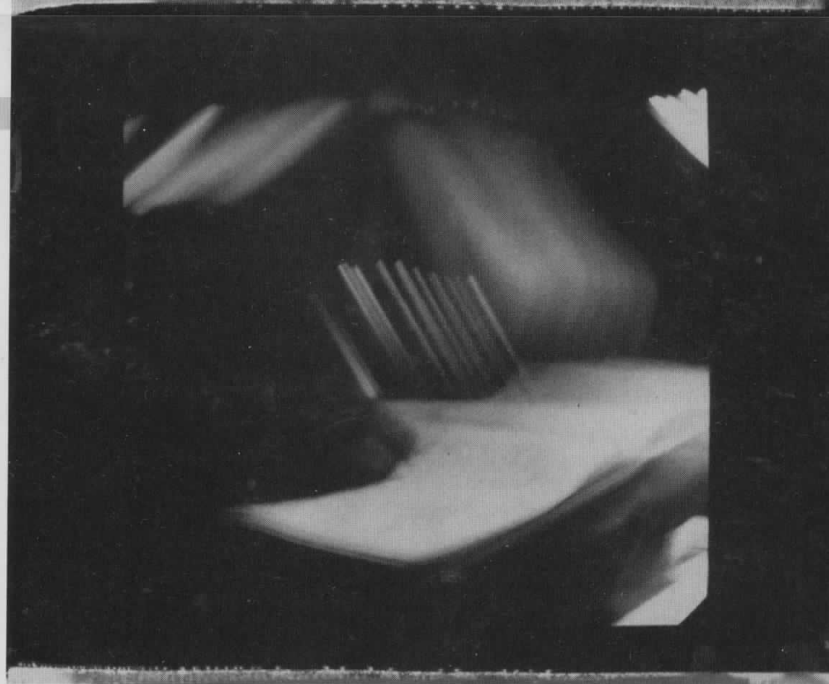


MA I was curious about the process by which you make a photograph. In other words how you turn something, from the negative to the positive, into the actual image. I was just brooding on this in the context of a series of poems I've been writing for an art exhibition at the Bild Museet in Sweden called *Mirror's Edge*. I don't know anything about the technical aspects of photography and am fascinated by the idea of the negative. Could you talk about that a little bit.

WN I have always been drawn to materiality and process in my work as a way to unpack modes of production. Materiality is a means of linking the work to an apparatus which is especially relevant to certain cinematic relations spelled by people like Stephen Heath. In our project, *Hand, Writing* I am using polaroid positive/negative film as a metaphor for short and long term memory; the immediate response of the positive film completes the feedback loop of what one sees and what the film captures and the latent disposition of the negative film only later "becomes" itself in print.

MA That is interesting because in this series, I've just been working on, the first poem is called *Mnemosyne* - which is of course the Greek word for memory. I imagine memory coming to me as a girl, but as a girl I saw in the mirror when I was ten or eleven with her hair in two plaits, or two braids as you say in America, and she gives me just three words; and the three words are *pane*, which is girl, *maram*, which is tree, and *pusthakum*, which is book. It is an old Sanskrit word which has come into Malayalam. And the poem actually ends with opening this book which is set to my ribs, with the idea of transport built into the poem. Transport as transportation to move from one place to another but also transport in the sense of ecstasy which is the liberation from the usual constraints of our lives. And I think that very sharp images are like that for us, they afford a kind of ecstatic release. In the poem the immediacy of its image is potent for us precisely because it has been stored away for a very very long time. So I do think that does link up



Warren Neidich *Hand, Writing 1*, 1999, silver print. Courtesy the Artist.

with what you were saying about short and long term memory. Though I am not sure I know exactly what those words mean.

WN In listening to you I wonder about your idea of the process by which images come to you. I am really interested in the differences in how a poet finds their images, where the writing is a physical manifestation of certain kinds of imaginations, and how an artist or photographer uses both that process and specifically images that come from the external objective reality. Could you comment on this in terms of poetry.

MA It is funny because I have no clue where images come from, and I'm not saying that in order to sound mystical or mystifying, I really don't know. I just know that there are certain spots or places in my life where I keep returning. I think they are like physical places, but out of those physical places are refined certain images that I think repeat in my work. Otherwise how would the whole work of an artist or a writer have any unity. It is almost like whittling away, paring away at the physicality of what we see in order to make representation, and I don't think this paring away is always done consciously. I think there is the discipline of what you cut and rewrite, what you cut and paste and chop, on the page, but I also think there is this kind of subterranean process by which extraneous stuff - particularly for poetry but I think for prose - also is just lost, it is like the *lire perdue*, it is just lost.

WN A number of writers have made the distinction between narrative film and non narrative film, or Hollywood film and avant-garde film, and they have talked about the construction of the narrative of each as very very different in the sense that in non narrative film or avant-garde cinema each member of the audience picks and chooses from the variety of images that appear on the screen and then creates a kind of subjective discourse through that kind of self editing, so that each one of the members of the audience sees that film in a different and individual way. I like to think about that as a model by which individuals who are moving through external, objective, real space - whether you are walking around New York City or walking around the country - each partake of certain visual images that are in the environment and we subjectively construct a memory of that particular moment or event in our minds. Perhaps you can talk about the process when you construct a poem from a series of memories that you have in terms of the process I just outlined.

MA That is an awfully hard question. I am thinking specifically of a poem I just finished. I started a draft several months ago where I just had a few lines about what it would mean to make an *éloge à maquillage* and crossed it out. I had directions about climbing the stairs and finding a landing and turning right and finding a door. A door that is stripped bare of all of its varnish. The idea of a landing and a door stayed with me, like something that is really inside of my head. There are two lines that run "what the mirror never finds/is vanishing" And that is really at the core of what I'm thinking about. Because of course the idea of vanishing of the perpetual transience of things is what really moves us to art, forces us to make images. Because if we live in a world where everything was perpetually present to us we would have no desire. Certainly loss would not be there.

WN I think what is interesting about memory is this idea of revisitation. And it is like there is this evanescent quality these things come and go, like on the cinematic screen where things move on the screen and you cannot grasp them. But the fact of the matter is

that I am really interested in this idea of revisitation of the idea of memory as revisiting a place that stimulates, for me I am very neurobiologically oriented and I want to bring this into a slight neurobiological discussion. Because for me it is interesting how the environment, how the external objective reality sets up a certain kind of situation, oscillates in a certain way, so that a pattern that is wedged in our neurobiological substrate is revisited so that when we go back to a place in our external reality we not only visit that place in our physical outward manifestation but we visit it in our brain again, because there is synchronism or symbiosis between that external reality and our brain, so I was wondering, in terms of poetry, about this idea of revisitation in poetry, and particularly in your work which is so culturally based and also about this idea of nomadism and translocation and revisitation.

MA Well, everybody's work is culturally based, everyone's work is based in the culture out of which they spring; even if one seeks to look in the other direction. It is impossible to evade culture and history, no matter how conceptual the moment, the framework of your art. It springs out of the ground, the perceptible soil, and that is culture. Apart from that this idea of visiting or revisiting a place is something that has haunted me all my life. A lot of my poetry has to do with a particular place in Kerala on the Southwest coast of India which is where my grandfather's house is. Dylan Thomas says "after the first death there is no other." For me for a long time I felt there was only one house, but of course as if after the first house there is no other. That is not literally true. I wrote a long poem called *The Storm: a Poem in Five Parts*, in which I muse on the idea of the first house, and migrancy. But of course memory is always subject to the place from which we remember, it is always subject to the specific place we are in as we recall. I think if you are an artist there is only so much that you do. In other words each of us only has a small pot to drink from. We have something for better and

L.A.

There's a student admission price, cheap popcorn, cheesy Egyptian thematics, and the widest, most comfortable art-house seats one is likely to experience this side of the grave. It's hard to know what it'll be like to witness the French New Wave on a gigantic 21st century screen. With the Prince's rather tame animation showing for a handful of wanderers, it seemed likely that the smaller theater on the property, would be left for the 'better' films, while the Cameron and Tarantino festivals would grace the bigger.

Even though the whole project reeks of irony and awkwardness, L. A. artists have every reason to celebrate the situation. It's a spot of good news.

There are other good signs of things to come elsewhere. The unpretentious hilly neighborhood of Mt. Washington looks forward to a revitalization of the likes that has enriched nearby Silver Lake, the home of many of R. M. Schindler's best houses and buildings. Jorge Pardo's project "Jorge Pardo" graces a mountain-top lot at 4166 Sea View Lane. After persuading MOCA to fund the construction of his own house, the artist planned and built the structure himself, producing architecture from out of the materiality of art. The structure, a kind of compound really, seems to crawl up off of the hill, in a skin of raw cut red-wood boards and wide shiny glass. The museum busses viewers to the neighborhood at certain hours, to view the artist's actual house. It works well in L. A., where the artificial is so permanently linked with the real, and where countless tours promise views of celebrity domiciles. The uniform simplicity of Pardo's materials gives the house an impermanent look, still as much an artist's rendering of a house, as an actual house.

Schindler's Bubeshko Apartment building of 1966, in Silver Lake, is formed like Pardo's into the hillside on which it is inscribed. But while Pardo sits on the relative flatness of a hill-top, Schindler's apartments tuck themselves into the side of a hill. Each apartment finds its own level, inscribes enough flatness for a tight, simple interior and expansive patio, and clutches to it, as if to permanently inhabit the sliding impermanence of Los Angeles. Without the address, you're lost; the Schindler is invisible, it's not to be seen except by the living inhabitant.

Art's become architecture.

Pardo's house shines simply out with a concern for its own image to the other. Architecture as art. In L. A. there's room to investigate these kinds of things, things we may think we may have already known.

But the entrenched Santa Monica art scene seems cramped. The simultaneously unfriendly and cold Bergamont Station, though site of some of L. A.'s best, biggest galleries, seemed deadlier than dead. Stuck off the side of S. M. to make way for the fancy chain stores sucking money off of the rich,

everything on display at the Station seemed familiar, boring, staid, even annoying. Perhaps it's because Shoshana Wayne and Patrick Painter galleries were closed when we went. Everybody was off at the uglified Getty, or the gigantic Van Gogh exhibition at LACMA. One can see a far better representation of young L. A. art in New York, it seems, than in Santa Monica.

That deadness has made a future possible. Once the quintessential date-spot of L. A., the surreal-y quaint version of a Chinatown in Downtown quietly awaits its own revitalization, this time at the hands of art. In January, an artist-run gallery, China Art Objects Galleries, opened on the red-lantern lit mall of "Chung King Road" with a collaborative show by L.A. artists Pae White and Steve Hanson. White and Hanson present the gallery itself, a beautifully renovated white-cube, carved into an abandoned Chinatown curiosity shop. Its back rooms painted in monotone pastel yellow and forest greens, the gallery puts its own front room on display from a rear upstairs loft. White's globular light fixtures cast a hallucinatory intensity over the entire project.

In the front room, the only object on display is a fishtank. A handfull of red-claw crabs and figure 8 puffer fish calmly explore a scale model of the gallery submerged on red pebbles.

With shows by Sharon Lockhart, George Porcari, Jorge Pardo and others down the road, the artist-run China Art Objects Galleries opens up possibilities for a future L. A., artist-run and re-formatted. Less idealistic forces may also be on the way: two more galleries have rented spaces in Chinatown already, and landlords are starting to get the picture.

Like Pardo's house, the China Art Objects Galleries project seemed something one couldn't



"Jorge Pardo," 4166 Sea View Lane

get away with in New York. Putting an entire gallery itself on display, in Los Angeles, makes a lot of good sense. L. A. artists, oddly enough, are presenting their ironies that, out there, aren't so much ironies at all, but realities. These young artists seem to be involved in making the real the object of art, thereby turning the old LA equation on its head. House as art, on view to busloads of public. Gallery as art, echoing itself in a fishtank. In a place which proclaims itself as man-made and artificial with such a straight face, is it any wonder that the reality/artificiality life/art question seems happy just being asked? It's not really looking for an answer at all.

Mark von Schlegell and Veronica Gonzalez

worse. We are born to (a life), and those are the materials of our memory and we have to work with them.

WN Do you think that we have ordinary memories? This house in India that you keep returning to, is that an ordinary memory, and how does this house look when you return to it? And in your own memory as you write about the house does it change? How does the house change when you return to it physically and through the kind diachronic nature of your writing when you return to it over and over how does the ordinary memory change?

MA I don't know what an ordinary memory is...I don't know what that word means. If you mean what we first saw and felt, how do you strip that free of all the encrustations that happen later, and what about what Freud calls "screen memories" which in fact perhaps stand in for memories but keep us from the most painful parts of our lives. I'd rather not get into that part of the technique. Since my first book *Here House of a Thousand Doors* I keep remaking the house, but it is not the same house. I blend different houses, I leave the doors wide open, I shatter them, in this new series of poems I have a whole thing about architecture, and the architecture of this house is memory. So it is as if I am trying to get further from the flesh or the teak wood and the old stones of this house into the idea of it, and it is essentially inscrutable. I mean when your hand passes through water there is a piece of the hand that never appears. And it is like your image of my hand and the pen, and there is always a piece of the flesh you can never get. "What the Mirror Never Finds is Vanishing." There is a poignancy at the root of our devices here. I want to ask you what it is you're doing with these images of process, with the hand writing or the optical device that you move in front of the shutter. What is it you are trying to catch. When I look at these images there is some evanescence there that really fascinates me.

WN These photographs came out of a larger series that I have been working on where I have



Warren Neidich *Hand, Writing 2*, 1999, silver print. Courtesy the Artist.

tried to deterritorialize different kinds of processes. I think the idea of interdisciplinary deterritorialization only works when you are talking about process, if you look at the end product if you try to put together an end product like a sculpture, or photograph or scientific equation in its finished form, or experiment in its final form it is very difficult to mix them but I think in the process of answering certain scientific questions or in the process of investigating certain artistic or aesthetic relationships you deterritorialize or aesthetize. I have been very affected by Marcel Duchamp and his idea of the found object or the recontextualized object. And what I have tried to do - and this idea has been taken many ways by many different artists - is show how certain neurobiological instruments become deterritorialized within the aesthetic domain. How does using this unnatural device in an aesthetic investigation affect what can be investigated or can be found. All of the devices that I've been using are involved in the discussion of gaze, and we know that Norman Brice, Rosalind Krauss, and Thierry De Duve, just to name a few, have been really interested in scopic regimes of identity, opticality, and gaze, these among other questions. So all the devices I am using have been used in the evaluation and construction of gaze. But normally these devices are used in the diagnostic domain which is very different than the scopic regime as it is used in evaluation of various indices of modernity. In the sense that the doctor is using the device to look inside the patient and the patient is responding by looking through the device. So it is about a kind of feedback and a relationship between objectivity and subjectivity. It is about this constant renegotiation between the response of the patient and the evaluation of the diagnostic device. So I have been very affected by the work of certain artists like Michael Snow and certain group of people called apparatus theorists that came out of London film discussion. What I have been doing is placing this apparatus, this one is called the prism bar, in these photos I have taken of you, and mounted it in front of the camera, which is another apparatus but in this case a technological apparatus, and in front of the eye which is the apparatus of the body; and by the superimposition of these three apparatuses we arrive at this image which is again a manifestation of this positive/negative film, which I like for the way it looks and for how quickly one gets the results. It is hard to take pictures with this device and you can tell if you've gotten something right. Again it is another feedback loop.

MA It is interesting that you talk about apparatuses because as writer the most I do is shift where I put my laptop, on a stool or a table. But I write with a pen all the time - of course I cannot read my own handwriting, but I love to write with a pen. My apparatus is my own body and I often write in a subway car that is moving. There was a time when I would literally pick up my pen and start writing as I was leaving the apartment and get into the subway. Going down the stairs to the subway and getting on the train became part of a ritual for me. And there was something in this swift moving metal carriage that partook from me of the idea of apparatus. It was as if there was something in that spatial form that forced me to write. Of course we all have our jogging mechanisms. I never put in the writing that it was taking place on the subway. Just as when you look at your images you don't see that you as a photographer moved an apparatus over the shutter. And I think you do not need to know that - there is a knowledge that the artist has that we don't need. Because we have the simple luminosity of the image.

WN You know one of the things I have been trying to get to with this work is this kind of optical virtuality. Because they are photographs one has to understand the diachronic

relationship that exists within the field of photography itself, prior to its conceptual shift which happened in the 60's with work by John Baldessari and all these other people. I have always been interested in the historicity of photography and where it came from. And these photographs emerge from Eadweard Muybridge's movement studies, and others' works, which used cinematic devices and which led basically to the first equipment for recording images of movement which evolved later into cinematography. There is a desire, there is a position of cinema. In these photographs you see no writing and you only see the movement. So it is about this idea of the opticality and the impossibility of writing.

MA It is interesting to me the place that theory has in how you talk about your work. Of course then I think that your work is in a different medium so talking about it doesn't interrupt it. But for me, I do read theory and think about it, but I bury it and put it somewhere else because I don't want it to get into my words. And it is because I use the same medium. The texture of the medium, language is somehow the most corruptible of mediums. What is the medium of photography, is it light? Is it color? How does one conceive of it? Or is it a stupid question. I'm also fascinated by what it means to write in all the languages of the world. And it is funny how memory works because I actually have that line "she wrote in all the languages she thought the earth contained" in a poem I published. And I forgot the line and I discovered something like it, about the languages of the earth, in reading someone else's work, and I thought "what a line" and I had forgotten that I had written something similar. So I think there is a way that the art that we produce, if we are true to what we think we know, is really an art of dwindling perception. Not dwindling in the sense of whitening something down and losing it but dwindling in the sense of really refining.

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