THE TWILIGHT OF THE INDEX

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I. MEDIUM SPECIFICITY

Contemporary film theory is doubly ungrounded: by metacritical debates about *the status of theory* and the role philosophy has to play in the reinvention of film theory, and by debates *about the status of film* in an era when film as a physical object might be disappearing. We can distinguish three main strands in recent theoretical debates: 1) a re-evaluation of the status of film theory in relation to philosophy and science; 2) a turn to ethics, as evidenced by a number of recent publications on Levinas and cinema;[1] and, most importantly, 3) a return to earlier ontological theories of film in response to the emergence of the digital, i.e., a historicization of theory.

The digital has prompted a critical revival of Bazin, Kracauer, Epstein, Balasz and Arnheim and, more specifically, a renewed interest in the relationship between film and photography[2] reflected in 1) the return to questions of indexicality and 2) a rethinking of medium specificity away from the idea of medium as a material or physical support. In *Remediation: Understanding New Media*,[3] Jay David Bolter's and Richard Grusin's exploration of the numerous ways in which new media and old media remediate each other, the notion of "indexicality" dissolves into the "double logic of remediation," which renders the history of *all* media as a continual oscillation between two contradictory impulses toward immediacy and hypermediacy, the experience of which, Bolter and Grusin suggest, remains constant regardless of the specific temporal and spatial limitations of different media.[4] That Bolter and Grusin use the term "remediation" to describe both remediation of one

medium by another, e.g., cinema and photography, as well as remediation within the same medium, suggests the extent to which they consider a material-based definition of medium specificity obsolete.

For Rosalind Krauss, too, in the "post-medium condition" a medium is no longer defined in terms of its material or physical support; "medium specificity" retains its legitimacy only as "different specificity": Krauss locates the specificity of a medium not within a medium's material limits but in the medium's relationship to the "essence of Art itself.[5] In "Two Moments from the Post-Medium Condition" she develops further her critique of the Greenbergian notion of medium specificity by expanding the notion of a medium's "physical support" to what she terms its "technical support," a concept that still acknowledges a medium's past practice (based on its material limits and constraints) but also refers to the development of new aesthetic conventions that 'reinvent' the medium by rethinking the Idea of Art itself:

> I am using the term "technical support" here as a way of warding off the unwanted positivism of the term "medium" which, in most readers' minds, refers to the specific material support for a traditional aesthetic genre. [...] "Technical support" has the virtue of acknowledging the recent obsolescence of most traditional aesthetic mediums [...] while it also welcomes the layered mechanisms of new technologies that make a simple, unitary identification of the work's physical support impossible (is the "support" of film the celluloid strip, the screen, the splices of the edited footage, the projector's beam of light, the circular reels?).[6]

Some have interpreted Krauss's substitution of "technical" for "physical" support as evidence of her commitment to upholding a medium's materiality in the face of

digital media's threatening immateriality.[7] However, Krauss never quite explains what distinguishes the "technical" from the "physical" support of a medium. For instance, her analysis of the work of conceptual photographer Sophie Calle fails to demonstrate how Calle's appropriation of the *aesthetic conventions* of "the documentary report" — which Krauss offers as an example of the "technical" support of Calle's medium — reinvents the *medium* of photography.

Like Krauss, Rodowick argues that "there is no medium-based ontology that grounds film as an aesthetic medium"[8] and that "a medium should be distinguished from its physical support and channel of transmission even if they share the same substance or material,"[9] although he offers a slightly different explanation: the cinematic image, he insists, is inherently virtual on account of its spatialization of time and temporalization of space. Appropriating Stanley Cavell's notion of medium as the creation of "automatisms" that are "cultural as well as mechanical,"[10] Rodowick posits cinematic and photographic codes as *virtual* rather than deriving from the physical nature of the signifier.[11]

Rodowick's "virtualization" of media informs, as well, a number of recently published studies on the relationship between photography and cinema, which continue to challenge medium-specific claims. In "Photography's Expanded Field" George Baker introduces the notion of "expanded photography," thereby problematizing any attempt to determine whether a given work is an instance of cinema's remediation of photography or of photography's remediation of cinema.[12] Along similar lines, in *Photography and Cinema* David Campany claims that the history of avant-garde cinema has been the history of cinema's gravitation toward photographic stillness, with art photography itself gravitating toward cinema. In Campany's view, both tendencies point to each medium's precarious place in contemporary digital culture. "Often the nature of a technology," he writes, "becomes clear to us just as it is about to mutate or disappear. Cinema seems to have

been attracted to different forms of the photographic image at such moments."[13] Peter Wollen suggests that even still photographs, while not narratives in themselves, can be considered elements of narrative and that, alternatively, movement is not essential to film.[14] Seemingly following Roland Barthes, Laura Mulvey claims that indexicality "gets lost" in the moving image, only to remind us that slowing down or freezing the moving image returns indexicality to it, thereby encouraging a more fetishistic involvement with the image.[15] David Campany surveys the changing social uses of photography in order to demonstrate that the definition of a medium is cultural rather than technological or physical.[16] In *After Photography* Fred Ritchin dismisses the *material* distinction between indexical and non-indexical photographs as secondary to the *cultural* distinction between fictional and non-fictional photographs.[17] Finally, Corey Dzenko elaborates on this point by noting that analog photography's relation to reality has always been *ideological*, once again emphasizing the social applications and the appearance of digital images which, he claims, they share with analog images.[18]

II. THE TWILIGHT OF INDEXICALITY

Recent theoretical engagements with indexicality reveal a subtle shift in the traditional understanding of this concept, not only in the work of theorists who believe digital photography and cinema to be just extensions of their analog counterparts, but also in the work of those who have tried to salvage the notion of medium specificity and to underscore the differences between analog and digital. In *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*,[19] perhaps the most exhaustive study of indexicality and archival desire, Mary Ann Doane locates the index on the threshold of semiosis: contingency, indexicality and illegibility are understood in terms of photography's

and cinema's capacity to record a plenitude of information irreducible to signification. However, in the final pages Doane reminds us that

> the index is evacuated of content; it is a hollowed-out sign. [...] Hence, indexicality together with its seemingly privileged relation to the referent — to singularity and contingency — *is available to a range of media*. The *insistency* and *compulsion* Peirce associates with the indexical sign are certainly attributes of television and digital media as well; witness the televisual obsession with the "live" coverage of catastrophe, the ultimate representation of contingency, chance, the instantaneous, as well as the logistics of the Internet which promises to put diversity, singularity and instantaneity more fully within our grasp.[20]

Here "contingency" becomes conflated with the unpredictability of natural catastrophes, while "instantaneity," no longer a temporal category, signifies the ease with which we access information.[21] Perhaps more importantly, by aligning the digital with the after-image, which she posits as a natural aspect of human vision, Doane suggests that the digital might indeed be pre-figured by, or inherent in, perception. At first, she claims the afterimage and the indexical sign stake out different relations to referentiality: "After looking at a bright object and then looking away, one will see an afterimage whether the original bright object continues to exist or not. [...] The concept of the index, on the other hand, seems to acknowledge the invasion of semiotic systems by the real."[22] However, she then reminds us that perception is never instantaneous but "pivots upon a temporal lag, a superimposition of images, an inextricability of past and present."[23] If perception is always, to a certain degree, independent of its referent, on account of this inherent delay, then the digital's complete independence from its referent only extends, or makes visible, the temporal lag: the after-image pre-figures the digital image

inasmuch as both exemplify the movement "away from referentiality and toward subjectivization of vision."[24]

The anxiety produced by the digital is then not inherent in new technologies of representation: it is caused by our realization that new technologies materialize the inherent instability or virtuality of the body, a body that cannot even trust its own senses. In the face of such a body, "the desire for instantaneity emerges as a guarantee of a grounded referentiality. [...] [Photography and cinema] become forms of prosthetic devices that compensate for a flawed body."[25] Doane implies that *the index is not necessarily synonymous with referentiality* because a temporal tension, in the form of delay, is inherent in the index: "Yet the index also harbors within itself a temporal tension. On the one hand, the indexical trace — the footprint, the fossil, the photograph — carries a historicity, makes the past present. At the other extreme, the deictic index — the signifiers 'here,' 'now,' 'this,' 'that' — are inextricable from the idea of presence."[26] Ultimately, the tension between the notion of the digital as breaking the indexical relation to reality and, on the other hand, the idea that all media — both old and new — are defined in terms of their legibility, conceived as both a lure (the promise of archiving time) and a threat (the threat of illegibility, noise, nonsense) remains unresolved in Doane's study. At the end of the book she notes that "the project of the cinema in modernity [...] that of endowing the singular [the contingent, the indexical] with significance without relinquishing singularity [contingency, indexicality] [...] is not necessarily abandoned with the emergence of even newer technologies of representation."[27]

Adopting a pragmatic position, in "What Is the Point of an Index?" Tom Gunning seeks to demonstrate that the digital and the indexical are not mutually exclusive by proposing that the index is meaningless or useless outside of the visual accuracy or recognisability of the image. He suggests a re-reading of Peirce's system of signs, arguing that indexicality cannot be separated from considerations of visual

accuracy against Peirce's claim that the indexical and the iconic function of a sign must be considered independent of each other. For Gunning the fascination we feel when confronted with a photograph stems not from any desire to know how it was made (whether it has a real referent or not) but rather from our ability to *recognize* its visual resemblance to a referent (however different it might be from it): "[T]he power of the digital (or even the traditional photographic) to 'transform' an image depends on maintaining something of the original image's visual accuracy and recognisability. I use this phrase (visual accuracy and recognisability') to indicate the manner in which indexicality intertwines with iconicity in our common assessment of photographs."[28] Gunning challenges the usefulness of the notion of indexicality by downplaying the photograph's semiotic structure and foregrounding its phenomenology:

> It is only by a phenomenological investigation of our investment in the photographic image (digital or otherwise obtained) that I think we can truly grasp the drive behind digitalization and why photography seems unlikely to disappear. [...] I am positing a phenomenological fascination with photography that involves a continuing sense of a relation between the photograph and a pre-existing reality. While this is precisely what "indexicality" supposedly involves, I am less and less sure this semiotic term provides the proper (or sufficient) term for the experience.[29]

The knowledge of how the photograph was produced (the indexical relation to a real object guaranteed by the light bouncing off the object), argues Gunning, cannot explain our fascination with it. An indexical relation "falls entirely into the rational realm"[30] and thus cannot account for the photograph's "irrational power to bear away our faith."[31] Gunning urges us to revisit Barthes and Bazin, both of whom

conceived of the photograph as an image without a code (Barthes) that puts us in the presence of something (Bazin). However, contrary to Barthes and Bazin, Gunning claims that the qualities that make the photograph fascinating are *not* necessarily those related to indexicality, i.e., to temporality. Instead, he emphasizes the photograph's "sense of a nearly inexhaustible visual richness," the delight in visual illusion it provokes, and its ability to put us in the presence of something that is not necessarily a real referent: qualities we recognize as essential to the digital rather than to the analog image.

In *The Virtual Life of Film* Rodowick challenges Gunning's reduction of indexicality to perceptual realism. Analog images, he reminds us, function through transcription, primarily a temporal process, while digital images function through calculation or conversion: they do not provoke an experience of the intensity of time but merely measure time as the conversion of light into code: "The primary sense of every photograph is that it is a *spatial record of duration* [...] Capturing a cone of light involves opening *a window of time*."[32] On the contrary,

> the technological criteria of perceptual realism [wrongly] assume [...] that the primary powers of photography are *spatial semblance*. [...] The concept of realism in use by computer graphics professionals [...] does not correspond to an ordinary spatial sense of the world and actual events taking place within it, but rather to our *perceptual* and *cognitive* norms for apprehending a *represented* space, especially a space that can be represented or constructed according to mathematical notation.[33]

Paradoxically, Rodowick, like Doane, ends up effacing the distinction between analog and digital he is supposedly trying to uphold by underscoring cinema's inherent virtuality. Rodowick returns to Metz who "distinguishes between film as

actual or a concrete discursive unity, and cinema as an ideal set. This distinction launches us toward another sense of the virtuality of film and film theory. [...] Within the filmic, the cinematographic inscribes itself as vast virtuality [...] [through] the notion of cinematic codes.[34] Individual films are concrete and singular while cinematic codes are virtual: "[T]he quality of being cinematic in no way derives from the physical nature of the signifier."[35] Medium specificity does not originate in the materiality of the cinematic signifier: a code "is a constructed rather than inherent unity, and it does not exit prior to analysis."[36]

Thus, cinema exists as a *conceptual virtuality*, of which analog cinema is just one particular instance. On the other hand, cinema's inherent virtuality is a function of its hybridity as both a temporal and a spatial medium. Unsettling the conceptual categories of 18th and 19th century aesthetics, cinema, defined as the presence of something spatially and temporally absent, was from the beginning "among the most temporal, and therefore virtual, of the arts"[37]: its "twofold virtuality [is] defined by a vertiginous spatialization of time and temporalization of space."[38] By treating the digital as the virtual life of the analog, and by emphasizing the ontological groundlessness of cinema — by implying that even the index cannot ground it — Rodowick downplays the rupture between the two, suggesting that the digital and the index are not mutually exclusive.

Along similar lines, in "Digital Editing and Montage: The Vanishing Celluloid and Beyond" Martin Lefebvre and Marc Furstenau propose that insofar as digital images are made in the hope of being interpreted as photographic they should be considered indexical: their "index" is photography rather than reality.[39] In order to demonstrate that every sign is indexical the authors analyze a realist painting of a house represented in a way that allows us to read it as a sign of domesticity:

> The hypothesis is that houses of this sort really belong to our concept of domesticity. The house in the picture is thus conceived as belonging to a class of *experiential objects* i.e. as being *indexically* "connected" to that class by contiguity. Moreover, if the house really exists, then the painting can be seen to have been *determined* by the *existence* of a house belonging to the class of objects falling under the concept of domesticity. If, on the contrary, it is a mere figment of the painter's imagination, still it is its *connection* to other *existing* houses belonging to the class of objects falling under the concept of domesticity that has partly *determined* it.[40]

Here indexicality is defined conceptually: the house functions as an indexical sign merely by virtue of belonging to a general *type* — houses, existent or imaginary — which fall under the *concept* of domesticity. The authors argue that this example "illustrates that every sign, whether it be about some individual existent or about a general type, requires indexicality. [...] In short, all signs, including digital images and cinematic fictions, should they mean anything, are to be understood ultimately as...indexically connected to reality."[41] Here indexicality is conflated with legibility: if a sign is legible it must be (because it is) indexical. All signs are automatically indexical because indexicality is merely

> the semiotic function by which a sign indicates or points to its object. [...] Now any given object, whether it be a photograph, a film, a painting, or a CGI is connected with the world (or Reality) in an unlimited number of ways, all of which are ways in which it can serve as an index. Thus it makes no sense to say, for instance, that a traditional photograph is more (or less) indexical than a digital image since we cannot quantify the number of ways in which a given thing can serve as a sign.[42]

Like Gunning, Lefebvre and Furstenau propose temporality as just one of the many ways in which a sign can function indexically: an index does not have to be a trace (an imprint of a past moment). Indeed, they go as far as to suggest that there is an entire spectrum of different *degrees of indexicality*, including direct and indirect indexicality, "an index of artistry" and "an index of style" being examples of the latter.

Theoretical discussions of indexicality have been shifting away from a strictly semiotic analysis to a phenomenological analysis of the index in terms of *affect.*[43] Thus, Thierry de Duve urges us to consider the psychological response produced by the photograph's illogical temporality rather than the semiotics of the index: "What is in question here is the *affective and phenomenological* involvement of the unconscious with the external world, rather than its linguistic structure."[44] The illogical conjunction of 'the here and the formerly', which results in the sudden vanishing of the present tense, accounts for the traumatic effect of the snapshot, while the time exposure's conjunction of 'now and there' accounts for its melancholy effect. Since there is no clear distinction between the snapshot and the time exposure ("one cannot decide on a shutter speed that would operate as a borderline between the two"[45]), every photograph has built into its semiotic structure the trauma effect and the mourning process, i.e. every photograph gives rise to two opposing libidinal attitudes: melancholy (the response to the work of mourning) and mania (the defensive reaction to trauma). It is important to note, however, that de Duve deduces the nature of our unconscious investment in the photograph from an analysis of its semiotic structure, i.e., he still relies on s*emiotics* to explain our strong *affective* response to the photograph.

Similarly, Doane understands the index no longer in terms of the deeply historical relationship to reality photography was said to guarantee by virtue of its automatism but in terms of the *affective response* — which she describes in terms of

intensity — produced by *both analog and digital* images. The shift from "the index" to "the affective response to the index" points to a new understanding of indexicality as something *produced: now it is certain representations that guarantee an experience of intensity (i.e., indexicality) rather than the index serving as the representation's guarantee*. For instance, Doane notes that the indexical trace "as filmic inscription of contingency [...] indissociable from affect"[46] can take the form of cinephilia, "a kind of zero degree of spectatorship [that] 'doesn't do anything other than designate something which resists, which escapes existing networks of critical discourse and theoretical frameworks. [...] [C]inephilia hinges *not on indexicality but on the knowledge of indexicality's potential.*"[47]

Let us now see how this growing ambivalence surrounding the notion of indexicality manifests itself in contemporary photography.

III. THE "SERIALIZED INSTANT," "THE LONG NOW," AND "CINEMATOGRAPHY"

Over the last couple of decades, art photography and experimental cinema have been engaged in a process of mutual mimicking that complicates medium-specific claims. Traditionally, photography has been aligned with stillness and film with movement, i.e., the two media have been distinguished by their different temporalities. Metz described photography as fetishistic by virtue of its 'off-frame effect':

> [T]he off-frame effect in photography results from a singular and definitive cutting off which figures castration and is figured by the "click" of the shutter. It marks the place of an irreversible absence, a place from which the look has been

> averted forever. The photograph itself, the "in-frame," the abducted part-space, the place of presence and fullness — although undermined and haunted by the feeling of its interior, of its borderlines, which are the past, the left, the lost: the far away even if very close by, as in Walter Benjamin's conception of the "aura" — the photograph, the inexhaustible reserve of strength and anxiety, shares, as we see, many properties of the fetish (as object). [...] Film is much more difficult to characterize as a fetish.[48]

At the same time, as Thierry de Duve reminds us, photography has a privileged relation to the past, which accounts for its traumatic/melancholy effect:

> However, I wish to claim that the photograph is not traumatic because of its content, but because of immanent features of its particular time and space. [...] [P]hotography is probably the only image-producing technique that has a mourning process built into its semiotic structure, just as it has a built-in trauma effect. The reason is again that the referent of an index cannot be set apart from its signifier.[49]

Film, on the other hand, has a privileged relation to the present, which makes it incapable of producing what Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*, describes as the "punctum" of the still image: while the essence of photography is "the Intractable," its quality of "this has been" and "this was now," cinema, in Barthes' view, cannot put us in a similar contact with death.[50]

While a strong investment in slowness and stillness has always been characteristic of the cinematic avant-garde, experimental cinema's turn toward photography really gained momentum in the wake of the "digital turn," for instance in works like Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* (1993), James Coleman's *La tache*

aveugle (*The Blind Spot*, 1978-90), and Sam Taylor-Wood's *Pieta* (2001). Experimental cinema mimics photography by "slowing down" the image and even eliminating movement altogether:

> Popular narrative film stays away from endless difference and endless sameness. [...] By contrast, the history of avant-garde cinema is a history of gravitation to those two extremes. At one end there is the film built up from rapid cuts and at the other the long single take. Significantly, at both ends we find versions of photographic stillness. Montage sees the photograph as a partial fragment. The long take sees the photograph as a unified whole.[51]

Thus, in *24 Hour Psycho* Gordon extends an entire time frame to that of a 24 hour day, while Coleman's *La tache aveugle* is a slide projection derived from a brief sequence, less than a second long, of the 1933 film.

While experimental cinema mimics photography, contemporary art photography mimics cinema by spatializing and narrativizing time in works of increasing temporal complexity. Barbara Probst's "serialized instant," Uta Barth's "the long now," and Jeff Wall's "cinematography" (staged photography) challenge the notion of the still image as instantaneous by exposing the cinematic within the photographic. That their photography, which relies on tripods, large formats and slow deliberation, has come into prominence at a time when we are bombarded with nostalgia-infused pronouncements of the imminent death of cinema can perhaps be attributed to their attempt at archiving time by exposing the cinematic within the photographic. Contemporary photography's "cinematic turn," I would argue, can be seen as a response to the waning of indexicality, an attempt to compensate for the evacuation of duration from digital cinema[52] by returning time to the still image.

In *Exposures* (2007) Probst uses as many as twelve cameras and tripods,

arranged around the subject, to photograph multiple points of view captured in separate images but taken simultaneously with a single *radio-controlled* shutter release: extending a single moment into a series dramatizes the impossibility of instantaneous perception. The multiplication of points of view prevents the viewer from taking them in at a glance and imposes a time of reading. Although the multiple vantage points expose the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the instant, they also eliminate "the outside" by making the act of archiving time itself an object of representation: rather than the index being an imprint of the past, we literally see the instant inscribing itself, automatically producing its own record in the present. Probst exposes the cinematic within the photographic by using techniques we have come to associate with cinema as a time-based medium: *suture, montage, shot reverse shot, variations in shot scale reminiscent of cinematic establishing shots, mediums shots, and close ups, elliptical editing, jump cuts, remakes/sequels*.

Each series of photographs is so meticulously staged that it takes a while before the viewer realizes what is missing from the photographs: the photographer's look. In the diptychs two subjects face two cameras set side by side: the shutters are released simultaneously, recording two "versions" of same moment. In *Exposure #23* a girl and a boy are looking at two cameras positioned in front of them. In each photograph, which records the same moment, they seem to be looking in different directions even though they have not moved, and their facial expressions seem slightly different, which prompts the viewer to "read" the images as consecutive rather than simultaneous, i.e., to narrativize them. Recalling both Kuleshov's psychological montage experiment ("the Kuleshov effect") as well as the *jump cut*, in which two sequential shots of the same subject are taken from camera positions that vary only slightly, Probst's diptychs expose *montage*, traditionally associated with cinema as a time-based medium, as inherent in the photograph. *Exposure #39* employs another familiar cinematic device, *the green screen*: a girl walks, in medium

shot, in front of a Swiss Alps background, which in the next image, a long shot, is revealed to be fake. In the first image of *Exposure #44*, a medium shot, a woman runs in front of the camera against the backdrop of a mountain in Bavaria; the second image, a long shot, reveals the woman to be running in front of a painting of the mountain, the painting itself held up by another woman standing in front of the real mountain. The "reframing" reveals what we thought was real, to be fake, but then re-inscribes the fake back into the real. The diptych exposes the real and the fake as interchangeable: the fake can pass for the real but the real can also pass for the fake, inverting the logic of the cinematic green screen.

Exposure #9 shows a woman walking through Central Station as various people pass her by. The series consists of two black and white images and four color ones. One of the images shows two of the photographers taking pictures of the woman: the pictures they produce are among the six making up the series. The arrangement of the images resembles a film sequence made up of establishing shot, medium shots, and close ups. The changes in *camera angle*, *distance*, and *lighting* narrativize the instant, infusing it with time: one image seems to record a moment before the woman passes by, another "after" she passes by, i.e., spatial extension produces temporal extension. The effect is similar to that produced by *elliptical editing*, which extends an action's screen time beyond its real time.

The same effect — creating a sense of "before" and "after" — can be observed in *Exposure #11a* and *#11b*. In the first diptych a woman and a little girl holding her hand are crossing the street. The first image is shot from a street level and gives us a close up of the girl; only parts of the woman's body are visible in the shot. The second image is shot from a high vantage point, most likely from a building across the street. In *#11b* a woman is biking across the street: the first image is a color medium shot, the second one is a black and white long shot. In both diptychs the variation in scale creates a sense of temporal variation; in both, as well, the archiving

of time has devolved into a surveillance of time (hence the forensic connotations of the titles of all photographs: *numbered exposures* that mimic forensic evidence).

On several occasions Probst returns to the same subjects and the same places, months or years after she has first photographed them, producing photographic *remakes* or *sequels*. In *Exposure #41* she returns to the same couple she shot a year earlier. The difference in the subjects' facial expressions from the first to the second series is superimposed onto the difference in their facial expressions within the same series. Since the two subjects *already* appear so different within the same moment, merely on account of the slight change in camera angle, we are less likely to believe that they would be dramatically different from themselves after a year has passed. Time collapses onto itself: it does not need to pass or unfold in order for difference to emerge since each moment already differs from itself. *Exposure #27* is a "sequel" to *Exposure #16*: both series are shot in the same hallway and seem to feature the same subject, though we see only the lower part of her body lying on the floor. The change in camera angle produces two different versions of the same moment: the first seems to represent the woman's point of view shot, while the second could be attributed to her attacker, or perhaps to a policeman investigating what appears to be a scene of domestic violence.

Probst's triptychs *suture* the viewer into the illusion of a self-produced space and time: each photograph in the series is taken by a photographer represented in one of the other images in the same series, collapsing the distinction between subjects and objects of representation. In *Exposure #32*, featuring two women and one man photographing one another, the first image is produced by the man represented in the third image, and the second image is produced by the woman represented in the third image. Every point of view shot includes the subject who produced it, mimicking the cinematic technique of *shot/reverse shot*. The triptychs set off an apparently infinite yet finite circulation of looks between the images without

ever opening up to the world outside: the images appear to be produced by no one. Within each series *time re-circulates rather than flows*. The inherent automatism of the photographic medium becomes an object of representation: indexicality is "preserved" in the form of self-reference. In other words, Probst's exposures archive the spectator's time: *it is the spectator that now functions as the index of the image*.[53]

Uta Barth's photographs in *The Long Now*[54] challenge the long history of the *point* in photographic discourse: de Duve identifies "the point of sharpness" as essential to the breakdown of the symbolic function in the photograph[55]; Cartier-Bresson speaks of "the decisive moment" also in terms of a point[56]; Roland Barthes builds his phenomenology of photography around the Latin term for point, *punctum*.[57] By contrast, Barth's multipanel images hover on the brink of visibility and legibility. Her subject is the act of perception itself, the act of focusing, not what we focus on. According to Barthes, even when I try to focus on the surface of a photograph, I eventually pass through it to that which really fascinates me: the photograph's referent. As he puts it, "the referent adheres."[58] In Barth's images, however, the referent does not adhere. The choice of a subject is no choice, she claims; the real "referent" are the conditions of seeing: "The more important data of perception...as disclosed in her images, are transitions, overlappings, indistinct limits, inconsistencies, depositionings, and vacancies [i.e.] those conditions of vision which make perception non-identical with itself."[59]

Although Barth's images are very different from Probst's, her vision is equally self-effacing: Jonathan Crary describes it as "a non-punctual seeing in that it functions without seeking points of focus, climax, or attraction,"[60] an "anonymous seeing [...] that labors to free itself from the [...] confines of subjectivity."[61] The images in the *Ground* series (1994-95) collapse the figure/ground distinction by eliminating the nominal subject of the photograph and making the background the subject not by bringing in into focus but by keeping it out of focus. The images are

focused "but on empty areas — focused on air, or focused on things off to the side in some way."[62] The images in the *Field* series (1995-98), shot mostly outdoors, mimic cinematic framing conventions in a subtle investigation of the visual structures that imply movement or activity in the foreground. The subjects — e.g., car headlights shining through falling rain — are "unspecific, generic places. The real subject [...] is the atmosphere itself."[63]

In the series *...and of time* (2000) Barth's attention "shifts away from the light outside toward the light that streams in. Now she is entirely contained within her house, and her attention is focused on nothing more than the light from outside as it enters the space, and how it moves and changes."[64] Just as Antonioni often lets his camera wander off, "forgetting" the character it is supposed to follow and instead following some insignificant, irrelevant, inexpressive detail of the environment, Barth "archives" everything: not just the image but also the afterimage; not a particular space, but "any-space-whatever," a term Deleuze employs to describe Antonioni's distracted camera.

The images in the series *white blind (bright red)* (2002) are "rooted in prolonged staring and the optical afterimages it can produce."[65] The series *Sundial* (2007) records "the (apparent) passage of late afternoon sunlight on the walls, furniture and floors of a home"[66]: "all the images [some five feet high, other thirteen feet long] are shot at dusk, just as the light begins to fade and in the process to erase whatever it has previously made visible."[67] These three series are a meditation on light, and thus, time, passing; thus they are inevitably tinged with melancholy.

Like Probst, Barth utilizes a range of what we typically think of as cinematic devices: she pans with the camera to produce slightly different points of view of the same unfocused subject; in her diptychs she alternates between close ups and long shots of the same subject. Barth's "method" in the series *Untitled 1998-1999* recalls Probst's interest in recording slight shifts in facial expressions through slight shifts

in camera angle. However, rather than using multiple cameras as Probst does, Barth sets up a single camera and waits for an imperceptible shift in the atmosphere. Rather than multiplying the same moment until it seems like different moments (Probst), Uta records different moments which seem to be the same on account of the almost imperceptible difference between the vantage points from which the same subject is shot, always out of focus. By extending time into "the long now" Barth's images move in the direction of cinema, mimicking the freedom, contingency and anonymity of the cinematic long take. Inasmuch as her images evacuate the nominal subject of a photograph, that which is supposed to leave its imprint in the image, they do not make a past moment present but render present that which renders the past present, namely light.

On one hand, Wall's light box photographs, like Uta Barth's series *...of time* and *Sundial*, betray his preoccupation with the materiality of light via the illuminated image and can thus be read as a response to the waning of indexicality manifested in the reduction of the materiality of light to an abstract symbol. On the other hand, his "cinematography" (staged photography) suggests a reinterpretation of indexicality's relation to temporality. The notion of indexicality in photographic discourse is usually bound up with the idea of the photograph as rendering the past present. However, Wall's "cinematography" renders the present (event) as past (representation): as he puts it, he is not interested in the event but in the representation of it.[68] "One of the problems I have with my pictures," Wall admits, "is that since they are constructed, since they are what I call 'cinematographic,' you can get the feeling that the construction contains everything, that there is no 'outside' to it, the way there is with photography in general."[69]

Wall insists that to look at the medium of photography one needs to come through another art: cinema, painting, or literature. Thus, his "cinematography" investigates how cinema affected the criteria for judging photography. Once he

turned to large scale photographs, Wall began referring to his photography as "cinematography":

> Cinematography' referred simply to the techniques normally involved in the making of motion pictures: the collaboration with performers (not necessarily actors, as neo-realism showed); the techniques and equipment cinematographers invented, built and improvised; and the openness to different themes, manners, and styles. It was probably an overstatement to identify these things strictly with filmmaking and not with still photography, since photographers, to a greater or lesser extent, have used almost all of the same techniques; but it made me concentrate on what was needed to make pictures with the kind of physical presence I wanted.[70]

Referring to Barthes's "The Third Meaning: Notes on Some of Eisenstein's Stills," in which Barthes stills the film experience to study single frames, Wall reminds us that films are made up of still photographs: the techniques we normally associated with film are simply photographic techniques and are thus "at least theoretically available to any photographer."[71] Indeed, Wall challenges the traditional view that cinema originated in photography, arguing instead that cinema was essential to photography establishing itself as an art:

> I think that artistically photography established itself on the basis of cinema, and not the other way around. [...] I have spent a lot of time talking about the fact that once cinema emerged, the narrativity that had previously been the property of painting was expelled from it. Until this time painting was quite explicitly painted drama and so it was always in a multivalent relationship with theatrical ideas. Our pictorial experience of drama was created by painting,

> drawing, etching and so on. But the cinema, unlike the forms of performance it canned and played back, is a performance picture. Cinema synthesized the functions of painting and of theatre simultaneously on the technical basis of photographic reproduction. So in that synthesis the mechanics of photography were invested with tremendous meaning, a meaning they will now always have.[72]

How do Wall's photographs expose the cinematic within the photographic? First, the cinematic aspect of his work reveals itself in his interest in "micro-gestures" (e.g., *Mimic* [1982]), which "seem automatic, mechanical or compulsive. They well up from somewhere deeply social," from the social, collective unconscious rather than from the individual's unconscious. Wall's "micro-gestures," which reveal thinking precisely through their extreme economy,[73] recall Cavell's "somatograms" which Cavell uses to demonstrate that the importance of cinema in "returning the mind to the living body" by recording thinking, which is not limited to "intellectual processes" but is enacted in "universal fidgetiness," the little involuntary gestures and movements of the human body. Cavell sees these micro-gestures or somatograms as instances of film's "optical unconscious" (Benjamin).[74]

Second, like Probst Wall has produced a number of "remakes," e.g., *The Destroyed Room* (1978) "remakes" both commercial window displays of clothing and furniture and Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus* (1827), while *Picture for Women* (1979) remakes Manet's *Bar at the Folis-Bergere* (1882): "It was a remake the way that movies are remade. The same script is reworked and the appearance, the style, the semiotics, of the earlier film are subjected to a commentary in the new version."[75] Third, Wall's large-scale photographs (e.g. *Milk* [1984], *Bad Goods* [1985], *Eviction Struggle* [1988]) are structured dramatically, like movies. In fact, he describes his method of preparing for a shoot in cinematic terms: "location scouting" and

"flânerie."[76] Given that his backlit transparencies are more reminiscent of projected film stills than of traditional photographs, it is not surprising that he admits to being fascinated by images whose source remains hidden, as in film viewing:

> In a painting, for example, the source of the site of the image comes from where it is. But in a luminescent picture the source of the image is hidden, and the thing is a dematerialized or semi-dematerialized projection. [...] To me, this experience of two places, of two worlds, in one moment is a central form of the experience of modernity. It's an experience of dissociation, of alienation.[77]

Fourth, Wall — like Probst and Barth — challenges the notion of photography's instantaneity by infusing the photograph with time: photography, he claims, is

> not a medium in which the sense of the non-identity of a thing with itself can be easily or naturally expressed; quite the opposite. A photograph always shows something resting in its own identity in a mechanical way. I think it's possible, through the complex effects of techniques derived from painting, cinema, and theatre, to infuse the photographic medium with this dialectic of identity and non-identity.[78]

Wall goes further: the dialectic of non-identity does not refer only to the duration of the photograph's subject but also to its ontological status, which Wall believes to be always unfixed or spectral, i.e., constructed. Thus, he claims that even his most "realistic" work is

> populated with spectral characters whose state of being [is] not that fixed. That, too, is an inherent aspect, or effect, of what I call "cinematography": things

> don't have to really exist, or to have existed, to appear in the picture. [...] The claim that there is a necessary relationship (a relationship of "adequacy") between a depiction and its referent implies that the referent has precedence over the depiction. [...] Depiction is an act of construction; *it brings the referent into being*.[79]

Without completely rejecting photography's indexical claim, Wall maintains that photography cannot be reduced to it. His way of working through this problem is "to make photographs that somehow suspend the factual claim while simultaneously continuing to create certain illusions of factuality. One of the ways [he does this is] by a kind of mimesis or simultaneous imitation of other art forms, painting and film in particular, each of which has a history of querying and subverting documentary claims."[80] Wall identifies two sets of film influences on his work: Godard's and Fassbinder's hybrid, mannerist, intertextual style[81] and the documentary, reportage, self-effacing style of the neo-realists. Indeed, the fusion of performance and reportage is one of the distinguishing characteristics of Wall's work.

Wall claims that his "cinematography" represents a return to, or a reclaiming of, the documentary or indexical aspect of photography: e.g., setting performances further away from the camera (*The Storyteller*) or shooting landscapes "was the way documentary or straight photography became a stronger elements in […] [his] cinematography."[82] For instance, he thinks of works like *Milk, Bad Goods, Eviction Struggle,* which deal with aspects of documentary photography as examples of neo-realism.[83] However, his digital 'cinematography' is better understood in the context of Manovich's observation that digital cinema is not a recording medium but a subgenre of painting, inasmuch as it returns to the hand-painted and hand-animated images of cinema's pre-history. This is evident from Wall's own reflections on his use of digital technology:

> Digital technology allows you to put different pieces together after the shooting is finished, so it is something like film editing. [...] I have always envied the way a painter can work on his picture a little bit at a time, always keeping the totality in mind by stepping back from his work for a glance at it. A painting is never the rendering of a moment in time, but an accumulation of actions which simulates a moment or creates the illusion of an event occurring before our eyes. By opening up the photographic moment, the computer begins to blur the boundaries between the forms and creates a new threshold zone which interests me greatly.[84]

Here Wall talks of the digital as blurring the boundaries between photography and painting by means of cinema, i.e., by "opening up the photographic moment" to temporalization and narrativization. According to Rosalind Krauss, one of his most vocal critics, Wall wrongly assumes that the "unassailable *now* of the photograph can be dilated endlessly by the chatter of narrative, which not only suffuses Wall's images insofar as they produce themselves as "history paintings" but is repeatedly thematized by the works themselves: e.g., the soldiers telephoning in *Dead Troops Talk*, the conversation of the two women in *Diatribe*.

In "A Note on Photography and the Simulacral" (1984) Krauss maintains that the discourse of photography is not aesthetic: with art's entry into a "post-conceptual" and "post-medium" age, photography stops functioning as a medium, becoming instead a tool for deconstructing artistic practice.[85] In the "post-conceptual," 'post-medium" age the only possible use of photography is the reinvention, not the restoration, of a medium. She correctly identifies the failure of Wall's supporters to analyze his medium by treating him as having rehabilitated the medium of painting, thus ignoring the fact that he is a photographer. For Krauss, Wall's work is really a restoration of painting in another medium: Wall turned to the history of painting and, with contemporary scenes and costumes, used photography

to recapitulate well-known paintings created around the beginning of modernism. Furthermore, he reconstituted the pictorial unity of the old master *tableau*: in this respect his images are diametrically opposed to the modernist project of fracturing imagery and disrupting the flow of narrative or the apparent intelligibility of the artwork.

IV. CONCLUSION

Probst's photographs do not register the "pregnant" or "decisive" moment; rather than revealing the contingency of the indexical they present the index as a carefully choreographed multiplicity of instants from a range of impossibly simultaneous angles. Of primary interest to the spectator is not the photograph's indexical relationship to the object photographed but rather the difference of each instant from itself. Her photographs, shot with a traditional camera, present the index as *constructed* or *produced* through external devices (remote control). Similarly, although Barth uses a traditional camera, her photographs *represent* that which guarantees their indexical relation to reality: light. In both cases, then, the index is not immediately or automatically registered but has to be *recognized* as such, i.e., these photographs *signify their indexical relation*, reminding us that analog photographs can "deceive" us as much as digital ones can. At first sight, Probst's photographs appear to represent different instants: it is only after a certain delay — necessary for *recognition* to take place — that we realize it is the same instant, i.e., we recognize the photograph's indexical relation to reality. Similarly, Barth's photographs appear to be multiple copies of the same instant: it is only after a certain delay that we *recognize* (using as "clues" the slight shifts in light) that they register different instants.

The photographs discussed here are impossible to take in at a glance but impose *a time of reading* by means of self-reference that exposes a single moment's difference from itself (Probst), by means of extending the present moment into a "long now" (Barth), or by means of enlarging the scale of the image and narrativizing it (Wall). Perhaps we can see contemporary photography as a response to what Manovich and Rodowick have described as the transformation of digital cinema into a subgenre of painting. While the digital announces the return of the artist but fails to capture duration inasmuch as it relies exclusively on patterns of recognition of spatial resemblance (perceptual realism), contemporary photography seeks to reclaim the cinematic within the photographic from within the twilight of indexicality: rather than putting us in a deep historical relation with time, it self-consciously reflects on indexicality, automatism, and duration.

NOTES

1. *Levinas and the Cinema of Redemption: Time, Ethics and the Feminine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); *Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters* (London: Routledge, 2010); *Out of Time: Desire in Atemporal Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); *Afterimages of Gilles Deleuze's Film Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

2. David Campany, *Photography and Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), Campany, ed., *The Cinematic* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), Karen Beckman and Jean Ma, ed. *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

3. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

4. A computer interface is organized spatially rather than temporally while a photograph, if we follow Barthes, is distinguished mostly by its illogical temporality. How, then, does the spatiality of the computer interface "remediate" the temporality of the photograph? On the other hand, how does the specific temporality of film "remediate" the specific temporality of the photograph? These questions remain unanswered in Bolter's and Grusin's study, which seeks to underscore the continuity, rather than discontinuity, between old and new media. Ultimately, Bolter and Grusin fail to reconcile their claim that there is very little new about new media — since all media are driven by the contradictory desire for immediacy and hypermediacy — with their belief that new media are radically different from old media, supposedly by virtue of the revolutionary ways in which new media remediate old media.

5. Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 10.

6. Krauss, "Two Moments from the Post-Medium Condition, *October* 116 (Spring 2006): 55-62. Krauss's examples include works by Ed Ruscha, James Coleman, and conceptual photographer Sophie Calle). While acknowledging the aggregate or composite nature of media, however, Krauss has remained reluctant to admit intermedia and installation into what she herself described as an "expanded field."

7. See, e.g., Ji-hoon Kim, "The Post-Medium Condition and the Explosion of Cinema," *Screen* 50:1 (2009): 114-123.

8. D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 23.
9. Ibid., 32.
10. Ibi., 48.
11. Ibid., 18-19.
12. George Baker, "Photography's Expanded Field," in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 175-189.
13. Campany, *Photography and Cinema*, 110.
14. Peter Wollen, "Fire and Ice," in *The Cinematic*, ed. Campany (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), 108-113.
15. Laura Mulvey, "Stillness in the Moving Image," in *The Cinematic*, ed. Campany (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), 134-142.
16. Campany, "Safety in Numbness: Some Remarks on Problems of 'Late Photography'," in *The Cinematic*, ed. Campany (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), 185-195.
17. Fred Ritchin, *After Photography* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2008).
18. Corey Dzenko, "Analog to Digital: The Indexical Function of Photographic Images," *Afterimage* 37:2 (September-October 2009): 19.
19. Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
20. Ibid., 231.
21. Indeed, it refers to the total mediation of hypertext: all Internet entries are instantaneously present to one another, rather than to me.
22. Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 70.
23. Ibid., 77.
24. Ibid., 70.
25. Ibid., 80-81.
26. Ibid., 220.
27. Ibid., 208.
28. Tom Gunning, "What's the Point of an Index? or, Faking Photographs," in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (Durham. NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 26.
29. Ibid., 33-34.
30. Ibid., 36.
31. Bazin cited in Gunning, "What's the Point of an Index? or, Faking Photographs," 36.
32. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, 48.
33. Ibid., 103-105. Rodowick concludes that we are now experiencing "an interesting mutation in our ontological relations with digital images. In its presumed correspondence with the viewer's cognitive and perceptual structures, perceptual realism retreats from the physical world, placing its bets on imaginative worlds" (105). The starting point for Rodowick's discussion of the paradoxes of perceptual realism is Stephen Prince's essay on the development of computer graphics for narrative film, in which Prince "clearly implies that the viewer's audiovisual experience is not defined by phenomenological criteria as such; rather, both 'understanding' and 'experience' are defined by the mental or psychological work of cognitive schemata" (102).
34. Ibid., 17-18.
35. Ibid., 19.
36. Metz cited in Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, 19.
37. Ibid., 21.
38. Ibid., 23.
39. Marc Furstenau and Martin Lefebvre, "Digital Editing and Montage: the Vanishing Celluloid and Beyond," *Cinémas: Revue d'études cinématographiques* 13:1-2 (2002): 69-107.
40. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, 17.
41. Ibid., 17-18.
42. Ibid., 18. Curiously absent from this analysis is a consideration of Peirce's first trichotomy of signs, which depends on whether the sign itself is a quality, an actual thing, or a habit (*tone, token, type*, also called *qualisign, sinsign, legisign*). A "qualisign" is a quality which acts as a sign, a "sinsign" (or "token") is an actually existing thing or event which acts as a sign, and a "legisign" is a law which acts as a sign.
43. Barthes had already made that connection with his notion of the *punctum* as unlocking the subject's deeply personal investment in the photograph. He claimed that the search for the essence of photography cannot be separated from the pathos inherent in photography.
44. Thierry de Duve, "Time Exposure and Snapshot: The Photograph as Paradox," in *The Cinematic*, ed. David Campany (London: Whitechapel, 2007), 56.
45. Ibid., 60.
46. Ibid., 225.
47. Ibid., 226-227.

48. Christian Metz, "Photography and Fetish," in *The Cinematic*, ed. Campany (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), 129-130.
49. Thierry de Duve, "Time Exposure and Snapshot: The Photograph as Paradox," in *The Cinematic*, ed. Campany (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), 57, 59.
50. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 55-57.
51. Campany, *Photography and Cinema*, 36
52. For instance, Rodowick argues, in relation to *Russian Ark* (2002), that the digital long take cannot convey duration — see Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, 169-171.
53. Numerous commentators have drawn attention to the way in which Probst's photographs unsettle our belief in "photographic truth." See, for instance: http://www.mmoca.org/exhibitions/exhibitdetails/barbaraprobst/index.php and http://www.barbaraprobst.net/press_2_schessl_eng.html.
54. Uta Barth, *The Long Now* (New York: Gregory R. Miller & Co., 2010).
55. De Duve, "Time Exposure and Snapshot," 57.
56. Henri Cartier-Bresson, "Images à la sauvette," in *The Cinematic*, ed. Campany (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), 47.
57. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 26-27.
58. Ibid., 6.
59. Jonathan Crary, "The Singularity of the Every Day," in Barth, *The Long Now* (New York: Gregory R. Miller & Co., 2010), 349.
60. Ibid., 353.
61. Ibid., 351.
62. Russell Ferguson, "Wider than the Sky," in Barth, *The Long Now* (New York: Gregory R. Miller & Co., 2010), 12.
63. Ibid., 12.
64. Ibid., 19.
65. Ibid., 21.
66. Crary, "The Singularity of the Every Day," 352.
67. Ferguson "Wider than the Sky," 22.
68. Wall often uses video to rehearse his actors' movements until they get them "just right."
69. Jeff Wall, *Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: MOMA, 2007), 251. Wall argues that photography's unique properties are contradictory: the history of photography has tended to privilege the notion of the photograph as a fragment of the world, downplaying the notion of it as a whole construction (this was often criticized as the influence of painting on photography, from which photography had to emancipate itself from) (252).
70. Ibid., 179.
71. Ibid., 179-180.
72. Ibid., 195.
73. See Wall, *Selected Essays and Interviews*, 85-87.
74. Stanley Cavell, "What Photography Calls Thinking," in *Cavell on Film*, ed. William Rothman (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), 126.
75. Wall, *Selected Essays and Interviews*, 188.
76. Ibid., 189.
77. Ibid., 193.
78. Ibid., 199.
79. Ibid., 254-255.
80. Ibid., 299.
81. Wall also admits to being influenced by cinematographers like Nestor Almendros, Sven Nykvist, Conrad Hall, and by directors like Luis Buñuel, Robert Bresson and Terrence Malick.
82. Wall, *Selected Essays and Interviews*, 318.
83. Arthur Lubow, "The Luminist," *New York Times*, 25 Feb. 2007.
84. Jeff Wall, "Wall Pieces: Jeff Wall interviewed by Patricia Bickers," *Art Monthly* 179 (September 1994): 4.
85. Rosalind Krauss, "A Note on Photography and the Simulacral," *October* 31 (Winter 1984): 68.