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PEDEM REFERENS
ART HISTORICAL MEMORY AND THE ANALOGUE IN THE WORK OF TACITA DEAN, JEREMY MILLAR AND LUCY SKAER

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Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctorate of Philosophy

National University of Ireland, University College Cork

History of Art

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Head of Department and Internal Supervisor: Dr. Flavio Boggi

External Supervisor: Dr. Edward Krčma

In memory of my sister Michelle.

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis submitted is all my own work and has not been submitted for another degree at University College Cork or elsewhere.

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INTRODUCTION

PEDEM REFERENS

> And now, on his way home, he had avoided every
> pitfall,
> and Eurydice, restored to him and trailing close behind
> (as Prosperina
> had decreed), was emerging into heaven's atmosphere
> when a stroke of madness caught him, who loved her,
> off his guard–
> a pardonable offence, you'd think, if the Dead knew
> how to pardon.
> He stopped, and for a moment wasn't thinking-no!–
> Eurydice was his again and on the brink of light, and
> who knows what possessed him
> but he turned back to look.[1]

Book four of Virgil's *Georgics*, 29 BC, tells the tragic love story of Orpheus and Eurydice, who are parted by death when Eurydice is bitten by a seven-headed serpent on their wedding day.[2] A bereaved Orpheus descends into the underworld to try and retrieve her by singing sorrowful lamentations. The power of his song, his art, permits Orpheus to lead Eurydice back from darkness and death, on the condition that he walks in front of her and doesn't look back until they both reach the upper world. The most poignant part of the poem, quoted above, depicts the

[1] Peter Fallon, trans., *The Georgics of Virgil* (Meath, Ireland: The Gallery Press, 2004), 114.

[2] Eurydice gets bitten whilst fleeing from the advances of another man on the day of her wedding to Orpheus. This figure is named by Virgil as Aristaeus (ibid.,113).

moment at which a grief-stricken Orpheus loses Eurydice a second time because he anxiously looks back at her. Orpheus's apprehensive backward glance is a metaphor for irreconcilable loss, the persistence of memory and a paradoxical inability to reclaim the past. In this thesis, the story of Orpheus and Eurydice is aligned with three contemporary British artworks which present the look back as a metaphor for a type of memory entwined with loss. Each artwork turns to face elusive and troubling aspects of subjectivity that have their roots in loss and open onto a loss of meaning. These three projects by Tacita Dean, Jeremy Millar and Lucy Skaer have not received any sustained critical attention. Collectively these three artworks are representative of a new and unexplored turn in contemporary British art, which pursues unpresentable aspects of psychic life by recalling art historical memory.

Jeremy Millar's *The Man Who Looked Back*, 2010, presents numerous reproductions of artworks depicting the second death of Eurydice, which span centuries of art history (Figure 1.1). Millar replicates Orpheus's journey by venturing into the past to shed light on overshadowed aspects of art historian Aby Warburg's legacy, restaging his seminal archive *The Mnemosyne Atlas* 1924–9. Aligning with the melancholic narrative of Warburg's model of art history, which focused on art's visual representations of disturbed psychic states that manifest themselves in the body, Millar uses photographic reproductions to focus on the dramatic moment of Eurydice's second death as witnessed by a traumatised Orpheus. Through representations of bodily gestures that signify death, return and retrieval *The Man Who Looked Back* documents failed attempts at reclaiming the past and an all-pervading sense of loss.

We find the physical journey of Orpheus at play again in Tacita Dean's passage into the underworld, the dark and cavernous basement visited in her film

Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers), 2002. In another failed attempt at reclaiming the past, Dean goes looking for spectral traces of the late Marcel Broodthaers only to dejectedly proclaim upon her return, 'I found I couldn't feel his presence there as I wanted to … the spirit having left and gone elsewhere'.[3] In this project Dean returns, via Broodthaers, to the origins of analogue film from the point of its obsolescence in order to advocate for the medium's continued relevance in a digital age. As noted by Margaret Iversen, we can hear echoes of a desolate Orpheus in Dean's lamentations as she decries digital ascendency because, '[w]e are being frogmarched towards its sparkling revolution without a backward turn, without a sigh or a nod to all we are losing'.[4]

Although it is most prominent in the work of Tacita Dean, all three artworks under analysis align the impending demise of the analogue medium with instances of unmeaning that are the result of more fundamental psychological experiences of loss. This agenda is most directly expressed in Lucy Skaer's installation *Leonora,* 2006, which includes a remarkably short 16 mm film of the late artist Leonora Carrington. During the making of this film the 89-year-old Carrington told Skaer of her heightened awareness of the imminence of her own death and of her inability to reconcile herself with the meaningless fact of her own mortality.[5] The irreconcilable nature of death becomes the impossible subject of *Leonora.* To varying degrees, all three of these artworks deal with the same problem of representation by orbiting the

[3] Tacita Dean 'Section Cinema' in *Selected Writings 1992-2011*, *Seven Books Grey* (Gottingen: Steidl, 2011), 55.

[4]See Tacita Dean, Ibid., 8 and Margaret Iversen, 'Analogue: On Zoe Leonard and Tacita Dean,' *Critical Inquiry* 3 8, no. 4 (Summer 2012): 812.

[5] Lucy Skaer interview with Kirstie North, Glasgow, 9th July 2014.

empty space opened up by death as an unavoidable yet unapproachable aspect of subjectivity.

In his short essay, 'Orpheus's Gaze', 1981, Maurice Blanchot connects the great void of death with artistic desire as Orpheus is compelled to go down into the underworld by 'his particular passion, his infinite patience, his endless experience of death'.[6] Blanchot argues that Orpheus's failed act of retrieval is not as melancholic as it appears because Orpheus turns back towards Eurydice 'not to make her live, but to perceive alive in her the fullness of her death'.[7] Eurydice represents the presence of an infinite absence at the centre of our psychic makeup. This perception of nothingness is the product of a sense of unmeaning related to death that Orpheus attempts to bring out of darkness and into light by giving it form and reality.[8] This thesis reaffirms Blanchot's claim that Orpheus's descent represents our timeless incapacity for accepting and understanding death as an integral part of our subjectivity.

Jeremy Millar, Tacita Dean and Lucy Skaer seek to achieve what Orpheus could not by granting us the opportunity to confront the presence of loss and death through tangible artworks that can withstand our gaze. Maurice Blanchot's interpretation of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice proposes a type of seeing without seeing death that is replayed throughout this thesis. Although primarily reserved for chapter three, this thesis builds upon Blanchot's conviction that the image has an intrinsic relationship with death because 'the image characteristically resembles

[6] Maurice, Blanchot, 'Orpheus's Gaze' in *The Siren's Song: Selected Essays,* trans. Sacha Rabinovich (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), 179.

[7] Ibid.,178.

[8] Ibid., 177–8.

nothing'.[9] Blanchot uses other examples taken from Greek mythology as a metaphor for this visualisation of the void of death, such as the story of Narcissus who sees without seeing himself. Rather than being attracted by his own image, Blanchot argues that Narcissus does not recognise himself, therefore he falls in love with an image and every image is attractive 'because the image exerts the attraction of the void and of death.'[10] Blanchot's conviction that the visual image is intrinsically connected to death, becomes an essential aid in understanding the three artworks in this thesis which affirm loss by loosing the object to which they refer. These three projects invite us to see without seeing as they push towards a place of unmeaning that is beyond loss – the inevitability and impossibility of death.

The story of Orpheus and Eurydice has been an inspiration to artists for centuries.[11] Recent feminist art historical interpretations of the story have focused upon an unfeeling, disembodied eye representative of Orpheus's ruinous male gaze which murders Eurydice.[12] However, in Ovid's version of the story in Book X:I of

[9] Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans Ann Smock (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 125.

[10] Ibid.

[11] This thesis examines the reappearance of Orpheus and Eurydice at the beginning of the 21st century. However, Aby Warburg studied the transmission of this story through artworks dating from ancient Greece, to the Italian and Northern Renaissances of the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries as discussed in chapter one. This story also gains traction after this point resurfacing in many nineteenth century artworks as painted scenes appear in the works of Eugène Delacroix, Camille Corot, Gustave Moreau, Jean Delville and in the sculptures of Auguste Rodin such as *Orpheus and Eurydice,* 1893. In the twentieth century Max Beckmann created a series of lithographs, *The Return of Eurydice, Three Cantos*, 1909, Rainer Maria Rilke wrote his *Sonnets to Orpheus,* 1922, Jean Cocteau created his *Orphic Trilogy*, 1930–1960, Cy Twombly made *Veil of Orpheus*, 1968, and Bracha L. Ettinger produced her *Eurydice Series*, 1994-8. This is by no means an exhaustive list. Kaja Silverman offers something close to a trajectory of the story as it underpins much cultural production referring to examples from art history, film, literature and psychoanalytic texts. See Kaja Silverman, *Flesh of my Flesh* (Stanford California: California University Press, 2009).

[12] Griselda Pollock argues that Orpheus is a personification of the male dominated ideals of western art as he both murders his wife, and annihilates her voice with his art. See Griselda Pollock, *Visual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2007), 172.

The Metamorphoses, 2 AD, he expands upon Eurydice's twofold death by emphasising the tactile nature of this moment.

> The ascending path is mounted in deep silence, steep, dark, and enveloped in deepening gloom. And *now* they were not far from the verge of the upper earth. He armoured, fearing lest she should flag, and impatient to behold her, turned his eyes; and immediately she sank back again. She, hapless one! both stretching out her arms, and struggling to be grasped, and to grasp him, caught nothing but the fleeting air.[13]

Ovid focuses on the body, the couple's heavy footsteps and flagging limbs, their thwarted longings for physical contact as he turns to behold her and she reaches out her arms for him. More than being a metaphor for memory and its impalpability, or for an intangible sense of loss, this story exemplifies a melancholic desire to grasp, or be grasped by something from the past that is tangible. This emphasis on touch disarms the power of the gaze by enhancing the importance of feeling, both in terms of a physical touch and in terms of the story's emotional poignancy. Ovid's more expansive version of the story is rooted in an embodied form of experience, which lends itself to the contemporary artworks under discussion. Each of these projects push beyond conscious thought to a place of unmeaning that is affectively charged. An emotive registering of loss, combined with a loss of meaning, is aligned in all three works with a sense of unthought knowledge, which is manifested in the body as it comes into contact with a physical trace of the past. The materiality and tactility of the analogue image is paramount to this direct mode of address that reaches beyond language and conscious thought.

[13] Henry T. Riley, trans., *The Metamorphoses of Ovid* (London: Bell, 1876), 343.

The title of this thesis, *Pedem Referens* reflects this agenda and it is taken from part of the introductory quote its original Latin form, '*iamque pedem referens casus evaserat omnes, redditaque Eurydice superas veniebat ad auras, pone sequens (namqué hanc dedetar Proserpina legem).*'[14] This section of the poem refers to Orpheus's return journey with Eurydice following behind him. The phrase *pedem referens* translates into English as 'tracing the step'. However, the connotations of this Latin phrase are much more evocative than the English translation allows as it succinctly encompasses the art historical practices of Millar, Dean and Skaer. *Referens* means referencing, returning, restoring, or echoing. *Pedem* is generally used to indicate a bodily presence, however, in the context of Virgil's poem it refers specifically to a footprint, an indexical mark. This thesis presents art historical returns which allow for a tangible retrieval of the past to be forged through physical contact with an indexical trace. Being more than just an echoing of the past, these artworks also return conceptually difficult aspects of our subjectivity by attempting to bring to light, as in this image of Orpheus leading the dead Eurydice out of the underworld, psychic knowledge that typically remains beyond conscious thought. Jacques Lacan's ambiguous concept of the Real will frame the instances of unmeaning that each of these artworks gesture towards in order to theoretically illuminate these powerful subjective experiences which escape linguistic expression. This psychoanalytic approach will be intertwined with photographic theory on the index as I argue that the specificities of analogue film and photography, at the time of their obsolescence, are in close proximity to the Lacanian Real because they offer a language of contact and loss that transcends symbolic registers.

[14] J.Mehler, *P.Vergili Maronis: Bucolica et Georgica* (Leiden Netherlands: Brill Archive, 1950), 195.

In 'The Freudian Unconscious and Ours', 1973, Jacques Lacan uses the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice as a metaphor for the elusiveness of the unconscious as defined by Sigmund Freud. Freud perceived the unconscious as an unrealised psychic substrate that can only be detected in the interstices of language. Normally passing quietly underneath the surface of a subject's discourse, Lacan, after Freud, writes that the unconscious reveals itself negatively as an 'impediment, failure, split. In a spoken or written sentence something stumbles'.[15] While it can become perceptible through speech the unconscious is 'always ready to steal away again, thus establishing the dimension of loss'.[16] Lacan writes, '[t]o resort to a metaphor, drawn from mythology, we have, in Eurydice twice lost, the most potent image we can find of the relation between Orpheus the analyst and the unconscious.'[17] This is because the unconscious is prone to receding from the analyst's view almost as soon as it reveals its presence.

The Real accounts for instances of unmeaning that go beyond what a subject is able to formulate in thought, or articulate through language. It can be thought of as the central determining concept of Lacan's work and he insists that it can also be found throughout Freud's research being the main object of Freud's concern.[18] Like the Freudian unconscious, the Real can only be defined negatively and Lacan does

[15] Jacques Lacan, 'The Freudian Unconscious and Ours' in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* trans. Alan Sheridan. (New York; W. W. Norton, 1977), 25.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Tom Eyers argues that the Real is a defining concept of Lacan's work in *Lacan and the Concept of the Real* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1. Lacan makes the same claim for the work of Sigmund Freud in 'Tuché and Automaton' in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* 54.

this in relation to the symbolic order, a network made up of signifiers associated with language. Lacan revises Freud's writings on the resolution of the Oedipus complex to describe a child's entry into the symbolic order. This decisive moment takes place when a child's incestuous desire for his mother is prohibited by the interjection of the primary signifier, the phallus or father's word 'no'.[19] The integration of this primary signifier sets in motion a proliferation of signifying chains which generate meaning. The symbolic then structures thought defining the subject that speaks.[20] In contrast, the Real is an excess beyond the symbolic, a remainder that cannot be assimilated into its order, hence it remains unthinkable. Lacan writes [t]he subject in himself, the recalling of his biography, all this goes only to a certain limit, which is known as the real.'[21] Although it cannot be thought, the Real is a fundamental aspect of psychic life. Lacan writes, '[t]here is in effect, something radically unassimilable to the signifier. It's quite simply the subject's singular existence'.[22] Lacan writes that

[19] Jacques Lacan 'Introduction to the Names-of-the Father Seminar,' trans. Jeffrey Meinham, *October* 40 (1982): 81–95.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Jacques Lacan 'Of the Network of Signifiers' in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* 49. As I will discuss later, operating alongside these two registers is a third register called the Imaginary, which comes into being when an infant first recognises itself as a coherent whole in a mirror image. The child's identification with this image has an alienating and destabilising effect as the sense of wholeness is attributed to an external image meaning that the subject's identity continues to be propped up on external images. See Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience' in *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 76.

[22] *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses, 1955–1956*, ed. Jacques-Alain Millar, trans. Russell Grigg (London: Routledge, 1993), 179. Peter Dews also discusses Lacan's introduction of the *object a* in this context in 'The Tremor of Reflection: Slavoj Žižek's Lacan Dialectics' in *The Limits of Disenchantment: Essays on Contemporary European Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1995), 236–58. Margaret Iversen also discusses the Lacanian Real as both an indicator of a unique being, and for a work of art it can become a marker of its irreducible singularity. See Margaret Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

during psychoanalysis 'we are always called with a real that eludes us'.[23] Hence, any encounter with the real is a, 'missed encounter'.[24] Orpheus's and Eurydice's missed encounter becomes a metaphor for the psychoanalytic project which seeks to bring to light an indeterminate aspect of psychic reality which always threatens to retreat back to 'this world of shades'.[25]

The Real first arose in the history of psychoanalysis in the form of trauma and the terminology describing its appearance supposes a type of physical contact. As it evades conscious thought, the Real is experienced as something that is both traumatic and something missed. Although it cannot be thought, it can be registered unconsciously and emotively. In order to define this missed encounter with the Real, Lacan appropriates Aristotle's term *tuche* which refers to the operations of chance. Lacan adds an accent mark to his term *tuché* which evokes the word *touché* meaning touched in French.[26] An encounter with the Real may always be missed, because it cannot be thought, yet contact with the Real can still be felt and it leaves an impression.[27] This is because the Real should be thought of as a material substrate which is holed, or, 'suffers from the signifier'.[28] This suffering or holing is mutual

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[23] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* 53.

[24] Ibid., 55.

[25] Ibid., 23.

[26] *Touché* is also an expression used in fencing to acknowledge a hit by one's opponent.

[27] Sigmund Freud discusses the psychic apparatus's receptiveness to physical impressions when he compares its retention with the mystic writing pad, a child's toy which retains physical inscriptions on a waxy block. See Sigmund Freud, 'A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad', 1925 in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud,* ed. James Strachey, vol. 19, ed. (London: Hogarth Press, 1961) 227–234.

[28] Just as the real is holed by the symbolic, the symbolic is also holed by the real, hence, the lost object, or *object petit a*, is the hole from the standpoint of the symbolic order, a hole through which the real may emerge. See Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2007), 132.

and at the contact point through which the symbolic intervenes in the Real it also suffers a fissure. It is through this gap that the Real may return in the symbolic.[29] The projects of Dean, Millar, and Skaer exploit this point of contact between the Real and the symbolic and they use the analogue medium to do so.

Throughout this thesis I will use the capitalised word Real in relation to the Lacanian Real and not to delineate a broader concept of reality. However, the intrinsic relationship that lens-based mediums have with the concept of reality is a larger question raised by Jean Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1981.[30] Here, Baudrillard argues that we are surrounded by images that simulate rather than represent reality as the concept of 'the real is no longer possible'.[31] Baudrillard argues that reality is determined by the signs and symbols we assign to it in order to give it meaning, hence there has been a transition from a concrete notion of reality to a simulated version of reality purely constituted by these signs and symbols. This perceptual shift involves a transition in the way we understand and relate to images as we move from 'signs that dissimulate something to signs that dissimulate that there is nothing'.[32] Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum is even more relevant in a post digital age as signs and symbols become increasingly virtual and further detached from material or physical reality. For these reasons this thesis does not concern itself with the already tenuous relationship photographic images have with reality. However, it does further the distinction Margaret Iversen has made between photographic images that are aligned with simulacra and other images, often

[29] Ibid.

[30] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1997).

[31] Ibid, 19.

[32] Ibid, 6.

traumatic in nature, that seem to reach beyond the simulacra by becoming the privileged site of the return of the Lacanian Real.[33] The image aligned with the simulacra implies a type of self, which is paper thin, lifeless or inauthentic. The main argument of this thesis makes the obverse claim celebrating the ability of the analogue image to affectively call into being something essential that resides in the subject beyond the acquisition of language and beyond the subject's captivation by imaginary images and simulations.

Jeremy Millar's restaging of Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*, 1924–9 revives Warburg's concern with uncovering what I argue was the Lacanian Real operating below the surface of artworks. Unable to articulate in words what he viewed as a timeless sense of suffering and anxiety which kept resurfacing through the medium of art, Warburg deferred to the body tracing the Real's repetitions and recurrences back throughout art history by archiving photographic reproductions of artworks depicting convulsed and contorted bodily gestures indicative of undisclosed psychic disturbances. Inseparable from his biography and personal experience of psychosis, Warburg's method of gathering together muted signifiers, which point beyond language to the Real, relied on the medium of analogue photography for the purpose of detecting and exposing a form of elusive subjective experience operating below the level of the symbolic order.

As Lacan's term *tuché* implies, the Real always returns as if by chance. In *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* Tacita Dean highlights the intrinsic relationship between the analogue medium and chance and I claim that this specificity of the medium makes it receptive to the Real. Although less concerned with the traumatic than the projects of Millar and Skaer, Dean's film still leads us

[33] See Margaret Iversen 'Conclusion: After *Camera'* in *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007) 131–151.

into the realm of this register as it opens onto a silent space beyond the symbolic order. In *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* Dean not only harnesses chance, but combines it with her documentation of the still remaining traces of Broodthaers's cinema; inscriptions stencilled on the walls which read 'fig 1, 2…' alongside the word 'silence'. These traces point beyond language as Broodthaers used his 'figs' as labels employed to destabilise meaning. Denoting all manner of objects including blank spaces, as they do in Dean's film, these figures essentially signify nothing.[34] Lacan writes that the empty signifier is a sign of 'subjectivity as present in the real'.[35] This mode of Real subjectivity asks fundamental questions concerning the nature of being.

The 'question of death and the question of birth are as it happens the two ultimate questions that have precisely no solution in the signifier'.[36] Empty signification is used most explicitly in this context in Lucy Skaer's *Leonora*. Through the medium of 16 mm film in which Skaer captures Carrington, *Leonora* brings us into close contact with human mortality, whilst simultaneously exposing the emptiness of its meaning as death remains physically present, but only as an absence, an unthinkable impossibility. *Leonora* demonstrates the fall from meaning that death incites, perfectly encapsulating what Roland Barthes has termed 'flat Death', which refers to the uncanny way that photographs of the deceased make us blankly and silently confront our own mortality.[37] Despite the fact that each of these

[34] Lacan writes that, 'the definition of the signifier, which is that it signifies nothing and is therefore always capable of yielding various meanings' testifies to the emptiness and ambiguity of these types of signs. See 'The Signifier as Such Signifies Nothing' in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis,* 190.

[35] Ibid., 186.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), 92.

three artworks gesture towards instances of unmeaning they are not meaningless. Even in the absence of language to frame the experiences they promote these works powerfully communicate something profound. Furthermore, these projects are not overtly concerned with trauma despite the unsettling nature of the subject matter, which revolves around mental illness and death. This is because, as this thesis will demonstrate, the artwork itself performs a restorative or reconciliatory function diffusing the trauma of the Real by allowing it to be thought in the symbolic.[38]

In *Creation Ex nihilo*, 1959–60, Lacan demonstrates how this operation works by recounting the case of a depressed young woman who complained that she had 'an empty space inside of her, a space she could never fill'.[39] This patient had suffered from fits of depression in the past. However, the worsening of this melancholic malady was attributed to the sale of one of her brother-in-law's paintings, which had left an empty space on the wall of her home. This gap in physical space crystallised her perception of an internal void, which Lacan relates to the lost maternal object, the object of desire. The empty space perceived is attributed to the traumatic holing caused in the Real by the interjection of the signifier, and that hole in the symbolic through which the Real returns. Although not an artist herself, the woman recovers from these attacks of melancholic depression by deciding to,

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[38] The Real has already been aligned with modern and contemporary art, and more importantly with techniques of mechanical reproduction, by Rosalind Krauss in *The Optical Unconscious* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1993), and by Hal Foster in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 1996). However, this thesis provides an original contribution because in these earlier accounts an emphasis on the trauma of the Real remains paramount.

[39] This is a case study recounted by Melanie Klein in her essay 'Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse,' 1929, referenced by Jacques Lacan in 'On Creation Ex nihilo' in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–60*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), 116.

‘“daub a little” on the wall … out of this there emerges a work of art’.[40] The resulting artwork fills the hole both externally and internally and ‘what is found is sought, but sought in the paths of the signifier.’[41]

In order to further explain the way in which a signifier may operate in the Real, Lacan visualises this empty signifier in the form of a vase, a primary art form that, like the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, can be traced back to ancient Greece.[42] He writes of the vase, ‘the first of such signifiers fashioned by human hand, it is in its signifying essence a signifier of nothing other than of signifying as such or, in other words, of no particular signified’. [43] Lacan adds that the vase is ‘an object made to represent the existence of the emptiness at the centre of the real that is called the Thing, this emptiness as represented in the representation presents itself as a nihl, as nothing. And that is why the potter … creates the vase with his hand around this emptiness’.[44] Lacan’s image of the potter’s hands resounds with one of the most

[40] Ibid.,116–117.

[41] To reiterate, Lacan’s lost object, or *object petit a* is the hole from the standpoint of the symbolic order. For an in-depth discussion on this mutual suffering of the two registers see Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness,*11.

[42] Lacan ‘On Creation Ex nihilo’, 115–127.

[43] Ibid., 120–121.

[44] The ‘Thing’ to which Lacan refers is the ‘Freudian Thing’ which corresponds to Lacan’s *object petit a*, again, it is the hole form the standpoint of the symbolic through which the Real emerges (ibid., 121). Lacan’s analogy is reminiscent of Pliny the elder’s account of the origin of drawing, which, coincidentally, can be traced back to the daughter of a potter named Butades, of Sicyon. She was deeply in love with a young man who was about to depart on a long journey. Her imminent loss prompted her to trace the outline of his face as it was thrown onto the wall by a lamp. This story comes to bear on the analogue image which attests both to making an image from light, and to making physical contact with someone present at a particular point in time, from which they are now absent. Furthermore, according to the story, the girl’s father tries to ease his daughter’s distress by filling in the outline, the empty space left by the departed lover, by pressing clay into the void and making a positive relief. This story resonates with Lacan’s analogy of the potter, and the woman who paints on the wall, as all these stories tell of the creation of an object which is physically present, but masks an absence. Michael Newman discusses this story in relation to drawing in ‘The Marks, Traces and Gestures of Drawing’ in *The Space of Drawing, Gesture and Act*, ed. Catherine de Zegher (London and New York: Tate Publishing and the Drawing Centre New York, 2003), 99–108. Tacita Dean also eschews the digital world because of this

remarkable shots of Lucy Skaer's film of Leonora Carrington. This shot lingers on the late surrealist's aged hands held strangely around nothing (Figure 3.21). Carrington's hands, which encase a void, encapsulate the empty, yet loaded gestures performed in all three contemporary British artworks as each presents us with a physical object that contains or masks an absence. These empty hands also point towards the medium in which they are captured by aligning the indexical nature of analogue film with both touch and loss. The analogue image testifies to making physical contact with someone present at a particular point in time, from which they are now absent. Viewing such an image then puts one into contact with absence and this not only comes to signify an external loss, it also resonates with the internal absence at the centre of subjectivity, the Real.

The language of contact and loss offered by the analogue at the time of its obsolescence may seem contradictory to the restorative or reconciliatory function that I argue art performs by channelling the Real through the symbolic. However, by diffusing the trauma of the real by lending it symbolic expression, Millar, Dean and Skaer allow the viewer to transcend the symbolic by becoming aware of the Real. These three artworks each open onto a space of unmeaning providing a thought object for the Real in the symbolic. Attending to the Real calls forth a self beyond the symbolic, which is also the restoration and reconciliation of a subject with their own singular existence. This promotes both a deeper level of self-awareness and the potential for more affective and affirmative experiences as generated through contact with these poignant art objects. Although art in general may similarly arouse the register of the Real in the space of the symbolic, I argue that the analogue medium

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loss of physical contact. She writes that the digital 'is too far from drawing, where photography and film have their roots'.[44] *Tacita Dean: Analogue: Drawings 1991–2006* (Basel: Schaulager, 2006), 8.

has maintained the closest proximity with this elusive register because of its indexicality.

THE REAL INDEX

This thesis claims that the mediums of analogue film and photography have maintained close proximity to the Lacanian Real from the moment of their inception, to the time of their obsolescence because of their indexicality. In *Rhetoric of the Image*, 1964, Roland Barthes demonstrates that there is a linguistic message present in every image, however, a photograph's indexicality conveys a particular type of message that differentiates it from all other types of images.[45] The meaning of a painting or drawing relies upon specific readable codes and rules, such as the use of perspective. The photograph is different, being 'a message without a code' as its maker does not intervene, or translate the reproduced object in the same way as an artist composing a painting, or drawing does.[46] Barthes writes that 'only the photograph is able to transmit the (literal) information without forming it by discontinuous signs and rules of transformation'.[47] The photograph then has an implied relationship with reality and is perceived as a true recording. This mode of presenting is also accompanied by an inherent time-lapse meaning that the linguistic message that accompanies the photograph is the reality of 'having-been-there'.[48] The indexicality of the analogue image makes it a particular type of signifier that communicates both presence and loss – what was there is there no longer. This

[45] Roland Barthes 'Rhetoric of the Image' in *Image, Music, Text,* trans Stephen Heath (London: Flamingo, 1977) 38.

[46] Ibid, 43.

[47] Ibid,

[48] Ibid, 44.

brings it into proximity with death adding overtones of uncertainty. This loss of meaning ruptures the symbolic order and gives way to the Real.

This argument builds upon theoretical writings on the index because much of this discourse specifically aligns the medium of photography both with the unconscious, and with ideas concerning a unique subjectivity or subjective truth. Charles Sanders Peirce defines the index as a sign that refers to the object it denotes by being physically affected by that object in the manner of a handprint, bullet hole or medical symptom. Peirce writes that the index testifies to a 'connection both with the individual object, on the one hand, and with the senses or memory of the person for whom it serves as a sign on the other hand'.[49] He adds, 'anything that startles us is an index … a tremendous thunderbolt indicates that *something* considerable happened, though we may not know precisely what the event was. But it may be expected to connect itself with some other experience'.[50] This idea suggests that at some level the index addresses or wakes an unconscious register calling into being something operating below the surface of conscious thought. The index exploits a point of contact between the registers of the Real and the symbolic by permitting an intrusion of the Real into symbolic space.

This merging of registers is alluded to by Peirce who uses the metaphor of a doorway to describe the startling nature of the index as 'a rap on the door'.[51] In his seminar on the *tuché,* Lacan also uses the example of the noise of someone knocking on the door to demonstrate the way in which external reality may interject into the register of the Real during dreaming. He writes:

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[49] Charles Sanders Peirce, 'Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs' in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justin Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955) 107.

[50] Ibid.,108–9.

[51] Ibid …108.

> The other day I was awoken from a short nap by knocking at my door just before I actually awoke. With this impatient knocking I had already formed a dream, a dream that manifested to me something other than this knocking. And when I awake, it is in so far as I constitute my entire representation around this knocking–this perception– that I am aware of it. I know that I am there … When the knocking occurs, not in my perception, but in my consciousness, it is because my consciousness reconstitutes itself around this representation–that I know I am waking up, that I am *knocked up.*[52]

This example of being knocked awake describes the fleeting coexistence between the Real and the symbolic order. In Lacan's example the knocking calls the subject out of the Real and into the symbolic. In the case of the photographic index, which is perceived in waking life, this operation is reversed as the index invites consciousness to attend to the Real. My alignment of the index with the Real has been alluded to numerous times in photographic discourse dating from the early to late twentieth century. Texts that pre-date Lacan's writings on the Real frame this connection through a Freudian lens and the more expansive concept of the Freudian unconscious and this correspondence, between photography and the unconscious, was first suggested by Freud himself when he compared the workings of the unconscious with the photographic process in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1899. Freud writes that as the dream is staged elsewhere than in the waking ideation, which is the consciousness of the subject, he 'accepts the invitation to think of the instrument which serves the psychic activities much as we think of a compound microscope, a photographic camera'.[53] This alignment between photography and the unconscious

[52] Lacan 'Tuche and Automaton', 56.

[53] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* trans. A. A. Brill (London: Wordsworth Editions, 1997), 377.

enters into photographic theory thirty two years later in Walter Benjamin's essay *Little History of Photography*, 1931. He writes:

> [T]he most precise technology can give its products a magical value, such as a painted picture can never again have for us. No matter how artful the photographer, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the here and now, with which reality has (so to speak) seared the character of the image, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the thusness of that long forgotten moment the future nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it. For it is another nature which speaks to the camera rather than to the eye: "other" above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious.[54]

In *The Ontology of the Photographic Image*, 1945, André Bazin later affirms the connection between photography and the unconscious. He focuses on the indexical specificity of the medium, which made the invention of photography the most 'important event in the history of the plastic arts' as ' t]he photograph as such and the object itself share a common being, after the fashion of a fingerprint'.[55] For Bazin, the importance of the index resides in its ability to open onto an unconscious register as he aligns the medium of photography with the surrealist movement, which is also an alignment with Freudian psychoanalysis. He writes, 'photography ranks high in

[54] Walter Benjamin 'Little History of Photography' 1931 in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Vol 2*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Massachusetts and London, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 510. Elsewhere Benjamin also writes that the photographic medium introduces 'us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses'. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations,* trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1968), 236–7.

[55] Andre Bazin 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', trans. Hugh Gray. *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (Summer, 1960): 8–9.

the order of surrealist creativity because it produces an image that is a reality of nature, namely, a hallucination that is also a fact'.[56]

Surrealism features strongly in this thesis and my interpretation of the legacy of this movement is contextualised by Maurice Blanchot's description of it as 'a powerful negative moment' in the history of art.[57] As Blanchot is primarily focused on surrealism as a literary movement, he is largely absent from the substantial art historical discourse on the subject.[58] In perceptive observations that lend themselves to the visual, Blanchot argues that for the first time in history surrealism made 'literature become the exposure of this emptiness inside' by making 'it open completely to its nothingness'.[59] This nothingness is the same absence at the centre of subjectivity that Lacan calls the Real. Blanchot refers to the surrealist method of automatic writing which attempts to capture or document something intrinsic about the subject that isn't censored, but realised in a direct form.[60] He writes that during automatic writing language becomes subject to unconscious emotions, or perceptions

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Maurice Blanchot 'Literature and the Right to Death' in *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (USA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 301.

[58] Much recent and contemporary art revives the darker side of a surrealist legacy focusing, like Blanchot, on the subject of death. The writings of Blanchot's close friend and confident Georges Bataille also became newly relevant from the late 80s to the early 2000s becoming aligned with the darker side of Surrealism where death is more prominent. See Dawn Ades, and Simon Baker, eds. *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents* (London and Massachusetts: The Hayward Gallery and the MIT Press, 2005). Rosalind Krauss, 'Corpus Delicti' in *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism* (Abbeville Press, 1985) 57-100. Hal Foster also explores death in art as a muted, or repressed consequence of surrealism in *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 1993).

[59] Maurice Blanchot 'Literature and the Right to Death', 301. Blanchot's ideas concerning this absence or sense of nothingness become aligned, as I demonstrate in chapter three, with Georges Bataille's concept of the *formless*. See Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings,* ed. Alan Stoekl (University of Minnesota Press, 1985) 31. The *formless* is utilised in the context of contemporary art by Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss in *Formless: A Users Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1999).

[60] Maurice Blanchot 'Reflections on Surrealism' in *The Work of Fir*e, 87.

allowing one to express and perceive 'the pure feeling of what I feel'.[61] Furthermore, he conceives of language used in this manner as something like indexical writing as 'I slide into the word, it keeps my imprint, and is my imprinted reality'.[62] This thesis transfers Blanhot's conception of the indexical nature of surrealist automatic writing, to the indexical specificity of the analogue medium which captures or reflects something uncensored and essential about a subject's singular existence. The index invites the one who comes into contact with it to attend to the Real as through its language of loss it gives rise to a perception of nothingness at the centre of subjectivity.

In *Camera Lucida,* 1980, Roland Barthes aligns Bazin's writings on the index with Maurice Blanchot's insistence on an emptiness, or sense of absence at the centre of a subject's being that strives for form. He directly quotes Blanchot in order to describe the way a photograph may confuse outside and inside carrying the imprint of something intrinsic, yet inexpressible about a subject.

> The essence of the image is to be altogether outside, without intimacy, and yet more inaccessible and mysterious than the thought of the innermost being; without signification, yet summoning up the depth of any possible meaning; unravelled yet manifest, having that absence-as-presence which constitutes the lure and the fascination of the sirens (Blanchot).[63]

Barthes's mournful memoir on photography was written soon after the death of his mother, and as a result it is primarily concerned with the relationship between photography and death. Barthes also indirectly aligns photography with the Lacanian

[61] Ibid., 89.

[62] Ibid., 88.

[63] Maurice Blanchot ref by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida,* 106.

Real–a subject's singular existence– as through her photograph he seeks to uncover something invisible and indefinable about his late mother, 'the impossible science of the unique being'.[64] What he hopes to find is 'a being; and not a being, but a quality (a soul): not the indispensable but the irreplaceable'.[65] After scanning numerous disappointing photographs which do not capture his mother's likeness he suddenly chances upon an old photograph of her as a young girl which does. The photograph becomes a tangible remnant of his deceased mother, however, Barthes quickly realises that like Eurydice twice-dead, 'she is going to die' he adds, 'I shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, over a catastrophe which has already occurred'.[66] Barthes painful perception of his mother's second death also foretells his own future death and this realisation opens onto a void, a sense of meaninglessness or nothingness indicative of subjectivity now present in the Real. Barthes uses the term *punctum* to describe the touching way that photography may bring about this instance of unmeaning. He writes 'for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole– and also a cast of the die. A photograph's punctum is that *accident* [my emphasis] which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)'.[67] Margaret Iversen argues that the *punctum* draws directly from Lacan's concept of the *tuché*, a missed encounter with the Real.[68] The *tuché* also has an 'apparently accidental origin' and is constitutive of a wounding that causes, or represents a hole, being 'the *one* of the

[64] Ibid., 75.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Barthes, 96. Barthes also mentions Greek mythology in *Camera Lucida* and he refers directly to Orpheus in a different context (ibid., 47).

[67] Ibid., 27.

[68] See Margaret Iversen, 'What Is a Photograph?' in *Photography Degree Zero*, ed. Geoffrey Batchen (MIT Press, 2011), 57–75. Hal Foster also remarks upon this connection in a discussion of the work of Andy Warhol in *The Return of the Real*, 132. As Foster points out, Lacan refers to the return of the Real as something *troumatic*, trou meaning hole, (ibid.,136).

split, of the stroke, of the rupture.[69] Lacan adds, '[t]here something other demands to be realized–which appears as intentional, of course, but of a strange temporality. What occurs, what is *produced,* in this gap is presented as the *discovery* ... This discovery is, at the same time a solution … it has that indefinable something that touches us'.[70]Although the Real cannot be fully grasped or thought through in linguistic terms, it can still enter into conscious perception. As outlined above in this brief summary of key texts in the canon of photographic discourse, from Benjamin, Bazin and Barthes, the Real may enter symbolic consciousness through the medium of analogue photography, and more specifically through the index's language of contact and loss.[71]

This trajectory of photographic discourse on the index calls for an updating of Rosalind Krauss's seminal essay, 'Notes on the Index', 1977.[72] In this essay Krauss foregrounds the privileged relationship that indexical photography maintains with reality by referencing Bazin's assertion that 'the photographic image is the object itself'.[73] It is this aspect of the indexical image that differentiates it from other types of images and Krauss argues that this makes the photographic medium 'sub –

[69] See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* 54–5.

[70] Ibid., 25.

[71] This constellation of Benjamin, Bazin, Barthes and Lacan, and the relationship between photography and the Real, are subjects that have also received substantial critical attention in recent years. The real resurfaced, via the eye and the gaze, in artistic discourse at the end of the twentieth century, most notably in seminal texts of the 1990s such as Rosalind Krauss's *The Optical Unconscious*, 1993 and Hal Foster's, *The Return of the Real,* 1996. Both of these texts which survey the century, Krauss from the 1920s to the 1960s, and Foster from the 1960s to the 1990s, allude to an innate connection between the Real, or the workings of the unconscious more generally, and mechanically reproduced imagery. This thesis draws upon this already existing discourse in order to make such claims more explicit as the privileged connection analogue mediums maintain with the real becomes more apparent in the 21st century as these mediums become marginalized due to digital ascendency.

[72] Rosalind Krauss, 'Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America,' *October* 3 (Spring 1977): 66–81.

[73] Bazin referenced by Krauss, ibid, 75.

or pre-symbolic, ceding the language of art back to the imposition of things'.[74] Krauss then challenges the relationship between the indexical sign and these discourses on realism by assigning the sub – or pre-symbolic nature of the photographic image with Lacan's imaginary register. She writes:

> If the Symbolic finds its way into pictorial art through the human consciousness operating behind the forms of representation, forming a connection between objects and their meaning, this is not the case for photography. Its power is as an index and it's meaning resides in those modes of identification, which are associated with the Imaginary.[75]

Lacan's imaginary register comes into being during the formative 'mirror-stage', which refers to the infant's precarious perception of its self as seen in a mirror as a coherent whole. This gestalt is illusory, not only because it is an external image, but also because this image does not correspond to the way the self is experienced.[76] Film theory of the 1970s misrecognised the Lacanian *gaze* as something belonging to the mirror-stage linking the illusory nature of film to this psychic process by which subject's enter into ideology and the constraints of the social order.[77] Krauss's misalignment of the index with the imaginary is the product of this general

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid..

[76] See Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience' in *Ecrits*, 502–509.

[77] The first theoretical impetus in this direction came from French film theorists Christian Metz, Jean- Louis Baudry and from British theorists associated with the journal *Screen* including Laura Mulvey, Peter Wollen, Colin McCabe and Stephen Heath. See Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* (Albany: New York Press, 2007), 1–2.

misreading of Lacan's triad of registers in film theory.[78] Investigating the way that the index seems to 'short-circuit or disallow' symbolic intervention, Krauss assigned this power of moving beyond the symbolic to the index's connection with the imaginary and a pre-linguistic conception of a coherent self, which is perceived firstly as an image, but one which is external and physically distant.[79] Krauss aligns the index with a linguistic shifter, a word that may be '"filled with signification" only because it is "empty"'.[80] She then uses various examples of 70s conceptual art to show how empty indexical signs are filled with particular presences.[81] The filling of the indexical sign with a reflected imaginary subject is not the empty sign itself, but rather, something added afterwards. The Lacanian *gaze* is not a subjective look, but rather, refers to something in the object. It is the gap within the subject's seemingly omnipotent look, this gap or absence is the perception of the Lacanian Real.[82] This would confirm that the index is not intrinsically connected to the imaginary, but aligned with the Real because in itself it only signifies an absence, or a gap. Krauss herself also infers this, even though she omits the Real from her opposition of symbolic and imaginary, she writes, '[i]t is the meaningless meaning that is insinuated through the terms of the index.'[83] As each chapter of this thesis will subsequently demonstrate, the index, as the presence of an absence, signifies through its unfilled emptiness the nothingness at the centre of subjectivity. This shifts emphasis away from Krauss's alignment of the index with the illusory, when

[78] Ibid.

[79] Krauss, 69–75.

[80] Ibid., 70.

[81] Ibid., 77.

[82] McGowan, 12.

[83] Krauss., 78.

connected to the imaginary, to the index as something revelatory as it is truly aligned with the Real.

The indexical properties of the analogue currently stand in sharp contrast to the virtuality of the digital. The specificities that are most apparent at this moment of technological transition are the medium's heightened emphasis on contact and loss. The digital's denigration of the sense of touch as we move more frequently from physical images to virtual ones becomes highly problematic given that 'touch is the hungriest sense of postmodernity'.[84] This problematic loss of tactile contact with the external world, exacerbated by digital reproduction, is also replicated internally as 'touch is the one sense that can provide us with a sensation of our mental process.'[85] This emphasis on touch and physical contact comes to bear on the analogue's propensity for signifying loss as the medium's materiality now becomes aligned with human frailty and mortality. Michael Newman has written of this connection as he maintains that digital technologies do not replicate 'the physical sense of the transcription of an irreversible, finite temporality into a medium that is itself finite and subject to degradation and loss (the loss of loss)'.[86] Tacita Dean often focuses on ageing or elderly art historical figures, as does Lucy Skaer in *Leonora,* and the obsolescence of the analogue is often framed by this relationship between material degradation and bodily frailty.[87] While drawing on such discourse, this thesis

[84] Constance Classen, *The Book of Touch* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 1–2.

[85] Ibid., 5.

[86] Michael Newman, 'Medium and Event in the work of Tacita Dean' in *Tacita Dean* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 2001), 24. Elsewhere, and in the context of Dean's use of Greek tragedy as subject matter, Newman draws out the melancholic stakes of the analogue as a medium of finite time writing, '[t]ragedy is the experience of finitude, of being subject to time.' 'Drawing Time: Tacita Dean's Narratives of Inscription,' *Enclave Review* 7 (Spring 2013): 6.

[87] Michael Newman discusses this relationship in the essays above and also in his essay 'Salvage' in *Tacita Dean*. (Paris Musees de la Ville de Paris and Gottingen:

proposes an original trajectory as it addresses the psychological stakes of this perception of human mortality in order to recover its reconciliatory emotive affects. The analogue images in this thesis touch on a loss of meaning approaching the limit of the visual by bearing witness to a gap.[88] Although the affective charge of this work seems to escape conscious thought it also gives rise to a surprisingly poignant encounter that leads in a direct way, beyond language, to the Real. Signifying absence and loss the indexical image calls forth an unthought, yet fundamental aspect of subjectivity as through loss something essential is returned.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

This thesis identifies a new art historical trend in contemporary British art by focusing on three exemplary artworks that have not received the critical attention worthy of them. Jeremy Millar's *The Man Who Looked Back* was commissioned for artist Simon Starling's curatorial project, *Never the Same River, (Possible Futures, Probable Pasts)*, 2010–2011, which explored a still relevant sense of temporal instability being expressed in contemporary art globally.[89] *The Man Who Looked Back* has not been exhibited anywhere else, nor has it received any sustained critical attention despite its relevance to current debates on artists' archives and the

Steidl, 2003). Other essays on this subject include Ed Krčma 'Tacita Dean and Still Life' *Art History* 37, no. 5 (November 2014): 960–977. George Baker's, 'Lateness and Longing.' In *50 Moons of Saturn; T2 Toronto Triennial,* ed. Daniel Birnbaum, 47–98 (Italy: Skira Editoire, 2008). Tamara Trodd also discussed Dean's use of the analogue in conjunction with capturing ageing figures in 'Fathers and Feminism,' (lecture Henry Moore Institute, 7th September, 2011).This relationship between aged bodies and aged mediums has also been the subject of other commentaries, on contemporary art more broadly, notably, by Erika Balsom who writes that, '[t]he contemporary insistence on using 16 mm film in the gallery in tandem with explorations of the contingent, the ephemeral, or the disappearing, is striking'. Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 68.

[88] Newman, 'Drawing Time', 6.

[89] See Simon Starling, 'Never the Same River: Possible Futures, Probable Pasts,' Camden Arts Centre/ December 2010– February 2011, *Camden Arts Centre,* File note #56, 2010.

obsolescence of analogue mediums. This is an oversight that this thesis rectifies as Millar's project expands such debates by registering and responding to the underexplored, destabilising effects of new technology on the workings of memory and the psychic apparatus.[90] Tacita Dean is an artist who has received substantial critical attention; however, her film *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* has received little more than a mention in such discourse.[91] Furthermore, as also noted by Margret Iversen, the intrinsic link between analogue mediums and chance that Dean continually highlights is rarely made explicit in the discourse that surrounds her work.[92] *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* dramatises this fundamental connection, and it also uncovers a relationship between Broodthaers's film and chance that has never been established before in any of the commentaries on Broodthaers *Section Cinéma.*[93] This thesis insists on the critical importance of *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers),* which is the first of many subsequent acts of art historical homage in

[90] For the only published articles or reviews of this work see Kirstie North, 'Review of Simon Starling's *Never the Same River: Possible Futures, Probable Pasts,*' *Enclave Review* 4 (Autumn 2011) and Kirstie North 'The Man Who Looked Back: Jeremy Millar and Aby Warburg,' *Artefact: Journal of the Irish Association of Art Historians* 6 (2006).

[91] The most substantial account of this film is by Rita Kerstig, 'Visible Vanishing' in *Tacita Dean*: *Seven Books* (Paris: Musees de la Ville de Paris and Gottingen: Steidl, 2003). Michael Newman also references this work in his essay 'Salvage' which explores a contemporary penchant for the past which is not prompted by a desire to relive or return to the past, but enacted in order to mine the past for relevant discourses that may be brought back to bear on the present moment. See 'Salvage' unpaginated.

[92] Margaret Iversen writes, 'For all the excellent secondary literature on her work, this connection has not been adequately addressed'. 'Analogue: On Zoe Leonard and Tacita Dean.' *Critical Inquiry* 38 (Summer 2012), 813. Iversen also connects Dean's continued use of analogue mediums in a digital age with a kind of, 'attentive *exposure* to things in the world marked by chance, age or accident' (ibid., 799).

[93] Benjamin H.D. Buchloh misreads Broodthaers emphasis on chance, expressed via the use of slapstick comedy, as a, 'gesture of facetious reverence for the primitive beginnings of industrial film' See Benjamin H.D Buchloh 'Marcel Broodthaers's *Section Cinéma* ' in *Marcel Broodthaers: Section Cinéma, 1972* (New York: Marian Goodman Gallery, 2010), 12. As I argue in chapter two, Broodthaers is not 'mocking' the idiot, but rather, harnessing chance and contingency as an artistic strategy.

Dean's film marking a turning point in her oeuvre.[94] Lucy Skaer's installation *Leonora* has been the subject of a number of reviews.[95] However, the work has not received any sustained critical attention, which again is something this thesis rectifies. In fact, the work of Lucy Skaer in general has not received the scholarly attention it deserves, apart from a collection of essays published in a catalogue of her work in 2008.[96] This thesis presents Skaer's previously unpublished commentaries on *Leonora* obtained during interviews with the artist on this challenging artwork. This is the first substantial critical study of *Leonora* and in its entirety this thesis constitutes the first study of these three interlinked artworks, which attest to a new movement in contemporary British art that engages the past through art historical returns.

Chapter one introduces Jeremy Millar's archival and art historical method of artistic practice as a symptom of psychic agitation. Millar's *The Man Who Looked Back* brings Aby Warburg's theory of the *pathosformel* into the present by mapping the manifestations and traces of a muted psychological disturbance operating below the surface of photographic reproductions of artworks. The convulsive bodily gestures archived by Millar give a visual, yet unnameable account of a troubled subjectivity which is theoretically framed throughout this thesis by Lacan's elusive register of the Real. The palpable sense of excess nervous energy, given visual form in *The Man who Looked Back*, also motivates the art historical turn back performed by Tacita Dean and Lucy Skaer. This initial chapter will foreground the

[94] Dean did make an earlier sound work about Robert Smithson, *Trying to Find the Spiral Jetty,* 1997, however, since *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers),* 2002, these art historical acts of homage have become more consistent.

[95] See James Clegg, 'Review: Lucy Skaer, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, 17 May – 9 July ', Art *Monthly* (July- August 2008): 318–9, and Valerie Knoll, 'Review: Lucy Skaer/ Anita Di Bianco' *Artforum,* XLNV, no. 6 (February 2007): vi

[96] See *Lucy Skaer* (Edinburgh: The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2008).

contemporary stakes of artistic archiving as a symptom of psychic disturbance caused by a problematic relationship with digital technology, first theorised by Hal Foster in 2004.[97] I argue that the rise in archival art practice is increasingly accompanied by a new engagement with art historical memory that acts to resist the destabilising effects of technological advancements. Millar's recalling of art historical memory is not only indicative of a reticence towards the digital; it also signals the reappearance of a problem concerning memory and its representations. Chapter one explores the relationship of new technology to memory through the medium of photography and photographic discourse. Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* is remembered by Millar because this earlier archive was itself contextualised by the advent of new technologies of mechanical reproduction that caused a memory crisis, now being replayed.[98] Millar's art historical awareness, combined with his use of an almost obsolete medium, looks to the past in order to dramatise compelling problems of the present. Analogue photography is privileged by Millar because it promotes physical contact, the objecthood of artworks, and a tangible technological trajectory which provides stability and anchorage, defending against the increased anxiety and agitation experienced by artists during this problematic moment of technological transition.

As well as causing a severance between the physical presence of an artwork and its mnemonic function, the post-medium implications of digital technology have unanchored artworks from the lineage of tradition and art historical memory secreted

[97] Hal Foster. 'An Archival Impulse,' *October* 110 (2004): 3-22.

[98] This was the subject of Siegfried Kracauer's seminal essay 'Photography' (1927) *Critical Inquiry* 19 (1993): 421–436.

within artists' mediums.[99] Chapter two focuses on the status of film as a medium by focusing on the specificities prevalent at its inception that are now more apparent through its obsolescence. Through recourse to Marcel Broodthaers and his interest in silent film and slapstick comedy, Tacita Dean's *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* reveals chance to be the enduring specificity of the analogue that most forcefully differentiates it from the digital. This chapter presents art historical memory as something secreted within the medium of film as points of coincidence between Dean's and Broodthaers's practices are forged through the medium's intrinsic receptiveness to chance. Of the three British artists grouped together in this thesis, Tacita Dean is the most vociferously critical of the substitution of digital for analogue technology. Chapter two takes seriously her claim that in losing the analogue we also 'lose something of our humanity's heart'.[100] Dean's openness to chance engages a surrealist legacy as she confirms André Breton's theory of 'objective chance' and the idea that material reality can become charged with psychic energy.[101] *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* demonstrates that chance gives way to this affective charge as it plays a revelatory, though no longer revolutionary, role in the processes of producing and viewing analogue film. Through its receptivity to chance, film can open onto a silent space that is surprisingly poignant because it offers us a non-traumatic inflection of the Lacanian Real as a subjective truth. This promise of the medium stands in opposition to a

[99] This is the subject of Rosalind Krauss's seminal text on Marcel Broodthaers *A Voyage on the North Sea; Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames & Hudson), 1999.

[100] Tacita Dean, *Tacita Dean: Film* (London: Tate Publishing, 2011) 24.

[101] Dean concurs with Breton's notion of objective chance in a quote in her curatorial project *An Aside* (London: Hayward Gallery, 2005), 4–5.

digital distancing of consciousness from fundamental, yet non-symbolic, aspects of subjectivity.

Chapter three ends the thesis on the terminal subject of death as Lucy Skaer highlights the close proximity that both analogue film and photography have always maintained with death as explored by seminal theoretical texts on the subject, notably by Roland Barthes.[102] The analogue's language of contact and loss is heightened through its obsolescence as the material degradation of film becomes even more closely aligned with human frailty. This is powerfully visualised in Skaer's haunting film of the late artist Leonora Carrington in *Leonora*. Chapter three furthers this discourse by moving beyond the physical body in order to examine the emotional affects and psychological implications of the medium's newly acquired proximity to death which is conceived of here as an instance of unmeaning that is deeply troubling. This chapter rearticulates Roland Barthes term 'flat Death' to articulate a becoming conscious of death that provokes a flat, or blank response leaving us with 'nothing to say'.[103] This chapter frames this instance of unmeaning in the context of an underexplored trajectory of surrealist thought as expressed by Georges Bataille who writes '[d]eath is a disappearance. It's a suppression so perfect that at the pinnacle utter silence is its truth. Words can't describe it'.[104] My reinterpretation of this surrealist legacy is aided by the writings of Maurice Blanchot who made the interrelationship of death and the image the subject of his life's

[102] See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* and Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second; Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006).

[103] See Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 93.

[104] Georges Bataille, *Georges Bataille: Essential Writings*, ed. Michael Richardson (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 208.

work.[105] This chapter casts new light on the writings of Blanchot who rarely features in the substantial art historical discourse on surrealism, despite the fact that his writings on death can be directly related to a surrealist trajectory. To become conscious of the presence of death, which is normally repressed, is also to become conscious of the Real. Lacan conceives of the emergence of the Real as a rupture that 'makes absence emerge' he adds 'just as the cry does not stand out against a background of silence, but on the contrary makes the silence emerge as silence'.[106] Skaer's *Leonora* celebrates the ability of visual art to articulate the unnameable.

Although most explicit in the final chapter, Jeremy Millar, Tacita Dean and Lucy Skaer all deal with the subject of death as both a physical loss and a loss of meaning. Death was also a predominant theme of British art in the 1990s.[107] Whilst distancing itself from the art of its predecessors, this new wave of British art acknowledges the legacy of the yBa's (young British artists) of the Saatchi generation by converging on the same subject matter. Rather than confronting us with literal representations of death in the form of photographs of dead bodies and the placement of corpses of rotting animals in the space of the gallery, these new British artists explore the intellectual and conceptual difficulties that this non-

[105] Death is the subject of many of Blanchot's theoretical books, as well as his novels such as *L'Arrêt de mort=Death Sentence,* trans. Lydia Davis (Barrytown: Station Hill, 2000) and *The Instant of my Death*, eds. Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellberry, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. (California: Stanford University Press, 2000).

[106] Jacques Lacan 'The Freudian Unconscious and Ours,' 26.

[107] There are numerous examples of the theme of death in yBa work as introduced at the outset of the movement by Matt Collishaw's *Bullet Hole*, 1988. Death also remains an on-going theme in the work of Damien Hirst as exemplified by *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living,* 1991, *With Dead Head*, 1992, *Death Explained,* 2007 and *For the Love of God*, 2007. Lucy Skaer's and Tacita Dean's explorations of death have more in common with the female members of the yBa movement drawing from the archival nature of Christine Borland's work which utilizes real human skeletons, such as *From Life,* 1994. This new British art is more subtle and a lineage could also be traced back to the operation by which absence is made present in the work of Rachel Whiteread, for example, in the mortuary slabs remade in *Untitled Pair*, 1999.

representable subject poses.[108] In dealing with the same themes in a more considered way, Dean, Millar and Skaer directly address the problematics of the yBa's literalness, obviousness, or as Julian Stallabrass describes it, 'a vacuous quality which is the work's defining characteristic'.[109]

The apparently melancholic atmosphere of Jeremy Millar's, Tacita Dean's and Lucy Skaer's work can also be directly related to the recent past of British art acting as recompense for the characteristic sense of 'presentness' that defined the art of the 1990s.[110] The purposeful employment of almost obsolete mediums, that critique both the recent past and the present, serve these conceptually challenging artworks because, as this thesis will repeatedly demonstrate, analogue film and photography can open up a space for troubling and elusive aspects of Real subjectivity to be encountered. By recalling the past to aid our understanding of compelling problems of our current moment, this new British art presents us with a more complex idea of contemporaneity.

[108] I obviously refer here to the work of Damien Hirst such as *With Dead Head*, 1992 or *A Thousand Years, 1990.*

[109] Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), 27.

[110] Stallabrass argues that much yBa work hides behind a, 'veneer of up-to-date pop cultural references, a scattering of demotic material, and constant reassurances that they are the expression of the present'. (ibid., 288).

CHAPTER ONE

REPETITIONS AND REPRODUCTIONS: JEREMY MILLAR'S *THE MAN WHO LOOKED BACK*, 2010

Jeremy Millar's *The Man Who Looked Back,* 2010, is a contemporary reimagining of Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas,* 1924–9, which consisted of 79 wooden panels, each covered with dark black fabric onto which the art historian pinned around 2,000 photographs from his own extensive collection.[1] This vast archive traced the persistence of an unintelligible, yet universal psychic disturbance that was operating below the surface of visual culture, manifesting itself in artworks that stretched back to Greek antiquity. The *Mnemosyne Atlas* was a visual demonstration of Warburg's theory of the *pathosformel,* a formula for communicating extreme emotional states of anxiety and agitation through convulsive and emphatic bodily gestures in artworks.[2] Millar's project testifies to the continuation of this traumatic form of art historical memory and the reappearance of this muted psychic disturbance, which is framed in the context of this thesis as the Lacanian Real.

[1] The *Mnemosyne Atlas* existed in three different versions; each image of the *Atlas* was attached to the black boards with moveable pegs and the boards were referred to as tables, on which to operate, so that the configuration of images could be repeatedly rearranged. Each new reconfiguration of images was re-photographed to form a final image, which Warburg had intended to present in book format. However, this project, which consumed him towards the end of his life, remained unfinished. See Georges Didi- Huberman, *Atlas: How to Carry the World on One's Back?* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte, Reina Sofia, 2010), 18, and Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. Sophie Hawkes (New York: Zone Books, 2004), 278.

[2] See Aby Warburg, 'Dürer and Italian Antiquity, 1905' in *Aby Warburg: The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity,* trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 1999), 55.

The Man Who Looked Back is made up of a careful selection of just thirty-two photographic reproductions displayed on three hessian covered display boards (Figure 1.1). These images all relate to the story of Orpheus and Eurydice and many of them depict the precise moment that Orpheus loses his ill-fated wife by looking back at her. Millar refocuses Warburg's entropic project by calling attention to the physical gesture of looking back as a metaphor for traumatic memory and irreconcilable loss.

The Man who Looked Back is in keeping with a broader renewal of interest in the work of Aby Warburg, who is posthumously viewed as an influential figure for recent generations of archival artists.[3] This thesis presents Warburg the art historian, as well as archivist, as a model for a younger generation of artists such as Millar whose own mode of artistic practice is predicated on art historical research. Since the 1990s Millar has produced a body of works that pay homage to an older generation of thinkers, predominantly artists associated with conceptualism like Robert Smithson in *Monument to Entropy (Hotel Palenque)* 1999, Marcel Duchamp in *Marquette for the Large Glass (Obscured*), 2006, Sol Le Witt in *Sentences on Magic (after Sol Le Witt)* 2009, Robert Morris in *Untitled (Mirror Cubes),* 2010, and Millar's touring curatorial project on John Cage, *Everyday is a Good Day*, 2010. This chapter presents previously unpublished primary source material, in the form of archival research, and interviews with Jeremy Millar.

The Man Who Looked Back is the second of a trilogy of works dating from 2010-2012, which pays homage to Warburg. The first project in this series, *Untitled: A Speculation on the Afterlife of Images,* 2010*,* is formally similar to *The Man Who*

[3] Georges Didi- Huberman has been pivotal in reframing Warburg's work in the context of contemporary art, the archive, and a contemporary interest in trauma and suffering as evidenced by his curatorial project, *Atlas: How to Carry the World on One's Back?*

Looked Back, being composed of a configuration of images pinned onto boards. This more sparsely covered display of images is comprised of photographs cut from German newspapers, all of which were printed on the day of Warburg's death on the 26 October 1929.[4] Millar writes:

> These images were part of the world in which he lived – even if they shared it only briefly – yet would never.... become part of his image-world; although they share certain characteristics with images that interested Warburg, we can never know if these would have done so similarly. As with many of my projects, this work acts as a form of speculative history, or rather a speculation upon history.[5]

If Millar's method of *speculative history* looks back, it also projects Warburg's legacy into the present.[6] In *The Man Who Looked Back* this is achieved by including imagery on the boards, stills from Chris Marker's seminal sci-fi film, *La Jetée*, 1962*,* that post-date the art historian's own.

Millar's practice typifies what Hal Foster has identified as 'an archival impulse' operating globally in contemporary art, which consists of a heightened

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[4] This desire to create monuments that mark the death of influential figures is a concern that is also played out in some of Millar's earlier works, such as a tribute to J.G.Ballard in *Concrete and Palms (for JGB),* 2009 and W.G. Sebald in *A Firework for W.G. Sebald,* 2005.

[5] Jeremy Millar 'A Speculation on the Afterlife of Images, 2010,' accessed21 February 2013, *http://www.jeremymillar.org/works-detail.php?wid=219*.

[6] Millar's final work of this trilogy operates according to a similar principle. *Afterlife of Images (Orpheus in the Hades)*, 2012, takes the form of an intervention, documented photographically, in which we see Millar inserting an original photograph from Marker's seminal film *La Jetée,* given to him by the film maker himself, inside the folder containing the images of Orpheus and Eurydice in the Warburg Institute. This is the same source from which the images that make up *The Man Who Looked Back…* are gleaned. Millar physically adds to Warburg's actual collection, he writes that it is a 'gesture in this place of past gestures; a gesture, from amongst the dead, with which to make the past new.' See Jeremy Millar, 'Time Traveller: Remembering Chris Marker,' *Frieze* 150 (October 2012), 5, and Jeremy Millar, '*Afterlife of Images (Orpheus in the Hades),* 2012,' accessed 21 February 2013, http://www.jeremymillar.org/works-detail.php?wid=245.

interest in historical representation coupled with the archiving of tangible traces of the past. Foster links the rise in archival modes of artistic practice to a problematic relationship with digital technology. He writes:

> In most archival art the "relational ends" are far more tactile and face-to-face than any web inter-face. The archives at issue here are not databases in this sense, they are recalcitrantly material, fragmentary rather than fungible, and as such they call out for human interpretation, not machinic reprocessing.[7]

Digital technology seems well suited to the practice of archiving as many institutional archives are prioritising the digitisation of their material over the preservation of the actual physical remnants, while museum collections are also being transposed into virtual formats.[8] However, archival artists like Millar resist this cultural turn towards the digital archive through the gesture of an anxious backward glance, which anticipates loss. *The Man Who Looked Back* draws parallels between Orpheus's bereavement and the impending obsolescence of analogue photography. Rather than focusing on Orpheus's gaze, which kills Eurydice before he ever reaches her, Millar presents us with numerous black and white re-photographed reproductions of paintings, which show Orpheus desperately holding onto the weighty body of Eurydice just before she disappears (Figure 1.2). Millar draws attention to this physicality because as he says, 'although there is something wonderful about Warburg's notion of images and gestures resonating through time, and of their having an afterlife, a physicality remains, however spectral'.[9] This

[7] Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse,' *October* 110 (2004): 7.

[8] The relationship of new technology to new methods of archiving is the subject of Wolfgang Ernst's, *Digital Memory and the Archive,* ed. Jussi Parikka (USA: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

[9] Jeremy Millar, e-mail message to author, 20 March 2012.

emphasis on bodily touch is reflective of Millar's emphasis on the tactile material qualities of analogue photographs and their processes of reproduction.

Millar's engagement with Aby Warburg aligns with his reticence towards the digital image because Warburg was primarily interested in obscure artworks and artefacts, meaning that the collection of images from which Millar draws is an ambiguous archive of documents. Key details, such as the names of authors and artists, along with titles and dates are vague. This ambiguity and lack of 'search terms' makes the images reproduced on Millar's boards impossible to find online, many of them have no deducible online presence.[10] In 2010, when this work was made, the images reproduced were not even archived digitally by the Warburg Institute meaning that the images that Millar selects and presents on his boards had to be physically retrieved.[11] (See appendix for a list of the artworks reproduced and archived in *The Man Who Looked Back*). This situation is not typical of our current moment and Millar also used a method of reproducing the images, which is beginning to seem antiquated in a digital age; the work is composed of re-photographed photographs of artworks using a copy stand. Not only was this a

[10] In researching this chapter I had to travel to the Warburg Institute in London in order to re-locate the actual images Millar reproduced on his boards. This was achieved by using a meticulous process of looking through numerous files in the Warburg Institute's photographic library in order to cross- reference hundreds of images with photographs of Millar's work. Much could be gleaned from the physical handling of these tactile documents; for instance, there were a number of reproductions mounted on hessian which could be felt on their backs, these particular images were likely to have been included in Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*. This important information has not been transferred into the Warburg Institute's digital archive, nor have the handwritten notes on the backs of some of the photographs.

[11] When writing this chapter, the iconographic database, which is a digital archive of the photographic library at the Warburg Institute, was a work in progress. The images relating to Orpheus and Eurydice were kindly prioritised for digital archiving upon the request of the author for the purposes of finalising this chapter, although initial research into Millar's selection of images had to be undertaken at the Warburg Institute itself, through engagement with these reproductions as physical objects.

necessary way of obtaining copies of images which are not digitised; it was also an intentional decision on the part of the artist. Millar writes:

> Their physicality seems important, as does the fact that I went to the Warburg, opened the drawers of filing cabinets, pulled out folders, opened them, shuffled through the prints, and then, choosing some, placed them upon the copy stand and then photographed them. This is very different from, say, searching through an online archive, and then just printing them off here, or worse, projecting them.[12]

Implying that the digital is not progressive, but worse than its technological precedent, Millar contrasts the tactility of the analogue against the virtuality of the digital, which severs the past from the present. The physical materiality of these analogue images, as objects, required that the artist make a physical journey in order to uncover and keep hold of these substantial remainders of history. Orpheus's journey into the underworld to recover Eurydice is the focus of Millar's boards in order to reflect this concern with physical retrieval. Replete with associations of death and the irredeemable past, this gesture also acts to critically question the virtual promises of the digital and its unchallenged embrace by culture more broadly.

Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* was also a response to its own moment of technological transition investigating the changing nature of the relationship between technologies of mass reproduction and memory. This interrelationship was first investigated in the 1920s, both practically by Warburg, and theoretically by Siegfried Kracauer who viewed the new techniques of reproduction pessimistically as the proliferation of mass-produced images at the beginning of the twentieth century led

[12] Jeremy Millar, email to the author, 20 March 2012.

to a type of memory crisis.[13] Hal Foster has recently written of a renewed memory crisis caused by digital ascendency. He argues that the digital severs art objects from art historical memory as that system of relation, which traditionally took place inside the museum's walls, is being transposed to the virtual spaces of the internet.[14] Millar revisits Warburg's project in order to reopen these early debates as *The Man Who Looked Back* marks a similar period of transition, replaying a contemporary apprehension to our own altering methods of reproduction, which have caused not only a rise in archival artwork, but also a rise in artworks which engage art historical memory. All three works in this thesis, by Jeremy Millar, Tacita Dean and Lucy Skaer, respond to this new memory crisis by constructing an inbuilt art historical memory that operates at the core of the physical artwork. This acts to remedy or resist the new memory crisis caused by digital reproduction.

Millar's project on Warburg not only exemplifies the recent art historical turn in contemporary archival art, it also adds a psychopathological dimension to the problematic nature of our current moment of technological change. Millar uses Warburg to foreground this concern as the art historian's archival activity was intrinsically connected to his personal experience of mental illness. Warburg began working on the *Mnemosyne Atlas* immediately after his release from psychiatric care. This biographical context, combined with the project's focus on trauma, suggests that the atlas was symptomatic of, or at the very least connected to the art historian's illness and subsequent recovery. During the last five years of his life Warburg worked obsessively on this archive, which seemed to function as a type of

[13] See Siegfried Kracauer, 'Photography,' *Critical Inquiry* 19 (1993): 421–436. For a more celebratory account of the theoretical implications of mechanical reproduction see Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations,* trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1968).

[14] See Hal Foster, 'Archives of Modern Art,' *October* 99 (2002): 81–95.

psychical rescue operation that allowed him to reorganize his own disordered thought processes. Functioning as an apparent cure for psychological anxiety, the *Mnemosyne Atlas* 'constitutes the brilliant reformulation of this anxiety, its practical and theoretical re-composition, its reproduction in new forms and its *re-montaging*'.[15] Warburg's archival method aligns itself with psychoanalysis as art is figured as a transmitter of unconscious cultural memory, and convulsive gestures become signs of unmanageable and incommunicable emotional excess.[16] Through his restaging of Warburg's atlas, Millar suggests that there is a continuation of the already existing connection between psychic disturbance and the proliferation of archival activity characteristic of his own generation. This chapter argues that the recent proliferation of contemporary archival artwork is indicative of heightened levels of anxiety, which lead us beyond the symbolic order, through its collapse, into the register of the Real.

While it will not be claimed that Millar's anxious archive, like Warburg's earlier one, is symptomatic of the artist's own psychopathology, it shall be argued that the melancholic disposition of contemporary archival practice constitutes a type of sickness which is triggered by recent developments in digital reproduction. In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, 1995, Jacques Derrida concurs that there is a direct alignment between disturbances of the psyche and new technologies which profess to function as an aid or supplement to memory.[17] He frames the recent

[15] Georges Didi Huberman 'Disasters: The Dislocation of the World that is the Subject of Art' in *Atlas,* 161.

[16] Griselda Pollock discusses the connection between Sigmund Freud and Aby Warburg's concept of the image as a transmitter of cultural memory in 'The Object's Gaze in the Freud Museum' in *Visual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2007), 67–86.

[17] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (London and the USA: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

obsession with archiving in the context of a symptom, a fever, indicative of an underlying sickness, or at the very least a state of nervous excitement or agitation. The cause of this symptom is attributed to changing technologies, which alter the way we create and interpret archives. Much of the current art historical discourse on artist's archives reaches analogous conclusions as Foster's term 'archival impulse' also infers that artistic archiving is a type of involuntary response motivated by feelings of anxiety stemming from a reticence towards the digital.[18]

This technological agenda is harmonious with Millar's restaging of the *Mnemosyne Atlas,* which registered and represented historical returns that were essentially always traumatic. In order to make these returns visible Warburg used photographic reproductions of temporally distant artworks to detect re-emerging patterns that would confirm the existence of an animating, yet muted force operating below the surface of cultural memory.[19] In the *Mnemosyne Atlas* and *The Man Who Looked Back* intense psychological states are archived by way of their outward manifestations as the camera traces these reappearances through time by allowing the reproductions of artworks to come together in the same space. Mechanical, not digital, reproduction is privileged by this form of archival activity as it promotes physical contact and a tangible technological trajectory which defends against the increased anxiety and agitation brought on by technological change.

The first section of this chapter will examine the intrinsic connection between archiving and psychopathology in the context of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* and the

[18] Hal Foster has written numerous essays on artists' archives of recent years notably in 'An Archival Impulse,' 'Archives of Modern Art,', and 'An Archive Without Museums,' *October* 77 (1996): 97–119.

[19] Philippe Alain Michaud relates Warburg's interest in movement with the origins of early film and photography in *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. Sophie Hawkes (New York: Zone Books, 2004).

important psychopathological dimension Aby Warburg added to the discipline of art history. Warburg's concern with psychic agitation was the subject of his life's work, both before, and after his illness and his research into this dimension of elusive psychic disturbance can be aligned with the writings of his contemporary Sigmund Freud. Like Freud, Warburg employed characters from Greek antiquity to give visual form to primitive and evasive aspects of psychic life. The figure of Orpheus was, for Warburg, the personification of traumatic memory. This is visually exemplified by Tables 5 and 41 of the *Mnemosyne Atlas.* Attentive observation of these two Tables reveals that the universal trauma that Warburg detected operating below the surface of artworks is the same primary trauma explored by the discipline of psychoanalysis. The object of Warburg's research was what Lacan, after Freud, would call the expression of subjectivity as present in the Real. Warburg constructed an archive of traumatic unconscious cultural memory by using the medium of analogue photography to think through the Real in the space of the symbolic.[20]

The second section of this chapter will frame *The Man who Looked Back* in the context of its own atmosphere of apprehension and anxiety concerning the changing nature of artists' mediums in an age of digital ascendency. Millar's project is inherently melancholic due to its lamentation of the loss of analogue photography. The Orpheus Millar evokes reflects the atmosphere of this work as in this archive we

[20] Warburg's method of reading bodily gestures as symptoms or muted signifiers indicative of subjectivity as present in the Real, aligns itself with early psychoanalytic treatments such as those practiced by Jean-Martin Charcot at the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris in the late nineteenth century. Georges Didi-Huberman has also claimed there to be a reciprocal relationship between photography, and psychiatry which focuses upon images of Charcot's hysterics, see *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière,* trans. Alisa Hartz (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), 4. Griselda Pollock also discusses this connection with reference to a painting of Charcot and a fainting hysteric in the painting by Jacques Moreau de Tours', *Hysterics of the Charité on the Service of Dr. Luys* , 1890, which Sigmund Freud had hanging on the wall of his consulting room. See Griselda Pollock, ed. 'The Image in Psychoanalysis and the Archaeological Metaphor' in *Psychoanalysis and the Image* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 1–29.

see both a figure repetitively pictured looking back and a dejected figure fixated on the past. Melancholia is a pathological condition and this section of the chapter will demonstrate that *The Man Who Looked Back* is indicative of psychic disturbance. The psychopathology of this artwork is the product of the conceptual agenda of the work overall. However, the repetitive bodily gestures that make up the work's more detailed parts will also be read as symptoms of mental disturbance, testimonials that point beyond the symbolic to a subjectivity present in the Real. By resisting the technology of his own time, Millar explicitly connects the detection of the elusive register of the Real with analogue photography, confirming the main claim of this thesis. The analogue medium has maintained close proximity to the Lacanian Real from the moment of its inception, as Warburg demonstrated, to the now of its impending obsolescence.

THE PSYCHOTIC ARCHIVE: *MNEMOSYNE ATLAS*, 1924–9

Aby Warburg changed the nature of the discipline of art history as he resituated the art object outside of a purely aesthetic realm by conceiving of it as a transmitter of cultural memory. This conviction, with its focus on uncovering the resonances of an inherited cultural memory that was essentially always traumatic, added a pathological dimension to the discipline registering the first stirrings of modern psychology, which were happening simultaneously. Sigmund Freud's anthropological and archaeological approach has been aligned with a Warburgian model of art history as both men shared a concept of 'the psychology of the image – the image as a kind of cultural memory-bearer, a register of common feelings, anxieties and desires'.[21]

[21] See Griselda Pollock, 'The Object's Gaze in the Freud Museum,' *Visual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2007), 67–86.

Like Freud, Warburg was interested in the manifestations and traces of a muted, yet evidently disturbing force, which was animating cultural memory. The *Mnemosyne Atlas* visually demonstrates the existence of this disturbance by drawing lineages between temporally diverse artworks and artefacts, which are grouped together in constellations of recurrent emphatic and dramatic bodily gestures. Warburg concentrated specifically on the depiction of bodies agitated and overwhelmed by forces beyond their control.[22] These convulsive gestures were mostly indicative of extreme psychological states, most notably communicating human suffering, anxiety and loss. His detection of these visual patterns provided a formula for communicating specific states of action, arousal and emotional agitation. Warburg termed this the *pathosformel.*[23] Through this theory he challenged the traditional understanding of the importance of the figure in classical antiquity for Renaissance artists shifting emphasis away from the ideals of beauty and serenity, towards darker and more obscure underlying mental states.[24] In his funeral eulogy for Warburg given in 1929, Ernst Cassirer wrote:

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[22] This was a continuation of his art historical methodology. Warburg writes 'the influence of antiquity manifested itself … through a change in the depiction of human figures – an increased mobility of the body and of its draperies.' This emphasis on movement was crucial to his analysis of bodily gesture as an outward symptom of internal psychological trauma. See Aby Warburg, 'Italian Art and International Astrology, in the Palazzo Scifanoia, Ferrara, 1912' in *Aby Warburg: The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity,* trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 1999), 563.

[23] See Aby Warburg, *'*Dürer and Italian Antiquity, 1905*'*, ibid., 55.

[24] According to Johann Joachim Winckelmann the importance of figures of antiquity, for Renaissance artists, was their representation of divine serenity and ideal beauty. The fundamental idea of Winckelmann's theories are that art strives primarily for beauty, and that this end can be attained only when individual and characteristic features are strictly subordinated to an artist's general scheme. See Johann Joachim Wincklemann, *The History of Art in Antiquity*, (Getty Research Institute, 2006).

> He did not firstly cast his eyes upon works of art, but he felt and saw the great configuring energies behind the works... Where others had seen determined and delimited forms, self-contained forms, he saw moving forces, he saw what he called the great *Pathosformel* that antiquity had created and left as a lasting patrimony to humanity... He delved here into his own, most deeply felt experience... He always remained in the centre of the storm and the whirlwind of life itself; he penetrated into its ultimate and deepest tragic problems.[25]

During Warburg's process of arrangement and rearrangement, in the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, latent qualities residing in a particular image would become charged by encounters with other images. He described this method as an attempt to represent the unpresentable, writing, '[t]hat which is found between the two, is the problem, impenetrable perhaps, but also, perhaps, accessible'.[26] The interval, or gap between the two, that Warburg refers to is the hole in the symbolic that can never be directly expressed or perceived. However, certain artworks do have the potential to make us aware of the Real's presence by bracketing, enveloping, or containing the hole in the sense of Lacan's analogy of the potter who creates a form around emptiness.[27] In Warburg's atlas it is not one artwork, which makes the Lacanian Real perceptible, it is the archive itself as constellations of convulsed figures that orbit around a central void.

Despite my alignment of Warburg's approach with psychoanalytic theory, it is unclear as to whether Warburg was reading the emerging writings of Sigmund Freud. However, his archival method which unveils the presence of the unconscious by paying close attention to recurring patterns has much in common with the task of

[25] Ernst Cassirer ref by Didi-Huberman, *Atlas*, 122.

[26] Aby Warburg, ref by Didi- Huberman, ibid., 108.

[27] Jacques Lacan 'On Creation Ex nihilo' in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–60*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), 121.

the psychoanalyst who looks for the signifiers of unconscious traumas in the patterns of a patient's speech. Furthermore, like Freud, Warburg often referred to Greek mythology in order to allegorise or anchor primitive and fundamental traumatic experiences in well-known mythological narratives. Freud does this most famously with his theory of the Oedipus complex first introduced in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1899.[28] A veiled reference to the Oedipus complex, on which I will elaborate, also finds visual form on the boards of the *Mnemosyne Atlas.* This shared strategy of using Greek mythology in order to convey primary impulses and emotional states is foregrounded at the outset of Warburg's project by the inclusion of a sculpture of Atlas on Table 1. Atlas, who was forced to bear the weight of the world and the celestial spheres upon his shoulders, introduces the *Mnemosyne Atlas* as an archive of historical persistence indicative of endurance and suffering. Another tragic figure, to which Warburg repeatedly referred, both in his writing and in the atlas, is Orpheus who embodies the *pathosformel* by connoting both memory and psychological trauma.[29]

ORPHEUS AND TRAUMATIC MEMORY

Orpheus appears numerous times in the *Mnemosyne Atlas,* most prominently in the centre of Table 5 on a white page of figures, which were used to illustrate Warburg's seminal essay, *Dürer and Italian Antiquity,* 1905[30] (Figure 1.3). This essay introduced Warburg's theory of the *pathosformel* through recurrent images depicting the violent death of Orpheus, which is traced from Albrecht Dürer's *Death of*

[28] See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* trans. A.A. Brill (London: Wordsworth Editions, 1997), 143–157.

[29] Aby Warburg, 'Durer and Italian Antiquity' in *Aby Warburg: The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, 553–558.

[30] Ibid., 555.

Orpheus, 1494, back to the same compositional gestures originating from an antique vase. According to Ovid, after the death of Eurydice Orpheus spurns all human contact rejecting the carnal desires of the Bacchantes, a group of female followers of Bacchus, who fly into a rage and batter him to death with sticks.[31] These recurrent images depict this violent moment as we see a helpless Orpheus cowering down with his arms held up in an attempt to defend himself from a brutal and overwhelming attack. Table 5 also draws depictions of agitated women into orbit with one another. These include the numerous images of furious women killing Orpheus, and a distressed Eurydice struggling with a centaur in Jacopo del Sellaio's painting *Orpheus and Eurydice in Hades,* 1485.[32] This board also contains numerous depictions of mothers in various emotional states including grieving mothers lamenting the loss of their sons.[33] Most of the images on this panel revolve around violent death and its aftermath as these emotionally disturbed figures raise one of their arms in the air in a gesture of grief, or as a cowering reflex enacted in self-defence. The perpetrators of the brutal attacks on this board, like the victims, also raise their bent arms.

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[31] Henry T. Riley, trans. *The Metamorphoses of Ovid* (London: Bell, 1876).

[32] This painting by del Sellaio intrigued Warburg who writes of it in his essay 'Dürer and Italian Antiquity', 1905. He also mentions it in the Addenda to his essay 'Sandro Botticelli's Birth of Venus and Spring: An Examination of Concepts of Antiquity in the Italian Early Renaissance', 1893. This panel painting was of interest to Warburg as it draws upon the work of the fifteenth century scholar Angelo Poliziano, who, as Warburg argues, becomes an important figure for Florentine artists such as del Sellaio as Poliziano influenced the Florentines to adopt a style that joined a realistic observation of nature with an idealizing reliance on familiar artistic and literary antique sources. In keeping with this formula, Warburg's own methodology consisted of tracing the survival of anachronistic motifs that have migrated from antiquity to the renaissance both through artistic and literary sources. See *Aby Warburg: The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*

[33] See Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne: L'Atlante delle immagini,* ed. Nino Aragno (Italy: Akademie Verlag, 2002), 23.

Table 5 with its theme of disturbed females, and the recurring gesture of the raised arm is linked to Table 41 and Warburg's notes on the project confirm this intended connection.[34] Table 41 (Figure 1.4) also contains numerous depictions of Orpheus who is juxtaposed with other images of figures beating one another. These include a reproduction of a painting of Christ being scourged, and numerous images of figures in battle striking one another with weapons. In both of these tables Orpheus is situated amidst a landscape of violent battle scenes and furious or grieving women. He is presented as a suffering victim, the personification of Warburg's own perception of 'the tragedy of culture'.[35] In its entirety the *Mnemosyne Atlas* continually refers to a non-specific, yet culturally inherited trauma which is destined to continually repeat itself. What is the exact nature of this universal tragedy?

Taking the historical context of the atlas into account, the battle scenes on Tables 5 and 41 become reflective of the tumultuous political climate of Germany in the 1920s. Warburg draws comparisons between the mythological conflicts depicted in his project and the modern warfare that contextualises his work. This suggests that these earlier fictional conflicts are repeated and reconfigured under hugely different circumstances, entailing shocking new technological developments such as aerial and chemical weapons. In a quote which connects the resurfacing of antiquity with later periods of trauma and transition, a quote which also contains resonances of warfare evoking threats and guns, Warburg writes:

[34] Warburg refers to this table as a representation of the pathos of destruction, victimization and also the liberation of pathos, supposedly through this liberated repetitive gesture. Ibid., 72.

[35] Warburg ref by Didi-Huberman, *Atlas,* 60.

> We must not demand of antiquity that it should answer the question at pistol point whether it is classically serene or demonically frenzied, as if there were only those alternatives. It really depends on the subjective make-up of the late born rather than on the objective character of the classical heritage… Every age has the renaissance of antiquity that it deserves.[36]

The renaissance of antiquity that dominated Warburg's time was essentially violent, as exemplified by his obsession with the brutal death of Orpheus and the violent battle scenes included in the atlas. These images reflect the shocked and traumatised German, Jewish psyche, which was still processing the impact of WW1, and simultaneously anticipating the traumatic repetition and escalation of violence and horror which was metered out during WW2.[37] This reading of the work is aided by the last Table of the Mnemosyne Atlas, Table 79, which brings together the signs of a long and recurrent history of anti-Semitism, including images of political propaganda and social upheaval, pre-empting the onset of the traumatic destruction of historical memory at the hands of German Fascism.[38]

Warburg's conviction that inherent acts of conflict and violence recur throughout time is contextually and temporally close to Freud's theory of war and traumatic neurosis in *Timely Reflections on War and Death*, 1915. Written in response to WW1, Freud argues that war is a phenomenon which, 'strips away our later stratifications of culture and brings the primeval man in us back to the

[36] Warburg ref by Kurt W. Forster in *Aby Warburg: The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity,* 6.

[37] Susan Buck-Morss examines an aesthetic registration of a shocked and anaesthetised German psyche in 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered,' *October* 62 (Autumn 1992): 3–41.

[38] See Buchloh, 'Gerhard Richter's "Atlas": The Anomic Archive, '*October* 88 (1999): 127.

surface'.[39] While Freud observed such neurosis from a clinical distance, Warburg experienced it directly, suffering a psychotic breakdown which reached its climax in 1918. After his recovery and during a seminar of 1927, while he was working intensively on the *Mnemosyne Atlas,* Warburg alluded to his illness as a symptom of his own thought, which was preoccupied with the returns of antiquity and the past. He said that historians are first and foremost 'receptors of mnemonic waves… of very sensitive seismographs with which the foundations tremble when they have to capture the wave and transmit it; hence the risk in [this] profession that of pure and simple collapse'.[40]

Tables 5 and 41 illustrate Warburg's concept of the survival of images, providing us with a visual tableau, which aids our understanding of the anachronistic coexistence of modern war and its pre-existing archaisms of social behaviour. Warburg traces a lineage from modernity, back to antiquity in order to illuminate the most relentless gestures that have survived from primitive man to the present. He concludes that primitive experience is essentially fearful and that the survival of images, which resonate through time are indicative of a 'suffering knowledge'.[41] The weight of such knowledge was, at the time of his breakdown, too much for Warburg to bear. Envisaging war and its technological advancements as a destabilising threat, Warburg firstly evokes the figure of Atlas who is bucking under the weight of the world, and then a victimised Orpheus who is powerless to defend himself against imminent attack and impending death. As Millar does later, Warburg looks back to antiquity in order to anchor his thought in the meaningfulness of the past. He writes:

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[39] Sigmund Freud 'Timely Reflections on War and Death'c1915, in *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholy* trans. S. Whiteside (London: Penguin, 2005), 193.

[40] Warburg ref by Didi-Huberman, *Atlas,* 156.

[41] Ibid.,, 73.

> The modern Prometheus and the modern Icarus, Franklin and the Wright brothers who invented the aeroplane, are those fateful destroyers of our sense of distance who threaten to lead the world back into chaos. Telegraph and telephone are destroying the cosmos. But myths and symbols, in attempting to establish spiritual bonds between man and the outside world, create space for devotion and scope for reason.[42]

The revival of antiquity that Warburg registers is understandably more violent and dramatic, due to its historical and biographical context, than the one evoked by Jeremy Millar who focuses more specifically on a sense of passive dejection and a state of melancholia. The figure of Orpheus is central to an understanding of Warburg's claim that 'every age has the renaissance of antiquity that it deserves'.[43] We see a very different personification of Orpheus in Warburg's and Millar's archives. Although both deal with the fate of Orpheus after the death of Eurydice, the art historian focuses specifically on Orpheus's death, while Millar's archive revolves around Eurydice's second death. Orpheus's fate is indirectly related to Eurydice's as the torment of her loss leads him to shun all physical contact, which paradoxically provokes a vicious and fatal attack. In the artistic interpretations of this moment, archived by Warburg, bodily contact is registered as something threatening and traumatic. However, in Millar's project, which focuses on an earlier moment of the story in which Orpheus still believes he can bring back Eurydice, bodily touch is anticipated and desired. We see this emotional state reflected in the recurrent gestures of reaching out and of holding on in the reproductions presented on Millar's boards. *The Man Who Looked Back* will be discussed in more depth in the next

[42] Aby Warburg, 'A Lecture on Serpent Ritual,' *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2, no. 4 (April 1939): 292.

[43] Warburg ref by Kurt W. Forster in *Aby Warburg: The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity,* 6.

section; however, it is worth noting here that these more tender gestures still connote loss and trauma. This implies that Millar's revival of Warburg's legacy attests to a sense of psychic disturbance, registered in the body, which persists beyond the context of war. In order to delve deeper into the nature of these convulsive gestures as symptoms of deeper psychic problems, we return to the *Mnemosyne Atlas,* and to Tables 5 and 41.

On these two significant tables, Warburg places emphasis on the act of the physical strike, which is characterised by a raised arm bent at the elbow. In order to emphasise this gesture he removes it from the context of violence and victimization on Table 41 by including two images in the bottom right hand corner that show a figure, just walking, with their arm also bent at the elbow. Opposite these images in the left hand corner of the panel there is also a painting of a woman holding the hands of two naked infants whose arms are also raised and bent at the elbow. The inclusion of these images, which are not as violent as the others, acts to refocus our attention on the bodily gesture which is the main object of contemplation. The repetitive gesture diverts attention away from the specifics of each individual image in order to reveal a universal sense of suffering through a type of visual stuttering, which is disturbing in itself.

Studying Warburg's atlas in the manner he intended, which is to look beyond the various narratives of these many different scenarios by focusing on the repetitive forms and patterns of gesture, we notice the dominance of the mother figure. Through these resonating arms we see the same convulsive gesture echo through the grieving mothers who have lost their sons, the rejected and dangerous females who are intent on harming Orpheus, and the naked infants clinging on to their carer's hands. There is a clear evocation of fundamental psychoanalytic themes in this

repetitive imagery, and the tumultuous atmosphere of the two panels on the whole also resonates with the ambivalent mixture of emotions felt in response to the maternal object as explored by the discipline of psychoanalysis.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud uses the figure of Oedipus, who unwittingly killed his father and married his mother, to illuminate what psychoanalysis regards as a universal and fundamental stage in psychic development. Freud writes that this ancient story retains its relevance as it corresponds to an inner voice. Oedipus's, 'fate moves us only because it might have been our own… we are all destined to direct our sexual impulses towards our mothers, and our first impulses of hatred towards our fathers'.[44] The volatile combination of love and hatred which plays out on Warburg's boards is indicative of a primary trauma that relates to the maternal object, which is both desired and then lost through the prohibition of incest. The Oedipus complex is resolved when the subject rescinds his desire for the mother and identifies instead with the father. However, on a deeper level the originary trauma is destined to repeat itself via the continual finding and loosing of a substitute object, this being the nature of the repetitive trauma Warburg seeks to uncover. It is not only the loss of the object of desire that is traumatic, but conflicting and troubling emotions also arise from the very fact that this object was desired in the first place. This is exemplified by Oedipus who blinds himself when he realises he has been involved in this incestuous relation. Freud concurs that the unveiling of this offence to morality makes us 'avert our gaze from the scenes of our childhood'.[45] The return of this repressed and

[44] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* 156–7

[45] Ibid., 157.

unpresentable material then gives rise to feelings of aversion, terror and self-chastisement.[46]

The Oedipus complex, as a fundamental and universal stage of human development, informs British psychoanalyst Darian Leader's recent claim that many of us are harbouring psychotic structures that for the most part lay dormant, but which in some cases may trigger.[47] This descent into madness happens when a subject is not properly integrated into the symbolic order, but starts to occupy the realm of the traumatic Real. After Freud, Lacan called this formation of a psychotic structure *foreclosure* which refers to the failure of the paternal metaphor in early infant life.[48] In cases of psychosis, or psychotic triggering, it is at this fundamental point that the symbolic order fails; it is not available to provide a network of meanings to process moments of change. The effect of this failure results in a lack of meaning and an acute experience of a hole. The foreclosure of the primary signifier, opens up a void in its place and in order to compensate for this hole a cascade of reworkings of the signifier proceed until a level is reached whereby signifier and signified become stabilised in a delusional metaphor.[49] Although stabilising structures, or ideals, may be formed to compensate for this foreclosure once the 'ideals implanted in the symbolic order are then found to be lies, the person's very

[46] Ibid., 158.

[47] Darian Leader, *What is Madness?* (London, Penguin, 2011).

[48] This structural defect refers to the paternal metaphor – mother and child – countered by the inclusion of an external agency or a third term such as the father, which causes a triangulation and separation of child from mother which foregrounds the child's entry into the symbolic order and healthy subject formation. In the formation of a psychotic structure there is a rejection of this third term and a non-integration of the symbolic function of paternity. See Jacques Lacan 'On a Question Prior to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis' in Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton and Co, 2006), 445–488.

[49] Ibid., 481.

foundations are removed'.[50] Leader explains that this 'is because the symbolic is made up of a network of signifiers that are all interconnected, if one term was felt to be missing, its effects would spread through the network'.[51] Psychosis is triggered when the symbolic order that has been reconstructed fails and 'the construction of reality becomes undone: signifier and signified come apart, so that the world just seems to "mean". This release of the sense of meaningfulness has an effect of interpellation: it concerns that person uniquely'.[52]

Psychotic delusions often have a persecutory dimension as auditory and visual hallucinations are nearly always aimed at the subject. The paranoiac delusions that Warburg himself suffered always had a persecutory dimension being made up of a binary of victim and perpetrator with no third term. At the pinnacle of his breakdown Warburg believed he would be personally held responsible for the tragedies of War and would be punished accordingly. As we have already seen this binary opposition plays itself out in Tables 5 and 41 as victim and perpetrator are linked as a coherent whole through the gesture of the raised and bent arm.

When the symbolic order fails, as it did for Warburg, the suffering subject is plunged into chaos. The *Mnemosyne Atlas* functions as a response to this type of situation, being the product of Warburg's attempts to reorientate his disordered thought processes through the creation of new and interconnected signifying chains which were image based.[53] Through this archive Warburg presents subjectivity as present in the Real because such an existence cannot be thought in words. Warburg's

[50] Leader, 146.

[51] Ibid., 175.

[52] Ibid., 174.

[53] Howard Caygill explored the connection between archiving and mental illness in 'Warburg, Benjamin and Outsider Art' (conference, *Warburg, Benjamin and Kulturwissenschaft,* the Warburg Institute, London, 14–15 June, 2012).

atlas then testifies to a definitive link between the activity of archiving images and mental illness. The archive serves a restorative function as it allows the Real to be thought in symbolic space.

Archiving was widely practiced in the early twentieth century discipline of psychoanalysis especially that practiced by Emil Kraeplin, who treated Warburg and would take daily notes on patients in order to create an archive of symptoms, which he would use to detect patterns.[54] The archive may function both as a diagnostic tool for the medical profession, and a compensatory response set in motion by the patient. Archival activity acts in a similar way to a delusion as it aims to reintroduce order into a disordered world. As most cases of psychosis involve a profound sense of change, this is followed by an attempt to find a solution either, 'through the construction of a delusion or via any activity which promises to provide a foundation at the point that the symbolic fails. This could involve a research project, a new profession, an artistic activity or a search for origins or historical truth'.[55] The archive, which is aimed at reconstructing the past and reconciling a disordered world, can act to, 'staple together signifier and signified once again'.[56]

During Warburg's illness, his psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger recounts that the art historian would carry his personal effects around with him, as he was only able to give his attention to a thing by connecting it to other things, forming a

[54] On 16 April 1921, Warburg was admitted to the Binswanger Belle Vue clinic in Kruezlingen, Switzerland, with a diagnosis of schizophrenia. He had experiencing threatening visual hallucinations, as well as hearing shots being fired at his wife. He responded with extreme agitation, brandishing his own revolver while threatening to shoot himself, his wife and his children in order to escape the imminent threats he perceived. This diagnosis was later challenged by Emil Kraeplin, who, on his family's insistence, intervened in Warburg's treatment proclaiming him to be instead suffering from a mixed manic depressive state which had the potential to improve. Ludwig Bingswanger ref by Did- Huberman, *Atlas*, 154.

[55] Leader, 194.

[56] Ibid., 174.

constellation through which he could orientate his thought.[57] This is a method of reorientation and reconnection with the world that Warburg continued upon his release from psychiatric care through the *Atlas* which functioned as a psychical rescue operation. Georges Didi-Huberman writes that we should take seriously Warburg's 'psychic disaster as a symptom of the tragedy of culture that played out beyond him and all around him'.[58] The *Mnemosyne Atlas* cannot be considered separately from Warburg's biographical history. The pathological disciple he established, based on gestures as psychomanias, was an active attempt to reorder or reconstruct some sort of organized chaos, or what Warburg called a 'thought space [*Denkraum*]'.[59] Warburg's 'thought space' is a space created in the symbolic that allows the Real to be thought. *The Mnemosyne Atlas* was not only indicative of illness; it was also a redemptive and reparative mode of self-expression.

A CRISIS OF MEMORY

The historical context of Warburg's archive is fraught with personal, political and technological agitations, tensions and traumas. Conceived during the inter-war period, it attempted to map out the visual manifestations of a type of unconscious cultural memory, an inherent psychological disturbance, which was animating visual culture by finding form through artistic expression. Whilst Warburg did not attribute this anxiety to the recent implosion of mechanically reproduced images, the relationship of art to technology and technology to memory was simultaneously being called into question by figures such as Siegfried Kracauer, who was pessimistic about the unchallenged embrace of photography as an aid to memory, and Walter Benjamin with whom Warburg's saturnine sensibilities have been

[57] Ludwig Bingswanger ref by Did- Huberman, *Atlas,* 162.

[58] Didi-Huberman, ibid., 155.

[59]Aby Warburg ref by Didi- Huberman, ibid.,122.

aligned.[60] As well as being informed by personal and historical trauma, Warburg's *Atlas* was conceived at this important historical juncture registering the onset of new techniques of mechanical reproduction, which unleashed their own forms of disorder and disarray. Although Warburg does not theoretically engage with these debates, his project is made up of photographic reproductions and so cannot be disassociated from the emerging theories of the time.[61]

In his essay, *Photography*, 1927, Siegfried Kracauer took a pessimistic view of the new technology, arguing that photographic representation was completely at odds with memory images.[62] This is because memories are retained due to their significance for the individual, while the organizing principle of photography is markedly different and somewhat arbitrary. Kracauer wrote of the photograph:

> If it were offering itself as an aid to memory, then memory would have to determine the selection. But the flood of photos sweeps away the dams of memory. The assault of this mass of images is so powerful that it threatens to destroy the potentially existing awareness of crucial traits. Artworks suffer this fate through their reproductions.[63]

Kracauer explains that photographs are only harmonious with memory if there is a living memory of what they show. He gives the example of a photograph of 'grandmother' as a young girl; this photograph is meaningless to her grandchildren

[60] The *Warburg, Benjamin and Kulturwissenschaft* conference at the Warburg Institute in 2012, explored the affinities between Warburg and Benjamin. For other publications on the similarities between the two thinkers see Matthew Rampley, *Remembrance of Things Past: On Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2000).

[61] Philippe-Alain Michaud argues that Warburg's aesthetic of movement and bodies in motion actually registers such changes as it aligns itself with cinema in particular, emerging at the same moment, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, 39.

[62] Siegfried Kracauer, 'Photography,' *Critical Inquiry* 19 (1993): 425.

[63] Ibid., 432.

who have no memory of her in this context. Kracauer writes that this family photograph which is devoid of familiarity for the grandchildren, now shows an 'archaeological manikin that serves to illustrate the costumes of the period'.[64] Once the mnemonic function of the photograph has been exhausted it reveals a central void, serving only to show the social and economic order of which it is a product. Aligned with fashion, photography becomes 'a secretion of the capitalist mode of production'.[65] This leads Kracauer to conclude that '*photography assembles fragments around a nothing* [my emphasis]'.[66] Kracauer's alignment of the photograph with surface image and a lack of substance, as opposed to a memory-image which looms large in the mind and captures the truth of a subject's being and history, only really applies to conscious memory which can be accessed.[67] What about those retained memories, which are not so easily recalled because they cannot be thought, the unconscious processes and repressed material that Warburg was trying to unveil?

I argue that photography's gesturing towards nothingness aids an understanding of deeper psychic problems because the medium provides a material substrate onto which the Real can find form in the symbolic. Warburg intuitively perceived this potential of the medium at the same time that Kracauer was critiquing it. However, this connection between photography and the Real is more apparent in hindsight due to the medium's obsolescence and its newly acquired distance from

[64] Ibid., 424.

[65] Without its intrinsic connection to memory, the photograph as a discrete signifier becomes disconnected from what it once signified. For example, the term grandmother becomes lost. Such exhausted and empty photographs become monuments to a nature that lacks meaning, gravitating towards disorder and diffusion, ibid., , 434.

[66] Ibid.,431.

[67] During the recollection of a memory-image aspects of a subject, or history, which are consciously recognised as true, are preserved, ibid., 428–9.

the capitalist mode of production. The context of the void to which analogue photography now points has changed from a meaningless mode of technological production, to this unpresentable void at the centre of subjectivity. In this context and in terms of Warburg's archive, the medium is now commended because through its language of loss analogue photography assembles fragments around a nothing. This resonates with the emptiness at the centre of subjectivity becoming reflective of the absence or void, which is the Real.

Despite his own technological pessimism and preoccupation with an antiquated past, Warburg demonstrated through the *Mnemosyne Atlas* that the mass reproduced image had the potential to aid the construction of an unconscious cultural memory by allowing for the grouping together of diverse artworks and artefacts. It is through the mechanical reproductions of artworks that Warburg counters the flood of imagery denigrated by Kracauer, using cultural memory as a way of determining a selection of imagery that has some form of organizational value. Warburg's atlas is a collection of non-arbitrary images situated amongst the backdrop of an ever-expanding circulation of unanchored imagery.[68] Warburg emphasises the mnemonic function of the photograph in conjunction with other photographs, and this saves each image from becoming an empty product of the capitalist mode of production.

[68] Warburg was not the only figure of this period to explore the archival properties of mechanical reproduction and the capacity of this new technology to construct new models of art history. Andre Malraux's later concept of the *Musée imaginaire* c1950 also explores the potential of photographic reproduction. Malraux's later project takes into account that the traditional function of the museum was changing and that mechanical reproduction opened up a new and expansive museum that would impact upon the status of artworks and the relationships between artworks. He wrote that reproduction creates 'fictitious' arts by falsifying the scale of objects, also depriving them of their colour, texture and dimensions'. Malraux unlike Kracauer celebrates the loss of certain traits particular to an original art object as this ebbing away of colour, texture and size allows formal similarities between disparate images to become clearer, as they do in Warburg's project. See Andre Malraux 'Museum Without Walls' 1953 in *The Voices of Silence,* trans. Stuart Gilbert (St Albans: Paladin Frogmore, 1974), 13–130.

He groups together diverse signifiers, which once archived reveal memory itself as their signified, albeit a traumatic memory, which originates from the Real. This method of archiving functions as a type of defence mechanism, enacted in response to the symbolic collapse no doubt exasperated by the seemingly inevitable engulfment of the image by capitalism, meaninglessness and disorder. The *Mnemosyne Atlas* is then both a product of, and a preventative measure that works against symbolic sickness. It provides a coping mechanism or model of resistance for a later generation of artists, like Millar, who are trying to come to terms with new reproductive technologies and a new crisis of memory. The anxious nature of Millar's metaphorical glance back is indicative of the uneasiness of this current period of technological transition as his art historical return aids our understanding of the conceptual difficulties of our own period, which have not yet been adequately theorised.

THE ANXIOUS ARCHIVE: *THE MAN WHO LOOKED BACK,* 2010

The Man Who Looked Back focuses specifically on the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, which emphasises the gesture of looking back, both literally, and as a metaphor for traumatic memory and irreconcilable loss. Millar says that the consequences of Orpheus's turn back 'are tragic rather than contemplative'.[69] What is the nature of this trauma for an artist like Millar whose archive is not underpinned by a psychotic breakdown, or by the tragedy of culture that played out in the 1920s?

The Man who Looked Back was commissioned especially for *Never the Same River, (Possible Futures, Probable Pasts),* 2010-11, which was curated by artist

[69] Millar, 'The Man Who Looked Back' accessed 14 June 2013, http://www.jeremymillar.org/works-detail.php?wid=234.

Simon Starling.[70] This exhibition brought together a number of artworks which questioned notions of linear time by restaging or reiterating ideas from the past, or by projecting ideas, images or forms into the future. Millar's project performs both of these functions, of remembrance and projection, through his method of *speculative history*. Supporting my claim for an inherent link between contemporary archival practice and psychological agitation, the agenda of Starling's curatorial project represented an on-going sense of temporal instability registered by numerous contemporary artists. Starling attributes this unease to developments in contemporary physics, as made most traumatically manifest in the two bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He writes that these technological shocks caused a 'fundamental rupture in our relationship with time [and] our understanding of the future which 'became something to be anticipated precisely and feared'.[71]

This exhibition, which explored a current sense of temporal agitation, made no overt mention of the rapid advancements of digital technologies that have impacted upon the status of artworks and the nature of artists' mediums in the most fundamental ways. This is a huge oversight because developments in digital technology have not only led to a proliferation of archival artworks, but also to a proliferation of works which re-engage with the past in the way Starling describes. Millar's work responds directly to the traumatic nature of these rapid technological advancements registering the impact this destabilising transition has had on the status of an artwork, the registration and formation of art historical memory, and on the human psyche more broadly.

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[70] See Simon Starling, 'Never the Same River: Possible Futures, Probable Pasts,' Camden Arts Centre/ December 2010- February 2011, *Camden Arts Centre,* File note #56, 2010.

[71] Ibid.

Millar's reticence towards the technology of the present is reflective of a particular crisis of signification in art history post-1990s, arising directly from digital advancements which threaten both the previous status of an artwork, its intrinsic link to certain traditions, and the material and historical conventions of artists' mediums. In 'Archives of Modern Art', 2002, Hal Foster writes of a renewed anxiety concerning art historical memory as it relates to artistic practices and art historical discourses today.[72] Parallels can be drawn between the current period and the memory crisis brought on by mechanical reproduction, as theorised by Kracauer, nearly a century ago. Archival relations are brought about through a crisis that is attributable to an anxiety that arises when art no longer displays its developmental trajectory, or its link to a certain tradition/s. Foster examines the changing role of the museum which has traditionally been the site for the mnemonic reanimation of visual art as new works would evoke, cite, subvert or challenge the major precedents, or traditions from which they arose. This would happen within the museum's walls.[73] The rise of digital technology impacts upon the status of the museum and the artwork in turn; the mnemonic function of the museum becomes increasingly severed from visual experience, because in our current digital age that system of reference and relation is now displaced onto the virtual spaces of the Internet and increasingly happens outside of any contact with the original object. This splitting or severance of the art object from its mnemonic function constitutes a memory crisis, which has been accompanied by a rise in archival artworks in recent years.

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[72] Hal Foster, 'Archives of Modern Art,' *October* 99 (2002): 88 fn 21.

[73] As Charles Baudelaire famously argued in *Salon of 1846* 'memory is the great criterion of art' as great works of art would merge present and past as present sensations and perceptions call up emotionally charged scenes from earlier times. This is a view of art's function that Warburg, and Millar after Warburg would sympathize with. See Michael Fried, 'Painting Memories: On the Containment of the past in Baudelaire and Manet,' *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1984): 513.

Millar's freestanding hessian boards are like remnants of another age, reminiscent of an out-dated museum display. The work is a monument that remembers the now increasingly redundant mnemonic function of the museum, its previous role of displaying and forging links between objects and artworks, which is now the premise of the virtual museum and archive. In order to resist these developments and the ensuing memory crisis, Millar constructs an inbuilt art historical memory that operates at the core of the archive; it cannot be separated from the work's physical presence, thus compensating for this split between the work's objecthood and the mnemonic function of the museum. *The Man who Looked Back* not only looks as if it belongs to an earlier time, it is also produced using methods of the past. Acknowledging the disparity between his own work, which seems belated, and Warburg's, which utilizes the technology of its present, Millar says of Warburg:

> He seems to be using the technological means at his disposal – mechanical reproduction – in order to test his ideas, and to activate the past. I'm not really using the means at my disposal, although I'm similarly attempting to activate the past, although my past is one that also includes Warburg's projected future.[74]

By referring to the same techniques as Warburg, from a different historical standpoint, Millar reopens these early debates testing their relevance and significance for his own contemporary moment. The analogue is no longer aligned with the capitalist mode of production, rather it is the digital, as the technology of the present, which is simultaneously producing and disseminating an accelerated amount of unanchored imagery.

[74] Millar, e-mail message to author, 20 March 2012.

Millar and Warburg employ the same technology and these same means are employed to the same ends as Millar resituates these technological debates in the context of an underexplored relationship between archiving and mental illness. Although some scholars have acknowledged that this connection is pertinent to Warburg's project, in terms of the art historian's psychosis, the relevance of this overlap between psychic disturbance and artists' archives has largely gone unnoticed.[75] Millar's revival of Warburg's legacy, which he aligns with two stories that deal with loss and traumatic memory, testify to this psychopathological agenda. Furthermore, I claim that the importance of Millar's return to the past resides in the illumination of a veiled, yet intrinsic link between psychic disturbance, the Real, and the medium of analogue photography which functions as an indexical receptor of these otherwise unpresentable anxieties and agitations.

ORPHEUS AND MELANCHOLIA

The Man Who Looked Back laments the loss of analogue photography. Such a determined clinging to the past can be likened to the depressive condition of melancholia. The central image of Millar's right board, Jacopo del Sellaio's painting, *Orpheus Charming Animals with his Music*, 1485, makes this melancholic position evident (Figure 1.5). It depicts a dejected Orpheus standing under an archway (Figure 1.6). This painting forges an intrinsic connection to Warburg's own writings citing the art historian's fascination with this myth as a key amalgamation of the connection between antiquity and the Renaissance. However, it is of more relevance for this chapter as it depicts the pathological suffering of Orpheus, which is reflective of the dejected disposition of Millar's project.

[75] See Benjamin Buchloh for a discussion of mental illness and archiving with regard to the *Mnemosyne Atlas* in 'Gerhard Richter's "Atlas": The Anomic Archive,' *October* 88 (1999): 117–145.

Del Sellaio's painting is the last of three Spalliera panels, collectively entitled *Story of Orpheus and Eurydice,* 1485.[76] These begin with the death of Eurydice and conclude with this last panel depicting a disconsolate Orpheus pictured after his return from the underworld without her. According to the myth, Orpheus lamented his wife's death by preoccupying himself with his sorrowful music. In the painting on Millar's board he is shown standing before a natural arch of rocks, mourning the loss of Eurydice by playing heart-breaking music to an audience of following animals. This isolated Orpheus, who can be seen both in the foreground of the painting and also in the top right hand side of the painting, walking out of the scene, is a figure now apparently destined to wander the world alone as he cannot let go of the past.

In *Mourning and Melancholia,* 1917, Freud aligns melancholia with mourning, as both conditions are a reaction to some form of loss. The two states are distinguished because mourning is an active process, a type of work undertaken by the subject whose aim is to detach the libido from the lost object. This work is painful as '[e]ach single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected.'[77] In contrast, melancholia is a pathological condition in which the ego does not detach itself from the lost object, but internalises it through identification. This alters the subject's perception of their bereavement from the loss of an external object, to the sense of an internal lack, meaning that the source of suffering is not always apparent. Freud writes, '[t]he object has perhaps not actually died' or 'one cannot see clearly what it is that has

[76] See Jerzy Mizolek, 'Orpheus and Eurydice: Three Spalliera panels by Jacopo del Sellaio,' *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 12 (2009): 117–148.

[77] Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' in *The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud Vol 16,* ed James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 245.

been lost … This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness'.[78] Freud refers here to the most primary of losses, the loss of the maternal object. He adds, [i]n mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself'.[79] The symptoms of melancholia consist of 'a profoundly painful dejection [and] cessation of interest in the outside world'.[80] These are symptoms embodied by the Orpheus depicted in del Sellaio's painting.

Yve-Alain Bois has discussed the states of mourning and melancholia in relation to artists' mediums and the anticipated end of the medium of painting.[81] Bois writes of a type of artistic grief at the perceived terminus of this medium, which is akin to mourning as artists must accept this loss via an active process whereby the 'end has to be endlessly worked through'.[82] He adds that this work of mourning can also become pathological through a manic repetition that defends against, rather than accepts the end of the medium.[83] Bois discussion of the work of mourning, as it relates to the end of painting, can be applied to the current apprehension concerning the loss of the analogue medium due to digital ascendency. Millar's project, and in fact all three artworks discussed in this thesis, are the product of a work of technological mourning, which acknowledges the imminent loss of the analogue medium. However, this active process of working through the medium's end could

[78] Ibid., 245.

[79] Ibid., 246.

[80] Ibid., 244.

[81] Yve-Alain Bois. 'Painting: The Task of Mourning' in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge Massachusetts and London England: MIT Press, 1993), 229–244.

[82] Ibid., 243.

[83] Ibid.

only be considered solely mournful if the aim of this process was acceptance, and/or detachment. Instead, these three artworks are symptomatic of a conceptual melancholia that does not let go of the medium being lost or the retrieved objects and figures which are held onto using a process of identification and repetition in the artworks themselves. In *The Man Who Looked Back* receding objects and reclaimed pasts become internalised and central to the new work being created.

There has been much written on the connection between melancholia and creativity, notably by Julia Kristeva who argues that melancholia asserts itself in times of crisis.[84] Millar's work does respond to a mnemonic crisis, which is connected to advancements in digital technology. In melancholia the past does not pass by as attention is not directed from the past towards a goal or towards the future, but remains fixed, as is Millar's project, in the act of looking back. Kristeva writes:

> Massive, weighty, doubtless traumatic because laden with too much sorrow...*a moment* blocks the horizon of depressive temporality or rather removes any horizon, any perspective. Riveted to the past, regressing to the paradise or inferno of an unsurpassable experience, melancholy persons manifest a strange memory: everything has gone by, they seem to say, but I am faithful to those bygone days, I am nailed down to them, no revolution is possible, there is no future.[85]

Millar's project is resolute in its focus on death and loss as exemplified by numerous reproductions of images of figures on the verge of death, which we will soon explore, as well as figures, such as Orpheus, stuck mourning the loss of loved ones. In keeping with Warburg's project, the overriding trauma to which these temporally

[84] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun; Depression and Melancholia,* trans. Leon S. Roudiez. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

[85] Ibid., 60.

distant representations gesture towards remains obscure, adding weight to the project's melancholic disposition as the cause of the suffering is not immediately apparent. Through repetitive gestures, the same traumatic themes and scenes are compulsively repeated. Millar's act of looking back disengages, at some level, with both present and future as the artist refuses to engage with the technology of his own time. Conceptually, the work also refrains from looking or moving forward because although Millar does resituate the debates pertinent to Warburg's work from the past to the present, there is still no obvious suggestion of a future trajectory, only continual referral to the past.

The melancholic atmosphere of this work is due to the subject matter, the loss of the medium in which it is produced, and due to the art historical agenda of the project. Like all three contemporary British artworks discussed in this thesis, *The Man Who Looked Back* engages art historical memory. The discipline of art history is innately melancholic as it deals with loss and lost time through a physical connection to the past which is established through contact with an art object.[86] Michael Ann Holly writes that the art historian confronted with such objects must always deal with contradictory emotions arising from the simultaneous disappearance and recovery of the past as the art object is both gone and held onto. This is especially true of art historical artworks which attempt to actively revive the past whilst acknowledging that what is lost can never truly be reclaimed. Like the melancholic and the art historian, art historical artworks deal with 'loss without a lost object'.[87] Millar's melancholic project does not resolve the pathological leaning of

[86] Michael Ann Holly, *The Melancholy Art* (Princeton, New Jersey and Woodstock, Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2013), 4.

[87] Ibid., 6.

Warburg's earlier archive, rather, it repeats his method in order to find new ways of communicating or pointing towards an undisclosed hole or internal lack.

In Millar's project, like Warburg's before it, we are not only dealing with the loss of the past, and the loss of the analogue medium, but a more primary loss. Drawing heavily on Freudian psychoanalysis, Julia Kristeva posits the loss of the maternal object as the driving force behind imagination, which seeks to find, or recover the lost object.[88] Artistic practice can serve as a redemptive and compensatory force that provides a supplementary hold over the lost thing.[89] While this fixation on loss is indicative of mental illness, the gesture of communicating psychological distress through a work of art may alleviate psychological suffering by lending it symbolic expression. We are reminded of Lacan's example of the depressed young woman who remedies her perception of an internal void by painting on the wall.[90] Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* functions similarly as it creates a 'thought space' used to think through the Real in the symbolic. Darian Leader concurs that art which depicts human grief and suffering can act as a compensatory response to loss that can aid or begin the mourning process. He writes that, 'it is less the content of these works, less the manifest association with bereavement or separation that counts. Rather, it is the fact that they have been *made,* since making supposes they have been created from an empty space, from an absence'.[91]

With its repetitive imagery of death and loss, *The Man Who Looked Back* occupies a precarious position that alternates from a state of pathological

[88] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 6.

[89] Ibid., 97.

[90] Lacan 'On Creation Ex nihilo' in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–60*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), 115–127.

[91] Darian Leader, *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression* (London: Penguin, 2008) 207.

melancholia, to an active and consciously aware process of mourning which as yet remains unresolved, seemingly destined to manically repeat itself. Millar's project constitutes a type of pathological mourning because while this project attempts to be trying to work through loss, the appearance of this archive, as a symptom, suggests some form of symbolic collapse. Millar's muted and empty signifiers, the convulsed bodies indicative of psychological suffering, give form and expression to subjectivity beyond the symbolic, subjectivity present in the Real. This space for contemplation, which bears witness to a sense of loss, or a gap can transfer meaning to a place of non-meaning and an existence beyond the symbolic can be expressed from within its structure.[92] Despite the diffusion of trauma offered by this symbolic expression of absence and loss, the presentation of a subjectivity as present in the Real is still indicative of illness. As we will now see, this is even more apparent in Millar's project than it was in Warburg's due to the latter's more condensed composition and the works more restrained arrangement of images.

NEUROSIS AND THE PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF GESTURE

The middle board of *The Man Who Looked Back* presents us with numerous images that show Orpheus leading Eurydice out of Hades (Figure 1.7). In many of these numerous depictions Orpheus is just turning back to look behind him. This gesture for the most part is quite pensive, recasting Orpheus as a melancholic or reflective figure cautiously looking back as a metaphor for the act of remembrance. However, this pensive glance is inherently anxious; suggestive of uneasiness about the future from which Orpheus's head is turned away. Through their juxtaposition, Millar draws parallels between the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and the narrative of Chris Marker's *La Jetée,* as both stories revolve around notions of retrieval, while both are

[92] Ibid, 103.

also traumatic stories that tell of failed attempts at reclaiming the past. *La Jetée* tells the story of a prisoner of German-speaking captors who subject him to experiments in time travel in order to secure the future of humanity in a post-apocalyptic context. These painful experiments are carried out with the aid of wired eye patches, which allow the subject to look back. Alongside the numerous depictions of Orpheus looking behind him for Eurydice, in the bottom of the left hand corner of Millar's middle board is an image of these eye patches (Figure 1.8). The voice-over of *La Jetée* informs us that the protagonist must look back in order 'to summon the Past and Future to the aid of the Present'.[93] *The Man Who Looked Back* constitutes a similar act of return and retrieval, which is reiterated by repeated images of Orpheus in Hades. The images on Millar's boards have been physically reclaimed from the Warburg Institute and the journey of Orpheus is reflective of this process. Millar says, 'the myth to which I make reference is one of retrieval, rather than a wishful summoning, and though I'd surely not compare my travails here with that of Orpheus, they do both contain the sense of a real journey, an act by which one hopes to bring something important back.'[94] Other than the reproduced images, what exactly is being brought back, and why is it important? This chapter claims that it is an aspect of subjectivity as present in the Real that is being brought back, first by Warburg and later by Millar. This reconciliation with a conceptually difficult aspect of psychic life is important as this elusive aspect of our psychic make-up transcends

[93] Millar uses *La Jetée* to these ends, projecting Warburg's conviction that the tragedy of culture is destined to recur. He uses *La Jetée* to remember the tragedy of war which underpins Warburg's project, while projecting its recurrence into a fictional future. Although *La Jetée* is set in the fictional context of post WW III Paris, this futuristic imagining connotes the recent past as its apocalyptic content is symptomatic of both the Cold War that was raging in the early 1960s, while it also evokes the atrocities of World War II. In the film the scientists from the future converse in German while the still photographs of a devastated cityscape resemble the immediate post-war imagery of a devastated Germany. See *La Jetée* Directed by Chris Marker (1962. England: Noveaux Pictures, 2003), DVD.

[94] Jeremy Millar, e-mail message to author, 19 March 2012.

the symbolic order giving rise to a more direct, if at times troubling, dimension of nonverbal experience.

Millar's gesture of looking back is indicative of an apprehension about the future as well as demonstrating a melancholic attachment to the past.[95] Neurotic pathological gestures also make up the work's more detailed parts. These resonances of troubled psychological states, revealed by emphatic bodily gestures, can be considered as symptoms, agitations that point towards the already outlined stressors that underlie contemporary archival practice. Before moving on to the most prominent and recurrent gesture on Millar's boards, I will firstly analyse the convulsive gestures that are absent, but present through suggestion as this will act to enforce my analysis of the dominant gesture on these boards, which I argue are indicative of the connection between archiving and mental illness in Millar's project.

As mentioned, Millar's middle board contains an image of the wired eye patches used in *La Jetée* that allow the subject to look back (Figure 1.8). Millar says the act of looking back in his work is cast as tragic, not contemplative; we could add with regard to Marker's film that this is an act that is acutely painful. Rather than connoting reflection, this film evokes the early and brutal methods of electroconvulsive therapy used to treat mental disorders when all other treatments had failed. The protagonist of *La Jetée* is subjected to painful experiments in time travel by his German captors, who attach the wired eye patches to his face and stand over him as they administer the experiment (Figure 1.9). These images strongly evoke early photographic records of electroconvulsive therapy (Figure 1.10). Here we see a Doctor standing over a patient, alongside three nurses who are restraining

[95] George Baker discussed this melancholic position in relation to the work of Tacita Dean in 'Lateness and Longing.' in *50 Moons of Saturn; T2 Toronto Triennial,* ed. Daniel Birnbaum (Italy: Skira Editoire, 2008), 47–98.

the patient. Like the subject of *La Jetée,* the patient's eyes have been covered and wires protrude from his head. In keeping with Warburg's project, these images are linked through convulsive bodily gesture. There are further echoes between the close up images of the protagonist of *La Jetée* baring his teeth (Figure 1.11), and early records of patients being subjected to electroconvulsive therapy as patients were given objects to bite down on, to stop them biting off their tongues during convulsions (Figure 1.12). In numerous scenes from *La Jetée,* we also see the protagonist writhing in pain, clenching his teeth and biting down on the bamboo hammock in which he is laid out (Figure 1.13).

We can assume that Marker evokes this controversial therapy purposefully as the protagonist of *La Jetée* is clearly suffering from psychic disturbance, caused by the strength of the traumatic memory that haunts him. Conversely, rather than being an aid to memory, as the eye patches are, early electroconvulsive therapy had the undesirable side effect of causing memory loss and it can also be assumed that Marker plays on this connection.[96] As demonstrated by the image of the wired eye patches, Millar's project is an expansive work, which, like the eye patches, aids recall. This work points outside of its own perimeters by engaging the viewing subjects own memory, prompting memories of other iconic images which resonate with those that are physically present, as will now be demonstrated further.

In *The Man who Looked Back,* we see the repeated gesture of a figure with their head and arms flung backwards, a gesture that dramatizes the moment of death

[96] The probing of the workings of memory is an enduring concern for Marker. See Lupton, Catherine. *Chris Marker; Memories of the Future* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2006). For a discussion of the connection between archival images and the elusive nature of memory, or involuntary memory in Marker's work see Balsom, Erika. 'Qu'est-ce qu'une Madeleine interactive?: Chris Marker's Immemory and the Possibility of a Digital Archive,' *Journal of e-Media Stuides* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2008):1–20.

as a standing figure begins to fall towards the floor. This is most theatrical in a photograph taken from *La Jetée,* in the bottom right hand corner of Millar's right, or final board (Figure 1.14). This figure has just been shot, by both a gun and the camera while running towards a woman who can be seen in the distance. The speed, at which he is moving, makes his fall backwards towards the camera more dramatic. The medium of photography also dramatises this fall back as the gesture is frozen still, the body contorted into an impossible pose. The grey skies and strong tonal contrast of this image, combined with the sparse landscape at the end of the viewing platform, serves to further emphasise the gesture as the man falling is silhouetted against an almost blank skyline.

This still quality of photography can reflect and provoke psychological disturbance. Christian Metz argues that the '*stopping of the look*' characteristic of photography can be aligned with Freudian fetishism, a pathological deviation, which again points towards the Oedipus complex and infantile realisations of sexual difference.[97] He adds that the stillness of the photographic image also evokes a sense of timelessness, which is comparable to the temporal indifference of unconscious memory.[98] *La Jetée* makes visible analogue film's underlying support, it being made up of a succession of still frames. This is a feature of analogue film that digital video does not replicate. Millar's purposeful inclusion of stills from this particular film emphasises the project's alliance with mechanical, not digital reproduction,

[97] Metz writes that the fetish, 'means both loss (symbolic castration) and protection against loss'. He references Freud's article 'Fetishism' which describes the child's first realisation that the mother does not have a penis. This gives rise to the fear of castration and in order to alleviate this anxiety the child disavows perception by stopping the look on a substitute object, the fetish, often something near or seen just prior to the place of the terrifying absence. See Christian Metz, 'Photography and Fetish' in *October* 34 (Autumn, 1985): 84–6.

[98] Ibid, 83.

foregrounding the close proximity that the analogue, specifically, maintains with psychic disruption and the Real.

The emphatic gesture of the death of the protagonist of *La Jetée*, this dramatised fall with arms thrown back, is revisited and replayed across all three boards in many of the images of antique sculpture and nineteenth-century painting. This recurrence is made most obvious on the top row of the left board (Figure 1.15), which includes, from left to right, a reproduction of Baldassare Franceschini's *Orpheus and Eurydice* and two film stills showing sculptures from Marker's film, firstly a headless female figure whose arms are thrown back in the air, followed by a reclining female figure whose face has worn away.[99] These images are followed by a reproduction of Fredric Watts's *Orpheus and Eurydice,* 1869, showing Orpheus trying to catch or hold up Eurydice who is falling backwards towards the floor. This painting emphasises Orpheus's act of physical retrieval, which is akin to Millar's own emphasis on the retrieval of physical images. The physicality of the gesture and the physicality of the body is dramatized in this one image, as it is in many of the images reproduced on Millar's boards, as we view the full weight of the body emphasised by the fall and by the forces of gravity that are acting upon it. Millar arranges these images so that they resonate with each other. The headless figures whose arms are thrown back mirrors the gesture of Eurydice in the painting to its left, while the reclining figure whose head and arm slumps back is in keeping with

[99] These two images are stills from *La Jetée* and are contrasted by their facelessness with the protagonist's memories of the woman whose face is often shown in close-up. This emphasis on the face also alludes to Marker's own preoccupation with depicting the face in film and photography. This fascination with the face was demonstrated most forcibly in Marker's photographic exhibition at the Wexner Centre for the Arts, *Staring Back,* 2007, an exhibition of close ups of the faces of protestors from the 1960's to the present. See Chris *Marker; Staring Back* (Wexner Center for the Arts. Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 2007). Marker's long term interest in the human face has also been commented on by many critics such as Catherine Lupton who calls him a 'portraitist' see Catherine Lupton 'Imagine Another Chris Marker as a Portraitist', *Film Studies* 6 (Summer 2005): 74–80.

the lifeless body of Eurydice in the painting to its right. In all cases the figure is falling and her arms are thrown back.

Warburg's theory of the *pathosformel* analyses convulsive gestures as signs of unmanageable emotional excess and the gesture of a figure throwing their arms back whilst falling to the floor is a notable example, not least because such gestures, which are predominantly female on Millar's boards, evoke the bodily poses of hysteria. The pose of Eurydice in Watt's painting (Figure 1.16) replicates the pose of a swooning hysteric in an infamous print after André Brouillet's painting of French neurologist, Jean-Martin Charcot presenting his hysteric patient Blanche Wittman to members of his neurological service at the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris in 1887 (Figure 1.17). In Watts's painting, Eurydice's expiring body is bent at the weakened knees, she arches back and her head drops back towards the left while her left arm hangs limp. This image of the dying Eurydice held up by Orpheus mimics the fainting patient in hysterical collapse, who is also being held up under the arms by Charcot's assistant, observed by an all-male audience.[100] This is not a coincidental connection as there are numerous early photographic images of hysteric women in similar postures, and as above, we can again see these resonances in the other images on Millar's boards. For example, Francescini's painting of Eurydice with her arms thrown back in the air, (Figure 1.18) mirrors Jacques Moreau de Tours, *Hysterics of the Charité on the Service of Dr. Luys* , 1890 (Figure 1.19).

[100] This image invites feminist readings concerning the male dominated discipline of early psychology and the reductive assignment of hysteria to a sexual dysfunction, which only effects women. Although I do not have the scope to explore the connection here this coupling of the female hysteric and the figure of Eurydice could make for an interesting comparison as many scholars have also read the Orpheus myth from a feminist perspective. See Griselda Pollock. *Visual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive,* 172.

In the 1880s, Charcot was studying the connection between hysteria and hypnotism, believing that hysteria, which was predominantly understood to effect females, involved a constitutional weakness of the nervous system. Its principle psychological effect was to render the patient susceptible to spontaneous hypnotic states. According to Charcot, the distinction also worked the other way around and it was only hysterical patients that were truly susceptible to hypnosis.[101] Freud, a student of Charcot, would later challenge the idea of hysteria as a neurological condition, arguing instead that it was a condition that arose from strangulated traumatic emotional experiences that manifested themselves in hysterical symptoms.[102] However, this print of Charcot and the fainting hysteric, presided over Freud's consulting room; it hung above his famous couch, opposite his own chair and would have been directly in his line of vision during the treatment of his own patients[103] (Figure 1.20). In 1893 Freud described Charcot as a man of 'an artistically gifted temperament' as like Warburg he immersed himself in long observations of visual appearances, studying intense psychological states by way of their outward bodily manifestations.[104] As early as 1878, Charcot had hired a medical photographer, Albert Londe, who used a camera with nine lenses, and an intricate timing system to study the physical and muscular movements of patients. Notably, in

[101] See John Kerr, *A Dangerous Method* (Great Britain: Atlantic Books, 2012) 26.

[102] See Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 1895, trans. Nicola Luckhurst. (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

[103] Griselda Pollock discusses this image in relation to all the other images and artefacts in Freud's consulting room in 'The Image in Psychoanalysis and the Archaeological Metaphor' in *Psychoanalysis and the Image,* ed. Griselda Pollock. (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 1–29.

[104] Sigmund Freud. 'Charcot' (1893) trans. Joan Riviere. *Sigmund Freud: Collected Papers*, Volume 1 (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), 10.

these studies of hysteria, we again see the gesture of raised arms so prominent on Millar's own boards (Figure 1.21).

Georges Didi-Huberman has linked the photographic archive with mental illness, suggesting there to be a reciprocal relationship between photography and psychiatry, by focusing upon images of Charcot's hysterics.[105] Didi-Huberman connects the invention of photography with the 'invention' of hysteria arguing that this new technology actually produced the illness it recorded. Charcot's iconographic impulse was motivated by his belief that 'images speak more vividly to the mind than words'.[106] The indexical nature of photography, its apparently privileged connection to the real, meaning reality, made it an authoritative diagnostic tool, which could objectively record evidence of symptoms and illnesses. However, Didi-Huberman takes a cynical view of the highly gestural photographic images of hysteric patients at the Salpêtrière, arguing that the dramatic poses captured by these early photographic techniques were performed by patients in front of the lens. He writes, 'I am nearly compelled to consider hysteria, insofar as it was fabricated at the Salpêtrière in the last third of the nineteenth century, as a chapter in the history of art'.[107]

Warburg's psychopathological strain of art history is akin to Charcot's method of treating and diagnosing patients using mechanical reproduction to detect repetitive and recurring patterns by reading bodily gesture. Even if the hysterical gestures performed by Charcot's patients were invented by the medium itself this

[105] Jean Charcot ref by Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière,* trans. Alisa Hartz. (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003).

[106] Ibid., 4.

[107] Didi-Huberman., ibid.

does little to refute my claim that Millar's project enforces a connection between archiving and illness. There is a reciprocal relationship between archiving and mental illness as the archive may produce the illness it records, as well as being a response to illness. This alignment is evidenced by Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas,* which was the product of a disturbed psyche, but also evoked early psychological treatments and methods which used mechanical reproduction to focus on bodily gesture. Warburg's own interpretive method is not only aligned with the symptoms of illness, but with diagnostics and treatments. The psychopathological gestures on Millar's boards function as symptoms that reaffirm my claim that archival activity is symptomatic of illness, even as a diagnostic method, or a tool that can aid recovery. This relationship between mental illness and the process of archiving analogue images adds weight to the central claim of this thesis, this being that the analogue medium has kept close proximity to the Lacanian Real since the outset.

The early photographic records of hysteria from the Salpêtrière are not only similar in their content–dramatic bodily gesture– to the images in Millar's archive; they are also marked by an anxiety concerning memory. Huberman writes that, 'the first fifty years of photography still bear the mark of a major anxiety, more or less expressed, over the *toning* and *effacement* of prints'.[108] The technological problem of the permanence of images was felt no more forcefully than at the Salpêtrière. As a medium designed to capture, record and preserve all pathological manifestations, themselves a product of troubling unconscious memories, photography was assigned the weighty 'duty of being knowledge's memory, or rather its access to memory, it mastery over memory'.[109] The early anxieties regarding new technology and memory, which overshadowed the inception of photography as explored through

[108] Ibid., 45.

[109] Ibid., 48.

outward manifestations of emphatic and convulsive bodily gestures at the Salpêtrière, are replayed again by Millar as the medium of analogue photography approaches its demise.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary artistic archiving is pathological as the archive is a product of some form of symbolic collapse that it aims to reconstruct. We have seen this operating principle at work in *The Man Who Looked Back* which gathers together bodily gestures whose meaning only becomes apparent when brought together in the archive. *The Man Who Looked Back* is made up of muted signifiers that encircle a central void, the Real. Whilst this expression of the Real in the space of the symbolic diffuses its trauma, this transfer of the Real into symbolic space causes symbolic collapse and a loss of meaning. *The Man Who Looked Back* holds incompatible psychic registers in suspension. It is both an indicator of symbolic dissolution that gives way to the Real, and the reconstruction of the symbolic order around the absence of the Real.

In Millar's project the Real is given tangible form through repetition. Millar reproduces photographic reproductions that repeat convulsive bodily gestures. Sigmund Freud identified repetition compulsion as a symptom of traumatic neurosis which, according to his definition, could take the form of hysteria or melancholia.[110] *The Man Who Looked Back* presents with symptoms of both of these disorders enacting its own form of repetition compulsion by reproducing gestures indicative of unconscious traumas that do not belong to one receding past, but arise in the present and promise to return in the future. Repetition compulsion was the symptom that led

[110] Sigmund Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* trans. John Reddick. (London and New York: Penguin, 2003).

Freud to the discovery of the death drive.[111] The existence of this drive is crucial to what Jacques Derrida views as the madness of the archive. His term 'archive fever' refers to the death drive as the obverse face of the desire to preserve and record, namely a desire that simultaneously seeks to destroy and forget.[112] Derrida argues that the construction of an archive takes place when memory actually breaks down, hence the archive is not really a mnemonic device, but works instead against memory or is external to it. He writes, 'the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory'.[113] This is confirmed by *The Man Who Looked Back* as it responds to a crisis of memory connected to new technological developments. Furthermore, *The Man Who Looked Back* is indicative of this archival madness because it schizophrenically oscillates between the recalling of unconscious memory, the Lacanian Real, and a breakdown down of memory, as this traumatic Real can never be grasped.

While Lacan's register of the Real is framed in relation to trauma and illness, I suggest that through its sickness *The Man Who Looked Back* has positive implications. The Real is perceived as traumatic largely because it is an impossibility that evades conscious thought. *The Man Who Looked Back* creates a 'thought space' for the Real creating room for this loss of meaning to be acknowledged. This recognition of a conceptually difficult and contradictory aspect of subjectivity, whose meaning evades us, is also a reconciliation that gives us back something lost to consciousness. *The Man Who Looked Back* gestures towards the Real's restorative

[111] This drive operates alongside the pleasure principle and these two impulsive drives condition human desire, as pleasurable sexual instincts strive towards the perseveration of life, while the more disturbing ego instincts move towards death, ibid.

[112] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,* trans. Eric Prenowitz (London and the USA: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[113] Ibid., 11.

implications because the persistence of this universal psychic register provides a sense of continuity allowing for the tracing of something consistent, even if it is traumatic, which endures from antiquity to the present. This anchoring lineage allows Millar to resist the destabilising and anxiety inducing implications of rapid technological transitions, which violently break with the past by severing art historical memory from its art objects.

Archival technologies are becoming more refined; however, these new technologies have reopened a gap between the mnemonic function of a work and its physical presence. Furthermore, as will be seen in the following chapter on the work of Tacita Dean, these new reproductive techniques unanchor artworks through intermediality, changing the very nature of artists' mediums by severing the inherent lineage of tradition and art historical memory secreted within them. Running counter to digital progression, *The Man Who Looked Back* is a monument to traumatic memory. The analogue medium's language of contact and loss is crucial to this project as it both replicates and is receptive to the simultaneous resurfacing and receding movements of the Real. As a grounding aspect of a shared subjectivity, the Real has been quietly shadowing the history of artistic production from antiquity to the present. Warburg's archive of analogue images captured and made visible the persistence of this elusive register for the first time and this evident connection between the Real and the analogue image is reaffirmed by Millar as he looks back to Warburg.

FIGURES 1.1 – 1.21



Figure 1.1 Jeremy Millar, *The Man Who Looked Back*, 2010 (Exhibition shot, *Never the Same River (Possible Futures, Probable Pasts)*, curated by Simon Starling, Camden Arts Centre, December 2010–February 2011).



Figure 1.2. Detail of *The Man Who Looked Back*, 2010.



Figure 1.3. Aby Warburg, Table 5, *Mnemosyne Atlas*, 1924–9.

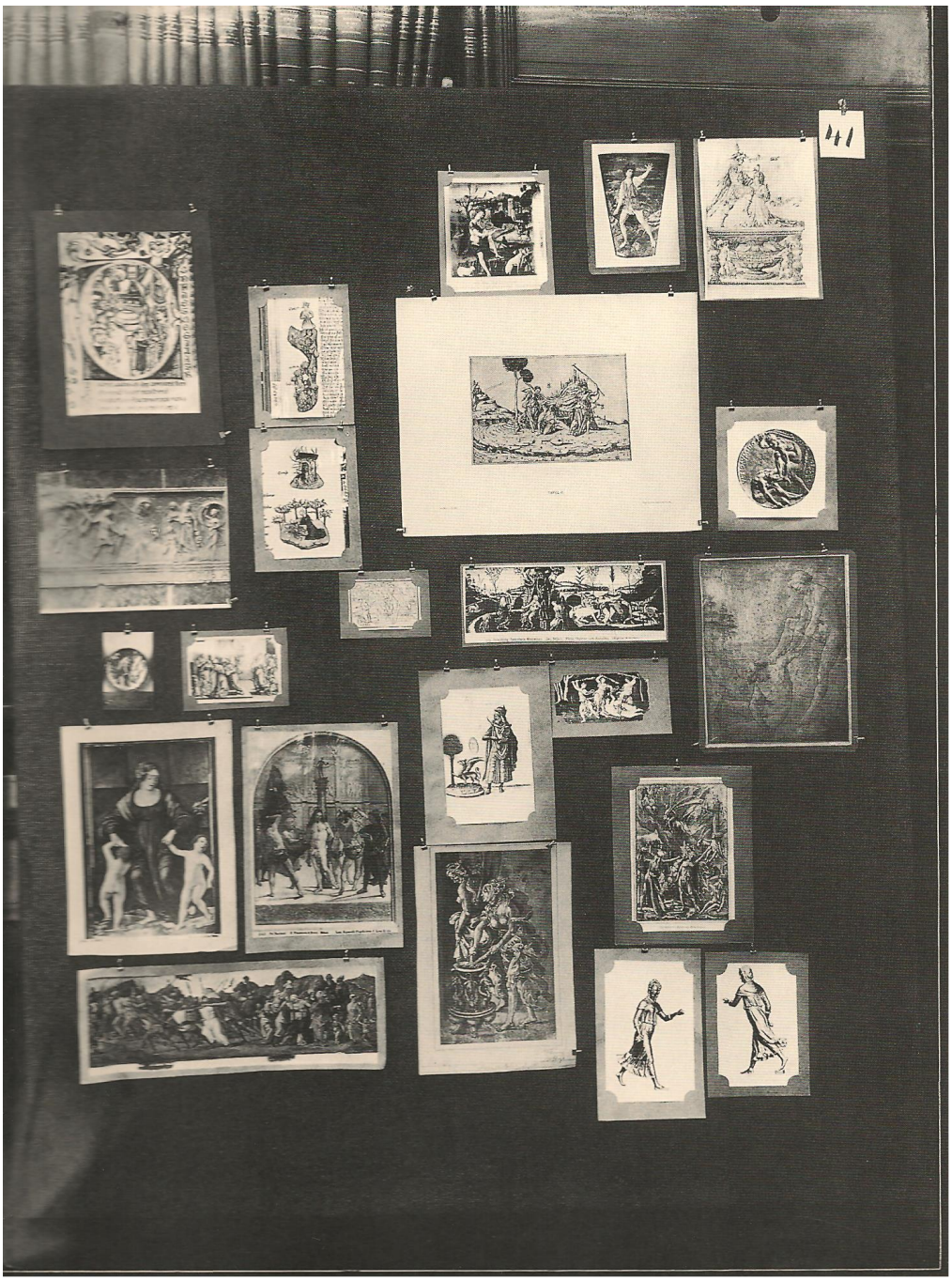


Figure 1.4. Table 41, *Mnemosyne Atlas*, 1924–9.



Figure 1.5. Left board of *The Man Who Looked Back*, 2010.



Figure 1.6. Jacopo del Sellaio, *Orpheus Charming Animals with his Music; Story of Orpheus and Eurydice,* 1485 (Reproduction from the Warburg Institute).



Figure 1.7. Detail of middle board, *The Man Who Looked Back,* 2010.



Figure 1.8. Detail of middle board, *The Man Who Looked Back*, 2010.



Figure 1.9. Chris Marker, film still from *La Jetée,* 1962.



Figure 1.10. Medical photograph of a patient receiving electroconvulsive therapy.



Figure 1.11. Film still from *La Jetée,* 1962.



Figure 1.12. Medical photograph of a patient receiving electroconvulsive therapy.



Figure 1.13. Film still from *La Jetée,* 1962.



Figure 1.14. Film still from *La Jetée,* 1962.



Figure 1.15. Detail of left board, *The Man Who Looked Back*, 2010.



Figure 1.16. George Frederic Watts, *Orpheus and Eurydice*, 1869–1880 (Reproduction from the Warburg Institute).



Figure 1.17. Print after André Brouillet's image of Jean- Martin Charcot presenting his patient Blanche Wittman to the members of his neurological service at the Salpêtrière Hospital, Paris, 1887 (National Library of Medicine).

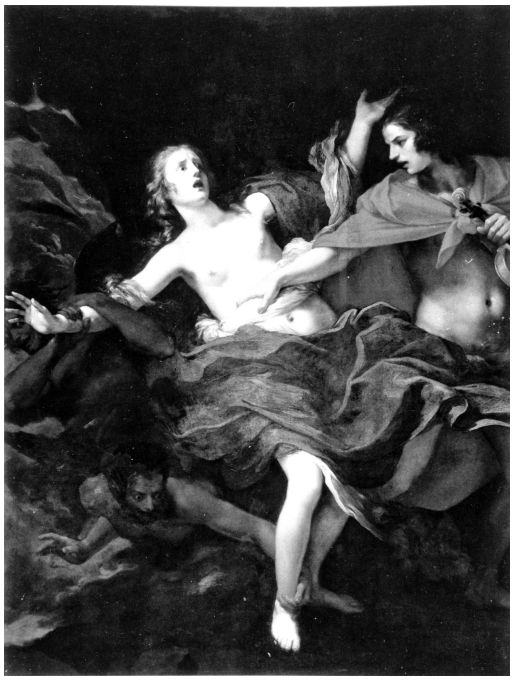


Figure 1.18. Baldassare Franceschini, *Orpheus and Eurydice,* third quarter seventeenth century (Reproduction from the Warburg Institute).



Figure 1.19. Joseph Moreau de Tours, *Hysterics of the Charité on the Service of Dr. Luys,* 1980 (National Library of Medicine).



Figure 1.20. Photograph of Freud's consulting room. The Freud Museum, 20 Maresfield Gardens, London.



Figure 1.21. Albert Londe, Hysteria chronophotogarphy. From the Salpêtrière of Jean Martin Charcot, 1878.

CHAPTER TWO

REMEMBRANCE AND CONTINGENCY: TACITA DEAN'S *SECTION CINEMA (HOMAGE TO MARCEL BROODTHAERS*, 2002)

Occupying and registering a significant moment of technological transition, Tacita Dean's *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers),* 2002, is a lament on the changing nature of artists' mediums in an age of digital ascendency. Marcel Broodthaers is a key figure for a younger generation of artists who are registering the shift from analogue mediums to digital ones. This is due to his premature emphasis on obsolescence and the outmoded in film and his engagement with art historical memory and the work of an older generation of artists and writers. Although newly relevant now, Broodthaers's outmoded aesthetic set his work apart from the avant-garde practices of his contemporaries who viewed the past as something to be superseded. Through Broodthaers and his interest in early film, *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* pinpoints the start and the anticipated end point of the medium. Dean focuses upon the temporal stages in which the qualities, complexities or promises offered by the medium of film burn brightest, because according to Walter Benjamin the illumination of the promise encoded at the birth of a technological support comes to light most effectively as it falls into obsolescence.[1]

[1] See Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism; The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia, 1929' in Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Vol 2, eds. Marcus Bullock

What promises were encoded in the medium of film at its inception, which are again relevant, or in any case more apparent, at the time of its impending obsolescence?

Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers) is a seminal work that looks back to Marcel Broodthaers in order to introduce a new art historical turn in contemporary British art at the start of the twenty-first century. This film signals a turning point in Dean's oeuvre as earlier films of the 1990s focused on sea voyages, as well as disappearing people and obsolete or outmoded objects and buildings. *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* sets in motion Dean's new art historical agenda being the first of many acts of homage to an older generation of artists. Other films include *Mario Merz*, 2002, Joseph Beuys in *Darmstädter Werkblock***,** 2007, which is formally closest to *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)*, Giorgio Morandi in *Still Life*, 2009, Claus Oldenburg in *Manhatten Mouse Museum*, 2011, Cy Twombly in *Edwin Parker*, 2011, and Robert Smithson, alongside J.G.Ballard, in *JG*, 2013.[2]

Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers) is a 13 minute, 16 mm colour film depicting the space that once housed Marcel Broodthaers's *Section Cinéma*, 1971–2. This under-ground basement is now a storeroom for the Stadtmuseum in Düsseldorf, however, many traces of its previous function remain. Dean's film emphasises the haunted nature of the space by lingering on the stencils

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and Michael W. Jenkins (Cambridge Massachusetts, Belknap Press, 2003), 210. Benjamin also touches upon this idea, of the redemptive potential of the outmoded in a number of texts including The Arcades Project 1927–1940, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Harvard University Press, 1999) and Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the End of High Capitalism, trans. Harry Zohn (London, Verso, 1997).

[2] During this time Dean also made films about other influential male figures including, *Michael Hamburger,* 2007, *Merce Cunningham Performs Stillness (Six Performances, Six Films)*, 2008 and *Craneway Event*, 2009.

left on the walls that index the absent presence of Broodthaers's hand, now filmed in the present by Dean's trembling hand-held camera. A sense of stillness permeates *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* residing in the unfrequented storeroom itself and because the film is composed of a series of locked shots reminiscent of a sequence of still photographs, like Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, 1962. Although the flicker and wobble of the projected celluloid is important, this stillness makes reference to the underlying structure of analogue film and its origins in photography. Through photographic silence and stillness Dean draws parallels between herself and Broodthaers who also probed the photographic nature of film by using it to animate a still image. This happens most prominently in two of his films, *Analysis of a Painting,* 1973, and *A Voyage on the North Sea*, 1973–4, which both focus on the same painting of a nineteenth-century sailing ship. Coincidentally whilst searching Broodthaers's former cinema for its still remaining traces, Dean's camera happens upon a number of model ships which are visually similar to the one depicted in Broodthaers's nautical films (Figure 2.1). Through this chance encounter Dean connects with Broodthaers and through him investigates the status of film as a medium– its emergence, its history and its capacity– from the moment of its inception to the point of its obsolescence. This engagement with Broodthaers hinges on the fortuitous find of the model ships as *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* presents chance as the most promising and now most threatened aspect of the medium of film.

In *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* art historical memory is presented as something secreted within the medium of film, which is then aligned with chance and contingency. Dean's film starts with a shot of a white wall, which was the entrance point to Broodthaers's *Section Cinéma* and still bears one of his

stencils that reads 'section cinema' boldly rendered in red paint (Figure 2.2). This opening shot of text provides immediate orientation and also acts like a sort of title card which makes reference to silent film presentations and the origins of film. This shot enforces the presence of Broodthaers as the era of silent film was a constant thread in his investigations into the filmic medium. Many of his films referenced slapstick comedy with the artist himself cast as a comedy figure reminiscent of Buster Keaton.[3] Broodthaers's interest in early film and slapstick comedy draws attention to the affinity between analogue film and chance because, as Siegfried Kracauer wrote of early cinema, 'film comedy did not highlight the performer's proficiency in braving death and surmounting impossible difficulties rather it minimized his accomplishments in a constant effort to present successful rescues as the outcome of pure chance'.[4] He writes, '[a]ccidents were the very soul of slapstick'.[5] Chance is an integral part of both Broodthaers's oeuvre and the historicity of the medium of film.

Despite the presence of this affiliation between analogue film and chance in numerous projects by Broodthaers, it has gone unnoticed in much of the discourse that surrounds his work. Dean's *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* remedies this oversight by establishing this rapport between herself and Broodthaers as Dean often harnesses chance and contingency as a working method and artistic strategy. This has been widely noted in the vast amount of secondary literature on

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[3] Bruce Jenkins, and Jean-Christophe Royoux, eds. *Marcel Broodthaers: Cinéma* (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1997), 271.

[4] Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: Redemption of Physical Reality* (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 62.

[5] Siegfried Kracauer, 'Silent Film Comedy' in *Sight and Sound* 21, no. 1 (August/ September, 1951) 31.

her work. However, as Margaret Iversen points out, the intrinsic connection between chance and the analogue in Dean's films has not been adequately addressed either.[6] *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* has not received any sustained critical attention, yet in this work the connection between film, chance and contingency that runs through many of Dean's projects is explicit. As this chapter will demonstrate, through close engagement with *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)*, chance is the specificity of the filmic medium so palpable at its inception, which again comes to light at the point of its obsolescence.

Broodthaers evocation of early cinema attests to the connection between film and chance through the comedic accidents, slips and chance events that permeated slapstick comedy. Dean also uses cinema to frame her claims for film and chance, yet she refers to the end of this cinematic magic as the recent changes cinema has undergone has caused a denigration of chance as we move from analogue to digital technology. She writes:

> 'Fix it in post' is the song of the digital. It has been the great advance in image-making in recent years, but it has also created an inert visual tidiness and uniformity. Crews have become less technically invested in a project because the image gets adjusted after the event. The atmosphere of the film shoot has changed. The move from making things in production to making them in post-production has been one of the most underestimated and radical shifts that has happened with the advent of digital cinema. Mistakes were often magical but we no longer see them.[7]

The digital has allowed for greater creative control post-production. Its innate strength lies in its accelerating capacity to produce stunning visual affects. However, as Dean consistently argues the digital diminishes chance as the increase in creative

[6] Margaret Iversen, 'Analogue: On Zoe Leonard and Tacita Dean', *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 4 (Summer 2012):813.

[7] Tacita Dean, *Tacita Dean: Film* (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), 29.

control is also an increase in censoring and erasing. This fundamental shift has largely to do with the fact that the digital can be simultaneously watched back while being recorded. Instantaneous decisions can be made and the unforeseen accidents, slippages and mistakes that can imbue film with a quality that could not have been envisaged have less chance of making it through the process. Whilst the digital's increasing capacity for manipulation and creative control is largely seen as a positive development, Dean argues that the affective potential of chance is beyond conscious control and so stands opposed to these strengths of the digital. She writes, 'analogue, which has now come to mean all that is not digital, proposes a place, a mountain, a realm of the mind that can be reached by those who feel that it is possible, in fact necessary to do so.'[8]

Dean frames film's openness to chance in the context of a surrealist legacy and the movement's practice of 'objective chance'. André Breton developed this term to describe the experience of material reality charged with psychic energy.[9] An object invested with this psychic charge is the surrealist *trouvaille,* which functions as both an indicator of repressed desire and a solution to a question that the subject is unable to formulate as such. Breton writes of such finds in *Mad Love,* 1935, '[i]t is really as if I had been lost and they had come to give me news about myself'.[10] Dean writes:

> I concur with André Breton when he spoke of the objective chance process being about external circumstances acting in response to the unspoken

[8] Ibid…27.

[9] For a fuller discussion see Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, Ltd, 1993), 40.

[10] André Breton, *Mad Love,* trans. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 8–9.

> desires and the demands of the human psyche. I have begun to recognise myself, not so much in the works of others–although I have always believed that art works best when it responds to the autobiography of the viewer–but in the connections between them.[11]

Dean's art historical agenda not only reinvests Broodthaers's practice, it also refers to an earlier moment by reaffirming Maurice Blanchot's description of the surrealist movement as 'a powerful negative moment' in the history of art that opens onto the emptiness at the centre of subjectivity.[12] Jacques Lacan was affiliated with the surrealist movement and derived his missed encounter with the Real, the *tuché,* directly from this same surrealist trajectory of thought. Dean aligns objective chance with something unspoken suggesting that affective chance encounters can lead us to a place beyond the symbolic order. Through its alignment with chance, analogue film maintains close proximity to the Lacanian Real and Dean's abandonment to contingency functions as a non-traumatic inflection of the Real. The medium then holds the promise of reconciliation with an elusive aspect of subjectivity lost to conscious thought.

This chapter will begin by exploring the relationship between analogue film and chance through Marcel Broodthaers's interest in early film. It will attend to *Section Cinéma* and the discourse surrounding it in order to foreground the legacy with which Tacita Dean is engaging. Contrary to the key scholars on Broodthaers's work, namely Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, I argue that Broodthaers's cinema was a celebration, not criticism of early cinematic practises. This new claim for Broodthaers's work and his affirmation of the medium of film aligns his interest in chance with his strategies of destabilising language in order to resist fixed meanings.

[11] Tacita Dean, *An Aside* (London: Hayward Gallery, 2005), 4–5.
[12] Maurice Blanchot, 'Literature and the Right to Death' in *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (USA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 301.

Both of these aspects of Broodthaers's practice move towards the unnameable by referring us to a silent space beyond the symbolic order.

The second part of this chapter will analyse Dean's *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* by focusing on two key points of convergence between Dean's and Broodthaers's claims for analogue film. The first point concerns film's intrinsic relationship with chance, while the second alights on its proximity to a non-symbolic space of silence. The first and most central of these claims will be explored in relation to Dean's method of objective chance and framed in the context of a body of work dedicated to Broodthaers that formed an exhibition entitled, *21.10.02–21.12.02* at the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen Düsseldorf in 2002.[13] *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* will be contextualised in relation to this exhibition before being aligned with Dean's earlier body of films on the sea voyage. The operations of chance were central to her nautical films of the 1990s extending into *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* through the presence of the model ships.

I will then demonstrate that Dean's homage to Marcel Broodthaers further illuminates key points of convergence between both of their practices as it aligns the chance find with a space beyond language. This claim will set *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* in dialogue with Dean's book project *Floh,* 2001. This photographic project draws heavily on the surrealist *trouvaille* combining chance encounters with instances of unmeaning culminating in what Dean calls the 'silence of the lost object'.[14] The model ships Dean finds in *Section Cinema*

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[13] See Tacita Dean, '*21.10.02- 21.12.02*' in *Tacita Dean*: *Seven Books* (Paris: Musees de la Ville de Paris and Gottingen: Steidl, 2003).

[14] Tacita Dean, 'Floh,' ibid., 50.

(Homage to Marcel Broodthaers) operate in the same manner that the found photograph does in *Floh.* The found object is a piece of material reality charged with psychic energy and Dean's silent lost object is representative of subjectivity present in the Real. The comparison between *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* and *Floh* dramatises celluloid film's receptiveness to chance, which can open onto a powerfully affective silent space beyond language.

The analogue's relationship with chance holds restorative potential as it can return a silent aspect of the self that exists beyond language and beyond conscious thought. By eliminating chance from the photographic process, the digital distances us from this self beyond the symbolic. The consequences of this seemingly irreversible transition threaten chance realisations, which can lead to a deeper sense of self-awareness and the propensity for more affective and affirmative life experiences. Dean writes of the intrinsic relationship between the analogue and chance, 'a decline in one will invariably mean a decline in the other and our lives would be greatly impoverished for it'.[15]

SILENCE: MARCEL BROODTHAERS, *SECTION CINÉMA*, 1971– 2

Marcel Broodthaers's *Section Cinéma* was one of twelve sections of his fictive museum, the *Musee d'Art Moderne,* which ran from 1968–72, in various locations.[16] The first manifestation of *Section Cinéma* was located and active in a cellar at 12 Burgplatz, Düsseldorf from January 1971 to June 1972. Broodthaers then closed down *Section Cinéma* before modifying it and reopening the same space again from

[15] Tacita Dean, *An Aside: Selected By Tacita Dean* (London: Hayward Gallery, 2005), 4.

[16] The first section of the museum was *Section XIXe siècle* which was made up of empty packing crates and postcard reproductions of master works, located in Broodthaers's own home in Brussels where it remained for a year. Rachel Haidu, *The Absence of Work: Marcel Broodthaers, 1964–1976* (Cambridge, Massachusetts London: The MIT Press, 2010), 108.

June–October 1972. *Section Cinéma* was made up of two rooms. The outer room housed a painted projection screen onto which Broodthaers's had stencilled 'fig.12, fig. 2, fig. 1, and fig. A' in black paint (Figure 2.3). Inside this room were two director-style canvas chairs with arm rests, the film projector, a standing lamp, and a darkened room, inside which was a photography table which alluded to the origins of film. When Broodthaers reopened *Section Cinéma* he added a number of stencils to this space painting 'department des aigles' on the black entrance door in gold paint and 'section cinema' in red paint on the entrance wall. Inside the outer room he painted a beam on the ceiling with the mysterious number combination '21 12 0 2' and adorned the walls inside the space with three inscriptions of the word 'silence'.

In the original *Section Cinéma* the inner room housed a number of objects, twelve elements in total, including a pipe, a clock, a mirror, an accordion, and a chest containing another set of twelve objects. These objects, which except for the chest, hung on the wall were labelled with painted stencils that also read 'fig.1, fig. 2, fig. A, or fig.12.' After closing down this section of the museum, Broodthaers sold off these objects. When he reopened the space the figures remained, however, he repainted fig.12, which denoted the now absent clock, larger than the others. Underneath this stencil was a newly added sealed vitrine containing catalogues of the sold objects. Other remaining objects inside the inner room were three framed posters, more stencils on the walls, which read 'musee' and 'museum', and a piano with its keys removed. This unplayable instrument functioned as both a non-functional art object and a reinforcement of Broodthaers emphasis on silence, which ran through the projection of his silent films in the outer room, and the accompanying stencils of the word 'silence'.

The closure of the first manifestation of *Section Cinéma* demonstrated Broodthaers's more cautious approach to the critical practice of his contemporaries. In its initial manifestation *Section Cinéma's* juxtaposition of object with textual figures was aligned with conceptual art's aim of resisting the commodification of aesthetic experience through the use of text. However, Broodthaers distanced himself from this mode of practice when he perceived that conceptual art was becoming absorbed by the same system it was supposedly opposing.[17] The later version of *Section Cinéma* then became a kind of parody of itself as evidenced by the new inclusion of catalogues documenting the objects sold in the inner room. In this new space, figures without objects were presented as artworks in their own right, as is the space of the museum itself. *Section Cinéma* could no longer be commodified as it was already acutely aware of its status as commodity. Conceptual art's textual language is silenced by Broodthaers who realised that the artist is essentially impotent with regards resisting the commodification of his art. The voiceless status of the artist is repeatedly expressed through Broodthaers's courting of silence in a number of films which frustrate language, and through his continuous use of figures that act to destabilise meaning.

CHANCE AND SILENCE

In *Section Cinéma* Broodthaers screened three of his films; *Promenade,* 1968, *Une Discussion inaugurale*, 1968 and *Un Voyage à Waterloo*, 1969. Three other found films were then added which, as Buchloh argues, acted to satirise or mock the 'primitive beginnings of industrial film production as banal entertainment and crude

[17] Manuel Borja-Villel and Michael Compton in Maria Gilisen, ed. *Marcel Broodthaers: Section Cinéma, 1972* (New York: Marian Goodman Gallery, 2010), 7.

documentary'.[18] These films which consisted of cheap outtakes or leftovers from Charlie Chaplin movies in *Charlie as Filmstar,* 1971, out-dated newsreel materials in *Belga Vox- Mode- twentieth century Fox,* 1971, and a commonplace tourist guide to Brussels in *Brussel Teil II,* 1971, according to Buchloh, acted to allegorise the cinema's supposedly overpowering presence demonstrating the intense doubts Broodthaers had about cinematic practises. In *Section Cinéma* Broodthaers makes reference to early cinema dating from the beginning of the twentieth century. At this time cinema was becoming a large-scale entertainment industry and cinema houses became much grander and larger as well as becoming more commercial. Much of the early slapstick comedy that Broodthaers evokes, namely films featuring Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, combined comedy with social commentary. Broodthaers seems to index this particular moment of cinema's history in order to highlight, and, as Buchloh argues, critique the cinema's potential to be an instrument of social change.

Buchloh claims that the famous photograph of Broodthaers holding Georges Sadoul's *L'invention du cinema,* 1832-1897 (Figure 2.4*),* taken by Jorge Romero to mark the first installation of *Section Cinéma* signals that Broodthaers's 'relationship to the cinematic apparatus was even more ostentatiously transferred into the realm of historical farce 'as it '[j]uxtaposes the archaisms of the smoke and mirrors of film culture's cheap populist vaudeville origins –"the cinema of attractions"– with the inescapable demarcations, or ciphers of discursivity, that instantly demystify or decipher the apparatus of totalising illusions in its present state as one of textual and ideological constructions'.[19] In this image we see

[18] Benjamin H.D Buchloh, 'Marcel Broodthaers's *Section Cinéma* ' in ibid, 12.

[19] Ibid., 10.

Broodthaers in a black mask which obscures his eyes, smoke emanates from his mouth in a gesture that signals toward the illusory nature of cinema. Buchloh argues that Broodthaers mocks cinematic practice in an attempt to demystify or decipher cinema's magic as an, 'apparatus of totalizing illusions'.[20] He says, Broodthaers's cinema looks back to the origins of this medium in order to illuminate its failed promises. This emphasis on failure is a trajectory that Dean takes up in a number of films which focus upon the failed utopian technological promises of the 1960s.[21] However, this chapter does not argue for or against the revolutionary political potential of film as this is not an obvious concern of Dean's work. Furthermore, Buchloh's account of Broodthaers's cinema as one that denigrates cinema's deceptive power must be called into question because while the redemptive promise of the medium of film, for Dean and Broodthaers, is not a revolutionary one, it is still a revelatory one.

Buchloh's reading of Broodthaers's work seems unjustifiably concerned with its critical potential at the expense of eliminating any of the redemptive potential of film that Broodthaers salvages from early cinema. Buchloh goes as far as to say that Broodthaers continually 'voiced his loathing of film as a technological regime for the production of an ideological apparatus'. [22] He views Broodthaers's reference to early cinema, as typified by the inclusion of a film made up of outtakes from Charlie Chaplin movies in *Section Cinéma* as a 'gesture of facetious reverence for the primitive beginnings of industrial film' as Broodthaers achieves 'the unique

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[20] Ibid.

[21] As Tamara Trodd argues, Dean's work should be considered as 'a practice which in general courts the example of failure assiduously – explicitly against the social form in relation to which it fails'. Tamara Trodd, 'Film at the End of the Twentieth Century: Obsolescence and Medium in the Work of Tacita Dean', *Object* 6 (History of Art department, UCL, 2003/04), 368.

[22] Benjamin Buchloh, 'Marcel Broodthaers's *Section Cinéma,*' 9.

synthesis of the obsolete, the infantile, and the imbecile even on the level of constructing his own film program'.[23] Broodthaers's reference to early cinema, however, is not overtly concerned with critiquing or mocking the deceptive nature of cinema, but on the contrary refers to silent film as a means of unveiling something which was beyond perception until cinema brought it into focus. Writing of the changes early film heralded in modes of perception in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 1936, Walter Benjamin writes:

> Fifty years ago, a slip of the tongue passed more or less unnoticed. Only exceptionally may such a slip have revealed dimensions of depth in conversation which had seemed to be taking its course on the surface. Since the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* things have changed. This book isolated and made analyzable things which had heretofore floated along unnoticed in the broad stream of perception. For the entire spectrum of optical, and now also acoustical, perception of film has bought about a similar deepening of appreciation.[24]

Benjamin refers to Sigmund Freud's, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life,* 1901, which put forward the thesis that forgetfulness, slips of the tongue, inadvertent actions, errors and mistakes are indicative of suppressed psychic material, which, although displaced from consciousness, finds expression through failures and accidents. Freud argued that such inadvertent actions or unintentional expressions, often assigned to the realm of clumsiness or carelessness, actually reveal some hidden factor in a subject's mental life. These revelatory phenomena bring concealed or unconscious wishes or desires to the surface aiding a subject's sense of self-awareness. Such inadvertent actions are often violent, jerky and at times very well

[23] Ibid., 12.

[24] Walter Benjamin 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1968), 235.

aimed. Freud cites many examples of his own personal experience. In one such account, he tells the story of a visit he had received from his sister who had come to his study to admire the new acquisitions of ornaments and sculptures he had recently added to his already extensive collection. Admiring this collection, his sister then added that the inkstand on his desk did not suit the rest of the room and he should buy a prettier one. Later that day Freud writes, 'I sat down at my desk to write, made a curiously clumsy, sweeping movement with the hand holding my pen and knocked the lid of the inkwell, which was already lying on my desk, to the floor'.[25] Freud argues that this apparently clumsy movement, which condemned the old inkstand by breaking it, expressed his desire to have his sister buy him a new one, adding that the clumsy gesture, 'in reality was both dextrous and purposeful, since I avoided all the more valuable items standing close to the inkstand'.[26] Through anecdotes such as this *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* paints a picture of ordinary life as disconsolately comic, being made up of slips and errors that are gags that the unconscious aims at the self. Benjamin argues that film is similarly revelatory.

In early cinema unconscious psychological impulses and unconscious optics were brought together through slapstick comedy, as audiences would gather to see everyday life as a litany of errors, accidents and failures. One of early cinema's discoveries is this revelation, an account of existence manifested in the accident-prone hero of early slapstick film whose rescues and escapes, which despite the haphazard jerkiness and clumsiness of his physical actions, would often see him come out on top, were portrayed as the outcome of pure chance. With this in mind it

[25] Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life,* trans. Anthea Bell (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 160.

[26] Ibid.

can be argued that Broodthaers did not screen his film *Charlie as Filmstar*, 1971 (Figure 2.5), to mock early cinematic practice, rather he used it to align the filmic medium with the revelatory aspect of chance and accident. Contrary to Buchloh's claims the persona that Broodthaers presents in many of his films is not reflective of a serious or critical observer, or a mocking cynic, rather, like Chaplin, he is a figure who is often hilariously and tragically impotent, the victim of failure and error.[27]

The failure to which Broodthaers continually refers in many of his films is the failure of art to be an instrument of social change and the failure of communication more generally. In many of his filmic performances we see him as a tragicomic figure in absurd situations. To reemphasise, he is not a mocking figure, although he does take this stance in other works, but often the actual butt of the joke. This comedy persona can be seen in *La Pluie (Project pour un texte),* 1969, a two minute 16 mm black and white film (Figure 2.6). Here we see Broodthaers sitting at a crate in a garden trying to write with ink from an inkwell, a connection to Freud's story not lost here, while fake rain continuously washes his words away. Similarly, in a later work, *Berlin oder ein Traum mit Sahne,* 1974, Broodthaers again explores the comedy value of failed communication while mocking the sleepy and sedentary disposition of the bourgeois artist (Figure 2.7). This 10 minute, 35 mm colour film, shows him sitting at a table with a fake parrot that appears to have laid an egg. A

[27] Chaplin's form of social commentary critiqued the faults and excesses of the Capitalist system, perhaps most notably in *Modern Times*, 1936. This portrayal of wealthy capitalists and oppressed workers corresponded to leftist stereotypes in the 1930s. Broodthaers harboured his own leftist sensibilities being a member of the Communist party from 1943–51. Despite this fact Broodthaers's comedy persona is often aligned with the more stoic Buster Keaton due to Broodthaers's adoption of the former's deadpan expression and perhaps because Keaton's political affiliations are less pronounced. The significance of these early figures of silent comedy in Broodthaers's work is only ever afforded a cursory mention in much of the secondary literature that surrounds it, yet this is an important and interesting area that would benefit from more research. For a more detailed account of Broodthaers involvement with the communist party see Deborah Schultz, *Marcel Broodthaers: Strategy and Dialogue* (UK: Peter Lang, 2007), 25.

young girl, his daughter Marie-Puck, enters the room and presents him with a cream cake, upon which his glasses are then shown resting. In slapstick style, Broodthaers then picks up his cream-covered glasses and tries to read the paper.

This stress on failed communication is also emphasised in *Section Cinéma* by the stencilled inscriptions of 'silence' that were disseminated across its walls. The meaning of this stencilled word 'silence' evokes traditional cinema houses whilst making reference to silent film. Broodthaers's repetition of the word 'silence' also indexes the Real because this register exists beyond the symbolic and beyond language. This point will be elaborated in more depth in relation to Dean's homage as she illuminates and emphasises this aspect of Broodthaers's silences. In the context of his wider practice Broodthaers's stencilled 'silence' is reflective of the reticence he always displayed towards any form of direct communication with his audience. When interviewed or asked to elaborate on his work he was often evasive, famously aligning his artistic intentions with a desire to create something 'insincere'.[28] This allusiveness permeated his work as Broodthaers employed multiple strategies to undermine and resist fixed readings, through different personae, riddles and word play. Broodthaers's 'fig', which he used in multiple works including his cinema also performs this destabilising function being a type of arbitrary sign, which does not clarify meaning, as in its traditional context as a label, but acts to dispel or undermine it. Broodthaers's 'figs' which point to nothing, can also be aligned with his use of objects that function as moulds, frames or voids that

[28] In a text of 1964, that announced his decision to retire from being a poet in order to become an artist, written for the invitation for his first exhibition at the Galerie Saint-Laurent, Broodthaers writes 'I, too, wondered if I couldn't sell something and succeed in life. For quite a while I had been good for nothing. I am forty years old … The idea of inventing something insincere finally crossed my mind and I set to work at once'. Marcel Broodthaers ref by Frank Maes in *Marcel Broodthaers*, eds. Emma Dean and Michael Stanley (Milton Keynes Gallery and Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications, 2008), 14.

encompass, or contain nothing. The most prominent of these objects is the mussel shell celebrated by Broodthaers as the mussel is a creature that forms its own shell, therefore creating itself out of nothing.[29] The mussel is also reflective of Broodthaers's interest in the sea, another point of convergence between Broodthaers and Dean.

As mentioned, the walls in both the inner and outer rooms of *Section Cinéma* were littered by Broodthaers's 'figs,' as was the projection screen in the outer room. The effect of the 'figs' on the viewing of the films can be seen in the stills from *Charlie as Filmstar* (Figure 2.5). During the screening of films in *Section Cinéma* the objects and subjects to which the 'figs' referred were constantly shifting and changing rendering these labels useless. These devalued ciphers draw attention to the materiality of the projection screen and the materiality of film, disallowing suture. They are also used to alert the spectator to the complex relationship of materiality to language in the 1970s. Broodthaers undermines the triumph of language celebrated by conceptual art and the transformation of materiality into signage. He writes that his 'figs' in *Section Cinéma* are 'a hypocritical lamentation about the destruction of the object by linguistics and at the same time an attempt to correlate the figure as the visual representation of a form and the figure as a representation of language'.[30]

Broodthaers's emphasis on failed communicative acts points to the failure of the symbolic order, and can also be attributed to his previous career as a poet who

[29] The mussel also makes reference to the national dish of Brussels, whilst Broodthaers also plays on the French word *moule*, which also means mould. Broodthaers paid tribute to the mussel in his poem *La Moule (The Mussel)*, which reads '[t]his mussel, This clever thing has avoided societies mould. She's cast herself in her very own. Other look-a-likes share with her the anti-sea. She's perfect.' Marcel Broodthaers ref by Deborah Schultz, *Marcel Broodthaers; Strategy and Dialogue.* (UK: Peter Lang, 2007), 114.

[30] Marcel Broodthaers and Fernand Spillemaeckers, untitled text, reproduced as facsimile in Bruce Jenkins and Jean-Christophe Royoux, *Marcel Broodthaers: Cinema,* 158–60.

lacked a visible audience. This misfiring of language also extends to interviews with inanimate objects and domestic animals, as exemplified by the one-sided conversation the artist had with a wax figure of Jeremy Bentham in his film, *Figures of Wax (Jeremy Bentham)*, 1974, and his conversation with a cat in the absurd work *Interview with a Cat*, 1970. This latter work is a sound recording of the artist probing a domestic cat to answer serious questions about the nature of art. He starts by asking the cat 'is that a good painting? … Does it correspond to what you expect from that very recent transformation which goes from Conceptual Art to this new version of a kind of figuration, as one might say?' To which the cat continuously, and obviously, responds 'Miaow'.[31] This interview evokes Joseph Beuys's, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare,* 1965. Although comic, Broodthaers both mocks and seriously critiques the social political claims for art made by Joseph Beuys, whom he also derided in an open letter of 1972.[32] While the self-serious and shamanic Beuys made huge claims for the socio-political potential of art and the importance of the role of the artist, Broodthaers couldn't take these claims seriously, writing, 'one fact is certain: commentaries on art are the result of shifts in the economy. It seems doubtful that such shifts can be described as political'.[33]

Although by no means a bumbling, or uncerebral character, Broodthaers uses slapstick comedy to signal towards the absurdity of the idea that art, as a mode of communication, can affect social or political change. By using his comedy persona and this reference to early cinema, Broodthaers paints a picture of the impotence of the artist as a failure-stricken and hapless figure with no voice, which

[31] Marcel Broodthaers, *Interview With a Cat*, 1970, translated transcript courtesy of Milton Keynes Gallery.

[32] See Stefan Germer, 'Haacke, Broodthaers, Beuys,' *October* 45 (Summer 1998): 63–75.

[33] Marcel Broodthaers ref by ibid., 64.

acts to reveal what he views as the true situation of the artist who is a similarly helpless figure subjected to fluctuations and shifts in the art market, over which he has no control. While it may be critical, Broodthaers's disconsolate comedy still makes claims for the redemptive potential of film as a revelatory medium that reveals the truth underlying the conditions of artistic practice. Artistic success or failure is a game of chance or accident and not purely the outcome of the author's intention.

ART HISTORICAL MEMORY AND THE SEA VOYAGE

Broodthaers's *Section Cinéma* was prefigured by *Cinéma Modèle* and the agenda of this earlier cinema was art historical. This history is significant to Dean's re-visiting of the site as an act of homage. *Cinéma Modèle* screened a number of films dedicated to an older generation of artists and literary figures.[34] Under the heading *Programme La Fontaine*, Broodthaers's screened five films each inspired by an artist or writer whom he had taken as a model. These include a homage to Kurt Schwitters in Broodthaers's first film *La Clef de l'Horage (poeme cinematographique en l'honneur de Kurt Schwitters),* 1957, Jean de La Fontaine in *Le Corbeau at le Renard*, 1967, René Magritte in *La Pipe (Gestalt, Abbildung, Figur, Bild)*, 1996–72, Stéphane Mallarmé in *La Pluie (Project pour un texte)*, 1969 and Charles Baudelaire in *A Film by Charles Baudelaire*, 1970.[35]

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[34] *Cinéma Modèle* opened in November 1970, in the basement of the *Musee d'Art Moderne* at area 12, Burgplatz. Originally planned to run until April 1971, the *Cinéma Modèle* only lasted five weeks, being replaced by *Section Cinéma*.

[35] Charles Baudelaire was a key figure for Broodthaers who made numerous references to him in a number of works, including his book, *Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes de Charles Baudelaire,* 1974. See *Marcel Broodthaers: Cinéma (*Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1997*),* 132. Broodthaers also participated in a seminar with Lucien Goldmann on Baudelaire in Paris in 1969–70. See Rachel Haidu, xxiv. Baudelaire was also a crucial figure for Benjamin, who saw him as a kind of personification of modernity. Baudelaire both influences and is the subject of numerous texts by Benjamin see Walter Benjamin *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire,* ed. Michael W. Jennings (Harvard University Press, 2006).

Broodthaers's first cinema, the precursor to *Section Cinéma*, is important because it is indicative of the way he distanced himself from his contemporaries by employing an outmoded aesthetic, alongside an art historical memory, that ran counter to the avant-garde traditions of the twentieth century. Buchloh writes that Broodthaers recollection of the past does not denounce it as '*retardataire* or *passéiste.* Instead it emerges as a countermemory to the technological touting of a numinous concept of cultural progress implemented by *avantgardiste* production'.[36] This aspect of Broodthaers practice has made him newly relevant to a younger generation of artists like Dean, Millar and Skaer who replicate Broodthaers art historical focus and outmoded aesthetic. Although they may look dated, like Broodthaers's cinema, these new contemporary projects also act to critique the present by bringing the cultural practices of the past back to bear on it.

Rosalind Krauss uses Broodthaers's film *A Voyage on the North Sea*, 1973–4 (Figure 2.8), to demonstrate how Broodthaers has become a model for a younger generation of artists that are 'reinventing the medium' by demonstrating ways in which the concept of medium specificity may endure in a post-medium age.[37] Broodthaers's nautical film exemplifies Krauss's concept of 'differential specificity', which reformulates the specificity of mediums to acknowledge their condition as essentially self-differing, 'a layering of conventions never simply collapsed into the physicality of their support'.[38] This alternate model of the concept of medium specificity is devised in order to remedy the criticism levelled against its more

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[36] Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'Marcel Broodthaers's *Section Cinéma,*' 8.

[37] Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea; Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition.* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), and Rosalind Krauss 'Reinventing the Medium' *Critical Enquiry* 25, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 289–305.

[38] See Rosalind Krauss, A Voyage on the North Sea; Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition. 53.

reductive modernist formulation as authored by Clement Greenburg.[39] Krauss's reading of Broodthaers's work is a celebration of the materiality of the medium of film, and its ability to open beyond its own perimeters. Her appeal for some enduring form of medium specificity in an age of installation art and digital ascendency, which puts increasing pressure on the relevance of the concept of medium specificity, hinges upon Broodthaers's nautical work.

A Voyage on the North Sea is structured like a book as images are permeated by page numbers. It is made up entirely of two still images, a photograph of a yacht and a found painting of a nineteenth-century sailing ship. Krauss reads this work as evoking a purely art historical narrative concerning questions of medium. In the 1970s, Benjamin Buchloh had reached similar conclusions about Broodthaers's work *Analysis of a Painting,* 1973, a film which is also based on this same painting of a sailing ship (Figure 2.9). These readings of Broodthaers's nautical films emerge due to a sequence of shots in which we see close ups of the ships sail, a white empty canvas. Buchloh argues that this reduction of the filmic image to the qualities of a painterly surface is an attack 'against a way of painting which intends to maintain an obsolete position'.[40] Buchloh refers here to modernist painting bound up with Clement Greenburg's reductive model of medium specificity. Krauss goes further in her reading of *A Voyage on the North Sea,* by analysing three successive shots in

[39] In 1960, Clement Greenberg wrote that the essence of Modernism lies 'in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself – not in order to subvert it – but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence'. The unique and proper area of competence for each art form refers to the nature of its medium and by being medium specific 'each art would be rendered "pure" and in its "purity" find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence'. Greenberg's concept of medium specificity became problematic due to its reductive nature, as a work could only refer to its own perimeters and not to anything outside of them. See Clement Greenberg 'Modernist Painting, 1960' in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds. *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 773–779.

[40] Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'Interview with Marcel Broodthaers and Michael Oppitz', 1973 in Jenkins and Royoux, eds. *Marcel Broodthaers: Cinéma*, 231.

which Broodthaers zooms in and back out of the image. She writes that this sequence of shots tells…

> the story of modernism's exchange of the deep space necessary to visual narrative for an increasingly flattened surface that refers only to its own perimeters … but by the next "page" the monochrome detail again retreats to a full view of the schooner, as in successive moves Broodthaers scrambles the account of a Modernist progression'.[41]

Dean's retrieval of Broodthaers's legacy does centre on questions of medium specificity, however, the above readings of the work are problematic as both Buchloh and Krauss read Broodthaers's work through a predominantly American lens which does not take into account Broodthaers's own European sensibilities. This tension is evident in a 1973 conversation between Broodthaers and Buchloh on this topic as Broodthaers resists the above mentioned reading of the work when Buchloh insists that his film 'still deals with the problem of painting'.[42] The artist responds, '[n]ot with painting as a problem, but with painting as a subject. If there is in *your opinion* [my emphasis] a problem of painting I pretend to have treated the film which we are speaking about in a style that transforms this problem'.[43] Buchloh goes on to press this issue, while Broodthaers becomes increasingly dismissive of it answering that the work is not a 'magic Sesame'.[44] This would imply that the work does not contain this hidden agenda, although Broodthaers often evaded fixed meanings with regard to his own works.

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[41] Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea*, 53.

[42] Benjamin H.D. Buchloh 'Interview with Marcel Broodthaers and Michael Oppitz', 1973, 231.

[43] Marcel Broodthaers, ibid.

[44] Ibid.

Krauss and Buchloh claim that Broodthaers's nautical films critique a reductive account of medium specificity by opening beyond the parameters of the medium, yet both scholars fail to follow this example as they both overlook the actual subject of the work; the ship itself. This is a recurring and important motif in Broodthaers's oeuvre, as it is in Dean's work, as both artists align the sea voyage with notions of chance and contingency.[45] This connection between the sea and chance is also a widely recurrent association, which reappears in many different contexts outside of the work of Dean and Broodthaers in the discourse of the art of chance more generally.[46] Chance is the particular specificity of the medium of film that Broodthaers revisits by referring to its beginnings through early cinema and he reaffirms this connection in his film of a ship.

Krauss and Buchloh overinvest the sequence of shots discussed in these nautical works, piling significant weight on the close up of the ships sail. This sequence of shots is likely the result of Broodthaers's attempt to animate a still image by zooming in and out of it as he does in many of his films. However, the work does still contain an art historical narrative, as is typical of much of Broodthaers's filmic works in which he revisits or remembers seminal moments and figures from both artistic and literary history. As evidenced by *Cinéma Modèle*, which paid homage to Kurt Schwitters, Jean de La Fontaine, René Magritte, Stéphane Mallarmé and Charles Baudelaire, these revered figures often typify

[45] Another notable example can be found in Broodthaers's artwork in the form of a book, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hazard-image*, 1969, which is an appropriation of Mallarme's poem about a shipwreck translated in English as *A Throw of the Dice will Never Abolish Chance*, 1897.

[46] Margaret Iversen, ed. *Chance*: *Documents of Contemporary Art* (London: Whitechapel, 2000), 17.

seminal moments in European art history and this is also true of Broodthaers's nautical works.

In a notification that accompanied the film *Analysis of a Painting,* Broodthaers gives an account of the painting, which is the subject of this and numerous other works of this period including *A Voyage on the North Sea.*[47] He writes, '[t]he seascape reproduced in these pages was purchased in a shop on the rue Jacob in Paris. Afraid it might slip through my fingers, I dared not bargain for it and paid a high price–that of love at first sight–even though it was unsigned'.[48] In the last part of this quote, Broodthaers, in typical fashion, alludes to the status of art as merchandise, as he paid a high price for something that was not even signed. More importantly, for this chapter, he also alludes forcefully to surrealism in his description of this chance find and the resulting experience of 'love at first sight', which takes place on the streets of Paris.

Inspired by the writings of Sigmund Freud, André Breton formulated his concept of the *trouvaille*, the lucky finding of an object often spotted amongst the detritus of the flea market, which would have an emotive or affective impact on the finder. In his novels, *Nadja,* 1928, and *Mad Love*, 1937, Breton deals explicitly with this notion of the chance encounter, or chance find, as it relates to love or unconscious desire in semi–fictional drama's which are set on the streets of Paris.[49] This chance or accidental encounter with an object of desire gives rise to an instance in which consciousness is bypassed and the otherwise inaccessible realm of the

[47] Other works include the slide show *Bateau- Tableau*, 1973 and the film *Duex Films*, 1973.

[48] Marcel Broodthaers in Jenkins and Royoux, eds. *Marcel Broodthaers: Cinéma,* 329.

[49] André Breton. *Nadja*, trans. Richard Howard (USA: Grove Press, 1960) and André Breton, *Mad Love,* trans. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).

unconscious is accessed. Breton writes, '*chance is the form making manifest the exterior necessity which traces its path in the human unconscious.*'[50] Broodthaers refers to this type of charged encounter in his description of the chance find of the painting of the ship. It is unlikely that the story surrounding the found painting in Paris, as described by the canny Broodthaers, is a coincidental one. It must be noted, however, that Broodthaers had a complex relationship with surrealism and this evocation of 'objective chance' has an easier relationship in the context of Dean's homage to Broodthaers, than it does in the context of Broodthaers own practice. Although his early work was initially categorised as Belgian surrealist, Broodthaers was critical of the revolutionary claims of André Breton. In *Ten Thousand Francs Reward*, 1974, Broodthaers was asked by Irmeline Lebeer, 'do you situate yourself in a Surrealist perspective?'[51] He responded by quoting Breton:

> This one I know by heart: "Everything leads us to believe that there exists a state of mind where life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, no longer seem contradictory". I hope I have nothing in common with that state of mind.[52]

While Broodthaers does not fully situate himself within a surrealist practice or agree with surrealist ideology, his work does emphasise the workings of chance in the artistic process and he continually aligns the workings of chance with the medium of film. By referring back to early cinema, Broodthaers focuses our attention on this specificity of the medium, which was evident at its inception, and he reaffirms this

[50] André Breton, *Mad Love,* 23.

[51] Irmeline Lebeer, 'Ten Thousand Francs Reward' *October* 42 (Autumn 1987), 43.

[52] Marcel Broodthaers, ibid.

point by aligning chance with the photographic origins of film in *A Voyage on the North Sea*.

If Broodthaers's chance find in relation to this film seems coincidental, or merely anecdotal it must be acknowledged that *Section Cinéma* continually presents film as a medium that is *open* to chance in this space where he accompanies his films with the word 'silence'. This word, alongside the piano with no keys, evokes John Cage's seminal work *4'33"*, 1952, a musical score in which a musician performs 4 minutes and thirty three seconds of silence marking the start of the performance by sitting at a piano and closing its lid. Recordings of this work demonstrate that the piece invites chance, namely unprompted noise from the audience, in the same gesture of openness that Broodthaers aligns with film. Cage's *4'33"* was inspired by Robert Rauschenberg's *White Painting*, 1951, a canvas painted a flat white which became a receptor for the light, shadow and dust that crossed its surface.

Broodthaers's relationship with his contemporaries can be related to this suspension between openness and closure as his particular mode of filmmaking positioned itself between the two dominant models of film in the late 60s and early 70s. The first of these was the structuralist model, which presented film as a closed medium or apparatus that did not open out beyond its own perimeters. The second was conceptual film, or film as a transparent medium, as exemplified by the infamous *Prospect 71: Projection* exhibition at the Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf, 1971, of which Broodthaers's work was a part. Projection, as the title implied, privileged the media of technological reproduction consisting of works made using photography, slides, film and video. The medium of film, however, was singled out and emphasised not for its material specificity, but because of

its capacity to be a neutral or translucent means of communication. Broodthaers's film harmoniously embodies both of these particularities of the medium by drawing attention to the underlying structure of film itself, as a material substrate, whilst also opening out onto narrative subjects and motifs.[53]

The films screened in Broodthaers's cinema were also permeated by interference, the flickers in the film caused by the scratches and dust marks on the celluloid surface. Through his use of old film stocks Broodthaers dramatised analogue film's receptiveness to the outside of the material world in order to draw attention to the physicality of film, its relationship with chance, and to further reference early cinema. Rosalind Krauss writes that he 'replicated the look of early cinema with its uneven exposures spliced together and its flickering gait' in order to 'return to the *promesse de bonhuer* enfolded in cinema's beginnings'. [54] Krauss understands this promise in terms of the self-differing condition of film, yet, this promise of openness relates to the medium's receptiveness to chance, to accident and to that which has not been invited or intended. This alignment between chance and film in Broodthaers's work has been overlooked in the discourse that surrounds it. This could be due to the density and complexity of his practice, however, Dean is able to cast new light on this aspect of Broodthaers's cinema because this alignment of chance and film becomes more visible as the specificities of the analogue medium are heightened by its obsolescence.

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[53] See See Rosalind Krauss, A Voyage on the North Sea; Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition. 53, and Prospect 71: Projection, Exhibition of Art from Galleries of the Avantegarde. (Stadtische Kunsthalle 1971). For a further discussion of this aspect of film see Eric de Bruyn 'Cinéma Modèle' in Gregor Jansen and Vanessa Joan Müller, eds. Real Presences: Marcel Broodthaers Today (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2010), 15.

[54] Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea*, 43–44.

SECTION CINEMA (HOMAGE TO MARCEL BROODTHAERS), 2002

Tacita Dean aligns chance and film, but unlike Broodthaers she does not do so through comedy. Dean takes chance much more seriously as a working method and a defining characteristic of the human condition that analogue film aligns itself with in ways that digital mediums do not. Dean reframes Broodthaers work from the context of conceptual art and institutional critique that encircled his practice in the 1970s, to the moment of technological transition that contextualises her practice. She has repeatedly voiced her exasperation at a general lack of acknowledgement of crucial differences between the analogue and the digital she writes:

> For some reason there is a cultural blindness towards the difference between film and digital: a blindness with an underbelly of commercial intent that is invested in seeing one replaced by the other so the difference can be quickly forgotten. Both film and digital are *pictures,* perhaps copies of one another, but they are not the same thing–one is light on emulsion and one is made by pixel, and they are also conceived, made and seen differently.[55]

This fundamental difference makes the digital less affective for Dean, who says, 'for me, it just does not have the means to create poetry … I wonder if this is because it is not born of the physical world, but is impenetrable and intangible'.[56]

In the 1980s, media theorist Friedrich Kittler began theorising the impact of digital technology on our concept of the term 'medium', registering the fundamental shifts caused by the onset of the digital. Kittler writes, 'The general digitalisation of channels and information erases the differences among individual media, sound and

[55] Tacita Dean, *Tacita Dean; Film,* ed. Nicholas Cullinan (*London*: Tate Publishing, 2011), 16.

[56] Tacita Dean, *Tacita Dean: Analogue: Drawings 1991–2006,* ed. Theodora Vischer (Basel: Schaulager, 2006), 8.

image, voice and text are reduced to surface effects, known to consumers as interface'.[57] Descending from Kittler, Wolfgang Ernst is one of a number of media archaeologists who now concentrates on the histories of mediums themselves, discarding written historical narratives in order to concentrate solely on the purity of the historical code imbedded in the technology.[58] Ernst's approach is a product of photographic discourse on the index, a unique aspect of the analogue that the digital does not replicate. The analogue anticipates physical contact by being receptive to the light that touches both the body of the referent and film's celluloid surface.[59] In contrast, the digital file employs a uniform numerical code, which transfers data into vast sequences of 1/0 combinations.[60]

Digital photography aligns itself more closely with the limitations of self-conscious human subjectivity as files can be viewed and deleted instantaneously, just as they are now more susceptible to manipulation. Ernst observes that the idea of the photograph as a 'technologically neutral code,' collapses through digital manipulation which returns 'images to a prephotographic quality of painting: that

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[57] Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1–2.

[58] *Wolfgang Ernst: Digital Memory and the Archive,* ed. Jussi Parikka (USA: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 49. Ernst's branch of media archaeology does not only encompass academic research but is also comprised of practical tinkering with old media via objects collected at flea markets. These objects and artefacts are collected and stored at his Media Archaeological Fundus in Berlin. Ernst's approach to medium as divorced from content and written narratives allows fundamental differences between mediums, such as a medium's indexical properties, to come into focus.

[59] Ernst's 'media archaeology' also draws upon the writings of Michel Foucault. Ernst writes, '[p]hotography did what Foucault demands in *The Archaeology of Knowledge:* it liberated the past from historical discourse (which is always anthropomorphic) in order to make source data accessible to different configurations' (ibid., 48). See also Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge,* trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2002).

[60] See Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2001), 27. For a more detailed discussion of the differences between analogue and digital mediums, and the proximity each maintains with older techniques of image making such as drawing, in the work of Tacita Dean, see Ed, Krčma, 'Cinematic Drawing in a Digital Age,' in *Tate Papers*, (Autumn, 2010), unpaginated.

characterized by the painterly brushstroke'.[61] Despite the general view that digital photography is an updated version of analogue photography, the differences in the technology are vast. Ernst warns that on a fundamental level, 'digitising technologies are absorbing the photographic. Thus photography as a visual technology in its own right could vanish'.[62] This is because digital files are not photographic in the sense that 'the photograph is, in fact, an inscription of the real, in physical (a unique moment of light) and in chemical (emulsion as storage) terms'.[63] Analogue film and photography promote physical contact with a past that is unmediated by language being crucial to Dean's *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* as it seeks contact with a still palpable past that is live in the medium itself. The analogue also has the potential to put us in touch with unconscious aspects of our subjectivity that are also unmediated by language.

Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers) is one of a number of works by Dean that pay homage to Broodthaers. It was exhibited for the first time, alongside these other works, in an exhibition entitled, *21.10.02–21.12.02* at the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen Düsseldorf in 2002. The title of this exhibition corresponded to its duration, from the 21 October 2002 to the 21 of December 2002, but more importantly this title relates to one of Broodthaers's remaining stencils on a beam of the basement of his former cinema that Dean lingers on in her film (Figure 2.10). The reason that Broodthaers stencilled this number combination, 21 12 02, in 1972, is unknown, yet can be linked to his interest in

[61] Ernst, 47.

[62] Ibid., 41.

[63] Ibid., 48.

symbolic and pictorial codes.[64] Obviously Broodthaers could not have predicted the date of Dean's exhibition, which was dedicated to him and revolved around this film of the same space thirty years later. However, Dean heightens the significance of this sequence of numbers by presenting them as a fateful coincidence.

Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers) was originally exhibited alongside the related work *Palindrome,* 2002, which again plays with the significance of dates. *Palindrome* is made up of the front pages of five daily newspapers whose date of publication was 20.02.2002. This date is afforded heightened significance for the simple reason that it reads the same backwards, as it does forwards, despite, or in spite of the mundane or exciting events that actually happened on that day as reported by the newspapers. The chance number combination that Dean draws attention to in *Palindrome*– and we could add in the title of the exhibition overall– adds an imperceptible charge that Dean makes visible. This emphasis on illumination permeates *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* and this is reflected in the film as Dean focuses on a light bulb on the ceiling accompanied by Broodthaers's stencil which reads 'fig 1' (Figure 2.11). The light bulb is symbolic of Dean's working method, as Rita Kersting, curator of this exhibition writes, '[i]n her images, which are fundamentally filmic in conception, she sheds light on situations, illuminating them so as to reflect at the same time the process whereby things are made visible'.[65] It is the allusive nature of chance that Dean's camera makes perceptible.

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[64] See Rita Kerstig, 'Visible Vanishing' in *Tacita Dean*: *Seven Books* (Paris: Musees de la Ville de Paris and Göttingen: Steidl, 2003).

[65] Ibid.

In *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers),* Dean's camera stalks the space that once housed Broodthaers's cinema, taking in wide views of the rooms which are now filled with wooden furniture; namely piles of stacked up chairs (Figure 2.12). Dean's camera zooms in and out of such scenes fixating on certain objects, such as an antiquated glass-fronted cabinet, evoking references to Broodthaers's earlier works in which he utilised domestic objects including cabinets as in *Kitchen Cabinet*, 1966–68. Dean's film casts Broodthaers's once animated cinema into a tomb-like space, a mausoleum. *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* has a forensic quality as we begin to feel we are visiting the aftermath of an event. Dean documents traces and clues pertaining to the past, which may paradoxically offer her new points of departure.

The photographic nature of this work acts to endorse parallels between Dean's film and many of Broodthaers's earlier films. While Dean's *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* reduces the movement of film to a series of still shots, Broodthaers attempted the reverse of this in many works where he used the medium of film to animate still images. Fortuitously for Dean, Broodthaers probed the materiality and underlying structure of analogue film in works based on the sea voyage. The most compelling aspect of Dean's film is the chance accumulation of model ships that she finds in Broodthaers's former cinema. These ships are visually similar to the one in Broodthaers's painting and they have the same affective impact.

SILENT SHIPS

The basement Dean films in *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* is littered by Broodthaers remaining stencils, notably the word 'silence' which stands out amongst the rest of the 'fig' stencils as it is legible and conveys meaning,

whereas the 'figs' do not. Dean films this word 'silence' numerous times. Again we are reminded of John Cage's *4'33"* as these shots are accompanied by a great deal of ambient noise, namely, what sounds like furniture being moved around above the basement and beyond the visual space of the film itself. Dean's emphasis on the word silence returns us once more to Broodthaers's evocation of early cinema. Perhaps more importantly Dean also stresses that silence, like chance, is a specificity of the medium of film. She writes '[f]ilm is mute … For me, it is important that film never loses its original silence'[66]

Dean keeps returning to this word 'silence', which is stencilled on the walls many times, however, what is striking about this focus is that every time she begins to frame the word it is accompanied by a model ship. Dean spends significant time focusing upon a number of antique model ships, which eventually come to dominate the work. Many of these models are in a state of disrepair, displaying broken masts and ripped sails as they lie covered in dust and sinking into the shadows and recesses of the shelving around the edges of the storeroom. In a succession of shots, Dean pays particular attention to the most distressed, aged ships with their sails and masts ripped or hanging down.

Approximately three minutes into the film we see the first of these shots that juxtapose the ship with the word 'silence'. This word is shown in close up; engulfed by a shadow, which is cast by what appears to be a model ship covered by a sheet. The second shot of this word happens a minute later and this time the pairing is more obvious. Firstly we see a wide shot of a shelving area, which is then shown in close up. The word 'silence' is visible on the far wall at the back of this alcove. The letter

[66] Tacita Dean, *Tacita Dean: Film*, 21.

‘s’ is slightly obscured by a model ship covered in plastic which is resting on the shelf to its left, while the letter ‘e’ is obscured by a cabinet on the right. This narrow enclave is illuminated by a light bulb which silhouettes the wooden masts and sails of another model ship, which is situated in front of the light bulb in the foreground of the shot. Just as the word ‘silence’ is cropped off at the edges by the surrounding objects, Dean has also cropped the model ships, which are coming out of the edges of the frame. This shot is immediately followed by a closer view of the same scene; the word ‘silence’ is now clearly seen, as is the intricate model ship on its left and the masts and ropes of the ship occupying the bottom right of the foreground (Figure 2.13).

This juxtaposition of the word ‘silence’ and the model ships could be nothing more than a coincidence as most of these models are stored in this area of shelving. However, the next time we see the word ‘silence’ about six minutes later it is again accompanied by a model ship. In this later shot the ship seems out of place. It looks as if Dean herself has deliberately placed it alongside this word in order to draw attention to this juxtaposition. In this shot we again see a close up of the word ‘silence’ which is bookended by the legs of an upturned chair. Directly underneath this stencil coming in from the bottom of the frame is the top part of a model ship. This model is different from the others as it is based on a fuel-powered ship without sails. Resting inside the hull is an illegible label and a model Spanish flag on the bow. This model is in much better condition than the others and, furthermore, it is not dusty like the others. This model appears to have been recently placed in the storeroom, or recently taken out of its protective covering. For this reason it seems deliberately composed and stands out amongst the other shots in the film, which give the impression that the space has been untouched for some time. The next shot

zooms out from the last and we now see a full view of the ship, clearly out of place, resting on an upturned table (Figure 2.14). Dean's pairing of the ship with the word 'silence' refers to the way that chance can offer a route into a space beyond the symbolic order, a place beyond language, conscious thought or intention.

The coincidental presence of the ship in Broodthaers's former cinema evokes art historical memory. These silent ships refer both to Broodthaers's nautical films, based on the painting of a sailing ship and the surrealist *trouvaille* that he aligns his painting with. The ship in Dean's film is much more obviously a *trouvaille*, a material object charged with psychic energy. *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* is the product of an impossible desire because Dean, like Orpheus, says she entered the basement in order to try and connect with the dead, to feel Broodthaers's presence.[67] The stencilled 'silence' in this haunted space refers to the absence of the late artist, but also to Dean's surprisingly poignant encounter with the model ship through which her desire is fulfilled. The heightened affective charge produced by this contact, between Dean and Broodthaers, is not attributable to the clear parallels between their work, but rather, with the fact that the ships which bring these connections into focus were not intentionally placed in the space, but discovered there by chance, as if by some twist of fate. The ship, as a *trouvaille,* conveys a nonverbal message that falls outside the symbolic register. Its felt sense of significance is attributable to a revelatory and affirmative non-traumatic perception of the Real '*as the lucky find [la trouvaille*]'.[68]

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[67] Tacita Dean 'Section Cinema' in *Selected Writings, Tacita Dean: Seven Books Grey,* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2011), 55.

[68] Jacques Lacan referenced by Margaret Cohen in *Profane Illumination,* 147. I refer to this translation as Cohen modifies Alan Sheridan's English translation of Lacan's original text as he translates '*trouvaille*' as 'discovery', thus loosing the reference to Surrealism that Lacan purposefully evokes. See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 25.

The web of associations, between analogue film, chance and the sea voyage, which Dean weaves between herself and Broodthaers in *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* is confirmed again in another work of the same year that was also exhibited in her Düsseldorf exhibition. Dean's *Chère petite soeur,* 2002*,* appropriates a found postcard of a boat in a storm that belonged to Broodthaers and was the subject of his four-minute, 16 mm black and white film of the same name *Chère petite soeur (La Tempête),* 1972. This film was produced in the same year that *Section Cinéma* was active in the basement that Dean later films. These two works, of 2002 and 1972, are postcards that address each other across time. The inscription under the image of Broodthaers's found postcard, translated into English, reads, *Dear Little Sister, to give you this, an idea of the sea during the storm …* We could imagine that this address comes from Broodthaers himself, responding to Dean's repeated attempts to connect with the older artist whose legacy she continues or whose footsteps she follows.

Broodthaers's film, *Chère petite soeur (La Tempête),* 1972 (Figure 2.15), is one of several films based on postcards.[69] Like *A Voyage on the North Sea* this film is made from a still image. Broodthaers uses the inscription on the front of the card as a basis for the subtitles that accompany this one image in the film. As with the other works discussed, the ship in Broodthaers's film is a recurring cinematic motif, which combines an emphasis on the found object or *trouvaille,* with close attention

[69] This film was reprised twice in the same year in *Trois Cartes Postales* and *Rendez-vous mit Jacques Offenbach,* other filmic works also based on postcards include *Le Mauritania*, 1972. The postcard is also significant in Broodthaers work as the first section of the museum was *Section XIXe siècle* was made up of empty packing crates and postcard reproductions of master works, located in Broodthaers's own home in Brussels where it remained for a year. The postcard signified both mass reproduction and circulation. See Rachel Haidu, *The Absence of Work: Marcel Broodthaers, 1964–1976* (Cambridge, Massachusetts London: The MIT Press, 2010), 108.

to the underlying support of film as a series of still frames, a condition Broodthaers amplifies by creating films from one still image. As mentioned previously, this is a process Dean evokes in *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers),* which is composed of a series of still, locked shots which reflect the underlying structure of analogue film which is animated as much by twenty-four gaps per second of blackness, than it is by the individual frames. Dean through Broodthaers pays close attention to this condition of the medium in order to highlight the properties that differentiate digital from analogue film in order to stress that chance is intrinsic to the analogue process and lost with the rise of the digital.

In her two-part blackboard drawing *Chère petite soeur*, 2002 (Figure 2.16), Dean reverses Broodthaers's formulation of a still image into moving film, by creating a filmic or cinematic still image. *Chère petite soeur* consists of two blackboard drawings made in situ in the gallery space (Figure 2.17). The first blackboard shows a ship in a storm and is taken directly from the postcard found and appropriated by Broodthaers in his film. The second blackboard shows the ship sinking, because, as Dean says of the motif of the ship, 'I always have to have it sinking'.[70] The inclusion of the sinking ship provides a cinematic and dramatic ending or sequel to Broodthaers's earlier sea voyage. Dean's blackboard drawings also comment on Broodthaers's earlier use of subtitles and page numbers by employing text to evoke film. Almost obscured beneath the chalky rolling waves of the blackboard drawings are sections of text, brief messages that read like the instructions of a film director, or a future filmmaker. We also see the initials MB. By

[70] Tacita Dean 'Interview with Marina Warner' *Tacita Dean: Contemporary Artists Series* (London: Phaidon), 25.

way of these written cues the drawings act like storyboards as Dean invites the viewer to animate the still images and the drawings become cinematic.[71]

Shipwrecks and failed sea voyages are the subject of many of Dean's works that predate her work on Broodthaers. These blackboard drawings relate to an earlier series of blackboard drawings all based on sea voyages dating from 1994–2000.[72] All these drawings are concerned with flux and chance as something intrinsic to the medium in which they are produced. The drawings remain unfixed as the chalk is shifted around the board in a method that is reflective of the constantly shifting nature of the sea. Dean writes, '[t]he thing about the blackboard drawings is that I can't actually do them about anything else now. I've tried, but they are so tied in with their subject matter, the sea'.[73] These drawings correspond to Dean's series of films on sea voyages, which received critical acclaim due to her nomination for the Turner Prize for *Disappearance at Sea,* 1996. This body of work on doomed sea voyages began with *Girl Stowaway,* 1994, and continued with Dean's trilogy of works on doomed amateur sailor Donald Crowhurst in *Disappearance at Sea*, *Disappearance at Sea (Voyage de Guerison)*, 1997 and *Teignmouth Electron*, 1999. Other nautical works include *How to put a Boat in a Bottle*, 1995, and *The Green Ray*, 2001. Dean connects her interest in doomed sea voyages and sinking ships to the specificity of analogue film. She writes that abandonment at sea is a fantasy

[71] See Ed Krčma, 'Cinematic Drawing in a Digital Age' *Tate Papers,* (Autumn, 2010).

[72] Other blackboard drawings on this theme include, *Girl Stowaway*, 1994, *Disappearance at Sea I-VI*, 1995, *The Roaring Forties: Seven Boards in Seven Days*, 1997, *The Lure of the Sea*, 1997, Sea *inventory Drawings (Opening Swell, Wing Getting Up, Angry Sea, Filthy Weather, Calmer Now)*, 1998, *The Sea with a Ship; Afterwards and Island*, 1999 and *Wake,* 2000.

[73] Tacita Dean 'Interview with Marina Warner,' 25.

belonging to 'the analogue world: the world where you could still get lost'.[74] The possibility of loss is also the promise of re-finding.

Not only is the possibility of getting lost connected to the analogue world in these nautical works; they also act to establish an intrinsic connection between analogue mediums and chance through the motif of the sea voyage. This link between the sea and chance is long established as represented by the ancient Roman Goddess, Fortuna, who represents both luck and chance and is often represented holding a billowing sail.[75] Dean evokes many stories that correspond to this long established tradition such as the Celtic legend of Tristan and Isolde.[76] Michael Newman has analysed this link between the sea and contingency focusing on this story which depends on 'the hero abandoning himself to the sea, in a journey where he does not decide the direction, but in a way confides himself to contingency'.[77] Dean has also written about the fateful sea voyages of both Donald Crowhurst, mentioned above, and conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader who died at sea during the making of his work *In Search of the Miraculous,* 1975.[78] These unsuccessful one-man sea voyages, which sadly resulted in death, are linked by Dean to the journey of healing made by Tristan in the Celtic legend as death at sea is 'one possible consequence of giving oneself up to contingency, but not the only one'.[79]

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[74] Tacita Dean 'Tristan da Cunha' in *Tacita Dean Selected Writings, 1992 – 2011: Seven Books Grey*, 78.

[75] See Margaret Iversen, 'Analogue', 815. This also brings to mind William Kentridge's working method, which encompasses chance in the drawing process, a method Kentridge refers to as 'Fortuna.'

[76] Joan Tasker Grimbert, ed. *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

[77] Michael Newman, 'Salvage' unpag.

[78] See Tacita Dean, 'Bas Jan Ader: And he Fell into the Sea' in *Tacita Dean: Selected Writings*, 1992–2011, 91–2.

[79]Ibid.

The connection between the sea voyage and chance highlighted in *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* is informed by Dean's earlier sea-based films, which dramatise this connection. The intricacies of these earlier works are too extensive to be elaborated on here; however, all these nautical films follow a pattern. They all incorporate true stories about figures that have embarked on fateful sea voyages, which are then interweaved with Dean's own biography and the documentation of her journey motivated by coincidences and the expansive connections she weaves between texts as she moves from one chance find to the next. Dean neatly describes this practice in an aside for *Girl Stowaway,* a work she describes as a 'passage into history along the line that divides fact from fiction, and is more like a journey through an underworld of chance intervention and epic encounter than any place I recognise. My story is about coincidence and about what is invited and what is not'.[80]

Dean couples her aesthetic of loss, the loss of the analogue medium and a romantic desire to get lost at sea, with found objects and chance coincidences in a strategy that operates according to a simultaneous dynamic of losing and finding. This dynamic also underpins the surrealist *trouvaille*, which operates in the service of the Real as this register is prone to sinking back below the surface of conscious thought as soon as it reveals itself. Fleeting perceptions of the Real oscillate between this awareness of something being returned and the feeling that this thing was lost. Hal Foster has argued that the surrealist's celebrated *trouvaille* is most definitely a substitute for the primal love object as objective chance becomes a method of

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[80] Tacita Dean, 'Girl Stowaway' in *Tacita Dean: Selected Writings 1992 – 2011*, 7.

working through trauma, a process which oscillates between losing and finding.[81] He writes that the *trouvaille* is, 'keyed to the maternal body' through the promise 'of a restored unity even as it recalls an old loss'.[82] Dean's silent ships seek to transport us back to a sense of self that both pre-dated and remains beyond the acquisition of language.

Dean's juxtaposition of the ship and the word 'silence' in *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* pulls together many of the themes threaded through this chapter, most importantly testifying to the connection between the motif of the ship and the found object as a revelatory chance encounter with the silent register of the Real.

THE SILENCE OF THE LOST OBJECT

The analogue's intrinsic alignment with chance makes it receptive to the Real as the analogue keeps close proximity to this evasive register. Dean again articulates this connection in her book project *Floh,* 2001.[83] The title of this project is the German word for flea referring to the collection of found photographs Dean acquired at flea markets. The chance find at a flea market again evokes the surrealist *trouvaille* and these chance encounters are also permeated by silence. There is no overriding theme running through the pages of *Floh* and no text to give details about the selection of photographs included in the book. Dean explains 'I want them to keep the silence of the market; the silence they had when I found them; the silence of the lost object'.[84]

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[81] Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 1993), 195.

[82] Ibid., 199.

[83] Tacita Dean and Martyn Ridgewell, *Floh* (University of Michigan: Steidl, 2001).

[84] Tacita Dean, ref by Mark Godfrey, 'Photography Found and Lost: On Tacita Dean's *Floh' October* 114 (2005): 90–172.

Like *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers) Floh* not only courts chance through the finding of lost objects that have an affective impact on the finder, it also highlights the role of chance in the analogue process. While there is no overriding theme determining the selection of images in this work, there is an emphasis on accidents. Many of the images in *Floh* evoke the amusing sensibilities of Broodthaers as they refer to the humorous, slapstick-style accidents that characterise everyday existence. This is evidenced in numerous examples, such as a photograph of a man being knocked over by a wave and his partner who is laughing in response, and a black and white photograph of a woman who has just fallen over in the snow, slumped against a wall laughing (Figure 2.18). There are also numerous photographic accidents in the form of mistimed shots that do not show their subjects in the best light. One example is a wedding photograph showing a bride who is yawning while cutting the cake. There are also many accidental or unintentional shots in which we can presume that the photographer's finger has slipped, as well as numerous other images that are badly framed resulting in the figures heads and body parts being chopped off (Figure 2.19). Alongside these accidents there are many photographic slips and mistakes, which are unique to the photographic process such as under-exposed and over-exposed images, as well as marks, stains and scratches on the film's surface. *Floh* emphasises the material quality of photographs, as objects, as many images bear the marks of their owners handling including fingerprints and penned inscriptions and scratches.

In *Floh*, Dean gathers together soiled and worn photographic rejects at a time when such accidents, mistakes and imperfections are being eradicated from photography due to the digital process which allows errors to be instantly deleted before ever acquiring physical form. Dean writes:

> To be actually able to delete an image at the moment of its inception is quite an enormous thing ... It pushes beyond democracy and becomes almost totalitarian. It [parallels the way] society is trying to organise itself to get rid of anything that is dysfunctional or not up to the standard. It's a horrifying concept to me if I think about it.[85]

The enduring value of analogue reproduction which produces accidents, duds and rejects as an unavoidable part of the process means that analogue mediums are sympathetic to the imperfections, failures, and happy accidents, the Freudian slips that permeate everyday existence and can provide access to the unconscious, whereas digital mediums are not.

Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers) contains numerous shots of distressed and aged ships, which function in a similar way to the marked and soiled photographs that make up *Floh.* Dean's camera caresses the tarnished surfaces of these ships, as she does to Donald Crowhurst's abandoned yacht in *Teignmouth Electron,* 1999. She spends time showing us their aged nature and soiled surfaces, the rips in the sails, the broken masts and the dirty hulls. Like the discarded photographic rejects that make up *Floh*, the imperfect ships have been hidden away, relegated to the basement, kept out of sight as they are no longer fit for display. Dean is commenting on the alignment between analogue mediums and accidents as a counterpoint to the digital world's censoring, its intolerance for mistakes and imperfections. Furthering this emphasis, *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* is permeated by interference, flickers in the film caused by scratches and dust marks on the celluloid surface. This interference is an integral part of the analogue process which cannot completely avoid traces of dust and floating

[85] Tacita Dean, ibid, 114.

ephemeral material which will always find its way into the developing processing, or the apparatus, no matter how carefully, or cleanly one works. This is a point of stark differentiation between analogue film and its digital successor, which is divorced from the material world by way of its virtuality.[86]

Broodthaers's presented film as a medium that is open to chance, but also open to the ephemera of the everyday world. His films are permeated by interference by way of marks and scratches on the surfaces of his flickering films. This aesthetic was heightened due to the fact that Broodthaers often used cheap scraps and discards of old film stock. This practice reached its climax in *Section Cinéma.* Here Broodthaers not only used old blank film stocks but, as mentioned previously, he used dated found film stocks, which he purchased in a shop specializing in old cameras and photo equipment.[87]*Charlie as Filmstar* was composed of cheap outtakes from Chaplin movies, or in other words it was made up of the rejected material which was left on the cutting room floor; material which was not deemed good enough to make it into the finished films. Similarly Broodthaers film *Belga Vox-Mode- 20th century Fox* was made up from out-dated newsreels, which Broodthaers purchased cheaply as this dated material was deemed no longer valuable. Broodthaers's use of outtakes and outmoded film in *Section Cinéma* can be related to Dean's collection of old marked and soiled photographs in *Floh.* Furthermore, the space of Dean's *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* with its dusty antique furniture and dilapidated model ships is, as it was for Broodthaers, a refuge for the outmoded, a space reserved for the aged, the tarnished and the imperfect, both in terms of the objects the camera films and the medium itself. While it may look

[86] Although it is still subject to imperfection and interference by way of image noise.

[87] See Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *Marcel Broodthaers Section Cinéma 1972,* 12.

dated, the past is revived in *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* as this film not only brings back memories of Broodthaers's earlier work, it also brings to life the historicity of the medium of film testifying to the fact that the promise of chance so evident at film's inception is even more palpable at the moment of its obsolescence.

CONCLUSION

In *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers),* Dean is guided by the innate connections that unfold between her work and Broodthaers's work. These connections between Dean, Broodthaers and objective chance shed new light on Broodthaers's practice, which has not been approached in this manner before. With *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* Dean not only remembers Broodthaers's cinema, she reinvests it with new clarity. By highlighting the role of early cinema and chance in Broodthaers's films she salvages this overlooked connection. As Michael Newman writes, salvaging, which has seafaring overtones, is different from the act of rescuing. In reference to *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* Newman writes, '[i]f rescue, conceived as resurrection, is impossible – these works can never be brought back to life again, even if they are restored or reconstructed – salvage which takes account of the difference of the time into which the object or gesture is returned, maybe another matter'.[88]

Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers) telescopes back through time, from film's anticipated end to its beginnings in early cinema, through Broodthaers. It is the temporal positioning of this work that allows the promise and unique specificity of the medium of film to emerge. Margaret Iversen writes, 'one could argue that analogue photography has only recently become a medium in the

[88] Michael Newman, 'Salvage', unpag.

fullest sense of the term, for it is only when artists refuse to switch over to digital photographic technologies that the question of what constitutes analogue photography as a medium is self-consciously posed'.[89]

The digital world is a great enabler of immediacy, instantaneity and has exciting creative possibilities through its increased capacity for manipulation post-production. However, this chapter agrees with Tacita Dean that there are certain capacities of film that the digital does not replicate, namely film's openness to chance. Broodthaers's use of film as well as his evocation of early cinema is important to Dean's campaign to save film because the eradication of film is largely driven by what Dean views as 'an underbelly of commercial intent' as digital cinema is cheaper and easier to shoot and reproduce.[90] The ontology of cinema is drastically changing with this new technology in many ways. Digital cameras instantly relay images causing editing and censoring to become an intrinsic aspect of the process of recording. The relationship of film to linear time has changed through non-linear editing systems and the viewer also perceives the end results differently as movies are now commonly watched and relayed on reduced sized screens. While fundamental cinematic shifts are numerous and widespread, this chapter has focused on the digital's denigration of affective instances of chance that previously found their way into film and cinema.

It is the abolition of accident and chance from the analogue process that is problematic for an artist like Dean and this thesis is sympathetic to this difficulty. While Dean's preference for working on film rather than digital is a personal choice, this chapter has demonstrated that the digital not only eradicates imperfections and mistakes but also marginalises contingency. This alone is enough of a justification to

[89] Margaret Iversen, 'Analogue', 796,
[90] Taciat Dean, *Tacita Dean: Film,* 16.

argue for the merits of film as a medium distinct from the digital with its own specificities and strengths that should be preserved. This chapter concurs with Dean, and Broodthaers, that chance can become a valuable aspect of the creative process adding previously unforeseen or unprompted affective potential to an artwork. Dean writes, '[s]erendipity, coincidence, chance, forgetting, loneliness, solitude, boredom are all part of our human condition and inspiration, and should be left unresolved and unfigured out by software'.[91] She adds that the unchallenged embrace of digital advancements puts us in danger of not only losing a soon to be outmoded technology, but puts us 'in danger of losing something of our humanity's heart'.[92]

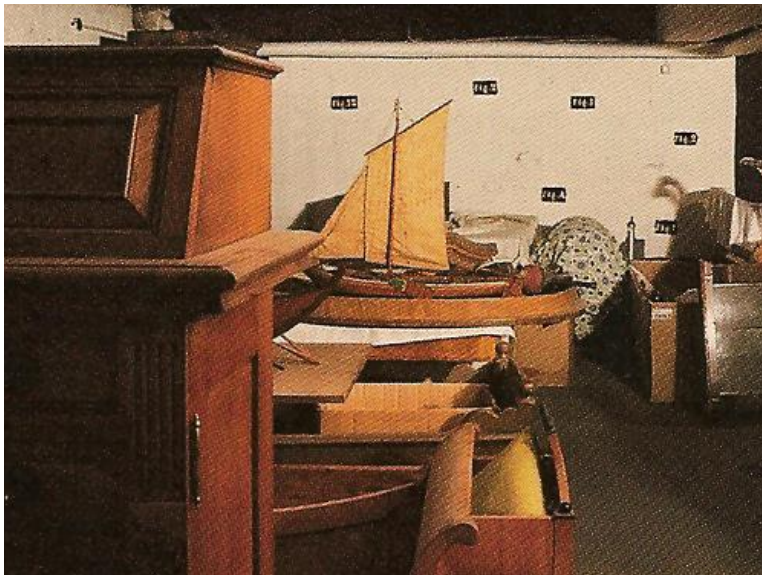
What is this 'something' of our humanity's heart that stands to be lost? This chapter has demonstrated that what is at stake in Dean's film is not only the loss of a now seemingly out-dated medium, but also the loss of chance, which diminishes our capacity for affective encounters with the Lacanian Real. Lacan's ambiguous register cannot be consciously evoked or controlled. Analogue film's openness to chance makes it much more receptive to the Real as an affective and surprising chance encounter with an essential aspect of subjectivity. Dean's silent ships become vessels which move back and forth between the analogue's receding language of loss, and the reappearance of a Real subjectivity which is coming back. *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* testifies to the central claim of this thesis, that the analogue can reconcile us with an authentic sense of unique subjectivity beyond the symbolic order, which is otherwise lost to conscious thought.

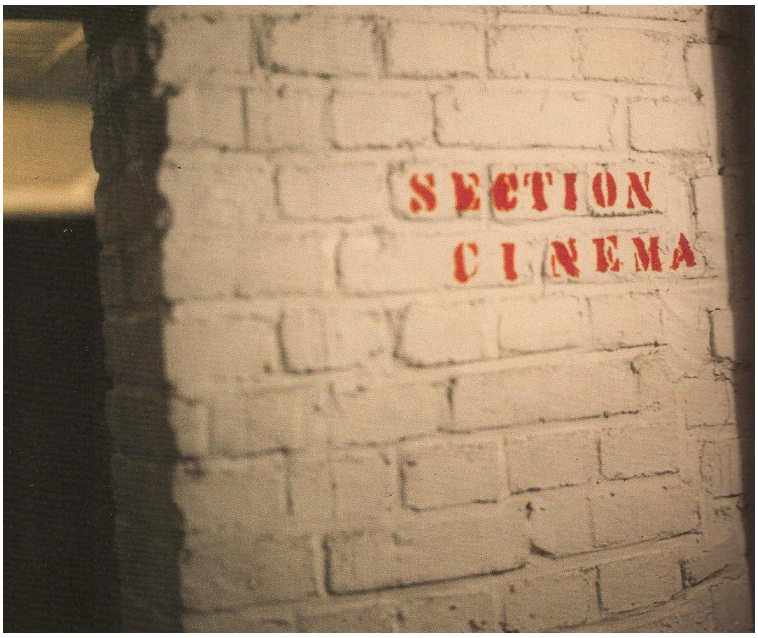
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[91] Tacita Dean, *Tacita Dean; FILM*. London: Tate Publishing, 2011, 24.

[92] Ibid., 33.

FIGURES 2.1 – 2.19.





Figures 2.1 and 2.2. Tacita Dean, film stills from *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers),* 2002.

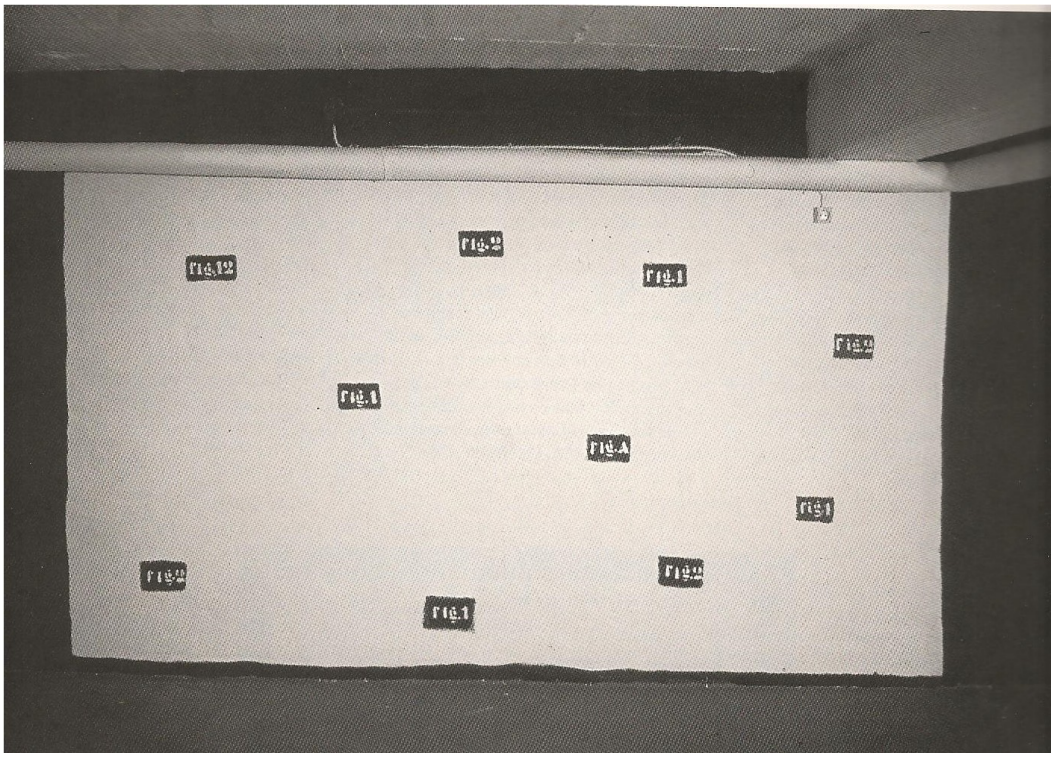


Figure 2.3. Marcel Broodthaers, projection screen, *Section Cinéma,* 1972.

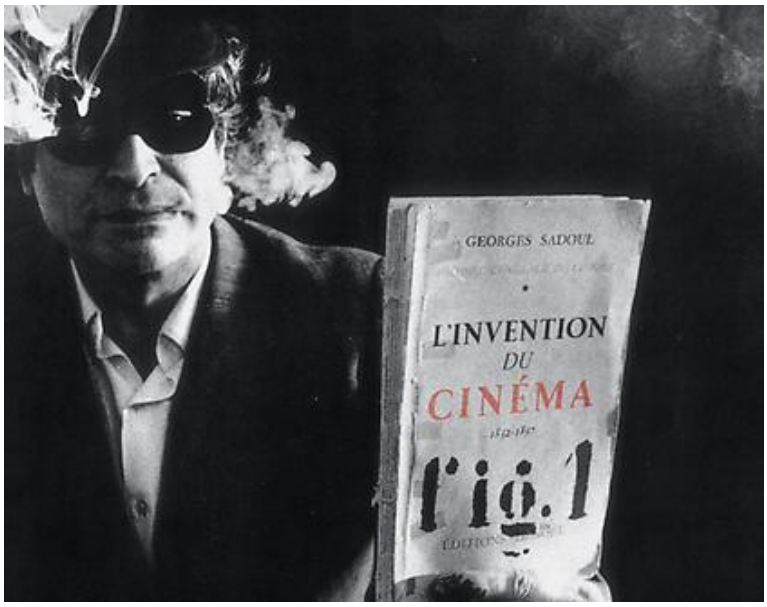


Figure 2.4. Jorge Romero, photograph of Marcel Broodthaers, 1971.

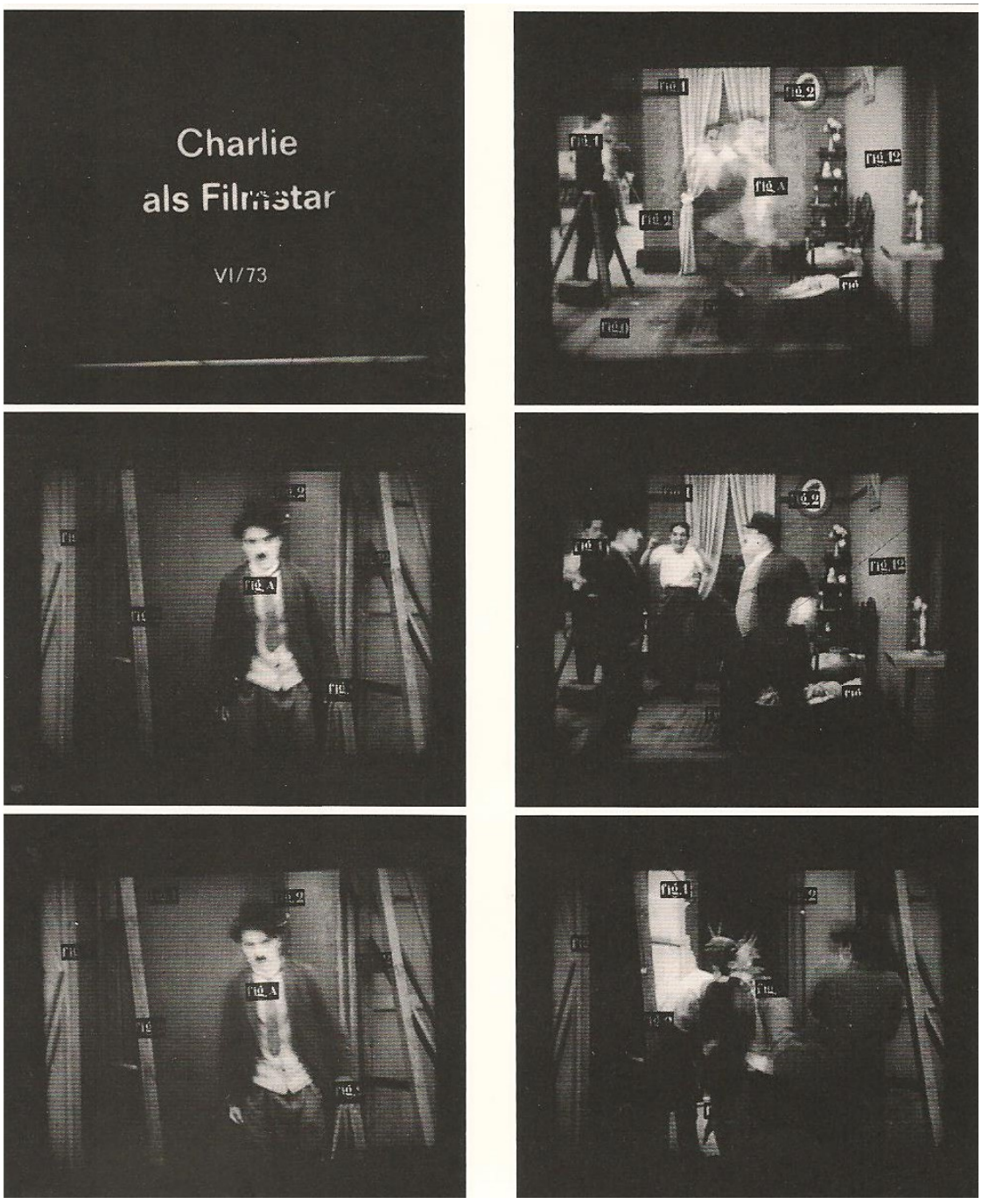


Figure 2.5. Marcel Broodthaers, film stills from *Charlie as Filmstar*, 1971.



Figure 2.6. Marcel Broodthaers, film still from *La Pluie (Project pour un texte),* 1969.



Figure 2.7. Marcel Broodthaers, film still from *Berlin ode rein Traum mit Sahne,* 1974.

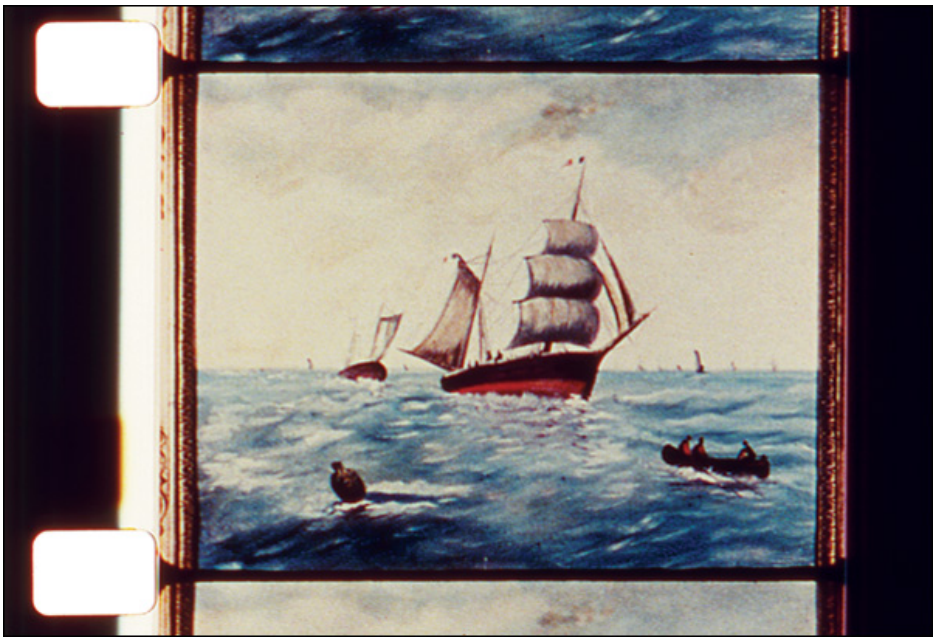
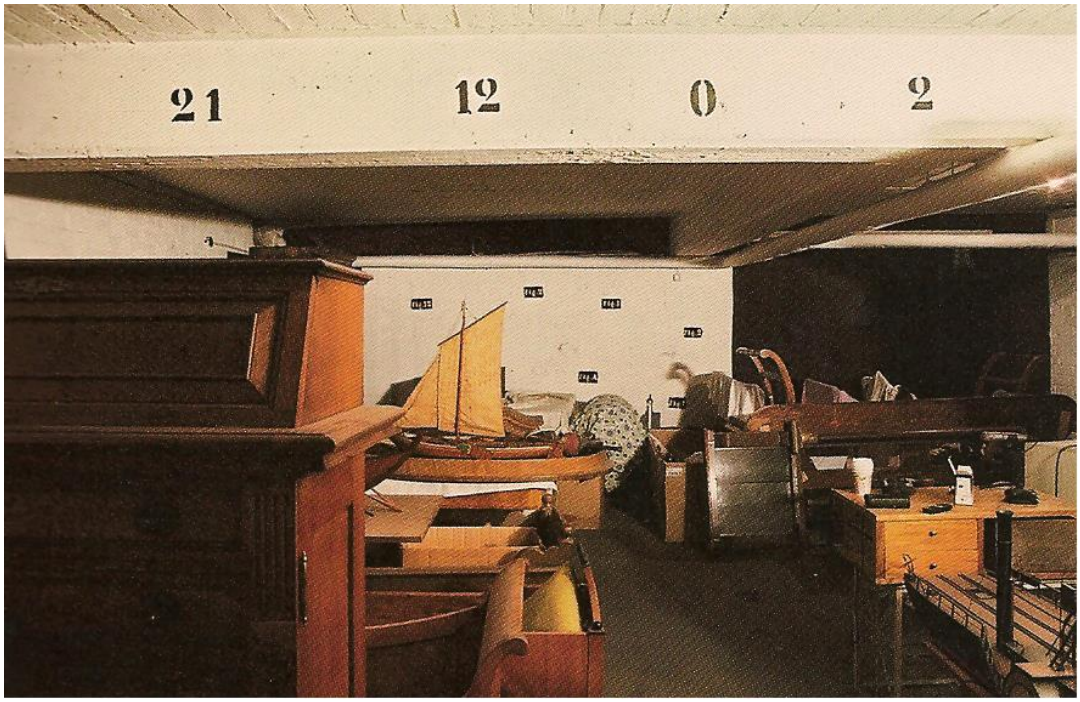


Figure 2.8. Marcel Broodthaers, film still from *A Voyage on the North Sea*, 1974.



Figure 2.9. Marcel Broodthaers, found painting featured in *A Voyage on the North Sea* and *Analysis of a Painting*, 1973.



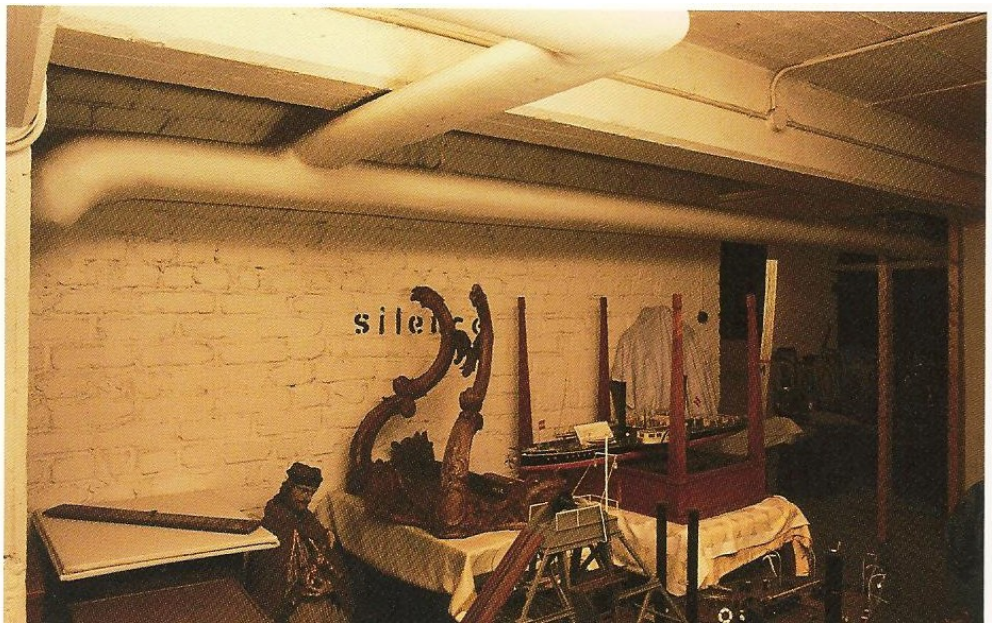


Figures 2.10 and 2.11. Tacita Dean, film stills from *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers),* 2002.



Figure 2.12. Tacita Dean, film still from *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers),* 2002.





Figures 2.13 and 2.14. Tacita Dean, film stills from *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers),* 2002.



Figure 2.15. Marcel Broodthaers, film still from *Chère petite soeur (La Tempête),* 1972**.**



Figure 2.16. Tacita Dean, *Chère petite soeur*, 2002.



Figure 2.17. Tacita Dean, *Chère petite soeur*, 2002.





Figures 2.18 and 2.19. Tacita Dean, *Floh,* 2001

CHAPTER THREE

FLAT DEATH: LUCY SKAER'S *LEONORA*, 2006

Lucy Skaer's challenging installation *Leonora* leads us into a confrontation with an incomprehensible subject; death.[1] *Leonora* is haunted by a flickering 16 mm film of the late artist Leonora Carrington, which plays on a loop and shows the 89 year old artist five years before her death in 2011. The outmoded projector mirrors the frailty of the late surrealist and the emphasis on ageing that runs throughout the installation. The film is exhibited alongside an antique mahogany table, which bears the silhouette of an oversized left hand inlaid on its surface in the primordial material, mother of pearl. Continuing the submarine theme, on the opposite wall, is a dense black drawing of a whale skeleton which is subtitled *Death.* This drawing is exhibited low to the ground and requires that the viewer squat down to examine it. From this lowered vantage point a small wooden sculpture, which is placed on the floor in front of the drawing can be better appreciated. On each of this object's ends are the figurative silhouettes of three people. One of these figures is lying rather

[1] In its initial configuration of 2006, the separate pieces of this installation were subtitled, *The Joker, The Tyrant, The Wheel and Death,* in reference to Tarot cards and Leonora Carrington's interest in alchemy. *Leonora* was first exhibited *in Minor Characters*, *Anita di Bianco and Lucy Skaer*, Galerie Elisabeth Kaufman, Zurich, 21 October–16 December 2006. See Valerie Knoll, 'Review: Lucy Skaer/ Anita Di Bianco. *Artforum*. XLNV, 6 (February 2007): vi. Its most recent exhibition was at the Hunterian Gallery, Glasgow, from 6 June 2014–25th January 2015. At the discretion of the artist some of the original objects were substituted for similar pieces. The work now bares just one overriding title, *Leonora,* which is inclusive of all the separate elements. Unless otherwise stated, this most recent configuration of the work is the one to which I will refer.

ominously face down on the floor. The black whale skeleton looming behind these silhouettes, which is then joined by the deathly pale spectre of Carrington hovering in the background, ensures that the presence of death is forcefully felt (Figure 3.1).

Leonora is not about the late artist and the connection between Skaer and Carrington is much more tenuous than that forged by the acts of homage paid to Aby Warburg and Marcel Broodthaers by Jeremy Millar and Tacita Dean. According to Skaer, the film acts only to document the combined presence of herself and Carrington, who functions as an anachronism. Skaer said that in 2006 she was amazed to discover that Carrington was still alive and making work at the same moment as herself. This prompted her visit to Carrington's home in Mexico, resulting in the subsequent film.[2] A resounding concern with death presided over this initial meeting with Carrington when Skaer asked her if there were any positives to growing old. Carrington responded:

> *LC: You become closer to death, so that really tends to dominate everything else.*
> *LS: Do you find that you become reconciled with that?*
> *LC: No, I don't. How can one reconcile with the totally unknown? We know nothing whatever about it, even if it happens to everyone, to everybody. Animals, vegetables, minerals, everything dies. How can you reconcile with something you know nothing about*?[3]

This chapter considers the profundity of Carrington's question. If a personal reconciliation with the inevitable fact of our own death is impossible, is it still possible to represent this unknowable subject artistically? In other words, how do

[2] Lucy Skaer interview by Kirstie North, Glasgow, 9 July 2014.

[3] Lucy Skaer. 'The Transcendence of the Image: Leonora Carrington'. *Tate Etc.* 14 (Autumn 2008): 1–3.

you negotiate the unrepresentable subject of death in a way that conforms to its incomprehensibility?

In *The Great Refusal*, 1993, Maurice Blanchot laments a type of universal reticence towards the subject of death which 'every discourse, including that of philosophy, covers over, rejects and obscures' in order to establish, 'a secure reign ... a clear and defined coherence of notions and objects, relations and forms'.[4] The difficult obscurity of death, its condition as an indescribable and unknowable event, leads to an avoidance or repression of the subject. Blanchot's 'great refusal' is not exactly a refusal of death, but 'the refusal to stop beside the enigma that is the strangeness of this singular end'.[5] *Leonora* does stop here and in doing so it traverses new territory as it treats the subject of death in a way that acknowledges its ambiguity and its abruptness.

Leonora Carrington is visually present in *Leonora,* however, Skaer is seemingly disinterested in Carrington as a model. Skaer says 'I'm actually not interested in her work,' yet Carrington's macabre and unsentimental approach to the theme of death resonates with Skaer's similarly confrontational treatment of the same subject. Carrington's own interested in *danse macabre* imagery and the use of corpses and skeletons in both her paintings and in her fiction resonate with a number

[4] Maurice Blanchot, 'The Great Refusal 'inn *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), 33.

[5] Blanchot's reflections on death owe much to Martin Heidegger whose reception he helped mediate in France. However, it is at the point at which these two thinkers seem closest, that they are most distant. The main thesis of Heidegger's *Being and Time,* 1927, is that dasein's awareness of his own death authenticates him. In contrast, Blanchot insists that death is anonymous and no authentic self comes to be. This is because death cannot be experienced as it marks the point where consciousness is lost, Maurice Blanchot, ibid., 35. See also Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper, 1962) and Michael Inwood, *Heidegger: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

of drawings of corpses in Skaer's oeuvre that will be examined in this chapter. [6] This point of convergence adds to the installation situating *Leonora* within the context of a specifically British surrealist trajectory of thought. This chapter will frame Leonora through the lens of this legacy. It will present previously unpublished primary research on *Leonora* gathered during interviews conducted with Skaer on the subject of this intriguing, yet conceptually difficult installation that up until now has not received the critical attention worthy of it.

Although Skaer does not aim to forge a connection between her own practice and Carrington's artistic method, a thematic link does exist. The first section of the chapter will begin by exploring this relationship through close engagement with the recurring subject of death in Carrington's work. The late surrealist's writing and painting features decomposing corpses and animated skeletons that chart death's visual traces and the impact that it has on the physical body. Carrington also explored death in relation to psychological trauma as informed by the mental breakdown she suffered during WW2. Carrington's uncanny visualisations of death act as a recurring motif that both pre-existed and extended beyond her illness.

The second part of this chapter will frame the work of Lucy Skaer in the context of British art. *Leonora* refers to a British model of surrealism, typified by Carrington, and this legacy extends into the more recent explorations of the theme of death in British art of 1990s. The young British artists of the Saatchi generation appropriated a surrealist attitude towards death and Skaer's practice will be contextualised in relation to this movement. While yBa representations of death were sensationalist, explicit and provocative, Skaer's treatment of the subject is elusive being marked by a contrasting sense of indifference. Skaer looks back to an

[6] Skaer herself was unaware of this connection, which she said did not inform *Leonora*, ibid.

underexplored legacy of surrealism described by Maurice Blanchot as a 'powerful negative moment' that presents death as an impossibility beyond conscious thought.[7] Her treatment of the subject of death is aligned with Maurice Blanchot's conviction that death plays a formative role in artistic expression as the sense of nothingness that it evokes exposes the void which conditions an image.[8] Blanchot's view of surrealism, as a negative moment, is anchored in the subject of death as an artistic theme. His close friendship with Georges Bataille led both thinkers to reflect upon death as something meaningless, silent and empty. This chapter will use these surrealist theoretical reflections on death to frame Skaer's artistic method and her work's resistance to interpretation.

Lastly this chapter will come to focus on the relationship between death and the analogue image specifically as I argue that *Leonora* exemplifies what Roland Barthes terms '*flat Death'*.[9] This phrase describes a type of emotional dullness, or numbness experienced most acutely in response to photographs of the deceased. This flat response is the product of a heightened awareness of the banal fact of our own deaths, combined with our inability to understand what this means.[10] Skaer exploits this sense of resignation in her short silent film of Leonora Carrington who is treated with a sense of indifference that borders on callousness. Viewing the film posthumously increases the sense of distance between viewer and subject amplifying the film's intrinsic impressions of remoteness. Carrington, who died on the 25 May

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[7] Maurice Blanchot 'Literature and the Right to Death' in *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (USA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 301.

[8] Maurice Blanchot 'Two Versions of the Imaginary' in *The Space of Literature,* trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 255.

[9] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*. (London, Vintage, 2000), 92.

[10] Barthes also expands on the origin of his term writing, 'One day, leaving one of my classes, someone said to me with disdain: "You talk about Death very flatly"– As if the horror of Death were not precisely its platitude!,' Roland Barthes, ibid.

2011, is now suspended at a greater remove, even more unreachable than the film had initially rendered her.

The medium of analogue film plays the most formative role in *Leonora* as through its obsolescence it is imbued with an intensified language of contact and loss. The intrinsic connection between film, photography, and death, which is already the subject of substantial critical reflection, has recently acquired new focus. To the numerous theorisations on this interrelationship, we can now add deathly resonances that link human mortality and the ageing process, to the subjection of celluloid film to the same ravages of time. This makes Skaer's treatment of the subject of death unique to the temporal position it occupies.[11] In its alignment of death with the obsolescence of the analogue image, *Leonora* reaffirms the already obvious connection between bodily frailty and the degradation of celluloid. However, the installation moves beyond these connotations of ageing and decay by exploiting the psychological implications of the medium's proximity to death. *Leonora* employs analogue film to confront us with conceptually difficult subject matter that is normally repressed or avoided. This ambitious installation attempts to represent the irreconcilable and unthinkable nature of death by demonstrating that art can open up a space for troubling and elusive aspects of subjectivity to be encountered.

By pushing towards a space beyond language and meaning *Leonora,* like *The Man Who Looked Back* and *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers),* leads us into an acknowledgment of a constitutional absence at the centre of subjectivity.

[11] Erika Balsom discusses this subject at length, likening analogue film to a ruin, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013): 91–100. Michael Newman also aligns the degradation of analogue film with bodily frailty and ageing in 'Drawing Time: Tacita Dean's Narratives of Inscription,' Enclave Review 7 (Spring 2013) 5–9.

This void, which is always beyond conscious thought, is framed throughout this thesis by the Lacanian Real. By using analogue film to confront us with an unthinkable subject, *Leonora* again attests to the close proximity analogue film and photography maintain with Lacan's elusive register.

LEONORA CARRINGTON'S CORPSES AND CADAVERS

According to Lucy Skaer, Leonora Carrington's presence in *Leonora* serves only as an historical anchor.[12] However, there are striking affinities between Skaer's evocation of death in the installation and the candidness with which Carrington faced the subject in her practice. The late surrealist's penchant for the macabre is evidenced by the corpses and skeletons that populate the pages of her short stories and paintings. Carrington's confrontational attitude towards death differentiates the model of surrealism that she represents, from the more dominant one advocated by André Breton, which, as Hal Foster has argued, distances, or represses death.[13]

Carrington's unflinching explorations of death, as exemplified by her depictions and descriptions of decomposed and wounded corpses, point towards the influence that the literary genres of English Romanticism, and the Fantastic had on her in her childhood. The gothic tales of W.W. Jacobs were read to her by her father.[14] Jacobs most famous story, *The Monkey's Paw*, 1902, features a decomposed corpse that is brought back from the dead.[15] This concern with raising the dead,

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[12] Lucy Skaer interview with Kirstie North.

[13] Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, MIT Press, 1993).

[14] See Paul Bond, 'I didn't have time to be anyone's muse: Leonora Carrington (1917–2011)', *World Socialist Website*, http://www1.wsws.org/articles/2011/jun2011/carr-j22.shtml (Published 22 June 2011).

[15] W.W. Jacobs, *The Monkey's Paw and Other Tales of Mystery and the Macabre* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1997).

which also places emphasis on the fleshly materiality of human remains, is a recurring theme in English Literature of the nineteenth century. Other prominent examples, from which Carrington's fiction evolves, include Heathcliff's excavation of Cathy's body in Emily Bronte's, *Wuthering Heights,* 1847.[16] There are also numerous repulsive accounts of decaying bodies in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, 1818. This latter novel contains many explicit descriptions of decomposed cadavers, for instance, when Frankenstein describes 'the fine form of man degraded and wasted ... the corruption of death succeed to the blooming light of a cheek ... how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and the brain'.[17] Carrington's own fiction draws upon these grisly and forthright descriptions of death as we see in stories such as *A Man in Love*, 1939, which features a disquieting warm corpse that a greengrocer keeps at the back of his shop. She writes:

> He took me by the arm and led me into the depths of his shop ... We went through a door at the back and reached a room where there was a bed in which lay a woman, motionless and probably dead. It seemed to me that she must have been there a long time, for the bed was overgrown with grass. "I water her everyday" the greengrocer said thoughtfully. "For forty years I've been quite unable to tell whether she is alive or dead. She hasn't moved or spoken or eaten during that time. But this is the strange thing, she remains warm ... I believe it's my love that keeps her so warm to this day. No doubt she is dead, but the warmth remains".[18]

Carrington adds to the unsettling nature of the scene by evoking decay and decomposition. She writes, '[a] great number of rats sat on the thresholds of their

[16] Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (London and New York: Penguin, 1994), 241-2.

[17] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (London and New York: Penguin, 2012), 45.

[18] Leonora Carrington, 'A Main in Love' in *The House of Fear: Notes from Down Below*, trans. Katherine Talbot and Marina Warner (London: Virago Press Ltd, 1989) 55–57. 'A Man in Love' was published a year before her incarceration in a collection of six short stories entitled *The Oval Lady*, first published in French as *La Dame Ovale*, 1939.

holes and sang with shrill, disagreeable little voices. Foul smells spread and dispersed one another, and there were strange draughts'.[19] In her novella, *Little Francis,* 1937–8, Carrington actually aligns herself with a corpse. This text has evoked much commentary as it is widely understood to be a barely veiled account of the beginnings of Carrington's love affair with Max Ernst.[20] It tells the story of a love triangle that corresponds to the relationships between Carrington and Ernst, and his then wife Marie-Berthe Aurenche. At the end of the story, the title character that represents Carrington, little Francis, is killed with a nauseating wound to the head. Carrington describes how Francis is hit with a hammer 'till a big hole' appeared in his skull and 'streams of blood made a strangely-shaped pool on the floor'.[21] The murderer, who represents Ernst's scorned wife, than gives an anguished and revolted account of how she couldn't stop herself 'whacking and whacking till all the awful blood came out bubbling and blackish–ugh!'[22] The story ends with a lengthy description of the corpse being placed in its coffin.

Carrington's stories draw on a long literary tradition of the macabre. Elisabeth Bronfen's book, *Over Her Dead Body*, 1992, examines this relationship between death and art, with particular focus on the nineteenth-century English literature from which Carrington draws.[23] According to Bronfen, death in art is not always frightening, but often aesthetically pleasing as it allows us to experience

[19] Ibid, 59.

[20] See Marina Warner, 'Introduction,' *The House of Fear*, 10.

[21] Leonora Carrington, 'Little Francis' In *The House of Fear*, 147.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Authors include Mary Shelley and Emily Brontë as well as Charles Dickens, Virginia Woolf and Irish author Bram Stoker.

death by proxy.[24] She offers examples of nineteenth-century art and literature showing various ways in which death is distanced by a typically, although not always, male artist who depicts a beautiful female corpse.[25] This beauty acts to mask and disprove the idea of disintegration and decomposition, whilst assuring the survival of the one who views the corpse.[26] Bronfen begins her book with a study of Gabriel von Max's painting, *Der Anatom, (The Anatomist)* 1869 (Figure 3.2). The anatomist sits contemplatively over a recently deceased young female. Bronfen writes that the moment the artist has 'chosen to arrest in his painting is one where beauty is defined in its contrast to destruction ... her beauty has not yet begun to disappear, as it will in the process of decomposition'.[27] Bronfen adds that this image 'places the work of death into the service of the aesthetic process'.[28] Clearly, this aesthetic appropriation of death does not apply to Carrington's treatment of the subject. Rather, the repulsive nature of death, the visual effect it has on the body is represented suggesting that Carrington does not aesthetically distance death, she confronts it.

Carrington's contrasting model is given visual form in her painting, *Adieu Amenhotep,* 1955 (Figure 3.3), which also depicts an autopsy. Loaded with alchemical symbolism, which I do not have the scope to unpack here, *Adieu Amenhotep* depicts a shrivelled and green-tinged cadaver whose insides are opened

[24]Elizabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), xxi.

[25] Edgar Allan Poe who wrote, 'the death of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world', famously sums this up. The woman to which Poe refers is the fictional character Lenore, of his poem *The Raven*, 1845. Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Philosophy of Composition,'1846 referenced by Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body,* 59.

[26] Ibid., 62

[27] Ibid., 5.

[28] Ibid.

up. It is placed on a levitating table. As Amenhotep is an ancient Egyptian name, we could read the lines on the corpse as bandages, rather than the tethers of skin which appear to be hanging down from the opened entrails. The murky colour of the mummy would imply that the bandages have been soiled over time and that the cadaver inside has decomposed and withered. The discolouration of the, apparently male, corpse is amplified by the contrasting purity of the bright white dress worn by the female-looking anatomists, as Carrington formally inverts von Max's painting. If a beautiful corpse, in art, serves to deny death by assuring the survival of the one who views it, the decomposing corpse must have the reverse affect. It confirms death and the inevitable degradation of the human body**.**

Carrington's corpses are not aesthetically pleasing but wounded and marked. Grounded in their materiality, their flesh and blood, these cadavers become associated with states of distress and repugnance. As well as serving an aesthetic purpose, Bronfen also claims that the cadaver can come to represent the order of the Lacanian Real, the destabilisation of categories or a disruption of the symbolic order. Images of death and dying then become apt tools for representing what is otherwise beyond communicability. This is because death itself is always outside the speaking subject's personal experience, and beyond imaginary and symbolic registers**.**[29] Carrington's use of corpses and cadavers aligns itself with this reading, especially when we consider her own account of her psychotic breakdown which led to her institutionalisation. This biographical context allowed Carrington direct access to the traumatic Real as through her illness she, like Warburg, experienced an acute sense of symbolic collapse.

[29]Ibid, 52.

In her autobiographical memoir, *Down Below*, 1944, which documents her incarceration in a Spanish mental asylum in 1940, Carrington aligns psychic distress with physical death. This interrelationship is introduced at the outset of the memoir which begins with a journey from France to Spain. It was during this journey that Carrington said she first became aware of her fragile state of mind. She began to see before her 'on the road, trucks with legs and arms dangling behind them'.[30] Believing this to be a hallucination, when she was actually passing through a huge military cemetery in Perpignan, Carrington adds that the 'road was lined with rows of coffins … They obviously were people who had been killed by the Germans. I was very frightened: it all stank of death'.[31] Carrington continues to liken the deterioration of her mental state with her own physical death in *Down Below*. On route to the asylum, she recalls being injected with the sedative Luminal, three times in the spine, before being handed 'over like a cadaver to Dr Morales'.[32] Alongside the text, she also provides an illustrative map of her perception of the asylum, complete with a key. Here we see the treatment room labelled '2– Radiography'. This place is drawn in the shape of a coffin. Inside we can make out a person with two heads, who is laid out flat as Carrington would have been during her treatment (Figure 3.4). This map accompanies her vivid written accounts of her subjection to electroconvulsive shock therapy. She describes being held or strapped down while it was administered, 'as all eyes fixed upon me in a ghastly stare ... eyes were tearing my brain apart and I was sinking down into a well ... very far ... The bottom of that

[30]Leonora Carrington, 'Down Below' in *The House of Fear*, 167.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 175.

well was the stopping of my mind for all eternity in the essence of utter anguish'.[33] After this treatment she recalls that she would weep by her bed 'thinking that I was dead'.[34] She later reflects 'after the experience of *Down Below*, I changed dramatically. It was very much like having been dead'.[35] In her autobiographical writing, Carrington opens up a contemplative space for the inevitable fact of death to be acknowledged. Carrington's explorations of death are relevant to *Leonora* as the older artist continually exposed the obscurity of death by using the corpse as a visual indicator of symbolic collapse or death beyond words.

LUCY SKAER AND THE PASSION OF INDIFFERENCE

Lucy Skaer's *Leonora* testifies to a new art historical turn in contemporary British art and, as with Jeremy Millar and Tacita Dean, this is not the only art historical artwork in Skaer's oeuvre. *Our Magnolia,* 2009, a film made in collaboration with Rosalind Nashashsibi, is relevant to *Leonora* as it confirms Skaer's particular interest in the British surrealism that Leonora Carrington also stands for. The film appropriates a painting by British surrealist Paul Nash who is an important figure of influence on Skaer's broader practice.[36] *Our Magnolia* begins with a shot of Nash's painting *Flight of the Magnolia*, 1944. This painting of the petals of a magnolia suspended in the sky recalls the deployment of parachutes during the aerial invasions

[33] Ibid., 191/2.

[34] Ibid., 207.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Skaer confirmed this in an interview I conducted with her. Her art historical agenda is also evident in a newly commissioned film also made in collaboration with Rosalind Nashashibi, *Why Are You Angry*, 2016, which investigates the problematic nature of Paul Gauguin's portrayals of Tahitian women. Skaer discussed her plans for this film in a conversation with me in 2014. This film is due to be screened in Tate St Ives in October 2016. Lucy Skaer interview by Kirstie North, Glasgow, 9 July 2014.

of WW2. *Our Magnolia* combines the painting by Nash with other imagery suggestive of death such as a skeletal shape, perhaps a whale, half buried in the sand of a deserted beach. The image of the whale and the preoccupation with death in *Our Magnolia* are motifs that are also pertinent to *Leonora* and they situate this earlier installation within the particular legacy of British surrealism that Skaer often evokes. This emphasis on British surrealism also places *Leonora* within the context of more recent explorations of death, and animal death, in British art.

Lucy Skaer's oeuvre, like Carrington's before her, includes obvious visual signifiers of death such as corpses as this chapter will explore later. In Skaer's work human corpses are also joined by the skeletons of animals. These morbid motifs align Skaer's work with the art of the young British artists of the Saatchi generation who also used animal death to make us consider our own mortality. *Leonora* features a huge heavily worked drawing of a 1:1 replica of a pygmy right whale skeleton, subtitled *Death*, on a vast piece of paper that dominates the space of the installation[37] (Figure 3.5). The surface of the drawing is made up of a laborious matrix of hand-drawn grey and black spirals. The black spirals are drawn with a fine point sharpie pen and then backfilled with pencil[38] (Figure 3.6). This formal technique gives the drawing both weight and mass, exemplifying Skaer's on-going interest in transforming an image into an object by affording it a heightened physical or material presence and density. In fact, one of the central concerns of Skaer's practice resides in the draining 'of life from material to leave a calcified blank version in

[37] The drawing was mapped out on site at the Natural History Museum, Basel, Switzerland while Skaer was on residency there. See *Suicide Narcissus: Artist Talk with Lucy Skaer and Paul Patritsch,* University of Chicago, 23 November 2013, http://vimeo.com/81524686, (Accessed 8 June 2014).

[38] See Ibid.

which the matter becomes primary and paradoxical'.[39] Images of skeletons and corpses, drained of life, become reflective of this formal agenda. When looking at the drawing from a distance, the whale skeleton can be made out, while looking at the work in close proximity one can only make out abstract marks. There is a formal play between proximity and distance which causes the eye to switch rapidly between registers. The image of the skeleton cannot be held, but keeps dissolving into patterns.[40] This formal strategy is reflective of the way that death is not comprehensible from close up, but perhaps only approachable from a distance and from a safe space, or by proxy, as Bronfen would claim. Death is both beyond words and cannot be held in view.

Death was exhibited at Tate Britain as part of the Turner Prize, 2009. Alongside the drawing, Skaer also exhibited her work *Leviathan's Edge*, 2009, which consists of a real sperm whale's skull partly screened off from view by two white walls on either side. Slits in the walls afford the viewer partial glimpses of the skull in a move that parodies the earlier drawing as again a skeleton is obscured by a flat surface.[41] While a classic side-view of the whale skeleton is denied, the whale skull can be viewed head-on as the ends of the screens are left open (Figure 3.7). This de-familiarised viewpoint makes the object strange. This is a common tactic

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[39] Lucy Skaer, *Subjective Histories of Sculpture: Lucy Skaer*. The New School, New York City, 6 March 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lagtoDaDyIA, (accessed 9 June 2014).

[40] By using this arduous drawing technique, Skaer says she was attempting to capture the fleeting sensation of 'the strangeness of a whale swimming past you in the dark', ibid.

[41] The skull itself was loaned from the National Museum of Scotland as Basel's National History Museum refused to loan the original skeleton from which the drawing, *Death,* was made. The original skeleton was loaned to Skaer for *Leviathan's Edge* as it was shown, again alongside *Death* in her first major solo exhibition outside the UK, *A Boat Used as a Vessel* at Kunsthalle, Basel, 5 April–14 June 2009. She was nominated for the Turner Prize on the strength of this exhibition, alongside her solo show at The Fruitmarket Gallery in 2008.

used by Skaer who uses obliteration to 'freeze the work at the moment of interpretation'.[42] She aims to make the work hover just on the periphery of language. She says, 'if I exhibited a whole whale skeleton it would be so readable'.[43] In *Leviathan's Edge,* Skaer is particularly interested in presenting the eye as something animal, blank, and uncomprehending, both with regard to the isolated eyes of the viewer that look through the slits at a partial form they cannot fully grasp, and the blank sockets of the whale inside the walls.[44] This same blank gaze is courted in *Death* as the eye cannot hold the image. This unseeing, or unknowing eye conceptually corresponds to the ungraspable nature of the subject of death, which cannot be thought.

The head-on confrontation demanded by Skaer's whale invites obvious comparison with Damien Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living,* 1991, as both works use specimens of natural history to place us in close proximity to death. Hirst's work consists of the corpse of a tiger shark preserved and suspended in formaldehyde inside a vitrine (Figure 3.8). Looking straight into the face of a tiger shark is supposed to be frightening, because death is frightening. However, it is also the titling of the work that gives it its potency. The shark is suspended in fluid and out of context in the gallery space, just as death itself is suspended from our minds having no place in the context of our everyday lives. Whilst it is true that Hirst deals with death in numerous works, it is often the death of

[42] Lucy Skaer, 'Artist's Talk Pieces and Parts: Lucy Skaer in Conversation with Adam Szymczyk, Basel, Kunsthalle, 12 June 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=59uqqnc2bU , (accessed 6 June, 2014).

[43] Ibid.

[44] This idea also evokes Bataille's *Story of the Eye*, which links death with the uncomprehending gaze of a matador's impaled eye and a bull's surgically removed and peeled testicles. However, the overt sexual content and associations of these objects in Bataille's work have no relevance to Skaer's project. See *Story of the Eye,* trans. Joachim Neugroschal (London: Penguin Classics, 2001), 53.

animals which is supposed to make us consider our own mortality and this in itself is problematic. Chris Townsend writes of Hirst that, '[i]t is as if our deaths were to be equated with those of the abattoir when, quite clearly, humans articulate their consciousness towards death very differently from animals'.[45] Hirst presents us with real-life mortality and decay with his rotting sheep's heads and fried flies in works such as *A Thousand Years*, 1990 (Figure 3.9), but this doesn't really deal with human death at all. Hirst uses the aforementioned strategy of distancing death that Bronfen explores. He presents us with a more comfortable death by proxy that affects animals, not ourselves. Despite these differing agendas, Hirst's distancing of death, versus Skaer's confrontational approach to death, there is an overlap between the animal corpses of Skaer and Hirst which appeals to the legacy of surrealism, and its darker side now associated with the writings of Georges Bataille.

Animal death was a recurrent theme in Bataille's writing as evidenced by his article *Abattoir,* 1929.[46] The original publication of Abattoir, in the surrealist journal Documents, was accompanied by a series of photographs by Eli Lotar taken in a slaughterhouse. These included a photograph of a row of neatly rolled up animal hides, with protruding tongues (Figure 3.10). These gruesome images, which would not be out of place amongst a survey of British art of the 1990s, form 'a kind of climax, within the journal, of the iconography of horror'.[47] However, Bataille's fascination with the grisly, the violent, and the macabre had a revolutionary agenda. He writes, '[h]ow can one not appreciate the extent of horror's fascination, and that

[45] Chris, Townsend, *Art And Death* (London and New York: I.B.Taurus, 2008), 48.

[46] Georges Bataille, 'Abattoir' *Documents* 1, no. 7, p382, ref by Yve-Alain Bois in 'Abattoir' in *Formless: A Users Guide*, 43-51.

[47] Ibid., 43.

it alone is sufficient to shatter everything that stifles us'.[48] Elsewhere he adds, '[w]ithout a profound complicity with natural forces such as violent death, gushing blood, sudden catastrophes and the horrible cries of pain that accompany them ... there could be no revolutionaries'.[49] Bataille was not so much interested in violence itself, but in the suppression of violence and death by a 'cheese eating' bourgeoisie who had banished all things fearful from their 'flabby world'.[50] He writes, '[i]n our time ... the slaughterhouse is cursed and quarantined like a plague ridden ship'.[51] The abattoir exiles and excludes death from normal life and this is problematic for Bataille who insists on the presence of death in life, death in all its fearful and repulsive glory.

If Bataille bemoaned the suppression of death from normal life, the yBas in the 1990s exploited and appropriated the now already existing over-saturation of images of death in the mass media.[52] Artists like Hirst brought the abattoir into the art gallery. These more recent explorations of the theme of death lack Bataille's emphasis on its revolutionary power, whilst retaining its capacity to cause shock and revulsion. The employment of death, as provocative shock tactic, was evident at the outset of the yBa movement as evidenced by works such as Matt Collishaw's gruesome, *Bullet Hole*, 1988 (Figure 3.11), first exhibited at the now infamous

[48] Georges Bataille, 'Oeil- Friandise Cannibale' in *Documents* ref by ibid.

[49] Georges Bataille 'La Valeur d'usage de D.A.F. de Sade' in ibid., 49. This text was written in response to Breton's derision of Bataille in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*.

[50] Georges Bataille 'Abattoir' *Documents* 6 (November 1929): 329.

[51] Ibid.

[52] The yBa treatment of death differs from Carrington's and Bataille's, because of its very obvious references to the mass media. An infamous example of this connection is Marcus Harvey's controversial portrait of Myra Hindley, *Myra*, 1995. Much of the power of yBa work was generated by courting the mass media, both in terms of the appropriation of its imagery and by the generation of its own headlines caused by exploiting death in controversial works of art like this one.

student exhibition, *Freeze*, 1988.[53] *Bullet Hole* is a transparency depicting an enlarged image of a wound to the head. Contrary to the title, the wound is not actually a bullet hole, but a wound from an ice pick. This image gives us a visual correlative to the description of the gaping hole left in little Francis's head in Carrington's short story, an overlap which testifies to the similarity of these depictions of death via visual bodily wounds. *Bullet Hole* has become synonymous with the yBas continued reuse of found imagery that is repulsive, or shocking. These depictions, like Carrington's before them, concern themselves with visual indicators of death, its effect on the body, and the cause of death through bodily wounds. Skaer is not interested in the visual signs of death, but its conceptual, or intellectual impact, which always eludes our gaze.

Death is one of a number of drawings in Skaer's oeuvre commonly referred to as the *Black Drawings.* These drawings are described in the discourse on her work as resistant, cold or difficult as there is an inability to transform the tension of the viewing experience into a linguistic one.[54] In regard to this particular drawing the formal techniques employed, which act to obscure the whale skeleton, correspond to the subject matter as the skeleton is present yet remains ungraspable as the eye cannot hold it in focus. This is reflective of the way death itself is suspended within parenthesis and cannot be fully grasped or articulated in linguistic terms. This same idea is conceptually communicated by *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living.* This title alone neatly sums up the difficulty we have in accepting death, even if we are conscious of it in a way that animals are not.

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[53] *Freeze* was a three-part exhibition, curated and orchestrated by Damien Hirst which took place in a warehouse in the Surrey Docks from the 6 August 1988–29 September, 1988.

[54] See Isla Leaver-Yap, 'Lucy Skaer's Black Drawings: Encounter and Aftermath' in *Lucy Skaer* (Edinburgh: The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2008), 95.

Skaer's drawing of a whale skeleton, which is always receding into the blackness of the marks, considers death's incomprehensibility in a visual register. In his essay, *The Gaze of Orpheus*, 1981, Blanchot uses the story of Orpheus and Eurydice to also consider the impossibility of death in a visual register. According to Blanchot, Orpheus's look back is an allegory of the artist's seductive, yet impossible relation to death which always recedes from view, as Skaer's skeleton does. He argues that Orpheus goes towards death itself, and not towards Eurydice as a lost loved one. He writes:

> Through the power of art darkness receives him ... Orpheus' art does not consist in opening the way to this 'point' by descending into the Underworld, but in bringing it to the light and, in the light, giving it form and reality. Orpheus is capable of everything, except of facing this 'point', of contemplating the heart of darkness in the dark. He can go down towards it. He can even draw it up after him to the light – but only when he averts his gaze. It can only be approached with averted eyes.[55]

Blanchot maintains that Orpheus does not turn back to 'find Eurydice's daylight reality and superficial charm, but her nightmare darkness and elusiveness ... He does not wish to see her visibility but her invisibility ... not to make her live but to perceive alive in her the fullness of her death'.[56] It is this impossible ambition, to represent something, which can never be directly observed, which differentiates Skaer's work from the earlier examples from Carrington and the yBas. These previous artistic expressions over compensate for what we don't know about death by using explicit visual depictions of what we do know, and can observe. Despite acknowledging the invisibility of death, Blanchot paradoxically aligns death with art.

[55] Maurice Blanchot, 'Orpheus's Gaze' in *The Siren's Song: Selected Essays,* trans. Sacha Rabinovich (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), 177.

[56] Ibid., 178.

Death is an impossible experience, which belongs to the register of the Lacanian Real. It cannot be visually or intellectually grasped, but art may gesture towards this void providing some sort of access to it in the symbolic order. As we will now see, Blanchot approaches this idea from a formal, rather than psychoanalytic perspective as he connects the nothingness of death to the condition of an image.[57]

DEATH AND NOTHINGNESS

While maintaining a distance from the fleshy repulsive signs of death advocated by Bataille, Skaer's investigations into the same theme do correspond to some of Bataille's ideas from a later moment in his career, informed by the influence of his close friend and confident Maurice Blanchot whom he met in 1940. In his novel, *Thomas the Obscure*, 1941, Blanchot writes, 'O night, I am itself … It makes me, nothingness that I am, like unto nothingness'.[58] Bataille references this work in *Inner Experience*, 1943, where he writes of Blanchot, 'I heard the author posit the foundation of all "spiritual" life, which can only … be contestation of itself and non-savoir.'[59] Again we return to the insistent gesturing towards a subjective void that runs throughout this thesis. Blanchot's and Bataille's affirmation of nothing refers to subjectivity as present in the Lacanian Real, which is not to say a non-existent subjectivity, but the confirmation of an unknown, un-thought or inaccessible aspect of psychic experience. This has been explored and elaborated upon in a Lacanian context in previous chapters of this thesis, however, in the context of Bataille's and Blanchot's writing, this sense of meaninglessness has been linked by some scholars

[57] Blanchot insists that death is, '[t]he central point of the work of art … the work as origin, the point which cannot be reached, yet the only one worth reaching,' ibid., 4.

[58] Maurice Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, trans. Robert Lamberton (Barrytown: Station Hill, 2000), 108–9.

[59] See Georges Bataille, *L'experience interieure* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), 20.

to a shared perception of the withering of revolutionary consciousness after WW2.[60] This aspiration to affirm nothingness can be traced back to Bataille's earlier concept of the *Informe*, 1929, and to Blanchot's on-going investigations into the relationship between death and art, both of which will now be elaborated upon in relation to Skaer's work.

Blanchot is not only concerned with death but also with the difficult idea of of dying, *le mourir*. Dying is differentiated from death by Blanchot and is perhaps more disturbing as it is interminable and incessant. Blanchot writes, '[t]he proverbial formula: "as soon as someone begins to live, he is old enough to die," is indeed impressive in as much as it distributes mortal possibility uncertainly the whole length of life'.[61] While dying is an inevitability that shadows the length of a life, it cannot be thought in the present tense and herein lies its complexity. Blanchot writes '[d]ying's difficulty comes in part from the fact that we think it only in the future and that, thinking it in the past, we immobilize it in the form of death. Dying in the past would be being dead'.[62]

Leonora Carrington's understandable inability to reconcile herself with the certainty of her own dying and death is largely to do with the fact that this experience is always lying in wait, yet cannot be thought. Just as dying resists presentness, belonging to the future, it is also something that 'no trace would make material in the present.'[63] Dying is the experience of absolute loss, it is something we cannot situate as we have no relation to it, yet at the same time we have no

[60] See Michael Holland, 'An Event Without Witness: Contestation between Blanchot and Bataille' in Kevin Hart and Geoffrey. H. Hartman, eds. *The Power of Contestation: Perspectives on Maurice Blanchot* (USA: John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 31.

[61] Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, trans Lycette Nelson (USA: State University of New York Press, 1992), 95.

[62] Ibid, 110.
[63] Ibid, 95.

possibility of liberation from it. The possibility of dying lies endlessly in wait and cannot be put to rest.[64] Blanchot suggests that dying is similar to writing in the sense that both are 'incapable of any present'.[65] He argues:

> To write is perhaps to bring to the surface something like absent meaning, to welcome the passive pressure which is not yet what we call thought … An absent meaning would maintain the "affirmation" of a push beyond loss, the pressure of dying that bears loss off with it. Lost loss.[66]

Death is a traumatic event that exceeds any possibility of description or representation. Dying also represents a traumatic 'madness that would overwhelm being from top to bottom and, at the same time, would only reach us as an imperceptible neurosis, escaping any observation, invisible because too visible'.[67] Blanchot's interpretation of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice is a visualisation of the way a work of art may affirm loss by loosing its object. Orpheus, the artist, visually represents death by giving form to Eurydice as lost. He does this by averting his eyes before turning towards this moment of withdrawal and absence.[68] As he

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[64] See Gillian Rose, 'Potter's Field: Death Worked and Unworked' in Carolyn Bailey Gill, ed. *Maurice Blanchot: The Demand of Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) .191–209.

[65] Maurice Blanchot, *A Step Not Beyond*, 89.

[66] Maurice Blanchot. The Writing of the Disaster, trans Ann Smock (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 41.

[67] Maurice Blanchot, A Step Not Beyond, 95.

[68] Trauma specialist Peter A. Levine also maintains that trauma can only be worked through if we avoid confronting it directly. He also draws upon Greek mythology in order to visualise the freezing response characteristic of trauma. Levine writes that as in 'the myth of Medusa, anyone who looked directly into her eyes would quickly turn to stone. Such is the case with trauma. If we attempt to confront trauma head on, it will continue to do what it has already done – immobilize us in fear'. Peter A. Levine. *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma.* (Berkely California: North Atlantic Books, 1997), 64.

approaches Eurydice with averted eyes, Orpheus intimates towards the traumatic void that is the unspeakable and unthinkable truth of our own mortality. All three of the artworks in this thesis constitute a similar affirmation of loss. By making an absent meaning present these works allow us to indirectly approach death as a past event that happens to someone else, as in Skaer's film of the now deceased Carrington. This gesturing towards the death of another opens indirectly onto the inevitability of our own death and the experience of dying which awaits us in the future. As this chapter will now reaffirm, the photographic image is perhaps the most affective medium through which to express the endlessness of dying because as Roland Barthes explains 'each photograph always contains this imperious sign of my future death'.[69] This affective experience places us in both the position of Orpheus who catches a fleeting glimpse of death, and of Eurydice suspended and dying between a death in the past, and one that awaits us in the future.

While Blanchot is primarily a literary theorist and concerns himself with the relationship between dying and writing, he claims that death is essential to art as it is reflective of the condition of an image as 'the cadaver's strangeness is perhaps also that of the image'.[70] He writes:

> The cadaver is its own image. It no longer entertains any relation with this world, where it still appears, except that of an image, an obscure possibility, a shadow ever present behind the living form which now, far from separating itself from this form, transforms it entirely into shadow ... It is likeness, like to an absolute degree, overwhelming and marvellous. But what is it like? Nothing?[71]

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[69] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 97.

[70] Maurice Blanchot, 'Two Versions of the Imaginary' in *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 255.

[71] Blanchot argues that the corpse is the image of a subject who moves from use value to image. He uses the Surrealist trouvaille as an example of this transformation

What Blanchot means is that while a corpse still resembles the person which has died, this person no longer exists and therefore it resembles nothing. This immediately recalls Bataille's description of the *informe*, to which I will shortly turn. Skaer draws upon this discourse in an earlier series of drawings of corpses and injured bodies that inform *Leonora*. She says her use of images of the dead began because of their 'complete 1:1 scale'.[72] However, she adds, following Blanchot, 'it is because an image of a dead person is like a double image because the body is twice an image'.[73] In the aptly titled work, *Tragedy No Us Touched Has*, 2001 (Figure 3.12), we see a doubled body taken from a photograph of a girl injured in the Bloody Sunday protests. The historical context of this image is not at all obvious. Rather, it is the formal positioning of the body which seems likely to have caused its selection. It is flipped to create a mirror image. In spite of the use of this highly charged material, the event itself is secondary to the qualities of the image.[74] Rather than being emotive or politically motivated, as the content of the drawing would suggest, it is instead quite decorative. At the centre of the drawing is a delicately etched glass bowl, and to further emphasise this point the otherwise monochromatic drawing contains one dash of colour, the blood on the face of the figure which is coloured

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from use value to image in the case of objects. He writes, '[b]y analogy, we might also recall that a tool, when damaged, becomes its image (and sometimes an esthetic object like "those outmoded objects, fragmented, unusable, almost incomprehensible, perverse" which André Breton loved). In this case the tool, no longer disappearing into its use, appears'. For Blanchot, the image is what comes after both object and subject, he adds, 'the image becomes the object's aftermath, that which comes later, which is left over and allows us to still have the object at our command when there is nothing left of it'. See Ibid., 258–60.

[72] Lucy Skaer in *Lucy Skaer*, 11.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Lucy Skaer confirmed that this work does not contain an overt political agenda in an interview with the author, 9 July 2014.

Wedgewood blue. This emphasis on the decorative diminishes affect and this is reflected by the blank, or flat expression on the face of the figure that is reflective of the diagrammatic nature of the flat drawing. In Blanchot's terms, this is the condition of a true image which 'removes us to where things are perhaps present, but in their image, and where the image is passivity, where it has no value either significative or affective, but is *the passion of indifference* [my emphasis]*'*.[75]

Skaer's juxtaposition of corpse with ornament is revisited in *Diagrams and Banners (Blood),* 2002 (Figure 3.13). Lying horizontally along the top of the drawing, as in a banner, is the barely legible figure of a corpse. The most definitive feature is its head, while the form becomes more suggestive as it moves down the torso. This image was taken from a newspaper article which featured a photograph of a dead man killed in a riot in Mexico. Blood runs out of the bowl and flows back into the body's mirrored twin at the bottom of the image. As Gilda Williams describes, everything is in 'a perpetual state of instability and in-betweeness'.[76] Life becomes death, body becomes ornament and liquid becomes solid. This dissolution of separate forms recalls Georges Bataille's theory of the *informe,* or formless*,* recalling the chains of interchangeable signifiers that run through his novel *Story of the Eye,* 1928. In this novel the eye is part of a metaphorical chain which becomes an egg, while an egg becomes a testicle and so forth. Associated liquids also become caught up in this sequence as tears become yoke, or milk, or semen. These interchangeable words, or forms become blurred resulting in what Roland Barthes terms a 'signification without a thing signified', which is essentially what images of

[75] Maurice Blanchot, 'Two Versions of the Imaginary,' 262.

[76] Gilda Williams, 'Lucy Skaer,' *Art Monthly*. 279 (September 2004): 24–5.

death are.[77] Bataille writes, 'the universe resembles nothing and is only *formless*'.[78] This idea is close to Blanchot's likening of an image to a corpse as both are like nothing. For Lacan, empty signification is an indicator of subjectivity present in the Real and Bataille's and Blanchot's affirmations, of nothingness, of an absence at the centre of subjectivity conforms to this theory.

Bataille's theory of the formless is commonly understood in terms of the act of lowering, debasing and declassifying that to which it refers, however, the term can also refer to a type of artistic strategy that frustrates expectation.[79] In Bataille's own analysis, this strategy is related to images of death such as Édouard Manet's *The Execution of Maximilian*, 1869 (Figure 3.14), discussed at length in his book *Manet,* 1955. Bataille writes:

> On the face of it, death, coldly, methodically dealt out by a firing squad, precludes an indifferent treatment; such a subject is nothing if not charged with meaning for each one of us. But Manet approaches it with an almost callous indifference that the spectator, surprisingly enough, shares to the full. Maximilian reminds us of a tooth deadened by novacaine; we get the impression of an all-engulfing numbness … Manet posed some of his models in the attitude of dying, some in the attitude of killing, but all more or less casually, as if they were about to "buy a bunch of radishes" ... There remain a variety of colour patches and the impression that the subject ought to have an induced an emotional reaction but has failed to do so – the curious impression of an absence.[80]

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[77] See Roland Barthes 'The Metaphor of the Eye' in Georges Bataille*, Story of the Eye,* 123.

[78] Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings,* ed. Alan Stoekl (University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 31.

[79] See Yve-Alain Bois, *Formless: A Users Guide*, 14.

[80] Georges Bataille, *Manet,* introduction by Francoise Cachin (Rivoli: Skira, 1983), 48. It is also interesting to note that the last text ever published by Blanchot was 'The Instant of My Death', 1994. This short piece of prose is an autobiographical account of his near death experience at the hands of a Nazi firing squad. See Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida, *The Instant of my Death* and *Demeure*, eds. Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellberry, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (California: Stanford University Press, 2000).

Painted in the same year as Gabriel von Max's *The Anatomist* discussed earlier (Figure 3.2) Manet's impression of death substitutes heightened realism for a sense of callous flatness as he works in a negative relation to Goya and the conventions of history painting. This is evident in the flat colour and diminished detail which is reflective of the inherent flatness of the canvas. There is also flatness, meaning emotional numbness, or dullness as represented in the painting by the bored expression of the guard on the far right who lowers his gaze but appears unmoved by the shooting. As Yve-Alain Bois has argued the 'semantic deflation' of this painting is less a simple absence then a 'desublimatory act of aggression', an attack against the then dominant genre of history painting.[81] This attack is also a tactic which acts to disappoint expectation as the emotional charge anticipated in the rendition of such a scene is nullified, a version of the *informe* as operation.[82] It is this aspect of the formless, as strategy, that Skaer's corpse drawings employ. She strategically drains highly charged material of its context which has the added effect of dissipating any political agenda and of diminishing emotional affect. Skaer forces us to recognize an image as an image, that is, as something dead, something that refers to nothing. To give greater purchase on this argument we may again think of Lacan's example of the depressed young woman who paints on the wall in order to express her persistent perception of an internal void at the centre of subjectivity which is related to death. This sense of emptiness is given symbolic representation by the painting she creates to cover an empty space on the wall. The image in this case, as in Skaer's work, is a product of this sense of nothingness, and so it refers directly to the gap in the symbolic for which it compensates.

[81] See Yve-Alain Bois, 14.

[82] Ibid., 15.

There are two interlinked yet different trajectories that inform Manet's approach which also play out in Skaer's work. It is worth clarifying the way these two distinct concerns interact, before returning to Skaer, as Bataille distinguishes between them. He views Manet's indifference towards the subject of death as the product of a purely formal concern with painting which acts to 'destroy the subject', producing 'a definitive silence'.[83] While the impact Manet's painting had on the development of modern art and the concept of medium-specificity is not in dispute, his formal approach does not only speak of the medium of painting, but links death, as artistic subject, with this same sense of indifference and silence. Bataille moves from *The Execution of Maximilian* onto other works by Manet which betray 'the attraction asserted on him by the theme of death,' in order to foreground what he views as a purely formal agenda.[84] Other examples include *The Dead Toreador,* 1864 (Figure 3.15), which is formally similar to Skaer's *Tragedy No Us Touched Has.* (Figure 3.12) The toreador's monochromatic uniform replicates the monochromatic nature of Skaer's drawing, whilst the pose, and position of the corpse, against a minimal background, is strikingly similar in both examples. Bataille also discusses *The Funeral*, 1870, and *The Suicide*, 1881 (Figure 3.16). Of this latter painting, depicting a dead man slumped on a bed after shooting himself, Bataille writes, 'with the pistol still clutched in a limply hanging hand, we have the clearest demonstration of his desire to subordinate –or sublimate–the horror of death in a naively unconcerned play of light'.[85] Bataille implies that Manet treats the subject of death with a lack of concern because death should primarily evoke horror.

[83] 'Destroying the Subject' is the title of the chapter in which Bataille discusses Manet's paintings on the theme of death, see *Manet*, 50.

[84] Ibid., 50.

[85] Ibid.

Furthermore, he also suggests that Manet's emphasis on the intrinsic qualities of a medium must actively work to diminish the subject being depicted as Manet wrings 'the last drop of meaning out of the subject'.[86] However, Bataille may be missing the point as death is beyond meaning, and beyond comprehension. Manet's indifference keeps medium and subject in harmonious suspension evoking the silence of paintings that speak of themselves, but also the silence of death as an impossible and unknowable event. Manet presents us with death's flatness.

Lucy Skaer brings these two concerns together as an emphasis on the formal qualities of a medium become intrinsic to the subject of death which they evoke. Returning to *Leonora*, in front of the drawing of the whale, *Death* is a small wooden object. On its ends we can make out a figure lying face down on the floor, flanked by two other figures. This object is a continuation of the earlier corpse drawings and a refinement of Skaer's strategy. The image itself is rendered flat and blank being devoid of detail. Though almost unrecognisable, the image on this object was created by spinning a photograph of students from the Kent State University protests of 4th May 1970, on its central axis by 180 degrees[87] (Figure 3.17). This image of a body on the floor is similar in composition to the most iconic image of this incident, John Filo's photograph of Mary Ann Vecchio, a 14-year old runaway kneeling over the body of 20 year old Jeffrey Miller minutes after he had been shot and killed by the Ohio National Guard. In Skaer's image, as in the photograph, we see two figures, one crouching and one standing over a dead body lying face down on the floor (Figure 3.18). In Filo's photograph the girl is frozen in the midst of a dramatic emotive gesture which moves us, her arms are thrown into the air, an outcry against the unjustness and senselessness of the Kent state shootings. This gesture could also

[86] Ibid., 48.
[87] Lucy Skaer interview with Kirstie North.

be indicative of the meaningless of death more broadly. In Skaer's representation of the same subject she recasts the image from a flat photograph into a three dimensional object. Paradoxically the emotive impact of the subject is weakened due to a paring back of detail which renders the image flat. As in Manet's paintings, the flatness of the image acts to dramatise, not diminish the flatness or meaninglessness of death.

Skaer's attacks on the photographic image function in the same way as Manet's attacks did on the genre of history painting as they also act to draw attention to the formal qualities of the medium of photography, in this case, its hidden condition as an opaque, flat image. As Roland Barthes writes, the illusory spell of photographs consists of the fact that 'a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see. In short, the referent adheres. And this singular adherence makes it very difficult to focus on Photography'.[88] This adherence or illusion is shattered when the photograph depicts someone who is dead, as the referent no longer exists, hence there is a separation of the photograph, which is visibly present, from the referent who can never be seen again. Skaer appropriates photographs of dead bodies because the corpse is close to an image. It is a potent motif that thwarts our desire to resurrect living beings on the grounds of dead images.[89] This strategy recurs throughout *Leonora* which explicitly probes the relationship between lens-based mediums and

[88] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 6.

[89] Breaking photographic source material is a prominent feature of Skaer's oeuvre. She was one of a number of contemporary British artists that insisted on the *deadness* of lens based images by reflecting on Britain's iconoclastic history in Tate's exhibition *Art Under Attack: Histories of British Iconoclasm*. 2 October 2013 – 5 January 2014. The curators, Tabitha Barber and Stacey Boldrick termed this recent mode of production 'contemporary iconoclasm' which takes two dominant trajectories. The first is demonstrative of a desire to alter original artworks, while the other, more prominent, strategy is exemplified by artists like Skaer who alter mass reproduced imagery. This is often carried out via violent attacks that dismantle, distort or divorce source material from its original context using abrasions, burns, punches, tears and defacements which act to draw attention to the image as inert matter. Tabitha Barber and Stacy Boldrick, eds. *Art Under Attack: Histories of British* (London: Tate Publishing Ltd, 2013).

death because this type of imagery dramatizes this intrinsic connection most forcibly.

DEATH AND THE ANALOGUE

Leonora, in its entirety*,* examines the interrelationship between death and the image; this is especially poignant in the 16 mm film of Leonora Carrington who died shortly after it was made. Viewing this film posthumously increases its unsettling nature, not only because we look back at Carrington as a subject about to die, in fact, one who is already dead, but because this very fact places us in the same position as we approach the same fate. In *Camera Lucida*, 1980, Roland Barthes discusses the disconcerting nature of this type of confrontation with death by using a photograph of a handsome young man on death row, Lewis Payne, who is pictured handcuffed in a cell waiting to be hanged[90] (Figure 3.19). Barthes writes, '*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'.[91]

Skaer's film of Carrington functions in a similar fashion to this photograph of Lewis Payne. She appears so frail that we know her death is imminent. In fact, this remarkably short film, only 44 seconds long and silent, takes on a photographic aspect, especially in its final and most powerful shot. Here we see Carrington seated in her studio, the camera is in close proximity. She looks directly into it and then holds up a forefinger suggesting she is about to say something important. We see her mouth what could be the word 'one' as she looks out at us from behind sunken black eyes, and then the film abruptly stops. Her gaze is confrontational, startling (Figure

[90] The photograph to which Barthes refers was taken by Alexander Gardner, 1865. Lewis Payne was given a death sentence for trying to assassinate Secretary of State W.H. Seward. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 95.

[91] Ibid., 96.

3.20). This filmic technique of stopping, or pausing, a moving image by holding or cutting a frame, is theorised by Raymond Bellour as the 'stop of death'. He writes '[i]f the stop on the image, or of the image, what one might also call the photographic 'take' on film, the pose or pause of the image asserts the power of stillness to enthral, if this impression is so strong, it must be because it touches the stop of death'.[92] The 'stop of death' is the moment at which the certainty of death is overwhelmed by uncertainty; what happens next? This abrupt cut mirrors the way death is arrested in our minds as we do not know what it means or what comes after it. This is the moment Skaer chooses to amplify in the film through Carrington's black eyes which no longer register nor reflect life. The uncertainty of death, which is the overriding concern of the whole installation, comes across no more powerfully than at this precise moment.

Not only does Skaer draw on the substantial critical discourse that connects photography and film with death, she refocuses this discourse on questions of medium that are pertinent to the moment which the installation inhabits. If made earlier, this work would not have had the same implications which are a by-product of technological changes inflicted on the analogue medium. It is no coincidence that Skaer documented her meeting with Leonora Carrington, which gave rise to the whole installation, on 16 mm film. When I probed her on this decision to use this almost obsolescent medium, when a digital camera would have been much easier to use and to transport, Skaer said, 'it has something to do with the quality of it, I don't like this in some ways about film, but it does have this kind of precious quality, now anyway, I suppose it always did because it's expensive, but we are more aware of it

[92] Raymond Bellour, *L'Entr'images: Photo, Cinema, Video* (Paris 2002), 13.

now'.[93] This precious quality stems from the indexical nature of analogue film, the physical connection it maintains with its referent and its subsistence as a tangible material which is subject to degradation and decay. The impending obsolescence of analogue film has afforded it new specificities as not only does it bespeak death, but now becomes infused with new and complimentary qualities such as historicity and spectrality.[94] Erika Balsom writes, '[i]n the contemporary gallery, analogue film is figured as an old medium'.[95] She adds that this new 'consideration of film as an old medium' which is often combined with 'form-content relationships wherein celluloid is used to deal with aged, or disappearing subjects,' allows for a new understanding of medium specificity.[96]

The elderly Leonora Carrington becomes both reflective of the intrinsic relationship analogue mediums have with death, and the newly acquired subtext of ageing and oldness that now accompanies this uncanny revelation. Like Carrington, the film itself appears aged with the intrinsic flickers and marks of the analogue medium on which it was shot. The colour of the film overall appears washed out and faded, perhaps due to limited or ambient lighting. Throughout the film we see a pale and frail Carrington, swaddled in a blanket, seated in her studio. She looks at the camera and talks into it. She appears to be showing Skaer some sketchbooks, although we cannot hear what she is saying about them as the film has no sound. This is followed by sudden cuts to new frames, one showing faded coloured clothes pegs swaying on an empty washing-line. This again reiterates the ashen nature of the

[93] Lucy Skaer interview with Kirstie North.
[94] See Erika Balsom, 67.

[95] Ibid., 69.

[96] Ibid.

film overall. All of these brief shots are bracketed by recurring close-ups of Carrington's wrinkled and aged hands.

Skaer's film can be aligned with some of Tacita Dean's films of elderly artists on the verge of death, which also foreground a concern with the obsolescence of analogue mediums as discussed in chapter two.[97] For example, Dean's short 16 mm film *Mario Merz*, 2002, which captures the Italian artist just a year before his death in 2003, is close to Skaer's film of Carrington just years before her death. Dean's *Mario Merz* has optical sound, namely the rustling of the leaves of the tree under which Merz sits and the sound of cicada's. However, in a similar fashion to Skaer's film of Carrington, when Merz speaks to others, who are out of shot, we cannot make out what he says.[98] Dean's film is a kind of portrait of Merz which studies his gaze and the way the light falls on his wrinkled and aged face. According to Tamara Trodd, this work becomes a memorial, 'slightly ahead of time' and is uncomfortable or uncanny because of this.[99] All of Dean's films of aged art historical figures comment not only on the aged status of the subject, but also the status of the outmoded medium in which the subject is captured. There is a direct correlation between aged figures approaching death and the medium of film. Laura Mulvey writes, '[b]uried in cinema's materiality lies a reminder of the difficulty of

[97] As mentioned in the previous chapter Dean's father figures include *Marcel Broodthaers* with *Section Cinema: Homage to Marcel Broodthaers*, 2002, Joseph Beuys in *Darmstädter Werkblock*, 2007, Giorgio Morandi in *Still Life*, 2009, Claus Oldenburg in *Manhatten Mouse Museum*, 2011 and Cy Twombly in *Edwin Parker*, 2011.

[98] This was on the request of Merz who agreed to being filmed but with 'no speaking' see Tacita Dean, 'Mario Merz' in *Tacita Dean Selected Writings*, *Tacita Dean: Seven Books Grey*, 59.

[99] Tamara Trodd 'Fathers and Feminism' Lecture at the Henry Moore Institute, 7 September 2011. (accessed 25 January 2014).

understanding passing time and, ultimately of understanding Death'.[100] While connotations of ageing, past time, and death were intrinsic to the medium at its inception, new technological shifts refocus these concerns. As Erika Balsom writes, these resonances of past time are now joined by 'the apparatus itself [which] contributes to the sense of stubborn resistances of the past ... film is employed as a reminder of novelty grown old. It evinces the sadness of acknowledging that all that once was modern will be tempered by times senescence'.[101]

Although comparable on a number of levels, Dean's and Skaer's treatments of the subject of ageing and death are very different. Dean treats her elderly figures, such as Merz, tenderly. This is due to the fact that these predominantly male artists are regarded by Dean as father figures. This is especially true in the case of Merz as Dean writes that she saw him as a 'true and apparently impossible object of desire' because 'he looked exactly like my father'.[102] Dean's distinctive long static shots which are combined with the soundtrack of rustling leaves, brings a sense of slowness, tranquillity and calm to her film. Her characteristic use of light which emphasises qualities unique to the medium of film also acts to render Merz's aged body more ephemeral. Dean casts a poetic light on the subject of death in a way that is gentle both for Merz, as subject, and on the viewer who ultimately anticipates the same fate. She eases the viewer into a contemplative consideration of passing time in this film that, like much of Dean's work, preserves what is on the verge of being lost.

Skaer's film is not so consoling. The absence of any soundtrack not only prevents a wealth of information, about Carrington as a subject, from being gleaned

[100] Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second; Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006, 31–2.

[101] Erika Balsom, 79.

[102] Tacita Dean, 'Mario Merz', 59.

but insists that Carrington remains an image, 'fluid and ungraspable'.[103] This film is much more violent than *Mario Merz*. Formally it is abrasive with its agitating cuts and splices. Furthermore, Carrington is not shown in the comforting sunlight of Dean's Merz, but is seen to be frail and cold, huddled in a blanket, her wan complexion parodied by the grey and bleak light of her washed out environment. For all of these reasons the film seems callous, both in its treatment of the subject and in terms of the sense of coldness with which it leaves the viewer. Here, we again see the passion of indifference that permeated Skaer's earlier corpse drawings. This sense of unfeeling reaches its climax in the film's ending as it abruptly stops and cuts away the speaking Carrington as the projector jolts back to life and repeats the loop. Here we see death as something meaningless and abrupt, something jarring which is impossible to reconcile with and over which we have no choice. According to Bataille, death forces us into silence. It is a condemnation, like that imposed on the young man on death row. He writes:

> To be honest, the language I'm using can't be complete until my death … Death is a disappearance. It's a suppression so perfect that at the pinnacle utter silence is its truth. Words can't describe it. Here obviously I'm summoning a silence I can only approach from outside or from a long way away. I'll add this. If I died right now, the unbearable pain of it would be added to my life. My suffering – which would conceivably make my death more painful to my survivors – wouldn't change the fact that I would be suppressed. This is how I finally reach the end of language, which is death.[104]

Skaer suppresses Carrington's voice in a move that amplifies death's violence, yet also attests to its truth and its power over us. This is all the more dramatic because we can see that Carrington is addressing the camera. Like the miming Carrington,

[103] Lizzie Carey-Thomas in *Lucy Skaer*, 34.
[104] Georges Bataille, 'Guilty'. 7–8, ref in Georges Bataille, *Georges Bataille: Essential Writings*, ed. Michael Richardson (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 208.

whose words we cannot hear, this film speaks of 'nothing to say' because even attempting to remember, or preserve what has passed away is disingenuous to the unspeakable fact of flat death.[105]

Along with its connotations of death and loss, it is the indexicality of the analogue medium, which differentiates it from the digital. The medium's implication of physical contact is self reflexively pictured in Skaer's film which contains recurrent shots of Carrington's hands. In fact it begins with a shot of her aged hands which are shakily held out over a table, poised as if holding onto something which is invisible[106] (Figure 3.21). This image, referenced in the thesis introduction, provides a striking demonstration of the way an artwork may contain the emptiness or nothingness of the Real as also alluded to by Lacan's analogy of the potter who creates a form from emptiness.[107]I questioned Skaer about this strange gesture, which stands out in the film because it refers to nothing. She said about Carrington, 'I asked her to do this gesture with her hands as I wanted her to have some kind of agency in my show. I wanted to have this kind of active gesture, like something is

[105] Barthes writes that *Flat Death* is the "nothing to say" which has its root in the revelatory knowledge that when looking at death in a photograph '[t]he only 'thought' I can have is that at the end of this first death, my own death is inscribed,' Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 92. This idea was reiterated by Blanchot on the occasion of Bataille's death in 1962. He writes, '[h]ow could one agree to speak of this friend? … One wants to say "everything" as if one were anxious about only one thing: that everything be said: as if the "everything is said" would finally allow us to stop a dead voice, to stop the pitiful silence that arises from it … Everything we say tends to veil the one affirmation: that everything must fade and that we can remain loyal only so long as we watch over this fading movement … This is thought's profound grief. It must accompany friendship into oblivion'. Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship,* trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford California: California University Press, 1997), 289–292.

[106] This film was first exhibited *in Minor Characters*, *Anita di Bianco and Lucy Skaer*, Galerie Elisabeth Kaufman, Zurich, 21 October – 16 December 2006. Here, the work was compromised being shown on DVD for technical reasons. It has since always been shown on film.

[107] This image of Skaer's hands also references Alberto Giacometti's, *The Invisible Object*, (or *Feminine Personage*, 1934). For André Breton this abstracted nude evokes the desire to "'love and be loved" through "the invisible but present object', however, Hal Foster argues that this sculpture refers to a link between lost object and lost mother. *Compulsive Beauty*, 37 and fn40, 235.

about to happen, but something that's not particularly natural'.[108] In my own reading of Carrington's hand gesture, it becomes a metaphorical one which attests to the ungraspability and invisibility of death, this being the event which is about to happen. In these trembling hands we see the signs of age, wrinkled skin and protruding veins. Along with ageing, Skaer's emphasis on Carrington's hands foregrounds a concern with touch. This is a reflective gesture that refers to the indexical nature of analogue film, the physical contact it requires, which differentiates it most forcefully from digital video.

Situated directly behind the film projector in *Leonora* is a mahogany table bearing the imprint of a hand, another indexical sign [109] (Figure 3.22). When standing behind this table, to look at its intricate surface, the flickering image of Leonora Carrington is visible just behind it. The handprint is a repeated gesture that seems to echo the gesture of Leonora's hands in the film. These hands are seen shakily held out over a table, and laid out flat on the table (Figure 3.23). However, despite what seems a very literal and obvious connection, Skaer says the inlaid hand on the table is not a reference to Leonora's hand.[110] In fact, in the original installation of 2006, the table, entitled *The Tyrant*, was different to its most recent configuration at the Hunterian Gallery, Glasgow and bore the imprint of the shadows of two hands which mirror more precisely the gesture of Leonora's hands in the film[111] (Figure 3.24). Despite Skaer's insistence that this connection was not

[108] Lucy Skaer interview with Kirstie North.

[109] Rosalind Krauss describes the indexical nature of analogue photography as a 'physical imprint 'which she likens too footprints, medical symptoms and shadows. Rosalind Krauss, 'Notes on the Index: part 1' in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), 196–209.

[110] Lucy Skaer interview with Kirstie North.

[111] In its most recent configuration this earlier table has been exchanged for the table, which bears just one hand, as Skaer hopes to 'actively avoid those kinds of shortcuts,' ibid.

intended, there is a connection between the handprint and the film that centres on the index.

The handprint inlaid on the table creates a focus on light as a means by which images and impressions are created.[112] The handprint is made up of intricate patterns of vivid greens and purples which, due to the iridescent nature of the material, change according to viewpoint and lighting. The luminous quality of mother of pearl is caused by the fact that the microscopic platelets that make up its surface are close to the wavelength of visible light. These structures interfere with different wavelengths of light producing various patterns and structural colours. This particular material has much in common with celluloid film as the impressions rendered upon its surface are the result of its physical contact with light. This touch by light emphasises Skaer's concern with the specificity of analogue mediums, while the physical contact implied also acts to amplify an awareness of death. This is because the perceived death of the referent of an analogue image is transferred, via light, to an awareness of the imminence of death in the viewer. As Barthes writes of the photographic process:

> From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here, the duration of the transmission is insignificant … A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.[113]

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[112] The handprint inlaid on the table in mother of pearl not only creates a connection with the film but draws in the nautical drawing of the whale skeleton entitled *Death* as both objects refer to fossilized specimens of sea-creatures.

[113] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 80–81.

The confusion between life and death, the animate and the inanimate, inherent in the uncanny associations provoked by analogue images finds a correlative in the material of mother of pearl. André Breton, for instance, writes of the strange and seductive draw of materials like this, found in the submarine realm, such as, 'those absolute bouquets formed in the depths by the alcyonaria, the madrepores. Here the inanimate is so close to the animate that the imagination is free to play infinitely with these apparently mineral forms.[114] While Breton typically recodes the suspension of life and death, below the sea, into an aesthetic of beauty, Foster writes that Breton's primordial example evokes 'a petrified nature in which not only natural form and cultural sign, but also life and death become blurred … it suggests the inertia of life, the dominance of death'.[115] Foster also cites another example of the dominance of death in Breton's fiction, this time a photograph of a bronze glove which is featured in *Nadja.*[116] Foster writes that this eerie object 'casts the human form in a deathly mould'.[117] This is what Skaer's film does to Carrington while focusing so intently on her hands. The dominance of death, as overriding theme in *Leonora,* deepens here as the material of mother of pearl finds self-reflexive expression in the form of the hand in which it is shaped.

The connotations of hand and death are not unique to a brief instance in *Nadja,* or to this film of Carrington, but also become the main focus of Maurice Blanchot's novel *Death Sentence,* 1948.[118] The hand is a significant point of contact with regards to death as the hands of the dying are held in support, as they are in

[114] André Breton, *Mad Love*, 11.

[115] Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 23.

[116] André Breton, *Nadja*, plate 16, 57.

[117] Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 33.

[118] Maurice Blanchot, *L'Arrêt de mort=Death Sentence*, trans. Lydia Davis (Barrytown: Station Hill, 2000).

Death Sentence, while the coldness of a dead body or the absence of a pulse is felt through touch. *Death Sentence* tells the story of the author's relationship with the terminally ill 'J.' The story begins when the author sends a 'very beautiful cast of J.'s hands to a young man who was a professional palm reader' in order to 'establish the greater coordinates of her fate'.[119] The palm reader responds with a note which, 'ended with these words: she will not die'.[120] This message is ironic, not only because the person of whom the cast is taken is terminally ill, but also because everyone must die. This message is also the reverse of what Barthes sees in the photograph of the young man given a death sentence, '*he is going to die*', yet Blanchot's point is exactly the same. Just as Skaer keeps revisiting Carrington's hands in her film, Blanchot revisits the living and dead hand of J. throughout this novel, which is a comparably unflinching exploration of the incomprehensibility of death. Blanchot writes later on in the novel, immediately after J.'s death:

> I would like to say that the coldness of these bodies is something very strange: in itself, it is not so intense. When I touch a hand, as I am doing now, when my hand lies under this hand, this hand is not as icy as mine is; but this little bit of cold is profound … It must be said, because it would certainly be useless to shrink from it now: the coldness of a hand, the coldness of a body is nothing … but there is another barrier which separates us: the lifeless material on a silent body, the clothes which must be acknowledged and which clothe nothing, steeped in insensitivity, with their cadaverous folds and their metallic inertness. This is the obstacle which must be overcome.[121]

These problematic and insensitive clothes which also cast the human form in a deathly mould, like the bronze glove and the cast hand, do so in a similar way to a

[119] Ibid., 10.

[120] Ibid., 11.

[121] Ibid., 70.

lens-based image which takes the form of the deceased yet grants no access to them. This reference to clothing recalls the faded clothes pegs swaying on an empty washing line in Skaer's film of Leonora Carrington. As Blanchot implies, the certainty of death is not nearly as distressing as the persistence of material remnants, once connected to the deceased, and now so empty in their absence, returning to goad us from a place of uncertainty and nothingness. It is the materiality of analogue mediums that makes them especially disturbing because physical contact through touch is suggested, in the manner of these clothes on a cadaver, and then denied as there is nothing underneath the flat surface except the lifeless materiality of the image. As Barthes writes of the tormenting nature of a photograph of his recently deceased mother, 'no culture will help me utter this suffering which I experience enirely on the level of the image's finitude.[122]

CONCLUSION

The resonating concern with flat Death in *Leonora*, specifically meaning a death beyond words and comprehension, a death which refers to nothing, is given a further overlay by Skaer's inclusion of a more recent series of photographs within the space of the installation. *Leonora,* 2012, is a series of large format black and white photographs made during a return journey to Leonora Carrington's house after her death. The most notable image of the series depicts the locked front door of the residence (Figure 3.25). This image is bypassed on entry; however, you walk towards it as you exit the space. This closed entrance is the last word on the installation; it represents visual rejection, a barrier impossible to penetrate which is reflective of how the work on the whole is intended to function.

[122] Roland Barthes *Camera Lucida*, 90.

Applying minimal depth of field, this photograph of Carrington's front door is especially flat. The harlequin shape which is screen-printed over the photograph acts to draw further attention to the flatness of its opaque surface. The photograph is not only visually flat, but flat in terms of its dullness and banality, it's pretty unremarkable; there is nothing beyond a door. This concealed access point is reflective of the way we never get close to the late Leonora Carrington in the installation; she is physically present, but only as an absence, an inaccessible spectre. This visible barrier also reflects the way we can never hold the whale skeleton in focus in the drawing *Death,* just as we can never maintain a relationship with death, or the dead, in any comprehensive manner. Death always eludes our gaze. *Leonora* entices us to make contact with death through these tangible and tactile material remnants, while all the time reiterating Carrington's initial question, *how can you reconcile with something you know nothing about*? [123] The answer is you can't. The door remains, as it always was, closed with nothing behind it.

Leonora confirms Maurice Blanchot's conviction that art has the potential to lend form and reality to an internal darkness that remains meaningless. Blanchot reminds us that 'Orpheus is capable of everything, except of facing this "point", of contemplating the heart of darkness in the dark...It can only be approached with averted eyes'.[124] This visual metaphor of 'averted eyes' describes an intellectual move towards an obscurity, which can never be thought, grasped or mastered. *Leonora* replays Orpheus's hopeless ambition to retrieve something that keeps receding from view. Despite the evasiveness of the subject of death, the installation does give form and reality to all we can know of it by keeping us at the distance we can never overcome. *Leonora* refuses to refuse death by rejecting any form of

[123] Lucy Skaer, 'The Transcendence of the Image: Leonora Carrington,' 1–3.

[124] Maurice Blanchot 'Orpheus's Gaze,' 177.

resolution, consolation or spectacularisation in favour of embracing death as an unthinkable impossibility. This installation is restorative in nature because it provides us with a thought object for death permitting us to think through a fundamental and unavoidable aspect of subjectivity that is normally beyond reach.

FIGURES 3.1 – 3.25.



Figure 3.1. Lucy Skaer, *Leonora*, 2006. Installation shot at the Hunterian Gallery Glasgow, 2014. (This photograph does not show the correct layout of the installation. Rather, elements are grouped together for the purposes of including them all in one image).



Figure 3.2 Gabriel von Max, *Der Anatom (The Anatomist)*, 1869.



Figure 3.3. Leonora Carrington. *Adieu Amenhotep*, 1955.

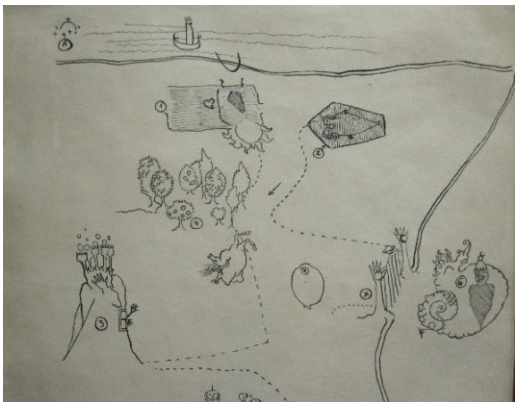
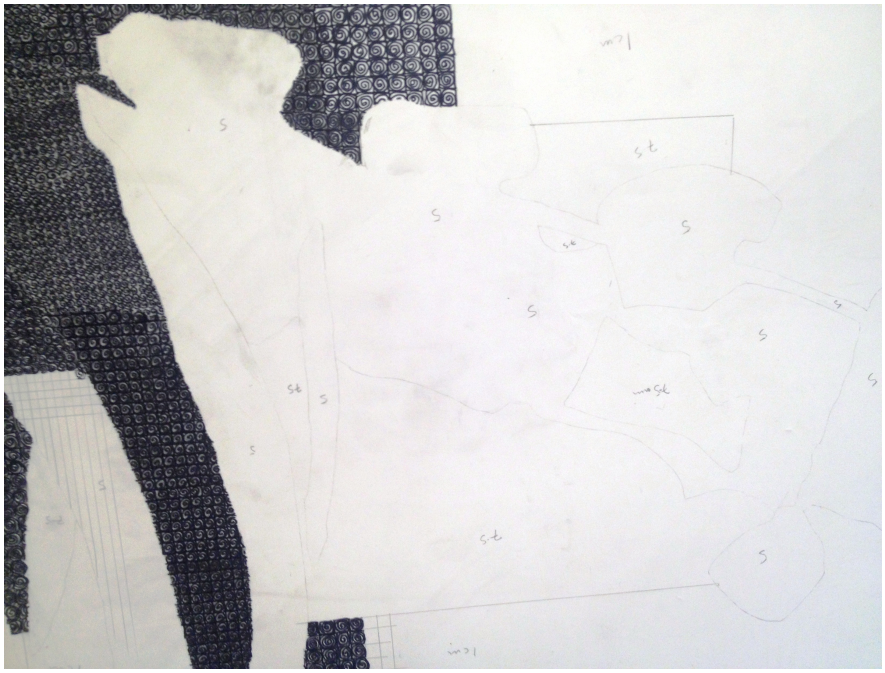


Figure 3.4. Leonora Carrington, Detail of *Map of Down Below*, 1943.





Figures 3.5 and 3.6 Lucy Skaer, *Death (Leonora),* 2006, installation shot and detail.



Figure 3.7. Lucy Skaer, *Leviathan's Edge*, 2009.



Figure 3.8. Damien Hirst, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, 1991.



Figure 3. 9. Damien Hirst, *A Thousand Years*, detail, 1990.

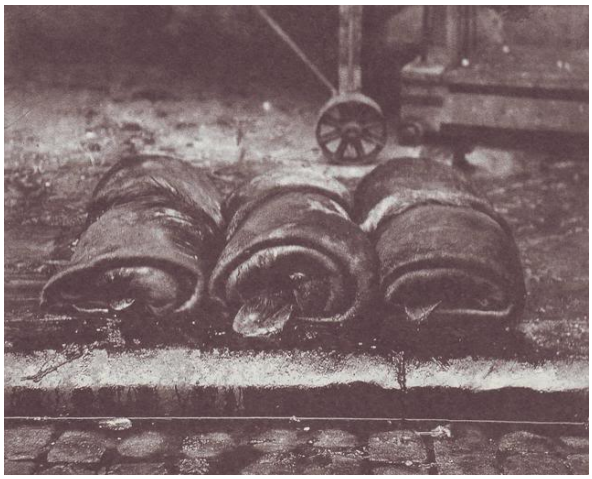


Figure 3.10. Eli Lotar*, La série Aux Abattoirs de la Villette*, 1929.

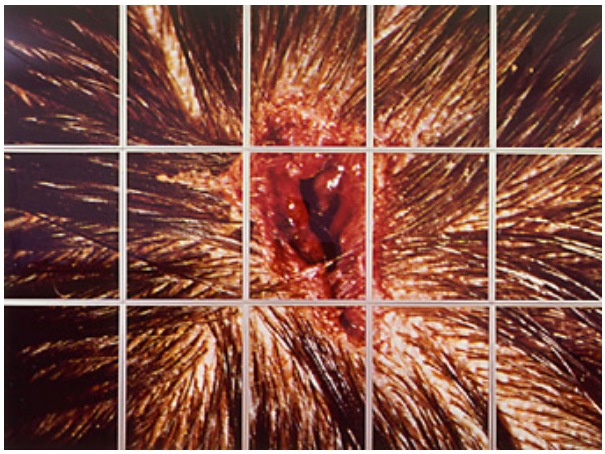


Figure 3.11. Matt Collishaw, *Bullet Hole*, 1988.



Figure 3.12. Lucy Skaer, *Tragedy No Us Touched Has*, 2001.



Figure 3.13. Lucy Skaer, *Diagrams and Banners (Blood),* 2002.



Figure 3.14. Édouard Manet, *The Execution of Maximilian*, 1869.



Figure 3.15. Édouard Manet, *The Dead Toreador*, 1864.



Figure 3.16. . Édouard Manet, *The Suicide*, 1881.



Figure 3.17 Lucy Skaer, *Leonora*, 2006.



Figure 3.18. John Filo. *Kent State University protests, May 1970*.

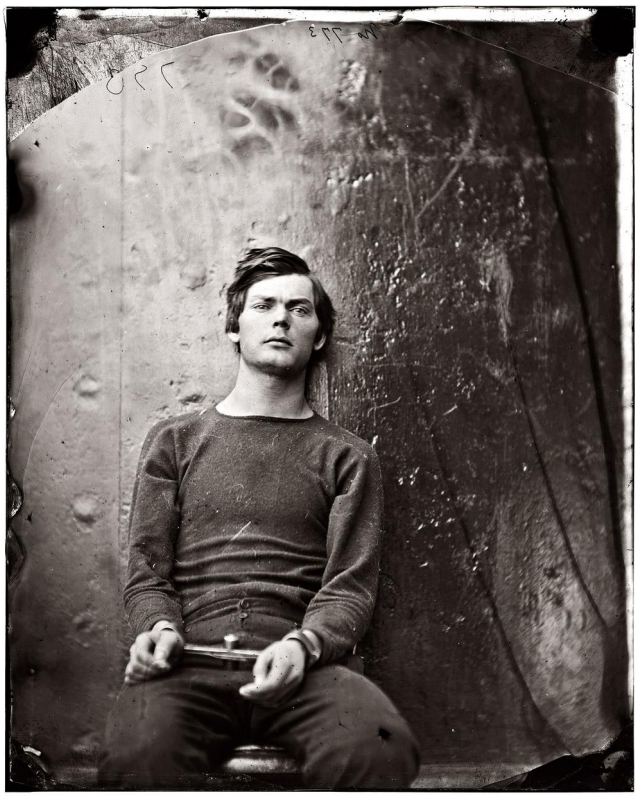


Figure 3.19. Alexander Garner. *Photograph of Lewis Payne*, 1865.

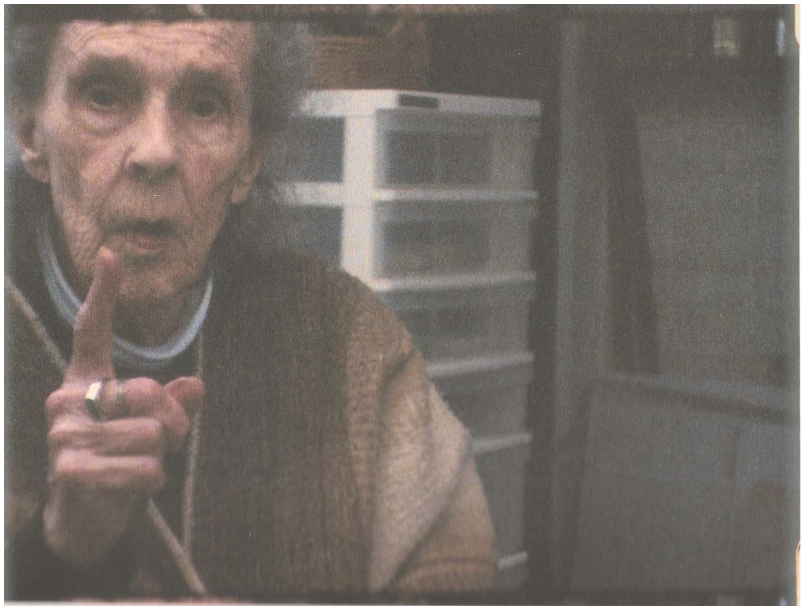


Figure 3.20. Lucy Skaer, film still from *Leonora,* 2006.



Figure 3. 21. Lucy Skaer, film still from *Leonora*, 2006.



Figure 3. 22. Lucy Skaer, *Leonora*, 2006.



Figure 3.23. Lucy Skaer, film still *Leonora*, 2006.



Figure 3.24. *The Tyrant (Leonora),* 2006.



Figure 3.25. Lucy Skaer, *Leonora,* 2012.

LOOKING BACK

The art historical returns performed by *The Man Who Looked Back, Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* and *Leonora*, have been aligned with Orpheus's apprehensive backward gaze. These three British artworks retrieve an art historical past in order to illuminate compelling problems of the present moment. Each artwork gives a problematic account of our current moment of technological transition by emphasising the capacities and competencies of the analogue that the digital does not replicate. The stakes of this reticence towards new technology focuses attention on the fundamental changes that are currently operating upon the nature of artworks and artists' mediums. These alterations come to bear on the affective potential and psychological charge that these markedly different lens-based technologies generate. The claims I have made further already existing discourse, which articulates that the melancholic disposition of contemporary art is symptomatic of a difficult relationship with digital technology.

In the late 1990s Rosalind Krauss commended the reemployment of outmoded technologies, by a small number of contemporary artists, as a continuation of some form of medium specificity. This return to outmoded mediums resists the unanchoring of artworks in a post-medium age, now exacerbated by digital reproduction, by providing a counter model to the 'fashion of installation and intermedia work, in which art essentially finds itself complicit with a globalization of

the image in the service of capital.'[1] In 2004, Hal Foster again signalled towards the problematic implications of digital ascendency detecting an 'archival impulse' operating globally in contemporary art that was calling out for 'human interpretation, not machinic reprocessing'.[2] Artists' archives tend to make displaced historical information present, and reconnect with the past through obsolete technologies and tangible material remnants. Contemporary arts' insistence on historical representation is directly related to a problematic relationship with changing technology and the fact that 'indexicality is under threat'.[3] The fundamental losses, caused by digital progression, have caused artists to retreat into the past by turning back towards outmoded mediums, to contest virtuality by creating tangible and tactile archives, and to reconnect with the past by making historical representation the subject of new artworks.

This thesis makes an original contribution to this discourse as it identifies a new art historical agenda operating in contemporary art. As I have demonstrated, this art historical turn is clearly related to the above issues concerning the digital's denigration of medium, touch and the index. Artists have traditionally engaged with art historical precedents through referencing, citing, evoking and challenging the art of the past, however, the art historical artworks I have presented are distinguishable as celebrated artists and moments of art history are not only remembered, but

[1] Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea; Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999), 56. Other essays on this subject include 'Reinventing the Medium' *Critical Enquiry,'* 25, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 289–305, ""…And Then Turn Away?" An Essay on James Coleman'. *October* 81 (Summer 1997): 5–33 and The Angel of History' *October* 134 (Autumn 2010): 111–112.

[2] Hal Foster. 'An Archival Impulse.' *October* 110 (2004): 4-5.

[3] Mark Godfrey writes, 'it is the approaching digitalization of all photographic mediums that sensitizes artists to the way in which such mediums used to serve as records of the past – and this sensitivity provokes artists to make work about the past.' 'The Artist as Historian,' *October* 120 (Spring 2007): 146.

become the actual subject of these contemporary works. Despite the geographical framing of these three British projects, this new art historical turn can be found to be operating globally, meaning that this research has scope for expansion.[4] *The Man Who Look Back, Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* and *Leonora* were isolated from a broader interest in art historical representation, in contemporary art globally, as these three projects form a coherent constellation of artworks. These projects are in close proximity, both temporally and geographically, and their art historical agenda and focus on outmoded mediums can be directly related to the recent past of British art acting as recompense for the characteristic sense of 'presentness' that defined the art of the 1990s. Furthermore, the conceptual agenda of these three projects reinforces their alignment through a compelling concern with articulating the unnameable.

The digital causes a disruption of art historical memory because the mnemonic aspect of an artwork is increasingly separated from the art object and transposed into a virtual realm. This severance, alongside a more widespread denigration of the materiality of images, causes instability and anxiety as memory starts to break down. Chapter one argued that the artistic archiving of material remnants in Jeremy Millar's *The Man Who Looked Back* reengages memory, art historical memory specifically, by placing value on the objecthood of analogue photographs, which provide anchorage through a tangible technological trajectory

[4] Notable artworks that were beyond the scope of this thesis include Swiss artist Thomas Hirschorn's makeshift monuments such as *Bataille Monument*, 2002 and *Mondrian Altar*, 2011. Irish artist Sean Lynch's uncovering of minor histories such as Joseph Beuys visit to Limerick in *Beuys (Still a Discussion)*, 2007. Gerard Byrne's re-enactments of seminal texts and documents associated with minimalism and surrealism in film based installations such as *A Thing is a Hole in a Thing it is Not*, 2010 and *A State of Neutral Pleasure*, 2013, and French philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman's installation *Mnemosyne 42*, 2014, which restaged Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* on a huge scale using digital technology. This last project provides a technological counter model to the artworks explored in this thesis, yet one which is still invested in visually theorising our current moment of technological transition.

and a reassuring physical connection with the past. This last point was reaffirmed in chapter two through Tacita Dean's *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* which unveils the art histories that are secreted in the materiality of celluloid film. Dean objects to the way digital technology strives for perfection by marginalising accident and chance from the photographic process. In its intolerance for mistakes, the digital not only affects memory, but also aligns itself with the limitations of human subjectivity and a blinkered mode of self-censoring that diminishes film's capacity to surpass conscious thought and intention. Dean's celebration of the openness and receptiveness of film to chance, and unconscious desires and processes, informs chapter three and Lucy Skaer's installation *Leonora*, which confronts that which is most vulnerable to repression, the subject of death that the analogue conversely amplifies.

The Man Who Look Back, Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers) and *Leonora* present us with what stands to be lost if we substitute digital for analogue film and photography. In this context, Orpheus's instruction not to look back becomes an allegory for the capitalist model of progress and the unchallenged embrace of digital technology that Millar, Dean and Skaer resist. This idea recalls Walter Benjamin's angel of history who, like Orpheus, also disobeys the instruction to face forward by turning towards the past even as he is propelled backwards into the future. Benjamin writes:

> This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the

> pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.[5]

The gaze of Benjamin's angel of history, like Orpheus's look back, is associated with powerlessness, hopelessness and tragic consequences. The desolate Orpheus learns that the past can never truly be reclaimed, while Benjamin's angel is dragged along against his will while witnessing catastrophe upon catastrophe piling up before his eyes. In *The Man Who Look Back, Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* and *Leonora* this turn towards the past is less hopeless. These three works are cognisant of the impossibility of properly retrieving what is lost, yet, each artwork remains visually fixed on what is receding because this stance ensures that the mnemonic function of the work stays attached to the art object's 'presentness'. This backward gaze trails a trajectory of art historical memory and a demonstrable history of the competencies of the medium being celebrated behind it. Dean, Millar and Skaer look back to what we are losing, if we lose analogue film and photography, in order to resist the unchallenged forward thrust of digital progression. This is not a denial of an unavoidable technological transition, but an articulation of its negative and non-progressive aspects.

Orpheus's journey to the underworld is generally perceived as a failure; one that costs him Eurydice a second time, serving only to deepen his initial experience of loss. However, this thesis has argued that Orpheus's unfortunate backward gaze is actually a reconciliatory and restorative one. His glance back at Eurydice is a tentative turn towards irreconcilable feelings of loss and an acknowledgment of the unbearable and inevitable fact of death. The analogue, which has always retained

[5] Walter Benjamin 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in *Illuminations,* trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1968), 249.

close proximity to loss and death, moves a step closer in its obsolescence inviting us to enter into this relation too. It is our intolerance for loss and death, which we can neither avoid nor affect, that is represented by the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. Maurice Blanchot maintains that the purpose of Orpheus's journey is not 'that something should be accomplished but that someone should confront this "point", perceive its reality where this reality is perceptible … to gaze into darkness at what darkness conceals'.[6] Orpheus's verbal instruction, not to look back, is reflective of psychological repression as we consciously turn away from and not towards the instance of unmeaning opened up by death. Blanchot writes…

> the forbidden gesture is precisely what Orpheus must do that so that art may rise above what makes it certain – which can only be done by ignoring art and responding to an urge that emerges from darkness, merges with darkness as its source. It is the one point where it is totally lost, where something more important than art, and more devoid of importance, emerges and exists.[7]

The muted bodily gestures archived by Jeremy Millar in *The Man Who Looked Back* gestures towards this point where art gets lost. The narrative of each individual artwork reproduced on Millar's boards opens onto a void, an undisclosed psychic disturbance connected to loss and death that these archived representations of overwhelmed and convulsed bodies collectively represent. Tacita Dean's affectively charged film *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* also opens onto a silent space beyond language. Fateful coincidences are afforded heightened significance in this work precisely because they seem to enter the work from somewhere outside the artist's conscious intention. Lucy Skaer's *Leonora* opens

[6] Maurice Blanchot 'Orpheus' Gaze' in *The Siren's Song: Selected Essays*, trans. Sacha Rabinovich (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), 177–8.

[7] Ibid, 180.

most powerfully and directly onto this dark point of uncertainty as death is the ultimate instance of unmeaning. These three works each present us with physical art objects that give way to absence by opening onto a space of impossibility. These projects do not seek to compensate for, or explain the fall from meaning that we are being encouraged towards, rather, they invite us to approach and acknowledge the unknown.

Analogue film and photography provide the most direct access to this non-symbolic space as there is an intrinsic link between the indexical qualities of analogue film and photography, and the Lacanian Real. As demonstrated, the index can open onto or wake an unconscious register and this specificity is dramatised in our current moment of technological transition. The medium's heightened emphasis on contact and loss confronts us with an absence that resonates with the nothingness at the centre of subjectivity, the Real. Orpheus's look back, informed by loss, is a metaphor for this visualisation of a space beyond conscious thought. Lacan refers to the Greek myth as 'the most potent image we can find' of our relation to this elusive and evasive form of unthought knowledge.[8] Virgil's original poem also aids this interpretation as he makes clear that Orpheus stops and turns around when he 'for a moment wasn't thinking'.[9] I have consistently demonstrated that it is the accidental or unthinking look back, clouded by loss, which brings about the possibility of perceiving this evasive aspect of Real subjectivity.

The digital diminishes chance in favour of increased control over images. This more forceful alignment with conscious, over unconscious processes, distances us from an affective and affirmative aspect of subjectivity and a singular existence

[8] Ibid.

[9] Peter Fallon, trans., *The Georgics of Virgil* (Meath, Ireland: The Gallery Press, 2004), 114

that is 'radically unassimilable to the signifier'.[10] Lamenting the threatened status of analogue film and photography, this thesis has celebrated the now heightened ability of the analogue to articulate the unnameable as through its heightened language of contact and loss it becomes a restorative mediator of the Real. *The Man Who Look Back, Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* and *Leonora,* each construct a thought space for the Real in the symbolic, allowing us to turn and face an elusive aspect of our subjectivity that always threatens to retreat back to 'this world of shades'.[11]

[10] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses, 1955–1956*, ed. Jacques-Alain Millar, trans. Russell Grigg (London: Routledge, 1993), 179.

[1111] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 23.

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APPENDIX

Images archived in Jeremy Millar's *The Man Who Looked Back*, 2010, are listed from the top right of each board to the bottom left. All details of images excluding the stills from Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, 1962 are taken from the Warburg Institute's Iconographic database. Many of the image details are obscure, dates are not precise and many works lack titles. In the iconographic database they are grouped together in folders that describe the scene depicted. Works included here that have no title are listed in terms of their descriptions which are not italicised.

Left Board

1. Baldassare Franceschini, *Orpheus and Eurydice,* third quarter seventeenth century.
2. Film Still from Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, 1962.
3. Film Still from Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, 1962.
4. George Frederic Watts, *Orpheus and Eurydice*, 1869–1880.
5. Jacopo del Sellaio, *Orpheus Charming Animals with his Music; Story of Orpheus and Eurydice,* 1485.
7. Film Still from Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, 1962.
8. Carlo Ruspi, Orpheus turns back loosing Eurydice, 1835.
9. Film Still from Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, 1962.

Middle Board

1. Peter Vischer the Younger, Orpheus turns back looking Eurydice, 1503–1528.
2. Not on database.
3. Marcantonio Raimondi, Orpheus leading Eurydice out of Hades, 1510–1527.
4. Antonio Zucchi, Orpheus leading Eurydice out of the Underworld, c1775.
5. Flanders School, Orpheus turns back loosing Eurydice, 1460.
6. Faenza, Orpheus turns back loosing Eurydice, sixteenth century.
7. Guilio Romano*,* Orpheus turns back loosing Eurydice*,* second quarter sixteenth century.
8. Illuminated Manuscript, Christine de Pisan, Orpheus in Hades playing the lyre to gods of the underworld, Paris, 1500–1.
9. Ancient Roman Relief, Orpheus turns back loosing Eurydice, first Century BC-first Century AD.
10. Film Still from Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, 1962.
11. Jacopo del Sellaio, *Orpheus and Eurydice in Hades: Story of Orpheus and Eurydice,* 1485.
12. Herri met de Bles, Orpheus singing in Hades, mid sixteenth century.
13. Frederico Zuccaro, Orpheus leading Eurydice out of Hades, second half sixteenth century, first quarter seventeenth century .

Right Board

1. John Lyndgate fall of princes, Illuminated Manuscript, Orpheus Killed by Bacchantes, British Library, 1450–60.

2. Flemish Illuminated Manuscript, Orpheus Killed by Bacchantes, 1493.
3. Illustration taken from Flemish, Colard Manision, *Ovid moralise,* Orpheus killed by Bacchantes 1484.
4. Ornamental sculpture of a castle, Germany 18th Century.
5. Athenian vase from Nola, Orpheus killed by Bacchantes, 450–500BC.
6. Film Still from Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, 1962.
7. Ruins of Roman Pillars, Orpheus killed by Bacchantes, first century BC – fifth Century AD.
8. Ferrara (attributed), Orpheus killed by Bacchantes, 1470–80.
9. Coins, Pastorino, Orpheus singing in Hades on reverse side, 1556.
10. Film Still from Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, 1962.