OUT OF SIGHT

Exploring Desire, Visuality And The Obscene Through Photographic Practice

by

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ABSTRACT

This practice-based research explores how photographic representation mobilises desire through the gaze. Informed by the work of Jacques Lacan (2006), the research investigates what it might mean 'to come out' through photographic practice, considering aspects of secrecy as activators of desire in looking.

The research begins by exploring the notion of the obscene according to the Greek etymology of the term *ob skene* (off-stage), when violent parts of Greek plays were acted, not in front of the audience, but out of sight (Mey, 2007). In light of this concept, the practice-based research was conducted in places in London where anonymous encounters take place out of sight of 'the public', such as sex shops, newsagents, gay bathhouses, sex clubs and a public toilet. The resulting body of photographic work offers a fresh perspective upon art photography; an original contribution to the representation of gay male desire.

The methodology is informed by the work of Michel Foucault (1977; 1978; 2003), whose theoretical framework considers the construction of visuality in the context of architectural and social spaces (hospitals, schools, asylums and prisons); spaces that condition how we look and determine what can be seen through relations of power (Rajchman, 1988).

I claim that photographic representation constitutes a site for the suspension of the revelation of what is represented; a necessary suspension of classification and intelligibility. As long as I desire, there will always be a 'yet not known', a perpetual space off-frame, off-site, out of sight, that irremediably throws me into the field of visuality, making me want to see and look again.

Key words: desire, gaze, photography, power, obscene, off-frame, secrecy, visuality.

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INTRODUCTION

This PhD research originated as the result of an encounter with an image in a book, *The Tears of Eros*, by Georges Bataille (1989). This initial encounter dates back to 2009 when I was reading a library copy of the book. I was taken by surprise by the density of Bataille's ideas. Much to my delight, the book focused on subjects such as eroticism and religion, the consciousness of death and the connection between prehistoric man and the caves he painted. I felt captured and absorbed.

Nevertheless, the most remarkable thing about the book was a photograph in the final chapter. The photograph made a profound impact on Bataille himself when he saw it for the first time. Of this experience, he says: "This photograph had a decisive role in my life. I have never stopped being obsessed by this image […]. [When I saw it,] I was so stunned that I reached the point of ecstasy" (Bataille, 1989, p. 206). He says that what he unexpectedly saw was "the identity of two perfect contraries: […] ecstasy and […] horror" (Bataille, 1989, p.207).

I felt that my experience paralleled his in many ways. The experience of encountering this photograph appalled me; I felt wounded. Simultaneously, I became euphoric. It was both breath-taking and at the same time, barbaric. Once my eyes caught hold of the image, something happened between the photograph and myself, a sort of epiphany. Such was the magnitude of this encounter that I decided to buy the book, second-hand, after I had finished reading the library copy. It took about a week for the book to arrive in the post, and, when it did, I browsed through it one more time in order to make some notes. The desire to see the image again was powerful, but I had not forgotten what it had felt like to experience it, so this time I psychologically prepared myself prior to looking at it and was certain it would not distress me. After a few moments of hesitation and anticipation, when I eventually turned the page in order to face the image again and look at it with full attention, to my astonishment, the photograph had been concealed. The person to whom the book had belonged before me had covered it using a piece of paper and some tape.

I had been waiting in anticipation and preparing myself to look at the photograph again and, suddenly, when I finally dared to confront it, it had been taken out of my sight. In my desire to see it, I began to think of it as a form of present absence. I began to wonder what a photographic image that is withheld from view arouses in the viewer.

The act of concealing is quite significant. The previous owner of the book could have torn the page out, thus removing the possibility of they (or anyone else) encountering the image ever again. By concealing it, the spectator appropriated the image and turned it into a secret—a hidden, nevertheless, accessible secret. The photograph is still there, in the book, on my bookshelf. The book faces me as I write this text. I have not looked at the photograph since that episode took place. I refuse to do so. This refusal operates as my attempt to prolong the moment when I reached 'the point of ecstasy'. Looking at it again entails enabling the possibility that I could look at it and feel disappointed. It satisfies me to know that the photograph is somewhere away from my view, there, inside the book. Although out of my sight, in-between other books on my bookshelf, I know that the image is present as a future possibility. My desire to look is, thus, incessantly mobilised.

Encountering the photographic image in its concealed form in Bataille's *The Tears of Eros* (1989) led me to consider acts of obliteration of the photographic image and the impact that such acts have on the act of looking. Through research, I found that the Greek meaning of the term 'obscene' addressed this aspect of the visual field I wanted to explore. The etymology of the term is uncertain, but the sense of its out-of-sightedness is maintained both in its Latin and in its Greek form. It "may be a modification of the Latin *scena*, meaning literally what is off, or to one side of the stage, beyond representation" (Nead, 1997, p. 25) and "within this context, the art/obscenity pairing represents the distinction between that which can be seen and that which is just beyond representation" (ibid.). It is also a derivative from the Greek *ob skene* (off-stage), when violent parts of Greek plays were acted, not in front of the audience, but out of their sight (Mey, 2007). This sense of the term was retained in the sixteenth century in Latin (*obsensus*), meaning something that should be kept

away from the public view (Mey, 2007).

The term subsequently found its way into legal parlance in order to allude to deviations from sexual morality which should, as a consequence, be kept out of the public view, and only in 1857 did it enter the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Mey, 2007). Today, "no object or event is obscene in itself" and although "the obscene signifies something that offends or outrages because it defies accepted standards of decency, civility or modesty", the obscene "is a value judgement and a cultural category produced through processes of reification" (Mey, 2007, pp. 1-7). In common parlance, the obscene does not necessarily imply or convey notions of invisibility in relation to what is "offensive or disgusting by accepted moral standards, especially in sexual matters" (The University of Oxford Press, 1995, p. 797). Following my experience of encountering the covered photograph, however, I have decided to explore the notion of the obscene in light of its original Greek meaning, maintaining a direct link to how what is withheld from view mobilises desire in looking as a consequence. I established the concept of the obscene as the central axis of this research.

My scholarly and artistic interest in such topics is rooted in my personal history as a gay man. What one sees when one looks and what one does not, or what one shows or decides to withhold from view, to keep secret, are fundamental aspects of my biography, influenced by my evangelical upbringing in Brazil. Such upbringing was infused with the religious belief that God in heaven was always watching me, always on the look out not only for any transgressive act I might commit but also any transgressive thought I might have. Following my desires would, inevitably, like in the myth of Adam and Eve, lead me from a state of 'innocent nakedness' to the visceral experience of shame: when one is ashamed of oneself, when one wishes to hide, to conceal, when one experiences the hopeless feeling of failing at making oneself invisible, when one dreads exposure at the same time that one feels that one is already being looked at and judged by an audience.

Whilst not autobiographical in its entirety, my practice is founded upon my research exploration of issues such as anonymous sexual encounters in publicly

accessible social spaces which are part of my lived experience. Publicly accessible spaces in London such as sex shops, newsagents, gay bathhouses, sex clubs and a public toilet, all furnished me with locations and situations to photograph and to question my visibility to others whilst photographing. In this sense, the performative aspect of my practice became critical. In this research, the spaces are charged with images of sexuality which are either covert or hidden from public view; such social spaces represent the 'off-stage' area, the space 'behind the curtains' where the violent parts of Greek tragedies were performed. Publicly accessible spaces where sexual encounters amongst men take place away from the view of 'the general public', remaining out of sight. The specificity of each location arose from lived experience as well as previous knowledge, and also as the result of research; such specificity determined the circumstances under which I photographed.

My methodology is informed by the work of Michel Foucault (1977; 1978; 2003), whose theoretical framework considers the construction of visuality in the context of architectural and social spaces (hospitals, schools, asylums, prisons). Such spaces condition how we look and are seen to be looking, spaces designed to make things visible in a specific way and spaces which determine what can be seen through relations of power[1] [2] (Rajchman, 1988). My artistic investigation of these publicly accessible sites of encounter in London furnished me with situations that led me to question how relations of power are put into operation through the photographic act. Such situations also led me to question how the performative

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1 The work of John Tagg (1988) constitutes an essential reference in this respect. Through a Foucauldian methodology, Tagg reveals how historical practices of photography (photographs of the working-class in slums, police photographs of criminals, medical photographs of people in asylums), are bound up with the exercise of power in institutional spaces. Also informed by the work of Foucault, Geoffrey Batchen (1997, p. 202) says that "power inhabits the very grain of photography's existence as a modern Western event", drawing connections between photography, power and its discursive spaces. I will expound on the relationship between discourse and photography in the chapter **Trajectory.**

2 According to Martin Jay (1994), Foucault argues that vision has "to be understood phenomenologically, taking into account the lived spatial experience that emerge[s] from the body's intertwining with the world" (1994, p. 386). Jay's thesis about the "denigration of vision" has been criticised for considering vision a fixed term across a wide range of philosophical texts. For example, Iversen (1994).

act of photography articulates a relation to the image, which then addresses the expectations of the viewer. In this research, relations of power mobilise or repress desire in viewing a photograph, giving it its force.

Through my exploration of formal elements such as the implied continuation of a scene necessarily cut off by the borders of the photograph, voids within images, figurative absences, ocular obstructions and elements of concealment as activators of the desire to look, this research creates visual codes of revealing, of secrecy, of what it might mean to 'come out'. However, this should not be understood primarily in the literal sense of the term that indicates the act of self-disclosure in which one brings into public knowledge their sexual orientation or gender. Although the research addresses aspects of gay male sexuality and its visibility, the research focuses not so much on the idea of 'coming out' of the closet as a gay person. Rather, it expands the notion of 'coming out', removing it from its literal context and placing it within an artistic framework as an allegorical impulse[3] [4]; a rhetorical question that operates in my photographic practice. This 'coming out' should not be understood as fixed and irreducible. On the contrary; in this research, the notion of 'coming out' is open-ended and functions in different ways as the research develops. This 'coming out' considers the performative element of the photographic act. For example, in order to photograph, I visit specific spaces which are more or less accessible; I go into them, and then I come out of them. This 'coming out' also addresses the frame of the photograph and the relationship between what stays within it and what comes

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3 This is a reference to Owen's essay (1980, p. 69) in which he says that, in the allegorical, "one text is read through another, however fragmentary, intermittent, or chaotic their relationship may be." The allegorical mechanism displaces the original meaning without overthrowing it. The allegory constitutes a suspension of the original. In the face of the allegorical, the original meaning fades but does not vanish. To allegorise is not to return to the original meaning, but to defer it; the original meaning is not re-established, it is transposed and reordered into something other than itself through the act of its exposition. The original meaning remains only as an implicit and succinct allusion. Its interpretation produces a different meaning.

4 Cadava (1997, p. 22) discusses photography in terms of the notion of the allegorical in a different way. He says: "That there can be neither truth nor photography without ashes means that, like allegory, both take place only in a state of decay, in a state that moves away from itself in order to be what it is. Like the photograph that tells us what is no longer before us, truth can only be read, if it can be read at all, in the traces of what is no longer present."

out of it. It investigates what comes out through photographic representation, and, in that sense, it reflects on what is rendered visible (or indeed if anything is) through the photograph. **It asks what it might mean to come out through photographic practice; what it might mean to come out to desire and into the field of visuality. It addresses the question of desire as ambivalent and intrinsically perverse in the sense that it does not rest upon the truth of visibility.**

As a response to such questions, I have developed an original body of photographic work that reflects, critiques and reimagines how elements of invisibility operate through photographic practice in the context of publicly accessible spaces in London where men meet to engage in sexual activity with other men. The resulting body of photographic work offers a fresh perspective within the field of fine art photography; an alternative approach to the stereotypical representation of gay male desire which is usually dominated by the unequivocal graphic depiction of sexual figuration.

A discussion about the issue of invisibility and its effects on the articulation and expression — the exposure —of sexual (and public) identity as a desiring gay person, of desire itself, through artistic production, is timely, urgent and necessary. It takes place at a time in history when we are witnessing a resurgence of populism and far-right ideals across Europe, the United States and also in Brazil, my place of birth. Through slowly shifting rhetoric, such ideas attempt to normalise and promote homophobic, sexist and racist paradigms. Paradigms which, in my opinion, perpetuate the tyranny of patriarchal ideologies that favour bigotry and sanction oppression against difference. Paradigms which affect the way art is disseminated in society and, more often than not, dictate which art can be looked at. Paradigms which, in the guise of conservative moralism, mask political authoritarianism. Paradigms which, attempting to uphold decorum in the face of moral degeneracy, have led art exhibitions to be shut down. For example, in the case of *Queermuseu - Cartography of the Difference in Brazilian Art* at the Santander Cultural Centre in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2017 (Artforum, 2017).

Such is the urgency of the debate that, in 2019, in London, a curatorial

summit by The Contemporary Art Society together with Frieze called *It Belongs to Me! Curation, Censorship and the Resurgent Far-Right* highlighted the impact of the issue in countries such as Brazil, Turkey and Germany noting that the governmental response in such countries "echoes the days when the School of Bauhaus closed due to mounting pressure from the Nazi regime" (CAS, 2019). Exploring the obscene as out of sight but insistently present, my research functions as a positive act of political and artistic resistance. As Elif Shafak (Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres, trialed by the Turkish authorities for insulting 'Turkishness' and whose novels are currently being examined for crimes of obscenity) mentioned during the event, "politics is about power, where there is power there is politics and to talk about sexuality is a political act" (CAS & Frieze, 2019, 41:20). It is in this historical, social and cultural context that my research brings its original contribution to knowledge.

OUTLINE

This thesis has five successive sections. **RESEARCH CONTEXT** focuses on the notion of 'the secret' and draws connections between secrecy, sexuality, visibility and gay culture; elements that characterise this research. It institutes the imagined spatial ambiguity of 'the closet' in the visual field and establishes 'outness' as an avowal of 'public identity'. The ensuing chapter **VISUALITY AND THE GAZE** draws on key theories that inform my understanding of photography. It contains the section **What Is Out Of Sight?**, which ascertains the field of visuality as a site where power relations begin to operate through the gaze.

OUT OF SIGHT IN PRACTICE presents the practical element of this research; it is sub-divided into seven chapters. In **Undercover**, I photograph the cover of pornographic magazines displayed on shelves in newsagents across London in order to explore notions of exposure and public display. I elaborate on how relationships of power emerge as a consequence of an exercise in scrutiny through photographic practice and expound on the idea of fetishism. In **Doorway**, I reflect upon my experience of photographing the doorway of sex shops in Soho and the function of the plastic strips that hang at their entrance. I elaborate both on the meaning of the photographic frame and also on the meaning of the space that escapes it, the off-frame space. In **Façade**, I frame the façade of gay bathhouses and sex clubs. I analyse what the façade signifies in the context of this research and draw on the idea of haptic visuality; the identification of the eye as an organ of touch. Key to the development of my practice and also to the development of this section of the written thesis are the concepts of guilt and shame.

In **Towel**, I enter a gay bathhouse; a move that initiates a seminal phase in my research. I photograph a towel I brought with me from this visit. I reflect on the relationship between photography and notions of pleasure, privacy, exposure, and how ethics, morality, laws, regulations and taboos affect photographic practice. Central to this research, I draw on Jacques Lacan's notion of the phallus as a signifier. **Towel** is followed by **Trajectory**, where I focus on a photograph by Andres

Serrano from the series *Ejaculate in Trajectory* (1988), in order to contextualise my practice in relation to the practice of another art photographer. Through discussing Serrano's photograph, I distil ideas about the pursuit of voluptuous pleasure, the idea of prodigality, and also the notion of the Other. In response to Serrano, I photograph glory holes at a sex club in central London in **Hole**. In this chapter, I expound on the notions of sexual perversion, iconicity, and I also provide an alternative to the idea of fetishism by elaborating on the notion of the enigmatic signifier. The chapter titled **Address** focuses on the desirous act of mark-making on the wall tiles inside a public toilet. I photograph the graffiti that covered many of the wall tiles and doors of this particular site of encounter. I consider the concept of expenditure according to Battaile and end by arriving at the notion of desire, according to Jacques Lacan. I elaborate on how photography and the notion of desire are inextricably linked.

In my **CONCLUSION**, I return to the initial thought I began this thesis with: my preoccupation with how photographic representation constructs visuality and how what is withheld from view mobilises desire; how the 'truth' of visibility can be undermined through photographic practice. I reflect on what I have learned through the research process and on the practical element I have produced. My conclusion is drawn in light of the insight I have gained about the relationship between desire and the photographic, between desire and looking, and desire itself.

LIST OF WORKS REFERRED TO IN THE THESIS

Chapter	Work
Undercover	*Undercover* (2013) Hard Cover Photo Book. Cover in Silver Grey Linen. Page Paper Type: Premium Silk Matte. Dimensions: 28cm x 21cm. 30 photographs.
Doorway	*Come Inside Me* (2019) Digital C-Type Print. Matt Paper. Dimensions: 42cm x 29.7cm each photograph (8 single photographs assembled as a panorama installation. Total lenght of installation: 237cm. 84.1cm x 59.4cm (2 single photographs).
Façade	*G(r)ay Area* (2016) Giclée Print. Hahnemuhle German Etching Matt Paper. Dimensions: 84.1cm x 59.4cm. 16 photographs.
Towel	*From the Bathhouse* (2014) Digital C-Type Print. Matt Paper. Dimensions: 127cm x 101.6cm.

Out of the Bathhouse (2015 - Present)
Digital C-Type Print.
Matt Paper.
Dimensions: 127cm x 101.6cm.
3 photographs.

Hole

Of Black Holes and Other Glories (2013)
Hard Cover Photo Book.
Cover in Black Leather.
Page Paper Type: Premium Matte Uncoated.
Dimensions: 28cm x 21cm.
10 photographs.

Address

Gentlemen (2016)
Hard Cover Photo Book.
Cover in Ivory Linen.
Page Paper Type: Standard Silk Matte.
Dimensions:19cm x 19cm.
30 photographs.

The outcome of the practical element of this research has taken several forms to date. The early stages of my research were presented at the *8th Global Conference - Exploring the Erotic* at the University of Oxford (2013) and selected for hard copy publication as a result of my participation. Visual material from practice has been selected for the exhibitions *Crash Open Salon* (Charlie Dutton Gallery, London, 2013), *Artworks Open* (Barbican Arts Group Trust, London, 2015), *Quintal Fotográfico* (Photoday Brasil at Galeria Garagem, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 2017) and *Visual AIDS* (Bortolami Gallery, New York, 2020). My solo exhibition took place at CAVALCANTI (London, 2019). This exhibition functioned as an experimental site of installation where I had complete curatorial control. As a result of what I learned here, some of the elements exhibited have been resolved in a different form for this submission. Throughout the thesis, this exhibition is referred to as **Out of Sight**.

See **APPENDIX** (p. 241) for documentation.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Traces of secrecy and the secret permeate this research, which was sparked by my encounter with the concealed photographic image in my copy of Bataille's *The Tears of Eros*. Secrecy concerning what one wishes or can see when one looks has been fundamental to the development of the practical element presented in this thesis. The notion of the secret is paradoxical. Doesn't this very possibility, that something, whilst hidden, is known to exist as a secret, and can be passed on from one individual to another through photographic practice, turn the secret into a non-secret? A secret as such can only exist outside a specific public knowledge; for something to be secret, it has already been recognised as existing for someone. In this respect, a secret can only exist insofar as a non-secret.

Sexuality and invisibility have operated differently in different periods in history (likewise, invisibility is a somewhat paradoxical term as the invisible can only exist in the field of the visible). Foucault says that in the Victorian era, "silence became the rule" and "sterile behaviour carried the taint of abnormality; if it insisted on making itself too visible, it would be designated accordingly and would have to pay the penalty" (Foucault, 1978, pp. 3- 4). Distinctive when compared to modern times is not the fact that "they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as the secret" [Author's italics] (Foucault, 1978, p. 35).

Elaborating on Jacques Derrida's concept of the secret, Leslie Hill mentions a relevant aspect of the notion of secrecy which is pertinent to this research. He says:

> Derrida differentiates between two kinds of secret: the one, which already has an answer, which is therefore always on the point of being divulged, and is in that sense barely a secret at all; and the other, to which no answer can be given and which therefore cannot be revealed, which is therefore the only proper secret, albeit one that, resisting all discovery, is not properly a secret either, but nevertheless resists and remains as that which has never been present, cannot be made present, and remains perpetually separated from words as an always future possibility (2007, p. 113).

Secrecy is a crucial element that historically has characterised gay[5] culture, underpinned by different social and political factors prevalent during historical periods and cultures. This secrecy operates in the field of the visual (although not entirely, that is the aspect that concerns this research) and is not fixed, for it relies on who is looking and indeed how. This twofold structure leads one to point out the relationship between the visibility/invisibility dualism in the context of other crucial binarisms that operate throughout the research, such as the private and the public, secrecy and disclosure, and also the notion of 'the closet', a concept that presents the notion of invisibility as intrinsically linked to space: one is either in or out of the closet—albeit the very knowledge that one is in the closet (like the knowledge of the existence of the secret) means that, in fact, one is out of the closet.[6]

The 'closet' is a paradoxical space (Halperin, 1995). If you are in the closet, you never really know if, or to what extent, you have succeeded in hiding your secret (Halperin, 1995). You do not know if the ones around you treat you as straight because you hide your sexuality well or because they are playing along with your pretence, with the privilege of knowing about your sexuality without your knowledge of their knowledge (Halperin, 1995). And if you are 'out', they "insist on constructing your sexuality as a secret to which they have special access, a secret which always gives itself away to their superior and knowing gaze" (Halperin, 1995, pp. 34-35).

To be out of the closet is first and foremost to be identified as a gay person. Concerning homosexuality in public life, I still cannot escape the presence of the closet and may be constantly concerned with whether it is open or closed. And how closed or how open. I may always be concerned with how safe it is to have it open according to where I happen to find myself (physically, socially, economically,

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5 Throughout the research, I use the term gay as opposed to queer due to the possibility of interpretation of the latter as including a wide range of cultural minorities rather than the specificity of same-sex, male-to-male sexual desire.

6 Merleau-Ponty (1968) also discusses signification in the field of visuality in terms of secrecy. He says: '*Meaning* is invisible, but the invisible is not the contradictory of the visible: the visible itself has an invisible inner framework […], and the in-visible is the secret counterpart of the visible, it appears only within it" (1968, p. 215) [Author's italics].

institutionally). I am always concerned if something (a gesture? a piece of clothing? the tone of voice?) comes out when it should not (the constraints of relations of power).

THE FIELD OF VISUALITY AND THE GAZE

In this section, I introduce the concept of visuality and critical theories that underpin the notion of the gaze. My aim in establishing a theoretical framework is not only to elucidate arguments I find the most relevant in the field but also to establish a point of departure from which I can begin to conceptualise the expanded field of vision through photographic practice. The concepts I introduce in this section have been central to my understanding of photography. Identified in the early stages of the research, these concepts have been revisited, reconsidered and reformulated, in light of processes of practice. As a form of presentation of key ideas in this section, determining an initial theoretical paradigm, this section also functions as a way to establish the scope of my endeavour. In expanding upon the ramifications of being seen, I place my question within the field of vision. I ask: What is out of sight?

What is Out of Sight?

Visuality, as a form of representation, involves networks of meanings and belongs to the realm of culture—as opposed to the realm of nature. In the field of photographic representation, visuality is contingent on what is out of sight in the strictest sense: it is not so much about what is seen, but about what is made intelligible by the subject in their deployment of vision. The faculty of vision differs from the notion of visuality: the first is deployed by optics of the eye and the brain; the latter includes workings of the psyche (Bryson, 1988). Visuality is characterised by codes of visual perception when one acquires the ability to make sense of what one sees in a specific way, when one sees socially (Bryson, 1988, p. 90). It involves subjectivity; it is about "how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing or the unseen therein" (Foster, 1988, p. ix).

The notion of the gaze, like the concept of visuality, also relies on the idea of the out of sight: it is imagined. Not physically seen, the out of sight is nevertheless present. Like visuality, the gaze is not a biological given; it is a social concept. Crucially, the gaze is constituted as a social construct that operates through relations of power, a form of peril (Foster, 1988). This understanding of the gaze comes from a Western deployment of power and knowledge which operates linguistically and psychoanalytically. The gaze destabilises the position of the viewing subject as the master of the visual field. It is at the same time experienced by the subject as a form of exposure in which the subject realises themselves as being revealed to something 'other'. This notion of a destabilising gaze (Lacan, 1981) suggests that the viewing subject is constituted not only as a being, but as a being-who-is-looked-at-from-all-sides. This gaze ceaselessly strikes the viewing subject who forever lacks the ability to see what looks back at them.

Lacan illustrated this idea with the telling of an episode when he went fishing in Brittany, and a fisherman on the boat pointed out to him a sardine can glittering in the sun, floating on the surface of the water. Reflecting on the fisherman's words ("You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!"), Lacan concluded

to himself that if that was true, that the can did not see him, it confirmed that he was being looked at all the same (1981, p. 94), that he was constituted within a discursive field of vision.

In this conceptualisation, the gaze is always interrupted by a non-personified threat. It is constituted as a form of alterity to which the viewing subject feels they have been exposed to (Bryson, 1988). Lacan's theory of the gaze is constituted by the subject's encounter with a point of failure in the field of vision because there is nothing to be seen (lack). There is nothing to be seen, but this nothing makes itself known in the field of visuality, and more importantly, it signifies. The gaze (of the Other) perverts the (viewer's) field of visuality. Because it is always and already out of sight, it causes the subject to be incapable of maintaining the equilibrium of their visual field as reciprocity. It represents the subject's ultimate collapse in the act of looking; it drives the viewing subject into the state of anxiety. This out-of-sightedness brings one back to the diverging aspects between the notions of vision and visuality: when someone looks at me, I can only see the eye (located in my field of vision), not the gaze (operating within the field of visuality).

This aspect of the gaze is introduced in the section **Undercover** (p. 33), in which I discuss the experience of photographing the cover of pornographic magazines displayed on shelves in newsagents across London in order to explore how images of sexuality are displayed and consumed publicly in the context of their commodification. Through the performance of the photographic act, I was exposed to the look of others at the same moment that I deployed a deliberate exercise in looking. Even if there seemed to be no suspicious look directed at me, I was still under the power of the gaze of the Other.

Whilst Lacan's notion of the gaze is a key theoretical paradigm around which my research unfolds, other conceptualisations have also informed my understanding of the term. For example, the panopticon as an architectural example of the exercise of power through visual surveillance, according to Michel Foucault[7] (1977). Foucault

7 Jacqueline Rose's discussion of sexuality in the field of vision also constitutes an essential reference to my understanding of the gaze (2005). Rose addresses sexuality in visual

discusses the panoptical arrangement in relation to Bentham's model prison system in which constant surveillance by way of the gaze is exercised upon bodies. In Bentham's model, the panopticon is constituted by a circular tower that is located at a central point inside an annular, ring-shaped structure; an arrangement of prison cells that form a bigger circle around the central tower. The tower in the middle of the structure has windows which allow the supervisor to look at the cells located around the ring-shaped structure without being seen looking.

The corollary of this structure is a provocation directed at the convict, one in which the convict is led to feel themselves in a condition of perpetual exposure. Such feeling of exposure guarantees, preserves and disseminates the systematic execution of power (Foucault, 1977). The concept in Bentham's system is that because the prisoner cannot see whether they are being watched by the supervisor, who may or may not be in the central tower, they inadvertently presume that they are and subject themselves to it. In the panoptical system, everyone is potentially being looked at, beheld by all or some (Foucault, 2008). This uncertainty produces in the inmate the continuous suspicion of being exposed to an ambiguous but ever-present and subjectifying force, where the gaze becomes widespread, shared and has an unidentifiable source (Foucault, 2008). In this respect, Foucault's account of the panoptical gaze verges upon Lacan's.[8]

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representation in light of Freud's text *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood*, drawing connections between Freud, Lacan, Saussure, and the arbitrary nature of the sign. Her text focuses on the relationship between "subject and scene", calling attention to the exposition of the "fixed nature of sexual identity as a fantasy" (2005, p. 227). In this section, however, my intention lies on emphasising the destabilising aspect of the gaze that the viewing subject feels exposed to in the deployment of vision.

8 This refers only to the panoptical gaze. Foucault talks about other different types of gaze. For example, the gaze of the doctor at the clinic (Foucault, 2003). The clinical observing gaze also exercises power, albeit in a different manner. The clinical gaze is characterised as an act of observation for identification and diagnostic purposes. It is constituted as a gaze that scrutinises but does not interfere. It is characterised as a silent and actionless gaze that reads, travelling from the body of the doctor to the body of the patient. (Foucault, 2003). The clinical gaze, according to Foucault, has a haptic nature (it travels from body to body), and it is also rather invasive, for it penetrates the body of the patient. Supported by systems of knowledge, it discloses (and exposes) hidden mysteries. The clinical gaze reveals, as opposed to the panoptical gaze that subjects.

Lacan's characterisation of the gaze is influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre's definition of the look. Sartre says:

> What most often manifests a look is the convergence of two ocular globes in my direction. But the look will be given just as well on occasion where there is a rustling of branches, or the sound of a footstep followed by silence, or the slight opening of a shutter, or a slight movement of curtain (2000, p. 257).

The notion that the gaze, permanently out of sight, brings relations of power into effective action and impacts the viewing subject lies at the heart of my thesis. It emanates from my methodology in which the relationship between site/sight is fundamental: each architectural and social space where I performed the act of photographing provided me with a different set of social rules related to how and what could be looked at, and laws to abide by. To photograph 'out in the open' or 'in public' is a highly regulated activity. Circumscribing the visual field, these social rules and laws determined my choice of image-capturing device, how my photographic act was performed and, in turn, how 'the public' perceived and reacted to my creative activity. The reaction of the public to my act of photographing forms an important part of my research and has had a direct impact on the practical element presented throughout this thesis. The notion of the ever-present, possibly threatening or forbidding gaze according to Lacan, is both integral and intrinsic to my conceptualisation of the photographic act; it is characterised as its catalyst.

Lacan's notion of the gaze is also historically determined: it marks the departure from the nineteenth-century conception of vision in which its "truth lay on the retina, in the physiology of the eye and the neurology of the optical apparatus" (Bryson, 1988, p. 106). It has enabled the acknowledgement of "the fact that the visual field we inhabit is one of meanings and not just shapes, that it is permeated by verbal and visual discourses, by signs; and that these signs are socially constructed, as we are" (Bryson, 1988, p. 106). Norman Bryson says: "What should ensue from Lacan's portrayal of the terror of sight is analysis, analyses, many of them, of how power uses the social construct of vision, […] how power disguises and conceals its operations in visuality" (1988, p. 108). This is the theoretical field within which this thesis operates.

OUT OF SIGHT IN PRACTICE

In this section, I focus on the practical element of the research. I turn to the "psychologically and ideologically informed act of taking photographs and the processes of developing, reproducing, and circulating them in society" (Kriebel, 2007, p. 3). I analyse the photograph as an object and its impact on the subject that looks at it. The elements of my practice presented here take the form of photo books and also series of photographic prints with varying dimensions. Some pieces have been experimented with in different forms—this will be commented upon as the practice is discussed.

Also, in this section, I reflect on Andres Serrano's *Ejaculate in Trajectory XIV* (1988) photograph. Through this discussion, I evaluate the notion of desire and establish the invisible phallus as its signifier in the context of my practice. I discuss one specific photographic image, for Serrano's practice is extensive, complex, and escapes the constraints of my endeavour. I have chosen Serrano's *Ejaculate in Trajectory XIV* (1998) photograph for it lies at the heart of my research question; it establishes a poetic intervention at the same time that it informs my conceptualisation of what it might 'come out' through photographic representation.

I refer to other relevant practices that characterise the contemporary context of the research in the chapter **Undercover** (p. 42) and in the footnotes section of each subsequent chapter (pp. 71, 101, 117, 120, 135, 163 183). I have decided to employ this method of reference because each practice referred to in this way has a specific relevance to the topic under discussion in the applicable chapter.

UNDERCOVER

I began by photographing the cover of pornographic magazines displayed on shelves in newsagents across London in order to explore notions of exposure and public display, of how images of sexuality are displayed and consumed publicly in the context of their commodification. Through the performance of the photographic act, I was exposed to the look of others at the same moment that I deployed a deliberate exercise in looking. This insight led me to ask: how do relationships of power emerge as a consequence of an exercise in scrutiny? How does it take place, and what are its effects upon photographic practice?

Thinking through the idea of the 'public display' in the context of visual representations, I decided to photograph pornographic magazines displayed on shelves of newsagents around London. These have the characteristic of being small shops that generally sell other products, such as groceries and stationery, for example, attracting a broad range of clientele. This is not the case everywhere. For example, in Brazil, newsagents are not shops as such. They are small or medium-sized stands, usually free-standing in the middle of the pavement. They sell mostly newspapers and magazines, sweets and cigarettes, perhaps souvenirs. What is notable is that, in both countries, the shelving system is the same in relation to the 'higher shelves' as the place where pornographic material is kept. If I could not speak either English or Portuguese but compared both shelving systems, I would still be able to identify which section was which because they are structured the same way.

My decision to photograph these displays resulted from my perception of the manner in which the magazines are normally laid out according to their genre. What the cover of the magazines shows (or hides) plays an important role within this taxonomy. My interest focused particularly on the top shelves. In such displays, pornographic magazines are placed just within my reach, in order to keep them out of the reach of children or the line of sight of other members of the public who might be offended. The magazines are arranged so that the viewer can have a glimpse of what they are about, frequently leaving only part of the actual image in view. If I find myself in a shop drawn to the pornographic section, I am acutely aware of who might be watching me, raising my fear of being exposed in the act of looking. Some of the pornographic magazines in certain shops are sold in sealed plastic sleeves. The sleeves are half blacked out, covering the more graphic areas.

The idea of exposure in this context is a paradox. For example, if I decide that it is safer to consume pornographic material in analogue form rather than online viewing because of my anxiety concerning the rise of digital surveillance as an instrument of power, in the act of purchasing a magazine I expose myself to the eyes of the public in the social sphere. If I consume pornographic material obtained

through the Internet in the privacy of my home, I am exposed to digital surveillance. Exposure is unavoidable.

Whilst I was able to obtain verbal authorisation to photograph the magazine shelves in the majority of shops I visited, a few of them did refuse, including a particular one that had more explicit material on view. This particular shop was located in Stockwell, south of the River Thames. I lived there for some years and chose this area because of my familiarity with it. Upon entering the shop, I spotted the area where the magazines were stacked and realised that the pornographic magazines were not on display together with the other periodicals. There was a sign on the wall, above the magazine shelves, where the pornographic magazines would have been located stating that, in order to look or obtain one of the magazines, one was supposed to make a request at the counter of the shop, so that the magazines would be brought out, into view.



Illustration 1. Detail of sign on wall of newsagent.
This is a partial reproduction of the image for the purpose of illustration in the thesis.

The magazines had been concealed, hidden from the sight of the public, although the knowledge of their existence was exposed to general view through the sign on the wall. This allowed me to re-evaluate the notion of the obscene according to its Greek meaning and how it operated in this context. I did not ask for an adult magazine to be brought out for me to look. I only took a photograph of the sign informing people about the magazines being behind the counter. On my way back to the station I discovered another newsagent to photograph. When I asked for permission to photograph the magazine shelves, I was given an angry and suspicious look and was told that there was no way that I would be allowed to photograph 'that'. At yet another, I was told I could photograph the display, as long as I only photographed the lower shelves, and 'not the upper ones'.

A similar use of metonym as a figure of speech to refer to pornographic magazines in light of the Greek definition of the 'obscene' is evident in the second scene of the film *Peeping Tom* (1960) by Michael Powell. In this scene, a man enters a newsagents shop in London and asks for a copy of *The Times* and *The Telegraph*. When asked if he would like anything else, he says: "I've been told by a friend that you have some views for sale". The attendant replies: "What sort of views, sir?" Upon seeing the concerned facial expression of the customer, who disconcertingly responds with "Well, hum", the attendant produces a black folder from under the desk and opens it up to show him photographs which we, as the audience, do not see but assume to be of a pornographic nature due of the satisfaction expressed by the customer. The attendant asks: "This sort, sir?" The customer enthusiastically buys the folder and, in order to avoid recognition of the material, puts it into a paper package which reads: "Educational Books". The scene draws attention to the covert and illegal sale of pornographic material at that time with its connotations of something 'dirty' as well as the complicated nature of the exchange.

Maria Wylke (1997) argues that after the Second World War, photographers would be often convicted for publishing 'obscene' material in the United States. Rupert Smith (2017, p. 170) says that the "physique underground supplied material that was created, distributed and owned at considerable risk to all involved". For

example, British photographer John S. Barrington was arrested in 1952 for "sending obscene material through the mail" (Bob Myzer Foundation, 2016). Resorting to subjects such as art, classicism and physical fitness as cover-up operated as ways to circumvent penalties and secure "mass-produced but privately consumed visualizations of gay desire" in the United States and Europe (Wylke, 1997, pp. 59-60).

In the 1950's, as an undergraduate student at the Royal College of Art, David Hockney subscribed to the American magazine *Physique Pictorial*, which he would receive in the post wrapped in plain paper (Lord & Meyer, 2019). He painted *Life Painting for a Diploma* (1962) depicting the cover of one of the issues. Artist Tom of Finland published his drawings in the magazine in 1957 (MOCA, 2020). Around the same time, *Physique Pictorial*'s photographer Bob Mizer worked in partnership with Dr Kinsey (founder of the Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University) in the United States and contributed issues of the magazine to Dr Kinsey's archive in Indiana (Lord & Meyer, 2019).

Upon Francis Bacon's death, copies of *Physique Pictorial* from 1960's were found in his studio, suggesting his interest in contemporary visual culture (Howe, 2017). Today, Bob Mizer's foundation in the United States (an non-profit educational organisation) promotes and preserves "progressive and controversial photography and believes that the most disputed works of art are the most important to the progress of society" (Bob Mizer Foundation, 2020). Another event that references the Greek definition of the obscene in the context of visual representations of gay male desire is the case of the magazine *Sui Generis*, in Brazil. It ran from 1995-2000 and was dedicated to the gay community. It did not display explicit images of sexuality. As an exception, the cover of a Valentine's Day edition depicted two men kissing (Ignácio, 2007). It ended up being censored by the publisher and was put on display to be sold at newsstands inside sealed black plastic packaging (Ignácio, 2007).

A pattern of response began to emerge in my behaviour every time I asked for authorisation to photograph. A persistent sense of self-consciousness and also of visibility and vulnerability would arise as if by requesting to photograph the

magazines, I was guilty of some offence or secret or had a nefarious motive. I began to assume I was being watched constantly and somewhat controlled and judged through the look of the shopkeepers, even before making the request and without actually knowing whether this was the case—some of them responded in a very helpful manner upon hearing my request showing no visible signs of judgment or surprise. But, were their responses genuine? It is possible some of them might not have passed any judgment, but it is also just as possible that they disguised any outward signs of such judgment.

Although my photographing the cover of the magazines displayed on shelves was at times sanctioned and at times prohibited by the attendants at the newsagents I visited, I felt this was always accompanied by a subtle air of suspicion. Whilst on a few occasions I was almost convinced of the sincerity of the smiles I received followed by a positive response, the vast majority of times I felt I was a disturbance, and although I was not fully trusted, I was given permission. At other times I was rudely acknowledged and refused authorisation to carry out the task I had set out to do. This is not unexpected or accidental; I was asking, although not directly, to take photographs of the exact locations where the magazines with explicit sexual material were located inside the shops.

I was publicly and expressly casting a gaze (an act emphasised by the possession of the camera) upon what normally remains unsaid, at what is hinted at and is not openly dealt with, or at least it is dealt with more privately. By performing the act of photographing, I was drawing attention to what stays on display for the look of the public but is not meant to be publicly looked at. When I look at the magazines in the shop through the viewfinder, my look is impacted by what is permissible in the sphere of the public (who is legally allowed to look) and to notions of shame[9] and guilt in the sphere of the personal ('I am acutely aware of who might be watching me, raising my fear of being exposed in the act of looking'). I am subject to the scrutiny and judgment of others as to my intentions. This takes me back to the notion of the gaze, according to Lacan, which I discussed in **What is Out of Sight?** Even if there

9 The notion of shame will be expanded on in the chapter **Towel.**

seems to be no suspicious look, I am still under the power of the gaze of the Other. This scrutiny is characterised by who sees who, looking at what, where exactly that look takes place, under what circumstances and with what technologies. This scrutiny exercises power. It does so because my behaviour when I browse through the cover of the magazines is affected by the feeling that I am being watched. At the same time, I am also in possession of a camera, and can exercise an element of power and control. My understanding of power is based upon Foucault's definition in terms of relations of forces inscribed in the social sphere, without a specific locus and being multifarious. Foucault (1978, p. 92) defines power as "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization". Power has this quality of being pervasive "because it is produced from one moment to another, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another" (Foucault, 1978, p. 3). According to this notion, "power is everywhere […] because it comes from everywhere" and "is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations" (Foucault, 1978, pp. 93, 94). Power is inscribed upon the subject from different points and at different levels, and everyone is subject to it in some form or another. Following Foucault, therefore, it is not possible to be outside relationships of power. In my awareness of being watched when I photograph the magazines through my camera, as a consequence of the power exerted upon myself by the gaze of others (or the gaze of the Other when no visible threat can be seen), my fear of exposure is not only affected by elements of shame, but it is also mixed with a sense of guilt.

A sense of peril, of punishment, somewhat linked to a pleasurable act, constituted the psychological aspects of this arousal. The arousal of guilt inaugurates a phase that constitutes the formation of the subject and is intrinsically related to one's libido (Grinberg, 2005, p. 716). It "represents a sensation of intrapsychic tension, sometimes linked to apprehension of a catastrophic threat to oneself" and "may also be manifest as humility, suffering, the need for punishment, remorse, and feelings of inadequacy" (Grinberg, 2005, p. 716). The sensation of being guilty "appears to dominate instinctual life not only by acting to deny gratification, but also

by leading to an increase in libido and thus the provocation of masochistic pleasure" (Grinberg, 2005, p. 717).

Although not explicitly, this definition of the sense of guilt conveys the idea that desire is in some way disrupted by it, or that at least a certain form of disruption of it takes place upon the surge of the feeling of guilt. The feeling of guilt describes "emotional states […] which follow acts that the subject deems reprehensible. […] It may refer to a vague sense of personal unworthiness unconnected with any particular act […]" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973, p. 414). The sense of guilt is also an idea elaborated by Freud (1991a). For him, the sense of guilt relates to a compulsive demeanour in the face of constraints. The sense of guilt arises from a conflict in the psyche of the subject during childhood and its origins are connected to early experiences in the face of authority represented by the father (Freud, 1991a). He says:

> As a child grows up, the role of the father is carried on by teachers and others in authority; their injunctions and prohibitions remain powerful in the ego ideal [the super-ego] and continue, in the form of conscience, to exercise the moral censorship. The tension between the demands of *conscience* and the actual performances of the ego is experienced as a *sense of guilt* [Author's italics] (1991a, p. 377).

The sense of guilt, according to Freud, then, follows an altercation between two entities that are present in the mental structure of the subject, what Freud calls the ego and the super-ego. The ego is characterised by and displays aspects of anxiety (Freud, 1991a). The ego represents rationality and sound judgement. The ego also relates to one's perception of consciousness within a body; it relates to one's perception of whom one is physically. The conscious ego is characterised as a body-ego (Freud, 1991a) as opposed to the super-ego, which represents the relationship to authority and the figure of the father. The super-ego speaks for control and accords a perpetual voice to the influence of the parents over the subject. These two entities, alongside the id, which is characterised by the intensity of strong emotions present in the mental structure of the subject, form Freud's tripartite mental framework. The sense of guilt is, therefore, characterised as the result of a

disagreement between these two entities, between common sense or prudence and the sense of authority or power exercised by the super-ego.

At this point, my aim is to draw attention to the emergence of the feeling of guilt as a result of a conflict that takes place in the subject's psyche, as a possible result of tensions between common sense and the sense of authority, which in Freudian terms, occurs between the ego and the super-ego. It brings some light into my experience of facing 'the law' when requesting authorisation to photograph, a pleasurable act. The sense of guilt I experienced took place as a result of my exercise in scrutiny inside the newsagents, which, in turn, would lead to my own exercise of power in producing the photograph or my own 'view'. My sense of guilt was intrinsically linked to the exercise of my gaze and the impact of the gaze of others upon myself.[10]

Photographing the covers of magazines displayed on shelves made me feel apprehensive. It created an atmosphere of distrust as if through my photographing, I could bring something to light (the notion of exposure), as if I was going on to reveal something behind the back of the shopkeepers. This distrust affected the way I was looked at by others inside the shops and how I was thus identified and in turn, how I decided to deal with each situation. It uncovered relationships of power which operate through the act of looking and the fear of exposure. Fear of exposure functioned at different levels inside the newsagents once I requested authorisation to photograph. Was I speaking to a shopkeeper afraid of being caught infringing the law in relation to sexually explicit material without their realising? Or was I speaking to an employee in fear of any wrongdoing in connection to the exposure of the pornographic magazines? Was I drawing attention to the magazines which are considered an invisible commodity? The power exercised over me is characterised as a relational dynamism because it is produced from one moment to the next, originates from various standpoints and functions in the social sphere. This encounter with relations of power, despite its negative effect with regard to its

10 The impact of the gaze of others upon myself will be further discussed in relation to the notion of shame in the chapter **Towel.**

subjecting force, is also what conditioned the production of the photographs. The photographs taken inside newsagents in London were subsequently made into the book *Undercover* (2013).

Undercover (2013)

The series *Undercover* (2013) is made up of thirty photographs, presented in book format. The book has a silver-grey linen hardcover and measures 21cm x 28cm. The title *Undercover* is embossed in silver on the cover of the book. Some of the photographs have been previously shown as unmounted prints hanging on the wall. The book format shows how the work has been resolved for this submission. Illustrations 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 follow the original size of each photograph, as they are presented in the photo book.

It is by firstly looking at the 'cover' of the magazine that I encounter the obscene in its Greek meaning, alluding to the violent parts of Greek plays which were acted, not in front of the audience, but out of their sight, away from the public view. At times, the cover of the magazine itself is covered by an obscure plastic sleeve; when that is not the case, the cover of the magazine has sexual overtones, without itself being explicit. The word 'cover' reverberates with meanings and associations. The 'cover of the book' refers mainly to its front, but how about its back? By covering, I "place something over or in front of something in order to hide or protect it" (The University of Oxford Press, 1995, p. 268). I cover something up in order to hide something I do not wish others to see. I cover up for somebody in order to hide their mistakes. A 'cover story' is a "story invented to conceal something, especially a person's identity or reasons for doing something" (The University of Oxford Press, 1995. p. 269). By contrast, the 'cover story' of a newspaper is the one meant to have the highest degree of exposure. The term 'undercover' means done secretly. The cover is also an invitation to go inside.

My decision to create an artist book entitled *Undercover* with the photographs came after testing some of my findings in the **Out of Sight** exhibition and as a way

to return to my initial experience of encountering the covered photograph. For the exhibition installation, I printed the photographs in A4 size (the size of the actual magazines) and experimented by hanging the photographs in higher places where the audience would not be able to see them from up close. I later realised that the photographs demanded to be seen differently. By giving them to be seen in the form of pages in a book, in sequence, the images are in closer proximity to the viewer (this act of looking is more intimate than, for example, looking at a print on the wall) and invite scrutiny because the comparison from image to image can be made inevitable. It also mimics the act of reading a magazine in the hands through the turning of the page.

Page 49: Illustration 2. Reproduction of cover of UNDERCOVER photo book.

UNDERCOVER


ADULT
ADULT
HOMES & DESIGN
HEALTH & BEAUTY
WOMEN'S LIFESTYLE
WOMEN'S WEEKLIES
MOTORING
PUZZLES
COMICS
TEENAGE INT
Home-grown
FREE
Ethio Beauty
Soap
Stella weds
GAGGED & KILLED
MUM ABLAZE IN THE STREET
TEEN LOCKED UP FOR KNIFE ATTACK
TULISA'S SHOCK NEW DRUG
FREE £10
Sport
News
South London
Southwark
MORTGAGE RATES SLASHED AGAIN
TWITTER RAPE THREAT TO MPS
BRADY HUMAN RIGHTS BATTLE COSTS YOU
RYAN AND HUBBY NO 2 ON THE ROCKS
FINANCIAL TIMES
INDEPEN
The Daily Telegraph


ADULT
HOMES & DESIGN
IF YOU CAN'T SEE A TITLE YOU REQUIRE PLEASE ASK AT THE COUNTER
Hi Fi
EISURE
BIG LONDON A-Z
LONDON A-Z
GREAT BRITAIN
VOGUE
GLAMOUR
Rita Ora
Chat
HACKED OFF HIS HEAD...
Yours
BLOCKBUSTER
WHAT CAR?
AUTOCAR
CUSTOM CAR
FREE! BOOK
InsideSoap
SPIDER-MAN
TOY STORY
Fairy Princess
HORRIBLE HISTORIES
PUZZLES
Wordsearch
Criss Cross
Sudoku
WORD SEARCH
SHOCK NEWS!
BRITAIN'S BEST VALUE PUZZLE MAGAZINES!
Loot
Advertiser

Page 50: Illustration 3. Photograph ‘Undercover #2’, from the series *Undercover* (2013).
Page 51: Illustration 4. Photograph ‘Undercover # 3’, from the series *Undercover* (2013).

The anticipation of turning the page in order to see what comes next becomes a form of complicity into which the viewer is drawn. A relationship of touch is thereby initiated.



Illustration 5. Turning the page of UNDERCOVER photo book.

The image on the first page of the book (p.55) creates a form of a visual pattern; it is excessive but symmetrical. An abundance of rectangular shapes fills the photograph. The higher shelf reveals to the viewer the word 'adult' and contextualises what the viewer is looking at. As the pages are turned, the images on them become less chaotic. The last page shows the photograph of the display in the shop in Stockwell, with no adult magazines and the sign on the wall.

Page 55: Illustration 6. Photograph 'Undercover #1', from the series *Undercover* (2013).


ADULT
NEWS & CURRENT AFFAIRS
WOMEN'S LIFESTYLE
WOMEN'S W
TV GUIDES
COMICS

Looking at some of the photographs in the book, I see the shelves are crammed with one magazine above the other. Some of the shelves are subdivided into two or three levels, a factor that intensifies the feeling of flatness that the photographic print makes of the scene, but also its layering of information. Each layer partly conceals the other and spills over the edge of the frame. There is an aspect of banality in these photographs. The book becomes a form of catalogue of the catalogue of the catalogue. In his reading of Siegfried Kracauer's *Photography* (1995), Sabine T. Kriebel discusses this form of excess present in my photographs. She says:

> The abundance of photographs, archived in the multiplicity of picture magazines, appearing on newsstands month after month, year after year, could potentially catapult consumers into unflinching recognition of, and revolt against, a vapid, overrationalized society. […] The sheer accumulation of photographs offers an eternal, ever-renewable photographic present, repressing the lurking presence of transience and death by ever reproducing more, new pictures (Kriebel, 2007, p. 9).

The photograph *Undercover #1* (p. 55) is utterly symmetrical. Five lines form the shelves that cross the image horizontally, dividing the photograph in strips. The lines themselves, the shelves that hold the magazines in this display are labelled according to the type of material that they contain, constraining any admixture of genres. The highest shelf is labelled *Adult,* followed by *News & Current Affairs* and *Women's Lifestyle*. *TV Guides* and *Comics* occupy the same level, ranked just above the shelf that holds newspapers.

Through looking at the photographs in the book, I realise that the cover of the magazines show—something, but concurrently, they also hide. What is hidden cannot operate without being intertwined with what is visible. When one speaks of the invisible, one speaks of what takes place in the visible. The field within which the notion of invisibility operates is that of visibility itself. The possibility of visibility is what conditions something to be invisible or non-visible in the first place. Binarisms such as the visible and the invisible or the public and the private, more than having an infallible nature, in actuality, are fluid and interdependent. This is an idea expounded by Derrida (1992), when he discusses the notion of genre/gender (in French, *le*

genre signifies both genre and gender) in terms of mobility, suggesting notions of contamination, as akin to a form of spillage. Derrida (1992) suggests that the notion of genre/gender brings forth the problem of the law since a process of taxonomy is set forth by the meaning of the word, in an attempt to contain this contamination. This law comes into existence irrevocably late, since the law that genres/genders are not to be mixed exists only insofar genres/genders are already desperately mixed, otherwise, such law would be useless (Derrida, 1992). Derrida uses the term "the law of the law of genre" (1992, p. 227) in order to explain the element of duplicity that is at work in the notion of binarisms, this form of counter-law, that is always late and constitutes recognition of admixture. According to this idea, the single term is never single because it defers and calls forth its opposite. Invisibility calls forth and is bound to visibility and vice-versa. Derrida says that the law of the law of genre is:

> Precisely a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy. In the code of set theories, if I may use it at least figuratively, I would speak of a sort of participation without belonging—a taking a part in without being a part of, without having a membership in a set (Derrida, 1992, p. 227).

The 'adult shelf' also shows elements of gender discrimination in its organisation. The word adult in English encompasses both male and female. In other languages, like in Portuguese, it does not. For instance, there is a male and a female version of the same word with the relevant one being applied depending on the object's gender. However, here the actual shelf only holds magazines most obviously directed at the male heterosexual audience. This calls forth Berger's claim that the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be (the white straight) male.[11] The shelf is full of naked or semi-naked women in suggestive poses, minimal lingerie and always smiling. There is no pornographic material explicitly dedicated to women. As a matter of fact, in none of the photographs I have taken does such a thing exist. One characteristic to be noted in some of the photographs, though, is that it is

11 I refer to Berger (1977). This will be discussed further in the chapter **Towel.**

possible to observe that periodicals dedicated to the gay audience, although not necessarily pornographic, are also kept in higher places, indicating its perception as obscene and suggesting it is something not to be seen by all. The texts on some of the pages are also interesting in how they address the viewer calling their attention, they seem to scream out: 'Dazed', 'Edge' 'Play Station', 'Closer', 'Thief', how the viewer is interpolated.

Solomon-Godeau contributes some interesting views to the discussion of pornographic imagery and the constitution of the subject who looks. She argues that "for the feminist viewer of erotic or pornographic imagery, there can be no question of neutrality" and that "notwithstanding the equally lengthy tradition of homosexual erotica, in the modern world the vast majority of such images are of women made by men for the use of men" (Solomon-Godeau, 2003, p. 220). She introduces her ideas by mentioning feminist positions that discuss the sexual economy of looking in terms of "the agency of patriarchal structures—psychic and social—[which] inform the act of looking"; feminist analyses that are based on the concept that "the active gaze is both formed and informed by the determinations of sexual difference which *a priori* construct the subject positions designated as the masculine and the feminine" [Author's italics] (Solomon-Godeau, 2003, p. 220). In this form of analysis, "the feminine—differentially conceived as Other to the masculine norm—takes *its* place in visual representation as object-of-the-gaze, while the position of active subject-of-the-gaze is generally the masculine prerogative" [Author's italics] (Solomon-Godeau, 2003, p. 220).

More interestingly, she says that "crucial to this analysis is its anti-biologistic approach; masculine and feminine, active and passive, [which] are understood to be subject positions, not biological givens" (Solomon-Godeau, 2003, p. 220). She further states that "a woman can thus look from the masculine subject position; [and that] a man can be represented in a feminine subject position (as is frequently the case in homosexual erotica, or in some recent fashion advertising" (Solomon-Godeau, 2003, p. 221). In response to this comment, I would argue that the subject position in homosexual erotica does not necessarily convey a feminine position; that

would be sexist (here I believe Solomon-Godeau means that the feminine position is subjected to the masculine). Pre-determining the sexual according to the idea of an active (the masculine who penetrates) agent and another passive (the feminine who is penetrated) is very reductive. Simply switching subject positions does not solve the issue of subjection and still conveys a patriarchal structure, regardless of who takes that position, even if symbolically. Doesn't the problem remain, and isn't it even more reinforced, when any position (under these terms) is taken anyway?

I agree with Solomon-Godeau, however, when she says that "the act of representation and its reception occurs within a patriarchal framework, [and that] even ostensibly innocuous or inoffensive images [are] marked by its terms" (2003, p. 221). She says that "photographic technologies […] seem especially to conform to […the] diagnostic [of the] imperialism of representation—the violence that may inhere in the representational act itself" (Solomon-Godeau, 2003, p. 221). She says:

> If we are willing to allow that [the] activity of visual capture already comprehends relations of power and mastery (implied, among other things, by the aggressive vocabulary of photography—to shoot, to take a picture, to aim the camera, etc.), it may well be that erotic and pornographic imagery manifests these relations with particular clarity [Solomon-Godeau, 2003, p. 221).

Thus, relations of power were not only triggered by my performance of the photographic act inside the newsagents, but they existed *a priori*, already manifested and displayed on the cover of the pornographic magazines.

Page 61: Illustration 7. Photograph 'Undercover #29' from the series *Undercover* (2013).


SAVE at WHSmith
MAXIM
HOT 100
attitude
JAMES HASKELL
LOUIS SMITH
Nuts
140 SEXIEST TWITTER PICS!
WIN MORE PRIZES
WIN MORE PRIZES
Bestselling Paperbacks
BUY 1 GET 1 HALF PRICE
classic cars
FREE! 64-PAGE MANUAL Transform Your Body By August!
Esquire
DAZED
TRASH FASHION
DAZED
FASHION / MUSIC / FILM / ART
FHM
HOLLYOAKS
XBOX 360
RETRO GAMER
games™
Microsoft just started a war.
XBOX ONE
iPhone Book
RIDE
BIG NAKEDS FROM £2000
5 FREE GIFTS!
PlayStation.
THE HOT 50
GTA V
BATTLEFIELD 4
PC GAMER
THIEF
Nintendo
SUPER SMASH BROS!
EDGE
THIS IS YOUR NEXT CONSOLE
MORE PRIZES
WIN MORE PRIZES
RAIL
Railway Illustrated
BRITAIN AT WAR
AEROPLANE
Tiger Moth training
HERITAGE RAILWAY
Railways ILLUSTRATED
North Norfolk TRACTOR
COMPUTER SHOPPER
net
WIN MORE PRIZES

The photographs that constitute the series *Undercover* (2013) show a classification and a display of different bodies. Not only the higher shelves, with representations of human bodies and their sexual appeal but the shelving system as a whole, displaying different bodies as objects of desire. Bodies of desire to be penetrated by the eye. The eye is "a phalloid organ able to unfold and erect itself out of its cavity and point towards the visible. The gaze is the erection of the eye" (Clair cited in Solomon-Godeau, 2003, p. 229). The eye becomes an organ of penetration. The word 'consume' here is evocative because it relates to the intensity of the desire to look and its incessant quest always to desire more. The notion of a 'consuming' gaze connotes aspects of a surplus of intensity. To consume something is to devour it. This consuming power does not only relate to the force of the desire to look, but also to the overindulgence of the pleasure in the act of looking. This act of consuming, of consummation, is also punctuated by a pulse, triggered by the act of turning the page, by the desire to see what comes next, creating a rhythm. The act of looking at the photographs in the book demands that I touch it and feel its texture in order to turn the page, at the same moment that it gives me images of bodies as objects of desire reinforcing the idea of "look but do not touch", a refusal of satiety.

See the grey linen hard cover photo book *UNDERCOVER* which accompanies this thesis.

DOORWAY

In this chapter, I analyse my experience of photographing the doorways of sex shops and the function of the plastic strips that hang at the doorway of some of the shops. Informed by the writing of Philippe Dubois, I discuss my decision to frame the doorways in a specific way and elaborate both on the meaning of the frame and also on the meaning of the space that escapes it, the off-frame space. I discuss what gay pornography represents to me from a feminist standpoint and introduce a photographic series entitled *Come Inside Me* (2019).





Page 68: Illustration 8. ‘Photograph #2’, from the series *Come Inside Me* (2019).

Page 69: Illustration 9. ‘Photograph #1, from the series *Come INside Me* (2019).

Photographing magazines shelves in newsagents around London drew my attention to representations of commodified images of sex and led me to look for other places around the city where I could find and photograph them. Taking into consideration the appeal of the decorated shop doorway that seduces the looking subject and also thinking about the allure they exert over the viewer, I decided to photograph doorways of sex shops in London. The doorway of these shops operates in a similar manner to the cover of the magazine. The doorway, like the cover of the magazine, is that which stands in between the viewer and the object of their desire, a form of a symbolic threshold.

The doorway functions as an element that demarcates the difference between what is inside, and in that sense what is included, from what is outside (or beyond, behind) the frame, excluded. I was interested in testing Dubois' assertion that features such as an open doorway are activators of the space beyond or behind the frame.[12] The actual plastic strips that hang at the entrance of most of these shops act as both visual barrier and invitation to enter. They represent a threshold; one is either outside or inside. They may also signify a physical blockage, a barrier to passing through from the outside world to the world of the erotic and vice-versa., but only initially. The threshold affects the subject psychologically as they pass across on the way in as well as on the way out. The moment of passing across this threshold is eroticised, too. The plastic strips that hang at the access to the shops caress the body of the subject as they walk through the doorway. The plastic strips do not necessarily conceal what is inside. They function as a flimsy form of ocular

12 The work of John Stezaker in *Masks (*2008) encapsulates such elements. Stezaker creates collages using black and white portraits from the 1930s as background. He overlays postcards depicting topographical scenes on the face of the sitter, juxtaposing accented geometric shapes such as the circular opening at the end of a tunnel with the sitter's eyes, in order to guide the eye of the viewer towards a space beyond what is represented. This space beyond representation in Stezaker's work suggests elements of secrecy, of what is hidden, of absence, the unconscious mind and death. The absurdist effect is eerie and unpleasant. The removal/substitution of the sitter's eyes for such framing features and the play with framing/deframing echoes notions of fetishism in photography (p. 77). It carries an element of barbarism, reminding me of the covered photograph in Bataille's *The Tears of Eros*. The field of visuality constructed through Stezaker's work also relates to the element of the Lacanian gaze which disrupts the viewing subject in the act of looking exactly because Stezaker's sitters do not 'have eyes'.

obstruction, which is also an instantly recognisable identifier of their nature.

Such plastic strips also allude to a form of a surface due to their thin and malleable materiality which connotes the idea of layers. This reminds me of a quote by Deleuze in which he (1990, p. 125) says that "the surface is the transcendental field itself, and the locus of sense and expression." He says that "sense is that which is formed at the surface" (Deleuze, 1990, p. 124) and adds:

> It is characteristic of the surface that it skims over its own field, impassible and indivisible, much like the thin strips of which Plotinus speaks, when they are of 'fine continuous texture, moisture is observed wetting them right through, and it flows through to the other side' (Deleuze, 1990, p. 124).

'The frame' has several meanings. For example, the rigid structure that surrounds a window, or a door. It can also mean how a concept is contextualised. One can talk about one's frame of mind in order to refer to one's mood. The frame of a person refers to the person's physique, whilst to frame someone means to make someone seen as guilty of some offence. In order to photograph, one must frame what is seen through a device. In photographic practice, the act of framing and the frame itself are unavoidable. The physical construction of a frame added to mount a print functions in a way that protects the photographic paper. The frame affects how one perceives the image (notions of value, of aesthetic taste, of durability) and even a photograph without an added frame will be framed by the finiteness of the photographic paper, its borders.

With photographic practice, I cannot escape the presence of the frame and have ultimately to decide what is left in or out of it, what is included and what is excluded, what is shown or withheld from view. This key element of photographic practice has parallels with notions around the performance of homosexual identity in public life. As an individual, my public life is filled with tasks which I must do, and such tasks are expected to be performed in a specific way according to where I find myself socially or institutionally. I am constantly framed by norms of decorum, and more often than not, aspects of my sexual identity disrupt such assumptions.

Another relevant aspect of photographic practice that relates to my personal life is that photography is a medium that functions through the operation of exposure. When I press the shutter release button, I must decide for how long I will expose the sensor inside the camera so that it can register what it is exposed to. The idea of exposure also relates to making something known, to bringing something to light. To expose is to reveal something, perhaps a secret or something private, something embarrassing, possibly detrimental. Exposure has connotations of vulnerability, of shame, of guilt, and it is a concept that often operates through being made visible. It functions both through looking and through being looked at. It relates to privacy on the one hand and the public on the other. When something or someone is exposed, it becomes a 'public display'.

French theorist Philippe Dubois discusses the concept of the frame in the field of photographic practice (1994). He discusses the frame in terms of space and in terms of signs such as doors or windows, which end up re-framing the borders of the photograph. He elaborates the idea that such apertures operate as elements that come to characterise a different type of space in relation to the photographic frame. He names these spaces "off-frame spaces" (1984). These are re-framed spaces represented inside the actual borders of the photograph that take the viewer to a space 'beyond' what is represented. This subcategory is defined as "the off-frame space by escape" (Dubois, 1994, p. 192). Such spaces function in a straightforward way in relation to one another, forming a "contiguous space" on "the referential plane" (Dubois, 1994, p. 192). The space off-frame and its relation to what is represented inside the rectangle of paper is brought by way of this sign right to the centre of the picture, placing the sense of escape in the "diegetic depth of the enunciated" and this escape has an effect of suspense and surreal restlessness (Dubois, 1994, p. 192). The 'off-frame space' is not restricted only to that which escapes the border of the photographic paper as it can also be located within the representational space of the photograph, just out of sight. For example, my photographs of doors of sex shops which through their framing call forth the space inside, the shop.





Page 74: Illustration 10. ‘Photograph #6’, from the series *Come Inside Me* (2019).
Page 75: Illustration 11. ‘Photograph #5’, from the series *Come Inside Me* (2019.
Page 81: Illustration 12. ‘Photograph #9’, from the series *Come Inside Me* (2019).

Christian Metz links the play with framing and de-framing in photographic practice to the idea of fetishism[13] as defined by Freud (1985). For Freud (1991b), fetishism emerges with the fear the little boy experiences upon realising the mother's penis has been castrated. Facing this drama, the little boy takes the fetish object as a form of disavowal of this lack, substituting the mother's absent penis with the fetish object (Freud, 1991b). Freud says that "the foot or shoe owes its preference as a fetish […] to the circumstance that the inquisitive boy peered at the woman's genitals from below" and gives other examples of fetish objects such as fur and velvet as a consequence of the sight of pubic hair and pieces of underwear which emphasise the moment of undressing (1991b, p. 354). According to this idea, fetishism as an activity can be understood as the act of focusing one's sight on a specific part (the foot) detached from the whole (the body of the mother). Photography can be understood as a fetishistic practice because it focuses on specific parts through the act of framing, and detaches it from the whole. Therefore, framing can be understood as fetishising. Through this fetishising, the photograph is brought into play as an object which stands in for something else.

To talk about the photographic frame is to talk about the finiteness of the pictorial space and the space contained within it. It is also to—necessarily—discuss what is excluded given this very finiteness and what is left out of the frame of the photograph. Through framing, and consequently and concurrently through deframing, the opposition between the two extremes of inside and outside represents less of a separation. It becomes more akin to a paralleling of the constituent elements of the photograph. What is outside the frame, therefore excluded and expelled by the borders of the photograph, is the very condition under which the idea of framing can be conceptualised at all. What is outside the photographic frame is always and already in operation when I look inside it.

Metz (1985) links Freud's theory of fetishism and the sense of absence and

13 The term fetishism was first defined as the venerating or adoring of an object that represented and was the substitute for an authentic, original object (Buchwald & Josefowicz, 2010). Krafft-Ebing (2011) established the notion of fetishism in terms of a sexual perversion where excitement is dependent upon an object, the inanimate fetish object.

anxiety that characterises it, to the act of framing in photography and its interplay with the frame, that both includes and excludes at the same time. However, in Metz's text, the off-frame space becomes relevant because it is elevated from its literal meaning. Metz introduces a new concept of what to 'be off-frame' signifies in pictorial terms. Metz argues that the viewer, when observing a photograph, does not have practical information about the space off-frame and that the viewer cannot refrain from visualising and fantasising about this space that somehow escapes the borders of the photograph, this emptiness. Metz says that the click of the camera "marks the place of an irreversible absence" (1985, p. 87). According to Metz (1985, p. 87), the space off-frame is "'excluded' […] yet nevertheless present, striking, properly fascinating (or hypnotic) — insisting on its status *as excluded* by the force of its absence *inside* the rectangle of paper, which calls forth the feeling of lack in the Freudian theory of the fetish" [Author's italics].

Whilst many of us, even with our diverse backgrounds and places of origin, would be able to recognise the coloured strips as a sign that stands for and represents sex shops or a kitschy idea of sleaze in general (sex shops in Brazil, for example, operate in the same way), this fact cannot be taken for granted; a passer-by might not necessarily know what the coloured strips connote. This touches on one of Pierce's properties of the sign—the symbol—which represents by general convention (Lefebvre, 2007).

The doorways of the sex shops are also symbolic because they characterise the way in, but they also constitute the way out. How is the experience of the person who enters the sex shop marked by the moment he or she comes out and faces the world again? What does the doorway mean to the one who leaves after having been inside and seen? Bachelard (1994, p. 222) expounds on the symbolism of doors. He associates doors with "desires and temptations: the temptation to open up the ultimate depths of being, and the desire to conquer all reticent beings". He talks about "how concrete everything becomes in the world of the spirit when an object, a mere door, can give images of hesitation, temptation, desire, security, welcome and respect" (Bachelard, 1994, p. 224).

He elaborates on the elements that constitute such symbolism by stating that "if one were to give an account of all the doors one has closed and opened, of all the doors one would like to re-open, one would have to tell the story of one's entire life" (Bachelard, 1994, p. 224). Bachelard asks: "[I]s he who opens a door and he who closes it the same being?" (1994, p. 224) He adds: "And then, onto what, toward what, do doors open? Do they open for the world of men, or for the world of solitude?" (Bachelard, 1994, p. 224). I wonder if he who enters the doorway through the coloured plastic strips is the same as he who exits onto the streets. Inside the shop, an element of security and intimacy is established. If it takes a certain degree of boldness and daring to be able to enter a sex shop, face a stranger and interact, asking for this or that product to satisfy one's sexual desires, it takes a lot more to come out onto the streets through the plastic strips. By coming out, one exposes oneself, makes oneself visible and thus vulnerable to the look and judgment of other passers-by.

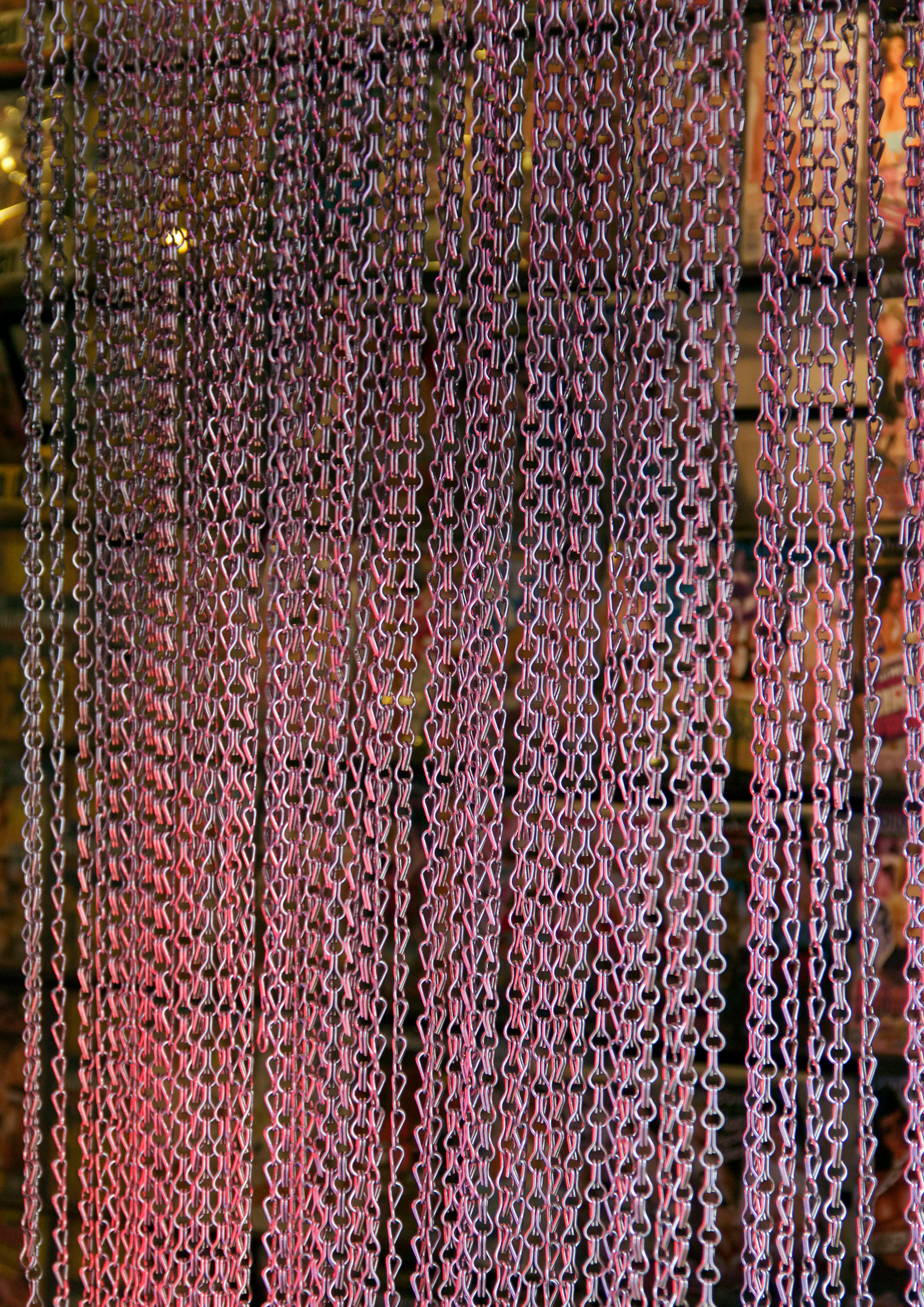
The photographs of the doorways of sex shops draw special attention to the plastic strips as a form of partition, a threshold, because through the act of framing, other architectural elements that constitute the façade of the sex shops are excluded, and the plastic strips are given a more accentuated visibility. Partitions and thresholds suggest notions of boundaries. Thresholds convey the idea of a new beginning, a portal into new territory, a point of departure. A threshold represents an outset. When I am on the threshold of something, I am at the beginning of a significant thing. In the case of the doorways of the sex shops, they also indicate a moment of return to the outside world.

One sex shop around the corner from Walkers Court in Soho was called *E…*. A sign at the door also informed me that it sold gay porn. There, the street was wider, and although the fear of being observed remained, it somewhat abated. I approached it, stood right in front of it and decided to photograph. Suddenly, I found myself being shouted at by a man across the street. He was sitting on the pavement across the road, stood up when he noticed I was photographing and began walking towards me. He kept shouting at me, asking what I thought I was

doing. Surprised and shaken, with a mix of horror and embarrassment, fearing for my safety, I apologised and walked away. A strong feeling of vulnerability (again accompanied by shame and guilt) arose. I felt exposed. Unconsciously, I had already perceived my act of photographing as something forbidden, although it was not, a form of infringement, a feeling brought to light at the moment I felt I had been 'caught out'.

My photographing created a moment of social friction. It raised complex questions with regard to the ethical aspects of photographing in public spaces. This included the assumption that my activity would compromise other people's right to privacy and perhaps the wish to protect business interests. This is evident not only because of the reaction of the man who shouted at me, but also because of my feeling, perhaps even before being shouted at, that my act constituted a form of transgression. The issue here was not one of location as such, as I could have been photographing in the same place, but with my camera pointed towards a different area, quite possibly without being harassed.

Walking away from Walkers Court into Brewer St., I caught myself looking at the entrance of another sex shop. It was called *S…P…*. It seemed to me intriguingly convoluted. Small chains were hanging on the door instead of the usual coloured plastic strips that hung at the entrance of this sort of establishment. The chains hanging at the entrance of the shop draw attention to the force of the image when it arrests the look. They act as a magnetic force of attraction that hooks onto and locks the look as if the looking subject is always chained to their desires. They also recalled sex slings which hang from the ceiling in sex clubs and bathhouses and are held up by chains, in order to facilitate sexual intercourse. The chains suggest the idea of bondage, which has a double meaning. In this respect, the photograph calls forth aspects of subjection and exploitation in relation to the pornographic industry. But also, bondage can signify the practice of having myself restrained for my sexual gratification, which suggests the opposite of enslavement and coercion. The red light suggests the force of sensual passions, of a voluptuous gratification of the senses. The repetition of the metalic rings in this image gives a restless visual agitation when compared to the colour of the plastic strips, which excite the eye.



Speaking as a gay man, gay pornography represents to me a life fantastic. As I see it, it stands for a form of fantasy, sexual pleasure in a life without doom, or death, or HIV, or fear, or guilt, or shame. Gay pornography is a celebration of sex and of being human. Gay sex also shares similarities with the act of taking a photograph; it is a pleasurable act in itself, gratuitous and with no purpose other than the attainment of pleasure. Watney (1997, p. 76) says that "porn tells us that sexuality is great, and, in the age of AIDS, that's a particularly important message to hear." As much as my generation is too young to have experienced the catastrophic outbreak of HIV, it was also the first generation to come into a world in which sexuality was experienced as a double-edged sword: back then, the rectum could also be a grave.[14]

Come Inside Me (2019)

There are three pieces in this body of work. One of them is constituted by eight photographs (42cm x 29.7cm each) assembled as panorama for exhibition installation (pp. 86, 87, 89). Two are single photographs (84.1cm x 59.4cm each, illustration 12, p. 81, depicts one of them). The panoramana installation measures 2.37m in length. The idea to exhibit these eight photographs in this specific way emerged when experimenting with curatorial possibilities for the architectural space where my exhibition took place. When the photographs are looked at one by one, in order, it is apparent that they vary slightly in their composition, gradually revealing elements of the spaces inside the shops.

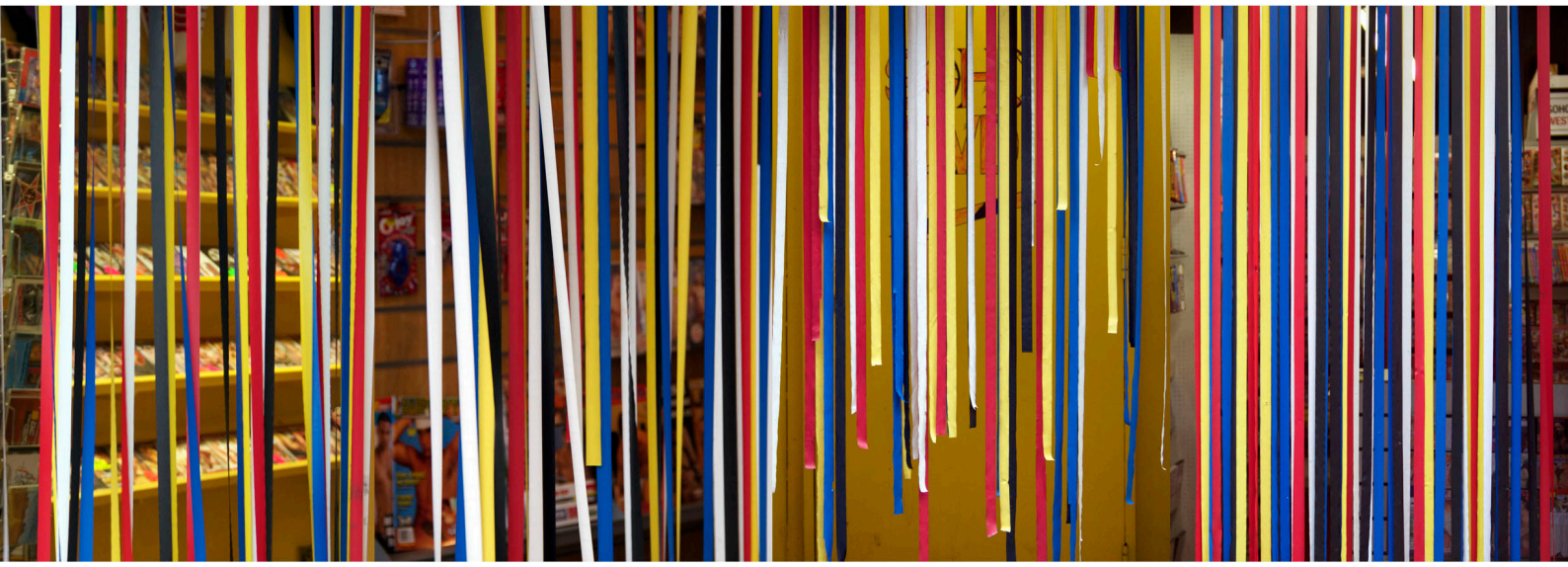
When looking at the photographs in the panorama installation, my desire to look is called upon: my eyes immediately look in between the coloured strips that seem to move in the photograph because of the wind that blows against them. In yet another, there is a hint of movement, a curious flow, perhaps someone had passed through this door seconds before the photograph was taken. There is also a softness implied by the strips appearing to be disturbed and in movement.

14 This is a reference to Bersani's *Is The Rectum a Grave?* (2010).

I think of Dubois's sense of escape, and I can see where my look escapes to. The space represented in between the plastic strips functions as an escape for my look that insists on looking further, on penetrating, passing through the coloured strips, searching for gratification.

These photographs demand the mobility of the viewer in order to be appreciated. They gradually reveal more and more (like in a strip-tease), the viewer is gradually given more details to visualise. Were the photographs displayed in a space where the viewer encountered them from a distance and was able to see the totality of the work immediately, this element of secrecy that meddles with elements of disclosure would be lost. In some of the photographs, the plastic strips run down the image, standing rigidly right next to each other to form a door that blocks the view. The spectator is given nothing to see but the colourful strips that cross the photograph. One of them is punctuated by the colour red that starts on the left side with a thicker strip (the frame of the door) and follows the direction in which our eyes naturally scan the image, from left to right (p. 68). Together with the white and yellow strips, they stand out. The darker colours (blue, green and black) together form a sort of gap between the more vibrant colours that dictate the rhythm of this composition. It is important to note that the photographs were all taken facing the doorway from the outside and not from inside the shops, focusing on the idea that positioning the camera's point of view towards the threshold, my eyes are 'on to something'.

Page 86 and 87: Illustration 13. From left to right, 'Photograph #8', 'Photograph #7', 'Photograph #6', 'Photograph #5', 'Photograph #4', 'Photograph #3', 'Photograph #2', 'Photograph #1', from the series *Come Inside Me* (2019)



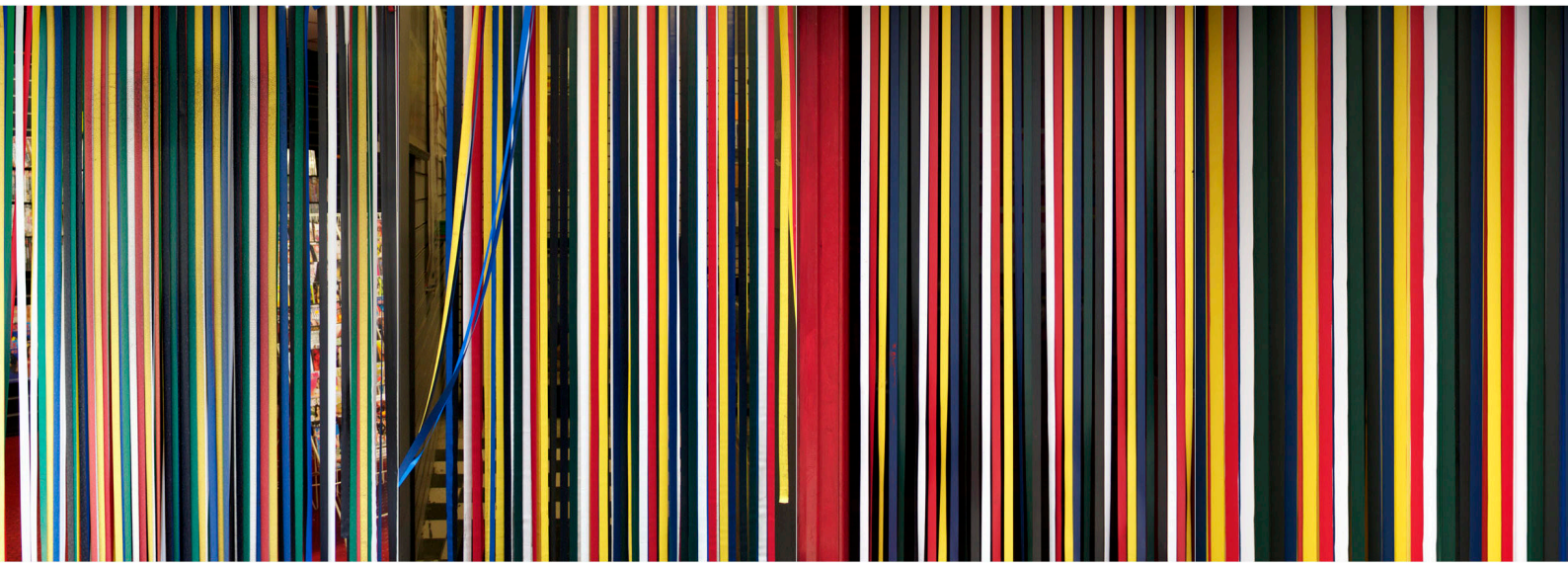




Illustration 14. View of *Come Inside Me* (2019) series assembled as panorama for the **Out of Sight** exhibition installation.

Page 90: Illustration 15. ‘Photograph 8’, from the series *Come Inside Me* (2019).



The second photograph in the panorama installation (p. 77, from left to right) shows a lot more of the inside of the sex shops than the previous ones. In trying to make their way through this image, looking beyond and in between the plastic strips represented in the photograph, the viewer can just about make out some of the elements that constitute the image —a lubricant used for sexual intercourse in one part, something that resembles a sex toy in another. My eyes move further down towards the bottom of one of the images. There, it finds a male figure awaiting my look with open arms, and it is there that my desire is called upon.

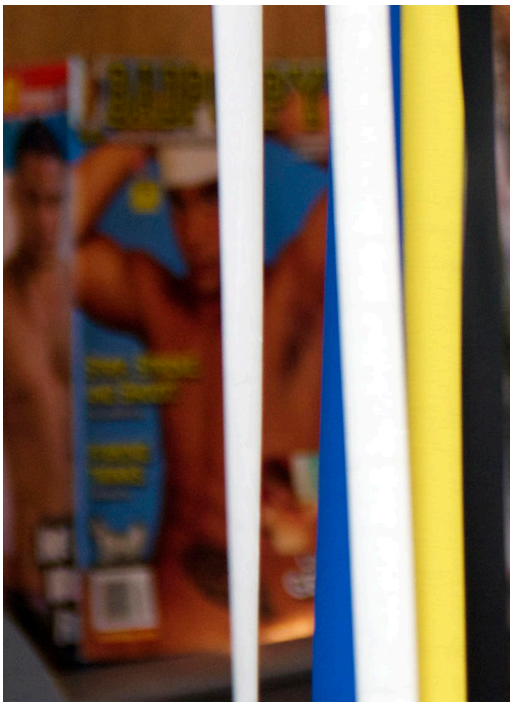


Illustration 16. Detail of 'Photograph #7' from *Come Inside Me* (2019).
This is a partial reproduction of the image for the purposes of illustration of the thesis.

Through the photograph, the plastic strips that were initially hung across to block my view when I look, here serve to tease my senses through the eye. The eye/I that surrenders to the photograph keeps seeing and looking through the frame of my desire, beyond the surface, the threshold—of the photograph—a desire that wants to keep looking and seeing more, an insisting desire that longs and longs for more of the image, a desire that through 'the off-frame', insists on its condition as desirous, a desire that only wants to look inside the frame and reach beyond it in order to desire again.

FAÇADE

Photographing doorways of sex shops in London led me to expand my area of focus and consider 'the façade' of sites of encounter; social sites where sexual encounters take place such as gay bathhouses and sex clubs. In light of the Greek etymology of the term obscene and its link to what was performed behind closed curtains, I considered the relation between the façade or surface and what lies behind.

In this chapter, I consider the experience of photographing the grey façade of a specific bathhouse and explore the meanings associated with the colour grey in relation to photography. I consider the façade and compare it to the idea of surface, a key aspect of photography. I turn to Deleuze's conceptualisation of the surface as a transcendental field and articulate the recognition of the materiality of the photograph and the image represented on it. The surface of the photographic paper becomes a crucial aspect of this discussion. I consider the idea of haptic visuality and the identification of the eye as an organ of touch, an organ that takes pleasure in scanning the surface of the image.

After the Walker's Court incident, in which I was shouted at by the man on the other side of the road, I began to think about being seen photographing the coloured strips which are a recognisable indicator of a sex shop. I began to wonder what would happen if I was seen photographing other places which quite possibly would not be recognised by the regular passer-by as anything out of the ordinary, such as sex clubs and gay saunas. A lot of these places do not stand out or bear any signs that give away their identity in any explicit manner to the person in the street. I decided to consider not just the doorway but the entire façade of these locations. I began to think about the meaning of the façade in the context of my research. The word façade comes from the Latin (*facia*), meaning 'face'. After the inception of the term in the 1650s, it went on to be used in French (*façade*) and also Italian (*facciata*), meaning 'the front of a building' in both languages (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2020). Its metaphorical use took place around 1850, when it began to be used to refer "to a way of behaving or appearing that gives other people a false idea of [one's] true feelings or situation" (Merrian-Webster, 2020).

My exploration led me to identify sites in London known by the gay community for being places where sexual activity takes place. I intended to explore the concept of the façade by photographing the exterior architecture of these sites. In contrast to the sex shops in Soho, which have a visible signifier that is culturally specific but recognisable and which indicate their nature more clearly, some of these locations bore neutral façades and did not stand out from the neighbouring businesses. Some had more explicit signs that might spark curiosity or recognition such as the rainbow flag. Some of them were invisible to the outsider who passed by on the street: no signs, no names, a simple household door in the middle of a busy road.

I found these sites by researching free periodicals from gay bars in the London area. Some of these locations were familiar to me personally. The areas in which these places were located varied greatly. Some areas were much busier and located in more central areas than others where a more suburban atmosphere prevailed. One of these places, in central London, had large dark see-through windows, and I noticed passers-by asking each other what sort of place it could

be. Another had metal safety bars outside a regular wooden door; this stood out as none of the adjacent businesses appeared to employ enhanced safety measures.

One of the places I photographed was a spa located in North London. Its entrance was situated off the main road and its façade was grey (a reticent colour, a 'grey area'). The access to the entrance of the spa was very different from any other location I had visited. It was at the end of an alleyway that opened onto a small yard, in a communal area. The yard was shared with what appeared to be a contemporary design store, a furniture shop. I felt at ease taking my camera out of my bag there to photograph, thinking I was out of sight of the 'public'. However, without my realising, I was being observed from inside the furniture shop. Just as I was photographing, I spotted a lady looking at me through the shop window. She immediately stopped a conversation she was having with a man inside and rushed outside to speak to me. It felt like a confrontation. She was friendly but firm and rather inquisitive. She asked my reason for photographing 'that', an act that demonstrated her reservations (had she had none she would have asked 'why are you photographing the spa?'); her approach suggested that she had some concern.

Either way, my position facing the spa was interpreted as that of a transgressor by the lady who came out of the shop. To photograph 'in public' today is a highly regulated activity, and the notion of what is 'public' itself is problematic. By photographing 'in public' I mean photographing when exposed to the general view of whoever happens to be present. The issue here was not only one of me standing inside private property without realising and taking photographs without authorisation. The attitude of the lady who spoke to me did not necessarily signal that. Were that the case, she would have informed me immediately. I wonder what would have happened, or if anything would have happened at all, had I simply been looking at the entrance of the spa without my camera. As soon as she finished questioning me, I looked puzzled, feigned ignorance and told her I was an architecture student photographing signage for a project. She felt reassured, and we both laughed. I thanked her for her concern, and we parted ways.

This led me to explore the meaning of 'the façade' further. The word façade

carries elements of deceit; it is characterised as "an outward appearance, sp[ecially] one that creates a false impression" (The University of Oxford Press, 1995, p. 413). Façade is a word that implies or draws attention to, a surface. When I look at the façade of a building, I am 'skimming its surface', and in doing so, I perceive this building as such or such a place. The façade makes me attribute qualities to what lies behind it. Assumptions are activated through the façade. Although not identical, façade and surface share similar elements; the surface is the condition by which the façade exists. The materiality of objects has a surface, and in a sense, a façade too; it calls upon the judgment of my perception when I look at an object. The surface is a form of face that faces me when I look.

The surface, in turn, suggests an element of 'the known', of that which I can fathom because I can see it and master what I can see. The surface appeases the eye. My sight reaches the surface, and there it rests. The notion of the façade appears to address the front and also implies a back or something behind it. It rests on the exterior, on the outside, calling forth the notion of interior or inside. It functions at the central axis of the invisibility vs. visibility dyad because its surface draws the imagination towards its hidden depths and its mysteries. I could say I maintain a façade of interest towards an object regardless of my true feelings for it. The surface is "the outward appearance of a person or a thing, contrasted with feelings, qualities, […] which may not be seen at first" (The University of Oxford Press, 1995, p. 1020). Surfaces emit signs and make visible. Deleuze (1990, p. 125) says that "the surface is the transcendental field itself, and the locus of sense and expression." He says that "sense is that which is formed at the surface" (Deleuze, 1990, p. 124).

The surface is the site of harmony and orderliness as opposed to that of chaos and confusion (Deleuze, 1998). In his reading of Lewis Carrol's *Alice in Wonderland,* Deleuze says:

> In Lewis Carroll, everything begins with a horrible combat, the combat of depths: things explode or make us explode, boxes are too small for their contents, foods are toxic and poisonous, entrails are stretched, monsters grab at us. […] Everything in depth is horrible, everything is nonsense. *Alice in Wonderland* was originally to have been entitled *Alice's Adventures Underground* [Author's italics] (Deleuze, 1998, p. 21).

He goes on to explain:

> But why didn't Carroll keep this title? Because Alice progressively conquers surfaces. She rises or returns to the surface. She creates surfaces. Movements of penetration and burying give way to light lateral movements of sliding; the animals of the depths become figures on cards without thickness (Deleuze, 1998, p. 21).

This interpretation of Alice's tale is interesting in the context of this research. I would suggest that what Deleuze is saying is that whenever one is on the surface, a sense of security pervades. Nevertheless, I wonder if it is ever possible to stay on the surface of things. Isn't any interpretation (even a superficial interpretation), already a leaving of the surface and an entering into 'the hidden depths' of whatever one is interpreting? Photographs and the things represented in them have an intrinsic relationship with the 'surface'. In the act of photographing, my camera flattens the depths that exist in the landscape. The outcome of this act, as a photograph, is represented on the surface of the photographic paper.

Barthes (1981, p. 6) discusses the photograph in terms of the invisibility of its surface. He says that "whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see" (Barthes, 1981, p. 6). I agree with Barthes in the sense that when I look at a photograph, I look through the surface. I can't entirely agree with him when he says that it is not the photograph one sees when one looks at it. Of course, Barthes wrote *Camera Lucida* in the context of a photograph of his mother, which brings a heavy emotional load to the argument in connection to the referent represented. Still, when I look at a photograph, my eyes oscillate between an implicit recognition of the photograph as a photograph, and what the image represents, what it tells me about the world that it assumes to represent.

I wonder what the façade of the spa I photographed signifies as a grey surface. The colour grey could be a question of a contemporary aesthetic, or it could also be for self-protection as it merges into a background. The colour grey

could constitute a trace of shame regarding sexual acts that remain in gay culture (Lindell, 1996, p. 80) as a form of neutralising or covering up, as opposed to the vibrant colours of the rainbow that characterise and advertise the gay flag. It could also constitute a camouflage for allegedly illegitimate behaviour such as drug-taking. In this sense, it could suggest the idea of 'maintaining a façade', as there is the possibility that men who are not 'out' in their social circles or who are in heterosexual relationships visit the establishment without drawing attention to themselves. I later found out that the Police had raided this particular spa in 2013 because it was suspected of being in breach of applicable council regulations (Roberts, 2013).

G(r)ay Area (2016)

After the incident with the lady who came out of the shop to speak to me, I began to explore more closely the meaning of the grey façade and its relation to the photograph. I photographed the façades of gay bathhouses and sex clubs methodically, always standing head-on when facing them and photographing them when the scene was devoid of human presence in order not to distract the eye and in order to avoid introducing different potential interpretations.[15] In the early stages of experimentation with the visual material gathered, I printed the images and covered the façade represented in each photograph using a sheet of grey paper to explore the meaning of the expression 'grey area'. Then, I would photograph the result.

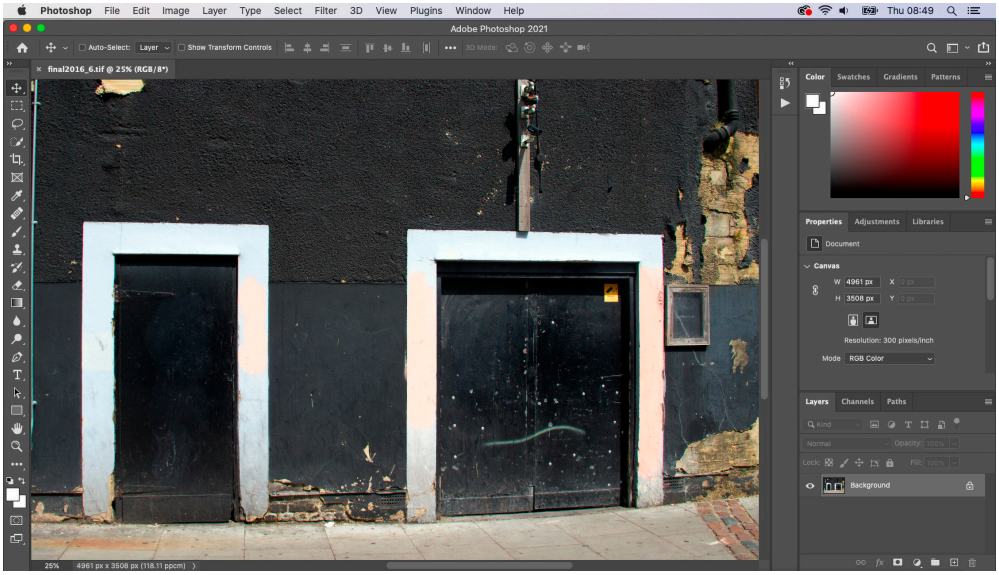
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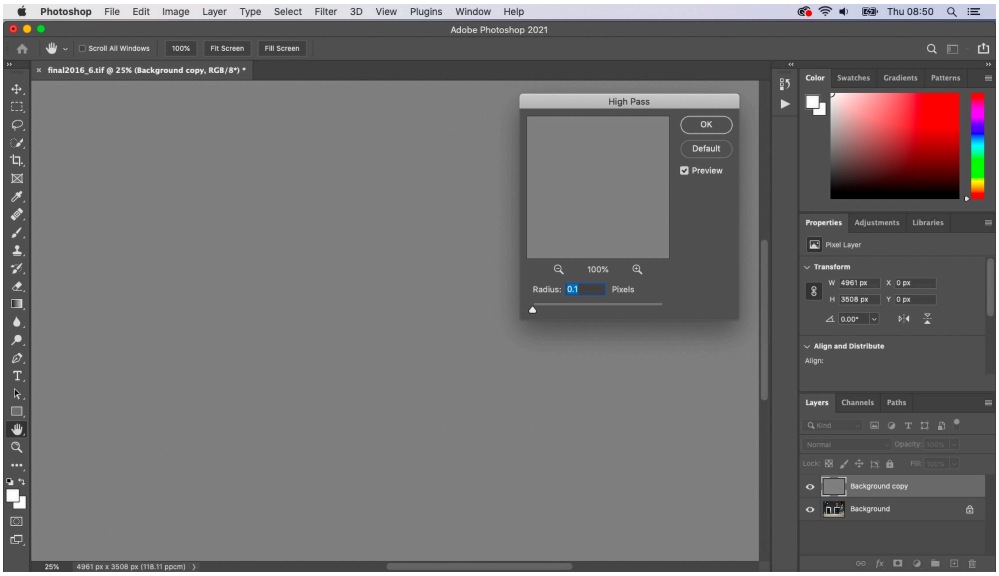
15 American artist Kaucyila Brooke has created an extensive body of work photographing the façades of lesbian bars in Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco and Cologne titled *The Boy Mechanic* (1996–present). Her series of photographs focuses on the relationship between photography, architecture and public memory. Her large-format photographs are exhibited alongside a short film with interviews of ex-bar goers and workers who tell the viewer about their experiences and, at times, take the viewer for a tour inside the filmed location. Brooke says that "focusing on the lesbian bar reveals how sexuality and sexual identity inform larger narratives about public identity and social space" (Brooke, 2020). Brooke's work is a pertinent artistic reference to the idea of how the performance of sexual identity can be understood through the photographic production of social spaces. Her project reminds me of the comment made by Claudia Becker on Vilém Flusser's ideas in which she says: "For Flusser, photography is not only a reproductive imaging technology, it is a dominant cultural technique through which reality is constituted and understood" (Becker, 2011, p. 251).

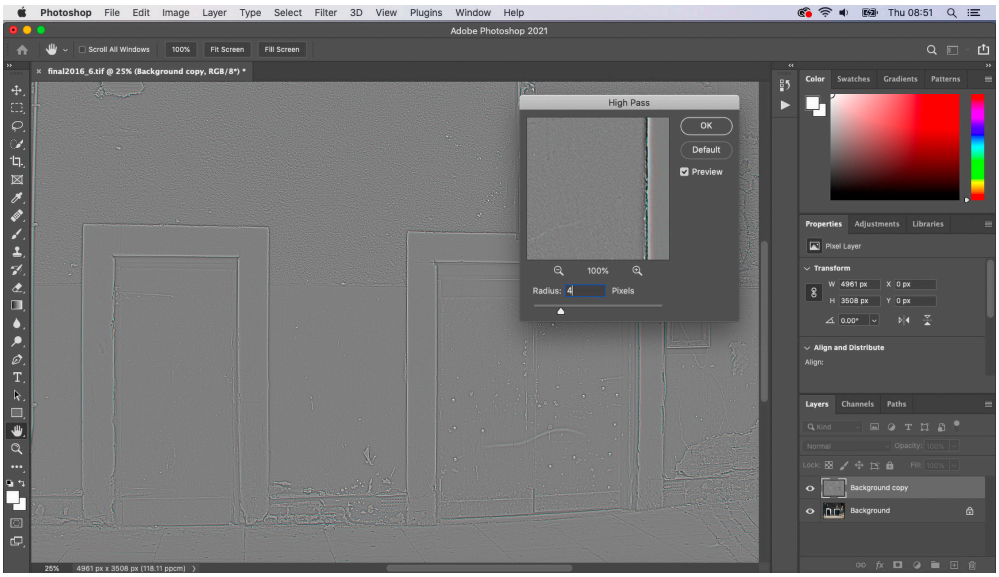
During the process of post-production for one of the original photographs, I paused to consider an image that appeared on my computer screen. This image came about as a consequence of a regular step in my digital workflow, a moment in which I adjust the edges present in the image in order for them to stand out. This step consists of applying a grey layer that covers the entire original image. The grey colour in the layer is not an optional move; grey is the only colour with which one can work for this specific purpose. Once the grey layer is applied, one is able, through a slider that coordinates the radius/pixels, to adjust how much grey remains on top of the original image. By adjusting the slider, the original image under the grey layer starts to emerge (p. 103).

The idea behind this action is to stop the slider as soon as there is any visible trace of the edges present in the photograph. The process is then finalised so that, through a process of overlaying, the grey layer is not visible but emphasises the edges that came into visibility initially and the photograph then depicts much sharper edges. However, my interest focused on the moment that the photograph became a grey area entirely, only allowing traces of visibility to emerge. I stopped at this stage and did not follow through with the sharpening process, allowing the grey layer to take over the image. A flattening of the image occurred as a result of this process. The image lost a significant amount of its depth compared to its original version before the grey layer was applied, inviting the eye to stay on the surface of the photograph.

Page 103. Illustration 17-19. Screen shots of post-production process demonstrating adjustment of radius/pixels and the effect is has on the image.


Photoshop File Edit Image Layer Type Select Filter 3D View Plugins Window Help
Thu 08:49
Adobe Photoshop 2021
final2016_6.tif @ 25% (RGB/8*)
Color Swatches Gradients Patterns
Properties Adjustments Libraries
Document
Canvas
W 4961 px
H 3508 px
Resolution: 300 pixels/inch
Mode RGB Color
Layers Channels Paths
Background
25% 4961 px x 3508 px (118.11 ppcm)


Photoshop File Edit Image Layer Type Select Filter 3D View Plugins Window Help
Thu 08:50
Adobe Photoshop 2021
Scroll All Windows 100% Fit Screen Fill Screen
final2016_6.tif @ 25% (Background copy, RGB/8*) *
High Pass
OK
Default
Preview
100%
Radius: 0.1 Pixels
Color Swatches Gradients Patterns
Properties Adjustments Libraries
Pixel Layer
Transform
W 4961 px
H 3508 px
Align and Distribute
Layers Channels Paths
Background copy
Background
25% 4961 px x 3508 px (118.11 ppcm)


Photoshop File Edit Image Layer Type Select Filter 3D View Plugins Window Help
Thu 08:51
Adobe Photoshop 2021
Scroll All Windows 100% Fit Screen Fill Screen
final2016_6.tif @ 25% (Background copy, RGB/8*) *
High Pass
OK
Default
Preview
100%
Radius: 4 Pixels
Color Swatches Gradients Patterns
Properties Adjustments Libraries
Pixel Layer
Transform
W 4961 px
H 3508 px
Align and Distribute
Layers Channels Paths
Background copy
Background
25% 4961 px x 3508 px (118.11 ppcm)

The series *G(r)ay Area* (2016) is made up of 18 prints measuring 59.4cm x 84.1cm (illustration 20). The surface of the printed paper became a crucial aspect of the series of photographs I produced as a result of this exploration. I usually print my photographs as C-Type prints on matt paper because this finish allows better visibility of detail and contrast in darker areas and avoids unnecessary reflection, which is a feature of papers with a shiny surface. For this series, I printed the photographs as Giclée prints onto Hahnemühle German Etching Paper. This paper has a distinctive surface that stands out if compared to the regular C-Type photograph printed on matt or glossy paper. It has more character and a notable cotton rag structure and texture. When looking at the image, the raised surface texture graze the eye thus accentuating the physicality of the surface and giving the eye a 'hook' to hold on to. The tactility of the paper invites the viewer metaphorically to touch it with the eye.



Illustration 20. Installation of 'G(r)ay Area' photographs.

The eye can be defined as an organ of touch (Marks, 2000). Marks proposes the notion of haptic visuality, in contrast to optical visuality, in order to suggest a new kind of relationship between the viewer and the image. Haptic looking occurs when one's eyes lose themselves on the surface of the image, without discerning forms in deep space (Marks, 2000). Haptic images "invite a look that moves on the surface plane of the screen for some time before the viewer realises what she or he is beholding" and "such images resolve into figuration only gradually, if at all" (Marks, 2000, p. 163). The eyes have pleasure in scanning the surface of the image. In this form of tactility, the look is a touching one and caresses the surface of the image.

The term haptic comes "from the Greek verb *aptô* (to touch), [and] does not designate an *extrinsic* relation of the eye to the sense of touch, but a 'possibility of seeing (regard)', a type of vision distinct from the optical" [Author's italics] (Deleuze, 2003, p. 189). This suggests that this possibility of seeing, because it is not optical and therefore does not simply relate to the physical operation of vision, is constructed by social elements and is characterised by a more intimate relationship between spectator and image (what constitutes visuality). Vision has qualities of a collective sense (when two people look at the same element, e.g. water in a glass, it is assumed that both see this element; they share this visual information), whilst touch is personal (only the person who puts their finger into the water will feel the temperature of the water).

Haptic looking relies not so much on what is looked at but on the spectator's look. Haptic visuality plays out in the vicinity of eroticism, and therefore, of desire (Marks, 2000). Marks says that "regardless of their content, haptic images are erotic in that they construct an intersubjective relationship between beholder and image" (Marks, 2000, p. 183). Haptics "move eroticism from the site of what is represented to the surface of the image" (Marks, 2000, p. 185). She says that "a film or video (or painting or photograph) may offer haptic images, while the term haptic *visuality* emphasises the viewer's inclination to perceive them" [Author's italics] (Marks, 2000, p. 162).

Through the addition of the grey layer, the photograph itself becomes the

grey area, thus establishing a solid relationship between the grey colour, the physical space of the printed paper and its referent. The photograph refers to its status as a 'grey area' in relation to what is represented, indicating an element of uncertainty and doubt with regard to the visibility of what is represented on the surface. Is the façade of the spa visible as such to the person who looks at it in the street? Should this knowledge be exposed through the photograph, through the representation of the façade? The idea of secrecy, in this context, can be understood as a possibility of a form of resistance.

The final photographs have a graphic element to them, due to the outlining of the edges in the image that stands out from the grey background. This quality makes it challenging for the viewer to distinguish what they are looking at when they first look at the photograph. At first glance, the photograph simply looks like grey photographic paper. Upon closer inspection, when the eyes begin to scan every centimetre of the photograph, looking for any traces or hints of what they could be looking at, in a forensic scrutiny, they begin to see details in the form of graphic lines, standing out from the grey background.



Illustration 21. Detail of photograph 'G(r)ay Area #8', from series *G(r)ay Area* (2016). This is a partial reproduction of the image for the purpose of illustration in the thesis. Digitally, this illustration is best viewed at higher magnification, such as 300%.


Roman Spa


Roman Spa
SECURITY NOTICE
CCTV
in operation
Roman Spa

Page 108 and 109: Illustration 22. ‘G(r)ay Area #8’ from the series *G(r)ay Area* (2016). Digitally, this illustration is best viewed at higher magnification, such as 300%.

Curiously enough, there is a certain kind of desire not to see much of the image behind this layer. In sharp contrast to the depth that teases so much in the photographs of the doorways of the sex shops, here, the eyes rest on the surface of the image. I am conscious of how the degree of information which is apparent leads to interpretation. These photographs activate different levels of meaning and signification with regard to invisibility and secrecy depending on the knowledge of the viewer about the existence and meaning of their referent. They invite the unaware viewer to stay on the surface (even if they look more closely, only knowledge of what takes place beneath will activate other meanings). My eyes switch from capturing any visual information that may stand out from the image to registering the distinct textured surface that constitutes the materiality of the photographic paper.

I included two photographs from this series in the exhibition **Out of Sight** (p. 104). There was a curious disparity in terms of how the audience perceived the photographs. Some viewers walked past them, oblivious to the fact that there was more detail available to a more engaged eye. One viewer told me that it was not imaginative to call a photograph 'g(r)ay area' and print a grey piece of photographic paper. In a conversation with another viewer, he eventually found out what was represented and, looking very closely, realised the graphic elements of the photograph. He later told me that these were the photographs he engaged the most within the show because he felt compelled to keep looking until he had scanned the entire space of the photographic paper.

Another viewer gave me the exact location of one of the bathhouses represented in one of the photographs and asked me to confirm if that was what he was looking at. He told me that the location was on his way to work and that he passed by it every day. He asked me why I thought it was interesting to photograph that location (unaware of its existence as a gay bathhouse, as I found out through our conversation). This indicates that even bathhouses with more prominent façades (as in the case of the locations depicted in a photograph) are not necessarily perceived to front the kind of business they are by the person who passes by on the street. I had a few discussions with viewers during the exhibition who did not know that 'gay

bathhouses' exist. They believed that these locations were places where one would go for health reasons. Historically, bathhouses were firstly introduced in London in order for men to be able to shower (Houlbrook, 2005).

The photographic series *G(r)ay Area* (2016) operates on a somewhat different register than the earlier photographic pieces of this research. Whilst the public seemed curious to know what each image represented, what stood out was that this was a moment in which the act of looking itself became centre stage; in the act of intense scrutiny, the viewer was brought very close to the surface. An eroticised form of looking in which the surface of the paper, rather than what is represented, comes into play to arrest the eye that, in an act of surrender, scans each centimetre of the image.

I realised that I had assumed a certain type of knowledge about the existence of gay bathhouses on the part of the viewer (although one of the viewers recognised one of the bathhouses in the photograph as referent, he did not know what it operated as despite its signage). This made me wonder about the position which I had until then taken in order to photograph such architectural spaces: an outsider. It led me to question how or indeed if it would at all be possible to represent through photography what takes place inside the bathhouse, what remains out of sight when I look at it from the outside.

TOWEL

The realisation that my position had always been that of one who looks from the outside led me to take the decision to visit a gay bathhouse in London, to cross the threshold and make my way in. The decision to enter the bathhouse initiated a significant phase in my research because it led me to analyse the relationship between photography and notions of pleasure, privacy, exposure, and how ethics, morality, laws, regulations, and taboos affect photographic practice.

This section is also significant because it is through the practice presented here that I draw on the notion of the phallus, according to Lacan. In this chapter, I discuss how the phallus and the obscene, according to the Greek definition of the term, intertwine. I consider the phallus as the signifier *par excellence*—the only signifier of desire. The idea of the 'cover' with which I began the first chapter of this research here takes a more complex and symbolic turn. My understanding of the 'out of sight' in photography moves towards the question of the impossibility of representation of desire through photographic practice.

I visited a gay bathhouse. Inside the bathhouse, I am not allowed to wear my clothes. I am only permitted to wear a white towel; a towel that covers my sex. The towel is usually given by the establishment to patrons when they enter. Because I am not allowed to wear my clothes, attending a bathhouse provides the opportunity for me to step outside sartorial social identifications temporarily. Inside a bathhouse, there are no indications of my tastes, class, or any other social denominator. Judgements based on any public persona or social positions are eliminated. By visiting this bathhouse, I was particularly interested in how many of the visible signifiers of identity are reduced to the white towel, which in the act of covering, also draws attention to what is beneath. I wondered if anyone I knew was here. It would have ruined my experiment because, for this visit, I used a concealed image-capturing device. I intended to see and record without being seen. The device recorded sound and moving images.

After paying the entrance fee, I was handed my white towel and also a locker key. The entrance hall led directly to the locker room, a bright white area where I was to leave my belongings and put my white towel on. I entered the space, got a locker in a corner to be more discreet and started taking my clothes off, piece by piece.[16] As I placed them in the locker, together with the rest of my belongings, including my identity documents, I felt like parts of myself were being removed. This was not the same as if I was taking my clothes off at home to have a shower or to go to bed. In the bathhouse, the removal of certain aspects of my identity was the condition on which I was allowed to reveal myself publicly to the gaze of others. It was also the

16 The installation *Do You Care, We Do* (2017) by British artist Prem Sahib consists of found lockers removed from the gay bathhouse *Chariots*, in Shoreditch, London (Sahib, 2017). The lockers had been disposed of when the establishment closed its doors in 2016. Sahib exhibited the installation at Kunstverein Gallery in Hamburg in 2017 and TATE has since bought it for their permanent collection. In this installation, all lockers are exhibited open; one can see packets of condoms inside left by customers, stickers with erotic images, political messages and ads for rental companies. Such traces suggest the absence of the desiring body. In that respect, the installation addresses the issue of desire and visibility but in terms of the disappearance of 'queer' spaces in contemporary London which has been taking place because of gentrification. The exhibition *Queer Spaces: London, 1980s – Today* that took place at the Whitechapel Gallery in 2019 focused on this issue (Whitechapel, 2019).

condition on which I was allowed to look.

The wearing of the white towel in the bathhouse carries elements of anonymity. This is not to say that the white towel allows whoever wears it to become anonymous *per se*, or that by wearing the white towel I am able to step outside and escape evaluations, such as ones based upon aesthetic appearance that take place amongst patrons inside the bathhouse. Aesthetic judgements based on one's body shape, or race, for example, are likely to occur and because of the lack of immediate social or economic visual signifiers, be even more intensified. Bersani (2010, p. 12) says:

> Your looks, muscles, hair distribution, size of cock, and shape of ass [determine] exactly how happy you [are] going to be during those few hours, and rejection, generally accompanied by two or three words at most, could be swift and brutal, with none of the civilizing hypocrisies with which we get rid of undesirables in the outside world.

As crude as social relations might turn out to be inside gay saunas, however, even Bersani himself sees the benefits of the experience of visiting the bathhouse, of wearing the white towel and of engaging in sexual activities with strangers (2010). This is the case because such experiences allow me to leave certain—and significant—aspects of myself behind when I am in the bathhouse (Bersani, 2010). The wearing of the white towel, because of its lack of economic or social visual signifiers, allows the emancipation of the subject to take place for as long as he wears it because he is not tied to the status indicators which exist on the 'outside'. Of the white towel, Bersani (2010, p. 60) says that "in addition to the opportunity anonymous sex offers its practitioners of shedding much of the personality that individuates them psychologically, […] [the white towel] communicates very little […] about our social personality". The wearing of the white towel opens up a new prospect of sociality, at least one not based on social or economic factors. This process subverts notions of subjection that would normally take place when I look at others as well as when I am looked at outside the bathhouse in the social sphere. Of course, there is the possibility that other patrons inside the bathhouse might

recognise me from somewhere else or that I might come across someone I know by chance. But more often than not, I am unknown to the vast majority of patrons inside the bathhouse and so too are they to me. By wearing the white towel and displaying elements of non-identity due to the reduction of signifiers that might indicate who I am, I am momentarily free from the judgment of others and also free myself from my judgements of myself and others. Aspects of anonymity and non-identity suggest elements of inconspicuousness and invisibility that take place inside the bathhouse through the wearing of the white towel.

The men inside the bathhouse passed by me, talked to each other, looked around, had sex with each other, all accompanied by the white towel. The wearing of the towel is compulsory; no one is allowed to wander around naked. The towel operated as an item that through its folding, hid the male body, at the same time as exalting it through the look. Of course, some wore their towel quite differently to others. Some wore it all the way down below the knee. Others folded the towel in half and wore it as if it were a mini skirt. Some were very neatly tucked in. Some were lopsided and about to fall.

There was a corridor with black and white photographs of handsome men showing off their muscular bodies on the wall. I wondered if anyone stopped there to look at them. I spent most of the time during my visit in this particular area, looking, with arms akimbo, observing the comings and goings of men in white towels. The atmosphere was that of a nightclub. Sometimes the corridor was devoid of human presence; at times, one or more men passed by. When the men passed under a certain red spotlight in the ceiling, coming into visibility for a couple of seconds, their bodies seemed to be on fire, bursting with heat. As a voyeur, I felt disconcerted when I was acknowledged. Some of the men returned my look, and one of them spoke to me. He asked how I was, and I replied that I was fine, without any further indication that I would like to begin a conversation. There, I was both available and unavailable at the same time. I wonder if this unavailability was conveyed to others and whether, at the same time, my desire for the male body was intertwined with it. In essence, I became a voyeur, making myself unavailable through my donning of

the image-capturing device, 'clothing' myself and removing myself from exposure. After a couple of hours inside, I decided it was time to leave. I left the bathhouse, and once outside in the street, I turned the device off.[17]

Due to ethical concerns, the recordings from inside the bathhouse were disposed of. The activity of working secretly was considered unethical by the University, seen as a breach of privacy of others inside the bathhouse. The ethical issue is intricate because it points to questions regarding who has the right to look, freedom of speech and the practice of ethics, which does not concern morals and has no simple solutions. It also shows how regulated, problematic and powerful the act of photographing in the presence of others without their knowledge or permission is today and how quickly laws regarding this act have changed as a result of events that shape our culture, for example, 9/11.[18] The advent of smartphones is another example of how attitudes change towards having photographs taken publicly. This event led me to rethink my act of photographing as a pleasurable act in the face of 'the public' exactly because it was not done 'publicly'. The notions of pleasure, privacy, exposure and 'public' in this context became highly problematic and seemed even more tied to laws, regulations and taboos. It emphasised the element of removal implied in the 'taking' of a photograph, as a form of exploitation.

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17 Polish artist Kataryna Kozyra entered a male bathhouse in Budapest in 1999 disguised as a man. She wore fake chest hair, makeup and towels in such a way as to gain access and not be noticed. She used a hidden camera to record the experience and created the video installation *Men's Bathhouse* (1999) (O'Reilly, 2009). She had also visited a female bathhouse previously and recorded the women in the bathhouse bathing without their consent. According to Kozyra, she intended to show how people behave when they are 'acting natural' (Polish Pavillion in Venice, 1999). Ethical considerations aside (her not having permission to use a video recording device inside the establishment and later exhibit the footage), I wonder what would constitute 'to act natural' in such circumstances. How would it be ever possible for the artist to know the real intention of the bathhouse goer? In the context of the male bathhouse, I wonder if anyone in her video recordings were gay and visited the bathhouse as a way to look / show the male body without being noticed. It also leads me to ask about her own desire to look at the male body without being seen as female.

18 The guiding principles of the *UAL Code of Practice on Research Ethics* are respect for persons, justice and beneficence. It considers the assessment of risk, academic integrity, informed consent, respect for privacy and also confidentiality. My intention in carrying the recording device inside the bathhouse was not to expose the identity of other sauna goers. That would be contrary to the element of ambiguity that lies at the heart of my research.

Brought to the fore through the white towel, that exalted the male body but also hid its nakedness, the relationship between pleasure and its regulation re-emerged. It led me to consider the wearing of the white towel in the bathhouse as intrinsically linked to the idea of nakedness and its prohibition. Although the bathhouse can be seen as a place for sexual freedom, nakedness is not allowed apart from in designated areas. Nakedness conveys the idea of deprivation, of dispossession and of vulnerability. Approaches to nakedness vary culturally, and the way nakedness is seen in different places has also changed through time.

I refer to nakedness as opposed to nudity. Clark (1990, p. 3) defines being naked as "be[ing] deprived of our clothes" and says that "the word implies some of the embarrassment most of us feel in that condition" (Clark, 1990, p. 3). He defines the word nude as projecting the image of a "balanced, prosperous, and confident body" (Clark, 1990, p. 3). Berger (1977, p. 54) says that "to be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognised for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to be seen as a nude. […] Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display." For Berger, gender differences circumscribe the notion of the nude. He says: "Women are depicted in a quite different way from men—not because the feminine is different from the masculine—but because the "ideal" spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him" (Berger, 1977, p. 64). The nude can also be understood as the willing exposure of the body as a performance of identity (Butler, 2007).

With regard to the law, nakedness can be considered an indecent act. In the United Kingdom, public nakedness can be considered a sexual offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (Sexual Offences Act 2003, S. 66). The relevant part of this act with regard to nakedness is under a section entitled *Exposure* and establishes that "a person commits an offence if he intentionally exposes his genitals, and he intends that someone will see them and be caused alarm or distress" (Sexual Offences Act 2003, S. 66). It also establishes that "a person guilty of an offence under this section is liable […] to imprisonment" (Sexual Offences Act 2003, S. 66).

Of course, public nakedness is not an uncommon practice for naturists or nudists, and there are areas where to be naked in public does not constitute an offence, like designated beaches or specific events. For the nudist, nakedness can be seen as a natural act, a form of personal freedom. For non-nudists, nakedness can violate a sense of privacy and can be the cause of embarrassment.

Culturally, the idea of prohibitions of nakedness leads us to myths in Christianity described in the Bible. The myth of Noah occupies a significant place in our culture. According to the myth, Noah gets drunk after the flood and falls asleep naked, is seen in his nakedness by one of his sons and curses his offspring as a punishment (The Bible, Genesis 9:18). Concealment by way of veiling in Biblical terms is also represented in the first myth of 'innocent nakedness' and prohibition leading to forbidden knowledge. Following desire and a wish to acquire 'knowledge', Adam and Eve are punished by becoming aware of their nakedness, a knowledge that leads to shame. They then use fig leaves as a way to hide their nakedness. The Bible says: "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves" (The Bible, Genesis 3:7).

The idea of the cover as a way to conceal is what conditions the possibility of nakedness and its exposure to take place, leading to shame. I tend to cover my face when I feel embarrassed and do not wish to be seen, when I feel exposed, when I cry. Shame is a state expressed through the eye and is directly connected to being seen. For Sartre (2000), shame functions in the field of vision. Shame exists only when we are aware of the state of being looked at. Shame is present only where the possibility of the Other's gaze is already there. To be conscious of being looked at is what conditions the advent of shame. For Sartre, "shame is the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging, shame [...] is shame of Self" (2000, p. 261). He says that "if I am wholly engulfed in my shame, the Other is the immense, invisible presence which supports this shame and embraces it on every side (2000, p. 360).

Sartre (2000, p. 288) says that "pure shame is not a feeling of being this

or that guilty object but in general of being an object." Campbell (2008, p. 77) states that "the word shame is derived from the Indo/European root kam/kem that means 'to cover, to veil, to hide.'" Freud (1991b, p. 76) defines disgust, morality and shame as forces that function and operate with a barring, inhibiting, debilitating and devastating authority upon sexual development. For Freud (1991b), shame is a product of culture. Children, as his examples show us, have no shame in showing their naked bodies (Freud, 1991b). He says that "shame, disgust, pity and the structures of morality and authority erected by society" (Freud, 1991b, p. 110) are the forces that restrict the direction taken by the sexual instinct. However, unlike disgust and morality, shame only exists as a consequence of being inserted into an environment with another being and it is directly opposed to the pleasure in looking. Pajaczkowska & Ward (2008, p. 1) argue that shame, the "most painfully isolating of emotions, announces the presence of another, the person who shames us and the person before whom we are ashamed, and as such it is one of the earliest of human social feelings."

From the Bathhouse (2014)

I brought the towel given to me upon my entrance to the bathhouse back to my studio. I later decided to create an image in which the male body was absent. The photograph that resulted from this is called *From the Bathhouse* (2014), a single large-format C-Type Digital Print (p. 125).

This act of dislocating the towel from the bathhouse and appropriating it for a photograph suggests something about my desire operating against my loss in destroying my work and the image of the male body alongside it. I used the towel to cover the lower body of a human figure in the same way as it would have been worn in the bathhouse and photographed it against a black background). In the post-production stage, I blackened the entire background of the photograph and discarded any visible element outside the towel.



Illustration 23. Installation of *From the Bathhouse* (2014) photograph in the **Out of Sight** exhibition.



Illustration 24. *From the Bathhouse* (2014).

Looking at the white towel that stands out against the black background in this photograph, I imagine an unveiling scene and a sense of inauguration, the moment when a sculpture or an important monument is unveiled. 'What is underneath' imposes itself because, not being explicitly visible under the towel, it makes me anticipate it and desire it. The moment of unveiling, which would allow me to see it, will never take place, deferring my moment of discovery interminably. The towel in the photograph functions as the activator of the anticipatory look, the object that activates desire, for not only does it tempt me to look 'behind' it but it also whispers that I will take pleasure in what is covered. Barthes (1975) talks about this sense of anticipation. In the context of literature, he considers the narrative to be a form of "unveiling the truth" and compares this sense of anticipation to the "pleasure of corporeal striptease" where the pleasure is not in actually seeing the sexual organ, but in the expectation of seeing it, in the "*hope* of seeing the sexual organ" [Author's italics] (Barthes, 1975, p. 10). "The stripping is performed by the [desirous] gaze acting out a will to knowledge and power that [has] been [forever] obstructed by the [towel]" (Copjec,1989, p. 60).[19]

The event of looking at the sexual organ (and the effects of seeing it or not) constitutes a key narrative and important phase in the development of children in Freudian theory. According to Freud, upon realising how female and male genitalia differ, the child assumes that the female penis has been cut off (Freud, 2005). This realisation leads the boy to believe that his penis will be cut off too and to develop a fear of castration (Freud, 2005). It leads the girl to believe she has already been castrated by the mother and to develop penis envy (Freud, 2005). According to Freud, 'castration' is bound up with the Oedipus complex, which also develops differently in boys and in girls. The boy, who desires the mother, fears being castrated by the father, his rival in the dispute for the mother's affection (Evans, 2006). To

19 The original quote by Copjec says: "The stripping is performed by the colonialist gaze acting out a will to knowledge and power that had been temporarily obstructed by the women's veils" (1989, p. 60). In this text, Copjec analyses French psychiatrist Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault's photographs of Algerian women taken in the early 1900s. The text focuses on notions of pleasure and desire, drapery and fabrics, colonialism, utilitarianism, and fetishism.

overcome this, he identifies with the father, internalises the father's characteristics and, as a consequence, his 'male' super ego emerges (Evans, 2006). His desire for the mother is substituted by a desire for women and the complex is thus resolved (Evans, 2006). The girl, in contrast, resents the mother for having cut off her penis and directs her desire towards the father, developing penis envy (Evans, 2006). Instead of exiting the complex, in reality, the girl is entering it, and no definite 'dissolution' is presented (Evans, 2006). This concept is problematic because it suggests the existence of a primal male state for all human beings, thus reducing the experience of the little girl.

Mitchell (1983) discusses Freud's concept in a more feminist vein. She says that "in and of itself, the female body neither indicates nor initiates anything" (Mitchell, 1983, p. 17). She goes on to say that "the structure and content of [Freud's] Three Essays erodes any idea of normative sexuality" and therefore, "by deduction, if no heterosexual attraction is ordained in nature, there can be no genderised sex—there cannot at the outset be a male or female person in a psychological sense" (Mitchell, 1983, p. 11). Bringing in Lacan's formulation of the phallus to shed some light on this problematic, she concludes that:

> 'What', asks Freud, 'does the woman [the little girl] want?' All answers to the question, including 'the mother' are false: she simply *wants*. The phallus—with its status as potentially absent—comes to stand in for the necessarily missing object of desire at the level of sexual division. If this is so, the Oedipus complex can no longer be a static myth that reflects the real situation of father, mother and child, it becomes a structure revolving around the question of where a person can be placed in relation to his or her desire. That 'where' is determined by the castration complex. [Author's italics] (Mitchell, 1983, p. 11).

What is 'potentially absent', 'standing in for the missing object of desire' reminds me of the definition of the obscene in its Greek meaning. Doesn't the stage curtain, closed, mean that the violent parts of the tragedies being played behind them are 'potentially absent' but still somewhat present, becoming unattainable objects of desire (I do not see the object as an object per se). Mitchell's description of the phallus in Lacanian theory also introduces a crucial notion which comes to

mind when I look at the photograph I made with the towel from the bathhouse. In the photograph, subtle curves of the body reveal to the observer, through the covering that they are looking at, the body of a man. It is not simply 'the lower body' that the towel is covering, not just 'any' part of the male body that the towel conceals. And this is how 'this part' is presented for the observer to look: covered. By way of the photograph, what is underneath (because it cannot be seen and can only be imagined) becomes a signifier. This move is fundamental; it is central.

Fantasised, and nevertheless present, it is a signifier that the notion of the phallus operates according to Lacan's definition. This takes us back to the beginning of this research when I discussed the difference between vision and visuality: we move from the biological given to the socially constructed. For Lacan (2006), the phallus is characterised by and functions exactly on the threshold of the present and the absent, through the search for a presence through an absence. He defines the phallus as:

> [A] signifier whose function, in the intrasubjective economy of the analysis, lifts the veil perhaps from the function it performed in the mysteries. For it is the signifier intended to designate as a whole the effects of the signified, in that the signifier conditions them by its presence as a signifier (Lacan, 2006, p. 579).

The phallus is not to be confused with the penis as an actual bodily organ; it belongs to the Symbolic Order (the fact that what is covered in my photograph of the towel from the bathhouse is the male sex says something about *my* desire—but should not imply that the penis, when covered, becomes the phallus). The Symbolic Order, alongside the Imaginary and the Real, form Lacan's structure of the mental apparatus of the subject. The Symbolic Order represents the linguistic scope of this organisation. Subjects enter the Symbolic Order when the cultural process is imposed on them, and they are then able to articulate their desires and communicate through an exchange of signifiers. This moment represents the rise of the subject from the dimension of nature. The Symbolic Order is not the mere equivalent of language, however. It represents the whole realm of culture. Lacan

(1988b, p.29) says that "the essential part of human experience, that which is properly speaking the experience of the subject, that which causes the subject to exist, is to be located on the level of the emergence of the symbolic."

The Imaginary, in turn, is the dimension of this structure that belongs to nature, as opposed to culture, which is the sphere of the Symbolic. The Imaginary represents the relationship between the ego and its image. In that respect, the Imaginary has to do with the relationship between the subject and the image of their body—as opposed to their actual body. If the Symbolic order refers to signifiers, the Imaginary relates to signifieds. The Imaginary operates within the scope of the superficial image. The Imaginary points to the mythical story of Narcissus. Evans (2006, p. 84) says that "the imaginary exerts a captivating power over the subject, founded in the almost hypnotic effect of the specular image." He says that "the imaginary is the realm of image and imagination, deception and lure" and elaborates by saying that "the principal illusions of the imaginary are those of wholeness, synthesis, autonomy, duality and, above all, similarity" (Evans, 2006, p. 84). For Evans (2006, p. 84), "the imaginary relates to the mirror stage."

The remaining part of Lacan's structure of the mental apparatus of the subject is characterised by the Real. The Real represents the seat of powerful emotions. The Real is extreme. The Real exceeds the Symbolic in the sense that it escapes it. The Symbolic cannot fully grasp the Real. Lacan (1988a, p. 49) says that "the real is that which always comes back to the same place—to the place where the subject in so far as he thinks, where the *res cogitans*, does not meet it." (Would that shed light on my constant returning to a game of hide and seek through my photographic practice?) For Lacan (2006, p. 324), the Real is "the domain of that which subsists outside of symbolization." Evans (2006, p. 163) says that the Real "is impossible to imagine, impossible to integrate into the symbolic order, and impossible to attain in any way." He says that "it is this character of impossibility and of resistance to symbolisation which lends the real its essentially traumatic quality" (Evans, 2006, p. 163).

Because the phallus is a signifier, therefore, it can only operate within the

scope of the Symbolic Order. The phallus can only exist once the subject has emerged from nature and has entered the Symbolic Order by the acquisition of culture. The phallus is opposed; it is against the Imaginary because the Imaginary is the realm of the image, of the specular image, of the delusional image of the subject's body. The Imaginary cannot contain the phallus because the Imaginary is characterised as the site of the signified. This is much less the case for the Real, which is constituted as that which exists only outside symbolisation and cannot involve the phallus in any way.

Bowie (1991, p. 128) explains the origins of the phallus thus:

> In embryology, the phallus is the primitive structure from which the penis and the clitoris are in due course fashioned. And in Lacan's doctrine it is the undifferentiated afterlife, in the Symbolic, that the male and female organs together enjoy: the phallus is again a primitive structure, but by now it has been elevated from anatomy to a universal semantics. Sexless it once was, and now, after passing for a time through the human body and creating sexual difference on the way, sexless it has again become. [...] What is absent in fact is present in phantasy.

Lacan says:

> The fact that the phallus is a signifier requires that it be in the place of the Other that the subject have access to it. But since this signifier is there only as veiled and as ratio of the Other's desire, it is the Other's desire as such that the subject is required to recognize—in other words, the other insofar as he himself is a subject divided by the signifying *Spaltung*. [Author's italics. Spaltung is a German term and means 'the splitting'] (Lacan, 2006, p. 582).

According to this idea, Lacan suggests that the phallus is always veiled. The power of the phallus remains in the fact that it is, above all, veiled. We never know for a fact what it is, only that it suggests the desire of the Other,[20] a signifier for desire. Because the phallus is, before anything else, veiled, it cannot be an object, much

20 The notion of the 'Other' (with a capital O) will be discussed in the next chapter.

less the object of desire. Hence it cannot be reduced to the penis. The phallus is veiled, the penis is not. The penis can be reduced to an object because we can see it, the phallus is ambiguous. It is cryptic, an enigma. Because it is always veiled, it assures us of its existence (we wish to know that there is something under the veil), but it is just not certain exactly what that something is.

Lacan's theory has been questioned (Jones, 1927; Derrida, 1987; Grosz, 1990). However, Rose (1983) elaborates that its condition in the progress of human sexuality is that the phallus is an entity that biology cannot provide an answer for, an indication that the status of the phallus is not in any way grounded on the basis of nature. She says that "the phallus can only take up its place by indicating the precariousness of any identity assumed by the subject on the basis of its token" (Rose, 1983, p. 40) and that the term can solely be comprehended in relation to prohibition and the law at the point around which desire revolves. (Rose, 1983). She says that "the phallus represents a moment of division […] which re-enacts the fundamental splitting of subjectivity itself" (Rose, 1983, p. 40) and that "by jarring against any naturalist account of sexuality […], the phallus relegates sexuality to […] the order of the symbolic outside which, for Lacan, sexuality cannot be understood" (Rose, 1983, p. 40).

Because the phallus, according to Lacan, is a signifier, castration, as a consequence, has a symbolic dimension. The idea of castration according to Lacan differs from what castration means in Freudian terms because of Lacan's elimination of the penis as a body part and the rise of the phallus as a signifier of sexuality for both sexes. In his reading of castration, according to Lacan, Evans (2006, p. 23) says:

> Lacan's account of the castration complex is thus raised out of the dimension of simple biology or anatomy. […] Following Freud, Lacan argues that the castration complex is the pivot on which the whole Oedipus complex turns. However, whereas Freud argues that these two complexes are articulated differently in boys and girls, Lacan argues that the castration complex always denotes the final moment of the Oedipus complex in both sexes.

In my view, Evans's reading still raises troubling questions. He affirms that 'the castration complex always denotes the final moment of the Oedipus complex in both sexes.' If that is the case, how would this account for the experience of the person who is inter-sex? Would castration denote the final moment of the Oedipus complex in all sexes? Hallward (2012a) says that "in its imaginary meaning, castration first of all signifies the threat of the castration of the imaginary phallus." He says that "with the symbolisation of castration, a decisive step is taken" (Hallward, 2012a). He elaborates by saying that "castration becomes 'merely' symbolic, but it is nevertheless binding on the subject as a symbolic, speaking being. From this point on, castration refers to 'the *symbolic* lack of an imaginary object'" [Author's Italics] (Hallward, 2012a). Thus, "all human desire is based on castration" (Lacan cited in Hallward, 2012a).

According to Lacan, then, the phallus has a symbolic value and does not indicate a physical reality—I consider this to be of fundamental importance to my understanding of the phallus—a symbolic lack of an imaginary object (which is not an object *per se*). The phallus is, according to him, a signifier of desire and draws attention to the presence/absence of an element. The idea of symbolic castration is central to my understanding of how the photograph comes into being. This has curious implications because it links my discussion to the issue of desire and the photographic. I think of the photograph as inseparable from the question of desire because at the same time that one is activated, so is the other produced.

The term castration has strong connotations, regardless of its attachment to the psychoanalytic model. Castration conveys the idea of a forceful transgression. It implies a form of violence and is performed through an act of removal. I do not mean to draw attention to a literal reading of castration, but instead, to think about its mechanism in relation to the idea of 'taking' a photograph and to connect it to how Dubois (1994) describes the photographic act: in terms of tearing, of extracting, as the forceful and crisp movement of a machete that cuts and detaches. Metz (1985) discusses this aspect of photography and argues that castration is performed through the click of the camera. Desire and photographic representation

are inextricably linked not only because, through the photograph, something of my desire is expressed. Desire and the photograph are so closely related because they are initiated in the same act.

The phallus is connoted through the photograph of the towel from the bathhouse exactly because it places desire at the central axis of the present and the absent through the covering. The landscape format of the photograph, that gives the photograph its shape, intensifies the point of focus in the photograph; were the photograph in portrait mode, the totality of the human body would be suggested, my eyes would be looking for a continuation of its form, vertically. The white towel that carefully covers this imaginary body tells me, as if it were an intimate confession, what it is that escapes my eyes in the act of looking. My look is infused with notions of shame as well as desire because the man's nakedness is forever covered, a taboo. Through the nuances suggested by the fold of the towel over the body, presence is assured through a visible absence inside the photographic frame. Its presence becomes secretive, but insistent. It leads me to reflect on my encounter with the covered photograph in Bataille's *The Tears of Eros*.

Out of the Bathhouse (2015-Present)

The enigmatic quality of the wrapped towel in the photograph suggests a paradoxical fantasmatic presence. It constitutes a vestiary code that suggests an inconspicuous form of visibility. The photograph lacks individual visual features that would allow the viewer to identify whose fantasised body is visualised; there is no face to be seen—the fantasised body is unknown. Reflecting on this idea, I decided to use the towel I brought from my visit to the bathhouse to photograph a sauna-goer. The portrait depicts details of his identity and social milieu, especially sartorial elements (the signifiers which visually place him within a specific social and economic context). By covering the head of the participant with the white towel as if it were a veil, the sauna goer, now becomes an anonymous figure outside the bathhouse. The veil performs only and insofar as it is worn in public, for one to look

at; it activates the field of the Other because it necessarily demands that it is looked at. It assumes, a priori, the impact of the gaze of the Other that emerges in the field of visuality. However, although veils typically cover the face, they are generally opaque or transparent and allow those who wear them to see through.

The white towel anonymises the subject at the same time as preventing the individual from seeing what is around, or indeed if anyone is looking. The image is charged with notions of masculinity in the form of visual signifiers such as the suit and the case, that suggest different layers of notions of power such as power in the form of authority and wealth, inserted into a landscape constituted by a business-like neoliberal world.[21] The image conveys a certain playfulness that subverts the supposedly masculine force the image would project were the towel not in place. The masculine power here becomes castrated from the image, highlighted by the embarrassment the subject might be feeling in his attempt to hide.

21 A reference to the representation of visual signifiers of masculinity is Hal Fischer's photographic series *Gay Semiotics* (1977) in which he explicitly writes an informative text over the image to reveal to the viewer what such visual codes signify (Fisher, 1977).



Illustration 25. ‘Out of the Bathhouse #2’, from the *Out of the Bathhouse* (2015-Present) series.

As the research progressed, I realised that it was important that I performed for the camera and faced it head-on, allowing myself to be the recipient of the gaze that comes from without. The result, the photograph *Out of the Bathhouse #3* depicts a human figure that stands in what seems to be a living room because of the curtains hanging at the back and the objects present in the composition: the subject in the photograph is ironing a business shirt. The photograph is both mysterious and playful. Facial identity is also withheld. This withholding ensures the impossibility of reciprocity of the gaze at the same time that it draws the look of the viewer right at my covered head, as if I am demanding, by wearing the white towel over my head, that the viewer's look is directed at me and nothing else, inexorably exclaiming: 'Look at me'. The series *Out of the Bathhouse* (2015-Present) is currently constituted by 3 large-format C-Type Digital Prints. They are printed on Matt Paper and measure 101.6cm x 127cm. Two of these are depicted in illustrations 25 and 26.



Illustration 26. ‘Out of the Bathhouse #3’, from the *Out of the Bathhouse* (2015-Present) series.



Illustration 27. Installation view of 'Out of the Bathhouse #2' and 'Out of the Bathhouse #3' in the **Out of Sight** exhibition.

As the visual outcome of the photographic act, an act of exposure by definition, the figure gives himself to be seen through the photograph; he gives himself to be inspected by the viewer. The inherent pleasure in making oneself the object of the other's look without oneself being able to stare back occurs at the same moment that judgment is denied and nullified; the subject is empowered by the denial of facial identification. By not being seen as an individual, part of his identity is kept secret. The act of public exposure in which no individual identification can be made constitutes both an act of defiance and also an act of vulnerability. Another aspect of the playfulness is the inversion of gender roles in house keeping tasks, which itself is again subverted by the forceful display of control through the operation of the shutter release. This moment of 'shooting' connotes the moment of sexual gratification, the moment of ejaculation. The moment the figure presses the cable release represents the moment that light penetrates the lens of the camera, crossing the threshold from the outside to the inside, reaching the transparency upon which the image is exposed and fixed. From a different standpoint, the photograph can also be seen as that which has been thrust aside; come out as abject, making a connection to the inappropriateness of the (female) bodily fluid, improper for public display (Kristeva, 1982). This feminist reading brings to mind the gratuitousness of the perverse.

TRAJECTORY



Illustration 28. *Ejaculate in Trajectory XIV* (1988) by Andres Serrano. 68cm x 100cm.
Dye Destruction Print.

In this section, I critically reflect on *Ejaculate in Trajectory XIV* (1988), a photograph by artist Andres Serrano. Bringing his photograph into focus contextualises my practice in relation to the practice of another art photographer whose concerns I share and whose photographs have influenced my work. Serrano's photographic practice addresses concerns that resonate with my own. Some of these issues are also topics Bataille draws particular attention to in *The Tears of Eros*. For example, Serrano has dedicated entire bodies of work to the subjects of eroticism (*A History of Sex*, 1995), religion (*The Church*, 1991), torture (*Torture*, 2015) and death (*The Morgue*, 1992). Serrano's photographic practice is dense. Therefore, it falls outside the scope of my intention to provide a critique of his oeuvre in this research. Following my discussion of the photographs in *Out of the Bathhouse* (2015), I discuss Serrano's photograph in order to distil ideas about the pursuit of voluptuous pleasure, the idea of prodigality, and also the notion of the Other, key concepts that underpin my framing of the obscene through photographic practice.

The photographs in Serrano's series *Ejaculate in Trajectory* (1988) are ambiguous, cryptic and obscure. I focus on one specific image, the one depicted in *Ejaculate in Trajectory XIV* (1988). The photograph depicts a black background with a streak of white liquid in movement in the foreground, crossing the photograph horizontally, approximately in the middle of the landscape, rectangular format. The projectile force of the streak is represented by a degree of blurriness, the result of a slower shutter speed. The effect of the streak is of a silky quality. This blurriness gives the streak a true sense of vigour in terms of its force as opposed to some of the other photographs in the series in which the movement is slightly 'frozen', constituting a different form of allure. The background of the photograph is filled with a deep black tone. To talk about depth in this image seems problematic. I am not able to distinguish or imagine the space depicted in this photograph. In this respect, the space filled with this black is infinite at the same time that it is flattened on the surface of the photograph. This image is minimalist to the point where, at least initially, I can only see the colour black and the white streak in its trajectory. I find this fact interesting in itself when I consider how iconicity operates in photographic representation (iconicity plays an important role in the traditional genres of photography); its ambiguity is what activates my desire to look. I consider the significations of the colour black and the colour white, and what the forceful white streak crossing the space of the photograph signifies against its black background.

The black space represented in the photograph is still, dead, as opposed to the vivid white streak, in movement. The streak crosses the photograph from one side to the other, escaping its borders. It comes in from the outside of one of the borders, crosses the image and is projected out. I can see neither its source nor where it stops. The space outside the borders of the photograph is immediately called upon. I am forced to imagine an origin and an end, which in turn, leads me to the idea of pleasure without beginning or end. The streak also leads me to believe that an action or event of some sort has been performed for the camera. As the viewer, I identify with the camera's point of view because I see through its lens when I look at the photograph. Therefore, it is implied through the photograph that this

act was performed in order to receive my look. I hesitate but I eventually surrender; I am inclined to read the photograph's title. The image reaches a different level of signification when I do so. I can visualise a moment of ejaculation taking place and I see that the photograph was created in 1988. The connotation of life and death represented by the colours black and white take a different turn in the context of the sexual in 1988, when HIV was still a matter of death, more than it was of life. There is also a connotation of masturbation or a sexual act in which ejaculation took place in the open, outside the body of the other. Sexual pleasure here is alluded to in terms of gratuitousness. Different layers of signification are added to how I see this image as a result of the introduction of a linguistic element—its title—without which its meaning would simply float in an ocean of possible significations.

The addition of this linguistic element to the photograph in the form of the text that accompanies it anchors my understanding of its message. This text frames the photograph; it frames how I look and how I see it. Benjamin (1999) sees this addition of the text to the photograph as a proposition of a form of organisation which roots the message. For Barthes (1977), the text ends up leading the viewer to consider specific signifiers at the expense of ignoring others, and that, in his view, constitutes a form of ideological control. The added text is also a form of discursivity. This debate brings to mind the notion of discourse introduced by Foucault (1972) and the different discourses within which an entity functions (broadly speaking, art photography operates in the field of aesthetic discourse).[22] For Foucault, discourses disperse the unity of the subject and constitute them as dispersed (1972). Foucault says: "discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined" (1972, p. 55). According to this idea, discourse is what establishes the different positions occupied by the subject, as opposed to a single universal or fundamental core or

22 Krauss (1982) discusses how photography can operate in different discursive spaces. She takes the example of a photograph and a lithograph copy of it, each belonging to different discourses and conveying different types of knowledge; one belonging to art and the other to empirical science.

essence, establishing the subject as characterised by a form of fragmentation. This is because statements are created in an immense system that is not controlled by the subject. This system, in its entirety, is alien to the subject; still, the subject is constituted by discourses disseminated in this system (1972).

Nevertheless, it is this characteristic of Serrano's photograph—the text—that leads me to associate its message with ideas about sexual gratification, voluptuous pleasure and the perverse. The perverse, according to the Oxford Dictionary, shows "a deliberate and obstinate desire to behave in a way that is unreasonable or unacceptable" ; it is "contrary to the accepted or expected standard or practice" (1995, p. 864). Dollimore (1991, p. 104) goes as far as defining the term in line with the ancient definition of the Latin *perversus*, something that has "turned the wrong way", something which is "not right". He also points out that the openly sexual meaning of the word is not found in the Oxford English Dictionary until the 1933 Supplement (Dollimore, 1991, p. 104). According to Dollimore's account, to investigate the concept of perversion today is to embark upon a cruel conflict between "domination and deviation, law and desire, transgression and conformity […] through repression, demonising, displacement, and struggle" (Dollimore, 1991, p. 103).

Freud says that a perverse (for Freud the perverse is sexual) activity is that which has left behind the objective of procreation and chases the fulfilment of pleasure as an objective autonomous to it (Freud, 1991b). Freud also makes it clear how the idea of perversion is central to civilisation (1991a). For Freud (1991a), the status of a child when he is born is that of a multifarious form of perversity. This polymorphic state, however, is incongruous with the burdens that civilisation bestows upon the child and cannot be eliminated as the development of the child into adulthood progresses. Thus, upon becoming a grown person, this multifarious state of perversity is altered, by way of repression and sublimation, and turned into other forms of forces and dynamisms that drive civilisation forward and on which civilisation indeed depends.

Lacan (1988a) also elaborates on his view of the definition of perversion. He says:

> [Perversion] is not simply an aberration in relation to social criteria, an anomaly contrary to good morals, although this register is not absent, nor is it an atypicality according to natural criteria, namely that it more or less derogates from the reproductive finality of sexual union. It is something else in its very structure (1988a, p. 221).

Lacan says that "the fundamental uncertainty of the perverse relation, the fact that it can find no way of becoming grounded in any satisfying action, makes up one aspect of the drama of homosexuality. But it is also this structure which gives perversion its value" (1988a, p. 221). He elaborates by saying that "perversion is an experience which allows one to enter more deeply into what one can call, in the full sense, the human passion, […] that is to say what there is in man which is open to this division from himself which structures the imaginary" (Lacan, 1988a, p. 221). He says:

> [P]erversion becomes a profound experience, on account of the fact that within this gap of human desire, all manner of nuances are called forth, rising up in tiers from shame to prestige, from buffoonery to heroism, whereby human desire in its entirety is exposed, in the deepest sense of the term, to the desire of the other (Lacan, 1988a, p. 221).

Evans (2006), in his reading of the term according to Lacan's definition, says that Lacan refines the notion of perversion that had been previously proposed by Freud, by saying that perversion is not a way to behave, but a structure. He says:

> The distinction between perverse acts and the perverse structure implies that, while there are certain sexual acts which are closely associated with perverse structures, it is also possible that such acts may be engaged in by non-perverse subjects, and equally possible that a perverse subject may never actually engage in such acts. It also implies a universalist position; while social disapproval and the infraction of 'good morals' may be what determines whether a particular act is perverse or not, this is not the essence of the perverse structure. A perverse structure remains perverse even when the acts associated with it are socially approved. Hence Lacan regards homosexuality as a perversion even when practised in Ancient Greece, where it was widely tolerated (Evans, 2006, p. 141).

Foucault (1978) sees perversion as occupying a position of exteriority in contrast to how Freud and Lacan characterise it. For him, perversion is not constituted by an internal repressed entity; it is not an instinct that is displaced or sublimated into other forces upon which civilisation depends for its development. For Foucault, it is civilisation itself, our cultural process that creates perversions in the first place with the ultimate aim of controlling and administering them, in the form of an interminable and bound to fail hunt to find—and see—them. Foucault's perversions also function within the field of sexuality. Such a possibility (of seeing the perverse act), is implemented everywhere, in every aspect of the social order, so that the possibility of finding it remains ubiquitous and remains in a state of readiness.

Barthes (1995, p. 207) defines perversion as belonging "to an order of voluptuaries practised gratuitously, the theme of prodigality, in which one loses oneself instead of affirming oneself". Barthes says that "perversion, quite simply, is a way of being happy" (1995, p. 206). Barthes's text focuses on the celebratory element in the perverse, the pleasure in the gratuitousness of the non-reproductive act. The perverse, for him, is firstly used in reference to hashish and homosexuality, "the search for a pleasure that cannot be turned to the profit of social ends or the species" (Barthes, 1995, p. 206).

Looking at Serrano's photograph, I cannot help but visualise the space off-frame (a perverse structure created by Serrano which induces me to visualise the perverse act of ejaculation). The force of Serrano's photograph lies in the space outside the frame, the space where the image is not. In this particular respect, it brings to mind Deleuze's notion of the Other. He says:

> For if the Other presupposes the organisation of fields of individuation, it is, on the other hand, the condition under which we perceive distinct objects and subjects in these fields, and *perceive* them as forming diverse kinds of identifiable and recognisable individuals. That the Other should not, properly speaking, be anyone, neither you nor I, signifies that it is a structure which is implemented only by variable terms in different perceptual worlds—me for you in yours, you for me in mine. It is not even enough to see in the Other a specific or particular structure of the perceptual world in general: in fact, it is a structure which grounds and ensures the overall functioning of this world as a whole [Author's italics] (Deleuze, 1994, p. 281).

Lacan discusses the difference between the term 'other' with regard to the use of the capital letter 'O' or lower case 'o', "the little 'o'" and "the big 'O'." He says: "We must distinguish two others, at least two—an other with a capital o, and an other with a small o, which is the ego. In the function of speech, we are concerned with the Other" (Lacan, 1988b, p. 236). Therefore, according to this definition, the 'other' refers to the ego, the subject, and the 'Other' refers to the Symbolic Order. The 'Other' is transcendental; it is more 'otherly'. Its 'otherness' is more absolute, more astute, and belongs to our socio-cultural context, whilst the 'other' is our semblance. Lacan (2006, p. 683) says that "the Other, as preliminary site of the pure subject of the signifier, occupies the key [maîtresse] position here, even before coming into existence here as absolute Master". From this definition, it is possible to suggest that the 'Other' always and already is; it already presents itself, before the 'other' comes to be constituted. This description is similar in tone to the idea that the space off-frame is always and already at work when I look inside it.

To talk about the notion of the Other is complex. Even if I try to discuss the Other in terms of what is external to the subject but is somehow perceived by them through any of the senses would be somewhat reductive. This would assume that the subject perceives themselves as the totality of the body, which is absurd, for 'my body is not myself', although the ego is bodily. The Other "operates in relation to its absence" (Young, Genosko & Watson (2013, p. 225). Serrano's photograph explores this idea for it enables the conceptualisation of the space off-frame, of the obscene, as Other. The obscene-as-Other decentres me when I look at the photograph, but it is also what triggers my desire. The notion of the Other shares similarities with the notion of the phallus if considered in terms of a scheme that functions only in relation to its absence: the condition for desire.

Elements of the notion of the Other also pervade the experience of shame and the feeling of exposure that accompanies it; the gaze of the Other constitutes me as a viewing subject who is looked at from all sides. The Other informs the field of visuality.

HOLE

Reflecting on the idea of endless pleasure in *Ejaculate in Trajectory XIV* (1998), and thinking of the photographic act as a perverse act in itself, without a profitable end, I decided to photograph glory holes. Sexual contact through the glory hole enables the voluptuous experience of sexual pleasure without seeing and also seeing without touching as sexual pleasure. Glory holes operate through framing and convey aspects of fetishism. Through my discussion of the photographs I took, I expound on the notion of iconicity by looking at Sartre's ideas on the perception of what is represented through a photograph. I also provide an alternative to the idea of fetishism by turning to Bersani's reading of Lacan and Laplanche's conceptualisation of the enigmatic signifier.

Glory holes are holes in the wall. The slang phrase is used to refer to holes in walls which divide cubicles in public toilets, and they are typically found in male public toilets in shopping centres, train stations, gyms and sports clubs, or public parks, for example. Glory holes are often made by men who attend these facilities in order to establish some contact with users on the adjacent side of the partition. Nowadays, glory holes have made their way out of the 'public sphere'. However, they can be found in places like private sex clubs, gay bathhouses and, at times, in nightclubs, (re)built purposefully in the form of a scenario, like in a film set, for the leisure of men who engage with other men sexually but wish to do it somewhat anonymously and away from the risk of identification, physical violence or any abuse.

To look through the hole for (or as) sexual gratification immediately calls forth notions of voyeurism. A voyeur is characterised as "a person who gets pleasure from secretly watching the sexual activity of others" (The University of Oxford Press, 1995, p. 1334). For Freud (1991b, p. 70), "this pleasure in looking [scopophilia] becomes a perversion (a) if it is restricted exclusively at the genitals, or (b) if it is connected with the overriding of disgust [...], or (c) if, instead of being *preparatory* to the normal sexual aim, it supplants it" [Author's italics]. He says that "this last [element] is markedly true of exhibitionists, who [...] exhibit their own genitals in order to obtain a reciprocal view of the genitals of the other person" (Freud, 1991b, p. 70). According to Freud (1991b, 70), "the force which opposes scopophilia, but which may be overridden by it [...] is *shame*" [Author's italics]. He says that "every active perversion is [...] accompanied by its passive counterpart" (Freud, 1991b, p. 81) concluding that "anyone who is an exhibitionist in his unconscious is at the same time a *voyeur*" [Author's italics] (Freud, 1991b, p. 81).

According to Freud, pleasure in looking is also connected to narcissism, the second constituting the early stages of the former. According to Freud, the term narcissism was first coined to "denote the attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated—who looks at it, that is to say, strokes it and fondles it till he obtains complete satisfaction through these activities" (1991a, p. 65). Jay (1994, p. 332) says that Freud believed

that “the very desire to know [...], was ultimately derived from an infantile desire to see, which had sexual origins”. Freud (2005, p. 210) says that “the preliminary stage of the scopophilic instinct, in which the subject’s own body is the object of the scopophilia, must be classed under narcissism, and that we must describe it as a narcissistic formation”. Freud’s idea of the pleasure in looking being connected to narcissism takes us to the notion of ‘the other’ according to Merleau-Ponty.[23]

I set out to photograph glory holes by initially contacting bathhouses in London, which I had myself visited in the past. I also researched online and in periodicals distributed in gay bars and clubs and came up with a list of other establishments. I emailed these venues asking for authorisation to photograph their glory holes and was ignored by the great majority. A couple of places I had never been to personally before did respond to my request, but refused it. More frustratingly, the ones I was really interested in photographing did not respond at all. After this unsuccessful start, I decided to adopt a more personal approach and turned up at one of these places in a very casual fashion, talking about my project to the attendants and mentioning my previous form of contact but also carrying a letter bearing the university’s logo confirming my academic research. I was greeted with a ‘there is no way you can justify what you are doing’ response. So, undeterred, I joined social media groups in order to make more contacts, made numerous phone calls, all without success.

Two months passed with no positive responses. I then discovered that one of the email addresses I had previously written to had been misspelt. I managed to contact this establishment and eventually obtained permission from someone willing to allow me to take my photographic equipment into their venue and photograph. After a week exchanging emails and making arrangements (p. 262), my entrance to the place had been cleared, and I was allowed to visit and stay to photograph for 30 minutes. The *condicio sine qua non* for the project to go ahead was the complete anonymity of the place. I was clearly instructed not to photograph anything other than the glory holes or anything that could suggest where I was. Ensuring that the

23 Merleau-Ponty says: ”Since the seer is caught up in what he sees, it is still himself he sees: there is a fundamental narcissism of all vision” (1968, p. 139).

space was unrecognisable was vital in order to maintain the privacy of members. From the outside, the venue looked like the pub next door and, indeed, it functioned as a regular bar on the ground floor.

I identified myself to a barman, and a friendly transsexual (whom I will call G) soon turned up. The space where the glory holes were located, in the basement, looked like a small nightclub. It was square-shaped and painted black. There were a few neon lights around and also a DJ booth. In contrast to the previous approaches, this visit was marked by my host's openness and curiosity. The people who spoke to me seemed to be genuinely interested in what I was doing. I felt I was warmly welcomed. The glory holes, which had been erected for that specific day only, were wood partitions that stood in the middle of what I imagine was a dance floor. Dark grey curtains with erotic paintings covered the structure, concealing the activities that went on inside. The regular lights of the room were left on during my visit in order to improve visibility. G herself explained to me that she was an artist and had painted the curtains that hung around the glory holes, depicting erect penises. The scenes were outlined, round, big and painted in red. They looked primitive. The erect penises painted on the curtains guarding the glory holes suggested the pursuit of sensual pleasure.

To photograph a hole raises questions of access. The hole can be seen as a framed entranceway. The hole can be seen both as a form of absence (because of the empty space framed by its rim) and also as a form of fullness (it only exists insofar as this empty space completes it). The glory hole, however, is not just any hole. The glory hole is a hole through which sexual endeavours take place, through which sexual organs are inserted, touched, looked at and desired. Desire and the look are exercised through the glory hole. The glory hole is characterised as a site of exchange,[24] always accompanied by a surround of some sort, which conditions

24 This element of exchange through a hole on the wall brings to mind Jean Genet's film *Un Chant D'Amour* (1950). In this film, two prisoners in separate cells communicate through a hole on the wall. One of the prisoners smokes and blows cigarette smoke through the hole whilst the prisoner on the other side sucks the smoke in. Visuality is constructed in this scene by regarding the blown cigarette smoke as an index of fire (literally and metaphorically), which enables both

the existence of the hole—every hole demands a surround which gives access to a depth. The glory hole is a site of access to unseen but anticipated pleasures and addresses the notion of the Other.

The field of visuality opens up when I look at the hole represented in the photograph, for it calls forth the fundamental basis upon which the out of sight is contingent: it is not so much about what is seen (I can only see the black contained by the hole), but what is made intelligible by me in my deployment of vision.

Of Black Holes and Other Glories (2013)

The series *Of Black Holes and Other Glories* (2013) is made up of ten prints, presented in book format. Some of the photographs in this series have been previously exhibited as single prints of varying sizes. The images depicted in illustrations 32-35 follow the original size of the photographs in the photo book. The book has a black leather hardcover. The back of each page is black. At times, the rough surface of the wood partition gives the image texture. The same geometric shape repeats itself as the pages are turned. This repetition functions as a form of return. It is insistent and exerts a seductive force upon the viewer. Unrelenting, it restates what is out of sight. It brings into focus a void in the field of representation.

inmates to fantasise about each other, their vision blocked by the wall that separates them and functions as a screen onto which they project their fantasies. The desiring body, also as an object of desire, is absent and present at the same time, leaving the smoke as trace.

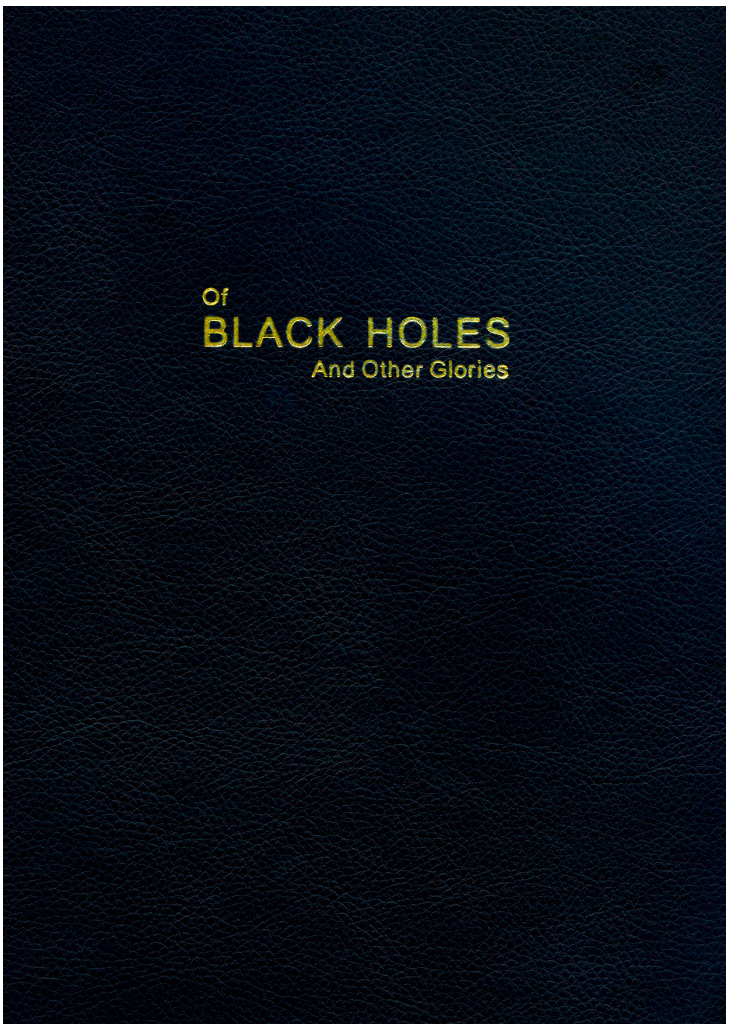


Illustration 29. Cover of *Of Black Holes and Other Glories* photo book.



Illustration 30. Turning the page of *Of Black Holes and Other Glories* (2013) photo book.



Illustration 31. Turning the page of *Of Black Holes and Other Glories* (2013) photo book.

In two of the photographs, two (circular) holes are present at once. Circles are universal symbols and suggest several possibilities for interpretation. Jaffé (1988, p. 245) says that circles are "a symbol of the Self". She says that they express "the totality of the psyche in all its aspects" and that they "always point to the singular most important aspect of life: its ultimate wholeness" (Jaffé, 1988, p. 245). To encircle suggests ideas of 'coming full circle', of 'the return' and also of repetition. Encircling suggests the notion of the compulsion to repeat. Bonnet (2005, p. 1474) defines repetition compulsion as "an inherent, primordial tendency in the unconscious that impels the individual to repeat certain actions, in particular, the most painful or destructive ones". This description of how the compulsion to repeat takes place in the psyche of the subject resonates with ideas about 'the return of the repressed'. For Rabain (2005, p. 1491), "the return of the repressed is the process whereby repressed elements, preserved in the unconscious, tend to reappear, in consciousness or in behaviour, in the shape of secondary and more or less unrecognizable 'derivatives of the unconscious'".

Freud elaborates about the mechanism of repression in the psyche and their re-emergence in the form of dreams, jokes, slips of the tongue and allusions, for example. He says that "*a dream is a (disguised) fulfillment of a (suppressed or*

repressed) wish" [Author's italics and parentheses] (Freud, 2010, p. 183). He goes on to say that "the theory of repression [...] asserts that [...] repressed wishes *still* exist—though there is a simultaneous inhibition which holds them down" [Author's italics] (Freud, 2010, p. 255). He suggests that the process of repression takes place as the result of a combined struggle between the censorship caused by the conscious mind which pushes what is to be repressed to one side, and by the unconscious mind which pulls it to the other.

According to Freud, what is repressed remains adamant in the psyche. He says that "impressions [...] which have been sunk into the id by repression, are virtually immortal; after the passage of decades they behave as though they had just occurred" (Freud, 2005, p. 499). With regard to repression, he suggests that failing to remember is not a sign that this or that wish has been annihilated in the psyche, but only that is not accessible to our conscious mind (Freud, 2005). In his reading of this aspect of the repressed, Rabain (2005, p. 1491) says that "the repressed [...] retains its initial impulse, its urge to penetrate consciousness." Freud talks about the idea of repetition in terms of a form of mastery by which the subject tries to obtain over painful events and suggests that a certain pleasure emerges as the result of this action as now the subject has control over it (Freud, 2005). He indicates that this "perpetual recurrence of the same thing" may emerge in active form but may also appear in a more passive way (Freud, 2005, p. 231). According to Freud, the re-emergence of repressed wishes in the way of dreams is a way for these wishes to evade censorship (Freud, 2010).

The recurring turning of each page to face the black space contained by the hole again and again, echoes the experience of turning the page of my copy of Bataille's *The Tears of Eros*, when I faced the space where the image was not.





The photograph *Glory Hole #1* (opposite page) depicts the partition that once again shows itself as a vertical layer, a surface. This hole, framed by a rectangular shape that follows and intensifies the shape of the photographic print, stands right in the centre of the photograph. I can see that the black surface that allows this hole to exist is made out of wood. The top and bottom parts of the rectangular rim are chipped. The black hole in the photograph is magnetic.

Page 166: Illustration 32. 'Glory Hole #3' from the series *Of Black Holes and Other Glories* (2013).
Page 167: Illustration 33. 'Glory Hole #9' from the series *Of Black Holes and Other Glories* (2013).
Page 169: Illustration 34. 'Glory Hole #1' from the series *Of Black Holes and Other Glories* (2013).



The black hole immediately arrests my gaze when I look at it. The hole is irresistible. It seduces me. It has a hypnotising effect on me; it is the part of the photograph that my eyes focus upon when I first look. The hole is deeply black; nothing seems to stand behind it. There is a substance in its blackness. I cannot see anything through it but its vividness and striking presence. It is so striking exactly because it denies me any possibility of triumph over the image. Although I want to see, to find something in this hole and say 'that's it, I can see that', there is nothing there. It nags me. The black in the hole is deepened by the stream of light passing horizontally right across the centre of the photograph. Nothing else in the photograph can compare to the arresting effect of the black hole. This hole draws my look closer and closer; it pulls me in. The space between myself and the photograph closes up. The aura that surrounds the glory hole in the photograph is an indication of what remains invisible through the depths of the blackness inside the hole represented in the photograph. An indication of what remains distant and unapproachable[25] (Benjamin, 1969).

Essential to this mode of looking is the moment of facing a form of visual absence. I wonder what is absent, in fact. What grasps me when I look at this photograph? What happens when the viewer looks at the photograph of the glory hole and does not recognise the image as such, does not master what he is looking at in terms of its actual referent, the question of iconicity? Sartre elaborates about this relationship between the photograph, what it depicts and how the subject experiences it (1948). He talks of different stages in the perception of the photograph by the subject. He says that when looking at photographs, this process can be divided into three stages of apprehension (Sartre, 1948, p. 25). These stages would be a) the perception that what one is looking at is a photograph, b) the recognition of what is depicted, for example, "a man standing on a pedestal" and c) who "the man standing on the pedestal is", in the case of his example, "Peter". However, he says that "it may also happen that the three stages occur so close to each other as to make but one" and that "it can happen that the photo does not function as an

25 Benjamin says: "The essentially distant object is the unapproachable one". (1969, p. 21).

object but presents itself immediately as an image" (Sartre, 1948, p. 25). I wonder what happens when the viewer only goes through the stages of first recognising that that is a photograph and, second, of recognising that what is represented in the photograph is a hole, as opposed to a glory hole. What is its specific message? The hole represented in the photograph becomes an "enigmatic signifier".[26]

Bersani (2010, p. 185), expounding on the term coined by Lacan and Laplanche, describes the enigmatic signifier as "that which is missing, that which is being withheld from me, that which I have been cut off" (this echoes notions of fetishism). Fletcher (2005, pp. 13, f# 13) explains the difference between the term according to Lacan and Laplanche by saying that "Lacan's 'enigmatic signifier of the sexual trauma' refers to the repressed term which is substituted for by a conscious representation in the metaphorical structure of the symptom" and that "Laplanche, however, reserves the phrase for the gestures, actions or words of the other in the situation of primal seduction". Laplanche grounds the "enigmatic signifier" on "the possibility that the signifier may be *designified*, or lose what it signifies, without thereby losing its power to signify to" [His italics] (Laplanche, 1989, p. 45). Fletcher (2005, p. 12) expounds on Laplanche's term by saying that:

> Laplanche establishes the "enigmatic signifier as a fully-fledged concept by invoking another [...] distinction between a signifier of a specific meaning or signified—and a signifier to—addressed to and interpellating a specific subject, a subject who may not be able to attribute a specific signified to it but who knows that it is addressed to them. [Author's italics]

He goes on to say that the message is enigmatic "not just because the infant has no access to a code to determine their meaning, or because it outstrips its capacities for understanding, but because, compromised by the unconscious wishes of the other, they are opaque to the other as well" (Fletcher, 2005, p. 12). The idea of an enigmatic signifier and the question of iconicity in photography, of how the viewer perceives the image when they look at the photograph leads me to

26 This goes back to the discussion of recognition raised in *G(r)ay Area* (2016).

the discussion of a curious event that took place in a Crit session during the **Out of Sight** exhibition. A silent crit session was held at the gallery, constituted by a group of other postgraduate artists with the intention to gather feedback on the work exhibited. Four photographs from this series were part of the exhibition.

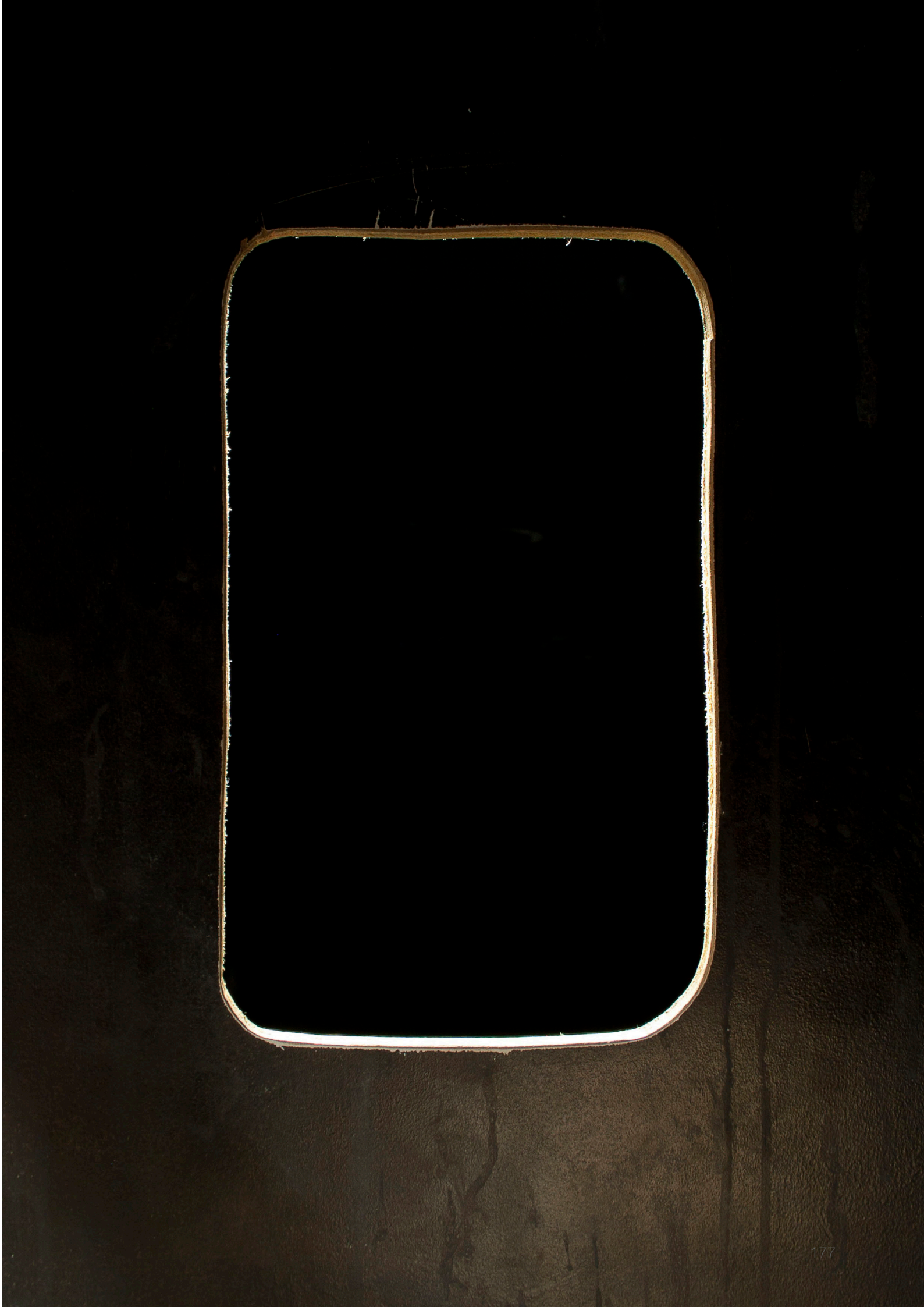
In this event, I was allowed to watch and listen to the comments from others about my work but could not take part in the discussion. The aim was to explore possible meanings only by looking at the work, without any contextualisation. Purposefully, I did not label any of the work exhibited for the event. To begin the session and initiate the discussion, I told the audience the title of the exhibition: *Out of Sight*, omitting the remaining *Framing the Obscene*. The glory hole photographs sparked great interest. An immediate tendency to rely on iconicity to interpret the photographs was evident from the comments I gathered. This was a constructive experiment. Some members of the audience were able to make connections as a result of the exhibition as a whole; others did not know what glory holes were but were intrigued by the photographs themselves. Through its enigmatic and auratic[27] presence, the hole depicted in the photograph locked the look of viewers and initiated debate. It also caused discomfort. After showing interest in the photograph as such and enjoying its formal elements, a member of the audience described it as 'a bit much' upon the realisation of the photograph's (problematic, for this viewer) referent. This was a relevant occurrence and indicates the political force and subversion—a perverse act on my part—of my photographs, for the viewer fully engaged with the image only later to figure out what they were looking at (some viewers were told and some figured out themselves).

It is in this chapter that the full allegorical force present in my research is established. The first link to be made to Owen's essay (2005) relates to the notion of the palimpsest. Owen says: "In allegorical structure, one text is *read through another*, […]; the paradigm for the allegorical is the palimpsest" (2005, p. 69) [Author's italics]. My understanding of the palimpsest is that of a form of intertextuality between two elements in which the latter, in producing new meaning, bears a resemblance to the

27 Resembling an aura.

former. In this respect, it is the first moment in the research in which I photograph an object *per se* (the glory hole, the first element). Through the representation of this object (the photograph, the second element), new knowledge is produced, thus characterising a new artistic text, the palimpsest. The second link to be drawn, however, brings me back to my research question; the displacement of the literal question of 'what's coming out?' and its insertion into a photographic practice as its allegorical kernel. Like visiting the bathhouse, here I describe the experience of visiting a place, of going in and coming out of it. My account is then flipped: this manoeuvre reveals a critical reflection where "one text is read through another". Thus, I write about photography through the logic of going in and coming out.

See the black leather hard cover photo book *Of Black Holes and Other Glories* that accompanies the thesis.



ADDRESS

Photographing glory holes led me to think that this was the first moment in the research in which a form of address was suggested. It reminded me of graffiti found on the walls of public toilets. I visited one in South London, a public toilet in Victorian style where 'cottaging'[28] took place. I was drawn to details and scribbles on the walls that constituted the partitions that divided the cubicles inside. I focused on the graffiti that covered many of the walls and doors. On some of the walls, the graffiti was more explicit than others, in terms of its sexual content. Also, barely visible traces remained in some cases, due to possible attempts at having them cleaned off. In this chapter, I discuss the experience of photographing inside the cubicles of a public toilet. I analyse the photographs that resulted from my visits and through this, I introduce my understanding of the notion of desire according to Lacan and how this notion is circumscribed by elements of invisibility. I analyse how photography and the notion of desire are inextricably linked.

28 Cruising in public toilets.

When visiting a particular park in South London, I found a public toilet. It had an entrance that suggested to me the facility had been there for some decades. It led me to wonder what it was like when public toilets were first installed in Victorian London two centuries ago and how 'cottaging' in public toilets has become such an institution in gay culture (Houlbrook, 2000). It is an activity that still takes place in certain locations around London despite the fact that today it is much easier and a lot more socially acceptable for one to have same-sex encounters (at least in London) than it was when cottaging in toilets was practised because of lack of freedom.[29] I found out by accident that cottaging took place at this facility. It happened on an occasion when I was walking to the park and decided to go inside. I realised then that there was more to it than initially met the eye.

There was a sign at the entrance; it said: "Gentlemen". The entrance to the toilet was located at street level, followed by a flight of stairs that took the user to a space in a sort of basement, located under the pavement. There must have been about ten urinals adjacent to each other, without partitions from one urinal to the next. The cubicles were located opposite the urinals, which means that when one left the cubicle, one faced the back of whoever happened to be standing at the urinal. The pavement at street level on which people walked by was located directly above where the cubicles were. The floor of the pavement at street level was constructed of glass bricks. These glass bricks did not allow the person walking on the pavement to see what was underneath. But at the same time, enough light flowed through, to allow sufficient illumination of the toilet below.

I began visiting the toilet regularly, spending time inside the cubicles of this facility in order to inspect its walls, constituted by white tiles. The act of regular visiting allowed me to familiarise myself with the space, and it eased my self-consciousness.

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29 British film *Prick Up Your Ears* (1987) represents the story of the relationship between writers Joe Orton and Kenneth Halliwell. In one of the scenes, Orton visits a public toilet at night and engages in sexual activity with other 'toilet-goers'. The scene suggests the public toilet as a form of meeting place, an urban social space where sexual interactions took place amongst men illegally and as a way to circumvent policing. It suggests how such a practice was commonly resorted to in London in the 60's.

There were several writings on these tiles, and I decided to photograph them. I was facing an address to myself as 'other' (for none of these graffiti were directly addressed to me). They were anonymous, too. The graffiti on the walls varied. It consisted of erotic drawings, words, and at times, just scribbles. The tiles themselves had previously been painted over with white paint in an attempt to cover and hide the messages, but now the top coating revealed what was underneath. On some of the tiles, the paint was peeling off. The colours were washed out. There was mould on the wall, dirt, the peeling of the paint also indicated that time had passed creating a nostalgic feel. I was curious about the graffiti as well as disgusted by the condition of the walls. There was graffiti on the doors as well. I photographed some of them but later on decided to photograph only the walls. The doors were brown and had a gleaming finish. It became challenging to photograph them because of this and because of the lighting conditions inside the space.

In some of the graffiti on the white walls, it was possible to read the words clearly: "Suits, Suits", "Message me – I am 29", "Love to suck", "Cocks only", "Under 30s", "I love you", "Threesome", "Be back in a week". In others, it was possible to see that something had been written but not what exactly. Although I could see that sentences were there, under the topcoat of white paint, they were just not visible enough in order for me to decode them. This leads me to wonder about the act of institutional whitewashing. Is the sexual activity that takes place in this facility less visible to the men that visit the toilet as a result of the painted walls? Or does it have the opposite effect of drawing attention through the traces that remain? Is the activity 'covered up'? After spending some time looking at the photographs I took, I realised that the relationship between their faded colour and the graffiti that had been painted over and was just visible enough, bore some affinities with the photographs of façades, with their grey layer partly covering the image, allowing traces of what was 'underneath' to be seen. Some of the messages on the wall had been scratched over. In two of them, it was possible to see vestiges of the words underneath. In others, the message had been scratched entirely. I wonder what had happened after these messages had been written on the wall. It did not look to me

like this was the hand of the janitor trying to clean the wall, but that of the author or another reader of the graffiti in an attempt to get rid of what he had just written.

The act of scratching the message that had just been written poses troubling questions. I wonder if the person who wrote the message regretted doing it after writing it. I wonder if he felt ashamed for exposing his desires to another man and scratched the message in an attempt to suppress his feelings. I wonder if another man recognised the handwriting of the person who left the message. Would it be possible that someone had recognised the telephone number on the wall and decided to get rid of it? If it was indeed the writer of the message, I wonder if he scratched it right after writing it, or if he decided to erase the message after he masturbated and was overcome with guilt. Or even if he wrote the message and returned to it after some time, changing his mind about his action. Would it be possible that anyone met as a result of leaving these messages on the wall? Do the men who write such messages on the wall of the cubicles actually mean they would like to meet someone?

It seems to me that the graffiti on the wall constitutes a different kind of relationship to the writer's desire in the sense that meeting someone was not the actual goal of this act, but the act an enjoyable thing in itself, a fetish (a substitute for the 'real' thing), a perversion (a pleasurable act without a 'profitable' end), which circled around the idea of encounter. This was the first time during the research process that I was engaging with a form of address, somewhat mysterious or secretive because it was anonymously written. The aspect of the anonymous address and the imaginary addressee present in these photographs (the graffiti was anonymously written to an anonymous receiver) suggests the concept of the imaginary.

I wondered if anyone in the toilet would suspect I was staying inside the cubicles for too long. I became more aware of the sounds outside of the cubicle. There was water running in the urinals, I could hear footsteps outside the cubicle and the sound of flushing from other cubicles. I realised that someone was in the cubicle next to mine. The reflection of his movements, illuminated by the lights coming from the ceiling, bounced on the floor where I was. After photographing as much

as I could inside one cubicle, I decided to move on to the next. I flushed — a sign to whoever was around me that I was coming out, I did not want to catch anyone by surprise. I opened the door and saw a man standing at the urinal right in front of the cubicle I was exiting staring directly at me. I turned right in order to go to the next cubicle and bumped into the man who was coming out of the cubicle next to mine. Panicking, I moved towards the exit and left. The same feeling of vulnerability, shame and guilt I felt when photographing the doorways of sex shops in Soho came to the fore. I decided to walk around the block in order to regain my composure. I stood nearby and observed the entrance to the toilet. I realised that there were other men at different spots outside observing the ones who came in and out. I waited for some time to pass and decided to go in again.

As I was walking down the stairs, I bumped into the janitor. The yellow signs were out. He stared deep into my eyes. I feared he had registered my intention and would recognise me any other time I bumped into him by accident again inside the bathroom. I went inside one of the cubicles, waited for 1 minute to pass, flushed, and left. Feelings of shame, guilt and transgression emerged yet again and indicated to me an intrinsic relationship between these feelings and my desire to photograph. This desire produces images which, in turn, express something about my desires. This insight is important to me because it takes us back to Lacan's definition of the drive and its relationship to desire in the sense that the drive does not pursue a finality as such but always repeats itself around desire, indicating different aspects of desire, expressing facets of desire and constituting it. Despite the fact that desire as such cannot be represented, something about my desire is represented through the photographs I make. They are a materialisation both of my desire to photograph and my desire in relation to what is photographed.

The interpretation of signs of an erotic nature drawn on walls constitutes one of the subjects chosen by Bataille in the book with the covered photograph (1989). Bataille (1989) tells us about the origins of eroticism and taboos, about how eroticism and the awareness of death came to be linked since early times in human history, all through the interpretation of drawings left in caves by prehistoric man, a

form of meaningful mark-making. From a myriad of subjects that such man could have chosen in order to represent and leave a mark in the world, in an attempt to communicate his ideas, Bataille (1989, p. 31) says that the prehistoric man chose to construct highly eroticised scenes of sexual exaltation depicting human-like figures with erect penises and images linked to hunting and killing. Bataille says that the "upper Palaeolithic man, Homo sapiens, is now known to us through signs that move us not only in their exceptional beauty [...]. These signs affect us more through the fact that they bring us abundant evidence of his erotic life". It is important to note, however, that such drawings have been framed historically in a certain way and we can only speculate upon the way they operated for the people who left such marks.

The existence of the eroticised cave drawings also indicates an awareness of sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure is a topic also central to the writings of Bataille himself (1986a) and is seen in terms of a certain excess, a form of surplus energy. Bataille says that "excess stands outside reason" (Bataille, 1986a, p. 168) and that "reason is bound up with work and the purposeful activity that incarnate its laws. But pleasure mocks at toil, and toil we have seen to be unfavourable to the pursuit of intense pleasure" (Bataille, 1986a, p. 168). He goes on to conclude:

> If one calculates the ratio between energy consumed and usefulness of the results, the pursuit of pleasure even if reckoned as useful is essentially extravagant; the more in that usually pleasure has no end product, is thought of as an end in itself and is desired for its very extravagance (Bataille, 1986a, p. 168).

For Bataille, this excess calls upon the notion of expenditure. Bataille says that "when the fever of sex seizes upon us, we [...] recklessly squander considerable resources to no real purpose" (Bataille, 1986a, p. 170). He says that "pleasure is so close to ruinous waste that we refer to the moment of climax as 'little death'" (Bataille, 1986a, 170). He says that "our only real pleasure is to squander our resources to no purpose, just as if a wound were bleeding away inside us; we always want to be sure of the uselessness or the ruinousness of our extravagance" (Bataille, 1986a, 170). The desirous act of mark-making on the walls inside the public toilet seem

to function in this specific field if one considers the pleasure of mark-making with no other purpose outside itself (supposedly meeting another man): the pleasure of squandering resources to no purpose. Bataille links pleasure to material utility, arguing that pleasure is material utility's main objective, "but only in a moderate form, since violent pleasure is seen as *pathological*" [Author's italics] (Bataille, 1986b, p. 116).

He says that "on the one hand, this material utility is limited to acquisition […] and the conservation of goods; on the other, it is limited to reproduction and the conservation of human life" (Bataille, 1986b, p. 116). According to Bataille, "any general judgement of social activity implies the principle that all individual effort, in order to be valid, must be reducible to the fundamental necessities of production and conservation" (1986b, p. 117). He says that "pleasure, whether art, permissible debauchery, or play, is definitively reduced, in the intellectual representations *in circulation*, to a concession; in other words, it is reduced to a diversion whose role is subsidiary" [Author's italics] (Bataille, 1986b, p. 117). He concludes that "the most appreciable share of life is given as the condition of […] social productive activity" (Bataille, 1986b, p. 117). However, Bataille points out that "human activity is not entirely reducible to processes of production and conservation" (1986b, p. 117). He says that part of this activity is represented by:

> Unproductive expenditures: luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activity (i.e., deflected from genital finality), […] activities that, at least in primitive circumstances, have no end beyond themselves. (Bataille, 1986b, p. 117).

The act of mark-making seems to me more a way to dissipate an intense energy, an excessive act valid in itself but without any 'productive' intent. This is also relevant if one considers the act of photographing and the pleasure inherent in it. However, the absence of purpose, its gratuitousness, does not reduce its relevance in relation to the writer's desires. On the contrary, it confirms the intensity of its insistence and the force of his pursuit for pleasure. The act of drawing graffiti on the

wall still entails an addressee nonetheless and thus, it can also be characterised as a form of social act. My photographic act, by engaging with the graffiti, confirms it, and through the photograph turns it into an artistic one.

Gentlemen (2016)

I began photographing inside the facility with my DSLR camera but soon I realised I was not able to use it due to the relatively loud noise from the click of the shutter that could raise suspicions about the nature of my activities, disrupt the goings-on at the urinals and put me in danger. I decided to use my mobile phone instead. The camera on my phone worked silently—and gently. This way, I would not invade the privacy of others and would retain my own. I have edited a series of 30 photographs out of the exposures I made. They form the series *Gentlemen* (2016) and are presented in book format. The book measures 19cm x 19cm and has an ivory linen hard cover. The photographs in this series have been previously shown as prints on a wall, next to each other , forming a grid-like installation.



Illustration 36. Cover of *Gentlemen* photo book.

The positioning of the photographs in each page of the book is reminiscent of the tiling pattern on the wall of the public toilet. The first photograph in the composition is the one in which the graffiti is fully visible, it says “Suits, Suits.” The graffiti gradually becomes increasingly difficult to read in each subsequent page. The last photograph depicts a white tile with nearly imperceptible traces.



Illustration 37. Opening page of *Gentlemen* photo book.

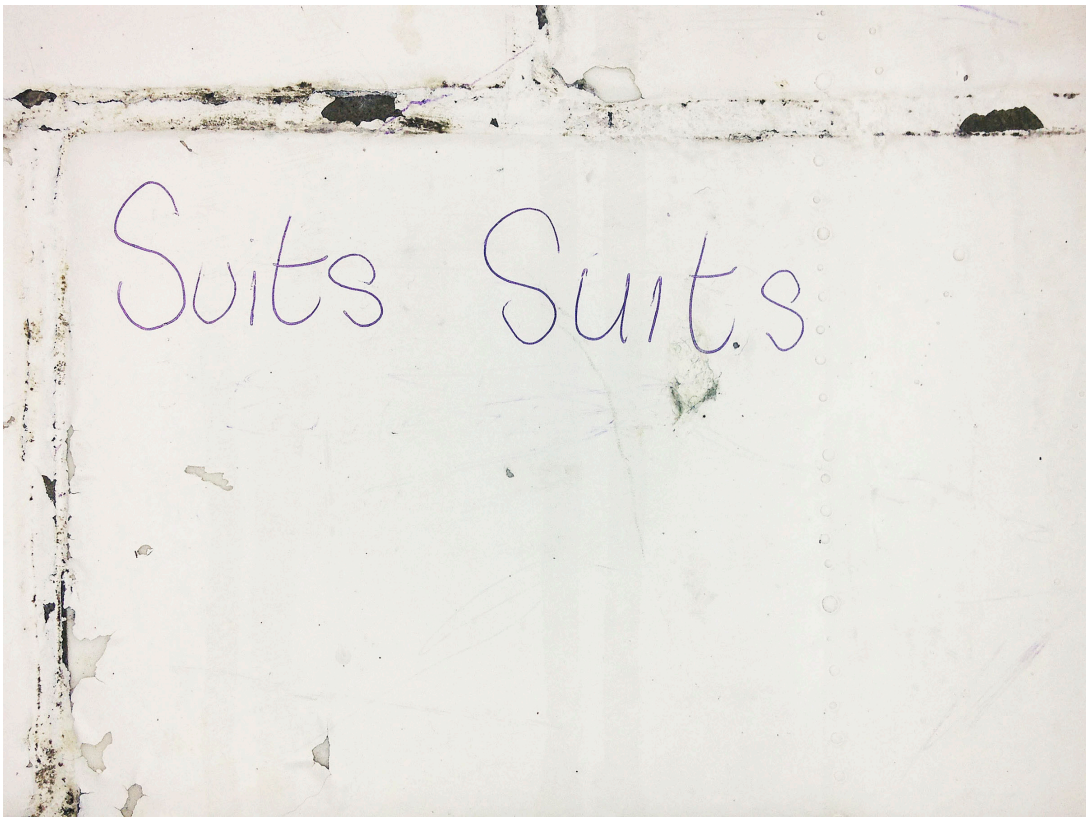


Illustration 38. Photograph printed on first page of *Gentlemen* photo book.



Illustration 39. Example of photographs of tiles on which the text inscribed is not fully visible.

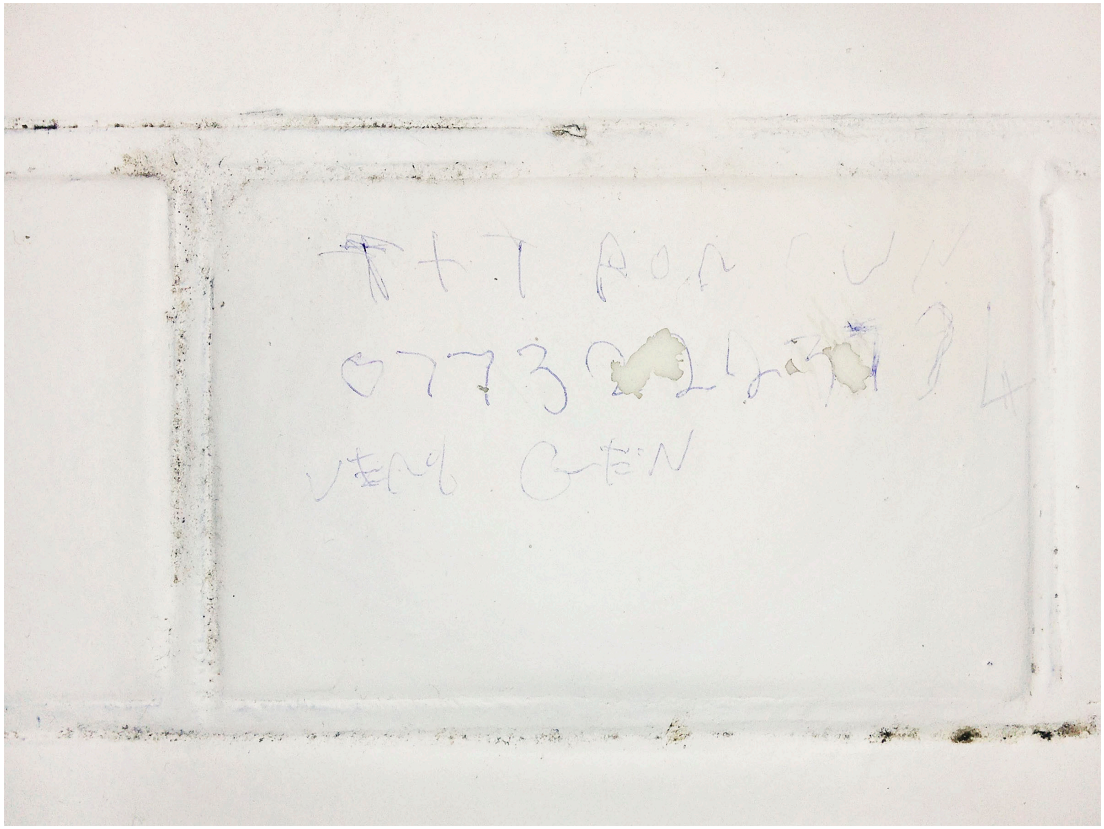


Illustration 40: Photograph printed on left page of photo book in illustration 39.



Illustration 41: Photograph printed on right page of photo book in Illustration 39.

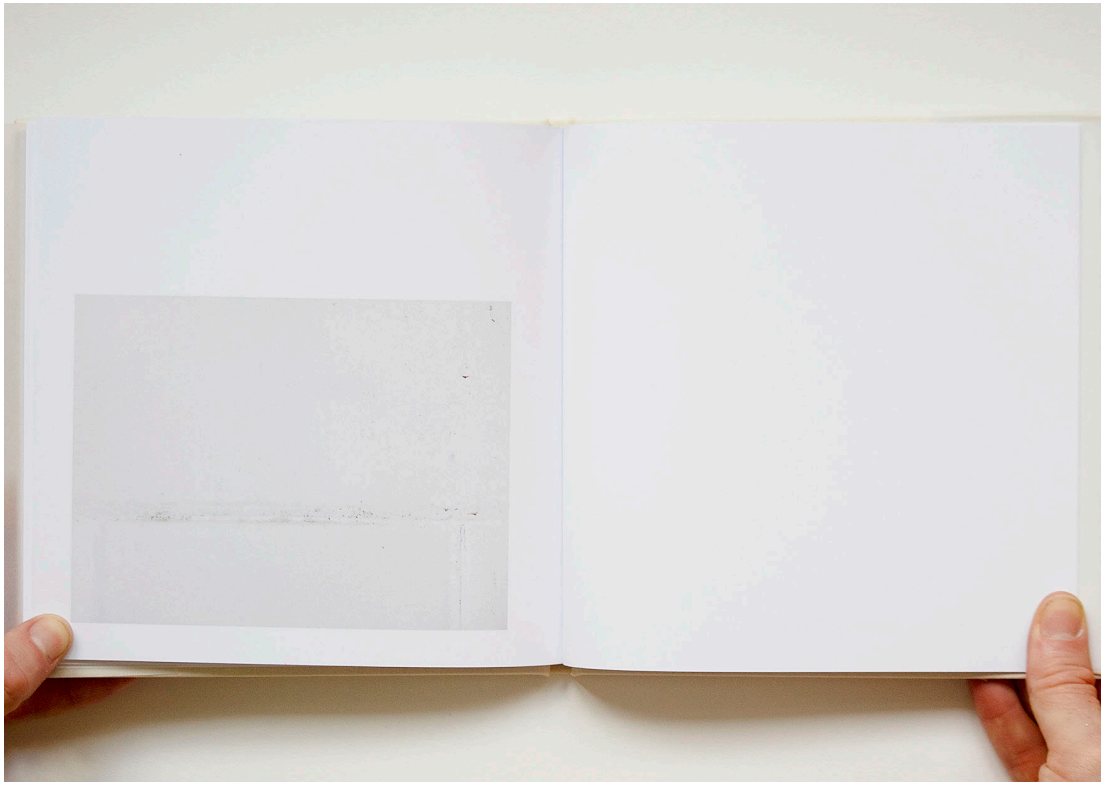


Illustration 42. Last page of Gentlemen photo book.



Illustration 43. Photograph printed on page of photo book in Illustration 42.

The graffiti inscribed on the walls of the cubicles I photographed constitute traces of desire. They represent a mark, an indication that a man had been there. They suggest that he wanted to communicate something about his desires to other men. I consider the meaning of 'the trace'. Traces suggest. As much proof as it can represent, there is still space for the tiniest amount of doubt through 'the trace.' 'The trace' indicates that something else, something which is now out of my sight, has taken place. 'The trace' suggests evidence. It renders something visible just enough to show it probably existed at some point in the past before I came to see it. 'The trace' is suggestive of the glimpse. 'The trace' is always subtle. 'The trace' is an almost invisible, imperceptible sign. Traces imply vestige. Traces are clues, what is residual. To trace something is "to follow a series of marks, of signs, […] to where they lead" (The University of Oxford Press, 1995, p. 1264), in order to discover something, to bring something into view. 'The trace'[30] indicates that something has vanished and suggests the indexical.

As much as desire may not be represented as such, the photographs of the graffiti on the walls of the public toilet are suggestive of the representability of certain elements of desire. They indicate to me that desire cannot be scratched off or out. They suggest the force with which desire strikes. The photographs show that desire cannot be removed or obliterated. Through the photographs, I see that desire cannot be abolished or eradicated. As an act of expenditure circumscribed by aspects of perverse pleasure, the scratched over graffiti, hopelessly painted over with the white paint that peels off and is now represented to me as a photograph, suggests that desire resurfaces, it re-emerges. Desire remains. Mediated by the act of representation, it leaves its traces.

The notion of desire is central to my framing of the obscene. Lacan (2006)

30 Derrida says that "the trace is not only the disappearance of origin - within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a non-origin, which then becomes the origin of the origin" (1997, p. 61). This passage suggests that, for example, a concept is always and already informed by the trace of another, with no 'original' trace being ever possible. This system informs Derrida's notion of *différánce*.

speaks of desire as a certain longing, constituted by lack or absence. Lacan (2006) defines desire (as compared to need and demand) as a longing that remains after essential, fundamental needs (for example, food to subsist) are fulfilled. He says: "Desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the very phenomenon of their splitting" (Lacan, 2006, pp. 580). This definition suggests that desire takes place when a demand asks for more than a need. However, desire is not to be confused with demand. Lacan says: "Although it always shows through in demand, […] desire is nevertheless beyond demand" (2006, pp. 530). Lacan's idea suggests that if 'desire shows through in demand,' it means that desire and demand operate in a synchronized way, that demand stands as desire's instrument, as its channel.

Nevertheless, 'desire is beyond demand'. To demand means 'to ask for'. Therefore, demand is that which you ask for and need is that which is necessary, something indispensable that cannot be done without. According to Lacan's notion of desire, desire takes place beyond the demand, in the expression of a demand that demands more than what is needed. As if in the case of being hungry, for example, in need of food, the need gets distortedly expressed through the demand for a dish made of Stilton cheese with foie gras, French truffles, caviar and sheets of gold flake garnished with edible flower petals. Leader (1997) elaborates on the idea of desire by comparing it to the game of Chinese Whispers, He says:

> When someone demands something, they get something else in its place. […] In other words, one always gets something else. […] There is a fundamental incompatibility between what one asks for and what one wants. [In the game of Chinese Whispers] a message is passed from one player to the next. When it has gone full circle, it has been dramatically distorted, showing how language is both what transmits a message and what necessarily deforms it. One could define desire as exactly this process: as the difference between the original message and that which arrives at the end. The key here is that desire is not the message itself. It is neither the original sentence nor the final one, but the process or structure of distortion itself (Leader, 1997, p. 108).

Leader's insight about the notion of desire as a process which is nevertheless misrepresented en route, in the sense that the original message is always twisted and 'perverted' draws attention to my act of photographing the graffiti inside the cubicles in the public toilet. The initial message, the graffiti initially inscribed by the anonymous man on the wall of the cubicle, an indication only of his desire, is photographed by me and is infused with something of my desire to communicate. Thus, it goes through yet one further stage in this process of distortion and finally takes the form of the image in the photograph, which together with the other photographs that form this series in book format, take yet another form of address to the viewer who looks.

Lacan (2006, p. 222) says that "man's desire finds its meaning in the other's desire, not so much because the other holds the key to the desired object, as because his first object(ive) is to be recognized by the other." According to Lacan (2006), our desire is first and foremost desire for recognition. What is at stake in this view of desire is not really what we desire as such, but that recognition takes place. Since this recognition comes from the other, our desire functions in accordance with what we believe to be desired by the other, what the other lacks. In Lacan's notion of desire, our desire does not belong to ourselves. Our desire always comes after the desire of the other. Our desire is always derivative, it is always indirect and pre-owned. We desire what is desirable for the other, what the other lacks, because what we are really after is the other's recognition, the other's desire turns into ours. For Lacan (1988a), desire cannot be satisfied by an object because desire is not desire for an object as such, like need or demand. Leader (1997, p. 109) says that in Lacan's notion, "desire, indeed, is there to persist as desire, not as anything else." This suggests that desire is alien to satisfaction.

Žižek (1989, p. 34) says that "the paradox of desire is that it posits retroactively its own cause, i.e. an object that can be perceived only by the look 'distorted' by desire, an object that *does not exist* for an 'objective look'" [Author's italics]. The gaze cannot be seen objectively because 'it does not exist,' it is 'objectively' nothing. We only see the eye, not the gaze. As a matter of fact, according to this definition, the gaze does not indeed need the eye in order to be felt. This echoes

my experience photographing displays of magazines inside the newsagents and the effect that my perception of being looked at at all times had upon myself. I have the impression I am being looked at when I pass by windows with closed curtains. This suggests the existence of the gaze, but not of the eye. However, this gaze is that which sets desire in motion. And desire's objective is not to attain this object (because it is not an object as such) but to beset it, to surround it, to circumvent it. Lacan (1988a, p. 243) says: "the object of desire is the cause of the desire, and this object that is the cause of desire is the object of the drive—that is to say, the object around which the drive turns". He says that: "It is not that desire clings to the object of the drive—desire moves around it, in so far as it is agitated in the drive" (Lacan, 1988a, p. 243). Hallward says that "to desire is not to desire the other but to desire the desire of the other" (Ogilvie cited in Hallward 2012c) and that "in so far as the other remains precisely *other*, the nature of desire remains fundamentally enigmatic" [Author's italics] (Hallward, 2012c).

According to Hallward (2012c), "recognition of desire (and desire for recognition) can only proceed in this symbolic domain". In his reading of the impasse between desire and speech (as desire being always distortedly expressed), he says:

> All that can be properly said or presented of the missing object of desire is simply that it is missing: speech misses it. In the domain of speech, the phallus is not a missing object that might be restored or grasped, but simply a signifier for what is missing as such; the symbolic phallus signifies nothing at all (which is also to say that it signifies nothing more, or less, than the order of signification itself, the order in which an object of desire figures only as lack). Within this order, then, the object of desire (which is always specific to a subject) can appear only as a paradoxical and elusive non-object, as something that 'objectifies' the situated absence or impossibility of an object, a determinate instance of 'something' that cannot be grasped or represented (Hallward, 2012c).

He concludes by saying that desire is "doomed to perpetual dissatisfaction by definition" (Hallward, 2012c) and that "the missing object of desire is nothing other than that: missing, pure and simple" (Hallward, 2012c). He says that the object of desire "is missing, rather than stolen or lost – properly understood, desire never

had an object it might lose" (Hallward, 212c). He says that "desire is never anything other than desire of lack, desire for what is missing and has always been missing" (Hallward, 2012c) and that "what is missing, however, and how it is missing, is always particular to the subject who strives to speak the truth of this particular lack" (Hallward, 2012c).

Mitchell (2005) introduces important questions with regards to desire and the photographic, the very first one being an argument of the impossibility of picturing desire, the invisibility of desire and its unrepresentability as an image. He says that "we might be able to talk about, or at least around, desire, […] but we can never see, much less show, desire in itself" (Mitchell, 2005, p. 58). He says that "art refuses to accept this prohibition, and insists on depicting desire" (Mitchell, 2005, p. 57). Essentially, Mitchell (2005, p. 66) says that "desire as longing produces fantasies."

The realisation that ambiguity pervades the photographic representation of desire and characterises the relationship between desire and the image leads me to draw my conclusion.

See the ivory linen hard cover photo book *Gentlemen* that accompanies the thesis.

CONCLUSION

This research began as the result of an encounter with a photographic image. My pondering upon the nature of concealment led me to the notion of the obscene as that which must be kept out of sight of the public. The experience of facing the covered photograph opened up for me the idea that photographic representation mobilises desire. The journey towards understanding what is at stake in looking and being looked at and how this is both part of the construction of visuality through photography on the one hand, and the constitution of sexual identity through psychoanalysis on the other, led me to the recognition of desire as a motivating force.

The notion of the permanently out of sight but ever-present gaze according to Lacan characterised the theoretical field within which my thesis operates. The understanding that the gaze destabilises the position of the viewing subject as a form of exposure in which the subject realises themselves as being revealed to something 'other', to something that is not seen (lack) but that, crucially, signifies and perverts the field of visuality, characterised my initial paradigm. The Lacanian framework provided a starting point from which to approach the question of what it might mean to come out to desire and into the field of visuality through photographic practice, one grounded on the idea that "the visual field we inhabit is one of meanings and not just shapes, that it is permeated by verbal and visual discourses, by signs" (Bryson, 1988, p. 106); all of which are imagined by the viewing subject.

The tensions between the Lacanian notion of the gaze and the Foucauldian framework which informs my methodology have been noted (Copjec, 1989).The first is psychoanalytically informed, a metapsychological concept, experienced by the subject as a result of their deployment of vision; Lacan's gaze is self-referential. The second is characterised as a technique to surveil imposed on the subject from without, one that does not originate in the psyche of the subject, but is established as a form of disciplinary force that implements and reinforces institutional power. Foucault's notion of the gaze is underpinned by the relationship between site and sight (as opposed to sight and psyche in Lacan), one in which architectural social spaces inform how the gaze affects the subject. Nevertheless, it is relevant to draw

attention to the aspect of a widespread gaze that greatly impacts the subject in both approaches. The idea of a gaze without an identifiable source remains central to both Lacan and Foucault.

The work of Foucault (1977, 1978; 2003) informed my methodology: aspects of who saw what or whom, where and under what technologies informed my exploration and characterisation of visuality through photographic representation. I was inspired by Foucault's ideas on how visibility is bound to relations of power in certain institutions (the home, the hospital, the school, the prison, the asylum) and how such relations affect the constitution of the subject. In light of this idea, I considered how specific architectural and social spaces were intrinsically related to the exercise of looking and, therefore, conditioned how this look was deployed, what was made visible and what could be seen. I examined how relations of power affect the performance of sexual identity and what is revealed about oneself through this performance (for example, p. 134). A Foucauldian methodology was paramount for the development of my thesis, for it suggests that "visibility enables the exercise of […] power;" that visibility is "power's condition of possibility" and that "devoid of visibility, power becomes powerless" (Gordon, 2002, p. 132).

I researched spaces where desire and the look are mutually exercised: publicly accessible spaces in London such as sex shops, gay bathhouses, sex clubs and a public toilet; specific locations that arose from lived experience, previous knowledge and also as the result of research. Visiting a bathhouse in London marked a symbolic moment during my research: in order to explore 'what is out', I went in. What came out of this exploration was an analysis of the relationship between photography and notions of pleasure, privacy, exposure, and how ethics, morality, laws, regulations, and taboos affect photographic practice. This exploration was also what enabled the notion of the phallus as signifier to be elaborated, I considered the phallus as the signifier *par excellence*. The idea of the 'cover' with which I began the first chapter of this research took a more symbolic turn, leading me to explore notions of nakedness and nudity, and ultimately, of shame (p. 122 and 123). I discussed how shame is constituted as an entity that performs through the eye and is directly connected to

being seen, how it emerges insofar as we are always and already in the state of being looked at, how it presents itself because of the possibility of the Other's gaze which is always and already there.

The resulting photo books *Undercover* (2013), *Of Black Holes and Other Glories* (2013) and *Gentlemen* (2016) and large-format prints *Come Inside Me* (2019), *G(r)ay Area* (2016), *From the Bathhouse* (2014) and *Out of the Bathhouse* (2015) make a distinct contribution to contemporary methods of representation of gay male desire, a field dominated by the invariably graphic depiction of the erotic and sexual figuration; assuming that the 'truth' of sexuality can be unproblematically made visible. The practice element present here also makes a distinct contribution to its proposition of a different approach in representation in that something always goes missing. The practical field of inquiry was contextualised through my discussion of Serrano's *Ejaculate In Trajectory XIV* (1988) as a key practitioner in my field. This discussion enabled me to demonstrate the visual field constructed through photography which my practice acts upon. It provided a possibility for the metaphorical question of 'coming out' through photographic practice. It enabled me to claim that my photography practice is perverse.[31] I identified the place where the image is not as the site of the Signifier, the field of the Other, as that which conditions the desire of the subject who looks.

This research led me to develop a new distinctive approach to my photographic practice. I explored a variety of possibilities for image-making —a medium format camera, a digital SLR and a mobile phone camera—and I also explored the different possibilities for the materiality of the photograph. Considering the materiality of the photograph led me to theories of the haptic and the imbrication of visuality with touch and surface. Not only did it allow me to physically touch the surface of different photographic papers in order to decide conceptually the appropriate paper to print; but it also allowed me to be sensitive to the touch of other surfaces. Surfaces of toilet walls, of magazine covers, of glory holes, of doorways, of a towel, of gay

31 Barthes' gratuitous act that "cannot be turned to the profit of social ends or the species" (1995, p. 206).

bathhouses and of façades of sex clubs. It has led me to now consider whether or indeed how tactility operates as a form of knowledge production in practice. This is an important consideration in the production of the works as handheld books.

Each surface photographed demanded its own output format, its own type of surface, so that the status of each piece could be resolved for this submission. Large-format digital C-type prints, photo books of varying sizes, colours and materials, photographs printed on textured Giclée paper. The use of the photographic series emerged and became a regular feature of my creative process. This multiplicity led me to conceptualise the different effects caused by the photograph as a material object and as a result of looking. Each surface photographed was bound up with a different form of visibility/invisibility, conveying secrecy in multiple ways, turning the notion of 'the secret' into the kernel with which to construct codes of revealing. The inevitability of visibility (which leads to intelligibility through the visual), of 'coming out' through photographic representation into the field of visuality, has been negotiated in light of its opposite term, through the ambiguity of that which is never fully exposed, of what is withheld from view.

This insight reminds me yet again of Derrida's two kinds of secret, in which he says:

> The one, which […] is […] always on the point of being divulged, and is in that sense barely a secret at all; and the other, to which no answer can be given and which therefore cannot be revealed, which […] resisting all discovery, […] remains as that which has never been present, cannot be made present, and remains […] as an always future possibility (2007, p. 113).

Researching the field of visuality in the context of representations of gay male desire led me to draw on the relationship between desire and the image. It led me to the insight that desire is what compels me to look, to photograph, and yet, it is also what prevents me from being finished, from taking 'the last photograph' and once and for all making a definite meaning of what I see. This relationship remains fundamentally enigmatic. Unrepresentable in its most singular form, my desire for

the image strikes me, and like the image, or rather, because of its absence, this desire remains. As long as I desire, there will always be a 'yet not known', a perpetual space off-frame, off-site, out of sight, that irremediably throws me into the field of visuality, making me want to see and look again. In this respect, this research falls short of a fixed answer, it does not bring me closer to an exhaustive hypothesis. The research does not provide answers but seeks further questions regarding the possibilities of desire in photographic practice, a pursuit which is never complete.

Roland Barthes (1981, p. 66) calls this eternal encountering with a photographic image that never satisfies the consuming eye, forever withholding something from the viewing subject "Sisyphean labor". Desiring to see and recognise something of his dead mother in a collection of photographs of hers that he found shortly after her death, he elaborates on the frustration of looking, of facing each photograph that reveals something of her to him and yet, does not show him that which he wants to see (Barthes, 1981). Unsatisfied, he says that to look (yet again) at a photograph is "to reascend, straining toward the essence, to climb back down without having seen it, and to begin all over again" (Barthes, 1981, p. 66). Eventually, Barthes finds a photograph in which he 'rediscovers' his mother, a photograph he called the 'Winter Garden' photograph (Barthes, 1981). However, he concludes that he would not be able to reproduce the image and reveal it to us because it existed only for him (Barthes, 1981). He withholds it and never shows it, thwarting our desire to look and see *that* which he had seen (Barthes, 1981).

Peggy Phelan (1996, p. 34) calls both Barthes' awareness of looking at the photographs yet not-seeing that which he wished to see and his desire to keep looking a form of enticement, a temptation. According to her, this double action is characterised as "the lure of the image repertoire" (Phelan, 1996, p. 34). She says that this dichotomy, the recognition of not seeing and the desire to look again, attests to the divergence between the eye and the gaze (Phelan, 1996). This informs the distinction between vision and the concept of visuality about which I wrote in **What is Out of Sight?** (p. 27). The ravenous, unrestful eye (vision) fleetingly succumbs to the power of the gaze (visuality), "the ocular perspective which frames the image,

sees what is shown and discovers it to be 'lacking'" (Phelan, 1996, p. 34). She goes on to say that "the law of the gaze is invested with a lure", and that this "lure is the erotic kernel of the gaze" (Phelan, 1996, p. 34). She expounds on the notion by saying that "desire is enflamed by the lure, by the gaping space between the gaze and the eye" and concludes by saying that "burden of […] photography is both to reveal and conceal this gap" (Phelan, 1996, p. 34).

Phelan turns to the work of photographer Robert Mapplethorpe to expound on the concept of the lure of the image repertoire (1996). Referring to Mapplethorpe's *Derrick Cross* (1983), she says:

> The gaze ravages the print, the eye accosts the model: the lure for the looker is to touch him – to hold him in your hand. Mapplethorpe's cool camera serves the model up untouched; the image's impression on the paper invites the spectator to fantasise the pressure of that touch. Erotic photography solicits the touch and defers it: instead of skin, paper. Instead of sex, the devouring gaze (Phelan, 1983, p. 34).

This quote reminds me of another of Mapplethorpe's photographs, his *Invitation to Light Gallery opening, January,* 1976. The photograph, in landscape mode, depicts Mapplethorpe's naked body head on, between thorax and quadriceps. The photograph also shows a photographic camera that looks out and faces the viewer; Mapplethorpe holds it with both hands. The camera is positioned in such a way that its back appears to touch the lower abdominals. It covers his belly button; his penis remains graphically visible below the camera. The image measures 7.6cm x 9.5cm, the sheet on which it is printed 8.9cm x 11.3cm. His name is embossed on the bottom right side, within the white border that surrounds the image.

In the event of the opening of his first solo exhibition in New York, Mapplethorpe made prints of this image using the original Polaroid negative (Christies, 2021). The photograph constituted the invite for the show (Christies, 2021). He covered the exposed penis in the photograph by placing a white circular dot sticker (diameter app. 2cm) on the area depicting it in each invite. The white dot sticker is rather opaque. Its whiteness is not absolute and covers the image but also allows something of it to be seen through, as if its opacity had been reduced. The photograph was then placed

inside a protective Polaroid sleeve which read 'DON'T TOUCH HERE' and sent out to guests inside a Tiffany's envelope (Christies, 2021).

Mapplethorpe's *Invitation to Light Gallery opening, January,* 1976 explores elements of secrecy as activators of desire in looking. This secrecy produces the invite for the exhibition: an invitation to come out. The photograph shows Mapplethorpe's body as an object of desire to be penetrated by the gaze, the eye's erection. But Mapplethorpe exclaims: "Don't touch here!". This statement reinforces the idea of 'look but do not touch', a refusal of satiety. It reminds me of my insights about the artist book *Undercover* (2013) (p. 63) and the photographs I took inside newsagents across London. Mapplethorpe's Polaroid photograph was also placed inside a sleeve – a form of barrier invested with an aura of excitement to be knocked down[32] – similar to many magazines displayed on the higher shelves of the establishments I visited.

Mapplethorpe's request "Don't touch here!" constitutes an invitation to transgression, for before one's hands had inevitably touched the invite, one's eyes, as organs of touch, would have already caressed it, transgressing the prohibition. The photographic camera he holds, and which faces the viewer, reinforces this idea: it is ready to shoot and capture the viewer in the act of looking/touching. The photograph also operates at the level of fetishism and the fetish. It frames part of Mapplethorpe's body, detaching it from the whole, and triggers a sense of absence with its interplay of framing/deframing, for it includes and excludes simultaneously. A symbolic castration takes place, for the viewer is confronted with the lack of a penis. The viewer disavows this lack by handling the photograph as an object. This disavowal, represented by the act of keeping the photograph (so that one can attend the opening of the exhibition), consequently brings the viewer to a threshold, a portal into a new territory, a boundary to be crossed; the moment when one's desiring eyes will be able to look again and see Mapplethorpe's photographs in the exhibition.

Mapplethorpe's act of covering the penis represented in the photograph

32 This is a reference to Bataille, 1986a, p. 48.

also brings to mind an element of the perverse in the terms I discussed Serrano's *Ejaculate in Trajectory XIV* (1988). A perverse act on Mapplethorpe's part, for the white dot sticker on the photograph, now as an off-frame space inside the rectangle of paper, leads one to visualise the obscene as *ob skene*, in light of the Greek etymology of the term, out of sight.

This insight takes me back full circle to where this thesis began. It takes me back full circle to my desire to look again and see the covered photograph in Bataille's *The Tears of Eros*, when I began to think of the covered photograph as a form of present absence, wondering what a photographic image that is withheld from view arouses in the viewer. It takes me back full circle to the act of concealing and to the idea that photographic representation mobilises desire.

I claim that photographic representation constitutes a site for the suspension of the revelation of what is represented, a suspension of classification and intelligibility. What is rendered visible acts as a form of artistic defiance directed at the subject who looks, its ambiguity functions as a resistance to and subversion of the hegemonic order, for it permanently denies the subject its position of supremacy. Its present absence poses a form of permanent dissent that threatens the social construct of vision and the relations of power that operate through the gaze. It does not aspire to be heroic and overthrow a political system, however. This suspension of intelligibility represented through the photograph poses an interruption to the tendency towards normalisation; and it does so in the face of power. And as Elif Shafak has said, "where there is power, there is politics. And to talk about sexuality is a political act" (CAS & Frieze, 2019, 41:20).

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APPENDIX

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Wednesday, 16 October 2013

Re: 8th Global Conference - *The Erotic,* Oxford, United Kingdom 2013

Letter of Confirmation

This is to certify that Fagner Bibiano Alves attended the 8th Global Conference - *The Erotic: Exploring Critical Issues*, held from Tuesday 17th September – Thursday 19th September 2013 in Oxford, United Kingdom.

At the conference Fagner presented a paper entitled "The Obliterated Image: Fetishism and the Erotic in relation to the Gaze in Photographic Practice". The paper was well received by the conference delegates and stimulated considerable academic dialogue. We are grateful for Fagner's participation in the conference and contribution to the global dialogues which took place in Oxford.

Warmly,

Dr Robert Fisher
Network Founder and Leader
Inter-Disciplinary.Net

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The Erotic 8 Hard Copy Announcement

[redacted]@inter-disciplinary.net <[redacted]@inter-disciplinary.net>
Sun 03/11/2013 1132

To: Fagner Bibiano Alves <f.bibianoalves1@arts.ac.uk>

Greetings Erotic 8 Delegates!

We are pleased to announce an inter-disciplinary volume that includes papers from the conference that took place in *September 2013:* * The 8th Global Conference – The Erotic.*

If your paper has been included here, please see the instructions that follow. If not, please remember that this is not a list of the 'best' papers from the conference, but rather represents papers that seem to be in conversation with one another in specific ways and in line with our desire to encourage and promote on-going interdisciplinary dialogue.

The volume will be published by *Inter-Disciplinary Press *under the tentative title: */The Nature of Erotic as Desire and Intuition/*

It will be edited by Dena Gilby and Doreen Bauschke

To Contact the Editors:

Dena Gilby: [redacted] <[redacted]

Doreen Bauschke: [redacted]

****

*** Important***

The titles listed below are based upon the title of the conference paper. The title of your hard copy chapter must be different from the conference paper and/or your eBook chapter if you submitted it for publication.

The book will have the following structure:

In Place of Introduction

/The Sacred Imperative to Teach the Erotic in Literature, Despite the Restrictions–Legal and Tribal–that Bar the Door and Demand the Veil

/Doyle Wesley Walls

I. Desire as a Motivation

/Plato's Reconstruction of the Erotic: Passion of the Reason/

Rekha Navneet

/ /

/Sartrean Sexual Persona: Overcoming the 'Gap' Between Sexual Identity and Personal Identity/

Gary Foster

/ /

/Dennis Cooper, Maurice Blanchot, Slavoj Zizek and Jacques Derrida The Erotic, Ethics & Philosophy: Fantasy & the Other in Dennis Cooper's Frisk

/Matthew Graham

/Erotic Space in Bernardo Bertolucci's Last Tango in Paris and Sarah Kane's Cleansed

/David Hammerbeck

II. "All Things Can Tempt Me" – Eros in Literature

/Same-Soul Desire: Arousing the Future via the Medieval

/Ben Ambler

/ /

/ //A Comrade or a Mistress?: Translations of Robert Burns's Erotic Poetry in the Soviet Union/

Natalia Kaloh Vid

/Breaking the Hard Limits: Romance, Pornography, and Genre in the 'Fifty Shades' Trilogy

/Jodi McAlister

III. Breaking the Limits of the Present and the Past

/ /

/Growing Intimate with Monsters: Mary Shelley's Dark Desires in Shelley Jackson's Patchwork Girl

/Doreen Bauschke

/ /

/Loving the Hybrid: Erotic Encounters with the Non Human/

Evelyn Tsitas

/ /

/Sexing the Past: Venus, the Erotic and History as a Lens for Intercultural and Inter-Historical Interaction/

Dena Gilby

IV. Visual and Auditory Effect of Erotic

/ /

/Erotic Neutrality and the self-display logic of Contemporary Art and Protest/

Paul Tebbs

/ /

/Eroticism against Terrorism in Algeria in the Raï Music Age

/Sabrina Zerar

/ /

/Woman in Heat/

Benita Suchodrev

/ /

/The Obliterated Image: Fetishism and the Erotic in Relation to the Gaze in Photographic Practice/

Fagner Bibiano Alves

* *

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* *

Instructions for Contributors - Please follow these instructions carefully:

1. Acceptance of the invitation:

All authors included in the volume must confirm their willingness to have their chapter included in the volume. Please send an e-mail to: [redacted]

, confirming your willingness to develop your chapter for inclusion in the themed volume. Please include the following information in your email's subject line:

Conference Name and Number: Your Last Name

This must arrive by *15 November 2013*. If you do not wish to participate, please send a courtesy email to the address listed above, indicating your desire not to participate; if we do not receive either response, your paper will be withdrawn from the volume with immediate effect. Volume editors that are included on the list of contributors must also send an acceptance of the invitation.

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The chapter must show awareness of, and make reference to, one or more of the other chapters in the section of the volume in which it appears. The publication is intended to be more than a collection of chapters, and it is a requirement for contributors to engage with and map bridges between their chapter and the others in the same thematic section. Begin by viewing the eBook chapter or online conference draft of the author to which you wish to refer within your chapter. It is a good idea to communicate with the author personally to produce the dialogue that will appear in your chapter. Your conference packet should have the email address of the author included, but you may also contact your editor who will have that information. For further questions or support on this requirement, /contact your editor/ at the email address listed above.

7. Submission Deadline:

All chapters are to be submitted to [redacted] * by 28 February 2014*. This is a non-negotiable deadline. If you miss the deadline, your paper will be excluded. It is a good idea to submit your paper at least four weeks before this deadline to allow for any changes which may need to be made in order to be accepted for inclusion in the hard copy volume. You must submit your paper, free from errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation. Please proofread your work before submitting it to us. Chapters that have not been proofread are subject to request of revisions by the PPM.

8. Communication with the Editor:

The editor will have three months to complete their work on these chapters. During this stage of development, your editor may contact you for more information or clarification of your materials. Your editor will give you a deadline in which to perform their requested actions. You must complete the communication with the editor by their given deadline or your chapter will be removed from the volume. During the editing phase will be the final opportunity to view your chapter before it goes to print. No post-technical editing checks will be offered.

9. Final Submission Date of Edited Chapters:

The editors will submit the finished manuscript by *15 June 2014.* The manuscript will then go to the technical editor for final touch-ups. Once completed, it will go to the printer.

10. Final Publication Date:

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Warmly

Lisa Howard and Rob Fisher

Lisa Howard

Publications Project Manager

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Charlie Dutton Gallery [redacted] 23/11/2013 14:03

Glory Hole

To photography@fagnerbibiano.com

Dear Fagner,

We will be exhibiting 50 pieces of work and film this year and it was extremely difficult to choose.

We are delighted to inform you that your work has made it in to this final selection. Congratulations! The title of the work that we would like you to show is in the subject heading.

We now need you to print and fill in the PDF form that is attached and send it back to us with the work. Very importantly as mentioned in the T/C, the work must be for sale, please let us know if you have sold it by Monday morning so we can arrange to show another work. If you sell from Monday 25th November a commission of 50% is to be paid to the gallery as we shall start to promote you, your work and the show.

The work needs to arrive at the gallery absolutely no later than 5pm Saturday 7th December. Between now and then the Gallery will be open at the following times:

Thursday – Saturday 11-6pm

The opening and party for the "Crash Open" will be on Wednesday 11th December 6 -10pm (all welcome).

The exhibition will until - 11th January 2014 collection of unsold work will be 11th 12th and 13th January

Congratulations again and we are looking forward to showing your work.

With very best wishes and looking forward to meeting you.

Charlie

Please do not hesitate to call us on 0207 831 0889 or 07930689839 if you have any questions or email me [redacted]

--
--
CHARLIE DUTTON GALLERY
1a Princeton Street
London
WC1R 4AX
020 7831 0889
www.charlieduttongallery.com

- Crash Form 2013.pdf (87 KB)

Barbican Arts Group Trust [redacted] 24/10/2015 06:30

Re: ArtWorks Open 2015 - Submissions

To Fagner Bibiano <photography@fagnerbibiano.com>

Dear Fagner

Thanks for your mail. Info should be with you by Monday

Kind regards

Mark

On 23/10/2015 11:50, "[Barbican Arts Group Trust]" <photography@fagnerbibiano.com> wrote:

Dear Mark,

Thanks for your email, I am really excited to take part!
I am writing in order to enquire about the CV and statement as I have not received the email with the template.
Please let me know!

Kind regards,

Fagner

> On 20 October 2015 at 18:01 BAGT [redacted] wrote:
>
> Dear Fagner
>
> I'm contacting you regarding your submission to ArtWorks Open 2015. Paul Johnson and Jonathan Baldock selected the show over the weekend 32 works were selected from 550.
>
> May I apologise for the delay in contacting you.
>
> I'm delighted to inform you your work AO_15487.jpg has been selected for the show.
>
> I'll be contacting you tomorrow with a template for a brief CV and statement. Please check you have the necessary dates for dropping the work off etc.
>
> Kind regards and congratulations
>
> Mark Wainwright
>
> Director
> Barbican Arts Group Trust
> Barbican Arts Group Trust Reg Company No 06355408 - Reg Charity No 1120918
>
> http://www.barbicanartsgrouptrust.co.uk/
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RESULTADO DA CONVOCATÓRIA GARAGEM

julho 12, 2017 | por Resumo Fotográfico



"Fora da Sauna" de Fagner Bibiano Alves, Londres, 2015

A Convocatória Garagem recebeu um total de 137 inscrições de diversas partes do Brasil. Foram selecionadas 40 fotografias autorais para fazer parte da exposição "Diverso", que terá abertura durante o Quintal Fotográfico, na próxima sexta-feira (14), em Belo Horizonte.

12 trabalhos finalistas serão impressos pela Lab Prophoto em papel silk no tamanho 30 x 45 cm e serão colocados em exposição nas paredes da Galeria Garagem. As fotos vão participar de uma votação popular entre público presente no evento e os autores das três fotos mais votadas serão premiados com livros e cursos da editora iPhoto.

Os demais 28 trabalhos receberam Menção Honrosa e vão integrar um fotolivro que será impresso exclusivamente para a mostra e estará disponível para a apreciação durante todo o período de exposição. Além disso, todas as fotografias selecionadas farão parte também de uma galeria virtual. Veja abaixo a lista completa de obras selecionadas:

Finalistas:

- ***Cheio de marra*** – Felipe Muniz – Ouro Preto, 2015
- ***Corpos Celestes*** – Marina Passos – Belo Horizonte, 2017
- ***Elementos*** – Ary Attab – Santos, 2015
- ***Fora da Sauna*** – Fagner Bibiano Alves – Londres, 2015
- ***Íntimo*** – Julia Bioni – Juiz de Fora, 2016
- ***Misérables Souvenirs*** – Filipe Chaves – Paris, 2014
- ***O conto*** – Ligia Morase – Contagem, 2017
- ***Pedreira*** – Caio Santos Siqueira – Mairiporã, 2017
- ***Pitonisa*** – Natália Nunes – Belo Horizonte, 2013
- ***Prece*** – Leo Tafuri – Belo Horizonte, 2017
- ***Ritual da manhã*** – Rose Steinmetz – São Paulo, 2017
- ***Vai Corintia*** – Elvécio Fernandes – Tiradentes, 2016

Menção Honrosa:

- ***A calmaria*** – Ellen Beraldo – Napoles, 2017
- ***A face*** – Tellus – Contagem, 2017
- ***Atrás das grades*** – Larissa Chilanti – Rio de Janeiro, 2016
- ***Chuva de cores*** – Marcelo Santos – Belo Horizonte, 2016
- ***Cidade Vazia*** – Marcelo Santos – Belo Horizonte, 2017
- ***Contemplação*** – Felipe Muniz – Alto Caparaó, 2016
- ***Coração Raiz*** – Daniel Manoel – São Paulo, 2012
- ***Corpos Celestes*** – Marina Passos – Belo Horizonte, 2017
- ***Cotidiano*** – Felipe Ferreira de Almeida – Belford Roxo, 2017
- ***Deep Beauty*** – Julia Bioni – Juiz de Fora, 2016
- ***Equilíbrio*** – Liliana Coluci – Ribeirão Preto, 2017

PUBLICAÇÕES POPULARES



Entenda as mensagens de erro das câmeras Canon

Na semana passada, publicamos na seção Duvida do leitor , uma postagem relacionada ao Erro 20 na câmera Canon EOS Rebel T1i de um leit...



Máquina do tempo: Cronologia das câmeras fotográficas

A série Máquina do tempo chegou ao fim. Foram publicados aqui, ao longo de 9 meses, mais de 30 postagens sobre os equipamentos fotográfico...



Anya Taylor-Joy posa para ensaio inspirado na série "O Gambito da Rainha"

A atriz Anya Taylor-Joy posou para as lentes do fotógrafo britânico Pip, reinterpretando seu papel na série "O Gambito da Rainha", do canal ...



Ísis Medeiros lança fotolivro sobre crime ambiental em Mariana

Mina do Chico Rei em Ouro Preto, primeira mina de Minas Gerais. Cinco anos depois da tragédia que paralisou a vida em Mariana e deixou Mina...



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Prêt-à-portrait ResumoFotográfico Um bom retrato é uma biografia fotografada

PhotoEros.net Fotografia, nu e sensualidade

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RESULTADO DA CONVOCATÓRIA GARAGEM

- ***Guarda-sonhos*** – Filipe Chaves – Belo Horizonte, 2008
- ***Janela*** – Alexandre Biciati – Tiradentes, 2015
- ***Liberação*** – Andréa e Silva – Santos, 2017
- ***Magote é cambada*** – Gustavo Araújo – Belo Horizonte, 2017
- ***Massai*** – Cléber de Assis, Tanzânia, 2015
- ***O gato subiu no telhado*** – Andréa e Silva – São Paulo, 2017
- ***O Iluminado*** – Renato Marcelo – Engenheiro Balduíno, 2015
- ***O Sal da Terra*** – Renato Marcelo – São João das Missões, 2016
- ***Os meninos da ponte*** – Floriza Rios – Fortaleza, 2013
- ***Piscina*** – Alexandre Biciati – Belo Horizonte, 2017
- ***Reflexo*** – Liliana Coluci – Ribeirão Preto, 2017
- ***Sem direito à cor*** – Alessa Ferreira de Melo – São Paulo, 2017
- ***Simbólico Feminino*** – Ligia Morase – Belo Horizonte, 2017
- ***Sobre meu pai*** – Ligia Morase – Contagem, 2017
- ***Social*** – Junior Carazzato – Belo Horizonte, 2017
- ***Solitário*** – Ellen Beraldo – Torcello, 2017
- ***Só love*** – Leo Tafuri – Belo Horizonte, 2017

PUBLICADO EM: CONVOCATÓRIAS, GARAGEM

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PAST EVENT

22ND ANNUAL POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE

HOSTED BY BORTOLAMI

DATE:
January 3, 2020–
January 5, 2020

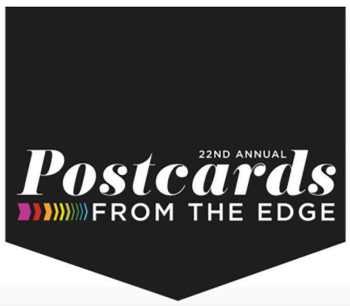
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PRICE:

TYPE OF EVENT:
VISUAL AIDS BENEFIT ,
VISUAL AIDS EVENT

LOCATION:
Bortolami Gallery
39 Walker St
New York, NY , 10013
United States





A BENEFIT FOR VISUAL AIDS

JANUARY 3-5 AT BORTOLAMI
39 WALKER ST • TRIBECA • NEW YORK CITY

1 / 45

Postcards From the Edge offers a rare opportunity to acquire original, postcard-sized artwork from internationally renowned and emerging artists for only $85 each. Offered on a first-come, first-served basis, over 1500 works are exhibited anonymously, and the identity of the artist is revealed only after the work is purchased. With the playing field leveled, all participants can take home a piece by a famous artist, or one who's just making their debut in the art world. Nonetheless, collectors walk away with something beautiful, a piece of art they love!

HOST GALLERY: Bortolami, 39 Walker Street, Tribeca

PREVIEW PARTY:

Friday, January 3rd, 5-8pm
VIP Preview begins at 5pm - $100 admission includes two raffle tickets (payable at the door or online)
Artist Preview 6-8pm - Participating Artists - FREE* (no need to RSVP - artists' name held at the door)

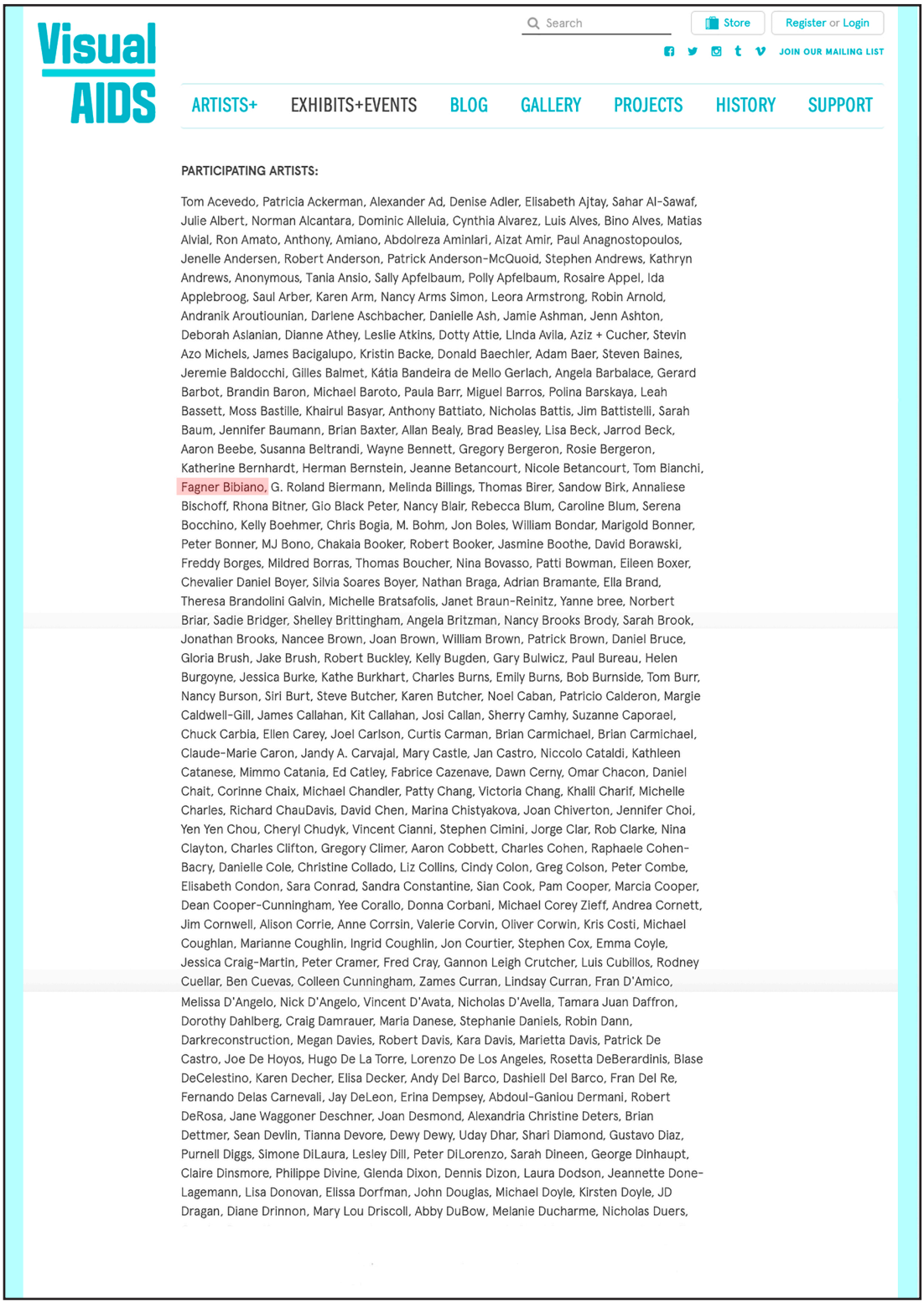
(Preview ONLY - NO POSTCARD SALES)

BENEFIT SALE:

Saturday, January 4th, 10am-6pm

Sunday, January 5th, 12noon-4pm

Benefit Sale is first-come, first served. $5 suggested admission. Works are signed on the back and displayed anonymously. Artist's name revealed only after purchase. Cash, check or credit card (MC VISA AMEX) accepted.



Visual AIDS

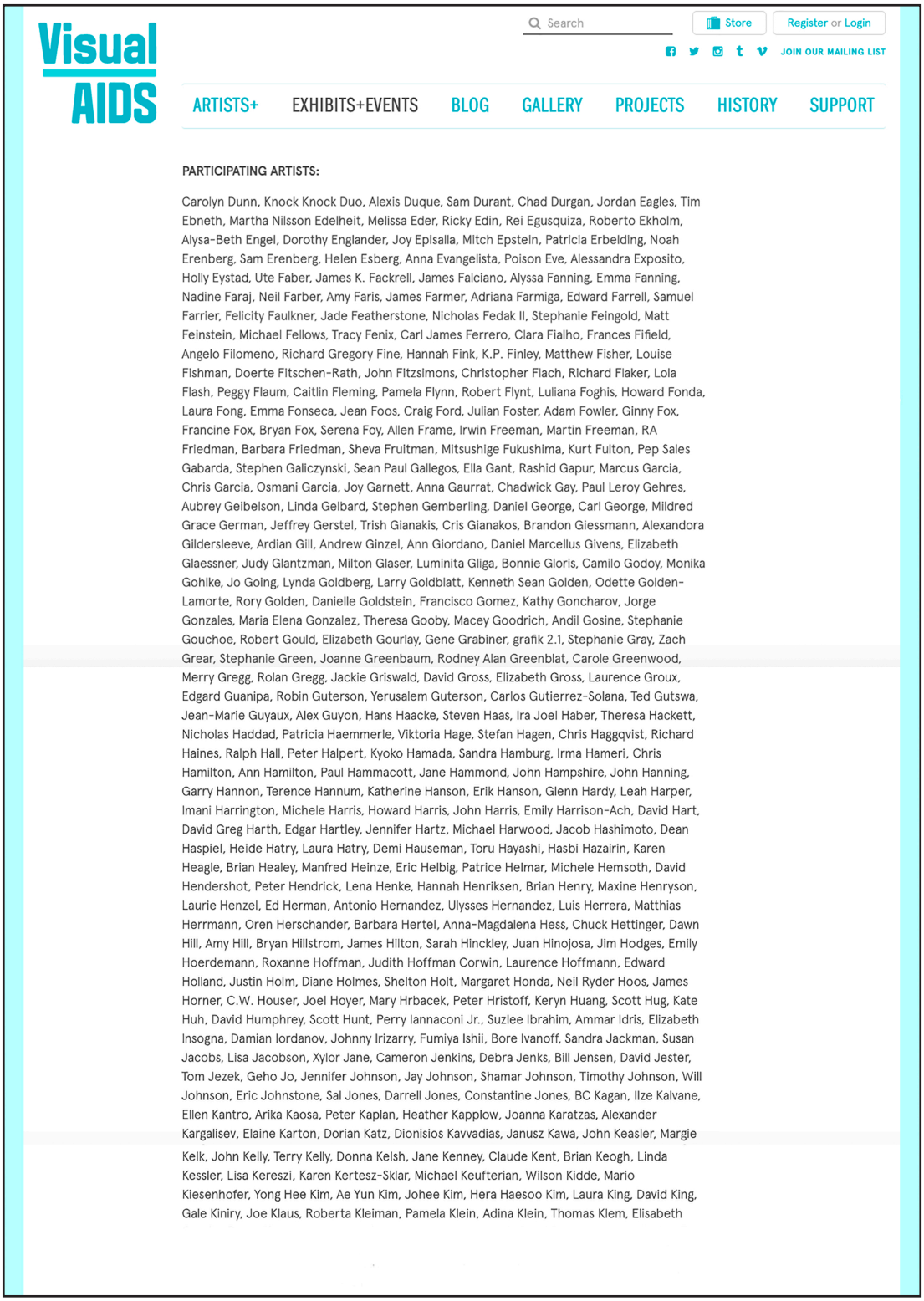
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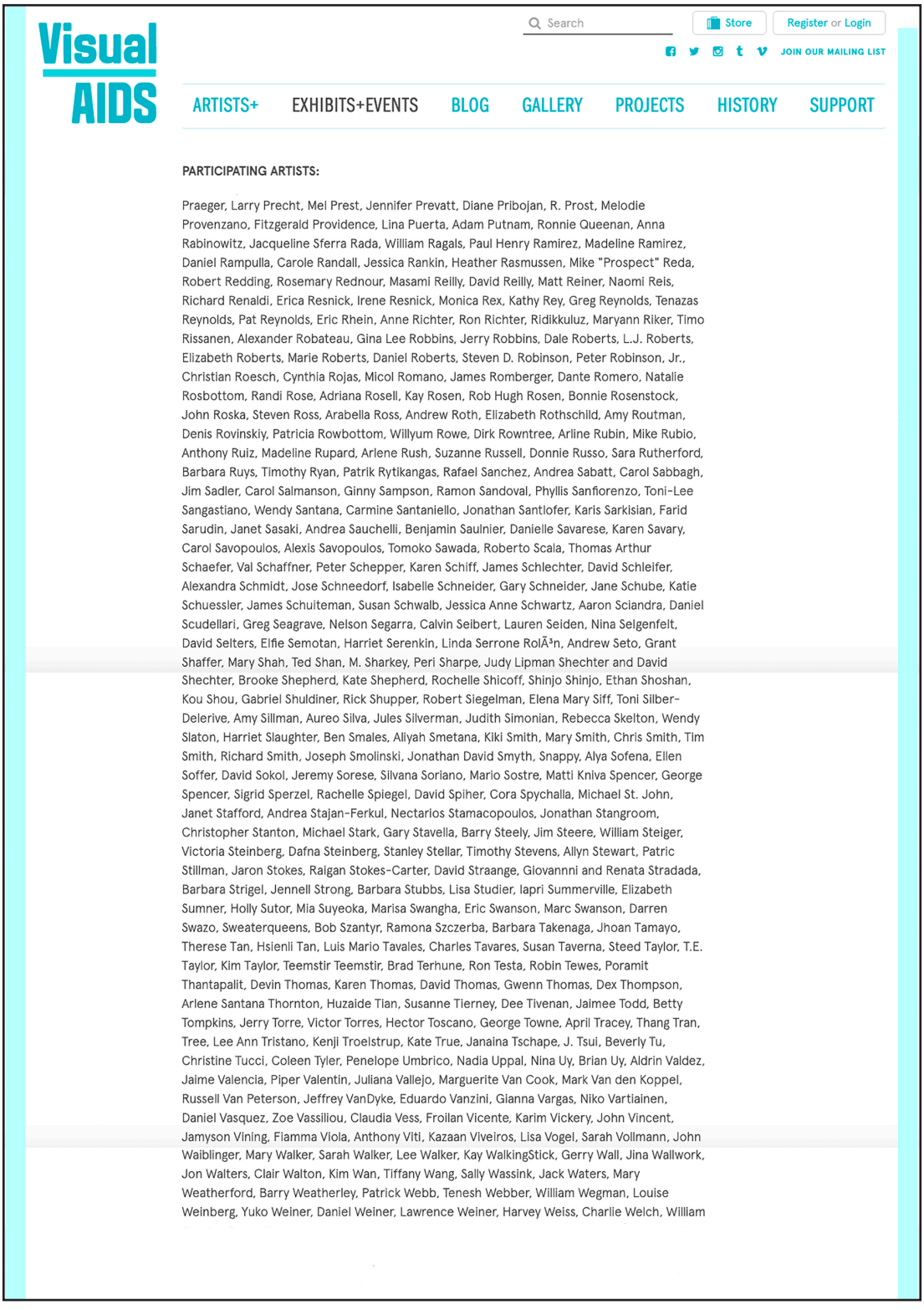
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CAVALCANTI
226





89 Fagner Bibiano

Past - 7pm Tues 23rd July 2019

Notes

CAVALCANTI Gallery, Peckham, London SE15

Fagner Bibiano presented his solo exhibition *Out of Sight*, which featured a number of photographic works made over the preceding years. A number of different techniques were employed in the different series of photographs, including semi-abstraction in a series which featured details of doorways and ”privacy curtains” from sex shops and clubs; digital manipulation in a diptych of 2 barely exposed grey works; a large series of photos of toilet graffiti; a number of close-ups of hole-shapes dotted around the space, amongst other works.

The discussion initially focussed on the sense that the images all depicted something that was hidden or being deliberately obscured or erased. For example the photos scrubbed-out or painted-over graffiti from the public toilets; the curtains obscuring the contents of the sex shops from the public gaze (ad vice versa) and the photos of holes, (which on further examination were identified as glory holes) operating in the liminal space between public and private. The exhibition title enforced the idea that the (urban) spaces of (male) gay sexuality were at stake, raising issues of visibility/invisibility, obscurity and obscenity through the camera’s gaze.

More about the artists

Fagner Bibiano is a lens-based Artist and PhD Researcher in Fine Art at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design. The notions of invisibility and the erotic are central to his practice. He is interested in elements of gay culture and is influenced by post-freudian philosophical debates with regard to the construction of vision.

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Project

The [redacted] Sauna [redacted]

Wed 29/05/2013 11:43

To: Fagner Bibiano Alves <f.bibianoalves1@arts.ac.uk>

Dear Fagner Bibiano

Thank you for contacting us.

Should your email require a response, we will try to reply as soon as possible.

Below is a copy of the message you sent to us.

Warmest Regards

The [redacted] Sauna

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Dear Sir, Good morning! My name is Fagner Bibiano, I am currently taking my PhD in Fine Art at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design. My research project is about gay desire and its relation to photography. I am writing this email in order to ask if you could help me. As part of this project, I am photographing "glory holes" in London. I would like to send you an email with a letter attached, which explains a little bit more what I am doing, if you could provide me an email address. I would be extremely grateful if you could have a look at it and respond to this message. Thanks for taking the time, I really appreciate it. I look forward to hearing from you. Regards, Fagner

:
Field 1 :
Field 2 :
Field 3 :
Field 4 :
Field 5 :

RE: Project

[redacted]

Thu 30/05/2013 12:49

To: Fagner Bibiano Alves <f.bibianoalves1@arts.ac.uk>

Afternoon Fagner,
I read your email and if you require just a few pictures its not a problem. but would like to meet you first. If you are free to pop in and have a quick chat. we can arrange a pic session.
Regards
[redacted]

From: f.bibianoalves1@arts.ac.uk
To: [redacted]
Subject: Project
Date: Wed, 29 May 2013 08:57:28 +0000

Dear Sir,

Good morning!
My name is Fagner Bibiano, I am currently taking my PhD in Fine Art at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design.
My research project is about gay desire and its relation to photography.
I am writing this email in order to ask if you could help me. As part of this project, I am photographing "glory holes" in London. I've attached a letter to this email, which explains a little better what I am doing.
I would be extremely grateful if you could have a look at it and respond to this email.
Thanks for taking the time, I really appreciate it.
I look forward to hearing from you.
Regards,
Fagner

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Scanned by iCritical.

RE: Project

[redacted]

Tue 02/07/2013 17:06

To: Fagner Bibiano Alves <f.bibianoalves1@arts.ac.uk>

Hello Fagner,

I'm sure this is a possibility, and we'd like to help you.

There are only two days a month when the glory holes are actually used, and this is the first and third Wednesday of the month.

We could probably set something up for 2 week's time – on the 17th July? 11am?

We just need to check with the club promoter that uses the glory holes that they're ok with this before I can confirm the date/time.

Best wishes,
[redacted]

From: Fagner Bibiano Alves [mailto:f.bibianoalves1@arts.ac.uk]
Sent: 01 July 2013 18:02
To: [redacted]
Subject: Project
Importance: High

Dear Sir,

Good morning!
My name is Fagner Bibiano, I am currently taking my PhD in Fine Art at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design.
My research project is about gay desire and places of leisure and its relation to photography.
I am writing this email in order to ask if you could help me. As part of this project, I am photographing "glory holes" in London. I've attached a letter to this email, which explains a little better what I am doing.
I would be extremely grateful if you could have a look at it and respond to this email.
Thanks for taking the time, I really appreciate it.
I look forward to hearing from you.
Regards,
Fagner

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