

**A Constellation of Sorts:
Pause, Glean, Repeat, Drift, Wait**

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**A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts**

**Graduate Program in Visual Arts
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York University,
Toronto, Ontario**

April 2016

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Abstract

My art practice is concerned with the nature of images—images which at once inscribe a historical continuity between the past and present, as well as index an inevitable sense of loss and drift. My MFA thesis exhibition, *A Constellation of Sorts*, is an assemblage of found and family photographs within my personal collection, to be shared and hidden, discontinuous yet whole. Through collecting, story telling, making and folding, my exhibition and thesis support paper reframe and represent fragments of images and thoughts into assembled entities. When one pauses and allows their eyes and mind to wander, these prints and texts may lead to nuanced observation, questioning how we know what we think we know about an image.

Dedications

To my partner,
my family,
my friends.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor, Barbara Balfour, my committee, David Scott Armstrong and Leslie Korrick, and my classmates. Thank you for your continued support and guidance, and the many challenging and encouraging conversations we have shared during my MFA studies at York University. This project would not have been possible without the help of the Joseph-Armand Bombardier Graduate CGS Master Scholarship and The Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Grant.

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A List – To Begin

Arnaud Maggs

John Berger

Roland Barthes

Aby Warburg

Giorgio Agamben

Walter Benjamin

Gilles Deleuze

Tim Ingold

Luis Camnitzer

Susan Stewart

Anne Carson

Angela Grauerholz

Richard Sennett

Gerhard Richter

Marcus Boon

Jean Baudrillard

Christian Boltanski

Mark Ruwedel

Susan Sontag

Jan Zwicky

Rebecca Solnit

August Sander

Robert Bresson

W.G. Sebald

Introduction: Entangled Encounters

Two young individuals—a woman to the left and a man to the right. They rest against a rail, as they stand on a dock with a view of the lake and shore behind them. It is mid day and the sun washes over their faces from above. The woman is dressed in a white shirt, skirt, and socks. Her heels are black. Her chin tilts down. Attempting to cast her eyes in shadow, she squints and smiles at the lens. Her right hand rests upon the rail while her left disappears behind the man's back. The man is adorned in white too—hat, pants, shirt, and loafers—he also wears a black blazer complementing her black heels. He gently grins from under his hat at the lens of the camera and shares a glance of nervousness. *(His arms and hands hang awkwardly overlapped and suspended in front of him as if they were crossed at his chest and he decided too late it best to lay them by his side.)* A gust of wind blows in from the left.

I begin in a quiet conversation with the photographs within my collection. I stare into the traces captured by the lens and describe what the images tell me: how a head may tilt, how eyes catch the lens, how a hand may fold. I refrain from telling stories beyond the photograph but simply narrate its traces. I use a photograph as both object and portal: an object to be fragmented and a portal through which to transport a wandering mind. My artworks point to the photograph and represent its traces. But my artworks are not quite photographs. They are prints that copy, fragment, and translate once photographic information.

For onlookers, there is a sense of quiet reflection when viewing these artworks. Peering into the collections of gridded and orderly assemblages, a slow unfolding begins to emerge. From afar, the entirety of the artworks—a constellation, grid, book, fold, and image—is assumed to be complete and straightforwardly simple in their initial encounter. When one pauses and allows their eyes to wander, moments of inconsistencies arise. Gaps and voids begin surfacing...slowly: a blank image is noticed, a void in a grid, a fold, a line. The systems, initially assumed to be complete, become interrupted and begin to drift into fragility.



Figure 1 – *Read me a story*

The following thesis support paper is an account of this slow unfolding. Opening with collecting, I dwell upon the photograph—an object and a portal—and the experience of acquisition. I then begin telling stories that may weave fact with fiction. These prints allow their onlookers to connect one image to the next as a constellation of sorts: “One can lie on the ground and look up at the almost infinite number of stars in the sky, but in order to tell stories about those stars they need to be seen as constellations, the invisible lines which can connect them need to be assumed.”¹ Each print can be seen as a point with the potential to be connected to another through such imagined lines, provoking nuanced observations that do not provide a linear narrative but an accumulation of pieces.

¹ John Berger, “Appearances”, *Another Way of Telling*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 284.

There is a sense of longing and drift in relationship to many pasts within my arrangements. The distance between the past and present—the time between them—acts like a fog. I do not attempt to bring a clarity and sharpness to these prints but embrace the softening the image may have experienced due to the heaviness of elapsed time. I attempt to contain this heaviness when I make and fold my images. I revisit an image over and over, again and again: scanned, cropped, printed, cut, moved, folded, unfolded. This process distances the printed image from the photograph.

My art practice is concerned with the nature of images—images which at once inscribe a historical continuity between the past and present, as well as index an inevitable sense of loss and drift. By combining mezzotint² and photopolymer gravure³ my translations and representations explore image, narrative, identification, and the collection.

² A historical print method from the seventeenth century, mezzotint is created through hand ‘rocking’ the surface of a copper plate until it has been evenly burred. The burred copper surface will print a rich black flat until its burrs are flattened or removed through hand scrapping and burnishing, establishing a range of greys to white when printed.

³ A contemporary print method with its own history in printmaking and photography, photopolymer gravure utilizes a photosensitive polymer plate that is first exposed on a ultra-violet light table to an aquatint screen to establish a dot structure. It is then exposed to a film positive, developed, cured, and printed.



a constellation

I

pause, reflect, drift, wait
bruise, prick, sit, stand
move, feel, cut, fold
remember, forget
pause

pause, reflect, play, drift
wait, become bruised
pricked – sit, stand, cut, fold
remember, forget
pause

pause, reflect, drift, wait, feel
touch, leave, stay, pause
remember, forget, pause
remember, forget
pause

pause, reflect, drift, wait, sit
stand, move, think, feel, touch
leave, stay, fold
remember, forget
pause

pause, reflect, drift, wait, bruise
prick, sit, stand, feel, touch
fold, leave, stay
remember, forget
pause

pause, reflect, drift, wait
become bruised, pricked
sit, stand, feel, cut, fold
remember, forget
pause

Part One: Collecting

*Even if the person photographed is completely forgotten today, even if his or her name has been erased forever from human memory—or, indeed precisely because of this—that person and that face demand their name; they demand not to be forgotten.*⁴

In my collection of images, of found and family photographs, I feel a responsibility—a longing—to revive them. I feel an urgent need to sit with them and ponder about the lives of those staring back. It's futile, really, to attempt to revive these images by representing them to be pondered once more. But my arrangements do not resurrect the single photograph and instead lessen the significance of a particular image in favour of a more diffused whole.



Figure 2 – *Reminders, Reminders* (digital collection)

⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, Trans. Jeff Fort. (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 25.

The experience of collecting these images—the searching for a particular image that speaks to me more than any other—is something I value. This experience begins when I enter an antique shop, flea market, or historical photography show. Walking through the doors, I become immediately taken by the aroma of a time passed. I begin searching for a collection of family photographs, often in an old shoebox displayed on a table. Once I find these photographs, I begin sifting through the images, feeling their age under my fingertips. I am entranced by them and drawn to them both as objects—their scent, markings, colour, weight, size, inscriptions—and portals—depicting other times, persons, and places.

As I sort through them, I wait for something to surface. I have related this sense of emergence to Roland Barthes' *punctum*: “that incident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).”⁵ Each image seems to respond differently: the gaze that seems to be directed at me, the veiled expression, the fold of the hand, the distinctive clothing. These all have the potential to ‘prick’ me, to make me pause. Once ‘pricked,’ I place the photograph aside and continue my search until I happen upon another. It is within these initial pauses that my practice begins.

These encounters are also experienced in the family photograph albums I search through. Although the images are part of my own family's collection, I do not seek out a specific photograph. When going through the albums, I engage with them in a similar manner as the found photographs, however I become ‘bruised’ not ‘pricked’. In many of the images, I recognize the individuals within them, both living and deceased; I experience a different sense of intimacy. I respond to a lost-and-found relationship between individuals I may have known or have heard stories about. The initial encounter of the family photographs in this sense ‘bruise’ me and linger on in a bodily response, whereas the finding of the found photographs ‘prick’ but do not provoke the same lingering intimacy.

⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 26-27.

Once both found and family photographs are acquired and enter my collection, I sit with them for elongated periods—pausing...narrating their traces. Each image may come to have the potential of ‘bruising’ me whether found or family, and it is when a photograph reaches this point that it can begin to enter into printed images.

You cannot see the original images from my collection but might attempt to imagine them. The spaces in between photograph and narrative, image and word, are replete with contingencies when one attempts to bridge them.

A photograph depicts four young individuals: two boys and two girls. Behind them in the distance, the profile of two homes and a series of trees are visible. Each youth present in the photograph sits upon the grass staring into the lens, except one who stares past. Their hair is disheveled in their seemingly quick coming together. A young girl places her hands upon the two outer boys’ shoulders as she kneels behind them. Her head tilted upwards and to the left. A second girl of younger appearance sits between the two boys. (*Hands always seem to be an oddity when posed for a photograph. As soon as the lens is present they appear as if they are intruders to be contained in pockets or crossed under arms. Left hanging by your side, they seem as though they are limp.*) Two of those sitting clasp their hands and place them upon their laps while one boy places each on a knee and the other places each hand upon a rifle held in shadow. At first glance it is almost undetectable to the eye.

Black bottoms and white shirts are worn by the two individuals present in this image: an elderly man to the left and a seemingly younger woman to the right. They both hold onto a wicker basket between them, sharing the burden. He carries another in his right hand and she carries a copper container perched above her head. The contents of the container are not visible but small plants are present in his. The woman’s left hand carried at her side has a ring visible upon her ring

finger. His hands are turned away and show no sign of a ring. (*The hands in this image do not appear limp or without meaning: they are hands at work.*) She is barefoot, standing upon a dirt and gravel road with plants growing all around. Their shadows are long and the sun is lower in the sky either suggesting an early morning or a late day. The photographer appears to have caught a candid moment and documents a day in the life, possibly an interruption. (*I have met the two present in the image in my childhood, but do not remember my encounter. I have never stepped foot on the gravel they walk upon but I know where it is.*)

A man stands confidently in full view. His legs are parted and his body is turned to his left and our right. His hands are hidden, seemingly holding each other behind his back. He stares into the distance. He is dressed in military attire with brush cut hair. His jacket is done up and its buttons catch the light. The image is black and white, but his buttons appear to have the warmth of gold. He stands at the bottom of a valley. Behind and above him, in the distance, is a row of trees that lies upon the perimeter of a city that stands atop a hill. The city is illuminated and competes with the whiteness of the sky. (*I recognize this man, and I know him today. He has changed physically but his confidence and charismatic nature was as present then as it is present now.*)

There is a relationship between a body and the camera's lens, as if both were aware of one another. Barthes describes this odd encounter: "once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of 'posing,' I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image."⁶ I find this process of posing exists for the hand as much as the head. When a lens is pointed in your direction, you begin to think of yourself as an image and how each extremity translates into a photographic representation. *To be left / By one's side* is an exploration of such odd encounters.

⁶ Barthes, 10.

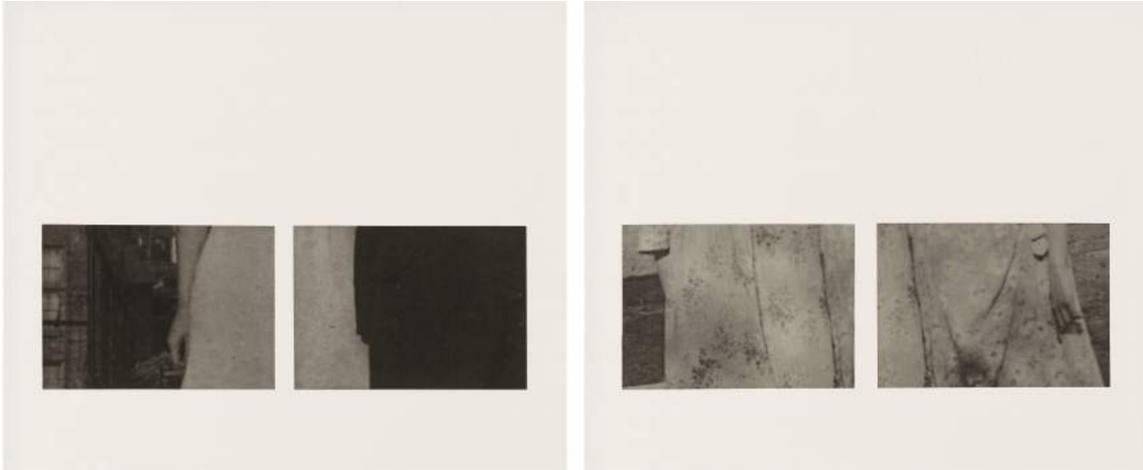


Figure 3 – *To be left / By one's side* (#2 & 7)

A collection of hands: laying limp, hidden in pockets, crossed under arms, working, awkward, unknowing. Isolated and separate, they become the points of attention when seen only as a body's prop in the original photographs. One figure has two hands but many of these hands feel abandoned, alone; some seem to connect while others do not. I stand in front of a collection of hands, lowered on the paper space—a heaviness of gravity in its display. I am drawn down and I feel each of my own hands and their presence, their uniqueness. I am aware of them while I stare and drift with these images. Two rows of isolated and collected hands; some hidden and some displayed. They are as individual as their owners but appear to be both particular and universal. I can imagine my hands posing/performing in a similar way to each image: a limp hand, a moving hand, a timid hand, a confident hand, an aggressive hand, a secretive hand. The hands presented here perform unknowingly as the sole subject of an image.



a constellation

II

glean, object, portal
death, mourn, memory
narrative, identity, identify
classification
glean

glean, object, portal
death, mourn, lost, found
narrate, fold, trace, identify
copy, preserve
glean

glean, mourn, drift
lost, found, trace, narrate
pause, reflect
preserve, survive
glean

glean, mourn, trace
lost, found, narrate, copy
preserve, survive
object, portal
glean

glean, mourn, trace
lost, found, narrate
copy, object, portal, space
preserve, survive
glean

glean, mourn, trace
lost, found, narrate
copy, object, portal
space
glean

Part Two: Telling Stories

My grandfather is an avid storyteller. When he shares the stories of his past, does it matter to the listener how embellished they may be? They are elaborate weavings with immaculate details. He seems to be able to recall what he was wearing, what he was seeing, the scent, the feelings. His stories do however repeat and reappear—changing, evolving and devolving depending upon the circumstances of the present. Reality may be drifting, but in the present, during the telling of a story, there is excitement on his face as he searches for the words to decipher the images in his head.

The story I escape to with immense excitement, which has been shared with me on multiple occasions, comes from my grandfather's childhood during World War II. Living in Patrica, a small town in the hills outside Frosinone, Lazio, my grandfather and his parents came across a young man—an English soldier. He was wounded and in need of help. Despite the German presence, and the devastating repercussions for not only any family housing an English soldier but the entire town, my great grandparents decided to care for him. They nursed him to health and even brought a teacher from the community into their home to educate the soldier in Italian while they were out at work. Constantly fearful of being found out, he needed to blend in to the community and remain unseen.

Any time German troops would interrogate the town's people, my grandfather's family devised a system of birdcalls through the hills and valleys that would send the English soldier into hiding. On one occasion, however, the birdcalls failed and a German soldier appeared at their doorstep. My grandfather, my great grandmother, and the English soldier stood in silence—in anticipation of the worst. "Who is this?" exclaimed the German soldier pointing to the English soldier. "My son" my grandfather's mother explained. "He can't be your son, he is much too old and you are young." "I was raped when I was young and he was the result, it is not his fault so I raised him as my own because he is my own. Come now, have lunch with us." My great

grandmother, my grandfather, the English soldier, and the German soldier ate lunch while performing this fiction to escape certain death.

I have heard this story on multiple occasions and each time it has taken on a new life. It never comes to me in the same form and in my resharing of it I am aware of details arising from the various retellings. This occurred seventy-five years ago. My grandfather was nine at the time. I am sure, as the multiple retellings of other stories are evidence of this, that this narrative has gone through an evolution of additions and subtractions. It is the evolutionary quality of storytelling as an oral tradition that gives these happenings such a wonderful existence. The stories have an ongoing life. They weave fact with fiction.



Figure 4 – Images of two great-grandmothers

Any time I heard this story or thought of it I recalled an image of my great grandmother: standing in a field, with a bag in one hand, and an apron around her waist. I recalled this one face,

her face, until one day I was sitting with my grandfather going through my collection of family images and he pointed to an image of his mother. It was a different face. The image was of a woman standing in a field, with a bag in one hand, and an apron around her waist. But it was not the same one. There was a slippage of identification.

I was once misinformed of the identification of two of my great-grandmothers. Or maybe I was told correctly but my memory failed me and I recalled a false identity. This slippage has become a part of my story in the retelling of my grandfather's. It has evolved into the reference of this photographic object and a portal into another time—a misguided one at that.

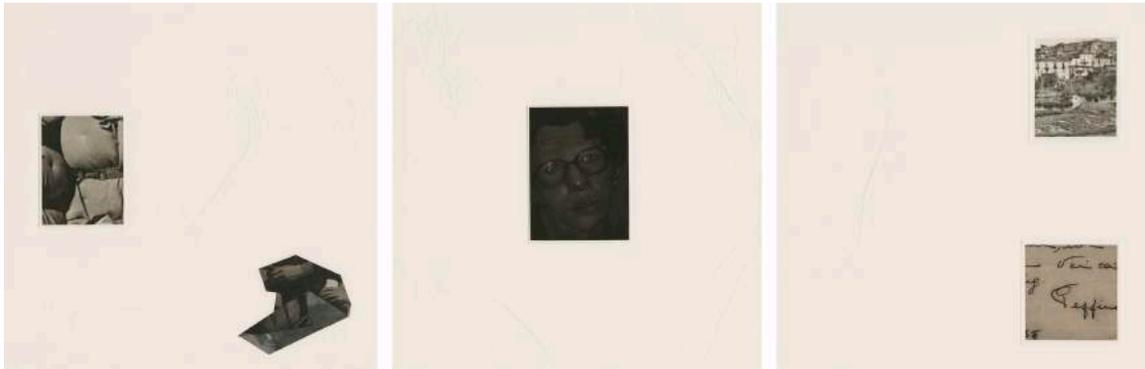


Figure 5 – *Reminders, Reminders* (detail)

By exposing multiple portals and glimpses into various times and circumstances within these prints I am inviting the onlooker to participate in the creation of fictions based upon the appearance of these objects and portals. These assemblages of prints become a constellation of sorts where the onlooker or storyteller begins to connect these distant parts in an attempt to create a whole, much like storytelling through the stars:

To tell a story, then, is to *relate*, in narrative, the occurrences of the past, retracing a path through the world that others, recursively picking up the threads of past lives, can follow in the process of spinning out their own. But rather as in looping or knitting, the thread being spun now and the thread picked up from the

past are both of the same yarn. There is no point at which the story ends and life begins.⁷

To think of both story and life as being part of the same entity is a means of diffusing this tension between fact and fiction. The threshold between these two parts is blurred and often becomes unrecognizable. Not only do we embellish our own accounts of past experiences, but we share and borrow from others. Oral storytelling then—as written stories have a certain sense of permanence and authority to them different than verbal narratives—is an evolving occurrence every time it is unfolded and pondered. Susan Stewart explains, “[s]peech leaves no mark in space; like gesture, it exists in its immediate context and can reappear only in another’s voice, another’s body, even if that other is the same speaker transformed by history. But writing contaminates; writing leaves its trace, a trace beyond the life of the body.”⁸ I do not present the narratives I think of in relation to my representations. Instead, I simply allow the images to index a sense of loss and drift in relation to the onlooking storyteller’s explorations. I do not feel the need to add permanence to a narrative, but trust in the images and gaps to invite one to pause...reflect, drift, and play.

Two accordion books sit upon a table, both unfolded, displaying multiple pages. One book, *Unfolded/Refolded Vol. 1*, displays photographs from my collection. They appear to have an order. One page to the next is an ongoing index of images that share relative size and imagery. The second book, *Unfolded/Refolded Vol. 2*, mirrors *Vol. 1* and exhibits the verso of the images in the same order. Looking through them, I see various notations, images, tape, dirt, and tears. Initially, the verso images call attention to the object-ness of the photograph—I find myself drifting into the accumulated markings, both written and circumstantial. I begin to unfold each page more playfully, cooperating with and challenging the book’s structure. A page in the front becomes paired with an image in the back. I can

⁷ Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 90.

⁸ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 31.

manipulate and introduce new relationships. I pause and drift into one image, then two, then a third. I recognize them from another place in the exhibition; a fragment made whole but still a fragment nonetheless.



Figure 6 – *Unfolded / Refolded Vol. 1&2* (installation)

Fragments

*The photograph is always more than an image: it is the site of a gap, a sublime breach between the sensible and the intelligible, between copy and reality, between memory and a hope.*⁹

I view my photographs as representing an illusionary space that allows me the ability to travel through portals into intangible, unknowable, distant, but familiar and uncanny worlds. The photographs within my collection provoke a sense of the real, and in particular, in the case of family photographs, a sense of the familiar.

I fragment the pieces of the photograph and present these fragments reframed and fractured in prints, calling attention to particulars that seem to have no specificity to an absolute

⁹ Agamben, *Profanations*, 26.

individual or universality to a group. They are no longer overly particular to an individual or universal in their relation to the masses. My prints and reframings exist in a middle ground: drifting between the particular and universal in constant oscillation, attempting to operate as Giorgio Agamben’s “whatever singularity”. For Agamben, *whatever* “is determined only through its relation to an *idea*, that is, to the totality of possibilities... Whatever is a singularity plus an empty space.”¹⁰ My prints attempt to respond to this idea of *whatever*. They do not belong to one possible outcome of a singular narrative, but to the totality of the possibilities of their outcomes. They exist with gaps and discontinuities that allow them to drift and exist in places of uncertainty and fragility—the spaces in between.

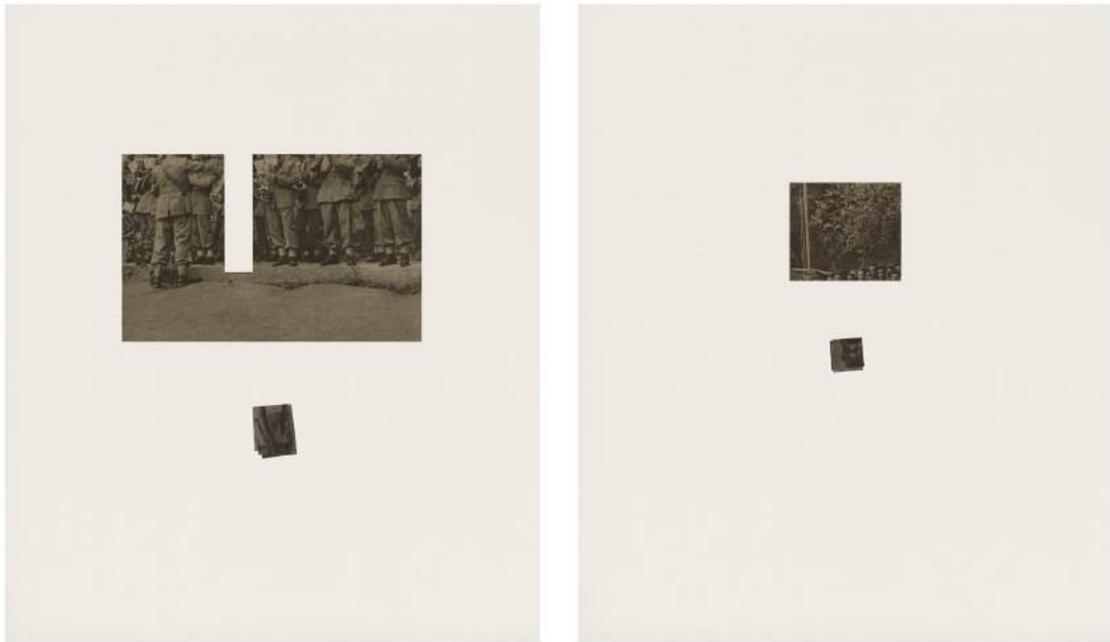


Figure 7 – *An Object, A Portal* (#3)

In *An Object, A Portal*, this fragmented experience is seen, however, it is much more immediate than in other assemblages. The image has been fragmented twice, from a source and

¹⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, Trans, Michael Hardt. Ed. Sandra Buckley, Michael Hardt, Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1993), 67.

then from its own fragment to produce a fold—both fragments, flat and folded, are displayed upon the same paper space. The title suggests both a division and connection between an object and a portal and asks the onlooker to make decisions as to whether the object exists as a fold, within the image, or is the image itself. The portal is then treated in a similar manner.

The grid in *Remainders, Reminders*, and *Read me a story*, pushes the onlooker to view from a distance to experience the whole but also pulls them in to view its particularities and glimpses into the original source material. In doing so, there is a shifting relationship between the system displayed and the subject seen. Artist Arnaud Maggs is a source of inspiration and investigation in my research upon the display of the grid and its effect upon both the work and its onlookers. In looking at Arnaud Maggs' many photographic grid installations, Phillip Monk, current Director of the Art Gallery of York University, explains he seems “more interested in system than subject, which makes his works more abstract, or at least they abstract something collective from the human subject by their presentation.”¹¹ The grid creates a system around the subject and complicates it. It allows for differences and similarities to be exposed and pondered by the onlooker who can engage in both the particulars and wholeness the work presents.

These gridded assemblages attempt to push and pull the onlooker between system and object. The in between spaces become active when a print is connected to another nearby. Lines begin to emerge, both imagined and physical. Within *Remainders, Reminders*, there is a line embossed through each of the paper spaces—a line is made present by its absence.

The line in my work came through listening to the words of artist Luis Camnitzer in a lecture he delivered at MOMA's exhibition, *On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century*,

¹¹ Philip Monk, *Arnaud Maggs: Works 1976-1999*, (Toronto Canada: The Power Plant, 1999), 21.

2010. He explains, “a drawn line is nothing more than unfolded handwriting.”¹² The line, then, only has to be pushed and pulled to create words and sentences before being pulled taut to start again.



Figure 8 – *Reminders, Reminders* (detail)

I sit in front of *Reminders, Reminders* and I see a constellation within a grid. Within it are prints, folds, and lines, sitting upon each paper space in various placements. Larger prints within this grid structure gently interrupt the systematic collection but also reinforce the grid from which they came. I sit and stare at fragments of images that are both individual and collective as a whole. One print begins to connect to another either through placement or my own arbitrary recognition. Assumed and visible lines connect one image to the next and there is an attempt to assign order to these once separated and individual elements like the constellations we know so well. I notice a fragment of an image but it is disconnected from its original whole. I attempt to complete the image’s particular form but additionally attempt to create wholeness by connecting that image to others nearby. My eyes jump from one image to the next.

¹² Luis Camnitzer, “From *On Line* to Online,” Moderated by Catherine de Zegher *On Line: Drawing the Through Twentieth Century*, January 21, 2011 (New York: The Celeste Bartos Theater) March 25, 2015 <http://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/audio_file/audio_file/2740/1-2111online_panelPart1.mp3>.



a constellation

III

*repeat, remove, routine
labour, ritual, feel
translate, narrate, drift
display, identify
repeat*

*repeat, reframe, unknown
preserve, copy, survive
labour, routine, skill
display, identity
repeat*

*repeat, remove, routine
preserve, copy, survive
translate, narrate, drift
display, identify
repeat*

*repeat, repeat, repeat
remove, routine, survive
copy, labour, evoke
display, identify
repeat*

*repeat, repeat, repeat
repeat, remove, routine
preserve, copy, survive
display, identify
repeat*

*repeat, repeat, repeat
remove, routine, survive
pause, preserve, copy
frame, survive
repeat*

Part Three: To Make and Fold

*A drawing contains the time of its own making, and this means that it possesses its own time, independent of the living time of what it portrays. The photograph, by contrast, receives almost instantaneously... The only time contained in a photograph is the isolated instant of what it shows.*¹³

John Berger explains “[u]nlike any other visual image, a photograph is not a rendering, an imitation or an interpretation of its subject, but actually a trace of it. No painting or drawing, however naturalist, *belongs* to its subject in the way that a photograph does.”¹⁴ My printed images, although photographic in appearance, do not share the same immediate relationship to the trace displayed upon the surface of the photograph. My prints distance themselves—scanned, enlarged, cropped, recropped, hand printed, cut, folded—they experience a loss of information and an addition of elapsed time. The sense of *belonging* to the subject and moment recorded becomes more ambiguous and detached but the relationship between the image and myself becomes more involved.

On the other hand, in the creation of my mezzotint images, I engage with an embodied process that is dependent upon slow acts of repetition within its preparation and cautious scrapings, reductive in nature, in the image’s emergence. Richard Sennett, in his writings on craftsmanship, states, “[t]he slowness of a craft time serves as a source of satisfaction; practice beds in, making the skill one’s own. Slow craft time also enables the work of reflection and imagination—which the push for quick results cannot.”¹⁵ The slowing down of time allows for contemplation and a chance to engage with the individuals whose likeness I reframe, translate, interpret, represent, and fold into a printed image. Craft in this regard is performative. I am aware and conscious of each pause, extracted photograph, created print, composition and fold. The

¹³ John Berger, “Appearances”, 95.

¹⁴ Ibid, *About Looking*, (New York: Vintage International), 54.

¹⁵ Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 295.

slowness of time is a part of this performance; there is a shared sense of significance in both craft-time and the completed print.

The slowness of craft within my photopolymer gravure images has a different emphasis on time in comparison to my mezzotints. This slowness occurs in the fragmentation of the found and family photographs into reframed details through investigating the image and reflecting upon the attributes—clues—within.

Umberto Eco defines clues as “objects left by an external agent in the spot where it did something, and are somehow recognized as physically linked to that agent, so that from their actual or possible presence the actual or possible past presence of the agent can be detected.”¹⁶ The individuals photographed often present themselves to the camera knowing they are being viewed. They display themselves in a manner reflecting how they want to be seen. Barthes claims that in front of the lens, “I pose, I know I am posing, I want you to know that I am posing.”¹⁷ Within this act of display, possible clues are present to be interpreted. I search within the subtleties of these clues. What influences our understanding of an individual unknown to us? What is integral to making assumptions about their identity? Are these assumptions based in fact, in fiction, or in both? The object-ness of the photograph exhibits its wear, its preciousness as an object treasured or its shared history of hands it has passed through. A blouse, a shirt, a dress, shoes, hands, feet, the backdrop—all provide traces to the ‘past presence of the agent’ that I attempt to unfold and, more specifically, allows one to question how we know what we think we know about an image.

¹⁶ Umberto Eco, “Horns, Hooves, Insteps: Some Hypotheses on Three Types of Abduction,” *The Sign of Three: Dupin, Holmes, Peirce*, eds. Umberto Eco, Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 211.

¹⁷ Barthes, 11.



Figure 9 – *An Uncanny Self-Portrait* reference images

In my print *The Uncanny Self-Portrait*, I am presented as the collector/the artist, attempting to resurrect a sense of weight and belonging to these forgotten and distant photographs. I am the keeper of the images and I come alive in their stories. Walter Benjamin states in his discussions on collections that they do not “come alive in him; it is he who lives in them.”¹⁸ In this print I have assembled and combined attributes of faces in my collection within my own portrait, creating a familiar reimagining of my own image, yet distant and unknown. It is a shared experience of others and myself staring back at the onlooker.

I look upon my self-portrait, and although it is not immediately evident, I have presented a misguided image. Brows, eyes, nose, ears, lips, and clothes all belong to different individuals, however only features that ‘fit’ my portrait were chosen. There is a slight oddity and uncertainty within this image but only to those who know my likeness intimately. (*Often, when art students attempt self-portraits, it is difficult to achieve a likeness that reflects the self and the portrait appears as a brother or sister*). My family recognizes the image of the portrait staring back however they do not recognize me in it—they see a second cousin of mine in his youth. This print has been etched, reworked, placed upon the floor and stepped

¹⁸ Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking my Library,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Trans. Harry Zohn. Ed. Hannah Arendt. (New York: Schocken Books, 1955), 67.

on, kicked, and reworked again. It is the only print to be displayed on its own, potentially creating a quiet moment and a pause.

Folds

To fold a paper into a smaller entity may be to acknowledge it as unwanted in the present but possibly needed in the future. It is forgotten to be remembered—pushed aside. To fold clothes is a similar experience. You fold these items to place them in a container to hold them until needed at a future time. I remember participating in folding pieces of paper in school with secret writing to be passed along to another as a note—a practice that continues when information needs to be exchanged quietly between hands. Folding makes cryptic the object's inside and becomes an outside.

Gilles Deleuze moves away from these more practical uses of a fold into a more philosophical undertaking in his essay titled *The Fold*. Deleuze discusses “when an organism dies, it does not really vanish, but folds in upon itself, abruptly involuting into the again newly dormant seed.”¹⁹ When engaging with found and family photographs, I often think of them as cryptic objects, folded in upon themselves into this singular point—both an end and a beginning waiting to unfold. Although I can peer into their illusionary spaces, I am often unaware of the connecting memories that should adorn their traces. Through my investigations I am interested in how these cryptic moments remain unknown and hidden. Some prints are crumpled and flattened upon a paper space and have a fluidity in their ‘static’ movements on the page, while others are folded quickly but purposefully into smaller—almost precious—objects. The translucency of the paper allows veiled information to come through. *Read me a story* is a collection of such folded objects displayed in a grid, oscillating between both object and portal. They are cryptic in nature and tempt the onlooker to unfold them to grasp its secrets.

¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold*, (New York: Continuum, 1993), 9.



Figure 10 – *Read me a story* (detail)

I feel an immediate relationship between my body and its size. It acts as a doorway—a portal—that can transport a wandering mind. It is a comfortable mass—not too expansive or contractive. I continue to look and notice one space, another, a third, a fourth...fifth and sixth. Gaps and voids complicate its structure and seem to make it visually ‘flicker.’ I step forward, becoming more intimate with each particular fold, and catch glimpses of images and writing—nothing more, nothing less. I feel tempted to pluck one off the wall as if it were an apple on the forbidden tree, but I resist. I bend and move to the left and right and look between folds: a hand, the letters “i-n-n-o”, hair, a shirt, a head, numbers, more unknowns. I know more information exists but I am restricted from accessing it—I am both invited and refused. Thinking back to its inception I remember the prints that form these objects as discards. Not wanting to rid myself of these precious remnants, I began folding them as if writing a note to myself and placing them in my pocket to be forgotten in the present, but remembered in the future.



a constellation

IV

drift, pause, found
lost, forgot, slow
slip, story, repeat
before, after
drift

drift, fast, slow
found, lost, unknown
slip, feel, preserve
before, after
drift

drift, fast, slow
doubt, lose, find
slip, feel, preserve
before, after
drift

drift, collect, glean
doubt, lose, find
slip, find again, repeat
before, after
drift

drift, collect, glean
mourn, lose, find
slip, find again, repeat
lose, lost
drift

drift, collect, glean
doubt, mourn, find
slip, repeat
lose, lost
drift

Conclusion: Wait

In my thesis exhibition, *A Constellation of Sorts*, I present you with a bench: an invitation to sit and pause, to become both still and adrift, to be seated, to participate in the slowness of time. You might simply rest and let your mind wander elsewhere, but the act of sitting in such a space is an acknowledgment of waiting, even just for a moment.

There is a heaviness of elapsed time due to the collected photographs' past. They are inevitably connected to a time and space other than our own. To narrate a photograph's traces is to slow down time and observe the nuances. Telling stories bridge gaps and thresholds from times past and present, inviting conversation—one person speaks and another listens:

I sit upon a chair in my studio and peer onto a floor, recently cleaned, covered in prints. Each print is a fragment of a photograph translated and displayed: portraits, hands, clothes, backdrops, are all visible. My eye lands upon the velvety blacks of a mezzotint portrait. Its darkness is noticed prior to the portrait of the young woman it displays. Next to the mezzotint is a fragment of a hand with a silvery sheen, printed on a paper with a pronounced laid line. A warm hue delicately surfaces beneath the hand and illuminates it. The hand is both disconnected and uninhabited but holds on to the warmth of life. I pick up the woman's portrait and sit and stare. I place it next to a foot, then a leg, and finally a shoulder. I do the same with the hand. Other prints follow these slow movements until a moment of drifting coherency arises. I sit once more and stare. I wait.



Figure 11 – *A Constellation of Sorts* (installation)



Figure 12 – *A Constellation of Sorts* (installation)



Figure 13 – *A Constellation of Sorts* (installation)



Figure 14 – *A Constellation of Sorts* (installation)

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