

***DESIRE FOR THE PUBLIC:***

**FACIAL AVERAGING AND THE INDEX**

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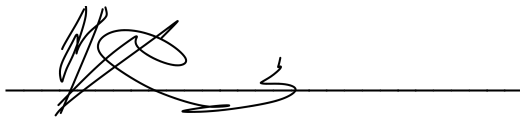
A research report submitted to the Wits School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA in Fine Art by coursework and research report.

Approved by the University of the Witwatersrand for said degree.

Johannesburg, 2018.

## DECLARATION

I, Alana Blignaut, declare that this Research Report is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of MA in Fine Art by coursework and research report at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Alana Blignaut', is written over a horizontal line.

(Signature of Candidate)

\_\_\_\_\_ 16 \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ July \_\_\_\_\_ 20 \_\_\_\_\_ 18 \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ Johannesburg \_\_\_\_\_

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Special thanks to co-supervisors David Andrew (Associate Professor and Head of the Division of Visual Arts at the Wits School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa) and Kathryn Smith (senior lecturer, Department of Visual Arts, Stellenbosch University/PhD researcher and graduate teaching assistant, Face Lab, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, United Kingdom).

Special thanks also to Madeleine Fullard of the Missing Persons Task Team at the National Prosecuting Authority, South Africa for her input and making available of their copy of the albums from the apartheid-era Security Branch for this project.

And finally, to Rian Blignaut for his patience in getting me here and his endurance in keeping me here.

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## PREFACE

The albums of “the estimated 7000 portraits of known and suspected activists in exile” were reportedly maintained by every Security Branch unit in apartheid South Africa (Dlamini 2014, loc. 2056-2057). The albums consist of two documents: a photographic album<sup>1</sup> and an index to the albums.

The photographic albums consist of images “taken from a variety of sources ... [including] family albums, the Bantu Identification Bureau, school yearbooks, sports clubs and informers” (Dlamini 2014, loc. 2059-2060). This is clearly visible in the albums owing to the different textures and degrees of degradation of the images, how they were cropped, irregularly cut, sometimes stapled, stamped and drawn on. Many of the images are so degraded they don’t even contain a recognizable face or could in no way be used to identify an individual. The drawing in the image above is, to my knowledge, the only drawing in the albums. These details are important, perhaps ironically, for how they demonstrate a lack of specification in the redoubling of the artefacts of the album’s ‘maintenance’. How, for our purposes here, they take us into the domain of desire: that is, of objects and part objects, of revelation and obfuscation (Krauss 2009, 187).

The index to the albums is not reproduced in the context of the report because it contains personal information of the individuals imaged in the albums. The list indicates a numeric reference number to the photographic albums, surnames, first names, ID numbers, an ‘afdeling’ (department)<sup>2</sup>, a column indicated only as ‘SAKB’<sup>3</sup> and finally column indicated as ‘S/NR’ that contains a number that indicates a racial categorisation - “1 for whites, 2 for Indians, 3 for coloureds and 4 for blacks” (Dlamini 2014, loc. 2058-2059). Some of the individuals were not classified according to racial

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1 An extract from the Security Branch photographic albums was included in this report for the purpose of examination. It has here been redacted for publication as per the agreement with the source Madeleine Fullard from the NPA’s Missing Persons Task Team, as the images potentially make the individuals in the albums identifiable (M Fullard 2018, personal communication, 21 February).

2 The ‘afdeling’/department column sometimes indicates a province and sometimes a specific local like a township.

3 A column containing numeric characters and sometimes single alphabetic characters and forward slashes.

category at all or else the 'S/NR' column contained an alphabetical character in its place, the meaning of which is not known to me.<sup>4</sup>

The description and explanation of the album's use that historian Jacob Dlamini cites comes from Eugene Fourie's (a Security Branch operative) testimony at the TRC's amnesty hearing into the abduction of Glory Lefoshie Sedibe, an activist who later turned collaborator (Dlamini 2014, loc. 5135). Already we see the complexities that would arise in trying to narrate these events: for the way in which the use of the albums is necessarily communicated by someone who allegedly used them within a trial regarding the abduction of an activist who subsequently had turned collaborator. In other words, how one narration necessarily inflects another.

The copy of the albums of "known and suspected activists" produced by the apartheid-era Security Branch referenced in this project was provided by Madeleine Fullard of the National Prosecuting Authority's Missing Person's Task Team who gave express permission for them to be used in the context of this project, provided it did not make any of the individuals in the albums identifiable by releasing their personal information or images publicly (M Fullard 2018, personal communication, 21 February). The Missing Persons Task Team uses the documents in their search for the human remains of the victims of apartheid-era state sanctioned violence. Another copy exists in the Wits Historical Papers collections, but has, as of yet, not been made available for research.<sup>5</sup> As far as I have been informed, this copy was made available by Gerhard Lotz, a former security policeman from the Eastern Cape, to a researcher Dave Fell who, in turn, passed it on to the Wits Historical Papers archive (M Fullard 2018, personal communication, 8 January). Another copy also exists in the care of Deborah Quin at the Durban offices of the Missing Persons Task Team (M Fullard 2018, personal communication, 8 January).

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<sup>4</sup> The racial classification number (or alphabetical character that is sometimes indicated instead) is separated from other numbers and sometimes alphabetic characters by a forward slash. The meaning of these other numbers and the 'S/NR' heading is not currently known to me.

<sup>5</sup> The reference number for the albums in Wits Historical Papers collection at the time of viewing (2016) was A3399-B2-4, but it seems to have subsequently been closed off for viewing entirely (G Mohale 2017, personal communication, 19 December).

## Introduction

In the context of this project biometrics can be defined as an attempt to measure or index human life for the purposes of administrative identification and policing of both citizens and non-citizens (Breckenridge 2014, 11). Facial biometrics, as a subcategory of biometrics, will here refer exclusively to photographically produced images of the face, such as the mugshot or ID photograph, that fulfil their biometric potential by forming part of larger biometric systems.

The facial biometric has a particularly intractable relationship to desire in the way that it evokes an assumption of truth to resemblance even as it prompts a dis-identification with the subject of the photograph. I want to argue that facial biometrics implicitly embody a desire to circumscribe what constitutes or forms part of the 'public', or then that which is of concern to all those governed by any given state, and thereby functions as an affirmation or denial of citizenship.

However, the photograph's meaning is inherently unstable<sup>6</sup> and potentially acts as a kind of rift in the system that allows us to rethink not only how the system itself functions, but also how the photographs might signify differently. For Ariella Azoulay, "The photograph is out there, an object in the world, and anyone, always (at least in principle), can pull at one of its threads and trace it in such a way as to reopen the image and renegotiate what it shows, possibly even completely overturning what was seen in it before" (Azoulay 2008, 13). However, what I want to ask is, How can we exploit the qualities the facial photograph *gains* from its inclusion in biometric systems in order to rethink citizenship in a context where it is very hard, if not impossible, to extricate it from biometric quantification?<sup>7</sup>

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6 See for instance Kris Paulsen (2017), "The threat of the digital ... is [supposedly] so overwhelming that it makes analog photography's always-dubious status seem nostalgically secure" (Paulsen 2017, loc. 895) and again "Photographs have a loose relationship to proof and truth ... because their meaning shifts depending on the contexts in which they are presented or used" (Paulsen 2017, loc. 895).

7 As an aside, we might even ask if we are really prepared for the reality of what losing biometric systems altogether would mean for our day to day survival and ability to document and communicate our grievances with regards to civil institutions to the state? See, for instance, Keith Breckenridge's "The Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present" (2014) on the histories, complexities, advantages and dangers of biometric identification in South Africa and other former colonies.

So, while the increasing repressive function of facial biometrics is evident in contemporary increase in surveillance and surveillance conscious individuals, there is no indication that the development or use of these technologies will halt in the near future. It therefore seems imperative to understand the productive capacities of facial biometrics and how they might be put to less conservative and/or creative uses.

Finally, the project also wants think through the interface as a means of production and presentation. Recent studies of the interface, notably for this project Kris Paulsen and Alexander R. Galloway, have given us critical tools to think through how we interact with and interpret the interface in both ethically critical and day to day contexts. What I want to ask is, How do these tools lend themselves to critical historiography? Which is to say, How do they change the way we understand mediation and what are the implications and affordances for the way we interpret and work with archival material that may or may not itself be in digital formats?

## **Literature Review**

### **Index and Biometric**

Indexicality can be thought in less rigid terms than biometric measurement implies and in ways that need not necessarily result in the same outcome. In photographic theory, indices are often understood as being “material traces of past moments of physical contact that therefore provide incontrovertible evidence of some existential truth” (Paulsen 2017, loc. 788) and often include the finger print, the footprint and the death mask to underline the materiality of the sign. In his analyses of the criminological archive, Allan Sekula, drawing on C.S. Pierce, also underscores the materiality of the index: “To the extent that photographs are ‘effects of the radiations from the object,’ they are indexical signs, as are all signs that register a physical trace” (Sekula 1986, 55). The Peircian formulation of the index is however, for Kris Paulsen, a much more ephemeral and doubtful sign that hinges on a split temporality that “regardless of when it was produced ... establishes a forceful present tense connection with its receiver” (Paulsen 2017, loc. 804) and therefore “does not necessarily serve as a record of the

past or testify to clear evidentiary truth” (Paulsen 2017, loc. 788). So, while in common parlance we might speak of biometrics as “measuring” or “indexing” human life, they cannot properly be designated indexical systems.

The Peircian tri-partite semiotic model distinguishes between three types of signs, namely symbols, icons and indices. As Paulsen (2017) reads Peirce, symbols “signify their referents by virtue of ... agreed upon convention” (Paulsen 2017, loc. 804); icons “signify their referents by virtue of ... resemblance”; and indices “have a real and necessary connection to what it signifies” (Paulsen 2017, loc. 820). Thus, the index, unlike the icon or symbol, “lose[s] the character that makes it a sign if its object ... [is] removed, but would not lose that character if there ... [is] no interpretant” (Paulsen 2017, loc. 804). Peirce uses examples such as pointing fingers and deictic shifters (i.e. signs whose meaning depends on context because of how they point to something or someone in the present, like ‘I’ or ‘we’) to demonstrate that the index requires “contextual information to signify” (Paulsen 2017, loc. 1080-1096). As Paulsen describes, he also connects his sign categories to three kinds of logic that help elucidate the difference between them, namely: “Induction is reasoning by resemblance, just as icons signify by means of likeness; deduction is reasoning by the application of a law or rule, much as symbols signify by means of agreed-upon meaning” (Paulsen 2017, loc. 1062-1080) and finally, abduction or hypothesis which “furnishes all our ideas concerning real things, beyond that which is given in perception” (Paulsen 2017, loc. 1906) and is our only means of interpreting the index.

If we accept Paulsen’s interpretation, the facial biometric should, more correctly, be characterized as *both* icon and symbol: iconic by virtue of the resemblance of the image to the individual it images, and symbolic by virtue of its inclusion in a larger biometric system that relies on symbolic classifications (statistical/numeric or linguistic).

A useful visual example of this dynamic can be seen in an interactive new media installation by the Mexican-Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, titled *Bilateral Time Slicer* (2016).



**Figure 1:** *Bilateral Time Slicer* by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Untitled Art Fair, Bitforms gallery, Miami, United States, 2016, screenshot from video (Lozano-Hemmer 2018).<sup>8</sup>

The work features a camera that live streams video to a screen right underneath it to the effect that the screen appears as a mirror. The installation uses biometrically derived algorithms to identify the vertical axis of anyone who views it and uses this data to split the live video image along that axis. Importantly it also displays the axis derived from the biometric algorithms over the video feed. As such it eloquently displays the iconic dimensions of the facial biometric in the form of the live video feed, the symbolic dimension of the facial biometric in the form of the graphic overlay derived from the biometric algorithm and, finally, the indexical potential of the facial biometric in the way the installation continually draws the viewer into a present-tense interaction by splitting the image of the present as it passes.

However, this particular project also offers up the photographic image itself as a site where we might potentially locate an interesting shift in signification. For Paulsen, the photograph is in fact both icon and index, or rather an atypical index, because of its “ability to capture ... uncannily – indeed iconic – images of the scene before the lens” (Paulsen 2017, loc. 913) even as its meaning “shifts depending on the contexts in

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<sup>8</sup> This image is reproduced in accordance with the author's Creative Commons Attribution – Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 Spain License.

which ... [it is] presented or used” (Paulsen 2017, loc. 913). Paulsen goes further to compare this paradigm to Barthes’ formulation of the *studium* and the *punctum*<sup>9</sup> that is particularly useful here, because it also demonstrates the relationship between the index and desire.

### Index and the *objet petit a*

For Paulsen, “the *studium* is formed by the indexical mechanism of the camera, it designates what might be thought as the iconic aspect of the photograph: it communicates what the photograph is ‘about’ and what objects, people and places it represents” (Paulsen 2017, loc. 983). The *punctum*, on the other hand, “is focused on the relationship between the sign and its viewer, not the sign and its referent” (Paulsen 2017, loc. 983). The *punctum* “summons the viewer’s attention in an urgent, forceful, sensuous way, so does the index” (Paulsen 2017, loc. 1005). Also drawing on Barthes and Peirce, Paulsen characterizes the sensuous experience of the index as a kind of “immaterial touch”, i.e. “it is not the material touch that creates the sign, but the way in which the sign touches its interpretant” (Paulsen 2017, loc. 1026). In the context of her overall argument regarding mediation and telepresence, she makes this point to underline the responsibility of those viewing mediated images on the interface (for instance remote drone operators) to act ethically even if the actions they implement are taking place somewhere else.

I, however, would like to elucidate this point somewhat differently by drawing on Rosalind Krauss who, also drawing on both Barthes and Pierce, makes an argument that the index, “leads us into the domain of psychoanalysis, or more precisely Jacques Lacan” and his formulation of the *objet petit a* or part object (Krauss 2009, 189). For Krauss, the *objet petit a* or part object is precisely that which says that the photographer “could not *not* photograph the part object at the same time as the total object” (Barthes in Krauss 2009, 187). This not only has clear resonance with Paulsen’s characterisation of the photograph as both icon and index but allows us to begin to understand how the facial biometric can mobilise desire to implement its truth

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<sup>9</sup> See French literary theorist and semiotician Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1981) translated by Richard Howard.

effect. Which is to say, as much as the *object petit a* is formative of the subject's ego or sense of self more broadly, it also "conspires paradoxically in an alienation of the subject from ... [herself]" (Krauss 2009, 188).

What I want to add to Krauss' argument is a more in depth look at Lacan's formulation of the *object petit a* in order to demonstrate how it not only allows us to think how desire is mobilised in the facial biometric, but by putting all three of Peirce's semiotic categories into a dynamic and co-temporal relationship to each other, it also lays the ground for thinking what other kinds of desires these kinds of images could embody and what kinds of formal interventions would make that possible.

For Lacan the subject, upon realizing her own split, chooses the privileged object of her desire in the field of vision which he terms the *objet petit a*. The object occupies an ambiguous position, formulated variously as the dissolution of the subject, "that point of vanishing being with which the subject confuses ... [her] own failure" (Lacan 1998, 83); as indexical, "[emerging] from some primal separation ... induced by the very approach of the real" (Lacan 1998, 83); and finally, as the gaze: "I see only from one point – but in my existence I am looked at from all sides" (Lacan 1998, 72). The gaze however also marks for Lacan the impossibility of the object even as it constitutes the possibility of the object, because "[i]n so far as I am under the gaze ... I no longer see the eye that looks at me and, if I see the eye, the gaze disappears" (Lacan 1988, 84).

In correlating individual perception to the collective visual field, Lacan's formulation produces a set of paradoxes that ultimately marks a limit to conscious thought. For Lacan, mimicry or imitation is the mechanism through which the individual locates herself in the scopic field through a conceptual bifurcation of representation into a mode of perception. Mimicry as a mode perception then is both the image, "I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture [amongst others]" and the screen, "in the geometrical field ... [we place] the subject of representation" (Lacan 1998, 105-106).

We can think the image in terms of Peirce's category of the icon, for the way in which it employs inductive logic (i.e. infers the status of the subject as an image from the

evidence provided by other images), and the screen as Peirce's category of the symbol for the way in which it employs deductive logic (i.e. deduces the geometrical coordinates of the representation from a presupposed abstract geometrical grid). Although these might seem like quite rigid categorisations, they are in fact continually open to dynamic revision because of the temporal dimension vision takes on for Lacan with respect to the *objet petit a*. That is, the moment of seeing in the scopic dimension is always retroactively formulated as the act in contrast to the gesture of the original temporality in which an identificatory relation to the other is situated through the signifier and spoken will (Lacan 1998, 114).

A useful visual example of this relationship can be seen in a video installation of the Colombian artist Oscar Muñoz, titled *Proyecto para un memorial (Project for a memorial)* (2005).<sup>10</sup>

The installation features five projections that display facial images (i.e. portraits) sourced from Colombian newspaper obituaries being painted in water on a tombstone placed in the Colombian sun. Drawn in water, the images continually evaporate, capturing so beautifully the gesture through which the relation to the object is both possible and impossible even as the change of subject illustrates simultaneously the object's specificity and substitutability. As the duration of the video passes between the completed images and the process of drawing the viewer is presented with an opportunity to recognize both their own status as image (i.e. an image amongst others) and recognizing the geometry that makes the image intelligible to them. Most importantly here, however, is how Muñoz translates the obituary images from their original newspaper context through this whole process, illustrating how interpreting the index through abductive logic "leads one away from the facts at hand to a hypothesis based on conjecture" (Paulsen 2017, loc. 1114). In the Colombian context we could speculate that there is analogy here to the "fluidity" and lightness with which death is reported in the media, the actual and nearly unimaginable mass of human remains, and the gravitas of the trauma this entails that it fails to communicate or even imply. Muñoz's process ultimately maintains that gap even as it points beyond it

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<sup>10</sup> Image redacted to preserve intellectual property rights of owner. See the project at: <http://www.sicardi.com/artists/oscar-munoz?view=slider#16>

through a subtle process of shifting, indeed it operates exactly as a dietic shifter that continually changes its meaning depending on the context. The work also begins to demonstrate in what ways the desire embodied in these images and forms could speak to how we negotiate what forms part of the public and how it relates to our understandings of human life.

### Citizenship and the Photographic

Ariella Azoulay has suggested that in attempting to rethink citizenship we have to recognize that the “true opposition ... is not between contractarian theories and theories of sovereignty”, but in the difference between moments of “sovereign violence” constituted by “the exclusive inclusion of bare life in the state” and “multiple voluntary associations between many individuals, which reproduce the original moment of contract without necessarily reproducing its results” (Azoulay 2008, 83). She also observes how a recognition of the ambiguity in conceptions of citizenship (whether as a product of Aristotelian distinctions between natural and political life, or Giorgio Agamben’s distinctions between “natural” life and bare life) rarely extends to thinking any form of legitimization of citizenship beyond some form of sovereign power (Azoulay 2008, 59). For Azoulay this “political man [sic], [that serves] as the basis of political sovereignty ... [poses] a direct threat to the citizen” (Azoulay 2008, 59).

Azoulay uses photography in a particular way to think through this distinction between ‘political man’ [sic] and ‘citizen’, suggesting that the camera effectively displaces any claim the subject has to sovereignty because of the way the camera embodies the gaze (Azoulay 2008, 148). In as much as the camera is controlled by the photographer, the photographer is also *subject to* the camera. She argues that understanding the gap between “the photo and the photographic event” (Azoulay 2008, 157) where the ‘photographic event’ encompasses an unfolding set of relations between the photographer, photographed and user that the photo sets in motion is essential because it allows both the photographer, the photographed and the user the opportunity to recognize each other as citizens even if any given sovereign power declines to do so. Azoulay shuns thinking about this relation unfolding in the register of desire because it seems, for her, to disconnect the viewer from any ethical obligation

towards the photographed. I, however, would like to explore this potential by looking at how conceptions of life share certain tendencies with desire as I have formulated it through Lacan and Peirce.

In other words, I would like to recuperate life as a *desire* rather than the *already established formulations* of life that Azoulay rightly dismisses as a threat to citizenship.

In his book *After Life* (2010) Eugene Thacker traces out different philosophical threads that ruminate on the concept of life starting with Aristotle and culminating in Kant, in order to critique a framework that for him is still evident in modern philosophic engagements with 'life': namely "life as time (the affective-phenomenological), life as form (the biopolitical) and life as spirit (the politico-theological)" (Thacker 2010, xiii). For Thacker the imperative in still thinking about these ontologies of life consists in recognising two persistent ontological commitments, firstly that every ontology of life is always thought "in terms of something other-than-life ... most often a mystical concept, such as time and temporality, form and causality, or spirit and immanence"; and that life is "not only inscribed by regional discourses (for instance, theology or biology), but in many instances it effects a reversal whereby it describes fundamental ontology, shoring up its limits and internal contradictions" (Thacker 2010, x). Ultimately then, conceptions of life share this fundamental contradiction with Lacan's formulation of the privileged object of the subject's (read user's) desire: the *objet petit a* is "that vanishing being with which the subject confuses ... [her] own failure" (Lacan 1998, 83).

Thacker's formulation of the problem of life then functions as a set of irresolvable contradictions that, far from recapitulating old conceptions of life, instead operates much like the index, drawing us away from the more 'established' conceptions of life that he describes.

### Archivalism and the 'criminal type'

Thinking *life as desire* in relation to Azoulay's rethinking of citizenship through photography could also be usefully applied to the ambiguous role that conceptions of

life played in the development of the criminological archive in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, more specifically, the criminal type.

In his seminal analysis of the development of the criminological archive in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from earlier interests in pseudo-scientific methods<sup>11</sup> for predicting character from physical appearance, scholar Allan Sekula explicates on the emergence of the criminal type as follows:

The law-abiding body recognized its threatening other in the criminal body, recognized its own acquisitive and aggressive impulses unchecked, and sought to reassure itself in two contradictory ways. The first was the invention of an exceptional criminal who was indistinguishable from the bourgeois, save for a conspicuous lack of moral inhibition: herein lay the figure of the criminal genius. The second was the invention of a criminal who was organically distinct from the bourgeois: a biotype. The science of criminology emerged from this latter operation. (Sekula 1986, 15-16).

However, Sekula argued that “it was only on the basis of mutual comparison, on the basis of the tentative construction of a larger, ‘universal’ archive, that zones of deviance and respectability could be clearly demarcated” (Sekula 1986, 14). The archive, for him, is then “both an abstract paradigmatic entity and a concrete institution”, acting, in both capacities, as “a vast substitution set, providing for a relation of general equivalence between images” (Sekula 1986, 17). Thus, “the central artifact [sic] of this system is not the camera but the filing cabinet (Sekula 1986, 16). In fact, “these early instrumental uses of photographic realism were systemized on the basis of an acute recognition of the *inadequacies* and limitations of ordinary visual empiricism” (Sekula 1986, 18).

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<sup>11</sup> Notably Physiognomy, a method that relied on isolating individual features of a head in profile and assigning them various characterological traits (Sekula 1986, 11); and Phrenology, that “sought to discern correspondences between the topography of the skull and what were thought to be specific localized mental faculties seated within the brain” (Sekula 1986, 11).

However, if we invert this argument by observing that the photograph in fact provides an excess of information that had to be “tamed”<sup>12</sup> by its inclusion in a larger biometric system, we can make an analogy between the role of the photograph and the criminal body or “biotype”. Here we find the inverse inference to Azoulay’s keen observation of the rift between the ‘political man’ [sic] and the citizen. That is, what Sekula’s argument implies for us here is that the paradox of the *criminal genius* and *criminal as biotype* is a threat to any understanding of citizenship that takes seriously the notion that the public should be defined as that which is of concern to all those who find themselves “amongst the governed”. This also has clear resonance with an observation by the writer and artist Henry Bond, that archival images relating to violent crime often evoke the taboo, or a fear that, if they are revealed *in the present*, the perpetrator’s actions and thoughts might somehow ‘contaminate’ individuals or “present an irresistible temptation” (Bond 2012, 24). Especially so when we consider a strange echo of the idea of the ‘criminal genius’ in identities fostered through contemporary digital archival practices.

Contemporary digital archival practices have in many ways enacted a paradigmatic shift in notions of the archive and surveillance to the point where it is hard to differentiate the two. The traditional archive was closely associated with the nation state, “producing each individual as a national subject (citizen or otherwise) through the cross-referencing of different elements of information about that subject’s finances, life decisions, educational achievements, medical health, compliance with law, and other elements” (Cover 2016, 252-253). The identity established by the collection of data through digital media is less easily categorized, because while it “operates in conjunction with the nation state through public-motivated but highly protected information gathering on subjects”, these practices in fact:

produce the subject through fostering particular biopolitical norms ...  
[that] are not norms of social engagement but norms *unto the individual alone*, such that the habits, behaviours, costs, commodifications, expenses, and finances serve as the basis for the

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<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, David Freedberg’s observations about identification of emotions on faces in photographs: “For the fact is that photographs do not provide too few clues to identification [of emotions]. They provide too many. They belong to that class of images ... that provide too much information for classification” (Freedberg 2014, 308).

production of the individualized consumer who must recognize himself or herself in that depiction that is presented through cookie derived advertisements on a social-networking page, search engine suggestions, advertisements, and the array of financial records, statements, invoices, correlated recommendations on eBay, and so on (Cover 2016, 253; emphasis added).

It seems then that there is value in holding onto the relationship between *life as desire*, photography and citizenship with regards to the facial biometric: on the one hand, for its ability to lead us away from a preoccupation with the criminal “biotype”; and on the other hand, for its capacity to lead us away from the narcissistic biopolitical norms<sup>13</sup> fostered by contemporary digital archival practices.

### Facial Averaging vs. the “Average Man”

Sekula further argues that the criminological archive was grounded in the codification of social statistics, specifically Adolphe Quetelet’s (1796-1874) formulation of the “average man”: that is, the aggregation of observational data, both physical and moral, was thought to reveal social laws by effacing individual peculiarities (Quetelet in Sekula 1986, 20). For Sekula, these “moral statistics” made it possible to frame the criminal as “an agent of determining social forces” that deviates from the social norm (Sekula 1986, 21). But of course, the “average man” and “social norm” aren’t so much things that provide explanatory frameworks, as much as they are things that need to be explained. That is, Quetelet’s binomial distribution of observational data cannot be seamlessly transposed into a symbolic ideal even if it does happen to suggest a statistical mean, because the data is already internally divided between analogic observation (observation based on resemblances) and symbolic quantification (that is, statistical analysis) as Peirce would formulate it.

The translation required is, in very concrete terms, an impossibility which means the “average man” functions more like a desire than as an ideal. That is, if the analogic

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<sup>13</sup> Biopolitical norms are not narcissistic by definition, but there is an analogy to be made between these two terms in so far as they are complicit in reproducing or fostering narcissistic behaviours in those of us who are implicated in such system.

observations and symbolic quantifications remain, in essence, an impossible paradox; the “average man” remains an impossible object. According to Sekula, Quetelet also admitted as much: “he admitted that the average man was a statistical fiction, this fiction lived within the abstract configuration of the binomial distribution” (Sekula 1986, 22). This tension is especially salient for our purposes here when Sekula notes that Quetelet’s quantitative model and determinist view of civil society indirectly described an ideal commonwealth not dissimilar from Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (i.e. a contractual model of human relations) to which it is diametrically opposed (Sekula 1986, 22). However, Quetelet’s statistical model ultimately provided the tools for the construction of early criminological systems such as those of Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914) despite this analogy to idealism. What is important here is that the “average man” [sic] was in fact never realized but, nonetheless provided a justification for criminological systems that in no way shared this idealism. However, what it affords us now, retroactively, is that in seeing how it operates as a desire we can start to speculate how that desire might be shifted when we are working with archival material that, similarly, classifies its subjects into “ideal” categories like race but in fact was concerned primarily with the cruel and banal details of administering racial separateness. I would like to explore this possibility by contrasting and comparing Quetelet’s idea of the “average man” [sic] to the method of Facial Averaging.

Digital facial averaging methods have a historical association with Francis Galton’s [1822-1911] eugenics project insofar as it employs derivatives of his methods, but avoid an explicit connection with his eugenic ideals insofar as they are taken up in an instrumental way. Galton’s ‘composites’ in fact drew on the statistical methods of Quetelet’s ‘average man’ as a way of establishing a justification for the conception of ideal racial categories; that is, took the average faces of certain populations to be evidence of ideal racial categories. But his concern was also with the “psychology of the visual imagination, with the capacity of the mind to construct generic images from sense data” (Sekula 1986, 47). Galton’s method then consisted of “a process of successive registration and exposure of portraits in front of a copy camera holding a single plate” (Sekula 1986, 47). Galton “believed that [through this method] he had translated the Gaussian error curve [i.e. Quetelet’s binomial distribution] into pictorial form” (Sekula 1986, 48). But is this in fact what the method actually achieved?

As Sekula keenly observes, “only an imagination that wanted to see a visual analogue of the binomial curve would make this mistake, finding the type at the center [sic] and the idiosyncratic and individual at the outer periphery” (Sekula 1986, 48). What I take Sekula to be pointing towards is exactly the opposite of what Galton had hoped. Far from justifying racial categorizations, they did exactly the opposite. It revealed them to be imaginary constructs, fictions that were the product of a desire to define under what auspices any given individual could make claim to an intelligible identity and thus be recognized as a citizen. If we draw this back to Azoulay, the facial average exactly reveals the imaginary quality of the ‘political man’ [sic] that, for her, so threatens our ability to recognize each other as citizens despite whether or not the state might recognize us as such.

The archive here reminds us that we cannot simply do away with the racial categorisations of the past, even as we should be wary of them and how they are employed and adapted in the present, because the unequal legacies that they helped institute still persist to this day. In other words, we can more productively think of the archive itself, in the way it keeps record of the past, as fostering the desire to move beyond those legacies. This places even more importance on the forms we use to interpret and intervene within it, because they constitute how we choose to respond to these fraught legacies.

Subsequently, I want to advance the idea that facial averaging as a method can usefully be employed as an *intervention* into archival material that consists of facial images for two reasons: on the one hand, in the way that it helps fulfil a desire for sensitive archival material to be conducive to public consideration without revealing personal information of individuals imaged in them; and on the other, in how it allows us to take a critical distance from the categorisations of peoples in the past. By revealing them as fictions even as we recognize their legacies, facial averages embody *life as a desire* that leads us away from the biopolitical norms they helped to foster; even as it makes us aware how citizenship continues to be in tension with biometric administrative apparatuses that seek to define us.

## Ethics and Desire

But what, you might ask, guarantees that the desire the facial average could embody for us in any way prompts a consideration of the ethics of how we relate to these historical legacies as citizens in the present? Azoulay attempts to ground the ethics of the spectator of the photograph in the fact that the camera effectively makes it impossible for any individual subject to make a claim to sovereignty because of how it embodies the gaze. In other words, a recognition that we are all, whether the state recognizes us as citizens or not, ultimately governed by the state (Azoulay 2008, 25). Azoulay dismisses Barthes' punctum and the index for what she perceives to be an essentialization or focus on our emotional response to images rather than a recognition of obligation toward those imaged. So, in "introducing the dimensions of time and movement into the act of watching stills ... [we can locate] the foundation for the ethics of the spectator" (Azoulay 2008, 25). In other words, recognizing that the photograph attests to the fact that the people imaged have never stopped being "there" (Azoulay 2008, 16-17).

I have however demonstrated, through Paulsen, Peirce and Barthes, how the index and the punctum in fact call the viewer (read *user*) into a present-tense relationship to the imaged person. The strength of Azoulay's argument is that this plurality (this shared "space" of those either being photographed or viewing the photograph) "[may not] erase structural inequalities and discrepancies between the different protagonists ... [but] can undermine the apparent stable conditions of domination" (Azoulay 2008, 133). The danger lies in that the ongoing effects of these discrepancies cannot so easily be erased. In other words, keeping alive the desire to move beyond them is as important as taking action to move beyond them. Seen another way, we are faced with the consequence that, if not adequately reckoned with, the fantasies that these legacies are imbedded in (rely/depend on), can overtake even our most sincere actions towards a non-racial future.<sup>14</sup>

So, while I want to hold on to Azoulay's formulation of the role of the photography in negotiating citizenship, I want to rethink this point by way of Facial Averaging as a

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<sup>14</sup>"We should be aware then that the actuality of racist violence and the predominance of racist fantasy may not be discreet categories" (Hook 2013, 48).

method, for the way that it not only reveals racist categorisations as the fantasies they are, even as it reminds us of their real effects and persistence in the present. But, also for the way they can usefully be interpreted through the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas in relation to how we respond to those imaged in the photographs the method draws on. Levinas is particularly useful here, because his conceptions of Sameness and Otherness has direct relevance to interpreting Facial Averages, and because of the convergences and divergences in his approach to ethics to that of Lacan's approach to psychoanalysis.<sup>15</sup>

While Lacan and Levinas both approach the problem of the subject's encounter with the Other/others, the role of desire in that encounter is simultaneously vastly different and uncannily similar. For Lacan, desire is always in principle a *misrecognition* of the other, "[i]n so far as I am under the gaze ... I no longer see the eye that looks at me and, if I see the eye, the gaze disappears" (Lacan 1988, 84); that nonetheless leads the subject away from herself, "that vanishing being with which the subject confuses ... [her] own failure" (Lacan 1998, 83). Whereas for Levinas, desire (in the sense of enjoyment or that which is satisfied) is fundamentally divorced from any constraint of form – "the face is present in its refusal to be contained" (Levinas 1979, 194) – even as the face is a receptacle for formlessness: "the infinitely more contained in the less ... is concretely produced in the form of a relation with the face" (Levinas 1979, 196). The important difference for us lies in which Other/others are being addressed in both these conceptions.

For Lacan the *objet petit a* in particular is here in principle (an)other: that is another human being or object; as opposed to his Other which is the principle of the way in which desire draws the subject away from herself, "man's [sic] desire is the desire of the Other" (Lacan 1998, 115). Whereas for Levinas the (an)other is an epiphany in so far as it manifests the principle of Otherness (that is, otherness as a metaphysical principle). For Levinas, it is "the idea of infinity alone [that] maintains the exteriority of the other with respect to the same" (Levinas 1979, 196) and so it is that "the exteriority of a being is inscribed in its essence" (Levinas 1979, 196). Sameness, on the other

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15 For further reading see Harasym, S., ed. (1998). *Levinas and Lacan: The Missed Encounter*. New York: State University of New York Press.

hand, is the very principle of ontology or being, that “which reduces the other to the same” (Levinas 1979, 42). From this, Levinas concludes that the “facing position, opposition par excellence, can be only as a moral summons” (Levinas 1979, 196).

We might summarise the difference here as follows: for Lacan the other is (an)other exclusive in the specular sense: it is seen to be other as a function of the gaze. For Levinas, vision cannot be separated from metaphysics, thus the other is (an)other in so far as it manifests the metaphysical principle of Otherness (or then the transcendental category of infinity). And that, for Levinas, is what makes the face – the epiphany of an(other), “the face, still a thing among others, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it” (Levinas 1979, 198) – a moral summons not to do violence to an(other). Because, for Levinas, to kill “is not to dominate, but to annihilate; it is to renounce comprehension absolutely” (Levinas 1979, 198) and as such, cannot in fact be aimed at an(other), only at the principle of Otherness: “The Other is the sole being I can wish to kill” (Levinas 1979, 198).

The pertinent connection, for us here, is the parallel I earlier drew between the form of the *object petit a* and the paradoxes Thacker observes in conceptions of life in relation to fundamental ontology. That *life as a desire*, rather than life in its various ontological formulations, draws us away from the realm of ontology altogether. Ultimately then Facial Averaging as a method and intervention into archives of facial images directly embodies this tension between desire and ethics: desire in the sense that the method allows us to offer the facial images up to the gaze of our fellow citizens without violating the privacy of those imaged in the album; ethics, in the sense of how it both embodies the paradox of ontology in the way it highlights sameness and at the same time produces an instance of facing, an injunction not to kill, in the way it manifests the idea of Otherness as a metaphysical principle.

## Interface

Contrary to Galton’s method of producing what he called his ‘composites’, this project used a software package called Abrasoft Fantamorph as a means of producing what I have been referring to as Average Faces. In the context of this project then, the

interface was both a means of production and ultimately key method of display. It is thus important to think through how the ideas I've been drawing on relate to how we interpret and work on the interface.

Although I have already discussed Kris Paulsen's formulation of the index it is useful to contextualise her argument here specifically in relation to the interface. Paulsen's argument identifies and responds to a certain trend in media theory intent on declaring the death of the index in the 'age of new media'<sup>16</sup> that derives from the index's association, in the context of art history, with the materiality of the photograph. That is, with "the qualities of pastness, permanence, truth and resemblance resulting from physical contact have come to be seen, inaccurately, as defining characteristics of indexicality rather than the specific condition of the analog photograph" (Paulsen 2017, loc. 856). Thus, by that reasoning, the index can no longer be operational in digital media. Paulsen then draws on Pierce and Barthes to argue for the continued viability of the index by extricating it from its narrow association with the photograph.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, she argues that the interface is, in fact, the index par excellence: "If the index is a sign that inherently sets up a connection between it, the event that created it, and the receiver's senses and mind, it is particularly well suited for the analyses of experiences enabled by digital and telecommunications technologies" (Paulsen 2017, loc. 1279).

In the context of Paulsen's argument about telepresence she also dives into the possibility that the index might be "falsified", not in the sense of the "death of the index", but in the sense of how indexical signs might be "circulated" to create the illusion of "liveness" in recorded video material (Paulsen 2017, loc. 521). She does not, however, think in any great depth about the relationship between the interface and the 'machine' that 'produces' it and how to decode or interpret interfaces not involved in telepresence. Thus, in the context of this project, where I am working with archival material that consists of photographic images and I am centrally concerned with the production of Facial Averages on the interface, I want to develop this by way of the American scholar Alexander R. Galloway.

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<sup>16</sup> Paulsen identifies authors like Anne-Marie Willies, W.J.T. Mitchell and Lev Manovich specifically (Paulsen 2017, loc. 856).

<sup>17</sup> See section above 'Index and Biometric'.

Contrary to new media theorists like Lev Manovich for whom digital interfaces are primarily formal and aesthetic devices directly associated with a physical screen (Galloway 2012, 5); the computer, for Galloway, is not primarily to be understood as an aesthetic but as an ethic (as distinct from the ethical that denotes categorical moral principles), “in which the outside is evoked in order that the inside may take place” (Galloway 2012, 32). Already there is a clear parallel to Levinas’ idea of the face, i.e. “the face is present in its refusal to be contained” (Levinas 1979, 194). However, Galloway’s use of the term ‘ethic’ is specifically aimed at an “anti-anthropocentrism of the realm of practice” (Galloway 2012, 22). For Galloway, ‘ethic’ in the context of the computer “describes general principles of practice” that are only ‘anthropocentric’ in so far as “the computer takes our action in the world as such as the condition of the world’s expression” (Galloway 2012, 22). While this in some ways has resonance with Levinas’ conception of ethics that arises from concrete human sensibility (in the sense of the experience of the senses), there is then a marked difference in how they understand action.

For Levinas, action, in its relation to vision, gives rise to the ‘openness’ of the object to the metaphysical principle of Otherness (that is the principle of infinity) through their mutual grounding in sensibility (Levinas 1979, 189). For Galloway, however, metaphysics can only be a function of practice; i.e. metaphysical principles are only viable in so far as they are an effect of any given configuration of practice through the interface (Galloway 2012, 49). So, while this does not preclude Levinas’s formulation as the face as an epiphany of the Other, that epiphany has to be concretely produced through practice (or then, ‘physics’ before ‘metaphysics’). For our purposes here, in so far as the Average Face is a product of an interaction with the interface and displayed on it, it then fulfils exactly that ‘requirement’ in the way it embodies these ideas.

Galloway explains the difference between the interface and the machine as follows: while the screen or surface might be an object, the intraface (i.e. the interface within the interface) is *unknowable* and *unworkable*, an *effect* of the indecisive relation between centres and edges rather than a *thing*, and hence always internally and orthogonally bifurcated (Galloway 2012, 40). For Galloway, a centre refers to that which, within the interface, creates “an autonomous logic” (Galloway 2012, 39)

whereas an edge refers to that which, within the interface, creates “a logic of flows, transformations, movement, process, and lines of flight” (Galloway 2012, 39).

This unknowable intraface (or interface *within* the interface) displays for Galloway four basic “regimes of signification” in so far as they are related to practice: a coherent aesthetics (Barthes’s *studium*, that is the icon), an incoherent aesthetics (Barthes’s *punctum*, that is the index), a coherent politics (characterized by stable institutions and organization around a central formation) and an incoherent politics (characterized by a tendency to dissolve existing institutional bonds, to *detrterritorialize*) (Galloway 2012, 46-47). Importantly for our purposes, ‘centers’ [sic] (what Galloway here calls ‘aesthetics’) are, like the photograph, capable of being both icon and index.

These ‘regimes of signification’ furthermore allow for four different combinations or configurations: the ideological, which is a combination of a coherent aesthetics and a coherent politics; the (formally) ethical, which is a combination of an aesthetics of incoherence and a coherent politics; the poetic, which is a combination of aesthetic coherence and political incoherence; and finally a category he refers to as the realm of ‘truth’ or indisputability, which is a combination of aesthetic incoherence and political incoherence (Galloway 2012, 51).

These four possible combinations, then, give rise to two complementary tendencies: “the more coherent a work is aesthetically, the more incoherent it tends to be politically” and vice versa (Galloway 2012, 52). What Galloway is describing then is not only a reconfiguration of the relation between the semiotic categories, but how they relate to the formal political dimension of the interface: that is, if the icon and index must exist along a continuum in the interface, the more any given interface relies on the icon the more incoherent its formal political dimension and the more it relies on the index the more coherent its formal politics.

In so far as I have worked with facial biometrics as source material in my practice-based research, I can make a few useful observations. As I am extracting the facial biometric from its inclusion in a larger biometric system (in other words, now more properly called a facial image and thus an icon) and using them within a software

program that reveals and allows me to control its 'inner workings' (i.e. map exactly the facial markers it uses to produce the Average Face) this process can be characterized, in Galloway's terms, as formally politically incoherent. On the other hand, as I am displaying the facial averages on the interface (that can now be characterized as relying more on the index for the way they embody desire) through display methods such as video players and presentations that do not allow the user to control their 'inner workings'; this process can be characterized, in Galloway's terms, as formally politically coherent.

While Galloway describes 'formal political coherence' as being characterized by stable institutions and organization around a central formation (Galloway 2012, 47) they can also be characterized as employing "highly precise languages for the articulation of social beings" (Galloway 2012, 47). So, in the context of Azoulay's argument regarding citizenship that might be formulated as "citizenship and only citizenship" if it were not for the fact that Azoulay's formulation of citizenship is centrally concerned with the fact that 'formal citizenship' is always based fundamentally on an asymmetry between those officially recognized as citizens and those who are not. So, while in Galloway's terms this configuration of the interface might be characterized as 'formally politically coherent', the *index as desire* leads us away from the formal qualities of the interface towards *life as a desire*. What Galloway's otherwise astute observations about centres (that which is both icon and index) misses, is its capacity to sometimes (like his edges) point us away from the interface.

### The post-apartheid and historiography

In the context of both the project's object of enquiry and the formulations of citizenship discussed up to this point, I need to clarify my use of the term the post-apartheid. Here I follow historian Premesh Lalu, who uses the term post-apartheid in contrast to the use of the unhyphenated postapartheid, to "designate a specifically temporal sense" (Lalu 2009, 271). That is, temporal not in the sense of chronological succession, but in the sense of a rupture or interval (that is, an "intervening time"). While this is not in principle irreconcilable with Alexandra Dodd's use of the 'post' in post-apartheid to designate what Achille Mbembe terms "an interlocking of presents, pasts and futures"

(Dodd 2014, 15), the designation is here used to denote more specific instances of concrete intervention into the archive, and how the post-apartheid arises from practice.

In his book *The Deaths of Hintsa: Postapartheid South Africa and the shape of recurring pasts* (2009), Lalu strategically examines a claim made by healer-diviner Nicholas Tilana Gcaleka, who was said to have found the skull of the late Xhosa king Hintsa in Scotland under the guidance of his ancestors, to examine the reality effects of historical narration. To begin with, Lalu draws on Michel Foucault's formulation of the archive:

Between *language (langue)* that defines the system of constructing possible sentences, and the corpus that passively collects the words that are spoken, the archive defines a particular level: that of a practice that causes a multiplicity of statements to emerge as so many regular events, as so many things to be dealt with and manipulated. It does not have the weight of tradition; and it does not constitute the library of all libraries, outside time and place; nor is it welcoming oblivion that opens up to all new speech the operational fields of its freedom; between the tradition and oblivion, it reveals the rules of a practice that enables statements both to survive and to undergo regular modification. It is *the general system of the formation and transformation of statements*. (Foucault in Lalu 2009, 266).

For Lalu then, "the archive in this conception is synonymous with a regime of truth which functions as a mode of evidence; an event in as far as it forms and transforms statements" (Lalu 2009, 266). Importantly for our purposes here is how he draws on Roland Barthes formulation of the reality effect of historical narration:

In the first phase ..., the referent is detached from the discourse, it becomes exterior to it, grounds it, is supposed to govern it: this is the phase in *res gestae*, the discourse simply claims to be *historia rerum gestarum*: but in a second phase, it is the signified itself which is repulsed, merged in the referent; the referent enters into direct relation with the signifier, and the discourse, meant only to express the real, believes it *elides the fundamental term of the imaginary*

*structures, which is the signified.* Like any discourse with ‘realistic’ claims, the discourse of history thus believes it knows only a two-term semantic schema, referent and signifier; the (illusory) merging of referent and signified defines, as we know, sui-referential discourses.” (Barthes in Lalu 2009, 267-268).

For Lalu then, “It is this elision that Gcaleka’s mission serves to open up in ...[his] discourse, in part because it calls the bluff of historical narration by overstating the work of the imaginary structure. In the process, it invites the closing in of a regime of truth that otherwise operates as a discreet apparatus for regulating statements” (Lalu 2009, 268). His concern is specifically with the way in which nationalist reworkings of history in the wake of apartheid are unaware of the way in which they are implicated in the imaginary structures (or then, the reality effect) of the colonial archive. Lalu observes how nationalist historical narrations are complicit with colonial archival practices in so far as they have to refer to the colonialist’s narrations of Hintsa’s death in order to dismiss Gcaleka’s claim in the present.

The problem here is that the practice of the archive, as Foucault defines it, cannot sustain the rupture or elision in historical narration provided, for Lalu, by Gcaleka’s ‘controversy’ without intervention, because it “invites the closing in of a regime of truth that otherwise operates as a discreet apparatus for regulating statements” (Lalu 2009, 268). Through his book, Lalu attempts to resolve this through constantly suspending the act of *writing* history, that is, “through a series of reversals and displacements of the techniques of subject formation generic to the colonial archive and its modes of evidence” (Lalu 2009, 9). I want explicate on this by referring on the one hand to Galloway’s formulation of the interface as an effect of centres and edges and, on the other hand, Roland Barthes’ formulation of the discourse of history through statements and speech-acts.

## Interface and Historical Discourse

Statements can be defined as that which refers to “the field of emergence, the authority to differentiate between individuals or objects, states of things and relations that are brought into play by the statement itself” (Foucault 1972, 91). Speech-acts, on the other hand, can be defined not as “the material act of speaking”, but as “the operation that has been carried out by the formula itself, in its emergence: promise, order, decree, contract, agreement, observation” (Foucault 1972, 83). For Barthes, what mediates between the speech-act and the statement in historical discourse are specific instances of ‘shifters’; what Peirce would refer to as indices (Barthes 1989, 128). For example, with reference to the Security Branch albums, if I were to say “You are an activist”, the shifter (“you”) is what mediates between the speech-act (“identification”) and the statement (“activists are not citizens”).

In this sense we can think statements as Galloway’s centres, that which creates “an autonomous logic” (Galloway 2012, 39), in so far as the statement both gives rise to and substantiates its own referents; and speech-acts as Galloway’s edges, that which creates “a logic of flows, transformations, movement, process, and lines of flight” (Galloway 2012, 39), in so far as the speech-act designates its own execution. In so far as the shifter or index is the mediating term, we can elucidate why a confusion occurred when I tried to define my process through Galloway’s terminology at the end of the previous section.

Galloway’s description of the punctum as a purely aesthetic category<sup>18</sup> (i.e. a centre) doesn’t take account of the fact that centres can be sourced or produced from other images like archival photographic images<sup>19</sup>; and in turn, that the index can be a mediating term between the centres and edges. In that way the index can point away from the interface in a way that is different from what Galloway calls ‘edges’, i.e. they are in fact, to use Paulsen’s term, the index par excellence. Most importantly for our purposes here, is how the *shifter as index* (specifically) for Barthes covers “all the declared signs by which ... the historian ... organizes ... [her] own discourse, revises

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<sup>18</sup> A mistake that Azoulay herself also makes, see section on “citizenship and photography”.

<sup>19</sup> The reason for this is problem lies in that Galloway (usefully for us), unlike Manovich, is not concerned with the implications of the digital media for art practice. His objects of study are, among other things, video games that are almost exclusively produced on the interface.

it, modifies it in the process of expression; in short, arranges explicit references within it” (Barthes 1989, 128) that has more than a passing resemblance to Lalu’s description of the process of writing his history of Gcaleka and Hintsa. In other words, here we can begin to think the interface as a historiographic intervention in general, and as concrete instance of the post-apartheid specifically.

Elsewhere Lalu also uses the terms ‘interval’ and ‘desire’ in conjunction that, for him, offers “a mode of communication ... that promised a non-sectarian future in place of the difference marked by the interval of apartheid” (Lalu 2014). I expounded on this point otherwise above by thinking the temporality of the *object petit a* and the index in conjunction to think desire as an intervention (thus again, as an “intervening time”) that is also *life as a desire*, that is a desire to move beyond the quasi-biological classifications of the apartheid system as they manifest in my specific object for this project. The reason for this difference in approach lies then exactly in our divergent choice of objects. While Lalu focusses on rethinking what the idea of the ‘school’ could mean in the aftermath of violence enacted against student activists; my choice of object, the albums of ‘known and suspected’ activists from the apartheid-era Security Branch, is concerned with how archival material relating to traumatic historical events can signify differently in the present, and what their implications are for how we negotiate citizenship among those considered both citizens or non-citizens in the present.

## The Security Branch Albums

This project set out to test these ideas with reference to one particular archive: albums of 'known and suspected political activists' produced by the apartheid-era Security Branch.

The construction of the albums echo historian Jacob Dlamini's characterization of apartheid bureaucracy as "messy, inefficient and violent" (Dlamini 2014, loc. 304). We know, from examinations of other documents relating specifically to the activities of one office of the apartheid-era security police, that establishing a chain of command with regards to the Security Branch's activities is often highly problematic; that is, these documents are conspicuous for "their *lack of specification*: these texts provided no formal rules of engagement" (Rousseau 2009, 360). Thus, it was that "operatives at regional and local level ... improvised from a general approach that could not be specified or procedurally defined as it was illegal" (Rousseau 2009, 360). Madeleine Fullard and Nicky Rousseau have also argued that while "all sides of the political conflict ascribed highly centralised decision-making power to each other", the "TRC hearings ... depicted a far more various and complex set of practices" (Rousseau 2009, 360). In other words, "in these accounts orders were given in multiple forms: through medal and telex; through song and slogan" (Rousseau 2009, 360). For Rousseau the Security Branch's operatives, in the context of a lack of specification as to their instructions and conduct, then resorted to drawing on signs from their everyday lives (i.e. the ordinary) to shape their "imaginary of violence" (Rousseau 2009, 367).

Dlamini goes further: "Apartheid did not work and, as a result, eventually collapsed under its own weight. But the regime did create bureaucratic procedures that governed everything from the destruction of communities to the official sanctioning of political murder" (Dlamini 2014, loc. 304-305). As such, the Security Branch's conception of the archive was tempered by their objective of capturing known and suspected activists: a "Cold War-inflected logic that used archives as a weapon against enemies of the state" (Weld in Dlamini 2104, loc. 472). But this archive in particular also facilitated a consumption of 'the enemy' into the apartheid security apparatus: here Dlamini has written about the role of the askari, which is to say activists turned

collaborators. In his book *Askari: A Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle*; he notes that “often, askaris were used to kill opponents of apartheid” (Dlamini 2014, loc. 894). Most importantly here, is how “for many captives, the album initiated their first act of collaboration” (Dlamini 2014, loc. 2043).<sup>20</sup> In the context of this project we might think this phenomenon in a similar way as Lalu did Nicholas Gcaleka’s claim; that is, in their function as the askari’s point of entry to the security branch’s narration of history (or then, in Lalu’s terms, their mode of evidence) the albums call the bluff of historical narration (i.e. their “imaginary of violence”) by overstating its reality effect. That is, it reveals how the albums that supposedly claim to reflect reality was based first on an assumption that activists cannot be citizens. In this way, the albums themselves can be thought of as embodying the concept of the post-apartheid for the way they cause an elision in the historical narration of apartheid; even if that elision can only be sustained by an intervention.

In formulating his conception of *necropower*, or the sovereign *right to kill*, Achille Mbembe asks the following question specifically in reference to apartheid: “What is the relationship between politics and death in those systems that can function only in a state of emergency?” (Mbembe 2003, 27). For Jacob Dlamini death under apartheid was inseparable from politics: “The truth is that apartheid operated without contradiction both within and without its own ‘legal’ bounds. The killing of political opponents was not, as [journalist Jacques] Pauw suggests, a desperate measure arrived at when all else had failed. It was all of a piece with the bureaucratic and political workings of apartheid.” (Dlamini 2014, loc. 320-322). This ultimately is why we need to not only think through how our interventions into the archive reveal the fantasies and contradictions that fuelled state sanctioned violence against activists during apartheid, but how the interventions can function as interdiction not to do violence in a similar way again.

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20 The point here is by no means to collapse the possibility of activism or of social justice; for Dlamini the phenomenon of collaboration does not diminish into ‘moral relativism’. “Individuals could still act, choose and take moral stands. They could refuse to collaborate. In fact, many did” (Dlamini 2014, loc. 255).

## Praxis

In total I produced eight Facial Averages, two (male and female) for each racial category indicated in the index to the albums, namely “1 for whites, 2 for Indians, 3 for coloureds and 4 for blacks” (Dlamini 2014, loc. 2058-2059). The individual images were selected alphabetically according to their corresponding entries in the index to the albums, skipping images that were either too degraded for the process (that is, images I could not adequately map with facial markers) or whose gender I could not infer with any degree of confidence. The albums themselves did not indicate gender classifications and it was my choice to classify them as such. Each Average Face was produced from 20 different faces of each category<sup>21</sup>, except category 2 female(s) for which I could only locate 8 viable facial images in the albums explicitly marked as category 2. As a result, the Average Face produced for category 2 female(s) (See fig. 6 below) is less defined than the other Average Faces and the artefacts of the image registration process more pronounced. This conjunction of alterations serves only to highlight the formal tensions more subtly present in all the other facial averages, but is useful for the way it demonstrates how the average face draws our attention to a tension between centres and edges in the interface when it is displayed thereon.

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21 The number of faces chosen, that is 20, to produce a single average face is derived from Galton's recommendations for the creation of a 'true average' (Galton 1881).



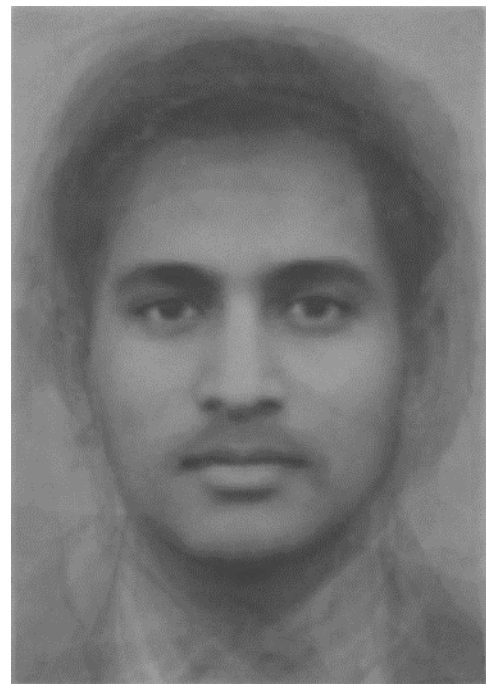
**Figure 2:** *Average Face of a Category 1 Female.*



**Figure 3:** *Average Face of a Category 1 Male.*



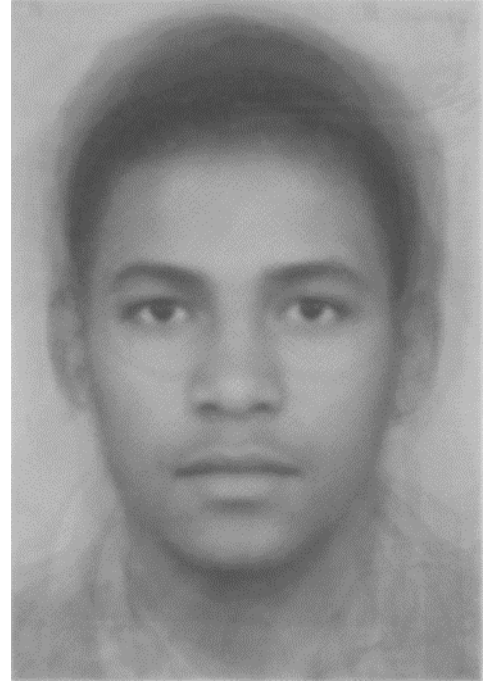
**Figure 4:** *Average Face of a Category 2 Female.*



**Figure 5:** *Average Face of a Category 2 Male.*



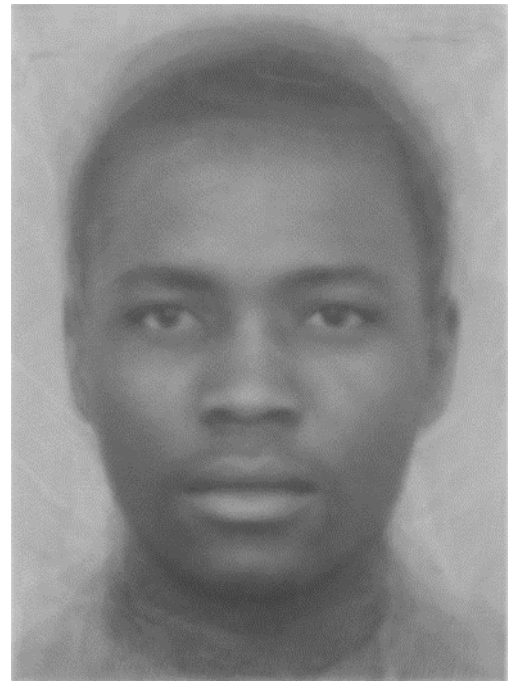
**Figure 6:** *Average Face of a Category 3 Female.*



**Figure 7:** *Average Face of a Category 3 Male.*



**Figure 8:** *Average Face of a Category 4 Female.*



**Figure 9:** *Average Face of a Category 4 Male.*

The Facial Averages were produced using a photo morphing software package called Abrosoft Fantamorph.<sup>22</sup> The process required that I extract the individual images from the albums (which were already digitized, i.e. scanned) by way of cropping, load them into the software package, remap the provided generic facial markers to each individual face (the 'Face Locator' function) and finally put the averaging process into operation (the 'Face Mixer' function). I had first tried another software package that automatically identifies faces for the averaging process<sup>23</sup>, but Fantamorph's capacity for allowing me to manually refine marker-placement after the software executed its own automatic placement produced significantly different and more precise results.

The Fantamorph software package also allowed me to create a morphing animation from the resulting 8 Facial Averages. In other words, an animation that morphs from one facial image to the next, and in this case, morphs through the entire 8 Facial Averages in sequence and reverse. The process requires me to remap the generic facial markers to each individual Average Face (i.e. in the 'Face Locator'), as patiently and as precisely as possible, and then put the morphing process into operation.

The resulting work was ultimately presented in a room at the Tshimologong Digital Innovation Precinct<sup>24</sup> in Braamfontein, Johannesburg. The 8 individual Facial Averages were digitally projected against a wall in a presentation-like format (i.e. a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation) that showed the Average Faces in sequence with minimal contextual information (i.e. a description of the project as "Average Faces of 'known and suspected activists' produced from the albums of the apartheid-era security branch" and a label for each Average Face as indicated in the figures above). The presentation was specifically looped continuously so that a viewer entering the space could start viewing the presentation at any given time in its duration. The morph animation was also displayed simultaneously on an iMac screen directly across from the projection and was similarly looped.

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<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.fantomorph.com/> for more information.

<sup>23</sup> That is, a python implementation called Face Morpher by Alyssa Quek. See the Github repository for the project here: [https://github.com/alyssaq/face\\_morpher](https://github.com/alyssaq/face_morpher).

<sup>24</sup> Reportedly named for the Setswana word for "new beginnings" it is described as a "collaborative working environment that acts as a catalyst to connect like-minded people to harness the power of innovation". See: <https://www.tshimologong.joburg/>.

## Reflection

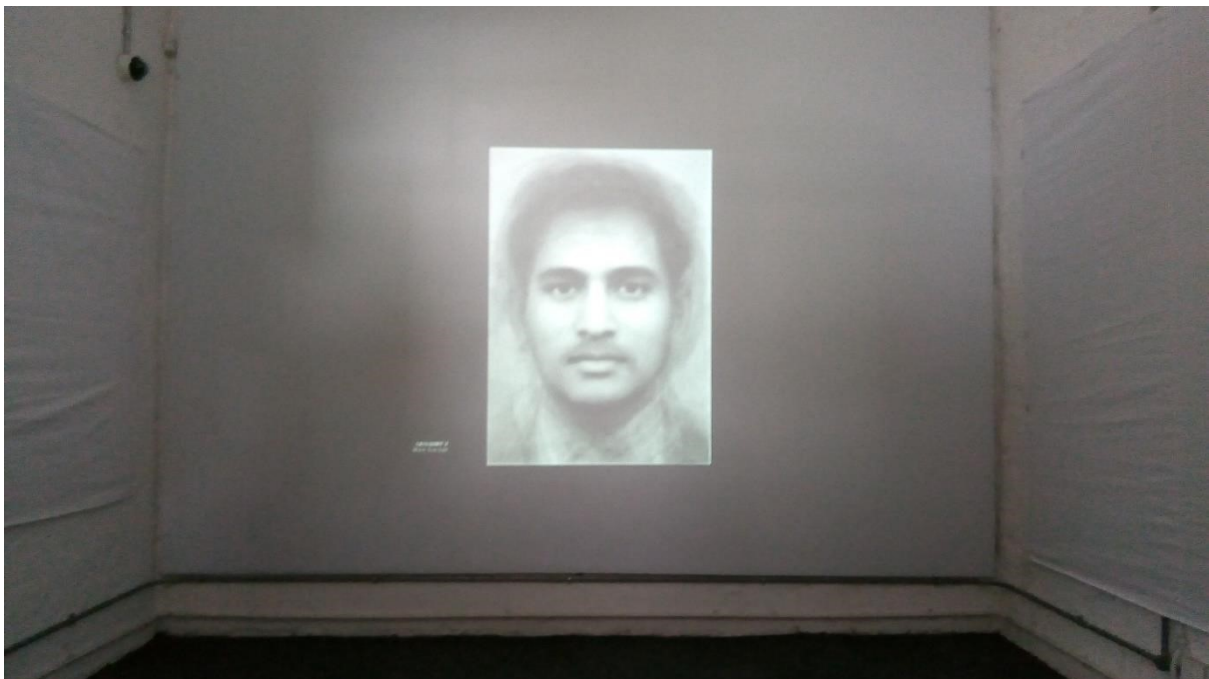
In order to summarise and offer a critical reflection on this project, I present two discursive pathways, each taking as its object one of the two parts of the practical presentation as touchstones (in the sense of a testing of validity) for the development of the ideas for the facial photograph, the facial biometric, the index, desire, citizenship, the face and the interface until this point. The intention is not so much to resolve whatever inconsistencies there may be (and probably are) in the arguments I've made thus far. Rather, it is to consider to what degree we can think of these forms and methods of display as embodying the rather dizzying constellation of ideas (I prefer deliberate contradictions) I have thus far described.

We will begin then from the presentation style projection in Fig. 12, because it is directly preoccupied with how I have attempted to describe the problem of the difference between the facial image and facial biometric for our understanding of citizenship and how I tried to resolve it through embodying *life as a desire* in the Facial Average. From there we will move on to the morph animation displayed on the interface in Fig. 13, for the way it is directly preoccupied with how I have attempted to describe the implications of the tension between desire and ethics for our understanding of citizenship and how I have tried to resolve it by way of thinking through the process of both producing the Average Face through the interface and displaying it on the interface. By way of conclusion, I will demonstrate that it is ultimately the index that allows us to shift between these two processes and, as such, allows us to think the post-apartheid and interface in concert.

## I. *Life as a desire* and the Facial Average



**Figure 10:** *Desire for the Public I*, 2018, embedded video, dimensions variable.



**Figure 11:** *Desire for the Public I*, Johannesburg, 2018, video, dimensions variable.

To begin with: we might assume that the user could, at first, recognize both icon, in the form of the Facial Average itself, and symbol in the form of the accompanying text that points towards some form of unspecified classification and the image being the product of a statistical function (in this case: Category 2, Male Average). That is, we might assume that it occupies for the user the same semiotic structure as that of the facial biometric.

As the presentation passes through the various Facial Averages and displays the title sequence ('Desire for the Public: Average Faces of "known and suspected activists" produced from the albums of the apartheid-era security branch'), they will of course have some notion (depending on the depth of their knowledge of South African history) of the provenance of the images in the Facial Averages and what they were used for. Either way, they should reasonably be able to infer that the image was produced from facial photographs that at another point was used as a means of identification and some form of classification.

Thus, the tension between the facial image and facial biometric is apprehensible at some point in the duration of viewing the presentation. And in that way, should alert the viewer that there is at play a certain concept of life: whether that is exclusively in terms of the measuring of life or evokes some sense of the political depends entirely on the disposition or 'political sympathies' of the user.

The facial average itself, however, draws our attention to a tension between the centre of the image (the recognizable face, seemingly suspended somewhere between reality and something imaginary) and the screen (that is, by virtue of the artefacts of image registration in the averaging process). Thus, it undeniably takes on the character of a desire; even more so when one considers how the presentation cuts between one image and the next (i.e. like the *object petit a*, both specific and substitutable). In this way subjecting the user to the gaze, it becomes possible for the user to recognize themselves as being identifiable in a similar way; that is, amongst the governed. How they choose to respond to this is, of course, another matter entirely. The point here is that this desire, being constantly shifted and shifting, leads away in the sense of index.

Constantly calling the user into a present-tense interaction in the way it loops continuously, and constantly requiring the user to make different inferences in excess of the information they are presented with, the presentation at some moments sets up the relations that at other moments make its referents intelligible in the emerging present. On the level of discourse then it cannot but operate as the statement.

## II. Ethics and the Interface



**Figure 12:** *Desire for the Public II*, 2018, embedded video, dimensions variable.



**Figure 13:** *Desire for the Public II*, Johannesburg, 2018, video, dimensions variable.

Firstly, in this iteration the user is presented with the Average Face without any accompanying text or symbols of any kind. That is, they are presented in the first instance with what appears only as an icon or resemblance that is, at the very least, recognizable as a human being (i.e. a recognizable category of life). In that same instance, by virtue of it being an Average Face, it operates exactly the same as described of the Average Faces in the previous iteration; that is, as a desire. A subjection to the gaze that positions the user as an image among images even as it leads one away from the image; that is, in the way one can infer how the image is made intelligible by processes of image registration and averaging.

However, as soon as the image starts morphing into another face the user is presented with a paradox: that is, the face being a marker of presence is in this instance only present in so far as it cannot be contained within a single face. It is, in Levinas' sense, "the infinitely more contained in the less ... concretely produced in the form of a relation with the face" (Levinas 1979, 196). At the same moment, the user is made aware that the image is but one in a sequence; thus, by inference constitutes a category. However, the category (which we can reasonably assume the user can infer relates to ethnicity) is only present in so far as it cannot be contained in a single face. That is, it cannot produce a reality effect on the level of discourse; it cannot elide the imaginary structure of the signified. It cannot, in this instance, constitute anything on the level of ontology or being; it must be apprehended on the level of sense (in the sense of the senses or sensibility). This is further underscored by the presentation of the Average Face on an interface that is also visibly a machine; that is, the very presence of the practice of the machine requires that any ideas of ontology or metaphysics that are fundamentally foreign to the practice of the machine be apprehended as arising from an interaction with the interface. So, in as far as the effects of the morph animation of the Average Faces were produced through an interaction with the interface and are, subsequently, presented on the interface and experienced on the level of sense (in the sense of the senses or sensibility) they fulfil that 'requirement'. Finally, it evokes the interdict not to do violence, because violence can in this instance only be oriented towards the self in so far as it is sensible (or experienced through the senses); because there is no 'being' that one can want to do violence to.

Constantly calling the user into a present tense interaction in the way it loops continuously and constantly requiring the user to make different inferences in excess of the information they are presented with, the morph animation sometimes formulates itself through those very inferences even as it sensibly (in the sense of the senses) expresses those very formulations. On the level of discourse then it cannot but operate as the speech-act.

## Conclusion

How then do these tools change the way we understand mediation? In taking the difference between facial images and facial biometrics as the starting point of the argument and drawing on parallels between the index, in the Peircian and Barthian sense, and desire, in the sense of Lacan's *objet petit a*, I have shown how we can move away from the narrow understanding of the facial biometric as a 'measurement of human life' towards thinking *life as a desire*. That is, how Lacan's formulation of the *objet petit a* allows us to think all three of Peirce's semiotic categories (symbol, icon and index) in a specifically co-temporal relationship that, in their similarity to Thacker's formulation of the ontological paradox in many established conceptions of life, allow us to move away from established conceptions of life implicated both in the criminological archive and in the asymmetries Azoulay observes in our established conceptions of citizenship (that is between citizens and non-citizens).

What are the implications and affordances for the way we interpret and work with archival material that may or may not itself be in digital formats? I argued that the method of Facial Averaging, that here specifically draws on facial images from a criminological archive, could usefully embody *life as a desire*, both for the way in which it can reveal the imaginary structure of the statistical formulation of the 'average man' that underpinned the development of the criminological archive, and how it allows us to think desire in relation to Levinas' formulation of ethics. That is, how in being *produced through* and *displayed on* the interface, the Average Face can embody an interdict not to do violence against those imaged in the archival images the method draws on. More so when one considers the crucial function of the Facial Average for this project: To offer up these sensitive images for public consideration without infringing on or revealing the personal information of those imaged.

How then do these tools lend themselves to critical historiography? Thus far I have drawn on Premesh Lalu to demonstrate how the albums of "known and suspected activists" produced by the apartheid era security branch embody the concept of the post-apartheid in so far as they overstate and reveal the imaginary structure of the reality effect of apartheid's historical narration as it manifests in the albums. I also argued that the interface, as formulated by both Galloway and Paulsen, lends itself to

a comparison with the two operations of discourse (the statement and the speech-act) that Roland Barthes identifies as central to the formation of the historical discourse and the formation of the reality effect in historical narration. I then identified and demonstrated, by way of referring to my own practical work in the context of this project, two processes by which the interface can operate on the level of discourse as either the statement or speech-act. On the one hand, the interface can operate as a statement by interrogating the relationship between the facial image and the facial biometric and thus *life as a desire* (as I have formulated it) through the Average Face in the context of a specifically presentational configuration of the interface. On the other hand, the interface can also operate as a speech-act by interrogating the relationship between desire and ethics in the context of displaying a morph animation of Average Faces on an interface that is also visibly a machine.

Although I have demonstrated that the interface signifies as an index in both these processes (i.e. the interface as the statement of historical discourse and the interface as speech-act of historical discourse) I want to conclude by demonstrating how the index allows us to shift between these two processes and, as such, allows us to think the interface and the post-apartheid in concert.

While Barthes is specifically concerned with how the speech-act enters into the statement by way of the shifter (and vice versa), he explicates in some length on particular examples of this operation in the historical discourse of certain classical and romantic historians (Barthes 1989). For example, in the way a historian might shift between writing in first person (i.e. “I”) to an omniscient third person; thus, creating an interval of time between them. I want to expound on this by referring to Premesh Lalu’s conception of the interval (in the sense of an “intervening time”) closely related for Lalu to desire. For Lalu, the interval (as an “intervening time”) works in opposition to a dilation of the “image of space” that, in turn, expunges any possibility of a desire for the future to be different (and presumably more egalitarian) than the present (Lalu 2014). I want to broach this in a different way by referring to Paulsen’s reading of the Peircian index; that is, in so far as the index is what allows events, people or objects “at a spatial or temporal remove” to nonetheless signify for us in the present (Paulsen 2017, loc. 1080-1096), is closely related to desire by way of its similarity to the Lacanian *objet petit a* and is interpreted through the logic of abduction that

nonetheless “leads one away from the facts at hand to a hypothesis based on conjecture” (Paulsen 2017, loc. 1114) it functions exactly, or perhaps in excess, of Lalu’s formulation of the interval.

In so far as *index as interval* (that is, the index specifically in the sense of intervention or “intervening time”) mediates between the interface as a statement and the interface as a speech-act it can then adequately be said to properly embody the post-apartheid. This is of course assuming that the interface as statement and the interface as speech-act are involved in directly sustaining an elision in apartheid’s historical discourse; which, in the context of this project, is provided by the albums of the apartheid-era security branch.

I can demonstrate this more directly with regards to the presentation of this project. While in isolation the two components of the project might both signify as indices and operate respectively as the speech-act and the statement; it functions concretely as the post-apartheid only when they operate in concert. That is, when the two interfaces, by virtue of their indexical capacity, point towards each other (or, in Barthes’ terms enter into each other) in order to lead us away from the work itself altogether by reintroducing the possibility of different kinds of desires.

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### **Archival Material**

*Albums Complete-OCR*. [scanned album]. The Missing Persons Task Team, NPA. Pretoria.

*Security Police list of people who left SA illegally*. [list]. The Missing Persons Task Team, NPA. Pretoria.

## APPENDICES



Alana Blignaut &lt;alana.blignaut@gmail.com&gt;

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**Security albums questions from Kathryn**

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**Madeleine M. Fullard** <mfullard@npa.gov.za>

Mon, Jan 8, 2018 at 5:11 PM

To: Kathryn Smith &lt;serialworks@gmail.com&gt;, "Madeleine Fullard (personal)" &lt;mfullard2@gmail.com&gt;

Cc: Alana Blignaut &lt;alana.blignaut@gmail.com&gt;

Hi there Kathryn and Alana

Sorry for the slow reply! Just getting to my emails after a bit of leave! Happy 2018!

I think the electronic copy that the Wits archive has actually comes from Gerhard Lotz a former security policeman from Eastern Cape who committed suicide a few years ago. He made it available to a guy called Dave Fell who was doing research on security force and MK. Dave passed it on to Wits archive. I also have an electronic copy of that. Dave is around Gauteng. (A strange guy with security force connections).

The Wits archive does also have an electronic and hard copy of OUR hard copy of the security police album which goes up to number 4644. The other scanned one at Wits goes up to about 6000 and some odds.

Anyway they are all the same, they differ only in what number they go up to.

I am happy to send you the pdf that I have for the security police album up to number 6000-etc. I understand you to say that no single face would be identifiable at the end of the process so I can't see what the issue is.

However I tried attaching it to this email but it is bigger than our server allow. Oh dear that means I must engage with those cloud thingies and expose my embarrassing lack of internet cloud knowledge! Can you advise which one to use? A simple self-explanatory one for a simple person like me!

You are also welcome to consult the hard copy in our Pretoria office. My colleague Deborah Quin in our Durban office has a hard copy of the album that goes up to number 6000 what-what but it has a few pages missing too. If you ever go to Durban!

Do you need the index of names that goes with the photograph album? That I can send you now (attached)!

Best

Madeleine

[https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=1075d7ff7a&jsver=\\_J1L9ckFJg4.en.&cbl=gmail\\_fe\\_180710.15\\_p2&view-pt&msg=160d654019165709...](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=1075d7ff7a&jsver=_J1L9ckFJg4.en.&cbl=gmail_fe_180710.15_p2&view-pt&msg=160d654019165709...) 1/2

7/16/2018

Gmail - Security Police photo album



Alana Blignaut <alana.blignaut@gmail.com>

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## Security Police photo album

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**Madeleine Fullard** <mfullard2@gmail.com>

Wed, Feb 21, 2018 at 8:51 PM

To: alana.blignaut@gmail.com, Kathryn Smith <serialworks@gmail.com>

Dear Alana and Kathryn

I have sent the file via We Transfer. I confirm that you can work with and reference this copy of the material as discussed.

Regards

Madeleine Fullard

[https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=1075d71f7a&jsver=\\_J1L9ckFJg4.en.&cbl-gmail\\_fe\\_180710.15\\_p2&view=pt&msg=161b9b4cd2d517ea...](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=1075d71f7a&jsver=_J1L9ckFJg4.en.&cbl-gmail_fe_180710.15_p2&view=pt&msg=161b9b4cd2d517ea...) 1/1

7/16/2018

Gmail - Enquiry about collection



Alana Blignaut <alana.blignaut@gmail.com>

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## Enquiry about collection

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**Gabriele Mohale** <Gabriele.Mohale@wits.ac.za>  
To: Alana Blignaut <alana.blignaut@gmail.com>

Tue, Dec 19, 2017 at 2:10 PM

Dear Alana,

Thank you for asking, which gives me an opportunity to clarify this collection item:

The album is part of a collection which has not yet been opened for research due to various reasons. Also, the images in the album cannot be used, as they are regarded third party information. Unless you have received permission from the person or family of the person. We would have allowed browsing the digital item in our Reading Room, but not downloading any of the images?

You can make reference to the existence of the album as it is known that it was used by the Security Police, but you cannot (yet) make reference to our archive. Maybe for the purpose of your research report you could say that both the TRC and the NPA have used the album in their work and that the National Archive of SA has at least one copy. Would that work?

Please feel free to call (to whom did you speak on the phone?), I will be at work during this week.

All the best,

Gabriele

**Gabriele Mohale (Mrs.)**

Archivist

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website: <http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/>

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