UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND LAW

Winchester School of Art

Units of Description: Writing and Reading the 'Archived' Photograph

by

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND LAW

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UNITS OF DESCRIPTION:
WRITING AND READING THE 'ARCHIVED' PHOTOGRAPH

Jane Anne Birkin

This practice-based PhD takes the institution of the archive as its primary locus, and the position of the photograph within it. This approach opens up an interdisciplinary and post-representational investigation into the photographic image and its relationship to the companion descriptive text, as well as instigating a consideration of the structure and the management of both objects and descriptions in an archive situation. More specifically, the model of the visual content-based archive description is taken out of the confines of the institution and into visual practice. Different kinds of sets and collections of photographs are examined here, as well as traditional archives, but all through techniques of archival description, listing and organisation.

The restricted institutional language structure becomes a conceptual writing technique when employed within this archive-related art practice. Positioned outside of the field of hermeneutical image analysis, this writing system is a form of information management, and, following archival conventions, does not attempt to assign meaning to the objects with which it engages.

The practice predominantly takes the form of moving image or performance, always with text present (written or spoken). The image itself, paralleling a common archival situation, is often hidden or obscured, and the description allows a novel exploration of the image to take place and to be discussed. The largely decontextualised type of visual content-based description used emphasises the discrete and atemporal nature of the photograph and the synchrony of the moment of capture. It is acknowledged though, that the message and meaning of the single image is located *outside* of this moment of capture, and so may be subject to some speculation. The spatiotemporal context of the image, denied by the visual content-based description, is brought back through 'reading' the archived image in its natural habitat, the archive list or catalogue. This relational situation reveals the fixed associations between images themselves and between images and their wider organisational structures.

The description is ultimately identified as a 'narrative pause' (Fowler: 1991, p.25), and is celebrated as such. Inside the indexical and diachronic arrangement of the archive, images *and* descriptions are viewed through something other than a narrative gaze, as lists, and the juxtapositions therein, expose the acutely shallow time and non-chronological advancement of the archive.

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8 x .mov files on attached memory stick:

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* for examination purposes only – selected films may be accessed online at:
https://vimeo.com/janebirkin

Academic Thesis: Declaration Of Authorship

I, **Jane Birkin**

declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

Units of Description: Writing and Reading the 'Archived' Photograph

 I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;

2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;

3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

7. Either none of this work has been published before submission, or parts of this work have been published as: [please list references below]:

Signed: …………………………………………………………………………………..

Date: …………………………………………………………………………………..

Acknowledgements

Introduction

The roots of this PhD project lie in an intense curiosity around the role of description in the context of the 'archived' photograph. Although the project began as an investigation of the image and its companion text, it soon became clear that consideration of the arrangement and structure, the *management* of archives, objects and descriptions, was to play an important role too. The reading of an archive image is dependent not only on its own unique description, but on the structures and levels of description that surround it. Equally, the dependence of these structures on descriptive metadata is fundamental, both in the context of the record-keeping function of the paper catalogue list, and especially as the archive (and the 'archived photograph' that is not necessarily situated in a physical 'archive') becomes a networked resource.

The motivation for this area of research has built up through personal experience of working in archives and image collections, and it follows on from practice-based extrapolations of archival techniques that were made before embarking on PhD study. Archival thinking has permeated through all aspects of the project: through the relationship between making art and keeping archives; the indexical and systematic (performative) approach to practice; and even the dry and matter-of-fact language of the thesis itself. In keeping with the tedium of archival procedures, my visual practice can at times test the patience of the viewer or reader, utilising 'the aesthetics of boredom', as Kenneth Goldsmith (2011, p.201) terms it. Although the locus of the project lies firmly in archives, I am not doing archival science here, or trying to further knowledge or build standards for archive professionals: they are not the expected audience for this project, although it is hoped that they would find it thought provoking and worthwhile if they were to come upon it.

Perhaps some explanation of the title will help define the aims of the project: the term 'units of description' is part of the language of the International Council on Archives, in their *General International Standard Archival Description* (ISAD(G), 2000), a document that is cited throughout the thesis. This term succinctly defines archival descriptions: they are indeed units, discrete objects that interrelate and interdepend. The phrase 'writing and reading' is purposeful: I am not reading the image in a

traditional sense, as in looking and interpreting. Rather, through my visual practice, I am looking and cataloguing, creating a text record of a visual object, only then is the image read *through* this intermediary text. The term 'archived' is used because it pertains to all collections of photographs, which are examined in the context of archival practices of description and organisation. It carries the inverted commas because certain professionals in archives insist that the word 'archive' is not a verb. (Nor is an 'archive' a building or an institution, although it is broadly used as such inside and outside of this thesis, for want of a better word). Finally, this research is about the 'photograph' as we commonly know it: a picture of a situation or scene, with at least some recognisable elements.

The project seeks to afford a novel 'reading' of the photograph, by taking the restricted 'writing' techniques and the predetermined structures of the archive into exploratory creative practice around images and image sets. Thus, I am operating, and advancing knowledge, across the interdisciplinary fields of photography, archive and conceptual writing.

The 'writing' element of this archive-related practice comes out of a conceptualisation of institutional descriptive techniques: this archival system of 'writing' is not perceived as a conceptual activity within archives, but, in the manner of the 'readymade', it *becomes* conceptualised as it is taken into visual practice. This practice falls broadly within the canon of the language-based Conceptual Art of the 1960s (Sol LeWitt and Dan Graham, for example), and these artists are examined in chapter one of the thesis in relation to their performative use of language. The phrase 'conceptual writing', was coined by Craig Dworkin as a way to include the practices of conceptual artists and those of language poets, such as the *Oulipo* group. For Dworkin the term 'conceptual writing' offered 'a way both to signal literary writing that could function comfortably as conceptual art and to indicate the use of text in conceptual art practices.' (Dworkin and Goldsmith: 2011, p.xxiii). My practice clearly comes under Dworkin's 'conceptual writing' umbrella, and shares many qualities with that of today's conceptual writers such as Kenneth Goldsmith. Goldsmith's book *Uncreative Writing* (2011) is referenced in chapter two, and significantly in chapter three, in relation to my use of Microsoft Word's 'tracking changes' feature, and in the 'uncreative writing' involved in my retyping of Allan Sekula's *Meditations on a Triptych* text. Goldsmith's piece *Day* (2003) has commonality with my *News24* piece (see

chapter two), as they both use conceptual writing processes to uncover aspects of news media. Whilst Goldsmith appropriates existing text, I appropriate a system of generating and managing text, but Goldsmith's views on the duality of the text, its meaning *and* its materiality, are critical to the position of my practice. He argues: 'we can choose to weigh it *and* we can choose to read it.' (2011, p.34, his italics). My *Meditations* installation piece, discussed in the second half of chapter three, 'weighs' the text in a very material way, as part of the indexing process. Additionally, my text is meaningful to the 'reading' of an image, although the process of writing itself makes no attempt to *attribute* meaning: the descriptive technique lies outside of traditional hermeneutics, involving a system of human/non-human hybridity, of the interaction of technician and technique. This brings it back to the work of LeWitt (his instructions for wall drawings) and Graham's 1966 piece *Schema*, which are based on written command, and are instructional and almost algorithmic in nature; these are characteristics shared with the institutional archival practices around which this project is based.

My practice differs from the conceptual practices mentioned above in its direct engagement with the photographic image, and the text generated requires 'reading' in relation this image. Goldsmith argues that conceptual writing 'invokes a *thinkership* rather than a *readership*', arguing that once the *system* is understood, the *words* do not matter. (http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2012/04/conceptual-writing-a-worldview/ [accessed 17-04-15]). British conceptual artist Fiona Banner's book *The Nam* (1997), also referenced in this thesis, is a 1000 page compilation of text descriptions of the action of five Vietnam war films and has been described as 'unreadable'. (http://www.fionabanner.com/vanitypress/thenamhb/ [accessed 20-04-15]). This is clearly not the case, although reading it would require great patience and one might not *need* to read Banner's book from cover to cover to get the idea. However, my practice is more in tune with with Kosuth's view on the complexities of art that uses language: 'Art can be dealt with as a language on its own terms. And it can also be analysed in a parallel study of linguistics and linguistic philosophy. At best one must consider both without confusing the two activities.' (1991, p.85). I take my writing off the page and into film, installation and lecture-performance: as text-based art form, it demands of the viewer a complex combination of both conceptual thought *and* more direct 'reading'.

This project uses description to locate the image as a temporally discrete unit, and the notion of the archive catalogue list to reveal it as part of a wider temporality: it is the relational study of *information*. The idea of image temporality through information management is key to the successful realisation of the project aims in terms of both 'writing' and 'reading' the image, and this is discussed in detail in the final chapter. Of course the relational study of *images* is an established and widespread practice, and the critical engagement of this project with relationships between images, whether visible *as* images or purely through text description, places my work in the territories of artists such as Taryn Simon, Ed Ruscha, and Bernd and Hilla Becher, cited in the Literature Review and in chapter one of this thesis. Aspects of archival thinking permeate through the various practices of these artists, notably through the application of performative working methods that position their work, and my own, within the established genre of indexing and categorisation of image sets. I take an indexical rather than a representational approach, and one consistent with the more recent 'material turn in photographic studies' (Vestberg: 2008, p.49).

Within the bounds of this research, there is no difference assumed between the analogue, the digital or the digitised image or image set. The differences between the digital and the analogue have been well argued and documented (for example by Tom Gunning (2004, p.39)), and the argument is for the most part exhausted. However, it is necessary to take into account the obvious effects of digital culture on the photographic image, in terms of storage and access. This is covered in sections **2.3** and **5** of the Literature Review, and then extensively in chapter one. Two pieces of practice, *Unlimited Vocabulary* and *Island*, both produced relatively early on in the period of research, and discussed chapters one and two respectively, investigate issues of categorisation, storage and retrieval related to the digitally 'archived' photograph.

In his text 'Archive in Transition', Wolfgang Ernst (2002, p.479) reflects on the conflict between the infinite possibilities of the machine-based search and the closed nature of standardisation. Ernst's media-archaeological viewpoint is most valuable, combined as it is with an understanding of the structures of the archive and of using networks to deliver archive material. Media Archaeology offers an understanding of digital cultures through physical examination and critique of past media forms and

has clear connections to the archive. The 'paper' list (or simple online database), which follows the orders and hierarchies, the shelves, boxes and files of the physical archive, may be perceived as a past media form, except that it is still in widespread use. The word 'archive' is now part of our digital vocabulary and the structure of the archive has firm ties to the organisation of *digital* media of all kinds. Cornelia Vismann (2008, p.164) emphasises the *physicality* of these ties, as she explains how '[in] highly unmetaphorical fashion, files and their techniques organize the very architecture of digital machines'. Jussi Parikka recognises the importance of the archive to the study of media and urges us to 'think through [media archaeology's] ties with archival institutions.' (2012, p.5).

An urgent problem in archives, not just for the archivist, but for the user of archives as well, is the emergence of cataloguing practices that are largely driven by economics. The use of narrow metadata schemas speeds up the descriptive process significantly, but results in images suffering from the use of a limited vocabulary, a tool that is too broad to constitute an accurate description and, therefore, too inaccurate for call-up. This cataloguing method is well documented in both the Literature Review, in chapter one of this thesis, and through practice. Reflecting on the flaws of the metadata schema, and researching them through practice, led me back to a more traditional kind of image description, the visual content-based, object-level description, a way of 'writing' images that now appears somewhat radical in the context of the widespread use of metadata schemas. But these descriptions are still being written, where the status of the object requires it and where financial constraints allow. Moreover, object-level descriptions still exist as finding aids in many archives, and they are not replaced in the context of digitisation of archive catalogues, but migrate successfully into searchable texts. As I explain in the Literature Review (section **4.2**) solid contextual information about photographs often comes at higher levels of description, such as collection or group, leaving the object-level description relatively context-free. It is this context-free description that demanded investigation as an alternative way of looking at images: a way that deals with what is in the image and not what *may* exist outside it. The methodology of object-level visual content description was incorporated into my practice-based research. The examination of this descriptive model, its place in the wider archive, its particular language form, and its implications for the image has occupied the most part of this project.

I take this descriptive model out of the constraints of the archive institution and into visual practice, where issues of time and labour are of a different nature altogether. It is used to expose the image, forcing a consideration of the authority of the single image outside of its own context and the contexts of its presentation. In isolating the visual from external contextual information, the description exposes the photograph as a discrete snapshot in time. All photographs become 'snapshots' in this position, whether they are vernacular or art photographs, although in dealing with archives one is usually steered towards the vernacular. The synchrony of description matches the synchrony of the image and reveals it as an intrinsically context-less and atemporal object. *Situation* and *event* are the two terms that I adopt in this thesis to differentiate the functions of the single image from those of the set or archive of temporally related images. The lone photograph depicts and describes a *situation* (Barthes (1977, p.42) uses the word 'scene' to similar effect); it does not embody a whole *event*. Personal tagging tends to refer to the *event* and this is highlighted in my piece *Island* (see chapter one). Metadata schemas tend also to produce event-based description and Ariella Azoulay (2010, p.9) describes the difficulty of archival storage and retrieval by 'event', with the use of broad captions such as 'refugees', 'expulsion', or 'torture' used to classify images. Flusser (2013 [1983], p.93) also uses the terms 'situation' and 'event' and the full quotes from Azoulay and Flusser can be found in chapter one.

The description differs from the photo caption, which is discussed in section one of the Literature Review, in that it does not accompany the image, it stands in place of it. Contrary to popular expectations and all the discussion around *Archives 2.0*, we are still firmly in *Archives 1.0* territory, in terms of the economics of digitisation: the self-maintaining 'living archive' of the Internet that Marquard Smith discusses (2013, p.385) cannot be compared to the colossal and very physical task of digitisation of archives that faces underfunded institutions. Consequently, vast amounts of archive photographs are not accessible as images online but still exist in as text descriptions in databases, and this means that all the ensuing problems of connotation and interference, the 'parasitic message' of the caption that Barthes discusses in *Image, Music, Text* (1977, p.25) are suitably avoided. In keeping with this archival situation, and in order to investigate it, in much of my visual practice the image is either partially or wholly hidden from view.

An object-level description of a photograph is an inventory of visual information. The signification of captured and described elements is undesirable in the context of archival descriptive practices: signification and information retrieval are not often consequential. This thesis does not deny signification, and in fact frequently confronts the difficult question of viewer 'participation' and 'completion' of the image *or* the description (a denoted text, after all), in an archive setting and elsewhere. I fully accept the fact that photographs come from, and are situated in, cultural spaces, and that images and descriptions are often expanded in an attempt to best fit these spaces. I do not take the line that images are autonomous objects and carry their own language, the much peddled 'universal language of photography' that is termed 'bourgeois folklore' by Allan Sekula (1982, p.86), and therefore I concede that any message must come from outside the moment of capture. The visual content-centred approach asks for consideration of the image *and* the description not as autonomous objects, but as *units* that must take their cultural and spatiotemporal context from their surrounding objects and from their recorded place in, for example, the archive catalogue. Once this line is established, sets, archives, albums and photostreams can be approached as event-defining entities made up of discrete units of extremely significant information. The structure of the 'archive' *becomes* the sign system for the 'archived' photograph. I hope I have created space for complex and abstract thinking around images and image sets, through theory and practice, whilst still maintaining the regulated confines of this system.

Although this thesis stems from an interest in image description, particularly archival image description, it was not only necessary to examine how the structures and functions of image and description have developed, but also to look more broadly at the way that textual relationships to the photographic image have changed, and are changing, in times of technological advancement. Through the Literature Review, I am able to revisit texts and concepts from previous fertile periods of photographic growth and its related discourse: Walter Benjamin in the 1930's, and important commentators from the 1960's through to the 1980's, such as Roland Barthes and Vilém Flusser. These writers offer important observations on the operative relationship between image and text.

The cultural and aesthetic impacts of the use of text within digital cultures are also documented in the Literature Review. The cameraphone encourages text-image

relationships through its interaction with messaging and other communication and social applications; it is no longer possible for photographs to remain without annotation, as descriptive, administrative, structural and technical metadata combine to provide a reading of the image. Old and new technologies are compared and contrasted, and many commonalities in terms of photographic purpose are detected. Martin Lister (2007, p.252) and Tom Gunning (2004, p.39) defend indexicality in digital culture, whilst Sean Cubitt (2010, p.3-5) highlights the 'the automation of the apparatus' as a continuous line through analogue and digital processes. Digital culture is perceived as being overwhelmingly visual, and one in which, as is frequently stated, everyone is a photographer. At least as important a factor, and one that draws a dividing line between analogue and digital, is that we have become voracious consumers and appropriators of images, with implications for loss of original context.

The requirements put upon photography always were, and are now more than ever, wide-ranging, encompassing functions such as record keeping, memory mediation and communication of information. I have addressed many of these functions in the Literature Review, examining photography as documentary tool; political instrument; archival object; means of evidence; memento; classification device; and cultural indicator. I call upon a wide range of artists; philosophers; media theorists; cultural commentators; and experts on archives such as Wolfgang Ernst and the more practically-minded Judith Ellis, in her informative book *Keeping Archives* (1993). Examinations take place within the framework of photo-textual relationships, from image caption and classification practices, through to archive description and tag.

The Literature Review began as a broad appraisal of writing and practice centred around text and image, but even before it was completed, there was a mood of urgency to practically explore some of the ideas contained within it. Through looking at the (dys)function of the metadata schema or tag in comparison to the traditional archival description, the first practice-based piece, *Island*, was conceived. The Literature Review identified a technique, the visual content-based object-level description. This regulated archival descriptive technique is identified as hitherto only surveyed within archival science; for archivists, not artists, image experts, philosophers or media and cultural theorists. This technique becomes the core

element of my practice, and one that intensifies and directs the theoretical research on text and image relations.

The methodologies of archival arrangement, grouping and description have driven the practice element of this PhD and the parallel development of the written thesis. The multilevel description structure is defined by the International Council on Archives, (ISAD(G), 2000, p.12) as 'a hierarchical part-to-whole relationship'. Its definition of 'item' as the 'smallest intellectually indivisible archival unit' that can be described is significant. Comparably, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (2002a, p.90) defines the 'statement' as an 'ultimate, undecomposable element that here can be isolated […] The atom of discourse.' Foucault's writing on knowledge formation, including his assignation of the statement as a discrete unit, and his views on seriality and groupings, are engaged in the task of establishing knowledge from collections of discrete archive objects. In this project the exacting rules of the institution are exchanged for more experimental thinking around objects, sets and relationships, as the descriptive model is transported out of the archive and into creative practice with unexpected and productive results. However, the traditional archival principles of physical arrangement and 'paper' description, and the motives underpinning them, first need to be understood. In chapter one I attempt to clarify aspects of archival arrangement that are particularly significant to this PhD project.

The important relationship between the physical arrangement of the archive and the catalogue list is discussed; this is a relationship that becomes increasingly important as the project progresses. Media theorists and experts on archives are employed, with some crossover between the two in the cases of Wolfgang Ernst and Cornelia Vismann. The discussion of physical to paper relationships moves forwards to take in the relationship between human memory and computer storage, and its implications for the storage and delivery of digital archives. I argue the difference between memory, a living entity that is frequently reconfigured, and understanding, which relies more on the spatial and contextual relationships that are fixed down in the physical archive by listing.

There is a consideration of the comparatively new concept of 'original order', its histories and its rationale, from its origins in the publication known as the 'Dutch Manual' in the late 1880's. This manual for archivists emphasised recordkeeping,

without anticipating the future use of archives, a methodology that still persists today. The diachronic nature of this ordering system, dependant as it is on collection and use by original owners, is examined through Foucault and Ernst, and the question of narrative begins to be examined here. The archive list, a non-narrative form, is identified as being determined by the arrangement of the archive and as critical to the maintenance of this arrangement. The nature of the list is investigated in relation to archives and in more general terms.

I examine the use of the list, and the concept of disorder within order, using examples of visual practice: the photographic practices of the Bechers, Ed Ruscha, Taryn Simon and Fiona Banner; then Dan Graham and Hetain Patel, artists who use the list as pure text form. These artists may be separated by time and are working across different fields of enquiry, but are connected to each other and to this thesis by their engagement with the indexical authority of the list. This leads to a discussion of my own visual practice involving the list. My piece *Unlimited Vocabulary* opens up the thinking on lists and on the use of metadata schema, a system constructed around the list. Ernst and Vismann again make appearances. Crucially, the list is identified as a core concept in the visual practice produced in the course of this PhD.

The visual content-based description is employed in its purest form in two pieces of work, *Island* and *News24*, both covered in chapter two. This descriptive method, together with the complete or partial concealment of the image itself (paralleling the concealment in the archive), initiates considerations of the image that are different to those invited by direct contact. Both *Island* and *News24* use sets of images, facilitating a 'part to whole relationship' (ISAD(G), 2000, p.12).

The methodology of *Island* was primarily designed to reveal a perceived gap between the visual content-based description and the user-generated, event-based tag. The techniques of archival description were applied to images retrieved from *Flickr*, and the results did indeed show a disparity between visual content-based and event-based metadata systems. The *Island* piece also confronts the problems of displaying text as visual practice and refers back to Charles Harrison (1991, p.61) and his views on the dematerialised nature of conceptual art, specifically the 'Art & Language' group. *Island*'s use of a simulated typewriter mode of display adds materiality, reveals the descriptive process, and affords discussion upon the relationship between the labour

of art practice and institutionalised labour, using the writings of Maurizio Lazzarato (2008, p.26-28) and Rancière (2013, pp.39-40).

The next part of chapter two turns the focus more to the complexities of the visual content-based description itself, with discussion on Erwin Panofsky's (1962, pp.3-17) and Roland Barthes' (1977, pp.52 -55) levels of meaning (they cite three remarkably similar levels). Flusser and Derrida are referenced here: Derrida with his views on the unpredictable transformative nature of signification (1981a, p.20), and Flusser declaring the denoted text dead (2011a [2002], pp.38-41). In studying these texts and witnessing the audience reaction to *Island*, I begin to identify the 'completion' of the image as an undesirable yet inevitable consequence in the archive.

The piece *News24* continues the practical and theoretical discussion of this particular descriptive model. Images from a twenty-four hour period of TV rolling news are presented through description and image, not as a single correlating entity, but in a way that allows one system to interrogate the other. These images are part of our culture, but go largely unnoticed; this is a very different situation than in the past, where news images, for example Robert Capa's photographs, are elevated to the status of art. The effect of decontextualisation on the aesthetic and documentary value of the archive image is a consideration of Allan Sekula, in his essay *Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital* (2003), mentioned here and discussed further in chapter three.

Twenty-four hour spectatorship, visual pollution and diminishing levels of attention are addressed, drawing on the texts of Flusser and on Jonathan Crary's *24/7* (2013). *News24* offers a representation of the repetitive nature of rolling news, where stories ebb, flow and sometimes build; these images are interesting *because* they exist as a flow of constant background radiation. Notions of temporality and of the diachronic nature of news reveal a connection to the developmental order of the archive. Temporality, and the non-narrative voice of the archive are notions examined further through practice and considered in detail in chapter four.

Chapter three deals specifically with archival concepts inside Allan Sekula's photo-text piece, *Meditations on a Triptych* (1973-78), and my transference of these concepts into visual practice. I identify the three family photographs (from 1967) that

constitute this work as a small archive, and Sekula as the organising authority. Sekula's practice commonly involves related image sets (although not through the performative production techniques of Ruscha *et al*), and the relationships between the set of three images presented here are frequently acknowledged in his lengthy four-part text (around 4,000 words in total). The short final part of Sekula's text, almost exclusively visual content description, refers to all three images. This notion of interdependence, the 'part-to-whole relationship' (ISAD(G)2000, p.12), is an archival concept, as already discussed.

Sekula's text wanders in and out of speculation and recollection and constitutes a very different form of writing to those archival description techniques outlined in this thesis so far. But the text is constantly interrupted by bursts of visual content description, bringing the reader back from the expanded narratives to the photograph itself. These descriptive moments are identified as 'narrative pause' (Fowler: 1991, p.25), a concept that becomes important in the context of the synchronic nature of both photograph and visual content description, and is taken up in chapter four. Although these are his own family photographs, Sekula writes from a viewpoint of unfamiliarity; the binary that is so crucial to archival description, that of known context and speculation, is blurred.

Sekula has written extensively on and around archives, and two of his texts, 'Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital' (2003), and 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning' (1982), are used in the first part of this chapter to unpick the archival thinking behind *Meditations on a Triptych*. The second of these texts invites a discussion on the dialogue between art and documentary photography. This is through a comparison of two photographs, one by Alfred Steiglitz and the other by Lewis Hine, that are very similar in terms of subject matter (the text includes visual content-based descriptions of both images by Sekula). The art / photography question is examined in the context of Sekula's account of aesthetic flaws in the *Meditations* photographs and I speculate that these photographs have been chosen *because* of these flaws. The discussion continues, identifying Sekula's use of the language of painting in his *Meditations* text. I draw on Bourdieu's *Photography: a Middle-Brow Art* (1996 [1965]), to help position the underlying sociopolitical and cultural aspects of Sekula's images. Bourdieu's text is cited in the Literature Review, providing a rationale for popular family photography in the 1960s.

Three main archival themes are identified through the analysis of the *Meditations* text, and these are methodically transferred into practice that exposes a systematic separation of Sekula's text into the three set themes. Two significant pieces of visual practice are generated through the uncovering of the archival in Sekula's *Meditations*. The first piece, an immersive three-projector installation, is discussed in the second part of chapter three, and the second, a related lecture-performance, at the end of chapter four. The first piece is made up of three separate projections of the entire *Meditations* text, as it appears in Sekula's book, *Photography Against the Grain* (faithfully re-typed). The bulk of the text fades away, leaving behind archive-related fragments, but also significant white space: a visual indexing of the scope of these unremarkable images. A text formation similar in appearance to Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dès* remains, and Derrida (1981a, p.3), is used here to argue the importance of these 'blanks'. It is at this point that Kenneth Goldsmith joins the discussion on the materiality of text, and on the notion of retyping (2011, pp.151-152). In this installation, the images are displayed in Sekula's book, but turned away, once again hidden from the text itself.

Time has become a preoccupation in this practice-based research project. This should come as no surprise, as time is so fundamental to the archive and to archival practices of collecting, description and structuring. In chapter four I reveal the image and the description as synchronic. However, descriptions taken together in an archive list, and the group of images that they represent, are identified as diachronic (developmental), demonstrating a complex temporal progression. They are also atemporal *and* supertemporal in nature: locally they are captured situations, discrete and unaffected by outside time, and they are rendered timeless in the archive through preservation and storage.

A Jeff Wall image of arrested movement provokes discussion on different representations of the 'embodied' duration of the image. Victor Burgin, British conceptual artist and theorist (who is mostly employed in this thesis as theorist), is referenced on time and painting, which he calls 'the folding of the diachronic into the synchronic' (2004, p.26), and Ernst in relation to the *tableau vivant*, a form that extends the timespan of the still image. A second Wall piece, this time a series of photographs, proves most useful in unravelling the temporal development in archival groupings and sequences. Newman emphasises the narrative in Wall's series, and I

perceive this as a weakness, suggesting that there are other ways to read sets (of images and descriptions). This is an argument firmly backed up by Ernst (2013, pp.150-154).

The visual content-based description defines the specificity of a moment, but when encountered together in a catalogue list, related descriptions define the wider temporalities of the event. The diachronic nature of the archive, the building up of objects over time, is presented as apposite to Foucault's ideas on the research model of archaeology (2002a, p.186). An example list from the Harry Price archives (University of London) becomes the 'script' for a lecture-performance, illustrating the temporal progression of the archive list, with reference to Marker's *La Jetée*.

The issue of 'completion' surfaces again, and, drawing on Flusser (2000, p.8) and Michael Newman (2007, pp.70-72), I resolve that 'completion' is perceived to be rooted in time, and, in the case of the archive image, can be tested by examining the image in the wider context of the archive set. I conclude that a study of archival structure can help determine the complexities of narrative and time.

Two pieces of my own visual practice directly confront temporal perceptions, and these are discussed in chapter four. The first, *El Rastro*, uses moving image to examine the still, as movement is interrupted by the descriptive subtitling of a frame. These descriptions are once again examples of 'narrative pause', and Fowler (the originator of this term) is cited, as he calls for the autonomy of description, a freeing from its chains (1991, pp.26-27). In line with this radical approach, the description disrupts and takes primacy over the recognisable narrative of the moving image. The second piece is a lecture-performance based on work previously carried out, and data gathered, on Sekula's *Meditations on a Triptych*. Here, the white spaces of the earlier work become silences. The text becomes an exacting musical score, operating to the rules of *werktreue* and utilising the indexing qualities of silence and sound, with some reference to Cage's *4'33"*.

The lecture-performance, like the film and animation techniques I use elsewhere, is a four-dimensional medium, where time is controlled and measured by critical indexing techniques that are fundamental to this project.

Methodology

This PhD project uses a practice-based research methodology that is embedded in theoretical debate: it 'does' practice and theory at the same time. Practice comes out of theory, and emerging concepts from 'fieldwork' feed back into theoretical inquiry. However, it remains unclear which comes first, as the project is historically rooted in my own thinking and working practices (both art *and* labour). Perhaps it is easier and best to view the situation not as a binary opposition, or cause and effect, but as a correlation, an interdependence between two research techniques, both of which are practical and both of which are theoretical. These two activities may remain culturally separated, and are materially separated in this PhD, but they are unquestionably of equal scholarly worth.

Theoretical engagement with practice increases as the project develops and the body of work is consolidated, and practical work also makes further ingress into theory: the intellectual gap between theory and practice diminishes and all but disappears as the project runs on. For this reason, theory and practice are intertwined in the written part of the thesis and cannot easily be disentangled. It is also perhaps interesting to note that the times specifically allocated for writing, that is the Literature Review period and the writing up stage, proved to be fertile times for the origination of new practice-based projects. This illustrates the important place that the *practice* of writing itself occupies as a methodology for the advancement of the project, as it connects and consolidates, projects and progresses the inquiry.

The project takes a broadly performative approach to practice, with an emphasis on planning and on acting to instruction. This is my own instruction, devised to explore the mechanics and the effects of text description on the photographic image. It is a methodology that is shared with many of the visual practices that I examine, from the early days of Conceptual Art, with its links to cybernetics, through to the more recent controlled and archive-related work of artists such as Taryn Simon. It is an approach that matches the subject matter of the thesis, that is, the predesignated and regulatory working practices of the archive. These practices are not only apparent in the 'end products', but permeate through the whole practical process, through preparation to execution. The methods of production of the visual practice rely heavily

on the deployment of archival methods such as listing, indexing, numbering, sorting and grouping.

Even though these administrative techniques are put in place and the practice is heavily structured, new realisations emerge from the enactment of the practice research process itself, as unforeseen circumstances penetrate and subvert; a sometimes difficult but nonetheless desired outcome of my visual practice experimentation. The production and subsequent analysis of the *Island* piece, through which the content-based description was identified as an entity worth exploring in its own right, demonstrates the unique theoretical value of practice-based methodologies, acknowledging the importance of making, looking and learning from practical encounters. The emergence of the lecture-performance as a mode of display is also an unexpected turn, resulting from consideration of an earlier piece of visual practice, and in an attempt to perhaps better the communication of this practice, amongst other things. Analysis of practice as knowledge production is both experiential and reflective, and this two-fold analytical approach is often concurrent.

The particular choice of production methods, materials, and ultimate installation techniques, differs in each piece of visual practice and is discussed in the context of each in the main part of the thesis. The materials and methods adopted are dependant on need, and not necessarily assigned at the beginning of the project. However, one particular, constant and overarching research method applied here is that of the employment of the visual content-based description, an archival technique that is transported and transformed into visual practice. This descriptive technique is used as a method of 'writing' the image and subsequently interrogating it as a discrete unit. It is also used to uncover relationships between images in a related set, to 'read' the image in the context of the wider management of the 'archive'. More detailed explanation of this technique and the reasons for its adoption are discussed at length in the thesis itself, and in the context of the practice, as this methodological system *becomes* the practice itself.

The Literature Review

1   The photo caption as descriptive metadata

1.1.   The caption and its impact on photography

August Sander, in his 1931 radio talk 'Photography as a Universal Language' states, 'Today with photography we can communicate our thoughts, conceptions, and realities, to all the people on earth; if we add the date of the year we have the power to fix the history of the world' (quoted in Sekula: 1984, pp.83-84). Whilst declaring the authority of the photograph as a self-contained means of communication, universal *because* of its independence from language, Sander acknowledges the historical and political consequence of attaching even a small amount of data to an image.

The photo caption was an early form of metadata that positioned photography as a popular method of communication and as a documentary medium. Crucially though, it challenged the photography's pictorial nature and its relationship with painting, a relationship that seemed to be driven by a feeling of absence in the technical image. Was it the 'aura', as defined by Benjamin (1999, p.216) in his 1936 text 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' that was missing? Victor Burgin (1986, p.34) argues that it was the lack of human hand: 'within the photographic image we can find no *trace* of the author. No humanity, only *technology*', cold characteristics that could give 'grounds for suspicion'. Suspicion of the new medium, the use of technologies that were not fully understood, would have been widespread. Perhaps it was also missing a history of its own; early photographers, by bringing in painters' props and backgrounds, could create an immediate and familiar historical context.

Vilém Flusser, in *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* puts forward a bold hypothesis: 'Ontologically, traditional images signify phenomena whereas technical images signify concepts.' (2000 [1983], p.14). Flusser avoids photography's problematic relationship with pictorialism, which Jeff Wall terms 'its own necessary condition of being a depiction-which-constitutes-an-object' (1995, p.32). Roger Scruton (1981, p.579) describes photography's relationship with the pictorial as 'causal and not intentional', in other words, the photographic image is a reproduction

(and not a representation) of whatever is in front of the camera, regardless of any other intentions the photographer might have. He sees the causal condition as 'ideal' photography, in opposition to 'actual' photography, which is 'the result of the attempt by photographers to pollute the ideal of their craft with the aims and methods of painting.' (1981, pp.577-8). The quest for the 'fine art photograph' was both driven and judged by romantic ideals. In his essay 'Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital', Allan Sekula, (2003, p.448) argues: 'To the extent that photography was regarded as a copyist's medium by romantic art critics in the nineteenth century, it failed to achieve the status of the fine arts.'

The publication of captioned photographs in magazines supported the more indexical work of photographers such as Eugene Atget. Walter Benjamin (1999, p.220) describes the significance of Atget's captioned photographs of deserted Paris streets, comparing them to the 'scene of a crime […] photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence.' This approach was a far cry from the public's fascination with the photographic portrait, and was a mix of media that Benjamin thought capable of provoking a genuine affect in the viewer:

> With Atget, photographs become standard evidence for historical
> occurrences, and acquire a hidden political significance. They demand a
> specific kind of approach; free-floating contemplation is not appropriate to
> them. They stir the viewer; he feels challenged by them in a new way. At
> the same time picture magazines begin to put up signposts for him, right
> ones or wrong ones, no matter.

Roland Barthes (1977, p.39), sees all images as polysemous, and cites the 'linguistic message' as one method that society has developed 'to *fix* the floating chain of signifieds' in an image. But he questions the idea that polysemy is a dysfunction which needs to be fixed at all, and unlike Benjamin, takes a negative view of the press caption, describing it as 'a parasitic message' (1977, p.25). He argues: 'the image no longer *illustrates* the words; it is now the words which, structurally, are parasitic on the image. […] Formerly, the image illustrated the text (made it clearer); today [1977], the text loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination.' (*ibid.*).

Pertinent to any discussion on the tangled relationship between image and caption, is Magritte's famous rendering of *Ceci n'est pas une Pipe* (1926, with versions until 1966). It was described by James Harkness in his translator's notes to Foucault's *This is not a Pipe* (1983, p.8) as an attempt to 'banish resemblance and its implicit burden of discourse'. Foucault (1983, pp.26-28) exposes the complexities of image and caption in a series of diagrammatic readings (Figure 1).

1.2.   Functions of the photo caption in an art context

Editorial design has changed dramatically since Benjamin was writing about Atget. Headlines and captions, through their size, placing and typographic form, have become physically integrated into the image, or have replaced the image altogether. Away from more popular editorial applications though, in the gallery and in the artist's publication, the caption has remained quite unaltered. In a gallery setting, there is a tendency for work to have minimal captions that describe the materiality of the work, whilst not offering contextual information for fear that it might interfere with the autonomous nature of the work of art. Peter Wollen (1989, n.p.), in his text 'Fire and Ice', recognises this sparseness of contextual information when he observes that '[a]rt photographs are usually captioned with noun-phrases, lacking verb forms altogether.' The common caption format in a gallery situation is known as the 'tombstone' (Marincola, 2006, p161), which gives only basic information: artist, title, date, medium, collection. But the title / caption, even without a verb, can give contextual information that is key to the reading of a piece. For example, Paul Graham's large-scale photograph *Republican Parade Strabane* (1986) (Figure 2) is part of the series *Troubled Land* (1984-86), shown at the Whitechapel Gallery, Spring 2011. At first sight this is a documentary landscape photograph, showing fields, trees, fences and a small town or village in the distance, details hard to make out from a comfortable viewing place for the large image. He uses a short and visually discreet caption (title) that is transformative: the piece becomes a direct commentary on events in Northern Ireland in the 1980s. This same transformation takes place in works such as *Bombed RUC station, Plumbridge, County Tyrone* (1986), and *H-block Prison Protest, Newry* (1985), all from the same series.

In her work (exhibition and publication) *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* (2007-8), Taryn Simon uses indexical titles and long captions (some 200 words) to give information that is not implicit in the images. *Live HIV, HIV Research Laboratory, Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts* (Figure 3) is a photograph of an unidentified bottle, although from its labelling one can deduce that it is a medical or scientific object. Simon uses the visually sparse but contextually loaded picture as a platform for providing detailed, factual information. In physical terms text may constitute a large or small part of a piece, but its significance lies in the inability of the piece to function properly in its absence. In Graham's and Simon's projects, the texts authorise the images, and as Benjamin (1999, p.220) observed with Atget 'the photographs become standard evidence for historical occurrences, and acquire a hidden political significance.'

There is rich political significance in Allan Sekula's work *Waiting for Tear Gas*, a photo-documentary piece on the Seattle protests in 1999, presented as a slideshow (Figure 4) and published in the book *Five Days that Shook the World* (2000), co-authored with political writers Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St Clair. Sekula provides a short text, 'White Globe to Black', in which he does not narrativise the action depicted, but 'outlines the conditions in which the photographs were taken and the critical ambitions shaping the overall project' (Armstrong: 2009, p.4). Armstrong (2009, p.5) continues: 'Sekula's text provides a critical context for situating the photographs, but it offers no single meta-narrative that is not internal to the photographs as they unfold from page to page'. In the publication Sekula's photographs are placed full-bleed and un-fettered at the end of a book, creating a physical space between text and image, refusing to let either form a commentary on the other. Roland Barthes discusses extensively the problems of 'connotation' by a text, which Sekula particularly seeks to avoid in *Five Days that Shook the World*. Although Barthes regards the image caption as 'a parasitic message' (1977, pp.25-26), he provides an alternative to Sekula's method of avoiding connotation:

> the closer the text to the image, the less it seems to connote it; caught as it were in the iconographic message, the verbal message seems to share in its objectivity, the connotation of language is 'innocented' through the photograph's denotation.

Barthes' argument relies on the power of the image and the weakness of the text. He believes connotation is best avoided by proximity, where the text is in a position to be subsumed into the image.

Jeff Wall (1995, pp.32-3) cites the 'rethinking and "refunctioning" of *reportage*' as a direction through which Conceptual Art could venture 'beyond the worn-out criteria for photography as sheer picture-making.' He suggests that 'the notion that art can be created by imitating photojournalism' first surfaced around 1920, with photographers Paul Strand, Walker Evans, Brassaï and Cartier-Bresson, and one could clearly include Atget in this list. The use of text alongside the journalistic or quasi-journalistic photographic image in the 1960's was a tactic borrowed from publishing and, curiously, the photographic image moved from old-style pictorialism to new art object via photojournalism's 'utilitarian' object (Wall 1995, p.33). Wall recognises the paradoxical nature of this passage: 'Photoconceptualism led the way towards the complete acceptance of photography as art—autonomous, bourgeois, collectible art […] blended with elements of text, sculpture, painting or drawing, photography became the quintessential "anti-object".' (1995, p.35). He elaborates on how this could come about, critiquing the work of Dan Graham's photo-essay format, 'Each photograph may be—or, must be considered as possibly being—no more than an illustration to an essay, and therefore not an autonomous work of art.' But Graham's ground breaking work *Homes for America* (1966-7) was never published as a piece of photojournalism. It became hybrid object, a lithographic print, 'an imitation of the non-autonomous.' (Wall: 1995, p.38).

2   Text and image tensions

2.1   Text and image

How well do text and image co-exist, in physical and in conceptual terms? The relationship is sometimes seen as parasitic (Barthes), sometimes symbiotic (Benjamin). This meeting of different but familiar systems of communication is not always comfortable, but it is always operative.

In *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, Vilém Flusser (2000 [1983], p.11) describes the change from an image-based to a text-based culture, and then back to an image-based one, but, crucially, now operating within the space of a text-based culture. He asserts that only after the evolution of writing did we gain the ability to think about *images* in a conceptual way. He re-examines this argument for the age of the technical image, and sees text and image as mutually reinforcing (2000 [1983], pp.11-12). But, according to Hubertus von Amelunxen, in his afterword to Flusser's text, (2000 [1983], p.88), Flusser, like Barthes, still perceives language as the 'home of being'; within the image-heavy culture of the 1980s, he is fearful for the text, 'whose capacity to integrate experience is being altered increasingly by technological media'. Barthes (1977, pp.38-9) rejects this fear, concluding that the image affords a beneficial environment in which text can flourish. He states:

> Today at the level of mass communications, it appears that the linguistic message is indeed present in every image: as title, caption, accompanying press article, film dialogue, comic strip balloon. Which shows that it is not very accurate to talk of a civiliation of the image — we are still, and more than ever, a civilization of writing.

But this, even though sympathetic to the image, is still spoken from a philological viewpoint: the image is important in so far as it facilitates the text.

Perhaps it is problematic to seek an objective assessment on the relationship between text and image from writers alone. It is, after all, not unexpected that writers, however much they think and write about the visual, look at the relationship of text and image from the perspective of the text. Derrida admits to a bias, and this is picked out by artist Gerhard Richter in his introduction to Derrida's *Copy, Archive, Signature*. Richter (2010, p.XVI) quotes Derrida (from a 1990 interview with Peter Brunette): 'It is true, for reasons that have to do with my own history and archaeology, that my investment with language is stronger, older and gives me more enjoyment than my investment in the plastic, visual or spatial arts.'

Artists who write theory are invaluable as moderators. Writer and photographer Allan Sekula also believes the technical image to be the product of a text-based society (giving authority to Flusser and Barthes). Sekula believes the two cannot be disengaged, or only for a instant, until a linguistic engagement kicks in, arguing that 'photography is *not* an independent or autonomous language system, but depends on

larger discursive conditions, invariably including those established by the system of verbal-written language […] the photograph is invariably accompanied by, and situated within, an overt or covert *text.'* (1984, p.81). Despite Sekula's efforts to isolate images from text by distance in *Five Days that Shook the World*, he had already conceded that '[e]ven at the level of the artificially "isolated" image, photographic signification is exercised in terms of pictorial conventions that are never purely photographic'. (1984, p.81). He identifies the damage that is caused by identifying photography as a universal language, 'the very ubiquity of this cliché has lent a commonsensical armor that deflects serious critical questions.' (*ibid.*). For Sekula, the perception of photography as a universal language renders it critically and politically powerless.

A more pragmatic stance comes from Benjamin, who, like many others, was fascinated by the ability of the camera, and other optical devices, to pick up things invisible to the human eye. In this context that he speaks of the practical advantages of an image over language to describe: 'It is possible, for example, however roughly, to describe the way somebody walks, but it is impossible to say anything about that fraction of a second when a person *starts* to *walk.* Photography with its various aids (lens, enlargements) can reveal this moment.' (1972 [1931], p.7). It is now well accepted that multimodality, a combination of different media, of which word and image is just one example, is key to understanding. Gee and Hayes, (2011, p.119) give a simple example, 'Our experience of tying a shoe is so tacit and complexly tied to the body that it is difficult to put into words. Pictures of the stage of shoe tying, with some verbal annotations, would be much more useful.'

Photographer turned novelist Wright Morris did not find the multimodal approach useful to his work. He tried using photographs in his novel *The Home Place* (1948). The images (Figure 5) are uncaptioned, and face every page of text; he wanted text and image to stand as equal and complementary counterparts. However, he discovered that he was 'losing readers, picking up lookers' (Morris:1999, p.89). His authority as novelist was questioned and he did not continue the production of photo-books. The Novelist W.G. Sebald also experimented with photographs in his novels *The Emigrants* (1992), *Austerlitz* (2001) and *The Rings of Saturn: an English Pilgrimage* (2002) (Figure 6). Like Morris, he used uncaptioned images inserted into the text of the novel, but they relate in a very different manner to the text around

them. Shawcross (2003, p.100) describes Sebald's practice: 'Sebald does not attempt the text-and-image equality that Wright sought in *The Home Place*. Rather, he accepts that he will use photographs as historians and documentarians typically use them—as adjuncts to the text that are pointed to and explained.' But Sebald's images are more than adjuncts and a much more important association between image and text is happening here: *Emigrants* and *Austerlitz* are both novels that deal with aspects of memory retrieval, and the images play an important part, over and above the documentary function. As Barzilai (2006, p.207) explains:

> The manner in which Sebald embeds old black-and-white photographs within the
> different narratives not only encourages a comparison between memory and
> photography, but also allows the readers to gain, experientially, a sense of the
> disruptive effect of the belated return of the past. Thus Sebald succeeds in
> replicating on the affective-aesthetic level the characters' and narrators'
> experience of unexpectedly facing certain previously inaccessible recollections.

These images go far beyond the pleasing but distracting images that Morris employs. Sebald's use is innovative and operative; his images interrupt at key moments, and in doing so, engage with the text to provoke an empirical response.

2.2   Text as image

In his discussion on ekphrasis, Gary Shapiro (2013, p.145) argues that Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard, who are sometimes perceived as enemies of the visual, are simply and justifiably acknowledging the infinitely definable relationship between text and image that renders an image to text translation impossible. Barthes (1977, pp.26-27) also disputes that a text could ever stand in for an image and talks about the problems of image description:

> in the movement from one structure to the other [image to text] second signifieds
> are inevitably developed. What is the relationship of these signifieds of
> connotation to the image? To all appearances, it is one of making explicit, of
> providing a stress: the text most often amplifying a set of connotations already
> given in the photograph. Sometimes, however, the text produces (invents) an
> entirely new signified which is retroactively projected into the image

The archival object-level image description, to be described in more detail in section **4.2** of this review, is at odds with signification and connotation: in short, the description is *standing in place* of the image and is a factual report of the visual content that does not incite false narratives. This description of an image from the Mountbatten database, University of Southampton Special Collections, is a detailed physical description with some contextual information (background information about the film *Nice and Friendly* and the fact that the Mountbattens stayed at 'Pickfair'):

> #Docref=MB2/L1/150 Black and white photograph of Charlie Chaplin wearing the costume and make-up of the film character who made him famous, Hollywood, n.d. c.18 October 1922 - 23 October 1922
> Event:
> Black and white photograph of Charlie Chaplin wearing the costume and make-up of the film character who made him famous. He is holding a bendy walking stick in one hand and a cigarette in the other. In the background Eulalia Neilson is sitting on a cane chair watching him. On the ground there is an enormous rubber mallet, one of the props for the film "Nice and Friendly", which Charlie Chaplin made in the garden of "Pickfair", home of Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, and in which he and Lord and Lady Louis Mountbatten, Jackie Coogan, Lieutenant and Mrs Neilson, Colonel Thompson and Mr and Mrs Stephen H.P.Pell acted. The house, "Pickfair", is partially visible in the background. It has a steeply raked roof, light coloured walls, and dark coloured woodwork. There is a striped awning over one of the ground floor windows. Beside the house there is group of several different kinds of evergreen tree and shrub. Lord and Lady Louis Mountbatten and their party resided at "Pickfair" during their stay in Hollywood.
> Date:
> n.d. c.18 Oct 1922 - 23 Oct 1922 #Bdate=18/10/1922 #Adate=23/10/1922
> Place:
> Physical description:
> 107 x 80mm; matt

Although it states at the start that this is a '[b]lack and white photograph of Charlie Chaplin', the description goes on to provide visual content information from across the image: information about furniture, roofs, walls, shrubs, and awnings, as well as other characters in the scene. The researcher must judge if the photograph even *needs* to be seen: the description may deem the image irrelevant, or the text itself might suffice for research purposes.

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Fiona Banner's book *The Nam* (1997) is a hundred page description of the action of five Vietman films, *Full Metal Jacket, The Deer Hunter*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Hamburger Hill*, *Platoon* and *Apocalypse Now!* It is described by its publisher, *Vanity Press* (http://www.fionabanner.com/vanitypress [accessed 12-02-12]), as 'the ultimate unedited text, a world in which nothing is prioritised, but everything', Banner has equalised the action by describing it in a disengaged way. In common with Allan Sekula in his photo-textual, photo-descriptive installation *Meditations on a Tripych* (1973-78), Banner constantly brings us back to the physicality of the media: 'Then he bends over a pile of papers. They're not visible because of his shadow. As he flicks through the pages you can see the reams of type, but its all out of focus.' (1997, n.p.).

Sol LeWitt's work reveals the complex relationship between image and text. Many of his drawings and paintings (and sculptures) are based on written instruction: he writes down the idea and how the work is going to be made. Algorithmic in nature, such pieces reflect the interest in systems and cybernetics amongst LeWitt and his peers in the 1960's. An example instruction from LeWitt:

> An increasing number of horizontal lines about one inch (2.5 cm) apart from
> bottom to top, vertical lines from top to bottom, diagonal right lines from left to
> right, diagonal left lines from right to left.

Reading this dry text could not be more different from looking at a LeWitt wall drawing (Figure 7). Often high colour and large scale, they are the antithesis to the restrained instruction. The work is clearly perceived experientially as well as conceptually, equivalent to the experience of listening to an orchestral piece rather than studying at a score, or moving around a building rather than looking at a plan, although scores and plans bring other information that cannot necessarily be amassed experientially. The text is an important, alternative interface with which we can connect to LeWitt's ideas, untrammelled by issues of taste and visual aesthetics. Each medium requires thorough and different examination if one is to understand the correlation between them. This requirement is articulated by Barthes (1977, p16):

> the two structures of the message each occupy their own defined spaces […] the
> analysis must first of all bear on each separate structure; it is only when the study
> of each structure has been exhausted that it will be possible to understand the
> manner in which they complement each other.

Ultimately, this negotiation between text and image becomes a delicate mediation on the question of sensation. Barthes' aligning of the two forms suggests that there exists equality and difference, and a symbiotic and complementary relationship between the two.

2.3   Text, image and technologies

There have been many challenges to the indexicality of the digital image, most stemming not from increased opportunities of infiltration by text, but from the likelihood of digital manipulation, although of course analogue images can be manipulated too. Barthes (1977, p.21) cites as an example the 1951 press photo of Millard Tydings and Earl Browser, and if further proof is needed, look at the 'spirit photographs' in the Harry Price Archive in the Senate House Library, University of London) (Figure 8). Michelle Henning (1995, p.217), discussing an advertising photograph (an image of a man with a sunburnt neck), asks: 'Is this a 'digital' image? It's hard to tell, at least for the uninitiated. Certainly, the image has been manipulated, but the red flush could feasibly have been produced using an airbrush. If it was produced on a computer, this new technology is merely performing a task as old as photography itself: retouching.'

Even discounting manipulation, questions of indexical legitimacy in the digital image are frequently raised. Martin Lister (2007, p.252) defends indexicality across the digital, asking, 'Is there so much at stake when the indexical quality of a photographic image is registered by an array of charge coupled devices rather than silver salts or electro-magnetic particles?' Even if we identify the digital image as a piece of code and scrutinise it as such, it still stands up to Gunning's 'truth claim' (2004, p.39). Gunning states:

> The fact that rows of numbers do not resemble a photograph does not undermine
> any indexical claim. An index need not (and frequently does not) resemble the thing
> it represents. The indexicality of a traditional photograph inheres in the effect of
> light on chemicals, not in the picture it produces. The rows of numerical data
> produced by a digital camera and the image of tradition chemical photography are
> both indexically determined by objects outside the camera. (2004, p.41)

Sean Cubitt (2010, pp.3-5), in his text on Flusser, views humans as 'functionaries of an apparatus' and examines both analogue and digital processes alike through notions of automation: he sees automation not as a matter confined to digital code, but as important concept in the development of photography, through the dry-plate process, the Box camera, the Instamatic, and 1970s electronic cameras.

The histories and practicalities of photography, not just in terms of production, automation and manipulation, but also in the related areas of cataloguing, storage, access and dissemination, can be extended into an analysis of the digital and so become extremely relevant to the study of photographic practices today. For example, the set of vernacular images, found across shared digital spaces, clearly solicits comparison in its function to the photograph album, which has existed as a social tool and an organisational device since the early days of photography. In 'Talking through the "Fotygraft Album"', Elizabeth Siegel (2003, pp.239-53) highlights the dual purpose of the photo album as being, 'to construct a visual and historical past for ourselves', and 'to entertain others and explain to them who we are'. These objectives are still valid within digital culture and now the 'talking through' is via caption, tag, message or 'status'. The images in early albums, following on from the *carte de visite* album, or the family bible with inserted *cartes de visite*, would be studio shots. These formal photographs provided a visual structure for the family narrative. The rationale for popular photograph in the 1960s was identified by Bourdieu and we still seem to comply with his 'five areas' of motivation for photographic satisfaction, which he lists as (1996 [1965], p.14), 'protection against time, communication with others and the expression of feelings, self-realization, social prestige, distraction or escape.' A similar rationale is cited in Nancy Van House's paper on *Flickr*, where she lists the four social uses of personal photography as: construction of memory, narrative and identity; reflecting and sustaining relationships; self-representation; and self-expression (2007, n.p.). Bourdieu's study group describe their shared family photographs as 'Like letters, and better than letters', (1996 [1965], p.22) and current trends in photo sharing replicate this view.

Photography has become increasingly cheap and user-friendly from capture through to storage. Andreas Müller-Pohle, (2010, p.3) takes a deterministic line: he sees this growing ease of use to be the reason why personal photographic practices have proliferated: 'What is driving private individuals […] is nothing more than the operation

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of the technologies available to them'. The camera has become an everyday extension of the body and Barthes (1981, p.15) identifies the responsible body part: 'the Photographer's organ is not his eye […] but his finger'. Today, the act of photography is often carried out with near circumvention of the eye: it has become a routine activity, and routine activities become automatic by definition. Blake Stimson's phrase 'an image factory in every pocket or handbag' (2012, p.41) identifies popular digital photography as a production-line activity, and one where aesthetic considerations are secondary to 'the sociopolitical register of multiplicity' (*ibid.).*

The most important factor in the digital photography revolution by far, and critical to the continuing socialisation of the vernacular image, is the sharing of photographs by cameraphone. This small device is the ultimate and ever available image factory and distribution service. Photographs are seamlessly moved to social media sites, as well as being distributed via text message or email. Whereas vernacular photographs were once created for 'exchange of family information' (Bourdieu, 1996 [1965], p.22), they can now be disseminated to a wide audience of family, friends and strangers alike, with a few clicks. Flusser had little time for the snapshot, even in the days of relatively low productivity. He identifies his problem thus: 'anyone who takes snapshots does not necessarily have to be able to decode photographs' (2000 [1983], p.57). But the decoding of the digital vernacular image takes on a different form as new sharing methods inevitably involve a text element. Now we are forced to decode by an apparatus (the cameraphone) that naturally drives text and image together. The disconnect with photography that is mourned by Flusser has been replaced by entirely different connections to images that must be assimilated into photographic critique, education and research.

Many images generated by the cameraphone tend to lean towards the personal and obscure, but can be rendered meaningful to others with just a small measure of contextual information. Again, a comparison can be made to earlier photographic practices: when the first Leica emerged in 1925, Benjamin was aware that as the camera became more portable and user-friendly, the nature of the images that come out of it would change and they would need clarification:

> The camera becomes smaller and smaller, ever readier to capture transitory and
> secret pictures which are able to shock the associative mechanism of the observer

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to a standstill. At this point the caption must step in, thereby creating a
photography which literarises the relationships of life and without which
photographic construction would remain stuck in the approximate. (Benjamin:
1972 [1931], p.35)

However, the 'transitory and secret' *digital* image can be tied down with a click, and
just as easily released with another; the fast and frequent sharing and appropriation
of images can lead to loss of authorship, context and meaning. On one side, the
networked image has become multi-functional with the rise of the stock photo and
other less formalised appropriations of images. However, it has also become
dysfunctional as it loses contextual integrity and individual value, whilst dipping in and
out of different networked usages and unions, suffering multiple decontextualisations
and recontextualisations. This excursive use may be transformative for the image, as
it is 'liberated from the vaults of cinemas and archives and thrust into digital
uncertainty' (Steyerl: 2012, p.32).

Wolfgang Ernst (2002, p.481) argues that online databanks 'values such as identity
and meaning dissolve in a network of links which decide, more relentlessly than ever,
what counts as context.' This observation comes from the perspective of the digital
archive, but the digital archive is moving closer to personal modes of storage and
distribution. Featherstone (2006, p.591) notes that 'the boundaries between archive
and everyday life become blurred through digital recording and storage technologies.'
Jussi Parikka (2013, p.2) proposes that this new world of near-limitless storage
opportunity is impacting on us as users, stating: 'We are miniarchivists ourselves in
this information society, which could be more aptly called an information
management society.'
Loss of context in the archive means a loss of cultural significance, which can rarely
be regained. Klijn (2004, p.23) argues:

> In today's information society easy search-and-retrieval of information is
> considered a basic requirement, and cultural institutions are expected to play their
> parts as information providers. With the increasing amount of unauthorized and
> unreliable information presented on the internet, memory institutions, more than
> ever before, have a responsibility as trusted guardians of authentic materials.

Undoubtedly, the networking and movement of archival images represents a democratisation of the archival object, freeing it up from institutional chains. Although appropriating images from any source can be fun and productive, surely it is best to be aware of cultural connotation and original source. Blake Stimson attributes to photography 'two distinctly appealing properties', the first being to capture the moment, and the second, its 'accelerated powers of reproduction and distribution'. He continues, 'Because of this bipolar allure, photography's ontology is defined by a dynamic tension between one and all: between unity and multiplicity.' (2010, p.41). The all-encompassing *culture* of digitisation, with its complicated relationship to text, is unquestionably more significant to photographic theory today than is the 'one', the single image. Individual images may be well worth examination and critique, but within what Steyerl (2012, p.44) terms the 'reality' of network circulation.

3   Classification and index

3.1   Photography as a classification tool

Techniques for the classification of images, both personal and administrative, will be discussed later in this review, but photography has been *used* to classify from the start. It was because of its indexical qualities that early photography was assigned to scientific enquiry (and subsequent classification), and it arrived at an opportune time. The exhibition *Brought to Light: Photography and the Invisible, 1840-1900*, at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2008, surveys a period when science and photography were in a state of rapid development; and scientists were using cameras in conjunction with other optical devices. In the catalogue, Tom Gunning argues that these images functioned 'not simply to record a recognizable world, but also to provide images of a previously invisible one.' (in Keller: 2008, p.54).

In 1665 *Micrographia, or some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies, made by Magnifying Glasses, with Observations and Inquiries thereupon*, shows Robert Hooke's engravings, revealing detail previously invisible to the naked eye.
Hooke writes in his preface: 'there is nothing so far distant but may be represented to our view; and by the help of Microscopes, there is nothing so small, as to escape our inquiry; hence there is a new visible World discovered to the understanding'. The

photograph was the natural successor to illustration as a method of scientific recording and classification. Like Hooke's engravings, the microscopic photographs by Fox-Talbot and Bertsch (Figure 9) shown at SFMOMA would have been challenging to the public gaze; Neal Benezra writes in his foreword to the catalogue: 'Circulated among scientists but also avidly consumed by the general public, these mesmerizing pictures provoked something of a sea change — a radical reconsideration of how the world around us was perceived and understood.' (in Keller: 2008, p.13). These images demanded faith in the truth and accuracy of new technologies; this faith was facilitated by the fact that the images fell under the umbrella of science, and were classified with a scientific rigour that provided authority. Jussi Parikka (2012, p.21) discusses the emergence of 'the science of the image' and references scientist Robert Koch, who in his '*Zur Untersuchung von pathogenen Organismen*', states that 'the photographic picture of a microscopic object can under certain circumstances be more important than [the object] itself'.

Scientific investigation and enlightenment did not always employ technologies other than the standard camera lens, and anthropological investigation especially was reinforced by photography, as a visit to the archives of the Royal Anthropological Institute quickly reveals. Anthropologists saw these photographs, many of which remain too sensitive to be published, as *visual metadata*, in support of their written documentation. The following are catalogue descriptions of photographs of the *Ainu* people in Japan:

[Ainu material]. [nd] [M249/1/19]

6 Young adults, adolescents & children. 16 photographs on 1 sheet. 16.5 x 11.5 cm.
7 Masagoshi, young Ainu with Japanese name, about 22. 1 photograph. 10.5 x 7.5 cm.
8 [Female child, seated portrait]. 1 photograph. 10 x 7.5 cm.
9 [Female child, seated portrait]. 1 photograph. 10 x 7.5 cm.
10 [Female child, seated portrait]. 1 photograph. 10 x 7.5 cm.
11 [Male, standing with back view]. Hair not as well seen on upper part of back, but more so below (loins). 1 photograph. 12 x 8 cm.

In his 1931 series, *Menschen und Landschaften* (People and Landscapes) (Figure 10) August Sander used portrait photography to record and categorise people with what Alan Sekula (1984, p.85) calls 'Physiognomic empiricism'. Sekula (1984, p.84) states: 'Sander describes photography as the truth vehicle for an eclectic array of disciplines: not only astronomy, but history, biology, zoology, botany, physiognomy (and clearly the list is not meant to be exhaustive).' Sekula, though, is sceptical of Sander's methodology and sees his scientific claims as an attempt to validate his artistic practice: 'I suspect Sander wanted to envelop his project in the legitimating aura of science without violating the esthetic coherence and semantic ambiguity of the traditional portrait form.' (1984, p.85). Jens Jäger (2001, n.p.) suggests further tension between the social (aesthetic) and administrative functions of early photography, as commercial portrait photography (with its inherent respectability) was used to identify criminals until the 1890s.

3.2   Classification as creative practice

. Following on from the work of Sander, photographic practice around classification, collection and typology has flourished and has been demonstrated and defined by artists / photographers such as Ed Ruscha and Berndt and Hilla Becher. By means of comparison, and the inherent addition and subtraction of visual information amongst typologically connected images, our understanding of a single image can be enhanced. As in the archive, the grouping becomes more important than the isolated image.

Ed Ruscha's seminal work *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963) (Figure 11) is a set of photographs of all the gas stations along Route 66 between Los Angeles and Oklahoma City. According to Iversen (2010, p.16), and gleaned from a 1965 *Artforum* interview, the choice of instruction was fairly arbitrary: ' the work began as a 'play on words', he liked the word 'gasoline' and the specific quantity 'twenty-six'. The design for the cover was finished before a single photograph was taken.' Like Ruscha, John Baldessari uses quasi-scientific organisation in his project *My File of Movie Stills*, with shifting sets of words serving as a device for choosing images. Even though he changes his words according to his requirements, the piece is significant for the artist's use of a limited vocabulary, 'I don't order stills, I must choose from the menu.'

(1985, pp.91-93). In his *Elbow* series of the late 1990's, Baldessari uses 'classificatory' and 'denotative' language (Diedrichsen: 1999, p.55) to depict the animal part of his three part works (human, animal, plant). A text element juxtaposed with two stylistically different images prompts questions on differing systems of representation.

Taryn Simons's *American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* (2007) (see Figure 3), an extensive photo-textual catalogue of things American, is not so much an index as 'an inventory', according to Elisabeth Sussman and Tina Kukielski in their introduction to the publication. They state, 'Simon is quick to admit that her selection process is random and the 62 annotated photographs comprising the series are by no means a system of classification. This is not an archive, but a time capsule.' (2007, n.p.). It is an index in so much as it is a pointer: it directs us to aspects of American life not normally seen. The index includes: transatlantic sub-marine telecommunications cables; research marijuana crop grow room; fireworks test site; Church of Scientology film screening room. The photographs are detailed and indexical in nature and the facts around them are meticulously described, giving exact numbers, measurements, dates and locations.

Public interest and artistic practice in response to the archive has proliferated in recent years. As Wolfgang Ernst observes (2002, p.475), 'The topic of archives has never been as inflationary as it is today. At the turn of the millennium, the archive transforms the questions of memory, recollection, and the preservation of traces into a cultural obsession.' Hal Foster (2004, p.3) discusses the 'archival impulse' through contemporary artists, but charts the history of archival art back to Rodchenko and Heartfield, and then Rauschenberg and Prince.

Archival art practice is frequently based around notions of memory, and the use of visibly degraded archive media is a way of exploring these ideas. Christian Boltanski's photo-installation *Menschlich (Humanity)* (1994-5) is a collection of 1,300 photographs whose only categorisation criteria is that they are photographs of people from the time of the Second World War; they are otherwise unsorted. Taken from a variety of sources, many appear faded or otherwise aged. The work was also published as an artist's book (Figure 12), printed on 'newsprint-like paper' (Campany: 2003, p.58). Some of these images were in fact taken *from* newspapers and the

paper choice further intensifies imperfections. Campany argues that through these images, '[t]he atrocities of the twentieth century are evoked but not directly imaged' (*ibid.*). The imperfect images are indeed evocative of fading memory. Ernst states, 'Many models of artistic work on recollection continue to be configured as being analogous to human remembrance and thus *anthropological* […] deriving from the old media of archive and library, collection and museum.' (2001, pp.97-98). However, he recognises the 'aura' of the physical archive and the 'nostalgic longing for material memory' (2001, p.99) and certainly such practice can be a way of exploring issues of temporality in the archive. An argument could even be made that conservators, who are charged with the task of halting degradation, so that objects can continue to function as useful historical documents, are interfering with the natural processes of time and the authenticity of the object.

Ernst argues though that the scope of the new (digital) archive aesthetic could be explored using 'images to find images, sequences to find sequences, and sounds to find sounds' (2001, pp.98-9); there is undoubtedly room for practices that deal with the structures and ordering systems of the archive itself. Some noteworthy examples visual metaphors that sit outside the standard use of archive materials are represented in Sven Spieker's book *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (2008), where he specifically considers artists working with archival technologies. For example, Spieker discusses the work of performance artist Andrea Fraser and her piece *Information Room* (1998), where she utilises the classificatory systems of shelves, boxes and files to address the fundamental archival notion of original order, through encouraging the visitor to rummage to such an extent that all order is lost (2008, p.175).

The degraded archive image *per se* can be perceived as a 'glitch aesthetic' from the past and its popularity feeds and fits in with the current obsession for vintage-inspired filters that are applied to images through applications such as *Instagram* or *Hipstamatic*. Stephen Bull (2012, p.25) concisely describes the problems encountered by the over-use of applied filters:

> It may seem that these pictures preserve the appearance of popular analogue photography, but instead the opposite might actually be the case. The loss of information through washing out, fading away and obscuration in these multiplying

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spectres of dead media represents, over and over again, the irretrievable loss of
popular analogue photography itself.

Bull fears for analogue photography, but the digital image is in danger of being
commonly perceived as uninteresting without the application of such filters. Crucially,
these 'spectres of dead media' are twisting the temporalities of old and new images
alike. Rosa Menkman (2011, p.11) in her 'Glitch Studies Manifesto' warns against
effects that are easily reproduced by using popular software, and she discusses in
detail the *technology* of glitch and noise.

4 Archival description

4.1 Structuring the archive

Structures in place for describing and organising archival collections, involving rules
on language and format, give authority to records and also provide clarity when
searching. Judith Ellis (1993, p.248) states:

> Finding aids lead researchers to the information they are seeking from or about
> archives. They may be generally defined as the descriptive media (such as
> registers, guides, inventories and indexes) that establish physical and intellectual
> control over the holding of an [sic] archives and make it possible to retrieve
> particular records or information from these archives.

Ellis' finding aids originate from an era before computer automation, and whilst the
box and file system of physical ordering systems (and the paper catalogue that
parallels the storage) may not have seen much change, the rules on language for
archival description have become increasingly structured, first with computerisation of
records and then with the digitisation of collections. Metadata is central to this
structure, facilitating the organisation and control of the computerised record system
or digital archive. The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) defines metadata
as 'structured information about information' (http://www.jisc.ac.uk/aboutus [accessed
1-11-12]). This information is largely structured today by the implementation of
metadata schemas, facilitating the addition of prescribed information to an image or
object via a limited vocabulary, or pre-defined thesaurus terms. *Dublin Core* is a

common metadata schema and forms the basis for many others. *VRA core 3.0* is a schema commonly used to catalogue art images and images of cultural objects, because, importantly, it 'makes a distinction between information relating to (1) the original artwork and (2) images of that artwork.' (JISC Digital Media, 2009, p.19). This seems a simple concept, but it is critical when examining the digitisation and cataloguing of visual materials, as it involves dialogue on issues of object, intermediary, authorship and ownership. Thesaurus sets are downloadable: general ones from organisations such as UNESCO or the Library of Congress, and subject focused sets from specialist providers. Even these specialist schema are often too restricted for most projects to use sensibly; they can be adapted to a certain extent but it is in their nature to remain limited. If an institution needs to create its own set there are British and International guidelines to help with this. Limitations are also set by the numerous data entry rules and formalities of language that must be observed, in order to preserve interoperability across different collections and institutions in the culture of keyword-based searching.

SEPIADES, initiated by the organisation SEPIA (Safeguarding European Photographic Images for Access) in 2003, is a metadata schema specifically designed for describing photographic collections, and an analysis of this is useful in exposing and understanding the mechanisms for adding both technical and descriptive metadata using a standardised schema. JISC Digital Media (2009, p.36) explains how *SEPIADES* works:

> In common with many other schema, SEPIADES supports multi-level description, enabling cataloguing at different levels: **Collection**, **Grouping**, **Single Item** – or all at once in the same cataloguing record. A SEPIADES record also records information about the **Institution** and the **Acquisition** (i.e. the means by which the material came into the institution). Each of these five sets of information (Institution, Acquisition, Collection, Grouping, Single Item) are further sub-divided into **Administration** (for administrative metadata), **Provenance** (for historical or contextual metadata), and **Material** (for descriptive metadata). At the single Item Level a 'Material' distinction is made between the Visual Image (i.e. its visual content) and the Physical Description (its physical form). The Physical Description is further divided up into Photographs and Digital Images.

Advocates of schema would argue that the main aim is to enable a machine search and retrieval process. For example, Klijn maintains that 'in this digital age the primary argument for applying a standard is the possibility of sharing data and searching through distributed databases.' (2004, p.13). There is a precedent for this: Krajewski (2011, ch.6, n.p.). states that Melvil Dewey (the creator of the Dewey Decimal Classification system in 1876) 'is convinced that library efficiency can be increased only with uniform cataloging techniques on uniform materials' and sees Dewey's main aim to be to save time. The cataloguing of archives is quite unlike the classification of books, but the standardisation of archival practices for the digital age, and particularly the use of thesaurus terms, indeed fulfils Dewey's aim, as it speeds up the process of adding descriptive metadata.

4.2   Object-level description

Even in 2001, (SEPIA, 2001, p.12), the dual problems of the staffing limitations of institutions and the growing numbers of photographs to be catalogued were apparent. Collections have always come into archives faster than it is possible to catalogue, as policy, not economics, rightly dictates acquisitions. The problem has been exacerbated with the arrival of 'born-digital' collections, for example photographs from news media. The *time* economy plays a role in the way both institutions and individuals approach the cataloguing of photographs: time is a valuable resource, one that individuals might choose to trade off against other commitments, paid or unpaid, but in the institution time is directly dependant on funding. Cataloguing is often outsourced, or carried out in-house by lower paid non-professionals who might lack necessary skills. In this climate, descriptions of the single object are often seen as a problematic and unnecessary extravagance.

Klijn (2004, p.15) explains the problems of archival image description: 'there are often many ways to describe what you see, it is often very hard to retrieve contextual information'. SEPIA (2001, p.17) presents a case study from the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam, demonstrating the difficulties of describing individual photographs:

"Man throwing stone" must be placed in context to make it "Man throwing stone on the Kurfurstendam in Berlin, after a speech held by Egon Krentz on 24th of October, 1989". Visitors can come up with a wide range of questions varying from "Do you have that picture with that man on the Kurfurstendam?" to "Do you have pictures that have something to do with the speech held by Egon Krentz on 24th of October, 1989?" Since it is not always possible to make a description that fits to both questions, the IISH decided to use its own thesaurus. Trying to find out the context of a photo can often take a lot of time and effort.

The object-level image description originated in a pre-digital access, relatively unstandardised era; although standards have been in place since records began, in the form of simple, collection-led structures, or latterly with structures imposed by organisations such as the *International Council on Archives*. Today the object-level description is typically found within a text-only database (printed and / or reproduced online), and separate from the image it describes. It is written in prose, and deals primarily with the 'Single Item>Material>Visual Image' aspect of description as defined by *SEPIADES*. It is a description of the physicality and the *visual content* of the image and it tends to be predominately context free, for the reasons covered in the "man throwing stone" scenario cited above. Any contextual information to hand may be included, although this information is often stored at higher levels such as collection or group, leaving the object-level description quite free of non-visual information, apart from perhaps names of people and places, if they are known. Context can be determined by visiting the rest of the collection, or perhaps by looking at higher level descriptions; context relies predominantly on the object's unique place in the archives and the notion of original order. The description often migrates to a computerised database and remains useful as searchable text, but a description of visual content is redundant in archival terms once the image is visible.

These object-level catalogue descriptions from the Broadlands Archives at the University of Southampton describe loose photographs, broadly grouped (taken in India), but not part of an album or other defining archival container, so there would be a problem in assigning context:

All of the Indian women wore white, and two had stethoscopes around their necks. There is, therefore, a possibility that this photograph was taken during a visit to a medical centre and that the white garments are uniforms.

> […] a very large number of people (none of who is identified) […]

> […] brass band instruments (distant and indistinct) […]

The descriptions are guarded and non-committal; they contain within the language of the description itself a refusal to deduce or interpolate.

Roland Barthes (1977, p.39) explains how a text can 'fix' an image's multiple meanings: 'the text replies — in a more or less direct, more or less partial manner — to the question: *what is it?* The text helps to identify purely and simply the elements of the scene and the scene itself; it is a matter of denoted description of an image'. The object-level description attempts to answer the question *what is it?* as clearly as possible. It fixes the visual content in a way that is factual, yet does not choose a singular meaning. It neither dismisses nor discusses the possible polysemous nature of the image. It provides enough information for the researcher to decide whether further investigation is warranted, but does not invite incorrect interpretation, or dismissal for the wrong reason; this is a fine balance for the cataloguer to achieve. Without contextual information, the archive description could be perceived as lacking but it can make compelling reading as a discrete unit. The affect of reading a context-free text can be compared to that of seeing a journalistic photograph stripped of its original context, for example, images appropriated by artist Thomas Ruff in his *Zeitungsfoto* series (1990) (Figure 13). These textual and visual models both involve the presentation of objective information, and the separation from their 'co-operative but […] heterogeneous'; 'contiguous but not 'homogenized' counterparts (Barthes, 1977, p.16). Inevitably, they nudge the reader towards speculation and the building of meaning, or multiple meanings, because in both cases the reader is aware that there is important context behind the factual interface. This is exactly what the artist (Ruff) wants and what the archivist does not.

5   Tag

5.1   The tag as flawed intermediary

The tag has become a byword in the discourse on connectivity, as it works across social media to bind things, ideas and people together. On a photo-sharing site such

as *Flickr*, the tag does all these things, as well as ideally facilitating the indexing, retrieval and circulation, the 'archiving' of networked images. But images can remain unseen or are seen in the wrong context, due either to a lack of meaningful, interpretive tagging, or simply because the matching of text and image do not conform to personal expectations (a fundamental flaw in the system). These failings are present in the context of institutional metadata, but are exacerbated in the unregulated form of the user-generated tag. Indeed, it is a difficult task to satisfactorily articulate an image with *any* volume of words, but the tag is profoundly flawed in the way that any single word description of a complex object is flawed, whether generated through a metadata schema or by using an open system. Rubinstein argues, 'it is largely irrelevant whether an image is tagged with 'chalk' or 'cheese'; what matters is that through tagging the image is converted into a meaningful substance that enters an expressive relationship with other media objects such as the class of objects tagged with 'cheese' (2010,p.199). Tags not only *express* the concept of identicality, they *create* an identicality, one that is reliant on the diverse motives of the tagger, allowing an unpredictable system of image description to persist and multiply and an uninitiated and increasingly random taxonomy to emerge. The image mapping effected by the tag is far more complex than the discrete signposting of Benjamin's captions (1999, p.220); the tag is a point on a map that has infinite navigational opportunities and unexplored territories.

Multiple tags function better than single ones, providing a combination of words, which, although often haphazard in nature, can converge to give a fuller account of the image, diffusing issues of inaccuracy by avoiding the single descriptor. With multiple tagging, physical 'seeing' is promoted, as odds for successful retrieval are shortened. Post-retrieval, multiple tags can aid understanding of the image, promoting 'seeing' in the deeper sense.

The use of collaborative cataloguing, crowdsourcing, or folksonomy, when extended to a very large group of participants, can give rise to accurate metadata, as proven by the success of the *Galaxy Zoo* project (http://www.galaxyzoo.org/ [accessed 09/12/2011). Engaging the skills of the many is another way of challenging the closed nature of the tag, and can be surprisingly productive in terms of generating reliable information. Axel Bruns (2008b, p.172) describes this practice as 'a widely distributed process of annotation at a distance', requiring 'only a minute and therefore highly

granular contribution from each individual user […] it allows for the emergence of probabilistic effects.' Within the space of the archive or museum, the practice of tagging photographs by untrained users is a far cry from object-level description, and even from the structure of schemas such as *SEPIADES*, yet it is now in mainstream use, with institutions such as the Library of Congress uploading images to a *Flickr* group for signed-up users to tag. Bruns, in his 2008 article in *Fibreculture Journal*, and on his website (http://produsage.org/) uses the term *produsage* to describe the concept of user as producer. He defines it thus:

> Produsage is based on the collaborative engagement of (ideally large) communities of participants in a shared project. This represents an important shift from industrial production which mainly relies on the existence of dedicated individuals and teams of content developers. Whether in open source software development, citizen journalism, or creative projects, produsage assumes that the community as a whole, if sufficiently large and varied, will be able to contribute more than a closed team of producers, however qualified. (2008a, p.4)

Bruns specifies that the contributing community should be 'ideally large'; using a relatively small group of participants can produce strange anomalies, even though participants may be interested, diligent and prepared to invest time. The results require careful and costly monitoring, making smaller institutions less inclined to utilise the community. A folksonomy is simply a 'folk taxonomy' and as such, the community decides on which linguistic terms take precedence, terms largely dependent on their cultural and social backgrounds; they are shaped by the users, and grow accordingly. Marlow et al explain: 'Because of their lack of predefined taxonomic structure, social tagging systems rely on shared and emergent social structures and behaviours, as well as related conceptual and linguistic structures of the user community.' (2006, p.31). James Surowiecki (2005, p.41) argues that collaborative tagging gives better results when the contributors are not influencing each other, because it 'keeps the mistakes people make from becoming correlated'. He highlights a problem with the community aspect: once a particular group of users starts to emerge, conformity or 'herding' becomes a threat to the independent nature of user-generated data as members exert influence on each other (2005, p.42).

So folksonomies can be flawed in a number of ways: they may suffer from low user numbers; a community is predisposed to follow the crowd; there is lack of regulation,

which can result in polysemy and ambiguity (Yeung et al: 2009a, n.p.); and, essentially, they still trade in the single word descriptor. However, they are open in nature and constitute a 'bottom-up subjective categorisation system' (Rubinstein & Sluis, 2008, p.19); they remain unrestricted by limited vocabularies and thesaurus terms that can be unfamiliar, counter-intuitive and inadequate, developing instead through 'the language and usage patterns of real users' (Smith, 2008, p.85).

Whichever way the tag is generated, it is our mode of introduction to a networked image, and to other images deemed similar to it. It is a fundamental part of our understanding of an image, a necessary structural feature. However accurate or inaccurate the tag may be, the tagged image, and the network of images around it, would not function without it. But Rubinstein sees the reliance on tagging as a distancing from *visual* literacy and states: 'tagging can be thought of as a strategy that allows one to remain immersed in photography without being affected by images.' (2010, p.199).

Tagging images can be speeded up and simplified by developing personal short-cuts and systems, for example by using the same tags throughout a broadly related set of images; an examination of *Flickr* show that this is common practice in personal photostreams. Here the tag becomes overtly contextual, as it denotes an event beyond the scope of the singular image. The image itself can be a short-hand, a symbol or a reminder of an event; and the tag becomes a linguistic memory aid that is employed to support this visual memory aid, with emphasis on the occasion and with little consideration for the individual image.

The temporal nature of the image is introduced through this type of tagging, as the tag refers to the broad event rather than the specific situation that is captured within the time the camera takes to record. The set of photos within a digital space takes on a filmic quality; a sequential set of images describing an event. Rubinstein and Sluis observe, 'we see our attention shift from the singular photographic image to image to image sequences: the image "pool', the '"slideshow", the "photostream", the image "feed". At the same time, images are not "frozen moments in time" in the way photographs used to be understood'. They muse on the diminishing difference between photography and video. (2008, p.22). The decisive moment has become an indecisive one, as the photographer takes multiple shots and decision-making is

carried out later, or not at all. Streitberger and van Gelder (2010, p.49) look at the function of the still image when placed within a movie, 'Catapulted out of the narrative, the spectator becomes aware of what she is looking at.' The narrative of the film can override the visual, and the still image snatches the visual back. Narrative can overpower a set of sequential images, especially within an event-based tagging system, and inside a culture where there is little chance to objectify an individual image. Joanna Drucker (2012, p.23) sees 'the shift from entity to event', as a fundamental change in the ontology of the photographic image, highlighting 'the radical incompleteness' of the single photograph. Steitberger and van Gelder (2010, p.48) go further, claiming that the ontological differences between photo and film do not hold in the digital age. With event-based tagging we are taken into a filmic domain where 'something is being endured' rather than 'acted' (Agamben: 2000, p.57); we are persuaded to look at the general, not the specific, the event, not the situation.

Within the context of event-based tagging, one must address the possibility that the tags are correct but they do not match the photographs. The intention of the photographer may not be obvious in the single image, but may come through in the sequential set, as the tag reveals a series 'formed by rare or repetitive events.' (Foucault: 2002a, p.8).

5.2   Why tag?

Flawed though the practice of tagging might be, there is little choice on whether or not to tag. It is implicit in web culture, as image and text are combined through the generation of automatic camera data and through the simple use of tagging systems inside photo sharing applications. In analysing the motives for tagging, Marlow et al (2006, pp.35-36) divide users into two distinct groups:

> The motivations to tag can be categorized into two high level practices:
> *organizational* and *social*. The first arises from the use of tagging as an alternative
> to structured filing; users motivated by this task may attempt to develop a personal
> standard and use common tags created by others. The latter expresses the
> communicative nature of tagging, wherein users attempt to express themselves,
> their opinions, and specific qualities of the resources through the tags they
> choose.

It is hard to imagine that personal tagging practices via networks are ever *purely* organisational, and it seems unlikely that the two practices described do not overlap; the *organizational* group use 'common tags created by others' for the same reason that metadata schemas use thesaurus terms: for reasons of interoperability, in other words, communication. Tagging is a highly tuned method of communication, of sharing, and of building relationships, and these are strong incentives to tag. However, these incentives do not always promote meaningful tagging, and whilst individuals clearly do not want to promote 'unseeing' Rubinstein (2010, p199), they do not want them 'cleared utopianically' of their connotations. (Barthes: 1977, p.42), because connotations are exactly what the social tagger wishes to proliferate. Thus tagging one's own pictures can constitute a subjective and egotistical form of denotation: the tag becomes more significant than the image in terms of constructing a personality. Rubinstein again:

> Social networks encourage tagging as a playful way of performing the self through the free association of words with images. The resulting blend of narcissism and marketing fuses identity politics with advertising while at the same time assisting computers with the identification of non-linguistic objects. (2010, p.198)

Tagging can generate warm feelings of individuality, visibility and recognition, but it is often mis-sold by the search engine industry as an instrument of empowerment, as it delivers more power to the industry than to the individual. Although Bruns is an advocate of the democratic nature of a user-generated web, he argues that 'produsage and commercial activity are by no means exclusive' and he goes on to examine the 'value chain' of such produsage to the individual user, as opposed to the project (2008b, p.6). Bruns is addressing open source communities that contribute to the likes of Linux, Firefox and Wikipedia, but his conclusions apply equally well to the social tagger: 'produsage' projects can generate valuable intellectual property in their own right and are predisposed to commercial exploitation.

The interpretation and classification of images remains a task best performed by humans, even though there has been progress in the field of computer image recognition. Rubinstein (2012, p.198) explains, 'The importance of tagging for the economies of the web lies precisely in the bridging of the gap between human perception of images and the computer's blindness to them.' Unlike the high cost of

institutional cataloguing, digital labour schemes are cheap; humans will readily work for free, or for very small payment. Amazon Mechanical Turk, founded in 2005, crowdsources 'HITs' (Human Intelligence Tasks). As an exploited worker, one can earn $4.95 for 4 hours 30 minutes of microtasking, presumably, if one works as fast as a machine: Mechanical Turk labels itself as 'Artificial Artificial Intelligence'. (https://www.mturk.com/mturk/welcome?variant=worker&state=aEpvNTRrZ0wwSTR MYkFGMzF1VTRDZ05uRVFRPTIwMTQxMDI2MTIwNFVzZXIudHVya1NlY3VyZX50c nVlJQ-- [accessed 26-10-14]). There are schemes that offer no financial reward at all: applications that turn tagging into games, such as *Tagr* from Microsoft Office, mobilising users to tag Microsoft's clip art and images, whereby the player gains points and Microsoft gains valuable image metadata. Additionally, feel-good projects like the Library of Congress' *Flickr* tagging group, or the *Galaxy Zoo* project, take advantage of the desire to be useful to society as collaborative individuals, to be gratis and granular 'produsers'.

Chapter 1

The archive, the list, the description within

1   Arrangement coalitions: physical, paper, online

Systems of archival arrangement of objects, together with the techniques for recording these objects and their arrangement, are critical to all aspects of this project. Before these systems are assimilated into the thinking of the research and into creative practice they need to be better understood and explained from *inside* the milieu of the archive. Explanation here comes partly from a historical and technical point of view, with some archive theory, but also from a theoretical perspective that may be unfamiliar to archivists or the bodies that dictate archival practice.

The hierarchical arrangement of an archive materialises as a series of containers, in the physical space as well as in the catalogue. This location-based arrangement starts with the building or institution itself, a place that is often loosely termed 'The Archive'. Placed inside this outer 'bricks and mortar' casing is a network of strongrooms and shelves. Here the archival object (the single manuscript, letter or photograph, for example) is placed in a folder; the folder within a box; the box stacked with associated boxes at a specified shelf location (Figure 14).

The archive catalogue matches and describes this arrangement. Moving downwards within and from the holding institution, the structuring continues with the name of the collection; then through cascading lists that might deal with groupings such as committees, people and events. These grouping are not imposed, but take their lead from the objects, as original order is preserved. Deep inside these loose categories (loose because one continually finds difficult objects that neither befit nor allow even this object-led categorisation) lies the description of the single object, although this concluding unit of description sometimes does not materialise at all, with information ending at folder level, or earlier. When it does exists, the object-level description varies in form and detail, which is also object-led: the description of general papers might be just that, perhaps grouped only by a date range or a committee, whilst

letters perceived to have historical significance could be fully transcribed, and images are described with variable and unpredictable degrees of attention to detail.

Nina Lager Vestberg, in her critique of the Warburg and the Conway Libraries, describes how these collections (both of them are relatively small and open access) are not fully catalogued and so rely on the physical storage as a finding aid: 'the filing cabinets and boxes are, at one and the same time, repositories for the 'things themselves' and catalogues explaining what things are.' (2013, p.476). This material manifestation of catalogue happens in archival collections too, but the visitor to the archive rarely sees the physical arrangement of objects, except for perhaps an occasional glimpse of the box from which their requested files are temporarily removed. The catalogue, replicating the storage as it does, and often mentioning specific numbers of boxes and files and the shelf space that the archive occupies, is for the reader a pointer to the storage and arrangement of the archive, and defines for them the scope and physicality of the collection. The catalogue, then, can initiate an imagining that returns an understanding and a longing for the physical space of the archive, just as the object-level description does for the single object. This affect could be perceived as an interdependence of understanding and imagination, as put forward by Blocker (1965, p.45) in his analysis of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*:

> 'The imagination is influenced by the understanding in that the form of the representation of the imagination is formful and bound, which become objects of cognition. […] The understanding is influenced by the imagination in that the imagination quickens or enlivens, gives spirit to the understanding.'

Sven Spieker (2008, p.19) argues that it is a Kantian idea that 'spatial concreteness' (*Räumlichkeit*) is not necessary for cognition and knowledge. But spatial understanding would seem necessary for the imagination to progress; taking the case of the archive itself, a spatial understanding of forms of storage: how papers, files, boxes and shelves all function together. Once imagined, the archive, its structure, and the position of the single object relative to this structure, is more clearly understood and the 'elusive past' (Spieker: 2008, p.109) starts to acquire tangibility. Then more complicated semantic groupings can be constructed.

The structure of the digital archive can be seen as an extrapolation of the classification and storage methods of the physical archive and its paper reflection. As Manovich and Douglass (2009, n.p.) observe '[w]e have "been digital" on a theoretical level for a very long time', in terms of employing categorisation to 'theorize, preserve and exhibit' our cultural knowledge. Not only do we borrow the organisational structures of the physical archive, but interfaces are devised to correspond to the physical organising techniques; this is not surprising, as computer interfaces and storage systems themselves first grew out of the physical filing systems of the archive and the office. Although interfaces of digital archives can present themselves in various ways and with various titles (from the 'virtual strong room', recently adopted by the University of Southampton Special Collections, to less materially inspired names such as the National Archives' 'online collections'), they broadly follow the same cascading container-based formula of folders and files as their physical counterparts; the terminology and the structure comes out of archival arrangement and returns to it, in order to contain the digital archive. The imagining and understanding of space and physicality that is prompted by the paper catalogue extends to the digital interface as well. Cornelia Vismann, in *Files* recognises a nostalgia for tactile storage systems when she states, 'The very terminology of computer surfaces is designed to remind users seated before screens of the familiar world of files.' (2008, p.163).

In the physical archive, systems of user registers and carbon-copied paper slips, recording the manuscript number and its exact shelf location, prevent a borrowed document from being misplaced. Corresponding measures are taken to prevent this kind of loss in the digital archive. Vismann (2008, p.164) states, 'Auto-protocol features save data from complete de-contextualization and immaterialization, thus retaining the filing principle, even in the digital domain'. In other words, just like its physical counterpart, the digital archive has walls that, although not made of bricks and mortar, cannot be easily breached in terms of compromising content or structure, Hence the label 'virtual strongroom'. However, within the archive database, they can be called up in any order, and once they are released or they escape in some other way to the outside, digital objects are reliant on systems of copyright regulations and trust. They can be copied, de-contextualised and re-contextualised; the files can be opened and their contents discarded or rearranged in a way would be considered

unthinkable and unethical inside the walls of the institution. Wendy Chun (2011, p.138) highlights the problem of the volatility of digital or digitised archives:

> If libraries and archives, as Abby Smith has argued, "serve not only to safeguard that information [which has long term value], but also to provide evidence of one type or another of the work's provenance, which goes to establishing the authenticity of that work," this function is seriously undermined by electronic images and documents, which are easily changed or falsified.
> [Smith, A. *Why digitize*. Washington, D.C.: Council on Library Resources, 1999]

Terry Cook, in his essay 'Archival science and postmodernism: new formulations for old concepts' (2001), is preoccupied with the ordering mechanisms facilitated by digitisation. He argues that there should be 'a shift away from viewing records as static physical objects, and towards understanding them as dynamic virtual concepts' (2001, p.4). He states:

> Original order changes from mainstreaming the initial physical replacement of recorded products in a registry or classification system to the conceptual intervention of software, where pieces of records are stored randomly, and then are recombined intellectually or functionally, in different ways, for different purposes, in different times and places, in varying types of orders, for different users (2001, p.21).

The idea that archival material should be 'stored randomly' is disturbing and counterintuitive, as it does not allow for any of the initial spatial understanding and that has been discussed, and is problematic in terms of loss of context and original relationship. However, a differentiation must be made between storage and interface. The computer storage system is mostly indeterminable and often controlled by other agencies, managing storage in the most economical way in terms of space and speed of retrieval; so, whilst not random, it does not necessarily follow archival rules on arrangement. The user interface of the on-line catalogue, and even the digitised archive, tends to remain under the control of the archivist and so retains the arrangement of the physical documents.

Wolfgang Ernst's analysis of human memory and its relationship to computer storage and retrieval systems has some parity with Cook's views. Ernst (2013, p.101),

reflecting on Freud's ideas (in his letter to Fleiss, December 6 1896) about the occasional reconfiguration of the order of human memory, states: 'Dynamic storage turns out to be closer to human neuronal memory than to cultural memory agencies'. Jose Van Dijck explains how the library and archive were indeed once used as metaphors to explain memory recall, as one 'searches through the stacks from which stored and unchanged information can be retrieved and read.' (2007, p.30). But she goes on to describe how this paradigm has been refuted by philosophers, such as Henri Bergson in his work *Matter and Memory* (1896), who argued that the brain does not store memory at all, but re-creates the past on demand. In this respect, as Van Dijck explains using new metaphors, 'the brain is less a reservoir than a telephone system'. (2007, p.30-31).

The archive is often termed a memory institution, a label that does not entirely fit, and, similarly, as Van Dijck (2007, p.31) concedes, the metaphor of the networked computer to explain memory function is probably the most used, but not necessarily the best. In any case, there must be a distinction made between memory and understanding in the context of the storage of the archival object: memory is a living instrument (whether comparable to network, strongroom, reservoir or telephone system) and can be reconfigured at random; understanding is gained not through the mnemonic recall of a particular object, the status of which can change from one time to another, but through the fixed down spatial and contextual relationship between objects.

The arguments around digitisation, semantic reordering and decontextualisation are now somewhat passé in the context of archive material, which is becoming absorbed into internet culture. Ernst (2002, p.482) describes how information on the Internet is 'quirky, transient and chaotically shelved', a chaos that may well be closer to human memory functions than archival order is. However, there is a strong argument for preserving and documenting the ordered shelving systems of the physical archive, more than simply as a 'retro-outcome of digital culture' (Ernst: 2001, p.99), but as a platform that is vital for preserving anomalous spatial relationships and facilitating understanding and conceptual interpretation of historical documents and artefacts.

2   The order of the list: *il faut respecter les fonds*

In archive terminology, *listing* is the name for cataloguing: the making of a list or an inventory. It involves the listing and numbering of every item in an archive, in the order in which it arrives into custodial care, whether in crates, carrier bags, sacks or other containers. Everything, to the last scrap of paper, is enumerable, and, when individually listed and numbered, is defined as a discrete unit with its own unique identifier. The act of listing the contents of an archive serves as an accurate account of all objects in a collection. The list forms the catalogue interface, an interface made up of lists within lists.

In the preface to *Files*, Vismann describes how in German '*Akten* (records) generate *Akten* (files)' (2008, pp.xi-xii), whereas the English language differentiates between materiality and function: *files* are the material containers and *records* refer to the content, the result of *recording*. No such differentiation between materiality and function exists in English for the word *list*; this homonymic form is used for noun and verb alike. Like *Akten*, one kind of 'list' generates the other kind of 'list', and lists accumulate in the archive in the same way as Vismann describes in relation to *Akten*, because they too are 'designed to record whatever can be recorded' (2008, p.xii). 'List' has a duality of meaning, and the list has a dual use, in the archive and elsewhere: firstly to collect information, and then to disseminate it. Christopher Hood uses the language of cybernetics to define the dual use of administrative tools of government, such as the list: firstly 'detector*'*, 'for taking in information'; and secondly 'effector', 'to try to make an impact on the world outside'. (2007, p.3).

A list is an exceptionally convincing effector; it appears indexical and factual and this makes it an invaluable tool for government and a basic instrument of administrative power. Archives are built upon the structure of the list: if the list is an instrument of administrative power, then it follows that archives must be as well, as they are organised by list and populated by many objects that fall into the broad category of list. Rolls, registers, accounts and inventories, many of them government and legal documents, are commonplace in archives. This power is evident in records of the British colonies (many of which can be found in the University of Southampton Special Collections). Manoff (2004, p.16) states that 'the establishment and

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consolidation of the empire was built on the accumulation of information about people and places under colonial rule'. She goes on to describe how postcolonial scholars have needed to adopt strategies of reinterpretation and recontextualisation of information in order to 'call into question the colonial version of events.' (*ibid.*). In other words, they turn the focus on the subjects of colonialism instead of the administrators, and examine the gaps in the records as much as the records themselves. The power is exerted in the production of the records; their preservation inside the depository allows power systems to be recognised and such realignments to be made. Ernst (2002, p.482) acknowledges the power structures at work in military and scientific network technologies and states: 'On the other side of the monitor […] an authoritative archive of protocols is more rigidly at work than in any traditional national archive.' He suggests that perhaps we have more to fear from this new power base, one that leaves no paper trail (and only a limited data trail), than we ever did from state archives. Allan Sekula in his essay 'Reading an Archive: photography between Labour and Capital' concludes: 'The archive has to be read from below, from a position of solidarity with those displaced, deformed, silenced or made invisible by the machineries of profit and progress.' (2003, p.451).

Judith Ellis (1993, p.12), in her text *Keeping Archives*, nicely quotes the words of eminent archivist Sir Hilary Jenkinson (1948):

> The Archivist's career … is one of service. He exists in order to make other people's work possible, unknown people for the most part and working very possibly on lines equally unknown […} His creed, the Sanctity of Evidence; his Task, the Conservation of every scrap of Evidence attaching to the Documents committed to his care; his Aim, to provide, without prejudice or afterthought, for all who wish to know, the Means of Knowledge.

Jenkinson's stipulation that objects should be kept and cared for 'without prejudice or afterthought', calls for the archive to be arranged not in a strict chronological or typological order, or in an order of assumed importance, but as they were accumulated or used: a diachronic or developmental ordering system (in some cases this could in fact *be* by time, type or importance). Archival order contrasts with the ordering systems of libraries, where, as Ellis (1993, p.11) points out, they are dealing with 'consciously authored information products', and not with the rich, complex and variously kept records of a life or an organisation. Foucault (2002a, p.145) defines the

archive as 'that which determines that all these things do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity'.

The concept of original order, or *respect des fonds*, is itself a comparatively new one, conceived in the late 1800s by Dutch archivists Muller and Van Riemsdijk, and authored as *The Manual for Arrangement and Description of Archives* (commonly known as *The Dutch Manual*) by Muller, Feith and Fruin in 1898. According to Ketelaar, it was Van Riemsdijk who pioneered the approach of maintaining original order. Focussing 'on the record-creating process, he tried to understand why and how records were created and used by their original users, rather than how they might be used in the future.' (Ketelaar: 1996, p.33). The idea that one should not try to anticipate future use of an object, but should allow for all possible uses, is fundamental to the practice of archival listing and description.

The list, echoing the order of archive, may be perceived on the surface as being made up of randomly arranged discrete pieces of information. It is only as the complete list is revealed that the discrete nature of the components disintegrates and a sense of belonging and order (often still exhibiting superficially as disorder) develops. Ellis (1993, p.11) maintains that rearrangement (accidental or contrived) 'can compromise the integrity of the records and destroy or mask the evidence provided by their original arrangement and juxtapositioning.' Sekula agrees, arguing that 'the specificity of 'original' uses and meanings can be avoided and even made invisible, when photographs are selected from an archive and reproduced in a book.' (2003, pp.444-45). Original order offers context and meaning and subsequent reordering takes it away. As mentioned on page 39 of the Literature Review, Sekula rejects the notion of the 'universal language' of photography as no more than a cliché. (1984, p.81). He argues vigorously that meaning is not intrinsic to the photographic image and explains: 'it is clear that photographic meaning depends largely on context. […] photographs, in themselves, are fragmentary and incomplete utterances. Meaning is always directed by layout, captions, text, and site and mode of presentation.' (2003, pp.445-46).

Sekula uses the everyday example of sorting family snapshots to highlight the complexities of arrangement: 'One is torn between narration and categorization, between chronology and inventory.' (2003, p.446). There is dissatisfaction and

discomfort inherent in the practice of ordering, because one particular ordering system will always compromise another, but there is more discomfort in *resisting* the imposition of order: we are culturally programmed to sort. Chronological order, if it is known in the first place, can be imposed at any time, as can other categorisations; original order cannot be recovered if it is lost without keeping a record. Of course, within a digitised collection, a new list, chronological or typological, can be created at whim: a keyword call up can create a taxonomic classification that orders and removes order simultaneously.

Modern historical research centres on the search for new avenues of knowledge and is not concerned with chronologies, but with the analysis of concepts; any single rearrangement of a collection, be it chronological or conceptual, could clearly not satisfy different types of historical analysis. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault (2002a, p.9) perceives a major turn in historical research. He describes the 'discontinuous' as alien to classical historians and states:

> For history in its classical form, the discontinuous was both the given and the unthinkable: the raw material of history, which presented itself in the form of dispersed events — decisions, accidents, initiatives, discoveries; the material, which through analysis, had to be rearranged, reduced, effaced in order to reveal the continuity of events. Discontinuity was the stigma of temporal dislocation that it was the historian's task to remove from history.

Foucault goes on to describe how discontinuity has become a basic element of historical analysis and deems it 'both an instrument and an object of research'. He maintains that discontinuity must cease to be seen as hindrance, but instead it must become a 'working concept'. (2002a, p.10). ' He argues strongly for a 'systematic erasure of all given unities' and a return to a 'specifity of occurrence' that recovers discontinuities. He claims that that the removal of 'natural, immediate, universal unities' can allow unexpected unities to occur or to be formulated. (Foucault: 2002a, pp.31-2). Archival ordering not only *presents* natural discontinuities amongst objects, but the neutrality of its description and classification affords *other* discontinuities outside of standard cultural categorisations.

Terry Cook (2001, pp.6-7), as part of his rationale for the 'postmodernisation' of archives, cites Foucault and Derrida, with their respective ideas on understanding

and dismantling 'systems of organised knowledge'. He centres his attention on broad themes of poststructuralism, such as reading through and behind text, and with Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1998) cited as the text that spawned a wave of studies on the archive's significance in society. Cook writes from the standpoint of the implications of postmodernism for archivists, arguing that they must 're-think their discipline and practice' in a postmodern world (2001, p.3). In taking this approach, he gives little attention the part *researchers* play in the discovery of context through interrelationships, *their* role in 'the questioning of the *document*.' (Foucault: 2002a, p.6, his italics); or to the role that archivists have traditionally played in *affording* this questioning. Cook calls for a change in archival practices to one that moves away from the 'guardianship' of the document into a mode of 'actively shaping collective (or social) memory.' (2001, p.4). He describes a world where '[n]othing is neutral. Nothing is impartial. Nothing is objective.' (2001, p.7). This observation is valid, but the conventional neutrality, impartiality and objectivity of the archivist, together with the concept of original order should preclude active interpretation or shaping of memory: the archivist's task is surely to document and preserve what Foucault (2002a, p.9) terms the 'raw material of history'. In Cook's essay, the role of archivist and that of researcher become dangerously confused; the 'postmodernisation' of the archivist that he calls for appears to contradict Foucault's rejection of the formation of 'cultural totalities' (2002a, p.17), and his call for 'rigorous but unreflected relations' (2002a, p.15) (addressed in more detail in chapter four of this thesis).

The ordered and material view of the archive that I have offered in this chapter differs to that revealed by Derrida in *Archive Fever*, where 'Archive' is perceived as 'only a *notion*' (1998, p.29, his italics) and becomes a vehicle for complex dialogue on past and future, on memory and death, through Freud's theories of psychoanalysis. But, as argued earlier, an understanding of the material nature of the archive is valuable in facilitating a conceptual interpretation. In an interview with Geert Lovink, Ernst (2013, p.194) cites his research year at the German Historical Institute in Rome as the first time that he recognised the materiality of 'real archives'. This was to be a factor in his connecting his past involvement with French poststructuralism with his theoretical interest in archives. He remarks:

> I then discovered that no place can be more deconstructive than archives
> themselves, with their relational but not coherent topology of documents that wait

to be reconfigured, again and again. The archival subject is thus a way out of the postmodern aesthetics of arbitrary anything goes—without having to return to authoritarian hermeneutics […] The simple fact is that archives exist not only in metaphorical ways, as described by Foucault and Derrida, but as part of a very real, very material network of power over memory. (*ibid.*)

As discussed, the notion of original order with its unexpected connections, relationships and discontinuities, has confluence with Foucault's views on modern historical analysis, through which, 'unities, totalities, series, relations' can be defined (2002a, p.7). In relation to this theoretical framework, the archival list is of great practical importance: it not only significant as a finding aid, but as an insurance policy against the misfiling of objects, against the loss of evidence of the methodological mechanisms of collection and use. Spieker (2008, p.19) quotes from Benjamin's 1932 essay 'Excavation and Memory': 'For authentic memories, it is far less important that the investigator report on them than that he mark, quite precisely, the site where he gained possession of them.' The archive list affords such precision.

The concept of *respects des fonds* increases in importance as the list continues down the description chain towards the single object and more particular and unexpected relationships come to light. The description at group level brings together contextual information. For example, describing a group of photographs means that the event that binds the series together is described, rather than individual visual elements and recognisable localised conditions. So whilst the group description reveals the broader *event*, the description of the single item tends to confirm a *situation*, a unique moment in time. Flusser uses the concepts of 'situation' and 'event' in his text 'Our Images': 'For the consciousness structured by images, reality is a *situation*: it imposes the relation between its elements. This consciousness is magical. For the consciousness structured by texts, reality is a *becoming*: it imposes the question of the event. This consciousness is *historical*.' (2013 [1983], p.93). Flusser is addressing the static nature of the image; it fixes a reality (a relationship between elements). He sees writing as a means to unfold the image, to temporalise and historicise it in relation to an event.

The arrangement of object-level descriptions in list form, reflecting the maintenance of original order as described above, is critical to the understanding of the single object. When seen together in a list, a series of single item descriptions go some way

to revealing an event, even without the intervention of the group title or description, (which anyway may not be useful, depending on the degree of contextual knowledge available). The list is a contextualising force and a basic form of data visualisation that allows context to be easily picked up. Liam Young (2014, n.p.) remarks, 'A form such as the list forges units, relations, and *cesaurae* via other visual means — borders, columns, numbers, lines, words, commas etc. — and as a result helps us to see and to imagine strange resonances between words, things, data, and people that might otherwise escape our grasp.' Belknap reiterates the importance of list membership and the idea of part to whole relationships, 'Each unit in a list possesses an individual significance but also a specific meaning by virtue of its membership with other units' (2004, p.15). Just as the catalogue parallels the storage system, so the list of objects in an archive parallels and makes visible the *actual* context of the object, its unique place amongst other objects and its unique place in the world. So the list itself becomes an important tool: a method of temporalisation. It participates in the formation of an event. Ernst informs us that the old English word *tellan* comes from the old German, meaning 'to put in order', and that this applies both to narration and to counting (2013, p.148). He describes how Homer's Iliad contains a list of ships, a 'narrative pause' (a term in narrative theory generally applied to description). He quotes Fowler (1991**,** p.25) on the narrative pause, who states, 'The plot does not advance, but something is described.' Ernst (2013,p.149) argues:

> To *tell* as a transitive verb means "to count things." When all sensual
> dimensions are quantifiable, even the temporal resolution, telling gets
> liberated from the narrative grip—a media-archaeological amnesia of cultural
> techniques like that of the early medieval *annales*, sequential notations of
> temporal events with no metahistorical, narrative prefiguration. We get a
> glimpse of a way of processing cultural experience that does not need stories
> (not yet? not any more?). Modern historians, though, are obliged not just to
> order data as in antiquaries but also to propose models of relations between
> them, to interpret plausible connections between events.

Ernst concurs with Foucault regarding the nature of modern historical research and reporting, but he is assuming a purely chronological arrangement here (citing annals) rather than the post-*Dutch Manual* diachronic nature of original order, with its small but 'telling' temporal shifts and anomalies, and where 'plausible connections between

events' are often already formed (*ibid.*). In the context of the archive list, the plot clearly does advance, and through numbering, not in a chronologically ordered way as with mediaeval annals, but through an ordered juxtaposition of descriptions that are tightly bound to a numbering system. Only when kept in numerical order do the objects in the archive, whilst still not constituting a narrative, inform (tell) the plot like fragmented film stills.

Flusser (2013 [1983], p.92) tracks the development of writing from its roots in pictograms: 'The text describes the image as it aligns the symbols contained in the image. It orders the symbols as if they were pebbles ("calculi"), and orders them in a series just like a necklace ("abacus"). Texts are calculations, enumerations of the image's message. They are *accounts* and *tales*.' A description of a single image is a quantitative recording of visual evidence and the comparisons to calculi and abacus are entirely appropriate, supporting Ernst's concept of 'telling'. Description can be perceived as an inventory, a stock-take of visual elements, but with small connecting words that explain the image in an economical way. Descriptions equalise visual elements; an element in the background may be as important as one that belongs to the foreground; a small element as important as a large one; a non-human object as important as a human. The description writer is processing and presenting (detecting and effecting) details without making judgments on their importance, and elements may be described in any order. In *Parallel Texts*, Victor Burgin (2011, p.198), although talking here about voice-over texts in his own practice, states, 'the material should be equally weighted and autonomously significant'. He continues:

> any sentence may occupy the position of 'first' sentence, just as any image
> may be the first image. This equality of status between elements has
> something analogous to 'description' in the classic distinction between
> *description* and *narrative*: the elements that make up a description may in
> principle be arranged in any order in time, whereas the elements that
> compose a narrative obey an invariable sequential order. (*ibid.*)

This departs from Flusser's analogy of the necklace or abacus, linear elements that are threaded, that *form* a thread and are immovable. Flusser's view of course concurs with the broader arrangement of things in an archive, which are fixed.

Description captures a discrete moment. Time exists *outside* the photograph; there is no time span *within* still images except for the fraction of a second that the shutter is open. Time is fixed (an appropriate term from analogue photographic processing techniques, but just as relevant to digital practices, still dependent on the opening and closing of a shutter to seal time). The object-level description of a still photographic image is made up of insignificantly ordered elements of an atemporal, synchronic nature. Burgin (2004, p.26) uses the term 'sequence-image' to explain how different elements exist in an unordered fashion inside a given image. The descriptions are in turn placed within the non-narrative form of the archive catalogue. The notion of a disjointed and atemporal descriptive voice within the milieu of the list, the synchronic within the diachronic, is one that is taken up through various practical projects that I put forward for consideration as part of this thesis. Interconnected perceptions of order and time; of situation and event; of narrative and pause; will all be discussed further in later chapters, in relation to my creative practice.

It is clear that in the case of archival listing, the order of the list is non-negotiable, being both predetermined by the arrangement of the archive and critical to the maintenance of this arrangement. Superficial randomness can manifest itself in the archival list, as already discussed, and indeed in any list where personal or complex ordering systems are employed. Foucault views this 'apparent disorder' *as* organisation, but within a conceptual system that needs each time to be defined (2002a,p.62).

There exists a common familiarity with and understanding of lists; the detector-effector role remains key outside of the institution, as personal lists are made and used on a daily basis. A familiar example to scrutinise is the shopping list. It can be highly organised and ordered by type (fruit and vegetables; dry goods; tinned food; household, and so on); or in an order determined by an imaginary trip up and down the familiar supermarket aisles, equal to the imagining of the physical space as described in the context of the archival list. With this second method, some of the categorisation of the first would inevitably appear, as supermarkets are highly organised and categorised spaces. A shopping list might have no apparent order, with items added to the list as they come to mind, but even this could be perceived as prioritisation and ordering through need or visual stimulation (an empty space in the cupboard that must be filled): a developmental order. Alphabetical order is useful in

many cases and large directories are built upon it, but alphabetisation of a personal shopping list would be unworkable, as the list would not match either the physical structure of the supermarket or the type of goods sought. The shopping list is an example of how personal and institutional administrations converge: at the point of sale the personal list is converted to an administrative one. Visible to the shopper as a till receipt, the list is rearranged in different ways to support multiple functions, from stock control through to the recording of personal shopping habits, all facilitating the strategic planning of the company and not necessarily benefiting the customer. At checkout the personal list becomes redundant and is often discarded, exemplifying the list as described by Liam Young as 'the detritus of day-to-day life, cast aside having served whatever its immediate purpose' (2014, n.p.). This is at the precise time that the administrative list becomes a valuable commodity to the company.

My on-going supermarket project, (2008 to present) (Figure 15), where I capture objects re-shelved by supermarket users, highlights not only the controlled environment of the supermarket but also the personal and developmental order of shopping. Often one goes 'off list', prompted in some way to take or return an object.
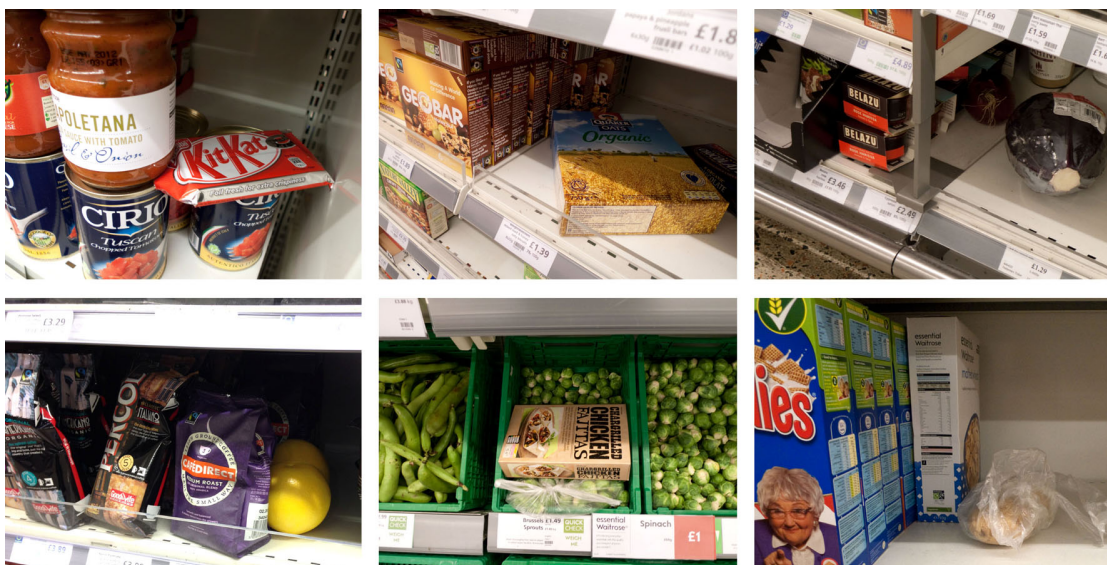
Figure 15: re-shelved supermarket objects (2008 – 2014)

There is logic to these user reconfigurations, as a relationship between objects is perceived that is different to the one put forward by supermarket administrations. As Vestberg (2013, p.483) observes of the arrangement of the Warburg Collection: 'it may well be an arbitrary sequence; yet it is still possible to discern a cultural logic to the arrangement.'

3   Art and list

A list is commonly made up of words or numbers, and in the case of the archival list both are critical. However, a list can also take the form of a photographic inventory. This inventory may be numbered, described or presented in isolation. From early on, photography (and illustration before it) was assigned to scientific enquiry and subsequent classification, its indexical qualities making it a perfect medium for this. This is discussed in the Literature Review, section **3.1**. A more creative photographic practice around classification, collection and typology has been defined over time by artists and photographers such as August Sander, Ed Ruscha and Berndt and Hilla Becher. On the work of the Bechers, Magnani (1990, p.81-82) remarks:

> Meaning undergoes a circular series of displacements that transfer significance from a single image, to a comparison between similar images, to the overall project that brings the images together, to the conditions that produced the project as they are instanced in the individual images. It is only through their participation in a system of presentation, under the model of the archive, that the single images gain a significance which is larger than their particular instances.

This is an iteration of Belknap's statement on the nature of the list, that each item gains 'specific meaning by virtue of its membership with other units' (2004, p.15). This simple idea is of fundamental importance to anyone working with typologically classified sets of images.

Taryn Simon is discussed in relation to *American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* (2007-8), in the Literature Review section **3.2**: 'Classification as art practice'. In her 2009 project *Contraband* (Figure 16) she photographs items illegally imported into the U.S. and seized by the authorities. Margaret Iversen terms Ed Ruscha's *Twentysix*

Gasoline Stations (1963) (see Figure 11) as a performative piece, which she defines as, 'displacing spontaneity, self expression and immediacy by putting into play repetition and the inherently iterative character of the instruction.' (2010, p.15). *Contraband* meets Iversen's definition; it too is performed to instruction. The project is carried out in a prescribed manner and over a prescribed time span (5 days at JFK airport, New York). The 1,075 contraband items are each presented in the same way: simple, clear and decontextualised, as though the project were a documentation of museum objects. In contrast to the text heavy *American Index*, here there is little text and the photographs themselves constitute the inventory, a list that takes its order from the performative nature of the work. The objects are grouped into sets, such as: BRANDING, TIFFANY AND CO. (COUNTERFEIT); FITNESS DVD'S (PIRATED); POTATOES (PROHIBITED); U.S. CURRENCY (INCIDENTAL TO ARREST). These categories form a descriptive list, and one that, as argued in relation to the archive list, forms the plot. Importantly, as Hans Ulrich Obrist argues, in his 'Ever Airport: Notes on Taryn Simon's Contraband', a foreword to the book of the project, the photographs too are 'something approaching the approximately impersonal and administrative form of the list.' (2010, p.9). He continues:

> the photographs and texts of Simon's Contraband reveal disorder and chance
> within the strictures of a system determined by absolute order and control [….]
> Simon's images and lists embrace both order and disorder, and open up a
> third space within the cracks of these forms of control. (*ibid.*)

The 'administrative form of the list' introduces immediately the idea of record-keeping and archival practices. Simon's work indeed leads us to the 'order and disorder' of the archive: structured, archival disorder that can materialise through the structure of a non-structure. The third space that Obrist refers to is that of original order. Fiona Banner's *All the World's Fighter Planes 2004* is a visual directory of fighter aircraft, but, unlike the museum-like photographs of Simon's *Contraband*, she uses found images, roughly cut from newspaper articles on war and conflict, often with some fragments of residual text showing. The planes are listed on the front and back covers of the publication, acting as a very visible index to this classificatory work and highlighting the artist's long-term engagement with language. Stephen Bury, in his 2005 review of the book, recalls Banner stating at the book launch that it is 'all about nature', with aircraft names such as albatross, hornet, hind, cayuse, eagle, cougar,

lion cub, cheetah, aardvark, nighthawk, making references to bird watcher manuals and such like (http://www.fionabanner.com/words/artmonth.htm [accessed 21-04-15]). The work demonstrates a strong link to early photographic classification used within the natural sciences; discussed in the Literature Review, section **3.1.**

Other artists have employed the list in its more familiar form, as pure text. American conceptual artist Dan Graham's *Schema* (1966) is an inventory of the grammatical structure of the publication in which it exists, as catalogued not by Graham himself but by the editor of the publication. There are as many versions of *Schema* as there are publications in which it appears: data becomes art and precipitates more art. At the same time it is a comment upon the structure and function of the list: as Graham observes in relation to *Schema*: 'The conventional linear, part-by-part reading logic is eliminated' (1969, p.16). The version reproduced here (Figure 17) is from the first issue of *Art-Language: the Journal of Conceptual Art* (May 1969). This is the journal of the Art & Language group: a collective first conceived by British artists Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin around 1966. Their language-based work provided a challenging riposte to the modernist and minimalist mainstream and Edward A. Shanken cites Art & Language (along with Joseph Kosuth) as 'perhaps the most persistent advocates of the use of text as a viable medium in visual art.' (2003, p.15). This journal issue puts forward three works in list form: Sol Lewitt's *Sentences on Conceptual Art*; Graham's *Schema*; and Lawrence Weiner's *Statements*. Conceptual Art's relationship with early computing and cybernetics is evident: number 29 of LeWitt's *Sentences* reads: 'The process is mechanical and should not be tampered with' (1969, p.13) and in an *Artforum* piece LeWitt states, 'The idea becomes a machine that makes the art […] the artist would select the basic form and rules that would govern the solution of the problem.' (1967, pp.79–83). As with Ruscha's *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* or Simon's *Contraband*, Graham's *Schema*, and of course LeWitt's work based on written instruction (discussed in section **2.2** of the Literature Review), are performative pieces. The terms used by Iversen (2010, p.15), in her definition of performativity cited above ('putting into play', 'repetition' and the 'iterative character of the instruction') are indicative of automation and cybernetics. Alexander Alberro argues that in *Schema* 'the artist virtually disappears' (1998, p.27). Notions of depersonalisation, performativity, and human and non-human hybridity are discussed in chapter two, in relation to my piece *Island* and the archival practices with which it is associated.

The *Art-Language* editorial board went on to produce a series of works entitled *Index*, the first of which was *Documenta Index*, displayed at Kassel in the 1972 Documenta exhibition. The *Art-Language* display was made up of four filing cabinets of texts surrounded by walls covered with copies of an index to these texts. Charles Harrison cites the principal design decision to be 'that the appearance of the indexing-system should be made compatible with the appearance of other indexing systems' (1991, p.67), in other words, non-aesthetic, not designed, but belonging to the real world of business and technology.

Hetain Patel's piece *Love and Marriage* (2012) (Figure 18), a site-specific commission for the John Hansard Gallery, Southampton, is a contemporary example of list as art practice. Patel's lists of words are taken from transcripts of interviews on love and marriage conducted in the Asian community in Southampton, alphabetized and repeated to match the exact number of times they are used. Patel's lists engage and enlighten in a way that the original transcripts might not, revealing the list as powerful effector. They are able to extend the impact of the prose of the original interviews by providing an immediate insight into themes and emphases; archiving and indexing in a very graphic and quantifiable way the occurrences of the words used. Alphabetical order forces new juxtapositions, revealing relationships between words and ideas that might not be evident in the original narratives. Patel is a performance artist and, as with Graham's *Schema*, Patel's *Love and Marriage* is a performative piece. His lists are the result of a series of actions, carried out by way of a prescribed formula, from which he does not deviate, or tamper with, as LeWitt would have it. In contrast to the real world aesthetic of Art-Language's *Index* it is highly designed, from production through to installation. Filling most of the walls and floor space of the small gallery, this is the list on an unfamiliar scale.

4   Vocabularies, limited and unlimited

Cataloguing time is increasingly at a premium as far as archives are concerned. The object-level description is becoming an endangered technique. In some institutions it is reserved for the collections that are deemed most important. The use of schemas, such as photo-based schema *SEPIADES*, facilitates and actively encourages

description at group level and the recording of common relationships between items and groups. (For more technical details on metadata schemas and *SEPIADES* in particular, see the Literature Review, section **4.1**: 'Structuring the archive'.) Consequently the archive description moves closer in nature to the user-generated, event-driven, contextual tag of social media spaces (where the same tag is often applied to a number of images from the same event, with little consideration of visual elements). In archival description, as in social tagging, the practice of looking at and describing objects is being surrendered so as to facilitate interrelationships and interoperability, between groups themselves and between collections and institutions. Ariella Azoulay (2012, p.10) considers the problems of event-based description for the researcher:

> In the press, and in archives in general, photographs are shown and stored
> as reference to an event, and are henceforth brought out and replicated time
> and time again in the simple and problematic signifying relations attested to
> by the language of captions common in archives, like 'refugees', 'expulsion',
> or 'torture'. […] This tagging mask is perceived as a would-be factual
> description or a broad common denominator of what different people might
> see in a photograph.

Ernst (2002, p.479) reflects on the conflict between the infinite possibilities of the machine–based search and the closed nature of standardisation:

> this very dynamism of the archive which occurs in digital space — its opening
> in the form of new addressability and its multimedial multi-voicing as a
> production agency of aesthetic meaning — is achieved at the price of a radical
> standardization, the sheer opposite of polyglottal discourse on the level of
> transfer protocols and the hardware itself.

He argues that we should think in terms of an 'entropic' digital space, where 'maximum disorder […] provides for a maximum of potential information.' (2002, p.482). But increasing standardisation is still perceived by institutions such as archives to be the best way of controlling its accumulating wealth of material. Parallel growths in technological developments, volume of materials, and levels of standardisation are converging to create a problematic future for the digital archive.

Institutional metadata carries the credible authority of the list, especially when positioned within the bureaucratic space of the institution, but it is deficient in breadth and accuracy. Interoperability can be superficial: although objects or images can be linked over archives and institutions by the same word, this word, part of a limited vocabulary as it is, may struggle as a shared descriptor. Azoulay's 'common denominator' (2012, p.10) becomes even broader as it has to accommodate a profusion and a diversity of materials: the keyword must expand in capacity but not meaning. Metadata becomes deficient in its primary role: that of finding aid. As Stephen Connor (2002, n.p.) observes in a talk given to the Friends of the University of London Library: 'the keyword search can easily shrink into a kind of keyhole surgery, in which what you get out is too narrowly prescribed by what you put in. […] You need to know not only the kinds of words that others have used to designate your topic, but the lexical and intellectual company those words have kept.'

Schemas are made up of closed and limited lists of keywords, standardised and enforced in order to facilitate interoperability; they are blunt tools for description as well as for searching and this narrowness seeps into user-generated tagging too, as interoperability is encouraged. The photo-sharing site *Flickr* does not overtly acknowledge the tag as a descriptive tool, but states: 'Tags help you find photos and videos which have something in common.' (http://www.flickr.com/photos/tags/ [accessed 06-02-13]). Users fall in to using a particular language form, a limited vocabulary of their own making, in order to achieve more hits and connections. But at least user-generated tags are open to negotiation and the vocabulary is 'bottom-up' and extendable, not restricted by institutional economics, but based on free labour.

An early and direct practice-based encounter with the form of the list, one that explores the dysfunctional aspects of the limited vocabulary, materialised in my piece *Unlimited Vocabulary* (2012) (Figures 19 and 20). This piece is a model of dysfunction in itself, albeit different to that of the metadata schema. This is a not a semantic dysfunction, although it alludes to that, but a material one: the vocabulary consists of six paper rolls of random words that in total measure an unwieldy and unreadable 300 metres.

It is by no means a truly unlimited vocabulary. It is estimated that the English language has recently reached one million
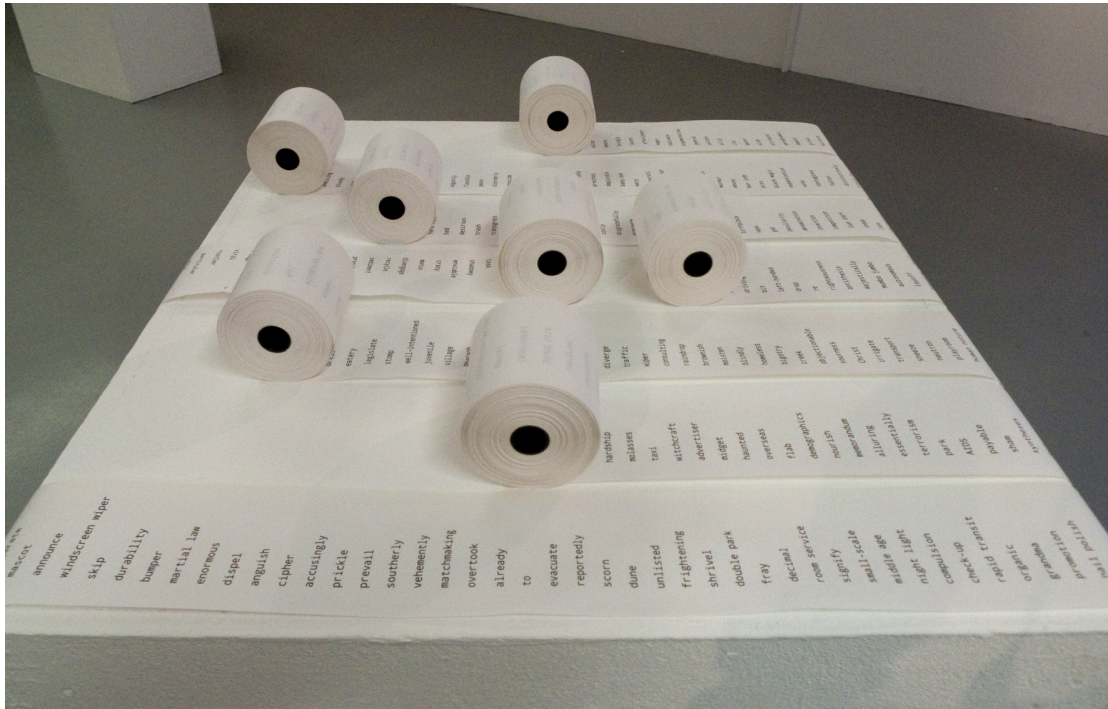
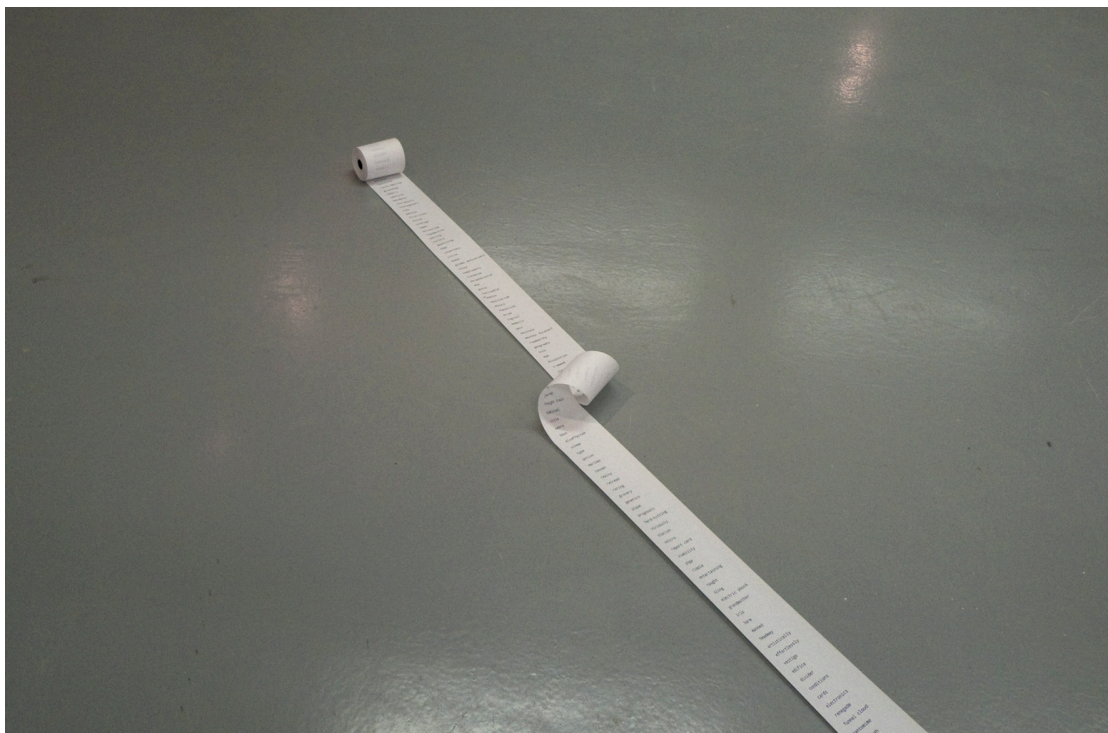Figure 19: Jane Birkin *Unlimited Vocabulary* (2012)

Figure 20: Jane Birkin *Unlimited Vocabulary* (2012)

(http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/jun/10/english-million-word-milestone
[accessed 07/05/14]), or from a different source, even one billion words
(http://www.nbcnews.com/id/11072371/#.U2zVrihy_Bs [accessed 07/05/14]). This
 'information' has no practical use to this project, because language anyway is 'in a
state of continuous variation' (Deleuze and Guattari: 2004, p.115), and the estimated
million or billion words are certainly not available as a list. My piece uses a modest
vocabulary of just over 20,000 words, taken and adapted from lists of words for
scrabble players and other word gamers, and then randomised as far as possible
using an online tool. The vocabulary is sufficiently extensive and random to function
in the context of the piece; this sufficiency itself a reflection on the limits of vocabulary
and language use in the real world. The rolls are presented partly unfurled to
demonstrate the scope of the vocabulary; most of the words remain unseen. As
Cornelia Vismann observes of the Alselm Kiefer's lead books (Figure 21), they are,
like the antique archive of lead tablets from the Greek cavalry, discovered in 1976,
 'files at a standstill' (2008, p.162). She continues, 'They represent nothing less than
the alphabetic media. For what is one to do with these unreadable tomes other than
venerate them as icons of writing and literacy? They preclude all use and reuse, and
it is precisely this dysfunctionality that highlights their literal function.' (*ibid.*).

Unlike units in an archive catalogue list, there is no contextual relationship between
units in this arrangement; the randomised and juxtaposed words do not join up and
make sense in either a syntactical or a relational way. The list format maintains an
institutional authority and avoids the nonsense narrative present in experimental
prose pieces in the *Oulipo* vein. *Unlimited Vocabulary* has little in common with works
such as Georges Perec's use of a 'machine for telling stories' (Harris: 1994, p.66) or
the *Strachey Love Letter Generator* (Sample: 2000, n.p.), both of which use the
grammatical structure of language as their framework. The inspiration for *Unlimited
Vocabulary* is drawn in part from the 1955 RAND Corporation publication *One Million
Random Digits with 100,000 Normal Deviates* (Figure 22), a work
succinctly described by an unnamed blogger as 'a monstrous anti-table, a work of
intentional disorder' (http://www.worldpowersystems.com/projects/million/ [accessed
22-02-13])*. Unlimited Vocabulary* is both of these things. The underlying connection
of both objects to the labour of production is clear, and this is well documented in the
introduction to the RAND publication, where the production of the random digits using
an 'electronic roulette wheel' is described, referring to 'careful tune-up' and

'adjustment' of the machine. The time-consuming and mechanical task of producing *Unlimited Vocabulary* is documented in a film of the printing of 50 metres of list, just one sixth of the total output, on an adapted and carefully adjusted home printer. Yet, in spite of all this labour, both works have few useful applications. *A Million Random Digits* is in the digital age no more of a labour saving device than is *Unlimited Vocabulary*.

Foucault (2002a [1969], p.96-97) uses the example of the random numbers table in his discussion of language and statement (he would very likely be referring to the RAND Publication):

> the table of random numbers that statisticians sometimes use is a series of numerical symbols that are not linked together by any syntactical structure; and yet this series is a statement: that of a group of figures obtained by procedures that eliminate everything that might increase the probability of the succeeding issues.

He classes the table of numbers as a 'statement' and argues, 'it is obvious that statements do not exist in the same sense in which a language (*langue*) exists', and that 'a regular linguistic construction is not required in order to form a statement' (*ibid.*). He argues that analysis of statements is 'one that avoids all interpretation'; rather it 'questions them as to their mode of existence' (2002a, p.123). He includes classificatory tables and account books as objects that can be classed as statements (2002a, p.92-3). These are texts that, like *Unlimited Vocabulary*, have many constituent parts but no grammatical structure. Foucault defines the 'statement' as an 'ultimate, undecomposable element that here can be isolated […] The atom of discourse' (2002a, p.90). This invites comparison to the International Council on Archives' (ISAD(G), 2000, p.12) definition of 'item' as the 'smallest intellectually indivisible archival unit' that can be described. Both these definitions exist in the context of seriality, and are both therefore concerned with relationships and shared functioning between parts. What is significant is the status, the 'mode of existence' of *Unlimited Vocabulary*: like *A Million Random Digits*, it contains and encloses a number of parts (it is made up of 20,000 distinct keywords) but the relationship between the parts is purely spatial, defining *Unlimited Vocabulary* as a single object, an 'intellectually indivisible' unit. Foucault defines discourse as 'a group of statements in

so far as they belong to the same discursive formation' (2002a, p.131). Other works made in the course of this thesis are more discursive in nature and can be decomposed; they contain parts (statements, units) that enjoy both intellectual and spatiotemporal relationships with each other and with the piece as a whole.

Whilst a effective piece of work within its own confines, *Unlimited Vocabulary* did not lead to further experimentation in the same vein, although discussions on the materiality of text objects prevail. The reason for the lack of direct continuity of practice from this piece are connected in some part to the notions of statement and discourse cited above, but the overwhelming reason is that is that *Unlimited Vocabulary* does not engage in a direct way with particular images. This engagement (whether it is with a displayed or a withheld image) is important to my practice, supporting a more particular exploration into the 'writing and reading' of the image that is consistent with the aims of the thesis. Hence the move was made towards investigating the image-specific visual content-based description, rather than the single word tag with its ability to connect a vast number of images. The two descriptive modes are explored through the *Island* project and discussed in chapter two, where I begin to expand upon the peculiar relationship that the visual content-based description maintains with its partner image. The notion of the list is of fundamental importance across all my practice pieces, through the use of sets of discrete objects (descriptions or images), where, as in the archive, each unit is reliant on its cohort. The visual content-based description itself is little more than a list in prose form. It is both 'detector' and 'effector', reflecting both the classificatory and the performative functions of the list that can be observed in the art practice cited in the first part of this chapter.

Chapter 2
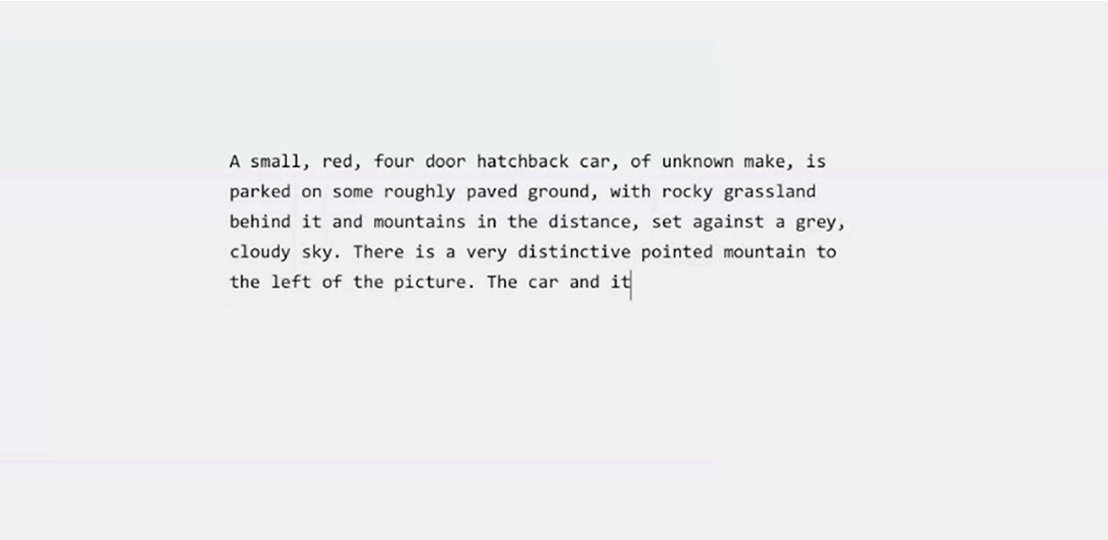
Description in action

1   *Island*

1.1   From collective tag to discrete description

The installation entitled *Island* (2012) is the first piece where I employ visual content-based description in its purest form, close in nature and concept to the archival description itself. Using the found vernacular image, the specific methodology of *Island* was designed to corroborate and present an expected disparity between two distinct units of description: the visual content-based description and the user-generated tag. The production of the piece is clearly defined from the start: firstly, the word 'island' is chosen from a dictionary by chance (discarding any words that are homonyms; homographs; polysemes; or capitonyms); secondly, eighteen images are chosen from *Flickr* using 'island' as a search term; thirdly, the visual content of these images is described. Iversen (2010, p.15) sees this instructional and performative approach as a 'partial abdication of authorial control'. In *Island*, any control is established early on in the work, in the design of the workflow. This working method echoes that of the archivist, who works to prescribed standards, producing work that is near algorithmic in form and intent. Still though, personal approaches materialise, resulting in a curious hybridity between human and system. This should not be surprising: as Geoffrey Winthrop-Young remarks, 'what we call the human is always already an emergent product arising from the processual interaction of domains that in time are all too neatly divided up into technical and human' (2013, p.10).

Island (Figure 23) materialises as a consolidation of eighteen separate screencasts of descriptions of unrevealed images, filmed whilst being typed. The film lasts some seventeen minutes and runs on a loop. The language is impassive: technical *and* human. It employs the rigorous techniques and terminology of archival object-level description, where care is taken not to mislead or misinform, speculation is avoided, and contextual information is only supplied when it can be validated by existing

A small, red, four door hatchback car, of unknown make, is
parked on some roughly paved ground, with rocky grassland
behind it and mountains in the distance, set against a grey,
cloudy sky. There is a very distinctive pointed mountain to
the left of the picture. The car and it

Figure 23: Jane Birkin *Island* (2012) screenshot

knowledge or careful research. A deliberate decision was made at the beginning of the *Island* project not to seek out any information external to these images, and other attached tags were ignored. The inherent decontextualised nature of the single image is made apparent through the descriptions. This methodology reveals the *Island* images as having nothing noteworthy in common with each other except for the tag: situations are described in detail, but the descriptions show no common thread. These descriptions reveal very different scenes. It is to be assumed that some of these images were photographed in island locations, and that this factor was reflected in the choice of tag, but this cannot be evidenced from the images or from the descriptions. In line with the *General International Standard Archival Description* (2000), point 3.5.3, entitled 'Related units of description', 'information about units of description in the same repository or elsewhere that are related by provenance or other association(s)' must be recorded. It also states, 'If the related unit of description is a finding aid […] make the reference to it.' (ISAD(G): 2000, p.31). The statement of relationship and the reference to finding aid is made through the title, *Island*.

The piece defines the tag as a contextual marker that ties the image linguistically, but not visually, to other images. The unstable nature of the tag is discussed in detail in the Literature Review, section **5.1** 'The tag as flawed intermediary'; these flaws are

exploited in *Island*. Daniel Rubinstein believes the user-generated tag is a threat to the integrity of the photographic image: 'a tag does not interpret the image, nor does it provide a context for it; instead it establishes complete identity between image and text and therefore strips the photograph of its own concrete and untranslatable language.' He argues, 'tagging promotes unseeing rather than seeing'. (2010, p.199). Once a word is attached to an image, the image undergoes a shift in meaning and, importantly, it forces occupation of a particular place in the pool of search terms, hence the obscure images thrown up by the tag 'island'. Flusser (2000, p.12) describes the difficulties of applying text as an intermediary: 'If it is the intention of writing to mediate between humans and their images, it can also obscure images instead and insinuate itself between human beings and their images.' But the description of visual content can mediate without damage as it leaves the photograph's 'concrete and untranslatable language' (Rubinstein: 2010, p.199) intact. (If this language exists at all, which is debated in this thesis).

Blake Stimson (2010, p.43) argues that pictures 'hide, confuse, obfuscate and mislead', and this applies to the unremarkable images picked out for *Island* as much as it does to any art or documentary photograph. Tagging is at least an attempt by the user to mediate; to provide context; to place the image within a recognisable milieu. But the tag, like the thesaurus term, is a blunt tool, often incentivised by considerations outside of the image. It is based on a textual reading of the image, one that that takes into consideration other texts (tags) and imagined signifiers, or 'signifiers of signifiers' (Derrida: 1997, p.7), as the tag system can easily link otherwise unconnected images. The system directly plays out Derrida's 'movement of language' that 'conceals and erases itself in its own production' (*ibid.*), although concealment is more apposite than is erasure. Contingent upon text and not directly by image, the system can unwittingly intensify the intrinsic traits of the image listed by Stimson. The tag takes on a different time / space / operative relationship to the image than does archive description, where one has a static and singular connection to the other. Tags are tactical media; they are transformative in relation to the image, creating and inhabiting their own territories of meaning, but this is meaning that may be distanced from common knowledge and understanding, hence the confusion. Images such as the ones picked out for *Island* may appear incompatible to their tag, but some research into the image, through looking at other tags and other images alongside it, can frequently reveal the context and the rationale behind the tagging

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activity. Of course, when images are taken out of their original order, as the *Island* images are here, they suffer the same loss of context as objects that are removed from their place in the archive.

The images are not revealed in the *Island* film, but the title (the finding aid), a short explanation of the methodology of the project, long links to the *Flickr* images and author credits are provided on cards. These printed cards have no connectivity to the networked images, except through complicated URLs that must be taken away and typed into a browser. They enable the viewer to undertake archival-like research for themselves in order to view the images, if they deem it necessary (and it is not necessary for the understanding of the project). Viewers may be surprised when the images do not match their own speculations, but by seeing the images in their native space (original order) and looking at surrounding images, it may be possible to further understand the images by establishing 'part-to-whole relationships' (ISAD(G): 2000), p.12). An examination of other tags attributed to the images could provide further contextual information, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter in the case of the *Island* image, *They Tied Me Up!*

1.2   In typewriter mode

In the *Island* project, where one kind of visual representation (a photograph) is converted into another (a text), the descriptions could be perceived as less accessible than the images they grew out of. Certainly, the text demands more time of the viewer than would normally be taken to read the *images*. This was an intentional outcome, contesting the notion that that a photograph, and especially a 'non-art' photograph can be quickly and easily decoded. These are mostly images that could be perceived as unremarkable and therefore undemanding: a toddler eating; a parked car; a dry twig. The language form, in line with archival description, is dry in nature. A need was perceived to strategise around issues of audience engagement with the eighteen *Island* texts and to deliver them in a controlled manner that supported a captivating reading experience.

Although the work is performative in nature, the delivery method of *Island* does not fit the *Art & Language* group specification that '[a]ny products which might be identified

were materials which happened to have been generated in these processes — as contingent consequences or as remainders.' (Harrison: 1991, p.52). The result of the *Island* investigation may be a set of discrete texts, but there is no attempt to oppose the production of the art object, though the object itself engages with questions of art and production. The form and the materiality of *Island* are not generated by the process (the work would then be presented as a text file) but are the result of a reflection on the process, and on the desired function of the end product. It is closer to Lucy Lippard's (2001, p.vii) definition of Conceptual Art as 'work in which the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or "dematerialized."' Harrison (1991, p.49) argues that Conceptual Art of the 1960s, including the work of the *Art & Language* group, should not be classed as either miminalist or dematerialised, but must be considered in relation to the *post*-minimalist climate of the time, where 'photostat statements took the place of abstract paintings, with little sense of cultural dislocation.' He is most likely referring here to the enlarged photostats of Joseph Kosuth's *Art as Idea* series (1966). He is also of a mind that Conceptual Art sought a 'suppression of the beholder' as a social and political metaphor, against the backdrop of the extraordinary events of 1968. They were not aiming for a wide audience, although, as Harrison continues, '[a]ll art idealizes a public in some form.' (1991, p.61). Although in my later projects such suppression is played on, and tedium becomes an important aspect in relation to notions of labour and art, it was not an objective or a fully realised concept at the point of making *Island*.

The descriptions started out as word-processed documents, and, whilst not wanting to loose this aspect of their materiality, the format demanded rationalisation. After experimentation with print (both large print and publication) it was apparent that these media would struggle to support full engagement with the texts. The use of moving image (recording the screen whilst typing) would preserve the characteristics of word-processing. It would present the texts in a measured way, controlling the reading order and reading speed. It would isolate each discrete unit of description from the next sequentially (and with a serendipitous flicker); there could be no browsing and no flipping from one description to another. A simple word processing programme was used, because its interface was uncluttered, free of pages, toolbars and multiple menus, unlike *Microsoft Word*, which is comprehensively critiqued in Matthew Fuller's text 'It Looks Like You're Writing a Letter' and described as 'bloated with features'

(2001, n.p.). It was also chosen because it provided the 'typewriter mode', where completed lines of type move up the screen as the return key is pressed.

The use of moving text in 'typewriter mode' created a two-fold interrogation of the saccade (the sudden change of fixation of the eye, common in reading). Firstly, there is the element of control: for the reader there is no opportunity to scan the text in a saccadic mode, it must be taken in a line-by-line, word-by-word, letter-by-letter order. Secondly, the film reveals the way that *I* am scanning the image; my own saccades are exposed through the order in which I record the visual content. *My* brain operations are demonstrated, as hesitations, corrections and small switches of emphasis are revealed. An urgency of reading is also forced, partly because of a fear that the text might disappear off the top of the screen (it does not), but largely because it generates an anticipation of the next letter, word and line. The tight control of reading time and order means that the only interactivity on offer is the interactivity of the imagination. These dry texts are 'cool media', defined by McLuhan (1967, p.22), as being 'high in participation and completion' by the audience. Two kinds of completion happen here: firstly the completion of the letters before they appear on the screen, and secondly the completion of the image itself, as the viewer visualises the situation being described.

The mechanical action replicates the labour-intensive act of describing within the institution, work that is carried out methodically and out to prescription. A form of labour is evidenced that is becoming too time consuming and consequently too expensive for institutions to employ, but is accepted as part and parcel of the production of art. An adversarial relationship between 'work' and 'art' is created. This relationship does not fit either of what Lazzarato (2008, pp.26-27) terms as Rancière's 'two politics of aesthetics': the first of which is 'the becoming life of art', where there is no separation between the two; the second, 'resistant art', is one that actively seeks separation, so as to maintain art as a commodity (*ibid.*). In this project the labour of the artist is comparable to the labour of the archivist or the office worker and the end product is very similar. Rancière (2013, pp.39-40), questions 'the relationship between the 'ordinariness' of work and artistic 'exceptionality'.' He uses Platonic ideas of the 'mimetician', which state that the ability to practice as an artist comes down to a fundamental question of time: the impossibility of doing 'something else' that is based on an 'absence of time' (such as the absence of time in the Archive). Rancière (*ibid.*)

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shows how, in the third book of the *Republic*, the mimetician is 'condemned in accordance with a principle of division of labour that was already used to exclude artisans from any shared political space'. He disrupts the order of things: he is a 'double being' and must be excluded from an organised society where work has its place. Work is made visible as the mimetician 'provides a public stage for the private principle of work'. Perhaps, as Lazzarato (2008, p.28) argues as in the case of the readymade, this relationship between work and art has more to do with the *dispositif*, the positioning of the piece on a public stage and outside of its original private location, so transforming both the 'ordinariness' of the activity and the 'ordinariness' of the product. Correspondingly, an institutional writing standard is here transformed into a conceptual writing technique through its transportation into art practice.

The process and materiality of writing, its construction and its human participation was demonstrated more openly in the pre-digital, typewritten object. Jack Kerouac's epic 36.6 metre *On the Road* scroll, produced in the course of three weeks in 1951 and on show at the British Library in December 2012, provides insight into the nature of the typescript, with its corrections, obliterations and handwritten marks and instructions for the moving of text — as well as signs of the technical problems he encountered, such as the uneven paper feed, which necessitated the adjustment of the tab every metre or so. The provision of this kind of physical paper trail is now more or less extinct (a problem for archives), as these human and mechanical practices are rendered invisible in computer-processed documents, with consequences for language use. Kenneth Goldsmith (2011, p.218) states:

> In today's digital world, language has become a provisional space, temporary
> and debased, mere material to be shovelled, reshaped, and molded into
> whatever form is convenient, only to be discarded just as quickly. [...] Notions of
> the authentic or original are increasingly untraceable.

Goldsmith's concerns about language can be traced back, technologically speaking. In his discourse on the hand and the typewriter in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Friedrich Kittler describes how the typewriter causes an insidious shift in writing practice, as type is 'set' with the same decisiveness as it is in the printing press and argues, 'The typewriter veils the essence of writing and of the script. It withdraws from man the essential rank of the hand' (1999, p.198). The 'setting' of type via the typewriter can be seen as both an original and a final act: original in that it exists in its

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first state, and final in that it cannot be changed (only rewritten as a new object) hence the word 'set'. The lack of freedom to scrawl and edit was a transforming feature of the typewriter as opposed to the hand. This is a freedom that is in part regained with word processing, where type is not committed letter by letter and nothing is 'set' until the document is saved and closed. However, the infinite opportunity for editing text brings its own problems, as original thought streams are lost and texts are over-written, in both senses. In *Paper Machine*, Derrida (2005, pp.46-47) states that '[e]ven when we write on a computer, it is with a view to the final printing on paper, whether or not this takes place'. He terms the loss of paper drafts not as the death of the medium, but as withdrawal and reduction:

> What must be decreasing proportionately, though, dramatically *withdrawing* and
> *reducing*, is the quantity of what we might call "primary" paper—the place of
> reception for an original tracing, for an initial composition or for invention, or
> writing with a pen, a pencil, or even a typewriter—in other words everything we
> continue to call "first version," original," "manuscript," or "rough draft" (*ibid.*)

Derrida turns from paper to pen and discusses his (and Heidegger's) relationship with writing technologies. He points out that even before the typewriter, technologies were in use: handwriting itself involved 'instrumentality, regular reproduction, mechanical iterability'. His experimentation with the quill pen, which he terms a 'theater of the prosthesis', reveals repetition and mechanisation (2005, p.20). Conversely, he argues that both typewriter and computer still involve the hand, and importantly, the fingers:

> Between the pen-tool and the pencil tool on the one hand, and machines on the
> other, the difference is not the hand, because it is maintained and stays relevant,
> it's also the fingers. With mechanical or electrical writing machines, with word
> processors, the fingers are still operating; more and more of them are at work. It
> is true that they go about it in a different way. You do it more with the fingers—
> and with two hands rather than one. All that goes down, for some time to come,
> in a history of digitality. (2005, p.21)

Although typewriter and computer keyboard still employ the human hand and indeed the digits, the *evidence* of the hand has decreased with each innovation. Handwriting is attributable through style and ornament; typewritten documents less so, although certain mechanical anomalies can be traced, as illustrated in the *On the Road*

typescript; the word-processed document is cleared of individuality, modes of display dictated only by the screen itself and the availability of certain fonts.

Darren Wershler-Henry argues that 'typewriting *was* writing. Its logic shaped not only written documents, but also bodies, workplaces and practices, institutions and politics.' (2005, p.16, his italics). Many archival descriptions that remain today would have originally been typewritten, perhaps another reason why such an efficient, prescribed and cautious language developed and thrived in archival and other governmental and institutional recording systems. This linguistic restraint manifests in *Island*: the language structure is simple; there is no attempt to change the structure by cut and paste; only small changes are made by using the delete key, not affecting the flow of the text as it appears on screen. The language, once guided by the use of the typewriter, is here similarly directed by the need to make a seamless recording. Jussi Parikka (2012, p.70) explains how language is subservient to media:

> language in the age of technological media is not just natural language: it is the technological and physical regimes introduced by media, such as the typewriter, and later computer software languages, which […] impose new regimes of sensation and use to which we have to accommodate ourselves in order to be functioning subjects. We are secondary to such systems.

In a play on writing technologies and forms, Derrida and Bennington recreate a post card image of Socrates writing with a quill pen (Plato standing behind him) in a *tableau vivant* (Figure 24), 'relocating the scene in our modern time' (Derrida: 2005, p.22); this time with Bennington looking over Derrida's shoulder as he works on a computer, and with the original postcard propped up in front of them. Bennington set up a database of Derrida's texts, 'a "Derridabase", according to an IT model' (*ibid.*), which they are working on in the photograph. The *Derridabase* takes up two thirds against Derrida's third of *Jaques Derrida*, the book the two co-wrote in 1991. In the photograph, Bennington appears to be telling Derrida what to write, as Plato was doing to Socrates (who did not write). It is a witty comment on the power and the authorship of the 'IT model', which Derrida attempts to transcend through his own text. *Island* too plays with technological stages, employing a traditional mode of description to define a new, networked and highly connected image. Meanwhile, the animated text could be classed as new media (word processor and digital film editing software) emulating old (typewriter): the discrete, sequential descriptions and lack of interactivity mimic typewritten texts. The line shift and abrupt appearance of single letters is a reminder

Figure 25: Jane Birkin *Island* (2012) installation

that typing is *still* a mechanical action. Flusser (1999, p.62) sees the click as a feature of the machine, stating 'Clicking is more easily mechanized than sliding.' He continues (1999, p.64),' if we insist on writing, then we have to go 'click'.' But *Island* is only a partial emulation; there is no audible click and certainly no machine-gun like sound (Kittler; 1986, p.191). As with the typewriter, a fixed-width font 'places an invisible grid on to the blank page' (Wershler-Henry: 2005, p.136), but the typeface used is *Consolas* (commonly used for programming), not a retro typewriter font. There are no sentimental feelings for the typewritten text or for the typewriter itself. The installation of *Island* (Figure 25) includes our current apparatus of writing (and symbols of our connectivity): the computer, the keyboard and the mouse. The objects that make up the *Island* installation sit on a white trolley, a tool of the modern archive: it is clean, crisp and functional, not dusty, degraded or nostalgic.

2   Reflections on the descriptive form

Island explores and presents the different authorities of the event-based tag and the content-based description of immediate situation that are discussed in chapter one; it exposes the rift that exists between tag and visual content and between description and event. However, it became clear to me through this piece that the visual content description was a form with potential for reading the image that rested outside of the aims of the *Island* project and would merit further analysis through theory and practice.

Explicit knowledge is the primary currency of the *Island* descriptions, but, as with archival descriptions, some tacit knowledge must be assumed. For example one must accept the knowledge of the existence of cars, skis, microwave ovens, skyscrapers, helicopters, baseball caps, bikinis and water towers, as well as their general significance in the world. Not to assume this basic knowledge would necessitate the rendering of the descriptions into reductive notations of shape and colour. Erwin Panofsky (1962, pp.3-17) in his text on iconology cites three strata of subject matter or meaning contained in an image: *primary*, where the viewer must have a 'familiarity with objects and events'; *secondary* or *conventional*, where a 'familiarity with specific themes and concepts' is needed; and *intrinsic,* where one would require a 'familiarity with the essential tendencies of the human mind'. Correspondingly, Barthes (1977, pp.52-55) defines his three levels of meaning: firstly,

the *informational*, or *communication*, 'which gathers together everything I can learn from the setting', secondly, the *symbolic, signification*, or the *obvious*, 'a second or neo-semiotics, open no longer to the science of the message but to the sciences of the symbol'; and thirdly, *significance*, or the *obtuse*, a meaning which extends 'outside culture, knowledge, information'. The object-level description deals mainly with the *primary* and *informational*; could stray into the *secondary* or *signification*: some cultural knowledge might be assumed, and the cautionary phrases 'appears to be', or, 'there is a possibility' might be employed. However, it stops well short of both Panofsky's *intrinsic* and Barthes' *significance*.

In *Positions*, Derrida argues that the difference between signifier and signified is never pure, and he extends this to practices of translation: 'for the notion of translation we would have to substitute a notion of *transformation*' (1981a, p.20, his italics). Since a translation and not a transformation of the image is the required objective, the archivist does not choose to trade in signs. However, descriptions, when released by the archivist, inevitably facilitate personal readings and are likely to prompt unwanted construction of image and context. Flusser (2011a [2002], pp.39-40) states:

> Texts are half finished, their signs rush towards an end point but past this toward
> a reader who, they hope, will complete them. It makes no difference whether the
> writer is aware of it, or even whether, like Kafka, he expressedly rejects a
> completing reader; texts are a search for Other.

Victor Burgin's photographic practice actively demands completion by the viewer, and he suggests that that the participative approach cited by McLuhan, and already referenced on page 94 of this thesis, might be a viable alternative to interactivity (2011, p.200). Burgin (2004, p.7), considers the power of completion as he begins *The Remembered Film* with a Wittgenstein quote, which concludes, 'If you complete it you falsify it.' The completion of the text, if uncorroborated by other units of description, is problematic for the archivist, who hopes to present a neutral view. Moreover, the completion (falsification) can differ from one time to the next. Lawyer and experimental poet Vanessa Place reads grey transcripts of court proceedings as performance piece. In an interview with Caroline Picard (2012, not paginated), Place explains: 'What happens depends on the receiver of the text […] There is nothing essential in the text itself: the text is dead. The context, on the other hand, remains quite animated.'

Flusser (2011a [2002], pp.38-39) differentiates between *denotative* texts, (communicative, informative, scientific), which he argues 'must transmit a message with a single meaning', and *expressionist* ones. He too deems that denotative texts are dead, but argues that they cannot be brought to life, believing that all readers will interpret them in the same way. If this were possible, it would be the archivist's problem solved. He states that *expressionist* texts, on the other hand, are able to transmit multiple meanings, pointing out the paradox 'that the very branch of literature that is unaware of its communicative intention transmits the more meaningful messages.' But he concedes that there are exceptions and cites *The Bible* as an example of a text that sits in both groups: a communicative *and* connotative text that 'speaks to all, and to each in a manner of his own choosing.' He concludes that 'all texts are outstretched arms trying, whether optimistically or in despair, to be taken up by another. This is what the gesture of writing is disposed to do.' (2011a [2002], p.40). Do Flusser's 'outstretched arms' reach out to another text? If so, he is not speaking directly of signification, but of an interdependence between texts that is vital to the reading and the understanding of an archive, as one text (description or archive object) informs and is informed by another.

The *Island* descriptions assume a certain language form: they are dry yet poetic; mechanical yet human; they hold back (on emotion, opinion, speculation) but nonetheless they reveal the image. In descriptions from the Harry Price Archive, Senate House Library, University of London, the dry language style might appear somewhat incompatible with the subject of spiritualism that the images depict, illustrating how subject matter has no bearing on style:

> HPG/1/12/12 *Ethel Beenham and Tools of the Fake Medium* n.d.
> Photographs of Harry Price's secretary Ethel Beenham demonstrating
> techniques of fake mediumship, along with photographs of the tools used,
> including the following:
> ii. Photograph of Ethel Beenham, feet tied to chair in the séance room at the
> NLPR, with tambourine in her hand and bell in her mouth (n.d.) (2 copies) [455,
> 817] (Copyright: William Davis)
> iii. Photograph of Ethel Beenham, feet tied to chair in the séance room at the
> NLPR, replacing musical instruments onto séance table with free hand (n.d.) (2
> copies) [818, 836] (Copyright: William Davis)

An incompatibility between style and subject matter also emerges in my *Island* description of the image entitled *They Tied Me Up!* **:**

> There is a man in baggy white pants with a red belt. He has no clothes on his upper body, but there is a thick piece of rope slung around him like a sash. He is attached to a thick, white pillar with a piece of rope, which is black and thinner than the other rope. A white spiral staircase runs around the pillar, and two young women, one with blonde hair and one with dark brown hair, both in bikinis made from a sparkly fabric, are standing on the staircase near to the man. The blonde woman is adjusting the thick piece of rope. The lighting is pink and purple. It is difficult to tell whether this is taking place inside, or outside at night.

These two described events are connected in another important way: the tags attached to *They Tied Me Up!* reveal this connection. They are: *Treasure; Island; Hotel; Casino; Las; Vegas; Strip; Paradise; Nevada; USA; United; States; America; US; show; artists; performers; stunt; pirate; siren; ship; boat; galleon; TI*. The tags suggest that this is an image of a staged event, with actors. The Price photographs are also staged, used as evidence against the existence of the supernatural (the photographs are indexical, so the language style in fact turns out to be quite fitting). In the parallel world of staged art photography, Jeff Wall offers up apparently clear scenarios; but in his photographs (except for his documentary landscapes), the scene is carefully constructed. The situation is a fabricated, or, in the case of pieces such as *Morning Cleaning, Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona* (1999) (Figure 26), a partially fabricated one. Interestingly, Burgin (2004, p.76) tells us that the van der Rohe pavilion's own structure is hidden from the outside; he quotes Beatriz Colomina who suggests that what matters in van der Rohe's buildings is what they look like, not how they are made: 'What counts then is their image, their photographic image.' Buildings can act before the camera too.

The language used in the descriptions of Wall's work for his exhibition at White Cube (November 2011 – January 2012) is significant in the light of his methods:

> In the lower ground-floor gallery, Wall will show, together for the first time, seven photographs that each feature a figure, or group of figures, many who appear to be playing or enacting a particular role … In Band and crowd (2011) a trio plays their drums and guitars with fervent intensity to a sparse, partly disengaged,

crowd, while in Boxing (2011) two boys exchange blows in amid the measured calm of a middle-class living room. Young man wet with rain (2011) depicts a figure caught in a moment of thought while seeking shelter from a rain shower, countless droplets clinging to his coat. (White Cube press release, 2011)

There is little or no attempt in these descriptions to contextualise the pictures, because there is no context, only the ones constructed by the audience, as, guided by the artist, they scan their own cultural experiences. Although there are some value judgements made, such 'middle-class' and 'caught in a moment of thought', the descriptions have much in common with archival ones. The significant words 'appear to be' establish the uncertainty of the images. The phrase 'playing or enacting a particular role' confirms the acting out of an event, a performance for the camera.

Wall's image *Boys Boxing* (2011) (Figure 27) is a fabricated situation: boys boxing within the incongruous backdrop of a middle-class home. The image *Two Boys Boxing* (*c.*1937) (Figure 28) is taken from Carmen Kilner's album, part of the *Basque Children of '37* archive; it is probably what Wall would class as 'near documentary' (Newman: 2007, p.9). These are real Basque refugee children; they played sport (two facts corroborated by other objects in the archive); they would probably have boxed; and this could be a boxing session; but it is apparent that they are posing for the camera. The only description that exists for this image is the title, which presents the image in clear visual content terms.

It is important to consider the relationship between visual-content based description and the acting out of visual fictions before the camera. The notion of fiction is irrelevant in terms of description: as far as the visual content description is concerned, everything inside the photograph is a discrete *situation*, no matter how it came about. Although a reality in so far as it happened in front of the camera, there is no bid to place it in the real world, whether it is a naturally occurring situation or a performance. The description of *They Tied Me Up!* treats the scenario as it is found, but of course the whole situation described places doubt in the mind of the reader: the set; the lighting; the costumes are all faintly unreal. It is the other tags that clear up the uncertainty, operating in the same way as the short notes that introduce the Harry Price descriptions. This acting out of a fiction can be extended to manipulated images, analogue or digital. The photographic manipulation in the Harry Price 'spirit'

photographs (HPG/1/11/1) is not acknowledged and the photographs are described as seen. Only the inverted commas denote a position of doubt:

xvii. Spirit photograph of seated woman with two 'spirits' above her head (n.d.) [1094]

xviii. Spirit photograph with same sitter as above, although 'spirits' in different position (n.d.) [1366B]

xix. Spirit photograph of young boy with female 'spirit' to right (n.d.) [1317]

Michelle Henning (1995, p.217) describes a confrontation with an advertising image that has obviously been manipulated in some way: 'I am distracted by an enormous panoramic photograph. It shows a man's back, his white T-shirt and cropped hair. He leans on a fence. In the middle distance is a pick-up truck, and beyond that, mountains. The back of his neck is a sunburnt red, the rest of the image is black and white.' Some degree of photographic manipulation is obvious from Henning's description. She questions its bearing on her relationship with the image: 'Perhaps there are other manipulations, so sly that I do not notice them. What does it matter to me? I have no interest in whether this man, his T-shirt or his truck ever existed. It is the image, its presence here, in front of me, which strikes me so forcefully.' (*ibid.*). This is the position that visual content description writers must take as they describe what is in front of them: they must ask themselves: *what does it matter* how it came about? Perhaps all visual content descriptions should begin with the phrase that is common in archival description: 'appears to be'; perhaps they should all be classed as 'scenario'. The classification 'situation' that I apply is an attempt to suggest this: the image defines a 'situation' that may have arisen in any of a variety of ways that are irrelevant to the description of visual content.

3   *News24*: information and analysis through description

My practical project *News24* (2013) once again utilises the content-based description in a form true to its archival origins, building on the findings of the *Island* project. It too involves a set of images, challenging the power of the single image and offering instead consideration of relationships between images. All the same considerations of describing visual content, of speculation, imagination and of the physicality of the

image that have been discussed in relation to the set of *Island* descriptions apply here.

On 14 June 2013, a camera was placed in front of a television screen showing the BBC News Channel and fired at regular intervals (Figure 29): a performative act resulting in more than 200 images. In common with *Island*, this project can be viewed as an archival process; a preservation of 'society's remnants' (Ernst: 2002, p.476); an amassing of normally disposable images away from their place of origination. Flusser (2000 [1983] p.65) might see these as redundant images: 'in a permanently changing situation that we have become accustomed to'. This project is as much about familiarity with and immersion in the 24-hour broadcast format as it is about the individual images produced. I was awake and present for the 24-hour period, in order to personally experience this state of immersion. I did not automate the photographic process, not wishing to go down the route of the military who still cannot conquer the human sleep / wake cycle and must resort to the use of robotic systems to carry out their out of hours business (Crary: 2013, p.2). As Crary states, '24/7 markets and a

Figure 29: News24 photoshoot, 14th June 2013

global infrastructure for continuous work and consumption have been in place for sometime' (2013, p.3). This infrastructure has even extended to academic libraries, where loans and return systems are fully automated and universities maintain that 24-hour provision is a result of student demands. Crary argues that sleep is 'an uncompromising interruption of the theft of time from us by capitalism' (2013, p.10), and it seems that this theft starts early: in the student population, assisted by their institution. 24/7 has not yet reached archives; although there are robotic retrieval systems in use for the fetching of archive material from closed storage, security issues make 24-hour access difficult.

Some comparisons can be made between *News24* and Kenneth Goldsmith's *Day* (2003); in *Against Expression: an Anthology of Conceptual Writing*, Dworkin and Goldsmith (2011, p.249) describe the methodology for the piece:

> *Day* (Great Barrington, Mass.: The Figures, 2003) is a complete transcription of the entire edition of the *New York Times* from Friday, September 1, 2000. Kenneth Goldsmith predicated his procedure on the constraint of uncreativity, which he refers to as "the hardest constraint a writer can muster." He systematically worked through each page, moving from one article to the next. Anywhere in the newspaper where there was a word, letter, or number, he transcribed it. He made no distinction between editorial and advertisement. Finally, when published, everything was set in the same font, without the use of styling such as bold or italic. The result is a leveling of information to text, which is stripped of hierarchy and design.

News24, like *Day*, uses a plain text, with no embellishments; it too is the product of uncreativity, using archival methods of description that, as already discussed, are restricted in language and scope. But *Day* differs crucially: whereas *News24* follows a developmental order (the order of the broadcasts), the stories in *Day* are ordered by where they are situated in the newspaper, which is dependant on editorial decisions about importance. Collated in a short time at the end of the journalistic day, the layout of a newspaper has no temporal relationship with a 24-hour period, but constitutes a post-event assessment. The *News24* reports do not follow the events of the day in a chronological way; they are repetitive and temporally disjointed. However, the recording and presentation here strictly follow the broadcast, forming a diachronic order. Any editorial assessment of importance in 24-hour broadcast news

materialises in the length of the report and the number of times it is featured; a composite time that also manifests in *News24* in the frequency of images of specific events (notably, the 'Airbus' images). The comparison between *Day* and *News24* throws up interesting ideas on the nature of the two news media in question. The spatiotemporal differences that exist between *Day* and *News24* are pertinent in this respect: *Day*, although in some ways (the systematic approach, the anti-design) a democratised archive of a particular edition of a newspaper, is outwardly (in terms of the day) *anti-archival* in its order of events; *News24* respects the archival model of original order. Additionally, in the production of a newspaper, stories are dropped if not deemed important in hindsight, in the context of the day (again, anti-archival); the 24-hour news broadcast is more inclusive, the smallest stories getting a mention, at least at first.

The *Island* and *News24* projects, though connected, part in two ways. Firstly, the presentation of the *News24* descriptions differs from that of *Island* in that no attempt is made to protect the audience from the monotony of the piece. Tedium is as inherent in the study of a 24-hour news period as it is in the archive and this is reflected in the management of the descriptions. As Highmore asks (2012, n.p.), 'could exhaustion be embraced as a necessary mood with which to deal with lists and archives? Might listlessness be something of a methodological orientation that has its own productivity […]?'. 14 June 2013 was a typical rolling news day, with no big breaking news, no single story dominating and few reaching conclusion. All this is reflected. Any escape from boredom comes with the looping of the video: viewing can start and end at any point, just like rolling news proper. The texts run from 00:00 to 23:59 and round again, each one carrying its own BBC time marker. There is no 'new day' in the world of 24/7 news broadcasts, only a slow and persistent overlap that yields a progression of sorts. As Crary states, 'temporal differentiation', such as the marking of individual days, weekends and holidays, 'is eroded by the imposition of 24/7 homogeneity' (2013, p.30). This time the descriptions take the form of static texts, black on white, each showing on screen for between 30 and 60 seconds, depending on the length of the text and the estimated reading time. (Figure 30). The ticker format is a constant feature in each image and it too is rendered using archival transcription techniques for intrinsic text, where original formatting is preserved. The ticker is identically and monotonously placed in every description, and it rarely provides any contextual information to the image it occupies, as images and tickers

A man with a beard is wearing dark clothing and a hood over a hat. He is facing the camera and is holding a large missile or rocket, which is pointing upwards. He is in a scruffy garage or workshop, with a dirty white concrete block wall and what appears to be a makeshift electrical circuit attached to this wall. Behind him is a badly dented white pickup truck with green Arabic script painted on its door. In the far left corner is a white plastic chair, with an indistinct object placed upon it.

A red band runs across the bottom of the screen obscuring part of the image and on this band is written in white the words
BBC NEWS   18:05   LLY CONFIRM THE APPOINTMENT OF MANUEL PELLEGRIN

Figure 30: Jane Birkin *News24* (description) (2013)

are dispensed by the BBC at varying rates and are therefore rendered mostly incompatible. With commitment, the viewer can start to put together the situations described and the events revealed by the ticker. The 24/7 TV news cycle offers repetition instead of interaction and this didactic system of information release is evidenced though the descriptions as stories repeat; for example: the Airbus A320 maiden flight, or the Syria conflict. Stories ebb, flow and occasionally build.Secondly, *News24* differs to *Island* in that the primary function is to expose and examine, through description, the nature and purpose of the image, in this case the TV news image; the newly determined functions of the content-based description are applied to a set of very specifically generated and typologically connected images. The images are on view this time, as the work comprises two time-based pieces: the 24 on-screen text descriptions, and the projection of more than 200 still photographs.

However, the pieces are carefully positioned: they are turned away from each other, facilitating only a perception of the crossover of content, not a direct comparison of text to image. (Figure 31). The timings of the two looped pieces are very different so

overlaps rarely, if ever, occur. In such a way, whilst the image and the description do not appear as a single correlating entity, one system is allowed to interrogate the other. Like the 24/7 news channel itself, the piece constitutes an endless manifestation that can be visited, consumed and ignored on a casual basis.

The move to 24/7 culture, has contributed to the much-maligned paradoxical state, where images are everywhere but mean nothing. Crary perceives the 'observer' in the Foucauldian sense to be 'destabalized' through the 24-hour availability of the digital image (2013, p.47). Serious observation of images is possible here, inviting a dialogue that is not easily afforded within their native milieu. 24-hour news is a complex space where repetitions and fragmented temporalities occur; and which, in common with all 24/7 spaces, 'solicits an open-ended but always unfinished investment' (Crary: 2013, p.31). The images, when in their broadcast form and timespan, may not be observed *per se*, because, as Flusser (2000 [1993] p.66)

Figure 31: Jane Birkin *News24* installation (2013)

argues, '[w]e have become accustomed to visual pollution; it passes through our eyes and our consciousness without being noticed. It penetrates our subliminal regions'. But immersion in such a space and at least a semi-subliminal engagement with the images, might allow different and interesting diachronic relationships with news images to emerge.

The images collected for this project are mostly unremarkable in their subject matter, but their affect is surprising. The 200 plus images are shown for three seconds each and the ticker is stripped away. They are pulled out of context, but not for reasons of elevating them to the level of art photography, as Douglas Crimp describes in the context of Julia van Haaften's reorganisation of the New York Public Library, where 'World War II becomes Robert Capa', collections of images of an event are 'reclassified according to their newly acquired value, the value that is now attached to the "artists" who made the photographs.' (1989, p.7). This is a practice that Crimp describes as the ghettoisation of the image:

> It will no longer primarily be useful within other discursive practices; it will no longer serve the purposes of information, documentation, evidence, illustration, reportage. The formerly plural field of photography will henceforth be reduced to the single, all-encompassing *aesthetic*. (*ibid.*)

In *Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital*, Sekula discusses at length the question of information, politics and aesthetics through his case study of images taken from the Shedden archive for the production of a book. He argues, 'the very removal of these photographs from their initial contexts invites aestheticism.' (2003, p.448). This debate is also dominant in Sekula's essay 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning', and both texts will be discussed further in the following chapter. The *News24* images are pulled from context in order to invite a different consideration of image than is possible inside the broadcast news interface. Examination of the images in such an untrammelled way invites debate as to the strength of their *function*, as Crimp's aforementioned 'information, documentation, evidence, illustration, reportage'. It is Flusser's view that apparatus, and television in this case, 'through which images are thrown into the private space', transcode technical images in two ways, 'The texts come in two different forms. In the form of reports, scripts etc. that "describe" scenes, and in the form of programming' (2013

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[1983], p.96-97). In the case of the 24/7 news broadcast, repetition can be considered a third 'text' that Flusser did not live to experience. However, as Flusser acknowledges, in spite of being transcoded by the apparatus, 'they are, all the same, images.' (*ibid.*). This is made very clear through the *News24* project.

There have been many transformations in reportage since the war reporting of Robert Capa, and with these transformations authorship and ownership have steadily diminished. The *News24* images of Syria, for example most likely originate from amateur footage. In her essay 'In Defense of the Poor Image', Hito Steyerl (2012, p.39-40) discusses Juan Garcia Espinosa's manifesto 'For an Imperfect Cinema' Espinosa predicted in the 1960's that developments in video technology would enable mass film production and threaten the position of traditional filmmakers. (Espinosa: 1979, pp.24-28). Steyerl states, 'Like the economy of poor images, imperfect cinema diminishes the distinction between author and audience and merges life and art. Most of all its visuality is resolutely compromised: blurred, amateurish and full of artifacts' (Steyerl: 2012, p.39-40).

The Syria images (Figure 32) are remarkable. Out of all the images gathered for the *News24* project they are the most documentary in nature, as the editorial gaze, the use of framing or composition to emphasise a particular person or event, seems to persist. This is not in the context of aesthetic consideration, but in an effort to capture and disseminate what is perceived to be important information by the amateur but extremely engaged filmmaker. This concurs with Agamben's view that film is rooted in gesture, making it a not simply a vehicle for aesthetics, but also a political and ethical event (2000, p.56). Any moving image aesthetic that *was* present in the original footage, whether accidental or engineered, is stalled by the capture of the single frame, although the gesture persists, as Agamben argues that it does in the case of Muybridge's still images or in sports photographs (2000, p.57). Many of the Syria images are degraded and indistinct, not by lack of resolution (they are taken with at high resolution and placed into a full HD film format) but by virtue of being still shots ripped from moving footage on a television screen, sometimes broadcast quality, sometimes clearly not.

Steyerl defines the 'poor image' thus: 'It is passed on as a lure, a decoy, an index, or as a reminder of its former visual self. It mocks the promises of digital technology. Not

Figure 32: Jane Birkin *News24* (image) (2013)

only is it often degraded to the point of being just a hurried blur, one even doubts whether it could be called an image at all.' (2012, p.32). This could easily be a definition of an archive description: it too is a lure, a decoy, an index, a reminder. In *News24* the images construct an index. In the same way that Taryn Simon's *Contraband* images are an index of five days at JFK Airport, these images are an index of a day's news that can be quickly surveyed: Steyerl's 'reminder of its former visual self' (*ibid.*), here the original broadcast. They are presented in original order, and the development of stories is a reminder of the developmental order of the archive. As with a written list or index, they are quickly accessible: the *News24 Images* slideshow is less than ten minutes long.

There is no doubting that these deserve to be called images, and perhaps they should be considered rich rather than poor: although they appear degraded, they expose visual content that is normally overlooked. But these are images that have been quietly assimilated into our culture and 'not assigned any value within the class society of images' (Steyerl: 2012, p.38). The two presentations (of images and descriptions) pose the questions: 'What are these images about?' 'What is their

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purpose?' and, ultimately, 'Do these images really matter?' These are images that are 'thrown into the private space' (Flusser: 2013 [1983], p.96). They could mostly be classed as background radiation and this is their substance, interest and value.

Chapter 3

Writing the image, reading Allan Sekula's *Meditations on a Triptych*

1   Out of the archive and back

Allan Sekula's photo-text piece *Meditations on a Triptych* (1973-78) is an exploration of three family photographs. The original gallery installation (Figure 33) consists of three 'type C' photographs, a booklet of text, a reading desk and a chair. The references in this chapter to Sekula's text indicate page numbers as it is reproduced in Sekula's now rare exhibition publication, *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973 – 1983* (Figure 34). This reproduction of the text forms the basis of my practice-based research on Sekula's piece and the publication itself becomes part of an installation.

The photographs, like others that I have been drawn to in this thesis, could be termed unremarkable: family photographs taken against modest backdrops. In the original installation the photographs are given presence by virtue of being original prints, mounted, framed and attached to a gallery wall. Printed in the book cited above, they are small, with visible degradation through screening. The accompanying text is divided into four parts, one relating to each image and the fourth to the set.

At first reading, Sekula's text appears to be the antithesis of archival description as discussed so far in this project. It includes not only contextual information (which, when substantiated, can of course contribute to a description), but it puts forward wide-ranging ideas and deviations that have little to do with the visual content of the images, or even the situations depicted and their contexts. It is a detailed piece of more than 4,000 words in total: a lengthy piece of observation, recollection, speculation and contemplation. It is an exploration that involves repeatedly travelling far outside the immediate territories of the images, moving in and out of themes such

as marriage, patriarchy, family, place, tradition, religion, class, colour theory and photography itself. However, and this is the significance of the piece to this thesis, the text frequently returns the reader to the image via detailed descriptions of visual elements. The narratives in the text are repeatedly paused and interrupted in this manner, so the visual content occupies a critical place in the structure of the text, affording a way into and out of Sekula's narratives. Interruption is a word often applied to photography itself, and the 'narrative pause' is a concept that will be discussed further in chapter four. Significantly, the text separates the images *and* brings them together as it spatiotemporally locates each within the set through description of related visual content.

It is my intention to uncover and exposit the 'archived' position of *Meditations*. The process involves close analysis of the text, and this in relation to Sekula's own writing on the archive. Through practice, I advance this investigation in a systematic manner. Using archival concepts of visual content description, interrelationships and context, I dissect *Meditations* in three different ways, and produce an immersive animated text piece; a visual rendering of the processes of investigation and separation of Sekula's text. Here, the text is not *written* using the archive system, but is *appropriated* by it. The conceptual and mechanical procedures involved in the making of the piece are discussed in detail in the second part of this chapter.

There are three photographs under scrutiny here and one wonders how they have come to be grouped together as a 'triptych'. Are they taken on the same day? The colour and light might suggest the same day and Sekula (1984, p.173) confirms this in the last two photographs: 'We wonder how the same sky that was moments before [in the second photograph] so intensely saturated with colour could [in the third photograph] be so washed out.' However, in the first photograph, Sekula (1984, p.169) writes: 'Quite probably the man and the woman are facing westward, into the direct light of a sun that is beginning to set.' Additionally, the man changes from military uniform in the first image to suit in the next, suggesting that it could be a different day. If they are in fact taken on the same day, then perhaps they are not presented in a chronological order. Moreover, the photographs did not exist within the family as a set, a fact that is evidenced in the text: 'this photograph [the first] is valued less than others taken on the same day. The picture remains in the processing envelope.' (Sekula: 1984, p.168). Through the creation of this small archive, likely taken from a larger

corpus of family photographs, Sekula is valorising the claim that he makes in his essay 'Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital', that an archive is 'a 'clearing house' of meaning', where 'the possibility of meaning is liberated from the actual contingencies of use.' (2003, pp.444-5). Sekula becomes the new organising authority of these records, the individual who has 'created, accumulated and/or maintained and used them in the conduct of personal or corporate activity' (ISAD(G)(2000), p.11).

The reason for this re-archiving is clear: Sekula is a user, producer and protagonist of photographic sequences. Roula Seikaly, in her text 'Allan Sekula Against the Grain', argues that 'Sekula places particular emphasis on work arranged by sequenced, relational images in conveying meaning, and resisting the postmodern construction of the singular, authoritative, commoditized photograph.' (2013, n.p.). The notion of the relational image points back to the archive. In the *Meditations* text he repeatedly relates one image to another, or others, in order to position the images in space and time. For example, he contrasts the second image to the first: 'She sits as demurely as she stood in the first photograph. […] She is wearing the same red dress as before but now instead of a mantilla she wears a black toreador hat.' (1984, p.171). The second and third images are similarly connected: 'We can discern a flagpole projecting upward from behind the wall. We could imagine that this pole is anchored in the monument we have already confronted.' (1984, p.173). Section 'Four' is made up of just four lines of text. It is a final bringing together of the three images, where '[a] red dress is repeated three times.' (1984, p.174).

Sekula is familiar with visual content description: in 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning' (1982, pp.88), he attempts to describe the Lewis Hine photograph *Immigrants Going Down Gangplank, New York* (1905) and Alfred Steiglitz' *The Steerage* (1907) in a naïve manner, 'divesting both images of context, as though I and the photographs fell from the sky':

> In the Hine photo, a gangplank extends horizontally across the frame, angling outward, towards the camera. A man, almost a silhouette, appears ready to step up on to the gangplank. He carries a bundle, his body is almost halved by the right edge of the photo. Two women precede the man across the gangplank. Both are dressed in long skirts; the woman on the left, who is in the lead, carries a large suitcase. […] In the Steiglitz photo, a gangplank, broken by the left

border, extends across an open hold intersecting an upper deck. Both this upper deck and the one below are crowded with people: women in shawls, Slavik-looking women in black scarves holding babies, men in collarless shirts and workers' caps. Some of the people are sitting, some appear to be engaged in conversation.

Note in both descriptions the use of the verb 'appear', a word commonly used in archival description, as discussed in chapter two. In the case of the Hine photograph, Sekula admits that he has been helped by the caption, saying, 'it would be somewhat difficult to identify either the gangplank or the immigrant status of the three figures without the aid of the legend.' (*ibid.*). He goes on to say that although the descriptions are 'deadpan' they are not 'innocent'. He believes he has made certain assumptions and described them 'as though they were stills from the same movie, a documentary on immigration perhaps.' (1982, p.90). Such are the complexities of archival description.

The first few lines of the *Meditations* text are pure description of the visual content of the first image. Speculation follows, but it is cautious at first, 'The woman's hands are hidden. Perhaps they are folded behind her back.' (1984, p.168). The word 'perhaps' is again suggestive of archival description and this is Sekula's articulation of the deductive process, equal to that evidenced in relation to the description of the Indian medical centre photograph discussed in chapter two ('stethoscopes around their necks […] therefore, a possibility that this photograph was taken during a visit to a medical centre'). But thoughts soon manifest that are uncorroborated by the visual content of the image and Sekula acknowledges this clearly in his text, as he reflects on the position of 'the man' in the first image: 'And yet, looking at this picture, we have no way of knowing how closely he identifies with the ideas of his more vocal generals. Nor do we know how much engineers pride derives from association with a sophisticated, technocratic war machine.' (1984, p.169).

The whole *Meditations* text is written from a perspective of unfamiliarity, a perspective that is common in the archive, and one that results in detached and unsentimental language forms. In the text, Sekula writes of the two figures in the first image: 'They look to be in their mid-forties. The man could be older. We assume they're married'. (1984, p.168). We are not told in this piece that this is Sekula's own family and the man and the woman are his mother and father, but this is now an accepted fact, and

it is corroborated by another work that he made around his family, *Aerospace Folktales* (1973) (Figure 35), where they are photographed in more natural domestic situations, although still with an element of distance in the commentary.

Art Gallery New South Wales, a holder of Sekula's original installation, state in their collection notes (http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/108.2012.a-d/ accessed 10-4-2012), 'We do not learn from the work itself that the characters in the photographs are Sekula's family. […] Sekula withholds vital information in order to ask pertinent questions about the nature of the medium. What do photographs actually reveal? Does their tenuous connection to facts undermine their validity?' Consequently, the knowledge and speculation binary in the *Meditations* text is not a straightforward one; there is doubt cast as to which parts of these texts are passages of memory, knowledge, speculation or fantasy. Several passages are in parenthesis and two of these passages start with the phrase 'Suppose I told you' (1984, p.169 and p.172). Are these passages the equivalent of contextual information recorded in an archive catalogue; notes off stage; insider knowledge shared? Whether he is talking fact or fiction, there is no doubt that what Sekula does through his text is what we are lured into doing ourselves when confronted with images: we expand situations into other events in time and space, always working with knowledge and experience of some sort. After reading Sekula's text, it is almost impossible for us to expand these images ourselves, to see them in a different light (although we are free to expand the text itself). Only when looking at them in relation to the evidence provided by Sekula's other photographs of his family, in more natural domestic situations, such as the 'home' photos in *Aerospace Folktales* (Figure 35), do we form different views of the Sekula family dynamics than those proposed in *Meditations on a Triptych*. The familiar location for these three photographs is what Bourdieu (1990, p.34) terms 'the space of life, which […] excludes alienation, that attenuated disorientation that leads to the act of looking.' Sekula would often photograph his family, and others, in their personal space (their home or place of work), and here in *Meditations* he is using the text exactly to invite 'the act of looking'. In setting this quantity of textual information against the images, Sekula is (in my words from chapter two, in relation to the *Island* images) 'contesting the notion that that a photograph, and especially a 'non-art' photograph can be quickly and easily decoded'. The title of the work invites the viewer to give the same attention to these images as they might to a Renaissance triptych. But this is snapshot, not art photography: all the images are to

some extent technically and compositionally flawed and Sekula points this out in his text: in section 'One' (1984, p.168), 'The shadow of a head falls on the scene, obscuring the tip of the man's right shoe'; in 'Two' (1984, p.172), 'The figure in the relief […] appears to be drilling a hole in the man's head'; in 'Three' (1984, p.173), 'The camera has been tilted at such an angle that the image has the appearance of running downhill'.

Walter Benjamin (1972 [1931], p.6), speaks of a 'fetishistic, fundamentally anti-technical notion of *Art* with which theorists of photography have tussled with for almost a century without, of course, achieving the slightest result.' He could see the difficulties that photography (and then film) caused for traditional aesthetics, as it represented a shift in aesthetics *and* function. In 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning', the art and photography dialogue is aired by Sekula, and he variously describes it as art versus documentary; symbolist versus realist; metaphor versus report (1982, p.108). In his discussion of the Hine and the Steiglitz photographs (1982, p.103), Sekula argues, 'the Hine discourse displays a manifest politics and only an implicit aesthetics, while the Steiglitz discourse displays a manifest aesthetics and only an implicit politics.' Has Sekula chosen the three *Meditations* images because of their technical and compositional flaws? They do not claim aesthetic merit (although he does discuss them in formal terms), and it is perhaps this that makes it easier to discuss their political, social and documentary implications.

Sekula uses painting analogies at various points in the text. For example, 'If he were a painted rather than a photographed figure, he would stand as an example of late Renaissance *contrapposto*.' (1984, p.171); then later again: 'Suppose this were paint, rather than photochemical dye. The man's shoes are raw sienna. The sky is a saturated cerulean blue, the trashcan is a saturated cadmium yellow.'(1984, p.172). In the short fourth section of the text Sekula consolidates this: 'The three images form a triptych. Two medium shots bracket a somewhat wider shot. The two outer images angle out from the symmetrical central image. We might be reminded of the half-open doors of an altarpiece.' (1984, p.174). Gerhard Richter (2010, p.xxii), in his introduction to Derrida's *Copy, Archive, Signature*, reiterates this quasi-religious engagement with the photographic image and speaks of 'the kind of prayerlike attentiveness and careful, restless study that a serious engagement with

photography requires.' He asserts a comparison to Derrida's own 'protocols of close reading and deciphering, analysing and translating, questioning and obsessive revisiting' of texts; Sekula has acted in accordance with these protocols in relation to the three images and recorded the results in his text.

According to the *Meditations* text (and continuing the religious theme), these images were taken around Easter time: 'It's Palm Sunday […] The woman is dressed for next week's Mass, wearing her new red Easter costume' (1984, p.170), and Sekula writes of the third photo: 'Of course the light is less harsh now and all three faces are shaded by their Easter bonnets.' (1984, p.173). Like most family photographs, these could be part of what Bourdieu calls 'a *technology for the reiteration of the party'* (1990, p.27): images that record happy occasions, celebrations and festive events. But, although the costumes are fancy, the setting is not, and the dismal backdrops are described in detail: 'The garages look a bit squalid and the woman has varicosed legs.' (1984, p.171), and, 'The three figures face the camera in front of a narrow strip of shabby grass.' (1984, p.173).

Many of the fragments of description centre around location and emphasise the ordinariness of the surroundings, 'The man and woman are standing in front of a row of white garages. The white paint is scuffed and faded. The asphalt in front of the garages is spotted with oil stains.' (1984, p.170). Clothing is also described in detail, with much repetition around the red dress (it is mentioned six times), the hats, and the man's uniform. In contrast to the surroundings, the clothing is described as being special, even exotic:

> The woman is wearing a red dress. Her mouth is painted with the same red […]
> Her demure stance contradicts the loud colour. She tempers this flamboyance
> with a black lace mantilla, perhaps finding in it the mark of feminine piety. Latin
> women wear these things to church. But here, on an Anglo-Saxon woman, the
> mantilla becomes an exoticism.

Throughout the text, the description of visual content often becomes the starting point from which Sekula transports us away from the image, and it is also the device for his calling back (1984, p.172):

The monument in the foreground has an octagonal base and a fluted pedestal. This is WPA architecture. This is art deco as it revolutionized the public buildings of America. This is an example of monopoly capital saving its own skin through the agency of the state. This is a high school built in 1938 in a working-class community. The man's head obscures the lower left of the bas-relief.

Reference to the photographic process is another of Sekula's devices for grounding us to the image. He does this in three ways: firstly, there are constant reminders that we are looking at a photographic image, with implications for the description. For example: 'All the vertical lines in the photograph are distorted in this fashion.' (1984, p.170). My *Island* descriptions similarly refer back to photographic production, describing elements that disappear off the side of the picture, or are out of focus. My description of the *Arts Club Theatre Company* image refers to the point-of-view: 'The picture is taken from a height, so both sides of the wall are visible'; in my description of *Moon over Saint Simons*, the reference to the photograph is direct, 'It is difficult to tell whether this is a black and white photograph, or simply has no visible colour'. My *News24* descriptions also flag the photographic process: my description of the swimming seal states that it 'appears green, probably as a result of a colour cast due to the camera and the lighting used underwater.' These are the realities of the image, describable features of photographic production.

Secondly, the photographer too is given a position in the text. He is revealed as being in league with the man in the first photograph: 'In presenting themselves as a couple, the man and the woman share their space with an unskilled accomplice.' (1984, p.168). We are not told who the photographer is; could it be Sekula himself? it is not important; as with many photographs that are found in archives, the author is unattributed. In 'Reading an Archive', Sekula (2003, pp.446-449) discusses the difficulties inherent in removing an archival photograph from its context (into a book, for example), de-politicising and de-historicising it in the process. He considers the 'post-romantic' path of classing the photograph as 'found object', an object that 'privileges the subjectivity of the collector, connoisseur, and viewer over that of any specific author.' He argues that even this approach, albeit to a lesser degree than the romantic one with its emphasis on author, still tends to convert photographs into 'works of art' (*ibid*.). This makes Sekula's positioning of the *Meditations* images a complex one: he evidently does not perceive these, or other archive photographs, as art photographs. Is he taking upon himself the role of 'collector, connoisseur, and

viewer' (if not photographer) and turning these images towards art? In the original installation, even though he places them conventionally framed on the gallery wall, the provision of this politicising commentary disrupts the conventional aesthetic.

Thirdly, through the *Meditations* text we are made acutely aware of the presence of the apparatus itself: 'The photographer stares down at a reversed reflection of the scene' (1984, p.168), and, on the same page, Sekula uses the visible effect of the lens to instigate a discussion on the male to female power relationships, a theme that continues through the text:

> At this angle the man appears much larger than the woman. Of course this impression is only the result of his being closer to the camera, which faces the couple from an oblique angle. The camera has a wide angle lens as well […] Perspective is exaggerated. The man tends, slightly, to belong to the foreground. The woman begins to belong to the background. This is merely an unmotivated optical effect. Or it could be an overdetermined effect of several causes. Perhaps this lack of symmetry was intended. […] There is nothing innocent about this conclusion.

Not only are *we* made aware of the presence of the camera, but it is clear from the text that the characters in the triptych are aware of it too. In chapter two I conclude that, in terms of visual content description, it is irrelevant whether a photograph records a 'real' situation or a scenario that is being acted out in front of the camera. Sekula confronts the notions of how people act (how they behave and how they play), and how the scene is directed for the camera:

> The man has directed the photograph to a point-of-view, mentioning forty-five degree angles and the avoidance of excessive shade. He has told the woman and the photographer of his desires. He has asked the woman to strike a pose. He has adjusted the angle of her stance. Her mantilla has been adjusted to reveal her face. He has drawn himself up, waiting. Instructions have been given. (1984, p.168)

Acting analogies appear again:

In this photograph, the man is indulging in a bit of costume drama. He's playing the military dandy and remembering his upwardly mobile march from the enlisted ranks during the war. He exaggerates a sideline, allowing it to expand into an image of self. Personal pride, pride in rank, national pride, patriotism: ultimately he's assumed a rather public pose. There's a recruiting-poster aspect to his stance. (1984, p.169)

Sekula writes in his *Meditations* text: 'This is not an everyday moment, a slice-of-life, but an imaginary construction. Costumes have been selected for this brief fiction.' (1984, p.170). These ideas are reiterated in 'Reading an Archive', where he argues that 'photographic constructs are frequently passed of as reality' (2003, p.443). This is not a comment on the art photography constructs such as those of Jeff Wall, but the much more subtle manipulations of photographic meaning that can go unnoticed, especially in an archive situation where one is inclined to perceive objects as evidence. He expands on this in 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning', (1982, p.94-5), where he charts the appropriation of the photograph as a vehicle for colonial expansion by the bourgeois state, and the press that they control.

Sekula sets out his stall early on: he writes of the first image: 'Years later, the photo reappears in an almost archeological [*sic*] light. What meanings were once constructed here? What ideas and desires directed this project? Who spoke, who listened, who spoke with a voice not their own?' (1984, p.168). Through asking these questions he is expressing his desire to unpack the archive that he has created and, as with any archive, the content of the images and the relationships between them are his points of reference. The questions he asks here must be read alongside the ones he asks in 'Reading an Archive':

How does photography serve to legitimate and normalize existing power relationships? How does it serve as the voice of authority, while simultaneously claiming to constitute a token of exchange between equal partners? What havens and temporary escapes from the realms of necessity are provided by photographic means? What resistances are encouraged and strengthened? How is historical and social memory preserved, transformed, restricted and obliterated by photographs? What futures are promised; what futures are forgotten? (Sekula: 2003, pp.443-4)

Through his distancing from the *Meditations* images, Sekula is able to look at them in the context of bigger questions about photography and archive. He argues some years later that 'archival ambitions and procedures are intrinsic to photographic practice' (2003, p.444); he is aware that the structures of the photographic archive 'maintain a hidden connection between knowledge and power' and that the archive should be viewed with suspicion (2003, p.447). Sekula's *Meditations on a Triptych* forms a critical reading of complex family relationships, through image and discourse. In adopting a detached position, where the reader is confused over the status of the text (is it knowledge or is it speculation?), Sekula reveals an understanding of the implicit power and authority of the archive and the 'archived' photograph.

2   The secret text

In *Paper Machine*, Derrida (2005, p.162-3) reminds us that 'secret' is 'a word of Latin origin that primarily means separation or dissociation'. This section deals with the first of my practical engagements around *Meditations on a Triptych*, an engagement based on a 'separation' and a 'dissociation' of Sekula's *Meditations* text. As well as also relating the word 'secret' to the politics of the archive, Derrida denies that there is any 'secret meaning to be interpreted' behind a poem or novel (*ibid*.). We can extend this denial to the photographic image: Sekula (1982, pp.97-98) sees the emotional and unconscious meaning attributed to photography, and proffered by Benjamin de Cassere in his text 'The Unconscious in Art', (*Camera Work*, 1911), as 'modern bourgeois aesthetic mysticism.' Cassere describes the genius and imagination of Steiglitz as that which 'the Secretive God stores in dreams.'

In my pieces *Meditations 1, 2* and *3* (2013), sections of Sekula's *Meditations* text that correspond to three archival themes are systematically identified. The first theme, addressed in *Meditations 1*, is that of visual content description. The second theme, in *Meditations 2*, singles out the occurrences in the text of relationships made between images. These are two archival concepts that have already been discussed in some detail in this thesis, and need no further explanation here. The third theme, although touched on earlier in this chapter, has not yet been properly explained: it is that of 'Context Area'. This is an area of documentation not directly concerned with description of object or *fonds*, but with any available background information,

gathered together so as to 'place the material in context and make it better understood.' (ISAD(G), 2000, p.18). In *Meditations 3*, such information provides not only a context, but also a deviation in the form and intent of the text that contrasts with the short lines of description isolated in *Meditations 1* and *2*. The work of identification of sections of text for *Meditations 3* is done for me: I take the sections of text that Sekula has put in parenthesis. I make the decision to collude with Sekula and accept these found forms as fragments of contextual information.

These themed appropriations of text are given new life in three separate animations of Sekula's *Meditations* text, where the text that is outside these stated archival themes fades and falls away, so that eventually only the pertinent sections of text remain. The decision on what should be removed and what should remain, even though it ran to the defined methodology described, was sometimes difficult; again a reflection on the intricacies of archival description. The order that the text disappears in the animations adheres to the decision-making process that took place as I analysed the text; it forms an accurate and truthful record. I used the 'track changes' feature of Microsoft Word (Figure 36), with its time-recorded deletions, 'extralinguistic and purposeful' (Goldsmith: 2011, p.32), to make an index of this order. 'Track changes' preserves the memory, logging deletions and edits, leaving a trace of the thinking and working process. Derrida mourns the loss of the trace of corrections that were visible before word processing, how 'erasures and added words left a sort of scar on the paper or a visible image in the memory […] now everything is drowned, deleted' (2005, p.24). The change tracking documents hold an important place in the history of the piece: the processes that resulted in this piece, processes of typing, deletion, tracking changes, laying out, and animating are recorded at every stage, resulting in an archive of procedures that are normally provisional.

The project required a diligent retyping (and, later, an accurate visual recreation) of the whole of Sekula's text; it is not available in a digital form, so no 'cut and paste' was possible. However, the act of retyping went far beyond the grey administrative task of transcription that it would first appear to be. In relation to the many retyping projects that have recently been undertaken, Goldsmith (2011, p.4) writes:

> Far from this "uncreative" literature being a nihilistic, begrudging acceptance—or
> even an outright rejection— of a presumed "technological enslavement," it is a

writing imbued with celebration, its eyes ablaze with enthusiasm for the future, embracing this moment as one pregnant with possibility.

One

A man and a woman are standing. They are posed in a deliberate way for the making of a photograph. The shadow of a head falls on the scene, obscuring the tip of the man's right shoe. This negative trace points back to the photographer. The man appears to be standing on the photographer's head.

They look to be in their mid-forties. The man could be older. At this angle the man appears much larger than the woman. this impression is only the result of his being closer to the camera, which faces the couple from an oblique angle.

The man's eyes are hidden under the shadow of his visor, His cheek muscles appear tense. One side of his mouth curls upwards in a half smile which reads as a mild grimace under the shaded eyes. He stands erect, shoulders back, hands at his sides, head turned towards the photographer.

The woman's hands are hidden. She stands nearly at a right angle to the man; her body is more directly oriented towards the camera. She stands with her feet together. She smiles slightly. Her eyes are closed against the light. Although no space is visible between the blue right border of the man and the red left border of the woman, it is likely that their bodies are not touching.

The man is wearing a military uniform. Those of us who know recognize this as the uniform of the United States Air Force. The uniform is dark blue,

The man is wearing a large ring with a blue stone on his right hand. On the man's right shoulder I can make out a blurred insignia, a scrap of metal. This item is bronzed and irregularly shaped. It's not a star, nor is it a pair of parallel bars. The photograph is poorly resolved; it's difficult to tell. The man is an officer. Metal means officer. But the absence of campaign ribbons, of extra stripes on the cuff of his jacket, suggest that he's only a reserve officer. There's a recruiting-poster aspect to his stance.

The woman stands next to her uniformed husband. The woman is wearing a red dress. Her mouth is painted with the same red.

her head covered.

they stand together.

The man and woman are standing in front of a row of white garages. The white paint is scuffed and faded. The asphalt in front of the garages is spotted with oil stains. To the couple's left, on the right side of the picture, is garage number twelve. The building appears to bow inward at the middle, as though it were sagging towards its eventual collapse. All the vertical lines in the photograph are distorted in this fashion. This is merely evidence that an inexpensive camera with a poor lens was used to make the picture.

The garages look a bit squalid and the woman has varicosed legs.

Two

The man and woman are situated in front of a monument of some sort, the woman sits at the man's right. She faces the camera directly. He stands, his body turned toward her as it casts a shadow over her left side. His hips, shoulders and head are turned in different

Figure 36: Jane Birkin *Meditations* track changes document

This project is different from most of those that Goldsmith describes, where 'uncreative' texts are retyped and recontextualised: 'the spectacle of the mundane reframed as literature' (*ibid.*); my retyping was a means to a different end. Nevertheless, this exercise in retyping, with its perceived uncreativity (it creates a new transcript in a new place, therefore it cannot be truly uncreative), generated for me the feelings of optimism so imaginatively described by Goldsmith above. In his introduction to *Uncreative Writing*, Goldsmith describes his chapter on Simon Morris's retyping of *On the Road* as 'raising the craft of the copyist to the same level as the author […] a utopian critique of labour and value' (2011, p.12). These themes in relation to art and work, inside and outside of the archive, have already been touched on in chapter two, and of course transcription is a labour commonly undertaken in relation to the archival object. The *On the Road* project has commonality with the retyping of the M*editations* text (although *On the Road* is a much more lengthy work), in that it is involves the transcription of a piece of writing that is creative (in the accepted sense) to start with. Goldsmith (2011, p.151) describes how Morris 'gets inside' the text, and he quotes Benjamin who writes in *Reflections* (1978, p.66):

> The power of a country road is different when one is walking along it from when one is flying over it by airplane. In the same way, the power of a text is different when it is read from when it is copied out. The airplane passenger sees only how the road pushes through the landscape, how it unfolds according to the same laws as the terrain surrounding it. Only he who walks the road on foot learns of the power it commands.

Benjamin is saying that the airplane passenger / reader is privy to the wider context of the work, whereas the walker / copier sees only the immediate text in detail and experiences its power as material object. This conceptual division holds true for the transcribing of archive manuscripts, where the palaeographic analysis and transcription by the archivist (walker) is quite different from the historical and contextual analysis by the researcher (airplane passenger). It also positions the retyping of *On the Road* and *Meditations*, where text is confronted in material terms: Morris counts the number of times the phrase 'on the road' is used (Goldsmith: 2011, p.152), and I record how many times Sekula mentions the red dress. This is an examination more akin to a process of indexing than it is to hermeneutical analysis.

In installation mode (Figure 37), the three animations are projected at right angles to each other, using three walls, creating an immersive text environment. The fourth side is open, establishing an entrance to the work's discrete space, but with a clear view into it. It is an easy task to move in and out of the work. The three films are of different lengths and looped; overlap is not repeated. They can be met at any point.

In this piece the book form is appropriated and explored. The slides used in these animations are laid out with faithful adherence to Sekula's spreads, using identical fonts, sizes, leading and kerning, forming an accurate reproduction of the text as it stands in *Photography Against the Grain*. This faithfulness to the original layout includes structural elements such as running heads, margins and page numbers. It comes not out of nostalgia for the printed form, as put forward by Derrida in *Paper Machine* (2005, pp.62-3), but is important to the concept of the projected page and the notion of 'text as image', encountered in a similar way in my piece *Island*, where

Figure 37: Jane Birkin *Meditations* (2013) installation 2015

typescript becomes image. Here the spreads are projected at a size normally reserved for images, challenging expected models of text and image, of looking and reading. These are animated jpegs and the jpeg is a format that is usually reserved for images. The timings of the slides correspond to estimated reading periods, which means that the initial slides in each spread, the full texts, are projected for several minutes. It is not only the time spent looking at an image that is in question through this study, but also the time spent reading projected text. As with the *News24* descriptions that are presented on screen, this proves to be a very different experience to that of reading the printed page, or even reading an exhibition board. This difference is most likely driven by expectations of what a projector (or TV screen) normally does: it throws out 'hot media' (McLuhan: 1987 [1964], p.22) and usually at a fairly brisk pace. There follows a combination of conflicting feelings in my *Meditations* animation: firstly that the text is an unstable object and might disappear; secondly that the text is not moving fast enough.

In my piece, the spaces taken up by a fragment of text are left behind when it eventually and slowly disappears; this is quite unlike a deletion in a word processing programme where no space remains. The projected blanks form ' the visible image in the memory', the loss brought on by the advent of word processing that Derrida (2005, p.24) laments. My spaces are in fact black text made white, so the text remains throughout but is simply not visible. They can be viewed in relation to Derrida's notion of the 'trace', where, as Spivak (1997, p.xviii) writes in the translators preface to *Of Grammatology* : 'the authority of the text is provisional'. She further states, 'we must learn to use and erase our language at the same time.' The *Meditations 1, 2* and *3* projections 'use and erase': the white spaces are important as markers of something that was there, and they remain *useful* as a spatial and temporal marker of this; they are 'simultaneously active and passive' (Derrida: 1981a, p.27), and constitute what Spivak terms 'the mark of the absence of a presence' (1997, p.xvii). The erasure is slow and what is *being* erased is made visible relative to the text that is allowed to remain.

The final slides in the sequences, especially in *Meditations 1* (Figure 38), with its shorter fragments of text, have much in common with like Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dès* (Figure 39) (or *Crapshoot*, Mark Amerika's version for the digital age). But these two pieces are formed using chance operations, whereas the text forms of the

Meditations pieces are not. Derrida writes extensively on Mallarmé, and in *Positions* he declares 'the necessity of those "blank spaces" which we know, at least since Mallarmé, "take on importance" in every text.' (1981a, p.3). Derrida frequently reiterates the importance of white spaces, for example, in *Paper Machine* he talks of 'writings blank white' (2005, p.53). In the case of Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dès*, the white is the paper; with *Crapshoot*, it is the computer screen; in my *Meditations* piece, it is the ultimate blank white space, the gallery wall.

My piece is visually *unlike* the somewhat over-designed Concrete Poetry forms that are said to be indebted to *Un Coup de Dès.* (Goldsmith: 2011, p.57). Although interesting from a media archaeology point of view and with ramifications for screen-based literary experimentation, the 'typewriter concrete poetry' that Lori Emerson (2014, pp.87-127) discusses also lean towards an over-considered aesthetic, rather
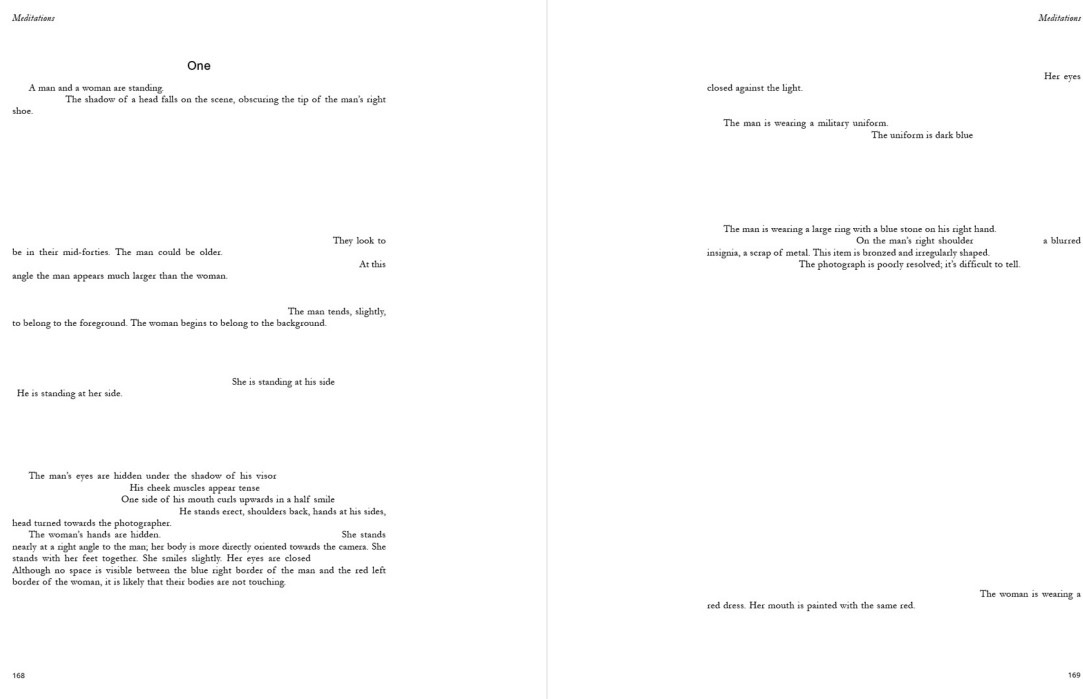
Figure 38: Jane Birkin *Meditations 1* (2013) animation slide

than the natural forms that are thrown by of the typewriter in, for example, Kerouac's *On the Road* scroll that I discuss in chapter two. I intend no poetry in my *Meditations* texts, and the only typographic design is that appropriated from the original book. These texts are arrived at by way of a well-documented methodology and a very particular materiality of text is declared through this. Goldsmith (2011, p.34) states, 'language works on several levels, endlessly flipping back and forth between the meaningful and the material'. Here the material is *with* meaning: the weight, the the frequency, the relationship of the text and the white spaces form a visual metaphor for the scope of opportunity in the reading of these everyday images.

Figure 40: Jane Birkin *Meditations* (2013) installation 2015

This analytical approach catalogues, explores and gives a visual intelligibility to the manner in which Sekula's text intersects with archival characteristics. It defines the frequencies and the dispersion of these intersections.

Sekula's three images are exhibited in this piece as well, but, in contrast to the display of the text, the images are shown as open pages in the book *Photography Against the Grain* (where one would perhaps expect to find the text) (Figure 40). The book sits outside the projection space and is turned away from it so that image of image and image of text cannot be read together. The book is displayed as a museum object; the pages are strapped down and it is enclosed in a vitrine. The images are cut off from their own text and from the rest of the book, a place where one could find, for example, the *Aerospace Folktales* images mentioned in the first section of this chapter. The vitrine acts as a physical screen: we are unable to experience the haptic interface of the book, 'the thickness and the resistance of a sheet—its folds, the back of its recto-verso, the *fantasies* of contact' (Derrida: 2005, pp.62-3). We are denied 'the "multimedia" resources or possibilities of paper' (Derrida: 2005, p.47). However, these images, though small in comparison with the projected text, are given status through their museum-like display. They are the source of all of this, after all.

Chapter 4

Description and temporality

1   Archives and time: synchronic description and diachronic order

Time is fundamental to the archive in terms of organisation (by original order, not necessarily chronological), storage and preservation of objects. As shown in the *Island* project, time is also implicit in the act of description. The 'archived' photograph brings extra temporal dimensions, as the embodied time of the image must also be considered. Allan Sekula exposes both the synchronic and the preservatory nature of the photographic image, when he writes of the first *Meditations* image: 'Since this is a still photograph, the man and the woman are still standing.' (1984, p.168). The dual use of the word 'still' reiterates how the photograph captures a specific time and locks it in place for time to come, just as the archive locks away its objects for future use.

Peter Wollen (1989, n.p.), in his text 'Fire and Ice', adds the time of the viewer to the mix: 'the spectator's 'now', the moment of looking at the image, has no fixed time. It can be extended as long as fascination lasts and endlessly reiterated as long as curiosity returns.' Marq Smith (2013, p.390), in his examination of research in the digital age, emphasises 'the future as a category of historical time'; Smith solicits us to re-examine 'how it functions as a most productive 'space' for projection, imagination, and fantasy; how we can harness our capacity to desire to speculate on the not-yet and the yet-to-come.' The fact that the archivist does not work with any particular future use in mind (Ketelaar, 1996, p.33), must naturally acknowledge this view of archives as a broad and productive futurising force, and one accommodating to the reiterations of viewing that Wollen mentions. An 'archived' photograph, along with its description, can be perceived as a synchronic form that is locally atemporal but at the same time supertemporal in nature. It is a complex object in temporal terms, as it remains in stasis for time to come.

Many of Jeff Wall's fabricated situations, such as can be seen in *Milk* (1984) (Figure 41), constitute a controlled exploration of the inherent temporality of a photographic

image. At the same time they consciously encourage the viewer to explore a timespan outside of the moment of capture. Michael Newman (2007, p.70) argues in relation to Wall's work:

> a still image can be temporally extremely complex. It is temporalized in the viewer's perceptual and intellectual experience […] The phenomenological experience of the stillness of the image is affected both by the duration embodied in that image, and by the possibility—or not—of movement.

Of course, the duration 'embodied' in the image can vary; our everyday snapshots tend to be taken with a shutter speed of only a tiny fraction of a second (Wollen's 'near-zero duration'). In the early days of photography, the duration of the shot was long, resulting in visible movement inside the image. Still though, all of the information inside that image experiences the same temporality, a synchrony that does not share its temporal characteristics with a piece of film of similar duration, for example. This still / movie dialogue is advanced and elucidated by Ernst in his discussion of the film or video projection of a *tableau vivant*, which he writes 'undercuts the apparent visual simultaneity.' (2013, p.155). He argues that this is how the *tableau vivant* differs from a classical painting. Indeed, it does differ in this way, and at the same time, a painting differs from a photograph, in that the duration 'embodied' can be extremely long. Victor Burgin (2004, p.26) acknowledges this, arguing that although a history painting might mark a specific moment in time, a 'freeze frame' of sorts, the temporality of the moment of arrest is not straightforward, as several temporally disjointed events can be incorporated. Burgin calls this placing of embodied time into the static event of a painting 'the folding of the diachronic into the synchronic'. One needs also to consider the time of making a painting, compared to that of making of a photograph, to realise that these two media *contain* and *present* very different embodiments of time.

It would seem clear that the completion of the photographic image, as already noted, is an outcome that archival description practices seek to avoid. But this completion is inevitable in any case, and it is clearly tied up with the viewer's desire for temporal extension. Flusser states (2000, p.8):

> Images are significant surfaces. Images signify — mainly— something 'out there'
> in space and time that they have to make comprehensible to us as abstractions
> (as reductions of the four dimensional space and time to the two surface

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dimensions). This specific ability to abstract surfaces out of space and time and project them back into space and time is what is known as imagination.

In archival description, the best that the description writer can do in situations such as the one in *Milk* is to speculate on the *possibility* of something outside the image's own temporality; a possibility that is *contained* in the image and *transmitted* through the description. This is not the same thing as Flusser's 'imagination'; it is a use of the photograph as a form of evidence, and is always presented by the archivist in guarded terms.

The staged event in Jeff Wall's photograph *Milk* (1984) creates a situation that has obvious and unavoidable temporal allusions. Less obvious, and of more importance in relation to archives and the question of temporality, is the series of images, *A Partial Account (of events taking place between the hours of 9.35 a.m. and 3.22 a.m., Tuesday, 21 January, 1997)* (1997) (Figure 42), all capturing scenarios involving a brown paper bag (as does *Milk*). Newman writes of this sequence (2007, p.72):

> Given the lack of speech, the lacunae in the sequence, it is up to the viewer to construct a narrative interpreting the images. […] This suggests that the photograph can never function in an unproblematic way as "evidence"—it always requires interpretation and fabulation—and this has at least partly to do with its temporal condition.

Newman's statement goes some way to explaining how time, a commodity so important to the archive, materialises in the 'archived' photograph, not through the captive temporality of the single image, but through the temporal complexities of archival groupings and the inevitable incompleteness (the 'lacunae') in the collection. But Newman questions the use of evidence and lays emphasis on the construction of narrative, which would render the image somewhat ineffectual in archival terms.

The very act of description has its own temporal implications, rooted in the order in which the components of the image are recorded. This is demonstrated in the filming of the *Island* descriptions, which expose and emphasise the order in which I record the visual information and the time this takes (already discussed in chapter two). Burgin (2004, p.21) discusses his earliest memory of an image from a film, which he calls a 'sequence-image' ('rather than an image sequence'); a still from the film burnt

in his mind's eye. He states, 'The order in which they [the visual elements in the image] appear is insignificant (as in a rebus) and they present a configuration — 'lexical, sporadic' — that is more 'object' than narrative.' He is referring to a recollection rather than an observation of an image that is physically present, but it is nevertheless a description, and the phrase 'more 'object' than narrative' is key. Visual content description emphasises objects, not narratives, although these object-words may be brought together with small prepositions and the like in order to provide the situation with some spatial information, which is where it differs from a list. The fact that visual information can be gathered in any order ('lexical, sporadic') is appropriate to the equality of visual elements in archival description, as discussed in chapter one.

In clarifying the understanding of the word 'narrative', there is a simple distinction to be made between the terms 'story' and 'narrative', although they are often perceived as interchangeable, even by some theorists here. A 'story' is defined as an 'event or sequence of events' that make up an action (Ryan: 2008, p.344). This is relatively acceptable in terms of how one views sets of archived photographs, although inside and outside the archive, description writing and list making are methods of recording, not storytelling. A 'narrative', however, involves a combination of story and discourse: 'an ability to evoke stories in the mind'. (Ryan: 2008, p.347). It is this combination that is most problematic in terms of the archived image and its description, as it involves imagination, speculation and fabulation to create a storyline outside of the image or the sequence. As Ernst argues, '*Description* is at odds with narration.' (2013, p.153, his italics).

If time in the 'archived' photograph is not to be defined through its discrete description, or through the order of elements inside the description, in what zone does the temporality of the archive description lie? The answer, already touched on by Newman in relation to Wall's *A Partial Account*, lies with groupings and sequences: in the case of the archive photograph, the interrelationships between images that are replicated through descriptions and lists. Descriptions of situations, when encountered together in a catalogue list, define the wider temporalities of the event. The event *unfolds* in time through juxtapositions of discrete units of description. Time in archives is delineated through original and developmental order, and, as discussed in detail in chapter one, the list respects and replicates the physical arrangement of the archive. Within this diachronic milieu, the synchronic

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image / description of image takes on a unique, and sometimes unexpected, temporality. The lists, and the juxtapositions therein, expose the acutely shallow time and non-chronological advancement of the archive. In this way, the list itself describes but does not narrate; Liam Young identifies the list as 'a paradigmatic form of non-narrative inscription.' (2014, n.p.).

Take, for example, the following extract from a catalogue list for the Harry Price archives, Senate House Library, University of London:

HPG/1/8   Fire Walking   1935-1946

Photographs of Harry Price's investigations into fire-walking and experiments with Kuda Bux and Ahmed Hussain at Carshalton, Surrey and Alexandria Palace, London. Includes photographs of tests with both fire-walkers and the BBC transmission of Hussain's fire-walk in 1937, along with photographs of fire-walks in other countries.

HPG/1/8/3   Ahmed Hussein: First Test   1937

Photographs from the first fire-walking test conducted with Cawnpore Muslim, Ahmed Hussain at Carshalton, Surrey (7 April 1937), including the following:

i. Upper body studio photograph of Ahmed Hussain (2 copies) [1122, 1123]
ii. Photograph of nurses washing Ahmed Hussain's feet prior to the fire-walk
iii. Photograph of nurses washing Ahmed Hussain's feet prior to the fire-walk, different shot from above
iv. Upper body photograph of Harry Price, C.E.M.Joad, Ahmed Hussain and O.K.De Silva (Hussain's manager), with Price and De Silva pointing, possibly at fire trench
v. Photograph of back view of Ahmed Hussain praying just before his first fire-walk
vi. Photograph of Dr Parnett and Dr Newcomb examining Hussain's feet after the first walk
vii. Photograph of Dr Parnett and Dr Newcomb examining Hussain's feet after the first walk, different angle from above
viii. Photograph of Dr Parnett taking temperature of Hussain's feet prior to walking

<div>

    ix.   Photograph of Dr Parnett and Dr Newcomb taking temperature at Hussain's feet before walking

    x.   Photograph of the raking of the fire trench just before walking

    xi.   Photograph of man raking the fire ready before walking

    xii.   Photograph of back view of Hussain walking over trench

    xiii.   Photograph of Mr Hawkins (of Cambridge Instruments) taking the temperature of the fire trench

    xiv.   Photograph of Mrs Dribbel, Harry Price, C.E.M.Joad, Ahmed Hussain and O.K.De Silva standing by fire trench

    xv.   Photograph of Reggie Adcock walking over the fire trench (He was unburnt)

</div>

The time anomalies in this list can be clearly identified. The units of description, their discreteness emphasised by of the lack of continuity, describe the event in a filmic way. Cuts, possibly even jump-cuts (one would need to examine the images) and flashbacks highlight the action. One can imagine the images these descriptions refer to, and there are thirty-six in this set, put together to create a *La Jetée*-like sequence. This would be a sequence directed by the list.

Ernst (2004, p.264) quotes Roger Odin (in Gaudreault: 1990, p.72), who writes in relation to Marker's *La Jetée* (1962): 'The absence of reproduction of movement […] tends to block *narrativity*, since the lack of movement means that there is no before / after opposition within each shot. The [effect of] narrativity can only be derived from the sequence of shots, that is, from montage.' His insert '[effect of]' is revealing: it places doubt on *La Jetée* as a narrative form, although the film clearly and famously has a story to tell. The notion of montage, a technique that may also produce a diachronic temporal progression, resonates through the Harry Price list. Burgin (2004, p.108) reflects on *La Jetée*: 'The linearity and narrative closure of *La Jetée* is only apparent, a contingent consequence of the conventional demand for a story with a beginning, a middle and an end when the spool of film runs out.' I would view *La Jetée*, like the Price photographs, as a limited set of images preserved in a particular order; discrete situations that make up an event: a spatiotemporal occurrence that is distinct from a narrative, in that its elements are contiguous, but not chronologically consecutive or interpolated; temporal but not linear.

Ernst (2013, p.154) describes how events are revealed in the Bayeux Tapestry as a 'precinematic form of cutting that has often been added to film or comic strips, with

abrupt changes in pace, jumps in time, and flashbacks.' He continues, 'Physically though, film puts sequences one after the other on a celluloid reel—just as on the Bayeux tapestry.' The *Fire-walking* photos, unlike either film images or the Bayeux Tapestry, are not physically connected, but placed loose in a file; their sequence is determined and they are connected by the catalogue list and by their upper level description (in this case, the title and two lines introducing the list). Levels of archival description move 'from the general to the specific' (ISAD(G), 2000, p.12); here we can see that the temporal configuration follows this structure, as it too moves from general to specific time.

Ernst (2004, p.264) discusses how film images were traditionally sorted mechanically, and within a time-based structure. He explains how technological developments offer new ways of sorting:

> Within the medium of film, the practice of montage (cutting) has always already performed a kind of image-based sorting […] Only video — as a kind of intermediary medium between classical cinema and the digital image — has replaced the mechanical addressing of cinematographic by different means (time code), offering new options of navigating within stored image space. Automated digital linking of images by similarity, though, creates rather unexpected, improbable links: which are, in the theory of information, the most informative, the least redundant ones.

The 'unexpected', 'improbable' and 'most informative' links of visually similar *still* images are always already present in photographic sequences such as the fire-walking series, just as they are in Marker's *La Jetée*. No form of advanced technology is required in order to retrieve either of these sets of images. For Marker, all that is required is to annotate and index his contact sheets (Figure 43); in the case of the Price photos, the list presents the set, and the visual content description confirms visual similarities. But Ernst's machine-based temporality has a correlation with the systematic approach of archival listing: a standardised technique that allows situations to recur and reiterate (not repeat), thus bypassing the narrative. Parikka explains Ernst's notion of 'machine time' (2013, p.15):

> Instead of typically emphasizing machine time as repetitious, Ernst is keen to
> argue for the importance of such regimes for our general cultural understanding

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of temporality. This points towards mathematicotechnical notions of time—iterations, recursions, short circuits—as a critical part of how we should think "history", too.

Although Wollen, (1989, n.p.) argues that, 'it is impossible to extract our concept of time completely from the grasp of narrative', a study of archival practices can help us to understand that temporality and narrative are concepts that are overlapping but distinct. Temporality is intrinsic to the archive; narrative is often constructed by users of archives. Ernst (2013, p.150) states: 'registering time does not necessarily require the narrative mode to organise the factual field in a form that we call information.' This is broadly in relation to computing, but it applies as much to archive catalogue information. Ernst (2013, pp.150-51) continues in relation to annalism:

> Here there can be order without stories, because documents and data exist not only for themselves but in relation to the series that each case precedes or follows—without being subjected to romance, where causality and the foregrounding backgrounding of events are expressed through explicit narrative subordination.

Ernst argues that '[t]he narrative construction of reality is a cultural sense-making pattern' (2013, p.151). There is a link here with the formation of 'cultural totalities', *meta*-narratives that Foucault (2002a, p.17), rejects. Instead Foucault argues for 'rigorous but unreflected relations'. (2002a, p.15). Wall's series (and the fire-walking list) may be read through something other than a narrative gaze: through a comparative processing of situations and relations that requires, and in turn affords, a more profound understanding of the temporality of the event. This is surely Marker's approach.

Foucault (2002a, p.3) describes research methodologies in history where 'linear successions' give way to 'discoveries in depth.' He argues that with these new methods, new questions about seriality must be asked:

> What types of series should be established? What criteria of periodization should be adopted for each of them? What system of relations (hierarchy, dominance, stratification, univocal determination, circular causality) may be established between them? What series of series may be established? And in what large-

scale chronological table may distinct series of events be determined? (2002a, p.8)

His questions are important in determining how we approach and understand a series of 'archived' images, examining discrete objects, relationships and groupings. He suggests that as much attention should be given to 'events' that could be classed as unimportant, as those that are deemed important, and without employing superficial methods of narrativisation, of cause and effect (2002a, pp.8-9). Advancement of a kind clearly materialises through the Harry Price descriptions, through Wall's series of photographs and in *La Jetée*: one can perceive a temporal shift; a back and forth, 'ebb and flow' progression of the kind that is encountered in the *News24* project and discussed in chapter two. Foucault does not deny advancement; he offers archaeology as a research model that does not assume progression as an absolute, but does not reject it either. He states (his italics):

> Archaeology, then, takes as its model neither a purely logical schema of simultaneities; nor a linear succession of events; but it tries to show the intersection between necessarily successive relations and others that are not so. It does not believe, therefore, that a system of positivity is a synchronic figure that one can perceive only by suspending the whole of the diachronic process. Far from being indifferent to succession, archaeology maps the *temporal vectors of deviation*. (2002a, p.186)

Considering these arguments, it would seem sensible to approach archival research as an archaeologist: excavating, considering discrete objects sometimes as 'temporally neutral', sometimes as implying 'a particular temporal direction' (*ibid.*). This research method fits with the archival system of diachronic or developmental order, where objects build up and are preserved in layers over time, through collection and use. Photographs themselves can be perceived as Foucault's archaeological 'objects without context', units that must be seen in relation to each other in order to form 'totalities' (2002a, p.8).

As we have seen, archival image description naturally emphasises the synchronic nature of the photograph; it is the lexical equivalent of a photographic capture, as it simply deals with what is there. But it must at the same time be accepted that the

description, like the image itself, is a participatory object, and that this participation is something that the description writer cannot deny the reader. Victor Burgin uses the idea of audience participation to take his strongly representational practice into a desired cultural and political framework. Throughout his career, he has worked across a variety of forms of visual representation, and with a strong linguistic presence to stimulate such participation. In his recent work *Mirror Lake* (2013) (Figure 44), he uses language in a typically restrained and carefully constructed way, alluding to notions that lie outside of image time. The visual content-based description, which does not offer anything external to the image, might not point the reader in a particular direction, but paradoxically this neutral text might afford more scope for completion than does Burgin's. One might use Flusser's 'imagination' or Newman's 'fabulation' to project temporalities, cultural, political or otherwise. These projections can only be properly tested by visiting the object in its native environment: its place in the list.

2   The narrative pause: *El Rastro de Madrid*

Following on from the *News24* project, and emerging from thinking around the temporal nature of the photographic image (articulated above), there emerged a practical need to investigate further the idea of moving image 'interrupted'; a technical 'narrative pause'. This was not in order to explore the moving image in terms of film studies critique, but to further define the still image as an object that is intrinsically de-contextualised in temporal terms, an object state that is upheld through visual content-based description. This is how the piece *El Rastro* (2014) (Figures 45-47) was conceived.

The notion of still versus moving image has been well documented in film studies discourse and continues to be explored through a variety of art and cultural practices. Streitberger and van Gelder (2010, p.48) see the boundaries between photograph and film as blurring in the context of digital technologies. Digital technologies undoubtedly afford easy practical investigation of these boundaries; however, as Kittler points out (1999 [1986], p.119), the boundaries have long been blurred: 'Since Muybridge's experimental arrangement, all film sequences have been scans,

he appears to be pointing to himself whilst looking at the camera

they are connected at the hands

multiple hexagonal lens flares against a dark shirt

Figures 45-47: Jane Birkin *El Rastro* (2014) stills

excerpts, selections.' Streitberger and van Gelder perceive film studies as being concerned with the role of the still image inside film, and ask: 'how do filmic techniques based on photographic materials or photographic techniques, such as the freeze frame, affect the perception of a film?' (2010, p.49). In his essay 'The Film Stilled' (1990), Raymond Bellour references *The Machine for Killing Bad People* (Rossellini, 1948) and describes how in this film the director repeatedly uses the photograph (thereby rephotographing the photograph) as a device to 'reproduce the effect of the freeze-frame' (1990, p.107). Bellour's discussion centres on how the use of the photograph affects the film and the plot, not on the effect on the photograph itself. Laura Mulvey (2006, p.67) perceives the photograph only as a pointer to the invention of film, when she states that '[s]tillness may evoke a 'before' for the moving image as filmstrip, as reference back to photography or to its own original moment of registration.' Newman, however, considers the film / still relationship from the opposite side, and in a way that is important to the aims of this project: he describes how the invention of moving image changed our view of the still image in a radical way. He argues: 'If before cinema photographs were one among many "static" images, once the moving image became a possibility, and was widely experienced, the "still" photograph became an "arrested' or "stopped" image.' (2007, pp.70-72).

For this project I did not want to work with an already interrupted and temporally re-arranged form such the news broadcast. In order to explore the 'narrative pause', the synchrony of the still image (and its description), I needed to use moving footage with a standard form of progression, a narrative that could be paused. With this in mind, I shot several short films around *El Rastro* flea market in the *barrio de Embajadores*, a working class area of central Madrid. The antiques and bric-a-brac sit beside stalls piled high with cheap second hand clothes, and the films present the small events that take place around these clothes stalls. Interestingly, the English translation of *el rastro* is 'the trail', perhaps a narrative form in itself, or even a mapping device that is more to do with indexing and calculation, the 'mathematicotechnical notions of time' that Parikka (2013, p.15) mentions in relation to Ernst's thinking.

The eight films were shot from a static viewpoint in each case; the action flowed in front of the camera and images materialised from these unremarkable events. The films were not edited or cut; they run in real time, and the 'cutting', the 'interruption', the 'pause', comes with the intervention of a series of subtitles, short texts describing

aspects of visual content within selected frames. The still image offers up a synchronic situation without a visible 'before and after'; here in *El Rastro*, the 'before and after' (both could perhaps be perceived as Newman's 'afterlife') are evident. The object of description is neither technically nor physically withheld this time, but the described frame is often obscured as the action flows around, over and through it. The music used for these films (*Música Clásica Española: Zarzuelas, Vals, Chotis y Mazurcas*) was heard and purchased at *El Rastro*. The pace of these classical Spanish dancing tracks works in conjunction with the moving image footage and creates further conflict with the static descriptions.

According to D.P. Fowler (1991, p.25), '[s]et-piece description is regularly seen by narratologists as the paradigm example of narrative pause, in the semi-technical sense of a passage at the level of narration to which nothing corresponds at the level of the story.' The units of description that traverse the films in *El Rastro* conform to Fowler's definition, as they do not correspond in story-telling terms to the narratives that are playing out around the stalls, or to the wider context of the Spanish economic situation which is clearly on view. Instead, they locate discrete situations, disrupting the narrative, forming Foucault's archaeological 'discontinuities, ruptures, gaps, entirely new forms of positivity' (2002a, p.187). When presented as a list, as the ten descriptions from film *0025* are here, they do not narrativise:

> *A glove in one hand, holding the other*
> *"CUBO DE CERVEZA + RACIÓN 5€"*
> *parallel poles*
> *a T-shirt with some upside down letters in a typewriter font*
> *two gloved hands and one bare hand visible*
> *his back caught in the sunlight*
> *in the distance stands a man, arms by his side, a cigarette in his left hand*
> *side by side, backs to the camera, almost filling the frame*
> *multiple hexagonal lens flares against a dark shirt*
> *we can make out two figures inside the bar*

There is no attempt to integrate these descriptions into a common narrative. As Fowler argues, 'the more radical move is to free description from the chains of slavery and to give it true autonomy.' (1991, pp.26-27). He cites Robbe-Grillet as a proponent of this approach, who states 'instead of this universe of "significations"

(psychological, social, functional), one must try to construct a world more solid, more *immediate*' (his italics, quoted in Halsall: 1988, p.27).

The *El Rastro* descriptions are transmutations between the language of archival description that I have used in previous pieces, and the more intimate visual content description used by Allan Sekula in his *Meditations on a Triptych* text (which has been discussed at length in chapter three). These descriptions are short and somewhat disjointed, sitting well with the notion of stills snatched from films. At times they play with notions of prior knowledge: the phrase 'he looks a little like Peter O'Toole' sits on the edge of archival convention. Some descriptions take Sekula's lead directly: for example, Sekula writes (1984, p.169), 'The woman is wearing a red dress. Her mouth is painted with the same red'; I write (film *0043*),' she is wearing a green shirt and her nails are painted the same green'. Similar compositional observations are made in both: in Sekula (1984, p.173), 'the middle of the image is traversed horizontally by a line of white lilies and a line of white bonnets.' In my text (film *0028*), 'the middle of the image is traversed horizontally by the pile of clothes'. I write in *0043*, 'floral patterns, overlapping but not touching', a contracted version of Sekula's text: 'Although no space is visible between the blue right border of the man and the red left border of the woman, it is likely their bodies are not touching.' (1984, p.168), Like Sekula, I make reference to the camera frequently. These similarities of description are not superficial appropriations of Sekula's words and phrases; they are an appropriation of his way of seeing and recording visual content.

The grammatical structures that are common to *Meditations on a Triptych* and *El Rastro* are worth noting in brief. Wollen (1989, n.p.), discusses notions of 'tense' and 'aspect' in relation to descriptions of photographs (through captioning) and explains:

> while 'tense' locates an event in time in relation to the present moment of speech, 'aspect' represents its internal temporal structure. Thus, some verbs like 'know' are 'stative' — they represent 'states', whereas others, like 'run' represent dynamic situations that involve change over time — so we can say 'he was running', but not 'he was knowing'.

He explains how '[e]vents themselves can be broken down between durative and punctual events.' (*ibid.*). Captions generally need to tell a story, or at least comply

with one, but in the case of description of visual content, every object, every action, is punctual. Internal temporal structure, 'aspect', on the whole cannot be described through visual content alone. The present continuous tense is mostly used in visual content description: that is, the present tense of the verb 'to be', followed by the active participle of the verb (the suffix 'ing'): in Sekula's text '[t]he woman is standing with two small girls' (2004, p.173), and in *El Rastro 0028* I write 'she is wearing an oversized watch and carrying bulging bags'. This usage notes a captured action that has not yet finished. We are in the middle of it; it is a temporary state of affairs. If I were to say 'she *wears*', rather than 'she *is wearing* an oversized watch', this would imply a permanent state, one that could not be corroborated by a still image. When I say in *0021*, 'the seated woman is licking her lips', I am describing a still frame; 'the seated woman licks her lips', would be the normal language form for a commentary on the moving image. Take this example from Fiona Banner's, *The Nam* (1997) (http://www.fionabanner.com/vanitypress/thenamhb/ [accessed 26-10-14]), a descriptive compilation of six popular Vietnam films: 'a heavy looking grey copter moves across the sky in front of the trees. It moves slowly but is gone quickly. Some yellow dust floats up in the wind and follows behind it, then fades back into the green.' (1997, n.p.). Through my use of the present continuous tense in *El Rastro*, I disengage from the action of the films. Similarly, in the Harry Price descriptions, we see protagonists washing; praying; examining; taking; raking; standing; and walking. The only deviation from this comes in the very last phrase of the section of the Price list reproduced above, '(He was unburnt)'. This is contextual information, not visual content description. It is bracketed as an aside, as are the Sekula fragments that I use in the *Meditations 3* animation that deals with context (see chapter three for more detailed explanation).

The *El Rastro* piece can be shown in two ways, depending on the availability of space and media equipment. Firstly, in a simple single screen set-up, it can be shown as a continuous loop of eight films. The preferred set-up though is more complex and more demanding of space and equipment: a configuration of eight TV screens, each showing a different *El Rastro* film (looped and each a different length, so there are endless iterations of sound and image) (Figure 48). Viewers can wander inside the piece, following a trail of their own around the eight market stalls and confronting randomised snatches of visual content. The two ways of showing this piece affect the position of the sound dramatically: the simplicity of the first version allows for the

Figures 48: Jane Birkin *El Rastro* (2014) installation 2015

music to be clearly heard in accord with the visuals and this has its advantages in terms of continuity; shown the second way, there is a dissonance and a disorder of sound (perhaps a rendition of 'The Noise of the Marketplace' (Burgin: 2004, p.7)), with volume rising and falling in endless variations of real time as one enters and departs a particular space.

3   Keeping time

In *Dissemination*, Derrida makes a firm connection between white space and silence as he reproduces Mallarmé's notes towards his project *Le Livre (The Book),* here with original layout of type (1981b, p.230):

The intellectual armature of the
poem, conceals itself and—takes place—holds in the space that
                                        isolates the stanzas and
among the blankness of the white paper; a significant silence that it
Is no less lovely to compose than
verse

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Mallarmé's experimental typographic work, such as *Un Coup de Dés*, which has already been discussed and illustrated in chapter three, invites non-linear and atemporal readings: it can be read in different orders and directions: across and down the page, across the fold of the page, skipping from word to word. Consequently, the blank space in Mallarmé's work may represent time physically (in terms of breaks between words and phrases, time for thinking and breathing, and the time of eye movement across the page); and theoretically (through its intrinsic temporal chaos); but it does not lock down the reading and the spaces (the blanks) of time.

Conversely, in my piece *Meditations 4: Lecture-Performance* (2014) (Figure 49), a precise spatial to temporal shift takes place, as the white blanks in the *Meditations* animations are directly transformed into spaces of silent time. This lecture-performance consists of a reading (some 25 minutes long) of the whole of Sekula's

Figure 49: Jane Birkin *Meditations 4: Lecture-Performance* (2014) (movie still)

Meditations on a Triptych text; but it is only the isolated fragments of text that have already been identified in my *Meditations 1* and *2* pieces that are read out loud (the visual content description and the parts that relate one image to another, or others), the rest is read silently. This tightly timed reading aloud precludes the non-linear reading that is possible in *Coup de Dés* and even the *Meditations* animations (although these animations are of course specific in terms of time spent with the text, and the viewer is aware of the position of the fragments within the complete text). The *Meditations 4* reading is accompanied by a changing slide show that identifies the image, or set of images, from Sekula's *Meditations* triptych that are being referenced in the reading out. The silences in the *Meditations* lecture-performance are varying in duration and often lengthy; once again my work tests the viewer-listener's tolerance. All of my description-based pieces are controlling of time, as a set time is allocated for descriptions to be read. However, the use of live performance in a lecture theatre

Figure 50: Jane Birkin *Meditations 4: Lecture-Performance* (2014) score
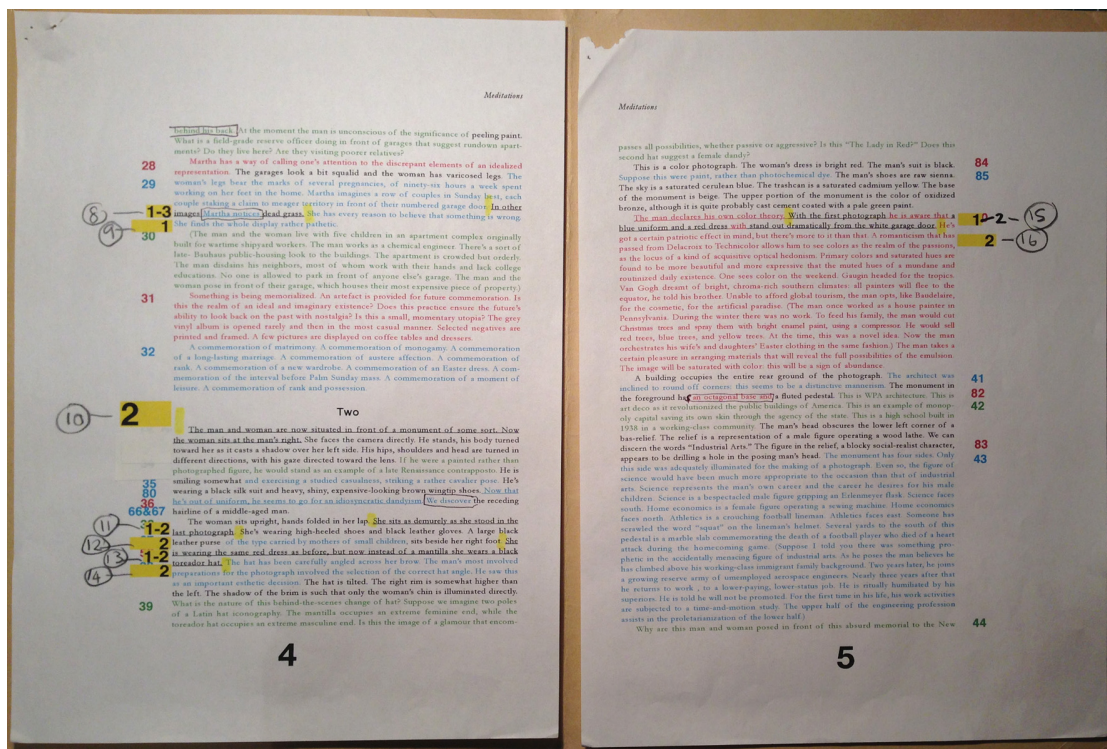
setting is very different to presenting a looped video on a screen in a gallery, where the viewer is free to come and go. The temporal control that comes out of the timing of the lecture-performance is reliant on the text, which is carefully notated using colours and number sequences (Figure 50). Thus the text (which of course does not contain blanks in the version that I read from) becomes an index that is equivalent to a musical score, where time must be kept, even if the instrument is silent. This is known more formally as *werktreue*, which G. Douglas Barrett describes succinctly as, 'the issue of "faithfulness" or adherence to an original musical score.' (2013, n.p.). Barrett is writing in the context of a new performance of John Cage's silent piece, 4'33" (first performed in 1952), and some connections must be made here to Cage. Douglas Kahn (1997, pp.557-8) observes:

> Silence has served as Cage's emblem. […] Organizationally, silence offsets musical sound within duration and thereby establishes the basis by which rhythm and structure could accept all sounds by being privileged over harmony, pitch, and timbre, which he considered to be outside duration.

For Cage, it is the *duration* that takes on importance, not the silence; in any case Cagean silence is not without sound. It is without intentional sound, and this unintentional sound can be extended to take in even loud sounds (Kahn: 1997, p.558). It is the durational aspect of 4*'33"* that has the most important connection with *Meditations 4*; the silence is a secondary commonality.

The performance of *4'33"* that Barrett critiques is titled *SILENT/LISTEN,* performed by art activists collaboration 'Ultra-red', repeated at different venues through 2005 and 2006. He argues that in one way Ultra-red adhere to Cage's original score: they conform to the concept of *werktreue* because the piece does indeed contain four minutes and thirty three seconds of silence. However, they place Cage's composition as a period of meditation for AIDS activists, and follow the performance with audience discussion. This positioning of the piece is outside of the score and is incidentally a political appropriation of *4'33"* that Cage may not necessarily have approved of, although he was open to interpretation of his work and even to deviations within his scores. Barrett argues that Ultra-red's piece necessitates 'a cross-disciplinary engagement between music and visual culture' (2013, n.p.).

Of course Cage's practice engages with visual culture at every turn, not only with his use of alternative text forms (Figure 51), his experimental ways of presenting scores and his highly visual performance pieces, but also in his original performance of *4'33"*, which began and ended with the highly visible act of opening and closing the piano lid. The visuals in *Meditations 4* comprise not only the images on the screen, but the act of reading, made visible by my head and eye movement and by the turning of pages. These are time-based signalling devices comparable to the opening and closing of the piano lid in *4'33"*. Ultra-red themselves employ archival methodologies in their performance and ensuing discussion, with record-keeping and minute-taking playing an important part in their various performances of *SILENT/LISTEN* (Barrett, 2013, n.p.). Barrett concludes that although Cage's *4'33"* is itself based on record-keeping, it is *more* than an archival piece, stating that it is 'apparently closer to the "ephemeral quality of performance art".' (*ibid.*).

Charlie Gere (2008, p.84) argues that it was a familiarity with Robert Rauschenberg and his white paintings that acted as Cage's inspiration for *4'33"*; a spatial to a temporal transition, white space to silence. Referencing David Revill (1992, pp.165-6), Gere continues, 'Cage realized that far from being empty, they [the white paintings] act as environmental surfaces, or fields of focus on which dust or shadows may settle.' Similarly, Derrida (1981b, p.253) speaks of 'the blankness that allows for the mark in this first place, guaranteeing its space of reception and production.' The blank space of time is the space of interactivity; interactivity *requires* time and *Meditations 4* provides an opportunity for unrestricted use of allotted time. In this way, and in common with *4'33"*, the *Meditations* piece affords a certain sense of freedom, whilst simultaneously imposing on the audience a strict temporal captivity. Burgin (2004, pp.109-110), in relation to the consumption of audio-visual media, discusses Bernard Stiegler's concept of the synchronisation and subsequent de-personalisation of mass media (Stiegler, 2003, p.53; and 2004, p.51), as we all watch the same thing at the same time, perhaps a less common occurrence now than it was even in 2004. Burgin disagrees with Stiegler's approach arguing 'whatever the audio-visual machine produces is destined to be broken up by associative processes that are only minimally conscious […] Consciousness may be synchronised in a shared moment of viewing, but the film *we* saw is never the film *I* remember.' (Burgin: 2004, p.110, his italics). The *Meditations 4* audience, whilst experiencing this freedom and captivity, silence and disruption, semi-conscious thought and synchronicity, might also easily

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move between Derrida's two different modes of 'reception and production' (1981b, p.253), and thus this becomes a very complex audio-visual experience.

Although *4'33"* could be classed as a visual piece, it is undeniably a minimal one. In *Meditations 4: a lecture performance*, as well as the temporal indicators of the live performance itself (the above-mentioned visible act of reading), there are important images to view throughout the silences. These are the 'environmental surfaces', the 'fields of focus' that Gere speaks of. They are surfaces that the viewer can populate with their own speculation, contemplation, *meditation*, within the very the same duration that Sekula fills with his (now silent) text. Sekula's 'calling back' to the image through the deployment of the narrative pause (here, a pause in the silence), takes the form of frequent snatches of visual content description (a device discussed and exemplified in chapter 3). The 'call back' is stronger here than in the slow, soft animations of the text: here, the audience members are brought back from their contemplative explorations with a jolt, an interruption as synchronic as the photograph itself, as the silence is broken and they are forced to consider the physical presence of the image its visual content. In the *El Rastro* films, short bursts of description also distract the viewer, but in that case it is distraction from the visible and tangible narrative sequences, not the speculative ones here.

Meditations 4 is a performance piece, and I fully accept that the audience might experience Barrett's 'ephemeral quality of performance art', but this is something that I can never be party to, because I an unable to observe it from the standpoint of the audience. I am reading throughout and following the complex score: these indexical preoccupations put me on the outside. I am similarly unaware of any Cagean unintentional sound (Gere: 2008, p.86). Disregarding the ephemeral quality of the performance (and the somewhat ephemeral ideas about speculation, contemplation, and meditation) the image sequences in *Meditations 4* can be viewed, as argued in the first section of this chapter, with something other than a narrative gaze: by a relational viewing of the repeated images and sets of images. The lines of text that are taken from *Meditations 2* motivate this second type of viewing, as they place the images in tightly described relationships with each other, using phrases such as, 'Now the woman sits at the man's right' (Sekula: 1984, p.171), 'she sits as demurely as she stood in the last photograph' (Sekula: 1984, p.171), 'She is wearing the same dress as she did before' (Sekula: 1984, p.171), and 'the artist is no longer standing

within the frame' (Sekula: 1884, p.173). These are straightforward observations, but they happen frequently, and each time with a showing of the two or three images in question. This juxtaposition, the back and forth movement and constant repetition of the same one, two or three images, each time overlaid with different spoken text, may initiate a way of thinking that steers away from the formation of a narrative, in favour of an ever changing, but measurable, visual connection between images. Once this way of thinking is established, it may even produce more complex thoughts about image relations. As Foucault (2002a, p.32) suggests in relation to the analysis of items within series, this should not be through 'secret discourse' but through 'their co-existence, their succession, their mutual functioning, their reciprocal determination, and their independent or correlative transformation.'

The time-keeping methodology of the lecture-performance is applied again in my piece *Fire-walking* (2014). This is a straightforward reading (aloud) of the Harry Price fire-walking list (*HPG/1/8/3, Ahmed Hussein: First Test, 1937*), part of which is reproduced in section one of this chapter. The full catalogue list consists of thirty-six photographs and takes around five minutes to read. This list has already been discussed at length for its filmic qualities, and in terms of narrativity and seriality, and of shallow time in the archive; the *Fire-walking* lecture-performance is designed to bring to light these same concerns. The reasons for taking this list into a lecture-performance rest on considerations of how the list is consumed. As already discussed in chapter one, a list orders and preserves the diachronic nature of the archive and it is the visible and indexical evidence of methods of collection and use. However, even though a list orders and keeps order, its non-syntactical character means that it can be read in any order. Jack Goody, in *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, states: 'The list relies on discontinuity, not continuity; it depends on physical placement, on location: it can be read in different directions, both sideways and downwards, up and down' (1977, p.81). In other words, it is subject to the same critical decision-making process by the reader as are other non-narrative texts, such as Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés*, where one can skip between elements in a non-linear and somewhat chaotic fashion. The act of reading out is a form of text management, as it removes the list from its physical placement on the page and upholds its ordering and time-indexing properties. It presents the objects (descriptions / photographs) in their place in the archive and thus allows the transition from discrete situations to whole event.

The paper to temporal relationships established through *Meditations 4: a lecture performance* and *Fire-walking*, are profoundly tied to the paper to spatial relationships between the physical space of the archive and the catalogue list that is discussed in chapter one of this thesis. The list is key to ordering and understanding the archive; blank spaces (lacunae) are frequent in the archive, whether the blank spaces of missing contextual information, or the blank spaces of missing objects. These critical archival dynamics are acted out in the archive by archival lists and storage systems themselves, and here by the careful transition from paper to the time-based device of the lecture-performance. As Jussi Parikka (2013, p.12) explains 'such notions [heritage, storage, freezing time] become an index to a way to understand time, rethink time as something that is at the core of the wider media-archaeological process'. This tightly indexed visual practice not only examines the notions of original and diachronic order, but the controlled stasis, the 'freezing time', that this material is forced to adopt once it is incorporated into the archive.

Coda

I came to this study as a practitioner, and as a reader and an avid note-maker. In those somewhat limited terms, I was already incorporating theoretical content into my practice. In the course of this research project, I have discovered that more formal writing is a practice in itself, one that is adept at pulling ideas together, at making connections and allusions, at posing questions, and at *attempting* to answer. It is also a medium with stylistic characteristics, and one that is capable of embodying aesthetic qualities. In this way, it operates in a very similar way to visual practice, and of course it *is* a visual practice in itself. Consequently, writing will continue to be an important part of my working process. It is also a constituent of my own art practice and I can even envisage a crossover of the two types of writing in the future. This crossover might not be seen as acceptable under the terms of PhD submission, although the dry writing style of the thesis, consistent with notions of archive and institutional labour, perhaps constitutes a small nod towards this possible amalgamation of forms.

If proof of the success of the rigorous approach demanded by PhD study is needed, it lies in final piece of work within the boundaries of this project, the lecture-performance piece that is the reading of an existing archive list (from the Harry Price Archives, Senate House Library). This piece of creative practice (or perhaps 'uncreative', depending on how one looks at it) is simplicity embodied; it is *so* simple that one might wonder why it took so long to arrive at. But it would not have materialised, I would have not given myself authority to carry it out, without the support of the body of work, both practice and theory, that came before it.

The restricted writing technique of visual content description was adopted as a methodological construct early on in the research, and it has successfully functioned within the project's aims, allowing for a novel 'reading and writing' of the image. The use of this particular descriptive model locates the content of the image, reducing it to a position where we are firmly looking *at* it, not *through* it; most significantly, it anchors the image to the moment of capture and so identifies the photograph as a discrete and synchronic object and as a 'narrative pause'; it demonstrates the temporal, but non-chronological and non-narrative power of the description within the list. It is a vehicle for examination of the photographic image in a post-

representational way: not as artwork, or in terms of the autonomy of the single photograph; not to do with the 'language' of photography; not to do with authorship or intention. I realise that I have been compelled to take a representational stance of sorts; after all, I am dealing with the relationship between one representation of visual content and another. However, the discussion that is provoked by the use of the visual content-based description takes place around tangible content and the physical relationships between content. It is placed outside of the system of signs that is usually considered in discussions of photographic representation and placed with the revealing organisational system of the archive, so becoming what Siegert terms '[p]ost-hermeneutical, rather than anti-hermeneutical in its outlook'. (2013, p.48). In common with the texts of conceptual writers and artists examined in this thesis, this specific technique of 'writing' the image is readily distinguishable from hermeneutical analysis: as in the archive, it is a form of information management and so does not attempt to assign meanings. It precludes interpretation of the single image, in order, in line with Foucault's methodology in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, to 'close this openness […] as if it had not come about in particular circumstances, as if it were not imbued with representations, as if it were addressed to no one.' (2002a, p.220). Engagement with conceptual writers and with theorists such as Siegert, and of course Foucault, who admits to having 'no great liking for interpretation' (2002a, p.22), will allow this approach to be confidently taken forward in future work.

Although practical projects were for a variety of reasons often left 'on the table' and picked up later, and there was at times a crossover between projects, this thesis contains a definite linearity in terms of knowledge advancement. In chapter four, I conclude that the participatory nature of the image is time-based, and may be tested, in the case of the 'archived' image, by its relationship with its neighbours. Its meaning is dependant on groupings, series and the interrelationships between objects. This final chapter on temporality, a notion that is introduced but not finalised in earlier chapters, is inevitably the one I am closest to in intellectual terms; in retrospect, this is the chapter that I find most expectant. It is predominantly through these notions of image time that the aims of the thesis are realised, as the old institutional 'writing' technique affords a temporal 'reading' of the 'archived' image. This realisation will be a platform for further writing and making around order, seriality, image relations, interdependency and temporality in the 'archived' photograph.

Questions of time and timing have become fundamental to the presentation of my practice, as it exercises control on spatiotemporal activities of moving, reading and looking. The work could be perceived as didactic and not participatory, in that it does not use touch screen technologies and so forth. However, my practice invites interaction with space, object and information. The pieces are reliant on installation techniques and involve careful positioning of elements to create a particular temporal experience inside a defined location; a tight control on reading is asserted that explores the complex orders and temporalities of the archive itself. Participation materialises as the viewer moves around the installation space, collaborating with and extending the limits of the work.

I have more recently experimented with longer 'set piece' descriptions, pushing the descriptive medium to its limits. This kind of detailed description focuses the questions around how much is given by visual content description, in terms of information (archive-approved) and terms of in terms of sensation (not archive-approved). D.P. Fowler (1991, pp.26-27) appeals for description to be freed from the chains of slavery and given true autonomy. In my research, description is *never* seen as a lesser form (as it is in narrative theory, which is what Fowler is contesting). It is *never* perceived as a poor relation of the image. One must even ask how far and in what department does description perform better than image, and to what extent is the *image* simply a descriptive form, a method of indexing in itself. After all, I have identified the photograph as a 'narrative pause', on a par with lists and annals, as well as descriptions.

This practice attempts to make space for complex and abstract thinking around text and image, whilst still maintaining the structural discourse of the archive. Working with image and description, as I do here, could be seen as working on the borders, the crossroads of the experiential, between sensational image and dry text. The description, in spite of its being a dry and evidence-based form, *can* be poetic, *can* embody the aesthetic qualities of writing that are described above in relation to the *practice* of writing, but these qualities can never be the same as those embodied in the image itself. At any rate, this thesis is not about the sensational nature of either the photographic image or the description, instead it concentrates more on the act of capture, and the autonomy of the moment of capture, in the case of both text and image forms.

I am perhaps in the unusual position of being an artist with substantial experience of working inside archives. I have drawn on this experience to make work that engages not with particular archive resources, but with procedural and material aspects of this model of information management. As Uriel Orlow (2004, p.80) observes, '[t]he freedom from pursuing specific research in the archive allows the foregrounding of other, material and conceptual aspects of the archive.' As stated in the introduction, this archive-related project is not 'doing' archival science and archive professionals may not be the expected audience. However, there may be an opportunity for the reverse flow of knowledge and 'work experience': an unpicking of the methods and thinking of this art research could be useful and constructive when taken back into the archive. This project traverses back and forth through cultural theory, language, performativity and media archaeology; a thematic that is after all as pertinent to archives as it is to art.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1997 [1974], p.xiii), states in her preface to Derrida's *On Grammatology* that 'all conclusions are genuinely provisional […] this need not be cause for gloom.' Accordingly, and with no gloom attached, this is not a true conclusion, but a brief discussion of some findings and expectations so far. It is one that may well be repositioned and rewritten in the light of future developments in my research. This is a project with roots put down before PhD study, and it will continue on (although for the purposes of this thesis it has come to a comfortable and timely 'end' point). Many questions, some of which are laid out here, have been thrown up in the course of this research, and this is a measurable success: effective visual practice should surely always ask questions, and not attempt to provide 'correct' answers. In short, the problems that I am attempting to address through my theory and practice will, with any luck, never reach a full and proper conclusion.

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