

**On Detail, in Detail:
Reaching a State of Nothing**

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Author's declaration:

This thesis represents partial submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy/ Master of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. K. 7' with a small mark above the 'K'.

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Abstract

When discussing *detail* in the context of photographic images – a medium much concerned with verisimilitude and exactness, historically speaking – the mutability of this particular linguistic item comes to the fore.

Used to describe an image that exclusively depicts one component understood to be part of a larger whole within its limited frame, the term functions as an image-category descriptor, commonly used interchangeably with ‘close-up’. But the term is also applied to images (or aspects thereof) far removed from that category, wherein ‘detail’ might refer to the capacity of a given imaging technology to resolve apprehensible visual information, a plane of optical focus, a subject, an aspect of fore/background, or any element of the composition included intentionally or incidentally within the frame. Each of these aspects of images are open to subjective scrutiny in terms of their capacity to inform, signify or otherwise inflect the viewer’s experience of both the image itself and what is implied to exist behind and beyond the frame. The relative arbitrariness of detail as it is commonly (and liberally) applied in this context, then, points to the unpredictable, multifaceted, rhizomatic and metonymic nature of the term.

Detail, in standard noun form, refers to an individual fact or item; in the absence of a complete information field to provide context and nuance, it can present an incomplete or distorted account of what it purports to represent. The phrase ‘in detail’, conversely, means including or considering all the information about something or every part of something. As such, the meaning of the phrase is analogous to elaborating, specifying and carefulness. The idiom “The devil is in the details”, for example,

expresses the importance of detail: whatever should be done, one should do it thoroughly; there are specific elements of the situation that have the potential to cause later difficulties if not carefully considered and addressed at the outset. Another idiom—that does not contain the word specifically, but clearly refers to the concept of details—is “Not seeing the wood for the trees”. The idiom serves as a warning against over-concentration on details, lest one damage their understanding of the larger endeavour of which those details are a part.

Details captured in photography are essentially different from both these vernacular linguistic references and other image-producing technologies in terms of the viewer’s relationship with the object. These details are beyond physical comprehension regarding memory, time and space. The photographic *punctum* elaborated by Roland Barthes denotes a photograph-viewer encountering a wounding, personally touching detail that establishes the unexpected perception of a direct relationship between themselves and the object or person depicted in the photograph; a relationship that is entirely subjective, deeply affecting in the sense of a Lacanian trauma, and drawing its particular affective import from—in large part—the indexical nature of the photographic image.

This practice-based research paper proposes that characterisation of the photographic detail and its associated perceptual and affective potentials as *nothing* (or *nothingness*) offers both an expansion of the enduring concepts of indexicality and punctum and a productive frame through which to critically assess the role of detail and perception in contemporary photographic, cinematic and virtual reality media.

Just as Barthes attempted to bring the metonymic detail into the linguistic tool-set of discourse around photographic images, this research attempts further to integrate the detail into the realm of the Real as elaborated within Lacanian analysis of the Unconscious. Also, by drawing upon Psychoanalytic theories of infant development, I propose the detail as a means of how humans primarily comprehend the world during

infancy, then investigate further stages of infantile development in the context of visual and sensual experience. The line of enquiry draws upon my personal experience of the *Isakower Phenomenon* - a sensory revival of the infantile experience of feeding at the mother's breast. I have focused on this particular phenomenon as a starting point of my journey towards nothing as it is a state where one's perceptions are undifferentiated and instinctive; prior to the acquisition of language and symbolic world that entails. In a broad sense, our infantile memory, the unconscious mind could be regarded as nothing in the world of language.

The application of theories of infant development contributes a unique perspective, proposing that detail plays a central role in investigating our perception given that what we perceive during infancy is grasped almost entirely through details. By drawing parallels to the Isakower Phenomenon, I suggest that our unconscious mind, akin to the detail, could be regarded as a state before language, representing 'nothing' in the world of language. My research ultimately aims to provide a critical reappraisal of the detail as it pertains to the photographic act and an unpacking of the perceptual mechanisms at play in a viewer's encounter with it.

Another important part of this research is exploring the discourses of digital photography. Several phases of digital innovation in media have fundamentally changed the essence of photography and the way we live. The indexicality that characterized earlier photographic technologies has shifted toward a generative mode of image-making in the digital era, which changes not only our perception of the photographic image but also our ways of interacting with those images. With the emergence of ever-higher-resolution imaging technologies and powerful computational processing of images being easily accessible and widely utilised, our visual and cognitive faculties are constantly adapting and adjusting to the abundance of visual details captured or created with these technologies, wherein both what we see and want to see are beyond our physical reality. What is it that we desire to see and remember? Furthermore, is it possible that our actual experiences in life can be archived as a whole,

when lived reality consists of fine details present in orders of magnitude larger than our visual and cognitive faculties can process?

In my photography practice, the concept of detail is explored both within the content of the images I produce and the installation of these works to include situational (or spatio-temporal) aspects. In keeping with my central concept of *nothing*, many of my works depict a period in-between scheduled exhibitions of a typical gallery space, the absence of any readily identifiable objects of display conflicting with the exhibition space's singular purpose as a place of display. The surfaces of these unadorned gallery walls are painstakingly photographed using a variety of techniques ranging from spatially-sequential, macro-scale captures to large panoramas, focus stacking and extensive post-processing to ensure fidelity of details and perfectly-matched colour and luminance of the prints relative to their real referent (the physical gallery wall). The demanding exactitude of this process necessarily encodes *time* into the works; this aspect is then expanded throughout the equally laborious process of installing the resulting prints into the gallery space to re-capture (in finalised installation-form) photographically and exhibit. Over time, this process has been refined to the point of installing prints that are processed, sized and installed to present seamless, perspectively-coherent representations in contiguous relationship to the walls, floor, ceiling, sightlines and features of the gallery space at 1:1 scale from a given viewpoint. Contrary to the complex process that brought them into existence, these installations present a seemingly empty space in their final form. Despite presenting an abundance of detail, the gallery appears to displaying nothing at all. As such, the conceptual relations (and perhaps, mutual dependence) of detail and nothingness are manifested in physical form, coalescing to point to a hard-won *practice of nothing*.



Figure 1: Soon-Hak Kwon, History of Union Gallery IV, 2014, 290x290cm, 42-part Giclee print

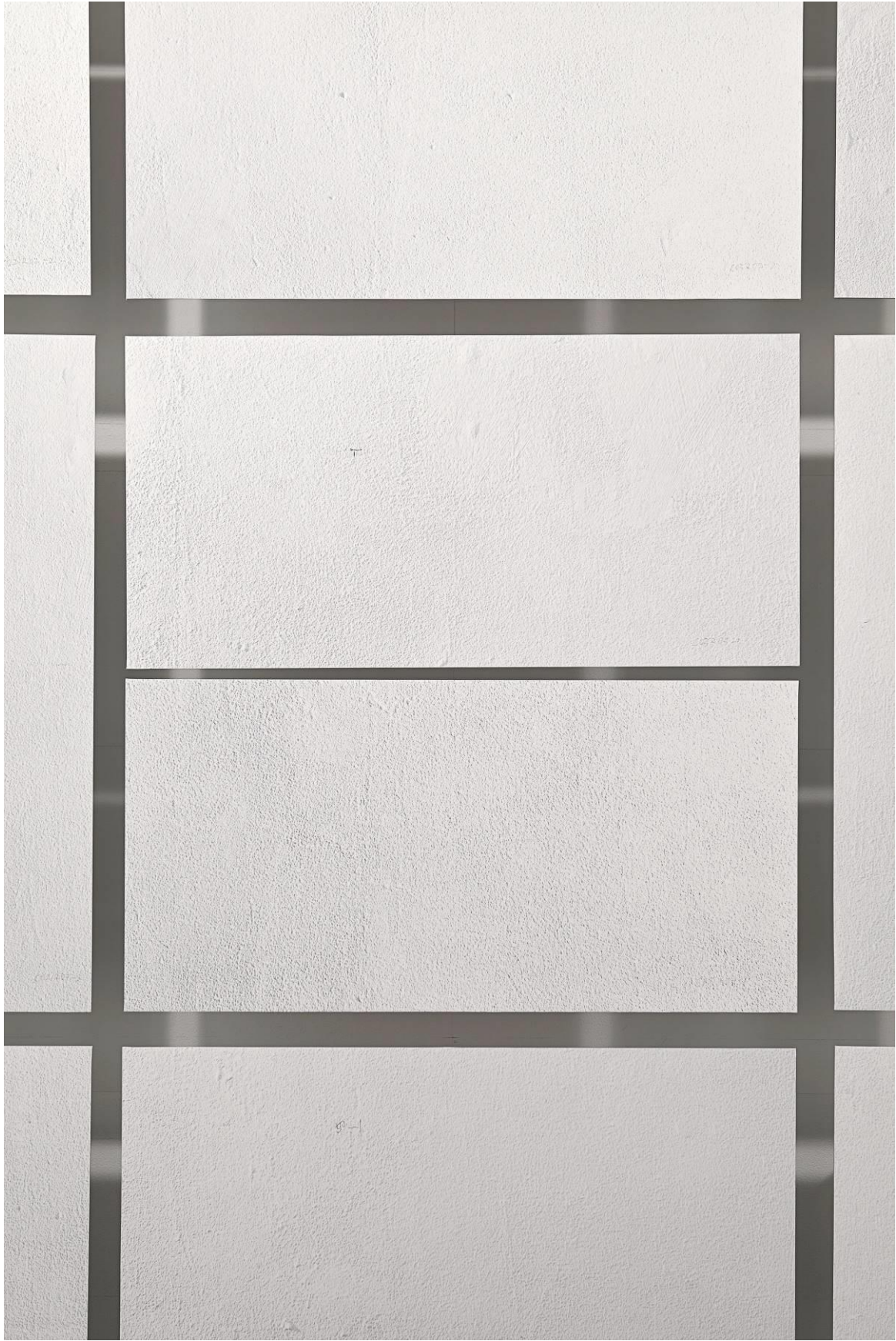


Figure 2: Soon-Hak Kwon, *detail* of History of Union Gallery IV

Introduction to the *practice of nothing* - 'History of'

My previous work is included here (figure 10, 17, 18, 19) for reference as the foundation upon which my recent practice (produced alongside and inseparable from this thesis) builds and expands. Ongoing serial works are included in this thesis as solo projects: *History of Basement Studio* and *White on White on White in everything*(2017), *History of Accumulated Ghosts I & II in Partitions* (2019).

History of is a series of photographs of interior walls - particularly gallery walls, typically painted plain white to provide a uniform, neutral backdrop to the artworks on display. Accordingly, in a strict sense, we are oblivious to the wall. Seeing the wall is only possible if we could purely see, as an infant would observe the world. Therefore, conceptually speaking, the image of white walls is analogous to the moment before one identifies the world of things.

While my work has never held Eastern philosophies or spiritual practices as a central concern, there is a clear parallel between my images of walls in this series and a Zen meditation technique in which practicing monks focus intently on a spot of unadorned wall for an extended period of time. As the practitioner progresses through the meditative states, his cognitive processes typically shift away from internal streams of conscious thought toward a heightened awareness of the external; in this case, that small textural details of the wall he faces. This state of heightened awareness set against the minimal visual stimuli provided by the static, monochromatic wall offers the sitter (eventually, and ideally) conscious access to the faculties of perception that normally function outside of conscious control. As the monk must stare at the blank wall in order to uncover what his perception and consciousness conceals, so too is the viewer of my photographic works urged to see nothing in an effort to perceive everything. The images

that I present of *nothing* propose that the concepts of micro/macro and embodied/disembodied are always-both at play in perception, and are not exist in binary opposition or contradiction to each other.

The wall images in *History of* resemble an empty screen at first glance. However, upon closer inspection, the images in fact offer a hyper-realistic depiction in which every wall texture has been photographed, processed and output in super-high-resolution or 'giga-pixel' format. To create this image, a modified panorama process is used in which numerous photographs are shot at a close distance parallel to the surface of the wall, with each singular photograph then being joined contiguously using digital image processing tools to form a single complete image. This labour-intensive process creates a kind of paradox both in the shooting and stitching process; during the shooting session, seeing the camera lens pointing at what appears to be an empty spot often makes passers-by wonder what is being captured in such a precise manner. In contrast, the manual stitching process of photographs devoid of typical pictorial reference points (perspectival delineations, defined edges of objects, etc.,) often causes confusion about scale and viewpoint when viewed on the monitor.

The print size is determined before the shooting, as the surface upon which the print will be installed is marked before shooting and prints are processed for accurate 1:1 scale reproduction of those surfaces. Life-sized print output (1:1 scale in relation to its surroundings) is a crucial aspect of my intention to create photographic images beyond the conventional principles of photography, which typically present a reduced or enlarged representation of reality. While making the giga-pixel image requires skilful photography techniques at the point of capture and post--processing using state-of-the-art computing platforms, the result nevertheless appears as a non-image. A typical photograph (meaning, in this case, an optically and chemically/digitally-produced image which is then reproduced in print at varying scales, presenting an enlarged or reduced depiction of its object) is clearly deficient in representing an experience of reality, attenuated as it is from embodied human vision in terms of scale and scope. In this series of works, the conceptual connotation varies depending on where the image of the wall was taken and where it is installed - often, it is installed at the exact location

of its original capture. The 'life-size' (meaning, in this particular context, that the print adheres as closely as possible to both the scale and scope of typical human visual faculties and the proportions of the space in which it is installed) extends to my later installation projects, wherein the installed images are reproduced to match the exhibition space's scale, proportions and perspectival sight-lines at a specific viewing-point. Another critical component of this work (and of my subsequent works in the same vein) is the timing of the photographs. They are primarily captured in-between exhibitions, wherein the artwork – and with it, the implied viewer and the typical modality of that encounter – is absent. Consequentially, this imbues the work with a more expansive, malleable notion of time than is commonly expected of – or offered by – most photographs. In the sense that an artwork is the *raison d'être* of the exhibition space and an exhibition period, only the nails remaining to signify that there was once an art object installed at that precise point in space, stymieing both the notion of photography (no subject) and the art (no value). Only when these become absent is it possible to bring forth the subtle, trace detail as the main subject; while ever-present, this kind of detail is typically occluded, literally and/or figuratively, by the signifiatory import of the conventional visual object and photographic representation.

My experiments in representation-without-recognisability are directly tied to my personal experience of the Isakower Phenomenon - a hypnogogic state experienced in early infancy wherein the child is unable to correctly assay the size of objects they interact with, having not yet developed the ability to perceive and differentiate between the internal and external world. The infant's visual experience at this stage can be thought of as a 'pure' or 'unprocessed' means of 'seeing', whereas the sequel-vision that emerges from the cognition stage is not –strictly speaking– *seeing*, but rather *recognizing* the object. Unusually, I have a strong recollection of experiencing this state as an infant - and an abiding critical interest in the potentials and limitations of photographic representation as a means of both approximating that untypical state and foregrounding the mechanisms by which affect and meaning are constructed around images.

The oral-centric stage of early infant development, (in which Isakower posits that the nursing mother's breast represents the entire world of objects to the undifferentiated ego of the infant), coupled with Freud's theory of polymorphous perversity, are drawn upon in this paper as both a means of critically unpacking my own experience of the Isakower Phenomenon during later childhood and to offer a likely genesis of my fascination with detail, embodiment and perception. Detail, and the potential of details to function as metonymic triggers to a cycle of signifier-relations is then explored through both linguistic and psychoanalytic theory. This establishes a contextual framework in which Barthes' punctum –perhaps the most influential and enduring account of the role and significance of detail in photographs– can be unpacked, with particular attention given to the punctum's expansive metonymic properties and indexical characteristics in relation to Lacan's Metonymy of Desire and conception of The Real.

Lacanian theory continues to serve as a key point of reference in the next chapter, where I investigate my relationship to detail and the mechanisms of desire that formed around this relationship while learning to paint and photograph in my twenties. The concepts of lack, desire and deficiency that emerged from those readings of Lacan in the context of my creative development are then applied to particular narratives and behaviours that have long been associated with the medium. Drawing upon Fox-Talbot's assertions of the exactitude and utility of photography at the very outset of the technology, Italo Calvino's mid-century cautionary tale *The Adventure of a Photographer* and the visual vernacular of YouTube, I examine my own behaviours and compulsions towards the medium and succinctly define the scope and nature of my own practice, broadly speaking.

Photographic-installation works that I have completed between 2014 and 2021 are then discussed in detail, reflecting upon the expansion of the work's material ambitions and production methodologies and the simultaneous refinement of their conceptual remit and execution over this time period. As the work evolves, new avenues toward *detail* and *nothingness* that attempt to encapsulate rich perceptual experiences and a metacognitive recognition of how photography, photographs and embodied

human agents inter-operate are explored. Site-specificity and interpenetration of space, and slippages and reconfigurations of time are central to the gallery-based works, while recent works centred around painters and landscape scenes explore the limits and implications of digital technologies and processes that resolve extreme levels of detail in relation to human visual and cognitive faculties.

Research topics that played pivotal roles in the development of particular works (or my practice in general) are elucidated at intervals. Cinema is given extensive attention, as a rich critical terrain that offers interdisciplinary insights into various modalities of editing (montage, digital visual effects) scenography (field-of-view, mise-en-scène) and the narrative body of the camera (considered, here, as analogous to human embodiment in the case of moving-camera “long take” filming techniques), each of which play a significant role in my photography-centric practice. Following the distinct metonymical concerns of *everything* (2017), the temporal aspects of the punctum (which underpinned key creative decisions made in developing that piece) are discussed at some length, with connections drawn between some of the phenomenological and psychoanalytical components of Barthes’ concept, my photographic practice and the emergence of popular virtual-reality technologies. Indexicality is reconsidered in terms of its relevance and applicability to computationally-driven photography practices following the intricate digital compositing and manipulation required to realise the prints that made up my *Elsewhere* (2020) installation. Concluding passages describe the ways in which works produced as part of this practice-based research thesis have represented major milestones in my journey to conceptually and materially articulate the relationship between detail and nothing (or nothingness), and reflect on my increased understanding of how I wish my viewer to encounter –and be affected by– these installations.

The Isakower Phenomenon

Why, generally speaking, do we not form memories prior to language acquisition? Infantile amnesia –defined as the failure of remembrance for the first years of our lives– is a factor in the Isakower Phenomenon, which potentially offers an access route to infantile sensorial experiences that would otherwise be irretrievable in adulthood.

There are two common mechanisms associated with forgetting that occur within the majority of neurotypical people. One is infantile amnesia, wherein memories are more or less permanently concealed; the other is the recollection of dreams, which fade far more quickly than other kinds of memory. Both are in the realm of the unconscious; they occur when consciousness recedes. It seems that the operations of both consciousness and systemic language tend to deem these as unimportant memories, and eschew them as such. Whilst dreams are occasionally recollectable, the memories and sensory impressions from one’s early infantile development stages are forever repressed in the process of ego development. While this might be characterised as a process of ‘forgetting’, it may be more accurately regarded as one of non-recognition, because those memories were never encoded within the structure of language. To Freud, convinced that these developmental stages of early infancy had definitive, consequential effects on the child and resulting adult person that emerges in the course of time, infantile amnesia was such a central object of enquiry. “We really have reason to believe that at no time of life are we more capable of impressions and reproductions than during the years of childhood”¹ It is the stages of oral (~one year), anal (1~3years)

¹ Sigmund Freud, *The Basic Writing of Sigmund Freud*, trans and ed. by Dr. A. A. Brill (New York: Random House, Inc. 1938), p. 581.

and phallic (3~5years) psychosexual development that are most forgotten; these reside exclusively in the unconscious level of the mind and the form the basis of all neuroses in later life. Freud extends this line of thought to encompass the development of infantile sexuality, stating: “It seems certain that the new-born child brings with it the germs of sexual feelings which continue to develop for some time and then succumb to a progressive suppression, which may, in turn, be broken through by the regular advances of sexual development or maybe checked by individual idiosyncrasies.”²

The Isakower Phenomenon is a hypnagogic phenomenon usually experienced in early childhood and somewhat frequently again at puberty, typically diminishing in frequency in later years. A revival of very early ego-attitudes at these distinct stages indicates that infantile perceptual states (e.g. post-natal suckling) *can* be revived in later life. Personally speaking, I seem to have an unusual degree of conscious access to that early developmental stage; I have been able to almost fully recall/re-live the sensory experience described as the Isakower Phenomenon well into adulthood, starting long before I learned its formal nomenclature through discussions with the psychoanalyst Darian Leader. The experience of the phenomenon itself was striking enough that I began consciously and deliberately employing that sensual memory as a guiding principle in making art, pursuing conceptualisations of nothingness, theories of perception and the role (or function) of details, intuiting that these fields addressed salient aspects of that formative experience. After reading Isakower’s *A Contribution to the Patho-Psychology of Phenomena Associated with Falling Asleep* (1939), I was intrigued by the possibility that this phenomenon offered perhaps the *only* route (barring traumatic brain injury or disease) to revisiting the state before one acquires language - the oral stage (~1 year old), in Freudian terms. The following is a description of my own experience of the Isakower Phenomenon at approximately eight years of age:

I am lying down on my parents’ king-size bed, facing up towards the ceiling. I am getting

² Ibid., p. 583.

over the fatiguing effects of a slight cold; not fully awake, yet not dozing off either. The surface of the ceiling is smoothly painted with a snow-white colour that seems almost flawless. I am now wondering about what kind of white it could be defined as. Cream-white, cold-white, matte-white? There are too many colours, and they are so delicate that I can no longer determine the whiteness before me. And in the meantime, my interest shifts towards the details of the surface, shallowly textured with curves, holes, lines and cracks. The more I gaze, the more I become confused about the distinction between simplicity and complexity, interior and external stimuli, alongside the matter of colour.

Whilst gazing at the empty space inside my mouth, the tip of my tongue is touching the inner wall of my teeth and gums. I cannot be sure if it is through a sudden or gradual progress, but I only know that I enter this mysterious state feeling a sort of thickness and, at the same time, smoothness inside my mouth. There, inside my mouth, every sensory organ becomes so sensitive that it seems I have metamorphosed into another being with the capability of feeling a universe within. An enormous solid transparent cube is hovering inside my mouth, and there it is - simultaneously - filling the whole room. The contrast between the surface of my inner mouth's organic texture (softness) with the cube's evenly flat surface and the sharp-points where the corners of its facets meet (hardness or sharpness) is irritating - not only due to perceiving both extremes at once but also the fact that it is happening in my mouth which is a private place; my inner body.

Then, in the same way that I encounter this strange sensation, a more hallucinogenic, odd, abstract, an uncanny exceptional state occurs; I am confused about whether this event is unfolding suddenly or gradually, and the concepts of 'I', 'You' and 'We' have become elusive and mutable. The ceiling feels like an enormous space yet at the same time a tiny space, so that I cannot measure the size in any direction nor the distance between me and the surface. I am feeling vertigo whilst lying on a bed: a paradoxical position since I am still conscious that my position is facing upwards, but it seems I am heading downwards toward the ceiling. I experience a pleasurable simultaneity of fright and curiosity - "It's not unpleasant but also not pleasant, at the same time" - now, since this enormous space is expanding unstoppably, my body seems relatively tiny. By

slightly moving my arms, I am trying to balance my relationship to the space. Whilst I can feel the enormous space, I can also feel the opposite at the same time. I cannot remember which feeling came first, that of enormity or tininess; am I enormous or tiny? Why am I confused? Not much time has passed - has it? The time frame is confusing; therefore, the notion of time is absurd.

It feels as though I could control this exceptional state - that it seems possible to escape from it easily. However, I do not want to get out of this state immediately, so I am still floating around, exploring this new sensation. It was like a recent situation wherein I woke from a particularly disturbing dream; I awoke in anguish, but tried to get back to sleep to return to the dream.

The continuum, I presume to be the next stage of this exceptional state, invites me to a somewhat more extreme experience. I start to picture an actual event or situation, accompanied by an auditory hallucination. The dizziness increases, and particular images and sounds seem to emerge from a space somewhere between dream and reality. They take on a theme of diametric opposition; "gigantic and tiny", "good and evil", "joy and anger", "true and false", and "myself and others". The images resolve and dissolve rapidly and simultaneously, to the point where I cannot distinguish the two. Meanwhile, I am also perceiving a sound - an undifferentiated amalgam of laughter and scream. At this stage of the hallucination, I am becoming quite disturbed; the state of confusion, previously intriguing, is now provoking deep emotional responses. Unable to continue, I finally avert my gaze to escape from this hallucination, and it vanishes.³

At the beginning of his essay, Isakower assumes that he is dealing with a single phenomenon - 'the state in question⁴'. After observing a number of patients, he attempts

³ This is a personal description of the experiencing the phenomena, recollected from my memory.

⁴ Otto Isakower, "A Contribution to the Patho-Psychology of Phenomena Associated with Falling Asleep", *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, Vol.19 (1938): p. 331.

to elucidate and delineate this common but little-understood phenomenon. His patients' accounts of their experiences closely aligned with each other's and my own, leaving little doubt that such episodes are the manifestation of a consistent, specific and identifiable phenomenon. For instance, the first two accounts emphasise the same sensation in the palate, recumbent posture, and the progression into auditory hallucination that characterised my experience. Also, it differs from most hypnagogic phenomena insofar as patients (given a suitable setting) are often able to trigger an episode at will. Notably, a blurring of the perceptual distinction between disparate physiological sensory inputs (e.g. the soft tissue of the mouth's interior and the skin of the hand) and between embodied internality and externality is consistently reported.

Psychoanalytic theory proposes that during sleep, a gradual process of the ego loosening its regulatory mechanisms and cathexes occurs. The diminution of the ego's differentiations seems to set in somewhat later than the dissociation of the parts and functions of the ego. Of the cathectic energy withdrawn from the external world, a higher quantity streams into the bodily ego than into the sensitive parts of it, while the cathexis of the side of the perceptual system that faces outwards is relatively depleted, and the side which faces towards the ego is more abundantly cathected. The boundaries of the body ego begin to be blurred and become fused with the external world; Isakower asserts that this phase of the ego-modification corresponds to and is reflected in the phenomenon,

The hypothesis here is that this phenomenon is a revival of very early ego attitudes. In the earliest phase, the oral phase, the child forms a libidinal bond with the mother via sexual pleasure gained from sucking the breast. In the hypnagogic events preceding sleep, as in the Isakower Phenomenon, there is a flattening of the external world, reduced (or equated to) the sensation of an object within the oral cavity - which in my case, is perceived as a cube. Isakower hypothesises the origin of his patients' hallucinatory experience of objects in the mouth accompanied by the sense of amorphous boundary between embodied-self and external-world as follows:

...they are mental images of sucking at the mother's breast and of falling asleep there when satisfied. The large object which approaches probably represents the breast, with its promise of food. When satisfied, the infant loses interest in the breast, which appears smaller and smaller and finally vanishes away. The mother's breast is the sole representative of the objects in the external world; at this stage it is not the mother as a person but only her breast which is the object.⁵

...oral cavity predominates, while in almost every case no mention is made of other parts of the body, with the one important exception of the hand. It is natural to conjecture that the structure of the body ego in this state is comparable to that of the immediately post-natal ego. The sensations in the oral cavity, at this stage of existence probably the most intense and also the most important for life, are diffused over the whole skin, the outermost frontier of the body, which, indeed, is scarcely yet recognized as such and is perhaps almost felt to be part of the external world.⁶

In conclusion, the Isakower Phenomenon is due to a malfunction of the ego-modification in the process of falling asleep: the perceptual ego (external sense) retains cathexes that should normally be transferred to the body ego (internal sense). In other words, the internal unconscious merges with the perspective of the external world, causing one to temporarily occupy that early developmental stage characterised by a lack of distinction between the self and one's surroundings. The uncanny experience of the phenomenon occurs because revisiting the state prior to the *differentiation* of the self means becoming the body prior to its symbolization.

⁵ Ibid., p. 342.

⁶ Ibid., p. 340.

Freud's theory of polymorphous perversity, a pure desire for pleasure, proposes that we are born with unfocused sexual libidinal drives, deriving sexual pleasure from any part of the body. 'It is quite obvious that no seduction is necessary to awaken the sexual life of the child, that such an awakening may come on spontaneously from the inner sources.'⁷ This assertion contrasts with the viewpoint that sexuality is developed alongside the development of the sexual organs. Polymorphous perverse sexuality continues from infancy until approximately age five. Perversions at this age are typically dynamic, not yet fully integrated into the psyche and not influenced by culturally-constructed concepts such as transgression – hence their polymorphosity.

My visual, auditory, and emotional experience of the Isakower Phenomenon has, I suspect, significantly influenced the pleasure I take in seeing detail in photography. The fragmented perceptions that characterise early infantile states closely resemble how I visually interpret the external world through the photographic act. My eyes are naturally attuned to registering corners and framing boundaries, then instantly shifting attention to the minute details present therein that blur distinctions between the whole (oneness) and the part (separateness). As such, it seems likely that the basis of an outsize pleasure in detail may lie in repressed memories and the unconscious at work; photographic images of seemingly null pictorial content revealing the primitive instinct of unfocused libido.

⁷ Sigmund Freud, *The Basic Writing of Sigmund Freud*, trans and ed. by Dr. A. A. Brill (New York: Random House, Inc. 1938), p. 592.

Metonymy and Punctum

Metonymy's roots can be found in the ancient rhetoric of the Greeks. By the 1st century AD, it was already defined as a figure of speech distinguishable from the metaphor. The concept saw further development thanks to critical investigation and application across many fields of Humanities academia, from literature and linguistics to psychoanalysis, semiology, analytics, anthropology, and philosophy throughout the 20th century. Metonymy first began as a subordinate concept of the metaphor, but was later regarded as a concept in contrast to the metaphor. My interest here is in the term's shift from being used and understood within the paradigm of the metaphor to that of metonymy. The metaphor, due to its semantic characteristics, has been scrutinized extensively in various fields. Metonymy, however, is notably neglected as an object of critical study due to the relative complexity of articulating its construction, function and applications. Therefore, the shift in interest from the metaphor to metonymy can be regarded as an example of a shift away from analytics. In addition, since metonymy works by applying what is referred to in one concept to another concept in continuity, the shift from the paradigm of the metaphor to metonymy can also be regarded as a shift from a relationship of meaning to a relationship of reference. Applying insights gained from academic inquiries into metonymy to the *punctum* provides significant utility in articulating how photography facilitates a shift from a closed structure to an open one.

The 19th-century linguist Roman Jakobson explained that each strata of language functions on the two axes of 'similarity' and 'contiguity'. Jakobson went onto expand metaphor and metonymy as figures of speech into a mechanism of 'procès métaphorique' and 'procès métonymique,' establishing the basis for metaphor and

metonymy to go beyond the boundaries of classical rhetoric and be applied to literature, art, culture, semiotic theory and beyond. Jacobson's contribution provided the framework enabling reference to photography as a form of metonymy.

According to Freud, dream-thoughts cannot be recognised because the conscious mind prevents this recognition. When the censorship mechanisms of consciousness regress whilst in sleep, the previously-inaccessible thoughts and feelings held in the unconscious appear in the form of dreams. The narrative and content of dreams are often nonsensical and incomprehensible, appearing not in a linear fashion but rather as fragments and details. As such, dreams clearly operate on a metonymic principle. A committed proponent of dream-analysis, Freud examined the process of the manifestation of the unconscious through Oedipus-complex, and observed the unconscious revealing itself at the conscious level by drawing upon the content of dreams. In doing so, Freud defined dreaming as the perceptual manifestation and pseudo-fulfilment of repressed desires.

‘We shall have included everything which the analysis of disagreeable dreams has brought to light if we re-word our formula thus: The dream is the (disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed, repressed) wish’⁸

At the beginning of his essay *The Dream Work*, Freud states that decoding the dream work is like resolving the puzzle of a rebus. ‘...I have before me a picture-puzzle (rebus) – a house, upon whose roof there is a boat; then a single letter; then a running figure, whose head has been omitted, and so on.’ A rebus is a puzzle in which the words of a sentence are represented by pictures and individual letters; a similar ‘decoding’ challenge to that presented by the analysis of the fragmentary, incoherent vignettes of dreaming. He believed that dreams contained both manifest content and *latent* content; the hidden implication of the dream.⁹ An idea long predating Freud, the content of the dream was understood to be symbolic - acceptable substitutions for

⁸ Sigmund Freud, *The Basic Writing of Sigmund Freud*, trans and ed. by Dr. A. A. Brill (New York: Random House, Inc. 1938), p. 235.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

unacceptable desires.

Freud also suggested *condensation* and *transference* as operations applied by the brain in the process of producing this symbolic dream-content.¹⁰ While not explicitly stated by Freud as such, metaphor and metonymy underpin these respective concepts, which are integrated into his schema of ‘homoeopathic magic’ and ‘contagious magic’ in *Totem and Taboo*. He later unifies both components of this dichotomy under a single key concept focusing on *contact*, proposing that both constitute a form of contact through either association by similarity or in a figurative sense. The influence of ‘contact’ on human psychology is also very much present in the technology of the photograph, being necessarily a product of physical contact in the form of metonymic expansions.

Whilst Jakobson and Freud explained metaphor and metonymy within a dichotomous structure, Jacques Lacan considered metaphor and metonymy in a more integrative fashion, incorporating both alongside aspects of Freud’s theory of the subconscious and Ferdinand de Saussure’s work in linguistic theory. According to Lacan, one who suffers the Oedipus complex endlessly pursues one signifier after another in the desire to express an unattainable signified object, and to compensate for the lack of something forever-unobtainable. Inside this metonymical cycle, the fixed meaning of the subject becomes useless. Either a new or unfamiliar sense is created, or the original meaning is entirely lost due to the disparity between this meaning and lived reality. Thus, psychoanalysis, the rhetoric of the subconscious, allowed the paradigm of metonymy to take precedence over the paradigm of the metaphor in theorising the subconscious.

Lacan harkens back to the connection made in Freudian thought between condensation and metaphor and between displacement and metonymy. He understands metaphor as a “quilting” of the metonymic chain, the *point de capiton* that holds together a sequence of disparate signifiers in such a way that a kind of substitution of

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 320.

signs, as opposed to a displacement of signs, can be accomplished.¹¹

Lacan's viewpoint departs from previous theories of consciousness. The essential disagreement and the source of his most intense hostility throughout this essay concerns whether there is a stable and, by implication, unique subjectivity present in every individual. The idea of the emergence of a stable and mature ego is presupposed by the idea that there is such a thing as stable human subjectivity. In other words, there is such a thing as consciousness from which our communicative, linguistic and other systems derive. Metonymy is empowered by desire and released, where the relationship between the subject and object moves toward an open structure in a true sense.

Roland Barthes' wonder for photography, in the opening of *Camera Lucida*, can be clearly seen as he says: "I am looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor,"¹² This is uttered by the author upon viewing a photograph of the emperor's brother. The light reflected by the emperor reached the brother's eyes and then bounced off to touch the photo-sensitive paper and leave an impression, the photograph.

The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who is here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze.¹³

What matters to me is not the photograph's "life" (a purely ideological notion) but the certainty that the photographed body touches me with its own rays and not with a superadded light.¹⁴

The expressions 'reach' and 'touch' both refer to 'contact'. Thus, the photograph can be said as an impression of light made by contact. Based on this principle, American

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III, The Psychoses*, trans. by Russell Grigg (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), p205.

¹² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

semiologist Charles Sanders Peirce classified the photograph as an index, wherein the relationship between sign and referent is determined by physical contiguity rather than as an icon of similarity or a symbol of general rules. Here, the photograph is a "metonymic genesis based on contiguity." Peirce's Photograph-Index theory is particularly significant in two ways. Firstly, it does not regard the photograph itself as the final message or product. Focusing on the photographic process shows that the "similarity to the represented object" that forced the photograph to compete with the painting is merely a by-product. Secondly, by defining the photograph as a sign that is 'created automatically' without the existence of an 'encoding' medium between the message and the represented object, the photograph is freed from being required to have contained a meaning.

'Contiguity' gives the photograph distinctive qualities of 'uniqueness', 'reference', and 'evidentiality'. The photograph is a physical trace of a unique moment and an actual object. For the viewer, a photograph is just a single photograph. In other words, the relationship between the viewer and the photograph is not cultural or universal. Rather, it is personal and particular. In such a relationship, it is only when looking at a photograph that one can experience the *punctum* and have a distinctly photographic experience. This is because the *punctum* is something that is particular and non-conceptual, a sudden *Touché* that pokes the viewer.

In the photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else: the Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see; it is the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid, the *This* (this photograph, and not Photography), in short, what Lacan calls the *Touché*, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression.¹⁵

A photograph is much like the index finger: It points at something. 'the gesture of a child pointing his finger at something and saying: *that, there it is, lo!* But says nothing else'¹⁶. Whilst the index finger is always pointing at something different, a

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

photograph stubbornly continues to point to the represented object. When the viewer looks at a photograph, he is looking at a photographic message. But when the viewer's eyes find and fix at the punctum, the situation is reversed. It is now the photograph that is looking at the viewer, and this reversal is the photographic experience. Lastly, the punctum contains temporality. The noema (Ca-a-été) of the photograph is evidence of the existence of the represented object. But here, the past and present reality coexist. The past is past, but it is not discarded; it remains. Time is something that flows, but in a photograph, it stops. A princess without her prince cannot awaken from her eternal slumber, and the punctum awakens the slumbering photograph. The moment the punctum of time is recognised within the photograph, time in the photograph begins to flow backwards. The past wakes up from its slumber and flows into the present, a metonymic expansion of time experienced by looking at a photograph.

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.¹⁷

The punctum can be evasive object of study; the more it is described, the more the possibility of a precise delineation of its form, function, and nature typically recedes. Therefore, to encounter the true photograph, in other words, to achieve the photographic experience via the punctum, as Barthes asserts, it has to be silent. Reflecting on the difficulty of expressing the punctum in linguistic form, Barthes states:

I wanted to explore it not as a question (a theme) but as a wound¹⁸

A Latin word exists to designate this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument...This second element which will disturb the *studium* I shall therefore call the *punctum*...A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

For Barthes, the punctum is a wound, in the sense of a Lacanian trauma. The essence of the punctum is virtually impossible to engage with at the level of conscious thought, being a ‘wound’ that the psyche will often work –at a subconscious level– to distance itself from. But a sudden appearance of the punctum triggers an endless cycle of metonymic activity from signifier to signifier, a metonymic expansion fuelled by the desire hidden underneath the punctum. When *the real* impinges upon the Symbolic order, one will suffer a trauma – an outcome that the psyche avoids or represses through sophisticated and automatic defence mechanisms. However, this ‘safety barrier’ of the subconscious might be circumvented through detail - a partial and, therefore, less problematic object of consideration.

I feel that its mere presence changes my reading, that I am looking at a new photograph, marked in my eyes with a higher value. This “detail” is *punctum*.²⁰

This detail grasps the viewer immediately - and radically alters the modality of their engagement with the photograph in question, inviting heightened and sustained attention and emotional investment into it. Barthes points to an insight gained from this altered modality of photography-viewership; that the punctum is a manifestation of the desire to see beyond what is approved.

The *punctum*, then, is a kind of subtle *beyond* – as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see: not only toward “the rest” of the nakedness, not only toward the fantasy of a *praxis*, but toward the absolute excellence of a being, body and soul together.²¹

The Punctum thus represents an impulsive desire to transgress a limited symbolic order in favour of engagement with the Real. The subconscious desire perpetually slips through signifiers to fulfil forbidden, unattainable desires. This is

²⁰ Ibid., p. 42.

²¹ Ibid., p. 59.

Lacan's metonymy of desire, which Barthes regards as the punctums' metonymic power of expansion.

However, lighting-like it may be, the *punctum* has, more or less potentially, a power of expansion. This power is often metonymic.²²

²² Ibid., p. 45.

Desire towards detail

What is the detail that so fixated me, to the point of becoming a desire? I looked back to my experiences with various image-making mediums and attempted to trace the origin of this obsession, toward a well-delineated definition of ‘detail’ as it pertains to my practice and a more thorough understanding of the desire that formed around it.

The desire towards detail became evident during two key phases of my engagement with the photographic medium; learning the gelatin-silver printing process, and transitioning from film-based to digital image-capture technologies.

In my early twenties, whilst undertaking a Painting course, I was introduced to the idea of *making photography* through a supplementary class. What particularly fascinated me was when the small black and white negative film became a large print – the way a realistic image arises from the developer chemicals seemed somewhat magical. Although, of course, it was not my first time seeing photographs, it was nevertheless my first exposure to the ‘making’ process they required. Given my training in hand-drawing, I was in the habit of intense visual scrutiny of subjects – yet I was struck by the level of detail present in photographs, exceeding even my most careful, technically-adept graphite drawings by orders of magnitude. In this regard, I came to recognise the photographic image as a truthful/reliable representation of reality while also becoming preoccupied with the abstraction and artificiality created by the medium’s monocular compression of time and space.

Even though these factors clearly undermine photography’s claims of an accurate representation of lived (that is, embodied, durational, binocular) reality, the

abundance of detail present in photographic images nevertheless provides considerable representational verisimilitude. Notably, much of the detail captured in photographs is often incidental, yet functions as an irreducible *part of a whole*. This is what Roland Barthes called the punctum. I, however, approach the subject from the viewpoint of an image producer/maker.

The larger the photographic film used to register an image is, the greater the resolution of detail it can provide. Large-format film sheets (typically 5x4" or 10x8") in particular, capture levels of detail that enable printing at large dimensions without the degradation of image-resolution that characterises large prints made from smaller films. This makes it possible to print at sizes large enough that the photographic representation of an object can exist in an approximately 1:1 relationship of scale and apprehendable detail with its real-referent. 'Near' is the operative term here, however – and I never considered this 'close enough'. Paired with the cumbersome processes involved in operating large format cameras, this dissatisfaction led me to explore digital photography processes that seemed better suited to my obsessive, desire-driven pursuit of detail.

After discovering digital methods for photograph-making, I found the potential to overcome the difficulties of large-format films. Computer-based image-stitching tools and techniques provided a viable workflow for combining multiple photographs containing fine detail into a single image. By shooting and combining numerous pictures of a space with a wide-angle lens, it was possible to capture an expansive scene while maintaining consistent focus and detail-resolution throughout; a kind of additive process for pictorial space, as opposed to the selective and exclusionary process typical of traditional photography. It appeared as though I, as an author, was in control of the reality (at least within the space I was dividing up and capturing). Even though the details were still uncontrollable because it was physically impossible to look at everything at once, the aim for me was to gain as much detail as possible. This further exacerbated my desire towards detail - there was never enough.

A particular pleasure exists when viewing a photograph by zooming in close enough to see incidental, unintentionally-included information, whilst still being aware of both where the frame ends, or when a small, trivial detail occupies a whole frame. In digital photography, zooming in on the computer screen is easily done compared to the traditional (optical) methods of inspecting the details of a photographic image. There is a reassurance that accompanies this storage and scrutiny of the image - that a kind of 'hard copy of life' has been obtained. The delusion of being able to capture everything often leads to compulsive behaviours of unrestrained shooting. I often find myself pressing the camera's shutter excessively, especially as the digital camera memory cards offer almost unlimited memory. Despite the quantity of images far outweighing my cognitive capacity to recall or care about them, I compulsively continue to archive moments of life only to find myself never reviewing the files.

As beings bound by time and space, we are destined to desire something to rely on in reality. In the modern era of technology, photography is a tool embedded in our everyday life that provides a repetitive sequence of relief/reassurance behaviours performed to affirm our existence and social relevance. A 'hard copy of life' is, in a strict sense, unattainable. As I experienced through the detail-capturing facility of photography, to gain a vivid representation of a real object is to gain only a meagre portion of it. Moreover, as long as technology evolves, the detail it is able to resolve will only become more vivid, thus creating a stronger illusion. Being obsessive or compulsive toward capturing detail is a predictable by-product of this scenario, emerging from both the illusion and the wish to acquire the real thing. I asserted that 'desire', in keeping with its metonymic nature, is not meant to be fulfilled. For Lacan, there is no simple relation between desire and an object that will satisfy it; in fact, he shows how desire is linked in a complicated fashion to desire of the Other.²³

²³ Madan Sarup, *Jacques Lacan*, (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 1992) p. 34.

Desire, more than any other point in the range of human possibility, meets its limit somewhere.

...I would point out that I said desire, not pleasure. Pleasure limits the scope of human possibility—the pleasure principle is a principle of homeostasis. Desire, on the other hand, finds its boundary, its strict relation, its limit, and it is in relation to this limit that it is sustained as such, crossing the threshold imposed by the pleasure principle.²⁴

People tend to spend an excessive amount of time trying to compensate for perceived lack. What has already been acquired rapidly loses one's interest, and the experience of satisfaction is once again replaced by a feeling of deficiency. Desire is rooted in this repeated process of deficiency and satisfaction, and we constantly evaluate ourselves as being in a state of deficiency. Desire is double-sided insofar as it can lead to either an unstable state in which we fear the destruction of our personal lives, or a productive one in which it becomes a driving force in our lives by prodding our needs.

Admitting and facing one's deficiencies through the lens of desire is an inconvenient and disappointing experience, as this is inseparable from encountering the object of desire. Nevertheless, the experience of searching for the fundamental reasons behind one's desire becomes the necessary process whereby one actively manages their desires rather than being stuck in a deficient state.

Lacan thought that repetitive instances of desire in one's daily life stemmed from one's deficiency in existence. According to him, desire occurs in fantasy rather than its true form when one recognizes what 'others' desire on a symbolic level. As such, desire

²⁴ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998) p. 31.

is created when there is a gap between one's need and the other's demand, creating a state of deficiency. This symbolic inconsistency results in the 'desire for recognition' in relationships with others; thus, desire is inscribed in and mediated by language. 'Desire for recognition' is a state experienced by a principal-agent having failed to assay the highly personal origins and catalysts of their desires; instead granting the opinion of others primacy as the measure of their own affirmation and fulfilment, creating a constant state of deficiency.

Photography: a medium of deficiency

A good illustration of the nature of an obsessive attitude towards photography can be found in a short fictional narrative of Italo Calvino's *The Adventure of a Photographer* - first published in 1958, but later appearing in the English translation of his short stories, *Difficult Loves*, in 1971. The main plot centres around family photography as an act of recording a fantastic or idealised version of an event, with little concern for veracity. I find that two particular acts of photographing described in the story suitably illustrate the impossibility of possession, and touch upon the obsessive behaviours that can develop from a fixation on this idea.

The first activity occurs within a discussion of family photography, specifically 'new parents framing their offspring'²⁵. He illustrates the desire for parents to photograph their children by saying that 'One of the first instincts of parents after they have brought a child into the world, is to photograph it.'²⁶ We could observe that this phenomenon has persisted throughout the modern era, as now we see inordinate amounts of baby-pictures across social network sites – a contemporary extension of the traditional family photograph album. Due to the rapidity of a child's growth, parents may feel the urge to capture every stage of its development. However, the desire for parents to have a photo that documents reality is, in a strict sense, impossible, as they cannot fix every moment into an image. On the contrary, what their photograph really constitutes is an idealised version of the moment. Antonio (the main character, a bachelor) criticizes his friends by saying, "The minute you start saying something, 'Ah,

²⁵ Italo Calvino, "*The Adventure of a Photographer*", in *Difficult Loves*, trans. by William Weaver, Archibald Colquhoun and Peggy Wright (San Diego; New York; London: Harcourt Brace, 1985), p. 222.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

how beautiful! We must photograph it!’ you are already close to the view of a person who thinks that everything that is not photographed is lost, as if it had never existed, and that therefore, in order to live, you must photograph as much as you can, and to photograph that much as you must either live in the most photographable way possible, or else consider photographable every moment of your life. The first course leads to stupidity; the second to madness.”²⁷

When, in turn, Antonio takes up photographing his girlfriend, Bice, in an attempt to photograph ‘the ideal postcard in his mind’,²⁸ he finds himself frustrated by the impossibility of the task. ‘There were many possible photographs of Bice and many Bices impossible to photograph, but what he was seeking was the unique photograph that would contain both the former and the latter.’²⁹ As Antonio comes to a conclusion that ‘photography has a meaning only if it exhausts all possible images’³⁰ He photographs Bice constantly - and when his new obsession drives her away, he starts to photograph the absence of her. The depression that the separation brings about in Antonio is sublimated into an obsessive compulsion to produce countless photographs. As Antonio’s mental health deteriorates, his photography takes on a metonymic aspect as he re-photographs the incidental collages created by tearing up and scattering the images of his absent partner over his apartment floor – which, by this point, is itself replete with photographs owing to the discarded newsprint littering the space. He concludes that photographing photographs was the ‘only course he had left – or, rather, the true course he had obscurely been seeking all this time.’³¹ This implies a realisation or acknowledgement that a photograph is an object with its own version of the ‘truth’.

The story evokes the delusive properties of viewing photography as a truthful medium. It concludes with the fact that a true, complete copy of life is unattainable. Being obsessive or compulsive toward something stems from the illusion of, and wish

²⁷ Ibid., p. 224.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 229.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 231.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 233.

³¹ Ibid., p. 235.

for, perfection: an impossibility that nevertheless appears compellingly attainable (if always just out of reach) to a disordered psyche. As a manifestation of repressed or transmuted desire, Lacan believed that such behaviours persist because their ostensible purpose must *necessarily* go unfulfilled. Although what the camera captures and reproduces in the form of a print is persuasive in its capability to exceed the accuracy of even a skilled pictorial artist's hand, we find this aspect elusive when paying attention to detail. There is never a perfect detail.

Moreover, in taking a photograph, the present recedes instantly, in favour of seeing the past far into the future. A colloquial term 'chimping', which is used in digital photography to describe the habit of checking every photo on the camera display screen immediately after capture, depicts the state one encounters in the act of photographing today. This act does not exist in film photography, as there was no way to view the image instantly. But with today's camera technology, this instant-review facility exacerbates the sense the deficiency in physicality and mechanics.

After becoming proficient with photography, my visual perception is habituated to the core concerns of my practice. Now when I see a photograph, my eyes almost instantly assess the resolving power of the lens optics and sensor film, while also seeking what was not intended to be part of the image; the imperfection, the detail, the ever-unfulfilled wish to capture external reality perfectly. In the early nineteenth century, camera lenses captured such little light and photographic film emulsions were of such low reactive sensitivity that exposure times were so long as to make capturing a sharply -focused portrait of a person impossible. We often see early portraits from this era with the eyes blurred, as it was impossible for subjects to remain utterly still and unblinking for the required amount of time required to register a sharp image. Similarly, early photographs could not arrest the motion of people in the street; this is observed in the earliest reliably dated photograph of people, Louis Daguerre's "The Boulevard du Temple" (1838). Although modern advances in optics have overcome many of the drawbacks of lenses used in the era of the Daguerreotype (the earliest photographic

process), the fundamental principle of lens design still remains today, in a broad sense – they are invariably circular and spherical. Consequently, no lens, even an advanced laboratory-grade optical lens such as Kepler space telescope, has overcome the issue of ‘vignétting’, a reduction of an image's brightness or saturation at the periphery compared to the image-centre. The inherent physical limitations of optical lenses mean that image-capturing technologies are, too, deficient by their very nature.

The completion of invention of photography as we know it today came about upon the invention of the Calotype process by William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877), which delivered much-improved capture of fine detail. As he writes in the accompaniment notes for *Plate X; The Haystack*, in *The Pencil of Nature (1844)* (the first commercially published book illustrated with photographs)

One advantage of the discovery of the Photographic Art will be that it will enable us to introduce into our pictures a multitude of minute details which add to the truth and reality of the representation, but which no artist would take the trouble to copy faithfully from nature.

Contenting himself with a general effect, he would probably deem it beneath his genius to copy every accident of light and shade; nor could he do so indeed, without a disproportionate expenditure of time and trouble, which might be otherwise much better employed.

Nevertheless, it is well to have the means at our disposal of introducing these minute details without any additional trouble, for they will sometimes be found to give an air of variety beyond expectation to the scene represented.³²

As he observed, the detail in Calotype is characteristic of Photographic Art that surpasses the skills and efforts of an artist in terms of representing truth and reality. As

³² William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, The Project Gutenberg EBook (2010), P.43.

this interest in veracity is predominant throughout the era of the invention of photography in the mid-nineteenth century, this is the moment at which a definitive purpose and status was established for the medium.

The twenty-four photographic illustrations included in *The Pencil of Nature* consisted of ten landscapes, four still-lives, three daily scenes, two sculptures, two photograms of plant and lace, and three photographic copies of prints, selected to demonstrate the utility of the newly invented Calotype. None of the photographs adopted the painterly aesthetic conventions that characterised photography's development period throughout the mid-nineteenth century, instead presenting banal-but-detailed renditions of their subjects. The photograms (a photographic image made without a camera by placing objects directly onto the surface of a light-sensitive material and then exposing it to light) were especially impressive in terms of resolving ample detail on the paper surface.

From then on, the objective of photographic technological development has been the production of mechanical, optical, chemical, and digital tools that facilitate the making of technically accomplished images in terms of rich tonal ranges, contrast, sharpness, and detail. Significant advances in digital technologies have ushered in a sea-change in popular methodologies of photographic image-making and formed new avenues of mainstream communication, creation and discourse. Once the preserve of the enthusiast, photography is now deeply embedded in everyday life.

The mass adoption of photography is inseparable from the emergence of 'internet culture' and the addition of video-graphic capabilities to consumer stills cameras. For example, in the context of the ubiquitous online video-sharing platform YouTube, a new trend has emerged known as video-blogging or, colloquially, 'vlogging'. Vloggers will often record their daily activities and upload every day with little omission or editing, suggestive of 'archiving life in its entirety'. Personally, I find that this mundane content delivers excitement similar to seeing detail in a photograph or accessing behind-the-scenes footage documenting the production of a feature film. This provokes a kind of awakening effect in the viewer, a deliberate re-direction away

from the suspended-disbelief of narrative immersion. The source of my pleasure here comes from an awareness that I am viewing the *process* of image-creation, rather than the *result*; the mechanisms by which the pseudo-realities of images are created, which I perceive as a kind of ‘third reality’ in which own photographic practice operates.

Everything(2017)

[Practice No.1- exhibition]

everything

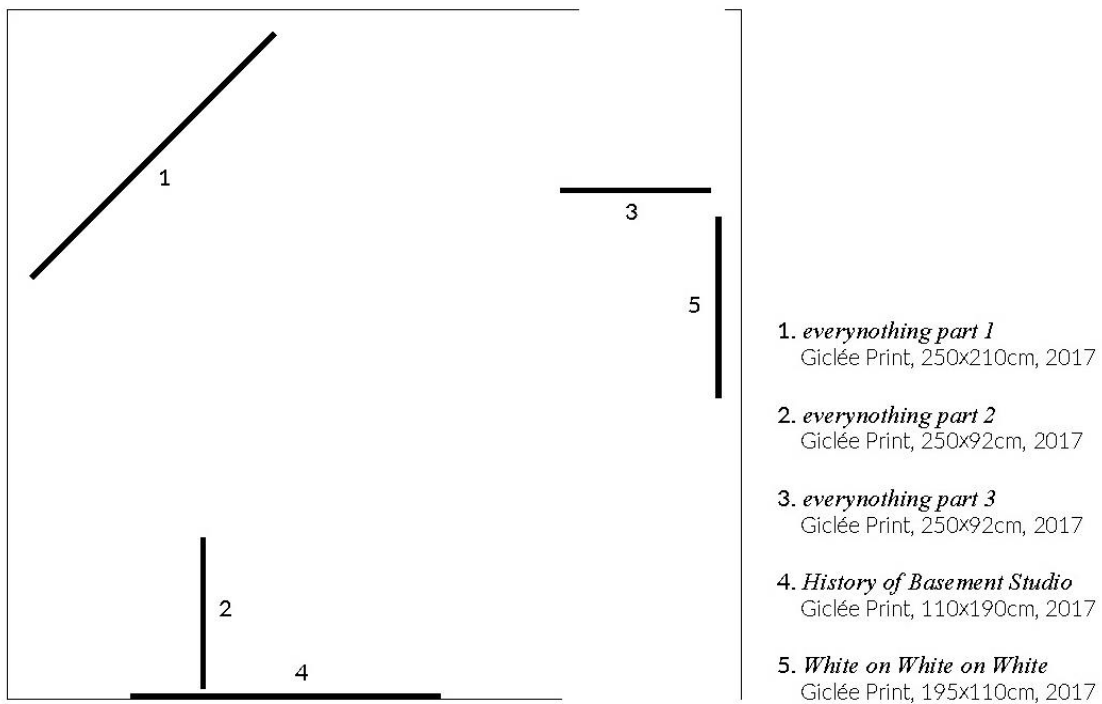


Figure 3: Soon-Hak Kwon, everything, floor plan



Figure 4: Soon-Hak Kwon, everything, installation view -1



Figure 5: Soon-Hak Kwon, everything, installation view -2



installation view of *everything part 1*, Giclée Print, 250x210cm, 2017

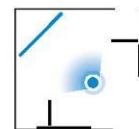


Figure 6: Soon-Hak Kwon, *everything part 1*, 2017, Giclée Print, 250x210cm



installation view of *everything part 2*, Giclée Print, 250x92cm, 2017

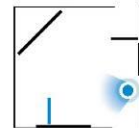


Figure 7: Soon-Hak Kwon, *everything part 2*, 2017, Giclée Print, 250x92cm



installation view of *everything part 3*, Giclée Print, 250x92cm, 2017

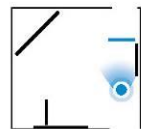


Figure 8: Soon-Hak Kwon, *everything part 3*, 2017, Giclée Print, 250x92cm



installation view of *History of Basement Studio*, Giclée Print, 110x190cm, 2017

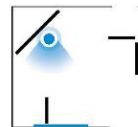


Figure 9: Soon-Hak Kwon, *History of Basement Studio*, 2017, Giclée Print, 110x190cm



installation view of *White on White on White*, Giclée Print, 195x110cm, 2017

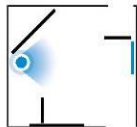


Figure 10: Soon-Hak Kwon, *White on White on White*, 2017, Giclée Print, 195x110cm

everything (2017)

[Practice No.1- exhibition]

everything is a photo-installation project at a venue in that existed in a liminal state; the installation took place while the venue was undergoing renovations in order to serve as a gallery space in the future. Prior to this, the space was an artist's studio. It was conveniently situated next to my studio; therefore, I observed the progress intimately, becoming aware of the points in time where halts in the renovation process gave the space a distinct air of liminality, or perhaps a 'status of nothingness'. This site-specific project intends to explore medium specificity in digital photography and installation art throughout the five images it comprises (which were created using three different methods.). Only the detail of the given environment is the source for photographic images - in other words, nothing beyond the space is included in the photographic images.

The first method, 'everything', same as the project title, is a three-part photographic work consisting of images taken from the room itself installed precisely to match the perspectival scales and sight-lines of the space, foregrounding a relationship between photographic reproduction and reality. Printed Inkjet paper is installed fixed on the ceiling and the floor with no supportive frame of a panel to highlight the materiality of the paper, and each print is produced on Rag (matte) paper to maximise the illusory quality of their appropriately-scaled integration into the space (as gloss and other print-finishes would likely register instantly to a viewer as specifically 'photographic prints' owing to their characteristic reflectivity). In the captured images, objects appear congruent with the space in its current state – a table, a mop, (electric) wires, a fluorescent light unit and left-over construction materials.

Certain objects are moved or hidden for the exhibition; a table that takes up one-sixth of the bottom right-side of 'everything part 1' is moved to the back, where the print is installed. This is intended so that the viewers could peek through the side and see the represented and real object simultaneously. Also, behind the prints, various objects are employed to reiterate the present situation, such as tapes, staplers, screwdrivers, pliers, gloves and leftover print rolls (which heightens the illusion through matching perspective, the result of much trial and error, labour and time). The top part of the image suggests the liminality of the space through its depiction of the hanging wires and temporary bulbs wrapped in cone-shaped plain paper. In the vertical, lengthened print format of 'everything part 2', a single wooden plank also stands vertically on its own in the image, its real-referent object absent from the space. This work is installed so that it obstructs the viewing of another work, 'History of Basement Studio', which was shot far before this project was initiated. The two images were not meant to be installed together; they were captured at different times with other intentions in mind.

Nevertheless, the image of the previous wall, bearing the traces of an anonymous artist (representing the past) and the image of a wooden plank (representing the present) installed in faithful (re)placement in space, combine to form a new nexus. This expresses the collision of the disparate times at which the images were captured. The only reason they are there is that they once were there. 'everything part 3', placed at the right-hand side of the three-part piece, indicates that there is a door behind the image, with a fluorescent light unit partially visible in the bottom right corner which is now installed in the ceiling. A wire from an electrical outlet comes from the inside of the behind door, and it is cropped out where the print ends. However, as the viewer comes closer to the image, the wire connects to the real object at a certain point. It is feeding electricity to light a halogen bulb lighting the rear side of 'part1'. Resuming the concept of different lighting, the inner space of the door was lit by an artificial light resembling the colour temperature of daylight. All of the works included in this first method are scaled and printed in a way that overlaps the perspective of the real space.

The second method, which builds upon the methodology developed for the *History of series*, presents *History of Basement Studio*; an image of the previous wall

(which was now invisible; at the time of the installation, a wall was newly built over it), printed at 1:1 scale and mounted directly on the freshly plastered wall. As previously mentioned, this image was initially made entirely separately from this installation project: however, after completing the three-part of the *everynothing*, this image was recalled as one-third of the concept for this project, representing the past tense.

Regarding the third method, *White on White on White* shows an image from a previous installation at upper floor gallery space, depicting a hexagon-shaped print of a white wall installed on a white wall; installed on a surrounding white painted surface. This image represents the future tense of the place, which would be the second space for the gallery.

Whilst the status of the venue as well as the images of it may be regarded as ‘nothing’, the images in the installation attempt to show everything through nothingness, by blurring the definitions of everything and nothing.

Three individual works that function as both discrete images and as a whole within the space in transition somewhat simulate what we capture through a camera. The detail that emerged here could be regarded as ‘time’, categorized as the past (objects), the present (installation) and the future (imagination). Especially, what the present implies is most complex as it only exists in the viewer's eye. This follows the tradition of Minimalism, an art movement much concerned with critical consideration of the viewers' experience. When the viewer enters the *everynothing* installation space, it is an experience of getting inside a metonymical camera. Whilst a photograph presents a new image from the past, the moment captured is forever lost, serving only as a representation of history in the future. In this sense, the installation is a commemoration of a lost world of nowhere and nothing.

‘That-has-been’ – the Punctum of time

With the metonymic properties of the punctum and its power to expand the language to the brink of linguistic representation discussed formerly, this section focuses on the experiential aspect of the punctum, which is the detail of encountering a particular, individuated component of a photograph which registers as significantly more evocative than both all other components and the image as a whole, eliciting a significant affective response. In other words, detail is the entry point for a particular experience of time.

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes attempts to depart from a prominent theory of photography: ‘transformation’ or so-called ‘photographic code’. Based on the discourse from some sociologists/semioticians, this theory implied that the reality in photography appears in a transformed manner rather than being analogous to the real. Barthes regarded analysing the signification mechanisms of photography as an understanding of the medium not as an image, but rather as language. However, a distinct characteristic of photography is that the referent is extraordinary. He simply abbreviates the index as ‘That-has-been’³³ - a photograph is formed from the imprint of light on a chemically sensitised surface, a physical process which Barthes describes as follows.

....it was the chemists (who invented Photography). For the *noeme* ‘That-has-been’ was possible only on the day when a scientific circumstance (the discovery that silver halogens were sensitive to light) made it possible to recover and print

³³ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 77.

directly the luminous rays emitted by a variously lighted object. The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who is here; the duration of the transmission is significant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star.³⁴

In the first half of his exploration into the specificities of photography, Barthes introduces the concepts of *studium* and *punctum* in relation to the principle of pleasure. He divides the pleasures that derive from viewing photographs into two aspects: ‘a certain photograph can satisfy one of them and interest me slightly; and if another photograph interests me powerfully, I should like to know what there is in it sets me off’.³⁵ *Studium* and *punctum* propose two respective modes of deriving information and pleasure. First, the Latin word *studium* means ‘study’, applied to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment, of course, but without special acuity.³⁶ This hints that engaging with the *studium* component of a photograph can provide information, but elicit little in the way of emotion or affect. He presents a photograph of rebellion in Nicaragua, explaining the information he gains from it, describing it as ‘banal, as it derives from an *average* effect, almost from a certain training’.³⁷ This information requires a conventional system of interpretation, meaning it is easily communicable, legible and unremarkable.

On the other hand, *punctum*, a Latin word, exists to designate a wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument.³⁸ Barthes describes it as ‘an element which

³⁴ Ibid., p. 80.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 26.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me'.³⁹ This runs contrary to *studium* – which the viewer intentionally engages with – insofar as the *punctum* affects the viewer regardless of their intended or anticipated interaction with the photograph.

'*punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole-and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)'⁴⁰ *Punctum* provokes each individual respectively by chance, thus does not assure consistency of experience between individuals. Accordingly Barthes writes as 'to give examples of *punctum* is, in a certain fashion, to *give myself up*.'⁴¹

Barthes shifts the focus on enquiries in the latter half of *Camera Lucida*, stating that "I had perhaps learned how my desire worked, but I had not discovered the nature (the *eidos*) of Photography."⁴² The first half of the book seems like an enumeration of the attraction point of each photograph, not yet establishing a broadly-applicable critical framework of photography-viewership. But he does not cease the attempt to seek the essence of photography from a subjective perspective.

I would have to descend deeper into myself to find the evidence of Photography, that thing which is seen by anyone looking at a photograph and which distinguishes it in his eyes from any other image.⁴³

The principle of pleasure was, in fact, already implied in his literary theory. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes introduced a dual concept of Pleasure (*plaisir*) and Bliss (*jouissance*) in a similar manner to the *studium* / *punctum* distinction offered in

³⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 43.

⁴² Ibid., p. 60.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 60.

Camera Lucida. Plaisir is a pleasure of fortifying ones' ego within the boundary of culture, whilst *jouissance* is a pleasure of losing ones' ego in the realm where it is impossible to revert to the cultural aspect. It is within this context that he comes to assert that photography might be more closely related to death than pleasure; his stated failure to grasp what he calls the 'evidence of Photography' hints at the irreducibility of death as a concept inseparable from the medium. Photography's specificity as medium might be better articulated in terms of 'time and death', rather than pleasures. This is what Barthes discusses in the second half of *Camera Lucida*.

In the second half chapter, the discourse of 'That-has-been' opens up with the description of a photograph of his mother, the so-called Winter Garden Photograph, which is not illustrated in the book.

The photograph was very old. The corners were blunted from having been pasted into an album, the sepia print had faded, and the picture just managed to show two children standing together at the end of a little wooden bridge in a glassed-in conservatory, what was called a Winter Garden in those days. My mother was five at the time (1898), her brother seven.⁴⁴

With this particular photograph, Barthes reflects on the image as physical evidence of his mother's existence itself – and reaches his formulation of Photography's noeme as: "That-has-been," or the Intractable."⁴⁵ In doing so, he rediscovers the salience of an earlier observation, that "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"⁴⁶, stating; "I didn't yet know that this stubbornness of the Referent in always being there would produce the essence I was

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 66.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

looking for⁴⁷

Barthes calls this new *punctum* 'Time', another *punctum* besides the detail, which is no longer a matter of form but of intensity - the lacerating impact of the *noeme* ("*that-has-been*"), its pure representation. In other words, what photography uniquely delivers to the percipient viewer is a comprehension of existence within and inseparable from *time*, rather than a particular insight into the existence itself. Furthermore, this means that an awareness of 'That-has-been' is, simultaneously and necessarily, an awareness of 'this-is-not-there-anymore'. It is true that photography functions as a witness but can equally point to non-existence. Regardless of whether the subject is alive or dead (in terms of portraits), when a moment is captured, the moment is already gone - and the photograph functions as a powerful reminder of this unceasing loss through its inherent, irreducible relationship with temporality.

The important thing is that the photograph possesses an evidential force, and that its testimony bears not on the object but on time. From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation.⁴⁸

Barthes adds a supplementary example through a photograph of Lewis Payne by Alexander Gardner. A man is in his cell, where he is waiting to be hanged. The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the *studium*. But the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*.⁴⁹ The photograph was taken before his death, but the viewer's awareness that death was immanent at the time of the photographic capture and completed at the time of viewing the photograph provides the *punctum* and its resultant affective

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 88-89.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 96.

response. This is a similar account to what Barthes experienced when regarding the photograph of his mother. "In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die"⁵⁰The referent in the real world is a real object that exists, perceived via embodied sensory faculties. However, when the referent of a photograph no longer exists in tangible form, it is impossible to perceive the referent of a photograph via sensory engagement. Hence photography is false (or at least deficient) in a perceptive dimension. However, unlike any other image, photography brings once-existing objects to the present in the form of verisimilar representations. In doing so, neither 'image' nor 'reality' seems sufficiently accurate descriptors of photographs. Rather, they might be considered a different entity altogether: a reality, but one that can no longer be touched.⁵¹

The *punctum* of time, redolent of death as it is, points to the potential for pain and suffering in the experience of photography and photographs. Barthes also observes that the Photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion, *it fills the sight by force*, and because in it, nothing can be refused or transformed.⁵² Through the Winter Garden photograph, the author demonstrates the experience of suffering involved with recognition of the 'that-has-been' - this is the very singularity of the photographic medium. The essence of photography is not necessary to show the referents' state or actuality – instead, it provides an experience of a particular *Zeitlichkeit*: an experience of existence that cannot be touched. Barthes writes, "The Photograph then becomes a bizarre *medium*, a new form of hallucination: false on the level of perception, true on the level of time: a temporal hallucination, so to speak, a modest, *shared* hallucination (on the one hand "it is not there," on the other "but it has indeed been"): a mad image, chafed by reality."⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 96.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 87.

⁵² Ibid., p. 91.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 115.

So far, the cause of the desire towards detail in question here is concluded by the matter of the existence. The encounter with the photographic punctum is accompanied by the fear and pain of disappearing: death. What the punctum of time denotes is an inevitable end. Barthes encountered not only the particular existence of his -then already dead- mother, but also his own destiny. The formulation of this proposed 'essence of photography' was thus a poignant, deeply affective experience: a trauma.

From video games to virtual-reality goggles, new visual-experiential devices will continue to be produced, providing ever-increasing degrees of (photographic-adjacent) realism that appear to mirror or exceed lived reality. However, although we project our desire to reaffirm the existence of ourselves and the world through such technologies, no such endeavour will provide the wish-fulfilment that drives, informs and sustains their design and application. There is no truth in representational fragments; they will only circulate metonymically. Furthermore, we are physical beings confined in time and space. We cannot transcend the second Law of Thermodynamics, which is partially a universal law of decay, and the ultimate cause of why everything ultimately falls apart and disintegrates over time.

Details, key to our earliest interactions with the world before even the conceptualisation of a self-world boundary, are also the key to immersion in the sophisticated virtual reality environments available to contemporary consumers. Detail, in this sense, is an immersion strategy entirely separate from narratives and plots; I recall a dream which featured a fly, seemingly irrelevant to the dream's central events, which was followed by the later (conscious) realisation that this seemingly innocuous, superfluous detail was in fact the key factor in the dream being vivid and re-collectable. In the same vein, detail can be a gateway to explore outside of language - perhaps even opening pathways toward an inherently incomplete, (but nevertheless, compelling) experience of different perceptual realities.

Partitions (2019)

[Practice No.2- exhibition]



Figure 11: (left) Soon-Hak Kwon, Partitions part I, 2019, Giclée Print, 180x290cm



Figure 12: (centre) Soon-Hak Kwon, Partitions part IV, 2019, Giclée Print, 180x290cm



Figure 13: Soon-Hak Kwon, Partitions part II, 2019, Giclée Print, 180x290cm



Figure 14: (centre) Soon-Hak Kwon, Partitions part III, 2019, Giclée Print, 180x290cm



Figure 15: Soon-Hak Kwon, Partitions part V, 2019, Giclée Print, 180x290cm



Figure 16: Soon-Hak Kwon, Partitions part VI, 2019, Giclée Print, 180x290cm



Figure 17: Soon-Hak Kwon, History of Accumulated Ghosts I, 2019, Giclée Print, 147×150cm



Figure 18: Soon-Hak Kwon, History of Accumulated Ghosts II, 2019, Giclée Print, 147×186cm



Figure 19: Soon-Hak Kwon, History of Accumulated Ghosts III, 2019, Giclée Print, 147×150cm



Figure 20: Soon-Hak Kwon, Partitions, 2019, Variable Installation



Figure 21: Soon-Hak Kwon, Partitions, 2019, Variable Installation

Partitions (2019)

[Practice No.2- exhibition]

The installation project 'Partitions' at the Dacheongho art museum was conceived around a year before the exhibition. A long preparation time provided the opportunity to observe the transitional stages of the space in-between exhibitions and flesh out my initial ideas of interacting with the given physical space. Consequently, in this project, the hidden character of the exhibition space was explored through the mobile partition system used to alter the space for each exhibition. Following my previous *everynothing* installation, I had begun to reflect on the limitations of the print medium, insofar as flat, one-sided prints constrained the range of possible interactions between the image, the space and the viewer. Utilising the gallery's partition system as a movable substrate for my prints resolved this issue somewhat - installing the photographs on both sides of the partitions enabled the images to take on a more substantial, structural presence with a direct physical relationship to that specific venue.

By bringing forth this hidden feature of the space, a recreated "scene" weaves an illusionary perspective of another space-time with the current space-time. Before this project, the museum had put up three exhibitions over the past six months. During visits to the venue, I carefully scrutinized the space to understand -and work with- its particular operations, features and proportions. This was when the partition system came to my attention. The partitions in the venue were designed to move along the rail system; they were attached to the ceiling in a specific orientation. However, it was not designed to move freely - it could only divide the space along a grid formation. Also, a storage-station for the piled-up partitions was intended to be hidden from sight: (this intention was not particularly successfully-realised, as the pile was still somewhat

noticeable despite attempts to mask it with tape and paint). Finally, I planned to use three out of the ten partitions, installed at an inclined angle within the grid. Precisely marking the placement of prints is critical for this project, as the photographic image has to match up convincingly with perspectival sight-lines when installed. I followed this reference line after moving the partitions around and making markings on the floor and ceiling—the shooting and installing process followed.

Each partition area acted as a field-of-view, and the six prints were installed on two sides of three partitions. The content of images includes both negative space and representations of various situations/objects photographed within the space during the liminal phase between exhibitions. Instead of artwork, incidental objects are depicted, such as a package of artworks and various tools. Because of the specific orientation of the partitions, the carefully-orchestrated viewpoint of Partitions part I with Partitions part IV, and in the reverse side, Partitions part II with Partitions part III overlaps with the viewer's anticipated movement through the exhibition space, mimicking the effect a stereotype photograph. The latter group depicts the outside of the entrance with some photographs documenting the history of this museum, which is absent in the present tense. Partitions part VI was intended to be observed lastly. An empty partition is included in this image, revealing the timeframe up to the moment the print is installed.

History of Accumulated Ghosts I-III shows the status of the space when the last exhibition was closed. It follows the established methodologies of the *History of* series - shooting a flat wall, bearing the traces of absent artworks, and printing at 1:1 scale. I deliberately requested that the gallery technicians leave the traces of the previous exhibition unfixed to facilitate this. Half of the space was painted red and divided by the partition, which was also red-painted on one side. *History of Accumulated Ghosts I* was shot where the two red-sided partitions connect, and are installed on top of the partition's station. This placement was horizontally moved back from where it was captured to expose the existence of the partitions in the space. *History of Accumulated Ghosts II and III* continues the red-painted-wall theme. However, a more specific placement plan was involved. Both capture the wall where the red-paint and white-paint divide. The framed print was then installed opposite where it was shot. Also, the red

wall was painted back to white, only leaving a small portion of red as it was. The red wall in the real world and its representation are situated opposite each other, forming a continuum. Small details were incorporated to refer back to the red wall, including a red-painted partition placed in the pile of partitions and the remnants of red wall socket covers.

This project could be loosely related to the site-specific art method. The trend of site-specific art is shifting from being reactionary and becoming a tool to materialise the value of a perishing place. This approach is inseparable from the recent surge of renewed interest in urban regeneration, which appears to be the key driver of a number of works that attempt to increase the preservation value of a place by highlighting its historical features. Photography is a particularly appropriate medium for such endeavours, insofar as it has frequently been utilised to capture a moment and place before it disappears, which refers back to its long-standing role to record and document.

Site-specific attributes can be found in previous works. Most notably, *Situated Senses: Inclined Angles* (2011), where the rough wall surfaces or the raw nakedness of the inner structure of a building waiting for reconstruction, became the source of the project. In *Whiterain* (2012), a residential space through a small door in the gallery was installed on the gallery wall, envisioning a transparent glass effect that penetrated the scenery behind the wall. Even though *A Soldier's Tale* (2013) is not a site-specific work per se, its specificity lies in an attempt to recapture the time of a person who has experienced a particular, noteworthy chapter of history.

However, in the course of my practice, I accept the specificity of a photograph and actively utilise its realism to move toward the illusory potentials of the medium. The project *everything* hinged upon taking photographs of an empty space and then reinserting the image back in its space, while *Partitions* presented photographs of an emptied gallery in the gallery it was taken; in each, the space depicted occupies a liminal or overlapping time-span between the previous exhibition being taken down and the next installed. Here, the gallery's space-time itself is the work's main subject.

A shift of the gaze moving from a wall to a space is not simply a move from a two-dimensional plane to a three-dimensional space, but rather an attempt to capture the essential universality of space-time beyond the materiality of the subject. This means replacing the specificity of a place with the transcendence of space, beyond the matter of a 'subject'. However, this is only a part of the conceptual spectrum of this project. The two works indeed take a similar approach. However, it is vastly different in its conceptual essence. The photograph of a wall is a departure from the orthodoxy of still-life photography.

Nevertheless, a wall is yet another subject matter. The surface that carries the traces of space and time is still a material subject. On the contrary, the photograph of a space presented here is essentially a photograph without a subject. The photographed walls, floors, and objects do not function as a subject but are detail-props to construct an empty space with no easily-recognisable subject matter. Such 'null' space can also be read as a time of void, a margin of time after one exhibition is over and before the next one begins: a blank time for the viewers. It is also a time of insignificance to the original purpose of the space as an art museum.

In this respect, this image-installation transforms a place that occupies a *particular space-time* into one that offers an extended concept of space. In other words, it challenges the gallery's conventional identity as "a place for X's exhibition" and instead invites consideration of the nature, purpose and status of the space during that small window of time when it is not fulfilling its conventional role (i.e., exhibiting). The 'nullified' images installed in the same place as its capture result in the effect of the familiar characteristics of both the space and the image becoming uncanny. This is a feature of lens-based detail that provides a sense of likeness and separation at the same time. Recreating the objective perspective as much as possible also reinforces the experience of uncanniness more vividly.

This experiment is not simply an attempt to dismantle the specificity of a place. Instead, it is an experiment towards the interchangeability of a place and a space. The

open perspective paradoxically leads to a more profound assessment of the identity of a place by discovering its spatial meaning. Presenting an experience of interchangeable place and space reveals the (commonplace) failure to recognise that perspective is very limited in reality.



Figure 22: Soon-Hak Kwon, *Situated Senses: Inclined Angles*, 2011, Variable Installation

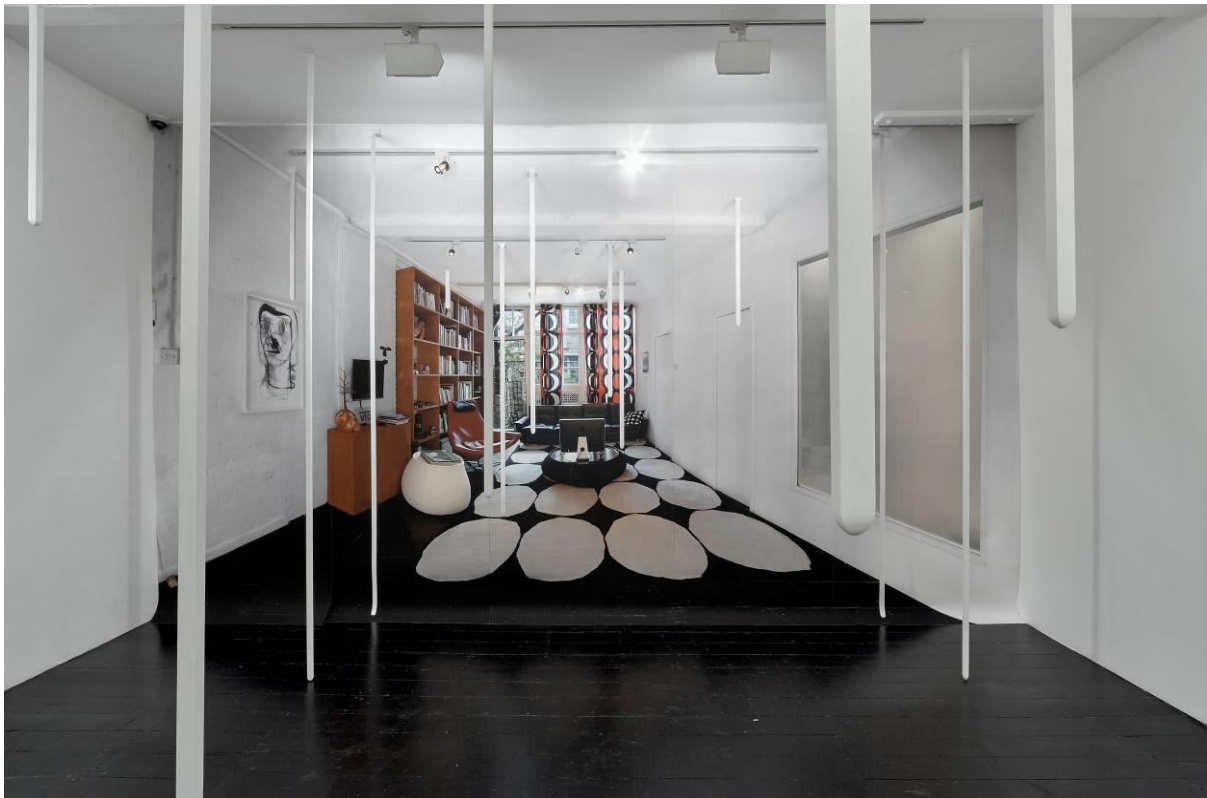


Figure 23: Soon-Hak Kwon, White Rain, 2012, Giclée Print, 310 x550cm

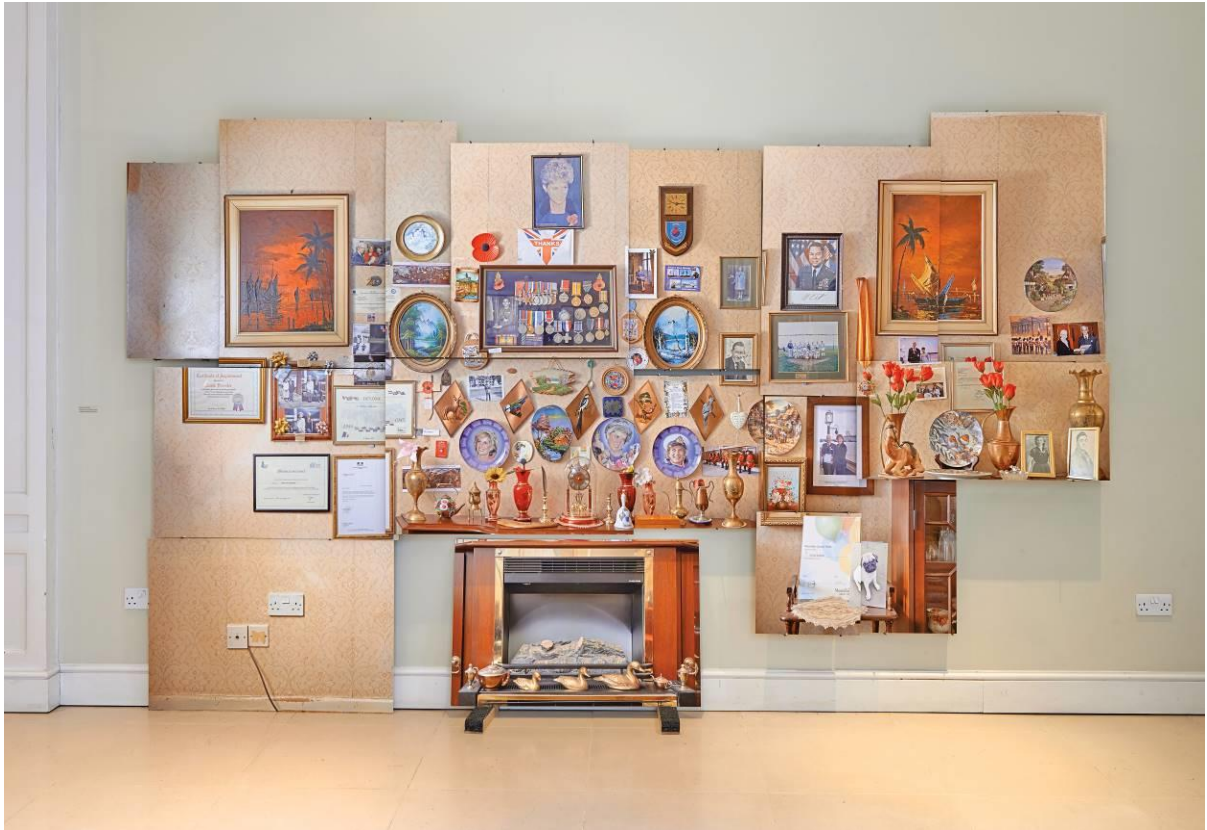


Figure 24: Soon-Hak Kwon, Work for A Solider's Tale I, 2013, 240 X 400cm

Elsewhere (2020)

[Practice No.3- photo-sculpture]

Elsewhere is an experiment in “photographic sculpture”, wherein a gallery space is photographed from three viewpoints, with the resulting prints mounted upon a triangular column installed within that same gallery space. One side of the panel has a two-fold plane, as illustrated in [Figure 25]; therefore, the column has three sides and four faces simultaneously. The triangular column stands in the middle of the room, and extends from the floor to the ceiling. It creates an effect of transparency by near-seamlessly blending with the space’s interior features and proportions.

'Elsewhere' inherits the methodology adopted in 'Partitions'. It involves a pre-visit to the exhibition space to take photographs of the empty space and an installation of carefully-scaled photographic prints depicting the exhibition space at a particular point in time and space. Although Partitions uses the same methodology as ‘*everything*’, in principle, the image became sculptural by addressing the issue of the two-dimensionality of the paper print; and the conceptual parameters of the project were expanded due to the nature of the unoccupied space of the continuously operating art museum. Compared to *Partitions part I~VI*, the content of *Elsewhere* intensifies visualising the process of making the work; it represents nothing but the process of producing the artwork itself, thus further eliminating the subject. This project focused more on the exhibition as a timely event that allowed for a fluid transformation of the surroundings, as the space was installed with multiple artworks, and the whole Biennale displayed more than a hundred pieces of artwork. Preparations for making this photographic sculpture also took on a minimal, gestural aspect very much in keeping

with its concept; by joining three panels, it literally stands alone. This aspect makes the work closer to 'nothing': the more the subject/message dissolves, the more powerful the detail becomes. The time before and after an event intertwines and overlaps as the viewer is presented with a convincing amalgamation of the space- in-present-reality and the space 'that-has-been'.

The most significant achievement of this project is that it moved closer to the concept of a photograph consisting of nothing but the detail – which is what I first attempted to establish with the *History of works*. It represents significant progress in the trajectory of my research and practice, which can reach its apotheosis only when a conclusive representation of nothing is achieved.

At the beginning of the making, the place for this project was moved around from a certain gallery space to another as per the curator's will. Finally, the precise point from which the photograph would be shot was marked off with tape (the exact spot where it would later be installed), and the first shoot commenced. Marking points included: 1. where the camera was placed (this is the same view-point as the viewer, and later to be documented from the camera again), 2. where the photograph would be placed, and 3. the distance from the imagined panel surface to the camera: the tape which marked point 1 and 2 is physically there with the installed image, and point 3 is visible in the represented photograph.

The existence of 'nothing', in the end, is revealed through the absence of the subject. Furthermore, an image viewed exclusively within the precise space it was made refers back to itself. Rather than trying to create the illusion that it is not a photographic image, I tried to highlight the aesthetics of immersive digital media in an attempt to foreground the nature and essence of photography by reducing it to a matter of linear perspective. Nothing is left but the format, the absence of a message. Only the

remnants of the large format photography, indexicality, verisimilitude, interior photography, and norms of contemporary art aesthetics remain.



Figure 26: Soon-Hak Kwon, Elsewhere(View-2), 2020, 200 x 360 x 200cm _ Giclée Prints on canvas with frames and installation structures, at the 2020 Changwon Sculpture Biennale NON-SCULPTURE : LIGHT or FLEXIBLE



Figure 27: Soon-Hak Kwon, Elsewhere(View-3), 2020, 200 x 360 x 200cm _ Giclée Prints on canvas with frames and installation structures, at the 2020 Changwon Sculpture Biennale NON-SCULPTURE : LIGHT or FLEXIBLE



Figure 28: Soon-Hak Kwon, Elsewhere(View-4), 2020, 200 x 360 x 200cm _ Giclée Prints on canvas with frames and installation structures, at the 2020 Changwon Sculpture Biennale NON-SCULPTURE : LIGHT or FLEXIBLE

Nothing but the Format

A noticeable change has occurred in the essence of photography since the transition from chemical photography to digital. If the past photography theory was based on “indexicality”, which means that the subject was once there (physically interacted with the camera, if only by dint of reflecting light), this fundamental conception is undermined by the capacity of digital technologies to produce images bearing all the characteristic hallmarks of photographs without requiring any physical interaction with real-referent. The value of the photographic ‘decisive moment’ and the medium’s long-held evidentiary utility no longer exists. This means the photograph has moved from an index to the realm of the generative image.

Before digital technology came to dominate popular perceptions of the photographic image, the essence of photography was that the medium itself was the ‘index’. Photography is a vestige of light. It is a physico-chemical reaction in which the light had touched the object; reflected into the camera, and been chemically fixed. In other words, there is a direct cause-effect relationship between the stimulus (light) and the sensor (photosensitive substance). This fact significantly influences and underpins a viewer’s response to photographs. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes links the indexicality of photography to an umbilical cord connecting the viewer to the thing photographed. The photograph is unique because it “is literally an emanation of the referent,”⁵⁴ which, for Barthes, means that “radiations which ultimately touch me” proceed “from a real body.”⁵⁵ These radiations that “touch me like the delayed rays of a star” are “a sort of

⁵⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 80.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

umbilical cord [that] links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze.”⁵⁶ Here, Barthes imagines that a metaphorical umbilical cord links the observer and the referent or that-has-been of the photograph. With this model, Barthes ignores that the photograph is a mere representation of a real-world referent. For him, the photograph-observer can reconnect with -virtually touch -the ‘that-has-been’. This metaphorical umbilical cord, the camera, does not only link the photographic observer to the photographed thing but also links the viewer to the past moment during which the photograph was taken. Therefore, Barthes’ that-has-been has a double meaning: it is both the photograph’s referent and that moment of the past during which the photograph was taken. Barthes’ theory of punctum is based on the ground that there must be a thing photographed. However, it is problematic to apply this thinking to photography in the digital process, as fabricating or extensively (and convincingly) manipulating images is a distinct, sophisticated and easily-accessible feature of digital photography. This weakens the medium’s relationship with indexicality.

The core difference between photography and painting is whether the media is based on indexicality or imagination. Although a painting may not depict a subject as accurately as a photograph, the painting can conjure up an image based on imagination alone. Taking a photograph of an imagined subject is an impossibility, as there must be a real thing in the real world to register. However, it became possible to generate a photo-realistic image with digital technology. Consequently, the causal relationship of indexicality is disconnected. Perhaps we could observe the trend returning to the 19c pictorial photography - the aesthetic sense of digital photography seems to be situated somewhere between the aspect of index and imagination.

As the sign of the index, photography, is based on the truth, the power of indexicality was central to the photojournalism and documentary genres throughout the twentieth century. In other words, in line with the socially and legally-established expectations of truth and accuracy that bound the companies and institutions funding such work. But now, we can see the emergence of questionable documentary-type

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 81.

photography because we have lost the certainty of a defensible relationship between truth, reality and photographic technologies. The resulting skepticism and anxiety surrounding photographic representation characterizes much contemporary practice in the medium - the portrait works of Thomas Ruff or Rineke Dijkstra being a good example. Although the typological elements of their images do create meaning, their insistence on a 'deadpan' visual language and the seemingly blunted effect of their subjects combine to create ambiguous representations that resist interpretation and categorization within the historical discourse of photographic arts. In the absence of evidentiary import, the photograph begins to be conceived as indistinct from the countless other types of images in circulation. This trend is reinforced as reality itself is increasingly virtualized. 'Photography' already may not exist anymore. The smartphone camera, which has thoroughly permeated our daily lives and become a central tool of contemporary image culture, overcomes its small lens and sensor-size limitations with digital processing, automatically making instantaneous adjustments whilst taking pictures. It is now the era of *computational photography*.

Of course, the punctum continues to exist. And although photography partially functions as it traditionally has (light focused by optics and registered on a reactive plane), it has an entirely different character. The transition from the painter's eye to the camera's eye and now to the computer's eye is becoming more evident as the digital, networked era establishes its own aesthetic codes and critical frameworks.

My photographic works completely conceal the fact that they are composite images. They are still produced by optical means; hence their indexical component partially remains. However, combining the indexical image with the generative image is an attempt to transcend beyond photography - without eschewing the history, conventions and specificities that continue to inform our engagement with photographs.

tHere There(2020)

[Practice No.4- exhibition]



Figure 29: Soon-Hak Kwon, tHere-front (View-1), 2020, 148x276x4cm,
Giclée print on canvas mount on wooden panel



Figure 30: Soon-Hak Kwon, tHere-front (View-2), 2020, 148x276x4cm,
Giclée print on canvas mount on wooden panel



Figure 31: Soon-Hak Kwon, tHere-front (detail)



Figure 31: Soon-Hak Kwon, tHere-back (View-1), 2020, 148x276x4cm,
Giclée print on canvas mount on wooden panel



Figure 32: Soon-Hak Kwon, there-back (View-2), 2020, 148x276x4cm,
Giclée print on canvas mount on wooden panel

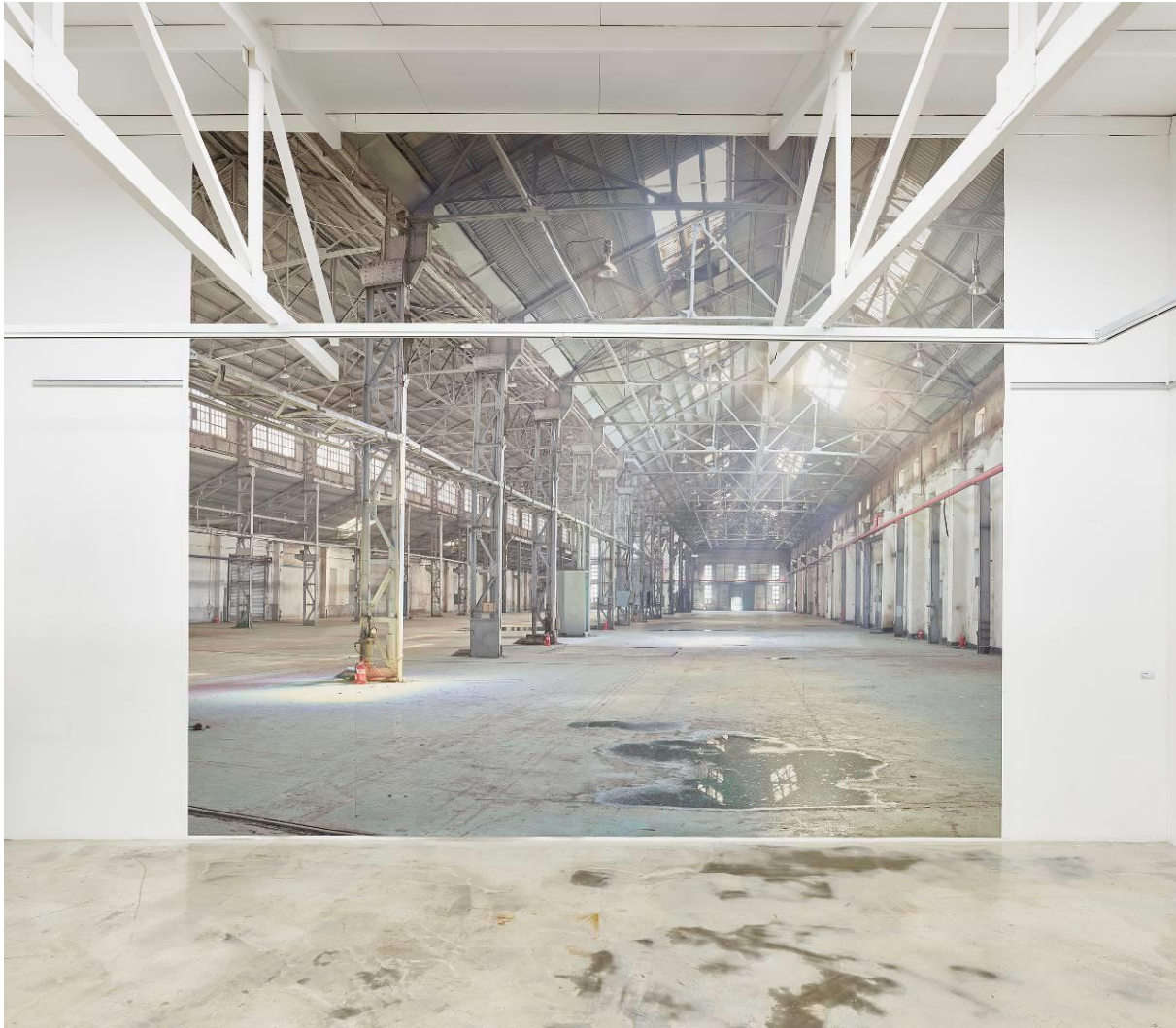


Figure 33: Soon-Hak Kwon, There-part1 (View-1), 2020, 486x423cm, Giclée print on canvas



Figure 34: Soon-Hak Kwon, There-part1 (View-2), 2020, 486x423cm, Giclée print on canvas



Figure 35: Soon-Hak Kwon, There-part2, 2020, 333x340cm, Giclée print on canvas

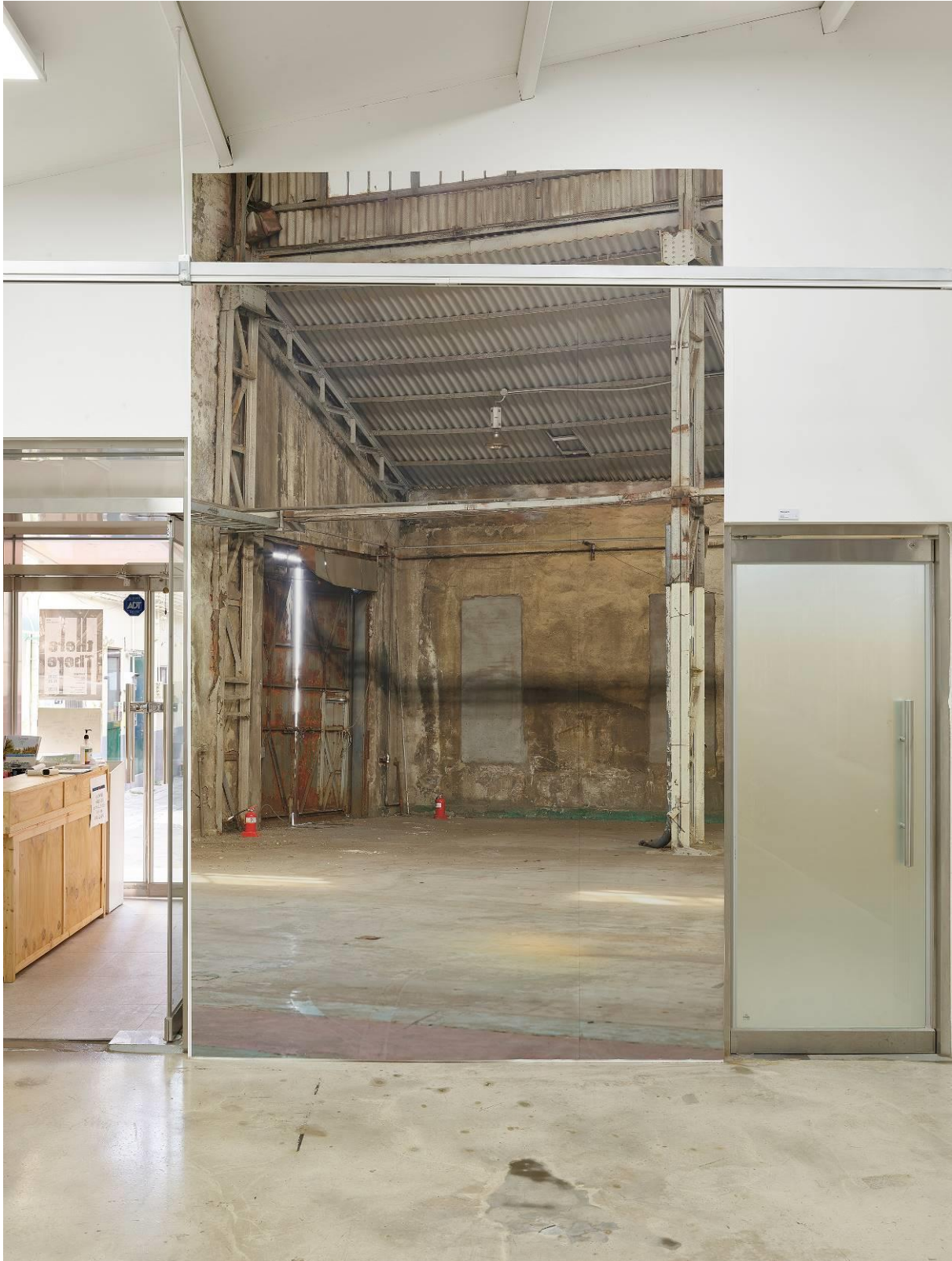


Figure 36: Soon-Hak Kwon, There-part3, 2020, 205x345cm, Giclée print on canvas



Figure 37: Soon-Hak Kwon, There-part4, 2020, 150x345cm, Giclée print on canvas



Figure 38: Soon-Hak Kwon, *Here There* (Installation view), 2020



Figure 39: Soon-Hak Kwon, *Here There* (Installation view), 2020

tHere There(2020)

[Practice No.4- exhibition]

Upon entering the Woori Art Museum space, one is immediately struck by the venue's compactness – it is relatively small in comparison to most venues with “museum” in their name. Furthermore, the old building is only rudimentarily renovated; its original wall and ceiling features are simply painted white and patched with plaster.

The first image the viewer encounters in my exhibition at the Woori, *tHere-front* (2020), faces the entrance of the exhibition hall and is carefully proportioned and positioned to merge seamlessly into the receding sight lines of the spaces' floor, walls and ceiling. The image depicts various cleaning and packaging tools such as vinyl, tapes, and broomsticks strewn about the floor of the exhibition space - trivial objects that might be remnants of either the previous exhibition or preparations for the upcoming exhibition. In other words, the vivid ultra-high-resolution image facing the entrance is an image that equally suggests an occurrence of the past and a portent of a future that has not yet arrived. The photo-image points to its own fictional nature, by using a presenting an optical illusion comprised of fine details beyond the resolving-capacity of human vision. This image placement (at the very outset of the viewer's journey through the space) signals that the images beyond this entrance would reflect any evidentiary truth, but rather the other side of time-space, the choreography of the event. The 'invitational' character of this work was carefully conceived and achieved at the time of the shooting; placing the camera at a vantage point outside of the entrance door enabled me to create a visuospatial-contiguous image that activates in its illusory capacity as the viewer approaches the museum's entrance.

tHere-front and *tHere-back*, occupy on the left side of the exhibition space, while *There-part1* (2020) is placed on the largest wall. This large-scale print that fills

most of the wall is an image of an abandoned factory near the venue. As in *tHere-front*, it expresses another time-space beyond the illusion created by the photograph, in this case presenting signifiers pointing to both the documented history of the Incheon Seaport's industrialization and things that have not yet occurred. If "tHere-front" reveals an uncanny presence by realising its status as an optical illusion, "There-part1" relies upon an immense proportional scale to create a tense of transcendent time-space. Because the images' scale is proportional to the size of the entire exhibition space, it is impossible to visually apprehend it in its entirety at a glance. The installed photos are intentionally imposing in their scale, proportions and placement, creating virtual 'environments' that elicit viewer-immersion by requiring physical movement throughout the space in relation to the images' perspectival scheme. Furthermore, the image rejects the nature of flatness, (a condition that is instrumental to the illusory projective characteristics of photographic prints). Instead of being displayed conventionally on a given wall, *There-part1* is installed in such a manner that aspects of the building's structure penetrate and occlude multiple parts of the work – an approach that applies equally to *There-part2* and *There-part3*. Because of the sheer size of the print, the image naturally passes a sort of "virtual limit line" of perception, problematising the relationship between illusory, projective image space and tangible, physically affordant space. These photographs imply an empirical space beyond a fixed frame and plane, different from the familiar (and thus simplistic to understand, decipher and disregard) illusions conveyed by generic photographic images.

Contained within *There-part4* is a depiction of a canvas frame. This was shot initially for a reference point for the print size. When shooting the abandoned factory, the size of the frame and its distance from the camera were pre-measured as a point of reference to ensure that the prints for the exhibition maintained correct proportionality. My inclusion of an image of the frame itself is a conscious embracing of the productive, resonant coincidences that can be involved in the image-making process - while simultaneously conveying the idea that the world as represented by the camera is never absolute and that it can be overturned and rejected at any time. Empty spaces, events

that have not taken place, and trivial objects neglected by typical photographic practice constitute the subject of my work in the medium - the carefully capturing seemingly insignificant objects providing a means of re-exploring the essential value of photographs.

The representation of the past, present, and future interpenetrate and influence each other. Therefore, images that present nonlinear spatiotemporal interrelationships objects in a manner that is visually congruent with the established norms of photographic representation (with all the implications of singular, arrested temporality and indexicality that those norms carry) can provide cognisance of immaterial events while reframing the primary-subordinate relationship in which non-occurring events (the 'could-plausibly-have-happened') and occurring events (the 'verifiably-did-happen') are typically conceived. Consequently, a new narrative is proposed to have arisen as the present is revealed to be a more ambiguous, intertwined state of affairs. The whole process stems from photography and results in photography - from here to there, then till now, from the front to the back of the flat photograph.

Digital Editing that Combines Mise-en-scène and Montage

This chapter is an integrated examination of mise-en-scène and montage, which have staging and editing techniques that are given much critical attention in the discourse of Film Theory. As film production has become digital, sophisticated software tools have emerged that provide motion-picture creators and technicians with virtually limitless image-compositing and sequence-editing options, facilitating new processes and forms of mise-en-scène and montage. The new visual languages and expanded parameters of image culture that such technologies have produced carry significant implications for the photographic medium, and as such, can provide considerable insights to inform contemporary photography practices.

Dramatic editing – the piecing together scenes shot at different times – largely began with the film director Edwin S. Porter (April 21, 1870 – April 30, 1941), and was further refined and articulated as a distinct technique by another director, David W. Griffith, established the basis for modern editing. Based on this, Soviet film directors Lev Kuleshov, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Sergei Eisenstein developed the mise-en-scène theory. In particular, Eisenstein's theories encompassed both the connecting of shots through editing and the compositional schema and inclusion of props within each individual shot. However, André Bazin decried montage as a technique, arguing that it undermined a sense of reality. Bazin instead favoured the long take of neo-realism, asserting that the cinematic medium should document a realistic unfolding of time. Two schools of filmmaking styles emerged; one artificial-intervention realism style centred on mise-en-scène, and one formalist (expressionist) style centred on montage. Since then, many directors have created new mise-en-scène and montage techniques that deviate from classic Hollywood editing conventions to represent objective time and

human subjective time. In today's editing technology that has changed from analogue to digital, it has become difficult to distinguish between realism and expressionism, to judge the extent of artificial intervention in the editing process. Realist films also frequently incorporate digital compositing to reduce production costs. Long takes in the digital age use technology that artificially creates the appearance of one continuous shot, rather than simply shooting without interruption. In this changed situation, it is necessary to raise an integrated awareness of the previously dichotomised *mise-en-scène* and montage.

Nowadays, video synthesis is actively utilised in movies, TV programs, and YouTube videos. Even in video lectures, anyone can efficiently synthesise their room into another virtual space. This is a result of the digitalisation of video editing. In the past, the workspace, which was separated into a temporary editing room, a general editing room, a recording studio, and a computer graphics room, has now been integrated into one software. It is now possible to complete a film with a singular digital video editor, starting with cut editing, adding subtitles, compositing, colour correction, and even sound design. For instance, a popular video editing software, *Davinci Resolve* provides tools for editing a rough cut, a final cut, composite visual effects, colour correction, sound design, and encoding features. This encompasses the entire post-production pipeline for motion pictures. Adobe's *Premiere Pro* and Apple's *Final Cut Pro X* can also do all of these tasks. Owing to such capable digital video editing software, it is now an era in which professional producers and one-person media producers can easily produce visual effects (VFX), colour correction, and sound design by themselves. Video-synthesis editing existed in the past days of film, but the process was complicated and expensive, so VFX was only used for large-scale productions. Digital editing has made the process much more accessible; thus, VFX is universal. For example, in director Bong Joon-ho's 2019 film *Parasite*, a one-story house is altered to appear as having two floors. In addition, the alleyway where the conversation between the characters Yeon-gyo and Ki-jung takes place was filmed in the studio and then composited with alleyway footage; the garden scene in which Ki-taek kills Dong-ik was

also created in a similar manner. After filming the garden of Dong-ik's house against a 'green screen', the background and trees of the garden were selectively placed in post-production. This is a case in which a part of the *mise-en-scène* arrangement, which is generally present during the shooting process, was put into post-production. Considering this film editing process change, it is now difficult to separate *mise-en-scène* as a scene composition for shooting a single shot and a montage as a simple connection and combination of shots. The common conception that *mise-en-scène* is composed during the shooting stage and montage is composed in post-production is now broken; filmmaking should now be viewed as a simultaneous operation across multiple disciplines and technologies rather than a sequential, unified endeavour. The boundary between *mise-en-scène* and montage has become blurred as video editing has changed from the analogue work of simply combining cuts of the film to form a coherent narrative sequence to that of digitally-synthesizing multiple types of representation.

The two essential axes of cinema directing are *mise-en-scène* and montage. Cinema is an art of space and time centred on moving images. Cinema directing is, essentially, composing a scene which involves time and space. Since a scene usually consists of several shots, the scene is filmed in units of shots; editing is the work of connecting and combining shots (cuts) – the resultant material of scene composition. The shot is, therefore, the basic unit of *mise-en-scène* and montage. Whether filming or editing, directing a movie is ultimately the work of composing a scene with a shot. In that sense, the basic unit of film directing is a shot. Also, a shot is the minimum unit of video language, insofar as scene is differentiated into shots and meaning is created through the relationship between shots and shots. Separating a scene into multiple shots like a storyboard is referred to as *decoupage* – the montage serves to connect the shots that were divided in this *decoupage* stage. Therefore, *decoupage* can be regarded as a simulation of a montage in advance. If *decoupage* is to divide a scene into shots, and montage is to complete a scene by connecting those shots, then *mise-en-scène* is to compose each shot with various audio-visual elements.

Mise-en-scène is not simply a screen composition that consists of a single shot with audio-visual elements. The reason is that, unlike a photograph, which composes a single still image, a film composes a scene by connecting several moving images, called shots. In that sense, mise-en-scène is a composition of both time and space in a more immediate, intuitive sense relative to photography. For example, in a scene of a conversation between two people, the reason why one person faces leftwards is that the other person in the next shot is facing rightwards. That is, the composition of one shot is determined in direct relationship with the next shot. Of course, one scene - one cut scenario, where one scene is produced as a shot, the mise-en-scène is created by only what is included within (or later added to) that single shot. In this case, there is no cut, but the effect of showing shots of various sizes can be given through camera movement. Also, that single scene and cut are linked with shots from other scenes, so eventually, it forms a connection between a shot and a shot. Since the scene is always expressed as a shot, the film can be defined as a time and space composition of the shot.

According to Sergei M. Eisenstein's essay *Film form*, well-known for his theory of montage as characterised by conflict, he lists types of conflicts found within and between shots, including those occurring from montage editing:

1. Graphic conflict
2. Conflict of planes
3. Conflict of volumes
4. Spatial conflict
5. Light conflict.
6. Tempo conflict, and so on

Some further examples:

7. Conflict between matter and viewpoint (achieved by spatial distortion through camera-angle)

8. Conflict between matter and its spatial nature (achieved by optical distortion by the lens).
9. Conflict between an event and its temporal nature (achieved by slow-motion and stop-motion)
10. Conflict between the whole optical complex and a quite different sphere.⁵⁷

In the Odessa stair sequence in the film *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), the shot in which the stairs' static lines collide with the stroller's dynamic lines amplifies the dramatic situation, which is an example of a conflict of graphic directions. Through this, it can be seen that for Eisenstein, the montage includes the visual composition of the shot itself, not simply the connection of shots. Therefore, montage can be interpreted not as a relative concept of mise-en-scène but as film directing itself, including mise-en-scène. In addition, Eisenstein expanded the montage further and saw it as a combination of various artistic elements that went beyond the scene composition and included the actors' performances. He called the process of creating a unified image encompassing harmonious visual, auditory, and dramatic elements proceeded simultaneously as a vertical montage.⁵⁸ He compared the vertical montage to an orchestral music score: whilst the various instruments in the score progress horizontally, at the same time, they play a critical role in relation to each other in a vertical structure.

Roman Jakobson states that in a system of auditory signs, time performs an exclusively organisational function on two axes: sequence and simultaneity.⁵⁹ In this case, if the sequence is the horizontal axis, the simultaneity is the vertical axis. A film can be perceived on two axes: a sequence and a unity of audio-visual signs. The vertical axis created by the unity is the concept of selection and system, and the horizontal axis

⁵⁷ Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, trans and ed. by Jay Leyda (New York; London: Harcourt, 1949), p. 39, 54.

⁵⁸ Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Sense*, trans and ed. by Jay Leyda (New York; London: Harcourt, 1975), p. 74.

⁵⁹ Ernst Gombrich, *Image and Code*, ed. by Wendy Steiner (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan 1981), p. 116.

formed by the unity is the concept of combination and process. Whilst *mise-en-scène* selects various artistic elements and systematises them in an instant on the vertical axis, montage is a process of sequentially combining elements of the *mise-en-scène* from front to back on the horizontal axis. To extend the musical metaphor, *mise-en-scène* functions as a chord, montage, a melody. The elements that makeup harmony in *mise-en-scène* colour, brightness, form, texture, vector, depth and composition, figurative elements such as clothes, makeup, hair, sets, and props; photographic elements such as camera movement, angle, and field-of-view of the lens; acting elements such as movements and gestures of characters; auditory elements such as music, dialogue, and sound effects. All these elements are not stationary; they are modulated to varying lengths and intensities, suggestive of the emotions and meanings a given scene or sequence intends to convey, like the melody of music. As a montage, the element that creates the melody is the interconnection of shots in conjunction with the changing aspect of all elements of the *mise-en-scène*. Therefore, just as melodies and chords intertwine to create music, montage and *mise-en-scène* are also integrated into a single image in the film.

Nevertheless, film montage and *mise-en-scène* have been recognised as separate and relative concepts. The first reason is that filmmaking is collaborative, not individual work. In other words, since the cinematographer and editor worked separately, *mise-en-scène* and montage for editing existed separately. The second reason stems from the particular characteristics of film media. The moment the light is imprinted onto the film is a mechanical and automatic process without human intervention. To make a montage with already-imaged film means to simply cut and paste film together. Whilst a painter can modify the image of their canvas at any time, the combination of various artistic elements on the screen is fixed in the filming process when the image is automatically formed on the film, so the *mise-en-scène* is inevitably limited to the stage of shooting. Since a key characteristic of film media is a seemingly-objective representation of reality independent of human perception (so as to better facilitate the suspension-of-disbelief required for the viewer to emotionally invest in the film's narrative) noticeable creative interventions upon the film material itself (be it chemical processing alterations

or physical transformation techniques such as scratching or painting on the film) were typically avoided so as to avoid introducing discernible artificiality to the end product. Although a moving image is a connection of discrete images displayed at 24 frames per second, it can be viewed as a transparent medium reflecting the visual experience of reality in much the manner that humans continuously perceive it. Whilst natural language cannot create meaning with a phoneme alone - but rather creates meaning through combinations and sequences of discrete linguistic components - the shot, the smallest unit of film, can -conversely- encapsulate a complete meaning within itself.

André Bazin believed that cinema would complete realism as a window into the world.

The guiding myth, then, inspiring the invention of cinema, is the accomplishment of that which dominated in a more or less vague fashion all the techniques of the mechanical reproduction of reality in the nineteenth century, from photography to the phonograph, namely an integral realism, a recreation of the world in its own image~ an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist or the irreversibility of time.⁶⁰

With the birth of the cinema, the image that Plato viewed negatively (as it plunged humans into the world of the senses) was finally able to show reality as it is objectively. From this point of view, Bazin negatively evaluated montage as an obstacle that undermined the potential for objectivity in cinema. In contrast to Eisenstein, who saw the intrinsic nature of film lying in the combination of shots, Bazin saw the intrinsic quality of the film in the composition of the shot itself—its specific representation of the real world.⁶¹ Since then, *mise-en-scène* has informed the directing style of realist

⁶⁰ André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume 1*, trans. by Hugh Gray (Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1967), p. 21.

⁶¹ Graeme Turner, *Film as social practice*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 41-42.

directors who emphasise the continuity of time, whilst montage underpins the directing style of formalist (expressionist) directors.

Louis Giannetti classified editing styles into realism, classicism, and formalism according to how intrusive or interpretive the cutting is. The least manipulative style is found in a sequence shot with no editing. Cutting with continuity as a guiding principle merely condenses the time and space of a completed action. Classical cutting interprets an action by emphasising certain details over others. Thematic montage argues a thesis—the shots are connected in a relatively subjective manner.⁶² Abstract cutting is a purely formalistic editing style, divorced from any recognisable subject matter. Although *mise-en-scène* and montage can be integrated into a composition of a single image, they have been regarded as antithetical concepts due to the opposite characteristics of continuity and discontinuity. However, in the era of digital editing, the analogue characteristics of film continuity and fixedness have been replaced by digital technology's characteristic discontinuity and mutability. The *mise-en-scène* elements, such as colour, brightness, shape, composition, set, props, and costumes, which were previously fixed in the filming stage, were now easily changeable at the editing stage, with myriad additional visual elements easily inserted. In addition, discontinuous editing, such as jump cuts, which were taboo in the past, are becoming commonplace throughout all types of moving-image media, and visual effects are marquee features of Hollywood's "realist" films.⁶³ Due to these changes in media, the boundary between the previously divided aesthetics of *mise-en-scène*-centred realism and montage-centred formalist aesthetics is blurring.

The Dardenne Brothers, a Belgian filmmaking duo, are directors heavily influenced by *Dogme 95*, a manifesto set forth by Danish directors Lars Von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg in 1995, which declared ten rules calling for a return to the purity

⁶² Louis Giannetti, *Understanding Movies*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall. 1999), p. 133.

⁶³ Neo-realism favours long takes and non-professional actors to reveal reality as it is, whilst illusory realism in Hollywood uses invisible editing to convincingly convey a specific reality.

of cinema.⁶⁴ Therefore, in the films of the Dardenne brothers, there are no flashbacks (narrative interjections presenting events occurring prior to the narrative's established temporal frame), only the present time. However, like Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959), it is difficult to see a film that shows the subjective time of a character while the past and present intersect as fiction. Time experienced by humans is not simply an objective chronological progression from the past to the future but rather a subjective, experiential "time" in which the present, past, and future coexist. Films often show flashbacks and flash-forwards using montage sequences, alongside signifiatory changes in colour grading and mise-en-scène. From the standpoint of simply recording the present objective time, montage should be restrained, but to express the subjective human time of memory or expectation, montage, which is a compression of narrative time in a film, is essential. For example, fragmented memories can be effectively depicted with jump cuts - likewise, harrowing memories are well expressed through the use of slow-motion. Therefore, mise-en-scène and montage are representative directing techniques of film that create a story that records human time, which goes beyond the simple role of recording objective time and space.

If conventional motion-picture editing strategies create pseudo-continuity, a long take using camera movement or deep focus is a representative mise-en-scène directing technique - that demonstrates *actual* continuity. Jump cuts, multiple angles, and flashbacks are representative montage techniques that intentionally break continuity.

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- ⁶⁴ 1. Shooting must be done on location. Props and sets must not be brought in (if a particular prop is necessary for the story, a location must be chosen where this prop is to be found).
2. The sound must never be produced apart from the images or vice versa. (Music must not be used unless it occurs where the scene is being shot.)
3. The camera must be hand-held. Any movement or immobility attainable in the hand is permitted.
4. The film must be in color. Special lighting is not acceptable. (If there is too little light for exposure the scene must be cut or a single lamp be attached to the camera.)
5. Optical work and filters are forbidden.
6. The film must not contain superficial action. (Murders, weapons, etc. must not occur.)
7. Temporal and geographical alienation are forbidden. (That is to say that the film takes place here and now.)
8. Genre movies are not acceptable.
9. The film format must be Academy 35 mm.
10. The director must not be credited.

In other words, one side is a mise-en-scène-led direction style utilising minimal cuts, and the other is a montage direction that actively utilises discontinuous cuts. Many directors creatively integrate montage and mise-en-scène to represent subjective experiences of reality in conjunction with more objective representations (the ‘establishing shot’ is a conventional example of the latter) to vividly depict not only objective time but also a character’s subjective experience of time.

In the 2000s, video editing, which was previously a professional field, became popular as software such as Premiere Pro, Final Cut Pro, Da Vinci Resolve, and After Effects became affordable. And it was only in the 2010s that the entire cinema production process, from filming to editing and projection, and the video production process of broadcasting stations were all digitalised. Whilst early film editing was a complex and highly detailed task for a handful of professionals, linear video editing was for engineers working with expensive machines. With the advent of the era of digital non-linear editing, video editing is finally becoming a task that anyone with a capable computer can undertake anytime, anywhere. As film editing shifted from analogue to digital, the variability of digital images replaced the fixedness of film. The mise-en-scène of the filmed video can now be edited at any moment of production. Therefore, it can be said that Eisenstein's concept of montage as a total composition method of the film is being realised only in the digital age.

In this context, it is becoming difficult to continue to adhere to the notion of “purity in film”, which has long been pursued by realism-oriented schools of film theory and practice – an objective mode of filmmaking that records reality mechanically and without significant subjective influence. This is because, to reduce production costs, even in films that prioritise realism, it is common to shoot in a studio and insert the background of a real place using compositing techniques rather than shooting on-location. Barely any viewers would have noticed that the second floor and the background of the garden of the Park's house in *Parasite* were digital insertions, and even if they did, few audiences would believe that the space was a fictional creation. The synthesised scene produces a believable reality as the 24-frames-per-second of sequential imagery medium tricks our perceptions. Therefore, the film's reality must be

comprehended in the spiritual dimension, not the physical dimension. Director Sam Mendes montaged and post-processed scenes in the movie *1917* (2019) to appear as one continuous shot; for example, a scene where a soldier jumps into a river while being chased by an enemy is in reality, a shot the actor jumping onto a mattress, and the footage of falling into the river was produced using computer-generated graphics and edited to appear as a seamless, convincing sequence. In the past, where Hitchcock would hide a cut through a blackout in the movie *Rope* (1948), Mendes used computer graphics to hide the cut. Even in realistic films such as Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu's *Birdman* (2014), many long takes are artificially made into one continuous shot rather than being shot without interruption. However, this seamless, temporally-and-spatially-coherent montaging makes it difficult to doubt the reality of the characters and events in *Birdman*. In the BBC drama *Sherlock* (2010), directed by Paul McGuigan, often in transitions between scenes, a section of the shot is digitally cut out using masking; parts of the shot are synthesised from other places. For example, while Holmes sits on the street, the underpass scene is synthesised behind him, and then the street scene is converted into the underpass. Also, text or graphics (frequently communicating the content of plot-relevant phone messages) are superimposed atop the live action. This can be defined as a montage since *Mise-en-scène*, through such digital synthesis, belongs to the editing stage, not the shooting stage. It is becoming difficult to distinguish the real from the virtual in the digital age. In this regard, André Bazin's argument that montage distorts reality in realist films must be reconsidered. Suppose we deny any manipulation of the images as being unrealistic. In that case, only images that are physically recorded are realistic would divide *mise-en-scène*-centred films into realist and montage-centred films into formalist films. In that both continuous editing, which reproduces objective time, and discontinuous editing, which expresses human subjective time, record human time, many film directors in the history of film use *mise-en-scène* and montage to convey human time vividly.

In the digital era, considering *mise-en-scène* and montage in oppositional terms are no longer practical, as the distinction between the real and the virtual is becoming ambiguous. Considering the aforementioned vlogs on YouTube that record daily life,

jump-cuts are used as a universal editing method, and viewers do not seem to feel that such a montage undermines vlog's implied claims to realism. In other words, it is difficult to find out whether it is real or not in the sense of the physicality of the actual mechanical replication. A film that actively uses montage can be realist, and a film that uses little montage can also be questioned for its realism. This means that not only realist-style films –but also digital-era formalist films– can convey realism. In addition, both objective records of reality and subjective expressions can become a reality experienced by humans. Realism, as achieved through *mise-en-scène* considerations and formalism enabled through montage techniques (which have been differentiated and developed since the birth of film) are being merged into one in the digital age.

Reality in Digital Cinema and the Long take

Today's cinema industry has wholly shifted toward digital paradigms as cutting-edge imaging technologies become ever more capable and accessible. Digital technologies are now utilized throughout the entire workflow of cinematic production; from shooting and editing to post-production, distribution and screening.

Digital film production has significant tools at its disposal to create distinctly immersive media products. These currently include, but are not necessarily limited to:

‘3D movies’ that maximize three-dimensional perception for the audience's visual immersion, ‘4D movies’ that add various sensory elements such as the vibration of the seat, water spray, wind, and scent, ‘VR’ (Virtual Reality) that implements vision-encompassing goggles that display virtual imagery, ‘AR’ (Augmented Reality) that superimposes virtual images into a real-time camera-view, ‘MR’ (Mixed Reality) comprising aspects of both VR and AR, various brands of ‘Holographic’ stage set-ups which use high-resolution LED projectors and angled mesh nets to provide an illusion of three-dimensionality to a projected virtual performer (essentially a contemporary upgrade to the ‘Pepper’s Ghost’ illusion of the Victorian era) and ‘Screen X’, a 270-degree screen arrangement.

If it was difficult to modify and transform moving-picture film, it has become far easier to alter filmed footage based on data and pixel dimensions. Through digital design and visual effects artistry, digital cinema emphasises visual illusions and spectacles that could not realistically be achievable in the physical world.

Digital cinema, as 'transparent representation of the outside world', loses the aspect of indexicality that characterises photographic images. The images produced in digital cinema that do not record tangible objects are still nevertheless creating indexes manipulated through 'Digital Mimicry', creating synthetic images that depend on referential entities that point to reality. This characteristic of digital images draws attention to the psychological effect of perceiving and recognizing the physical properties of the synthesized or generated image itself, not the actual existence of the referent.⁶⁵ Regardless of the presence of the referent, a digital image based on the audience's perceptual acceptance allows the audience to accept the fictional image in a mode of 'perceptual realism'⁶⁶.

In this new environment, wherein the film strip has been largely reduced to an anachronism, all established conceptions of the moving-picture medium become subject to reassessment – from the properties and specificities of the image to editing paradigms, narrative and signifiatory potentials, representations of time, space and motion, storage and dissemination, and economic logics. In short, the medium's very ontological existence has come due for reappraisal.

In digital cinema, "long takes" and elaborate camera movements often show a tendency to project a reality by emphasizing different elements of spatial and temporal dimensions, respectively. The long takes in the film *Gravity* (2013) particularly exemplify the immersive aspect of contemporary filmmaking, through non-causal and unrealistic movements of the camera (placing the viewer in the subject position of an observer experiencing a zero-gravity environment) that periodically reverse the viewpoint by 180 degrees. This unusual camera movement offers a heightened awareness of the spatial parameters of the film-viewing experience, while the

⁶⁵ D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, (Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 149.

⁶⁶ Stephen Prince, "True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory", *Film Quarterly*, Vol.49, No.3 (1996): p. 199

interspersed with notably long-take scenes brings the film's subject and the audience's world into close contact under the same temporal duration. The slow-paced shots, almost still, inserted between the continuous streams of highly-kinetic footage, emphasize a special moment in the narrative, encouraging the audience to be immersed.

The long-takes of *Gravity* aim to illuminate the fluid movement of the subject entering or leaving the centre of the frame from the periphery, which functions like a shot corresponding to a general film cut. If the classical method of representation is based on the 'suture' of the shot-reverse-shot convention (that is, the second shot replaces the absence of the first shot, and is based on a chain of images that creates the illusion of coherent continuity) the digital long take, by violating the classical method of representation in an identifiable dimension, expands the invisible realm of the external scene.

The long take is relatively straightforward to comprehend but surprisingly ambiguous to define. A simple but effective description is of a single shot with an unusually long duration: a parcel of time within the duration of the film wherein editing is absent. Whilst statistical evidence demonstrates a gradation towards ever-faster-paced editing in mainstream cinema, many filmmakers have –and continue to – employ long takes. Directors from a wide range of cultures, filmmaking traditions and time periods have consistently utilised the long take as a form of cinematic and narrative technique. Whilst the general trend may be toward frequent cutting (largely in order to circumvent the costly technical challenges involved with producing perfectly-staged long takes), they can still be found in mainstream Hollywood films. With the development of Steadicam technology and Computer Generated Imagery (CGI), productions have pushed technical boundaries in the pursuit of more ambitious, complex and creative manifestations of the long take.

In his essay, *The Ontology of the Photographic Image* André Bazin expresses a belief that the photographic image, and by extension film, is separate from other modes of artistic representation. Bazin argues the camera has the facility of creating an index (an imprint) of its referent, because 'the photograph as such and the object in itself share a common being, after the fashion of a fingerprint'.⁶⁷ In addition to this, he writes, 'now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were', thus integrating the concept of a shot's length with that of its content.⁶⁸ Content and duration are, therefore, essential to Bazin's ontology of cinema as the camera is able to reflect the object's existence through the time in which it was recorded. The stress placed on the camera's mechanics, its ability to create an 'imprint' of what it records through time, establishes the foundation of Bazin's theory. The indexical relationship between object and referent necessarily achieves a form of reality effect that other art forms cannot match. This camera's ability to capture what it records through time is the essential characteristic of the cinema. The representation of space and time leads Bazin to advocate the use of the long take, stating that 'the long take enables the image [to be] evaluated not according to what it adds to reality but what it reveals of it'.⁶⁹ For Bazin, the long take utilises the camera's unique power to directly capture the ambiguities of reality.

Bazin's theory leads him to advocate for certain types of long takes. He argues that the combination of deep focus and the long take helps to bring the 'spectator into a relation with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality'.⁷⁰ Having the entirety of a depicted space in focus means that the viewer is allowed to view the image with a greater degree of independence. This assertion signifies that the viewer is able to perceive any part of the recorded space without manipulation, an experience that

⁶⁷ André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume 1*, trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1967), p. 15.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

corresponds with how we experience the world. Bazin's analysis of the long take is therefore framed as much by *how viewers see* as by the style's ability to record an independent or objective reality. By explicitly combining the issue of perception with the parameters of cinematic camera operation, the essay is concerned (in part) with the structures that underpin the viewer's experience, both in the world and in the cinema.

The long take offers the viewer the opportunity to consider the image in its entirety and engage with particular details that they find resonant. The viewer's 'independence' and access to a plethora of clearly-resolved detail is facilitated by the technical means of shooting at a 'deep' aperture setting, resulting in both the foreground and background being in focus. Rather than the director or editor forcing a specific mode of passive, guided viewership through – for example– shallow focus on a particular component of a larger scene, or rapid cutting between a specific and limited set of viewpoints, the long take can enable the viewer to take on a more active, contemplative or personalized mode of viewership, given the option and the time to perceive a wider range of scene-elements. This aspect of Bazin's thinking on cinema forms a crucial point in *The Ontology of the Photographic Image*; that it is from the viewer's attention, interpretation and will that the meaning of the image in part derives.

Furthermore, Bazin's interest in the spectator's perception of *The Great Diptych: Geology and Relief* reflects his criticism in *The Ontology of the Photographic Image*. When defining the different levels of realism that operate in a film, he posits 'a psychological realism which brings the spectator back to the real conditions of perception, a perception that is never completely determined a priority.'⁷¹ ~~Whilst Bazin has argued about the ontological basis of the camera's mechanics and the form of~~

⁷¹ André Bazin, *Orson Welles: A Critical View*, trans. by Jonathan Rosenbaum (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 80.

objectivity, Here Bazin boldly asserts an experiential dimension to the viewer's engagement, suggesting that filmic realism is related to the way the viewer experiences reality.

His conception of the long take in relation to realism is also tied to the viewer's perception. Bazin's argument in favour of deep focus and the long take is, therefore, partly phenomenological, using the viewer's experience of the image as evidence for the greater level of realism that is achieved. The long take, for Bazin, builds upon the camera's ability to provide a filmic equivalent to human perception. The stress placed on the viewer's ability to assay an entire scene reflects the importance placed on perception.

By characterising the long, static shot of *Magnificent Ambersons*(1942)'s kitchen scene as 'tantamount to making us witness the event in the position of a man helplessly strapped to an armchair', he suggests the idea that the camera is used to approximate the viewer's visual field. It also indicates how Bazin conceptualizes the camera in a filmic context - as a proxy and catalyst of a viewer's embodied perceptual faculties and affective response. He further argues that the fixity of the shot is central to developing the scene's sense of mounting tension; the static placement of the camera in the long take makes the viewer painfully aware of both the partiality of its vision and the helplessness of having no agency with which to act upon the unfolding events. Bazin's analysis of this scene indicates how his work on the long take expanded his previous ontological conceptions of realism to encompass a more experiential dimension.

Engagement with the experiential aspects of film is important not only to grasping Bazin's conception of the long take, but also because of the parallels it introduces to the work of phenomenological film theory, which represents a mode of enquiry that has the potential to open up new ways of considering the long take. Maurice

Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) remains one of the most important contributions to the field of existential phenomenology, wherein the author asserts that consciousness, the body and the world are inseparably entwined and engaged:

Perception is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them. The world is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making; it is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions. Truth does not 'inhabit' only 'the inner man', or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself.⁷²

As opposed to conceptualising the world as external, Merleau-Ponty sought to understand the ways in which it is constituted by human perception and consciousness. For existential phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty, knowledge stems from the experience of phenomena through the body and its senses. The notion that the body is fundamental to the experience and understanding of the world is vital to the subsequent development of phenomenological film theory.

By stating that film has its own conceptual body, phenomenological film theory proposes that the cinematic experience can be described and understood as fundamentally embodied. As a result of this, connections can be made between the expressive and perceptual capabilities of the film and the experience of the viewer. The long take has special significance in this conception, when examined in relation to how

⁷² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London; New York: Routledge, 2005) p. xii(Preface).

style embodies the camera. That is, in the same way that a viewer's knowledge of the world occurs through the embodied experience of phenomena, the temporal and spatial continuity manifested in the long take creates a comparable mode of embodiment, one that lends itself to phenomenological enquiry.

Suppose we assign the camera its own individuality in the fictional world. In that case, it means that the camera is able to transcend its mechanical body in fiction; it functions as a proxy for – literal– embodiment. In Michelangelo Antonioni's film *The Passenger* (1975), a long take at the end of the film has the camera slowly track towards and then through a very small gap in the bars of a window. The gap appears to be too small for a full-scale production camera of the time. The sequence is not merely significant because it seems like an impossible orchestration. Rather, the shot exemplifies how the camera possesses its own comportment in the context of the fiction, one that embodies and transcends its material status in the recording. This is not to say the camera in the act of filming and the camera in the film world are completely different - they are not. They share a range of physical and perceptual capabilities. Yet the camera body in the narrative transcends these. A more recent film demonstrates this point in another way. In *Panic Room* (2002), one long take has the camera move around a house, following two men as they try to break in. The camera undertakes a series of elaborate and seemingly impossible actions, such as passing in and out of a keyhole. The shot was accomplished through a combination of traditional filming and Computer Generated Imagery (CGI). The use of CGI raises complex issues not just regarding what constitutes a long take, but the role of the camera therein. A productive reframing of this debate is to understand that the camera functions as a discrete object within the fictional world of a film, and that it possesses its own status in the fiction.

The justification of the camera's embodiment resides in the way the particular long takes indicate certain physical characteristics of the camera. Essentially, for the duration of a shot, the camera is materially situated in the fictional space. Without

cutting, the camera has to either physically move (or alter the settings and components of its optical apparatus) to re-orient its field-of-view. The embeddedness of the camera in the film world is a mark of its narrative body, because human embodiment imposes similar requirements - humans are also situated in the world and must physically re-orientate ourselves to move. In long take sequences, the camera and human bodies share certain characteristics. The ways in which we move and see are always-already embodied. However, other factors determine the particular qualities of the camera that make it a uniquely cinematic body. Its ability to adjust focal length, for instance, is indicative of the difference between camera optics and human visual faculties.

Nevertheless, the connection between the camera's embodiment and the spectator's body is vital to explaining how we relate to the film world. The camera's form of embodiment is uniquely cinematic - in the way it moves and sees. It is apparent that our experience of the long take depends on an ability to somehow understand and connect with the camera's body. Although it is evident that embodiment is not a fixed or absolute state of being—subject to vicissitudes of health, age and culture as all bodies are—it is this variegation that allows us to relate to a range of embodied practices and states and, in a cinematic context, enables us to internalize the camera's heightened state as a body in certain long takes. When the camera glides through scenery in a film, our awareness of movement and our understanding of navigating through space creates a form of embodied understanding. The camera's motion is not analogous to human motion, but the latitude of human embodied experience facilitates a perceptual response to camera motion nonetheless.



Figure 6: Soon-Hak Kwon, Conversation with Rose Wylie I, 2017, 147x170cm, Giclee Print

A perfect photograph for a painter [Practice No.5 portrait]

After arriving at her house in Faversham, Kent, I had a conversation with the British artist Rose Wylie regarding her frustration that photographs of her paintings do not simulate her painting in reality. I then looked around her garden, determining where I would shoot her portrait. Although I was planning to blur out the background completely, it was as important to carefully frame the surrounding area as this background, though out of focus, would nevertheless still provide a general sense of the surrounding space in the final image. I found a place near the backdoor to the garden where she could sit on a chair, directly under some leafy hanging branches. I would be able to include the silhouette house of her house in the background. I invited her to sit, and explained what I would do.

The first step was to shoot a wide-angle test image, in order to judge what would be captured in a panorama-format shot. She was not interested in the photoshoot and asked me how much time it would take. I wanted her to be as still as possible for a long time - not because of the low sensitivity of film as was the case for 19th century portrait photographers, but because I intended to take multiple shots to construct the whole image later; a process that can take some time to complete. However, she could move out of the frame after firstly shooting her figure: the rest of the shoot would be capturing the background. I discussed the pose briefly. The posture did not matter – her comfort was given priority. I attached a 135mm lens, adding an extension tube to be able to focus closer than the standard minimum focal distance of that lens - which set the distance between the camera's focal plane and the focal point to 1 meter. At this distance, the frame of a single shot captured around one-third of the face. Once I attained the critical exposure of part of her face and locked in the lens' focal point, I finished taking pictures covering the facial area and told her that she could be relieved of her pose and

expression. Then, after shooting her upper body , I continued to shoot the surrounding area. As I had expected, the focus point was so shallow as to render almost nothing in focus but the eye. At this point, it was difficult to determine where I was shooting,- not only was most of the subject out of focus, but even the one dedicated area of focus was only partially so. I later discovered (during the process of digitally joining the separate images together) that there were misalignments in several frames due to movement when I was shooting her torso - which I had to rectify in editing software, accounting for discordances of the light and some missing parts of the frame. I generally have to shoot images that overlap by at least one-third of the frame to ensure a seamless stitching-together process. However, as it was my first time shooting with the 135mm lens's 18° of diagonal angle of view (compared to a much wider 45mm lens's 51.4° diagonal angle of view), there were errors in the camera movement between each picture.

The aforementioned missing parts metaphorically resemble the blind spots of my vision. Although I was scanning the space, looking through the camera lens as I would do so with one of my eyes, there was a missing picture within the imaginary frame to be completed. Our vision is not analogous to a camera. From a digital image perspective, human vision is generally accepted as 576 megapixels of resolution. However, a single, short glance at a given subject only resolves the equivalent of 7 megapixels of information, which are packed into the two degrees of optimal acuity coverage, with the rest of our field of view resolving approximately 1 megapixel's-worth of extra information. A camera captures an entire frame at once, whereas our eyes move around. The brain amalgamates its constant stream of information into vision – that is, our sight. The image created by the eyeball alone during a single glance would hardly even be acceptable by today's accepted standards of digital camera resolution. Furthermore, unlike a camera, our brain processes certain unnecessary stimuli out, and we possess blind spots - literal blank spaces in our vision where the optic nerve meets up with the retina and no visual information is received. In other words, our vision ignores what does not matter; we generally only see what our automatic cognitive processes deem immediate or important in a particular context.

What I intended to create in this portrait was as close an approximation of human vision as possible. I captured the images using a 35mm format, 36 megapixel (36 million pixel counts) 36 mm × 24 mm plane sensor, which produced a final (stitched) image consisting of 46833x52727 effective pixels (2469 million pixel counts), which simulates an image taken by an approximately 13-inch square format sensor. Also, the diagonal view angle of 18° was expanded into approximately that of 110° angle of view, which is equivalent to the focal length of a 15mm lens in 35mm format. Given that current 35mm CCD sensors resolve an image quality similar to that of a medium format film, the resolution could even be a simulation of a much larger format compared to traditional film. However, by calculating these numbers, I do not want to assert that I intended to achieve a certain number of pixel counts in the image - rather, the effort was an attempt to simulate an image captured by an 'imaginary camera', an image captured by mind. The whole digital imagery industry has dramatically increased its resolution standards over the last decade with the help of advancements in computing; the resolution of this image is suggestive of an image from the future, but considering that there would likely never be a demand for these kinds of pixel-counts outside specialist scientific or military applications and hardware, this image is much more akin to an imaginary, non-existent camera.

The attempt to produce an image as close to human visual faculties as possible was a process of deconstruction whilst shooting and reconstruction whilst stitching the puzzle-like arrangements of details. Photography is different from what we see in reality, but the medium's history as an ostensibly 'accurate' representational technology and the advanced resolving-power of contemporary imaging tools invite an intuitive –if critically flawed – conflation of the two. In the aforementioned conversation with Rose Wylie, I told her a photographic image is another version of reality. The photographic image interprets reality differently depending on which format and lens are deployed in the process. Moreover, the real world does not stand still as depicted in a photograph: it lacks 'time'. But how close is a photograph to the real thing? And how close are other representational technologies to a photograph? As computer rendering power has advanced, the quality of computer-generated imagery seen in films and video games has

become decidedly *photo-realistic*. In the film *Rogue One*(2016), two deceased actors have been convincingly represented using computer-generated image technologies. We may presently be able to differentiate between a real person and a virtual representation with relative ease; but in this context, a future in which distinguishing one from the other becomes more difficult seems likely.

Our eyes cannot resolve more than a certain amount of information at once; only a particular part of reality can be perceived at a given time. This is not to say that a rich field of details is inherently superfluous. I argue that there lies a desire towards the representation of the world and, more importantly, owning an object: a ‘hard copy’ of the world, which is embedded throughout the trajectory of the history of image. There has always been a desire for an immersive virtual version of reality - the image - that suggests that we are never satisfied with the world as it is. I observe this desire with some detachment at this point in my research aware that the metonymic desire is never meant to fulfil the virtual space. Also, the dilemma of digital photography is that –as it is possible to capture as many images as the memory card allows– there is a tendency to shoot an immense amount of photographs which often exceeds one’s cognitive capacity for meaningful scrutiny of those photographs in the future, thus losing the sense of existence in the present tense. We, now, only save the present for later. This fantasy of obtaining a hard copy of life is a relief from the painful awareness that time’s arrow points in only one direction. However, it is never as real as the real.



Figure 6: Soon-Hak Kwon, Artist Room Project 01(view-1), 2020, 420 x 520 x 300cm, Giclée Print on Canvas, installation



Figure 6: Soon-Hak Kwon, Artist Room Project 01(view-2), 2020, 420 x 520 x 300cm, Giclée Print on Canvas, installation



Figure 6: Soon-Hak Kwon, Artist Room Project 01(detail), 2020

Artist room project

[Practice No.6 diorama installation]

This artwork explores virtual experiences by reproducing the panoramic view of the four-sided studio space in the form of an oval-shaped, full-scale model. Additionally, the shooting of over 500 photos was achieved via an unusual process; I remotely directed the shooting as I faced disruption in my summer 2020 travelling schedule due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The significance of making a representation of a particular place in another, wholly separate space has taken on a new aspect and relevance in this current situation, in which movement, stasis and the substitution of tangible, embodied presence for virtual equivalents have become central topics in social discourse.



Figure 6: Soon-Hak Kwon, Before a day overwhelms a tree-1, 2021, 160x188cm, Giclée Print



Figure 6: Soon-Hak Kwon, Before a day overwhelms a tree-2, 2021, 160x200cm, Giclée Print

Before a day overwhelms a tree

[Practice No.7 landscape]

This series is an extension of the series *A Tree*, an experiment in making photographic works using panorama and compositing techniques of stitching individually shot photos together. It differs from conventional panorama photographs in that the final format of the images is closer to a square than to the long, horizontal format that typifies panoramic photography. This is due to my interest in delivering a comprehensive view from both a horizontal and vertical line; hence, the whole scene is represented by spatial experience. It is much like David Hockney's "Joiner" photographic collage works, but it differs from those insofar as the seams are hidden, as if it is a single photograph. In other words, it presents, to the viewer, a seamless experience of the time and space I have experienced. Also, as it consists of multiple individual close-up shots, all parts of the image are focused – an image built with details. Because both the foreground and background are in focus, the viewer is afforded the freedom to visually explore inside the frame. Consequently, the all-over-focus effect, in turn, becomes a no-focus image. By the same token, the immensely wide-angled open view creates a closed space of its world within the image.

Although it seems to depict a particular subject, the ostensible subject is distinctly secondary - much as was the case for the 'portrait' image discussed in this thesis. In a way, it is another "nothing" disguised as genre photography. A large portion of this is due to the technical process it undergoes, which enables me to include an observable and sharply-resolved horizontal line throughout; when the entirety of the photograph is in focus, it creates an effect of experiencing both closeness and distance simultaneously. Because the notion of distance to the subject is blurred, it summons the 'nothing'. In the end, it presents itself as perfect photograph in terms of being exceptionally well-resolved, focused and exposed throughout - while paradoxically signifying 'nothingness'.

Summary

‘Detail’ means ‘photographic.’

In photography, "detail" typically refers to the clarity, sharpness, and distinguishable resolution of the elements within an image. When a photograph is said to have a lot of detail, it means that the fine textures, patterns, and nuances in the scene are clearly visible and well-defined.

Punctum comes from the detail.

Barthes' *punctum* refers to a detail or element in a photograph that “punctures” or “wounds” the viewer emotionally. It is something that elicits an instantaneous, subjective, affective response in the viewer - often bypassing rational interpretation.

Detail lives outside the signified world.

In the context of the punctum, detail exists beyond the realm of the signified or the intended meaning.

The Punctum emerges from an incidental detail that the photographer did not consciously intend to include. Even if the inclusion *was* deliberate, there is no predictable causal connection between the particular detail included and the individual, uncontrolled affective response that the punctum elicits, the mechanism for which is opaque and resides exclusively in the unique experiences, faculties and attendant psychological makeup and consciousness of the viewer. The punctum, then, comes –for all intents and purposes– from ‘nothing’.

In the era of digital photography, capturing extreme detail is both possible and accessible; contemporary imaging technologies compensate for the disappearance of the index by offering ever-higher resolutions.

Immersion through detail in punctum was replaced with a virtual experience.

The pleasure of digital imaging is in its casting-off of truth-claims as the index recedes. In the absence of the index, the photograph takes on a nature and aesthetic of ‘nothing’.

David Hockney stated in his book *Secret Knowledge*(2001) that image-making in the 20th century was characterized by the tyranny of the singular, lens-based optical image, leading him to adopt a non-linear, Cubism-inspired approach to perspective through collaged arrangements of multiple photographs in order to break away from the one-point linearity that restricts visual experience. Visual representation has progressed beyond the optical eye to the computer eye in the digital age. Digital technology, which has become ubiquitous in our lives, has returned to the punctum, becoming an intermediary that allows us to see details. As the detail is nothing, the text receded whilst the format remained.

In an indexicality-less world, then nothing becomes everything.

Our eyes can only perceive three dimensions. However, when the element of ‘time’ is considered, the situation becomes four-dimensional. The frustration that comes from not seeing time with our eyes and how to overcome that lack - could it be in detail?

Only if there are more and more pixels.

Would this enable us to visually apprehend more of –if not all– of our existence?

Is this the desire behind our technological development?

It may be absurd to discuss the punctum in my practice,

as the punctum is an inadvertent byproduct, unrelated to the creator's intention.

But wouldn't it be possible to conceptualize that experience and communicate it?

My practice reveals detail through constant removal of as much signifiatory potential as possible. Subject matter, aesthetic expression, ready recognisability as *being a photograph* - all are consciously nullified to the greatest extent. All that is intended to remain is the repeated summoning of time. 'That-has-been.' Or, better; 'just-as-is'.

The first major iteration of this practice -the *History Of* series- presented close-up, high-resolution photographic images of gallery walls upon which artworks had previously been installed. By excluding any other subject matter other than the textural detail of the walls (particularly any visually-identifiable objects and perspectival cues) from the image, the series constituted an experiment in visually representing:

- Perceptual experience prior to the development of a distinct concept of selfhood (as articulated by Freud in the context of infancy and Isakower in that of later stages of socio-physiological development),
- The detail as an irreducible characteristic of the medium (in both the technical sense of resolving more accurate visual representations than other visual mediums and that of the subjectively evocative Barthesian punctum),
- The photograph's deficiency in fulfilling human desire to arrest and possess a moment of life or part of the world, given its compression or exclusion of time, space, and all

other sensory faculties –beyond the visual– that constitute human perception of a moment or object (as narrativized in Calvino’s *The Adventures of a Photographer*).

Photographically reproducing the surface of a white wall was problematic, as the photographic image tends to appear darker than the real white wall when installed on it –a result of the photographic image representing the world with tones. Highlight details became indistinct when the tones were brightened in post-processing, and made the whole image appear greyish when darkened slightly. I had to find an appropriate tone balance for this – a tonal range that enhances the surface detail while maintaining a recognisably-white overall tonality. I overcame this issue by installing mounts that allow the prints to protrude a small distance from the wall, painting the surrounding walls with tones other than white and shaping and directing the gallery lights to illuminate only the image plane.

In this white wall project, the absence of instantly recognisable objects of consideration (in terms of the clearly-delineated artworks presented within the carefully-neutralised surrounding space that is typical of a gallery environment) problematises the idea of ‘value’- there is no readily identifiable subject represented in the white wall images, and later installation projects present nothing beyond visually-contiguous images of the physical space in which they immediately reside. The photo-installation projects *everything*, *Partitions*, and *Elsewhere* extend this concept by integrating seamlessly into their surroundings from multiple viewing angles using unframed large-scale prints and excluding all visual signifiers bar those that communicate the near-past state of those surroundings and the process of installing the work itself.

If the white wall is semiotically coded as ‘neutral’ space in service of an artwork and its aura, the spatially integrated, unframed large-print installation communicates a negation of its own possible value as a precious object that can be possessed. It signifies the medium, act and state of photography as one of deficiency, and that my practice explicitly interrogates what photography is. This is evident in the *everything*

installation, insofar as it invites the viewer to enter a space that functions as a metonymical camera, wherein the installed images encompass the past, present and future. Whilst a photograph presents an image from the past, the moment captured is forever lost, serving only as a representation of history in the future. Elsewhere, a "photographic sculpture" project concludes this practice-based research that centers around the Detail. In order to apprehend the Detail in its entirety, an image must be painstakingly considered and calibrated in its capture, processing, materialization and spatial situation to minimize or negate its representational import.

As such, my methodology at this stage is much concerned with eliminating every element that signifies anything other than a narrow frame of time and space that is recognizably proximate to that which the viewer occupies in viewing the work. Toward these ends, the process of creating the image becomes a recognisable element of the image; the markings visible on the top and bottom of the image - which were my prior marking of the exact spot where the panels would be installed - remain intact in both the physical and pictorial space, overlapping the real and the virtual. This foregrounds visualising the process of the actual making of the image/installation; it represents nothing but the process of producing the artwork itself, thus further reducing the possibility of any representational, communicative import beyond the Detail of the thing-in-itself. In the end, the existence of 'nothing' is revealed through this absence of any subject / message in any conventional sense established over the course of two centuries of photography. Furthermore, an image viewed exclusively within the precise space it was made refers only to itself (and perhaps also to the space on a secondary level, for which galleries, culturally constructed as aesthetically/semiotically neutral – provide an appropriately nullified setting). The work thus achieved the state of 'nothing' and revealed the aesthetics of the digital punctum by presenting an image that points only to itself, or; *A photograph of The Photograph*.

The practical difficulties encountered in this research were in ascertaining the correct scale/perspective and tone/colour adjustments in relationship to the space. These

two aspects could easily have been disregarded if the image had been separated from the time and space in which it was taken. However, I had to calculate how an image should exactly match how the eye perceives the space. In the installation projects, the main concern was the contiguity between the gallery's physical divider-grid system and their pictorial representation on the image-plane. Also, the tone and colour adjustments were more complicated than the white-wall images in the *History Of* series, as the edge of the image must convincingly intersect with the physical ceiling and floor of the space. This is impossible to implement with perfect exactitude, even with well-practiced digital capturing and editing techniques executed using calibrated cameras, monitors and printers. Instead, I had to physically revisit the place with test prints to actually compare the likeness between embodied perception of reality and the print. However, the attempt to surpass photography's properties using photography revealed the impossibility of reproducing reality in its entirety. After all, owning a moment is unattainable. It is only possible to catch a glimpse of the transcendence of reality through detail - with this work, I consider my practice to have advanced significantly from its earlier iterations in terms of constructing images and viewing experiences that makes catching that transcendent glimpse possible.

In the delicate interplay between embodied and disembodied elements within the photographic sculpture project "Elsewhere," a nuanced paradox emerges, unfolding within the layers of artistic exploration. It is a dance between presence and absence, substance and void, materiality and ethereality, carefully calibrated through the sustained rigour and experimentation of conceptual artistry. The very essence of 'Elsewhere' resides in its endeavor to encapsulate the tangible gallery space within a multi-faceted photographic prism, refracting multiple spatial dimensions and temporal intricacies. The triangular column, standing resolute yet transparent, becomes a conduit for this paradox, embodying the tangibility and physical affordances offered by the gallery space while beckoning the viewer into a perceptual scheme that defies those conventional boundaries. This paradox takes root in the juxtaposition of the photograph as a concrete, two-dimensional representation and its metamorphosis into a sculptural

entity, transcending the confines of flatness. This marriage of the photographic image with the triangular column introduces a tension, a dialogue between the inherent flatness of the printed medium and the sculptural assertion of dimensionality.

As the viewer navigates the triangular form, the two-fold plane on one side beckons, blurring the lines between what is physically present and what is merely an illusion. The column, with its three sides and four faces, becomes a metaphorical bridge between the embodied reality of the gallery space and the disembodied projection encapsulated by illusory representational schemes. Tension surfaces in the deliberate act of emphasizing the *process* of creation, where the project's very substance converges with its concept. 'Elsewhere' distances itself from conventional subject matters, dissolving into a representation of nothing but the meticulous journey of crafting art. This deliberate elimination of subject matter makes the intentional paradox that underpins the work readily apparent; that the further the subject dissolves, the more potent the details become.

In this precise choreography, the project inches closer to a photographic representation of nothing. The elusive concept of 'nothing' reveals itself in the absence of the subject, and the photograph, viewed exclusively within the site of its conception and execution folds back upon itself visually, referentially and conceptually. Here, the tension arises not only from the paradox of material and immaterial but from the remnants; the fragments of large format photography, the vestiges of indexicality, and the echoes of art aesthetics—all lingering as a testament to what was and what now remains.

The photographic-installation practice in this research resides in a deliberate divergence from the conventional pursuit of aesthetic experience in favour of designing an encounter for the viewer that follows the logic of cinematic embodiment. In this endeavour, I drew parallels between cinema and photography, acknowledging their shared utilization of light and lenses while being cognizant of cinema's distinctive differences to photography in terms of the centrality of time and narrative in cinematic practices. Central to my methodology is the nuanced deployment of the modified

panorama technique, a device that not only accentuates the cinematic phenomenological encounter in the resultant images but also encodes temporality into both the process of creation and the final visual outcome.

As employed in my practice, the panorama technique mandates a considerable temporal investment in meticulously capturing the scene in-camera.. This temporal dimension becomes ever more complex as disparate temporalities are seamlessly amalgamated into the final composite images. The viewer, in turn, is compelled to invest their time into an illusory but perceptually convincing perspectival and spatial engagement, thereby underscoring the immersive and durational nature of the cinematic encounter. This deliberate manipulation of time aligns with my overarching goal: to foster an embodied experience that transcends the traditional parameters of two-dimensional, temporally-singular and unreflexively-disembodied aesthetic appreciation.

Integrating cinematic modes and mechanisms into my practice in this way has enabled me to articulate that the camera transcends mere materiality (or functional objecthood as a recording apparatus) when situated within a spatial narrative. This transcendence is elucidated through protracted takes that highlight the physical characteristics of the camera within the fictional, scenographic space. It is imperative to acknowledge the embodied nature that the camera and human subject share during these extended sequences. However, my exploration extends beyond mere parallels, emphasizing the unique cinematic qualities inherent in the camera's embodiment (such as its capacity to operate across a range of focal lengths and aspect ratios - a feature distinct from human visual faculties) and seeking to identify, articulate (and create) scenarios in which these inherent characteristics might be brought into coalescence with those of the corporeal experience and perceived physical affordances of the viewer toward an encounter that collapses perceptual differentiation between the two - another form of the *nothing* that my work centers around.

A pervasive paradox and tension permeate my artistic oeuvre, encapsulated in the delicate interplay between the embodied and disembodied elements. This disturbance of perception, a deliberate manoeuvre, prompts viewers to engage closely

and deliberately, encouraging a deceleration of gaze and an imperative presence within the spatial narrative. The demand for meticulous observation and unhurried absorption serves as a catalyst for the viewer's immersion in the intricate layers of the visual narrative, dismantling preconceived notions of spatial and temporal certainties.

In the process of completing this research, my photographic practice has begun to explore the nuances of cinematic embodiment, inviting viewers into a realm where the inherent tension between the embodied and disembodied engenders a profound disturbance of perception. This deliberate disruption serves as an invitation to contemplative and deliberate engagement, urging viewers to unravel the intricacies of spatial narratives and temporal amalgamations, thereby redefining the parameters of visual experience within an ostensibly photographic, yet conceptually cinematic paradigm.

Just as I once experienced the simultaneously narrowed and expansive perception, undifferentiated ego and embodied-yet-unbounded sensations afforded by the Isakower Phenomenon, the success of my work hinges upon eliciting that fleeting moment, before and beneath rational comprehension, contemplation and linguistic framing, where one's perceptual apparatus is liberated from accurate recognition of spaces, objects, affordances and images. An encounter with the *nothing*.

The critical reappraisal of photographic "detail" that my practice and research takes as its central concern underscores the conceptual and practical compatibility of the detail and the "nothing." Both concepts have become inseparable elements in my works, pointing towards a practice that ventures into the complexities and nuances of nothingness. My engagement with detail has become a tool for questioning the reality of images, pushing the boundaries of representation by disrupting both mechanisms of visual signification and the schematic separation of 'work' and 'exhibition space', inviting viewers to confront the subtleties that are nested within the conventional visual and symbolic significance of photographic images.

As my research progresses, new works will delve into the evocative potential of immersive detail in virtual environments. The continued exploration of detail remains central to my artistic endeavors, maintaining a focus on photography's medium-specificity, its spatio-temporal functions, the perceptual faculties involved in photographing and encountering photographs, and the metacognition required to represent and communicate these in material and experiential forms. Through a critical reappraisal of the "Detail" in my practice, this research ultimately aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how detail functions as a visual language unto itself, shaping our perception and engagement with the visual world.

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