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# Surface tension: examining the implications of intentional disruption of the photographic surface

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# SURFACE TENSION

## Examining the Implications of Intentional Disruption of the Photographic Surface.

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Surface Tension

Examining the Implications of Intentional Disruption of the Photographic Surface.

Abstract

This dissertation aims to explore the theoretical and metaphoric implications of intentional disruptions to the material surface of the photographic print. It will consider how interferences with the surface of the print alter the end product of the photographic process, thereby shifting it from the realm of mechanical reproduction associated with photography, forcing a reconsideration of the photograph as object. This will involve a discussion of photographic theory concerned with the verisimilitude of the image as well as the common philosophical understanding that photographs somehow embody a 'contained' space. It will also necessitate a study of notions of the surface, as boundary and as skin, and therefore the implications of a conceptual association between the image and the body. It is specifically concerned with embodied action on the surface of the print, exploring different forms and levels of interference, and considering these processes as bodily encounters with photographic representation, through the use of theories of fetishism, scarification, and power.

Statutory Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, nor has it been prepared with the assistance of any other body or organisation or person outside of the University of the Witwatersrand.

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*I went to have an Identity Photograph taken. But looking at the portrait, I had a desire to hurt myself. I felt insulated from the world. Wrapped up. Coated. Removed. I looked at my own image and was alienated. It was 'another person's photograph of me', another layer to the husk surrounding me, another thickening of the calluses of my skin. I had to tear it away. To destroy, to deface that image of myself I had been given. Maybe inside the depth of the paper I could, perhaps, find the mutilated self beneath the mutilated emulsion. Maybe, by destroying the reproduction, I could recover the referent.*

**Surface Tensions**

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## Chapter One - Introduction

"Surface tension is that tension of a liquid by virtue of which it acts as an elastic, enveloping, membrane, tending always to contract to the minimum area." (Funk & Wagnalls Company 1941, 1132)

This dissertation investigates the artistic practice of intentional physical interventions on the material surface of the photographic print. The examination is approached firstly through an exploration of the varying theoretical and metaphoric implications involved in the action, then through an analysis of the such physical interventions phenomena in the work of several contemporary and historic artists. The research is based, in part, on my own corpus of photographic work. Perhaps it would be best to start this dissertation in the same place as I started that body of work, with an identity photograph that I had taken, and the strangely brutal reaction I had too my own image as it was presented to me.

The desire for violence with which I was overcome that day, holding the small black and white image, has largely been exorcised now. I gave in to the violence and attacked the image, yet I was not satisfied. I printed a copy, the same image again, and again I destroyed it. I did this many times, keeping fragments of images I destroyed and, finally, the products of images I worked on. Perhaps exorcism came from the numbing repetition, but it also came from the focused, self-conscious attention this research has given to both the intention and the act. This research has been an attempt to unpack the why's and how's of my own obsession, by relating it to contemporary artistic practice and theoretical understanding. Whether it has brought me nearer to an understanding of my personal compulsion remains unclear, but at least through this process, it has been laid to rest.

In grappling with a seemingly irrational desire, the research examines the various aspects related to that original moment: the photograph, the surface, the act. Each

aspect is set out and interrogated individually, and the discoveries made are drawn together through their related implications. Finally, the works of several diverse artists are analysed in the light of the theoretical elements laid out.

The analogue photographic process allows for, and even encourages, interference and manipulation in the 'darkroom' or printing phase; however, acting upon the finished photographic surface is perceived to be deeply subversive. Interferences with the surface of the print alter what is conventionally understood to be the end product of the photographic process, thereby shifting it from the realm of mechanical reproduction associated with photography, forcing a reconsideration of the photograph as object. This shift in perception, from 'image' to 'object' is central to the investigation of intentional disruptions of the photographic surface. Establishing the argument will necessitate a discussion of photographic theory concerned with the verisimilitude of the image as well as theoretical constructs of the photograph as a 'contained' space, and the photograph as imaginary site for the projection of desire. The research also compels a study of notions of the photographic surface, as boundary and as skin, and therefore the implications of a conceptual association between the image and the body. It also takes cognisance of the liminal nature of the surface, and the role played by the edge and the frame.

Once the theories of photographic verisimilitude and surface have been outlined, they become the basis for exploration of the implications of disrupting the surface. This in turn leads me to a discussion of notions of decay and loss, gesture, the autographic mark, the drive to iconoclasm, fetishising of the photograph, as well as the power relations implicit in these actions.

My experience with the identity photograph was a compulsion to act, manifested physically. This physical aspect is central to the notion of 'embodied action' on the photographic surface set out in this research. The research explores different forms and levels of interference, and considers these processes as bodily encounters with photographic representation, opening the possibility of this encounter as at once intimate and traumatic, constructive and deconstructive.

There is a sense of displacement inherent in the altered photograph, a feeling of strangeness stemming from the disruption of the photographic surface. Photographic images are 'contained spaces', framed by the camera, cut off from time, and apparently held below the seamless surface of the photographic object. Techniques

like re-photographing the altered surface, which would re-constitute the image in its two dimensional state, accentuate this displacement. Re-photographing the altered image reinforces the illusion of photographic seamlessness: a hiding or masking, reconstructing the polished, contained surface.

While scars, scratches and marks on the photographic surface leave the viewer with a strange discomfort, this may only be partially due to the disruption of a field so closely related to the 'real'. Some of this discomfort also arises from a conceptual relationship between the photograph and the body, a metaphoric link between the desires projected onto the photograph and our understanding of ourselves as governed by our bodies. To establish this link it will be necessary to consider the 'prosthetic body' as discussed by Lacan, the relation between the image of the body and the construction of whole or unified identity, as well as the symbolic potential of both the body and the photographic image.

My interference with the photographic surface is far from unique; it manifests a major trend, reflected in the work of several artists operating both locally and internationally. Each different philosophical aspect of the research is related to selected works by various artists. As South African examples I will be including Kay Hassan's *Non-European Libraries,* as well as works by Santu Mofokeng, Julia Tiffin and Candice Breitz. International examples include Annette Messager's *Children with their eyes scratched out* and selected examples of works by Joel-Peter Witkin and Christopher Webster.

In a vast area of study I am limiting my field of research to the photographic print. I do not in any way deal with modern developments in photography and digital manipulation, as the digital process implies an entirely different bodily relation to the image as well as a different implication for memory, trace and decay due to the different methods of information storage. Digital manipulation operates within an entirely different reality or space. It lacks the material, physical quality of the photographic print as object, which is the basis for this study.

## Chapter Two - The Photograph

“Imprinted by rays of light in a plate or sensitised film, these figures (or better perhaps, these signs?) must appear as the very *trace* of an object or a scene from the world..." (Damisch 1978, 71)

In investigating the desire to act and interfere with the photograph as object it is first necessary to establish the significance that the photographic object holds in popular imagination. The photograph has the ability to evoke highly emotional, even violent reactions from the viewer. The power of the photograph to evoke such violent reactions relies on the indexical relationship between the image and the object which it represents. For a discussion on the indexicality of the photographic image I have turned to the work of Roland Barthes.

In *Camera Lucida* (1981), the poetic book in which he mourns the death of his mother, Roland Barthes explores the powerful relationship between photography and death. This seminal text has shaped much of the discourse surrounding photographic theory in the last twenty years. To a large extent it informs notions of loss and mourning associated with photography, as well as many of the discussions concerning the ‘objecthood’ of the photograph.

The first half of Barthes’ book is devoted to a discussion of the emotional impact of photography, dividing the types of engagement with a photograph into the ‘studium’ and the ‘punctum’. The ‘studium’ represents academic or conceptual interest, while the ‘punctum’ is the point of impact, that which cannot be explained and very often cannot even be identified, but which offers a point of emotional access, or engagement, with the photograph. Barthes explains the ‘punctum’ to be that personal and implacable thing in the photograph that ‘wounds’ the viewer.

In Part Two, Barthes leaves the discussion of his ‘engagement’ in photography in general and moves to a specific, more personal experience. The second section is centred on his experience of a single photograph and the role that photograph plays in the process of mourning his mother. From the poignant exploration of this

photograph, *The Winter Garden*, Barthes arrives at what he posits as 'the nature' of photography: its relationship with death.

His incredibly emotional reaction to this specific photograph alerts him to the prime importance of the relationship between the photographic image and its referent.

> What I had noted at the beginning, in a free and easy manner, under cover of method, i.e., that every photograph is somehow co-natural with its referent, I was rediscovering, overwhelmed by the truth of the image. (Barthes 1981, 76)

What distinguishes photography, for Barthes, from other representational arts is the necessarily indexical relationship between the photograph and that which is photographed: "in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*" (Barthes 1981, 76) In the photograph there is an indexical rather than an arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified. Barthes identifies this relationship as being necessarily indexical due to the mechanical and chemical process of photography. The reflected light off the object is directly responsible for the image produced. In the work of photographic theorists like Tagg (1992) and Sontag (1977) this relational quality is put forward as the main cause for popular acceptance of the image as 'real' and 'true'. The photograph as sign literally contains some aspect of the referent. In this aspect photographic 'truth' resembles the religious relic or the fetish object: photography embodies the notion of the icon as imbued with, and eventually replacing, the aura or presence of the 'concept' it originally signified.

Due to its mechanical, mimetic nature the photographic image has historically been associated with objective truth, assumed to reflect unmediated reality. This assumption can be seen as early as 1839 in the writings of photographic pioneer William Henry Fox Talbot. In a paper presented to the Royal Society of London dated 31 January 1839, *Some account of the Art of Photogenic drawing, or the process by which natural objects may be made to delineate themselves without the aid of the artist's pencil*, Talbot muses: "How charming it would be if it were possible to cause these natural images to imprint themselves durably and remain fixed on the paper!" (Cited in Warner Marien, London, 2006, 18) Crucial to this early concept of the photograph is the assertion that the images "imprint themselves" naturalising the process and downplaying the role of the photographer. This concept is also explored in the writings of Siegfried Kracauer (1960) and André Bazin (1967) both of whom

investigate the ontological status of photography. Subsequently many photographic theorists have argued that the presence of the photographer, and the act of photographing itself, involves several kinds of subjective mediation questioning any such thing as an 'objective' or 'real' photograph. The collection of essays *Thinking Photography* edited by Victor Burgan (1982) traces this debate in detail. This attitude towards the photographic image is also exemplified in the Martha Rosler article "Image Simulations, Computer Manipulations, Some Considerations" (1989) in which she locates her discussion of computer manipulated images within a historical challenge of the photograph's assumed truth. (37) However, even in today's image-saturated world where digital and other manipulation is commonplace, this 'truth' about photographic verisimilitude remains central to the definition of the medium:

> The photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion *it fills the sight by force*, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed. (Barthes 1981, 91)

It is this assumption that in the photograph 'nothing can be refused or transformed' that gives rise to the photograph's very loaded relationship with our notions and constructions of the 'real'. Seen as a moment frozen in time, it functions as a trace, direct evidence of the existence of the object recorded. Barthes links the idea of the necessarily evidential nature of the photograph with the notion of the past. For him the constraint that exists only for photography, what he calls its essence or "noeme", is this notion of the "that-has-been" (Barthes 1981, 79). It is this sense of past that provides the link with death, mortality and decay. The photograph as a captured moment represents the irretrievable loss of that moment, and its continually growing distance from the ever-moving now.

Barthes describes the photograph as representing the death of the 'specific moment in time' it was taken. Photographs appear to fix a moment in time to a piece of paper eternally, therefore reminding us constantly of the nature of time, the unattainable quality of the past and necessarily our own mortality - the reality of Dorian Gray's portrait, only we cannot choose to exchange places. As Barthes says: "All those young photographers who are at work in the world do not know that they are agents of Death" (Barthes 1981, 92).

Christian Metz (1985) explores the relationship between photography and death briefly in his comparison between the media of photography and film as fetish

objects. Metz highlights the importance of the photographic image as a still image, isolated from the experience of the 'real' through its lack of movement and sound. Metz states that:

> The importance of immobility and silence to photographic *authority*, the nonfilmic nature of this authority, leads me to some remarks on the relationship of photography with death. Immobility and silence are not only two objective aspects of death, they are also its main symbols, they *figure* it. Photography's deeply rooted kinship with death has been noted by many different authors, including Dubois, who speaks of photography as a 'thanatography,' and, of course, Roland Barthes, whose *Camera Lucida* bears witness to this relationship most poignantly. (Metz 1985, 83)

For Metz the relationship between photography and death reaches beyond the parallel 'loss' that is experienced in both, and manifests as a shared symbolic language. The frozen moment, lost to time, also becomes the still and silent reflection of death. Metz continues:

> Photography has a third character in common with death: the snapshot, like death, is an instantaneous abduction of the object out of the world into another world, into another kind of time – unlike cinema which replaces the object, after the act of appropriation, in an unfolding time similar to that of life. The photographic *take* is immediate and definitive, like death and like the constitution of the fetish in the unconscious, fixed by a glance in childhood, unchanged and always active later. Photography is a cut inside the referent, it cuts off a piece of it, a fragment, a part object, for a long immobile travel of no return. Dubois remarks that with each photograph, a tiny piece of time brutally and forever escapes its ordinary fate, and thus is protected against its own loss. I will add that in life, and to some extent in film, one piece of time is indefinitely pushed backwards by the next: this is what we call "forgetting". (Metz 1985, 84)

The artist Christian Boltanski also points out the photograph's relation to the past, loss and death: "The Photo replaces the memory. When someone dies, after a while you can't visualize them anymore, you only remember them through their pictures" (Perloff 1997, 57). Photographs often act as prosthesis to memory, their already mediated and contained images replacing the jumbled half-felt fragments of our unaided memories. The relationship between photographs and memory is possibly most accessibly illustrated in the convenient cinematic technique of representing memory, or even the passage of time, through the use of still photographs. The sepia tinted sequences indicating a 'flashback' are all too familiar as a narrative technique in cinema, and even some other genres, like the graphic novel and the comic book, which mimic photographic conventions to indicate a memory visually.

This (con)fusion of the photographic image and 'accurate' recall leads to an awkward dynamic between the understanding of the photographic image and conceptions of reality. The photographic image necessarily shows something 'that has been', something 'real', due to its indexical nature. The projection of 'reality' onto the image is however constantly undermined by the photograph's existence as a physical object, and still requires some measure of suspension of disbelief. When attention is drawn to the photographic print precisely as an *object* it jars with the acceptance of the photograph and highlights the other disjunctions between the photographic image, and the 'real'. Susan Sontag (1977) posits that "what is surreal (in the photograph) is the distance imposed, and bridged, by the photograph: the social distance, and the distance in time" (Sontag 1977, 58). Both of these are however manifest in, and augmented by, the photograph's essential objecthood.

Changes in the nature of the photographic medium in the last few decades have affected our understanding of photographic indexicality and the presence of the Real. Lynne Kirby (1995) states:

> The emergence and increasing acceptance of video still cameras over conventional, mechanical cameras, along with the ability of digital processing techniques to alter any image originating in any medium, period, are ominous signs of the erosion of our faith in and acceptance of photography – and, by extension, the image. (Kirby 1995, 72)

Although photographs are no longer taken at face value the lingering perception of 'photographic truth', demonstrated in such sayings as "the camera never lies", continues to influence much contemporary photography. A great deal of recent photographic theory (Kembler 1998, Rosler 1991, Batchen 2001, and Manovich 2003) still centres on addressing the problematic popular historical acceptance of photographs as 'real', with analysis stressing the mediation of the photographer, the editing process, captions and the like. *Photography: A Critical Introduction* by Liz Wells (2004) offers an excellent overview of the shifts in approaches to photographic 'reality' in theory. The challenge to the 'reality' of the photographic image has become part of photographic discourse, dictating methods of making as well as themes in contemporary photographic work. An artist that works extensively in this field is the South African Kathryn Smith, whose photographs *And then I Missed You* (2000) and *Lethal Spaces* (2000) directly address concerns of photographic truth and projection.

One of the elements opened to study by the relationship between the photograph and the Real is the ways in which our understanding of our own reality, our notions of the body itself, is tied into our understanding of the photographic space. This is explored in Celia Lury's *Prosthetic Culture – Photography, Memory and Identity* (1998), where she outlines the ways in which photographic imagery has affected our understanding of identity, as well as memory / body relations. The ability of the photograph to reproduce a likeness accurately and quickly gave rise to its use as a means of documentation and control, binding identity to our image photographically through government use and sanction.

In *The Burden of Representation* John Tagg (1992) examines several of the socio-political determinants which are bound in with the development of photographic practice. One element which he scrutinises is the role photography plays in surveillance, as well as in evidence, in a civil legal system. Tagg traces this 'spreading network of power' through the early development of the police force specifically, but also touches on many other institutions of civil control. In all of these areas he outlines the complicity of the photograph. As social roles changed and growing numbers of people congregated in urban centres it became increasingly necessary for authorities to monitor and record the actions of individuals as a means of control. Easy and accurate identification became paramount. In this endeavour the photograph has an obvious advantage in its indexical nature but coincidentally, as Tagg points out: "the early years of the development of the photographic process coincided approximately with the period of the introduction of the police service into [the United Kingdom], and for more than a hundred years the two have progressed together" (Tagg 1992, 74). Today most state documentation pertaining to an individual is accompanied by a portrait photograph for the purposes of identification. This link between methods of control and the photographic image is also expounded upon by Susan Sontag. In her book *On Photography* she states that:

> Photographs were enrolled in the service of important institutions of control, notably the family and the police, as symbolic objects and as pieces of information. Thus, in the bureaucratic cataloguing of the world, many important documents are not valid unless they have, affixed to them, a photograph-token of the citizen's face. (Sontag 1977, 22)

In conflating the individual's identity with their photographic image the image itself, as well as the sitter, becomes subject to control. Richard Brilliant, in his book *Portraiture*, comments on the requirements of the portrait photograph as set out by the US Immigration and Naturalisation Service form:

> A close scrutiny of the Service's requirements reveals the complex nature of their specifications, even when imposed on what seems to be the most commonplace of portrait commissions. The sharply truncated bust, long honoured as the preferred format for portraits because it so concentrated attention on the face, was deemed sufficiently indicative of the person's likeness to serve as its overt sign; thus, the rest of the body could be omitted. The oblique view of the bust presents the face three-dimensionality and therefore provides more substantive information than a profile, unaccompanied by a frontal view; its orientation towards the right is an artificial convention, imposed on all the submissions to the service for the sake of uniformity. (Brilliant 1991, 42 - 43)

The New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs (http://www.dia.govt.nz/diawebsite.nsf/wpg_URL/Services-Passports-Photographic-Requirements?OpenDocument, 2008-10) requires a Photograph that is similar to that required by the USA. The document outlining the requirements is extensive and clearly demonstrates the level of control exercised over the image submitted.

> **The Department of Internal Affairs will be enforcing the revised photographic requirements and any photos not meeting an acceptable standard will be rejected. The processing of the passport cannot begin until a correctly completed application is received (including photos). Any unacceptable photos will delay the time for your passport to be completed. If you are applying for a passport we recommend that you allow sufficient time for the passport to be processed. By following the photo guidelines you can avoid application-processing delays by ensuring that acceptable photos are taken first time.**
>
> All applicants, including babies, must provide two identical photos of themselves. Both photos must be the same in all ways taking care they are not damaged by staples, pins, paperclips, folding or ink etcetera.
>
> The photos must be:
> - Recent photos, less than six months old
> - A full-front view of face, head and shoulders, looking straight at the camera with eyes open and head straight
> - Without hat, head band or head covering. If you wear these for religious or medical reasons, please state the reason on the Statutory Declaration in the passport application form.
> - In all cases, facial features from the bottom of the chin to the top of the forehead and both edges of the face must be clearly shown

- Without sunglasses. Tinted prescription glasses may be worn as long as the eyes are still visible. There must be no light reflection on the glasses. Thick or heavy rimmed frames must be removed
- A true image and not altered in any way
- Clear, sharp and in focus with minimum reflective light on the face
- With a plain, light coloured background (not white or dark) and no background shadow
- Of high quality colour showing natural skin tones (black and white photos are not acceptable)
- Printed on high quality photographic paper of high resolution, instant colour film and low gloss coated thermal papers providing the printers are high resolution printing systems
- Not printed with ink jet printers, on extremely high gloss paper or heavily backed thermal paper
- Taken with a neutral expression with the mouth closed
- With eyes open and clearly visible, and no hair across the face or eyes
- Actual photo size of 45mm height x 35mm width
- Head size a maximum 80% of the photo (36mm) and minimum 70% of the photo (32mm)
- The witness who identifies you on the application form must write your full name on the back of one photo, and then sign and date it.

(New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs Homepage)

Like the US Immigration and Naturalisation Service requirements discussed by Brilliant the New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs thus directs the photographic techniques, specifying the angle, focus, and contrast, as well as the percentage of the image that is filled by the sitter and even the background to be used. The document also specifies the position of the sitter, their facial expressions and dress. What is of specific interest to this dissertation is that the document goes on to determine the physical shape that the final image is to take: the paper it is to be printed on, the printing process and the size of the print. These requirements demonstrate how the identity photograph is subjected to institutional control in terms of three distinct elements, the photographic technique, the photographic subject, and the photographic object.

There are many official documents that outline the requirements of a given department or civic body from an identification photograph, but whatever the specifics may be, we all know them well and react to the multiple situations where our photographs are taken for this purpose almost instinctively. The ‘terrible’ ID photograph with its half smile and far-away stare have become commonplace and all its incarnations are easily recognisable.

But there are other implications of this standardised image, designed to aid in the identification of the individual as a form of control. Tagg explores this with reference to the police 'mug shot', but his observations could easily be applied to any of the multiple uses of the identity photograph:

> It is a portrait of the product of the disciplinary method: the body made object; divided and studied; enclosed in a cellular structure of space whose architecture is the file-index; made docile and forced to yield up its truth; separated and individuated; subjected and made subject. When accumulated such images amount to a new representation of society. (Tagg 1992, 76)

Schools, clubs, access cards, identity documents, passports, prisons; in an ever increasing capacity, in almost every strata of society, the identity photograph is used as a surrogate for the individual. It indicates belonging and conveys an aura of societal acceptance and official sanction. The photograph functions as one of the primary markers of identity, along with the fingerprint, the signature, and with more recent technological developments DNA (although this has not yet permeated society to the same extent). Tagg argues that the accumulation of these images begins to shape a new representation of society as a whole. I would however extrapolate this further, or rather focus it more closely. If the accumulation of these markers of identity reflects society itself, the personal archive of the same images begins to reflect the individual. The cataloguing of sanctioned moments that the individual's inventory of identity photographs represents, outlines the official record of a life. And as such moments are imbued with social authority, they are also, due to their overwhelming presence, slowly incorporated into the individual's representation of himself. The identification of the individual with their image in the identity photograph shapes not only the way in which society is represented, but also the way in which the individual understands his or her place in that society.

But far more influential than the sanction and control of the identity photograph is the way in which the photographic image makes tangible the psychological link between image, body and identity. The photograph gives us the ability to view accurately, and in a way 'possess' through seeing, our own likeness. The power of the identification with the self in the photographic image recalls the impact of what Lacan refers to as the 'Mirror Phase'. The Mirror Phase is identified in developmental psychology as that in which the child first begins to form a coherent 'image' of the self as an

autonomous entity, existing as a contained whole, separate from its surroundings. Lacan uses the metaphor of the mirror to explain this process by relating the child's realisation of its 'wholeness' to the (mis)identification of the 'image' in the mirror as the self. In this (mis)recognition the reflection in the mirror seems more complete than the child's experience of itself. For Lacan this 'wholeness' becomes the ideal never to be attained, the object of desire. As Grosz explains it:

> The mirror image provides an anticipatory ideal of unity to which the ego will always aspire. This image, preserved after the Oedipus complex as the ego ideal, is a model of bodily integrity, of outsideness, which the subject's experiences can never confirm. (Grosz 1994, 43)

This lack is linked to the image, introducing the notion that images will stand for us in the world, be complete in our stead, and yet never fulfil our desires. Lacan theorises that this introduces the first 'Symbolic' relationship inaugurating the child into the Symbolic Realm, the first imposition of abstract rule and the 'Law of the Father'.

While the mirror phase refers to a very specific and highly theoretical element in developmental psychology it is useful as an analogy of the relationship viewers have with portraits, and specifically with portrait photography. "Lacan," states Grosz, "suggests that this desire for a solid, stable identity may help explain our fascination with images of the human form". (Grosz 1994, 43)

Extending this analogy into the realm of the photograph I would argue that the viewer's recognition of the coherent wholeness of the image in the photograph, augmented by a sense of the indexicality of the image, coincides theoretically with their understanding of their own coherent self. This analogy would imply that the image in the photograph, just like the image in the mirror, is (mis)recognised as the self. Where the mirror shows an inverted representation of exteriority, the photograph shows a 'self' that is captured in the smooth contained surface, as well as removed temporally from the experience of the viewer. The 'wholeness' of the photographic image re-establishes the lack of the mirror phase. The photo can be seen as both reinforcing and undermining the precarious stability of the unified body image.

The development of the relationship between the photograph and the individual's sense of self as set out in psychoanalysis, like the development of the relationship

between the photograph and institutions of control, can be traced back to the early days of photography. Celia Lury makes reference to this when she states that: “Portraits were very popular when the camera was first invented as part of a cult of remembrance, and photography, in turn, has come to shape not only what we now understand as portraiture but also the individual and his or her relation to consciousness, memory and embodiment”. (Lury 1998, 42) Lury expands on this argument by relating the historical criteria for the recognition of the individual to a sense of *embodiment*, by which she means that “individuals are constituted as such through the recognition of their possession of a unique body”. (Lury 1998, 7) She argues that modern society recognises this embodiment through various techniques of identification, including genetic coding, fingerprinting, and of course the photograph.

This bodily identification with the photographic image as well as the complex relationship that photographs have with our notions of memory enable a discussion of the photograph in terms of theories of fetishism. Due to the privileged place that photographs have in our constructions of memory, as a link between the ‘then’ and ‘now’, the photograph slots readily into our understanding of the fetish. In this context fetishism should be discussed both in its original meaning as a cultural construct imposed on the so-called ‘primitive’ by the west, as well as the current psychoanalytical understanding of the term and its present use in cultural criticism: as an object or action insuring against loss to which excessive or unnatural significance is attributed.

The meaning of the term ‘fetish’ has changed greatly since the words origin which was used by Portuguese traders to indicate ‘small wares’ or ‘magic charms’ to which the native Africans seemed to them to attach a disproportionate value. From this beginning the term grew to indicate all religious or superstitious behaviour that westerners perceived in Africans. Fetishes became curios in Europe, deeply embedded with colonial beliefs, and it can be argued that the term tells us more about western imagination than it ever did about African ritual and religion.

Today the term ‘fetish’ has come to mean a very different thing due to its use in psychoanalytic theory. The word was adopted by Freud to describe a form of perversion, which attaches sexual significance to an unrelated part of the body, a

specific act, or an object. For Freud the fetishistic significance is attached to an object when the boy child discovers his mother's lack of penis, and castration fear sets in. The 'lost' object is replaced by another object, enabling a denial of the loss, while implicitly acknowledging it. Freud explains that "the replacement of the object by a fetish is determined by a symbolic connection of thought, of which the person concerned is usually not conscious". (Freud 1927, 353) In his article on fetishism, part of a larger exploration of sexual perversion, he traces a chain of experience, fantasy, and association which explains how an object is entrusted to provide reassurance against castration fears and therefore becomes the focus of sexual desire.

This concept of fetishism is useful as it introduces the idea of the fetish being a physical object that replaces or 'preserves' (Freud's word) a 'lost' ideal. The term has been assimilated into cultural production where it has come to mean any object or act to which disproportionate significance is attributed. In Elizabeth Apter's introduction to *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse* (1993) she quotes Pietz as he again stresses the link between time, loss and the fetish:

> The fetish is always a meaningful fixation of a singular event; it is above all a 'historical' object, the enduring material form and force of an unrepresentable event. This object is 'territorialised' in material space (an earthly matrix), whether in the form of a geographical locality, a marked site on the surface of the human body, or a medium of inscription or configuration defined by some other portable wearable thing… (Apter 1993, 3)

This link between a lost moment or event directly parallels the significance attributed to the photograph by Barthes. The fetish, like the photograph "fixes in time and place" but while the photograph records the light off an object and the moment 'that has been' the fetish commemorates "a founding moment in the etiology of consciousness, harkening back as a 'memorial' (Freud's expression) to an unrepresentable first form" (Apter 1993, 4).

Susan Sontag (1997, 16) also alludes to the relationship of the photograph to the dual meanings of fetishism:

> A photograph is both a pseudo presence and a token of absence. …The lover's photograph hidden in a married woman's wallet, the poster photograph of a rock star tacked up over an adolescent's bed, the campaign-button image of a politician's face pinned on a voter's coat, the snapshots of a cabdriver's children clipped to the visor – all such talismanic uses of photographs express

> a feeling both sentimental and implicitly magical: they are attempts to contact or lay claim to another reality. (Sontag 1977, 16)

While the photograph easily lends itself to analysis in terms of fetishism, the act of working the surface of the photograph also resonates in fetishistic terms. Compulsive, repetitive action on an object already invested with power has a distinctive symbolic value. This action is related to the original concept of the 'African' fetish where the object is invested with value in relation to the inscription on its surface, think for example of Nkisi figures, which, as Anthony Shelton (1995) explains, are Congolese nail fetishes that are traditionally thought to increase in power the more their surface is ritually embedded with nails.

The ritual process of nailing into the Nkisi figures symbolically imbues the object with power, but it also indicates a concerted effort over a period of time. The nailed figure begins to speak of the original untouched object in relation to the nails as scars on the surface of the figure, each bearing witness to the passage of time. Like the photograph, the fetish figure therefore becomes a receptor of memory, guarding against loss, and treated with disproportionate reverence. The presence of memory is however not unique to the photographic image itself, but also exists in the photographic print as object, in a way that parallels the physicality of the traces of time on the fetish figure. Memory as physical trace has also been related to explorations of the meanings of the body through scarring, ageing and so on. The next chapter of this research examines the relationship between the imagined body and the inscriptive surface, and the imagined body as culturally inscribed surface. Cultural inscription, as well as physical inscription on the skin is tellingly similar to actions and inscriptions on the photographic surface.

Because of its contested relationship with the 'real', the photograph is a highly charged space. It exists uncomfortably between two realms: firstly, there is the two dimensional representation, in other words, what the photograph actually shows. A contained space in itself, this is the 'closed reality' into which many of our desires of the photograph are projected. This is also the source of concepts of timelessness, preservation, memory, and reality. But the photograph also exists as a tangible material object in its own right. And it is this materiality that constantly reminds us of its constructed, fallible, and perishable nature. These realms are in constant conflict.

The seduction of photographic representation lies in a suspension of disbelief that enables the projection of ‘reality’ onto the image. This is however constantly undermined by the material actuality of the photograph as object.

## Chapter Three - The Surface

"An integument is any natural outer covering or envelope, as the skin of animal or the husk of a seed." (Funk & Wagnalls Company 1941, 602)

The photographic image has historically been the site for the projection of many of our own desires and assumptions, a process which relies to a great extent on the seduction of the smooth, contained, finished image. Susan Sontag writes that "[t]o collect photographs is to collect the world. Movies and television programs light up walls, flicker, and go out; but with still photographs the image is also an object, light weight, cheap to produce, easy to carry about, accumulate, store." (Sontag 1977, 3). In this passage Sontag links the iconic view of the photograph as the receptacle of memory not only to the frozen, indexical image itself, but also to the convenient physical form of the photographic object. The object is assumed to be stable, to last, trapping the moment depicted in the image beneath its surface.

Part of the appeal of the photographic process was the ease with which images could be produced, could be *re*-produced, and as Sontag points out, the affordable, practical nature of the final object. This is thanks to the material most often used in the photographic process: paper. Although the photographic process is dependent on the emulsion which can be applied to a host of other materials, nothing is as associated with photography, both commercially as well as in cultural understanding, as paper. The paper photograph, whether fibre or resin based, allows the photographic object to be the collectable, transportable keepsake that it has become.

The previous chapter of this investigation examined the charged relationship between the photographic image and the real, and explored the ways in which the concept of the 'captured moment' is constructed. This ideal image is however not only dependant on, but also in constant conflict with the physical actuality of the photographic print. Paper, as well as the thin emulsion coating, is easy to damage and will eventually decay. Both the processes of damage and decay re-insert traces of time onto the object and therefore interfere with the illusion of the frozen moment. This has led to an entire industry centred on the protection of the photographic object. Photo frames, photo albums, photo storage boxes, even the fascinating

current trend of ‘scrap-booking’ all strive to prevent decay and damage and preserve the integrity of the print.

In his essay ‘Flat Life’ Steven Connor, author of the immensely influential book *The Book of Skin*, argues that “[f]latness is the most important quality of paper”. (Connor 2001, 7) Being paper-based the photographic print is, by nature, flat. This flatness leaves the photographic object to be defined predominantly by the qualities of surface and edge. The edge is often theorised photographically in terms of the frame of the image, cropping, bordering, inclusion, and exclusion. It is traditionally discussed in relation to its role in determining the image to be contained. This concept of the edge is demonstrated by Sontag where she states that “[t]he photograph is a thin slice of space as well as time. In a world ruled by photographic images, all borders (“framing”) seem arbitrary. Anything can be separated, can be made discontinuous, from anything else. All that is necessary is to frame the subject differently.” (Sontag 1977, 22)

The conflict between the physical actuality of the photograph and the desire for it to be transcendent plays out on the surface of the print, that part which is at once the image as well as the object. The surface of the print acts as the border between our projected desires and the actuality of the photograph. It becomes the edge, the liminal space – that which is neither one nor the other but somehow, impossibly, both. And like all liminal spaces the surface of the print is therefore at once invested with power and subjected to control. The desire to control this surface is evidenced even in something as simple and commonplace as a photo frame.

Conceptually the photographic image is co-natural with its referent, yet physically the nature of the surface removes it from that direct relationship. The surface seals the image in a doubled act of freezing: as the indexical photographic image itself holds a moment frozen in time, it is also held, encapsulated by the smooth, often glossy surface. In an interview with Brian Dilton, Steven Connor begins to address the surface of the photographic print by considering it in terms of touch. Connor states that:

> I have a very strong apprehension that photography is much more fundamentally an art of touch, or the idea of touch, than we've got used to recognising. I think it was very clear in the beginning, when photographers were people who processed their own photographs, when there was, as we now like to put it, a hands-on experience of the photograph. (And I like very much those two hands: writing and art are so often idealised as the work of the single hand.) But it's still the case that there's a very privileged

> relationship between really quite vernacular practices and objects of photography, and touch. It's a particular kind of visual-tactile complex, I think, that photography gives us. If that weren't the case, why would the texture of photographs be so important? Shine and gloss: in one sense locking the photograph up, inviolably, like a kind of window, or glass, or protective skin or membrane; on the other hand, rendering it vulnerable, as a skin does. We look at a photograph and want to touch, and know that we mustn't; so there's a kind of preciousness that comes from the glossy photograph, and by reference to that, other kinds of textures that are always implicated, it seems to me, in the photograph. (Dilton n.d., 3)

Steven Connor's investigations of skin, surface and flatness are central to the discourse on the photographic surface. In this discussion on photography Connor's description of the glossy surface which simultaneously seals, protects and exposes the fragile image epitomises the way in which the photographic surface can be analysed in terms of other discourses on surface.

Surface itself has been theorised in a variety of ways, most commonly that of flatness, and that of skin. The 'surface' is the outside, the exterior, the façade, the outer or topmost boundary: to 'scratch the surface' is to treat something superficially. Surfaces are presented to touch, laid over valuable interiors, even used idiomatically to represent the often false appearance of a thing, 'on the surface'. Surface can also be an integument - the protective natural outer covering or coat, it can be the meniscus - the curved upper surface of a liquid held together by surface tension. But, whether as defensive shield or vulnerable layer, the idea of surface always implies interiority. Notions of surface therefore carry with them both the implications of flatness, and of depth.

The characteristic interiority of surface enables us to examine it not only in terms of, but also in contrast to the 'flatness' outlined by Steven Connor in his essay "Flat Life". In the opening paragraphs of the essay, Connor contrasts our world of 'fullness', depth and therefore surfaces to the imaginings of a 'flat world' (which always makes me think of the world captured inside the photograph): "The flat world would have no interiority, no depth, no secret, nothing hidden from view. Whatever was not seen in it would simply be not to be seen, rather than something withdrawn from sight." (Connor 2001, 1) In this essay Connor traces some of the meanings of flatness, relating the thin, translucent dream of the flat to a desire for the precious, arguing that "[t]he thinner a surface is, the more vulnerable it is in the real world to tearing and injury; but in imagination, the thinnest substances are possessed of a power that

augments in proportion to their thinness and flatness: the most exquisite papers, gold beaten into leaf, the finest, sheerest silks". (Connor 2001, 1)

In the discourse of high modernism flatness held a privileged position, similar to that of the palimpsest in post-modern thought. Clement Greenberg argued that a search for the autonomy of painting, free from all literary devices and concerned only with "pure form" led modernist painters to become increasingly obsessed with the sole element he identified as being unique to painting only, its two dimensionality, its flatness. Connor however argues that defining flatness as this 'absence of depth' is only scratching the surface.

> The power of flatness, like the power of any simulacrum of absoluteness, lies in part in its vulnerability. Paper has its life cycle, like everything else. Paper begins in flatness, in the intensity and possibility of that which has been rendered almost immaterially flat. Newspaper is a daily allegory of this process. When it is first bought, or appears miraculously through a letterbox, the newspaper has the qualities of flatness redoubled in the tightest of folds. Newspapers promise the pent newness of the smooth and the flat. The impulse to keep the newspaper smooth for as long as possible, like the impulse to keep things ironed and free from creases, is a projection of this idealised body-image, this bodily image of the body, into the world. But the newspaper cannot survive, and is not made to. It moves from the condition of virgin flatness into the formless, excremental condition of waste paper. (Connor 2001, 5)

The photographic surface shares this vulnerability of paper's flatness. The photographic print is defined by its smooth, flat, surface, which is as fragile as that of any other paper. Fibre-based photographs are pressed and ironed to ensure this flatness, while the various methods of preserving photographs all work to retain this transient flatness.

The flatness of an ordinary sheet of paper offers the viewer a doubled surface as it is imagined to consist only of its two sides. Paper's surface is therefore one that consists of only another surface, with no tangible interiority. A plain sheet of paper refuses depth in favour of this doubled surface. However, in cultural imagination the photographic object exists only as a single surface. The double surface of paper is ignored to enable an implied depth which is projected through the photographic image. The second surface is lost in favour of maintaining the integrity of the projected 'closed reality' of the image. This illusion of depth also depends on maintaining the integrity of the remaining, idealised surface. When the flatness and

smoothness of the photographic print is lost, the objecthood of the paper itself detracts from the desires projected onto the photographic image.

Another tendency in theories of surface is to associate the idea of the surface with that of skin. Pages, playing cards, and photographs all share a sheer dimensionality that reminds one of a thin covering or integument and, by association the skin. Connor explains that "[f]latness is not exactly of the skin. Rather it is the skin skinned, emptied of the substance of skin, leaving only idea; flatness behind" (Connor 2002, 4). This association of flatness, surface and skin brings with it a wealth of implications because, as Connor is pained to remind us, "there is nothing, as Valéry said, that is deeper than the skin." (Connor 2002, 3)

This self contradictory nature of skin is explored by French psychoanalyst and professor of psychology Didier Anzieu. Between 1985 and 1989 Anzieu introduced the concept of the 'skin ego' as part of developmental psychology. The concept of the skin ego, as theorised by Anzieu, is as a projection of the child's ego, a development of notions of autonomy, through an association with the confining and delineating surface of the body. Anziue emphasised the complexity of the skin as a signifying surface, and Sidlauskas quotes him as stating that the "Skin has a paradoxical nature…It is both permeable and impermeable, superficial and profound, truthful and misleading. It is regenerative but caught in a continual process of desiccation" (Sidlauskas 2001, 18) The skin retains all of the interiority associated with surface: a protective yet vulnerable covering for the body, that outer edge of the self, it comes to stand for not only the physicality of our bodies, but also our imagining of our bodies. "Skin, it is commonly said, is bilateral: it is both substance, and signifying surface, the body's largest organ, and an integument in which meaning is layered." (Bunn 2003, 2) The skin is the visible exterior of the body, that part which can be imaged to represent the individual.

> The skin is identified with the self; it is what the self sees and displays of itself. Losing one's skin is losing one's very self - so that when Michelangelo depicts himself flayed in the *Last Judgement* on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, it is his cast-off skin that retains his identity and acts as his visual signature. But, because the skin, the sign of self, is so fragile and can so easily be imagined as being stripped off, it is also the means by which the self can be imagined as subject to transformation, trickery and transaction. The wearing of animal skins is regularly associated with the powers of healing, or the taking on of new or different selves, while invisibility is often conferred in stories by means of a cloak. The skin is the sign of the self's transactability as a sign. (Connor 2002, 9)

Connor's assertion that '[t]he skin is the sign of the self's transactability as a sign' takes us back to Lacan. Lacan's theorisation of the mirror phase describes the child's introduction into a 'Symbolic Realm', a world of symbols and signs. In the Mirror Phase the projection of one's own understanding of bodily unity falls on the symbolic, the visual representation of that unity: the reflection in a mirror, the photograph. This transferral depends on the body as a contained space, a state that is ensured by the presence of the skin. The relation to the concept of a unified self is therefore bodily, but related to the visible surface of the body, which is why it is often imagined as tactile. This bodily understanding is carried over into the identification with the photograph, one therefore relates not only to the image, but also to the bounding surface of the print.

A lot of attention has been paid to notions of the skin, body and identity in the past few decades. As Connor says:

> If the skin has always been in sight, it has never been so in view as it is today. The skin is pervasive not only in critical and cultural theory but also in contemporary life. Everywhere, the skin, normally as little visible as the page upon which is displayed the words we read, is becoming visible on its own account; not only in the obsessive display of its surfaces and forms in cinema and photography, in the massive efforts to control and manipulate its appearance by means of cosmetics and plastic surgery, the extraordinary investment in the skin in practices and representations associated with fetishism and sadomasochism, but also in the anxious concern with the abject frailty and vulnerability of the skin, and the destructive rage against it exercised in violent fantasies and representations of all kinds. (Connor 2002, 2)

This emphasis on skin, present in psychoanalytic theory, is also evidenced in art making practices as well as in the theorisation of art. Genealogies of the use of skin as a symbol in art have appeared as well as examinations into the depictions of skin, and the use of surface in artistic practice, for example David Bunn's (2003) in depth examination of skin as a concept in the work of Penny Siopis. These have been accompanied by in depth analysis on the surface of the historically privileged art work, the painting, as a metaphor for skin. Painterly techniques, materials and subject matter have all been implicated in the obsession with the skin. In a seminar presented at the Wits School of Arts, David Bunn relates painting to skin through "the historical milieu in which both painting and skin are thought of as a kind of integument: a hardened organic covering that is both a shield for some kind of imagined inner vulnerability, and a signifying surface." (Bunn 2003, 1)

In establishing the relationship between painting and skin theorists have considered the depiction of skin as subject matter, the surface of the painting as a metaphor as well as the physical action of the application of paint. This critical attention to the action and physicality of painting is noted by Caroline Archer (1998) in her paper "Skin to Work; Shifting Materialities, Ambiguous Boundaries" where she states that many current theorists "emphasise the essential role of the painter's *embodied* processes in the appreciation of paintings… [arguing that] the *processes* by which paintings are made as well as their physicality and tactility are qualities deserving of greater critical attention." (Archer 1998, 12)

Painterly conventions as to the treatment of the surface of the painting, the physical application of the paint, are constantly shifting. Historically, Cartesian thought, specifically the focus on the mind over the body, led to a privileging of the so-called rational aspects of painting: form and design. The physical actuality of painting was subservient to the subject matter. Steps to address the physicality of the painted media could be seen in the work of the Impressionists, and the Expressionists. It may be argued that awareness of the physicality of the painting action climaxed with the work of the 'action painters' of Abstract Expressionism. Painters like Jackson Pollock focused on the bodily interaction between the painter and the painting, and produced works in which the subject matter was subservient to the awareness of the bodily interaction with the surface.

In a discussion on the work of William Turner, Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby (2002) examines the application of paint: "Moreover, the act of painting entails the application of layers; it cannot be fully disassociated from masking. Perhaps this is the point: Turner seizes the controversial value of Old Master pictures, of their obscuring layers, and produces it as the action of painting. On his canvases, pigment performs patina – it washes across the surface suggesting atmosphere. Sometimes delicately transparent, sometimes inertly opaque, it harmonizes, reveals, and also veils." (Grigsby 2002, 144)

The physicality of painting as a theoretical approach to augment subject matter can also be seen in the methods of contemporary South African painter Penny Siopis. "'Painting,'" she says, "'is for me a form of imagining… and that imagining leaves physical tracks of itself'". (Bunn 2003, 11) Bunn considers this statement and continues to say that: "intriguingly, in the relationship between technique and philosophical method, the Pinky Pinky pieces approach the condition of what Gilles

Deleuze has called the ‘haptic’, in which there is a codetermination of optical and tactile experience, without the deictics of the hand being overshadowed by the touch of the eye”. (Bunn 2003, 11) Here the physical action of painting, and the physicality of paint, is considered in two ways. Firstly it is addressed in the article as pertaining to touch, the haptic, and the correlation of technique and theory. Secondly it is considered in terms of ‘trace’, the marking and masking of the surface through the application of paint.

In his article “Patina, Painting, and Portentous Somethings” Grigsby addresses the action of painting as a process of covering, and therefore masking or obscuring, the surface. He opens with a discussion of a painting that the character Ishmael identifies with in Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*. In the novel Ishmael describes the painting as dark and sooty, almost obliterated by age. Grigsby uses this description as a starting point for his analysis of the effects of ageing and patinas on our understanding of painting. He argues that: “what the picture meant (and continues to mean) is also inseparable from the patina that attests to its situatedness: temporally, spatially, and socially. Indeed, the painting not only depicts the activities of a specific community but also indexically registers that community’s activities on its very surface.” (Grigsby 2002, 142)

The importance Grigsby attaches to patina reflects a value attached to paintings as their age increases. He suggests that patina “increases atmosphere”. This echoes the value attached to an original artwork by Walter Benjamin as the patina. The mark of age that for Grigsby enhances the work of the old masters is also an augmentation of the ‘aura’ of the unique work of art. Benjamin discusses the significance of the unique artwork in terms of what he calls its ‘aura’ in his article “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”. Written circa 1935-36 this has become a seminal text, informing notions of not only photography and film, but also the effects and ramifications of modernity as a whole. The text takes a strong Marxist position, opening and closing with commentary on the time’s socio-economic climate. It examines the effects of the reproducibility of the work of art. It traces the historical development of reproduction, looks at the effects of printing of literature, and argues that for the first time, with photography, visual arts approach that level of reproducibility. For Benjamin this replication, exemplary of modernity, climaxes in film: “…pictorial reproduction accelerated so enormously that it could keep pace with speech”. (Benjamin 1968, 219) Benjamin noted that this reproducibility caused profound change in the reception and understanding of art. He argued that the

element that differentiates a traditional work of art from any reproduction is its physical presence, its uniqueness in time and space. He defined this quality as the work's 'aura', and stated that it is this aura that disappears in the realm of mechanical reproduction. The patina that develops on old paintings evidences their age, as well as their physicality as object, adding to the 'aura' of the work.

Patina is however not the only way in which age is reflected in painting. David Bunn suggests that "[g]iven the fact that oil paint forms a membrane over an interior that can stay moist for centuries, the transformations of the surface, through cracks, wrinkles, and differential ageing, provide a subtle analogue for the human experience of bodily time" (Bunn 2003, 10). The traces left on a painting are therefore two-fold; the traces of the artist, physically marking the surface through bodily action, and the traces of time, scarring and marking that makes the painting analogous to bodily ageing visibly borne on the skin.

These approaches to the surface of painting and its relationship to the body and skin can be applied to an understanding of the surface of the photograph. While the surface of the photograph differs from that of a painting in many ways, there are still similarities to be found. In the same way as the painterly surface can function as a metaphor for skin, the photographic surface displays many of the same properties.

In contrast to the textured flatness of the painting which instantly suggests application, the smooth flatness of the photograph's surface makes it appear to be a unified object. The surface is assumed to be inseparable from the marks on it. As an object, the photograph is made up of paper with a thin emulsion coating on one side; the image consists of a chemical change in the emulsion: this is a change in the actual surface itself. It is a change in the coating (or the meniscus, or the skin) of the paper. The photographic image immediately becomes part of the surface, and is not imposed on it, as in painting where real depth is added to stand in for the implied or imagined depth of the image, the skin, the person.

The photographic object forms a contained unit, as much as the photographic image is a contained space. In the photograph the haptic, that dual sense of the visual and the tactile that is so evident in painting, is not immediately visible but still exists. Connor's statement that "…photography is much more fundamentally an art of touch, or the idea of touch, than we've got used to recognising" begins to address the fundamental tactile qualities of the photograph. (Dilton n.d., 3) In this analysis Connor

emphasises the smoothness, the fragility, and the flatness of the photograph. His discussion centres on the desire to touch the glossy surface, precisely because it is fragile, and 'forbidden'. For the photograph to retain its status as a receptacle for memory it has to remain stable as an object. Damage to the surface in the form of fingerprints or other marks left by touching disturbs this stability and is constructed as 'taboo'. Tension is thus created between the opposing desires of tactile contact with the smooth, seductive, surface, and the understanding of its fragility.

As the photograph is a flat, smooth object depth exists in the image alone, with interiority alluded to by the overwhelming significance of the recorded image and not at all present in the object as it is in painting. When the average snap-shotter collects their images they are presented with moments sliced out of time, frozen and kept static, significant to them only because of the memory it represents. The object itself is merely a vehicle for this illusion, sterilised and hardly touched by human hands. In contrast to painting, in which there is a doubled trace of touch and age, the only trace acknowledged in the photograph is that of the indexical referent.

However, for those who print their own photographs this relationship to the photographic object changes, precisely because of the change they themselves witness / bring about in the surface of the paper. Connor touches on this shift in perception of the photograph. He argues that a tactile awareness of the photograph is augmented by the printing process: "I think it was very clear in the beginning, when photographers were people who processed their own photographs, when there was, as we now like to put it, a 'hands-on' experience of the photograph." (Dilton n.d., 3) In developing and printing a photograph the photographer witnesses the shift from the virgin smooth and white emulsioned paper to a surface containing an image, which magically appears as part of the surface, from the surface, as if it has always been there. In the darkroom, for those who print, the surface surrenders the image, as if the latent image has not just recently been imposed through the touch of light, but had been hidden in the depth of the paper. However, even in observing this little miracle of the image 'appearing', it is still precisely the image which entrances the viewer. The smooth glossy surface remains the carrier, useful and practical, but ultimately insignificant. The seamlessness of the image and surface, the unity of the object adds to the illusion of the frozen moment.

The identification with, and projection of 'reality' onto, the photographic image relies on a suspension of disbelief. The material actuality of the photograph as an object,

however, constantly undermines this projection. This tension between the photographic image and the photographic print as object is heightened when the surface is damaged or decayed. Generally the ageing and accidental marking of the surface is actively guarded against. However the tension that arises from the juxtaposition of the desire of the image and the actuality of the print has opened many possibilities for exploration and investigation by artists. In painting traces are left both by the autographic mark of the artist and the natural aging of the object, elements that are masked in photography. The photographic process is designed, step-by-step, to result in verisimilitude; marking or ageing in the surface interferes with the suspension of disbelief that the process attempts to create, and therefore constitutes a significant disruption. Emphasising this interference allows artists to draw attention to the constructed nature of the photograph, damaging its masquerade as 'truth' and preventing the viewer's projection of reality onto the image.

Artists choose to draw attention to this tension in several different ways. Exhibiting found photographs marked by natural ageing is one such strategy, which will be examined in detail in Chapter 5 with reference to the work of Santu Mofokeng *Black Photo Album / Look at Me*. Another is the decision to impose an autographic mark on the surface of the print. Similarly to painting this manifests as a tactile desire for the surface to be 'worked on' by the artist, in some way physically affected by the presence of the individual. In this case the corporeal nature of the artist's intervention with the surface is in dramatic contrast to the photograph as encoded mechanical result. Acting on the surface of the print is affecting an independent object in the world, but it is also the scarring and manipulation of a charged representational image. This allows the artist to re-insert physical agency into the photographic frame, creating a tension between bodily experience and the mechanical nature of the print.

Creating a break, or drawing attention to a flaw in the surface of the object, grants access to a physical depth in the photograph that fractures the glossy surface, and aids in the futile search for the interiority of the image. In painting the image is created on the surface by the application of paint. In photography the image quite literally *is* the surface. To scar or mark the surface, in painting, on the land and even on the body itself, is to create meaning. It designates sites of significance, erogenous zones, marks the passage of time and events, and physically shows history. The desire of photography is however to present history as seamless,

contained in the moment, frozen in the image. Scars, scratches and marks on the photographic surface leave the viewer with a strange discomfort due to the disruption of a field related so closely to the 'real'. This discomfort is augmented by material identification between the surface of the photographic print, and the contained unit of the body.

The photograph acts as a receptor for memory, guarding against loss and decay. Barthes' link between photography and death is again useful here. If the photograph represents a desire to preserve, to memorialise and immortalise, it alerts us to an anxiety about our own inevitable death and decay, and therefore reminds us of our physical state, reflecting the failure of our bodies to preserve. This discomfort at our own physical condition revealed by the 'timeless' 'frozen' qualities of the photographic image links the photographic object as container for these desires to the fallible body. The photographic image stays time, while our bodies, like the photograph as object, continue to reflect it.

## Chapter Four - The Action

“He looked round, and saw the knife that had stabbed Basil Hallward. He had cleaned it many times, till there was no stain left upon it. It was bright, and glistened. As it had killed the painter, so it would kill the painter’s work, and all that that meant. It would kill the past, and when that was dead he would be free. It would kill this monstrous soul-life, and without its hideous warnings, he would be at peace. He seized the thing, and stabbed the picture with it.”
(Wilde 1891, np)

The projection of a sense of reality or truth into the photographic image relies on the suspension of disbelief; this suspension is encouraged, in turn, by the offering of the unblemished, smooth, window surface of the photographic print. When this surface is interfered with or damaged the viewer’s attention is drawn to the material actuality of the photograph and the spell is broken.

The photograph’s use as mnemonic device grants it an immense presence in the imagination of the viewer. The image of a loved one may be cherished, framed and placed in a privileged position in the home, while an image of an old lover may be torn or burnt in anger as part of cathartic act of cleansing.

The drive to damage or destroy images is often considered in terms of iconoclasm. The iconoclastic impulse is at once a denial of, or rebellion against, the power of the image as well as an affirmation of the influence an image may have. Iconoclasm involves the “effacement, degradation, or annihilation of art, when neither the term destruction nor the term art can be taken as simple givens”. (Bryson 1998, 1) Norman Bryson’s reminder that neither ‘destruction’ nor ‘art’ are simple terms opens the debate surrounding iconoclasm. His argument about iconoclasm (complemented by his discussion of Dario Gamboni’s *The Destruction of Art)*, is that iconoclasm encourages a complex interaction between many societal and psychological factors.

Bryson also differentiates between iconoclasm and vandalism, briefly exploring their similarities and differences. In his review of Gamboni's *The Destruction of Art,* he explains that

> [o]n the one hand, there is the word iconoclast, and on the other, the word vandal… The iconoclast has an intellectual program, a doctrine opposed to the official use of imagery, whether ecclesiastical (as in the case of the disputes over the nature of the divine image in Byzantium) or secular (in a looser, yet still respectable sense, the iconoclast attacks 'venerated institutions or cherished beliefs regarded as fallacious or superstitious'). The vandal, however, belongs to the mob, to the gutter. His attacks on the image are ignorant, oafish, blind; unable to understand beauty, he can only destroy it. (Bryson 1998, 1)

Gamboni, in Bryson's interpretation, links the iconoclastic impulse to a purposeful, intellectual decision to destroy or deface an image of power. These images are usually considered to be confined to religious or political symbols or monuments, and the acts committed are often a manifestation of significant social change. The immense psychological and social significance of the photograph however sets it up for a similar iconoclastic impulse.

In *Camera Lucida* Barthes refers to the 'iconicity' or the 'indexicality' of the photographic image. By this he is referring to the necessary rather than arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified in that the photographic image is assumed to result from the light reflected from an actual external object and so, in a tangible way, to contain an aspect of the signified article. In the traditional understanding of religious icons, the icon is invested with some of the power of that which it represents; it reflects its aura or gestalt, gaining in imaginary significance and symbolic power until it eventually replaces the original as an object of power in its own right. It is this emotional projection onto the iconic image that rouses violent reaction in some viewers, reaction that, when it is manifest in the damaging of the object, draws attention to the icon's physical, constructed, and perishable nature, and reasserts the agency of the actor over the image.

Thus defacement or destruction of an image requires the iconoclast to physically engage with it as an object. This direct interaction is expressed in an autographic mark, a mark made that requires the presence of the body. Like an autograph, which is indicative of the presence of the signatory, the autographic mark reflects the physical tangibility of the action performed.

Notions of the autographic mark are more commonly associated with art making than with its destruction, although in both vandalism and iconoclasm the agency and authority granted by the autographic mark are central to understanding the impulse. One of the most influential studies of the importance of the autographic mark in art making is that of Clement Greenberg, notably in his article "'American Type ' Painting" first published in 1955. Greenberg was the main critical apologist of the modernist painting movement of Abstract Expressionism. His analyses and critical insights focused largely on what he famously called 'The Crises of the Easel Picture' in his article of the same name (1942) – which addresses the ways in which painting needed to redefine itself as a medium specifically in America during the early half of the twentieth century. In "'American Type ' Painting" Greenberg outlines two kinds of Abstract Expressionism, which he calls Action Painting and Colour-field Painting. Central to our discussion are his conceptions of Action Painting, specifically the works of artists like Jackson Pollock.

The action painters focused on the physical elements of the painting process. Greenberg looks at the autographic mark by relating it to the aura of the artist-genius. The physical presence of the creator is necessarily evidenced by the 'mark' left and this leads to a privileging of the painterly mark within the discourse. In his influential essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Walter Benjamin explores the concept of physicality and authenticity in very similar terms. He writes that "even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" and expands on this by saying that "the presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity". (Benjamin 1968, 220) The privilege of the painterly object that Greenberg addresses is therefore vested in the uniqueness and physical presence of the work, and the trace of the artist. Benjamin refers to the authenticity and presence of a work as its "aura".

Richard Shiff explores the relationship between aura and the artist's bodily relationship with the act of painting, an argument set up by critics and theorists like Greenberg and Benjamin. In his article "Constructing Physicality", he explains that

> [a]t issue is touch: the painter's touch becomes the vehicle for a metonymic exchange between an artist's, or a viewer's, human physicality and the

> material, constructed tangibility of an artwork. When we see a picture in terms of its material references to touch (as opposed to its fictive allusions to vision), we reorient not only a local pictorial order but also our global sense of how human bodies contact their surroundings; we reconstruct the functioning of the body and its senses, how it relates to the world. When vision dominates, knowledge becomes centralized, abstracted, and distanced; with touch, experience is multiple, concrete, and proximate-close "at hand." (Shiff 1991, 44)

Steven Connor (2001) theorises the mark in his essay “The Law of Marks”. His investigation of mark-making draws attention not only to the autographic mark, but also to the action of marking itself. Connor conceptualises marking as the result of the action of one surface on another.

> [There is a] higher law … called upon to some degree in every kind of spontaneous or immediate manifestation of a mark: the handprint which signs the cave-painting, the writing on the wall at Belshazzar’s feast, the miraculous images deposited on the handkerchief of Veronica, or the Shroud of Turin, the ‘maternal impression’ that marks the foetus with the sign of the mother’s terror or immoderate desire, the stigmata of the mystic, the medium’s planchette suddenly filled with writing, the fingerprint of the burglar, the silhouettes seared upon the wall at Hiroshima, and the signature coiled in my DNA. This higher, lower law can perhaps be stated thus: *things come together*. Things of the world and beyond it sign themselves through the contact, impact, or printing of their surface upon another surface. (Connor 2001, 1)

The autographic mark, inextricably entwined with the physical and the maker’s presence can be seen in things ranging from such everyday actions like the signature, right through to artistic mark-making processes. The common factor is that the direct physical presence of the mark-maker is required, and that due to this, the mark is seen as a form of identification, of asserting ownership and originality.

> What signs in this spontaneous impression, this sigillating impingement of things one upon another, is not a proposition, or a proper name, but the all-at-once, *tout d’un coup* here-and-now haecceitas [the individuating essence of an object or person – JEB] of the very gesture of the signature. One must sign quickly, after all, without pausing for thought; and how hard it is to do that consciously, as when we are required to sign a new credit card, taking care that the signature is like itself, which is to say unfalsifiably spontaneous, or when we strive to replicate it under a suspicious eye. Forging a signature, or imitating one’s own, cannot be done letter by letter or word by word, for a signature belongs to a different order from writing - the order of marks. A signature is therefore not to be inscribed, but stamped. (Connor 2001, 1)

In this passage Connor relates the signature to the order of mark-making rather than writing due to the spontaneity and reflexivity of the action. While meticulous, conscious actions can be falsified, Connor asserts that the unconscious mark

tangibly bears the relationship to the mark maker, and therefore exhibits its authenticity.

The autographic mark is culturally privileged; it does not necessarily need to be a creative or positive action. Vandals and iconoclasts assert their agency over the image by marking or marring the surface. Vandalism also extends to the marking of objects in the public domain, for example the graffiti practise of 'tagging' functions to indicate the presence of the maker, just as a signature would.

Connor's notion of the "spontaneous or immediate manifestation of a mark" is derived from his interest in comparing mark-making to the structured, orderly act of writing. In this chapter, I collapse that distinction, treating both as the consequence of one surface on another resulting in a visible trace of the contact. The mark in the sense that it is used here implies a conscious, deliberate action, of any kind that necessarily indicates the physical touch of the mark-maker and which is therefore imbued with their authority and aura.

The previous chapters of this dissertation explored the photograph as receptor of memory or trace, and related the surface of the photograph to the skin. The metaphor of skin is again useful here and it enables the exploration of the marking of the photographic surface not only as an interference, but also as a parallel process to the marking of the body. In his investigation of the relationships between law, writing and marking Connor arrives at the following conclusion:

> There is one particular kind of marking which seems to bring together law and letters: the marking of the body, or the surface of the body, as though it were a signifying medium. If law is to bear down upon the body, then the skin is the medium or locale for this encounter. Inscribing its text on the body, law makes the body, and more specifically its skin, bear witness. (Connor 2001, 1)

In this text Connor focuses on the penal marking of the body through scarring, burning or tattooing, and argues that through this marking

> the law is not only done, it is seen to be done; and this seeing-to-be-done is no mere reflection or re-echoing of the operations of punishment; rather, it is the nature and reach of the doing itself. In the mark incised or pricked or burned upon the body of the criminal, the law precipitates a lasting sign of its action, the letter of the law made actual and present in a continuing here and now. (Connor 2001, 1)

What is useful from this analysis is Connor's insistence on the agency of the act of marking, the "doing itself" as well as the apparent permanence of the mark as a sign of presence. Both of these elements of the penal marking of the body can be directly mapped onto the iconoclastic impulse – the desire to correct, to revise, or to inscribe. The iconoclast attacks the image for defined political, religious or social reasons, and the marks left are significant precisely because of the 'doing' that Connor describes. In the iconoclastic interference with the image it is not the form or final look of the mark that is significant, but the act of marking itself. For the vandal, while their marks are considered to be unconsidered and random, or 'ignorant' and 'oafish', it is also the act of marking that is important. Like the penal marking of the body, in the iconoclastic or vandalous act marks are imposed from outside, marks reflective of societal change or disregard. But, Connor's passage also alerts us to the fact that while, for the actor, it is the act of marking itself that is significant the continued lasting visibility of that action that the mark represents "is the nature and reach of the doing itself". For Connor, the persistence of the penal mark on the body represents the "time of the law that is brought to bear upon the merely mortal time of the body". (Connor 2001, 1)

Connor's penal marking of the body is however not the only theorisation of the marking of the body that can be related back to the impulse to act on the image. In *Volatile Bodies* Elizabeth Grosz (1994) explores the ways in which the body is complicit in the production of cultural and social meaning. In the chapter "The Body as Inscriptive Surface" she discusses both the physical and cultural marking of the body as means of signification.

The body is inscribed by time; memory and trace are symbolically etched onto its surface through ageing and scarring. But as well as this visible inscription our bodies are also culturally inscribed, a concept Grosz investigates extensively. Grosz' aim in *Volatile Bodies* is to lay out a feminist concept of corporeality, and to examine the ways in which the established theorisations and language of the body and signification can be co-opted to feminist ends. Her investigation therefore focuses largely on the cultural inscriptions of the body and their underlying power relations. She considers the work of several theorists tracing cultural corporeal inscriptions, beginning with the work of Lingis, discussing visible, surface marking of the body seen in such practices as scarification, tattooing, piercing and branding, and

develops her discussion to include the theories of Nietzsche and Foucault as they explore the body as the site of social production. In her own words she examines the ways in which their theories construct “social inscription of bodies to produce the effects of depth”. (Grosz 1994, xiii)

Much like Connor, Grosz begins her exploration with an investigation of existing practices of marking the body but, where Connor examines the penal marking of the body and relates it to written language and law, Grosz considers the mark as a societal inscription: “Inscriptions of the subject’s body coagulate corporeal signifiers into signs, producing all the effects of meaning, representation, depth, within or subtending our social order.” (Grosz 1994, 141)

In the case of penal marking of the body, which Connor examines, the marks are imposed on the surface of the body; it is an involuntary process, forced from outside, making the body bear witness to the law. This kind of marking displays the submission of the body to the letter of the law. Grosz, however, points out other ways in which the body is inscribed that are not externally imposed. She argues that “[t]he various procedures for inscribing bodies, marking out different bodies, categories, types, norms, are not simply imposed on the individual from outside; they do not function coercively but are sought out. They are commonly undertaken voluntarily and usually require the active compliance of the subject.” (Grosz 1994, 143) As an example she cites the practice of body building, arguing that in this extreme case the inscription of the body occurs through the subject’s conscious effort to change its appearance, and that this change in appearance serves to differentiate the body and create it as a site of cultural meaning.

Grosz’ argument is that “[e]very body is marked by the history and specificity of its existence". (Grosz 1994, 142) She explores this through the inscriptions left by societal norms, bodily training, everyday habits and lifestyle as well as accidental scarring and ageing. She also however considers bodily inscription through the externally visible marks inscribed on the surface of the skin. Where Connor considers actively imposed markings by analysing their function in a legal and penal system, Grosz also touches on voluntary marking for decorative or religious reasons as well as accidental marking. In all these cases however, the physically visible mark alters the surface of the body making it ‘bear witness’ to the action of marking itself.

Grosz describes the effects of these markings where she states that: “Welts, scars, cuts, tattoos, perforations, incisions, inlays, function quite literally to increase the surface space of the body, creating out of what may have been formless flesh a series of zones, locations, ridges, hollows, contours: places of special significance and libidinal intensity.” (Grosz 1994, 139) Creating places of ‘libidinal intensity’ implies the fracturing of the surface of the body, the skin, to reveal the promise of interiority. Marking is an action that creates a sense of depth on the smooth surface of the skin, indicating areas of significance, but also areas of fragility. David Bunn explains that “scars… are not simply the mark of a generalized episteme of trauma, but also of an epidermal coarsening that points to an uncertainty about the future of the body, time, and the conditions of intimacy that have yet to be built.” (Bunn 2003, 17 - 18)

As a physical affirmation of surface marking the body challenges the “class and cultural perspective” that casts people as “not so much surfaces as profound depths, subjects of a hidden interiority”. (Grosz 1994, 138) To mark the body is to impose a map, designating sites as significant and creating ‘meaningful’, interpretable, areas. It constitutes a codifying of the body, increasing the surface area and “creating out of what may have been formless flesh a series of zones, locations, ridges, hollows, contours: places of special significance and libidinal intensity”. (Grosz 1994, 139) These philosophical reflections on inscription and corporality allow insights into the meaning of deliberately damaged or inscribed photographic surfaces.

This parallel process is made explicit in the work of Joel-Peter Witkin. Witkin photographs damaged or malformed bodies, setting up elaborate tableaus often working in a style reminiscent of art historical images. In the printing process he then recreates the effects of ageing and scarring of the print itself, by printing through glass, liquids, and scratching onto the negative as well as the final print. In his essay “Corpsing the Image” Peter Schwenger discusses this process:

> [Witkin’s] disturbing images are often contained within enclosures whose constructedness is immediately evident, evoking the claustrophobic studio photographs of the nineteenth century. As well, he imitates features of such photographs present to our eyes today but not intended by the photographers: scratches, folds, the decay of emulsion. And Witkin goes beyond nostalgic patina to work over his negatives with gouges, splotches, smears, and spatters. Corrosions of the eye’s self-contained space, these techniques may also be seen as a kind of rage inflicted on the image. To scar and mutilate the film’s

> pellicle is etymologically to inflict a kind of violence on its skin, a violence that is parallel to the bodily mutilation often depicted in these photographs. (Schwenger 2000, 69)

Inscription into the photographic surface not only has similarities to the aggressive marking of iconoclasm and vandalism, but it also has a similar cultural significance to the marking of the body. Marking the photographic surface indicates the photograph as an object vulnerable to time and decay; it alludes to depth, and indicates areas of significance and intensity. Marking the photograph is also a consciously transgressive act, going against the usual desire to protect and cherish the smooth contained surface. Most significantly however, the act of marking a photograph re-asserts human agency over a surface assumed to be the result of a perfect mechanical process. The agency of mark making, the tactile presence of the artist, is something which is absent in the traditional analogue photographic process, and is mostly attributed to the painterly mark, as is evident in Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction".

In *On Photography* Susan Sontag briefly mentions painting as producing a unique 'handmade' original and contrasts this to photography which relies on mechanical reproduction. While she addresses the convenience of the mechanical nature of photography, her discussions of the artistic merit of the photograph, and the presence of the artist which in painting is associated with the tactile mark, centre on the captured and framed moment. In her discussions of the photograph, the agency of the photographer is visible in the cropping and framing, the skill with the camera, and primarily, the choosing of the perfect moment. These elements all allude to a distance between the photographer and the photograph; the 'hands on' quality assumed of other artistic practices is missing. This distancing of the creative presence of the artist in favour of the mechanical nature of the photographic process originally fuelled a lot of the critical debate around photography.

One such a consideration of the ramifications of the mechanical in art is Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in which he examines the reproducibility of the work of art. He traces the historical development of reproduction, by looking at the effects of printing in literature, and argues that for the first time, with photography, the visual arts approach that level of reproducibility. For Benjamin this replication, exemplary of modernity, climaxes in film in which,

according to him, "…pictorial reproduction accelerated so enormously that it could keep pace with speech". (Benjamin 1968, 219) Benjamin notes that this reproducibility causes profound changes in the reception and understanding of art. He argues that the element that differentiates a traditional work of art from any reproduction is its physical presence, its uniqueness in time and space. He defines this quality as the work's 'aura', and states that it is this aura that disappears in the realm of mechanical reproduction.

While the aura of the original is not present in a photograph due to its indefinitely reproducible nature, the mechanical process of photography also has other effects. The conception of the photograph as mechanically reproduced alienates the print from the viewer; the sense of human touch is lost and this loss enhances the idealised, untouchable, untouched reverence of the image. Like the religious icon, the photographic print is elevated by this myth of separation from the human, but while the religious icon is assumed to be privileged through divine influence, the photograph is privileged due to its mechanical nature. In both, the ontological status is assumed to be that of a pure record of an original.

When the photograph is marked this reverence of the image is destroyed, the illusion of the contained moment is shattered, an awareness of the physicality of the print is created, and the individual touch of the actor re-asserts its agency. The marking of the photograph leads to a strange doubling of its trace: the trace of the lost moment in the photographic image and the trace of the actor.

There are several ways in which a mark can be left on the photographic surface. In this discussion, the only determining factor is that the mark is intentional, and the result of human action. Mark-making can loosely be divided into two categories: marks that are the result of the action of elements to which the photograph is deliberately exposed, and marks that are the results of gestural traces. The latter category of mark is clear in its dependence on human action as it involves the gesture and trace visible in both iconoclasm and the autographic mark; the former category has a more complex relationship with the autographic mark and can be explained as a form of encouraged or enacted decay. It mimics the natural ageing and degrading of the photographic object, but is distinguished from this as it is the result of direct human action.

**Gestural Marks**



Figure 1 - Gestural Marking

Gesture is inextricably linked with the autographic mark, particularly in its use as a concept in art theory. Whereas I've used the term 'autographic mark' to refer to any kind of mark that requires the direct bodily presence of the mark-maker, the term 'gestural mark' has been incorporated into artistic language as a signifier of the creative subject. This occurs specifically in the modernist project, although remnants of it still remain canonised. The gestural mark is often conflated with the autographic mark as the relationship between the trace left and the presence of the mark-maker is directly visible. Whereas decaying marks work to conceal the action of the mark-maker by imitating natural processes, gestural marks announce it.

The gestural mark leaves a direct, bodily related trace of the mark-maker, and has therefore been constructed as a 'privileged signifier' of the artistic subject. Here it may be useful to refer to Mary Kelly's seminal article "Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism" (1984), where she discusses the production of the artistic subject – from gesture, through bodily presence, to documentation – in art criticism.

Kelly begins her discussion by quoting Peter Wollen where he points out how the advances in photographic techniques prompted painting to emphasise the subjective and the intuitive. She sets out the differences between the photographic and cinematic apparatus and the painterly signifier: the photographic apparatus erases and disguises its presence, whereas the painterly signifier is “manipulated precisely to trace a passage, to give evidence, of an essentially human action, to mark the subjectivity of the artist in the image itself. It is above all the artistic gesture which constitutes, at least metaphorically, the imaginary signifier of 'Modern Art'.” (Kelly 1984, 89) The photographic action is assumed to disguise the autographic mark as, although the artist is present behind the camera, the mark left is mechanically produced and indexical of the referent and not of the artist.

Kelly differentiates between gesture and colour and comments on the residue of figuration found in gesture, the play of presence and absence within pictorial space, and the importance of these elements in the production of the signifier. She continues to show how,

> abstraction's apparent liberation of gesture from the figurative constraints of perspectival representation renders even more exactly the imaginary effect of a transcendental *chiaroscuro* whereby the spectator recognizes, in the mark of the enouncing subject, an essential humanness, smoothly eliding the look of the artist, that unique vision, with his own, assuming in that image an essential creativity which authenticates his experience as aesthetic and validates the object as art. (Kelly 1984, 90)

The ideas of ‘essential creativity’, authenticity, and the artist’s undeniable subjective presence exemplified by gesture in high modernist painting have far reaching implications when juxtaposed with the ‘mechanical’ nature of the photographic print. Kelly addresses this where she mentions that “artistic practices employing film or photography, as well as those using found objects, processes or systems where creative labour is apparently absent, continue to problematize the transcendental imperatives which predominate in critical and historical literature on art” (Kelly 1984, 91) Enacting an autographic mark on the surface of the photographic print enables the artist to re-insert evidence of their own subjectivity onto a surface traditionally employed to hide or mask its own process traces in favour of verisimilitude. Visible gesture breaks down this masking to reveal the constructedness of the photographic process.

Significantly an additive process, which obscures the image, resonates very differently to a subtractive process, where the image is scraped away. These slight differences in process constitute different psychological intentions on the part of the enactor, as well as different emotional response in the viewer.

Acting on the photograph reasserts the artist's presence in photography, just like acting on the icon or vandalising an object reasserts the mark-maker's presence as a signifying subject. The marking of the invested photographic object strips some significance from the image and reinstates the power and agency of the actor. In the context of artistic practice, the investment in the photographic image that is endangered when the print is marred is reinvested into the photographic object itself, but as signifying the presence of the artist.

Steven Connor (2001, 8) interprets the agency attributed to the mark-maker as "represent[ing] the occasional, redemptive irruption into successive time of a folded-together, instantaneous time. It is precisely because of this power that the making of marks has been associated with the extension and distribution of power…" (Connor 2001, 8) The marking of the body to which Connor refers has many similarities with the marking of a photograph. The surface of the body, laden with meaning, is constantly reflected in our understanding of the surface of the photograph. Connor's theory that the surface of the body retains the traces of injury and time, and therefore acts as a mnemonic map, easily transfers to the photograph as well. With marking on the body Connor reasons that

> Whether it is an exhibition of a penalty or a redemption, marking is a making good, in which the exhibition of the mark is part of the equation. This is an equation that aims either to refuse or to reverse time. It borrows and transforms the skin's tendency to gather and retain the marks of injury and accident. It trammels up accident and change in representation. Marking is remarking. The marked skin allows the past and present to communicate, easily, running backwards and forwards. (Connor 2001, 7)

The photographic image already appears to collapse time, to grant the viewer access to the captured moment, like the marked body Connor describes. The photograph's tendency to age and be marred interferes with this process of conflation, but the re-marking of it allows a communication between a different past and present, not the past of the frozen moment, but the more bodily past of the object. The metaphor of the photograph as body enables Connor's theory to be mapped onto the object of the

photograph. Therefore, leaving a mark through acting on the photograph would be "borrowing and transforming" the photograph's natural tendency to mark: constituting a re-marking of, and remarking on, the object.

Connor reasons that there are two ways in which a bodily mark can be removed.

> One is through effacement, disfiguring of the disfiguring mark. Here the skin may be razed or cauterised. But the skin is a thing of time, which means that it can never suffer revocation, but only revision. Something will always remain of the first defacement and decision, the first excision of the body's immaculate autonomy. The other, subtler and less drastic way of removing a mark from the skin is to subject it to overwriting or extrapolation. The shaming 'A' which Hester Prynne is made to wear is never removed, but is transformed, by extension, extrapolation, variation. (Connor 2001, 4)

The 'removal' or reworking of the photographic image, in gestural terms, can be achieved through two processes: effacement and overwriting. Let us survey the kinds of additive and subtractive marking that have been applied to the photographic surface by various artists. To illustrate some of the processes, I use some of my own work; the works that started this process of investigation.

**Overwriting**

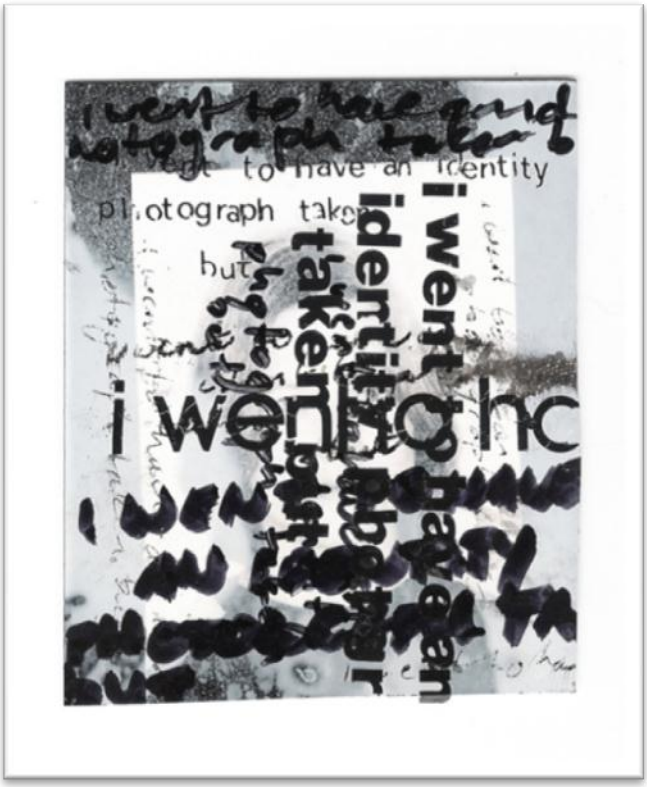

Figure 2 - Overwriting

Connor explains the overwriting of a mark by referencing Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic novel *The Scarlet Letter*. The novel explores concepts of labelling and reinvention through the tale of Hester Prynne, convicted of adultery, and forced to wear the mark of her shame publicly in the form of a red 'A' embroidered on her garments. The novel hinges on the instability of marking and symbols as always open to re-interpretation. Through the course of the novel Hester Prynne reinvents herself, demonstrated through the embellishment of the 'A', originally signifying adultery, until it becomes a thing of beauty, demonstrating skill rather than shame. The physical embellishment of the symbol in the novel echoes the emotional and societal reinvention that Prynne undergoes. The imagined elaboration of the original symbol shifts its meaning and exemplifies a manner of overwriting.

Overwriting however is not only the embellishment and reinvention of existing marks; it can also be an obscuring or concealing mark. Overwriting can be used to blot out the original, to remove it from view, but not from existence, as the original remains present, but hidden. The depth resultant from this covering or layering has often been theorised in painting, as seen in David Bunn's writings on the work of Penny Siopis, and functions in exactly the same way when the photographic surface is concealed. Shiff (1991, 3) explains this in relation to painting where he says: "Greenberg's opposition of old-master to modernist art parallels the critical distinction between 'transparency' and 'opacity.' The descriptive figure of transparency converts a painting surface into an immaterial plane (metaphorically, a window) that renders visible what appears to lie beyond it, a world of normative pictorial representation. In contrast, the figure of opacity suggests that a painting surface remains undeniably material, exhibiting its own detailed physicality" (Shiff 1991, 3)



Figure 3 - Racheal Anilyse - *Faith As Is* (2008)

Many distinct actions result in additive marks, each with its own set of assumptions, and each requiring a slightly different emotional engagement from both the artist and the viewer. Drawing is one form of additive mark-making that mostly takes the form of embellishment. This is illustrated in Figure 3 *Faith As Is* by Racheal Anilyse, in which the artist has reworked the photographic image with drawings in black and silver ink. Anylise works on the surface of her prints, often starting by doodling a familiar pattern or design, which she then builds into a final drawing. What defines a drawing is the structure that it implies. Even the loosest drawing is an intentional, considered intervention. Drawings on the photographic print can be made using pen, pencil, charcoal, inks, pastels or many other traditional and non traditional media. Drawing on the photograph embellishes or alters the content of the image, offering the artist an/the opportunity to change and reinvent the captured moment. Drawing, relying mainly on line work, creates interesting interplays between the concealing and revealing of the original photographic image. It also re-inserts 'traditional' art processes into the mechanical process of the photograph. Unlike painting, which is associated with final works of art, the associative qualities of drawing are those of the sketch, and preparatory work.

Painting, traditionally a privileged medium, transfers many of its loaded meanings to the photograph. Painting constitutes a literal covering of the surface or integument with another second skin, a more traditional artistic skin. The layering of the surface that takes place in traditional painting gains added significance when applied over the predetermined photographic image. It constitutes an obliteration of the image underneath in favour of the image imposed by the artist. The final product also carries with it the illusion of physical interiority assumed of paintings. The action of painting is structured and measured, like drawing an intentional alteration of the image.



Figure 4 - Painting on the Surface of the Print

The image above, Figure 4 - Painting on the Surface of the Print, illustrates elements of both painting and drawing on the surface of the photograph. The unaltered image is an identity photograph of me, reprinted on the same scale on a larger sheet of photographic paper. The portrait has been covered with paint, oil pastels and ink, but while the surface is almost entirely concealed, the materials have been used to re-create the face: a painting of a face over a photograph of a face. A portrait

photograph, especially an identity photograph, is assumed to have a very direct relationship with the subject. This assumption gives rise to the institutional practice of documentation and control surrounding the identity photograph that has been discussed earlier. A portrait painting on the other hand, while traditionally expected to bear a likeness to the subject, is understood to be far more expressive, gesturing toward the individual rather than being intrinsically tied to them. The worked photograph therefore gave me, as the artist as well as the subject, an opportunity to re-invent and re-imagine the 'self' presented in the identity photograph by recreating the likeness as a painting. However, this process manifests as an act of covering the original photograph. The recreating it enables is only possible through an obliteration of the photographic image. The action is therefore both creative and destructive, replacing one order of signification with another.

The planned and considered interference with the photographic image presented by painting can be contrasted to an action like scribbling which is loose and largely random. While scribbling uses similar media to that of drawing, the kind of mark left, as well as the intention of the mark is very different to that of drawing. Scribbling is much more closely associated with an attack; the action itself is more aggressive than the considered actions (no matter how loose) of painting and drawing, and the resulting mark is one that covers the surface of the photographic image in parts, but does not embellish it. It is additive in terms of surface and layers, but not in terms of altering or reinventing the original content of the photographic image.

Scribbling on a photograph is a violent action, obliterating parts of the image. Like drawing, scribbling leaves some of the image still visible and enforces a reading of the marks (both photographic and autographic) in relation to each other. While with drawing the photographic image is read as altered but embellished, with ornamental or fictitious details added, scribbling lends an iconoclastic air. When a photograph is scribbled on, the scribbling is something done to the contained space of the image. Both scribbling and drawing draw attention to the surface of the print in contrast to the imagined space of the photographic moment, but where drawing or painting can subvert the indexical value of the photographic image by creating an environment or adding details that are plainly the result of an artist's touch, scribbling utilises the indexical only as a point of attack. Scribbling sits on the surface, rather than becoming part of a new whole image, like drawing and painting. Even when it tears

the emulsion the action never breaches the metaphoric surface to penetrate the projected reality of the image. Scribbles are done to the photograph as object, rather than the photograph as image.

Another form of overwriting that can be applied to a photograph is the practice of doodling. Doodling refers to a reflexive action of marking often assumed to be subconscious, like the automatism attributed to surrealist artists. While doodling is not as violent as scribbling it also does not constitute the intentional, measured action of drawing. The action is usually associated with a lack of attention, when the mind is elsewhere and the hands are just playing. Doodles have received attention through analysis, including David Greenberg's *Presidential Doodles: Two Centuries of Scribbles, Scratches, Squiggles & Scrawls from the Oval Office*(2006) as well as in exhibitions, like Gregory Kerr's "Hidden Agendas - A Life in Meetings" which showed at the Gordart Gallery in 2006. The assumption underlying much of this interest is that the doodle reveals the internal state or psychological profile of the drawer. Doodles are made on scraps of paper, in margins, on serviettes or any other suitable surface that is at hand but crucially these surfaces are not usually considered to be significant, and tend to be disposable. When the photograph becomes a surface for doodling on, its significance has been stripped away. Drawing or painting augments the preciousness of the photographic image, and scribbling affirms it through resistance, but with doodling neither reverence nor aggression toward the photograph is evident. For one to doodle on the photograph, the object as well as the image has to be unimportant, an insignificant surface for the hands to mark while the mind is elsewhere. The photographic image, usually so loaded, is rendered impotent.



Figure 5 - Drawing and Doodling

The identity photograph above, Figure 5 - Drawing and Doodling, could be an example of doodling, which has then been extended to form the base of a simple drawing. I absentmindedly drew on the image while watching television. The flower pattern border is one that adorns many of my notes, textbooks and scraps of paper and very little thought goes into it, as it is something that has been drawn so often that it has become habitual. The felt tipped pen that was used smudged heavily on the glossy photographic paper which was not of concern at all in the making of the careless doodle.



Figure 6 - Pierre-Louis Pierson *The Queen of Hearts* 1861–63 - Salted paper print overpainted with gouache by Aquilin Schad

When I returned to the image later, I was struck by the similarity to early hand coloured photographs, like Figure 5: Pierre-Louis Pierson's *The Queen of Hearts* (c 1861), which often sported intricate decorative borders. Using a finer pen and a scalpel I re-worked the doodle, attempting to add detail and convert it into a considered drawing. With the pen this was however nearly impossible. The familiarity of the shapes and lines which I doodled was such that my hand would fall into retracing those lines as if dictated by muscle memory. In contrast, when using the scalpel to remove the outer layer of emulsion and expose the white paper, I found myself estranged from the pattern. As the scraping process is unfamiliar it requires more physical control and concentration, and the naturalised, comfortable, marks of the doodle are lost. Drawing, painting, scribbling and doodling all qualify as gestural marks in the traditional use of the term as referring to a privileged artistic signifier. However, overwriting in this context can also be resultant from other forms of additive marking or covering of the surface not associated with gesture in that sense. These other additive processes remain autographic, like drawing and painting, since they depend on the mark-maker's direct presence and action. These actions loosely fit the description of covering processes. Covering actions include dripping, coating, dipping, wrapping and pasting.

Dripping, coating and dipping constitute a deliberate obliteration of the photographic surface through indiscriminate covering. While dripping has associations with painting, specifically action painting and the gestural mark, those have been examined as forms of painterly marks, and are not included in this analysis. Dripping onto the photographic surface is an extremely visceral act, and the conceptual relationship with bodily fluids lends it an abject tone. Dripping, dipping and coating create a layer over the image, adding physical depth to the object while blotting the image out. When the photograph is dipped into, or coated with a substance that will harden, it forms a second skin with all the associated implications of protection, interiority and fragility. Different substances applied to the surface of the print also read in different ways. For example, a photograph that is coated in wax - where the wax itself is a fragile second skin which is easy to chip off, and soft enough to invite inscription - is significantly different to a photograph encased in resin. Connor reasons that

> the hard is that which resists the hand, forcing it to cramp and concentrate its movements. The warm and the soft - wax, clay - are a kind of reciprocal, emollient flesh, which soften the hand and finger. When wax or clay dries, it seems to form a scar or cicatrice, which seals in the meaning, as though a skin had formed over it, protecting it from degradation and change. It is the body which writes, and in writing, discovers, or bestows a skin wherever in the world it writes. (Connor 2001, 6)

Wrapping the photograph also adds a second skin, shifting the surface of the photograph to the interior, and substituting it with a secondary surface. Wrapping is a protective act; valuables are wrapped to keep them safe, and wounds are wrapped to ensure that they remain clean. But gifts are also wrapped, and only in part for protection. Wrapping both shelters and hides. The interiority implied by wrapping is not that of a thing that is part of its surface; it is something that can be unwrapped, revealed. Wrapping necessarily contains within itself the potential to become undone when its purpose is fulfilled.

The final additive mark I will discuss is pasting over the surface of the photographic print. Pasting is covering the surface by permanently adhering to another surface, with its own set of meanings and associations, onto the already loaded photographic surface. Pasting is one of the techniques used in collage, a medium deeply entrenched in photography through its extensive use by the surrealists in their attempts to express the workings of the subconscious through fantastic imagery and

incongruous juxtaposition of subject matter. Pasting emphasises juxtapositioning, not only of the subject matter of the images, but also the textures and significances of the surfaces themselves.

**Penetrative Marks**



Figure 7 - Penetrative Marking

Gestural marking of the surface is not confined to overwriting or additive marking; it can also take the shape of penetrative or subtractive marks. Penetrative marking would include processes like cutting, scraping or tearing. The penetrative mark alters the surface through disruption or destruction rather than addition. While the additive mark creates depth through layering, the subtractive mark reveals the interiority of the flat surface itself. Richard Shiff explains this where he states that

> Cuts, tears and the like, which characterise materials by altering them, define and retain a localised physicality (the character of the cut indicates qualities of a given material)… They call attention to themselves, the action that generated them, and the physicality of the material they transform. (Shiff 1991, 158)

In “The Law of Marks” Connor (2001, 6) describes cutting as the “the agonistic submission of the less hard to the hard, the erring body to the obdurate law”. For Connor the marking of a surface, even with additive marks, depends on the yielding

of the surface to the implement of mark-making. This surrender to the imposing implement regardless of the surface or medium echoes the inscription of the body. “The incising of solemn marks always has this symbolic reference to the body, the integrity of which is first violated, and then restored in a new form, that pretends to be original. ‘Nothing can be sole or whole / That has not been rent’, as Yeasts’ Crazy Jane declares.” (Connor 2001, 6) Connor considers an additive mark to be necessarily penetrative, as the surface submits to the imposition of the mark. Incisions into the body specifically leads to this doubled mark, as the flesh is penetrated but healing converts the cut into a scar, which sits neither on the surface as an additive mark, nor remains open as a subtractive mark. Penetrating into the surface of the photographic print, however, remains a subtractive, intrusive act. The print does not heal, and the mark remains, often even increasing in scale over time.

Penetrative marking redoubles the surface, breaking the smooth exterior to reveal new edges, and added depth through the rending of the very flatness it emphasises. Like the marking of the body, penetrative marking on the photographic surface creates new liminal zones, where the flatness of the surface is fractured. Piercing the surface of the print startlingly reveals the ontological or abstract flatness of the object, jarring against the implied depth of the photographic image.

Of all the forms of mark-making, penetrative or subtractive marks are also most closely associated with violence. The rending of images, specifically ones as charged as the photograph, is conceptually disturbingly close to that action against a body. The opening or wounding of a body results in an abject spectacle. Seltzer theorises this spectacle in terms of ‘wound culture’.

> The convening of the public around scenes of violence - the rushing to the scene of the accident, the milling around the point of impact - has come to make up a wound culture: the public fascination with torn and opened bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound. (Seltzer 1997, 3)

Wounding of an image or icon encourages similar reactions of revulsion and attraction. Scratching, cutting, tearing and other forms of subtractive actions are often presented as resulting from a pathological drive in the maker. In cultural imagination the penetrative mark on the photographic surface is used to indicate psychological instability and violence, a technique used in many horror and thriller

films, where the murderer or stalker is shown compulsively collecting and damaging photographs. For example, in the film *One Hour Photo* directed by Mark Romanek (2002), Robin Williams plays Seymour 'Sy' Parrish, a lonely man who develops photos in a department store. In the film Parrish becomes fixated with the lives of a young family, one of his biggest clients, who appear to represent everything he desires. Through the photographs they bring in Parrish traces their lives, collecting duplicates into a large wall collage in his home. When Parish later discovers that the family is flawed, he attacks the photos and begins editing out the husband through cutting and scribbling. This constitutes a systematic removal of what he considers the flaw from his idealised imagined family, and foreshadows the violence which is to come.

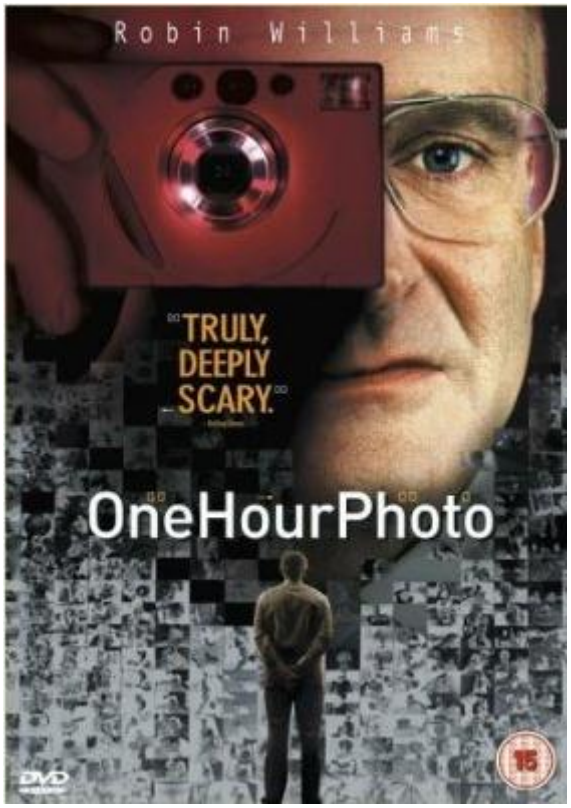


Figure 8 - Publicity Poster for *One Hour Photo* (2002)

Because of its close conceptual relationship to the self and the body the rending of the photographic surface is a deeply transgressive act. The compulsion that so often accompanies this act can be related to the repetition of a trauma, constantly re-wounding the image, the prosthesis for the self. "One discovers again and again the excitations in the opening of private and bodily and psychic interiors: the exhibition

and witnessing, the endlessly reproducible display, of wounded bodies and wounded minds in public." (Seltzer 1997, 3)

Like additive marking, subtractive or penetrative marking also has several distinct manifestations. The actions resulting in penetrative marks also each carry their own set of assumptions and meanings. These actions include cutting, piercing, scratching, tearing and peeling. The most directly violent of these penetrative actions on the photograph is piercing. Piercing is associated with points of impact, holes or punctures, with intensity and severity: weapons pierce the flesh. Piercing also implies some measure of depth, for it is surfaces that are pierced, revealing the protected interior. When a photograph is pierced, the interior that it reveals consists only of the ruptured surface itself, emphasising the flatness of the paper.



Figure 9 - Piercing the Surface of the Photographic Print

Figure 9 - Piercing the Surface of the Photographic Print, shows two differently pierced photographs. In the photograph on the right the surface area of the face is filled with pins, each pin prick leaving a hole in the paper, rupturing the smooth glossy surface and creating new edges that connect the doubled surface of the print object. The pins have been left in the photograph, their heads creating an illusionary silver surface above the face, and their length adding depth to the altered object as a whole. The pins obsessively and repetitively stuck into the face of the photographed subject are reminiscent of many myths and superstitions: some inspired by actual cultural artefacts including the so-called nail fetishes of the Congo basin (Figure 10

below), and others founded in the realms of popular imagination, like voodoo dolls (Figure 11 below) and European witchcraft. For example in the 1996 film, *The Craft* directed by Andrew Fleming, the young witches practice sympathetic magic by wrapping, piercing and burning objects related to their victims, and emphasis is notably placed on the manipulation of and attacks on photographs. The actions of piercing a likeness or symbol of a human figure are assumed to have power, and when applied to a photograph this assumption is augmented by its indexical nature. The slippage between symbol and referent that occurs in photography renders this kind of action profoundly disturbing.

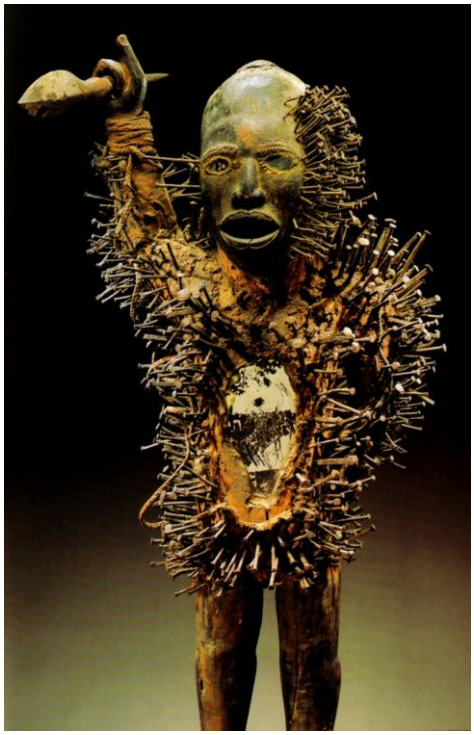



Figure 10 – (Left) Sculpture covered with nails. Nkonde Lower Zaire. Yombe, Wood, nails, wooden spear and fabric.
Figure 11 – (Right) Contemporary Voodoo Doll

In Figure 9, the photograph on the left also plays on these conventions of myth and magic in terms of the projection of reality onto the photograph. In this instance the action, or attack, is focused on the eyes, nose and mouth of the portrait rather than the face as a whole. As in the previous photograph the surface is pierced and the piercing filled with a material moving through the object, accentuating its conceptual flatness as well as adding tactile three-dimensionality. The sewing up of the facial features suggests a blinding and a silencing of the subject, closing the orifices and

thereby sealing the liminal passages of entry into the surface of the body. Paradoxically, while in the imagination of the photographic image the cavities in the surface of the body are sealed, sewn shut, in the object of the photographic print, the surface is disrupted and penetrated. The stitching onto the surface of the photograph recreates liminal zones that are sealed in the projected image.

The next penetrative action I will discuss is cutting into the surface of the photograph. Cuts, whether created by scissors or knives imply a considered action much like that of painting or drawing. While cutting can be aggressive and random, in the imagination it is surgical, the result of a blade wielded with precision. A cut slices through the surface, again creating new edges but, unlike those created by piercing, the cut edge is not contained within the image. Cutting separates the surface of the photograph from itself. Areas are selected, designated as significant by their separation from the rest of the image through a new, imposed border. Cutting a photograph is a form of editing the image, removing elements completely or merely leaving gashes in the surface. Like all penetrative marks, cutting is associated with wounding and injury, but it also has other bodily associations. Cutting can purge: cancer is cut from the body, removed to maintain bodily integrity. Cutting can be cosmetic: hair and nails, those abject peripheries to the body, are preened and pruned, cut and discarded. Similarly photographs are cut to create new meanings, reframing, and cropping the object rather than the image as can be done when taking or printing a photograph. Photographs can also be cut to purge: old lovers removed from the photograph symbolically re-constituting the memory that the image represents without that person.

Closely related to cutting in many ways is tearing. Cutting and tearing both create new edges through separating the surface from itself. Both can be used to remove elements from the image, or simply to fracture the unified surface. Tearing, however, has vastly different conceptual associations. While cutting is imagined as precise and considered, tearing is assumed to be random and impulsive. A tear is difficult to control, and leaves ragged scars rather than the clean edge of a cut. To tear an image is an engaging action as it is more physical and hands-on, than cutting, which requires a tool. Tearing is a very violent action: it rends and pulls apart by force, as briefly explored by Steven Connor in his essay “Flat Life” (2001). Photographs are most commonly torn when they are to be discarded, first symbolically destroyed by

the division and disruption of the image accompanied by a satisfying tactile and auditory rip before they are thrown away.

Another possible subtractive mark that can be made on the surface of the photographic print is a scratch. Scratching a photograph refers to an action which results in damage to the emulsion of the print. Scratching has violent associations, and is reminiscent of nails and claws, and associated with damage to the surface of the body. Photographs are prone to surface damage, and are obsessively guarded against scratching through protective displays. Despite these aggressive overtones different actions can scratch photographs to various effects. Photographs can be drawn, scribbled, or doodled on through scratching the emulsion off the print, revealing the white base paper. Marking the photograph in this way is unlike the same type of mark applied through use of a pen or pencil. Where the results may be similar, the additive vs. the subtractive processes is very different. Scratching also mimics a natural occurrence, the accidental scratching of the surface of the photograph through age and wear. In this way it can also be related to forms of encouraged decay that are discussed later in the chapter.



Figure 12 - Scratching the Surface of the Photograph

The last form of penetrative mark that I will discuss is peeling. Peeling implies interiority, a layering of surfaces to create depth. The word itself is very much associated with the organic: fruit and vegetables are peeled, bark peels, and skin peels, although applied layers like paint also peel. The core action of peeling can be extended to include the concepts of skinning and flaying as well. Peeling is an action that strips off the protective surface to reveal what is inside. When something is peeled two distinct, separated objects are left, the exposed interior of the peeled object, and the peels themselves, strips or pieces: the surface having become an object. When a photograph is peeled, the two layers of the photographic print are forcibly separated: the emulsion torn off the paper. However, as a defining characteristic of the photograph is its flatness, the exposed interior of the photographic print manifests as a flat surface in itself. The photograph is fragmented into two peels, the paper and the emulsion.

Most of the mark-making processes that have been discussed here tend to overlap. For example, drawing with ink or through scratching both rely on the same conscious actions, yet are different in their relationship to the surface. While these similarities and differences may make the divisions I have constructed between actions appear inconsistent, I have needed to make distinctions in blurry subject matter in order to engage with it meaningfully. Processes have therefore been grouped in terms of their conceptual relationships with the surface of the photographic print. Figure 7 demonstrates this overlap occurring between a number of penetrative marks. The photograph, another re-print of the original identity photograph of me that sparked this research, has been scratched, cut, and had strips peeled off repeatedly with a blade. The markings left on the photograph are excessive and aggressive, with the original image being nearly indistinguishable. All three processes used on this print are aggressive and deconstructive: it has been damaged, fractured and stripped, and very little remains intact. This is accentuated by the repetitive, obsessive quality of the marking process.

**Decay – Exposure**



Figure 13 - Decay

As I have already suggested, the physicality of mark-making is linked to the concept of the autographic mark, and we have divided these marks into two broad categories: marks resulting from direct human action leading to the decay of the object, and marks ensuing from gestural traces made on the object.

If, as Barthes suggests, the photograph represents the death of the moment it was taken, what happens when it itself decays? The decay of a photograph over time, or due to outside influences, implying its inevitable destruction can be cast as a 'loss', or the 'death of', the photographic print as the preserver of a moment which is itself already lost. Seen in this light the decaying photograph represents a doubly articulated loss: the loss of the moment and the loss of our attempt to preserve the moment.

This decay does not however need to be natural; the processes of decay can be encouraged or enacted, forcing an 'unnatural' or pre-emptive loss of the object.

Purposely enacted decay may be initiated by actions like burning, blistering, and crumpling the print. While the autographic mark is not as evident in these processes as it would be in gestural marks – for example the privileged painterly mark – the presence and physical action of the intervener still leaves a trace on the object.

Purposeful decay articulates the tension between the desire for preservation inherent in the photographic process and the inevitable decay and eventual loss of the photograph as object. Even the natural decaying of the photograph uneasily shifts the viewer's understanding of it as a defence against loss, to that of an object that can in itself be lost. Purposeful decay of the photographic print therefore consciously echoes and articulates the loss of the moment that links photography and death. The decay of the photographic print not only causes the loss of the object, but also signifies an existing loss: the loss of the original moment. As John Tagg points out: "There is another irony to add to this. As a memorial of the past, the photograph is fragile and fleeting". (Tagg 1995, 298)

While the photographic process, and the conventional practices associated with the photographic print, strive to maintain the integrity of the photographic print and protect it from decay, the fading and corrosion of the image is accepted as inevitable. This acceptance of the degradation of the image over time is displayed in the nostalgic affection for old photographs. These photographs open 'windows' to long lost moments and places, conveying that sense of immortality that is desired from the photograph. The doubled trace of time resultant from the decay of the photographic object reinforces this nostalgia, and has become part of the popular aesthetic signifying memory. Susan Sontag expresses this where she states that "photographs, when they get scrofulous, tarnished, stained, cracked, faded still look good; do often look better." (Sontag 1977, 79)

The decay of the photograph is an inevitable and natural process. Although this physical process can be slowed down - through various precautions such as using only archive quality paper, or storing in a cool, dark, dry place - and existing damage can to some extent be restored, the entropy can never be truly halted. Each photograph therefore contains within itself the potential, or rather the inevitability, of this doubled loss: the death of the moment 'preserved' in the photographic representation, as well as the death of the representation itself as a physical object.

Although it can be argued that the ‘eternal’ quality of the photograph is due to its reproducibility, which allows it to be continually renewed, each generation of reproduction, if contained within the traditional, non-digital, photographic medium, becomes further removed from the original. This is the case not only when images are re-photographed, but even when the photographs are reprinted from the original negative, as the negative is a temporal object in itself, also subject to the ravages of time. This has the result of a loss of quality, also a differentiation – however slight – between photographs, necessitating each to be treated as individual specimens, distinct objects, every one of which will eventually decay. This concept of reproducibility and loss can perhaps be most concisely described with reference to its articulation in terms of the analogue versus digital divide. The analogue reproduction of a message, be it image or sound, is reproduction from a physical medium to another physical medium. Each analogue reproduction therefore is subjected to the ‘noise’, or unintentional information, generated by the physical process as well as the ageing of the physical original. Digital information is assumed to be infinitely reproducible as the original stored coded information does not alter through age, and can be perfectly copied as code alone without incurring any of the drawbacks of physicality. Traditional photography is an analogue process. While early theorists like Benjamin rightly considered the levels of reproducibility it offers unprecedented, it does not constitute exact reproduction. Each image produced from the same negative, or re-photographed and printed again, is exposed to more noise within the system, and corrupts, degrades, or even decays further.

If the photographic image is read as existing in an enclosed reality all of its own, frozen forever, the process of accelerating decay on the object of the photograph mirrors what happens in the world, and re-inserts the photographic image into lived experience. This process renders the passage of time as well as the object-ness of the photo in the world, visible on the actual surface of the print. The surface forms the dual space between the image and the object, therefore enacting decay forces the viewer to see the ‘frozen’ moment through a literal veil of time, distancing them from the recorded moment and re-enforcing the sense of loss.

When processes of decay are enacted on a photographic image the echo, repetition, or acceleration of the natural decay of a photograph stresses the doubled loss embodied by the photograph. The encouragement of decay on the photographic surface constitutes an attack on the notion of the photograph as a preserved moment. It is the damaging de(con)struction of the timelessness assumed of

photography, and the loss of the memory photography is assumed to preserve. The power of this strategy has allowed this process of enacted decay to find its way into the production of artists and photographers. The range of examples stretches from the most basic desire for making a photograph 'look' old, including techniques like the sepia tint or printing through glass mimicking scratched and old negatives, to works where the artist purposely encourages physical decay on the photographic print, for example Julia Tiffin's "Beauty and Decay" (1996), which I examine in the following chapter.

In enacting decay, artists, iconoclasts, vandals, and artists have several methods available to them. Not all actions that decay the print are the same, nor do they have the same symbolic significance. The actor's choice in the type of decaying marks that are made is integral to understanding the purpose of the action. The first distinction that can be made between different decaying marks is again that between additive and subtractive mark-making. Some forms of decay add patina, which obscures, and covers the image. Others degrade the surface, erode it, create blisters and eruptions or even completely destroy it.

The natural marks of continual use on a photograph can be easily imitated. Actions that give these effects include crumpling, the making of dog-ears, staining, folding, abrasion, delaminating, fraying, discoloration, and fading. The cause of decay that these actions imitate can also be varied. Some may be related to an excess of affection, like the discoloration and fading of a photograph too long on display, or the dog earring and fraying of one carried in a wallet, which has been taken out often and examined. Other signs of use could relate to images that are not, or are no longer, important: for example the crumpling of a photograph, which, like the crumpling of a piece of paper, is a physical action expressing a loss of significance. An old letter may be crumpled up and thrown away when it is no longer wanted; this implies a disregard for, or disinterest in, the object. If the same letter was burnt, for example, the act of burning would re-invest significance into the object as worthy of complete ritual destruction. Crumpling a piece of paper, or a photograph, shows only a decision, physically manifested, that it is no longer important.

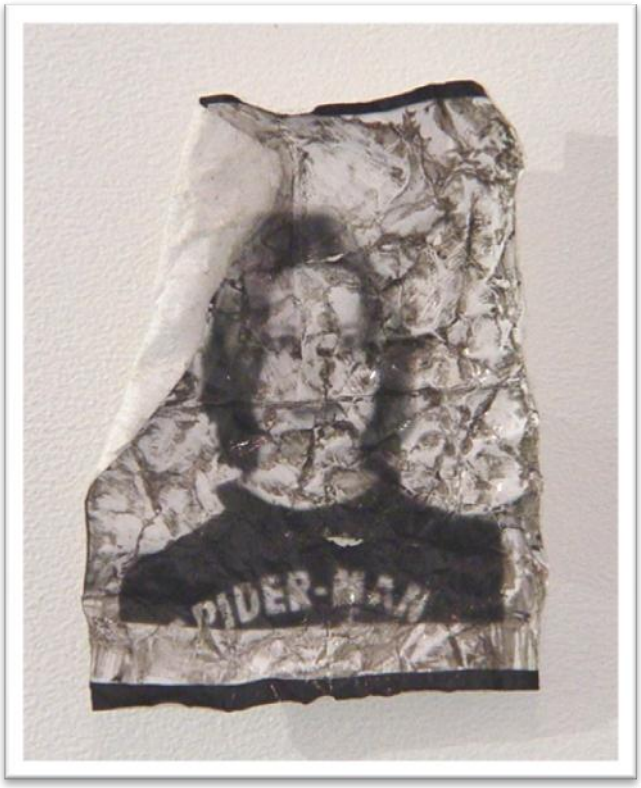

Figure 14 - A crumpled photograph

The photograph shown above, Figure 1414, is one that has been crumpled. The original interference on the surface was with brush and ink. When the ink ran smudging over the image, I crumpled it in frustration and discarded it only to rediscover it later. The ink has covered the image unevenly, obscuring some areas while leaving others vague but visible. As it was still wet when it was crumpled, the ink has also settled in the grooves and folds, accentuating the creased effect. In some areas of the photograph, the emulsion was softened by the liquid and began to lift, peeling away at the tops of the folds. The general effect is one of neglect and disinvestment in the object. The image is only re-invested with significance as a result of my decision to salvage and show it in its current state.

Other forms of decay stemming from signs of use are those actions that leave human traces on the photographic print. Fingerprinting, the primal mark of unique identification, is a constant threat to photographs. The smooth glossy surface is easily marked by the oils in our hands, and everyone who handled a photograph as a child will remember being told ‘not to touch’, and only to pick it up by its edges. Photographs of a loved one may be kissed, leaving the imprint of the lips in minute

traces of moisture that will eventually accumulate, stain and slowly destroy the beloved image

Anyone who has ever stored photographs by piling them in a box or a drawer will know how the photographs begin to stick together if they are left undisturbed for long enough. This may be due to the storage space being exposed to atmospheric moisture or heat, causing the emulsion to degrade, and melt into the surface it is in contact with. Photographs stored in these conditions often begin to accrue mould. Every care is taken in current photographic processes to avoid moulding, including treating commercial photographic paper with anti-moulding agents, and this makes the deliberate moulding of a photograph challenging and time consuming.

Figure 15 below shows an identity photograph in which moulding was induced. The difficulties posed by the anti-moulding agents were eventually overcome through the use of a layer of flour and yogurt paste to serve as base for spore growth.



Figure 15 - Mould

Mould growth on the surface of the print obscures the image, alluding physically to the ‘veil of time’ separating the photographic moment from the present. While many other methods conceal the image beneath opaque layers, mould is differentiated by

the fact that it refers strongly to a ‘natural’ process of decay. Mould is not only visual, it is tactile and olfactory as well. Mould is related to the abject, to ‘matter out of place’, recalling in the viewer visceral images of food and rot. Mimicking this process on the photographic print, although it has very powerful associations, is mostly passive. The actor may choose to recreate a site that is optimal for natural moulding, dip the print in foodstuffs to encourage bacterial and fungal growth, or even place the print in an incubator environment, but in every case they would have to wait. While the initialisation of the process may result from human action and interference, it remains largely outside of the actor’s control.

The overwhelming symbolic significance attached to the photograph encourages ritualised treatment of the print. This ritualistic element can be identified in many of the approaches to the photographic print that have been, or will be, discussed: framing, filing, burning, etc. But this ritualistic treatment can also extend to re-creating human bodily ritual on the prosthetic body of the photograph. One such an example is the burial of the photographic object. The act of burial is tied in cultural imagination to death, loss, mourning, and closure. The grave site is used in narrative to signify all of these concepts, even though many different funerary methods exist. When a photograph is buried, with all of the associations of memory and body that it carries, the act is deeply symbolic. Burial is also firstly also an attack on the surface, with soil caking over the image until it is completely concealed. With time the photograph will decompose, starting from the paper side and later spreading to the emulsion carrying the image. Digging the photograph up and exhuming the remnants of the image, which was done with the photograph shown below ( ), has voyeuristic connotations - a need to see ‘what has been done’, like the revisiting of a corpse.



Figure 16 - A photograph that has been buried

Related in the imagination to burial, but considerably different in its effect, is burning. Closely related to notions of cleansing and ritual, the attractiveness of the act itself can be satisfying. Fire is awe-inspiring in its untameable beauty and danger and as such has always held a fascination. Fire also destroys completely: the fine ashes it leaves behind bear no resemblance to the original object and are easily scattered or caught by the wind and lost. In periods of social change many icons are destroyed by fire, notably during the Russian Revolution (1915-1917) religious icons were burnt in public bonfires throughout the country. . Photographic prints are made of paper, and paper is particularly susceptible to fire. But even with fire the usually fragile emulsion is resistant to decay. When exposed to intense heat the emulsion of the print will begin to separate from the paper, bubbling and blistering off. As the print cools these blisters will crack, and the emulsion will begin to chip. Exposure to an open flame has a different effect however; the paper side of the print is more vulnerable, catching fire first, with the emulsion side beginning to shrivel and contract. When the emulsion itself catches alight the effect is almost explosive, with the flame engulfing the print. The process of burning is difficult to control, with the fire able to run away at any time. Burning to mark and not to destroy is unpredictable and requires conscious effort; therefore the narrative convention of finding a half-

burnt photograph among the ashes, while symbolic, is highly unlikely. Exposing a photographic print to a controlled flame leaves marks additional to the blistered, discoloured and burnt surface. A thick patina of carbon begins to deposit on the surface, it is powdery and can easily be flaked off, but the dirty, charcoaled effect will remain.



Figure 17 - A Burnt Photograph

7 above shows an identity photograph that has been exposed to an open flame and allowed to burn slightly from the bottom left edge. The print shows clearly how the emulsion contracts, pulling away from the edges of the paper and bending the print. It then begins to blister and bubble, but the moment the direct heat is removed these emulsion bubbles hardens and burst, revealing the paper below.

Water also cleanses and purifies. Long running water erodes, but conceptually water is generally considered to be almost the opposite of fire: benign, controllable, life giving. Yet for photography water is a both a necessity and deadly enemy. Photographic printing involves a ‘dry’ process and a ‘wet’ process, which can’t spill over or the print will be damaged. The last step in the traditional photographic printing process is the rinse, where the chemicals are removed from the paper by soaking it in running water. The water cleans the paper: if it is not properly rinsed

chemical stains from the printing process may be left. The print is removed from the rinse and dried, giving the emulsion opportunity to harden. This is the stage in the printing process where the surface of the print is most vulnerable. The emulsion carrying the image has just been through chemical change, revealed through a process of chemical soaking. It is softened and very susceptible to damage from scratching and dust. But it is also vulnerable to the process of drying itself through water stains, marks left in the emulsion by uneven drying and hardening. Once the print is dry any drop of moisture that the emulsion is exposed to will disrupt the smooth glossy surface leaving a water stain.

Water can also have more destructive effects on the print. Leaving a photographic print entirely immersed in water for extended periods washes away the emulsion. The image is seamlessly removed, leaving only glossy but clear paper behind. If the print is left in the water even longer the paper itself begins to disintegrate and come apart. The paper can, of course, be removed from the water at any time in the process, making the effect much easier to control than the effects of burning (which may run away) or burial (which is not possible to observe and monitor). The print shown below was left in water for some time, softening and lifting the emulsion in places. The softening effects of water on the emulsion also makes the print particularly susceptible to scratching, however, the scratches only remove the emulsion and do not etch into the paper below.



Figure 18 - The effects of water on the photographic print

As previously alluded to, the photographic chemicals themselves can also leave marks on the print. This is an effect that the process of photographic printing is designed to avoid, not only because it mars the final image, but also because chemical stains indicate a flawed process, which means that the emulsion may still be slightly light sensitive and that the photograph will degrade. Acting on the print with the manipulation of the chemical elements of the printing process is not the same as manipulating the image itself in the darkroom. Working on the negative, techniques of over printing or layering do not affect the surface of the print, but the image itself. The chemical development of the photograph however does not directly affect the image, but the object. While the image can be over or under developed, affecting the contrast and darkness, chemical staining happens after the latent image has already been revealed, in the fixing and rinsing stages of the process. The action of chemical staining is one that happens before the photograph enters the public realm, at a stage in the production where the photographic object is assumed to be vulnerable and private, viewable only by the printer. The action of damaging the photograph by sabotage of the process specifically designed to make it stable reveals the transience and fragility of the photographic object.

Another chemical reaction that decays the stable object is the action of chemical burning. Strong acids and alkalis corrode the photograph, burning and blistering the surface. When exposed to a corrosive chemical the emulsion bubbles and foams, and if then rinsed comes away cleanly as it would with prolonged exposure to water. Should the corrosive substance be left on the print for longer periods the paper itself would begin to disintegrate. If weaker chemicals are used or the exposure is limited, the print may come away with only a stain, similar to that caused by interference or negligence in the printing process. Corrosive chemical action is one of the more aggressive methods of encouraging decay as a form of marking the photographic object. The action on the print is much faster than water, mould or burial, and is much more comparable to the actions of fire and human touch. Acting on the chemical process in the darkroom on the other hand is a more staid and passive process. Corrosive chemicals also have a distinct bodily effect on the actor, like burning does, in that the process is dangerous and can be physically experienced by the actor as tactile, olfactory and visual.

In this chapter I have used samples of my own work to briefly illustrate the technical aspects of various interventions on the surface of the photographic print. These techniques are very seldom used alone, but the theoretical understandings gained

from examining each individually can be applied in analysis of complex works in this field, as will be shown in the following chapter.

## Chapter Five - Conclusion

"The order of marks is the order of identity, of immediate resemblance, in which everything can be the image of everything else, because everything can both make its mark and be made to bear the mark of everything else." (Connor 2001, 8)

The preceding chapter explored the reasons why the photograph is a powerful space for intervention and mark-making, and it looked at the implications of some of the various types of marks that can be made on the surface of the photographic print. The desire to mark or mar the surface of the photograph has been traced back to the practice of iconoclasm, an aggressive act disempowering the image and reinvesting the actor with agency. Acting on the surface of the print can however also be the result of a conscious, and considered, artistic intervention. In these cases the actor is invested with power not merely by the action itself, but also by the role of creator genius that is often still attributed to artists. When the charged space of the photograph is manipulated from within this doubled position of artist and iconoclast the symbolic implications of the kinds of actions performed become integral to the meaning of the work. While artists create in both the aggressive as well as the considered mode, the status of the final object as an 'artwork' places it in a position that demands systematic analysis and automatically implies intentionality.

This final chapter will consider the work of several artists, both international and South African, who have produced works in which interference with the surface of the photograph becomes a strategy. While this is used extensively, it is in most cases confined to isolated examples in an artist's body of work. Many of the artists selected for discussion work with installation rather than photography per se, and choose to use photographs only in relation to the themes they wish to address. Other artists work primarily with traditional photography and see this intervention as part of a process of exploration of the medium. Not all of the artworks selected for discussion necessarily fit the description of a physical interference on the surface of the print; these works are instead useful as a foil against which to test the theories outlined in this text.

One such artist is the internationally recognised Joel Peter Witkin. Witkin sets up elaborate and disturbing tableaus often depicting marginalised people in art

historically familiar settings and poses dealing with themes of death, sexuality and disability. He then manipulates the photographs during printing, either within the printing process, or through working on the negative itself. In his artworks the surface of the print has not been interfered with at all, but the works nonetheless offer a very useful comparison (with what?). Witkin's photography displays a fascination with the visceral and abject. His rich images of figures and bodies, often disfigured or mutilated, depict the 'other' in sensual terms, questioning our ideals of self, the natural, and of beauty. As Kathryn Smith points out, "'Othered' bodies are considered ob-scene – beyond the field of vision." (Smith 1999, 73) Witkin forces his viewers to confront the body of the marginalised in his imagery, echoing the fragmented 'broken' bodies of his subjects in the techniques used in printing.



Figure 19 - Joel Peter Witkin, "Leda", Los Angeles, 1986

These manipulated images, altered to "look made rather than taken" (*Fine Art Photography Gallery and Forum* n.d.), have an astoundingly tactile presence. The film itself is scratched on using pins and scalpels, paralleling the processes that have been described in relation to the photographic print, and the final photograph is further altered through darkroom printing techniques including printing through glass and liquids as well as the selective application of developer and fixer. The resultant

prints therefore mimic old, blistered and damaged photographs, but retain the integrity of the sealed unblemished surface.



Figure 20 - Joel Peter Witkin, "The Three Graces", New Mexico, 1988

As mentioned previously Witkin's work often reflects themes taken from historical paintings. In the image above Witkin sets up a tableau overtly referencing many canonised depictions of the Graces including Raphael's "The Three Graces" (c.1503-1504) and Rubens' "The Three Graces" (c.1636-39), but with telling differences. While in both the Raphael and the Rubens the female figures are turned slightly away and their eyes avoid the viewer's gaze, the Witkin Graces boldly face the spectator, turning their bodies and their eyes towards the fourth wall. The Graces are traditionally depicted as the pinnacle of feminine beauty and charm, displayed coyly to society's gaze. Witkin, however, applies this visual cliché and the associated expectations to a figure that is shunned and rendered invisible in society: the hermaphrodite. He manipulates traditional form, composition and subject matter to create a beautiful, edifying and seductive image from a physical form that is often treated as repulsive and unnatural according to societal norms. Yet the image remains unsettling in other ways too. The frank and challenging look directed at the viewer is exaggerated still further by the de-individualising masks and obscured head

of the leftmost figure. But it is the treatment of the photographic medium itself, the interference with the print, that is perhaps more unsettling in Witkin's work.

Witkin has used several techniques during printmaking to achieve the effects displayed on the image. Detailed descriptions of his working process are not available, but from the information that is obtainable the markings on the photograph appear to be the result of a combination of scratching on the negative and selective application of photographic chemicals. The markings on the feet of the left and central figure mimic blistering and peeling paint. These kinds of marks may be created through damaging the negative carefully with a small, sharp implement such as a pin, warping the film slightly and piercing it in places allowing light to spill through and create the little black dots. On the far right of the image a series of scratches are visible. These appear on the final print as white lines rather than black marks, since, when the film is pierced additional light is let through onto the print resulting in black dots or lines, if the negative is scratched, leaving the surface damaged but not broken, the slightly raised edges of the scratch obstruct light, producing white lines on the print. The final print also has a painterly quality about it, with loose brushstrokes visible towards the edges of the frame. This effect can be created by applying the photographic chemicals selectively with a brush. The final result is an image that does indeed look "made rather than taken". And that is precisely where the difference between this technique and an interference on the surface of the photograph lies.

Witkin's images look made. While the physical actions applied to the film and in the darkroom may be similar to those described in the previous chapter, the final images, while they may resemble each other closely, are fundamentally different. The artist produces a final print that is a coherent image and will not be altered subsequently. The manipulation and alteration take place before this stage, and therefore become part of an image that is necessarily separated from the viewer's expectations of the 'reality' of the photographic object. The image mimics painterly techniques, historical poses and familiar subject matter; it also challenges assumptions of photographic reality and studio photographic conventions, but while it subverts all of these elements, twisting them around themselves, it never challenges the integrity of the object itself. The photographic object remains intact, manipulated, but fully contained beneath the smooth surface. The taboo, the threat of the subject matter, is negotiated through the art historical references, just as the menace posed by the

manipulation of the photograph is contained by the unchallenged coherence of the surface.

Witkin's methods can be contrasted to those employed by artist Christopher Webster in his large-scale photographs. Webster was born in England in 1965, but spent his teens and early twenties living and studying in South Africa. As Webster himself explains, his work draws strongly on the Surrealist tradition:

> The work I make is an exploration of the mysterious inclinations and suggestions of the unconscious. I am interested in entropy and the dissipation of things over time. In these spaces the re-contextualised object becomes an evocative story-telling medium, an updated Grimm's fairytale, where the photograph/object as memento mori merges with the suggestion of other presences. Folk tales, childhood memories, a meeting with a Navaho shaman; political traumas, automatic writing, experiments with chemicals; spirit photographs, dream states, the encoded and multifaceted symbols of alchemy; all have been influential in the assemblage that makes up my work. (Webster 2006, np)



Figure 21 - Christopher Webster, "Insomnia", 2003

In recent work Webster uses both found and original photographic images which, after being subjected to careful selection, are printed, massively enlarged onto photographic paper, photo-linen, or even other surfaces like aluminium through a traditional darkroom process. Even in this phase the focus of his work remains tactile, as Webster refuses to use digital re-scaling and manipulation techniques. Once the final prints have been made, their surfaces are treated as canvases,

subjected to intense painting and drawing work, in a frenzied process he describes as harking back to surrealist automatic writing.

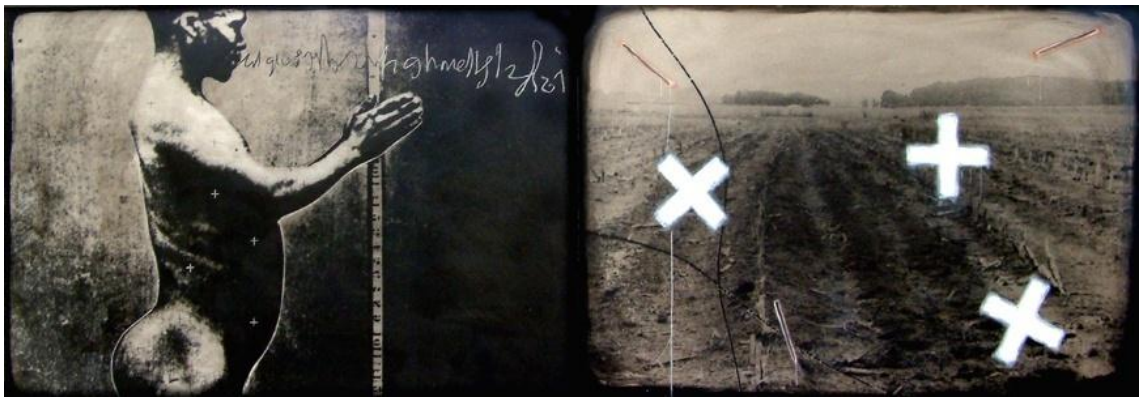

Figure 22 - Christopher Webster, “Glossolalia”, 2005

In the image “Glossolalia”, which formed part of his touring exhibition *Cipher* in 2005, Webster juxtaposes two photographs on a single canvas. In this instance both are found, archival photographs, which have been re-photographed and reproduced without digital manipulation. The image on the left appears to be a photograph of a Khoi-San man being subjected to anthropometric measurements, facing into the image, on the right that of a landscape with tilled fields stretching into the distance. The man’s hands are raised to shoulder height in front of his chest in a prayer-like position, with what appears to be a ruled line running through them to the bottom of the canvas. Both of these images are recognisable within a colonial context, and the juxtaposition of the man subjected to ethnographic scrutiny with the farmed land immediately begins to raise questions around dispossession and oppression. The combination of images used therefore becomes central in the creation of meaning in the work; however this is further developed by Webster’s subsequent actions on the surface.

Webster paints on the combined image, designating spaces and differentiating between areas on the surface of the photograph by his choice of mark. From the mouth of the man on the left side of the image flows a stream of “words”, marks made to look like writing, that through cartoon convention are used to suggest speech. But Webster tells us, literally when discussing the work, as well as in the title he gives the piece, that the marks are meaningless. “Glossolalia” is nonsensical speech, sounds that do not form part of a recognisable language. It is the gift of speaking in tongues, but it is also the babblings associated with certain forms of

schizophrenia. Webster's marking attempts to achieve the trancelike state of automatic writing, but the final nonsensical words also speak of other things. Khoi-San communities speak a variety of languages that are in the process of dying out. Webster places text that belongs to the order of marks rather than the order of writing on the photograph. The man in the photograph appears to speak, but the words are not his own. They are marks placed in his mouth, implied by the title to be the result of divine intervention, but they are incomprehensible, even to the artist.

The marks in lieu of speech are not the only marks Webster leaves on the surface of the photograph. He also marks the body and the landscape with a series of painted crosses or x's. Of course, what he is marking is the surface of the print, and the large white crosses on the right hand frame float loosely above the fourth wall. However the association with the marking of the land itself is very powerful. The fields that were the subject of the original photograph already bore the marks of human intervention, in the long rows of neatly tilled soil, but the marks that Webster imposes on them are something completely different. While they are again of the order of mark-making, they are not random, automatic or unconsidered. The form of the cross, or the x, is one that is established as a signifying sign with a predetermined set of meanings. On the land it is reminiscent of a child's imagining of a treasure map -x marking the spot - of some unknown object or event. On the body they uncomfortably echo crosshairs, or indicate possible incisions. In both frames these marks retain a sense of the forensic, marks made after the fact, mysterious indicators of unknown things.

Webster's work seeks to question the constructions of 'truth' that surround photographic imagery in general and is reinforced when the image is incorporated into an archive. Working on large-scale reproductions of the photographs, instead of the original found object, he emphasises one of the key assumptions regarding photographs: their reproducibility. This is however brought into sharp relief by the process of painting over the reproductions, as painting is often considered to be the quintessential medium of the un-reproducible original, fully dependant on the autographic mark of the artist. By painting on the surface Webster turns a reproduction into an original, and draws it from the frame of indexicality into the order of mark-making.

But painting on the surface of these supposed archival images also has implications other than the assertion of ownership and the autographic mark. Webster's stated

interest is in questioning the perceived 'truth' of the photographic image, but he does so through altering the image overtly through his painting and drawing processes, rather than through darkroom or digital manipulation that mimics the form of photography. The focus of the additions to the image is therefore shifted to juxtaposition and symbolism, rather than alteration. The images change context from photographic documents to painterly objects.

As has been previously pointed out, painting on a photograph constitutes a covering; concealing the image rather than destroying it. Painting is additive, and the choice is of what to reveal of the image while imbuing areas of the surface with the added significance of the painterly mark. In "Glossolalia" Webster marks the landscape on the right with a series of crosses, as if indicating places on a map, marking the surface of the print, but also marking the land itself. These are echoed by a series of small crosses on the body of the figure on the left, leading to a conceptual mapping of the landscape onto the body. Like Witkin's "The Three Graces", the image is riddled with lines that may be scratches in the original photograph, or may, more likely, have been added by Webster himself. These marks are aesthetically related to ageing and decaying photographs, and emphasise a symbolic veil of time, separating the viewer from the photographic instant and insisting that it be viewed through the mediation of the artist. Webster's work deliberately plays on the notion of the photograph as a bearer of memory and trace. His technique contrasts the 'real' with the constructed, the photo with the painting, constantly re-emphasising the indexical and the autographic.

In contrast to Webster, who displays his large images as paintings themselves, the French artist Annette Messager produces a series of works where she marks the photographic object, but displays a reproduction of the marked surface. Primarily an installation artist, Messager has on several occasions explored the use of photography, as well as marking the surfaces of the photographic prints to various effects. Like Webster, Messager's work displays an interest in the archival impulse, but where Webster raids an existent archive for imagery that can be juxtaposed and re-interpreted, Messager compulsively constructs archives and collections of her own. Instead of removing an image from the context of the archive opening it to external interpretation, Messager creates meaning through the act of collection itself.



Figure 23 - Annette Messager, installation view of “Children with Their Eyes Scratched Out (Les Enfants aux yeux rayés)”, 1971-72.

The images displayed in “Children with their Eyes Scratched Out” - one of the works most relevant to this body of research - were originally clipped from magazines and collected into a series of scrap books. Magazines, like newspapers, are culturally significant media for the distribution and reproduction of photographic imagery. The ubiquity of magazine photographs, which are inexpensive, low-quality reproductions, is such that these images are treated as consumables: viewed once and then

disposed of like the papers themselves. In contrast to the photographic object, which, in light of our past discussions has been portrayed as being an item of significance to be treasured, the photographs reproduced in the mass print media are intrinsically disposable. The act of collecting something which is disposable reinvests the collected object with some of the significance which was lost through the process of mass circulation.

Messager's work often appropriates imagery from popular culture, re-contextualising it through incorporation into a collection or archive. Any individual image's relation to the collection imbues it with meanings quite different from those it held in its original context, giving it a collective meaning more significant than that of a single clipping. When Messager subsequently acts upon the surface of these objects, the violence of the action is not trivialised by appearing to be merely the defacement of disposable media; it is instead weighted by the fact that the object belongs to the personalised collection.



Figure 24 - Annette Messager, Detail of "Children with Their Eyes Scratched Out (Les Enfants aux yeux rayés)", 1971-72.

In "Children with Their Eyes Scratched Out" Messager has used an additive process; choosing to cover the children's eyes with ink rather than scratch the paper, or cut them out as a way of removal. One of the reasons I would suggest for this is choice is that it reflects a childish impulse to draw onto the image. The haphazard, loose marks, intensifying towards the centre but allowed to loop over onto more of the image than only the children's eyes, are reminiscent of the marks made by a child

clumsily holding a pen in every way but one: the concentrated attention to the signifier of greatest vulnerability - the eyes. Iconoclastic actions often focus on the eyes as a point of entry to damaging not only the physical image itself, but also its psychological and political power. Jan Corbett argues that this may be due the assumption that the eyes “are essential to enculturation in a verbal visual culture” (Corbett 1996, 33) However, although the action Messager uses is violent, it is less severe than cutting or scraping would have been, as it merely obscures and does not physically destroy the object.

Messager has been known to exhibit these works in two ways, either as the actual scrapbook in which the clippings are collected, or as series of photographs of the pages of the book, presented by being hung on a wall. These two forms of display are distinct in meaning, as the one provides a private, tactile experience, allowing the viewer to engage with the works on a more personal level, whereas the second provides a more conventional, distanced exhibit, instilling the photographic reproductions with the notions of value that are conventionally associated with artwork. Corbett reflects on this difference as follows:

> The voyeuristic quality of Messager's books is lost when they are transferred to the museum wall. Unambiguous frames replace the ambiguous covers, unifying each image into a work which seems to exist on its own merit, related to like objects only by virtue of its subject matter and its juxtaposition in a symmetrical arrangement. Although the content of each image is violent and provocative, its exhibition robs viewers of the tactile process of discovery which is a part of opening the cover of a book, turning its pages, and discovering its secrets. By exhibiting only the contents of her books, Messager undermines the books' potential for performance, a comment on this possibility within traditional canons. (Corbett 1996, 36)

The viewers' understanding of the action on the surface is markedly different in the two display contexts. In the scrapbooks the clippings are visibly severed from their original context as magazine photographs with the cut edges exposed, as well as being physically overwritten and marked, enabling the viewer to gain a tactile sense of the immediacy of the object. When she photographs the pages of the books it restores the photographic integrity of the original prints, sealing away the iconoclastic action and sanitising the viewing experience within a familiar and conventional frame of reference.

> Photographs are traditionally accepted as documentary evidence, but Messager's use of this medium turns documentation against itself, revealing its artifice. By re-photographing photographs which make no claim to aesthetic value, or whose aesthetic value has been violently erased, and then exhibiting these reproductions of reproductions on the aesthetic spaces of museum walls, Messager critiques the aesthetization of documentation while

simultaneously documenting the aesthetic concepts of the human body which have dominated Western art. (Corbett 1996, 33)



Figure 25 - Annette Messager, "The Lines of the Hand (Les Lignes de la main)", 1988

This fascinating series is however not the only way in which Messager interacts physically with photographic surfaces. In two other works entitled “The Lines of the Hand” and “My Trophies” respectively, she approaches the marking of the photograph in a similar fashion to Webster. In these works Messager printed large photographic images of body parts, and then proceeded to draw and paint onto their surfaces, particularly emphasising themes of “whimsical figures, arcane symbols, and decorative marks” (Conkelton 1996) where the end product is reminiscent of medieval illumination. In these works Messager creates an accessible, tactile experience, without resealing the surface of the print and also without the aggressive or destructive overtones of the scribbling witnessed in “Children with Their Eyes Scratched Out”. These works demonstrate a considered and creative action, defined in the previous chapter as part of the painterly impulse. While both the scribbling and the painterly have been classified as additive and autographic marks, they convey considerably different sentiments.

The violence displayed in “Children with Their Eyes Scratched Out” is entirely replaced in these second examples by a fine and delicate mark making. In “Children with Their Eyes Scratched Out” the nature of the magazine clippings and the treatment of the surface both speak of the discarded and rejected, but conversely in “My Trophies” and “The Lines of the Hand” the large gelatine-silver prints, adorned with bright, colourful drawings become increasingly precious as objects. These works, like Webster’s “Glossolalia”, bear the autographic mark of the artist. The body parts used in these works, specifically the feet and hands of the samples selected, are all associated with proof of identity. The “lines of the hand” are inextricably linked to the fingerprints that differentiate us and the tradition of palmistry which is thought to tell the individual’s fortune based on the unique patterning. In these works Messager documents identifying features, presents them photographically, the medium of assumed visual truth, and then marks them by hand. This creates a doubling within the work, overlaying the identification of the documented body with the identification of the autographic mark.



Figure 26 – Annette Messager, “My Trophies (Mes Trophées)”, 1987

Messager’s body of work is very personal, with the focus often resting on her own experience of collection, identity and individuality. Due to their overtly iconoclastic

nature however, techniques of interference on the photographic surface lend themselves readily to a more politically involved practice as well.

One such work which alludes directly to political critique is Candice Breitz' "Ghost Series" 1994 – 96. Here Breitz also employs additive techniques, covering an original photographic image with 'white out' or correction fluid. Technically the correction fluid operates like acrylic paint would, with a similar consistency and final effect, however it dries much faster than paint, and is much more difficult to apply. As a medium in itself it also highly suggestive of its conventional application where it is used to blot out mistakes made in permanent materials like pen or typeface. As the marks these leave cannot be erased, correction fluid covers them, providing an additional, new surface that may be re-marked, and thus be imbued with new meaning.



Figure 27 - Candice Breitz, "Ghost Series", 1994-96

In "Ghost Series" Breitz appropriates photographic imagery from popular culture, like Messager did in "Children with their Eyes Scratched Out", but using South African postcards instead of clippings taken from magazines and newspapers. The postcard

as an object in itself is also subject to a host of predetermined assumptions. Postcards are intended to send messages to loved ones and acquaintances while the sender is away. These messages are public, as the postcard is not sealed and the text always remains visible. Conventionally they depict drawings or photographs of the area the sender is visiting, or of some peculiarity of that area, allowing the receiver a 'glimpse' of the experiences of the holidaymaker. These strangely non-personal items are often collected, either as received notes and letters, or even by the travellers themselves as mementoes of the trip. When Breitz therefore chooses to use images from postcards, rather than original photographs, it raises many questions around value, communication and commercialism. In addition, she does not work on the postcard itself, but re-photographs it before she begins to work on the surface, thereby extending the chain of reference: the surface she works on becomes that of a photograph of a mass-produced postcard photograph.

The images Breitz used in the "Ghost Series" depict black South African women in traditional dress, with a shallow depth of field blurring out the landscape in which they are set. Her selection of images in which the landscape is blurred is significant as this blurring indicates a break in the exact relationship between figure and land which often characterises ethnographic photography. The original postcards were highly posed portraits taken in an ethnographic tradition in which the significance of the figure is as an indicator of a group rather than an individual. Brian K Axel explores this element of the works:

> Breitz uses white-out to reconstruct the spectacle of racially marked gendered bodies on display in the ethnographic postcard, which would ordinarily circulate in a predominantly white tourist market. Covering up signs of race and gender, but not quite exactly, the 'Ghost Series' foregrounds and acknowledges the violence of whiting-out as a process at social and political levels. The 'Ghost Series' projects a violently non-totalised body, disrupting any possibility for the simple recognition and identification which the aesthetics of national belonging requires. (Axel 1998, np)

Within the turbulent political climate of mid-nineties South Africa, these works were seen as outrageously controversial because of the socio-politically loaded depiction of the black body. This controversy was extensively documented in the book *Grey Areas: Representation, Politics and Identity in Contemporary South African Art* (1999) which was co-edited by Brenda Atkinson and Candice Breitz herself. At the time of publication many debates were raging as to the depiction of the body of the 'other', identity and ethnicity in South African Art. One of the most heated discussions surrounded the works of Lien Botha, Candice Breitz, Pippa Skotnes,

Penny Siopis, and Minnette Vári, all of whom were targeted in an essay by Okwui Enwezor, entitled “Reframing the Black Subject: Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Art” (1999), as well as the documentary photography of Steve Hilton-Barber which depicted North Sotho initiation ceremonies. Many of the issues raised during these debates were considered by various essays published in *Grey Areas.*



Figure 28 - Steve Hilton-Barber, Untitled, 1990

Breitz deliberately stages her works within this debate, provocatively addressing the concerns raised by earlier works. Her use of the colour white specifically references notions of transitional states and liminal experience within many indigenous South African cultures, predominantly Xhosa and North Sotho. White is a colour expressly associated with initiation and spirit possession in both of these cultures. In 1990, only a few short years before, the work of Steve Hilton-Barber had incited furious debate surrounding race, custom and documentation. But this debate had been situated specifically around the male gendered ritual of circumcision and initiation. In contrast Breitz makes ghosts out of female figures, physically blotting out the photographic representation of race as well as gender. The ‘white out’ or correction fluid she chooses for this plays on the dualities of the meaning of ‘whiteness’ as a signifying colour in different cultures. Indicative of the spirit realm, transition and rites of passage, white is also a non-colour, the norm against which other concepts are staged, the subject position from which Western culture speaks. In South Africa, with its racially loaded history, it is inextricably linked with white skin, the colour of privilege.

In his analysis of the work, Brian Axel (1998) addresses the socio-political implications, whilst using the language of process and action. The choice of phrases such as “covering up” and “the violence of whiting-out” refers not only to the reading of the final meaning of the work, but also to the physical processes of production. While this link is implicitly assumed by Axel, the extent to which the process influences meaning in this work has not been fully explored. Attention focussed upon the artist’s subject position detracts from observations of the artist’s choice of medium and action. Her specific use of the re-photographed postcard as surface upon which the action is inflicted, using the correction fluid, explicitly harks back to the colonial violence witnessed in South Africa in previous decades. She plays upon the idea of enforcing homogeneity, covering up of the skin as signifier of the subject. This covering up, while not being penetrative, is also considered a violent application, as demonstrated by Axel’s analysis. It can be seen to represent a masking of the original context with the purpose of recreating and repositioning the subject.



Figure 29 - Candice Breitz, "Ghost Series", 1994-96

The use of correction fluid distinguishes this process from that of painting, in that the sole purpose of correction fluid is to provide the mark-maker with a new, clean surface on which to work – concealing previous mistakes – without having to remove the original mark from the object. In Breitz's works the original mark is the representation of the skin itself, and this signifying skin is what she uses the correctional fluid to systematically blot out. The suggestion that skin is a 'mistake' to be resurfaced is particularly provocative. Interestingly, she exclusively blots out the skin leaving visible the extensive beadwork, an ubiquitous symbol of African cultural identity, as well as the vulnerable, liminal facial features of the eyes nose and mouth. The circumvention of the facial features is particularly relevant, as they are the humanising elements, inherently representative of the identifiability of the subject, specifically in a photographic context, thus suggesting an intention to overwrite racial identity rather than personal or cultural being. However, the skull-like caverns that are left around the features in the white-out become extremely unsettling. The impact of the overwriting of the skin as surface is further heightened through the choice of the postcard image with its popular culture references and public content. The public space of the postcard and the photograph are echoed by the nature of skin as an overt social signifier, as Sidlauskas explains: "The skin is the social and physical frontier of the body, where a person's private identity interacts with the larger stage of his or her surrounding culture". (Sidlauskas 2001, 18)

The skin as a surface of social signification is emphasised in this series through Breitz's intervention. She uses the original context of the subject as the primary, individuating skin, sealed away beneath the public photographic skin of the postcard photograph, and finally overwritten by the imposed re-writable skin of the correction fluid, left by the autographic mark.

The artists discussed up to this point have all to some extent utilised conventional methods of gestural mark making, like drawing, painting and scratching, practices which have been canonised within artistic language. The next set of artworks for consideration are works that in some way incorporate decay, either natural aging or enacted decay, as a central concern.



Figure 30 - Julia Tiffin, "Beauty and Decay", 1996

The first work falling into this category is one by the South African artist Julia Tiffin. The piece, entitled “Beauty and Decay” was made in 1996 and was shown at the South African National Gallery as part of an exhibition entitled *Photo-Synthesis: Contemporary South African Photography* in 1997. In “Beauty and Decay” Tiffin mimicked and accelerated decay on the surface of a black and white fibre-based print featuring images of skin and limbs which she then re-photographed. The image itself appears to show just disembodied arms, with hands curled and floating in water, evoking a very corpse-like, deathly effect, especially when seen in conjunction with the title. This corpse-like effect is mimicked by the welts and scars on the photograph’s surface. When this is re-photographed and therefore re-invested with photographic integrity, it becomes part of an image of metaphorical decay rather than a literal photograph of a body. In her introductory essay to the exhibition, “Avoiding the Event”, Jane Taylor explains that:

> Julia Tiffin, for example, manipulates the photographic surface itself with acids and water, burning and blistering the skin of the emulsion. This "decay", as she terms it, is integral to the work's final meanings. (Taylor 1997, np)

As Taylor suggests, process and meaning are inextricably linked in this work. This is underscored by Sue Williamson when she briefly describes Tiffin’s working process:

> Experimenting with images in the darkroom, Julia Tiffin allows the surface of her close-up photographs of flesh to blister, before re-photographing the result, giving a surreal representation of physical pain. (Williamson 1999, np)

Williamson understands the image as a representation of physical pain, a reading which hinges on an instinctive conflation of the surface of the photographic print and the surface of the body. While it is the print which is damaged, identification with the image superimposes the damage onto the photographed body, and by extension the body of the viewer. The doubling between the skin of the photographed subject and the skin of the surface of the photograph means that both are affected by this enacted decay, which mimics the ravages of time and accumulation of scars on the body. When these scars are then re-photographed, they are again symbolically arrested in time, and sealed beneath the unblemished protective surface of a new image.

Julia Tiffin's work beautifully demonstrates decay, mimicked for conceptual purposes, on new photographic material. But artists have also used archival or historical photographs, where the surfaces have been subjected to natural ageing and loss of integrity. While, like with Witkin's work, this may not closely fit the definition of acting on the surface of the print, the way in which these images have been treated and the reactions elicited by the naturally damaged surfaces are useful to the argument.

In the 1997 work "Black Photo Album / Look at Me (1890 – 1950)" Santu Mofokeng collected, scanned and projected private archival photographs from black South African families. The piece formed part of research commissioned by the University of the Witwatersrand aimed at addressing inequalities in historical representations. It was originally exhibited as an installation, with the photographs projected on a wall alongside captions such as the statement "Who is looking? Whose gaze is it?" Later the work was re-shown in a different format, printed out as a series of black and white photographs rather than projected in sequence, and individual photographs from this second incarnation are found in many collections. These different forms of display lead to divergent readings of the role of the surface in the work, and therefore of the meanings of the piece in general.



Figure 31 - Santu Mofokeng, from the series "Black Photo Album / Look at Me, 1890 – 1950", 1997

In an article that appeared in the *Art Journal* of Spring 2002, Lauri Firstenberg holds this piece as a prime example of archival photographic imagery used in the rewriting of suppressed South African histories. Firstenberg states that:

> Specifically focused on the post apartheid context, [Mofokeng] treats the archive as both a material mechanism of negotiating memory, trauma, and amnesia, and as a conceptual strategy with which to investigate identity and representation in South Africa. Throughout this series, he maintains a play between legibility and illegibility, accessibility and inaccessibility of subjects of a particular social field.

As Firstenberg states, Mofokeng uses the concept of the archive itself, as well as the individual images he selects, as both 'material mechanism' and 'conceptual strategy' in his negotiation of the politics of memory and representation in South Africa. Another element at play in the work is his treatment of the physical object of the archival image. While the techniques of scanning and re-presenting old images does not by any means constitute a radical intervention, when the arguments laid out in the previous chapter are applied to this work, it reveals several intricacies of the material surface in effecting meaning. The aged images Mofokeng collected display

the markings of time on their surface, and when re-scanned these signs of decay are captured as part of the reconstructed new whole. The marks create a wistful impression, playing on the sentimental representations of history and memory in popular culture media. But, like the representations of time and memory in the media, the signs of ageing are visible only as part of a new, recreated image, and are not in fact physically present for the viewer.



Figure 32 - Santu Mofokeng, from the series "Black Photo Album / Look at Me, 1890 – 1950", 1997

The resultant images somewhat increase the distance of the viewer from the subject already present in any photograph by adding a second veil, the moment of scanning (or re-photographing), between the original photographic moment and the moment of viewing. The subjects in the portraits are therefore subjected to a doubled gaze, as

the new image is viewed not only in terms of the original photographic display, but also of the secondary display of the re-photographed image. The *noeme* of the photograph, its link to what-has-been, is no longer only associated with the original photographic moment, but also with the what-has-been of the photographic object itself; the print as a lost moment, captured and frozen in time, sealed under a new photographic surface.



Figure 33 - Santu Mofokeng, from the series "Black Photo Album / Look at Me, 1890 – 1950", 1997

But Mofokeng's interference with the surface of the images is not confined to the reconstituting of photographic integrity through the scanning and reprinting process; when he chooses to project these images, separating them from the physical realm and thrusting them into the digital, he also removes all corporeal elements. Shown in this way the re-constituted images are devoid of surface and substance altogether, becoming ethereal non-objects. The passage of time is most easily made visible in the markings of decay it leaves on the physical object. Mofokeng's slides, projected and disembodied, are therefore not only frozen in time but appear to be severed from it altogether.

The final artwork dependant on the use of the surface for signification to be discussed is Kay Hassan's series "Non-European Libraries" (1999 - 2000). The series is made up of several images individually framed and presented, each consisting of a collage made from Polaroid negatives, South African Libraries stickers and official stamps. Like Santu Mofokeng, Kay Hassan uses found images and re-contextualises them to create new meanings. The use of found objects is typical of Hassan's modus operandi as the greater part of his body of work consists of intricate collage and assemblage. In contrast to the use to which Mofokeng puts found images, where he reconstructs the integrity of the photographic surface in his re-photographed prints, and dissociates the images from the object entirely in the projections, Hassan uses the found photographic object as it is. The Polaroid negatives Hassan exhibits in this work are the remnants of a photographic process, rather than the final prints themselves. Therefore, like Witkin, his physical interference takes place on the negative, but not with the goal of creating a positive final print. Instead, he aims to display the discarded refuse of identity photography, the contact negative, itself.

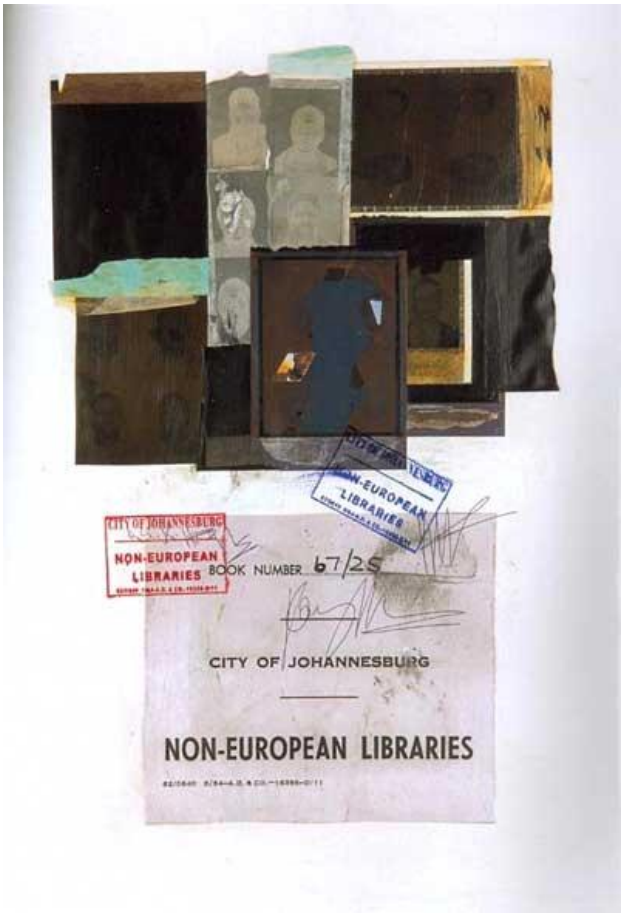


Figure 34 - Kay Hassan "Non-European Libraries" 1999 - 2000

In his description of Hassan's work in the 2000 Daimler Chrysler Award Catalogue Martin Hentschel writes that in

> the series "Non-European Libraries" (1999 - 2000)… the artist juxtaposes Polaroid negatives of passport photographs with the stickers that used to be found during the apartheid era in library books intended for the black population: "Non-European Libraries" - a special form of exclusion through the demarcation of knowledge."(Hentschel 2000, 74)

The central argument of the work - the forms of exclusion and the demarcation of knowledge Hentschel identifies - is reinforced by the negative spaces of the inverted portraits. The government stamps overlapping the stickers and negatives not only visually link the two separate areas of the image, but speak strongly of institutional authorisation and control.

The use of the identity photograph format, one with which we are all familiar, inevitably comes with predetermined associations. When juxtaposed with the governmental issue stamps and the bold words "Non-European Libraries" the question of racial identity is immediately raised. The fact that the subjects remain entirely nameless and almost faceless due to the degrading of the paper negative, which is only ever needed once and therefore is never fixed chemically, enables them to symbolise the faceless masses that suffered under the apartheid years. The original photographic surface, or photographic negative surface, with which Hassan works, is already marked through ill-use and time. To that he adds marks of his own: the cutting and pasting of collage, and imprinting with old official stamps. The mark-making is also continued passively, as the unfixed paper negatives reconstituted as images in their own right, are not held unchanging in time. They are temporal objects, firstly as prints, in the same way that any photographic print is as physical object temporal, but also as an image, which changes constantly as it is exposed to more light and the elements.

The negative, an unseen part of the photographic process, links the material with the unseen, unidentifiable subjects of the identity photographs; the people are obscured in this part of the process which is not meant to be viewed. The unidentifiable, discarded elements of the identity photographs also emphasize the political situation of the time period that the dates and stamps on the rest of the work cue us to, the era during which the othered body was kept out of view. The black body was kept both unseen and obscene. In the context of "Non-European Libraries" Hentschel explains that

> when Hassan links the rescued negatives with a found "Non-European Libraries" sticker from 1967 - a form of double recycling - he is running the reel of history backwards, once again evoking an image of control and exclusion in an unconstitutional state. It was after all in1967 that the anti-terrorism law came into force, which allowed any senior police officer to put suspects under unlimited arrest and to conduct interrogations. (Hentschel 2000, 74)

Hassan's negatives reflect only ghosts or shades of identity, again similar to Mofokeng's ethereal portraits, but whereas the former spoke of wistful aspirations and histories forgotten, these are far more aggressive and speak of faces, identities blotted from view within a violent political system, identities symbolically cut out, severed, and discarded. Hassan's use of the identity photograph is all the more striking due to the mundane familiarity of the object. The absent individual in these appropriated photographic negatives opens them as a site for projective identification from (for?) the viewer and acts as a marker for both difference and generalisation. This projection is in many ways possible due to the strange and strained relationship that exists between people and their Identity Photographs. These little images of ourselves we all carry, state-sanctioned and designed to control, are never truly assimilated into our conceptions of our own identity. The indexicality of the photograph, the historical construction of portraiture, and the common use of ID photographs of loved ones tucked into the wallet, all imply a conventional relationship with these photographs that I, for one, have never shared. For me, the ID photo has always remained an imposition, another person's photograph of me, with which I barely identify. Perhaps with this kind of effect in mind, Sontag famously claimed that "to photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed." (Sontag 1977, 14) It thus appears that the ID photo has a paradoxical relationship with the self: while it is "officially" assumed to be the most authentic signifier of the self, it is very often experienced by the human subject as exactly the opposite.

I began this research with a desire to understand my own drive to act on the surface of the photographic print, specifically that of an identity photograph, first instinctively and irrationally then with increasing artistic focus and intent, until the process had become one of creation rather than destruction. The anger and resentment with which I responded to the initial photograph was slowly replaced by a desire to re-insert a sense of my own identity onto the image. Through this process I first experientially discovered what this dissertation has theoretically explored: that the

glossy, contained surface becomes skin-like; that the incisions and marks made on it trace both the presence of the artist as well as the re-insertion of time into the frozen frame; and that the various acts of cutting, piercing, marking, sewing, burning all carry a different implication with regards to the physical relationship between the action and the surface of the print. Connor puts forward the following theoretical claim: “The incising of solemn marks always has this symbolic reference to the body, the integrity of which is first violated, and then restored in a new form, that pretends to be original. ‘Nothing can be sole or whole / That has not been rent’, as Yeasts’ Crazy Jane declares.” (Connor, The Law of Marks 2001, 6)

The surface of the body, and of a painting, is the site for a specific kind of production of meaning, and the surface of the photograph is no different. The methodologies applied when looking at mark-making upon the signifying surface must perforce take into account both the surface itself as well as the action, which imbues the photographic object with as much potential for signification as the photographic image. The photograph as signifying surface can be made to bear the mark of more than just the original exposure, allowing an agency other than that of the photographer. Above all, it must be remembered that acting on the photographic surface is not the same as marking a clean, non-signifying façade. It is an act of superscription: something written or engraved on the surface of, outside, or above something else, and act of overwriting. Superscription implies a hierarchy of meaning, stratifying layers of text and information, and in a single word encapsulates what this dissertation is about: the radical effects triggered by the overwriting of meaning contained in the photographic print.

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