

Poetry and the Arts (ENG 266)
Professor Jeff Dolven

Readings for Monday (2/14)

Some poems about blue, as inspiration for the exercise (you can also use poems assigned for last week).

Elizabeth Alexander, "Letter: Blues"

Marilyn Chin, "Blues on Yellow"

John Hollander, "Blue Wine"

Maggie Nelson, from *Bluets*

Wallace Stevens, "Of the Surface of Things"

Readings for Wednesday (2/16)

John Ashbery, "The Picture of Little J. A. in a Prospect of Flowers"

David Ferry, "Plate 134."*

Barbara Guest, "Photographs"

Seamus Heaney, "The Grauballe Man"***

Ben Lerner, "The Voice"

Plus excerpts from:

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

Thierry de Duve, "Time Exposure and Snapshot: The Photograph as Paradox."

* see linked image on our website

* see linked excerpts from *Glob, The Bog People*, on our website

Exercise (due 5PM on Sunday 2/13)

Make an image of one line from a poem we have read this week (for 2/9 or 2/14). "Of" is a beautifully flexible word, and you can take full advantage of that flexibility. You might want to explore something that the line itself pictures (that it is "about"); you might want to render something in its structure, its sound, its associations. You could incorporate text, or not. This is a project of free translation across media, trying out how an image can read a poem.

Our medium in this case is the cyanotype, and we'll be making them in class on Monday with Accra Shepp. You can get an overview of how to make them [here](#), see some examples (courtesy of Eve Aschheim) [here](#). We'll meet in the print shop at 185 Nassau, and we'll have all the supplies, and instructions, on hand. To prepare, you'll want to choose your poetic line, and give some thought to its possible visualizations. Because cyanotypes are made with shadows, you should scavenge for small objects that have a curious profile, and one way or another might point

toward or open onto or explain or involve the line you have chosen. Give yourself a chance to explore a bit, and if you see something interesting, but aren't sure how it would fit, throw it in your bag anyway—you may have a use for it, or one of your classmates might. Accra suggests jogging your imagination with the following categories:

- Animal (feathers, hair, chicken bones)
- Vegetal (leaves, bark, seeds/seed pods)
- Machine (plastic shopping bag, fan blade, fork)
- Earth (water)

You can also write and paint on the acrylic surface, and we will have sharpies, white-out, gesso, paint brushes etc. for the purpose.

Ordinarily each exercise is accompanied by a brief prose essay describing the thinking behind it. In this case, since we will be completing the exercise in class, that essay (300-500 words) should be submitted by 5 PM on Sunday, as usual, but should take the form of a prospectus: identifying your line, exploring what is or might be visual about it, trying out ideas for what you might do in class the next day. The essay is *not a contract*: if, when you get your hands on the materials, you find yourself going in an entirely different direction, so much the better.

(As usual please send the essay as a pdf (converted from Word or whatever your word processor is), named YOURLASTNAME EX 2.)

LETTER: BLUES

*"Those Great Lake Winds
blow all around:
I'm a light-coat man
in a heavy-coat town."*

WARING CUNEY

Yellow freesia are like twining arms;
I'm buying shower curtains, smoke alarms,
And Washington, and you, Love—states away.
The clouds are flat. The sky is going grey.

I'm fiddling with the juice jug, honey pot,
White chrysanthemums that I just bought.
At home, there is a violet, 3-D moon
And pachysandra vines for me to prune,

And old men with checkered shirts, suspenders,
Paper bags and Cutty bottles, menders
Of frayed things and balding summer lawns,
Watching TV baseball, shelling prawns.

The women that we love! Their slit-eyed ways
Of telling us to mind, pop-eyed dismissals.
We need these folks, each one of them. We do.
The insides of my wrists still ache with you.

Does the South watch over wandering ones
Under different moons and different suns?
I have my mother's copper ramekin,
A cigar box to keep your letters in.

At least the swirl ceilings are very high,
And the Super's rummy, sort of sly.
I saw a slate-branched tree sway from the roots—
I've got to buy some proper, winter boots.

So many boxes! Crates and crates of books.
I must get oil soap, bleach, and picture hooks.
A sidewalk crack in Washington, D.C.
Will feed my city dirt roots. Wait for me.

BLUES ON YELLOW

The canary died in the gold mine, her dreams got lost
in the sieve.

The canary died in the gold mine, her dreams got lost
in the sieve.

Her husband the crow killed under the railroad, the
spokes hath shorn his wings.

Something's cookin' in Chin's kitchen, ten thousand
yellow-bellied sapsuckers baked in a pie.

Something's cookin' in Chin's kitchen, ten thousand
yellow-bellied sapsuckers baked in a pie.

Something's cookin in Chin's kitchen, die die yellow
bird, die die.

O crack an egg on the griddle, yellow will ooze into white.

O crack an egg on the griddle, yellow will ooze into white.

Run, run, sweet little Puritan, yellow will ooze into white.

If you cut my yellow wrists, I'll teach my yellow toes to
write.

If you cut my yellow wrists, I'll teach my yellow toes to
write.

If you cut my yellow fists, I'll teach my yellow feet to
fight.

ALICE

Do not be afraid to perish, my mother, Buddha's
compassion is nigh.

Do not be afraid to perish, my mother, our boat will
sail tonight.

Your babies will reach the promised land, the stars will
be their guide.

I am so mellow yellow, mellow yellow, Buddha sings in
my veins.

I am so mellow yellow, mellow yellow, Buddha sings in
my veins.

O take me to the land of the unreborn, there's no life on
earth without pain.

Blue Wine

for Saul Steinberg

- 1 The winemaker worries over his casks, as the dark juice
Inside them broods on its own sleep, its ferment of dreaming
Which will turn out to have been a slow waking after all,
All that time. This would be true of the red wine or the white;
But a look inside these barrels of the azure would show
Nothing. They would be as if filled with what the sky looks like.

- 2 Three wise old wine people were called in once to consider
The blueness of the wine. One said: "It is 'actually' not
Blue; it is a profound red in the cask, but reads as blue
In the only kind of light that we have to see it by."
Another said: "The taste is irrelevant—whatever
Its unique blend of aromas, bouquets, vinosities
And so forth, the color would make it quite undrinkable."
A third said nothing: he was lost in a blue study while
His eyes drank deeply and his wisdom shuddered, that the wine
Of generality could be so strong and so heady.

- 3 There are those who will maintain that all this is a matter
Of water—hopeful water, joyful water got into
Cool bottles at the right instant of light, the organized
Reflective blue of its body remembered once the sky
Was gone, an answer outlasting its forgotten question.
Or: that the water, colorless at first, collapsed in glass
Into a blue swoon from which it never need awaken;
Or: that the water colored in a blush of consciousness
(Not shame) when it first found that it could see out of itself
On all sides roundly, save through the dark moon of cork above
Or through the bottom over which it made its mild surmise.

- There are those who maintain this, they who remain happier
With transformations than with immensities like blue wine.
- 4 He pushed back his chair and squinted through the sunlight
across
At the shadowy, distant hills; crickets sang in the sun;
His mind sang quietly to itself in the breeze, until
He returned to his cool task of translating the newly
Discovered fragments of Plutarch's lost essay "On Blue Wine."
Then the heavy leaves of the rhododendrons scratched against
Gray shingles outside, not for admittance, but in order
To echo his pen sighing over filled, quickening leaves.
- 5 "For External Use Only?" Nothing says exactly that,
But there are possibilities—a new kind of bluing
That does not whiten, but intensifies the color of,
All that it washes. Or used in a puzzle-game: "Is blue
Wine derived from red or white? emerging from blood-colored
Dungeons into high freedom? or shivering in the silk
Robe it wrapped about itself because of a pale yellow chill?"
One drink of course would put an end to all such questioning.
- 6 "... and when he passed it over to me in the dim firelight,
I could tell from the feel of the bottle what it was: the
Marqués de Tontada's own, *El Corazón azul*. I had
Been given it once in my life before, long ago, and
I tell you, Dan, I will never forget the moment when
It became clear, before those embers, that the famous blue
Color of the stuff could come to mean so little, could change
The contingent hue of its significance: the truer
To its blue the wine remained, the less it seemed to matter.
I think, Dan, that was what we had been made to learn that night."
- 7 This happened once: Our master, weary of our quarreling,
Laughed at the barrel, then motioned toward us for a drink; and
Lo, out of the sullen wooden spigot came the blue wine!
- 8 And all that long morning the fair wind that had carried them
From isle to isle—past the gnashing rocks to leeward and around
The dark vortex that had been known to display in its whorls
Parts not of ships nor men but of what it could never have
Swallowed down from above—the fair wind blew them closer to
The last island of all, upon the westernmost side of
Which high cliffs led up to a great place of shining columns
That reddened in the sunset when clouds gathered there. They
sailed
Neither toward this nor toward the eastern cape, darkened by low
Rocks marching out from the land in raging battle with the
Water; they sailed around a point extending toward them,
through
A narrow bay, and landed at a very ancient place.
Here widely-scattered low trees were watching them from the
hills.
In huge casks half-buried there lay aging the wine of the
Island and, weary half to madness, they paused there to drink.
This was the spot where, ages before even their time, Bhel
Blazed out in all his various radiances, before
The jealousy of Kel led to his being smashed, as all
The old tales tell, and to the hiding and the parceling
Out of all the pieces of Bhel's shining. Brightness of flame,
Of blinding bleakness, of flavescent gold, of deepening
Blush-color, of the shining black of obsidian that
Is all of surface, all a memory of unified
Light—all these were seeded far about. There only remained
The constant fraction, which, even after every sky
Had been drenched in its color, never wandered from this spot.
And thus it was: they poured the slow wine out unmingled with
Water and saw, startled, sloshing up against the insides
Of their gold cups, sparkling, almost salty, the sea-bright wine . . .
- 9 It would soon be sundown and a shawl of purple shadow
Fell over the muttering shoulders of the old land, fair

Hills and fowl dales alike, singing of noon grass or Spanish
Matters. The wooden farmhouses grew grayer and the one
We finally stopped at, darker than the others, opened its
Shutters and the light inside poured over the patio.
Voices and chairs clattered: we were welcomed and the youngest
Child came forth holding with both hands a jug of the local wine,
It was blue: reality is so Californian.

- 10 Under the Old Law it was seldom permitted to drink
Blue wine, and then only on the Eight Firmamental
Days; and we who no longer kept commandments of that sort
Still liked to remember that for so long it mattered so
Much that they were kept. And thus the domestic reticence
In my family about breaking it out too often:
We waited for when there was an embargo on the red,
Say, or when the white had failed because of undue rain.
Then Father would come up from the cellar with an abashed
Smile, in itself a kind of label for the dark bottle.
At four years old I hid my gaze one night when it was poured.
- 11 Perhaps this is all some kind of figure—the thing contained
For the container—and it is these green bottles themselves,
Resembling ordinary one, that are remarkable
In that their shapes create the new wines—*Das Rheinblau*,
Château
La Tour d'Eau, *Romanée Cerulée*, even the funny old
Half-forgotten *Vin Albastru*. And the common inks of
Day and night that we color the water with a drop of
Or use for parodies of the famous labels: these as
Well become part of the figuring by which one has put
Blue wine in bold bottles and lined them up against the light
There in a window. When some unexpected visitor
Drops in and sees these bottles of blue wine, and does not ask
At the time what they mean, he may take some drops home with
him
In the clear cup of his own eye, to see what he will see.

1. Suppose I were to begin by saying that I had fallen in love with a color. Suppose I were to speak this as though it were a confession; suppose I shredded my napkin as we spoke. *It began slowly. An appreciation, an affinity. Then, one day, it became more serious. Then* (looking into an empty teacup, its bottom stained with thin brown excrement coiled into the shape of a sea horse) *it became somehow* personal.

2. And so I fell in love with a color—in this case, the color blue—as if falling under a spell, a spell I fought to stay under and get out from under, in turns.

3. Well, and what of it? A voluntary delusion, you might say. That each blue object could be a kind of burning bush, a secret code meant for a single agent, an X on a map too diffuse ever to be unfolded in entirety but that contains the knowable universe. How could all the shreds of blue garbage bags stuck in brambles, or the bright blue tarps flapping over every shanty and fish stand in the world, be, in essence, the fingerprints of God? *I will try to explain this.*

4. I admit that I may have been lonely. I know that loneliness can produce bolts of hot pain, a pain which, if it stays hot enough for long enough, can begin to simulate, or to provoke—take your pick—an apprehension of the divine. (*This ought to arouse our suspicions.*)

5. But first, let us consider a sort of case in reverse. In 1867, after a long bout of solitude, the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé wrote to his friend Henri Cazalis: “These last months have been terrifying. My Thought has thought itself through and reached a Pure Idea. What the rest of me has suffered during that long agony, is in-

describable.” Mallarmé described this agony as a battle that took place on God’s “boney wing.” “I struggled with that creature of ancient and evil plumage—God—whom I fortunately defeated and threw to earth,” he told Cazalis with exhausted satisfaction. Eventually Mallarmé began replacing “le ciel” with “l’Azur” in his poems, in an effort to rinse references to the sky of religious connotations. “Fortunately,” he wrote Cazalis, “I am quite dead now.”

6. The half-circle of blinding turquoise ocean is this love’s primal scene. That this blue exists makes my life a remarkable one, just to have seen it. To have seen such beautiful things. To find oneself placed in their midst. Choiceless. I returned there yesterday and stood again upon the mountain.

7. But what kind of love is it, really? Don’t fool yourself and call it sublimity. Admit that you have stood in front of a little pile of powdered ultramarine pigment in a glass cup at a museum and felt a stinging desire. But to do what? Liberate it? Purchase it? Ingest it? There is so little blue food in nature—in fact blue in the wild tends to

mark food to avoid (mold, poisonous berries)—that culinary advisers generally recommend against blue light, blue paint, and blue plates when and where serving food. But while the color may sap appetite in the most literal sense, it feeds it in others. You might want to reach out and disturb the pile of pigment, for example, first staining your fingers with it, then staining the world. You might want to dilute it and swim in it, you might want to rouge your nipples with it, you might want to paint a virgin's robe with it. But still you wouldn't be accessing the blue of it. Not exactly.

8. Do not, however, make the mistake of thinking that all desire is yearning. "We love to contemplate blue, not because it advances to us, but because it draws us after it," wrote Goethe, and perhaps he is right. But I am not interested in longing to live in a world in which I already live. I don't want to yearn for blue things, and God forbid for any "blueness." Above all, I want to stop missing you.

9. So please do not write to tell me about any more beautiful blue things. To be fair, this book will not tell you

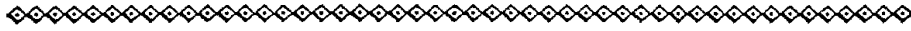
about any, either. It will not say, *Isn't X beautiful?* Such demands are murderous to beauty.

10. The most I want to do is show you the end of my index finger. Its muteness.

11. That is to say: I don't care if it's colorless.

12. And please don't talk to me about "things as they are" being changed upon any "blue guitar." What can be changed upon a blue guitar is not of interest here.

13. At a job interview at a university, three men sitting across from me at a table. On my cv it says that I am currently working on a book about the color blue. I have been saying this for years without writing a word. It is, perhaps, my way of making my life feel "in progress" rather than a sleeve of ash falling off a lit cigarette. One of the men asks, *Why blue?* People ask me this question often. I never know how to respond. We don't get to choose what or whom we love, I want to say. We just don't get to choose.



OF THE SURFACE OF THINGS

I

In my room, the world is beyond my understanding;
But when I walk I see that it consists of three or four
hills and a cloud.

II

From my balcony, I survey the yellow air,
Reading where I have written,
“The spring is like a belle undressing.”

III

The gold tree is blue.
The singer has pulled his cloak over his head.
The moon is in the folds of the cloak.



ANECDOTE OF THE PRINCE OF PEACOCKS

In the moonlight
I met Berserk,
In the moonlight
On the bushy plain.

*THE PICTURE OF LITTLE J. A.
IN A PROSPECT OF FLOWERS*

He was spoilt from childhood
by the future, which he mastered
rather early and apparently
without great difficulty.

BORIS PASTERNAK

I

Darkness falls like a wet sponge
And Dick gives Genevieve a swift punch
In the pajamas. "Aroint thee, witch."
Her tongue from previous ecstasy
Releases thoughts like little hats.

"He clap'd me first during the eclipse.
Afterwards I noted his manner
Much altered. But he sending
At that time certain handsome jewels
I durst not seem to take offence."

In a far recess of summer
Monks are playing soccer.

II

So far is goodness a mere memory
Or naming of recent scenes of badness
That even these lives, children,
You may pass through to be blessed,
So fair does each invent his virtue.

And coming from a white world, music
Will sparkle at the lips of many who are

Beloved. Then these, as dirty handmaidens
To some transparent witch, will dream
Of a white hero's subtle wooing,
And time shall force a gift on each.

That beggar to whom you gave no cent
Striped the night with his strange descant.

III

Yet I cannot escape the picture
Of my small self in that bank of flowers:
My head among the blazing phlox
Seemed a pale and gigantic fungus.
I had a hard stare, accepting

Everything, taking nothing,
As though the rolled-up future might stink
As loud as stood the sick moment
The shutter clicked. Though I was wrong,
Still, as the loveliest feelings

Must soon find words, and these, yes,
Displace them, so I am not wrong
In calling this comic version of myself
The true one. For as change is horror,
Virtue is really stubbornness

And only in the light of lost words
Can we imagine our rewards.

Photographs from a Book: Six Poems

I

A poem again, of several parts, each having to do
With a photograph. The first, by Eakins, is of his student,
Samuel C. Murray, about twenty-five years old,
Naked, a life study, in the cold light and hungry
Shadow of Eakins's studio in Philadelphia.
The picture was taken in eighteen ninety-two.
The young man's face is unsmiling, shy, or appears to be so
Because of the shadow. One knows from other
Images in the book that Murray's unshadowed gaze
Can look out clear, untroubled, without mystery or guile.
His body is easy in its selfhood, in its self and strength;
The virtue of its perfection is only of its moment
In the light and shadow. In the stillness of the photograph
I cannot see the light and shadow moving
As light and shadow move in the moving of a river.

II

He stands against what looks like the other side
Of a free-standing bookcase, with a black cloth
Draped over it, and a shelf as the top of it,
And on the shelf, sad, some bits and pieces
Of old 'fine' culture and bric-a-brac:
An urn; a child's head; a carved animal
Of some sort, a dog or a wolf, it's hard to tell;
A bust of a goddess staring out at nothing;
Something floral in wood or plaster. "The Arcadians
Are said to have inhabited the earth
Before the birth of Jupiter; their tribe
Was older than the moon. Not as yet enhanced
By discipline or manners, their life
Resembled that of beasts; they were an uncouth
People, who were still ignorant of art."

III

There is a strange, solemn, silent, graceless
Gayety in their dancing, the dancing of the young
Ladies of Philadelphia in the anxious
Saffron light of Eakins's photograph;
There in the nineteenth century, dressed in their 'Grecian'
Long white dresses, so many years ago,
They are dancing or standing still before the camera,
Selfhood altered to an alien poetry,
The flowers in their hair already fading;
Persephone, Dryope, Lotis, or maybe only
Some general Philadelphia notion of Grecian
Nymph or maiden, posing, there by the river.
"If those who suffer are to be believed,
I swear by the gods my fate is undeserved."
The light in Eakins's photograph is ancient.

IV

Plate 134. By Eakins. "A cowboy in the West.
An unidentified man at the Badger Company Ranch."
His hat, his gun, his gloves, his chair, his place
In the sun. He sits with his feet in a dried-up pool
Of sunlight. His face is the face of a hero
Who has read nothing at all about heroes.
He is without splendor, utterly without
The amazement of self that glorifies Achilles
The sunlike, the killer. He is without mercy
As he is without the imagination that he is
Without mercy. There is nothing to the East of him
Except the camera, which is almost entirely without
Understanding of what it sees in him,
His hat, his gun, his gloves, his homely and
Heartbreaking canteen, empty on the ground.



Thomas Eakins, "Cowboy in Dakota Territory."

Finnish Opera

Grass grew long in the story.

Pieces clung to bedclothes. In the night he believed he grew taller.
Grass covered the dream of a serpent, eyes sunk in his head, tail of silk
clover. The dream translated into silver tone. More serpent heads and the
dream turned into an opera.

It was the opera that made the dreamer famous. Location of opera could be
in any country, could be Antarctica, more likely Finland, where they believe
in silk clover, it is gold in a land of starved desire for summer.

The opera had a clover leaf copied in porcelain by Aalto, the famous
designer, who sewed the clover leaf into a white curtain. He designed a
window for the man when he looks out to sea in his serpent costume.

This opera that begins with a dream traveled to Rome and Zagreb, traveled
across continents, once by camel. The travels became more famous than
the opera. People began to forget whether the grass really had grown long,
and where the serpent came from.

The opera was called by another name and included a gold limousine.
Somewhere in Oceania they added mermaid elves.

Photographs

In the past we listened to photographs. They heard our voice speak.
Alive, active. What had been distance was memory. Dusk came,
Pushed us forward, emptying the laboratory each night undisturbed by
Erasure.

In the city of X, they lived together. Always morose, her lips
soothed him. The piano was arranged in the old manner, light entered the
window, street lamps at the single tree.

Emotion evoked by a single light on a subject is not transferable to
photographs of the improved city. The camera, once
commented freely amid rivering and lost gutters of treeless parks or avenue.
The old camera refused to penetrate the unknown. Its heart was soft,
unreliable.

Now distributed is photography of new government building. We are forbidden to observe despair silent in old photographs.

Petticoat

She ran down the middle of the road throwing her hands up to Heaven.
Longinus, Leviticus, mathematical wonder.

She believed whole buildings might fall on top of her.

Pollen filled the air.

It was her duty to plunder the ant of air, beasties of calico.

The Morse Code arrived in petticoat blue, the steam engine.

She read Leibniz before she visited the pastor.

Blue Arthur

Aroused from bed with movement around him.

Fasted and lay with malade. Waited with poem
folded into sorrow.

Hollow, blue morning.

Cloth overhangs daytime

Kingdom of Blue Arthur.

Dismayed lightness.

Woman walks solitary arrayed in grey velveteen, doors open for her.

Autobiography

Underfoot is secure,
part of made up plan.
In middle ground,
Coconut tree.

The Grauballe Man

As if he had been poured
in tar, he lies
on a pillow of turf
and seems to weep

the black river of himself.
The grain of his wrists
is like bog oak,
the ball of his heel

like a basalt egg.
His instep has shrunk
cold as a swan's foot
or a wet swamp root.

His hips are the ridge
and purse of a mussel,
his spine an eel arrested
under a glisten of mud.

The head lifts,
the chin is a visor
raised above the vent
of his slashed throat

that has tanned and toughened.
The cured wound
opens inwards to a dark
elderberry place.

Who will say 'corpse'
to his vivid cast?
Who will say 'body'
to his opaque repose?

And his rusted hair,
a mat unlikely
as a foetus's.
I first saw his twisted face

in a photograph,
a head and shoulder
out of the peat,
bruised like a forceps baby,

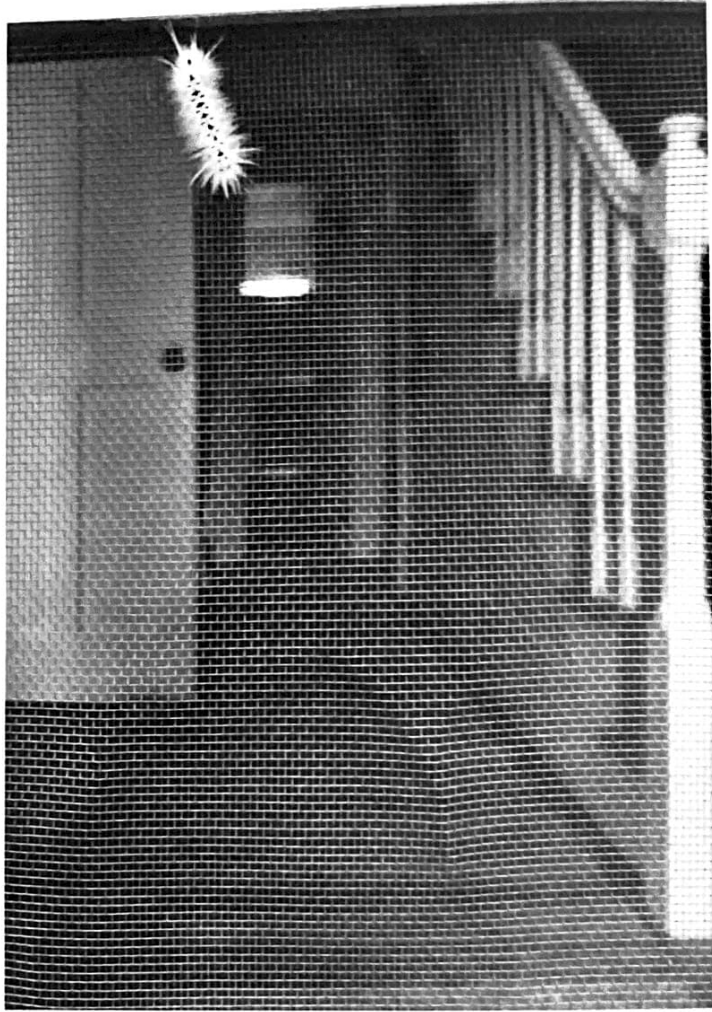
but now he lies
perfected in my memory,
down to the red horn
of his nails,

hung in the scales
with beauty and atrocity:
with the Dying Gaul
too strictly compassed

on his shield,
with the actual weight
of each hooded victim,
slashed and dumped.



THE VOICE



Sometimes you have to kill the bee, my father would say. Sometimes you have to press the flower. The proverbs he quoted made at least as much sense to me as the ones my grandmother claimed were Yiddish: Fleas are not lobsters. He can make the dream larger than the night. After my father died, I found that I was using some of these phrases in my own life. I didn't really think about what they meant. Nobody ever asked me to explain them. One afternoon I was hanging out with Emma—she was so careful I didn't worry about distancing—and I said this thing about the bee and flower and she was like, What are you quoting? What does that mean? They're just sayings. Idiomatic expressions. Cliches. I don't think so, she said. Where did you learn them? And I told her. And that's when I realized: The blue path never curves. That's when I realized, or realized in a new way, that stars are not steeples. The nouns are interchangeable. The dream that presses the flower spares the bee. Soon we were drinking red wine and Googling these sayings I'd believed connected me to my father and through my father to Ukraine and Judaism, personal and collective histories; in fact none of them was timeworn, none had circulated, they were just his private nonsense formulations. I felt like laughing and crying simultaneously. My father was a poet: He made a world for me, a toy folk tradition. Or my father was a fraud: How else had he deceived me? Or my father was a comedian: He knew I'd figure it out in the end and find it funny. And I did find it funny. I was laughing in Emma's arms while also shaking with sobs, blowing my nose on her shirt, maybe just missing my ridiculous dad. Outside her window we could hear the protesters gathering on Dekalb, but that night we wouldn't join them. Emma started making up her own expressions as she held me, stroked my hair. Seven days from now is not a future. Don't buy a mattress during vespers. One iris is always a different color than the other. At first, her delivery was mock-portentous, but then she got into it, there was something hypnotic about it, soothing. When I was half-asleep I half-believed that I could hear the protesters chanting the phrases that Emma was coining just for me: We are the glass that plates the wound. The rain enters the dream as snow. The rose is absolute. A call and response between the whisper in my car and the people in the streets. Even though it was muffled by a mask, I could pick out my father's voice.

probably a friend, holding a handkerchief to her nose. Here again, in a bombed-out apartment, the huge eyes of two little boys, one's shirt raised over his little belly (the excess of those eyes disturb the scene). And here, finally, leaning against the wall of a house, three Sandinists, the lower part of their faces covered by a rag (stench? secrecy? I have no idea, knowing nothing of the realities of guerrilla warfare); one of them holds a gun that rests on his thigh (I can see his nails); but his other hand is stretched out, open, as if he were explaining and demonstrating something. My rule applied all the more closely in that other pictures from the same reportage were less interesting to me; they were fine shots, they expressed the dignity and horror of rebellion, but in my eyes they bore no mark or sign: their homogeneity remained cultural: they were "scenes," rather *à la* Greuze, had it not been for the harshness of the subject.

10 My rule was plausible enough for me to try to name (as I would need to do) these two elements whose co-presence established, it seemed, the particular interest I took in these photographs.

The first, obviously, is an extent, it has the extension of a field, which I perceive quite familiarly as a consequence of my knowledge, my culture; this field can be more or less stylized, more or less successful, depending on the photographer's skill or luck, but it always refers to a class.

sical body of information: rebellion, Nicaragua, and all the signs of both: wretched un-uniformed soldiers, ruined streets, corpses, grief, the sun, and the heavy-lidded Indian eyes. Thousands of photographs consist of this field, and in these photographs I can, of course, take a kind of general interest, one that is even stirred sometimes, but in regard to them my emotion requires the rational intermediary of an ethical and political culture. What I feel about these photographs derives from an average affect, almost from a certain training. I did not know a French word which might account for this kind of human interest, but I believe this word exists in Latin: it is studium, which doesn't mean, at least not immediately, "study," but application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment, of course, but without special acuity. It is by studium that I am interested in so many photographs, whether I receive them as political testimony or enjoy them as good historical scenes: for it is culturally (this connotation is present in studium) that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions.

The second element will break (or punctuate) the studium. This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. A Latin word exists to designate this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument: the word suits me all the better in that it also refers to the notion of punctuation, and because the photographs I am speaking of are in effect punc-

tuated, sometimes even speckled with these sensitive points; precisely, these marks, these wounds are so many *points*. This second element which will disturb the *studium* I shall therefore call *punctum*; for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).

Having thus distinguished two themes in Photography (for in general the photographs I liked were constructed in the manner of a classical sonata), I could occupy myself with one after the other.

11 Many photographs are, alas, inert under my gaze. But even among those which have some existence in my eyes, most provoke only a general and, so to speak, *polite* interest: they have no *punctum* in them: they please or displease me without pricking me: they are invested with no more than *studium*. The *studium* is that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste: I like / I don't like. The *studium* is of the order of liking, not of loving; it mobilizes a half desire, a demi-volition; it is the same sort of vague, slippery, irresponsible interest one takes in the people, the entertainments, the books, the clothes one finds "all right."

To recognize the *studium* is inevitably to encounter the photographer's intentions, to enter into harmony with

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TIME EXPOSURE
AND SNAPSHOT
THE PHOTOGRAPH AS PARADOX

Thierry de Duve

Commenting on Harold Rosenberg's *Tradition of the New*, Mary McCarthy once wrote, "You cannot hang an event on the wall, only a picture." It seems, however, that with photography, we have indeed the paradox of an event that hangs on the wall.¹

Photography is generally taken in either of two ways: as an event, but then as an odd-looking one, a frozen gestalt that conveys very little, if anything at all, of the fluency of things happening in real life; or it is taken as a picture, as an autonomous representation that can indeed be framed and hung, but that then curiously ceases to refer to the particular event from which it was drawn. In other words, the photograph is seen either as natural evidence and live witness (picture) of a vanished past, or as an abrupt artifact (event), a devilish device designed to capture life but unable to convey it. Both notions of what is happening at the surface of the image have their counterpart in reality. Seen as live evidence, the photograph cannot fail to designate, outside of itself,

the death of the referent, the accomplished past, the suspension of time. And seen as deadening artifact, the photograph indicates that life outside continues, time flows by, and the captured object has slipped away.

As representatives of these two opposite ways in which a photograph is perceived, the funerary portrait would exemplify the "picture." It protracts onstage a life that has stopped offstage. The press photograph, on the other hand, would exemplify the "event." It freezes onstage the course of life that goes on outside. Once generalized, these examples suggest that the time exposure is typical of a way of perceiving the photograph as "picture-like," whereas the instantaneous photograph is typical of a way of perceiving it as "event-like."

These two ways are mutually exclusive, yet they coexist in our perception of any photograph, whether snapshot or time exposure. Moreover, they do not constitute a contradiction that we can resolve through a dialectical synthesis. Instead they set up a paradox, which results in an unresolved oscillation of our psychological responses toward the photograph.

First, let us consider the snapshot, or instantaneous photograph. The snapshot is a theft; it steals life. Intended to signify natural movement, it only produces a petrified analogue of it. It shows an unperformed movement that refers to an impossible posture. The paradox is that in reality the movement has indeed been performed, while in the image the posture is frozen.

It is clear that this paradox derives directly from the indexical nature of the photographic sign.² Using the terms of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics, though the photograph appears to be an icon (through resemblance) and though it is to some extent a symbol (principally through the use of the camera as a codifying device), its proper sign type, which it shares with no other visual representation (except the cast and, of course, cinema), is the index, that is, a sign causally related to its object. In the case of photography, the direct causal link between reality and the image