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Credulous Spectatorship from Zeuxis to Barthes

by

Carrie Robbins

October 2013

Submitted to the Faculty of Bryn Mawr College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Abstract

This dissertation explores intersections between trompe l'oeil painting and photography. It began as an interest in contemporary photographers, such as Thomas Demand, whose photographs of constructed paper models encourage viewers to discover the nature of his interventions. His strategy resonates with a centuries-old strategy in trompe l'oeil painting, but now in the terms of photographic, rather than pictorial presence. That is, most of Demand's photographs do not compel the viewer's belief in the tangible presence of the object represented; instead, they exploit photography's indexical promise of delivering the world as it once appeared, in order to temporarily trick viewers about the terms of that indexical delivery. Beyond intersections in artistic strategies, I track reception accounts of trompe l'oeil painting and photography for their reliance on a credulous spectator. Pliny's Zeuxis, who is tricked by Parrhasius's painting of a curtain, remains the model for this errant credulity. In their efforts to reveal the manipulation of photographs, historians and theorists assume that the natural attitude for viewing photographs is wholly credulous and recast postmodern viewers as contemporary Zeuxises. Instead of admonishing spectators for such credulity, I argue that trompe l'oeil facilitates a pleasurable experience of oscillation between belief and disbelief. I also suggest that these trompe l'oeil deployments of oscillation tend to coincide with historical moments of perceived change in visual technologies—changes due to digitalization, as well as mechanical or other forms of reproduction. Trompe l'oeil artists play upon our supposed willingness to accept reproductions for the objects they represent. The inclusion of photographs and/or engravings in these trompe l'oeil paintings simultaneously stages

and reprimands our desire for the aura of the actual object. Finally, I suggest that a contemporary renewal of trompe l'oeil in the medium of photography reveals an interest in recuperating belief in photographs—a belief not unlike that which Roland Barthes narrates in *Camera Lucida*. Just as Barthes can discover something of photography's indexical promise, even after decades of his own scholarly efforts to unveil photography's rhetoric of construction, so might we, even while heeding the postmodernist lessons of disbelief, recuperate a moment of belief in a skeptical age.

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Introduction

The apparent contradiction between the photograph as transparent and the photograph as representation describes a fundamental duality in theories of the medium. In his essay “Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism,” Kendall Walton declares, “Photographs are *transparent*. We see the world *through* them.”¹ He compares this kind of ‘seeing through’ to seeing through eyeglasses, mirrors, or telescopes.² The mechanical manner in which a photograph is produced allows us to see the referent *through* the photograph; “viewers of photographs are in perceptual contact with the world.”³

It was also as “the record of a perception” that Ernst Gombrich defined painting.⁴ Norman Bryson admonishes Gombrich for this misunderstanding, describing it as “*fundamentally wrong*” insofar as it suppresses, in his estimation, “the social character of the image, and its reality as *sign*.”⁵ Bryson insists on the social and cultural dimensions of the world available to interpretation *through* a painting, and John Tagg, for one, does this for photographs, arguing that they are signs through which class-, race-, or state-based power relations are represented, rather than records of reality.

¹ Kendall L. Walton, “Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism,” *Critical Inquiry* 11 (December 1984) 246-77, 251.

² André Bazin states the case for photography’s transparency somewhat more emphatically: the photograph “shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it is the model.” It is not a sign, but rather a contribution to the natural world, in the order of a flower or snowflake. (André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in *What Is Cinema?*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray, vol. 1 (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2005) 14.

³ Walton 273.

⁴ Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) xii; abbreviated *VP* hereafter.

⁵ Ibid.

For Bryson, Gombrich's mistake is an error of "The Natural Attitude," a term lifted from the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl to title the first chapter of his book *Vision and Painting*. According to Husserl, the natural attitude is our everyday encounter with the world, which presumes that the world is always already present, prior to my reflection upon it. In the natural attitude, he writes, "I find ever present and confronting me a single spatio-temporal reality of which I myself am a part.... This 'reality,' as the word already indicates, I find existing out there.... 'The' world as reality is always there."⁶ It is a profoundly naïve, but ordinary way of being in the world, which Husserlian phenomenology efforts to correct through its insistence that the subject is always implicated in the world and vice versa.

Insofar as a viewer of a painting might see in it an "image-object as if it were the image-subject present to direct perception," she encounters it in the natural attitude. Scholars describe this as the domain of a particular kind of painting: *trompe l'oeil*. Indeed, Bryson's chapter, "The Natural Attitude," begins with an analysis of what he terms a most "revealing story about painting in the West."⁷ Taken from Pliny's *Natural History*, it is the oft-claimed origin story for *trompe l'oeil* painting.

Zeuxis produced a picture of grapes so dexterously represented that birds began to fly down to eat from the painted vine. Whereupon Parrhasius designed so lifelike a picture of a curtain that Zeuxis, proud of the verdict of the birds, requested that the curtain should now be drawn back and the picture displayed. When he realized his mistake, with a modesty that did him honor, he yielded up the palm, saying that whereas he had managed to deceive only birds, Parrhasius had deceived an artist.⁸

According to Pliny, a painting ought to be so perfect a copy of the world that its status as both a painting and a copy can be overlooked.

⁶ Husserl qtd in Ibid., 4-5.

⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁸ Pliny qtd in Ibid., 1.

Zeuxis approaches Parrhasius's painting in the natural attitude, and Parrhasius's painting facilitates this by concealing its status as representation. For Bryson,

Parrhasius's painting is an image in the natural attitude, insofar as it is

self-effacing in the representation or reduplication of things. The goal towards which it moves is the perfect replication of a reality found existing 'out there' already, and all its effort is consumed in the elimination of those obstacles which impede the reproduction of that prior reality: the intransigence of the physical medium; inadequacy of manual technique; the inertia of formulae that impede, through their rigidity, accuracy of registration.⁹

Its relationship to the world, or its subject matter, is "essentially optical," as if a kind of passive transcription, and its goal is thus transparency.¹⁰ It is not the painter's effort, but the perfectly reproduced world that we should see. It is in *trompe l'oeil* that this painterly effort to conceal its status as a sign through self-effacement is most dramatically realized; "an artist aims to create an illusion convincing enough to deceive the eye of the beholder by making a flat surface appear three-dimensional when the painting is finished. Thus, in a sense, his technical skill is meant to go undetected."¹¹

For Bryson, Pliny's tale establishes the goals of art to be the disavowal of its fundamental materiality. Cast as an effort to achieve an "essential copy," all traces of the process of production are purged, including the features of style, which would only interfere with this goal. Within this paradigm, style "appears as an inert and functionless deposit encrusting the apparatus of communication."¹² The traditional method of art historical connoisseurship proceeds as if a forensic analysis of telltale details—drapery, hands, hair, ear lobes—through which "style *betrays* itself, in the manner of a crime."¹³

⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹¹ Célestine Dars, *Images of Deception: The Art of Trompe l'Oeil* (New York: Phaidon Press, 1979) 7.

¹² Bryson, *VP*, 7.

¹³ Ibid., 7.

According to Pliny, the painter who can best efface himself and his effort is victorious; painting's goal is thus transparency. Its manner ought not to betray itself. While the connoisseur, the certain professional, might discover some telltale sign of an artist's style in the detail of the drapery, Zeuxis does not. Instead, Zeuxis believes that the curtain—the world reproduced in the painting—is actually present, as available to him as the world is in the natural attitude.

But it is in reaching out to touch the painted curtain that Zeuxis discovers the mistake of the natural attitude: the curtain, much like the world 'out there,' is not (only) given to be seen (via perception), rather it is (also) given to be interpreted as a sign with social and historical dimensions. To understand *trompe l'oeil* as painting in the natural attitude is to overlook the way it simultaneously effaces and discloses its status as representation. Zeuxis does 'realiz[e] his mistake' and yields the prize to Parrhasius. Parrhasius's curtain, ultimately, gives itself away. The viewer realizes that the curtain has "no being apart from [its] constitutio[n] as [an] image-subjec[t]," and this enables a phenomenological reflection, which marks a further departure from the natural attitude, "from the habitual givenness in our relation to things; instead of being there, ready to hand, they become obstinately painterly, merely representations."¹⁴

Instead of being only a mode of painting in the natural attitude that posits transparency as its goal, *trompe l'oeil* is also understood according to the disclosure of its trick. Inasmuch as it declares the obstinacy of its materiality, its goal is self-implication. As Caroline Levine writes, *trompe l'oeil* is "an art that compels us to reflect on the

¹⁴ Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, *The Ecstatic Quotidian: Phenomenological Sightings in Modern Art and Literature* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007) 220.

making of art.”¹⁵ Following Jean Baudrillard and Bryson, she understands trompe l’oeil as a simulacrum meant to implicate itself according to the artifice of its construction. “Even though trompe l’oeil appears to rely on mimesis,” writes Susan Siegfried, “it remains an unusually closed and self-referential system of representation that problematizes its mode of signification.”¹⁶ By limiting the interpretation of self-reflexivity to *problematization* or *self-implication*, these scholars however cynically undercut what it means to reflect on the making of art. It is as if they imagine trompe l’oeil’s project to be one of catching the conventions of western art red-handed in the act of illusion, thereby condemning illusion and isolating it from any of its imaginative power.

By limiting their interpretations of trompe l’oeil to its self-reflexivity these scholars, perhaps surprisingly, reprise something of John Ruskin on the subject, insofar as Ruskin complains that trompe l’oeil redirects the viewer’s attention from the imaginative power of a painting to the materiality of the constructed object.¹⁷ Moreover, they re-write that which Ruskin observed as its failure according to the discourse of self-criticism, most readily and suspiciously associated with Greenbergian modernism. And while I agree that trompe l’oeil’s capacity to redirect spectatorial attention to the materiality of the art object is a critical part of its artistic deployment, I want to resist stopping short at this point alone. It is not as if trompe l’oeil has unique purchase in the history of art for drawing spectatorial attention to an artwork’s materiality.

¹⁵ Caroline Levine qtd in Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, *Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe l’Oeil Painting* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2002) 362.

¹⁶ Susan Siegfried, *The Art of Louis-Léopold Boilly: Modern Life in Napoleonic France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 183.

¹⁷ Caroline Levine, “Seductive Reflexivity: Ruskin’s Dreaded Trompe l’oeil,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56.4 (Autumn 1998) 366-375, 369.

Leo Steinberg writes, “All major painting, at least of the last six hundred years, has assiduously ‘called attention to art.’”¹⁸ He describes the effect of reality in the paintings of the Old Masters as being, “as it were, between quotation marks.”¹⁹ Of the Sistine Ceiling, he observes, “the work is a battleground for local illusion, counter-illusion, and emphasized architectural surface—art turning constantly back on itself.”²⁰ Of the stria figures in the corners of Niccolò di Pietro Gerini’s *Crucifixion* (1387) (Figure 0.1), he writes “their eager demonstrative gestures towards the Christ turn the illusionist scene of the Crucifixion back into a picture of it—complete with its own patterned frame. The artist here,” he continues, “does exactly what [Clement] Greenberg admires as a significant find in a crucial Cubist picture by [Georges] Braque: ‘(Braque) discovered that *trompe l’oeil* could be used to undeceive as well as to deceive the eye. It could be used, that is, to declare as well as to deny the actual surface.’”²¹

Greenberg rewrites *trompe l’oeil* according to the goals of modernism. Braque and Picasso did not employ *trompe l’oeil* within their collages to perpetuate the Renaissance goals of mimesis and to compel belief in their (deceptive) images, instead they use it for its capacity to undeceive, insofar as it ultimately discloses the material surface of the painting upon which the illusion is rendered. Unlike the viewer of William Harnett’s *trompe l’oeil* *The Old Violin* (1886) (Figure 0.2), who, according to a Cincinnati newspaper, bet \$10 that a painted scrap of newspaper was an actual piece of newspaper pasted to a board, the viewer of Braque’s Cubist picture, according to Greenberg, is undeceived and incredulous, rather than deceived and credulous to its

¹⁸ Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972) 71.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Greenberg qtd in Ibid., 72.

trompe l'oeil illusion. Braque's viewer navigates the painting's "ceaseless optical oscillation," until he can resolve it, ultimately as the flatness of the picture plane.²² "The abiding effect is a constant shuttling between surface and depth, in which the depicted flatness is 'infected' by the undepicted. Rather than being deceived, the eye is puzzled; instead of seeing objects in space, it sees nothing more than—a picture."²³

For Greenberg it is the "use of art to call attention to art" that is the mark of modernism.²⁴ This is in contrast to realist or illusionist art, which dissembles its medium, "using art to conceal art."²⁵ If the effect of pre-modernist paintings has to do with the way they "dissemble the medium, conceal the art, deny the surface, deceive the eye, etc.," then their viewers seem to be wholly credulous to their illusion or realism. In this way, Greenberg conjures a credulous spectator of pre-modernist paintings, one who cannot "register two things in concert, to receive both the illusion and the means of illusion at once."²⁶ He projects the revelatory account of the trompe l'oeil viewing experience onto the history of spectatorship; at first the (credulous or pre-modern) viewer sees past the concealed brushwork of the painterly illusion, until recognition of (or attention to) its materiality as painting (via modernism) allows him to discover his error. Instead of its illusion of objects physically present in space, he now sees only their representation as a picture. Narrated as such, trompe l'oeil, like modernism, corrects for the error of credulous spectatorship, teaching viewers to discover the signs of a work's construction. Braque and Picasso use trompe l'oeil to this end, discovering, according to Greenberg, its potential to undeceive.

²² Ibid., 75.

²³ Greenberg qtd in Ibid.

²⁴ Greenberg qtd in Ibid., 68.

²⁵ Greenberg qtd in Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 75, 74.

The artist's mastery by way of the trompe l'oeil painting instead becomes, by way of the *incredulous* spectator, an opportunity for spectatorial mastery. Wholly skeptical of a painting's illusory effect, "we now believe that we are living in a world of codes, in a world that is encoded, and is, thus, artificial, manipulated and manipulable, mutable, clonable, mechanically and digitally multipliable and remasterable."²⁷ Such thinking insinuates its own kind of mastery over the existence of anything that might elude human knowledge—a noumenal beyond, according to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, or the real, according to the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan. Accordingly, as Melinda Szalòky helpfully articulates, "we have begun to imagine, and to believe that... 'everything that exists, all existing things, are really just signs.'"²⁸

If we limit our understanding of trompe l'oeil to its disclosure of the trick, then we cover over our experience of vulnerability to its illusion according to our regained mastery over its deployment of signs. But insofar as the trompe l'oeil trick accommodates even an infinitesimal experience of disorientation, it allows for something that is "held out to be ungraspable and unknowable for thought, something that should remain a promise, a residue never to be used up, a limitation within thought set or constituted by the nature of the thinking self" to re-emerge.²⁹ Indeed, inasmuch as Parrhasius deploys this mode of painting in the representation of a curtain that refuses to be pulled back, he figures something of the Void of the unattainable object that Slavoj Žižek argues is the task of art today.³⁰

²⁷ Melinda Szalòky, "The Reality of Illusion: A Transcendental Reevaluation of the Problem of Cinematic Reality," *Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies* 1 (2009) 7-22, 19. Accessed May 17, 2012. <http://www.acta.sapientia.ro/acta-film/C1/film1-1.pdf>.

²⁸ Ibid., qtg Theodor Adorno.

²⁹ Ibid., 20.

³⁰ Žižek summarized in Ibid., 19.

Žižek suggests that the fringes of this impenetrable beyond are represented in films, especially in the genre of the western, in the trope of the frontier as a literal horizon.³¹ In the *trompe l'oeil* tradition, “there is no horizon, no horizontality.”³² The curtain, for example, of the stage or the magic theater, or perhaps of a window, in contrast to the horizon, represents the threshold of a penetrable beyond. But, it is the painted curtain, in its refusal to yield, which reinsinuates the unreachability of a transcendental beyond into the archetypal *trompe l'oeil* scenario. In Chapter 1, “The Curtain as the Site/Sight of Credulous Spectatorship,” I locate the curtain as a site/sight of credulous spectatorship throughout not only a history of *trompe l'oeil* painting, but also of visual culture—from the stage to the cinema. I trace this iconographical motif from Pliny through *trompe l'oeil* painting to contemporary photography to explore the recurrence of this visual trope and its confrontation with the space of the credulous spectator.

My use of examples from 17th-century Dutch painting to 21st-century German photography, from the ancient Greek theater to the cinema is not intended to overlook the often enormous differences between them, although perhaps it does this, or at the very least allows that work to be done elsewhere. Instead, I opt to attend to these examples in terms of their congruencies, which exist objectively and historically. The methodology aims to resemble something like a compilation of discoveries, inspired both by my experience as a curator of a not-fully cataloged photography collection and by the approach of Tacita Dean for her found photography book project, *Floh* (2001). Let loose in the collection stacks at Bryn Mawr College, the boxes of photographs I found there

³¹ Žižek summarized in *Ibid.*, 12-13.

³² Patricia Allmer, *René Magritte: Beyond Painting* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2009) 71.

became the pool from which to gather samples; Dean, in turn, trawled flea markets to collect and amass her sampling of photographs. She compiled recurring subjects—an Audi, a pair of women, twin girls—while “never looking for anything specific, instead coming across appealing images by chance. So too, we might suppose, the two Audi drivers came across each other fortuitously: one, noticing how strange it was to encounter a matching car, could not resist capturing the moment.”³³

In Mark Godfrey’s article on *Floh*, the author plays the delighted reader, exclaiming, “As we turn each page with anticipation, we relive Dean’s experience of coming across the images in the flea market, each moment of enchanted discovery.”³⁴ For my exhibition at Bryn Mawr College, *Double Take* (2011), this spectatorial sense of discovery was very much part of my curatorial aim, but beyond its delight I hoped that the pairings would “recreate, to a degree, my initial encounters with these photographs, by demonstrating how they initially withheld their meanings from me, challenging me to discover some of them over time and through repeated viewings.”³⁵ I wanted to convey the opacity of the photographs through juxtapositions that prompted the viewer to look longer in order to discover more about the photographs than they may have done otherwise. I aimed to trouble notions of photographic transparency, the idea that these images had a single and fixed meaning. Similarly, Godfrey observes this in Dean’s project: “it is not as if the photographs Dean found had one fixed and clear meaning in their original context.... The initial, and eventual, meanings are opaque.”³⁶

³³ Mark Godfrey, “Photography Lost and Found: On Tacita Dean’s *Floh*,” *October* (Autumn 2005) 90-119, 93.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

³⁵ Carrie Robbins, “Double Take,” *Double Take: Selected Views from the Photography Collection at Bryn Mawr College, 1860s – Present* (Bryn Mawr: Bryn Mawr College, 2011) 7.

³⁶ Godfrey 99.

In contrast with Dean's artistic project, my job in collections was an archival project, and my invitation to exhibit was meant to introduce my findings to the wider campus community. What this came to require from me, most dramatically, was a seemingly endless supply of my text to accompany now (and forever) the objects piled in these boxes, which otherwise were unidentified, untitled, and unremarked upon. *Floh*, on the other hand, supplies no text. Dean has been emphatic about this; she writes, "I do not want to give these images explanations, descriptions by the finder about how and where they were found, or guesses as to what stories they might or might not tell. I want them to keep the silence of the flea market, the silence they had when I found them, the silence of the lost object."³⁷ Dean articulates something of the reticence I felt about attaching text to the objects I was finding, knowing that once I supplied the signified, the easy name or best guess about the object, they would function as if transparently according to those descriptions. It would take more work to detach that language or to consider the object differently, than to name it. My naming efforts thus *tamed* the photographs, perhaps in the way that Roland Barthes means when he writes, "Society is concerned to tame the Photograph, to temper the madness which keeps threatening to explode in the face of whoever looks at it."³⁸

By turning the photograph into art or information, my words tamed some of the undecidability, multivalence, or madness at the heart of these photographs. Beyond that, the archival dictate to reorganize those photographs that were filed together according to their shared subject matter (Egypt, the Sistine Ceiling, family snapshots, for example) now according to the names of their makers (Frith, Braun, Allison) not only identified

³⁷ Dean in *Seven Books* qtd in *Ibid.*, 92.

³⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) 117.

these objects as artworks rather than as illustrations or as documents, which some of these once were when they were used to study the objects they represent, it also recognized the individuals who made them as artists rather than technicians, machine-operators, or heads of studios; but it also insinuated a priority of importance for those objects whose maker could be ascertained (or at least guessed) over and above those that remained anonymous. By refusing to supply text and by culling photographs of people she does not know by anonymous makers, Dean allows photography's opacity to stand; while her selection and display of these found objects in book form does relate it to a kind of archival practice, it is a practice that simultaneously insists upon the surfeit and lack of meanings available in both the photographs and the archive, which the act of naming or describing covers over.

Godfrey notes the importance of Dean's (anti)archival act relative to its particular historical moment. "For Dean, facing digitalization, analog photography offers a messy and necessary kind of memory. Photographic memory is untamable rather than pristine, chaotic rather than censored."³⁹ The institutional initiative to digitize the college collection was that which made my work in the photography stacks possible. Digital cataloging organized the messiness of the collection into a database consisting of digital boxes to be filled by standardized constraints: artist's name, title, year, medium, artist's life dates, date of accession, etc. The experience of filling in these boxes with information that would be easily searchable resonates for me when I read Godfrey's remarks that "digitalization leads to more organized forms of archiving. Will there still be flea markets full of old photographs in the near future? Will there be jumbles of unedited snapshots? Probably not. But what is so important about this? What is so wrong with efficient

³⁹ Godfrey 114.

archives of images?”⁴⁰ As I filled in the database’s boxes, I felt the obsolescence for any future searcher of the kind of experience that I had when opening an unmarked box of photographs – the charming experience of surprise and discovery perhaps only available when one doesn’t know what to expect. As I filled in the digital boxes, I was supplying the expectations. I was eradicating the mode of finding to which I’d been privy, a “mode of finding,” which as Godfrey wonderfully articulates, “is important because it reveals to the finder the unexpected, points to unacknowledged desires and fears.”⁴¹

While the loss of this kind of experience prompted me to structure my exhibition with what I hoped would be surprising pairs of images, so as to recreate something of my experience of discovery and of the photographs’ profound opacity or withholding of information rather than window-like transparency, I soon learned that digitalization’s efforts to name or archive did not necessarily eradicate the possibility of surprising discovery nor of the object’s withholding. Having recently presented a paper on Andrew Bush’s *trompe l’oeil* photographs of envelopes, which I discuss in Chapter 5, a colleague surprised me with a printout from the online catalog shared by Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges of another photograph of an envelope.⁴² This photograph, held in the collection at Haverford, had eluded my Bryn Mawr-centered cataloging efforts and thus my own discovery. Entitled *66 dead, 4/5 leafed clovers* (2008) (Figure 0.3), the black and white photograph, measuring roughly 14x19 inches, of a slightly bulging and oft-handled envelope, was a work by Tacita Dean. How telling to have the anxiety about digitalization’s threat to this mode of finding, which I’d shared along with Dean, relieved and upended by another of her works.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 115.

⁴² Thanks to Nathanael Roesch for surprising me.

Beyond that, Dean's envelope, which she shot straight on so that it seems to emerge slightly from the surface upon which it sits, accommodates something of a trompe l'oeil illusion. Scrawled legibly upon the envelope are its presumed contents, 66 dead, 4/5 leafed clovers, but even this photographic transparency will not produce the clovers for us; they remain hidden from our view by the envelope which contains them. She employs a compositional strategy of emergence, typical of trompe l'oeil representations, so that the envelope seems present, inciting perhaps a desire to touch or to see inside. But this envelope inasmuch as it is photographed can never be opened to deliver its contents, just as Parrhasius's curtain inasmuch as it is painted, can never be pulled back to reveal what is hidden behind it. The opacity of this representation challenges what might be (mis)characterized as the natural attitude of photography: its transparency. In Chapter 5, "Transparent Envelopes," I consider Roland Barthes's description of the photograph as a "transparent envelope," especially insofar as this later characterization in *Camera Lucida* (1980) seems to fly in the face of his earlier insistence on deconstructing photography's (seemingly transparent) content delivery system. The odd metaphor asks us to see through the bulkiness of the printed photograph, its image's 'envelope,' to the image's referent. It was because the photograph seemed to show no trace of its construction that photography could become as deceptive as trompe l'oeil painting. It was this effect of photographic transparency of which Barthes had been suspicious in his earlier essays. But in this last consideration of photography, Barthes makes room for belief in photography; he plays the part, I want to say, of the credulous spectator.

But this return to belief comes in the face of decades of postmodern efforts, including Barthes's own, to unmoor our supposedly naïve credulity relative to photography. Scholars insisted that we understand the discursiveness of photography, its necessary constructs and deployments, its lack of transparency and ultimately its unreality. Notably, their efforts feel motivated by a corrective impulse, which reveals their reliance on belief as the natural spectatorial attitude relative to photography. The postmodern insistence on becoming incredulous and skeptical spectators in the face of photography has had the effect of re-writing the history of photography as if it had a kind of then-and-now, them-and-us logic—then, they, those primitive and misguided spectators, believed simplistically and absolutely in the reality and presence of the photographic image, whereas now, we skeptics who know better understand the constructs of the photographic image and its capacities to deceive. Beyond this, it has had the effect of splitting our understanding of the medium itself—into one that was once straightforward and objective (analog) and one that is now manipulable and deceptive (digital). Across the board, I want to insist, these are misleading binaries. Photography has always been a simultaneously indexical and manipulable medium, requiring an active negotiation of belief and disbelief.

We can look at a sign—a painting or a photograph, for example—according to its aspect as either a material signifier or an immaterial signified; moreover, as we look, our experience vacillates between these. An oscillation between disclosure and illusion has always been fundamental to the viewing experience not only of *trompe l'oeil*, but also, as Steinberg demonstrates, of the past 600 years of painting. I want to restore this sense of oscillation to the account of *trompe l'oeil*, which otherwise tends to be narrated as

painting that either deceives or undeceives. Pliny's tale presents *trompe l'oeil* as a scenario that accommodates two conflicting beliefs. It is not just a tale of painting in the natural attitude, nor is it just a tale that corrects for the error of the natural attitude. Instead, Pliny's tale articulates the way that painting allows for the spectatorial oscillation between positions of belief and disbelief, according to the painting's oscillation between transparency and opacity. *Trompe l'oeil* stages the fundamental duality of the field of representation and its necessary (but often disavowed) address of the spectator.

In Chapter 2, "Graspable Objects," I revise Jonathan Crary's suggestion that it was the stereoscope in the 19th century, which newly insinuated vulnerability into the experience of the observer. Whereas the intertwining of vision and touch, according to Crary, secured an experience of visual mastery in a pre-19th-century paradigm of vision, I suggest that the perceived need for 'reciprocal assistance' from other senses, such as touch, already demonstrates the subject's experience of susceptibility to visual deceptions. *Trompe l'oeil* painting takes advantage of this vulnerability, exposing it, only to re-conceal it as play, just as Crary claims the stereoscope did.

In Chapter 3, "Representing the Photograph as a *Trompe l'Oeil* Image-Object," I consider the *trompe l'oeil* representation of photographs in paint, especially in John Peto's paintings of the 19th century. By making another type of image the subject of his painting, Peto thickens the layers of illusion available in his *trompe l'oeil* works. *Trompe l'oeil* representations of image-objects, such as photographs, refuse to settle into either category of image or object; the *trompe l'oeil* jolt of discovery that what seemed to be materially present is instead merely representation does not halt its visual vibration between these two aspects. The discovery allows us to see the materiality of the painting

and of the photograph, as well as that material object's image: the seeming presence of the photograph and the one-time presence of the photographic subject. It is not that we see the photograph through the painting in the natural attitude, nor that we see only its status as a sign, but that we see the subject alongside (necessarily *through*) its material conditions; it is knowable, but not entirely; its trompe l'oeil mode discloses, while preserving something of its unknowability, the unreachability of a noumenal beyond.

I suggest that the trompe l'oeil representation of photographs and image reproductions, such as engravings or commercially reproduced objects, becomes additionally meaningful when we consider the historical context of widespread image proliferation in the 19th century, wherein images were readily translated from one medium to another. Trompe l'oeil lets the markers of material difference between these media seem discoverable, at the same time that it demonstrates their intertwinedness. In Chapter 4, "Auratic Disclosures," I consider the way trompe l'oeil's attention to the materiality of image-objects might remind us to see the material conditions of digital images in the contemporary era. So-called anxiety about the digitization of photography tends to center on the fear of being tricked by increasingly invisible manipulations of the image. This logic reinvests in the myth of a one-time truth-value for photography, or of an authentic photograph, returning the appropriate mode of our analysis to the connoisseurship of individuating marks; it reinvests in that which Walter Benjamin named the aura.⁴³

Trompe l'oeil paintings imitate the aura of the objects they represent by carefully rendering their signs of use or manufacture, while disguising their own marks of

⁴³ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007).

manufacture. Moreover, inasmuch as the objects represented in trompe l'oeil paintings are images that are already reproductions of other images, they stage an ironic impossibility. It was, Benjamin argued, our willingness to accept a reproduction in place of the object it represents that destroyed the unique aura of the work of art. This willingness to accept the representation in place of the thing itself is alternately staged and critiqued in the trompe l'oeil painting, not just to restore the aura of the original or to expose it as merely an illusion. Instead, these marks simultaneously indicate the loss of aura while displacing that aura upon the reproduction; the availability of an aura oscillates relative to our encounter therewith. Indeed, the representation of these marks, inasmuch as they reinstall our distance from the object, makes room to discover Žižek's 'Void of the unattainable object.'

In Chapter 4, I also compare the representation of auratic marks to Benjamin's recommendation to translators. Like those who fear we might mistake a digitally manipulated photograph for a 'straight' photograph, Benjamin worries that we might mistake a translation for the original text. He reinstalls the aura of the original, requesting that translators indicate their interventions—with marks of their own; he advocates the stutters of literal translations which disclose their intervention into the original rather than the smoothly communicated versions of the originally expressed ideas. Nonetheless, seeing or reading these signs of interruption falls to us, and it is with this onus that I conclude the penultimate chapter, considering digital photography by way of the tricky but emphatically analog photography of Thomas Demand.

To the extent that my prose might not always cover over my abrupt transitions from an object from one century to another object from a different century, I intend

something of the effect of an interruption to draw attention to the seams along which the dissertation is constructed. And to the extent that my mapping of the congruencies between these otherwise disparate objects or ideas sometimes seems readily meaningful, I intend the transparency of this argumentational effect. Readers, like viewers, occupy a position that allows their oscillation between regard of the interrupting signifier and enjoyment of the signified. Caught between reading and seeing, between believing and disbelieving, I know but all the same; this is the fundamental structure of our encounter with the space of representation. And this too is the adventure of *trompe l'oeil*.

Chapter 1. The Curtain as Site/Sight of Credulous Spectatorship

[Parrhasius] entered into a competition with Zeuxis, who produced a picture of grapes so successfully represented that birds flew up to the stage-buildings; whereupon Parrhasius himself produced such a realistic picture of a curtain that Zeuxis, proud of the verdict of the birds, requested that the curtain should now be drawn and the picture displayed; and when he realized his mistake, with a modesty that did him honour, he yielded up the prize, saying that whereas he had managed to deceive birds, Parrhasius had deceived him, an artist.⁴⁴

—Pliny, *Natural History*

At least since Pliny's ancient tale of Zeuxis tricked by Parrhasius, written accounts of duped or credulous spectatorship have served as persuasive rhetorical devices. In this tale Zeuxis loses an artistic contest to Parrhasius whose painting of a curtain is so convincing that Zeuxis asks him to draw it back so that he might see the picture behind it. Art historians typically invoke this account as the origin story for trompe l'oeil painting practice. Parrhasius represents his subject—a curtain—so convincingly that Zeuxis, the credulous spectator, mistakes it for the (represented) thing itself.

Insofar as Zeuxis misapprehends the image of a curtain as a real curtain, he establishes the trompe l'oeil mistake of credulity. That is, throughout the writing of art history, the term, trompe l'oeil, operates as a kind of shorthand for the mistaking of an image for a reality, for one's ignorance of the image's status as image. This shorthand pivots upon (establishes and requires) the role of a credulous spectator, whose Zeuxian ignorance is frequently called upon and cited in accounts of the paintings' reception. Such accounts are often meant to illustrate an aberrant form of primitive spectatorship—one in contrast to which a discerning spectator should model him or herself—or they are

⁴⁴ Pliny: *Natural History*, Book XXXV, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) 309, 311.

meant to convince readers of an artist's or a medium's accomplishment. This chapter considers the iconographical site of the curtain in Pliny's tale, tracing it across history and media for its relation to credulous spectatorship. Instead of dismissing this continual reinvestment in and redeployment of the curtain and the believing spectator as a trope or mere gag, I argue that it stages a pleasurable and necessary spectatorial negotiation of belief and disbelief relative to visual representation.

The representation of a curtain in an illusionistic manner recurs throughout the history of art. A favorite illusionist trick among 17th-century Dutch painters is the representation of a curtain, not only within the space of a room represented, but also as if it were attached to and hovering in front of the material support of the painting. In Johannes Vermeer's painting *A Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window* (circa 1659) (Figure 1.1) a green curtain billows illusionistically at the threshold of the painting, seeming to hang from the painted rod that extends across the width of the canvas. The illusion confronts our presence as spectators before the canvas, even perhaps mocking our belief in the rest of the painting's representational fiction by interrupting its seeming coherence.

Vermeer's represented curtain conforms to the 17th-century practice of covering paintings with a protective curtain, like the one behind which Gabriel Metsu's maid peeks in another Dutch painting of similar subject matter, *Woman Reading a Letter* (circa 1665) (Figure 1.2). But Vermeer has us caught between zones of representation; between a zone that bars our entry (almost as much as the table between our space and hers) existing for us as optical surface only and another that implies our entry into the space, our having pulled back the curtain to see. It turns the representational logic of linear perspective

inside out. Instead of receding, the objects seem to come forward into the space of the viewer. For this reason, trompe l'oeil subject matter tends toward vertically-oriented and shallow-spaced or flat compositions; i.e. letter racks, objects hung on or attached to doors or boards, bookshelves, curtains, etc. Norman Bryson describes the sudden intrusion of these represented objects into the space of the viewer as a shock; “instead of the objects’ obeying the subject’s sovereign gaze, they slip out...: they look back.”⁴⁵ By disclosing its status as representation, the painting corrects for the Cartesianism of the natural attitude, which originally presumed not that this was a painting, but that this (painted) set of objects was laid out for my mastering gaze.

It is over the course of one’s viewing then, that trompe l'oeil reveals itself (or is discovered by the viewer, depending on the assignment of agency) to be representation. Writing this according to its capacity to shock rewrites the natural attitude of this mode of painting—wherein its image was mistaken for a reality—as a modernist effort to undecieve.⁴⁶ Recognition of the materiality of this painting as painting allows the now incredulous viewer to discover, instead of the frivolous enjoyment of its represented image, its status as a picture and the accomplishment of its maker.

Understood in this way, the representation of a curtain functions only as a symbol of revelation; via the trompe l'oeil discovery that Vermeer’s curtain is painted, the truth of its material status is revealed. This cuts short, however, the powerful calling structure of trompe l'oeil painting, which compels our belief in the fiction of an image (that there is something unseen behind Zeuxis’s curtain), at the same time that we are made aware of

⁴⁵ Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990) 143.

⁴⁶ In his essay on Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin describes the experience of the modern city according to the navigation of its shock effects. The cinema incorporates this strategy of shock in its rapid succession of images, according to his essay on the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. (Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007) 165, 238.)

its status as representation. In his painting *The Holy Family* (1646) (Figure 1.3), Rembrandt van Rijn paints a curtain as if pulled back to reveal a painting of the holy family. Like Metsu, he represents a historical practice of attaching protective curtains to the uppermost frames of paintings; but unlike Metsu, he severs this representation from the internal narrative of painting. Rembrandt's painted curtain is not there for the figures within the painting, as it is for Metsu's maid, instead it is there for us, appearing as if on a brass rod attached to the upper left and right corners of its frame. Eric Jan Sluijter describes the broad strokes and thick highlights with which Rembrandt paints the curtain and its rod as evidence of Rembrandt's self-conscious (hence, modern) disclosure of the materiality of his painting. But, he continues, the curtain, rod, and frame have an entirely different light source than the scene of the holy family does, which competes with the disclosure of its materiality and enhances the illusion that the curtain, rod, and frame exist apart from the "painting," which appears to be only that of the scene of the holy family. By painting his curtain as if it coincides with the dimensions of the painting, rather than the represented room, Vermeer similarly severs its representation from the internal narrative of the painting. But by placing it as if at the threshold of the room, Vermeer disguises its trompe l'oeil disclosure.

Gerrit Dou's *Painter Smoking a Pipe in a Window* (circa 1647) (Figure 1.4) employs a curtain, but in a way that makes its role either within or as if apart from the represented scene undecideable. The curtain is represented as if attached to an undecipherable darkened span, which might represent the painting's simple black frame, except that its slight edge conforms to the framing of the window represented within the image. Dou's paint application does not assert its materiality, and his light source "from outside!,"

Sluijter observes, insinuates that it is shared by both the curtain and the scene inside the window. Neither his paint application nor representation of light disrupts the fiction of the painting. It is not clear that Dou wants to picture his pipe-smoking painter as if part of a painting protected by this curtain, but the representation (and seeming-presence) of the curtain keeps this possibility in play. Instead, Dou's painting does not insist as much on the unveiling of a single illusion, as it does on our continual negotiation of its unresolvable layers of illusion and material reality throughout the duration of our viewing.

The representation of a curtain, in this way, foregrounds the scenario of painting as one that oscillates between veiling and unveiling, concealing and disclosure. The pulled back curtain assures us that this is a painting, at the same time that the shared light source ("from outside!") re-enlivens our sense that the painter and the curtain seem to be here for us. Dou's painter emerges from the curtained and darkened space of a rounded window into the light, casting his shadow back on the frame upon which he also leans. As his middle fingertip gently transgresses this most interior window ledge, our conviction in his presence (coming forward across the ledge into our space) turns into our delight in the painted illusion. This fingertip belongs to a hand that rests upon a book, lying upon that same windowsill, but the verso pages of that book spill out from the ledge, transgressing the window's threshold even further than his fingers' grasp. Our delight in negotiating the threshold of illusion or reality in this painting extends beyond the frame of the windowsill to the paper label that appears to be nailed to it. Seemingly attached to this frame, however, in the way that a label would have actually been attached to a picture frame, the window frame once again becomes a picture frame. Its practical usage

for identifying a painting conforms to convention, just as the curtain's presence conformed to conventions for protecting paintings. The bent corner of the label suggests that we might peel it off of the frame, but any attempt to do so reveals both the label and the picture frame to which it seemed attached to be yet part of the picture.

Victor Stoichita argues that the 17th century was “a period obsessed with the ‘aesthetic boundary’ and the period that marks the birth of intertextuality” and that its “episteme was concentrated on the definition of the ‘ontological cut’ effected by the frame of all paintings.”⁴⁷ Stoichita attends beautifully to the way that *trompe l’oeil* elements, including the depiction of framing elements, *pierce* the seemingly enclosed painting. “The reproduction of ‘real openings’ in painting,” by which he means windows, niches, doors, for example, “can be regarded as the image’s ‘autobiographical confession’ ... [as] confirmation of a meditation on the structural consubstantiality between the picture frame and all other types of enframement.”⁴⁸ The depiction of enframing devices, in addition to the actual painting’s frame, increases the painting’s fiction “by the power of 2... establish[ing] itself twice as a representation.”⁴⁹ Elsewhere however he seems to contradict this conclusion about the painted frame’s doubling the signification of the image’s representation. “Although the function of an effective picture frame is to act as a caesura between ‘art’ and ‘reality,’ the painted frame serves to blur this boundary.”⁵⁰ Instead of seeing this as a contradiction within Stoichita’s summary of the effects of the painted frame, perhaps it is more productive to see this as evidence that the painted frame allows us to maintain contradictory beliefs.

⁴⁷ Victor Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting*, trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 30.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

To explore the way the painted frame blurs art and reality, Stoichita also turns to Rembrandt's *Holy Family*. This example has two painted framing devices: the arched and seemingly carved frame that surrounds the 'nativity' scene, as well as the trompe l'oeil curtain that seems attached to a painted rod that spans the width of the work. This second framing device, which Stoichita calls the "binomial false curtain/frame" has a long history, which he briefly tracks from the *velum* of Medieval altar paintings, where its veiling or unveiling corresponded to its liturgical function. Stoichita observes that by the 16th and 17th centuries this religious purpose "virtually disappears," at which time the curtain becomes widely used in "presenting works of art of a private nature" and to "[protect] the painting from dust and bright lights. It is only open when the proprietor wishes to show the painting or look at it."⁵¹ The representation of a curtain as if open might have compelled viewers to see past the status of the painted curtain to instead gaze upon the rarely seen painting.

This desire to pull back the curtain to see the painting returns us to Pliny's emblematic scenario of Zeuxis tricked by Parrhasius. Indeed the scenario was explicitly invoked by Leiden poet Dirk Traudenius, when he referred to Dou, as "the Dutch Parrhasius" or den Hollandschen Parrhasius.⁵² Traudenius writes, "If Zeuxis saw this banquet, he would be deceived again:/ Here lies no paint, but life and spirit on the panel./ Dou does not paint, oh no, he performs magic with the brush."⁵³ For contemporary Dutch critics, the goal of the art of painting is perfectly summarized by the antique anecdote: the ultimate deception of the eye. As Sluijter writes, Phillip Angel, a 17th-century critic,

⁵¹ Ibid., 60-61.

⁵² Eric Jan Sluijter, *Seductress of Sight: Studies in Dutch Art of the Golden Age* (Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 2000) 209.

⁵³ Ibid.

“places great weight on imitation and the power of painting to obscure the boundary between appearance and reality.”⁵⁴ To do so, Dou typically employed the framing device of a window in his paintings. But instead of allowing us to imagine his painting as a “window on the world,” as typically characterizes the Italian or Albertian project of perspective paintings, Dou reverses the point of view from one of looking through the window and out at the world, to one of looking in the window to the home. Yet seeing into the home does not seem to be the goal here either. Our ability to see in is interrupted by the figures he puts at the windows or even the curtain-like tapestries that are draped there. Frequently, his light source is placed outside the window, illuminating the objects in the foreground—at the windowsill—and not anything inside the house. Furthermore, his painted windows feature prominent sills used to display meticulously depicted objects in the foreground. As Sluijter writes, “The window motif – which he began using in his paintings in the 1640s – seems to have been developed in order to display this wealth of objects to their best advantage for the benefit of the viewer. The windowsill provides a highly suitable surface on which to arrange as a still-life all sorts of items painted in detail in the immediate foreground; they have a place there in a relatively natural way.”⁵⁵

The windowsill also becomes a site of experimentation for Dou, allowing the placement of his figures to suggest a kind of forward projection, as if breaking through the picture plane. Sluijter describes this as “a superb transition from the painting’s space to that of the beholder... creating the illusion of proximity.”⁵⁶ At the windowsill, the figure can grasp the frame, seeming to emerge from within the bounds of the picture’s enframing; this recasts the painted picture frame, which Dou’s master Rembrandt

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 231.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 232.

employs in his *Portrait of Agatha Bas*, 1641 (Figure 1.5), as a painted windowsill.

Instead of grasping the picture frame like Bas, Dou's figures grasp (*Maid servant with an Oil Lamp in a Window*, circa 1660) (Figure 1.6) and even seem to lean out of the window, exciting a feeling of contact between the figurative space of the painting and the real space of the spectator.

Stoichita cites J. Chapelain's 1630 letter to Antoine Godeau, which describes the spectator's 'surprised eye' as establishing the dependence between two levels or plots within a painting.

...a good draughtsman would never have only one plot, and if he accommodates others in recesses or in the distance, he will do it in such a way that they will have the necessary dependence on the first, but more so for they will at least be taking place on the same day, because the eye can only see one thing at a time and because its action is limited to one particular place; from which we would proceed if we did not want to bring the painting within the reach of the human eye which must judge it, so that instead of persuading and inspiring through the lively representation of things, and forcing the surprised eye to deceive itself for its own good, we should make it aim to enlighten the imagination as to the falseness of the objects represented, and we would cheat the art of its ending which wants to touch the spectator with its opinion on truth.⁵⁷

One such temporally- and/or spatially-split painting, *Dutch Woman Bringing Fish into the Room* (Figure 1.7) by Pieter Aertsen, as we know it from its engraving by Jacob Matham, separates the recessed scene from the main plot by a threshold across which two figures hang a curtain. Stoichita characterizes this "tactical use of the curtain" as "unveil[ing]' the picture as though it were a theater."⁵⁸

Returning to Pliny's tale of the contest between Zeuxis and Parrhasius, a historical footnote attends its publication, clarifying that "the pictures were hung on the

⁵⁷ Qtd in Stoichita 14.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 16.

front of the stage buildings in the theatre.”⁵⁹ The viewing context of a theater for these pictures further underscores the way that an awareness of representation foregrounded the trompe l’oeil contest. According to Xenophon’s account, Parrhasius is already an accomplished painter by 399 BC, dating his practice to the decades after the new Greek theater practice of using *skenes*, or small huts in which actors could change or await their entrances. The building of *skenes* accompanied the turn from a communal participation that characterized Greek theater-in-the-round to linearly structured plots performed by a few actors and requiring a temple or other building as the backdrop/locating scenery. By 425 BC, these *skenes* were built in addition to a long front wall or *proskenia*. While the use of an actual curtain to cover over this stage, as would become typical for proscenium theater production in the 18th century, is not yet the case, the 4th-century BC shift toward realism and a focus on stage action, viewed against a wall and even through a kind of frame-like focusing device, accompanied a shift in the experience of the spectator from one of participant to one of viewer. Thus, the “stage buildings in the theatre,” on the front of which Pliny describes Zeuxis and Parrhasius’s paintings as hanging, would have been the backdrop that intervened against Greek spectatorial participation; indeed, it was this framing structure or *proskenia* that arguably trained Greek theater-goers to become viewers, not participants.

These “stage buildings in the theatre” are representations, but they are a typical form of illusion in the theater. As James R. Hamilton writes, “stage scenery is a set of devices which lead us to see (or think we see) rooms and such when what is in fact before us is so much canvas, wood, and paint, not *really* rooms at all, false appearances. We may also find this deceptive, even when we are not deceived; for the spectator has to be

⁵⁹ Pliny 307.

asked not to disbelieve and this requires an effort of will (after all, ‘objectively’ the spectator should disbelieve.)”⁶⁰ Hamilton refers here to a conventional spectatorial disposition in the theater, that of the suspension of disbelief, wherein theatergoers bracket the play’s status as representation so that they can be carried along by the narrative into the reality of the play. Hamilton takes to task ordinary descriptions of the theater as the creation of illusions or as trading in deceptive appearances. To understand theater accordingly is to (really) forget the institution and its set of cultural conventions as the framing devices that an audience is invited to temporarily forget or bracket in order to let themselves feel deceived. But this is not to say that theater-goers are actually deceived. “In the theater at least, we are invited to regard as true of the thing what is presented as true of the representation of it... In the theater, audiences are intended to regard certain relevant presentations about the representation as true of the thing it represents.”⁶¹ This is different than saying, for example, that “in the theater, audiences are intended to take a representation for the thing itself.”⁶² If this were the case, the audience would truly be deceived, having been “seduced into massive and wildly hallucinatory journeys [which] of course may be possible; but no one can reasonably suppose that it is the typical situation.”⁶³

At least in the modern theater, the proscenium curtain is a conventional marker of the theater institution’s frame, through which an audience looks and is made aware of the theatrical fictions on stage. If audience members were not made aware of the play’s status as fiction, they would become “the Jonathan,” or the country bumpkin of Royall Tyler’s

⁶⁰ James R. Hamilton, “‘Illusion’ and the Distrust of Theatre,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 41.1 (Autumn 1982) 41.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

1782 play, *The Contrast* (1782), who has never been to the theater and mistakes the experience for a magic show. Without knowledge of the theater's institutional conventions, he is unaware of the signification of the curtain in particular and is able to be deceived. He exclaims, "Why, I vow, as I was looking out for him, they lifted up a great green cloth and let us look right into the next neighbour's house. Have you so a good many houses in New York made so in that 'ere way?"⁶⁴ Tyler restages Pliny's scenario of the credulous spectator at the site of the curtain within the text of his satirical play. This insertion of the play within the play centers on the experience of the audience, doubly underscoring the representational status of the play, so that Tyler's audience can take knowing pleasure in Jonathan's foolish mistake.

From Zeuxis to Jonathan and beyond, deceived and credulous spectators populate accounts of the illusionistic arts. Tom Gunning convincingly argues against the mythology of the "credulous" spectator within the context of early cinema in his seminal essay, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator." He refuses to take reception accounts of supposedly duped cinema viewers at face value. He disputes typical reception of what is perhaps the Ur-story of cinematic illusionism, in which spectators at a screening of the Lumière brothers' film *Arrival of a Train at the Station* (1897) reportedly "reared back in their seats, or screamed, or got up and ran from the auditorium" at their misperception of the train's coming off the screen, straight toward them.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Qtd in *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁵ Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995) 114.

Gunning observes, “This audience of the first exhibitions exists outside of the willing suspension of disbelief, the immediacy of their terror short-circuiting even disavowal’s detour of ‘I know very well...but all the same.’”⁶⁶ This story casts and reinforces film’s power in terms of its “unprecedented realism, its ability to convince spectators that the moving image was, in fact, palpable and dangerous, bearing towards them with physical impact...the imaginary perceived as real.”⁶⁷ Taking this story at face value perpetuates an underestimation of the basic intelligence and reality-testing ability of the average film viewer, and this tends to be retrospectively cast upon historic film audiences, as if to demonstrate our development as film viewers since a prior stage of child-like or savage credulity.⁶⁸ But importantly, Gunning doesn’t just throw out this founding myth and its account of astonishment and terror; instead he historicizes it to better understand the “uncanny and agitating power” these images exerted on audiences.⁶⁹ To do so, Gunning contextualizes early film reception within its broader visual culture, as, for example, a development of magic theatre, as practiced by Georges Méliès and John Maskeleyne. “The magic theatre laboured to make visual that which was impossible to believe. Its visual power consisted of a *trompe l’oeil* play of give-and-take, an obsessive desire to test the limits of intellectual disavowal—I know, but yet I see.”⁷⁰

But this characterization of early cinema as *trompe l’oeil* is more generous than the one Gunning will go on to employ. That is, he will cut short the pleasurable vacillation between belief and incredulity that *trompe l’oeil* shares with the cinema, when

⁶⁶ Ibid., 115.

⁶⁷ Ibid.,

⁶⁸ This is Gunning’s critique of Christian Metz’s reading of the Lumière anecdote: “he introjects this primal audience, removing it from historical analysis by internalizing it as an aspect of a presumably timeless cinema viewer” (115).

⁶⁹ Ibid., 116.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 117.

he writes that whereas “the film first presents itself as merely image,” trompe l’oeil gives the initial appearance of being “actual butterflies, postcards, or cameos.”⁷¹ He does this in order to establish the kind of shock effect that the suddenly animated photographic projection had on early cinema-goers and how this shock differs from the gradual disquiet that arises from the divergence of what we see and what we know in the trompe l’oeil experience. But perhaps inadvertently, his doing so seems to insinuate that viewers of trompe l’oeil did not know the images at first to be images, but rather mistook these representations of objects for actual objects.

This seems to reverse the understanding of trompe l’oeil that Gunning gained from Martin Battersby’s account, which he cites, wherein trompe l’oeil not only aims for accuracy of representation, but causes “a feeling of disgust in the mind of the beholder.”⁷² This disgust is the product of the “conflict of messages” that characterizes trompe l’oeil reception: the simultaneous knowledge *that one is looking at a painting* while also feeling compelled to test its painted-ness via closer examination and touch. In this account, it is not that the viewer first sees an actual butterfly, but that s/he *simultaneously* has a competing set of beliefs and compulsions about the representation/reality of that butterfly.

Gunning’s argument is a compelling effort to demonstrate early cinema’s difference from the dominant narrative form of later cinema, by indicating its continuities with contemporaneous and earlier forms of visual culture – such as magic theater – that he describes as an entertainment culture of “attractions.” But I wonder if he doesn’t draw too firm a line between the sorts of “attraction” that were 19th-century magic theater and

⁷¹ Ibid., 119.

⁷² Martin Battersby qtd in Ibid., 117.

those of trompe l'oeil painting. Beyond that, in arguing that viewers of trompe l'oeil paintings mistake representation for actuality, Gunning reinstates the same kind of spectatorial naivete for them that he rejects for viewers of early cinema. According to Gunning's own terms, I think the display and spectatorial dynamics, as well as the reception histories that characterize trompe l'oeil painting anticipate those that Gunning uses to characterize his "cinema of attractions."

Beyond cinema's shock factor, Gunning describes some additional differences between it and trompe l'oeil painting: the latter's small scale and its evocation of a desire to reach out and touch it. Gunning characterizes this desire to touch trompe l'oeil painting as exactly opposite the viewing response to both cinema and the magic theatre, which causes viewers to "rear back" and keep their physical distance. But what spectatorial reactions to both trompe l'oeil painting and early cinema have in common, however, is the feeling that the represented objects are emerging from the screen or painting, rather than receding into represented space. What compels viewers to reach out and touch the trompe l'oeil painting is the feeling that the represented objects look as if they are actually there, emerging from the surface of the painted background. In the case of *The Arrival of the Train at the Station*, what supposedly caused viewers to "rear back" was the sense that the projected image was approaching from the screen toward viewers at a high speed. Gunning describes this as direct audience address, wherein the images "rush forward to meet their viewers."⁷³ This forward momentum is almost "an experience of assault" and is markedly opposite the *sutured* experience of narrative cinema, in which the audience is caught up in the narrative action or identifies empathically with the psychology of a character. Accordingly the viewer does not get lost in the fictional world

⁷³ Ibid., 121.

of the film, but “remains aware of the act of looking, the excitement of curiosity and its fulfillment.”⁷⁴

The forms of this direct address in the cinema of attractions might range from an implied emergence from the screen into the space of the viewers (as in the Lumière film) to characters’ nods or gestures off-screen toward the viewer, but it might also occur in its situation of cinematic display, wherein a showman lecturer would introduce the film or direct the audience’s attention throughout its run. Much like a “fairground barker,” this showman presenter would set up a heightened sense of reception and suspenseful presentation. For example, Gunning includes one script used to introduce *The Black Diamond Express*, another one-shot film of a locomotive rushing toward the audience:

Ladies and Gentlemen you are now gazing upon a photograph of the famous Black Diamond Express. In just a moment, a cataclysmic moment, my friends, a moment without equal in the history of our times, you will see this train take life in a marvelous and most astounding manner. It will rush towards you, belching smoke and fire from its monstrous iron throat.⁷⁵

I think the showman operates here as a framing device, following from Stoichita and Louis Marin’s observations about Alberti’s “*storia*” figures. These “*storia*” figures are placed as if they were in the position of a commentator, admonitor, or advocator: “someone who alerts us, who shows us what is happening.”⁷⁶ For Marin such *storia* figures are framing devices, especially because they are typically placed at or near the image edge; similarly, Gunning’s showman sits at the edge, even outside of the image space and yet prescribes the work’s reception: constitutively supplemental or parergonal, as in Jacques Derrida’s reading of the motif of the frame in Kant. Marin identifies the

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Qtd in Ibid., 120.

⁷⁶ Alberti qtd in Louis Marin, “The Frame of Representation and Some of Its Figures” in Paul Duro, ed., *The Rhetoric of the Frame: Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 84.

storia figure not as the delegate of the spectator, but as the delegate of the frame, indicating the particular mode of the spectator's gaze, indicating, for example, an expression of astonishment, which the spectator should mirror.⁷⁷

The extent to which we can see these forms of direct address at work in the experience of a trompe l'oeil painting, depends to some extent on revising the dominant (and Gunning's repeated) assumption about trompe l'oeil: that it is apprehended from the first as the object it represents, rather than as a representation of that object. This will be part of my endeavor throughout this text. I am not looking to throw out this dominant understanding, for I think it is an important constitutive (but not necessarily primary) aspect of not only the spectatorial experience, but also of centuries of productive theorizations about trompe l'oeil. My hope is to complicate this assumption, showing that it can still stand, even if viewers were not, even initially, completely ignorant of the painting's status as representation.

If the showman figure in early cinema functions like a *storia* figure, framing the film's reception for the audience, we might venture even further outside the frame of the work to consider the ways in which published newspaper accounts function like showmen to directly address viewers of 19th-century trompe l'oeil paintings. Not only do these accounts relate something of the public situation of display in which these paintings were exhibited and the interactive debates in which viewers took part, but they also set up an expectation about what it is that will be seen for viewers who have not yet (or will never) attend the exposition. Here, we can follow and add to Gunning's own use of journalistic accounts that were showman-esque in tone. He cites one journalist, who in

⁷⁷ Marin identifies the peasant figure at the most righthand edge of the Gobelines tapestry, Entry of Louis XIV into Dunkirk, and describes his expression as one of astonishment, according to Charles Le Brun's visual representation of it.

1896 describes Lumière's cinema as provoking "an excitement bordering on terror." In saying so, Gunning assesses that the journalist both "prais[es] the new spectacle and explain[s] its success."⁷⁸

Let us turn our attention to some of the Zeuxian tales published in 19th-century American newspapers to describe the deceived viewers of trompe l'oeil paintings. In response to William Harnett's painting *The Old Violin* (Figure 0.2), which was shown at the Thirteenth Cincinnati Industrial Exposition in 1886, a journalist for one Cincinnati newspaper describes the spectacle of a credulous spectator:

"A painting [*The Old Violin*] has been added to the Art Gallery, which has created a furore. It has ... a crowd of bewildered gazers continually about it. It represents an old violin hanging on an old time worn door. By it hangs the bow, and under the violin is a sheet of music with dog-eared corners. A blue envelope is stuck in the warped lower corner of the door, and above it is a newspaper clipping, that a man wanted to bet \$10 last evening, was pasted on the board.... An old gentleman stood and gazed at it last night, through his spectacles, and finally said, "By Jove, I would like to play on that violin," enthusiastically judging that many a touching melody had been wafted from its well resined strings. The gentleman never noticed the deception until he went closer to it and he was 'completely got.' A policeman stands by it constantly, lest people reach over and attempt to see if the newspaper clipping is genuine by tearing it off. They want to pull at the envelope as well."⁷⁹

Elsewhere, another journalist writes: "Crowds still stand doubtingly before the famous Harnett violin hanging on the old door, uncertain as to how much is painting and how much reality."⁸⁰ And another local reporter, writing for the *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, similarly describes the work's effect on credulous spectators, but this time identifies as one himself:

"So real is it [*The Old Violin*], that one of Captain Wise's specials has been detailed to stand beside the picture and suppress any attempts to take down the

⁷⁸ Gunning 121.

⁷⁹ Qtd in Paul Staiti, "Illusionism, Trompe l'Oeil, and the Perils of Viewership," in *William M. Harnett*, ed. Doreen Bolger, et al. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992) 31.

⁸⁰ Qtd in *Ibid.*, 32.

fiddle and the bow.... The writer being one of those doubting Thomases who are by no means disposed to believe their own eyes, was permitted to allay his conscientious scruples by feeling of it, and is prepared to kiss the book, and s'help me, it is painted. Mr. Harnett is of the Munich school, and he takes a wicked delight in defying the possibilities."⁸¹

Notably, this journalist admits that credulity is not his standard disposition: that he's more typically a "doubting Thomas," and not, we might say, a 'believing Jonathan.' But so well-painted is Harnett's *Old Violin* that it can turn even the incredulous and worldwise skeptic into the credulous country rube: note his colloquial turn of phrase, "s'help me."

Paul Staiti observes very carefully the spectatorial dynamics at play in Harnett's reception, refusing to buy into a more simplistic account of trompe l'oeil, in which what is initially belief is then followed by assured revelation.

What all these pictures invite viewers to do (and what the newspaper accounts claim that viewers did do) is to engage in a cycle of reading in which response is a steady movement toward the picture. Viewing begins with a distanced, genteel, dispassionate sighting of an entire painting: the ensemble of objects in it, their shapes, formal pattern, and position in a shallow space. Response is held in check at first, but it leads to a more proximate, lively, and finally, more troubled encounter with a surrogate reality. Teased closer by an ingratiating display of objects, the viewer moves to a new discourse. Leaving the large compositional issues behind, a viewer of *Old Models* of 1892 [Figure 1.8], for example, begins to constrict attention to irresistible details: the rosin dust beneath the violin strings, the ragged edges of ripped paper, the individual coils of violin strings, the broken green threads wriggling out of a ripped leather bookbinding, the crisp hairline crack in a ceramic pitcher on which the original painted design is indistinct beneath a thick glaze. He can believe, as one person wrote of *After the Hunt*, that 'the wood *is* wood, the iron is iron, the brass is brass, the leather is leather.' Without knowing it the viewer might find himself at the mercy of the picture, an unwitting conspirator in an illusionistic transaction. He may have begun his visual experience from a viewer's sovereign space, but he eventually ruptures or 'brackets' it, then accepts, enters, and consensually participates in the illusionistic theater. In the case of the most accomplished trompe l'oeil and the most inexperienced viewer, his defenses crumble. He loses command over his

⁸¹ Qtd in Ibid.

controlled, polite response. He may doubt the picture, doubt himself, and begin to flounder anxiously in a fictive world.⁸²

But even Staiti's close reading of the complex play of belief and doubt narrates the viewing experience as if unfolding sequentially from the former to the latter; insofar as he relies upon the construct of "the inexperienced viewer" whose "defenses crumble," Staiti preserves the notion of the credulous spectator.

Instead of taking the reality of these newspaper accounts at face value, we might consider the way these journalists turn to the credulous spectator as a motif or a rhetorical gesture. We can recall that when one of these writers describes the newspaper clipping within Harnett's painting, he immediately relates the way an onlooker "wanted to bet \$10 last evening, [that it] was pasted on the board." We might imagine that if the newspaper clipping had actually been clipped from and not representative of a newspaper, the clipping could have been one such enthusiastic review of the painter's accomplishment. Newspapers were a common visual motif in 19th-century American trompe l'oeil paintings. Sometimes the legible aspects of these represented clippings used inflammatory and bombastic language to declare the power of the artist's painted illusion, which reflected actual journalistic practice. John Haberle's *Reproduction* (circa 1886) (Figure 1.9) flaunts its illusionism via painted newspaper headlines in the bottom left quadrant of the painting. The painted but seemingly overlapping newspaper clippings, which look as if they have been affixed to a board, have headlines and text that proclaim: "A Counterfeit" and "John Haberle the Counter[feiter]/[de]ceives the eye into the belief that."⁸³

⁸² Ibid., 38.

⁸³ Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., "'Sordid Mechanics' and 'Monkey-Talents': The Illusionistic Tradition," in *William M. Harnett*, ed. Doreen Bolger, et al. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992) 25.

But even without having to be represented within the bounds of the painting's frame, the newspaper participated in the work's reception. That is, the writer, much like a *storia* figure or showman lecturer, directs our response, invoking the credulous spectator to show us the expression of astonishment or of bewilderment that we should have in front of the work, or that we should now know better than to have. Or both; that is, the newspaper writer assures us that we will not approach the representation and mistake it for a reality (certainly not initially, and thus, never fully); but he also encourages us to disavow our knowing better and to appreciate the simultaneous belief and doubt that the work provokes in us.

The newspaper has a powerful 'calling structure' much like the one Stoichita observes of Metsu's servant (who attracts) and his painted curtain (which eclipses), shaping our reception by interacting with both the representation and the self-awareness of the representation. Both the painted and the read versions of the newspaper work to attract and eclipse the spectatorial experience of the painting. Within the representation, the painted clipping attracts at the very least our desire to read what it says, only to deny the fulfillment of that desire by blurring or omitting some of the text. The circulating newspaper compels us to go see the exhibition of an astonishing painting, at the same time that it insists that we always already understand the painting's intention to astonish us, confirming its status as representation.

Just as newspaper accounts of duped spectatorship were inserted into the subject matter of *trompe l'oeil* paintings, much like Jonathan's credulity was absorbed within the plot of Tyler's play, similarly credulous spectators populate the plots of some early films. We might consider R.W. Paul's *The Country Man at First Sight of the Animated Pictures*

(1901) or Edwin Porter's *Uncle Josh at the Moving-Picture Show* (1902), which spoof the country rube, who lacks the cultural framework needed to distinguish an image from real life. Uncle Josh is shown seated in a box to the left of the screen, where he applauds the bowing and dancing woman on the screen as if at a theater, until he becomes so compelled that he jumps over its threshold to join her dancing onstage. Further separating the screened images from the theater box in which he sits is an elaborate proscenium curtain, like that of Parrhasius, in front of which Uncle Josh looks at and reacts to the projected images. His presence in front of the curtain doubles its framing device for the audience of Porter's film, becoming the source of the joke, especially when prudish Uncle Josh proceeds to tear down the film of a flirtatious young couple.

In 1902, *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* is made amidst the historically changing role of the theater spectator, much like I suggested was true of the theatrical context for Pliny's tale. Audiences of Vaudeville revues would have been encouraged to participate in something like the way that Uncle Josh does, or at the very least through their vocal expression of participation. But in the cinema, spectatorial participation becomes restricted; viewers were to be passive, silent, and well-behaved.⁸⁴ Parrhasius's curtain reappears, here as a proscenium curtain, at another historical revision of the spectator's role at the theater: from active participant to silent viewer. Where Zeuxis had reached out to "tear down" Parrhasius's curtain, to see the painting hidden beneath it, Uncle Josh reaches out, past the curtain, to intervene in the represented content, an inappropriate romantic advance, tearing down the white cloth that had served as the projection screen. Miriam Hansen understands Porter's film as a didactic or disciplinary

⁸⁴ Miriam Hansen, *A Cinema in Search of a Spectator: Film-viewer Relations before Hollywood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) 59.

instruction to film spectators, a version of the rule of “look, don’t touch.”⁸⁵ But as Wanda Strauven has argued, it is more likely that Porter’s film already “was meant as a farce, a comedy to amuse the early, yet by then no longer inexperienced, cinemagoer.”⁸⁶ And beyond this, it was capable simultaneously of provoking “nostalgia for the more interactive days of so-called precinema.”⁸⁷ The hand-cranked projectors, showmen lecturers, live music, nonstop walk-in (and walk-out) screenings, as well as talking and smoking spectators, that is to say any of the (potentially) interactive elements of early cinema, were suppressed as the spectatorial role moved toward one of passive reception.

It is the role of “confrontation” that further links trompe l’oeil painting to the culture of attractions, to which Gunning adds early cinema; this “confrontation” is a directness of display which focuses attention on “the immediate reaction of the viewer.”⁸⁸ Gunning describes early film programs as offering a series of short films, “all of which offer the viewer a moment of revelation.”⁸⁹ It solicits a particular reaction from its viewer, and in this way is “exhibitionist” – which he adds is quite opposite the prevailing 19th-century ideals of detached contemplation (the fourth wall in 19th-century naturalist theater or that described by Michael Fried as “absorptive.”)⁹⁰ “These early films explicitly acknowledge their spectator, seeming to reach outwards and confront.... The viewer’s curiosity is aroused and fulfilled through a marked encounter, a direct stimulus,

⁸⁵ Hansen 59.

⁸⁶ Wanda Strauven, “The Observer’s Dilemma: To Touch or Not to Touch,” in Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, ed., *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011) 157.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Gunning 122.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Although Gunning relates Fried’s discussion of 18th-century painting here, he does not account for the historical time lapse. Fried’s discussion of the prevailing ideal of artistic reception in the second half of the 19th-century turns to Manet and the way his subjects address the viewer in the mode of facingness, which acknowledges rather than ignores the inherent theatricality of the primordial condition of a painting: that it is made to be beheld.

a succession of shocks.”⁹¹ Tempering the “violence” of this experience, he allows that at the very least “some sense of wonder or surprise” is at the heart of early cinematic viewing experience, even “if only wonder at the illusion of motion,” that is to say wonder at the apparatus, or perhaps, at the accomplishment of its maker.⁹²

Charles Musser works to trace a long history of the so-called precinema in his book, *The Emergence of Cinema*, by focusing on the element of the screen. “The genesis of the screen coincided with a profound transformation in Western culture, particularly in Holland (where magic-lantern inventor Christiaan Huygens was working).”⁹³ There, he observes, amidst the seventeenth-century’s Scientific Revolution, a convergence between technological progress and cultural change took place in such a way as to allow the screen to emerge as a form of entertainment. The mystical terror provoked by projecting apparati diminished as a belief in ghosts declined and as witch burnings ceased. For Musser, “The demystification of the screen established a relationship between producer, image, and audience that has remained fundamentally unaltered ever since.”⁹⁴

While it was Dutch scientist Huygens who developed the simple *lanterne magique* in 1659, he did not exploit the magic lantern for its commercial possibilities. Instead it was Danish teacher and lens grinder, Thomas Walgensten, who, living in Paris in the 1660s, developed his own magic lantern and, by 1664, began giving exhibitions. He presented lantern shows to royalty in Lyons (1665), Rome (mid to late 1660s), and Copenhagen (1670).⁹⁵ It is instructive to consider the context of such exhibitions abroad. When Walgensten returned to his homeland of Denmark in 1670 to exhibit his lantern

⁹¹ Gunning 123-124.

⁹² Ibid., 125.

⁹³ Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema* (New York: Scribner, 1990) 19.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 20.

show, he did so in the year of King Frederick III's death. But this was only two years after Frederick III had appointed Cornelius Gijsbrechts, a Southern Netherlandish trompe l'oeil painter, to his court. During his four-year stay in Copenhagen, Gijsbrechts produced a number of trompe l'oeil works for the Perspective Chamber in the monarch's Cabinet of Curiosities, where the king's guests would have been entertained by these modern trickeries, at the same time that the king's interest in these works would have demonstrated his keen knowledge of contemporary developments in the arts and technology, as well as his knowing better about the status of their illusions. At least six of the 22 works produced during Gijsbrechts' stay in Denmark, and now part of the national art collection in Copenhagen, prominently feature a curtain. The painted curtains are represented as if slightly pulled back, appearing to partially obscure and partially reveal either a (painted) letter rack or a (painted) still life. Isolating another element of Gijsbrechts' 1672 painting *Trompe l'oeil of a Letter Rack with Proclamation by Frederick III* (Figure 1.10), we see the painted proclamation within the work, which arguably functions as a kind of signature, or at the very least as an acknowledgment of his painterly accomplishments. Gijsbrechts cites the king's acknowledgment of his artistic ability not only pictorially, but also by demonstrating it in the mode of trompe l'oeil illusionism. This signature or acknowledgement of the work as a work of art would have allowed spectators to sort the levels of representation within the painting. Such acknowledgment of the work's manufacturedness interferes with the popular notion that these paintings only would have fooled viewers about their status as representation. Thus, the demystification of the spectator, which Musser observes as the effect of 17th-century screen practice, occurs contemporaneously in 17th-century painting practice.

Musser attends to this historical moment in the decades following the invention of the catoptric lamp, a forerunner to the magic lantern described in Kircher's 1646 *Ars Magna*, as one concerned with the demystification of illusion, wherein any understanding of illusion as the result of magic was forbidden. Instead, illusion became understood at this time as central to the display of the apparatus. For Musser this marked "a decisive turning point for screen practice when the observer of projected/reflected images became the historically constituted subject we now call the spectator."⁹⁶ Gunning helpfully summarizes this point: "In other words, Musser would see demystification as essential to the existence of the spectator, and points out that a tradition of screen spectatorship preceded Lumière by centuries."⁹⁷ But this demystified spectator, nonetheless, continues to want to believe in the illusion, continues to find pleasure therein; this pleasure is now the result of the disavowal of this demystification.

I am sympathetic with Musser's effort, which is not to locate a new starting point for the history of cinema, nor to do away with the concept of origins all together, but instead to indicate "the possibility of so many starting points that the notion of a beginning is not only diffused but ultimately avoided."⁹⁸ Ultimately, he pursues an alternative perspective of placing cinema within a larger context of, what he calls, "the history of *screen practice*."⁹⁹ I hope that Musser would embrace the notion that this delimited context too might be reimagined as one of multiple or "so many" contexts, one of which might be thought of, following Gunning, as a history of the (in)credulous

⁹⁶ Ibid., 31.

⁹⁷ Gunning 130 FN 2.

⁹⁸ Musser 15.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

spectator, but which moving on from Gunning, extends this history to trompe l'oeil painting practice.

Insofar as turning our attention to 17th-century Copenhagen allowed us to see some intersections across visual media—both painted and projected—perhaps a similar attention to the American center of 19th-century trompe l'oeil painting practice—Philadelphia—will prove productive. Alfred Frankenstein, the principal scholar of late 19th-century trompe l'oeil and still life painter, William Harnett, describes the extraordinary resemblance that Harnett's still life painting has to that of fellow Philadelphia painter, Raphaelle Peale. He writes, "Place a Harnett still life of the middle 1870's next to a Raphaelle Peale of 1815 and it is impossible to believe that they are separated by two generations, that the one belongs to the era of James Madison and the other to that of U.S. Grant."¹⁰⁰ He accounts for this according to a "direct line of descent," but holds off on characterizing it: "if there are any intermediate links between them, they have yet to be discovered."¹⁰¹ While both artists worked in Philadelphia, where something of a continuous tradition of still life painting can be traced, there is little evidence to support Harnett's awareness of Peale's work.¹⁰² The link, as Nicolai Cikovsky argues, is that both employ a common practice of illusionism, in its most extreme form: trompe l'oeil. My question attempts to link these symptoms; does the practice of trompe l'oeil illusionism shared by these historically separated painters relate to the other forms of visual culture then available in Philadelphia?

¹⁰⁰ Alfred Frankenstein, *After the Hunt: William Harnett and Other American Still Life Painters, 1870-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) 31.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Cikovsky 19.

The kind of deception that characterizes the viewing experience of *trompe l'oeil* was not a common goal for all makers of still life painting; “it was a special and historically infrequent occurrence.”¹⁰³ Raphaelle Peale and his father, Charles Willson Peale exhibited “Deceptionist” works at the 1795 Columbianum exhibition in Philadelphia and in exhibitions at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts through Raphaelle’s death in 1825, after which point there is little evidence of a continuing tradition of deceptive illusionism at least as far as we can tell from the titles of exhibited works. But neither Cikovsky nor Frankenstein consider what may have been the most prominent intervening event in the passing years between Peale’s and Harnett’s illusionistic image production: the invention of photography in 1839.

Alan Trachtenberg allows for a productive intertwining of painting and the pre-history of photography and notably does so using Charles Willson Peale’s 1822 painting *The Artist in his Museum* (Figure 1.11). The painting features a standing self-portrait of Peale in the foreground, who lifts a curtain to reveal his Philadelphia museum: a room of shelves, rendered in dramatic linear perspective, housing natural specimens. Trachtenberg describes it as a painting that prepares the way for photography, insofar as photography will be the art form tasked with making visible the order of nature, while providing an exact copy thereof. The painting is divided into two modes of representation: the linear perspective of the room behind the curtain and the *trompe l'oeil* representation of the foreground.¹⁰⁴ Trachtenberg argues that Peale’s gesture, lifting the curtain, positions him as a showman figure, mediating between the tasks of entertainment and instruction, to provide a model for the ambitions of photography.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 20.

¹⁰⁴ Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989) 10.

As Geoffrey Batchen makes clear in his book *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography*, while the technical accomplishment of photography was made official via 1839 publications and decrees, its conceptual and metaphorical origins have a much longer pre-history, which includes some of the visual culture practices I have already been tracing here. Following him and Trachtenberg, I look for additional intersections between early photographic practice and contemporaneous trompe l'oeil painting practice, some of which take place at the level of discourse, wherein reception for both media are characterized by claims of astonishment and deception, as well as seeming presence.

In his book *The Pencil of Nature* (1844), William Henry Fox Talbot struggles to articulate what photography is and how it works. Batchen observes that Talbot seems unable to decide between terms like “render” and “imitate,” or between its “hav[ing] drawn its own picture” or its having been “effected” or “impressed” by the “boundless powers of natural chemistry.”¹⁰⁵ Around the same time, Talbot recounts anecdotes about the reception of his photographs of lace, describing those to whom he showed the images as being “unable to tell the difference between the picture of lace and the piece of lace itself.”¹⁰⁶ As Batchen points out, the story unconsciously seems “to mirror his own linguistic uncertainty about the relationship between image and referent.”¹⁰⁷ Insofar as Talbot’s story relates the possibility of an unknown observer mistaking a picture of lace for actual lace, we can recognize another invocation of the credulous spectator, but this time in the context of the new medium of photography.

¹⁰⁵ Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997) 68; abbreviated *BWD* hereafter.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Talbot invokes the credulous spectator to relate the fidelity of his apparatus's reproductions, but he does so while also observing something undecideable about the status of the photograph. Indeed his text affirms his own vacillation about how to articulate what photography accomplishes and what a photograph is. Photography, at this moment and arguably throughout its history, produces an object that is both credible and incredible, nature and artifice, art and science; it is undecideable. And Talbot shows his photogenic drawing of a piece of lace to an audience who wants its status as representation to be undecideable (Figure 1.12). Talbot reports that he asked his audience, "whether it was a good representation" and that they replied "that they were not to be so easily deceived; for that was evidently no picture, but the piece of lace itself."¹⁰⁸ Despite their skepticism, they nonetheless become Zeuxises for Talbot's purposes. They rhetorically reach out to pull back the piece of lace—which they took to be physically present—even though its representational status had already been disclosed. Talbot illustrates the "strange implosion of representation and reality" that is photography by way of Pliny's iconography: he gives us an image of lace, a fabric used as a curtain.¹⁰⁹

The intersection of *trompe l'oeil* painting, the theater of attractions, and early photography exceeds the discursive realm in the practice of Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre. Before his invention of daguerreotypy, Daguerre was best known for his *trompe l'oeil* scenery designs, which he later displayed, not just as theatrical backdrops, but as objects that were by themselves on view as diorama paintings. One of the most successful of Daguerre's dioramas, according to Helmut and Alison Gernsheim's account

¹⁰⁸ William Henry Fox Talbot, "Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing." Accessed December 17, 2011. http://royalsociety.org/uploadedFiles/Photogenic_Drawing.pdf.

¹⁰⁹ Geoffrey Batchen, "Electricity Made Visible," in *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader*, eds. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Thomas V. Keenan (New York: Routledge, 2006).

of its reception, was a trompe l'oeil curtain, which was a widely admired representation of an immense blue drapery with a gold cord.¹¹⁰ Other dioramas included landscapes, such as *La Forêt de Sénart*, about which admirers declared that they saw a “real stream, trees, and grass”¹¹¹ or another of the Canterbury Cathedral, which resembled a window, through which one could see a construction scene of the cathedral, including a few workmen. One credulous woman reportedly asked to be accompanied down the steps to the building. The diorama pictures measured approximately 22 x 14 meters and were framed by a proscenium-like opening in the wall at the end of a 13 meter tunnel; the audience remained stationary in a cylindrical room (with a diameter of 12 meters and a height of 7 meters) that slowly revolved (rotating 73 degrees, turning on a pivot) to reveal a second diorama picture. Each painting, which was painted on linen for its transparency, was hidden from view by a curtain and was painted in such a way that it was both translucent and opaque, allowing shutters and screens to modify the daylight that entered through a skylight and from long vertical windows behind each painting to dramatic scenic effect. Each viewing of the two dioramas lasted approximately 15 minutes. They had such a strong illusion of depth that spectators reportedly threw coins or paper balls at the picture. Insofar as the reception accounts of the diorama invoke credulous spectators that mistake the diorama's image for reality, the Gernsheims characterize the diorama's effect as one of trompe l'oeil.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand precisely the type of illusion generated by the diorama, as few are extant and we are not 19th-century viewers. If viewers felt provoked to throw coins *in toward* the represented scene, we might infer that

¹¹⁰ Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, *LJM Daguerre: The History of the Diorama and the Daguerreotype* (New York: Dover Publications, 1968) 9.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

the scene appeared to recede in space, following the rule of linear perspective, rather than seeming to emerge toward the viewer. But perhaps like in Peale's painting, this diorama employed two modes of representation: recall Gernsheim's description that the cathedral diorama resembled a window, through which visitors could look at the construction scene. For this window to have compelled viewers to look out from it, we might guess that it was rendered in a *trompe l'oeil* manner, as if emerging from the surface of the diorama, much as the diorama of blue curtain with its gold cord is described; perhaps the cathedral window would have inspired viewers to want to lean through or up against its seeming glass, believing momentarily in its tactility just as they would have wanted to pull the gold cord of the blue curtain, provoked perhaps to touch it, or even like Zeuxis to pull it down.

But again, we must remember the viewing context and allow it to inform the way we understand reception accounts. Viewers would have had to enter a special proto-cinematic auditorium to look at the dioramas, even paying an admission fee. Thus, their knowledge of the image's status as representation precedes their willingness to suspend or bracket that knowledge. As one spectator remarked, they were "an extraordinary mixture of art and nature, producing the most astonishing effect."¹¹² Additional critical reception reported that spectators felt "transported by some magic spell to the scene itself."¹¹³ As Batchen points out, by 1839 Daguerre would claim this same astonishing effect for his daguerreotype.

Returning to the context of 19th-century Philadelphia, German emigrants William and Frederick Langenheim introduced several new photographic

¹¹² Qtd in Batchen, *BWD*, 71, as qtd in Gernsheim 31.

¹¹³ Gernsheim 25.

processes to the United States in the 1840s and fostered the later production of photographic lantern slides in the 1850s. An 1851 article in London's *Art-Journal* described these slides accordingly:

The new magic-lantern pictures on glass, being produced by the action of light alone on a prepared glass plate, by means of the camera obscura, must throw the old style of magic-lantern slides into the shade, and supersede them at once, on account of the greater accuracy of the smallest details which are drawn and fixed on glass from nature, by the camera obscura, with a fidelity truly astonishing. By magnifying these new slides through the magic lantern, the representation is nature itself again, omitting all defects and incorrectness in the drawing which can never be avoided in painting a picture on the small scale required for the old slides.¹¹⁴

Thanks to the Langenheims among others, Philadelphia became the center of the American photographic and lantern-slide industries for several decades.¹¹⁵ Having improved the magic lantern in the 1860s, optician Lorenzo J. Marcy moved his business from Rhode Island to Philadelphia, where he marketed his sciopticon, a double-wicked projector that burned more strongly and brightly. Casper W. Briggs moved his slide lantern business from Boston to Philadelphia in 1872 and remained the nation's dominant slide producer until World War I. Musser observes, "Audiences, accustomed to projected images painted on glass, were overwhelmed by the realism of life-size photographs on the screen."¹¹⁶ Or at least this was the claim of the advertisements for and the journalistic reception of the slide presentations. When some photographic slides by Alexander Gardner, the photographer for the Army of the Potomac, were shown in New York, an 1864 advertisement in the *New York Daily Tribune* announced, "The views...bring the battle fields, their incidents and localities, before us in the most faithful and vivid

¹¹⁴ Qtd in Musser 29-30.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 36.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 31-32.

manner, each view being reproduced on a canvas covering a surface of over 600 square feet.”¹¹⁷ Here we can see the way newspaper and advertising accounts function as surrogate showmen, directing and determining spectatorial expectation and experience of photographic slide shows, just as they will within the next decades for trompe l’oeil painting.

Of Gardner’s slides of the Army of the Potomac, one journalist from the *New York Tribune* wrote, “The dead appear almost to speak; the distant to overcome space and time and be close and palpable.”¹¹⁸ This feeling of or desire for proximity and palpability is perhaps heightened or already fostered by the visual experiences of the Peales’ deceptionist paintings, as well as another optical device, the stereoscope. The Langenheim brothers also introduced the stereoscope to the United States in 1850. It was a hand-held device that positioned two photographic images side-by-side, each taken from a slightly different angle; when viewed together, the two images appeared to combine, giving the illusion of three-dimensional depth. Insofar as the viewing experience gives the impression that the represented content is emerging from the surface of the photograph, the stereoscope shares a visual history with trompe l’oeil paintings that seem to reverse linear perspective, allowing represented objects to seem to emerge from the surface of the painting, as well as with early cinematic works such as *Arrival of the Train at the Station*, wherein the filmed train is shot in such a way that it seems to emerge from the screen toward the spectator, rather than receding into space. Because the viewer holds the binocular peephole-like device in his or her hand, we might imagine how

¹¹⁷ Qtd in Ibid., 31.

¹¹⁸ Qtd in Ibid.

tempting it would have been for some viewers to reach out with the other hand to test the reality of the image's impression of depth.

In an 1859 article for *The Atlantic Monthly*, Oliver Wendell Holmes famously observes that photography and its application by the stereoscope allow form to be “*henceforth divorced from matter....* Give us a few negatives of a thing worth seeing, taken from different points of view, and that is all we want of it. Pull it down or burn it up, if you please.”¹¹⁹ The remark, which appears in the first of his three articles on the subject of photography for this predominantly literary journal, is typically taken as proof of Holmes's belief in photographic objectivity. So sufficient a substitute or copy is the photograph, Holmes can advocate the destruction of the physical object from which its form is taken: “burn it up, if you please.” But to read Holmes in this way is to divorce the form of his rhetoric from the content of his remarks. A closer look at the historical and rhetorical context of his statement complicates its meaning.

Instead of taking Holmes's epigram as an indication of his belief in photographic objectivity, I follow Gunning to instead cast doubt on the naïve credulity of this spectator. Just as Gunning recommends that we not underestimate “the basic intelligence and reality-testing abilities of the average film viewer,” similarly, we should not underestimate Holmes, a physician and Harvard Medical School professor, who vigorously critiqued conventional medical practices, such as bloodletting and homeopathy, as “imbecile credulity.”¹²⁰ Indeed, his “chief relevance today” according to

¹¹⁹ Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (June 1859) 747; abbreviated SS hereafter.

¹²⁰ Gunning 115; Holmes in “Homeopathy and Its Kindred Delusions,” qtd in Charles S. Bryan and Scott H. Podolsky, “Dr. Holmes at 200,” *The New England Journal of Medicine* 361.9 (August 27, 2009) 846-7, 846.

a 2009 article in *The New England Journal of Medicine* is “his legacy as a skeptic:” he was “a key spokesperson for an ‘age of uncertainty.’”¹²¹

My effort here, however, is not a playground rebuttal, a simple reversal of terms; if Holmes’s remark has been understood as reflective of a nineteenth-century belief in photography, my intention is not to upend this to insist that he and his public were instead wholly skeptical. Certainly, Holmes enjoys photography’s “faithful” and “perfect copy” of nature; and at the same time, he understands the processes involved in making the picture, including those that “meddle with” the image—whether through coloring, staging, or error. This vacillation between belief and disbelief, if we can call it that, is, as Gunning observes of early film, “part of the *attraction* of the new invention;” it cultivates an aesthetic of astonishment.

In his essay, Holmes self-consciously adopts the style of the “showman lecturer,” building throughout the course of his essay an atmosphere of expectation that stresses the novelty and astonishing properties of the attraction and its capacity for transformation. Indeed, he admits to using “a certain rhetorical amplitude not doubtfully suggestive of the lecture-room” relative to new inventions, such as the railroad car, the telegraph, or chloroform; but in this essay revises that instinct, deciding that it is “hardly necessary to waste any considerable amount of rhetoric upon wonders that are so thoroughly appreciated.”¹²² Unlike these other inventions, however, it is the “invention of the *mirror with a memory*, and especially that application of it which has given us the wonders of the stereoscope,” which Holmes writes, “is not so easily, completely, universally

¹²¹Bryan and Podolsky 846.

¹²² Holmes, SS, 739.

recognized in all the immensity of its applications and suggestions.”¹²³ By Holmes’s own logic then it is due some rhetorical amplification because, as he observes, photography “has become such an everyday matter with us, that we forget its miraculous nature.”¹²⁴ Rather than a reflection of photography’s dominant reception, Holmes’s essay is an effort to intervene into an already jaded public opinion—an effort to restore a sense of astonishment to “this,” as he writes, “triumph of human ingenuity... [this] most audacious, remote, improbable, incredible...of all the discoveries man has made.”¹²⁵

To restore a sense of astonishment, Holmes first directs our attention to the apparatus itself. He proceeds, in the mode of a scientist, with an itemized and lengthy outline of the technologies involved with the daguerreotype, the photograph, and the stereoscope. This section, notably omitted from Alan Trachtenberg’s well-known edited version of the essay, reads like an instruction manual, dryly detailing the chemicals required for preparation of photo-sensitive plates, the length of exposure, and the processing of the exposed plate. It is relative to the necessary reversal of negative to positive, however, that he begins to employ showier prose. Instead of the truth effect of the negative, he observes its “perverse and totally depraved” qualities. He writes, “the glass plate has the right part of the object on the left side of its picture, and the left part on its right side; its light is darkness, and its darkness is light. Everything is just as wrong as it can be...”¹²⁶ His emphasis here on how incorrect the photographic negative looks is a set-up for a suspense-laden reveal. He continues, “Extremes meet. Every given point of the picture is as far from truth as a lie can be. But in traveling away from the pattern it

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 738.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 740.

has gone round a complete circle, and is at once as remote from Nature and as near it as possible.”¹²⁷

Holmes understands that “astonishment,” as Gunning observes, “derives from a magical metamorphosis rather than a seamless reproduction of reality.”¹²⁸ Holmes dramatizes the metamorphosis of the photographic negative into the photographic positive by suddenly and seemingly inexplicably transforming the style of his prose. “— ‘How far is it to Taunton?’ said a countryman, who was walking exactly the wrong way to reach that commercial and piscatory centre. — ‘bäout twenty-five thäousan’ mild,’— said the boy he asked, -- ‘f y’ go ‘z y’ ‘r’ goin’ näow, ‘n’ bäout häaf a mild ‘f y’ turn right räoun’ ‘n’ go t’other way.’”¹²⁹ The regional dialect of this wise-fool, represented both visually and phonetically, showily enacts the contradiction that is the photograph— at once remote from and near to nature—in the voice of another contradiction—the wise-fool. Doing so acts out what Gunning calls “the contradictory stages of involvement with the image, unfolding, [as in] other nineteenth-century visual entertainments, a vacillation between belief and incredulity.”¹³⁰

Like the country man who must turn around to be set on the right path, the negative must be turned around “to,” as Holmes writes, “give birth to a *positive*—this mass of contradictions to assert its hidden truth in a perfect harmonious affirmation of the realities of Nature. Behold the process!,” he exclaims. The exclamation point follows a statement that directly addresses the reader, rupturing the prose at least as much as the regional dialect of the earlier dialogue. Moreover, the exclamatory statement shifts our

¹²⁷ Ibid., 741.

¹²⁸ Gunning 118.

¹²⁹ Holmes, SS, 741.

¹³⁰ Gunning 119.

attention away from the realistic effect of the photographic positive, back to the means of its production: “Behold the process!”

This exclamatory direct address is repeated just three paragraphs later as he continues to describe the procedures by which the positive is made: “For, lo! when the sensitive paper is laid in the sun under the negative glass, every dark spot on the glass arrests a sunbeam....”¹³¹ His exclamations directly confront the reader and solicit a reaction of astonishment. Furthermore, the direct address of these phrases emulates the direct address of the stereoscope itself—the device he goes on to describe—which accommodates only a single viewer at a time.

To operate the stereoscope one inserts a stereograph—a card with two seemingly identical pictures that are actually taken from slightly different angles—into the stereoscopic viewer, and then looks through it. The stereoscope reproduces the effect of binocular or natural vision; “the everyday truth” as Holmes writes, is that “our two eyes see two somewhat different pictures, which perception combines to form one picture.”¹³² Holmes articulates this perception as if it were motivated by desire, “the pictures are two, and we want to slide them into each other, so to speak, as in natural vision, that we may see them as one.”¹³³ That which is disavowed in natural vision is illustrated and made explicit by the situation of viewing through the stereoscope. Viewers know the difference between what is on the card and what is seen through the viewfinder, and yet the sudden transformation can be astonishing.

¹³¹ Holmes, SS, 741.

¹³² Ibid., 743.

¹³³ Ibid., 744.

Holmes defines the stereoscope according to its astonishing effect of metamorphosis: “A stereoscope is an instrument which makes surfaces look solid.”¹³⁴ That is, when viewed through a stereoscope, the two images of the stereograph combine into a single, seemingly three-dimensional image. This transformation of surface into solid, however, is an effect, an appearance. “By this instrument,” he proclaims, “that effect [of solidity] is so heightened as to produce an appearance of reality which cheats the senses with its seeming truth.”¹³⁵ His words recall those of scientist and lecturer Michael Faraday, who during an 1846 lecture at the Royal Institution describes the experience of viewing the Electro-magnetic Chronoscope as one in which we are “cheated by our senses out of the true observations.”¹³⁶ When viewed in a darkened room, the sudden illumination of the chronoscope’s spinning disk quite accidentally allowed him to observe a single frozen instant of its otherwise continuous motion. Faraday reproduces this experiment on a grander scale for his live audience to expose an illusion of natural vision: although a disk, such as that depicted here, might appear entirely white while in motion, a sudden flash of gunpowder reveals its color as clearly as if it were at rest. Like the chronoscope, the stereoscope reproduces an illusion of natural vision. As Holmes observes of the stereograph, “the pictures are two, and we want to slide them into each other, so to speak, as in natural vision, that we may see them as one.”¹³⁷ Holmes, like Faraday, disrupts our sensory illusion with a sudden revelation of truth, as if to exclaim, ‘See for yourself!’

¹³⁴ Ibid., 742.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Michael Faraday, “Electro-Magnetic Chronoscope.” Accessed February 22, 2013. http://archive.org/stream/yearbookoffactsi1847londuoft/yearbookoffactsi1847londuoft_djvu.txt

¹³⁷ Holmes, SS, 743-44.

Unable to illustrate the illusory effect of the stereoscope within the unillustrated pages of *The Atlantic Monthly*, Holmes uses his authorial intervention to rhetorically perform its astonishing accomplishments. Indeed, he does this in the mode of a showman lecturer, who says, “See for yourself!” His exclamatory direct address directs our looking: “Behold the process!” and later, “Look!” This later exclamation arrives to point out a discrepancy between the stereograph’s supposedly twin images. Of a stereograph of two women at Bern’s Ogre Fountain, he observes, “In the right picture two women are chatting, with arms akimbo, over its basin; before the plate for the left picture is got ready, ‘one shall be taken and the other left’; look! On the left side there is but one woman, and you may see the blur where the other is melting into thin air as she fades forever from your eyes.”¹³⁸ Holmes alerts us to a discrepancy that the illusionism of the stereoscope will overcome, unless, as he exclaims, we “Look!” (Figure 1.13).

Returning to Holmes’s hyperbolic divorce of form from matter, we now recognize in the direct address of his remark, “Pull it down or burn it up, if you please,” a solicitation of our astonishment. Indeed, he prefaces this remark by admitting the extravagance of his speculations.¹³⁹ And we can recognize hyperbole in that which follows: “There is only one Coliseum or Pantheon; but how many millions of potential negatives have they shed,—representatives of billions of pictures,—since they were erected!...We have got the fruit of creation now, and need not trouble ourselves with the core.”¹⁴⁰ Transformed into ‘billions of pictures,’ might we now discard these landmarks of antiquity as we would an apple core? Holmes continues to amplify rather than to diminish the stakes of such ostentatious waste: “Men will hunt all curious, beautiful,

¹³⁸ Ibid., 745.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 747.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 747-8.

grand objects, as they hunt the cattle in South America, for their *skins*, and leave the carcasses as of little worth.”¹⁴¹ Rather than celebrating the trophy-like accomplishment of photography, Holmes warns against the potential for hubris—that hunting for the skins we might devalue and destroy the world we deem photographable, as so many animal carcasses left to rot.

Photography may astonishingly transform matter into image, but not without consequence. One “consequence,” Holmes writes, “will soon be such an enormous collection of forms that they will have to be classified and arranged in vast libraries, as books are now.”¹⁴² It is notably the persistent materiality of these forms which becomes his concern. Beyond this, because the camera lens has no “fixed standard of focal length,” we risk the “possibility of being misled by those partialities which tend to make us overrate” familiar objects, rather than being able to objectively compare them.¹⁴³

When Holmes declares that photography turns matter into form, this is less a pronouncement of his faith in the medium than a rhetorical performance of its astonishing transformation—one directed at an audience who already finds its accomplishment unremarkable. The hyperbole lets him vacillate between belief and skepticism without finally deciding between them. While for Holmes the stereoscope exceeds its popular reception as a “pretty toy” or “a charming novelty,” signaling “a new epoch in the history of human progress,” just what the future of this media will be is to be determined by the imaginations of future users.¹⁴⁴ That is, he concludes by handing over responsibility for

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 748.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

its use and its meaning to us: “Let our readers fill out a blank check on the future as they like,—we give our indorsement [sic] to their imaginations beforehand.”¹⁴⁵

Just as Holmes directs popular reception of stereography by incorporating the rhetorical style of the showman, some photographic slide shows import the showman into their representational content. Henry R. Heyl presented a series of photographs of a man, each with his lips in different positions; shown in quick succession this phasmatropic projection created the illusion that the man, Brother Jonathan, was speaking.¹⁴⁶ Brother Jonathan was the personification of the United States from about 1783 through the War of 1812, when Uncle Sam replaced him.¹⁴⁷ The term Brother Jonathan is a reclamation of a mild aspersion used by British Loyalists against Colonial Patriots and its usage continued through the Civil War, but would likely have been somewhat outdated by the time of Heyl’s exhibition in 1870. Nonetheless, Heyl’s exhibition at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia was “the first public exhibition of moving pictures in which photographs of living objects were shown as if in motion by projecting the views upon a screen.”¹⁴⁸ The phasmatrope consists of a disc that revolves intermittently to project a series of images, so that Brother Jonathan’s lips appear to speak the words simultaneously spoken from behind the screen during its exhibition.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Heyl cites developments in chronophotography as making possible the phasmatropic projections he made. But his project precedes the type of photographic series produced by Eadweard Muybridge while in residency at the University of Pennsylvania from 1883-86, which claims to record movement by breaking it down into many still images.

¹⁴⁷ Any relation between the Brother Jonathan persona and Royall Tyler’s credulous Jonathan character is yet to be established, but the former is said to have entered popular usage in 1783, the year following publication of Tyler’s play in 1782. We might consider that Tyler’s play is a satire, written in the British tradition of a comedy of errors, and that the term Brother Jonathan is a reclamation of a mild aspersion used by British Loyalists against Colonial Patriots.

¹⁴⁸ Heyl qtd in W. Stephen Bush, “Motion Pictures in 1870,” *The Moving Picture World* (July 31, 1915) 826.

Ladies and Gentlemen: We are tonight to see for the first time, photographs of persons shown upon a screen by the aid of a magic lantern, the figures appearing to move in most lifelike ways. How this effect is produced we cannot briefly explain, but you will have the evidence of your own eyes to convince you that this new art will rapidly develop into one of the greatest merit for instruction and enjoyment.

This beginning of greater things is not an imported product but it was perfected right here in Philadelphia, where it adds one more to the list of first inventions of real merit that stand to the credit of the City of Brotherly Love. The photographs were made at 1208 Chestnut Street in the studio of Mr. O. H. Willard, which place may now be well named "The Cradle of the Motion Picture."¹⁴⁹

From its mode of address, "Ladies and Gentlemen," to its calling attention to the apparatus and its description of the apparatus's effect on the audience, Brother Jonathan's script is remarkably similar to the scripts of showmen who had accompanied previous photographic slide shows. Now however, the showman's enframement of the spectacle is absorbed into the subject matter; he enframes and performs the attraction.

Some of the earliest photography already self-consciously addressed its own deceptive illusionism by aligning itself with trompe l'oeil motifs. A carte de visite in the collection of Philadelphia's American Philosophical Society shows a bearded man in an elaborately painted trompe l'oeil studio setting, much like the arched windows that populate Dou's 17th-century Dutch trompe l'oeil paintings. Window sets became popular in studio photography later in the 19th century, but the example of *Bearded Man Posed in an Artificial Window* (Figure 1.14) dates to the late 1860s.¹⁵⁰ In it, a bearded man leans out from an elaborately framed arched window; his right arm rests outside the window along its ledge. As Janice Schimmelman points out this particular tintype was encased in an embossed Potter ferrotype card mount, the Gothic arch frame of which doubles the

¹⁴⁹ Musser 47.

¹⁵⁰ Janice G. Schimmelman, "The Tintype in America," *The American Philosophical Society* 97.2 (2007).

studio's window frame within the image. The raised stars and edges of the frame on the embossed card, which the tintype viewer could have felt by running her fingers across the mount, might have had an additional impact when paired with the trompe l'oeil photography studio set, supplementing its play between haptic and optic experiences.

Although it is unlikely that she knew this particular photograph, though possible that she was aware of the larger 19th-century practice, contemporary German photographer Annette Kelm's *Your House is my Castle* of 2005 (Figure 1.15) almost seems to cite the Philadelphia carte de visite, *Bearded Man Posed in an Artificial Window*. With her hands resting on the ledge of the windowsill, the artist dons a false beard and looks out at the camera/spectator. She strains to maintain an upright posture, by pressing her left shoulder against the window frame, having to do so because the window and the tower in which it is situated lean dramatically to her right. While the window in the carte de visite was a set built for the indoor photography studio, the tower is situated in a wooded landscape in the Italian hillsides, the mannerist *Sacro Bosco* pleasure garden complex built at Bomarzo in the 16th century by Pier Francesco Orsini in memory of his recently deceased wife. There, the leaning tower is joined by sculptures of monsters from antiquity and a giant hell mouth—the terror of Dante's inscription, "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here," is upended by the picnic table that sits just inside its threshold (Figure 1.16). While not trompe l'oeil in any of the ways so far discussed, the park exhibits a mannerist self-consciousness meant to solicit a particular kind of response—astonishment—from its visitors.

Recent reception of another contemporary German photographer, Thomas Demand, reanimates the 19th-century reception of trompe l'oeil painting. Richard Eoin

Nash concludes his review of an exhibition of works by Demand with an anecdote in which he describes trying to peek through the vertical blinds of an office window. Expecting a view into a curator's office, instead he discovers that he has been "fooled" by Demand's photograph *Window* (1998) (Figure 1.17) whose "*trompe l'oeil*" window is capable of convincing a viewer that a representation is a reality.¹⁵¹ Rhetorically Nash turns Demand's photograph into a painting by asserting its effect as one typically reserved for that medium. For other critics too the power and the threat of Demand's *trompe l'oeil* effect is that it troubles the indexical link between the photograph and its referent; this is a point I will address more fully in Chapter 4. But insofar as Demand's photographs, at first glance, might look to be of real places, Nash describes the spectator's experience as one of being tricked. This critic repeats the terms of Pliny's emblematic *trompe l'oeil* tale, casting himself in the role of Zeuxis, the credulous spectator, who mistakes a represented curtain for a real one—one that he wants to look behind.

For his 2009 solo exhibition at Berlin's Neue Nationalgalerie, Thomas Demand hung curtains of weighty gray fabric throughout the space (Figure 1.18). Instead of mounting free-standing walls within Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's glassed and wall-less structure, he opted for curtains to help define the space. His frame-less images (sealed between a layer of aluminum and Perspex) hung from or near the curtains, somewhat improbably as if affixed to their folds or hovering slightly in front of them. Exhibition reviewer Kirsty Bell described this as drawing the focus "away from the constructed images' *trompe l'oeil* effects" to allow instead for "a constant shift in scale and

¹⁵¹ Richard Eoin Nash, "Follies and Falsities: Architectural Photography," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 23: 2 (May 2001) 74.

attention.”¹⁵² I want to say, however, that rather than drawing our focus away from his works’ trompe l’oeil effects, the curtains foreground the work in the Ur-scenario of trompe l’oeil, Parrhasius’s presentation of the painted curtain. By drawing our attention away from trompe l’oeil, Bell wants to avoid reiterating the subject of most of Demand’s critical reception: Demand’s meticulous paper sculpture construction of the scene he then photographs. While she (productively, I think) wants to relocate focus to our spectatorial experience in front of these works, one in which our attention is constantly shifting, she overlooks the way that trompe l’oeil already insists upon the spectatorial experience of the work of art. The drawn curtain not only thematizes the secrecy of Demand’s shrouded meanings, as Bell indicates, but also incites our Zeuxian desire to have it unveiled.

Whereas Demand’s works typically reference a historically rich site, his titles refuse to specifically identify it. Demand’s exhibition display in Berlin included table-like vitrines on which large white books displayed short texts. Similarly, these texts did nothing to help identify the source material for his resulting images. Instead the texts lead the viewer away from the representational content of his image toward considerations of his or her spectatorial experience in front of the work. One such text reads like a (showman’s) script directing and/or describing in second-person address the viewer’s uncertainty: “And what are you seeing? You are watching your own forgetting. Yes, you are gazing out upon the river of forgetfulness.”¹⁵³

In 2011 Demand stepped into the role of curator to organize an exhibition, *La Carte d’Après Nature*, which occurred at two venues: the Villa Paloma in Monaco and at Matthew Marks Gallery in New York. In the latter installation, which I visited, Demand

¹⁵² Kirsty Bell, “Thomas Demand: Neue Nationalgalerie,” *Frieze* (October 26, 2009). Accessed December 1, 2011. https://www.frieze.com/issue/review/thomas_demand3/.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

returned to the curtain as a site upon which to hang three works by René Magritte (Figure 1.19). This time, however, the curtain surpassed its iconographical association with Parrhasius's *trompe l'oeil* feat; indeed, it was deployed in the mode of *trompe l'oeil*, which I describe as a specifically photographic mode of *trompe l'oeil*. That is, Demand wallpapered two of the gallery walls from floor to ceiling with the image of a regularly folding red curtain. Given his prior installation of an actual curtain upon which to hang works of art, its status as photographic wallpaper is not immediately apparent; that is, its flat coincidence with the wall could go unnoticed until it was approached or attended to at all. In the installation at Matthew Marks, the wallpaper curtain was the only piece by Demand included in the show, as such it was listed on the corresponding checklist/map that each visitor received upon entering the space. Here, he realizes the *trompe l'oeil* mode of his photography in the exhibition display; rather than hanging actual curtains, he wall-papers the image of a curtain and builds free-standing white walls to form a (maze-like) configuration of rooms within Matthew Marks' otherwise undivided space. The labyrinthine quality of his built environment further underlines the artist-curator's interest in giving visitors a playfully disorienting experience.

As curator of this exhibition, Demand featured the work of several artists preoccupied by the way representation of reality. Most prominently, he featured the work of a lesser-known Italian photographer, Luigi Ghirri, whose color photographs, spanning the 1970s through the 1980s, frame reality with a self-conscious wink to the often-banal results of this act. His photographs "[document] the collision of everyday life with banal representations of nature, such as those from advertisements..."; they "[show] nature

with a nod to that in the photograph that was also ‘not nature.’”¹⁵⁴ Demand continues, “Ghirri doesn’t select this photo for its realism or its picture-perfect narrative, but for the disorienting effect it creates, in which it looks as if the couple [in his *Alpe de Siusi* (1979)] are walking toward a movie set backdrop, or into a postcard.... This is what Ghirri does best—taking a typical scene, even loaded with clichés of landscape, and making it confusing, strange or unresolved, not unlike what Magritte did in his landscapes. We are torn between belief in the romantic idea of this idyllic vista and doubt about its veracity” (Figure 1.20).¹⁵⁵

As I already mentioned, Demand selected several paintings by Magritte to hang in his show and on his trompe l’oeil wallpaper, at least in its New York exhibition. It is from Magritte’s art journal, sporadically published between 1951 and 1965 and consisting typically of a single postcard, that Demand takes the title of his exhibition. Following Magritte’s interest in the obdurate impossibilities and failings of representation, Demand takes up the “semantically irresolvable connection between ‘nature’ and ‘carte’” that constitutes his title.¹⁵⁶ Arguably he takes up the curtain motif as another nod to Magritte, who featured curtains in his paintings, including *The Human Condition* (1933) (Figure 1.21) and *La Gioconda* (1964) (Figure 1.22). In the former, a grassy field traversed by a dirt path under cottony white clouds is seen through a window framed by curtains, but the view is obstructed by a painting standing on an easel, which shows (at least what appears to be, or what visually matches) the very same landscape we see outside through the window behind it. The viewer is thus challenged to determine which landscape is the real one, but also knows that “of course the answer is neither one.

¹⁵⁴ Thomas Demand, *La Carte d’Après Nature* (London: MACK, 2010) 14.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 73.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 94.

They are both equally made of paint, and painted on the same flat surface. Magritte dryly satirizes the Albertian art historical notion that painting should provide a window onto the world. For him, a painting may be a window, but it is a painted window, and that world is a painted world.”¹⁵⁷ The curtains open to reveal this conundrum of representation.

Christy Lange suggests that Demand brings Magritte and Ghirri together in his show according to their shared “penchant for drawing back the curtains on the representations of nature that surround us, revealing rather than their resemblance to nature, their artificiality and constructedness.”¹⁵⁸ For Lange, the metaphor of “drawing back the curtains” means exposing the “artificiality and constructedness” of the representation, revealing the apparatus. But neither Demand’s wallpaper, nor Parrhasius’s paint will ever allow their represented curtains to be drawn back. While the paint’s refusal to yield has the effect for Zeuxis of metaphorically drawing back the curtains to expose the curtain’s status as representation, this stages that which Magritte terms, the “human condition:” “our gaze [tries] always to go further, to see the object, the reason for our existence.”¹⁵⁹

What lies behind the painting for the famously sardonic Magritte is, “the wall;” he insists, in this way, that there is nothing to find behind the curtain of representation. But neither Parrhasius’s painting nor Demand’s wallpaper will ever show us even this. While Magritte’s trompe l’oeil efforts, following Patricia Allmer, might be to “radically undermine Western valorizations of the sublime,” the representation of the curtain

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 13.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 73.

¹⁵⁹ Magritte qtd in Patricia Allmer, *René Magritte: Beyond Painting* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2009) 68-69.

continues to hold out the promise of something behind.¹⁶⁰ This desire ‘always to go further, to see the object, the reason for our existence’ continues to condition our human experience. I will return to this powerful aspect of representation in the final chapter by way of Roland Barthes, who in *Camera Lucida* (1980) reclaims belief in images by becoming a credulous spectator. Tellingly, the frontispiece for this text, Daniel Boudinet’s *Polaroid* (1979) (Figure 1.23), shows us a pair of drawn curtains, barely parted—perhaps just enough to incite our desire to see beyond them. While to attempt literally to see beyond them will result only in our Zeuxian discovery of the photograph’s obdurate materiality on the page, to do so imaginarily is the gift of human consciousness and a purpose of art. We go to the theater or a film, not so that we can feel embarrassed about the way its illusions can dupe us, but so we can participate in its imaginary scenarios, despite knowing better. We want to be carried away, perhaps, from the reality of material limitations, which is always also disclosed.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 71.

Chapter 2. Graspable Objects

In his seminal text, *Techniques of the Observer* (1990), Jonathan Crary argues that the nineteenth-century invention of the stereoscope insinuated a break in the way that vision had been understood previously. From the 16th through the 18th centuries, he writes, “from Descartes to Berkeley to Diderot, vision is conceived in terms of analogies to the senses of touch.”¹⁶¹ These thinkers insisted “that knowledge, and specifically knowledge of space and depth, is built up out of an orderly accumulation and cross-referencing of perceptions on a plane independent of the viewer.”¹⁶² They could thus have known “nothing of the ideas of pure visibility to arise in the nineteenth century. Nothing could be more removed,” in Crary’s account, “from Berkeley’s theory of how distance is perceived than the science of the stereoscope.”¹⁶³ For Crary, the stereoscope is the archetypal device of the nineteenth-century, through it “tangibility (or relief) is constructed solely through an organization of *optical* cues (and the amalgamation of the observer into a component of the apparatus).”¹⁶⁴ As such, it “eradicates the very field on which eighteenth-century knowledge arranged itself.”¹⁶⁵

But the stereoscope’s break with an older paradigm of vision may not be as clean as Crary would like. Indeed, the older paradigm may not be as uniformly coherent as he portrays it. Although the shift he identifies is located in the observer, rather than in the field of representation, he suggests that Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin’s 18th-century still

¹⁶¹ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990) 59.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

life paintings are exemplary of a model of vision still based on the relation of touch and sight. This is in contrast to modernity's distanced image—an image set off solely for the eyes—which had not yet become dominant. Instead, the “shallow, stage-like ledg[e] populated with forms,” in Chardin's *Basket of Wild Strawberries* (1761) (Figure 2.1), Crary argues, allows the artist to transpose the immediacy of sense experience “to a scenic space in which the relation of one object to another has less to do with sheer optical appearances than with knowledge of isomorphisms and positions on a unified terrain.”¹⁶⁶ Chardin's still-lifes, Crary continues, “underscore the primacy of a vision, belonging to a specific historical moment, in which tactility was fully embedded.”¹⁶⁷ Chardin's 18th-century viewer apprehends the objects represented on the table in the natural attitude, as “out there,” across the visual threshold of the table ledge, in all their plenitude; the strawberries organized in a perfectly pyramidal geometry are surrounded by other objects—a glass of water, two carnations, two cherries, a peach—upon the ordering and independent field of the table. Chardin's still lifes are for Crary “a last great presentation of the classical object in all its plenitude, before it is sundered irrevocably into exchangeable and ungrounded signifiers or into the painterly traces of an autonomous vision.”¹⁶⁸

Mieke Bal counters Crary's argument, observing the way that even art which fit clumsily the paradigm of the perspectival regime, “baroque and especially rococo art, although not ‘knowing’ the stereoscope, was in its own way putting the body back into

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 62, 63.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 66.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 62.

the act of viewing.”¹⁶⁹ The centuries-long tradition of trompe l’oeil painting might also be thought of as ‘putting the body back into the act of viewing,’ inasmuch as objects are represented as if they are actually present—as if they are graspable. Let us consider, for example, paintings that include a single trompe l’oeil element as if it could be lifted from the surface of the painting, the image of which is not otherwise organized according to a trompe l’oeil logic of spatial emergence. In Francisco de Zurburán’s *The Annunciation* (1650) (Figure 2.2) at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, a small piece of paper appears to be adhered by melted wax to the lower left quadrant of the painting’s surface; this painting, apart from this element, conforms to a logic of linear perspective, made visible by the orthogonals of the raised step upon which Mary suddenly kneels in acknowledgement of Gabriel’s arrival. The depicted window along the back wall of Mary’s interior, with its shutter open to allow a glimpse of blue sky and trees, doubles the motif of Zurburán’s painting as a window. A cloud full of cherubs bathed in golden light, however, interrupt the view through this window, just as the trompe l’oeil note interrupts our view through the window that is Zurburán’s painting; instead, its insistent reminder of the painting’s surface disrupts our spectatorial entry.

Another painting of a divine vision, El Greco’s *Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata* (circa 1585-90) (Figure 2.3), also includes a trompe l’oeil representation of a small piece of paper as if adhered by melted wax. According to curators at the Walters Art Museum, where the painting is on view, the mundane reality of the slip of paper contrasts with the otherworldly effect of Francis’s vision.¹⁷⁰ While ecstatically transfixed

¹⁶⁹ Mieke Bal, “Looking at Love: An Ethics of Vision,” review of *The Threshold of the Visible World*, by Kaja Silverman, *Diacritics* 27.1 (1997), 59-72, 64.

¹⁷⁰ “The absence of setting, brilliance of the apparition, and elongation of the figure contribute to an otherworldly effect... The effect is magnified by the contrast with what appears to be a real piece of paper, stuck

upon a vision of the crucified Christ, which otherwise emerges amidst ethereal clouds from total darkness, St. Francis receives the stigmata—the material manifestation of the wounds of Christ. An adherent of Augustine’s imperative to imitate Christ, St. Francis advocated both a spiritual and a physical imitation thereof. El Greco’s depiction of St. Francis at the moment he receives the stigmata attends to his most exemplary physical imitation of the wounded Christ.

El Greco’s *trompe l’oeil* representation of a piece of paper as if adhered to the surface of the painting would seem to undermine the spiritual truth of St. Francis’s imitation of Christ, revealing it, in turn, to be merely an illusion. But insofar as the piece of paper bears the artist’s signature—written in the artist’s native language—El Greco seems to reinvest in, even identifying with St. Francis’s act of meaningful imitation. For it is through Christian imitation of Christ—even if as a less physically injurious imitation than that of Francis—that one might enter, not just imaginarily through the painting, a world beyond this one.

The banal seeming-reality of the piece of paper is a reminder to a Christian audience not to set its thoughts on worldly things, but instead on things above; the rest of the scene holds more truth for those who believe in a reality beyond that of this life.¹⁷¹ But this truth is available only to those who believe without the ability to verify through touch. As St. Francis’s vision reminds us, Christian belief in the resurrected Christ famously subjects Christ to at least two touch tests: the first given by Mary Magdalene who reaches out to touch (perhaps to verify his physical existence) the resurrected Christ

to the canvas and bearing the words “Domenikos Theotokopoulos Made This” in Greek, expressing El Greco’s pride in his origin.” (wall text, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MD, December 20, 2012.)

¹⁷¹ “Set your minds on the things above, not on things that are on earth.” Colossians 3:2 (English Standard Version).

and the second by Thomas who touches his wounds. According to the book of John, Christ admonishes Mary Magdelene not to touch him—*noli me tangere*¹⁷²—but only ten verses later invites Thomas to do so, saying “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”¹⁷³ El Greco’s *trompe l’oeil* detail tempts the viewer to touch the canvas, just as the doubting Thomas touched the wounds of Christ to verify, but also scolds the viewer in the manner of Christ to Mary by refusing to disclose as certitude what must be maintained as belief. The Walters Art Museum echoes this Christ-like admonishment, in its institutional mandate, “Do not touch.” As both image and earthly object, El Greco’s painting employs the illusionistic device of the *trompe l’oeil* cartellino as a reinvestment in the imaginative power of Christian faith and as a reminder about the earth-bound acts that promise eternal life. He foregrounds his painting as thus necessarily split between the material and imaginative (or spiritual) realms, as is Christian life.

Another seemingly present slip of paper beckons our hand in Louis-Léopold Boilly’s *Trompe l’oeil of an Ivory and Wood Crucifix Hanging on a Wall* (1812) (Figure 2.4), a work which also takes a reminder of Christ’s crucifixion as its subject. Whereas the wounds of the stigmata are understood to be a bodily reenactment of Christ’s suffering on the cross, the crucifix makes available an imaginary remembrance thereof. As the site of Christ’s sacrifice, the crucifix does not represent his resurrection, but instead represents the promise of resurrection into eternal life. As a subject, the crucifix stands in as the foremost site of Christian negotiation of belief and doubt, one whose truth-claim is attested by way of Mary and Thomas’s desire to verify the sight of the

¹⁷² John 20:17 (Ibid.).

¹⁷³ John 20:27 (Ibid.).

resurrected Christ by touching him.¹⁷⁴ Boilly restores this Christian desire to touch in order to verify by way of his trompe l'oeil painting of the crucifix.

Additionally striking is the internal competition of illusions: the piece of paper seems to be adhered to the surface of a painting—Siegfried describes it as seemingly “wedged between the frame and the canvas,” although the slip of paper does not reach all the way to the painting’s edge. Still, the direction of its shadow conforms to the more dramatic shadow seemingly cast by the crucifix; both the slip of paper and the crucifix, these shadows imply, are objects affixed to a two-dimensional surface. It is this surface that is internally riven—between the surface of the painting-as-object (material) and the surface of a represented wall (image).¹⁷⁵

Siegfried notes the way that the slip of paper looks “ready to be plucked out by an interested passer-by, a prospective client perhaps” and finds this to be “at odds with...the apparent devotional content of the painting.”¹⁷⁶ As in El Greco’s painting, the piece of paper legibly discloses the name of the artist; to this, Boilly adds his address, directing prospective clients to his door. But again the shadow that seems to be cast by the ivory and wood crucifix suggests that it too is available to be plucked. It compels the hand in the way that Christ’s resurrected body compelled the hands of Mary and Thomas. Rather than the painting’s mode of trompe l'oeil being at odds with its devotional content, it actually reanimates the symbolic reference of the crucifix to both Christ’s and the spectator’s resurrection into eternal life in terms of a desire to touch, and thus to affirm,

¹⁷⁴ Notably, Boilly represents the site of Christ’s crucifixion and not, for example, Thomas’s touching of the wounds of Christ. Of Caravaggio’s depiction of this scene in his *The Incredulity of St. Thomas* (1600), Michael Fried describes it as “the most famous scene of successfully resolved skepticism in the New Testament.” (Michael Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) 86.)

¹⁷⁵ Susan Siegfried, *The Art of Louis-Léopold Boilly: Modern Life in Napoleonic France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 187.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

this belief. The spectatorial negotiation of illusion and reality relative to the painting thus underscores the Christian effort to believe in the face of doubt. Again, as at the Walters today and likely at the Salon of 1812 where Boilly exhibited this painting, it is the art institution that admonishes us with “do not touch” as a further echo of Christ’s *noli me tangere*: Do not touch, rather believe.

The conflict inherent in Christ’s opposite sets of instructions to touch and not to touch becomes the spectatorial dilemma of trompe l’oeil paintings. When praise for trompe l’oeil painting was expressed in 19th-century newspaper accounts, it often described the painting’s effect in a way that put the body back into the act of viewing, and in ways that implicated the viewing subject’s vulnerability to deception. Of a 19th-century painting by American trompe l’oeil artist John Frederick Peto, L. Placide Canonge wrote, “One reaches out to touch the canvas as if in spite of oneself. Yes, in looking at this strange composition—if it is a composition—the eye is deceived throughout. The hand longs to play with that string, which seems to move and flutter. One would like to unfold and read that copy of the *Picayune*...”¹⁷⁷ Another critic identifies what he perceives to be a failure in John Haberle’s trompe l’oeil painting *Grandma’s Hearth* (1890) (Figure 2.5) by singling out the bowl of flowers on the mantel, which “lack the ‘tactilely perceptible’ forms best suited for trompe l’oeil performances.”¹⁷⁸ Indeed another of Haberle’s paintings *Blackboard I (Leave Your Order Here)* (c.1895) (Figure 2.6) calls out specifically for a kind of tactile engagement with the work. This painting presents itself as if a blackboard, framed in wood, with a type-faced invitation to “LEAVE YOUR ORDER HERE.” What appear to be partially erased

¹⁷⁷ Qtd in Marie-Louise d’Otrange Mastai, *Illusion in Art: Trompe l’oeil: A History of Pictorial Illusionism* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1976) 302.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 306.

messages, signatures, or cartoons rendered in chalk turn out to be as painted as the piece of chalk on a string that seems to hang from the uppermost frame. Haberle's painting, however, excites the spectator's desire to pick up the chalk and leave one's own graffiti-like mark, just as many others seem to have done.

While this impulse to touch may be more frequently discussed, especially by way of entertaining anecdotes of credulous country rubes, such accounts simultaneously serve to caution against being duped into touching the painting. This admonishment is sometimes foregrounded in the imagery, as when Boilly represents paper artworks as if behind broken glass, as in *A Collection of Drawings [with Boilly and Elleviou]* (1800) (Figure 2.7). It is in reference to this painting that the term "trompe l'oeil" was first used as a noun, although the genre long predates its French name.¹⁷⁹ In such paintings, the represented broken glass interferes with the viewer's desire to test the reality of the painting by touching it. Reluctant perhaps to risk cutting oneself, the viewer resists the (Thomas touch) test that would confirm the painting's illusion.

In the trompe l'oeil examples from the 16th through 19th centuries already discussed in this chapter, we have seen the ways in which the technique of trompe l'oeil was already exploiting the assumption of a unified space of order, purposefully disrupting its coherence. Although Crary does not specifically address the relevance of trompe l'oeil painting to this end, we might imagine the ways in which trompe l'oeil painting and its reception history might and might not fit into his narrative. Insofar as trompe l'oeil compels the (credulous) observer to touch the painting to negotiate its seeming reality from its status as representation, it relies upon the reciprocity of the senses. Vision is far

¹⁷⁹ Alan Chong, "Contained under the Name of Still Life," in *Still-Life Painting from the Netherlands 1550-1720*, eds. Alan Chong and Wouter Kloek (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1999) 36.

from privileged over the other senses, as it is, per Crary, in the nineteenth century. Instead, touch corrects for its failings. In his *Letter on the Blind* (1749), Diderot describes the dissimilarity of the senses in a sighted person as being able to provide knowledge about the world through “reciprocal assistance.”¹⁸⁰ This intrusion of the sense of touch, in this case, did not interrupt the Cartesian illusion of mastery; “the certainty of knowledge did not depend solely on the eye but on a more general relation of a unified human sensorium to a delimited space of order on which positions could be known and compared.”¹⁸¹

The illusion of graspable, material presence appeals to the hand and can be readily tested by means of close study, or better yet, of physical touch. Trompe l'oeil exploits this impulse. The seeming presence of the curtain prompts Zeuxis to reach for it, so that he can examine the painting presumed to lie behind it. In reaching out to grasp it, however, he discovers the error of his vision, discovering the flatness of the painted surface—the painterly illusion he sought was already there before his eyes. The intrusion of his touch disrupts the (false) certainty of his sight, but only to reciprocally assist him in the understanding of it as painterly illusion. His mastery, in this way, is seemingly restored.

Like Zeuxis, when Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand III is shown a painting of an engraving by Alsatian-born and Flemish-trained painter, Sebastian Stoskopff (1597-1657) (Figure 2.8), he reaches out to grasp the print. Or at least this is the account of the artist and art theorist Joachim von Sandrart (1606-1688), who writes, “the Emperor tried to remove the print with his hand. The emperor then laughed—endlessly—about the

¹⁸⁰ Diderot qtd in Crary 60.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

artful deceit and decided to hang the work in his art gallery in Prague.”¹⁸² Now savvy to the painting’s trick, the emperor is no longer credulous to his initial mistake. With the reciprocal assistance of touch, both Zeuxis and the emperor become disabused of the object’s seeming presence, which they now understand to be representation. The emperor reclaims the vulnerability the painting exposed in him as enjoyment by repeating his compulsion to possess the work; where his desire to possess the engraving caused him to reach out and grab for it in error, now, knowing better about the terms of its representation, he takes possession of the painting and its potential trickery of other viewers by placing it in his gallery. Ferdinand learns the way the surface of this particular painting is ordered and thus regains mastery over it, even enjoying his mistake.

Insofar as trompe l’oeil reception is narrated as a tale of revelation, it is reinscribed in a scenario of mastery. This places ‘certainty of knowledge’ as the goal of the painting’s haptic-optic negotiation. As such, trompe l’oeil fits within the older paradigm of vision identified by Crary. David Lubin describes the successful negotiation of the trompe l’oeil revelation as giving 19th-century masculine viewers a sense of triumph, but Michael Leja, in contrast, finds no clear sense of victory in the reception accounts.¹⁸³ Instead, these accounts bear out a viewing experience marked by confusion and doubt. The destabilizing effect of Zeuxis’s mistake, for example, might send him back to the painting, looking closely at how its effect was materially accomplished. Vulnerability to the painting’s subjective sensory impressions, whether or not successfully reinscribed as mastery, is already central to the viewing experience of this

¹⁸² Anna Tummers’s summary (and translation) of Sandart in *Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe l’Oeil Painting*, ed. Sybille Ebert-Schifferer (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2002) 187.

¹⁸³ Michael Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 272, FN 25.

centuries-old painterly mode. Trompe l’oeil letter rack paintings, for example, simulate an ordered and coherent field independent of the viewer, on which objects are organized in spatial relation to one another. The success of their representation compels not just a rationalizing or imaginative, but also a bodily interaction with the represented objects. It is the observer’s movement from an otherwise fixed (or disembodied) viewing position as s/he approaches the painting, even prior to any actual touching thereof, which reveals its illusion. We might say it is the desire to physically grasp, rather than merely conceptually grasp the represented objects that makes apparent both the embodiedness of the observing subject in this older paradigm of vision and his or her vulnerability to painterly illusion.

Joan Copjec observes the way that this “incapacity for intellectual mastery” is already disclosed in perspectival models of vision.¹⁸⁴ She finds it “altogether curious that Crary reads into [perspective] the ‘autonomous individual ego[’s]...capacity for intellectual mastery” when its constitutive orthagonals literally point to, by converging to meet, the so-called ‘vanishing point,’ at which the illusion of mastery of the infinite vanishes.¹⁸⁵ Beyond this, several scholars argue persuasively that the older paradigm of vision is not as obviously disembodied as Crary claims. By attending closely to the diagrams used to illustrate perspective theories, Lyle Massey observes the way the body is already implicated in both the production and representation of the perspectival illusion. The diagram pictures the embodied act of production—the eye looks and the hand draws—and the embodied object of representation—that which is drawn is often figured as a body around which space is visually organized. In both ways, the body was

¹⁸⁴ Joan Copjec, “The Strut of Vision: Seeing’s Somatic Support,” *Qui Parle* 9.2 (Spring/Summer 1996) 1-30, 9.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

always already part of perspectival representation, even if as a central problem in its geometrical efforts to achieve disembodied, purely mathematical space.

Massey observes the way that perspective diagrams ask the “artist/viewer to imagine being split, occupying both real and imaginary space at one and the same time.”¹⁸⁶ In Vignola’s diagram for the first rule of perspective, for example, the body of a woman is figured at the distance point, representing the metaphorical viewer but also seeming to occupy concrete space in front of a picture plane that imaginarily extends into the infinite. The viewer of the diagram is given both an illusion on a flat surface, as well as a demonstration of the geometric congruence of reality and its representation.

In Albrecht Dürer’s woodcut *Draftsman Drawing a Nude* (1525) (Figure 2.9), which is easily the best-known illustration from the history of perspective, a mostly nude woman reclines on a table divided from the draftsman by a gridded veil, or Albertian ‘window.’ His single-point perspective never varies, as his eye’s position is aligned with the tip of an obelisk in front of him. Despite the obelisk’s pointed indication of the ideal line of sight, which in another diagram by Dürer *Jacob Keyser’s Device* (1538) (Figure 2.10) he illustrates as a cord that comes from behind the artist’s head, as if a ‘view from nowhere’ and thus posited as objective, rational, and neutral, Massey locates the way both diagrams simultaneously represent the bodies of the artist. That is, Dürer complicates the supposedly transcendental view of perspective by contrasting it with “the situated, embodied gaze of the artist, a gaze that must somehow interact physically with the device to complete the movement of the ideal eye...a hindrance to the demonstration

¹⁸⁶ Lyle Massey, *Picturing Space, Displacing Bodies: Anamorphosis in Early Modern Theories of Perspective* (University Park, PA: The Penn State University Press, 2007) 80.

of its ideal and purely geometric properties.”¹⁸⁷ Dürer’s diagram represents the moment just prior to the one in which the artist must look away from his subject in order to represent her; “perspective was predicated on the principle that the hand must provide a translation from eye to image.”¹⁸⁸

While the embodiedness of production in these perspective diagrams might illustrate Crary's points about the interconnectedness of sight and touch in this earlier era, this is fundamentally different than the embodiedness of vision Crary reserves for the 19th-century. That is, in the 19th-century, vision becomes so sequestered from touch that the subject experiences a new vulnerability to appearances (now newly divorced from matter). Massey, however, suggests that theorists of perspective in the 15th–17th centuries already understood the type of vulnerable, embodied vision that Crary identifies as newly inaugurated in the 19th-century. Indeed, these early theorists had to elect whether to represent these distortions, which occur naturally in vision, or to correct for them. Followers of Alberti, who used a Euclidean model of optics, corrected for them by controlling the viewpoint, as in single-point perspective.¹⁸⁹ In contrast, da Vinci opted to reproduce the visual field along with its concomitant distortions and aberrations.¹⁹⁰ Da Vinci maintains the literal look of a distortion within his representation, even though it may come at the expense of legibility or communication.¹⁹¹

The practice of anamorphosis accommodates and/or confuses both of these goals: rigidly controlling the point of view at which the otherwise seemingly deformed image is

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 89.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 72.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 67.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 67.

¹⁹¹ We might align this way of representing the visual field with the type of translation advocated by Walter Benjamin; see Chapter 4.

resolved through strict one-point perspective, while also requiring an active viewer, who negotiates the spatial conflict produced by this form of perspective. Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533) (Figure 2.11) features an anamorphic representation of a skull, which can only be resolved at an oblique vantage point; that is, by "moving to the right of the inchoate shape that hovers uncannily in the picture's foreground."¹⁹² In this way, as Robert Klein argues, "the integration of perspective thus comes up against the problem of illusion; but also collides with the problem of 'participation.' The precise question upon which the two factions confront each other is that of the connection between the fictional space and the space of the spectator."¹⁹³ In anamorphosis, Massey writes, the viewer is forced "to see perspectival space as a fiction of geometry and to see the pictorial surface as an object that stares back," which in this way turns inside out the window analogy of perspective.¹⁹⁴

Insofar as still life paintings tend to be organized compositionally as shallow spaces, they similarly reverse the pictorial strategy of linear perspective. This is most apparent in the flattened compositions of trompe l'oeil paintings, in which, as Hanneke Grootenboer observes, "the rhetorical paradigm of the image comes to the surface and lays bare its strategies, which otherwise remain buried in the depth of the pictorial field."¹⁹⁵ She describes the complexity of perspectival organization in trompe l'oeil painting. Whereas in the classic construction of perspective, the sense of space is constructed according to two points—the vanishing point (located on the imagined horizon of the picture) and the point of view outside of the picture (marking the ideal

¹⁹² Massey 124.

¹⁹³ Klein qtd in *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁹⁵ Hanneke Grootenboer, *The Rhetoric of Perspective: Realism and Illusionism in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Still-Life Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) 14.

beholder's position)—that are connected at a vertical axis (the picture plane) by two sets of orthogonals mirroring one another. In trompe l'oeil painting, the two triangles formed by these mirrored orthogonals are folded into one another, so that the two points merge with one another. "The mathematical space that is supposed to be depicted *in* the picture has been hollowed out in a forward direction and has to be imagined *outside*, in the space of the actual viewer.... The gaze of the viewer is no longer able to look 'into' the painting but instead ricochets off the surface of the picture, bouncing back to the viewing eye, the place from which it originated."¹⁹⁶ The optical effect is insecurity in the form of deception, insofar as the blind spot of the vanishing point (which is posited as that point that can never be reached or seen) merges into the point of view.

In *The Ambassadors* the image of a skull looks back at the subject from the place where he sees, suggesting the disappearance of the viewer as the painting's true content; Jacques Lacan uses this to theorize the split between the eye and the gaze.¹⁹⁷ As Massey summarizes it, "Neither completely absorbed into the gaze, nor completely outside it, the viewer as subject sees himself in this screen as a kind of stain or spot—a something that, like Holbein's skull, hovers between appearing and being. Thus, the screen seems to be equivalent to a picture in that it functions to block the effect of the gaze."¹⁹⁸ For Lacan, the subject's corporealized vision is made visible to him as a kind of stain or spot, as something that hovers between appearing and being. He is vulnerable to disappearance, but he remains present as a stain; the corporealized experience of his vision is that which remains able to be seen.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 54.

¹⁹⁷ Massey 126.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 127.

Massey describes some makers of perspective diagrams as “eschew[ing] both the unitary view of linear perspective and its attendant Cartesian overtones, defending instead a conception of multiple viewpoints or perspectives that reveal the phenomenal reality of the world that is not independent of human perception.... For [them], the curious nature of perspective insures that the subject is but another object in and of the view itself.”¹⁹⁹ It is in this way that the older paradigm of vision already accommodates the corporealization of vision that in Crary’s account is new to the nineteenth century. The subjective impressions due to the physiology of the eye inscribe themselves, like a stain, upon that which the observer sees. Massey observes the expression of this in perspective diagrams as well. “It is in the very structure of perspective that the viewing subject appears to him or herself as a stain—neither pure representation nor pure being but in some way suspended between the two.”²⁰⁰

Of *trompe l’oeil* paintings, Grootenboer asks, “is it the painting, which despite its hyperrealism presents its own flatness instead of the illusion of depth? Or is it the optical deception caused by our own eye, which, assuming depth, is confronted with its own annihilation?”²⁰¹ These questions seem to be crucial for Crary’s account because the latter aligns with his characterization of the corporealized sense of vision which structures that of the 19th-century, whereas the former articulates its effect in terms of its spatial organization on a plane (in terms of its tangibility of vision or sudden lack thereof). The answer to these questions requires that they be intertwined; the depth which is not available in the flattened plane of the *trompe l’oeil* picture “extends in our eye, behind our pupil, there where we cannot see but from where our seeing is made

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 109.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 128.

²⁰¹ Grootenboer 56.

possible.”²⁰² The vanishing point that structures perspective’s recession into deep space and marks a point beyond the scope of our perception is pulled inside out and is found to reside in the eye. As Lacan describes it, “I am not simply that punctiform being located at the geometrical point from which the perspective is grasped. No doubt, in the depths of my eye, the picture is painted. The picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I am in the picture.”²⁰³ In the process of looking at the picture, which in its display seems to be submitted to the look of the beholder, the beholder discovers himself (in what Merleau-Ponty describes as the ‘fundamental narcissism of all vision’) because his look veils the picture in the process of seeing it. We see according to our desire, our belief.

At the same time, the painting seems to stare back, as if with mastery over me, indeed it confronts me with my failed perception; its deception is actually my mistake about the truth it told in its appearance. Lacan describes the simultaneity of these looks (mine and its) simply, “things look at me, and yet I see them.”²⁰⁴ Merleau-Ponty illustrates this as two mirrors facing one another, producing an infinite series of mirror images that do not belong either to one surface or another, but which form a ‘couple.’²⁰⁵ In Kaja Silverman’s summary, “The look has never coincided with the gaze” and “has never possessed the mastering and constitutive functions that have traditionally been attributed to it. The body to which it stubbornly belongs has also always been positioned within spectacle.”²⁰⁶

In paintings that employ linear perspective this instability tends to be disavowed according to, rather than being foregrounded in, the spatial organization of the image.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Lacan qtd in Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Lacan qtd in Ibid., 57.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 156.

That is, its structure “hides behind its own invisibility as the painting’s secret. It is a framework that signifies without revealing—in our perception—how its meaning comes about.”²⁰⁷ Both anamorphosis and trompe l’oeil paintings, in contrast, disclose this instability: in anamorphosis by making visible its spatial disorganization and through the viewer’s necessary participation in making it coherent (choosing to see/believe), and in trompe l’oeil painting by making visible painting’s inherent flatness, as well as through the viewer’s necessary participation in its so-called deception (mistaking this as depth) and revelation (seeing the truth of its appearance).

Dürer’s perspective drawings, however, disclose rather than disguise the instability of their pictorial structure. William Ivins observes something irresolvable in them: they posit two competing points of view. It is as if he looked at figures from below and at buildings from above, and then combined them within a single work, he claims. “Both were right, but taken together, both were wrong.”²⁰⁸ This is not a failure, for Ivins, rather “this fundamental contradiction of one of the great intuitive bases of experience produces a subtle psychological malaise in the beholder of his work that, not being readily traceable to an obvious cause, is doubtless one of the principal reasons for the peculiar fascination that his work has always exercised over the mind of man.”²⁰⁹ Marie-Louise d’Otrange Mastai suggests that this instability was, in fact, Dürer’s intention, allowing him to flaunt the rules of perspective, in ways that he could not have done if illusionism had been his only purpose. She revises Ivins’ description of the effect of Dürer’s combined perspective system on the viewer; instead of “subtle psychological

²⁰⁷ Grootenboer 58.

²⁰⁸ d’Otrange Mastai 16.

²⁰⁹ Ivins qtd in *Ibid.*, 17.

malaise” she suggests that it “would have verged on optical insecurity for the viewer.”²¹⁰ This “something irresolvable” in the picture looks back from the place from which the viewer can’t see, making him aware of his susceptibility of being seen on all sides; in this something irresolvable, he experiences the gaze.

Instead of perspective’s organization of a stable and ordered relationship between inner and outer worlds, in Crary’s terms, Dürer’s diagrams already expose the way that this stability is illusory. Geoffrey Batchen describes perspective diagrams by Alberti and Dürer in terms of their capacity for destabilization. The perspectival apparatus, which Alberti describes in *della Pittura* (1435) as a ‘window,’ is both transparent and opaque, so that it is also a ‘veil.’ These terms “destabiliz[e] any simple oppositional structure—[suggesting] something that simultaneously allows and denies the gaze, depending on which side of its surface the viewer is positioned.”²¹¹

Batchen goes on to describe our spectatorial position in Dürer’s woodcut and the ways in which it denies us the ‘seeing-through’ that the Latin word *perspectiva* implies; that is, we are unable to see through the draftsman’s window. Dürer’s woodcut, for Batchen, provides a critique of perspectival representation: the blankness of the draftsman’s page shows us the dilemma of the draftsman’s project, its impossible call to order and transparency, and its failure to ‘fix’ its object in place. The blank page too doubles the nearly blank view through the window on the left side of the wall in Dürer’s image; both surfaces should depict that which perspective accommodates, but both remain blank. According to Louis Marin, the blank surface framed by the window permits the mechanism of the “background” to come into view, repudiating “the depth

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997) 110.

illusorily realized by the perspective mechanism that delves into the distance, even to infinity, an infinity represented through the atmospheric working of the horizon.”²¹² By attending to the horizon line, which is all that we see “through” the window, we allow it to become a framing mechanism, drawing attention to its role in representation by denying its representation of spatial depth. In doing so, we witness “how, conversely, the background is brought forward through the relative neutralization of depth and through the negation of any distant figures.”²¹³ The background, the view “through” the window, instead becomes a blank surface, as blank as the page set before the draftsman; both blank spaces await representation via the artist’s work at the same time that their blankness calls attention to itself as representation.

While Dürer doesn’t represent distant figures outside the window on the right, he does give us represented objects on its windowsill. What we are able to see, he writes, is a potted shrub on a large windowsill next to the draftsman, a potted shrub that “exceed[s] the strictures of its framework of sticks,” suggesting, for Batchen, that it might be a “microcosm of perspective at work.”²¹⁴ I locate a similar critique of perspective available in the representation of the pitcher on that same windowsill. Insofar as the pitcher edges up uncomfortably to the drawn edge of the windowsill, it refuses to be fixed upon the representational plane of its ledge. Indeed it seems to come forward, almost as if it might fall from the windowsill into the space of the draftsman, which Batchen describes as our space as well, since it is his side of the grid that we see. If we remember, as Batchen suggests, that Dürer made this woodcut as an illustration to a text meant to introduce the

²¹² Louis Marin, “The Frame of Representation and Some of Its Figures” in *The Rhetoric of the Frame: Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, ed. Paul Duro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 80.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Batchen, *BWD*, 111.

methods of Italian perspective to a Northern European audience, his subtle critique of its method undermines the so-called naturalness of linear perspective, “mak[ing] it plain that perspective is an Italian, rather than a universal, way of seeing.”²¹⁵ Indeed, in the representation of the pitcher, which seems to come forward in space as if toward the viewer, perhaps we can recognize something of that which comes to characterize a Northern European way of seeing.²¹⁶

In Svetlana Alpers’ definitive text *The Art of Describing* (1983), she sharply distinguishes Dutch art from that of Italy according to the condition that the former are non-Albertian images.²¹⁷ Dutch art, she says, is an art of describing, rather than an art of narrating as in the Italian tradition. There is an attention to the surface of the world described in Dutch art that comes at the expense of narrative representation; it is an art of space and not of time, thus the preference for the still life. Indeed, Alpers describes Dutch pictures as surfaces like mirrors or maps, and not like windows, as in the Albertian tradition. Alpers uses the particular examples of mirrors and maps, insofar as they are devices that represent the world or the subject to itself, to suggest that a central mode of self-consciousness was consistent with Dutch visual experience generally.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Eric Jan Sluijter locates this self-consciousness of representation in the Northern tradition of painting figures as if emerging through a window, such as Gerrit Dou’s *Painter Smoking a Pipe in a Window* (circa 1647) (Figure 1.4). This painting accentuates the picture plane itself, and destabilizes its spatial

²¹⁵ Ibid., 111.

²¹⁶ Stoichita also contrasts a northern European pictorial style with an Italianizing one as two levels within a single painting (Pieter Aertsen’s *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*, 1552) and describes them as representing two moments in the history of art (Stoichita 7).

²¹⁷ Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the 17th Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

representation so that “we are *simultaneously* looking into a space while also beholding a beautiful surface.”²¹⁸ Indeed, this beautiful surface also seems graspable, inasmuch as the curtain compels our interaction therewith. In this painting, a man leans out of a window; his elbow rests upon the sill as he lifts his long slender pipe to his lips to draw smoke through it. His idle hand rests upon an open book, a single fingertip crossing the threshold of the ledge. The book spills out from the window ledge upon which it casts a stark shadow, its pages splayed as if we too could run our fingers across the edges. He looks back at us.

It is not this painting, although it could have been, that Crary uses to describe the relation of touch and sight in pre-19th century models of vision. Instead, he offers another painting by Chardin, *Boy Blowing Bubbles* (1739) (Figure 2.12). In this painting, a boy leans out from a window ledge; he rests his elbows against the sill as he raises a long slender straw to his lips to blow a bubble through it. His idle hand crosses the threshold of the window ledge, gripping it. In front of the ledge, a transparent round bubble emerges from the straw. Of the scene, Crary writes,

This depicted act of effortless mastery, in which vision and touch work cooperatively (and this occurs in many of his images), is paradigmatic of Chardin’s own activity as an artist. His apprehension of the coidentity of idea and matter and their finely set positions within a unified field discloses a thought for which haptic and optic are not autonomous terms but together constitute an indivisible mode of knowledge.²¹⁹

If this painting reflexively stages Chardin’s activity as an artist, then the activity depicted also undermines his “effortless mastery.” The boy blows a soap bubble—an ephemeral object whose structure will inevitably fail when it necessarily bursts. The haptic and optic

²¹⁸ Eric Jan Sluijter, *Seductress of Sight: Studies in Dutch Art of the Golden Age* (Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 2000) 232.

²¹⁹ Crary 64.

modes operate together, arguably in a kind of reality testing, not only to sustain the illusion of Chardin's mastery but also to anticipate its failing, thus foregrounding its status as illusion.

Chardin's boy breathes into being a floating object, and this substitutes for his own projective entrance into the world. For Merleau-Ponty, "it is through my body that I go to the world," and for Alexander Nemerov, the body enters the world of Raphaelle Peale's still life painting *Blackberries* (1813) (Figure 2.13) as a projection: "[Peale's] paintings suggest the body thrown into the depicted space, where it adheres as the density, the vitality, of the objects shown there."²²⁰ The body is thrown into depicted space, as if a bubble, and the simultaneous density and vulnerability of this specific thing accommodate the body's corporeal reality, allowing us to apprehend our own physicality by way of an exterior object. Merleau-Ponty describes this as the 'reversibility' or 'intertwining' of body and object. Indeed Nemerov describes the way that *Blackberries* "simulates a person seeing his own body within the very objects into which he has blown the breath of a corporeal life."²²¹ This spectatorial breath is quite literally represented and thematized in Chardin's painting, as an object made of air and ever-thinning soap; its existence is ephemeral, but as paint it lasts forever, or at least as long as the viewer suspends her disbelief about its material status as such.

While 'seeing one's own body' by way of a projection, or fantasy of bodily intertwining, is not the same as 'seeing one's own body' according to the physiological distortions of vision in which Cray locates the newly corporealized vision of the 19th-century. Both, however, cast light on the (necessarily) blurred status of body and world in

²²⁰ Alexander Nemerov, *The Body of Raphaelle Peale: Still Life and Selfhood*, 1812-1824 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 32.

²²¹ Ibid.

vision, which was already disclosed in perspective diagrams and trompe l'oeil paintings. All of these refuse a model of vision for which seeing an object 'out there' takes place from a safe, distanced, and mastering position 'in here.' Instead, seeing involves "a kind of self-regard, the blurring of the distinction between vision in here and object out there."²²²

Nemerov uses Peale's 19th-century still life painting of a basket of blackberries to complicate the kind of clean break from the older paradigm of vision represented in Chardin's basket of strawberries. For Nemerov, tactility remains fully embedded in the model of vision available from Peale's *Blackberries* (1813), at the same time that vision is rooted in the observer's body. Objects are shown at close proximity, on "a ledge that implicitly extends into the viewer's space or comes close to doing so; and they are shown in a raking light that rounds them into a three-dimensional materiality that seems to indicate the hand that placed them there. In their dense proximate physicality, that is, these objects seem to exist *for somebody*—and not, by any means, as a pure emanation of consciousness."²²³ In Nemerov's assessment, Peale's represented objects are not yet set back at a greater distance, available thus for the eyes only, as they are in works by Peale's contemporary, John Johnston. Whereas "Johnston's still life augers the nascent 'autonomization of sight' in the early nineteenth century: the broad-based theory of vision as, in Crary's words, 'sundered from any relation to the observer's position within

²²² Linda Williams, "Corporealized Observers: Visual Pornographies and the 'Carnal Density of Vision,'" in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, ed. Patrice Petro (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) 36.

²²³ Nemerov 29.

a cognitively unified field,” Peale’s paintings “root sight in the observer’s body, and operate thus within an older paradigm of vision.”²²⁴

For Crary, however, it was the *new* way in which sight became rooted in the observer’s body that marked the break; the stereoscope demonstrated the body’s active and vulnerable, rather than passive and mastering involvement with vision. As Laura Bird Schiavo helpfully clarifies, “by inducing the illusion of solidity with only binocular *cues*, and prompting the experience of solidity where no depth actually existed, the stereoscope called into doubt the alleged subordination of vision to touch, an assumption predicated on the belief in a self-present world ‘out there.’”²²⁵ By “introducing the body and its productive capacities” into the model of vision, “the stereoscope contested the idea that vision could be represented geometrically,” Schiavo writes; but as we have seen, perspective diagrams themselves already insinuated this challenge.

Insofar as Peale’s still life of a basket of blackberries upon a table represents objects in the near-ground in a way that roots sight in the observer’s body, Nemerov understands this as a continuation of the older paradigm of vision. And it is as part of this older paradigm of vision that Crary locates Chardin’s still life of a basket of strawberries upon a table. But the objects in the near-ground of Chardin’s still life did not root sight in the observer’s body in the same way as the stereoscope. Its “shallow, stage-like ledg[e] populated with forms,” Crary observes, allows Chardin to transpose the immediacy of sense experience “to a scenic space in which the relation of one object to another has less to do with sheer optical appearances than with knowledge of isomorphisms and positions

²²⁴ Ibid., 30, and qtg Crary.

²²⁵ Laura Bird Schiavo, “From Phantom Image to Perfect Vision: Physiological Optics, Commercial Photography, and the Popularization of the Stereoscope,” in *New Media, 1740-1915*, eds. Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003) 116.

on a unified terrain.”²²⁶ Chardin’s still-lives, Crary continues, “underscore the primacy of a vision, belonging to a specific historical moment, in which tactility was fully embedded.”²²⁷

Michel Foucault describes the great project of Enlightenment thought as an ordering of the world into “simple elements and their progressive combination; at the center they form a table on which knowledge is displayed contemporary with itself. The center of knowledge in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is the *table*.”²²⁸ John Locke demonstrates the harmonization of the senses through another example involving objects on a table. This example posits a man, who has been blind since birth and thus taught to distinguish between a cube and a sphere by way of touch. “Suppose then the cube and sphere placed on a table, and the blind man be made to see: *quaere*, whether by *his sight before he touched them*, he could now distinguish and tell which is the globe, which the cube?”²²⁹ The problem was, in Etienne Condillac’s summation, “how the senses could ‘reconvene,’ that is, come together in the perceiver.”²³⁰

In the nineteenth century, this concern with ‘reconvening’ pertains not to one sense with another, but to one eye with the other. It is, Crary claims, binocular disparity that becomes the object of study in the 1830s; “given that an observer perceives with each eye a different image, *how* are they experienced as singular or unitary?”²³¹ Both the chiasma between the different perceptions and its unification are internalized as taking place within the human subject; both the error and its resolution are thus corporealized.

²²⁶ Crary 62, 63.

²²⁷ Ibid., 66.

²²⁸ Foucault qtd in Ibid., 56.

²²⁹ Locke qtd in Ibid., 58.

²³⁰ Ibid., 59.

²³¹ Ibid., 119.

Charles Wheatstone finds that the human organism has the capacity under most conditions to synthesize retinal disparity into a single unitary image. But as objects are brought closer to the observer, the difference between their independent perspectives is made greater; reconciling the disparity of these two distinct views becomes a form of play by way of the stereoscope.

Wheatstone invents the stereoscope as a more adequate form of representation than painting for objects at close distance. He finds painting better equipped in the representation of objects at a great distance; he contends that “if those circumstances which would disturb the illusion are excluded,” its frame, for example, then we could mistake a representation, a painted landscape, for reality.²³² But he finds this type of faithful representation of objects in the near distance heretofore unavailable to painters. He, and Crary does not correct him, thus overlooks or finds insufficiently convincing, works such as those by Chardin or Peale, and moreover centuries of *trompe l’oeil* still life painting. Or perhaps it is *trompe l’oeil*’s simultaneous disclosure of its trick, which, like the frames of landscape paintings, too successfully disrupts its illusion. This is despite his having aligned the intended effect of the stereoscope with that of *trompe l’oeil*; “the desired effect of the stereoscope was not simply likeness,” Crary articulates, “but immediate, apparent *tangibility*. But a tangibility that has been transformed into a purely visual experience.”²³³ It was painting’s inability to “be confounded with the solid object,” which made room for the stereoscope, in Wheatstone’s account.²³⁴ The success of the landscape painting occurred according to our capacity to “mistake the representation for reality,” which painting, in Wheatstone’s opinion, was unable to accomplish relative to

²³² Ibid., 122.

²³³ Ibid., 122, 124.

²³⁴ Wheatstone qtd in Crary 122.

objects represented as if close to the viewer; the stereoscope instead was intended to accommodate this type of illusion for objects in the near-ground.²³⁵ Wheatstone's stereoscope "aimed to simulate the actual presence of a physical object or scene."²³⁶ It is its representational ability to be confounded with a solid object, to be mistaken for reality, and to simulate a physical object's actual presence that defines the representational goals of *trompe l'oeil* painting—at least as much as these goals also must fail.

But such prior opportunities within the history of art are overlooked. Instead, as Schiavo writes, it was "by creating a situation in which we 'see' that which is not really there" that the stereoscope insinuated a heretofore-unknown "arbitrary relationship between stimulus and sensation."²³⁷ "By suggesting that vision could be manipulated into causing observers to see what was not really there, and by challenging the equivalence of the exterior world and the retinal image, the stereoscope suggested a model that ceased to suppress viewer's subjectivity in the manner of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century visual paradigms."²³⁸ Crary's study isolates the technology of the stereoscope from its application in photography, instead using drawings of geometrical shapes to demonstrate binocular disparity and the subjectivity of vision apart from the mimetic effects of photography. As such, "Crary displaces photography as a dominant perceptive model, deemphasizes the centrality of photography to stereoscopy, and overlooks the ways in which the distinctions between the two media were obscured in the practice of commercial stereo-photography."²³⁹ Insofar as he looked to isolate photography and its mimetic effect from his study of the implications of stereoscopy, it is not surprising that

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Schiavo 116.

²³⁸ Ibid., 117.

²³⁹ Ibid., 121.

he would also isolate it from trompe l'oeil and its mimetic effect. But the overlaps between stereography and trompe l'oeil may not have been as overlooked in the 19th century as they are by Crary.

Indeed, a trompe l'oeil effect seems particularly sought out in both the still life photography and stereography of the Alsatian firm, Adolphe Braun & Cie. In the mid-1860s, Braun made eight large photographic game pieces (Figure 2.14) “suitable for decorating a dining room,” according to the Braun company catalog.²⁴⁰ These photographs continued a trompe l'oeil tradition that dates at least as far back as Jacopo de' Barbari's 16th-century *Still Life with Partridge, Iron Gauntlets, and Crossbow Bolt* (Figure 2.16) and includes the 17th-century Dutch example of Johannes Leemans' souvenir or trophy paintings of the hunt. We might infer the success of Braun's photographic trompe l'oeil effect from their use by 19th-century American trompe l'oeil painter, William Harnett, as referential models for his *After the Hunt* series of the 1880s (Figure 2.17). In the paintings and photographs of these game and hunting still lifes, objects inventorying a hunt are hung against a flat, wood-grained surface. Douglas R. Nickel argues that Harnett's paintings were made to conform to the realist goals of photography and that indeed they took photography as their paradigm.²⁴¹ But, as Elizabeth Jane Connell says, these “photographers, in turn, admired Northern European paintings and wished to create works that would be aesthetically and symbolically equal or superior.”²⁴² She lists several 19th-century photographers, other than Braun, who took

²⁴⁰ Qtd in Douglas Nickel, “Harnett and Photography” in *William M. Harnett*, ed. Doreen Bolger, et al. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992) 179. This reference to the dining room underscores their formal reference to chromolithographic hunting subjects then popular in the United States, which were called “Dining Room Pictures” (Figure 2.15).

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 177.

²⁴² Elizabeth Jane Connell, “After the Hunt” in *William M. Harnett*, ed. Doreen Bolger, et al. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992) 280.

up this subject matter, including Charles-Phillipe-Auguste Carey, Louise Laffon, Francis Edmond Currey, William Lake Price, Dr. Hugh Welch Diamond, and John C. Browne. In addition to their shared subject matter—a “game bag, circular horn, dead rabbit and duck, diagonally slung rifle, nails,”—Braun, for one, shared with Harnett the use of a “directional, raking light to enhance the volume of their subjects,” as well as a *trompe l’oeil* mode of representation.²⁴³ Indeed, Braun’s photographs were described as “so exact that under glass they have already fooled people.”²⁴⁴

In Nickel’s summary, “With their large scale, centralized compositions, and strictly limited depth, Braun’s trophy pictures represent an approximation of *trompe l’oeil* painting that was rare in nineteenth-century photography.”²⁴⁵ Additionally, the carbon process that Braun used for printing his photographs produced a physical relief when held to raking light; this contributed to the tactile qualities apparent in his work. Beyond this, Nickel reports that some of Braun’s game compositions were also pursued in “a more prevalent form of photographic illusionism:” the stereograph (Figure 2.18).²⁴⁶

Nickel concludes that by attending to the “incidental truths” of “irrelevant details,” “primarily for the interest of their visual appearance,” Harnett conformed his painterly goals to the “optical” goals of photography: “The popularity of the stereograph helped promote an aesthetic of ocularity, one in which the sensation of viewing tended to displace concern for conspicuous meaning.”²⁴⁷ Nickel thus recasts the haptic-optic goals of Harnett’s *trompe l’oeil* into an aesthetic that is wholly ocular; this privileging of the

²⁴³ Nickel 179.

²⁴⁴ Thiébault Sisson qtd in *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 180.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 182.

visual over the other senses is, for Crary, characteristic of the 19th-century rupture of the otherwise classical model of vision.

But this seems to sell short the goals of both stereography and *trompe l'oeil* painting, as if they provide nothing more than ocular pleasure, as if their appeals to three-dimensionality do not also incite a perception of tangibility or a desire to touch, which would place this genre, pursued by both media, in a visual history that accounts for touch within the field of vision. By recasting the historical timeline for these concerns, we can see that “photography” did not yield a uniform experience; some photography, such as Braun’s large plates of dead game on the wall, gave us objects ordered on a plane that seem to exist as if independently from the viewer. My visual experience of these objects seems analogous to touch; but the seeming presence of these objects compels my hand in a way that ruptures my scenic relationship to them. Braun’s stereographic representation further ocularizes the experience of tangibility, at least in Crary’s estimation, by translating it into a “purely visual experience.” But the compositional effect is one of spatial emergence, predicated on a mistake of the senses. By correcting for photography’s lack of color, for instance, Harnett heightens the mimetic effect of this compositional strategy and the spectatorial compulsion to touch, further aligning its haptic-optic goals with those of the classical model of vision at the same time that its *trompe l'oeil* effect hinges upon the rupture of the illusion of my mastery. And insofar as Braun’s composition and its illusionary effect was already sourced from extant and centuries-old *trompe l'oeil* paintings, his stereoscopic redeployment returns the subjective experience of instability available in the viewing of *trompe l'oeil* paintings to the experience of the stereoscope.

Whereas prior to its use with photography, the stereoscope laid bare the “phenomenological event and physicality of binocular vision—its productive, human labor—” afterward, according to Schiavo, the stereoscope was “nothing more than a tool for the enhancement of mimetic representation.... The illusion here was one of positivism and avowed transparency. Conceptually, the new stereoscope rested on a classical notion of transparent, unmediated representation.”²⁴⁸ This, she adds, was increasingly reified by its reception as “the actual visual equivalent of the object or objects signified.”²⁴⁹ But the illusion of dimensionality in the stereoscope is, according to Barbara Stafford, the way the brain resolves the retinal disparity of viewing two slightly different images.²⁵⁰ The stereoscope mimics the lived experience of binocular parallax, both of which ask for our disavowal of the physical and physiological apparatus through which vision occurs.

Schiavo observes that photography recasts the theory of vision disrupted by stereoscopy into one “that held fast to Crary’s classical model of vision with its suppression of subjectivity and its grounding in a faith in human optics as an accurate reflection of the external world.”²⁵¹ She notes the proliferation of claims of stereography’s “eminently reproducible, truthful depictions of lifelike solidity,” in trade publications and editorials, describing this as “a far cry from theories being presented in physiological optics about the productive nature of vision.”²⁵² The distinct technologies of the stereoscope and of photography became conflated in the public imagination. “Reconfigured as constituents of commercial photography,” Schiavo writes,

²⁴⁸ Schiavo 125.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 128.

²⁵⁰ Barbara Stafford and Frances Terpak, *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on the Screen* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2001) 97.

²⁵¹ Schiavo 121.

²⁵² Ibid.

“stereoscopic views were removed from the field of phenomenological inquiry and contained in the language of fine arts as models of mimetic representation.”²⁵³

As evidence of the way its application in photography recasts the subjectivizing rupture of stereoscopy into its capacity for objective representation, Crary offers the account of a credulous spectator: “even as sophisticated a student of vision as Helmholtz.”²⁵⁴ Quoting Helmholtz, writing in the 1850s, he continues:

these stereoscopic photographs are so true to nature and so lifelike in their portrayal of material things, that after viewing such a picture and recognizing in it some object like a house, for instance, we get the impression, when we actually do see the object, that we have already seen it before and are more or less familiar with it. In cases of this kind, the actual view of the thing itself does not add anything new or more accurate to the previous apperception we got from the picture, so far at least as mere form relations are concerned.²⁵⁵

Helmholtz observes that what the stereograph gives us is an accurate plotting of form relations; this is so accurate that it cannot be improved by actually viewing the thing itself. This assessment of the stereograph as so sufficient a substitute for the actual object photographed, “at least as mere form relations are concerned,” resonates with a similar pronouncement of the stereoscope's capacity to divorce form from matter, which I discussed in Chapter 1. Writing in the same decade as Helmholtz, Oliver Wendell Holmes famously observes that photography and its application by the stereoscope allow form to be “*henceforth divorced from matter*.... Give us a few negatives of a thing worth seeing, taken from different points of view, and that is all we want of it. Pull it down or burn it up, if you please.”²⁵⁶ But just as we ought not to misconstrue Holmes's remarks as evidence of his credulity, we must not assume that Helmholtz is only convinced by the

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Crary 124.

²⁵⁵ Helmholtz qtd in Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (June 1859) 747.

sufficiency of the stereoscopic image. Indeed, Crary attends to Helmholtz's remark to discover the ways in which it nonetheless betrays a visual experience of vulnerability. Because Helmholtz characterizes our viewing of the actual object, having already been seen in the stereoscope, as if a kind of *déjà vu*, or seeing again, a feeling that “we have already seen it before,” Crary describes it as “uncanny.”²⁵⁷ And by way of Sigmund Freud's essay, “The Uncanny” (1919), which uses the term to relate the vulnerability of the modern subject, we can understand the uncanny effect of the stereoscope to undergird its mimetic effect with a latent experience of vulnerability.

Helmholtz may be expressing surprise or concern about the accuracy—again, in terms of ‘mere form relations’—enabled by this ‘apperception.’ But, in Crary's terms, he may also be relating what it means to feel newly vulnerable to appearances (now divorced from matter), or perhaps, rather than vulnerable, he feels in this something thrilling (the democratizing effect of the destruction of the aura). Crary, however, opts for the former interpretation. If he can discover moments of vulnerability in Helmholtz's otherwise enthusiastic reaction, I think he frees us similarly to look for evidence of vulnerability in other (often less ambiguous) historical accounts of visual astonishment, such as Sandrart's or Pliny's, which in turn should direct us to art works or strategies in which vulnerability, rather than or in addition to mastery, was already available and deployed.

Rather than naturalizing the otherwise rupturing effect of the stereoscope, Holmes's prose efforts to restore something of its rupturing effect by performing his astonishment and by reminding us of its cheat. I want to suggest that some practitioners of the photographic application of the stereoscopic technology, such as Braun, insinuated

²⁵⁷ Crary 124.

this effect of rupture within the field of representation. Braun did this by appropriating subject matter and compositional strategies that were traditionally the domain of *trompe l'oeil*.

Roger Fenton's still-life stereographs of the 1860s also reinscribe the destabilizing effect of stereoscopy's corporealized vision within photography's mimesis. He produced at least 48 still life genre photographs, including five that depict game, six with Chinese objects, and 37 arrangements of fruit, flowers, textiles, vessels, jewelry, statuettes, and glassware.²⁵⁸ When first exhibited his still life *Spoils of Wood and Stream* (1859) (Figure 2.19) was displayed alongside a painting by George Lance, an English painter best known for reviving the genre in the 19th century. While Pam Roberts supposes that Fenton's impulse to photograph still life stemmed from this photographic encounter with Lance, she also remembers that Fenton would have gained practical experience photographing objects when he worked for the British Museum from 1853-1859.²⁵⁹ During this time, Fenton photographed sculptures, paintings, engravings, ivory carvings, relics, and collections of geological, ethnographic, and anthropological specimens. Many of these photographs were produced and published as stereo views for *Stereoscopic Magazine* between 1859 and 1861. Working for the museum, Fenton learned how to use stereography to enhance the three-dimensional effect of his three-dimensional subjects, and thus for mimetic effect. When published in the April 1861 issue of *Stereoscopic Magazine*, the following caption described his still life stereo photograph *Chinese Curiosities* (1860) (Figure 2.20): "The object in the centre is an ivory casket, laid on its side to show the carving on the top, which it will be seen is in high relief, executed with

²⁵⁸ Pam Roberts, "Roger Fenton and the Still-Life Tradition," in *All the Mighty World: The Photographs of Roger Fenton, 1852-1860*, eds. Gordon Baldwin, et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) 91.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

the ingenuity and neatness for which the Chinese are celebrated.”²⁶⁰ The caption suggests the attention Fenton paid to securing a three-dimensional effect from his compositions; he shoots the casket on its side, so that he can secure a frontal view to maximize the depth effect of its relief. This is a strategy he would have learned while shooting sculpture in relief at the British Museum, as can be seen in both *Ivory Carving, Jesus Sustained by the Angels* (1857) (Figure 2.21) and *Ivory Carving, The Temptation* (1858) (Figure 2.22).

Indeed, it is the mimetic effect of these photographs, rather than their opportunity for visual rupture, which is most often praised in the reception. This seems to underscore Crary’s point about photography’s mimetic effect covering over the opportunity for stereoscopic rupture in such viewing experiences. When a non-stereo version of *Chinese Curiosities* was exhibited, along with eleven other still lifes in January 1861, all were well received and even were compared to Lance: “Mr. Roger Fenton has come out in an entirely new character, and may now be regarded in the photographic world in the same light as Lance amongst painters... ‘How delighted Lance would be with these!’”²⁶¹ Roberts remarks, “it is the reality of these images, the three-dimensional density of their compositions of fruit piled upon fruit, that is most startling. And because they are so abundantly real, these displays are transmuted into something lush, sensuous, and ultimately bound to decay—true *nature morte*.”²⁶²

Fenton seems preoccupied with the different effects of dimensionality that can result from different shot set-ups. Stereography is one way to achieve three-dimensionality, but he directly compares this effect with non-stereo versions of the same subject. Fenton would photograph each still life with three different cameras, only one of

²⁶⁰ Qtd in Ibid., 96.

²⁶¹ “London Photographic Society’s Exhibition” qtd in Ibid., 97.

²⁶² Ibid.

which was stereoscopic, setting up all three at the same time. Each camera, a six-lens stereo, a 15x15-inch-plate, and a 20x16-inch-plate, frames the scene slightly differently: the stereo uses a wide shot, capturing more of the background (usually a bare wall draped with cloth); the 15x15 uses a medium shot, eliminating most of the background; and the 20x16 is more of a close up with the still life objects filling the frame. The three views would have allowed him to directly compare the variable effects of dimensionality achieved in each.

For Roberts, all of these views share a tremendously real effect, as well as a symbolic meaning. She notes the multitude of grapes throughout 33 of his 39 (extant?) still life photographs and writes that he “obviously intended this series of still lifes to express homage to the grape.”²⁶³ She observes how he emphasizes this point by including wine-related objects, such as decanters, goblets, a glass beaker, a Parian wine vase and silver and ivory tankard—each of which feature grapes in relief. But her use of the word “obviously” points to her lack of interpretation about why Fenton would have wanted to express homage to the grape, even though I think she suggests one when she insists upon the realism of his representations. Perhaps Fenton is invoking Pliny’s Zeuxis—the painter of grapes so real-seeming that birds flew down to eat them—suggesting that the camera, in its many forms, has entered the archetypal artistic contest. Beyond that, he incorporates the rupturing effect of vulnerability available to the viewing subject by way of the stereoscope into photography’s mimesis. He does so while referencing another visual precedent in which this was already achieved. Just as Braun incorporates *trompe l’oeil* compositional strategies and subject matter, Fenton iconographically reminds viewers of

²⁶³ Ibid., 98.

trompe l'oeil's disruptive effects; both photographers contend that the effects of vulnerability can persist within photography's mimesis.

While for Cray Fenton's stereograph *Group of Fruit and Flowers* (1860) (Figure 2.23) might illustrate the way that photography's mimetic effect reinscribes the opportunity for stereoscopic rupture within its terms, this is to overlook the ways in which this opportunity for rupture remains available to the viewing experience. For Cray, its subject matter, a still life of fruit and flowers on a table-like surface, would realign the depth effect of its binocular disparity with the goals of mimesis. Instead of an illustration of physiological optics, its seeming tangibility is no longer experienced as wholly optical; its subject matter instead allows us to relate to it as we would within the older paradigm of vision. Is Fenton's still life thus an extension of the model of vision epitomized in Chardin's *Basket of Wild Strawberries*, one in which tangibility is fully embedded? Or might the opportunity for stereoscopic rupture continue to destabilize the seeming coherence of this image, returning to such compositions the subjectivity of vision that arguably was always already there?

At the same time, does looking through a stereoscope at a composition similar to Chardin's immediately divorce it from the older paradigm of vision, through which we would have been compelled to understand the reciprocal assistance of sight and touch in our relation to this perceived space? Holmes describes the visual experience of the stereoscope as an imaginative bodily interaction with the objects depicted therein. He writes, "A stereoscope is an instrument which makes surfaces look solid...we see something with the second eye which we did not see with the first... By means of these two different views of an object, the mind, as it were, feels round it and gets an idea of its

solidity. We clasp an object with our eyes, as with our arms, or with our hands, or with our thumb and finger, and then we know it to be something more than a surface.”²⁶⁴ The observer can only understand the image through the stereoscope by relating to it as if bodily, as if it were an object in space that s/he could clasp in his or her hands. This act of imagination then allows the observer to know it as something it is not, “more than a surface”—the discrepancy perhaps resulting in something of an experience of vulnerability.²⁶⁵

Although Crary might understand Holmes to be translating a bodily experience into purely optical terms—clasping as if with our eyes—Holmes also orders the visual field in a way that resonates with a 17th- or 18th-century model of vision. The stereoscope sets up a field out there, at which I can look by way of the stereoscope. Indeed this stereoscope might even sit upon a table, as at least two versions included as illustrations to Crary’s text do (Figure 2.24). The observer then leans against a tabletop, while looking at the image of another tabletop, upon which objects are arranged so that they seem actually present. In his account, Holmes conceives of vision as an analogy to touch; he describes the way the mind “feels” its way around the depicted object. Sight and touch operate with Diderotian ‘reciprocal assistance’ in the rhetoric of his description. Notably, too, although Holmes’s viewing subject experiences something of her vulnerability to its deception, insofar as she sees something with the second eye that she didn’t see with the first, she is subsequently able to know something in a fuller way; the second eye compensates for that which a single eye could not see, allowing “more” to be seen. Rather than stopping short at this experience of vulnerability or failed mastery, the

²⁶⁴ Holmes, SS, 742-43.

²⁶⁵ Holmes, SS, 743.

subject continues looking. Even if that which can be seen is “merely” an appearance, the stereoscope allows something to show itself to us and in a way that makes it seem present.

Of Lorenzo Ghiberti’s doors of the Baptistery in Florence, Vik Muniz observes the way their “fusion of an ancient three-dimensional medium, *haut-relief*, and the most sophisticated perceptual technique of Ghiberti’s era for rendering two-dimensional pictures, three-point perspective,” produces an effect that “overwhelms the senses and confuses the eye, which unable to decide what language to follow, is arrested in the surface of the picture” (Figure 2.25).²⁶⁶ Already in 1403, Ghiberti combines a three-dimensional element and a pictorial one, and in doing so, “forces the viewer to become aware of the image’s syntax, to assume an active role in the apprehension of the image. *Apprehension*,” he continues, “means capture, arrest, and control, making something your own—but it also means hesitation, trepidation, and uneasiness.”²⁶⁷

The stereoscope marks a continuation of this doubly-meant apprehension, the effect of which is the result of another combination of a three-dimensional element—even one that is simulated, rather than sculpted—and a pictorial one. As in Ghiberti’s doors, its effect similarly depends upon the juxtaposition of representational elements in the near ground, as if emerging toward the viewer, as well as elements that seem to recede in perspectively-rendered space. Just as Crary sought to isolate the effect of stereoscopy on the viewer from the effects of pictorial mimesis, so too does he isolate it from the unifying efforts of linear perspective. He writes, “pronounced stereoscopic effects depend on the presence of objects or obtrusive forms in the near or middle

²⁶⁶ Vik Muniz, *Reflex: A Vik Muniz Primer* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 2004) 46.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

ground; that is, there must be enough points in the image that require significant changes in the angle of convergence of the optical axes. Thus the most intense experience of the stereoscopic image coincides with an object-filled space....”²⁶⁸ In this way, it seems, Crary qualifies which types of images, even which types of photographic images, when viewed through the stereoscope, can optically produce the corporealized experience he describes. Those stereo views, which demonstrate standard perspectival recession, for example, roads or railroad tracks converging toward a central vanishing point, or those of open spaces with few intervening elements, produce little impression of depth or dimensionality.

Rosalind Krauss, in contrast, describes the perspectival effect of stereography in terms quite opposite those of Crary: “Stereographic space is perspectival space raised to a higher power. Organized as a kind of tunnel vision, the experience of deep recession is insistent and inescapable.”²⁶⁹ As Krauss describes it, the hyper-perspectival effect of the stereoscope would not only accommodate imagery that conforms to the deep orthogonals of linear perspective, but could transform all imagery into an experience of deep space. But she amends this description of the “steep gradient” of stereography’s “tunnel vision” and “deep recession” to say instead that discrete planes organize the space into fore-, middle-, and background; they are layers “of different planes stretching away from the nearby space, into depth.”²⁷⁰

Rebecca Solnit concurs with the description of stereography’s sense of deep space as having to do with the way represented objects seem to sit on several flat planes within

²⁶⁸ Crary 124-125.

²⁶⁹ Rosalind Krauss, “Photography’s Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View,” *Art Journal* 42.4 (Winter 1982) 311-319, 314.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

it. She describes its hyperdimensional effect as being “less like the depth of field and dimensionality of ordinary binocular vision than it was like the pop-out valentines and paper theaters popular in the era.”²⁷¹ To enhance its spatial effect, she writes, “photographers sought views that would emphasize the stereograph’s strong points: deeply receding space with solid objects distributed throughout the foreground, middle ground, and back ground.”²⁷² Observers, in turn, actively scanned the illusion of stereoscopic space. Krauss observes that “as one moves, visually, through the stereoscopic tunnel from inspecting the nearest ground to attending to an object in the middle-distance, one has the sensation of refocusing one’s eyes. And then again, into the farthest plane, another effort is made, and felt, to refocus.”²⁷³ And Crary can agree with this model of an active viewer; as he narrates the experience, “our eyes never traverse the image in a full apprehension of the three-dimensionality of the entire field, but in terms of a localized experience of separate areas....Our eyes follow a choppy and erratic path into its depth: it is an assemblage of local zones of three-dimensionality, zones imbued with a hallucinatory clarity, but which when taken together never coalesce into a homogenous field.”²⁷⁴ For Crary, this loss of a coherent field meant “the loss of touch as a conceptual component of vision.” Thus the eye was freed, or “unloosened” from “a network of referentiality incarnated in tactility and its subjective relation to perceived space.”²⁷⁵ And this made the observer newly vulnerable to appearances, that is, to forms that exist for the eye only, radically divorced from matter.

²⁷¹ Rebecca Solnit, *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West* (New York: Viking Press, 2003) 41.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Krauss 314.

²⁷⁴ Crary 125-26.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 19.

But just as this experience of vulnerability may not have been as profoundly new as Crary casts it, nor was it so disabling to the viewer's experience. Just as Zeuxis or Ferdinand suffer the humiliation of their defeat by the painting's illusion, and yet yield up the prize to the artist who accomplished it, the viewer of stereoscopic images can discover the subjective errors of his vision, but continue to enjoy its mimetic effect. The experience of enjoyment or of perfect mimesis does not wholly recast the subject's vulnerability as mastery, rather masterful knowledge and subjective vulnerability remain in productive tension as a condition for viewing. It is in the face of a competing reality, one that I know to be true, that belief in my mastery is compelled most convincingly.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁶ This disavowal is at the heart of psychoanalytic accounts of belief in the cinema (i.e. Suture theory; Metz on *The Impression of Reality in Cinema*). Cinematic suture theory emerges from Jacques-Alain Miller's use of the term to describe the relationship of a subject to the chain of its discourse—another illusion of mastery, for example, in the linguistic representation of the subject as "I."

Chapter 3. Representing the Photograph as a Trompe l'Oeil Image-Object

*"Materiality is that which halts transparency."*²⁷⁷ –Michael Ann Holly

In 2012 an exhibition of paintings, sculptures, photography, video, and installations made since 1960 was organized at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis according to the ways in which these works seemed real or, per the exhibition's title, *Lifelike*. Given my interest in trompe l'oeil, which according to this exhibition catalog is "a technique of illusionism to test one's ability to discern between what seems to be and what *is*," I was compelled to see the exhibition to learn if, and if so which, works of art made since 1960 could be claimed as trompe l'oeil.²⁷⁸ I expected to find, for example, representations of objects that disguise the hands of their makers, representations that prompt viewers to participate in the trompe l'oeil game of seeming or being, representations that could, at least potentially and initially, be mistaken for that which they represent. I was dismayed to find at the entrance to the gallery Jonathan Seliger's 9-foot tall bronze milk carton *Heartland* (2010) (Figure 3.1), which cartoonishly and hyperbolically refuses a goal of seeming real. Its scale, instead, insists that this is not the milk carton of everyday use.

Scale continues to interfere with the seeming reality of the art objects inside the exhibition's first gallery. Instead the exhibition seems to recast trompe l'oeil's goal of lifelike illusionism as an issue of iconography, according to the everydayness of its subject matter. In other words, the only criterion for inclusion in the exhibition seems to be that the work of art takes something familiar from the realm of lived reality as its subject. The first section of Engberg's catalog essay, entitled 'Common Objects,'

²⁷⁷ Michael Ann Holly, "Notes from the Field: Materiality," *The Art Bulletin* (March 2013) 16.

²⁷⁸ Siri Engberg, *Lifelike* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2012) 54.

reinforces this point. Following Norman Bryson, in *Looking at the Overlooked*, she wants to place the objects she exhibits in a continuing tradition of *rhopography*, or the ‘depiction of those things which lack importance.’ And so it is that we find in this first gallery representations of everyday subject matter, executed in a variety of realist modes: from the loosely painted, high angle view of Vija Celmins’ *Eggs* (1964) (Figure 3.2) to the more tightly rendered ‘photorealist’ approach of Robert Bechtle’s *Fosters Freeze* (1970) (Figure 3.3), or from the painted lead relief sculpture of Jasper Johns’ *Bread* (1969) (Figure 3.4) to the over-scaled, 5-foot tall fiberglass sculpture of Alex Hay’s *Paper Bag* (1968) (Figure 3.5).

Just as the scale of the milk carton foregrounds the status of the object as representation, the strategy of enlargement continues to put everyday subject matter at odds with its otherwise recognizable and everyday nature inside the exhibition’s first gallery. Vija Celmins’ *Eraser* (1967) (Figure 3.6) recreates a familiar and commercially-produced object—a pink pearl eraser— at an exaggerated scale, now 20 inches wide. Another of her works, *Untitled (Comb)* (1970) (Figure 3.7), reimagines a familiar handheld hair comb as a 6-foot tall wooden sculpture, now leaning against the wall. Alex Hay translates the strategy of enlargement he used in *Paper Bag* to the wall in *Cash Register Slip* (1966) (Figure 3.8). While, in some cases, the scale of these objects may cause a spectatorial experience of awe or fascination about how the works were made, it mainly has the effect of estranging the objects represented from their everydayness. At no point in the course of viewing these over-scaled representations are visitors deceived about the nature or status of the object before them.

Also included on the wall of the first gallery is Chuck Close's *Big Self-Portrait* (1967-68) (Figure 3.9). Its inclusion here, amongst so many over-scaled representations of everyday objects, is perhaps puzzling, insofar as its subject matter seems to be that of portraiture and not still life. In this way, its placement here only seems to make sense relative to its enlargement, rather than according to its subject. But this curatorial dissonance is remedied if we consider the source of his painting—a photograph—and thus understand the painting to be an enlarged representation of a photograph—rather than as, or in addition to its being a self-portrayal. Indeed, the painting reveals its source insofar as it looks 'photographic': it is tonally rendered to reproduce the look of a black and white photograph, its vertical format remains consistent with that of a photo-booth print, it has a single point of focus, and a camera's flash is reflected in the lenses of his glasses. While it is typical to describe Close's paintings as being paintings of photographs, this usually refers to his photorealistic use of the *image* as a source for the subject of his painting; what if instead we understood this relationship more literally? Suddenly, I was grateful to have visited this oddly-assembled exhibition, because it allowed me to see something I'd been overlooking. Like the eraser, comb, paper bag or cash receipt that Celmins or Hay enlarges, it is the everyday object of the photograph that Close here recreates as a painted enlargement. The photograph is not just an image source then, but is an object—a paper photograph—and it is insofar as the photographic object is the subject of Close's painting that we might understand his work as *trompe l'oeil*.

In the specific case of photography, enlargement is not necessarily at odds with its reality as an object, unlike with the eraser, comb, paper bag, cash receipt, or milk carton. That is, at least since the 1970s, especially within the context of the art museum, it is

increasingly common to see photographs enlarged to be wall-sized, in what Michael Fried calls tableau photography. Enlargement alone should not be enough, then, to declare that this (seeming) photograph—Close’s subject matter—is actually a painted representation of a photograph. It is sufficient in the context of *this* exhibition gallery, where visitors come to recognize enlargement as code for an artistic intervention, but it is not enough to do so in another gallery. If Close’s painting had been placed in a gallery of enlarged photographs, for example, its painted status might have been less apparent. Indeed, it may also have been overlooked. That is, it would have been so *lifelike*, so much like a real photograph, that its painted status would not have been revealed.

Because the exhibition also includes enlarged photographs, such as Thomas Demand’s *Barn* (1997) (Figure 3.10), James Casebere’s *Landscape with Houses (Dutchess County, NY) #8* (2010) (Figure 3.11), and Esteban Pastorino Diaz’s *Cuatro Vientos* (2006) (Figure 3.12), the viewer gains a familiarity with large photographic art objects. Each of these photographs has its own tricks to play at the level of its image and its internal relationship to a photographic referent, so that an attentive visitor to *Lifelike* is looking for signs of these types of tricks within the imagery of large photographically-rendered representations, rather than at whether or not the work is actually a photograph. Now familiar with large photographic-looking objects that actually are photographs, viewers come to expect the photographic nature or status of this type of object. This expectation makes one vulnerable to being deceived by a photographically-rendered painting, which occurred, at least for me, in the ensuing gallery from the one that displayed Demand’s, Casebere’s, and Diaz’s photographs. In this gallery, many feet above eye level, there hangs another wall-sized and photo-realistically painted portrait,

Rudolf Stingel's *Untitled (after Sam)* (2006) (Figure 3.13). Less familiar with Stingel's work than with that of Close, I found myself able to mistake this painting for a very large photograph. Stingel's 2006 painting, measuring 11 x 15 feet, is nearly three-times the size of Close's painting, but otherwise, is also rendered in black and white and executed from a (gridded) photographic source. My mistake helped me understand the trompe l'oeil potential for both of these works. That is, the manner in which the object—a photograph—is represented—painted—allows it to *seem real*, to seem like a real photograph. To say this is not yet to enter into a consideration of the photograph's relation to a real referent; it is instead to think about a photograph as an object represented in paint, yet another object represented as a trompe l'oeil still life.

While the height at which Stingel's painting hangs might interfere with the kind of close looking that trompe l'oeil representations court, Close's painting readily accommodates this viewing experience. Indeed, *Lifelike* curator, Siri Engberg beautifully narrates the way that Close's painting rewards close looking. She writes, "While the veracity of the image is astonishing, vestiges of the penciled grid are faintly visible beneath the veil of acrylic paint, a reminder that this is a work from a photograph that has been reinvented, and has declared itself a painting."²⁷⁹ In this way, Enberg narrates the viewing experience as one of trompe l'oeil—as a revelation *that* the object is painted (rather than *how* it is painted) which takes place over the course of one's looking. This is the revelation that is constitutive of the trompe l'oeil experience; its trickery hinges on the viewer taking (eventual) notice of a particular detail that reveals the seemingly real object's status as (painted) representation.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 28.

To understand Close's or Stiegel's mode of representation as *trompe l'oeil*, we must understand that the subject matter of their paintings is the photograph itself, rather than the human subject of that photographic object's image. The extent to which these paintings participate in the longer history of *trompe l'oeil* has to do with the way their photorealist paintings have the potential to deceive the viewer about their material status as paintings. That is, its reception as *trompe l'oeil* has to do with the possibility of its being mistaken for a photograph—not insofar as it looks photographic, but insofar as it looks like a photographic object: an actual and printed photograph. Photorealism, I want to say, only accounts for the specific manner in which the image is rendered; it does not account for one object—the painting—being mistaken for another object—a photograph. Of course, the use of a photorealist style facilitates the illusion that this painting appears to be a photograph, just as a particular kind of painterly illusionism—one that similarly disguises the brushwork of its maker—facilitates the *trompe l'oeil* illusion that a painted curtain or fly appears to be an actual curtain or fly. Accordingly, if photorealist works are to be considered *trompe l'oeil*, it is to the extent that a photorealist style of painting facilitates the illusion that a painted representation of a photograph appears to be an actual photograph.

It might help then to consider *trompe l'oeil* photorealist paintings, such as Close's or Stiegel's, as analogous to *chantournés*, a type of painting for which the shape of the canvas is cut to be “fully congruent with the shape of the object represented.”²⁸⁰ Insofar as photorealist paintings of photographs are congruent with the photograph's shape, they

²⁸⁰ Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, “Trompe l’Oeil: The Underestimated Trick” in *Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe l’oeil Painting*, ed. Sybille Ebert-Schifferer (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2002) 33. See also Célestine Dars, *Images of Deception: The Art of Trompe l’Oeil* (New York: Phaidon Press, 1979) 33.

might be thought of as *chantournés*. This artistic effort to disguise the material objecthood of the painting for that which the painting represents has been employed since the 17th century. Indeed, a two-part work by Cornelius Norbertus Gijsbrechts *Cut-out Trompe l'oeil Easel with Fruit Piece* (c. 1670) (Figure 3.14) asks viewers to mistake a painting for an actual easel holding a painting; this work also includes *The Back of a Picture* (c. 1670) (Figure 3.15), a painting of the reverse-side of a stretched canvas, which leans against a wall behind the painted easel. Victor Stoichita concisely interprets this detail, when he writes, “The object of this painting is the painting as an object.”²⁸¹ That is, the material objecthood of the literal painting—the framed canvas—is made congruent with the subject of its painted image—the verso of a stretched canvas—so that it can be mistaken for an actual verso—one that should be able to be turned around to reveal its painted picture. Sybille Ebert-Schifferer differentiates this type from archetypal *chantournés*, such as Gijsbrechts’ easel in which the “contours are cut in the irregular shape of the thing they represent,” by calling it a “*chantourné* in a natural way.”²⁸² By this she means, “the painting’s outline and format collapse into each other.”²⁸³ Another way to say this, I think, is that the conventional format of this painting’s represented subject—a painting—conforms to the quadrilateral outline of this material object—the framed canvas. The same is true of mid-20th century photorealist paintings: the conventional format of the painting’s represented object—a photograph—conforms to the rectangular outline of the painting itself. So, to revise Stoichita’s summary, the object of the trompe l’oeil-photorealist painting is the *photograph* as an object.

²⁸¹ Victor Stoichita qtd in Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the American trompe l'oeil artist John Peto revives the theme of the painting's verso and adds to it what appears to be an oval photograph of Abraham Lincoln. The oval version of this portrait of Lincoln appears in a great number of the artist's letter rack pictures, but usually as one object among many others. Its isolation and odd placement, as if nailed to the back of a painting, in *Lincoln and the Pfleger Stretcher* (c. 1900) (Figure 3.16) therefore deserve special attention. The inclusion of the photograph, painted as if materially present as an actual photograph nailed to the wooden surface of the framing device, repeats an illusionistic motif in Gijsbrechts' *The Back of a Picture*. In that painting, Gijsbrechts included the representation of a piece of paper as if adhered by melted wax to the upper left corner of the painting's verso. Instead of an image, Gijsbrechts depicts the number 36 as if it were written on a curling slip of paper. Scholars have speculated that the 36 signifies the work's availability for sale, further enticing the viewer to turn the thing around to see its picture, but also further insisting upon its material status as an object—a commodity. Rather than solely reinforcing the materiality of the painting as an object, Peto's tacked inclusion illustrates the materiality of this object too. This image-object, the photograph, seems as materially present as the painted verso. But unlike the painted verso, which if turned around would be found to be actually present as the backside of this painting, the photograph exists only as painted image. Instead of revealing its status as “merely image,” we might instead say that Gijsbrechts' painting of the verso holds out the promise that representation can be made real in the material world; it is realized in the act of turning it around to reveal an actual verso. If so, then Peto might be similarly hopeful about his represented image. By representing his portrait of Lincoln as if present, he

illustrates materiality, not as “only illusion,” but as an illusion that seems present; this “as if” presence vacillates between image and object.²⁸⁴

But the experience of trompe l’oeil is conventionally characterized as an experience of revelation: that which seems actually present is discovered instead to be merely represented (only an illusion). So, my suggestion that the experience of trompe l’oeil’s illusion of presence might itself constitute a kind of presence upends the nature of its revelation. Indeed, instead of an experience of revelation, trompe l’oeil becomes an experience of oscillation. Whereas Ebert-Schifferer characterizes the actual content of Gijsbrechts’ paintings as posing a “skeptical question about the ontological status of painting: vision or object?,” I will insist that this question remains unresolvable.²⁸⁵ Just as a painting is both a vision (image) and an object, indeed, so too is a photograph; I will understand her use of the word “or” then, not to require a choice between these ontologies, but instead to signal painting’s oscillation between them. It is this oscillation which trompe l’oeil painting stages.

The oscillation between vision and object takes place according to the (seeming) transparency or opacity of the materiality of the painting itself. In order to “deceive perfectly,” according to Ebert-Schifferer, a work’s “painting must be invisible as technique.”²⁸⁶ She elaborates:

“Trompe l’oeils must expunge the individual features of artistic style such as brushstrokes and other marks left by paint application: in order to be convincing, painting must truly transform itself by mimicry into the material it represents. In

²⁸⁴ Michael Ann Holly describes “‘as if’ presences” relative to digital images that “manifest themselves as presences, that is, even though many of them are regarded as disembodied, they exist in the form of ‘as if’ presences with different ontologies made real in the material world” (“Notes from the Field: Materiality,” *The Art Bulletin* (March 2013) 16). (Notably too, “as if” is the fundamental trope of Michael Fried’s descriptions of paintings.) I want to consider some trompe l’oeil illusions as antecedents for this kind of qualified presence.

²⁸⁵ Ebert-Schifferer 33.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

perfect mimesis, art moves invisibly behind its product and is thus self-denying: a point that Ovid had made early on in regard to Pygmalion's creation: such art his art concealed."²⁸⁷

This transparency of technique allows Gijsbrechts' *The Back of a Picture* to seem, at least initially, like the back of an actual picture (perhaps even an already extant picture). The compulsion to touch or to turn around this object is an effort to resolve the dissonance of its competing ontologies. This desire to touch is thus testament to the work's otherwise continual oscillation between vision and object, illusion and reality, seeming and being, appearance and presence.

But trompe l'oeil painting cannot be so transparent, so self-denying, that its trick remains undiscovered. In the case of Gijsbrechts's painting, close looking, especially from the side of the object, allows viewers to recognize its trick in the flatness of the painting—that which appeared to be materially present is present instead as representation. Although this recognition of the painting's trick is arguably the constitutive moment in the experience of trompe l'oeil, this recognition does not entirely halt the experience of its oscillation to instead reveal it as merely representation. That is, once tricked, we try to reconstruct the experience, returning to the now opacified transparency of its technique to marvel at how skillfully its now visible technique convinced us.

Beyond this, Michael Leja observes that suspicious viewers are most vulnerable to being deceived by an image (paradoxically) when they are tricked into letting down their guard. Once savvy to the painting's trick, assured of its status as painting and of the limits of its painterly mimesis, the viewer lowers her guard and is surprised again by something else that seems to surpass representation. Leja makes this point relative to a

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

work by another American trompe l'oeil painter, William Harnett. That painting, *The Artist's Letter Rack* (1879) (Figure 3.17), includes a represented newspaper clipping which refuses legibility. That is, its text is painted to imitate the shapes and graphic frequencies of a typographic format without representing anything coherently alphabetic. The illegibility of the newspaper scraps or of the illustrated magazine is in striking contrast to the seeming presence of each object, rendered as if adhered to its wooden board support or as casting a shadow across other seemingly present objects.

As a regularly-issued, delivered, and received object, the newspaper “relates back to,” what Ebert-Schifferer refers to as, “the tactile experience of moving things: taking them away, for instance of tidying up.”²⁸⁸ That is, in their dailyness, they relate to a habitual frame of mind, one in which “we pay little attention, partially switching off the brain’s normal mechanisms for inspection.”²⁸⁹ In this way, the iconography of the newspaper further assists the painting’s effort to catch us off-guard. By juxtaposing these conflicting impressions, Harnett solicits a spectatorial experience of cognitive uncertainty.

Peto also represents an illegible newspaper clipping in his own rack picture of that same year. But this “rack picture” is another verso, which he titles *Mr. Abraham Wiltsie's Rack Picture* (1879) (Figure 3.18). The verso becomes a rack insofar as he represents two addressed and stamped envelopes as if stashed inside the shallow pocket produced between the wooden frame and the canvas it appears to hold taut. A presidential portrait, this time of George Washington, appears in this earlier verso too, in the form of the stamp adhered to an envelope addressed to another Abraham. The newspaper clipping is painted

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

as if adhered to the lower right corner of the verso's frame; its length drops below the lowest edge of the framed canvas, insinuating that it would be seen if the painting could be viewed from the front. In this painting, he uses a transparent medium—watercolor—to represent transparently the different materialities of wood, canvas, wire, metal, and paper as if they were actually present. Moreover, he uses one medium to represent the appearance of others, insofar as this is a watercolor of an oil painting's verso—signified by the stretched canvas—and insofar as this is a watercolor of print reproductions—the newspaper and postage stamps.

Wilmerding describes the influence of both Harnett and Peto on the more contemporary work of Roy Lichtenstein. In his *Things on the Wall* (1973) (Figure 3.19), Lichtenstein paints a verso that is not exactly a trompe l'oeil, but an imitation of the techniques of photo-mechanical reproduction. Although he notes Lichtenstein's attention to imitating the look of three-color Benday dot reproduction techniques, Wilmerding does not attend as closely to the way Peto takes reproduced objects as the subject of his letter racks. Wilmerding is not alone in ignoring this. Doreen Bolger interprets the letter rack paintings as portraits; she relates the addresses that appear on envelopes or the (legible) headlines of newspaper clippings to the lives of the paintings' owners. Doing so requires that she look past the specific objects represented—envelopes, postcards, photographs, etc.—to instead read that which appears within this iconography. In this way, she treats the represented objects as if they were actual found objects—real envelopes with addresses or actual newspapers with published text.

But Peto's paintings complicate biographical interpretations of letter rack paintings. His *Office Board for Christian Faser* (1881) (Figure 3.20) represents many of

the same objects that appear in his painting *Office Board for Smith Bros. Coal Co.* (Figure 3.21) of that same year: an 1881 almanac, a greeting card with flowers and berries, a card advertising Smith Brothers Coal, a torn envelope on which the words “Important Information Inside” appear, a generic U.S. postal card, as well as a card with a flower. The intended recipients, at least according to the paintings’ titles, seem to have nothing to do with one another; Faser was a frame-maker who was not associated with the coal company.

Letter rack paintings, as pictures of the accumulation of things, insist on the obdurate physicality of those things, even at the same time that their *trompe l’oeil* deployment competes with this thingliness to instead remind us of its painterly illusion. We especially experience this oscillation relative to one of the represented objects, which may or may not be common to both of these paintings. On the Smith Brothers board, there is a postcard depicting a flower and a bee; and on the Faser board, there is a similar postcard of a (pink, rather than white) flower, but a small paper scrap obscures the card at exactly the spot where the bee should be. On the Smith Brothers board, the bee’s location seems to vacillate between seeming to be part of the picture postcard and seeming to sit on the surface of Peto’s painting itself. In this way, Peto reinvents and redeploys the traditional *trompe l’oeil* representation of a fly as if having just alighted on the painting. Whereas the fly seems to be either present upon the surface of the painting or represented in the painting as image, Peto’s bee seems to be either present upon the surface of the painting or represented in the image *as* a representation. While one layer of illusion can be resolved in the manner of Cimabue, who according to Vasari, tried to shoo away the fly painted by his student Giotto, another layer of illusion cannot be. That is, whereas the

fly's refusal to budge from the space of representation assures us that it is in fact painted, we cannot learn in this way whether the bee was intended to seem present upon the surface or to seem represented as part of the postcard, which is also represented so that it seems present. To ascertain whether or not the bee is part of the actual postcard, we would need to compare it to the actual card represented—which Wilmerding does relative to another greeting card repeated in both paintings—but this is to treat the representation as if it were a found object, as Bolger does. Or perhaps we could compare it to another of Peto's representations of it, but the artist denies us this opportunity for assurance by changing the color of the flower and by obscuring the card at exactly this place in the Faser board.

By taking other (photographic or otherwise reproduced) representations as the subject of his (painterly) representations, Peto thickens the layers of illusion available in his trompe l'oeil works. Rather than posing the revelatory trompe l'oeil question suggested by Ebert-Schifferer—vision or object?—Peto adds a third term which oscillates between these ontologies: image-object. His trompe l'oeil bee is not resolved from its seeming to be actually present as an object on the surface of the painting through our discovery of its representation as image. Instead, it is further embedded within the image, as part of the design of a postcard, so that its illusion might not be resolvable.

This type of illusionary oscillation requires that we see the postcard as if actually present. It is in this way that I am beginning to suggest the iconographical significance of objects that are also images as the subjects of trompe l'oeil paintings. These image-objects refuse the kind of binary sorting associated with trompe l'oeil—image or object—and instead allow its illusionary status a further oscillation as an object with an image and

an object as an image. To have sorted the illusion of Peto's bee in the way that Cimabue sorts the illusion of Giotto's fly—image or object—is to see through the intervening device of the postcard—image-object. The illusion of the postcard stages the ease with which we look past the materialities of images. We look past the photographic or printed image's status as an object, to see instead its subject—that which it represents—in ways that the trompe l'oeil mode efforts to expose. That these paintings of other images are made at a historical moment of widespread image proliferation seems to me additionally meaningful.

Peto's paintings reflect upon the increasingly widespread practice of translating one medium into another for the purposes of mass reproduction. The relationship between photography and printmaking is materially intertwined in the mid-nineteenth century because mass reproduction and circulation of photographic images still requires the intermediary step of engraving. Photographs often served as the basis for wood engravings of paintings that appeared in periodicals, including *L'Illustration* and *L'Artiste*; indeed this became common practice by the mid-1850s. In their history of the photobook, Martin Parr and Gerry Badger write, "As far back as 1839-40 daguerreotypes were acid etched to provide a plate suitable for printing in ink—a technique that achieved a limited degree of success. More frequently, daguerreotypes and other photographs were copied by hand, using the simple expedient of tracing them and making plates for reproduction as etchings, engravings or aquatints."²⁹⁰

Beyond their material intertwined-ness, photography and engraving are conceptually entangled, especially insofar as they are understood to be technologies of image reproduction. Even though he describes its freedom from the artist's hand as that

²⁹⁰ Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, *The Photobook: A History* (New York: Phaidon, 2004) vol. 1, 19.

which differentiates it from engraving, William Henry Fox Talbot has difficulty conceptualizing photography apart from its role in image reproduction. In *The Pencil of Nature*, published in installments between 1844 and 1846, he writes that the plates of photographs are “formed or depicted by optical and chemical means alone, and without the aid of any one acquainted with the art of drawing. It is needless, therefore, to say that they differ in all respects, and as widely as possible, in their origin, from the plates of the ordinary kind, which owe their existence to the united skill of the Artist and the Engraver.” He continues, “They are impressed by Nature’s hand.”²⁹¹ Photography is thereby imagined as an image reproduction technology that removes human agency—even human consensus of painter and engraver—from the process of image reproduction, but only insofar as the agency of its making—imagined as a pencil—is instead turned over to nature. That is, Talbot removes the drawing pencil from the hand of the printmaker, only to put it back in another hand, that of nature. Carol Armstrong productively understands the rhetoric of “the pencil of nature” as “the nineteenth-century way of speaking about the photograph’s indexicality.”²⁹² That is, Talbot’s conflation assigns an authorial mode of production to the camera in ways that our contemporary mechanistic or industrialized conception of the camera’s automatism prohibits. Beyond this, as Lars Kiel Bertelsen observes, Talbot continually conflates the activities of depiction and impression; the description of an impression by way of nature’s hand relates it to a type of printmaking that involves direct mark making, such as engraving or

²⁹¹ William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969) introductory remarks, 2.

²⁹² Carol Armstrong, *Scenes from a Library* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998) 425.

drypoint.²⁹³ These rhetorical choices make clear his difficulty in conceptually separating the practices. Indeed, he refers to the new practice of image production as “Photogenic Drawing.”

Talbot’s claim that photography accomplishes reproductions that are free of interventions by the human hand becomes impractical to maintain, especially as it relates to the production of the book in which this claim appears. *The Pencil of Nature* is, as Talbot notes in his introduction, “the first attempt to publish a series of plates or pictures wholly executed by the new art of the Photogenic Drawing, without aid whatever from the artist’s pencil.”²⁹⁴ And while Talbot celebrates his calotype as not only “the first photograph per se” but also the “first photograph publishable in book form,” its reproduction process is far from free of human intervention.²⁹⁵ In contrast to the publication of a daguerreotype, which required an engraver to reproduce it as an engraving, publication of the calotype in book form required each calotype to be individually produced from the same negative and then laboriously glued into each book by hand. If print publication of calotypes required individual printing and gluing into pages, this proved impractical for large runs; inclusion, for example, in a successful magazine remained more easily accomplished by engravings of photographs—whether they were made from the unique image of the daguerreotype or the reproducible image of the calotype.

That Peto paints both the Smith Brothers coal and Christian Faser office boards in the year 1881 is particularly significant, as it is the year in which the halftone begins to

²⁹³ Lars Kiel Bertelsen, “Reading Photographs Iconographically or Ichnographically,” in *The Meaning of Photography*, eds. Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2008) 163-177.

²⁹⁴ Talbot qtd in Armstrong 112.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

reshape the reproduction of photographic images. The halftone process allows a photograph's intermediate shades of gray to be reproduced by means of a printing press, so that image and text could be printed simultaneously. In this way, the halftone begins to obscure the difference between a photograph and its reproduction in mass media. Indeed, the halftone involves its own trick of the eye, insofar as its effectiveness relies on the limited power of the eye to see the variously sized dots of which it is materially comprised. At a distance, the eye resolves these dots as a continuous tone. It was not only in 1881, but also in Philadelphia, the city in which Peto was then residing, that Frederick Ives developed the most commercially viable form of halftone reproduction.²⁹⁶

Having obtained the patent for his process in 1881, Ives published notice of its commercial viability in 1884. In a letter to the editors of the English weekly periodical, *The Photographic News*, Ives aims to establish his process as the "first patented or published process which was introduced into truly successful commercial operation."²⁹⁷ He does this in response to similar claims by George Meisenbach of Munich. He asserts his own publication in 1883 in a southern trade journal of "the first series of phototypographic portraits which ever appeared in a regular periodical publication, printed in a page of type matter."²⁹⁸ As Ives reveals by way of his comparison to Meisenbach, he was not alone in his efforts to develop an automatic process for the reproduction of photographs; indeed, Talbot's own efforts, beginning in the 1850s are chronicled in this same issue of *The Photographic News*. Alphonse-Louis Poitevin, it is also noted, was engaged as early as 1842 toward this end relative to daguerreotypes, although he had

²⁹⁶ In 1887, Peto leaves Philadelphia for Cincinnati; in 1889, he moves to Toms River, New Jersey (John Wilmerding, *Important Information Inside* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983) 16).

²⁹⁷ Frederick E. Ives, "Photographic Block Methods," *The Photographic News*, January 4, 1884, 13.

Accessed December 12, 2012. <http://archive.org/stream/photographicnew01unkngoog#page/n25/mode/2up>.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

better luck with photolithography. Beyond this, the notice of patents in this same issue includes one by Alexander Borland for “Improvements in and apparatus for the production of photographic negatives to be used in the processes of photo-lithography, photo-zincography, photo-engraving, photo-etching, or photo-type productions.”²⁹⁹ The stakes for Ives’ claims are made clear elsewhere within this same issue of *The Photographic News*, in an account of “Photo-typography” under the heading of “French correspondence:” “The question relating to the transformation of a negative or positive print, having soft gradations of shadow, into a typographic negative with hatched or stippled shading, is becoming more important every day; yet it is surprising to see how little used are the processes producing this transformation.”³⁰⁰ While not widely applied quite yet, the development of techniques of photographic reproduction preoccupied the experiments of aspiring inventors in the early years of the 1880s.

We hear an echo of Talbot’s desire for an image reproduced without the intervention of the human hand in the same issue of *The Photographic News* that announces Ives’ success with the halftone. Of the seven illustrations in this issue, four are diagrams or an engraved illustration of photography equipment and two are sketches engraved from photographs, only one, a photograph of lightning by Robert Haensel (Figure 3.22), is described as a “photo-etching from a photo-gravure made from the original plate by M. Gillot of Paris, so that the result is in all respects a pure photograph,

²⁹⁹ “Patent Intelligence,” *The Photographic News*, January 4, 1884, 10. Accessed December 12, 2012. <http://archive.org/stream/photographicnew01unkngoog#page/n23/mode/2up>.

³⁰⁰ Leon Vidal, “French Correspondence: Photo-typography-Photographic Copyright Question-Calico Dishes and Funnels-Celluloid Varnish for Gelatine Negatives,” *The Photographic News*, January 4, 1884, 7. Accessed December 12, 2012. <http://archive.org/stream/photographicnew01unkngoog#page/n19/mode/2up>.

and has not been touched by hand.”³⁰¹ The exceptional nature of this reproduction is noted in detail. It, in contrast to the other illustrations, remains “in all respects” as pure a photograph as the original plate to the extent that it is made without the intervention of the artist’s hand. The original plate by Haensel remains, despite the intervening steps, a “pure photograph” because the content of its image has not been re-translated by an artist. Accordingly, we might observe that the photographic reproduction accomplishes that which was merely the effect of *trompe l’oeil* illusion: the reproduction of the thing itself (as if) without the artist’s intervention. To do this, photography had to remove the engraver’s hand from the process of reproduction and *trompe l’oeil* painters had to disguise the handedness of their painterly intervention—their brushstrokes, for example.

It was the “disappearance” of the *trompe l’oeil* painter “behind his work” which caused the genre to be “so despised within the hierarchic schemes established by the academy.”³⁰² As Ebert-Schifferer summarizes 18th-century reception of the genre, “*Trompe l’oeil* seemed to be pure technique, mere handicraft, and even sought to conceal the presence of the artist’s hand through meticulously smooth, fine brushwork.”³⁰³ In 1759 (and thus prior to the invention of photography) Joshua Reynolds complained, if to imitate nature means to represent objects as if they have “such relief that they seem real” then

³⁰¹ “Lightning Photographed,” *The Photographic News*, January 4, 1884, 2. Accessed December 12, 2012. <http://archive.org/stream/photographicnew01unkngoog#page/n15/mode/2up>. While the editors conclude with a declaration that Haensel’s photograph of lightning is “the most perfect yet secured,” just pages later, in the periodical’s “Notes” section, further commentary suggests that its perfection actually reveals something of the truth of lightning heretofore unknown: “We are very diffident about the wisdom of printing Herr Haensel’s photograph of lightning... it is so unlike any picture, painter or draughtsman has ever produced. The orthodox zigzag [of the lightening bolt] is entirely wanting, and there is not a single sharp angle throughout. In fact, the photograph, with its gentle curves, is the very reverse of what our artists always put before us.” This revelation exemplifies that which Walter Benjamin describes as photography’s optical unconscious.

³⁰² Ebert-Schifferer 17.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 18.

painting must lose its rank and be no longer considered as a liberal art, and sister to poetry, this imitation being merely mechanical, in which the slowest intellect is always sure to succeed best: for the painter of genius cannot stoop to drudgery, in which the understanding has no part; and what pretence has the art to claim kindred with poetry, but by its powers over the imagination?³⁰⁴

The “mechanistic” imitation of trompe l’oeil pictures, however, achieved such relief that the objects represented therein could “seem real.” While Reynolds found this an insufficient criterion for art, Daguerre—who painted trompe l’oeil dioramas—or Talbot seems to have found something worthwhile in a “merely mechanical” pictorial imitation that represents objects so that they seem real or seem really present. If trompe l’oeil artists accomplished their seemingly true copies of the world by disguising the materiality of their representational technique, by disappearing behind the work, then this criterion seems to persist in the evaluation of other mechanistic means of copying the world.

If the terms used by Reynolds to disqualify trompe l’oeil as art might re-emerge as those that describe the successes of photographic reproduction, late 19th-century painters might turn to the new medium to re-assert their legitimacy. That photography and photographic reproduction could chemically accomplish the disappearance of the artist’s hand—the domain, heretofore, of trompe l’oeil painting—might, if not threaten, then, at least, compel a renewed contest with painting. Into this revised paragone, strides Peto, who efforts if not to outdo the effect of photography’s handless-ness, then to expose the fraudulence of its claim.

Knowing all too well how to disguise the labor involved in the meticulous copy and translation of objects in the world into two dimensions, Peto would have recognized another such disguise in the rhetoric of photography’s lack of hand. The description in

³⁰⁴ Joshua Reynolds, “Grand Style of Painting,” in Samuel Johnson, *The Adventurer and Idler*, 1:79, (October 20, 1759). Accessed December 12, 2012. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12050/12050-8.txt>.

The Photographic News, for example, asserts that the published image has not been “touched by hand,” only after listing the laborious interventions required in its execution: first the development of the original plate, then the exposure of the resulting photographic positive, which etches, according to the process of photogravure, a photosensitive plate that is subsequently printed to produce a photogravure or photo-etching. While many hands are involved in the various development and printing processes, it is the image itself that seems able to be reproduced without the intervention of the human hand. But Peto incorporates the photograph in the iconography of his painting to remind us of unseen hands in the making of this type of image. He represents the photograph as if materially present but unable to be touched—and, in this way, verified—by hand. Our recognition, then, of his intervention upsets its image’s seemingly photographic correspondence to the world in ways that remind us of the situation of that image’s production. And at the same time, they remind us of the delight we have in that image’s visual illusion of presence.

It is in his 1880 painting *The Rack* (Figure 3.23) that Peto first represents a photograph. But he paints the gray-toned look of an albumen print as if it is largely obscured by a brightly colored greeting card, which appears to be stacked atop it. This placement, however, entices our spectatorial desire to pull the photograph out from underneath the card to see its image. He repeats this representational strategy in *Office Board for Christian Faser* the following year, insofar as he obscures the photographic image—much like he obscures the representation of the bee on the postcard of the flower in this same painting—by placing it as if tucked behind another object. In this painting, he further obscures the photograph of a bowtie-wearing man by turning it upside-down so

that most of his face is hidden from view. Again, he courts our desire to see the image of the photograph—the face of its represented subject; we want to pull it out from under the envelope to discover him. Instead of seeing through the photograph to its subject, we see only the materiality of the object—an envelope, which insofar as it is addressed to Mr. C. Faser, further teases our interest in identifying the photographic subject.

Cabinet cards, which became popular in the early 1870s, even replacing cartes de visite in the 1880s, are albumen and, in the 1890s collodion, prints mounted to cardboard backs measuring about 4.5 x 6.5 inches. Peto represents the photographic image of this cabinet card as if mounted slightly higher than center, as was conventionally done to accommodate the name of the photography studio that produced the image. But he does not reproduce the name of a studio on his painted version, as for example Thomas H. Hope later does in his *The Artist's Letter Rack* (1886) (Figure 3.24). Typically, the name and address of the photography studio also would have been printed across the reverse side of a cabinet card's cardboard mount. By representing this card as if tucked into a letter board, Peto entices the habitual instinct of contemporary viewers to pull out or turn over the card to learn its maker from the bottom or the back of the card. But as painted image, its representation forecloses upon this discovery; instead, its maker remains as obscured as its subject.

Peto continues to represent cabinet cards amongst the other objects included in his office boards and rack pictures in *Old Souvenirs* (1881/1900) (Figure 3.25), *Rack Picture for William Malcolm Bunn* (1882) (Figure 3.26), *Office Board* (1885) (Figure 3.27), *Office Board for Eli Keen's Sons* (1888) (Figure 3.28), *Ocean County Democrat* (1889) (Figure 3.29). They also show up in his studio door or wall paintings of the 1880s,

including *Stag Saloon Commission* (1885) (Figure 3.30), *Objects in the Artist's Creative Mind* (1887) (Figure 3.31), *Old Time Letter Rack* (1894) (Figure 3.32), *Card Rack with Jack of Hearts* (c. 1900) (Figure 3.33), *Portrait of the Artist's Daughter* (1901) (Figure 3.34), *Lincoln and the Star of David* (1904) (Figure 3.35), and *Toms River* (1905) (Figure 3.36). His *Patch Self Portrait with Small Pictures* (c. 1900) (Figure 3.37) includes several small, unstretched paintings as if tacked to a door, but also (at least) two empty photograph mounts as if tucked amongst them—a small carte de visite mount with an oval cut-out and a board with rounded corners about the size of a cabinet card.

Wilmerding compares another of Peto's "patch paintings" *Still Life (Patch Painting)* (c. 1890) (Figure 3.38) to Walker Evans' later photograph of photographs *Family Snapshots in Frank Tenge's Home, Hale County, Alabama* (1936) (Figure 3.39), calling it "a modern equivalent of Peto's meditation on his medium."³⁰⁵ Wilmerding however connects the two works according to the ways in which they document the "daily existence" and "humble conditions of rural America." But beyond this, they share a compositional strategy. Evans photographs two family snapshots directly square with the wall of the Hale County home on which they hang. The photograph's shallow compositional space, wood-grain backdrop, and the protruding nails by which the snapshots are affixed to the wall connect it visually to the flatness of Peto's studio wall or door paintings, as well as to a larger tradition of trompe l'oeil painting. Indeed, the nails in the Evans photograph seem to emerge into the space of the viewer.

Furthermore, they share an appropriative artistic strategy. Peto's painting not only cites some earlier paintings of his own, but also a painting by Franklin D. Briscoe, which

³⁰⁵ Wilmerding 178.

Peto is known to have owned.³⁰⁶ Evans photographs two photographs that he did not take and he does so in the manner of trompe l'oeil paintings of images tacked to walls. When, for example in the Christian Faser office board, Peto paints another photography studio's photograph and omits the name of that studio from his representation of the cabinet card, he makes visible the deletion of the human hand claimed in rhetoric surrounding photography's accomplishment. But he also appropriates it, encouraging viewers to mistake it for his creation, as his painting. Without a photography studio's name on the cabinet cards he represents, he is the image's only identifiable maker. Peto's re-painting of photographs returns the artist's hand to a mechanized process imagined to be free of it. But of course, Peto's identification as maker comes only after we realize that the painting itself is a representation and not an actual letter rack; that is, after we sort vision from object. Peto's iconographical inclusion of reproducible image-objects courts additional layers of illusion that refuse to be settled as easily.

In Peto's *Old Time Letter Rack* (1894), for example, a carte de visite of Abraham Lincoln appears tucked beneath one of its represented straps. To the extent that we can sort the card's status as painted image from its appearance as actual object, we come to recognize the painting's trompe l'oeil trick. Our recognition of the materiality of his painterly technique halts its illusionistic transparency. But what we cannot learn from the materiality of the painting is the extent to which Peto intervenes into the image of the carte de visite that he represents. There is no identifying text reproduced, for example. If Peto means for this carte de visite to reproduce an already extant carte de visite, we can only recognize it and his interventions into its image through external comparison thereof. The three-quarter, right-side bust portrait of Lincoln is likely based on one that

³⁰⁶ Ibid. Wilmerding mentions this but does not connect its inclusion to appropriation.

Lloyd Ostendorf characterizes as “a widely-circulated carte-de-visite photo-copy [Figure 3.40] of an engraved portrait based on Berger’s camera study [Figure 3.41], often mistaken for a print of the original photograph [Figure 3.42].”³⁰⁷ Or perhaps the source of Peto’s representation is its cabinet card version, as I earlier identified it, and which Ostendorf identifies, but does not illustrate, as the Brady cabinet card. It is on the verso of one of these Brady cabinet cards that he discovers a note by Frank B. Carpenter, another of Lincoln’s portraitists, which records the chain of this image’s production. He writes:

From a negative made in 1864, by A. Berger, partner of M.B. Brady, at Brady’s gallery. This is the photograph engraved by J.C. Buttre [sic] of New York, just after Mr. Lincoln’s re-nomination. It was the basis after Mr. Lincoln’s death of the portrait made by Marshall, and also the one made by Littlefield. In each engraving the parting of the hair was changed, to the *left side*, as Mr. Lincoln always wore it. His barber by mistake this day for some unaccountable reason, parted the hair on the President’s *right* side, instead of his *left*.³⁰⁸

In our efforts to pin down Peto’s manipulation of this “photograph” of Lincoln, we discover manipulation already therein. Not only is the carte de visite a photo-based reproduction of an engraving made by another otherwise hidden intervener (John Chester Buttre) from a photograph by another photographer (Berger)—operating under the name of another photographer (Brady)—but also Lincoln’s barber (allegedly) intervened before the photograph was taken to alter Lincoln’s appearance. It is in this way that we only begin to see the elusivity of pinning down the “original.” Later engravings by Marshall and by Littlefield, which restore the president’s hair part to the left side, alter the Berger photograph, but in order to restore the truth of Lincoln’s hair part. Which intervention is preferable? Beyond all of this, as was typical at the Brady studio, Berger would have used a multiple-lens camera to shoot Lincoln that day, producing simultaneously four

³⁰⁷ Lloyd Ostendorf, *Lincoln’s Photographs: A Complete Album* (Dayton, OH: Rockywood Press, 1998) 177; O-92.

³⁰⁸ Carpenter qtd in *Ibid*.

stereoscopically-related, but ever so slightly differently-angled images at once. The ‘original’ photograph was thus always already multiple.

My effort here is not to track down the identity of the object “actually” represented in Peto’s painting, instead it is meant to illustrate something of the material history of this type of object at this time and to suggest its subsequent iconographical appeal for a trompe l’oeil painter. When Peto was born in 1854, the technologies necessary for the photo-mechanical reproduction of photographic images were as yet in development. Peto, among the rest of his generation of 19th-century American trompe l’oeil painters, would live through the cultural changes wrought by both the Civil War and photomechanical reproduction. He repeatedly represents mass-produced image-objects of Abraham Lincoln in at least eight paintings from 1894 through 1904. The oval shaped portrait appears most often, including in two identically titled paintings, *Reminiscences of 1865* (1897; after 1900) (Figures 3.43, 3.44). Wilmerding directs our attention to “the Lincoln photograph” in the first of these paintings, but this is apparently a slip because elsewhere he identifies it as an engraving: “the source of this likeness, an engraving, was a commonly reproduced and available print, and Peto owned a copy” (Figure 3.45).³⁰⁹ While such a slip was most certainly an innocent error, I want to underline the ease with which it can be made. Indeed, I want to suggest that this confusion of an engraving for a photograph or vice versa was part of Peto’s project. It was the indeterminacy of this object’s identity, especially once represented in paint, which heightened its iconographical appeal for the trompe l’oeil artist.

In both versions of *Reminiscences of 1865*, Peto paints an engraving of Abraham Lincoln, an engraving that is already a reproduction of a photograph. He adds to the

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 13, 187.

number of hands in the chain of reproduction. Perhaps Peto paints Buttre's engraving of Berger's photograph of Lincoln. Beyond this, I want to point out that both the oval engraving of Lincoln and the carte de visite of Lincoln that appear in Peto's paintings would have shared the same source photograph taken on February 9, 1864 by Anthony Berger. Indeed, the carte de visite of Lincoln and Buttre's engraving of Lincoln would have served the same purpose: the mass-distribution of Berger's photograph of the president.

To mistake an engraving for a photograph, one must overlook the intervening hand of the engraver, just as to mistake Peto's representation of an image-object for the actual image-object is to overlook the materiality of his technique. John Ruskin observed that in print reproductions of paintings, most changes made between versions were motivated by the engraver's interest in clarifying the truth of the image. Depending on one's definition of truth, clarifying it might also be the claimed motivation for the alteration made, for example, by Marshall or by Littlefield when they reverse Lincoln's hair part. Or, for example, this may be Thomas Doney's intention when he adds Lincoln's beard to a mezzotint (Figure 3.47) of a photograph of Lincoln by his campaign photographer Alexander Hessler (Figure 3.48). Ostendorf writes, "When Lincoln took office as the first bearded President, people wanted pictures of him with whiskers. Several photographers and artists met this demand simply by painting beards on earlier photographs."³¹⁰ The transparency of Doney's intervention does not seem to trouble the image's relationship to the real; instead his correction, the addition of a beard, can be understood to actually enhance the photograph's likeness, especially insofar as it more accurately reflects the President's newly bearded visage. Doney's print then benefits from

³¹⁰ Ostendorf 260.

the truth it inherits from the photograph, but can improve upon or correct for the failings of this truth through the artist's intervention.³¹¹ This may seem surprising to 21st-century viewers who, by all accounts of the anxiety of the digital era, worry about being duped by the invisible interventions into photographs made possible by Photoshop; and yet, most Photoshop interventions have a similar aim: to clarify the image.³¹²

Beyond adding a beard in the reproduction of photographs of Lincoln, artists also added elements to the *mise-en-scène*. These included redesigning a chair in which Lincoln sits, adding a curtained window to the background, redrawing the album he holds so that it appears to be a Bible, or even adding family members. Ostendorf lists the various media in which these revisions occurred—retouched photography, painting, lithography, and woodcut—and observes that many of these would have been “published as photographs.”³¹³

Michael Leja notes that various collections currently housing Doney's mezzotints done from daguerreotypes classify the images as photographs; this is for Leja “another sign of the transparency of Doney's work.”³¹⁴ So transparent was the work of Doney's hand that the subject himself is unable to identify the medium through which it was accomplished. In response to Doney's having sent him a copy of the bearded mezzotint, Lincoln thanks him for “the picture (I know not the artistic designation).”³¹⁵ Frederick

³¹¹ Of course, some of the changes made to photographs at this time helped the artist to evade the photographer's copyright.

³¹² D.N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 101. This is what Rodowick calls the “paradox of ‘perceptual realism.’” That is, the imagined painterly freedom of digital image production is paradoxically geared toward the “realist” conventions of photography.

³¹³ Ostendorf 269.

³¹⁴ Michael Leja, “Fortified Images for the Masses,” *Art Journal* 70.4 (Winter 2011) 60-83, 65.

³¹⁵ Lincoln qtd in Ostendorf 257.

Hill Meserve, an early collector of photographs of Lincoln, thought the mezzotint to have been a second pose from Alexander Hessler's photography session of 1857.³¹⁶

Ostendorf describes the selling of engravings and lithographs as if authentic photographs as an "accepted practice." He continues, "All photographers did it. Their purpose was not to deceive but to provide 'photographs' which would meet the public demand for interesting or unusual scenes and portraits."³¹⁷ Unfortunately, Ostendorf offers no citation for the motives of these makers; instead he editorializes, perhaps too freely, about an observed historical practice. To answer public demand for images of the President, Marshall's and Littlefield's engravings or Doney's mezzotint reversed a hair part or added a beard, so that they conformed to an already extant imaginary public image of a bearded and left-side-part-wearing Lincoln. These artists altered the photographic images they reproduced, but most of us would agree with Ostendorf in saying that by doing so they did not mean to deceive their public about Lincoln's appearance. Or perhaps they did mean to deceive them, but only to accommodate their expectations about the subject; in doing so they enhance or clarify the original to compensate for its translation between media.

If engravings could be sold in the guise of photographs, this required the materiality of their production technique to remain invisible or at least unrecognizable. The success of reproductive technologies is directly correlated to their seeming invisibility. The halftone process engraving, like the photogravure of Haensel's lightning photograph or the mezzotint of Doney's Lincoln portrait, has invisibility as its goal. William Ivins insists that the halftone, in contrast to the linear syntax of an engraving and

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 256.

its visual reminder of the intermediary presence of a maker, remains undetectable to human vision. His logic mirrors that used in *The Photographic News* to maintain that Haensel's lightning photograph, despite its translation into photogravure, remains a "pure photograph." As such, both the photogravure and the halftone can be understood as an immediate and factual form of reproduction.

These translations are not so much invisible as they are unseen or unrecognized. In contrast to these reproductions, trompe l'oeil representations of other images halt their seeming transparency by insisting that we recognize the materiality of the means of their representation. Gerry Beegan rejects Ivins' assessment of the invisibility of the halftone. He describes the "regular row of dots" that constitutes the halftone as being "in themselves a visible and meaningful aesthetic element."³¹⁸ These regularized dots might be understood as "the hand" of the halftone, the code according to which its reproductive intervention is accomplished. Beyond recognition of its constitutive dots, Beegan observes that the intervention of the halftone was also made apparent by way of the caption, which at least in the 1890s identified halftone reproductions as being "from a photograph."³¹⁹

The caption served to reinforce the truthfulness or factual form of the halftone reproduction, at the same time that it called attention to its intervention. In turn, the halftone could also be retouched to correct for the limitations of the photograph—to clarify its truth. Beegan writes, "The introduction of photomechanical technologies destabilized reproduction and representation so that the discrete categories of photograph, wood engraving, and drawing took on a new fluidity. Imaging practices dissolved the

³¹⁸ Gerry Beegan, *The Mass Image: A Social History of Photomechanical Reproduction in Victorian London* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 12.

³¹⁹ Qtd in *Ibid.*

boundaries of the image, melding wood engraving with process and photography with drawing.”³²⁰ The retouched halftone was one among numerous blurrings of media specificity listed by Beegan; he also notes photographs of wood engravings printed by process, the engraved backgrounds of otherwise photographic portraits, the ink tracings of photographs then bleached to look like drawings. He writes, “In some cases these mixtures were concealed, but many syncretic illustrations openly fused different systems of photographic and hand-drawn representation and reproduction.”³²¹ “Indeed,” as Parr and Badger note, “‘photographs’ appeared in books, newspapers and journals throughout the nineteenth century—and into the twentieth—in the guise of engravings, until the development of the halftone block and the rotogravure press made the cheap and seamless reproduction of actual photographs in ink a daily reality.”³²²

Peto likely would have been familiar with photographs “in the guise of engravings” through his uncle (by marriage), the Philadelphia photographer William Bell (1830-1910).³²³ It was likely Bell who facilitated Peto’s own limited practice of photography in the 1870s. Bell was active in Philadelphia at this time, primarily producing stereo views of local streets and buildings. But he also worked on a series of photographs of wounded Civil War veterans commissioned in 1867 by the Army Medical Museum. The photograph by Bell in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art comes from this series and shows a seated man with lower legs exposed to reveal the

³²⁰ Ibid., 9. While Beegan’s characterization of mass reproduction’s effect on the specificity of media is useful, his judgment that this fluidity of media was ‘new’ is perhaps an overstatement. Engravings of paintings had long been produced in ways that already complicated the discreteness of those media to their publics.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Parr and Badger 1:19.

³²³ Wilmerding 15.

aftermath of a gunshot wound to his knee (Figure 3.49).³²⁴ Bell's photographs were models for engravers illustrating medical books.³²⁵ Such books would have been produced before development and widespread use of the halftone; thus, their photographic illustrations would have required translation into engraving. The series of medical books that included several engravings based on photographs by Bell was formally published in 1871 as *Photographs of Surgical Cases and Specimens Taken at the Army Medical Museum*. Peto's relationship with the photographer might even have allowed for his direct comparison of Bell's original photographs with their engraved reproductions.

Reviving something of that which Talbot imagined to be photography's hands-free image production, Carol Armstrong stresses this difference between "the original photograph" and "the photographic-looking reproduction after it."³²⁶ She admits that this "may seem like an odd regress, in its following the criteria of first- and second-hand reproductions laid out by pre-mass media thinkers about photography such as Talbot." But, she continues, "what was significantly different about the image regime of the photograph...was its indexical relation to the referent."³²⁷ We should also recall that Armstrong already qualifies the 19th-century understanding of the indexical relation to the referent according to its authorship by nature. The photograph reco(r)ded nature as a tonal look; in turn, the tonal look functioned as the indexical trace of its nature-authored mode of production.

³²⁴ At the risk of insensitivity, I wonder if Peto would have recognized a kind of visual pun in such an image. The currency bills that frequently populate his and other trompe l'oeil paintings of the 19th century are typically described as "shinplasters." The term derives from privately printed and essentially valueless notes of currency mainly used to bandage a bruised shin.

³²⁵ "William H. Bell." Accessed Nov 29, 2012. http://www.luminous-lint.com/app/photographer/William_H_Bell/A/.

³²⁶ Armstrong 424.

³²⁷ Ibid.

Photography's tonal look is for Armstrong as significant a change in the regime of the image as its indexical relationship to a referent. She writes, "The tonal look of the photograph was as different from other graphic codes as its indexical mode of production, the splitting of the image into a nonlinear, gradated tonal register of blacks, grays, and whites (or sepia-browns, buffs, and off-whites) guaranteeing the difference of its light-authorized mode of production and of its light-traced relation to the referent."³²⁸

Accordingly, to the extent that reproductions could replicate "the tonal look of the photograph they also retained the effect of its indexicality."³²⁹ It was the tonal look of Doney's mezzotints that helped them inherit the veracity of their daguerreotype sources. By "giving stable and material form to the elusive figure floating in the reflective daguerreotype plate," Leja observes that Doney's mezzotints were

anticipating the look photographic prints would come to have in a decade or two, once collodion wet plate and gelatin dry plate processes made possible paper prints with distinct forms and a broad value range. By translating the daguerreotype's rich detail and subtle handling of modeling, and expanding its tonal spectrum, Doney was devising a compelling way to merge the strengths of a paper print with those of a daguerreotype. The photographic look of his prints is all the more remarkable when we recognize that he was inventing that look as he copied. He pioneered a printmaking language in which the source daguerreotype hovered within his mezzotints the way the image of the sitter hovered in the daguerreotype plate.³³⁰

Here again we see the complicated inextricability of engraving and photography that Beegan observes as characteristic of photography's first 50 years. He describes the way that the style of wood engraved illustrations changed to more closely resemble the look of photographs, "in order to compete with the detail of the photograph, wood engraving had

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Leja, "Fortified Images," 64.

become increasingly fine and increasingly tonal in its aesthetic.”³³¹ They had to become photo-realistic.

To the extent that these other media—the halftone, wood engraving, mezzotint, etc.—could replicate the tonal and hands-free look of photography, they could inherit its truth effect. Armstrong describes the way the halftone maintains a tonal structure, so that it “looked like a photograph rather than like an engraving or an etching.”³³² Its success thus belongs to its mimetic effect, rather than to its being “technically any closer to the original photograph than photographic reproductions printed by other photomechanical means.”³³³ It is not as though the halftone process was indexically any truer or closer to the original than the heliotype, autotype, Woodburytype, photogravure, or wood-engraved photograph. That is, following Estelle Jussim, the halftone process could be understood to be yet another “recoding” of what is already a photographic coding of reality.³³⁴ In this Armstrong finds resonance with contemporary concerns about digital photography’s complex recodings of both nature and photography, which gives rise in her estimation “to the vexed question of how to consider images that look like photographs, but either have no photographic—which is to say, indexical—point of inception in the referent, or alter the original photographic ‘transmission,’ therefore constituting photographic simulacra that nonetheless partake of the mythology of the photograph and of its authenticity effect.”³³⁵

³³¹ Beegan 8.

³³² Armstrong 423.

³³³ Ibid., 423-424.

³³⁴ Estelle Jussim, *Visual Communication and the Graphic Arts: Photographic Technologies in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1983).

³³⁵ Armstrong 495, FN 3.

If the 19th-century understanding of photography's index already accommodated an author—the pencil of nature—then the tonal look of the resulting image was understood to be the iconic expression of that author—one which seemed without intervention of the human hand, and instead drawn by light. The photograph's author—light or nature—concealed its representational activity in this tonal look, just as the trompe l'oeil painter concealed his representational labor in his meticulously smooth, fine brushwork. If it was the disappearance of the trompe l'oeil painter behind his work which caused the genre to be so critically despised in the 18th-century academy, this was because the artist prefigures the role of the camera—his painterly achievement, its having “such relief that [the represented objects] seem real,” is an “imitation [that was] merely mechanical,” in the words of Reynolds. Its effect was the result of concealing the presence of the artist's hand, which remained invisibly present—concealed as meticulously smooth, fine brushwork. Its effect was thus the result of concealing the indexical signs of its production. Today, Armstrong claims, it is indexicality that “disappears behind the understanding of the photograph as the product of a machine, the camera.”³³⁶ Instead, “the photographic criterion of indexicality—the photograph's status as a direct trace of the referent—is both forgotten and assumed.”³³⁷

If the tonal look works to reinforce the indexical relationship of the photograph to its referent, its lack of line also seems to promise its record of the transmission of light, rather than the hand of the artist. With this in mind, let us return to Peto's representation of the engraving of Lincoln in *Reminiscences of 1865*. In both versions from 1897 and circa 1900, he paints the engraving so that it looks like a photograph, according to its

³³⁶ Ibid., 425.

³³⁷ Ibid.

tonal look. This is in direct contrast to earlier *trompe l'oeil* representations of engravings, such as Sebastian Stoskopff's *An Engraving of Galatea* (1644-57) (Figure 2.8), an example to which I will return in Chapter 4, which represents the look of its engraved line-quality in paint. Indeed, it is the tonal look of Peto's oval portrait of Lincoln, painted in gradations of sepia and cream, which allows Wilmerding's slippage when he refers to the represented object as a photograph. By translating the linear look of the engraving into the tonal look of the photograph, Peto intervenes in a way that is closer to the look of the 'original' image—Berger's photograph of Lincoln. He re-enacts manually and in paint Buttre's reproduction of the photograph but without the linear look of his engraving; instead he surpasses both this and the halftone's efforts toward invisibility, accomplishing in paint a photographic-looking reproduction.

Michael Leja describes engravings done from daguerreotypes as “double images, having the identity of both photograph and print, each fortified by the other.”³³⁸ Their hybridity of media, he observes, allows for a mutually beneficial relationship: the daguerreotypes gain reproducibility from their translation into print, at the same time that the prints gain veracity from their photographic source. In this way, however, these images “refuse to settle” into either the category of print or of photograph, “instead vacillating between mechanical and autographic image, which can produce a sense of uncanniness or an unsettling cognitive uncertainty.”³³⁹ And the uncanniness of these doubled images, I contend, makes them appealing subjects for *trompe l'oeil* artists. To represent them again in paint only heightens further the indeterminacy of their status as engraving or photograph.

³³⁸ Leja, “Fortified Images,” 65.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

Leja borrows this idea of images that “refuse to settle” from Sherrie Levine, who describes her own appropriative photographs as “put[ting] a picture on top of a picture so that there are times when both pictures disappear and other times when they’re both manifest; that vibration is basically what the work’s about for me...”³⁴⁰ Levine redeploys the re-photography practice we already observed in Walker Evans’ *Family Snapshots in Frank Tenge’s Home, Hale County, Alabama* and re-directs it back toward Evans’ own oeuvre. In her photographic series *Untitled (after Walker Evans)* (1981) (Figure 3.50), she re-photographs the photographs of Walker Evans, in ways that allow hers to be mistaken for his. However, the photographs by Evans that become her subjects are already not his photographs; they are reproductions of his photographs. That is, she photographs mass reproductions of his works readily available in published catalogs, such as *Walker Evans: First and Last* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978). Because Levine’s photographs are taken from photographic reproductions of a print or plate in a book, the resulting photograph indexes a loss, especially of the rich tonality or clarity of Evans’ ‘original’ photographs. Molly Nesbit describes this loss as a “shift” and describes the ways in which the poor production quality of these prints marks their distance from the source.³⁴¹ But recognizing this difference is more likely to happen only when direct comparison of both works is made possible. Instead, Levine exploits the unlikelihood of our recognizing the difference between Evans’ original and her reproduction; but even if we fail to notice the difference between Evans’ original and its mass-reproduction—the object she actually photographs—she imagines that something of its layered presence remains visible. “Knowing that a picture has other pictures under or over it,” Leja

³⁴⁰ Levine qtd in *Ibid.*, 75.

³⁴¹ Molly Nesbit, “Without Walls,” *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960-82*, ed. Douglas Fogle (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2003) 254.

observes, “complicates our response to it, even in cases where we cannot see the layers.... The characteristics of the underlying or overlaid pictures may accrue to what is visible or be offset.”³⁴² I find this pictorial layering at work in trompe l’oeil representations of mass produced images, and I think Peto understood something of this effect.

In Peto’s painting *Daniel Webster Patch Picture* (c. 1900) (Figure 3.51), he repaints a portrait of Daniel Webster. The oval portrait of Webster, unlike that of Lincoln, is represented as if part of a page, rather than as if an oval-shaped object. Like the oval object in *Reminiscences of 1865*, this object appears to cast a shadow, indeed its creases and tears suggest that this page has been similarly well handled. Perhaps it has been torn from the pages of Webster’s famous dictionary, where it might have served as a frontispiece featuring a portrait of the author. Every other aspect of the painting affirms the tactile presence of this page: the folds of a yellow envelope ripped open, the remnants of a card still clinging to the nails by which it was once attached, as well as the weathered and defaced wood of the painted green planks to which these items appear tacked. Trompe l’oeil’s trickery is comprised of these illusions of seeming presence, which we discover in the course of our looking. While the page with the portrait of Webster is not actually present, not physically affixed to what we thought were painted boards, but is instead painted to seem present, its represented image remains present. Learning that this image, which seemed materially present, is (only) a painted representation does not interrupt its representation of Webster. Webster still appears to us by way of a chain of reproduction; our discovery via trompe l’oeil that his representation, his appearance, is “merely” painted image does not resolve it for us. Peto makes use of the changing nature

³⁴² Leja, “Fortified Images,” 75.

of this type of image-object at this time: its simultaneous and increasingly indeterminate status as photograph, engraving, or photo-mechanical reproduction.³⁴³ The tonal representation, rather than the replication of engraved lines or halftone dots, allows its image to look photographic, but its placement on the page should conjure the chain of reproduction to which this image was submitted—the actual history of which cannot be known from this tonally-painted (mimetic) version. Webster's painted image vibrates with the pictorial layers that have brought it into existence. Those layers show themselves to us if we know (how) to look for them.

Levine's project of picturing pictures has the simultaneous effect of making the act of picturing visible and invisible. It is invisible to the extent that we see through the acts of picturing that bring an image into being. If we as viewers overlook the degraded status of Evans's image—the result of Levine's re-photography of its mass reproduction—we demonstrate the effectiveness of mass reproductions' tendency toward invisibility. The act of picturing is visible to the extent that we let it accrue to the resulting image and to the extent that we look for it. Perhaps it becomes visible as a loss—a loss in the tonality and clarity of Evans' image. In Peto's painting, it is his use of *trompe l'oeil* that obscures the transparency of his artistic intervention, making its vibration materially visible as paint.

Wilmerding helpfully identifies the image of Webster in Peto's painting as based upon an engraving by John Sartain made from the well-known daguerreotype by John A. Whipple (1847-48). But instead of considering its inclusion in Peto's painting relative to mass reproduction, Wilmerding reads the Webster portrait as Peto's "nostalgia for well-

³⁴³ Within the same paragraph, despite having already identified the representation of Webster in Daniel Webster Patch Picture as "an oval engraving," Wilmerding slips again and describes the painting as the "picture incorporating a Webster photograph" (169-70).

known statesmen who lived on powerfully after death in the collective imagination.”³⁴⁴

That is, Wilmerding interprets the reproductions represented in Peto’s paintings according to the subject matter of the represented image-object, rather than according to the image-objects that are the subject matter, nor according to the mode in which those subjects are painted. The materiality of the image of Webster vibrates between visibility and invisibility within Wilmerding’s account of the painting; he sees the pictorial layers of its material sources only to see through them to the ways in which this image continues to make Webster present to us despite his physical death.

As trompe l’oeil the representation of Webster’s image upon a page, which seems physically present, compels the hands of viewers who want to touch it to sort its illusion of presence from its status as representation. This compulsion would have been further supported by the material history of image reproductions in books. Tipped engravings or photographs glued into the pages of books could be physically discovered by readers, who while holding the book in their hands might casually drag a finger across the edge of the picture, even lifting it from the page. By the date of this painting circa 1900 the gluing of images into books would have been replaced by photo-mechanical means of reproduction, such as the halftone. The representation of an oval image—which in other paintings by Peto exists as an independent object—on a page might unconsciously remind viewers of their prior tactile explorations, further compelling the urge to touch the trompe l’oeil painting.

Another trompe l’oeil painter Jefferson David Chalfant makes the comparison of actual versus painted objects the subject of his painting. In *Which is Which?* (1890-93), Chalfant adheres an actual four-cent Lincoln stamp alongside his painting thereof. He

³⁴⁴ Wilmerding 172.

then makes this deception explicit by painting in the mode of *trompe l'oeil* a newspaper clipping, as if materially pasted to its surface. The legible text of this clipping declares the stakes of the painting as a challenge to the viewer. It reads: “[-]uine. Mr. Chalfant pasted a real stamp beside his paint-ing and asks, ‘Which is which?’” The painting lays bare one level of illusion by way of another. The legibility of the newspaper accommodates its illusionism, encouraging us to see through the simulation of its materiality to instead read its message—a message which seems fully disclosive of the terms of its illusion. That one of the stamps is painted has already been disclosed; indeed it was revealed by the text of the newspaper clipping.

The trickery of this painting capitalizes upon a viewership that is trained to view illustrations and text together. As Brian Maidment writes, “The most profound revolution brought about by the massive use of wood engraved illustration was the way in which wood engraving presupposed an intense relationship between an image and a written text.”³⁴⁵ Written text could change—clarify, modify, or contradict—the meaning of the image. Readers of illustrated magazines were trained to glance and scan rapidly until something caught their particular attention. Chalfant delimits the amount of text available to scan, but uses the legibility of this text to redirect the viewer’s attention to the stamps. Doing so has viewers look past the status of the newspaper clipping itself, so that its painted materiality remains concealed perhaps even longer than that of the painted stamp.

The directive content of Chalfant’s pictorially-rendered text turns viewers’ attention to the imagery of the stamps. There, they look for signs of its material realization—brushstrokes, paper grain, water marks, among other things. As Ebert-Schifferer describes this, viewers assess the difference between the stamps by reaching

³⁴⁵ Brian Maidment qtd in Beegan 14.

out to touch, even to rub or pick at the stamps. She describes the panel's surface as having "suffered considerable abrasion from attempts to rub it and thereby test its authenticity."³⁴⁶ Beyond the indexical marks of these touch tests visible in the condition of the painting itself, Chalfant already incorporates the look of its having been touched at the level of representation. The irregularity of the painted stamps' perforated edges and the unevenness of the background-fills surrounding Lincoln's head both suggest the tearing or rubbing of curious fingers.

But insofar as we understand this painting as yet another incarnation of the optical-tactile game of *trompe l'oeil* painting, we, as historians, limit our iconological consideration of this painting. We must not look past the material history of the objects represented—the stamps themselves—to see only their representation as image. The modern adhesive stamp and envelope came into existence nearly contemporaneously with photography.³⁴⁷ England's Sir Rowland Hill published a pamphlet on post office reform in 1837, advocating the creation of a notation "using a bit of paper just large enough to bear the stamp, and covered at the back with a glutinous wash...."³⁴⁸ His idea that postage be charged according to weight helped establish the use of envelopes; and his brother Edwin Hill invented a prototype for an envelope-making machine, which was exhibited at Queen Victoria's Crystal Palace Exposition of 1851—where the stereoscope was also debuted. It was in that same year that adhesive postage stamps came into use in the United States. The stamp featured in Chalfant's painting, a 4-cent stamp depicting

³⁴⁶ Ebert-Schifferer 25.

³⁴⁷ As with photography's invention, there are many who claim the invention of the postage stamp, including James Chalmers, Dr. John Gray, Samuel Forrester, Charles Whiting, Samuel Roberts, Francis Worrell Stevens, Ferdinand Egarter of Spittal, and Curry Gabriel Treffenberg. ("Postage stamp." Accessed January 8, 2013. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postage_stamp.)

³⁴⁸ Rowland Hill, et al., *The Life of Sir Rowland Hill and the History of the Penny Postage* (London: Thos. de la Rue and Co., 1880) vol. 1, 271. Google e-book.

Abraham Lincoln, is the third stamp issued of the president. The first was valued at 15-cents and was issued a year from the date of the President's assassination; the second, issued in 1869, was valued at 90-cents. The 4-cent stamp featured in Chalfant's painting was issued between 1890 and 1893; this correspondence to the painting's date suggests to me that the (tricky) image of the stamp may have been used to date the painting. While the dating of the stamp helps us to know that the work couldn't have been painted before 1890-93, it does not help us know how long afterward he might have painted it.

The existence of correspondence from a second owner of *Which is Which?* helps us date the work as having been made prior to February 20, 1901, but this letter concerns another painting of the same name, one featuring 2-cent stamps of George Washington (Figure 3.53).³⁴⁹ As in his painting with the Lincoln stamps, Chalfant includes the representation of a newspaper clipping that reads "uine. Mr. Chalfant proposes to paste a real stamp on the canvas beside his painting, and the puzzling question will be "Which is which?" The letter from its owner charmingly participates in Chalfant's game, as its writer inquires the answer to the painting's title: "I have forgotten which is the real stamp and which is the painted one and would feel obliged if you will kindly inform me which is the painted one."³⁵⁰ Especially remarkable about this request is its disclosure that the problem staged by the painting's title had once been solved, but has since, once again, become unresolved. The short-lived effect of tension or oscillation between image and object is thus restored and revisited with each encounter of the work, even by the same viewer. In the act of forgetting, the oscillation of the stamp between image and object is

³⁴⁹ Joan Gorman, *Jefferson David Chalfant, 1856-1931* (Chadds Ford, Pa: Brandywine River Museum, 1979) 14.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

renewed. Even as the title pretends to solicit resolution—a solution to its problem—*Which is Which?* remains an unanswered question.

Identification of the stamp included in the Washington version of the painting requires both external context and close looking. Of the 184 United States postage stamps with a denomination of two cents, eighty-four feature portrait busts of George Washington in varieties of nine basic designs. Visual comparison of the bust itself disqualifies all but three of the designs; they are according to V.F. Thomas's design catalog: A57, A61, and A88. There are three colors of design A57 (Figure 3.54) (red-brown, pale red-brown, and green) and two colors of design A61 (Figure 3.55) (carmine or lake). There are four types of design A88 (Figure 3.56); each type involves slight differentiations in the two decorative triangles in the upper corners of the stamp (Figure 3.56a-d), and each of these has between one and four variations of color or watermarking.³⁵¹

Looking closely at the painting, however, is made difficult because it likely remains in a private collection (last known to be that of Ernest Jarvis of Ft. Lauderdale) and reproductions of the work are in black and white. Although design A57 (Scott 210, 211B, 211Bc, 213, 213b) dates between 1883 and 1887, the inclusion of only a single number two in the bottom-center of the stamp design, as well as the lettering of the words "TWO CENTS" differs from the stamp represented in the painting. The two decorative triangles in the upper corners of the A88 design do not appear in the stamps on the painting; this version dates to 1895. Based on the appearance of its design, the painting likely features the A61 design (Scott number 219 or 220, dependent on color), which

³⁵¹ Design numbers: V.F. Thomas, "Identification Guide for Two Cent United States Postage Stamps." Accessed April 26, 2013. <http://www.vfthomas.com/USpostagestamps/twocents.htm>; Scott numbers and dates: "Designs of the Issues of 1870-1888." Accessed April 26, 2013. <http://www.1847usa.com/1870identifier.htm>.

dates to 1890-92.³⁵² Joan Gorman dates the Washington version of *Which is Which?* to circa 1889, but analysis of the stamp's material history helps us learn that it could not have been painted prior to the stamp's issue in 1890.

The same designer Thomas F. Morris, vignette artist Alfred Jones, and frame and lettering artist Douglas S. Ronaldson revise the 1883-87 versions of the Washington stamp for the 1890-92 version. The image reprises the same left-side view of a sculpted plaster bust of Washington by Jean-Antoine Houdon circa 1786. Houdon made this bust from a life mask of the subject, but in preparation for a life-sized statue in marble. Before the final version, Houdon revised the bust; nonetheless, the sculpture's relation to the life mask facilitates reception of Houdon's representation of the president as the most accurate. Since the 1850s, the marble sculpture has been cast in bronze and plaster multiple times over. Chalfant's painted copy of a second version of a mass-produced engraving of a multiply reproduced portrait bust taken from a life mask becomes yet another iteration of these reproductions in the effort to represent Washington. His image enters a chain of makers. Despite the second owner's claims, we might more easily settle the question, "Which is which?," insofar as we understand it to be asking which is the actual stamp and which is the painted representation thereof, than we might satisfactorily answer the question of its representation: which is the real Washington? Or, does one of the representations in this chain of reproductions have better claim to representing Washington? Instead it seems each allows Washington to appear—to show himself—to us according to the particular material terms of its representation.

³⁵² "Designs of the Issues of 1890: The Baby Bank Notes of the American Bank Note Company." Accessed April 26, 2013. <http://www.1847usa.com/1890identifier.htm>.

This representational dilemma is also the subject of the version of the painting with the Lincoln stamps. While the stamps in Chalfant's version appear to be or to represent the stamp issued in 1890-93, like the Washington version they are re-issued in 1894 and again in 1896 with the addition of two decorative triangles in the upper corners. The Lincoln stamp shares the same team of designers as the Washington stamp, including Alfred Jones, then head of the American Bank Note Company. The American Bank Note Company was responsible for the printing of stamps until 1894 when it was taken over by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, which then re-issued both stamps under discussion.³⁵³ For the Lincoln stamp, as with other stamps commemorating heroes of the Civil War, Jones used a photograph of the president taken by the Brady studio as the source for his engraving. This engraved photograph, like the engraved portrait bust and the engraved photograph painted by Peto, is thus a reproduction of a reproduction, many times over, even before Chalfant reproduces it in paint. The photographer, like the sculptor, is among the unseen makers of the stamp's image. Chalfant inserts himself as yet another maker in the list, but one whose intervention adheres to his painting.

Although Gorman describes Chalfant's later genre paintings as a move away from his earlier trompe l'oeil work, she observes some examples of continuity, especially relative to the small size of the paintings. But their size, she suggests, might also have to do with his having painted them from photographs. And while Gorman insists, "the resulting genre pieces did not copy the photographs in every detail," she admits that Chalfant used photographs as models for his genre pieces beginning in the mid-1890s;

³⁵³ Cornelius Vermeule, *Philatelic Art in America: The Aesthetics of United States Postage and Revenue Stamps* (Weston, MA: Cardinal Spellman Philatelic Museum, 1987) 12.

indeed, she supplies the photographs from which his scenes were painted.³⁵⁴ While his genre paintings may not exactly copy their subjects in the way that his painted stamps do, the representational activity of painting from photographs restages the engraving of photographs required for the production of the Lincoln stamps—stamps, which he then reproduced in paint (according to the linear look of the engraving rather than the tonal look of the photograph).

Gorman compares one of Chalfant's genre paintings, *A Difficult Problem* (c.1903-05) (Figure 3.57), to his *Which is Which?* paintings, insofar as they all directly solicit the viewer's participation. In *A Difficult Problem*, two elderly men are seated at a table and engaged in a game of chess. On its verso (Figure 3.58), Chalfant lists the placement of the game pieces on the chessboard depicted in the painting and the anticipated outcome: "white to play and mate in three moves." The viewer can thus, as Gorman notes, "actually participate in 'the difficult problem' portrayed. This curious addition," she continues, "recalls the informative and inviting notation on *Which is Which?*. The artist's involvement with the storytelling quality of painting is clear."³⁵⁵ But to gain access to this information, the viewer would have to turn around the painting to see its verso. In the 1890s it was already customary to discover information about at least some images on their versos, most notably, photographs. To turn Chalfant's painting over as if it were a photograph re-imagines the spectatorial desire to reach into Peto's trompe l'oeil letter rack to grasp the physical cabinet card—even turning it over to learn something about the object. That Chalfant paints this genre scene from a photograph (Figure 3.59) in a way that compels viewers to treat it like a photographic object anticipates something of the

³⁵⁴ Gorman 22, 28.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 24.

trompe l'oeil effect of 20th-century photorealist chantournés with which I began this chapter.

Chalfant's viewer must physically interact with the work in order to imaginatively participate in the genre scene it depicts. S/he must treat it as an object in the world—one which, like a cabinet card, can be handled, even turned over. The materiality of a painting—its objecthood—is typically that which we, as viewers, disavow in the course of our looking; as Amelia Jones observes, “Art’s materiality is, depending on context, both accepted in art history and perennially disavowed.”³⁵⁶ Having learned the ways in which his trompe l'oeil paintings could compel the hands of viewers to discover the materiality of a representation instead of the materiality of the object represented, Chalfant applies this lesson to his genre scene in *A Difficult Problem*. That which he represents is not only the genre scene of two men playing chess, but also the photograph depicting that scene; it is to the extent that we might treat the small painting as if it were another type of image delivery system—one, which, like a photograph, we already would have been accustomed to holding and turning over in our hands.

Contemporary artist, Vik Muniz, revisits the trompe l'oeil verso in his series *Verso* (2008-2009) (Figure 3.60) for the ways in which it asks us to observe the materiality of paintings as physical objects in the world. When exhibited, each of his *Versos* sits atop two planks of plywood, presumably to protect the edge of its frame, but also to replicate conventions of exhibition preparation and storage; consider, for example, the way Gerhard Richter's *Nude* is propped up on two planks and leaning against the wall in Louise Lawler's photograph of a gallery amidst installation, *Nude* (1984) (Figure 3.61). Similarly, each *Verso* leans against the gallery wall, as if not yet hung, much like

³⁵⁶ Amelia Jones, “Notes from the Field: Materiality,” *The Art Bulletin* XCV: 1 (March 2013) 17.

Gijbrecchts' *The Back of a Picture* (Figure 3.15). An exhibition of these works has the appearance of not yet being completely installed. In this way, its effect is similar to that of Peter Fischli and David Weiss's installation *Empty Room* (1995-96) (Figure 3.62), a work also included in the *Lifelike* exhibition described at the beginning of this chapter. That installation displays carefully carved and painted polyurethane replicas of everyday objects and tools, such as paint trays, drop cloths, stretched canvases, wooden boards, plastic buckets, etc, isolated to a single small room within the museum's galleries. Museum-goers who encounter *Empty Room* amidst other perfectly installed galleries likely assume that installation work is in progress, and as such they risk passing it by with barely a glance. In accompanying wall text, curators at the Walker Art Center align this illusion in Fischli and Weiss's *Empty Room* with "the long artistic tradition of trompe l'oeil—a French expression that literally means to 'deceive the eye'—in which objects are depicted in highly realistic detail."³⁵⁷

Given the banality of the scene produced, it is perhaps surprising that when Fischli and Weiss describe its effect they skip past the possibility of its being overlooked by visitors. Instead of duped spectators, their imagined audience already knows better about the status of their objects as representation. In an interview, Weiss narrates the viewer's experience as one in which "you 'see something' that you also know is not there. Of course, it is there, but the chair is not a chair, the table is not a table."³⁵⁸ I want to amend this to say, relative to Fischli and Weiss as well as Muniz, the viewer sees something that is and is not there; whether or not s/he "knows" this becomes something of what is at stake in trompe l'oeil. Trompe l'oeil requires that viewers are empowered,

³⁵⁷ "Empty Room," accessed March 26, 2013, <http://www.walkerart.org/collections/artworks/empty-room>.

³⁵⁸ David Weiss in "Real Time Travel," *ArtForum* (Summer 1996) 86.

or at least compelled to discover that the physical object is not actually there but is instead there as representation. The reproduced objects by Fischli and Weiss “are no more interesting than the things they mimic, but what is really fascinating is that they are no less interesting either... Their copies return attention to the things they resemble, so the things they resemble in turn return attention to the things themselves, that is, the work of Fischli and Weiss.”³⁵⁹ This generous reading again presumes that the represented objects are in themselves sufficiently engaging as to attract any attention at all, let alone a reciprocal set of exchanges. As another curator reminds us, Fischli and Weiss “knowingly ru[n] the risk that viewers might mistake [their sculpted and painted objects which at first appear randomly scattered and forgotten] for the cast-off objects they painstakingly replicate.”³⁶⁰ Their work is not an opportunity to experience a moment of discovery amidst looking, as I think is central to—or at least seemingly available in—the experience of *trompe l’oeil*. Gallery-goers are not compelled to handle the banal objects represented, which would allow the *trompe l’oeil* discovery. Instead they enter already knowing better or not; the former might linger to marvel about their achievement of verisimilitude or to join in on their joke, and the latter might walk past the doorway of the piece.³⁶¹

The display context for Muniz’s *Versos* reinforces the ordinariness of their objecthood. In an art museum or gallery, the *Versos* conform to everyday objects in need of hanging, transport, or storage. Beyond this, the information displayed by each verso is

³⁵⁹ Bruce Hainley, “Double Takes,” *ArtForum* (Summer 1996) 86.

³⁶⁰ Engberg 57.

³⁶¹ In my experience, visitors have not been permitted to enter the space of the installation. While this is arguably a framing device that might signal its status as an artwork, its being roped off conforms to an institutional practice of keeping visitors out of uninstalled galleries. Those who wish to look at the piece are forced to do so at such a distance as to undermine the opportunity to discover a detail that gives away the object’s handmade status.

of limited interest to a general public and is incredibly ordinary to the inner workings of the institution. Unless one is a professional who deals with artworks as material objects on an almost daily basis, one might not otherwise think about iconic images, such as *Starry Night* or *American Gothic*, as having back sides—one does not think of them materially. Conventions of installation or rhetoric negate the existence of a reverse side to paintings; hanging them so that they are unable to be seen, reinforces the colloquial account that there's nothing there.

And yet, one remains compelled by that which remains undisclosed on the other side of the *Verso*, even if the image is well-known enough to be easily conjured imaginarily. Instead of wholly banal objects situated so as to seem uninstalled, Muniz's objects are (representations of) objects of interest. The labels populating their surfaces legibly display well-known names, places, and titles. The words "PICASSO," handwritten in black permanent marker across the surface of *Verso (Woman Ironing)* (2008) (Figure 3.63) or "GUGGENHEIM" in similarly sized font on a label just below it, attract our attention, whether or not we already know this object's status as a replica.

As in Fischli and Weiss's installation, the objects represented cannot be sorted from that which they represent through close looking alone. Muniz's *Versos* reproduce the backs of some of the world's most famous paintings in such exacting detail as to be "capable of *really* fooling someone."³⁶² According to Muniz, he hired:

a great number of experts, each doing a specific but fundamental job. To coordinate the innumerable tasks that ranged from photo enlargement, to carpentry, to hardware reconstruction, to 'antiquing' and label making, I called Barry Frier, one of the most detail-oriented brains I've ever met. He worked with a team of carpenters and craftsmen on the basic structure of the pieces before he enlisted Tony Pinotti and Rebecca Graves who did things absolutely beyond my expectations. When I first saw my version of *Starry Night* completed, the level of

³⁶² Vik Muniz, Interview with Eva Respini, *Verso* (New York: Charta, 2009) 18-19.

faithfulness to the original was so photo-realistic that I thought it was too sick. I had to deal with an object capable of *really* fooling someone.³⁶³

Muniz's team of craftsmen reproduces to exacting detail the physical materiality of the painting versos upon which they are modeled. These craftsmen stretch canvas on wooden stretcher bars and rebuild the wooden frames to the complex specifications of the original. They physically adhere copies of labels; they remake rubber stamps which they then ink and apply. Luc Sante describes this "forging of stickers, stamps, seals, markings" as "simulated almost millimeter by millimeter."³⁶⁴ If, instead, he had represented the backsides of the paintings in the medium of photography, as Muniz had originally conceived the project, he would have allowed us to discover in the course of our looking only image where labels, stamps, and seals had seemed actually present.

Rather than accommodating a trompe l'oeil discovery at the level of the image, however, Muniz gives us a counterfeit version, a forgery, "capable of *really* fooling someone." Sante describes "the decision to counterfeit these objects" as producing "a sort of inverse trompe l'oeil (and here we recall that backs of frames were an occasional subject for the trompe l'oeil painters of the nineteenth century)—you may expect a flat surface but instead are confronted with depth, not to mention variegated texture."³⁶⁵ But this description is not quite right; our expectation is not of a flat surface, such as that of a photograph. Instead, the replica conforms to our expectation about how these things ought to look; its variegated texture helps it look like the actual backside of an actual painting. It is perhaps "a sort of inverse trompe l'oeil" inasmuch as it a forgery; it accommodates the illusionism of trompe l'oeil but without allowing us to discover that it

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Luc Sante, *Verso* (New York: Charta, 2009) 12.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

is not actually the object it (merely) represents, unless we turn it over and find no painting there.

While the *Verso* project began as a photographic one, Muniz decided that photography's ready accomplishment of trompe l'oeil—he describes the medium as “the ultimate trompe l'oeil”—was not the point.³⁶⁶ He acknowledges the long history of trompe l'oeil representations of the backs of paintings “since the mid 1600s in Holland. They resurfaced in North America in the 1800s and briefly in the 1970s, profiting from the invention of the airbrush.”³⁶⁷ And he links these practices according to their “indexical approach to realism,” by which I think he means their “sick artisanship that replicates reality.”³⁶⁸ It is photography's indexical replication of reality, which establishes it, for Muniz, as “the ultimate trompe l'oeil.” And although photography is the medium most often employed across Muniz's oeuvre, he is wary of making a photograph of the back of a painting—or, in his words, “a trompe l'oeil of a trompe l'oeil,” which, he decides, “would not really make any sense.”³⁶⁹

Nonetheless, photography does enter into Muniz's process, embedded as a single step in the making of the *Versos*. Indeed, having earned access to the actual paintings at the museums where they are housed, his first step is to photograph the backs of each painting using high-resolution digital cameras. He took many of these photographs for a series of works he made in 2002; he writes in 2005 about his desire to blow up this series to life size in order to exhibit them thus. Instead of exhibiting them as photographs—as trompe l'oeils of trompe l'oeils—he blows them up to life size so they can serve as

³⁶⁶ Muniz 22.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 18.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 21.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 18.

models for the elaborately constructed replicas. For Muniz, photography's scalar distortion did not interfere with its status as "the ultimate trompe l'oeil." Having described it as such, Muniz goes on to say, "I love Edgar Allen Poe's account of his first experience in front of a daguerreotype. He describes it as an illusionistic scale distortion."³⁷⁰ Interestingly, Muniz moves from photography's trompe l'oeil effect—its "wow factor" or "its ability to record the world in exquisite detail"—to Poe's observation of its scalar distortion.³⁷¹

Relative to a recent revival of the "three-dimensional trompe l'oeil" or "photo-realistic sculpture" of Duane Hanson and John DeAndrea," however, Muniz observes that Ron Mueck, Robert Lazzarini, and a few others introduce "distortion and scale shifts as a novel element."³⁷² These distortions of scale bring "subjectivity" to what was otherwise just "sickening artanship."³⁷³ Mueck's *Crouching Boy in Mirror* (1999-2000) (Figure 3.64), a diminutive but naturalistically rendered silicone rubber sculpture of a boy crouched down upon the floor, his hands over his head, gazing at himself in a mirror propped against the gallery wall, was among the works included in the *Lifelike* exhibition with which I began this chapter. Measuring only 18" from the ground, Mueck alters the boy's scale, as Seliger did with the milk carton or Hays did with the brown paper bag, to interfere with his otherwise seeming reality. But the tilt of the mirror into which Mueck's boy looks re-distorts his scale; as image, he appears once again convincingly real. In this particular piece, Mueck stages the trompe l'oeil oscillation between image and object. As miniature object on the floor in front of us, we marvel at the technical accomplishment of

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 22.

³⁷¹ Eva Respini, Interview, *Verso* (New York: Charta, 2009) 22.

³⁷² Muniz 21.

³⁷³ Ibid.

its making; as image in a mirror, we enjoy the illusion of the boy's seeming presence. That is, until we see our own image as well; "when we view his reflection," curator Engberg observes, "he appears all the more 'real' to us, yet we who share his space in the picture plane feel disconcertingly out of place."³⁷⁴

Rather than distorting the scale of the *Versos* by exhibiting them, for example, as miniatures, which he did with photographs of the rectos of famous paintings for the exhibition *Model Pictures* (Menil Collection 2002) (Figure 3.65), Muniz restores the scale of the image to a 1:1 ratio with the object photographed. In doing so, he effaces the scalar distortion of photography that Poe had observed. Its scalar distortion is inherent to the medium insofar as it has no given size—is its scale set through the viewfinder, by the negative or contact sheet, the digital read-out screen, the conventions of printing-out paper, among others? Muniz's representation (his photograph) necessarily manipulates the scale of the represented object (the back of the painting), much like Mueck's miniaturized sculpture does; but just as Mueck tilts the mirror, Muniz then enlarges his original photograph to accommodate the appropriate or conventional scale, not of the mirror or photograph—which can be any size—but of the image subject—the boy or painting verso. Doing so enables our (eventual, in the case of Muniz,) enjoyment of that subject's seeming reality.

When Muniz uses the enlarged photograph as a model for the three-dimensionally realized material version of this image-object, he maintains its 1:1 scale. The realized *Verso*, like the enlarged photograph of the original painting, then corresponds to the scale of the actual painting; this is the strategy of the chantourné: the shape/scale/outline of the representation is congruent with the shape/scale/conventional format of the thing

³⁷⁴ Engberg 58.

represented. Unlike the scalar distortion of Mueck's object in front of the mirror image and unlike the flatness of Gijsbrecht's verso, there is nothing to disrupt the illusion that Muniz's *Verso* is not the thing itself. This erasure of his (photographic) intervention is further reinforced by his (or, I should say, his team's) meticulous reproduction of it as a three-dimensionally realized material object—"as objects, faithful down to the last scratch."³⁷⁵ There are no signs to indicate that this is a replica and not the actual painting; in this way, it seems not to qualify as *trompe l'oeil*.

But, insofar as Muniz's *Versos* address the spectatorial impulse to relate to this representation as if it were the actual object, they employ the *trompe l'oeil* strategy that Chalfant associated with *trompe l'oeil*. The label's legible disclosure of that which should be on the other side compels the hand of the visitor to turn the object around, that is, to relate to it as an object. But if we treat the painting like an object—as the artist Christopher D'Arcangelo did in 1978 at the Louvre, when he surreptitiously removed Thomas Gainsborough's *Conversation in a Park* from the wall and placed it on the floor—we risk punishment, because we know better the institutional mandate not to touch. Nonetheless, the lean of the *Versos* against the wall offers a gap that incites and supports our desire to see the other side. If we don't turn the painting around, we feel deprived of its imaginary realization, which paradoxically feels like its actuality. Although the specific paintings reproduced as *Versos* are familiar enough that we can likely call their pictures to mind in our imaginations, we remain unable to see the material facture or indexical objecthood of the paint itself. Instead, if we could satisfy the impulse to turn around this object, we would find not paint, but ordinary inventory information about this art object—Muniz's *Verso*—rather than the one it represents. We would likely

³⁷⁵ Sante 11.

find the actual marks and labels that “revea[l] where [this object] has been, how old it is and how many times it has changed hands.”³⁷⁶ But this remains invisible to us if we treat it like an image, observing it, as its lean against the wall dictates, only from the front. The *Verso* oscillates between image and object, and we are caught in its scenario of imaginary desire and fear of symbolic punishment.

Notably, it is not that Muniz’s *Versos* allow us to discover their status as representation, but that they incite our desire to have it revealed. We want to interact with the object physically, reaching out with our hands or craning our necks to discover that this is not the object itself but a representation thereof. It is insofar as *Verso* is a representation—a highly detailed reproduction—that I think Muniz presents it as an image. When Respini suggests to Muniz that his versos “stress the painting as an object, rather than an image” and that “in some ways this seems to be the opposite of your photographic work, which is so much about the image,” Muniz responds by resisting such categories to instead embrace a more holistic category of “image.” He says, “I think we’ve got to the point that the use of technical terminologies no longer adds to the discourse on ways to preserve the relevance of representation and the continuity of visual symbolic exchange in our society. When the common denominator is simply ‘the image’ then we can approach it from a multitude of perspectives and really come up with a holistic sense of our visual world. I’d like to think of *Verso* as a collection of physically and conceptually ‘thick images,’ and that’s completely in line with what I have been doing for the past twenty years.”³⁷⁷

³⁷⁶ Respini 20.

³⁷⁷ Muniz 20.

His description of *Verso (Starry Night)*'s faithfulness to the original as "photo-realistic" rhetorically reinforces the way that he treats these objects as images. And photography's standard of realism is embedded into the process of making the *Versos*. I began this chapter by suggesting that photorealist paintings were trompe l'oeil according to the degree to which they could be mistaken for actual photographs at 1:1 scale. I characterized photorealism as a particular style, determined by the visual characteristics of the photographic-model, in which the subsequently painted image was rendered. By saying that the effect of his *Verso* is "photo-realistic," Muniz describes its style, which is similarly based on a photographic model and successfully articulated by its material representation. In contrast to some photorealistic paintings, however, this object is not trompe l'oeil insofar as one might mistake it for the photograph of the verso. Instead it is trompe l'oeil to the extent that one mistakes it for the object it represents—the subject of the intervening photographs. Whereas one might (temporarily or conceivably) be able to mistake Robert Bechtle's photorealist painting '73 *Malibu* (Figure 3.66) for a photograph, one won't mistake it for the car itself; the opposite is true of Muniz's *Versos*—at least his *Versos* of paintings.

As with photorealist paintings that are also trompe l'oeils, it is possible to mistake Muniz's *Versos* of photographs, for example, *Verso (The New President)* (2008) (Figure 3.67) for both *a* photograph and *the* photograph (of Johnson sworn in on Air Force One after Kennedy's assassination), when in reality it is neither. But as with the *Versos* of paintings, these objects don't give us an opportunity to discover their artifice; instead they replicate so closely the look of the original object and by way of the same materials that they are more like forgeries than trompe l'oeils. In contrast, if the backs of these

paintings or photographs had been photographed and then framed, we might have noticed the object's lack of relief or texture; this would have been the opportunity to discover its status as a representation in the manner more conventionally ascribed to *trompe l'oeil*.

Although, as objects framed behind glass, they deny our physical discovery that there is no image on the other side, these photographic *Versos* compel our desire to see the photographic image we imagine exists there. By prohibiting us from seeing that which we want to see, that which may or may not affirm the status of this object as the thing itself, our experience oscillates between one of belief and one of doubt. Compelling belief, even belief mixed with doubt, requires a credible object: as Muniz team member Rebecca Graves remarks "it's not exact...It's more about that it's a credible object, right?"³⁷⁸ But credibility alone, like exactitude, is not always enough to compel viewers to closely consider the materiality of something; this we learn from the example of Fischli and Weiss. Instead of the credibility of an object alone, its photorealist style, for example, it is the particular sociability of the object represented—the way it addresses or engages me, the way it seems to desire my reciprocal exchange with it—that compels my belief.

Like Parrhasios, Muniz compels our belief that a representation could be the thing itself by withholding something from our view. By representing the thing itself as if behind a curtain or as if on the other side of something, viewers feel compelled to see for themselves. They are prompted to enter into an exchange with the representation, treating it as if it were an actual object by trying to pull it back or wanting to turn it around. In both cases, something unseen, something of value, something (that seems to be) auratic,

³⁷⁸ Rebecca Graves in *This is Verso* (Part 2 of 2), accessed March 28, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsVJWsmf5fg>.

lets us look through the represented nature of the curtain or verso: the promised, but undisclosed thing itself—a painting. Each of these representations promises to make present a unique object and even if it cannot, it nonetheless seems as if it could.

When Zeuxis treats the representation as if it were a curtain, the object it represents, he discovers its status as image. Whether or not its status settles so as now to be regarded only as image has to do with the extent to which Zeuxis continues to interact with it, searching the materiality of the representation to discern how it was that previously he might have seen through it, or by imaginatively reliving the moment in which he was fooled. By denying us the opportunity to discover their status as representation, Muniz does not allow for a moment of revelation. We do not actually turn around Muniz's often very large and heavy-looking *Versos*, nor de-frame the photographs to view the image that ought to be hidden there. But their placement in the gallery, propped against or hung on walls, seems to promise that someone authorized will do just this. Because they hold out the promise of making visible the painted or photographed image on the other side, these images seem to be made present by these *Versos*; in this way, they are “as if presences.”

Because our experience of these “as if presences” vacillates between one of belief and one of doubt, they refuse to settle into either category of representation or original (the thing itself). That Muniz's *Verso* refuses to disclose its recto image literalizes another hidden image internal to its chain of production. These “thickened images,” as Muniz describes them, vibrate in a way not unlike Sherrie Levine's appropriative photographs. Just as Levine's photograph of a Walker Evans photograph already covers over another hidden image—the photo-mechanical reproduction of Evans's photograph—

Muniz's reconstruction of an already extant painting verso covers over the hidden image of his intervening photographic model. Similarly, Peto's painting of a photograph of Lincoln already covers over the engraved reproduction of that image, or vice versa, his painting of an engraving of Lincoln already covers over the unseen photograph, which served as its model. These hidden pictures "accrue," as Michael Leja says, "to be visible or be offset" as a loss, or as Molly Nesbit has it, as "a shift." These accretions are signs that can visibly halt the transparency of an artist's material interventions.

Trompe l'oeil representations of image-objects refuse to settle into either category of image or object; the trompe l'oeil revelation that what seemed to be materially present is instead "merely representation" or "just an image" does not halt its visual vibration. Instead, they continue to oscillate between image and object, as a kind of "as if" presence. They have a different kind of ontology, existing in the material world by way of this qualified presence. Our recognition of these "as if" presences in trompe l'oeil painterly representations of image-objects, which seem present (as if objects) but are discoverable as representation (as image), makes room to discover presence in the realm of appearance. And this has important implications for the digital era, which I consider in the next chapter.

Chapter 4. Auratic Disclosures

While the past twenty years in the history of photography have been indelibly marked by innovations in digital technology, the medium is not somehow newly capable of tricking us. Although digital cameras may institute practical changes in image capture—from mechanical cameras and film to electronic sensors and microchips—and in image viewing—from prints in albums or piles to computer or mobile phone screens—these changes have not inherently ruptured what was heretofore the medium's capacity for truth. Similarly, just because image-processing software, such as Photoshop, has come to replace darkroom development techniques, photography is not suddenly more prone to manipulation than ever before. And yet, such claims continue to be made about the cultural shift in photography and its reception. Mia Fineman writes in her introduction to *Faking It: Manipulated Photography Before Photoshop*,

Among the most profound cultural effects of these new technologies has been a heightened awareness of the malleability of the photographic image and a corresponding loss of faith in photography as an accurate, trustworthy means of representing the visible world. As viewers, we have become increasingly savvy, even habitually skeptical, about photography's claims to truth. Our creeping suspicion about the credibility of photographs has been fueled by periodic revelations of digital fakery in news images.³⁷⁹

One recent example of a digitally “faked” news image, which supposedly sparked renewed concern about photographic objectivity, was the 2013 winner of the World Press Photo of the Year. The winning photograph, taken by Swedish photojournalist Paul Hansen, shows two dead Palestinian children wrapped in cloth, carried by their uncles, who are leading a large group of men down a narrow street (Figure 4.1). Of the

³⁷⁹ Mia Fineman, *Faking It: Manipulated Photography Before Photoshop* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012) 4-5.

photograph, Dr. Neal Krawetz, a forensic image analyst with a doctorate in computer science, wrote on his blog, “I cannot tell you about the original picture(s), but I can tell you that the controversial picture is definitely not original.”³⁸⁰ Krawetz alleges that the photograph is a composite of three separate images, and this post-processing of digital imagery, as *Der Spiegel* points out, stokes “fear that the boundaries are becoming blurred between journalistic photography...and artistic commercial image design.”³⁸¹

Another digital photography expert Eduard de Kam compares the raw file with the prize-winning version of the photograph and attests that he “can indeed see that there has been a fair amount of post-production, in the sense that some areas have been made lighter and others darker.” “But,” he continues, “regarding the positions of each pixel, all of them are exactly in the same place in the JPEG—the prize-winning image—as they are in the raw file. I would therefore rule out any question of a composite image.”³⁸² The image, as we may or may not be able to see, exhibits overall image toning; indeed, there is almost a cool, metallic bronze cast over the image, which has a de-saturating effect, and the bottom-left area beneath the arms of the two men carrying the younger victim seems darkened to be almost entirely black, so that it falls away into shadow, offsetting the whiteness of the victims’ shrouds in a way that puts visual emphasis on them. But does this tonal intervention disqualify its journalistic integrity, or moreover, interfere with our belief that these children were killed and mourned?

³⁸⁰ “‘Gaza Burial’ Photoshopped? World Press Photo Award Winner Was Doctored, Expert Says,” The Huffington Post Blog, accessed June 10, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/14/gaza-burial-photoshopped-world-press-photo_n_3273381.html.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Olivier Laurent, “World Press Photo controversy: Objectivity, manipulation and the search for truth,” *British Journal of Photography*, 22 May 2013. Accessed May 22, 2013. <http://www.bjp-online.com/british-journal-of-photography/news-analysis/2269913/world-press-photo-controversy-objectivity-manipulation-and-the-search-for-truth>.

Santiago Lyon, director of photography at the Associated Press and chair of the 2013 World Press Photo jury points out that alterations of tonality have always been a part of photo-journalism. These occurred in analog photography almost automatically, according to choice of film stock or filter, for example. He claims, “Whether it’s black-and-white, different colour temperatures, different kinds of film, with people preferring a Kodachrome look over an Ektachrome look or a colour negative. I don’t think that’s anything new.”³⁸³ Indeed, these different photo temperatures often co-existed in news publications without disrupting their truth claims. “Twenty years ago, the public trusted the blueish images they saw in *Newsweek*, the warm images in *Time*, the black-and-white images in *The New York Times*, and the straight images in *Life* magazine,” according to photographer Ashley Gilbertson.³⁸⁴

Responding to the criticism that Hansen’s tonality is unnatural, photographer Francesco Zizola asks, “when was the representation of reality ever natural? Certainly not when one photographs in black-and white; in that representation, all colour data disappears. Today, when a photojournalist photographs an event in black-and-white, no one contests it and no one asks for his or her exclusion from a competition for having falsified reality.”³⁸⁵ Black-and-white marks a particular style of photographic re-coding; it translates the physical world into this code and thereby discloses its intervention, but only if we recognize it as such. Often, we fail to notice the codes of photography, instead imagining that we can see through its materiality as if it were transparent. Arguably, it is this illusion of dematerialization, which was once the domain of photography, that is now characteristic of digitization. “Analogue photography,” writes Robin Kelsey, “which

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

once, in comparison with older pictorial media, seemed de-skilled and dematerializing, now appears difficult, tactile, and dense. Anything fashioned by an individual without keyboard or mouse has an aura of lost artistry and reminds us, however briefly, of the real. Photographs might as well be paintings.”³⁸⁶

Analog photography’s divorce of form from matter, à la Oliver Wendell Holmes (see Chapter 2), seems an especially hyperbolic claim in the face of digitization. It is digitization, rather than photography, at least as Joanna Sassoon claims, which now reduces the materiality of the photograph to an image. This is a special concern relative to archival efforts to digitize photography collections. She writes:

Fundamentally, what were once three-dimensional physical objects become one-dimensional and intangible digital surrogates, with the tactility and materiality of the original object being reduced to both an ephemeral and ethereal state. Likewise, those important and diverse material and visual cues embedded in original photographs, such as original technologies and social uses...are transformed by the nature of the viewing technology into a unity of a predetermined size, quality and tonal range of the digital image. Thus photographic sizes that lend meaning to the original object may be cropped to the proportions of standard computer screens.³⁸⁷

As a result, she continues, “the fidelity and authenticity of digital images are open to question.”³⁸⁸ Sassoon’s worry is that the custodial institution of the photographic object can alter the image content in ways that are “unbeknownst to the viewer and without leaving visible trace.”³⁸⁹ Beyond this, digitization:

reduces the complexity of the photographic object to a single dimension, with the backs of the photographs, where additional information lends further meaning to the image content, rarely being digitized. This encourages a focus purely on subject content, and the production of a digital image database whose

³⁸⁶ Robin Kelsey, “Notes from the Field: Materiality,” *The Art Bulletin* XCV.1 (March 2013) 22.

³⁸⁷ Johanna Sassoon, “Photographic Materiality in the Age of Digital Reproduction,” in *Photographs, Objects, Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, eds. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (New York: Routledge, 2004) 190.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

‘philosophical basis lies in an aggressive empiricism, bent on achieving a universal inventory of appearances.’ This concentration on the visual nature of the digital image at the expense of other material features of the photograph is further emphasized in the viewing of images through an intermediate and universalizing technology.³⁹⁰

Sassoon describes a supposed anxiety about being fooled by digitally manipulated photographs, which also seems to be at stake relative to Hansen’s World Press Photo. In response to Hansen’s photograph, another photographer remarks, “I think the level of trust in the media from a public standpoint has dropped so dramatically that everything that’s presented now is questioned.”³⁹¹ This lack of trust seems to stem from a suspicion that we are always vulnerable to the trickery of digital photography because it remains invisible to anyone but experts. One way to regain a sense of control in this scenario of diminished trust is to declare all photography to be a lie. Photographer Christopher Anderson argues, “It is beside the point to argue about the degree to which facts have been altered, because all photography does that. . . . I am more interested in the truth in what they have to say, even though I know it is subjective.”³⁹² Anderson distinguishes between facts, which “do not exist,” and truth, which “does,” at least in the sense of “my own personal subjective truth.” He continues, “I think journalism and the public will be better served when we acknowledge that photography is subjective, but it can also be ‘true’—and that truth is a personal truth.”³⁹³

Another strategy about what can be done, by “World Press Photo in particular, and the photojournalism community as a whole, [to] regain the public’s trust,” is to

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 190-91, qtg Allan Sekula.

³⁹¹ Laurent.

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Ibid.

require photographers to be transparent about their interventions.³⁹⁴ As Lyon suggests, “they should request the raw file from all entrants...it would make photographers aware that their images are going to be compared and contrasted to the original files. That level of transparency would be very useful and powerful, and would serve to encourage photographers to attempt to display their work as closely as possible to what they saw in the first place.”³⁹⁵ But this is to assume that what the photographer saw and what the raw file captures are equivalent images. When a photographer sees the raw file, “it may be at odds with his memory of it... Memory plays into it. And sometimes your memory plays tricks on you.”³⁹⁶

Moreover, this kind of transparency establishes the raw file as “authentic,” as “original,” as if it has not already translated the material world into the codes of (digital) photography. While these codes may be literal and less visible—as binary—they are also rendered visually and thus visible, necessarily disclosed by the photograph, if we, like the digital photography experts, know how to recognize them. “I think that we have to learn to understand the context,” adds Zizola, “draw barriers, ask questions, look carefully, think consequently. This is the only healthy attitude with respect to the truthfulness of images, avoiding such excesses as believing that all is fake and nothing is true, or the opposite—that photography is nothing but the exact representation of reality.”³⁹⁷

When Lyon recommends comparison of the raw file with the submitted photograph, he reinvests in a “sense of uniqueness gained from inspection of surface

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

marks left on an object by its manufacture.”³⁹⁸ He advocates a connoisseurial inspection of the type used to guarantee the authenticity of the art object. Of Michelangelo’s *Atlas Slave* (c.1530) (Figure 4.2), for example, Anthony Hughes describes the way “the marks of those processes by which it was brought to [a] stage of semi-completion” are typically interpreted as “guarantee[ing] its authenticity as a historical survival. Like the facture of a painting, they are signs that the shaped stone is an issue from Michelangelo’s hands. In [Walter] Benjamin’s terms, those traces of the chisel constitute part of its ‘aura.’”³⁹⁹

But to understand these signs as the trace of Michelangelo’s hands requires interpretation. Of “similar marks of manufacture” in Auguste Rodin’s *La Pensée* (Figure 4.3), Hughes notes that they are not those of Rodin; instead, they index the intervention of the stone carver hired to reproduce Rodin’s clay or plaster sculpture.⁴⁰⁰ In contrast to Michelangelo’s sculpture, which is “without a doubt an ‘original,’” Rodin’s marble “is a fiction.... the marks here do not show how excavation of the block was broken off..., but deliberately concoct the unearned appearance of an image half-discovered in rock.”⁴⁰¹ Following this logic, *La Pensée* is not a unique work of art, but “a version of a work originally conceived in a different medium (clay or plaster), translated into stone, not by Rodin but by a professional carver.”⁴⁰² Without Hughes’ clarification, this imitation of aura may have passed as an authentic aura; this is the threat according to which “aesthetics seem to become a branch of ethics.”⁴⁰³

³⁹⁸ Anthony Hughes, “Authority, Authenticity and Aura: Walter Benjamin and the Case of Michelangelo,” in *Sculpture and its Reproductions*, eds. Anthony Hughes and Erich Rannft (London: Reaktion Books, 1997) 41.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 30-31.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 31.

Navigating this “threat” is especially difficult because the stone carver’s marks so closely resemble those of Michelangelo. If we are unable to discern the difference, we might mistake the reproduction for the original, just as a credulous spectator mistakes the trompe l’oeil painting for the object represented. Trompe l’oeil paintings must disguise the marks of their manufacture, at least initially, in order to promote our conflicting belief in the presence of the objects represented. Their meticulous representation of the marks of use and age supposedly acquired by these represented objects further assists in this illusion. It is, in Michael Leja’s estimation, the trompe l’oeil painting’s accurate depiction of and emphasis on surface texture, which compels viewers to touch the painting. He relates the experience of having seen someone reach out in an attempt to remove a newspaper clipping from William Harnett’s trompe l’oeil painting *The Old Violin* (1886) (Figure 0.2); he “watched in stunned amazement as a viewer walked over to the painting and scratched its surface with a fingernail in an effort to peel off the newspaper clipping.”⁴⁰⁴

This viewer, in Leja’s estimation, is not deceived, rather he is compelled by the rendered texture to feel its surface. Harnett describes the selection of the objects he paints in an interview: “As a rule, new things do not paint well. I want my models to have the mellowing effect of age.... [From older] pieces I can get the rich effect that age and usage gives to it—a soft tint that harmonizes well with the tone of the painting.”⁴⁰⁵ In seeking out “the aged and worn quality of the objects depicted,” Harnett selects objects that have, in Leja’s account, “an index of sustained tactile contact—touching, holding,

⁴⁰⁴ Michael Leja, “Trompe l’oeil painting and the deceived viewer,” in *Presence: The Inherence of the Prototype within Images and Other Objects*, ed. Robert Maniura and Rupert Shepherd (New York: Ashgate, 2006) 173-189, 177; abbreviated TLO hereafter.

⁴⁰⁵ Harnett qtd in *Ibid.*, 178.

using—wear [that] implies a residual human presence, which Harnett’s paintings maximize and highlight.”⁴⁰⁶

By imitating the look of the particular marks of use acquired by each of the objects represented, Harnett paints these objects according their *unique existence*. While this imitation aids the trompe l’oeil illusion of the represented object’s actual presence, it also preserves “the history to which it was subject.”⁴⁰⁷ In this way, Harnett represents the aura of these objects. Walter Benjamin articulates the concept of the aura in terms of the work of art and “its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art....,” he continues, “includes the changes which it may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as the various changes in its ownership.”⁴⁰⁸ But, of course, the changes in the physical condition of Harnett’s objects are representations; their index of tactile contact is merely the appearance thereof. These cannot be revealed through “chemical or physical analyses” of the painting because, as Benjamin writes, these are “impossible to perform on a reproduction.”⁴⁰⁹ Harnett imitates the index of past contact, which now exists according to the iconic look of wear and tear. Rather than an index of the use of these objects, we find only indices of the painting’s manufacture. Still, this iconic representation of the lustre of usage, rendered “so substantially and palpably,” is that which Leja argues, “enhances their tactile sensuousness for viewers,” and ultimately provokes a spectatorial “desire for tactile gratification.”⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 178.

⁴⁰⁷ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007) 220; abbreviated as WOA hereafter.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Leja, TLO, 178.

In Chapter 2, I discussed Sebastian Stoskopff's *An Engraving of Galatea, Attached to a Board* (1644-1657) (Figure 2.8) according to Joachim von Sandrart's report that its trompe l'oeil illusion had fooled Emperor Ferdinand III into reaching out with his hand to remove the print. But perhaps here too it was Stoskopff's careful rendering of the particular texture of the engraving's rippled edge, which prompted his hand. Or perhaps, as Sandrart insinuates, it was Ferdinand's desire to possess the engraving which compelled him to reach out. The bent corners of the engraving also suggest its having been roughly handled, perhaps in its exchange between owners, and this compels Ferdinand to grab hold of it for himself—indeed, even after it is revealed to have been only a representation, Ferdinand, according to Sandrart, “decided to hang the work in his art gallery in Prague.”⁴¹¹

By painting an engraving as if auratically present, Stoskopff stages what is for Benjamin an ironic impossibility. That is, the engraving represented in Stoskopff's painting is an engraving of Galatea by Michel Dorigny (1616-1665) (Figure 4.4), which in turn is already a reproduction of a painting by Simon Vouet (1590-1649).⁴¹² The seemingly auratic object represented in Stoskopff's painting is thus already a reproduction, and as reproduction, aura is anathema to it; according to Benjamin, reproduction was that which caused the aura of the work of art to wither. “Aura is,” for Benjamin, “tied to presence; there can be no replica of it.”⁴¹³

⁴¹¹ Anna Tummers's summary (and translation) of Sandrart in *Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe l'Oeil Painting*, ed. Sybille Ebert-Schifferer (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2002) 187. “The Emperor tried to remove the print with his hand. The emperor then laughed—endlessly—about the artful deceit and decided to hang the work in his art gallery in Prague.”

⁴¹² According to Alvin L. Clark, Jr., Dorigny came to work for Vouet's Parisian workshop in 1637 and “would eventually reproduce eight of Vouet's designs under the master's supervision (Alvin L. Clark, Jr., “Simon Vouet and his Printmakers,” in *French Prints from the Age of the Musketeers*, ed. Sue Welsh Reed (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1998) 34). I have been unable to locate this painting.

⁴¹³ Benjamin, WOA, 229.

By representing the signs of age and usage suffered by this object, Stoskopff like Harnett paints what seems to be the specific instance of this engraving and its particular material history. The engraving, which is represented as if actually present, thus seems to possess an aura, and it is this seeming auratic presence that compels Ferdinand's hand in his desire to touch and possess it. That is, Ferdinand imagines that he can 'get hold of' Dorigny's print of Vouet's painting by physically prying it off of the wooden surface upon which it seems to be attached; but, in reaching out for it, he discovers that he cannot because the engraving is a painted representation—(only) an image. Ferdinand can nonetheless 'get hold of' Dorigny's print by way of Stoskopff's painted representation, just not physically as an object. He can, however, 'get hold of' it as an image according to its likeness.

It is our willingness to accept this image in place of the object that pries the aura of the work of art from its shell.⁴¹⁴ And this destruction of the aura, according to Benjamin, is motivated by our desire to possess the auratic object. He describes "the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly," as that "which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction."⁴¹⁵ Even art historians demonstrate how willingly we look past the materiality of the reproduction of a work of art to access its image content. That is, we use photographic reproductions of the works of art we discuss not only to illustrate our points, but also to research and formulate them.

⁴¹⁴ "To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose 'sense of the universal equality of things' has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction" (Ibid., 223).

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

This willingness to look past the materiality of reproductions is demonstrated in iconographical analysis of Stoskopff's painting. That is, instead of looking *at* Stoskopff's representation of an engraving, in itself, some art historians look *through* it to the iconography of the engraving's represented imagery; we thereby attend to the representation of Galatea, rather than to the representation of an engraving. In this way, we continue to mistake the painting of an engraving for the engraving it represents, and thus, like Ferdinand, remain credulous to its trompe l'oeil illusion of actual presence.

Iconographical consideration of the particular subject of Galatea may certainly open onto additional meanings relative to trompe l'oeil's illusionism. As Anna Tummers observes of Stoskopff, "Perhaps he saw the sea nymph Galatea as a metaphor for painting itself. Her beauty famously enamored the Cyclops Polyphemus, whom she frustrated by disappearing into the waves every time he tried to approach her. Not unlike the print in this painting, she appeared to be merely a seductive illusion."⁴¹⁶ Although her account acknowledges that the painting's illusion turns on mistaking a painting for a print, it locates the metaphor for painting's seductive illusion in the subject matter of the represented print, overlooking the way that the print's effort at reproduction is itself already an effort of seductive illusion. Doing so accounts for the trompe l'oeil illusionism of the print, insofar as it is represented as if materially present, but looks past the imaginary function of a print reproduction, which is to represent the work of art as if it were actually present. The metaphor Tummers locates in Galatea is similarly available through an interpretation of prints in and of themselves. While the illusion of Galatea's beauty eludes Polyphemus's possession, a print accommodates the illusion of possessing, or at least of having access to the painting it represents; moreover, Stoskopff's painting of

⁴¹⁶ Tummers in Ebert-Schifferer 187.

this print gives Ferdinand the illusion of possessing not only the print, but also of encountering Vouet's painting—twice removed. But as *trompe l'oeil*, the illusions do not entirely hold, proving to be as elusive to Ferdinand's possession as Galatea's beauty is to Polyphemus.

Benjamin locates the decay of auratic experience in the contemporary desire to bring things closer to us, to possess it as an object in close-up, in the form of a picture, a copy—that is, especially, by means of reproduction. For Jonathan Crary, it was this urge to “take possession of the object—from the closest proximity—in an image and the reproduction of an image” that was fulfilled in the viewing scenario of the stereoscope and its visual priority of foreground objects.⁴¹⁷ As in Polyphemus's dream of Galatea, it is the desire for possession that is also at the heart of art reproduction. Nearly three-hundred years earlier than Benjamin's essay, Stoskopff's painting stages this desire to bring things closer or to possess them via reproduction, not only insofar as its subject, Dorigny's print, accommodates the illusion of knowing Vouet's painting, but also insofar as the *trompe l'oeil* mode in which Stoskopff paints Dorigny's print accommodates, at least initially, the illusion that the print is actually there, available for him to ‘get hold of.’ If, as Benjamin writes, “reproduction extracts the aura from even a unique object, destroying its aura as if an object pried from its shell,” Stoskopff's painting enacts this destruction at least twice over.⁴¹⁸

Like Stoskopff's *Engraving of Galatea*, Harnett's *trompe l'oeil* also stages our willingness to accept an image in place of the object itself. Leja cites a response to one of Harnett's paintings that appeared in an 1887 edition of the *Springfield Daily Republican*:

⁴¹⁷ Benjamin qtd in Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990) 127.

⁴¹⁸ Benjamin, WOA, 223.

“The artist shows his highest skill in the representation of textures. The wood *is* wood, the iron is iron, the brass is brass, the leather is leather. The fur of the rabbit and the feathers of the birds tempt the hand to feel their delicate softness.”⁴¹⁹ What is elided in these remarks is an acknowledgement of his act of representation: Harnett’s *painted* wood *is* wood, his *painted* iron *is* iron, etc. The way he paints these things allows the existence of these materials to be sufficiently replaced by images. A viewer’s willing acceptance of images as if they were the actual, material things they represent also describes the trick of trompe l’oeil.

But by reaching out with a desire to touch and ascertain the specificity of that material texture, Leja’s 20th-century viewer reveals his resistance to fully accepting this likeness. Indeed, insofar as the painting must disclose its status as representation, the mode of trompe l’oeil ultimately resists the destruction of the aura. It admonishes us for our willing acceptance of a likeness for the material object itself. It mourns the destruction of the aura, even at the same time that it demonstrates how easily it can occur. Insofar as the viewer discovers that the trompe l’oeil object is just as absent as the human presence, which in Leja’s account, always seems to be “just out of sight,” (s)he encounters the “sense of melancholy” often attributed to Harnett’s paintings.⁴²⁰ This melancholy “probably stems from the frustrated desire for gratifying, physical contact, especially the human contact that the personal belongings seem able to mediate.”⁴²¹ Leja continues,

Melancholy also issues from an unconscious awareness that the alluring fantasies held out in the painting—of a comfortable world of aestheticized leisure and culture, of material fullness that absorbs and emanates human presence, of

⁴¹⁹ Qtd in Leja, TLO, 178.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 179.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

wordless interpersonal contact through material things—are illusions ultimately as phantasmagorical as the conjured still-life objects.⁴²²

Like the aura of Harnett's objects, the aura of the engraving in Stoskopff's painting is revealed to have been only an illusion—a mimetic representation of an auratic look—by way of its *trompe l'oeil* mode of representation. It is Ferdinand's reaching out, or tactile approach to the painting, that reveals the engraving to have been not actually present, but instead present as *trompe l'oeil* representation, thereby exposing the illusory status of its auratic effect. Stoskopff may caution, or at least playfully indicate, the possibility of falling for a phony aura—mistaking a reproduction for a work of art or an image for the actual object—but his use of *trompe l'oeil*, which hinges on our recognition of the representational status of its depicted aura, does not allow us to remain fooled by it.

Harnett represents the auratic signifiers of these objects in the mode of *trompe l'oeil*, which ultimately admonishes us for our acceptance of a likeness for the object itself. Whereas initially I may have looked through the painted signifiers of wear and tear to see only their tactile allure, my compulsion to touch, to approach, or to possess the objects represented in the painting insists that I come to see those signifiers as such and recognize their capacity to trick me. As Leja observes, Harnett paints the highlights of these objects with “thick impasto, much thicker and more textured than necessary to secure the opacity of the light colour.”⁴²³ This auratic signifier of reflective light, which seemed caused by an actual source of light upon the shiny surface of the violin, for example, asserts its origin as paint. Such impasto disrupts the illusion of transparency; it “actually undermines the illusionism of the image; the medium erupts into materiality at

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Ibid.

these sites.”⁴²⁴ While at first the painting may have seemed as smooth and transparent as a photograph, and equally able to dematerialize the reality of the objects represented, suddenly its materiality resurfaces to look back at the viewer. The destabilizing effect of this look back catches us at a moment in which we may have been vulnerable to the painting’s illusion; the conflict of this illusion with the impasto’s literal tactility further compels our hand.

This disclosure of the painting’s materiality reminds us that transparency is not the (entire) goal of *trompe l’oeil*. Stoskopff uses *trompe l’oeil* to make visible the less visible layers of illusion within his painting—its reproduction of a Dorigny engraving after a Vouet painting. These disclosures ought to compel us to look for the acts of translation that intervene, but insofar as they require external comparison and are not readily disclosed by the painting itself, these disclosures remind us of our vulnerability to their illusions. By representing an already reproduced object that is also an image in a mode of painting that presents images as if they are objects, Stoskopff intends for us to know something, even if not everything, of this otherwise undisclosed context.

Benjamin pursues the ethics of an analogous kind of disclosure in his essay, “The Task of the Translator” (1923). Concerned that we might be tricked into mistaking a translation of a text for the original, Benjamin recommends that translators disclose their interventions into the original. Because, as he observes, it is impossible to reproduce an original faithfully, he dissuades the translator’s pursuit of invisibility or perfect reproduction. He writes, “No translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. For in its afterlife—which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living—the original undergoes a

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

change.”⁴²⁵ Guarding against the destruction of the original intention means maintaining something of its remoteness alongside its revelation; something of the foreignness of the original language must remain part of the translation.

Translation exceeds the reproduction of meaning, for Benjamin. Fidelity can in no way guarantee the preservation of meaning in the original; “for sense in its poetic significance is not limited to meaning, but derives from the connotations conveyed by the word chosen to express it.”⁴²⁶ “It is not,” he writes, “the highest praise of a translation, particularly in the age of its origin, to say that it reads as if it had originally been written in that language.”⁴²⁷ The translation should not attempt to pass as an/the original; its task is not communication or comprehension. Instead “a real translation is transparent.”⁴²⁸ But by “transparent,” Benjamin means something quite different than the seeming transparency of a photograph or the initial transparency of a *trompe l’oeil* painting. A transparent translation is possible, for Benjamin, paradoxically when its intervention opacifies our comprehension of its meaning; transparency, for Benjamin, is transparency of intention rather than transparency of effect. For if communication of information becomes the goal of translation, some essential aspect of the original is overlooked. For example, a word may have many connotations; to preserve these in the translation, Benjamin recommends that the translator not choose among them but instead translate the word as literally as possible, even if the same connotations are not maintained by the new word. It is because that word is not quite right that it will remind the reader of the losses suffered in translation. Better to forego comprehension and retain its “true” or “pure

⁴²⁵ Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007) 73; abbreviated as TT hereafter.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 78.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 79.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

language” “in all its literalness,” even at the loss of meaning, so that it remains open to revelation rather than having been already interpreted in a most singular way by a particular translator at a particular time.⁴²⁹ While transparency may be the goal, this is a transparency that makes visible—like the cracks of a repaired vessel—the intervention of the translator. “Fragments of a vessel which are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel.”⁴³⁰

Of a good translation, he writes, “it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully. This may be achieved, above all, by a literal rendering of the syntax which proves words rather than sentences to be the primary element of the translator.”⁴³¹ A translation, inasmuch as its transparency lets the light through, is like a pane of glass, through which light enters a room—as through the lens of a *camera*. It captures not only the content, but also the form of the original language—as a photographic exposure captures the material world or a work of art. In this way, it allows transparent access to the original source. At the same time, however, a good translation cracks the glass of its seeming transparency to signify its intervention. In Thomas Demand’s diptych of cracked pieces of glass, *Glass I* and *II* (2002) (Figures 4.5a-b), he insists that we see a signifier of his photographic translation. Neither the

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 82.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 78.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 79.

camera's lens, nor the resulting photograph, is a window onto the world, which Demand literalizes by showing us a piece of glass through which we can see nothing but flat grayish-blue. Instead of looking through this pane, we look at the glass itself; the crack, in this way, further opacifies its transparent effect. It interrupts what ought to be a view *through*, transforming it into a look *at* the piece of glass, and this makes clear Demand's intervention. Because Demand does not photograph an actual piece of glass, but instead photographs a pane he has built out of opaque pieces of paper, his model literally re-codes the material world into a flattened array of tonalities and shapes. His translation of glass into paper reminds viewers of the way that all photographs translate the world into flat tonalities and shapes on paper. These codes of photography are similarly visible, even if not as readily as those of a lens flare or blur, for example, to remind viewers of the act of translation or reproduction.

Inasmuch as a good translation maintains something of the remoteness of the original alongside its revelation, it preserves its aura. To the extent that we accept a likeness, or reproduction, for the original, reproduction becomes a bad translation—one that does not preserve the aura of the original's distance. But this acceptance of a likeness requires that we look through all the signifiers of that reproduction's manufacture, which otherwise would assert themselves to maintain something of their remoteness alongside their representation. It is in this way that Benjamin's notion of a disinterested camera interferes with his recognition of the persistence of its aura. The presumption of a disinterested camera overlooks the foreignness of the form of its translation—those signifiers of photography's re-coding which adhere to its translation. To overlook these signs of the photograph's manufacture is to overlook the aura of the photographic

object—the signs specific to its persistent materiality, even as its materiality exists in multiple unique instances of the same image. It is to imagine the photograph as if without materiality.

The use of *trompe l'oeil* to reproduce image-objects, such as engravings or photographs, resembles the type of translation Benjamin advocates. Its goal is not to pass as a perfect substitute for the original; instead it aims to be transparent about its intervention upon the original by making visible the cracks in its reconstruction. The *trompe l'oeil* mode discloses, or is transparent about, its intention to deceive, at least eventually, insofar as its trickery hinges on the viewer's discovery of the artist's accomplishment. But at the same time that the manner of its manufacture is discoverable, it must also be disguised. That is, the materiality of the *trompe l'oeil* representation must also seem transparent. It is this transparency of effect that initially lets Ferdinand see through the material circumstances of Stoskopff's painting to imagine his access to its referent. His eventual recognition of its status as representation makes clear the painting's intention to deceive. Over the course of his looking the painting's transparency of effect is transformed into a transparency of intention.

The genre of *trompe l'oeil* plays with these simultaneous and seemingly paradoxical takes on transparency. Insofar as one can “see through” the materiality of the painted surface to mistake the representation for the thing itself, a *trompe l'oeil* must initially seem transparent in its effect; but insofar, as we also discover its status as representation, it makes clear the intention of its intervention. A particular type of *trompe l'oeil* manifests this doubly meant “transparency” in the representation of the “transparent” surface of broken glass. Most notably, Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761-1845)

depicts this broken glass as if pressed atop layers of drawings and engravings. Marie-Louise d'Otrange Mastai writes that Boilly was "said to have created 'transparent paintings,'" but notes, "no one knows just what these were."⁴³² That is, we remain unsure about which paintings in his oeuvre earned this description, but they may be his paintings of glass. He paints what seems to be a collection of drawings, prints, and other reproductions as if behind broken glass. By representing glass—a material we quite conventionally look through without notice of its material intervention—as if it were cracked, he, like Demand, opacifies its presumed transparency. By way of the crack, the otherwise unnoticed glass takes on a surface texture that compels the viewer's hand. But at the same time, as Ebert-Schifferer describes it, "any attempt to verify with touch is countered by the frustratingly ironic threat posed by the jagged edges."⁴³³ Unlike the representations that compelled Ferdinand or Zeuxis to reach out toward them, this one threatens such a touch. Instead, the spell of this painting's illusion may remain unbroken by the viewer's approach or touch test. Ebert-Schifferer relates the way that modern viewers informed guards on duty in the galleries of the National Gallery of Art, where Boilly's *A Collection of Drawings [with Boilly and Elleviou]* (1800) (Figure 2.7) was exhibited in 2002, that the glass was broken.⁴³⁴

But the broken glass is so compellingly rendered that its surface texture, like that of Harnett's *The Old Violin*, prompts the viewer to touch it, even at the risk of injury. As if once protected behind this (now broken) glass, there are painted representations of drawings and prints. The lower left corner of the central engraving seems to be exposed

⁴³² Marie-Louise d'Otrange Mastai, *Illusion in Art: Trompe l'Oeil A History of Pictorial Illusionism* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1976) 249.

⁴³³ Ebert-Schifferer 25.

⁴³⁴ Philip Conisbee in *Ibid.*, 200.

by the break, as if almost available for our (once forbidden) tactile gratification. This engraving is itself already a reproduction of another painting by Boilly, *The Actor Elleviou in his Role as 'The Prisoner,'* which had been exhibited at the Salon of 1798 to mixed critical review.⁴³⁵ It perhaps thus makes its own claims to transparency of effect or of intention relative to its now painted translation of (or as if it were) the engraved reproduction of a painting. Beyond that, at the level of the image, the represented actor makes his own claim to transparently perform the role of a prisoner, but this effort may be particularly difficult for Elleviou, whose notoriety as a “leading member of the right-wing *jeunesse dorée*” became especially controversial “when he tried to dodge the draft,” notes Susan Siegfried.⁴³⁶ While this past controversy may have reinforced the controversy of the 1798 painting’s reception, as Siegfried suggests, I am not sure that this accounts entirely for its inclusion in Boilly’s *trompe l’oeil* with broken glass.

Amidst the French Revolution, Boilly pursued social satire, most notably perhaps in his *Follies of the Day* series of caricatures ridiculing the mores of the period. One of his four episodes, *The Credibles by the Stairway* (1797) (Figure 4.6) depicts “two speculators conning a young man selling *mandats territoriaux*.”⁴³⁷ This caricature revises Carle Vernet’s caricature *The Incredibles* (1796) (Figure 4.7), adding a third figure and complicating the symbolism. Whereas Vernet pairs type against type, culprit against victim, according to unmistakable identifiers, Boilly blurs these identifiers. For example, one of Boilly’s speculators wears both the tricolor plume of the patriots and carries the

⁴³⁵ This painting is described in Henry Harisse, *L.-L. Boilly: Peintre, Dessinateur, et Lithographe: Sa Vie et Son Oeuvre, 1761-1845* (Paris: Société de Propagation des Livres d’Art, 1898) 76, No.16. I have been unable to locate a reproduction.

⁴³⁶ Susan L. Siegfried, *The Art of Louis-Léopold Boilly: Modern Life in Napoleonic France* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995) 189.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

baton démocratique of their opponents, the *jeunesse dorée*. In Vernet, we find a ““conservative sensibility,”” one that lends ““reassuring evidence that social differences are clearly discernible and enforceable.””⁴³⁸ Siegfried argues that Boilly, in contrast, undoes that clarity, or at the very least plays with it, “by confusing the boundaries between social stereotype and eschewing much of the emphatic, exaggerated rhetoric of caricature.”⁴³⁹

From the point of their inception, Boilly’s paintings were meant to serve as models for engravings, which then circulated in publications in the 1790s. The caricatures from Boilly’s *The Credibles by the Stairway* were appropriated into broadsheets, such as those known alternatively as *The Ridiculous Ones of the Day* or *Portraits of Credible Men* (Figure 4.8), which then used text to fix their meaning. In this broadsheet, the caricatures are used to advocate a restoration of order, which the corrupting figures—the speculator and high-fashion fop—disrupted. These types were problematic because they could pass as actual members of the bourgeoisie, thus extending the implications of their corruption to all holders of money. “These marginal types were not only getting confused with the wealthy bourgeoisie and messing up the boundaries between the middle class and the lower orders, they were also exacerbating social tensions,” writes Siegfried.⁴⁴⁰

While the possibility of confusing these types with actual members of the bourgeoisie fed class anxieties, it was the representational fluidity of Boilly’s caricatures that allowed them to be differently deployed. That is, the translation of Boilly’s caricatures into print material fixed their meaning, in ways they otherwise resisted. In another example from his *Follies of the Day* series, *No Agreement* (Figure 4.9), an

⁴³⁸ Berheimer qtd in Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 82.

elegant man shows a coin to a woman dressed *à la Grecque*—a fashionable, but revealing sleeveless dress—indicating perhaps that he has mistaken her for a prostitute. She crosses her fingers in refusal, but does she say, “no,” or does she indicate that the coin is an insufficient amount of money to pay her.⁴⁴¹

In addition to their fluidity of meaning, Siegfried notes the way Boilly’s caricatures could be seamlessly relocated into entirely different settings, even between media. That is, he could relocate figures intended for the print trade into paintings, as he did most notably in *The Incredible Parade* (1797) (Figure 4.10). Beyond this, when engravings made after his small caricature paintings were “hand-colored, the distinction between paintings and prints was further blurred. This blurring, we shall see, was distinctive to Boilly,” Siegfried argues.⁴⁴² Although she observes Boilly’s fluid transfer of characters between paintings and prints, Siegfried does not connect this blurring of media to his representation of prints in paint, as in his *trompe l’oeil* work just three years later.

When Boilly paints his painting of Elleviou as if it were a print, he reenacts the translation of his caricature paintings into prints for the trade. The ambiguity of his painting of Elleviou, like his painted caricatures, was hard to read, which made it disturbing and controversial. Would his translation of it into print, especially into a *trompe l’oeil* print, fix its meaning as the broadsheets tried to do? As *trompe l’oeil*, the painting’s disclosure that this is merely a representation of an engraving and not an actual engraving would have reassuringly fixed its otherwise ambiguous status, just as the text of

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 73.

the broadsheet clearly discloses the fixed identities of its otherwise ambiguously rendered caricatures.

But this restoration of order is destabilized by the illusions internal to Boilly's image, which cannot be as easily resolved. Boilly does not represent Elleviou with the *baton démocratique* of the *jeunesse dorée*, instead he appears in his role as "the prisoner."⁴⁴³ Whether Boilly condemns Elleviou's politics by portraying him as a prisoner, or celebrates his convincing performance, or both, remains obscured rather than revealed by the *trompe l'oeil* mode of this representation. The *trompe l'oeil* painting's effort to pass as an actual engraving thus re-doubles both Elleviou's theatrical effort to pass as someone else, as well as the engraving's effort to pass as a painting. This effort to pass as an engraving is central to Boilly's Grissaille paintings, such as *Monsieur Oberkampf* (c. 1810-1815) (Figure 4.11), which is also represented as if under broken glass.

This relationship of the painted representation of a print, such as Stoskopff's or Boilly's, to the print itself, Dorigny's or Boilly's, or to the source painting, Vouet's or Boilly's, remains obscured whether painted as if adhered by wax seals or as if behind glass—even broken glass. Reaching out to touch these paintings cannot test the fidelity of their reproduction. It is at the level of the image that these paintings acknowledge and participate in the historical practice of altering subject matter, something already long practiced by print artists. While the representation of prints in the self-conscious mode of *trompe l'oeil* may have worked to alert viewers to the possibility of manipulation within the image content of the painted prints, it could not disclose the nature of this intervention

⁴⁴³ The play is *Le Prisonnier ou La Ressemblance* (1798). Siegfried does not indicate how closely the represented print reproduces the painted portrait of 1798. This archival work remains to be done.

without external comparison. Beyond this, changes within the image may not have disrupted its capacity to represent the original; often alterations were made in the name of clarifying the truth of the source image for its translation into a different medium.

In her study of the history of printed reproductions of works of art, Susan Lambert observes that faithful copies were not always the goal of reproductions in print. “Even reproductions which acknowledge the source of the image through inscription often show unexpected changes when compared with the so-called original,” she writes.⁴⁴⁴ Dorigny’s engraving of Galatea includes a Latin inscription, as well as an attribution to Simon Vouet, the date of the engraving, and his signature.⁴⁴⁵ Without opportunity to compare Dorigny’s engraving with Vouet’s painting, we do not know the extent to which this print reproduces or reinvents its source. But comparison of Dorigny’s engraving with Stoskopff’s painting allows us to see that Stoskopff elects to omit these, among other details from the print, in his painted representation of it.

Hand-formed reproductions, of which both Stoskopff’s painting and Dorigny’s engraving are, have for Lambert an essentially “interpretative nature.”⁴⁴⁶ If “two minds and four hands,” according to Alvin L. Clark, can collaboratively realize a masterpiece, Stoskopff shows us the result of three minds and six hands.⁴⁴⁷ The handedness of Stoskopff’s intervention, however, intends a sleight. This is clear insofar as he employs the mode of *trompe l’oeil*. Direct comparison of his painting and Dorigny’s print most readily reveals his omission of two putti that hover above Galatea. His erasure enacts what is typically an invisible and tacitly accepted practice among printmakers, who alter

⁴⁴⁴ Susan Lambert, *The Image Multiplied: Five Centuries of Printed Reproductions of Paintings and Drawings* (London: Trefoil Publications, 1987) 14.

⁴⁴⁵ Ebert-Schifferer 187: “Cur non tuta lates tumidis, Galatea, sub undis Arderet formà nec procus ille tua.”

⁴⁴⁶ Lambert 15.

⁴⁴⁷ Clark 40.

or interpret the works of art they claim to reproduce. Stoskopff chooses to amend Dorigny's engraving in perhaps further imitation of what was already the engraver's discretion. That he does this within the mode of *trompe l'oeil* heightens the self-consciousness of his deception.

Such changes in the printed image from its source image, Lambert observes, affect public knowledge about the original work of art. She writes, "The process of reproduction has the effect of removing the image from its 'original' context, usually reducing its size, and providing it with unforeseen juxtapositions. The result for the onlooker is not only a different experience from that undergone in the presence of the original but an irreversibly changed relationship with the original."⁴⁴⁸ In taking for his subject a printed engraving, Stoskopff takes the deceptions that he observes within the act of reproduction as the subject of his *trompe l'oeil*. He discloses by way of *trompe l'oeil*'s discoverable deception another deceptive practice occurring at the level of the image.

It is at the level of the image that a printmaker can and regularly did reinterpret a source in a way that deceives his audience about that source. These 'deceptions,' however, were intended to enhance understanding of the painting's meaning; of print reproductions of paintings, John Ruskin observes that most changes made between versions were motivated by the engraver's interest in clarifying the truth of the image, which for him was its imaginative power. To best represent a work's imaginative power, a copy has to submit its source to changes—both insofar as it converts it into a different medium and insofar as it might alter the image to accommodate this conversion. Stoskopff recognizes and exploits something of this paradox by representing this particular object at the same time that he makes further alterations to Vouet's painting,

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 16.

even omitting some of the changes already made in Dorigny's reproduction. Insofar as his changes to Dorigny's reproduction are not as easily discoverable as his *trompe l'oeil* representation of the engraved object, he participates in the printmaker's enterprise, further isolating the figure of Galatea as the source of the imaginative power of Vouet's painting. But by representing such changes to the image in the manner of *trompe l'oeil*, he cues us to look for additional layers of illusion within the image, and thus helps to make visible this interpretive printmaking practice.

Hughes relates another imitative practice for which exact mimicry was not necessarily the goal in the sculptural example of Nanni di Baccio Bigio's emulative version (Figure 4.12a) of Michelangelo's *Pietà* (Figure 4.12b). Nanni declares his "imitation" of Michelangelo by way of an inscription on a sash worn by Madonna, where Michelangelo's signature had otherwise been placed; it states that Nanni "made the work 'EX IMITATIONE' (in imitation) of the original group."⁴⁴⁹ To understand Nanni's funerary monument to Michelangelo's friend Luigi del Riccio as "a copy," in the modern sense, is inaccurate; better, he writes, to think of it as "a variant," for all of the ways in which it diverges from Michelangelo's model.⁴⁵⁰ This divergence was understood to be part of the 16th-century meaning of *imitatione*, which "implied not mimicry but emulation, an enterprise whose aim embraced both humility and ambition."⁴⁵¹ He observes the way this 'inaccurate' representation extends to poetry written in response to the sculpture; of Gian Battista Strozzi's poetic homage to Nanni's *Pietà* variant, Hughes observes that it "seems almost willfully inattentive to the actual appearance of the

⁴⁴⁹ Hughes 33.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

work.”⁴⁵² In his verse, the virgin weeps, for example, despite not being represented as such in either Michelangelo’s or Nanni’s representation. For Strozzi, however, Nanni’s version is “transparent,” letting Michelangelo’s *Pietà* show itself through it; and both equally allow for “imaginative access to the mysteries of the Virgin’s nature,” reminding “believers of the saving grace of Christ and of the Virgin’s role as chief intercessor for the souls of the dead.”⁴⁵³

In contrast to this emulative type of reproduction, Hughes offers Gregorio de’ Rossi’s bronze version of the *Pietà* (Figure 4.13), which he surrounds with two other versions of sculptures by Michelangelo, *Rachel* and *Leah* (Figure 4.14a-b), originally made for the tomb of Julius II (Figure 4.14c), where they flank the figure of Moses rather than the *Pietà*. Just as Nanni declared his act of emulative imitation on the Madonna’s sash, so too de’ Rossi includes an inscription, ‘EX AERE FUDIT,’ on the altar of his monument. But this inscription, Hughes claims, “functions more as a founder’s mark..., and it is possible that the three figures were manufactured directly from casts of the marble originals.”⁴⁵⁴ It is tempting, Hughes notes, to treat this almost mechanical form of reproduction “as though they were reproductions of a sort much despised by twentieth-century art historians.”⁴⁵⁵ Doing so, in his account, is to treat them as if vulgar perversions of Michelangelo’s original intention, to understand reproduction only as travesty or loss.

For de’ Rossi’s *Pietà*, such losses would have included: the “translation of marble into bronze [which] has profoundly affected the legibility of the figures...; [and] the

⁴⁵² Ibid., 37.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 38.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 37.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

relative positions of *Rachel* and *Leah* [which] have become unnecessarily reversed.”⁴⁵⁶

But these may have been overlooked or seen through in the 16th century, according to one’s endowment of aura to that object—that is to say, according to one’s belief in the object, perhaps even one’s belief in the transparency of its reproduction. Cast reproductions, for example, would have been perfectly acceptable for the French monarch Francis I, who wrote to Michelangelo in 1546, requesting that he allow Francesco Primaticcio ““to take casts from the *Christ of the Minerva* and from *Our Lady della Febbre* [the Roman *Pietà*] so that I may adorn one of my chapels with them, as things which I am assured are the most exquisite and excellent in your art.””⁴⁵⁷ These casts would have allowed the monarch access to the excellent artistic achievements of which he has been “assured,” but has not himself seen in the specific instance of their time and place. And this access to the artist’s excellence is possible even through signs of Primaticcio’s reproductive intervention, which by 20th century standards are revised to indicate only its lost aura.

And yet, this destruction of the object’s protective auratic shell also frees the object, making it increasingly available to democratic appreciation. Benjamin observes, “for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual.”⁴⁵⁸ He continues, “With the emancipation of the various art practices from ritual go increasing opportunities for the exhibition of their products.”⁴⁵⁹ Just as Nanni’s image allows increased imaginative access to Michelangelo’s *Pietà*, so too do de’ Rossi’s reproductions for the Strozzi chapel or

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Francis I qtd in Ibid., 38.

⁴⁵⁸ Benjamin, WOA, 224.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 225.

Primaticcio's casts for King Francis. As Hughes argues contra Benjamin, "multiplication of an icon, far from diluting its cultic power, rather increased its fame, and each image, however imperfect, conventionally partook of some portion of the properties of the original."⁴⁶⁰

Stoskopff's painting is, I think, similarly ambivalent about the destruction of the auratic qualities of the unique work of art wrought by reproduction. On the one hand, by reproducing the engraving as a painting, he playfully restores to it the experience of an aura—not only does his *trompe l'oeil* illusion allow one to believe that the printed engraving could be physically present in its particular individual existence, but also his painting of Dorigny's engraving exists as a unique object in Ferdinand's Prague gallery. And on the other hand, by reproducing an engraving of Vouet's painting, he extends Dorigny's democratizing distribution of the otherwise unique instance of this work of art.

Because it is indexically tied to the original, a cast lets Francis I imagine that he can see through its intervening materiality to Michelangelo's original. Inasmuch as the cast indexes another object, it "points beyond itself to the original, advertises itself as a trace, exhibiting in extreme degree...transparency."⁴⁶¹ So at the same time that it provides seemingly transparent access to the original, "it is precisely because it is an indexical sign that [it] can never be regarded as satisfying in itself."⁴⁶² It discloses its inability to substitute for the original, at least not completely, unless we look past these disclosures to instead believe, as King Francis does, that through the reproduction we have the work itself.

⁴⁶⁰ Hughes 38.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

When we conceive of photography according to its “standard of informational accuracy,” we fill in the gaps of these losses by seeing through them as if they were transparent. This is what Benjamin does when he looks at photographs; he looks through them as if they themselves were transparent. Relative to photographic reproductions of art objects, he no longer looks for the auratic potential in the representing object but instead in the object represented, as such he sees through the materiality of the photograph. He writes, “Everyone will have noticed how much easier it is to get hold of a painting, more particularly a sculpture, and especially architecture, in a photograph than in reality.... Mechanical reproduction is a technique of diminution that helps people to achieve control over works of art—a control without whose aid they could no longer be used.”⁴⁶³ In this way, photographic reproductions of works of art accommodate a (false) illusion of the artwork’s presence, indeed the illusion that through the photograph we possess (‘get hold of’) and even control the work of art.

It is in “the presence of the subject, of what is photographed,” rather than the presence of the artist’s “unmistakeable hand” that Benjamin finds the possibility of aura in some photography. It is photography’s access to reality, its “tiny spark of contingency, of the here and now, with which reality has (so to speak) seared the subject” of the picture, which causes him to look through the materiality of the photograph itself and its act of translation.⁴⁶⁴ Of an early photograph of Franz Kafka as a boy, for example, taken in a studio “thick with palm fronds” “in a sort of greenhouse landscape,” he observes that it has an “infinite sadness,” which “forms a pendant to the early photographs in which

⁴⁶³ Benjamin, “Little History of Photography,” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2 1927-1934*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, et al., eds., Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999) 523; abbreviated LHP hereafter.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 510.

people did not yet look out at the world in so excluded and godforsaken a manner as this boy. There was an aura about them, a medium which lent fullness and security to their gaze even as it penetrated that medium.”⁴⁶⁵ It was the subject of the portrait photograph, that “member of a rising class equipped with an aura that seeped into the very folds of the man’s frock coat or floppy cravat,” whose aura could be made visible for us by way of early photography.⁴⁶⁶

But later developments in photography eradicate this auratic possibility by simulating its effect as if it were a painting. Benjamin writes,

After 1880, though, photographers made it their business to simulate the aura which had been banished from the picture with the suppression of darkness through faster lenses, exactly as it was being banished from reality by the deepening degeneration of the imperialist bourgeoisie. They saw it as their task to simulate this aura using all the arts of retouching, and especially the so-called gum print.⁴⁶⁷

The gum bichromate process used in pictorial photography not only endowed the medium with a painterly effect, but also incorporated a brush into the development process.

Edward Steichen, a painter turned photographer, plays with the intersections of these media in both the subject matter and technique of his pictorial gum bichromate photograph *Self Portrait* (1901) (Figure 4.15). He incorporates the brush in his realization of the photograph at both the level of the image and the level of the object. In the image, he holds a paintbrush and palette; and in development of the prints, he uses “a brush...to give them the look of gesturally painted pictures.”⁴⁶⁸ By imitating the look of painting, these photographs don “the fraudulent mask of art. It is artiness that erodes...the aura” of

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 515, 517.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 517.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Jonathan Weinberg, “Making It Real,” in *Shared Intelligence: American Painting and the Photograph* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011) 8.

humanity in the subjects portrayed, according to Rosalind Krauss's reading of Benjamin.⁴⁶⁹ The brushy aesthetic of the gum print, as a signifier of the photographer's intention, seems to interfere with the subject's aura. Beyond this, writes Benjamin, "a pose was more and more clearly in evidence, whose rigidity betrayed the impotence of that generation in the face of technical progress."⁴⁷⁰ The brushiness of the gum bichromate joins the artifice of the pose, and both of these rob the photographic subject of its aura.

But couldn't this brushiness have been the mark of a literal translation from one medium into another, and as such, at least in Benjamin's terms, a good translation? When Steichen represents Rodin's plaster cast of Honoré de Balzac *Monument to Balzac* (1898, cast 1954) (Figure 4.16) in his 1908 series *Balzac, the Open Sky—11 P.M., Balzac, towards the Light—Midnight*, and *Balzac, the Silhouette—4 A.M.* (Figures 4.17a-c), his photographic intervention is anything but transparent. His use of soft focus blurs each image, and his decision to photograph at night shrouds its subject in darkness. Beyond this, he applies a bluish-green tone during the printing process.

In all of these ways, Steichen plays with expectations of photographic transparency relative to art reproduction. At the time Rodin's sculpture was a rejected commission that remained a plaster cast in the artist's studio. By photographing the sculpture outside, on the terrace adjacent to Rodin's studio, Steichen cast the yet uncast sculpture as a monumental fixture set against a changing nighttime sky. Insofar as the photographs obscure the legibility of the sculpture, it is perhaps surprising that, as Steichen later recalled, Rodin found them appropriately representative of his work,

⁴⁶⁹ Rosalind Krauss, "Reinventing the Medium," *Critical Inquiry* 25.2 (Winter 1999) 289-305: 291-292.

⁴⁷⁰ Benjamin, LHP, 517.

remarking, ““You will make the world understand my Balzac through these pictures.””⁴⁷¹ By obscuring the sculpture, Steichen’s images disclose his photographic intervention—his hand, as it were—in a way that refuses photography’s effect of transparency. In doing so, he also helps us understand something of Rodin’s intention: that he did not mean his portrait to be an exact likeness of the French novelist. Beyond this, insofar as Rodin’s sculpture remained uncast and singularly housed in his studio, it would be through the democratic distribution of Steichen’s reproductions, which were produced as photogravures for *Camera Work* magazine, that the world would first come to know anything of Rodin’s rejected commission.

But for Benjamin, as Douglas Crimp notes, “the connoisseurship of photography is an activity diametrically opposed to the connoisseurship of a painting: it means looking not for the hand of the artist but for the uncontrolled and uncontrollable intrusion of reality, the absolutely unique and even magical quality not of the artist but of his subject.”⁴⁷² It means seeing through the materiality of photography as if its codes were transparent in effect. This dematerialization was the hallmark of modernity for Benjamin; the reduction of objects to images became a principal function of commodification. Accordingly, he attends more closely to the way photography compels us to see through its mode of (re)production, thereby overlooking (or condemning) the signs of its persistent materiality.

But as we learned from an ironic Holmes in Chapter 1, form is not ‘henceforth divorced from matter.’ The most persistent sign of photography’s materiality is perhaps its edge, which reminds us of the absent context of this image, reminds us that it is only a

⁴⁷¹ Rodin qtd in Edward Steichen, “Introducing Modern Art to America,” in *A Life in Photography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963) 4.

⁴⁷² Douglas Crimp, “The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism,” *October* 15 (Winter 1980) 91-101: 95.

fragment. Oliver Wendell Holmes demonstrates the way photography encourages us to see past this edge, filling in the gaps of its representation, when he describes the fragments of a sign that are caught in a photograph of Temple Bar, but cut off by the image's edge: "22/ PAT // CO/ BR/ PR / What can this be but 229, *Patent Combs and Brushes*, PROUT? At any rate, we were looking after Prout's good old establishment, (229, Strand,) which we remembered was close to Temple Bar, when we discovered these fragments, the rest being cut off by the limits of the picture."⁴⁷³

Elsewhere, Holmes reminds us of the materiality of the developing process. To do so, he playfully revises Dante's warning at the mouth of Hell—Abandon all hope, ye who enter here!—"Leave all linen behind you, ye who enter here, or at least protect it at every exposed point."⁴⁷⁴ For nitrate of silver will blacken not only the photograph, but everything else; "every form of spot, of streak, of splash, of spatter, of stain, is to be seen upon the floor, the walls, the shelves, the vessels."⁴⁷⁵

Holmes describes the elaborate process of developing a photographic plate over the course of nearly five double-columned pages of *The Atlantic Monthly*. He notes the care required, "Let us brush [the square of crown glass] carefully, that its surface may be free of dust. Now we take hold of it by the upper left-hand corner and pour some of this thin syrup-like fluid upon it, inclining the plate gently from side to side, so that it may spread evenly over the surface, and let the superfluous fluid drain back from the right hand upper corner into the bottle."⁴⁷⁶ Should we fail to rock the plate in just the right

⁴⁷³ Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Sun-Painting and Sun-Sculpture," *The Atlantic Monthly* (July 1861) 13-29: 19.

⁴⁷⁴ Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Doings of the Sunbeam," *The Atlantic Monthly* (July 1863) 1-15: 4; abbreviated DS hereafter.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

way, “the neglect of this precaution is evident [even] in some otherwise excellent photographs; we notice it, for instance, in Frith’s *Abou Simbel, No. 1*, the magnificent temple façade.”⁴⁷⁷ Here, Holmes observes a disclosure of the developer’s intervention, materially apparent in the photographic print. But it is the developer’s job to avoid such disclosures, so that the photograph can seem, as the essay’s title ironically indicates, as if it is the product of nothing but the sunbeam.

It seems to me worth noting that the photographic production process detailed by Holmes is actually an effort of reproduction; indeed, it is the photographic reproduction of an engraving, perhaps even an engraved reproduction. The sentence used to establish the subject of this photograph could also describe the process of setting up the model for Stoskopff’s painting: “We will fasten this picture, which we are going to copy, against the wall.”⁴⁷⁸ Despite the pages devoted to preparing the glass plate negative and then developing it, Holmes forgets this effort and looks through the glass to the represented picture: “we see that every line of the original and the artist’s name are reproduced as sharply as if the fairies had engraved them for us.”⁴⁷⁹ But, he continues, “the picture is perfect of its kind, only it seems to want a little more force. That we can easily get by the simple process called ‘intensifying’ or ‘redeveloping.’”⁴⁸⁰ He describes pouring another solution on the “pictured film” and repeating this several times until “the fluid grows brownish, and at the same time, the whole picture gains the depth of shadow in the darker parts we desire.”⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

It is at this point that the development of the plate is complete; but “this is a *negative*,—not a true picture, but a reversed picture, which puts darkness for light and light for darkness.”⁴⁸² Holmes then goes on to elaborate the process of printing and fixing the positive. He recommends producing a number of trial exposures for the ways in which these “will teach the eye to recognize the appearances of under- and over-exposure.”⁴⁸³ That is, exposure has an appearance, a code, and the printer must learn to recognize the differences between these appearances, so that he can opt for the one in which these codes seem most transparent. In the series of trials Holmes describes, it is “No. 3,” which was exposed for “about the proper time. It is the best of the series, but the negative ought to have been intensified. It looks as if Miss E. V. had washed her face since the five-seconds [trial] picture was taken.”⁴⁸⁴ After subjecting the print to some “toning in the gold bath,” Holmes declares the process to be finished.⁴⁸⁵ “We have copied a picture, but we can take a portrait from Nature just as easily, except for a little more trouble in adjusting the position and managing the light,” he writes.⁴⁸⁶

Even if Holmes had not accommodated the necessary reversal of its negative in the printing of the positive, the photographic code of this negative image would have interrupted its otherwise seeming transparency. Whereas this accommodation is always made for photography, it is not necessarily done relative to printmaking, even though reversals of left and right occur in that process as well. Although sometimes, as with their signatures, printmakers correct for this reversal, to let it stand would be to translate the painting into the medium of printmaking in a way that discloses the ‘pure language’ of

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

this intervention. While court painter to Archduke Leopold Wilhelm of the Netherlands, David Teniers the Younger engraved some plates for and coordinated an illustrated catalog of the Royal Collection in Brussels. *Les Théâtre des Peintures* was one of the earliest illustrated catalogs of Europe's great art collections.⁴⁸⁷ Each of the catalog's 247 plates includes the name of the painter as well as the dimensions of the painting, but not the name of the engraver. In 1696 when Charles Patin visited the Royal Collections in Brussels, he observed,

There are also engrav'd prints of the best pieces of this inestimable collection; indeed the project was well contriv'd, and the reputation of Teniers, who is the graver, would have been much more considerable if he had taken care to put his design in execution with greater success. But these sorry copies only serve to disguise the originals and to disfigure the finest draughts in the world.⁴⁸⁸

The fact that Teniers's prints were reproduced in reverse of their originals was perhaps most regrettable for Patin. As such, they altered the originals in ways that "disguised and disfigured them." We rely on the further intervention of Patin's judgment—which declares this the wrong kind of copy—because Teniers' intervention cannot be assessed by sight alone, at least not without direct comparison to its claimed source. Patin wants a more transparent reproduction, something more easily realized later by photography. But this portrayal of their reversal, for Benjamin, would have been akin to letting the cracks of its reconstruction show themselves; as the artifact of the printmaker's intervention, the reversal is the "pure language" of that medium into which the painted originals were translated. It thus appropriately ruptures the illusion of faithful representation with its disclosure of the means of its translation.

⁴⁸⁷ Lambert 170.

⁴⁸⁸ Patin qtd in Ibid.

Teniers the Younger's pursuit of such a vast reproductive enterprise and the recognizable deception of the reversed character of his copies may have enhanced the appeal of his art as a subject for trompe l'oeil painting. Susan Siegfried notes Boilly's inclusion of a "rumpled Teniers print of two drinkers" in his *Various Objects* (1785) (Figure 4.18) at the Clark Institute.⁴⁸⁹ As was the case with Dorigny's *Galatea*, I am as yet unable to locate the claimed source of this print.⁴⁹⁰ Boilly represents the print of two drinkers as if it is signed, but the signature is not legible in the reproductions I have seen. Siegfried does not source her identification of the print as being by Teniers, though a curator also identifies it as such in a more recent catalog from its 2011 exhibition in Lille: "a crumpled engraving represents two drinkers, signed 'D[avid] Teniers.'"⁴⁹¹ In any case, this identification remains obscured by the genealogical reproduction of Teniers—both father David Teniers the Elder (1582-1649) and son David Teniers the Younger (1610-1690) were artists whose paintings are commonly confused for one another's. In any case, if it is a print, as Siegfried suggests, the signature's presence, no matter to whom it belongs, may imply an intervening author in the chain of reproductions from Teniers's source painting to Boilly's trompe l'oeil painting—the printmaker. As in *Les Théâtre des Peintures*, the signature on the print does not necessarily identify the printmaker, but rather the painter of the painting of which this is a reproduction. Even if the signature legibly reads Teniers, whether Teniers made this print or the painting on which this print is based, or both, remains obscured.

⁴⁸⁹ Siegfried 185.

⁴⁹⁰ It is similar, but not identical, to a painting by Teniers the Younger at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., *Two Peasants with a Glass of Wine* (c. 1645).

⁴⁹¹ Richard Rand in Boilly (1761-1845) *Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille* (Paris: N. Chaudun, 2011) 236. My translation.

Reproductions, whether of or by Teniers, populate other trompe l'oeil paintings beyond this example by Boilly; indeed, Boilly's painting may cite an earlier trompe l'oeil painting that also does so. Gaspard Grésely (1712-1756) represents an etching of a different painting by Teniers, but also of two drinkers, in his trompe l'oeil letter rack *A trompe l'oeil of an engraving of David Teniers II's Surprised Lovers, letters, a bill, two scrolls, a feather, a pipe and a pair of calipers attached to a partition, with a fly and a butterfly* (Figure 4.19). Grésely also painted (or at least is linked to an 18th-century French school of painters who represented) several trompe l'oeil engravings as if behind broken glass. These include *Trompe l'oeil after Les Enfants de Sylène engraved by Pierre Dupin after Watteau* (Figure 4.20), *Head study of a young girl with trompe l'oeil of broken glass* (Figure 4.21), and *Trompe l'oeil of a print with broken glass* (Figure 4.22).

Beyond these, Lambert includes another 18th-century French example whose authorship is unknown, but which, as she indicates, might be by Grésely. This painting of an engraving under broken glass, she titles *Trompe l'oeil after St. John engraved by Nicolas Dorigny after Domenichino* (Figure 4.23). The subject of this painting is thus a print by Dorigny's son, Nicolas Dorigny (1658-1746). Like his father, N. Dorigny is also known to have made a print of a painting, one that is then re-represented in the mode of trompe l'oeil by Stoskopff and Grésely, respectively. Like his father, N. Dorigny is known to have made a print based on a painting of Galatea, *Galatea with Nereids and Tritons* (1693) (Figure 4.24)—this time after Raphael's painting (Figure 4.25) as opposed to Vouet's. Both Stoskopff and Grésely, in taking up the subject of the elder and younger Dorignys' prints respectively, represented print reproductions of roughly contemporary

paintings in the manner of *trompe l'oeil*.⁴⁹² Although these observations may seem to be coincidences, I want to propose instead that they are productive iconographical choices—if not of Galatea, then of prints by Dorigny or of prints after paintings by (the printmaker) Teniers—and that the *trompe l'oeil* reduplication of objects by these individuals redoubles the duplication already at work in the specific function of these objects, in their particular artistic activity, as well as, perhaps, in their personhood as sons.⁴⁹³

As discussed in Chapter 3, when John Frederick Peto elects to represent an engraving of Lincoln, as if it were a photograph—insofar as he obscures the linear line quality in paint, reproducing it instead according to a tonal look—his iconography exceeds the subject of Lincoln to include also the means of that image-object's production. Peto translates the engraved lines of the object he represents according to the tonal look of the photograph upon which it is based, while disguising the strokes of his paintbrush. In his *Lincoln and the Pfleger Stretcher* (c. 1900) (Figure 3.16), the oval portrait of Lincoln is painted as if exhibiting additional wear and tear; as Johanna Drucker observes, “this particular reproduction has lost some of its earlier engraved clarity in his work, and its representation is muddled, blurred, incomplete, like a memory over time....”⁴⁹⁴ Drucker thus reads the way that Peto obscures the line quality of this engraving not in connection to the photographic roots of its reproduction history, but as literalizing the metaphorical effect of memory's fading over time. There is a way, however, to understand these readings in tandem.

⁴⁹² Stoskopff's painting dates between 1644 and 1657; the engraving dates to 1644. The 18th-century painting reproduces a print from N. Dorigny's series of the Evangelists from 1707.

⁴⁹³ A further vibration with El Greco's painting as discussed in Chapter 2: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him” (Genesis 1:27).

⁴⁹⁴ Johanna Drucker, “Harnett, Haberle, and Peto: Visuality and Artifice among the Proto-Modern Americans,” *The Art Bulletin* 74.1 (March 1992) 37-50, 47.

The loss of this portrait's clarity metaphorizes memory much like the model of the mystic writing pad or palimpsest Sigmund Freud uses to illustrate memory's function. If we think of the formation of memory as if it were written on the transparent celluloid sheet of the writing pad, its appearance is registered there until it is pulled up from the underlying layer of wax. The memory seems to disappear, but its trace is nonetheless preserved in the underlying wax impression. The original text or record of this palimpsest is effaced, partially erased, and then overwritten by another; it becomes a multi-layered record. I want to suggest that for Peto Lincoln's portrait is a multi-layered record; there is no authentic or inviolable "Lincoln" identity. He represents this lack of referential coherency as a cumulative image that vibrates as a multiplicity of media, but one that cannot be untangled. Indeed, he may also be using an actual engraving as the model for an imaginary photograph, or vice versa.

As I observed in Chapter 3, Sherrie Levine photographs other photographs, "put[ting] a picture on top of a picture so that there are times when both pictures disappear and other times when they're both manifest," just as Peto paints an engraving of a photograph as yet another type of image that refuses to settle.⁴⁹⁵ The traces of the underlying layers of image-types accrue as now absent presences. Drucker describes *Lincoln and the Pfleger Stretcher* as a representation of the "marked absence" of the image—"there is no image as such."⁴⁹⁶ By painting the verso of a canvas, he paints the absence of the painted image, making it present as an absence. Similarly, he paints an absent piece of paper, the one-time presence of which he implies with the representation of three nails in the lowermost stretcher bar to the left of the portrait. These nails seem to

⁴⁹⁵ Levine qtd in Michael Leja, "Fortified Images for the Masses," *Art Journal* 70.4 (2011) 60-83: 75.

⁴⁹⁶ Drucker 46.

secure three scraps of paper, indeed their squared orientation to one another and their correspondence with a slightly lighter square of the wooden stretcher bar suggest that they once held three corners of the same piece of paper. Of this motif in trompe l'oeil painter William Harnett's practice, Drucker writes,

The label itself has been removed, and is indicated merely by remnant corners and by the convincing phantom of its erstwhile presence—a lighter patch distinct from the surrounding panel of wood. In this device, Harnett presents the conceptual face of his practice, depicting an unrepresentable absence: this blank patch is not a surrogate, but a ghostly trace of something once present. This is a rendering of absence marked to be perceived as an absence.⁴⁹⁷

By representing objects as literally absent—torn away, for example—trompe l'oeil artists represent the elusivity of the (lost) original.

Beyond that, their representations of absence as presence tempt viewers to fill in the gaps of these represented losses, indeed to see through them or to look past them. Notably art historians often look past these traces of lost objects, covering over or filling in the gaps in their representation to arrive at coherent interpretations. When John Wilmerding describes the way that a bowie knife hangs in Peto's *Reminiscences of 1865* (1897) (Figure 3.43) so that it obliterates the first word of a painted calling card, but nonetheless reads it as, "Head of the House," he fills in the obscured text to imagine its legibility, as if its meaning were patently manifest. Doing so allows him to interpret the painting of Lincoln as a symbolic double of the artist's father who had recently died; the bowie knife thus cuts off the "head" in "head of the house" in simultaneous reference to Lincoln and Peto's father: "two lives cut down by death, individuals who were heads of national and personal families, respectively."⁴⁹⁸ But already, his reading covers over

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 43-44.

⁴⁹⁸ John Wilmerding, *Important Information Inside: The Art of John F. Peto and the Idea of Still-Life Painting in Nineteenth-Century America* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1983) 13. According

something not actually legible in the painting. The envelope represented in the painting does not read, “Head of the House,” but rather “of the House.” While Wilmerding accounts for this painterly obfuscation nicely by reading it as a visual severing of the head from its household, I think Peto’s painting purposefully obscures the kind of straightforward legibility that Wilmerding assumes it to have.

Peto’s fellow trompe l’oeil painter, friend, and mentor, William Harnett, had painted a trompe l’oeil letter rack in 1879, *The Artist’s Letter Rack* (Figure 3.17), which featured an envelope addressed to the “lad[y] of the house.” I mention this, at the very least, to suggest that the phrase “of the house” is not necessarily begun with the word “head.” In Harnett’s painting, too, part of the phrase is obscured, here, by the pink strap behind which the envelope appears to be tucked. If we were to seek clues about the obscured letter from the information available on the other painted cards and envelopes in Harnett’s image, we would find no apparent “lady of the house.” We might assume that the “C.” of “C.C. Peir[son?] & Sons” on one envelope corresponds to the “Charles” of another, but neither of these suggests the presence of a lady. Perhaps the pink strap obscures not a “y,” but an “s,” addressing the “lads of the house.” My point is not to pin down an actual identification of the obscured information; instead it is to address the mode of its presentation. That is, to read the painting depends upon ignoring the gaps in its presentation by filling in the implied letters to arrive at an imaginary coherence of representation, as Holmes did relative to the photograph of the Temple Bar.

That both Holmes and Wilmerding fill in these gaps demonstrates a shared spectatorial dynamic of both photography and trompe l’oeil. They coax viewers to look

to Wilmerding, Peto’s father died in 1895, but Peto represents his father’s death date as 1896, in a trompe l’oeil painting of his father’s tomb, *Memento Mori* for Thomas Peto (1904).

past what is actually apparent in print, pixel, or paint, to instead imagine the reality of what is there as representation. Peto already understood this play between concealing and revealing from Harnett's paintings and used it to similar effect in his own. The year after Harnett painted *The Artist's Letter Rack*, Peto painted his own pink-strapped version, *Rack Picture with Telegraph, Letter and Postcards* (1880) (Figure 4.26). The pink straps of this painting similarly interrupt the name of an addressee on one envelope, in this case the first two letters of what otherwise appears to be the artist's own name, "hn F. Peto." Peto thus uses the pink strap of his painted letter rack to literally carry out the task of the trompe l'oeil painter: to eliminate, at least initially, the trace of the artist.

Peto, however, does not wholly disappear behind the pink strap. This partial disappearance doubles Wilmerding's observations about his technique: Peto "prefers to exploit, rather than suppress the mark of his brushwork."⁴⁹⁹ Wilmerding continues, "In contrast to Harnett's objectivity, Peto became increasingly subjective, if not autobiographical."⁵⁰⁰ This puts a little too much argumentational pressure on Peto's somewhat looser brushwork, I think, especially considering that he continues to employ centuries-old trompe l'oeil iconography and compositional strategies. Instead I think Peto's decision to paint with a softer line quality demonstrates his application of another of Harnett's lessons, as well as his continued investment in the visual vibrations between illusion and disclosure available in trompe l'oeil painting. Whereas Wilmerding assumes that looser brushwork only works to disrupt the illusionism of a trompe l'oeil image, we might instead consider the ways in which this disclosure fuels additional levels of illusion within the image. The looser brushwork, then, like the blurred or illegible appearance of

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 217.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 216-17.

Harnett's represented newspaper clippings, according to Leja, allows viewers to let down their guard about the status of the painting as such, making them newly vulnerable to the surprise of something that seems to surpass representation.

In *Lincoln and the Pfleger Stretcher*, Peto represents both the image of the painting and a piece of paper—perhaps even the label identifying the painting—as absent—as either turned or torn away. In contrast, the portrait of Lincoln seems wholly present—intact and fully visible. The extent to which one might think it is physically present as an object constitutes its trompe l'oeil trick, but this trick prompts the disclosure of his painterly intervention, re-coding the syntax of its engraved lines in paint according to the tonal look of the photograph upon which it is based. The image-object vibrates between seeming presence and absence, as well as between presence as painting, engraving, or photograph. By painting the engraving of the photograph of Lincoln as if present and as if tattered or mishandled, Peto both ruptures and reasserts its auratic presence. While the material qualities of the object—the oval engraving—may deteriorate and disappear, the reproduction of the image—recoded into new materialities—will go on.

Peto intervenes into the image of Lincoln most notably to efface the mouth of the great orator. Lincoln's embodied voice can speak no more, but his words—as written images—can still be read. The material representative of an image may fade, but not the image or “icon,” as long as it continues to be reproduced. Thomas De Quincey's 1845 essay “The Palimpsest” describes its propensity to preserve over its intention to destroy; but rather than a utopian fantasy of eternal preservation, the palimpsest also demonstrates

the necessary disappearance and contamination of that which is preserved.⁵⁰¹ These shifts or losses suffered by the image in its re-coding remain legible, if we know how to look for them. And rather than recuperating originality or authenticity, these losses remain present as aspects of the copy.

It is striking to me that the losses suffered in the reproduction of the work of art—the inaccuracies or imperfections—accrue to become visible signifiers of the object's status as a reproduction. The translation of *Leah* or *Rachel* from marble to bronze, for example, is visible according to its loss of legibility. In Chapter 3, Sherrie Levine's photograph of a mass reproduction of Walker Evans's photograph was described by Molly Nesbit as "less a copy than a shift," especially insofar as Levine made the finished print from an internegative, "a thinner, lighter, less intensely toned second generation."⁵⁰² These visible losses function as the marks of manufacture, especially for those who deem the reproduction an inferior version of the auratic original. But in identifying these traces—these visible losses or present absences—they extend auratic possibility to the reproduction. Douglas Crimp observes this return of the aura in the work of Sherrie Levine; aura returns, but not as a recuperation, and is instead shown to be "only an aspect of the copy, not the original."⁵⁰³

Rather than recuperating the aura of the original, which reproduction destroys, this lost aura marks the reproduction as a loss, and this loss acquires its own aura, marking its presence at the place where it happens *not* to be. To describe the losses inherent to reproduction as aura seems precisely opposite Benjamin's meaning, for in his

⁵⁰¹ "Palimpsest." Accessed May 28, 2013.

<http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/palimpsest/>.

⁵⁰² Molly Nesbit, "Without Walls," in *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960-82*, ed. Douglas Fogle (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2003) 254.

⁵⁰³ Crimp 98.

terms the aura insists on the presence of the original and its authenticity. But this aura is present as absence; this presence, which “is *not there*,” is, as Crimp describes it, a “ghostly aspect of presence that is its excess, its supplement.”⁵⁰⁴

The aura of a reproduction discloses the unbridgeable distance from the (original) thing represented; its absence, as Crimp reminds us, is the condition for all representation. It is this condition, which we enjoyably disavow via fantasies of its material transparency which seem to make the subject present for us (it is this enjoyment which I pursue in the final chapter). That is, as Sherrie Levine articulates, “the desire of representation exists only insofar as it never be fulfilled, insofar as the original always be deferred. It is only in the absence of the original that representation may take place.”⁵⁰⁵

When Levine showed her re-photography of Edward Weston’s young nude son (Figure 4.27) to a friend, he reportedly remarked that “they only made him want to see the originals. ‘Of course, [Levine] replied, ‘and the originals make you want to see that little boy, but when you see the boy, the art is gone.’”⁵⁰⁶ This unrealizable desire of representation is perpetually thematized in the reception of trompe l’oeil paintings—Zeuxis wants to see behind the curtain; Emperor Ferdinand wants to see the engraving, which in turn will make him want to see Vouet’s painting; Leja’s viewer wants to touch the textured surfaces, Boilly’s viewer wants to report the broken glass.

Sherrie Levine’s work is exemplary of the kind of photographic activity Crimp identifies as postmodern, insofar as it questions the activity of representation through photographic modes, particularly those aspects of photography that have to do with reproduction, “with copies, and copies of copies. The extraordinary presence of their

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 92.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 98.

⁵⁰⁶ Levine qtd in Ibid.

work,” Crimp writes, “is effected through absence, through its unbridgeable distance from the original, from even the possibility of an original as a ‘ghostly aspect of presence that is its excess, its supplement.’”⁵⁰⁷ But Benjamin describes the aura’s presence according to its “unique phenomenon of a distance, however how close it may be.”⁵⁰⁸ Hughes too summarizes the aura with similar emphasis on its imposition of distance: aura is “that nimbus of awe with which the cult surrounds the image and which establishes a psychological distance between the believing spectator and the statue itself.”⁵⁰⁹ It is this phenomenon of distance that reproduction destroys in its effort to bring things closer.

But because Crimp associates Benjamin’s aura with “that aspect of the work that can be put to the test of chemical analysis or of connoisseurship, that aspect which the discipline of art history, at least in its guise as *Kunstwissenschaft*, is able to prove or disprove,” he finds the ghostly quality of presence in postmodern photography “to be just the opposite” of the aura.⁵¹⁰ Because art historical attention to the auratic materiality of the work of art intends to prove its authenticity, and because photography made these tests irrelevant—“overturn[ing] the judgment-seat of art” which fetishistically sought out credentials for the photographer—Crimp finds no room in postmodern photography for the “hand” or “eye” of the artist. But signs of the work’s manufacture—whether linked to a particular authorial subject or not—adhere, and these are typically described as losses—they are present as absence. Describing them as such actually helps us to hold on to Benjamin’s aura to account for the ghostly type of presence Crimp locates in the work of Sherrie Levine, for example, rather than to declare it “just the opposite.”

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 94.

⁵⁰⁸ Benjamin, WOA, 222. And as the “unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be” (Benjamin, LHP, 518).

⁵⁰⁹ Hughes 41.

⁵¹⁰ Crimp 94.

Hughes helpfully summarizes aura, in its other meaning, as “that sense of uniqueness gained from inspection of surface marks left on an object by its manufacture and its subsequent passage through time.”⁵¹¹ This “manufacture” can imply an author, but it can also be used more generally to account for the historical circumstances of its production. Hughes continues, “Facture and damage are interpreted as respectively signs of authorship and of historical authenticity.... It is the beholder who must actively interpret these traces to invest the work with a reverential nimbus.”⁵¹² Authorship and authenticity are interpretations available from the inspection of the signs of manufacture, but they are not the only interpretations available. Indeed, to arrive at these interpretations requires the beholder’s belief in these values and her investment of them in a particular object. As a beholder of sculptural reproductions, Francis I apparently was prepared to activate the auratic traces of Michelangelo’s excellent original effort even at the same time that they inherited the (visible or invisible) (auratic) traces of Primaticcio’s casting.

The interpretations of the aura—as authored and authentic—are precisely those that postmodern photographers seek to “displace,” rather than to “recuperate.”⁵¹³ And as if following Benjamin’s recommendation, they use a strategy of emptying the object of its aura to do so. It was Eugène Atget who for Benjamin “initiated the liberation of the object from the aura;” he did so by emptying his photographs not only of mood, but also of people. It is according to this “emptying operation, the depletion of the aura, the contestation of the uniqueness of the work of art” that Crimp locates a shared strategy

⁵¹¹ Hughes 41.

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ Crimp 98.

with art of the late 20th century.⁵¹⁴ But perhaps the evacuation of the aura could never be fully realized. Perhaps it is better to say that Atget empties the aura of its associations with authorship or authenticity, rather than that he destroys the aura itself. With mechanical reproduction, as Benjamin articulates, “the semblance of [art’s] autonomy disappeared forever.”⁵¹⁵ It is not that the auratic signifier disappears, but that its signification of autonomy does.

The emptiness of Atget’s photographs, for example of deserted Paris streets, causes Benjamin to describe them as “scenes of a crime;” he continues, “The scene of the crime, too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence.”⁵¹⁶ This description reminds not only me, but also Tamara Trodd, of the photographs of Thomas Demand, who presents empty scenes that in many cases are modeled after scenes of a crime. Of Atget’s photographs, Benjamin describes the way they “suck the aura out of reality like water from a sinking ship.”⁵¹⁷ Demand’s photographs “seem to have had something pumped out of them, leaving them airless and confined. Thus, in the work of both there is a simultaneous sense of the emptiness of non-art and of curiously intensified and uncomfortable effect, summed up in the way that, in Benjamin’s descriptions, Atget’s work appears emphatically de-auratic and uncanny.”⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 95.

⁵¹⁵ Benjamin, WOA, 226.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Benjamin, LHP, 50. In 2012, Demand perhaps literalizes this description in his animation, *Pacific Sun* (2012), made after the sinking of the Costa Concordia off the coast of Italy—a shipwreck that was also deemed a crime scene.

⁵¹⁸ Tamara Trodd, “Thomas Demand, Jeff Wall, and Sherrie Levine: Deforming ‘Pictures,’” in *Photography after Conceptual Art* eds. Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) 143.

It is by way of the uncanny effect of this emptiness that, as Trodd suggests, Benjamin leaves room in his text “to let the notion of ‘aura’ back in.”⁵¹⁹ It was in the uncanny effect of early photographs that Benjamin located the possibility of a photographic aura. In David Octavius Hill’s photography, as opposed to his paintings—which were sometimes based on photographs, as in his 1843 fresco of the Church of Scotland—, “we encounter something new and strange...there remains something that goes beyond testimony to the photographer’s art, something that cannot be silenced, that fills you with an unruly desire to know what her name was, the woman who was alive there, who even now is still real and will never consent to be wholly absorbed in ‘art.’”⁵²⁰ Her distance from us—as someone who was alive there—seems presently available—even now still real—in what seems to be “a strange weave of space and time;” this is how Benjamin transfers the aura to the subject of the photograph, rather than discovering it in the art or manufacture of photography.⁵²¹ Because the aura of the female subject does not submit to becoming ‘art,’ this convinces him to look through the photograph to its image; in doing so, he overlooks, I want to say, the persistence of an aura signaled by the marks of that object’s manufacture—its codes.

This uncanny effect returns in Benjamin’s description of Atget’s photographs, now as the result of his evacuation of both its auratic cult value and the human face and figure from the photograph. It is in the refusal to represent an (auratic) human subject, to instead represent the signs of their one-time presence—“the tables after people have finished eating and left, the dishes not yet cleared away”—, as in Harnett’s paintings of

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

⁵²⁰ Benjamin, LHP, 510.

⁵²¹ Ibid., 518.

well-used objects, that the human subject seems uncannily present. The aura thus returns in the effort to absent it—present as absence.⁵²²

Benjamin does not make room for the possibility that the photographs of the Church of Scotland remain uncannily present as absence in Hill's painted 1843 fresco, in the way that Weston's photographs remain uncannily present as absence in Levine's re-photography. But he also overlooks the fact that he experiences the aura of early photographs by way of reproduction; he finds "the charm of old photographs, available in fine recent publications" ready to use "for real insights into their nature."⁵²³ These auratic traces of the reproduction trigger an involuntary memory tied to our one-time unconscious perception thereof, and thus, they remain uncannily visible in their seeming invisibility.

Even as the material traces of reproduction become increasingly invisible, we remain unconsciously aware of them. But critics such as Sassoon worry that we won't see these interventions, that knowledge of what is lost won't adhere to the digital reproduction. Digital archiving, she writes, "creates an image bank of auratic digital objects without reference to associated contexts or clues as to their previous physical embodiment."⁵²⁴ These digitally reproduced "quasi-objects" obtain an illusory "aura of transcendence and independence."⁵²⁵ She fears that we might be duped by these phony auras into supplanting our experience of the material (multiply reproduced, but unique) object with that of its digital reproduction. This can occur inasmuch as we accept a likeness for the object itself; digitization "empt[ies] the photograph of all visual clues

⁵²² Ibid., 519.

⁵²³ Ibid., 508.

⁵²⁴ Sassoon 192.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

based on its materiality and leav[es] it to be judged solely on its image content.”⁵²⁶ But this understanding of digital reproduction reproduces a premature mourning of the loss of materiality, one which already occurred relative to photography’s dematerialization of that which it photographed, and now occurs relative to digitization’s dematerialization of the photograph; instead, we ought to remember the materiality that clings to digital reproduction as well. Consider this example:

using a lupe [sic] to magnify detail in an original photograph, for instance, physically draws the viewer into the core materiality of the object to interact with the larger detail under view, while almost touching the object’s surface. Enlarging a digital image involves using a keyboard or mouse while maintaining physical distance from the screen image. Thus, an intermediate technology used to view a digital surrogate is unable to replicate the interactive nature and process of viewing experienced with a material object.”⁵²⁷

The difference is not so clear, however. Both the physical and digital efforts to magnify, however, achieve the same goal: they allow observation at high magnification of an object—either the material photograph or the digital image of that photograph. Having taken great care to distinguish these relative to the photographic print, Sassoon mistakenly conflates the image and object when it comes to digital reproduction.

Consider what would happen to her example if we said that the photographic print depicts Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*; then looking through the loupe gets us no closer to the material presence of the paint on canvas photographically reproduced than the computer’s virtual enlargement does to the material presence of the photographic print digitally reproduced. Enlarging an image on a computer beyond its ideal resolution reveals, like the loupe held too closely to the photograph, not the image, but the material through which that image is constituted—whether pixels or paper fibers. Indeed, we

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 199.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 192.

might think of this experience of limited resolution akin to the discovery that the photograph in Peto's painting is a replication of the tonal look of photography; these are reminders about both the effort to reproduce the object as a convincingly accurate image and that image's status as a material object.

Revealing the persistent materiality of photographs—whether analog or digital, but almost always repeatedly reproduced and widely distributed—is a central concern of Thomas Demand's trompe l'oeil photography. But just as digitization efforts are misunderstood as de-materializing or misleading, Demand's project is often similarly misunderstood. His *Window* (1998) (Figure 1.17), which I discussed in Chapter 1, was included in an exhibition *Supermodel* at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MassMoCA), a show focused on photographs of architectural models and fake buildings by nine contemporary artists. As Richard Eoin Nash writes in a review of the exhibition, these works “[eschew] the conventional documentary tradition of representing the built environment, the exhibition takes for its subject the photographic dissolution of perceived reality.”⁵²⁸ Nash continues, in line with the predominating reception of this photographic strategy, by describing how the work troubles the apparently referential relationship between a photograph and its object. Extending the fear of photography's irreality to architecture, Nash worries that “architecture appears not to require actual buildings anymore.”⁵²⁹

Depending on our point of view, we either find something of an endorsement of or a rebuttal to Nash's rather hyperbolic fear in Thomas Demand's 2000 photograph *Model* (Figure 4.28). Here, we see a room with a window and a table, upon which there is

⁵²⁸ Richard Eoin Nash, “Follies and Falsities: Architectural Photography,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 23: 2 (May 2001) 71.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

an architectural model. Looking through the darkened window, we learn that it is night and assume that the architects who normally populate this office would not have been there for the photograph because they had already gone home for the evening. But as we continue to look, our look *through* this darkened window becomes instead a look *at* it; its pane of glass has no sheen, no transparency, its surface, like every other surface in the space, has the same strange matte quality. We inspect more closely, perhaps spying an uneven edge or seam, until we realize that the architectural model on the table is not the only model in this photograph, rather the entire scene is a model, a paper construction. Demand constructs life-size, three-dimensional paper models that he photographs with a large format analog camera, and then destroys, exhibiting only the resulting image, which is roughly to scale, and thus a photograph of about five to nine feet in size. Here his represented content – the architectural model – self-reflexively doubles his process of building paper models. Just as Stoskopff paints a print in the manner of trompe l’oeil to prompt us to look for that which ‘lies behind’ it—Dorigny’s engraving and Vouet’s painting—Demand photographs a model in a modified trompe l’oeil, prompting us to look for that which ‘lies behind’ it.

On the one hand, Demand’s photograph is the literal result of an elaborate construction process. By photographing the soon-to-be-destroyed paper models rather than displaying them, he disguises this construction and does so using a medium we have come to rely on for its objectivity and documentary capacity. His photograph can thus trick us in a way that resonates with our growing fears of photography’s truth-telling capacity, in the face of increasingly invisible digital interventions via programs like Photoshop. Indeed this worry is only heightened when critics realize that Demand’s

images are not just extemporaneous constructions—the brainchildren of a creative artist, much like the models produced by architects—but instead are modeled after mass media photographs. Thus, Demand’s constructions are actually *re*-constructions that erase any signs of the historical specificity of the site documented by the “original” images. That the photographs he chooses to reconstruct are typically of sites where something historically tragic or infamous has occurred further dramatizes the vulnerability we might experience when faced with his manipulated versions of these places. In this way, his photographs seem to undermine “photography’s capacity as witness to the Real,” forcing us to relinquish any capacity for the photograph to bear witness and perhaps, like Nash, to lose faith in the reality of the built world itself.⁵³⁰

Such a suspicion about a one-to-one correspondence of document and reality structures at least part of this artistic strategy. But if we understand Demand’s strategy only in terms of how it empties the image, as for example Camille Morineau claims in her article “The Empty Image,” then we repeat postmodernism’s evacuation of any adherence of the real from photography, reformulating our understanding of photography according to a binary logic in which it is either objective documentation or fictive construction. But as Morineau herself writes, “For the generation [of artists] that emerged in the 1990s, the image is not only photographic but hybrid, a construction with no clear relation to the real.”⁵³¹ But just as she describes the photograph as hybrid, she re-asserts its lack of clear relation to the real. As hybrid something of its relation to the real would be maintained at the same time that that relationship would be made unclear.

⁵³⁰ Doug Harvey, “Are we photographs?,” *Camerawork: A Journal of Photographic Arts* 28.2 (Fall-Winter 2001) 19.

⁵³¹ Camille Morineau, “The Empty Image,” trans. C. Penwarden, *Art Press* 264 (January 2001): 33-40. Wilson Web (200100104392007).

By emptying Demand's image, Morineau can assert that the artistic strategy of photographing built architectural models produces a "wholly digital image."⁵³² Digital interventions to correct or alter photographic images have become standard, yet invisible practice. Morineau links the historical specificity of digitization's impact on photography to photography's impact on painting a century earlier. "If the coexistence of painting and photography set artists thinking about the status of the pictorial image, then what are the questions raised by the coexistence of photography and digital technology?"⁵³³ Her question conflates painting with digital technology, suggesting that both do something to complicate photography's status as a pictorial image. Implicitly for Morineau, whereas photography's invention accomplished quite readily, even automatically, a quality of realism that was unrealizable for realist painters because of the necessarily subjective interventions of their hands, even diverting their pictorial efforts away from realism, now digital technology intervenes into photography's documentary status. If these digital efforts intervene invisibly, then Morineau worries that digital photography will be able to trick us into mistaking photography for what is actually closer to painting.

As a tricky kind of painting, Demand's photography becomes aligned with that of *trompe l'oeil*; I think that even this slippery sort of logic is worth further consideration. Nash actually describes his experience in front of another of Demand's photographs as one of being tricked and even describes the work's effect as *trompe l'oeil*. Nash's attempt to look through the vertical blinds of Demand's *Window* (2000), results in his discovery that he had been "fooled" by its "*trompe l'oeil*" effect.⁵³⁴ Rhetorically this critic not only turns Demand's photograph into a painting—Parrhasius's painted curtain—but beyond

⁵³² Ibid..

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Nash 74.

that, he turns it into a painting capable of convincing a viewer that a representation is a reality. For many, this is the power and the threat of Demand's work; "If we can be convinced by a photograph that a model is a real building, we might begin to doubt the reality of documents everywhere."⁵³⁵ Both Parrhasius and Demand could "convince" viewers because their representations *looked* real. But the stakes of this trick seem different in the case of Demand because of photography's documentary function. This documentary function has to do with the automated and chemical process of photography, which allows the photograph to be understood as causally related to its referent. In photography theory, this causal relationship has been characterized as indexical.

But Demand's photographs are often misunderstood as having no index or referent: Morineau describes the way that Demand empties his photographs of "any relation to the real;" she writes, "How is it possible to look at these uncertain images that have no unity, no index or referent, [no] history or origin?"⁵³⁶ I say that this is a misunderstanding because his photographs do still relate indexically to a referent; they are causally related to the paper models he has built and then photographed. Mistaking that referent for the real thing, rather than a construction thereof, does not rid the photograph of indexicality; the paper construction is the referent that adheres. If we mistook the photograph of the paper model for a photograph of a real room with a paper model, it was only because of how it *looked*. It is photography's *realism* that contributes to our expectation of its truth or authenticity, so that when photography's realism is disrupted, so too is its supposedly truthful and authentic relation to the real via its

⁵³⁵ Exhibition brochure, *Supermodel*, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, 2000.

⁵³⁶ Morineau.

indexical referentiality. Thus, when the realism of Demand's photographs is undone by a stray pencil mark or an uneven edge, critics confuse this sign of the referent's construction with a manipulation of the photograph's indexical relationship and its presumed promise of truth.

This uneven edge is not only a sign of the referent's construction; it is another index – a trace record of Demand's (translation) process, his meticulous wielding of scissors. It is our recognition of this index that disrupts the truthfulness we associated with the photograph's index. As such, we begin to see how inappropriate it is to yoke truth claims to indexicality. Indeed, as film and new media theorist D.N. Rodowick writes, "a photograph can neither lie nor tell the truth; it only denotes (automatically registers space) and designates (is causally related to a past state of affairs)."⁵³⁷ Demand's photograph might trick us about the constructed-ness of its subject, but it doesn't lie; it denotes and designates the paper construction and its resemblance to the real world. In that Demand shows us the possibility of producing "misleading images that appear spatially consistent and perceptually real," he stages the dominant fear about digital photography.⁵³⁸ Indeed this is what prompted Morineau to describe Demand's construction within the image as rendering it a "wholly digital image."⁵³⁹ For new media theorist Lev Manovich, it is digital intervention that disrupts photography's status as a "recording medium by allowing manual construction within the image." As a result, photography, he writes, "is no longer an indexical media technology but, rather, a subgenre of painting."⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁷ D.N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 143.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁵³⁹ Morineau.

⁵⁴⁰ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000) 295.

But, like Demand's paper model, painting also has an index – a sign that exhibits its cause – in the brushwork or trace of the painter's point of contact with the canvas. It is this index – the telltale sign of brushwork – that trompe l'oeil painting must disguise in order for the trick to succeed. That is, the trompe l'oeil work of art uses resemblance or perceptual realism to disguise the indexical trace of its painted process. When it succeeds, its illusionism is typically described as photographic. Here, we might think of Chuck Close's photorealistic paintings (Figure 3.9), which aspire to spatial descriptions that are as exacting as those of photography and indeed that depend on photography as their models. But describing painting's realism as photographic repeats the misunderstanding that a photograph is necessarily a likeness: it can be out-of-focus and over- or underexposed beyond recognition. Such photographs display their indexical relationship to, rather than their iconic resemblance of, the physical world. Trompe l'oeil paintings cannot display their indexical trace *initially*, but they have to *eventually*. Otherwise, the trick that Parrhasius' curtain is a painting and not a real curtain may never be discovered.

By describing digital intervention in photography as a 'subgenre of painting,' Manovich looks to place digital image-making in a history of hand-painted animation practice. Cel animation, insofar as it is understood as the hand drawing of sequential images, is typically seen to undo film's indexicality. But Rodowick finds that cel animation, insofar as it is understood as the *photographing* of hand-drawn images frame by frame to produce an illusion of movement, has "a strong indexical quality," despite its imaginative use and malleability.⁵⁴¹ For Rodowick, it is crucial that each animated cel is

⁵⁴¹ Rodowick 121.

photographed, not that it's also drawn. He writes, "Here, as in all other cases, the camera records and documents a past process that took place in the physical world."⁵⁴²

This connects, I think, to Demand's project.⁵⁴³ Like the hand drawings of cel animation, Demand's handmade constructions are photographed. Here again, the camera records the results of Demand's process all of which took place, painstakingly, in the physical world of paper, cardboard, and glue. But, what seems crucial is our ability to (eventually) perceive the index of this construction within the image: the drawn penguins in *Mary Poppins*, for example, are perceptually distinct from the human Dick van Dyke and this distinction is maintained in the film; they are understood to be existentially distinct (Figure 4.29).⁵⁴⁴

But the constructed elements in Demand's photographs are not as readily perceptually distinct, at least not *initially*; there is no 'real-world' point of contrast, no Dick van Dyke or other human subject, within the image. Indeed, the *trompe l'oeil* illusion that I described can occur because we don't initially perceive the existential distinction in his photographs between his paper models and the real world. The paper models *look* (at first) to be 'ontologically equivalent' to the real world, at least to the extent that it would be registered and represented by a photograph.

Similarly and increasingly, digital image synthesis presents humans and animations together in ways that are perceptually indistinct. In *The Social Network* (dir. David Fincher, U.S., 2010), two unrelated and non-identical actors portray two identical

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ Indeed, Demand also makes animations from stop-motion photography of his models. Examples include: *Escalator* (2001), *Camera* (2007), *Rain* (2008), *Pacific Sun* (2012). These works became the subject of a 2012-2013 exhibition: *Thomas Demand: Animations*, jointly organized by the Des Moines Arts Center and DHC/ART, Montreal.

⁵⁴⁴ Rodowick 122.

twins; the face of one actor, Josh Pence, was digitally replaced by the face of the other actor, Armie Hammer, producing the filmic illusion that the two actors are identical twins playing identical twins (Figure 4.30a-b). In the film, the digitally replaced twin can look ontologically equivalent to the filmed twin. The invisibility of this digital intervention is the commonly cited source of digital anxiety; if we are unable to perceive the difference between the real world elements and the digitally constructed elements within a photograph, then we are more apt to be tricked by photography. But insofar as cinematographer Jeff Cronenweth's digital capture imported the image of both human actors, Hammer and Pence, into the world of digital synthesis, the actors and animations don't just look "ontologically equivalent," for Rodowick, they *are* "ontologically equivalent."⁵⁴⁵ Whether captured by digital cameras or synthesized on computers, they are both numerical code.

In digital photography, the moment of capture is immediately and automatically transcoded, that is, converted into code. This quantifiable and symbolic data can then take any form whatsoever (thus Manovich's 'subgenre of painting'), but it tends to take a form that looks perceptually indistinct from the real world. This is what Rodowick calls the "paradox of 'perceptual realism.'"⁵⁴⁶ That is, the imagined painterly freedom of digital image production is paradoxically geared toward the "realist" conventions of photography.

While Demand does not use a digital camera, I think his process of building paper models literalizes this digital transcoding process. By producing perceptually realistic images that structurally correspond to a viewer's experience of photographic space, he

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 101.

literalizes the realist conventions of digital image-makers. Both he and digital filmmakers build the content of their images to conform to our expectations of photographic realism.⁵⁴⁷ Demand's constructions are built (and lit) to be photographed; they cheat for that purpose: tops or undersides of tables are built relative to the high or low camera angle; backsides of objects do not need to be built because of their frontal orientation to the camera.

But this logic of photographic realism is not Demand's only constraint. His paper models are not just constructions; they are *reconstructions*. They reference a source, a photographic source that he typically finds in mass media publications. Thus, they are bound to the information established by this source image. In this way, he also literalizes the way that digitization transcodes the point of capture into another symbolic representation of that data. His source photograph literalizes the digital camera's point of capture, which he then manipulates in the form of his paper constructions; as such, his source photograph is like the "raw material" of "live-action footage" that digital filmmakers can, according to Manovich, manipulate "by hand."⁵⁴⁸

Instead of converting the source image into binary numeric symbols, he manifests the terms of the digital in entirely analogical ways. He literally 'cuts and pastes' the scene of the photograph back together, while literalizing another hallmark of the digital; its "inevitable loss of information."⁵⁴⁹ Demand refuses to supply any potentially individuating sign that might help us link his photograph to its source photograph.

Whereas in *Model*, this erasure was naturalized by our assumptions about architectural models – they show no marks of use or specific identifiers—elsewhere, as in *Poll* of 2001

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 102.

⁵⁴⁸ Manovich 302.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 66.

(Figure 4.31), the post-it notes without reminders, the ballots without votes, the telephones without numbers refuse any (even analog) display of the symbolic coding central to digital transcoding.

Demand's literalized 'digit'-alizations draw out the goal of perceptual realism at the heart of digital transcoding. As in *The Social Network*'s seamless digital replacement of one actor's face with another, "[g]iven enough resolution, a digital[ly filmed image] can simulate the look of a[n] ... analogical image."⁵⁵⁰ While digital image-making thus aims toward the terms of photographic likeness, Demand's image-making only aims for this as our initial impression. This not only helps us to see a crucial distinction between Demand's project and the efforts of digital media, but it helps us to name that distinction as the former's investment in the continuing tradition of trompe l'oeil practice. Spying a single pencil mark or seam is enough to let Demand's viewer, like the one watching *Mary Poppins*' penguins, perceive the construction within the image as ontologically and existentially distinct from the real world. In this way, his trompe l'oeil images allow the indices of their construction to become visible. Demand allows the goal of photographic realism to fail. Doing so reminds us that spatial semblance is not photography's primary power.

The logic of photography's index, determined by its causal relations or 'real connections,' never had a necessary relationship of resemblance. A weathervane, for example, can index the wind's direction without resembling the wind. Rodowick defines the index as "a present trace of a past action whose causal origins must be found through reasoned conjecture."⁵⁵¹ Photography's index, in this way, implies two different kinds of

⁵⁵⁰ Rodowick 119.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 115.

interactivity: the ‘touch’ of the trace through light and chemical interaction, as well as the viewer’s interaction through ‘reasoned conjecture’ to discover the cause of an image. I think Demand literalizes both versions of interactivity in his project. His touch literalizes the photographic trace, denoting the image’s cause, but insofar as this touch re-touches a source image, it also literalizes his ‘digital’ transcoding of that image. Digital interactivity, for Manovich, has to do with the user becoming co-author of the work, interacting (by touching) a media object to choose elements to display or paths to follow.

Demand’s version of the source image is the only version we see; he physically chooses what to show and what to withhold. His withholdings eventually upset the perceptual realism of the final image; they become visibly absent traces of his past actions upon the paper construction, signs of his co-authorship. When we recognize the index of his intervention, we experience a *trompe l’oeil* rupture in our viewing experience of the photograph. He literally re-touches a source photograph and our discovery of this touches us; we have a bodily experience of confusion or surprise that prompts our own interaction with the image. Our confusion prompts our desire to know how Demand built his image to look this way, which we can discover through ‘reasoned conjecture.’ But the cause of Demand’s image exceeds his paper intervention. It includes his selection of the source image and the initial reason someone else took that photograph.

But Demand intervenes here too, withholding this cause. His banal titles refuse any historical specificity. Instead, it is up to us to remember the source by imaginarily reconstructing that which Demand has withheld from his paper reconstructions. Returning to *Poll*, we may recall a more populated version of this scene from newspapers or magazines reporting the vote recount of the 2000 U.S. presidential election. But its

identification as such is not just a name game, even though art historians and curators often treat it like one by suggesting explicit sources in wall or catalog text accompanying exhibitions of his work. In an interview, Demand regrets this one-to-one identification; “if you label [it,]” he says, “it becomes too much like Madame Tussaud’s—people compare before and after.” Instead, he says, “I just did something about the knowledge that you and I have about [it].” His refusal to supply the now-lost source image insists that something of the limitations of our knowledge remains; he resists letting the site of a historic or tragic event seem wholly communicable and contained. Instead, he employs a *trompe l’oeil* strategy, which unsettles our certainty about the reality of his photograph, to prolong our uncertainty about its identification and to insist that our re-membling and re-construction of the source remain active through our ‘reasoned conjecture.’

Notably, Demand is discouraging comparison of the source image and his final photograph in terms of spatial correspondence or of resemblance. I think that he is warning against our reliance on the criterion of resemblance for understanding the indexical or causal logic of the photograph. Rodowick insists that photography’s primary power lies in its temporal and existential qualities: a photograph is not necessarily a likeness, but an assertion of existence in past space-time.⁵⁵² Demand discourages comparison of his source photograph and final photograph in terms of resemblance, and notably he does so through language that situates them temporally: “before and after.” If we resist taking his discouragement to think of the works as “before” and “after” wholly at face value, we might recognize a kind of misdirection that works to remind us of the temporal situation and relation of his photograph to another, rather than (or in addition to) its resemblance-based and comparatively derived identity.

⁵⁵² Ibid., 58.

His use of a photographic model to construct a paper model, even when not literally doubled as in *Model*, becomes another opportunity to confuse the stakes of spatial correspondence with those of temporal indication. Inasmuch as the Platonic model has been central to a history of the mimetic tradition in the visual arts, Demand contends with its long-standing implications about originals and copies. But insofar as the concept of the model is temporally oriented toward a future realization and simultaneously toward a past prototype, Demand uses the model for these temporal implications. The temporal layers thicken when he retrospectively returns the already-realized building site to its ‘before,’ in the form of the paper model, and to its ‘innocent before,’ by doing this after a tragic or historic event has occurred there.

Beyond this, Demand’s particular invocation of Madame Tussaud is interesting for the ways in which her practice was a pre-photographic memorial portraiture; her first wax memorial portraits were death masks of Marat and Robespierre.⁵⁵³ Perhaps the difference that Demand asserts between his own practice and hers is that her effort is not one meant to unsettle the indexical relationship—and thus the reality claim—between her subject and her representation thereof; it intends to pass as a substitute for that referent. As has been observed at length, Demand’s project has primarily been thought of as one concerned with the meticulous evacuation of the index. But its understanding as such is a misunderstanding. He may evacuate the indices of use, the aura of its subject’s one-time presence in time and space, or of the crime that took place there, but his photographing of the “evacuated” site does not evacuate the photographic index nor the existence of its own aura. He absents one kind of index, to reclaim another; he undermines and affirms

⁵⁵³ Lisa Saltzman, *Making Memory Matter* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006) 85.

the index and the aura. His citation of Madame Tussaud similarly undermines and affirms her use of the index inasmuch as it becomes a memorial site.

Demand specifically asserts his project's particular engagement with memory when he describes the ways he translates a two-dimensional representation into three dimensions and then back into two. He says:

By doing this translation, I found the same thing you get with any other translation, you lose a few things and a few things come in. I think the extra that comes in through that operation is probably memory, it has to do with my experience of things and your experience of things.⁵⁵⁴

Demand puts forward his own re-tellings, translations of another photograph: versions that like our own stem from widely circulating images, but versions that cannot promise a trace of what happened there. Whether or not the room that Demand presents to us remains innocent is up to us as viewers. It is reliant upon our memory of what might have happened there. His works cannot bear witness for us; but they might do so with us, if we see, think, and remember.

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth speaks of the ethical relation to the real as “an impossible demand at the heart of human consciousness.”⁵⁵⁵ While Caruth is thinking about the dream of the burning child that Freud relates in his *The Interpretation of Dreams*, she is also thinking about the ethical imperatives surrounding missed encounters with the traumatic. In the dream, the child tells the father, “Father, don’t you see I’m burning?” The father has missed seeing the traumatic event, but he awakens because the dreamed child commands him: “wake up,

⁵⁵⁴ Sarah Crompton, “Gained in Translation,” *The Daily Telegraph* (London) May 27, 2006.

⁵⁵⁵ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) 104.

leave me, survive; survive to tell the story of my burning.”⁵⁵⁶ For Caruth, the ethical imperative at the heart of this dream is to “tell what it means not to see.”⁵⁵⁷ Quoting the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, she continues, “Is not the dream essentially, one might say, an act of homage to the missed reality—the reality that can no longer produce itself except by repeating itself endlessly, in some never attained awakening.”⁵⁵⁸ Demand begins his project with a missed encounter—on the one hand, the photographs from which he culls his images have been taken belatedly, after an historic or tragic encounter has occurred, and on the other hand, his culling of the image is similarly belated, he was not there to photograph the scene himself. He then repeats what he did not see by reconstructing what was already an endlessly re-produced media object, not once by producing it in three-dimensions, but twice when he repeats the photographing of the re-presented missed encounter. In doing so, he seems to be engaged in what Caruth would claim as an ethical imperative to “tell what it means not to see.”

In *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*, James Young engages what it means not to have seen the Holocaust but to live in relation to it for a generation of postwar artists.

The problem for many of these artists, of course, is that they are unable to remember the Holocaust outside of the ways it has been passed down to them.... It is necessarily mediated experience, the afterlife of memory, represented in history's after-images: the impressions retained in the mind's eye of a vivid sensation long after the original, external cause has been removed.⁵⁵⁹

This engagement of the “original,” inasmuch as it was already mediated, can only ever be known to him as mediated, and can only ever be re-mediated by him for others. This

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 105. Her italics.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., 105-6.

⁵⁵⁹ James Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) 3-4.

represents a significant thrust of Demand's project, but at the same time, his concerns about mediation would have implications for its reality claims, for its indexicality. Relative to a traumatic history such as the Holocaust, amid claims contesting the historical reality of that genocide, the existential stakes of indexicality, rather than its supposed truth claims, might be important for Demand. It is in light of his project's affinities to other postwar art strategies that a consideration of the specificity of Demand's identity as a postwar German subject proves productive and worthwhile.

Demand was born in Munich in 1964; his grandfather oversaw architectural reconstruction for the city of Munich after the Second World War.⁵⁶⁰ The belatedness of his birth means that Demand would not have witnessed the atrocities of the war directly, but indirectly through mediated experiences of their aftermath. Growing up amidst efforts toward reconstruction, Demand would have witnessed the lingering effects of that history at the same time that reconstruction marked an effort to cover it over. In *Drafting Room* (1996) (Figure 4.32), Demand reconstructed the architectural office where his grandfather worked to orchestrate the rebuilding of Munich. This reconstruction gestures toward a relationship not only to the site where his grandfather worked, but also to the project his grandfather pursued. Unlike the designs his grandfather would have produced, Demand's reconstruction efforts will not result in physical buildings. But he will produce a model—sometimes even literally as in *Model*.

The paradox of the model means that it might gesture toward a future realization of its idea, or it might model another already realized idea of the past; the photograph persists for the future as the past. Demand's photograph persists for the future as the future of the record of the past—the future that forgets, that fails to recuperate or

⁵⁶⁰ Thomas Demand (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000) 62.

remember. At the very least, Demand's photograph attends to our failings to remember anything outside of representation (appearance). At the same time, the model always already anticipates its realization; by returning to that moment in the realization of a physical building before it accumulates the notorious associations with what will have transpired, Demand is simultaneously remarking upon the impossibility of fully recuperating and remembering those accretions. He retrospectively casts the historical site back to its earliest and most idealistic incarnation—the model—at which point there already is an anachronistic assumption that the future event of its construction—and of its historical infamy—will take place. He does this in the aftermath of a historically significant event's having taken place there. Returning this site to a moment before it had been realized removes any trace of the subsequent series of events. Doing so becomes a gesture about history's limitations, about the forgetting and erasing that occurs if we do not allow something to adhere. Whereas his grandfather's reconstructions would have been carried out in an effort to renew a city, even while simultaneously covering over that city's history, Demand's photographs of his reconstructions insist that something of existence in space-time be remembered. Demand's reluctance to supply the traces of historical events fuels our desire to know them, at the same time his image instantiates the impossibility of that knowledge. He inspires our desire to remember, even as that memory fails. He ethically imposes our participation in bearing witness—his image will not stand in as a counter-memory, unless we allow it to do so.

Of course, the paper model from which *Drafting Room* was photographed, like all of Demand's other works, displays an absence of any index particular to that historical site. The blueprint on the far left wall features no building plan; neither do the sheets of

paper laid out on the room's drafting tables show any marks. There is no clock upon the wall, nor any indicator of historic time or place. It is this lack of particularity that allows so many to discuss Demand's project in terms of its "assault on, or at least a reimagining of, the traditional link between photography and indexicality...the 'that-has-been' in which Barthes saw the 'noeme' of photography."⁵⁶¹ Demand tends to reject this; to see his work as such is to see it as a relativistic project that insists on the constructedness of everything. He notably links his project to the novel, saying, "You don't read a novel to get a true story, you read it because you want to have your brain working on something. You make a distinction between truthfulness and truth. It's the same here."⁵⁶² Relative to this, we might consider the strategy employed by W.G. Sebald to include photographs throughout his novels. These photographs may or may not bear an indexical connection to Sebald's biography or to the story he tells us. Indeed, they might inhibit our understanding in that they seem to promise at the same time that they do not promise historic specificity. As such, they help us to bear witness to the "truthfulness" of his project—a novelistic representation of everyday events even inasmuch as it is an effort to reconstitute the elusiveness of the past and of loss.

Young might imagine this "truthfulness" in line with his prescription for the study of history as "a combined study of both *what happened* and *how it is passed down* to us;" it is a concern for the specific inasmuch as the specific gets constituted by mediations that translate it into the generic.⁵⁶³ Sebald's specific stories and images open out onto the generic as much as Demand's images do. This strategy is also employed in efforts of memorial making, perhaps especially relative to the logic of Holocaust memorials. A

⁵⁶¹ Michael Fried, "Without a Trace," *ArtForum* 43.7 (March 2005) 200-01.

⁵⁶² Crompton 4.

⁵⁶³ Young 11.

trauma so massive defies specificity; instead specific accounts of what happened occlude at the same time that they open out onto the whole.

The novel does not require the index of a particular site from which to begin its project of “truthfulness.” Until this point, Demand’s project has required the index of a (albeit already mediated and mechanically reproduced) photographic press image. His series *Yellowcake* (2007) (Figure 4.33) makes clear his concerns about memory perhaps more than any other. *Yellowcake* refers to the enriched form of uranium that the United States government accused Saddam Hussein of procuring for his supposed weapons of mass destruction. The only evidence for Hussein’s receipt of the yellowcake consisted of letters written on stationery of the Embassy of Niger. In his *Yellowcake* series, Demand reconstructs the Niger embassy in Rome; but because cameras would not have been allowed in the embassy, Demand had to reconstruct his models from memory. In this way, he simulated the initial index from which he had always begun. As a result the only indices that adhere in his most recent project are the indices of his construction and the photographic index that occurs when he finally photographs his model.

Relative to works that simulate the architectural index as “works *from* memory,” Lisa Saltzman remarks that artists are “establish[ing] a sculptural relation not to actual architecture but to the architectural archive that is [(their)] memory, which may be, for its utter lack of trace in the realm of the real, just as easily, fiction, and certainly is, if process is any indication, fabrication.”⁵⁶⁴ At the same time that Demand’s final photograph might only index a fiction, it might also index his subjective experience of that situation—which, in the end, might have been all that we ever should have hoped for from a photograph. But to speak here of the subjectivity of the photograph is not to undo

⁵⁶⁴ Saltzman 94.

its ability to document or to bear witness in the way that Morineau would have it do. Instead I do so to confront the ways that the real does and does not adhere to histories. Young calls for a study of history that allows historical fact to commingle with the subjective experiences through which we understand it; as such, he is dealing with the specific inasmuch as it opens out onto the generic. Understanding the limitations of history to represent the real is not the same as rendering it incapable of conveying the real. Demand's photograph might be as historical or fictional as one of Sebald's novels; but both artists are confronting the ways in which we come to know history. Both posit reality claims at the same time that they undermine them, and in this way bear witness to a "truthfulness" of some lost presence; one that in the end might be up to us to negotiate.

It is especially in this way that I see Demand's project as participating in the historical tradition of *trompe l'oeil* practice: in its activation of the role of the spectator via his or her negotiation of the field of representation and its seeming reality. Demand gives us a seemingly real photograph of a strangely ordinary site – and hopes that the signs of his interventions – his literal cuts with scissors or his cut content – will startle or confuse us enough to prompt interaction—our own reconstruction. Demand's literal transcoding preys on our fears of being tricked by digitally transcoded photographs. But his photographs do trick us, and this trick unfolds in the duration of our viewing. His photograph may look real, but this seeming reality fails and in failing, it shows us the terms of its existence, the terms of its construction – a construction that was (his models are discarded) really there. As the visibility of digital intervention becomes increasingly invisible, we might not experience its trick and it may go unnoticed. But this should

remind us that any image can *look* innocent of its construction or manipulation; the onus of discovering causal origins through reasoned conjecture is (and always has been) on us.

Chapter 5. Transparent Envelopes

“a photograph cannot be transformed (spoken) philosophically, it is wholly ballasted by the contingency of which it is the weightless, transparent envelope.”⁵⁶⁵ —Roland Barthes

Since 1992 Andrew Bush has pursued a series of works entitled *Envelopes* (Figure 5.1), in which he isolates a single envelope, frames each one face down, and displays them in clusters along a picture rail against a gallery wall. Their flaps are frequently unsealed and partly opened, inviting our entry, while securely thwarting it behind glass. These envelopes are blank and may be empty; they have been opened, but they cannot be read. They deny our access to their contents but fuel our desire to see or read or know.

Letter-writing had been the subject of many 17th-century Dutch paintings, and art historians perform this desire to read the contents of these depicted letters by way of iconographical interpretation. The ace of hearts on the floor of Gerard ter Borch’s painting *Officer Writing a Letter, with a Trumpeter* (c. 1658-59) (Figure 5.2) prompts curators at the Philadelphia Museum of Art to read the depicted letter as a love letter. But in Gabriel Metsu’s *Woman Reading a Letter* (c. 1665) (Figure 1.2), the letter functions within the painting as just another object to be looked at: the maid looks beneath the curtain at a painting, the dog looks at the maid, the woman looks at the letter, and even the mirror seems to look at the window it reflects. By giving us letters as painted surfaces, these Dutch artists represent something that is meant to be read—a letter—as an image, and in doing so deny us insight into the letter’s contents.

⁵⁶⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) 5.

While we might wish that we could read depicted letters as easily as actual letters, their representation only as surface interrupts their communicative work. This desire to read paintings as easily as the letters they depict is fueled, I think, by the lack at the center of each painting—a lack that is figured as a letter, as a blank white rectangle upon which we can project the content we think we see there. As such, the illegible letter figures our perennial art historical fantasy, insinuating a hidden iconographical content that can be disclosed. But, the letter as image also figures the interruption of this kind of art historical project, as any definitive claims about content constitute an illicit trespass into the undisclosed space of the work of art.

In the aforementioned examples, the letter's writing or reading is the activity depicted. Ter Borch's soldier writes the letter; Metsu's woman reads the letter. But the letter also interrupts the flow of daily activity; Ter Borch's standing soldier waits as the letter is written; Metsu's maid averts her eyes while the letter is read; both paintings have dogs that halt the attendants' intrusions into the space of the letter. In both, the letter is the source of the interruption, but one that is internal to the implied narrative of the painting. But even to name the white shapes that absorb their attention as "letters" allows them to operate transparently as representation. It allows us to forget the reflexive opacity of their formal presentation. The interruptive presentation of opaque white forms and their resistance to being read is instead subsumed into an interruption that takes place as a moment in the painting's narrative representation.

We see another interruption of the painting's narrative figured in Johannes Vermeer's *Girl Interrupted in Her Music* (c. 1660) (Figure 5.3). In this painting, a young woman holds a piece of paper, but instead of reading music from it, she stares out at the

viewer. The imagined narrative content of this painting is a music lesson, but that content does not exist because we have interrupted it; the painting's actual content, in this respect, is our interruption. We can never close the gap of our interruption to restore the imagined narrative coherence of the music lesson. This reading thematizes the structuring lack at the heart of the art historical project; the lack that most of us disavow in our efforts to get at something of what artworks mean. We, like the male instructor towering over the seated figure, try to peer into the imagined content that the blank surface refuses to disclose. But the young woman clings to this lack with both hands, refusing to relinquish it fully to his scrutiny and refusing to look away from our impossible intrusion into the painting and its meaning. In this figuration of the spectator's interruption, art is made private *from* and *by* the spectator. The blank paper's surface is obdurately there in its structuring lack; present and absent; cohering and incoherent; available to and closed off from the spectator.

Elsewhere in his oeuvre, Vermeer joins ter Borch and Metsu in exploring the motif of letters. In *A Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window* (Figure 1.1), his subject is absorbed in the reading of the letter she holds. She seems to be alone, until we observe the quiet doubling of her reflection in the lower right corner of the open window's leaded glass. It is this reflected surface that confronts our presence in front of the canvas, almost as directly as the girl with her music, making us aware of our voyeuristic intrusion. This sense of our uninvited presence is reinforced by the table that physically bars our entry into her space, but any frisson of discomfort we feel is met by our visual delight at the illusion of the billowing curtain attached to a rod extending across the entire top span of the canvas. As explored in Chapter 1, this was a favorite illusionist trick among Dutch

painters and has been characterized as the most straightforward example of trompe l'oeil in Vermeer's oeuvre. The curtain does not belong to the space of the room represented, but instead seems to hover in front of the painting's surface. In this respect, it joins the girl's reflection in acknowledging our presence before the canvas; beyond that, it might mock our belief in the painting's representational fiction by interrupting its seeming coherence.

Vermeer has us caught between zones of representation, between a zone that bars our entry and exists for us as optical surface only and another that implies our entry into the space, our having pulled back the curtain to see. This desire to pull back the curtain to see the painting recalls the ancient author Pliny's emblematic scenario of Zeuxis tricked by Parrhasius. Beyond its account of artistic rivalry, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan cites it as a story about the essence of visual desire.⁵⁶⁶ It is not just that Zeuxis mistakes the representation for the real, it is that he *wants* to see what is behind the represented curtain, what is behind the irreducible blank rectangle there presented; as such, it also stages the essential impetus of art historical desire.

As something one expects to find hanging across the surface of a painting, the protective curtain falls prey to a kind of habitual viewing that no longer registers the thing as seen. It can be overlooked. Letter rack paintings, such as Peto's but also dating to the 17th century, are similarly populated with objects of habitual use, which Norman Bryson describes as being typically overlooked. He writes, the "scissors and combs, books and papers, all the effects that weave the warmth and familiarity of a personal habitat" all "at once appear[ing] pathetic and lost.... They are simply junk, personal

⁵⁶⁶ Jacques Lacan, "What is a Picture?," *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XI The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998) 105-119, 112.

waste.”⁵⁶⁷ By depicting banal objects of use, the letter rack paintings engage the hand even more than the eye; they speak to habits of straightening up more than to sumptuous visual pleasure or scrutiny. They pretend, Bryson continues, that their “objects have not been pre-arranged into a composition destined for the human eye: vision does not find the objects decked out and waiting, but stumbles onto them as though accidentally.”⁵⁶⁸

Edgar Allan Poe famously revives the letter rack’s version of habitual looking when he hides a letter in plain sight in his 1844 short story “The Purloined Letter.” A stolen letter – the contents of which remain unknown to the reader – is hidden somewhere in an apartment and unable to be found until Dupin, the shrewd detective, looks for it in an excessively obvious place: it has been turned inside out and placed as if a useless piece of paper in an old letter rack. Poe reverses the logic of *trompe l’oeil* painting to deceive the minister, who can’t find the compromising letter, insinuating that he mistook the actual letter rack for a painted letter rack.⁵⁶⁹

The upright and flat surface of the letter rack seems continuous with the wall surface on which the painting is displayed. Its remarkably shallow space is no deeper than the curled edge of a letter. It turns the representational logic of linear perspective inside out. Instead of receding, the objects come forward into the space of the viewer. Bryson describes this intrusion into the space of the viewer as a shock; “instead of the objects’ obeying the subject’s sovereign gaze, they slip out...: they look back.”⁵⁷⁰ In his overzealous desire to disclose what lies hidden in the scene, Poe’s minister overlooks the

⁵⁶⁷ Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990) 144.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁵⁶⁹ Hanneke Grootenboer, *The Rhetoric of Perspective: Realism and Illusionism in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Still-Life Painting* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005) 48-50. Both Lacan and Jacques Derrida offer opposing interpretations of Poe’s story.

⁵⁷⁰ Bryson, *LO*, 143.

mode of the letter's presentation. In contrast, Dupin's desirous look scans the room in a way that allows the letter to look back, to make itself present, emerging from what the minister had assumed was mere representation.

In William Harnett's *The Artist's Letter Rack* (Figure 3.17), at least five envelopes appear to be tucked into its pink straps. As discussed in Chapter 4, these envelopes are painted to be legible, addressed to particular recipients: "C.C. Peir[son] & Sons, 3908 [G]lory St, P[hi]ladelphia Pa," or somewhat more generically, "To the lady of the house." We might use the legibility of these envelopes to piece together a biographical narrative about its presumed owner, but to do so ignores the way the represented straps interrupt this legibility.⁵⁷¹ To read the addresses depends upon ignoring the gaps in their presentation, by filling in the implied letters to arrive at an imaginary coherence of representation.

Harnett confuses the activities of seeing and reading elsewhere in this painting, in a way that insists upon making visible its mode of presentation, rather than making legible its represented content. To the lower left of the represented letter rack is a newspaper clipping that refuses to be read no matter how hard one tries; it is painted to imitate the shapes and graphic frequencies of a typographic format, but without representing anything coherently alphabetic. Like these implied alphabetic letters, the paper letters in the letter rack are also only implied; we see only envelopes and have to imagine the letter hidden inside, encouraged by one at the upper right that peeks out suggestively from the torn edge of its envelope. If the newspaper clipping insists on the painted-ness of the image, the torn edge of the envelope or the curled edge of the clipping

⁵⁷¹ Such interruptions are discussed as "constitutive blanks" in Wolfgang Kemp, and as requiring "the beholder's share" in E.H. Gombrich.

re-engages our impulse to reach out and touch the representation to test the reality of its presentation. Michael Leja observes that suspicious viewers are most vulnerable to being deceived by an image (paradoxically) when they are tricked into letting down their guard. I think it is the newspaper lettering's evident construction that might trick the viewer into lowering her guard; assured now of the painting as painting and of the limits of painting's mimesis, her viewing is vulnerable to spectatorial interruption by the surprise or shock of something that seems to surpass representation.

Caught between reading and seeing (and between believing and disbelieving), we are vulnerable to the letter rack's signs of wear and tear which taunt us by suggesting points of entry or by prompting an instinctive desire to touch. Leja suggests that this fantasy of entry into the painting goes beyond tactile gratification, "incit[ing] other abstract and unconscious fantasies ... of forbidden or inaccessible spaces."⁵⁷² But this attraction is met by "an unconscious awareness that the alluring fantasies held out in the painting...are [only] illusions"; and this has a melancholy effect.⁵⁷³ This illusion of our entry is poignantly interrupted by the uppermost envelope, which turns away as if in melancholic resignation, refusing to be opened or read.

Each of Bush's envelopes, like Harnett's melancholy envelope, is displayed face down, but unlike it, is usually unsealed. Like Harnett's torn envelopes, Bush's envelopes tempt the possibility of our entry by exciting our desire to touch. They do this sometimes through signs of wear and tear on the envelopes and often on the ground on which they are mounted, but not always; nonetheless, the paper envelopes exhibit a rich texture of warm roughness or cool crispness that invites our handling. Their display in frames,

⁵⁷² Michael Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 144.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

leaning from a picture rail, might encourage us to think of them as objects rather than pictures, as Leo Steinberg famously suggested of the Flatbed Picture Plane.⁵⁷⁴ But beyond all this, it is the shadow cast by the flap of Bush's envelope, which most powerfully invites our touch; the flap protrudes into our viewing space, suggesting even the possibility of our illicit entry into their contents.

It is in attending to the shadow, however, that its illusion begins to unravel. If truly pressed onto a mount beneath the glass of a frame, the envelope would cast no shadow. Instead, the illusionary shadow makes the *representation* of this envelope as image, rather than its *presentation* as object suddenly visible. For these works are not framed envelopes, they are one-to-one scaled *photographs* of envelopes, framed in antique photographic printing frames, negative holders, or x-ray containers.

The display of these envelopes, as if found objects pressed between a ground and a glass, calls to mind an effort of preservation or memorialization, like pressing a flower in a book. In this way, Bush's photographs point back toward the one-time presence of the original object, now lost, but also preserved through representation. The frames that contain his photographs are salvaged from an antiquated apparatus that would have housed countless other plates of glass for the duration of their exposures. They would have contained other images now unknown and unknowable. The one-time presence that these frames promise is the unseen image, the now absent presence of the lost image. Bush's particular mode of photography thematizes this experience of one-time presence; insofar as they tricked us, the envelopes were once there for us, once-present, and now present as image, as representation. This longing for presence via photography might be

⁵⁷⁴ Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972) 82-91.

understood as an effort to preserve analog photography's index in the face of digital technology and its Photoshop-able malleability; Bush's interest in photographs of letters engages both subject and medium in terms of outmodedness, inasmuch as each is now threatened by its virtual version.

But to limit our understanding of Bush's *Envelopes* to his pursuit of objective presence is to cut short the mode of trompe l'oeil. For the trick to work, the trompe l'oeil illusion must fail; otherwise, we don't feel ourselves to be tricked and don't recognize the artistic feat. To this end, Bush requires that we recognize the shadow as *impossibly* present and the photograph as representation. But I don't think he does this for the trick alone, nor to simply have us replace our mistaken apprehension of the object's presence with a newly assured recognition of the image's mere representation. Rather, I think he wants us to see the way this vacillation between image and object, between present image and lost object has always structured photography.

Like Harnett's melancholy envelope, Bush's photographs insist on the limits of our engagement with the envelope as image; even dismantling their frames will not allow our access. They remain, like the Dutch paintings of letters we have seen, available as surface only, unable to supply any insight into their contents. Inasmuch as Bush's envelopes also re-imagine the blank rectangles or lack at the center of those paintings as a promising envelopment of a hidden message, they too figure the fundamental art historical fantasy of legibility and full disclosure. But insofar as they remain unyielding and empty surface, they insist on that fantasy's interruption.

Bush uses the mode of trompe l'oeil in the medium of photography to disclose that medium's capacity to deceive, interrupting what he presumes to be its delivery of

truthful image content. In this way, his efforts resonate with those of postmodern theorists of photography who caution against being duped by photography's seeming verisimilitude. Photography's transparency is its "mythic value," according to Abigail Solomon-Godeau; "phenomenologically, the photograph registers as pure image, and it is by virtue of this effect that we commonly ascribe to the photograph the mythic value of transparency."⁵⁷⁵ That is, because viewers of photographs see through the materiality of the representation, they see only the image, the optical precision of which convinces them of its truth or documentary value and its freedom from authorial intervention. Such scholars, thus, intervene into what they understand to be a dominant attitude of credulity amongst viewers of photographs. They wish to challenge the perception of photography's neutrality, asserting instead that its reality is "not just its material item, but also the discursive system of which the image bears its part."⁵⁷⁶ Bush's use of *trompe l'oeil* similarly intervenes to interrupt this fantasy of photography's transparency by asserting the limitations and specificity of its materiality.

Perhaps foremost among the scholars of the 1960s who are most suspicious of photography's authority and truth claim is Roland Barthes. In their survey *The Meaning of Photography* (2005), Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson name him as the herald of this new era of suspicion.⁵⁷⁷ Following Barthes's lead, photography historians and theorists in the second half of the 20th century seek to unseat photography's truth claim, which had seemed to be technologically guaranteed by its automatic registration of the referent.

⁵⁷⁵ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) 180.

⁵⁷⁶ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988) 4.

⁵⁷⁷ Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson, eds., *The Meaning of Photography* (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2008) xx, xxii.

While this automatic registration seemed to deliver its (image) content as directly and efficiently to its viewer as an envelope delivers a letter to its recipient, photography theorists articulated the many interventions impeding this delivery. As such, it is perhaps surprising that in the opening pages of Barthes's last commentary on photography *Camera Lucida*, he should describe a photograph as a "transparent envelope."⁵⁷⁸ Like a pointing finger, the photograph or envelope is a deictic gesture, directing one's attention to what it contains or shows: "'Look,' 'See,' 'Here it is'; it points a finger at certain vis-à-vis, and cannot escape this pure deictic language."⁵⁷⁹ The transparency of this gesture makes it "improbable," for Barthes, "to speak of *the* Photograph" only "to speak of *a* photograph."⁵⁸⁰ For *the* photograph like a "weightless, transparent envelope"—the medium itself—is not seen; it is the particular referent of a photograph that is seen. It is through this strange metaphor of the weightless, transparent envelope that Barthes describes the way we regard photography: that is, we do not see the photograph itself, rather we see its content, that which it represents, and we see it with an insistent presence. Inasmuch as the photograph is an envelope, it is a vessel of containment, and because this container is transparent, we see only that which it contains and delivers to us.

A specific photograph, in effect, is never distinguished from its referent (from what it represents), or at least it is not *immediately* or *generally* distinguished from its referent (as is the case for every other image, encumbered—from the start, and because of its status—by the way in which the object is simulated): it is not impossible to perceive the photographic signifier (certain professionals do so), but it requires a secondary action of knowledge or of reflection. By nature, the Photograph...has something tautological about it: a pipe, here, is always and intractably a pipe.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) 5; abbreviated as *CL* hereafter.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

Barthes's allusion here to René Magritte's famous paintings *The Treachery of Images* (1929) (Figure 5.4) and *The Two Mysteries* (1966) (Figure 5.5), which include the line, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe," seems an ironic nod to his previous insistence on the semiotic deconstruction of photography. Magritte's text is meant to interrupt the conventions of signification that allow a viewer to say of a painting of a pipe, "That's a pipe." The painting thus addresses this linguistic tendency to overlook the painting's status as such; the caption intervenes to disrupt this illusion of ordinary language. By declaring that this is not a pipe, Magritte draws our attention to the process of signification that has taken place. Whereas in earlier essays, Barthes discussed photography according to its surreptitious levels of signification—its denotations and connotations, for example—in *Camera Lucida*, he abandons this concern and instead declares a photograph to be transparent: 'always and intractably a pipe.'⁵⁸²

Insofar as the photograph is not distinguished from its referent (from that which it represents), Barthes's transparent envelope (at least rhetorically) becomes a kind of trompe l'oeil envelope. For Barthes the photograph is indistinguishable from its referent (from what it represents); and in trompe l'oeil "the representation of a thing seems to *be* the thing itself."⁵⁸³ This indistinguishability of a photograph and its referent is not encumbered by the way in which the object is simulated, for example, by its status as painting; but this is also the criterion for trompe l'oeil painting: the represented thing can seem to *be* the thing itself because its painted 'status' is disguised.

⁵⁸² See for example Barthes's essays, "The Photographic Message," "The Rhetoric of the Image," and "The Third Meaning," in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

⁵⁸³ Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, *Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe l'Oeil Painting* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2002) 18.

When Barthes writes that the photograph “is not *immediately*” distinguished from its referent, this draws it even closer to *trompe l’oeil*. For in *trompe l’oeil* the mistaking of the represented thing for the thing itself is only temporary; the deception must be interrupted so that its trick can be recognized. *Trompe l’oeil* allows us to experience what Jean-Paul Sartre calls the “illusion of immanence,” in which we mistakenly treat the image as a separate reality, as a thing. When we ‘fall for’ the *trompe l’oeil* illusion, we see the referent and think we perceive its reality. In the painting of a letter rack or in Bush’s photographs, we think we perceive actual envelopes; but we recognize that this perception was in error when we (actually) perceive the materiality of the representation—the flatness of the canvas or photographic print (sometimes this requires actually touching the object, to compensate for vision’s confusion of apprehension and perception). We had mistakenly treated the image of an envelope—the referent—as a separate reality, as a thing, when the separate reality or thing was actually a painting—colored pigments organized on a canvas. We experienced, perhaps we even enjoyed the illusion of immanence when we posited its imaginary referent as a reality, experiencing an image as if it were a thing that could be perceived.

Recognizing the trickery of *trompe l’oeil*—perceiving its material status as representation—requires a secondary action of reflection, which Sartre calls the “reflective consciousness.” “To determine the properties of an image as image I must turn to a new act of consciousness: I must *reflect*. Thus the image as image is describable only by an act of second degree in which attention is turned away from the [represented] object and directed to the manner in which the object is given.”⁵⁸⁴ In *Camera Lucida*

⁵⁸⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of the Imagination*, trans. (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1948) 3.

Barthes acknowledges this “secondary action of knowledge or reflection,” which makes it possible “to perceive the photographic signifier,” but he describes this as the domain of “certain professionals.”⁵⁸⁵ Better yet, for Barthes, to deal with the photographic signifier is to deal only with its *studium*. “To recognize the *studium* is necessarily to encounter the photographer’s intentions... It is rather as if I had to read the Photographer’s myths in the Photograph, fraternizing with them but not quite believing in them.”⁵⁸⁶ It is at the level of the *studium* that I recognize the photographic signifier, the role of the photographer, the photograph’s function. It is there where I negotiate photography’s messages—the messages Barthes previously described at length in his essay, “The Rhetoric of the Image” (1964), cautioning against photography’s ability to naturalize the symbolic messages it contains, “innocent[ing] the semantic artifice of connotation.”⁵⁸⁷ But in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes is not interested in “‘see[ing]’ the photographic signifier.... What did I care about the rules of composition of the photographic landscape, or, at the other end, about the Photograph as family rite? Each time I would read something about the Photograph, I would think of some photograph I loved, and this made me furious. Myself, I saw only the referent...”⁵⁸⁸ Barthes wants to see through the photograph, letting the referent adhere, even as he acknowledges that to do so is to ignore the “importunate voice (the voice of knowledge, of *scientia*)” and to instead become “a primitive, without culture,” to become, I want to say, a credulous spectator.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁵ Barthes, *CL*, 5.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵⁸⁷ Barthes, “The Rhetoric of the Image,” in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 45.

⁵⁸⁸ Barthes, *CL*, 7.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

But the limitation of the image, for Sartre, is that its object cannot be experienced as a perception. In *L'Imaginaire* (1940), the text to which Barthes dedicates *Camera Lucida*, Sartre writes that he wishes to recall the face of his friend Peter, who is not present. "I want the face of Peter to appear as a perception. I want 'to make him present' to me."⁵⁹⁰ It is because he cannot bring Peter before him as a perception that Sartre seeks "recourse [in] a certain material which acts as an *analogue*, as an equivalent, of the perception."⁵⁹¹ This analogue allows for an illusion of that object's immanence. Barthes begins the second part of *Camera Lucida* in search of an adequate analogue for his recently deceased mother. Whereas Sartre considered three kinds of analogue images for his friend Peter, Barthes limits his account to only one of these: the photograph. Sartre first tries to call Peter to mind; but while the mental image can arouse in him pleasant or sympathetic feelings, it lacks the clarity of Peter's countenance. This clarity he finds in a photograph of Peter, but while it presents his external traits perfectly, "it does not give his expression."⁵⁹² His expression can instead be found, Sartre says, "rediscovered," in a caricature, although this representation distorts his physical features. Whereas Sartre differentiates between these types of images and what they can deliver, Barthes makes room for all of these experiences in a particular photograph. This photograph, the Winter Garden photograph, allows him to "rediscover" his mother.⁵⁹³ It has the clarity of Sartre's photograph and the expression of Sartre's caricature; in it, he finds "the distinctness of her face, the naïve attitude of her hands, the place she had docilely taken without either

⁵⁹⁰ Sartre 23.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

⁵⁹² Ibid., 22.

⁵⁹³ Barthes, CL, 69.

hiding or showing herself, and finally her *expression*...”⁵⁹⁴ It also arouses in him the pleasant and sympathetic feelings that Sartre used to describe the mental image: he saw her “kindness” and “gentleness,” giving him “a sentiment as certain as remembrance.”⁵⁹⁵

But to describe it as an “analogue,” Barthes writes, is insufficient to his experience of this photograph. Perhaps other photographs of his mother, those “photographs, which phenomenology would call ‘ordinary’ objects, were merely analogical, provoking only her identity, not her truth; but the Winter Garden photograph was indeed essential, it achieved for me, utopically, *the impossible science of the unique being*.”⁵⁹⁶ This particular photograph allows Barthes to imagine that he has direct access to his absent mother, as if he could actually perceive her. For Sartre, however, this is merely an illusion; although he may wish to have Peter present as a perception, all that he can actually perceive is the materiality of the photographic object itself. This is his move from the imaginative consciousness to the reflective consciousness, a secondary action through which one sees not just the object of the image (the referent), but the image as an object (the signifier)—the manner in which the image is given. It is in the act of reflection, for Sartre, that one discovers “the *essence* of the image,” which has “a content of immediate certainty.”⁵⁹⁷ For Sartre this content was “the same for everyone.”⁵⁹⁸

But although the photograph and caricature have a materiality that can be perceived in the act of reflection, the materiality of the mental image was less apparent. Sartre writes that its materiality “derives its meaning solely from the intention that

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 69, 70.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., 70-71.

⁵⁹⁷ Sartre 4.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

animates it.”⁵⁹⁹ Barthes revises this remnant of Sartre’s Cartesianism relative to photographs that have a *punctum*. It is not just his intention, which animates it. “Suddenly a specific photograph reaches me; it *animates* me, and I *animate* it. So that is how I must name the attraction which makes it exist: an *animation*.”⁶⁰⁰ The *punctum* breaks or punctuates the homogenous field that is the *studium*; it “rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me.”⁶⁰¹ I do not “seek it out” in contrast to the field of the *studium*, which “I invest...with my sovereign consciousness.”⁶⁰² Just as I am attracted to it, it exerts attraction upon me; it advenes, comes upon me (“m’advient”).⁶⁰³ He writes, “It is what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*.”⁶⁰⁴ Arguably, it is according to this duality, what I seek from the photograph versus what it wants from me, that Barthes sorts photography into the *studium* and the *punctum*. Barthes’s phenomenology makes room for an agency other than his own; the photograph can animate him by looking back at him in perhaps an unexpected way.

It is Sartre’s subjectivism that Barthes takes up in *Camera Lucida*, as Ron Burnett says, “with a vengeance.”⁶⁰⁵ This is why he insists on the ways in which the photograph animates him. Sartre concedes no reality to the object of the image—Peter, Barthes’s mother—beyond that which I put there, that which I animate. For Sartre, “I know where I’m going and what I want to produce” as an image; “this is why no development of the image can take me by surprise, whether the scene I produce is a fictitious one, or one of

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., 23.

⁶⁰⁰ Barthes, *CL*, 20.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., 26.

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., 55.

⁶⁰⁵ Ron Burnett, “*Camera Lucida*: Roland Barthes, Jean-Paul Sartre, and the Photographic Image,” *The Australian Journal of Media & Culture* 6.2 (1991). Accessed August 11, 2012. <http://www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/6.2/Burnett.html>.

the past.”⁶⁰⁶ But it is specifically relative to an image that takes him by surprise, indeed an error of *trompe l’oeil*, that Sartre experiences the object of an image as a perception; in this case, it is the picture that acts upon him. When Sartre walks into an unfamiliar room and mistakes the figures in a large picture to be actual men, his experience “was not imaginary but perceptual. No doubt the synthesis was poorly made and the perception was false, but the false perception was nonetheless a perception.”⁶⁰⁷ The illusion is short in duration, perhaps a quarter of a second, and it disappears, but its cause remains: “the picture, made like a human being, acts on me as if it were a man, regardless of what the attitude I assumed towards it may be otherwise.”⁶⁰⁸ The “knitting of the brows, on the canvas, moved me directly”; “the repose of that figure moved me directly.”⁶⁰⁹ These elements are neutral, able to enter either an imaginary or perceptual synthesis, but they are *expressive* and this expressive value does not go away. “If I decide to hold on to the perception, if I look at the picture purely aesthetically, if I observe the color relationships, the form, the touch, if I study the purely technical processes of the painter, the expressive value will nevertheless not vanish; the figure in the painting begs me gently to look upon it as a man.”⁶¹⁰ Barthes’s mother in the Winter Garden photograph has “the assertion of a gentleness.”⁶¹¹ This is “her expression” which begs him to look upon her as if through it she exists.

Sartre describes looking at a portrait of someone who is dead, such as Charles VIII. When he looks at it, his “whole present attitude is full of this fact”—the fact that he

⁶⁰⁶ Sartre 187.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 29.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ Barthes, *CL*, 69.

is dead. “Nevertheless,” he writes, invoking the structure of disavowal (‘I know, but all the same’),

those sensuous and sensual lips, that narrow forehead, immediately arouse a certain affective impression which is directed at *those lips* as they are in the picture. Thus those lips perform a double function simultaneously: on the one hand, they refer to the real lips long since turned to dust, and derive their meaning only from this source; but, on the other hand, they act directly on my feelings, because they are a deception, because the colored spots on the picture appear to the eye as a forehead, as lips. Finally these two functions become grounded, and we have the imaginary state, that the dead Charles VIII is here before us. It is he we see, not the picture, and yet we declare him not to be there: we have reached him only ‘as an image,’ ‘by the mediation’ of the picture. Here we see that the relationship that consciousness posits in the imaginative attitude between the portrait and its original is nothing short of magical. Charles VIII is at one and the same time absent and also present... We do not think, in our non-reflective consciousness, that a painter made that portrait, etc. The first bond posited between image and model is a bond of emanation. The original has the ontological primacy. But it becomes incarnated, it enters into the image. This explains the attitude of primitives towards their portraits as well as certain practices of black magic... This mode of thought has not disappeared. We have it in the structure of the image which is irrational, and, in which, as almost in everything else, we make rational constructions on prelogical foundations.⁶¹²

To *imagine* an object, for Sartre, is to *intend* a particular and certain knowledge of it; to imagine aims for (intends to grasp) the perceptual object—the object that I could see, hear, touch, if it was present, but which is necessarily absent in the image of it. He describes the way the imaginative consciousness differs from the reflective consciousness, “the imaginative consciousness I have of Peter is not a consciousness of the image of Peter. Peter is directly reached, my attention is not directed on an image, but on an object.”⁶¹³ To imagine is to believe, in vain, that “the object really exists by means of our conduct towards it: we can pretend for a second, but we cannot destroy the immediate awareness of its nothingness.”⁶¹⁴

⁶¹² Sartre 31-32.

⁶¹³ Ibid., 8.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 18.

Barthes wants to postpone this ‘awareness of its nothingness’ and to instead *conduct himself* in a way that allows photography’s object to *really exist*. To do so, he strays from the path of a formal logic, instead following “[his] desire or [his] grief,” to retain “an affective intentionality, a view of the object which was immediately steeped in desire, repulsion, nostalgia, euphoria.”⁶¹⁵ For it was this ‘pathos’ that could not, for Barthes, be separated from the essence of the Photograph; it was “at first glance” this ‘pathos’ of which photography consists.⁶¹⁶ Barthes wants to extend the temporality of Sartre’s ‘second’—the second in which we can pretend that the object exists—because it is in this first glance, before the secondary move to reflective consciousness, that he can make his mother exist, once more.

Barthes finds something of photography’s essence in what is available ‘at first glance.’ Like Zeuxis’s ‘first glance,’ this is the credulous glance. While this credulous glance is corrected in reflective consciousness, according to Sartre, or at the level of the *studium*, for Barthes, this correction is not necessarily for the better, as it brackets the intensity of emotion available ‘at first glance.’ Sartre identifies the imaginative element in the activity of reading as that which can “account for the intensity of our emotions.”⁶¹⁷ In the act of reading, he continues, “We take sides, we become indignant; and some even weep.”⁶¹⁸ It is photography’s *pathos*, available ‘at first glance’ that prompts Barthes to let the referent adhere, to look past the manner in which something is given (and instead to recognize the fact of its given-ness). It is the intensity of his feeling, his ‘attraction,’ which helps Barthes see through the photograph, just as for Sartre, it helps the theater-

⁶¹⁵ Barthes, *CL*, 21.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ Sartre 90.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

goer see past the (now absent) presence of the curtain or the cardboard status of the forest stage set and helps the reader see past the signs of the words on the page.

Sartre locates an affinity between the illusion of immanence and the operation of affect, both of which circumvent the reflective consciousness. Feeling has intentionality toward an object; “Hatred is hatred *of* someone, love is love *of* someone.”⁶¹⁹ It envisions an object but this object appears differently than it would to reflective consciousness. If understood in reflective consciousness, feeling would be consciousness *of* the feeling, so that the feeling *of* hatred, for example, would be consciousness *of* hatred. But feeling is not reflective consciousness: “the feeling of hatred is not consciousness *of* hatred: it is the consciousness *of* Paul as hateful; love is not, primarily, consciousness of love: it is consciousness of the charms of the beloved.”⁶²⁰ My feeling seems to follow from an object. “I assume,” for example, “that in the absence of a certain person it is the feeling which was inspired in me by her beautiful hand that reappears.”⁶²¹ But this feeling, for Sartre, has “a primary content which animates intentions of a very special type; in short, it is an affective consciousness *of* those hands.”⁶²²

Insofar as affect or feeling rushes past the manner in which it is given—as hatred or love—to instead reach its (representative) object—Paul or those hands—it is like the desire of Zeuxis to see behind the curtain, which allowed him to rush past the painted manner in which it was given. But that which he wanted to see—the painting behind the curtain, which would have been the representative object of his desire—remains

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., 98.

⁶²⁰ Ibid., 99.

⁶²¹ Ibid., 100.

⁶²² Ibid., 101.

unrevealed, without form. His desire remains without object: a vague or hazy something. This is the nature of desire: it is a blind effort to understand itself.

Sartre describes desire as a “blind effort to possess on the level of representation what I already possess on the affective level.”⁶²³ My feeling, my love, gropes blindly in order to understand itself, which it does when it is met with a knowledge that causes its source to emerge. In Sartre’s examples, it was either Paul or those hands that emerged as representative realizations of my otherwise vague desire. Desire gropes blindly (past the manner in which it is given—thus rendering its signifier transparent) toward its object, which it “knows” only according to a representative substitute for it. It is here that consciousness is “entirely knowledge and entirely affectivity:” “affective-cognitive consciousness.”⁶²⁴ The feeling is an affective consciousness of “something fine, graceful, pure, with a nuance of strictly individual fineness and purity.”⁶²⁵ And this something is absolutely unique for me and defiant of description. This affective consciousness is so determined to find its object that it fills in an imaginative knowledge thereof. In Sartre’s account:

I am invaded by the knowledge that this something stands for ‘two hands.’ This assurance comes upon me suddenly: in relation to this affective object I find myself in the attitude of quasi-observation. Those hands are really there: the knowledge that penetrates them gives them to me as ‘the hands of such a person, white hands, etc.,’ and at the same time the feeling reproduces most poignantly what there is of the ineffable in the sensations of whiteness, of fineness, etc.; it gives that empty knowledge the opacity of which we spoke in the preceding chapter. I *know* that the object which is there, transcendent, confronting my consciousness stands for two white and delicate hands; at the same time I *feel* that whiteness and that delicacy, and particularly the *nature of hands* always so intimate, so personal. But, at the same time, I am aware that these hands have not as yet come into existence. What is before me is a substitute for these concrete hands, full but unable to exist by itself. When that substitute is present it delivers

⁶²³ Ibid., 102.

⁶²⁴ Ibid., 103.

⁶²⁵ Ibid., 101.

the hands to me completely, but at the same time it lies in its nature to *claim* these hands which it posits, so that I am aware of envisioning them through it.⁶²⁶

When Sartre describes the details that affectively structure the objects he recalls in affective consciousness—her beautiful hands—he describes them as “what is unique for me in those hands—and what cannot express itself in a knowledge, even imaginative—namely, the tint of the skin at the finger tips, the shape of the fingernails, the small wrinkles around the phalanx, all this does, no doubt, *appear* to me. But these details do not present themselves in their representative aspect.”⁶²⁷ Instead he “become[s] aware of them as an undifferentiated mass which defies all description.”⁶²⁸ That is, in Barthes’s language, they ‘wound’ or ‘prick’ him in an un-nameable way, as does the *punctum*: ‘something’ in a photograph “*holds* me, though I cannot say why, i.e., say *where*: is it the eyes, the skin, the position of the hands, the track shoes? The effect is certain but unlocatable, it does not find its sign, its name; it is sharp and yet lands in a vague zone of myself; it is acute yet muffled, it cries out in silence. Odd contradiction: a floating flash.”⁶²⁹

When Barthes does name the *punctum* of particular photographs, it often happens to be something particular about the subject’s hands. In the Winter Garden photograph, he notices that his mother “was holding her one finger in the other hand, as children often do, in an awkward gesture.”⁶³⁰ He lists this “naïve attitude of her hands” among that which “transformed the photographic pose into that untenable paradox which she had

⁶²⁶ Ibid., 103-104.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 101.

⁶²⁸ Ibid., 101.

⁶²⁹ Barthes, *CL*, 51-53.

⁶³⁰ Ibid., 67-68.

nonetheless maintained all her life: the assertion of a gentleness.”⁶³¹ Of a 1926 portrait of Tristan Tzara by André Kertész (Figure 5.6) he writes, “What I notice, by that additional vision which is in a sense the gift, the grace of the *punctum*, is Tzara’s hand resting on the door frame: a large hand whose nails are anything but clean.”⁶³² Of Duane Michals’ photograph of Andy Warhol (Figure 5.7), in which “Warhol hides his face behind both hands,” he writes, “I have no desire to comment intellectually on this game of hide-and-seek (which belongs to the *Studium*); since for me, Warhol hides nothing; he offers his hands to read, quite openly; and the *punctum* is not the gesture but the slightly repellent substance of those spatulate nails, at once soft and hard-edged.”⁶³³ Describing the hands of his mother or of Tzara or of Warhol, Barthes ‘projects a certain tonality’ on them, suggesting the way these affective structures constitute *for him* their deepest reality—the *punctum*.

Throughout his text Barthes animates the energy of the *punctum* by using the word, “advene” and its variant, “adventure,” thus, insisting on its meaning, to accede or to approach, to come forward, which is rooted in the Latin *advenire*, to come or to arrive at.⁶³⁴ It is a detail that allows the person in the photograph to have “a whole life external to her portrait,” allows her to “emerge,” to “continue living.”⁶³⁵ Notably Barthes illustrates the *punctum* in terms of its ability to “emerge” with an 1863 photograph of Queen Victoria on a horse (Figure 5.8). The arched format of the photograph, as well as its date of production and its maker’s notoriety as a stereographer, suggests that it was likely one of two constitutive images of a stereograph. Queen Victoria was among the

⁶³¹ Ibid., 69.

⁶³² Ibid., 45.

⁶³³ Ibid.

⁶³⁴ Ibid., 19.

⁶³⁵ Ibid., 57.

first to publicly praise the virtues of stereography at the Great Exhibition in 1851. By reproducing only one of the images, Barthes eliminates the potential for its stereoscopic effect, which, if viewed in the right context, would have allowed the figures to seem to emerge from the overexposed and hazy background. If reproduced as a stereograph, the image would have been literally doubled, but instead we remain blind to its doubled field.

Barthes discusses this photograph of Queen Victoria in section 23 of *Camera Lucida*, the section titled, “Blind Field.” Here, he describes the *punctum* as a kind of doubled vision: “a ‘blind field’ constantly doubles our partial vision.”⁶³⁶ Millions of photographs lack this blind field: “everything which happens within the frame dies absolutely once this frame is passed beyond.”⁶³⁷ That is, for Barthes, in photographs that lack a *punctum*, its figures “do not *emerge*, do not *leave*; they are anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies. Yet once there is a *punctum*, a blind field is created (is divined)...The *punctum* fantastically ‘brings out’ the Victorian nature (what else can one call it?) of the photograph, it endows this photograph with a blind field.”⁶³⁸ The euphemistic description, “Victorian nature,” *emerges* here according to Barthes’s purposes, not stereoscopically (although it would have done that too) but as a *punctum*. Barthes discovers this “Victorian nature” relative to the kilted groom, whose only function within the picture is to hold the horse’s bridle. He is there “to supervise the horse’s behavior: what if the horse suddenly began to rear? What would happen to the queen’s skirt, *i.e.* to *her majesty*?”⁶³⁹ This is what the *punctum* “‘brings out’.... What else

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

⁶³⁸ Ibid.

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

can one call it?," he asks, almost facetiously.⁶⁴⁰ For what he describes, the suddenly exposed site underneath the queen's skirt, conforms to the primal sight/site of disavowal in Sigmund Freud's construction of the fetish, where the subject sees the mother's absent penis (a blind field), resulting in a simultaneous belief and disbelief in this reality. In this particular case, the mother is also the symbolic father of England and thus continues to possess the phallus. The *punctum* is constructed much like the fetish, as an opportunity for credulity in the formation of the subject, one that protects the subject from the threat of castration, or perhaps the threat of the lost mother. The *punctum*-fetish compels Barthes's belief in an object—the Winter Garden photograph—that then magically protects him from the loss of his mother by returning her to him, as well as from her hallucinatory return in the real. Its 'blind field' beneficently doubles his partial vision.

Inasmuch the *punctum* is a "blind field" that "constantly doubles our partial vision," it is as Kaja Silverman observes like Hans Holbein's anamorphosis, "a kind of subtle *beyond*—as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see."⁶⁴¹ It complicates the fantasy of the look's mastery by suggesting the existence of a field that is not available to my look, is not given to be seen. Sartre believed his look to be his own, when as Barthes indicates, the object already dictates how it is seen. As discussed in Chapter 2, Lacan uses Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (Figure 2.11) to demonstrate the eye's relation to the given-to-be-seen. The painting's use of conventional perspective allows me, the looking subject, to imagine that everything I see radiates out from my look. The painting encourages my "*méconnaissance* which is, for Lacan, the visual equivalent of the *cogito*—to equate our look with the gaze, and to impute to it a

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., 57, 59.

mastering relation to the world.”⁶⁴² But the painting also gives me something that is not available to my look; Holbein’s inclusion of a large anamorphic skull “prevents our look from effecting an imaginary mastery of its contents by dramatizing what might be called our ‘blind spot.’”⁶⁴³

Viewing the skull requires that we position our bodies all the way to the right of the painting, indeed almost flush with its surface, as if entering the painting. “Rather than positing us as viewer, it puts us in the ‘picture.’”⁶⁴⁴ The anamorphic skull inverts the situation of looking, transforming my look at the object into my becoming the object of the gaze; the skull marks my emplacement within the field of vision, rather than my imagined mastery over it. It ““makes visible for us here something that is simply the subject as annihilated—annihilated in the form that is, strictly speaking, the imaged embodiment of the *minus-phi* of castration, which...centres the whole organization of desires through the framework of the fundamental drives.””⁶⁴⁵

The second vantage point—the anamorphic one—calls into question the rules of the first—the perspectival one. It negates the ‘dominant fiction’ of the first vantage point. Insofar as the perspectival vantage point has ‘passed as reality,’ it was the screen of the given-to-be-seen. Its fiction dominates as long as it is affirmed by the larger society not only through conscious belief, but also through certain desires and identifications. Both vantage points require the viewer to occupy a particular location in space relative to the image. Silverman asks “under what conditions we might occupy a different viewing position with respect to the screen?” She wants “to define the conditions under which we

⁶⁴² Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 177.

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁵ Lacan qtd in Ibid.

might step away from the geometral point, and see something other than the given-to-be-seen. The category through which I propose to do so is memory,” she writes.⁶⁴⁶

Silverman turns to Freud’s topographical model of the preconscious and unconscious to explore the potentiality of memory as that which allows the step away from the dominant fiction of the perspectival vantage point. She aligns that vantage point with Freud’s preconscious, insofar as both accommodate the subject’s ‘ability’ to classify and evaluate. A red chair, to use Silverman’s example, is thus a ‘chair’ or ‘red object’ or possibly even, ‘cheap’ or ‘high design.’ But I may also have unconscious memories of a particular red chair, and those may cathect my associations with this chair in “a dense, libidinally resonant signifying network.”⁶⁴⁷ What I see and deem important may be congruent with the values of a dominant fiction, but that is not necessarily the case; in this way, it begins to be possible to imagine stepping away from dictates of the cultural screen. My unconscious memories inform and re-direct my look at the behest of unconscious desire. But Silverman reminds us that desire’s object cannot be named directly; instead that which for me is libidinally cathected by my memories and my desire is already a substitute. “Repression dictates that the desired object can only be recovered or ‘remembered’ in the guise of a substitute.”⁶⁴⁸ It is relative to this capacity to substitute—to displace or to introduce alterity—rather than in its imperative to return to the primordial object of desire that Silverman locates the potentially productive capacity of the look. “It is a look which has developed such an appetite for alterity that it is capable of seizing upon even the most fleeting metaphoric or metonymic connection so

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., 179.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 180.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., 181.

as to facilitate transfer of psychic value from one term to another, otherwise radically divergent, term.”⁶⁴⁹

It is here that Silverman finds Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* to be a powerful demonstration of “both this appetite for visual alterity, and the resistance which such a remembering eye can exercise when confronted with the given-to-be-seen.”⁶⁵⁰ It might help to roughly map that which Barthes calls the *studium* onto the screen of the given-to-be-seen, insofar as it is that “which I perceive quite familiarly as a consequence of my knowledge, my culture.”⁶⁵¹ “What I feel about these photographs derives from an *average* affect, almost from certain training.... it is culturally (this connotation is present in *studium*) that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions.”⁶⁵² In contrast, it is the *punctum* that allows us to step away from these dictates to see the photograph differently. The *punctum* “breaks” the *studium*; it is a desiring look that “takes the spectator outside of its frame.”⁶⁵³ This confirms for Silverman Barthes’s interest in “the eye’s transformative potentiality—its capacity for looking from a position which is not assigned in advance, and for affirming certain ostensibly marginal elements within the screen at the expense of those that are culturally valorized” which he, like she, locates in memory. She observes that the *punctum* is unpredicable, its form always shifting; “even though it is anchored in the unconscious to so conventional and insistent an object of desire as the mother, its itinerary cannot be charted in advance.”⁶⁵⁴ In this

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁵¹ Barthes, *CL*, 25.

⁶⁵² Ibid. 26.

⁶⁵³ Ibid. 26, 59. He also writes, “History is hysterical. In order to look at it, we must be excluded from it” (*CL* 65). Like Kertész’s photograph, history excludes me; it is memory that allows my entry. The photos in W.G. Sebald’s novels, for example, allow the possibility of both, included as if a memory (recognition) of that from which the protagonist is nonetheless excluded.

⁶⁵⁴ Silverman 183.

way, Barthes demonstrates the imperative of displacement that rules the look. But insofar as the remembering look returns to the ego, to Barthes, to ‘me,’ Barthes’s look deploys memory in order to make a representational element his own. It is in this way that Barthes’s example stops short, for Silverman, of the kind of productive look that she advocates.

Relative to the Kertész photograph, for example, Barthes discovers in a particular detail—the texture of the road—*his own* memory of roads like this that he himself traveled as a child. He uses a photographic version of a memory that belongs to Kertész to instead remember his own past experience. According to Silverman, “When Barthes apprehends a photograph in the way he celebrates, his own past is victorious over the photograph’s assertion of a ‘this has been.’ The figures depicted in the photograph serve only to activate his own memories, and so are stripped of all historical specificity. Barthes’s recollections might thus be said to ‘devour’ the images of the other.”⁶⁵⁵

This is exactly opposite the kind of productive look that Silverman finds in Chris Marker’s film *Sans Soleil* (1982). The narrative structure of the film “‘remembers’ and encourages the viewer ‘to remember’ what might best be characterized as ‘other people’s memories.’”⁶⁵⁶ An off-screen female narrator reads letters supposedly sent to her by a filmmaker named Sandor Krasna. When she speaks, she thus inhabits, rather than devours, the “I” of Krasna’s first person account. Krasna’s text, in turn, operates as a kind of heteropathic recollection, according to which the things he describes “‘belong’ to someone else’s or to another nation’s ‘past.’”⁶⁵⁷ Barthes’s remembering, according to

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., 184.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., 186.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid.

Silverman, stops short of this heteropathic memory, enabling him to remember only his own memory.

But I want to say that this is not necessarily the case, especially relative to the touching details he observes in Koen Wessing's photographs from Nicaragua (Figure 5.9). Whereas the scene of "a torn-up pavement, a child's corpse under a white sheet; parents and friends stand around it, desolate" is "a banal enough scene, unfortunately," Barthes notes certain "interferences: the corpse's one bare foot, the sheet carried by the weeping mother (why this sheet?), a woman in the background, probably a friend, holding a handkerchief to her nose."⁶⁵⁸ His short and parenthetical inquiry, "why this sheet?," does something to heteropathically imagine according to another's point of view, thus displacing what unconsciously touches him onto another. Of another related photograph by Wessing, not reproduced in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes describes the limits of his knowledge in front of a photograph of three sandanistas whose faces are covered by rags: "(stench? secrecy? I have no idea, knowing nothing of the realities of guerilla warfare); one of them holds a gun that rests on his thigh (I can see his nails); but his other hand is stretched out, open, as if he were explaining and demonstrating something."⁶⁵⁹ In this photograph of a war scenario to which he cannot personally relate, he remains touched nonetheless by insistent details—hands and nails, and we, as readers, see these particular details return in and throughout *Camera Lucida*, rediscovered in other photographs. Here, however, he does not dwell on them; instead they are dropped, one might say, forgotten. That is, until he "'recollects' them" in relation to other photographs—notably those of Tzara or of Warhol, which he does not reproduce.

⁶⁵⁸ Barthes, *CL*, 25.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

Insofar as unconscious desire seeks a substitute for its remembered object in the given-to-be-seen, Silverman recognizes this displacement as a possibility for effecting change. She writes, “As *Sans Soleil* makes explicit, memory implies more than anything else the possibility of effecting change at the level of representation.”⁶⁶⁰ It does this by showing a set of images, forgetting them, and then remembering them, but this time in relation to new images (substitutes). Silverman describes the “recombination of familiar elements with new ones” as formally dramatizing “the transformative process which results when the productively remembering eye transects the cultural screen.”⁶⁶¹ It dramatizes the operation of memory: to repossess or rediscover a lost object of desire within the constraints of the given-to-be-seen. In *Camera Lucida*, like in *Sans Soleil*, the “nails” of one guerrilla warrior and the open hand of another are remembered (returned to), but in relation to other (substitute) images, in other photographs.

Indeed, Barthes finds “the right degree of openness, the right density of abandonment” in the hand of Robert Mapplethorpe’s self-portrait (Figure 5.10).⁶⁶² It is this degree of openness that strikes Barthes as a *punctum*, which takes him outside the frame, *beyond* that which the photograph permits us to see “toward the absolute excellence of a being, body and soul together.”⁶⁶³ I want to say that such recollections have less to do with Barthes’s own memory reserve than with a textual strategy, as perhaps a reward to an attentive reader. Or if not a reward, an activation of the reader: recognizing these reappearances “enlist[s] me in an act of ‘heteropathic recollection.’”⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶⁰ Silverman 190.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶⁶² Barthes, *CL*, 59.

⁶⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁴ Silverman 185.

Barthes's first-person narrative throughout *Camera Lucida* requires me to inhabit his "I," displacing me from my self and "introduc[ing] the 'not me' into my memory reserve."⁶⁶⁵

Mapplethorpe's photograph, for Barthes, is erotic, and not pornographic, insofar as the body does not show itself, but rather gives itself. That is, Barthes feels that the hand has been "caught" in just the right way; he does not feel that the hand has been deliberately positioned in this way, but rather that "the photographer has found the *right moment*, the *kairos* of desire."⁶⁶⁶ Said differently, in this photographed hand, Barthes doesn't feel the intervention of the photographer, the 'hand' of an author. He can believe in the chance of this photograph, of its having been caught; he can believe like the Byzantines in "the image of Christ which impregnated St. Veronica's napkin: that it was not made by the hand of man, *acheiropoietos*."⁶⁶⁷

Another way in which *Sans Soleil* makes change possible at the level of representation, for Silverman, is by feeding the images through a synthesizer "to destabilize and to defamiliarize them."⁶⁶⁸ The letter-writer, Krasna, explains according to his friend, Hayao Yameneko, that by changing the images, the synthesizer drains the images of reality. These images "'are less deceptive...than those you see on television,' since 'at least they proclaim themselves to be what they are—images, not the portable and compact form of an already inaccessible reality.'"⁶⁶⁹ Whereas Barthes certainly does not run the photographs he reproduces in *Camera Lucida* through a synthesizer, he does alter at least one of them via language. Most famously, as Margaret Olin observes, when Barthes recalls a James Van der Zee photograph (Figure 5.11) that he had earlier

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁶ Barthes, *CL*, 59.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 82.

⁶⁶⁸ Silverman 190.

⁶⁶⁹ *Sans Soleil* voice-over qtd in Ibid.

described, he not only changes the location of the *punctum*, but he changes that which is in the photograph.⁶⁷⁰ Earlier in the text, Barthes describes that in the photograph which “prick[s] me” as “the belt worn low...and above all her *strapped pumps* (Mary Janes—why does this dated fashion touch me?...).”⁶⁷¹ But later in the text, he writes that sometimes the *punctum* is only revealed “after the fact, when the photograph is no longer in front of me and I think back on it.”⁶⁷²

It is this “remembering eye” that Silverman celebrates in *Camera Lucida* for its capacity to displace: “Who could predict, for instance, that in the case of the Van der Zee photograph, Barthes’s remembering look would come to rest on the thin gold necklace around the neck of an African-American woman, and thereby assimilate that woman (through the intervening figure of his father’s sister) to what might be called the ‘mother complex’?”⁶⁷³ Barthes recollects a different *punctum* via memory—no longer the belt or shoes, but instead a necklace. But he also ‘misremembers’ the necklace, displacing the pearl necklace that actually appears in the Van der Zee photograph onto a “slender ribbon of braided gold” that he remembers having been worn by his father’s sister—a woman who, like Barthes himself, had “never married, lived with her mother as an old maid.”⁶⁷⁴ He displaces his own lived experience onto the figure of his aunt, and writes, if not heteropathically perhaps empathically, “I had always been saddened whenever I thought of her dreary life.”⁶⁷⁵ Describing his realization that “the real *punctum* was the necklace

⁶⁷⁰ Margaret Olin, “Touching Photographs: Roland Barthes’s ‘Mistaken’ Identification” in *Representations* 80.1 (Fall 2002).

⁶⁷¹ Barthes, *CL*, 43.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶⁷³ Silverman 183.

⁶⁷⁴ Barthes, *CL*, 53.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

she was wearing,” he writes, “for (no doubt) it was this same necklace.”⁶⁷⁶ For Olin, the misidentification signals a split between Barthes the author and Barthes the narrator: the former understands the mistake, performs it as a textual strategy, the latter remains duped according to his naïveté and astonishment, parenthetically signaled as “(no doubt).” Barthes allows the *punctum*’s affect to survive even the possibility of nonexistence.

That Olin seems to be first to observe this ‘mistake’ of the pearl necklace for a gold one indicates roughly twenty years of credulity among Barthes’s readers. Until prompted by Olin, we allowed his language to function transparently, as transparently as he describes the envelope that is the photograph. For me, this is not necessarily an accusation against inattentive reading; I am not advocating that we should have resisted letting ourselves be duped, that we should not have trusted our narrator’s memory, that instead we should have read *Camera Lucida* from a wholly skeptical stance. The text asks us to participate in his desiring looks, asks us to believe with him in photography’s relation to the referent, but it also performs the way the photograph or language necessarily fails to make its object exist. It asks us to maintain competing beliefs about photography. Instead of Yameneko’s synthesized images, which “‘are less deceptive’” because they proclaim their status as image rather than posturing as a “‘portable and compact form of an already inaccessible reality,’” Barthes allows both aspects of photography to stand.⁶⁷⁷ He does this in a way that splits himself in two: Barthes the narrator/credulous spectator lets photographs deceive us, according to the way they let us (and we want them to let us) access past reality; and Barthes the incredulous author

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁷ *Sans Soleil* voice-over qtd in Silverman 190.

points to its deception, to its status as image, drains it of reality—finds in it something that is not there.

Krasna observes that Yamaneko's "'language touches me'" because it "talks to that part of us which insists on drawing profiles on prison walls, a piece of chalk to follow the contours of what is not, or is no longer, or is not yet. The handwriting each of us will use to compose the list of things that quickens the heart, to offer or to erase."⁶⁷⁸ Krasna allows Yamaneko's language to 'touch' him, just as we allow Barthes's language to touch us, to affect us with its affect. We allow it to pierce our incredulity, our skeptical stance, about the 'status' of an image's 'access to past reality' because both Yamaneko and Barthes speak to that part of us that insists on drawing profiles on prison walls, that part of us that longs for something to remain of that which no longer does, that part of us that wants to make/let the index mean something—Sartre writes, "Consciousness has many...ways of *surpassing the real in order to make a world of it*."⁶⁷⁹

In *Sans Soleil*, Marker, like Barthes, turns toward "the marginal details of the cultures it depicts [instead of] those aspects which are more centrally featured at the site of the screen."⁶⁸⁰ These details "become, quite simply, 'things that quicken the heart.'"⁶⁸¹ They touch us as Barthes's *punctum* touches us, through a displacement that shifts the "libidinal value from the 'large' or 'socially significant' to what was regarded as 'small' and 'socially insignificant.'"⁶⁸² It is for Silverman insofar as these details are "insistently read through other people's memories" apropos of Marker's film (and not of *Camera Lucida*) that they enable a "psychic and a cultural displacement, an estrangement from

⁶⁷⁸ *Sans Soleil* voice-over qtd in Ibid., 191.

⁶⁷⁹ Sartre 268.

⁶⁸⁰ Silverman 191.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., 192.

⁶⁸² Ibid., 191.

one's self" toward an identification with an other.⁶⁸³ Marker (the director-author) shows us a detail, —“an outstretched stockinged foot on the ferry from Hokkaido to Tokyo”—which a narrator (the letter writer, who is doubled by the female voice-over) insistently reads according to someone else's memory. Barthes-the-author locates a detail of a Van der Zee photograph—a necklace—and synthesizes it via Barthes-the-narrator into something different—a gold necklace; Barthes-the-author thus deploys a textual strategy that remembers the necklace according to someone else's memory—Barthes-the-narrator's faulty memory. As Olin begins to indicate, Barthes's writing in *Camera Lucida* performs an estrangement from himself; he is split in two—credulous narrator and incredulous author.

It is elsewhere in his writing that Barthes had already, and perhaps most famously, imagined and performed this estrangement from himself. In his 1967 essay, “The Death of the Author,” Barthes argues that the meaning of any text ought not to be sought in or from information about the author, but that instead its meaning belongs to an other—the reader. Notably Barthes begins this essay with an observation of a split between an (incredulous) author and a (credulous) narrator—a split that cannot be resolved. He asks who it is in Balzac's *Sarrasine* that mistakes a castrato disguised as a woman for “woman herself.”⁶⁸⁴ He asks who is speaking; does Balzac write this in his own or through another's voice? Is it Balzac's hero (the narrator) who is credulous, “bent on remaining ignorant of the castrato hidden beneath the woman,” or is it Balzac (the author) commenting on the philosophical, psychological, or literary status of women?⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸³ Ibid., 192.

⁶⁸⁴ Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 142-148, 142; abbreviated as DA hereafter.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid., 142.

Barthes describes the way that Marcel Proust refuses our confusion of author and narrator; for in Proust, it is the author who writes, the narrator has not yet written. The narrator is not “he who has seen and felt nor even he who is writing, but he who *is going to write*.”⁶⁸⁶ Barthes writes at the beginning of the second part of *Camera Lucida*, “what I wanted—as Valéry wanted after his mother’s death—was ‘to write a little compilation of her, just for myself (perhaps I shall write it one day, so that, printed, her memory will last at least the time of my own notoriety).’”⁶⁸⁷ Barthes the narrator, like Proust’s narrator, speaks as if he does not coincide with Barthes or Proust the author; he is the one who ‘perhaps’ ‘is going to write’ ‘one day.’ Indeed Barthes further displaces this authorial intention onto Valéry; he speaks through Valéry’s words, doubling and thus negating the singularity of their authorship.⁶⁸⁸

The author’s *I* designates a performance, it does not represent a person. “Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance saying *I*: language knows a ‘subject,’ not a ‘person,’ and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language ‘hold together,’ suffices that is to say, to exhaust it.”⁶⁸⁹ Barthes empties the *I* of the author, clearing the way instead for the reader. Because “no one, no ‘person,’ says” “the Balzac sentence:” “its source, its voice, is not the true place of the writing, which is reading.”⁶⁹⁰ In Greek tragedy, the text is riddled with double meanings that the characters understand “unilaterally (this perpetual misunderstanding is exactly the ‘tragic’).”⁶⁹¹ It is

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., 144.

⁶⁸⁷ Barthes, *CL*, 63.

⁶⁸⁸ Barthes describes Valéry too as one who “never stopped calling into question and deriding the Author...all recourse to the writer’s interiority seemed to him pure superstition” (DA 144).

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid., 145.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., 147.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., 148.

the attentive reader-listener who “understands each word in its duplicity.”⁶⁹² It is the reader who can hold together multiple and conflicting beliefs, allowing all of these meanings to constitute the text. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes’s first-person strategy asks me to identify with the narrator’s “I,” and I am given details that I read as if according to his memory—so insistently that I misremember along with him the gold necklace that was never there.

Barthes sees, but his seeing is not limited to his own consciousness; “I see,” he writes, through another’s sight—“by means of [a] ‘thinking eye,’” “that additional vision which is in a sense the gift, the grace of the *punctum*.”⁶⁹³ The photograph(er) leads a blind Barthes, much like the boy in Kertész’s photograph leads the blind violinist, giving (not showing) him the *punctum* of the dirt road (Figure 5.12). If this boy, this photograph(er), is “Orpheus, he must not turn back to look at what he is leading—what he is giving to me.”⁶⁹⁴ He paves the way, gives me a field, for my own discovery. The *punctum*, my *punctum*, is likely not seen by the photographer; it was merely there for him to photograph: “he could not *not* photograph the partial object at the same time as the total object (how could Kertész have ‘separated’ the dirt road from the violinist walking on it?)”⁶⁹⁵ Its presence there was inevitable, but its discovery is my delight. Discovering it then turns me into “a primitive, a child—or a maniac,” perhaps even into one of the “idiot children” in the Lewis Hine photograph he is describing when he writes, “I dismiss all knowledge, all culture, I refuse to inherit anything from another eye than my own”

⁶⁹² Ibid.

⁶⁹³ Barthes, *CL*, 45.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid., 47.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid.

(Figure 5.13).⁶⁹⁶ Barthes sees something by way of another's sight, which becomes all his own. Through the gift of the *punctum*, Barthes, like the taller of Hines' photographed children, sees what the other child, whose eyes are closed, does not. And at the same time, that which Barthes sees exists only for him, as if he saw it with his eyes closed.

Barthes shuts his eyes to the photograph, "withdraw[ing] it from its usual blah-blah: 'Technique,' 'Reality,' 'Reportage,' 'Art,' etc.: to say nothing, to shut my eyes, to allow the detail to rise of its own accord into affective consciousness."⁶⁹⁷ Sartre describes the way that "some people," at the orchestra, "shut their eyes to hear it, detaching themselves from the *visual* and dated event of this particular interpretation: they give themselves up to pure sounds."⁶⁹⁸ They do this because what they seek to hear—a melody or a particular piece of music—is not located "*here*, between these walls, at the tip of a violin bow. Nor is it 'in the past' as if I thought: this is the work that matured in the mind of Beethoven on such a date. It is completely beyond the real."⁶⁹⁹ He continues, "The performance of the symphony is its *analogue*...the real sounds must be apprehended as analogues. It therefore occurs as a perpetual elsewhere, a perpetual absence."⁷⁰⁰ Inasmuch as it exists outside of real time and space, for Sartre, the melody or image is outside of existence. "I do not hear it actually, I listen to it in the imaginary.... There is in fact no passing from one world to the other, but only a passing from the imaginative attitude to that of reality."⁷⁰¹ The *punctum* allows Barthes to pass into the imaginative attitude relative to photography, away from the banal reality of its *studium*.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., 51.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., 55.

⁶⁹⁸ Sartre 279.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., 280.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid.

By not reproducing the photographs of hands by Kertész or by Michals, or the Winter Garden photograph, Barthes renders us as blind as Kertész's blind violinist; we have only Barthes—the (naïve) boy—to lead us, to look on our behalf. But he describes his own looking, as if a kind of blind looking, that is, as if groping for or touching the referent; it is the “texture” of the dirt road in the photograph that gives Barthes “the certainty of being in Central Europe.”⁷⁰² This texture, however, is an imaginary touch. It is an illusion that will not survive the reality test, wherein he reaches out his hand to touch the photographed road. Insofar as the photograph allows Barthes to imagine that he can feel the texture of the road—that he can *perceive* and not just imagine it—the photograph annihilates itself as *medium*, as in between, becoming instead the thing itself: “I recognize, with my whole body, the straggling villages I passed through on my long-ago travels in Hungary and Rumania.”⁷⁰³

His desire gropes as blindly as Kertész's man down the road, led by the photograph, the materiality of which he disavows, to see through its eyes, just as the blind man sees through the boy's eyes, as if they were his own. Barthes begins Part 2 of *Camera Lucida* on a blind search through photographs of his mother. He “had no hope of ‘finding’ her, ... expected nothing from these photographs...,” when suddenly one photograph among the piles, the Winter Garden photograph, emerges.⁷⁰⁴ Something in it ‘advenes,’ or accedes, approaches, comes forward as if rising off the page to shoot out at me, to pierce or to wound me. And this he discovers in a photograph for which he

⁷⁰² Barthes, *CL*, 45.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

imagines the photographer's instruction to his subject to have been: "Step forward a little so we can see you."⁷⁰⁵

When Barthes uses *advenir* to describe the energy of the *punctum*, he also uses it for its other meaning: to be superadded to, to become part of something (though inessential). For Silverman (and Freud), that which is added is unconscious memory and its libidinally resonant associations; the addition was thus a displacement, allowing us to step away from the culturally-dictated given-to-be-seen (of the *studium*). For Sartre, there is nothing in the picture other than what I add. Whereas in memory (in my affective consciousness), my mental image can remain ambiguous—"something fine, graceful, pure, with a nuance of strictly individual fineness and purity," if instead I desire something, it must take on a specific affective form.⁷⁰⁶ "Desire must superadd itself" to affective consciousness, thus positing its object in an equivalent or substitute—"those hands," in Sartre's example.⁷⁰⁷ And it is to this affective equivalent that desire is then directed. It is through displacement, then, that desire operates; but it moves in a double direction—back toward an ambiguous mental image and forward toward a displaced substitute.⁷⁰⁸

According to Sartre, desire is a "blind effort to possess on the level of representation what I already possess on the affective level."⁷⁰⁹ Desire is a blind effort to find a representative, a substitute; desire is a blind effort to displace. In Kertész's photograph, Sartrean desire is metaphorized as the blind gypsy, which I (as the boy) re-

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., 67.

⁷⁰⁶ Sartre 101.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁸ Sartre refuses the concept of the unconscious, although it seems invoked here as the ambiguous mental image—see Jean-Michel Rabaté in *Writing the Image after Roland Barthes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1997) 6.

⁷⁰⁹ Sartre 102.

direct away from its (his) well-worn movement in affective consciousness (the tracks in the dirt road extending behind the baby toward the violinist) toward a representational substitute (off to the left of the image). Likewise, desire prompts the gypsy to represent an ambiguous feeling as a tune played on his violin.

Barthes-the-author's performance of the first-person constitutes an effort to see through the eyes of Barthes-the-narrator, who wants to believe that the past can return to him in the form of a photograph, who wants to believe that he can make his mother exist again through it and through his narration thereof. While we might assume that it is the boy who leads Kertész's blind gypsy, there is reciprocity in this leadership. Each leads the other, and each is led by the other. For their relationship to be successful, each must *see* the world through the other's eyes, in a kind of heteropathic seeing. If the boy forgets that the gypsy cannot see, he will dangerously assume that the man is aware of objects obstructing his path; and if the gypsy does not trust the eyes of the boy, he will have no path through the world. Kertész's photograph illustrates a heteropathic relationship in the scenario of vision.

And the *punctum* of Kertész's photograph gives Barthes this heteropathic opportunity. But inasmuch as he sees through Kertész's eyes and recognizes something that is all his own, he may, as Silverman suggests, devour the other. Even as the *punctum* allows him to rediscover something that is all his own, until then, he did not have it; it belonged to the other within him. It lay dormant in his unconscious, forgotten and inaccessible to his conscious mind until rediscovered by way of an other. His unconscious displacement of a memory from his childhood returns to him by way of another's sight. Barthes then writes an account of this opportunity for rediscovery, for

remembering by way of an other, that is insistently first-person, so that as the reader I must inhabit another's "I," Barthes's "I." Barthes's text, *Camera Lucida*, engenders my own heteropathic recollection of another person's (his) memories. Insofar as "The Death of the Author" insists that a text, a piece of writing, belongs to the reader, *Camera Lucida* then belongs to us (at least as much as it feels insistently like his own). Reading Barthes's memories in the first person, then allows us to step into the mode of the 'productive look' that Silverman describes for Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil*. In *Sans Soleil* the off-screen narrator reads letters penned by a fictional author, remembering vicariously through his memories. This is *Camera Lucida*'s gift to us as readers.

By restoring a capacity for heteropathic recollection to *Camera Lucida* against the grain of Silverman, I do not wish to be ungenerous to her scholarship. Instead, just as Barthes has given over his text to his reader—both Silverman and myself, in this instance—so she gives her text to me. My reading against hers is always already a marker of this. Moreover, I agree with and find generative the majority of her argument.

For Silverman the Holbein painting "shows that the same image can look very different depending upon the vantage-point from which it is observed."⁷¹⁰ The competing systems of intelligibility in the Holbein painting for Lacan—one perspectival, one anamorphic—are also present in certain photographs for Barthes—one is the *studium*, the other is the *punctum*. The winter garden photograph looks very different from Barthes's vantage point than from our own. He writes

(I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the 'ordinary'; it cannot in any way constitute the visible object of science; it

⁷¹⁰ Silverman 177.

cannot establish an objectivity, in the positive sense of the term; at most it would interest your *studium*: period, clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound.)⁷¹¹

He won't reproduce it for us, it will not become a transparent envelope; it remains sealed, kept from our look. A page before, he writes of his mother and of him, "we supposed, without saying anything of the kind to each other, that... the suspension of images must be the very space of love, its music."⁷¹² He suspends this particular image from our look, but makes it—and hence his mother—exist for us through and as text.⁷¹³ He shares it with us in another medium, in this way "synthesizing" it as much as Yameneko's images in *Sans Soleil*, to "destabilize and to defamiliarize" it, as if through language he can more easily prevent turning her into an ordinary object of everyday reality (for us). Barthes's text itself—*Camera Lucida*—has competing systems of intelligibility—his (as author), his (as narrator), and mine (as reader). While at times, the text looks to be wholly inhabited by the author (it is his), at others it looks to be mine (I inhabit his "I").

The text *Camera Lucida* like the tool, a camera lucida, allows us to hold multiple vantage points simultaneously. The camera lucida was a 19th-century invention (1809) consisting of "a three-sided glass prism suspended before the eye of the draftsman, such that a subject and the piece of paper beneath the prism meld together onto the back of the draftsman's retina. Thus, the image produced by a camera lucida is seen only by the draftsman and by no one else, except in the form of a tracing. Here, then," as Geoffrey Batchen surmises, "was an apt metaphor for Barthes's own text."⁷¹⁴ The camera lucida comes in between the world and the unique mental image that exists on my retina. It

⁷¹¹ Barthes, *CL*, 73.

⁷¹² *Ibid.*, 72.

⁷¹³ His writing replaces his mother, in a way, becoming "the unique goal of my life." (*Ibid.*).

⁷¹⁴ Geoffrey Batchen, *Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009) 11.

allows me to plot this collision between world and mental image according to points on a page; Barthes similarly charts the existence of the photographed subject according to “sensitive points; precisely, these marks, these wounds are so many *points*.”⁷¹⁵ In Olin’s estimation, Barthes privileges the relationship between the photograph and its beholder over the relationship between the photograph and its object. But I think both remain at stake for him.

It is according to the *punctum*’s principle of adventure that Barthes understands existence relative to photography. Whereas the *punctum* had an “attraction that makes it exist: an *animation*,” the *studium* did not.⁷¹⁶ Quoting Sartre, Barthes describes the way that he can look at the banality or studium of newspaper photographs “without assuming a posture of existence. Though the persons whose photograph I see are certainly present in the photograph, they are so without existential posture, like the Knight and Death present in Durer’s engraving, but without my positing them.”⁷¹⁷ In *L’Imaginaire* Sartre had written, citing Husserl:

when I look at the photos in a magazine they ‘mean nothing to me,’ that is, I may look at them without any thought that they exist. In that case the persons whose photographs I see are reached through these photographs, but without existential position, exactly like Death and the Knight, who are reached through Durer’s engraving, but without my placing them. We can also find cases in which the photograph leaves me so unaffected that I do not even form an image. The photograph forms but a vague object and the persons depicted in it are well constituted as persons, but simply so because of their resemblance to human beings, without any particular intentionality. They float between the banks of perception, between sign and image, without ever bordering on either of them.⁷¹⁸

This is the fate from which Barthes saves the Winter Garden photograph by not reproducing it for us. He cannot allow this photograph, which “gave me a sentiment as

⁷¹⁵ Barthes, *CL*, 27.

⁷¹⁶ Barthes, *CL*, 20.

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷¹⁸ Sartre 33-34.

certain as remembrance,” to become just any photograph, a photograph that might mean nothing.⁷¹⁹ “No more than I would reduce my family to the Family, would I reduce my mother to the Mother.... When I confronted the Winter Garden Photograph I gave myself up to the Image, to the Image-Repertoire. Thus I could understand my generality; but having understood it, invincibly I escaped from it. In the Mother, there was a radiant, irreducible core: my mother.”⁷²⁰ He opts to believe in that which another’s photograph gives him to be seen, and this causes him to rediscover photography: “that every photograph is somehow co-natural with its referent, I was rediscovering, overwhelmed by the truth of the image.”⁷²¹ He continues, “Henceforth I would have to consent to combine two voices: the voice of banality (to say what everyone sees and knows) and the voice of singularity (to replenish such banality with all the élan of an emotion which belonged only to myself).”⁷²²

Barthes discovers the emphatically undecidable nature of photography and represents it through two voices. The Winter Garden Photograph compels Barthes to believe in photography, understanding that his conviction in the existence of this photograph and its referent exists only for him (by way of another’s having been there to photograph it). For the rest of us, this photograph is merely banal, interesting only our *studium*; it speaks only to ‘what everyone sees and knows,’ which is its status as a photograph made by a photographer at a certain time and place for a particular purpose. The photograph, he comes to recognize, “always carries its referent with itself...they are glued together.... The photograph belongs to that class of laminated objects whose two

⁷¹⁹ Barthes, *CL*, 77.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

⁷²¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷²² *Ibid.*

leaves cannot be separated without destroying them both: the windowpane and the landscape.”⁷²³

Whereas his previous essays on photography sought to unveil the medium’s surreptitious delivery of ideology, this essay reevaluates the seeming transparency of its operation. Were we ever so credulous to photographic advertisements, which delivered their dominant fictions to us without our knowing better? Or did photography always operate in a way that ‘everyone [already] sees and knows?’ He returns to photography as the site of credulous spectatorship not to expose it as such, but to explore its own mythology. He suggests that the credulous first glance about which he and myriad postmodern critics spilled so much ink might always already have been joined by the incredulous second glance of the reflective consciousness. The first glance—as if through a transparent windowpane—and the second glance—at gelatin exposed or paint organized to depict that scene—are laminated together. In *Camera Lucida* Barthes articulates our understanding of this duality as our natural attitude relative to photography. Although its envelope may be transparent, we still recognize the status of its delivery mechanism. Rather than continuing to conjure a primitive and credulous spectator in need of a postmodern reminder that photographs are not transparent windows, and instead are made objects discursively deployed, in *Camera Lucida* Barthes suggests that such credulity is actually quite rare, and that moreover, it is a gift.

⁷²³ Ibid., 5-6.