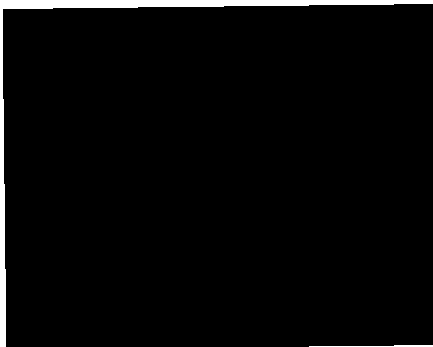


A dark, blurry photograph of a hallway. On the right, there is a door with a small, glowing light fixture. The overall atmosphere is somber and mysterious.

DIGNITY ON FIRE





Dignity on Fire
a personal journey through control and surrender
.the fire which made me you.

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by H&M, Piet Zwart Institute , 2019



Dignity On Fire

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Thesis submitted to: the Department of Media Design and Communication, Piet Zwart Institute Willem de Kooning Academy in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the final examination for the Master Media Design and Communication for the degree of: Master of Arts

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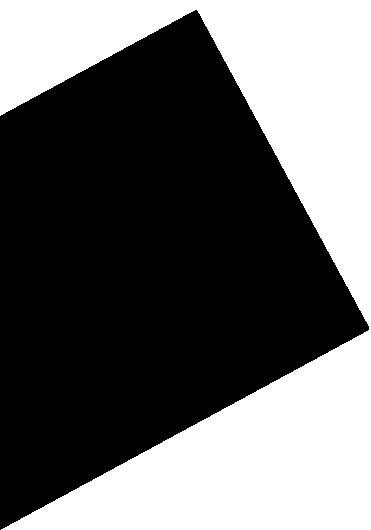
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burning point series, 2017, Rotterdam

the eveNt

Imagine, that one morning, on an October Friday 13th, you wake up as you usually do and do your morning routine, if you have one. Like mine was: peeing, stretching, bothering my boyfriend by deciding who's turn is to make coffee, try to find clean underwear, check facebook, wash face, dress up like a pantomime character in black and white striped shirt and black pants, drink coffee with an optional cigarette (David and Goliath, Dutch brand), check Instagram, take a morning selfie on the toilet while taking a shit and reading a dutch comic magazine, **forget** to have breakfast, kiss, key, another kiss, bike, cycle, arrive to Theatre Rotterdam. Obviously, after this strong start of a morning I didn't have any clue about

that it could have been a better decision to wear my favourite gloves or just take Esterházy Peter's¹ book with me, since he died few years ago, but dedicated that book for me before. Just because twelve hours later I lost everything, including my gloves and **the** book by Esterházy. During that night, after checking the focal point of some concave lenses, I had a bar shift at Wunderbar and I was just about to get annoyed by some drunk costumers around midnight when I got a phone call from an unknown number. My boyfriend was on the phone, in a panicky tone and his **voice** was just like Kurt Cobain playing a victim role in an Alfred Hitchcock movie. Out of his control, repeating the next sentence: "Come home now, I'm watching our house burning down.."

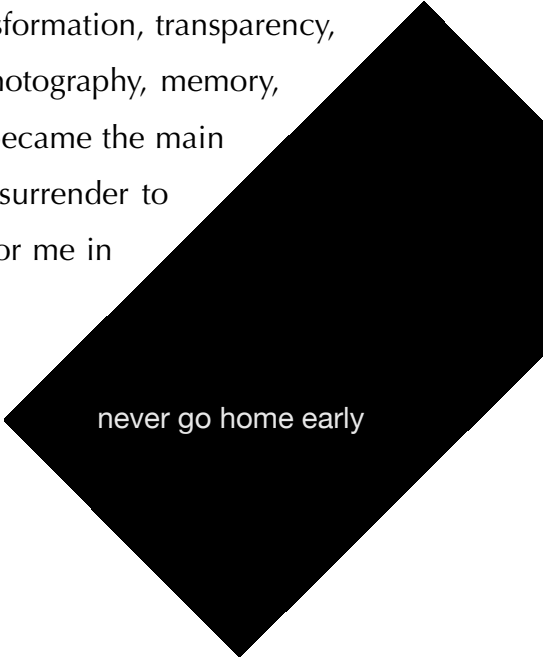
burning point series, 2017, Rotterdam



So, what could I do, I cycled home like a maniac, the whole road was a blackout, a live stream of simulation. The ground felt unstable under my legs, the reflection of blue and red lights **of** the giant firetrucks were swirling around the whole street. My perspective of life was randomly zooming in and out, I saw everything like in Gaspar Noë's "Enter the void", well I just entered **the void**. Standing on the street with all the neighbours around us, their pathetic and worried faces weren't hiding these questions: "How the hell this all happened? Who is responsible for this?" The fire started in our apartment, on the second floor of a three floor high building. Living above us, was a young Polish couple with their fourteen months old daughter and a hyperactive grey dog. When my partner realised the fire in our living-room/working space, where almost all of my paintings, footage materials, his instruments and our books went on flames quickly, he ran out without shoes and started to smash the doors of the neighbours. In the chaos and panic, Luna, the grey dog, got stuck upstairs and the flames blocked her way out. They **found** her body a few days later hidden in their fully smoked up apartment.

The death of that dog brought me closer to the explanation of life and fire by philosopher Gaston Bachelard: "If all changes slowly may be explained by life, all the changes quickly is explained by fire." According to this view, life is slowly crawling and progresses as time passing. Fire, on the other hand is an irruption in time, it is irreversible, a system crash and a memory loss. Of course, fire is not only the enemy of life, as Bachelard spends most of his book 'The Psychoanalysis on Fire' (1964) pointing out, it is deeply ingrained in our consciousness as a **symbol** of vitality, reverie, sexuality, and growth. "It is cooking and it is apocalypse." he wrote. In this text, I'm dedicated to discuss this paradox, trauma and life changing experience, which made me a better person and artist. During my research and writing time I've been facing the ambiguity of transformation, transparency, enlightened consciousness and perception of reality through photography, memory, time, trauma and fear. While working on this paper two things became the main core of my thinking process: how to take control and how to surrender to myself, these two paradox ideas of self attitudes are important for me in the progress of understanding and feeling my own art.

Be aware, I learned, as a cliché and profound realisation that the thin line between madness/distorted vision and reality/ clear vision, it **is** a mental and physical reaction, which



never go home early

continuously asks you to give yourself up and rewrite your values and measurements of life. I'm not telling this story to remind you that every morning before leaving your house to be aware of a possible fire caused by an electrical short circuit, I'm telling you my story because this event made me able to document an unusual and bizarre interior of a living space after being destroyed by fire, I mean this is the shallow and first of all most beneficial perspective of the event. Obviously, during the time when I started to feed an idea to create an installation for my graduation I realised there are **more** complex and layered reasons why I'm telling this story, you continue reading.



burning point series, 2017, Rotterdam

relation to phoTography, media speCtacle

Before I'm continuing to peel off the layers of my traumatic experience related to photography and transformation I have to admit that I never considered myself as a photographer. My first interest in capturing slices of reality started when I was 5 or 6 years old and I was watching "Casper the friendly ghost" on VHS player at least twice or three times a day. I loved to sit as close as possible to the television just to disappear and stop to exist in the actual reality. The young me probably used that **audio-visual** impact as a gate to escape. When I had to pee, I stopped the movie and after releasing the liquids of my body I used to stare at the image. I never understood why Casper isn't see-through or why he isn't moving if he is a ghost. Anyway, those were my first photographs and since then nothing changed too much, but my experiences and experiments started to prove that the image isn't always what you see. The image itself is just a channel, full with possibilities of translations and misunderstandings.

First when I met with the photographs of Eva Besenyö, in a book titled Face to Face (2003) a Hungarian photographer from the early 90's, I thought she was portraying poor gipsy kids on the streets with their instruments and I found it pathetic and sad. After all, when I gave enough time and space to see her interest in **mankind**, in it's social context, combined with dramatic framing, compositions and unexpected viewpoints or the influences of the Russian cinema. I started to see her point on 'light, air and space' which changed my perception of her subjects, I **felt full** of sympathy and respect for those kids. They were not just the kids on the photographs anymore, they were something more, they had meanings and several layers of different stories or it might happen that they were just repeating the same story. I'm not sure, but they were captured in a specific measurement of time and space, but they were timeless and spaceless. Furthermore, in this dislocation from time and space I started to see the media differently as well. As a young kid I used to watch the news with my parents or read the photographs from the newspaper with my grandfather and somehow I always found it difficult to believe what I saw. The short information flow wasn't enough convincing for me to understand what actually happened with the characters from

the brief storytelling. It just felt like I was manipulated to understand and believe life from another person's **perspective** without questioning it. The same method as in religion, the priest shows us a piece of wafer and he says that there is the body of Jesus, well I never believed in that either.

Then something changed in me, after I started to travel in Europe and Asia as a teenager, I became more sensitive and vulnerable about suffering around the world. I can explain this struggle by analysing Robert Capa's photographs, another Hungarian photographer from the same era as Eva. Ten-to-one, if you open any book on the history of photography in the 20th century you will see the most famous war photo **of all time**: The Falling Soldier. Slightly out of focus, it shows a man dropping his rifle and falling backwards at the moment a bullet hits him in the head.



Capa was 24 years old when he took that photograph and I was shocked by the fact that in that specific moment one life just stopped to exist. For that soldier there wasn't anymore time and space in our knowledge, there is a space captured between death and life. So again, how complex are the layers and the transformation of realities locked into one image? During my experiments with my own photographs this question led me to **deconstruction**, first I had to destroy the structure of my images to see what they are about for me. They are not just documentation of a bizarre event, these photographs are representing the dignity of my past. And I even don't remember the to the exact moment of taking them.

Capturing the moments or the evidences of a catastrophe, a war or a destroyed space are a few subjects in history which made an astonishing impact on photographers, on the media and on movie makers from documentaries **to** arthouse movies to Hollywood productions. The key of being able to tell and **describe** through images to other people how horrific and decaying these events are for the human race, and to sometimes remember the uncontrollable nature. In the 19th century these documentations and art works, attempted to show us reality, were highly influential to how we think about empathy, spectacles and visual manipulation. Today the spectacle can be found on every screen that you look at. It is the advertisements plastered on the subway, the pop-up ads that appear in your browser and the news constantly feeding us with more and more disturbing imagery. It's hard to stay sensitive about individual suffering, when collectively we are indoctrinated. These days from a really young age we consume via video games and television so much violence and aggression that sometimes we have problems to distinguish real and virtual cruelty.

Before the Crimean War we didn't have photographed documentation on war time. When those pictures arrived to the public it shocked the world and changed the common attitude about how we saw wars before. "The Crimean War of the 1850s, after all, was arguably where the genre was born, with British photographers like Roger Fenton (1819 - 1869) and James Robertson (1813 - 1888), the Italian-British Felice Beato (1832 - 1909) and the Austro-Hungarian Carol Szathmari (1812 - 1887) making what most historians consider the very first photographs of a major military conflict.



The pictures might lack the often-brutal drama of modern war photography, but they nevertheless serve as compelling documentation of the look and, in **a sense**, the logistics of mid-19th century warfare."² All around the world artists felt the urge to express their thoughts and struggles as a reaction. As Malevich later, in 1915 just reflected on the First World War with a 'Black Square' "as simply -as simple" that could be, fully powered by a nation behind of him with questions about a fair world and **pain**. After many people were devastated and lost faith in their own mothers, and by the mothers I mean ideologies. He was a Russian, an avant-garde artist, a theorist and a suprematist, but I guess first of all he was a living artist in the middle of a war who was radical and able to change the perception on symbols.

From the moment—in my case—when I saw the destroyed interior of my apartment I knew that this experience will highly influence my life and the way how I'm looking at my artworks. My visual observation, exploration and understanding changed. I look at my 'burning point' photograph series and I see washed pen-like drawings, exactly the way Rembrandt himself used to make his paintings. I see an organised, staged Armageddon covered with a dark **layer** of dust and coal which gives an unexpected softness to the images.

² Time Life Magazine, 30.11.2014., "Crimea: Where War Photography Was Born" by Ben Cosgrove

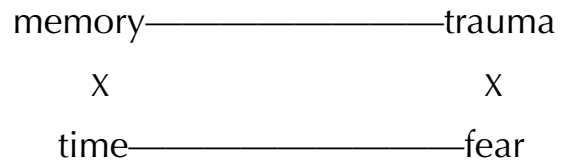
In this way I started to think about my graduation project as an experiment to engage with the audience by letting them to look into my selection of photographs in an interactive way. Possibly building an installation where I want to translate the present moment which has been **captured** in my past and continuously changing. About the experiments with the photographs, printings and other materials I used during the last few months I'm explaining in a chapter later.

In the perspective of using photographs, as I mentioned before, artists can open up questions in their audience about certain struggles. On the other hand, the media used/uses similar images and footage' that fits better in a different context for pure **propaganda** to build fear and to manipulate the population. The world witnessed the dangerous and irreversible results caused by strongly discriminative propaganda of dictatorial regimes all around the world and it looks like a huge part of it still doesn't want to question it. For me it's not that difficult to see, for example how far the Hungarian government went recently by using provocative, sometimes fake, manipulative footage in their propaganda against immigrants, homosexual movements and human rights in general. Orbán Viktor's presidency is in several ways comparable with the republican Donald Trump in the U.S. Building fear and hate in the name of true nationalism, both presidents are using distractions and blaming techniques to blindfold the population through mass media.

Since photographers and movie makers are trying to communicate through capturing scenes of catastrophes and spectacles, it doesn't matter if the reasons are political or artistic, the target audience is interested and influenced by it. All this can come from curiosity for the unknown or from a fear that it can happen to you too. Large parts of media strategies are based on shock, by building a "buzz", often in the easiest way, by showing images which will 'freak you out' to create fear and confusion. The same thing happened with me, when I saw the first few photographs by neighbours and journalists taken of the event. It busted my imagination about the possible and hypothetical guess of the damage. I created my own inner reality about the house again and again, a **speculated**, vividly dramatised image. "Is there something left inside?" I was drifting away from reality and believed that I was in somebody's **dream**, mirroring a common existential crisis of conscious beings.



tiMe and fEar tiMe and fEar tiMe and fEar tiMe and fEar tiMe an



<<<<<<This section of the text serves the part to expand through the process related to symbolic journeys, in which the protagonist sets out on the trip, unaware that she is on the way to the origin of her fate. On the way she comes to realise that her existence is due to the same codes, symbols and processes. The phenomenon of photography starts to fade into memory and trauma in relation of time and fear. There is a continuous memory **loss** and time drifting happening to the hero of my story, she seems to understand her fears by working with the images which are the closest translations of her trauma.>>>>>>



Rotterdam 2017
by a neighbour

After the fire we had to wait five days to go back to the house and see the damage. Our last conversation with a fireman didn't give too much hope either. "Just forget what you had there, focus on the future.." I personally never have seen anything like this before, a black apartment, I didn't know anyone who lost her/his home and artworks in a fire. Soon figured, that there are plenty of other artists who already went through similar experiences, I'll discuss this later in another chapter of my paper. We became part of an inner circle of artists who experienced the same and started to focus on new perspectives to not feel pity for ourselves. It's really easy to get lost in this process emotionally and rationally, I was hiding my trauma, I was afraid to show that I was weak. I lost all my official documents together with my artworks and underwear, I was a refugee artist. Even if my family was supporting me from Transylvania, I felt everyone and everything was too far from me to feel safe in The Netherlands. In that period I was often listening music produced/played by David Lynch from the album *The Big Dream* (2013) and Nicolas Jaar's *Space is Only Noise* (2011) albums, that time music was my gate to escape visual reality. Both of the artists are close to a certain loss of time and a fearless state of mind in their music, they unite human emotions by deconstructing and simplifying **distance**, physical and mental distance from their experiences.

The fears and suffering are circulating between personal and communal levels, in the moment when you are able to release your own doubts, you connect to a specific part of your community and the healing and understanding starts. Before this feedback based problem solving process can start, you have to locate the exact point of your unconscious fear, where the whole dislocation started. Then the journey of my protagonist was able to start.



burning point series, 2017, Rotterdam

As I was mistaking my fears of losing my safe space, I started to feel danger in the country I was, though it's not like Holland is a dangerous country. When I was fifteen I saw a young brown bear standing on his back feet, while I was sitting on my horse ten meters away and looking in his eyes in the middle of a forest just five kilometres from my parents house. Since then I understand two things: —first— that Einstein was right about the relativity of time and —second— that the fear of death makes me feel stronger and hopefully never having to feel it again. The bear was humble or scared enough to not attack me, in that 6 seconds, which felt like five hours, I felt nothing and everything, in one focused centre of my body, felt like looking in the eye of a psychopath.

In *Death Proof*³, the main character, Double Mike is an old man that enjoys killing young girls by his death proof car. At first you think that this guy is a complete psycho, but as the plot proceeds, you realise that everyone in that movie is just crazy. Initially the images have a great impact, but in the end you just laugh, it seemed to be part of a Japanese video-game. I guess it's an auto **defence** mechanism, to evade violence which is very graphic. We should think how these things are taking off our sensibility and making us fall in this never ending cycle of fear and violence, that unfortunately isn't exclusive of Tarantino's movies.

Heat left my legs and my face became pale, like a hopeless character in a Netflix melodrama. I never felt danger so close to me, so when I was looking at my own house my feelings and thoughts stopped to exist for a while. I'm not sure if I was just shocked for few minutes or scared for a year, but I was a ghost in my own body. Driven by an autopilot in my acts, I was dislocated from reality and just few things were giving joy, like the excitement during taking videos and photos in the house. I didn't really have time to think about my actions, stuck like Casper in a loophole, frozen on the screen.

³ *Death Proof*. 2007. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. US

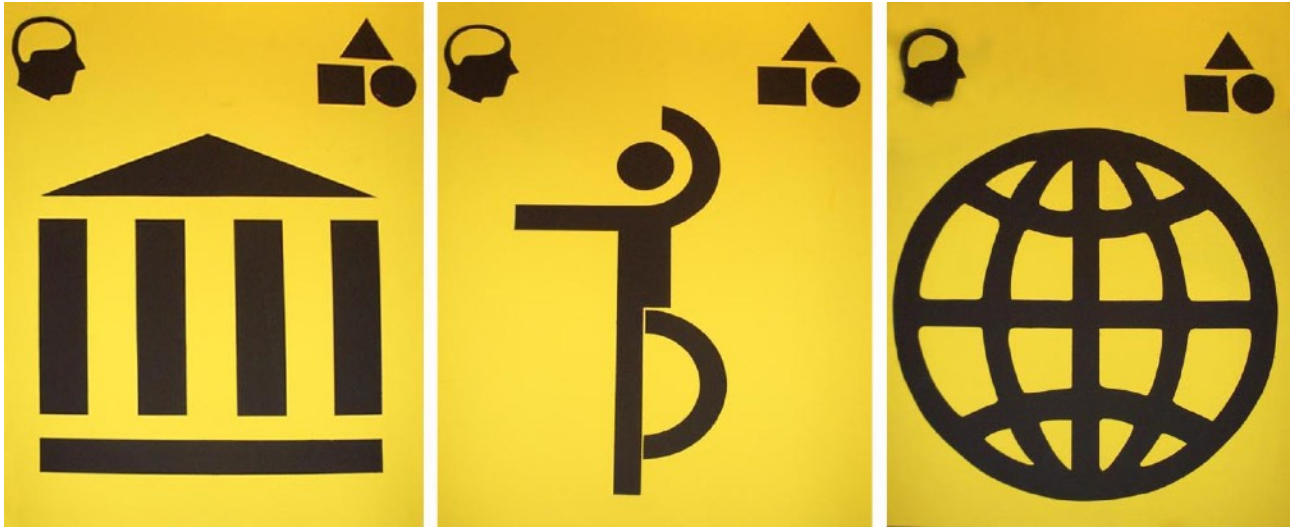
I wanted to go home and run away or just hug my mother. In the end it's so amazing to have two nationalities, when all of your passports are burnt. Being a Romanian-Hungarian is one of my **privileges** as an Eastern European, to remind everyone how fucked up it is when we have wars and we think we can change borders. Anyway, I was just stuck in a country 2000 km away from my home, I mean the place which used to be called my home. When I moved here in the end of 2014, one German guy asked me: "So, do you have something else there in Transylvania then the forrest and a castle?" Yes, I do, my family, who never understood me and my decisions, but always supported me to choose for education and choose for myself, for my freedom and that's why I'm here now (I said it with a German accent). Even these naive destinies weren't sure anymore. As in 'Ghost in the Shell' the policewoman cyborg in her stated confusion regarding her origin "Sometimes I suspect I'm not who I think I am. Like, maybe I died a long time ago, and somebody stole my consciousness. Maybe there never was a real me in the first place, and I'm someone's dream.."



Learning about the diversity of visual expressions combined in mixed media, to accept my existential crisis and meanwhile hoping that this is just a dream, was the point for the waking. The value of life remains. **Death** is central to the meaning and value of human life as experienced by individuals. Death does not give meaning to life, but does provide the backdrop against which life is lived. And one thing I learned, is that I want to live my life in love instead of fear. On this way of conceptualising my work through symbols, signs and meanwhile dealing with a personal “self-understanding” I studied Matt Mullican's⁴ works. A large part of his work is an ever-growing ensemble of single images, which he refers to as his “signs”. Not without irony, these signs are represented in a familiar style: that of those idealised, featureless pictographs we see in such public places where a commonality of language may not be taken for granted, as in international airports or stations. Designed to take the place of words, these pictographs can represent a large range of concepts; they can direct us to a baggage area with a picture of a suitcase, or to a restaurant with the image of a knife and fork. Mullican, of course, has added many images of his own to this “wordless” vocabulary. It is to a very primitive level of understanding that these kinds of pictographs appeal, by necessity of their purpose, which is to be universally recognisable. What is interesting in this context is that this level of understanding is rooted in a certain stage of the child's early psychological development. This particular stage is characterised by the child's beginning to assimilate those basic schemes of classification which are inherent in the way his environment **is** organised by those members of society engaged in his upbringing, and which serve to isolate and establish separate identities for the objects which make up that environment.

Taken as a whole, Mullican's sign-making is a clear expression of this phase of understanding: he has produced hundreds of single signs representing the objects of his world, from pork chops to sexual acts to metaphysical ideas. Included prominently in this lexicon, of course, is the human form. Since it is only after this stage of counting things that the subjective self is established as the centre of awareness in the psychology of the child, the depiction of the human form in this pictographic vocabulary — counted as one type of object amongst others — can be seen to represent the self in precisely this pre-subjective way of **understanding**.

⁴ Matt Mullican is an American-Venezuelan artist based in California, USA.

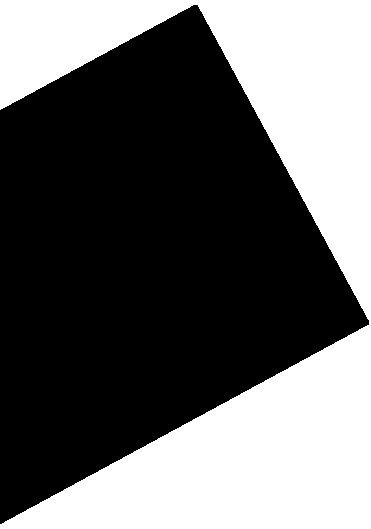


Matt Mullican on Symbolism



“...before any formation of the subject, of the subject who thinks, who situates himself in it, [there is] the level at which there is counting, things are counted, and in this counting he who counts is already included. It is only later that the subject has to recognise himself as such, as he who counts...” Lacan, J., 2017. “Formations Of The Unconscious: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book V.”, U.K., Polity Press

burning point series, 2017, Rotterdam



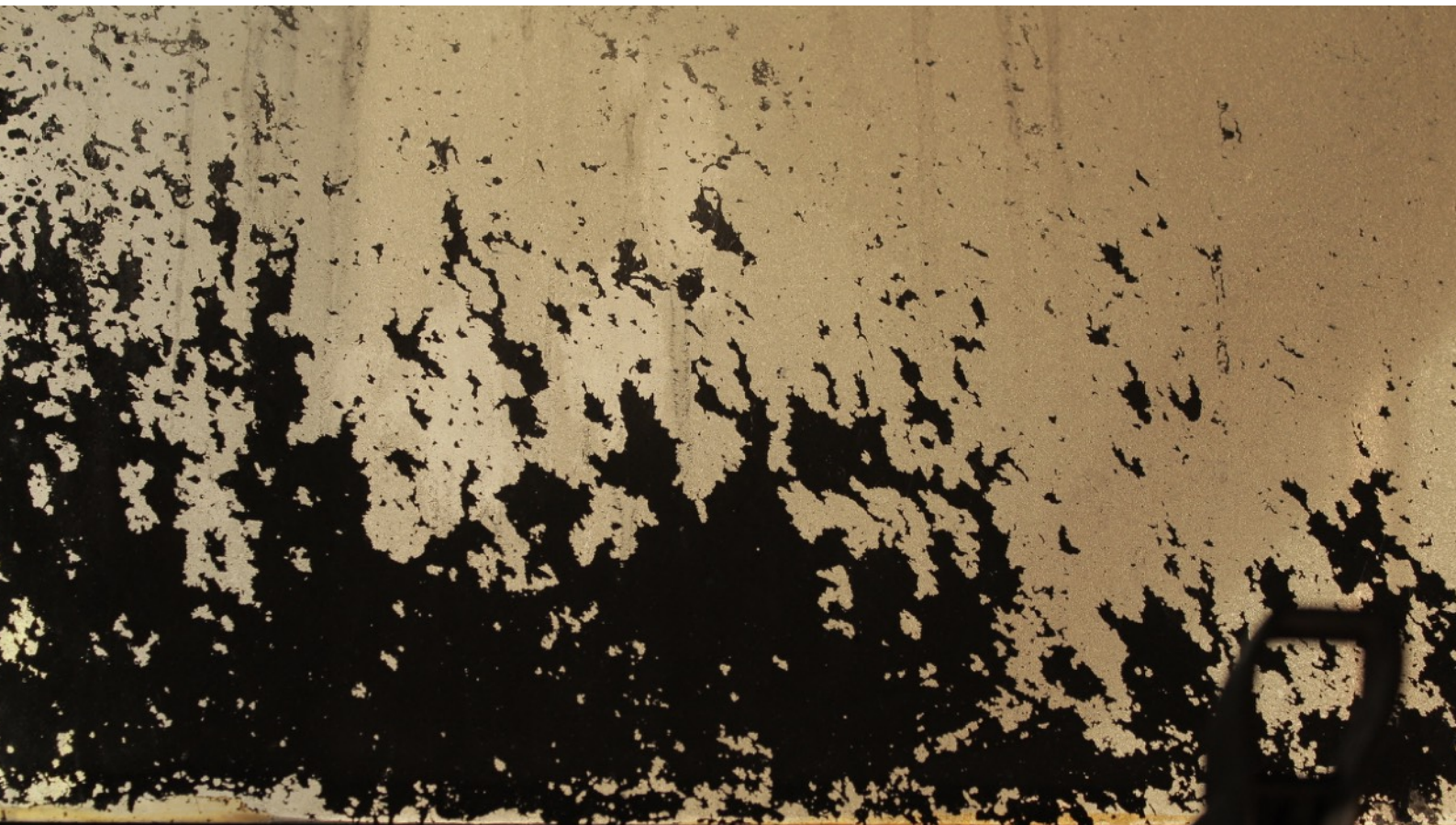
“On Fire”

After understanding why I'm seeking to not escape from my coded fears anymore, in this part I would like to introduce other contemporary artists who lost their studios in fire. Some of them found themselves in years of debts and struggles, some of them built a whole successful career based on that surreal experience. Artist's studios have been burning down for centuries, but since I started to study several artists and their relationship with these events, I realised that they are also looking for a **metaphorical** understanding and translation of the moments after fire.

One book by author Jonathan Griffin, titled 'On Fire' had an essential impact on me, because of its honesty and Griffin's incredible respect for the victims and their unique ways of dealing with loss and the fresh start. He asked ten contemporary artists how they recovered after their studios went up in flames. Talking to them, he gained surprising insights into their working methods, their relationship to their chosen profession, and their reasons for making art. A discussion about studio fires, a catastrophic but potentially transformative event in the lives of a surprising number of artists. The widely humble but critical view on how nobody wants to be defined by tragedy, or have their works eliminated by it. There is nothing meaningful about the accident itself, it is only our response to it, that is significant. Most artists are not sentimental, but suspicious. In most of the conversations they all experienced a sense of guilt and had to explain themselves or even defend sometimes. The doubts are not coming of losing finished works, most of the time it was the loss of the requisite materials to make work in the future. Suddenly you feel directionless, as Kate Ruggeri asked herself, in horrifying **self-doubt**, the day after her studio fire, "Am I even an artist still?"

For a deeper and more narrow analysis I chose two artists and their stories from the book to understand the consequences of what makes you a “REAL” artist or just a better version of yourself. On Fire includes writing, as in the quotation above, Kate Ruggeri, a Chicago based multidisciplinary artist who was only two years out of school, whose studio fire triggered an existential crisis. “How to begin all over again?” “Do I start over at all?” At that time she was working at Reckless Records so she went to work and she found herself looking around and the environment felt odd and interesting, it seemed usable and inspiring when she suddenly realised: being an artist, for her, was not about the material trappings of a career but about seeing the world in a unique way: “It was a big moment for me” she says. “I realised that this is implanted within me, even if I’m not working.”

burning point series, 2017, Rotterdam



Kate's way of dealing with the event reminded me of my own approach, as in, she also bought a new notebook next day and she also started to work with different mediums, up until this point she was mainly known for her painted sculptures. Suddenly she was making drawings in pastel, gouache, and ink. When I started to experiment with black after the fire to understand the lack of light in black, the first material I used was black Chinese Ink.

Her friends and the art community around her threw a fundraiser and people donated art supplies, I experienced the same here in Rotterdam. Her first exhibition happened four months after the fire and she was experiencing a sense of artistic rebirth, and in the meantime, instead of making **process-based** work or studio accidents "I felt I had something to say" she says. Both of us as young artists we feel now the weight of our past productions are lighter on our shoulders and the experience of making is in the present, in the future.

The second artist is Erik Van Lieshout a Rotterdam based contemporary artist, mostly known for his installations, movie works, about his identity search and his amazing Dutch accent. Erik Van Lieshout has been working on projects located in the South of Rotterdam, in the neighbourhood of my old house and now I can almost see his **studio** from my window. So a Friday afternoon he came over to my place and I witnessed his unbelievable energy. The almost two hours conversation with Erik — the INFILTRATING artist — was way more than an interview about his studio fire back in 1998 in Berlin, the same year that the unfolding story of President Bill Clinton's affair with a White House intern was evolving in the international news media in a prurient and hysterical witch hunt. In the book *On Fire* he tells us about the uncomfortable and from time to time depressing after effects of the **traumatic** experience. In that time he was a thirty years old painter who had to face a trial and work his ass off to get himself free from the accusations. In the old studio, he was working on five paintings which were destroyed too, so he painted them over again and did a show, an exhibition in Amsterdam at Fons Welters Gallery. "They were fresher, better." A year later, he titled his exhibition at Stella Lohaus Gallery, in Antwerp, "Selbstenzünderen"— "The Self-Combusting Man." Nine months after the fire in court finally he got a deal. "Because I was a very stupid, poor Dutch artist, I would go back to Holland and not come back to Germany anymore."

This incident happened 21 years ago with Erik and I'm more interested in the way how he is thinking and working in the present moment than just hunting the memories of an **unpleasant** accident. During our conversation he was generously sharing his own approach of life and the reflective and necessary turns in his art. During his academy years he was mainly busy with building objects and sculptures as a post-modern artist, after that three years in the academy he realised that by making a drawing, building a painting, he started to know how to make an image. "That was really important for me. Also had to learn that freedom is super shit. Free is not free." Six/seven years later, when everything was happening on the streets of Rotterdam and the politics were always triggering his critical view as a reaction he was working more with people, he opened his studio for the muslim community. To learn how to make friends in your own neighbourhood, started with small little things, videos, diary. Be moved by the actual happenings around you, as he was highly influenced by the death of Pim Fortuyn in 2002, he felt that the city was exploding and he was part of it. The constant self reflection and the constant interest in others are few components of Erik's which makes him a "**mirror** of his society" from my perspective. Like just during our meeting

he is busy with everything and everyone in the room, my partner was also in the living-room and Erik was easily involving him too. He was more concern about me finding questions and answers about my dilemmas and my trauma, then just him telling his experiences. Being aware, open, funny and critical that's how I can describe him. "To enjoy your art. You like your art. The only one who is interested in your art is you." An artist who starts with a socially outstanding charismatic personality, who is able to observe himself, able to confront with the society and in better case able to create a happier surrounding, when you share space and time with him.



burning point series, 2017, Rotterdam

While we were drinking some Gunpowder tea I gained my thoughts around the necessary restrictions, the control what I had/have to take in my life to be able to follow and achieve my ideas. As a person, I always have more than ten different ideas about how i want to work on certain projects, as happened during the preparation for my graduation show too. In this process I figured that giving limitations to myself isn't a scary and frightening decision. But I also understand, as just coming out of an experience like mine, **freedom** is the only solution you seek. Further, reflecting on the other artists from Griffin's book, there was an instant time when they all realised as well that the tiny refuge of safety and freedom that they had won for themselves was gone. I can relate to all these different existential questions and judgements from the society. Even if people in Rotterdam were amazingly helpful, in that time help felt useless and forced. Immediately everyone was calling, writing, wanted to know the details and wanted to give his/her stored boxes full with clothes and furniture, but everyone forgot about it, that we don't needed anyones trash. And then, you have to deal with the insurance and landlord situations, when you already read it in Kafka' book that bureaucrats are capable to turn into rats. Hours of discussions on phone, in life, with the police, arguing with the ambassador that I can't wait five months to have new documents, and in meantime we were homeless. Nobody was able to tell what is the protocol in this case.

Bizarre and surreal moments to reshape the meaning of events around myself, I felt. On the other hand, traditionally, we are talking about fires as omens, there is a factor of metaphysical significance in such an event, it resonates for a longer period after it happened. It changes meanings, associations and attitudes, even if I was concerned that I'll use the event as a catalyst for growth, for a long period I pushed myself into distraction and tried to destroy myself with substances until I found myself in the fucking hell again and again. In this case was helpful that I'm not religious, but I needed an enormous amount of faith and believe to see the light. Before the lightening I had to experience the randomness and unpredictability of "strobe lights". **Flashes and exposure.** I went back to the house alone one night with two digital cameras in my hands in total dark, by using the flashlight I took a three minutes long video, where I started to understand the real mechanism of light flickering and how important is for me to show less and feel more as an image maker or consumer.



The giFt is a bLack ghost

The urge to work with the photographs and footage material I collected in the burned house is coming from a realisation of simplicity and complexity of beauty in the blackest and darkest way. The simplicity of the **space** and the complexity in the details of the images, in the blackness of them. The fact that you are looking at images, which were taken in a regular apartment and they are mostly reminding you of an abandoned building. The lack of light made me think about the possibilities of experimenting with different layers. My first exhibition after the fire, titled "When the birds are flying out" where I presented some of the photos, were based on the research of layering, I used transparent papers, clear films and baking papers for printings. **Unconsciously** already then I was looking for ways to deconstruct the images and try to hide behind them. It took me few months to admit that I was running away from the confrontation to look at these photographs without thinking that they are kitsch and to realise the potential impact as a curse or a gift.

Right now I'm continuing to discover more about the details, through printing on transparent films in a bigger scale as I mentioned above about the installation. As a continuation of my research I want to know more about why and how this photographs are representing my trauma? Why does it help to understand more about my psychological state by capturing those specific moments, when I even don't remember them? How photography is related to trauma? Did these images changed my memory about the event? Dr. Gábor Máté psychoanalyst, who's main subject is trauma and addiction, explains it in one of his book, "When the body says no" (2004), trauma as **disconnection** from ourselves and from the present moment. Not every bad and painful situation causes trauma, in lot of the experiences we are talking about traumatic events, but in a case where the person is driven by a hurtful experience and it takes a lot of consciousness to connect to the present moment, a person may undergo a range of emotional reactions, such as fear, anger, guilt, shame, feelings of helplessness, this complex and disturbing experience can be described as trauma.

In this moment when the literal space, the actual room where the fire started became more than a dark **place** of a catastrophe. It became a symbol of my trauma and it became a symbol of my healing by taking photographs of it. Margaret Iversen wrote about photography as a medium is often associated with the psychic effects of trauma. In her ebook, "Photography, Trace, and Trauma" (2017) she explains the similarity between analogue photography and how our brains are processing trauma, she explores on the psychoanalytic spectrums, **speculates** on Freud's analogy the clear plastic sheet and paper represent the faculties of perception and consciousness with their protective physic shield against stimuli; the retentive wax below represents memory and the unconscious. The analogy neatly accommodates in one system the two key mental functions of receptivity and retention, consciousness the unconscious: the magic slate combines the notebooks' permanent retention of marks and the chalk slate's renewals receptivity to them. Freud understood that a great deal that is perceived is not consciously registered. Some of these mental contents are traumatic impressions mainly formed in infancy and childhood; since they are not consciously registered, they are not integrated into experience until, perhaps, much later.

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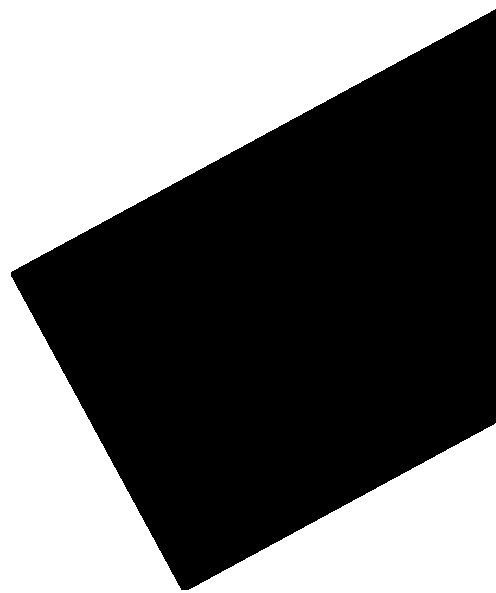


This thought led Freud to propose a more high-tech apparatus as an analogy for mental functioning: the camera has the capacity to capture something unexperienced, which comes to light only later, when the film is developed. Walter Benjamin made the same connection when he marked it in "A short history of photography" (2015) "it is through the camera that we first discovered the optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis."

Iversen writes about the traumatic experience as the physical translation of photography: "The automaticity of the process, the **wide-open camera lens**, and the light sensitivity of film all lend themselves to this association." I remember when I was alone in the house and I used the flash light of the camera, for a second I saw the place in flames, but the most shocking part was that I constantly felt that someone else was in the house. When you experience something like this, you don't really want to talk about it, you don't want to risk it that people around you will think that you are crazy and you are seeing ghosts. In every picture I believe I captured the ghost of my trauma. I'm not the first person who went that crazy to think about photography as a possible '**ghost** buster'. Honoré de Balzac knew this when he conjured his theory of ghostly layers to get out of having his picture taken.

According to Balzac's theory, all physical bodies are made up entirely of layers of ghost-like images, an infinite number of leaf-like skins laid one on top of the other. Since Balzac believed man was incapable of making something material from an apparition, from something impalpable—that is, creating something from nothing—he concluded that every time someone had his photograph taken, one of the spectral layers was removed from the body and transferred to the photograph. Gaspard-Félix Tournachon, alias Nadar, French writer, caricaturist and photographer wrote about the same subject in his memoir "When I was a photographer" (2015) "Repeated exposures entailed the unavoidable loss of subsequent ghostly layers, that is, the very essence of life. Was each precious layer lost forever or was the damage repaired through some more or less instantaneous process of rebirth?" In this translation, every time when I took a photo of the burned walls I captured more than just a charcoal covered, disturbing image. I captured a potential link between voluntary and **involuntary** memory to create a new experience, a new black experience.





Photography, in the modern life, is everywhere around us, technology made it possible for everyone to take images and become everyday photographers. I consider our generation the “hashtag photographers” all around on social media, but how can we take note of their deep impact? Loads of traditionally trained photographers are claiming that the value of a digital **image** will never compete with analogue photography. How I think, these days the profession as photographer is challenged to reinvent itself. The value of an image isn't about quality, resolution or the type of paper you print on or develop. The value is coded in each photographs, which can be decoded by the interaction with it. How you look at it and how you give the value to based on your own interpretations and knowledge. Example, if I just keep staring at the prints of these images from my old house, every time I get to know more about the texture, the depth of colour information, the lights and the new black experience. I have never seen anything this close to vantablack⁵, but to understand the richness of these shades of black, which appears on the photographs, we also have to understand the power of the transformative fire.

The specific way how chemistry works during fire and can be transformed into artwork, one Dutch designer, Maarten Baas, deeply studied this process by burning furnitures and creating artworks from them. I'm concerned about that he had a different question or fundamental interest about colour black when he was working with abstraction in his unique way. Maarten is a different representative of rebellion artists, as Malevich was in the XXth century. His way of influencing the modern design world by playing with the boundaries of art and design, I would call it theatrical. He perfected the technique of **burning** furniture, after the pieces are charcoaled, they're preserved in a clear epoxy resin, which makes them usable again. When needed, pieces are re-upholstered or otherwise fixed so that they get back their original function. Shamelessly he went against human tendency to keep things as they are supposed to be and keep them beautiful as they originally were. The variety and playfulness of his works are showing the lead to a lot of us, about how many different mediums are combinable for an artist in our century. Helped me to find the way to start to combine the medium of photography and interactive installation.

⁵ Vantablack is a material developed by Surrey NanoSystems in the United Kingdom and is one of the darkest substances known, absorbing up to 99.96% of visible light (at 663 nm if the light is perpendicular to the material). Vantablack is composed of a forest of vertical tubes "grown" on a substrate using a modified chemical vapor deposition process (CVD)

During my searching process to finally find the most relevant materials to build my work with I was also experimenting with other materials than transparent film, metal, led panel and mirror. Before that I was making clay sculptures, short videos, ink paintings, music recordings, metal dust magnified fields and I was even burning wood in my garden just to sit next to it and understand the burning process more. I found this process really helpful, to always connect back to the black and the ghostly layered memories. The medium of different arts is a tool. For my graduation show as I described earlier I'm **translating** my trauma into one appearance of light and layers of my printed photographs on **transparent** film. The led panel has a build in motion censor which turns on when the viewer enters the perfect angle.

Thinking further about my installation, the photographs printed on several layers, large scale transparent films are communicating about memory. The light of the led panel is the symbol of trauma, the shaping time is metaphorically the metal frame of my work. And in the end, the 4th component of my work is the translation of fear which is represented by the mirror on the bottom side. Right now I'm observing the differences between the different components and finding the ways to develop them into one work for my graduation.



With similar installation ideas, another artist, David Spriggs, who's work invites us to see-with what is not actually there and to move-with the constellation of what we're beginning to see. Moving-with perception composing itself, we experience the dynamics of an object becoming spacetime. We no longer simply observe – we are moved by the experience of watching, and we move with it. We note the contours but feel the colours. We see the lines but feel the rhythm. We see-with the becoming-work. The artwork of David lies in a space between the 2 and 3 dimensions similar to my idea. In his work he explores phenomena, space-time and movement, colour, visual systems and surveillance, the strategies and symbols of power, and the thresholds of form and perception. There is something stuck between the layers, maybe exactly how Balzac felt about the ghostly captured layers of physics, but in the term of layers of psychological transparency and **deconstruction**.

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Into my research I realised that I was looking deep into the dark side of my psyche and photography was literally the “light out”, in a therapeutic way, so I was really happy when I could go back to the place one year after the fire. I broke into the house, which isn't renovated yet. I can tell you, the breaking in wasn't so difficult. I needed a chair, a broom and a little bit of effort. Entering the house was more like bringing back all the memories of the last two years when we were living there. Now emotionally it was significantly less attached to me, when I looked at the empty black room finally I saw the details in the beauty of the chalk coal, the transition between life and death started to make sense and even further, I exactly felt like all my existential dilemmas were fading away, for a whole day. Of course, next day I found myself crying into my pillow and questioning if my personal experience is universal as much as unique we are as human beings?

I also invited few friends, Rotterdam based artists, to come there, and in that moment I was observing their reactions and specific interest in parts where they wanted to take photos. There are few ‘hits’, corners and shapes which worked in the same ways for each of them, the reactions were **repeating** themselves, maybe because mainly we are decoding visual imputes in similar ways and our spectacle hunting is limited to our cultural aspects. This time I was taking videos and seeing a more poetical decay in the place, I didn't have fast flashing lights around me, the distraction was less, everything was more melancholic and just black.



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@After party

Imagine, that one morning, on an October Friday 13th, you wake up as you usually do and do your morning routine, if you have one. Like mine was: ...you know, I would not do anything differently, I would not go back in time and save my favourite gloves or the book from Esterházy Péter, I'm bored and not interested in the hypothetical past. The urge to destroy and build are fundamental components of our existence. As deeper we try to dive into one specific aspect of our understanding —as I'm accepting my trauma through photography— we immediately find ourselves within the boundaries of our imagination.

To step forward and leave things behind, I had to understand that we are constellations in the present time and space through light and imagination.

As I used Bachelard's description of fire in the first chapter of this text: "fire is cooking and is apocalypse" something basic and **fundamental** in individual and collective levels, something that we are all sensitive about, because of the fast transformation, the unpredictable and strong impact of it. Belief at an individual level changes you, and belief at a collective level changes the world. The meaning of fire in life is similar to the meaning of photography in art. The danger, the traumatised film, the **constant** need of it in our modern life and the fact that it can be used as a weapon too. Photography is the art of capturing memories and several layers of reality. Throughout the course of this paper I have traced the development of an interdisciplinary view on the art of image creation. The contrasts of my subject and the speculations around it are leading my thinking process to the direction of significant changes, the need of a **revolution** to reshape the boundaries of the medium. What we think about photography is dramatically transformed in the last decades, the only thing remains is the constant technological evocation and the urge to tell our stories.

More importantly, I opened questions about the relation between trauma and photography by following Nadar, Walter Benjamin, Freud, Jonathan Griffin and Margaret Iversen's writings. Therefore, as a conclusion I found Breton's conception of "objective chance", the formulation of the chance encounter and the lucky find spotted amid the detritus of a flea market. Just as traumatic events bypass the psychic defences of consciousness, leaving behind an incredible trace. Breton evoked photography's affinity with trauma by emphasising its unguarded quality and referring to the camera as a blind instrument. Translated this into my own journey: being the protagonist, being in the lucky position, being privileged of my own social heritage means that this traumatic experience is healed. It took me more than one and half year of close studying the forgotten series of images (15 pictures) I took in my burned house.

I would like to close my contemplation with an honour to my teachers, because they encouraged me to work on this subject and to Jorrit, who ran out of the burning house in time.



burning point series, 2017, Rotterdam

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