An apologia of camera-using:
toward an embodied photography

Andrew Philip Hobden
Swansea College of Art, University of Wales Trinity St. David

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‘The world is
not with us enough.
O taste and see[…]’ (Levertov 2003: 36 [the bold script occurs in the original])

‘[…Tichý’s] body took photographs: organic, biological photographs, each an encounter and impulse toward life[…]’ (Christov-Bakargiev 2010: 24)

‘“*I am the prophet of decay and a pioneer of chaos, because only from chaos does something new emerge*.”’ (Buxbaum 2010: 315, quoting Miroslav Tichý [italics occur in the original])

‘The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. […]Anyone can easily see that we are moving in a circle. Ordinary understanding demands that this circle be avoided because it violates logic. […]Thus we are compelled to follow the circle. This is neither a makeshift nor a defect. To enter upon this path is the strength of thought, to continue on it is the feast of thought, assuming that thinking is a craft. Not only is the main step from work to art a circle like the step from art to work, but every separate step that we attempt circles in this circle.’ (Heidegger 2011: 89-90)

A disclaimer

Before I embark on a survey of the doing, making and thinking with which I have been engaged, I ought to make one crucial disclaimer: I do not self-identify as *photographer.*[1] [I am even uncertain whether I am comfortable with the label of *lens-based artist* and confess a nagging suspicion that I do not even possess a practice as such.] Henceforth, I shall refer to myself as *camera-user*, *photograph-taker* or *photograph-user*. These descriptors connote something significant to my experience of photography: I emphasize the active and progressive elements of the photographic experience, the 'embodied thinking' (Bleeker 2008: 159),[2] as it were, involved in the taking and the making. The term *photographer* stresses the nominal component of the photographic act, the end-product of the object[ive] of the photograph and the resultant [and, for me, discordant] elision between the I/eye progressively doing with the static [and bracketed (Bleeker 2008: 153)] photograph, the last thing of the photographic.

However, the mind [particularly in its more conscious processing] does bracket. Thought itself implies the ability to focus the attention or still or take a mental snapshot in order to analyze. So, I am not anti-photograph; I take exception to the subordination of the body of the camera-user to the stilled body of the object of the photograph. This uneasy subjection of the dynamic body to the bracketed photograph reminds me of the following aphorism by Lev Shestov:

> One need neither see, nor hear, nor understand what is taking place around one: once your mind is made up, you have lost the right to grow, you must remain a stock, a statue, the qualities and defects of which are known to everybody. (Shestov 1977: 53)

And as an antidote to such conceptual and material corporeal entrapment, Lev Shestov quotes Turgenev:

> 'No! without culture, without freedom in the widest sense, freedom within oneself, freedom from preconceived ideas, freedom with regard to one's own nation and history, without this, the real artist is unthinkable; without this air he cannot breathe.'

(Shestov 1977: 14)

What happens if we steer the *modus operandi* of the photographic act away from the photograph? What does the camera become if it loses its function as a generator of images intended for print and is transformed into a tool through which the user opts to perceive, experience and investigate? I hear the heckler [my doppelganger] say: 'Why, then, photograph at all if it isn't ultimately about the photograph? To what end are you photographing?[3] Cease your pointless generation of images and return your camera to the self-professed photograph-generators, the photographers!' To provide further force to the heckler's questions and imperatives, I disconcertingly observe that my writing heretofore avoids direct mention of either photographs or photography, that I have been intentionally talking around photography. So, while this article will be ostensibly about what I have been doing and making, it will equally be about what underpins these actions — the first things or the proto-photographic of photography, perhaps the 'non-photo-graph[ic]' (Laruelle 2011: 1) or pre-photographic element resident in the photographic act: a phenomenology of camera-using, photo-taking and photo-refashioning.

‘Addressing the elephant in the room’

To approach a discussion of the photographic, I must first acknowledge the cause of my aversion to directly engage with photography discourse: Roland Barthes in his seminal ‘reflections on photography’, *Camera Lucida* (Barthes, 2000).

> So I make myself the measure of photographic ‘knowledge.’ What does my body know of Photography? I observed that a photograph can be the object of three practices (or of three emotions, or of three intentions): to do, to undergo, to look. […]One of these practices was barred to me and I was not to investigate it: I am not a photographer[…]. (Barthes 2000: 9)

In a simple statement, logically ensuing from his decision to make his subjective experience (Barthes 2000: 8) the basis of the reflections, Barthes summarily dismisses the camera-user and the camera-user’s experience. By omitting the body and the embodied experience from which the photograph issues, Barthes literally disembodies photographic discourse.[4] And due to this body-shaped vacuum, all manner of immateriality and insubstantiality follows — such as, the process of reduction and dematerialization of the photographic subject involving a predatory shooting; the spectral emanation of ‘a little eidolon’ (Barthes 2000: 9) from the object shot; the capture of that phantom in the object of the photograph, which, in turn, as a ‘return of the dead’ (Barthes 2000: 9), possesses the potential to prick or wound the viewer, the ‘*punctum*’ (Barthes 2000: 27) of the photograph. Barthes’ theory of photography is a Photography-according-to-the-Photograph-and-the-‘Spectator’ (Barthes 2000: 9), unhinged from the camera-user.[5] For Barthes, in effect, it is as if the photograph self-materializes — it might only be an apparition, a mirage, a trick of the eye.

From the vantage point of the camera-user’s experience, the photograph and, hence, the viewer of the photograph are the ‘last things’ of the photographic act. According to Martin Heidegger, the ‘last things’ are ‘death and judgment’ (Heidegger 2011: 92). So, quite appropriately does Barthes’ critical appraisal of the photographic, based

upon the ‘last things’ of the photograph and the viewer of the photograph, revolve around death, temporality and incorporeality.



Figure 1: *Photographing a Photograph*, Andrew Philip Hobden, 2016.

Even Georgio Agamben’s ‘angel of the Last Judgment — who is also the angel of photography,’ whose ‘judgment concerns a single person, a single life’ (Agamben 2007: 24) — surely must recognize the import of the corporeal enabler of her pronouncements. And perhaps, unlike Barthes, her omniscient judgment is doubled back to include the body of the camera-user, who could be repeatedly summoned into reckoning; or, just maybe, she treats that body as a counterpart and seeks feedback on the equitability of her verdicts…

* * * * * *

So, in reaction to the threnodial tone of *Camera Lucida*, I decided to make. And this making altered the trajectory of my doing, making and thinking toward the twin concerns of embodiment or embodied thinking and matter or substance in relation to the photographic.

Fleshing out the lack

Due to the strength of my reaction to *Camera Lucida* combined with a suspicion that perhaps something encoded in the text was eluding me, I set myself a thought experiment. In order to comprehend or see more fully the anatomy of its impact, I chose to type out Barthes' text and my reactions to said text within it as they occurred, unedited. So, I was more than merely engaging with *Camera Lucida* via my fingers upon the keyboard*;* the text became reliant upon *my* body for its re-materialization. Embodily filtered, it circulated through me from eye to brain to fingertips. In effect, I inhabited the text, and the text inhabited me. I, as camera-user, added my body to *Camera Lucida*, the element that I perceived Barthes' reflections lacked.[6]

I designed each page of this hybrid, bastard, [self-]illuminative text ['[…]self-reflexive, demonstrative[…]unoriginal[…]' (Goldsmith 2011: 3)] to be printed upon four to five pages of acetate, which together form a whole, readable page. Throughout the text, I employed quotes from various thinkers, printed backwards — staged hecklers, if you will. Unregistered or unhinged, each page required the reader's [my] body to hold it together to retain its sense. I derived [and derive still] an immense pleasure in holding the page together, then relaxing my grip and allowing the page to slide again into an indeterminacy, a stuttering 'stuff and nonsense' (Pajaczkowska 2005: 221).

It ought to be noted here that when I conducted this thought experiment, I was unacquainted with James Elkins' book, *What Photography Is* (Elkins, 2011). Elkins aspires "[…]to write about photography by writing into or through Barthes's book—ventriloquizing if necessary, inhabiting the book, writing at first from inside it, in order finally to be outside it' (Elkins 2011: xi). The similarity between the two endeavours could have resulted from an unwitting encounter with his ideas or perhaps due to the zeitgeist. However, I still contend that Elkins is principally concerned with photography as an ocular, 'solitary' (Elkins

2011: viii) act and, hence, the resultant photograph retains a prominent position in his discourse; whereas, I emphasize the sensorial, cognitive dimension in the photographic act (which implies that the act itself is connection-making, rather than a solitary or insular pursuit) and, hence, a rethinking of the product of the photograph in deference to that embodied, nodal act.

The philosopher with a camera penetrates the web of reality

As a heckle employed in my reflections within Barthes' reflections, Walter Benjamin jeers: 'The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web' (Benjamin 1999: 227).[7] What is the nature of this web of reality to which Benjamin refers? From a phenomenological reading, this web is comprised of sets of relations of which the hub or centre is the body of the perceiving subject — in other words, a web of pure, subjective reality. The perceiving body moves freely through its environ, sensorially making connections with phenomena.[8] For the camera-user, the camera is borne along, by and with the user's body and is employed to directly engage with objects or groupings of objects as encountered and to actively establish connections *to* them. In short, through the mediation of the camera, the camera-user phenomenologically investigates objects and, while so doing, plumbs her/his very own embodied experience.

Paraphrasing François Laruelle, the philosopher is the 'photographer with no camera' (Laruelle 2011: 1). Via this anachronism, Laruelle reveals that the philosopher and the camera-user are compelled by an analogous, rudimentary probing. Originating from, or catalyzed by, her/his embodied experience, the philosopher poses rudimentary questions regarding the nature of identity, the nature of the things surrounding the body and the relation of the perceiving subject to those things comprising the world of phenomena, which she or he variously answers. Comparably, for the camera-user — via her/his body, through that recognizable choreography which includes a focussed intensity, a scrutiny — *asks* suchlike, rudimentary questions. By and during this dance, this thinking through the body, the camera-user photographs not the object-by-itself but a correlation between that object and her/his body, providing multiple, tentative answers or hypotheses or *photographs* to the implied enquiry. The literal positioning of the camera-user's body —

the sizing up for the shot — is simultaneously a physical posing of the following questions: 'what is this object *to* me?' and 'what am I *to* this object?'. And it matters little whether the camera-user is conscious of the philosophical content resident in the photographic act — for it is not an intentional but a symbolic content. Viewed in this manner, the photograph is almost incidental, hypothetical, a by-product of embodied thinking.

What is documented in the photograph is not the object but the object's relation to the body of the camera-user. It is far from an objective representation or an object-by-itself. Rather, the photograph is a particularity — an individual, personal vista — resulting from a nodal interaction between a perceiving subject enquiring through the mechanism of the liminal camera toward a perceived object scrutinized. Furthermore, the moment of the taking of the photograph involves a certain affective, reciprocal tactility: a being touched that results in a touching in return, which is the instant of the opening of the shutter — a connection, a photograph. To reiterate: in reality, the photograph is a hybrid that does *not* record a solo object but a correlation between the object and the body of the perceiving subject wielding the camera. Every photograph, thusly construed, is partly a 'selfie'. So, perhaps the 'little eidolon' sensed in the photograph by the viewer is not the dying ember of the dematerialized soul of the object photographed but the hidden body of the camera-user [or rather, the philosopher with a camera] implicit in the photograph itself as a presence occluded from view, yet nonetheless essentially present. The relic of the photograph reveals only in part.[9] What is shown in the photograph is a part of the whole, and the sum of the relations — the web of the embodied real — is concealed within the fabric of the constituting photograph.

A looking-through-toward v. a looking-directly-at

As posited, there is a perhaps unconscious, philosophico-symbolic content resident in the embodied thinking/posing of the camera-user during the photographic act. Moreover, looking or reading through things comprising that act may also be perceived to contain something of the allegorical construed minimally — '"something turned into something else … one text read through another"' (Berger and Richon 1990: unpaginated). The camera-user, the perceiving subject, reads closely or scrutinizes [which presupposes a looking through the texts of her/his cognitive, paradigmatic filters] through the text of the mechanism of the camera to the text of the body of the perceived object — truly an intra- and intertextual act. So if the act possesses an allegorical dimension, it follows that, as described by Berger and Richon in the introduction to *Other Than Itself*: *Writing Photography* (Berger and Richon, 1990), the product of this act is also allegorical in nature. Viewed thusly, the relic of the photograph, that conceals yet contains within it the relation of the body of the object photographed to the body of the camera-user, is an 'other than itself' (Berger and Richon 1990: unpaginated) — an interpretation of the photographic image via the text of the unseen-yet-essentially-present body of the camera-user. The photograph references more than what is shown — an embodied relation which is half-obscured yet the whole remains implicit. In other words, the hybridic photograph, the product of an intra- and intertextual activity, is a constituting thing, that alone it is partial and fragmentary requiring context or supporting texts to be optimally apprehended. Left to its own devices, the common misdirection of the viewer occurs toward a reading of an objective rendering of the object[s] photographed, rather than a yield from an interaction between two or more bodies. The counteraction of the looking-through-toward of the camera-user and the looking-directly-at of the viewer of the photograph perhaps may be eased by an understanding of the allegorical nature of the medium itself.



Figure 2: *Untitled*, Andrew Philip Hobden, 2012. A photograph of [or a looking-through-toward] Ben Ross reading through the text of his self-potrait [*Resonance — Figure 1*] toward me photographing him; the photograph operates as a sort of diagram of the relation between camera operator and object photographed from the perspective of the camera-user.

Matter matters, mind: the photograph as a stack or a [piece of] fabric

I propose that the exhibitor of photographs may address the natural disparity between the photograph-according-to-the-camera-user or the indirect looking-through-toward and the photograph-according-to-the-viewer or the looking-directly-at — that this disparity may be alleviated and the allegorical dimension of the medium incorporated into the way the viewer approaches the photograph — a certain indirect looking-through-toward. Perhaps this new material indirection, this re-thingification of the matter of the photograph, may be fathomed in part by metaphorically plumbing the photograph-according-to-the-camera-user.

For the camera-user, the photograph acts as a fragment or relic or metonym that recalls a whole set of relations and sensations from an embodied experience, including the instant of the photograph or that affective, reciprocal tactility. Hence, there is a density or a flesh to the photograph that for the viewer is, perhaps seductively, absent. This perceived density has something of 'the functioning synthesis of the conceit or the extended metaphor' to it. As I wrote in '"Wheel Within Wheel": Nodes, Merleau-Ponty's Space and the Mind-Body-Space Continuum' (Hobden, 2013):

> In effect, the conceit stacks whole, disparate objects, concepts, experiences and feelings upon one another which, via their proximity, form connections and layers of nuanced meaning that inter-explicate the individual items within the stack and build up to a complex holism. (Hobden 2013: 14)

Thus, for the camera-user, the photograph possesses some layeredness, an interconnectedness or an intra- and intertextuality: in short, it is a stack of 'associations, displacements, and condensations' (Berger and Richon 1990: unpaginated) connected to the embodied experience that incurred the photograph. The depth and density added to the photograph might simply be put as the addition or the connection of a unifying body to it — a body which acts as a node or hub of connectivity, synthesizing disparate elements.

An alternative metaphor for the photograph-according-to-the-camera-user is that it

is cloth or [a piece of] fabric, that 'its seduction is to hide rather than to reveal' (Berger and Richon 1990: unpaginated). Berger and Richon quote Diderot as saying that 'allegory is a form of conceit which[…]resembles "*un tissu d 'hiéroglyphes entassés les uns sur les autres*" [a fabric of hieroglyphs piled one on another]' (Berger and Richon 1990: unpaginated). This is a single fabric composed of the multiple — that shrouds its multiplicity behind the guise of a singularity — this is the tension between the ostensible and the actual folded into the fabric or the 'stuff' (Pajaczkowska 2005: 221; Merleau-Ponty 2002: 283) of the photograph. In Claire Pajaczkowska's essay, 'On Stuff and Nonsense: The Complexity of Cloth' (2005), while relating cloth to 'stuff' or 'unspecified materiality,' she writes that cloth is experienced '[…]as neither object nor subject, but as the threshold between, as a liminality where meaning decomposes into materiality, and threatens nonsense' (Pajaczkowska 2005: 221). The metaphor of cloth or fabric emphasizes the photograph's ultimately indeterminate, liminal status, that it is by nature a borderland, an in-between-ness, a correlation — indeed, a subject/object hybrid.[10] It represents a state of flux between two or more terms. Moreover, due to the implication of the body [the skin] with cloth, this metaphor evokes the element of the camera-user's body that is both clothed and shrouded by the matter of the photograph.

Reading through Miroslav Tichý: the text of the unseen-yet-essentially-present body of the camera-user

In May of 2010 at the International Center of Photography in New York, I attended an exhibition of Miroslav Tichý's photographs and homemade cameras. Previously unacquainted with the work of Tichý, I approached it ignorant of the assorted controversies surrounding him. As a result, I encountered his photographs on their own terms as objects. The 'unspecified materiality' (Pajaczkowska 2005: 221), the surface texture of the photographic objects, almost palpably struck me.[11] As I moved from photograph to photograph — from revelation to revelation, I mused that Tichý had reinvented and reclaimed photography-according-to-himself — from the fabrication of cameras and lenses to the materiality of the photographs themselves. On leaving the show, I read some critical appraisals of Tichý's life and work, venturing to contextualize and verify my impressions. While being informed that Tichý was an enigmatic maverick who suffered from psychotic episodes, the unique crux of Tichý's work [as perceived by me] was oft-glossed over, and in its stead the potentially dismissive label of *voyeur* was utilised. Reading Tichý primarily as *voyeur* places emphasis on the photographic subject rather than the stuff through which the viewer looks toward those blurred and distorted images of women. Hence, the photograph-according-to-the-camera-user is eclipsed once again by the viewer of the photograph and her/his reading of the photographic motif.



Figure 3: 10-1-126, Miroslav Tichý, date unknown, supplied courtesy of Tichý Ocean.



Figure 4: 4-3-269, Miroslav Tichý, date unknown, supplied courtesy of Tichý Ocean.

Roman Buxbaum mentions that Tichý possesses a 'propensity for the *Gesamtkunstwerk*' (Buxbaum 2010: 312) or for the 'complete art work' (Cuddon 1998: 342), that his 'approach did not distinguish between art and life' (Buxbaum 2010: 312). For Tichý, the photographic act is essentially an embodied, perceptual act, indistinguishable from embodied experience with no camera.[12] This indeterminacy — this elision between Tichý's habit of living and his photographic practice — is, in essence, the camera-user's direct penetration of the web of the embodied real. Tichý, the self-professed 'pioneer of chaos' (Buxbaum 2010: 315), consistently catches up the material of the photograph into the experienced vortex of the 'chaosmos' (Doy 2002: 150) of art/life — which is also Heidegger's 'feast of thought' or the 'circles in [the causal] circle' of 'art to work' and 'work to art' (Heidegger 2011: 90). From production to post-production, Tichý's embodiment extends its influence upon the substance and appearance of the photograph. For instance, Tichý failed to use tongs to retrieve the photographs from the developing solution, leaving some with a thumb- or fingerprint on them (Buxbaum 2010: 319). Furthermore, Tichý's 'infamous [photographic] post-production methods' (Buxbaum 2010: 312) have been described as follows:

> […]sitting on the photographs, sleeping on them, cutting off the edges, improving the composition with a ballpoint pen or colored pencils, folding them, using them under a table leg to keep the table from wobbling, spilling coffee or rum on them, throwing them out the window, forgetting that he threw them out the window (even when it begins to rain), then finding them again and saving them, sticking them onto a piece of cardboard, giving them a mat, and, finally, noting the TV listings on the back. (Buxbaum 2010: 320)

Through bodily interaction, a conflation between his body and the material of the photographs occurs to such an extent that '[…]one soon understands that it is the photographs themselves that are bodies, as Tichý *draws* the world of mere appearances toward himself and condenses them into the materiality of his *withdrawn* world' (Christov-Bakargiev 2010: 26 [emphasis occurs in the original text]). Via embodied engagement, Tichý, as 'prophet of decay' (Buxbaum 2010: 315), displaces the photograph from the

position of a last thing of the photographic act to an almost last thing, a perpetually displaced, *penultimate* thing — a thing that never arrives.

Like aging bodies, Tichý's photographs were in a state of natural degradation, akin to the influence of geologic time upon the landscape. They had not arrived at the Ultimate destination, the point of cessation: obliteration, death, the eschatological Day of Reckoning. Tichý's embodied protraction of photograph production indefinitely postponed the verdict from the 'angel of the Last Judgment', the 'angel of [the] photo-graph[ ]' (Agamben 2007: 24 [the amendment of Agamben's phrase creates greater concord with my vision of an embodied photography]). Indeed, the photographs continued to dwell 'in the land of the living' (Psalm 116:9; Psalm 27:13; Isaiah 38:11) — that is, until they were salvaged — the decomposition forcibly halted — and were preserved [pickled] for posterity as photographs.



Figure 5: 10-1-93, Miroslav Tichý, date unknown, supplied courtesy of Tichý Ocean.

So, in effect, the viewer is actually looking *through* Tichý — through evidence, traces, residues of the text of his embodiment — his habit of living among his photographs — *toward* the text of the person photographed. This evidence of Tichý's embodied presence partly explicates or interprets the image; for the viewer, the marks become one with the image, inseparable from it. In a sense [almost literally], the proper embodied relation of the body of the camera-user to the body of the photographed subject is made manifest to the viewer. It is as if the viewer stands behind Tichý photographing — for the viewer is reading through Tichý's embodiment, which both clarifies and obfuscates [clothes] the photographic subject. A partial collapse or failure of quantifiable space occurs between perceiving subject and perceived object, between camera-user and viewer — a new whole [or a new piece of fabric] has been fabricated, synthesized from disparate elements, which is the stack of the conceit. The allegorical dimension of the photographic medium is realized in, and adapted into, the materiality of the photographs. In the embodiment of the photographs of Miroslav Tichý, we see/hear intimations of the web of the embodied real.



Figure 6: 3-031, Miroslav Tichý, date unknown, supplied courtesy of Tichý Ocean.

Weaving photographs

As I have contended, the hybridic photograph documents a correlation between the unseen-yet-essentially-present body of the camera-user and the object photographed. Also posited as answer to the disparity between the photograph-according-to-the-camera-user and the photograph-according-to-the-viewer is the possibility of a new material indirection, whereby the materiality of the photograph incurs a certain looking-through-toward for the viewer — a re-thingification of the matter of the photograph that incorporates the allegorical dimension of the photographic medium. Tichý, as read by me, via a manifestation of his body in the materiality of his photographs, addresses this disparity and offers a new model for an articulation of the photograph-according-to-the-camera-user. So, I was faced with a dilemma: without emulating Tichý [throwing photographs out of the window, using them to steady a table, sleeping on them, etc.] or, worse yet, simulating the appearance of Tichý's photographs through contrived means, how could I insinuate myself as camera-user into the substance of my photographs? I required an alter-language in order to approach Miroslav Tichý and also to facillitate an articulation of a phenomenology of camera-using and photo-refashioning. Via research into textile theory, I recognized the emphasis on embodiment as the element that photographic discourse lacked. Could I approach the photographic through the lens, the text of textile thinking? I rightly assumed that the pliable grid (Pajaczkowska 2005: 8) and the 'soft logics' (Barnett 2009: unpaginated) of textiles would indeed make it manipulable enough — that I could tailor textile theory to suit the photographic in order to rethink [re-embody] it.

After a brief period of a literal application of the photographic *to* textiles — a printing of photographs on silk and cotton and silk voile, I commenced an experimental doing and making, an adaptation of weaving to the photographic. I came to perceive the weaving act

as analogous to the embodied experience involved in the photographic act. Weaving as the making of new wholes from the disparate [disparate materials and disparate (pieces of) images] parallels the allegorical dimension of the photographic [the stack of the conceit and the *fabric*ation of the photograph]. Also, weaving new wholes from fragments, traces, remnants imitates the synthesis that continually occurs in cognition — the ideational flow that takes place within the white matter of the brain. The white matter or the body's 'communication pathways are the spaces where our [sensorial], embodied experience of space integrates into a unified whole and also where thought unites with this sense data resulting in a cognitively integrated, [woven,] embodied experience' (Hobden 2013: 5). The disparate is woven into a synthetic unity in the body of the perceiving subject.

Initially, I sought to see/use photographs as raw material, as potentially non-visual stuff. Using this photographic stuff, I embarked on a series of experiments in weaving: I tacked weaves to frames; I wove pieces into larger photographs; I created long mobile-like structures — referred to as *nodes* — by drawing out and reconnecting lines extant in the strips of photograph; and I stripped down an image printed on photographic paper and cut the same image printed larger on silk and wove it into itself, creating pleats.

Due to reflecting on the photograph as a relic or trace of an embodied experience, I commenced printing photographs of the wires of a suspension bridge onto tracing paper and sewing weaves of them together with silk thread and/or ultra-thin, monofilament fishing line. In an attempt to capture the sense of fluidity in [the flow of] the embodied experience involved in taking the photographs, I cut two images into strips and wove them together: while one image retained an impression of being a discernible whole, I wove piecemeal the second image to connect and sever the lines of the photographed wires in the former. Resultantly, I wove the image as much as the material.

I then undertook the fabrication of a series of tracing-paper photoweaves by weaving the same suspension wire photograph into itself. Thricely doubled, there is an



Figure 7: A detail of *Punctus contra punctum* photographed during the photoweave's construction, Andrew Philip Hobden, 2014.

Figure 8: A detail of *Punctus contra punctum* photographed during the photoweave's construction, Andrew Philip Hobden, 2014.

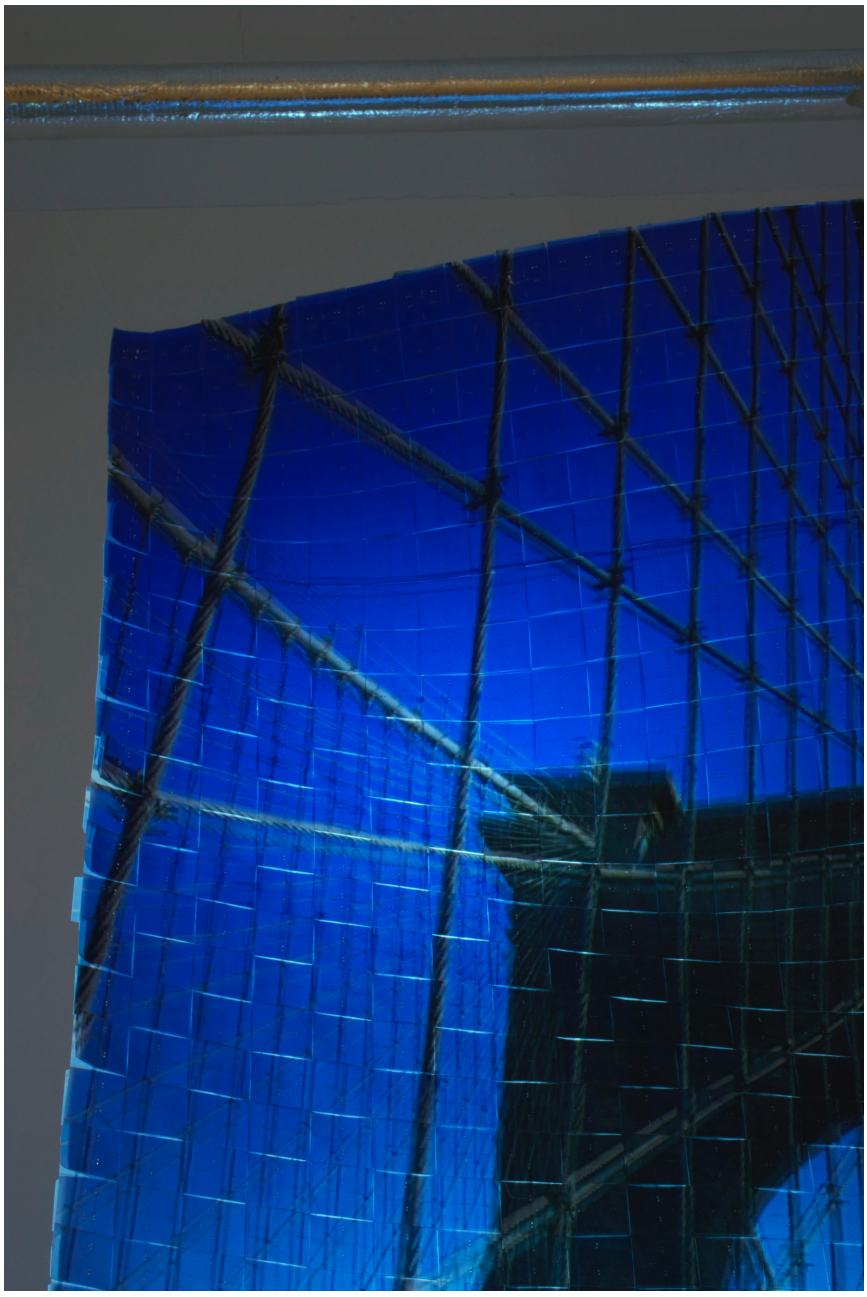


inherent doubleness in the act of weaving my photographs, a doubleness in the construction and a doubleness in the final product. During the act of weaving, I am looking at, thinking about and working on myself — recalling, reworking, reliving and rethinking the embodied experience from which the photograph issued — a self-reflexivity, bordering on solipsism if it were not for considerations of the viewer during its construction. Moreover, since the [duplicitous] photograph documents a relation between the unseen-yet-essentially-present body of the camera-user and the object[s] photographed, then in the activity of weaving my photographs I, as camera-user, am drawing the object of the photograph [in which I am concealed] back to my body [from which it issued]. I am re-embodying it by the re-application of my body, a reclaiming [or a recolonizing] of it.

Once reclaimed as the photograph-according-to-the-body-of-the-camera-user, there is a doubleness in the photoweave's construction. The faltering image is 'stutter[ed] and stammer[ed]' (O'Sullivan 2012: 4) in part by design [the slight angle at which I choose to

cut the strips] but also by a natural displacement that occurs via the act of weaving.[13]

Figure 9: A detail of *Punctus contra punctum 2*, one of three photoweaves comprising an installation, Andrew Philip Hobden, 2014.



Incorporated into the construction is a looking through the photograph to its double, which parallels the essential presence of the camera-user in the photograph and the reconstituting of it via an act of the camera-user's body. Hence, the minimally-construed allegorical ["'one text read through another"' (Berger and Richon 1990: unpaginated)], intrinsic to the photographic medium, is made apparent via the manner by which the photograph is reified, affecting how the viewer approaches the photograph — for the viewer looks through evidence of an activity of weaving — an act of my body — toward the image informed via that activity.[14] Even though my body is unseen in the photograph, it is no longer obfuscated by the matter of the photograph — my body is made visible in the photograph via the act of weaving it. In a sense, my presence in the photograph has been doubled for the sake of the viewer.

The finished fabric also has a doubleness to it: these tracing-paper photoweaves are traces, remnants, relics of my original, embodied experience [since they are partially transparent when backlit, they are also icons or windows or portals to it]. Once reified, these objects [fashioned from my subjective experience] are relinquished, freed by me. In turn, the viewer is encouraged to embodily engage with these fabrications on her/his own terms. Thus, an embodied experience [doubled by the act of weaving] provides occasion for a distinct or alternative, embodied experience.



Figure 10: Andrew Hobden and Paul Jeff, our visual/material dialogue from the *Co-respondents* Exhibition at The Mission Gallery in March 2014. My relics and/or icons to Paul's relic and icon. The photograph is supplied courtesy of The Mission Gallery, Swansea, Wales.

* * * * * *

Thus,

I find myself at

a destination

which is but

a commencement

[a ‘feast of thought’ (Heiddeger 2011: 90)] —

a non-arrival

[a ‘Wheel within Wheel’ (Blake 2004: 662)] —

a deferment

[‘circles in this circle’ (Heiddeger 2011: 90)] —

a starting point

[embodiment]…….. And here

in this potentiality

I spin —

a whirling Dervish…

Punctus contra punctum [evidence of a baroque[n] mind]

The consequence of my doing and making was [and is] the tug-and-pull incurred by the repellent effect of Barthes' camera-user-less [hence, disembodied] theory and the attraction to the model of Tichý's camera-user-laden [hence, embodied] approach to photographic practice. Both the *for* and the *against* have been critical components of the catalyst of my thinking, doing and making [and, resultantly, I am indebted to both Barthes' photographic theory and Tichý's embodied, photographic example]. In my embodied mind, I have united them. No longer polarized, they have become a new interdependent, coherent whole — a synthesized fabric of the multiple, the disparate.

Punctus contra punctum [or 'point against point' or 'note to note' (Kennedy 2013: 190)], the etymological root of the musical term *counterpoint*, encapsulates this bringing-together of the two inherently oppositional bodies [as arrayed in my mind-body] of Barthes and Tichý. In the *Oxford Dictionary of Music* (Kennedy, 2013), *counterpoint* is rudimentally defined as

> the ability, unique to music, to say two or more things at once comprehensibly[…or …]the combination of simultaneous parts[…]each of significance in itself and the whole resulting in a coherent texture, and is, in this sense, synonymous with polyphony. (Kennedy 2013: 190)

I do contend, however, that the ability to express the multiple in a coherent whole is not 'unique to music.' The metaphor, the conceit and the allegory, as employed in both the visual and literary arts, are counterpoint's counterparts. And more relevant, once understood, the allegorical dimension resident in the photographic act and the photograph suggests a coherent whole of simultaneous multiplicity, which, in turn, parallels embodied experience, which is fundamentally a synthesis or a unification of the multiple occurring in cognition — the ideational flow within the white matter of the brain.

There is a dissonance implied in the literally translated 'point against point,' a discord. The presence of the Latin word *punctum* as object of the preposition *contra*

metonymically conjures up Barthes' entire, theoretical schema. In opposition to the *punctum* is placed the *punctus* of the body of the camera-user in or [in the case of Miroslav Tichý's practice] *in-and-on* the substance of the photograph. Hence, due to the Latin preposition *contra*, the intrinsic, dichotomous relation is voiced. However, also resident in the phrase is a meaning of connectivity, the fusion of oppositional forces, a contradictory union that forms a new complex whole, 'a coherent texture,' a concord.[15] This meaning of harmonization in *punctus contra punctum* occurs via both the musical use of counterpoint as 'the combination of simultaneous parts' or the attachment of 'note to note' *and* the English translation of the Latin *contra* which contains the contradictory meanings of 'against' as 'in opposition to' and 'in or into contact with' (Soanes (ed.) 2006: 24).

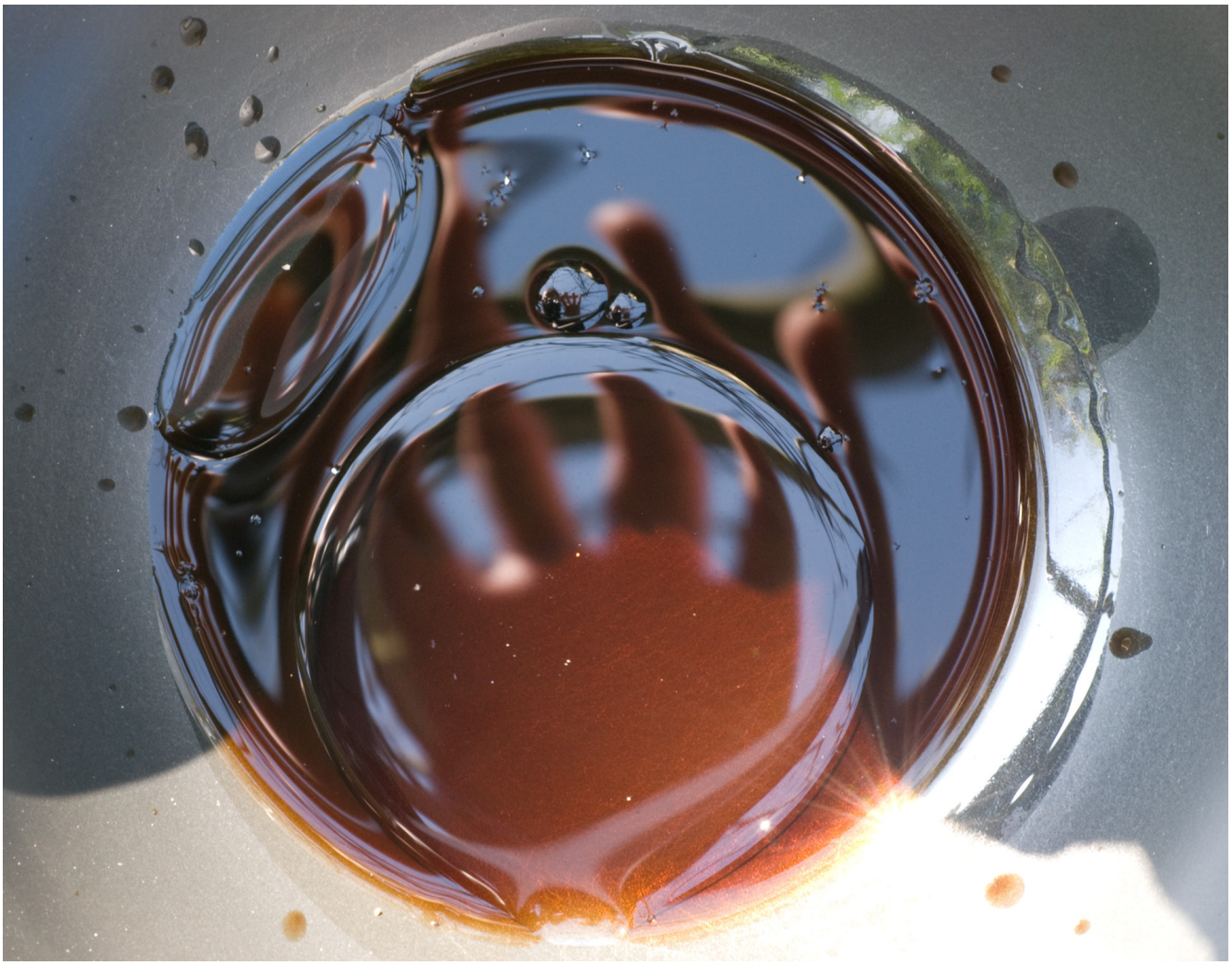


Figure 11: *Untitled* from *The Dichotomy Bowls* series, Andrew Philip Hobden, 2012. In my *Dichotomy Bowls* series, I endeavoured to fashion 'new wholes' (Eliot 1932: 287) from the oppositional [mutually repellent] ingredients of olive oil and vinegar. The images are harmonized by the repetition of the circular form of the bowl, representing wholeness.

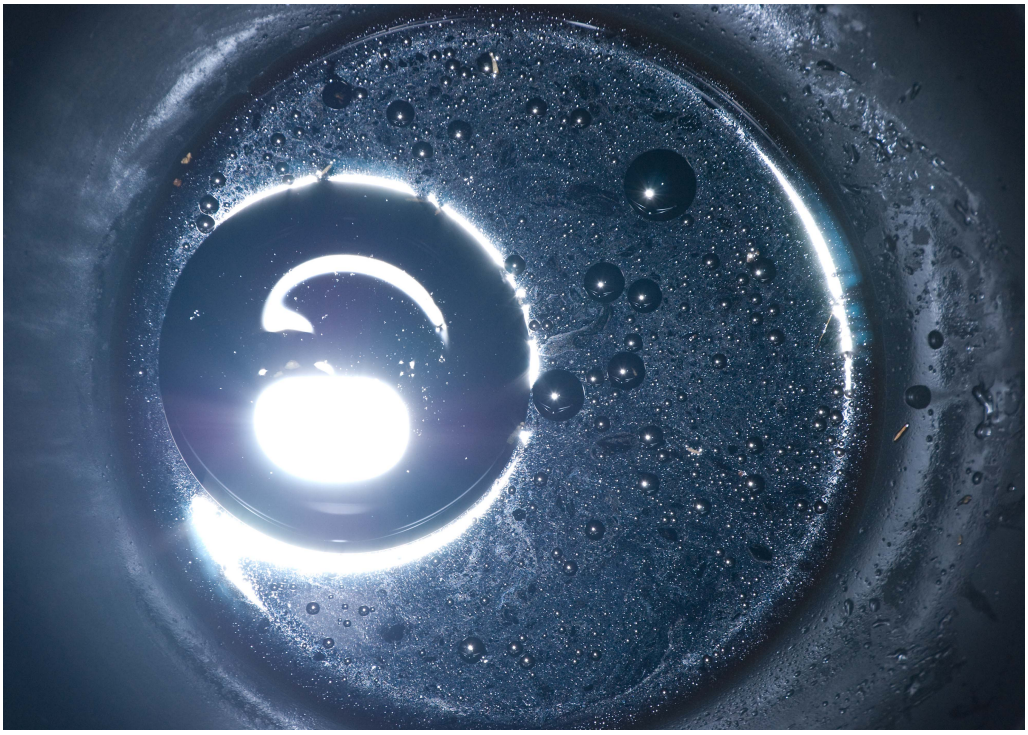


Figure 12: *Untitled* from *The Dichotomy Bowls* series, Andrew Philip Hobden, 2012. The matter employed in this series is also highly reflective: hence, when photographed, the surroundings of the bowls drastically affect the manifestation of the final, photographic image [‘*context is the new content*’ (Goldsmith 2011: 3)] — truly a model of the conceit as a stack or fabric of the disparate.

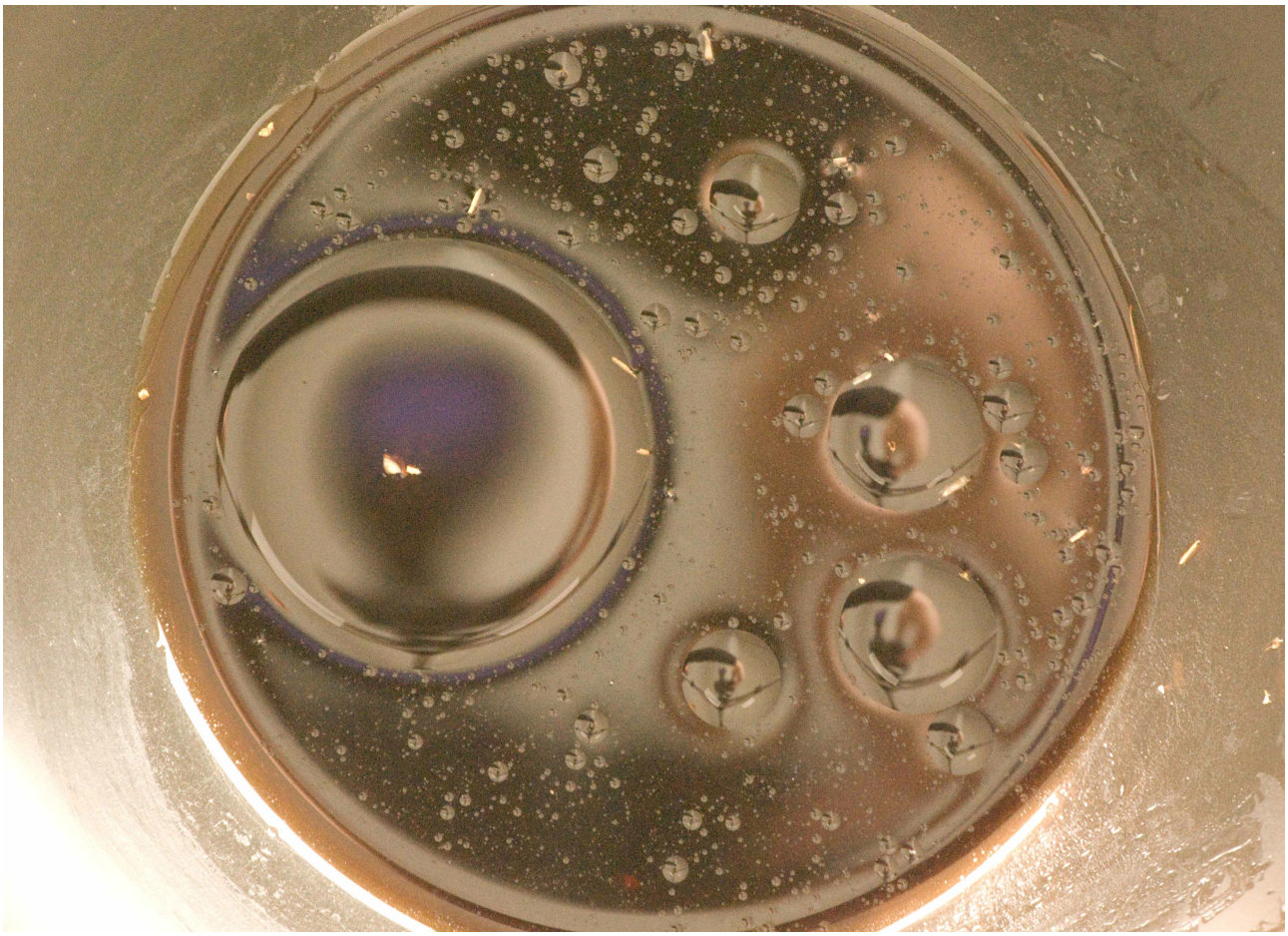


Figure 13: *Untitled* from *The Dichotomy Bowls* series, Andrew Philip Hobden, 2012. Resultantly, this series equally engages conceptually with cognition, the substance of the object photographed and the camera-user’s embodied presence in the photographic object — a dual sense of *presence* as a physical presence and a presence of embodied mind. These dichotomy bowls, these ‘new wholes’, formed by the repellent, yet unifying, effect of the substances, were then further synthesized into a new whole of an installation.

The photograph as a fabric of the multiple metaphorically transmuted into polyphony: an anti-conclusion

Like it or not, for anyone who has engaged with photography discourse, Barthes' theory overlies, voile-like, every photograph encountered, obscuring considerations of the camera-user. I contend that there should be multiple means of reading the photograph, that we should be ever adding new meanings to the photographic, that a photography-according-to-the-camera-user is yet but another meaning, another such piece of voile, so to speak, which potentially overlies and complements Barthes', through which the viewer may peer.

So I imagine that I am gradually sewing my layer, and with a satisfying tear and pop the needle punctures the photograph and simultaneously its *punctum* — a *punctus contra punctum*, or 'point against point' or 'note to note' (Kennedy 2013: 190) — the incantatory mantra as I sew. I am sewing polyphonous alter-meanings, intertexts, mind and body as text… I am acting upon myself, thinking about thinking — thinking of the experience when I took the photograph, an intense focussing upon, or a *photographing* of, a photograph. As the silk thread passes through the hole, I detect light on the other side. 'Keep going,' now says my fickle double. 'More substance may be added to the relic than what Barthes has prosaically read it to possess.'[16] Perhaps illumined by the light on the underside of the photograph, I will spy evidence of myself, the unseen-yet-essentially-present body of the camera-user, that supports, or provides substance to, the image — flesh as a counterweight — and prevents it from collapsing in upon itself or being carried up into the ether by the slightest breeze. As I sew I envelop the photograph: I/the eye, the actor, the perceiving subject overlies the hidden, the acted upon, the eye/me, the homuncular, dwelling on the underside. Buoyed, anchored and suspended between us is the perceived object: the photograph.

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Notes

[1] '[…photography's] abyssal character as "identity-photo"[…]' (Laruelle 2011: viii)

[2] '[…]an understanding of the body as the site of multi-sensual, perhaps synaesthetic, interpretative activities, where the border between perception and cognition fades in a process of embodied thinking[…]' (Bleeker 2008: 159)

[3] '[…]performing photography for no productive or good reason[…]' (Christov-Bakargiev 2010: 24), referring to Miroslav Tichý's practice.

[4] Note Barthes' appeal to *his* body and *his* embodied experience in the above quote. Do I detect a play for power in Barthes, an eclipsing of the camera-user's embodied experience by his own? Is there something fundamentally flawed in Barthes' understanding of subjectivity: an impetus to transform subjectivity into an objectivity, a new 'universal without which there would be no Photography' (Barthes 2000: 9)?

[5]I must observe that it seems incredible to me that photographers seriously engage with a theory that leaves them out of the equation. But perhaps self-professing photographers, being resultantly 'photographocentric' (Laruelle 2011: 2), resonate with Barthes' photograph-centred discourse.

[6] Perhaps I am also making a powerplay here: a metaphorical wrestling contest between two mind-bodies for supremacy — an unfair pairing since I retain my flesh and Barthes is divested of his… However, I contend that both embodied experiences, both vantage points in relation to the photographic, should be entertained and voiced — the locked wrestlers' hold, then, becomes an extended [perhaps unwanted] embrace.

[7] Benjamin is here referring to the camera of film-makers, yet, I contend, this may be applied to the embodied experience of camera-use in general, both filmic and photographic.

[8] 'Experience is wider than scientific experiment, and individual phenomena mean much more to us than the constantly recurrent.' (Shestov 1977: 106)

[9] '"The trace of an act can be interpreted as an absolute realism. The act of making a trace is a whole other ball game. It's obvious it's not the same thing… the act of making a trace implies that you attribute significance to the trace, whereas the trace itself may or may not carry this significance"' [Ralph Rumney quoted] (Jeff 2006: unpaginated).

[10] 'Cloth, woven on a loom, incarnates the most troubling of conceptual paradoxes. It is a grid, a matrix of intersecting verticals and horizontals, as systematic as graph paper, and yet it is soft, curved and can drape itself into the three-dimensional fold.' (Pajaczkowska 2005: 8)

[11] 'Tichý's images look more alive because you are very aware of their materiality' (Christov-Bakargiev 2010: 26).

[12] 'Tichý's cameras became prostheses of his body moving through space, not only and not so much of his eyes to enhance visual perceptions (he carried them at waist height often, under his sweater), but more of his involuntary bodily movements, perceptions, and motions through space. […]his body took photographs: organic, biological photographs, each an encounter and impulse toward life[…]' (Christov-Bakargiev 2010: 24).

[13] Simon O'Sullivan's essay thoroughly explores Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'minor literature' in preparation for that concept to be applied by others to the photographic: a 'minor photography.' 'A minor literature stutters and stammers the major. It breaks with the operation of "order words." It "stops making sense"' (O'Sullivan 2012: 4).

[14] …analogous to the viewer looking through traces of Tichý's embodiment toward the photographic image…

[15] In this signification, we see the perceiving subject's embodied, experienced relation *to* the perceived object, which is also the embodied probing of the philosopher with a camera and the yield of that philosopher's in[tro]spection which is the hybridic photograph itself.

[16] …that is, if we extract the seductive, elusive, mythological component from his theory…