

Haunting Legacies

Photography and the Invisible



Haunting Legacies

Photography and the Invisible

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INTRODUCTION

Photography and the Invisible

Some universities had art collections before Vassar College was even founded. In 1832 the artist John Trumbull donated to Yale University more than one hundred paintings portraying the American Revolution. That set of artworks, which formed the core of the first university art museum, marked it with strong patriotic sentiments. Vassar, however, was the first educational institution to include an art museum in its original charter. At its opening, in 1865, what is today the Francis Lehman Loeb Art Center was conceived as an integral component of the College's liberal arts curriculum. The remarkable collection of Hudson School landscape paintings, which Matthew Vassar gave to the College as part of its inaugural endowment, has helped many generations of students forge a relation with the artistic, environmental, and cultural context of their learning. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the first female institution embraced its art collection as a learning opportunity rather than as an instrument of patriotic edification.

Since 1865, many classes of Vassar students have enjoyed dedicated viewings of individual works of art, which faculty familiar with the collection typically requested to be shown as a complement to a specific syllabus. The recent launching of the e-museum has radically changed the accessibility of the collection, which anyone can now browse from the privacy of their own laptop.

I became aware of the e-museum from Dr. Elisabeth Nogrady, who coordinates the interaction between the Art Center and the academic programs. As she started to describe the wonders of this new resource, one quiet summer morning in my office, the idea of this exhibition started to take shape. It then took us several months to canvass the plan that has enabled the twenty-six students enrolled in my course, Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics, to act as curators of a show of their own.

Haunting Legacies: Photography and the Invisible, which was open to the public from March 3 until March 24, 2015, is the stunning result of this pedagogical experiment, the first exhibition originating in the Department of Philosophy at Vassar, or in any other Philosophy program in the country.

The singularity of this exhibition is the distinctly philosophical question it explores, which concerns not so much what photography makes visible, but what remains outside its frame: the invisible. The hypothesis underlying the exhibition is that, while photography calls attention to what it frames by making it visible, it also spectrally exposes who and what renders it possible: the invisible.

Like every other artistic medium, photography has its material constraints. Chief among them is the presence of an invisible hand, endowed with the power of the magic "click." In addition, the perspective from which the framing of photographs is organized remains invisible, along with the background against which the field of visibility is projected. But perhaps most crucial from an ontological standpoint is the fact that any photographic impression is the invisible interruption of the temporal flow, and thus a caesura in the fabric of the visible. Insofar as it produces moments that are frozen in time, photography gives us back the world in a way that we never actually experienced it, or have ever seen before. This means that no matter how descriptive or instantaneous photographs may be, they do not re-present reality as we experience it or see it, but rather create spectral images of it. Photographs are phantoms, which haunt us by injecting our perception of reality with the return of a past that was never truly present.

This hypothesis was elaborated in conversation with a number of texts that we discussed during the first few weeks of the course. Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* and Jacques Derrida's *Copy, Event, Signature*, for example, both claim that

photography is the spectral art par excellence, because it creates apparitions of a past that was never present in the crystallized form in which photography claims to record it.

This hypothesis has interesting critical implications. For example, could it be that it is precisely the spectral power of photography that has made it powerful in the political arena? More than any written reports, photographs of human rights abuses have succeeded in mobilizing public opinion worldwide, from the Nazi concentration camps to the killing fields in Cambodia. More recently, photographs of acts of police brutality have inspired popular uprisings, from Northern Africa to Yemen, from Ferguson to Staten Island. In all these disparate contexts, photography emerges as an anchor of collective memory and even of identity, at least for those collectivities based on the imperative not to forget.

In addition to Barthes and Derrida, two seminal thinkers of collective memory have been key to the class discussions that constitute the invisible of this exhibition: Gabriele Schwab and Andreas Huyssen. Born in Germany during the Nazi regime and raised in Germany after its demise, both Schwab and Huyssen have posed a number of questions that acquire additional depth when asked by Germans. What kind of truth do photographs of unimaginable violence capture? And how is violence transmitted across generations?

Haunting Legacies is heavily influenced by both of these thinkers. The exhibition's title literally follows in the footsteps of Schwab's own book, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (2010). Huyssen's volume, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (2003) revealed to us that indiscriminate and spectacular modes of memorializing can ultimately serve the cause of forgetting. On March 12, Huyssen traveled to Vassar and, after visiting the exhibition, agreed to hold a public conversation with me. Excerpts from it are

appended to this volume.

Haunting Legacies was displayed in the Focus Gallery, a space of passage and interrupted white walls. Anyone walking through it must have wondered how the conceptual program of the exhibition was executed by a group of twenty-six students. My first prompt to the class, which was divided into groups of four or five students, was to choose a theme from a list of six: Human, Animal, Machine, Being, Beauty, and Justice. Then I ask each group to pair two photographs from the Lehman Loeb and think of the pairing as an illustration, interrogation, contestation, or deconstruction of their theme. Lastly, each group had to record their discussions and draft a short text whose aim was to guide the visitor in making sense of the paired photographs in relation to the theme.

As Huyssen aptly noticed, “the combination, or perhaps contextualization, of photography through language” is an important element of the show. The relationship between image and words invokes the links but also the gaps that remain between what we see and what we read, another fold of invisibility that this exhibition exposes.

A remarkable fact about *Haunting Legacies* is that what started as a pedagogical experiment turned out to be a spontaneous site of encounter between courses on campus that were tackling connected issues. A cluster of classes visited the show and in a couple of occasions students-curators volunteered to act as facilitators of the discussions that occurred during their visit. Professor Katherine Hite (Political Science) brought her Freshman seminar on collective memory; Professor Amitava Kumar (English) brought two of his creative writing courses; and Professor Gabriele Cody (Drama) brought her advanced seminar on the question of the animal.

Finally, there is no doubt that the Spring 2015 semester has been a delicate time on the Vassar campus. To many students and faculty the mission of the College feels like a haunting apparition, both connected and disconnected from the forces that are reshaping its grounds. While we celebrate the presence of the most diverse student body to date, many feel under a normalizing and securitizing pressure. New bans are being implemented; new assessments by external consultants are being commissioned, aimed at measuring the local, and often quirky, Vassar ways against corporate and global parameters; many familiar faces have left. How to provide testimony for this delicate time? This exhibition's hope was to ask this question, inside the classroom and outside of it.

Those of us who love teaching know that the classroom is a magical space. At the start there is only a group of people, but very quickly, if one dares to be creative and takes the time to listen, the group starts to look like a *Wunderkammer*: a cabinet full of secret openings and endless surprises. This is the inspiration behind the creation of the exhibition that is the subject of this catalogue. *Haunting Legacies: Photography and the Invisible* is one class's attempt to interrogate not only what we see and what we are told, but what lies hidden behind it all.

Giovanna Borradori
May 2015

The Exhibition









Haunting Legacies

Photography and the Invisible

The rise of social media combined with the cellular phone's retooling as a camera has given photography a political role of unprecedented scale. Photographs of detainees in the Abu Ghraib prison and of police brutality in Ferguson and Staten Island have helped mobilize grassroots movements of resistance against violence and oppression. But what is it that these photographs convey that no text can possibly tell us? Does the moral outrage they foster stem solely from what they explicitly denounce, or does it also implicitly engage the normal flow of life that the photograph interrupts and that remains outside the frame?

Haunting Legacies is one class's exploration of photography's unique ability to point to the flow of normal life and the way in which it invisibly regulates whatever is being represented. The six pairs of photographs that constitute the exhibition, entitled Being, Human, Animal, Machine, Beauty, and Justice, interrogate the norms that establish differential allocations of visibility: what makes up the recognizably human, who is and is not publicly grievable, and finally, which lives are worth being recorded in collective memory.

While firmly rooted in the past, the photographic frame is the elusive testimony of a moment, presented to us in isolation, but that never existed as such. The experience of taking photographs, viewing photographs, and even being photographed opens a splintered temporality, because the click of each shot belongs simultaneously to yesterday, today, and tomorrow. All photographs have for this reason the spectral quality of disjoining time. In their role as curators, this group of students has taken it upon itself to offer hospitality to some of the specters that haunt them as members of the Vassar College community today. These are the tacit premises that, in their being taken for granted, exist unnoticed while framing the ways in which we think. As Roland Barthes said, "to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes."

BEING

How should we understand the question of being? We imagined these photographs as provocations to think of being in the shadows from which entities emerge, becoming recognizable and sensible.

Bellmer's work explores the many unresolvable ambiguities of these shadows. It is unclear whether what is being photographed is one or two, alive or dead, real or surreal. Even the horizontality of the legs raises the question: do they belong to a girl or woman, or a mannequin? The darkness at the center could be both a womb and a grave as the emergence of being from sublimation is neither of birth or of death.

Kertész's work demands photographic exposure regarding the ongoing nature of our becoming through time. The subject's endpoints blend together and trail out of the frame, surfaces disappearing into the background. Is this a merging or a separation? Is it one woman whose movement is captured over time, or two connected bodies?

We are unsure how to read these photographs because their grounding scenes are obscured: the identity of the subjects, the gender implications, and the temporality of their processes remain impossible to pin down. The duplicity of these images both complicates and liberates being in representation.

— Alexander Berry '14, August 2014, "18, Two Walls '12"



Hans Bellmer

German 1922–1975

La Femme (The Shadow), 1950

Color, white print with black hand coloring

Provenance: J. Paul Getty Center, Los Angeles, CA

Gift of J. Paul Getty Center, Los Angeles, CA

Artist's Edition: 1/100, printed 1950

Gift of J. Paul Getty Center, Los Angeles, CA

Provenance: J. Paul Getty Center, Los Angeles, CA

BEING

How should we understand the question of Being? We imagined these photographs as provocations to think of Being as the shadows from which entities emerge, becoming recognizable and nameable.

Bellmer's work explores the many unresolvable ambiguities of these shadows. It is unclear whether what is being photographed is one or two, alive or dead, real or unreal. Even the femininity of the legs raises the question: do they belong to a girl, a woman, or a mannequin? The darkness at the center could be both a womb and grave—is the emergence of beings from nothingness a matter of birth or of death?

Kertesz's work distends photographic exposure signaling the ongoing nature of our becoming through time. The subject's endpoints blend together and trail out of the frame, outlines disappearing into the background. Is this a merging or a separation? Is it one woman whose movement is captured over time, or two connected bodies?

We are unsure how to read these photographs because their grounding norms are obscured; the identity of the subjects, the gender implications, and the temporality of their processes remain impossible to pin down. The duplicity of these images both complicates and liberates Being in representation.

— Maranda Barry '16, Logan Pitts '18, Tom Wolfe '15



Hans Bellmer
German 1902-1975

La Poupée (The Doll), 1936
Gelatin silver print with later hand coloring

Purchase, E. Powis and Anne Keating Jones, class of 1943, Fund; 1981.48



André Kertész
American, b. Hungary 1894-1985

Nude #88, 1933, printed 1960s
Gelatin silver print

Anonymous gift; 2001.6.18

BEAUTY

Beauty is so unimportant as it is transient, a fleeting perceptual and affective experience. The ephemeral encounter with beauty connects our desires but our greatest attractions may conflict with its idealized form. These dominant constructions of beauty, particularly composed beauty, have historically been made into standards of humanity. Susceptibility to beautiful forms has become what humans admire in other humans, a means of selection between those who are and are not educated or civilized, and to the end those who are and are not human.

As we drift our gaze between these photographs we are reminded of the spectral nature of beauty. While we focus on one, we inevitably superimpose it above with the contours of the other, unsure of what exactly we recognize in each.

Cosman's *Beauty Needs* drifts within a frame of undefined space, securely held together by the skin of her own form. Her glowing shape has no identity, no history, and no substance, and yet we believe it is a human. Conversely, Weston's *Paper* is an extreme clarity that should reveal itself to us immediately: a solid three-dimensional object unencumbered by two-dimensional space. And yet it doesn't. We struggle to believe it is a person.

Other Galleries: 13, Ellen Pollock 13, Sophie Koster 14, David McHenry 14



KENNETH COSMAN

Untitled (2005)

Acrylic on paper

Gift of Anne and Bruce Mink, date of 1997 and 2001

KENNETH WESTON

Untitled (2005)

Acrylic on paper

Gift of Anne and Bruce Mink, date of 1997 and 2001

Gift of Anne and Bruce Mink, date of 1997 and 2001

Gift of Anne and Bruce Mink, date of 1997 and 2001

BEAUTY

Beauty is as omnipresent as it is transient, a fleeting perceptual and affective experience. The ephemeral encounter with beauty commands our desires but our private attractions may conflict with its idealized forms. These dominant constructions of beauty, particularly corporeal beauty, have historically been made into standards of humanity. Sensibility to beautiful forms has become what humans admire in other humans, a means of selection between those who are and are not educated, civilized, and in the end, those who are and are not human.

As we shift our gaze between these photographs we are reminded of the spectral nature of beauty. While we focus on one, we involuntarily superimpose its shape onto the contours of the other, unsure of what exactly we recognize in each.

Cramer's "Female Nude" drifts within a frame of undefined space, scarcely held together by the skin of her own form. Her ghostly shape has no identity, no tactility, and no substance, and yet we believe it is a human. Conversely, Weston's 'Pepper' is an extreme close up that should reveal itself to us unmistakably: a solid three-dimensional object immortalized in two-dimensional space. And yet it doesn't. We struggle to believe it is a pepper.

—Sophie Koeller '16, Max Goldstein '15, Ethan Hofmayer '15, Destin McMurry '16



Konrad Cramer,
American 1888-1963

Female Nude, 1939,
Gelatin silver print



Edward Weston
American 1886-1958

Pepper No. 30, 1930
Gelatin silver print

HUMAN

These two photos explore the spectacles of achievement and bereavement in their capacity to interrogate the humanity of the human. The body in each photograph is central, but their functionless reminds the viewer that the historical and political indications of these two dimensions of spectacle may not fully affect the universally human.

Gutierrez's *Twist Dive* portrays a female athlete plunging along an almost impossible diagonal. The spectacle of diving is an act of human achievement: the individual has the ultimate power to defy anything, including gravity.

Niederlander's photograph focuses on the spectator's position and taps into a moment suspended between the ordinary and the sublime: an anonymous woman talks on the phone recounting the spectacle before her. We are left with the fading impression of the act, not becoming witnesses of her witnessing, both to the spectacle and the spectator's own engaged response.

The parameters of the spectacle shift as we travel between these two images, between the seen and the seen, the past and the present, genre and genrelessness, to a place where the human exceeds the frame of both photographs.

Andy Ruiz '18, *Henry Butler* '15, *Katherine Dorr* '15, *Ben Leaky* '18, *Kristen Tolbert* '18



JAMES GUTHERSON
 Curator 1993-1998

Twist Dive, 1998

Medium: color print

Twist Dive, 1998

Medium: color print

Twist Dive, 1998

Medium: color print

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Twist Dive, 1998

Medium: color print

HUMAN

These two photos explore the spectacles of achievement and bereavement in their capacity to interrogate the humanity of the human. The body in each photograph is central, but their facelessness reminds the viewer that the historical and political imbrications of these two dimensions of spectacle may not fully efface the universally human.

Gutmann's Twist Dive portrays a female athlete plunging along an almost impossible diagonal. The spectacle of diving is an icon of human achievement: the individual has the ultimate power to defy anything, including gravity.

Nederlander's photograph focuses on the spectator's position and taps into a moment suspended between the ordinary and the sublime: an anonymous woman talks on the phone recounting the spectacle before her. We are left with the fleeting impression of this act: our becoming witnesses of her witnessing, both to the spectacle and the spectator's own anguished response.

The parameters of the spectacle shift as we travel between these two images, between the seer and the seen, the past and the present, power and powerlessness, to a place where the human exceeds the frame of both photographs.

—Arshy Azizi '16, Jeremy Burke '15, Katherine Durr '15, Erin Leahy '16, Korina Tolbert '16





John Gutmann
German 1905-1998

Twist Dive, 1934
Gelatin silver print

Purchase, E. Powis and
Anne Keating Jones, class
of 1943, Fund; 1981.22

Eric Nederlander
American, b. 1966

*Woman on cell phone watches
fire*, 2001
Digital ink print

Purchase, Advisory Council
for Photography and ad-
ditional funds provided
by Lee Balter, Mario Del
Pozzo, Steven Roffer,
Margaret Smith-Bourke and
Scott Wilder; 2002.20.17

ANIMAL

Only questions

Why do we grow millions of animals under the eagle eye of the state? Why is the Animal Act that which allows us to hold them in place, but also to domesticate them? Why is the Animal therefore another name for the proximity of a creature? Why, and in particular, for something and something different? Can we formulate a definition of humanity that does not seek to separate the species of the Animal and of the domesticated? Perhaps.

The Animal is a creature that is not the Animal. For the government bodies we are looking at the animal as to the domesticated. Can we distinguish between the two? As Walker said: "The animal is like an object of something, something, something, other people."

What if we stopped playing with Walker's learning about the animal? What if we have bodies who appear in the human world as something else, as a background to the animal? What if we could see the animal with their animals in background? What if we could see the animal in the possibility that it is going on in the world, the world of us, and that we have been considering the animal in the world of the animal?

John 10: 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 885, 886, 887, 888, 889, 890, 891, 892, 893, 894, 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917, 918, 919, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 941, 942, 943, 944, 945, 946, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 958, 959, 960, 961, 962, 963, 964, 965, 966, 967, 968, 969, 970, 971, 972, 973, 974, 975, 976, 977, 978, 979, 980, 981, 982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000



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ANIMAL

Only questions.

Why do we group millions of species under the single title of Animal? Who is the Animal if not that which allows us to hold onto the Human, but also to dehumanize other humans? Is the Animal therefore another name for the phantasy of a primitive Human, used as justification for enslaving and colonizing others? Can we formulate a definition of humanity that does not seek to suppress the specter of the Animal and of the dehumanized Human?

Do Kara Walker's shadow-hands engage this concept of the Animal? Do the prominent hands we see belong to the artist or to the oppressor? Can we definitively distinguish between the two? As Walker said, "The artist is like an abuser of everything—picture-playing, history, other people."

What if we imagined placing Kara Walker's looming shadow hands "behind" the two Sami herders who appear, in this nineteenth-century ethnographic study, as a background to their reindeer? Would they suddenly become figures with their animals as background? Would this reversal awaken us to the possibility that, in gazing proudly at the camera, this couple looks at us too, and toward their future assimilation by civilizing forces and the appropriation of their culture by the tourism industry under the guise of education?

—Jake Ellis '16, Mary Huber '15, Victoria Jahns '16, Tilhenn Klapper, Shira Tagliavento '15



Kara Walker
American, b. 1969

Testimony #2 (Figure on Horse with Hands Controlling the Puppet),
2005

Photogravure on Hahnemühle paper

Purchase, Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation Fund; 2009.25.5



French, 19th century

Laplanders with deer
Albumen Print

Gift of Winston and Jeffrey Adler Collection of 19th Century Photography; 1986.42.141

MACHINE

This pairing illustrates a shift in the means of photographic representation that transformed the relation between memorialization and photography. Looking from left to right, we see an evolution from the intention to preserve a subject to the desire to select a singular instant.

Given the low sensitivity of film stock in early photography, the long exposure of the albumen portrait made it technologically impossible to record an instant. Consequently, the photographic event was carefully constructed. The albumen process fictionalized the moment by staging the composition before the click of the shutter and through post-production hand coloring. This mechanical and social method creates a subject abstracted from physical space such that the portrait is suspended without a background. As a result, the photographic object becomes a standard for the conceptual being, rather than for the moment she sat in front of the lens.

Unlike the albumen print, the Polaroid promises to capture a moment in its immediacy. Therefore, there is no opportunity for Linda Croney, holding a camera, to prepare herself to be photographed. The rapid shutter speed captures Croney mid-blink and partially out of focus. Ultimately, the Polaroid conditions us to see every moment as photographable.

—Lauri Riedner "13, Spencer Davis '14, Sam Schwartz '14, Sasha Zwickler '13"



French

1840s–1850s

Portrait of a woman

Albumen print

Gift of Richard and Editha Allen Collection of 1984 (Lent)

Photography in 19th-Century

Kevin Winters

American 1980–1990

Linda Croney (and her camera), 1980

Polaroid 7

Gift of The Jacki Winkler Foundation for the Visual Arts in honor of Linda Croney (born c.1950)

MACHINE

This pairing illustrates a shift in the means of photographic representation that transformed the relation between memorialization and photography. Looking from left to right, we see an evolution from the intention to preserve a subject to the desire to extract a singular instant.

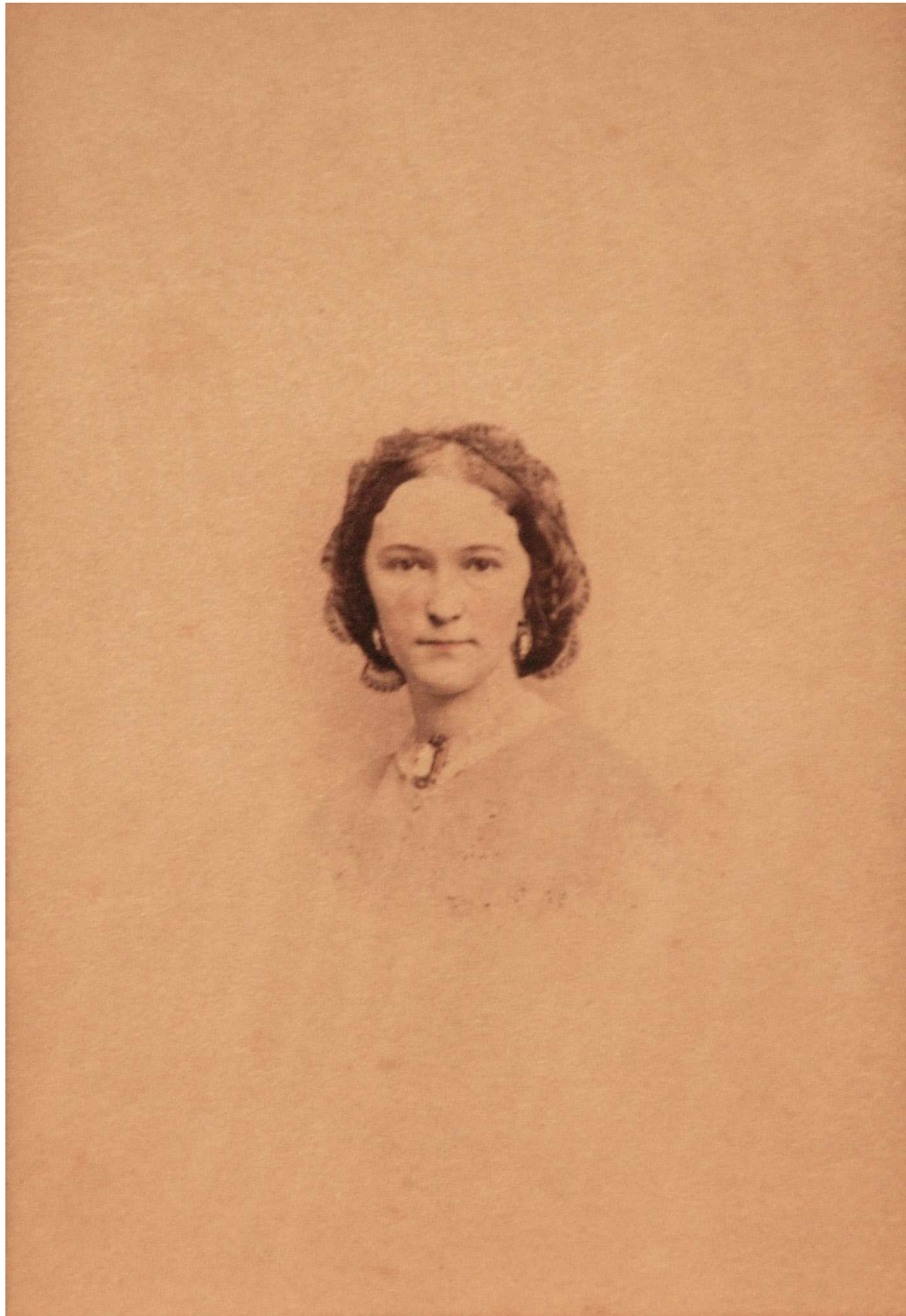
Given the low sensitivity of film stock in early photography, the long exposure of the albumen portrait made it technologically impossible to record an instant. Consequently, the photographic event was carefully constructed. The albumen process fictionalized the moment by staging the composition before the click of the shutter and through post-production hand coloring. This mechanical and social method creates a subject abstracted from physical space such that this portrait is suspended without a background. As a result, the photographic object becomes a stand-in for her atemporal being, rather than for the moment she sat in front of the lens.

Unlike the albumen print, the Polaroid promises to capture a moment in its immediacy. Therefore, there is no opportunity for Linda Cossey, holding a camera, to prepare herself to be photographed. The rapid shutter speed captures Cossey mid-blink and partially out of focus. Ultimately, the Polaroid conditions us to see every moment as photographable.

—Jonah Bleckner '15, Sasha Zwiebel '15, Spencer Davis '16,
Sam Schwamm '16, Madison Wetzell '15

French, 19th century
Portrait of a woman
Albumen Print

Gift of Winston and Jeffrey Adler Col-
lection of 19th Century Photography;
1986.42.99



Andy Warhol
American 1928-1987

*Linda Cossey (and her
camera), 1980*
Polacolor 2

Gift of The Andy
Warhol Foundation for
the Visual Arts in honor
of its 20th anniversary;
2008.7.11



© ANDY WARHOL

The click—can justice be done with a click?

The click—can justice be done with a click?

A photograph of a sign that warns against photography expresses caution against our tendency to aestheticize trauma and loss. A photograph of flowers that lie atop an open grave soberly memorializes lives that have been effaced. Photography and mourning go together. We click to do justice and to not forget. But what we embrace are only shadows.

The next handwritten note, so loud and explicit, and the messy heap of flowers, so silent and withdrawing, interrupt one another by interrogating, but also negating, what they represent. This is the construction and deconstruction of the work of mourning, in New York and in Mexico.

The click is a translation but is also annihilation—a specialization of the real and an abstraction of loss. With each click, the uniqueness of the traumatic happening is both offered and effaced. It becomes something other that remains locked outside the frame of the photograph.

Switching between these two photographs, we wonder whether to mourn with photography is to partake in a public grammar. The fragmentation of temporal flux at once renders photographic mourning possible and impossible. In the end, photographic justice is itself an act of mourning.

-Jack Cheng '13, Matt Towner '13, Will Tang '17,
Jon Tuett '17



Gains From

JUSTICE

The click—can justice be done with a click?

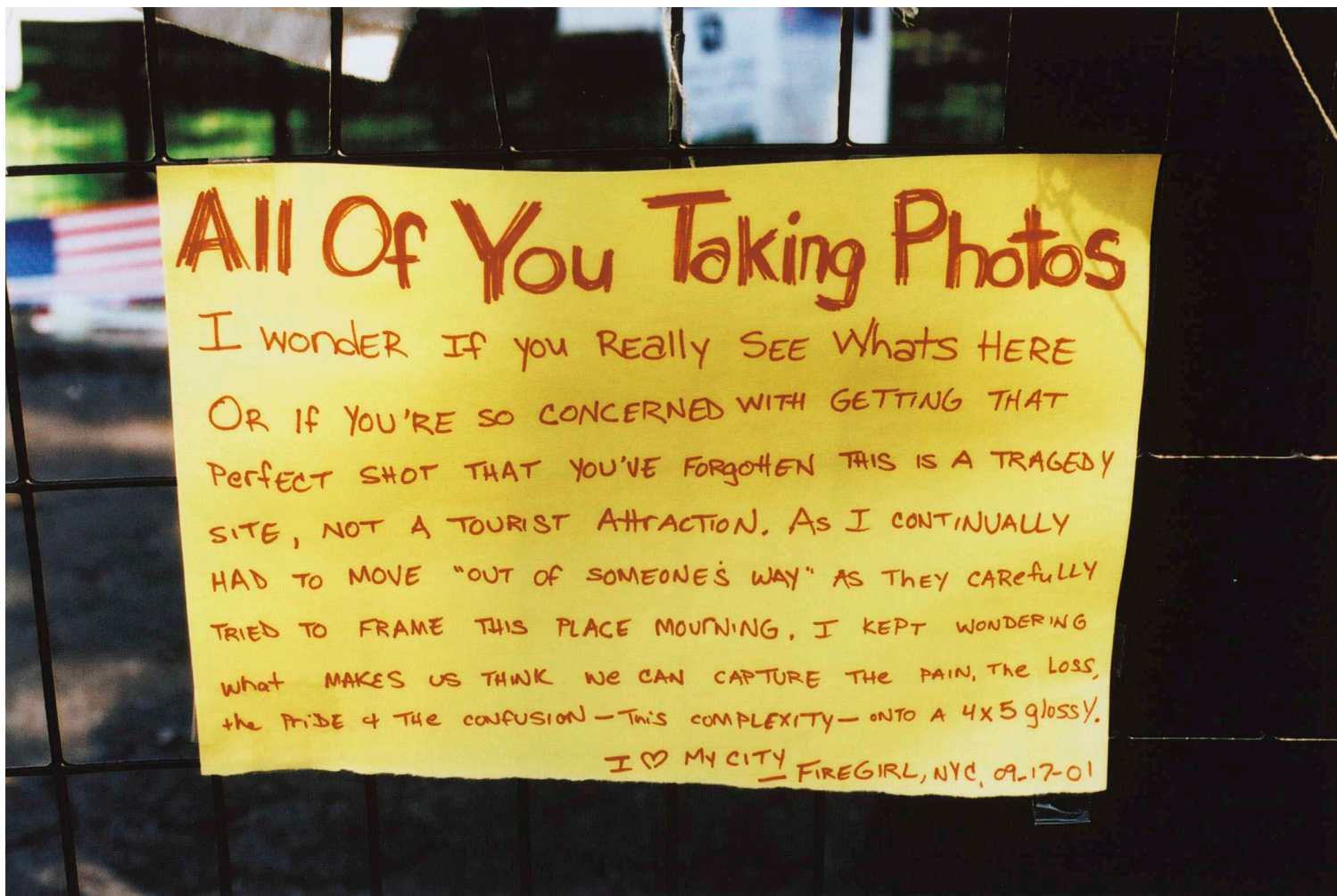
A photograph of a sign that warns against photography expresses caution against our tendency to aestheticize trauma and loss. A photograph of flowers that lie atop an open grave soberly memorializes lives that have been effaced. Photography and mourning go together. We click to do justice and to not forget. But what we enshrine are only shadows.

The neat handwritten note, so loud and explicit, and the messy heap of flowers, so silent and withdrawing, interrupt one another by interrogating, but also negating, what they represent. This is the construction and deconstruction of the work of mourning, in New York and in Mexico.

The click is a translation but is also annihilation—a spectralization of the real and an abstraction of loss. With each click, the uniqueness of the traumatic happening is both affirmed and effaced. It becomes something other that remains locked outside the frame of the photograph.

Switching between these two photographs, we wonder whether to mourn with photography is to partake in a public grammar. The fragmentation of temporal flux at once renders photographic mourning possible and impossible. In the end, photographic justice is itself an act of mourning.

—Louis Cheng '15, Maura Toomey '15, Will Tseng '17, Ian Yusem '17



Glenn Foster
American

Handwritten sign from Firegirl, 2001
Digital ink print

Purchase, Advisory Council for Photography and additional funds provided by Lee Balter, Mario Del Pozzo, Steven Roffer, Margaret Smith-Bourke and Scott Wilder; 2002.20.30



Peter Hujar
American 1934-1987

Flowers for the Dead II, Mazatlan, Mexico, 1977
Gelatin silver print

Gift of Stephen Koch; 2003.47.5



Giovanna Borradori and Andreas Huyssen during the exhibition's inaugural event.

THE OPENING

Questions for Andreas Huyssen

Giovanna Borradori: As a German, born in a country ravaged by war and violence, you obviously have always lived with specters.

Andreas Huyssen: No doubt about it, and this figure of the specter brings me to *Haunting Legacies. Photography and the Invisible*, the show that you have organized with your class and that we just visited earlier this afternoon. I must say that I really liked the way in which you paired the photographs under six general rubrics - Being, Animal, Human, Beauty, Machine, and Justice. But what struck me was that each of the pairings that anchored each of the rubrics in a conceptual constellation had a relatively long text attached to them. And it reminded me of something that Walter Benjamin said in his "Short History of Photography." He says that the illiterate of the future will not be the man who cannot read the alphabet, but the one who cannot take a photograph, and thus he or she who cannot read images, not books. This comment strikes me because it comes from Benjamin, the man of the word and of language. No matter how much Benjamin celebrated film and photography, he still asks: well, what about a photographer who is not able to read his images? The point that he reiterated many times was that photography needs the supplement of language. The combination, or perhaps contextualization, of photography through language struck me as important about the show. And there was a lot of imagination that obviously went into the creation of these constellations.

GB: I am delighted of what the students were able to bring out in combining pairs of photographs and juxtaposing them with texts, which they labored on with intelligence and imagination. The relationship between the image and the text, which invokes the links but also the gaps that remain between what we see and what we read, brings me to the research you undertook in one of your books, *Present Pasts, Urban*

Palimpsests, and the Politics of Memory. The students of Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics had it in mind when putting together the exhibition because they had read extensive excerpts of that book for class.

In *Present Pasts*, you discuss what I dare call the “haunted condition” of metropolitan life. There is no doubt, you suggest, that we cannot move forward without confronting our own past, but how we confront our past is a difficult and complex question. For example, you notice that our age exhibits a seemingly compulsive injunction to remember: you define it as a “hypertrophy of memory.” How does this hypertrophy manifest itself? And what was the historical and cultural context that made you come up with this somewhat pathological image: the hypertrophy of memory?

AH: While growing up in Germany in the 1950s and 1960s, the issue of memory was always present. When people say that there was repression, I don’t agree; there was certainly evasion, but evasion is different from repression. There was a lot of talk about the past, Auschwitz against Dresden—as if the two would cancel each other out.

Already in the 1970s, when critics in the United States especially were obsessed with the question of post-modernism, I started to write about memory. The issue of temporality was not really a central issue in the debates on postmodernism. I remember Fredric Jameson, for instance, saying that modernism was all about time whereas postmodernism was all about space.

Then came the 1990s, when the memory debates truly exploded and the question we all asked ourselves was: where does that come from? To go back to the theme of your exhibition, one crucial component was the presence of photography in the

public sphere, which changed the political dimension and the political dynamics especially in the early 1990s. And that is precisely the subject of *Present Pasts*: 1989, the dismantling of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. This is in addition to the end of apartheid in South Africa and the end of the Latin American dictatorships.

Suddenly all over the world you have all kinds of memorial constellations opening up, dramatic memorial constellations, which given populations had to work through. It is that kind of constellation, emerging in the early 1990s, that got me into writing about the politics of memory, which for me always starts with the memory of the Holocaust, although it then moves into other areas of the world.

GB: This is all very interesting for us right now, as we think of ourselves and of our moment. You mentioned 1989, the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent apparent healing of some wounds. You speak of the end of apartheid in South Africa and the end of some of the dictatorships in Latin America. A lot has been made of the supposed end of the Cold War, which has produced a sense of self-satisfaction, or maybe even entitlement on the part of the so-called liberal democratic world. I was wondering how this reflection on memory, which you started before the end of the Cold War, has changed from the 1990's, when that sense of self-satisfaction was so rampant? How was the politics of memory transformed as we crossed the threshold of the new millennium and how did it transform?

AH: Well, I think the memory debates in the 1990s were still very largely contained within national frames. This is very clear in the work of the French historian Pierre Nora, for instance in his *Realms of Memory*, which to me is an extremely interesting

project. It is an attempt to rewrite French national history through the problematic of memory—and especially the sites of memory.

I think Nora's approach was dominant in other parts of the world, in Latin America as well as in South Africa. What has happened since then, which I tried to analyze in some of the essays that make up *Present Pasts*, is that a new take on the memory debates came about, which is well represented in the book by Michael Rothberg, titled *Multidirectional Memory*. In my own work I had become interested in the way in which the Holocaust has traveled as a trope, as a set of images, and a set of clichés. You know, from the German and European theatre into South Africa, into Latin America, and even to some extent to India and its own description of the India-Pakistan partition. But I think there is a move toward expanding geographic and temporal frames. Since the 1990s, discussions about Holocaust memory came to be juxtaposed with discussions about colonialism. This is at the core of what has happened in the past ten or fifteen years.

GB: This is the sort of "globalization of the Holocaust" that you talk about in *Present Pasts* and that you usefully describe in terms of the transformation of an act of memorization and memorialization, into an act of monumentalization. This tendency of our time to transform memory into a monument seems very crucial to me; in spite of the strong injunction to remember, it serves the cause of forgetting—the cause of evasion, as you said earlier.

AH: At a theoretical level, the memory discourse is always linked to forgetting. There is no question that memory itself, or standards of memory, never reproduce what was there in the past. An act of memory is always also a moment of evasion.

In every act of remembrance there is evasion, whether stronger or weaker it does not matter. What happens in memory is not the reproduction of the past but its transformation that reflects the different kinds of influence that given moments have throughout time.

The question then becomes: what role do the media play in memory? What role does television and film, and since 1995 the Internet, play in memorization? And that is, I think, still an open question. One can argue, and some people have argued, that the more talk there is about memory the more knowledge of the past, historical knowledge of the past, gets passed down. I am referring here to an older debate between Historians and Memorians. The Historians claim that "memory is nothing but the stuff of history." So history remains the primary model to deal with the past because memory is fuzzy, subjective, impersonal, unreliable.

But it seems to me that this constellation that sets History against Memory is no longer truly relevant today, because the concern with memory is itself a serious historical enterprise. How did different generations at different times deal with the memory of the nation, the memory of the family, the memory of whatever it might be? And how did they codify it?

GB: I see what you are saying and agree but I am going to push back a bit. If the monumentalization of events such as the Holocaust does indeed serve the cause of historical forgetting, how does it serve memory?

AH: I have been asking myself for a long time whether this obsession with memory, in the academic world and in the public world, was ever coming to an end. Well, it has not come to an end yet. What I called the "memory boom" in the 1990s is still

going strong. But then one would want to ask oneself: what is the cognitive gain of evermore work that we do in the academy about memory, especially about the memory of a traumatic past? And it is in that context that I think it may be useful to bring together memory discourses and human rights discourses. As far as the academy is concerned, memory discourse is primarily present in the humanities, whereas human rights discourses happen in law and in political theory. In the reality of political constellations in South Africa after apartheid or Latin America in the post-dictatorship period, memory discourses are always linked with legal questions, with judiciary questions, with trials, etc. So the question then becomes whether bringing memory discourses as they happen in the humanities together with human rights discourses as they arise in the social sciences, might be a way to instill a more political dimension.

GB: You seem to worry about the lack of political force that this literary dimension of memory discourses may harbor. But isn't the marketing aspect of memory much more worrisome, a marketing that has been opened and sustained by supposedly educational institutions such as memory museums? You have written about Berlin, and powerfully about New York, focusing on the museums that have been built during the post-Cold War years, from the late 1990s into the new millennium. I found your argument that museums have really contributed to this marketing of memory very persuasive. And this is maybe another aspect of the deep politicization of memory.

AH: There are critics who have spoken of the Holocaust business. I certainly see that some of these concerns are well placed: Holocaust museums have sprouted in different places of the world and have to some extent contributed to a kind of commodification of trauma. I had a very interesting experience a few weeks ago

when I organized a conference at Columbia University, on “Ghosts of the Past: Nazi Looted Art and Its Legacies.” We had brought in a number of researchers from Germany and the United States. The researchers from Germany did provenance research, which is a very concrete instance of Holocaust-related museal activities that has now reached the wider public. For example, it was all over both national and international press the story of a man who was living with over 1,000 artworks that nobody even knew still existed. What was very interesting in terms of marketing issues, invasion issues, memory and forgetting issues in this conference, was that the German researchers made ample use of the ledgers of auction houses—who sold what, who were the dealers, who were the complicit among the art world with the Nazis at that time. A tension ensued between the Germans, who did very detailed, positivist, and empirical work, on the one hand, and a number of American critics, who talked very effectively, emotionally, and politically about restitution. It was really a conflict of discourses.

So I asked myself: “What is being brought out in the provenance research of Nazi looted art?” The complicity of art dealers, including the complicity of art dealers in New York—art dealers who actually worked with Nazi art dealers during a period, and who then met some of the refugees, Jewish refugees, in New York in the post-war period. It’s a dynamite topic.

Now you asked about museums in the post-Cold War years. If I may, I would like to sort of shift the question a little bit to the change in the nature of museums. It is very clear to me that since the late 1980s and early 1990s museums have become public institutions in a much broader sense than ever before. Not bastions and fortresses for the elect few and for the connoisseurs, but mass media in themselves: perhaps

one last remnant of the public sphere in an Age of Malls. In *The Birth of the Museum*, Tony Bennett, the British critic, talked about the museum as “exhibitionary complex.” Museums are created for the elites and control how various pasts are being seen and interpreted. Only 10 years later, between the late 80s and early 1990s, we began to talk about museums as “experiential complex,” fostering, according to Bennett, commercialization and fast consumption, which of course go with forgetting and evasion. Bennett is basically a commodity critique, coming out of a Marxist approach, a critique of the commodification of the museum. Of course, if you go into museums today sometimes you do feel like you are in a mall. This is something we need to take into account when it comes to memory issues and face museums that are being built to commemorate the past. Take the Museum of Jewish History in Berlin, or the Holocaust Museum in Washington, and then most recently, the Museo de la Memoria y de los Derechos Humanos that I haven’t seen yet, in Santiago, Chile. To the best of my knowledge, it is the first museum that actually adds human rights to the notion of memory. This shift from memory discourse into a discourse of human rights is a new phenomenon. This is not a history museum but a museum of the “history of memory.”

This does not save these new kinds of museums from the danger of forgetting. Take the 9/11 Museum in New York, which I think is a disaster. But that is maybe a conversation for another time. It certainly does not give us any kind of deep sense of the history of 9/11. I mean there are some shadow plays on the wall, near the wall down in the basement, that pretend to introduce the question of history. But they are more like apparitions in the digital world that are there one minute and they disappear in the next. So the writing on the walls in the 9/11 Museum has the production of forgetting as a purpose.

—Transcribed by Ethan Hoffmayer

"Today I visited the exhibition... *"Haunting Legacies: Photography and the Invisible."* In it, you quoted Roland Barthes who still thinks about photography as having an irreducible tie with death. And implicitly too, the exhibition seems to suggest that an image is a presentation of something absent. If we think that an image is a presentation of something absent, we are thinking that the absent was prior to the image. That is to say, the absent, which we can call reality, is first and the image is second. If it is so, we are once again thinking in a Platonistic way: of the image as a copy of a model. This is what is implicit in the idea that images have something to do with death – the death of what is now absent. What I tried to suggest in my book, through Merleau-Ponty and other French thinkers, is the idea that actually the images do not refer to something prior to themselves but present something that didn't exist as such before. In my view, I see images more as creations than acts of memory, celebrating something dead. In this sense, images are more linked to life than to death."

– Mauro Carbone, Professor of Philosophy,
Jean Moulin University, Lyon, France

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