

Can We Still Consider  
The Photographic

Image  
a Material Witness?



Fig.A



Fig.C

# Can We Still Consider The Photographic

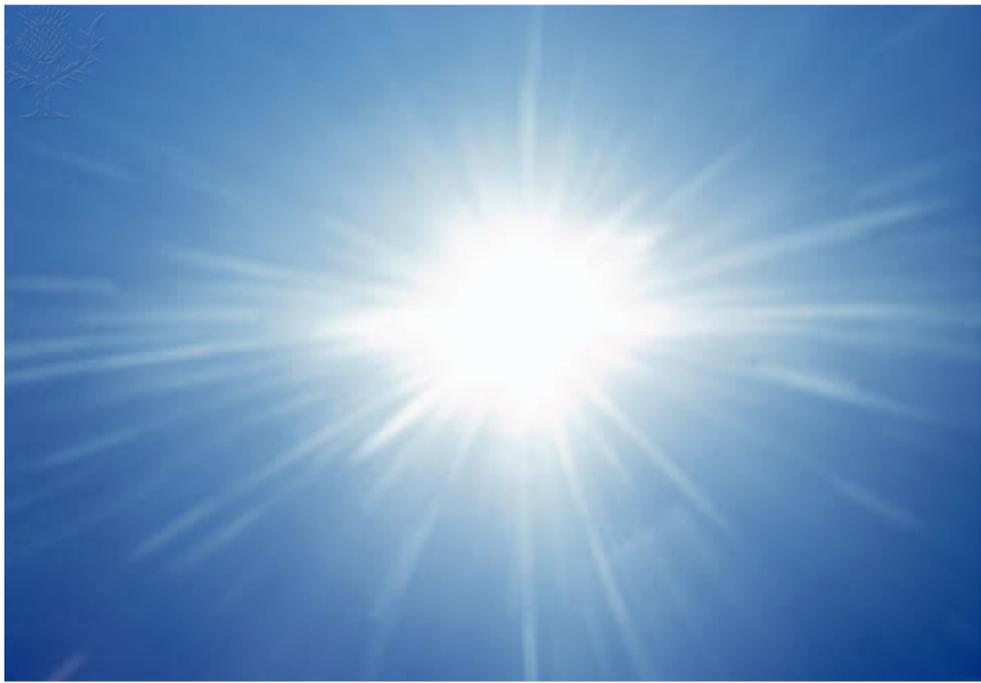


Fig.B

Image  
a Material Witness?

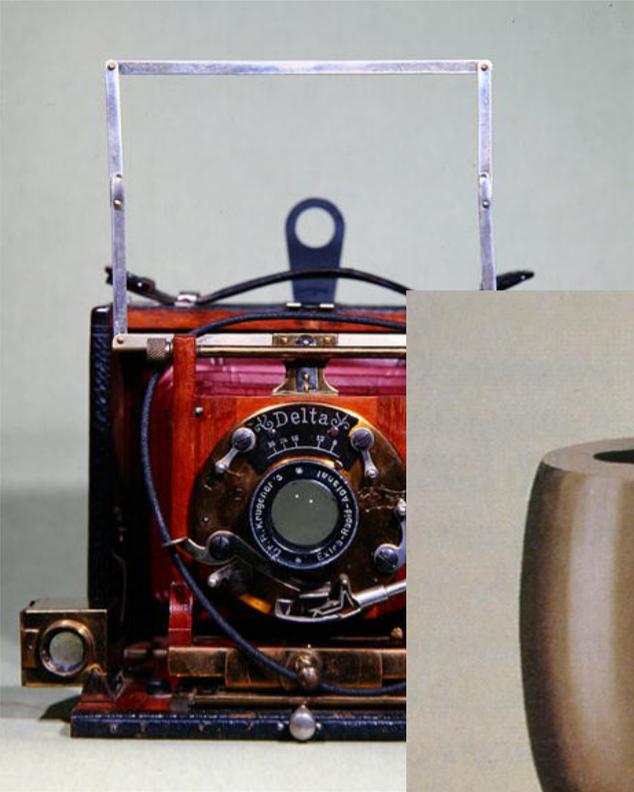


Fig.A



Fig. E



Fig.C

# Can We Still Consider The Photographic



Fig.B



Fig.D

# Image a Material Witness?

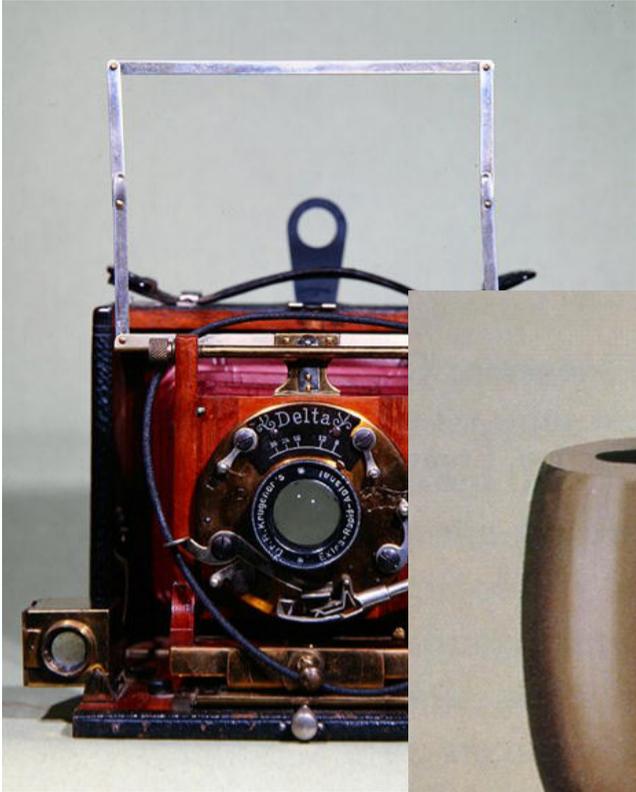


Fig.A



Fig. E



Fig.C

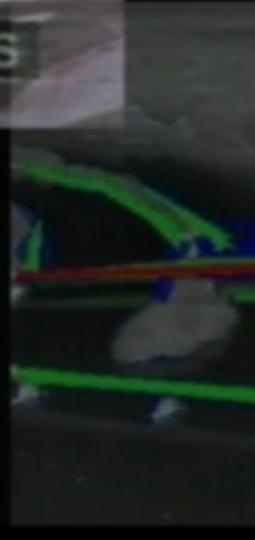


Fig.F

# Can We Still Consider The Photographic

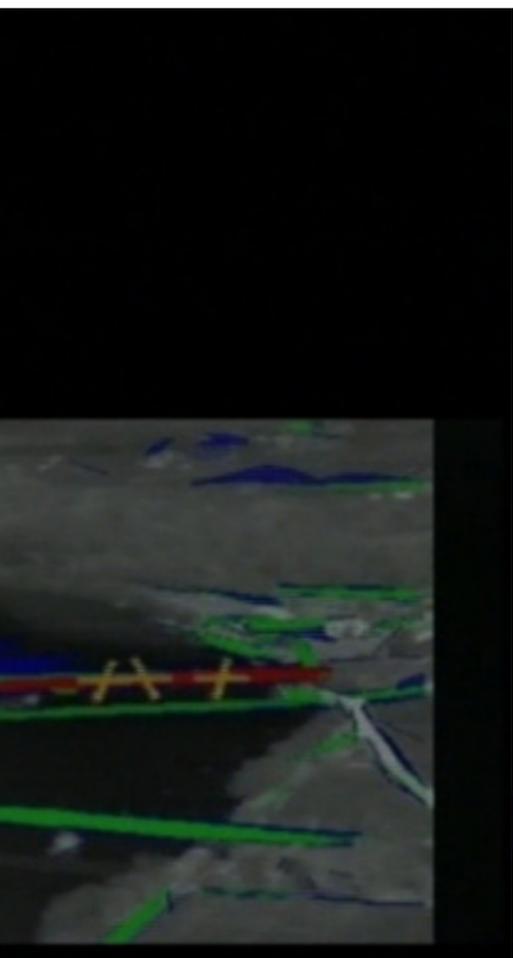


Fig.D



Fig. G

# Image a Material Witness?

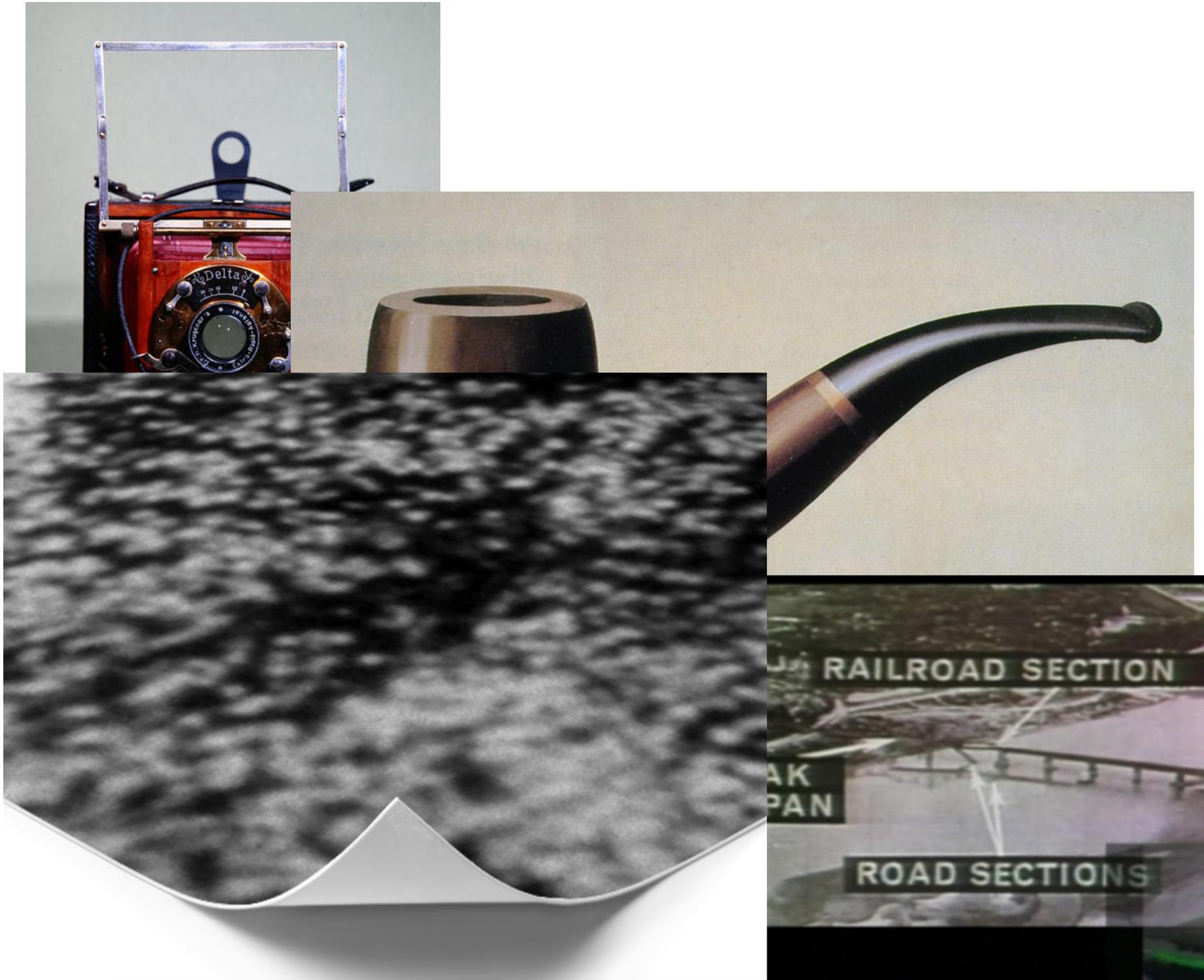


Fig.H



Fig.C



Fig.F

# Can We Still Consider The Photographic

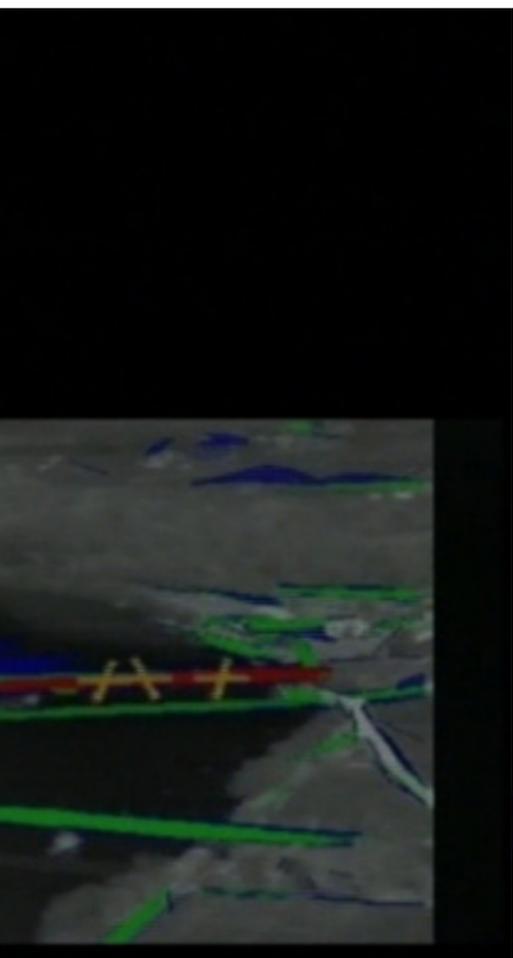


Fig.D



Fig. G

# Image a Material Witness?



Preamble

Introduction

Part 1: Can the sun lie?

Part 2: Well it doesn't  
see you

Part 3: The  
conceptualization of  
time - photography as  
right now

# preamble

# 2

Photographs are, or at least used to be present in our world as tangible, singular objects, incised to a substrate. Now, more commonly there is a presence of the photographic image among screens, mobile and immobile devices, regularly morphing and changing, with the transfer of image to device adapting the photographic image, into different sizes, aspects and quality.

Ontologically, the act of photographing something, or creating an image resembles an action, a trace of doing. “far from being a literal or mirror image of the world, the (photograph) is an endlessly deceptive form of representation. As an object (itself) it announces presence but resists definition. It’s in the end a sealed world, “a complex play of presence and absence”(Derida, J. Pg 23)

I do appreciate that while digital photography is now somewhat separated from its original analogue forms of production and dissemination, there is considerable evidence to suggest that, as a culture, we still consider the digital image within this; the previous status of analogue photography, imbuing the digital with the same indexical relationship between subject and the representation. As Geofery Batchen writes, “even if we continue to identify photography with certain archaic technologies, such as camera and film those technologies are themselves the embodiment of the idea of photography or, more accurately of a persistent economy of photographic ideas and concepts” (Zylinska, J. Pg 169).

Now the digital photographic image is seen as a physical object, almost embedded within the multiple screens that viewers may encounter images rather than previously in a printed, wholly physical form. So therefore, when I refer to ‘images’, or ‘photography’, or ‘the photographic’ I am referencing the digital iteration rather than that of the analogue, however I acknowledge that some academic writings around the analogue have still informed my discussion as there is still a prescient relationship between both modes of image production, fundamentally they will always be linked.

I think that it is also important to acknowledge the contemporary perspective and understanding of the photographic apparatus, in western culture the convergence of several modes of media has resulted in mobile phones (and other devices) dual functioning as both still and video cameras; making photography faster, and ever more assessable. Thanks to their locatability, their ease of function and generally pleasing results, smartphone photography has turned everyone into a casual photographer - with the proliferation of photo sharing platforms one can place their work next to that of a “seasoned professional” (Zylinska, J. Pg 167). When I refer to the apparatus, as in the device that creates photographs, I will principally be considering both the smartphone as equally as the more traditional camera.

I shall define the word ‘photograph’ as an image that is created and disseminated through an apparatus and through being an image, carries information on its negotiated surface(s). The Images at the beginning of this publication are mapping the flow of the argument, a visualization of the body of text.



# Introduction

Within this writing I want to consider the idea of ‘material witness’, as an operative term within the medium of photography and how it can be used as a position or contextual framework within the medium.

Ultimately questioning whether we can still consider the photographic image a material witness? Under this overarching question, through the body of text I will be exploring further questions that lie within this thematic, with a view to widen the discussion but also encompass and evaluate multiple considerations and arguments.

I am not looking to discuss this idea plainly in terms of metaphor, migrating it across semantic contexts, but rather through taking the concept quite literally I hope to arrive at a developed critical standpoint to consider my own artistic practice, the work of others and photography as a medium.

A ‘material witness’, if considered in the context of a legal proceeding, is a person who is viewed to hold information that is pertinent to the subject matter of a lawsuit or criminal prosecution, that could be deemed significant enough to affect the outcome of that proceeding. To re phrase, the ‘witness’ by means of the information they possess, is considered apposite to the legal procedure and every effort must be made to procure their testimony. It is then true that “Humans become ‘Witnesses’ when the knowledge they hold makes them semantically Material to a case.” (Schuppli, S.).

If you consider the photographic encounter as an event, with the creation of a relationship via the photographer, the apparatus and the subject; in a sense the photographic image, whether physically tangible or not, becomes material in its visual documentation, and informative inscription of that event. If we then appreciate this “interplay between singularity and universality”, in this state of photography, particularly in the creation of the photograph we may think of the photographic image as a “technically mediated “act of witnessing” (Derrida, J. pg 24).

This ‘witnessing’, within the act of the photograph, taking place as the procedure of a recording, storing and then the subsequent dissemination of technically mediated inscription; also bears witness, in that it activates the circulation of a certain cultural memory and exchange through its medium specific modes of writing, inspection and interpretation. It is this mode of technical witnessing that I want to consider through the next chapter, and what will be important to retain in mind throughout the following examples and arguments.

I will begin by exploring an early documented consideration of the photograph within a legal proceeding, in the mid 1800's in America. This introductory anecdote will introduce the idea of truth or the lack thereof, within our indexical relationships to images and the photographic. By considering the visual testimony of that which was not produced by a human, to the same level there arises this doubt in the agency of photography, and technical acts of 'witnessing', questioning the reliability of this 'impartial' producer that is unable to be verified as to their intentions.

I will then explore further examples in this disconnect of agency and truth, within the consideration of the photographic image as witness; the photographic output of the national American space agency photographs all its images of space, in black and white, then colourizing them with a selection of filters for distribution to the press, often without any description or indication that the colour present in the images, have been edited into them. Questioning ideas of perceived witnessing, these images have been captured in almost the same way as conventional photography, but through their alterations, and re presentation there is a disconnect in the perceived fact and the visual information contained within them. Therefore, presiding over a disconnect between the perceived image and the actual 'seen' reality, the images become approximated to how we think we would see the phenomena of space. This consideration will lead me to investigate the way machines do this very thing, namely via the camera phone, and through using an anecdote from Lacan I will explore the photographic encounter with this 'new' apparatus.

I will then lead on to explore the mechanic rise of 'operational images' and image making, through considering the quality of digital cameras that are part of camera phones, and the work of Harun Farocki. Suggesting further, that there is a disconnect between our perceived indexical relationship with images, the photographic and their production. This will lead to the concluding chapter where I will examine the conceptualization of time that occurs within the photographic, and question this palpable 'material' relationship that we still continue to have with photography in this age of the perceived immaterial-digital.

# Part 1: The Material Witness

'Can the sun Lie?' questioned the Albany law journal in 1866, "perhaps we may say that though the sun does not lie, the liar may use the sun as a tool" (Franke, A et al. pg 56).

If the analogue photographic image is produced by the application of light to a photographic surface, can the sun lie?... Can the inscriber of that information remain impartial – recording the information – without including a personal inflection on that information? This question arose from a transformation of the courtrooms across the United states in the late nineteenth century, due to the rising inclusion of 'sun pictures' - or 'photographs' as we now know them to be.

The arrival of this non-human apparatus of un-verifiability, was then the first occasion testimony had been considered, that was not the literal account of a human; one whose motives were for the most part, unable to be confirmed and whose actions were unable to be tried for perjury. One could understandably question the radiant nature of the sun; Could it be per-missing these traces of external events to be captured, to transcend the natural order of things and be a manipulator in this relationship, transforming stable realities into slippery 'sketches' "arriving out of the collusion of chemistry and light? "(Franke, A et al. pg56 ) Or was the sun a mere facilitator being used by man to fabricate this new photographic reality?

While photographs taken as part of crime scene documentation had previously been presented in court, in an effort via a visual aid, to procure testimony: Not to be considered as literal, material fact, but a conduit to receiving the information from the sovereign eye witness. Now photographic images were being entered into the legal process as demonstrative evidence in their own right, meaning if evidence could be purposefully constructed, after the event, then self-evident 'facts' presented as part of a case would themselves be thrown into doubt. The entire notion of the eye witness was brought to question via new modes of technically mediated witnessing, contributing to what has been referred to as an "episteme of mechanical objectivity" (Franke, A et al. pg57).



Fig 1. The Sun, Van D. butcher

The photograph as a material witness could be said to be an introduction of doubt within these already established modes of human interaction and procedure, the introduction of a third agent (the Photographic apparatus), creates an unknown, and yet physically verifiable standpoint. So, when questions posed like the Albany law journals question in 1866, “Can the sun lie?” can be read from a point of fear. A fear of the potential treachery of images (cite magrite in footnotes) , as seen by the public at the time, or even a classic fear of the unknown. With regard to the previously considered objective truth of the human witness, the visual ‘edit’ or even presentation of photography in relation to time and human testimony, which would then throw doubt to other forms of ‘corruptible’ witnessing.

You may think of the apparatus as a neutral agent of documentation, but is the apparatus as impartial as it may appear? When considering this verifiability, in the cases of both human and non-human modes of (visual) information production, It is important to consider whether it could be possible that the agent of inscription of that information can remain impartial – recording, and then relaying the information without adding a personal inflection. I will return to this topic throughout the following text, this is central to the consideration of the material presence of photography, and the potentially problematic consideration of photography as a material witness. In the following section, I will explore further this idea of agency and corruptibility within the photographic image through using NASA’s space photography as an example. In the NASA imagery, there is a prevalent but undisclosed manipulation of ‘true’, images by human agents. A repackaging the way of seeing, approximated the captured image into one that we as humans can understand



Fig 2. The treachery of images,  
1928, Rene Magritte, 63.5 cm  
× 93.98 cm

# “I’ve Made Images For Aliens”

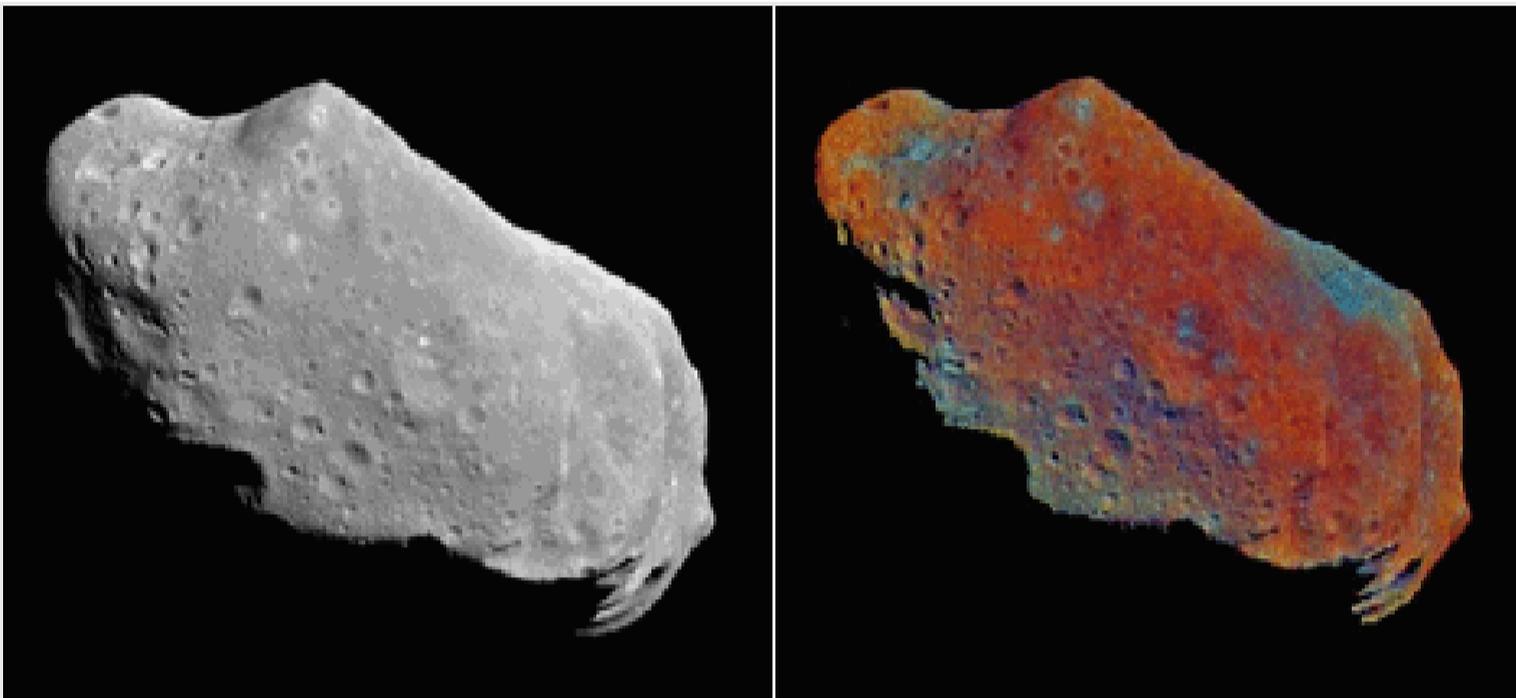


Fig 3. Two images of the asteroid 'Ida', to the left is the original photographic image, on the right is the 'False colour' version.

This image as we see it (see fig.3), is not real. Not 'fake', as in it was fabricated in some way to trick or masquerade as a true representation, but filled in and painted with colours other than the ones that were collected by the sensors of the camera, omitting certain details of information and emphasizing others. These are the official space photographs from the National American Space Association's press photography archive, these photos have been distributed widely across different media outlets, but they are false, or in another sense they are images made to look false, so that they are more real to us.

There is an inherent duplicity here, just as there is with the case of the Albany law journal. we acknowledge the claim of the image as fact because, although we are here considering a subject that very few people have physically encountered, one believes we know or have experienced space through these images. When the viewer receives these images as given fact, from their sheer presence and existence alone, who is to blame? There is an innate tendency to believe photographic images, (which I will cover in a later chapter), as what is seen in the material form of the photograph seems palpably real as one relates it back to all other material encounters.

An author, creating work to a similar effect, who is more overt with the admission that these are doctored photographs, is the German Photographer Thomas Ruff. As part of his 'stellar landscapes' series (see fig.4, 5 and 6), Ruff made additions of his own chosen colours to the raw HiRISE (high resolution imaging science equipment) images – sometimes conforming to what was known of the Martian landscape, “sometimes according to his own whim” (Fahr Campbell, E.).

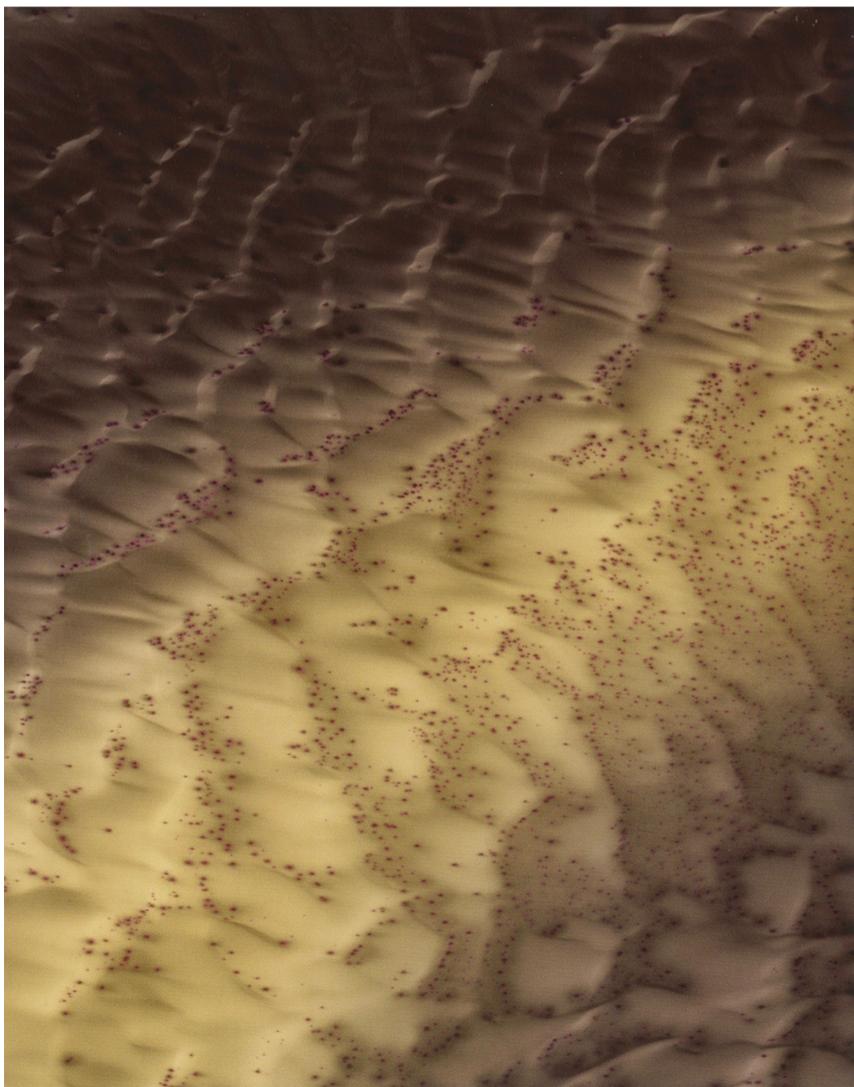


Fig 4. Ma.r.s 20, 2010  
Thomas Ruff  
255 Cm x 185 Cm  
(framed)

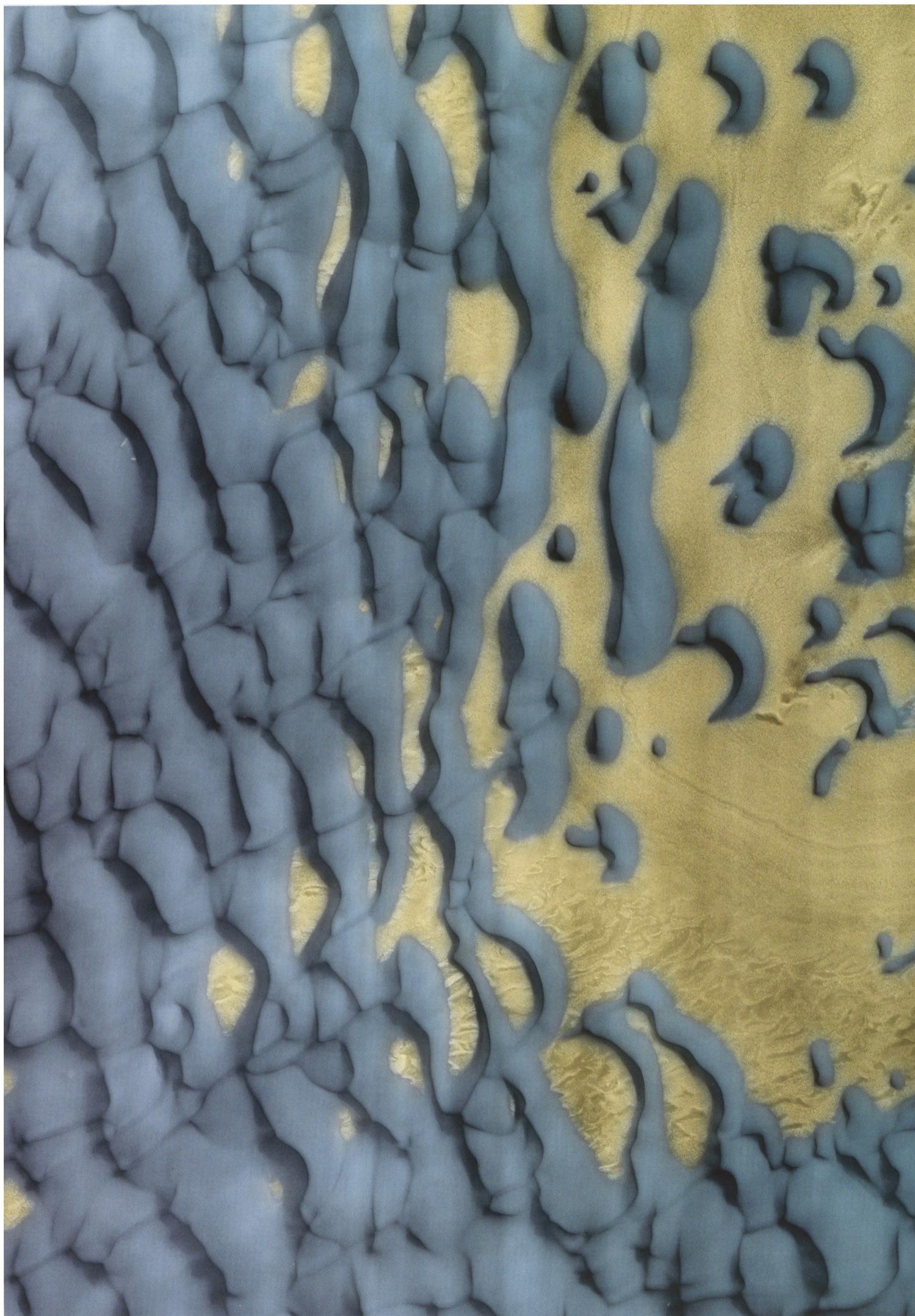


Fig 5. Ma.r.s 15, 2011  
Thomas Ruff  
255 Cm x 185 Cm  
(framed)



Fig 6. Ma.r.s 23, 2011  
Thomas Ruff  
255 Cm x 185 Cm  
(framed)

“There are no green sands on Mars,”(Fahr Campbell, E.) He admits in an online interview, while then going on to explain that the features in many of the photographs of this series aren’t what we would see even if we viewed them with our own eyes. The photographic apparatus can take us only so far, these are interpretations of a view that exists, but not as we would know it. Ruff concludes that “But aliens could have completely different access to the electromagnetic spectrum,” he says. “So perhaps I’ve also made images for aliens.”(Fahr Campbell, E.). Within the scientific community these photographs are known under the term of ‘false colour images’. The term “false colour” describes the doctoring of the photograph, from astronomers, scientists or others, that makes the photograph more comprehensible to human viewers.

As Radio-graphic astronomers began to generate images of sources, they initially discovered that the images being captured were formed of “Various shades of grey – ranging from pure black to pure white” (Whitlock, L.), the strength of the shade then represented the intensity of a radio emission. These photographs were then converted to colour by assigning colours to differing intensities of emissions, red to the most intense, blue to the least intense and for the intermediary positions, were assigned to different levels of radio intensity. Where there was no emission recorded, black was assigned.

The colouring of the image then allows astronomers to assess the images more quickly. If we consider colour as a phenomenon that is visible to humans, the electromagnetic radiation in space does not have ‘real’ colour to the human, except for the radiation that has a wavelength of between 400 and 700 nm all other radiation is not visible to the human eye. Which means, the colour picked up by the apparatus is fictional, to us.

The first image of this section is of the asteroid Ida, taken by NASA’s Galileo satellite. To the right of it is the ‘false colour’ version of the same image. The accusations of falseness within the photographic have arisen then out of the inability for humans to comprehend the work of the apparatus, but through the agency of an editor, the image is made readable, understandable and ‘true’ to our understanding of how we see.

So, if we consider the photographic image as objective truth, as we know it, these images although questioning the idea of photography being considered a material witness, are literal records of space. It is the human agent within this relationship that corrupts this interpretation, and introduces doubt.

Perhaps in the consideration of this possibility of change, In the relaying of information after the fact, it is not appropriate to think of the photographic image as a material witness but rather a form of visual testimony. In the same vain as an analogue photographic process, information relayed in court is recounted, written, documented or inscribed into a material form. But just as with digital iteration of photography, through each re telling of the testimony each version will change through personal inflections, mistakes and human tendency. After this image of space was first recorded, through different representations, edits and changes of its function, it ceases to be a literal presentation of what was 'materially' there at all.

In similarity with the example of the Albany law journal, there seems to be an innate problem with the consideration of apparatuses and the images they produce. A perceived infallibility, to say that considering that this image exists, then it must be accurate, without the consideration of how the creation of both the photographic image and its creation device (the apparatus) would have been authored by another.

Throughout this next chapter, I will elaborate on this disconnect between documentation and 'fact', highlighting further the discord, doubt and high levels of agency within the photographic event. Questioning whether 'witness' is the correct term if we consider this level of corruptibility and agency within the act of the photography.

# Part 2: “Well it doesn’t see you!” 16



Fig 7. ‘How to recognise sardines’ - it’s sardine run time

In his book ‘The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis’, Lacan writes of his experience with a sardine can. (I have included a surmised quote here at length because I feel the piece benefits from its inclusion.)

“It is a true story...One day, I was on a small boat, with a few people from a family of fishermen in a small port. At that time, Brittany was not industrialized as it is now. There were no trawlers. The fishermen went out in his frail craft at his own risk. It was this risk, this danger, that I loved to share. But it wasn’t all danger and excitement, as we were waiting for the moment to pull in the nets, an individual known as Petit-Jean pointed out to me something floating on the surface of the waves. It was a small can, a sardine can. It floated there in the sun, a witness to the canning industry, which we, in fact, were supposed to supply. It glittered in the sun. And Petit-Jean said to me - You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn’t see you!”(Lacan, J. pg 95.)

“Information, is produced by dialogue” (Williams, C et al. pg110). Both in the sense of the way objects relate to one another, and in the way, one takes a photograph. If the photograph, and its relationships contained within the production and dissemination of the said photography can be considered an act of witnessing, then I want to consider further the interaction of these three parties. Namely, the photographer, apparatus, and subject. The location, and relation of these three parties is essential, as one does not function without the other.

I want to consider this anecdote from Lacan as, say a photographic encounter. Where in this three-person relationship, we might consider as Lacan and his friend, Petit Jean as both the subject and the can the apparatus, or Lacan the photographer, his friend the apparatus and the can being the subject. But first I want to consider how these digital apparatuses, do ‘see’. 83% of all mobile phones, an object widely carried daily by members of the western world, “has a camera as part of its functionality”( Harrington, R); And unlike the previously prolific analogue means of producing a photograph, with the recent proliferation of low quality cameras attached to other pieces of consumer electronics, in terms of the device alone, “not seeing anything intelligible is the new normal” (Steyerl, H. pg. 47), which in some ways draws a parallel to the previous wait between shooting and processing of film, encountered through analogue production.

To take a photograph now, information is passed through a set of signals “that cannot be picked up by the human senses”. (Steyerl, H. pg. 47) It could be said then that contemporary perception is mechanical to a large degree, if we are giving the algorithm control over the image. To ‘see’, in terms of modern image production, has resulted in the previous ‘viewfinder’- to be replaced by filtering decrypting and pattern recognition. This technology for contemporary phone cameras is quite different to the traditional DSLR or to a lesser extent the ‘point and shoot’: the lenses are very small in comparison, and of comparably poorer quality, meaning that more than half of the data captured by the sensors in these ‘cameras’ is digital noise, the challenge then becomes for the software engineers to write the algorithms to discern the photograph from within this noise.

Especially in terms of the camera as part of a smartphone, broadly, they now take in inputs from social media feeds, directly comparing between all other previously taken photographs on your device, and now can even take the input from the gyroscope and combine that input with the image sensor to provide image stabilization, all in the effort to approximate what you the photographer wants out of the image. This could be seen in the same vein as the NASA space images, creating a ‘truth’ out of ambiguous data, prefiguring the image for what the viewer wants to see.

# ‘Operational Images’

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Harun Farocki was one of the first visual artists to notice that image-making apparatus, machines and algorithms were “poised to inaugurate a new visual regime” (Paglen, T. ) Machines began to go beyond the capturing of images, to controlling things in the world, from warfare, to marketing. The physical eye witness was becoming anachronistic, as named by Farocki this was the advent of operational images.

In his Film ‘Auge/ Maschine III’ (Eye Machine III), Farocki subtly uneases the viewer, opening a window into the military industrial complex; convulsing arrows show how a robot “sees” (Paglen, T.) as it navigates the landscape, various animated extensions hover over film and still images, that are seemingly baffling to the human viewer, we do not understand this evidence. Farocki can be seen as an artist and filmmaker that turned the camera back on itself to explore the production, the often-invisible side of contemporary consumer image making. Insisting on visualising the material process of their construction and the materiality of images themselves. Revealing the tracking of a missile system, showing how a computer vision system functions, ‘Eye machine III’ is a lesson in how to see’ like a machine. By adding these lines and boxes over the captured images, the machine allegedly works to become more autonomous

In the works ‘An Image ‘and ‘Deep Play’ Farocki examined the manufacture of eyeware, in other works, for instance I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts and Ausweg/A Way, he located the act of image-making within the various apparatuses of domination and mass surveillance. Farocki’s works frequently interrogated how the routine act of seeing itself is regularly dismantled or reconstituted to the service of both capitalism and moreover militarism. “He looked around, he watched, he documented, he demystified” (Paglen, T.).

Given that over ten years has passed since Farocki made ‘Eye machine III’, we have predictably passed the moment where a majority of the photographic images in the world could be considered the successors of the operational images included in the work: namely images made by machines for reading of other machines. From “quality control systems in manufacturing to Automated License Plate Readers (ALPR) throughout cities, and from retail motion tracking systems in supermarkets and malls to automated pattern-recognition systems in military drones” (Paglen, T.). It can be said that images are directing and controlling, upon the world on a far greater scale than at the time of Eye/Machine’s production. Farocki’s at the time considered exploration of the beginning world of operational images could now be considered anachronistic.

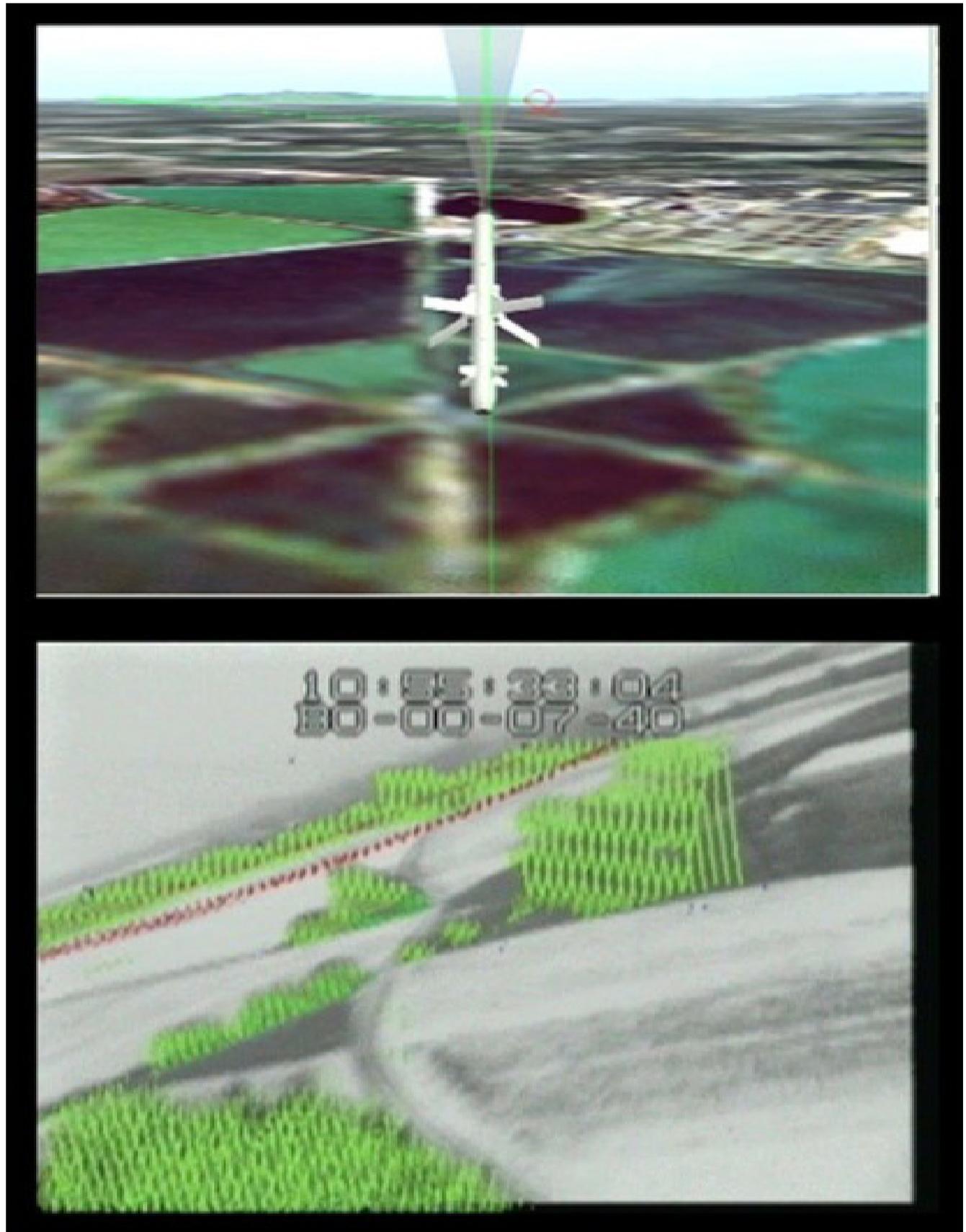


Fig 8. Two stills from  
Eye/ Machine III,  
2003, Harun Farocki

In the following chapter, I return back to the consideration of the photographic image as a material witness, to consider the current argument. Given the many stages of agency within the photographic event, combined with the present intentions of the person in possession of the photographic apparatus, and the already pre-programmed and therefore subjective presence of the software. Combined with the rise and proliferation of operational images, and apparatuses, there has been a very real change in the nature of how we use, consider and consume imagery.

Fundamentally there is a question of agency in relation to verifiability and what we may consider 'witnessing', If machines are able to capture and read images, then there needs to be a cultural re assessment of our opinions of the photographic.

Moving towards a conclusion, in the last chapter I will investigate the role of time within the photographic process and a consideration of witnessing, questioning if the photographic repackaging of 'time', is to be considered an act of witnessing.



Increasingly now, ‘operational images’ are not simply unreadable or unrecognisable to humans—they are now literally invisible. On reflection, in *Eye/ Machine*, there’s a kind of irony- it is not a film compiled of ‘operational images’ as is suggested but rather it’s a film constructed from ‘operational images’ that have specifically been programmed by machines, or apparatuses, to then be interpretable by humans.

Machines do not need overtly coloured jittery animated red and blue lines and green boxes overlaid onto video footage to perform calculations or to recognize moving bodies and actions. Those marks are for the benefit of humans—“they’re meant to show humans how this machine is seeing” (Paglen, T.) . If we consider these apparatuses of operational images, part of the discussion in terms of the medium of the photographic - we must realise that the very ontology of the photographic object has become much more multiplied, fluid, networked if it is “not even aimed at the human viewer” (Zylinska, J. pg168)

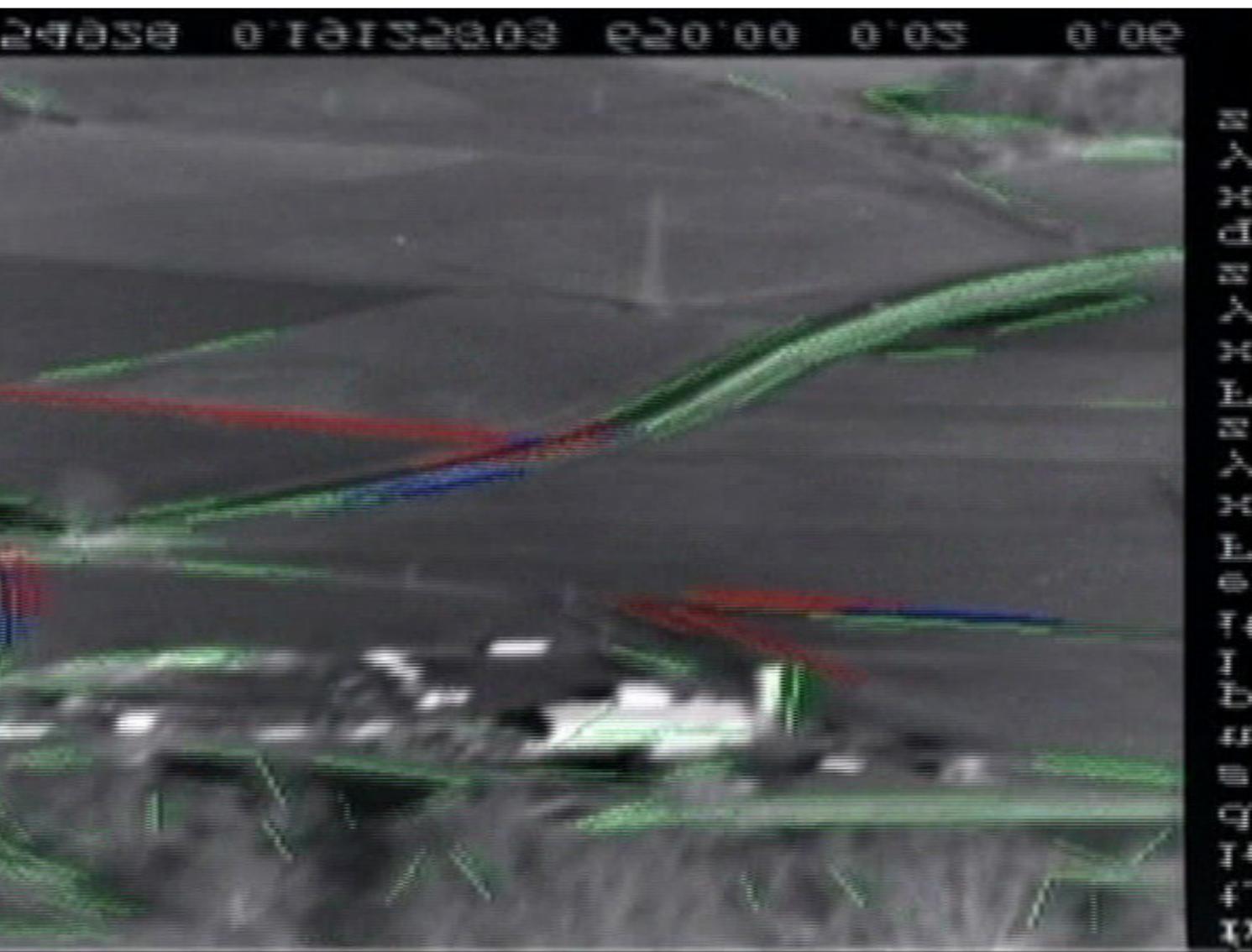


Fig 9. Still from *Eye/Machine III*, 2003, Harun Farocki

# Part 3: The conceptualization of time - photography as right now

“To ask whether a photograph is analogical or coded is not a good means of analysis the important thing is that the photograph possess an evidential force, and that testimony bares not on the object but on time.”

Roland Barthes – Camera Lucida 1981

Culturally, there seems to be an inherent way of viewing photographs, and in the skeuomorphic rise of the camera phone shutter sound, there is a sense that all images are happening right now. When looking at any image, there seems an instant relatability, a want to treat a photograph as a random snapshot from an imaginary infinite loop of time and life seems innate. Photography remains material, but it is no longer an imprint to the same degree; the indexical relationship still exists but it is a shifted, uneasy status that cannot go on for much longer given the advancements in image creation and distribution, of which I will go into more later in this chapter.

This conceptualization of time, that occurs within the relationship of engaging with a photograph, how is it that photography says what is it, that it is? What is it within an image that claims a kind of implicit timeless truth. There is an inherent assumption, that within a photograph, especially a digital image, (when we consider the information from part two), is merely an approximation out of digital noise, then what is it that we are actually ‘seeing’ and relating to? It is a fluidity of culture and its objects, that imbues a re-looking through the photograph. In the speed of our environments, the captured image is perceived to secure a moment of now. There is an implied epistemological grid structure between the viewer and the photograph, the viewer is supposed to be grounded in the present over here while the photograph is assumed to refer to a prior moment over there.

The photographic image, phenomenologically on a base level is time, not time eschatologically promised to halt. Rather it exposes as an idea that history is “ever flowing and pre-programmed to produce an ongoing narrative” (Baer, U. pg1). it can always be stopped and viewed from particular standpoints. The photographic image is bearing witness, in an act of disclosure, the resolute space of the image functions as a space of non-identity, between the “visible appearance of the thing ( the photographic subject) and the totality of social relations, which is the thing made manifest”(Roberts, J. pg 1)

Ove the next section, we will look to the first ever photograph for this idea of the storage of time within the image, while also re questioning the consideration of the photographic image as a material witness.

# ‘View From A Window At Le Gras’

24

Initially exploring the lithograph as a means to transfer images, the French inventor Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, experimented with the combination of a camera obscura, a device developed in the renaissance in which an image could be projected through a small hole into a darkened box or room. Inside this darkened area, an image would be cast as a “realistic, albeit upside down, projection” (Hansel, H.)

Niépce envisioned to capture an image using a light-sensitive material so that the light itself would describe the picture for him into the surface. He turned to the view from his studio as a site for inspiration, and in 1826, through a process of trial and error, he finally came upon the combined mixture of bitumen of Judea (a form of asphalt) coated over a metal plate. After leaving the coated surface, placed inside the camera obscura without being disturbed for 8 hours, the presence of the light began to harden the bitumen where it hit, consequently creating a rudimentary photographic image. Niépce then developed, and ‘fixed’ this picture by washing away the soft bitumen with lavender water, revealing an image of the rooftops and trees visible from his studio window. “Niépce had successfully made the world’s first photograph” (Hansel, H).

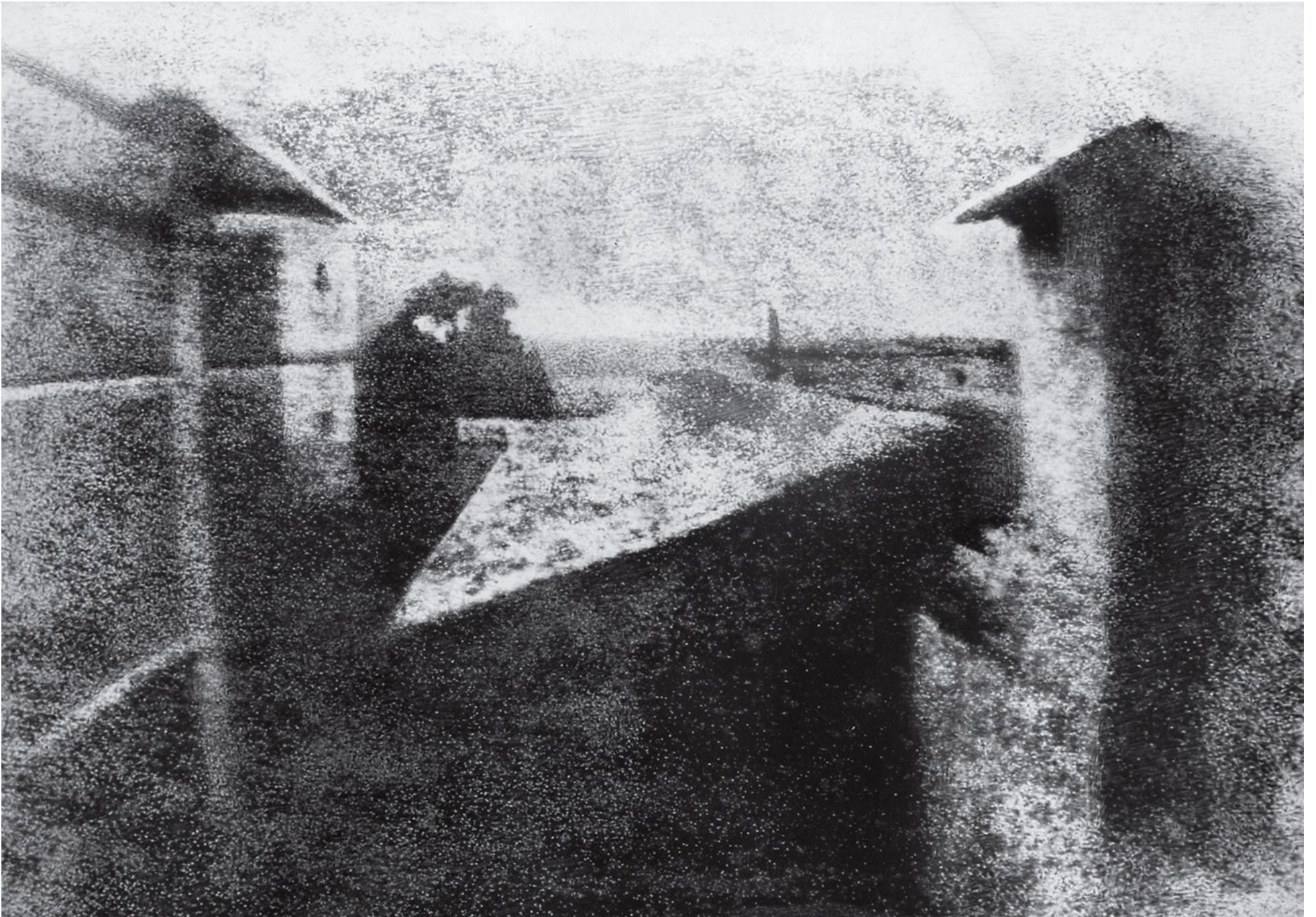


Fig 10. Enhanced version of 'View From a Window at Le Gras', circa 1826, Joseph Nicéphore Niépce

In this reproduction ( see fig 10), there are no immediately discernible features except for the suggestion of a wall, or the hint of a tree towards the distance, but what is an important testimony, a feature of the view from 'A Window at Le Gras', is the problematic nature of considering the photographic as a truthful, verifiable position; due to the long exposure and the very nature of the early process, the image reproduced in its self is a false approximation. Over the duration of the exposure the presence of light can be seen to move across the scene, creating shadows and other features that were just not there concurrently. It could be said then that to photograph, has always been an act of approximation, a visual memory of that viewpoint in time.

As it still remains through the presence of the preprogrammed digital apparatus, there are levels of agency within the construction and capturing of a photographic image that then create serious implications if we do consider the photographic to be at the same level of testimony as the eye witness.

Fundamentally, there needs to be a consideration of what do we, as a culture, consider accurate, or true within the visual information of images. Is the nature of photography always to be taken at face value or do we imbue it with a set of unreal truthful obligations?

In the concluding section, I will explore the implication of culture on the idea of considering the photographic image a material witness.

# The Adherence of the Referent? a Conclusion

While as in previous methods of photographic production, when Henry Fox Talbot first chemically fixed a shadow, recording an image perfectly, “with the agency of light alone”(Mitchel, W. Pg 24 ) , arguably there is no longer a ‘fix’, a literal incision of the visual information to a light sensitive surface. Fundamentally, within digital iterations of photography there is a certain lack of permanence within the digital and its materiality.

The file, the little packet of data that makes up or takes the place of the photographic incision, then becomes the new referent – a disconnect that then permeates to the perception of the image itself. But as I outlined in my introduction to this text, there is an increased step of agency between the viewer the apparatus and the subject.

There is a pervasive impartial view of technology that forgoes the maker, each device capable of taking digital images has been programmed, to use the data received through the lenses and translate it into a recognisable image. A given processed view of what an image should be. Looking at ‘View From A Window at Le Gras’ we see that photographs were, and still now are translations of a given event, not transcriptions.

To use the term 'witness' is an ineffective description of the status of the photographic image, what may have previously been a possible consideration is now beyond feasible. There is an accuracy, a short step that is associated with the idea of witnessing, that within modern photographic practices cannot be said to be present (If it was ever there at all?). The digital photograph is no longer "fossilized light" – its ontology in terms of the digital production has totally changed, rather the image has become an approximation, a 'memory', passing through several agents, before being received as an image. And given this level of removal, of agency, we cannot consider the photographic image as the impartial, verifiable status of a material witness.

We continue to associate photography as material, but this is due to its still pervasive material presence within our culture, it is still present on our identification cards, hanging on our walls. However, it has arguably moved or is beginning to move beyond that level of perceptible materiality of a paper surface, images still hold material form – but it is in a new freely moving – liquid culture, of screens, mobile devices and data.

Although we may have considered the evidence of the photograph as equal to, or even more sovereign than the eye witness. There is a verifiability that photography is associated with, but within this liquid culture, given digital cameras one cannot consider the photographic image as impartial as previously considered.

The photographic image should be considered as testimony, in terms of its agency and accuracy, through different representations, algorithms and changes of its function, it ceases to be a literal presentation of what was 'materially' there at all; which the term 'witness' would imply. The photographic image continues to bear witness, but it can no longer be considered a witness, as we have arrived a point in our culture and society whereby we can acknowledge that our very relationship toward the photographic image and its apparatuses has changed.

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