

In returning to Shellburne Thurber's psychoanalytic interiors, as I have many times ~~over the twenty-plus~~ years since she first began making them, it is tempting to locate my implicit sense of the photographs as 'structures for feeling' through artist and theorist Jill H. Casid's queer theory of "pyrography." In her essay, "Pyrographies: Photography and the good death," a close reading of Hervé Guibert's photo-novel *Suzanne and Louise* through the writings of his friends (namely, Michel Foucault's "The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will" and Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* and *Mourning Diary*), Casid correlates photography's unstable material qualities ~~with the medium's inextricable associations to~~ mourning and death. In it, Casid establishes photography "as a practice of making volatile structures for feeling... not just for mourning the losses that have actually happened but spaces in which one might begin to imagine and transact with care the losses and the letting go yet to come."¹

In discussing death's rehearsals as photographically enacted by Guibert (~~both~~ alone and together with his aunts), or wished-for in a proposition to Barthes (to photograph him with his dying mother), Casid also speaks about love, mirrors, re-sequenced time, the untimely, Guibert's photography as a "séance to the future,"² and impossible photographs that can't or shouldn't be made. ~~Guibert's 1980 text *Suzanne and Louise* opens with a handwritten title that reads:~~ "A simulacra." ~~It~~ contains black and white photographs of Guibert's elderly aunts ~~performing deathbeds~~ in their homes as well as ~~a~~ letter from Hervé to Suzanne that includes the line, "And when you feel yourself about to die, call me..." Published in the same year as *Camera Lucida*, Casid notes: "It is, of course, well known that *Camera Lucida* was Barthes's last book; he died only two months after its French publication. It is ~~also~~ well known ~~that this book on photography is~~ organized around a central and quite specific absence: a photograph of his deceased mother ~~that presents her as a little girl in a greenhouse.~~ He describes it and gives it a name (the 'Winter Garden Photograph'), but refuses to reproduce it: 'I cannot reproduce the 'Winter Garden Photograph.' It exists only for me."³ By unwriting past tense entanglements of loved ones and their pyres, and considering the future perfect "what-will-have-been," Casid establishes "what it means to use photography as a performative rehearsal for the catastrophe that has already happened,"⁴ not unlike ~~the process of~~ psychoanalysis itself. ~~In this citation, Casid refers to Barthes' *Mourning Diary*, where he draws from psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott's final paper, "Fear of breakdown," posthumously published in the *International Review of Psychoanalysis* in 1974. With this contextual background, Thurber's analytic interiors perceive the complex dramaturgies of rehearsal that have occurred in these empty rooms.~~

¹ Jill H. Casid, "Pyrographies: Photography and the Good Death," *Women & Performance: a Journal of Feminist Theory*, 22:1, 2012, 109-131.

² Casid, 117.

³ Casid, citing Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 110.

⁴ Casid, citing Roland Barthes, *Mourning Diary*, 112.

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Deleted: While the subject of psychoanalysis has appeared in the work of many contemporary artists, particularly through the citation of psychoanalytic theory, this is not the route that Thurber has taken another route in to arriving at one of her most significant bodies of work—, a series of square format chromogenic prints depicting the unoccupied office spaces of psychoanalysts. Initiated in 1998 in Buenos Aires, the project continued through 2000 as recipient to a Bunting Fellowship (Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University) in 1999-2000, enabling her to continue to pursue this project in the Boston area. Unlike art practices that seek to demonstrate theoretical premises, Thurber's work, instead, elaborates upon a long photographic history, fusing particular formal concerns with an interest in people: their varying abilities to communicate, and the ways in which the constructed environment — (homes, motels, offices) — can articulate, by containing, the complexities of the lives that pass through them. The issues most clearly raised by her psychoanalytic interiors and the ideas they evoke — absence, emptiness, the unconscious, the unstable boundaries between self and other — are also the subjects of featuring in Thurber's work as a whole. (... [1])

