving rise to the time-image. The wallpaper image served as a more overt reference to this ruinous space. Deleuze describes *any-space-whatever* as:

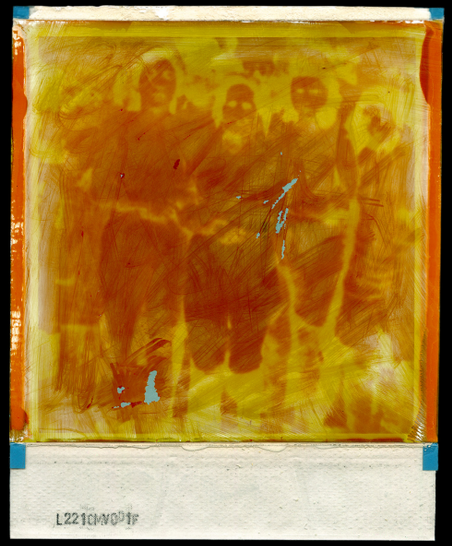
> *not an abstract universal, in all times, in all places. It is a perfectly singular space, which has merely lost its homogeneity, that is, the principle of its metric relations or the connection of its own parts, so that the linkages can be made in an infinite number of ways. It is a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as pure locus of the possible. What in fact manifests the instability, the heterogeneity, the absence of link of such a space, is a richness in potentials or singularities which are, as it were, prior conditions of all actualization, all determination (Deleuze, 2005a:113).*

Marks expands on the historical and socio-political implications of *any-spaces-whatever,* contending that they

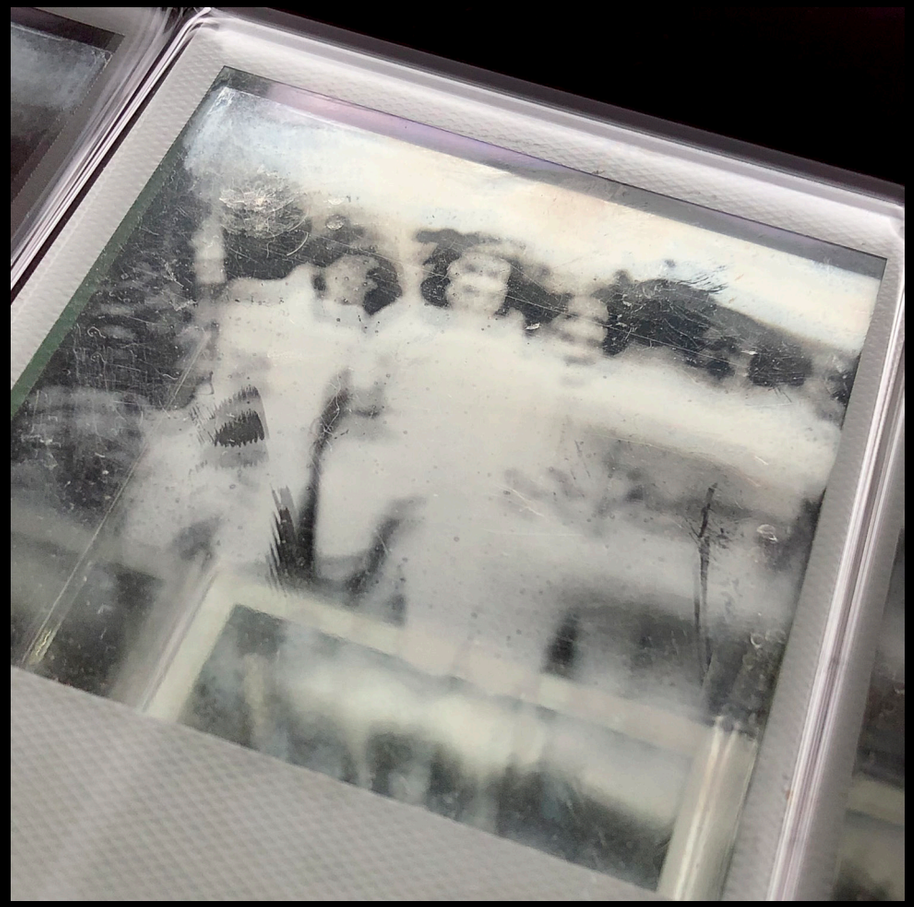
> *are not simply the disjunctive spaces of postmodernism, but also the disruptive spaces of postcolonialism, where non-Western cultures erupt into Western metropolises, and repressed cultural memories return to destabilize national histories ... The end of the modern period is characterized not only by industrial ruins but also by the dismantling of colonial power, whose ruins are perpetuated in the lives of the people it displaced. (Marks, 2000:27)*

My attempt to create an *any-space-whatever* within the exhibition held significance with regard to its particular location and context: a post-apartheid South African university grappling with its colonial past and continuously seeking ways to decolonise. From this standpoint, how might an *any-space-whatever* contribute to challenging deeply entrenched colonial epistemologies and pedagogies?

Deleuze provides insight into how *any-space-whatever* might catalyse change in such a



3.26 Negative *Family Portrait*. (2023)
Lightbox. 33 x 30 cm.



3.27 Reflection of Polaroid residue of Family Portrait.

context, stating that it "no longer has co-ordinates, it is a pure potential, it shows only pure Powers and Qualities, independently of the states of things or milieu which actualize them" (2005a:123). Within *any-space-whatever*, composed of pure optical and sound situations, "all the possible movements emerge from it" (Deleuze, 2005b:126). Deleuze further contends that within the aberrant time of *any-space-whatever*, "fragments of space are the object of a specific relinkage over the gap: the absence of match is only the appearance of a linking-up which can take place in an infinite number of ways" (2005b:235). As pure potential, *any-space-whatever* possesses the capacity to radically disturb, disrupt, and complicate disciplinary and institutional knowledge claims that rely on conventional pedagogical methodologies predicated on rationalism, hierarchies of difference, and the logic of causality.

Minh-ha's term "elsewhere within here" aptly captures the spatio-temporality of *any-space-whatever* and implicitly connects it with the concentrationary experienced by viewers within the exhibition, whereby "while you are entirely involved in the now-and-here, you are also elsewhere, exceeding your limits even as you work intimately with them" (Minh-ha, 2005:126). Deleuze's *any-space-whatever* and time-image begin to closely resemble the concentrationary, particularly in relation to Silverman's postulation of concentrationary memory and history as palimpsestic, which

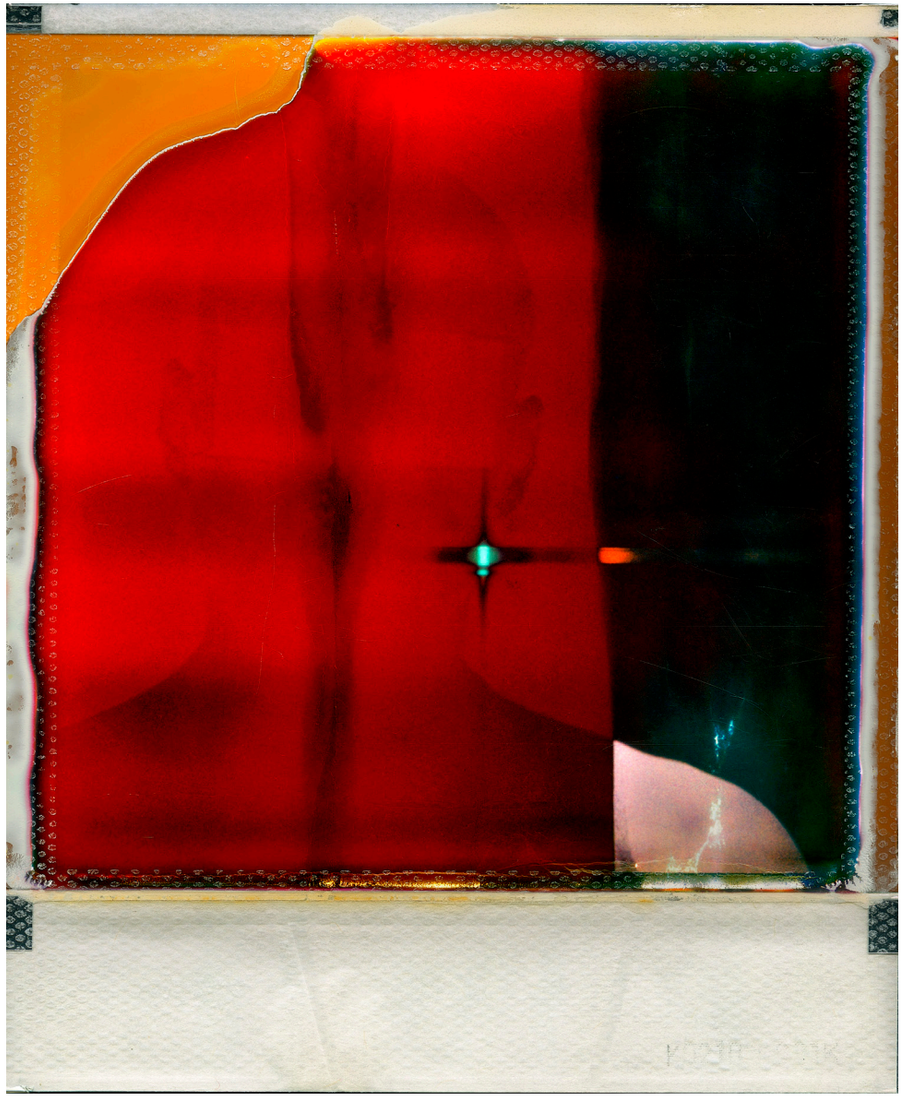
> *is not only an aesthetic device but also becomes the model for a politics of representation. The merging and (re)merging of traces gives us a way of understanding the concentrationary not as belonging to any one time or place, nor as a universal phenomenon, but as occupying a new space and time in-between the two, composed of overlapping or superimposed sheets of time (or, to use the Lazarean metaphor, a time always haunted by its own elsewhere) … In this new space, repetitions and similarities across time disturb the singularity of the event by splitting it between its presence in the here and now and its dispersal across time and space … Time and space out of joint – both of one place and multiple places, of one time and multiple times – means that the palimpsestic concentrationary memory draws the present (no matter how banal) into the realm of history and politics by revealing its complicitous concentrationary shadow (Silverman, 2011:206-207).*

The time-image's absence of a unified whole and the breakdown of sensory-motor extensions make it significant to the philosophy of thought. Deleuze argues that "the essence of cinema – which is not the majority of films – has thought as its higher purpose, nothing but

thought and its functioning" (2005b:163). This underscores that Deleuze's primary concern is not with cinema itself, but with the cinematic nature of thought. Drawing on philosopher Antonin Artaud, Deleuze recounts, "what forces us to think is 'the inpower of thought', the figure of nothingness, the inexistence of a whole which could be thought" (Deleuze, 2005b:162). Referring to Maurice Blanchot's philosophy, Deleuze writes that cinema is uniquely capable of exposing, "on the one hand the presence of an unthinkable in thought, which would be both its source and barrier; on the other the presence to infinity of another thinker, who shatters every monologue of a thinking self" (Deleuze, 2005b:162). As a result, "thought undergoes a strange fossilisation, which is as it were a powerlessness to function, to be, its dispossession of itself and the world" (Deleuze, 2005b:164). Deleuze proposes although this world is intolerable, "The intolerable is no longer a serious injustice, but the permanent state of a daily experience" (Deleuze, 2005b:164). Could this nothingness, the unthinkable in thought, the disruptive presence of the radical alterity of the other, and the intolerable within the banalities of the everyday, not be the presence of the Lazarean, and palimsestic history, as Silverman suggests, of "humanity haunted by its inhuman double, the known always subject to its deformation into the grotesque" (Silverman, 2011:200)? And where, as Silverman writes, "The everyday has become a façade hiding the most unimaginable of cries" (2011:204). Within the concentrationary universe, Silverman and Griselda Pollock propose that the ordinary has been "touched by the horror of extremity," and it is "the uncanniness of the proximity between the everyday and the horrific that is indeed the deepest horror of the systematicity of *the concentrationary*" (2011:44).

Within the exhibition's assemblage of fragmented images taken mostly of past events, history was not represented as the work of re-assembling and re-making in light of a critical relation to a pre-given past, but rather as the infinitely intolerable open-endedness of the virtual universe and *any-space-whatever's* pure locus of the possible. In this intolerable state, we find ourselves as Lazarean, de-centred, and the world essentially falsifying, where the linking of events no longer makes sense and perhaps never did, where semblance becomes indiscernible from dissemblance, horror indiscernible from banality, where the parts no longer accumulate into an intelligible whole, where every act of knowing is cut through by un-knowing.

Didi-Huberman illuminates this state of affairs, its impact on history, and my strategy of



3.28 *Portrait Error.* (2023) Lightbox. 84 x 68 cm,



3.29 Image for *Burnt House.* (2023) Lightbox in TV frame, 40.5 x 58 cm,



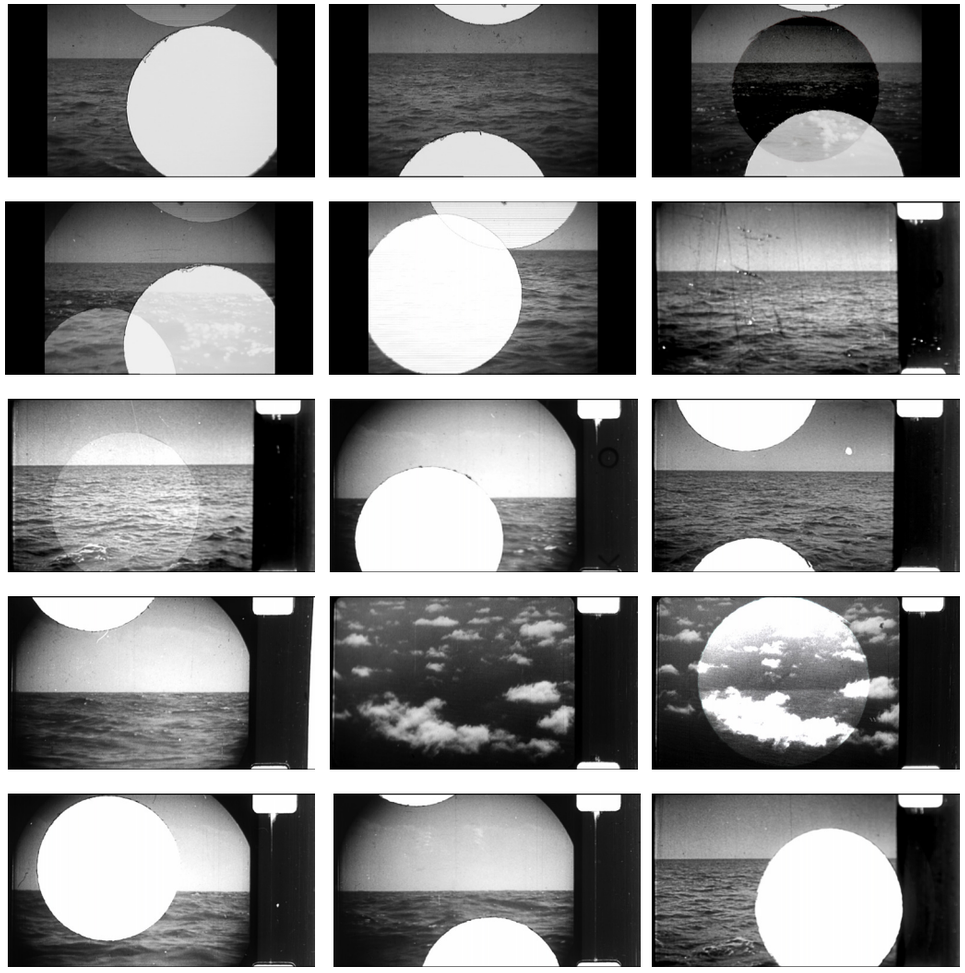
3.30 Installation view. One of two 2-meter structures that displayed the Polaroids erect. (Image courtesy of Claire Hesom).



3.31 Close-up Installation view showing mirror reflection of the Polaroids. (Image courtesy of Claire Hesom).

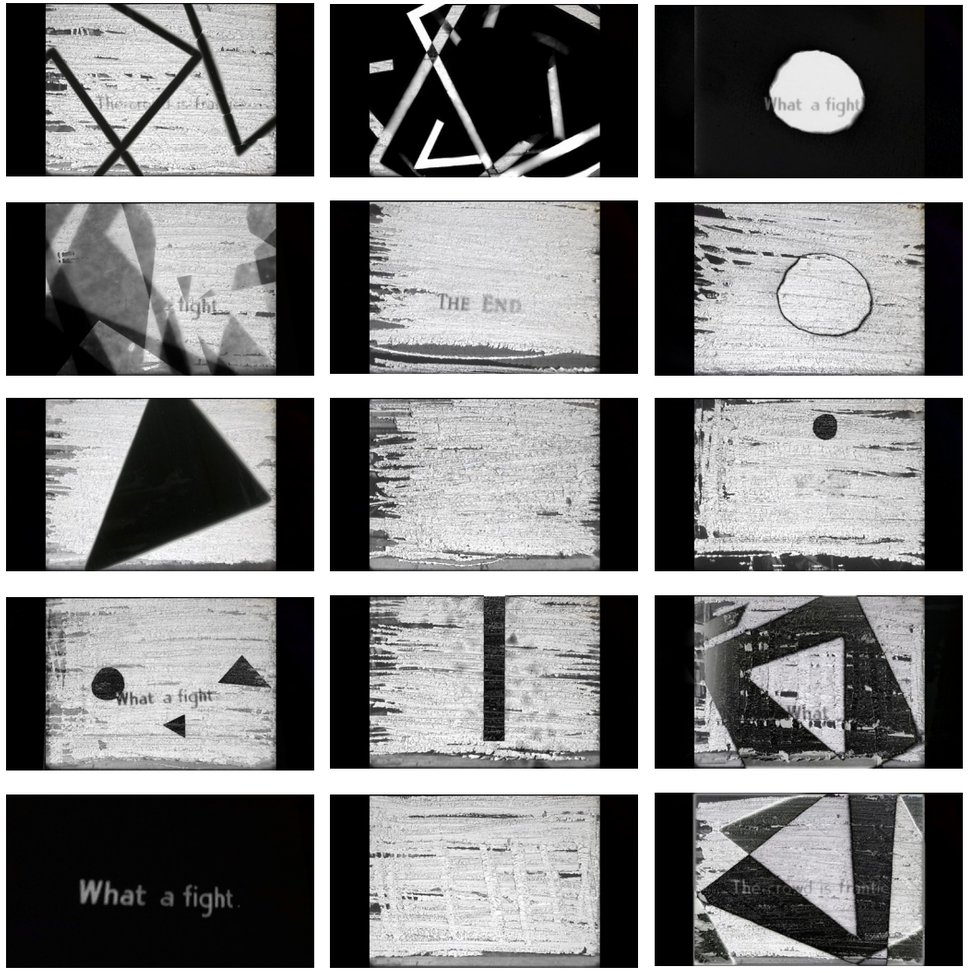


3.32 Image for wallpaper. 318 x 480cm



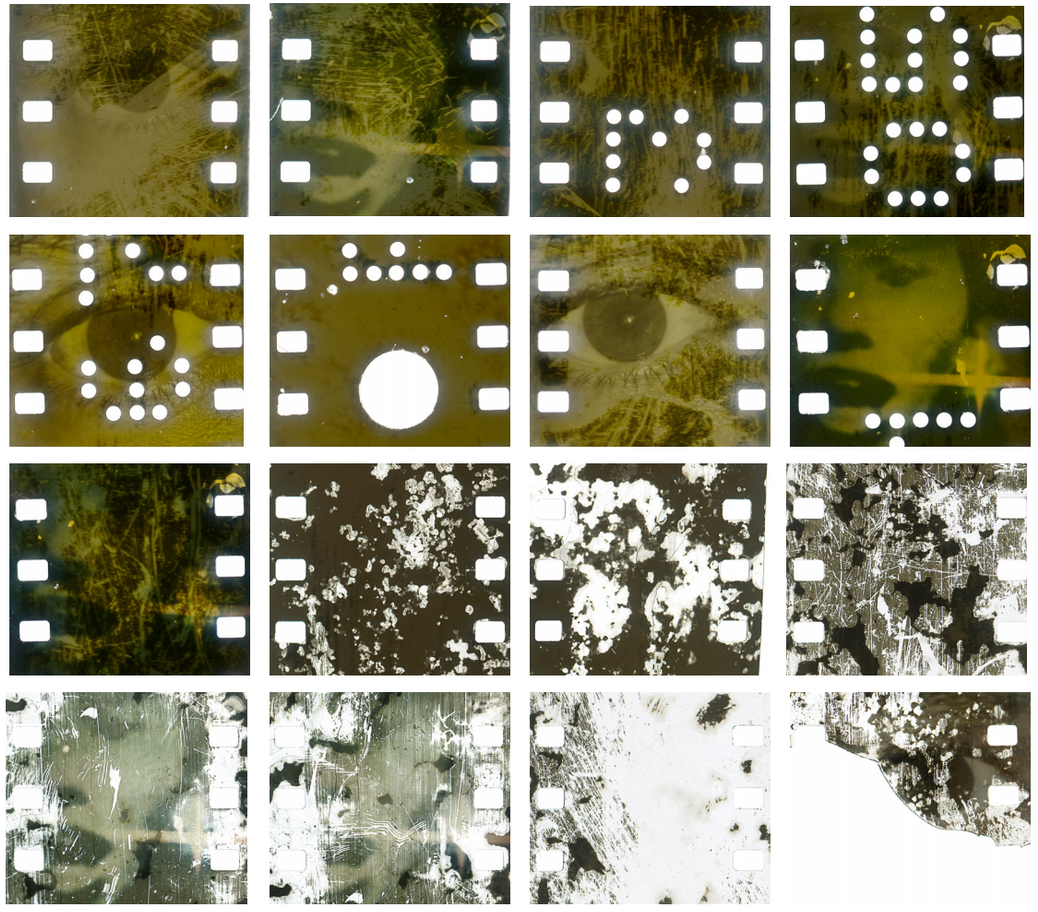
3.33 Video stills from *Seascape.* (2023) Digital video, sound. Duration 2min, 15sec.

The video was created by punching holes into sections of 16mm film. The punched holes obstructed the view of the horizon, the place of destination. This alluded to the desire for images to signify something; to arrive at meaning. The holes punched through the horizon held the viewer's attention to surface, to the physical materiality of the film. The video simply oscillates, going backwards and forwards; marooned in the non-place of the ocean.



3.34 Video stills from *What a Fight* (2023). Digital video, sound. Duration 3min, 19sec.

This video was created by scratching out the image of each frame from an 8mm film. Overlaid were scans made from abstract photograms. Although the representational image had been erased – eclipsing nearly all narrative – the animation and pacing of the shapes created a tempo that alludes to or provided a sense of storyline via imaginative projection.



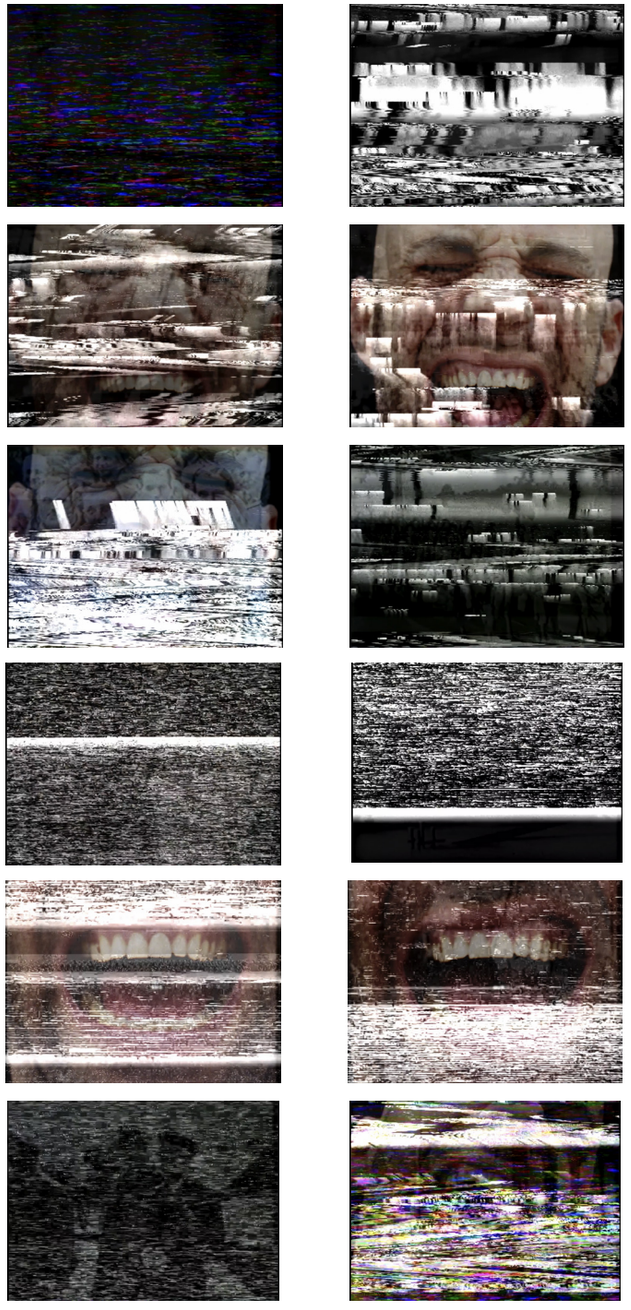
3.35 Video stills from *Buried* (2023). Digital video, sound. Duration 2min, 32sec.

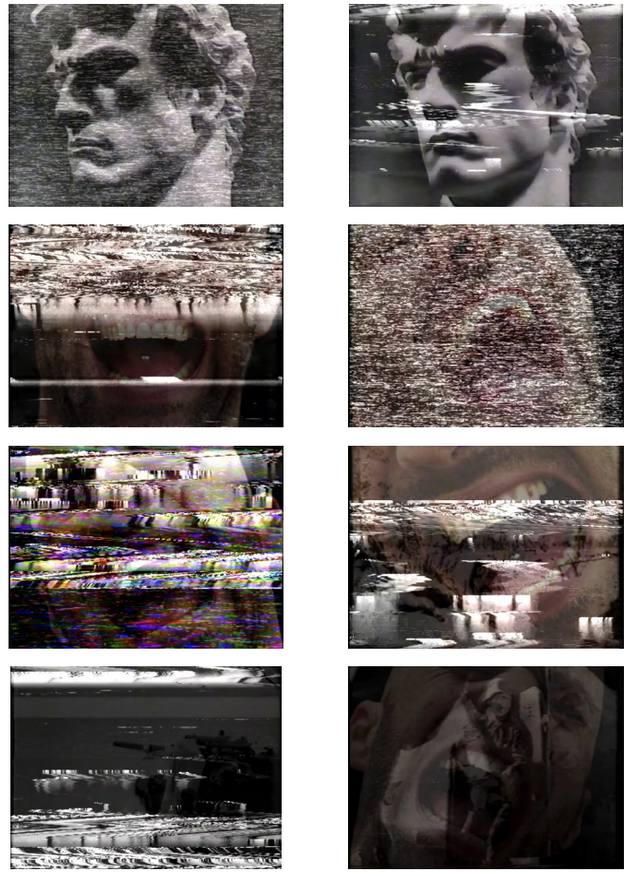
To make this video I buried an exposed blank film for four days which damaged the surface of the film. I then digitally overlaid the image of a woman screaming which was from a scanned Polaroid. The damaged surface of the film was complimented by crackling audio.



3.36 Video stills from *Inauguration* (2023). Digital video, sound. Duration 50min, 39sec.

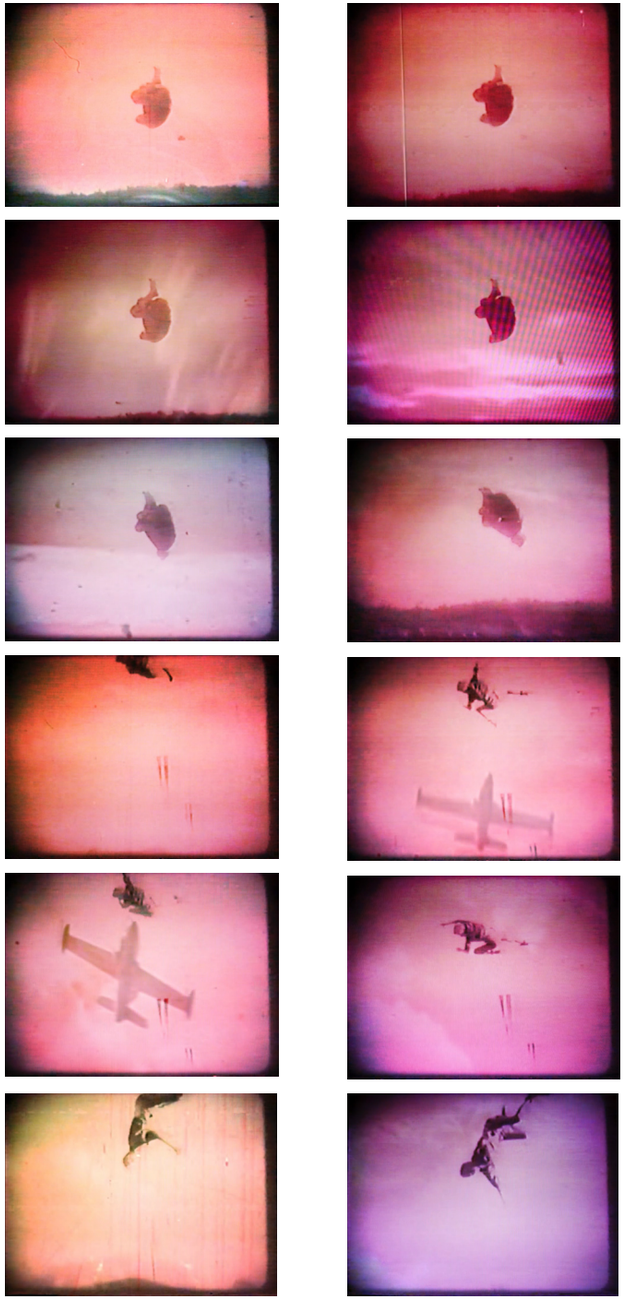
The video was made from digitally manipulating a found a VHS video recording of Nelson Mandela's inauguration as the first democratically-elected president of South Africa in 1994. The video was made by first splitting the footage in half on a time-line. I reversed the second half of the footage, which I converted into a negative image and superimposed it onto the first half. The video therefore begins and ends at the same time, simultaneously running forwards and backwards in time. I then split the footage in half to create a mirror image. Image and time folded in on themselves. An audio track of white noise interfered with the voices. I also overlaid a still image of a found photograph of an equestrian public monument that I cut-out. The video was an inquiry into public memory and memorialisation. The aesthetic devices I deployed were also intended to visually and temporally collapse an event that was supposed to signal a new era for South Africa.

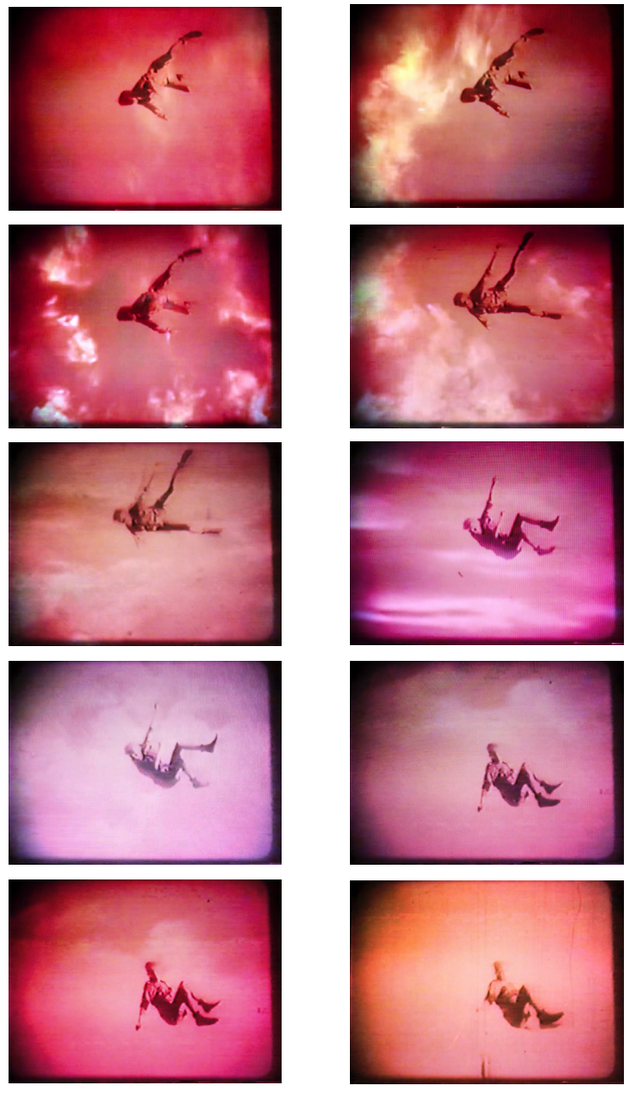




3.37 Video stills from *Silent Scream* (2023). Digital video, sound. Duration 2min, 3sec.

The footage was sourced from a found documentary video of Nazi Germany. At the beginning and end of the footage, there was video distortion. I edited these sections out and then accelerated the rest of the video so that it matched the duration of the distortion. This was then overlaid on top of the distortion. At various intervals, I include still images of myself screaming. The open mouth conveys both the silent scream and an attempt to consume history.





3.38 Video stills from *Suspension* (2023). Digital video, sound. Duration 3min, 55sec.

This video was made by digitally photographing off a TV screen every frame of a scene from Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935). The original scene was of Nazi youth playfully bouncing each other into the air with a sheet. Digitally overlaying these images with fighter jets and fire transformed the joyful scene into something more ominous.



3.39 Video stills from *Wonderer* (2023). Digital video, sound. Duration 4min, 52sec.

The imagery in this video was made by overlapping still and moving images. With an analogue camera, I repeatedly photographed archival footage of an Israeli soldier from 1948. Before scanning the negatives, I splashed them with diluted salt water. I then superimposed a clip from VHS footage where the camera pans across Cape Town's mountain ranges. The landscape from Israel/Palestine merges with Cape Town. Still images then flash in quick succession of bombings and rocket launches. The images were sourced from recent photographs of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Following this, an image of a tallis, a Jewish prayer shall, was superimposed over the landscape.

creating artworks from found historical images by arguing that the artist who constructs a montage of images from history, "whose elements, taken from reality, induce, through the form they have been given, a new effect of knowledge that is found neither in timeless fiction nor in the chronological facts of reality" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:55). "Pure fiction," he writes, "disregards all historicity and risks at every moment spilling into myth. But pure documentary narration … disregards its immanent historicity just as much, since it falls back entirely on things at the expense of relationships, on facts at the expense of structures. In fact, there are neither complete metamorphosis nor absolute facts" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:55). He proceeds to affirm that "It is necessary then to give oneself 'experimental conditions' in order to show the non-ideal nature of history, that is to say, its fundamental *impurity* – the incompleteness, the 'contradictory,' conflicting, incomplete nature – of all historical metamorphosis" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:55). Didi-Huberman terms the work of thinking with conflicts through montage "a *dialectics of multiplicities*" (2018:113), which "is the new, reciprocal position of the elements of montage that transforms things, and it is the transformation itself that implements a new thinking" (2018:114). Similarly, Minh-ha states that multiplicity "is a way of working radically with difference" (1999:10), adding that "The relation of the segment to the whole is always in displacement" (1999:11). It is from this new thinking that a new coming into being emerges, of form always undergoing a deformation. Here, the image of history is not only in ruins, but one finds one's own self-image precariously entangled, so that one encounters a process of self-differentiation, of the potentiality of always being otherwise.

Although the exhibition began as an inquiry into the affect the Liepāja family photograph has on me and its refusal to capitulate to becoming an object of knowledge (the primary force of refusal emanating from Sorella), this led me to explore the dialectic between territorialisation and deterritorialisation. When the image refuses the totality of knowing, it necessitates the work of dialectical montage and the time-image, of making connections and clashing disconnections in the search for meaning that create further multiplicities and differences, which proved uncontainable as they opened up the vast realm of the virtual space in-between. By evoking the dialectics of montage and the time-image within *any-space-whatever*, the specificity of reference shattered into indeterminate potentiality, transforming the exhibition into a space to encounter the affective dynamics of images, encouraging viewers

to imagine for themselves, where historical traumatic events were opened-up and re-presented to the infinite contingency of relationality and futurity. Through this process, I had to renounce, as Didi-Huberman argues,

> *the notion that the image is 'one,' or even that it is 'whole.' Rather, we should recognise the potential of the image as that which determines that it will never be the 'one-image' or the 'all-image' – what destines it to multiplicities, to intervals, to differences, to connections, to relations, to bifurcations, to alterations, to constellations, and to transformations. In other words, to montages. To montages capable of punctuating for us the apparitions and deformations and that are capable of showing us, in images, how the world appears and how it is deformed. It is in this way, by taking position in a given montage, that the different images that make it up – by composing its chronology – can teach us something about our own history – by which I mean something else" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:251).*

During the viewer's activation of dialectical montage and the time-image within the exhibition's *any-space-whatever*, historical images were transformed into fragments of time, bursting forth with an independent life force of multiple contemporaneous and differentiated trajectories. Consequently, the exhibition also conveyed the impression of a Deleuzian crystal-image. Within the crystal, "The past does not follow the present that it is no longer, it coexists with the present it was. The present is the actual image, and *its* contemporaneous past is the virtual image, the image in the mirror" (Deleuze, 2005b:76-77). Within the exhibition, by withholding the actual image of the Polaroids so that it could be seen only as a mirror reflection along with the reflection of the viewers themselves, the past was contemporaneous with the present as its inverse crystalline double. This was also evoked with the *Papa, Can You Hear Me* (2023) video, were the subject appear to be spit, a mirror image, where the distinction between sameness and difference was confused, appeared to overlapped, and where time was perceived as aberrant or out of joint, as folding in upon itself, moving backwards and forwards at the same time. Deleuze further explains that within crystalline time,

> *the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same time, time has split itself in two at each moment as present and past, which differ from each other in nature, or, what amounts to the same thing, it has to split the present in two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past. Time has split at the same time as it sets itself out or unrolls itself: it splits in two dissymmetrical jets, one of which makes all the present pass on, while the other preserves all the past … the crystal constantly exchanges the two distinct images which constitute it, the actual image of the present which passes and the virtual image of the past which is preserved: distinct and yet indiscernible, and all the more indiscernible because distinct, because we do not know which is one and which is the other. (Deleuze, 2005b:79).*

Deleuze continues, "What we see in the crystal is therefore a dividing in two that the crystal itself constantly causes to turn on itself, that it prevents from reaching completion, because it is a perpetual *self-distinguishing*, a distinction in the process of being produced; which always resumes the distinct terms in itself, in order constantly to relaunch them" (2005b:79). By starting with the family photograph on the brink of annihilation, the exhibition sought to relaunch the past by activating three trajectories that reflected, refracted, and faceted one another. The exhibition aimed to demonstrate how each of these histories intrinsically bears upon the others, capable of relaunching the one through another, enabling the co-existence of differentiating virtual presents; fragmented presents that can be imaginatively re-composed, each time altering the whole that is intrinsically unbounded. This experience of time is analogous to Didi-Huberman's observations on Henry Maldiney's notion of "pure proceedings," which, rather than durational time, are "exposed in their *becoming*, not in their chronology" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:167). Didi-Huberman explains that within this event of emergence:

> *the past is presented outside of the present, outside of presence as well as chronology, contemporary history, but also outside mere actuality as well as teleology, in an enigmatic 'there is' that juxtaposes its heterogeneous elements as though on a montage table, or in a free association that swirls around an inaccessible knot of real – the eye of history, like the eye of the hurricane (Didi-Huberman, 2018:168).*

As pure proceedings within the exhibition's design, the events referred to in the Polaroids, as well as the videos, and the veiled event of a family murdered during an operation of mass execution are re-presented as pure potentialities, emergent yet impossible even to imagine. And so, imagine we must, which becomes an obligation to bear witness to the inaccessible eye of history while being caught within the hurricane. By bearing witness, being close, but at the un-traversable distance of "there is", their becomings emerge through differentiation,

preventing them from cohering into an image of the same and falling back into the homogeneity of historicism. Instead, we can bear witness to their heterogeneity, multiplicity, and difference, allowing us to get close enough to bear witness to the heterogeneity, multiplicity, and difference of life, and therefore grieve those disregarded lives that Butler terms the 'ungrievable'. Elaborating on this point requires extensive quotation. Butler writes that she is

> *referring not only to humans not regarded as human, and thus to a restrictive conception of the human that is based upon their exclusion. It is not a matter of a simple entry of the excluded into an established ontology, but an insurrection at the level of ontology, a critical opening up of the questions, What is real? Whose lives are real? How might reality be remade? Those who are unreal have, in a sense, already suffered the violence of derealization. What, then, is the relation between violence and those lives considered as 'unreal'? Does violence effect that unreality? Does violence take place on the condition of that unreality?*
>
> *If violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated. But they have a strange way of remaining animated and so must be negated again (and again). They cannot be mourned because they are always already lost or, rather, never 'were,' and they must be killed, since they seem to live on, stubbornly, in this state of deadness. Violence renews itself in the face of the apparent inexhaustibility of its object. The derealization of the 'Other' means that it is neither alive nor dead, but interminably spectral. (Butler, 2006:33-34)*

I propose that it is from within an *any-space-whatever* and crystalline time that this repeated violence of unreality can come to an end. We can no longer deny the unreal because, within the crystal of time, unreality has become indiscernible from the actual, and so spectrality is re-composed as the affective presence of the virtual. Here, it becomes impossible to deny the presence of the 'Other' or the repeated violence subjected upon the ungrievable because we have become decentred, others to ourselves, thereby bearing witness to the insurrection of ontology, the human, and the self, recomposed as essentially self-differentiating. Within *any-space-whatever*, one can therefore witness palimpsestic concentrationary history which, Silverman writes, "has disturbed the dichotomy of individual and collective guilt and blurred the boundaries between victim, perpetrator and witness" (2011:207).

The crystal's splitting of time in two dissymmetrical jets has caused a differentiated fracturing of the human, bringing them into contact and relation. The exhibition thus became a space within which one could encounter Édouard Glissant's poetics of Relation, where, "we imagine the dis-closeable aesthetics of Chaos, with every least detail as complex as the whole that cannot be reduced, simplified, or normalized. Each of its parts patterns activity implicated in the activity of every other" (Glissant, 1997:32-33). He describes this as "an aesthetics of turbulence whose corresponding ethics is not provided in advance" (Glissant, 1997:155), proposing that "the poetics of Relation calls upon the imagination" (Glissant, 1997:174). "The imaginary," he adds, "does not bear with it the coercive requirements of idea. It prefigures reality, without determining it a priori" (Glissant, 1997:192). The dynamics of montage and relationality was employed as an aesthetic strategy to induce spatio-temporal turbulence of *any-space-whatever* and the crystal so that, as Glissant writes, "The other of Thought is always set in motion by its confluences as a whole, in which each is changed by and changes the other" (Glissant, 1997:155). Within the exhibition's contained space, viewers could imagine alternative ways of being-in-the-world, as Glissant proposes:

> *Relation diversifies forms of humanity according to infinite strings of models infinitely brought into contact and relayed. The point of departure does not even allow us to outline a typology of these contacts or of the interactions thus triggered. Its sole merit would lie in proposing that Relation has its source in these contacts and not in itself; that its aim is not Being, a self-important entity that would locate its beginning in itself (Glissant, 1997:160).*

Evoking the dialectics of montage and the time-image, Glissant writes, "Prime elements do not enter into Relation. Any prime elements would call up the shadow of Being" (1997:161). Within this new vision of humanity, he proposes, "Thought of self and thought of the other here become obsolete in their duality ... The right to opacity would not establish autism; it would be the real foundation of Relation in freedoms" (Glissant, 1997:190). Glissant envisions a new cosmology with relationality, stating, "In Relation the whole is not the finality of its parts: for multiplicity in totality is totally diversity ... the idea of totality alone is an obstacle to totality" (1997:192). Therefore, as with crystalline time within an *any-space-whatever,* Glissant's totality is constituted in the diversity, difference, and multiplicity

of Relation, the whole can never be fully grasped; rather, it is a totality that is always in motion, dynamic and diversifying from itself. It is a totality without a centre, not merely the sum of its parts; instead, it is an amorphous whole within which all its parts are constantly acting upon one another, a figuration concomitant with disfiguration. Within this totality, nothing can be known with certainty except for the dynamic workings of relationality itself. In this sense, the only knowable, is un-knowing.

By presenting various mediations of the Liepāja family photograph in the exhibition in relation to itself and in contact with other historical events, although it did not become fully *known* to me, it did become *re-presented* to me with the dynamics of the event and the ensuing forces of futurity. In doing so, the exhibition sought to provide a space for viewers to imagine other un-imaginables, where, to reiterate Didi-Huberman, we are compelled to imagine the impossible and for the impossible to become a present potential that we can bear witness to. Through this exploration, Sorella became akin to the Lazarean, the returnee, as Pollock and Silverman write, "who has experienced in his or her body and mind that other planet in which political terror became a system, and must now warn us of the reality that 'everything is possible'" (2011:29). When everything becomes possible, narrativity and temporality begin to fracture, thrusting us into the indeterminacy, infinity, and pure potentiality of *the now of re-presentation*.



Conclusion

The Art of Taking-Position by Potentialising Time



In order to know, we must take position. There is nothing simple about such a gesture. To take position means to situate oneself at least twice and on at least two of the fronts included in any position, for every position is inevitably relative. It is, for example, a question of facing something, but in front of that thing we must also take into account everything we turn away from – that which is outside of the frame, behind us, that which we might refuse but that conditions, for the most part, our very movement and therefore our position. It is also a question of situating oneself in time. To take a position is to desire, to demand something, to situate oneself in the present and to aim for a future. Yet all of this exists only on the basis of a temporality that precedes us, encompasses us, and appeals to our memory and even to our attempts to forget, to break away, and to reach the absolutely new. In order to know, we have to know what we want, but also where our not-knowledge, our latent fears, and our unconscious desires are situated.

(Didi-Huberman, G. 2018:3)

Future Pasts Now

Throughout this investigation, I have been guided by Georges Didi-Huberman's claim: "In order to know, we must *imagine* for ourselves" and that "*We are obliged* to that oppressive imaginable" (Didi-Huberman, 2008:3). This led to his revised assertion that the knowledge engendered by the imagination is reliant on the particularity of taking-position, which, rather than being predicated on the discourses and politics of knowing or taking-sides, is predicated on the *poiesis* of not-knowing – the emergences that come from sustained questioning, delving further into realms of the unknowable. I've referred to this as the process of un-knowing, where the particularity and relationality of affect engenders an opportunity to unlearn and be presented with new potentialities, where, as with Didi-Huberman, it becomes an historical imperative to imagine the unimaginable. I propose that certain strategies of art-making, which activate the affective imagination (as outlined within the discussion of specific artworks by Penny Siopis, Anton Kusters, and myself), invite the viewer to take-position and that this position taking is connected to Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's work of potentialising history, which is not the work of excavation or discovering the new, but of *presenting* that which refuses the pastness of history. Consequently, my theoretical methodology and inquiry into specific artistic praxes elucidated strategies for activating the obligation to imagine *in spite of all*, which became an opportunity for the unlearning required to potentialise history, where new trajectories of history are relaunched.

Although Azoulay does not directly address trauma, in her postulation, the Western disciplines of history, archives, and art are intrinsically interconnected and founded upon an originary violence, therefore implicitly referring to the suppressions and negations of historical traumas. She explains:

> *Potential history is not an attempt to tell the violence alone, but rather an onto-epistemic refusal to recognize as irreversible its outcome and the categories, statuses, and forms under which it materializes. Potential history refuses to inhabit the position of the historian who arrives after the events are over, that is, after the violence was made into part of the sealed past, dissociated in time and space from where we are. Violence against people and their worlds is not history, and the work of potential history is to argue that this violence can be reversed, brought to a closure, mended (Azoulay, 2019:286).*

Despite Western art's entanglement with the violence of colonialism, imperialism, and, by implication, historicism, I have argued that certain artistic strategies can potentialise history by potentialising the time of the now. These strategies disrupt and rupture chronological historical time, allowing art to become a monad, a means to re-approach the violence of historical trauma and re-activate the symptomatic latency of these events by giving rise to the criticality of taking-position and a renewed sense of the past now This encounter can therefore be said to create an opportunity to perceive Walter Benjamin's image of history emerge while imbuing it with a sense of urgency. Artistic strategies for doing this were elucidated in chapter II with the discussion of artworks by Siopis and Kusters, which informed the methodologies I undertook within my own praxis in chapter III. I proposed that our praxes, by being attentive to the vibrancy and opacity of materiality and the somatics of haptic visuality, engendered affective dynamics that encourage participatory engagements by enlivening relational embodied sensations. Furthermore, I suggested that due to the mediation of distance and going beyond the representational specificity of an event, historical traumatic events can be re-encountered in alternative ways. I argued that by deploying the workings of dialectical montage and the time-image, our artworks encouraged viewer-participants to imagine what was previously impossible without this eruptive temporality, which involves *re-presenting* the past and orienting it towards anterior futures. Consequently, our artworks became akin to an event, positioned within the indeterminate state of unfolding and becoming. Our artworks can thus be considered as instances that do the work of potentialising history. Azoulay elucidates this concept, stating, "Potential history strives to retrieve, reconstruct, and give an account of diverse worlds that persist despite the historicised limits of our world" (2019:289). She further argues, "History is potentialised with the persistence, protection, transmission, and renewal of different ways of being in time and in the world that are still alive" (Azoulay, 2019:292).

Reflecting on the Liepāja family photograph in chapter I, I discussed how Sorella's refusal to look up at her photographer-cum-executioner is not a singular event but ongoing. Because of the photographic record, she continues to look down, refusing to meet my gaze. The discussion of my exhibition *Knowing and Un-Knowing: The Affective Relations of Images* (2023) in chapter III was a theoretical and methodological inquiry into affective strategies of potentialisation, a response to Sorella's refusal. "The point," Azoulay explains, "is not giving voice to a silenced past and making the invisible visible but releasing the past from its 'pastness' and letting it assume the vitality of what has always been there" (2019:350). She compellingly claims, "When what was made past is understood as part of ongoing struggles, history is no more" (Azoulay, 2019:350).

By finding strategies for taking-position, notably the speculation of the familial, from which I could encounter the aspirational, I avoided dwelling on the victimisation of those recorded in the Liepāja family photograph. Instead, I encountered acts of refusal, particularly Sorella's, which prohibited the projection of victimhood that would have foreclosed the photograph, relegating it to the past as an object of knowledge. Rather, her refusal became imbued with the force of futurity and fugitivity, transcending and escaping the finality of death. In this sense, the photograph enables Sorella's refusal to live on, persisting for all of eternity. Therefore, I was not engaging in an exercise of theoretical rescue, of coming to know, because Sorella's Lazarean refusal endures with or without my intervention. By becoming attuned to haptics, I merely came to apprehend what has always been there. It was the interminable afterlife of her refusal that informed my inquiry into relationality, which enabled me to begin the work of knowing for myself by imagining for myself and thereby taking-position.

These acts of refusal and un-knowing necessitated a search for meaning by bringing the Liepāja family photograph into contact with other events, or more precisely, other photographs of traumatic historical events. This meant that I had to turn away and distance myself from the Liepāja family photograph in order to discover and explore the fullness of its affective registers and its socio-political reverberations. My participatory act of watching the event of photography therefore extended beyond coming to know its particular circumstances and necessitated bearing witness to other events in which I am implicated and which continue to impact how and what I see in the Liepāja family photograph. The photograph took me places where the actual was encountered simultaneously with concentrationary virtual elsewheres that required photographic representation to physically present and convey the relationality that is an essential feature of how all images are encountered and how they exist dialectically in the world. What I began to experience was how relationality opens up a being with others within the heterogeneous confluences of temporal multiplicities, a space where the past becomes open to the potentialities of the future. Within this explosive

temporality, I not only assumed the position of the photographer-witness, but by taking up the position of watching, I could not maintain a stance of neutrality. I had to take-position and confront my own complicity in the violations that I watched and photographed on the television screen. Azoulay argues that in "regime-made disasters," such as the ones that I photographed, namely: the Holocaust, South Africa's apartheid regime, and Israel's independence predicated on the Nakba, "perpetrators are the entire population of fully entitled citizens whose differential civil status within the body politic perpetuates the victimization of other groups" (Azoulay, 2019:524-525). Therefore, it is precisely because I arrived late to the scene that, rather than absolving me from the violations being watched from the past, I was positioned within the safety of citizenship, which meant that I became incriminated. This incrimination does not merely pertain to what happened in the past but also to the continued violations of rights that maintain my citizenship and grant me the position of being able to watch from a distance the pain of others and how the ungrievable are repeatedly negated.

Sorella's refusal to look up at me becomes an indictment and evidence of the concentrationary universe that has corrupted and forever deformed the human. This is the power of photography to potentialise time – rendering presence and life concomitant with absence and death. In the words of Azoulay, I am obliged to acknowledge that "*the violation of any person's rights infringes on the rights of others*" (Azoulay, 2019:526).

In the previous discussion on my exhibition *Knowing and Un-Knowing: The Affective Relations of Images* (2023), I explained how I utilised the installation of Polaroid photographs and videos to activate the dialectical workings of montage and the time-image. Because the images were selective re-framings of journalistic and documentary footage, I endeavoured, as Didi-Huberman puts it, to engage in the act of "*taking position* on the real by modifying, in a critical way, the respective position of things, discourses and images" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:101). By taking-position, the exhibition was not conclusive; it did not take sides on a socio-political critique because montage, as he proposes, "makes any authority of message or program equivocal, improbable, and even impossible" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:110). To reiterate, this does not mean that the exhibition became a-political. Rather, montage, as Didi-Huberman argues, "establishes a position-taking – of each image regarding the others, of all the images regarding history," which is "a new work of *political imagination*" (2018:111). By taking-position, Didi-Huberman asserts:

> *Politics is exposed only by showing the conflicts, paradoxes, and reciprocal shocks with which all of history is woven. That is why montage appears to be the perfect process for this exposition: things appear in it only to take position, and they show themselves only in order to be dismantled … Montage is to form what politics is to acts: these two meanings of dismantling, or de-montage – which are the excess of energy and the strategy of place, the madness of transgression, and the wisdom of position – are needed together (Didi-Huberman, 2018:121).*

Following Didi-Huberman, the strategic use of montage in the exhibition argued that "as topical and political position-taking, as a re-composition of forces, offers us then an *image of time* that explodes the narrative of history and the arrangements of things" (2018:117). As viewers physically navigated the *any-space-whatever* of the exhibition, an encounter with aberrant time, its powers of the false, and the emergence of the crystal, it became a space within which to experience the pure powers and qualities of affectivity. The palpability of this felt experience was inexplicable and ungraspable in language, wholly particular – from which ensued the rupturing of ordered causality and historicism's progressive temporality.

As argued, montage did not fill in the missing gaps of not-knowing or expunge Sorella's refusal, which would have alleviated the photograph's haunting grievousness. Rather, the gaps themselves, the intervals between images, became the indeterminate spaces within which to imagine impossible pasts and impossible futures. These spaces between became potentialities for imagining another way of being – of being as premised on the multiplicity and difference of Relation.

The events that I brought into contact with the Polaroids, therefore, did not create a coherent historical critique. Rather, because the images were arranged according to formal relationships and detached from textual information that would have concretised the referent, each event was fragmented in itself and through the crystalline prism of the other in order to asymmetrically relaunch time. The workings of montage were not given within the bounds of an individual artwork but activated by viewers as they moved through the exhibition, having to physically navigate a position from which to see the images. As a result, making meaning was participatory, contingent, and particular. However, the task of making meaning and position-taking can never be resolved. As the spaces between increased in number, viewers had to question their own political presuppositions and prior knowledge of

historical narratives.

The specific physical properties of the Polaroid and its non-chronological serial display in the exhibition, placed upside down with their images reflected off mirrors, were deployed as strategies to critically investigate how we approach images in general and how we rely on them for making certain claims about reality. The Polaroid's mechanical automatism, vibrant and vulnerable materiality, tight square framing that draws attention to selectivity and exclusion (the off-frame-effect), and its blank underside worked together to distance the viewing subject and place obstacles that prevented transparent revelation. By negotiating closeness and distance when observing the images, viewers had to consider how these factors function within the acts of interpretation and the formulation of meaning. Within the exhibition, physically moving closer to the image caused further obfuscation rather than revealing more. As much as the exhibition presented images to be seen, it simultaneously withheld images and obstructed their view, which necessitated the work of imagining for oneself. Visibility and visuality of the actual, the spatiality of the movement-image, gave way to the impactful presence of the virtual, the aberrant temporality of Gilles Deleuze's time-image. As viewers moved from one image to the next, instead of experiencing a greater sense of territorialisation, they encountered an expanding sense of deterritorialisation, a virtual 'elsewhere' that became increasingly indeterminate – the fluid, non-totalizable whole of relationality. Viewers were aware that each image was taken of existing footage from a historical event, a partial and diminutive view of the screen, a selective re-framing of the framed, and a re-materialization of the digital image. As the imagination worked against these limitations, mediations, and translations, its workings took on a discernible socio-political quality. Consequently, viewers necessarily became aware of their position-taking, of where the imagination was going in the attempt to make meaning from these ambiguous images detached from referential textual support. Any presuppositions of historical causality or progress could not be maintained as homogeneous time fragmented into a multiplicity of heterogeneous temporalities.

Montage brings to bear the spaces between, the this and that of what is given. Within the exhibition viewers were invited to imagine their own virtual images between the actual images, transforming every act of visual association into a simultaneous act of virtual disconnection that probed beyond the limits of the known. Viewers were compelled to confront

their own un-knowingness, encouraging self-reflexive inquiry. The shattering of history, the enfoldings and overlappings of space and time, provided an opportunity to reflect on their own discreteness and apprehend the precarity on which this is founded. The breaking apart of time through montage was intended to invite contemplation of how being is predicated on time. The viewer's experience of being-in-time became a means to engender an encounter with the relationality of being – the being with unknown others, the ensuing becomings contemporaneous with un-becomings that characterise the event of emergence.

The exhibition sought to demonstrate how certain strategies of art-making, by activating the obligation to imagine in spite of all, poses the question of how we live in the world with others and the ensuing obligation to relationality as that which protects, nurtures, and respects different ways of being-in-the-world. These historical events brought into contact within the exhibition broke away from their location in the past and were imbued with symptomatic re-appearances – the past potentialised and re-presented.

My research therefore demonstrates how artistic praxis can become a mechanism that puts images in authority of time. Artistic praxis has been argued as a novel modality for position-taking because it creates the the mystery and enigma of the image, offering a special kind of meaning by setting in motion the workings of the affective imagination and un-knowing. It is this un-knowing that keeps me beholden to Sorella. Sorella's refusal to meet my gaze, a visual, epistemological and ontological point of opacity that animated my plea was transformed by strategic art-making into a highly generative force. This force activated the open-ended critical inquiry of un-knowing – the potentialisation engendered by transgressing spatio-temporal limits. Strategies of art-making has afforded evidence of independent, critical and creative ability in handling and interpreting the known Liepāja family photograph, and that, through my praxis, it and Sorella's refusal has been newly discovered, resulting in the acknowledgement of agential spatio-temporal emancipation. Thus, art-making, when enlivening the affective imagination and re-presenting historical trauma, is capable of producing epistemic and ontological openings to grieve the ungrievable while imbuing the past with renewed futurity. The plea returns, transformed as a poignant call to action and creative origination:

Sorella, please look up at me.

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Appendix

Notes on the Indeterminacy of Photographic Evidence

Photography was imperial from the very beginning. It was shaped and institutionalized to confirm and facilitate the reproduction of imperial rights, already acquired and maintained through technologies of extraction whose large-scale operation made consent and mutuality superfluous to the function of the operation of the technologies themselves. In other words, for photography to become omnipresent on a global scale, the interference of people with its smooth operation – those whose presence, labour, and consent was nonetheless indispensable to its operation – had to be minimized. The negation of people's right to actively participate in (let alone give consent to) being photographed is not part of the ontology of photography, but is the outcome of the extractive principle on which photography was first institutionalized.

(Azoulay, A, A. 2019:146-147)

The Myth of Transparency

Susan Sontag inquires, "A photograph is supposed not to evoke, but to show. That is why photographs, unlike hand-made images, can count as evidence. But evidence of what?" (2003:42). Looking back at the history of photography and its deployment by Western colonialists in the late 1800s and early 1900s reveals the grave injuries and abuses of power when photography was posited as a transparent mechanical medium that produces evidentiary and factual information of what was recorded that necessitated the sublimation of its evocative and affective dynamics. Mark Sealy writes:

> *When the native was photographically rendered, they were mediated into a subject of curiosity, a lower human form, out of harmony with European capitalist ideals or, alternatively, posed on the edge of humanity: a raw savage reproduced for voyeuristic pleasure, staged as ripe for religious indoctrination, primed for hard industrial labour or ready to be tamed for domestic work. These representations cumulatively constructed an authentic but lesser human form, producing these figures as primarily on earth for European benefit (Sealy, 2019:42).*

The presupposition of transparency was exploited in the 19th and early 20th centuries by Western pseudo-scientific disciplines, such as eugenics and social Darwinism, extending into the disciplines of ethnography, anthropology, and archaeology, deployed to hierarchically categorise people and inscribe ontological essentialisms. In fact, soon after photography's invention in the mid-1800s, it accompanied colonial expeditions to Africa, where the pseudo-science of eugenics developed into the malignance of racial science.[52] Art historian Tamar Garb explains:

> *Hierarchical notions of race joined modern technological inventions, of which photography was one, to manage and comprehend the ineluctable difference of cultures and peoples that the colonised world presented. Photography's purported veracity and realism made it perfectly suited to the positivist claim of new disciplines seeking credibility as a science. But photographs themselves registered ways of seeing and imaging the world, according to conventions and perceptual filters, which produced as much as copied the realities they set out to picture. Whether conceived as reliable records of the past or as palimpsests of*

> *fracture and fiction, such images form part of the ethnographic and racial imagination that still furnishes conceptions of the present (Garb, 2011:14).*

These hierarchical categorisations of humans positioned black Africans as variously being out-of-time, primitive, and uncivilised – debased as sub-humans and even non-humans. Historian James T. Campbell elaborates:

> *Like the photographs themselves, this language was black and white, with Africans and Europeans appearing as starkly different, incommensurable 'races' – one benighted, backwards, and black, the other enlightened, progressive and white. In so-called anthropometric photography, which emerged in the late nineteenth century alongside the discipline of physical anthropology, Africans were further classified ethnically, each 'tribe' recognisable from its distinctive costume, coiffured, and physiognomy. Rendered in mid-close up, frontally and in profile, Africans in anthropometric photographs were leached of any individuality, operating instead as scientific specimens. Women were often displayed bare-breasted, limning the scientific with the pornographic (Campbell, 2004:n.p.).*

However, anthropologist Deborah Poole recounts that ethnographers and anthropologists from the 19th and early 20th centuries were not

> *naively accepting of the much-lauded 'transparency' or objectivity' of photographs. Indeed, the value they assigned to photographs as scientific evidence was intimately related to forms of exchange, accumulation, and, above all, comparison, through which mute photographs could be made to produce the general laws, statistical regularities and the systemic predictions of evolutionary, and ethnological 'theory' … In other words, photographs were not read by anthropologists as evidence of facts that could be independently observed. Rather, as if in response to an increasing awareness of the almost infinite variety of human behaviours and appearances, photographs themselves came to constitute the facts of anthropology (Poole, 2005:162-163).*

Poole mentions that to curtail contingency, restrict interpretation, and refine functionality, these photographers attempted to exclude excess information of culture, place, or personhood. They standardised photographic representations to confer scientific semblance. These strategies, Poole writes, "were concerned to erase evidence of the moment at which the image was taken" (2005:166). This included the attempt by ethnographic photographers to erase their own presence. Performing the illusion of scientific objectivity was a requirement for sustaining the validity of purported evidence. Despite this implementation, it is vital, as historians Patricia Hayes and Gary Minkley affirm, "If photography exceeds human intentionality, then despite being a *European* invention, photography in Africa exceeds European intentionality" (Hayes & Minkley, 2019:3). The evidentiary has, therefore, always been enshrouded with ambiguity and doubt as well as pervaded by fiction.

These self-legitimising 'scientific' disciplines, despite professing objectivity, neutrality, and ahistoricity, were also fuelled by the virulent gaze and imago of the Western imagination consisting of fervent fear and desire that, with the aid of photography, sought to gain authority over Africa, its subject of fascination, by formulating a regime of representation that sought to render it a knowable object. Okwui Enwezor explains; "From the earliest record of the photographic encounter, Africa has made for a fascinating and elusive subject, at once strange, intoxicating, carnal, primitive, wild, elusive" (2006:13).[53] He describes the Western imaging of Africa as a "veritable phantasmagoria," and the relation as a "vampiric machine" (Enwezor, 2006:14). The fascination with the African body needed to be sublimated, tamed, and controlled. By representing Africans as primitive and uncivilised, by signifying their being-from-the-past, it legitimated the impending catastrophe that Western powers were to unleash upon the continent. This colonial history of photography elucidates that the mechanics of the camera are by no means dispassionate; rather, they are suffused with the uncontainable surplus value of the imagination; the 'real' was thoroughly fabricated.

In acknowledgement of this violent history where the ability to use photography to exert power over others, in *On Photography* (1979), Sontag expresses great concern for photography's supposed power of objectification. "To photograph," she states, "is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and, therefore, like power … Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire" (Sontag, 1979:4). She goes on to claim that "There is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera" (Sontag, 1979:7). This sense of possession and knowledge, however, is never attained. As a promise unfulfilled, ever more photographs are required, creating greater distance and separation from the world. Consequently, Sontag argues that the real

becomes surreal. "To possess the world in the form of images," she writes, "[is] precisely to reexperience the unreality and remoteness of the real" (Sontag, 1979:164). Photography's appropriation of reality, she continues, is "a means of making it obsolete" (Sontag, 1979:179). According to Sontag, within the objectified, subjugating, pseudo-knowledge of the surreal world, consumers of photographic images inevitably look at what has been recorded with detachment. Viewers become voyeurs of the past, therefore desensitised to the pain of others and alleviated from any responsive action. Sontag's critique of photography argues that, over time, aesthetics inevitably supplants politics, which closes off the past, sealed and set apart from the present. However, in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), she revised her position and challenged her prior claim:

> *To speak of reality becoming a spectacle is a breath-taking provincialism. It universalises the viewing habits of a small, educated population living in the rich part of the world, where news has been converted into entertainment … It assumes that everyone is a spectator. It suggests, perversely, unseriously, that there is no real suffering in the world. But it is absurd to identify the world with those zones in the well-off countries where people have the dubious privilege of being spectators, or of declining to be spectators, of other people's pain, just as it is absurd to generalise about the ability to respond to the suffering of others on the basis of a mind-set of those consumers of news who know nothing at first-hand about war and massive injustice and terror. There are hundreds of millions of television watchers who are far from inured to what they see on television. They do not have the luxury of patronising reality (Sontag, 2003:98-99).*

Returning to Poole, it is clear that Sontag initially failed to notice the muteness and contingency of photography that troubled early ethnographers and anthropologists. Not only does the photograph have to be made to speak, but it also involves contesting structural temporalities. "An anthropology," Poole writes, "focused on defining horizontally differentiated forms of life through the language of 'race' (or 'culture') affords conflicting evidential (or juridical) weight to the different temporalities involved in the fleeting immediacy of the encounter and the stabilizing permeances of the fact" (2005:172). Sontag, rather than activating this opposition for critical effect, conflated them, so that permanence succeeds in deactivating the fleeting contingent moment by means of aesthetic entombment.

Art historian John Tagg follows on from Sontag's initial pessimism, arguing that within certain spheres of deployment, such as journalism and bureaucratic documentation, the mechanical and technological properties of the camera continue to be entrusted with neutrality and objectivity. These properties are instrumentalised by the institutional and bureaucratic organizations of the modern state as one of their mechanisms for exercising power over its citizens via record-keeping, categorisation, and surveillance. Tagg discusses the insidious historical and enduring relationship that the photographic evidentiary has with knowledge production and how, by producing supposedly incontestable truths, the state is able to extend the reach of its power.[54] He writes:

> *The links of the chain are truth, knowledge, observation, description, representation, record. The value of the camera was extolled because the optical and chemical processes of photography were taken to designate a scientifically exploited but 'natural' mechanism producing 'natural' images whose truth was guaranteed. … It was free, too, from the imprecisions of verbal language (Tagg, 1988:78).*

Tagg challenges the presumption of a photographic ontology, which would credit the medium as having an overarching or unifying attribute. He argues:

> *Its status as a technology varies with the power relations which invest it. Its nature as a practice depends on the institutions and agents which define it and set it to work. Its function as a mode of cultural production is tied to definite conditions of existence and its products are legible and meaningful only within the particular currencies they have. Its history has no unity. It is a flickering across a field of institutional space (Tagg, 1988:118).*

Tagg continues, emphasising that the camera is never merely an instrument:

> *Its technical limitations and the resultant distortions register meaning; its representations are highly coded; and it wields a power that is never its own. It arrives on the scene vested with a particular authority; authority to arrest, picture and transform daily life. This is not the authority of the camera but of the apparatus of the local state which deploys it and guarantees the authority of its images to stand as evidence or register as truth (Tagg, 1988:150).*

Tagg therefore insists that photography is "a domain of coexistent but mutually exclud-

ing and irreconcilable photographies" (2009:14). He further states, "There are only differences and no positive terms, only differences and the kind of violence that insists that they can be held in place. It is in this sense, therefore, that I have said that photography has no identity" (Tagg, 2009:15).

In his essay *Myth Today* (2009), Roland Barthes likewise denounces that which is perceived to be objective, neutral, or transparent, including that which has come to be conceived as innate, essential or 'human nature', as the workings of myth – "the global sign" (Barthes, 2009:138). According to Barthes, myth obfuscates historicity and, therefore, the socio-political contingency of signification. "However paradoxical it may seem," Barthes writes, "myth hides nothing: its function is to distort, not to make disappear" (2009:145). Elaborating, he states:

> *A conjuring trick has taken place; it has turned reality inside out, it has emptied it of history and filled it with nature, it has removed from things their human meaning so as to make them signify a human insignificance. The function of myth is to empty reality: it is, literally, a ceaseless flowing out, a haemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short, a perceptible absence (Barthes, 2009:169).*

According to Barthes and Tagg, to perceive something as pre-given, neutral, factual, or ahistorical is evidence of it having already been monopolised by power; the state exerting control over its populace.[55]

Because photography is deployed by governmental and bureaucratic productions of knowledge and truth, Tagg questions its efficacy in challenging these frameworks. He suggests that because corporate monopolies have standardised photographic technology, photographers are always-already consumers, which restricts and restrains the potential for oppositional signification. As a result, capital not only quells opposition but more insidiously, it appropriates these acts of resistance and feeds off them in order to extend its markets. The predicament, Tagg argues, is that "it is not enough to gesture to some 'truth' somehow emancipated from every system of power. Truth itself is already power, bound to the political, economic and institutional regime which produces it" (1988:94). However, this seems to suggest that photography does have a unifying feature, that of a commodified technology, which somehow renders it submissive to authoritative use, but impotent in challenging

authority.

Ariella Aïsha Azoulay contests this proposition, affirming that "every photograph – belongs to no one" (2008:14). In stark disagreement with Tagg and Sontag, Azoulay asserts, "There is nothing inherent to the technology of photography that creates discriminatory or oppressive situations for different populations, and in the same way it cannot erect a barrier against movements between different positions in social reality" (2008:127). Every viewer, therefore, has the opportunity to be both the addressee and the addresser, "who can produce meaning for it and disseminating this meaning further" (Azoulay, 2008:14).

Azoulay's postulation of "a new ontological-political understanding of photography" is a theory that, on account of conceptualising photography as an event that involves various participants interacting within a relational matrix that is socio-politically plural and heterogeneous, constituting "an economy of gazes," photography repudiates sovereignty (Azoulay, 2008:23). Azoulay draws attention not only to photography's socio-political instrumentalisation but argues that it is also a means to communicate the fact that everyone is duty-bound to uphold the rights of the governed, which is based on what she terms *the civil contract of photography*.

In Azoulay's postulation, the evidentiary is a necessary fragment of truth, a fragment of *what was there* and *continues to be there*, around which the participants of the photographic event assemble to defend and uphold the rights of citizenship. The camera's expansion of our perceptual field is central to Azoulay's theory, an expansion that is not only an individual phenomenon of being able to see more; rather, "everyone gained the opportunity to see through the gaze of another", necessitating, "the individual's renunciation of ownership of 'his' or 'her' image or point of view, just as he or she was prepared to give away that image to become one" (Azoulay, 2008:113).

Whether or not the mechanical properties of the camera are invested with truth, falsity, or degrees thereof, it has expanded and opened up the realm of the visible by offering glimpses of the world formerly unseen by embodied human perception. In his essay *Little History of Photography*, (originally published in 1931) Walter Benjamin writes that the technological advances of photography are not oppositional to, or evacuating of, but rather productive and generative of mystery, engendering an opening of and access to what he terms the optical unconscious (Benjamin, 2005:512).[56] The mechanical optics, while extending the realm of

the visible, to an equal degree, produces an expansive realm of opacity. Azoulay writes, "Benjamin is seeking what the photograph at once exposes and conceals, discloses and encrypts, opens and closes" (2001:36). Enigmatically, the optical unconscious, John Lechte proposes, reveals "what is seen but not registered by the eye" (2012:131). According to Lechte, for Benjamin, "images are equivalent to the real. But this is a real which is imperceptible, only accessible prosthetically, via the image" (Lechte, 2012:134). Pertinently, this means that the photograph is not a duplication of the real, but affords one special access to the real hitherto unattainable. Elaborating on how the optical unconscious impacts perception, visual culture theorist Shawn Michelle Smith states:

> *Enabling one to see more, it simultaneously demonstrated how little is ordinarily visible, giving one the unnerving sense of living in a world only partially perceived. Here, then, the optical unconscious is the recognition of ordinary blindness – the revelation of an unseen world that photography does not fully disclose, but makes us aware of in its invisibility. Photography brings into view what Avery Gordon has called 'a kind of visible invisibility.'*[57] *It draws us to the edge of sight (Smith, 2013:6).*

Smith also references cultural theorist Siegfried Kracauer[58] to propose that "The camera sees beyond the physical and the cultural limitations of sight" (2013:7). Therefore, the optical unconscious, she argues, not only directs attention to physical perceptual limits but also to the socio-political nature of perception. Despite the proliferation of photography, Smith writes, "In making so much visible, photography further obscures what is not visible, encouraging viewers to focus on what is in the frame, to the exclusion of what is not. Occasionally, however, the weight of what has been obscured, or culturally repressed, pierces the visible world, ushering forth the invisible into sight" (2013:215). The optical unconscious plays a significant role in making sense of the differential forces at work when something is seen – how that which comes into view is conditioned by what retreats into a blind field.

At the edge of sight, the optical unconscious demands a greater degree of participation from the viewer. It necessitates a reflective and critical awareness of an expanded perceptual realm, one that grapples with the tension between the desire for stable transparency and the inexorable indeterminacy of opacity. The optical unconscious, by revealing the historically contingent and socio-politically constructed nature of perception, challenges the assumption that a photograph halts or fixes time and documents an evidentiary imprint of what once was. When the evidentiary brings something into view, it conceals the affective realm of desires and fears of the unconscious that determine empirical perception.

Moving Away from the Evidentiary and Towards a Piercing Temporality

Instrumental to my re-thinking of the photographic evidentiary and its temporality is Roland Barthes' inquiry in *Camera Lucida* (2000). He begins the book by stating that his intention is to locate the essence of photography, which he associates with its capacity to render presence, so that the viewer can exclaim: 'Look, there it is!' The evidentiary is supposedly paramount, the certitude of a photograph recording something that was there, which Barthes terms the referent. However, his postulations regarding the referent are more complex because he does not connect it necessarily to evidentiary certitude, but rather temporal certitude, the necessity of something having-been-there. He explains that the referent is, "not the optionally real thing to which an image or sign refers, but the necessarily real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph … in Photography, I can never deny that the thing has been there. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past" (Barthes, 2000:76).[59] Barthes then proposes, "Every photograph is a certificate of presence … henceforth the past is as certain as the present" (2000:87-88). Curiously, the referent signifies the certitude of presence concurrent with absence.

Barthes' inquiry into photography was driven by his search for a photograph of his recently deceased mother that would encapsulate her essence and alleviate his grief – a substitute presence for her irrevocable absence. He claims to have found this essential image in what he calls the Winter Garden Photograph. Taken in 1898, it depicts his mother, at the age of five, standing on a bridge with her seven-year-old brother in a glass conservatory. Her presence, he writes, is captured in the "distinctness of her face … her expression" (Barthes, 2000:69). For Barthes, this photograph achieved "the impossible science of the unique being" (Barthes, 2000:71). This discovery, he states, "led me to that cry, the end of all language: 'There she is!'" (Barthes, 2000:109). Barthes thus connects the essence of photography to its ability to record and preserve the essence of its subject; however, and most significantly, this essence is not verifiable but wholly personal, which introduces what he terms the *punctum*.

Barthes differentiates the *punctum* with another quality he terms the *studium*, which, he writes, "derives from an average affect, almost from a certain training" (2000:26). By training, he might have more aptly said socio-political conventions or conditioning. As with perception, the *studium* relies upon prior knowledge for its intelligibility, requiring projection and prior experience to complete and fill in what is not given. Therefore, it operates within a relation of power, maintaining the division between the active seeing subject and the passive seen object. The *studium* is associated with what is perhaps more commonly ascribed to the evidentiary; the photograph's visible connection and likeness to the object recorded.

The evidentiary that Barthes ascribes to the *punctum* is decidedly different from that of the *studium*. "This time," he writes, "it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me ... A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (Barthes, 2000:26-27). The *punctum's* spontaneity, and the viewer's lack of defence against its force, means that the power structure of the active subject – the seer who gains knowledge and mastery over the passive object – is momentarily overthrown. Elucidating its force, Barthes proposes: "What I can name cannot really prick me" (2000:51). The piercing and impairment of language that the *punctum* precipitates engenders a sense of being wounded, and, along with the experience of belated return – the past spontaneously piercing through into the present – associates the *punctum* to the psychic wounding ascribed to trauma.

Seemingly contradictory, the *punctum*, which is not only necessitated by the referent but postulated as an essential expression of the referent – redeeming its absence – is untethered from the photograph having recorded an intelligible description of what was necessarily there. The Winter Garden Photograph, although presenting Barthes with an essential image of his mother, is one that bears no correspondence to how he knew her during his life. Barthes therefore also disconnects the *punctum* from memory. Affirming that the *punctum's* evidentiary is of a different class, Barthes states that "once there is a *punctum*, a blind field is created" (2000:57). "The important thing", he adds, "is that the photograph possesses an evidential force, and that its testimony bears not on the object but on time. From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation" (Barthes, 2000:88-89). The *punctum* is, therefore, the experience of temporal simultaneity, the certitude of the past with the present.

Barthes also alludes to the *punctum's* traumatic qualities when discussing the Winter Garden Photograph. During her illness, shortly before her death, Barthes saw his mother as "my little girl, uniting for me with that essential child she was in her first photograph" (Barthes, 2000:72). The Winter Garden Photograph becomes, paradoxically, his mother's first and last photograph – preserving life while signifying death. The incongruity of this presence-in-absence means that there is no recourse to mourning that promises closure and finality. There is only interminable grief – the openness of the piercing psychic wound.

Barthes' postulation of the *punctum* was influenced by philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's phenomenological approach to the imagination in *L'Imaginaire* (1940) (*The Imaginary*). Sartre proposes that the imagination, or the imaging consciousness, gives itself immediately and fully, which means that the image conjured in the mind's-eye cannot provide one with new knowledge. Unlike the perceptual consciousness, which gives its object partially and deficiently to observation leaving an infinity of aspects hidden, the image within the imagination is an essential amalgamation of finite parts. It is a generality predicated on prior knowledge, requiring one to amalgamate aspects that are already known. Although the image appears spontaneously, Sartre claims it cannot surprise one – it is wholly passive. The imaging consciousness and the perceptual consciousness are two modes that posit their object antithetically, so they cannot coexist. Sartre describes the imaging consciousness as a quasi-observation, explaining, "We are, indeed, placed in the attitude of observation, but it is an observation that does not teach anything" (2010:10). He adds that "the object as imaged is never anything more than the consciousness one has of it" (Sartre, 2010:15).

Sartre argues that because the image exists wholly within the imagining consciousness, or, stated more accurately, the image is its own mode of consciousness, given with all its aspects, it has no relation to the world – it is severed from the world's infinite relations. It is for this reason that although the image is given essentially, it nonetheless exists as an essential poverty, which is why Sartre claims that "the image gives its object as a nothingness of being" (2010:13). The image consists of only what consciousness posits for itself, that is, prior knowledge. Sartre explains, "there is a continuity between the empty imaging knowledge and the full imaging consciousness" (2010:62). For the image to exist, the object it aims towards and presents to consciousness must necessarily be absent. Thus, the *punctum* closely

resembles a quasi-observation, giving an essential presence to an absent object that it spontaneously presents all at once. Barthes alludes to this when he writes,

> *despite its clarity, the punctum should be revealed only after the fact, when the photograph is no longer in front of me and I think back on it. I may know better a photograph I remember than a photograph I am looking at, as if direct vision orientated its language wrongly, engaging it in an effect of description which will always miss its point of effect, the punctum (Barthes, 2000:53).*

Barthes is, therefore, alluding to the radically contradictory manner of how the imaging consciousness and the perceptual consciousness posit their objects and how the one vanquishes the other. Sartre explains that if one looks at an object in a photograph and then has an image of that object, one would cease to be looking at the photograph itself. This is because, Sartre explains, "An imaging consciousness is, indeed, consciousness of an object as imaged and not a consciousness of an image" (Sartre, 2010:86). Barthes is also alluding to the *punctum's* affective dynamics, how its force is wholly predicated on particularity; there is no adequate means of linguistically describing or conveying its force. Sartre explains, "In the mental image the object is aimed as a synthesis of perceptions, which is to say in corporeal and sensible form; but it appears through an affective analogon" (2010:85-86). The *punctum* is wounding precisely because it is constituted not only by affect, but by how this affect *presents* its absent object in its known entirety. This is why Sartre describes the image as an irreal object, it "exists only as much as I know it and want it" (2010:133). He also claims that the irreal object appears "without any temporal determinations … this irreal object belongs neither to the present, nor to the past, nor to the future … it is timeless" (Sartre, 2010:130). Within the image, time and space are irreal. Sartre adds, "There is an absenteeism of time and space" (2010:131). He explains that the irreal object "has no environment, it is independent, isolated – by defect and not by excess: it acts on nothing and nothing acts on it: it is *without consequence*" (Sartre, 2010:135).

Although the *punctum* closely resembles a quasi-observation, it deviates from Sartre's notion of irreality. The wounding poignancy that Barthes assigns to the *punctum* is a clear indication that it is not without consequence and the referent holds onto its temporality in the past. Apprehending the referent's pastness is essential to the affect of the *punctum*.

> *Without delving into great detail, it's worth mentioning that Barthes' postulation that the essence of photography derives from the particularity of the punctum has faced warranted criticism. Notably, in his discussion of a 1926 family portrait by photographer James Van Der Zee depicting his maternal aunts and uncle – Mattie, Estelle and David Osterhout – Barthes uses the photograph as an example of the punctum's initial manifestation from a detail (Figure 4.1). He identifies a seemingly unassuming detail that interrupts and disrupts what he sees, expanding and suffusing the photograph, demanding a not quite a new perspective that would grant new information, but rather, following Sartre, a new mode of consciousness – the imaging consciousness. Barthes identifies the detail as:*
>
> *the belt worn low by the sister (or daughter) – the 'solacing Mammy' – whose arms are crossed behind her back like a schoolgirl, and above all her strapped pumps (Mary Janes – why does this dated fashion touch me? I mean: to what date does it refer me?). This particular punctum arouses great sympathy in me, almost a kind of tenderness (Barthes, 2000:43).*[60]

If the *punctum* is a Sartean image and consists only of what one gives or presents to oneself, why does Barthes seem uncertain about why it emanated and to what it refers?

It was the *punctum's* emanation from a detail within the photograph that closely resembled my encounter with Sorella's refusal to meet my gaze in the Liepāja family photograph printed in *The Yellow Star* (1969). I too found myself deeply affected by this detail that I did not understand and that shifted how I perceive the photograph. Sorella undoubtedly opened up a blind field within the photograph, but this blind field does not take me away from the referent. The fact of her having-been-there is essential. The very instant that I found Sorella's refusal, I knew that I had lost her, that I would never attain any understanding of who she was in that fateful moment. It was a discovery of loss that has impacted me for many years, and seems unabating.

However, further on in the book, Barthes returns to Van Der Zee's photograph, recalling it from memory, he relocates the detail that activated the *punctum*:

> *I thought I had discerned what moved me: the strapped pumps of the black woman in her Sunday best; but this photograph has worked within me, and later on I realised that the*



4.1 The strapped pumps.
James Van Der Zee. Family Portrait. (1926)
In: Barthes, R. 2000. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography.* Howard, R. Trans. London: Vintage Books. 44.

> *real punctum was the necklace she was wearing; for (no doubt) it was this same necklace (a slender ribbon of gold) which I had seen worn by someone in my own family, and which, once she had died, remained shut up in a family box of old jewellery (this sister of my father never married, lived with her mother as an old maid, and I have always been saddened whenever I thought of her dreary life). I had just realised that however immediate and incisive it was, the punctum could accommodate a certain latency (but never any scrutiny) (Barthes, 2000:53).*

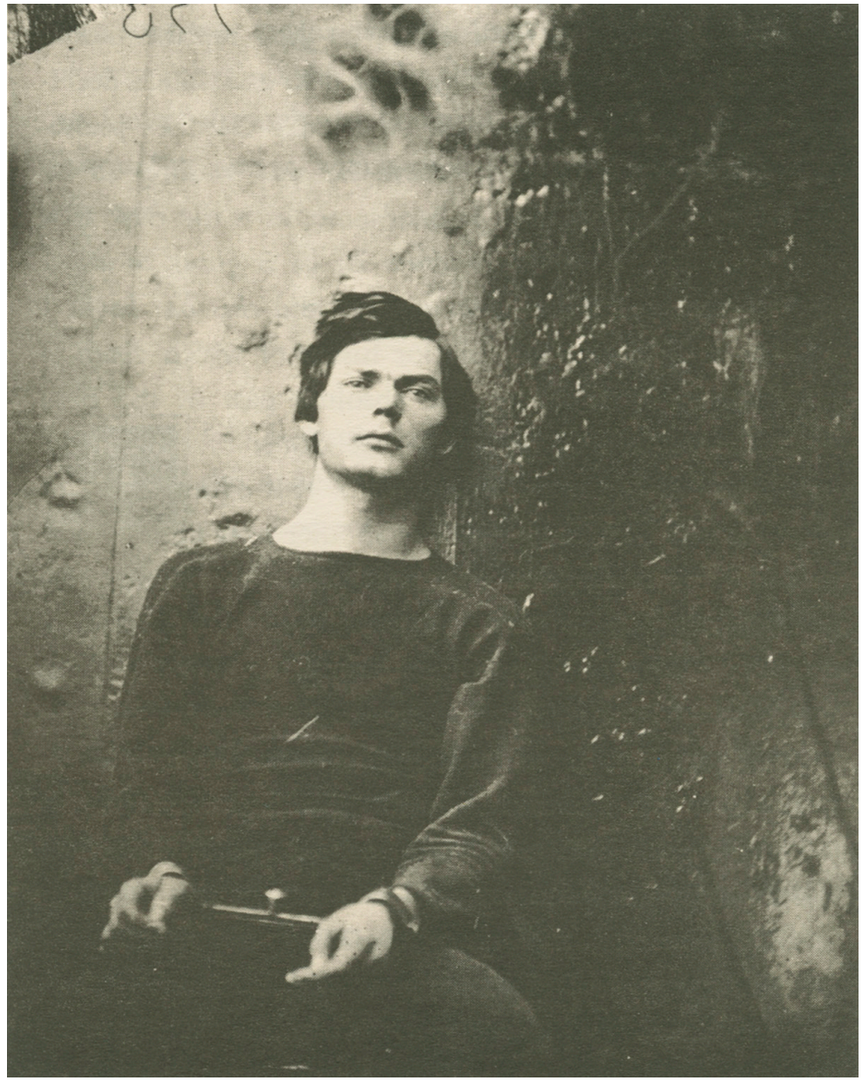
Barthes then restates the quasi-observational quality of the *punctum*. "Ultimately – or at the limit – in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes" (Barthes, 2000:53). However, in this case, remembering the photograph has resulted in an error of misidentification. Smith corrects Barthes's fallible recollection, noting that "both women (not one woman) in this photograph wear necklaces and that they are pearl necklaces, not ribbons of braided gold" (2009:245). Even though Barthes disconnects memory from the *punctum* in Winter Garden Photograph, why would he have returned to it in his discussion of the Van Der Zee photograph? Sartre explains the essential difference between the image and memory. "If I recall an event of my past life, I do not imagine it, I *remember* it. That is to say, I do not posit it as *given-absent*, but as *given-now* as *passed*" (Sartre, 2010:181). He elaborates; "when I *recall* this or that memory, I do not *evoke* it but I take myself to where it is, I direct my consciousness towards the past where it awaits me as a real event in retirement" (Sartre, 2010:181). In contrast, with the image, "I grasp an object that is not given to me at all or that is precisely given to me as being out of reach. There I grasp *nothing*, which is to say I posit *nothing*" (Sartre, 2010:182). It would seem that Barthes' lapse into memory has resulted in the *punctum* becoming injuriously effacing. The referent, previously proclaimed as essential, has been displaced by the *punctum* emanating from a misidentified detail. Something has gone awry. Smith reproaches Barthes:

> *What is disturbing is not the erasure of a pearl necklace for a gold one but the effacement of an African American woman under the sign of Barthes's aunt. One is left to wonder whether this erasure, effected by the punctum, is in part a result of the studium, a racist paternalism that disregards an African American woman's self-representation as trite. (Smith, 2009:245)*

This misidentified *punctum* has led Barthes to displace and erase the photographed individuals, substituting them with autobiographical recollection. Has the *punctum* returned to the perceptual consciousness or memory, to empirical evidence, or personal recollection, which has proven to be not only misleading and unreliable but effacing?

It is telling that in the second-half of the book, Barthes abandons the *punctum* that emanates from a detail and re-ascribes it in relation to time and the referent's presence-in-absence. He develops the *punctum's* temporality in light of an 1865 photograph of twenty-two-year-old Lewis Payne, awaiting execution for the attempted murder of the US Secretary of State William H. Seward (Figure 4.2). Barthes proposes that "the *punctum*, is: he is going to die. I read at the same time: This will be and this has been; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. What *pricks* me is the discovery of this equivalence" (Barthes, 2000:96). The sense of injury caused by the *punctum* is an effect of injury to linear chronological time, experiencing two paradoxical certainties simultaneously – the past that-has-been and the future that-will-be. While the *punctum* seems to emanate from the *studium*, relying on the information of Payne's identity and circumstances of awaiting death, it also illustrates the *punctum's* generality, as this is a potential latency of every photograph. As Barthes proposes, every photograph indexes the future anterior of death. The *punctum's* particularity pertains not to interpretation or recognition, but to the unanticipated activation of this latency. Lechte explains that the *punctum* "is entirely virtual; it cannot be depicted as such. For the *punctum* is not a feature in itself, but the impact of that feature … The personal is a way of conveying the fact that this feature can never be definitively presented. For it is not coded" (Lechte, 2012:127). When the *punctum* is described, as shown with Barthes' engagement with the detail in Van Der Zee's photograph, the personal can overtake the photograph and jettison the very quality that conditioned it – the referent.

Barthes' discussion of Van Der Zee's photograph therefore exposes how the *punctum* of the detail can be contaminated by speculative interpretation, which is perplexingly contradictory, especially since he disassociates the *punctum* from pictorial likeness. He reiterates this when he writes that the photograph of his mother as a young girl in The Winter Garden pierces him because "her truth is precisely a lost, remote photograph, one which does not look 'like' her, the photograph of a child I never knew" (Barthes, 2000:103). Before finding



4.2 *"He is dead and he is going to die …"*
Alexander Gardner. Portrait of Lewis Payne. (1865)
In: Barthes, R. 2000. Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography. Howard, R. Trans. London: Vintage Books. 95.

the Winter Garden Photograph, Barthes searched in vain for an image of his mother and found only dulled reflections. "According to these photographs, sometimes I recognised a region of her face, a certain relation of nose and forehead, the moment of her arms, her hands. I never recognised her except in fragments, which is to say that I missed her being, and therefore I missed her altogether" (Barthes, 2000:66-67). Did Barthes accidentally misidentify the detail in Van Der Zee's photograph, or could it be that he did so intentionally? Could the *punctum* of the detail be intentionally misleading to stress how insidious the optical evidentiary can be and how fallible or fictitious memory can be? It would seem that in this scenario it is no longer the photograph that has authority over the viewer, but the viewer has regained interpretive authority over the photograph.

Barthes does not reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph, firstly because the *punctum* has no correlation to the transcription of likeness and secondly to emphasise its particularity, how the fullness of its affect comes from the freedom of an individual's imaging consciousness. Miriam Hirsch elaborates, "Barthes cannot show us the photograph because we stand outside the familial network of looks and thus cannot see the picture in the way that Barthes must. To us it would be just another generic family photograph from a long time ago" (1997:2). She explains this familial network as "a very private kind of self-portrait, revealing, unexpectedly, the most intimate and unexposed aspects of himself. The picture of his mother provokes a moment of self-recognition which, in the reading process, becomes a process of self-discovery, a discovery of the self-in-relation" (Hirsch, 1997:2). The discovery of the self-in-relation initiated the rupturing not only of the self as a discrete singularity but of linear time, uncovering the affective dimensions of traumatic time. Experiencing the co-existence of the past and the future testifies to the *punctum's* ruinous effect on time. As Hayes and Minkley propose, "[Photographs] in themselves have a great capacity to overturn unified, linear, and chronological ways of thinking and open new analytic spaces … And just as time ruins photographs, so the photographs ruin time" (2019:11).

Returning to Sartre, he makes some provocative claims regarding the image, or rather the imaging consciousness, that, when applied and redirected by Barthes' *punctum*, open up new possibilities for how to think about and engage with a photograph's potential ruinous and piercing temporality. Sartre claims that the irreality of images, their nature of timelessness, of being elsewhere and not impacted by the laws of causality, "offer us an escape from

all the constraints of the *world*, they seem to be presented as a negation of the condition of *being in the world*, as an anti-world' (2010:136). Although I interpret Barthe's referent as challenging this proposition, with the *punctum* it seems that he would agree with Sartre's following claims. "For consciousness to be able to imagine, it must be able to stand back from the world by its own effort. In a word, it must be free" (Sartre, 2010:184). Paradoxically, "the essential condition for a consciousness to imagine is that it be 'situated in the world' or more briefly that it 'be-in-the-world'" (Sartre, 2010:185). Sartre is, therefore, arguing that in order for consciousness to be able to negate the world from a particular point of view, firstly, it must be grounded in the world. For nothingness to be apprehended it has to be grounded in and emerge against something. In other words, nothingness has to be in a direct relation to something. Sartre explains that

> *in order to imagine, consciousness must be free from all particular reality and this freedom must be able to be defined by a being-in-the-world that is at once constitution and nihilation of the world; the concrete situation of consciousness in the world must at each moment serve as the singular motivation of the constitution of the irreal. Thus the irreal – which is always a double nothingness: nothingness of itself in relation to the world, nothingness of the world in relation to it – must always be constituted on the ground of the world that it denies " (Sartre, 2010:186).*

In my reading of Barthes' *punctum* as being an encounter with the photograph as an image, it follows that the imaging consciousness that experiences the *punctum* must be in the world while stepping outside and negating that world. However, I propose that with the *punctum* Barthes has illuminated another dimension of the imaging consciousness, which might well be a new dimension of consciousness itself – its ability to hold together and simultaneously apprehend the oppositional modes of reality and irreality. While Barthes would agree with Sartre that the imaging consciousness is "at once *constituting*, *isolating* and *annihilating*" (Sartre, 2010:181), Barthes implies that there is an affective consequence of experiencing this all at once.

With the encounter of the *punctum*, I propose that Barthes has shown that the photograph can offer an experience of the imaging consciousness that does not dissolve time into a vague timelessness, but that it holds fast to the past and future, *presenting* them all at once.

The image can indeed surprise us with the poignancy of affective knowing, a knowing that is infused with the pathos of un-knowing, indeed that of the great unknown – the certitude of death. And it is from the encounter with the absent-present of the referent concomitant with the certitude of one's own death that one experiences the intense relationality of grief, those bonds that make and unmake us. Although the *punctum* offers the Sartean experience of the imaging consciousness, its ability to constitute and annihilate the world – the absent-presence of the referent – rather than encountering the powerful creative freedom of transcendental consciousness, we encounter how being-in-the-world is predicated on how we are essentially tethered to others. The *punctum* is an experience that evinces how the image's annihilation of the world enables one to return to the world with a deeper sense of connectedness to others.

End notes

1 Siopis's films are available via the following links:

Siopis, P. 2012. *The Master Is Drowning*. https://vimeo.com/50357030/87ff829a41?share=copy

Siopis, P. 2011. *Communion*. https://vimeo.com/94036020/bc2f996963?share=copy

Siopis, P. 2010. *Obscure White Messenger*. https://vimeo.com/190829849/d2df05cfee?share=copy

2 Documentation of *One Thousand and Seventy-eight Blue Skies* (2018) is available via Kusters' website: https://antonkusters.com/the-blue-skies-project

3 In her literary analysis of trauma, Cathy Caruth takes lead from psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and also discusses Freud's text *Moses and Monotheism* (originally published in 1939), suggesting that "these two works, read together, represent Freud's formulation of trauma as a theory of the peculiar incomprehensibility of human survival" (1996:58). *Moses and Monotheism* takes the personal psychological experience of trauma into the historical, arguing for history-as-trauma, history as constituted by the return of the repressed, initially the repression of monotheism and then the repressed murder of Moses who reintroduced monotheism to the masses. "The psychoanalysis of individuals," Freud writes, " have taught us that their earliest impressions, received at a time when they were hardly able to talk, manifest themselves later in an obsessive fashion, although those impressions themselves are not consciously remembered. We feel that the same must hold good for the earliest experiences of mankind. One result of this is the emergence of the conception of one great God" (1967:167). Freud argues that Moses was in fact an Egyptian who reignited a following of monotheism after a period of repression. It was the Pharaoh Amenhotep (IV), a time of Egypt's glorious imperial reign of the Eighteenth Dynasty, who later went by the name Ikhnaton, who imposed on his subjects the worship of the sun deity – the Aton religion. Freud also postulates that the legend of Moses, was also a return of the prepressed primeval experience of the human family – the firstborn son, who is feared by the father as the rightful successor, is banished, only to return revengeful , more powerful, and kills the father. Although this text is informative of the workings of the return of repressed in trauma, because it is so interwoven with Freud's hypothesis on the rise and establishment of monotheism, I have decided to not directly refer to it in the body of the text, although elements from its argument are tacitly present.

4 Benjamin refers to Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* (1920) to conjure an image of history where time has collapsed with no past, present or future, just the colossal ram-

pant amassing of ruin. His evocation of the Angelus Novus has been highly influential to philosophical, political and artistic inquiries into the representation of history as an enterprise of domination and ruin.

5 Curator and cultural historian Mark Sealy corroborates: "The key colonizing objective was to remake Africa as a form of temporally backward European state, ripe for subjugation and economic exploitation, with a black workforce that was lower in human value that Europe's peasants, and which would naturally, with the assistance of force and superstition, serve white supremacy" (2019:29). Sealy thus elucidates how crucial the rhetoric of Africa's backwardness or primitivism was in the service of colonization and how this played into not only the justification of forced exploitative labour, but also as a morally justified mission of salvation. Commercial interests overlapped with religious moralizations with the 'civilizing' scheme of saving African souls by enforced conversion to Christianity.

6 Under imperialism's linear progressive temporality Azoulay argues that "the law is assumed to be the foundation of order, always already there prior to any exercise of violence; those who were forced to be differentially included are framed as those who attack the law rather than those who are exposed to its violence. Through the foundational violence of the law, these imperial principles have come to be understood as transcendental conditions" (2019:134). What ensues is the naturalization of the law and its differential rule of the governed and the body politic. "This inequality," she goes on to write, "is denied by a plethora of transcendental conditions and universal forms, so the consequent injustice that it entails can be narrated as a given condition rather than as a violent project of the privileged" (Azoulay, 2019:134).

7 In presenting his argument, Lalu refers to the pre-eminent works by anti-colonial and anti-imperialist scholars Stuart Hall, *When Was the Postcolonial* (1996) and Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and *Reflections on Exile* (2000).

8 Grunebaum has conducted significant inquiry into the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (1995 – 2002), which became somewhat of a spectacle of victim testimony about the violence suffered and endured under apartheid and, most problematically, espoused the rhetoric of forgiving the perpetrators. Forgiveness, she writes

> *implied a call to revenge, or a return to war (an implication that is itself replete with racist metaphors about violence and racist assumptions about its perpetrators) and that the binary coupling of reconciliation/revenge should be critically engaged to this end … With the ascendance of an 'official' script of reconciliation and forgiveness, critical civil voices and open public spaces began to narrow for forms of memory activism that did not fit these terms or that actively refuted them. A line was drawn creating an ontological distinction between past and present (Grunebaum, 2018:5).*

Entrenching a "before and after", she argues, "excludes those stories that would attest, rather, to individuals' and communities' ongoing struggles with socioeconomic survival, community conflict, trauma, rage, and despair" (Grunebaum. 2001:201). Lalu also questions the TRC's efficacy along the same lines.

> *While the commission prioritised the legal foundations that upheld apartheid's rationalization, it appeared somewhat tentative in tackling the affective dynamics of apartheid's banality. As a consequence, the TRC is frequently suspected of insufficiently reckoning with apartheid's past, especially when the latter is placed alongside the festering wound of partition in twentieth-century postcolonial formations across the world (Lalu, 2023:28).*

9 Warburg's first hypothesis of the symptom was in his text "Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus and Spring*: An Examination of Concepts of Antiquity in the Italian Early Renaissance" (1893). He argued against the proposition that Botticelli, and the art of the Renaissance, returned to the art of Antiquity and fulfilled the idealization of perfect figurative form. In this text he focused on the element of wind as an external force that acts on and animates the contours of figures. Consequently, balance and symmetry jostle against imbalance and disorder, engendering a lively presence; a lively particularity. In later texts, he shifted his attention from the external motion of the wind to an internal destabilizing force active within the figures themselves. Philippe-Alain Michaud elucidates:

> *According to Warburg, what Renaissance artists derived from ancient forms was not an association between substance and immobility, a privilege granted the being over the becoming; on the contrary, they recognized in these forms a tension, a questioning of the ideal appearance of bodies in the visible world. Their works bear the stamp of a force that is not harmonious but contradictory, a force destabilizing the figure more than pulling it together. (Michaud, 2004:28)*

According to Warburg, the revival of Antiquity in Renaissance art was not merely a thematic reinvigoration. Rather, Michaud explains;

> *The mythological figures they depicted were not the simple incarnation of an idea. As they began to move, the figures became the source of a strange tension, the product no longer of a single will but of independent and multiple forces exercising contradictory influences – that of the artist, but also those of the model and of natural conditions, as well as that of the viewer looking at them … Warburg demonstrated that through a particular exercise of attention, the spectator can substitute himself for the external cause setting the figures in motion … The movement in question is henceforth as much that of the subject looking at the work as that of the object regarded. The spectator abandons passive contemplation in order to intervene actively in the representation. (Michaud, 2004:83)*

In other words, although the image is static, the figure transcribed by art is not mo-

tionless, but imbued with a lively animating forces that agitates not only the image's composition, but the viewer's interaction with the image – a force that does not subside or become subdued by over time. These figures, rather than being predisposed to iconographic interpretation, are individuated.

10 Boris Groys elaborates on this point with regard to the avant-garde's key role in the Modernist project, stating: "The genuinely creative artist was supposed to effectuate a radical break with the past, to erase, to destroy the past, to achieve a zero point of artistic tradition – and by doing so to give a new start to the future… It is also no accident that the vocabulary constantly used by the historical avant-garde is the language of iconoclasm" (2008:71). However, Groys points out the contradictory nature of iconoclasm: for an artwork to be iconoclastic, to radically break with the past, it necessarily references the traditional icons of the past it aims to dismantle. Paradoxically, he states, "the more you want to free yourself from the art tradition, the more you become subjected to the logic of the art historical narrative and to museum collecting" (2008:72). Consequently, the iconoclastic break with the past, intended to bring about a new vision of the future, ends up becoming a reproduction of the past.

11 However, Enwezor is swift to reiterate the warning of systemic appropriation, exclaiming that:

> *we know, as a fact of experience, that the constitutive field of art history is a synthetically elaborated one, that it is a history made by humans. Thus transcendental categories of art, including those works that seek to highlight this synthetic elaboration and as such obviate its foundational principle, still come under the putative influence and exertion of the epistemes of historical thought. Even the most radical exhibitions are constituted in this general field of knowledge and define themselves within or against its critical exertion, which is both historical and institutional … What exactly do exhibitions propose and curators organize, if not the alliance of historically and institutionally ordered experience governing the reception and relations of art and its objects, concepts, forms, and ideas by a heterogeneous and culturally diverse public? The avidity with which critics seek to confine the task of the curator and the curator's relationship to the one true history of art makes this reach for openness a pressing imperative (Enwezor, 2008:229).*

12 Nadine Fresco recounts how Gerhard Schoenberner, a twenty-six-year-old German political science student, visited Auschwitz in 1957 "at a time when such visits were still very rare" (2021:3). These students, she continues, became aware "of how crucial it was for their compatriots to confront head-on the crimes that had been perpetrated by their country. But the Germany of that time did not want to see, and the elites, having largely collaborated, had also largely succeeded in returning to their former positions" (Fresco, 2021:3). Compelled by this experience, Schoenberner began his extensive search for photographic evidence of these crimes. He was particularly startled by the discovery of photographs, of which he reproduces five in *The Yellow Star* (1969),

that arrest my attention. Having visited archives in London, Paris, Warsaw and Amsterdam in search of photographs, it was in Moscow's State Archives in 1959 that he came upon these photographs – "A series that he had not seen anywhere up to that point and that had not yet been published anywhere" (Fresco, 2021:4).

13 It is pertinent to note that the *Einsatzgruppen* murder squads executed approximately 1,150,000 people "mostly Jews," historian Dan Stone recounts, "but also many non-Jews such as priests, intellectuals and local Bolshevik leaders. Their mass shootings are usually regarded as the first step towards the taking of the 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question', that is, the decision to murder all the Jews of Europe" (2006:3). Referring to historian Ulrich Herbert's research, Stone relays that designating the Holocaust as a "quasi-anonymous process, as 'industrial death', is misleading. He [Herbert] notes that the number of Jews killed by gas in the great death centres made up some 60% of the six million murdered Jews … The concept of 'clean' death by gas is inapplicable to large proportions of the genocide" (Stone, 2006:3). Einsatzgruppe A, led by commander Dr. Franz Walter Stahlecker, was operational in three Baltic states and part of Belorussia, but in Latvia they sought assistance from Latvian auxiliary troops. These men and their collaborators neither had nor required military training. Their duty was to 'secure' these territories by purging the civilian populations of those deemed undesirable – those who were considered racially impure or a political threat to National Socialism. The Einsatzgruppe's primary means of doing so was by mass executions, usually by firing squads. In Liepāja, Jews, communists, Gypsies and the mentally ill were killed. Of the 90,000 Jews that were living in Latvia on 22 June 1941 – the day the German army invaded – only 1.6% of them, some 1440, survived the war. Among the survivors, a mere few hundred were from Liepāja. The executions were conducted in a military manner; the condemned were instructed to stand with their backs to the firing squad. Two or three men were assigned to shoot each victim. This method was intended to alleviate the psychological strain on the individual executioners, making it uncertain who fired the fatal bullet. Diluting accountability was believed to assist in making the task more bearable, especially when murdering the elderly, women and children.

14 It is incumbent to recall how South Africa's Apartheid laws and its racial classifications mirror Germany's Nuremberg Laws of 1935 in their restriction of movement and access to social spaces of non-white South Africans and Jews respectively – boundaries inscribed into space that were intended to essentialise the rhetoric of ontological difference. Apartheid's laws sought to carefully control the interaction of different races by legislating measures of distance and closeness. Despite these statutes of so-called 'separate development' and 'segregated amenities,' white capital in its entire scope,

from the industrial, urban and domestic sectors, was essentially sustained by exploitative black labour. Inextricably connected, closeness needed to be carefully regulated and monitored in order to prohibit any intimate encounter that could result in the recognition of the human between those inscribed with categorical difference. Among Afrikaner Nationalism's most insidious mechanisms was the forced relocation of black South Africans to so-called 'Bantu homelands', which essentially displaced and exiled them from their own country. By Law, they had to carry passbooks when outside of these 'homelands' – a bureaucratic and symbolic indication of their non-citizenship and their exploitation as a 'migrant' labour force. These circumstances are indeed indicative of the devastating dislocation enforced by colonization – the majority black population forced into a diasporic experience within their own country.

15 This is not to say that South Africa was always welcoming of Jewish immigrants. The Quota Act of 1930 restricted Jewish immigration. Then, in 1937, when the perilousness of German Jews was mounting, Barry Herzog's Afrikaner Nationalist government, the United Party, passed the Aliens Act, effectively closing South Africa's borders to Jewish refugees. However, during the post-war years of the 1950's, when South Africa was governed by DF Malan's Nationalist Party, antisemitism rapidly declined, primarily on account of the economic upswing of Afrikaners and the general white population. Historians Richard Mendelson and Milton Shain in *The Jews in South Africa* claim that "English speakers, including Jews, were necessary for the apartheid project, the National Party's putative solution to South Africa's racial problems. Colour was the essential divide and any lingering views – heard earlier in the century – of the Jew not being 'white' soon disappeared" (2008:135).

16 Katyn refers to the massacres ordered by Joseph Stalin in 1940, the largest of which occurred in the Katyn Forest of Western Russia. There, in April 1943, German troops discovered eight mass graves where 4,443 Poles had been executed, each killed with a shot to the back of the head. The Soviets denied responsibility for the murders and claimed that the Nazis, who were in Soviet territory at the time, were the perpetrators. It took fifty years before Russia admitted responsibility. Approximately 22,000 Poles were murdered by the Soviets during WWII, including military officers, police and intelligentsia.

17 Most of the Jewish men from Liepāja were murdered in the first few months of the occupation, which is why no male victims are pictured in these photographs. Women and children were spared these earlier executions, only to be killed in the winter massacre. Their fate was made apparent two days prior, when they were rounded up and crowded into the courtyard of the Women's Prison. They were then taken to Skede beach, which is near a small fishing village just beyond the city. They had to wait their turn to be taken to the execution site, which was a trench that ran parallel to the shoreline of the Baltic sea.

18 Heidi Grunebaum informed me that the Italian word for sister is *sorella*. Whether or not this young girl was in fact Sorella Epstein, by referring to her as such, the accuracy of the name is less important than my use of it to reaffirm my familial connection to the photograph.

19 By writing through photographs, Campt encounters various acts of resistance and defiance within vernacular photographic archives that picture diasporic African subjects, as well as obligatory photographs taken for bureaucratic institutions, such as prison mug shots and Identity Documents. These subjects all experienced various forms of marginalisation, oppression or subjugation, either in the Western countries where they resided or from surviving postcolonial institutionalised racism within African countries. Even though the photographic frame functioned as an extension of the state's control, Campt proposes that these photographs can also be sites of subversion where we can bear witness to agency and self-reclamation.

20 It must be mentioned that Sealy's argument is located within the work of de-colonizing the camera. He proposes that, although photography was an active agent of Western colonising authority at work on the body of the Other in both the present and the past, in order to decolonize photography, Sealy proposes that we

> *must not allow photography's colonial past and its cultural legacies in the present to lie unchallenged and un-agitated, or simply left as the given norm within the history of the medium. Decolonising the photographic image is an act of unburdening it from the assumed, normative, hegemonic, colonial conditions present, consciously or unconsciously, in the moment of its original making and in its readings and display (Sealy, 2019:2).*

21 Creole was born from a necessary concession, as Glissant writes: "The alienated body of the slave, in the time of slavery, is in fact deprived, in an attempt at complete dispossession, of speech. Self-expression is not only forbidden, but impossible to envisage" (1989:122). For the slave, and indeed their descendants to this day, the dispossession and severance from their former world was total, compelling them to find a means to exist within what Glissant describes as "a nonworld that no ancestor will haunt" (1997:7). They were therefore compelled to resort to the master's language even though it was, he states, "an unsuspected source of anguish" (Glissant, 1989:120). The Martinican, he goes on to state, "has the unconscious sense that a basic dimension is missing in his relation to time and space" (Glissant, 1989:165). It is also important to note that Glissant posits creolization as an idea which is "not primarily the glorification of the composite nature of people: indeed, no people has been spared the cross-cultural process. The idea of creolization demonstrates that henceforth it is no longer valid to glorify 'unique' origins that the race safeguards and prolongs" (1989:140). Creolization is therefore imperative to his theorisation of Relation, which he makes evident

when he states; "creolization is the unceasing process of transformation" (Glissant, 1989:142).

22 Didi-Huberman offers compelling insight into this moment and the importance for us as viewers to take heed of these obscure elements recorded in the photographs. The photographer, he writes,

> *had to hide in the gas chamber, itself barely emptied – perhaps incompletely – of victims. He steps back into the dark space. The slant and the darkness in which he stands protected him. Emboldened, he changes direction and advances: the second view is a little more frontal and slightly closer. So it is more hazardous. But also, paradoxically, it is more posed: it is sharper. It is as though fear had disappeared for an instant in the face of necessity, the business of snatching an image. And we see the everyday work of the other members of the squad, which is that of snatching the last human semblance from the cadavers, still sprawled on the ground … Having hidden the camera – in his hand, or in the bucket, or in a patch of his clothes? – the "unknown photographer" now ventures out of the crematorium … There too, the hell continues: a convoy of women, already undressed, gets ready to enter the gas chamber. The SS are about. It is simply not possible to take out the camera, even less possible to aim it. The "unknown photographer" takes two snapshots, furtively, without looking, perhaps even while walking (Didi-Huberman, 2012:12-16).*

23 The other films by Siopis that I will not be discussing include: *My Lovely Day* (1997), *The New Parthenon* (2016), *Welcome Visitors!* (2017), *She Breaths Water* (2019), *Shadow Shame Again* (2021) and *Celluloid Body* (2021).

24 A notable publication arguing that the assassination was politically motivated is: Dousemetzis, H. 2019. T*he Man who Killed Apartheid: The Life of Demitrios Tsafendas*. Johannesburg: Jacaranda Media.

25 TJ Demos explains: "Tsafendas was of mixed race: his Greek father lived in Lorenço Marques (today's Maputo) where Demitrios was born, and his Mozambican mother worked in his father's household as a domestic labourer" (2014:209).

26 For a concentrationary reading of Siopis's film *The New Parthenon* (2016) see: Hollweg, B. 2024. *Encounters with the Concentrationary. In Your History with Me: The Films of Penny Siopis*. Nuttall, S. Ed. Durham & London: Duke University Press. 135-175.

27 Established in 1940, at the Mauthausen-Gusen camp complex, Griselda Pollock informs her readers that the

> *death toll was about 320,000 and at liberation there were 85,000 just-surviving prisoners. It was one of only two Grade III camps, which were specifically designed to create the most brutal and toughest regime for its inmates of Vernichtung durch Arbeit: Extermination through Labour … This policy was specifically developed for those designated as the 'incorrigible political enemies of the Reich' namely the intelligentsia of the home and occupied territories: the educated and higher social classes" (Pollock, 2011:275).*

28 Central to Silverman and Pollock's theorisation of concentrationary art is Alain Resnais's 1955 film *Nuit et Brouillard (Night and Fog)*. They propose that, because Resnais's film is not focused on extermination or genocide, it is not a Holocaust film as such. Rather, *Night and Fog*, "is not about absence and absenting. It is about terror and the systematic operations of its specific experimental sites: the concentration camps" (Silverman & Pollock, 2011:39). Notably, Jean Cayrol wrote the text for the voiceover of the film. Silverman writes that "Cayrol's spoken text and Resnais's montage invoke multiple connections, continuities and ruptures that convert the physical traces in the present into the new field of a non-teleological history" (2011:207). Elucidating Resnais's intention with *Night and Fog*, Silverman quotes Emma Wilson:

> *Resnais seeks to know or understand a relation between the unimaginable (the invisible, the unsayable) and the very matter that remains – the material remains, the relics and the traces of past experience. His films work at that difficult juncture between events that cannot be known, seen, or felt (in their occurrence or in retrospect) and the matter, images and objects, which seem conversely to offer material proof and evidence (Wilson, 2011:202).*

29 Pollock offers a proposition on how the political dimension of the concentrationary exceeds its specificity and relates to the present moment and to prior history, writing,

> *this contamination lies not in overt forms of persistent fascism alone – for which there are both new political sites and penetrations of the everyday – but in the structural relations between norms of contemporary capitalist exploitation, with its relentless instrumentalization of humans for the logic of profit, and those spaces of exception or the extreme application of such (ab)use of the dehumanized body that the concentrationee has seen with his or her own eyes and experienced through her or his own physical torture under the regime named 'annihilation through labour' (Pollock, 2019:94).*

30 The concept of the concentrationary takes note of Giorgio Agamben's conceptualisation of 'bare life' in *Homo Sacer* (1998). Agamben discusses how, within the concentration camps as zones of exception, life was reduced to base physical existence, where death had no meaning and the law was abrogated. He argues that bare life, life deprived of all political protections, should become the principle for re-conceptualizing the politics of the human. While endorsing this point, the concentrationary focuses on the figure of the Lazarean, the returnee who carries lived knowledge of this world of the dead, where death was inconsequential and immanent. With the concentrationary, the exceptional has now infiltrated normal everyday life, forever deforming it.

31 Strategies similar to documentary-fiction are those of *critical fabulation*. However, these relate specifically to the subaltern archive of slavery, where life was violently reduced to bare matter and fungible commodities. Academic and writer Saidiya Hartman explains: "The intent of this practice is not to give voice to the slave, but rather to

imagine what cannot be verified, a realm of experience which is situated between two zones of death – social and corporeal death – and to reckon with the precarious lives which are visible only in the moment of their disappearance" (2008:12). She continues, "It is an impossible writing which attempts to say that which resists being said … It is a history of an unrecoverable past; it is a narrative of what might have been or could have been; it is a history written with and against the archive" (Hartman, 2008:12). The aim of critical fabulation is, Hartman writes, to produce "a counter-history at the intersection of the fictive and the historical" (2008:12). However, she notes that this method must attend to the challenge that "the history of black counter-historical project is one of failure, precisely because these accounts have never been able to install themselves as history, but rather are insurgent, disruptive narratives that are marginalised and derailed before they ever gain a footing" (Hartman, 2008:13). "The task of writing the impossible," she proposes, "has as its prerequisites the embrace of likely failure and the readiness to accept the ongoing, unfinished and provisional character of this effort, particularly when the arrangements of power occlude the very object that we desire to rescue" (Hartman, 2008:14).

32 Explaining his reluctance to forgo truth, Demos rerefers to historian and philosopher Michel Foucault's conceptualization of a "politics of truth", which is, he states,

> *a politics that exceeds the definition of truth as a matter of verifiable content and proposes in its place an expanded field of contestation and problematisation, of critical thinking and creative experimentation. In this realm, truth figures as a process and, at times, a practice tied to contingency and driven by political commitment and subjective engagement, a process that seeks to escape from constituted forms of political rationality and equally from academic doctrine and institutionalized regimes of thought. Such a definition diverges from that which reinforces preformed identifications and calculated political positions. Truth, in this version, assumes no ready-made group or predetermined subject. Instead, it frees the progression of subjective becoming from its determination by representation – whether that of government, media, or art – and relocates it at the centre of an agnostic collective assembly, one formed in disagreement and debate, within a conflict that is internal to the individual as much as the social realm (Demos, 2008:174).*

33 Marks deploys her notion of haptic visuality to challenge the conventions of the ocular-centrality of Western epistemology and aesthetics, which produces knowledge by means of distance – the separation between the active subject and the passive object. Haptic visuality bridges this distance, creating embodied, affiliative relational encounters. It is therefore comparable to Tina Campt's conceptualisation of haptics. However, Marks' haptic visuality relates specifically to what she terms 'intercultural cinema', an artistic methodology created by artists and filmmakers from marginalised diasporic communities. She explains that intercultural cinema

> *is characterized by experimental styles that attempt to represent the experience of living between two or more cultural regimes of knowledge, or living as a minority in the still majority white, Euro-American West. The violent disjunctions in space and time that characterize diasporan experience – the physical effects of exile, immigration, and displacement – also, I will argue, cause a disjunction in notions of truth. Intercultural films and videos offer a variety of ways of knowing and representing the world. To do this they must suspend the representational conventions that have held in narrative cinema for decades, especially the ideological presumption that cinema can represent reality. (Marks, 2000:1)*

By turning to personal experiences, intercultural cinema, Marks adds, "is not sanguine about finding the truth of a historical event so much as making history reveal what it was not able to say. Any truth is lost in the event's discursive representation, in the layers of words and things that build up over it" (2000:29).

34 This somatic affect is perhaps particularly disturbing when recalling Siopis' ink-and-glue painting *Ambush* (2008), which references Hokusai's woodblock print *The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife* (1814). In Ambush, a massive pink octopus engulfs a naked woman. Having already swallowed half her legs, its tentacles pull her body into its mouth. A smaller octopus reaches into the woman's gaping mouth. The unsettling question arises: Will the octopus plunge deeper into her mouth to see inside? Boundaries spill and splatter out in this scene of horrifying ecstasy, replete with the carnality of coitus, death, and auto-cannibalism.

35 Didi-Huberman elucidates the etymology of the term dialectic to inform how its application as an artistic method differs from its origins in philosophy, respectively intending for disorder and conflict versus order and synthesis. He states:

> *The ancient Greek verb dialegesthai means 'to converse' – to introduce a difference (dia) into a discourse (logos). As a confrontation between divergent opinions, with a view to arriving at agreement on a meaning that is mutually accepted as true, dialectics is therefore a way of thinking that is linked to the first manifestations of rational thought in ancient Greece. It was in Plato's work, as we know, that dialectics acquired the fundamental status as a method of truth that related it and even identified it – with theory (theoria) and science (episteme) itself (Didi-Huberman, 2018:82).*

With the advent of Hegelian philosophy, dialectics became "the very structure of things and the absolute method of pure thinking, the ultimate system of knowledge, the ultimate knowledge of history, the just way to posit truth in its becomings" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:83). Contrary to the philosopher working within this tradition of dialectics to posit truth, "the artist of montage," he proposes, "creates heterogeneities in order to dys-pose truth in an order that is no longer the order of reason but rather of 'correspondences' … This is how to expose the truth by disorganising, and therefore by complicating while implicating (rather than explicating) things" (Didi-Huberman, 2018:85).To which he adds,

We can understand then that the dialectics of the montage-maker radically disorganises the amount of foreseeability that we might have expected from a 'philosophical dialectic' describing the progress of reason in history. The dialectics of the montage-maker (the artist, the one who shows) – inasmuch as this dialectics gives its entire space to symptoms, unresolved contradictions, to speeds of appearance, and to discontinuities – only dys-poses things in order to make their intrinsic tendency for disorder felt (Didi-Huberman, 2018:89).

36 Deleuze says as much when he writes:

> *We can choose between emphasizing the continuity of cinema as a whole, or emphasizing the differences between the classical and the modern. It took the modern cinema to re-read the whole of cinema as already made up of aberrant movements and false continuity shots. The direct time-image is the phantom which has always haunted the cinema, but it took modern cinema to give a body to this phantom. This image is virtual, in opposition to the actuality of the movement-image. But, if virtual is opposed to actual, it is not opposed to real, far from it. Again, this time-image will be said to presuppose montage, just as much as indirect representation did. But montage has changed its meaning, it takes on a new function: instead of being concerned with movement-images from which it extracts an indirect image of time, it is concerned with the time-image, and extracts from it the relations of time on which aberrant movement must now depend (Deleuze, 2005b:39-40).*

37 Discussing Bergson's theses on time, Deleuze writes:

> *the past coexists with the present that it has been; the past is preserved in itself, as past in general (non-chronological); at each moment time splits itself into present and past, present that passes and past which is preserved. Bergsonism has often been reduced to the following idea: duration is subjective, and constitutes our internal life. And it is true that Bergson had to express himself in this way, at least at the outset. But increasingly, he came to say something quite different: the only subjectivity is time, non-chronological time grasped in its foundation, and it is we who are internal to time, not the other way round. That we are in time looks like a commonplace, yet it is the highest paradox. Time is not the interior in us, but just the opposite, the interiority in which we are, in which we move, live and change. (Deleuze, 2005b:80).*

38 When making this statement W. J. T. Mitchell referred to the following text: Williams, R. 1997. *Marxism and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.

39 The criticism levelled at Polaroid was not only directed at automation and amateurization but also to the fact that it produced a print without a negative as its base. Buse recounts that the absence of a photographic negative "more or less excluded the camera from commercial and professional applications" (2008:226). In response to this professional criticism, the Polaroid Corporation embarked upon various technological developments. These included manufacturing Polaroids that could render finer detail within a greater range of exposure conditions, launching a Polaroid backing in 1957 that could be attached to professional cameras, and developing a Polaroid film in 1961 that produced both an instant print and a reusable negative. When professional photographers did make use of Polaroids, it functioned as a preliminary tool in commercial photography. The Polaroid's instant print was highly beneficial in ensuring correct exposure to studio flashes, which cannot be seen by the naked eye. Once the photographer was satisfied with the exposure, the Polaroid print was discarded. However, even as commercial photography encouraged capitalist consumption, it was also regarded as frivolous by professional photographers who worked to advance the medium's prestige as a serious art form.

40 Other noteworthy professional photographers and artists that were drawn to Polaroid include: Walker Evans, Minor White, Robert Frank, Ralph Gibson, Laurie Simmons, Lucas Samaras, Helmut Newton, Les Krims, Robert Mapplethorpe, Carrie Mae Weems and Samuel Fosso, not to mention Andy Warhol, David Hockney and Chuck Close.

41 In examining Adams' images, it is evident the Polaroid provided an outlet for experiment. In addition to photographing landscapes, he found a more intimate and close engagement with his subjects through Polaroids. Over time, his Polaroids became more abstract. Occasionally he used slower shutter speeds to blur movement, departing from his signature formal hyperrealism. The Polaroids allowed Adams to explore the emotive qualities of colour in a way that diverged from his conventional style.

42 Elaborating on this partnership, Buse writes:

> *In his capacity as consultant Adams negotiated for images taken on Polaroid film to appear on the back cover of the fledging Aperture magazine from its sixth issue onwards in 1953. Every subsequent issue of Aperture until the 134th (Winter 1994) contained a reproduction of a Polaroid print. Until 1960 these images were mainly by Adams himself, with two contributions each by Adams's assistant Gerry Sharpe and Polaroid employee and consultant Nick Dean. For the next decade Adams provided more or less every second picture, and in the latter years images were selected for the 'ad' from Polaroid Collections, which had been formally founded in 1973. (Buse, 2009:358-9)*

Buse goes on to claim that the exorbitant costs incurred by the Polaroid Corporation meant that "this arrangement was closer to a form of patronage than formal advertising" (2009:360). The Polaroid Corporation's influence was indeed far-reaching.

"What is more," Buse recounts,

> *this industrial and technological giant of mass photo production engaged, from the 1950s onwards, in a range of activities – 'creative' photography workshops, collecting, fine art photography publishing, exhibitions – that have traditionally been conceived as the domain of institutions (museums, art schools, galleries) relatively autonomous from industry. (Buse, 2009:35).*

43 Deborah Martin Kao quotes Land, who reportedly described photography as "a new eye, and a second memory" that "enhances the art of seeing" (1999:13). [Edwin H. Land, Çhairman's Letter,'Polaroid Corporation, Annual Report (March 23, 1997):5]. Land, reminiscent of Walter Benjamin, was interested in how this technology could expand the realm of the visual and, in doing so, transform human perception.

44 Elucidating on Polaroids hypocritical business policies, Eric L. Morgan writes that

> *Land advocated progressive policies, such as comprehensive benefits packages and increased education for his workers. During the 1960s, at least 25 percent of Polaroid's employees were taking courses, funded by the corporation, to further their educations and productivity. Land employed numerous minorities, including African Americans and women, who received the same benefits and had the same opportunities for leadership and advancement as Polaroid's white male employees did. He believed that all Americans, regardless of race, gender, class, had the potential to do great things (Morgan, 2006:528).*

45 Morgan expands on this significance:

> *Regardless of the experiment's shortcomings and dubious nature, Polaroid's actions were important for several reasons. They proved that major American corporations could become involved in international affairs and issues of human rights, practicing the ethical business model abroad. Also, Polaroid's attempt to challenge going public with verbal opposition and new policies blacks set a bold precedent for later challenges company's experiment attempted to show that engagement more enlightened approach than disengagement; within, Polaroid believed, would put more pressure on the South African government without totally abandoning blacks. Withdrawal would have potentially eliminated hundreds of jobs to help liberate black workers. But despite its progressive attempt to help South African blacks, Polaroid eventually left the country ... Though ultimately forsaken, Polaroid's efforts were crucial to the growing protest movement against apartheid, as they illuminated the limits of engagement (Morgan, 2006:545-546).*

46 Buse recounts the demise of Polaroid Corporation:

> *In 2005, after changing hands twice, Polaroid was acquired by the conglomerate Peters Group Worldwide, which primarily used the name to sell LCD TVs and DVD players. Peters announced on 8 February 2008 that it was permanently discontinuing production of Polaroid film, with current supplies to last until the end of 2009. In late 2008, Polaroid filed for bankruptcy protection for a second time as Tom Peters, Chairman of the Peters Group, was arrested for financial fraud. In April 2009, the company was purchased by a joint US-Canada venture specializing in intellectual property rights. (Buse, 2010:193)*

47 This shattering and fragmentation caused by the frame is often used creatively by displaying Polaroids in grids or collaged mosaics. Artist David Hockney, for example, frequently works in this manner. He arranges close-up Polaroids of a given subject so that each attentive detail, when presented in a cluster, contributes to a description of the whole, albeit fragmented. The individual Polaroids do not align, thwarting cohesive comprehension. Curiously, this presentation also mimics the movements of the human eye as it darts around a given object. The brain then amalgamates these separate pieces to render perceptual cohesion.

48 The looped sound bite was sourced from a scene in the film *Yentl* (1983), where the titular character, played by Barbara Streisand, embarks on the journey of breaking away from tradition. She pretends to be someone else, dressing as a man so that she could gain entry and study at a yeshivah, eventually leaving for the 'New World' promised by New York City. There, she hopes to finally realise her aspiration of studying the Torah and the Talmud. In the scene, Yentl had just left her home after her father's death and appeals to him for his blessing to embark on this journey. The film explores the ideas of becoming otherwise to find yourself, and of finding home by going elsewhere. The film does not advocate a breaking away from the past and tradition entirely, but rather suggests that the past becomes oppressive and stifling if it fails to respond to the demands of the present, and to those seeking new forms of self-identification and freedom.

49 The stereoscopic photograph presents one image alongside another with a shifted view. When looking through a device that isolates each photograph for one's eyes, it simulates three-dimensional space. I pondered whether I could apply this strategy to the representation of time. By showing the one face a phrase ahead of the other, could this depict a more 'real' experience of temporal progression?

50 The dates that I selected were the first night of the start to the week-long festival of Sukkot, known as the festival of huts: 20 September 2021 and 9 October 2022, which correspond in the Hebrew calendar to 15 Tishrei 5792 and 15 Tishrei 5793. During the festival, which is also a harvest celebration, one constructs a hut with three temporary walls and is supposed to have meals and sleep in the structure. The roof which should be made from palm fronds is spaced out to allow one to gaze up at the stars in the night sky. I chose this date because it alluded to the history of exodus and the diasporic experience, and the association of hospitality, which, I believe, should be re-considered as an essential quality and experience of Jewish identity that should be mobilised to challenge Zionist nationalism.

51 Situating the opening scene of Shoah (1985) requires lengthy quotation of the prologue text:

> *The story begins in the present at Chelmno, on the Narew River, in Poland. Fifty miles northwest of Lodz, in the heart of a region that once had a large Jewish population, Chelmno was the place in Poland where Jews were first exterminated by gas vans. Extermination began on December 7, 1941. At Chelmno, four hundred thousand Jews were murdered in two separate periods: December 1941 to Spring 1943 and June 1944 to January 1945. But the way in which death was administrated remained the same throughout: the gas vans. Of the four hundred thousand men, women and children who went there, only two came out alive: Mordechaï*

Podchlebnik and Simon Srebnik. Srebnik, a survivor of the last period, was a boy of thirteen when he was sent to Chlemno. His father had been killed before his eyes in the ghetto in Lodz; his mother died in a gas van at Chelmno. The SS placed him in one of the 'Jewish work details,' assigned to maintaining the extermination camps and slated in turn for death.

With his ankles in chains, like all his companions, the boy shuffled through the village of Chelmno each day. That he was kept alive longer than the others he owed to his extreme agility, which made him the winner of jumping contests and speed races that the SS organized for their chained prisoners. And also his melodious voice: several times a week, when the rabbits kept in hutches by the SS needed fodder, young Srebnik rowed up the Narew, under guard, in a flat-bottomed boat, to the alfalfa fields at the edge of the village. He sang Polish folk tunes, and in return the guard taught him Prussian military songs. Everyone in Chelmno knew him.

52 Discussing the enthusiasm for the new science of eugenics, sociologist and anthropologist Steven Robins states that it, "was embraced by scientists and politicians across the political spectrum – progressives, liberals, socialists and fascists. They all shared the belief that this was the appropriate scientific solution to improving the wealth, health and welfare of nations" (Robins, 2016:165). The English scientist Francis Galton pioneered the eugenics movement in the early 1900s. Galton, Robins states, "studied the English upper classes and determined that their dominant social position was based on their inheritance of superior physical and mental characteristics" (Robins, 2016:163).

Galton, he continues,

was concerned that the supposedly physically and mentally inferior poor and working classes were having more children than intellectual and professional classes – a trend that would ultimately undermine Britain's national stock. By then, Galton's followers baldly began calling for drastic measures to diminish this danger, which included selective breeding, euthanasia and sterilisation (Robins, 2016:164).

53 Enwezor discusses the dichotomy of the image repertoire of Africa. There is the imaging of human strife and suffering, the extent of which attests to hopelessness, which obfuscates historical and political circumstances, absolving the West from any culpability. On the other extreme, Africa is represented as a place of exceptional natural beauty. There is seldom a middle-ground. People do not populate these idyllic spaces and remain confined in despair and in need of salvation. Enwezor states that

The paradox is that images of suffering – which function as a sort of shorthand for neither looking properly nor seeing Africans in normal human terms – do not ameliorate the disasters which they purportedly engage. On the contrary, they have compounded and skewed the photographic imperatives of a mediatized fascination with the continent's 'abnormality' as the primal scene of global media's masochist pleasure, its unrelenting horror vacui (Enwezor, 2009:19).

54 Tagg neglects the earlier history of the colonising camera, but discusses photography's comparable deployment in the Second New Deal in the United States during the 1930s Depression and the development of the documentary genre. Documentary photography, rather than implemented within the systems of the disciplinary state, was utilised to evoke emotive responses from viewers, what Tagg describes as "emotive realism" (Tagg, 2000:90). The documentary genre, cultivated in the pages of Life magazine, was characterised as concerned and compassionate, engendering moral obligation to the grave suffering of the rural agricultural communities. It was therefore not used primarily to disseminate knowledge, but to excite the feeling of the common good and advance, "the imaginary of the benevolent, impartial, paternal State" (Tagg, 2009:93). The intention of documentary photography was, Tagg states, "To feel the moral imperative to look headlong at catastrophe and meet the eye of the forgotten who look straight back was to bear witness to the truth of citizenship and to renew again the ethical contract between the citizen and the State as the form of our collective participation in the truth. From crisis came the renewal of the corporate community" (Tagg, 2009:93).

55 Theorist and artist Colin Richards observed how the South African apartheid state utilised extensive visual material that inundated the public sphere to aid in its mythology. Richards writes, "The sheer amount of signage apartheid generated suggests a hypervisibility at odds with its aspirations to be 'natural'; signage for toilets, transport, benches and bridges, reception rooms and public telephone booths" (2013:234). Hypervisibility worked to generate a kind of blindness. Richards goes on to state, "Normalisation is a form of invisibility – the taken-for-grantedness – and in perverse ways apartheid's supreme visibility worked to create its own normalisation. Habit and repetition corrode the real" (2013:234). The apartheid state, as with any oppressive regime, is a myth-making machine that utilises a plethora of images to naturalise itself. Accordingly, Barthes states that "Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact" (2009:169-170).

56 The first photograph that Benjamin reproduces in *Little History of Photography* is by the English portrait painter David Octavious Hill who used photographs as sketches for his fresco paintings in the Church of Scotland produced in 1843. The photograph is an anonymous portrait, titled: Newhaven Fishwife. Benjamin describes the woman, "her eyes cast down in such indolent, seductive modesty, there remains something that goes beyond testimony to the photographer's art, something that cannot be silenced, that fills you with an unruly desire to know what her name was, the woman who was

alive there, who even now is still real and will never consent to be wholly absorbed in 'art'" (Benjamin, 2005:510). The woman is irreducible to the photograph. Her being exceeds the capture of the frame and the viewer is compelled to wonder. Despite the fact that the woman is already deceased, the photograph has captured an enigmatic trace of her and with it our curiosity and imagination.

57 Avery, G. F. 1997. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 16.

58 Siegfried, K. 1997. *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

59 *Camera Lucida* (2000) can be viewed as a development of propositions that Barthes discussed in *The Photographic Message* (1977), where the referent in the former, is comparable to what he terms the analogon in the latter. Likewise, the connoted message (the second-order message, which is socio-politically conditioned) and the denoted message (the first-order message, which he describes as a message without a code) correspond respectively to the *studium* and the *punctum* (Barthes, 1997:17). This correlation is made more explicit when Barthes disputes equating the denoted message with neutrality or objectivity and even the supposed impartiality of observational description and identification, which would rather be an indication that connotation has succeeded in mythologizing itself. "If such denotation exists," Barthes writes, "it is perhaps not at the level of what ordinary language calls the insignificant, the neutral, the objective, but on the contrary, at the level of absolute traumatic images. The trauma is a suspension of language, a blocking of meaning" (Barthes, 1977:30). Denotation, he goes on to state, "is an evictive state naturally corresponding to a plenitude of virtualities: it is an absence of meaning full of all meanings" (Barthes, 1997:42).

60 Equally problematic, Barthes describes the studium in Van Der Zee's photograph as follows:

> *I am sympathetically interested, as a docile cultural subject, in what the photograph has to say, for it speaks (it is a 'good' photograph): it utters respectability, family life, conformism, Sunday best, an effort of social advancement in order to assume the White Man's attributes (an effort touching by reason of its naïveté). The spectacle interests me but does not prick me (Barthes, 2000:43).*

Smith argues that his description, "is laden with a paternal racism that the readers are asked to ignore in pursuit of what really interests Barthes – the punctum." (2009:244) Smith then suggests that Barthes:

> *describes the photo's studium as if it is self-evident – as if this lovely formal portrait could not be read in any other way, as if all readers would share Barthes's bemused reaction to the image and its subjects. Although Barthes's reading might be attributed to a predictable set of European cultural codes, readers are not asked to 'see' racism as part and parcel of the studium but instead to see through it to the studium meaning that Barthes presumes. In other words, Barthes's text asks readers to view racist paternalism as natural or beside the point rather than as culturally codified part of the studium that can be put under examination (Smith, 2009:244).*