Skin

The Skin of the Image

Photography and the Contemporary Imaginary

The S K I N of the image.
The F A C E of the image.
The B O D Y of the image.
The V O I C E of the image.

Those were the things we had in mind when putting together the second research symposium of our Photography and the Contemporary Imaginary Research Hub at London College of Communication, which took place on 5 June 2014. We started the hub in January 2013 and have since been conducting a series of internal as well as outward facing events – all on and about photography as a medium of fine art that comments on our contemporary condition; a condition that, to paraphrase Giorgio Agamben, stands out from the present thus reworking unfulfilled potentials from a past that is itself a present. Or an 'imaginary'.

The fantasy of a luminous skin reducing the three-dimensional body to an immaterial light-reflecting surface, recalls the cinematic screen, the photographic surface, a mirror. These relationships between skin and narrative, skin and memory and our investment in the legibility of this deceptive, fantasmatic surface, parallels the projected cinematic image's ability to turn any surface into a screen. Similarly Steven Connor describes THE SKIN of the body as a filmic surface, reflecting images upon its sheen, thus recalling the dream-screen of cinema.

Following James Elkins' Lacanian approach we can argue that THE FACE of photographic images is an object that 'stares back'. This gives the surface of the photograph 'a face' even if it does not depict eyes or a mouth – a face that looks at us and engages with its own condition as something to-be-looked-at. Here we are not just observers looking at an image-object, we are faced with a work that returns our gaze in a seemingly reciprocal process, in which the intersection of gazes equally creates observer and image, possibly holding its viewers captive.

Maurice Blanchot draws comparisons between the uncanny and unsettling nature of the image and the corpse. Now very different flesh and skin, these share many properties with the image, both resembling something they are not. He describes THE BODY of the deceased as a body that no longer sees, cannot touch, only be touched: the description of a body that is pure semblance, image, a presentation of itself.

Drawing upon Roland Barthes's 'grain of the voice' we can also investigate what THE VOICE of the photograph may be. This photographic voice is essentially performative as it demands an active participation of the viewer. This means to offer photography for *doing*: not just for seeing, but for looking as a form of writing, perhaps, in order to consider how the body is actively engaged and affected in the image – not only when *making* photographs but also when *perceiving* them: breathing them, chewing them, spitting them out and putting them together again.

Contents

Wiebke Leister
On Kissing

'Didn't you know that love is impossible?' Thus his only answer: a question. But what, in fact, what exactly does it mean when one says 'love is impossible'? That it is impossible now, at this very moment; *or* that we love the impossible *(incomprehensible)* aspects of love; *or* that we merely consider loving when it is actually impossible *(illicit)* to love; *or* that only in impossible *(illegal)* encounters love can develop; *or* that love as such is not possible, a philosophical impossibility *(imaginary)*? *Or* that it renders love as desire sustained by non-fulfilment and therefore a complete impossibility *(inaccessible)*, marked by a loss yet to come, based on the impenetrable fact that two people can never fully merge *(integrate)* and that one can never fully represent *(imitate)* the other? After all, does this render love 'beautifully impossible' *(irrelevant)*, a distracting pastime in itself, plummeted impossible *(impracticable)* by the act of making love rather than through falling in (and out of) love? What if love is not utterly impossible *(insignificant)*, but just '*utterly*': utterly *everything*, utterly *nothing*? But he did not say what he meant by '*impossible*'; and she did not ask him. (LLL, part 2)[1]

An excerpt from 'Lovers, Liars and Laughter'.

This project assembles photographs of kissing couples; ink drawings of tongues chasing one another; text collages of lingering gazes and unfulfilled smiles; a monologue of failed love. Literally plunged into a deep shade, the kiss is both yet to come and concealed from view by its very anatomy, portraying the features of love through a potentially growing distance between lovers. Just as the images do not depict kisses, the work negotiates several layers of photographic *impossibilities*, thus investigating the metaphorical structure of such kissing: The *invisible*, as something unrepresentable. The *inverted*, as a negative-positive, inside-outside construction. The *imaginary*, as a future encounter.

The body of work exists in several versions and combinations of its parts: as artist publication, as journal article, as exhibition, façade installation, video with voice over. When launched at the ICA in London it was performed as a colour slide show alongside a live reading, during which each of the eight photographs developed in four stages from either a positive into a negative or from negative into positive – the pale orange skin of the unexposed parts of the colour film not unlike human skin, turning into deep black shadow when developed as a positive. The monologue, written in the voice of a young female character, was spoken by a white-headed actor in his eighties, as if looking back at an event of his past. At the same time the dissolving slides gradually merged not only giving and receiving participant of each stage of their kiss, but also the couples following each other.[2]

'Meeting him was like a puzzle picture, an optical illusion. At times focussing on our embracing profiles, at others on the space between us; flipping foreground and background, reversing the negative space into a positive one, a third figure to be negotiated.' Loosing touch, at some point the shadow fell between the adorer and the adored – a shadow that, by appearing other than itself, seemed to hold a certain depth, while it was nothing more than a mask folding in on itself. A surface devoid of any limit of interpretation, always shifting in relation to other (sur)faces or other encounters on other days. No longer the shadow of intimacy, of lovers approaching one another, the shadow started indicating the gradually rising distance between them – finally drawing the curtain. (LLL, part 6)

Both in theory and practice the work tests the model of the Inverted Mask as a figure of thought that underlies a visual search for

portraits that are both projection fields and viewing encounters: ways of engaging with a photograph by assimilating it as a latent part of one's skin. This model suggests that in the process of its viewing, the former space between sitter and photographer is reflected into the actual space between viewer and photograph, thus inducing a triangle of signification between actual photographic sign, imaginary referent and possible interpretations. It concludes that a portrait, able to enter into this process, should be considered a Non-Likeness because it is metaphorically turned over and worn on the viewer's face, therefore ceasing to be the impression of a particular sitter. It further speculates that this process of transferring the image onto ones face triggers an empathic encounter between viewer and photograph based on an exchange of latent images, during which the inverted image-mask moulds the viewer's perception and the viewer animates its mask. This actualizes the photograph as an emotive composite of the image and the viewer's psyche, at the same time turning the viewer into an extension of the inner workings of the image.

Following a sudden impulse, she took off his mask, first tenderly stretching out the thin layer it was made of, then turning it *inside out*, before putting it back on her face. Now she was not in his place *behind* the mask any longer (trying to reveal his perspective, getting under his skin), but rather *in* his image – again on the side facing his make-up, now feeling it on her skin. And here, suddenly, she remembers how, very slowly, it started disclosing its magic: an imaginary trace impressed upon her consciousness, it no longer was part of him and his point of view. Instead it supported her own view of the world – like a reminder of something forgotten, a remainder that had lost its origin. Displaying it as a layer on top of her own skin, slowly moulding it after her own image, (…) she started realizing that her mental image of his face had never been a pre-requisite of love, rather some kind of post-requisite left after the show. Not all that different from an after-image, the inverted mask had produced a semblance of love – an appearance or impression, a façade or veneer, not love itself.
(LLL, part 4)

Assuming that every portrait is in fact an anthropological organism, this rootless understanding of 'image' as an interaction between *internal* and *external* entities is therefore more than just a result of visual perception, but a living creation constructed in the interplay between mental images and actual pictures. In a process of symbolic animation the body of the viewing subject turns into a place *occupied* by images, hence opening the picture for other stimuli. This means not only that images support the construction of meaning, but also that they shape us in the process of activating them in and for us. In photography this synthesis of perceived and imagined images is particularly seductive because it enhances its myth to be *'like'* the world. This lures viewers into reading the world *into* photographic presentations, more often than not based on the wishful thinking a viewer brings to that image. And since desire always affects our seeing – activated by the authenticity of seeing an image, not by any authenticity of the image itself – portraits in particular are always embodiments of visual metamorphosis.

So, how do photographs actually touch upon things? This not only asks what it means to touch an image, but also what a touching image is and how the image touches us: an image that affects more senses than just the visual. So, if love comes by looking, falling in love with an image is perhaps an equally interpersonal endeavour? The image might end up kissing back? Impossible encounters over the skin of the image. Possibly getting under one's skin.

[1] Text excerpts from monologue 'Lovers, Liars and Laughter' (2008). Pagination refers to the artist publication: Lovers, Liars and Laughter, Fieldstudy 11, London: Photography and the Archive Research Centre, 2008 (part 1 p.8, part 2 p.9, part 3 p.12, part 4 p.13, part 5 p.16, part 6 p.17); https://vimeo.com/56443579.

[2] Slide projection 'Ever After': 32 colour slides, 35mm, performed with monologue 'Lovers, Liars and Laughter' read by Kenneth Gilbert, 23min at On Kissing, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 14 November 2008. Installation 'Ever After', façade of London College of Communication, Elephant & Castle roundabout, London, Summer 2009, 5 x 35 meters.

Edward Dimsdale
Because This Is Not Heaven:
Major Implications Of Minor Imperfections

Debby Lauder, The Fold (2014)

It is said that Bishop Eadfrith, illustrating the Lindisfarne Gospels, included a deliberate mistake on every page – the reason being that "…this is not Heaven". Perfection could only be an attribute of the divine.

Crack scratch foible dent break chip pit decay stain kink fissure twist eyesore fault spot streak flaw tarnish smudge blot blur taint gash sin lack affliction pock snag patch slight catch hitch lapse limitation insufficiency inadequacy…

Rarely do the signifiers of language do very much to reassure us as to how far we, inevitably, and all-too-humanly, fall short of perfection. So it falls, invariably and variously, to the frameworks of philosophy, theology, poetry and psychology to operate as soothing unction to our unavoidable vulnerabilities, and the conflictions of self-loathing that may be evidenced in the negative connotations produced by almost each and every term that we make use of in order to signal imperfection.

In recent years, however, one word – connotative of error, of imperfection – has been increasingly invested with a more positive potential. That word is *glitch*.
From the Yiddish *glitsh*, meaning 'slippery area' (itself from the German *glitshen*, meaning 'to slide'), glitch began as the technical jargon of electronic hardware engineers, naming a short-lived fault in, or failure of, a given system's functions. Popularised by the US space programme, *glitch* is now widely applied, across a number of contexts, from music to gaming. In the visual arts, artists such as Rosa Menkman manifest visual artefacts that deliberately court accidents arising in digital media. For Menkman, as for others, *Glitch*

Studies invoke more than simply '…the primal data-screams of the machine', but rather are considered as being productive of 'a lost truth…a vision that destroys itself by its own choice of oblivion.' [1]

Latterly, *glitch* has expanded its own borders, and the 'error' does not have to have been produced in an electronic system; it has become transferable, meaning any disruption, any undoing, of almost any given system. In astronomy, *glitch* describes the change in rotation of a pulsar, a dense object spinning at a great velocity; whereas, in more common parlance, *glitched* has come to describe anyone – perhaps similarly dense, perhaps similarly spinning at a great velocity – under the simultaneous influence of both drink and drugs.
Yet more recent theorizing of the photographic image, as variation and multiplicity, has also sought to mobilize the notion of the *glitch*, as a means of identifying a position that might be characterised as a *both/and.*

Debby Lauder's series *The Fold* (2014) is a compelling example of the photograph understood as heterogeneous object, in which conventional assumptions of the medium are forced to disintegrate as a result of the artist's deliberate *glitching* of the physical form of the photograph itself. The series in question principally arises from concerns with the materiality of the photograph, in which the emphasis is shifted from the photograph as image to the photograph as object.
The 'material' in question consists of photographic images of a pair of marble sea monsters, which have stood guard in front of the *Palazzo Carafa della Spina* in Naples, since the late 16th century. Originally sculpted

by Domenico Fontana, the monsters' open mouths were once used to extinguish the torches borne by visitors to the building.

The sculptures' original materiality, not to mention their monumentality, had become entirely reduced in the translation from object to image. However, in seeking to re-invest something of the statues' original physical presence into the very materiality of the photographs themselves, Lauder has resuscitated the images, producing new 'monsters' in the process; unexpected surfaces emerge, in the seismic shifts experienced by the paper support; fresh contours are galvanised into being; the skins of the images are emphatically, irrevocably, re-sensitised.

In each *glitching* operation, the photograph *takes on* the attributes of the sculptural, whilst sculpture *takes up* the photographic as raw material; the combinations and adaptations of these practices are furthered by means of the inclusion of an additional artistic discipline, namely drawing. Each *glitched* object, therefore, becomes both a critique and a construction. Such inter-medial strategies, in which conventional assumptions regarding individual media are put in question, are suggestive of the inter-connectedness of artistic and communicative media.

The theorist Simon O'Sullivan proposes an understanding of the mobilisation of the *glitch* as a process in which photography is freed from itself, in which a rupturing of representation is provided, and by means of which the photograph is put into contact with forces other than itself. Active participation is demanded of the viewer, who must respond to the *glitch* as an event of the new, as potentiality; the experience, as O'Sullivan has it, "names a passage between object and subject"[2]; this, in turn, is suggestive of Deleuze and Guattari's characterisation of art as "a passing place between things."[3]

It might follow that the *glitch* can describe any circuit-breaker that experiments with a medium, that seeks to undo conventional assumptions, that transforms standardised practises into novel processes, that are then generative of new formations, with new aesthetic and even new political consequences. In this sense, the *glitch* can also activate the operations of the *minor*.

For Deleuze and Guattari, *major* approaches tend to repeat the use of established forms, methods and assumptions, tending to repeat the present in order to perpetuate what is already recognisable.[4] *Minor* approaches, however, are those ideas, forms, techniques and strategies that are often less recognised, are sometimes ignored, or are even disavowed by the mainstream. This is not to think of them as lesser, or subordinate.

In fact, minoritarian approaches may contain greater critical and creative potential than more majoritarian approaches. It is often when photography is conducted in a minor key – when actively embracing, embodying, and even producing, imperfections – that it bears with it the greatest potential to give shape to the new, both imagining and constructing the future.

It is also when photography reflects our condition as human – as essentially *glitched* – most closely. Because this is not Heaven.

Crack scratch foible dent break chip pit decay stain kink fissure twist eyesore fault spot streak flaw tarnish smudge blot blur taint gash sin lack affliction pock snag patch slight catch hitch lapse limitation insufficiency inadequacy, glitch…

Debby Lauder, The Fold (2014)

[1] *Menkman, R (2011) The Glitch Moment(um). Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures.*

[2] *O'Sullivan, S. (2012) "From Stuttering and Stammering to the Diagram: Towards a Minor Art Practice?" In: Bleyen, M. (ed.) Minor Photography: Connecting Deleuze and Guattari to Photography Theory. Leuven: University of Leuven Press.*

[3] *Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1994) What is Philosophy? New York: Verso.*

[4] *Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1986) Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.*

Peter D. Osborne

A Photography of Resurrection: Politics, Aesthetics And The Secular Theology Of The Body In Latin America

**'The Idea of Society
is the soul of religion'**
ÉMILE DURKEIM

**'All religions organize the relationship
between the visible and the invisible'**
THOMAS TWEED

I

**Los Desaparecidos: reappearance
– the testimony of loss.**

'Even the dead will not be safe'
WALTER BENJAMIN

From the 1960's through to the 1990's Authoritarian Governments and Military Dictatorships across Latin America applied the practice of *Disappearing* their perceived opponents. Numerous artists have taken up the question of the disappeared – their task to picture not the appearance of people, but the condition of those with no appearance – to represent the terroristic deployment of absence – to place the viewer before a frame with no content, which would *be* its content. The Chilean theorist, Nelly Richard, writes that the body: 'is… a repository of memories, an actor in the theatre of power… because the body is at the boundary between biology and society, between the drives and discourse, between the sexual and its categorization in terms of power, biography and history, it is the site par excellence for transgressing the constraints or meaning or what social discourse prescribes as normal'.[1]

This is the complexity that challenges the totalitarian mind and must not only be punished by it, but abolished. This annihilation of bodies is the denial of memory or of memorializing and it represents too the

abolition of the political body – the body politic. To represent these disappearances is to attempt to reintegrate what is dispersed; to rebuild the political body – to reincarnate it – if only as representation.

In the aftermath of Pinochet's dictatorship Arturo Duclos recreated the Chilean flag using almost seventy human bones.

Nicolas Guagnini's installation *Treinta Mille/ '30,000'* (1999) presents the photograph of his father's face, a journalist who disappeared during the Junta's dictatorship, printed across a cluster of separate white columns. As the viewer walks round and the columns appear to align closely his features come to life. As the viewer moves on the columns separate and the face disintegrates. The viewer is thereby implicated in the act of remembering – or of forgetting.

**'The spectral essence
of photography'**
JACQUES DERRIDA

Sara Maneiro: '*La Mueca de Berenice' (Berenice's Grimace)*, 1995: In blue, diaphanous light, the ghostly x-rays of the skulls and teeth of unidentified demonstrators killed by the police in a massacre in Caracas known as *La Caracazo* in 1989. About 300 died, buried in secret graves, later disinterred. Maneiro writes of the 'somatic discourse' of the human body. But what *can* speak here? The body through its relics? Or is it the

semiotics of forensic evidence that speaks? Or, by transforming the brute, dark unsignifying density of the corrupted remains into pure photographic translucency, is Maneiro trying to picture the possibility of revelation – the clarification of the truth of these people and the fate of their bodies; a kind of invocatory prayer perhaps.

II

Photography is the incarnation of what is disembodied.

What is represented in a photograph withdraws further within the photograph, it is a form of burial. In his *'Two Versions of the Imaginary'*, Maurice Blanchot writes: 'the cadaver's strangeness is perhaps also that of the image'. Discussing Blanchot and Walter Benjamin, Eduardo Cadava writes: 'As its own grave, the photograph is what exceeds the photograph within the photograph. …In order for a photograph to be a photograph, it must become the tomb that writes, that harbours its own death.'[2]

In one sense, the photograph is the re incarnation of what is absent. Barthes of course spoke of photography in this way, a mode regarded by Rancière as a retreat from politics into metaphysics in the fashion of Blanchot. Perhaps this is unavoidable. The philosopher Peter Osborne, has written of photography as 'the naturalization of the

theological structure of the icon, via time…' and of how 'meaning participates in the real through the becoming 'carnal' of light'. Osborne cites Boris Groys who proposes that the theological character of the photograph is further intensified in its digital form as: 'The visible copy of an invisible original, 'the digital image is functioning as a Byzantine icon – as a visible copy of an invisible God'.[3]

So now we encounter this connection between the photographic and the theological – the absent god – the irretrievable real – the elusive source of meaning, the sacred or the parasacred.[4]

Niklas Luhmann argues that religious meaning is produced even though, he says, 'something always remains unobservable'. At the same time 'the distinction between observable and unobservable re-enters the observable realm'.[5]
What should be the relationship to the remote god, the god that left the world? The Jewish God is 'sheer absence'. Aquinas and Pascal speak of the *deus absconditus*. So: How to imagine what is not present but what is the cause and origin of all events and all meanings?
'Christianity', writes Thierry de Duve, 'is the religion of incarnation', but is it really permitted or possible to represent the divine? – heretical according to many. Calvin saw it as a criminal act to claim the divine could be accessible to human perception; others argued that pictures of Christ were representations of the human form that the divine

had put on – the Incarnation, an outward form. Some of this is retained in the Catholic tradition.

The traditions and traces of Catholic theology and Catholic cultural practices remain active in the Latin American imaginary – even in secular minds – sometimes it is transmuted into the poetic, in which language is seen as material, reality as symbolic. Or it can be invoked or appropriated for its symbolic power, infusing a subject with deeper significance and encouraging reverence in the viewer. It remains for many a reference mythos – for others an embraced revelation. Aquinas and other Catholic thinkers featured prominently on Latin America's philosophy programmes long after they had been all but abandoned in much of post-Enlightenment Europe.

And religious imagery and connotations are consciously mobilized in art and politics – such as the altar theme in Latin American visual art which appropriates a widely popular vernacular art form, the retablos, domestic altars – common in devout houses, especially in Mexico. An example is Amalia Mesa-Bains's *'Ofrenda for Dolores Del Rio'*, 1984. Or the presence of blood and martyrdom in Regina José Galindo's video *'Quien puede borrar las huellas? (Who can erase the traces?)*, Guatemala, 2003. The artist carries a bowl of blood in which from time to time she dips her feet to leave footprints on the streets between the Constitutional Court and the Presidential Palace in protest against the court's

permitting of an ex-general implicated in mass murder to run for president. Law has failed, forensic evidence has been discounted and is now replaced by sacrificial blood, and the artist who risks her own martyrdom. Or the work of Luis Gonzalez Palma, Guatemala, whose images incorporate religious elements and appearances in which the sacred is retrieved, re-imagined and politicized.

It is unsurprising that the repertoires and forms of religious visual culture appear so much in work that addresses the theme of the *Disappeared* in which the subject is essentially the empty tomb, but it is also martyrdom, and of course the desire in the families and comrades of the victims for some kind of incarnation or resurrection – even if in some secular form – in which a kind of holiness is bestowed on the disappeared, as through the rational magic of photography they are re-admitted accompanied by their deaths into the social imaginary.

'The redemptive purpose of the aesthetic'.
IMMANUEL KANT

[1] *Richard Nelly: Margins and Institutions, Art in Chile Since 1972. Melbourne: Art & Text, 1986, p.65.*

[2] *Eduardo Cadava: Words of Light; Theses on the Photography of History. Princeton, 1998, p.10.*

[3] *Peter Osborne: Anywhere or Not At All; The Philosophy of Contemporary Art. Verso, 2013, Chapter 5; and see Boris Groys 'From Image to Image File – and Back: Art in the Age of Digitalization' in his, Art Power, MIT Cambridge Mass. 2008.*

[4] *See Victor E. Taylor: Para/Inquiry; Postmodern Religion and Culture, Routledge, 1999) 'From Image to Image File – and Back: Art in the Age of Digitalization' in his, Art Power, MIT Cambridge Mass. 2008.*

[5] *Niklas Luhmann: A Systems Theory of Religion, Stanford, 2013, Chapter 1.*

Victoria Ahrens
Corporeal Witnessing: Portrait As Flesh

Worn and weathered, its corners bent from constant touch, handed round, evidence in court, online source in the public domaine, this photograph is a witness, a corporeal witness.

She wears an overall, appears dishevelled and slightly hunched, her sleeves partly rolled up, a small chunk of hair out of place, and poignantly her shoelaces are undone. Her arms by her side, legs together, gaze straight ahead, the look is military, stiff, uncomfortable and hurried.

She stands in front of a closed door, on a concrete floor, which serves as the photographic backdrop to her apparent confusion. It is hard to tell whether saliva glistens on her lower lip, or whether it is her lips which are partially open, frozen in mid sentence and unable to speak of the horror of that moment. Her eyes stare at us, accusingly, defying us to look back at her, which we do, which they do, again and again: they are unblinking, defiant, holding our gaze through time despite the life that has gone out of them. Yet they see, they see things they should never have had to see, and they see us.

Ida Adad, aged 72, kidnapped, tortured, disappeared during Argentina's Dirty War years (1976–1983); her body thrown from an aeroplane into the murky brown waters of the Rio de la Plata, drugged but alive, to find an inhospitable watery grave below, a grave that is unmarked, that is unfound, that is 'disappeared'. The iron in her blood now totally dissolved into the brown iron rich waters that define her organic demise.

Her total obscurity is denied by a single act: that her photograph, taken by a slave prisoner who himself was saved from death by his profession (a graphic designer and photographer) and by the end of the regime, was allowed out for home visits from the clandestine detention centre he was held in for years (ESMA), smuggled out this and eleven other photographs of detainees on his body, hidden in his flesh.[1] Victor Basterra was thus able to 'keep [her] story alive (…) as opposed to entombing it in the realm of the unspoken'[2] giving it voice, giving it an identity and a 'self' and defying the ultimate goal of her oppressors: to annihilate 'the subject (…) in the name of the body, the body (…) in the name of state secrecy and state secrecy (…) in the name of terror'[3]. In the barbarism of the 'process of national reorganization' as it was called, no one, not even the elderly and infirm were spared the horror. These twelve 'saved' photographs, then, stand in for the absence of the bodies of thousands of 'disappeared', 30,000 it is estimated, and speak to us of corporeal witnessing while accusing us of complicity, as though we had taken the photographs. Yet we help 'corroborate' their narratives, while their ability to 'move' us informs *who or what* we are in relation to them: witnesses to their photographic and physical 'capture', yet their only hope of continued survival, as material 'resistance to the[e] discourse'[4] of forgetting.

The Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF) was set up in 1984[5] in response to the need for a separate, non-governmental organization to identify and exhume the bodies of unidentified cadavers found in mass graves. By using photography and DNA technology to determine the identity of those who would be denied it, they are able to give corporeal substance to the 'disappeared', literally bringing the bodies back from the dead, fleshing out the identity of the skeletal remains.

It was in a second floor room with windows opened out onto a busy shopping street that I witnessed the skeletons laid out. These I could not photograph, their soul long stolen by other more traumatic means, a camera out of place in this theatre of forensic archaeology. In the 'waiting room', boxes were stacked one on top of the other, fragments of body parts resting inside, bones literally rattling in their cages, forming abject and unnatural poses. These are inventories of people, fragments that promise wholeness, yet, in too many instances, like the twelve photographs, are all that remain of those who will never be whole again.

However, it is the archive of photographs as well as these ossified remains that reveal that which they are intended to hide, and become the 'word' around which the 'speech acts of trauma' can be narrated. Material witnesses in the continuing trials of the military junta, they 'vivify'[6] make flesh, and in their 'visual rigour mortis'[7] capture a sense of resistance both as photographic object and physical stand in for the 'disappeared'. By relocating these images to the wider contexts of cultural consumption, in galleries, lectures and in court, they act as body-signifiers, as objects of defiance in the absence of the actual bodies they record, and Ida with her mouth semi-opened, can speak, ambulant and spectre like from beyond the grave in the spaces denied her in life. This resurrected image then, this corporeal witness, this portrait as flesh, resists closure and reconciliation, demanding justice as victim of state crime and as a fetishized relic, affixing identity and ensuring it continues to figure in people's consciousness. Like Giorgione's painting, *Col Tempo* (1500–1510) that hangs in the

Academia in Venice, portrait of an elderly woman in mid speech, Ida, articulates her anguish through time (col tempo), her corporeal witnessing made flesh in the corrupted, scratched surface of the photograph, carried inside the flesh of her photographic rescuer, and now widely available as a pixelated spectre online, screen idol of the 'disappeared', she is brought to our attention through 'speech acts'[8] of her own.

In 2010 I worked with the EAAF and ESMA detention centre to photograph spaces of memory in an AHRC funded research project about Argentina's disappeared. I have since gone back in 2014, to create photographic etching plates of my own in the waters of the Rio de la Plata and Upper Paraná, developing the polymer plates in situ. These plates detail a landscape of political trauma, while alluding to the absent bodies: where new evidence suggests this is where many of the disappeared found their death, few clues remain, their bones washed away in its murky iron rich depths. Yet the invisible traces are etched indelibly on the surface of my photographic plates, as the water washes away the light sensitive layer to reveal the etched grooves and troughs as haptic encounters now imbued with the DNA of the 'disappeared'. Here the corporeal witnessing is made flesh in the portrait of a landscape, a place of almost forgotten significance in the politics of a country submerged beneath the iron rich waters of its own history.

[1] Victor Basterra, 'Las Fotos de la ESMA', Desaparecidos.org [online] http://www.desaparecidos.org/nuncamas/web/investig/basterra/basterra_01.html (accessed 02/10/14).

[2] Andreas Huyssen, Present Pasts, Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory, Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries (ed.) (Stanford, California: Standford University Press, 2003) p. 101.

[3] Horacio Gonzalez 'The Shadow of the building: construction and anti-construction' Memory under Construction, Guido Indij, David Foster and Marcelo Brodsky (ed.) (La Marca: Argentina) 2005, p. 246.

[4] Silvia R. Tandecriarz, 'Mneumonic Hauntings: Photography as Art of the Missing, Social Justice, June 22, 2006, Access my Library [online] http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-IGI-155751147/mneumonic-hauntings-photography-art.html (accessed 20/04/10).

[5] EAAF, 'Latin American Initiative for the Identification of the Disappeared: Genetics and Human Rights', Argentina Section, Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF), 2008.

[6] Silvia R Tandecriarz, 2006.

[7] Heather Cameron, 'Memento Mori: Mourning, Monuments and Memory', The Museum in Mourning, Photography and Memorial Practice [online] http://antviz.tripod.com/mourningphoto/id11.html (accessed 20/03/2010).

[8] Susan J. Brison 'Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self', Acts of Memory, Cultural Recall in the Present, Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer (ed), Dartmouth College: University of New England Press, 1999) p. 39.

Dallas Seitz
The Deconstruction Of Marilyn

Film stills
(from 3 minute film piece with sound)
2014

Chantal Faust
Haptic Aesthetics

I want to speak about touching. About the haptic, not in opposition to the optic, but rather, as suggestive of something that pushes the limits of optics. As a build up of tension. An arousal. An uprising against the regime of the visual. A call to touch.

In a scene from 'The Day of the Doctor': the 50th anniversary episode of *Doctor Who*, the Doctor and his companion – Clara – walk into the National Gallery in London and are presented with a 3D oil painting of an impossible scene: a scene from the future. One of the given titles of the work is *No More*. Clara's outstretched hand reaches out to touch the skin of this painting that has no surface, only depth. She can't believe her eyes. She reaches out to touch, to touch *no more*.

The desire to touch beneath the surface in order to believe in something is the subject of Caravaggio's *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, also known as *Doubting Thomas*. It shows the Apostle Thomas, who as the story goes, had missed out on seeing one of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. He refused to believe that the resurrected Jesus had appeared to the eleven other apostles, until he could see and feel the wounds received by Jesus on the cross. From the tip of Thomas' finger, to the eyes of each subject, to the folds of Jesus' shroud – everything in this painting is pointing at the cut, at this act of penetrating the skin – and the dramatic tension that surrounds this puncture. Mieke Bal writes: Caravaggio's Doubting Thomas is an entangling work, and it represents entanglement. The 'most copied of all Caravaggios in [his own] period' displays flesh and skin as well as the rupture of skin, a wound whose shallow depth is frighteningly, painfully, probed yet gently endorsed.[1]

It is not enough for Thomas to see the marks on the flesh. He wants evidence: he wants to touch. And the skin of this painting, this argument of faith, is covered with suggestions of openings, folds and flesh for us to see. See, but not touch.

One generally isn't allowed to touch paintings. Even if they show signs of touch, are about being touched, or are touching. Paintings should not be touched. They should be looked at. And there's nothing wrong with looking. Look but don't touch. Touch me not.

Touch me not. *Noli me tangere*. Some of you may be familiar with this famous phrase. For those, like me – who are not that well versed in Christianity, it is described in Chapter 20 of the Gospel of John that a meeting takes place between Mary Magdalene and Jesus at his empty tomb. A conversation starts up between them, in which the mysterious words are spoken: *'Noli me tangere'*.
The scene begins when Mary Magdalene, wanting to embalm Jesus' crucified body, arrived to discover an empty grave. As she stood there weeping at the tomb she saw two angels sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying. She then turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but did not realise that it was him. Jesus asked her why she was crying and who she was looking for. Mary, thinking that he was a gardener, responded 'Sir if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away,' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabboni!' Jesus said to her, 'Touch me not' (*noli me tangere*), because I have not yet ascended to the Father.
Noli me tangere. Touch me not. This episode has often been taken up in painting. And it is always known by these words, by this spoken phrase. Mary is on her knees, reaching out almost blindly in Giotto's depiction (1304–6), while Jesus puts out his hand as if to say, stop, stop right there. She is up on one knee in Fra Angelico's *Noli me tangere* (1440). She reaches out as if to embrace his legs and Jesus, in a similar pose to the Giotto, holds one hand out as if to stop her. His legs already twisted in the other direction. He is walking away.

Things take on a more dramatic turn in Correggio's version that was painted in 1534. Mary Magdalene is half seated but

her right hand is hovering, her head and neck reaching out to Jesus. Again, he half turns, one hand at her level, the other pointing away from her and to the heavens. Poussin offers us more of a close-up of the pair in 1653, looking rather rustic. Mary Magdalene has a kind of 'come-to-Mama' look about her and Jesus looks down and wards off her embrace with the chop of his hand. In Bronzino's *Noli me tangere* (1561), it's all a bit of a dance. Mary shimmies up to Jesus, arms outstretched, she gazes lovingly into his eyes. He seems to rebuff her with his chest. It is unclear as to the direction of his gaze – perhaps looking down to Mary or possibly the draping cloth that is wrapped around his waist and seems perilously close to falling to the ground. Of all the versions so far, this seems most like a kind of game of touch me / touch me not.

But it is another *Noli me tangere* painting that I want to focus on. One that I think is quite spectacular – and I wanted to briefly discuss some of these other depictions so that you can see perhaps, how this painting is a little different.

In Titian's *Noli me tangere* (1514), Mary Magdalene and Jesus are close, almost close enough to touch. Jesus looks down towards her. His right arm is twisted around his body, not away from her – but so as to hold onto the cloth of the shroud around his neck. He gathers it up and places it in front of another quite extraordinary piece of cloth. The loincloth around his waist is tied in, what could be described as quite a peculiar knot. Coming to a head at the front, this material form seems quite suggestive. It is semi-translucent, and coiled in such a manner that it seems to hint at that which lies beneath its folds.

And where exactly is Mary looking? She hardly seems like she is in a position of prayer. Her hand reaches out, reaches out to touch him. But this is no embrace. There seems to be a fairly clear line between her hand and its potential target. Mary catches Jesus in the process of arising. He has not fully risen and she must not touch him in this state. This is an intimate moment between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Unlike the Doubting Thomas, Mary doesn't need proof. Mary already believes. It is not evidence that she is seeking through her

desire to touch his body. She does not need proof as much as she wants to embrace the loved object. To taste the body, to take him in… and commune with this newly risen form of Christ. Touch me not, he says. *Noli me tangere*, is the title of this painting.

"Don't touch me" is a phrase that touches and that cannot touch, even when isolated from every context. It says something about touching in general, or it touches on the sensitive point of touching: on this sensitive point that touching constitutes par excellence… but this point is precisely the point where touching does not touch and where it must not touch in order to carry out its touch… the point or the space without dimension that separates what touching gathers together, the line that separates the touching from the touched and thus the touch from itself.[2]

In Titian's *Noli me tangere*, just seeing Jesus risen is not enough for Mary Magdalene. She wants to experience more than just the optic. And what Titian depicts is a body of Christ that suggests the violation or transgression of that optic. *Touch me not* he says – and yet he is happy for the skeptical Thomas to touch him in his

not yet ascended state. Mary wants to touch, there is a build up of tension that that could almost break, with the thought of a touch.

'The ego is first and foremost, a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface identity, but is itself a projection of a surface.'
SIGMUND FREUD. THE EGO AND THE ID. 1923

[1] Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, p31.

[2] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Noli me tangere: on the raising of the body*, trans. Sarah Clift, Pascale-Anne Brault, Michael Naas, New York: Fordham University Press, 2008, p13.

Esther Teichmann
The Flesh Of The Image – Photography And Skin

The last photograph became her marker of time. For those weeks, which turned into years, she carried that last image taken of him laughing back at her, unknowing contented sleep-filled-eyes, skin stretching languidly against the morning sun. She wore the tiny smooth square against her skin. Each morning she placed this image against the bottom curve of her belly, just to the side of her hipbone, a second skin invisible beneath the layers of clothing placed on top. Each evening she would peel him off, tiny bits of photographic emulsion sticking to her, her skin slowly erasing him, rubbing away and disintegrating his skin day by day. Eventually his eyes no longer looked back and the edge of his body became blurred.

In our look upon the other, they are already image, are image before a camera is even considered, before the photograph is created and fixed. The bodies that surround us exist as surface, as resemblance. Nancy speaks of the essence of the photographic being in its flesh, within the body (of photographer, subject and viewer). It is then strangeness, foreignness that characterises from the very beginning any relationship to the skin of the other and to the photograph.

"What makes the photograph possible... is that in the photo it is a question of the body: it is the body that grasps, and it is the body that is grasped and released. It is the body, its thin surface that is detached and removed by the film. This is the physics and the chemistry of the instant, the force of gravity of the click, this curvature, space and this impalpable lightness of a vision that precipitates and coagulates into a thickness of skin, a density of touch."[3]

In Joel-Peter Witkin's photograph, Glassman (1994), careless imprecise stitches run the length of a corpse, holding together that which will no longer heal, skin that has relinquished its function. These piercing stitches roughly piece back together this no longer containing body, excess seeping from every puncture wound in his decaying flesh. Surviving a violent unzipping is Sophie Ristelhueber's turned away female nude, Every One (a photographic work also made in 1994, documenting the scars of war both etched upon the body and landscape). Equally brutal stitches run the length of her spine, following its seductive curve, forcefully pulling skin back together in a mirroring of Glassman's torso. Looked at side by side, this unrelated photographed couple affect one another: she animating him, whilst he in turn makes her

miraculous survival and abject beauty even more corpse-like and ungraspable. She displays her wound in a gesture echoing both classical and modernist femininity, as well as a language of forensic, medical documentation. His corpse is propped up on a metal contraption, half morgue gurney, half 19thC photographic device to hold the living still during long exposures. Sacrificial in gaze and pose, the dirtied, bloodied skin, inked fingers (presumably in an attempt to identify the body) and parted lips recall ecstatic saints, exhaling one last exhausted breath.

This fictional wounded couple of mine become all skin, reminding me that we are made and unmade by the touch of the other, who is always surface, exteriority and epidermis, their alterity confounding itself paradoxically at its most extreme within the erotic encounter. Thus, the relation to the other is not one of ecstatic seamless fusion, but rather a relation to the unknown and unknowable. It is their exteriority and their alterity that constitutes their entire existence. Within this wrapping around and being enwrapped by the other, the lover becomes consumed, annihilated as other, becomes image, idol and disappears, encrypted within this movement.

The photograph and photographic apparatus underlines a corporeal trace, an index, a theatrical medium in which desire is enacted. Within the studio, behind the camera, faced with the flesh of the other, my body is invisible, whilst nothing other than my desire is imaged. Both subject and myself disappear, melting into one, melting into a fictional fantasy, unseen image-maker more present than the body depicted. I am the photograph's stain, the shadow hovering, the desiring eye that cannibalistically, gently and in complete silence devours the body that has given itself to me.

[1+3] *Jean-Luc Nancy. The Ground of the Image. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005, p. 107.*

[2] *Sebasten-Roch-Nicolas Chamfort Products of the perfected civilization: selected writings of Chamfort. Translated by William Merwin. London: Macmillan, 1969 (17961).*

Images: Esther Teichmann, Untitled from Mythologies, 2010/ 2012.

Beverley Carruthers
Imaginary Animals

Once

It is dark. We are in the darkness, (*Can you hear me in the `darkness shouts John Berger*) we can smell the dampness mixed with the sensation of dripping, the thick rock surrounds us. Our senses are magnified. We are not just below the rock we are within the rock. It takes time for our eyes to adjust but slowly we start to see… the bear, … the lion, … animals all around us.

We are in the Chauvet caves in France. Famous for it's 25,000 year old cave paintings.

John Berger is telling us that the hunter/painters who made these cave paintings saw themselves as being part of the herd of animals they hunted. There was interconnectedness between human and animal not understood today.

I am now sitting in my sister's kitchen she is heavily pregnant and upset, her husband has just shown her a photo from the newspaper of a woman who has given birth to a half dog half human baby. She is asking me if this could be possible. What about the Minotaur, Harpies, Sphinx, Fauns? All these creatures made of a blend of human and animal if they exist what stops her from giving birth to something similar.

These are all mythological creatures I suggest to her and these things could not happen in real life. But I am not so certain. The memories of such creatures are in all of us from folk tales told to us as children but for my family even more so, having grown up with fishermen and their tall tales of the sea, mermaids were never far from any of our minds. Borges in his Book of Imaginary Beings tells us 'the zoo of mythological creatures is never ending as the combination of creatures is infinite, only limited by our boredom or disgust.'

In Iceland the wind is so strong I can hardly keep the car on the road, I am with Berthora and Thor. We are trying to explore the imaginary animal within us, the animal that could have been in this landscape if humans remained as fluid as the landscape it inhabits. The kind of creatures Ovid talks of in his Metamorphoses 'from beast to men, from men to beast, but always it keeps on living. As the pliant wax is stamped with new designs and is no longer what once it was, but changes form'.

I am nervous how is this going to go, the weather is so bad and I am responsible for them. They don't seem to be worried – they are excited. We get out of the car I know where I want to go I've been here before many times testing, shooting, looking.

We all feel the landscape it seems primal unformed, not yet settled.

We walk to the water's edge. Berthora excitedly jumps onto a rock a little out into the water. She falls and slips deep into the freezing cold water. I quickly pull her out, strip the wet clothes from her body, wrap blankets around her, dress her again and give her lots of hot tea. We are in the car again, not a single photo taken. We decide to go where the earth is hot. We drive along, the car out of control. We crawl on our hands and knees up the hill sheltering from the wind. It will blow us over if we stand tall. Are we at the border of our condition as a human being?

There is no need to ask them to perform they are only trying to survive out here we take some photographs. I am the photographer I gain some control over the situation, composing, exposing, talking, and making sure I do what I need to. I know the things I haven't noticed will be the interesting things to me. This process is repeated many times.

It is only through this repeated action that eventually I start to see what I have been exploring.

I am now in darkness this is my own cave, the place imagination is allowed, the place creativity takes place. The smell of dampness is replaced by the smell of chemicals, but the sense of trepidation remains. My 'Off Cells' are activated and the process of becoming begins. The enlarger I am using is on wheels it moves around like a caged creature, controlled by motors, the lights/eyes flashing on and off, allowing the image to be created on the wall where the paper is stretched out. It is in the silence that the images emerge, the new creatures are born. The darkroom is this cave, the cave Plato talks about, the cave where creatures are reflected on the walls.

The cave where my creatures are born.
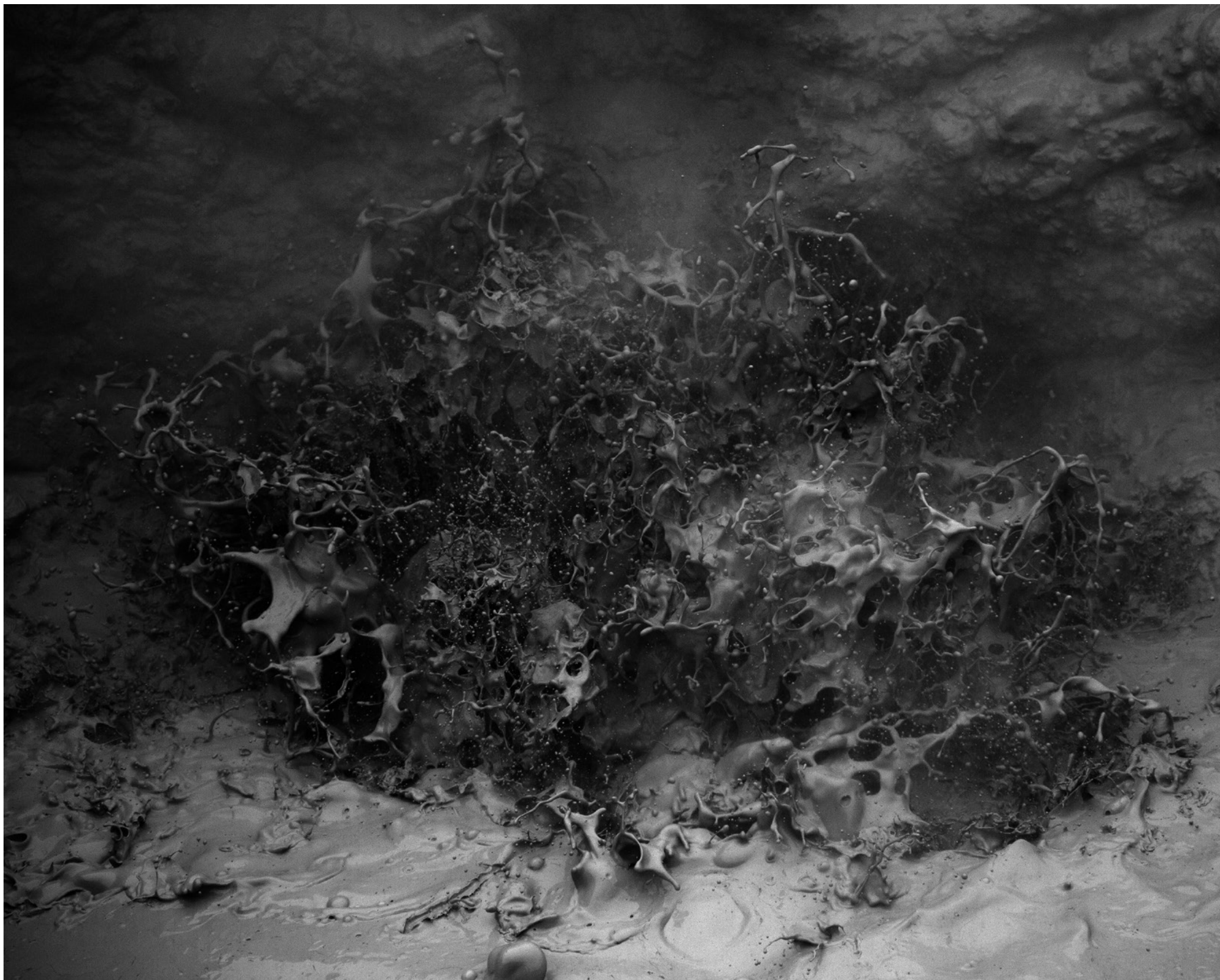
Once

Contributors

Dr. Wiebke Leister
Course Leader MA Photography, LCC
Wiebke Leister's research investigates conditions of photographic Non-Likeness – focusing on representations of faciality and the photographic presentation of expressive signs of the face in relation to its facial canvas.

Edward Dimsdale
Senior Lecturer BA and MA Photography, LCC
Edward Dimsdale's research interests include critical histories of the medium, fine and alternative methods of photographic printmaking, and inter-relations between photography and live performance. His work is represented by HackelBury (London) and Gallery 339 (Philadelphia).

Peter D. Osborne
Senior Lecturer MA Media Communications and Critical Practice, BA Media and Cultural Studies, LCC
Peter Osborne's research interests include Latin American photography; landscape and identity; tourism, place, and the contemporary cultural condition.

Victoria Ahrens
UAL
Victoria Ahrens is currently studying for her AHRC funded PHD in Art Practice at Birkbeck, (UL). She also teaches on BA and MA Printmaking and Photography courses across UAL, London, and has exhibited her work widely in the UK and internationally, with the Clifford Chance Printmaking Prize 2013, and the Celeste Photography Prize 2013 to her name.

Dallas Seitz
Senior Lecturer BA and MA Photography, BA Sound Arts and Design, LCC
Dallas Seitz' work has been purchased by the Saatchi Collection and the Zabludowicz Collection amongst other private collections and supported by the Arts Council of Canada, the British Council for the Arts and the Henry Moore FoundatiWon. Seitz has published many short writings on Curating and the production of Art.

Dr. Chantal Faust
Tutor Critical and Historical Studies, RCA
Chantal Faust is an artist and writer with an interest in the mechanics of vision, blatancy and touch, subjectivity and performance, flatbed scanners and Slavoj Zizek's beard.

Dr. Esther Teichmann
Senior Lecturer BA Photography, LCC
Esther Teichmann's practice uses still and moving image, collage and painting to create alternate worlds, which blur autobiography and fiction. Her research looks at the origins of fantasy and desire and how these are bound to experiences of loss and representation.
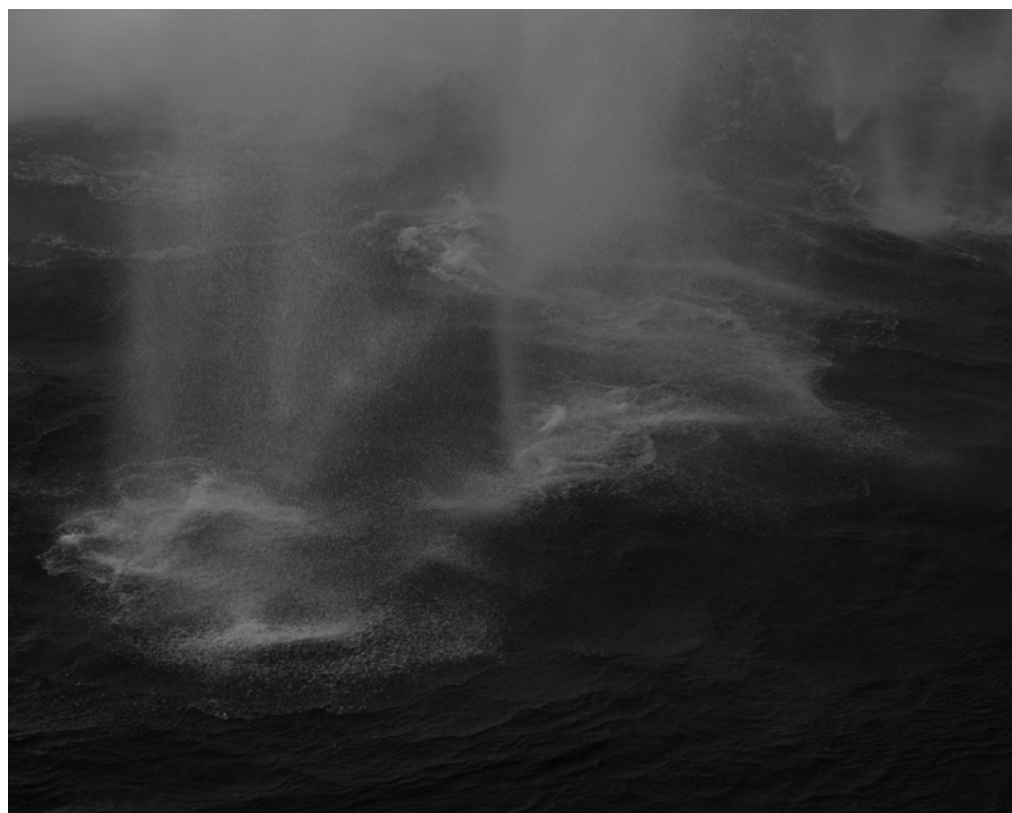
Beverley Carruthers
Course Leader BA Photography, LCC
As a photographer and educator Beverley Carruthers makes work exploring the primal state of the human.