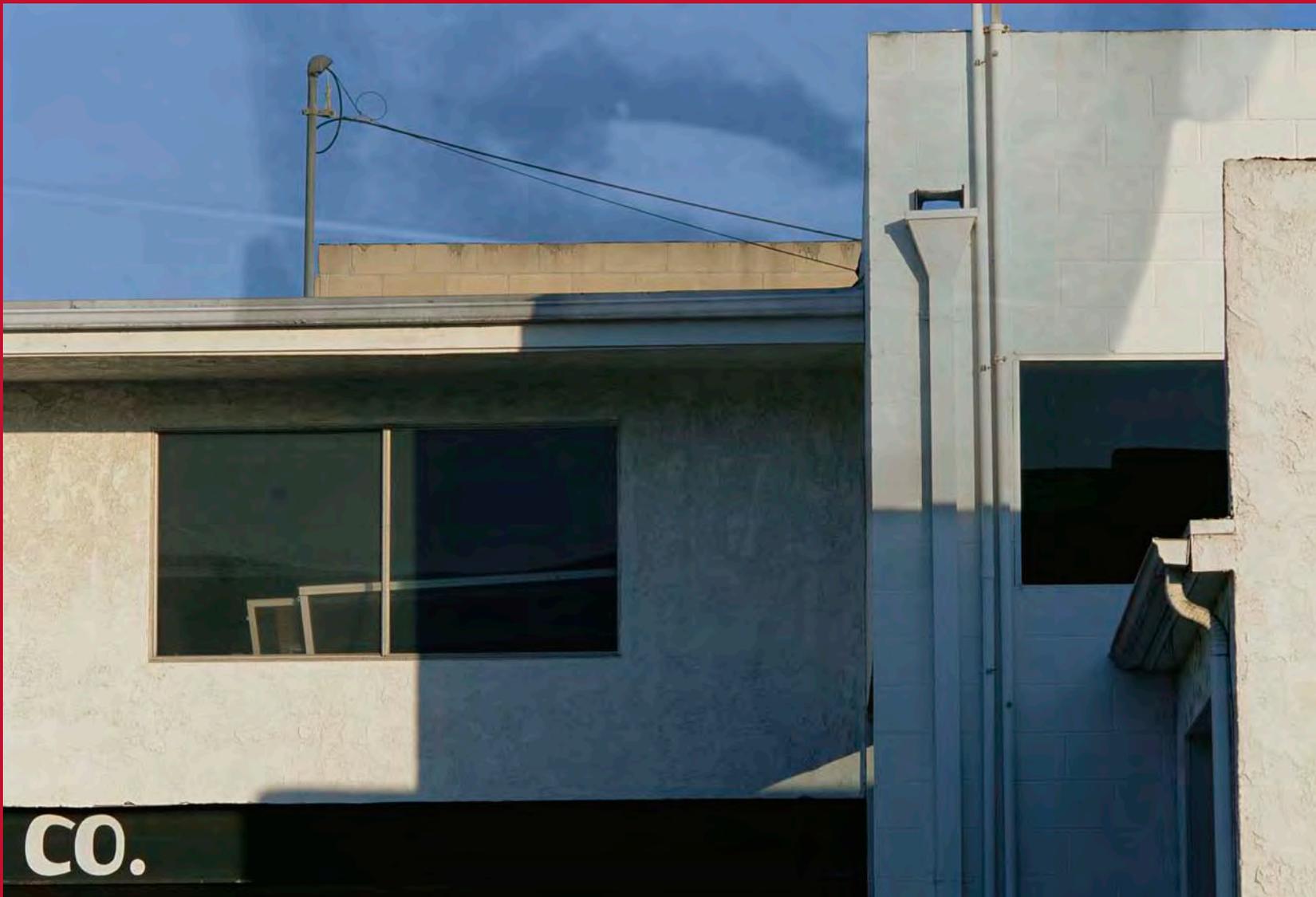
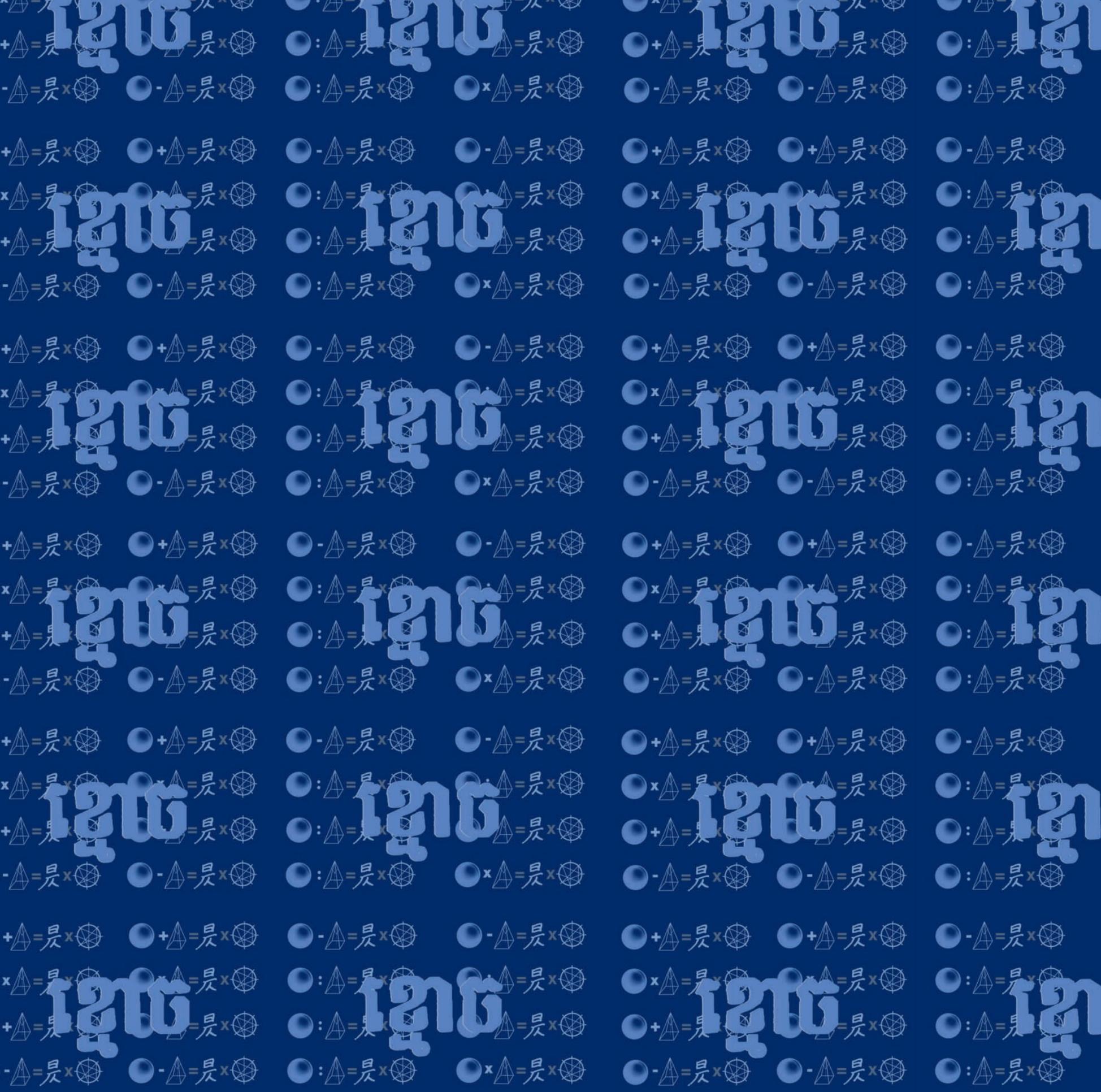


CAMBODIAN GHOSTS



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MICHAEL EB DETTO





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Foreword

Michael Detto doesn't believe in ghosts—but his camera sees them. His pictures appear empty at first, but they quickly become hauntingly scary, once a person realizes the subject matter.

At first glance the pictures look mundane and generic, but upon careful inspection the images slowly reveal themselves. When I sat down to view them, I was taken aback by the power and the subtlety they present—the artistry, the settings and the stage of the shots make the pictures peculiar. As I view Detto's work, I realize the images are mostly empty of people. One has to search to find ghostly figures lurking around somewhere throughout the image, reflecting from the glass, on the billboard or in the television screen. With the assistance of computer manipulation, Detto connects images of Cambodia and Long Beach, California into one.

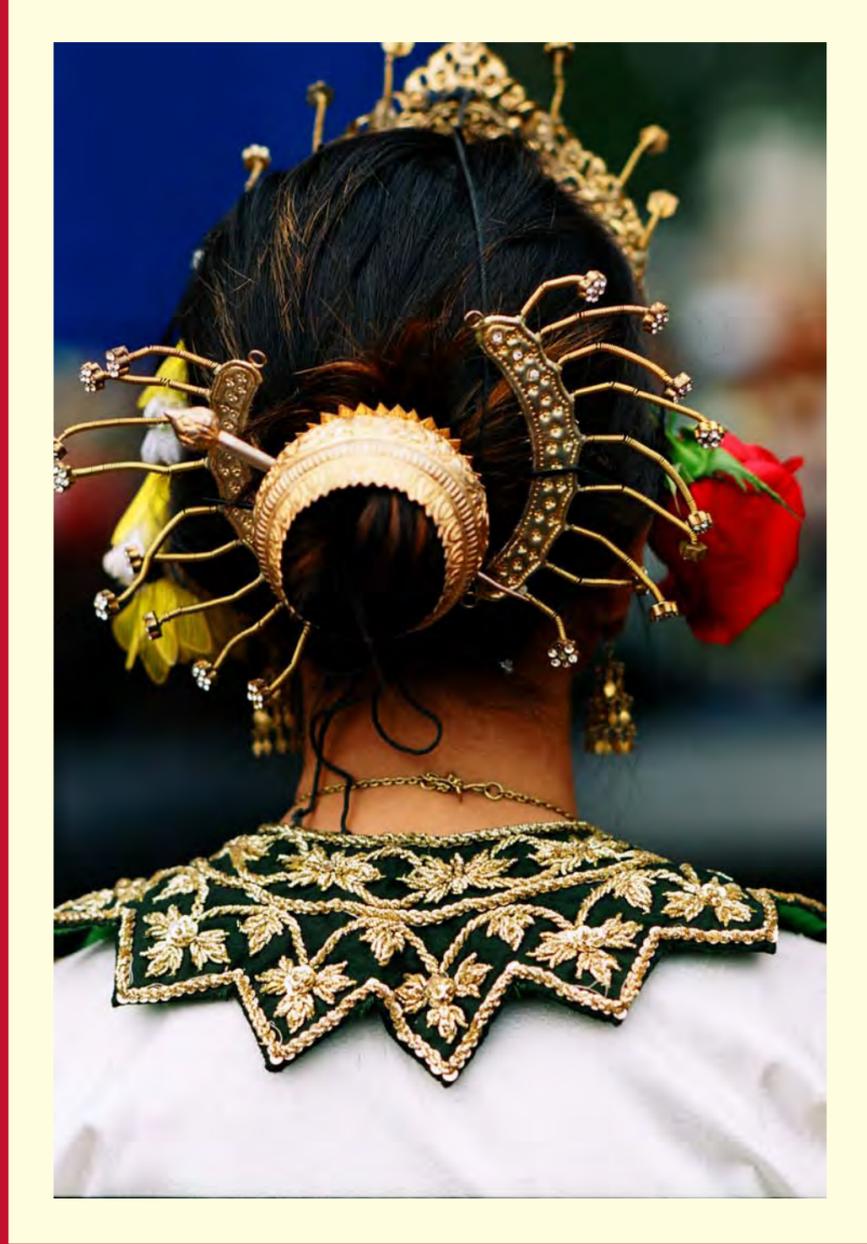
Michael Detto was born in Germany and relocated to the United States in 2004. He traveled to Cambodia in 2010, and was instantly drawn to the country, the people and the culture. His trip there was impacted by the history of the Khmer Rouge, which he began documenting with his camera, capturing fleeting images of moto drivers, vendors, and apsara dancers—hinting at the loss and the destruction of the country and its people after the infamous killing fields. There remain in Cambodia today left-overs of the killings that took place, such as the mass graves, the Choeung Ek Memorial, and the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (or S21: Security 21), a high school turned into an interrogation/jail/execution house. These reminders can be seen in Detto's images. Are they ghosts? Or our own thoughts? When at the gym, in Long Beach, I sometimes see my fellow Cambodian-Americans working out. I often wonder if I see images reflecting off of them – much like Detto's images. Many of the younger ones were born here, not in Cambodia. How do they think of themselves? Do they appreciate their parents' struggle? Yet I am paradoxically optimistic when I see them. Detto's images capture this collage of emotion for me.

Michael Detto's photographs remind us that we live in a borderless world—a world of sadness and joy, struggle and celebration. The images of Khmer people uprooted from their country, learning a new language, a new culture, taking up a difficult new life in a new land. Detto's photographs remind us that while life goes on, our past is always a fundamental part of who we are.

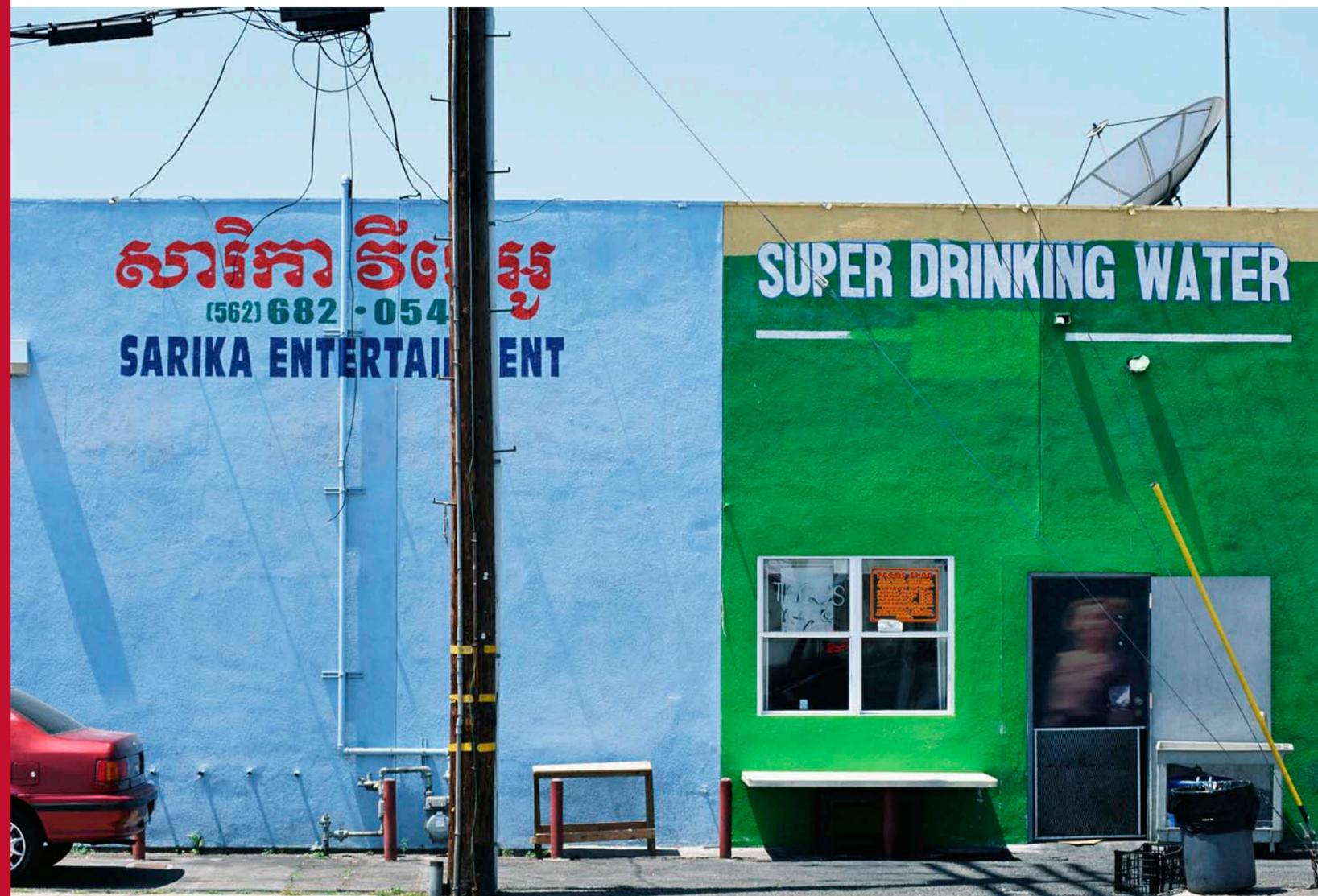
–Sayon Syprasoeuth

(Artist, Cambodian refugee living in the United States)

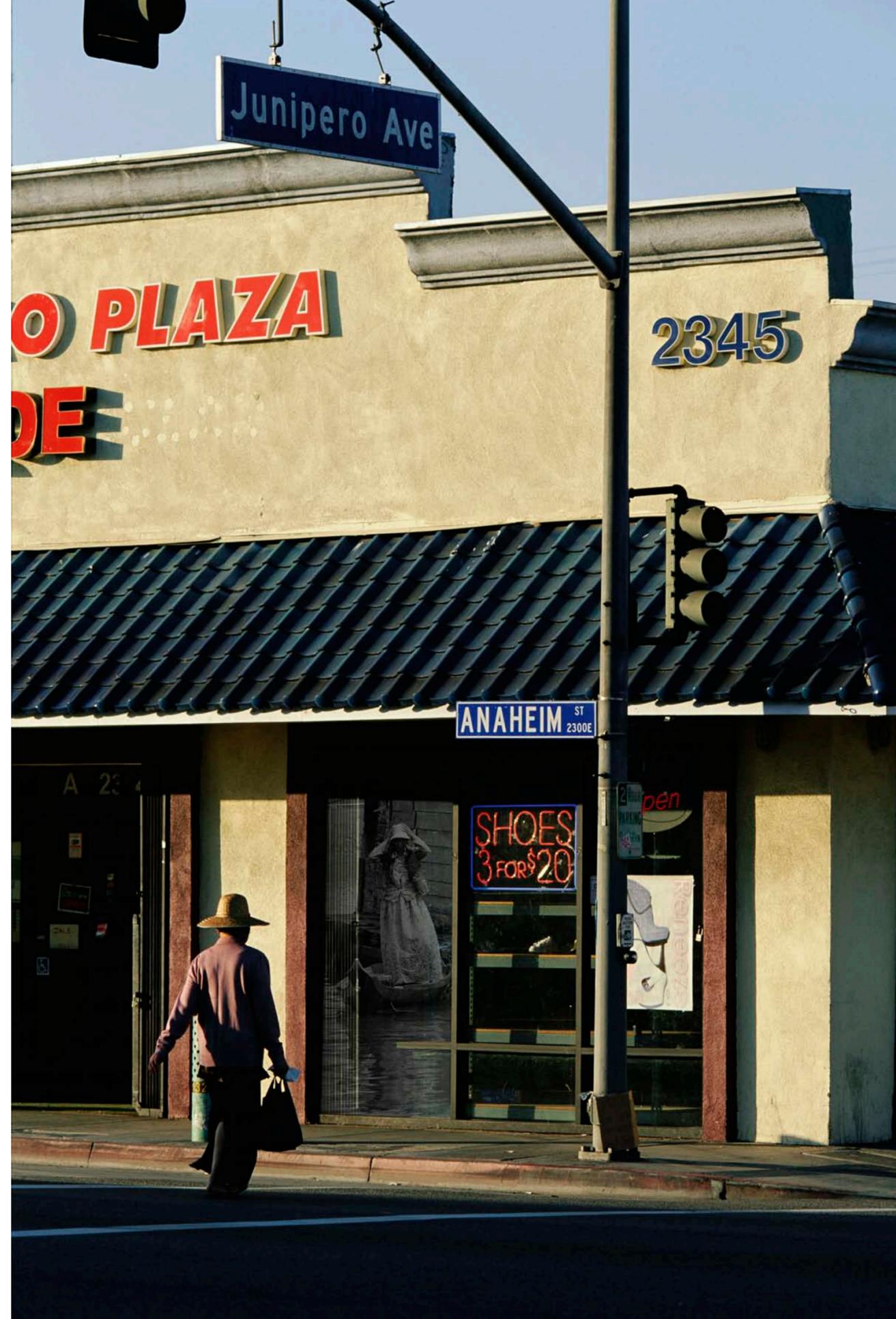




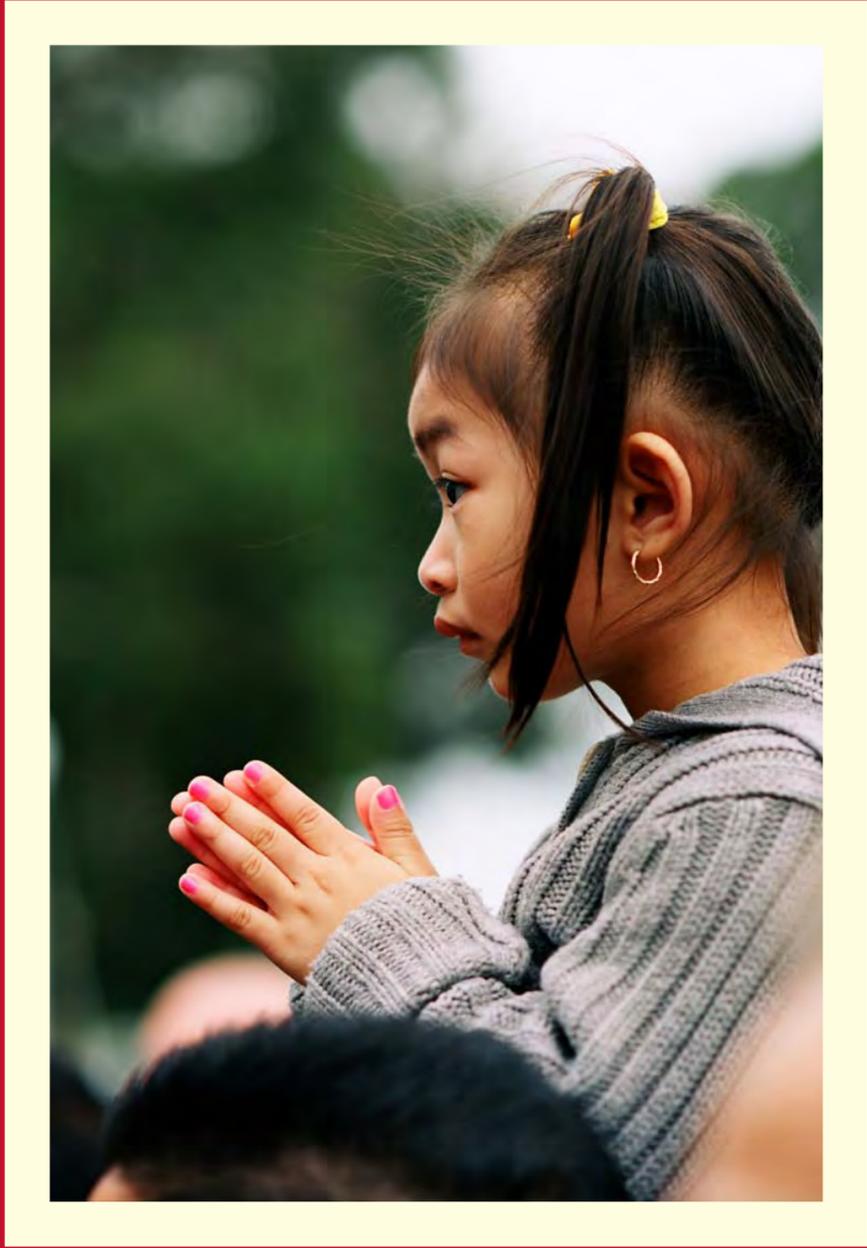












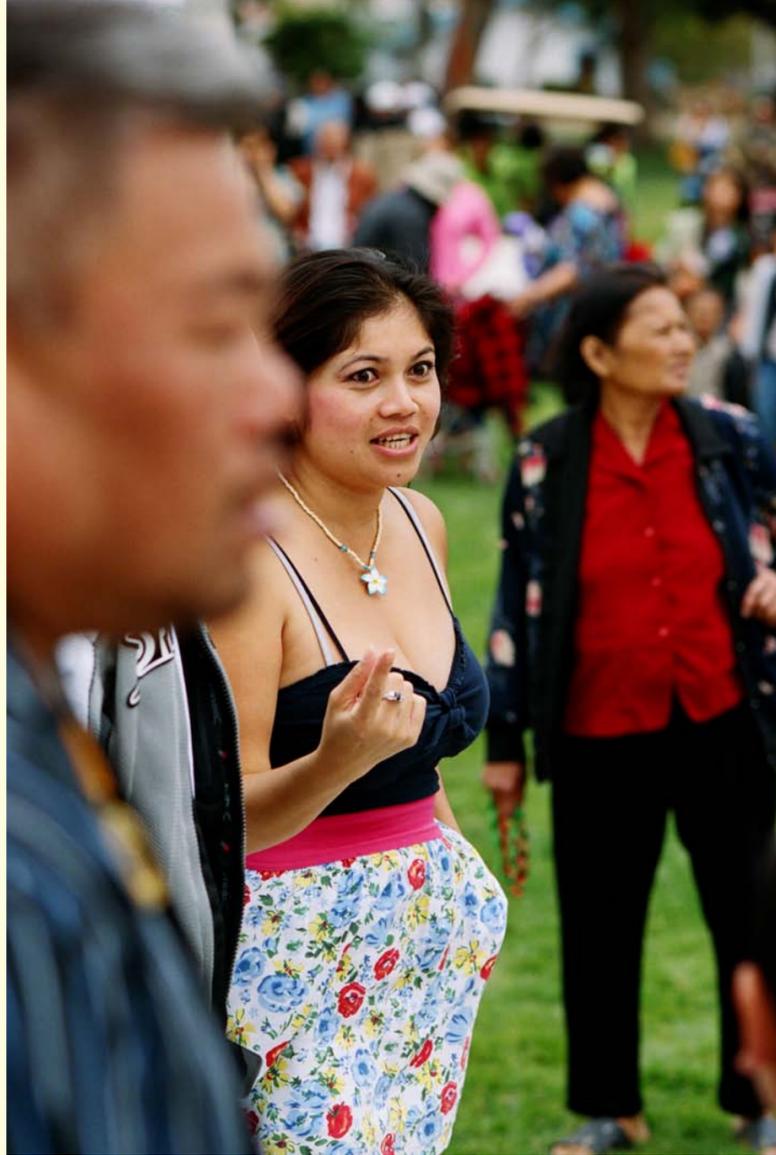












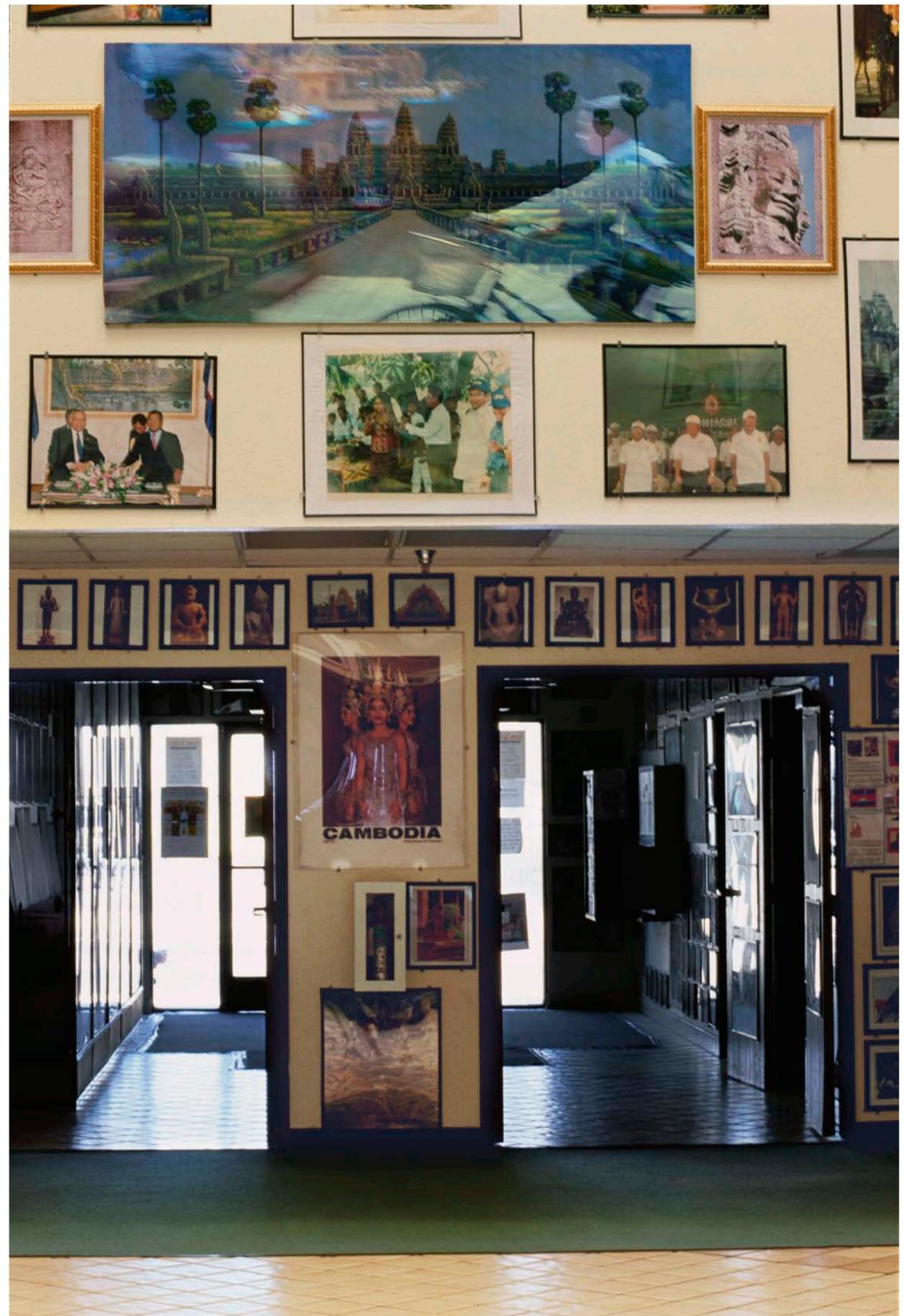


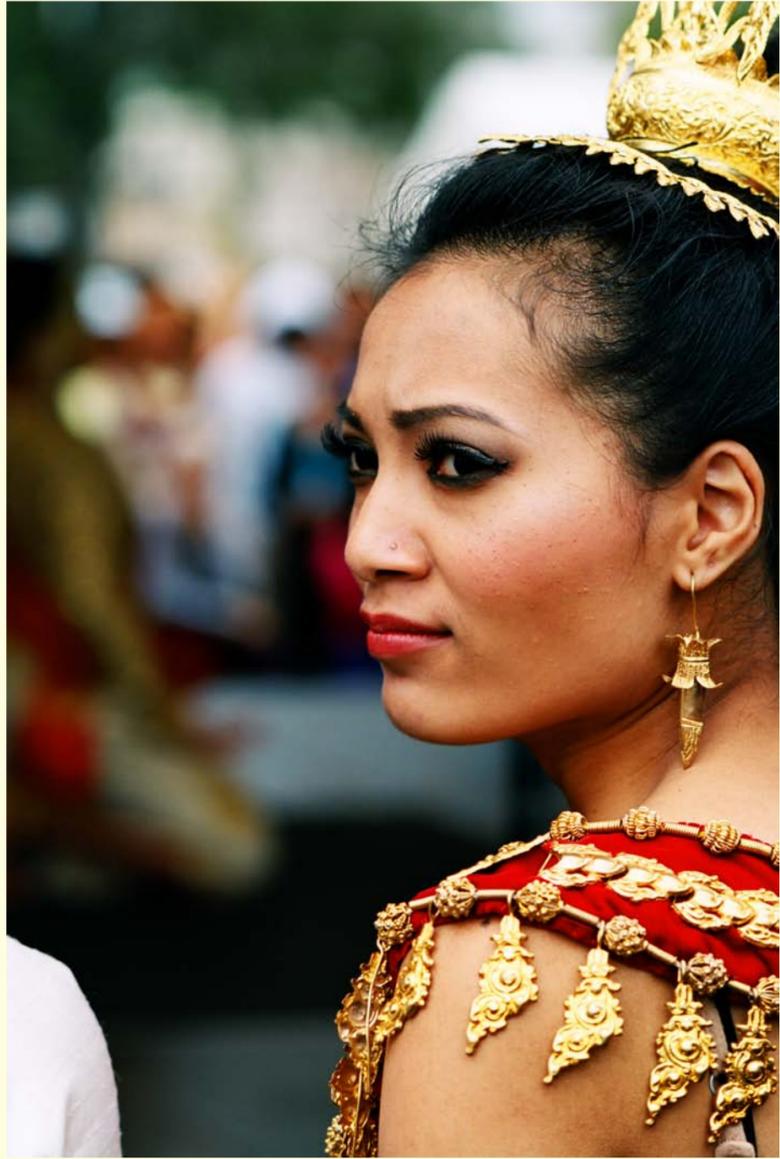














Eurydice, Santa Monica
1989

About Cambodian Ghosts

"How should we live?" Someone asked me in a letter.
I had meant to ask him
the same question.

Again, and as ever,
as may be seen above,
the most pressing questions
are naïve ones."

—Wisława Szymborska¹

Why start with this poem from Poland? What was on my mind when I initiated a project about Cambodian ghosts?

Szymborska's poem *The Century's Decline* ends with those lines quoted above after limning the failed utopias and shattered hopes of the twentieth century. It was published in 1986, before the walls came down. Can the answers be naïve ones, too?

As much as I rely—like every writer—on the empathy of the well-intentioned reader of the following remarks, I nevertheless want to start by mentioning the following caveat: The essay, formal openness granted, requires a focused mind to master its subject.

The 'haunted mind' on the other hand, as Hawthorne described it, is chased by spirits and overwhelmingly distracted by sensations of otherness: "You find yourself, for a single instant, wide awake in that realm of illusions, whither sleep has been the passport, and behold its ghostly inhabitants and wondrous scenery, with a perception of their strangeness, such as you never attain while the dream is undisturbed."² It happens then that thoughts and voices you listened to before prevail, thereby cracking up the inner lids. Hawthorne continued: "In the depths of every heart, there is a tomb and a dungeon, though the lights, the music, and revelry above may cause us to forget their existence, and the buried ones, or prisoners whom they hide. . . . In an hour like this, when the mind has a passive sensibility, but no active strength; when the imagination is a mirror⁴, imparting vividness to all ideas, . . ."⁵ And as much as every poem transforms in the reader's mind, every quote starts to oscillate being ripped out of its native bed⁶.

Following me into my sketchbook of contemplations and considerations and quotes will cover the route I took to find the naïve answers to Szymborska's question—that haunted me already

The Corridor

"You open a door and there is another one, and then another and another, until the last one, which doesn't even exist, and so on, until you find yourself at the first one, which doesn't even exist, and you take a stroll to old places because what you thought had released you, and really had released you, becomes a trap and brings you back there to finally understand that your last truth is just as illusory as the first one and to remember that you are always walking a fine line."

—Gellu Naum³

¹ Wisława Szymborska, *Poems New And Collected 1957–1997*, translated by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh, Harcourt Inc. 1998. From *The Century's Decline*. (p. 198-199)

² Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Haunted Mind*, in: *Tales and Sketches*, The Library of America 1982. (p. 200)

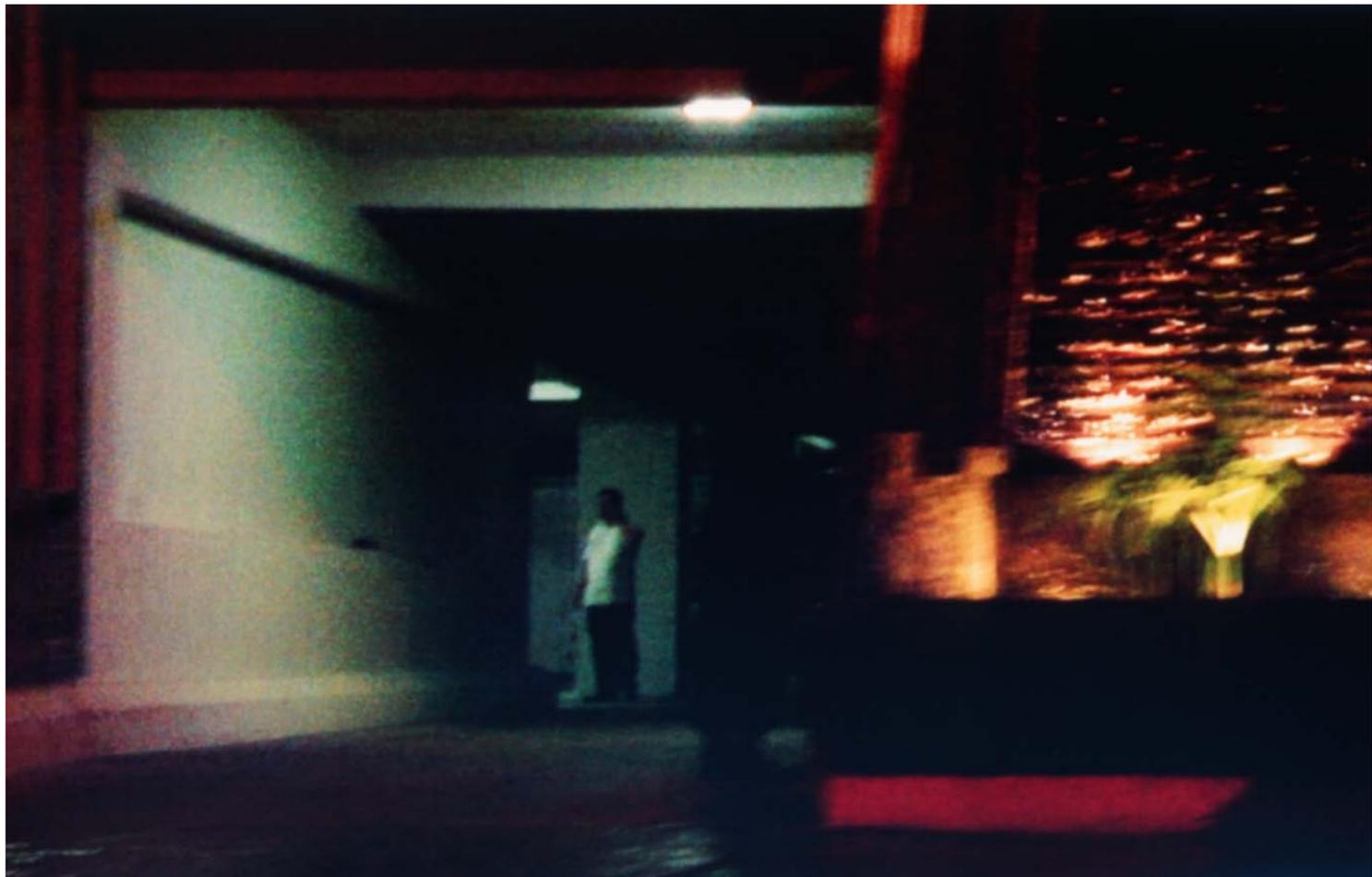
³ Gellu Naum, *Zenobia*, translated by James Brook and Sasha Vlad, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1995. (*The Corridor*, p. 57)

⁴ Leonardo da Vinci, *Leonardo's Notebooks*, edited by H. Anna Suh, Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, New York 2005.

"You should take the mirror for your guide . . . because on its surface the objects appear in many respects as in a painting." (p. 14)

⁵ Hawthorne, *The Haunted Mind*. (pp. 201-202)

⁶ Norman M. Klein, *The History Of Forgetting, Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory*, Verso, New York 2008. "If we concentrate, the imago seems to be waiting for us intact: a photo, a document, a table of statistics, an interview. It remains where we put it, but the details around it get lost, as if they were haunted, somewhat contaminated, but empty. Imagos are the sculpture that stands in the foreground next to a negative space. Imagos are the false light that creates chiaroscuro. They are the rumor that seems haunted with memory, so satisfying that it keeps us from looking beyond it. . . . I realized that imago—or phantom limbs, or whatever one called them – are extremely deceptive." (p. 4)



47

Male Night Ghost, Phnom Penh
2010



Female Night Ghost, Phnom Penh
2010

for a while—and seemed appropriate to me if you start becoming occupied with those “blood-begotten spirits”⁷ called ghosts. Involved are the themes of God and the devil, art and water, memory and method, and many words of other people like those of the ‘hauntologist’ Jacques Derrida.

After you have read a certain amount of diverging books with the befitting passion of the curious mind the lingering sound of those voices can escort you like friendly ghosts through your daily musings and doings. Those ghosts may disclose faces more resembling typefaces assembled of the images they caused immersed in a dark coating of ink. Looking at a landscape, or a house, or a face I enjoy sometimes the uncanny feeling of discovering signs, literals, and structures imitating a text. Over the years I got used to the idea of owning a shadow of words being attached to me, forming a black lake of written things I can use as a retreat wherever I am. For the project *Cambodian Ghosts* I regarded it as a worthy undertaking to let an audience have a glimpse of the dark waters I enjoy swimming through sharing some sources and building some bridges to cross them.

Guilt & Text

I feel an obligation to disclose why and how the images in this volume were made for two reasons: First: there is a sense, an idea of guilt. In the meantime it had transformed into an old tale: Ensuing the triad of beauty, truth and goodness had become a burden like a bondage on the artist’s will to make art (not to mention the restrictions already imposed by taste, material, time, space and ability), in such a way that the freedom created by the breakup of aesthetics and ethics owing to the triumph of Modernism is still sensible like a fresh breeze.

Thus we may feel uncomfortable when morality intrudes: The painful embarrassment caused by the well-intentioned piece, the film, or picture, or poem dedicated to the common good; a topic amiably executed is perceived as cutified if it is done without a hidden subversion; a mindset of suspicion stalking each work embedded in political subjects or themes—those are sensations and praxis of resentment which were always there, probably, yet they seem more in charge than ever.

Especially the horrors of the last century established the great exclamation point: “They show that questions of guilt will still be central to any aesthetics.”⁸ Adam Thirlwell explicated prior to that: “But the intricate problems of representing the Shoah demonstrate, I think, that this modern wish [the “separation of the aesthetic and the ethical”] is impossible. For these problems are not specific to the Shoah.”

Secondly, not only me, we all are surrounded by text, may it be spoken, written or just sensed through the gestures of the everyday. Quotes, testimonies, opinions, directions chaperon our actions day-to-day, and one night, after countless hours of rummaging through old tomes for a hardly remembered line thereby succumbing to the temptation of bibliomania, I dreamed about being embalmed with banderoles in a still life of dusty letters, bows, speech scrolls and bandages weaved into a growing thicket of words until I woke up with a cough.

Images generate texts, in abundance, they are meant to give comfort, the image unvested by text

⁷ W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, Revised Second Edition, edited by Richard J. Finneran, Scribner Paperback Poetry, Simon & Schuster Inc., New York 1996. “. . . Where blood-begotten spirits come/ And all complexities of fury leave./ . . .” from *Byzantium*, (p. 248). Could he have words in mind, too? “Like ghosts, words are disembodied presences”, wrote Renée L. Bergland, *The National Uncanny, Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*, Dartmouth College, University Press of New England, Hanover 2000. (p. 5)

⁸ Adam Thirlwell, *Genocide and the Fine Arts*, book review of Claude Lanzmann’s memoir, *The New Republic*, May 10, 2012. (pp. 25-31)

seems still too untamed to be welcomed in our world⁹, and I just have to get rid of some of those lines simply by writing them. “There is no word that is not also flesh.”¹⁰

Boris Groys stated that we all have to face the same problem: “What has to be done? And even more importantly: How can I explain to myself what I am already doing? The urgency of these questions results from the acute collapse of tradition that we experience today.”¹¹ All that is not imaginable without a written text, abandoned or newly established, without the—maybe imaginary—body of this very text becoming the Literal, the shadow in and of every image. Imaginary shadows are different: they can be created by shadows, they can create shadows of themselves, they can shake off the real shadow’s fate to be attached to the gallows of their provenance.

I was born and raised in Germany (West), I had studied the arts in Hamburg and in Poland (after the walls came down); later I migrated to Los Angeles, California.

Water¹²

Culture is a cage¹³, and we can feel very uncomfortable and corseted by even a passing mention that delimits our being within the sub-cages of gender, age, status, etc. Still, I sympathize deeply with the desire to enter one of those popular shark cages: No ground, just endless water, it is not really your element, the monstrosity of space is concealed but well known, the sighting of shadows in the distance does not reveal their size. You check the reliability of the grid, they can come close faster than you think, but they will be pacific, probably.

In two groundbreaking American short stories the protagonists have to swim¹⁵ constantly to become ghosts themselves: Peyton Farquhar in Ambrose Bierce’s *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*¹⁶ and Ned Merrill in John Cheever’s *The Swimmer*¹⁷ struggle for their lives swimming

⁹ Compare ‘*NUFF SAID*, Marvel Characters, Inc. 2002. “That’s right, Marvel Prez Bill Jemas and EIC Joe Quesada hatched a test for the Mighty Marvel Maestros: Since you are the best artists and writers in the biz, we challenge you to tell a story using visuals only.” (from the preface). This experiment is revealing in two respects: First, it takes much more time to ‘read’ those comics without the usual lettering—to a degree that makes it nearly uncomfortable; second, it is noticeable how often the storytellers desperately need written language (via newspaper headlines, computer screens etc.) in the panels to tell the story.

¹⁰ Witold Gombrowicz, *Diary*, translated by Lillian Vallee, Yale University Press 2012. “I think, therefore, that literature has submitted itself too much to professors in this century (written in 1954, MD) and that we, artists, will have to cause a scandal in order to destroy these relations. We will be forced to act arrogantly and brashly to make our desire for an unhealthy flirting with formulas of scientific intelligence go away. . . . There are no ideas like embodied ones. There is no word that is not also flesh.” (p. 105)

¹¹ Boris Groys, *Under the Gaze of Theory*. E-flux journal # 35, New York 05/2012.

¹² Leanne Shapton, *Swimming Studies*, Blue Rider Press, New York 2012. “In water, most of the communication is physical.” (p. 296)

¹³ Weston La Barre, *The Ghost Dance-Origins of Religion*, A Delta Book, New York 1972. “We can also agree that every culture is a tyrannical system, though fortunately no one is ever completely enculturated.” (p. 335)

¹⁴ James Merrill, *Selected Poems*, Edited by J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 2008. (From *Dead Center*, p. 211)

¹⁵ Compare Shapton, *Swimming Studies*: “Other photographs are of abandoned outdoor pools, weeds sprouting between concrete tiles, water levels disturbingly low: it is like seeing a section of unshaven leg, or an abandoned drink. As I linger over these images I think of the ghosts of northern European swimmers and summers past, vaguely of the Second World War.” (p. 285) The reader of *The Swimmer* (see below), bearing in mind John Cheever’s lifelong struggle with alcoholism, may worry at times that Cheever’s hero, presumably being drunk himself, could risk a deadly jump into one of those pools, not being aware of the phantasmal mirage of water covering an empty concrete bed for his suicidal crash.

¹⁶ First published in the San Francisco Examiner, July 13, 1890; see: Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil’s Dictionary, Tales, & Memoirs*, edited by S. T. Joshi, The Library Of America 2011. (pp. 10-20)

¹⁷ First published in The New Yorker, July 18, 1964; see: John Cheever, *Collected Stories and Other Writings*, The Library Of America 2009. (pp. 726-737)

“In Now’s black waters burn the stars

of Then.

. . .

In Now’s black waters burn the stars.

Ah then.

Leap, Memory, supreme

equestrienne,

Through hoops of fire, circuits you

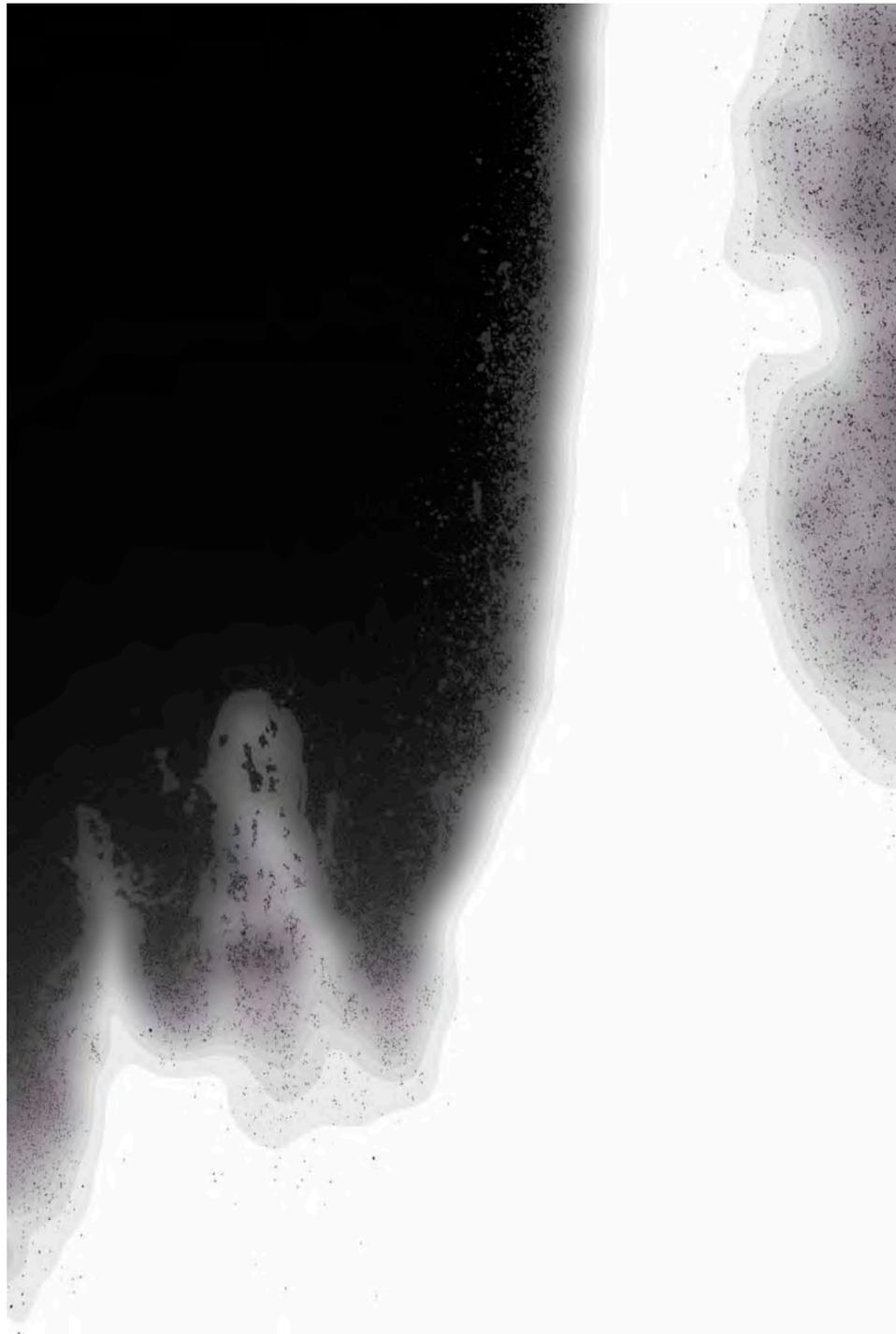
overload!

Beyond reflection, as I dip my pen

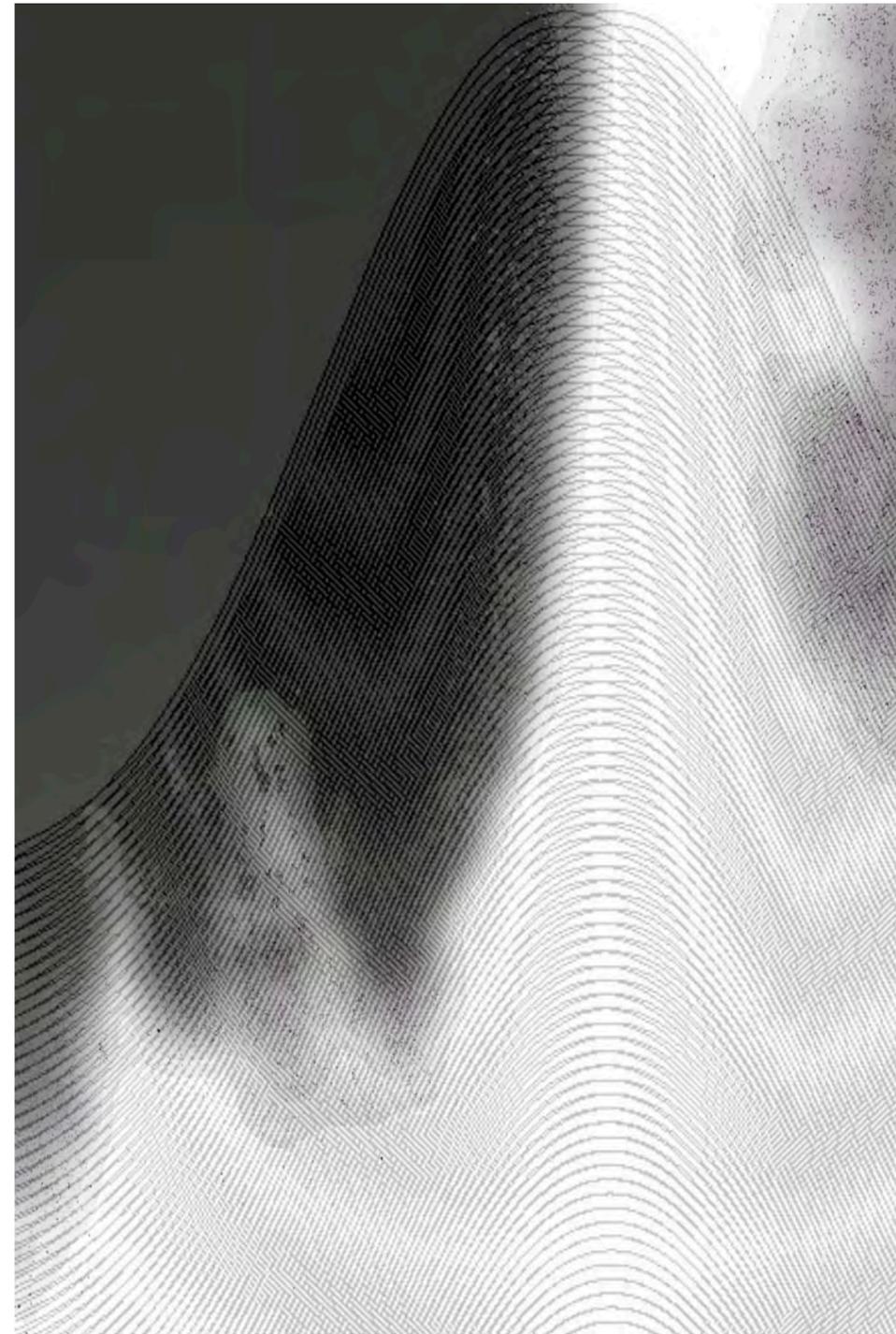
In Now’s black waters, burn the stars

of Then.”

—James Merrill¹⁴



Digital Ghost: Water #1, Los Angeles
2012



Digital Ghost: Water #2, Los Angeles
2012



Digital Night Ghost: Water #3, Los Angeles
2012



Digital Night Ghost: Water #4, Los Angeles
2012

against time and fate and they end up deconstructed as faded shadows of themselves.

It is as if water could be the element that ‘others’ us¹⁸, the pH, the molar concentration of hydrogen ions of our body fluids, reminds us where we came from, and that our skin is just such a small barrier to protect us for a season until we loose everything. Both films about Jacques Derrida (*Ghost Dance*¹⁹ and *Derrida*²⁰) start with water, an overhead shot of water, as if reinstructing the gesture of the great Jean Vigo, who ended his masterpiece *L’Atalante* (1934) with an overhead shot on water, thereby dismissing the tokenistic use of the sunset for a happy-end. Forcing our head above water can be unsettling: Should I jump? Will it let me go back again? Will I want to come back again?

Jules Michelet described a landscape in northwest France, an “intermediate region that heralds the sea”²¹. Trees, those progenitors and carriers of all texts you find here, trees are different there: “Still elsewhere, tree trunks become small and they endlessly extend their branches horizontally. On the beaches trees are overcome and engulfed by the fine dust given off by fragmented shells. Their pores close up. They lack air. They suffocate but conserve their form and remain there as trees of stone, as ghosts of trees, as gloomy ever-present shadows, as captives even in death.”²²

Cambodia & Poland

Visiting a friend in Cambodia in 2010, I instantly felt drawn into the déjà vu like into an inverted paradise garden populated by hidden things and strange but not always unpleasant smells. Where did that come from? I remembered my first arrival in Poland: I came to Łódź, Poland by train in 1993, on a hot summer noon. The station was deserted, surrounded by wasteland and decrepit buildings. A line from Joseph Conrad crossed my mind, “There is something going on in the sky like a decomposition, like a corruption of the air, . . .” And: “. . . as if all my sins have found me out.”²⁴ The only taxi absconded when I approached it with my luggage. I had to carry on for a while until I found a tram stop. My shirt was soaked with sweat, wild dogs—they did not wear the mandatory muzzles—were roaming in the distance. The tram stop was equipped with a braying ice cream ad promoting colorful ice cream between huge breasts; *vis-à-vis* an uninviting collation with a handmade McDonalds sign—McDonalds hadn’t arrived yet.

In Phnom Penh we arrived by plane at night, after having a stopover in Seoul where we had seen snow on the landing track. Five hours later the air was hot and smooth, and the endless drive into the city on a moto rickshaw through a moonless tropical winter night brought the comfort of being gently jounced back on a ground not undermined by air any more. If you do not believe in ghosts, and the demons of the past, the passing of spacious dark holes in the landscape floating by may let you sense at least the spirits in those dim spaces as they foreshadow the activities of the coming day.

‘Poor people’ was the first thing that came to mind—even being less well-off yourself—and

¹⁸ Roger Deakin, *Waterlog, A Swimmer’s Journey Through Britain*, Vintage Books, London 2000. “So swimming is a rite of passage, a crossing of boundaries: the line of the shore, the bank of the river, the edge of the pool, the surface itself. When you enter the water, something like metamorphosis happens. Leaving behind the land, you go through the looking-glass surface and enter a new world, in which survival, not ambition or desire, is the dominant aim.” (p. 3)

¹⁹ *Ghost Dance*, a film produced and directed by Ken McMullen 1983.

²⁰ *Derrida*, a film directed by Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman, produced by Amy Ziering Kofman 2002.

²¹ Jules Michelet, *The Sea*, translated by Katia Sainson, Green Integer, København & Los Angeles 2012. (p.19)

²² Ibid. (p. 20)

²³ Bob Hicok, from *Equine Aubade*, *The New Yorker*, March 19, 2012. (pp. 60-61)

²⁴ both quotes from: Joseph Conrad, *The Shadow-Line* (written in 1915), 1st Vintage Classics ed. 2007. (p. 101)

²⁵ Nanna Biyndis Hilmarsdottir, quotes *Of Monsters And Men*, “King and Lionheart” from the album *My Head is an Animal* ©Sony.

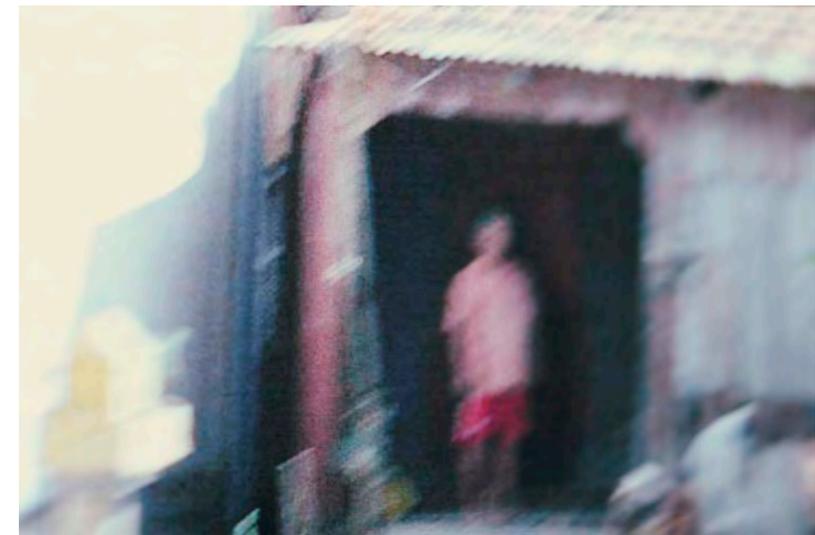
that was what you saw. As a visitor coming from wealthier parts of the world arriving at a particular time in the history of a country like Cambodia—or Poland—this may just sound like an arid and shallow statement soon to be obliterated by the attractions of otherness and novelty. At least it urges respect and the imperative to demonstrate good conduct.

“To pose unapologetically outsized questions in the hope that we all might find a better way to live”, write Joshua Chuang and Jock Reynolds in their afterword to Robert Adams, the photographer²⁶. It is obviously an aspiration many photographers prescribed to, and it leads Robert Adams to the question: “And what obligations, if any, follow from our beliefs?”—“to record hope with pictures truthful and useful”²⁷ as he claimed earlier?

I stayed for three weeks in Phnom Penh. I travelled to the beach community in Kep (now extinct), Kampot, climbed through the jungle to the ruins of French colonialism on Bokor Hill, visited Battambang, the floating villages, Siem Reap, and Angkor Wat. I took pictures (color slides and b & w negatives), and I used video HD. Back home in Los Angeles, I made a sketchbook, one hundred-thirty pages, titled *In Cambodia*. And in a sleepless night in my apartment I shot still pictures from the screen using the video material.

As a German and as an immigrant in America I can empathize with being the stranger. I had always felt estranged in my own culture even to the extent that it lightens my efforts now to write by avoiding the mother tongue.

“Cambodian refugees initially resettled in high numbers in some of the economically depressed and high crime portions in Long Beach” wrote Megan Berthold in a book review²⁸. So I paid Signal Hill and Long Beach in Los Angeles many visits making pictures of ‘Little Phnom Penh’, as it is called, as well as portraits on the occasion of the Cambodian New Year Celebration. Walking down Anaheim Street I felt the need to look for the missing, to picture



Male Ghost, Phnom Penh
2010

²⁶ Joshua Chuang/Jock Reynolds in: Robert Adams, *What Can We Believe Where? Photographs of the American West*, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven 2010. (p.115) “Faced with these incongruent facts about our time and place, Adams now asks: What can we believe? And where can we still go to hold on to our beliefs? He would rather, he has said, respond to these questions as a psalmist than as a prophet—with praise rather than condemnation—but neither seems an adequate approach by itself.” (p. 114)

²⁷ Robert Adams, *What Can We Believe Where?* Preamble.

²⁸ Available from: <http://jsaeea.coehd.utsa.edu/index.php/JSAAEA/article/viewFile/63/63> (accessed July 14, 2012).

See as well: Scott Shaw, *Cambodian Refugees In Long Beach, California, The Definitive Study*, Buddha Rose Publications 3rd Edition 2011; Susan Needham and Karen Quintiliani, *Images of America - Cambodians in Long Beach*, Arcadia Publishing 2008.

“I often feel
everything is applause, an apparition
of the surprise of existence,
that the substance of life
aren’t copper and lithium, fire
and earth but the gasp
and its equivalents, as when rain falls
on a hot road
and summer sighs.”

—Bob Hicok²³

“Howling ghosts they reappear
In mountains
That are stacked with fear.”

—Nanna Biyndis Hilmarsdottir²⁵

the void, being starry-eyed to take away the cunning of street photography. And I felt the need to create an album for the exiled community here in Los Angeles.

What was missing? A first spontaneously compiled outline became a small manifesto:

“Ghosts.
We were not supposed to believe in them.
I still can’t.

Growing up with the all-day presence of not only the sluggishly recognized story of the Holocaust, but also the hidden past of evil suspected in most adult faces, and being aware that every inch of the ground you live on is moist from the tears of harm, and despair, and death, it was nevertheless simply not possible to see the hidden spirits of all those squandered souls. There was merely huffiness, riled at the slightest provocation and noise. Ghosts were something for the uneducated: ‘Do Not Follow That Path Of Ignorance’.

I learned that you can see them without faith. The history of photography is specked by people who tried to substantiate the presence of ghosts.³⁰ The hubris of photographers to represent the real world just by the abuse of a machine is part of that scheme (I am guilty here, too).

Being exposed to Asian feelings, visiting Cambodia for some time, finally, gave me an idea to bridge the awareness of a deficit, gave me the boldness to manipulate a medium which is infamous for being the embodiment of distortion.

In Cambodia I considered motion blur equitable to represent the ghostly presence of every-day-life in that country ridden by guilt and sorrow.

I matched the slides of Little Cambodia in Los Angeles (home of most of the exiles) with the slides taken from a TV where I replayed my motion-blurred images from Cambodia. I expected the results to scare me a bit. They did.”

After all, this draft opened up areas to work on:

What are ghosts, how do I find them, at the least, could I make a list of them?

Ghost & Death & God

A ghost is an *Un-ding*. The German noun *Unding* (literally: a thing is denied its very existence) is translated into the English usually with “absurdity”, a hint that will give us more to consider later. (The philosopher Vilém Flusser offers a different idea³¹ about the *Unding*: In his phenomenology of things he postulates that things have to be tangible to be called things. He perceives our world suffocated by non-things = *Undinge*, represented by electronic media, including holograms, software, digitally stored information etc. In some way Flusser formulates a theory of ghostly things³², solely he is avoiding the term ‘ghost’.)

But isn’t it common sense? The very own substantiality each one thing in itself exhibits, its innate properties, its relation to subject, time, space, and language are altogether qualities³³

²⁹ Lollie Groth, Cixous, Mnouchkine, and The Théâtre Du Soleil, in: Hélène Cixous, *The Terrible but Unfinished Story of NORODOM SIHANOUK, King of Cambodia*. (p. XX)

³⁰ David Lillington, *Ghosts, Magic, Enchantment* in: METROPOLIS M, *In Search Of The Miraculous*, Issue No. 2, 2006, Utrecht, Netherlands. “The equation of ghosts with both photography and film is a major one.” (p. 94)

³¹ Vilém Flusser, *Dinge und Undinge. Phänomenologische Skizzen*, Carl Hanser Verlag, München 1993. “Undinge dringen gegenwärtig von allen Seiten in unsere Umwelt, und sie verdrängen die Dinge. . . . Die Informationen, die gegenwärtig in unsere Umwelt eindringen und die Dinge darin verdrängen, sind von einer Art, wie sie nie vorher bestanden hat: Es sind undingliche Informationen. Die elektronischen Bilder auf dem Fernsehschirm, die in den Computern gelagerten Daten, all die Filmbänder und Mikrofilme, Hologramme und Programme, sind derartig ‘weich’ (software), daß jeder Versuch, sie mit den Händen zu ergreifen, fehlschlägt.” (p. 81)

³² compare Vilém Flusser, *Towards A Philosophy of Photography*, translated by Anthony Mathews, Reaktion Books, London 1983: “Our thoughts, feelings, desires and actions are being robotized; ‘life’ is coming to mean feeding apparatuses and being fed by them. In short: Everything is becoming absurd. So where is there room for human freedom?” (p. 80)

³³ A preliminary reading of Heidegger’s study of the particularities of the Thing can prove to be very helpful before examining the Non-thing: Martin Heidegger, *Die Frage nach dem Ding*, Max Niemeyer Verlag Tübingen 1987. Read loudly Heidegger’s language of that lecture can disclose a musicality, it is ringing like bells celebrating an older, more playful time. See as well: Martin Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, Philipp Reclam jun. Stuttgart 2010 (English: *The Origin of the Work of Art*).

La Mort

“This evening the fatal beggarwoman,

the pale, brutal old woman with

calloused hands and a low forehead,

the one who walks in the middle of

the road, sometimes here, sometimes

elsewhere, blocking the road to

tomorrow, the one who dashes her

iron-clad stick against clattering

stones and kicks them with her hell-

ish clogs; this evening, death, for no

reason, crossed the threshold of my

house. I was dreaming by the fire,

reading hope and life in my child’s

blue eyes. The old woman came in

and sat between us. And I hadn’t seen

a chair was there.”

—Grégoire Le Roy ³⁷

Mirrors

“The glass is watching us. And if

a mirror

hangs somewhere on the four walls

of my room,

I am not alone. There’s an other,

a reflection

which in the dawn enacts its own

dumb show.”

—Jorge Luis Borges ³⁹

which all of a sudden start to dissipate when we have to deal with ghosts. It is hard even to agree on one word for them: there are specters, phantoms and wraith, genie and spirit, the apparition and many other denominations to describe a phenomenon that tends to blur the demarcation lines between subject and object, past and presence, here and there.

And it is remarkable how often technology is involved in documenting the ghost: Ghost boxes are offered as communicating devices, ghost-removing equipment is used by ghost-busters, and I was introduced to a ghost detecting tool on my field trip to a ghost tour in Key West, Florida. Ghosts possess radios, televisions and space stations, but first and foremost the camera.³⁴ The narrative of photography’s history contains as a side show a carnival of stories³⁵ featuring the alleged unintentionally captured image, the accidental object caught in a frame, precipitating a bouquet of illuminations and ideas designed to cope with, and to exploit, the ultimate inexplicability of phenomena caused by a concurrence of arbitrariness, time and a medium that nevertheless embodies the promise to deliver a realistic world map, one-to-one, again and again.

Machines represent the scientific approach, their manufactured nature relates to rationality and makes them trustworthy. But as David Tomas observed: “. . . scientific representations are never completely docile: They always threaten the imagination with the terror of the unknown, the void of the infinite that they mask and cannot know.”³⁶

Ghosts seem to be representations of this “terror of the unknown”, and death (another “void of the infinite”) their natural habitat. But what is death? ³⁷

For our purpose it may be illustrative to refer to a definition given by Komar & Melamid: “Death is a dream within a dream. Like two mirrors facing each other, it is an eternal repetition of one and the same, receding into the distance”³⁸ We should know from our countless encounters with popular art forms (but do we really need them for that, isn’t it a feeling that is written in our genes?) how ghosts erupt in mirrors, those framed simulations of ourselves³⁹, where we never feel safe, where minor irregularities, sudden movements in the indistinct background next to our reflected image can cause shivers like from a chilly breeze.

Yet, death is more: It appears that the very way of dying, suffering, and guilt are the preconditions for the unleashing of the beast, creating haunting reminders of unresolved ‘things’.

Let us listen to another artist who was obsessed with death: “To see how death spreads over this world, how it kills a tree and how it penetrates dreams, how it withers a flower or a civilization, how it gnaws on the individual and on culture like a destructive blight, means to be beyond tears and regrets, beyond system and form. Whoever has not experienced the awful agony of death, rising and spreading like a surge of blood, like the choking grasp of a snake which provokes terrifying hallucinations, does not know the demonic character of

³⁴ But compare how the dialectics of ghost-sightings come into play even when there is no ghost-sighting at all, just its premonition seems crucial: John Pemberton, *The Ghost in the Machine*, in: *Photographies East, The Camera and Its Histories in East and Southeast Asia*, edited by Rosalind C. Morris, Duke University Press 2009. “Yet still the ghost is not exposed. During this time of disassembly, when machines are not yet in gear, the ghost should, in fact, not be in the picture. Through the very appropriateness of an absence, then, the ghost becomes all the more possible here, all the more anticipated in this extended moment of mechanical pause and waiting, all the more tangible in this photograph.” (pp. 52-54)

³⁵ see also: Rolf H. Krauss, *Jenseits von Licht und Schatten, Die Rolle der Photographie bei bestimmten paranormalen Phänomenen – ein historischer Abriss*, Jonas Verlag, Marburg 1992.

³⁶ David Tomas, *Beyond The Image Machine – A History of Visual Technologies*, Continuum, London 2004. (p. 56)

³⁷ Grégoire Le Roy, *La Mort (Death)*, in: *French Symbolist Poetry, An Anthology selected and translated by John Porter Houston and Mona Tobin Houston*, Indiana University Press 1980. (p.198)

³⁸ Komar & Melamid, *Gedichte über den Tod – Das Gespenst des Eklektizismus/ Death Poems – the specter of eclecticism*, English translation by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, Andrea Arnold, New York, Verlag Dirk Nishen, Berlin 1988. (p. 125)

³⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, *Selected Poems*, edited by Alexander Coleman, Penguin Books 2000. From *Mirrors*, translated by Alastair Reid. (p. 105)



Death In Venice
1989



Death In Spain
1990

life and the state of inner effervescence from which great transfigurations arise. Such a state of black drunkenness is a necessary prerequisite to understanding why one wishes the immediate end of this world.”⁴⁰

As much as we may want to categorize, neutralize those beautiful ruminations as convulsions of a mindset attracted to fascism and intoxicated by the sublime pleasance of being the master of despair, (the same author insists: “Naïveté is the only road to salvation.” If salvation requires living rightly, it seems inevitable that reason should be tamed, and ignorance welcomed, shouldn’t they?), we recognize the obvious.

The apocalypse is not the desired endpoint of history, the comfort is rather given by an apocalyptic awareness which covers us like a shroud, all differences collapse, and of course, the absence of a subject that does not bear any responsibility, just the wish to ‘end this world’ establishes the ‘demonic character of life’.

“Impressions like these are not reasoned or catalogued in the mind; they are felt as part of violent emotion; . . .”⁴¹ writes Henry Adams meditating in a hot Italian summer about death: “For many thousands of years, on these hills and plains, nature had gone on sabring men and women with the same air of sensual pleasure.” Henry Adams denounces “. . . nature’s gesture,—her attitude towards life, . . . as a fantasm, a nightmare, an insanity of force.”⁴²

We should investigate this violent emotion further: Surviving World War One Blaise Cendrars gave voice to an outburst of his protagonist in his novel ‘Moravagine’: “War. All our philosophies, religions, arts, techniques and trades lead to nothing but this. The finest flowers of civilization. The purest constructions of thought. The most generous and altruistic passions of the heart. The most heroic gestures of man. War. Now and a thousand years ago. Tomorrow and a hundred thousand years ago. No, it’s not a question of your country... It’s a question of your life. If you want to live, kill. Kill, so that you can be free, or eat, or shit. The shameful thing is to kill in masses, at a predetermined hour on a predetermined day, in honour of certain principles, under cover of a flag, with old men nodding approval, to kill in a disinterested or passive way. Stand alone against them all, young man, kill, kill, you are unique, you’re the only man alive, kill until the others cut you short with the guillotine or the cord or the rope, . . . What a laugh.”⁴³

Could this not be the monologue of a spree killer, or is it the chant of children soldiers on their way to some killing fields? The younger they were the more merciless they were, exhibiting the purest cruelty. “The innocence of childhood can turn into the amorality of childhood”⁴⁴, states Susie Linfield, and she describes how the laughter escorts these acts of violence.

Our own laughter, may it just be the harmless joy witnessing how Laurel causes the butler falling down the stairs, can remind us sometimes on biting reflexes and laughing hyenas. Countless times it is written in our novels, reenacted on our stages or transcribed in our histories, the siblings laughter and violence let us recognize our descent into unchecked pleasures, action and commentary as if carved into our flesh. Nature’s gesture? For Henry Adams the very idea that “any personal deity could find pleasure or profit” in this scenario was out

of the question: “For pure blasphemy, it made pure atheism a comfort.”⁴⁵

We recognize: Our little excursion into the inevitabilities and sufferings of humankind spared one crucial point: The difference between good and evil seems to have vanished giving nature all the credit not only for death but also its causes causing the souls of slaughtered millions to beleaguer our world even more, and for good.

Let us listen to this: “He wails voicelessly as conviction invades him, he who had believed in nothing before. All the agonies of Earth, uncanceled? Are broken ghosts limping forever from Stalingrad and Salamis, from Gettysburg and Thebes and Dunkirk and Khartoum? Do the butchers’ blows still fall at Ravensbruck and Wounded Knee? Are the dead of Carthage and Hiroshima and Cuzco burning yet? Have ghostly women waked again only to resuffer violation, only to watch again their babies slain? Is every nameless slave still feeling the iron bite, is every bomb, every bullet and arrow and stone that ever flew, still finding its screaming mark—atrocious without end or comfort, forever?”⁴⁶

Alice Sheldon’s uncanny vision of an invasion of the mind by the army of the dead unfurls a picture, a writing on the walls that should have protected us as metaphors, as all pictures should protect us, but instead it throws the reader into the abyss of time, more precisely it opens up a cornucopia of ghosts mourning the irreversibility and unfulfilledness of the past.

Large conglomerates, societies, parties, tribes, families, ideologies can be quite successful in obscuring accountability for any harm done to their inmates or just by insisting on loitering around until enough time passed by. But the individual, the single person? The question of guilt is more often than not property of the ghost, maybe even its origin and fuel.

However, Henry Adams’ pure atheism leaves no room for even the tiniest ghost, even when he adds: “God might be, as the Church said, a Substance, but he could not be a Person.”⁴⁷ Yet ghosts behave usually like persons, not like a substance. That is why the devil in John Carpenter’s film⁴⁸ is represented by a green liquid, a contagious substance exhibiting properties of anti-order and uncontrollable data output.

We are in the trap of theodicy, the old thorn for believers: How can God be so powerful if she is not capable of protecting us from evil? Though there were many strategies developed to cope with God’s exculpation, I nevertheless have the impression that those endeavors just deliver consecrated water to exorcise some evil spirits leaving an inapproachable image of the substance not the person.

Are ghosts closer to us? I guess so: Hearsay suggests they single out people or places and behave like a mélange of guardian angel, savaged pet and infestation. I suspect ghosts offer comfort just by doing what they do, even by scaring us they authenticate the other world, they are the other and they are not at the same time. At times ghosts know the laughter like we do, then they are like us.

The Naïves & The Devil

As a child I devoured fairy tales but there was one narrative which provoked a strong

⁴⁰ E. M. Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair*, translated by Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston, University of Chicago Press 1992. (pp. 24-25)

⁴¹ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, Penguin Library of America Classic 2010. From Chapter XIX *Chaos* (1870). (p.269)

⁴² Henry Adams, l.c.

⁴³ Blaise Cendrars, *Moravagine*, translated by Alan Brown, New York 2004. (p.190)

⁴⁴ Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance, Photography And Political Violence*, The University of Chicago Press 2010. See as well:

Peter Maguire, *Facing Death In Cambodia*, Columbia University Press, New York 2005.

⁴⁵ Henry Adams, l.c.

⁴⁶ James Tiptree, Jr., *Her Smoke Rose Up Forever*, Tachyon Publications, San Francisco 2004. (p. 400) [James Tiptree was the pen name of American science fiction author Alice Bradley Sheldon]

⁴⁷ Henry Adams, l.c.

⁴⁸ *Prince of Darkness*, written and directed by John Carpenter, USA 1987.

objection: A story in Ludwig Bechstein’s German Fairy-Tale Book (1845) called *Das Gruseln*⁴⁹. In English it should be titled probably “The Creeps” (albeit this noun should not refer to creatures, instead to a feeling caused by them). In German *gruseln* is a reflexive verb describing “The Horror” when it is expressed for and by children. By using it as a noun for his story (see the Brothers Grimm’s differing title⁵⁰) Bechstein seems to suggest an essential truth about humans facing the uncanny.

The tale starts with the dilemma of a father: He had two sons, one is bright, versatile, industrious, only very timorous. Contrariwise his brother Hans was not capable of doing one thing right, lazy and indolent as he was. But he was not scared of anything, actually the only thing he was interested in was to learn to be afraid. Soon he was banished from his father’s home to glean the world’s scares. His indolence and his brutish repartees grant him everything in the end: the girl, the gold, the kingdom. He did not learn the fear at all—his wife’s whimsical practical joke, at the end of the story, does not really count—a deadhearted fool proves a lack of empathy—or do we encounter here Cioran’s naïveté?—what secures the golden path to success. I did not accept *Das Gruseln* as a fairy-tale, more as a legend from the past that tried to intrude with values of a more present day.

Ernst Bloch stated: “. . . the legend narrates a mythical spell, gives its heteronomous charms, is a ghost story of an older order. . . .”⁵¹ Having been a child I remember of being very fond of fear as an aesthetic pleasure but not being interested in the genre of legends at all. Bloch had studied the legend how it was abused during the rise of Nazism. I was probably more concerned about protecting chimerical issues from being purged by indolence.

The other day, a teenager, let’s call her M, riddled me with the questions, “Those crazy guys with beards, Charles Marx and Karl Manson, were they related? Do you remember?”

I knew how resentful she was of any facial hair [a long time ago, I had made a film⁵² about her: She was a few years older then, defending pornography⁵³ and expressing her hate for beards, abusing writers like Gombrowicz and Szyborska for her very personal desires. In the end she killed her Doppelgänger—or was it reciprocal?], and I tried to change the subject, “What bands do you like?”

Her eyes became darker like the ocean in front of her while she focused on something moving in the sea.

“Old stuff. Placebo, NIN, Noir Désir.”

She continued to play with the first names Karl and Charles, “I know they both had dreams of upcoming race or class wars; they ‘offered utopia’;⁵⁴ they made other people kill for their ideas which they took again from other people’s artwork.”

⁴⁹ Ludwig Bechstein, *Sämtliche Märchen*, Artemis & Winkler, Düsseldorf, 2. Auflage 2005, *Das Gruseln* (pp. 359-369).

⁵⁰ Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, *Märchen von einem, der auszog das Fürchten zu lernen, Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, 1812. English: *The Story of a Boy Who Went Forth to Learn Fear*.

⁵¹ Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, translated by Neville and Stephen Plaice, Polity Press, Cambridge 1991. (p. 166)

⁵² *Żertwa, jeśli chcecie*, shot in Łódź, Poland in 1995, produced in Munich, Germany (35 mm, color and b/w, 35 min.).

The film disappeared in 2007.

⁵³ see also: “Georges Bataille has this in common with Sade: for him pornography is a form of the spirit’s battle against the flesh, a form that is thereby determined by atheism, because if there is no God who created the flesh, then there are no longer those excesses of language residing in the spirit that aim to reduce the excesses of the flesh to silence. Thus, there is nothing more ‘verbal’ than the excesses of the flesh. . . . Language is condemned to an endless reiteration.” (p. 67) in: Pierre Klossowski, *Such a Deathly Desire*, translated, edited, and with an afterword by Russell Ford, State University of New York Press 2007.

⁵⁴ Charles D. Watson: “Manson offered utopia”. Available from: <http://www.aboundinglove.org/about.php>, 1997-2010 (accessed July 14, 2012).

“Helter Skelter!”, I found my voice.

“Paradise lost!” she returned with a laugh. “My God, I am so happy not to have a ‘K’ in my name. Charles is definitely the better name.”

She continued to draw letters in the sand with her foot. “Did you notice, the ‘C’ looks like a boob, very mellow, it tries to soften the combative ‘K’.”

She was right, her ‘K’s looked over-armed and aggressive. The tide started destroying her sand writing, I counted twenty-one letters when we left the beach.

“But Charlie liked fallen angels,” she said.

I was not sure of whom she was talking now. I think I am afraid of teenagers, not least because I remembered myself, and Witold Gombrowicz’s insight: “What can fear have in common with innocence? Yet for me, maximal horror is something as pure as . . . maximal innocence.”⁵⁵

And silliness. The fear of being ridiculed when you admit you believe in ghosts. It does not help to recollect Gombrowicz again: “But fear is also a form of homage.”⁵⁶ Because he pointed at Hitler, rightly, so the ridiculization of Hitler by Chaplin was the right thing to do, wasn’t it? And Hitler was so superstitious. Chaplin is seen as a “paradigmatic character of naivety”, his performance developing “in a way . . . that the gesture of naivety can make sense and unfolds efficacy by establishing an ethical as well as a political position in an authentic way.”⁵⁷ Your fear of being ridiculed as a believer does not approximate you to the irrational beliefs of a fascist leader. Yet, . . . a sequence of loose associations of thoughts as exercised in this paragraph may demonstrate silliness in extremis but is nevertheless paradigmatic for a German mindset, in the aftermath of the Holocaust entrenched into the impossibilities of remembrance—national pride desired, in vain, and guilt abnegated, in vain as well.

Let us go back then, to the year 1925. Walter Hasenclever, a German Expressionist writer and, one can say, a poet for young people (I enjoyed his poems badly at a certain age, no, even today), discovered the mystic Swedenborg who was highly influential not only in eighteenth-century Europe. Hasenclever published an adaptation of Swedenborg’s⁵⁸ magnum opus *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell from Things Heard and Seen* (1758) and tried to redefine the artist’s role in an extensive afterword: “Placed in the middle of this world of confusions and passions, the poet has the task to unite the kingdoms of the living and the dead. . . . Everything . . . is

⁵⁵ Witold Gombrowicz, *Diary* (p. 402)

⁵⁶ Ibid. *Diary* (p. 360)

⁵⁷ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Wenn die Bilder Position beziehen*, translated from the French by Marcus Sedlaczek, München 2011.

“Lässt sich, nebenbei bemerkt, zur Zeit Brechts ein besseres Beispiel für diese geniale Unbefangenheit oder operationale Naivität finden als Charlie Chaplins Inszenierungen seines tanzenden Körpers? Die Figur Charlie Chaplins erscheint nämlich als eine paradigmatische Figur der Naivität. Chaplin zeigt sie uns aber in der Weise, dass sich aus dem unbefangenen Blick gleichwohl ein richtiggehendes dialektisches Denken entwickeln kann. Ja mehr noch: Er zeigt sie so, dass die Geste des Naiven Sinn finden und Wirksamkeit entfalten kann, indem auf authentische Weise ethisch wie politisch Position bezogen wird.” (p. 252-253) See: Bertolt Brecht, *Schriften zur Literatur und Kunst 2*, Suhrkamp 1967. “Die Naivität ist sowohl eine Eigenschaft der Greise wie auch der Kinder.” (p. 413; in: Didi-Huberman, *Bilder*, p. 282)

⁵⁸ Christa Spreizer, *From Expressionism To Exile, The Works Of Walter Hasenclever (1890-1940)*, Camden House 1999. “Philosophers and writers from the eighteenth century onward, including Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Honoré de Balzac, Charles Baudelaire, and especially August Strindberg, the model for many expressionist writers, were drawn to his teachings.” (p. 109) “In *Himmel, Hölle, Geisterwelt* Hasenclever endeavors to reveal and expound on Swedenborg’s teachings, and in an extensive fifty-four page afterword, he claims to act as a medium of higher revelation for contemporary audiences, much as Swedenborg had served his own generation. He also reiterates his anti-intellectual and anti-rationalist beliefs, viewing the present world as one endangered by the powers of intellect and technology. . . .” (p. 109)



M entering Her Apartment, Łódź
1995

M and Her Doppelgänger, Łódź
1995



Derrida's Shadow, Germany
1997



Derrida's Visor Effect, Angkor Wat
2010

Amusing it is, indeed. And refreshing, compared to the omnipresence of a sullen Marxism that haunts European writing to this day. And I remember well the huge castle of Critical Theory, in the everyday practice of intellectual writings being armed with Marxism as a compliant tool to act out snobbery and *ressentiment*⁷². And I remember very well the hordes of Maoists I dangled after in the mid-1970s. In Western societies the common line of argumentation to defend the Khmer Rouge’s policy was to dismiss all reports about any sanguinary event as propaganda of American footmen, quoting left-leaning American intellectuals, as needed.

Other Obstacles & The Devil

Photography still has its detractors⁷³: “The medium of photography, one might say, is inherently pornographic.”⁷⁴

Prior to that Roger Scruton wrote: “There are images which are representations (paintings) and images which are not (mirrors). To which class does the photograph belong? I have argued that it naturally belongs to the latter class. Photography can be made to belong to the former class by being *made* into the principle vehicle of the representational thought. But one must then so interfere with the relation between the photograph and its subject that it ceases to be a *photograph* of its subject.”⁷⁵

At another place he writes: “One is the general difference between painting and photography—the first being a representation of fictions, the second a presentation of realities (even when adjusted by the airbrush or the photosoftware). . . . No-one is degraded in Boucher’s painting (*Blonde Odalisque*), since no-one real occurs in it. This woman— . . . —is presented as a figment, in no sense identical with any real human being, despite being painted from life.”⁷⁶ It is quite touching how Mr. Scruton attempts to revitalize a canon, to establish disqualifications rules.

“When distance is lost”, he continues, “then beauty . . . has lost its value and gained a price.”⁷⁷ Fair enough. However,—and that makes Scruton a writer only for the conservative connoisseur, excluding the contemporary artist—too many questions are brushed aside: What happens if distance has to be overcome as an artistic strategy? What about this obsession in so many genres with the lost distance between model and painter/photographer etc.—

⁷² I use the noun in reference to Max Scheler, see: Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, translation by Lewis B. Coser and William W. Holdheim. Introduction by Manfred S. Frings, New Edition, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee Wisconsin, Fifth Printing 2010: “A statement is needed concerning the unique undertone of the French word *ressentiment* as distinguished from English ‘resentment’. The French word possesses a peculiar strong nuance of a lingering hate that our English word ‘resentment’ does not always carry. The German language does not even have a word for *ressentiment*. In German one uses the French word in common speech.” (pp. 4-5)

⁷³ compare Vilém Flusser, *Towards A Philosophy of Photography*: “A philosophy of photography is necessary for raising photographic practice to the level of consciousness, and this is again because this practice gives rise to a model of freedom in the post-industrial context in general. A philosophy of photography must reveal the fact that there is no place for human freedom within the area of automated, programmed and programming apparatuses, in order finally to show a way in which it is nevertheless possible to open up a space for freedom. The task of a philosophy of photography is to reflect upon this possibility of freedom—and thus its significance—in a world dominated by apparatuses; to reflect upon the way in which, despite everything, it is possible for human beings to give significance to their lives in face of the chance necessity of death. Such a philosophy is necessary because it is the only form of revolution left open to us.” (pp. 81-82) Earlier Flusser stated: “There is no such thing as naïve, non-conceptual photography. A photograph is an image of concepts. In this sense, all photographers’ criteria are contained within the camera’s program.” (p. 36) I assume Mr. Flusser has a naïve relationship with the machine itself; I prefer Adam Thirlwell’s vision: “All styles are systems of operations on a language for the contrivance of effects: they are like machines. And these stylish machines are therefore also portable. Machines, after all—like cars, or typewriters—can be imported anywhere.” (p. 15, “about translation”), in: Adam Thirlwell, *The Delighted States*, Picador 2010.

⁷⁴ Roger Scruton, *Photography and Representation*, Critical Inquiry, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Spring 1981), pp. 577-603, The University of Chicago Press. (p. 603)

⁷⁵ Ibid. (p. 596)

⁷⁶ Roger Scruton, *Beauty, A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press 2011. (p.135)

⁷⁷ Ibid. (p. 138)

Or isn’t it inevitable, for example, to experience the (real) suicides of Heinrich von Kleist, or Jean Améry, not only as a fatal loss of distance to their own work, but as a decisive esthetic sensation, inseparable from their work, and inescapably present whenever this work is received?

What about mirrors, windows and reflections which took over our world—after Borges, should we not be aware that we live on the map, not in the real world anymore? Who knows if this leaf or that tree in this photograph was ‘real’, and not altered or just invented, to be there?

I do not want to bore with more questions, and I just hear the cynic claim that Scruton’s celebrated erotic art is just the pornography of the educated classes; that cynic will not solve Scruton’s problem, even if he disguises himself as a class warrior—it just creates another phantom. Joshua Billing: “As Scruton argues, the best works of art always make us feel at home in the world. But today they do so by recognizing and incorporating the world’s ugliness, making what is beautiful stand out more wondrous and more strange.”⁷⁸

“Ugliness is associated with evil and fear, with villains and monsters.”⁷⁹ However, the Satan in Milton’s Poem *Paradise Lost* declared “Evil, be thou my good”⁸⁰ and initiated therewith a prolific evolution not only in the liberal arts.

The Aesthetics of Evil, those wild children of the Romantic Age, produce the dark shadow that is cast by all relevant talks about art, may it be un verbalized, downright denied, or implied. Karl Heinz Bohrer⁸¹ had extensively written about the pact of literary imagination with violence, war, evil itself. In his rationale for evil as an aesthetic category he asks if it is even possible that there is a work of art which—affected, even governed by its theme—becomes evil, on its own behalf, as its own canon of inherent rules. Bohrer deplores the inexistent German discourse and the inexistent German practice of the aesthetics of evil (rare exceptions conceded) due to a literary tradition bound to Hegelian misconceptions and ideologically indurated provincialism.

The outright gesture of denial in German dispute is illustrated quite well when confronted with demons of the past: Berlin, 1987, the Akademie der Künste dedicated a retrospective to the work of the Russian film-maker Elem Klimov. A tumultuous panel discussion occurred after Klimov’s film *Come And See*⁸² was shown, on the podium the German film-maker Wim Wenders (West Germany), the writer Heiner Müller (East Germany), Luigi Nono and others. Outside of Germany *Come And See* is not only regarded as one of the masterpieces of Russian cinema, but also in its ambition and power it is compared to films by Coppola,

⁷⁸ Joshua Billings, *A Joy Forever?*, Book Review of Roger Scruton’s *Beauty*, the Oxonian Review, Issue 9.3, 11 May, 2009. Available from: <http://www.oxonianreview.org/wp/a-joy-forever/> (accessed July 14, 2012).

⁷⁹ Sarah Kershaw, *Move Over, My Pretty, Ugly Is Here*, The New York Times, October 30, 2008. Available from: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/30/fashion/30ugly.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print (accessed July 14, 2012). See as well: *On Ugliness*, edited by Umberto Eco, Rizzoli, New York 2007.

⁸⁰ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1674. “So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear,/ Farewell remorse; all good to me is lost./ Evil, be thou my good.” (Book IV, Lines 108-110; see: Luxon, Thomas H., ed. *The Milton Reading Room*. Available from: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton>, March, 2008)

⁸¹ Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Der Skandal einer Imagination des Bösen*, Merkur 02/2011, Klett-Cotta Verlag, München. “Nun hat sich aber das Böse andererseits auch unter die Begriffe des Ästhetischen eingereicht, und das nicht erst seit Baudelaire’s programmatischem Titel *Fleurs Du Mal*. Die Verbindung der Wörter »Ästhetik« und »das Böse« beziehungsweise »der Schrecken« ist seit der Erhabenheitsästhetik des ausgehenden 18. Jahrhunderts, ja seit den eingangs angeführten Schreckensmotiven der griechischen Tragödie nicht fundiert in der Erkenntnis des intellektuellen Charakters des politischen Verbrechens, sondern in der Wahrnehmung einer durch Schrecken intensivierten Schönheit, was in den berühmten Worten Rilkes aus der Ersten Duineser Elegie seine klassisch moderne Formel fand: »Denn das Schöne ist nichts / als des Schrecklichen Anfang«. Es ist aber zu betonen, dass die im 18. Jahrhundert gefasste Idee von einem ästhetisch Bösen in der deutschen Tradition im Unterschied zur affirmierenden französischen Idee davon nur über eine moralisch-philosophische Funktion legitimiert wurde. Und diese Moralisierung der Kunst bestimmte ihre deutsche Diskussion bis in unsere Tage.” See as well: Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Plötzlichkeit, Zum Augenblick des ästhetischen Scheins*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1981, and: Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Ästhetische Negativität*, Carl Hanser Verlag, München 2002.

⁸² *Idi i smotri – Komm und sieh*, a film directed by Elem Klimov, UdSSR 1985.

Malick, or Spielberg. The film’s subject was the atrocities committed by German soldiers in the Byelorussian SSR (today: Republic of Belarus) during the Nazi occupation in 1943.

Both Wenders and Müller were obviously overwhelmed by the film and tried to cope with fatuous remarks: Wenders denounced the film using the means of the horror genre and demanded that a film dealing with history should not be done in that way. This undiscerning judgment found its way right into the German film dictionary⁸³. Müller, on the other hand, asserted that he was utterly emotionless watching the film but he nevertheless moved on to the limits of art itself dismissing the film’s *Überwältigungsästhetik* (aesthetics of overpowering). He tells a story of a young boy he knows very well in East Germany who used to go frequently in documentaries about concentration camps because this was the only way for him to see naked women.⁸⁴

The ban of images by declaring them as pornographic may have protestant roots, the iconoclastic tradition of the “Bilderverbot” (prohibition of images) is not far away, and as pronounced as it can be found in German culture even today it may own strong roots in the same tradition of ‘moralization’ that can accept the devil only as a void, indicating the absence of God—not as an entity of its own kind. And we are dealing with pictures of evil, which are usually more disturbing than the text of the same matter. Yet beyond the aesthetics of reception there is still the ethics of representation.

Darryn Ansted writes about Gerhard Richter’s problem: “Gerhard Richter encounters an ethical quandary when painting historical subjects relating to National Socialism and the Holocaust. . . . In the late 1960s Richter wanted to paint photographs of concentration camp victims beside pornographic images but felt that he ethically could not do so⁸⁵. . . . Richter uses the ‘blur’ variously to obfuscate, to indicate when something cannot be represented and to make the depicted subject felt as well as seen. . . . Richter’s subjects also have an iconographic power that makes them taboo and he too evokes a presence of the unseen by developing a ghostly quality through the act of blurring. . . . The subject is blurred, de-sacralised, othered, made banal and thus becomes observable. However, the result is a blur that also has an autonomous status like the ghost or presence of the figure that interrupts the here and now and casts a shadow even after its erasure.”⁸⁶

⁸³ “greift der Film stellenweise leider allzusehr zu Klischees des Horrorkinos und verspielt dabei einiges an Ernst und Betroffenheit.” Available from: <http://www.zweitausendeins.de/filmlexikon/?sucheNach=titel&wert=783> (accessed July 14, 2012).

⁸⁴ Akademie der Künste: *Elem Klimov Werkschau*, Berlin 1987. Heiner Müller: “. . . Es ist nicht möglich, den Film zu kritisieren, weil der Stoff einen so überwältigt. . . . Es ist kein realistischer Film, es ist ein politischer Film. Hier wird Schrecken simuliert und inszeniert. . . . Fragen nach den Grenzen der Kunst. . . . Mich lässt der Film als Film merkwürdigerweise kalt. . . . Ein Problem der filmischen Mittel. . . . Eine Überwältigungsästhetik. . . . erinnert mich an die Ästhetik von Coppola. . . . mich irritiert etwas die Dämonisierung der Deutschen, weil dadurch, glaube ich, der wirkliche Schrecken, weil dadurch die Normalität der Menschen, die das gemacht haben, aus dem Blick gerät. Und dem Zuschauer wird die Freiheit genommen, den Mechanismus zu sehen, die Strukturen zu sehen, die sowas ermöglichen. Grenzen der Kunst. . . . zehn- bis zwölfjähriger Junge ging fünfmal in Dokumentarfilme um nackte Frauen zu sehen. . . . Wim Wenders: “Wie kann man mit Geschichte im Film umgehen? Darf man das mit den Mitteln eines Horrorfilms machen? Die Mittel eines Horrorfilms kann man nicht anwenden, damit tut man nicht den Tätern, den Nazis, Unrecht, sondern den Opfern. Die Mittel des Films verraten sein Thema. Wohin führt es uns, wenn wir Geschichte weiter so anschauen? Ist dieser Film ein Weg. . . . oder sind wir nur alle erschlagen von den Mitteln des Films? So kann man damit nicht umgehen!” My transcription of the tapes, generously provided by the Akademie der Künste, is incomplete due to acoustic noise, probably caused by turbulences in the audience).

⁸⁵ Darryn Ansted, *The Un-paintable Image: Gerhard Richter, Ethics and Representation*, in: *New Imaging: Transdisciplinary strategies for art beyond the new media*, edited by Su Baker and Paul Thomas, published by Transdisciplinary Imaging Conference Sydney, Australia, 2010. (p. 5) Available from: <http://blogs.unsw.edu.au/tiic/files/2011/04/TIICproceedings.pdf> (accessed July 14, 2012).

⁸⁶ Ibid. (pp. 10-11); before that Ansted wrote: “Žižek agrees with Arendt’s rejection of the idea of a sublime evil.” (p. 5) and: “He (Žižek) suggests that the Nazis secretly “knew that the rituals of duty were a pretence to disguise the enjoyment derived from doing something horrible – even the guilt feelings generated here served to enhance their pleasure. . . . Richter’s project would have underscored this conceptualisation of the horrors of Nazism – that it was underpinned by the same banal drives that are invested in pornography.” (p. 6); and then later: “Gerhard Richter’s oeuvre is (sic!) registers an echo, an immanent otherness and a shadow that never can be fully visible.” (p. 13)

Digression: The Blur, The Memory & The Mirror

So, a technique solves the problem? I had been skeptical for some time, the blurred picture, or object, “. . . turning branches into feathery gestures and people into wraith-like traces in an eternal landscape”⁸⁷ sounded too much like a cliché for me that had to be avoided. I talked to architectural photographer Julius Shulman a few years ago and noted that he was very fond of the mishap in one of his most famous photographs of the Kaufmann House in Palm Springs, California, designed by architect Richard Neutra: A poodle had walked into the picture and had left a ghostly trace. It represented for Shulman probably an unexpected case of flawed beauty as it is so familiar to the Japanese artist’s practice (but beware of mentioning the word ‘art’ in his presence, it could make Shulman very angry).

The photographer Wright Morris used lyrical words to describe the blur: “Where time is captured in repose, and is seemingly timeless, its fleeting presence is visible in the ghostly blur of a passing figure, the actual track of time’s passage. The carriage crossing a square, the pet straining at its leash, are momentarily detained from their destination. On these ghostly shades the photograph confers a brief immortality.”⁸⁸

And we have the horror of the blur as well, in the cracked mirror: “‘What secret do you seek in your cracked mirror?’ It is rightly to this secret, this internal knowledge, that man aspires when questioning his reflection. For centuries he has constructed himself, assumed his roles, and integrated the transformations of experience before the mirror. Before his own face, he glimpses the mystery of the face of God. And then his image blurs, and he discovers on the reverse side, the horror of self-consciousness. The mirror cracks or breaks. A whole geography of fantasies is linked to the fragments of the mirror: losses of origin, vacillating identities, phantasms of being engulfed, labyrinthine spaces, and fears of powerlessness and dismemberment.”⁸⁹

My little collection of strategies to deal with the blurring effect revealed at least one element as crucial for blurring: time—and interlaced with it memory as one way of subduing time. “Memory is a broken voice: we hardly/ Hear it, no matter, how close we lean./ Though still we listen—so long, sometimes,/ That life passes us by.”⁹⁰

In Jean Améry’s words time and memory become a nightmarish ghoulish possessing the ego: “Absolute time, absolute since body and mind now know that further deceptive repetitions will be organized, compresses itself on two levels. Memory, arrested in time, the memory of past times in the present, grabs its abundance closer and closer to itself until it is only a tiny, very heavy nucleus, a nucleus of the ego. So much has happened, and even in the most externally banal life.”⁹¹

It is very disconcerting, the traumatized memory, the memory of trauma, it can be like a sagging force requiring space inside of you. The blurring happens, not so much caused by tears, but aroused by constriction of the throat. And it affects the mind like a permanent distraction. “There are many Cambodians who have difficulty thinking, concentrating, and remembering. But they still remember the names of their [dead] children, wives, or husbands. They remember how the Khmer Rouge tortured and killed their family”.⁹³

“Memory is a broken voice: we hardly
Hear it, no matter, how close we lean.

Though still we listen—so long,
sometimes,
That life passes us by. And already,
Death says no to all our metaphors.”

—Ives Bonnefoy⁹⁰

“Our entire life passes away in the
absurd effort to avoid the unavoidable:
the more we ‘die’ and the closer we
come to our last breath, the more des-
perately we struggle against something
with which, in order to be sensible, it
is our business to reconcile ourselves.
Sensible? We find ourselves in a place
where it is all over with every form of
being sensible, where we’re dealing
with death, which is absolute non-
sense. To reconcile ourselves: that
means to accept death. But that would
mean refusing life on the spot.

Neither the one nor the other is
possible. . . . Before the opacity of
the No that is set against us and
given to us, we come to be nothing
even before we come not to be.”

—Jean Améry⁹²

⁸⁷ Craig J. Barber, *Ghosts in the Landscape, Vietnam Revisited*, Umbrage Editions New York 2006. (p. 7)

⁸⁸ Wright Morris, *Photographs & Words*, edited and with an introduction by James Alinder, The Friends Of Photography, Carmel 1982. (p. 54)

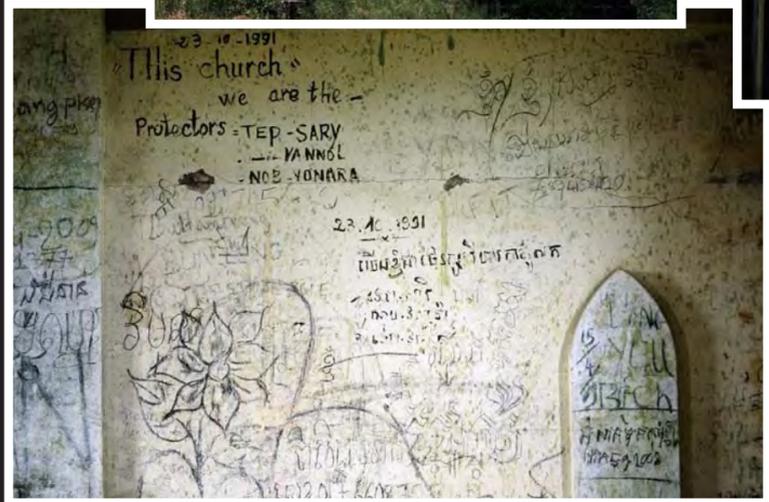
⁸⁹ Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror, A History*, translated by Katharine H. Jewett, Routledge 2001. (pp. 268-269)

⁹⁰ Ives Bonnefoy, *Second Simplicity: New Poetry and Prose, 1991 - 2011*, translated by Hoyt Rogers, Yale University Press 2011. *From A Memory* (p. 251)

⁹¹ Jean Améry, *On Suicide, A Discourse on Voluntary Death*, translated by John D. Barlow, Indiana University Press 1999. (p.88)

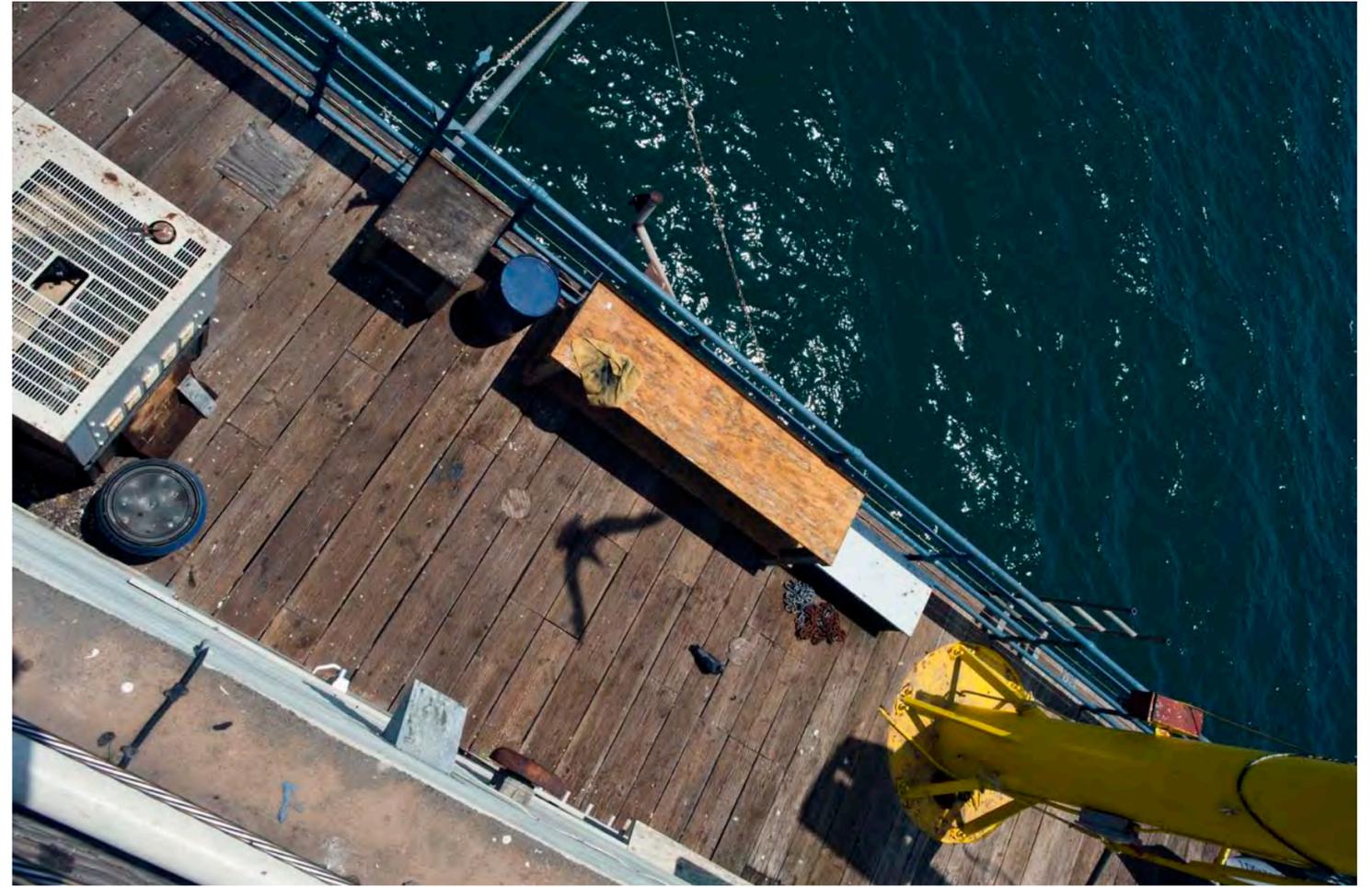
⁹² Jean Améry, *On Aging, Revolt And Resignation*, translated by John D. Barlow, Indiana University Press 1994. (p. 121)

⁹³ *Not Just Victims—Conversations with Cambodian Community Leaders in the United States*, edited by Sucheng Chan, Interviews by Audrey U. Kim, University of Illinois Press 2003. (p. 76)





The Holy Ghost, From Below, Santa Monica
2012



The Holy Ghost, From Above, Santa Monica
2012

“The difficulty of traumatic memory, however, is not limited to its unavailability and resistance to representation. Very much like a photograph, traumatic memory can be characterized by the excessive retention of details that cannot be integrated into a nontraumatic memory of comprehension of the past.⁹⁴ . . . The recovery of traumatic memory—and the process of healing—consists often in making the event seem less unreal by draining it of its vividness, its persistence, its haunting details, its color.”⁹⁵

Blurring takes off the realism of an event—is healing Richter’s intent? Probably not. And I do not really believe in the blur having “an autonomous status like the ghost”⁹⁶ etc., it is just a tool. The (blurred) representation of something that is not representable creates a paradox, at least an inconsistency building up to a gesture of courtesy toward the viewer. “To remember, one must imagine”, expounded Georges Didi-Huberman.⁹⁷ But: “What if the technology of memory, the composite visual-verbal architecture of the memory palace becomes a haunted house?”⁹⁸ One strategy to immerse into the haziness of memory can be achieved by accommodating the dream.

Let us listen to Gaston Bachelard: “Our memories are encumbered with facts. . . . If we have retained an element of dream in our memories, if we have gone beyond merely assembling exact recollections, bit by bit the house that was lost in the mists of time will appear from out the shadow. We do nothing to reorganize it; with intimacy it recovers its entity, in the mellowness and imprecision of the inner life. It is as though something fluid had collected our memories and we ourselves were dissolved in this fluid of the past. . . . Such dreams unsettle our daydreaming and we reach a point where we begin to doubt that we ever lived where we lived.”⁹⁹ It will be a haunted house, probably under water, the very medium for a blurred image, yes, and we will become a ghost on the way.

Back To Evil

Even without a given value of evil it seems unavoidable to face the need to represent it, in all its glory and its self-determined valence. Although we are only representing the ghost—who is not haunted to a lesser extent by evil as we are haunted by it—the presentiment of evil should be omnipresent as it behooves for a factor opposed to God. Discussing Bataille, Hannah Arendt and Siegfried Kracauer, Ulrich Baer states: “According to Bataille, evil is tolerated and spread by pretending that human beings are not evil. Drawing in the work of Hannah Arendt and Siegfried Kracauer, we might add that evil is also spread by relegating it to realms beyond the range of vision and the reaches of reason and declaring it to be demonic, monstrous, or inhuman.”¹⁰⁰ Alyce Mahon¹⁰¹ refers to de Sade in her essay about the painter/writer Pierre Klossowski: “Klossowski sought to restore to the writings of Sade the thorough philosophical examination he believed they deserved. . . . In the aftermath of war, Sade seemed to offer a means of humanising or personifying extreme evil, just as the horror’s of Sade’s epoch—namely the Jacobin Terror of the French Revolution of 1789—provided a useful analogy for both the terror of twentieth century totalitarianism and the excesses of the *épuration*, the post-war purging of Nazi collaborators. As the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre wrote in

1947: ‘We heard whole streets screaming and we understood that Evil, fruit of a free and sovereign will, is, like God, absolute.’”¹⁰²

But let us abandon the devil for now, and reexamine the ghost. In the meantime, my list of ghosts to be uncovered has grown and grown:

The Ghost & The List

1. Ghosts with hats
2. Ghosts imitating shadows
3. Ghosts in distress
4. Ghosts on a bike
5. Digital ghosts
6. Ghost as a silhouette
7. Children ghosts
8. Ghosts in an office
9. Ghosts talking to Gods
10. Ghosts in a church
11. Ghosts working as waitresses
12. Ghost meditating about Marcel Proust
13. Ghosts in love
14. Ghosts under the impression they have to fulfill an important task but they forgot what it was
15. Incomplete ghosts
16. Ghosts that are actually a demon
17. Ghost as a specter
18. Ghosts representing a building
19. Ghosts left behind in a window
20. Ghosts hiding in a museum
21. Ghosts collecting trash
22. Ghosts hiding behind a truck
23. Ghosts you fear or love
24. Ghost waiting for a bus
25. Ghosts on a screen¹⁰⁴
26. Naked ghosts

I excluded the Holy Ghost because he is a modern God, not really a ghost.

As a photographer I had to come up with a hybrid of a pragmatic and a poetic list (I am grateful to Umberto Eco for this distinction¹⁰⁵). So, as much as I wanted to follow Wallace Stevens’ path of “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”¹⁰⁶, the charms of the pragmatic list¹⁰⁷, on the other hand, is compelling for someone using a machine—not to mention

“But Charlie, Charles,
I’m alone in the house. The
servants have fled to help the Aga.
Now on this final night, Chuck,
I need a writer-man to see the
ghost. Does your skin prickle.
Come. I’ve mysteries and a home
to give away.”

—Ray Bradbury¹⁰³

“What matters is being seized
by the dizzying sound of the list.”

—Umberto Eco¹⁰⁷

⁹⁴ Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence—The Photography of Trauma*, The MIT Press, Cambridge 2002. Discussing Reinartz’s and Levin’s landscapes. (p. 47)

⁹⁵ Ibid. (p. 80)

⁹⁶ Ansted, *The Un-paintable Image*. l.c.

⁹⁷ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All, Four Photographs From Auschwitz*, translated by Shane B. Lillis, University of Chicago Press 2008. (p. 30)

⁹⁸ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Narrative, Memory, and Slavery*, in: *Picture Theory, Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, 1994; quoted from: Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw, *Seeing the Unspeakable, The Art Of Kara Walker*, Duke University Press 2004.

⁹⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics Of Space*, translated by Maria Jolas, Beacon Press, Boston 1994. (pp. 57-58)

¹⁰⁰ Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence—The Photography of Trauma*, The MIT Press, Cambridge 2002. (p. 180)

¹⁰¹ Alyce Mahon, Pierre Klossowski, *Theo-pornologer*. In: Pierre Klossowski/Maurice Blanchot, *Decadence of the Nude*, Black Dog Publishing Limited, London 1997. (pp. 161-162)

¹⁰² Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is literature?* (1948), translated by David Caute, Routledge, London 1993; compare: *What is literature? And Other Essays*, Introduction by Steven Ungar, Harvard University Press 1988. (pp. 179-180)

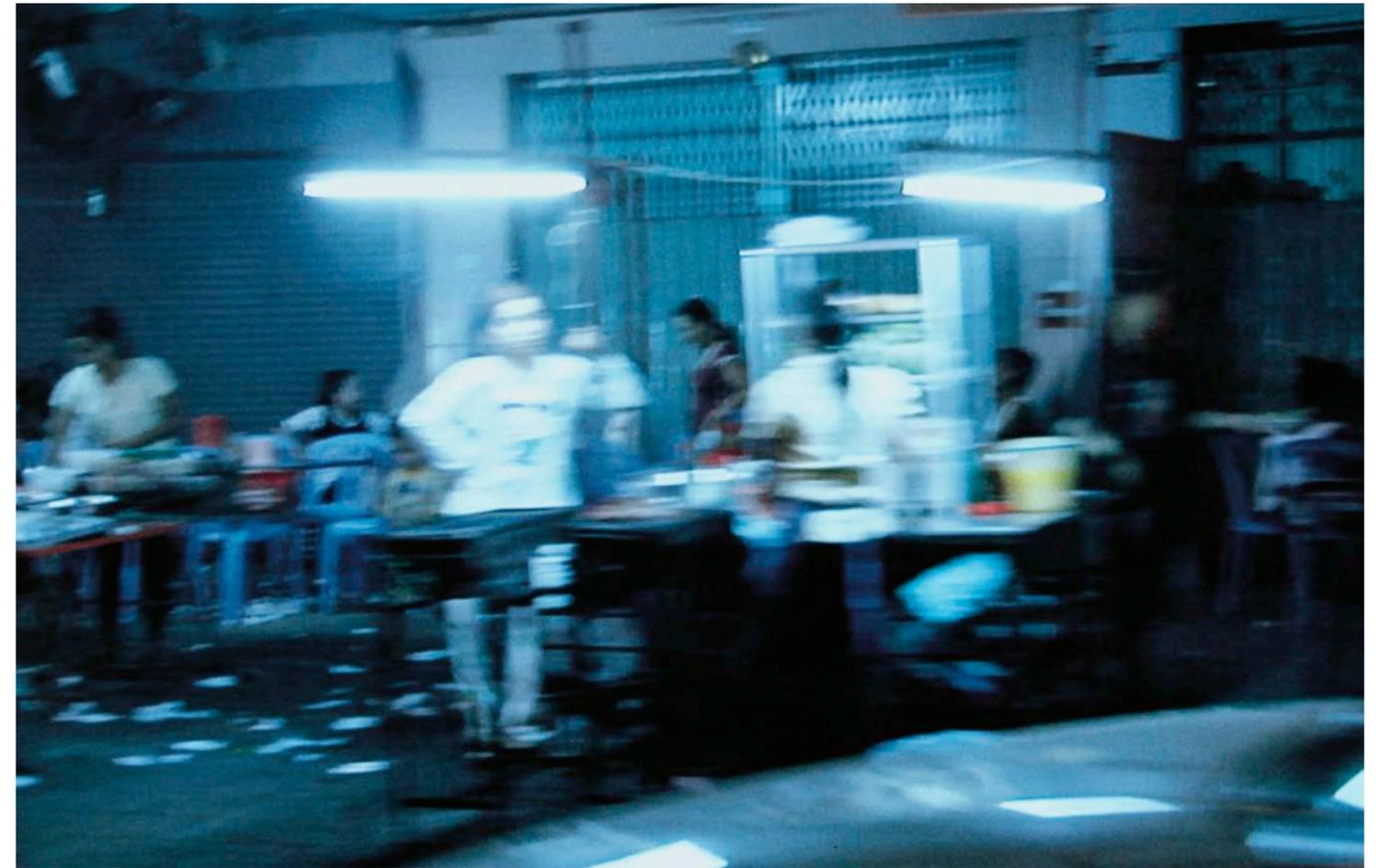
¹⁰³ Ray Bradbury, from *The Haunting Of The New*, in: *The Stories of Ray Bradbury, Everyman’s Library 2010*. (p. 821)

¹⁰⁴ T. C. Lethbridge, *Ghost And Ghoul*, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York 1962. “The television picture is a man-made ghost. Fortunately man has yet to produce a ghoul, but it is the same kind of thing. A person does not, I think, perceive a ghost with his senses. He sees it on the screen of his mind.” (p.151) Mr. Lethbridge could be called a contemporary Swedenborg who influenced rather musicians (see the British independent record label Ghost Box) than writers. He died in 1971.

¹⁰⁵ Umberto Eco, *The Infinity of Lists*, translated by Alastair McEwen, Rizzoli New York 2009, “. . . we must make an important distinction, and that is between ‘practical’ or ‘pragmatic’ and ‘poetic’ lists . . . “ (p. 113) Practical lists have to “. . . comply with a contextual pressure, in other words they are related for their being (or for being expected to be found) all in the same place or to constitute the goal of a certain project.” (p. 116)

¹⁰⁶ Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poetry And Prose*, The Library Of America 1997. *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird* (pp. 74-76)

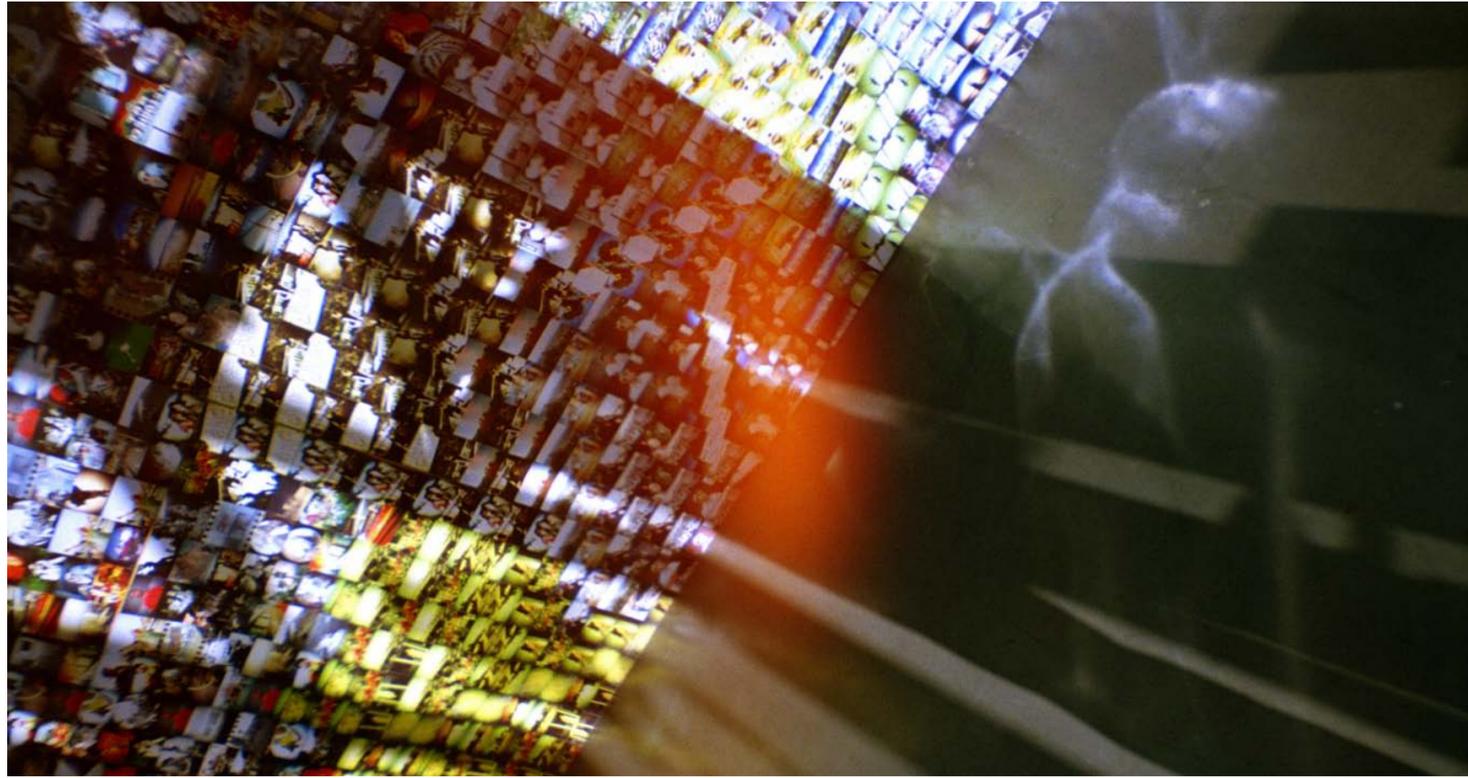
¹⁰⁷ Umberto Eco, *The Infinity of Lists*, (p. 118); see as well: Liza Kirwin, *Lists: to-dos, illustrated inventories, collected thoughts, and other artists’ enumerations from the Smithsonian’s Archives of American Art*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York 2010.



above:
Female Ghost Working, Phnom Penh
2010

above left:
Ghost On A Bike #1, Phnom Penh
2010

lower left:
Ghost On A Bike #2, Phnom Penh
2010



Ghost In A Lomography Store, Los Angeles
2012



Mourning Ghosts, Florida
2011

that I had to work with another number than Thirteen (more hereof later).

The belief in ghosts is hinged to the idea of an immortal soul. Recollecting Plato’s teachings Marcus Tullius Cicero enthused over the soul’s design: “. . . —since such is the lightning-like rapidity of the soul, such its wonderful memory of things that are past, such its ability to forecast the future, such its mastery of many arts, sciences, and inventions, that its nature, which encompasses all these things, cannot be mortal; and since the soul is always active and has no source of motion because it is self-moving, its motion will have no end, because it will never leave itself; and since in its nature the soul is of one substance and has nothing whatever mingled with it unlike or dissimilar to itself, it cannot be divided, and if it cannot be divided it cannot perish.”¹⁰⁸

But “not everybody has a recognizable soul”¹⁰⁹, argues Vladimir Nabokov, how should we expect then a ghost for everyone? Yet, “to refute and defeat the possible persistence of discarnate life”¹¹⁰ as Nabokov narrates it, can be a futile undertaking that accelerates the surrender to a state of blurred melancholia. Notwithstanding, there are voices to consider which are denying North America her ghosts. Washington Irving blames American mobility for the sparseness of ghosts: “Local tales and superstitions thrive best in these sheltered, long settled retreat; but are trampled under foot, by the shifting throng that forms the population of most of our country places. Besides, there is no encouragement for ghosts in most of our villages, for they have scarce had time to finish their first nap, and turn themselves in their graves, before their surviving friends have travelled away from the neighbourhood, so that when they turn out of a night to walk the rounds, they have no acquaintance left to call upon. This is perhaps the reason why we so seldom hear of ghosts except in our long established Dutch communities.”¹¹¹

William S. Burroughs seems convinced that Jesus expelled the ghosts: “The point is to establish a monopoly so no more miracles can ever occur. So Christ set out to destroy the raw material of miracles . . . souls, spirit, djoun, prana, the force that animates any living creature . . . spontaneous, unpredictable, alive. And what is Panic? The realization that everything is alive. *The great god Pan is dead.*”¹¹²

Burroughs reminds us that ghosts are much older than our contemporary Gods, they were always there with us but then defeated and humiliated by the authoritarian gestures of monotheism. Ambrose Bierce, to whom we owe the definition “Ghost, *n.* The outward and visible sign of an inward fear”¹¹³, conceded: “There is one insuperable obstacle to a belief in ghosts. A ghost never comes naked: he appears either in a winding-sheet or ‘in his habit as he lived.’ ”¹¹⁴ Bierce’s further disquisitions on the ghost’s apparel are regrettably not convincing the more so as I heard about naked ghosts in modern times repeatedly.

A contemporary author, Iain Sinclair, describes a ghost-free American landscape: “Humans struggle to make their mark on land which has been fenced, branded, but which remains a *tabula rasa*, bereft of ghosts.”¹¹⁶ A reader found this statement to be a “tiresome

¹⁰⁸ Cicero, *De Senectute (On Old Age)*, translated by William Armistead Falconer, Harvard University Press 1923. (pp. 89-91)

¹⁰⁹ Vladimir Nabokov, *The Vane Sisters* (1951), in: *American Fantastic Tales—Terror And The Uncanny From The 1940s To Now*, edited by Peter Straub, The Library Of America 2009. (p. 140)

¹¹⁰ Ibid. (p. 147)

¹¹¹ Washington Irving, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, in: *History, Tales & Sketches*, The Library of America 1983. (p. 1078)

¹¹² William S. Burroughs, *Ghost of Chance*, Serpent’s Tail 1995. (p. 25)

¹¹³ Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil’s Dictionary*, The Library of America 2011. (p. 499), compare Bergland, *National Uncanny*, who describes “the ghosting of Indians” as “a technique of removal.” (p.4)

¹¹⁴ Ibid. (p. 500)

¹¹⁵ Iain Sinclair, *Ghost Milk—Recent Adventures Among the Future Ruins of London on the Eve of the Olympics*, Faber and Faber, Inc., New York 2012. (p. 330)

¹¹⁶ Ibid. (p. 385)

old cliché”,¹¹⁷ yet we should take some questions seriously in that context: “What is space without demarcation? What happens to a people’s concept of history when markers are few?”¹¹⁸

Los Angeles has in common with the city of Rome, Italy, that it is excessively documented in images and challenges, as Rome does, because of “how it treats its history and aestheticizes it.”¹¹⁹ On the other hand, Los Angeles offers the blur and fluctuation and wild spaces¹²⁰ similar to the one discovered by Stephen Willats in London: “In the work *The Lurky Place*, the waste land is seen as a vehicle for a ‘counter-consciousness’, which takes the form of self-determined behaviours. . . . The movement of an item from location to location represents a point of change in the way that item’s function is perceived.”¹²¹

Los Angeles in itself is such a “Lurky Place”, where the status as wasteland is still well remembered, sometimes present, and can happen again at any time, where items, and people, move in and change, or simply disappear. To integrate historic images into this landscape, as Shimon Attie did, remembering the Holocaust in Rome or other places,¹²² would make no sense.

I remember how impressed I was by the enterprise of another artist, Joseph Beuys, by what he had called *Polentransport*: “Beuys’ action . . . —a donation of almost a thousand of his works ‘mainly works on paper, to the permanent collection at the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, Poland’ was, on the one hand, a symbolic gesture subversing the division of the world, still very strong in 1981, and on the other, the means of widening distribution of his works and, as a matter of fact—of his ideas of unity.”¹²³ The German compound word *Polentransport* has a double meaning: The determinative element *Polen* can refer to the country Poland (*Polen* in German) thereby referring to the act of transporting something to Poland. On the other hand the same noun represents the accusative case of Polish people, changing the meaning of the word *Polentransport* to the meaning of transporting Poles somewhere, an act that is still loaded with dark memories of the time when trains transported millions of Poles at the behest of the German Reich to slave work, into ghettos or right away to extermination camps.

Beuys’ donation occupies a charged noun, and by treating Poland as a “Lurky Place” in Willat’s sense he hoped to create a playground of ideas—and while I was standing in front of a conveyor

¹¹⁷ Alan Jacobs, *The Ghost Writer, Walking with Iain Sinclair*, Christianity Today/Books & Culture Magazine 2011: “These are tiresome old clichés, lacking even the truthfulness residing in most clichés; which makes one wonder why Sinclair would bother to come to America in the first place.” Available from: <http://www.ctlibrary.com/bc/2011/novdec/ghostwriter.html> (accessed July 14, 2012).

¹¹⁸ Diana Taylor, *The Archive And The Repertoire, Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Duke University Press, Durham and London 2003. (p. 209)

¹¹⁹ Shimon Attie, *The History of Another*, Museum of Contemporary Photography, Columbia College, Chicago 2004. Alexander Stille, *The History of Another*, quotes Attie: “Rome was a difficult nut to crack, precisely because of how it treats its history and aestheticizes it. The two most obvious approaches were to be seduced by it and lose a critical perspective, or to do an active critique of it. I found both to be simplistic and problematic, and decided to let Rome be Rome, but to subtly subvert it by inserting these interventions.”

¹²⁰ Compare: Ivan Chtcheglov, *Formulary for a New Urbanism*; written 1953, Translation of the Newly Published Complete Version by Ken Knabb, Écrits retrouvés, Éditions Allia, 2006. See: *Situationist International Anthology, Revised and Expanded Edition*, Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley 2006. (pp. 2 - 3) Available from: <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/Chtcheglov.html> (accessed July 14, 2012).

¹²¹ Stephen Willats, *The Lurky Place* (1978); in: *The Everyday, Documents of Contemporary Art*, edited by Stephen Johnstone, Whitechapel Gallery/ The MIT Press 2008. (p. 185); see as well: Stephen Willats, *The Lurky Place*, Lisson Gallery Ltd., London 1978. “. . . the implicit escape of an item from the restraining conventions of society also frees the person involved. For such a person, the item becomes a manifestation of another consciousness which is outside the social norm.” (p. 3)

¹²² Peter Muir, *Shimon Attie’s Writing on the Wall*, Ashgate Publishing 2010. “. . . these haunting projections . . . ” lead Muir to the question: “The very idea of the haunted district, structure, site or house as suggested and proposed by the work in the Scheunenviertel opens up a series of questions about the nature of human habitation and occupation.” (p. 149)

¹²³ Jaromir Jedliński, *Presences of Joseph Beuys’ Ideas and Works in Poland*, in: Joseph Beuys, *Polentransport 1981*, Torino 1993. (p. 17)

band in the museum representing the artist’s enterprise, I admired the bravery of his work and how it was capable of transferring ideas just by simply moving things. I remember asking myself for a moment imagining the spirits of people and projects marching on this assembly line: “But could you transfer ghosts like that as well?”

Shadows¹²⁴ And Doppelgänger

To locate a ghost, to narrow down its properties it seems advisable to differentiate further since other phenomena compete in their misty realm such as shadows or doppelgänger.

We are used to looking at the “parasitic nature of shadows”¹²⁵ dependent on light and an object it is attached to. As Michael Baxandall writes: “Shadow, then, is in the first instance a local, relative deficiency in the quantity of light meeting a surface, and is objective. And in the second instance, it is a local, relative variation in the quantity of light reflected from the surface to the eye.”¹²⁶

But this can not always be a satisfactory description: “However, shadows (like other holes) can survive the destruction of their originators. . . . if the moon were instantly obliterated during a solar eclipse, its shadow would linger for more than a second on the surface of Earth. If the moon were farther away, its shadow could last several minutes” demurs Sorensen. The artist Julia Kissina¹²⁷ actually caught shadows creating humans.

So even our understanding of the shadow as a tool in art can be challenged by a change of place or time. The art historian Ernst Gombrich comments on the absence of shadows in traditional Chinese paintings: “. . . never assume that artists did not see what they did not paint. The Chinese, for instance, did not normally paint cast shadows, but it would be ludicrous to conclude that they never saw them; at least one instance has come to light where they represented the shadows cast by moonlight, for the simple reason that the poem the painting illustrated mentioned them.”¹²⁸

In German the expression “einen Schatten haben” (literally: ‘to have a shadow’) is an old colloquial term to paraphrase a person’s questionable mental state. This negative connotation for a shadow became blown up in a theory where the shadow represents an archetype of negativity.¹²⁹ But had not the German romantic Adelbert von Chamisso advised (in 1813): “But, my friend, while you live among mankind, learn above all things first to reverence your shadow, and next your money?”¹³⁰

He wrote from Peter Schlehmil’s experience; his protagonist had sold his own shadow to the devil—with unbearable consequences. In contrast the abolitionist Sojourner Truth decided to promote her cause successfully with the slogan: “I sell the shadow to support the substance.”¹³¹

The African artist Santu Mofokeng explains the very different treatment of shadows in his

culture: “‘Shadow’ does not carry the same image or meaning as *seriti* or *is’thunzi*. The word in Sotho and Zulu is difficult to pin down to any single meaning. In everyday use *seriti* or *is’thunzi* can mean anything from aura, presence, dignity, confidence, power, spirit, essence, status and or wellbeing. The words in the vernacular also imply the experience of being loved or feared. One’s *seriti/is’thunzi* can be positive or negative and can exert a powerful influence. Having a good or bad *seriti/is’thunzi* depends on the caprice of enemies, witches, relatives both dead and living, friends or associations, and on circumstance or time. Having and defending one’s own *seriti/is’thunzi* from evil forces or attacking the *seriti/is’thunzi* of one’s perceived enemies preoccupies and torments many African people. Those Africans who disdain these notions are at least aware of *seriti/is’thunzi*. Especially the elite, when they engage in conversation with white South Africans, often deny this black African consciousness.”¹³²

The silhouette as an old art form is very often compared to the shadow, see for instance Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw’s writing about the art of Kara Walker: “The uncanny confrontation with the ghostly shadow that the viewer experiences when standing in front of *The End of Uncle Tom* may be read in terms of Carl Jung’s concept of the shadow as the primary archetype of the collective unconscious. For Jung, the shadow, the anima, or the spirit within represents our hidden nature, and as such it is generally opposite in temperament to what is revealed on the outside. The Jungian shadow is the antagonist within the repressive exterior personality; . . .”¹³³

And: “When Walker’s life-size silhouettes are read in this way, as the independent-minded shadows of those who gaze upon them, they may be viewed as icons of death that have been resurrected to haunt the living. In nineteenth-century gothic literature and imagery the term ‘shadow’ has often appeared as a reference to the personification of Death and to the spirits of the dead returned to haunt the living.”¹³⁴

In photography it is quite easy to create a silhouette, and its emergence can cause sustained contemplations¹³⁵. Furthermore, the shadow itself appears to be the most longed for friend for any photographer. I know that ghosts may behave like shadows, hide in shadows, but they are not shadows. I felt deeply touched by Mr. Mofokeng’s remarks regarding the African shadow yet I decided for my ghosts to spare them the darkness—mostly—and use the silhouette sparingly. I prefer the more ghost-like mate of the shadow: the doppelgänger.

Describing the artist Guillaume Bijl’s installations Marc Holthoff explains the concept: “by copying reality, he (Bijl) makes us feel ill at ease. Like every mirror image, every double, his work has a certain disconcerting effect. . . . The most beautiful and most uncanny horror stories from the age of Romanticism are precisely those about doubles. They express the metaphysical fear that there could be an identical copy of a unique reality—indeed, of ourselves. A doppelgänger is identical to us, apart from one small detail: it occupies a different place in

¹²⁴ “The Khmer Rouge exterminated more than 90 percent of the dancers and artists of the country. Apparently only one octogenarian puppet master-ballet teacher remained alive to pass on the tradition of the dance, which uses shadow puppets.” in: Juliet Flower MacCannell, *Cixous and Modern Consciousness*, (p. xvi), introduction to: Hélène Cixous, *The Terrible but Unfinished Story of NORODOM SIHANOUK, King of Cambodia*, translated by Juliet Flower MacCannell, Judith Pike, and Lollie Groth, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London 1994.

¹²⁵ Roy Sorensen, *Seeing Dark Things, The Philosophy of Shadows*, Oxford University Press 2008. (p. 30)

¹²⁶ Michael Baxandall, *Shadows and Enlightenment*, Yale University Press 1995. (p. 2)

¹²⁷ Julia Kissina, *When Shadows Cast People*, Peperoni Books, Bad Münders 2010.

¹²⁸ E. H. Gombrich, *Shadows, The Depiction of Cast Shadows in Western Art*, National Gallery Publications, London 1994. (p. 11)

¹²⁹ see: Angelina Bauer, *The Repressed Strikes Back, An Analysis of the Doppelgänger Motif in 19th Century Gothic Fiction Based on Jung’s Notion of the Shadow and Baudrillard’s Concept of the Simulacrum*, VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, Saarbrücken 2008.

¹³⁰ Adelbert von Chamisso, *Peter Schlemihl*, translated by John Bowring, BiblioBazaar 2008. (p. 79)

¹³¹ Sojourner Truth, *Carte-de-visite*, 1864.

¹³² Santu Mofokeng, *Chasing Shadows, 30 Years of Photographic Essays*, Prestel Verlag 2011. “The expression I take as a title for this exhibition. *Chasing Shadows*, has quixotic connotations in English, but in African languages its meaning is antithetical.” (p. 108)

¹³³ Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw, *Seeing the Unspeakable, The Art Of Kara Walker*, Duke University Press 2004. (p. 40)

¹³⁴ Ibid. (p. 43)

¹³⁵ see Mark Rawlinson about Robert Adam’s photograph *Colorado Springs, Colorado, 1968* in: Mark Rawlinson, *Disconsolate and Inconsolable: Neutrality and New Topographics in: Reframing the New Topographics*, edited by Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach, The Center for American Places at Columbia College, Chicago 2010: “The facelessness of the subject deserves our attention, because, as the sociologist Georg Simmel has argued, the face ‘offers itself as the first object of the gaze between one person and another.’ (quoted from Simmel, *The Sociology of the Senses*, Sage Publications, London 1997, pp. 112-113) . . . The lack of personality and spirit in the faceless figure speaks to concerns about the suburbs themselves in the early 1970s. The picture window (as a transparent threshold between interior and exterior, public and private, and stylistic architectural affectation) and dwelling are equally problematic.” (p. 134)



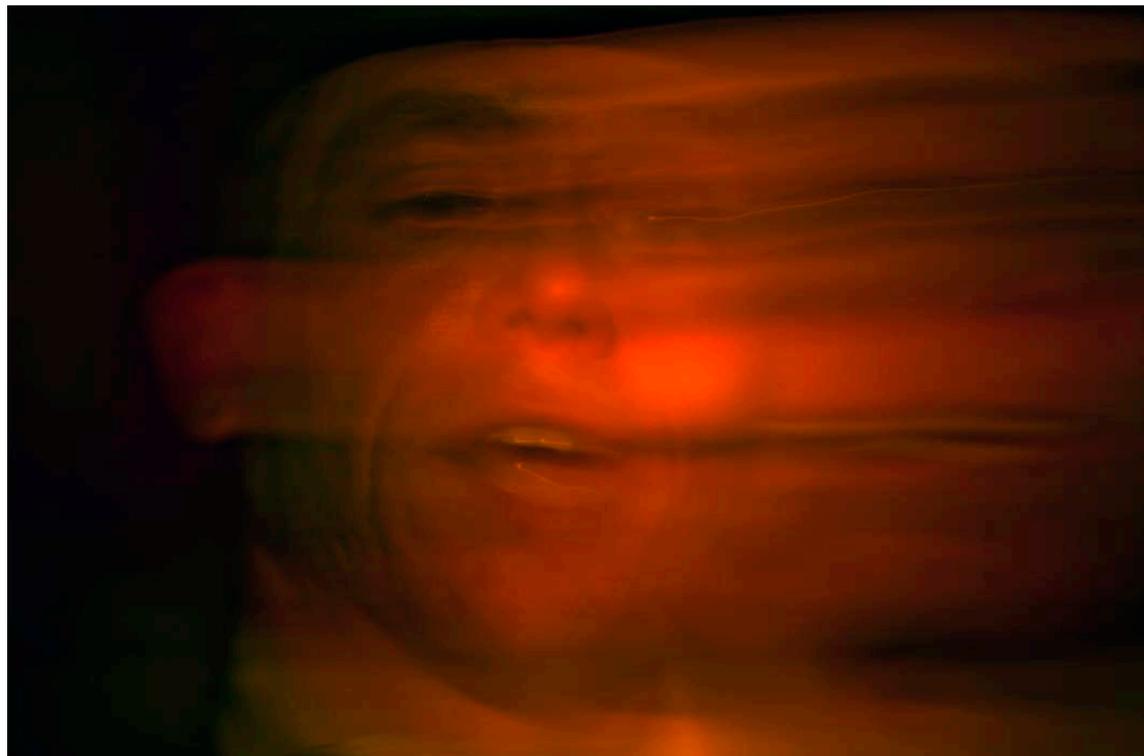
above:
Go-Between, Florence
2010

above left:
Silhouette, Phnom Penh
2010

below left:
White Ghost, Mortuary, Munich
1997



Doppelgänger's Birth #1, Santa Monica
2012



Doppelgänger's Birth #2, Key West
2011

“Soul mate dry your eye
Cause soul mates never die”

—PLACEBO,
Sleeping With Ghosts ¹³⁹

Specters Of The Desert

“Neither the ku klux klan
so sad outside and within
nor the ku klux klan of stone that
throws its shadow
no ku klux klan in the end
even while undressed
and above all while undressed
catches itself in the door”

—Jindřich Heisler¹⁴¹

the three dimensional world than we do.”¹³⁶ So it does not surprise: “The doppelgänger’s curriculum vitae is blood-stained: . . . Associated with death is the figure of following, accosting, or pursuing. The doppelgänger very often will pursue its other, or be pursued by it, or both, which would usually be a prelude to a murder.”¹³⁷

Nevertheless, let us go back to the term’s origin: In 1796 the noun Doppelgänger was coined by the writer Jean Paul in his novel *Siebenkäs* where we can find the following description of two people looking exactly alike: “Thereon they look at each other’s faces, but full of joyous affection and without any grudge regarding the bygone boisterous joke. At this hour, a third person would have been afraid of their similarity, given that each one was the plaster cast of the other, but love made for both of them their faces look unlike; each of them saw into the other one just that what he loved short of himself; and it was with their traits like with beautiful deeds which we admire and are touched by if they are done by the other one, not by ourselves.”¹³⁸

Outsourcing the fear and creating comfort for the double made sense to me as a strategy at least when you are creating the image of a ghost just with the appearance of the ordinary person. Could a rapprochement to the ghost be possible by integrating the doppelgänger’s original concept of affection?¹³⁹

After all, where carries the specter? Jacques Derrida emphatically had insisted on the difference between a specter and a ghost. I am under the impression the specter has a decided political agenda, be it Marx’s or Derrida’s specter, be it Hamlet’s ghost that appears to be a specter in that very sense, the specter of Patrice Lumumba’s murder in Sven Augustijnen’s work¹⁴⁰, or be it the Ku Klux Klan specter in Jindřich Heisler’s poem.¹⁴¹

The *Cambodian Ghosts* may have rather the character of ancient Genii as they were present in Roman households and iconography. Yet I tried to shirk the old ghosts. Simone de Beauvoir

¹³⁶ Marc Holthoff, *Realität und Theatralität im Werk von Guillaume Bijl, Das Dekor unserer Zeit*, in: Guillaume Bijl, *Installations & Compositions*, Verlag Der Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln 2008: “Doppelgänger . . . Sie drücken verbal die metaphysische Angst aus, das von der einzigartigen Realität—jajwohl, von uns—offenbar ein identisches Abbild existiert. Ein solcher Doppelgänger ist identisch, sieht genauso aus wie das Original, bis auf ein—nicht unwesentliches—Detail: Er nimmt einen anderen Platz im Raum ein als wir. Auch das Werk von Bijl ‘verdoppelt’ die Realität, stellt ein Stück Realität an einen Ort, wo sie nicht hingehört. Und genau deshalb kommt es zur Bestürzung. Bijl imitiert die Realität, nicht mittels der Malerei oder Bildhauerei, sondern mit Hilfe der Realität selbst.” (p. 352, English version p. 22)

¹³⁷ Dimitris Vardoulakis, *The Doppelgänger, Literature’s Philosophy*, Fordham University Press, New York 2010. (p. 69) Note also: “The canon of the doppelgänger does not have an end or a beginning because the doppelgänger does not have a measure—in the sense that he doppelgänger is that which interrupts the opposition between the measurable and the immeasurable. The operation of the subject can no longer be equated either with individual perceptions or with a generalized subjectivity. Rather, as both delimit themselves, they set in motion a chiasmic relationality between being creative and been created, that is, the ontology of the doppelgänger, the liminal subject.” (p. 10)

¹³⁸ Author’s translation from the edition: Jean Paul, *Sämtliche Werke Band 1/2*, Carl Hanser Verlag München, edited by Norbert Miller, 5. Auflage 1999. *Siebenkäs*, Viertes Bändchen, Zweiundzwanzigstes Kapitel: “Darauf sahen beide einander ins Gesicht, aber voll freudiger Zuneigung und ohne ein böses Nachgefühl des vorigen wilden Scherzes. Ein Dritter hätte in dieser Stunde sich vor ihrer Ähnlichkeit gefürchtet, da jeder der Gipsabguß des andern war, aber die Liebe machte beiden ihre Gesichter unähnlich; jeder sah im andern nur das, was er außer sich liebte; und es war mit ihren Zügen wie mit schönen Handlungen, die uns wohl an andern, aber nicht an uns selber in Rührung oder gar in Bewunderung versetzen.” MD (pp. 532-533)

¹³⁹ PLACEBO, *Sleeping With Ghosts*, written by Brian Molko, Stefan Olsdal, Steven Hewitt, William Lloyd, Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC 2003. “The album title’s about carrying the ghosts of your relationships with you,” Brian explains, “to the point where sometimes a smell or a situation or an item of clothing they bought brings a person back. For me it’s about the relationship that you have with your memories. They inhabit your dreams sometimes. There can be a lot in the future that’s gonna remind you of the ghost of relationships past” Available from: <http://www.abc.net.au/rage/guest/2003/placebo03.htm> (accessed July 14, 2012).

¹⁴⁰ Sven Augustijnen, *Spectres*, supplement book published as part of Sven Augustijnen’s solo exhibition *Spectres*, Editors: Steven Tallon, Emiliano Battista, ASA Publishers, Bruxelles 2011. “If the ‘communist infiltration of Africa’ was a spectre often used to justify the elimination of Patrice Lumumba, the assassination of the Congo’s—indeed, Africa’s—first democratically elected Prime Minister on 17 January 1961 created a spectre of its own.” (back cover)

¹⁴¹ Toyen, *Specters Of The Desert*, Poem by Jindřich Heisler (first published 1939), translated by Stephen Schwartz, Black Swan Press, Chicago 1974. (p. 10) See as well: Jindřich Toman and Matthew S. Witkovsky, *Jindřich Heisler, Surrealism under Pressure 1938-1953*, The Art Institute of Chicago, Yale University Press 2012.

had observed: “Old age also sets men apart, so that they form a distinct category. . . . The relationship with the dead ancestor is felt to be ambivalent; in many societies he is a forebear who wishes his descendants well. In all he is a spirit, and as such he is dreaded. Almost everywhere it is ghosts who are held responsible for any misfortune that happens to the individual and the tribe.”¹⁴²

The Methodology—Numbers & Assembling¹⁴³, & The Portrait’s Entitlement

Ghosts may cause “that little rush of cold air” (James Tate)¹⁴⁴, but they are not comfortable in a grid governed by the chilliness of reason and differentiating rules. Magical powers require magical thinking, all things should resemble each other and be connected in one way or the other, and the magic of numbers should be respected. For instance the number 21: Twenty-one is glutted with significance in western culture, it is a holy number just by the very fact that it is the result of the multiplication of the holy three with the holy seven. S21 stands for the pure horror of the Khmer Rouge regime: A former school was converted by the Khmer Rouge into a prison and named S21¹⁴⁵. At least fourteen thousand people were tortured and killed here. So this number 21 will be forever encased with a mantle of agony and sorrow. In no way could I have avoided that cipher.

The German philosopher Ernst Bloch wrote: “montage appears culturally as the highest form of eerie intermittence above diversion, indeed possibly as a *contemporaneous* form of intoxication and irrationality.”¹⁴⁶ Beforehand he stated: “In *technical* and *cultural* montage, however, the context of the old surface is decomposed, a new one is formed.”¹⁴⁷ But let us consider first the more basic definitions: “Photomontage is a technique that involves re-photographing photographs or parts of them to form a single seamless unit” (Verna Posever Curtis).¹⁴⁸

The word collage gets often in the way, sometimes the difference between montage and collage blurs when people refer to photography. “Collage is a medium that connects the past with the present, sometimes offering a glimpse of what may be the future” writes editor Richard Brereton.¹⁴⁹

He continues about the artist Ashkan Honarvar (and quotes him): “His ‘Finding Hitler’ project found him examining the concept of evil through a series of very graphic cut-and-paste anatomical collages: ‘Again, like a surgeon, I tried to go inside different body parts to find the roots of evil.’” I did not intend to follow that path or to form a “Protest against the events of the time”¹⁵⁰ with my montages, and I am not sure if “collage is all about the recycling, reinterpretation and reprocessing of our collective past, present and future”¹⁵¹ as others tried

¹⁴² Simone de Beauvoir, *The Coming of Age*, translated by Patrick O’Brian, W. W. Norton & Company, New York 1996 “Primitive peoples acknowledge a ‘magic vocation’ in certain individuals who are set apart by some particular characteristic—law-breakers, cripples etc. Old age also sets men apart” (pp. 81-82)

¹⁴³ . . . or Collage, or Montage, those playgrounds for Surrealists and photographers, see: “One could start by asserting that the very invention of photography in 1839 was a Surrealist event, even before Surrealism;” (p. 5), in: Candice Black, *Ghosts of the Black Chamber, Experimental, Dada and Surrealist Photography 1918–1948*, Solar Books 2010.

¹⁴⁴ James Tate, *The Ghost Soldiers, Poems*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York 2009. “They call them the ghost soldiers, much beloved even by their enemies, and I guess that’s why I went to the parade, just to feel them march past, that little rush of cold air.” (p.33)

¹⁴⁵ see: *S21–The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, documentary by Rithy Panh (2003).

¹⁴⁶ Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, translated by Neville and Stephen Plaice, Polity Press, Cambridge 1991. (p. 203)

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. (p. 202)

¹⁴⁸ Verna Posever Curtis, *Photographic Memory, The Album in the Age of Photography*, Aperture Foundation, New York 2011. (p. 11)

¹⁴⁹ Richard Brereton, Foreword, in: *Cut & Paste, 21st Century Collage*, edited by Richard Brereton with Caroline Roberts, Laurence King Publishing, London 2011.

¹⁵⁰ Silke Krohn: *A Brief History Of The Twentieth Century Collage*, in: *cutting edges—Contemporary Collage*, edited by Robert Klanten, Hendrik Hellige, James Gallagher, Die Gestalten Verlag, 2nd printing Berlin 2011. (p. 9)

¹⁵¹ James Gallagher, Preface, in: *cutting edges*. (p. 3)

to define the principles of collage. It is more difficult to decide these days, more than ever, what element in a photograph is inherent to the represented subject, a condition I like to adapt to, the more so as I do not feel uncomfortable with the lie in photographic art.¹⁵²

Every truth has the lie as an innate double hidden as a ghost, ready to absorb the former’s luster. Every ghost represents a hidden truth in disguise. Discussing Douglas Huebler’s conceptual photographic work depicting hidden ghosts the critic Gordon Hughes declares: “For in these empty faces, we catch a glimpse, not of a ghost, but of the empty remains of the once spectral presence of photography.”¹⁵³ He said earlier: “And with this Huebler is in total agreement. For the claim to photography’s constitutive uncanniness is exactly what Huebler’s photographic portraits render null.”¹⁵⁴ And Douglas Huebler conceded: “I mean to be setting up a number of ironies. I’ve spoken seriously, and I am very serious, but you know an awful lot of the work is meant to twist things to the point of almost absurdity. I don’t want to celebrate absurdity, but I do mean to challenge a lot of premises.”¹⁵⁵ One can say that Huebler externalized the collage principle outside the picture, however, to assert that the charm of the photographic image is lost forever should be considered—notably for the critical mindset—an ambition gone overboard.

The basic approach to portraiture should be aware of some present-day conflicts. “A prominent and distinct strand has become established in contemporary art photography in which people are depicted in uniform series, usually one per picture, facing the camera head-on and gazing into the lens. These people are represented straightforwardly, without much apparent intervention by the photographer, and the series displays manifestly uniform characteristics.”¹⁵⁶ I was tempted to follow that scheme for the portraits of Cambodians in Los Angeles. I did not mind the self-presentation of people before the camera, however, as Julian Stallabrass in his article continued: “On the face of it, the motive for raising that old specter of objectification and domination is a puzzle, let alone that such a tactic should meet with art-world approbation. After all, ethnographic photography was subjected in previous decades to damning critique by theorists and artists who exposed its power relations and drew links to the continued use of photography for surveillance, classification, and control.”¹⁵⁷

This slanted classification of a genre granted, yet the main feature of classical portraiture concerned me most: “The portrait is undoubtedly the most complex and problematic genre of representation within art history and doubly so within the history of photography. This is because it locates representation on its ultimate frontier, that of capturing the essence of what constitutes a person through the depiction of appearance, fundamentally of the face.”¹⁵⁸

I could not approach my ghosts in the city landscapes with an elaborate studio setting or preparations similar to those required for a portrait in that sense, so I recalled the snapshot,

¹⁵² see also: Kevin Young, *The Grey Album, On The Blackness Of Blackness*, Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2012. “ . . . the notion of lying—the artful dodge, faking it till you make it—the forging of black lives and selves in all their forms. . . . Storying means the ‘lies’ black folks tell to amuse themselves and to explain their origins. . . .” (p. 17)

¹⁵³ Gordon Hughes, *Exit Ghost, Douglas Huebler’s Face Value*, in: *Photography After Conceptual Art*, edited by Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen, Wiley-Blackwell 2010. “As much as Arbus’s twins have come to signify ‘Diane Arbus’, the faces of these ghosts, for me, have come to signify ‘Douglas Huebler’—or at least that side of his practice that engages with the status of photographic portraiture. For in these empty faces, we catch a glimpse, not of a ghost, but of the empty remains of the once spectral presence of photography.” (p. 84) and: “Tom McDonough makes a similar claim . . . ‘It is the uncanny itself whose critical force seems to have become exhausted.’ McDonough, *The Beautiful Language of My Century: Reinventing the Language of Contestation in Postwar France, 1945–1968*, Cambridge, MA 2007, 181.” (p. 85)

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. (pp. 82–83)

¹⁵⁵ Douglas Huebler, ‘Variable’. Etc., Fonds Regional D’Art Contemporain du Limousin, Limoges, France 1992. (p. 188); Robert C. Morgan quoting Huebler from *Talking with Douglas Huebler* by Michael Auping, LAICA Journal July–August, 1977, (p. 44)

¹⁵⁶ Julian Stallabrass, *What’s in a Face? Blankness and Significance in Contemporary Art Photography*, in: OCTOBER 122, MIT Press, Fall 2007. (p. 71)

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. (p. 72)

¹⁵⁸ Jesús Carillo Castillo, *There Is Something I Don’t Know*, in: *Jitka Hanzlová*, Catalogue, FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE, Madrid 2012. (p.177)

the drive by shooting on the street, in a public place¹⁵⁹. The Cambodian New Year¹⁶⁰ in Los Angeles gives all classes of the community the opportunity to celebrate and gather, considering past and future for an afternoon. I gave myself just a few hours to catch the few Twenty-Ones as dedicated patrons for my ghosts.

New Year:

“Out of their torments men carved
a flower
that they perched on the high
plateaus of their faces
hunger makes a canopy for them
an image dissolves in their last tear
they drank foam-rhythmed monsters
to the point of ferocious horror ...”

—Aimé Césaire¹⁶⁰

The Book & The Cover

A family album requires a book—and a narrative. “Books are for prisoners!” shouted someone¹⁶¹. This is true. Having said that we should consider Gerry Badger’s¹⁶² claim: “Linear narrative is inherently populist, accentuating the familiar, the known, and the predictable. We can go further and say that it offers reassurance and solace.”¹⁶³

The classical album has the linear narrative (time), and it dispenses solace by doing so. I do not mind comforting the familiar because the disaster is always present anyway, it is encapsulated in our memory: “Inasmuch as disaster is thought, it is nondisastrous thought, thought of the outside. We have no access to the outside, but the outside has always already touched us in the head, for it is the precipitous. . . . The disaster comes back; it would always be the disaster after the disaster—a silent, harmless return whereby it dissimulates itself. . . . The disaster, unexperienced. It is what escapes the very possibility of experience—it is the limit of writing.”¹⁶⁴

This was written by Maurice Blanchot. He had written at another place: “I have lost silence, and the regret I feel over that is immeasurable. I cannot describe the pain that invades a man once he has begun to speak.”¹⁶⁵

The cover had to be different than the other pictures.

First of all: It was the only picture that included a historic image, one of those photographs taken of a prisoner by the Khmer Rouge before they killed that person in Tuol Sleng (S21). The features of that young man reminded me of a beautiful woman. I had heard many a time about a female ghost of the night called Ap (in Khmer) or Krasue (in Thai), a real “termagant and a fright”¹⁶⁶, as Nabokov has phrased it in his “meta-ghost story”¹⁶⁷, more a

¹⁵⁹ Jeffrey Browning, *Chairs Rooms Windows*: “A public space is a place of transition, one of life’s stations. Our lives are spent, for the most part, in interiors. For urban dwellers the out-of-doors is a route between two interiors. . . . We make a city our own by familiarizing ourselves with its streets, buildings, public places and interiors.” (p. 60-61) In: John Register, *Sixteen Color Plates*, Black Sparrow Press 1985.

¹⁶⁰ Aimé Césaire, *Solar Throat Slashed, The Unexpurgated 1948 Edition*, translated and edited by A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown 2011. (p. 87)

¹⁶¹ Jackie Burckhardt, played by Mila Kunis in: *That ‘70s Show*, “Prank Day” episode, March 26, 2002.

¹⁶² Mr. Badger has, what he calls, an “instinctive aversion to theory” (Badger, *The Pleasures of Good Photographs*, Aperture Foundation, New York 2010. (p. 224) He shares that with others: “it is not just me, and Andre Gide, who are bored by ideas: other people were bored, too. . . . Ideas are the ultimate in content; they are the high point of subject matter. Understanding how ideas lose their seriousness—how they become relative to the characters, transient, impermanent—is a way of understanding what irony is in a novel, too.” In: Thirlwell, *The Delighted States*, l.c. (p. 268) See as well Gombrowicz in his *Diary* (l.c.): “. . . we artists have allowed ourselves to be led around too sheepishly by philosophers and other scientists. We have proved incapable of being sufficiently different. An excessive respect for scientific truth has obscured our own truth. In our eagerness to understand reality, we forget that we are not here to understand reality, but only to express it. We, art, are reality. Art is a fact and not commentary attached to a fact.” (p. 104)

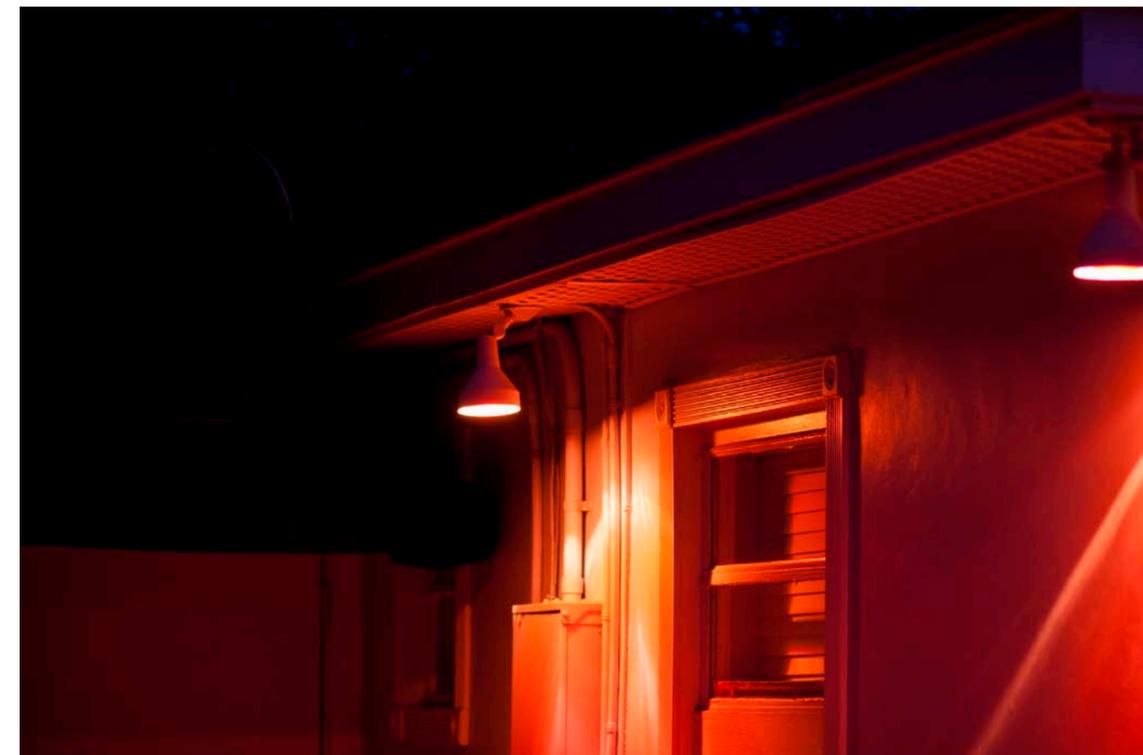
¹⁶³ Gerry Badger, *The Pleasures*, l.c. (pp. 224-225)

¹⁶⁴ Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, translated by Ann Smock, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London 1995. (pp. 6-7)

¹⁶⁵ Maurice Blanchot, *Death Sentence*, translated by Lydia Davis, Station Hill Press 1998. (p. 33)

¹⁶⁶ Nabokov, *The Vane Sisters*, l.c. (p. 136)

¹⁶⁷ Peter Straub, Introduction to *American Fantastic Tales*, l.c. (p. xii)



Ghost Building, Night, Florida
2011



Ghost Building, Day, California
2011



In Phnom Penh
2010



In Tuol Sleng, Phnom Penh
2010

ghoul than a ghost in that popular legend, where Ap is beleaguering and preying on pregnant women, those very warrantors of future.

Second, I needed an architectural structure, a building denying transparency¹⁶⁸ that could be a house for a ghost. Third, the letters C and O were essential for me in that picture (not only because my dear friend M would have appreciated it). And finally, I needed the color blue as a matching color to the red binding.

Against Method?

“What does it all mean?” Phoebe Zeit-Geist¹⁶⁹

The last words of Kurtz, prior to his famous murmuring “The horror! The horror!” in Joseph Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness*, are words, which are introducing his own anticipated death: “Live rightly, die, die . . .”¹⁷⁰. The artist David Tomas developed a project¹⁷¹ quoting those words to “explore(s) the contemporary phenomenon of artistic tourism”¹⁷² leading to an exhibition in Montréal and a book.

Tomas states: “A new artistic interest, if not obsession, with investigating human diversity and the global human condition ¹⁷³ is fuelled by the educational transformation of the artist by means of a university-based redefinition of subject matters and the development of new academic disciplines such as visual, cultural and post-colonial studies. . . . Artists seem finally to have achieved the twentieth-century avant-garde goal of bridging the divide between art’s refined knowledge of the world, as presented through its esoteric practices, and the real world of the everyday citizen of a ‘global’ economy and an emerging integrated culture.”¹⁷⁴

Joseph Conrad’s novel “was adopted as the exhibition’s historical and intellectual template because it is the story of a journey to an anti-monument of human progress and civilization: Kurtz’s Inner Station.” And Tomas uses Conrad’s book “as a frame of reference for an exploration of the most appropriate methodology that could be adopted for this exhibition’s conceptual and visual organization”. Special attention is paid to today’s university as “an

¹⁶⁸ see: Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny, Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, The MIT Press 1992. “Modernity has been haunted, as we know very well, by a myth of transparency: transparency of the self to nature, of the self to the other, of all selves to society, and all this represented, if not constructed, from Jeremy Bentham to Le Corbusier, by a universal transparency of building materials, spatial penetration, and the ubiquitous flow of air, light, and physical movement.” (p. 217). Compare the images of F. Dujardin: Filip Dujardin, *Fictions*, Highlight Gallery, San Francisco 2011.

¹⁶⁹ Michael O’Donoghue and Frank Springer, *Phoebe Zeit-Geist*, ECLIPSE COMICS/Ken Pierce Books 1986. (p. 12, p. 14 etc.)

¹⁷⁰ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, The Modern Library, New York 1999. (p. 86)

¹⁷¹ *Live rightly, die, die . . .*, A project by David Tomas, Catalogue of an exhibition held at the art gallery Dazibao, Montréal 2012. All further quotes are taken from the introductory essay by David Tomas, *Live rightly, die, die . . . Anatomy of an Exhibition*. (pp. 7-22)

¹⁷² Compare the more conventional approach in a recent symposium in Munich in June 2012: *Migration und künstlerische Produktion* - Institut für Kunstgeschichte/Center for Advanced Studies/DÜKKAN Kulturplanungsbüro, Internationale Tagung unter Leitung von Prof. Dr. Burcu Dogramaci, Senior Researcher in Residence am CAS Available from: <http://www.kunstwissenschaften.uni-muenchen.de/forschung/symposien/symposien2012/migration-produktion/index.html> (accessed July 14, 2012).

¹⁷³ compare “the motif of the open window in Romantic painting. In it, the Romantics found a potent symbol for the experience of standing on the threshold between an interior and the outside world. The juxtaposition of the close familiarity of a room and the uncertain, often idealized vision of what lies beyond was immediately recognized as a metaphor for unfulfilled longing, as evoked in the words of the Romantic poet Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg; 1772-1801): ‘Everything at a distance turns into poetry: distant mountains, distant people, distant events: all become Romantic.’” (p. 3, about Caspar David Friedrich) Sabine Rewald, *Rooms With A View, The Open Window in the 19th Century*, Yale University Press 2011.

¹⁷⁴ compare James Cuno, *Museums Matter, In Praise of the Encyclopedic Museum*. The University Of Chicago Press 2011. “I want to explore the idea of the experience of the encyclopedic museum as akin to travel and to think about travel as a term of translation, a means of mediating between differences, recognizing that a translation is never a simple and exact reproduction of meaning because the terms in question are not fixed, nor does it eliminate the differences between the terms.” (p. 62)

embryonic, increasingly capitalist entrepreneurial organization where the pursuit of knowledge is more often than not geared to monetary gain and its universal truths of free exchange, and where students are trained to think in a technocratic as opposed to an independent fashion.”

Tomas frowns upon “art’s flirtations with everyday life and its flirtations with fiction in its various forms” since they “cannot compete with *Heart of Darkness* or *Apocalypse Now* because artists are unwilling to embrace the risk of their own cultural, moral, economic or psychological breakdown and the epistemological disintegration of their discipline.”

As rigorous and profound as Tomas executes the analysis and implementation of Kurtz’s “Live rightly, die, die . . .” as the project’s spine, I sense a lack of spaciousness in his exploration of our contemporary situation. Where are the migrants, among them countless artists, the exiled and expelled and wasted ones? The sophisticated focus on the privileged few, may they be in the spotlight of the academic and curatorial community, can hardly embrace the causes, sources and agents of all those artifacts which I would call hybrids and offshoots of intercultural contamination.

Tomas mourns that: “Today’s equivalent to Congo ivory in *Heart of Darkness* is academic method.” And he claims: “the art world does not suffer from an absence of method and its cultural, moral and psychological consequences. It suffers, on the contrary, from a *surplus of methods*”. This “excess of method” would cause “degenerative cultural consequences in the visual arts.”

Maybe. So, should we feel guilty because there is not “the possibility of the kind of absolute clinical horror” caused by “the question of excess, its links to an absence of method and its moral consequence in visual arts?” Are we still Kurtz? Kurtz as the culprit, the epitome of the colonial venture, cannot complete the sentence “Live rightly, die, die . . .”; facing his diverse, troubled and gory past Kurtz hushes into ruminations.

I was reminded of Phoebe Zeit-Geist: “In her final desperate moments, Phoebe recalls a poem mother once told her when she was a little girl. Odd, the little things one clings to when faced with destruction . . .”¹⁷⁵ She quotes the last lines of Cooke’s popular poem from the dawn of the nineteenth century “How did you die?”: “Death comes with a crawl, or comes with a pounce, /And whether he’s slow or spry, /It isn’t the fact that you’re dead that counts, / But only how did you die?”

Phoebe’s death (as her subsequent resurrection) ridicules that question; Kurtz otherwise immerses himself into the absurdity of silence, that is why we have the strong feeling of a suicidal drift in Kurtz’ performance as the representative of a former power. The vanishing of Kurtz into nothingness renders his life—all the achievements disembody into becoming a monstrosity—absurd. At best Kurtz will enter a ghostlike state as a haunting colonialist, even the narrator will later deny in the story the truth about his death. “Disappearance is generally associated with defeat.”¹⁷⁶

The poet and essayist Kevin Young answers back to that defeat by mourning three kinds of “shadow books”¹⁷⁷: the unwritten ones, the removed ones, and the lost ones. TATE presented recently an online *Gallery of Lost Art*. Bas Jan Ader, who vanished in the open water executing his last project, is present in Thomas’ and the TATE’s project.

¹⁷⁵ Phoebe Zeit-Geist is quoting Edmund Vance Cooke, *Impertinent Poems*, Dodge Publishing, New York 1907. (p. 103) From (*How did you die*). (p. 13)

¹⁷⁶ quoted from: *Gone To Croatan—Strategies of Disappearance*, published on June 8th, 2011 by HMKV (Hardware Medien KunstVerein), Exhibition 04 June –15 August 2011. Available from: http://creative.arte.tv/de/space/Hardware_Medien-KunstVerein/message/3302/GONE_TO_CROATAN_-_Strategies_of_Disappearance/ (accessed July 14, 2012).

¹⁷⁷ Kevin Young, *The Grey Album, On The Blackness Of Blackness*, Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2012.



Phoebe Zeit-Geist And The Ghost, Munich
2000



Phoebe Zeit-Geist, Reading, Munich
2000

“ . . . and yet possessed by the
bitter grief of the tomb it
continues to confront the memory
of the departed spirits. The living
should really shut their mouths and
let the graves speak; let the dead
souls teach the living what it means
to live, what it means to die, what
it means to be dead but still alive.”

—Liu Xiaobo ¹⁸⁰

To Kevin Young’s shadow books we could add countless other works: we will never be able to read the memoirs of Haing Somnang Ngor, Pov Panhapich, Sinn Sisamouth or Sharon Tate, of František Gellner or Daniil Charms, artists who vanished in wars, were slaughtered by bloodthirsty cults or gangs.

The Russian poet Daniil Charms¹⁷⁸ had found the ultimate formula for this absurdity of vanishing, of becoming an Unding, a ghost:

“There was a red-haired man who had no eyes or ears. Neither did he have any hair, so he was called red-haired theoretically.

He couldn’t speak, since he didn’t have a mouth. Neither did he have a nose.

He didn’t even have any arms or legs. He had no stomach and he had no back and he had no spine and he had no innards whatsoever. He had nothing at all! Therefore there’s no knowing whom we are even talking about.

In fact it’s better that we don’t say any more about him.”¹⁷⁹

Finally

The ban of Phoebe Zeit-Geist’s adventures in Germany was countermanded in 2002. Jacques Derrida died in 2004. Pascale Ogier died in 1984, one year after her performance in *Ghost Dance*. Wisława Szymborska died in 2012, Witold Gombrowicz in 1969 and Joseph Conrad in 1924. Julius Schulman died in 2009. Kant and Swedenborg died a long time ago, as well as Henry Adams, Ambrose Bierce and many other people. František Gellner disappeared in 1914. Daniil Charms was killed in 1942. Walter Hasenclever committed suicide in 1940 to avoid being extradited to the Nazis; Jean Améry committed suicide in 1978, Alice Bradley Sheldon killed herself in 1987, my brother did the same in 1984, not to mention all the others. Surrounded by dying people, professionally and otherwise, I succumbed, in a manner of speaking, to the distractions of the flesh for a long time with no patience for needy spirits. Do I believe in ghosts, now? Yes, certainly. Yes, absolutely. Now I do, absolutely. And, do I have any advice at all?

I do not know. Do not kill yourself, and do not kill the other one. Respect the ghosts. Enjoy the picture; if you can’t, make another one. Do not believe in images. Don’t trust the word.



¹⁷⁸ Даниил = Хармс = Charms = Kharms; the absurdist poet Daniil Charms had chosen the pseudonym ‘Charms’, written in the Latin alphabet. The transliteration of Russian names made it common to spell the poet’s name now with a K—my friend M would have disagreed strongly.

¹⁷⁹ Daniil Kharms, *Incidences*, edited and translated by Neil Cornwell, Serpent’s Tail, London 1993. “(1) *Blue Notebook No. 10 (or ‘The Red-Haired Man’)*. (p. 49)

¹⁸⁰ Liu Xiaobo, *June Fourth Elegies*, translated by Jeffrey Yang, Greywolf Press, Minneapolis 2012. (p. XXVi); see as well: Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance, Photography And Political Violence*, The University of Chicago Press 2010. “It is not that the dead have nothing to tell us, show us, teach us; it is that we have trouble listening, seeing, learning.” (p. 99)





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Other Media

Akademie der Künste: *Elem Klimov Werkschau*, Berlin 1987, tape

Derrida, a film directed by Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman, produced by Amy Ziering Kofman 2002

Ghost Dance, a film produced and directed by Ken McMullen, 1983

Idi i smotri—Komm und sieh, a film directed by Elem Klimov, USSR 1985

Of Monsters And Men, *My Head is an Animal* © Sony 2012

PLACEBO, *Sleeping With Ghosts*, written by Brian Molko, Stefan Olsdal, Steven Hewitt, William Lloyd, Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC 2003

Prince of Darkness, written and directed by John Carpenter, USA 1987

S21—The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine, documentary by Rithy Panh (2003)

Sojourner Truth, Carte-de-visite, 1864

That '70s Show, Jackie Burckhardt in “Prank Day” episode, March 26, 2002

Charles D. Watson: *about Manson*. Available from: <http://www.aboundinglove.org/about.php>, 1997-2010



Credits

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Moiré pattern used in *Digital Ghost: Water #2* (p. 52) courtesy of *Moiré Index* by Carsten Nicolai, Die Gestalten Verlag, Berlin 2010 (mi-clg-blackman-01).

Stills from the film *Žertwa, jesli chcecie*, written and directed by Michael EB Detto, 1995 (pp. 65 & 66), feature the actresses Monika Frajmut and Susanne Hausner respectively.

Images on page 76 were shot in and around the former Catholic Church on Bokor Hill, Cambodia.

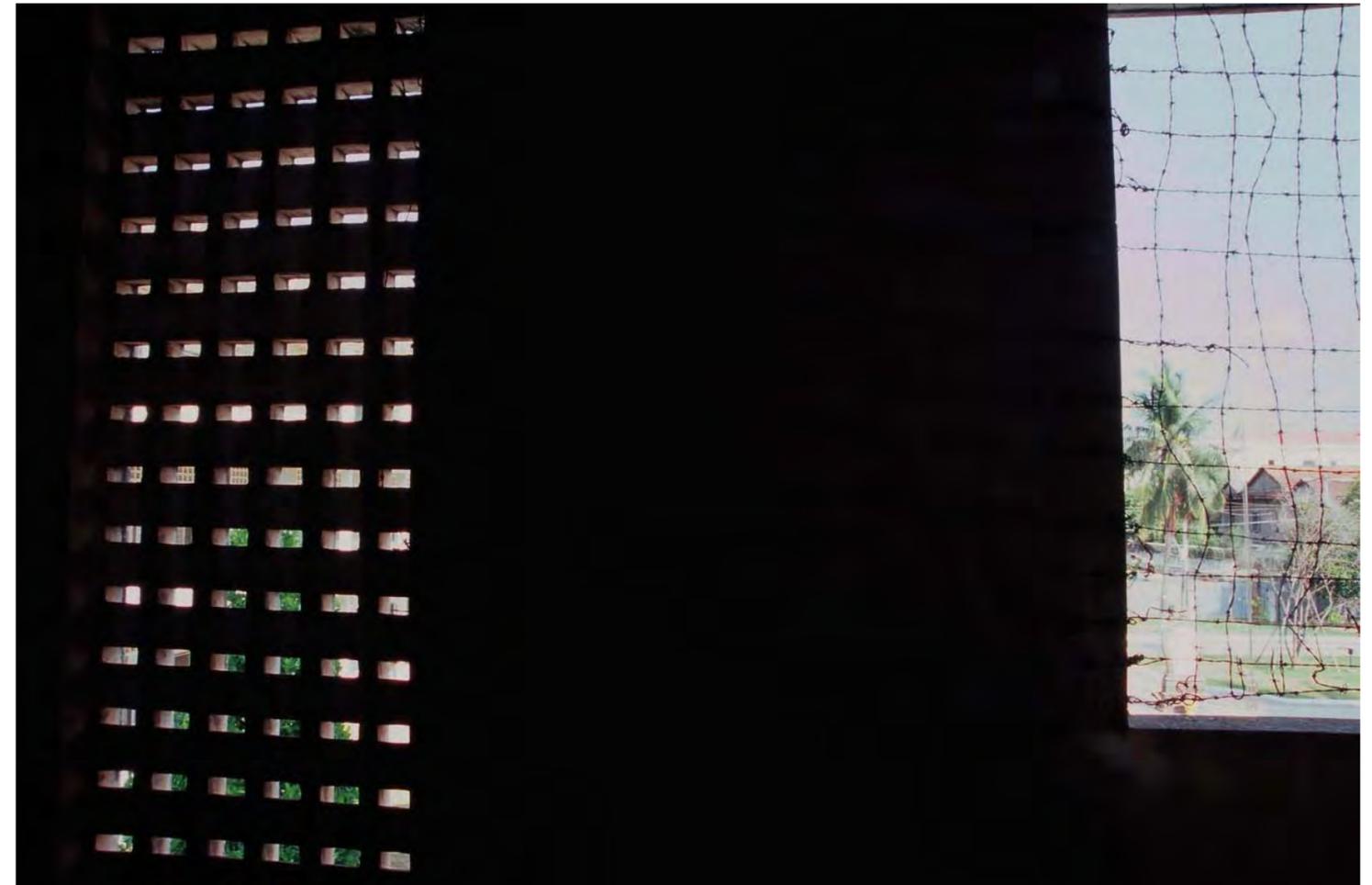
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