

**Harry Penhaul and the Subject of the Real:  
Photographing post-war Cornish community through a Lacanian lens.**

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Declaration: 'I certify that this work has not been accepted for any degree other than that of Doctor of Philosophy. I declare this work is the result of my own investigations except where identified by references and I have not knowingly plagiarized any other work'

## Abstract

### **Harry Penhaul and the Subject of the Real: Photographing post-war Cornish community through a Lacanian lens**

Harry Penhaul was photographer for *The Cornishman* newspaper in the decade following the second World War. His images narrate the history of a West Penwith Cornish community negotiating the social, cultural and economic upheavals of 1950s post-war modernity. In this study I argue that the discourse of Lacanian psychoanalysis provides a conceptual prism with which to encounter a less familiar narrative in Penhaul's images, one which foregrounds an account of the subject figured as estranged and fragile. Lacan figures the image as the linchpin of key psychoanalytic processes and in particular the constitution of subjectivity and of the ego. In his Seminar XI of 1964 Lacan insists that visuality, the scopic field, is one of the main discursive modes by which the subject is disciplined and identity positioned. Lacan describes the ego of 'imaginary capture' in terms of being an illusory palimpsest of identifications, the imaginary register as fraught with rivalry and aggression, as conflictual, paranoid and relentlessly negative. Indeed, ten years previously during his second seminar series in 1954, Lacan had bemoaned the vulnerability of an increasing societal tendency to be 'spellbound by our egos'.

Lacan's stance has been said to inform 'an austere cultural politics' (Iversen 2007: 9). It is a description of the interest of self-interest, of subjection to 'the defiles of the signifier'<sup>1</sup> and the misrecognitions of interpellation, as Margaret Iversen comments: 'the sacrifice of ... being, a sort of suicide in the manner of Narcissus' (Iversen 2007: 130). However, this study argues that such an iconoclastic portrayal can in turn inform what Geoffrey Batchen calls the 'ontological project of photography' (Batchen 2002: 18), that is, that Lacanian psychoanalysis opens up new discursive spaces with which to discuss and engage photographic representation. Lacan refuses the ideological closure of a unified, harmonious subject or society. Despite the insistence on a pessimistic dialectic from illusory mastery to the chaos of the subjective abyss, Lacan's 'tragedy of the subject', such an account, this study argues, also gives rise to a redemptive ethics. In the seminar of 1957 Lacan maintained that the great insight of psychoanalysis was that if we take our bleak subjective fate into account, face up to who we are and how we constitute ourselves and others, then perhaps our relations in the social field can be different. Perhaps we can learn to resist the subversions of ideological interpellation, to challenge the illusory satisfactions of the imaginary, and to take a subjective position which figures that our perceptions and understandings can be other than they are; in short, one that allows us to see the familiar in new ways. This study argues that the Lacanian conceptual landscape suggested here facilitates just such a re-assessment of the familiar and enables normative photographic tropes such as in evidence throughout Penhaul's photographic practice, to be also seen anew.

Each week in the pages of *The Cornishman* Harry Penhaul illustrated the cultural practices of the West Penwith community amongst whom he lived. He took photographs of what people knew, he photographed their daily routines, their habits and rituals - he photographed their culture. While Lacanian concepts provide a ready-made framework with which to discuss the ontology and epistemology of the subject they also enable a discussion concerning that which is outside of culture, outside of what we know and recognise. The Saussurean linguistics that underpin Lacan's re-reading of Freud's notion of the unconscious states that because language refuses the exactitude of direct correspondence, as speaking subjects we can never be sure of what we know; indeed, uncertainty is read as constitutive of the subject. Furthermore, as signifying subjects, we risk encounters that exceed what culture permits us to define and recognise. This study draws on Lacan's notion of the real in order to interrogate such (missed) encounters that, I argue, permeate and persist in Penhaul's photographic record of West Penwith community. Just as the present absence of the real marks the subject with a loss that forever constitutes the subject throughout all its subsequent interrelations, so too the Lacanian real, through both its eruption and exile, is argued to mark the photographic image. Lacan provides a vocabulary with which incursions, displacements, missed encounters and markers of uncertainty can not only be conceptualized as characteristic of the real but also as able to be glimpsed and alluded to within photographic representation. Penhaul's practice is read as mediating the absent real and, following Iversen (2007), photography is figured as the privileged site for the return of the real.

A Lacanian conceptual landscape therefore facilitates an engagement with photography that is not about uncovering lost or secret meaning but rather looks to articulate the intelligibility of photographs from the past for our own time. This study's Lacanian methodology posits an engagement with the photograph that forwards an interrogation of uncertainty and begins the recognition of the terrain of unmapped alterity, the realm Lacan named the real.

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**Table of contents:**

Title page	1
Abstract	3
Acknowledgements	5
Table of contents	6
Introduction	7
Chapter 1 Harry Penhaul: a post-war portrait of West Penwith	30
Chapter 2 Photography, psychoanalysis and discursive congruence	83
Chapter 3 An austere cultural politics and the tragedy of the subject	123
Chapter 4 The Real	168
Chapter 5 The Grimace of the Real	215
Conclusion	251
References and Bibliography	264
List of Illustrations	277
Appendix Archive contents analysis	281
Endnotes	282

## Introduction

### Part 1 Why photography with psychoanalysis?

In searching for an answer to this question this study examines and explores various theoretical concepts, and in particular that of the Lacanian real, which appear to remain tantalizingly always already somehow out of reach.<sup>2</sup> However, according to Slavoj Žižek, a theoretical strategy frequently employed across the discourse of psychoanalysis is to 'encircle' that which cannot be directly attained (Žižek 1992: 4) and this study will figure such a trajectory of encirclement to various discursive problematics in the course of the following chapters. Simply put, this study proposes that the two discourses of photography and psychoanalysis, described by Walter Benjamin as epochal events of Modernity (Benjamin 1931) are read against or at least alongside each other with the plain objective of observing the possible conceptual outcomes of this forced encounter. While the consolations of revealing personal history are always seductive, and this study does closely follow the post-war career of Cornish photographer Harry Penhaul, it agrees with Jae Emerling (2012) that we should not be side-tracked by biography; our knowledge remains at the level of speculation (Emerling 2012: 52). As Freud stated in his seminal text *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) 'we need the assistance of provisional ideas' (Freud 2001: 536). Even the most ardent of its critics would surely concede that psychoanalysis excels at speculation, that conceptual conjecture is clearly written into its job description. Indeed, as Elizabeth Roudinesco notes, throughout its brief history, psychoanalysis can be seen as frequently taking reflexivity to extreme levels of institutional and discursive self-destruction (Roudinesco 2005).

While psychoanalytic discourse has remained characterized by contradictory tendencies towards both speculation but also inward-looking critique, commentators such as Jae Emerling argue that what distinguishes photographic discourse has been its fluidity and flexibility, its openness and adaptability. Emerling (2012) notes that photography studies has so far avoided the 'sclerosis' of the dictates of the canon and institutional rigor. Like any discourse, that of photography has been marked by degrees of theoretical schism and discursive dissent. Gelder and Westgeest observe how discursive discussion has often erred

towards an impasse which has absorbed much theoretical energy; the vexed notion of the index is regularly cited in this regard (Gelder and Westgeest 2011: 29). This study argues that the discourse of photography read against that of psychoanalysis, can provide new perspectives that not only keep discourse innovative, but perhaps can also provide some of the missing pieces of a conceptual jig-saw that appear to be holding back the means of radical enquiry.

For Geoffrey Batchen, a dominating issue for photography has always been and remains, the beleaguered question of what kind of a conceptual object photography is and therefore what kind of a history it deserves. Batchen argues that the theoretical problems posed by photography's perennial ambivalence as to its identity haunt every attempt to establish coherent parameters for a theory of critical judgement or evaluation. Joanna Lowry (2013) comments that: 'much of Batchen's writing that attempts to negotiate these concerns, is underpinned by the ontological question of how a theoretical practice constructs its object' (cited in Burden 2013: 21). Drawing on Foucault (1977), Batchen states that what we think of as photography comes into being through the way in which we talk about it, that is, the objects we choose to look at and the discursive spaces we allow it to inhabit (Batchen 1997). This study maintains that reading photography against psychoanalysis keeps photographic discourse mobile, opening out new spaces, perspectives and ways to theoretically engage with photography and its ontology. Gelder and Westgeest agree that in terms of providing an innovative critical cultural instrument 'psychoanalysis is a productive way to go' (Gelder and Westgeest 2011: 213). Batchen vigorously maintains that we need to be alert to a wider sense of photographic discourse as it operates in our culture 'as being something always caught in the process of becoming ... subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power' (Batchen 2003: 29).

Jae Emerling indicates something of the unfolding nature of discourse in general and photographic discourse in particular when he states that 'photographic discourse is a continual reworking of positions' (Emerling 2012: 17). Indeed, Emerling positions photography as occupying a place between history and theory and argues, in contradistinction to the conveniences of any technological reductionism, that the theories of photography are its history: 'The photographic image constructs a complex network of socio-cultural discourse that defines contingently the framework through which both the image and ourselves as spectators, become visible. An image is already an ensemble of history and theory' (Emerling 2012: 16). Emerling forwards the case that it is in the interweaving of discourses that new understandings emerge. He outlines how discourse

can move to achieve such an effect – discourse continually reworks positions, it retraces lines of argument, it uncovers archives, redacts histories and draws attention to aporia and paradox (Emerling 2012). Emerling sees as instrumental to the application of these effects, the rereading of old texts in new ways to facilitate new intelligibilities for today. Joan Copjec exemplifies just such an approach. In the mid 1990s Copjec reads Lacan against Foucault’s conceptualization of the primacy of the power-knowledge nexus. For Copjec the reduction of society to these relations is at best problematic. In Copjec’s view, Foucault reduces social space to the relations that fill it (Copjec 1994a: 3-9). Lacanian theory insists there is more to our experience of the social field than ‘the historicist reduction of society to its indwelling network of relations of power and knowledge’ (Copjec 1994a: 6). Copjec uncovers new insights in old Lacanian texts; she literally redacts histories (in terms of a perceived historicist hegemony) and insists that new understandings of the subject emerge when we learn to become literate in desire: ‘Disregarding desire, one constructs a reality that is real-tight, that is, no longer self-external’ (Copjec 1994a: 14).

This study follows Emerling’s (and Copjec’s) imperative and discursive model – it reads Lacanian theory from the post-war period in terms that are meaningful today and in so doing is complicit in redacting other histories. Central to this process is the uncovering of archive. The interweaving of discourse is argued to facilitate new perspectives but also key here is the recognition that it is practice itself, photographic practice, that can agitate and promote discourse along different paths. As Gilles Deleuze states in his 1990 text *The Logic of Sense*, in the dialectical relation between theory and practice, it is practice in particular that can ‘pierce the wall of theory’ (Deleuze 1990: 78). Gelder and Westgeest go so far as to say that it is only the photographic object itself that can transform the discourse (Gelder and Westgeest 2011: 14). This study argues that such photographic objects are to be found in the archive of Harry Penhaul at Penlee House museum in Penzance.

## **Part 2 A statement of desire**

Joan Copjec makes her appeal that we become ‘literate’ in desire in her 1994 text *Read My Desire*. Copjec demands not only that we should be literate in desire but that we should ‘learn to read what is inarticulable in cultural statements’ (Copjec 1994a: 14). This study echoes this injunction in demanding that we learn to recognize in photographic representations, not just desire, unconscious desire, but the determinations and effects of what Lacan referred to as the exiled real (Lacan 2008). In Seminar 7 Lacan quotes the seventeenth century writer François de La Rochefoucauld on the necessity of being

instructed in love before the experience of love could be achieved (Lacan 2008). This study takes Lacan's above citation and rephrases the aphorism to apply to the Lacanian real. The general trajectory of this study's argument emerges from the gradual development of Lacan's evolving conceptual topography. Slavoj Žižek observes that Lacan's rereading of Freud, his 'return to Freud' of the early 1950s, is usually associated with his adage that 'the unconscious is structured like a language', that is, with an effort to unmask imaginary fascination and reveal the symbolic law that governs it. Žižek notes that 'in the last years of Lacan's teaching, the accent shifted from the split between the imaginary and the symbolic to the barrier separating the real from symbolically structured reality' (Žižek 1992: viii). Crucial to Lacan is that the realm he called the real cannot be thought, grasped or directly encountered. However, this study argues that we can learn to recognize the determinations and effects of the exiled real and that such effects are present and observable within photographic images.

Margaret Iversen states that photography is not an isolated medium, but rather, through its cultural ubiquity, 'photography has changed the whole configuration of the visual arts and our thinking about them' (Iversen 2007: 132). According to Rosalind Krauss, critic and writer Walter Benjamin treated the photograph not so much as a cultural medium *per se*, but as what he referred to as a 'theoretical object' and one to which he ascribed certain cultural effects (cited in Iversen 2007: 168 n1).

In the UK in the early 1980s, the fledgling discipline of photography studies came as it were, pre-programmed with a Lacanian inflected theory appropriated from the radical left leaning seminars and workshops of film criticism. The appropriation is clear in Victor Burgin's insistence that 'photography theory must take account of the subject as the complex totality of its determinations are nuanced and constrained in their passage through and across photographs' (Burgin 1992: 153). The area of Lacanian theory drawn on by Burgin preceded that which utilized the notion of the real, but its depiction of the subject as constituted through specular misrecognition was a persuasive one in its rigorous and nuanced account (Easthope 1999). Margaret Iversen is one theorist who argues that we need to follow psychoanalysis in this direction. Iversen insists we have to be 'relentlessly negative and iconoclastic' in how we conceive the subject (Iversen 2007: 10). Iversen underlines the ethical imperative inherent to Lacan's thinking when she comments that only by uncovering and deconstructing the motivations of the subject through the account given by Lacanian psychoanalysis can we hope to objectively recognise our

position in culture and society and possibly come to affect and negotiate some measure of change (Iversen 2007: 15).

The ethics of psychoanalysis do not stop there – inherent to the task of thinking through what makes humans subjects of culture, the account given by psychoanalysis is one of a radically uncertain dependence between subject and other. Psychoanalytic accounts of the subject provide conceptual frameworks, read under the sign of alterity, whereby communities such as that photographed by Penhaul, can think through their constitution with and of the other, a relation figured by Lacan as uncertain but radically dependent (Lacan 1998). This study argues that entangling the discourses of photography and psychoanalysis unfolds many new issues and perspectives otherwise unrecognized and unheeded. This is the work psychoanalytical cultural discourse can do – psychoanalysis can participate in the project of persistently denaturalizing normative terms of reference and enable a showing and delineation of cultural and social limits (Belsey 2002b). Such limits can be made visible when we become ‘literate in desire’ and, more precisely, when we learn to recognize the effects and determinations of the lost real in our cultural representations, identified in this study as present within photographic representation. This study argues that what makes photographs intelligible to us today is exactly the harsh reality of the pessimistic psychoanalytic account of the subject which sees the human being as living a hideous lie of self-interest and fantasy, a description exemplified by Terry Eagleton in his portrait of the Lacanian subject as someone for whom: ‘the world of everyday reality is a fantasy ridden fiction enacted through the symbolic coordinates inherent to the language based differential logic of structuralism’ (Eagleton 2003: 167). Roland Barthes commented that ‘what has always fascinated me all my life is the way people make their world intelligible’ (cited in Culler 2002: 41). In his 1972 text *Critical Essays*, Barthes argued that it was not the critic’s job to discover secret meanings or an essential truth in works of art but rather to ‘construct an intelligibility for our own time’ (Barthes 1972: 257). One facet of such intelligibility that comes into focus when reading the discourse of photography against that of psychoanalysis, is that in laying bare the tragic nature of the subject, psychoanalysis also announces that the possibilities of the subject’s undoing are revealed in the contingency of the specular process. What becomes intelligible through this dour account is that not only do we need the other to define and constitute ourselves, but we also need a particular other who will grant us recognition in the terms we demand – in terms portrayed by Harry Penhaul when he illustrates a desire which not only declares ‘this is who we are’ but also insists ‘this is how we demand to be recognised’.

This study's use of the Lacanian lens as a structuring metaphor is admittedly somewhat laboured at times but it does convey the imperative entailed in looking anew and from a fresh perspective, from a viewpoint Slavoj Žižek has described as being 'from awry' (Žižek 1992: iv). This study's lens is calibrated to look across the conceptual landscape of the Lacanian tripartite topography. In Chapter 3 Lacan's imaginary and symbolic registers are examined while in Chapters 4 and 5, the Lacanian realm of the real is brought into focus. Perhaps a more useful analogy would be to say that this study looks to construct a template whereby Lacanian markers and motifs of the real can be recognized, not just in Penhaul's photographs but in photographic representation in general. The aim of mobilizing such frameworks remains that of today's intelligibility rather than the secret meanings of the past. What this study attempts is to follow Roland Barthes when he calls for us to 'construct an intelligibility for our own times' (Barthes 1972: 257). Matthew Bowman (2013) comments, with reference to Rosalind Krauss, that she might be accused of implementing an *ad hoc* methodology,<sup>3</sup> but the validity of her references and argument is not to be judged according to how accurately she appropriates from a given philosophical or theoretical (con)text, but rather in connection with 'how productively she engages with and interprets the art work ... to what degree she invites us to see familiar artworks anew' (Bowman in Durden [ed]: 2013: 151).

From Freud's visceral depiction of the human subject where repressed fears proliferate in the dark of the unconscious, to Lacan's linguistic and almost mechanistic account of the 'defiled' subject, psychoanalysis changes focus from a concern with the conscious self and its symptoms to a linguistic account of the unconscious. Lacan turns away from Freud's depiction of the unconscious as a hell below where the bad beasts of repressed desire proliferate in the dark, to a linguistic account of the subject. This linguistic account emphasizes the role played by the Saussurean signifier in subject formation, a subject figured as radically uncertain and divided to itself and in the grip of unconscious desire and its determinations. This radically uncertain and divided self is the subject as constituted within what Margaret Iversen calls 'an austere cultural politics' (Iversen 2007: 18). Using photography to focus on issues raised by forwarding such a Lacanian account of the subject proceeds in two directions. First, psychoanalysis argues that the phantasmal lie that constitutes people's reality as an austere cultural politics, owes much to photography's participation in the visual disciplining of the subject - visibility is read by psychoanalysis as

one of the dominant modes by which the subject is disciplined and identity is positioned. Second, the Lacanian account constitutes the subject within a topography in which frameworks for thinking alterity matter. According to Lacan, the realm of the real is not accessible to humans as they are subject to the interventions of language, but psychoanalysis provides a framework where the real can be situated and the consequences of its absence thought (Belsey 2005: 204). The real matters because 'the real governs our activities more than any other and it is psychoanalysis that designates it for us' (Lacan 1998: 60). How the real is thought is key in terms of the possibilities to which different modes of thinking it can give occasion. The real's incomprehensibility reminds us that knowledge is the product of a system within its own terms. The photograph is exemplary in how it can provide a support and scaffold that lie beyond normative systems of making meaning. For Catherine Belsey, the fact that signifying systems instil uncertainty into the constitution of the subject means that, as subjects in culture, we always already risk encounters that exceed what culture permits us to define. This study argues that photography can record these moments of uncertainty and meaninglessness. Todd McGowan (2007) comments that such moments of non-sense can provoke in us the recognition that what we call symbolic authority cannot account for everything, 'that disjunctions in the social matrix of the social field might become apparent' (McGowan, T. 2007: 15). Lacan stated that 'psychoanalysis is essentially an encounter with the real that eludes us' (Lacan 1998: 53). This study argues that photography is also just such an encounter with the real that eludes us. Photography is argued to mediate the real and thereby perhaps allow us to see ourselves for what we are, that is, in the grip of unconscious desire.

### **Part 3 Field position and previous knowledge**

In short, with no prior knowledge of either psychoanalysis or photography, I now find myself alone in a field, or rather a photograph of a field, with no-one to talk to about something (the real) you cannot talk about - as Lacan insisted on several occasions, 'the real is what does not depend on my idea of it' (Lacan cited in Fink 1997: 145). Arrival in this conceptual field has been part happenstance and part the proscriptions of my own lack of knowledge. Elizabeth Roudinesco in her 2014 text *Lacan: In Spite of Everything*, claims the heroic age of psychoanalysis is long over. That heroic Lacanian age extended briefly to photography as an academic discipline in the UK during the 1970s and early 1980s, but the realm of the real was never part of that discussion. Margaret Iversen (2007) notes that

even the most 'Lacanianly' literate of academics, Victor Burgin, never seriously engaged with the real in terms of its relation to the photograph (Iversen 2007: 166 n8). These were the years before Slavoj Žižek had re-energized the Lacanian zeitgeist with his own interpretation of the real during the 1990s. However, Žižek's writing has predominately figured the real in terms of film but not photography. It was Margaret Iversen who in the mid 1990s reread Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* alongside and against Lacan's Seminar 11 in her seminal essay *What is a photograph?* published in 1994. This essay was reprinted in 2007 when included in her text *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes*. In this paper Iversen figures the photograph in terms of the Lacanian missed encounter with the real and she reads Barthes' neologistic notion of the punctum as constituting this missed encounter with the real within photographic representation. As far as I am aware, this is the only sustained engagement between photography and the Lacanian real before or since. Reading Žižek and Iversen decisively positioned my fledgling account; these writers presented the possibility of reading the real in terms of material culture and in Iversen's account, in terms of the photograph. However, the distance between where Žižek and Iversen initially positioned my account and the field where I now find myself sheltering, turns out to be substantial. Chapter 4 and 5 of this study will outline just how my account has come to radically differ from Iversen and Žižek. In particular, my reading of British writers, Antony Easthope, Kate McGowan and Catherine Belsey has problematized Žižek's understanding of the real as void.

#### **Part 4 Limitations and failure**

A very apparent and seemingly unavoidable limitation inherent to this study is that it takes as a structuring rubric the notion of the real which Lacan himself declared as 'that which resists signification completely' (Lacan 1991a: 66). Lacan's dogmatic hermeticism keeps the concepts which make up his elaborate theoretical frameworks continually in play and as always in a state of becoming – definitive statements are rendered impossible in such terms. But such impossibility both inhibits and licences particularized interpretation; foundational psychoanalytic texts are abstract and abstruse - they are therefore available to be read towards bespoke ends. A substantive limitation inherent to this study is that I have admittedly only traced the vague outlines of the monumental Lacanian theoretical edifice; my ignorance forces my account of Lacan to be restricted, to be from awry. The extent of psychoanalysis' back catalogue encourages competing schools of interpretation to flourish. Engaging with Lacan would seem in these terms to be a bound to fail attempt to

make sense from a place where there is none to be found. However, psychoanalysis insists that failure, that is, the impossibility of the subject to achieve its desire, is precisely what mobilizes and constitutes the human subject. Slavoj Žižek is an enthusiast and proponent of psychoanalysis' customary reversal of cause and effect. Indeed, Žižek not only reads 'communication as a successful misunderstanding' (Žižek 1992: 30), he also considers blindness the condition of insight and truth the upshot of misrecognition. Žižek reads in Hegel the contention that truth, while it looks like an end-product, turns out to encompass the whole process of trial and error which led up to it. Certainly, misrecognition has been integral and perhaps essential to this study's enterprise of reading Penhaul alongside the Lacanian real - I misrecognized Penhaul's basking shark (figure 30) in terms of Žižek's portrayal of the monster in Hollywood's horror movie *Alien* as an explosion of the real. I was not able to arrive at an alternative interpretation until I encountered Catherine Belsey's account of the real as void.

#### **Part 5 Reproduction of images**

All images reproduced in this study have been re-photographed by the author both from archived images held at Penlee House Museum and from extant copies of *The Cornishman* newspaper, again held at Penlee House. Photographs are reproduced to illustrate the style and content of Penhaul's photojournalist practice and to visually orientate the study in terms of geography and the post-war specificities of social and cultural constitution. Therefore not all images are referenced in the text but contribute to a collective photographic record of Penhaul's work and the community he lived alongside and photographed during the 1950s. Attention has been paid to reproducing images within this text so as to replicate the experience of encountering images while reading a newspaper - to this end, reproduced photographs have been sized proportionally to reflect those printed in *The Cornishman* and, as in the original newspaper, carry minimal captioning. Many of the re-photographed images subsequently reproduced in this study are of 6"x 8" prints held in the archive at Penlee and they have been reproduced in the text to reflect both the tight framing and cropping that characterizes Penhaul's photojournalistic style and newspaper presentation. However, a major aspect of this study has been to problematize, within a psychoanalytic register, the relation between image, reality and the looking subject. To accompany such exegesis, some images reproduced in the text work to distantiate and disorientate the position and perception of the viewer; Jean-Michel Rabaté regards Lacan as belonging to a critical tradition of 'thinking from the outside' (Rabaté

2001: 12) and the reproduction of images in this text that reveal archive location or the distortions of material degradation, work to gently orientate the reader to an experience of seeing from outside the photograph, from outside the 'pernicious spectatorial epistemology of geometral optics' (Jay 1994: 264).

The key conceptual objective of this study is to examine photography through a Lacanian lens, to enquire through this psychoanalytic register how various key precepts such as the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real are performed and made manifest and, above all, to exemplify these mechanisms through the photographs of Harry Penhaul. In his 1931 text *A Small History of Photography*, while Walter Benjamin stated that the illiterates of the future would be those who could not take a photograph, he also vested the photographic caption as being all that could rescue an image from the 'ravages of boorishness' (Benjamin 1985: 27). This study however, will argue that it is not the caption that conveys upon a photograph its revolutionary use value, but rather, through the psychoanalytic register of the Lacanian lens, political power can be found in the photograph itself. This study therefore works to deflect attention away from the proscriptions of the caption towards the photographic enunciations of what Lacan described as the 'grimace of the real' (Lacan 1990: 6), a visual enunciation of the subject's most profound fantasy of misrecognition.

## **Chapter outline**

The following outline of chapters will look to signpost chapter content and indicate the main direction of theoretical exegesis as it unfolds through each chapter.

### **Chapter 1 Harry Penhaul: a post-war portrait of West Penwith**

This first chapter will begin with a biographical sketch of Harry Penhaul. It will then present a cultural and economic contextualization of Cornwall in the 1950s before discussing in more detail the photographs and archive of Penhaul's work. Finally, this chapter will include an initial presentation of the psychoanalytic visual methodology that is put to use by this study, an account that will be augmented during the unfolding of this particular discourse going forward through this study.

#### **Part 1 Biography, economy and a portrait of *The Cornishman***

##### **1: 1 Harry Penhaul: a biography**

Biographical material on Penhaul is scant – a short booklet written by former journalistic colleague Douglas Williams provides some details and as well as a sense of Penhaul's

character but the brief written text is more of an accompaniment to the photographs reproduced. Finally, despite some remnants of eye witness account, it is the museum archive itself and references in the local weekly newspaper *The Cornishman* that throw further biographical light on the man known as 'Flash Harry'.

### **1: 2 Post-war Cornwall: an economic overview**

Studies of Cornwall's economy suggest there were inherent and fundamental structural difficulties in the economy as the county entered the post-war years.

### **1: 3 *The Cornishman*: A West Penwith weekly newspaper**

Founded in 1878 *The Cornishman* established itself as the main weekly newspaper for the West Penwith district of the Cornish peninsula. Positioning itself as politically independent, the paper reflected a supposed post-war consensus in its reporting of social, economic and cultural change.

## **Part 2 Cornwall: a photography hub**

From the mid nineteenth century Cornwall had been a centre of photographic activity and innovation - in terms of the arts, technological development and commercialization.

Penhaul's practice is situated within this rich existing photographic culture.

## **Part 3 The Penhaul archive**

This section will introduce the Penhaul archive currently held at Penlee House Museum in Penzance and will focus on characterizing the extent, form and image content of the Penhaul collection. An outline of the archive's classificatory systems is followed by a brief resume of the compositional analysis framework used in this study to describe Penhaul's images.

## **Part 4 Visual methodologies**

The following sections will position the Lacanian visual methodology to be employed by this study by reading it against both Foucauldian discourse analysis and semiological analysis.

### **4: 1 Discourse Analysis: Foucault and desire**

This section will follow how Foucault's conceptual frameworks have come to dominate photographic analysis in recent years. The work of Joan Copjec will read against such historicist discursive methodology.

### **4: 2 Semiology as visual methodology**

This section will briefly outline the close associations of semiological and psychoanalytical methodologies before indicating areas of particular conceptual difference between them –

a discussion of the scope of semiological method will enable a clearer view of that of the psychoanalytical visual methodology to come into focus.

### **4: 3 A Psychoanalytic visual methodology**

This section will present an initial introduction to a psychoanalytic visual methodology; subsequent chapters will further unfold and elaborate the particular Lacanian visual methodology applied by this study. Psychoanalysis encompasses a range of ideas that deal with sexuality, subjectivity and the unconscious. Key concepts were initially developed by Sigmund Freud and subsequent writers have taken his ideas and reworked them to the point where psychoanalysis now consists of a broad and diverse body of work (Walsh 2013). As well as its use in clinical practice, psychoanalysis has been called on to understand aspects of social and cultural theory.

## **Chapter 2 Photography, psychoanalysis and discursive congruence?**

In this chapter I will continue to present a founding description of the discourses of photography and psychoanalysis around and through which this study will circulate and articulate its particular interrogation of photographic representation. This discussion will look to identify methodological commonalities and areas of conceptual congruence that will enable the discourses of photography and psychoanalysis to be purposefully read alongside and against one another.

### **Part 1 The discourse of photography**

Part 1 of this chapter will engage the discourse of photography from various but overlapping perspectives and in particular: how it is possible to define discourse in terms of its exposition through statements, how has the discourse of photography been elaborated through a series of key categories? And what has been the consequence for photographic discourse of the emergence of photographic studies as an academic discipline? Finally, this part of the chapter will examine how two key texts have shaped the reception and trajectory of recent photographic discourse.

#### **1: 1 Photography as discourse**

This section will examine some aspects of the discourse of photography that emerge through statements and definitions made about discourse in general and about photographic discourse in particular. This section will reflect on the nature and coherence of the discursive field and will observe the movement of discourse across that field. This section will note how the discourse of photography has been characterized by a prevailing

binary opposition between Formalist and postmodern accounts. This section will posit that the theories of photography are its history and that theory and discourse are co-constitutive.

### **1: 2 The discourse of photography**

This section examines how the discourse of photography has engaged with conceptual issues that have emerged as fundamental to critical engagement with photography and its discourse. Debates and discussion around issues such as indexicality, reproducibility and identity have themselves helped define and delineate photographic discourse itself as complexly multi-layered, mutually interdependent and shifting in formation.

### **1: 3 Thinking about photography and the nature of photography studies**

In this section the emergence of photography studies as a discipline in formation will be charted in terms of its effects and determinations on the discourse of photography. Photography studies will be read as a discipline that has worked to avoid the 'sclerosis of critical orthodoxy' (Emerling 2012: 62).

### **1: 4 Making statements about photography**

This section outlines the discursive fortunes of two seminal texts within the discipline of photography studies - Victor Burgin's *Thinking Photography* (1982) and Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (trans 1981). The respective reading and reception of these texts exemplifies the manner in which the discourse of photography unfolds across the field and how it has come to be characterized as more feverish and troubling than definitive and ordered.

## **Part 2: Psychoanalysis from Freudian foundations**

The second part of this chapter explores the nature of psychoanalysis as discourse by asking the question what exactly is the field of psychoanalysis and to what extent do the discipline's Freudian foundations underpin and constitute its subsequent Lacanian elaboration?

### **2: 1 The field of psychoanalysis**

The following section, in asking the question what is the nature and extent of the field of psychoanalysis, finds that it is characterized not least by its central concern with the discursive zone that emerges from the overlap between the fields of the somatic and the psyche. Psychoanalysis is found to circulate with and encroach on many other discourses and disciplines and writers like Joan Copjec insist that we should be not just follow desire but that we should be literate in desire.

## **2: 2 On following unconscious desire**

This following section locates at its Freudian foundations a radical inconsistency within the psychoanalytic discourse that propels it continually towards new perspectives and frameworks of understanding, not just of the psyche, but of the subject's contingent relation to and within society and culture.

## **2: 3 Jacques Lacan and Surrealist associations**

Lacan's pre-war associations with the Surrealist movement can be seen to inform much of his later conceptual development both in terms of the identity of the subject and notions concerning the missed encounter with what Lacan later came to call the realm of the real.

## **Chapter 3 An austere cultural politics and the tragedy of the subject**

Victor Burgin stated 'photography theory must take account of the subject as the complex totality of its determinations are nuanced and constrained in their passage through and across photographs' (Burgin 1982: 153). This study argues that to perceive and critically consider Penhaul's photographs of Cornish community in new ways, the social and cultural landscape of the subject should be viewed through a Lacanian lens. It will be argued that psychoanalysis has the language and conceptual frameworks to give a critically useful account of a period marked by uncertainty and inflected with trauma, past and present.

## **Part 1 A Lacanian conceptual landscape**

### **1: 1 The Lacanian imaginary**

This section will follow Lacan's elaboration of a dialectical model of the subject that associates the phenomenological distinction between subject and ego with psychoanalysis's view of the role of images and the constructed nature of the self. Lacan conceptualizes a model of the subject as caught up in a constitutive but alienating and conflictual dialectic with imaginary identity and the other. The subject's constituting misrecognition takes its form from the organizing and inaugurating properties of the image and this dynamic is posited as becoming the model for all future identifications.

Constituted from the other, the subject emerges as alien to itself.

### **1: 2 The Symbolic**

This section will follow how Lacan brought aspects of the anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss and the linguistics of Ferdinand Saussure together with a psychoanalytic reading of the subject as alienated and at the mercy of unconscious determinations, into a totalizing

structure he called the symbolic order. Lacan situates the subject, read as precarious and unfixed, as bound within the localized particularities of symbolic communal authority. The signifying subject Lacan describes, takes its cues and references from surrounding social and cultural fields; this constituting structure Lacan terms the big Other and which functions as a social and cultural repository of collected and projected beliefs and rules which are argued by Lacan to be determinative of the subject's constitution. This section will argue that it is just these collected, projected beliefs and rules that Penhaul's images illustrate and perform.

### **1: 3 From the streets to the academy - appropriating Lacan**

The following section will identify a brief moment in the early 1970s when, following the evenements of 1968 in Paris, various social and political movements looked to elaborate aspects of their critical agendas within a Lacanian space. If populist appropriation of abstruse Lacanian categories was brief in duration, some academic disciplines such as social theory have incorporated elements of the psychoanalytic paradigm more fully into their conceptual frameworks. This section therefore begins to sketch out and indicate something of the range and relevance of Lacan's ideas outside the clinic from the street to the academy.

### **Part 2 An austere cultural politics**

As the reception of Lacanian ideas has passed through the various academic filters of disciplines such as film studies and feminism, commentators such as Margaret Iversen (2007) and Jacqueline Rose (1986) have suggested that such understanding of Lacan's mirror stage schema have been in some ways tendentious in that account was taken of the satisfactions of the imaginary domain, but not its threat. In her 1986 text *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, Rose called for the concept of the imaginary to be resituated to its psychoanalytic context, calling into question 'the use of the concept to delineate or explain some assumed position of plenitude on the part of the spectator' (Rose 1986: 52). This chapter will explore this darker side of the imaginary domain and will pursue what might appear as a path of relentless negativity and iconoclasm to arrive at an admittedly 'austere cultural politics' (Iversen 2007: 10). This part of chapter 3 will follow the argument made by Lacan in his Seminar 7, that such a severe positioning of the subject is necessary before the illusion and fantasy which come to constitute the subject have any possibility of being, in Žižekian terms, 'traversed' (cited in Wood 2012: 307).

### **2: 1 Proliferating in the dark and the defiles of the signifier**

This section will follow how psychoanalysis changes its focus from concern with the conscious self and its symptoms to a linguistic account of the unconscious. Lacan moves decisively away from Freud's account of the unconscious as a hell below where the bad beasts of repressed desire proliferate in the dark. In Lacan's structural linguistic account of the subject, emphasis is given to the role of the signifier in subject formation.

### **2: 2 Egos and hommelettes**

Ostensibly figured by Freud as mediator between the realm of the psyche and the outside world, his term ego acquires increasing complexity over time (Evans 1996). Lacan's concept of the ego positions it as central to processes of identification within a relation to the specular image – a relation posited by Lacan as illusory and fallacious. Lacan insists that the ego, 'the seat of illusions', should be approached with 'daggers drawn' (Lacan 1997: 12).

### **2: 3 The tragedy of the subject**

This section follows Lacan's account of the subject to where its representation, although figured as signifying the possibility of recognition, is ultimately pessimistic and which configures the subject as tragically constituted within a site of loss and impossibility. However, Lacan figures this tragic subject in terms of an ethics which argues towards some possibility of subjective redemptive re-positioning.

### **2: 4 The enculturation of the subject**

In its task of thinking through what makes humans subjects of culture, the account given by psychoanalysis is one of a radically uncertain dependence in the relation between subject and other. In elaborating this dependency, psychoanalysis also describes the consequences of the processes involved in the enculturation of the subject; as the subject participates in the discourse of the other in the interest of self-recognition, the possibilities of the subject's undoing are revealed in the contingency of the process. In Lacan's schema, difference is not only foundational of the subject but is also a vital aspect of maintaining a meaningful sense of itself in the world. Penhaul's photographs are read as participating in this dialectical account of same and other.

## **Chapter 4 The Real**

This chapter will examine how the real can be read as functioning to mark the limits of culture and of any subsequent cultural criticism; that is, it will interrogate the space where

epistemology occludes ontology (Belsey 2005). This chapter will propose that such questioning is both inherent to and vital for photography's relation to the real. Two issues arising will be then discussed. First, that the real has determinations and effects recognizable in material culture. Second, that the real persists and in its functioning as a question for cultural criticism has relevance for an understanding both of the ontology of the photograph itself and also for the specular relation between the subject and the photographic image.

This chapter will proceed by discussing various accounts and configurations of the realm of the real in order to conceptually 'ring-fence' that which Lacan repeatedly referred to as being 'what does not depend on my idea of it' (Lacan cited in Fink 1995: 142).

### **Part 1 The subject, culture and beyond**

This section will discuss the subject's relation to culture, language and what Lacan named the realm of the real in an account which posits uncertainty and unconscious determinations at the core of the subject's imbrication with the real. The real is figured as culture's defining difference and as being that silent exteriority which is also inside the subject's very constitution. The real is figured as a determinative absent presence, a loss that is the effect of a structural relationship between language and subjectivity, a relation built on the notion of the real. The real is argued to surround the subject but also to inhabit the subject as condition of its existence.

### **Part 2 Configurations of the real: from Žižek to Lacan**

Since the late 1980s Slovenian writer Slavoj Žižek has prominently proselytized his own specific reading(s) of the real with his particular, and perhaps to some, partial appropriation of Lacanian theory (Kay 2003). Reading Žižek against Lacan qua the real highlights nuances of conceptual difference that are seen to generate substantively contrasting effects. In part two and three of this chapter, which both elaborate a view of the Lacanian real by reading Žižek against Lacan, I have drawn on the theoretical scaffolding provided in the work of writers such as Antony Easthope, Kate McGowan and Catherine Belsey whose clarity and insight have outlined productive, persuasive and focused lines of enquiry that have helped propel this study forward.

#### **The real as void**

Žižek's real is a void; in Žižek's view, tear away the veil of signification and you will find nothing. Ideological fantasy creates a fantasmatic screen to mask and prevent the horrific

trauma of encountering the abyss of the void. Unlike Lacan's real, Žižek's real is not only not there for the subject, it is not there at all.

### **Part 3 The Ideal and the Sublime**

Can the real somehow be 'there' but beyond comprehension? For Lacan, any account of the subject as tied to the imaginary and symbolic must be integrated into and with the real (Johnston 2009).<sup>4</sup> Lacan's topographic sketch outlined in his seminar series of 1974, foregrounds the absolute interdependency of its three orders. The Lacanian subject of the Borromean knot is participant to a dynamic process, always in motion, delimited only by the confluence that is so outlined (Chiesa 2007).

Lacan's real is replete and not lacking because it is not made in culture (Belsey 2005: 49). The imaginary and the symbolic are, however, necessarily partial and incomplete. What is real is that which cannot be comprehended and which 'in its incomprehensibility functions to remind us that comprehension is just that - the systematic production of intelligibility limited in terms by the terms of the system' (McGowan, K. 2007: 116). The real must be that which cannot be symbolized or imagined; the real cannot operate in any specific interest but it can continue to mark the insufficiencies of any culturally manifested interest (Sharpe and Faulkner 2008).

Between Žižek and his critics there are areas of engagement and agreement: the real has cultural effects and reveals both inadequacies and fractures present to symbolic systems. As Kate McGowan explains: 'that the real marks a limit ... seems vital to cultural criticism since it also marks the impossibility of cultural systems of meaning ... to be either real or absolute in the sense of their being all there is' (McGowan 2007: 116).

For Catherine Belsey, the question posed by the real is paramount. In her analysis, the real is vital for cultural criticism because of the domain of meaningless alterity it marks. The real for Belsey is 'not nature ... Nor is it a fact ... Still less is it the truth, a foundation on which to base new laws or dogmas, or an alternative reality with which to contrast appearances. On the contrary, the real is a question, not an answer' (Belsey 2005: 14).

Contrary to Žižek's position, only an account of the real as that which *is*, and which cannot be grasped, is the certainty of the subject radically displaced: 'If the real is what is independent of my idea of it, then the real continues to haunt and to trouble not just my particular version of reality but the certainty by which I come to know anything in the first place ... for cultural criticism the real is indispensable' (McGowan, K. 2007: 118).

The real matters because the real and the symbolic realm of meaning where we as signifying subjects lead our lives, are, according to Lacan, intimately bound together. The

following sections in this chapter examine further this relation and continue to read Žižek against Lacan. Section 3: 1 below will reiterate this study's critique of Žižek's notion of the real as retroactive construct and will then further interrogate Žižek's position qua idealism with the purpose of shining further light on Lacan's notion of the real.

### **3: 1 The ideal Žižek**

Reading Žižek against Lacan qua idealism is here posited as a productive critical approach with which to differentiate Žižek's conceptualization of the real and that of Lacan. The opposition of idealism and alterity highlights some implications inherent to different conceptions of the real. In Žižek's denial of the real he embraces a surety and sovereignty for the subject (Sharpe and Boucher 2010). Conversely, Lacan's conception of the real, as there but not for the subject, substantiates uncertainty and insists that there is nothing the subject can be sure of.

This section will first revisit Žižek's conception of the real as retroactive construct in order to illustrate Žižek's notion of the sublime object of ideology and will then discuss the relation between Žižek and Lacan in terms of idealism.

### **3: 2 Žižek's sublime and the real nature of culture**

This section will examine how critics have drawn on postmodern appropriations of the notion of the sublime to conceptualize the limits of culture and intelligibility (Zupancic 2011). While this section will read Lyotard's conception of the sublime as synonymous in many ways with Lacan's notion of the real, Žižek will be argued to have appropriated the sublime as a fantasy object in order to mask the void of the real. Lacan however, has no interest in the sublime. Instead he positions the homonymic Freudian notion of sublimation as key for the existence of culture. The exile of the real is read by Lacan as manifesting itself in desire which is then sublimated towards cultural work. Lacan views culture as rooted in the real and for Lacan, culture and beauty allude to the real.

#### **The sublime Žižek**

The notion of the sublime ostensibly provides a category with which to conceptualize the limits of culture and intelligibility. Notwithstanding, Žižek's appropriation of the sublime denies the real as Žižek's sublime object works to screen the void of the real. Lacan however, has no use for the sublime; psychoanalysis provides a ready-made framework to discuss the limits of culture and alterity. Lacan appropriates the Freudian notion of sublimation to give an account of the existence of culture as rooted in the real; an account not open to Žižek for whom the real does not exist.

#### **Part 4 Determinations and effects**

Part 4 of this chapter will continue to explore the central conceptual tenet of this study – that the effects and determinations of the absent, exiled, obliterated real persist and present within material culture. Such presentation is frequently figured by Lacan in terms of cultural effects carried within the symbolic register and as therein alluding to the exiled real. The real cannot be seen or touched or even delineated in language, but its effects and intent are argued to be recognizable in the subject’s cultural reality as motifs that connote such allusion to the real. Part 4 will explore the presentation in culture of such determinations and effects initially as identifiable in both two and three-dimensional space.

##### **4: 1 Monuments and macaroni**

This section will discuss how the void, the emptiness encircled by material three dimensional structures, can exemplify and allude to the place of the exiled real.

##### **4: 2 The real and two-dimensional representation**

This following section will examine Lacan’s contention that the loss of the real can be alluded to in two-dimensional space. While Lacan presents his argument with reference to the medium of Western post-Renaissance painting, his assertions are read as equally applicable to photography. Hubert Damisch (1994) is cited as modelling a Lacanian account of two-dimensional representation.

##### **4: 3 Baltimore, bedtime and burning dreams: further motifs of the real**

This section will follow how Lacan uses various motifs to allude to and figure his theory of the real and its relation to unconscious desire.

#### **Part 5 Photography and the real**

By the late 1980s and early 1990s Slavoj Žižek had brought a new vitality to Lacanian studies and a fresh interest and appreciation of the Lacanian real (Žižek 1989, 1994). It was at this time that certain critics such as Hal Foster and Margaret Iversen articulated an account of the real which they applied to the discipline and discourse of photography. In particular, they read Roland Barthes’ late work *Camera Lucida* (1980), as being resonant with, and structured by, an understanding of the Lacanian real. Both Foster and Iversen came from art historical backgrounds; Foster was associated with the *October* journal whose writers, including Rosalind Krauss, engaged in a rigorous postmodernist and anti-essentialist critique of culture which often incorporated photography into its theoretical frameworks and anti-Formalist agenda (Batchen 2002). In the 1970s and 1980s, a

psychoanalytic critical discourse had been incorporated into the poststructuralist house style of journals like *October*, *Screen* and *Ten.8*. But only in the mid 1990s, with writers like Foster and Iversen, did the Lacanian real make a brief incursion into photographic criticism and it was Barthes' *Camera Lucida* that played a central role in photography's brief encounter with the Lacanian real.

### **5: 1 Roland Barthes and the possibilities of the punctum**

Barthes writes about photography in a conceptual language that has been identified as being frequently synonymous with Lacanian theory and notions of the real. Barthes' neologism of the punctum appears indebted on many levels to the Lacanian real and as such will be argued to provide possibilities for reading the Lacanian real as figured within the medium and ontological frameworks available for an understanding of photography.

### **5: 2 So what is a photograph?**

This following section will consider Margaret Iversen's reading of Barthes' *Camera Lucida* which she undertakes in reference to and against Lacan's Seminar 11, an account in which she arrives at a conception of the photograph as exemplifying the relation of the real to the unconscious desire of the subject. Iversen's original 1994 essay is reprinted in her 2007 text *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes*.

### **5: 3 Barthes, the real and the gaze**

In the 1960s Lacan incorporated the gaze into his notion of the real. The gaze is figured in relation to desire and the exiled real and is positioned outside the subject - crucially the gaze can recognize the subject for what it is, in other words, as being in the grip of desire. Both Lacan and Barthes explore the implications of this chiasm of vision and conceptualize the determinations of the exiled real qua externalized gaze of the other as key in the determination of the subject.

## **Part 6 Film and the real**

From the 1970s film theory has been an early adopter of aspects of Lacanian theory and this has continued to be the case in more recent appropriations of contemporary understandings of the Lacanian real. This following section will follow Todd McGowan (2007) in differentiating between 'early' and 'late' Lacanian film theory. As Lacan became less interested in how the subject sees and more concerned with how the subject is seen, Lacan incorporated the real into his conception of the subject's relation to the specular. Lacan developed a notion of the real as gaze figured through the conception of unconscious desire and *objet a*. The Lacanian gaze is outside the subject and disturbs the

scopic field, presenting another's desire and presents the subject's desire to himself. In late Lacanian film theory, the cinema is site where the (other's) gaze can show itself and demarcate points of failure within symbolic authority.

### **Part 7: Batchen to the future**

This next section will discuss the possibility of identifying the real as having always already inhabited conceptualizations of the photograph from the moment of the medium's inception. Geoffrey Batchen has argued (1997) that early proponents of photography expressed an equivocal conceptual articulation of the new medium's identity; Batchen argues that such an ambiguity in positioning can provide an alternative to today's persisting binary theoretical conceptions of photography.

### **Chapter 5 The Grimace of the Real**

This chapter will proceed by bringing together groups of Penhaul's photographs that illustrate particular characteristics of such markers of the exiled real in its determinations and effects within the subject and across culture, in order to substantiate Lacan's claim that 'a certain real may be reached' (Lacan 1999: 22). Allusion to the lost real is one such mode that becomes recognizable as being inscribed within cultural forms and this chapter will identify characteristics across a number of cultural sites from the encircling of space in architectural form to the scopic proscriptions of perspective. Another recognizable marker of the real is its traumatic intrusion into symbolic space. Lacan argues that the real, despite being exiled from the subject, can erupt into social reality; events can be so traumatic that they appear to be beyond meaning, beyond sense. This chapter will argue that such occurrences and their effects are frequently identifiable in Penhaul's photojournalist practice where he is continually required to record the urgency of traumatic events that resist immediate comprehension.

This chapter will also examine how Lacan's conceptualization of the real as gaze and his critique of what Martin Jay has described as 'ocularcentrism' (Jay 1994: 235), enables an understanding of the real to be elaborated as exemplified within the elisions and concealments inherent to the scopic normativities of the dynamics of geometrical space. Such elisions, concealments and markers of uncertainty will be identified within particular Penhaul images. Indeed, this chapter will work to conclude that the real is in every photograph.

The signifier and the real exist on different levels: the signifier invades the unknown spaces of the real during the construction of new knowledges, and the real periodically forces its way violently into our cultural reality. 'Psychoanalysis takes as its specific field of interest the enigma that issues from the unstable conjunction of the two in human beings' (Belsey 2005: 63).

This chapter will figure such 'unstable conjunctions' through the characteristics and motifs of the determinations and effects of the lost real; characteristics and motifs read in terms of allusion, elision, concealment, trauma and occlusion.

### **Part 1 Alluding to the exiled real**

In the following sections, this study will look through its conceptual Lacanian lens to observe and recognise how the determinations and effects of the exiled real are manifested through allusion and reference to the lost real - whether in the architectural encompassing of space, the detours of beauty or the invocation of loss within memorial sculpture invoked through the determination of the lost real Lacan named *das Ding*:

#### **1: 1 In Memorial(s)**

#### **1: 2 Architecture**

#### **1: 3 Ships and sharks**

### **Part 2 A matter of perspective**

For Lacan, just as architecture is organized around the invocation and circumscription of emptiness (Lacan 2008: 167), in two-dimensional representation, that is, painting and photography, perspective works to create and organize emptiness; however, the proscriptions of perspective occlude and elide the real.

#### **2: 1 Perspective gives and perspective takes away**

Perspective in its single tense and single location, pacifies the drive and fences off the pure absence of the Thing.

#### **2: 2 Perspective and the gaze**

Photographic perspective opens a place of loss that perpetuates desire in the viewer, but narrows reality and denies alterity

### **Part 3 Beauty and the real; 'closer to evil than good'**

Beauty is conceptualized as creating a barrier between the subject and the drive

### **Part 4 The dialectic of *tuché* and *automaton***

The following sections examine Lacan's contention that 'psychoanalysis is essentially an encounter with the real that eludes us' (Lacan 1998: 53). Lacan introduces the notion of the

tuche to exemplify the traumatic dimension of what he called the 'missed encounter' with the real. Penhaul's photographs are figured within the dialectic of trauma and missed encounter.

#### **4: 1 The trauma of *tuché***

This section explores the surrealist origins of Lacan's notion of the 'missed encounter' and follows Lacan's elaboration in Seminar 11 of the traumatic relation between the subject and the real, a relation figured in terms of the painful disruption to the subject's frameworks of signification.

#### **4: 2 Vicissitude and contingency**

In this section, the representation of perplexity and contingency provides images that allude to the intrusion into the subject's symbolic frameworks markers of uncertainty and non-sense as indicators of the lost and exiled real.

#### **Part 5 Recognizing the real, a complementary encounter**

In this section film is argued to function like dream in its ability to show the real as gaze, to reveal to the subject their constitution as in the grip of desire. The real is further argued to be in every photograph, not just in the allusions, intrusions and concealments of the determinations and effects of the lost real but in the excess of meaning which the chain of signifiers are unable to contain.

## **Chapter 1 Harry Penhaul: a post-war portrait of West Penwith**

### *Chapter Outline:*

*This first chapter will present a biography of Harry Penhaul and will examine the social and economic context of Penhaul's post-war work and career. An account of the rich photographic history of Cornwall will then further contextualize Penhaul's particular practice. This chapter will then review in more detail some of the images found in the Penhaul photographic archive currently held at Penlee House Museum in Penzance. Finally, this chapter will present an initial introduction to the psychoanalytical methodology followed by this study.*

### **Introduction**

Harry Penhaul was born in 1914 in Gulval, a village just outside the town of Penzance in the West Penwith district of Cornwall<sup>5</sup>. After an apprenticeship with a local photography business, Penhaul began a career as a freelance photographer living and working amongst the Penwith community whose lives he documented as the traumas of war gave way to the uncertainties of peace. By the 1950s Penhaul had established himself as the chief photographer for the West Penwith local weekly newspaper *The Cornishman*, a position he occupied with increasing local celebrity until his early death in 1957. It is Penhaul's images from his years at *The Cornishman* that constitute much of the archive of extant material now held at Penlee House Museum in Penzance and which has been the main source and focus of this study's research.

The material in the archive was secured in the 1990s from Penhaul's photographic studio and comprises prints and negatives, stock images and various items of photographic apparatus. The studio contents, locked away and untouched after Penhaul's sudden and premature death, constitute not just a time-capsule of Cornish post-war community, but encapsulate in their subject matter a particularity of place that sets in motion a set of concerns regarding photography, representation, the subject and intersubjective relations. Reading the still available copies of 1950s editions of *The Cornishman*<sup>6</sup>, gives rise to a palpable sense of the particular but prosaic and quotidian nature of a rural close-knit community. However, this particularity embodies the wider concerns that underpinned the social, cultural, economic and political transition from war to peace. This dialectical transition from war-time trauma to post-war uncertainty is arguably reflected in Penhaul's own practice. Penhaul records the everyday lives of a rural community keen to ground

themselves in what Philip Payton refers to as the certainties of traditional pre-war social and cultural roles (Payton 1993). But interjecting through the complacencies of an assumed conformity, Penhaul records events that pierce and disturb the mundanities of the prosaic every-day.

This study has chosen a psychoanalytic conceptual framework with which to engage and discuss the photographs of Harry Penhaul. This may not appear at once to be a self-evident choice; the mytho-poetic abstractions of the Freudian paradigm might seem at odds with the harsh visceral realities of rural existence, but it will be argued through this study that a Lacanian visual analysis uniquely enables an interrogation, at the level of the individual subject, of precisely this dialectic of trauma and uncertainty.

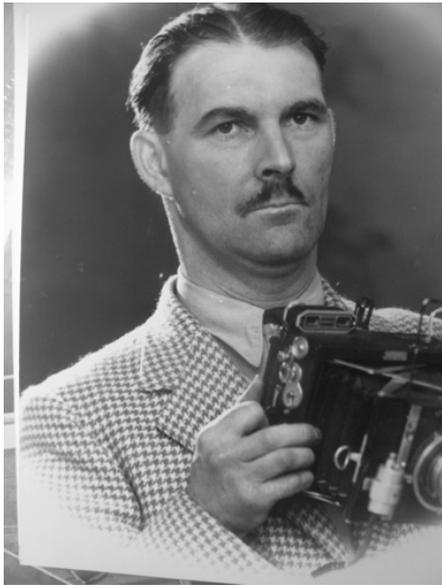
The photographs of events and personalities that constitute the main body of the Penhaul archive situates such photography within a documentary paradigm that attests and affirms a supposed immanentism of experience, a 'window on the world', a depiction of reality particular to the medium of photography itself (Tagg 2009). However, this study will argue that such representations posit, within their play of signification, a presentation of the subject as precarious, unfixed and uncertain. The critical framework from within which this contrasting elaboration of the photographic subject is situated, is that associated with the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. This study will therefore follow a post-structuralist pathway with the aim of assuming a psychoanalytical theoretical position within a conceptual landscape through which this study will interrogate the photographic record made by Harry Penhaul of the Cornish community in the post-war years.

Therefore, as well as presenting a biography of Harry Penhaul, this chapter will begin to delineate and situate the particular Lacanian critical framework that drives this study, a framework it will be argued that enables familiar representations to be seen anew and to be made intelligible in terms of the social and cultural context of today.

Such a Lacanian post-structuralist critique will crucially foreground the structural and ideological dependency within which images necessarily operate in order to begin to elucidate alternate sets of meanings always already at work within such representations, and to do so in order to disrupt the values taken for granted in the circulation of such images.

Elizabeth Edwards in her 2014 study of local community at the turn of the century has described societal and cultural dynamics as 'interlocking, complex, fragmented,

amorphous, localized and contradictory' (Edwards 2014: 12), a description not dissimilar to that applied by Philip Payton to the littoral of Cornwall during the inter-war period (Payton 1993). Edwards urges that the study of representation in local community should move away from what she describes as 'a homogenizing macroscopic perspective' (Edwards 2104: 18). This study will argue that a Lacanian conceptual framework will enable such a particular and focused analysis and one in which the intricacies and intimacies of the constitution of the subject can be examined in relation to photographic representation.



*Fig: 1 Garfield Hall Penhaul and MicroPress camera print PHA.*

Embedded within the intimacies and close networks of local community, Penhaul was uniquely placed to photograph the effects and determinations of societal and economic change.

John Tagg has stated that the danger of photography's 'perceived transparency and inexorable immanence' is that ideological presumptions and relations of power go uncontested (Tagg 1989: 39). Platitudes of 'truth', 'experience' and 'common-sense' persuade the viewer that this is the way the world is. The Lacanian conceptual framework used by this study activates a discourse which precisely challenges such normative presumptions. A central discussion running through this study concerns how psychoanalysis works within cultural criticism to question the limits of knowledge and allow new perspectives and understandings to emerge.



*Fig: 2 Penhaul Upper Jew Street Penzance 1954 print PHA.*

Stuart Hall (1997) maintains that the grounds for a particular interpretation must necessarily stem from concrete example in order to 'to justify one's reading in relation to the actual practices and forms of signification used' (Hall 1997: 9). This chapter will therefore engage both quantitative material and qualitative interpretative method. Accordingly, the chapter will have a twin focus. Firstly, to describe Penhaul in terms of his social cultural context and then to illustrate his practice referencing archive material. Secondly this chapter will begin the argument sustained throughout this study - that a psychoanalytic visual methodology enables particular understandings to be made not available through other discourses. The aim of such a Lacanian conceptual lens is not just to see the people and places of Cornwall in new ways, but also to initiate a refocused line of enquiry as to the ontology of the photography itself. A psychoanalytic visual methodology is therefore argued to enable a particular method of engaging with culture and meanings generated therein not least with the aim of disputing normative and dominant cultural meanings.



Fig: 3 Garfield Hall Penhaul at Lido Town Guide 1952 print PHA.

Harry Penhaul's photographs documented and were part of a specific culture, one which articulated the social practices, social identities and social change peculiar to this particular district of Cornwall during the post-war period. Stuart Hall describes culture as 'a process, a set of practices. Culture is concerned with the production and exchange of meanings ... between the members of a society or group ... interpreting meaningfully what is around them, and making sense of the world, in broadly similar ways' (Hall 1997: 2). The psychoanalytical methodology followed by this study will allow a particular reading of the subject's relation to culture that insists on positioning the subject and its constitution within the visual field, a positioning elaborated by Lacan precisely in his Seminar 11, where Lacan argues the visual field as fully imbricated in the formation of the subject and intersubjective relations (Lacan 1998).

Christopher Pinney comments that a 'key issue in photographic studies is not how images look but what they can *do*' (2004: 8). Pinney notes that photographs are multimodal, they exist in the world and make sense in relation to other things, what writer Victor Burgin refers to as 'a field of determinations' (Burgin 2011: 49). However, this study will argue that a Lacanian framework can give an answer not just to Pinney's question as to what a photograph can do; it will be argued that such a methodology can begin to answer the abiding question of what a photograph *is*.

The psychoanalytic methodology that will aim to answer such questions will be unfolded over the course of the study. This first chapter will continue with a biographical sketch of Harry Penhaul. It will then present a cultural and economic contextualization of Cornwall in the 1950s before discussing in more detail the photographs and archive of Penhaul's work. Finally, this chapter will include an initial presentation of the psychoanalytic visual methodology, an account that will be augmented during the course of the rest of the study.

## **Part 1 Biography, economy and a portrait of *The Cornishman***

### **1: 1 Harry Penhaul: a biography**

*Biographical material on Penhaul is scant – a short booklet written by former journalistic colleague Douglas Williams provides some detail as well as a sense of Penhaul 's character but the brief written text is more of an accompaniment to the photographs reproduced. A further source of information regarding Penhaul is the vivid testimony of a few remaining eye witnesses who have a recollection of Penhaul's ubiquitous photographic and personable presence in Penzance during the post-war years.<sup>7</sup> Finally, it is the archive at Penlee House and material contained in hard copies of the weekly newspaper The Cornishman, that come together to throw further biographical light on the man known as 'Flash Harry'.*

Bertrand Russell gave the first BBC Reith Lecture in 1947. He spoke of the collective trauma experienced by the country and questioned where the violent impulses required to pursue a war could find alternate outlets in time of peace. The war had been a time of heroic projects; the peace would be notable by the 'routinization' (sic) of daily life with 'citizens left to day-dream' (Russell 1947). Russell identified a tension existing in society between the passion of war and the sobriety of peace.<sup>8</sup> Harry Penhaul, born in 1914, grew up in the shadow of one world war and saw his career as a photographer develop and flourish in the shadow of a second.

Penhaul was born and grew up in Gulval, a village just outside Penzance in the west of Cornwall, in the district known as West Penwith. The son of a secondary school teacher, Penhaul had several siblings and was, according to Williams (1990), particularly close to his sisters Lily and Jennifer. Apart from service in the army during the World War Two, Penhaul lived and worked all his life in west Cornwall.<sup>9</sup>

Leaving school at sixteen, Penhaul was apprenticed to Penzance photographers Lawley and Sons of Market Jew Street in 1935. Lawley and Sons was one of a handful of local commercial photography enterprises operating in West Penwith at this time. Small photographic businesses such as Lawley and Sons were sustained by income in the most part generated from studio portrait work, the demand for which was sufficient to support several such concerns in Penzance alone during the inter-war period. Apart from taking portraits of family and individuals, enterprises such as Lawley and Sons would also supplement studio income from soliciting images to local newspapers, providing

photographs for guides and post-cards as well as touting photographs of local events to potential buyers amongst members of the community.



*Fig: 4 Penhaul Flora Day Helston 1951 PHA*

The rapid spread and development of photography in England in the mid and late nineteenth century had been associated not just with middleclass ‘gentleman practitioners’ for whom photography was pursued as a hobby,<sup>10</sup> this period had also seen a widespread commercialization that included most districts of Cornwall. A widely known example is John Gibson from the Scilly Isles who had started a photography business in the 1860s and had gone on to become a well-known and successful photographer. Gibson opened a studio practice in Penzance in the 1880s which was commercially successful and a prominent institution in the town well into the early 1900s.<sup>11</sup> By the time Penhaul began working as a photographer in the 1930s, the figure of the commercial photographer who was embedded within the local community and who could be seen actively recording the lives and events of that community had become a familiar part of West Penwith everyday life (Bowden 1994, Stanier 2003).<sup>12</sup> As a business model and social practice, the role of local commercial photographer was still a focal part of community visual culture both before and after the war surviving well into the 1950s. Williams and Bright (2008) have commented that the post-war decade can be regarded as perhaps the heyday and apotheosis of the local community based commercial photographer.<sup>13</sup>



Fig: 5 Penhaul May 1953 *The Cornishman* print PHA

The matrix of news gathering and dissemination was in a state of rapid technological and cultural change in the decade following the end of the Second World War (Kynaston 2009). There was also an increasing demand for local news photojournalism just at the time when Penhaul was establishing his own freelance photography business. He was therefore well placed to take advantage of this changing demand. He had the requisite skills, experience and drive to pursue opportunities in the local news media as well as continuing in his previous role as community commercial photographer. Evidence from Penhaul's archive suggests that Penhaul astutely combined the two roles; he would photograph a wedding for publication in *The Cornishman* and then sell print copies direct to family and friends.



Fig: 6 Penhaul Mayoress and visitors *Penzance Town Hall* 1952 print PHA.

Harry Penhaul was the fourth of seven children. His father, Sydney Penhaul, was a teacher at St. John's School in Penzance and his mother, Nellie Laity, was from the nearby village of Illogan. Of Penhaul's siblings, Alfred became a cabinet maker, Sydney a hairdresser, Jack a motor mechanic and Hyacinth, a nurse. According to family members Penhaul's first encounter with photography appears to have been when he responded to an

advertisement by Messrs Lawley of Penzance for an apprentice. Aged sixteen and escorted to the interview by 'quiet and business like' mother (Williams 1990: 36), Penhaul was taken on and according to sister Hyacinth, had an immediate affinity for the job.

Penhaul's apprenticeship would have taught him the basic elements of using a camera, of processing and printing negatives and above all would have given him experience of organizing and setting up both individuals and groups prior to being photographed.

Penhaul brought an energy and enthusiasm to this aspect of the photographer's role.

Through his career Penhaul attained increasing local renown not least for the general air of performance and show he brought to a photographic event.

With his apprenticeship completed, Penhaul had a brief collaborative partnership in the mid 1930s with another Penzance photographer, Joseph Churchwood. Churchwood did not operate a portrait studio in the same way as Lawley and Sons; he supplied newspapers with occasional images and his business practice was very much community rather than studio based. It was in collaboration with Churchwood that Penhaul had his first photographs published in *The Cornishman*:

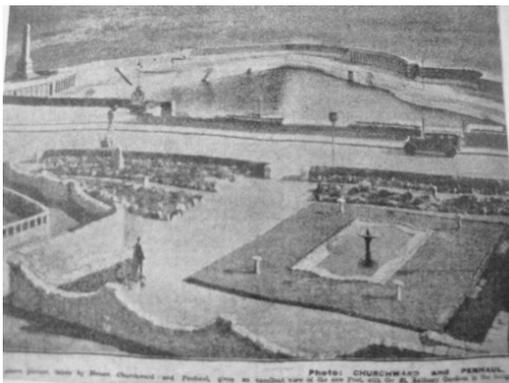


Fig: 7 June 6<sup>th</sup> 1935 Churchwood and Penhaul *The Cornishman* NNA

A year later aged twenty-two, Penhaul had several of his own photographs published in *The Cornishman*:



Fig: 8 Penhaul Nov 1936 *The Cornishman* NNA



Fig: 9 Penhaul Dec 1936 *The Cornishman* NNA

Working with Churchwood enabled Penhaul to work outside of the studio environment and provided him with his first experience of news photography. Fig 10 shows Penhaul with his large format Micropress glass plate camera at the visit to Penzance of the exiled King of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie in 1935, an image taken by another West Penwith freelance commercial photographer Marcus Negus.



*Fig: 10 Marcus Negus April 1935 The Cornishman NNA [Harry Penhaul in background]*

Working alongside Churchwood also gave Penhaul experience in wedding photography, a genre which underpinned the finances of many commercial photographers working in Cornwall at this time. Content analysis of the Penhaul archive shows that wedding photography was a not an insignificant part of Penhaul's work schedule in the post-war period.



*Fig: 11 Churhwood and Penhaul July 1935 The Cornishman NNA*

Douglas Williams records that during his association with Penhaul in the post-war years, Penhaul was a popular and proficient professional at the many weddings he was tendered to photograph (Williams 1990).



Fig: 12 Penhaul Wedding 1953 print PHA

The skill set required for wedding photography was transferable to other facets of his work practice - group choreography, composition, framing, speed and personal skills; the commercial photographer has to work quickly and needs to personally engage with his subjects. Douglas Williams, a reporter for *The Cornishman* who worked extensively with Penhaul in the 1950s, corroborates the evidence of many testimonies that Penhaul was an adept and charismatic practitioner whose arrival at an event invariably caused a stir and was itself news (Williams 1990).

Penhaul began freelancing in 1936 and he converted a room in the family house into a studio for developing and processing his work. The material in the archive at Penlee House Museum, where the contents of Penhaul's studio were subsequently stored, suggests that the Gulval studio was used not just for processing and printing, but also storing materials and equipment and increasingly to house what became Penhaul's personal stock library of particular images. Material in the Penlee House archive suggests that Penhaul appears to have stayed away from studio portrait work and concentrated on photographing local events, sporting fixtures, municipal and civic occasions as well as community and family gatherings:



*Fig: 13 Penhaul Retirement presentation Dec 1955 print PHA.*



*Fig: 14 Penhaul Mayor Bennetts meets players June 1956 print PHA.*



*Fig: 15 Penhaul Birthday cake Jan 1954 print PHA.*

Penhaul referred to himself on his invoices as freelance press photographer. Surviving invoices reveal that Penhaul's income stream appears to come from several sources. The number of images Penhaul had published in *The Cornishman* would have been a small part of Penhaul's overall income but the status and access that his position as chief photographer allowed Penhaul access to news events, his images of which he could then sell to the various press agencies he subscribed to:

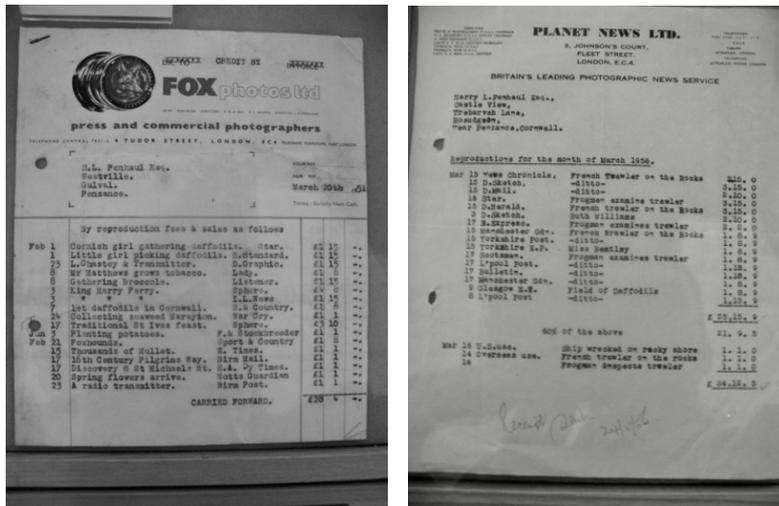


Fig: 16 Press agencies used by Penhaul during 1950s PHA

Penhaul was also able to gain remuneration from direct selling of print copies which he processed himself at his Gulval studio:



Fig: 17 Print copies ready for postage large 3/6, half plate 2/6 PHA

Barker and Thompson (1999) state that even in the 1960s there was a surviving economy in the direct selling of beach photography to tourists.<sup>14</sup> In the post-war period in West Penwith the operating photographic economy of which Penhaul was participant, concerned itself more with community events and studio portraiture rather than beach tourist photography *per se*. Commercial freelance photographers such as Penhaul would attend a

local function, take some photographs and then receive orders for copies of the subsequent images from those who attended the event.

By the time war was declared in 1939 Penhaul had succeeded in establishing his fledgling freelance photography business as a going concern. His photographs published in *The Cornishman* during the late 1930s show Penhaul as an already confident practitioner; the images are well balanced and framed and the participants appear relaxed. In 1939, shortly before Penhaul left Penzance to join the army, Penhaul found himself inadvertently at the centre of a major news story. Penhaul had been commissioned by *The Cornishman* to take a portrait of the St Ives lifeboat crew. Tragically of all those men who Penhaul photographed only one survived during a rescue attempt undertaken days later off the north coast. In a sequence of events that was to be repeated many times during his career, Penhaul was also on hand to photograph what remained of the tragically wrecked vessel:



Fig: 18 Penhaul 1939 St Ives crew The Cornishman NNA



Fig: 19 Penhaul Feb 2 1939 Wreck of St Ives Lifeboat PHA

Penhaul volunteered early in the war and served with the Royal Artillery, not as a photographer, as he later maintained in his post-war advertising copy, but as a cook. He never served abroad. When Penhaul returned to West Penwith on being demobbed in 1945, he immediately resumed working as a freelance photographer.



Fig: 20 Penhaul Civilians and military 1950 print PHA.

On his return to Gulval, Penhaul quickly consolidated his pre-war reputation and skills. By the 1950s he had become the principal freelance photographer used by *The Cornishman* and where he was able to demonstrate a growing confidence in producing images from across a broad repertoire of local newspaper photo-journalistic conventions from community and sporting events to more dramatic news coverage.



Fig: 21 Penhaul street party June 1953 print PHA.



Fig: 22 Penhaul Hayle football team Nov 1954 print PHA.



Fig: 23 Penhaul Western Morning News original newspaper copy PHA

Douglas Williams recalls that Penhaul had what he describes as ‘a good news sense’ (Williams 1990: 41) and in the years after the war, Penhaul increasingly demonstrated a degree of tenacity in pursuing newsworthy photographic opportunities. In the post-war period such opportunities also began to include the sale or syndication of images to larger and national press outlets (see fig 24 below). For example, in June 1949 Penhaul secured exclusive photographs of cross-Atlantic sailors, the Smith brothers, whose exploits became a national story documented by *Pathe News* and shown in cinemas across the country. Penhaul had ‘scooped’ the first images of the Smith brothers as they neared the Cornish coast having hired a speed boat for the purpose.



brothers Colin and Stanley Smith in their 20 ft. cutter off Lizard after crossing the Atlantic when contacted by the Llyn fishing boat. This is the picture raced by boat, car and telegraph to London.

Fig: 24 Penhaul June 1949 Smith brothers The Cornishman NNA

In the 1950s, as de facto 'house' photographer for *The Cornishman*, Penhaul was increasingly commissioned to take on prestigious assignments such as royal and celebrity visits as well as covering society social events. According to Douglas Williams, Penhaul took these opportunities in his stride. Williams recalls that Penhaul's was a confident personality, he was not apparently overawed by social status or fame:



Fig: 25 Penhaul 1952 Royal visit print PHA.



Fig: 26 Penhaul 1955 Hunt Ball print PHA.

By the early 1950s Penhaul had established his signature style which featured tight composition and framing, with particular attention to balance and perspective. Although many images are evidently posed, subjects consistently look relaxed. Penhaul drew on a long history of photographic conventions which related to his particular practice of rural community freelance photography. Growing up in the interwar period, Penhaul was surrounded by a flourishing commercial community based photographic culture with practitioners such as the Paul brothers, Robert Negus and Colin Bennett establishing and reinforcing conventions and genres that Penhaul would have become familiar with as he began his apprenticeship in the early 1930s. While Penhaul consistently shows a

compositional understanding and camera technique to be able to reproduce such conventions of composition and subject matter, Penhaul images are invariably immediately recognizable as being by him.



Fig: 27 Penhaul students and livestock 1952 print PHA

In the 1950s, Penhaul's responsibilities and workload at *The Cornishman* increased. His role as resident in-house photographer 'immersed him into an increasingly faster swirl (*sic*) of news gathering activity' (Williams 1990: 19). As Penhaul embraced the imperatives intrinsic to a new post-war age of news and information gathering, imperatives which consistently privileged speed and immediacy (Kynaston 2007), he was not only in pursuit of the next news scoop as he speeded around the county in his sports car,<sup>15</sup> he also began to articulate a photographic sensibility for the unfamiliar and strange. Images from the Penhaul archive at Penlee House Museum show Penhaul's persistent interest in representations that fall outside the dominant visual conventions that constituted the majority of Penhaul's practice, that is, in representations that touched on a contingency, a liminality and uncertainty intrinsic to life on the littoral. After the social and economic traumas of the Second World War, Cornwall found itself in the post-war period, enmeshed not just in the uncertainties of an ineluctable modernity, but also the unpredictable nature of economy and rising austerity (Kynaston 2009, Payton 1993).



Fig: 28 Penhaul The Warspite in tow 1955 print PHA.

Penhaul worked amongst a relatively remote and rural community whose lives were always already marked by uncertainty and contingency. Disasters such as the loss of the St.Ives lifeboat crew in 1939 were inscribed into the communal cultural imaginary (Anderson 2006). Connectedness and dependency to the sea and to the land, meant a community's life, its very being, was bound up in a pervading contingency; a rural and remote community was disproportionately reliant for its existence on events that were seemingly beyond actual control. Whether agricultural prices or the vagaries of the sea and weather, uncertainty was writ large into the fabric of community long before the uncertainties of world politics and national economics played their hand.

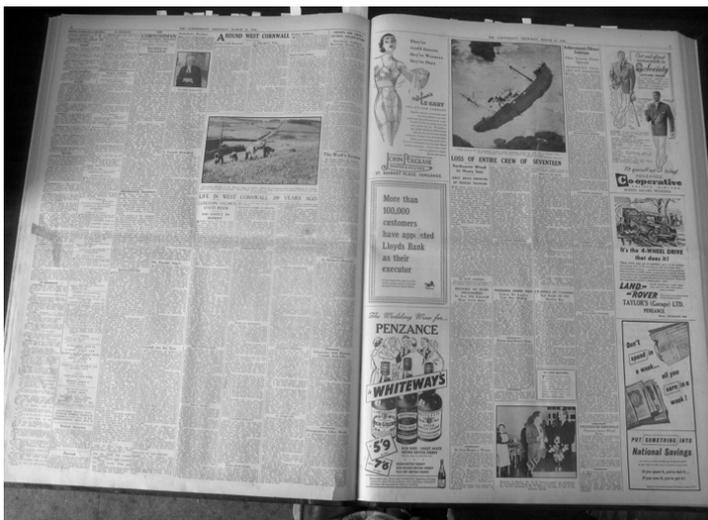


Fig: 29 Penhaul The Cornishman March 1953 Wreck of Vert Prairal and weather damaged crops



Fig: 30 Penhaul 1952 Basking shark print PHA



Fig: 31 Penhaul 1950 Subsidence print PHA

Whatever the possible imperatives behind Penhaul's sensitivity for the unfamiliar and strange, perhaps the most pressing was the financial - such images were well received by photo editors at publications like *The Cornishman* and were therefore a good source of income for Penhaul.

Penhaul's dynamic exploits in the cause of gathering and photographing news made good copy in itself.<sup>16</sup> Sports car, press badge, professional camera and eponymous flash - all became established signifiers of the performance that accompanied the appearance of Harry 'Flash' Penhaul at a news event.<sup>17</sup>



Fig: 32 Penhaul 1954 Self-portrait print PHA

Even Penhaul's step ladder was part of the performance; it ensured he could see but also that he could be seen. The five cinemas in Penzance made its film going public more than conversant with the Hollywood clichés of light-bulb popping dare-devil reporters, an image, according to Douglas Williams, that Penhaul was happy to embrace and appropriate (Williams 1990). At the same time, the nature and dynamics of even local press photography were changing. New technology meant that Penhaul was able to send images by wire telegraph to photographic agencies in London. The race to develop an image and then make a wire transfer to London, imposed another set of deadlines, parameters and imperatives within which Penhaul could perform his role of dynamic news photo-journalist. Integral to the Penhaul performance was the large format plate glass camera Penhaul somewhat anachronistically continued to use into the 1950s. Although cumbersome, it was a familiar and trusted technology as well as a visually impressive apparatus.



Fig: 33 Penhaul's MicroPress 'glass negative back' professional camera (retail price 1953 £79). PHA.

Negatives could be quickly loaded into the MicroPress camera and once developed could be sent in the post or by train to the London press agencies.<sup>18</sup> The large camera with its elaborated functioning, the changing of glass negatives and the very evident flash apparatus - all functioned as prominent signifiers of the performance and cultural status of Penhaul the press photographer.<sup>19</sup>

Much of Penhaul's work reflected and recorded the deep connectedness between Cornish community and the sea. Since the mid nineteenth century, photography had traced the bitter-sweet history of a remote and rural community bounded by and bound to the sea (Watkiss 1978).



*Fig: 34 Penhaul 1950 The Warspite beached in St Michael's Bay print PHA*

Penhaul's images collected together within the Penlee House archive reflect many aspects of a coastal community's deep association with the sea. Like many of his commercial associates Penhaul frequently photographed reassuring images of recreation and leisure using familiar conventions of beach photography (Richardson 2009):



*Fig: 35 Penhaul Lido 1953 print PHA.*



*Fig: 36 Penhaul Penzance Lido 1955 print PHA.*

But Penhaul also recorded the savage uncertainty that is a consequence of a community's life lived by and on the sea:



*Fig: 37 Penhaul Penzance Promenade Dec 1954 print PHA*



*Fig: 38 Penhaul Wreck of Traute Sarnow 1954 print PHA.*

Penhaul's images capture the breadth of social relations and cultural practices that are sustained and constituted by the relation of lives lived in association with and on the maritime and in recording this dialectic between the sea and the social, photography is placed under a tension and scrutiny that becomes central to the object and purpose of this study. Penhaul follows the news but in so doing he positions his camera in front of contingency and uncertainty - and in the process produces an extended photographic essay on the relation between the subject and the unknown, the uncanny and the unsayable. Penhaul's energy and dynamism reflected and responded to changing cultural appetites in the 1950s, not just for news in itself, but also for how news would be disseminated and visually presented. Penhaul's photography responded to such new demands, imperatives and opportunities, but the locus of his practice was situated within a geography of the littoral, a liminality which imposed its own imperatives of precariousness and inconstancy. In the 1950s national newspapers and other media such as *Pathe News* and *Movietone* fed the public a rich diet of gripping and visually dramatic news. To the Cornish, the sea had always been the unrelenting cause of drama and tragedy, and for Penhaul, looking to respond to modern media exigencies for dramatic news gathering (and those of his news editor), the seas around Cornwall provided a constant news source of photogenic spectacle and vicissitude.

In the decade after the war, new media technology such as television, was still limited in its technical capacity to respond quickly and flexibly to breaking news stories. Local reporters like Penhaul suddenly found themselves well placed to supply a new demand for 'of the moment' photographic coverage of news events occurring in their locality. This was a demand for news images that fledgling television services at the time could not fulfil. Penhaul had the dynamism, self-belief, desire and visual perspicacity to pursue such images, not least because such images also commanded commensurably high premiums.<sup>20</sup>

By the mid 1950s Penhaul's career as freelance photographer was going well – he had established a position of professional status and his photographs were well known and in demand. Recently married, well known and respected in his community, Penhaul, aged just forty-three years, was taken suddenly ill and died of tuberculosis in 1957. His studio was locked and left untouched until 1989 when Penhaul's effects were taken to the archive at Penlee House Museum in Penzance.

## 1: 2 Post-war Cornwall: an economic overview

*Studies of Cornwall's economic sector (Payton 1993) suggest there were inherent and fundamental structural difficulties within the economy as the county entered the post-war years.*

According to Philip Payton the economy of West Cornwall has always been marked by complexity: 'the region is remote but is the subject of complex economic determinations none the less' (Payton 1992: 37). Payton argues that the economic, social and cultural mix that characterised post-war Cornwall reflected both the increasing pace of modernity and change but also a complexity inherent to the Cornish littoral itself. In his seminal study of twentieth century Cornish history, *The Making of Modern Cornwall* (1992), Payton states that the 1950s marked the end of what he terms 'a great paralysis' (1992: 27), one which traced its origins back to pre-war de-industrialization and collapse in the mining sector.



Fig: 39 Penhaul 1954 Skiffle group print PHA.

Indeed, Ronald Perry (1992), in his review of 1950s Cornish economy, asserts that some sectors performed well: 'It was a time of unaccustomed prosperity and demographic stability as Cornish industry benefited from the absence in the market of overseas competitors' (1993: 520).



Fig: 40 Penhaul 1952 print PHA.

During the 1950s unemployment dropped to an historic low as agriculture prospered under a regime of price control and as the mining sector briefly revived when the Korean war sent tin prices soaring. However, the relative prosperity of some sectors in the economy at this time masked fundamental and structural difficulties that were, according to commentators like Payton and Perry, inherent to the region. Perry observes that the Cornish socio-economic system presented a model of a post-industrial society, an argument evidenced not least by the percentage of the workforce who had long been engaged in the service sector. Perry identifies that the Cornish economy was based on a perhaps unique set of products and services; the 1952 *Cornwall County Council Development Plan*, reflected the complexity of the situation and of any possible solutions. While 'peripherality' or distance from markets, seemed to encapsulate the key to Cornish economic difficulties, it was also that which gave the region its particular identity. Adrian Lee (1993) states that a concentration on tourism and the retirement sector reflected an underlying lack of enterprise and a reluctance by many sectors of the economy to work together. Indeed, Lee identifies the fierce localisms displayed between communities throughout the county, as undermining the potential homogeneity that was bestowed by the geography of the littoral.



Fig: 41 Penhaul Tractors and horses print 1954 PHA.

### **1: 3 *The Cornishman*: a West Penwith weekly newspaper**

*Founded in 1878 The Cornishman established itself as the main weekly newspaper for the West Penwith district of the Cornish peninsula. Positioning itself as politically independent, the paper looked to reflect a post-war consensus in its reporting of social, economic and cultural change.*

Payton and Perry's narrative of post-war economic vagaries, of inherent and fundamental structural difficulties and of post-industrial change, of lack of enterprise and debilitating fierce localisms, is one played out in the pages of *The Cornishman* through the 1950s. Post war change in printing technology meant more opportunities for photographers like Penhaul as newspapers were able to cost effectively reproduce more images in their regular publications. As Penhaul's photographs were increasingly featured in *The Cornishman* during the 1950s, the text of the newspaper they accompanied reflected the economic and cultural anxieties and uncertainties outlined by commentators like Philip Payton. By the time Harry Penhaul restarted his career as a freelance photographer after the war, *The Cornishman* had been established for more than seventy years.

In 1928 *The Cornishman* had published a fiftieth anniversary edition in which the then editor Herbert Thomas, gave an account of the founding of the paper in the late 1870s: 'There had long been a demand for a newspaper of independent views that would impartially portray the activities of both political parties as well as chronicle local happenings and the doings of local church people and nonconformists with equal fairness' (Thomas *The Cornishman* July 19<sup>th</sup> 1928).



Fig: 42 Marcus Negus The Cornishman July 1928 NNA [Herbert Thomas front row, hat on].

Accordingly, several worthy and like-minded individuals got together and the ‘appropriate’ (sic) steps were taken to bring about the enterprise. Local JP, John Branwell was an initial chairman and the founding director was local businessman William Bickford-Smith. Herbert Thomas recalls that central to the enterprise was Robert Matthews, a former publisher who ‘visited the business houses of London, the Midlands and Liverpool and who obtained considerable business from shipping companies with the result that the first issue of the paper contained a very fine show of advertisements as well as news. Mr Matthews also organised sales and appointed agents in every town and village in Cornwall’ (Thomas *The Cornishman* July 19<sup>th</sup> 1928).<sup>21</sup>

Herbert Thomas noted that ‘the very fine show of advertisements’ was key to the financial success of the paper. From Victorian entrepreneurial zeal to post-war consumerism, advertising copy has been an important and conspicuous feature in the layout of the paper:



Fig: 43 The Cornishman July 1954 PHA

The effects of economic, social and cultural change underlie much of the coverage of local and national news that makes up the weekly content of *The Cornishman* in the 1950s. From agriculture to new technology, from emigration to the role of women in society, the pages of *The Cornishman* give a voice to the negotiation by various elements and interests that constituted West Penwith community, of social, economic and cultural change. These issues and anxieties are discussed through particular articles, editorials and reader's letters. Penhaul's photographs are frequently positioned by editorial staff adjacent to relevant text in order to illustrate and reflect on-going debates and discussions:



Fig: 44 The Cornishman pages 6 and 7, Feb 17th 1955 PHA  
PHA



Fig: 45 Penhaul The Cornishman page 7, Feb 17th 1955

Fig: 45 above shows how a Penhaul photograph of potato planting is accompanied by articles on farm worker wages, the issue of workers leaving the agricultural sector, the adverse effects of seasonal weather and transportation infrastructure and costs.



Fig: 46 Penhaul The Cornishman Oct 1954 PHA.



Fig: 47 The Cornishman Oct 1954 PHA.

In fig: 46 above, Penhaul's photograph of new build housing stock is positioned on the same page as an article on the deleterious state of existing council properties.



Fig: 48 Penhaul Feb 1955 Barbara Hepworth The Cornishman PHA.



Fig: 49 The Cornishman Feb 1955 print PHA.

In fig: 48 above, Penhaul's photograph of Barbara Hepworth accompanies on a facing page, the somewhat acerbic commentary on modern art by the president of St. Ives Art Association, Mr Claude Muncaster.

In 1928 Herbert Thomas had talked about *The Cornishman* in terms of its aspiration to independence and impartiality. Thomas was still editor in the immediate post-war years and no doubt regarded Penhaul's job as to 'chronicle local happenings and doings (*sic*) ... with equal fairness' (Thomas *The Cornishman* July 19<sup>th</sup> 1928). Such aspirations to independence, impartiality and fairness are traditionally underpinned in western metaphysics by notions of 'truth' and 'reality' (Storey 2006). This study argues that the notions of truth and reality are exactly those which the discourses of both psychoanalysis and photography work to undermine and problematize. The conceptual trajectory mapped out through this study, will substantiate and illustrate this position and elaborate the implications both for the subject in culture and for the discourse of photography.

## **Part 2 Cornwall: a photography hub**

*From the mid nineteenth century Cornwall had been a centre of emergent photographic activity and innovation. In terms of the arts, technological development and commercialization, links to metropolitan centres kept Cornwall in the vanguard of photography's growth and evolution. Penhaul was part of a long legacy of photographic development and commercialization that was focused on the county.*

By the early 1950s Penhaul had successfully re-established his photography business after the break imposed by the war years. Penhaul was first and foremost a commercial photographer; while he referred to himself as a freelance press photographer his income

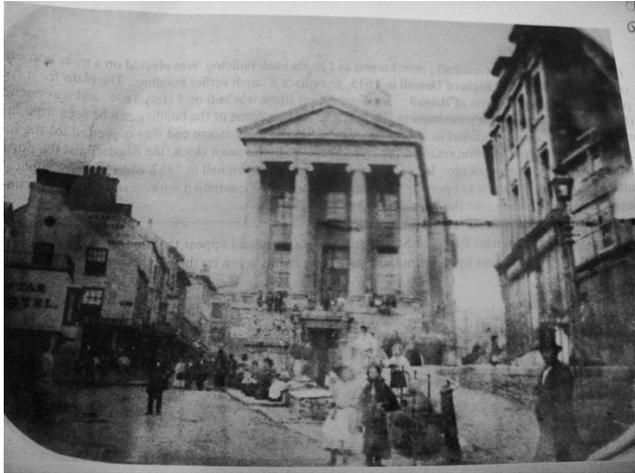
was equally dependent on direct sales of print copies to the public. Penhaul took photographs of the West Penwith region and the lives and events that made up this close-knit community for local newspapers such as *The Cornishman* and the *Western Morning News*. Penhaul also provided sales opportunities to purchase print copies of these photographs direct to the public. This practice is widely evidenced in the Penhaul archive: a photograph of a local hockey team gleans some twenty orders for variously sized prints. This basic business model had sustained a number of Penzance photographers since the interwar period; the commercial application of photography in Cornwall had been very much in evidence since the mid nineteenth century. Charles Thomas, in his seminal survey of Victorian Cornish photographers *Views and Likenesses* (1988) gives an exhaustive list of local practitioners that speaks of just how important Cornwall was as a centre for photography. According to Thomas, in the Victorian period, nowhere outside of London witnessed the degree of photographic activity as seen in Cornwall.

Several factors contributed to this concentration of photographic practice: the founding of local photographic institutions such as the Falmouth Polytechnic Society of the 1830s, the growth of a tourist industry from the 1850s and the continual attraction of Cornwall for artists and artist communities.

In Falmouth, the Polytechnic Society was inaugurated in the 1830s and aspired to promote the useful and fine arts (Bradley 2012). Photography was seen to be both 'useful' and 'fine' in turn and was embraced by the Polytechnic for its scientific as well as its aesthetic merits. The Polytechnic's leisured middle-class adoptees of the new medium were attracted not least by this combination of scientism and art. The Polytechnic served as intermediary between luminaries such as Robert Hunt and William Brooks, who were conversant with the rapidly moving metropolitan centred developments in photographic discourse and technology, and the autochthonous Cornish photographic community. In London, the Photographic Society was founded at the time when The Polytechnic in Falmouth had already begun to establish its own particular tradition in photographic exhibition, lectures and demonstrations. Continual developments in photographic apparatus technology during the mid-Victorian period were a key factor in making photography more accessible to a wider group of practitioners.<sup>22</sup>

In 1854 a collection of photographs was included in the Penzance School of Art annual exhibition. In Camborne, the *Society for The Promotion of Useful Knowledge* incorporated

photography into its curriculum and celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1859 with an invitation lecture and photographic exhibition from Robert Hunt.



*Fig: 50 Anonymous Market Jew Street Penzance c1853 print PHA.*

By the 1860s there was a network of both amateur and professional photographers established through the county. An emerging commercial photography sector responded to a growing demand for portraits and topographic representations.<sup>23</sup> By the mid 1860s distinctions between professional and amateur photographers were reflected in the organisation of competition exhibitions.

The Victorian entrepreneurship that had underpinned unprecedented industrial development and expansion of empire took in its stride the facilitation of an exponential burgeoning and growth of both photography and tourism. The commercialization of photography was in part led by the tourism sector – the commercial success of Francis Frith was testimony to the successful relation between photography and tourism. Photographic reproductions were able to segue seamlessly into a growing market for views and likenesses already established by the lithographic industry. In the south-west, William Spreat had run a highly lucrative lithographic business, winning prizes at the Polytechnic during the late 1840s. By the 1860s Spreat was offering photographs and stereoscopic views for sale to tourists. In 1865 Truro's population supported six separate commercial photographers, engaged mostly in making portraits. Nearly a century later Penzance still had four commercially active photography enterprises.

Based in West Penwith, William Brooks (b 1838) was a professional photographer who worked predominately in Penzance. With connections to the metropolitan photographic community, Brooks became one of most influential early Cornish photographers working with both Robert Preston and John Gibson.



*Fig: 51 William Brooks 'The Launch of the Lifeboat 'Daniel Draper' Penzance 1867 [Watkiss 1975]*

John Gibson was one of the most celebrated of Cornish photographers. He bought his first camera in the 1850s and was apprenticed to Robert Preston in Penzance. By 1870 John Gibson was at work as a professional photographer on the Isles of Scilly had soon established a distinct compositional style (see figure 52). In particular he photographed the shipwrecks that were common around the Scilly Isles. Gibson possessed great business acumen. At first he sold images of shipwreck to the shipwrecked sailors themselves. He went on to establish an extensive business in Penzance which was run by his son Alexander until the 1920s.



*Fig: 52 John Gibson 'Jeune Hortense' Mount's Bay May 17<sup>th</sup> 1888 [Watkiss 1975]*

Another influential early Cornish photographer was Robert Preston (1837-1933). He was associated with both Brooks and Gibson and built up a flourishing photography business in Penzance. Preston helped establish the artistic remit of many community commercial

photography enterprises. He specialized in picturesque landscapes, portraits, souvenir portraits and images of royal visits to Cornwall.

Robert Hunt 1807-1887 was an eminent scientist who brought to the Cornish photography tradition connections to the metropolitan scientific establishment and the latest technical innovation (Ryan 2017).

By the turn of the century commercial photographic enterprises were serving communities across Cornwall. Penzance supported several photography businesses through the Edwardian period until the late 1930s. Prominent among these were the Paul brothers (active 1904 – 1925), Marcus Negus (active 1920s and 30s), Lawley (1920s and 30s), C Bennett (1920s and 30s), the Richards brothers (1930s to 50s). John Gibson's son Alexander Gibson was also active in the interwar period.



Fig: 53 Lawley 1927 The Cornishman NNA.

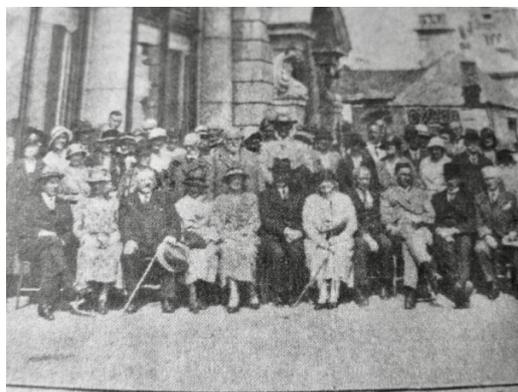


Fig: 54 Richards July 1932 The Cornishman Visit by Polytechnic Society to Penzance. NNA

### Part 3 The Penhaul archive

*This following section will introduce the Penhaul archive currently held at Penlee House Museum in Penzance. The archive contains almost all known extant primary material.*

Harry Penhaul processed and printed his own photographs throughout his career. He had learnt to develop glass plate negatives as an apprentice with Lawley and Sons of Penzance in the 1930s. On becoming an independent freelance photographer in the late 1930s, Penhaul set up a processing studio at his house in Gulval, Penzance and which he continued to use until his death in 1957. The studio was then locked and untouched until 1989 when the contents of the studio were given by Penhaul's family to local museum and gallery Penlee House in nearby Penzance. The contents of the studio included prints, glass negatives, cameras and processing equipment and effectively comprise the extant effects of Harry 'Flash' Penhaul. In subsequent years the collection of photographs has been

classified and sorted by museum staff and volunteers and stored in the museum archive.



*Fig: 55 Penlee House Museum archival storage facility (author)*

The main body of the archive consists of prints and print copies of Penhaul photographs, the majority of which date from within three or four years of Penhaul's death. This indicates the archive very much represents the contents of a commercial photographer's work space where prints are held for a minimal time before being replaced by more recent images. Penhaul published photographs in various publications but central to his finances was the direct sales of print copies to the local community. Much of the archive consists of unsold photographic prints and what appears to be a stock library of images ranging across various subject areas and genres including sports events, picturesque views and seascapes (see Appendix Archive Contents). The majority of prints are 6" x 8" format, many are multiple unsold copies of photographs taken in the years 1956 and 1957.

There are approximately 4000 prints held in the Penhaul archive at Penlee House. A collection of glass negatives (some 400 5" x 4" plates) more or less corresponds with prints held in the archive. The quality and condition of prints is quite variable. Due to their age many prints have been subject to various amounts of damage including the effects of hygroscopic curling:



*Fig: 56 Penhaul prints PHA (author)*



*Fig: 57 Penhaul prints PHA (author)*



useful analytical tool not least because it insists on viewing carefully the content and form of an image. Such detailed scrutiny can then be combined with other analytical methods - this is the approach taken by this study which uses elements of contents and formal visual analysis to provide a descriptive framework of terms of reference with which to situate Penhaul's photographs when employing the primary visual methodology of psychoanalysis that underpins this particular project. This study engages a psychoanalytic visual methodology reading Penhaul's images through a Lacanian lens and the calibration of this theoretical 'lens' is very much the focus of following chapters. For this study, compositional and formal analysis constitutes a vital tool to work alongside a psychoanalytic framework. A Lacanian visual methodology centred on an interrogation of the specular and compositional analysis provides a vocabulary and nomenclature to consistently describe and delineate visual content and effects. The outline of compositional analysis below is intended to present a framework of visual reference that will be deployed through this study. A determinative meta-analysis of Penhaul images is not attempted but rather characteristic and signature elements of Penhaul's practice are highlighted and identified.

Compositional analysis can be undertaken using the following categories:

*The content of an image:* the Penhaul archive has been subject to various classifying schemes in the past years as succeeding museum staff have sorted the collection in terms of image subject content; this ostensibly objective method is invariably subjective in that assessors do not of necessity agree on what constitutes the primary focus of an image. However, over time a degree of consensus has occurred and which has resulted in the current arrangement of material [as of 2016: see Appendix: Archive Contents].

*Colour analysis:* Penhaul always worked in black and white. Print quality is surprisingly variable in terms of focus, depth of black but perhaps reflects the poor quality of chemicals available in the post-war period (Jem Southam 2014).

*Organization of space:* Consideration here is given to two initial aspects – the organization of space within an image (Acton 1997), and the way spatial organization presents particular viewing positions.



*Fig: 59 Penhaul Cauliflower picking 1953 print PHA.*



*Fig: 60 Penhaul Culdrose airfield 1954 print PHA.*

The spatial organization of the above two images characterizes much of Penhaul's work. In part this reflects the working practices and camera settings Penhaul used. His MicroPress glass negative back 5"x 4" professional press camera (see fig 33 above) would normally have two focal lengths pre-set ready on the lens - for close up work (twelve feet focus) and landscape setting (infinity focus).<sup>24</sup> With close up images Penhaul invariably fills the frame, he stages and controls positioning. Penhaul often arranges figures horizontally in a line across the frame (figure 60), a pictorial convention that can be seen in some of the oldest examples of Cornish photography (figure 61):



Fig: 61 E. Trembath 1869 [Watkiss 1975].

Penhaul's photograph of cauliflower pickers (fig: 59) is again very characteristic of his style; although the 'subject' of the image is situated in the middle-ground, the sense of perspective dominates the photograph. Content is tightly controlled and placed within the frame. Again, Penhaul's image composition works within longstanding pictorial conventions. The use of St Michael's Mount as a 'focalizer' (Mieke Bal 1991: 159) to organize landscape representation can be clearly seen in eighteenth century topographical lithographs and oil paintings:



Fig: 62 R. Pentreath lithograph 1836 PHA (author)



Fig: 63 John Moyles oil on canvas 1852 PHA (author)

Penhaul's close up and landscape photographs both position the viewer front, centre and at eye level in relation to the frame. Penhaul's positioning of the viewer is uncomplicated, what Michael Ann Holly (1996) has called 'the logic of figuration' (Holly 1996: 62).

*Light:* Despite his eponymous soubriquet, Harry 'Flash' Penhaul took relatively few images at night and very few remain in the archive. However, Penhaul invariably used flash equipment to back-fill and enhance the light in his daytime photographs. The flash equipment also augmented the performative aspect of Penhaul's arrival at a photographic event (Williams 1990). Interior shots are frequently characterized by deeply saturated

blacks, the use of flash illuminates the near ground but often leaves the background and peripheries occluded and concealed in darkness:



Fig: 64 Penhaul 1956 Christmas carols broadcast print PHA

*Expressive content:* Gillian Rose (2007) argues that compositional analysis can also include a reading of 'expressive' content. Although assessing the 'feel' of an image is of itself subjective, responding to expressive content moves away from reducing images to nothing more than reflections of cultural context (Rose 2007: 52). Indeed, Eck and Winters (2005) state that the essence of visual experience is its sensory qualities. If Penhaul's photographs are read in terms of such 'expressive content' then undoubtedly many viewers of his images would agree that subjects in his photographs often appear to exude a palpable sense of enjoyment. Douglas Williams, who accompanied Penhaul on many of his assignments during the 1950s, reports how Penhaul's personable personality would delight members of the public as he quickly and good naturedly organized his photograph:



Fig: 65 Penhaul 1956 print PHA.

Penhaul also showed a less 'rhapsodic' side to rural life. His photographs of potato planting in the fields above Gulval cannot hide the harsh realities of agricultural labour:



Fig: 66 Penhaul 1952 Planting early potatoes print PHA.

Compositional analysis offers ways of describing the content, spatial organization, colour, light and expressive content of a photograph. It is useful to help describe the visual impact of an image on a spectator. Compositional analysis has shortcomings. It does not encourage discussion of production nor how an image might be used, understood and interpreted by various viewers, 'compositional analysis needs to be combined with other methodologies in order to address such issues' (Rose 2007: 57).

The critical visual methodology used by this study has emerged from the discipline of psychoanalysis and in particular the discourse associated with the Lacanian account of the subject and the specular. This chapter will proceed by presenting an introduction to psychoanalytic visual methodology, but first it will give an outline of Foucauldian discursive analysis and then briefly examine key elements of semiotic visual methodology.

#### **Part 4: Visual methodologies**

*This following section will conceptually position the Lacanian visual methodology as employed by this study, by reading it against both Foucauldian discourse analysis and semiological analysis.*

Ian Buchanan (2010) comments that for more than fifty years the academic field of cultural studies 'has embraced an interdisciplinary approach to the study and analysis of culture, understood in terms of specific texts and social practice' (Buchanan 2010: 135). In this fifty years or so, critical methodologies have increased in number and have moved in and out of academic favour; for example, post-war structuralism can be said to have been superseded

by a Lacanian account of the subject which in turn gave way to a hegemonic Foucauldian discursive methodology (Feldner and Vighi 2012). Although the range of available critical methodologies available today has continued to increase, the influence of Foucault's ideas are still widely felt and are consistently brought to bear on the analysis of photography. However, Buchanan states that cultural studies does not have a specific methodology or discrete area of interest: 'its approach tends to be needs-based, meaning that it applies theory according to the case in hand' (Buchanan 2010: 103).

The 'case in hand' for this study are the photographs made by Harry Penhaul of the West Penwith community during the 1950s and it will be argued that a psychoanalytic visual methodology will produce a particularly profitable and unique reading of these images and the society and culture which they reflect and record. The discursive approach of Foucault and the analytical method associated with semiotics often reveal close affinities with psychoanalytical methodology. Indeed, Bal and Bryson have described psychoanalysis as 'just another form of semiotics' (Bal and Bryson 1997: 81). However, it will be argued that despite areas of congruence, each methodology has different modes of address and analysis that can produce quite disparate outcomes.

#### **4: 1 Discourse analysis: Foucault and desire**

*This section will follow how Foucault's conceptual frameworks have come to dominate photographic analysis in recent years. The work of Joan Copjec will read against this 'historicist' discursive methodology.*

Michel Foucault has been the predominant voice in the instrumental development and dissemination of the concept of discourse and discursive practice (Buchanan 2010). Foucault has examined the underpinning systems and rules of particular societal formations in terms of power, knowledge and institutional practice. Such rules are argued to govern the production of discursive statements which in turn determine not only what can be said but also what it is possible to say. Foucault asks who has the right to use a particular discourse and how its usage is policed (Mills 2004). The predominance of Foucauldian method which emerged across the academy in the late 1980s has been argued by commentators such as Vighi and Feldner (2012), to have responded to what were then regarded as theoretical absences in the explanation of the construction of social difference among existing methodologies including that of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Stuart Hall encapsulated the way in which Foucault's ideas filled some of the gaps left by a purely

psychoanalytic viewpoint in its account of ideology: 'If ideology is effective, it is because it works at both the rudimentary levels of psychic identity and the drives, and at the level of the discursive formation and practices which constitute the social field' (Hall 1996: 7).

Twenty years on and Foucault's ideas are still broadly disseminated within cultural studies (Rose 2007) and have been used extensively within what is now termed photographic studies (Elkins 2007). Discourse is understood to produce particular subjects and can be articulated across a wide range of visual and verbal texts. Intertextuality is read as a key aspect of figuring discourse; discursive meaning is argued to be associative and accumulative (Mills 2004).

According to O'Farrell, visuality can be read as discourse - a specific visuality will make particular things visible in certain ways but can also work to make other phenomena unseeable (O'Farrell 2005). Specific subjects are said to be produced and act within the field of vision; Foucault's insistence on the production and disciplining of the subject is at times synonymous with Lacanian notions of subject formation (O'Farrell 2005). For Foucault, discourse produces the world in its own terms. Foucault's conception of power is that power is not something imposed down through society, but rather power is everywhere and is itself productive of what Foucault calls 'resistance'. Foucault explains: 'where there is power, there is resistance ... a multiplicity of points of resistance' Foucault 1979: 95).

Foucault claims that certain discourses dominate; they are located in socially powerful institutions such as the police, prisons and the press. Such institutional discourses are often made powerful through their claims to truth which Foucault identifies at the intersection of power and knowledge (Foucault 1974). Understandings of photography that associate the medium with realism and immanentism, have been argued within a Foucauldian methodology, to have been produced not by new technology but by the use of images within a particular regime of truth (Rose 2007).

A discursive visual analysis consists in analysing the organization of discourse itself. Such an analysis reviews how a particular discourse is structured and asks how it produces specific knowledge. Discursive method is therefore intertextual; it works to identify key themes, words and images. It looks for clusters and connections and searches out how a discourse produces its truth effects. Discourse analysis emphasises contradictions and complexities internal to discourses: discursive formations have structures but they are not necessarily coherent (Storey 2006). Discourse analysis also entails looking for what is not present; absences can be as productive as explicit factors, invisibility can be as powerful as visibility (Mills 2004).

Discourse analysis is argued to respond to the rhetorical organization of images and texts (O'Farrell 2005). Discourse analysis frequently concerns itself with discourse as produced and reiterated by institutions and practices. For example, while an archive can be seen in terms of data and its influence on discourse, an archive can also be discursively examined with regard to its function as an institution with particular practices and discursive effects. Referring to photographic archives, Alan Sekula argues that 'archives are not neutral ... any photographic archive, no matter how small, appeals indirectly to institutions for its authority' (Sekula 1986: 155). Sekula makes the case that archives work in particular ways that have effects on what is stored in them, and on those who use them (Sekula 1986: 72). In Foucault's 1977 text *Discipline and Punish*, he addresses how visibility has been central to the production of particular subject positions and in his claim to the centrality of visibility in the process of the disciplining of the subject, Foucault's arguments sound at times synonymous with Lacan's (Vighi and Feldner 2007).

John Tagg is another prominent writer within photographic studies who has utilized Foucauldian frameworks and particularly to discuss the relation of technology to discursive practice. For Tagg, photography is diffuse; it is given coherence only by its use in certain institutional apparatuses and through their technologies: 'Photography as such has no identity. Its status as technology varies with the power relations that invest it. Its nature as a practice depends on the institutions and agents which define it and set it to work' (Tagg 1988: 63). In an argument that closely follows Foucault, Tagg states that it is institutions that give photography status and coherence, a status and coherency primarily achieved from photography's claim to picture reality (Tagg 1988: 65). In producing a certain regime of truth, institutions have used photography to insist on their particular truth claims; visual images and visualities are thus read as articulations of institutional power and as embedded in those institutional practices and their exercise of power. Discourse analysis therefore offers a methodology that allows consideration of how the effects of dominant power relations work through the discursive dynamics of an institution's practice (Mills 2004).

From this above description discourse analysis appears to be a powerful and purposeful methodology, and one which could be profitably used with which to critically engage with the photographs of Harry Penhaul. However, this study, while appreciating discourse analysis as a significant and perceptive tool, instead makes an unequivocal and clear methodological choice to follow a psychoanalytic paradigm as its analytic model. On

examination, the reasons for this choice become increasingly apparent. In the late 1970s Foucault had stepped away from previously held allegiances to psychoanalysis and linguistic theory. He had begun his career like many of his contemporaries, by interpreting social facts in terms of structures defined by structuralism and psychical effects. In the late 1960s he began to oppose the terms of these two disciplines and declared 'the history which bears and determines us is war-like, not language-like. Relations of power, not relations of sense' (Foucault cited in Morris and Patton: 33). Foucault showed his interest in the micro-workings of small-scale systems of power relations but for Joan Copjec, such a reduction of society to these relations of power is at best 'problematic' (Copjec 1994a: 3). What Foucault misses, according to Copjec, is what she describes as the 'surplus existence that cannot be caught up in the positivity of the social ... that notion of existence without predicate' (Copjec 1994a: 4). Foucault's embrace of discourse means that he no longer conceives of power as an external force but rather as immanent within society; the 'fine, differentiated, continuous' network of uneven relations that constituted the very matter of the social (Foucault 1973). It is this notion of immanence, the conception of cause that is immanent within the field of its effects, that Joan Copjec regards as problematic in terms of its historicist positioning. By 'historicist' Copjec means 'the reduction of society to its indwelling network of relations of power and knowledge' (Copjec 1994a: 5). Foucault reduces social space to the relations that fill it.

Joan Copjec argues that a psychoanalytic framework entails a model of society as split between appearance and being – appearance in terms of the positive relations and facts we observe in it, being in the sense of its generative principle which doesn't appear among such relations. Society is conceptualized as always already realizing itself, it continues to form itself over time. With psychoanalysis, society is given a generative principle which 'provides for it a place beyond the realm of positive appearances ... fitted out thus, society ceases to be a dead structure and is brought to life' (Copjec 1994a: 9). Copjec argues that the social unrest of the late 1960s is evidence to how Lacanian frameworks had such an 'enlivening' effect. In France, during the *événements* of 1968, political protest was directed not least at what was perceived to be moribund academic structural analysis: 'structures do not march in the streets' proclaimed popular graffiti. Lacan declared his own critique of structures; they should absolutely not take to the streets. Structures were not immanent to society. Lacan stated that structures are not to be located among the relations that constitute our everyday reality; they belong instead to the realm of the real. The real Lacan invokes here is not the real of conscious reality but an ontological realm that this study will

argue as constitutive and determinative of subjectivity and social, cultural relations. Psychoanalysis, unlike Foucauldian discourse, claims the human as subject to unconscious determinations. This study will outline the psychoanalytic paradigm in which these unconscious determinations are figured within desire – it is unconscious and unaccountable desire that drives the human subject in society and culture. Lacan insists we take desire literally, as Copjec explains: ‘we must articulate desire, we must refrain from imagining that desire is inarticulable’ (Copjec 1994: 14). As Copjec states, we must read desire, we must show desire, we must follow desire. This latter imperative is what this study sets out to do - to follow unconscious desire and effects as its determinations make themselves known in and through conscious reality. This study will therefore try to read what is inarticulable and it is this aspiration that will ultimately bring this study back from the Parisian seminars of Jacques Lacan to the photographs and community of West Penwith.

#### **4: 2 Semiology as visual methodology**

*This section will briefly outline the close associations of semiological and psychoanalytical methodologies before indicating some areas of particular conceptual difference between them.*

Semiotics and psychoanalysis are rooted in such close associations that they can give the appearance at times of addressing similar discursive ground. On examination however, the two methods differ significantly in method, aims and outcomes and by discussing the remit of semiological method, a clearer view of that of psychoanalysis comes into focus.

It was in the post-war period that theorists from a wide range of disciplines began to engage critically with Ferdinand de Saussure’s notion of the sign (Saussure 1916) and found that its use could be extended to a range of meaning-making activities both linguistic and non-linguistic.<sup>25</sup> Ian Buchanan observes, ‘from the 1960s, semiotics became the dominant mode of analysis within the humanities, particularly in cultural studies which saw semiotics as a means of theorizing how ideology works’ (Buchanan 2010: 428). A prominent pioneer was Roland Barthes whose work on myth showed that even the most everyday of objects conveyed significance beyond their utility (Culler 2002).

Semiology means the study of signs and is concerned with how signs are thought to underpin sense making in culture (Eco 1978).<sup>26</sup> Semiology is centrally concerned with the social effects of meaning, with the ways in which social difference is created. Semiology has

been extensively used to dissect the workings of ideology, as Margaret Iversen comments: 'laying bare the prejudices beneath the smooth surface of the beautiful' (Iversen 2007). The distinction between signified and signifier (see endnote 19), is utilized by semiotic visual methodology to enable an understanding of the structure of images. Robert Goldman (2011) argues that the structure of advertisements works by transferring visual and textual signifieds onto their products in a process referred to as meaning transference. Judith Williamson's seminal study of 1978 shows how adverts work by shifting signifieds from one signifier to another:



Fig: 67 Advertisements in The Cornishman 1955 PHA.

Semiotics pays attention not just to specific images but also attempts to understand the interrelation between signs from other texts and how images interact with other images (Bal 1996).

Semiotics also enables signs to be interrogated in terms of how they can refer to wider systems of meaning. Stuart Hall refers to this mode of meaning in terms of 'codes' (1980), Judith Williamson refers to 'referent systems' (1978), and Roland Barthes talks about 'mythologies' (1957). Each of these terms can have different implications. For example, while Stuart Hall's 'codes' allows a discussion of the wider ideologies at work in a society and in particular of the operative 'dominant codes', Williamson's 'referent systems' refer to systems of meaning in which signs are enmeshed (Rose 2007).

Barthes's notion of mythology has different connotations again. He argues that mythology is defined by its form, not its content (1957) and that myth builds up using denotive signs which are easy to understand. The contingency and the history of the meaning becomes remote, and instead myth inserts itself as a non-historical truth. Myth naturalizes cultural

objects and practices; myth can be read as a form of ideology. Myth, code and referent systems, require a broad understanding of a culture's dynamics; these wider systems emphasize the relationality of signs. The meaning of one sign depends on its relation with others. Meaning comes from the movement from one sign to another but without any particular starting point or terminating point from where it is possible to say 'this is what a sign means'. With semiotics, meaning always defers to something else, to other images, to other dominant codes, referent systems and mythologies.



Fig: 68 Advertisements in The Cornishman July 1955. [ariel photograph of Mambo sinking by Penhaul]. PHA.

The meaning of signs is invariably complex. Complexity results in meanings that are polysemous in that they have more than one ascribed meaning. Stuart Hall however, maintains that images will produce what he calls 'preferred meanings' (Hall 1980), meanings which constitute and are constituted by, a dominant cultural order. Preferred meanings, or ideologies, become such when they are interpreted by audiences in ways that retain 'the institutional, political, ideological order imprinted on them' (Hall 1980: 134). The production of preferred meanings is explained semiologically in terms of the relation between image and viewer and also the modality of the social relations entailed in the reception of an image (Hall 1997).

The associations between semiotic and psychoanalytic method are clear, not least because both paradigms situate their conceptual frameworks within Saussurean linguistics. But while semiotics is fundamentally of and within the social, psychoanalysis insists on the psychological dimension of subjective, societal and cultural relations (Belsey 2005).

### **4: 3 A psychoanalytic visual methodology**

*This section will present an initial introduction to a psychoanalytic visual methodology; subsequent chapters will elaborate and position the particular interpretation of the psychoanalytic methodology applied by this study.*

Psychoanalysis encompasses a range of ideas that deal with sexuality, subjectivity and the unconscious. Key concepts were initially developed by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and subsequent writers have taken his ideas and reworked them to the point where psychoanalysis now consists of a broad and diverse body of work (Walsh 2013). As well as its use in clinical practice, psychoanalysis has been called on to understand aspects of social and cultural theory. Visuality is central to many aspects of psychoanalytic theory and is argued to be fundamental not only to the make-up of drives which Freud maintains are at the core of what makes the subject 'human' (Freud 1920) but is also of key importance in many aspects of the conceptual frameworks elaborated by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981). Lacan argues that certain moments of seeing and particular visualities are central to how subjectivities and sexualities are made. Psychoanalysis is often utilized to understand how the visual is imbricated in the production of sexual difference, and psychoanalysis's attention to visual images will often be related to social effects – that is, the ways such visualities produce particular spectating positions that are differentially sexualized and empowered (Grosz 1991).

Psychoanalysis as applied to the cultural, social field, is not used to analyse the personality of the person producing the image. There is no interest in the producer of images as an individual per se. A psychoanalytical visual methodology is used rather to interpret aspects of images and effects on viewers. Psychoanalytic commentators do not adhere to a rigid toolbox; critics tend to work with one or two concepts and explore their articulation across the requisite field (Walsh 2013). As Griselda Pollock argues, there is no absolute right or wrong way to interpret an image; different concepts brought to bear on the same image can produce quite different interpretations of that image (Pollock 1994).

Film has proved to be particularly responsive to psychoanalytic interpretation. In the 1970s and 1980s, *Screen* journal established itself as a showcase for the appropriation and dissemination of Lacanian theory within the discipline of film studies within the British academy (Milner and Browitt 2006). Cinema functions powerfully as a visual medium in creating a total world for an audience; film manipulates the visual, the spatial and the temporal. Film is a powerful means of structuring looking - cinematic codes create a gaze.

Freud and Lacan both argue that visuality is central to subjectivity and film is argued to addresses our sense of self very directly (McGowan, T. 2007). This study will explore how such assertions can be applied to still photography.



*Fig: 69 Penhaul Man irons pants print 1952 PHA.*

The founding assumptions of psychoanalysis have always come under degrees of scrutiny, and as the emphasis of such critique has changed, so too has the discipline's approach to the interpretation of visuality and ways of seeing (Thwaites 2007).

Subjectivity, sexuality and the unconscious are three key terms that conceptually underpin the paradigm of psychoanalysis (Sharpe and Faulkner 2008). These terms have implications for how psychoanalysis conceptualizes both the viewer of an image and the image itself. Gillian Rose notes that the image and the audience are the two sites of the production of meaning that psychoanalysis puts under scrutiny (Rose 2007).

With regard to the audience of an image, the use of the term subjectivity (rather than identity), entails the acknowledgement that individuals are 'subjective'; that we make sense of the world and ourselves through complex, non-rational ways of understanding. Psychoanalysis can often focus on the emotional effects of visual images, on how an image's emotional effects may be 'immediate and powerful even when its precise meaning remains vague, suspended – numinous' (Hall 1999: 311). Psychoanalysis further argues that understanding reactions to images requires the recognition that not all reactions are working at a conscious level; some reactions may come from the unconscious. Freud's elaboration of the notion of the unconscious regards the unconscious as created during a maturational process of disciplining by cultural rules and values (Freud 1915). Repression of non-normative instincts is inscribed into Freudian understandings of the unconscious – in short, repression results in the unconscious (Thwaites 2007). The interaction between conscious and unconscious results in subjectivity as being never fully conscious, coherent

or complete (Sharpe and Faulkner 2008). As subjects we can never fully know ourselves; our conscious selves are always likely to be infiltrated by excursions from the forbidden zone of the unconscious, as Jacqueline Rose explains: 'The unconscious is the only defence against a language frozen into pure, fixed or institutional meaning, and ... in its capacity to unsettle the subject, is a break against the intolerable limits of common sense' (Jacqueline Rose 1986: 3).



*Fig: 70 Penhaul 1952 Lord Bolitho and police print PHA.*

Psychoanalysis does not ascribe to the modernist notion that to see is to know, indeed, according to Lacan 'in this matter of the visible, everything is a trap' (Lacan 2006: 93). The notion of the unconscious places attention on the uncertainties of subjectivity and the uncertainties of seeing. Psychoanalysis is interested in just such blind-spots, visual confusions and mistakes (Žižek 1991b).

Psychoanalysis emphasizes that subjectivity is always subject to certain disciplines; the unconscious is argued to be formed by disciplines active within a culture, by the particular interdictions and permissions of these disciplines (Sharpe and Faulkner 2008). Subjectivity is claimed therefore to be culturally as well as psychically constructed (Grosz 1991).

Crucially, this is a process argued to be one that continues through our lives; we are made as subjects through disciplines, taboos, prohibitions (Žižek 2006a). Visuality is claimed as one of these disciplines. We learn to see in particular ways and this is a process reiterated each time we look (Pollock 1992). We are tutored into particular subjectivities by certain kinds of visual images (Moi 1999).

Psychoanalysis both examines the constant disciplining of subjectivity but also stresses the instabilities of the unconscious and the ways in which this can undermine the disciplinary processes. Subjectivity is read as being always a work in progress, as Griselda Pollock argues: 'visual representation is analysed ... in terms of its continuing necessity as a site for

the perpetual cultural process of shaping and working the subject, conceptualized as precarious and unfixed' (Pollock 1992: 10).



Fig: 71 Penhaul Cyril Rich 1953 print PHA.

A psychoanalytic visual methodology concerns itself with the effects of images on spectators; Stuart Hall regards this interaction as an internal relation that is mutually constitutive, as being part of a circuit of articulation (Hall 1999: 310).<sup>27</sup> Images are therefore interpreted in terms of their subjective effects - one of the subjections psychoanalysis talks about particularly is that of sexuality.

Psychoanalysis is centrally concerned with the process through which sexual difference is established and maintained. Freud reads a constitutive ontological lack as resulting from the dissolution of the dyadic parent child relation (Freud 1905). Through the course of its history, psychoanalysis has conceptualized this lack in various articulations, but the lacking subject has been consistently presented as one imbricated within aspects of visibility and formations of the unconscious (Sharpe and Faulkner 2008). Issues of sexuality and gender have given rise to an intricacy of discussion but commentators such as Gillian Rose (2007) claim that psychoanalytic scrutiny remains valid not least because it can be regarded as a productive theory of sexuality that speaks of its complexity, its disruptions and its disciplines.<sup>28</sup>

During the 1970s psychoanalytic theory was brought to bear on how visualities inherent to cinema had a gendering and gendered effect on audiences. Laura Mulvey published an essay in *Screen* journal in 1975; entitled 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' the text explored the social effects of narrative Hollywood cinema in terms of the mutual constitution of the psychic and the social. Mulvey was concerned with the disciplining of subjectivity into particular forms of sexual difference.

Mulvey's seminal essay today stands as an example of how critics have been able to selectively draw on the many conceptual possibilities offered by the discourse of psychoanalysis. Mulvey's analysis takes on increasing conceptual complexity as she interlays successive psychoanalytic notions. By mobilizing the conceptual 'tool' of the Freudian notion of the 'castration complex' Mulvey was able to explore the gendered visualities that position male and female subjectivities. Mulvey employed Freud's notion of the castration complex to mobilize ideas about sexual difference in relation to subjectivity and visibility. Mulvey also applied several other critical 'tools' to substantiate her examination of gendered looking within cinema, among them voyeurism<sup>29</sup>, fetishistic scopophilia<sup>30</sup> and the Lacanian mirror stage.



Fig: 72 Penhaul Cabbage and boy 1951 print PHA.

With this tangled elaboration of psychoanalytical notions Mulvey was able to substantiate a profound and perceptive analysis of subjective positioning through phallogentric, patriarchal scopic regimes. Mulvey's particular selection and interpretation of conceptual notions was her own – subsequently psychoanalytic critics have engaged with many of the same criteria but have dealt with these in quite different ways. The notion of the discourse of psychoanalysis as offering a 'tool-box' from which concepts can be cherry-picked as required, has proved tempting. Arguably, within photographic studies, Freudian and Lacanian concepts have tended to have been deployed more as supplements to rather than foundations of critical analysis (Iversen 2007).



*Fig: 73 Penhaul Hungarian refugees 1954 print PHA.*

This stated aim of this study is to look through a Lacanian lens at the Cornish community photographed by Harry Penhaul in the 1950s. To calibrate this lens, this study will turn its attention away from the lives and landscapes of West Penwith and make the journey across the channel to a post-war Paris where the discourse of psychoanalysis was being re-read by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. It is Lacan's conceptual frameworks that will calibrate this study's interpretive lens and which will also provide a consistent and holistic theoretical foundation on which to build and substantiate a critical position.

## Chapter 2 Photography, psychoanalysis and discursive congruence?

In this study I have drawn upon psychoanalysis as an instrumental methodology of cultural criticism in order to interrogate a particular body of photographs made by press photographer Harry Penhaul in Cornwall during the 1950s. The resulting interrogation is aimed broadly at elucidating how the subject, and by extension community, is imbricated within the social modality of photographic representation. This study employs a Lacanian psychoanalytic account of the subject and the specular to consider and reflect not just on the relation of photographic practice to the constitution and representation of the social field, but also to contribute towards an enquiry that will circulate around the ontology of the photograph itself. The aim of this study is to look through a Lacanian lens at the photographs of Harry Penhaul and to initiate a view of the resulting Lacanian conceptual landscape through a renewed perspective and perhaps new frameworks of understanding. In Chapter 1 of this study the photographs and biography of Harry Penhaul were introduced as were the social, cultural and economic context of his post-war practice. Chapter 1 also introduced some of the basic tenets of a psychoanalytic visual methodology, a critical approach stemming from the discourse of psychoanalysis and which this study will foreground as its central interrogative framework.

In this following chapter and in order to prepare and organize the above methodological framework, I will continue to present a foundational description of the discourses of photography and psychoanalysis around and through which this study will circulate and articulate its particular interrogation of photographic representation. This discussion will look to identify methodological commonalities and areas of conceptual congruence that will enable the discourses of photography and psychoanalysis to be purposefully read together. In his 1969 text *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault insisted that discourse could never be determinative and that it was always already characterized by dynamism and fluidity, that discourse is always in motion and never fixed (Foucault 1969). The discursive trajectory of both photography and psychoanalysis presented in this chapter supports Foucault in this assertion. Their discursive trajectories reveal unfolding and at times circuitous routes; discourses do not present as coherent and unified frameworks, on the contrary, discursive enquiry is marked by a continual reworking of positions (Batchen 1997). This study will present my particular account of the discourses of photography and psychoanalysis, an account that is constitutively and necessarily both selective and

reductive. Therefore this chapter will present my individual conceptual pathway through these discursive fields, a pathway ultimately determined by what I have found meaningful and useful.

In the first section of this chapter I will explore the discourse of photography and its various articulations across the histories of photography and the emergence of photography studies in recent years. In the second part section of this chapter I will examine some founding precepts of the psychoanalytical paradigm and look to identify at the Freudian roots of psychoanalysis conceptual characteristics that mark subsequent iterations of psychoanalytic discourse.

## **Part 1 The discourse of photography**

### **Introduction**

Part 1 of this chapter will engage the discourse of photography from various but overlapping perspectives and particularly will question how it is possible to define discourse in terms of its exposition through statements, how has the discourse of photography been elaborated through a series of key categories and what has been the consequence for photographic discourse of the emergence of photographic studies as an academic discipline? Finally, this part of the chapter will examine how two key texts have shaped the reception and trajectory of recent photographic discourse.

### **1: 1 Photography as discourse**

*This section will examine some aspects of the discourse of photography that emerge through statements and definitions made about discourse in general and about photographic discourse in particular. This section will reflect on the nature and coherence of the discursive field and will observe the movement of discourse across that field. This section will note how the discourse of photography has been characterized by a prevailing binary opposition between Formalist and postmodern accounts. This section will posit that the theories of photography are its history and that theory and discourse are co-constitutive.*

*'All of this implies that the meaning of photography is still controversial'* Sigmund Kracauer 1960 (cited in Trachtenberg 1980).

Writing during the inter-war years of the 1920s and 1930s and coming into critical prominence during the 1970s, Walter Benjamin's seminal analysis of cultural materialism transformed the way cultural production is conceived and interpreted by focusing attention on the inextricable links between the photographic image as aesthetic form and socio-political interests (Eagleton 2009). *A Short History of Photography* (1931), *The Author as Producer* (1934), and *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility* (1936), comprise a set of essays that have, for many commentators, defined and delineated modern conceptions of the discourse of photography (Emerling 2012). Today, such discourse can be defined as the set of statements that articulates the concept named photography - it is the structure into which specific, individual events are received, discussed, explained, and critiqued. It is the framework through which we understand and think photography (Costello 2007).

Geoffrey Batchen states that photographic discourse is 'how we think and use photography, the statements made about it' (Batchen 1997: 16). Simply put, there is no photography without discourse. Diamuid Costello comments: 'discourse is the conceptual field within which and around which move various kinds of objects, activities, processes, ideas and theories, subcultures and movements, institutions and exhibition' (Costello 2007: ix). This is not to say that the discourse of photography is a coherent, unified framework – on the contrary. Jae Emerling (2012) agrees that photographic discourse is a continual reworking of positions; it creates by retracing lines of arguments, by uncovering archives, redacting histories, and drawing attention to aporias (gaps or impasses, paradoxes) within the discourse itself. As in the game of chess, there is structure, yet each enactment, each play, both reiterates the past and also demands variation. Such retracing, archival uncovering and discursive paradox will characterize this study's approach to its research of the work and practice of Harry Penhaul.



Fig: 74 Penhaul Stithians agricultural show 1954 print PHA.

Discourse can appear circumscribed and repetitive but can also be athletic, leaping quickly in the rethinking of history as new discursive event. As Liz Wells comments, 'Ideas and positions do not supersede one another, or inter-act and synthesise in clear dialectical fashion. Rather we witness an accumulation of models and critical perspectives which sort of fold into one another, re-emerging in shifting formations' (Liz Wells 2003: 3). Therefore, approaching the history and theory of photography as discourse should allow us to 'better understand the references, ideological legacies and socio-political inheritances in relation to which we negotiate the contemporary' (Wells 2003: 5). Such discursive unfolding underpins the conceptual trajectory of this study – images of West Penwith will be read in terms of conceptual frameworks whose discursive path reflects this description of discourse as iterative, folding and shifting in formation. The notion of the Lacanian real, central to this study, exemplifies such discursive characteristics as it has continually altered in meaning and prominence since its first articulation as a minor category in Lacan's pre-war conceptual topography (Homer 2005).

Discourse involves representation, codes, significations, and aesthetic affects (Buchanan 2010). Many disciplines take up positions within the discourse of photography - philosophers, historians, critics and curators have all situated their thinking and practice within the discourse of photography (Emerling 2012). However, Gelder and Westgeest argue that only photographers themselves, in the creation of new images, can perform and initiate a step change within the discourse (Gelder and Westgeest 2011). A similarly positivistic view is taken by this study as it argues that photographic practice can facilitate what psychoanalytic theory refers to as 'traversing of the discourse' (Žižek 2013).

By the 1950s Harry Penhaul had established himself in the West Penwith district of Cornwall as a successful freelance press photographer. His career and practice as a photographer were situated within a wider visual culture where photography played a substantial and substantive role in everyday life (Warner Marien 2011). David Bate states that in the post-war period prevailing attitudes to photography and to the discourse of photography can be argued to have been encapsulated by exhibitions such as *The Family of Man* photography exhibitions at MoMa in New York curated by Edward Steichen in 1955 (Bate 2016). The Greenbergian Formalism which underscored the exhibition's aesthetic foundation, and in particular its instrumental immanentism, was the dominant post-war discourse within which photographs and the practice of photography were commonly

understood and situated (Bate 2016). The subsequent critique of this essentially Formalist position that took place in the 1970s and 1980s, demonstrates for commentators like Kelsey and Stimson, just how photographic discourse can move, fold and be transformed (Kelsey and Stimson 2008). The critical post-modern anti-aesthetic discourse which ran contrary to the post-war hegemony of Formalism, became, within the Anglo-phone academy of the 1980s and 1990s, itself the determinative critical framework within which to critically engage with photography.



Fig: 75 Penhaul Postal delivery print 1950 PHA

Critical postmodernism arose not least as a critique of the ways in which photography was being appropriated by art institutions in the 1960s (Stephen Bull 2010). The critical postmodern position, presented and proselytised in *October* journal during the 1970s and 1980s, forwarded an anti-aesthetics in which traditional artistic and aesthetic criteria such as originality, autonomy, self-expression and uniqueness were forfeited in order to salvage the possibility of staging a socio-political critique (Bate 2016).

This position was articulated along two fronts: the critique of art institutions (galleries, museums, art history) and the examination of the constitution of subjects. This amounted to a radical approach to art and its histories and one which began with Marxism and the psychoanalysis of Freud and Lacan and which at its root was the desire to understand the complex relations between art and ideology (Emerling 2012).

In the post-war years photography found itself positioned between two opposing discursive strands. With the critical postmodernism of *October* magazine photography became not just an object of study in itself but was also utilized instrumentally to critique Formalism. Opposing this anti-aesthetic position, Clement Greenberg's medium-specific, formalist evolutionary model of art history was directly actualized in photography through the work of John Szarkowski, head of photography at MoMa, New York, from 1968 to 1991.

Exhibitions curated by Szarkowski such as *The Photographer's Eye* (1964), have had significant influence on the subsequent trajectory of photographic discourse. Szarkowski looked to isolate photography from discourses and functions other than those relating to art and art history.<sup>31</sup>

Alan Sekula has been at the forefront of the critique of Greenbergian formalism. Critics such as Sekula have insisted on the social and political functions of photography. Sekula's 1981 essay *The Traffic in Photographs*, positions photography as exposing a series of interrelated ideological positions, including those addressing art, race, economics and class. For Sekula, the issues of social and political context, not form, are what comprise the discourse of photography: 'Formalism collects all the world's images in a single aesthetic emporium, tearing them from all contingencies of origin, meaning and use' (Sekula 1981: 23).



Fig: 76 Penhaul St Ives lifeboat 1954 print PHA.

In the late 1990s Geoffrey Batchen, in his essay *Burning with Desire* (1997) questioned the mutually excluding positions of formalist and postmodern perspectives on photography. He saw these as not only co-dependent views, but also insisted that 'history inhabits the present in very real ways; that the practice of history is always an exercise of power; that history matters in all senses of this word' (Batchen 1997: xiii). Batchen explains that he personally is convinced by the postmodern critique of the formalist position, a critique that centres around how meaning is determined by cultural and institutional contexts, how the production of the political and psychological subject is an effect of photographic representation; and on the assertion that there is no discrete and fixed medium that can be named photography.

However, Batchen's position is not symptomatic of the simple choice between formalism and postmodernism. Batchen maintains that the difference between the two discursive

camps is not as marked as it appears; both share a presumption that photograph's identity can be determined as a consequence of either nature or culture. Batchen argues that both perspectives 'avoid coming to terms with the historical and ontological complexity of the very thing they claim to analyse' (Batchen 1997: 21).

Batchen grounds his methodology in critiques which challenge dominant structural binary oppositions; he draws on the work of both Foucault and Derrida to conclude that both formalist and critical postmodernist positions 'presume that photography's identity can indeed be delimited, that photography is ultimately secured within the boundaries of nature or culture' (Batchen 1997: 176).

Batchen returns to the multiple origin points of the discourse of photography in order to prove that the 'either/or-ism' is a historical effect rather than a determinative framework – he demonstrates how the discourse of photography is, at its origins, always more troubling and feverish than it is definitive and ordered: 'there is always another line to construct that passes through the origin of photography to the present' (Batchen 2002: 39).

Batchen's method is to indicate openings in discursive frameworks and he privileges an understanding which explains history as inhabiting the present in very real ways. Batchen comments that photographic history has always carried with it the process of its own erasure; he comments that linear narrative and definitive meaning are typical historical props and he argues for a more provocative way of thinking about photographic discourse: 'a way of rethinking photography that persuasively accords with the medium's undeniable conceptual, political and historical complexity' (Batchen 1997: 202).



*Fig. 77 Penhaul Budgie fanciers The Cornishman August 1951 print PHA.*

Jae Emerling is a more recent commentator who also argues that the complex identity of photography as revealed by Batchen should be embraced and to this end Emerling urges

that the theoretical texts that enabled formalist and critical postmodernism should not be abandoned: 'these texts continue to proffer new possibilities, new readings and strategies that were overlooked in the headlong rush to instrumentalize theory in the 1970s and 1980s' (Emerling 2012: 6). Photography is read by this study as occupying a position between history and theory; the study of photography, its images, discourse and socio-political affiliations, is read as a conceptual catalyst enabling an exploration of how images of and from the past can be made intelligible for today.

Jae Emerling argues that contending theories of photography *are* its history and that theory and discourse are co-constitutive. He states that the discourse of photography 'defines not only a historical relation between images and temporality, it frames the theoretical discussions that surround and compose what we mean by the concept photography' (Emerling 2012: 8). Discourse comprises statements that construct the artistic, historiographic, institutional, and aesthetic aspects of the photographic field.<sup>32</sup> This study does not take as its centre of critical focus a privileging of content analysis with its tendentious tendencies towards the uncovering of past and now secret meanings and of the nostalgia of facial recognition and explications of architectural form. Rather, this study takes as its driving premise that it is through interrogating the weave of discourses, and in particular through viewing photographs of Cornish community through a Lacanian lens, that fresh perspectives and intelligibilities can emerge.

A further aspect of the interrogation carried forward by this study, will be to further explore the relation of theory and practice. Hilde Van Gelder and Helen Westgeest argue that photographers can present us with 'unimagined impossible objects' (Gelder and Westgeest 2011: 47). They claim that the photographic image has the potential to unsettle discourse, to be 'untimely' and to create new paths through the discourse thereby altering its history and theoretical presumptions. Gilles Deleuze stated that practice is 'a set of relays from one theoretical point to another, and theory is a relay from one practice to another. No theory can develop without eventually encountering a wall, and practice is necessary for piercing this wall' (cited in Bouchard 1977: 266). This study argues that Penhaul's practice can be read within such a framework in that particular images encourage and affirm this study's radical use of the Lacanian real as a critical methodological tool. The goal of this study will be to read Penhaul's images in terms of the Lacanian real in order to bring into focus a conceptual landscape that makes visible the relation between the event (photograph) and narrative (discursive structure). Deleuze continues: 'We don't revise a theory, but construct new ones; we have no choice but to

make others ... As Proust said ... treat my book as a pair of glasses directed to the outside; if they don't suit you, find another pair' (cited in Bouchard 1977: 267).



Fig: 78 Penhaul Stranded ship 1953 print PHA.

Gilles Deleuze commented, 'thought and art ... disturb the reality, morality, and economy of the world' (Deleuze 1990: 61). This study brings together Lacanian thought and Penhaul's practice and looks for signs of disturbance.

## **1: 2 The discourse of photography**

*This section examines how the discourse of photography has engaged with conceptual issues that have emerged as fundamental to critical engagement with photography and its discourse. Debates and discussion around issues such as indexicality, reproducibility and identity have themselves helped define and delineate photographic discourse itself as complexly multi-layered, mutually interdependent and shifting in formation.*

Hilde Van Gelder and Helen Westgeest argue that 'the greatest challenge for photography today is to discover how exactly it wants to position itself in relation to the reality it 'mirrors' or merely reflects on' (Gelder and Westgeest 2011: 40). Issues of indexicality, reproducibility and identity have moved endlessly around the discourse of photography revealing it to be infinitely complex, multi-layered and interdependent. The issue of indexicality is characteristic of such discursive complexity as it has been articulated across the discursive field of photography.

The discourse of photography has frequently been preoccupied with debates as to whether or not photography is a distinct medium; these debates have tended to circulate around whether the mechanical nature of photography takes aesthetic precedence over the human role in the production of a photograph (Kriebel cited in Elkins 2007). Automaticity is

cited by many who argue for photography as a medium whose chemical and digital processes allow for a direct, unmediated record of the external world to be taken. Such an assumption has heightened the importance of a corollary concept, the index. Within photographic discourse, the index has been wielded as a guarantor of a material connection between the image and reality. Jae Emerling (2012) states that any discussion concerning automatism and indexicality in photography needs to be complicated by referring to discourses outside of photography. For this study such 'complication' is provided by the discourse of psychoanalysis. As Joel Snyder has commented, physical objects do not have a single definitive representation as the camera can manipulate and thereby create an infinite number of varying images (Snyder cited in Elkins 2007: 369). As a precondition of photography, an index is a trace of light moving and being refracted; it is not a trace of the object before the camera's lens. As Chapter 4 of this study explains, the Lacanian critique of dominant post-war scopic regimes was in-part figured in terms of emanations of light, emanations which came to underpin Lacan's concept of the gaze (Lacan 1998). Roland Barthes' discussion of the photographic referent in *Camera Lucida* (1980) also references what Barthes describes as 'emanations and arrows of light', a description which Margaret Iversen argues draws heavily on Lacanian notions of the gaze (Barthes cited in Iversen 2007: 89).



Fig: 79 Penhaul Culdrose airdrome 1952 print PHA.

Another discussion that has had significant impact on the discourse of photography is that of the relation between technology, image production and reproduction (Roberts 2014). During the period Penhaul was active as a freelance photographer (1936 to 1957) the number of images being printed in newspapers such as *The Cornishman* steadily increased. In the 1930s *The Cornishman* would feature at most a handful of photographs in each edition. By the beginning of the 1950s, upgraded print technology meant *The Cornishman*

could feature several photographs on each of its ten pages. Stuart Hall comments that what was also to change in the post-war years was the demand for news and news photographs (Hall 1992: 71-120). Penhaul's career during the 1950s coincided with increased opportunities for regional press photographers like himself to provide images for national news outlets. Local photographers such as Penhaul were literally on the spot for reporting provincial news events. Penhaul embraced this opportunity with gusto; his pursuit of the 'scoop' frequently positioned his practice at the edge of what was physically and technically possible.



Fig: 80 Penhaul *Relief of Lighthouse* 1954 print PHA.

The issue of reproducibility was central to much of Walter Benjamin's writing during the 1930s (Eagleton 1981). He specifically addressed such concerns in his seminal 1936 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility*. Through a cultural materialist and Marxist analysis, Benjamin argued that the implications of greater accessibility that came with more efficient technology were politically and socially profound. As Kelly Dennis observes, during the 1980s Benjamin's ideas were frequently appropriated and repeatedly cited within the 'postmodern debate' in order to declare many, and at times, mutually contradictory positions such as the death of the modern art aura, the critique of modernist notions of artistic uniqueness and authenticity and also the assertion of the photograph's role in problematizing not only art's aesthetic status but also representation itself (Dennis 2009: 12). Diarmuid Costello argues that Benjamin's writings have remained 'multi-interpretable and multi-applicable' (Costello 2007: 165). Benjamin stressed in his own writing how images could assume various readings dependent on context. Benjamin described modernity in terms of the consequences of capitalism and technology, and he figured photography as an epochal event within that modernity (Benjamin 1936). For Benjamin, any discussion of reproducibility immediately set in motion questions of

authenticity and what he called 'aura'. Benjamin talked in terms of the 'dissolution of aura' due to reproduction of unique appearance and existence. Benjamin traced a connection between the 'shattering' effects of reproducibility on tradition and what he regarded as the possibility, configured through representation, of 'revolutionary potential' (Benjamin 1936: 47). Throughout the nineteenth century the radical changes of modernity had been accompanied by constant transformations to the apparatus and application of photography.

According to Jae Emerling, the main thrust of Benjamin's work was to create a new relation between past and present and to interrogate the notion of spectacle, for which, Benjamin believed, photography was largely responsible.<sup>33</sup> Benjamin's 1933 essay *Experience and Poverty* summarizes many of his conceptual positions. He discusses the 'barbarism' of modernity, how spectacle destroys tradition by simulating its continuation, and how it 'dazzles us with a mishmash of styles and ideologies' (Benjamin 1999: 31).

A further debate that has preoccupied the discourse of photography has been the issue of medium-specificity. This was a central concern of post 1960s critical postmodernism, a critical attitude which largely defined itself through its sustained challenge to Greenbergian Formalism. Mary Ann Doane has argued in her essay *Indexicality and the Concept of Medium Specificity* (2008), that medium-specificity is not an essentialist idea *per se* but one that is resolutely historical, capable of changing in a variety of social and cultural contexts. Doane claims that what is specific to the medium becomes apparent as the medium itself changes (cited in Kelsey and Stimson 2008: 4). Postmodernism appropriated the work of many contemporary photographers in order to investigate the full complexity of representation and to articulate new narratives for the history of modernism (Kriebel 2007). Greenbergian formalism had been the dominant narrative of modernism and had stressed the unique specificity of each medium. Critical postmodernism displaced this approach to emphasize how and why modernism comprises a more complex assemblage of socio-historical interests and codes. Kelsey and Stimson have commented however, that the 'critical turn' made by postmodern critics in its association with suspicion and melancholy perhaps needs to be put to one side today and instead we should 'look to see whether photography has some new meaning, or some old meaning renewed, to offer us now' (Kelsey and Stimson 2008: xxii). This study will argue that the Lacanian real can provide just such a new meaning 'from an old meaning renewed'.



Fig: 81 Penhaul Prize giving The Cornishman August 1956 print PHA.

The identity of photography has been a matter of contention ever since the medium's inception, but as Batchen remarks, this debate has become if anything more vigorous in recent times (Batchen 2009). While the 1970s saw photography attain a new and commercial prominence in the art world, during this period it also attracted a range of trenchant critical voices. Influential commentaries such as John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) and Susan Sontag's *On Photography* (1977) were published alongside critical works by writers such as Roland Barthes. Informed by intellectual traditions of Marxism and semiology, these authors contributed to what Batchen describes as 'a cultural anthropology of the photograph' (Batchen 1997: 4). Photographic images from advertising copy to family snapshots were all treated with the same critical rigor as art photographs. This reinvigorated photographic discourse was incorporated into a wider critique of modern cultural and social systems that through subsequent dissemination through publications such as the journal *October*, became known as critical postmodernism (Kriebel 2007).

Postmodernism has been frequently called upon in terms that situate it as a convenient rhetorical trope (Gelder and Westgeest 2011). Postmodernism is not itself homogenous in outlook having been informed by a variety of competing theoretical models, for example, Marxism, feminism and semiotics. Geoffrey Batchen comments that critical postmodernism has become the 'de facto' critical approach to thinking the medium of photography. Such a position is typified by John Tagg in his essay *The Burden of Representation* (1988). Here Tagg insists that the photograph can never exist outside of discourse or function. For Tagg, photography has no identity, 'it is a flickering across a field of institutional spaces. It is this field we must study, not photography as such' (Tagg: 1988: 63). In Tagg's view, a photograph can have no single true meaning. Tagg draws on Louis Althusser's structural

Marxism to claim that 'photography is itself an apparatus of ideological control ... under the control of the class ... who hold state power' (Tagg 1988: 165). Tagg sees the photograph as a tool for transporting ideology; the camera is never neutral, the representations it produces are highly coded and the power it wields is never its own.

Such a description of the identity of the photograph draws explicitly on Foucault and notions of 'disciplinary power' (Foucault 1979). Following Foucault's lead, Tagg relates the photograph to that 'disciplinary archipelago' of agencies and local apparatuses of state involved in the circulation of power and knowledge. Tagg's account of the political effects of photography focuses not on the medium itself but on the determining mechanisms of its historical frames. Tagg utilises Foucault's notion that 'discourse constitutes its object' (Foucault 1979: 32) to regard the photograph as an instrument that facilitates the imposition of power. As such, the photograph is conduit of power, a thing with no fixed identity and therefore belongs to every institution and discipline but its own.

The basic tenets of Tagg's work are found in other writers such as Alan Sekula who observes that photography's objectivity reveals class differences to be constructed, historical, unnatural and therefore potentially open to change (Sekula 1986). This capacity to both undermine and yet underpin the established order of capitalism is for Sekula the source of the photograph's fascination and social power. Sekula stresses across much of his writing, that when we look at a photograph we confront a double system that is capable of 'functioning both *honorifically* and *repressively*' (Sekula 1986: 52). In Sekula's view the photograph is always the vehicle of larger outside forces and its identity as being contingent on those forces. Never neutral, the photograph always finds itself attached to a discourse, indeed to a 'cacophony of competing discourses that gives any individual photograph its meanings and social values' (Sekula 1986: 41). According to Sekula, because of its indexical properties, the photograph is 'fundamentally grounded in contingency' (Sekula *Mining Photographs*: 218). In other words, as an index the photograph is never itself but always a trace of something else (Kelsey and Stimson 2008).

Like Tagg and Sekula, Victor Burgin has no time for the notion of photographic essence. He approaches the photographic image in terms of the 'general sphere of cultural production' and considers its primary characteristic to be its capacity to produce and disseminate meaning (Burgin 1982: 9). Burgin's conception of photography is that 'meaning is perpetually displaced from the image to the discursive formations which cross and contain it' (Burgin 1982: 215). For Burgin, the object of photographic theory is not the photograph itself, but rather the practices of signification that precede, surround and inform the image.

Burgin's view is that the photograph is an intertextual site and that among the 'texts' overlapping the photograph are the social and psychic functions of the reader/author (Burgin 1982).



Fig: 82 Penhaul Wedding reception 1952 print PHA.

In his contribution to the anthology *Thinking Photography* which Burgin edited in 1982, he brings together semiotics and psychoanalysis as two modes of the articulation of meaning in the intertextual site where he positions photography. Burgin's particular conception of the photograph was incorporated into a Lacanian theory of the subject where the subject was involved in the unending process of becoming, just as the photograph was positioned as always already contingent and unfixed. Burgin writes 'It is therefore important that photography theory take account of the production of this subject as the complex totality of its determinations are nuanced and constrained in their passage through and across photographs' (Burgin 1982: 153). For Victor Burgin writing in the early 1980s, the identity of the photograph is no more than a manifestation of the subject's desire: 'it is the unconscious subject that desires ... but the conscious object of desire is always a red herring. In fact, desire is the instinct ... the trace of a primal, lost, satisfaction. The real object is irretrievably lost' (Burgin 1984: 98).

The shared conception of photography held by Tagg, Burgin and Sekula, as having no identity and its history no unity, is one shared by many other writers. Abigail Solomon-Godeau for example argues against any photographic autonomy and stresses the mutability of photographic meaning when she states, 'the photograph is ... a building block in a larger structure' (Solomon-Godeau 1991: 15). For Solomon-Godeau, the photograph is

best understood as a 'conduit for much larger social and psychic forces ... In the final analysis, photography is ever a hireling, ever the hired gun' (Solomon-Godeau 1991: xxii). Hilde Van Gelder and Helen Westgeest argue that the critical postmodern consensus towards photography which emphasises its mutability and contingency, its lack of autonomous history and no fixed identity, was in most part a response to the dominant modernist formalist art-historical agenda of 1960s and 1970s. This agenda had entailed thinking about art practice and its interpretation in terms of a search for an art form's fundamental essence. Such an approach was characterized by John Szarkowski who, unlike the postmodern critics, took the position that 'there really is such a thing as photography' (Szarkowski *Afterimage* 12 no 3 1984). Szarkowski's 1964 exhibition *The Photographer's Eye* was his attempt to define and delineate certain medium specific issues; in particular he identified five concepts that he claimed were 'peculiar to photography': The Thing Itself, The Detail, The Frame, Time, and Vantage Point (Szarkowski 1966: 28). These concepts were read as being inherent to the medium, awaiting discovery by the perceptive photographer. Szarkowski presents the history of photography as an inevitable progression toward self-knowledge. Subsequently many histories of photography and exhibitions have contributed to this general formalist project. Peter Galassi's exhibition at MoMa in 1981 *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography*, was accompanied by his catalogue statement 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 exhibition catalogue). Galassi identified photography's 'syntax' and conceptual origins with artistic rather than social, intellectual or political roots. Solomon-Godeau commented that Galassi's 1981 exhibition was constructed to provide the thesis the museum required. Solomon-Godeau explains that 'the history of photography, essentially and ontologically, is not only engendered by art, but it is inseparable from it' (Solomon-Godeau 1991: 25). The two opposing paradigms of Greenbergian formalism and critical postmodernism have been determinative of photographic criticism and interpretation over many years. Geoffrey Batchen comments that 'In a sense, the entire laborious argument between them reduces down to a single deceptively simple question: is photography to be identified with (its own) nature or with the culture that surrounds it?' (Batchen 1997: 17).



Fig: 83 Penhaul Newlyn neighbours 1952 print PHA.

### 1: 3 Thinking about photography and the nature of photography studies

*In this section the emergence of photography studies as a discipline in formation will be charted in terms of its effects and determinations on the discourse of photography.*

*Photography studies will be read as a discipline that has worked to avoid the ‘sclerosis of critical orthodoxy’ (Emerling 2012: 62).*

In the early 1980s Victor Burgin’s edited anthology of essays *Thinking Photography* (1982) was explicitly intended to establish a theoretical framework for the study of photography. It featured contributions from contemporary writers, John Tagg, Allan Sekula, Burgin himself, as well as essays by Walter Benjamin and Umberto Eco, all chosen by Burgin as necessary reference points for thinking about photography. Welch and Long (2009) attribute to *Thinking Photography* a key role in the creation of photography as a legitimate field of study. Since its publication in 1982, photography studies has accumulated the academic appurtenances and attributes of a recognized domain of enquiry – a series of canonical academic publications including John Tagg’s *The Burden of Representation* (1988) and Roger Bolton’s *The Context of Meaning* (1989), have allowed the ‘theoretical armature of the discipline to take shape’ (Welch and Long: 1).

Burgin’s thinking was symptomatic of the gradual infiltration of continental critical theory into academic discourse over the course of the 1970s. John Roberts relates how, although slow to embrace structuralism, Anglophone academia eagerly took on board what would be later termed post-structuralism as work by Derrida, Lacan and Foucault began to be translated into English in the late 1970s (Roberts 1998). Increasingly influential at this time were the writings of Walter Benjamin which also came to prominence following translations in the 1970s. In embracing critical developments in socio-political thought,

linguistics, semiotics, psychoanalysis and discourse analysis, Burgin's *Thinking Photography* was self-consciously conceived as a foundational gesture, aimed at challenging the ways photography had been thought and conceptualized until that point. Welch and Long (2009) refer to *Thinking Photography* as a 'future orientated project'; Burgin himself stated that he considered the publication a 'contribution towards photography theory ... rather than 'to' as the theory does not yet exist' (Burgin 1982: 1 original emphasis).

The implicit teleology identifiable in Burgin's approach was that there could be a unified and unitary body of thought waiting to be applied to the photograph; in fact the photograph's emergence as a central object of study in the humanities and social sciences has been accompanied by a vast proliferation of theoretical approaches characterized by if nothing else their plurality and diversity.

Stephen Bull comments that for all the intensive and critical activity that photography has generated since the early 1980s, photography studies remains a relatively youthful domain although one which 'carries its own traditions and histories and whose canons and critical orthodoxies must be negotiated and acknowledged' (Bull 2010: 23). Photography studies is regarded by Welch and Long as 'a discipline in formation, one around which the sediments of critical orthodoxy have not yet settled' (Welch and Long 2009: 8).

John Tagg states that in the 1970s photography was an attractive object of study not least because it was not bound by a specific institutional canon (Tagg 1992: 76). The diversity of photographic studies can lay claim to disciplinary legitimacy but does so without a fixed institutional home; photography has been frequently studied within the purview of other departments – art history, anthropology, geography, each with established methodological approaches. Theoretical plurality is a function of both the diverse and dispersed nature of photographic practices and the nomadic status of photographic studies. Indeed, Welch and Long regard photography as a trans-discipline - its plurality is not contingent but structural and 'embodies contradictions that can neither be resolved by theoretical orthodoxy nor sublated in a teleologically conceived photography theory of the future' (Welch and Long 2009: 4).



Fig: 84 Penhaul Housewife's choice 1951 print PHA.

There are a range of critical paradigms and perspectives that inform discussion of the photographic image and many of these can be applied to the photographs taken by Harry Penhaul. Disciplines such as art history and visual culture have long had purchase on photography, while others such as anthropology see photography less as evidence source than as playing a complex role in in our encounter with other cultures and societies. For writers such as Elizabeth Edwards who utilize such an anthropological approach, the photograph is not solely a visual phenomenon but a material socially salient object which mobilizes and engages the full range of senses (Edwards 2014). Edwards' focus on the social uses of photography and the manner in which it mediates social relations, rejects according to Jae Emerling, the textual reductionism performed by Burgin in *Thinking Photography* (Emerling 2012). For Edwards, language is but one of many factors in the reception and use of photographs; thinking about photography becomes a privileged site for considering more generally the ways in which social relations are mediated by material culture.

In Geoffrey Batchen's 2004 essay *Forget Me Not, Photography and Remembrance* (2004), he discusses Victorian *cartes-de-visite* photographs and reads them, according to Welch and Long, in terms reminiscent of Burgin in 1982 - in particular how *cartes* offer revealing insights into the ways in which bourgeois society envisioned itself in the nineteenth-century. Between them, Edwards and Batchen demonstrate that 'the battle between different conceptions of photography – as a branch of art history or visual studies on the one hand, and as a complex social object on the other – continues to be fought some two decades later' (Welch and Long: 5).

It might appear that in the years since Victor Burgin's *Thinking Photography* that the radical politically inflected engagement with photography of which *Thinking Photography* was part, has been lost from sight (see Roberts 1998). However, just as this project endorses the political radicalism of the 1970s and 1980s, it will do so with the assertion that an understanding and awareness of micro social and political dynamics of the uses of photography will support a wider appreciation of the photograph and its political and social functions. Geoffrey Batchen comments that photographs are characterized by what he calls 'semiotic mobility', and thus require a subsequent and corresponding 'mobile historicization' (Batchen 2002:106).



Fig: 85 Penhaul Nurses at Penzance hospital 1952 print PHA.

In order to achieve both a 'small-scale' and political stance this study will aspire to maintain what Pierre Bourdieu referred to as 'epistemological vigilance' (Bourdieu 2001: 178), that is, a critical awareness of the discourses, interpretive fields and relationships of power governing a field of enquiry over time, a vigilance crucially important for photography if it is to maintain the hybridity and fluidity which has defined it so far and to avoid the sclerosis of critical orthodoxy (Emerling 2012). It is for this reason that this study argues that a psychoanalytic treatment is suited to photography - psychoanalytic discourse questions how objects of study are defined, how statements are made and subverts mechanisms of power (Žižek 2016).

Kelly Dennis comments 'it is useful to rethink the field of study as it becomes increasingly institutionalized and thus subject to dogmatism, cult value and embeddedness of any institutionalized field of study' (Dennis 2006: 114). This study argues for a psychoanalytical account not least because of the reflexivity inherent to the discourse. Hilde Van Gelder argues that reading the discourses of photography and psychoanalysis together and against

each other 'constitutes a productive strategy for generating new understandings or insights' (Gelder and Westgeest 2011: 215).

#### **1: 4 Making statements about photography**

*This section outlines the discursive fortunes of two seminal texts within the discipline of photography studies - Victor Burgin's Thinking Photography (1982) and Roland Barthes' Camera Lucida (trans 1981). The respective reading and reception of these texts exemplifies the manner in which the discourse of photography unfolds across the field and how it has come to be characterized as more feverish and troubling than definitive and ordered.*

Gillian Rose has summarised Foucault's definition of discourse as 'groups of statements which structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking' (cited in Stephen Bull 2010: 43). John Roberts has commented that what is now evident in the discourse outlined throughout Burgin's 1982 text *Thinking Photography*, is that other sets of statements were being made elsewhere with different discursive implications. Roberts argues that the semiology inherent to Burgin's 1980s theoretical outlook had been previously enunciated by French structuralist thinkers such as Roland Barthes in the 1950s. By the time Burgin published *Thinking Photography*, Barthes' discursive trajectory had changed course and had been stated, in almost poetic terms in Barthes' 1980 essay *Camera Lucida*. Barthes' 1950s appropriation of Saussurean structural linguistics adhered to a theoretical vocabulary parallel to Lacan's thinking at the time and which conceptual perspective would underpin Burgin's thinking in the 1980s. However, Barthes, ever the experimenter (Culler 2002), would then reinvigorate his ideas using Lacan's subsequent theoretical developments. Commentators such as Margaret Iversen read Barthes' 1980 text as centrally positioned within a Lacanian conceptual framework that privileges Lacan's notion of the real (Iversen 1994). While Barthes was incorporating new critical and conceptual perspectives into his discussion of photography, according to John Roberts, Burgin was still working through conceptual developments from the 1950s (Roberts 1998).

Victor Burgin had set out with his 1982 text *Thinking Photography* to revitalize and re-set both the understanding and analysis of the photographic image. The almost simultaneous appearance of Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, published in 1981, has complicated the retrospective assessment of Burgin's attempt to propose his own theoretical perspective of photographic theory.



Fig: 86 Penhaul Dog show Penzance 1952 print PHA.

The essential components of Victor Burgin's theoretical framework were unequivocally forwarded on the front cover of *Thinking Photography: Saussure's Cours de linguistique*; an edition of the journal *New Left Review* featuring Lacan's *Mirror Stage* essay, and some essays by Walter Benjamin. Burgin makes two things clear through this selection – he is putting forward a particular mode of analysis informed by semiotics, psychoanalysis and cultural materialism and in so doing is positioning photography studies as a political project. John Roberts identifies Burgin's statement as exemplifying the theoretical thread in British academia of the 1980s which placed photography as central to broader process of ideological critique and political intervention (Roberts 1998). As John Tagg later observed, Burgin's anthology was published at a time when it was felt that social and cultural revolution were not just possible, but that 'the first brick could be thrown by photographic theory' (Tagg 2009: 21).

Burgin's concerns and approach contrasted with existing modes of reception and interpretation which he saw as enmeshed in traditional art historical criticism and legitimized by the authority of longevity and association with cultural institutions like MoMa in New York<sup>34</sup>. Burgin's adopted theoretical positions and his explicit alignments with Marxist cultural materialism, placed him in clear opposition to conservative and influential critics like Szarkovski. There existed a palpable opposition between Burgin and the radical left margins of the British academic field and dominant art institutions figured by the left as august and conceptually conservative<sup>35</sup> (Roberts 1998). *Thinking Photography* represented an attempt to initiate a trend towards greater autonomy in the discipline and the appeal to theory was an essential part in this process (Emerling 2012). In drawing on

linguistics, psychoanalysis and cultural materialism, Burgin looked to relocate the authority to speak about photography in domains lying beyond the reach of existing art experts, 'connoisseurs' and what Burgin termed 'agents of legitimation' (cited in Roberts 1998: 106).

The attraction of 'theory' was in large part that it offered academic study within the arts, frameworks and methodologies that appeared 'scientific' in comparison to impressionistic and subjective responses - what Burgin called 'assertions of opinions and assumptions disguised as arguments' (Burgin 1982: 3).

In some ways *Thinking Photography* did set the agenda of photographic studies going forward. Its radical perspective was consolidated and developed during the 1980s and 1990s through the work of John Tagg, Martha Rosler, Abigail Solomon-Godeau and Burgin himself.<sup>36</sup>

Burgin was not just influenced by French structuralism, he drew heavily on the cultural materialist analysis which had characterized the writing of Walter Benjamin. Benjamin's work endows Burgin's project with Left leaning provenance and a theoretical template. In his 1934 essay, *Author as Producer*, Benjamin had stated that it was the role of the intellectual to find innovative ways to subject the dominant social order and its cultural production to critical scrutiny (Benjamin 1934). For both Benjamin and Burgin, photography possessed revolutionary potential and they read this potential as being deliberately enabled and enacted by the practitioner producer (Burgin 1986).

*Thinking Photography* and *Camera Lucida* each became significant as two influential interventions into the disciplines of photography and visual studies. One was a contribution to a discipline in formation, the other a series of reflections on the medium which has become one of the sacred texts of that discipline (Bull 2010). In *Thinking Photography*, Victor Burgin brings to the fore Barthes' ideas on semiotics and cultural criticism from the 1950s and 1960s just at the moment when Barthes himself takes leave from such 'scientific' approaches to the photographic image. What emerges from these two authors are quite different, if not competing, theoretical interpretive paradigms (Emerling 2012). Burgin's concern is directed towards how an image works in its social context and about unmasking the ideological and political power of images by drawing on what Paul Ricoeur called 'the hermeneutics of suspicion' (Ricoeur 1975: 39). In the early 1980s Barthes was looking ostensibly to take photographs out of the realm of the social, the political, and the ideological. In terms of Barthes' intellectual trajectory, in *The Pleasure of the Text* he had

been initially 'euphoric' about a possible 'scientific' approach (1975: 129) but seven years later the opening pages of *Camera Lucida* testify to a disappointment and disillusion with the discourses of the human sciences and in particular semiotics and sociology; Barthes talks about his 'desperate resistance to any reductive system' (1981: 8). Whereas in previous essays, for example *Mythologies* (1954) and *The Rhetoric of the Image* (1964), Barthes had undertaken to demystify the image, twenty years later he appears to be actively encouraging a mystified relation to the photographic image, to validate responses based in emotion and affect. Burgin and theoretical fellow travellers like John Tagg, sought to assert precisely the paradigms and discourses which Barthes himself had come to see as inadequate to the task of engaging with the photographic image.

In his 1986 text *The End of Art Theory* Burgin takes issue with what he perceived as the turn to phenomenology that for him defined *Camera Lucida*. Barthes' attempts to explore the affective nature of the photograph are particularly problematic for Burgin in that it entails putting to one side the insights of psychoanalysis.<sup>37</sup> For Burgin, the domain of psychoanalysis is where some of the most pertinent insights for photography theory are to be found; psychoanalysis is a 'body of research crucial to photography theory' (Burgin 1986: 88). When the detail is examined, Burgin and Barthes in the early 1980s are theoretical poles apart. As will be shown in Chapter 4 of this study, less than a decade later commentators such as British critic Margaret Iversen would insist that Barthes' text *Camera Lucida* was constituted by its positioning within Lacanian conceptual frameworks that privileged the notion of the real, a notion conspicuously absent from Burgin's analysis (Iversen 1994).



Fig: 87 Penhaul Model of trawler The Cornishman Jan 1956 Newlyn PHA.

John Tagg's response to *Camera Lucida* was made clear in the opening pages of *The Burden of Representation* (1988). Barthes' reassertion of a realist position and his opinion of

photography as 'magical' leads Tagg to archly declare that what photography needs is 'a history not an alchemy' (1988: 3). Tagg's rhetorical strategy deploys the voice of science; he states that emotional responses to photography should no longer have a place in a discipline which calls on increasingly sophisticated theoretical frameworks for its authority. According to Welch and Long, of the two competing paradigms, one which locates thinking about photography in the present and political and the other which situates that thinking more in the realm of the personal and the past, it is the latter paradigm 'which has set the critical agenda and gained the most critical currency' (Welch and Long 2009: 17). Welch and Long consider that a possible reason for the subsequent seeming sovereignty of Barthes' text is that it allows a whole series of critical tropes to crystallize: memory, trauma, death, the familial - tropes which began to dominate academia through the late 1980s and 1990s.<sup>38</sup>

The discursive entanglements that have characterized the relations and subsequent fortunes of Barthes' and Burgin's texts in many ways exemplify the dynamics and determinations exerted by discourse across a discursive field. Discourse unfolds and develops in its own time and own direction. Indeed, this study follows a particular discursive thread as it unravels in its own specific direction and time. This study takes as its specific conceptual object of interest, the Lacanian notion of the real, a notion that follows an uncertain path across the discursive field, appearing and disappearing in uncertain and precarious fashion until it erupts into critical prominence within Barthes' late text, *Camera Lucida* (Iversen 1994) and into more general critical awareness with the proselytism of Slavoy Žižek in the late 1990s.

In the years since *Thinking Photography* was published the study of photography today has developed to encompass a proliferation of approaches and paradigms, indeed a variety of photographs with which these ideas engage. Photography may not have thrown the first brick in the revolution, but it continues to scrutinize and confront the complex ways in which the photographic image functions in our societies (Emerling 2012), and it is this scrutiny that this study of Harry Penhaul attempts to contribute. The diverse nature of the discipline allows a broad spectrum of critical methodologies to be brought to bear and it is within this broad sweep of methodological possibility that this study's account and use of a psychoanalytical approach finds its place.



Fig: 88 Penhaul The Cornishman September 1953 PHA.

## Part 2: Psychoanalysis: from Freudian foundations

Geoffrey Batchen has commented that ‘never neutral, the photograph always finds itself attached to a discourse, or more accurately, a cacophony of competing discourses’ (Batchen 1997: 9). This study examines what part the discourse of psychoanalysis has played in this ‘cacophony’. Perhaps it should not be surprising that photography and psychoanalysis, as products of Enlightenment, as ‘epochal events of Modernity’ (Benjamin 1934), should have found themselves with mutual concerns, desires and moments of discursive congruence.

When Jeff Wall noted that there were two prominent myths regarding photography, one that it tells the truth and the other that it doesn’t (cited in Edwards 2006), he was re-articulating a discussion that has been underway since photography’s inception. Steve Edwards (2006) claims that to engage in photography’s ongoing ontological debates that circulate around indexicality and discourse is to accept and affirm a constitutive tension between the two myths to which Wall refers. Jeff Wall’s comment in a sense outlines the dialectic that Batchen identifies as being constitutive of the discourse of photography: is an image mediated by culture or does it present an unmediated, ‘natural’ account of reality? The following section of this chapter will continue this study’s presentation of a particular psychoanalytic conceptual landscape, an account that will continue to unfold across the study’s remaining chapters. Explanations of human behaviour will be situated only as they can be extended to cultural analysis. A discursive account can never aspire, almost by definition, to be in any way, determinative and this study follows an admittedly selective and reductive route. However, the conceptual pathway pursued across the unfolding

Lacanian landscape is one I have found most meaningful and useful within the current discussion. There is no definitive conceptual or methodological route-map for the discourse of psychoanalysis – its history of schism and division (Gay 1988, Roudinesco 2005) testifies to its apparent inherent resistance to the imposition of any definitive and determining discursive boundaries.

The psychoanalytical conceptual landscape that this study elaborates, figures itself within a comparable conceptual dynamic to that which has been identified as underpinning much of the discourse of photography, that is, the photograph's relation to nature and culture (Batchen 1997). The constituting dialectic that is read as at the heart of psychoanalysis is figured as a determining relation between the world constituted through language, mediated by culture and society, and the world before language, before culture, before any mediation. Just as Geoffrey Batchen locates his conceptual account of photography in the historical ground of its inception, so too will this study examine psychoanalysis's Freudian foundations for evidence of its subsequent conceptual development and discursive unfolding. This section will begin this scrutiny by asking the question what exactly is the field of psychoanalysis that it can be read in any terms that can be said to adhere to the paradigm of photography?

## **2: 1 The field of psychoanalysis**

*The following section, in asking the question what is the nature and extent of the field of psychoanalysis, finds that it is characterized not least by its central concern with the discursive zone that emerges from the overlap between the fields of the somatic and the psyche. Psychoanalysis is found to circulate with and encroach on many other discourses and disciplines and writers like Joan Copjec insist that we should be not just follow desire but that we should be literate in, and recognize, desire.*

Having the discursive option of pursuing a particularized conceptual path through the field of psychoanalysis reflects in part that although it would seem psychoanalysis has become well established as an institutionalized discipline since its inception by Freud a century or so ago, as Alenka Zupancic explains, 'the more the paradigm of psychoanalysis is inspected, the less clear what the field of psychoanalysis actually is' (Zupancic 2008: 6).

From its very beginnings psychoanalysis was surrounded by debates as to whether its scope lay more in the realm of the natural sciences or in the realm of philosophy and the cultural sciences (Milner and Browitt 2006: 61). Freud was criticised for both his biologism

and scientism but also his cultural relativism and speculation that went beyond clinical circumstance (Gay 1988). Although such debates are still in circulation, a major dimension to Freud's discovery was precisely the overlapping of the two realms of the psyche and the somatic. As Alenka Zupancic explains: 'If there is any meaningful general way of describing the object of psychoanalysis, it might be precisely this – the object of psychoanalysis is the zone where the two realms overlap' (Zupancic 2008: 7). This overlapping is not simply that of two well established entities, body and mind, but an intersection which is generative of both sides that overlap in it.



Fig: 89 Penhaul Seaweed collection 1955 print PHA.

The problem of what exactly is the proper field of psychoanalysis also concerns the way psychoanalysis often seems to move discursively around and to encroach on all kinds of different disciplines: science, religion, art, philosophy. Certainly, psychoanalysis has refused to keep within the boundaries of clinical therapeutic practice. This objection has been most frequently levelled at Jacques Lacan. In his seminar *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, given in 1959-60, Lacan had asserted that psychoanalysis is not about personal mental well-being; psychoanalysts were not there to be 'the guarantors of the bourgeois dream' (Lacan 2008: 72). Such a psychoanalytic perspective has an intrinsically social, objective and critical dimension. Lacanian psychoanalysis has always insisted that its theoretical scope included not just the development of its own theory of the subject, but also of truth, knowledge and social links. Joan Copjec comments that Lacan never lost sight of the fact that any true conceptualization is intrinsically universalistic, and that any individual psychoanalytic understanding had implications for how the social and cultural fields were thought (Copjec 2004: 87).<sup>39</sup>

Despite his persistent claim that psychoanalysis is not philosophy, Lacan was constantly developing his theory in a dialogue with philosophy (Roudinesco 2005). Samo Tomsic comments that it is precisely on account of his highly developed and structured conceptual proposals that Lacan is responsible for the fact that psychoanalysis has become very much involved in and present on the stage of many contemporary philosophical debates (Tomsic 2016: 146-163).

This study will pay attention to a specific conceptual route that has lain at the very heart of the psychoanalytic paradigm since the inception of the fledgling discipline in the last years of the nineteenth century - that is, the unconscious and its mobilizing determination in the human subject which Freud first named as unconscious desire (Freud 1900). This study will follow desire across the discursive folds of the paradigm of psychoanalysis; from its Freudian foundations to its central position within the Lacanian conceptual landscape. Psychoanalysis asserts that the subject's relations to society and culture have complex determinations, determinations which are precarious and unstable (Sharpe and Faulkner 2008). Joan Copjec argues that to begin to take these determinations into account, 'we have to follow desire, we have to be able to read desire, above all, we have to be literate in desire' (Copjec 1994: 7).



Fig: 90 Penhaul Helston Flora Day The Cornishman May 1954 PHA.

## 2: 2 On following unconscious desire

*This following section locates at its Freudian foundations a radical inconsistency within the psychoanalytic discourse that propels it continually towards new perspectives and frameworks of understanding, not just of the psyche, but of the subject's contingent relation to and within society and culture.*

The term 'unconscious' was first used in a neurological context by the French psychologist Pierre Janet in 1889. Freud and erstwhile collaborator Josef Breuer cite the term in their 1895 paper *Studies on Hysteria* though from the outset their usage, to describe repressed thoughts, is far more dynamic than Janet's. Peter Gay (1988) records that Freud had become particularly interested in hysteria as a neurological symptom during a sabbatical placement at the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris during 1885-6. It was during the time at Salpêtrière that Freud witnessed for the first time the clinical use of hypnosis by Jean Martin Charcot. Results of the resulting hypnotically induced hysteria were extensively photographed for Charcot:



Fig: 91 photograph of hysteria Salpêtrière hospital 1886. [From Marien 2010: 235].

For Freud and Breuer the unconscious was not just a name for a region of the mind, but rather the product of conflicting forces (Freud 1895). From the very outset of psychoanalysis, Freud reads hysteria as caused by some form of psychological trauma which the mind is unable to process and discharge its affect. Trauma is therefore conceptually present as a key structuring notion at the conceptual foundation of psychoanalysis. So too however, is the characteristic for its effects to be elaborately displaced (Easthope 1999: 7). At the time of the publication of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900, Freud saw the unconscious in terms of resulting from a repression it was the task of psychoanalysis to undo.

Freud's conceptual ideas were subject to a process of continual revision and development over a sustained period of years that spanned several decades. As Tony Thwaites (2007) explains, from its conceptual beginnings, the discourse of psychoanalysis presents itself in terms of hypotheses, as a range of ideas positioned as work in progress and subject to revision. The conceptual trajectory of Freudian hypotheses reflects a continual rethinking

and repositioning that has typified its subsequent discursive history and particularly its development through the thinking of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan who dominated the conceptual advancement of the discipline in post-war years. The notion of the unconscious within the paradigm of psychoanalysis exemplifies how discursive concepts unfold, move and are re-articulated across a discursive field.

Freud's customary conceptual methodology was therefore to posit a particular hypothesis and then retrospectively observe its effects on a given range of symptoms. In his 1915 paper *The Unconscious*, Freud claims 'incontrovertible proof' for his hypothesis of the unconscious (Freud 1915: 167). Such a hypothesis once made, can result in all sorts of senseless data and events suddenly becoming of a theoretical piece in what Freud calls a chain of reconstruction. Freud continually revises his ideas, adding material, critiquing earlier views and placing concepts into different frameworks. This controvertibility is what Freud frequently claims gives his working hypotheses their scientificity. The reason for taking a hypothesis seriously is that everything works *as if* it were true – without the thesis there would be just scattered effects. With a hypothesis, events fall into place, or rather, have a place to fall into (Storr 2001). From the earliest years Freud's conceptual practice is characterized by his procedure of establishing foundational conceptual metaphors which are then deployed to organize and recognise surrounding conceptual fields (Storr 2001). Hypotheses are tested by observing if the psyche behaves as if the conceptual idea were true. In later chapters it will be shown how Lacan similarly uses the conceptual device of the structuring metaphor to realize his discursive developments and in particular his notion of the realm of the real.



Fig: 92 Penhaul Traffic lights Penzance 1951 print PHA.

During the course of almost half a century of writing about psychoanalysis, Freud posits many further hypotheses about the unconscious. As Freud stated in his 1915 essay *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes*, within each schema 'a number of views is presented and a degree of uncertainty and indecision are constitutive of the elaboration of any working hypothesis' (Freud 1915b: 117). Freud's first major discussion of the unconscious was elaborated in his 1900 text *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and where in chapter seven he explicitly states that such is the nature of any hypothesis that it is always already subject to ongoing refinement: 'to approach the same problem from another angle' (Freud 1900: 511). By 1915, Freud's revised notion of the psyche allowed him to position the conscious and unconscious in terms of agencies which were in a dynamic and conflictual relation. Freud was not concerned to prove empirically his hypotheses but rather to weave a rigorous web of inference connecting otherwise meaningless phenomena. Such a methodology allowed Freud to substantiate concepts such as condensation and displacement as mechanisms of the unconscious (Freud 1916).

In 1920 Freud published his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and in which he detailed his theory of the reality principle in which the notion worked in the manner of a wager in which the deferral of pleasure was rewarded (Storr 2001). The reality principle emerges as a key concept in psychoanalysis not least in that it can be seen to divide the psyche radically from itself (Sharpe and Faulkner 2008). It installs the unpredictability of the external world in the very midst of the internal world of the psyche, like a foreign body at its very heart. As Tony Thwaites explains: 'with the reality principle, the boundaries between inside and outside are themselves no longer clear' (Thwaites 2007: 26).

Throughout Freud's writing, his elaboration of the psyche is invariably figured in terms of its susceptibility to continual invasion by contingency. Throughout the paradigm of psychoanalysis, key elements such as dream-work and the symptom, are positioned as subject to the contingencies, the vicissitudes and uncertainties of daily life. Freud's revised conception of psychoanalysis no longer permits a simple division between inner and outer, between those structures which belong to the psyche and those which are part of the social world. Thwaites argues 'If trauma is the name for the wound caused when the outer invades the inner, then trauma is always already at the heart of the psyche' (Thwaites 2007: 28). The psychic agency that Freud names the unconscious is imagined as an immense foreign territory, a landscape whose logic Freud worked to unravel throughout the rest of his career.



Fig: 93 Penhaul End of sweet rationing Penzance Feb 1953 print PHA.

Freud wrote several texts during the course of the First World War period including *The Unconscious* (1915), *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes* (1915) and *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917). Sharpe and Faulkner note that despite the exhaustive work entailed in these texts, Freud appears to be struggling to hold the psychoanalytic enterprise conceptually together (Sharpe and Faulkner 2008). What emerges is a portrayal of the psyche as improvisatory, making use of whatever is at hand to construct symptoms or dreams, to get around repression, to manage affect. The unconscious is an experience of gaps and inconsistencies, not bound by sequential logic. It happily incorporates contradiction. Everything appears poised in a delicately chaotic system. Freud's initial topography that sees a great split between consciousness and the unconscious comes to look increasingly inadequate and too simple for the phenomena it has to explain. Unconscious and conscious were adequate descriptive terms but did not function as explanations of psychic mechanisms. In the 1920s Freud abandons the view of the unconscious as a system in its own right (Easthope 1999). Beginning in 1923 with *The Ego and the Id*, Freud proposed a replacement tripartite topography. The second topography recognises the insistence of the ego and its mediating role as it juggles often conflicting and incommensurable demands of the other parts of the psyche and of the external world and of the unforeseen and unforeseeable events the psyche has no option but to deal with (Sharpe and Faulkner 2008). Whereas the ego was for Freud that part of the psyche most directly in contact with the external world, the id, in contrast was the most unconscious part of the psyche, an internal foreign territory quite out of conscious control – and full of unquenchable and relentless drives. In Freud's second topography, boundaries between psychic domains were blurred.

The second topography also introduced a further hypothetical agency into the economy of the psyche which Freud referred to as the superego. The superego performed both a demanding role and also one of prohibition which drew the subject into a never-ending spiral of inadequate and conflicting identifications (Easthope 1999: 37). Each of the agencies in the second topography is in some way split and divided against itself. Freud places at the heart of the subject an irreducible dissension – an endless negotiation of conflicting demands from the psyche and also the world itself, ‘The ego is hemmed in ... and it reacts by generating anxiety ... and struggles to master its task of bringing about harmony’ (Freud 1975e: 77).

Freud’s first model of the psyche which posited a structure of the two agencies of the conscious and unconscious and a censoring mechanism between them, can be described as a ‘homuncular’ or circular model, that is, one in which terms are ‘explicated only within their own terms’ (Thwaites 2007; 29). With his second topography Freud had begun to apply what he called a metapsychology which looked to explain phenomena in *a priori* terms. Freud’s metapsychology rummages through and borrows from a disparate range of other bodies of knowledge – from physics and fluid mechanics, to biology and electromagnetism. Freud engages in a description of the ego, which is no longer master of its own house, in terms that are *inhuman*. The attraction of such terms was the authority they brought in their very distance from those used in the humanities (Sharpe and Faulkner).

However, Freud’s metapsychology was incomplete and inconsistent, he frequently reverts back to using homuncular arguments to underpin hypotheses.



Fig: 94 Penhaul Fishermen Newlyn 1950 print PHA.

Freud is inconsistent. But for some commentators like Tony Thwaites such inconsistency has radical implications. Peter Gay (1988) notes that across the broad range of his writing, Freud can be seen to make profound statements about the possibilities of the human subject in one instant and then talk in platitudes and commonplaces the next. Freud introduces hypotheses as little more than speculation but which are subsequently authenticated by no other means than repetition and longevity within the discourse. Tony Thwaites observes that Freud's metapsychology is evidently incomplete and inconsistent but he argues that these factors should be seen as enabling limits not indicators of the invalidity of the Freudian psychoanalytic enterprise. Thwaites argues that such inconsistency and incompleteness are central to the entire Freudian project. To explain, Thwaites first points out that as Freud's corpus of work is produced over four decades his ideas are subject to change over such a long period of revision; for Freud, the very business of science is to raise and test new hypotheses. Thwaites then goes on to argue a more substantively radical point when he insists that the inherent inconsistency shown by Freud is 'perfectly consistent with and even a necessary conclusion from his very premises. Freud is, after all, pointing out how the data of consciousness are always necessarily inconsistent' (Thwaites 2007: 48). The knowledge produced by Freud is predicated on inconsistency. As Thwaites explains: 'the psyche and all it does, including its knowing, and in all the concreteness of its effects, are made possible only through the radical inconsistency at its heart' (Thwaites 2007: 49).<sup>40</sup> Thwaites appears to insist here that just as the ego can never be master of its own house, nor can psychoanalysis.

The last of Freud's major texts was *Moses and Monotheism* which was written during the politically turbulent years leading up to its publication in 1939. The text can be read as indicating that metapsychological description is and must be itself inconsistent. Again Tony Thwaites argues that such inconsistency, far from being a disabling weakness, 'is the very thing that opens up new and quite radical possibilities' (Thwaites 2007: 50). Inconsistency here is read as being the very condition of the subject and that this condition is what opens out new and radical possibilities for knowledge. In the next chapter, some of the implications of this positioning will be explored; in particular it will be argued that psychoanalytic discourse and its radical positioning of the subject, opens up a terrain of unmapped alterity, a realm that Jacques Lacan named the real. It is this realm of the real that this study will follow as it exerts its effects and determinations.

### **2: 3 Jacques Lacan and Surrealist associations**

*Lacan's pre-war associations with the Surrealist movement can be seen to inform much of his later conceptual development both in terms of the identity of the subject and notions concerning the missed encounter with what Lacan later came to call the realm of the real.*

The trajectory and method of the conceptual foundations to Freud's theoretical enterprise of the paradigm of psychoanalysis have been the focus of much of the subsequent discursive development of the discipline. This is certainly true of the work of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan who in the post-war years radically reread many of the basic precepts that had underpinned the Freudian psychoanalytic project. While the nature of Lacan's rereading of Freud through the structural linguistics of Levi-Strauss and Saussure, will be discussed in the next chapter, it is Lacan's association with the Surrealists during the 1930s that is the concern of this following section. It is in Lacan's associations with the surrealists Salvador Dali and Andre Breton that can be found the genesis of key conceptual areas that would emerge into prominence later in Lacan's discursive development (Iversen 2007).

Lacan had taken up the study of medicine in 1920 and specialized in psychiatry from 1926 at the St Ann hospital in Paris where he became increasingly occupied with the neurological symptoms of paranoid psychosis. During his time as a student Lacan had also taken an active interest in the arts and was closely associated with the several figures from the Surrealist movement during the late 1920s and early 1930s (Roudinesco 2005). The pre-war decade proved to be a particularly fertile period for exchanges between the Surrealists Salvador Dali, Andre Breton and the newly qualified psychiatrist. While Dali was Lacan's main surrealist interlocutor, particularly when both Lacan and Dali were concerned in the 1920s with examining issues around paranoia, Andre Breton became increasingly conceptually important to Lacan as he later came to formulate his notion of the missed encounter with the real. Margaret Iversen notes that Lacan's pre-war associations with the Surrealists can be seen as informing his later conceptual development: 'even in the 1960s Lacan was still rethinking psychoanalysis in terms of his initial encounters with the Surrealists in the 1930s' (Iversen 2007: 126).



Fig:95 Penhaul January daffodils 1954 print PHA.

Both Lacan and Dali shared an interest in paranoia, interests that brought together both clinical and artistic dimensions. Lacan's involvement with paranoia was initially clinical but he became aware of Dali's fascination with the relation of paranoid psychosis and art through material Dali had written for the Surrealist publication *Minotaure*. Lacan had also published an article in the journal in 1933 on the subject of style in paranoiac painting. The same edition featured an account by Dali of his 'paranoiac-critical' analysis of Millet's *Angelus*, an account which suggested an Oedipal and Freudian influenced reading of the painting. Dali had read Lacan's 1932 doctoral dissertation on paranoia and had paid tribute to it in the *Minotaure*. For both Lacan and Dali, the symptoms of paranoiacs bore close relation to the dynamics and results of imaginative creativity (Iversen 2007). Lacan's interest in paranoia and his attendance at Alexandre Kojève's seminal lectures on Hegelian dialectics, can be seen as contributing to Lacan's later elaboration of a theory of the ego as essentially paranoiac and alienated through the misrecognition of self-image (Roudinesco 2005).



Fig:96 Penhaul Tree Inspector The Cornishman 1955 PHA.

Lacan was to bring together his ideas on the subject's relation to the misrecognition of self-identification in his 'Mirror Stage' paper of 1936. This essay was much revised before being re-published in the post-war period (1949) and has itself become a mainstay of much film and critical theory during the 1970s and 1980s when it was widely appropriated and adapted to explain the manner in which images can work to enhance an illusory sense of personal autonomy and visual mastery. Iversen notes that the appropriations of Lacan at this time tended to ignore just how ambivalent Lacan's conception of the mirrored ego was. For Lacan, the ego could be both lucid and affirmative but also subversively threatening.

Lacan was also associated with another celebrated Surrealist, Andre Breton. It was Breton's idea of the chance encounter that can be seen as instrumental in Lacan's post-war notion of the 'missed encounter'. As Breton made clear in his novel *Mad Love*, the Bretonian encounter was characterized by its fortuitous and accidental nature: 'It is really as if I had been lost and they had come to give me news about myself' (Breton 1937: 8). In later years Lacan was to describe his clinical practice in similar fashion comparing himself to Picasso who had famously stated 'I do not seek, I find' (Lacan 1977: 7). Breton's surrealist project concerned the paradoxical search for something that can only be encountered by chance, what Breton called the *trouvaille*, the lucky find. For Breton, such an encounter might be good or bad, that is, 'delightful' or 'unnerving' (cited in Iversen 2007: 25), but what set it apart was its baffling fascination and unexpectedness. By implication, an encounter cannot be contrived, indeed, Lacan insists that the encounter is always already missed. Undoubtedly Lacan's intellectual baggage was as heavy as it was voluminous including as it does references to Hegel, Heidegger, Saussure, Merleau-Ponty, Levi-Strauss *et al.* However, it is possible to read many of Lacan's ideas as being rooted in his early surrealist associations. For example, in Seminar XI Lacan refers to the unconscious in terms of la *trouvaille* (Lacan 1998: 25). Lacan's language draws on Breton's description of the chance encounter: 'as soon as it is presented, this discovery becomes a rediscovery and, furthermore, it is always ready to steal away again, thus establishing the dimension of loss' (Lacan 1998: 26). Lacan here stresses the dimension of loss inherent to the *trouvaille*. Margaret Iversen argues that Lacan's phantasmatic lost object, *objet a*, is modelled on Breton's *trouvaille* (Iversen 2007: 65).

If Lacan formulated his idea of the object of desire, *objet a*, with Breton's *trouvaille* in mind, then it is likely that he also borrowed the surrealist chance encounter for his

conception of what he termed 'la rencontre manquee'. Margaret Cohen, in her 1993 text *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of the Surrealist Revolution*, argues that Lacan recasts Freud's conception of trauma in terms of the surrealist encounter. Lacan himself refers to 'the real as encounter – the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter, first presented in history of psychoanalysis, as trauma' (Lacan 1998: 55).



Fig: 97 Penhaul Award ceremony The Cornishman March 1956 print PHA.

Lacan conceptualizes the missed encounter in various ways. It is missed because it is impossible – the object of desire, *objet a*, is already absent; the encounter can only reveal a fundamental resulting lack. The encounter is also missed because when it does occur, it is not understood. By the time the subject has hauled into understanding, into recognition, the substance of what has occurred, the moment has gone. In Chapter 4 of this study the close associations of the missed encounter to the Lacanian real will be further examined.

The association between Lacan and the Surrealists that characterized Lacan's conceptual development during the 1930s continued to play itself out through the trajectory Lacan's subsequent discursive development in the post-war years. The two following chapters of this study will, in general terms, turn their attention to the two such surrealistically inflected notions that have featured in this section: Chapter 3 will focus on the mirror stage and the dialectic of self and Other, while Chapter 4 will examine the Lacanian notion of the realm of the real.

### Chapter 3 An austere cultural politics and the tragedy of the subject

#### Introduction

With the end of the war Harry Penhaul returned to West Penwith in 1945 and recommenced his previous career as a freelance press journalist. His work for local news outlets such as *The Cornishman* weekly newspaper enabled Penhaul to photograph a privileged account of Cornish community as it negotiated its position within the uncertainties and imperatives of change that pressed hard on the social, economic and political realities of post-war life (Payton 1993). During the war *The Cornishman* had continued to record and reflect the impact of world events on the community of West Penwith. Perhaps most poignantly in the last years of the war *The Cornishman* had begun to present, on page ten, dedications to local servicemen killed or missing in action and which featured a short obituary and portrait photograph of the individual. By the last year of the war, the entirety of page ten could be filled with tributes to those local men and women.

Through the post-war decade *The Cornishman* followed the Cornish community as the social and economic privations of austerity gradually give way to 'new values and aspirations inscribed in an encompassing Modernity' (Marwick 2003: 48). By the 1950s Harry Penhaul was established as the main freelance photographer used by *The Cornishman*, so it is Penhaul's images that increasingly occupy the pages of the local newspaper. Penhaul's photographs reflect the broad sweep of *The Cornishman's* coverage. While articles and editorials articulate concerns and uncertainties across a wide spectrum of issues from housing to job insecurity, from fashion to new technology, Penhaul's photographs illustrate and record these issues and events. In its close relation to the sea and the land, Cornish community had always been marked by uncertainty, had always been at the mercy of events beyond its control – extreme weather, vagaries in the dependence of raw materials such as fish stocks, mining deposits and so on (Ronald Perry cited in Payton 1993:64). The traumas of war and the continuing strain and upheavals of its aftermath merely added further layers of uncertainty to an inherent contingency. The main content of the Penhaul archive now housed at Penlee House Museum in Penzance, contains material almost exclusively from the 1950s, the period when Penhaul's freelance photography business had become successfully established at the heart of the West Penwith community. Commentators such as David Kynaston (2007) and Philip Payton

(1993) have characterized the 1950s as a decade of uncertainty, of residual austerity and post-war trauma, of cultural and social change, but this despondent outlook is not born out by the portrayal given by Penhaul, whose photographs invariably depict scenes that would seem to belie such a gloomy prognoses.



*Fig: 99 Penhaul Choir singing 1952 print PHA.*

This disparity and disjunction between harsh reality and incongruously cheerful presentation opens up a route for applying a psychoanalytic methodology – it is argued that a psychoanalytic methodology has a particular critical purchase on such disparity and discrepancy. As Victor Burgin stated ‘photography theory must take account of the subject as the complex totality of its determinations are nuanced and constrained in their passage through and across photographs’ (Burgin 1982: 153). This study argues that to perceive and critically consider Penhaul’s photographs of Cornish community in new ways, the social and cultural landscape of the subject should be viewed through a Lacanian lens. It will be argued that psychoanalysis has the language and conceptual frameworks to give a critically useful account of a period marked by uncertainty and inflected with trauma.

This chapter will therefore set about calibrating this psychoanalytic lens and will do so by employing a Lacanian account of the subject and subjectivity. The Lacanian topography that will come into focus might at first seem at odds with the at times lyrical representations of Cornwall that figure in many of Penhaul’s images - as Terry Eagleton comments of the psychoanalytic panorama ‘the view is hideous’ (Eagleton 2003: 199). From its Freudian foundations, the purview of the psychoanalytic paradigm has been one of relentless pessimism tinged with glimmers of optimism (Easthope 1999). As Eagleton explains: ‘For Freud, we are shaped into human subjects only by a shattering repression of much that went into our making. It is this crippling forgetfulness that allows us to thrive’

(Eagleton 2003: 197). If Freud's account of the subject is at best bleak, the view does not improve with Lacan's summation of social reality as 'a fantasy ridden lie ... encumbered by misrecognition and self-interest' (Eagleton 2003: 197).

This study will argue that in the face of such ostensible gloom, a psychoanalytic account provides a purposeful and productive critical perspective. For example, in its account of the desire which is posited as unconsciously mobilizing the subject's thoughts and actions, desire is regarded as an affliction that was lying in wait for the human subject from the outset. Indeed, according to Eagleton 'it is what makes us human, the fissure in our being which props up who we are' (Eagleton 2003: 198). Psychoanalysis addresses what Freud referred to as the 'foreign body inside us' (Freud 1915: 217). Behind its apparently bleak account of the human subject, psychoanalysis insists on an ethical and affirmative stance. This chapter will discuss the positive position Lacan assumes in Seminar 7 with regard to an ethics of psychoanalysis – that our singular subjectivity is all we have and instead of hiding its flawed reality behind fantasmal lies, we should take its imperfections into account and move forward with some measure of reflexivity (Sharpe and Faulkner 2008). In the next chapter, Lacan's depiction of the subject's relation to culture will also provide a further countervailing but ultimately sanguine account of the psychoanalytical subject.



*Fig: 100 Penhaul Interview 1954 print PHA.*

Psychoanalysis suggests that there is metaphorical light at the end of the tunnel as it brings into focus elements of a conceptual landscape not apparent within other critical perspectives. Lacan's conceptual landscape describes a topography consisting of three elements. While this study is particularly interested in the element Lacan called the real, this realm of the real is inseparable from the other constituting elements of the imaginary and the symbolic, which together with the real make up Lacan's tripartite topography. In order to consider the real, we need to discuss the imaginary and the symbolic and this

dialogue will constitute an initial interrogation of the dialectical relation between the subject and the specular. However, the logic of this discussion will continually return the interrogation of the visual to the third term in Lacan's topography, that of the real. It will become apparent that not only is the real never far away, the real conceptually comes increasingly into focus as being constitutive of and as always already haunting the elements of the imaginary and symbolic.

The view through the Lacanian lens may be at times harsh in its portrayal of human nature, but the perspective takes on renewed significance through the filter of the real. While Chapters 4 and 5 will discuss in more detail the implications and effects of the real for the visual field and photography in particular, this following chapter will piece together the constituting conceptual structures that underpin the Lacanian account of the subject's relation to the scopic field. As Eagleton comments, psychoanalytic categories might appear abstruse, but the purpose of any enquiry is that such categories should be 'brought home to everyday ... life' (Eagleton 2003: 202).

This chapter will therefore proceed in two parts. The first part will examine under the rubrics of the imaginary and symbolic, the conceptual and topographical structure Lacan employs to discuss the relation of the subject to the visual field. The second part of this chapter will discuss implications for the subject of its relation to photography and the visual field.

## **Part 1 A Lacanian conceptual landscape**

### **1: 1 The Lacanian imaginary**

*This section will follow Lacan's elaboration of a dialectical model of the subject that associates the phenomenological distinction between subject and ego with psychoanalysis's view of the role of images and the constructed nature of the self. Lacan conceptualizes a model of the subject as caught up in a constitutive but alienating and conflictual dialectic with imaginary identity and the other. The subject's constituting misrecognition takes its form from the organizing and inaugurating properties of the image and this dynamic is posited as becoming the model for all future identifications. Constituted from the other, the subject emerges as alienated to itself.*

Lacan's first significant innovation in the field of psychoanalysis took place in 1936. Aged 35, practicing as a psychiatrist and still in psychoanalytic training, Lacan presented a paper to the International Psychoanalytical Congress at Marienbad entitled 'The Mirror Stage'.

Thirteen years elapsed between this initial formulation of ideas and Lacan's extensively revised paper of 1949, first published in the 1966 edition of *Ecrits* and in English translation two years later (*New Left Review* 1968 51: 63-77). In the post-war years the mirror stage formed a constant point of reference throughout Lacan's work as he took it up and reworked it in various different contexts (Macey 1988). Ostensibly concerned with the formation of the ego through identification with an image of the self, the ever-increasing complexity of the mirror stage paradigm came to embrace ideas to do with human self-consciousness, aggressivity, narcissism and the subject's fascination with images.



Fig: 101 Penhaul Flower packing January 1948 print PHA.

Drawing on a wide range of influences the post-war iteration of the mirror stage amounted to a fundamental reconceptualization of Freud's notion of the ego (Homer 2005). It is possible to identify several strands of thinking being incorporated within the mirror stage, not least the Hegelian phenomenology of Kojève, the work on mirroring by psychologist Henri Wallon and that on animal behaviour by ethnologist Roger Callois (Jay 1994). From the 1930s until the early 1950s French philosophy had been strongly influenced by phenomenology<sup>41</sup> and Lacan was one of many intellectuals whose thinking was determined to some extent during the inter-war years by the ideas of phenomenologist Jean-Paul Sartre (Dossé 1997).

Sartre's distinction between subject and ego (Sartre 1943) paved the way for Lacan's own formulation of the relationship between subject and ego in the mirror stage, while the Sartrean notions of 'ex-sistence' and 'nothingness' can be seen to recur throughout Lacan's work (Jay 1994). Roudinesco notes that although Lacan instinctively drew on a wide range of influences he always transformed concepts into a psychoanalytic register (Roudinesco 2005). As Bruce Fink argues, in distinguishing the ego from the subject Lacan was able to further elaborate a conception of subjectivity as divided or 'alienated' (Fink 1997: 44).

Elizabeth Roudinesco (2005) observes that between the initial presentation of the mirror stage at Marienbad and its publication in 1949, Lacan's conceptual theorizing was preoccupied with issues that concerned the nature of consciousness and self-consciousness, that is, what it was that enabled individuals to become aware of themselves as autonomous thinking, feeling beings.<sup>42</sup> Lacan's central conceptual innovation in the mirror stage as it was elaborated in the years after the war, was to combine the phenomenological distinction between subject and ego with a psychological understanding of the role of images and the constructed nature of the self (Fink 1997). The conceptual dynamic Lacan utilized to underpin these arguments regarding the construction of self was the philosophical category of the dialectic.

During the 1930s Alexandre Kojève's Paris based seminars on Hegel had a profound influence on a generation of thinkers; indeed it was not until the post-war decades that Hegelianism was finally displaced by Structuralism and Post-structuralism (Dossé 1997). Hegel's dialectical mode of thinking foregrounded the contradictory nature of all things and is encapsulated in the Hegelian schema of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, whereby all phenomena can be said to encompass their opposite, their own negation (Homer 2005). Kojève was interested in Hegel's account of the emergence of self-consciousness as an effect of the transition from nature to culture, from animal existence to human existence. For Hegel, self-hood emerged through a process of developing self-consciousness through self-reflection<sup>43</sup>. Kojève read this dialectic as a struggle of desire and recognition, of mutual dependence; Lacan later commented that it was Hegel's great insight to reveal how 'each human being is in the being of the other' (Lacan 1991b: 72). Lacan was eventually to argue that such a mutually dependent (and also conflictual) constitution of self and other was what permeated the construction and constitution of self; that is, that the subject is caught in a reciprocal and irreducible dialectic of alienation (Fink 1997: 47). Lacan came to identify two moments of alienation, first through the mirror stage and second through language

(Homer 2005: 71). This first moment of alienation Lacan described in terms of the developmental stage he named as the 'Imaginary'. John Storey notes that it was the concept of the Imaginary that can be seen to have fuelled the initial appropriation of Lacanian thinking in the sphere of visual and cultural studies (Storey 2008).

In Lacan's revised 1949 account of the mirror stage it is the subject's identification with an image that is given greater conceptual prominence. The sense of completeness, of mastery evoked by the reflected image, contrasts with the experience of the fragmented body, one not under control. The image alienates but at the same time becomes confused with the self. The sense of a unified self is acquired at the price of this self being other: 'the mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation - which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image ... to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity' (Lacan 2006: 78). For Lacan, the ego emerges at this moment of alienation and fascination; the ego takes its form from the organizing and constituting properties of the image. The ego is the effect of images.



*Fig: 102 Penhaul Penzance Spring show 1954 print PHA.*

Lacan insists that the ego is based on an illusory image of wholeness and mastery. It is the function of the ego to maintain this illusion of coherence and mastery; the function of the ego is one of mis-recognition; of refusing to accept the truth of fragmentation and alienation. Furthermore this opposition between fragmentation and unity establishes the subject as a rival, as conflictual to itself: the fragmented sense of self versus imaginary autonomy; a conflict that marks all future relations between subject and others. As Benvenuto and Kennedy state, 'to exist one has to be recognised by an-other; our image, ourselves, is mediated by the gaze of the other. The other becomes the guarantor of

ourselves' (Benvenuto and Kennedy 1986: 27). The subject is at once dependent on the other as guarantor of its existence but is also inscribed in a relation marked by rivalry (Fink 1997: 70).

Through the mirror stage the subject imagines a mastery over its body but in a place outside of itself. Alienation, in Lacan's terms, is precisely this 'lack of being' where the subject is realized in another place: 'In this sense, the subject is not alienated from something or itself but rather alienation is constitutive of the subject – the subject is alienated in its very being' (Homer 2005: 26).

The mirror model emphasizes the spectator's identification with a coherent form but 'the formation of an illusory unified ego has a certain unconscious cost' (Lacan 2006: 75). When the child recognises its literal or metaphorical mirror image, it is 'a startling spectacle' announced by 'a flutter of jubilant activity' (Lacan 2006: 78). The subject's identification with the image means that the emergent ego will be an alienated one, an object outside. Moreover, this primary identification acts as a template for a whole series of future identifications that will further shape and maintain the deluded ego, 'The value set on the image involves the sacrifice of its own being, a sort of suicide in the manner of Narcissus' (Iversen 2007: 8). The metaphorical mirror does not reflect back an already constituted self but rather creates a simulacrum of self, as Iversen states, 'the double comes first' (Iversen 2007: 75). In order to sustain this ideal image of self, all the impulses and objects which cannot be assimilated into the seemingly coherent and attractive picture are expelled.<sup>44</sup>



Fig: 103 Penhaul Outing to Bodmin moor 1952 print PHA.

Lacan's imaginary is therefore the realm of the ego, of the pre-linguistic realm of sense perception and identification, and of an illusory sense of unity (Fink 1997: 51). The imaginary concerns the relation between the subject and the specular. The processes of

the imaginary which form the ego are repeated and reinforced by the subject in subsequent relations with the external world (Homer 2005: 30). The imaginary is not a developmental stage - it remains at the core of the human subject's experience. This experience of unity and coherence is however completely illusory; there is a fundamental disharmony regarding the processes of the ego, the ego is the terrain of conflict, discord, of continual struggle (Fink 1997: 73). In his second seminar given in 1954-5, Lacan describes the resulting ontological gap as 'lack in being' (Lacan 1991b: 29). This lack at the heart of the subject is not just about loss but is conceptualized as constitutive of subjectivity itself (Homer 2005).

Although commentators such as Margaret Iversen describe the mirror stage model as 'now very familiar' (Iversen 2007: 6), this study agrees with Jae Emerling that 'foundational texts from past decades can be usefully reread in terms of contemporary contexts and present-day social and cultural valencies' (Emerling 2012: 51).<sup>45</sup>

The imaginary was the first part of Lacan's topography to be fully detailed. In the post-war decade Lacan increasingly incorporated aspects of structuralism and linguistics into his conceptualization of his developing topography of the psyche. It was in the post-war years that Lacan began to elaborate his understanding of the subject in terms of its constitution in and through language, the topographical realm he called the symbolic.

## **1: 2 The Symbolic**

*This section will follow how Lacan brought aspects of the anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss and the linguistics of Ferdinand Saussure together with a psychoanalytic reading of the subject as alienated and at the mercy of unconscious determinations, into a totalizing structure he called the symbolic order. Lacan situates the subject, read as precarious and unfixed, as bound within the localized particularities of symbolic communal authority. The signifying subject Lacan describes, takes its cues and references from surrounding social and cultural fields; this constituting structure Lacan terms the big Other and which functions as a social and cultural repository of collected and projected beliefs and rules which are argued by Lacan to be determinative of the subject's constitution. This section will argue that it is just these collected, projected beliefs and rules that Penhaul's images illustrate and perform.*

David Macey argues that although the mirror stage paper as first presented in 1936 had been Lacan's first radical innovation within the field of psychoanalysis, it remained

recognizably within the parameters of accepted psychoanalytic theory and practice (Macey 1988). It was some fifteen years before a distinctly Lacanian reading of the discipline began to emerge when in 1951, Lacan made his call for a 'return to Freud' (Lacan 1997: 57). At the Rome Psychoanalytical Congress of 1953 Lacan set out his major concerns, chief of which was the elaboration of the concept of the symbolic order. What was subsequently referred to as the *Rome Discourse* came to be seen as the founding document of a new direction in psychoanalysis (Lacan 1997: 30-113). The 1950s was an extraordinarily innovative period for Lacan and it was during this time that he introduced many of the concepts that would preoccupy him through the remainder of his career (Roudinesco 2005). Like many other writers and academics, in the post-war decade, Lacan was increasingly influenced by the field of study that came to be known as Structuralism.

Structuralism was a method of analysis that particularly dominated French intellectual life in the 1950s and 1960s; it was not a movement as such but rather a label for a mode of thinking and analysis applied to a wide range of disciplines and seen as applicable to all social phenomena (Dossé 1997). Although the sources of Structuralism were eclectic, the work of anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss was central. Drawing on Saussure's earlier work on linguistics, Levi-Strauss's structural methodology was interested in describing the organization of an overall sign-system or 'structure' (Henaff 1998). Linguistics provided the model for this form of analysis although the objects of study for structuralism were often non-verbal sign systems, for example Levi-Strauss's own analysis of kinship systems (1949) and food preparation (1966). Structuralism's basic premise was that all social activity constitutes a language insofar as it involves sign systems with their own intrinsic rules and grammar – individual acts are thus interpreted not in their own right but against a background of social relations from which they derive their meaning.

A central aspect of Levi-Strauss's work that was particularly notable for Lacan was the significance given within the field of enquiry to the role of symbolic exchange. In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949), Levi-Strauss argued that what was significant was not so much the actual exchange of women between groups, but rather in the way that people were transformed into signs and operated within a system of symbolic exchange. Levi-Strauss argued that the exchange of people operated like a language, that is as a system that had its own rules and regulations but which remained unconscious to the individual system users. From Lacan's reading of Levi-Strauss he derived the idea that what characterized social relations is what he referred to as the 'symbolic function'; Lacan

identified there being an elementary structure, an unconscious structure, that underlay all kinship and social relations and this process was one of symbolic exchange (Lacan 1991b).



Fig: 104 Penhaul Beating the bounds 1953 print PHA.

Furthermore, Lacan drew on Levi-Strauss's notion that 'what is called the unconscious is merely an empty space in which the symbolic function achieves autonomy' (cited in Roudinesco 2005: 211). Lacan combined Levi-Strauss's insight into the autonomy of the symbolic function with a close reading of Saussure's *Cours de linguistique generale* (1916). Saussure had stated that: 'man's understanding of reality came to be seen as revolving about their social use of verbal signs' (Saussure 1916: ix). Saussure argued that language was a total system comprising rules, grammar, vocabulary and conventions, but that individual speaking subjects remained unconscious of the system itself although it governed what individuals were able to say and not say.

Key to Saussure's schema was that the relationship between the sign's constituent elements, the signifier and signified, is arbitrary and is determined by social convention; language becomes meaningful because it creates a differential system whereby any given sign acquires its meaning by virtue of its difference from other signs.<sup>46</sup> The meaning of what a person says depends not only upon the words used (and excluded), but also on the place of those words within the overall structure. Language exists as a complex network of signs, a given sign is defined not by virtue of an intrinsic meaning but rather through its relative position within the overall system of signification and through its difference from all other signs in that system.

Saussure's ideas were foundational not just for structuralism but also for what were to become known as the social sciences in the 1960s and 1970s (Storey 2008). In particular, the implication of Saussure's differential system of meaning was that language precedes consciousness and as speaking subjects we are born into language. Therefore language

does not reflect reality but rather produces a subject's experience within the constraints of the given language system which in itself conditions the nature of experience. Central to all this was the understanding that language is not an absolute and fixed system within which a singular meaning can be located but is rather a set of differential relations (Saussure 1916).

In the post-war period Lacan was characteristically aware of and receptive to new disciplines and lines of enquiry and he freely incorporated ideas from structuralism, anthropology and linguistics into his own particular conception of psychoanalysis. While Saussure's notion of language as a total system provided the model for Levi-Strauss's concept of social structure and in turn Lacan's symbolic order, there were important differences between Lacan and Saussure. Taking his cue from Levi-Strauss's ideas to do with the autonomy of the symbolic function, Lacan rethought Saussure's conception of the indivisibility of the sign. Lacan accepted the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign but questioned not only the indivisibility of the sign but also the prioritization of the signified over the signifier (Evans 1996: 185). By the late 1950s Lacan had elaborated an understanding of signification that saw it in terms of an endless process, an unending chain of referral where meaning is never fixed. The direction of Lacan's enquiry during the post-war decade was explicated in papers such as *The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis* (1956) and *The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious* (1957) in which Lacan introduced his particular understanding of the symbolic order.

Saussure's analysis of language provided Lacan with a scientific as opposed to an historical model to analyse language and its role in Freud's 'talking cure'. Saussure argued there was a structure within us that governed what we say; for Lacan that structure was the unconscious. Lacan reads the unconscious as at once produced through language and governed by the rules of language - the precise mechanism through which this takes place Lacan adapted from the ideas of Roman Jakobson. Lacan saw in Jakobson's structural model of metaphor and metonymy a direct correspondence with Freud's dream work processes of condensation and displacement. By mapping Jacobson's distinction between metaphor and metonymy on to Freud's conception of the mechanisms of condensation and displacement, Lacan was able to demonstrate how the unconscious was structured like a language. Lacan asserted that the unconscious operated according to the rules of metaphor and metonymy (Lacan 1997: 147-58).

Throughout the 1950s Lacan was concerned with elaborating a system in which everything in the human world is structured 'in accordance with the symbols which have emerged' (Lacan 1991b: 29). Sean Homer comments that at this time in the mid 1950s, Lacan was not saying that everything is reducible to the symbolic, but that 'once symbols have appeared, everything will be ordered or structured, in accordance with those symbols and laws of the symbolic, including the human unconscious and subjectivity' (Homer 2005: 44). Lacan's conception of the unconscious is in many respects, conceptually at odds from that of Freud's for whom the unconscious is that part of our existence that escapes us and over which we have no control, but which at the same time governs our thoughts and wishes (Freud 1915). For Lacan, the unconscious consists of signifying material. The unconscious is a process of signification beyond our control; it is the language that speaks through us rather than the language we speak. The unconscious is the discourse of the Other, what Lacan distinguished as 'the big Other' (Lacan 1997: 146-63). The big Other consists of language, of the symbolic order. For Lacan, what is key here is that the Other can never be fully assimilated to the subject; it is a radical otherness which forms the core of our unconscious.



Fig: 105 Penhaul Mayor Bennetts 1955 print PHA.

Central to Lacan's conception of the subject is its determination by what Lacan termed the signifier (Evans 1996: 185). Lacan conceived of the symbolic order as a totalizing concept, as marking the limits of the human world. As human subjects, we are born into language and it is through language that the desires of others are articulated and through which we also articulate our own desire. The subject is locked within what Lacan describes in the seminar of 1954-5, as a circuit of discourse: 'It is the discourse of the circuit in which I am integrated ... one can't stop the chain of discourse, and it is my duty to transmit it in its aberrant form to someone else' (Lacan 1991b: 89). Born into the circuit of discourse, to be

human is to be *subjected* to this symbolic order, a structure that cannot be escaped, although it escapes the subject. As individual subjects we can never grasp the symbolic totality that constitutes our world, but that totality has a structuring force upon us as subjects. Lacan thereby binds the individual subject to the symbolic community within which that subject functions as a signifying individual (Fink 1997). Individual subjects take their signifying cues and references from those around them. Lacan's society and community, is one of shared and particularly construed, signs and signifiers. In short, those around the individual subject will make meaning from a common ground of cultural definitions elaborated through shared significatory practices (Evans 1996: 201).



Fig: 106 Penhaul Harvest April 1956 print PHA.

Lacan argues that it is the structure of language that speaks the subject and not the other way around (Lacan 1991b). The subject is that which is represented by one signifier to another.<sup>47</sup> With the concept of the symbolic order Lacan is further able to distinguish between the ego and the subject: the ego for Lacan is an imaginary function whereas the subject is constituted in the symbolic order and is determined by language. What constitutes the subject is determined by the symbolic world it occupies. In this way Lacan de-essentializes the subject: it is the structure of language that speaks the subject and not the other way around (Homer 2005).

The manner in which the subject is caught up in the chain of signification and is marked by the signifier is discussed at length in Lacan's 1954-5 seminar entitled *The Ego in Freud's Theory and the Technique of Psychoanalysis*. In this seminar Lacan examined Freud's late meta-psychological text *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Lacan examined Freud's notion of repetition compulsion and associated it with his conception of the insistence of the signifying chain. Lacan's seminar on *The Purloined Letter*, given in 1956, is an illustration of his thesis of the insistence of the signifying chain and the determination of

the subject by the signifier (Lacan 1991b). Lacan frequently uses poetic, literary allusions to explicate his ideas and this is the case with his appropriation of Edgar Allan Poe's short story 'The Purloined Letter'. In this story Lacan finds a precise illustration of his ideas that it is the signifier, performed in Poe's story by the eponymous letter, that determines the subject. The subject is caught up by the signifier and situated in a chain of signification through a continual process of repetition. According to Muller and Richardson (1993), the letter functions as a free-floating signifier that passes along the signifying chain with each character in the narrative unconscious of what is taking place: 'This is the very effect of the unconscious in the precise sense we teach that the unconscious means that man is inhabited by the signifier' (Lacan 1991b: 48).



Fig: 107 Penhaul Flower harvest 1955 print PHA.

Since Lacan's initial elaboration of his notion of the symbolic order in the 1950s, many critics and not just those working within the discipline of psychoanalysis, have found critical purchase around Lacan's understanding of the subject and its relation within the symbolic. Slavoj Žižek is a philosopher who has been working with Lacanian concepts for many years and who has consistently drawn on Lacan's notion of the symbolic with which to structure many of his ideas concerning the constitution of self and the nature of contemporary reality. Since the late 1980s and the publication of his seminal text *The Sublime Order of Ideology* (1989), Žižek has consistently read Lacan's symbolic order as that which emerges from the processes and symbols of signification and which can subsequently can be thought as that which constitutes our socio-symbolic reality (Žižek 1989: 62-8). According to Žižek, 'The symbolic order constructs and confirms a fiction of individual and collective identity through an intersubjective network of implicit and explicit rules and habits experienced through the co-ordinates set out within the framework of the symbolic order' (Žižek 1993: 36). Catherine Belsey describes the symbolic order as 'the cultural script which

directs and controls our lives' (Belsey 2005: 45) and this study contends that Harry Penhaul's photographs of West Penwith community can be interpreted in terms of acting as an illustrated guide to that cultural script. If the symbolic order is theorized as the social, linguistic constitution of the subject in the symbolic dimension, then Penhaul's photographs present and rehearse the repertoire of available signifiers particular to the West Penwith readership of *The Cornishman*.



Fig: 108 Penhaul Portrait of three girls 1954 print PHA.

The symbolic is not simply a pre-existing formal framework that limits choices and practices. In his 1982 text *Thinking Photography*, Victor Burgin argued the subject 'as an effect of the photograph' (Burgin 1982: 149) and refers such a dynamic as occurring within the symbolic register. Lacan insists that processes of symbolic identification are 'always thoroughly contextualized in historically contingent modes of collective practice' (cited in Žižek 2006: 15). The symbolic order flexes and changes in terms of values, rituals and beliefs. It absorbs and culturalizes subjects into new patterns and traditions of behaviours – Harry Penhaul can be read as providing a continually updating illustrated guide to the symbolic order's constitution of the social and cultural field.

The weekly editions of *The Cornishman* reflect both post-war change but also a post-war retrenchment of symbolic authority. The decade after the war was a time of fundamental social change and readjustment in Cornwall (Payton 1993). It was a period when old and new values were both disappearing and emerging. Penhaul's images in *The Cornishman* can be read as part of the symbolic process that underpins and validates the ebb and flow of beliefs, values and conceptions of the social. The symbolic order has an ambitious purview - from language to laws and all social and cultural structures in between (Homer 2005), but the character of the symbolic order is not permanent or necessary. Symbolic identification

means the internalization of cultural norms and conventions, often through identification with figures of symbolic authority.



Fig: 109 Penhaul Hunt scene Jan 1953 print PHA.

Penhaul's photographs can be read as performing as part of the intersubjective social sphere of the symbolic order, a space governed by the rules of prohibition and politeness (Žižek 2006a); Penhaul's photographs work to underpin the surety of the social field, what Paul Taylor (2010) describes as the collective social fantasy and social subjectivity that secure the subject a sense of place in the world (Taylor 2010). Societal and cultural rules are read not as inherent or natural but rather assumed and performed (Žižek 2006a). In *The Sublime Object of Ideology* Žižek imagines the symbolic order as a social repository of collected and projected beliefs, 'an unwritten constitution which controls, directs our lives' (Žižek 1989: 27). Penhaul's photographs perform instrumentally in substantiating the terms by which the symbolic order imposes itself through the rules, prohibitions and broader tacit assumptions particular to a given social field. Lacan uses the term the 'big Other' to describe this intangible but constituting structure. As Sarah Kay explains: 'the big Other is the social repository of collected and projected beliefs which we can relate to and rely on' (Sarah Kay 2003: 9).



Fig: 110 Penhaul Gwennap Pit 1953 print PHA.

Griselda Pollock gives a sense of the instability and mutability of the relation between representation and the adherence of meaning, a relation played out by photographs such as those of Penhaul: 'visual representation is analysed in terms of the continual necessity as site for the perpetual cultural process of shaping, working the subject, conceptualized as precarious, unfixed' (Pollock 1992: 10). Paul Taylor (2010) insists on the illusory nature of representation when he comments that the radical insight of psychoanalysis is that 'truth', that is the rules and beliefs which govern what we do and which photographs such as Penhaul's illustrate and underpin, is 'structured like a fiction and that reality is only accessible through our subjectivised, fictionalized and fantasized engagements with it' (Taylor 2010: 58). Slavoj Žižek argues that through the constituting structures of the symbolic order, our deepest beliefs and convictions are shaped not least by external institutions and the repeated practices of daily life (Žižek 1991b). Lacan states that the subject is locked into a discursive and constituting circuit, and that the subject remains dependent on external elements for confirmation and self-definition (Lacan 1991b).



Fig: 111 Penhaul Shell grotto Porthleven 1955 print PHA.

### **1: 3 From the streets to the academy - appropriating Lacan**

*The following section will identify a brief moment in the early 1970s when, following the événements of 1968 in Paris, various social and political movements looked to elaborate aspects of their critical agendas within a Lacanian space. If populist appropriation of abstruse Lacanian categories was brief in duration, some academic disciplines such as social theory have incorporated elements of the psychoanalytic paradigm more fully into their conceptual frameworks. This section therefore begins to sketch out and indicate something of the range and relevance Lacan's ideas had outside of the clinic from the street to the academy.*

In the years following the end of the war Lacan's conceptual frameworks were of consequence solely to the Parisian psychoanalytic establishment wherein Lacan based his clinic practice and began his seminar series in the early 1950s. However, Lacan's protean theorizing opened up opportunities for others outside the field of psychoanalysis to gain a degree critical purchase on some of Lacan's conceptual ideas. While the appropriation of Lacanian concepts became increasingly marked across a number of academic disciplines in the 1970s and 80s, it was in Paris during the late 1960s that Lacan's particular explanation of how the subject came to exist within society and culture appeared to gain traction with many of those outside the clinic who were questioning societal and cultural values (Turtle 1992). Across the political and academic spectrum Lacan's conceptual landscape found a resonance with the increasing scrutiny and questioning of social relations and systems of power, questions existentialism had failed to answer.<sup>48</sup> Sherry Turtle argues that for a brief period at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s 'many writers, activists and thinkers from across the social and political spectrum looked to situate their discussions within a Lacanian space' (Turtle 1992: 52). It was for this brief time, according to Turtle, that the abstruse categories of Lacanian psychoanalysis achieved some conceptual purchase outside of the clinic.

By the 1960s the status-quo of French post-war 'stalemate society' (Roudinesco 2005: 162) was repeatedly shaken by events and social change, not least the Algerian war, industrial conversion, urbanization and rural exodus. The events of 1968 were at the very least dramatic but for commentators like Sherry Turtle, they marked and demarcated the importance of changes already occurred: 'The social unrest of May had proved ephemeral

but was midwife to the emergence of French psychoanalysis from a movement to a culture' (Turkle 1992: 28).<sup>49</sup>

The psychoanalysis that came to prominence in the Paris of the 1960s was very much a French variant. The French had resisted psychoanalysis until they had produced with Jacques Lacan, an 'indigenous heretic' whose structuralism and linguistic emphasis were resonant with contemporary French intellectual thinking. In the 1960s Lacan emerged as an increasingly prominent figure in French intellectual life; his iconoclasm, anti-institutionalism, anti-Americanism and anti-bureaucratic stance, all contributed to his alignment with the literary and political Left. Turkle argues that Lacanian ideas were perceived by some on the Left as ways to analyse group and individual processes, to think through the relationship between individual and society and to do so politically. The *événements* of 1968 called long-established patterns of life into question and prepared the ground for new cultural interest in individual psychology; the metaphorical style that characterized much of Lacan's theoretical exegesis enabled bridges to be built between psychoanalysis and politics.

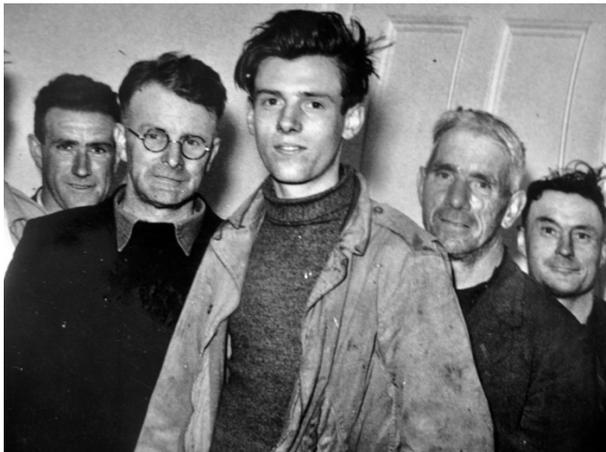


Fig: 112 Penhaul Shipwreck survivors 1955 print PHA.

Structuralism's most powerful message was that man was not his own centre and was determined by structures that transcend the individual (Dossé 1997). The social movements that appeared around the events of May 1968 became increasingly concerned with the question of the relation between society and the individual, a questioning which corresponded to the field of enquiry that had been the focus of Lacan's seminar series for some years. Lacan's move to the Ecole Normale Superior in mid 1960s, on the invitation of Louis Althusser, had brought his teaching to a large new audience drawn increasingly from disciplines outside the clinic (Roudinesco 2005). Lacan's concept of the symbolic provided an accessible account of the individual subject's relation to society and in particular the

notion that society does not influence the individual from the outside, but comes to dwell within them - that is, when language and law enter the subject, there is no longer a boundary between self and society (Lacan 1991b). Lacan made it clear that the concept of the symbolic entailed the individual as determined by the social relations in which he is enmeshed. As Sherry Turkle comments: 'Lacanian psychoanalysis established a context for people struggling toward a reconsideration of society, self and politics, to think through their concerns' (Turkle 1992: 203).

For Richard Vinen (2018), the events of 1968 left many on the Left sceptical about existential assertions of man's freedoms and more ready to accept the structuralist emphasis that large areas of life lay outside conscious control. Sherry Turkle states that it was Lacan's particular combination of psychoanalysis and structuralism that made him a central figure at this time (Turkle 1993). Indeed, Lacan's description of the constitution of the subject on the basis of lack was appropriated by elements on the Left as revealing the fate of the subject under capitalism.<sup>50</sup> Turkle describes how different groups on the Left found various ways to situate themselves in 'Lacanian space'; Phillippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva and Louis Althusser were some of the writers on the left who openly appropriated Lacanian ideas into their work.

If, as Sherry Turkle argues, Lacan was briefly the focus for a popular appropriation of his ideas within a post 1968 Parisian political culture, Lacan's influence within many spheres of academia in France and beyond, has been both substantive and enduring (Sharpe and Faulkner 2008). Having welcomed Lacan to the Ecole Normale Superior in the mid 1960s Althusser's ill-tempered break with Lacan a decade later appeared to signal the end of a particular and short-lived moment between Lacanian psychoanalysis and French politics. However, Lacanian ideas had been increasingly incorporated within the structures and theoretical categories of various disciplines within the academy and in particular that of social theory (Storey 2006).



Fig: 113 Penhaul Socialite Party December 1954 The Cornishman print PHA.

Althusser's 1964 text *Freud and Lacan* marked a recognition that a modern psychoanalytic discourse had a role to play in considering contemporary ideas on politics, ideology and subjectivity (Žižek 1989). According to Althusser, psychoanalysis and Marxism converged upon a specific problematic, that of misrecognition as played out through the dynamics of ideology. Althusser stated in his 1971 essay *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* that ideology was profoundly unconscious and that it was not a set of ideas or indoctrinating political programme but rather ideology was a system of representations, a system of images, concepts and above all structures which are lived (Althusser 2008). Althusser put forward a notion of ideology as representing a subject's imaginary relation to their actual conditions of existence. Althusser focused questions of ideology on representation and the subject's constitution as an ideological subject within the system of representation. According to Slavoj Žižek, such a conception of ideology, as an imaginary relation to real conditions of existence, clearly resonates with and exemplifies, aspects of Lacanian theory (Žižek 1991b).<sup>51</sup>

Since Althusser, psychoanalysis's interventions with ideology have frequently been framed within the category of what has been termed socio-ideological fantasy, an account characteristically given by Slovenian theorist Slavoj Žižek. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) Žižek argues that any psychoanalytic account of ideology must take into account the constitutive role of fantasy (Žižek 1989: 72). Indeed, Žižek maintains that there is no such thing as 'reality *per se*, and that what Lacan teaches us through notions of unconscious desire and fantasy is that reality does not exist. For Žižek the function of what he calls the 'socio-ideological fantasy' (Žižek 1989: 72) is to mask the trauma that society, the individual subject and the symbolic order are themselves constituted by inherent lack.<sup>52</sup> Žižek's conception of the socio-ideological fantasy is indebted to Laclau and Mouffe's 1985 *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. Laclau and Mouffe, following Lacan, insist that both subject and society are constituted through lack and that as a consequence, there can be no such thing as society, the social is an 'impossible object'. Arguing from a Lacanian perspective, Laclau and Mouffe state that there is no identity prior to its discursive constitution; all identity is therefore 'equivalent to a differential position in a system of relations ... all identity is discursive and based on difference' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 217).<sup>53</sup>

## Part 2 An austere cultural politics

### Introduction

The appropriation of Lacan's concept of the imaginary founding of the subject of ideology that occurred within the social sciences and field of visual culture and film studies in the 1970s and 1980s (Roberts 1998), owed such frequent application not least to its narrative of misrecognition, fallacy and illusion which positioned the constitution of the subject squarely within the scopoc dynamics of the image within representation (Jay 1994).<sup>54</sup> However, as the reception of Lacanian ideas has been filtered through several and various academic disciplines such as film studies and feminism, some commentators from Jacqueline Rose (1986) to Margaret Iversen (2007) have suggested that such understanding of Lacan's mirror stage schema have been in some ways tendentious in that account was taken of the satisfactions of the imaginary domain, but not its threat. In her 1986 text *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, Rose called for the concept of the imaginary to be resituated to its psychoanalytic context, calling into question 'the use of the concept to delineate or explain some assumed position of plenitude on the part of the spectator' (Rose 1986: 52). Joan Copjec similarly argued that film theory's appropriation of Lacan tended to disregard his stress on the instability of the imaginary register which he saw as fraught with rivalry and aggression. For Lacan the mirror is far from being a straightforward confirmation of the ego - not least as the ego, being an object 'outside', can turn around its friendly aspect and confront the subject as rival.

The following section of this chapter will explore this darker side of the imaginary domain and will pursue what might appear as a path of relentless negativity and iconoclasm to arrive at an admittedly 'austere cultural politics' (Iversen 2007: 10). This section will argue that such a route not only follows a certain 'Lacanian logic' (Lodge 1988: 61) but also is an essential position to be assumed before any redemptive ethics of psychoanalysis can be undertaken. In short, Lacan insisted during his seminar on the ethics of psychoanalysis which he gave over several weeks from late 1959 to early 1960, that as subjects we must face up to and take into account our subjective reality in all its negativity. Such a gesture Slavoj Žižek describes as 'traversing the fantasy' (Žižek 1989: 52) and he agrees with Lacan that any such subjective repositioning will be at best of brief duration before inevitable ideological re-closure.

The austere cultural politics outlined below will examine not just how the illusory identifications of the imaginary constitute an ideal conception of the self but also how such identifications can become rigid and defensive (Fink 1995). In his second seminar series of

1954 Lacan describes the subject as continually looking to self-mastery and as always being on the edge of sliding back into chaos; Lacan's subject 'hangs over the abyss' (Lacan cited in Gallop 1982: 84). The fictionality and externality of the illusion of coherence and stability offered by the ego makes it very susceptible to subversion (Žižek 1991b).

The specular regime of illusion and fallacy which the Lacanian register of the imaginary proposes, is one that figures the photograph as a central vector in such identifications. The rigidity and defensiveness of the subsequent sense of idealized and illusory self-mastery reinforced by the imaginary register is argued by Lacan to also extend to the subject's projected object world (Lacan 1991a). As Lacan explains, 'We are led to see our objects as identifiable egos, having unity, permanence, and substantiality' (Lacan 1991a: 120). The Imaginary orders not just the subject's sense of self but also a sense of how the material world of the subject should be organized. Margaret Iversen argues that such dispositions crucially leave the subject's object world 'as fragile as glass' (Iversen 2007: 126).



Fig: 114 Penhaul Lady Bolitho at Penzance WI. 1955 print PHA.

## **2: 1 Proliferating in the dark and the defiles of the signifier**

*This section will follow how psychoanalysis changes its focus from concern with the conscious self and its symptoms to a linguistic account of the unconscious, a change which saw Lacan move decisively away from Freud's account of the unconscious as a 'hell below where the bad beasts of repressed desire proliferate in the dark'. In Lacan's structural linguistic account of the subject, emphasis is given to the role of the signifier in subject formation.*

When Terry Eagleton comments that 'Lacan advances an essentially tragic philosophy of life' (Eagleton 2003: 201), the pessimism inherent in Lacan's account of the subject as always already estranged, precarious and provisional can be readily identified in Freud's

writing from the very inception of psychoanalytic discourse (Thwaites 2007). Freud maintained that human consciousness was always illusory, that when we enter the world as an unstructured animalistic being, we move quickly from that state into a world of meaning which is the culture we inhabit (Freud 1915: 109-40). According to Freud we acquire meaning in a process that entails the repression of socially unacceptable forces and in the process of repression, the psyche is radically split between the conscious and the unconscious. While the splitting of the psyche allows for the formation of a sense of self with a place in the world of meaning, it also produces that sense as radically divided to itself.<sup>55</sup>



Fig: 115 Penhaul Howard Grenville MP at home 1955 print PHA.

This conceptualisation of the subject as ‘not master in his own house’ (Freud 1917: 162) was reinforced during the post-war period as Lacan began to read the Freudian subject through the logics of structural linguistics. Constituted as textual, subjectivity (consciousness of self in terms of the concept ‘self’ provided by language) becomes both an effect and an operation of signification (Fink 1997). To an unconscious degree (*sic*), this means that as signifying animals we are never in control – we are deluded into thinking that we can say what we mean or for that matter, mean what we say.



Fig: 116 Penhaul Plaque unveiling 1954 print PHA.

Constituted through signifying processes, the subject is continually re-read, both directly and indirectly; signification works through association and difference and subsequently always functions to substitute one signifier for another (Eagleton 2003).<sup>56</sup> In this sense words and meanings have a life of their own, constantly overriding and obscuring the supposed coherence and intelligibility of external reality. No meaning is shored up by anything other than reference to another meaning. Through Lacan's appropriation of structural linguistics during the 1950s, he changed the focus of psychoanalysis from a concern with the conscious self and its symptoms to a linguistic account of the unconscious as being the 'kernel of our being' (Lacan 1997: 149). As David Lodge comments, 'Lacan challenges traditional Cartesian liberal humanist conceptions of the conscious self which he reads as fallacious and illusionistic' (Lodge 2008: 61). David Lodge argues that when Lacan claims that there is no transcending the limits of language, he is arguably looking to alter our deepest notions of who we are (Lodge 2008). Lacan deconstructs the idea of the subject as stable amalgam of consciousness. Lacan argues that if the unconscious is where the kernel of the self is to be found then 'I am where I do not think' (Lacan 2006: 472). The split in human mind instituted by its move from the raw existence of infant animality to the structuring of that existence in the symbolic systems of culture, is a foundational tenet shared across the psychoanalytic project from Freud to Lacan (Benvenuto and Kennedy 1986). Psychoanalysis proposes a theory of the subject in and of culture, in and of the symbolic order, as always already estranged within itself as a very condition of becoming subject (Lacan 1991b).



*Fig. 117 Penhaul Lands End to John O'Groats 1952 print PHA.*

The subject is read as perpetually in the process of becoming – mobilized in culture through the break between the conscious and unconscious. Impossible to control, the trace of the unconscious perturbs the completeness of presence of the conscious to itself.

If the estranged subject is always already divided to itself, this subject is conceptualized by Freudian psychoanalysis as always impelled towards recovery of the mastery threatened by the opening of the gap in its seamless apprehension of the world. The unconscious process is at work all the time: 'a kind of lining on the other side of normal waking consciousness' (Easthope 1999: 3). Furthermore, the unconscious process manifests itself; it 'speaks' in all kinds of symptoms, traces, gaps, discontinuities and excesses that appear in ordinary conscious discourse. Under the impact of contemporary linguistics, particularly Saussure and Jakobson, Lacan undertook to not just follow but to go beyond Freud in his rethinking of the unconscious in terms of language. Lacan turns away from Freud's view of the unconscious as a Hell below where we hide away the bad beasts of repressed desire and where such abominations 'proliferate in the dark' (Freud 1900: 148). For Lacan, in his reading of Saussurian linguistics, the unconscious is 'neither primordial nor instinctual' but rather something that happens when language becomes dislocated (Lacan 1997: 170). Lacan emphasised the role played by the Saussurean signifier in subject formation. His view was that from the time we enter language, we always have to 'pass through the defiles of the signifier' (Lacan 1997: 264). Lacan identified the completed sign as the place of consciousness, and the signifier as the place where the unconscious operates. The Lacanian subject appears present to itself in the signified and completed sign but is lacking or barred from itself in the signifier (Fink 1997).



Fig: 118 Penhaul Hunt Ball 1955 The Cornishman print PHA.

Lacan drew on Roman Jakobson's work regarding metaphor and metonymy (Jakobson 1956: 55-73) to explain how unconscious significances can emerge alongside or even within coherent meaning (Lacan 1997: 156-9). What matters for Lacan is that unintended meanings are always in play; there is always the 'sliding of the signifier under the signified'

(Lacan 1997: 160). There is no set of terms which cannot produce an 'improper' meaning. The Lacanian subject therefore is subject to and of language and of the processes of signification that make up the realm of meaning Lacan named the symbolic order. David Lodge notes that it is in these processes of signification that we see 'the self's radical ex-centricity to itself' (Lodge: 2008: 62). For David Lodge, Lacan's subject is not in control of itself in any conventional Cartesian terms: 'who is this other to whom I am more attached than to myself ... since at the heart of my assent to my own identity it is he who wags me' (Lacan 1997: 172).



*Fig: 119 Penhaul Nurses and spring blossoms 1956 print PHA.*

At the inception of psychoanalysis, Freud and Breuer's account of the unconscious was differentiated from that of previous psychologists like Pierre Janet in the dynamism and fluidity of its libidinal economy – psychic processes were characterized in terms of circulation, flow and excess (Thwaites 2007). Lacan's topographical account of the relation between the symbolic and the imaginary is expressed in similar terms of movement and issuance. For Lacan, a subject's utterance is always accompanied by an excess of meaning, an excess that has to be denied (Lacan 1991a). Lacan introduces the term and process of the imaginary to describe how the subject can overlook and thereby deny the surfeit and disjunctions of the excess of signifiers, to make, through illusion and misrecognition, cogent meaning present to consciousness (Sharpe and Faulkner 2008). Lacan's notion of the imaginary serves as an explanation of how the subject makes consistent and cogent meaning from the flood of signifiers that constitutes the subject's daily existence within language and through the 'defiles of the signifier' (Lacan 2006: 342). Paul Taylor argues

that the human subject cannot bare too much reality (Taylor 2010); the subject endeavours to fill the gaps and inconsistencies in signification as presented in the symbolic. Antony Easthope argues that Lacan attempts to solemnise a marriage between Saussurean linguistics and the subject's split between conscious and unconscious (Easthope 1999). Lacan's term 'imaginary' specifies the inescapable mode of fantasy in which the subject finds meaning apparently present to consciousness. The 'symbolic' defines the organisation of signifiers which makes this possible and of which it is an effect (Lacan 1991a). Every subject lives out their own imaginary disposition but Slavoj Žižek notes that subjects also take part in shared identifications so that the Lacanian imaginary is also a comprehensive and collective effect: the reality our lived and experienced perception returns to us is permeated by fantasy elements and supported by the signifiers of the symbolic system (Žižek 1989). According to Žižek such imaginary calibration is constitutive of the social field; anchoring points, for example measures of time and space, assumptions of social behaviour, have an acquired symbolic authority which the individual subject has little choice but to submit to (Žižek 2006a).



Fig: 120 Penhaul The Cornishman July 1954 PHA.

Conceptualized within this Lacanian schema of making meaning, the function of Penhaul's photographs becomes multifarious. Just as photographic images are read as participating in the 'flood' of signifiers that engulf the subject's daily symbolic existence, they also work to both illustrate and perform the imaginary processes of identification and fantasy through which the individual (and collective) subject inaugurates and maintains its sense of place in the world. Penhaul's images are therefore read as providing an illustrated guide to these anchoring points, what Lacan refers to as 'master signifiers', which work to subtend and substantiate the subject's symbolic existence (Fink 1995: 76-79). However, because this symbolic matrix of meaning is upheld by a system of signifiers, a system conceptualized as

defiled and contingent, re-inscription is always already read as in progress: within the social field, master signifiers defining class, gender, nation, family and so on, are continually open to re-categorization (McGowan, K. 2007). Again, Penhaul's images can be read as not just a weekly reiteration of symbolic authority but also as a prospectus of change.



Fig: 121 Penhaul Anchor print PHA.

## 2: 2 Egos and hommelettes

*Ostensibly figured by Freud as mediator between the realm of the psyche and the world outside, Freud's use of the term ego acquires increasing complexity over time (Evans 1996). Lacan's concept of the ego positions it as central to processes of identification within a relation to the specular image – a relation posited by Lacan as illusory and fallacious. Lacan insists that the ego, 'the seat of illusions', should be approached with 'daggers drawn' (Lacan 1997: 12).*

The notion of the ego occupies a central position within the psychoanalytic paradigm as both Freud and Lacan assign substantive and ever changing roles to the function of the ego within their respective topographies. Although ubiquitous as a notion, no definition ever quite fits the profile of the ego. Freud's view of the ego's role was first stated in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) and through successive writings a more specific sense of the ego as an agency of mediation emerges. By Freud's elaboration of his second topography given in his 1920 text *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the ego's function as mediator between other elements of the psyche and the outside world is consolidated, as is its location as situated between conscious and unconscious realms (Freud 1920). To enable its mediating role between conflicting and incommensurable demands placed on it, the ego has at its disposal a variety of mechanisms for redirection including repression, projection, introjection and sublimation (Thwaites 2007). Antony Easthope identifies other mechanisms of defence

including denial, disavowal and fetishism as 'holding the line against unconscious pressure'(Easthope 1999: 50). The mediating function of the ego, elaborated by Freud and then further developed by Lacan, positions the ego as central to a range of psychic processes including that of identification. In its Freudian guise identification is posited as an unconscious process of the ego 'whereby one subject adopts as his own one or more attributes of another subject or group of subjects' (Evans 1996: 80). Unconscious identification works in large part through fantasy and the ego is assigned a role in this identification process.



Fig: 122 Penhaul St. Ives Lifeboat crew 1952 print PHA.

Tony Thwaites argues that Freud offers two disjunct theories of the ego (Thwaites 2007): while one function is to deal with reality through perception and consciousness, a second task for the ego is structured in relation to unconscious desire. Lacan's conception of the ego and identity follows this second line of analysis.

Lacan makes it clear that he believes the subject does perceive a real world though it is one which is always taken up in terms of fantasy and desire, terms stemming from operations 'in the significations received from language' (Lacan 1997: 22). For Lacan, while every subject is said to perceive the same material world, each individual has their own experience of the field of vision; that is, reality is there but each subject experiences it for themselves in their own way (Easthope 1999: 59). The ego reflects the subject's individual experiences; the Lacanian ego spreads out like a batter and needs to be cooked like an 'hommelette' (Lacan 1997: 19). Lacan places a special emphasis on the role of the image within identification and which he defines as 'the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image' (Lacan 1997: 2). Dylan Evans explains that 'to assume an image is to recognise oneself in the image, and to appropriate the image as oneself'

(Evans 1996: 81). Evans identifies two main categories of identification that emerge through Lacan's writing – imaginary identification and symbolic identification. Lacan reads imaginary identification as the mechanism of image identification that constitutes the subject with something outside of itself and 'structures the subject as a rival with himself' (Lacan 1997: 33). This process is the one elaborated in Lacan's mirror stage (1949) and constitutes the primary identification and is the origin of the ideal ego (Evans 1996: 81). Lacan's symbolic identification is so called because it is read as completing the subject's passage into the symbolic order but is modelled on and takes place in the imaginary (Evans 1996: 52).



Fig: 123 Penhault Cable and Wireless install transatlantic connection 1953 print PHA.

Easthope comments that Lacan's subject, as conceptualized through structural linguistics as arriving into culture from the outside (Easthope 1999: 59), means that not only is identity a form of identification but that the subject's ego is also 'that which is reflected of his form in his objects' (Lacan 1997: 194).

During his first seminar given in 1953-54, Lacan insisted that the major problem of modern culture was that we are all 'spellbound by our egos' (Lacan 1991a: 12). He argues in his paper *Some reflections on the Ego* that people are locked into 'the stability of the paranoid delusion system' (Lacan 1991a: 14). Despite the mirror stage having a positive and necessary role in the development of the individual, the ideal body image can become rigid and defensive. Similarly, the projected object world of the anxious subject is seen by Lacan as having the same potential towards idealized rigidity. Lacan notes, 'we are led to see our objects as identifiable egos, having unity, permanence, and substantiality' (Lacan 1991a: 12).

Margaret Iversen argues that the dynamic of egoic identification can be read both in terms of landscape and material objects (Iversen 2007). Iversen posits that structures of

identification are organized through the subject's perception of three dimensional space and which give the subject the illusion of perceptual control. Landscape functions here as an object to be seen and to be controlled (Iversen 2007). The perception of the object landscape, gives the subject spectator the illusion of visual mastery and control, thus providing a pleasurable confirmation of personal integrity and perceptual stability (Iversen 2007: 153, note 32).



*Fig: 124 Penhaul Penzance court November 1954 print PHA.*

Another aspect of identification posited by Lacan is that between the subject's ego and their material objects: 'the subject's ego is that which is reflected of his form in his objects' (Lacan 1997: 194). Lacan observes, 'we are led to see our objects as identifiable egos, having unity, permanence, and substantiality' (Lacan 1991a: 12). Subjected to the processes of the ego and of illusory identification, such objects are devoid of ambiguity or ambivalence of meaning. As mentioned above (p146), for Margaret Iversen, such objects seen through a perception of illusion and fantasy, are no more than simulacral, as not existing outside the subject's illusory perceptions (Iversen 2007). Iversen insists these objects are subsequently as 'fragile as glass' (Iversen 2007: 9). Antony Easthope observes that the Lacanian 'object' can be anything the subject endows with meaning and that has thereby been through the processes of the imaginary, resulting in an erasure of ambiguity and the absolution of discontinuity (Easthope 1999).

Slavoj Žižek figures the identificatory processes of the ego and its objects as being full square with the assumption of ideological subject positioning; he insists that Lacan's concept of the imaginary founding of the subject posits the Lacanian object as a function of narcissistic identification in general and of ideology in particular (Žižek 1989: 104-11). The process of imaginary enthrallment that enables Lacan to state 'I is an other' (Lacan 1997: 23), can take place in any medium but the visual focus brought by the photograph itself

and the iterative dynamics of a weekly publication like that of *The Cornishman* lends itself to the contention of the photograph as a dominant vector of egoic identification (Taylor 2010).

Lacan's notion of the mirror stage exemplified how the pre-language construction of identity was fundamentally about the subject's relation to others. According to Lacan, the subject's identity is borrowed from what he named 'the Other', where the 'Other' is conceptualized as consisting of law, society and other people (Lacan 1997: 140). The individual subject relates to these on the shared basis of the signifier; the Other is encountered as the symbolic order, that organisation of signifiers that surround the subject. Lacan states that the mirror stage 'situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction' (Lacan 1997: 2). With the acquisition of language, the subject continues to acquire identity through the identificatory processes of misrecognition and fantasy. As Antony Easthope explains: 'The adult ego, which seems so sure of itself, comes about by impersonating earlier models until the mask becomes a face' (Easthope 1999: 62). Lacan's ego is not the amenable and amendable ego that has come to dominate American post-war ego-psychology and to which Lacan was virulently opposed (Roudinesco 2005).<sup>57</sup> For Lacan, the role of the ego in the processes of identification is both perfidious and duplicitous. According to Bruce Fink, Lacan indeed argues that the ego is the source of resistance to psychoanalysis; because of its imaginary fixity, the ego resists subjective growth and change (Fink 1997).

Lacan argued that Freud's discovery of the unconscious removed the ego from the central position to which western philosophy, at least since Descartes, had traditionally assigned it. Indeed, as Dylan Evans notes, for Lacan, 'the ego is in fact an object' (Evans 1996: 51), the ego is a construction which is formed by identification with the specular image in the mirror stage. It is thus the place where the subject becomes alienated from itself and assumes a paranoid structure (Lacan 1997: 20). The ego is therefore an imaginary formation, as opposed to the subject, which is a product of the symbolic (Lacan 1997: 128). As Dylan Evans states: 'the ego is precisely a *meconnaissance* of the symbolic order ... and is structured exactly like a symptom' (Evans 1996: 51).

In his post-war writings Lacan pays more attention to distinguishing the ego-ideal from the ideal ego. The ideal ego is defined in the way the subject projects itself onto objects and moves out into identification with them. The ego ideal develops when external objects are

taken in or introjected.<sup>58</sup> The ideal ego develops in the mirror stage, in what Lacan calls the imaginary; it emerges as the ego ideal with the acquisition of language, in the symbolic. Both transformations of the ego are idealised and as Antony Easthope comments: 'the whole ego is a source of delusion, leading us to believe in our own fantasies, our own importance, our imagined control of the world around us' (Easthope 1999: 63).<sup>59</sup> The subject's ability to be aware of this delusion is blocked by repression. The ego ideal is figured by Lacan as always already fraudulent and duplicitous: 'the mirage that renders modern man so sure of being himself even in his uncertainties about himself, and even in the mistrust he has learned to practice against the traps of self-love' (Lacan 1997: 165).

### **2: 3 The tragedy of the subject**

*This section follows Lacan's account of the subject to where its representation, although figured as signifying the possibility of recognition, is ultimately pessimistic and which configures the subject as tragically constituted within a site of loss and impossibility. However, Lacan figures this tragic subject in terms of an ethics which argues towards some possibility of subjective redemptive re-positioning.*

During 1959-60 Lacan gave his seventh seminar series entitled *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* in which he outlined his ideas concerning how an ethics of psychoanalysis might be constituted. A central aspect of his commentary was the issue of what it is to be a subject in and of culture. Echoing the sentiments of Jacqueline Rose in the mid 1980s who called for a more honest account of the Lacanian subject, Kate McGowan's more recent depiction of the subject emphasises the precariousness and tragedy inherent to the subject's position in culture (McGowan 2007). Through the argument subsequently pursued in his seminar, Lacan invoked the notion of what he referred to as the 'tragedy' of the subject (Lacan 2008: 91) a notion in part appropriated from Freud's thesis on the maturation of the subject as it appears into culture (Freud 1915-16). In Seminar 7, Lacan states the condition of the subject in terms of the possibilities that language allows - that Lacan can state the condition of the subject in these terms is an effect of his understanding of language as a system, the systematicity of which constitutes the subject (Fink 1997).

A central precept for Lacan, and one which organizes his thinking over many years, is that the subject is not born but made - raw human animalism must be cooked 'like an (h)ommelette', in order to make it palatable to culture (Lacan 1997: 6). To be subject, the human infant must move from the realm of being into that of meaning. This move once

made separates the human from its original circumstance of being and the subject can never again return to the state of being outside of meaning except in death (Lacan 2008: 211).



Fig: 125 Penhaul Statue of Humphry Davy, Penzance 1950 print PHA.

Lacan argues that it is possible to have being or meaning but not both. As Kate McGowan explains: 'When the subject moves from being to meaning, it does so only in meaning's terms and so emerges as *subject to* those terms and as *subject of* them (McGowan, K. 2007: 63). Lacan posits that the very fact that the subject can imagine it otherwise, is also an effect of the function of language; Lacan states that the subject's move from being to meaning involves a radical separation of being from itself - in such terms, meaning becomes a place of loss (Lacan 1997: 92). Imagined in this way, a consequence of the move from being to meaning is what Lacan termed the 'tragedy' of the subject (McGowan, K 2007: 63). The subject's sense of self is however quickly recuperated. Evans (1996) insists that Lacan's mirror stage acted as a rehearsal for the misrecognition and misidentification that continues through the subject's life in language (Evans 1996: 115). For Lacan, the mirror is a metaphor for the undertaking of self-perception as an operation of self-identification (Lacan 1997: 5). The seeming recognition of the self in the other is nothing but utter misrecognition, since all that is acknowledged is a location within the symbolic order into which the subject inserts itself in the undertaking of coming to be a subject in the world of meaning.

Precariousness is written into the constitution of the Lacanian subject – specular and linguistic identifications are both unreliable and doubtful processes that leave the ego in a fragile condition. In fact, the ego is never finally present for Lacan who describes an ego which is lacking, dependent and an effect of misrecognition, and as always seeking to maintain and defend itself against everything which might threaten to undermine it (Lacan 1991a). Kate McGowan describes the tragedy of the subject as ‘the tragedy of its foundation on the basis of a relational process within which it is inevitably lost in the dialectical process of dependency that subjectivity becomes’ (McGowan, K. 2007: 67).



*Fig: 126 Penhaul Painting 1954 print PHA.*

Lacan refers to the symbolic structures of culture as the big Other; such structures, constituted within the realm of language and signification, inaugurate a further sense of loss in the foundation of subjectivity. Dylan Evans notes that Lacan appears to have borrowed the term from Hegel to whose work Lacan was introduced in a series of lectures given by Alexandre Kojève in the mid 1930s. Evans states that the big Other designates radical alterity, an otherness which transcends the illusory otherness of the imaginary: ‘Lacan equates this radical alterity with language and the law, and hence the big Other is inscribed in the order of the symbolic’ (Evans 1996: 133). The subject’s relation to the structures of culture is destined, according to Lacan, to be constituted in the endless process of deferral and difference that meaning is and there to endlessly search for what it will never definitively find once and for all (Lacan 1991b).<sup>60</sup>



Fig: 127 Penhaul Tea party 1953 print PHA.

A seemingly bleak and despondent account but one which for Lacan underlies an essential tenet of psychoanalysis which is not to mask the radical disjunction of the subject (Lacan 1997: 342 – 4). The point of psychoanalysis is to accept the subject as defiled, as not only self-interested but at the same time dis-jointed. Echoing Lacan, Slavoj Žižek insists that this tragic and pessimistic subjectivity is inexorable; we should not deny our malign egoic disposition but rather face it for what it is and to take it into account (Žižek 2013). For Lacan, the motivations of the subject are never pure - any expression of interest is always one of self-interest, 'At this juncture of nature and culture, psychoanalysis recognises this knot of imaginary servitude ... we lay bare the aggressivity that underlies the activity of the philanthropist, the idealist, the pedagogue, and even the reformer' (Lacan 2003: 8). Generosity is always already a form of self-interest, a mode of aggression. In Seminar 7, Lacan makes it clear that such ethics cannot reside in some splendid isolation; the ethical relation of the subject to the 'other' is central to and constitutive of Lacan's entire psychoanalytic project.



Fig: 128 Penhaul Mayor Bennetts and Hungarian refuges 1954 print PHA.

## 2: 4 The enculturation of the subject

*In its task of thinking through what makes humans subjects of culture, the account given by psychoanalysis is one of a radically uncertain dependence in the relation between subject and other. In elaborating this dependency, psychoanalysis also describes the consequences of the processes involved in the enculturation of the subject; as the subject participates in the discourse of the other in the interest of self-recognition, the possibilities of the subject's undoing are revealed in the contingency of the process. In Lacan's schema, difference is not only foundational of the subject but is also a vital aspect of maintaining a meaningful sense of itself in the world. This study positions Penhaul's photographs within this dialectical account of same and other.*

In the Lacanian psychoanalytic account of subject formation, the subject is held in a dialectical relation to the other, that is other people or objects within which the subject may appear to find itself (Lacan 1997: 212). This relation is dialectical as it operates in both directions and Lacan goes back to Freud for a model of this interdependent relation in what was Freud's *Schema L*.<sup>61</sup> Lacan writes 'This schema signifies that the condition of the subject ... is dependent on what is being unfolded in the Other 'O'. What is being unfolded there is articulated like a discourse, the unconscious is the discourse of the Other' (Lacan 1997: 214).



Fig: 129 Penhaul Commonwealth students 1953 print PHA.

According to Dylan Evans, in Lacan's revised schema the condition of the subject (S) is relationally dependent on the Other (O) and also on the ensuing shift through the subject's objects (o) and the ego's objects (o') on its way to the Other as represented in the symbolic (Evans 1996: 176). Lacan describes this shift, this unfolding, as being like a discourse, 'the discourse of the Other'; the unfolding encapsulates the possibilities open to the subject.

Lacan states that the subject is 'interested' in the Other not least because it is in part initiated there, 'Why would the subject be interested in this discourse if he were not taking part in it? He is' (Lacan 1997: 214).<sup>62</sup> The subject desires to be recognised and this is what drives it to take part in the discourse of the Other.

The configuration through schema L marks not only possibilities for the subject but also the contingent potentialities for the subject's ruin.<sup>63</sup> It is the individual's particular detours on the route between the subject and the Other, that account for the constitution of subjectivity in its specificities. In Lacan's model, difference is not only foundational of the subject, but also an essential part of securing a meaningful sense of itself in the world.



Fig: 130 Penhaul Farming commonwealth student 1952 print PHA.

Lacan's *Schema L* is therefore a simplified sketch of the continual process of subject formation, affirmation and reformation and as such further augments the operations of the mirror stage metaphor of development; *Schema L* can be read as a simplified sketch of the subject's relation to the processes of identification within representation (Sharpe and Faulkner 2008).

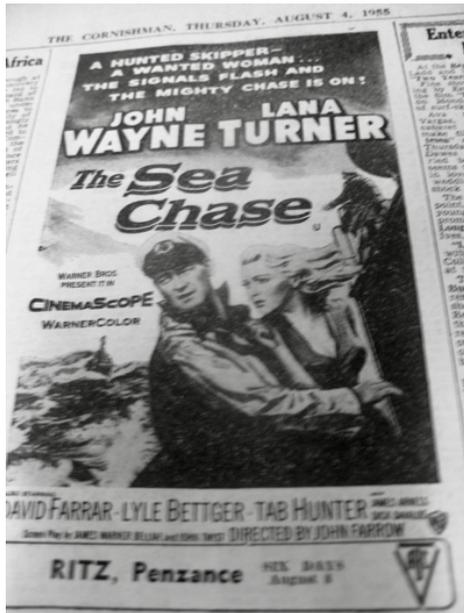


Fig: 131 cinema advert *The Cornishman* August 1955 PHA.

In his Seminar 11, given during 1964, Lacan further discussed the uncertainties that invariably come to undermine the smooth running of the dialectical relation between self and other and figures this impossible relation through the metaphor of unrequited love. Lacan observed that while the subject needs the other to define itself, it also requires a particular other who will grant it recognition in the terms it demands (Lacan 1997: 186-198). Penhault's photographs can be viewed in just such terms, as a visual prospectus which illustrates the terms of recognition and declares 'this is how we desire to be seen'.



Fig: 132 Penhault Penzance score winning goal November 17<sup>th</sup> 1955 print PHA.



Fig: 133 Penhaul MP Grenville Howard meets farm workers 1954 print PHA.

Penhaul's photographs in *The Cornishman* can be read in terms of a fantasy - of deception and misrecognition: the image presented is ideal but any reciprocity can only take place in the imaginary and the likelihood according to Lacan, is that the dialectic of recognition will not be successful. Subjectivity can only occur through a fantasy of recognition from the Other but failure is inherent not least because as Lacan states, 'You never look at me from the place from which I see you' (Lacan 1998: 103).

Lacan identifies in the mirror stage and *Schema L* the precarious nature of the subject's dialectical relation to the other. Lacan further argues that the acquisition of language additionally situates the subject within a relation of uncertainty - identification through the semantics of language is conceived by Lacan as misrecognition. Lacan concludes that in a very real sense, contrary to assumptions of self-mastery, that 'language speaks us' (Lacan 1997: 106).<sup>64</sup> When the subject acquires language and enters the social world, the sense of meaning offered there is only within language's deficient terms.

For Lacan, the subject is represented by the signifier in the order of the Other as the order of the symbolic - the signifier is 'that which represents the subject for another signifier' (Lacan 2006: 350). It does not represent the subject for another subject. The subject is positioned provisionally along the chain of signification; the subject's desire, to represent itself to the other, is not feasible. The subject is divided in its desire, it has desire *for* the other (misrecognition in the imago) but also is desperate for desire *from* the other (the desire to be recognized by the other as we would wish to be recognized). 'It must be posited that, produced as it is by an animal at the mercy of language, man's desire is the desire of the Other' (Lacan 1977a: 292). Language gives and language takes away and

ensures that a great deal can go wrong for the subject. Foundational yet precarious, the subject's relation to the other is situated in the desire to be whole. But desire also becomes the desire to be for the other. As Kate McGowan comments: 'what Lacan terms the movement of desire is thus the movement that motivates and regulates the behaviour of the subject in any social situation. Understood as movement, desire informs the subject's perceptions and actions, and at the same time keeps the subject within the movement of desire' (McGowan 2007: 88).

The subject is constituted in a never ending gesture of repeatedly grasping for an imagined fulfilment from *objet a* and defending its ego-ideal from whatever may prevent its achievement there (Žižek 2006a).<sup>65</sup> The Lacanian subject desires the other but wants to master the other at the same time – this duplicitous function is inherent to the condition of being a subject in the world.

Lacan insists on the crucial role of failure in the constitution of the subject (Lacan 1997: 170). The possibility of failure for the subject (of failure of recognition from the place of the other as the ego-ideal) is for Lacan an absolute possibility and is argued to be a fundamental condition of being subject. The fear of failure mobilizes a matrix of constituting forces that drive the subject in every facet of its existence in the social and cultural world.



Fig: 134 Penhaul Sports day 1956 print PHA.

Within this Lacanian reading of the dialectic of same and other, of subject and Other, Penhaul's photographs illustrate and perform the subject's constitution within the discourse of the Other as brought about within socially elaborated situations (Lacan 1998:

122). The radical dependency of same and other posited by Lacan as foundational of the subject's very constitution and is argued in this study to be staged and choreographed through Penhaul's photographs and between the pages of *The Cornishman*. Every civic visit by a foreign dignitary or student exchange programme is pursued and portrayed by Penhaul with almost neurotic zeal - Hungarian refugees, Commonwealth agricultural students, trans-Atlantic adventurers: all are subjected to an interrogatory gaze. Penhaul acknowledges difference in all its guises; he records the increasing presence of English tourists and traffic, he marks the differential social relations brought by the demarcations of class difference on display within Cornish society.

Lacan's schema of the constitution of the subject and the radical dependency of same and other brings a measure of available focus to the view through this study's Lacanian lens and provides a useful and workable framework within which to figure Penhaul's practice in terms of a psychoanalytic register. The weekly content of *The Cornishman*, its editorials and articles, its photographs and adverts can be read not just as a portrait of 1950s Cornish community but as a prospectus of identity, as an instrumental constitution of a particularized subjectivity. Lacan suggests how this manifesto of perpetual becoming can work in the real world. In Lacan's terms when *The Cornishman* and Penhaul ask 'Who am I?' they ask it of the other and the Other. What they find is never an answer in itself but rather the possibility of a further question 'Where am I there?' (Lacan 1997: 214). In Lacan's model, difference is not only foundational of the subject, but also a crucial facet in its maintaining a meaningful sense of itself in the world. This sense of meaning may be precarious, based on misrecognition and subject to the perpetual movement of impossible desire, but as Lacan insists, this is the only subjectivity we have. Lacan states that the ethics of psychoanalysis is to accept and face the ugly reality of the dialectical relation of the self and other and not to deny it, but rather take it into account (Lacan 2008).

The ethics of psychoanalysis proposed by Lacan is the ethics of accepting and facing that condition, rather than attempting to simply change it. Psychoanalysis positions the subject as precarious, fallacious and living in a fantasy-ridden reality of lies and misrecognition (Eagleton 2003: 197), a pessimistic portrayal of the subject Margaret Iversen describes as 'an austere cultural politics indeed!' (Iversen 2007: 6). The account of the subject given by psychoanalysis is characterized by impossibility, failure, lack and misrecognition but all these ostensibly negative elements work not just to constitute the subject but make up the mobilizing matrix which is 'what keeps us up and running' (Eagleton 2003: 199). Post-

structuralism may have patented the paradox that what makes something impossible is also what makes it possible (Storey 2006), but in Lacan's terms, it is the sheer impossibility of desire, the fact we can only plug our lack with one inadequate substitute after another, that keeps the subject in a constant movement of becoming (Fink 1997).

Read under the sign of alterity, the relation of the subject with the Other is one of dependency, of radical dependency. According to commentators like Kate McGowan, the issue of alterity haunts cultural analysis: 'that alterity is an issue in cultural criticism is evident in its growing concern with an attention to cultural difference. From refugees and asylum, through notions of home and hospitality ... the question of the other persists in cultural analysis' (McGowan, K. 2007: 79). The notion of the Other serves to remind us that we are not all there is, that a dominating epistemology can occlude other possible ways of conceiving the world and being in it. Psychoanalysis can provide a model which marks the limits of metaphysics, which in its privileging of alterity, posits its frameworks, not as an answer, but as a question. The post-structuralist paradox of impossible possibility is most eloquently exemplified in the Lacanian notion of the real, the ontological realm that exists at the impossible limits of alterity. The following chapter will outline a conceptualization of this impossible realm by gesturing towards the domain where 'epistemology occludes ontology' (Belsey 2005). It will be argued that the Lacanian real, for all its impossibility, exerts determinations and effects within the subject and culture nonetheless. The next chapter will scrutinize the question of the real and in particular how psychoanalysis and cultural criticism constitutes this scrutiny and circulates that constitution within their specific terms.

#### **Chapter 4 The Real**

## Chapter Outline:

*For Lacan the subject is not just an effect of culture and signifying practices but is inescapably and completely subject to and of the ontological realm beyond meaning, the topographical realm Lacan named the real. This chapter will examine how the real can be read as functioning to mark the limits of culture and of any subsequent cultural criticism; that is, it will interrogate the space where epistemology occludes ontology (Belsey 2005). This chapter will propose that such questioning is both inherent to and vital for photography's relation to the real.*

*Two issues arising will be then discussed. First, that the real has determinations and effects recognizable in material culture. Second, that the real persists and in its functioning as a question for cultural criticism has relevance for an understanding both of the ontology of the photograph itself and also for the specular relation between the subject and the photographic image.*

*This chapter will proceed by discussing various accounts and configurations of the realm of the real in order to conceptually 'ring-fence' that which Lacan repeatedly referred to as being 'what does not depend on my idea of it' (Lacan cited in Fink 1995: 142).*

## **Introduction:**

The previous chapter elaborated a Lacanian model of subjectivity which posits a reading of the subject as constituted within a mobilizing matrix of lack and desire (Lacan 1997: 214). Lacan's schema figures the subject as precariously performed through misrecognition and fantasy in a perpetual movement between the subject and the cultural world around it (Žižek 2006a). This model implicates the subject in a dialectical relation with the Other, performed under the sign of alterity.<sup>66</sup> This following chapter will be concerned with the conceptual corollaries of Lacan's post-structuralist understanding of the subject as figured within the processes of signification. This chapter will examine the effects and determinations on the subject and culture of the realm Lacan conceptualized as outside of signification and cultural meaning, the realm he named the real. In order to examine possible modes of address and so further discussion, this chapter will continue to draw on the metaphor of the Lacanian lens to interrogate the ontological sphere of the unrepresentable real and its (im)possible relation to the photographic image. This chapter will argue that the Lacanian model of subjectivity not only provides a profitable framework with which to think the subject in terms of alterity but also facilitates

an interrogation of the manner in which the notion of alterity functions in marking the limits of culture and cultural criticism such that it works to delineate the uncertain ground mapped by the interrelation of epistemology and ontology (Belsey 2005). Poststructuralist theory, of which Lacan became a leading proponent during the post-war years, affirms the relativity of what it is possible for subjects to know in and of the cultural and language systems we inhabit (Storey 2008). As Catherine Belsey argues, in its refusal to incorporate what exists into what we know exists, post-structuralism leaves open the possibility of a terrain of unmapped alterity (Belsey 2002a). Lacan's conceptual topography is argued to provide a modality not just for thinking the subject's relation to the Other, to culture and to meaning, but to also implicate the subject in a relation to that which is outside of culture, outside of representation but yet wholly imbricated within the realm Lacan named the real.

During his annual series of seminars given from the early 1950s until the late 1970s, Lacan developed his argument that the subject was not just an effect of culture and signifying practices but was inescapably and completely subject to and of the ontological realm of the real (Fink 2004). This chapter will explore how the realm of the real can be interrogated in terms of its determinations and effects which are argued to push and pull and thereby act on the culture and subjectivities the subject inhabits and the representations it makes (Belsey 2005). This chapter will argue that such effects and marks of the (exiled) real can be recognized in representation and this chapter will look to theoretically substantiate the manner and modes of such recognition.

How the real is thought and the possibilities to which different modes of thinking it can give rise, will be explored through this chapter; above all it will be argued that the realm of the unknowable real can be glimpsed and alluded to within representation and that such effects can be identified as motifs particularly within photographic representation and practice. It will be argued that the real and its effects intrude and erupt into the cultural reality we make for ourselves, a reality not designed to recognize such intrusions (Žižek 2006c). This chapter will therefore be concerned with just how such motifs of the real can be thought and identified and will accordingly look to undertake a further 'calibration' of this study's figurative Lacanian lens such that the determinations and effects of the real can come into some degree of critical focus.

This chapter will explore configurations of the real expressed in recent years by several prominent writers who have articulated a particular interest in the discourse of the real.

The main discussion here will be between a Žižekian reading of the real as void and a Lacanian conception of the real as being 'out there' but unknowable. As the attributes or otherwise of these various configurations are discussed, it will be argued that what all such modes of the real have in common is that they insist that the real functions persists and as a question for cultural criticism in general (McGowan, K). This study will further argue that such persistence and functionality characterizes the medium of photography.

Within Lacan's late topology, elaborated most fully in his Seminar 22 of 1974, the real is situated as that which is beyond symbolization: 'The real is what does not depend on my idea of it' (Lacan cited in Fink 1997: 142). Over the many years of his annual seminar series, from the mid 1950s until the late 1970s, Lacan drew on different modes of address to think around the resulting conundrum of making sense of the nonsensical, of making meaningful statements about that which he himself conceptualized as beyond meaning. One such mode mobilized by Lacan during his seminar 7 series, was to conceptualize the real as delineated in terms of its cultural effects (Lacan 2008). This chapter will pursue a similar path in that it will present various configurations of the realm of the real with the aim of conceptually 'ring-fencing' and delineating that terrain of unmapped alterity where 'epistemology occludes ontology' (Belsey 2005: 47) and will work to identify the materialization of its effects.

The conceptions of the real that will be discussed may appear to be marked only by nuances of difference, but it will be noted how such nuance can have on occasion, huge significance, 'not just in terms of conceptual constitution but also in how that constitution is subsequently circulated' (McGowan, K. 2007: 115). Through such a dialectical strategy a sufficiently robust notion of the real and its effects will be elaborated such that it can be usefully situated within this study's Lacanian conceptual landscape and so further augment the Lacanian lens through which systems of representation such as the photographs of Harry Penhaul can be viewed and discussed.

This chapter will discuss the notion of the real under the sectional framework outlined in the study's main introduction.

## **Part 1 The subject, culture and beyond**

*This section will discuss the subject's relation to culture, language and what Lacan named the realm of the real in an account which posits uncertainty and unconscious determinations at the core of the subject's imbrication with the real. The real is figured as culture's defining difference and as being that silent exteriority which is also inside the subject's very constitution. The real is figured as a determinative absent presence, a loss that is the effect of a structural relationship between language and subjectivity, a relation built on the notion of the real. The real is argued to surround the subject but also to inhabit the subject as condition of its existence.*

For Lacan, in his post-war reading of Saussurean structural linguistics, the meanings that give us our sense of reality are always acquired from outside the subject, that is, we learn to mean from other people, from a language that pre-exists us, from what he describes as the 'irreducible otherness of the symbolic order' (Lacan 2006: 328). We become subjects through our subjection to the symbolic order and the 'defiles of the signifier' (Lacan 2006: 342). Lacan argues that through this subjection subjects gain access to social reality but in the process we leave behind the realm of the human organism, the realm named in Lacan's topology as that of the real. Lacan's reading of Saussure enabled him to conceptualize this separation in terms of the subject's move from being to meaning figured through the acquisition of language (Lacan 1997: 78-85). Lacan makes the distinction between meaning, which we learn from language itself, and the world that language supposedly describes. Lacan appropriates Saussure's contention of language as a system 'without positive terms' (Saussure 1974: 120), a consequence of which is the inference that there is no way to conclusively assert that the meanings we know match the world they appear to map (Lacan 1997: 64-8). According to this model language, once acquired, will always come between the subject and direct contact with the real (Žižek 2006: 38).

In his first seminar series given in 1953-4 entitled *Freud's Papers on Technique*, Lacan begins to elaborate his structural linguistic account of the subject's position within the social field and its relation to language and the realm of the real: 'One can only think of language as a network over the entirety of things, over the totality of the real. It inscribes on the plane of the real this other plane, which we call the plane of the symbolic' (Lacan 1991: 262). Catherine Belsey comments, 'The real is what is there, but undefined, unaccountable, perhaps, within the frameworks of our knowledge. It is there as such, but not there-for-a subject' (Belsey 2005: 5). According to Catherine Belsey, the post-structuralist in Lacan always acknowledges the relativity of what it is possible to know and

to be sure of, and he figures this discussion in terms of the subject's relation to culture (Belsey 2002b).<sup>67</sup>

In Seminar 7, Lacan repeatedly insists that culture is the element we as humans inhabit as speaking beings; it is what makes us subjects (Lacan 2008). Culture consists of a society's entire range of signifying practices: rituals, stories, entertainment, lifestyle, norms, beliefs, prohibitions, values (Belsey 2002a). As Paul Taylor argues, such signifying practices are precisely embodied and performed in the print and visual media (Taylor 2010). Culture resides in the meanings of these practices, meanings in which subjects are continually enculturated. Within Lacan's Saussurean account, the subject is what speaks and is what signifies; subjects learn in culture to reproduce and possibly challenge these meanings as inscribed in the signifying practices of the society that shapes them (Zizek 1989). While Lacan repeatedly articulates in Seminar 7 the position that subjectivity is an effect of culture and of the inscription of culture in signifying practice, his continual conceptual concern is for what is 'out-there' beyond the subject: for culture, for the Other and for whatever lies beyond (McGowan, K. 2007).

For Lacan, there is no place for the subject outside of culture; culture is all the subject knows - the subject is always in culture, always in the game (Belsey 2005: 33). However, a consequence of such positioning is that there is nothing the subject can be sure of in so far as culture is all the subject knows or rather thinks it does. In such terms, uncertainty is posited as constitutive of the structure of the subject. Certainty will always evade the subject because as meaning consists of language and symbols; there is no way of showing that any set of symbols and or words maps the world, maps 'reality', with direct correspondence. Because knowledge thus proposed, exists at the level of the symbol, the psychoanalytic account of subjectivity subtends inevitable anxiety and possible psychosis (Lacan 1998). It is this sense of unease that particularizes the Lacanian Saussurean account; the Lacanian vocabulary is organized to conceptualize uncertainty (Fink 2004). The psychoanalytic account problematizes notions of 'truth' and in so doing resists the sovereignty of the symbolic and opens out the possibilities of an encounter that exceeds what culture permits the subject to define. Lacan argues, in opposition to traditions of classical philosophy, that truth is not beautiful or even necessarily beneficial to learn (Lacan 1991a: 122). Indeed, Lacan indicates that truth is similar to the real in that it is impossible to articulate the whole truth, and 'precisely because of this impossibility, truth aspires to the real' (Lacan 1990: 83).

A further consequence of Lacan's positioning of the subject within culture is the view that the human subject is driven by determinations that bear a complex relation to culture (Copjec 1994). In Lacan's psychoanalytic account, unconscious desire is read as a determination which effects every facet and function of the subject's behaviour within the social field: 'The unconscious obeys its own grammar and logic. The unconscious talks and thinks' (Žižek 2006: 3). Slavoy Žižek claims that in Lacan's conception, social reality offers gratifications, sexual and cultural, but because language is theorized as irreducibly other, the satisfactions available to the speaking subject never quite match the wants they are supposed to meet (Žižek 1991b). The subject has demands that belong to the 'alien' language and not to the organism; Lacan argues that the gap between the two constitutes the location of unconscious desire (Lacan 2006: 329). Lacan's central point here is that unconscious desire is theorized as subsisting in ways that are not culturally scripted and can therefore make its disruptive presence felt. Lacan posits at the heart of the subject this mobilizing yet unconscious determination, but despite its position beyond language and culture, the unconscious is not the realm Lacan calls the real. In a nuance of difference, it will be argued that unconscious desire comes to occupy not the place of the real itself, but rather the place of the exiled real (Belsey 2005).<sup>68</sup>

Thus conceived, the Lacanian subject is conceptualized precisely in terms of incompleteness (McGowan 2007). According to Antony Easthope, thinking the real in such terms of exile and incompleteness, figures a subject at variance with any practical autonomy (Easthope 1999). The real, what Catherine Belsey calls 'culture's defining difference' (Belsey 2005: 29), is that silent exteriority which is also inside us, unsymbolizable and unknowable even when we call it 'the real' (Belsey 2005: 30). The real is not nature nor is the real a fact. It is not the truth or an alternative reality with which to contrast appearances (Žižek 2006). The real, like alterity, can function as a question, it can 'act as a kind of spectre which in its haunting continually reminds us that what we know is not all there is' (McGowan, K. 2007: 114). For Belsey, the real is a question not an answer (Belsey 2005: 50).

Lacan elaborates these concerns at length in Seminar 7 given in 1959-60. Over this seminar series Lacan repeatedly asks 'what is it to be a subject in and of culture?' (Lacan 2008: 28). Lacan reworks Freud's thesis on the development of the human organism as it moves into culture. For Lacan the subject is not born but made. As discussed above in Chapter 3 (p:

158), for Lacan, the subject is a raw material, not yet cooked; a raw animalism that must be baked like an (h)omlette (sic) in order to make it palatable to culture. To do this the human must make the move from the realms of its being into the realm of meaning; it must give up being for meaning. Such a move, once made will separate the human for ever from its being. Lacan argues that you can have being or meaning, but not both (Lacan 2008: 175). Saussure's conceptualization of language as a signifying system means that language can only refer to itself and has no intrinsic relation to the subject, and in these terms, meaning becomes a place of loss for the tragic subject (Lacan 1997: 8).

The subject recuperates such loss in Lacan's imaginary, a dynamic considered by Lacan to also be constitutive of subjectivity (Lacan 1997: 3-7). Lacan figures the imaginary as masking the loss entailed in the foundation of the subject and does this through operations of fantasy and misrecognition (Sharpe and Faulkner 2008). The imaginary thereby aids and abets the subject through the dynamics of self-perception within the idealized-self (imago). During the seminar series of the 1950s, Lacan elaborates a developing topology which increasingly figures the constitution of the subject as within a confluence not just of the imaginary and symbolic, but also of the real. Indeed, during the 1950s, Lacan becomes increasingly dependent on the realm of the real and its mode of absent causation, to enable his topographical enterprise to continue to conceptually function (Žižek 1991a). By the time Lacan sets out his psychoanalytic account of the subject's relation to culture in his Seminar 7 series, his use of the term the real had travelled some considerable conceptual distance since its first substantive use by Lacan in a paper of 1936. As Dylan Evans explains: 'as a term the real was commonly used in philosophy during this time to define an ontological absolute ... in speaking of the real Lacan followed a common practice in early twentieth century philosophy' (Evans 1996: 159). After its brief appearance in the mid 1930s, the term disappears from Lacan's work until the mid 1950s – at first Lacan uses the real to locate an ontological point of reference for the subject, that is to oppose the world of appearances (Žižek 1992a). By 1953 Lacan had elevated the real to the status of a fundamental category within psychoanalytic theory; the real was henceforth inscribed as one of the three orders according to which all psychoanalytic phenomena could be described (Evans 1996: 160). By the mid 1950s, the real had shifted roles from location of point of origin to functioning increasingly as a determinative absent cause imbricated within the orders of the imaginary and the symbolic, and as constitutive of the subject within culture (Homer 2005). However, while Lacan's real comes to be conceptualized in

terms of its participation in a confluence with the imaginary and symbolic orders, it resolutely remains for him as that which is outside of language and inassimilable to symbolization – as ‘that which resists symbolization completely’ (Lacan 1991a: 66).

During the post-war period as Lacan continued to conceptually develop the extent and function of the real within his now tripartite topography, the account of the real is increasingly situated by Lacan in opposition to the philosophical tradition of Idealism. Figured as an interrogation of the limits of what we can and do know and the possible effects of the unknown real on our material reality, such an account, according to Catherine Belsey (2005), brings psychoanalysis into a direct impasse with the dominant philosophical tradition widespread in Western culture of Idealism, defined by Terry Eagleton as ‘the attribution of primacy to ideas’ (Eagleton 1983: 56). Belsey argues that the assumption that what we do not know does not exist is an easy one to make until it imposes limitations on what we can do; the underside of such complacency is that we have no way of understanding phenomena outside the existing frameworks of our ideas - in a very real (sic) sense, ‘epistemology occludes ontology’ (Belsey 2005: 51). Thinkers from Kant to Hegel have discussed what it is possible to know as opposed to what exists. Idealism conceives of ideas as the ultimate reality and so completes the Cartesian project: ‘I think, therefore I am’ becomes ‘I think and that’s all that matters’. As Hegel noted, idealism affirms the sovereignty of the self (Hegel 1977: 298). Idealism’s world is reassuring while that posited by psychoanalysis is intrinsically uncertain.<sup>69</sup>

Lacan consistently positions himself in opposition to idealism and cultural determinism (Lacan 1997: 284-6). Lacan’s Saussurean view of language is that language always comes from outside the subject and thereby assumes a position that is within but also alien to the subject. Borrowing from an existing system of differences and dependent on other’s normative formulations, we as subjects cannot say exactly what we mean: language generalizes. Lacan appropriates such ideas directly from Saussure but inflects the concepts within a psychoanalytic register (Sharpe and Faulkner 2008). The acquisition of language is figured with and within the loss to the conscious subject of the realm of the real; the real is consequently ‘obliterated’ and its place assumed by unconscious desire (Fink 1996).

Lacan’s notion of the subject as emerging from the confluence of the three orders of the imaginary, symbolic and the real, allows Lacan to refer to the subject as ‘woven’, as a ‘composite of the speaking beings we become and real organisms we remain but cannot

reach' (Belsey 2005: 39). According to Kate McGowan, the unconscious thus figured is not a leftover of the real but a residue of obliteration itself, evident as lack (McGowan 2007: 115). Lacanian psychoanalysis concerns the inevitable loss that is the effect of a structural relationship between language and subjectivity. Thus figured, the subject is positioned as at the mercy of compulsions that have no seeming rational causation, and for writers such as Joan Copjec, this is the ground where the project of psychoanalysis looks to function (Copjec 1994).

Psychoanalysis then repudiates idealism and the mind-body dualism it entails (Belsey 2005). For psychoanalysis the cultural script is never absolute; it plays a crucial role but leaves many occurrences unexplained. Psychoanalysis insists that we need to recognize what culture withholds, that is, the inability of the script to cover the lack that appears in culture itself (Žižek 1991a). Belsey states 'the abolished particularity returns as resistance, marking the speaking being's loss of the unnameable real, which is still there, but no longer there-for-a-subject' (Belsey 2005: 37). This resistance makes itself felt not only in individual experience, but also as incoherencies in the apparent homogeneity of culture itself. Freud's case study of 'Anna O' demonstrated how during periods of ill-health, Anna resisted the cultural script assigned to her (that of middle-class Viennese woman). For Lacan such resistance stemmed from an unconscious desire posited by Lacan as representing the residue of the obliteration performed by language of the instinctual, organic self (Lacan 1991b). The unconscious was conceptualized by Lacan in Seminar 20 as the place of the loss and exile of the real, not the real itself (Lacan 1999). The obliterated real exercised, in the form of symptoms, determinations none the less. What is lost reappears as a residue of unconscious desire for something else. In this way 'the real that exists outside us acts as a limitation on our power to make the world in our own image of it' (Belsey 2005: 36).

Lacan's conception of the real was always indebted to his interest in the structuralism of Levi-Strauss and the linguistics of Saussure (Roudinesco 2005). Lacan drew on Saussure's proposition of language as a system of differences 'without positive terms' (Saussure 1974: 120) to argue that while there was nothing lacking in the real, there was always something missing in the symbolic. As Sean Homer comments: 'The real is a kind of undifferentiated mass from which we must distinguish ourselves, as subjects, through the process of symbolization. It is through the process of cancelling out, of symbolizing the real, that social reality is created. In short, the real does not *exist*, as existence is a product of thought and

language and the real proceeds language' (Homer 2005 : 74). For Lacan, the symbolic consists of signifiers that can only approximate to that which they refer. There will always be gaps in the signifying chain but these absences makes their presence felt. Lacan's Saussurean conception of language implied that it was incomplete and not to be trusted (Lacan 1997: 99-102). Nothing anchors the meanings that language itself produces. The signifier cannot quite tell the full story but rather appears to evoke the existence of something behind or to the side of it - but there is no access to this out of reach place (Žižek 1991a). Whatever inhabits this space remains conjectural and undefined. The signifier appears as a veil, but one that veils the unknown.<sup>70</sup> This conjectural, undefined and unknown space is the space that the signifier fails to cover. It's the space of the real as it seeps through the gaps in what language can say (Belsey 2005: 46).

Whether as words or an image or mathematical equation, the signifier veils whatever might be there. Lacan comments that any symbol whether a picture, photograph or story, constitutes 'evidence only of the latency with which any signifiable is struck, when it is raised to the function of the signifier' (Lacan 1997: 288). For Lacan, it is this latency that gives our existence what meaning it has. We make meaning not from certainty and truth, both notions problematized by psychoanalysis, but rather from the possibilities connoted by the signifier (Lacan 1997: 279).

The figure of the veil can be again usefully employed to draw out further aspects of the real. Lacan argues that the subject is driven to know the cause of its inexhaustible desire, the unknown element that would fill the absence created by the loss of the real. This object or thing that motivates and perpetuates desire takes on increasing significance for Lacan in the 1960s.<sup>71</sup> Freud had initially insisted that the unconscious mobilizing force behind all human life was the sex drive. After the traumas of the First World War Freud posited another drive that pressed towards death. In Seminar 7 Lacan elaborates Freud's concept of the drive as both life-giving and deadly. Lacan's account incorporates not only desire for physical mortality but also as operating in the speaking being at the level of the signifier and as seeking what Lacan refers to as a 'second death' (Lacan 2008: 285-95). Crucially this 'symbolic' second death entails the full recognition of what we, as signifying subjects, are not: we are not complete, not knowing, not immortal and it is the subject's brutal destiny to languish in such incompleteness.<sup>72</sup>

In Lacan's attempt to identify the origins of this life-giving yet deadly drive he makes explicit the connection between the drive and the real. Initially called *the Thing* and then

later *objet a*, Lacan constructs this object to retroactively occupy the space of pure loss that is left by the erasure and exile of the real as the subject enters the world of meaning and language (Žižek 2006). *Objet a* occupies the place where the real was; it constitutes itself in filling the emptiness that resides there for the speaking subject (Lacan 1997: 179).<sup>73</sup>

*Objet a* represents non-being; it constitutes the nothing that is to be found behind the veil, the object-cause of desire (Lacan 2008: 296-8). *Objet a* is not therefore the real. Instead it exists at the level of demand as whatever could fill the gap created by the fact that the real is lost to the subject (Žižek 1989: 82). As Kate McGowan explains: 'the real of the organism as lost to the subject remains the condition of the existence of the drive figured as *objet a*' (McGowan 2007: 114).

In his first seminar series of 1953-4 Lacan had stated that signification and the real exist at different levels. Twenty years later in Seminar 20 Lacan was still working to elaborate the conceptual frameworks he used to position the real in relation to the subject and signification. In particular, he insisted that the symbolic misses the real; it is only to the degree that psychoanalysis is able to register the impossibility of touching it, that 'a certain real may be reached' (Lacan 1999: 22). The real remains in place as what exists, but *ex-sists* the speaking being (Evans 1996: 58). The real is not 'there-for-a-subject' but as a present absence; its effects persist within every subject, although it is left outside of the subject. The real surrounds us. It also inhabits us as the condition of our *ex-istence*. Dylan Evans comments that 'it is only that which is impossible to symbolize that exists: the impossible *Thing* at the heart of the subject ... This is the existence of the subject' (Evans 1996: 58). This existence Lacan describes as 'ineffable, stupid existence' (Lacan 1997: 194). Mobilized by drives and constituted by culturally constructed images of reality, the subject remains ultimately empty. When asked on national television what it was possible to know Lacan replied 'nothing that does not have the structure of language' (cited in Copjec 1990: 59). He went on to say that reality was nothing more than 'a grimace of the real' (Lacan 1990: 6). It is precisely this grimace of the real that this study argues can be seen to emerge through the Lacanian conceptual lens.

## **Part 2 Configurations of the real: from Žižek to Lacan**

Since the late 1980s Slovenian writer Slavoj Žižek has prominently and persuasively proselytized his own specific reading(s) of the real with his particular, and perhaps to some, partial appropriation of Lacanian theory (Kay 2003). Reading Žižek against Lacan qua the real highlights nuances of conceptual difference that are seen to generate substantively

contrasting effects. In part two and three of this chapter, which both elaborate a view of the Lacanian real by reading Žižek against Lacan, I have drawn on the theoretical scaffolding provided in the work of writers such as Antony Easthope, Kate McGowan and Catherine Belsey whose clarity and insight have outlined productive, compelling and focused lines of enquiry that have helped propel this study forward.

### **The real as void**

*Žižek's real is a void; in Žižek's view, tear away the veil of signification and you will find nothing. Ideological fantasy creates a fantasmatic screen to mask and prevent the horrific trauma of encountering the abyss of the void. Unlike Lacan's real, Žižek's real is not only not there for the subject, it is not there at all.*

For Žižek, cultural criticism must work to tear the veil of signification from the real in order to expose it for what it is: nothing. In 1989 Slavoj Žižek published his seminal text *The Sublime Object of Ideology* and in so doing regvanized Lacanian theory not least by bringing it to a wide readership and increased public awareness. Žižek announced his programme as being 'to reassert the Cartesian subject' by means of a 'Lacanian reading of the problematic of subjectivity in German idealism' (Žižek 1999a: 10). Similarly, in *The Žižek Reader* he states: 'the core of my entire work is the endeavour to use Lacan as a privileged intellectual tool to reactualize German Idealism' (1999b: ix). In recent years Žižek's critical and cultural fireworks have been more widely read than Lacan's esoteric texts from several generations ago and in his close reading of Lacan, Žižek has done more than any other contemporary thinker to bring to prominence the notion of the real (Parker 2004). However, it is evident that nuances of difference emerge from Žižek's 're-reading' of Lacan's real and it is argued that such nuances have substantial and substantive effects (Belsey 2005). This and following sections of this chapter will accompany these arguments and look to interrogate and position Žižek's real in relation to that developed by Lacan in the post-war period.

Simply put, Žižek's position qua the real is that he rejects the notion that the real *is* - he refuses the possibility of the real as 'something-in-itself' which is beyond the differential grasp of symbolic systems (Johnston 2009). The real for Žižek is a void. He argues that in the place of the real as nothing the subject erects a fantasy in order to protect itself from the abyss of nothingness that is impossible for the subject to confront (Myers 2003: 26-9).

In Žižek's schema the subject, as in Lacan, is founded on the basis of lack but for Žižek the foundational absence of the subject comes not from any primal separation from being to meaning, but as an effect of the symbolic itself (Žižek 1989: 57-8). According to Žižek, the subject is lacking because it is constituted in a system that has no positive terms and so cannot be supported by it (Žižek 1989: 57). For Žižek, the symbolic works by a logic of internal negation (Žižek 1991b: 35) whereby, from nothing but difference, the symbolic creates the totality of everything (Žižek 2013: 921). The conceptual move from nothing to something is frequently explicated by Žižek in his writing by drawing on the notion of the negation of negation as producing the semblance of something as an effect only of itself (Žižek 2013: 292-304). Kate McGowan identifies the negative real as becoming the absent centre of the symbolic: 'an absence which hollows out the symbolic and thus excludes from it what Žižek calls the hard kernel of the real, a radical nothingness at the heart of every something ... Since the real is a negative in Žižek's terms, the symbolic cannot operate in relation to it - in consequence the symbolic has 'no external support' (McGowan 2007: 108). In Žižek's understanding, the real appears retroactively in the negative space opened up by its own failure. Whereas Lacan's real marks a limit to signification, 'that which resists symbolization completely' (Lacan 1991a: 66), the notion of the real posited by Žižek comes about as an effect of the failure of signification to attain nothing but itself. Kate McGowan argues that: 'In this sense the real is paradoxically real only in its nothingness, which in turn has nothing to do with any real as such, except as an effect in and of the symbolic' (McGowan 2007: 108).

Some of the effects of Žižek's understanding of the real as void become apparent in his writing on social antagonism and ideology. In his 2005 essay *Interrogating the Real* Žižek argues: 'the subject is an empty place correlative to antagonism: social fantasy as the elementary mode to mask that antagonism' (Žižek 2005: 282). For Žižek, ideology is not something we consciously think but rather something we unconsciously practice (Žižek 1989: 36). What Žižek terms ideological fantasy consists in overlooking 'the illusion which is structuring our real, effective relationship to reality' (Žižek 1989: 33). The subject is thus precariously placed but ideology moves convincingly through fantasy to secure the subject a sense of place in the world.

In the absence of the real as something, ideology works to protect the subject by maintaining the fantasmatic screen between itself and nothingness upon which its concept of self-rests (Žižek 1989: 43-4). Žižek understands culture and cultural objects in terms of

their ability to ward off the possibility of fantasy collapsing in on itself for lack of an external prop (Myers 2003: 99-102).

Adrian Johnston argues that for Žižek, fantasy is not the false consciousness of Marx,<sup>74</sup> but rather a social dialectic enacted in relation to the other (Johnston 2008). Antagonism engendered in the subject on the basis of its foundational lack is projected out onto (an)other social subject and Žižek argues that racism becomes an exemplary expression of this movement (Žižek 2009: 87).<sup>75</sup> Žižek situates racism as a mode of being for the subject but he offers a way in which the subject can engage and contest this operation. In order to loosen the grasp by which ideology takes control, the subject must move through or 'traverse' this fantasy to the void it masks. Žižek figures trauma as both initiating and marking the traversal of fantasy (Myers 2003: 26-7).<sup>76</sup> The subject's encounter with the horror of the real as nothing is one which implies the subject's own impossibility; this is what Žižek in *The Ticklish Subject* describes as 'the terror of the real' (Žižek 2000: 265).<sup>77</sup>

Tony Myers observes that Žižek consistently conceptualizes the real as the absence on which signification is founded and reality as being merely the game of fantasy in relation to signification (Myers 2003: 108-9). Žižek assigns the subject agency in terms of what he calls traversing the fantasy (Žižek 2013: 689-90). As such, the force of traversal, what Žižek calls the 'authentic act' (Žižek 2013: 427 and 690), lies in its capacity to redefine the rules of that game, what Žižek describes, in an echo of Baudrillard, as 'a good terrorist act which can shatter the very foundation of our being' (Žižek 2000: 377).

In a position contra Lacan, Žižek argues (2002: 31) that any notion of the real as *there-but-untouchable* must be refused and that such refusal is for Žižek the only conceivable 'ethics of the real' (see McGowan, K. 2007: 112). In his 2002 text *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Žižek insists that 'this Real *Thing* is a fantasmatic spectre whose presence guarantees the consistency of our symbolic edifice, thus enabling us to avoid confronting its constitutive inconsistency qua antagonism' (Žižek 2002: 32). That there should be an originary real concealed beneath the veils of the symbolic and imaginary registers is untenable for Žižek; he refers to this as being the 'ultimate appearance' (Žižek 2013: 36). Tony Myers notes that for Žižek, what is masked by fantasy is the truth that there is none - this being the result of the symbolic field and not some realm that cannot be apprehended (Žižek 2005).

Žižek's theoretical leanings on Lacan are so absolute it is possible to underestimate just how at variance many particularities of Žižek's thinking are when read against Lacan's own conceptual frameworks. However, differences emerge on many theoretical fronts (Parker 2004). Many aspects of Žižek's reinterpretation of Lacan become untenable in Lacan's own terms: from the paradoxical concept of the subject as sufficiently present to itself to choose to act beyond the fantasy that constitutes it, to a notion of the real as void. The Lacan of Žižek takes cultural criticism along a very different trajectory to that put forward by Lacan himself (Belsey 2005). While Žižek's real is void, for Lacan, writing in *The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire*, 'the real is that which does not depend on any idea of it' (Lacan 1997: 196). Lacan does not deny the existence of the real but rather that it is there-for-the-subject. The view through a Žižekian lens is at stark variance with that through a Lacanian optic. The real configured as void entails the necessary conceptualization in which disavowing fantasies are erected in the imaginary and the subject can be master of all it surveys, that is, the subject can think its way out of ideology. This Žižekian account of the real preserves the sovereignty of the subject since the subject, buffeted by the defiles of signification, may experience sufficient control of meaning to see beyond it.

### **Part 3 The Ideal and the Sublime**

Can the real somehow be 'there' but beyond comprehension? For Lacan, any account of the subject as tied to the imaginary and symbolic must be integrated into and with the real (Johnston 2009).<sup>78</sup> Lacan's topographic sketch outlined in his seminar series of 1974, foregrounds the absolute interdependency of its three orders. The Lacanian subject of the Borrowman knot is participant to a dynamic process, always in motion, delimited only by the confluence that is so outlined (Chiesa 2007).

Lacan's real is replete and not lacking because it is not made in culture (Belsey 2005: 49). The imaginary and the symbolic are however, necessarily partial and incomplete. What is real is that which cannot be comprehended and which 'in its incomprehensibility functions to remind us that comprehension is just that - the systematic production of intelligibility limited in terms by the terms of the system' (McGowan, K. 2007: 116). The real must be that which cannot be symbolized or imagined; the real cannot operate in any specific

interest but it can continue to mark the insufficiencies of any culturally manifested interest (Sharpe and Faulkner 2008).

Between Žižek and his critics there are areas of engagement and agreement: the real has cultural effects and reveals both inadequacies and fractures present to symbolic systems. As Kate McGowan explains: 'that the real marks a limit ... seems vital to cultural criticism since it also marks the impossibility of cultural systems of meaning ... to be either real or absolute in the sense of their being all there is' (McGowan, K. 2007: 116).

For Catherine Belsey, the question posed by the real is paramount. In her analysis, the real is vital for cultural criticism because of the domain of meaningless alterity it marks. The real for Belsey is 'not nature ... Nor is it a fact ... Still less is it the truth, a foundation on which to base new laws or dogmas, or an alternative reality with which to contrast appearances. On the contrary, the real is a question, not an answer' (Belsey 2005: 14).

Contrary to Žižek's position, only by an account of the real as that which *is*, and which cannot be grasped, is the certainty of the subject radically displaced: 'If the real is what is independent of my idea of it, then the real continues to haunt and to trouble not just my particular version of reality but the certainty by which I come to know anything in the first place ... for cultural criticism the real is indispensable' (McGowan, K. 2007: 118).

The real matters because the real and the symbolic realm of meaning where we as signifying subjects lead our lives, are, according to Lacan, intimately bound together. The following sections in this chapter examine further this relation and continue to read Žižek against Lacan. Section 3: 1 below will reiterate this study's critique of Žižek's notion of the real as retroactive construct and will then further interrogate Žižek's position qua idealism with the purpose of shining further light on Lacan's notion of the real.

### **3: 1 The ideal Žižek**

*Reading Žižek against Lacan qua idealism is here posited as a productive critical approach with which to differentiate Žižek's conceptualization of the real and that of Lacan. The opposition of idealism and alterity highlights some implications inherent to different conceptions of the real. In Žižek's denial of the real he embraces surety and sovereignty for the subject (Sharpe and Boucher 2010). Conversely, Lacan's conception of the real, as there but not for the subject, substantiates uncertainty and insists that there is nothing the subject can be sure of.*

*This section will first revisit Žižek's conception of the real as retroactive construct in order to illustrate Žižek's notion of the sublime object of ideology and will then discuss the relation between Žižek and Lacan in terms of idealism.*

In *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) Žižek constitutes the real within a structured absence, what he terms the void. For Lacan, the real is represented as emptiness at the level of the signifier; Žižek goes further than Lacan in divorcing the real from the organic (Žižek 1989: 72-3). Žižek insists that the real is, in the end, no more than the inability to find its own inscription. For Žižek, the real is necessary in that it is required to set the story of the subject in motion. It must be presupposed, to the extent that it is observable in its effects; but it remains an absent cause. It does not exist 'somewhere beyond the symbolic order' (Žižek 1989: 179). On the contrary, 'in itself it is nothing at all, just a void, an emptiness in a symbolic structure marking some central impossibility' (Žižek 1989: 173). The gap between the real and the symbolic is irreducible. Žižek situates a repressed traumatic residue of the non-existent real at the heart of the subject and this conception allows Žižek to situate antagonism as fundamental to the subject's interactions within the social (Myers 2003: 74-6). In short, the real is figured by Žižek as a position that cannot be occupied; Žižek comments that the real is 'the rock upon which every attempt at symbolization stumbles' (Žižek 1989: 169).

Žižek's real functions as the absent object-cause of desire, and as such is synonymous with *object a*, a Hitchcockian MacGuffin that does not exist but exerts determinations none the less (Žižek 1991b: 101-5). In his 1992 text *Enjoy your Symptom* Žižek describes how the traumatic kernel of the real that survives in the unconscious, resists assimilation into the symbolic order and interrupts the smooth flow of the signifying exchange (Žižek 1992a: 23). Žižek's real is nothing more than a (ontological) construct, produced retroactively as a purely psychical phenomenon: 'the real thing is a fantasmatic spectre' (Žižek 2002: 32).<sup>79</sup> The traumatic instance of its constitution represents the advent of the death drive which Žižek argues is then projected out into the social field as social antagonism (Eyers 2012). This antagonism is directed at hate-figures, what Žižek names as sublime objects of ideology, invented by the subject to screen the unbearable absence of the real (Žižek 1989). Žižek claims the notion of the real as chaotic and monstrous is just pure imagination, no more than myth; but he adds 'imagination at its most violent' (Žižek 1999: 33).

In his 1997 text *The Plague of Fantasies* Žižek reiterates that the encounter with the real (as void) is always traumatic; the horrifying impossible-possibility of directly experiencing the

something missing from the 'in-itself' is 'screened by the symbolic order, a place of fantasy which enables the subject to support the otherwise unbearable encounter with the real' (Žižek 1997: 65). In Žižek's account 'fantasy commonly resembles the absent materiality it is designed to conceal, so that he finds the real made manifest in the giant sea-beast of cinematic imagination, putrefied flesh, or the visceral rubberiness of the Hollywood Alien' (Belsey 2005: 55). Figures of horror allude to the terror of an encounter with the void. Behind the veil for Žižek is 'the traumatic encounter with the monstrous real, which is nothing but the fantasmatic actualization of the subject's own desire' (Žižek 1999a: 302). Behind the veil of the signifier for Lacan is always the fruitless search for the objet *a* that takes the place of the lost real. What matters to Žižek is the retrospectively constructed element of the real subsumed by the speaking subject that leaves them traumatized and antagonistic. Such a position is antithetical to Lacan. In Seminar XI Lacan refers to the *tuché*, the missed encounter. He insists that the subject will always avoid the inextricable and unnameable real (Lacan 1998: 68).<sup>80</sup> Lacan states that even during a dream the subject will wake to avoid a sleeping encounter with the real (Lacan 1998: 59).

Adrian Johnston (2008) comments that critiques of Žižek's account of the real frequently identify as problematic an intrinsic idealism that appears to be integral to Žižek's understanding of the real. This is the issue raised precisely by Catherine Belsey: 'by identifying the real with the void Žižek affirms, contrary to Lacan, the idealist view that determination is exercised not by the world but only by our idea of it, conscious or unconscious' (Belsey 2005: 56). Seeming nuances in difference that characterize Lacan and Žižek's accounts of the real expose hugely different and determining depictions of the subject and its relation to the world and the possibilities of alterity. In Seminar 2 Lacan asks: 'What could it possibly mean to say that the subject is everything?' (Lacan 1988: 98). In reply Antony Easthope argues that it would mean 'perfect sovereignty for the subject where in a world without alterity, the subject could construct its own origin' (Easthope 2002). Idealism, argues Easthope, leaves autonomy there for the taking. With Žižek's real as nothing, as void, the world is ultimately what we think it. Easthope (2002) and Belsey (2005) argue that Lacan, in contradistinction, offers an independent material alterity: 'the real is what does not depend on my idea of it' (Lacan cited in Fink 1995: 142).

If the subject constitutes its own origin, which according to Easthope is essentially Žižek's idealist view (Easthope 2002), the implications for the social field and culture the subject inhabits are far reaching - not least the conception that, in Žižek's terms, idealism

ultimately devalues all that resides outside our own heads.<sup>81</sup> In a world without alterity idealism delivers to the self the manner of its own constitution through a constant process of self-fashioning.<sup>82</sup>

Lacan resolutely and consistently opposed idealism which he named the 'extreme of vertigo' (Lacan 1998: 71). 'Psychoanalysis does not', Lacan insisted, 'lead in that direction' (Lacan 1998: 53).<sup>83</sup>

When Lacan argues that social reality is no more than a fantasy and that the gratifications it offers do not match those suggested by unconscious desire, it can sound on occasion that Lacan is denying the existence of the material world after all, reproducing a version of idealism in spite of himself: 'The world is but a dream ... for there's no such thing as a knowing subject' (Lacan 1998: 126). However, a claim that the world does not exist, or the certainty that only ideas exist, is erroneous in Lacan's view. To deny the real is also to claim to know for sure and Lacan repeatedly insists that the subject can never achieve such surety. During Seminar 20 Lacan commented on the subject's relation to knowledge: 'The world, the world of the being full of knowledge, is but a dream ... there is no such thing as a human subject' (Lacan 1998: 126). The dream Lacan alludes to here is the claim to know, the deluded certainty of full knowledge. Lacan insisted that subjects can only know what they have learned from what their own culture knows or seems to know.

Nor can the subject assert that what it don't know doesn't matter.<sup>84</sup> While Lacan was aware of idealism's appeal, its promise of an assured knowledge for the subject, Lacan was not remotely seduced: 'Idealism consists in affirming that we are the ones who give shape to reality and that there is no point in looking further. It is a comfortable position. Freud's position, or that of any sensible man for that matter, is something quite different' (Lacan 1992: 30).

Lacan argues that what idealism misses is the crucial contribution of psychoanalysis, that is, its understanding of the continuity between the subject and the world, interrupted, but not erased by the advent of the symbolic order, and where the subject remains marked by the lost but inextricable real (Homer 2005). When Lacan argues that as subjects we are liable to fade and thereby be open to temporary disappearances from the signifying chain, his claim is a long way from the idealist position: 'there is no subject without aphanisis ... and it is in this alienation, in this division, that the dialectic of the subject is established' (Lacan 1998: 221).

Lacan maintains that the speaking being cannot apprehend its own condition - a condition made up of a subjectivity that uneasily inhabits an inaccessible, unnameable real. The Lacanian subject is alienated from the signifier and subsequently as subjects 'we are perpetually beside ourselves' (Lacan 1999: 44). In his Seminar 20, given in 1972-3, Lacan conceptually allows for the invasion of the signifier into the real and at the same time conceives of the violent incursion of the 'real event' into a world not designed to recognize it (Lacan 1999: 47). Antony Easthope states that: 'Psychoanalysis takes as its field of interest the enigma that issues from the unstable conjunction of the two in human beings' (Easthope 1999: 52).

### **3: 2 Žižek's sublime and the real nature of culture**

*This section will examine how critics have drawn on postmodern appropriations of the notion of the sublime to conceptualize the limits of culture and intelligibility (Zupancic 2011). While this section will read Lyotard's conception of the sublime as synonymous in many ways with Lacan's notion of the real, Žižek will be argued to have appropriated the sublime as a fantasy object in order to mask the void of the real. Lacan however, has no interest in the sublime. Instead he positions the homonymic Freudian notion of sublimation as key for the existence of culture. The exile of the real is read by Lacan as manifesting itself in desire which is then sublimated towards cultural work. Lacan views culture as rooted in the real and for Lacan, culture and beauty allude to the real.*

Throughout this study psychoanalytic discourse is argued to enable the possibility of modes of thought outside of culture and its foundational determinations, that is, psychoanalytic discourse provides a response to questions of the extent and limits of culture (McGowan, K. 2007). However, although the notion of culture has the virtue of allowing for difference and of acknowledging the diversity of cultural values and practices, it has been argued to have come to occupy all the available discursive space: culture is seen to explain everything, specifying what existed, defining our identities, materializing our bodies (McGowan, K. 2007). Culture, in our post postmodern world, has become foundational. A cultural script of normative expectations, assumptions and behaviour in the social field 'has installed a new tyranny ... this version of culture allows itself no limits, no alterity, no resistances and no place for desire' (Belsey 2005: xi). This study argues that a psychoanalytic perspective allows for a position outside of culture to be considered and one which acknowledges the determinations and effects exerted by the unknowable real.

The real is not 'reality', it is not the world we know that culture presents to us. The real, as 'culture's defining difference', does not form part of our culturally acquired knowledge, but exercises its own independent determinations even so (Belsey 2005: 43). When Lacan comments in *Ecrits* that 'the world of words gives rise to the world of things' (Lacan 2008: 328) he borrows from Heidegger the observation that while language indicates what is 'sayable', language also brings into the world what is unsayable (Heidegger 1971: 74).<sup>85</sup> For Lacan, the unsayable demarcates, but does not ultimately delineate, the real (Lacan 2008: 318). As Tony Eyers states, the real enlists speculation - as to what lies beyond culture and what escapes the cultural script (Eyers 2012). A psychoanalytical account of culture and the real provides a ready-made framework and vocabulary to discuss not only what is outside of culture but also culture itself (McGowan, K. 2007).

For recent writers interested in culture and its limits, the postmodern notion of the sublime has served as a useful interrogatory tool with which to analyse the limits and the beyond of culture (Zupancic 2011). The sublime has featured conspicuously in Žižek's rereading of Lacan and will therefore provide another account in this study's stated aim to theoretically 'encircle' the real and will therefore be situated in relation to that put forward by Lacan in his late topography (Johnston 2008). Jean-François Lyotard's conceptualization of the sublime also provides an additional point of reference from which the sublime's relation to the real can be configured and considered.

### **The sublime Žižek**

*The notion of the sublime ostensibly provides a category with which to conceptualize the limits of culture and intelligibility. Notwithstanding, Žižek's appropriation of the sublime denies the real as Žižek's sublime object works to screen the void of the real. Lacan however, has no use for the sublime; psychoanalysis provides a ready-made framework to discuss the limits of culture and alterity. Lacan appropriates the Freudian notion of sublimation to give an account of the existence of culture as rooted in the real; an account not open to Žižek for whom the real does not exist.*

Even before it featured in the title of Žižek's 1989 text *The Sublime Object of Ideology* the notion of the sublime had undergone a major revival in previous years which had repositioned it centrally within the discourse of postmodernism (Storey 2008). For many writers, not least Jean-François Lyotard, the sublime, which had been a central organizing

concept in nineteenth century Romanticism, has more recently served as a critical tool to interrogate understandings of cultural limits and intelligibilities (Milner and Browitt 2006).<sup>86</sup> According to McGowan, while the Kantian legacy is clear in Lyotard and Žižek, Lacan's psychoanalysis, read as textual intermediary between Kant and postmodernity, can be argued to provide alternative terminologies for cultural criticism (McGowan, K. 2007). In his essay *Critique* written in 1982 Lyotard stated that postmodernism rejected modernism's nostalgia for the missing truth, repudiated the consolations of good form, and celebrated instead the 'un-representable'. For Lyotard it was the notion of the sublime that could be brought to bear to account for that which exceeded the capacity of representation. Catherine Belsey notes that Lyotard's re-reading of Kant bears a marked resemblance to Lacan's real (Belsey 2005:135-7).<sup>87</sup> Indeed, according to Belsey, Lyotard's discussions are shot through with psychoanalytic models and terms. What is at stake, Lyotard suggests, is an unconditional desire that is never fulfilled; 'the artist is to the cultural as the real of desire is to the imaginary of demand' (Lyotard 1997: 30). Lyotard's definition of the sublime is Lacanian in all but name: 'the occurrence, the unknown and unpredicted event, disarms thought and dismantles consciousness; it is what consciousness forgets in order to constitute itself' (Lyotard 1991: 90). Lyotard's 1984 text *The Postmodern Condition* utilizes the Kantian sublime as authority for the existence of the unrepresentable and in his 1994 text *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, the sublime constitutes a challenge to reach the unreachable, to defy in thought the limitations of thought's own finite character. Lyotard states 'I ask the reader to forgive me for using terms of the idiom of Freud and Lacan to situate this violence' (1994: 55).

Lyotard's sublime appears at times synonymous with the Lacanian real and Catherine Belsey comments that it is almost as if Lyotard has been waylaid by the sublime and the absolute while he was looking for *objet a* (Belsey 2005). However, as Alenka Zupancic argues, an issue with employing such a postmodern invocation of the sublime is that conceptually it can carry too much baggage - in particular the secularization of religion, the quasi-religious connotations of the supersensible and the metaphysics of mystery (Zupancic 2011).

Slavoj Žižek takes a somewhat different path in his appropriation of the sublime. While in Lacan's account the real is there, but not there-for-a-subject, for Žižek, the real is not there-for-a-subject and subsequently not there at all. According to Žižek, what fills the void of the real is the mirage of what he calls the sublime object. This takes the form of a fantasy figure

or fetish and masks the nothingness at the centre of the symbolic order. The sublime object promises the subject gratification, an enjoyment or *jouissance* which promises some respite from the destructive and ineluctable drive towards death (Žižek 1989: 202-7). Žižek argues that the subject is driven to look behind the symbolic façade of human subjectivity but with the danger of finding only the void which Žižek posits as all there is behind the chains of signification that constitute the subject (Wood 2012). Žižek situates his sublime object in order to mask the void of the non-existent real.<sup>88</sup>

Žižek acknowledges his main theoretical impetus as coming from German idealism (Žižek 1989: 32). However, as Belsey observes, 'when Žižek draws on Kant for an appropriation of the sublime he does so within an intertextual conjunction made with the psychoanalytic concept of sublimation' (Belsey 2005: 141). In Seminar 7 Lacan jokes about the homonymic proximity of sublime and sublimation. He speaks briefly about the sublime but his real interest is the Freudian concept of sublimation and how sexual instincts are sublimated into the pleasurable production of cultural objects. The difference between Žižek and Lacan is considerable here. Whereas Lacan's notion of sublimation concerns pleasure and culture, Žižek's sublime concerns itself with universal pathology, the materialization of forbidden *jouissance* and the 'mask of death' (Žižek 2000: 159). Catherine Belsey argues that 'Žižek's position is Lacanian only by a stretch of the imagination ... Žižek's Lacan becomes Kantian as the sublime is conflated with sublimation' (Belsey 2005: 141).

Žižek's conflation does have profound results. Lacan's account of sublimation given in Seminar 7, offers a way of inhabiting the symbolic and of gratification without the repercussions of repression. Sublimation involves pleasure - sublimation works to pacify the drive and do so without pathology or destruction.<sup>89</sup> Catherine Belsey comments that the ground sublimation occupies is the field of desire: 'that which is brought into being with the loss of the real entailed in the subjection of the subject to the symbolic order' (Lacan 1997: 287).<sup>90</sup>

To secure his sublime object of ideology Žižek sacrifices precisely the Lacanian conception of sublimation that explains the existence of culture. Lacan offers on the basis of Freud a theory of human culture as the only hope of a rapprochement between the symbolic and the real. Žižek contends that the subject must move through fantasy to the void. Lacan insists that we should face up to the precarious illusions of the subject and in the meantime engage in cultural and pleasurable activity (Lacan 2008). The act of creation, of making, substantiates most definitions of the presence of culture (Milner and Browitt 2006) and Lacan, who largely ignores the Kantian sublime, provides a theoretical explanation of

culture's existence and as being rooted in the real (Belsey 2005). Sublimated beauty and pleasure create a barrier between the subject and drive's destructive desire. The pleasure of making, of cultural making, presents the beautiful as capable of alluding to the lost real, to revealing the nature of the drive. There is nothing escapist or sentimental in Lacan's understanding of the beautiful, in fact Lacan states 'the beautiful is closer to evil than to the good' (Lacan 1992: 217). Lacan states 'it is precisely the function of the beautiful to reveal to us the site of man's relationship to his own death ... in a blinding flash' (Lacan 2008: 295). By encircling the void, which marks the place of the real that is lost to the subject, culture exercises the creative aspect of the drive to make allusions at the level of the symbolic to the inaccessible real (Belsey 2005). While the drive works like a centrifugal force pulling us towards death - in culture, the symbol, the artefact, comes between the subject and the enticing, terrifying object of the drive (Eyers 2012).

Lacan, Lyotard and Žižek are three writers where there appears to be a desire to engage with and to conceptualize that which is beyond the knowable world of the signifying subject. While Lyotard and Žižek get 'waylaid' by the Kantian sublime (Belsey 2005), Lacan by and large ignores the sublime and instead embraces sublimation as a means of theorizing the subject's relation to culture and the real. While Žižek employs his sublime objects of ideology to keep the subject from the void which Žižek situates in the place of the non-existent real, Lacan refutes the sublime and engages with the Freudian dynamic of sublimation with the effect of positing the real as imbricated in both the subject's constitution and in the existence of culture.

The following sections of this chapter will examine how such allusions to the real can be recognized within cultural representation and will proceed by considering such allusion as recognizable within two and three dimensional space.

#### **Part 4 Determinations and effects**

Part 4 of this chapter will continue to explore the central conceptual tenet of this study – that the effects and determinations of the absent, exiled, obliterated real persist and present within material culture. Such presentation is frequently figured by Lacan in terms of cultural effects carried within the symbolic register and as therein alluding to the exiled real. The real cannot be seen or touched or even delineated in language, but its effects and intent are argued to be recognizable in the subject's cultural reality as motifs that connote such allusion to the real. Part 4 will explore the presentation in culture of such determinations and effects as identifiable in both two and three dimensional space.

#### 4: 1 Monuments and macaroni

*This section will discuss how the void, the emptiness encircled by material three dimensional structures, can exemplify and allude to the place of the exiled real.*

In Seminar 7 Lacan outlines his understanding of the subject and its relation to culture, cultural production and the real. Lacan argued that when the subject becomes a speaking being, it loses a particular relation to the organism of the real human being (Lacan 2008: 61). With the advent of signification this loss is marked by an absence that appears at the heart of the subject. It is beyond the signifier and alien to the subject. The real has been exiled and in its place, and marked by the terms 'the Thing' and *objet a*, is a never ending centrifugal force or drive that initiates the desire to create but also to destroy (Lacan 2008: 107-123). Lacan reads culture as offering a detour that keeps this absence in a creative play of perpetual motion. The subject engages in culture to keep at bay the absence at its very heart: 'the drives do not seek to attain the *objet a* but rather to circle round it' (Lacan 1998: 179).

In Seminar 7, Lacan argues that culture works to encircle this absence which he initially refers to as 'the Thing' and then later as *objet a* (Lacan 2008: 72-81).<sup>91</sup> The Thing is conceptualized by Lacan as outside of representation and missing from the symbolic. It marks the place in the speaking being of the lost real; it constitutes the absence that appears at the heart of the subject with the advent of signification (Lacan 2008: 79). Lacan describes creativity as the project of culture and one that keeps the Thing at bay. Culture keeps this driving absence within bounds but does not deny its existence. Cultural pleasure does not repress or get rid of the drive but deflects it, imposing a signifying screen that protects the subject from getting too close to the void of the exiled real lying at the heart of the subject (Belsey 2005: 71)<sup>92</sup>.

Lacan illustrates his theory of culture and the real by using a succession of material objects and Catherine Belsey finds examples of these in both architecture and tombs to the dead (Belsey 2005: 65-8). Architecture takes form by encircling emptiness - it invokes and circumscribes the void which is the memorial to the lost real (Lacan 2008: 135-7). Tombs similarly work to enclose the void and monuments, whose very presence testifies to an absence, allude to loss. Lacan cites the grandeur of the baroque church as constitutive of a paradigm instance of culture's role in encircling absence (Lacan 2008: 136). Lacan

conceptualizes the void that architecture surrounds as the place of the lost object (of unnameable desire) in the inextricable real. Architecture reaffirms the power of culture to keep the object of the drive in its place by enclosing emptiness and surrounding it with a substantial materiality (Belsey 2005: 83-6). The emptiness that three dimensional objects surround (as in architecture and pottery) exemplify for Lacan the operation of the Thing, the structural discontent that gives rise to a desire sublimated through cultural production. Lacan describes the potter's vase as the archetypal cultural object whereby the potter creates a space by making a vase to surround it (Lacan 2008: 120).<sup>93</sup> Lacan appropriates Heidegger's interpretation of the potter's vase into his own particular psychoanalytic account of culture. Heidegger argues that the indispensable element of a vessel is the hole at its centre - the void is what does the holding. When the signifier completes what Lacan calls 'a magic circle' around the absent Thing, beauty will become present (Lacan 2008: 134). Even the humble empty matchbox is enlisted by Lacan in Seminar 7 to illustrate how the absence of the lost real can be enclosed and inscribed (Lacan 2008: 114). In Seminar 7 Lacan instances macaroni, a hole with pasta round it, as constitutive of an elementary cultural object which creates and encircles emptiness and works to introduce a gap or void into the continuity of the real (Lacan 2008: 150).

#### **4: 2 The real and two dimensional representation**

*This following section will examine Lacan's contention that the loss of the real can be alluded to in two dimensional space. While Lacan presents his argument with reference to the medium of Western post-Renaissance painting, his assertions are read as equally applicable to photography. Hubert Damisch (1994) is cited as modelling a Lacanian account of two dimensional representation.*

Throughout Seminar 7 Lacan gives an account of art's relation to the real not in terms of how art might delineate the real or act as substitute for it, but rather as alluding, at the level of the signifier, to the loss of the real and to the cause of discontent in the signifying subject (Lacan 2008: 168). In his seminar Lacan discusses how the loss of the real can be alluded to within two dimensional space and in particular the medium of painting.<sup>94</sup> Hubert Damisch, in his 1994 text *The Origin of Perspective*, gives a Lacanian account of the fifteenth century development of fixed point perspective painting. Damisch states that the 'truth', the 'reality' depicted in a painting 'exists at the level of the signifier and is limited by the rules of seeing and making' (Damisch 1994: 58). Damisch claims that what he refers to

as the 'newly discovered' fifteenth century science of perspective, narrowed the possibilities of depiction as the image is increasingly expected to settle for 'a single tense and single location' (Damisch 1994: 60). The Albertian miracle that culture performs, that is, to conjure three dimensional space out of two dimensions, is achieved at some cost. Illusionism puts on display a moment the artist chooses, investing the artist with sovereignty over the observed scene. As Damisch argues, for the spectator viewer, the moment of the art work is always unattainable, elsewhere, lost (Damisch 1994: 62). Catherine Belsey concurs with Damisch's Lacanian inflected views on perspective painting: 'It pacifies the drive, fences off the pure absence of the Thing, but in so doing perspective painting opens a space of loss that perpetuates the desire of the viewer ... Perspective gives and it takes away' (Belsey 2005: 99-100). Painting gives the illusion of simulated reality and installs the viewer as sovereign spectator but it also narrows reality to a moment already lost in a dynamic that always already excludes the observing subject. If perspective offers a place of imaginary sovereignty for the spectator, the realism it offers is contingent on an illusion (Damisch 1994).

According to Catherine Belsey, perspective, in its 'single tense, single location', veils the real. It restricts what can be seen to a specified angle so that some parts of the space it defines are always excluded, obscured, concealed. The marks of the exiled real are for Lacan, exactly such occlusions, concealments and elisions: 'discreet no entry signs at an opening that at once promises and yet denies access' (Belsey 2005: 107). These occlusions, concealments and elisions are precisely examples of what Žižek refers to as motifs of the Lacanian real. Žižek argues that such motifs pervade culture and society and can be identified as indicative of the determinations and effects of the real (Žižek 2006). In the place of the lost and exiled real, an image, painting or photograph, enlists the viewer in a search for the symbol of its loss. In this search depth of field lures the viewer to pursue *objet a*, that is, for the something that eludes the cultural script (Belsey 2005: 111).

#### **4: 3 Baltimore, bedtime and burning dreams: further motifs of the real**

*This section will follow how Lacan uses various motifs to allude to and figure his theory of the real and its relation to unconscious desire.*

Lacan's particular expository style has been argued to incline on occasion towards opacity and the enigmatic (Eyers 2012) but it does however, lend itself to an articulation through motif and as Slavoj Žižek suggests, motifs for the Lacanian real saturate Lacan's writing (Žižek 2006a). Although Lacan stated that 'the real is what does not depend on my idea of it' (Lacan cited in Fink 1995: 142), he did attempt in *The Four Fundamental Concepts* to allude to and figure through motifs as expressed in anecdote, reminiscence and metaphor, the role and significance of the real within his overall topography and conceptual schema. Just as Lacan frequently re-interpreted Freudian case studies in order to exemplify his ideas, he would similarly draw on his life experiences in order to instance a particular conceptual framework. Lacan for example, used the memory of a glinting tin can in the sea to discuss his conception of the gaze and the real as *objet a* (see section 5: 3 below). Elizabeth Roudinesco relates how while on a lecture tour in Baltimore during 1966, Lacan took as an exemplar, the neon lights and skyscrapers of the modern cityscape to illustrate the relation of the unconscious to the real (Roudinesco 2005: 359). The pre-dawn man-made landscape struck Lacan as a metaphor in which the unconscious was figured as a cultural and linguistic fabrication, a differential network of discontinuous and combining signifiers. The cityscape encapsulated for Lacan the unconscious as a field of flashing and flickering signifiers (Sharpe and Faulkner 2008). Unlike Freud's internalized, confined and almost subterranean unconscious, for Lacan, the unconscious is situated as external to the subject. Lacan's urban metaphor posits a precarious subject, caught up in the field of unconscious signifiers, where the subject's accession into meaning from the realm of the real is figured as the flickering lights of passing cars moving across the wall of Lacan's hotel room. Thus configured, this precarious and elusive subject appears and fades from within the dark of the real into the light of meaning, 'Hence the division of the subject - when the subject appears somewhere as meaning, he is manifested elsewhere as fading, as disappearance' (Lacan 1997: 218). Lacan goes on to argue that it is the very incompleteness and inconsistency of the symbolic network that ensures that the subject is not just a replicable effect of symbolic determination. The symbolic order is not complete. Not only is it full of holes (in terms of what the signifier can and cannot define), it is structured around a hole: the hole created by the unassimilable traumatic real of primal separation (Homer 2005). When the subject enters the structures of the symbolic order, it does so as a unique human subject where the place of the lost real is taken and supported by *objet a* and the desire it maintains (Eyers 2012).<sup>95</sup>

In his 1964 seminar *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan turned to a reminiscence of Freud's for a further explication of the unknowable real. Lacan relates Freud's description of a child's game which Freud had interpreted as rehearsal mechanism to manage parental absence. Lacan re-interprets the child's plaything, repeatedly thrown and retrieved, as metaphor for the exiled real as *objet a* (Lacan 1998: 62). As Margaret Iversen explains, the child, separated from the parent, subject to Law and caught up in the net of language 'just manages to hang on to this remainder, this piece of the real that resists symbolization' (Iversen 2007: 65).

A further elaboration of the real given in *The Four Fundamental Concepts* sees Lacan re-interpret the Freudian case study of a father's dream of his burning child which Freud details in *The Interpretation of Dreams* from 1900. Freud interprets the father's dream of his child as still alive in terms of wish-fulfilment; while asleep the father can avoid the reality of his bereavement. Lacan however, uses the dream as an opportunity to bring into focus other issues. Lacan argues that the father wakes to avoid the trauma that is being laid bare in the unconsciousness of sleep (Easthope 1999: 125-7). The waking conscious self protects the subject against the trauma of death, loss and the real while in the dream the protective screen is broken through and the real shows itself. Lacan argues that this is so traumatic the subject wakes to escape it (Iversen 2007: 65).

Having examined how Lacan configures a notion of the real that invokes its effects and determinations both in the subject and in culture and its objects, the following sections of this chapter will explore more precisely photography's own relation to the real. Looming large over this discussion is the French cultural critic, contrarian, chameleon and public experimenter, Roland Barthes and his 1980 seminal text *Camera Lucida*. Jonathan Culler comments that in the Paris of the 1970s when psychoanalysis had become the reigning intellectual fashion, Barthes, previously an enthusiast for the Freudian paradigm, seemed to have become 'the main promoter of traditional literary values and the principal non-psychoanalytical theorist' (Culler 2002: 12).<sup>96</sup> However, it is within Barthes' text *Camera Lucida* that is to be found arguably photography's most influential statement on its relation to the Lacanian real (Iversen 1994)

## Part 5 Photography and the real

By the late 1980s and early 1990s Slavoj Žižek had brought a new vitality to Lacanian studies and a fresh interest and appreciation of the Lacanian real (Žižek 1989, 1994). It was at this time that certain critics such as Hal Foster and Margaret Iversen articulated an account of the real which they applied to the discipline and discourse of photography. In particular, they read Roland Barthes' late work *Camera Lucida* (1980), as being resonant with, and structured by, an understanding of the Lacanian real. Both Foster and Iversen came from art historical backgrounds; Foster was associated with the *October* journal whose writers, including Rosalind Krauss, engaged in a rigorous postmodernist and anti-essentialist critique of culture which often incorporated photography into its theoretical frameworks and anti-Formalist agenda (Batchen 2002). In the 1970s and 1980s, a psychoanalytic critical discourse had been incorporated into the poststructuralist house style of journals like *October*, *Screen* and *Ten.8*. But only in the mid 1990s, with writers like Foster and Iversen, did the Lacanian real make a brief incursion into photographic criticism and it was Barthes' *Camera Lucida* that played a central role in photography's brief encounter with the Lacanian real.<sup>97</sup>

### 5: 1 Roland Barthes and the possibilities of the punctum

*Barthes writes about photography in a conceptual language that has been identified as being frequently synonymous with Lacanian theory and notions of the real. Barthes' neologism of the punctum appears indebted on many levels to the Lacanian real and as such will be argued to provide possibilities for reading the Lacanian real as figured within the medium and ontological frameworks available for an understanding of photography.*

Roland Barthes was critically associated with Marxism, the structuralism of Claude Levi-Strauss, the semiology of Ferdinand de Saussure as well as the poststructuralism of the 1960s and 1970s. During the 1950s several of Barthes' essays on photography had been compiled into an anthology titled *Mythologies* (1954). This collection of essays reflected Barthes' Marxism which powerfully inflected his critique of capitalism, seen by Barthes as instrumentally underpinned and supported through the uses of photography particularly evident within the pernicious and pervasive intrusions of advertising.<sup>98</sup>

Stylistically *Camera Lucida* (1980) appears very different from the structuralist dogmatics that drove Barthes' earlier texts such as his *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative* (1966) and *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973) (Badmington 2018). *Camera Lucida* is

dedicated to Jean-Paul Sartre and the text's phenomenological emphasis on the philosophical notion of the *thing-in-itself* appeared to mark a return to Barthes' own philosophical roots although he describes his ideas in *Camera Lucida* as invariably 'steeped in desire, repulsion, nostalgia, euphoria' (Barthes 1980: 21). The text announces itself as much a work of fiction as of theory and in the years since its publication *Camera Lucida* has acquired an iconic status within photographic studies and one which has given rise to an industry of analytical responses.<sup>99</sup>

In *Camera Lucida* Barthes' semiotic past ostensibly propels his interest towards the photograph as 'literally an emanation of the referent' (Barthes 1980: 80); Barthes states that the referent appears to adhere to the photograph<sup>100</sup> and Barthes claimed this characteristic of adherence was the 'essence of photography' (Barthes 1980: 93). Barthes used the neologisms of the 'studium' and 'punctum' to further define his understanding of the photograph. The studium was the general field of cultural interest instigated by the photograph whereas the punctum was that which pierces the studium and aroused specific interest in a photograph (Batchen 2009). While the studium encompassed the photographer's intentions, the punctum was that contingent, accidental element in a photograph that captures the attention of the viewer (Emerling 2012). If the studium referred to the general sense of the photograph, then the punctum was the detail that disrupts its smooth surface. In Barthes' description the punctum has a metonymic power which leads from one association to another; indeed Barthes compares it to the partial object of Freudian psychoanalysis (Barthes 1980: 36).

The associative power of the medium of photography is further alluded to in Barthes' positioning the text of *Camera Lucida* as being explicitly a work of mourning. The image which leads to Barthes' ruminative thoughts is never actually reproduced in the text. In what can be read in terms of an almost overtly Lacanian motif, *Camera Lucida* is structured around an absent centre with the text continually circling around this absence (Iversen 2007). Barthes situates the photographic referent in relation to this absence. For Barthes, the photographic referent is not the referent of other sign systems; unlike language or painting, photography can never deny its past, it cannot deny that the photographed object existed and was present in front of the lens. However, that reality is lost the moment the photograph itself comes into being. For Barthes this is the essence of photography, its 'that-has-been' or intractability. This latter adjective is one Lacan frequently applied to the

real in his seminars from the mid 1950s (Evans 1996). Just as Barthes' notion of the studium can be read as homologous with the symbolic order, so much of what Barthes describes in *Camera Lucida* appears synonymous with motifs and tropes used by Lacan to figure the real - its intractability, its absent presence, its contingency, its 'being-in-itself' and also the notion of loss in relation to coming into being. Barthes' referent sticks to the photograph just as in the 1955 seminar, Lacan describes the real as sticking to the heel like spat out chewing gum (Lacan 1991b: 40).

In proposing the binary between studium and punctum, Barthes follows a conceptual trajectory that figures prominently throughout his writing (Badmington 2018). Barthes insists that it is within such conceptual opposition that lies the opportunity to say something new, and in the 1977 text *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* he states 'the work proceeds by infatuations, successive enthusiasms and perishable manias' (Barthes 2010: 114). Jonathan Culler regards Barthes as an experimenter trying out ideas and systems in the public gaze (Culler 2002: 28). In *Critical Essays* Barthes comments that the critic's job is not to discover the secret meaning of a work or a truth of the past, but rather to elaborate an intelligibility for our own time (Barthes 1972: 257). In Barthes' essay *The Rustle of Language*, published posthumously in 1984, Barthes argues that structural analysis does not move teleologically towards the discovery of secret meanings. Culler argues that to treat Barthes as an experimenter looking to construct renewed intelligibility, 'helps to account for much that is puzzling in his writings' (Culler 2002: 8).

Nancy Shawcross has commentated that Barthes' concept of the punctum has proved intriguing for some but infuriating for others, 'yielding no consensus about whether Barthes presents a theory on which to build or a paradox that offers little to no critical utility' (Shawcross cited in Durden 2013: 12). That Barthes' nomenclature should have been invoked so often and so variously since the publication of *Camera Lucida* in 1980 would surely not have displeased or surprised Barthes. According to Jonathan Culler, Barthes' refusal to assign ultimate meaning to a text is 'liberatory' (Culler 2002: 8). In the years since its publication many commentators have examined Barthes' richly dense text and undertaken many and various procedures of 'disentangling threads of meaning' (Culler 2002: 67).<sup>101</sup>

One particular discursive thread that had waited to be 'disentangled' from *Camera Lucida* was that which referred to allusions made by Barthes to notions of the Lacanian real. In the

mid 1990s just such a thread was pulled in the seminal essay by art historian Margaret Iversen entitled *What is a photograph?* (1994).

## 5: 2 So what is a photograph?

*This following section will consider Margaret Iversen's reading of Barthes' Camera Lucida which she undertakes in reference to and against Lacan's Seminar 11, an account in which she arrives at a conception of the photograph as exemplifying the relation of the real to the unconscious desire of the subject. Iversen's original 1994 essay is reprinted in her 2007 text Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes.*

In her 1994 essay *What is a Photograph?*<sup>102</sup> Margaret Iversen reads Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, despite its apparent anti-theoretical stance, as being a fable about photography and one deeply influenced by the seminar given by Lacan in 1964. Seminar 11 was published in French in 1973 and entitled *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* by its editor J-A Miller. Lacan gave Barthes an inscribed copy of the published seminar in early 1973.<sup>103</sup> In her essay Iversen sets the texts of Lacan and Barthes side by side 'elucidating Lacan through Barthes' reading of him and, conversely, interpreting *Camera Lucida* in the light of *The Four Fundamental Concepts*' (Iversen 2007: 114). Despite Barthes dedicating his text to phenomenologist Jean-Paul Sartre and citing Sartre's essay *The Psychology of the Imagination* (1973) in his introduction, Iversen finds Barthes work 'psychoanalytical through and through' (Iversen 2007: 114). With hardly an overt reference to Lacan himself, associations to Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalytical theory according to Iversen 'drench' (*sic*) the pages of *Camera Lucida*. While Barthes' text is ostensibly concerned with the death of his mother and the location of the lost photograph, Iversen argues that *Camera Lucida* concerns an interrogation of the nature of mortality, of presence and absence, of present and past and, fundamentally, of the encounter with the Lacanian real.

Marginal notes made by Barthes in his copy of Seminar 11 indicate his interest in particular aspects of Lacan's thinking and in particular that of the missed encounter with the real (Iversen 2007: 115). Barthes' writing had always been marked by his interest in pleasure - the pleasure of the text and the pleasures of culture (Badmington 2018) but in *Camera Lucida* Barthes turns his attention to another fundamental of psychoanalysis: death. For Iversen, Barthes' text is not so much about the transgressive and dangerous dimension of desire but the trauma of separation, loss and death.<sup>104</sup>

Barthes' own 'encounter' with Lacan's later tripartite topography, which privileged the real as a major category, was itself an oblique encounter. Lacan's *The Four Fundamental Concepts* contains several chapters exploring the real as manifested in the visual field with an emphasis, according to Iversen, on the missed encounter with the real. At the beginning of *Camera Lucida* Barthes observes that the defining characteristic of photography is its attachment to 'the absolute particular, the sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid. This ... in short, is what Lacan calls *Tuche*, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression' (Barthes 1980: 3). Here Barthes draws directly from Seminar 11 chapter 5 which is entitled *Tuche and Automaton*. Lacan defines *tuche* as the encounter with the real and *automaton* as the network of signifiers. Iversen states 'while the *automaton* or network of signifiers involves the subject in his relation to the machinery of the symbolic register, the *tuche*, or real, is a relation outside that system' (Iversen 2007: 115). Lacan makes clear that the *tuche* is experienced by the subject as trauma, as a painful intrusion (Lacan 1998: 52-64). The 'pain' Lacan describes here is caused by the disruption in how the subject is able to make meaning; signifying frames of reference are argued to be thrown into disarray (Lacan 1998: 54). In Lacan's re-reading of Freud, and in particular of dream sequences such as the dream of the burning child, the real emerges as a hitch in the circuit of endlessly repeating and unresolvable drives.<sup>105</sup> Iversen's contention is that 'in Lacan's terms, the photograph can either be fully integrated in the network of signifiers or it can be tyctic. Or as Barthes observes, it can either be experienced as tame ... or mad' (Iversen 1994: 117). Such a conception of the photograph is questioned by this study and will be examined in section 7 below.<sup>106</sup>

Barthes appropriates a psychoanalytic understanding of trauma to discuss his conception of the photograph. For Lacan, trauma is real in so far as it remains unsymbolizable, a kernel of non-sense at the heart of the subject (Lacan 1997: 68). *Camera Lucida* can be read as structured around various instances and metaphors for trauma: for a lost mother, for a missed encounter with the real. Indeed, Barthes points out that photography has an inherently 'traumatic' structure not least because past events are witnessed by 'deferred action' (Barthes 1980: 10).<sup>107</sup>

Margaret Iversen argues that to understand more fully this inter-relation between the real, trauma and the photograph it is necessary to further interrogate Barthes' notion of the punctum. Barthes states that in some photographs there lurks a detail, a punctum, which takes the viewer by surprise. It pricks the viewer and alters the sense of the image 'It

shares with trauma, and Lacan's anamorphic stain, an uncoded, unassimilable quality. It is unnameable' (Iversen 1994: 120). The sharpness of the punctum cuts through decorum and the decorous, and in so doing reactivates trauma. Barthes observes 'the incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance' (Barthes 1980: 51).<sup>108</sup> In Seminar 11 Lacan refers to psychoanalysis in terms of its being 'essentially an encounter with the real that eludes us' and he makes explicit the connection between the missed encounter and the notion of the *tuche* (Lacan 1998: 53). Iversen draws attention to the long association Lacan enjoyed with the Surrealist movement during the 1930s and in particular his friendships with Salvador Dali and Andre Breton, and it is from Breton that Lacan draws his notion of the missed encounter (Breton 1960). Iversen argues that *Camera Lucida* is itself haunted by such an encounter which she reads as configured in the text under the sign of Barthes' punctum. The Barthian punctum thus figured performs as a glimpse or encounter with the real as *objet a* (Iversen 2007: 120).

In Seminar 11 Lacan states that the purpose of psychoanalysis is to negotiate and understand the subject's relation to unconscious desire and the exiled real because the determinations and effects of the absent presence of the real impact on everything the subject does and thinks. This study has noted Joan Copjec's 1994 imperative to *Read My Desire* and has itself followed unconscious desire across the Lacanian topography - through the defiles of the signifier, its determinations in the material world and in culture and art. This study has followed desire and arrived at its appearance in the photograph wherein we have found the determinations and effects of unconscious desire and the exiled real. Indeed, this study argues that the real is in every photograph. The relation of the photograph and the real will be the explicit focus of the following chapter. However, for this study the path of desire and the real has further to travel. In the 1960s, Lacan reconfigured his understanding of visuality and the notion of the gaze in order to incorporate an account of the real and this is the emphasis of the next section and which encounters the Lacanian gaze in Barthes' *Camera Lucida*.

### **5: 3 Barthes, the real and the gaze**

*In the 1960s Lacan incorporated the gaze into his notion of the real. The gaze is figured in relation to desire and the exiled real and is positioned outside the subject - crucially the gaze can recognize the subject for what it is, in other words, as being in the grip of desire.*

*Both Lacan and Barthes explore the implications of this chiasm of vision and conceptualize the determinations of the exiled real qua externalized gaze of the other as key in the determination of the subject.*

Barthes' discussion of photography in terms of the studium and punctum can be read as a participation in a longstanding and particularly French interrogation of what Martin Jay in his 1994 text *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in the Twentieth-Century French Thought* calls 'ocularcentric discourse' (Jay 1994: 17). This discourse, Jay argues, has characterized Western understandings of vision and visuality since the Enlightenment. Jay recounts how a group of thinkers in the interwar years, including Claude Levi-Strauss, Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, pressed back against the hegemonic conceptual orthodoxies of Third Republic philosophy. Their tutelage in Hegelian dialectics through the lectures of Alexander Kojève not only impelled them to reject 'the stale abstractions of neo-Kantianism' (Jay 1994: 264) but also to begin a process of radically questioning the ocularcentric bias of the then dominant specular tradition. Sartre and Merleau-Ponty in particular shared deep-seated misgivings re the Cartesian perspectivalist gaze.<sup>109</sup> Lacan was also an attendee at the inter-war Hegelian lectures of Kojève and many of his conceptual developments can be read as bringing within a psychoanalytical register the search for a new ontology of the specular that had so pre-occupied Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Lacan's particular elaboration of the notions of anamorphosis, the gaze, *objet a* and the real can all be seen as part of an on-going critique of the increasingly discredited Cartesian perspectivalist scopic regime 'whose pernicious spectatorial epistemology the phenomenologists found so wanting' (Jay 1994: 297).

In Seminar 11 Lacan undertakes his own critique of classical optics and perspectival construction. Referencing Merleau-Ponty's posthumously published *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964) Lacan's concern was with the idealist illusion of 'seeing oneself see oneself' (Lacan 1998: 83) which Lacan considered as the scopic equivalent of self-reflective Cartesian consciousness. Both Sartre (1952) and Merleau-Ponty (1964) had explored the condition and corporality of being both subject to, and subject of, sight. Sartre in particular elaborated a notion of the gaze as constitutive of subjectivity in which 'le regard' encompassed both the act of looking and being looked at.<sup>110</sup> Echoing Sartre, Lacan stated, 'I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides' (Lacan 1998: 72). Martin Jay comments that Lacan joined Sartre and Merleau-Ponty in their 'interrogation of

the implications of the imbrication of vision and the question of Being' (Jay 1994: 251). Iversen comments that 'Lacan's subject is not autonomous or rational but is constituted by the desire of the Other. The subject is thus decentred in relation to the ordinary point of sight' (Iversen 1994: 122).<sup>111</sup>

Lacan's understanding of the gaze and perspectival scopic regime is evident in Barthes' *Camera Lucida*. For Barthes a key characteristic of the studium is the sense of self-possession it entails: 'I invest the field of the studium with my sovereign consciousness' (Barthes 1980: 26). Such perception conforms to a geometral perspective, in which a single point of sight organizes and inaugurates the field. Lacan stated that the Cartesian subject was 'itself a sort of geometral point' (Lacan 1998: 86) and that such a conception of self-reflective consciousness was itself founded on a misrecognition or 'scotoma'.<sup>112</sup> Lacan's argument is that only the gaze of another can see the subject for what he really is. Only the Other's gaze can glimpse the unconscious desire that constitutes the subject's very being. Margaret Iversen argues that Barthes' punctum is equivalent to Lacan's gaze in that it is elided in classical optics (Iversen 2007: 139). In Seminar 21 Lacan argues that desire is constituted by a lack and that lack as gaze inevitably invades the visual field and disorganizes it (Lacan 1998: 89). Iversen argues that the Barthian punctum also disorganizes the visual field, irrupting into the network of signifiers that constitute reality (Iversen 1994: 122). Barthes states 'This time it is not I who seek it out, it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me' (Barthes 1980: 26). Barthes' conception of the punctum situates it as volatile and subject to displacements.

In Seminar 11 Lacan draws on the notion of anamorphosis to illustrate the disparity between sovereign subject of sight and object of the gaze. Only when the position of illusory mastery is vacated does the gaze come into view; the two positions are mutually exclusive.<sup>113</sup> From the position of the gaze the subject becomes recognizable as being in the grip of desire. As Iversen comments, 'I gain the world of representation only when I sacrifice the immediacy of the real, and, conversely, I glimpse the real only when I renounce the vanity of the world conceived as my representation' (Iversen 1994: 123). Lacan identifies within the orthodox perceptual field a blind spot which he names 'the stain' (*la tache*) which he defines as 'that which always escapes from the grasp of that form of vision that is satisfied with itself in imagining itself as consciousness' (Lacan 1998: 75). Barthes incorporates this definition into his notion of the punctum calling it 'une petite

tache'. Thus conceived, Barthes' punctum, as read through the concept of the Lacanian real, cannot therefore be directly approached but rather viewed awry, with just a glance and without conscious deliberation.<sup>114</sup> As Sean Homer comments, 'Barthes' detail that pricks us, bruises us and disrupts the studium (the symbolic) of the photograph is that fleeting glimpse, or encounter with the real as *objet a*' (Homer 2005: 94). Catherine Belsey clarifies this point: '*objet a* is not the real; *objet a* exists at the level of demand, as whatever would, if it could, fill the gap created by the fact that the real is lost to the subject' (Belsey 2005: 49).

Lacan's complicated dialectic of the eye and the gaze may be impossible to summarize in any simple formula but clearly his thinking had moved on decisively since his earlier discussions of the mirror stage (1949). Whereas in the mirror stage argument, vision was involved in an imaginary identification due to a specular projection of narcissistic sameness, the notion of the gaze as *objet a* was concerned with desire for and of the Other. According to Belsey, Lacan had moved his ideas into the field of explicitly intersubjective relations - that is, vision may be understood as a conflictual field in which the 'looker' (*sic*) is always a body to be observed. As Martin Jay explains: 'Even though on one level the impersonal gaze is a function of the split subject's internal dynamics, his desire for the *objet a* as a way to compensate for a lack, on another level it expressed the unsublated dialectic of intersubjective gazes, that dihedron of superimposed visual triangles Lacan had borrowed from Caillois and used to redescribe Kojève's dark vision of Hegel' (Jay 1994: 368).<sup>115</sup>

While most references to visual art made by Lacan in *The Four Fundamental Concepts* are taken from history of painting, he does mention photography on one occasion. Lacan argues that the externality of the gaze has the effect of turning the subject into a picture: 'What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which ... I am photo-graphed' (Lacan 1998: 106). Lacan continues: 'In the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say I am a picture' (Lacan 1998: 106). Iversen argues that Lacan's insistence here is consistent with his conception of the unconscious as an intersubjective relation: desire is the desire of the Other, 'The unconscious also sees' (Iversen 2007: 125). Through such a dynamic Lacan is able to conceptualize his being 'photo-graphed'; even with a humble floating tin can, 'perception is on the objects that it apprehends' (Lacan 1997: 88).

Lacan's conception of the gaze in terms of radiations of light emanating from a surrounding scopic field, can be related to Barthes' thinking on the essential nature of the photograph as a 'that-has-been': 'The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me ... a sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed' (Barthes 1980: 81).<sup>116</sup> Iversen argues that what both Barthes and Lacan wish to express is 'the chiasm of vision. I may see objects, but I am also enveloped by a light or gaze that unsettles the position I want to occupy as the source of the coordinates of sight' (Iversen 1994: 127). The final sentences of Barthes' *Camera Lucida* indicate what at first appears to be a nuance of difference between Barthes' and Lacan's conception of the real. However, this nuance takes on greater significance as its implications come to radically separate the conceptions of the Lacanian real from the Barthesian punctum. Lacan finds geometrical optics and its spatial mapping inadequate; such a comprehension, Lacan argues, entirely misses what is essential about vision.<sup>117</sup> Barthes asks us to choose between what he reads as two incompatible positions, between a photograph that inhabits the studium of 'tame' or conventionalized codes of representation, or an image that is perceived as 'mad', as possessed of the punctum which disrupts and disturbs the field of representation. Barthes concludes *Camera Lucida* with his structuring binary still in place: 'Such are the two ways of the Photograph. The choice is mine: to subject its spectacle to the civilized code of perfect illusions, or to confront in it the wakening of intractable reality' (Barthes 1980: 119). The next chapter of this study will further question Barthes' binary imperative and his subsequent account of the photograph. A contrary position will argue that the real is in every photograph.

## **Part 6 Film and the real**

*From the 1970s film theory has been an early adopter of aspects of Lacanian theory and this has continued to be the case in more recent appropriations of contemporary understandings of the Lacanian real. This following section will follow Todd McGowan (2007) in differentiating between 'early' and 'late' Lacanian film theory. As Lacan became less interested in how the subject sees and more concerned with how the subject is seen, Lacan incorporated the real into his conception of the subject's relation to the specular. Lacan developed a notion of the real as gaze figured through the conception of unconscious desire and objet a. The Lacanian gaze is outside the subject and disturbs the scopic field,*

*presenting another's desire and presents the subject's desire to itself. In late Lacanian film theory, the cinema is site where the (other's) gaze can show itself and demarcate points of failure within symbolic authority.*

Film's *mise-en-scene* within the darkened specular particularity of a cinema's auditorium has lent more recent appropriations by film studies of the Lacanian notion of the real specific and revealing understandings perhaps not so immediately apparent within other mediums.

Lacanian theory has had strong associations with cinema since the 1970s and film theorists have generally adopted Lacanian ideas in advance of photographic studies (Roberts 1998). This was true for appropriations of Lacan's mirror stage and can also be seen with more recent re-workings of the Lacanian notion of the real. While critics like Joan Copjec, Mladen Dolar and Slavoy Žižek have brought to prominence aspects of the real through its application to film and the film industry, Bordwell and Carroll observe that in the mid-1990s, contemporary photography theory has yet to utilize notions of the Lacanian real to the same extent as had recent film theory (Bordwell and Carroll 1996). Twenty years later this remains arguably still the case.

Lacan's mirror stage essay in its revised 1949 version (Lacan 2006: 75-81), offered film theorists a generation later ways to think through the ideological problems inherent in the act of film spectatorship. For early Lacanian film theorists the work of Louis Althusser was a crucial bridge between Lacan's theory of the mirror stage and the cinematic experience, not least because Althusser emphasized the social dimension of the misrecognitions detailed in the mirror stage. The politicizing of Lacan's ideas and their application within film studies was initially given impetus by theorists such as Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz in France and a group of British academics associated with *Screen* journal including Peter Wollen, Laura Mulvey and Stephen Heath. For Metz, the cinematic experience allowed spectators to temporarily overcome the sense of lack endured by the subject. By perpetuating through film the *mis-en-scene* of the mirror stage's specular self-deception, the cinema was understood as a machine for the perpetuation of ideology (Metz 1982). According to early Lacanian film theorists like Metz and Baudry, cinema functions within the imaginary register; it provides an illusion of completeness in both the subject and what the subject perceives. The subject is duped into not seeing what is lacking in itself or the wider world (Baudry 1974: 43).

For critics like Baudry the cinematic image acts as an imaginary deception, a lure blinding the spectator to an underlying symbolic structure and to the material cinematic apparatus (Baudry 1974). Baudry argued that the cinema's spectator subject accedes to this illusion and believes it has a sense of control over what it sees; the gaze is conceived as a function of the imaginary. Early Lacanian film theory identifies this gaze with the misguided look of the spectator: 'any psychoanalytic reflection on the cinema might be defined in Lacanian terms as an attempt to disengage the cinema object from the imaginary' (Metz 1982: 3). Laura Mulvey associated this gaze with male spectatorship and the ideological operations of patriarchy (Mulvey 1975).

Bordwell and Carroll argue that there was a perceived waning in the 1980s and 1990s of academic enthusiasm for Lacanian-centred psychoanalytic film theory which was encountering increasing degrees of criticism and scepticism (Bordwell and Carroll 1996). Todd McGowan (2007) argues that what made Lacanian film criticism vulnerable to critique was the very breadth of its claims, its theoretical universality. McGowan argues however, that in the wake of such re-evaluation has come the opportunity to develop a psychoanalytic film theory that draws its conceptual strength not from the Lacanian order of the imaginary, but rather from more contemporary conceptions of the Lacanian real (McGowan, T. 2007).

Early Lacanian film theory employed the notion of the gaze in terms that located it from within the spectator whereas Lacan actually conceived the gaze as something that the subject encounters emanating from an object (Lacan 1998: 103). Lacan's use of the term reverses what has become the normative conception of the gaze.<sup>118</sup> The Lacanian gaze, as opposed to the Mulvean male gaze of the mid 1970s, supplemented his earlier account of the mirror stage. Lacan's conceptual interest became less concerned with how the subject sees and more with how the subject is seen (Jay 1994). The notion of the Lacanian gaze incorporates a visuality that pre-exists the individual subject and into which the subject is born. It comprises all the multiple discourses of vision built into the social arena; the gaze is culturally constituted. It is external - it looks at the subject (Evans 1996: 72).

Lacan clearly enunciates this revised notion of the gaze in Seminar 11. He states: 'In the scopical field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, I am a picture ... What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside' (Lacan 1998: 106). Lacan further conceptualizes the gaze in terms of *objet a*: 'The *objet a* in the field of the visible is the gaze' (Lacan 1998: 105). According to Lacan there is a form of *objet a* that corresponds to each of the drives and in each case functions as a lost object, that is, that which is lost

when the subject is constituted in the primal move from being to meaning (Evans 1993: 125). The gaze is the *objet a* of the scopic drive. The subject will only ever know its own (misrecognizing) gaze. According to Todd McGowan what the other sees will always escape the subject, will always be lost, will always be the object of desire and will remain unnameable; it will always be real (McGowan, T. 2007: 23).

Positioned in this way, the Lacanian real as gaze assumes increasing significance in the subject's constitution in that it is argued to disturb the scopic field and the limits of what it is possible to know (McGowan, K. 2007). The real as gaze presents another's desire. The real as gaze interrupts and disturbs the subject's conceptions of (illusory) mastery. It distorts the field of the visible, it undermines the certainties afforded by perspective (Jay 1994: 340-6).

Early Lacanian film theory documented the ideological effect of mainstream cinema; the unquestioning fascination shown by spectators was the political issue. For Laura Mulvey in the mid 1970s, the fundamental political problem of the cinema was the extent to which the spectator submits to the fantastic dimension of the cinema. In early Lacanian film criticism politically progressive cinema was therefore taken to be one that destroys such spectator fascination; the aim of criticism was to gain distance from the scene of cinematic manipulation and view the experience with suspicion from the start (Mulvey 1975).<sup>119</sup>

Psychoanalysis allows the illusions that inform typical cinematic experience to be exposed. However, recent understandings that encompass notions of the Lacanian real regard the establishment of critical distance as another way of avoiding the real of the gaze (Copjec 1994a). Some more contemporary Lacanian theorists have argued that when the cinema draws the subject into its darkened dreamlike world 'it may well insert the subject into ideology, but it may open the possibility of an encounter with the traumatic real that disrupts the power of ideology' (McGowan, T. 2007: 15). Todd McGowan insists that the project of contemporary psychoanalytic film theory is to take such an awareness of the real, the gaze and the subsequent moments of rupture and disjunction, from the confines of the cinema into our attitudes and awareness in everyday life.

For commentators like Todd McGowan the most radical aspect of the cinematic experience lies in the ability of the gaze to show itself there. McGowan claims that in the course of 'our normal everyday' we avoid the gaze and experience the world as if it were there ready-made for us to approach: 'We think of ourselves as agents directing our interaction with this 'ready-to-go' world ... this understanding is the fundamental deception of waking life' (McGowan, T. 2007: 15). Lacan had put forward this idea in his seminar of 1964: 'In the so-

called waking state there is an elision of the gaze, and an elision of the fact that not only does it look, it also shows. In the field of the dream what characterizes the images is that it shows' (Lacan 1998: 75). Lacan here draws out a characteristic mode of dream function to illustrate how the gaze operates in the specular; he identifies that when dreaming we do not approach things, but rather things show themselves to us. This showing is what allows us to experience the gaze in the dream. When we encounter the gaze, we encounter an object that shows itself to us but which is not positioned within our visual field (Lacan 1998: 76-8). According to Todd McGowan, the form of the dream is the form of the cinematic experience and as such makes the encounter with the gaze possible (McGowan, T. 2007).

Todd McGowan argues that our immersion in the scopic drive and the illusion that as looking subjects we control the visual field, works to obscure *objet a*, to obscure the gaze and to hide the absent presence of the exiled real (McGowan, T. 2007: 79-82). Vision gives the subject an implicit sense of mastery over what it sees insofar as it directs where and how it looks. However, McGowan claims that the cinema is the site where the structure of ideology finds itself most imperilled: 'Ideology constantly works to obscure the traumatic real of the gaze because this real threatens the stability of the social order that ideology protects ... The real marks a point of failure, not just of the subject's look but also of ideology's explanatory power' (McGowan, T. 2007: 16). Symbolic authority retains a hold over the subject so long as the traumatic real is avoided. McGowan claims that when the subject encounters the traumatic real there is a possibility that it could recognize symbolic authority's failure to account for everything; that disjunctions in the symbolic matrix of the social will become apparent (McGowan, T. 2007: 28). For McGowan this is the key to the political power of the gaze as real. Although the encounter with the gaze carries with it the possibility of trauma, it also provides the basis for the subject's potential ideological freedom from the constraints of the big Other, a position from where the subject can possibly confront the ultimate groundlessness of our subjectivity, a position which psychoanalysis calls freedom (Zupancic 2012: 17).

Todd McGowan argues the Lacanian logic of this contention in terms of the subject's subjection to the big Other. The big Other sustains its hold over the subject through the creation of a world of meaning and when the subject accepts the meaningfulness of this world it subjects itself to the big Other and its authority. This process of subjection allows the subject to exist in a world where things make sense; but the price paid is the price of freedom (McGowan, T. 2007). McGowan argues that the encounter with the traumatic

real, which is an encounter with a point of non-sense within the big Other (that is, with what the big Other cannot render meaningful) works to free the subject from its subjection: 'In the moment of the traumatic encounter, the subject experiences the groundlessness, and ultimately the nonexistence, of the big Other and the symbolic world that the big Other sustains' (McGowan, T. 2007: 17).

Our ability to contest an ideological structure depends on our ability to recognize the *real* point at which it breaks down. For Todd McGowan, cinema is the site for the revelation of the gaze.<sup>120</sup> The following chapter of this study will examine whether photography can assume a similar relation to the real and the gaze as McGowan posits for the cinema.

### **Part 7: Batchen to the future**

*This next section will discuss the possibility of identifying the real as having always already inhabited conceptualizations of the photograph from the moment of the medium's inception. Geoffrey Batchen has argued (1997) that early proponents of photography expressed an equivocal conceptual articulation of the new medium's identity; Batchen argues that such an ambiguity in positioning can provide an alternative to today's persisting binary theoretical conceptions of photography.*

In his 1997 essay on the conception of photography *Burning with Desire*, Geoffrey Batchen draws on a Foucauldian notion of archaeology as instrument of critical theory to consider the emergence of photography during the early nineteenth century within the terms of the regularity of a particular discursive practice.<sup>121</sup> Such regularity cannot be said to exist or have existed with regards the discourse of the Lacanian real. While during Lacan's lifetime the real was afforded increasing topographical prominence as a structuring concept, it was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that the real was more widely incorporated by critical theorists into cultural criticism (Eyers 2012).<sup>122</sup> As the notion of the real had only occasionally appeared in academic discourse it never established the consistency of discursive practice said by Foucault to be the mark of an established critical strategy (Foucault 1969). Indeed, even in the 1990s the concept of the Lacanian real had still to achieve any palpable internal consistency. Sarah Kay comments that Slavoj Žižek, perhaps the most prominent proselytizer within contemporary cultural and Lacanian studies, continues to forward various and at times conflictual interpretations of the Lacanian real

some of which differ markedly from the main developmental trajectory followed by Lacan (Kay 2003).

However, this study suggests that perhaps some consistency and or continuity is to be found if we return to the scene of Batchen's enquiry into the conceptual origins of photography. With this in mind, the following section will explore the possibility of identifying the Lacanian real 'within the very grain of photography's logic' (Batchen 1997: 173).

Geoffrey Batchen (2009) supports the widely held contention in recent photography studies that a binary divide runs through the heart of contemporary critical approaches to photography and its place within society and culture (Elkins 2007). But while he positions the Formalist and postmodern accounts of photography as fundamentally in opposition, Batchen also identifies moments of congruence between the two paradigms not least at the moment of photography's emergence as a material practice during the early years of the nineteenth century. Batchen argues that both Formalist and postmodernists share the presumption that the identity of photography can be determined within the discursive frameworks of either nature or culture; while the postmodernists insist that photography has remained in and of culture, the Formalists claim that something of nature has adhered to photography in culture (Batchen 2002: 7). He observes that while contemporary commentators continue to avow allegiance to either nature or culture as source of photograph's identity, the medium's earliest proponents 'offer a far more equivocal articulation that incorporates both without obstinately siding with one or the other' (Batchen 1997: x).

In 1827 Nicephore Niepce concentrated his energies on the possibility of making 'a view from nature, using the newly perfected camera' (Niepce cited in Gernsheim 1969). Niepce's English contemporary proto-photographer, William Henry Fox Talbot, was himself never able to decide whether the origins of photography, that 'art of fixing a shadow', were to be found in nature or culture. Batchen observes how, in an attempt to describe his own experiments with photography, Talbot often abandoned empirical description in favour of a range of mytho-poetic metaphorical language (Batchen 1997). Batchen argues that Talbot's 1844 photo-book *The Pencil of Nature* underlines that for Talbot photography was 'neither natural or cultural but rather an economy that incorporates, produces and is simultaneously produced by both nature and culture, reality and representation' (Batchen 2002: 17).

Batchen states that he employs a deconstructionist approach to attempt to unpick the 'impossible but necessary question of what is photography on the inside before it enters a specific historical or political context?' (Batchen 2002: 5). He cites Gayatri Spivak in her introduction to the 1976 English translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*: 'the sign must be studied *under erasure*, as always already inhabited by the trace of another sign ... semiology must give way to grammatology' (Spivak cited in Derrida 1976). Accordingly, to discuss the photograph's relation within nature and culture, Batchen utilizes what he calls a 'photogrammatology' and he comments: 'you do not have to read theory to encounter the dynamics of photogrammatology - just look at the evidence of history itself' (Batchen 2002: ix). For Batchen, such a photogrammatology produces a conception of the photograph as palimpsest, as trace of both nature and culture.<sup>123</sup> To illustrate his argument Batchen uses the example of Fox-Talbot's 1835 image *The Oriel Window*<sup>124</sup> which he reads not in terms of the photograph's ability to transparently represent a material reality but rather as palimpsest, as complex conjunction of nature, camera, image and photographer, 'all present even when absent, all coming together to represent an impossible conjunction of transience and fixity' (Batchen 2002: 9). Batchen calls this a 'perverse dynamic' (Batchen 2002: 10). *The Oriel Window* is what Fox Talbot himself referred to as a 'philosophical window' (Fox-Talbot 1825 *Notebook C*). To Batchen, its palimpsestic character both inscribes yet erases the viewer, inscribes yet erases the photographer.

Batchen presents an image by another early practitioner, Hippolyte Bayard's *Le Noye* of 1840<sup>125</sup>, as representing a meta-discourse on the identity of photography. The image shows Bayard as 'both subject and object, as acting even while acted upon, as representation that is also real, as self and other, present and absent, as nature and culture' (Batchen 1999: 172). Batchen identifies in *Le Noye* 'an uncertainty and strategic hesitation, a troubling movement back and forth within the very grain of photography's logic' (Batchen 1999: 173).<sup>126</sup>

Although the title of Geoffrey Batchen's 1997 essay *Burning with Desire* might indicate a sympathy with psychoanalysis he invariably gives the Freudian paradigm short shrift referring to it as 'a conveniently universal narrative which, with its continuing emphasis on the trans-historical constitution of the individual subject, seems unable to account for either cultural specificity or historical change' (Batchen 1997: 20). Batchen considers that a psychoanalytical conception of the photograph is to see it solely in terms of its operation as 'yet another process of substitution for a lack conceptualized as a perennial gap in our

subjectivity' (Batchen 1997: 20). In 1989 Batchen had interviewed Victor Burgin for the journal *Afterimage* and Batchen cites Burgin from this interview in his 2002 text *Each Wild Idea*. He quotes Burgin who comments on the subject's relation to the 'always absent real object of desire' (Burgin cited in Batchen 2002: 20). From the text of the interview it appears that Batchen does not give any weight to or even apprehend that the 'real' Burgin refers to here could itself allude to the Lacanian real.<sup>127</sup>

Batchen states that early photographers' attempts to talk about their practice and medium were fraught with issues of nomenclature and articulation. Such issues of description have certainly been to the fore in critical accounts of the real put forward since Lacan first posited his 'late' conception of the real in the 1960s. Consider the language Batchen uses to describe Bayard's *Le Noye* and it appears at times inadvertently synonymous with the language that saturates the Lacanian paradigm: presence and absence, subject and object, acting, acted upon, self and other, nature and culture, uncertainty, hesitation, a troubling movement back and forth.

From the conjunction of nature and culture, historians like Batchen posit the emergence of photography - precarious, ontologically uncertain, unfixed, perpetually in the process of becoming within a dialectic of self and other. From the conjunction of nature and culture (read as being and meaning), psychoanalysis posits the emergence of the subject - precarious, ontologically uncertain, unfixed, perpetually in the process of becoming, entrapped within a dialectic of self and other. If it is then possible, up to a point, to read Batchen through Lacan then that point is the Lacanian real. Photography and the psychoanalytic subject are argued to make appearances on similar metaphysical ground as palimpsests of nature and culture and seemingly invoke a similar vocabulary of description. But Batchen's position in relation to the Lacanian real is a 'missed encounter' and one which denies his conception of photography the dimension of the real.

Both photography and the psychoanalytic subject can be argued to emerge as palimpsests. But, the Lacanian real is *not* the subject. As Alenka Zupancic insists, the real is what remains, what is left over from the formation of the subject (Zupancic 2012). Catherine Belsey concurs: 'the real is the silent or silenced exteriority which is also inside us' (Belsey 2005: 14). The photograph is not the real, the photograph is present in the world of meaning. But, as in the subject, the real haunts the photograph as silenced exteriority and present absence. The determinations and effects of the exiled real are manifest and exemplified in every subject and every photograph. In this sense the real is in every photograph just as the real is in every subject.

The following chapter will return to the images made by Harry Penhaul and will take the arguments and issues raised in this chapter in order to further examine the impossible possible relation of the Lacanian real to the photograph.

## **Chapter 5 Harry Penhaul and the Grimace of the Real**

*Lacan's rhetorical figure of the grimace of the real is conceptualized here as exemplifying the subject's relation to the real in which reality is read as a fantasy of misrecognition.*

*Although Lacan describes the real as 'unsymbolizable', this chapter will explore how allusions to the exiled real and its effects and determinations can be discerned and recognized within photographic representation.*

### **Introduction: A Grimace of the Real**

This chapter will argue that the relation between psychoanalysis and photography is a complementary one; that photographs work to exemplify abstruse Lacanian concepts and to help explicate what is, according to Paul Taylor, the radical insight of psychoanalysis: that what we refer to as reality is only accessible through our subjectivised, fictionalized and fantasized engagements with it (Taylor: 2010: 58). Such an engagement was embodied in Lacan's rhetorical figure of the grimace of the real, increasingly utilized as a structuring metaphor to encapsulate the subject's fanaticized misrecognition of reality, a fundamental and constitutive misrecognition this study argues as exemplified in the medium of photography itself.

In 1973, during a lecture given on national French television about psychoanalysis, Lacan's typical 'posturing rhetoric' (Eagleton 2003: 205) included a description of reality as a 'grimace of the real' (Lacan 1990: 6). This figure of the grimace, (see Chapter 4: 178), encapsulates much of Lacan's later conceptual development which, 'in an essentially tragic philosophy of life' (Eagleton 2003: 201), envisaged reality as nothing more than a fantasy of misrecognition (Eagleton 2003: 201). As shown in the previous chapter, exploring the mechanisms of such misrecognition had always been central to Lacan's work; from the Mirror Stage of the 1930s (p. 129-131), to *Schema L* in the 1950s (p. 162-4) and the scopic regime of the real as gaze (p. 202-4). By the early 1970s, the notion of the grimace of the real enabled Lacan to conceptually propose a perception of everyday reality as the ultimate misrecognition, of social reality as a fantasy of misrecognition resulting from the 'unstable conjunction' between psychoanalysis and Sussurean linguistics which had propelled Lacan's thinking since the 1930s (Easthope 2002: 72). This chapter will argue that not only can the photograph be read as embodying the grimace of the real but that the real and its effects and determinations are to be found in every photograph.

In the year before his 1973 television appearance Lacan had presented his Seminar 20 in which he re-stated the relation between psychoanalysis and linguistics. He reaffirmed the

'complex determinations' (Copjec 1994: 72) that existed between the subject and the unconscious, the non-rational movement of which determined the subject's perception of reality through what he described as the 'defiles of the signifier' (Lacan 2008: 348). Lacan had formulated a similar view fifteen years before when he had stated that 'unconscious desire belongs to an animal at the mercy of language' (Lacan 1977: 264). As Sean Homer comments, Lacan argues that the subject observes and makes sense of the world through the signifiers it garners from the world around it, but it is the unconscious, with its autonomous agenda, that organizes these knots or chains of signifiers into the defiles through which signification can then occur (Homer 2005). Jae Emerling describes the relation between social reality and the real as: 'the emergence of the human subject from its non-individuated, prelinguistic state of being, not into unmediated reality, but into a culturally constructed world of symbols' (Emerling 2019: 181).

Terry Eagleton describes the real as the pre-Oedipal Eden from which we are torn when we acquire language - in the process, desire flows unstaunchably from the gash in our being where we are torn from Nature: 'Fantasy then is not the opposite of reality, it is what plugs the void in our being so that the set of fictions we call reality are able to emerge' (Eagleton 2003: 197). Such a description connects with Lacan's use of the term 'grimace of the real' - when the real is exiled from the subject on the acquisition of language, it leaves a subject not only at the mercy of the non-rational determinations of unconscious desire, but one constituted through the processes of signification which by definition, are incapable of describing the world with any certainty or exactitude (Eyers 2012). The relation between the speaking subject and the real is as impossible as it is incommensurable (Rabaté 2003: 12); for Lacan, the reality that exists for the individual subject and for the social collective, is a fantasy of misrecognition, a signifiatory squint, a sneer of the signifier, a 'grimace of the real'.

Lacan argues that signifiers constitute evidence only 'of the latency with which any signifiable is struck, when it is raised to the function of signifier' (Lacan 1977: 288). Catherine Belsey comments: 'Whether as image or words, scientific equation or logical notation, the signifier veils whatever might be there' (Belsey 2005: 42). In Lacan's account, it is this inherent latency, and not 'truth' or 'certainty', that gives our existence what meaning it has. The signifier appears as a veil, but one that veils the unknown, the undefined, the conjectural - the real.

This study therefore argues that it is this fantasy, this misrecognition, that the photograph performs: the signifiers that construct social meaning in their differential and ever moving

associations, construct a collective and particularized fantasy, approximation of reality, a collective and particularized misrecognition. This is why the real can be said to be in every photograph. Viewed through a Lacanian lens, Penhaul's image of the Penzance Lido (figure 135) manifests the grimace of the real: the loss and exile of the real to the then lacking subject inaugurates unconscious desire which in turn unceasingly organizes and re-organizes the defiles of available signifiers in an attempt to find what is missing from the subject. It is from these chains of signifiers that the subject derives meaning. These chains of signifiers are attempts to ameliorate the impossible demands of unconscious desire, to find what is missing; the photograph depicts synchronic snap shot of this signifiatory process which is conceptualized to be an effect and determination of the exile of the real. The photograph manifests the consequences of the loss of the real; the photograph is a 'grimace of the real'.

As Lacan began to outline a growing prominence of the real in his tripartite topography during the 1950s (Rabaté 2003), he was emphatic in his insistence that the real and signification exist at different levels. In consequence, the signifier neither matches nor meets a referent: 'Language ... inscribes on the plane of the real, this other plane, which we call the symbolic' (Lacan 1988a: 262). Two decades later during his Seminar 20, Lacan again foregrounded such an account: 'meaning effects that occur, evoke the assumption that that they must be caused by the referent, but this is not so: the two are not aligned, not adjusted to each other ... In each case, the symbolic misses the real' (Lacan 1975: 23).



Fig 135 Penhaul Penzance Lido The Cornishman 1955 PHA

Lacan increasingly argues that fantasy and misrecognition not only embody the subject's relation to what is considered to be reality, but that fantasy and misrecognition become associations and values shared across particular social groups. Paul Taylor suggests that such collective cultural connotations are underpinned and promoted by the propitious

repetition peculiar to newspaper media such as *The Cornishman* (Taylor: 2010). Specular relations remained germane to Lacan's continually developing formulation of subjectivity and perception of reality. Sean Homer notes that the Lacanian subject constitutes itself and its sense of the world in large part through what it sees (Homer 2005). Paul Taylor argues that, in Lacanian terms, media apparatus such as newspaper photography, present and perform the fantasy of misrecognition which constitute the subject's 'reality' and that of the imagined community with which an individual reader identifies (Taylor 2010). Situated within the prevalent formalist discourse, for a reader of *The Cornishman* in the post-war period, a Penhaul photograph would elicit the presumption that what was depicted must correspond to reality, must be caused by a referent, a 'thing-in-the-world'. However, through a Lacanian lens, such a presumption cannot be made. For Lacan, a photograph cannot show reality any more than it can show the real; as Lacan states in his Seminar 20, the real and (photographic) representation are not 'aligned, not adjusted to each other' (Lacan 1975: 23). A photograph shows the world but shows the world as it is for the subject, it shows the world through a filter and that filter consists of language, of the signifier organized through the autonomous and 'complex determinations of unconscious desire' (Copjec 1994).

The trajectory of Lacan's conceptual development in the post-war years led him to conceptualize reality, our symbolic world, not just as a cultural construction, but above all, as a fantasy of misrecognition (Emerling 2019). The figure of the grimace of the real utilized by Lacan during his 1973 television appearance, encapsulates the sheer incommensurability of the realms of the real and the symbolic, a disjunction which for Lacan enacted the most significant of the misrecognitions he posited as constitutive of human subjectivity: 'the world is merely the fantasy through which thought sustains itself' (Lacan 1990: 6). While Lacan would emphatically state that, 'the real is what does not depend on my idea of it' (cited in Fink 1995: 142), the grimace of the real also serves to help explicate just how the real persists and functions as a question for cultural criticism. The grimace of the real enacts the inability of the symbolic world to grasp the real. The real is that which cannot be symbolized or comprehended, and in its incomprehensibility functions to remind us that comprehension is just that - the systematic production of intelligibility limited in terms by the terms of the system. The real must be that which cannot be symbolized or imagined: 'That the real marks a limit is vital to cultural criticism since it also marks the impossibility of cultural systems of meaning and values generated

there to be either real or absolute in the sense of their being all there is' (McGowan, K. 2007: 116). For Catherine Belsey the function of the real and the question it poses is vital; the real is not one particular version or another but rather the real is vital to cultural criticism for the domain of meaningless alterity it marks. In Belsey's view, the real is the radical alterity that cannot be named or grasped and this real radically displaces the certainty of the subject. This study has followed psychoanalytic discourse as it has continued to maintain that the subject is constituted not in terms of certainty, but uncertainty, not in terms of what it knows, but what it doesn't know (p. 140, 157, 172). In this sense the real will always function as an ultimate measure of alterity. As Kate McGowan argues: 'If the real is what is independent of my idea of it, then the real continues to haunt and to trouble not just my own particular version of reality, but the certainty by which I come to know anything in the first place' (McGowan, K. 2007: 118). For cultural criticism, the function of the real is indispensable and this current chapter will illustrate such indispensability in terms of the relation between photography and the real.

While viewing Penhaul's photographs through a Lacanian lens will not directly grasp or comprehend the real, it will be argued that photographs manifest and allude to the effects and determinations of the real and its exile. Mechanisms of absent causation (Johnston 2008) will be cited to argue that through the processes of unconscious desire, motifs for the real can be recognized across aspects of photographic representation in general and Penhaul's record of post-war Cornish community in particular. Furthermore, it will be argued that within such effects and determinations, the incommensurability of the real will mark the inadequacies of any systems of cultural meaning - the intangibility of the real means that if and when the cultural script of the symbolic order fails to cover what it is possible to say, then we can perhaps learn to recognize and identify such gaps and inadequacies within photographic representation. As such, the real is read as not just haunting and problematizing our particular version of reality but the certainty with which we come to know anything at all (McGowan, K. 2007).

Terry Eagleton (2003) explores the radical uncertainty that psychoanalytic discourse describes as constitutive of subjectivity and the function of the real as being the ultimate measure of alterity. He refers to a sense of the real as marking a limit, a point of failure within our symbolic systems and he comments that: 'we are never complete, never wholly bound to our own cultural context, but always to some degree out of joint with it. What I and the Other have in common is the fact that there is always something which eludes our

grasp' (Eagleton 2003: 205). Eagleton goes on to argue that: 'it is when we are able to discern the blind spots, the shared gaps and absences of another culture, its point of failure, that we are most at one with it, since it is just such an internal limit which constitutes us as well' (Eagleton 2003: 206). McGowan and Eagleton give a sense here, not just of the fundamental part the real plays in the constitution of the subject and its cultural world, but also why it is important to put in place frameworks and theories for recognizing and identifying markers of the real and the effects and determinations of its exile. This chapter will argue and illustrate that while the real remains by definition that which is always unsymbolizable, within photographic representation it is possible to discern those blind spots, shared gaps and absences to which Eagleton refers - perhaps to learn to recognize the very 'points of failure' that constitute the subject in its fantasy of misrecognition.

This chapter will therefore proceed by bringing together groups of Penhaul's photographs that illustrate particular characteristics of such markers and motifs of the exiled real in its determinations and effects within the subject and across culture, in order to substantiate Lacan's claim that 'a certain real may be reached' (Lacan 1999: 22). Allusion to the lost real is one such mode that will be argued to be widely discernible as being inscribed within cultural forms and this chapter will identify characteristics across a number of cultural sites - from the encircling of space in architectural form to the scopic proscriptions of perspective. This chapter will also explore the close relation between beauty and the real, a particular conjunction that led Lacan to state that 'beauty is closer to evil than good' (Lacan 2008: 295). Another marker of the real that this study argues as recognizable within photographic representation is its traumatic intrusion into symbolic space. Lacan argues that the real, despite being lost from the subject, can erupt into social reality; events can be so traumatic that they appear beyond meaning, beyond sense. This chapter will argue that such occurrences and their effects are identifiable in Penhaul's photographs and will discuss such phenomena in terms of Penhaul's photojournalist practice.

This chapter will also examine how Lacan's 'critique of ocularcentrism' and his conceptualization of the real as gaze, enables an understanding of the real to be elaborated as exemplified within the elisions and concealments inherent to the scopic normativities of the dynamics of geometral space (Jay 1994: 235). In short, this chapter will set out to 'recognize the real', not just through allusion but also in the elisions, concealments and markers of uncertainty as identified within particular Penhaul images that this study cites

as modes and motifs of the Lacanian real. In so doing this study will posit the encounter between photography and psychoanalysis not as 'forced' (p. 7), but as profoundly reciprocal and complementary.

### **Part 1 Alluding to the exiled real**

*In the following sections, this study will look through its conceptual Lacanian lens to observe and recognise how the determinations and effects of the exiled real are manifested in Penhaul's photographs through allusion and reference to the lost real - whether in the architectural encompassing of space, the detours of beauty or the invocation of loss within memorial sculpture invoked through the determination of the lost real Lacan named das Ding.*

#### **1: 1 In memorial(s)**

Market Jew Street defines and delineates the centre of Penzance; as the major thoroughfare into the town the street climbs steadily along its half mile length to its finish at the domed and porticoed grandeur of Market House built in 1838 as corn exchange and theatre.<sup>128</sup> Directly in front of Market House is a memorial to local polymath Humphry Davy (1778-1829) which was erected in 1872 to celebrate the life and work of the prominent Penzance scientist and putative proto inventor of photography (Batchen 1997).<sup>129</sup> The street's distinctive and defined perspective has long invited the attentions of artists and photographers, one of the earliest photographs was taken in 1851 (see figure 136) and fig 137 shows the same view fifty years later.

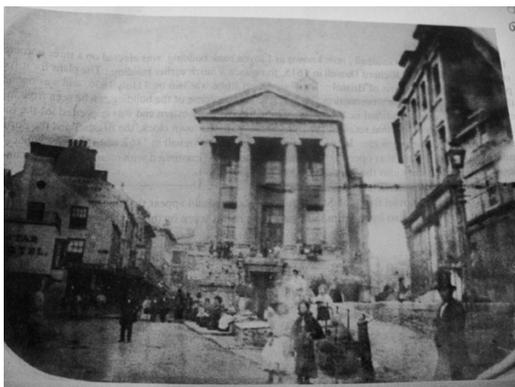


Fig: 136 Anon Market Jew St c1851 [from Watkiss 1975]. Fig: 137 Anon Market Jew St c1900 PHA.

Penhaul himself took many photographs of community life up and down Market Jew Street during his career, typical of which was one from 1954 made for *The Cornishman* and which records the departure of a coach tour party to North Devon (see figure 138). The editorial

office of *The Cornishman* is located a short distance to the left of Market House and the photographic studios of both Robert Preston and the Gibson family were situated in the parade of shops along the right side of Market Jew street. In the post-war years, charabanc tours were still of such occasion as to be featured in local press coverage of community events; Penhaul records many similar scenes during these years.



Fig: 138 Penhaul Coach tour from Market House *The Cornishman* print 1954 PHA.

The Humphry Davy sculpture and memorial, framed by the Palladian porticoes of Market House, looks down on the scene of departure. Penhaul featured the Davy memorial in many photographs, frequently incorporating it as an optical focalizer to organize the formal construction and perspective of an image. Another photograph of the memorial was taken for *The Cornishman* in 1950 (fig 139 below) and which shows the Davy sculpture being cleaned prior to a civic event for which the Davy memorial was a familiar and frequent location. In terms of this study, the Davy memorial exemplifies how, through a Lacanian lens, the exiled real is manifest in such photographs by Penhaul. Davy's impressive memorial dominates the centre of Penzance; its location, size and subject matter carries particular symbolic significance in its celebration of local scientific renown. On a Lacanian register, the image testifies to loss, invoking signifying practice to memorialize in the present its absent subject; Penhaul's photograph stages and performs how Davy's sculpture, like all memorials, exemplifies the necessary ambiguity in the relation Lacan posits as existing between the real and the symbolic.

For Lacan, although the signifier and the real exist on different levels (Lacan 1991b: 312), Lacan maintains a degree of equivocity concerning the separate and mutually antagonistic relation between the signifier and the real. Lacan argues that culture, in all its signifying processes, papers over the gaps in the symbolic that the chain of signifiers which constitute

the subject and its objects, cannot fully mark (Lacan 1998: 43-8). However, memorials to the dead acknowledge on the plane of the signifier the ability of the real to redeem the subject, to return the human organism to the realm of the real.



*Fig. 139 Penhaul Humphry Davy statue 1950 print PHA.*

Memorials and sculptures mark the existence of an ex-speaking subject who has re-joined the real; a sculptural presence testifies to an absence. Death is real. The memorial immortalizes an individual but at the same time does not deny the loss of the person they are built to remember; these conceptual mechanisms are staged, performed and hence manifest in photographic representations of such memorials. In Lacanian terms, a monument or its photographic image, does not celebrate some religious eternal life, but rather presents a cultural text which alludes to loss and promises pleasure. As Catherine Belsey explains: 'memorial sculpture constitutes a paradigm instance of culture as Lacanian psychoanalysis defines it' (Belsey 2005: 65).

Davy's memorial co-opts a range of signifying practices against the annihilating power of death - the monument not only affirms immortality, but does its best to confer it too, making Humphry Davy live in durable stone. But what is lost to this symbolic representation of Davy is the remainder - the real of the organism, the unnameable characteristics of his individual subjectivity, that is, all the intangibles inaccessible to the signifier and the monument designed to preserve his memory.

Monuments depend, in other words, on the existence of a gap between the real and the symbolic - the loss they set out to erase by preserving a memory is also the condition of

their existence as objects in culture. Humphry Davy's monument alludes to the death it also seeks to overcome although there are no material remnants inside the memorial; the memorial conceals nothing but rather offers some degree of consoling pleasure through aesthetic appreciation (Belsey 2005). In the same way, Penhaul's photograph manifests such Lacanian mechanisms. In Lacanian terms, monuments and memorials and their photographic representations, form a magic circle round what Lacan conceptualizes as the Thing, *das Ding* (Lacan 2008). This construct features briefly in Lacan's writing hovering uneasily between the real and the symbolic before its place is taken by the conceptual structure Lacan named *objet a*. However, the Thing features prominently in Seminar 7 of 1959-60, the seminar in which Lacan elaborated an extended account of culture and the real. While Lacan locates the Thing in the real, it also inhabits the psyche appearing there as a kind of exile. Lacan conceptualizes the Thing as the object of an unnameable desire; it does not exist as such except as a psychic reminder (Lacan 2008: 61). The Thing marks the place in the speaking being of the lost real - behind the signifier and alien to the subject, the Thing constitutes the absence that appears at the heart of the subject with the advent of signification, with the acquisition of language (Lacan 2008: 65). Lacan uses the Thing as a conceptual device to interconnect the subject's prehistory within the dyadic and real maternal relation, with the single drive of the speaking subject and its unconscious impulsion towards both life and death, towards cultural creativity and the return to the real of death (Eyers 2012: 110-111). This is the conceptual mechanism which is staged and performed by the photographic image. This is the mechanism which manifests the exiled real in the photograph.

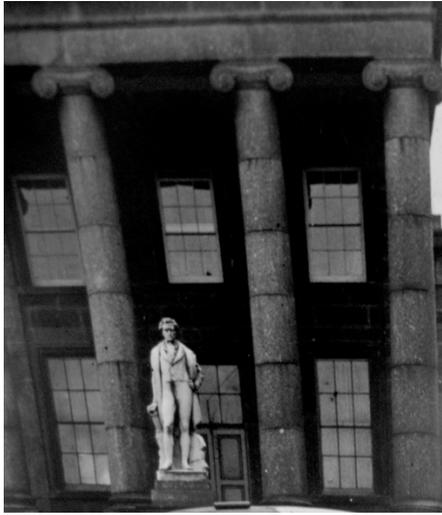
The Thing is the non-existent object of the Lacanian single drive that comprehends both life and death. While the Thing is conceptualized by Lacan as the void at the centre of the speaking subject, as what the subject unconsciously desires in the lost real, it can never however, be found. In fact Lacan states that too close an encounter would dissolve the subject, the symbolic and culture itself (Lacan 2008: 70). Lacan joins Freud's double imperative of desire and death into a single drive, the Thing, as object of the drive, can be directed to both life and death. The Thing initiates the desire to create as well as to destroy; to destroy in order to create again (Lacan 2008: 212). Lacan positions this drive of creativity as the enterprise of culture; culture offers a detour that keeps the Thing itself at bay and offers pleasure in the process. Pleasure is that which regulates the distance between the subject and the Thing (Lacan 2008: 69). Lacan conceptualizes cultural objects in terms of 'encircling the lost Thing, keeping it within bounds, without denying its

existence' (Belsey 2005: 71). As Davy's memorial surrounds absence with the signifier and provides pleasure in the process, Penhaul's photographs of the Davy sculpture manifest the culturally creative consequences of the real lost to the subject. The exiled real drives the movement of desire, a potentially hazardous movement contained, detoured and encircled by the cultural artefact itself and its photographic representation. These photographs not only manifest the exiled real but also demonstrate the capacity photographs have to illustrate and exemplify aspects of Lacanian theory, to provide a material object where theoretical concepts can be staged and performed. As Eagleton noted, Lacanian categories may appear abstruse, but the purpose of any enquiry is that such categories should be 'brought home to everyday life' (Eagleton 2003: 202). This study argues that photographic representation is just one such vehicle to think the Lacanian real.

## **1: 2 Architecture**

Lacan discusses the real and its relation to architecture in similar terms to that of monumental sculpture, that is as a way of enclosing emptiness and the marking off of space (Lacan 2008: 135-7). Penhaul's images are again cited in the photographic manifestation of the exile of the real. Through a Lacanian lens, Penhaul's photographs can be interpreted in new ways, as providing the scaffolding to think and exemplify various Lacanian concepts. In his Seminar 7 Lacan reads the void that architecture surrounds as the place of the lost object in the inextricable real, a place, Lacan argues, that is otherwise impossible to symbolize. The object of the drive, constructed retrospectively as the proscribed Thing, leaves a hole in what it is possible to signify, and can be represented only by emptiness (Eyers 2012). Lacan posits the loss of the real in terms of a source of dissatisfaction for the subject, as a structural discontent that gives rise to desire. In the 1960s Lacan introduces the term *objet a* to replace that of the Thing (*das Ding*) and it increasingly comes to figure as the place of the desire resulting from the loss, exile of the real (Lacan 2008: 138). This centrifugal drive of both life and death is what constitutes the subject and Lacan argues that if the subject were ever to attain such desire, it would then dissolve into pure absence (Lacan 2008). The Lacanian subject therefore has to somehow keep its distance from this place of the void of the exiled real. For Lacan, architecture both invokes and circumscribes the void which is the memorial to the lost real and photography works to manifest and to illustrate, such allusion to the exiled real. As Catherine Belsey

explains: 'Enclosing emptiness, surrounding it with a substantial materiality that is shaped, styled and decorated ... architecture reaffirms the power of culture to keep the object of the drive in its place' (Belsey 2005; 84).



*Fig: 140 (detail of fig 138) Penhaul Market House PHA*

Penhaul's photographs manifest and perform such allusion to the exiled real - through a Lacanian lens, such affirmation can be read as manifest in the ornate porticoes of Market House standing prominently at the top of Market Jew Street (see figure 140). Through much of Seminar 7, Lacan elaborates his understanding of the interconnection between culture and the real. Architecture is variously cited in terms of the enclosure of emptiness (Lacan 2008: 135-7). Grandeur, ornamentation and monumentality emphasize the effect of such enclosure: 'To put it briefly, architecture can be defined as something organized around emptiness ... and it is the true meaning of all architecture' (Lacan 2008: 167). Photographic representation of such architecture stages and manifests the architectural enclosure of space as category of consequence of the loss of the real.

Lacan references the architectural forms of the Baroque as paradigm instance of allusion to the real. The glittering surfaces which put ornamentation on show work to fence off the loss they surround, keeping the void at bay with a parade of pleasurable signifiers (Lacan 2008: 168). Lacan reads the void that architecture surrounds as the place of the lost object in the inextricable real. The Thing, the object of the drive, constructed retroactively, leaves a hole in what it is possible to signify, and can be represented only by emptiness. The loss of the exiled real remains a source of dissatisfaction and this structural discontent gives rise to desire, 'Architecture both invokes and circumscribes the void which is the memorial to the lost real' (Belsey 2005: 84).

In Seminar 7 Lacan broadens his discussion of the relation between culture and the real with reference to painting. In the chapter entitled ‘Marginal Comments’, Lacan elucidates the interconnections architecture and painting share with the real. He regards painting, like architecture, as first and foremost something that is organized around emptiness. Painting uses perspective to create the sense of space and emptiness in an image.<sup>130</sup> Lacan argues that neoclassical architecture, such as Market House, ‘submits itself to the laws of perspective, plays with them, and makes them its own ... in order to find once again the emptiness of primitive architecture’ (Lacan 2008: 168). Figure 140 (above) shows some detail from Penhaul’s photograph of Market House and the Humphry Davy memorial sculpture (fig 138). Penhaul’s photograph of the neoclassical porticoes and Palladian pillars speak of the building’s enclosure of space and subsequent allusion to the void of the exiled real. They also allude in their ornamentation to the excesses of material cultural which Lacan reads as putting on show a parade of signifiers whose function is to help keep at bay the void of the real (Lacan 2008: 167).

Today, from Market House it is just possible to glimpse across Mount’s Bay and down to the fishing village of Marazion and the promontory of St. Michael’s Mount (fig 141). This Victorian ancestral home of local landowners the St. Aubyn family, exemplifies in Lacanian terms, the grandeur and power with which architecture can contain and surround space - its turrets and towers, internal arches and vaulted domed ceilings contribute to what Lacan referred to in Seminar 7 as an enclosure of absence (Lacan 2008: 166).



Fig: 141 Penhaul *St Michael’s Mount* 1951 print PHA.



Fig: 142 John Moyle *Queen Victoria leaving the Mount* 1846 PHA.

St. Michael’s Mount featured in many of Penhaul’s images from when he first started work as a freelance press photographer before the war. He had the opportunity to photograph the castle interiors when it was taken over by the National Trust in 1954 and was featured

in an article in *The Cornishman* during August of that year (see figure 143 below). Viewed through a Lacanian lens, Penhaul's portrait of the building's exterior and interior burst with allusions to the exiled real – the enclosure of emptiness, the surrounding and substantial materiality that is shaped, styled and elaborately decorated. For Lacan, such architecture affirms the power of culture to keep the object of the drive in its place (Lacan 2008: 167). As Catherine Belsey observes: 'Grand buildings at once allude to loss and contain it, render it present and absent at the same time. They are in consequence places of desire' (Belsey 2005: 84). The excesses of Victorian Gothic style as personified by the castle of St. Michael's Mount, have some resonance with those which typify seventeenth century architecture. In Seminar 7 Lacan cites Baroque style as paradigm instance of a play of forms which attempts to both circumscribe space and invoke emptiness. The neo Gothic grandeur of the interiors of St Michael's Mount similarly enclose emptiness, allude to loss and are, in Lacan's terms, the location of desire.

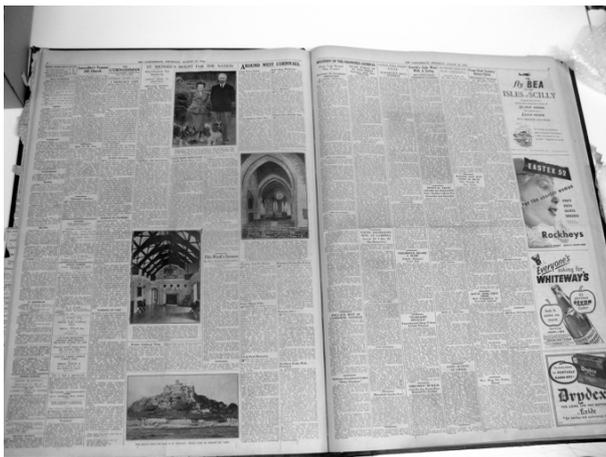


Fig: 143 Penhaul St Michael's Mount feature The Cornishman 1954 PHA.



Fig: 144 detail fig 143

The ability of architecture to both invoke and circumscribe the void as memorial to the exiled real is not of course limited to the putative pomposity of Victorian building. Any structure which encloses space can be read in this way; Lacan singles out what he calls primitive architecture as particularly evocative of spatial enclosure: 'To put it briefly, primitive architecture can be defended as something organized around emptiness' (Lacan 2008: 167). Penhaul's photograph of the power station at Hayle, which he photographed in 1955 (see figure 145 below), enacts precisely Lacan's conceptualization of the palimpsest of the exiled real as exemplified within architectural space. Penhaul's image both stages and performs the Lacanian concepts pertaining to the exile of the real and the cultural consequences of this loss.

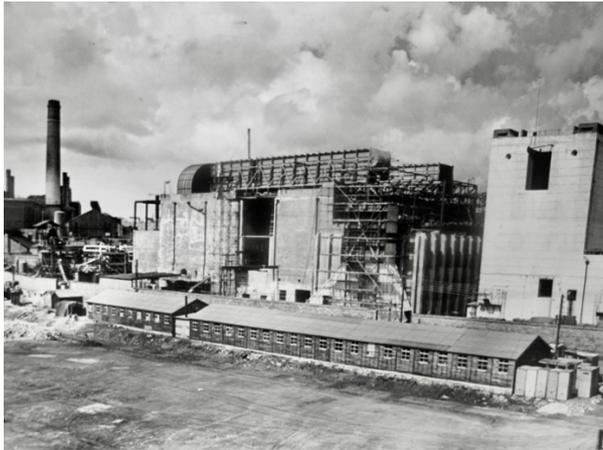


Fig: 145 Penhaul Hayle Power station 1955 print PHA.

Drawing on the same theoretical premise, but on a slightly smaller scale, an object as utilitarian as a prefabricated concrete bus shelter can again exemplify the enclosing of space through material culture, an enclosure which can be read in Lacanian terms as exemplifying the creation and encircling of emptiness; this is undoubtedly an example of the 'primitive' architecture to which Lacan refers above when he states that such primitive architecture can be 'defended' in its being organized around emptiness.

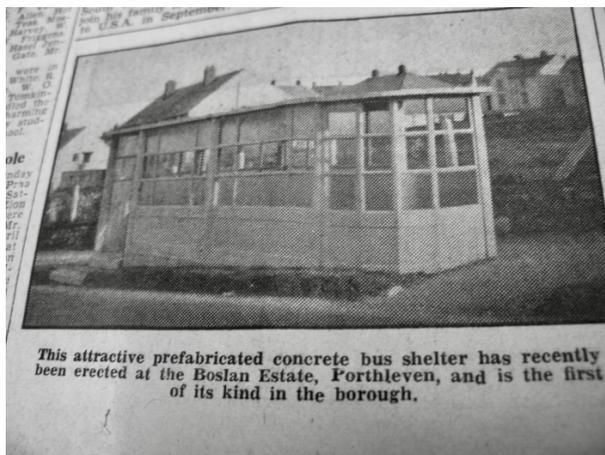


Fig: 146 Penhaul Bus shelter The Cornishman 1954 PHA.

Penhaul's images work to stage and manifest the exile of the real; these images exemplify Lacanian concepts in the everyday - whether in the grand scale of the modern power station or the neo-primitivism of the contemporary bus shelter, both structures and their photographic representations, exemplify the forces put in play with the exile of the real resulting from the insertion of the subject into the symbolic order of signification.

Penhaul's images provide a visual framework on which conceptual ideas can derive meaning. In the place of the exiled real Lacan posits a never ending centrifugal force, a driving absence which initiates a desire whose aim is both to create and destroy. Lacan

names the retrospective place of this drive, this desire, *das Ding*, 'the Thing'. Lacan posits culture as offering a detour that keeps this exiled space of absence in perpetual motion (Lacan 2008: 293-5). Cultural practice encircles this absence in order to pacify and contain it. Creativity, and pleasure in creativity, are products of culture whether that creativity presents itself as a Palladian façade or a prefabricated concrete bus shelter – the same determinations are being exercised. Once articulated in terms of material cultural production, the number and extent of the theory's photographic manifestation increases exponentially. As Slavoj Žižek comments, motifs for the real are legion in cultural production (Žižek 2006).

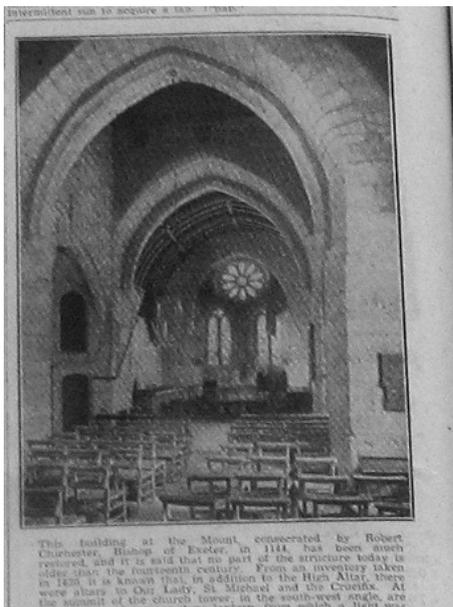


Fig 147 Penhaul (detail of fig: 143) Penhaul interior St. Michael's Mount The Cornishman 1954 PHA.

Aesthetic pleasure does not repress or get rid of the drive but deflects it, imposing a signifying screen which prevents the subject from getting too close to the void of the exiled real at the heart of the subject (Lacan 2008: 136-8). The emptiness that three-dimensional objects surround exemplifies the operation of the Thing, of *objet a*, that structural discontent which gives rise to desire and which is sublimated through cultural making (Lacan 2008: 55-62). Such mechanisms are manifest and recognizable both in material culture and in the photographic representation of that cultural production.

### 1: 3 Ships and sharks

Prints held in the Penhaul archive reflect a continuing demand from newspaper picture editors for images of the extraordinary and confounding. Material in the archive suggests that Penhaul appears to develop a particular, and undoubtedly, commercially driven

sensibility for recognizing images that unsettle and perplex, for capturing scenes that stand out from the everyday. Such images are ineluctably associated with West Penwith's littoral location and the inherent uncertainties of a community life lived in proximity to and reliant on, the sea. What might be termed 'stranded ships' figure prominently in the archive - a failed engine or missed tide frequently resulted in vessels becoming beached and often broached; such events were not uncommon and although not perceived as traumatic in themselves, Penhaul's photographs invariably convey a sense of perplexed curiosity in those that gather to view the scene. The aptly named *Sand Runner* was photographed by Penhaul in May 1950 after it had run aground near St. Ives (figure 148).



Fig: 148: Penhaul *Sand Runner* May 1950 print PHA.

Penhaul's image conveys something of the uncanny in what has taken place - the familiar and unexceptional structure of the ship is encountered in an unfamiliar situation; it is palpably out of place. While the photograph invites an interpretation that would mobilize the Freudian notion of the uncanny, the stranded ship can also be read in terms of the lost and exiled real. The stranded ship is as out of place and removed from its natural environment as Lacanian theory would suggest the speaking subject is irreducibly separate and exiled from its preontological, prelinguistic undifferentiated origins. Penhaul's image of the stranded and helpless *Sand Runner* again exemplifies how a photograph can embody and visually personify various aspects of Lacanian thinking - the image works as a theoretical object, one which can help to systematize and exemplify understanding of conceptual frameworks.

This chapter has previously detailed ways of alluding to the lost real which can be also manifested within visual representation, for example in terms of the emptiness of architectural space exemplifying the void left by the exiled real. The stranded ships

photographed by Penhaul can also be read in terms of the real but in this instance it can be argued that the ships allude to the real in the sense that they exemplify for the subject the notion of loss.



*Fig: 149: Penhaul Serenity Feb 1954 print PHA.*

What is absent for the stranded ship is of course the sea, the very element that constitutes the ship's essence and presence. Perhaps the fascination for the evidently absorbed spectators, is that the stranded ship reminds and exemplifies for the spectator subject, that they too are out of place; they have lost the fundamental facet that once constituted their elemental dyadic essence, that is, the real. Many other photographs made by Penhaul can be read this way - the shark and the whale in figures 150 and 151, can again be read through a Lacanian lens as alluding to disjunction and loss and as of reminding the subject of their own place of loss and exile from the real.



*Fig: 150: Penhaul Shark 1950 print PHA.*

The spectating subjects in Penhaul's photographs of stranded ships and sharks may appear enthralled and possibly perplexed, they do not seem remotely perturbed.

While the people on the beach in figure 151 look like they are going for a Sunday stroll, the fishermen posing with the shark in figure 150 couldn't appear more casual and relaxed; certainly, the frightening and disturbing attributes usually associated with the Freudian uncanny (Buchanan 2010), are not evident in these images.



Fig: 151: Penhaul Whale 1954 print PHA.

Perhaps it is not surprising that the notion of the 'out of place' as motif or index for the lost or exiled real should be so prevalent in Lacan's writing. As previously mentioned in Chapter 4, commentators like Margaret Iversen, argue that concepts from Lacan's earliest Surrealist associations, continued to be worked through and appear in Lacan's work over the course of many years (Iversen 2007), while critics such as Slavoj Žižek (2006) and Todd McGowan (2007) have continued to insist that once recognized, indexes and motifs for the Lacanian real abound in many aspects of general cultural production. The photographs of Harry Penhaul are cited by this study as instance of how, in Eagleton's words, 'abstruse Lacanian concepts may be exemplified within the everyday' (Eagleton 2003: 201).

## **Part 2 A matter of perspective**

*The previous section followed Lacan's contention that through an invocation and circumscription of emptiness, cultural production and architecture in particular, can allude to the exiled real within the form of three-dimensional building (Lacan 2008: 167). In part 2 of this chapter Lacan's conceptual frameworks will be applied to a discussion of allusion to*

*the real within two-dimensional representation. Through this study's Lacanian lens, perspective, created within photographic representation, will be argued to open a place of loss that perpetuates desire in the spectator viewer while at the same time narrowing reality and denying alterity; that is, perspective will be read as pacifying the drive and as fencing off the pure absence of the Thing (Belsey 2005)*

## **2: 1 Perspective gives and perspective takes away**

The members of the assembled coach tour party photographed by Penhaul awaiting departure on their day excursion to Devon in 1954 (figure 152 below), are positioned



Figure: 152 Penhaul Coach Tour 1954 The Cornishman print PHA.

within the frame of the image not least in relation to the pronounced lines of perspective that fundamentally organize the image frame. The shop fronts in the right side of the photograph and the hand rail that is glimpsed underneath, both accentuate the receding perspective that is echoed in the position of the coach and in the arrangement of the party members themselves who also find an alignment that reinforces the pronounced vanishing point perspectivism within the photograph. In Seminar 7 Lacan declared an unequivocal preference for architecture as a cultural form as compared with the perceived 'inferiority' of painting and photography: 'it is a matter of finding once more the sacred emptiness of architecture in the less marked medium of painting' (Lacan 2008: 168). While Lacan held photography in perhaps even lower regard than he did painting, he was quite clear in stating that the perspective found in two-dimensional representation functioned to create and organize the 'sacred' emptiness which for Lacan alluded to the space left by the exiled real. Penhaul's photograph of the coach tour party (figure 152) situates the viewer specifically as occupying a particular vantage point and one where perception is managed

by the scopoc dictates of perspective (Jay 1994). Through a Lacanian lens such perspective demarcates an emptiness which alludes to the space left by the exiled real (Lacan 2008). In his Seminar 7 of 1959-60, Lacan had outlined various ways in which culture works to recognize and disarm the drive and several of these mechanisms are manifest in the coach party image. This chapter has already indicated the manner in which the cultural effects of both architecture and memorial sculpture encircle and allude to the Lacanian conceptual category of the Thing and to the lost and exiled real. A Lacanian reading of Market House reads the void that the grandeur of the Palladian architecture surrounds as the place of the lost object in the inextricable real, a place retrospectively occupied by the object of the drive which Lacan named the Thing (Lacan 2008: 73-9). Similarly, the Davy memorial sculpture itself alludes to loss of the real in the subject and encircles the void of the exiled real. But this image also encapsulates the mechanism of perspective as it delimits and differentiates empty space within the image which Lacan again reads as alluding to the space of the lost real (Lacan 2008: 168). Furthermore, Lacan argues that allusion to the exiled real indicates the locus of dissatisfaction in the subject, of a structural discontent that gives rise to desire. A photograph such as Penhaul's Coach Tour Excursion Party (figure 152) exemplifies how, through a Lacanian lens, a photograph can function as a place of desire and of allusion to the exiled real through the mechanisms of absent cause (Homer 2005).

In Seminar 11, Lacan discusses the relation of perspective and desire. He details how the reproduction of perspective hollows out a space in which to accommodate desire (Lacan 1998: 105-17). While Lacan makes his argument with regard to the medium of painting, his arguments apply equally to the photograph's capacity to conjure three-dimensional space on a flat picture surface.



Figure 153 Penhaul Flora Day The Cornishman 1954 PHA.

Penhaul's photograph of the Flora Day celebrations taken for *The Cornishman* in 1954 (fig 153), is marked by a dominant line of perspective, an organization of the visual frame which 'hollows out a space' within the image which Lacan argues alludes to the lost real and installs desire in the viewer who is required to look from a particular vantage point. Catherine Belsey comments that the 'miracle' of fixed-point perspective is today taken for granted, 'with the effect of rendering imperceptible its relation to unconscious desire ... photography simply completes a programme inaugurated six centuries ago' (Belsey 2005: 81). In Seminar 11 Lacan affirms that what we seek in two-dimensional representation is not simply the illusion that we are looking at the scene itself. Lacan argues that the viewing subject looks for an indication that the imitation of the object or scene, declares itself to be just that, 'destroys itself, by demonstrating that it is only there as a signifier' (Lacan 2008: 136). As Catherine Belsey explains: 'Art ... neither delineates the real, nor acts as a substitute for it, but alludes at the level of the signifier to the loss of the real that is the cause of discontent in the signifying subject. All art is a place of desire' (Belsey 2005: 86).

Lacan frequently refers to the two-dimensional presentation of Albertian fixed point perspective in somewhat derogatory terms (Homer 2005). Lacanian art historian Hubert Damisch indicated just how constructed representations of Albertian geometrical space were: the viewer had to look with only one eye, from the right distance and at the correct level (Damisch 1994: 140). Only within these proscriptions would the 'truth' itself appear. Painting and photography conjure a truth into being but, as Damisch argues, it is an instance of truth limited by certain conditions, specific rules and conditions of visibility, that render the representation possible. Martin Kemp argues that the conditions and rules of geometrical visibility had to be learnt and internalized over many centuries before it became normalized within Western culture in the sixteenth century (Kemp 1990: 49-50).



Fig: 154 Penhaul Picking cauliflowers and St Michael's Mount 1954 print PHA.

Penhaul's photograph of cauliflower picking (figure 154) exemplifies the proscriptive nature of perspectival depiction. Penhaul occupies a specific vantage point which accentuates the relation of foreground and the vanishing point focus of the castle in the rear ground. This construction of perspective dictates the photograph's final form and narrative focus but also provides the conditions where perspective demands and forces a blinkered vision, one where what is marginal to the lines of perspective allude to a real which is occluded and concealed. Penhaul's particular perspectival positioning indicates that any cultural representation, however 'truthful', has limits, edges. Catherine Belsey argues that the implication here is that: 'culture is always cut out against what necessarily exists beyond it ... culture is itself a kind of a fretwork, a cut-out that screens the real, while at the same time encircling the vacancy that alludes to its loss' (Belsey 2005: 95).

Perspective functions proscriptively not just in terms of space. As Damisch notes, perspective narrows the possibilities of representation, it depicts an imaginary instant (in the Lacanian sense) and it makes specific what Damisch refers to as the 'single tense and single location' of an image (Damisch 1994: 75). The miracle of three-dimensional representation is achieved at considerable cost - illusionism puts on display a moment the photographer chooses, investing the practitioner with autonomy over the material presented. But for the viewer, this moment is always elsewhere, lost, unattainable – the exact instant of the image can never be recovered. In requiring the viewer to occupy a specific vantage point, perspective pacifies the drive and fences off the pure absence of the Thing, but also opens a place of loss that perpetuates the desire of the viewer. As Catherine Belsey comments: 'Perspective gives and perspective takes away' (Belsey 2005: 96).

## **2: 2 Perspective and the gaze**

If the perspectival image invests the maker with autonomy, and while it installs the viewing spectator with some degree of sovereignty, perspective narrows this 'reality' to a moment already lost and which has the effect of excluding the viewer from the scene. Such sovereignty places the viewing subject 'in a world struck with a presumption of idealization, of the suspicion of yielding me only my representations' (Lacan 1998: 81). As Stuart Hall notes, culture provides and enacts the symbolic frameworks that enable us to be thinking and seeing subjects in the world (Hall 1996). In Lacan's terms, perspective directs and determines our signifying attention - to see and think beyond the proscriptions of perspective is to think in terms of alterity. In a world without alterity, without the real,

what you see is what you get; the interpretation of a photographic representation belongs to the viewer's single tense, single location. A world without alterity allows photography no independent existence; interpretation of an image is constrained and confined by the prohibitions of perspective.

Psychoanalysis however, provides conceptual frameworks to disturb the solace of visual sovereignty not least in its account of imaginary identification, that elementary dynamic of reassurance in the scopic field (Lacan 1997: 146). Lacan situates his thinking within the conceptual structure of the mother-child dyadic relation (Homer 2005). Lacan argues that the loss of the unified gaze, lost with the acquisition of language, constitutes the object-cause of desire in the field of the visible as mother and child perceive a different world (Lacan 2006: 75-82). With this splitting of the gaze, the process of looking becomes reversible; the once undifferentiated gaze becomes divided between seeing and being seen. Looking and desire become inseparable. Lacan argues that the missed gaze, the off-frame look, elicits desire; the missed encounter between gazes Lacan termed *objet a*, a Thing-like void that meets the place of unconscious desire, itself a determination of the exiled real.



Fig: 155 Penhaul Newlyn lady 1954 print PHA.

Dylan Evans explores Lacan's considerable engagement with culture and the visual arts noting how Lacan discussed art primarily in terms of how it could usefully illustrate psychoanalytic concepts (Evans 1996: 14). This study makes the case that photography, admittedly seldom mentioned by Lacan, illustrates and exemplifies Lacanian categories in general and the determinations of perspective and the specular in particular. For example, the man's gaze in figure 155 implies a focal point we do not have access to; one that is closed to the viewer, unaccountable and missing. As Catherine Belsey argues, the gaze in an image can both promise and withhold a place of recognition for the viewer. All

photographs lure the viewer into a place of desire - the gaze of the man in figure 155 implicates the viewer in a desire to know what is beyond the frame, an uncertainty that keeps desire in play. In Seminar 11, Lacan locates the desire of the viewing subject at an unconscious level although the knowing subject understands the photograph as no more than a representation (Lacan 1998: 106). Perspective in a photograph evokes emotion by its subject matter and by positing a place of imaginary mastery for the viewer. But it also activates unconscious desire in several ways: perspective restricts what can be seen to a specified angle so that some parts of the space it defines are always obscured, concealed or excluded. A photograph can excite unconscious desire in that it both denies and insists on the pictorial surface, as Catherine Belsey explains: 'an image tantalizes us with the promise of direct access to a world beyond words, only to affirm that the source of that access is itself a signifying image' (Belsey 2005: 107).

Perspective within an image functions to both help portray an event but also to set the event elsewhere. Figure 156 bares the traces of these indicators of unconscious desire which it offers to the viewer. As Belsey comments: 'The marks of the exiled real are the oclusions and concealments, the elisions ... which function like discreet 'no entry' signs at an opening that at once promises and bars access' (Belsey 2005: 108). In place of the exiled real, the photograph enlists the viewer in a search for the symbol of its loss, what Sean Homer refers to as: 'that fleeting glimpse, or encounter with the real as *objet a*' (Homer 2005: 94).



Fig 156 Penhaul Traffic Lights print 1953 PHA.

In Lacanian terms, Penhaul's photograph of newly installed traffic lights in Penzance (figure 156), presents and exemplifies various psychoanalytical categories that unfold from the presence and effects of a dominating perspective. This perspective carves out space within the frame, a space Lacan reads in terms of the exiled real. The proscriptions of the

dominant line of perspective and the off-frame gazes of the people in photograph, conceal the real in elision and occlusion while also instigating and perpetuating the lure of desire. Figure 156 (above) exemplifies how perspective positions the viewer into occupying a specific vantage point, in this case, one previously occupied by Penhaul. This knowledge acts like a guarantee of truth as the image conveys an essential immanentism. The viewer is installed in a privileged place. As Margaret Iversen explains, three-dimensional space as created by perspective, organizes structures of identification that give the viewer the illusion of control, sovereign mastery (Iversen 2007: 117). However, through a Lacanian lens which recognizes the determinations and effects of the exiled real, such a position of sovereignty is problematized. The blank windows of the buildings can conceal a whole other life going on there but one that is closed to the viewer looking from Penhaul's 'perspective'. Catherine Belsey identifies such shadowy recesses as where Lacan would have perhaps located the concealed and occluded real.<sup>131</sup> While perspective lures the viewer into its depth of field in the hope of finding *objet a*, in the hope of returning the gaze that would restore an undifferentiated looking, fascination comes from what is not at the viewer's disposal. The impossible place of the viewer motivates the scopic drive and promises a satisfaction it continues to withhold.

### **Part 3 Beauty and the real: 'closer to evil than good'**

In Seminar 7 Lacan gives his account of the Freudian process of sublimation. In Freud's work, sublimation is a process that functions to channel drives towards socially accepted cultural activity (Freud 1975b). In Lacan's account, outlined in Seminar 7, sublimation works to pacify the drive without pathology or destruction. For Lacan, the purpose of the drive is not to reach a goal *per se*, but to follow its aim which is always to encircle the object (Lacan 1998: 162). As Dylan Evans explains, the purpose of the drive is not satisfaction but rather: 'to return to its circular path ... the real source of enjoyment is the repetitive movement of this closed circuit. Drive is a thoroughly cultural and symbolic construct' (Evans 1996: 47). When Lacan reformulated Freud's drive theory in the 1950s, while he retained the basic dualism of the drives, he insisted that as every drive was excessively repetitive it was therefore ultimately destructive (Lacan 2006: 848).

Lacan followed Freud in emphasising the centrality of the element of social recognition since it is only insofar as the drives are diverted towards socially valued objects that they can be said to be sublimated (Lacan 2008: 107-9). The ground sublimation occupies is the

field of desire: 'the drives are closely related to desire as both originate in the field of the subject' (Evans 1996: 47). Lacan emphatically states his position re desire when he describes in *Ecrits* the relation between desire and the real - Lacan writes that desire is: 'that which is brought into being with the loss of the real entailed in the subjection of the subject to the symbolic order' (Lacan 2006: 287). Lacan offers on the basis of Freud, a theory of human culture as the only hope of a rapprochement between the symbolic and the real (Lacan 2006: 286-8). Sublimated beauty and pleasure are posited by Lacan as creating a barrier between the subject and the drive's destructive desire. The pleasure of making within all aspects of cultural production, presents the beautiful as capable of alluding to the lost real, to revealing the nature of the drive (Lacan 2008: 198-202). In Seminar 7 when Lacan states that 'man is the artisan of his support system' (Lacan 2008: 119), he implies that the subject creates or finds signifiers that delude him into believing he has overcome the emptiness of the Thing (see figure 158).



Fig 157: Penhaul Three children 1953 print PHA.

However, for Lacan there is nothing escapist or sentimental in his understanding of the beautiful: 'the beautiful is closer to evil than good' (Lacan 2008: 217). Later in the seminar he adds 'it is precisely the function of the beautiful to reveal to us the site of man's relationship to his own death ... in a blinding flash' (Lacan 2008: 295). Therefore, through a Lacanian lens, any normative Western values of beauty projected onto Penhaul's photograph of three smiling children (fig 157), would be seen in terms of how beauty can perform the function of containing that desire towards evil and death that lies at the heart of the subject - scratch the surface of beauty and the death drive will be found in all its self-serving malevolence; beauty hides the inevitability of death, of the return to the real (Eyers 2012).

Lacan closely associates beauty and creativity. By encircling the void, which marks the place of the real that is lost to the subject, culture exercises the creative aspect of the drive to make allusions at the level of the symbolic to the inaccessible real. Beauty inserts itself between the subject and the void left by exiled real - whether it's a charming child or bucolic idyll, beauty works as enforcer to keep the subject free from the perturbation that would ensue from an unconstrained drive.

In Seminar 7 Lacan talks about pleasure and its relation to creativity. He states that pleasure for the subject is found on the side of symbolic, not the real. The Thing, as object of the drive, is missing from the symbolic and is outside representation; it is figured as absent presence (Lacan 2008: 12). Lacan configures the symbolic as forming a 'magic circle' to keep the subject and the Thing separate (Lacan 2008: 134). Creative pleasure institutes a signifying screen that keeps the subject and the Thing at a distance.



*Fig: 158 Penhaul Model ships 1955 print PHA.*

At the same time, the pleasurable signifier alludes to the loss of the real from where the Thing has its origins. Lacan implicates beauty in his dynamic of drive as absent Thing and resulting protective magic circle and detour of pleasurable creativity. Lacan makes his position clear in Seminar 7 where he argues that the beautiful satisfies not by representing the real, nor by avoiding the drive, but by 'indicating towards the lost real while at the same time keeping the Thing at bay' (Lacan 2008: 135). Lacan argues that objects made in culture offer satisfaction when the signifier encloses absence and at the same time offers pleasure (Lacan 2008). Penhaul's photograph of model ships (fig 158) can therefore be read in such Lacanian terms, that is, as indicating towards the exiled real and the resulting drive, here encircled and contained with creativity and beauty.

During Seminar 7 Lacan discusses Heidegger's essay *The Origin of the Work of Art* and argues that what characterizes much artistic production is the depiction of both 'a presence and an absence' (Lacan 2008: 297). For Lacan, such presence and absence come to metaphorically exemplify loss, past temporality and present materiality. Contemplating Dutch sixteenth century painting, Lacan reads the possibilities of future loss in the inevitable decomposition of the fruit depicted in the still life composition: 'the still life both reveals and hides that within it which constitutes a threat, denouement, unfolding, or decomposition, that it manifests the beautiful for us as a temporal relation' (Lacan 2008: 298). Lacan stresses the ambiguity that art, as a signifying form, both constitutes a presence and invokes absence; the work of art draws attention to the inevitability of death and does so in signifying practice, 'The true barrier that holds the subject back in front of the unspeakable field of radical desire ... is the aesthetic phenomenon where it is identified with the experience of beauty' (Lacan 2008: 216).



Fig: 159 Penhaul *Anemone harvest* 1953 print PHA.

Penhaul's photograph of harvested flowers (figure 159 above), might appear a somewhat staged and formulaic depiction, but within the terms of reference Lacan sets out to discuss the aesthetics of beauty and creativity in Seminar 7, such an image can be read as manifesting the beautiful as a function of a temporal relation. While this photograph presents a screen of signifiers carrying (normative) notions of beauty, the observer is aware that the image reveals and hides the threat and inevitability of death and decomposition, both for the flowers and the women in the photograph. The beauty that is culturally read into the image, and which affords the viewer pleasure, through a Lacanian lens such beauty works primarily to protect the subject from what Lacan describes as the oblivion of radical desire (Lacan 2008: 292). For Lacan, beauty has a specific job to do and he states: 'the

beautiful has the effect, I would say, of suspending, lowering, disarming desire. The appearance of beauty intimidates and stops desire' (Lacan 2008: 294).



Fig: 160 Penhaul View towards St Michael's Mount 1956 print PHA.

Penhaul's photograph of St Michael's Mount (figure 160 above), in drawing on standard conventions of the picturesque and in presenting an image of such constructed pastoralism, affords the viewer both beauty and pleasure. But in Lacan's terms, such beauty functions primarily to protect the subject by fencing off the space of the exiled real which is marked by the Thing but also to keep the subject at a distance from the Thing in its pacification of the drive's impulse towards obliteration. Penhaul's photograph of harvested flowers (figure 159 above), might appear a somewhat staged and formulaic depiction, but within the terms of reference Lacan sets out to discuss the aesthetics of beauty and creativity in Seminar 7, such an image can be read as manifesting the beautiful as a function of a temporal relation. While this photograph presents a screen of signifiers carrying (normative) notions of beauty, the observer is aware that the image reveals and hides the threat and inevitability of death and decomposition, both for the flowers and the women in the photograph. The beauty that is culturally read into the image, and which affords the viewer pleasure, through a Lacanian lens such beauty works primarily to protect the subject from what Lacan describes as the oblivion of radical desire (Lacan 2008: 292). For Lacan, beauty has a specific job to do and he states: 'the beautiful has the effect, I would say, of suspending, lowering, disarming desire. The appearance of beauty intimidates and stops desire' (Lacan 2008: 294).

#### **Part 4 The dialectic of *tuché* and *automaton***

*The following section examines Lacan's contention that 'psychoanalysis is essentially an encounter with the real that eludes us' (Lacan 1998: 53). Lacan introduces the notion of the*

tuché to exemplify the traumatic dimension of what he called the 'missed encounter' with the real. Penhaul's photographs are figured within the dialectic of tuché and automaton that is argued, according to Jae Emerling, to stage and perform what the subject most desires - the structure of desire itself (Emerling 2019).

#### **4: 1 The trauma of tuché**

In her 2007 text *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes*, Margaret Iversen insists that Lacan should be read in terms of the influences of his early associations with the Surrealist movement during the 1930s; this insistence stems from Iversen's contention that such Surrealist origins offer insights into Lacan's subsequent conceptual development. Such associations began with Salvador Dali and Lacan's shared interest in the clinical and artistic effects of mirroring and paranoia and continued with André Breton who became an increasingly important influence for Lacan as he developed his notions of the 'missed encounter' and *objet a* (Rabaté 2001). Indeed, according to Iversen, even in the late 1960s: 'Lacan was still feeding his imagination and rethinking psychoanalysis by drawing on his initial encounter with the Surrealists in the 1930s' (Iversen 2007: 40). Iversen argues that because 'Lacan learned so much from Dali, Breton and Surrealism generally, psychoanalytic theory cannot simply be 'applied' to art. Rather, Lacanian theory itself is thoroughly imbued with a surrealist aesthetic' (Iversen 2007: 14). Following such a genealogy of ideas from Freud to Lacan and then on to Roland Barthes, arguably provides a rigorous and consistent conceptual pathway and analytic framework with which to interpret photography in terms of the Lacanian real.

While the previous section of this chapter has reflected on how photographs can provide a mode of representation in which allusion to the lost and exiled real can be recorded and recognised, this following section will discuss how the 'unrepresentable' real, can on occasion erupt traumatically into the subject's symbolic reality and throw into disarray the very frames of signifying reference with which the enculturation of the subject is enacted (Lacan 1998: 55), that fantasy of misrecognized reality Lacan later termed 'a grimace of the real' (Lacan 1990: 6).

In early 1920, while Freud was writing the first draft of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, a text which presented a fundamental reconsideration of his existing metapsychology, Freud was also reworking an older paper entitled *The Uncanny*. Freud's observation of the effects of shell-shock during World War 1 had led him to revise his theory of instinctual life. Although

unmentioned in the text of *The Uncanny*, Freud introduced the notion of the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to suggest an account of the dynamics of trauma on the psyche. In particular, Freud emphasized that the psyche was highly susceptible to invasion by contingency, to the vicissitudes and uncertainties of everyday life (Freud 1975a: 119). Margaret Iversen comments that: '*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *The Uncanny* inaugurated a tradition of writing on art first picked up by the Surrealists' (Iversen 2007: 5). Iversen notes how André Breton's surrealist understanding of trauma contributed to his conception of the 'encounter' and the 'found object' later described in his 1937 novel *Mad Love*. According to Iversen, Breton's ideas were subsequently taken up and elaborated by Lacan in Seminar 11 of 1964, and where he introduced the notion of the 'missed encounter'. In this seminar, Lacan in effect proposed a surrealist take on his reading of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Some fifteen years later, Roland Barthes continued Lacan's surrealist-inflected thinking in his own deeply traumatic and evidently psychoanalytic account of photography, an account which commentators such as Iversen attribute to his reading of Lacan's Seminar 11 (Iversen 2007: 114).

Margaret Iversen argues that Freud's reading of the notion of the uncanny can be seen not only as impacting on later Surrealist concepts of the encounter and the chance find but also as directly influencing and inflecting Lacan's subsequent conceptual development. Freud's uncanny object is conceived as ambivalently familiar and unfamiliar, both intimate and strange (Freud [1919] 2003: 220). Freud writes, 'The uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it through the process of repression' (Freud [1919] 2003: 241). For Ian Buchanan (2010), the proximity of the familiar and unfamiliar is the very hallmark of the uncanny. Buchanan describes the uncanny not as a new occurrence but rather as being an old and repressed object that recurs in a place where it is not expected (Buchanan 2010: 476).

It was in the seminar of 1964 that Lacan introduced the notion of the 'missed encounter' and whose provenance lay directly in Breton's concept of *la rencontre*. The encounter contained an element of the uncanny; accidental and fortuitous, it could be both a delightful but also troubling experience. It could be as baffling as it was unexpected; an encounter could not be planned in advance. According to Jean-Michel Rabaté, the paradoxical was a key element in the surrealist project and this was encapsulated in another Bretonian notion, that of the *trouvaille*, the search for something that could only

be encountered by utter chance, what Breton called the 'lucky find' (Breton 1960). In Seminar 11 Lacan takes these ideas and rereads them through a psychoanalytic register. He reads the *trouvaillie* as a conscious thought which is 'knocked off course'; Lacan states: 'Now, as soon as it is presented, this discovery becomes a rediscovery ... and is always ready to steal away again, thus establishing the dimension of loss' (Lacan 1998: 25). Iversen argues that it is this sense of loss that is a key aspect to Lacan's thinking (Iversen 2007: 64). In this way Lacan brings together elements from Freud and the surrealists and incorporates them in his explication of the real. The contingent and uncanny encounter can knock the subject off balance and throw signifying frameworks into disarray until such time as the subject manages to 'reconstitute' itself back into the quotidian relations of the cultural script. What the subject 'discovers' is the real, a brief and traumatic encounter with the unexplainable and the unsymbolizable which sees the subject 'knocked off course'. This in Lacan's terms, is an encounter with the real but it is a failed encounter, because as the subject reconstitutes itself within frameworks of meaning, the real 'steals itself away' leaving only the dimension of loss (Rabaté 2001).

Margaret Iversen indicates that she regards Lacan as a good reader of Breton, and in his writing Lacan's emphasis makes clear the uncanny aspect of both the *trouvaillie* and the chance encounter. Margaret Cohen (1993) argues that Lacan recasts Freud's conception of trauma in terms of the surrealist encounter. Lacan clearly declares this contention himself, referring to: 'the real as encounter ... the encounter in so far as it may be missed, first presented itself in the history of psychoanalysis ... in the form of trauma' (Lacan 1998: 55). Cohen stresses the element of pure contingency that characterizes the trauma event. Iversen supports this observation and argues that Walter Benjamin was cognizant of the way in which the photograph could record the trace of trauma, and she comments that Roland Barthes echoes Benjamin when he speaks of photography's 'spark of contingency' (Barthes 1981: 3).

Lacan gives his most precise elaboration of the traumatic encounter with the real in Chapter 5 of the published version of his Seminar 11 (1973). This chapter, entitled *Tuché and Automaton*, explores the nature of the real as manifested in the visual field. Lacan stated that: 'psychoanalysis is essentially an encounter with the real that eludes us' (Lacan 1998: 53) and in the seminar Lacan made explicit the connection between the missed encounter and what he called the *tuché*. Lacan borrows the terms in the title of Chapter 5 from Aristotle's *Physics*, a text which is concerned with the nature of causality. Lacan takes

the terms *tuché* and *automaton* and redefines them as 'the encounter with the real' and 'the network of signifiers' respectively (Lacan 1998: 53). The *automaton* or signifying network, involves the subject in their relation to the dynamic of the symbolic register; *automaton* refers to the behaviour of the self within the symbolic, that is, the behaviour of the signifying chain within language. As Jae Emerling states: 'This behaviour is structural because it is formed in relation to that which resists and yet instigates the signifying chain: the *objet a*, the surplus of the real' (Emerling 2019: 180). For this reason, Lacan considers the *tuché*, to be the encounter. While the network of signifiers or *automaton* is defined as 'the insistence of the signs by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle' (Lacan 1998: 54), the *tuché* is experienced by the subject as a painful intrusion or trauma: 'The real is that which always lies behind the *automaton*, and it is quite obvious, throughout Freud's research, that it is this that is the object of his concern' (Lacan 1998: 54). Lacan makes explicit the connection between the encounter and trauma: 'The function of the *tuché*, of the real as encounter - the encounter in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter' (Lacan 1998: 55).

Jae Emerling observes that Lacan here reinscribes Freud's notion of the pleasure principle. Lacan explains that just as Freud's system demonstrates how human beings are always kept just short of pleasure, Lacan's focus is on how desire can never be attained. Indeed, Emerling states that: 'Lacan argues that what we desire is the very structure of desire: the frisson between the *automaton* and the *tuché*, the pleasure derived from the chance encounter with the real that interrupts and undermines the very ground on which we stand' (Emerling 2019: 180). This study argues that it is just this 'frisson' that is staged and performed by the photograph and that this staging and performance is evident in the photographs of Harry Penhaul. An image can present and re-present the *tuché* - as a page of *The Cornishman* is turned, the reader can actively and dynamically encounter a photograph which performs the traumatic and contingent intrusion of the unexplained and uncanny as the *automaton's* signifying frames of reference are 'knocked of course' and thrown into disarray. However, an image will also be the nexus and facilitator of what Lacan refers to the 'reconstitution' of the subject as it works to 'haul back' and derive meaning once more from the encounter with the disarray of signifiers initially presented by the photograph in what amounts to a reclaiming and retaining of the signifying, symbolic normativities constitutive of the cultural script (Lacan 1998: 56). Lacan refers to such disturbance and readjustment in terms of being 'knocked up', of an awakening from

meaninglessness into meaning, of being 'reconstituted' back into the network of signifiers he calls the *automaton* (Lacan 1998: 56).

As soon as the subject 'reconstitutes' itself from the disturbances of signifying disarray, the encounter with the real is lost. In this manner, for commentators such as Jae Emerling, modes of representation such as the photograph can provide the subject with what it most desires, that is, the structure of desire. The dynamic interrelation between the *tuché* and the *automaton* stages the paradoxical structure of desire - the subject wants to know the real but cannot sustain such propinquity: 'the frisson between the *automaton* and the *tuché*, the pleasure derived from the chance encounter with the real that interrupts and undermines (even traumatizes) the very ground on which we stand' (Emerling 2019: 180).



Fig: 161: Penhaul The wreck of the Vert Prairial The Cornishman March 15<sup>th</sup> 1956 PHA.

*The Cornishman* has been published each Thursday since its founding in the late nineteenth century. On March 15<sup>th</sup> 1956, the local weekly newspaper carried the story of the wreck of the French trawler Vert Prairial which had struck a reef off the coast at Porthcurno the previous evening and quickly sunk. The ship had been on route from Cardiff to Brixham and had carried seventeen crew members; the report in *The Cornishman* starkly stated that all hands had been lost and that bodies had been seen drifting out to sea some five miles away (figure 161). First to have seen the wreck was local resident Mr Leslie Trewern who had risen early on the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> in his daily search for driftwood. *The Cornishman* reported, 'to his surprise, he found the beach strewn with wreckage and on looking further saw the bows of the trawler above the surf. His mother had been woken in the early hours by the smell of fuel oil but attached no importance to it' (*The Cornishman* 15<sup>th</sup> March 1956). Penhaul's dramatic cliff top photograph of the trauma of the prostrate and broken vessel featured in *The Cornishman's* pages the next day (figure 161). *The Cornishman*

reported that, 'later in the afternoon crowds of local people ... gathered on the cliff tops to see the stricken vessel lying on its side slowly breaking up under the pounding of the sea' (*The Cornishman* March 15 1956).

In Seminar 11, Lacan discussed the relation between trauma and the encounter with the real. In Chapter 5 he talked about 'both the ambiguity and function of waking and of the function of the real in this awakening. The real may be represented by the accident, the noise, the small element of reality, which is evidence that we are not dreaming' (Lacan 1998:60).



Fig: 162: Penhaul Vert Prairial The Cornishman March 22 1956 PHA.

The following week *The Cornishman* published another photograph taken by Penhaul of the irreparably damaged trawler (figure 162). By the time Penhaul's images had been developed, printed and disseminated, the initial instant, the trauma of the meaningless event undoubtedly experienced by first responders, would have passed. While readers of *The Cornishman* would perhaps re-experience through the photograph something of the trauma and meaninglessness of the original event, Penhaul's photograph also speaks of the prior moment, it alludes to loss, to the loss of the real as it bears witness to the trace, to the absent presence of the eruption of the real. Todd McGowan (2007) argues the traumatic moment in terms of the big Other: 'In the moment of the traumatic encounter, the subject experiences the groundlessness, and ultimately the nonexistence, of the big Other and the symbolic world that the big Other sustains' (McGowan, T. 2007: 17). Penhaul's image of the stricken trawler works to exemplify both a traumatic encounter with the real and also allude to the exile of the real in terms of loss and absence.

Shipwreck has long been inscribed into the history and art of the Cornish littoral and has been the focus of photography since the mid nineteenth century. Images of sunken and wrecked vessels carry particular memories and connotations for the maritime community of West Penwith and the readers of *The Cornishman*. Two years before the disaster of the Vert Prairial, Penhaul had photographed the wreck of the Traute Sarnow which had run aground at Gurnard's Head on the night of July 26<sup>th</sup> 1954. The cargo ship was on route from Cardiff to Ostend and local resident Mr Kliskey was first to be alerted to the incident at around midnight when he heard the sudden and frightening noise of what seemed like 'the sound of a car crash coming from the fog out to sea' (*The Cornishman* July 29 1954). Once holed on the rocks, the Traute Sarnow suffered a quick, savage and traumatic destruction and *The Cornishman* reported that: 'the sea boiled over ... steel plates twelve feet square were torn off her sides like pieces of cardboard' (*The Cornishman* July 29 1954).



Fig: 163: Penhaul Wreck of Traute Sarnow *The Cornishman* July 1954 PHA.

*The Cornishman* reported that the next day 'thousands' of holiday makers and locals crowded the cliffs at Gurnard's Head in order to look down on the wreck as it was repeatedly pounded by the waves.



Fig 164: Penhaul Traute Sarnow *Western Morning News* March 27 1954 PHA.

Penhaul sold an image of the Traute Sarnow to the *Western Morning News* (figure 164). Penhaul's photograph clearly shows the many people described by the paper as 'enthralled' at the spectacle. Three days later, Penhaul's photograph in *The Cornishman* shows spectators in similarly relaxed demeanour as they took in the scene (figure 165).



Fig: 165 Penhaul Traute Sarnow The Cornishman March 29 1954 PHA.

In Lacanian terms the clifftop vigil (fig 164) enacts a 'hauling back'<sup>132</sup> into symbolic normativity of the sudden disjunction and eruption of the senseless real. *The Cornishman's* report of the Vert Prairial and the Traute Sarnow disasters hint at Lacan's discussion of the traumatic encounter with the real from Seminar 11. Lacan refers to elements such as noise, smell and the accidental as indicating the presence of a real encounter and that events are not a dream (Lacan 1998: 60). *The Cornishman* reports the smell of engine oil, the sound of steel plates being torn apart and the noise of the sea boiling over. The stricken vessels are described in traumatic terms of wreckage and savage destruction. The time is given as around midnight, but the observers are said to be awake. All of these elements are suggestive of the *tuché*, the traumatic encounter with the real, a senseless, contingent, shocking, incomprehensible but fleeting event. But while the trace of the disarray caused by the eruption of the real is captured in a photograph, this 'discovery' is what Lacan calls 'stealing away'; it is being 'reconstituted' back into the *automaton*, back into the quotidian signifying structures of the everyday. This then is the dialectic of *tuché* and *automaton* that the photograph stages and performs; that Penhaul's photographs stage and perform within the pages of *The Cornishman*.

Since John Gibson on the Isles of Scilly in the 1860s, photographers have made images of shipwrecks. Indeed, Gibson's income was initially based on sales to shipwrecked survivors

themselves (Watkiss 1975). *The Cornishman* first published half-tone reproductions of wreck photographs back in the years before the first World War. For Penhaul and his contemporaries in the post-war years photographing the events and traumas of maritime disaster were a staple of their trade. The Penhaul archive contains a preponderance of images related to seagoing incidents; Penhaul pursued such dramatic photographable events in his sports car, in a speed boat and even by light aircraft. However, the nature of photojournalism is that the journalist photographer invariably arrives too late. The image taken is what Geoffrey Batchen describes as always alluding to 'the prior moment' (Batchen 2002: 81). In this sense the photographer's practice almost comes to define the term 'missed encounter'. The drama of shipwreck provided ample commercial copy for press photographers like Penhaul but the prevalence and recurrence of such images is perhaps not entirely due to financial considerations and the consolations of photogenic form. Cathy Caruth notes that Freud stressed the determining factor in trauma was fright, or lack of preparedness: 'The shock of the mind's relation to the threat of death is thus not the experience of the threat, but precisely the missing of this experience, the fact that not being experienced in time, it has not yet been fully known' (Caruth 1996: 62). As Iversen points out, 'Repetition would seem to figure as the hallmark of whatever cannot be assimilated or subdued' (Iversen 2007: 5).<sup>133</sup> But perhaps the enthrallment and attention that is both evident in and given to these images, may result, as Emerling suggests, 'from the frisson between the *automaton* and the *tuché*, the pleasure that derives from the chance encounter with the real' (Emerling 2019: 180).

#### **4: 2 Vicissitude and contingency**

For Freud, writing in the 1920s, the psyche was highly susceptible to 'invasion' by contingency, to the vicissitudes and uncertainties of everyday life (Freud 1975a:119). Tony Thwaites notes that in Freud's revised topology, there was no longer any division between the psyche and the social: 'If trauma is the name for the wound caused when the outer invades the inner, then trauma is always already at the heart of the psyche' (Thwaites 2007: 28). While Lacan rephrased the intimacy of the psyche and the social in terms of the signifier (Eyers 2012), if anything, he reinforced Freud's assertion of the subject's manifest vulnerability to the vicissitudes of the quotidian (Sharpe and Faulkner 2008). Undoubtedly, the uncertainties of everyday life are the concern and focus of a local newspaper such as

*The Cornishman*. While images that encapsulate and accompany narratives of trauma and misfortune sell newspapers, and a determining aspect of Penhaul's job role was undoubtedly to search for and record such events, he also pursued with some determination, similarly profitable photographs of scenes that perplexed and disconcerted the viewer, of incidents and occurrences that stood aside from the seemingly normative and unassuming routines of the every-day.



Fig: 166: Penhaul Mr Grenfell *The Cornishman* Feb 1954 PHA.

Penhaul photographed Mr P. Grenfell just a few days after his young son had fallen down a deep subsidence that had suddenly appeared on his land. Although the immediate agony of the traumatic moment has passed, the image feels redolent with the meaninglessness of the event. Through a Lacanian lens this image plays out the dialectic of *tuché* and *automaton*, of the meaningless eruption and encounter with the real, figured by the *tuché*, and the reconstitution of the traumatic event back to the norms of the *automaton*. This dialectic is enacted each time the image is newly observed - as the page is turned the reader will encounter the real in all its meaningless trauma, the photograph will enact the *tuché*. As the reader subsequently scans the image and reads accompanying text, they will be able to reconstitute the scene back into meaningful frames of reference and to come to some understanding of what the photograph reveals - this ability to stage and perform the dialectic of *tuché* and *automaton* is perhaps a unique attribute of the medium of photography.

Dramatic coastal scenery and tempestuous Atlantic storms have attracted a long tradition of photographers since the mid nineteenth century. As a local press journalist Penhaul photographed the frequent instances of collateral infrastructure damage that resulted from West Penwith's exposed coastal location; figure 167 shows the power of storm waves

exploding over Penzance promenade. The image also details the reactions of passers-by as they take in the bewildering scene.<sup>134</sup> In Lacanian terms the enthrallment of spectators can be attributed not just to the drama of events but also as indicative of their attempts to ‘haul back’ into the symbolic this eruption of *tychic* meaninglessness. This photograph stages the dialectic of *tuché* and *automaton* twice over - firstly as a record and trace of the traumatic event itself, witnessed on 12th February 1952. But then this dialectic is also potentially re-staged and performed when the photograph is later viewed within the pages of *The Cornishman* as a reader initially takes in the contingency and perplexity of the scene, followed by a ‘reconstitution’ to the signifying conventions of the symbolic (Belsey 2005). According to Jae Emerling, it is this ability of an image to stage and re-stage the dialectic of *tuche* and *automaton* that gives a photograph its power, its ‘frisson’, as the reader scans the image for meaning (Emerling 2019: 181).



Fig: 167 Penhaul Penzance promenade Feb 1952 print PHA.

Incomprehension and meaninglessness are not solely associated with life threatening traumatic incidents but such perplexity and bewilderment can be read as indexes of an encounter with the real. Such bewilderment appears to characterize Penhaul’s photograph of a be-suited bureaucrat from the Ministry of Forestry as he scrutinizes the contusions and convulsions in the bark of a particular tree (fig 168). Paul Taylor (2010) cites just such an arboreal encounter in his description of the real as he references the engagement between the character Roquentin from Sartre’s *Nausea* (1938) and the roots of a chestnut tree.



Fig: 168 Penhaul Tree inspector 1953 print PHA.

As Taylor explains: ‘In a novelistic representation of Kant’s *thing in itself* and Lacan’s *Das Ding*, to Roquentin’s eyes, the tree oozes with life that is nevertheless inexpressible and unrepresentable, a vital force of nature in its rooty ‘thingness’ (Taylor 2010: 65). The uncanny conflation of pinstripe suit and visceral layers of bark would seem to constitute a *tychic* encounter, both for the individual in the photograph and for the newspaper reader. If traumatic and indescribable events at sea can be read in Lacanian terms of the eruption of the real into symbolic reality, then the liminal space of the beach can in turn be understood as the locus of a continual staging of the contingent and perplexing.

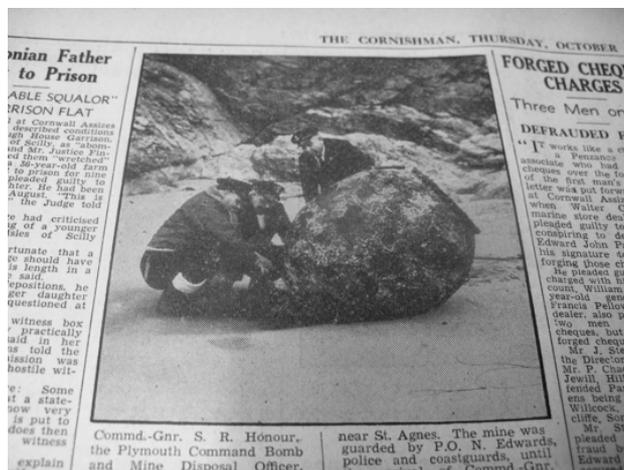


Fig: 169 Penhaul Beach bomb The Cornishman 1952

Margaret Iversen comments that an account of the real that rests on the disconcerting contingency of chance encounter, draws the notion of the real back towards a certain surrealist and uncanny provenance (Iversen 2007). Penhaul’s photographs of an unexploded bomb (fig 169) and crashed vehicle (fig 170) allude to the sense of the inexplicable that clings to these images; his de-facto staging of participants appears to

emphasize the feeling of perplexity that inscribes these contingent encounters.



Fig: 170 Penhaul Car on beach 1955 print PHA.

Penhaul cannot photograph the real, the real remains always already unsymbolizable, unrepresentable. While Penhaul can record the determinations and effects of the real and his can evoke allusions to the real, Penhaul's photographs will always remain 'essentially an encounter with the real that eludes us' (Lacan 1998: 53).

### **Part 5 Recognizing the real, a complementary encounter**

*This section argues cinema as providing a model for the recognition of the real as gaze, one read as applicable to the still image of photography. The recognition of the real as gaze is posited as marking the failure of the subject's look and of ideology's explanatory power.*

*This section discusses the encounter between psychoanalysis and photography, an engagement read as complementary.*

Film has had a long association with Lacanian theory; in the 1970s it was initially positioned as instrumental in the constitution of the subject's illusory self-deception within the specular (p. 207). Cinema was conceived as 'a machine for the perpetuation of ideology' (Metz 1982: 56) and as a lure of imaginary deception blinding the spectator to the dictates of the underlying symbolic order (Baudry 1974). The 1990s saw renewed interest in the Lacanian real and its recognition within general cultural production, a project inaugurated by critics such as Slavoj Žižek, Alenka Zupancic and Joan Copjec. The scopic particularity of the cinema environment revealed possibilities for the recognition of the real through the form of film, possibilities argued by this study to be germane to the medium of photography and the still image.

Todd McGowan argues that the cinema should be considered in radical terms as providing a location that is particularly favourable to the recognition not just of allusions and motifs to the real but also of the real as gaze (McGowan, T. 2007: 14). In Seminar 11, Lacan precisely elaborates a revised notion of the gaze wherein the gaze is conceptualized as incorporating a visuality that pre-exists the individual subject and into which the subject is born (Lacan 1998: 91-98). Lacan posits the gaze as comprising all the multiple discourses of vision figured within the social arena; the gaze is constituted within culture, it is external to the subject - in fact it looks at the subject (Lacan 1998: 106-8). As Lacan reiterated, 'What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside' (Lacan 1998: 107). As outlined in the previous chapter, Lacan further conceptualized this externalized look in terms of the desiring gaze of the other which he called *objet a*: 'The *objet a* in the field of the visible is the gaze' (Lacan 1998: 106). Todd McGowan comments that for Lacan the subject will only ever know his own gaze: 'what the other sees will always escape the subject, what the other sees will always be the object of desire and will remain unnameable, will remain real' (McGowan, T. 2007: 17). The constitutive lack which Lacan situates at the centre of the subject as an effect of the exile of the real (Evans 1993), inaugurates the unshakable desire Lacan conceptualizes as *objet a* in the scopic field. As Martin Jay comments, in the post-war years Lacan became less interested in how the subject sees and more interested in how the subject is seen (Jay 1994). Indeed, Lacan insists that the real as gaze, the desire of the Other, disturbs the entire scopic field, a disturbance later commentators explicated in ideological terms (Copjec 1994, Žižek 1992). Thus figured, the real as gaze undermines the certainties afforded by perspective in its 'pernicious spectatorial epistemology' (Jay : 297). The real as gaze puts into a psychoanalytic register the critique of geometral perspectivism that had swayed phenomenologists such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The battleground of gazes that Lacan envisaged contrasted with the single aspect and ideological viewpoint, the sovereign consciousness implicit to the structures of geometral perspective (Lacan 1998: 104-6). For Lacan, the geometral consequences of perspective were the scopic equivalent of self-reflective Cartesian consciousness (Lacan 1998: 83). As Antony Easthope states, the real as gaze was Lacan's contribution to an on-going critique of classical optics and perspectival construction (Easthope 2002). In such terms, Lacan's subject is not autonomous or rational but is constituted by the gaze from outside, by the desire of the other; for Lacan, vision is a conflictual field which, according to Catherine Belsey, reinforces Lacan's insistence on the constitutive role of intersubjective relations in the social field

(Belsey 2005: 45). Margaret Iversen states that for Lacan, geometrical optics and its spatial mapping had become increasingly inadequate as a model for the scopical regime of the post-structural subject (see endnotes 111 and 112). Lacan uses various schemas in Seminar 11 to illustrate the chiasmic intertwining of eye and gaze and he comments: 'in the matter of the visible, everything is a trap' (Lacan 1998: 92). The ideological implications of this 'trap' are noted by Margaret Iversen: 'I may see objects, but I am enveloped by a light or gaze that unsettles the position I want to occupy' (Iversen 1994: 97).

For writers such as Todd McGowan and Joan Copjec, cinema became a place where Lacan's theories of the real as gaze could be instrumentally explicated through the scopical peculiarities of the cinematic environment itself. While for Todd McGowan the darkened dream like surroundings of the cinema insert the subject into ideology, he argues that this specular particularity provides a scopical setting which can 'open the possibility of an encounter with the traumatic real that disrupts the power of ideology' (McGowan, T. 2007: 15). Cinema facilitates what McGowan refers to as the showing of the real as gaze, that is, it enables the individual subject to come into contact with another's look, another's ideological viewpoint and thereby open them to the possibility of seeing themselves as in the grip of their own particular desire and from an other's ideological outlook (McGowan, T. 2007: 12-18). In this sense, the real as gaze, envisaged as 'flowing' from the screen, marks the point of failure of the subject's look - unavoidable, presented mesmerically as in a dream, the subject is engulfed in an alternate perspective, an alternate framework of signifying and ideological reference. For McGowan, the most radical aspect of the cinematic experience lies in the ability of the gaze to show itself there: 'In the moment of the ... encounter, the subject experiences the groundlessness, and ultimately, the non-existence of the big other and the symbolic world that the big Other sustains' (McGowan, T. 2007: 17). Lacan associates this showing of the gaze with dreaming; the dream function illustrates how the gaze operates in the specular. McGowan argues that the cinema facilitates a dreamlike world, one which enables us to experience the real as gaze in the cinema; the form of the dream is the form of the cinematic experience and as such makes the encounter with the real as gaze possible (McGowan, T. 2007). Lacan comments in his Seminar 11: 'the real has to be sought beyond the dream ... this is the real that governs our activities more than any other and it is psychoanalysis that designates it for us' (L 1998: 60). Todd McGowan insists that 'such an awareness of the real, the gaze and the subsequent moments of rupture and disjunction, can be translated from the cinema into our attitudes

and awareness in everyday life' (McGowan, T. 2007: 16). This study argues that such an awareness of the real is translatable from the location of the moving image in cinema to the medium of photography and the still image; as subjects in the specular field we can learn to recognize the real despite the discomforts of such positioning.

Joan Copjec (1994) states that in our daily lives we avoid the gaze; the subjective and ideological consolations of the geometral are hard to contest, and as Martin Kemp comments, geometral perspectivism has been culturally conditioned into our normative Western scopic conventions over many centuries (Kemp 1990). Todd McGowan comments that although we imagine as seeing subjects, that we control the visual field, we are actually immersed in a scopic drive that directs our look and obscures the gaze from outside. Lacan states that in our so-called waking state, 'there is an elision of the gaze, and an elision of the fact that not only does it look, it also shows' (Lacan 1998: 76). McGowan argues that the cinema is the locus where such one-sided (ideological) looking can be subverted - film can present like a dream, and as such show another's gaze, another's desire. This study argues that the photograph can perform a similar function: the photograph can operate like a film-still, as a synchronic snap-shot of the film of our lived reality. It is in the photograph we can learn to recognize the motifs of the real, the encounter with the real, the gaze and desire of the other.

Lacan described the visual field as a 'conflictual battleground' (Lacan 1998: 62) and figure 171 works to reveal the various gazes present in an image. Penhaul's photographs in *The Cornishman* present to its readership a view of the world constituted through Penhaul's particular symbolic authority and its ideological frameworks. But figure 171 shows Harry Penhaul as *seen*, not as *seeing*. Lacan argues that the externality of the gaze has the effect of turning the subject into a photograph: 'What determines me ... is the gaze that is outside ... the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which I am photographed' (Lacan 1998: 106). This study argues that the photograph has the effect of showing another's desire and as such shows that which the subject normally elides and avoids, that is, the gaze from an alternative framework of signification and ideological constitution. This study argues that the photograph can work to exemplify how the real may be recognized.



Fig 171 Negus 1937 Haile Selassie The Cornishman print [Penhaul in background] PHA.

For Todd McGowan, symbolic authority retains its hold over the subject so long as we avoid the real as gaze, avoid the possibility of another's look. However, when we recognize the real as gaze, there is the possibility that a particular conception of symbolic authority, a particular dominant ideology, cannot explain all. From another's gaze, 'there is the danger that we might begin to recognize disjunctions in the symbolic matrix of the social' (McGowan, T. 2007: 28). For McGowan, this is the political power of the real: as recognized in the gaze or as traumatic encounter, as *tuché*, in allusion, in acknowledgement of the effects and determinations of the exile of the real - such recognition can serve as the locus for the possibility of questioning the ideological constraints of the big Other and the symbolic reality that the big Other sustains (McGowan, T. 2007: 17). In this sense, it is the grimace of the real that becomes the ultimate fantasy of misrecognition that stands to be acknowledged.

For a theorist whose concerns are significantly situated within the visual field, Lacan gives scant mention to photography other than a passing reference during Seminar 11. Jean-Michel Rabaté argues that Lacan, rather than explicate his thinking through a judicial choice of clinical case studies, preferred to convey understanding through literary analysis. In this, Lacan followed Freud in the suggestion that there is not opposition but complementarity between the literary domain and psychoanalytic exegesis (Rabaté 2001). Rabaté comments that 'Lacan's main tenet is that literature provides uniquely significant models that allow the analyst ... to understand new configurations in dreams, symptoms, parapraxes' (Rabaté 2001: 3). This study argues that it is psychoanalysis that offers uniquely significant models to understand photography and that photography in turn facilitates the

explication, performance and manifestation of categories central to the Lacanian psychoanalytic register; the encounter between psychoanalysis and photography is argued as a thoroughly complimentary engagement. Such a view leads on from Slavoj Žižek's ground-breaking political and culturalist approach and his insight as to the generalized exemplarity and polymorphic relevance of cultural production across the piece. While Lacan always vehemently opposed any 'applied psychoanalysis', in Žižek's view Lacan provides a set of fundamental readings which can be verified through reference to popular culture which this study has pursued through the photojournalistic practice of 1950s Cornish local press photographer Harry Penhaul

This study has presented many photographs by freelance photographer for *The Cornishman* newspaper Harry Penhaul. The concentration on this one practitioner has endeavoured to foster a continuity of place and time so as to better exemplify the collective and social dimension of the photograph and its effects as viewed through a Lacanian theoretical lens. Within Lacan's conceptual frameworks the role of the photographic image has been forwarded as instrumental within the fantasy of the Imaginary or the enculturation of the subject into the symbolic. The photographic image is argued in Chapter 3 of this study, to exemplify and perform the conceptual mechanisms (and misrecognitions) of the Mirror Stage and the Lacanian *Schema L*. In its discussion of the Lacanian real, this study has used various images to illustrate the ways in which the Lacanian real manifests itself within photographic representation – for example, through allusion to the exiled real, through the elisions of perspective, through the traumatic encounter and with the recognition of the real as gaze. In so doing, photography uniquely situates itself as both explicating and performing the real. Rabaté argues that Lacan's central insight is that: 'each picture, each image holds ... a trace of the gaze of the Other as the place I cannot see myself but know that I am seen from the outside' (Rabaté 2001: 12). Here, Rabaté's argument can be taken to help substantiate this study's key tenet that not only is the real in every photograph, but that in its absent presence and its effects and determinations, the real can be recognized and the implications of such recognition taken into political account. Rabaté comments that Lacan is increasingly positioned within a tradition not so much obsessed with subjectless linguistics or kinship systems, but rather of 'a thinking of the outside' (Rabate 2001: 16). This study situates the photograph as always of the outside, as always showing the other in the grip of desire. In Seminar 11 Lacan asks, 'Where do we meet this real? For what we have in the discovery of psychoanalysis is an encounter ... an appointment to which we are always called with a real that eludes us'

(Lacan 1998: 53). Here Lacan is emphatic that the real surrounds us and inhabits us as condition of our ex-sistence - but we are not the real, we are the consequence of its loss, a consequence whose implications will become increasingly apparent as we learn to recognize the real in every photograph.

## **Conclusion**

### **Part 1 To show desire**

According to Julian Young, Freud, an enthusiastic reader of Schopenhauer, offered his own non-metaphysical version of the Schopenhauer monster which was figured as an alien presence at the core of the human subject (Young 2005). Freud argued that what makes us human is precisely this foreign body lodged inside us but which he thought in terms of unconscious desire which he read as an affliction and a perversion into which the subject is positioned from birth; for Freud, desire was a disorder which is deaf to meaning and as invasive as a virus (Thwaites 2007). Terry Eagleton argues that Lacan appropriated elements from both writers for his notion of the real (Eagleton 2003). Lacan's at times cruel conceptualization of the substantiating and determining absent cause at the heart of the subject, encompasses not only the traumatic and the impenetrable but also the vacuous, obscene and meaningless that lies beyond symbolization. As such the real always already

evades the human subject; 'the real is what does not depend on my idea of it' (cited in Fink 1995: 142).

This study chose to interrogate the subject through a Lacanian lens and what it finds is that Lacan's thinking endlessly circulates the fearful psychical scene where the subject is constituted within the dyadic destruction of the maternal relation resulting not least from the acquisition of language and the move to the realm of meaning. In such terms the real can be read as the primordial wound incurred by the subject's fall from the pre-Oedipal Eden, what Terry Eagleton refers to as 'the gash in our being where we were severed from Nature and from where desire flows unstaunchably' (Eagleton 2003: 197). Such dyadic separation is figured as both traumatic and as something which manifests itself as retrospective internalized absence, 'a muteness which resists being signified but which shows up negatively as the outer limit of our discourse, the point at which our representations crumble and fail' (Eagleton 2003: 197). For Lacan, the real is tantamount to being the opposite of a reality which he sees as a low place of fantasy (Lacan 1991a). The subject's destiny is to lead a phantasmal lie, 'everything is played out for him at the level of fantasy' (Lacan 1999: 88). Lacan's real cannot be included in any symbolic system but its absence pushes and pulls systems out of true, a centrifugal vortex which bends matters out of place (Belsey 2005: 46). Because it can never be signified, the real is a sort of nothing detectable only through its effects, constructed retrospectively after the event, noticeable by the way it acts as a drag on discourse. Absence organizes the system and becomes a kind of presence within it – this constitutive lack is the driving essence of the human subject, a subjectivity mobilized by the impossibility of desire.

Viewed through the Lacanian lens, what comes into focus is that the fundamental gesture inherent to the real is to disrupt closed symbolic systems with its sheer contingency and insatiable desire.

Lacan's conception of the social field may appear to comprise a tragic expression of what it is to be a subject, what Margaret Iversen (2007) describes as 'a culturally austere politics' of lies, fantasy, misrecognition and self-interest which this study observes being played out particularly within the scopical field wherein the subject is accounted for and constituted. As Terry Eagleton explains: 'The world of everyday reality is a fantasy ridden fiction enacted through the symbolic coordinates inherent to the language based differential logic of structuralism' (Eagleton 2003: 167). While Margaret Iversen also insists that we should be 'relentlessly negative and iconoclastic' (Iversen 2007: 10), such disheartened resolve is hard

to sustain, not least because of the nature of imaginary sovereignty and Lacan's posited posturing rhetoric of the consolations of sublimation through the pleasures of beauty and the allure of ideological fantasy.

Lacan stated, 'we are spellbound by our egos' (Lacan 2006: 325) and Margaret Iversen assumes a similar position when she comments that 'the image is the linchpin in the process of ego formation and ideological interpellation' (Iversen 2007: 10). What this means for the subject is that it is hard to see the monster, that is, the movement of unconscious desire that regulates and motivates the behaviour, perception and actions of the subject in the social field. If the real cannot be directly symbolized and its determinations are mobilized through an in-articulate and inaccessible unconscious, is the subject resigned to an existence wherein its very sense of self, its ego, is nothing more than 'an illusory palimpsest of identifications'? (Iversen 2007: 137). While Lacan argues that such unconscious desire 'belongs to an animal at the mercy of language' (Lacan 2006: 427), he insists that only another can see us for what we are – that is, as in the grip of unconscious desire (Copjec 1994). The subject has to be shown their position relative to desire, relative to its positioning through the 'defiles of the signifier' (Lacan 2006: 342). This study maintains that unconscious desire stems from the exile and loss of the real from the subject and that this loss remains a source of dissatisfaction for the organism in culture which is the human being and it is this structural discontent that gives rise to desire. The object of desire, of the drive or Thing, constructed retrospectively, leaves a hole in what it is possible to signify but which is found in a succession of substitutes (Belsey 2005: 45). The exiled real exercises determinations and effects which place the subject in the grip of a constituting desire which can only be shown to the subject from outside, by an other. Joan Copjec (1994) implores the other to read her desire, to show her the desire and its ideological positioning that unconsciously mobilizes and motivates actions and perceptions in the social field. Lacan claims that the real, whose exile from the subject inaugurated the desire in whose grip the subject finds itself, can show itself in a dream but he adds in Seminar 11, that 'the real has to be sought beyond the dream ... this is the real that governs our activities more than any other and it is psychoanalysis that designates it for us' (Lacan 1998: 60). Todd McGowan claims that the cinema provides just such a scopic field where film can work to show the real as gaze, to show the subject as in the grip of desire. According to McGowan, 'the cinema is a radical location where the real shows itself' (McGowan, T. 2007: 15). This study argues that the photograph can also be read in just

such radical terms – as a location where desire shows itself and the determinations and effects of the exiled real can be recognized. The consequences of such posited subjective reflexivity figure prominently in psychoanalytic literature. Lacan's position was precisely made in his Seminar 7, which was entitled *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* and in which he elaborated a standpoint that maintained that only by recognizing and facing up to our position qua desire, could the subject ever achieve any subjective or ideological freedom (Lacan 2008). This is the theoretical trajectory that underpins this study's contention that Penhaul's photographs work not only to show the other their particular desire, but also to reveal and record the determinations and effects of the exiled real.

## **Part 2 Psychoanalysis and photography: a glimpsed (dis)junction**

During his Seminar 11, Lacan stated that 'psychoanalysis is essentially an encounter with the real that eludes us' (Lacan 1998: 53), that is, everything that happens to the human subject has a determination in the loss of the real – what drives our desires and motivates our interactions and perceptions all have determining cause in the subject's exile from the real. Lacan designates to psychoanalysis the role of interpreting a subject's pathology in terms of this absent cause (Lacan 1998: 60). This study argues that this relation between absent cause and determining effect also applies to the medium of photography, to the extent that it is possible to state that 'photography is essentially an encounter with the real that eludes us'. In short, this study has maintained that the real pervades and persists in every image – the determinations and effects of the exiled real are manifest in allusion and incursion, in displacement and missed encounter, in concealment and elision. The real shows itself in the gaze and in the occlusions of perspectivism. Extending Lacan's notion of 'flocculation', which he describes as the 'the crystallization into signifying units' of the subject's existence (Lacan 2008: 146), it is possible to think of every pixel as a signifier, then the real is shown in every photograph as it percolates its disruptive presence into the gaps in what the cultural script can describe.

In Seminar 11, Lacan cites La Rochefoucauld's remark that 'few would experience love if they had not had its ways and means explained to them' (Lacan 1998: 61). This study extrapolates this premise and takes as its central and determining proposition that it is possible and necessary to learn to recognize the real and its effects within visual and cultural representation and that the photograph in itself can be posited as a template and exemplar of motifs and indicators that instrumentalize awareness and identification of the

real and its effects. This study contends that the photograph performs a double function – it both witnesses and records the determinations and effects of the exiled real and also actively performs and shows the real. The determinations and effects of the exiled real are recorded by the photographic image in terms of witnessing examples of allusion, markers of uncertainty, moments of meaningless trauma and so on. The photograph also has performative function – an image can indicate and show another’s desire, can evoke uncertainty and propose concealment and occlusion. The proscriptions of perspective, although heavily invested with the normative sovereignty of a dominant specularity, can also be understood, when viewed through a Lacanian lens, to signpost the possibility of an unmapped alterity. As Margaret Iversen explains: ‘the photograph can be seen as a privileged site for the return of the real’ (Iversen 2007: 137). According to Iversen, the glanced encounter with *objet a* prompts an indirect awareness of the real beyond symbolization. Slavoj Žižek (2006) writes that a new wave of Lacanian paranoia should be instigated, and he insists that ‘we should start to discern Lacanian motifs everywhere, from politics to trash culture, from obscure philosophers to Franz Kafka’ (Žižek 2006: 410). Todd McGowan, in his 2007 text *The Real Gaze*, similarly contends that ‘we should export our attitude in the cinema (our openness to the gaze) to our everyday life. This is the project that psychoanalytic film theory calls us to take up’ (McGowan, T. 2007: 15). McGowan argues that cinema works like the dream in its ability to allow the spectating subject to experience the gaze of the other; ‘both the dream and the cinema allow the encounter with the gaze qua *objet a*. This is what the cinema offers us that we cannot find anywhere else outside our dreams’ (McGowan, T. 2007: 16). This study argues that the photograph can also enable such an encounter but that the awareness of such recognition must be acquired. Lacan gestures towards the possibilities inherent to the otherness of the gaze: ‘in the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say I am a picture’ (Lacan 1998: 106). The photograph has long been held complicit in the processes of ideological interpellation (Burgin 1982), but if the photograph has been seen as part of the problem (of an illusory mastery), then perhaps it can also be seen as part of the solution: the photograph read through a Lacanian lens can proffer the possibility of recognizing ‘symbolic authority’s failure to account for everything ... the encounter with the real provides the basis for the subject’s freedom – freedom from the constraints of the big Other’ (McGowan, T. 2007: 16). Hilde van Gelder and Helen WestGeest forward comparable sentiments: ‘the conjunction of psychoanalysis and photography informs a productive strategy for generating new understandings and insights’ (Gelder and

WestGeest 2011: 215). Martin Kemp, in his 1990 text *The Science of Art*, describes how the new science of fifteenth century Western perspectivalism took many generations before it became the dominant scopic regime so perhaps it is early days for the project of the recognition of the real and its determinations and effects.

### **Part 3 Real thinking and contributing to knowledge**

Thinking the real has implications for the interpretation and understanding of photography itself and also the wider field of culture within which systems of representation are positioned. In his first seminar of 1954, Lacan had described the relation between the real and the symbolic with Saussure in mind: 'one can only think of language as a network ... over the entirety of things, over the totality of the real. It describes on the plane of the real this other plane, which we call the symbolic' (Lacan 1991a: 262). For Lacan at this time, the real and signification exist on different levels; the symbolic order misses the real. Twenty years later Lacan stated that 'the real is what does not depend on my idea of it' (cited in Fink 1995: 142). Seminar 11 saw Lacan insist that the role of psychoanalysis was to undertake an encounter 'that is always missed ... with a real that eludes us' (Lacan 1998: 53). The trajectory of Lacan's ideas circumscribes a notion of the real as that which remains in place as what exists, but ex-sists the speaking subject.

However, if the real is not there-for-a-subject, knowledge is capable of intruding on it – Freud's concept of the drive mapped previously unknown territory of knowledge as 'it traced its way in the real that it set out to penetrate' (Lacan 1998: 163). Lacan compares psychoanalysis with Einstein and Newton 'in the sense that all these fields are characterized by tracing in the real a new furrow in relation to knowledge ... previously attributed to God' (Lacan 1998: 127). The real surrounds us and inhabits us as the condition of our ex-sistence, 'human beings remain uneasy composites, the conjunction of an unreachable real organism and the subjects they become' (Belsey 2005: 50). Lacan's subject is constituted by culturally constructed images of reality but remains ultimately empty; the real of the organism as lost to the subject remains the condition of the existence of the drive, 'the real ... is the mystery of the speaking body, the mystery of the unconscious' (Lacan 1999: 131). This mystery of the body and mystery of the unconscious gestures towards an unstable conjunction of the two in the humans that psychoanalysis looks to examine.

The twists of Lacan's own theoretical explication of the real has been accompanied by subsequent conceptualizations from other writers. But for Catherine Belsey the key issue is

not about one version of the real being better than another; what is key is that the notion of the real continues to provide a way of thinking and accessing the zone of alterity (Belsey 2005). For writers such as Belsey, the concept of alterity which the notion of the real opens up, is more important than adhering to some scripted Lacanian orthodoxy. Joan Copjec comments that 'In disregarding desire, one constructs a reality that is real-tight, that is no longer self-external' (Copjec 1994: 14). Without the realm of the real claims Copjec, you are proscribed by the epistemological horizon of a self-enclosed society. For Kate McGowan (2007) frameworks for thinking alterity matter – the issue of alterity haunts cultural analysis but psychoanalysis provides a framework to discuss and explore the implications of what ex-sists culture's understanding. The Lacanian real, as that which cannot be comprehended, reminds us that the intelligibility of a system is marked by the terms of the system itself (McGowan 2007: 116). McGowan argues that 'the real marks the impossibility of cultural systems of meaning and values generated there, to be absolute and all there is ... the real changes the terms of that engagement and contestation' (McGowan, K. 2007: 116). The notion of the real prevents us from saying that what we know is all there is to know, that our current knowledge is the only way to truth; the real radically displaces the certainty of the subject (McGowan, K. 2007: 118). Todd McGowan insists that the real, in marking a point of failure, that is, that the subject's gaze is not sovereign, the real also marks point of failure in ideology's explanatory power (McGowan, T. 2007: 16). For Todd McGowan 'the encounter with the real, which is an encounter with a point of non-sense within the big Other (what the big Other cannot render meaningful), frees the subject from its subjection' (McGowan, T. 2007: 17).

Looking at an image through a Lacanian lens calibrated to focus on the realm of the real and its effects has the appeal of being a methodology not frequently brought to bear on the study of photography. However, investing the study of photography within the realm of the real also has the attraction of incorporating the discipline within a discursive mind-set that forwards the potential of the unknown rather than the sclerosis of the traditional. As Joanna Lowry states the beleaguered question of just what kind of an object photography actually is, and what kind of a history it deserves, has been a particularly persistent one, 'The wider sphere of 'the photographic' troubles key concepts of authorship, originality, uniqueness, aesthetics and value that lie at the heart of the way in which we think about art and visual communication' (Lowry 2013: 21). Lowry cites the work of Geoffrey Batchen which has examined the ontological issue of how theoretical practice constructs its object. Batchen argues that what we think of as photography comes into being through the way in

which we talk about it, the objects we choose to look at, the discursive spaces we allow it to inhabit, 'The question at the heart of all his writing is always an abstract one: how is an idea of the photographic formed?' (Lowry 2013: 22). This study argues that the view through the Lacanian lens of the real makes available to the discourse of photography the ontological possibilities of the unmapped terrain of alterity, a discourse that has been consistently de-limited by incestuous and circulatory binary divisions since at least the modern era (Emerling 2012). Jean Baudrillard comments on the necessity of thinking real: 'the point is not, then, to assert that the real does or does not exist – a ludicrous proposition ... For the body of the real was never recovered. In the shroud of the virtual, the corpse of the real is forever unfindable' (Baudrillard 1996: 46). As Mike Gane explains, what Baudrillard insists on here is that we should not ignore the real just because it is unrepresentable within signification – thinking real entails dissent and not acquiescing to the rule of reason; for Baudrillard, 'the crucial revolution is that of uncertainty' (Gane 2000: 97). Catherine Belsey notes that a cultural world without alterity resigns the subject to the self-enclosure of imaginary sovereignty, to a world view sedimented within a single tense, single location (Belsey 2005: 101).

When discussing the acquisition and building of new systems and accounts of knowledge, the metaphor of the wheel rut has frequently been utilized to exemplify the sense of discovery inherent to discursive enquiry. As mentioned above, Lacan co-opted the analogy to describe the set of relations put into play within the new discipline of psychoanalysis itself by 'tracing in the real a new furrow in relation to knowledge' (Lacan 1998: 127). More than a century earlier, Henry Fox Talbot had hastily convened a presentation of his photographic experiments to the Royal Society in late January 1839. This was in response to the declaration by Louis Daguerre in Paris two weeks earlier of his invention of the Daguerrotype image making process (Batchen 1997). In his paper given on January 31 1839, Fox Talbot described the moment of revelation in October 1833 – while trying to make sketches with his camera lucida 'the idea occurred to me ... how charming it would be if it were possible to cause these natural images to imprint themselves durably and remain fixed upon the paper' (Fox Talbot 1839 cited in Batchen 1997: 34). In Fox Talbot's paper to the Royal Society entitled, *Some account of the photographic art and of drawing*, he referred to his enquiries in terms of there being 'no previous wheel ruts or earlier corners' (Fox-Talbot 1839: 7). Fox Talbot had moved quickly and disingenuously to retrospectively claim provenance and precedence over Daguerre in the invention of photography and to

make it clear his discoveries had no origins in others work. Geoffrey Batchen unpicks Fox-Talbot's vaulting assertions at great length in his 1997 text *Burning with Desire*. Batchen's deconstruction of Fox Talbot's truth claims stand as a salutary reminder that *contributions* to knowledge are just that, they are contributory, a descriptor that implies the participation, knowing or otherwise, of others.

This study makes no secret of its absolute indebtedness to the ideas and thinking of others – previous wheel ruts have been followed and earlier corners similarly negotiated.

However, the paths this study has followed were new to me and the lack of signposts has meant a direct teleological course has never been an option. Geoffrey Batchen cites Foucault (1977) to note that at the beginning of any historical enquiry there is not the inviolable identity of origin, but rather the dissension of other things; there is always disparity and obfuscation (Batchen 2002: 24). Chapter 2 of this study outlined how discourse invariably folds and unfolds onto itself, leaps forwards and backwards as it repeats re-finds new ground. Perhaps the wheel rut metaphor does more to obfuscate the discursive trajectory than shine any particular sense of clarity on the map of possible direction. I have tried to read and discover the discourses of psychoanalysis and photography side by side, but I have found that I have read about the discipline of psychoanalysis backwards and the discourse of photography in the opposite direction. My initial engagement with psychoanalysis was the ursine affability and paratactic persuasions of Slovenian writer Slavoj Žižek. Since then my focus has increasingly gone back to settle on the work of Jacques Lacan. Meanwhile, I have followed a more traditional route in reading about photography and its histories and theories, beginning with its eighteenth century proto inventors as described by Geoffrey Batchen et al and ending enmeshed in the binary oppositions of formalist and postmodern positioning. So perhaps it is no surprise that the un-signposted wheel ruts I have naively followed have brought me to what I must call my particular field – this field, or rather photograph of a field, is located in Cornwall during the 1950s and is also being visited by Jacques Lacan and his notion of the real.

To the question of what specifically happens in this field that doesn't happen anywhere else I would state that in this discursive location, and to paraphrase Lacan, the photograph is essentially an encounter with the real that eludes us – more specifically, this study enumerates a range of modes and motifs with and within the determinations and effects of the exiled real may be recognized. Furthermore, this study agrees with Todd McGowan's claim, and directs it to the photograph, that it is such an awareness and understanding of

the real that enables the possibility to recognize and thereby challenge 'real' points of ideological fracture (McGowan, T. 2007: 15).

This particular field has drawn on the ideas of Margaret Iversen re photography and the missed encounter with the real (1994) and has some more contemporary conceptualizations of the real from Catherine Belsey and her study of the real and culture (2005) and from Kate McGowan (2007) and Antony Easthope (1999) with their understandings of the real as void (contra Žižek) and the implications of the real's relation to alterity. Presiding over this field has been the perplexing and persisting presence of Jacques Lacan accompanied by his extensive literary output. Jae Emerling (2012) remarks that such theoretical texts are our critical archive, 'all readings of theoretical texts are to a degree, misreading's, that is, interpretations that put different aspects of the work to use' (Emerling 2012: 158). Derrida corroborates this stance when he states in *Archive Fever* that 'as much and as more than a thing of the past ... the archive should call into question the coming of the future' (Derrida 1998: 28).

In his 2002 text *Each Wild Idea*, Geoffrey Batchen echoes Roland Barthes' assertion that the task of a critical visual methodology is not to uncover lost or secret meaning 'but rather to articulate the intelligibility of photographs for our own time' (Batchen 2002: 78). This study maintains that its template for the recognition of the exiled real can perform and articulate such intelligibility. The Lacanian lens refutes a bucolic vision of an idealized Cornwall; its austere cultural politics, its tragic and hideous conception of subject (Žižek 1991) enables psychoanalysis's redemptive ethics to be installed: when psychoanalysis claims things can be other than they are it comes with the rider that the subject must face up to the reality of their situation and take it into account. In its task of thinking through what makes humans subjects of culture, the account given by psychoanalysis is one of a radically uncertain dependence in the relation between subject and other. Sean Homer explains: 'Lacan is relevant for us today because he holds open that space, conceptualized as unstable and disrupted. Lacan refuses the ideological closure of a unified, harmonious conflict-free subject or society' (Homer 2005: 74).

In the face of a persistent localism and entrenched sentiment of peripherality, psychoanalysis looks at the Cornish subject through its Lacanian lens and sees a community which despite its putative hermeticism, cannot escape this radically uncertain dependence on the other, a dependence that insists on recognition on its own terms. This study argues

that the images made by Penhaul can be read as a visual declaration of that demand – ‘this is how we want to be recognized’.

#### **Part 4 Harry Penhaul: a man who knew a lot more than he thought**

Psychoanalysis develops as a paradox and one which gives it a particular purchase on culture and ipso facto, photography. At the time when the distinction between the arts and the sciences was in the course of sedimenting into a single and determining antithesis between culture and the material world, psychoanalysis emerged across the opening divide (Gay 1988). Freud offered a talking cure for physiological symptoms, named the central concept of his new science after a Greek work of fiction. Psychoanalysis refused to reproduce the widening gap between the arts and the sciences, it could never settle for a dualism of mind and body – instead, psychoanalysis turns on the paradox of the speaking being. In Lacan’s Seminar 20, given in 1972-3, he expanded the view he had proffered a decade before when he stated that unconscious desire belongs to ‘an animal at the mercy of language’ (Lacan 2006: 264). In this seminar, entitled *Encore: The limits of love and knowledge*, Lacan outlined three distinct but interconnected levels of human existence – first the organism in the real, then the world of fantasy, of conscious social and cultural reality, and finally the level of the un-conscious, the element subtracted from consciousness that knows however, more than we think, or more than our conscious thinking makes explicit:

‘There is ... an animal that happens to be endowed with the ability to speak and who, because he inhabits the signifier, is thus a subject of it. Henceforth, everything is played out at the level of fantasy, but at the level of a fantasy that can be perfectly disarticulated in a way that accounts for the following – that he knows a lot more about things than he thinks he knows when he acts’ (Lacan 1999: 88).

This view through the Lacanian lens of Seminar 20 argues that unconscious determinations inform and perform Penhaul’s fantasized representations (‘everything played out at the level of fantasy’) - he may not consciously set out to photograph West Penwith and its community in this way, but unconscious determinations guide his view. Catherine Belsey argues that Lacan’s account of sublimation presents a way of understanding the pleasures the signifier offers the speaking being, ‘without reducing culture to something else: ethical instruction, ideological control, or scripted determinism’ (Belsey 2005: 155). Culture does not do away with our discontents but offers a way to engage with them while finding a

focus for desire. If we look carefully, the photographs of Harry Penhaul can tell us more about ourselves than we think we know.



*Fig: 172 Penhaul Judgement day 1951 print PHA*

## Coda

Decommissioned in 1946, the battleship *Warspite* ran aground off the Cornish coast and was finally beached in Mount's Bay Penzance where the vessel was duly scrapped in situ during the following years. In what was said to be the largest ever salvage operation undertaken in British waters, the *Warspite* was methodically broken into pieces and returned to the steel mills of Sheffield from which it had originated in 1915 to be once again melted down into molten form. This industrial scale operation which was not completed until 1955 is almost entirely absent from the Penhaul archive and the pages of *The Cornishman*. Penhaul did take a series of images as the *Warspite* was being finally towed into Mount's Bay in 1950. There is no evidence of Penhaul photographing the *Warspite* again until 1955 when he recorded the final strands of steel that remained poking through the sand at low tide in Mount's Bay – to all intents and purposes, the *Warspite* had disappeared.



Fig: 173 Penhaul *Warspite* under tow 1950 print PHA.

Penhaul's image of the monstrous hulk of the *Warspite* (figure 171 above) resonates with Lacanian allusion. The visceral decrepitude of the once grand and powerful vessel is almost beyond meaning; the tug boats struggle to haul the derelict ruin the site of grief and loss, into the symbolic and into comprehension. At the same time this scene enacts not only a metallurgic destiny but also that of every speaking being – in Lacan's topography, everything returns to the real. As Lacan puts it 'it is in the signifier and insofar as the subject articulates a signifying chain that he comes up against the fact that he may disappear from the chain of what he is' (Lacan 2008: 295). Just as the subject's constitution

in language brings about the death of the real for the subject. This exiled real anticipates a future absence for the subject itself, marks subjectivity as temporary and finite. Penhaul's image marks the return of the monstrous object back to its place in the realm of the real.



*Fig: 174 Penhaul Warspite in Mount's Bay 1950 print PHA.*

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### List of illustrations:

- Fig: 1 Garfield Hall Penhaul and Micro Press camera print PHA [courtesy of Penlee House Archive].
- Fig: 2 Penhaul Market Jew Street Penzance 1954 print PHA.
- Fig: 3 Garfield Hall Penhaul at Lido Town Guide 1952 PHA.
- Fig: 4 Penhaul Flora Day Helston 1951 PHA
- Fig: 5 Penhaul May 1953 *The Cornishman* PHA
- Fig: 6 Penhaul Mayoress and visitors Penzance Town Hall 1952 print PHA.
- Fig: 7 June 6<sup>th</sup> 1935 Churchwood and Penhaul *The Cornishman* NNA {Courtesy of National Newspaper Archive}
- Fig: 8 Penhaul Nov 1936 *The Cornishman* NNA
- Fig: 9 Penhaul Dec 1936 *The Cornishman* NNA
- Fig: 10 Marcus Negus April 1937 *The Cornishman* NNA [Harry Penhaul in background]
- Fig: 11 Churhwood and Penhaul July 1935 *The Cornishman* NNA
- Fig: 12 Penhaul Wedding 1953 print PHA
- Fig: 13 Penhaul Retirement presentation Dec 1955 print PHA.
- Fig: 14 Penhaul Mayor Bennetts meets players June 1956 print PHA.
- Fig: 15 Penhaul Birthday cake Jan 1954 print PHA.
- Fig: 16 Press agencies used by Penhaul during 1950s PHA
- Fig: 17 Print copies ready for postage large 3/6, half plate 2/6 PHA
- Fig: 18 Penhaul Jan 1939 St Ives Lifeboat crew *The Cornishman* NNA
- Fig: 19 Penhaul Feb 2 1939 Wreck of St Ives Lifeboat PHA
- Fig: 20 Penhaul Civilians and military 1950 print PHA.
- Fig: 21 Penhaul street party June 1953 print PHA.
- Fig: 22 Penhaul Hayle football team Nov 1954 print PHA.
- Fig: 23 Penhaul *Western Morning News* original newspaper PHA
- Fig: 24 Penhaul June 1949 Smith brothers *The Cornishman* NNA
- Fig: 25 Penhaul 1952 Royal visit print PHA
- Fig: 26 Penhaul 1955 Hunt Ball print PHA.
- Fig: 27 Penhaul Penhaul Students and livestock 1952 print PHA
- Fig: 28 Penhaul The Warspite in tow 1955 print PHA.
- Fig: 29 Penhaul *The Cornishman* March 1953 Wreck of Vert Prairal and weather damaged crops
- Fig: 30 Penhaul 1952 Basking shark print PHA
- Fig: 31 Penhaul 1950 Subsidence print PHA
- Fig: 32 Penhaul 1954 Self-portrait print PHA
- Fig: 33 Penhaul's MicroPress professional camera (retail price 1953 £79). PHA.
- Fig: 34 Penhaul 1955 The Warspite beached in St Michael's Bay print PHA
- Fig: 35 Penhaul Beach scene 1952 print PHA.
- Fig: 36 Penhaul Penzance Lido 1955 print PHA.

Fig: 37 Penhaul Penzance Promenade Dec 1954 print PHA

Fig: 38 Penhaul Wreck of Traute Sarnow 1954 print PHA.

Fig: 39 Penhaul 1954 Skiffle group print PHA.

Fig: 40 Penhaul 1952 print PHA.

Fig: 41 Penhaul Tractors work with horses print 1954 PHA.

Fig: 42 Marcus Negus *The Cornishman* July 1928 NNA [Herbert Thomas front row, hat on].

Fig: 43 *The Cornishman* July 1954 PHA

Fig: 44 *The Cornishman* Feb 17th 1955 PHA

Fig: 45 Penhaul *The Cornishman* Feb17th 1955 PHA

Fig: 46 Penhaul *The Cornishman* Oct 1954 PHA.

Fig: 47 *The Cornishman* Oct 1954 PHA.

Fig: 48 Penhaul Feb 1955 *The Cornishman* Barbara Hepworth PHA.

Fig: 49 Reader's letter *The Cornishman* Feb 1955 PHA.

Fig: 50 Anonymous Market Jew Street Penzance c1853 print PHA.

Fig: 51 William Brooks The Launch of the Lifeboat 'Daniel Draper' Penzance 1867 [Watkiss 1975]

Fig: 52 John Gibson 'Jeune Hortense' Mount's Bay May 17<sup>th</sup> 1888 [Watkiss 1975]

Fig: 53 Lawley June 1927 *The Cornishman* NNA

Fig: 54 Richards July 1932 *The Cornishman* Visit by Poly NNA

Fig: 55 Penlee House Museum archival storage facility

Fig: 56 Penhaul prints PHA

Fig: 57 Penhaul prints PHA

Fig: 58 content analysis sheets PHA

Fig: 59 Penhaul cauliflower picking 1953 print PHA.

Fig: 60 Penhaul Culdrose airfield 1954 print PHA.

Fig: 61 E. Trembath 1869 [Watkiss 1975].

Fig: 62 R. Pentreath lithograph 1836 PHA

Fig: 63 John Moyles oil on canvas 1852 PHA

Fig: 64 Penhaul 1956 Christmas carols broadcast print PHA

Fig: 65 Penhaul 1956 print PHA.

Fig: 66 Penhaul 1952 Planting early potatoes print PHA.

Fig: 67 Advertisements in *The Cornishman* 1955 PHA.

Fig: 68 Advertisements in *The Cornishman* July 1955. [ariel photograph of Mambo sinking by Penhaul]. PHA.

Fig: 69 Penhaul Man irons pants print 1952 PHA.

Fig: 70 Penhaul 1952 Lord Bolitho and police print PHA.

Fig: 71 Penhaul Cyril Rich 1953 print PHA.

Fig: 72 Penhaul Cabbage and boy 1951 print PHA.

Fig: 73 Penhaul Hungarian refugees 1954 print PHA.

Fig: 74 Penhaul Stithians agricultural show 1954 print PHA.

Fig: 75 Penhaul Postal delivery print 1950 PHA

Fig: 76 Penhaul St Ives lifeboat 1954 PHA.

Fig: 77 Penhaul Budgie fanciers *The Cornishman* August 1951 print PHA.

Fig: 78 Penhaul Stranded ship 1953 print PHA.

Fig: 79 Penhaul Culdrose airdrome 1952 print PHA.

Fig: 80 Penhaul Relief of Lighthouse 1954 print PHA.

Fig: 81 Penhaul Prize giving *The Cornishman* August 1956 print PHA.

Fig: 82 Penhaul Wedding reception 1952 print PHA.

Fig: 83 Penhaul Newlyn neighbours 1952 print PHA

Fig: 84 Penhaul Housewife's choice 1951 print PHA.

Fig: 85 Penhaul Nurses at Penzance hospital 1952 print PHA.

Fig: 86 Penhaul Dog show Penzance 1952 print PHA.

Fig: 87 Penhaul Model of trawler *The Cornishman* Jan 1956 Newlyn PHA.

Fig: 88 Penhaul *The Cornishman* September 1953 PHA.

Fig: 89 Penhaul Seaweed collection 1955 print PHA.

Fig: 90 Penhaul Helston Flora Day *The Cornishman* May 1954 PHA.

Fig: 91 Anon photograph of hysteria Salpetriere hospital 1886. [From Marien 2010: 235.]

Fig: 92 Penhaul Traffic lights Penzance 1951 print PHA.

Fig: 93 Penhaul End of sweet rationing Penzance Feb 1953 print PHA.

Fig: 94 Penhaul Fishermen Newlyn 1950 print PHA.

Fig: 95 Penhaul January daffodils 1954 print PHA.

Fig: 96 Penhaul Tree Inspector *The Cornishman* 1955 PHA.

Fig: 97 Penhaul Award ceremony *The Cornishman* March 1956 print PHA.

Fig: 98 Penhaul Students and livestock 1952 print PHA. Gone to p47 as fig 27

Fig: 99 Penhaul Choir singing 1952 print PHA.

Fig: 100 Penhaul Interview 1954 print PHA.

Fig: 101 Penhaul Flower packing January 1948 print PHA.

Fig: 102 Penhaul Penzance Spring show 1954 print PHA.

Fig: 103 Penhaul Outing to Bodmin moor 1952 print PHA.

Fig: 104 Penhaul Beating the bounds 1953 print PHA.

Fig: 105 Penhaul Mayor Bennetts 1955 print PHA.

Fig: 106 Penhaul Harvest April 1956 print PHA.

Fig: 107 Penhaul Flower harvest 1955 print PHA.

Fig: 108 Penhaul Portrait of three girls 1954 print PHA.

Fig: 109 Penhaul Hunt scene Jan 1953 print PHA.

Fig: 110 Penhaul Gwennap Pit 1953 print PHA.

Fig: 112 Penhaul Shipwreck survivors 1955 print PHA.

Fig: 113 Penhaul Socialite Party December 1954 *The Cornishman* print PHA.

Fig: 114 Penhaul Lady Bolitho at Penzance WI. 1955 print PHA.

Fig: 115 Penhaul Howard Grenville MP at home 1955 print PHA.

Fig: 116 Penhaul Plaque unveiling 1954 print PHA.

Fig: 117 Penhaul Land's End to John O'Groats 1952 print PHA.

Fig: 118 Penhaul Hunt Ball 1955 *The Cornishman* print PHA.

Fig: 119 Penhaul Nurses and spring blossoms 1956 print PHA.

Fig: 120 Penhaul *The Cornishman* July 1954 PHA.

Fig: 121 Penhaul Anchor print PHA.

Fig: 122 Penhaul St. Ives Lifeboat crew 1952 print PHA.

Fig: 123 Penhaul Cable and Wireless install transatlantic connection 1953 print PHA.

Fig: 124 Penhaul Penzance court November 1954 print PHA.

Fig: 125 Penhaul Statue of Humphry Davy, Penzance 1950 print PHA.

Fig: 126 Penhaul Painting 1954 print PHA.

Fig: 128 Penhaul Mayor Bennetts and Hungarian refugees 1954 print PHA.

Fig: 129 Penhaul Commonwealth students 1953 print PHA.

Fig: 130 Penhaul Farming commonwealth student 1952 print PHA.

Fig: 131 cinema advert *The Cornishman* August 1955 PHA.

Fig: 132 Penhaul Penzance score winning goal November 17<sup>th</sup> 1955 print PHA.

Fig: 133 Penhaul MP Grenville Howard meets farm workers 1954 print PHA.

Fig: 134 Penhaul Sports day 1956 print PHA.

Fig: 135 Penhaul Penzance Lido *The Cornishman* 1955 PHA

Fig: 136 Anon Market Jew St c1851 [from Watkiss 1975].

Fig: 137 Anon Market Jew St c1900 PHA.

Fig: 138 Penhaul Coach tour from Market House *The Cornishman* print 1954 PHA.

Fig: 139 Penhaul Humphry Davy statue 1950 print PHA.

Fig: 140 Penhaul detail of fig: 138 Market House PHA.

Fig: 141 Penhaul St Michael's Mount 1951 print PHA.

Fig: 142 John Moyle Queen Victoria leaving the Mount 1846 PHA.

Fig: 143 Penhaul St Michael's Mount feature *The Cornishman* August 1954 PHA

Fig: 144 detail fig 143

Fig: 145 Penhaul Hayle Power station 1955 print PHA.

Fig: 146 Penhaul Bus shelter *The Cornishman* 1954 PHA.

Fig: 147: Penhaul (detail fig: 146) interior St Michael's Mount 1954 PHA

Fig: 148 Penhaul Sand Runner May 1950 print PHA.

Fig: 149 Penhaul Serenity Feb 1954 print PHA.

Fig: 150 Penhaul Shark 1950 print PHA.

Fig: 151: Penhaul Shark 1950 print PHA.

Fig: 152 Penhaul Coach party from Market House 1954 *The Cornishman* PHA

Fig: 153 Penhaul Flora Day *The Cornishman* 1954 PHA

Fig: 154 Penhaul Picking cauliflowers and St Michael's Mount print PHA

Fig: 155 Penhaul Newlyn lady 1954 print PHA

Fig: 156 Penhaul Traffic lights print 1953 PHA.

Fig: 157 Penhaul Three children 1953 print PHA

Fig: 158 Penhaul Penhaul Model ships 1955 print PHA

Fig: 159 Penhaul Anemone harvest 1953 PHA

Fig: 160 Penhaul View towards St Michael's Mount 1956 print PHA

Fig: 161 Penhaul Wreck of Vert Prairial *The Cornishman* March 1956 PHA

Fig: 162 Penhaul Vert Prairial *The Cornishman* 1956

Fig: 163 Penhaul Wreck of Traute Sarnow *The Cornishman* July 1954 PHA

- Fig: 164 Penhaul Traute Sarnow Western Morning News 1954
- Fig: 165 Penhaul Traute Sarnow *The Cornishman* 1954 PHA
- Fig: 166 Penhaul Mr Grenfell *The Cornishman* Feb 1954
- Fig: 167 Penhaul Penzance promenade 1952 PHA
- Fig: 168 Penhaul Tree inspector 1953 print PHA
- Fig: 169 Penhaul Beach bomb *The Cornishman* 1952
- Fig: 170 Penhaul Car on beach 1955 print PHA
- Fig: 171 Negus Haille Selaisse *The Cornishman* PHA
- Fig: 172 Penhaul Judgement day 1951 print PHA
- Fig: 173 Penhaul Warspite under tow 1950 print PHA
- Fig 174 Penhaul Warspite in Mount's Bay 1950 print PHA

## **Appendix: Archive Content analysis**

Penlee House Museum Penhaul Archive Content Classification (2016)

- Shelf Q1 box 51 Fishing, crafts, lifeboats, lighthouses, Scillonian (119 images)  
box 56 Ships and Wrecks (71)  
box 57 Agriculture, horticulture, crafts (81)  
box 58 Agriculture (49)  
box 59 Newlyn: views, boat trips, quay events (63)  
box 60 Church christenings (48)  
box 7 Flowers on Scilly and West Cornwall (110)  
box 8 Farm, West Cornwall Show (92)  
box 9 Commercial fishing, ships, shipwrecks (84)
- Shelf Q2 box 10 views of Cornwall (54)  
box 11 Postcards of local views (122)  
box 12 Sailing boats (180)  
box 13 Angling and Fishing (93)  
box 14 Hunting and Horses (71)  
box 15 Cricket (82)  
box 16 Sport (85)  
box 17 Sport (71)  
box 18 Soccer (81)
- Shelf Q3 box 19 Royal visits (86)  
box 20 Archaeology, traditional trades, grand houses (80)  
box 21 Railways (87)  
box 22 Lands End (174)  
box 23 Presentations, awards (90)  
box 24 Weddings (250)  
box 25 Amateur dramatics (130)  
box 26 Personalities (140)  
box 27 Penzance views (131)
- Shelf Q4 box 28 Religion, harvest festivals, bell ringers (127)

- box 29 Crying of the Neck, carnivals, Gorsedd (120)
- box 30 Fire and Rescue, police, tourism, transport (81)
- box 32 Dinner and dances, education, Flora Day (170)
- box 33 Uniformed groups (110)
- box 34 Portraits, flowers (149)

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## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Lacan 1997: 286.

<sup>2</sup> Slavoj Žižek cites the the libidinal economy of Achilles and the tortoise whose paradoxical relation echoes that of the subject and object-cause of its desire, which can never be attained 'The object-cause is always missed; all we can do is encircle it' (Žižek 1992: 4).

<sup>3</sup> Krauss has been said to ignore or downplay historical specificities of the texts she uses and at times divorces them from the philosophical systems in which they are embedded (Bowman in Durden (ed) 2013: 151).

<sup>4</sup> And more recently Lyotard, perhaps one of the more Lacanian of philosophers (Belsey).

<sup>5</sup> Local authority district of West Penwith comprises the region at the western end of the Cornish of the peninsula, from Penzance to Lands End.

<sup>6</sup> Morrab subscription library in Penzance and Penlee House Museum both hold some editions of *The Cornishman*.

<sup>7</sup> I refer to the members of Penlee House Museum Photographic Research Group

<sup>8</sup> *The Cornishman* in July 1953 reported what it referred to as a '41% rise in mental disorder in the past three years within Cornwall' (*The Cornishman* July 26 1953).

<sup>9</sup> Penhaul served as a cook through his time in the forces but later advertised himself in *The Cornishman* as having spent the war as an army photographer.

<sup>10</sup> John Bramwell was example in Cornwall – from a well off family in Penzance he lived in what is now Penlee House Museum. His extensive collection of photographs mainly depicting his close family is now housed in the Penlee archive.

<sup>11</sup> He made money from selling photographs of visitors during the summer months and taking photographs of shipwrecks in the winter months - the latter being bought in the main by survivors of shipwrecks themselves (R. Watkiss 1975).

<sup>12</sup> Penhaul would have been familiar with other commercial photographers operating in and around Penzance such as Churchwood, the Paul brothers, Richard Heamoor and the Richards brothers, the latter having a prominent studio in Market Jew Street from the 1930s to the 1960s.

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<sup>13</sup> The presence of commercial photographers in local communities such as West Penwith despite the exponential growth of camera ownership throughout the century (E. Edwards 2012) indicated the demand for professionally taken photographs. The short comings of the snap-shot were highlighted by the erstwhile editor of *The Cornishman* Herbert Thomas in an article in 1927. The article was accompanied by images taken by Thomas that eloquently proved his point.

<sup>14</sup> The extent of the commercialization of photography in the late 19<sup>th</sup>, early 20<sup>th</sup> century can be seen in the large fortune amassed by the Frith family photography empire.

<sup>15</sup> According to Douglas Williams (1990), Penhaul drove a two litre Morris, top speed 80 mph.



<sup>16</sup> *The Cornishman* was quick to celebrate the exploits of its intrepid photographer. When Penhaul helped apprehend an escaped prisoner, the paper celebrated Penhaul's decisive thinking and action with a lengthy article in a subsequent edition (July 16 1954).

<sup>17</sup> The sobriquet "Flash' Harry is still used by some who have memories of Penhaul today.



<sup>18</sup> Glass negatives sent by post.

<sup>19</sup> Villem Flusser talks about the inscription of the camera user into the 'techniks' of the camera apparatus (Flusser *Toward a Philosophy of Photography* 1982) - the Micro Press camera could be set up to automatize framing and focus with pre-selected focal lengths (group shot at 12' and infinity).

<sup>20</sup> On another occasion Penhaul received an assignment from his picture editor at *The Cornishman* to photograph the aircraft carrier *HMS Illustrious* going to the aid of a steamer in distress in the English Channel. In wild weather the small aircraft barely took off and only returned some hours later with fuel all but exhausted but successful in having captured the photographic 'scoop'.

<sup>21</sup> Herbert Thomas became editor in 1903 and was still responsible for writing most editorials up until the end of the war. *The Cornishman* progressively amalgamated with many other local newspaper titles in West Penwith including *The Cornish Evening Tidings*, *The Cornish Post and Mining News* and *The Redruth Effective Advertiser*.

<sup>22</sup> Scott Archer's wet-plate collodion process was one such enabling innovation.

<sup>23</sup> By the time Daguerre's patent expired in 1853, allowing anyone to make daguerrotypes, camera technology had moved on and Scott-Archer's wet-plate collodian process offered greater profit margins for professional photographers.

<sup>24</sup> Conversation with Jem Southam September 2014.

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- <sup>25</sup> Literary theorists, linguists, cultural critics and psychoanalysts: Roland Barthes, Levi-Strauss, Christian Metz and Jacques Lacan
- <sup>26</sup> The fundamental unit of semiology is the 'sign' and is understood to be a unit of meaning. The first stage of a semiological analysis is to identify the building blocks of an image, that is, its signs.
- <sup>27</sup> 'Visual discourses already have possible positions of interpretation ... embedded in them, and subjects bring their own subjective desires and capacities to the text which enable them to take up positions of identification in relation to its meaning' (Hall, S. 1999: 310).
- <sup>28</sup> Juliet Mitchell insisted that 'psychoanalysis is not a recommendation for a patriarchal society, but an analysis of one' (Mitchell: 1974: xv).
- <sup>29</sup> Voyeurism is a way of seeing that is active; it distances and objectifies what is looked at. It is controlling and possibly sadistic. Mulvey argues that voyeurism is mobilized by Hollywood film to disavow woman.
- <sup>30</sup> Fetishistic scopophilia is when female is represented as beautiful object of display, anxieties to do with castration are assuaged by display of beauty.
- <sup>31</sup> As such a continuation of the Western pictorial tradition that began during the Renaissance. Critical postmodern critics rejected this formalist, medium-specific approach to photography.
- <sup>32</sup> Emerling writes 'Situating the subject of photography as something between history and theory affords the opportunity to convey the sheer complexity of a photographic image, which is at once inhuman, fortuitous and aleatory' 2012: 8.
- <sup>33</sup> Benjamin described spectacle as being 'the false consciousness of time ... when culture becomes nothing more than a commodity' (cited in Guy Debord *Society of the Spectacle* 1983: un-paginated).
- <sup>34</sup> According to commentators such as Jonathan Harris (2001) traditional art historical criticism tended towards an understanding of culture which conceived of singular creative figures transcending their historical and social conditions to produce timeless works..
- <sup>35</sup> See Bourdieu (2001) for discussion of emergence of academic disciplines and autonomy in relation to broader fields of power.
- <sup>36</sup> Welch and Long comment that the book's status today 'appears curiously anachronistic'. It is of its time, 'born of a particular moment in the recent history of ideas, and the relic of an era when the belief in the political power of radical cultural critique was still strong' (Welch and Long 2009: 10).
- <sup>37</sup> Burgin points out (1986: 83) that phenomenology does not recognise the notion of the unconscious.
- <sup>38</sup> Eg the Derridean 'ethical turn'
- <sup>39</sup> Slavoj Žižek notes that anti-universalistic positions, with their flexible empirical realism, invariably position themselves as efficient and enthusiastic guardians of dominating socio-economic systems (Žižek 2016: 91).
- <sup>40</sup> This is why psychoanalysis is not a form of epistemological nihilism; it doesn't say that all knowledge is inconsistent, so there can be no real knowledge of anything.

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<sup>41</sup> Phenomenology derives from the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and was concerned with the idea that objects do not exist independently as things in the world separate from our perception of them – consciousness actively constitutes phenomena (Eagleton 1983).

<sup>42</sup> Henri Wallon had proposed that for such a process to occur the ability to distinguish mirror reflection was key and it was from Wallon's experimental psychology that Lacan took the idea of the importance of the role of mirroring in the construction of self and self-consciousness. To account for the fascination and power of the mirror reflection for the subject, Lacan turned to the animal behaviourist work of ethologist Roger Caillois.

<sup>43</sup> Hegel illustrated this process through the Master/Slave dialectic where both parties are locked in a reciprocal relationship of recognition.

<sup>44</sup> These expelled elements are further alienated by language (by symbolic castration) and can be said to constitute what Lacan called the realm of the real – see Chapter 4.

<sup>45</sup> For example, notions of alienation, misrecognition, conflictual constitution of self and so on have been cited (Belsey 2004) as necessary counters to an increasing Idealism (see Chapter 4).

<sup>46</sup> The signified and signifier are the two conceptual elements that make up Saussurean sign, the basic unit of language (1916). Lacan defines the sign as that which 'represents something for someone' in opposition to the signifier which 'represents a subject for another signifier' (Lacan 1977b: 207). Lacan takes up the Saussurean concept of the sign in his 'linguistic turn' during 1950s and makes several radical modifications. For Lacan, the signifier is first of all a meaningless material element in a closed differential system. Dylan Evans comments: 'it is these meaningless indestructible signifiers which determine the subject; the effects of the signifier on the subject constitute the unconscious, and hence also constitute the whole field of psychoanalysis' (Evans 1996: 186). For Lacan, language is not a system of signs but a system of signifiers.

<sup>47</sup> Lacan is at pains to indicate the disjunction between the subject of enunciation and the subject of utterance, between the subject who speaks and the subject who is spoken (Lacan 1991b: 52).

<sup>48</sup> From its Freudian beginnings, psychoanalysis presented itself in opposition to a Catholic bureaucratic consensus that was at odds with ideas that suggested the relativity of values and that civilization was the origin of our discontents.

<sup>49</sup> Žižek (1996) suggests that psychoanalysis has functioned as a screen onto which a culture projects its preoccupations and values.

<sup>50</sup> Sherry Turkle indicates that although Lacan made no clear statement to support this view *per se* his depiction of the crisis of the subject was widely taken as an image of the fate of the individual within capitalism (Turkle 1993: 61).

<sup>51</sup> The relation between psychoanalysis and Marxism has always been disadvantaged not least because while Marxism's interest is ultimately in the representation of social and material reality, psychoanalysis is primarily concerned with psychical reality.

<sup>52</sup> Žižek identifies this traumatic moment as the fundamental constitutive antagonism at the root of all societies, but masked by socio-ideological fantasy. The point of ideology writes Žižek, 'is not to

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offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, Real kernel' (Žižek 1989: 45).

<sup>53</sup> Implications of Lacanian concepts for social theory have subsequently been more fully explored by writers such as Yannis Stavrakakis as in his 1999 text *Lacan and the Political*. Lacanian thinking on subject positioning has been influential in post-colonial theory (see Homi Bhabha *The Location of Culture* 1994). For more recent work on Lacan and politics see Tomsic and Zevnik's *Jacques Lacan: Between Psychoanalysis and Politics* (2016)

<sup>54</sup> The image as linchpin in processes of ego-formation and ideological interpellation on an immediate level makes sense of the visual dynamics of much cinema, advertising and social networking sites today.

<sup>55</sup> Freud conceptualized this in terms of what he called the 'mystic writing pad' where the psyche emerges from the erasures and traces made by exposure to the material world and where our actions are always owing to (unconscious) traces and erasures (Freud 1925).

<sup>56</sup> If signifiers only relate to one another, then language is detached from external reality and becomes an independent realm - a crucial post-structuralist notion (Storey 2008).

<sup>57</sup> Lacan was totally opposed to the idea that the aim of psychoanalysis is to strengthen the ego. As 'the ego is the seat of illusions' (Lacan 1987: 16), to strengthen the ego would just increase alienation.

<sup>58</sup> The subject's ideal ego appears at 'that point at which he desires to gratify himself in himself' (Lacan 1977b: 257). The ego ideal appears at 'that point from which the subject will see himself as others see him' (Lacan 1977b: 268)

<sup>59</sup> Dylan Evans describes the ego-ideal and the ideal ego in the following terms: the ego-ideal is a symbolic introjection, it operates as a signifier and guides the subjects position in the symbolic order. The ideal ego is source of imaginary projection, a specular image of the mirror stage – it establishes an illusion of unity on which the ego is built. Although formed in the process of primary identification, the ideal ego continues to play a role in all subsequent secondary identifications (Lacan 1977a: 2).

<sup>60</sup> This is what Lacan calls the *objet a* which promises to end the movement of desire by making good the loss on which it is founded.

61

S (subject)      O (objects)

O' (ego)      O (Other)

<sup>62</sup> Lacan continues to describe the schema's constituent elements 'namely, *S*, his ineffable, stupid existence, *o*, his objects, *o'*, his ego, that is, that which is reflected of his form in his objects, and *O*, the locus from which the question of his existence may be presented to him' (Lacan 1997: 214).

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<sup>63</sup> Although Lacan's schema is initially brought to bear on the condition of psychosis, it also designates the condition of subjectivity itself.

<sup>64</sup> By taking up the position of the 'I' of language, by identifying myself with it, myself is identified by it in particular terms which not only are not controlled or defined by me but also, pre-exist me.

<sup>65</sup> The dialectical relation of self to other manifests the potential for aggression on both sides of the relation.

<sup>66</sup> Alterity: the 'other', takes me out of myself and creates new understanding. Our encounter with the other life creates new contrasts as foundations of consciousness.

<sup>67</sup> Such a position contrasts with that held by culturalists for whom what exists depends on our idea of what exists.

<sup>68</sup> It is almost as if Lacan's model of the unconscious (beyond consciousness and culture but as exercising effects none the less) provides a model for the real (as beyond conscious perception, beyond language and meaning but exercising effects none the less).

<sup>69</sup> Language for Hegel is the means of escape from the prison of individual consciousness and the source of confidence that universal knowledge is possible..

<sup>70</sup> In the seminar on the gaze Lacan invokes classical story of Zeuxis and Parrhasios. Parrhasios paints a curtain so realistic that Zeuxis asks what lies behind it.

<sup>71</sup> In Seminar 7 Lacan names it *das Ding* (later remodelled as *objet a*).

<sup>72</sup> Lacan draws on Greek myth and the figure of Antigone to present the subject's relation to death.

<sup>73</sup> See Sharpe and Faulkner for discussion of symbolic second death and incompleteness (2008).

<sup>74</sup> Marx's concept of false consciousness is derived from his economic model of social organization. The modes and means of production (base) give rise to superstructure (consciousness as ideology) in which the reproduction of the base is secured by ideas which cover exploitation of working class.

<sup>75</sup> Racism is thus conceptualized as an effect of need of the subject to expunge the antagonism of its own foundation in difference and also of the precarious dialectic of opposing fantasies.

<sup>76</sup> By traversing the protective fantasy Žižek argues that the subject enacts a refusal to comply with associated ideology, thereby inaugurating a ground-zero *tabula rasa* from where the subject can 're-boot' its fantasy structures

<sup>77</sup> Žižek demands that we preserve the traces of all historical traumas, dreams and catastrophes; not as nostalgic imperative but rather to be able to discern the paths of ideology.

<sup>78</sup> Belsey notes that for Lyotard, the indisputable real as ambivalently neither fully inside the subject nor outside the subject but nevertheless real, is crucial (Lyotard 1993).

<sup>79</sup> Žižek rounds up Kant and Hegel to argue the real as a totality of things, as always-already disrupted for the subject by the traumatic cut inflicted by the symbolic, is no more than myth.

<sup>80</sup> Both Lacan and Žižek reread Freud's burning candle dream to produce different interpretations of the real. Žižek's real is more of a Hitchcockian MacGuffin that does not exist but exerts

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determinations in the psyche none the less. Reproduced retrospectively the traumatic moment of its constitution is projected outwards as social antagonism – this hostility is directed towards hate-figures which Žižek calls sublime objects of ideology, invented to screen the unbearable absence of the real (Žižek 2002).

<sup>81</sup> This ‘idealist complacency’, that we make ourselves and the world in our heads, confines what exists to consciousness and erases the real in the process: ‘this may be one of the most dangerous features of Western culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century’ (Belsey 2005: 58).

<sup>82</sup> The advertisements in *The Cornishman* interpellate the readership into an ideology of culturally scripted consumerist perfectionism. The concept of self-fashioning is a frequent trope in Žižek’s thinking..

<sup>83</sup> Instead psychoanalysis ‘turns on the signifier’s relations with the real’, and both these items (sic) carry their own weight (Lacan 1998: 55). Lacan concedes that ‘the signifier marks the real as much and as more than it represents it ... Don’t be mistaken, there is no idealism in this’ (Lacan 1990: 76).

<sup>84</sup> For Lacan there is no such thing as a knowing subject but only subjects who have learned what their culture knows, or seems to know.

<sup>85</sup> Roudinesco recounts how Lacan ‘courted’ Heidegger as he did many other thinkers who could be theoretically useful to him. Lacan visited Heidegger but the latter was not ‘enthused’ (Roudinesco 2007).

<sup>86</sup> Transcending the everyday, the Romantic sublime was a way of naming whatever seemed to soar above the reach of Enlightenment rationality while its postmodern counterpart reflects a sense of the inadequacy of human experience.

<sup>87</sup> Lyotard viewed the postmodern sublime as indicating a turning point in cultural history disrupting Enlightenment model.

<sup>88</sup> Žižek gives the wreck of the Titanic as an example of a sublime object – it marks the end of an ideal social order, a ‘materialization of the terrifying, impossible jouissance’ Žižek 1989: 71).

<sup>89</sup> The common narrative of the 1950s that accompanied Lacan’s growing preoccupation with the death drive was that of the mutually assured nuclear destruction resulting from cold-war antipathies. During this time *The Cornishman* reflected widespread associated anxieties amongst its readership and reported in 1953 that mental ill health had increased by 41% in the previous three years.

<sup>90</sup> In Lacan’s schema only two things can protect the precarious subject from the destructive destiny sought by the death drive: the superego and sublimation.

<sup>91</sup> *Das Ding*, the Thing, features significantly in Seminar 7. It inhabits the psyche as object of unnameable desire, an exile, a psychic remainder. The Thing marks the place in the speaking being of the lost real. Where there was continuity in the dyadic relation, with signification there is emptiness marked by the Thing.

<sup>92</sup> While Lacan positions the Thing in the real, it appears there as a kind of exile, a psychic reminder marking the place of the lost real.

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<sup>93</sup> Lacan borrows freely from Heidegger here - 'the potter shapes the void' (Heidegger 1971: 168).

<sup>94</sup> Although he comments: 'the sacred emptiness of architecture is less marked in the medium of painting' (Lacan 2008: 136).

<sup>95</sup> Lacan makes an analogy between the subject and an oyster. The subject lives out its life within the protective shell of a consciousness that deludes the subject into a false sense of security. Lacan saw the job of psychoanalysis to break open the illusory shell.

<sup>96</sup> Culler relates how Barthes had been an enthusiast of psychoanalysis back in the day – he wrote a psychoanalytically inflected study of some guy Picard which had met with critical opprobrium.

<sup>97</sup> In 1996 Hal Foster wrote *The Return of the Real*. Foster's engagement with the Lacanian real is situated within a critique of the paradigm of turn of the century avant-garde, a paradigm Foster figures in opposition to those of art-historical categories - *art-as-text* 1970s and *art-as-simulation* 1980s. Foster's conception of the real is concerned with actual real bodies, actual real social sites. The Lacanian real does not appear in the index to Foster's text.

Foster discusses the real in terms of superrealism, in the sense of the real as that which is below, beneath the superrealist surface. Foster uses the real to illustrate a shift in conception 'from reality as an effect of representation to the real as a 'thing' of trauma' (Foster 1996: 146). Foster takes his cue from Seminar 11; he incorporates Lacan's schematic dihedral presentation of the subject and gaze to discuss various photographic works including those of Cindy Sherman. His analysis draws on Margaret Iversen's 1994 essay *What is a Photograph?* But Foster never strays far from his more familiar territory of the abject, *the informe* and the uncanny.

<sup>98</sup> In particular Barthes focuses on how photography supports consumerism while masking the exploitation of the working class.

<sup>99</sup> Typical of these is *Photography Degree Zero* an anthology of essays and reflections edited by Geoffrey Batchen in 2009. Only one of the essays brought together by Batchen is concerned with the Lacanian real: Margaret Iversen's *What is a Photograph?* first published in 1994.

<sup>100</sup> Or 'stick like chewing gum to the sole of a shoe' as Lacan described the real in the early 1950s. In the 1961 essay *The Photographic Message*, Barthes claimed the photograph as unique among 'signs', because the photograph carries its referent with it the signifier can never be completely erased.

<sup>101</sup> Geoffrey Batchen's 2009 compilation of essays and reflections on *Camera Lucida* gives a vivid account of contemporary and historical responses to Barthes seminal work. Included are texts by Krauss and Fried, Burgin and Gallop as well as Iversen's original essay of 1994.

<sup>102</sup> Iversen echoes Lacan's question in Seminar 7 'What is a Picture?' (2008: 82). Iversen's essay is reprinted in her 2007 text *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes*. Page numbers cited use this 2007 reprint.

<sup>103</sup> It was subsequently translated into English in 1977.

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<sup>104</sup> Iversen states that 'there is little overt evidence in *Camera Lucida* to support my case for the central importance of Lacan's Seminar XI' (Iversen 1994: 114). However, Lacan gave Barthes a copy of the text whose marginal notes indicate Barthes' interest in the missed encounter with the real.

<sup>105</sup> The compulsion to repeat is for Freud the hallmark of that which cannot be assimilated or subdued.

<sup>106</sup> Barthes' 'mad' realism clearly related to Surrealism in which a disruptive reality unsettles the civilized codes.

<sup>107</sup> Barthes makes a reference to Freud here - a passage from *Moses and Monotheism* offers an analogy between photography and psychic deferred action where deferred trauma can be understood 'by comparing it with a photographic exposure which can be developed after any interval of time and transformed into a picture' (Freud [1939] 2001: 72).

<sup>108</sup> Jane Gallop discusses the way in which a photograph with only studium stays within the confines of the picture; its coherence is internal. In contrast the punctum breaks up that coherence, bursts through the frame and plane (Gallop 1980: 150).

<sup>109</sup> For a fuller exposition of anti-ocularcentrism see Jay 1994 Chapter 5 'The search for a new ontology of vision'.

<sup>110</sup> Martin Jay argues that Merleau-Ponty increasingly took up psychoanalytic and linguistic motifs: 'what is certain is that the perceived is not limited to that which strikes my eyes' (1942: 221).

<sup>111</sup> Over four seminar sessions given in 1964 Lacan appropriates Merleau-Ponty's thinking on the chiasmic intertwining of the 'eye' and 'the gaze'. In the first seminar entitled 'The split between the eye and the gaze' Lacan pays tribute to Merleau-Ponty's recently published *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964) but then reinterprets its significance in his own terms: 'we are beings who are looked at ... the split between eye and gaze will enable us to add the scopic drive to the list of drives' (Lacan 1998: 78). Lacan turns to Sartre's discussion in *Being and Nothingness* of the reifying power of the gaze to explicate his assertion that in scopic relations the gaze functions as the *objet a*.

Later in the seminar Lacan gets further help in explicating the relationship between gaze and objet a when he uses Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* to critique Cartesian geometrical mapping of space as the dominant perspectivalist scopic regime.

In the next seminar entitled *The Line and the Light* Lacan illustrates the chiasmic intertwining of eye and gaze (Lacan using the dihedron schema utilized by Roger Caillois in 1935). Here the subject is 'caught, manipulated, captured in the field of vision' (Lacan 1998: 92). Lacan continues: 'In the matter of the visible, everything is a trap' (Lacan 1998: 92). For Lacan the field of vision is a labyrinth. Lacan turns to narration and the anecdote of the tin can to further explicate his arguments. When out at sea fishing, a friend tells Lacan that a tin can which happens to be floating past, cannot see him. Lacan however, concluded this was incorrect because: 'the can was looking at me all the same. It was looking at me at the level of the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated' (Lacan 1998: 95).

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<sup>112</sup> Scotoma carries with it associations of a blanking out of the traumatic. For Lacan what is blanked out is that the subject is not just a subject of consciousness but also a subject of unconscious desire.

<sup>113</sup> Lacan's point of reference here is Holbein's painting of *The Ambassadors*.

<sup>114</sup> These could be argued to be visual equivalents of Freud's strategies of indirection used to approach the unconscious (dreams, free association and so on). 'It is not for nothing that analysis is not carried out face to face' (Lacan 1998: 78).

The way Lacan formulates the concept of the real as *objet a* is revealing of the how he intertwines ideas into and out of the psychoanalytic register. The gaze does not reflect an idealized coherent body image but rather the subject in the grip of desire. Lacan's account of the constitution of the subject involves series of self-alienations culminating in giving up of the dyadic relation: 'The *objet a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off. This serves as a symbol of lack' (Lacan 1998: 103).

<sup>115</sup> Kojève reads Hegel's *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* as a dark dialectic of desire and violence.

<sup>116</sup> Balzac refused to be photographed considering that each time he was, a layer of his being would be stripped away (see Marien 2006).

<sup>117</sup> Rosalind Krauss comments that what Lacan proposes is a juxtaposition of a tactile visuality that is obvious (even to a blind person) with an optical visuality or 'atmospheric surround' in which the viewer is 'caught within the onrush of light' (Krauss 1993: 42).

<sup>118</sup> This conception of the gaze as an object encountered rather than the look of the subject, has provenance in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* 1952.

<sup>119</sup> See Mulvey and Wollen's *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977).

<sup>120</sup> However, the history of film would suggest that film has always worked to produce docile subjects (see Adorno 1951).

<sup>121</sup> Notion of archaeology as figured in Foucault's 1969 text *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

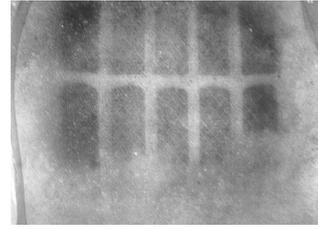
Foucault's premise is that systems of thought and knowledge are governed by rules (beyond those of grammar and logic) which operate beneath the consciousness of individual subjects and define a system of conceptual possibilities that determine the boundaries of thought and language use in a given realm and temporality.

<sup>122</sup> Dylan Evans notes that Lacan's use and determination of the real underwent almost constant change within his topology as he utilized the concept to elucidate a number of clinical phenomena as well as a framework for cultural criticism (Evans 1996: 160).

<sup>123</sup> Sarah Dillon (2007) defines the palimpsest as a multi-layered record, a product of a layering of texts. Kristeva refers to a 'permutation of texts, an intertextuality'. The multiplicity that emerges from the palimpsest produces a sense of ambivalence. Freud's mystic writing pad can be read as metaphor for the palimpsest.

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<sup>124</sup> Fox Talbot *The Oriel Window* 1835 [Batchen 2002: 8]



<sup>125</sup> Hippolyte Bayard *Le Noyé* 1840 [Batchen 2002: 161]



<sup>126</sup> Batchen argues that Bayard's ghost haunts not only photography but also the whole of Western metaphysics (Batchen 1999: 174).

<sup>127</sup> Margaret Iversen states that Victor Burgin is a writer who has an understanding of the Lacanian real and who has made the connection between the Barthian punctum and the real. Iversen adds that Burgin has not developed the idea. (Iversen 2007: 166n8).

<sup>128</sup> Market Jew comes from the Cornish *Marghas Yow* meaning Thursday Market.

<sup>129</sup> Davy published perhaps the first account of a photographic process in the journal of the Royal Institution June 1802: 'An account of a method of copying upon glass, and of making profiles by the agency of light upon nitrate of silver, invented by Tom Wedgewood with observations by H. Davy'.

<sup>130</sup> Lacan comments that perspectivism and Palladian architecture appear at the same historical moment. The front aspect of Market House has marked Palladian features.

<sup>131</sup> See Belsey's discussion of Velasquez's *Las Meninas* (Belsey 2005: 110).

<sup>132</sup> Belsey calls such reconstitution a 'hauling back' into the symbolic (email to author March 2018).

<sup>133</sup> Freud's revised topology viewed trauma as an flood of unbound energy capable of smashing through the subject's psychic protective shield.

<sup>134</sup> This photograph by Penhaul was taken at almost the exact same location as an image by Robert Preston taken 11 Feb 1895 and according to photographic historian Reg Watkiss, the photographer on the far side of the subsidence is none other than John Gibson:



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*Fig. 173 Robert Preston Penzance promenade and John Gibson 1895 [from Watkiss 1975].*