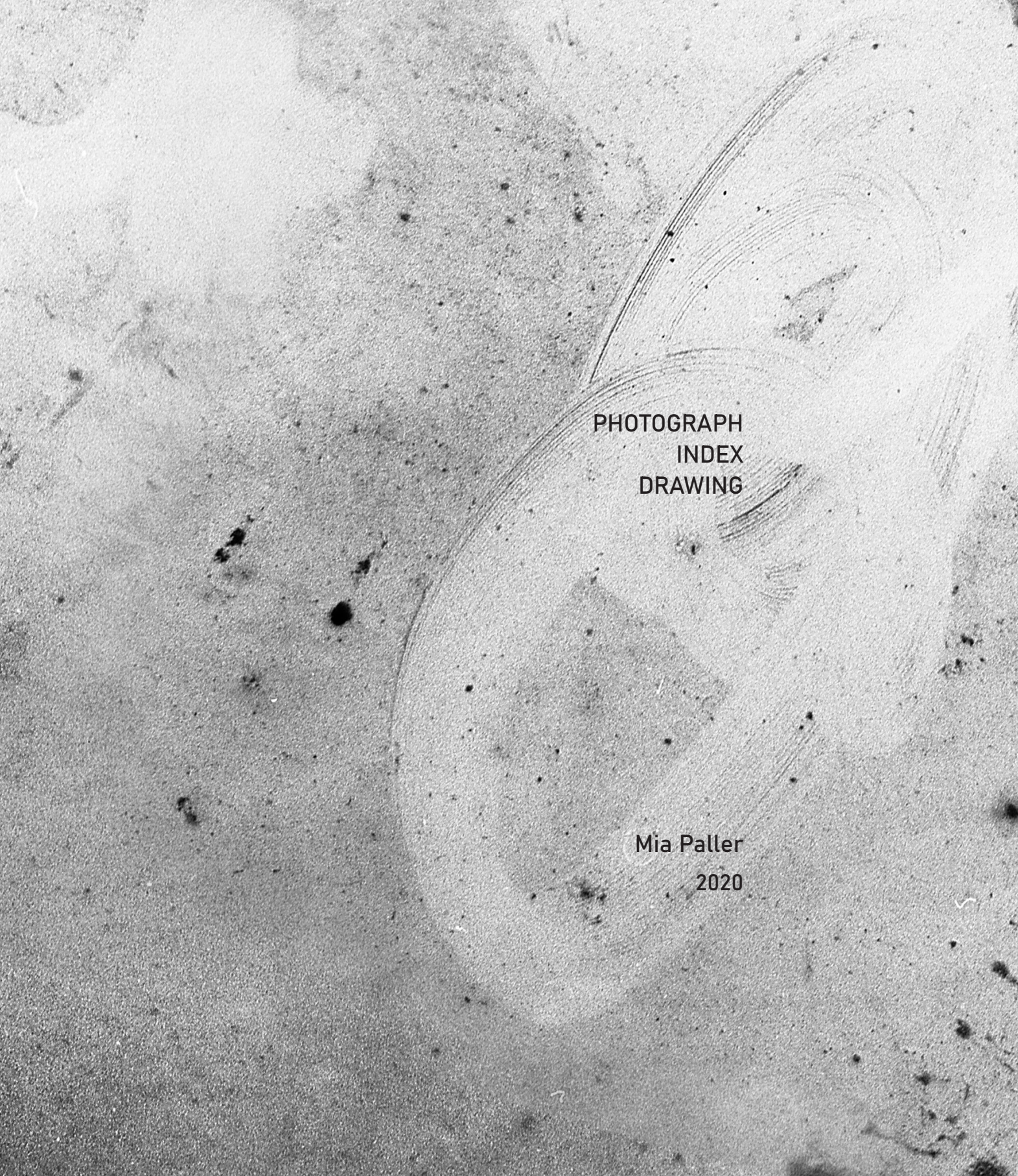

PHOTOGRAPH
INDEX
DRAWING
Mia Paller
2020

THE SHUTTER OPENS

Evolving from painting background, I didn't have much scholarship in lens-based image-making. Yet, as photography has entered my practice, I feel the urge to examine its tradition, conceptual and theoretical basis. I notice that my photography and drawing (or painting) involve corresponding methods.

To be able to analyse my recent practice between drawing and photography, I thus chose to look for overlaps of these image-making modalities. How is this relationship of drawing and photography already defined from a theoretical and historical viewpoint? In what ways do I leave a mark; what are the types of gesture in my own work? Hoping to provide the necessary context, I scrutinise my methodology through the lens of analogous artistic practices, trying to place my own amongst them.

I employ analogue rather than digital photography, which makes me wonder what is so fascinating about it for me to do so. Is it due to its distinct materiality? Does this materiality in any way correspond to drawing experience?

The following text is an attempt to bind the concepts of drawing, gesture and index to develop an operative terminology for articulating my own work. It is an attempt to identify the common denominator(s) of gesture-based and light-based practices.

Louis Daguerre, Boulevard du Temple, 1838, daguerrotype plate, detail.

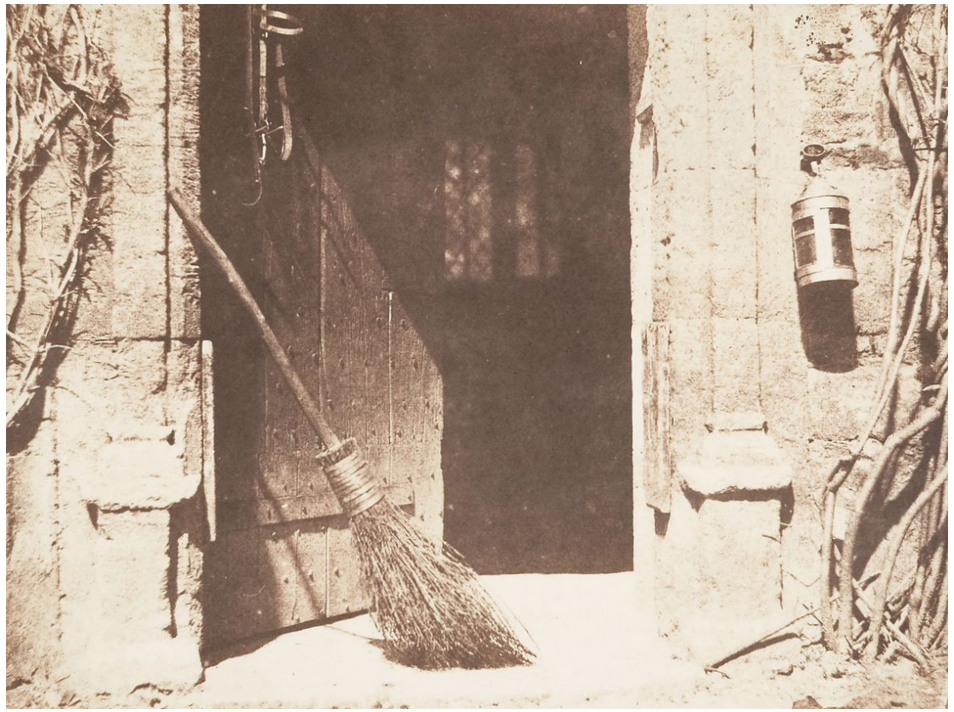
Julia Margaret Cameron, Alethea, 1872, carbon print, 46.3 x 38.3 cm.

Sir John Everett Millais, Ophelia, 1851-52, oil paint on canvas, 76.2 x 111.8 cm.

Edward Weston, Oceano, 1936, gelatin silver print (printed 1940s), 20.3 x 25.1 cm.

Christen Købke, View at Dosseringen. ca. 1837, oil on paper, 24.2 x 27.8 cm.

J. W. Draper, Copy of a photograph of Dorothy Catherine Draper,
ca. 1840, Daguerreotype, 8.3 x 10.2 cm.



W. H. Fox Talbot, The Open Door, before may 1844, salted paper print from paper negative, 14.3 x 19.4 cm.

Andre Kertesz, Chez Mondrian, 1926, gelatin silver photograph (36/50), 24.4 x 18.1 cm.

Edward Hopper, Stairway, 1949, oil on wood, 40.6 x 30.2 cm.

Andre Kertesz, Untitled (street view), 1962, gelatin silver print, 25 x 18 cm.

Edward Hopper, Roofs, Washington Square, 1926, watercolor over charcoal on paper, 35.24 x 50.48 cm.

Traditional and technical picture

Thinking about the relationship between light-based and gesture-based image-making led me to compare the notion of drawing (painting) and photography to trace how it changed. As one of the core conceptual analyses of photography, Vilém Flusser's Towards a Philosophy of Photography offers a strict division of so-called technical (e.g. photographic) and traditional pictures (e.g. paintings and drawings).

"Images are mediations between the world and human beings. Human beings 'ex-ist', i.e. the world is not immediately accessible to them and therefore images are needed to make it comprehensible" (Flusser, 1983, p.9). Flusser states that traditional pictures appear long before texts and signify phenomena. Extracting from the concrete world, they are abstractions of the first order. Technical pictures, au contraire, are third-order abstractions, because they are created by apparatuses, which are constructed through applied scientific texts. In the 19th century, photographs as technical pictures were invented to illustrate incomprehensible scientific texts and make them intelligible again. They do not signify phenomena, but concepts.

Yet, Flusser stresses that both traditional *and* technical pictures should be decoded with the same meticulousness. In works like paintings, drawings and statues, symbolic character is obvious, as human intervention is evident and leads us to decipher the creator's thinking process in order to grasp the meaning. On the contrary, we assign a quasi-objective character to technical pictures because they are produced by the apparatus and their decoding seems unnecessary. Flusser warns that we lack critical reading of technical pictures and suggests we should decode them thoroughly. According to Flusser (1983), traditional and technical pictures are fundamentally different, yet both should be read thoroughly.

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photography:
painting's mortal
enemy...

The power struggle?

Moving from a rather conceptual standpoint, a historical overview shows how understanding the duality of painting (drawing) and photography evolved through time. A lot has been written on photography's status in its early stage and its crucial impact on other pictorial media. The views on photography's relation to painting (and art) are multifarious or sometimes even conflicting, yet one voice seems to prevail – one identifying the relationship between the new photographic medium and the established medium of painting as a major *power struggle* of (modern) art.

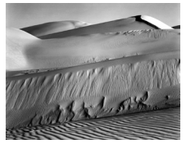
"Photography has been, and is still, tormented by the ghost of Painting (Mapplethorpe represents an iris stalk the way an Oriental painter might have done it); it has made Painting, through its copies and contestations, into the absolute, paternal Reference, as if it were born from the Canvas (this is true, technically, but only in part; for the painters' camera obscura is only one of the causes of Photography; the essential one, perhaps, was the chemical discovery). At this point in my investigation, nothing eidetically distinguishes a photograph, however realistic, from a painting. 'Pictorialism' is only an exaggeration of what the Photograph thinks of itself" (Barthes, 1981, p.30).

After its invention, photography has undergone a struggle to attain the position of aesthetically legitimate art genre.[1] First, it was attacked as non-expressive and mechanical plagiarism, especially by painters and their literary allies (Jay, 1989; Sontag, 1973). Baudelaire, for instance, even labelled it as painting's "mortal enemy" (quoted in Sontag, 2005, p.113), attacking its vulgarity as it satisfied the masses' craving for mimetic representation of the observed world. On the other hand, some photographers employed painting's vocabulary to achieve rather emotional effects in photographs. Yet this approach was equally criticised by fellow and later photographers such as Edward Weston.[2]

1 I discuss the matter in depth in the essay Photography Encapsulates Art Itself (2018).
2 Weston (1930, p.114) explicitly argues that photographers and painter should pursue their own methods and therefore calls for certain medium-specificity: "No photographer

"Because the early photographers who sought to produce creative work had no tradition to guide them, they soon began to borrow a ready-made one from the painters. The conviction grew that photography was just a new kind of painting, and its exponents attempted by every means possible to make the camera produce painter-like results. This misconception was responsible for a great many horrors perpetrated in the name of art, from allegorical costume pieces to dizzying out of focus blurs" (Weston, 1930, p.114).

As Sontag suggests, the most persistent idea in photography histories is that of the final reconciliation between photography and painting, allowing both sides to keep their side of the bargain and pursue "their separate but equally valid tasks, while creatively influencing each other" (Sontag, 2005, p.114). Photography was assumed to be painting's liberator. Shouldering the burden of realistic representation, it permitted painting to develop a higher method of pictorial encoding - abstraction: 'Photography has, or will eventually, negate much painting - for which the painter should be deeply grateful; relieving him, as it were, from certain public demands: representation, objective seeing" (Weston, 1930).



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...or its liberator?

Dealing with the historical legend

However, Sontag is highly critical towards this conception, naming it a "legend [which] falsifies much of the history of painting and photography" (Sontag, 2005, p.114). Her objection to the statement of the power struggle is shared with Peter Galassi's argument that photography *did not* abruptly change painting's vocabulary, but entered the artistic environment where the mundane, fragmentary and contingent were *already* the operations in use by established artistic media.

"[Photographic] medium is inevitably considered an outsider,

can equal emotionally nor aesthetically the work of a fine painter, both having the same end in view — that is, the painter's viewpoint. Nor can the painter begin to equal the photographer in his particular field."

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details of the everyday

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syntax of 19th century art

which proceeded to disrupt the course of painting. The extreme corollary of this conception is the notion that photography adopted (or usurped) the representational function of painting, allowing (or forcing) painting to become abstract. This argument, now discredited, seems to have been launched around 1900 by painters, who used it to justify their rejection of nineteenth-century naturalism. The argument has its roots in the conviction - born in 1839 - that photography is the epitome of realism" (Galassi, 1981, p.12).

"The object here is to show that photography was not a bastard left by science on the doorstep of art, but a legitimate child of the Western pictorial tradition" (Galassi, 1981, p.12). Galassi sets aside mechanical developments (e.g. camera obscura) which finally aimed in the invention of photography and focuses on aesthetic traditions which contributed to it equally. He delineates the development of new ways of seeing and representing three-dimensional space, from 15th century linear perspective to nineteenth century picture, composed of fragments from reality. "This sense of the picture as a detail, carved from a greater, more complex whole, is a characteristic, original feature of nineteenth-century art" (Galassi, 1981, p.26).

He rejects the generally accepted view that some new features of for instance Degas's paintings were acquired *by absorbing methods from photography* (spatial flattening, abrupt cropping, odd obstructions and angles). This understanding overlooks the long tradition from which these procedures derived. He claims that the invention of photography simply coincided with or even emerged from the revision of representational models[3] in pictorial media from 15th to 19th century. Galassi takes landscape painting as an example of broad artistic transformation which "catalysed the invention of photography. The landscape sketches [...] present a new fundamentally modern pictorial syntax of immediate, synoptic perceptions and discontinuous unexpected forms. It is

3 such as flattening of space, capturing ephemeral moment, chance-like framing etc.

the syntax of art devoted to the singular and contingent rather than the universal and stable. It is also the syntax of photography" (Galassi, 1981, p.25).

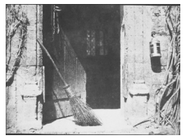
He observes that most early photographs were actually records of people, objects and places, and were created for documentation rather than for an aesthetic purpose. Thus, he concludes that the way photography influenced painting was due to the artistic environment and tradition it entered. From there, a new vocabulary synchronously developed which both media now shared (Galassi, 1981).

Mutual evolution

Similarly, Martin Jay observes that the relationship between painting and photography was reciprocal. He claims that it was precisely through this mutual influence, that photography gradually developed its recognition[4] (Jay, 1989). Sontag confirms that the existence of the camera shaped painters' visual imagination and language, "creating a preference for the fragment, rising interest in glimpses of humble life, and studies of fleeting motion and the effects of light. Painting did not so much turn to abstraction as adopt the camera's eye. But painters have never stopped attempting to imitate the realistic effects of photography. And, far from confining itself to realistic representation and leaving abstraction to painters, photography has kept up with and absorbed all the anti-naturalistic conquests of painting" (Sontag, 2005, p.114).

The relation of photography and painting has thus been primarily reciprocal. Yet, as Sontag indicates, photography has always

4 Yet Susan Sontag (2005) stresses that throughout history, photography itself encompassed even conflicting standpoints on whether its products are art or not and why. She presents examples ranging from Julia Margaret Cameron's claim that photography qualifies as art because it seeks beauty, to the very opposite Henry Peach Robinson's statement that it is art because it can lie. Furthermore, there were artists who rejected the question in the first place. Sontag claims that there is no unambiguous answer to the question whether photography is art or not or at least it is not to be found within the multifarious voices of its creators.



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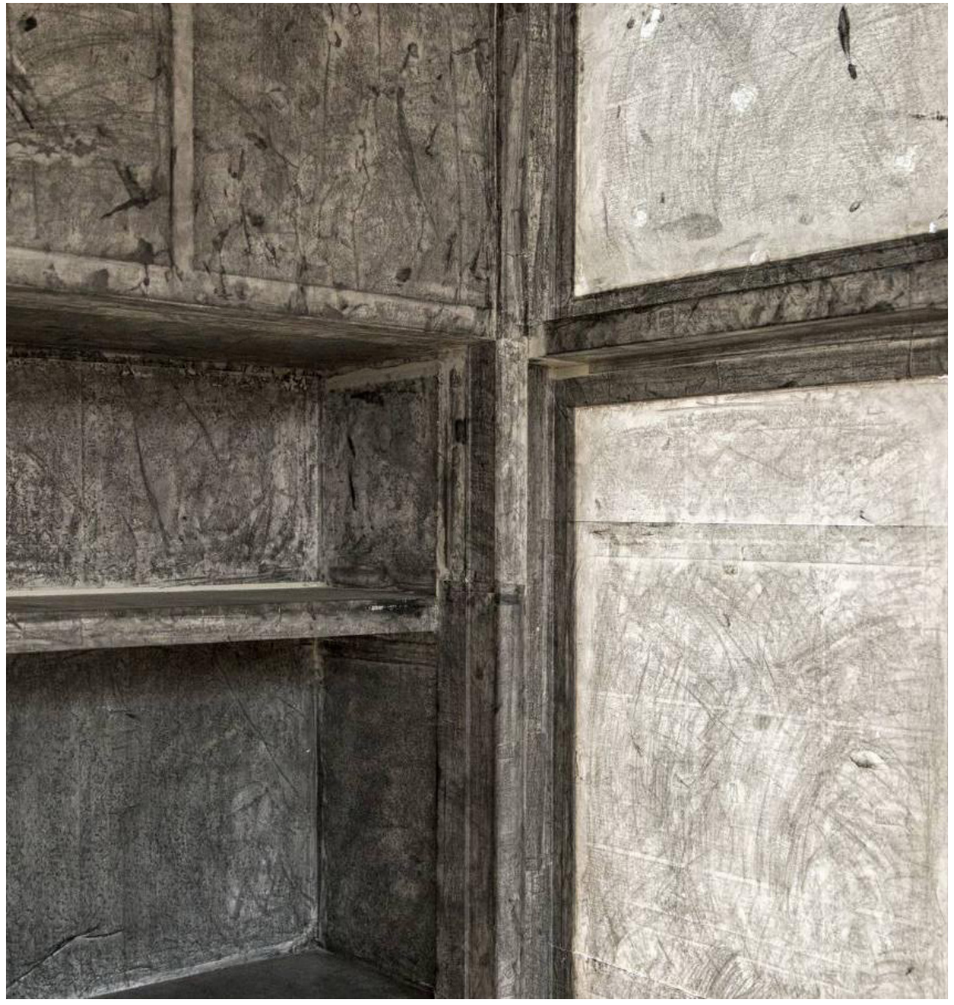
had the high ground. She observes that painters have often turned to photography as visual aid, while no one expects photographers to turn to painting for assistance. Similarly, an eye trained on painting can better observe the photographs, whereas photography's ubiquitousness has (to borrow Sontag's words) "weakened our experience of painting" (Sontag, 2005, p.115).

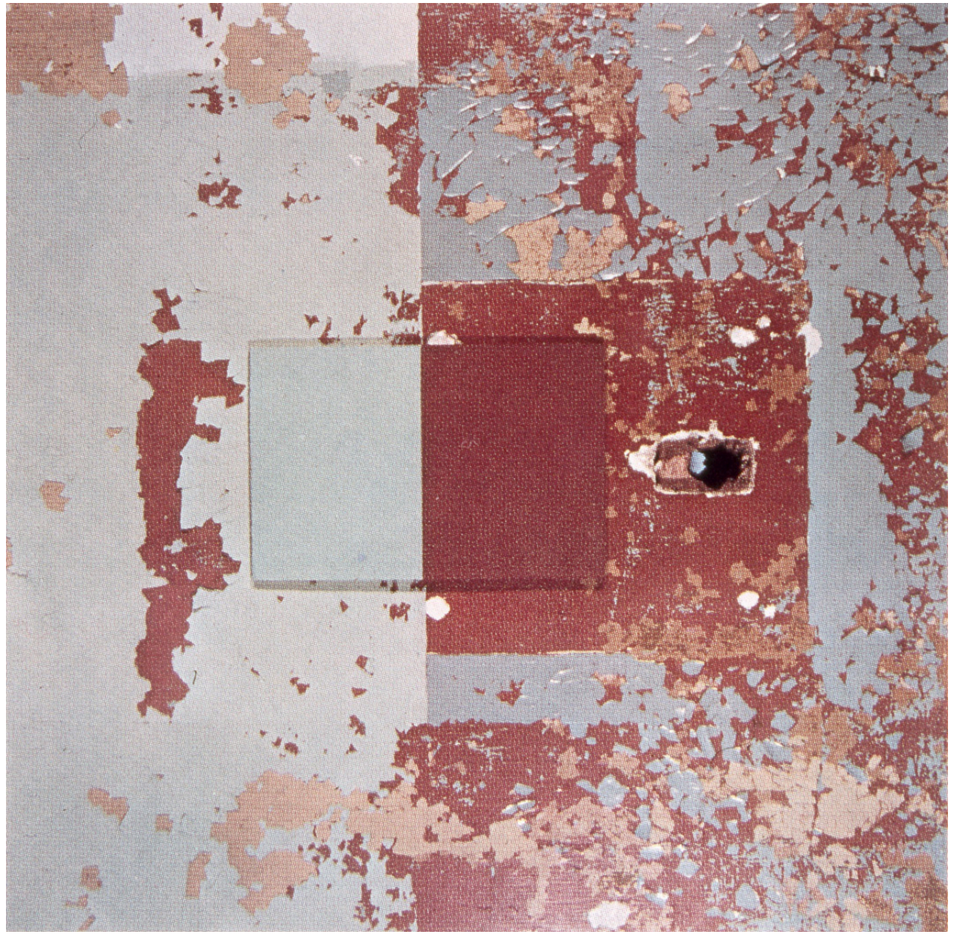
Rosalind Krauss in her essay Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America even recognises photography as an *operative model for abstraction* (to which I return in the following essay). She takes it to dissect the contemporary post-medial condition. Walter Benjamin took photography to attack the idea of medium specificity: "This is because photography's status as a multiple, a function of mechanical reproduction, restructures the condition of the other arts" (quoted in Krauss, 1977, p.46). Benjamin observes that artworks are being reproduced, but, more importantly, they become designed for reproducibility. Sontag arrives at a similar conclusion: "It is inevitable that more and more art will be designed to end as photographs" (Sontag, 2005, p.117). Separate artworks become commodities and just as separate mediums fall prey to general equivalency. The uniqueness of the work, its aura, is lost as well as the specificity of its medium.

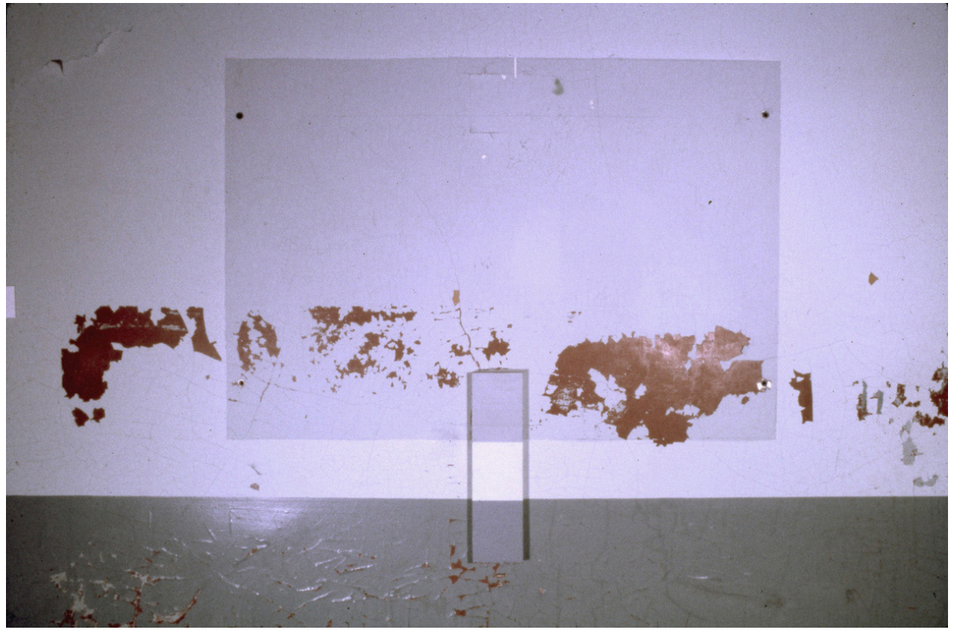
With this discussion, one can see that the viewpoints on the course of events seem to be as numerous as the visual examples that support them. What truly happened, depends on whose eyes we look through. I favour the idea of relation between photography and painting being one of mutual influence, rather than the former causing the latter to pursue abstraction. The following chapters will attempt to argue this case thoroughly. However, it is important to note that all the above-mentioned texts were written before the ubiquity of digital photography. It is therefore necessary to complement arguments produced within the discourse of analogue photography with more contemporary discussions.



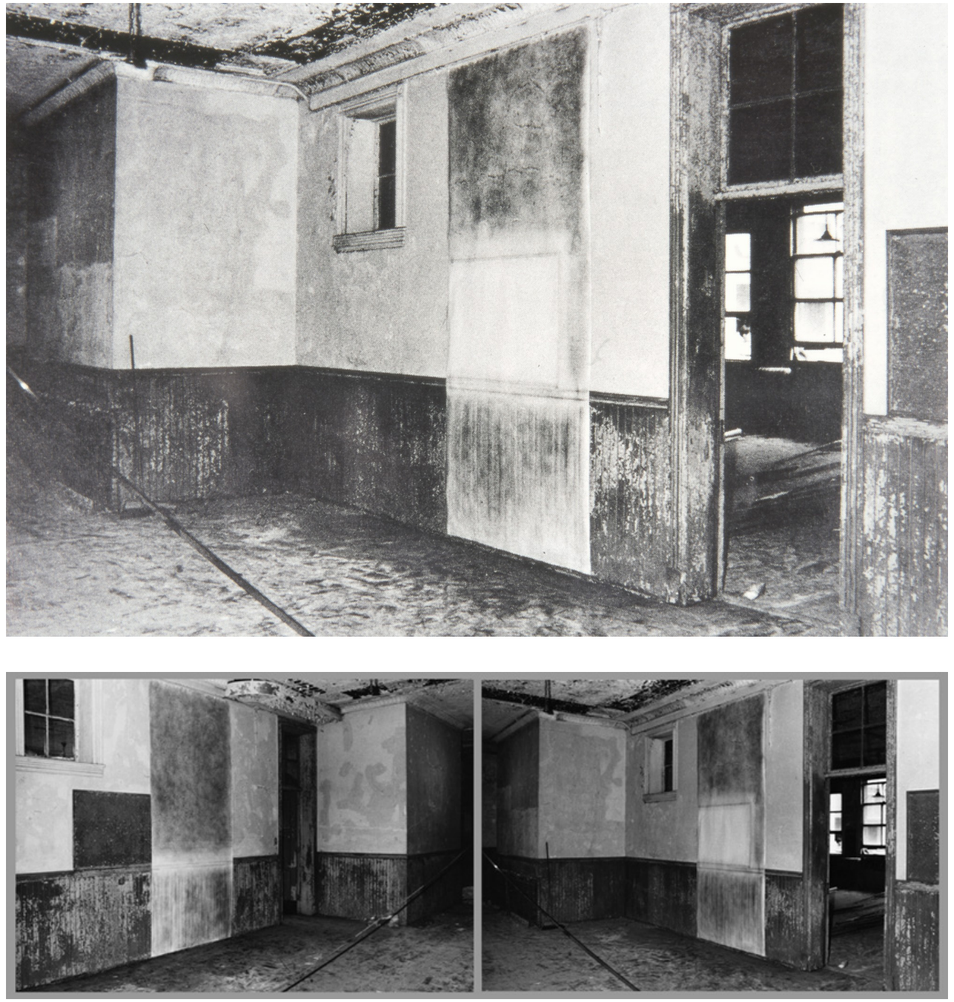
Do Ho Suh, Rubbing/Loving Project: Company Housing of Gwangju Theater, 2012, detail.

This spread: Do Ho Suh, Rubbing/Loving Project: Company Housing of Gwangju Theater, 2012, graphite on paper, wooden structure, video monitor and player, speaker, 368 x 273 x 292 cm.





Both pages: Lucio Pozzi, P.S.1 Paint, 1976, installation of acrylic painted wood panels. Exhibition Rooms, P.S.1.



Michelle Stuart, East/ West Wall Memory Relocated, 1976, graphite, 2 units of 366 x 157 cm. Rooms, P.S.1.

Gordon Matta-Clark, Office Baroque, 1977, two silver dye bleach prints, 51.3 x 101 cm and 50 x 101 cm.

Gerhard Richter, 128 Details from a Picture (detail), 1987,
128 black and white photographs on board, framed, 127 x 400 cm overall.

John Divola, Vandalism: DSCN0631, 1973-75, archivally processed B&W photographic print, 35.6 x 35.6 cm.

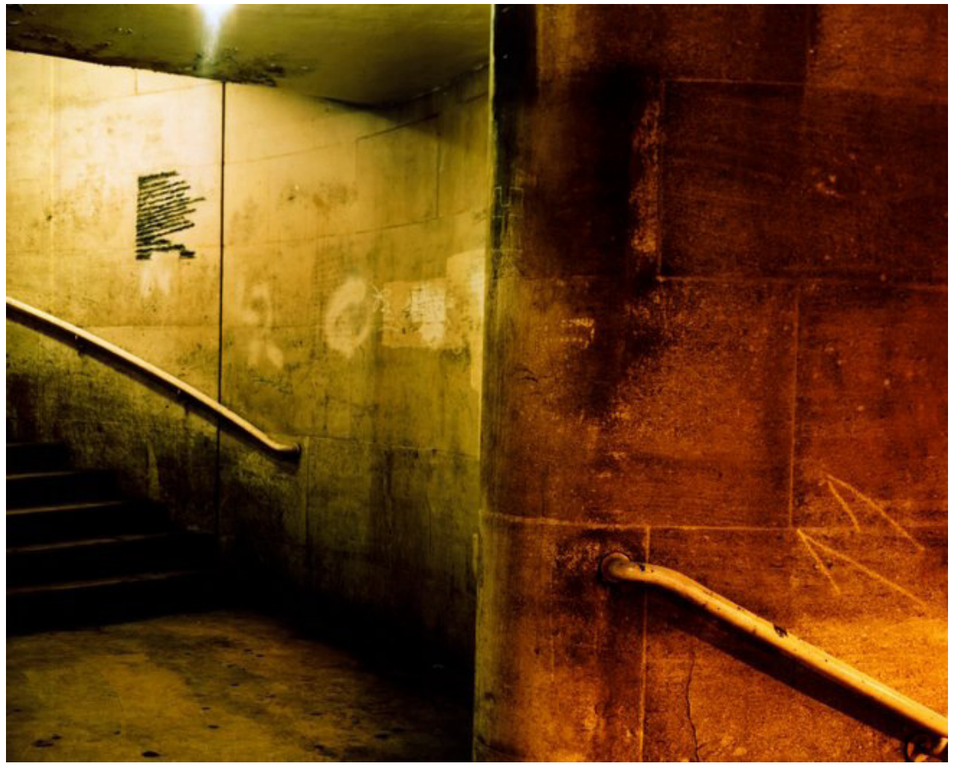
John Divola, Vandalism Series, 1973-75, gelatin silver print, 64 x 61.5 cm.

John Divola, Vandalism: L, 1973-75, archivally processed B&W photographic print, 35.6 x 35.6 cm.

John Divola, Vandalism: DSCN0565, 1973-75, archivally processed B&W photographic print, 35.6 x 35.6 cm.

John Divola, George Air Force Base Series (4 x 5's), 2015-2017.

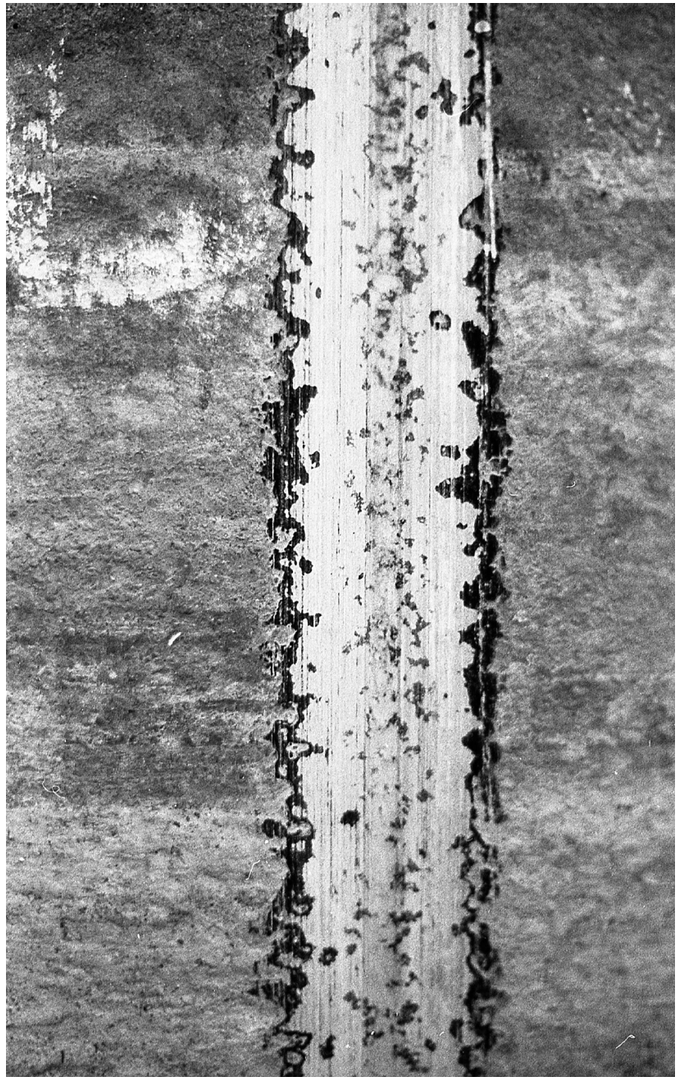
John Divola, George Air Force Base Series (8 x 10's), 2015-2017.

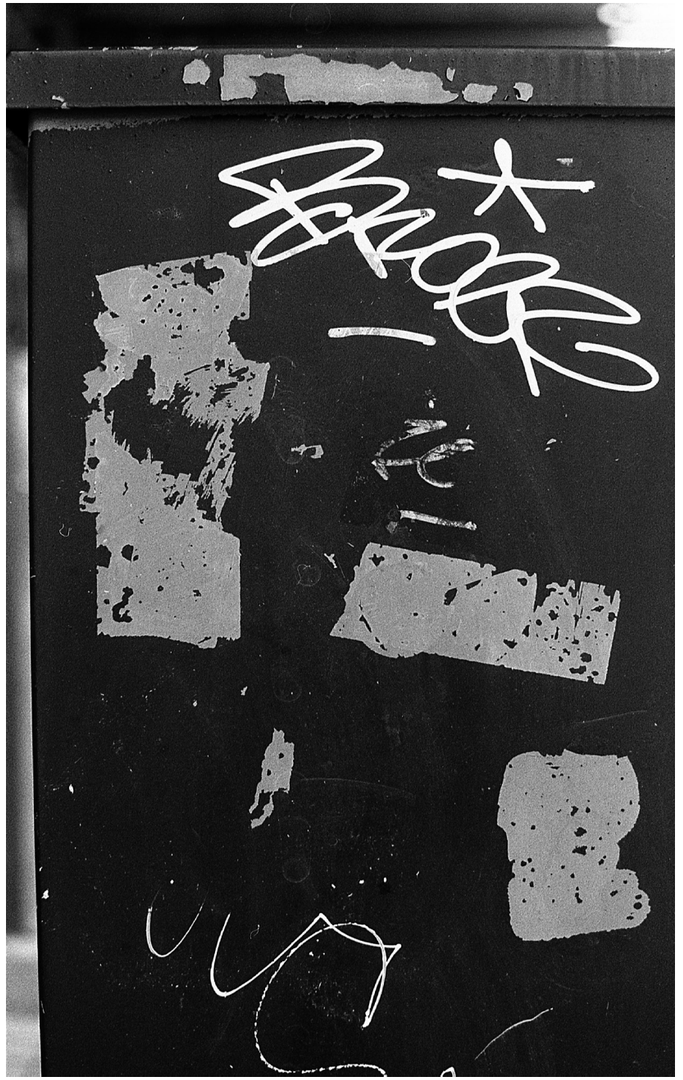


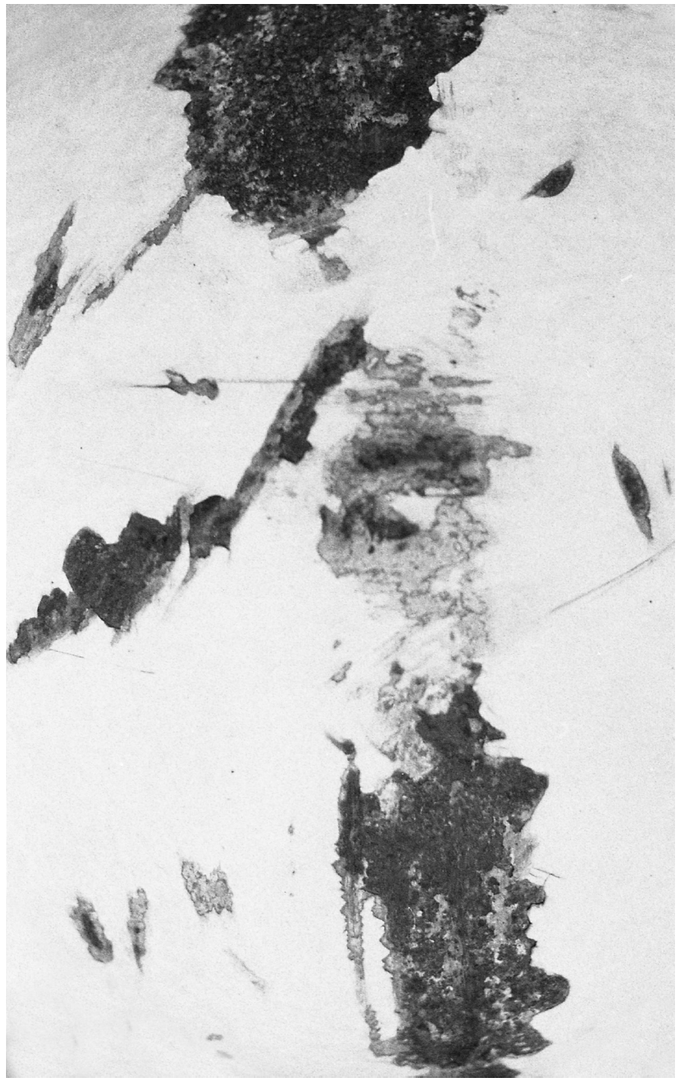
Rut Blees Luxemburg, Liebeslied, 1997, C-type print mounted on aluminium, 150 x 180 cm.

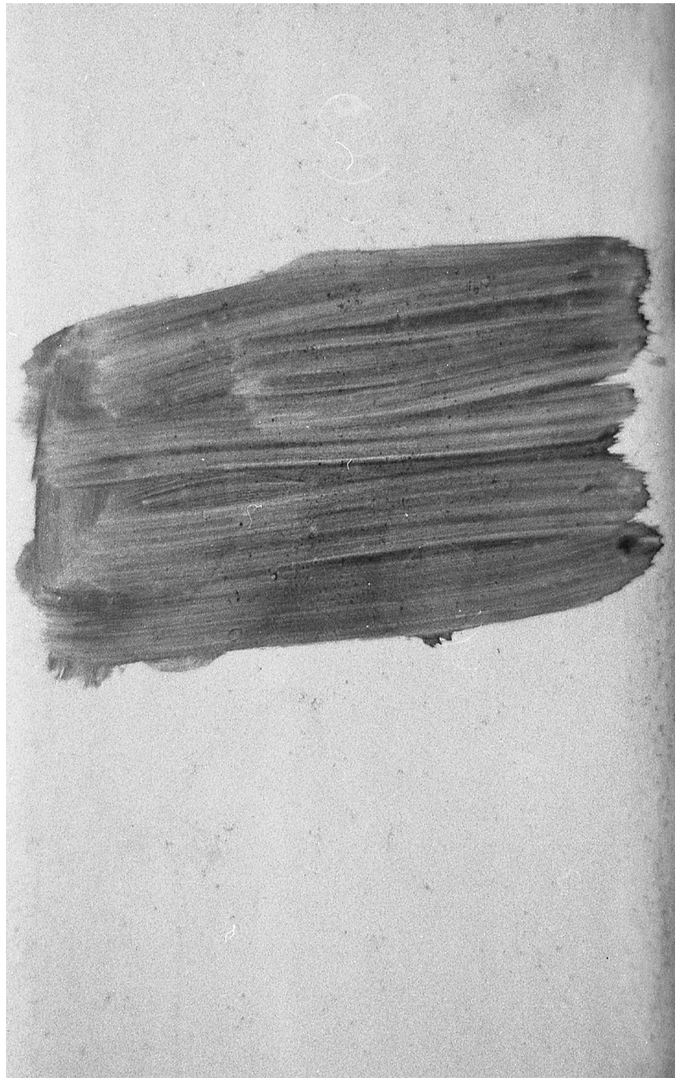
Mia Paller, Trace 1 and Trace 2, 2019, photobooks, charcoal and cotton gloves, each book 21 x 29.7 x 3 cm.

This and the following pages: Mia Paller, photographs of the series Trace 1 and 2, 2019, digitised black and white 35mm negatives.









This spread: Mia Paller, Trace 1 and Trace 2, 2019, 2 photobooks,
charcoal and cotton gloves, each book 21 x 29.7 cm.

Thinking about the nature of the photographic medium as manifested in my recent works, it seems necessary to touch upon the concept of indexicality[5]. According to semiologist C. S. Peirce's theory, all signs display three modes of meaning – iconic, indexical and symbolic. Indexicality characterises, among other examples, signs of the order of a trace, such as a death mask which leaves an 'impression' of someone who once lived, a footprint, and the photograph. An index is defined as a representation which refers to its object by direct physical, material connection.

"Indexicality […] arises when a sign has a direct physical connection to another object. This occurs when a physical process leaves a mark upon the sign. This indirectly reveals the presence of another object influencing the sign, without that object directly appearing" (Robins, 2014, p.4).

The Rubbing/Loving Project is an enclosed wooden structure and its interior is covered with artist's drawings of living space in Gwangju (Korea). The work refers to the 1980 "Gwangju Uprising", a democratic protest, resulting in hundreds of deaths, which was suppressed by the government and news media. The large-scale frottages were made by the artist and his assistants, who carefully registered the space with graphite while blindfolded, as shown in the video. Their *blindness* relates to the insufficient information on political conditions at the time and tactile approach reveals the story of the space which was, once, a home. The work is a print of the original space, relocated and presented in the gal-

5 Borrowing from Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic division of signs, the term indexicality has been widely used in the sphere of art history and theory from the second half of the twentieth century onwards. However, it is important to note that Peirce developed his theory based on scientific photographic methods. Later transposition of the terminology to the arts has caused indexicality to be understood in a broader sense, not always corresponding to Peirce's conception. Alexander Robins in his essay Peirce and Photography: Art, Semiotics, and Science (2014) offers a critical reflection on the use and abuse of the theory of signs in art and photography discourse.

what is an index

Do Ho Suh: Rubbing/ Loving Project

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lery. "Rubbings are exact indexes of the object being represented, strange but pure two-dimensional records" (Lykins Reich, 2014).

I first encountered Rubbing/Loving Project in Museum Voorlinden in Den Haag: entering the wooden structure, I immediately felt the peculiar presence of distant space. The sound of scribbling graphite coming from the speakers, explained just enough to imagine the artist touching and tracing every single corner and the tiniest detail to cover the whole surface. I understand such frottage as an index *per se*, indicating the artist on the one hand and the space captured on the other. Indexical work refers to both at a physical, even bodily level. It is essentially a drawing mode, but through its indexicality it coincides with photography.

Photograph as an index

Fundamentally, a photograph (especially analogue) is an imprint of light emanating from an object onto a light-sensitive surface. Photographs were "produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature. In that aspect, then, they belong to the second class of signs, those by physical connection*"* (Peirce, 1894).

A photographic impression is evidence of the actual light rays that produced the image. Thus, it can be understood as an indexical sign[6]. We need to keep in mind Peirce's emphasis on the photograph being indexical and iconic at the same time[7], but for the purpose of this discussion, I will focus on the indexical aspect of the picture, showing that it is the very indexicality that photography and drawing share.

6 However, Peirce states that in every sign, all three modes - iconic, indexical and symbolic - are present and bound together. They can be conceptually distinguishable, but visually they often coincide. Alexander Robins explains: "In many photographs there exists a visual continuity between icon and index. When we regard a portrait of a person, we simultaneously see the image resembling the person and see evidence of the actual light rays that produced the image. They are one and the same" summarises Robins (2014, p.4).
7 As Peirce states: "Photograph is an index having an icon incorporated into it" (quoted in Robins, 2014, p.9).

Photography: model for abstraction (after Krauss)

In her essay Notes on the Index, 70's Art in America (Part 2), art theorist Rosalind Krauss takes indexicality to explain how photography has even become the model for abstraction, even though this might seem paradoxical. 'Nothing could seem further apart than photography and abstract painting, the one wholly dependent upon the world for the source of its imagery, the other shunning that world and the images it might provide" (Krauss, 1977, p.58).

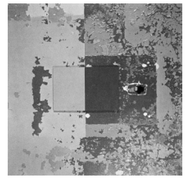
Observing the tension between photographic image and abstraction in contemporary art (70's art in America), she recognises a recurring formula. "This logic involves the reduction of the conventional sign to a trace. […] Movement ceases to function symbolically, and it takes on the character of an index" (Krauss, 1977, p.59).

As a starting point, she chooses the group exhibition Rooms (1976)[8], which took place in an abandoned public-school building. The show consisted of installation works, all dealing with the dreary condition of the building itself, to capture its presence. Krauss recognises that abstract artists pursue "the mute presence of an uncoded event" proper to photography (Krauss, 1977, p.60).

Among other works she inspects Lucio Pozzi's P.S.1 Paint, a series of two-colour panels dispersed around the building, mounted on the seams of two differently painted walls. Pozzi painted these wooden panels, perfectly matching the wall-colours (which use to designate building's areas) and aligned them with these seams. The panels are bridging the disjuncture, but at the same time replicate it. The features of that specific wall are directly duplicated onto the painting, and this is, according to Krauss, a photographic strategy - "cropping, reduction, and self-evident flattening" (Krauss, p. 60). The painting acts as an impression: its relation to its subject is indexical. Krauss describes: "If the

8 Exhibition Rooms, P.S.1, Queens, NY, 1976.

reduction of the sign



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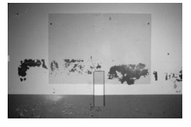
Lucio Pozzi: P.S.1 Paint



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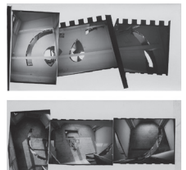

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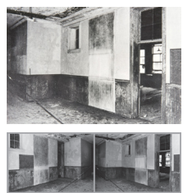

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surface of one of his panels is divided, that partition can only be understood as a transfer or impression of the features of a natural continuum onto the surface of the painting. […] Paintings are understood, instead[9], as shifters, empty signs (like the word this) that are filled with meaning only when physically juxtaposed with an external referent, or object". Abstract painting internalised the operation of photography: "Internal division (drawing) is converted from its formal status of encoding reality to one of imprinting it" (Krauss, 1977, p.64).

The effect of these works is a strong feeling of past time. Traces and imprints are residues of the cause no longer present in the given sign. We are dealing with the synchronism of presence-absence. Recalling Roland Barthes, this aberration is innate to photography: "Photography set up, in effect, not a perception of the *being-there* of an object (which all copies are able to provoke), but the perception of its *having-been-there*. It is a question therefore of a new category of space-time: spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority" (Barthes, quoted in Krauss, 1977, p.65). In this sense, the wall is signified by his painting as something which *was* there but has now been coated over.

Trace as a subject

Above, indexicality was used to explain the photograph's nature as a *trace*, and to show this photographic principle insinuating in abstract installation practices. *Trace*, however, is not only a *conception* of a photograph, but also a *subject*, most prolific for numerous visual artists.

Ephemeral forms of performance and process art were central to art practices of the 70s. Artists like Gordon Matta-Clark, Vito Acconci, Michelle Stuart[10] and John Divola all employed photography as a record of their transient or site-specific actions.

9 In contrast to former abstract painting of for instance Ellsworth Kelly (Krauss, 1977).
10 All participants in the show Rooms

An impression of an artist's body in the landscape, cut-out parts of buildings, painter's gesture, remains of a catastrophe, found and constructed evidence… Traces function as marks of the real within photographs as documents. As David Campany (2003, p.88) writes: "A photograph of a trace is perhaps the opposite of a 'decisive moment'. It is the moment after. It records the marks made by the world on the body and by the body on the world."

John Divola: Vandalism & George Air Force Base

Traces in one's direct environment were constant source of inspiration for photographer John Divola. In 1974/75 he initiated the series Vandalism, traveling to Los Angeles' abandoned buildings equipped with a camera. Intrigued by the marks of decay in deserted rooms, he intervened with his own gestures of spray paint, torn cardboard pieces and string compositions. He catalogued these constellations by photographing them, developing a language he has been using ever since.

Recently, Divola produced a comparable photographic series, at the decommissioned George Air Force Base in Victorville, California (2015 - 2017). Due to groundwater contamination the housing units were left to deteriorate, becoming a scenery of erosion: exposed constructions, suspended piping, breached walls, rust, flaking layers…

Trace within the photograph testifies about building's afterlife, about what is left behind once everyone departs. Divola's photographs bring a tension of the veracity we still assign to photography: its forensic quality on the one hand and the constructed evidence (his own marks) on the other. Focusing on the exploration of *traces,* the fact that these are analogue photographs only reinforces my understanding of them as double-indexes. I am trying to show that indexicality is the common denominator of photographical and gestural image-making. John Divola's practice is strongly rooted in both, which explains his obsession with ges-

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tures and abstraction: “My interest in gesture is not limited to my own marks and activity but also architectural gesture, the gestures of individuals ripping open the walls stealing copper wire, or the gestures of military trainees spraying the walls with paint ball impacts during war game exercises. Or, on the exteriors, the gestures of someone recklessly driving a bulldozer clearing foliage between the buildings.” (Divola, 2017) His broad understanding of gesture resonates with my own practice which is the subject in focus in the following chapter.

Rut Blees Luxemburg: Liebeslied

Liebeslied. Photograph’s strong texture of saturated reds and yellows exposes scratches, blots and inscriptions of the urban surfaces. Rut Blees Luxemburg’s picture brings to mind the double-indexical structure of Divola’s photographs and draws a parallel between the two practices. Blees Luxemburg wanders the city at night and captures its overlooked surfaces. The writing on the wall in the underpass seems private: “I’m attracted to the *heimlichkeit* (secretness/clandestine quality) of this space which is public,” she says, “a space that allows for a moment to repose.” (Blees Luxemburg, quoted in Campany, p. 246). The tiny graffiti resemble a poem which was then eradicated and became another trace, adding to all the stains on the surface of the city. Similar to Divola, she uses the analogue camera to capture these traces.

Yet, in contrast to Divola, Blees Luxemburg does not intervene in the scenery photographed, but acts only as a night wanderer and inspector. Her gesture is not that of a painter adding to the public canvas, but that of a meticulous observer using long exposure times. Exposures of up to 20 minutes inevitably let objects in motion disappear from the image, leaving visible only the static and permanent. Luxemburg considers chance an important method at work: “The long exposure leaves space for unexpected things to happen while the shutter is open. So contingency is a big part of my way of taking images” (quoted in Campany, 2003, p.247). Her highly controlled process is thus pierced by the unforeseen.

Mia Paller: Trace photobooks

A blank paper, the moment before the first lines of a drawing appear. It has all the potential in the world. Loaded with tension, it awaits for the first mark to be made, for the first trace to determine it. I see no image in mind - nothing I can imagine and bring onto the paper… Uneasy, I finally spill some ink. It’s done. Now, I can begin.

I consider chance principle one of the important factors in my own practice, be it drawing, painting or taking a photograph. What Rut Blees Luxemburg calls “letting in that which is outside of my control”, at some point leaks into the photographic series *Trace* as well. The black and white photographic series took the form of an artist’s book, cataloguing the typology of a trace: marks of use, coats peeling off, scratches, a drip of gasoline, humble graffiti tag. Just as John Divola or Rut Blees Luxemburg, I became a hair-splitting observer, seeking accidental drawing which goes unnoticed in the everyday environment. Collecting is a major method at work here and resonates with the forensic character of a photograph, to borrow Campany’s words. (Campany, 2003, p.88)

Luxemburg’s motifs are urban underground and passages, principally photographed at night when the city is quiescent. Divola adopts deserted buildings, similarly motionless but historically or politically significant. I find my interest closer to Luxemburg’s as it is not a culturally charged place that I seek; but a place so familiar that it seems self-evident.

Photographs for Trace 1 and 2 were predominantly taken in the city centre of Rotterdam close to my studio. When I first moved to Rotterdam, I was struck by how the city’s never-ending transformation. Constant rebuilding makes *the new* overpower *the*

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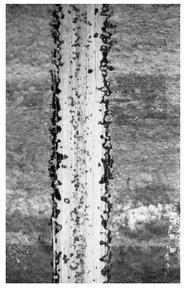

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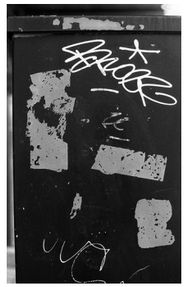

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black and white

existing. But a close inspection reveals the minuscule relics of the (immediate) past. Personally, photographing forces me to *observe*, to wonder about the surrounding landscape, which culminated in these images.

Trace 3 is a work in progress for which I chose the area named M4H as the motif. The zone is close to where I live and I pass it every day without stopping to explore.

M4H is an industrial estate with former docking infrastructure and warehouses. The harbour is being transformed into a district of creative industries and urban innovation. Fascinated by the area's worn-out atmosphere and its metamorphosis, I returned to the same spot several times to produce the third photographic series, trying to make a portrait of one of the buildings named Rotterdamse Citrusveiling B.V.

Taking my analogue camera, I wander around the M4H. The area is fairly tranquil on a Sunday. I meet no one. I hear small waves hitting the pier. Cranes, container ships and workshops, everything seem motionless, except for an occasional truck. The area is raw and rich in textures: brick walls, scratched kerb, rusty fence, locked entrance. Everything hints at the human presence.

The decision to omit colour emerged from the intention to produce a series with a rather graphic quality, closer to printmaking and drawing. Creating diversity with texture and tone rather than colour is more a drawing principle, than that of painting which is what I was looking for. At the same time, reduction to greys unifies the variety of found traces. It seems necessary to touch upon the decision for analogue instead of digital photography. I hereby borrow John Divola's reasoning: "An analog photograph is, quite literally, a physical manifestation of an engagement, an artifact of history. […] There is something about an analog photograph that feels like an industrial artifact" (Divola, n.d.).

Since Trace deals with urban spaces, the industrial character of analogue photography is appropriate.

Another reason for choosing analogue, has to do with the double-indexicality I outlined earlier. Photochemical processes, I believe, establishes a photograph as an index. Alexander Robins (2014) and Mary Ann Doane (2007) discuss this claim in depth, but the question arises, whether digital technologies challenge the indexicality of the photographic medium. Corey Dzenko (2009) analyses how a digital image - converted into data - indeed loses the physical connection with 'reality' and therefore functions as an icon, not the index. The effortless manipulation, recombination and circulation of digital photographs casts a shadow of doubt to their reliability and disrupts previous notions of photography's indexicality. But Dzenko stresses that this only holds in theory and that viewers' perception did not shift according to theoretical observations. Digital images function within the tradition of analogue photography and their social use has therefore remained unchanged. A photograph, be it an analogue or a digital one, is still perceived to represent reality.

To me, the analogue photograph operates as an imprint, as evidence of something that happened, more than a digital one does.[11] The images were not printed in the darkroom, but on a copy machine. Yet, the analogy remains. The photocopy is nothing more than powder of toner particles, transferred onto paper in a specific arrangement to produce the picture.

The notion of an imprint brings up the act of touching. The paper quality varies – rough, off-white, smooth, silky, translucent, absorbent… Leaving many pages blank, the book exposes the at-

11 "With language, and digital photography, we are dealing with testimony and testimony appears more suspect, more amenable to interpretation and manipulation. A digital photograph can easily be reassembled in any manner that one desires. While an analog photograph is subject to forgery, forgery is a different matter altogether. I am not making an assertion here concerning objective referential accuracy, although one might be able to support such an argument. My concern lies more with how it feels, the image and its subjective reception," explains Divola in artist's statement about his project George Air Force Base, 2015 – 2017 (Divola, n.d.).

why analogue

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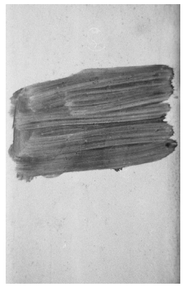

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touching

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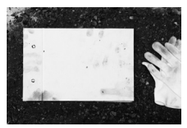

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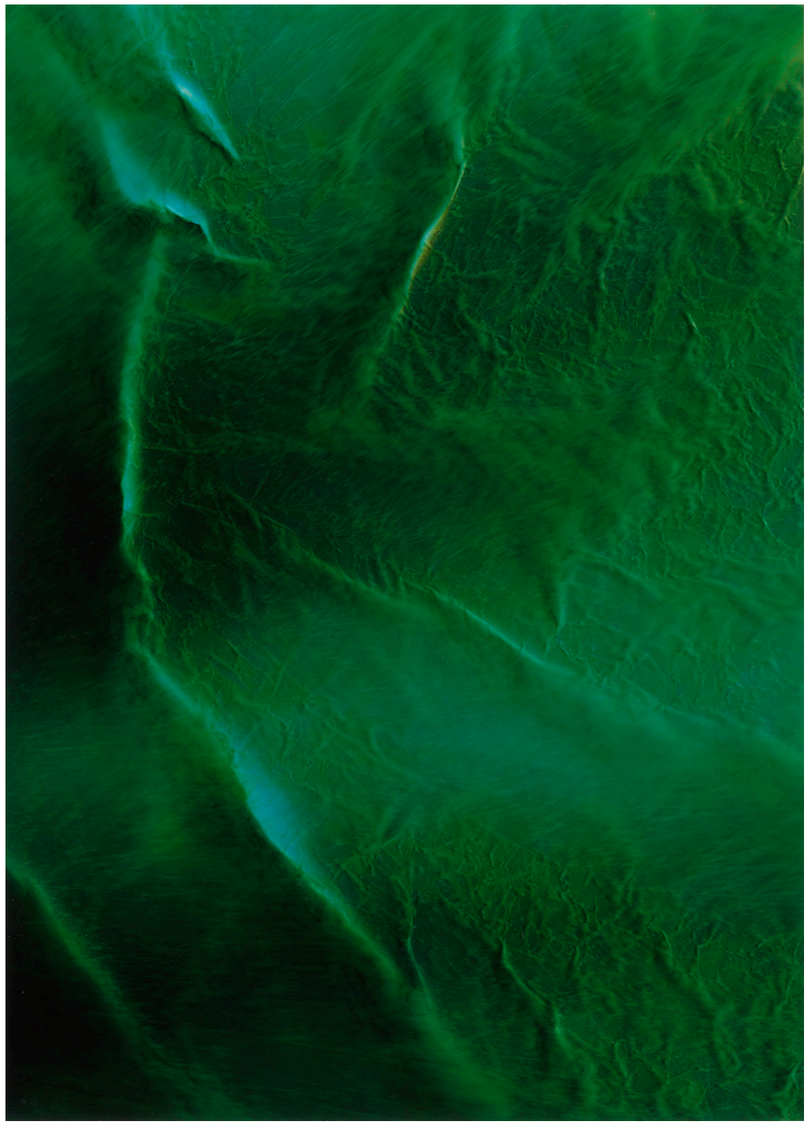
tributes of papers themselves. By leafing through, one senses the materiality of blank papers, running into a photograph every couple of pages. Feeling the surface is like that of Do Ho Suh's rubbings and evokes certain intimacy or fragility. Blank pages provide space for additional traces if the book is being used. Trace 1 and 2 were exhibited in gallery DobraVaga in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Each presented on a small table, covered with crumbled charcoal, white covered books immediately got stained. The way of presentation made space for the unforeseen to enter the work just as Blees Luxemburg suggests. Handling it, visitors would stain the pictures and blank pages. Turning from pure white to smudged grey, each book started as an *opera aperta (the open work)* and changed through the time of display. I regard the piece complete only at the end of the exhibition, becoming a carrier for traces of visitor's handling. Similar to the above-mentioned practices of John Divola, Do Ho Suh and Michelle Stuart, Trace 1 and 2 are characterised by processuality.

In comparison to Liebeslied and Vandalism, I see Trace somewhere in between. It is a typology of found marks, with an *intervention* of charcoal smudges, approaching Divola's work. His marks, however, take place *before* the image is captured, whereas in Trace it is a crucial component of presentation. Divola made the marks himself, whereas in Trace, I chose to expose the work to collect the traces of visitors' experience. The photobooks correspond to both categories of traces, found and provoked ones, and the photograph as an imprint speaks for double-indexicality.

Jackson Pollock, Autumn Rhythm (Number 30), 1950, enamel on canvas, 266.7 x 525.8 cm, detail.

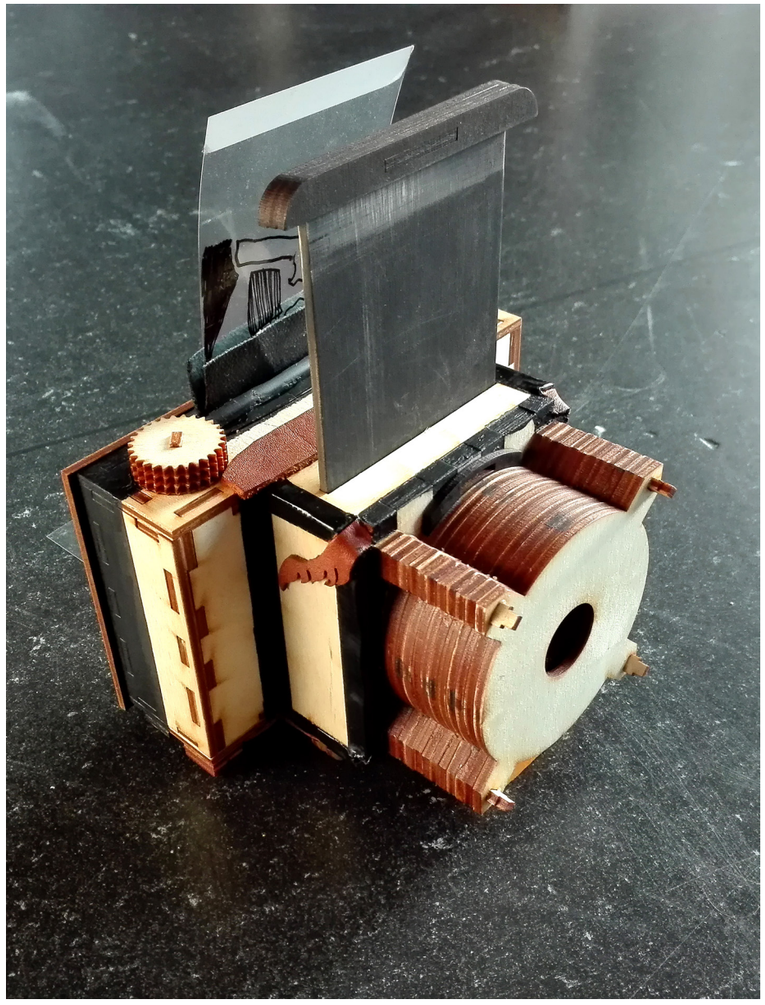
George Romney, The Origin of Painting, ca. 1775–80,
pen and brown ink and grey wash, 51.7 x 32.2 cm.

William Henry Fox Talbot, Wrack, 1839, salted paper print, 22 x 17.5 cm (irregularly trimmed).



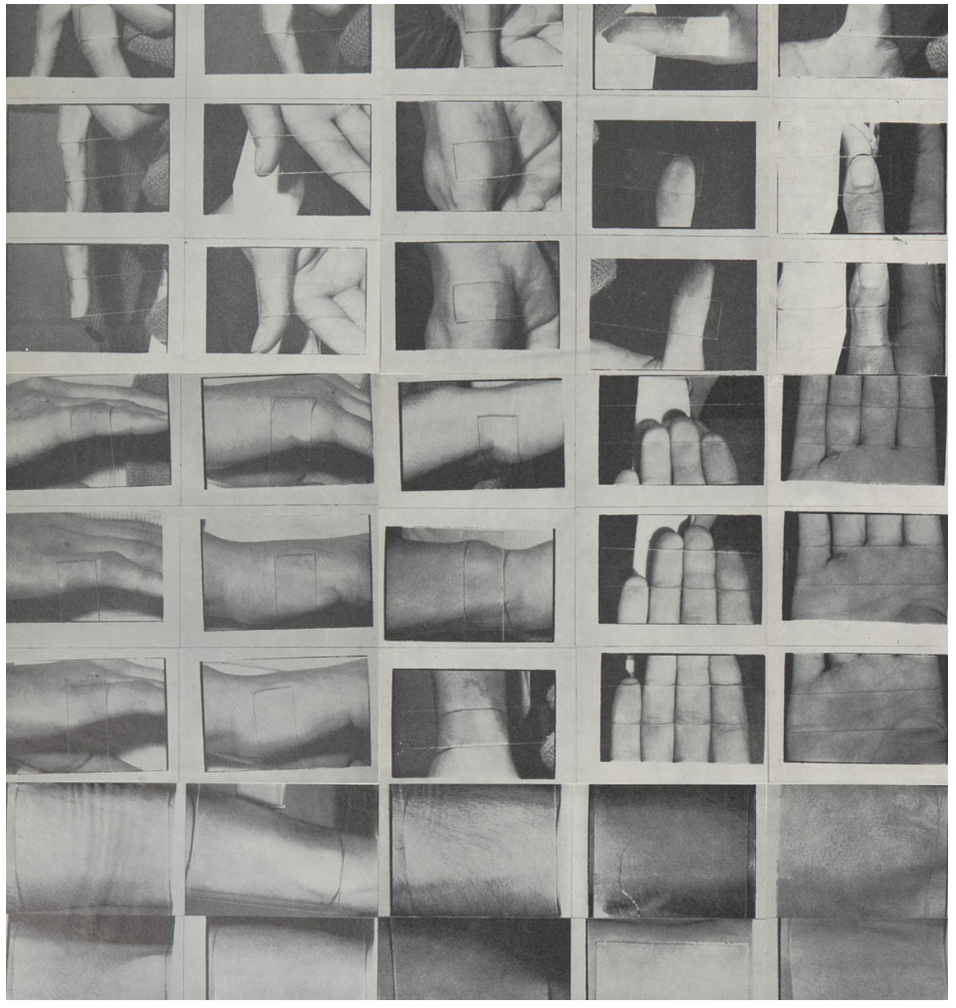
This spread: Sonia Mangiapane, untitled, from the series faux topographies, 2019, analogue chromogenic prints, unique, 13 x 18 cm.

This spread: Sonia Mangiapane, untitled, from the series faux topographies, 2019, analogue chromogenic prints, unique, 10 x 15 cm.



Mia Paller, the Drawing Camera, 2018, plywood, glue, fabric, tape, transparent foil, 14 x 18 x 12 cm.

Mia Paller, I Am Scratching My Pockets, 2017, gelatin silver print on resin coated paper, 40 x 30 cm.



Giuseppe Penone, Svolgere la propria pelle, 1970–71, gelatin silver print, 69.5 x 107 cm; details.

Alexander Cozens, A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape, Plate 15 of 16, 1785, aquatint on paper, 24 x 31.4 cm.

Alexander Cozens, A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape, Plate 7 of 16, 1785, aquatint on paper, 24 x 31.4 cm.

Mia Paller, Landscape 7/12, 2019, gelatin silver print on fibre based paper, 26.5 x 26.5 cm.

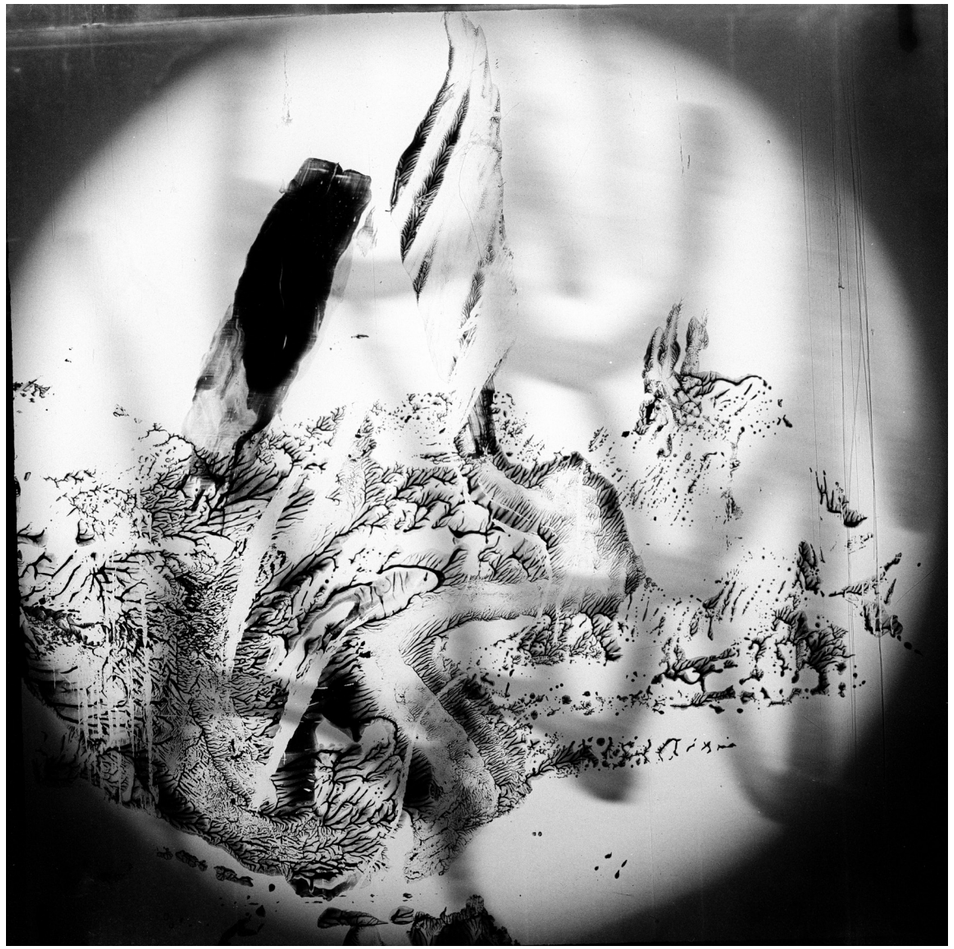
Mia Paller, Abstractaparat 12/12, 2019, gelatin silver print on fibre based paper, 26.5 x 26.5 cm.

Mia Paller, Landscape 10/4, 2019, gelatin silver print on fibre based paper, 26.5 x 26.5 cm.

Mia Paller, Abstractaparat 8/10, 2019, gelatin silver print on fibre based paper, 26.5 x 26.5 cm.

Mia Paller, Landscape 10/9, 2019, gelatin silver print on fibre based paper, 26.5 x 26.5 cm.

Mia Paller, Landscape 10/2, 2019, gelatin silver print on fibre based paper, 26.5 x 26.5 cm.



Mia Paller, Abstractaparat 12/7, 2019, gelatin silver print on fibre based paper, 26.5 x 26.5 cm.

Mia Paller, Abstractaparat 11/11, 2019, gelatin silver print on fibre based paper, 26.5 x 26.5 cm.

Cy Twombly, Bay of Naples, 1961, oil paint, house paint, wax crayon, lead pencil on canvas, 241.8 x 298.6 cm.

Cueva de las Manos (Cave of Hands), cca. 7300 BC, unknown binder and mineral pigments on the cave walls.

Unfolding the beginnings

While delineating the practice between drawing and photography, a well-known myth springs to mind, a myth about the *origin of drawing*. Greek, Egyptian and Roman scholars made different geographic claims, and throughout the centuries, the story was reshaped into many variants. All, however, share the idea that painting was invented by outlining a person's shadow. "Modeling portraits from clay was first invented by Butades, a potter of Sicyon in Corinth," writes Pliny. "He did this owing to his daughter, who was in love with a young man; and she, when he was going abroad, drew in outline on the wall the shadow of his face thrown by a lamp. Her father pressed clay on this and made a relief" (Pliny, quoted in Petherbridge, 2010, p.19).

This legend has been philosophically analysed numerous times in relation to silhouettes, memory, drawing and photography. Borrowing the example of *Origin of Painting* by George Romney I hereby extend the myth as a metaphor for photography's correlation to drawing. Corinthian Maid is depicted in tracing her sleeping lover's silhouette. It is paramount that the outline is not traced around his actual body, but around his *"incorporeal shadow"*. Petherbridge (2010, p.21) reads Romney's illustration: "This representation therefore directly links absence and loss with drawing." But feeling of past time and absence is, recalling Barthes, innate to photography. Absence is in the heart the *origin of drawing* but makes it, at the same time, the *origin of photography*. After all, a photograph is essentially a shadow fixed onto light-sensitive support. It is an image, produced by light.

Linkage between line and light thus historically led to William Henry Fox Talbot's earliest experiments with shadow and discoloration of sensitive paper. He first named his invention *skiagraphy* (literally shadow drawing or shadow writing). Soon, he

origin of painting

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birth of photography

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conceived *photogenic drawing* (1834), the first photographic process capable of producing and *fixing* negative images on paper. Talbot described it as "the mere action of light upon the sensitive paper […] impressed by Nature's hand" (quoted in Kenaan, 2015, p.550). The notion of shadow is the crucial common point of Corinthian myth and Talbot's invention.[12] For Talbot, the shadow is an "emblem of all that is fleeting and momentary" and that it may be fixed to overcome the passage of time (quoted in Kenaan, 2015, p.554). As the shadow is the crucial point in common of the origins of two image modalities, it once again reveals the indexical nature which photography and drawing share.

Questioning the instinctive

My work is deeply rooted in drawing, but what exactly is it, this drawing? Abstract, spontaneous, open, gestural, linear, tonal, textured, mixed media… Few words to describe my drawings. But I know possibilities are endless: fragmented, complete, private, performative, public, geometric, figurative, smooth, finished, detailed, sketched, colour… Is it separable from other media, or is it a parasite, seeping into all modes of image-making?

As Deanna Petherbridge (2010) observes, defining drawing is a futile attempt. She claims that any formula would have to include all the contradictory aspects of drawing and its indefinable status. She proposes the notion of *drawing as a continuum*, touching upon its differences and analogies with painting and other media.

Since we talk about drawing *in* sculpture, *in* painting, *in* architecture etc., one can say that drawing is in reciprocal relationship with these other media. Petherbridge (2010, p.18) states: "The

12 Hagi Kenaan in his essay Photography and Its Shadow (2015) thoroughly compares the myth of the origin of drawing with the birth of photography and analyses the notion of shadow and its relation to both drawing and photography.

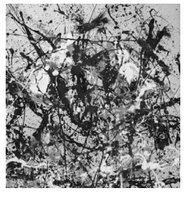
incompleteness of a drawing has its own vibrating life, but also invites its completion in other media. On the other hand, a drawing can be so finished in itself that it subsumes the need for further stages of transformation." Drawing embraces plurality and has an inter- or even trans-medial nature. The inability to define drawing is perhaps the heritage of postmodern collapse of distinctions between media. But I will, in order to contemplate my work, try to establish a notion of drawing, first in relation to painting.

Drawing: against or with painting

For centuries, drawing was considered to have the upper hand over painting and that it precedes colour. Alberti claimed that drawing meant "the first lines encircling an object… profiles or outlines" and that painting was "filling up outlines" in colour (quoted in Charles and Carl, 2014, p.77). Similarly, Roger de Piles (1660s) argued that line pre-exists colour: "Drawing can exist without *coloris* and since *coloris* cannot exist without drawing […] drawing is more necessary, more noble and more considerable than *coloris*" (quoted in Petherbridge, 2010, p.25).

Modernism, however, overturned the norms of visual art, including the relation between line and colour. Paul Cezanne introduced drawing *through* paint: "Drawing and color aren't distinct from one another. Gradually as one paints, one draws; the more harmonious the colors, the more exact the drawing becomes" (quoted in Petherbridge, 2010, p.25).

Jackson Pollock's Action Paintings are such embodiment of the unity drawing-painting. Pollock acknowledged: "Yes, I approach painting in the same sense as one approaches drawing; that is, it's direct. I don't work from drawings, I don't make sketches and drawings and color sketches into a final painting" (quoted in Karmel, 1999, p.22). He developed the method of dripping and pouring the paint onto a flat laid canvas or paper, strokes of paint dispersed as action-lines, recordings of a moving hand.



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Drawing = gestural mark-making

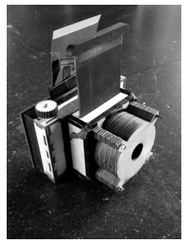
Furthermore, precedence of line or colour becomes irrelevant with postmodernism, and the notions of painting and drawing merge into one. This corresponds to my understanding of drawing as a fusion of principles into the unity of *gestural mark-making*.

Jackson Pollock's Action Paintings imply the kinetic aspect of the gesture and serve me as a starting point to pin down the term *drawing*. I lean on Philip Rawson's statement that "drawings are done with a point that moves. […] The essential feature remains that something generically classed as a point, […] has made a mark that records a two-dimensional movement in space" (Rawson, 1987, p.15).

I might use graphite or charcoal for this one… Making soft gradients or expressive zig zags. But there is a certain charm in not using any implement at all. I pour some ink on moist paper, wait for a moment, and observe. The drop of black ink dissolves into infinite grey tones, spreading and swirling. I lift one corner of the sheet. The ink is slowly finding its way over the paper until it's absorbed. Time to dry, then continue.

It is not only the point of a drawing implement that can move but can also be the material itself. In my slides for the Drawing Camera, for instance, marks were often created by the blot of acrylic paint itself, rather than applied with a brush or a pencil. Blotting (to which I return later) is therefore one of drawing's modalities, much present in my practice.

If *drawing* is stripped down to its essence, to marks with kinetic component, mark-making becomes a broad understanding of drawing.



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Drawing and photography: temporality

"In reality a line once made does not itself change or move. It is fixed as a static mark. But there always lies at the bottom of every drawing an implied pattern of those movements through which it was created"[13] (Rawson, 1987, p.15). Every drawing is born in sequential steps and thus implies temporality. To break down how photographing and drawing pertain to time, we need to make a distinction between *making* and *reading*. The action of *making (taking)* a photograph relates to time differently than the action of drawing. Making the photograph seems to be instantaneous. The shutter opens for a slice of time (and rapidly shuts again), the light hits the silver crystals in photosensitive emulsion and causes them to alter. It seems that the image is produced in an instant, or at least evenly all over the surface.[14] The drawing, au contraire, is fabricated bit-by-bit over time and space. Decisions are made in real time: draftsperson makes decisions while leaving a trace on the surface. Stamping or monotype take the role in-between. They emerge step-by-step but in the act of printing, the picture comes into being all at once. From the perspective of *making*, a photograph and a drawing seem to encompass different temporalities. Nevertheless, the act of reading is equally complex and requires attention and time.

Rawson (1987, p.17) analyses how to observe a drawing: "[These sets of visual symbols which constitute the drawing] demand to be read by scanning. For them to have meaning depends on our perceiving them, in their kinetic nature." The operation of image *scanning* is also brought up by Vilém Flusser: "If one wishes to deepen the significance, i.e. to reconstruct the abstracted dimensions, one has to allow one's gaze to wander over the surface

13 Rawson claims that this quality of underlying movement is the specific charm proper only to drawing and less present in finished work such as painting or sculpture. I must note that I do not entirely agree, as a painting is just as much constructed in sequential steps and therefore can only be read by unveiling them in time. This speaks for the conglomerate drawing-painting and its kinetic nature.

14 However elaborate the setup and preparations for the photograph may be, the camera invariably captures an instant.

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feeling the way as one goes. This wandering over the picture's surface is called 'scanning'. In so doing, one's gaze follows a complex path formed, on the one hand, by the structure of the image and, on the other, by the observer's intentions. The significance of the image as revealed in the scanning process therefore represents a synthesis of two intentions: one manifested in the image and the other belonging to the observer" (Flusser, 1983, p.8).

Scanning of a drawing and that of a photograph have the same temporality. Reading unfolds in time, step by step. But simultaneously, one is decoding the picture: how it was fabricated, what decisions were taken, which materials used… We follow the steps and intentions of the artist, yet we still approach drawings and photographs differently. As Flusser claims, the urge for decoding traditional pictures (e.g. drawings) is evident, whereas technical pictures (e.g. photographs) seem *sealed*, they seem *believable*. We thus read them accordingly, as if there is nothing to decode.

After modernism we see pictures differently - impressionism, cubism and abstract expressionism trained us to read pictures analytically - but we mostly apply the method to paintings, drawings and prints, while the photographs still carry the *burden of proof*. The question arises: what kind of photograph invites deconstruction, in the way a drawing does?

Sonia Mangiapane: camera-less photography

I believe one of the answers lies in the practice of Sonia Mangiapane. The decoding of a picture is triggered by the work; which is opaque, hard to grasp on the one hand, and tangible on the other. When decoding a picture, one asks: what decisions were taken and what is the order of those decisions? Sonia Mangiapane's photograms and luminograms often refer to the photographic processes themselves and thus explore formal qualities of the medium. The series falls under camera-less photography, where the artist uses the darkroom as her camera to manipulate light and photosensitive material which results in rather abstract pictures. By probing

the essence of the photographic medium, it bridges its boundaries and seeps into the realm of painting (drawing) with light. I believe abstraction and self-referentiality bring photography closer to the action of drawing and serve as an interruption[15], preventing the viewer from accepting the photograph as the truth. This rupture is thus the trigger for decoding (the photographic image), which shatters the *picture as a window to reality*. It makes one aware of the materiality of both the photograph and the drawing and evokes pertinent decoding. Despite being still images, they imply temporality, as both must be read in time, by the moving gaze.

Mia Paller: Drawing Camera (part 1)

In photographic works, I try to generate a similar rupture. In the series made with the Drawing Camera *drawing* serves as a leverage to disrupt the smooth photograph's appearance and evokes its dismantling. As already concluded, I understand drawing in a broad sense – as mark-making – which also involves producing gestural traces. In the following paragraphs, I wish to dissect the types of gestures present in these works. To contextualise the outcoming pictures, we first need to construe the Drawing Camera as an apparatus.

It is a handcrafted analogue camera for producing Photodrawings. First, I draw onto a transparent plastic foil, then I slide it in the camera and take a picture. Thus, we get a negative which combines a scene from my surroundings with the drawing. The latter can be made at the spot or prepared in advance. The photographs are merged with drawings directly in the process of exposing the film. It is a collage that happens in the machine itself.

The creative process is often ingrained by intuition, the more because there is no viewfinder to completely control the framing. This is exactly the point where my methods from painting

15 This interruption is close to what Barthes (1981, p.27) terms *punctum* (in contrast to *studium*): "A photograph's punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)."

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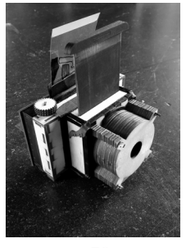
DIY camera



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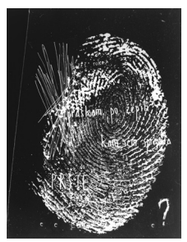

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infiltrate photography. I often approach a blank picture plane by spilling the paint, dropping collage elements on the composition etc. While working with Drawing Camera, accidental elements surprised me again and soon I found myself drawing, scratching and stamping on the transparent foil, treating it similarly as I do the canvas.

The material's physicality is a characteristic that fascinates me and influences my approach to picture-making. Similarly present in Trace, the bodily contact with the surface is of great importance. Instead of drawing with an implement, I often use fingers to stamp paint on the foil, smudging and staining it. Philip Rawson beautifully observes: "The hand may apply some substance directly to the surface. It may smear on with the fingers, palm, and edge of the hand […] Usually the hand which draws in this way will make deliberate gestures which produce an 'additive' line made up of separate touches; for the fingers cannot carry enough of the drawing pigment, nor can they apply it freely enough, to make a long, elaborated stroke.[16] […] Many modern draughtsmen seek without great success to imitate the blunt, accumulative strokes of primitive finger-drawing in fine modern media on bland modern surfaces" (Rawson, 1987, p.59).[17]

This brings me back to the photogram I made when I only started using the darkroom. I stamped my finger with acrylic paint on transparent foil and inserted it in the enlarger. Focus. The picture I developed was simple, but I think it's the fact of a fingerprint – its connotation of identity – that still makes it intriguing. It is a signature, the most explicit one... I see that I was using the darkroom then as I am now using my Drawing Camera.

16 In Photodrawings, such marks are enlarged which makes us perceive them differently as they gain a different character. A small mark is amplified, stretching over the whole frame of the negative and works as one continuous stroke, even though it might only be a few centimetres wide.

17 Rawson is highly critical to modern 'imitations' of ancient (even 'primitive', in his words) methods, but I believe in the practice of Cy Twombly, for example, the approach is genuine. I disagree that such artists merely try to *imitate* the effect, but rather seek the direct bodily connection, phenomenological link between the person and the drawing.

While reading about the trace in photography, I came across this untitled statement from 1974 by Giuseppe Penone: "A finger that touches a surface leaves an image corresponding to the points of contact. This operation is the result of a clear, precise pressure which generates the image. What gives rise to the sensation of pressure derives from the mechanical deformation of the skin tissue with respect to the surface that is the object of the pressure. […] Every sensation of pressure constitutes a model, with characteristics of space, time and intensity, which provides different images. […] By enlarging a 'fingerprint' photographically, one obtains a clear image of the intensity of pressure exercised by the various points of the skin" (quoted in Campany, 2003, p.239).

Penone's reflection can also be understood in the context of my Camera. I believe the importance of *touch* is twofold: on the one hand, it acts as physical connection between the image and its constructor. On the other, it makes the image speak on the physical level *to the viewer*. It is as if the viewer reconstructs separate steps of making process, following the artist's touches.

The enlarging process implies a desire to see better and therefore to better *understand*. I believe it comes from the need to reveal what is hidden to the naked eye. Telescopes, microscopes and other lens-based instruments empower us to observe (and photograph) the outer space and microcosmos. Such technology works as the extension of our vision to be able to grasp reality far beyond our sensory limits. The enlarging in the darkroom may operate on a much smaller scale, but the analogy remains. It is this feel of something unreachable that attracts me in such processes. To me, the blow-up amplifies the gesture and reminds me of forensics. In the case of a fingerprint, it means looking deeper in the trace of my own body, my own hand.

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the blob

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The above-mentioned photogram says, “I am scratching my pockets; where did I place my fingers?” This one-verse poem came from the feeling of looking for something without knowing what it is. It is a rhetoric question about the inability to create or inability to express (verbally), where the fingerprint acts as direct visualisation for the words.

Returning to Rawson’s analysis of drawing marks, *the blob* seems the category to describe the drawings I combine with photographs. Rawson (1987, p.81) explains its relationship with coincidence: “The blob is a mark in which chance plays the dominating part. […] But the appearance of the blob intrinsically represents the element of hazard in drawing technique.” He observes that embracing this hazard has been method to stimulate invention, used by Chinese and Japanese ink-painters and by Abstract Expressionists (e.g. Jackson Pollock) who incorporated the blob into a system.

Alexander Cozens: blotting

Alexander Cozens, an 18th century painter, employed the so-called blotting technique for landscape drawings. He used the method of splattering ink on blank paper as initial stage of sketching to liberate the imagination. Resulting drawings were mainly landscapes, dynamic and abstract. Blot was, according to Cozens, a “production of chance, […] an assemblage of accidental shapes […] from which ideas are presented to the mind” (Cozens, 1785, p.66). The methods at work are like ones of the Drawing Camera. I use blotting as a trigger for the picture but also as means to overcome the anxiety of blank paper. In this sense, I see the parallel with Cozens’ *blot landscapes*. The blob can, according to Rawson, embody the unique individuality of the moment of inspiration. Transfer onto a photographic negative, however, challenges this exclusiveness by making the mark reproducible.

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Due to the abstract nature of blots, we assign them meaning associatively. In rather figurative context, the surrounding signs provide a frame of significance, whether in art which does not emphasise intelligible contexts, blobs’ meaning will depend upon a purely subjective response of the spectator; like in Rorschach test-blobs (Rawson, 1987).

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Mia Paller: Drawing Camera (part 2)

Blots serve me as intrusions in the photograph. We assign them meaning associatively, as seen in the Landscape series of Photodrawings: a cityscape behind the amorphous blob makes it a cluster of trees.

In developing the Abstractaparat series, I mainly focused on surface, texture and fragments of the mundane found in M4H, former industrial area. The location itself is already abstracted which enhances the puzzling character of the produced image. The Photodrawing for instance merges a found graffiti tag with an abstract gestural mark I made with paint. In a way they both state the same ‘I was here’ and the act of photographing only reinforces the tautology of such index. Abstractaparat reminds me again of John Divola’s Vandalism and his abstract configurations of marks that make one wonder whether they are genuine graffiti or carefully composed by the artist.

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This city is so geometrical. Rotterdam and the Dutch landscape in general, the ‘countryside’ here is so constructed, quite different from the land I am used to. Even nature seems fabricated. But so is the photograph, in the end.

This *fabrication* made me try to merge the photograph with a gestural layer. Pure architectural photography does not excite me as much. But when the atmosphere of the cityscape, its cold character is contrasted with a personal mark, I find it more imag-

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inative. In Landscape 7/12, for instance, the amorphic drawing that resembles rocks appears to be overgrowing the buildings in the background. I consider Photodrawings a contemplation on my surroundings or even an attempt of rapprochement.

However, there is another aspect to this urge to fuse the two. Any photographic image carries numerous references. Looking at a photograph, one immediately thinks of the myriad of other images, associating their subject, atmosphere, composition etc. No photograph is a pure invention, but it always relies on, and emerges from, pre-existing images. Moreover, by flooding our visual culture, photographs are so omnipresent that they overpower our imagination. Implanting the gesture in the photograph is a way to resist this monopoly and that is where my motivation lies.

The act of merging brings the tension between reality and fiction. These drawn or blotted disruptions (as in Landscape 7/12) introduce the narrative element; the amorphic and natural seems to be overpowering the constructed. By obscuring 'reality', they are symptoms of fiction. For me, they open a possibility of daydreaming, of envisaging the mundane differently. Some pictures bear a poetic atmosphere which I sometimes miss in the city. By poetic, I mean the imaginative character of a picture which takes us away from the actual. I associate it with the Romantic[18] view, where the sublime in nature serves as a getaway from (corrupt) reality. In Romantic painting, the overwhelming phenomena – cliffs, stormy skies, wild forests – are representations of the sublime. In modern art, however, sublime does not lie in depicted nature, but is performed through a *subjective experience*. For me, poetic layers of Photodrawings bear such feeling of simultaneous ambiguity and overwhelmingness. They disrupt the sealed surface of the photograph, creating a link between the imaginary and the evident. The viewer struggles to reconstruct the making process. I want to open space for contemplation by blending the notion of the actual (embedded in the photograph) with the subjective.

18 Referring to the Romantic era (Romanticism), not to *romance*.

I have a couple of times touched upon the notion of gesture. Drawings present in Photodrawings and in Trace, include found marks, marks I made deliberately, or ones created by mistake (such as scratches of the foil or film). But Divola suggested a broader understanding of gesture, which resonates with my own aspirations in photographic work (see previous chapter). It is therefore understood also as an artistic gesture, for instance letting visitors invade one's work as manifested in Trace photobooks.

Secondly, there is a gesture of selection. I mentioned that chance plays an important role in the production of Photodrawings, but it does not mean all pictures in the end have the same status. It is the act of selecting which serves as author's gesture. With the collection growing, I retrospectively analyse and group the Photodrawings based on the analogies in form and subject. Thus, I printed two clusters of pictures: Landscape and Abstractaparat. For each, I set the criteria to categorise and judge the outcomes. In Abstractaparat, for instance, I considered texture, contrast in form and tone and degree to which the photographic projection merges with the reality of substance present in the drawing. The more graphic the photograph, the more I find it fascinating (hence the choice of black-and white film). On the other hand, while selecting for Landscape series, I was mainly looking for analogies (or contrasts) between the facets of nature (e.g. tree bark, water, treetops) and marks I made with acrylic paint (e.g. amorphous shapes, branched patterns, rock-resembling form). The harder it is to distinguish both layers, the more convincing I find the picture. And that is what I mean by 'exploring the gesture as the bridge between photography and drawing'.

Hand and touch have already been mentioned in the context of stamping, a method I use to prepare the slides for the Drawing Camera. Stamping is essentially a modality of printmaking, namely a monotype. Rawson defines: "Its essence is that a single print is made from something drawn on another surface, e.g. sheet of glass, by pressing the other surface and the drawing ground together" (Rawson, 1987, p.75). Monotype (as the etymology sug-

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a print

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gests) means a unique print: I make marks with acrylic paint onto a surface, cover it with foil and then peel it off. The resulting print is one of a kind. It compares to blotting and is close to the realm of painting. The most archaic form of monotype is a print of a hand dipped in dye. Such Palaeolithic cave-prints are one of the earliest drawings known, which reminds me of the myth 'origin of painting'. Tracing a shadow is analogous to the monotype of a hand, as they both suggest indexical presence.

THE SHUTTER CLOSES

When drafting this research, I understood the element of *gesture* in my work as a visual artist as bridging the medium of drawing-painting with that of photography. Based on the historical development of both media and on practical experience of image-making, I believe that the relation between photography and drawing-painting is one of mutual influence. However, the notion of *gesture* proved not to be the main common denominator in my practice. The concept of *trace,* instead, encompasses gesture but includes absence and temporal displacement. Tightly related to photography and drawing, *trace* deeply resonates with my interests translated in visual practice.

Sparked by this slight shift of visual practice, I began to question some concepts and terminology I previously employed intuitively. I shifted from a close reading of texts by established theorists to close reading of my own practice. I juxtapose the latter with the works of other artists in the light of issues arising from photography and drawing-painting. There are some ideas – as printmaking, the symbolic meaning of format and black ink, importance of surface, the technique of *cliché verre* – that are only briefly noted, bringing to light further issues that remain unanswered but can serve as the foundation for my future research. Nevertheless, I hope this essay brought into focus enough to expose and contextualise my work.

Taking the myth of drawing's origin as a metaphor, I believe that drawing-painting and photography emerge from the same need: to leave a trace. Talbot's obsession with fixing the beautiful image produced by light and the hand-contours covering the walls of Cueva de las Manos… they both originate from the urge to leave a trace, an elementary mode of expression. The need to register an event or existence suggests, I believe, the desire for protection against the teeth of time which is inherent in human nature.

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