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Rawi Hage and Madeleine Thien

Introduction

A double exposure is an image consisting of two exposures forming juxtaposed layers. The exposures (double or multi-) ultimately produce one unified image composed of many photographs. This final image is a hybrid of light and shadows which, colliding and crossing, trace a multitude of depictions, and give birth to a new figurative work.

The technique arose from ludic experimentation or maybe sheer accident. The photographic medium was initially imagined as means to preserve and duplicate the real as a slice of time and space; the double exposure became one of photography's earliest attempts to contest its own notions of exactitude and actuality. Layering juxtapositions, and thereby contesting the claims of any singular image to be an accurate depiction of the real, became a way for the photographic medium to refute its own history, materiality and traditions.

From the outset, the ease of photography's various manipulations filled its users and critics with doubt. No longer simply a tool with which to preserve and examine slices of time, the medium appeared unwilling to provide truths let alone grand narratives. Instead the medium, engaged in a conversation with uncertainty, resisted ideological assertions. Photography, ever multi-faceted, revealed itself to be an adaptable technology which could be used as easily for policing and surveillance as for tourist souvenirs. Few inventions or artistic mediums seemed so relentlessly versatile.

Manipulations by its users – everyone from dictators to bureaucrats to artists to parents – turned the photographic quest away from the real and authentic, and towards the flamboyant, unreliable, imaginary and even academic.

The photographic medium, by virtue of its capacity to simultaneously play the role of a singularity, while also generating, willingly or un-willingly, double and multiple exposures, obliges us to experience integration, fusion, blurring and appropriation. This chameleon medium and its multifaceted usages pose ever-shifting academic, political and artistic challenges. The double exposure contains truth and versatility, stability and unreliability, narration and counter-narration. The double exposure offers not simply intertextualities but a way to exist, moment by shifting moment, inside cultural, aesthetic, linguistic and deeply personal crossings.

The works in this book form a memory of our encounters with various juxtaposed histories and personal narratives, and with the permanence and ephemerality of all such contacts. We hoped that we would each be left with brief, distorted, contested, and lasting exposures.

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We are immensely grateful to Leonie Achtnich at the Peter Szondi-Institut and Christine Laule at Holtzbrinck, without whom this book would not have been possible. Thank you to Petra Salomon and Emilie Ann Sievert for their brilliant work on this volume; Elisa Arnold for helping us in myriad ways during the seminar; the Freie Universität, the Samuel Fischer Guest Professorship for Literature, and Holtzbrinck for their support and generosity; and Andrew Blevins and Claire Bleecker who coedited, substantively and sensitively, these collected pieces.

We thank the writers in this volume for the joy, inventive-

ness and provocation they brought to their writing. Together we encountered colliding histories and languages; we made a camera obscura of our classroom, and tried to let the darkness fall, and light arrive, week after week.

Finally, our thanks to Yoko Tawada and Adania Shibli who visited our seminar; and to the texts, stories, novels and films we encountered, whose traces remain in our lives and thoughts –

Rachid Al-Daif, *Dear Mr. Kawabata* (an excerpt)
Albert Camus, *The Stranger*
Bohumil Hrabal, *Too Loud a Solitude*
Yiyun Li, “When We Were Happy We Had Other Names”
Chris Marker, *La Jeteé*
Rithy Panh, *The Missing Picture*
Gillo Pontecorvo, *The Battle of Algiers*
Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* (an excerpt)
Adania Shibli, *Touch*
Yoko Tawada, *The Naked Eye*

Interruption-Story

This text is the result of a writing experiment that is called an 'interruption-story'. We were given different impulses – images, sounds and text – and were asked to write a story as the different 'interruptions' passed by. I have edited the final text only slightly, to change grammatical errors or awkward constructions. Two of the 'interruptions' were quotes by Antonin Artaud and Ai Weiwei, which have been included into my text. The quote from Rainer Maria Rilke came from myself. The slightly amended motive of death and the cauliflower came from a text by Michel de Montaigne, which I read the evening before the experiment; but Montaigne was talking about a cabbage. There are, of course, many other references and connections to things I have read and seen – nothing grows in a vacuum and certainly not a cauliflower – I have mentioned only the most explicit ones. This text is a fascinating piece for me because it almost feels as if I have not written it myself. The words came up automatically, as if I was in a trance, and yet the text reflects many of the questions and struggles that are pervasive in my life. Questions are openings to nothing. And to everything.

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Fluctuation. Movement. Everything is as it is. But only during an infinitesimally small moment. Things fade. Colors are muted. I walk through the countryside. I am in con-

versation. I am melting into the fields. The green becomes blue in front of my eyes. The green becomes blue inside my eyes. Is there anything that can bring things back to where they were? When we were happy, we had other names. Everything is fleeting. I try to capture one moment. I fail. Of course. I want death to find me while I am planting cauliflower. Particularly cauliflower.

A piano plays. A piano is played. Images retreat into darkness. What is left when there are only sounds: Are you there? Is He there? The piano fades away; I am fading away while the cauliflower grows. Will I survive my cauliflower? Questions are openings into new rooms of thought. But these rooms are as empty as the ones I have treaded before. Atmosphere. That is what I am searching for. A piano. A violin. Candles. Cheese. Wine. A soft wind. Light twinkling in the eye of the person in front of me. The smoke of a cigarette, momentarily adding some haze to it all. All of it fills the empty rooms. Questions are openings to nothing. And to everything. Will I survive my cauliflower?

An old man stares at me through the rain. "Du mußt dein Leben ändern." But how? I think back to those moments in the bed of my parents, under the tilted roof, with the rain falling on the window. There were no words. No uncertainties. Everything that existed was there.

It is fleeting.

The old man will fade away soon. He leaves us behind. We leave him behind. He is standing on the beach and slowly walks into the sea. He disappears. "I give myself back to the oceans," he does not shout. I hear the rain on the window. Will I survive my cauliflower? I was born, I planted a cauliflower and saw a man walk to his death in a dark sea. If all this exists, "then surely one can no longer think that this is a fluke and the fluke means nothing." Meaning is incorporated into everything. Every sound, every image, every gesture.

Leonie Achtnich

Afterword

The Samuel Fischer Guest Professorship is an important pillar of the Peter Szondi-Institute for Comparative Literature. Since its foundation in 1998 by the S.Fischer Verlag, the Holtzbrinck Publishing Group, the DAAD and the FU Berlin, it has hosted 43 renowned international writers in Berlin. Each term, these writers teach one course at the Peter Szondi-Institute, thus encouraging students to critically reflect on world literature. Students of the department thus have the unique opportunity to engage with contemporary writers from all over the world, to exchange ideas and to turn the solitary experience of reading and writing into a collective endeavour.

In the summer term of 2019, Madeleine Thien and Rawi Hage shared the Samuel Fischer Guest Professorship. Thien and Hage are two of the most renowned voices of contemporary Canadian literature. Their writing has in common a relentless investigation of the wounds and scars of the 20th century and the imprint they left on the lives of individuals. The contributions in this volume are the result of the seminar series they taught, entitled 'Insinuation and Double Exposure: Appropriation as Literary Response'. In their class, Thien and

or movies they had watched in class, by discoveries they made on the streets or in their surroundings – at times from memory, at others caught by their own camera lenses.

The sheer variety of these 'exposures' in form and text is astounding. Many of the contributions move easily between different genres, media and languages and sometimes undergo metamorphoses from movie to text, from picture poem, from one language to another. The 'exposures' contain echoes of other literary works, movies and photographs discussed in class – among them the writers Yoko Tawada and Adania Shibli, who were invited by Madeleine Thien and Rawi Hage as guest speakers. The pieces also speak of the process of rewriting triggered by such an active dialogue with other voices and languages. The wonderful creative output of this course speaks of the immense energy and devotion provided by Madeleine Thien and Rawi Hage. This volume is the eighth of its kind to appear in the series. It is proof of the value the Samuel Fischer Guest Professorship has been offering to students and writers alike.

We are immensely grateful to Madeleine Thien and Rawi Hage and to their students for bringing the idea of the Samuel Fischer Guest Professorship alive. Warm thanks go to Petra Salomon for conceptualizing this volume, to the Veranstaltungsforum of the Holtzbrinck Publishing Group for their encouragement and financial support, to Andrea Blevins and Claire Bleecker for editing, Emilie Sievert for copy-editing and to Elisa Arnold for her overall support of the Guest Professorship.

Biographies

Jef Biebuyck was born in Belgium and has spent the last years reading and studying literature and philosophy. He loves poetry and cheese.

Alissa Birle is 24 years old and grew up in Berlin. When she isn't reading and analysing contemporary literature from France and Quebec, she dances, makes music, translates and writes, always stunned how learning never ends and how the thing you looked at a million times suddenly gains a new colour.

Claire Bleecker is a writer living in Brooklyn, New York.

Andrew Blevins is a writer and editor living in Portland, Oregon.

Elsa Canali, first of four children, was born in the countryside surrounding Parma, Northeast Italy, in 1993. She studied Italian-German Language and Literature at Florence University and Bonn Universität and graduated with a thesis on the war correspondent Tiziano Terzani. Currently based in Berlin, Elsa is completing her studies in General and Comparative Literature at the Freie Universität. She tries to overcome gravity with bouldering and often wonders which of David

Bowie's eyes would be the most delicate to be photographed. She firmly believes in the salvific value of words.

Louisa Ramdane Cherif is the child of a German mother and an Algerian father. Born in 1996 and raised in Berlin, a melting pot of different nationalities, she did not think a lot about her roots as she grew up. When she started university, she confronted herself more and more with the notion of identity and with the fact that the question "where are you from?" does not entail a one-word answer.

El Salem is a political scientist turned quasi anthropologist from Cairo with an interest in city studies. Following political upheaval and the post-2011 exodus, he left Cairo and has made Berlin his home. El Salem currently works and studies Middle Eastern cities, with a focus on Levantine cities, while constantly writing with, on, and about Cairo.

Cara Enders, born in 1995 in the Herz-Jesu-Krankenhaus Fulda, is mostly interested in the logic of our hearts, building the world around us.

Paul Fenski was born in Bremen. He studies media, political communication and journalism. Since 2017, Paul lives in Berlin.

Maria Fogliano was born in Naples, Italy, on a Monday in the spring of 1992. She is a Master student of AVL at the Freie Universität Berlin. A friend just told her she is loca, livin' la vida, but she's not livin' la vida loca.

Katharina Fräbel, born in Berlin in 1996, studies in Berlin: Media and Communications (major) and General and Comparative Literature (minor). This was her first attempt at

Creative Writing, and to be honest, at the beginning of this project she was afraid of it. But as the class progressed, she got more comfortable with writing.

Sophie Sarah Franke is a graphic designer currently working towards her MA in Applied Literary Studies and Contemporary Literature at the Freie Universität Berlin. She has earned her BA in Comparative Literature from the FU as well. Her fields of interest include children's literature, mythology, fairy tales and animal studies.

Lucas Gerosch, born 1991 in Berlin, is studying Comparative Literature and Dutch.

Digne Glatzel was born in southern Germany and raised in California. At eighteen she moved to Berlin to study Comparative Literature.

Weronika Maria Gorczynska started writing short stories in a selection of stale-smelling classrooms at UC Santa Barbara. She has often travelled to Israel in the past two years and is currently finishing her MA in Comparative Literature at Freie Universität. Weronika has a BA in Philosophy and was born in Berlin in 1994.

Rawi Hage was born in Beirut, Lebanon. He emigrated to Canada in 1992 and now lives in Montreal. His first novel, *De Niro's Game*, won the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. His three subsequent novels won or have been shortlisted for twelve other major awards and prizes. His work has been translated to thirty languages. He finally decided to no longer subscribe to a practice of false humility.

Galina Kotow was born in Russia. She is currently studying Comparative Literature and Greek Philology in Berlin.

Elena Marcos was born in Bilbao, Spain, in 1993 and has lived in Berlin since 2015. The 'exposures', focused on the Berlin underground, are an attempt to inhabit a new city through music, art and literature.

Francesca Romana Marcucci was born in 1994 in Rome. In 2013 she moved to Trieste, where she studied Slovenian and German Languages and Literatures. Her main interest is the dialogue between the arts and the many uses of language, so she collected experiences in different fields, such as theatre, cinema and translation. Since 2018 she has lived in Berlin where she studies Comparative Literature.

Leonid Nezhinskiy is a Russo-German student of Comparative Literature and Communications with a deep interest in the theory and practice of the *videoludic*. He is easy to amuse, easy to confuse and usually to be found near sources of cozy warmth of all kinds. And just this once he seems to be a writer of somewhat strange little stories set in colder climates.

Fernando Ramos López, neophyte writer, persevering polyglot and aspiring linguist, General and Comparative Literature Studies and Spanish Philology student at Freie Universität Berlin, born and raised on the Canary Islands, Spain, 1997.

Fleur-Nicole Riskin, born 1998 in Berlin, has been studying General and Comparative Literature as well as German and English Philology at the Freie Universität Berlin since 2017. As her parents are from Russia, she grew up bilingual, with German and Russian as her native languages. She's very interested in foreign languages and different literary genres and also likes to write poems and prose in her free time.

Jila Röthling is studying Literature and Philosophy in the fifth semester. She was born in August 1999 in Berlin and has since

lived in this vibrant city, experiencing its various colors and voices in a new way everyday.

Fio Sierwald, born in 1994 in Munich, has studied German and Czech Literature, Philosophy and Comparative Literature. Through their creative and academic writing as well as performances and body work, they have been and are still thinking about memory, trauma, histories, narratives of nation and/or family in relation to the self, body and community – to try and find ways of opening up, queering and politicizing those narratives. They don't like brussels sprouts. They love maps.

Kai Spellmeier has always been a little bookmad. When he isn't off gallivanting around the UK to meet his favorite authors, he can be found in his Berlin flat, reading a YA novel while eating too much cake.

Madeleine Thien is the author of four books, including *Dogs at the Perimeter* and a story collection, *Simple Recipes*. Her most recent novel, *Do Not Say We Have Nothing*, about art, music and revolution in 20th century China, was shortlisted for the 2016 Man Booker Prize and won the 2016 Scotiabank Giller Prize and the Governor-General's Literary Award for Fiction. She is a Professor of English at the City University of New York.

Maurits van Uffelen has been studying Intercultural China Studies at Freie Universität Berlin and Zhejiang University since 2017. Discovering different cultures and philosophies has influenced his way of thinking profoundly, and, while writing on a multitude of topics, he always finds himself reflecting on them from an intercultural perspective.

Jasmin Veeh

“name, birth, origin and subjects”

this and that

here and there

i don't know, my mum did most of the work

Lisa Vogel is an MA student in comparative literature, and her studies gravitate towards anglophone literatures from the 20th century to the present. Born and raised in the north of Germany, she also got to spend time with her family in the USA and thus feels equally at home in both English and German. She came to Berlin five years ago and enjoys reading in the city's many bars, which inspired her writing for this project.

Guillermo Romero von Zeschau, born in Corrientes, Argentina, 1989. Poet and poetry translator. His published works include *Portátil* (2013), *Mascotas y vegetales* (2016) and, as co-author, *Uncinos* (2015). He currently lives in Berlin.

Lena Wassermeier, 27, finished her BA at Leuphana Universität Lüneburg in Kulturwissenschaften and is currently pursuing a master's degree in General and Comparative Literature at Freie Universität Berlin.

Xiao Yang, 1994, China subjects: Through time and space, we meet love.