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Film as an archive for colonial photographs: activating the past in the present

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Abstract

This practice-led research looks at the ways in which the colonial archive, and the colonial photographic archive in particular, can be reconstructed to produce new critical histories. The research argues for the potential of the moving image as a tool for re-staging colonial archives, as a means of generating responsible ways of looking at, and of engaging with our troubled collective pasts.

In my practice I mix the photographic archive of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (which became BP) with my family's photographs from Iran, and with the documentation and narrativization of my encounter with both of these sets of materials, within the moving image. Through this process I address questions about the nature of the photographic archive and the search for historical meaning within it; the question of the researcher's position within the archive and within the history she produces; and I investigate the affective power of colonial photographs within film and the experience of untimeliness which they produce.

While addressing problems associated with the failure of photographic archives to offer access to any stable, transparent meaning, I show how engaging with slippages of meaning can produce other kinds of historical knowledge. But I also argue that attending to the impression of the 'real' produced by the colonial photograph as it appears within film, makes the past felt in the present tense, in ways that draw attention to the responsibility of being an onlooker in a situation of injustice. In addition I show how registering the place and time of the researcher within the new filmic archive in motion produces an effective means of imaginative time travel and a lively experience of history.

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5.1 Photograph, verso

Note:

Many of the above are images that eventually came to find a place in the film I produced, The Host (2015, UK). However their status within this written thesis is that of fragments awaiting contextualization and interpretation, prior to their new life within said film. This fact is reflected in their captions and attributions.

Accompanying material

1 DVD: *The Host*, HD transferred to SD, 60 minutes

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I wish to thank my supervisors, Dr Uriel Orlow and Professor Joram ten Brink, for sharing their expertise and offering guidance at key stages in this process. I am very grateful for the intellectual commitment and friendship of my cohort, Christine Douglass, Nina Mangalanyagam and Samuel Stevens, and of the AVPhD group convened by Professor Tony Dowmunt at Goldsmiths College. Thanks are also due to my friends Jenny Morgan and Farhana Sheikh for proof-reading this text.

Author's declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Part 1

Practice

The Host, HD video, 60 minutes.

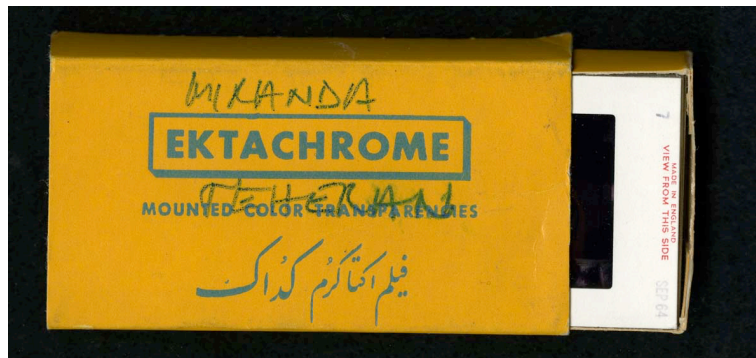


Fig. 0.1 Scanned object.

The following is a faithful inscription of events that have been indelibly stamped upon this writer's memory.

I had set about digging out a wooden chest which had then opened to reveal dozens of small yellow or red cardboard boxes that dazzled with their brightness. Each was inscribed with one of two words in a strange language and script whose meaning I could not grasp. 'K-o-d-a-k'; and 'A-g-f-a'. Looking into each box I could see layers of antique cardboard that each formed the frame of an individual, miniature image-world, dating back to the early 1960s.

Time had eroded the colour index of the transparent pictures, which now bore a pink or red hue. Nevertheless, and despite some exotic oriental scenery and unfamiliar clothing, I was able to recognize the gestures and facial expressions of some of the people in the tiny images as members of my immediate family, not all of whom are living today. All of a sudden, while examining one of the image-worlds, I became aware of a powerful sensation in my chest, that seemed to precipitate two rivulets of liquid that ran, quite against my will, down my face at a most inconvenient moment. I was immediately unnerved by the unwanted effects of my research, and unsure as to whether to proceed with my analysis. It occurred

to me that the fragile surface could easily become infected and distorted by the salty discharge of my emotions, and on this basis I concluded that it was unsafe for me to continue the close examination of my family archive.

The expedition

After a long, arduous journey through strange and unfamiliar country, I arrived tired and hungry at the BP archive, located somewhere to the east of darkest Coventry. The purpose of my expedition was to investigate photographic imprints of the British oil corporation in Iran – imprints made over the course of six long and tumultuous decades of the 20th century. These papery resources were rumoured to have accumulated in great abundance within the bowels of this godforsaken place, and my naïve plan was to bring them back with me, in order to distil and refine their contents later, through the modern medium of video. As part of my planned method, I had in mind the careful application of our great civilization's most advanced editing technologies, such as the one called Final Cut Pro V7. However, so restless being the forward march of progress, this will most likely have become obsolete by the time you read these words.

For I had come to believe that traces of the invisible forces that shape our world might be divined from within these colourless parchments. If only these opaque fragments, long-entombed in the shadows of this imperial citadel could be brought to the surface and allowed to speak. Surely the only challenge, I reasoned, was to navigate a way around the fearsome brutes that guarded the gates of the archive, so that the shades of the past could be illuminated by means of the light cast by modern techniques of vision.

At this time I felt quite certain that rumours of a curse that befalls the media archaeologist who disturbs the sleep of the ancient spirits of the imperial archive

were based on nothing more than the superstition and childlike fears of the primitive mind. With hindsight, I should have known that I would come to regret my arrogance, and rue the fateful day I crossed the threshold of the BP archive and entered that hellish territory of tangled tag words, arbitrary indexing systems and the doomed 'required fields' that would recognize none of the terms of my search.

I can now see that the true beasts were neither Joanne, Bethan nor Peter – administrators of the BP archive – but rather the invisible designers of the archival labyrinth. For above all else, the land of images is one of ghastly ambiguity and undecidability that defies the rational logic of catalogue, database or beastly binaries of Boolean search...

But I digress. Not long after ingesting some quite tasteless substances that pass as sustenance in those parts, I began to regain my strength. Revitalized, I was ready to begin my field work: an initial survey of the surface strata of the visual archive. Having failed to unlock the code that governs the indexing of images, I was reduced to entering random date and subject terms which triggered the arrival of a succession of overloaded trolleys, each bearing a vast mass of materials, which I would need to appraise individually – like some prospector who is forced to pass great handfuls of compacted earth through the coarse mesh of his sieve in the faint hope of discovering a single speck of gold dust. Undeterred, I decided to adopt as rigorously systematic and scientific approach as possible from here on in, and set about meticulously categorizing and colour-coding the contents of various pictorial collections into my graph-paper notebook.



Fig. 0.2 Aerial photograph of South-West Iran, sourced from the BP archive.

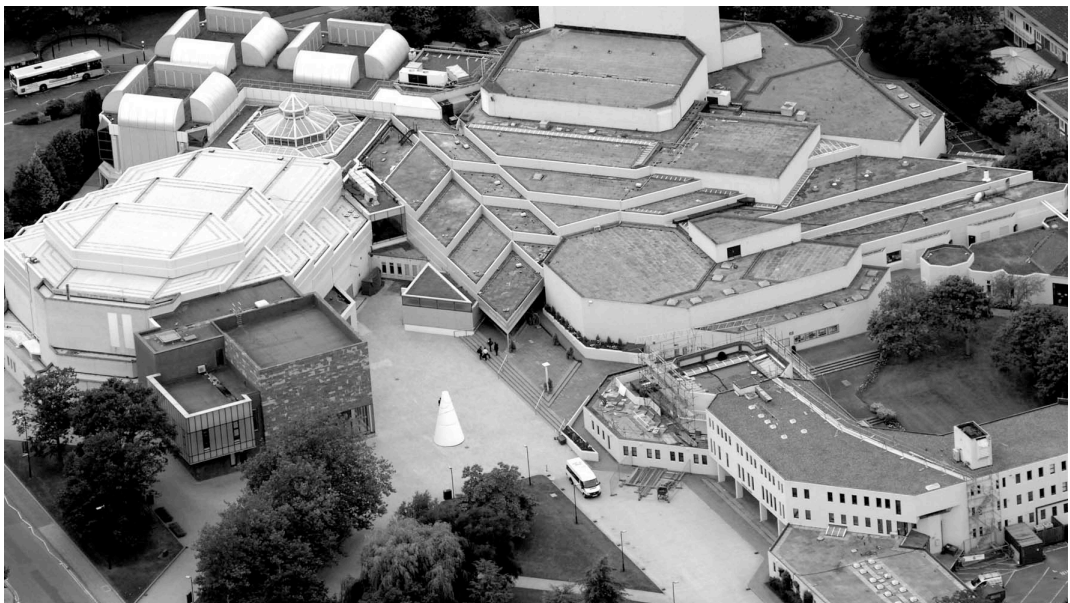


Fig. 0.3 Aerial photograph of the University of Warwick, home to the BP archive, sourced from the University website¹.

¹ <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/communications/medialibrary/images/december/194.jpg>

Things I found

The first remains I unearthed had the ability to abstract the world into a series of geometric patterns. Both aerial and panoramic records constructed space in such a way that human beings magically disappeared altogether, while vast mountain- or desertscapes revealed the outlines of their hidden sub-structure, a stratified history of several millennia. In these images, the geometry of pipelines, giant containers and other industrial facilities stood out like monumental effigies designed for the visual gratification of some fearsome celestial deity. I told myself that these were mere representations, illusions made from traces of silver on paper support. My suspicions were confirmed then and there, that the imperial beings that ruled over the globe were able to do so because in fashioning these paper doubles of the world, they had conjured the power to influence and thus control the original. This dreadful realization chilled me to the bone.

The return home

When the time of my return approached, I effected a swift and technically advanced extraction of raw visual matter. It became apparent that the value of this material could only be appreciated by a pictorial expert such as myself. The natives who inhabited the archive treated the stuff roughly and I suspected that they were worshippers of the Word, and thus ignorant of the potential of precious visual materials, other than for the most primitive illustrative purposes. On leaving the place, I carried the digital treasures I had unearthed upon a small stick, which I guarded securely about my person until I was able to reach the safety of my headquarters back in the Capital. Here I inserted the stick into the orifice of my centralized memory-storage device, and waited patiently as it eagerly unburdened itself of its contents.

The distillation of historical meaning

Determined to avoid a repetition of the unfortunate incident that resulted from my unguarded attempts to evaluate my familial photographs, I made an effort to completely empty my mind of all preconception and prejudice as I prepared for the process of close analysis and translation of the pictographic impressions. In order to distil the historical meaning contained in each document, and to hone the forensic searchlight of historical reason, it is necessary for the researcher to banish all traces of desire and fantasy from her consciousness. On completion of this brief mental exercise, my mind had taken on the clarity of a translucent pool of still water, the emptiness of a clean sheet of paper, and the smooth neutrality of a freshly plastered wall. I was ready to begin.

Part 2

Written Thesis

Introduction

This practice-led research looks at the ways in which the colonial archive, and the colonial photographic archive in particular, can be negotiated to produce new, critical ways of engaging with the past. It argues for the possibilities of the moving image as a potent tool through which still images can be processed and projected, in order to produce new ways of thinking about history and of relating to the colonial.

This project is a search for a method adequate to the task of addressing blind-spots associated with colonial memory and colonial representations. In particular it seeks to address problems of dissociation, disavowal, denial and other forms of expedient 'forgetting' that frequently manifest themselves in contemporary narratives of colonial nostalgia or of mawkish regret – those narratives that serve to distance Europe from the troubling after-effects and continuities of colonialism. This research considers aesthetic and ethical questions in order to find ways of producing a lively and responsible engagement with colonial images.

T.J. Demos (2013), among others, situates such failures of memory squarely in the context of European economic and political policies that perpetuate the same relational dynamic, under different guises, in the post-colonial present.

Demos proposes "spectropoetics" as a term to describe an aesthetics he considers exemplified in the lens-based work of a number of the European artists that he studies, who turn to post-colonial Africa in order to make visible linkages that bind past and present, post-colonial Europe and the African continent (2013,

p13). My research shares preoccupations with some of the divergent, lens-based investigations of the haunted character of post-colonial Europe which Demos studies. However, rather than enact a physical return to the post-colony in order to explore how the past haunts the present, my research addresses the past that haunts the colonial archive. It also focuses on some specific methods for producing historical knowledge and for making the colonial past felt in the present, by looking at what happens when colonial photographs are embedded within film.

My practical research sets out to investigate the image archive of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, now known as BP, using the moving image to sequence and to test the relationship between photographs. As I embarked on this research I wondered how the visual documentation of British lives in Iran in the 20th century would inflect my understanding of that imperial project, in particular in the colonial encounter² between the British and indigenous and migrant populations in Iran. This work raises a cluster of theoretical and practical questions, which I link to each of three sites of research:

1. The researcher's encounter with the colonial archive.

What is the relationship between the individual researcher, the experience of searching for and looking at images in an archive, and the kind of knowledge produced? What happens when the researcher finds herself inside the history she is researching?

2. The researcher's encounter with colonial photographs.

Given the fact that archives have been central to the establishment and exercise of colonial power, what alternative orders of meaning and knowledge can productively be sought from their documents, and by what

² I use 'colonial' to describe the set of relationships that shaped political, social and economic realities in Iran. Iran was never an official colony.

methods can this meaning be extracted and transmitted?

3. The film viewer's encounter with an image.

What opportunities are opened by embedding photographs within the moving image, and how might the encounter with such images shape perceptions? What are the ethical implications of reproducing or looking at photographs that have been taken under conditions of radical inequality?

This research develops and extends my previous video work with colonial photographs, *Why Colonel Bunny Was Killed* (2010), which first sparked my interest in questions concerning the relationship between images and the colonial. I embarked on that project which related to the British presence in the Afghan borderlands at the turn of the 20th century, with the hope of addressing what seemed to me to be important questions pertaining to the ways that some kinds of memory and history are used. I was interested in a contemporary context in which, while colonial catastrophes go largely unremembered in Britain, colonial images and tropes persist, returning unrecognized in public life. I wished to consider practical ways of undoing this effect both for myself and for an audience.

The starting point for my preceding video was the memoirs of a medical missionary who lived in what was the North West Frontier of British India and who is distantly related to me. As I began my next project, I was unsure whether I would incorporate a number of my parents' photographs, together with many more sourced from an official, corporate archive. Over the course of the research, family history and personal memory have become part of this reflection on a collective past, sending me into new territories, presenting new questions and opportunities. During my research I found few European practitioners who approached colonial history through the lens of a personal history that links the

author to the figure of the colonizer. This research has tasked me with situating myself within colonial history, as both participant and critic.

Research structure and methodology

The research is divided between a practical and a written component, which have been developed in tandem and have informed each other. Both are especially informed by the experience of, and reflection on the labour of, *looking* at archival photographs and *searching* for meaning, and by my attempt to recreate aspects of that experience for another person, an audience or a reader.

The film work has produced a dramatization, a semi-fictionalization, of the research process. This in turn has allowed me to write *through* the practice. Both film work and written research take a self-reflexive approach. The film, and to a lesser degree the written text, are structured around a first-person voice, which I use to enact or perform some of the relationships and concepts I go on to develop through theoretical argument.

The film (the outcome of which is a 60-minute, single screen video, *The Host*) combines photographic documents from the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company with photographs taken by my parents of their life in Iran as staff of the company. The film dramatizes my encounter with both sets of archive images. The voice-over narrates my speculations about what I find or fail to find, building several interconnected stories. At the film's centre is an account of the explorations of a petroleum geologist who developed an interest in ancient history, leading him to produce some improbable theories derived from doubtful historiographic methods. The film sets his theories against those of a British Imperial project that deprived Iranians of independence and democratic rights for much of the 20th

century. While both photographs and film describe colonial encounters at individual and corporate levels, ultimately the film sketches the contours of the colonizing imagination, its fantasies, anxieties and justifications about itself and its others.

Structure and content of the written thesis

The written thesis sheds light on theoretical questions about the nature of our engagement with past and present, with the category we call the colonial, with archival documents, and above all, with still and moving images and the kinds of knowledge these produce.

The first chapter sets out some problems and challenges relating to working with archives in the context of the post-colonial. It then attends to a number of different moving image strategies that my research will build on, combine, and transfer to the particular context of a research with colonial photographs. The second chapter takes the encounter with the photographic archive as its starting point, and addresses problems, failures and paradoxes associated with deciphering signs and making sense of the photographic remains of the past. It argues that by taking slippages and surpluses of meaning in the archive seriously, new kinds of knowledge about the construction of an image of the past can be produced. The third chapter looks at the implications of the artist-researcher's intervention in the colonial archive, her position within the Imperial history she investigates, and the documentation of the negotiation between the personal and the collective. It argues that situating the time and place of the researcher within the research and the film produces both a responsible approach to history and an effective form of time travel. The fourth chapter turns to the experience of reception, and the ways in which merging archival photographs into the moving

image can generate productive experiences of untimeliness. It argues that the moving image has the power to continually uproot and reposition the viewer in relation to the photograph, its subject, and the past it embodies; and that this sense of positionality provokes ethical questions about relationship and responsibility.

Note on the scope and limits of the research

The completed film falls into a category of practice sometimes called the essay film. I discuss the essay in relation to montage strategies in Chapter 2, but I approach this research from a perspective that takes questions about the base materials of the film, the photographic archive of BP, as the starting point.

There is much to be said about the role of sound in relation to the experience of time within the moving image. Although I have touched on this role in Chapter 4, I have chosen to limit my comments on the sound-image relationship, since a proper exploration of the subject would require a further chapter in its own right.

Chapter 1

Contextual Review

1.1 Obstacles to colonial memory

Given the fact that there is no firm separation from, or clear European conscience in relation to, the colonial past, in many ways the colonial era never ended. (Demos, 2013, p8)

The title of Stuart Hall 's essay *When was the post-colonial? Thinking at the Limit* (2005) points to two related misrecognitions concerning the post-colonial, the first being that the 'post' of post-colonial constitutes a chronological 'after' that follows the supposed suspension of the colonial; and the second, that the colonial simply describes the binary of colonizer/colonized, in a situation of direct rule. Hall argues for the post-colonial as a field that enables thinking *through* hybridity – in order to undo spatial and temporal binaries, the outside/inside of the colonial, the linear logic of historical closures and successions. Therefore far from the post-colonial being the a-historical and depoliticizing concept painted by critics of the term, Hall insists on a politics that recognizes the ambiguity and fluidity of categories such as the colonial, precisely because its effects were and are felt, albeit in multiple, differentiated ways, across boundaries of geography and time.

The difficulty of locating and of recognizing the colonial bears on the ways in which its afterlife can be disavowed, misrecognized or denied, and it reflects an underlying problem for European colonial remembrance. In this context, anthropologist and historian of the colonial Ann Laura Stoler criticizes what she argues is the contemporary French academy's difficulty with a past that is close to home, specifically in relation to contemporary racial thinking around the impoverished and disenfranchised youth of North African origin who live in France. In her essay *Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France*, Stoler (2011) formulates "colonial aphasia" in order to describe a problem which

she argues is not of simple forgetting or of amnesia, but one of misrecognition, a failure to make connections, to connect details to their bigger picture. She describes this blind spot both in terms of "a political disorder and a troubled psychic space" (*ibid.*, p153) that manifests itself as the "political *déraison* (un-reason) that splits and disperses [the] colonial from contemporary categories" (*ibid.*, p155).

Stoler describes the way in which the dissociation from the past that enables colonial aphasia manifests itself in a sudden prevalence of certain types of narratives about the colonial past that are inflected by patterns of nostalgia and moral outrage, or by reassuring themes of past regret or individual redemption, the canonization of heroic figures and so on, that in different ways produce distancing effects. Stoler writes, "History in an active voice is only partly about the past" (2011, p155). The challenge is to find methods for re-connecting the "severed pathways" and repairing the "systems of association" that Stoler identifies (*ibid.*, p148). Crucially, Stoler comments that the extent to which we produce an "effective rather than idle colonial history" is proportionate to how deeply it disturbs the present (*ibid.*, p144).

This last observation suggests a role for forms of practice that might animate the past and in so doing, disturb the present. In *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and The Sociological Imagination*, Avery Gordon (2008) searches for methods of producing knowledge of the legacies of state-sanctioned violence. She traces the ways in which unresolved, troubled histories erupt in their afterlife as unspeakable but looming presences, something she imagines as the invisible furniture that we keep bumping into.

Gordon asks why it is that literary fiction sometimes manages to make visible forms of knowledge that the literature of social science fails to address. She seeks

a critical language that can make an account of the not-visible, of those who have been hidden from history. Gordon writes that if our task is to write a history of the present, we must take account of experiential realities of social and political life that have been systematically hidden from view. She proposes that in order to study social life and to contribute to changing it, we are tasked to identify hauntings and to “reckon with ghosts” (2008, p23). These ghosts, she writes, are the symptoms and manifestations of the “seething presence” of a society’s elisions, occlusions and invisibilities, but crucially they also “represent a future possibility” (*ibid.*, pp7-9). It is this future possibility that gives our efforts to engage with the presence of the past their power and significance.

The challenge issued in different but connected ways by Stoler and Gordon is one of relationship and therefore of responsibility – between ourselves and the occlusions and invisibilities of past and present. This research explores the potential for images to provoke the sort of dynamic and lively relationship with the past that these writers suggest is necessary if we are to better grasp our present.

In *Return to the Postcolony: Spectres of Colonialism in Contemporary Art*, art historian T. J. Demos (2013) asks by which methods artists might engage with the spectres that haunt Europe and its representations, how they might make visible that which has been rendered invisible, suppressed, erased or elided by the social body. Demos examines the work of European artists who return to the post-colony precisely to provoke ‘the ghost’. He proposes that

against the amnesia and misrecognition that characterize much of European cultural and political representation the artists addressed herein might be thought of as conjurers of the “spectral”. (2013, p8)

Demos considers the ways in which past injustices go unexamined and unrecognized, so that unresolved historical troubles live on as repressed

memories which emerge within a society's prevailing discourses and representations. He argues that through the practice of art, ghosts of the past can be engaged in order to make visible the things that have been repressed and denied. He proposes that such practices can play a political role as antidotes to a condition where 'hauntings' are otherwise acted out in unconscious and therefore destructive ways. And that such practices can press us in the West to imagine other ways of living, and living more justly, in the post-colonial present.

Return to the Postcolony looks at the work of five lens-based European artists who deal with colonial legacies. Demos writes of the investigative impulse of such art practices as a sort of "reverse migration" (2003, p10) of European artists returning to the post-colony (post-colonial Africa, in his study) in search of histories and causes, some answers to transgenerational haunting. These artists' practices are informed by reflections on the era of decolonization of their parents and grandparents, as well as by the presence of neo-colonial policies, linked to contemporary realities such as migration and war. He argues that these diverse art practices enact a new aesthetics which he argues can be held together under the term "spectropoetics"³ on account of their shared ability to enable "ghosts or presences [to] enter uneasily into, or insistently disturb, representation and the stability of its visual, temporal, and spatial logic" (Demos, 2013, p9).

In asking how figures that have been elided, omitted or erased from history, or whose presence we may simply be blind to, might be made visible, Demos asks "For how can we account for an aesthetics of the negation of appearance, or the appearance of negation...?" (2013, p13). In what follows, I consider how this question has been addressed in relation to the colonial archive, given its erasures, omissions and repressions. How should an artist or a historian negotiate ghosts

³ Demos is building on Derrida's notion of "spectropoetics" developed in *Spectres of Marx* (1994)

and presences within the colonial archive? How might we 'read between the lines' of the evidence presented by the archive?

1.2 The colonial archive and its negations

In *The Rani of Sirmur: an essay in reading the archives*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985) considers problems of representation in relation to the impossibility of recuperating subaltern consciousness as an object of study. She asks how, "after the planned epistemic violence of the imperialist project" a historian might "inspect soberly the absence of a text that can 'answer one back'" (1985, p251). Spivak proposes that we concentrate on documenting and theorizing the "consolidation of Europe as sovereign subject" (*ibid.*, p247).

She presents this as a strategy of "displacement" and disruption, an alternative to succumbing to what she sees as a revisionary impulse to simply reverse or invert the relation between Europe and its Others, which she claims produces a sort of nostalgic "third worldism" that is "openly ethnicist or primitivist" (1985, p252). In seeking a viable methodological strategy, Spivak calls on us to commit to "read" the archive, rather simply using the document as a "quarry". She advocates a

careful deconstructive method, displacing rather than only reversing oppositions (such as here between colonizer and colonized) by taking the investigator's own complicity into account. (*ibid.*, p272)

More recently, Stoler, also using geological metaphors, has criticized what she describes as the "extractive" method, by which students of colonial experience *mine* the *content* of archives, without paying attention to their "form or placement" (2002, p90). She wants to see a move away from the seeking of evidence of colonial practices inside the archive, towards understanding forms and systems of classification as the locus and the very substance of colonial politics themselves. For Stoler this reflection on the politics of knowledge

production opens the possibility of understanding colonialism as a 'living history', one that continues to inform and shape post-colonial practices into the present, rather than as a conveniently distanced, finished past.

Like Spivak, Stoler is sceptical of attempts to generate history from below, working "against the grain" in order to recuperate the effaced subject. For Stoler the assumption that the "script" of the archive is already known, bypasses attention to the "grain" of the archive itself. She calls on researchers to dwell or "pause" on the conventions of the archive, and not to bypass them (2002, p100). Indeed an archival turn in the humanities over the past decade or more has marked a shift away from the idea of the archive as a source to be mined, towards interest in and acknowledgement of the nature of archiving as a historically contingent process and as a subject requiring philosophical and political analysis in itself.

1.3 The archival photograph and its negations

Ariella Azoulay (2012) identifies three categories of negation or absence within the photographic archive. *Untaken* photographs (a photographic event took place but no trace was recorded on a photographic support). *Inaccessible* photographs (they existed but have become inaccessible). *Unshowable* photographs (they exist but cannot be shown publicly).

To take one such problem, in *Different Ways Not To Say Deportation* (2012), an exhibition consisting of a series of pencil drawings, Ariella Azoulay finds creative strategies for negotiating the repressive aspects of the pictorial archive. She examines photographs from the archive of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) taken between 1947 and 1950, the period in which Palestinians were first made refugees or 'internally displaced people' (IDPs) –displacements that enabled the founding of the state of Israel as a Jewish state. The Red Cross

archive's condition for allowing the reproduction of these photographs obliges the user to label the images using prescribed language. Azoulay reports that they describe a Palestinian city as a "Jewish zone" and another as an "Arab zone" as though the production of "two sides" was intrinsic or pre-existing; in another example, they use the jargon of 'repatriation' to describe a process by which a column of Palestinian women crosses over into Jordan. Azoulay reports that the ICRC state that the use of language is prescribed in order to preserve the "neutrality" of their work (2012, unnumbered pages). She writes:

the problem with this language [concepts of ethnic separation serve to create and ground a reality that had been violently imposed upon the inhabitants] [is] rather its violent application to a reality in which these categories were themselves one of the main bones of contention. (Azoulay, 2012, unnumbered pages)

Since she is not permitted to suspend the paradigm of "two sides", of separation, in her re-presentation of the photographs Azoulay's strategy is to make pencil drawings from each image, which allows her to make an impressionistic approximation of each picture for exhibition. She then narrates each according to another, critical logic that resists what she calls the archive's "constituent violence"⁴.

Azoulay understands the ethical problem as one that requires responsibility on the part of the onlooker:

Captions too, one must remind herself, do not speak for themselves. They need us, readers and spectators. If we do not uphold our responsibility as citizens – [...] when we participate in the event of photography, we preserve the law achieved by constituent violence. (*ibid.*)

⁴ "Constituent violence, as Walter Benjamin wrote, needs law-preserving violence in order to persist." (Azoulay, 2013, p550)



Fig. 1.1 Spread from the catalogue for the exhibition *Different Ways Not to Say Deportation* by Ariella Azoulay (2012)

Azoulay reconstructs the absent photograph by means of drawing and speculative writing, which not only give presence to the photograph and its absent subjects, but, by drawing attention to the archive's negations, they bring an unsettling, ghostly disquiet to bear on each scene, to each unshowable photograph, conjuring their unresolved, spectral aspects.

Elsewhere, Azoulay suggests (2010) that historians, political philosophers and sociologists simply do not acknowledge photographs as documents.

Photographs are considered too partial, fragmentary and incidental to be of value of themselves in producing real knowledge. Azoulay argues that the indexing label that the archivist attaches to the photograph disables our ability to see the photographic image. She draws attention to the viewer's position as a sovereign

subject, who is not situated *outside* of the conditions that governed the photographic encounter. Therefore she calls for a “civil imagination”, that emphasizes the photographic situation as one that occurs between a number of protagonists –photographer, camera, subject, spectators and the viewer of the photograph – in an attempt to eschew binary discussions around being inside/outside the photograph (Azoulay, 2010, p12).

But crucially Azoulay also points to resistant ways of reconstructing the photographs in order to recover the radical potential of photographs from within the archive:

Reconstructing the photographs contrary to the pact signed through them in the archive restores the potentialities of the archive. It generates what Walter Benjamin called the “incompleteness of history”, the potential of a mixed population to limit the power of national sovereignty. (2012, unnumbered pages)

In what follows I look to the capacity of the moving image as a tool for animating the archive’s negations. I consider some of the ways in which the moving image has been used to restore the radical potential of the archive to reconnect with the incompleteness of history.

1.4 Moving image methodologies

*Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire*⁵ is an on-line project, launched in 2011, in which Birkbeck University of London and the University of Central London worked with several other British institutions⁶ to gather together over 6,000 colonial films into a single database, “to allow both colonizers and colonized to understand better the truths of Empire”⁷. The project indexes and re-

⁵ www.colonialfilm.org.uk

⁶ British Film Institute, Imperial War Museum, British Empire and Commonwealth Museum

⁷ From the website

contextualizes a wide range of film materials showing life in British colonies, with the aim of making the films more accessible through their collation and the addition of a range of specially commissioned contextual research. The project aims to draw attention to the films and the contexts in which they were made, and it makes the materials available, particularly to those in former British colonies. The actual, physical materials remain housed in their original institutions, but over the course of my research I wondered whether the project's secondary indexing required a conceptual cleavage of the materials from the others on the shelves that surround them. And whether that categorical separation would undermine the opportunity to attend to the social, cultural, political and psychic continuums beyond territorial boundaries that enable us to perceive the internal reach of the colonial.

1.4.1 Archive, moving image and appropriation

Colonial archives have been reworked by artists, filmmakers and researchers seeking to re-purpose images, using different methods, and to different ends. Ten years after its release, Emile de Antonio would write of his film *In the Year of the Pig* (1968), "*In the Year of the Pig* was/is an organizing weapon, a collage/history of the people's struggle in Vietnam" (de Antonio and Nichols, 2005). De Antonio's film intercuts footage from Vietnam's colonial history in the 1930s and 1940s with contemporary footage and voices drawn from newsreels and testimonies from diverse sources, shifting between the United States and Vietnam, past and present. The film juxtaposes different voices, images and arguments in order to construct its own argument through a collision of images and the contradictions that emerge. Of his film, de Antonio said, "It was the other addressing itself to us, frequently in our words and images" (De Antonio and Nichols, 2005). Without recourse to spoken commentary, *In the Year of the Pig* fashions its argument from an assembly of film texts that together offer an explanation of the imperial roots of

the Vietnam war, revealing its violence and racism in order to confront and to mobilize an audience against its government's prosecution of that war. De Antonio's reworking of images grows out of the leftist political circuit of Newsreel collective screenings in the US at the time, but as Bill Nicholls (de Antonio and Nichols, 2005) has pointed out, the ambition of the film's theatrical distribution and the outraged reaction this provoked beyond the usual circuits marked a departure from previous models.

Nearly thirty years later, in a wordless and poetic register, Vincent Monnikendam's *Mother Dao, The Turtlelike* (1995) interweaves moving images from the Dutch East Indies between 1912 to 1933 to present another kind of indictment of the colonial. Monnikendam selects from and clusters sequences in order to expose themes that he 'reads' within the material, including those of environmental destruction, attitudes to technology, the exploitation of labour and of resources, indigenous ritual, and so on.

The film cumulatively reveals the scale of imperial exploitation and the hubris of the colonial masters, while also continually creating space to witness the presence of indigenous people and to imagine their experience. The editing, especially the addition of a subtle sound score, gives weight to the silence of the returned gaze and the gestures of indigenous ritual and labour. The absence of narration (or of sync sound), save the addition of occasional intermittent fragments of enigmatic, poetry, song and indigenous mythology, works to produce a contemplative atmosphere that invites critical reflection on the experiences of a colonized people and the horrifying brutality of the colonial regime. *Mother Dao, the Turtlelike* operates not through argument nor as an explanation of causes and their effects, but it produces another kind of knowledge, another kind of quiet shock – one that is felt through a chain of linkages, delivered through the affective

power of its cumulatively disturbing arrangement of images, sounds and poetry⁸.

Laura Mulvey (2007) thinks about the compilation film in general and Monnikendam's working through of colonial film in particular. She attributes the tasks of revision, analysis and interpretation to the historian and to the psychoanalyst alike – the one reworking materials in an archive, and the other reworking the subject's unconscious as a personal archive of past history. She makes use of the psychoanalytic concept of "deferred action": or "afterwardsness", by which memory is revised in accordance with later experience. Mulvey considers the appropriated image as a quotation, which inhabits a "double existence", simultaneously belonging to its original context and to its second life, in which it bears the marks of an extruded fragment. Thus the time of the photographic capture of the traumatic event and the time of its revision are woven together in the compilation film – though crucially she reminds the reader that as with the structure of traumatic memory, the materials we work with are never fully resolved.

John Akomfrah, filmmaker and founding member of Black Audio Film Collective, explores a number of recurring and inter-related themes that include memory, experiences of migration, and black experiences of Britain and Britishness, past and present, by interweaving archival film with newly filmed and often staged images. His films rework archival material while emphasizing its affective and atmospheric qualities. He does this through an essayistic, combinatory approach which assimilates fragments of literature or poetry, still and moving images, and, especially, music and sound. Archive materials work to cut across and between temporal and geographic boundaries, in the way that memory does, in order to

⁸ *La France est notre patrie* (2014) dir. Rithy Panh, adopts similar strategies to *Mother Dao, the Turtlelike*, in the context of the French national archives from Vietnam and Cambodia. It might therefore make an interesting comparison to de Antonio's film made at the time of the US war in Vietnam. I was unable to include an analysis of the film in this thesis as I became aware of it late in the research.

revisit, repurpose and redeem images and experiences that have been variously objectified, ignored or maligned.

Such themes and strategies are at work in his three-screen video inspired by the life, memories and ideas of Jamaican-born cultural critic and broadcaster Stuart Hall, *The Unfinished Conversation* (2013). The title reflects Hall's conception of identity as a continuous, lively negotiation, and Akomfrah cites Hall: "Identities are formed at the unstable point where personal lives meet the narrative of history. Identity is an ever-unfinished conversation". This open-ended conception of identity characterizes Akomfrah's approach to the life of the image, its making and remaking, the conversation it produces between the documentation of individual experiences and collective histories, between apparently disparate places and times. Akomfrah articulates his understanding of the interrelationship of images, ideas and experiences in terms of the essay's formal sympathy with musical structure and specifically with improvisation:

The logic of improvisation is setting a number of things in motion. At one point one causes and the other tries to respond... [T]he primary colours of sound, text, archive television, radio recordings and photographs mix elegantly and in such a way as to create a more complex palette. [It's] what happens if you strip a documentary from its pretensions of truth and get it to work as a fiction. (Korossi, 2014)

Taking the porosity of the border between historical and fictional narratives further, artist Walid Raad has generated his own archives, often relating to the traumatic history of his native Beirut, through performance, video, photography and writing, under the assumed name of 'The Atlas Group'. Raad intervenes in Lebanon's traumatic recent history in order to produce fictitious or semi-fictitious documents, engaging in forms of enchanted story telling. He constructs archival documents in which actual places and events seem to be at once documented and transformed by poetic and improbable details. *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes #17 and #31*, by Souheil Bachar (2001) is presented as part of a multimedia

performance. Raad introduces the video, saying: "These videos do not show what happened, but rather what we can imagine, say or take for granted in terms of the war" (Raad cited in Vouille, 2009). The video testimonial reproduces the presentational style of the low resolution video materials circulated by armed groups during the civil war. The 'hostage', a man named Soueil Bachar, at one point addresses the camera and asks that his voice be dubbed by that of a woman, and that the subtitles appear in blue, the colour of the sea.

Andre Lepecki (2006) draws attention to Raad's use of the performance lecture (which frames the presentation of his archive) in relation to the troubling idea of 'producing' documents relating to traumatic events during the Lebanese civil wars. The archive, like the lecture, provides the authoritative frame par excellence for the presentation of information – yet here the evidence presented has been subject to imaginative invention. Lepecki sees performance as a mode of transmission that is particularly pertinent to the animation of history, because of its temporality:

The production of documents after the fact and their presentation under the guise of scholarly lectures becomes the privileged mode of identifying and accessing the critical divergence between active presentness of the event and the inactive pastness of history. (p62)

He argues that, against the failure to contain or evoke the swirling multiplicity of events, dynamics, politics, bodies and experiences within the inert singularity of a term such as "The Lebanese Wars 1975-1990/2", Raad intervenes imaginatively in history's abstractions. Lepecki writes that Raad addresses "the need to re-image 'the wars' in their constitutive and ambiguous disparities so they may be actively (that is to say, affectively) perceived, remembered, and finally thought through" (p62).

Each of the above projects sets out to reflect critically on the archive's cultural meanings within a particular set of historically specific contexts, and to create from this new pathways of thinking, feeling and imagining the relationship between our past, present and future.

1.4.2 The perpetrator's testimony

Filmic mediations that take the documents or testimonies of the colonizer as their primary object of study can be considered in relation to recent attention to the figure of the perpetrator within documentary and other moving image production. This concern leads documentary practices away from survivor testimonies and projects that present 'histories from below', and deliberately turns away from a humanist tradition that produced what Brian Winston (1988) has described as "the figure of the victim". Filmmaker Eyal Sivan argues (Demos, 2011, p25) that documentarians have an ethical obligation to substitute clichés of human suffering presented as spectacle with an analysis of the "regimes of justification" that enable violence in the first place. Such regimes of justification underpin the exercise of power, and therefore must be made visible through the deconstructive gestures available to filmmakers. In order to address questions of accountability and responsibility and ultimately of justice, the social, political or psychic mechanisms that sustain and justify the abuse of power must be exposed and examined. This kind of investigation of troubled social and political realities inevitably confronts the spectator with an unsettling experience, because it does not allow for an uncomplicated emotional identification with, or empathy for, its subject, rather the opposite. In a discussion about *The Specialist* (1999), his film made from archival recordings of the 1966 trial of former SS officer Adolf Eichmann, Sivan comments:

To focus on the perpetrator is to risk making us identify with him; as he explains and justifies himself, tells us about his work, his joys, his sorrows,

he looks like anyone else and we grant him our understanding. (Sivan, cited in Demos, 2011, p25)

In *Spectres* (2011), artist Sven Augustijnen follows Jacques Brassinne de la Buissière, a former civil servant in Belgian Congo, in his quest to find evidence that will disprove the complicity of Belgian officials in the murder of Congo's first elected Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, in 1961. As Brassinne pursues his mission and his obsession, the clues he gathers and the arguments he offers to prove his negative hypothesis contribute to a cumulative portrait of the subject that is actually being illuminated – that of a man possessed. Witnessing Brassinne's performance gives access to something that remains unnamed in the film. The shadow story that emerges by default through the testimony that Brassinne presents to camera is one that traces the workings of disavowal. There is no spoken commentary. The viewer is invited to make what she will of the pattern of evidence presented, the manner of its presentation, the nature of its omissions, and to speculate as to what exactly this evidence is supposed to provide proof of.

Demos comments , "The object is not to record speech as a transparent medium of reality, but instead to investigate how his subjects construct one version of reality" (2011, p10). This raises the question that where the meaning of evidence is not transparent, and if meanings lie outside the information presented, by which methods might we decipher that which is missing? What order of knowledge will this silent testimony, this invisible evidence belong to, and how is it to be apprehended? In Augustijnen's film, the evidence provided by Brassine's performance becomes meaningful because the viewer is invited to read between the lines, to attend to the pattern and dynamic of the discourse itself, and thereby discern that which is elided or omitted. The viewer's awareness of a disparity between intentionality and reception, between the use-value of a testimony and its repurposing within an altered frame of reference, registers affectively, and not through explanation or argumentation. These strategies are harnessed in a

deconstructive move that turns the colonizer's discourse against itself in order to point to something that is not named nor pictured, that can only be apprehended in negative.

1.4.3 The reflexive image

Filmmakers who re-present and repurpose pre-existing images often do so in a reflexive gesture that problematizes the power of the very images they deploy. For example, in Rebecca Baron's short film, *The Idea of North* (1995), the act of looking and reviewing comes into question through repetition and an emphasis on the fragile, material quality of image and archival trace. These haptic qualities, transmitted through the moving image, bring the materiality of the photograph and the archive itself closer to the viewer, and simultaneously evoke their limits and the ultimate enigma, unreliability and un-readability of a message.

Baron examines and re-examines a set of five photographs from a failed Polar expedition of 1897, found on a roll of film discovered an improbable thirty years later with the frozen bodies of the explorers. Baron's speculative attempts to decipher the images are mirrored in her audio-visual strategy, so that the viewer is invited to look and look again in order to participate in excavating the enigma of photographs – which are enigmas of time. The images are reproduced several times within the film, producing increasing uncertainty as to what we may have seen or not seen within the images. Baron comments:

There is an implicit question in this: given that each photograph is a record of the unique instant a person passed in front of the lens, when that image is experienced differently in different contexts, what does it say about the reliability of the photograph to stand in for the real? (2008, p126)

In the film, Baron goes on to introduce images from a book she has found, in which the same images have been re-touched, in order to provide more 'information'. She uses film to mobilize the uncertainty, fragility and limits of

certain orders of information, especially that produced by the official archive. Her films foreground the process of looking as part of her associative investigation of images and sounds and the connections they generate. The reflexivity of her films, and her elliptical, reflective writing/voice-over, question the nature of the image and emphasize the role of subjectivity in the practice of seeing and meaning-making in relation to history.

When it comes to histories of state violence, the power of images is not separate from the power of the regimes that produce them. Film and video works such as *okay, bye-bye* (1999) by Rebecca Baron and *48* (2010) by Susana De Souza Diaz (discussed in Chapter 4) have in different ways, and to different ends, used the moving image in order to animate the (sometimes brutal) circumstances of filmic or photographic production or circulation, or to redeem the memory, or the voices, of those who have been silenced or whose voices are simply lost to time.

Andrei Ujica uses media footage produced by the regime of Ceausescu to construct a critical portrait of the Romanian dictator. The moving images he repurposes have been produced through a system of tightly controlled state propaganda. The ironic title of the film, *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceausescu* (2010) points to the fact that the film is constructed from the dictator's official representations of himself, even though this 'autobiography' was produced after Ceausescu's death. Without verbal commentary, Ujica manages to produce a critical and reflexive film, which turns the documents against themselves, simply through subtle editing and the cumulative effect of the state's unrelenting, humourless propaganda.

Films that construct non-linear narratives through associative connections between image, word and sound fragments frequently generate de-centred modes of looking and of producing knowledge. Such work tends to reflexively emphasize

the interventions of the filmmaker, whether by making evident the filmic construction as it plays out, or by foregrounding the subjectivity of the image maker. And sometimes, this reflexive subjectivity is directly expressed through the filmmaker's embodied presence, either on-screen or voiced in the audio-track.

1.4.4 First person, the personal and the collective

Avery Gordon (2008) sets out to account for some of the ways in which subjectivities are haunted by the repressions and erasures imposed by modern social and political life. Arguing against a reading of Freud that would engage his theories of consciousness as a privatized, closed system that denies the social, Gordon draws on analyses in which the unconscious contains "the life of others and other things within us" (2008, p48). In so doing she points to the ways in which boundaries may already be elided and constantly be eliding, between private and public, between filmmaker and subject, between individual and collective consciousness, for example. Under these conditions, the representational task and strategy are, quite logically, to make the hand that frames the world visible, because it too is part of that world.

My research focuses on the performative aspects of authorial presence in film, as a creative strategy for negotiating the relationship between author, subject, representational apparatus and spectator. Some filmmakers and artists have in different ways and to different degrees placed themselves at the centre of the frame, either figuratively or literally, in order to mediate, provoke, perform and play out the social and political relationships they wish to describe.

John Smith's *Hotel Diaries* (2001-2006), for example, is a series of videos taken over six years. Each video comprises a single, hand-held take filmed in a

European⁹ hotel room, as the filmmaker reflects on his personal experience over the previous 24 hours, making associative connections between details of furniture and other decorative features inside his hotel room and events taking place on that day in the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq or Palestine. The banal hotel room is transformed into a film set, as the artist's immediate surroundings trigger meanings and thoughts about a geopolitical situation he has no control over, and no access to, except through seepage from the television's 24-hour news channels. Smith's performance reveals a tension between improvisation, accident and a prepared script or score (in some films his notes are briefly visible in shot). Rather than bringing expertise and authority to bear on the complex global issues that impinge on his state of mind, Smith articulates the anxieties of an everyman, trying to make sense of his experiences and seeking meaning from, for example, a carefully arranged tray and upturned glass, the design woven into the carpet, or the obscure symbolism in a reproduction on the wall. In this respect, Smith's mediating role might be aligned with that of the figure of the fool or the joker (Sayad, 2013, p110), who, with the most basic and immediate of means, is able to transform ubiquitous hotel furnishings into tools for reflecting on the global events that trouble him. Here, near objects link to distant ones just as personal anxieties are infected by global troubles.

While Smith's performance emphasizes his remoteness from the violence that forms the basis of the televised news reports that disturb him, artist Renzo Martens, equipped with an official press card, plants himself at the centre of the sites where some of those news reports are constructed, in the refugee camps of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On the one hand, Martens presents himself with the comportment of the 19th century colonial adventurer, but he also adopts that of the 21st century Western humanitarian worker. Through adopting

⁹ All except one, filmed in a Bethlehem hotel

carefully contrived figurative gestures, he mirrors transactions between European NGOs or the UNHCR and the permanently impoverished and exploited people living in the Congo. Through his performance, which is planned rather than spontaneous, the colonial and the humanitarian figure merge into one, with disturbing consequences, in order to make a wider political point about Europe's role in perpetuating the structural violence it claims to want to alleviate.

Demos (2013) (via Gordon) emphasizes the notion that "exorcising ghosts of the past means discovering our own complicit position" (2013, p16). This question of responsibility can be approached from a number of perspectives, including by considering the relation of personal memory to collective history; the position of the artist-researcher as a catalyst within the historical field she observes; and the ways in which both camera and viewer are positioned, and thereby implicated, in relation to an image of injustice.

Where Gordon takes up and recasts Freudian analysis through her exploration of narrative fiction, Demos (2013) wants to transfer Gordon's approach to "haunting" to a film and photographic aesthetics that investigates the colonial (pp13-14). Demos proposes the notion of a "spectropoetics" as an aesthetic category spanning a range of very different practices. In what follows, I consider a specific set of aesthetic strategies for negotiating the ethics and politics of the colonial by looking at what happens when photographs are appropriated within film. In this last section I focus on how artists and filmmakers have mediated still photographs within the moving image with the effect of complicating the temporal register of an image of the past.

1.4.5 Film as an archive for still photographs

In the examples that follow, this merging of materials has enabled the artist to produce a reflection on, for example, the nature of memory or of history, and also sometimes to destabilize the viewer's position in relation to the subject of the photograph.

Hollis Frampton's film (*nostalgia*) (1971) displays a succession of photographs from his own portfolio, and a succession of remembrances in voice-over. Each image that is presented gradually starts to smoke, to burn and then to disintegrate against the hot plate on which it rests, leaving only undiscernible remains for consideration. Each image provokes a narrative of remembrance, yet crucially each verbal description has been displaced and always corresponds to an image yet to be seen by the viewer. It presents the viewer's future memory, as it were. The film generates a cycle of remembrance, through literal and virtual image construction and disintegration. Still photographs are animated by language, new images are generated and held in the mind's eye, and later materialized, transformed and eventually rendered unreadable by flames.

The viewing experience is a cycle of simultaneous anticipation, recognition and memory. Rachel Moore (2006) sees in the temporal doubling or splitting in the film the operation of history itself: "The space between the photograph's making and the act of our looking, well, that's history. Watching the photographs burn on the film screen however, belongs to the present" (p10). As it unfolds, further temporal layers complicate (*nostalgia*), as the film exercises the memory of the viewer, the memories of filmmaker/photographer, and tests the nature of photographs and film as tools for animating simultaneous and contradictory temporalities.

In their introduction to *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, editors Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (2008) propose that we transpose the destabilizing

paradigm invoked by “still-moving” (the term they use for the field defined by the co-existence of stillness and motion in the image) to our notions of history, for example to the histories of film. Responding to changes that are currently transforming the landscape of film studies and art history, Beckman and Ma critique what they see as the reductive nature of traditional models of medium-based enquiry that centre on categorical boundaries and linear conceptions of subject history. They make an argument in favour of the promiscuous, fluid and productive potential of recent cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional approaches to the image, which guides their study of theories and practices that engage with the relationship between still and moving images. The utopian potential of the plural, the provisional and the impure mixing of materials, thought and disciplines that they invoke reflects the spirit of enquiry with which I wish to embrace in my own research, specifically with regard to destabilizing historical certainties and enabling the formation of new affinities across time and space.

Beckman and Ma’s anthology responds to new understandings of imaging technology and reflects back on a lively history of debate around the ontology and the temporality of the photograph in relation to that which had once been conceived of (by Roland Barthes (1982) for example) as its opposite, the moving image. My research does not revisit arguments about the temporal status of photograph or of film, but focuses instead on the perceptual effects and the meanings produced when they are combined, from the perspective of their reception, and in relation to perceptions of the colonial in particular. Therefore in Chapter 4, I use Raymond Bellour’s short, seminal essay *The Pensive Spectator* (1984) as a starting point from which to consider the spectator’s experience of time in relation to history, and to the particular violence of the colonial archive.

The work of artist Fiona Tan plays on the in-between status of film, video and photography in order to reflect on representation and self-presentations in

interesting ways. In her video installations, Tan undermines the expectation both of stillness in photography and movement in film, opening a space of temporal contradiction, uncertainty and hesitation within the image. Whether editing colonial footage appropriated from archives in *Facing Forward* (1999) or generating original moving image footage in her subjective ethnographies *Countenance* (2002) or *Correction* (2004), she seeks out what she describes as “filmic moments”, a point of stasis within archival film; and she adds duration (the time-plus-sound of film or video) to the conventions of photographic portraiture. The former work isolates group portraits temporarily gathered in a compliant stillness for the colonial film camera, while the latter consists of filmed ‘photographs’ of individuals who appear to have been invited to present themselves to the video camera for a continuous exposure.

In Tan’s art the conflation of film/photography and motion/stasis works to underline the fundamental dynamics of the encounter with the camera – and the colonial, of all encounters, has a particularly marked and troubling dynamic. Yet both approaches focus the viewer’s attention on the provocation of the camera, on the performative nature of ‘the pose’ (think of Barthes’ (1982) reflection on this process of self-fashioning). Sven Lutticken (2000) writes about her

group portraits that stay frozen within the static frame of the camera, as if the potential of the moving image had not yet been discovered. Even as Tan makes the viewer complicit with the colonial gaze of the original filmmaker, one cannot avoid the feeling that the (groups of) subjects are also staring back.

But this effect is tempered by the blue or reddish tints that Tan sometimes gives to her old film material: [...] she creates a filter that emphasises the distance between viewer and image. They may be looking at us, and we may be looking at them, but the two gazes seem never to meet, never seem to bridge the temporal gap. (p96)

The power of the exchange of looks described by Lutticken, and the sense of the contemporary viewer’s complicity with the colonial gaze, perhaps connect with

Stoler's promise that the ability to animate history in an active voice is proportionate to the power to disturb the present.

In order to think about the film envelope that re-mediate archival fragments, it seems relevant to consider the expanded notion of 'film as archive', explored by Thomas Elsaesser (2009) in his essay *Freud as a Media Theorist: Mystic Writing Pads and the Matter of Memory*. Elsaesser argues that, emerging around the same time, cinema and psychoanalysis compete to replace literature's agency as a repository for memory. Elsaesser looks at parallels between Freud's conception of memory systems and the structure of media and data systems, in particular, the ways that Freud pictures the relation between input, storage and processing. For example, psychoanalysis understands the role of the body and voice as the material support for recording and storage of experience, mediating sensory input and representational output. And psychoanalytic techniques automate this process.

Significantly, Freud thinks of time as a human construction designed as a defence against discontinuity and contingency. With the prevailing linear model of time and explanation, Freud suspects that causes are found to explain effects, whereas Freud's model of deferred time is founded on a non-linear, discontinuous model. Elsaesser cites Mary Ann Doane who speculates that cinema's imposition of continuous linear time, its "narrativisation of the contingent", and its emphasis on surface appearances, meant that Freud would not likely have trusted this superficial form of narrativisation of experience (2009, p6). But what of film's non-narrative dimensions?

From the vantage point of digital mediatization, Elsaesser posits cinema as just one of many ways of dealing with memory and mnemonic traces, that might be contrasted with other forms of data registration, storage and management – for

example administrative archives, such as those of surveillance, of military reconnaissance, of medicine, or of meteorology. He suggests that cinema needs to be understood not just at a perceptual/visual level, but also according to its storage and processing functions. And that for this, the dominant emphasis on the narrativising function of film is inadequate.

The categories of visual data Elsaesser mentions correspond to the stuff of my research material: administrative archives of aerial surveillance and reconnaissance; archives of cartography; medicine; geology and so on. Picturing the moving image as an archiving device grounds an analogy between film and memory as open systems of data appropriation, storage, processing and output. This is useful given that this research aims to describe a methodological approach in which sets of data might be processed and provisionally organised according to, for example, systems of pattern recognition as much as narrative values. Frances Guerin (2010) cites the artist Harun Farocki, who describes the film-strip as an archive, as a "form of classification" that allows a meditation on the historical and cultural power and value of images. Sequences, fragments and details of images can be retrieved from the film-strip, examined, re-played, tested. Through this perspective, Guerin argues, Farocki articulates his simultaneous concern with the re-use of the image, and with illuminating the power and value of the original (Guerin, 2010, p1).

In her essay *Film as an Archive for Photography: The Portraitist as Witness to the Holocaust* (2010) Guerin writes of still photographs within the moving image as an "archive in motion", and as a form of historiography that can re-open time, in order to issue a challenge to the present. She proposes that the fragmentary nature of the archive, and of the still image in particular, offers an opportunity to grasp the nature of history as an incomplete process. She proposes that the sequencing of photographs foregrounds their fragmentary nature, through the

gaps and discontinuities between them. Guerin argues that her case study, Irek Dobrowolski's otherwise rather formally conventional documentary film, *The Portraitist* (2005), about Nazi photographs of prisoners of Auschwitz, "revivifies" the still images and in doing so creates a new space and time in which the viewer is invited to reflect on the unfinished nature of *this* past, of *this* history.

This incompleteness is precisely what enables the possible development of memory narratives. [...] when the fragmentation of the archival image is kept alive through an open and incomplete film narrative, the viewer is invited to embrace the dynamic and shifting nature of the past. (Guerin, 2010, p3)

The memorialization of World War 2 has a status and nature quite different to that of colonial memory in Britain. The problem that obscures the readability of images of this period stems from the surplus of reiterated clichés and moral certainties that serve to distance and to seal off that particular chapter of history from the present. So it is striking when Guerin comments on the open-ended way in which these photographs are "revivified", writing that they "serve to remind us that WWII and the way it is remembered is still open for debate, as yet, an unfinished history." (2010, p2)

1.5 Situating the research

This chapter has looked at how the moving image has been used as a tool for animating the archive's silences and its negations, and for restoring the radical potential of the archival images to disturb inert, fixed histories with the charge of the present moment. In particular I have looked to how artists, filmmakers and others have used the moving image to re-purpose images; to reflect on the power of the image as it unfolds; to bear witness to state discourses and the violence they represent; to self-consciously perform relationships between image-maker and world, as a form of critique; and to destabilize the viewer's perceptions of time and of history.

These capacities are ones that I explore through the particular methodological approach that I develop through this research. I hope to formulate a set of strategies that negotiate the colonial photographic archive in ways that address the aesthetic, representational and ethical issues at stake. In the process I will show how contrasting approaches to the archival image can work together to create a complex picture of the lives of images and the way they shape the world and our perception of it.

The chapters that follow spring from questions firstly about the nature of the photographic archive and the search for historical meaning within it. Secondly, the question of the researcher's position in the archive and within the history she produces. And thirdly, an investigation of the affective power of colonial photographs within film and the experience of untimeliness that they produce.

Chapter 2

Deciphering signs, making meaning

2.1 Exploration, excavation and extraction (of historical meaning)

As I embark on my exploration of the BP archive, I come into contact with another kind of exploration – that of a British petroleum geologist in south-west Iran in the 1930s. The company's search for buried resources called for specialized knowledge of the history of the earth and its ancient secretions – the concern of geology. The British geologist's investigations involved surveying and interpreting traces left by movements of the earth's layers over millennia. He applied the science of geophysics to identify the wrinkles, shapes and patterns that marked the earth's surface with clues as to the momentous transformations of the past and the likely location of resulting oil deposits.

His professional contribution to the work of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company,¹⁰ like my own father's, involved a scientific form of dowsing or divination – the identification of subterranean oil resources in Iran and beyond, that enabled one of seven companies of the global cartel (the 'Seven Sisters', as they were known) to control most of the earth's territories, and the supply of the world's energy resources, for over a century. Both his experience of geological field work and his sojourn in various vast and distant territories controlled by the British oil company would perhaps have prepared the geologist for his ambitious personal project of reading signs left by very early inhabitants of (and as he reveals, visitors to) the earth. His later career as a self-taught archaeologist and amateur historian of the ancient world resulted in a number of unconventional publications, including *The*

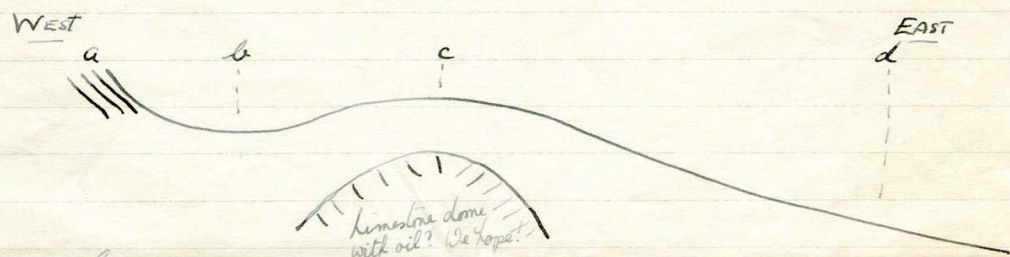
¹⁰ Founded in 1909 as the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, this British company was renamed the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1935, and following the coup d'état in Iran, it was renamed British Petroleum in 1954. Later it was rebranded as *BP*.

Genius of the Few (1985) and *The Shining Ones : an Account of the Development of Early Civilization with the Direct Assistance of Powers Incarnated on Earth* (1997). Rather than dismiss these as the irrelevant ramblings of one of BP's more eccentric board members, it is possible to read these narratives as a modelling of ancient history according to a template informed by the British imperial project. Or at least, one informed by the experiences of its emissaries and foot-soldiers, who would reproduce a paternalistic narrative that took colonizers to be superior yet beneficent beings who descended from above to bring the gift of 'Western progress' for the benefit of 'Mankind', to territories that were dormant, backwards or simply outside of history.

The geologist fashions a fantastical historical theory from archaeological remains that seems to have little truth-value as 'History'. However the image he projects of time, technology and the 'origins' of 'civilization' echo some familiar colonial tropes and preoccupations. When imagined alongside the historical documentation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, the most outlandish aspects of his testimony can yet provide tools for thinking about and momentarily recognizing the psychic logic of the colonial order. In so positioning two distinct registers of narrative, one man's singular preoccupations can tentatively, provisionally, be recast as the reflection of a political project and a historical process. The geologist's oeuvre *is* 'history', though not in the way he intended it.

Geological and archaeological analogies have long been used to conceptualize the processes by which fragmentary remains of the past are stored, buried, retrieved and reconstructed in the present through the work of memory. So what's in an analogy? What constitutes a proper or an improper use of a historical document? What shall be the status and the claim of any new knowledge constructed through picturing these different orders of historical document *together*?

measure the angle at which each bed of sandstone is leaning. (with an instrument known as a clinometer)
 We have done that we can draw a picture or section of what a slice of the area would look like - cut like a large cake. In this case roughly we are going to get a thing like this.



Then you see at 'a' the beds are dipping steeply - further back at 'b' they are horizontal, then between 'b' + 'c' they turn the other way till at 'c' they are level again, and after 'c' and towards 'd' they dip down into the ground again.

Then you see we decide ^{that} the limestone dome is somewhere under 'c' - pushing it up or as we vulgarly style it - "kicking it in the pants"!

The area we are working on now is just over 30 miles long from North to South and eight miles wide from east to west! So there is room for a large number of domes and we hope to advise the petroleum division as to where they are, and then they ^{can} come and put down wells over the spots.

Fig. 2.1 Christian 'Tim' O'Brien, 1936, from a letter to his mother, reproduced in *Eastern Odyssey: Letters of a Young Geologist Letters 1931-1948* (2004). Original sourced courtesy of Christchurch Library, Cambridge.

This chapter is about how we make sense from the material traces of the past and in particular from archival remains that formed part of the exercise of colonial power. It asks how we, as spectators, might read archival materials and recognize their significance without becoming complicit with the elisions and constituent violence that they perpetuate. The chapter takes both failures and surpluses of meaning seriously, because the gap between the photographic archive's promise of embodying evidence and proofs, and the radical ambiguity it produces in practice, its resistance to explaining itself in any stable and reliable way, demands it.

2.2 Technologies for capturing time

From the 19th century historian's perspective, the archive promised special access to time preserved. On entering an archive, such a historian would, in theory, aspire to remove him/herself from the historical operation entirely, "as it were erase my own Self in order to let only things speak", as wrote Leopold von Ranke, founder of the modern discipline (von Ranke 1870, cited in Speiker, 2008, p6). Thereby, s/he would be confronted with "sediments, forces and processes whose authority was underwritten by the fact that they were not recorded there" (Speiker, 2008, p6). Historians have traditionally viewed archival documents as "quasi-objective corollaries of the living past" (ibid., xii), and the archivist as a mere "hand maiden" (Cook, 2006, p169), servile to the historian's recuperative gesture. Thus the evidentiary power of the archival document was grounded in the assumption that it directly reflected its origin, its provenance in another territory, a place and a time outside of and distinct from the archiving process itself, that its conservation through time somehow guaranteed its significance as historical evidence.

By the 19th century, the rupture of revolution and the social and personal transformations brought about by industrialization had heralded fundamentally new experiences of time, which would become central to European culture. The objectification of time by means of its mathematical segmentation into mechanical and chronological time had already produced a conceptual separation of past, present and future into sovereign categories. The unsettling experience of modernity's flux, and in particular the capitalist teleology of continuous 'progress' along a unidirectional trajectory that would be applied to every aspect of human endeavour, produced a preoccupation with time, a disquiet and anxiety about its constant slippage, its loss, and with this, a drive to seize its passing. In this context, the archive's system of documents sought to fix

contingent time in the form of discrete traces (records), the hope that the present moment – contingency itself – might become subject to registration and measurement. (Speiker, 2008, p5)

This drive to grasp the flux of time and contingency was tied up with the conviction that the objectification and mastery of time would enable all phenomena eventually to be made available as objects of knowledge and explanation.

The upheavals of modernity, and the mass disruption of traditional forms of memory that resulted, brought disquiet such that, according to Richard Terdiman (1993), "the coherence of time and subjectivity seemed disarticulated"(p4). Mary Ann Doane (2002) suggests that this experience provided the epistemological underpinnings for the development not only of the archive, but of technologies that would isolate and pin down the problem of an unpredictable and unstable flow of time and experience (p21). Interest in the photographic trace as a means of capturing and materializing contingency and the ephemeral, Doane argues, should be seen as a resistance to the opposing yet interdependent tendency

towards the re-organization of knowledge as increasingly rationalized and abstracted, for example through the rise of a science of statistics. Through the registration of an indexical trace, technologies such as photography, and later film and sound-recording, held the potential not only of capturing the ephemeral and making it repeatable, but also promised to bypass the biases of symbolic representation (i.e. of writing) altogether, apparently making the imprint of nature itself visible, readable and self-evident.

This aspiration held that the registration of the fleeting moment should eventually enable all of nature and culture to speak directly and with transparency to a dispassionate observer. Think of Etienne-Jules Marey's "méthode graphique" (Speiker, 2008, p63), derived from a device designed to trace the motion of bodies, whether the flight of an insect or a galloping horse, and his conviction that the resulting trace (the registration of a series of points and curves) could eliminate the fallibility of human perception and the bias of linguistic interpretation. Instead, he reasoned, this data would simply reveal the "language of the phenomena themselves" (Marey 1885, cited in Speiker, 2008, p65), promising a more scientific future in which writing would be limited to classification and nomenclature alone. Human interpretation would thus become redundant.

But the incomplete, fragmentary nature of photographic imprints, and the continuity of moving images that captured the flux of the present only to reveal that, once projected, the capture of the present would immediately become subsumed into the past, highlighted the paradox and failure implicit in the technological image's promise. On the one hand, the capture of unpredictable, singular events offered a newness and difference that could be seen as productive. Yet, at the same time, the indiscriminate nature of the registration of

time and chance contained a dangerous potential for producing pure description and thus, overwhelming meaninglessness (Doane, 2002, p12).

In practice, the proliferation and accumulation of imprints, of sheer description, threatened to drown the subject. In his 1927 essay, Siegfried Kracauer (1993) would warn of the proliferation of photographs in the popular press as a "strike against understanding", describing photography's recording of "mere surface coherence" as a gesture which effectively obliterates history. He contrasts the selective, discontinuous nature of memory with the indiscriminate nature of the indexical imprint, which "from the perspective of memory, [...] appears as a jumble that consists partly of garbage" (Kracauer, 1993, pp425-6). The anxiety and alienation expressed in Kracauer's perception-disabling "flood" and "blizzard" of images produced by the print media, in Baudelaire's need to defend against a "riot of details" (Doane, 2002, p11), in the vast archival continuum described retrospectively by Alan Sekula (1986), are amplified a hundred-fold in the contemporary explosion of digital modes of archivization that renders the likelihood of meaningful synthesis of information untenable, and the aspiration to do so, absurd. The relationship between the indexical document (its indiscriminate nature and unmanageable proliferation) and historical meaning, or indeed any meaning at all, proves to be unstable and opaque.

However, I shall show that acknowledging and engaging with the absurd dimensions of the archival aspiration may offer a way forward, nonetheless. Indexical imprints are not simple gate-ways to the temporal zone of their origin. Gathered together, the arbitrary and heterogeneous nature of the collected materials will, in addition, resist cohering into a narrative. The photographs and other documents selected and preserved as archival objects of knowledge reflect the pattern of rules that govern the interests of what is worthy of capture, and, for example, the collecting habits, indexing procedures and taxonomic bias of an

archive and its archivists, and the selective preoccupations of a researcher-historian. Chance, contingency and unconscious projections of the colonial enterprise permeate most levels of the archive and its operations, especially through the formation of its categories and organizational systems.

Trying to make sense of an archive turns out to be a continuous, incomplete process, in which meaning-making can only ever be provisional and speculative. It is a process that confronts the researcher not only with the polyvalence of signs but also with the implicit obstacles laid by the *archons*¹¹. Chance and subjectivity infiltrate the archive's systems and procedures at every stage, nowhere more so than in the contrast between the "glut of signification" (Baron, 2014, p115) produced by the unmanageable, continuing accumulation and proliferation of materials, and the poverty of means for accessing them. Excavating photographic materials from a corporate archive such as BP occurs via the inhibiting search engine, whose limited terms of reference and 'required fields' lead to an often misleading written index that fails to coincide with the researcher's perception of the point of interest of a photographic album or collection. While the indexing criteria and the accessibility of archives vary, the search tools and the indexing system for accessing the BP archive's photographic materials in particular prove remarkably resistant to an even loosely focused search. I become aware through private conversations with one of the three members of staff in the archive, that the collection of indexed materials is dwarfed by the vast volume of materials that are yet to be examined, sorted and indexed. Despite my desire to make a systematic, even scientific, survey of the oil company's buried resources, I have no choice but to embrace a mainly random and groping search, in which pictorial evidence about the nature of the colonial encounter must be accessed by somewhat irrelevant categories of date and place-name.

¹¹ According to Derrida, the archive from its Greek etymology was "initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded" (1996, p2).

2.3 The colonial archive and violence

The survey photographs of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company from the 1930s and 1940s (next page) were processed in Bond Street, London, by Huntingdon Aerosurveys, a company that procured aerial surveillance contracts for oil-prospecting in the Middle East, Venezuela and Colombia and tin-mining in Nigeria. This order of cartographic photography grew out of the instrumentalization of photography by military intelligence units during World War 1. Following the war, pilots and photographers, seeking to extend their business, obtained contracts that enabled them to transfer the project of aerial surveyance to European colonies (Oslund, 2014). (The fact that the link between aerial surveyance and its military use is not only a historic one is underlined by the fact that decades later, Huntingdon Aerosurveys' military division will be the manufacturers of Trident submarine-launched ballistic missiles¹².)

The all-seeing perspective of this category of imaging technology abstracts and de-familiarizes an inhabited landscape, flattening it into a single plane, making indigenous presence (and human consequences) all but disappear. It reduces the density of place to a number of discrete shapes that can be translated, plotted, arranged and measured against a small ruler from the comfort of a desk at the centre of power, thousands of miles away. (Figure 2.5 shows this last effect of the cartographic archive reflexively documented and re-assimilated into the archive.)

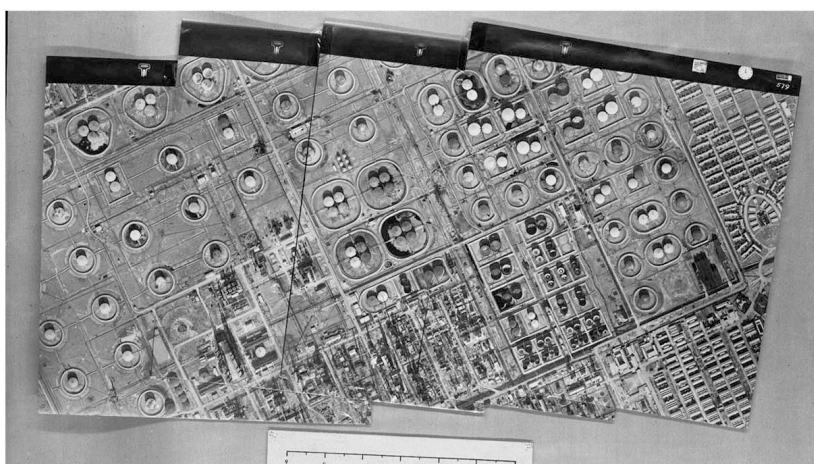
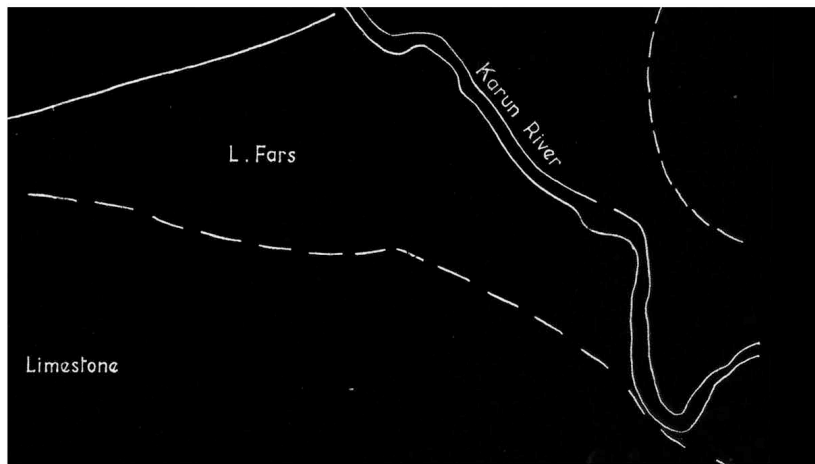
Next page:

Figs. 2.2, 2.4, 2.5 Photographs of Iran by Huntingdon Aerosurveys, sourced from the BP archive.

Fig. 2.3 Geological mapping traced from aerial photography,
sourced from the BP archive, reproduced in negative.

Fig. 2.5 Photograph of photographs with scale rule, sourced from the BP archive.

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hunting_Aerosurveys_Ltd accessed 01.11.2015



Both photograph and archive form part of an array of representational devices that overlay the cartographic grid, objectifying hundreds of thousands of square miles of Iranian territory. This will produce not just the colonial construction of space in the European imagination, but the means to plan and measure the process of its material transformation and exploitation, and the enforcement of violently unequal social relations that this will require. This colonial archive did not simply register, but it produced the world it described, measured and named.

Colonial power has been exercised through a web of administrative, juridical, economic and military transactions, articulated through a system of bureaucracy whose by-products and detritus founded the colonial archive. Stoler (2002) describes the archive as "the supreme technology of the late nineteenth century imperial state" that supplied the "scaffolding" of colonial rule (p87). Colonial statecraft was constructed from statistics and surveys, but also out of the "paper empires", the administrative apparatus that produced that information (*ibid.*, p 99). So how should we approach the archive as contemporary spectators and interpreters of this paper empire? How is the researcher to search for the things that cannot be accessed via the archive's finding tools, to apprehend the outline of the stuff that is not shown, the relationships that have been judged ineligible and discarded or suppressed? What order of research can give shape to and document those very effacings?

Stressing the archive's role in the exercise of colonial power, Stoler criticizes the "extractive" method, by which students of colonial experience tend to "mine the content" of archives, without paying attention to their "form or placement" (2002, p90). Rather than simply reading documents "against the grain" she calls for a move away from seeking evidence of colonial practices inside the archive towards understanding forms and systems of classification as the locus and very substance of colonial politics themselves. She argues that the assumption that the "script" of

the archive is already known bypasses attention to the "grain" of the archive itself. Therefore she urges researchers not to ignore the conventions of the archive, but rather to dwell or to "pause" upon them (2002, pp99-102).

For Stoler, to "pause" on the grain of the archive requires an ethnographic approach; for example by close attention to the life of the archive, its archivists, its documents and the relationship between them, in order to begin to read between the lines and beyond the margins of the document itself. Applied to the photographic archive, this suggests the possibility of not only reading an image of the past, but of reading what an image betrays, its use-value, and the taxonomy of the archive which produced it, in order to access an order of information that conceals itself behind what is presented.

Stoler's methodological admonition reflects a contemporary shift across arts and humanities disciplines, from an understanding of the archive as source to the archive as subject; and archives as sites of on-going knowledge production rather than sites of knowledge retrieval. This a shift that locates the production of meaning firmly in the politics of the present. Georges Didi-Huberman thinks through the contingent, provisional nature of archives, of photographic images and history together, when he cites Michel de Certeau to argue that we *create* the 'knowledge value' of documents: "We produce documents by their selection, gathering, changing their status..." (de Certeau, 1975, cited in Didi-Huberman, 2008, p98). If photographs, like the archive, and like history itself, do not possess any fixed, original meaning and are therefore always in a process of becoming, then this meaning must be produced in the present, through relationship to other images, documents and testimonies.

If the pattern of colonial politics frequently goes unrecognized, this is because its contemporary iterations are familiar and persist in post-colonial and neo-colonial

representations. If as Derrida (1996) argues, the process of archiving functions so as to “shelter itself and, sheltered, to conceal itself” (p3), then the rules that govern the colonial archive take on a doubly shadowy aspect. If the very substance of colonial politics is embedded in its forms of classification, then by which methods can the shape of something at once so sprawling and indiscernible be made visible and so be contested? This problem suggests that the search for methods for making the archive’s systems of division and classification tangible provides both a special challenge and a special opportunity to make the unapparent, the unshown and the inaccessible readable, along with the unwritten, and untaken pictures.

My research turns out to be a search for a method, even though at the time, I am simply in the dark, recognizing with each attempt only what the research *cannot* do, forms of representation that *will not* do. I need a method capable of making events and experiences that are absent – because they are past – felt in the present. But the project does not, cannot, represent the ‘what-really-happened’ of the oil company in Iran. Nor can it represent a ‘history from below’ that would attempt to recover the experiences and perspectives of oil workers or ‘ordinary’ Iranians that I cannot have access to. And neither is it an attempt to remember the colonial life-styles of the British in Iran, nor to construct an autobiography. Though it may at times do aspects of all of the above, this search must make visible some of the discourses, the ‘regimes of justification’ that sustained this colonial project and its ways of knowing the world, ways which produced phantoms that required repression ‘back then’, and which continue to shadow our present. In addressing these, I must set out not only to find another kind of evidence within the archive, but another kind of approach through which to communicate it.

I become engaged in a groping search for those places where other kinds of information seep through the cracks in the official archive, between narratives, and

modes of argument. I need to find fault lines that might open onto ways of apprehending the psychic net cast by the colonial, which enmeshes the colonizer as much as it does the world that is colonized. And do so in such a way as to do justice (or rather, do no further violence) to the Anglo Iranian Oil Company's other, which I can only vaguely qualify as an imagined assemblage of culturally, ethnically and nationally diverse people that I call 'Iran'.

In *Ghostly Matters: haunting and the sociological imagination*, Avery Gordon (1997) asks what methods can be adequate to the challenge presented by the erasures produced by official narratives and official histories. She thinks in particular about how we address the social damage and trauma of state violence and its hidden legacies, that which lingers, and which she conceives in terms of the spectral aspects of social life. Her writing points to the limits and blind spots of social science, which, she argues provides inadequate tools for attending to parts of modernity that are marked by absence and silence. She calls for sociology to attend to that which it represses.

It seemed to me that radical scholars and intellectuals knew a great deal about the world capitalist system and repressive states and yet insisted on distinctions – between subject and object of knowledge, between fact and fiction, between presence and absence, between past and present, between present and future, between knowing and not knowing – whose tenuousness and manipulation seemed precisely to me in need of comprehension and articulation, being themselves modalities of the exercise of unwanted power. (Gordon, 1997, xvii)

Gordon analyses the places where such separations collapse, in order to elicit another kind of knowledge. The knowledge she seeks is one that can allow the "social figure" that she names the "ghost" to emerge, and she looks for it in "that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life" (1997, p8). She warns that we will understand this order of information "not as cold knowledge but as a transformational recognition" (*ibid.*). My research, like Gordon's, will attend to

what happens where separations start to blur, and tenuous distinctions between self and other, imagination and reality, modern and primitive, then and now, colonized and colonizer are dissolved. And I will show how, precisely at the points where things become unmoored from the places or categories in which we habitually expect to find them, new ways of recognizing the colonial can appear.

2.4 Strange constructs: montage

In the archive our task must be to find ways to read colonial photographs without becoming complicit, or “entering into a pact” (Azoulay, 2012, unnumbered pages), with the ways of seeing the world that produced them, and which they otherwise invite us to collude with. Rather, the archiving process and the ways in which this produces knowledge must be accounted for within our reading. How to decolonize this vision of the world in which race appears naturalized and exploitation is presented as science and progress?

In addressing problems associated with looking at an image of the past, Georges Didi-Huberman points to the fragility of what he calls, after Walter Benjamin, the “critical moment” of the photographic document’s recognizability (2008, p89). Observing that photographs are never one-offs, “just one”, are always several, temporally and spatially discontinuous, Didi- Huberman describes this condition as the relationship produced by montage – that all photographs wait to be put into relationship in order to become readable (*ibid.*, p120).

My own search for knowledge not just within, but in the ‘beyond’ of the archive, begins with imagining a re-arrangement of archive photographs that might make the categories, divisions and elisions implicit in the colonial order readable, through relationship. While the colonial order of things is founded on rhetorical binaries that produce contradiction, contradiction is also the stuff of montage.

Therefore those very collisions can be the sparks that make new meanings visible and new thoughts thinkable.

To do this I want to look at some of the ways in which the re-arrangement or re-classification of photographs in the colonial archive can work to produce or transform meaning. Siegfried Kracauer (1993) addresses the problem of meaning presented by photographs as their “mere surface coherence” (p428) – their construction of spatial continuity he sees as presenting an equivalent logic to the chronological continuity of historicist thinking, which is in effect a “strike against understanding” (p432). In his seminal essay on photography, Kracauer proposes that with the passage of time, the photograph itself becomes a kind of archive. He argues that once living memory and the oral history that animate a photograph have died, the photograph’s meaning, its truth content, drains away, leaving only an inventory of optical detail (*ibid.*, pp429-431). The individual photograph disintegrates into discrete signifiers that cluster around a hollow centre, leaving us with nothing but the remnants of faintly comic, outdated fashions and fads, so that “the images of the stock of nature disintegrated into its elements are offered up to consciousness to deal with as it pleases. Their original order is lost.” (*ibid.*, p435)

It is this alienated perspective that enables Kracauer to advocate for the capacity of photographic meaning to be redeemed through the creative use of disorientation. He argues that through the suspension of habitual relationships we become aware of the nature of the social and economic conditions that shape our capacity to read an image. The cacophony of alienated, disconnected fragments holds the possibility for radical reconfiguration by means of the montage principle used in film, which “combines parts and segments to create strange constructs” (1993, p436) and whose assembly follows the logic of dreams rather than that of spatial or chronological continuity: “the game that film plays with the pieces of

disjointed nature is reminiscent of dreams in which the fragments of daily life become jumbled" (*ibid.*).

Accordingly, the alienation of the image from its life as a certain kind of mnemonic tool gives rise to the possibility of new configurations of meaning, and with this, the potential to grasp the social order which produced it (Speiker, 2008, p145). According to this principle, on abandoning the primacy of provenance as the guarantee of meaning, the image takes up a new and altogether different existence, reconfigured to serve another kind of function.



Fig. 2.15 The senior petroleum geologist and his young assistant?
The colonial self and its shadow? Sourced from the BP archive.

Case-study: re-classification

My imagined (and later, actualized) re-arrangement brings the image of a 1930s geological survey of Iran together with an image of the city of Coventry's borough boundaries and the road system which shows the route to the BP archive from which I conduct my investigation. The categorical logic that unites two images is as arbitrary as that of coded lines, white on black, which on the one hand points to the subterranean structure of Iranian mountain and plain, but which also leads back to me, in the archive, looking at and imagining mountain and plain seventy years later.

Triangular shapes link the image of an ancient Elemite complex to the chimneys of Abadan oil refinery, as I reflect on my findings over my lunchtime sandwich, which will in turn be scanned together with the rest of the materials that make up my study. 'Triangle' is not a term of reference, or of classification, nor a tag recognizable by the BP archive search engine; however the three-sided polygon connects meaningful elements of my historical investigation by means of visual association and memory.

The two freshly ironed, hanging suit jackets, one bright white and one dark grey, seem to me to stand in as symbols of the colonial self and its other. The full photograph, of which these jackets are just a detail, shows that this is one of the British-style 'modern' laundries at Abadan, in which rows of dark-skinned men and women are ironing white linen in a tall-ceilinged room. Later on, when I come to incorporate the image in a film, the two jackets will stand in for the chief geologist and his young assistant, who might have worn them.



Fig. 2.6 Map showing Coventry borough boundaries (2012), sourced from the internet, reproduced in negative.
 Fig. 2.7 Geological mapping, traced from an aerial photograph, in the oil region of Iran (1931-1946),
 sourced from the BP archive, reproduced in negative.

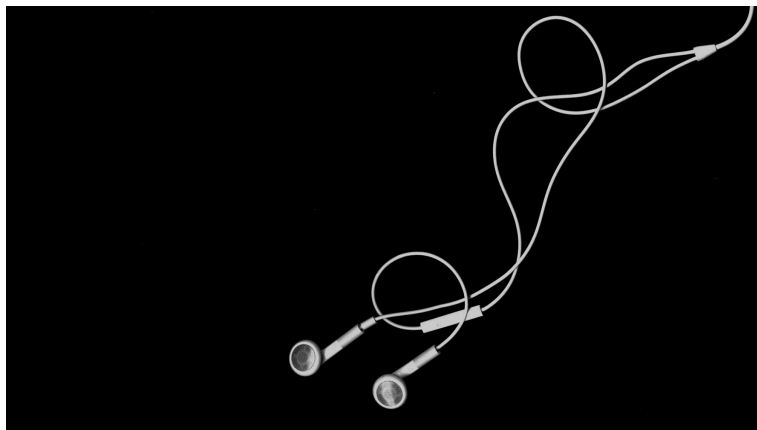
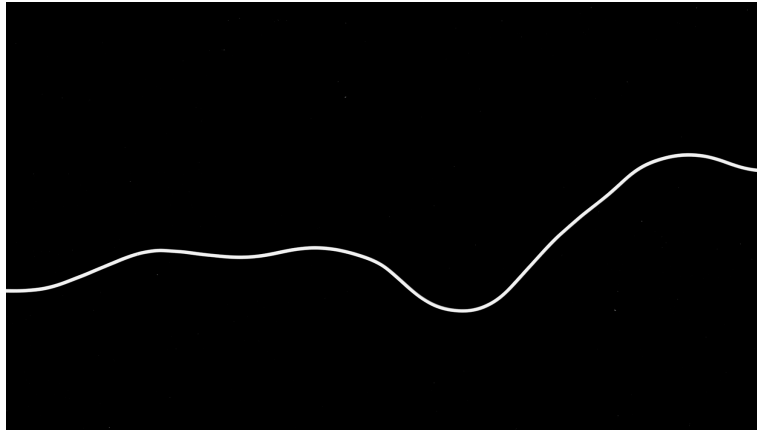


Fig. 2.8 Scan of my headphones, detail showing wire only, reproduced in positive.

Fig. 2.9 Detail from a geological map of Iran, sourced from the BP archive, reproduced in negative.

Fig. 2.10 Scan of my headphones, reproduced in positive.

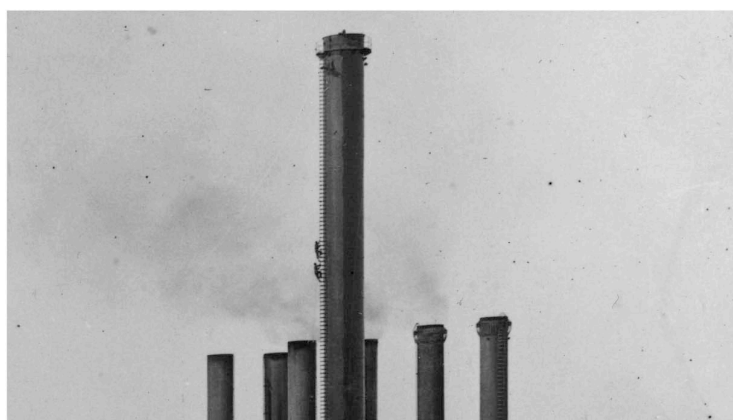
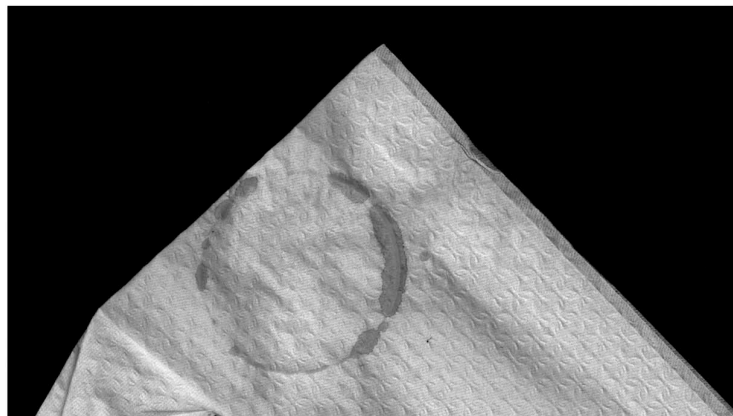
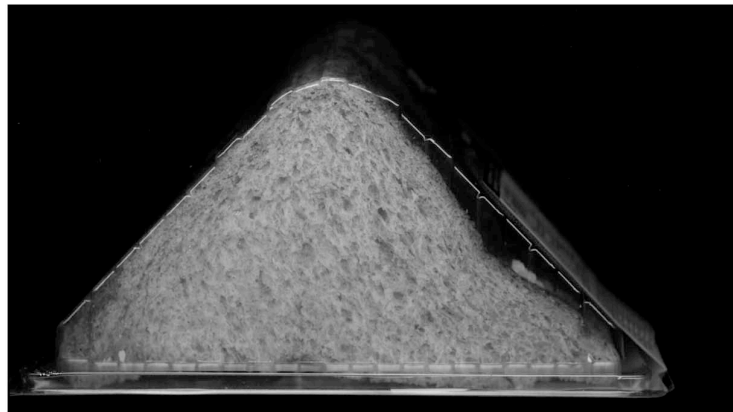
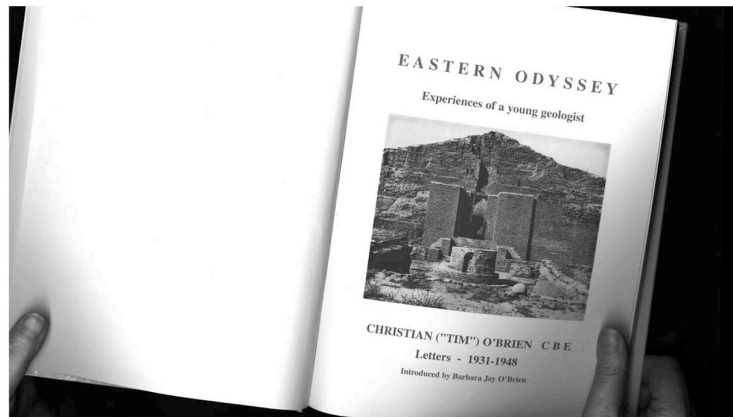


Fig. 2.11 Triangle 1

Fig. 2.12 Triangle 2

Fig. 2.13 Triangle 3

Fig. 2.14 Triangle 4

Liberated from their archival slumber as place holders in BP's taxonomic regime, and liberated from the primacy of provenance, the images can become part of a mobile database, a jumble of signs waiting to be put into relationship, waiting to find another purpose and meaning. The archive, as Alan Sekula tells us, is an abstract paradigm as well as an institution, that lays out a vast "substitution set" (1986, p17) providing relations of equivalence between photographic images. Sekula once established the importance of such a paradigm within the early history of photography in connection with phrenology, physiognomy and the creation of an archive of criminal or deviant types. Terms of comparison were suddenly made possible by the unifying constant of the camera's mechanical precision, and its promise to frame and to reduce nature (and people) to their fundamental geometry (*ibid.*). What might the physiognomy of objects reveal about the colonial universe and its unconscious desires, through their rearrangement on the comparative grid?

In the examples pictured in these pages, the principle of the primacy of archival provenance and of fidelity to given meanings will be disregarded by conflating incompatible categories of image. In fact, altogether alien documents, of uncertain provenance and authenticity, have slipped into the equation. The requirement to prioritize the provenance of an image or document in order to secure its historical meaning is dispensed with in favour of an opposite move – to shed contextual information in order to allow altogether new meanings to freely attach themselves regardless of effects of anachronism, or even because of them. Not only this, but the unity and coherence of the individual archival document will be violated through masking (reframing) or magnifying (zooming in on) details that will potentially produce discrete and contradictory meanings from within the same document.

2.5 Testing meaning

This readability of the essay form no doubt repulses the patently positivist 'decipherer' – that guardian of the prison of reason – with its experimentations and *super-interpretations*. (Didi-Huberman, 2010, p97) [translation my own]

The particular placement of the above figures provides chains of associative meaning that make new connections between, say, past and present, over 'here' and over 'there', personal and collective memory. Such linkages implicitly question and disrupt legitimized procedures and established forms of classification and the distinction between, for example, a valuable historical document and contemporary quotidian detritus. But what kinds of knowledge can montage produce in relation to the colonial past?

Georges Didi-Huberman situates montage in relation to the literary principle derived from the surrealists (the editors of *Document* in particular) as well as to the radical, critical potential of the 'essay', as elaborated by Theodor Adorno. According to Adorno, the condition for readability rests on "the capacity to make all the elements of a subject speak together, at once" (Adorno 1984, cited in Didi-Huberman, 2010, p97) [my translation], such that

In opposition to the cliché of the 'understandable', with the notion of truth as a network of causes and effects, the essay forces one to think, from the first, the thing in its true complexity [...] [and] disposes of the illusion of a simple, fundamentally logical, world. (*ibid.*)

Montage, like the essay, offers a way of slicing through habits of seeing by means of a process that makes images resonate with other images, other testimonies, to "put the multiple in motion" in order to find "the hiatuses and the anomalies" (Didi-Huberman, 2008, p120).

Given what he sees as the absence of transparent or stable meaning attributable to an image, or indeed to history, Georges Didi-Huberman (2010) problematizes 'seeing', arguing that seeing itself must be understood as strictly contingent on the conditions that allow for 'readability', for 'recognizing'. He considers the nature of obstacles that limit our capacity to engage with the past in the context of photographic representations of the Nazi camps and apparatus. In particular he identifies the need to overcome the effects of the over-saturation of familiar memory images (and its flip-side, the repression and invisibility of other memories). Cliché and conformity follow from this saturation, erecting an "*écran aveugle*", or *blind screen* (Didi-Huberman, 2010, p19) which obstructs readability, and which must continually be undone. Thus he writes that the potential for images to produce knowledge can *only* be realized by cutting through disabling habits of seeing.

By detaching the object from its obvious, close interpretations and from social norms, the critical gesture of *un-staging* or *un-framing* ("*démonter*") allows one to decouple the object from its stereotypes, and simultaneously re-frame it according to a radically other play of affinities (2010, p97). By this principle, Didi-Huberman argues that the essay, whose operations can be aligned with those of montage, has the potential to evoke that which escapes official thought or official memory. Furthermore, he reminds us that this approach to knowledge avoids fixity and complacency. It is "a form that is patiently elaborated but that does not rest on certitude – intellectual, aesthetic or moral" (*ibid.*, p96). Instead, unexpected alliances provoke movements of the imagination that foreground meaning-making as a continuous, fluid process. It generates a creative testing-ground that is speculative and tentative, and which allows for "juxtaposing different paradigms of readability" (*ibid.*, p98).

Under these conditions, multiple narratives, archives and time zones can become

provisionally conflated or intimately acquainted – not through the logic of cause and effect, nor by chronological progression or by convention – but rather through anachronism, digression, coincidence and an associative poetics that produce speculative forms of knowledge. For example, returning to the narrative of the British geologist cited at the start of this chapter, a new field opens through the process of putting the archival remains of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company into relation with the remains of the geologist's pursuit of ancient truths. This relational field allows for a multiplication of readings beyond the literal or intended meaning contained in either collection of images and words.

The colonial historian and I are both similarly entranced by the enigma of the past and by the puzzle of deciphering signs and traces that stand in for things that are lost and gone forever. When interwoven with those of the BP archive, fragments from both of our respective archives generate a hybrid, or perhaps even a mongrel, archive. This new archive stages the conflation of different orders of material to allow for associative connection or dissonance to occur. The potential to perceive that which it makes itself felt beyond the obvious meaning of what is written, presented or expected, lies within the dynamic of this contrapuntal relationship. When thought together, the psychic world of an imperial foot-soldier, and the operations of the imperial project he served, can be put into productive play. This is a serious kind of play, that produces not literal Truth, but through the principle of test and essay¹³, prompts the exercise of the historical imagination.

In this particular case, the linkage of two or more narratives allows a parody of the imperial project to emerge from within its own discourse, in the form of a metaphor. In the first place it conjures a fantasy of colonial power cast as super-human genius and as a gift. But in the second, through the film research the

¹³ The Latin root of 'essay', meaning to try out.

metaphor enables a serious point to be made about the construction of the fictional Oriental 'character' as essentially and intrinsically possessed by child-like emotion and fantasy. This is imagined in opposition to the fictional figure of European 'Man' whose knowledge is supposedly grounded in objective fact and reason. These tropes are neither the reason nor the explanation for reprehensible British policies towards the Iranians, but they provide the justification for those policies and in my view are essential to reading BP's narrative.

While the colonial order of things is founded on rhetorical binaries (civilized/primitive; culture/nature; facts/fiction; reason/emotion) that produce contradiction, contradiction is also the stuff of montage. If colonial forms of classification are not ignored, but attended to, upturned or conflated, the cultural clashes and mis-recognitions that characterize both the colonial encounter and the archival encounter can, I argue, be productively played out and become crystallized in the collisions and coincidence of images. In this context, montage offers a method that can activate a process of strategic, deliberate misreading that stages a collision of colonial tropes while making the construction of the image and the hidden or unconscious lives of its pictorial categories visible.

2.6 Double meaning

Montage provides a laboratory for testing paradigms and re-purposing an archive's terms of comparison and measurement; it provides a stage on which image relations can be performed in order to reveal their shadow side, their other lives. Here, the cultural clashes and mis-recognitions that characterize the colonial encounter can be played out in miniature, in the collisions and coincidence of images arranged on a time-line. The clashes that occur chart nothing more nor

less than collisions between the colonial self and the image she has made, the spectre in the mirror which possesses her.

The paradoxical effects of the archive with regard to the polyvalence of (photographic) meaning makes the process of interpretation open to satire and to a powerful sense of the absurd. With each misreading of word or image the slippery nature of signification and the processes by which we secure and store our knowledge of the world is magnified. Jaime Baron (2012) finds an implicit affiliation between the archival image and the structure of the 'joke' because of the slipperiness produced by radical ambiguity, and the combination of anxiety and playfulness that both produce. Deliberate mis-reading and play on double meaning (the visual 'pun') allow for the metaphoric, metonymic and allegorical life of the archive that operates through the logic of dream, the imagination and the unconscious, to be acknowledged and made visible.

The image fragment comes to stand for something other, or may momentarily crystallize an entire enterprise. A pair of freshly ironed jackets hanging at the back of the company laundry room come to stand in for two petroleum geologists. A sandwich is reminiscent of the ancient Elemite complex which apparently haunted the petroleum geologists (and now the filmmaker). Following this approach, the fragile and illusory unity and coherence of an archive, and of historical narration, are undermined by evidence of the utter incoherence of a chaotic cacophony of archival fragments. The logic of an explanatory model linking a linear chain of like with like, of causes and effects, is abandoned in favour of an associative one. Rather than describe the anatomy of the archival documents' original order in another place and time, that other territory is mapped as a psychic one, fragmented and much closer to the structure of memory and dreams than of historical chronology.

I opened this chapter by taking a historical view of the modern archive, situating it in relation to a generalized sense of loss and anxiety produced by the acceleration of time experienced in modernity. From this perspective the development of photographic technologies can be linked to the desire to fix and archive experiences, including time itself, as a step towards the promise of objectifying and thus explaining all phenomena. I have drawn attention to some paradoxes, contradictions and failures of the photographic archive in providing historical knowledge on the above basis, but have sought to show how failures of meaning can be put into play in order to produce other kinds of knowledge about the past and our relationship to it. The archive's work of objectifying and classifying the world is particularly stark in the colonial situation, and the colonial archive has been central to producing the imperial order. Despite, or because of, the colonial archive's histories of subjugation, suppression and silence, I consider the potential of the colonial archive to yield knowledge of its regime by means of its systems of categorization, its taxonomies, and its own contradictions. The colonial archive's failure to fix meaning opens the door to new methods.

Gestures that radically displace meaning can make an alternative, unconscious or hidden order of the archive and photographic testimony visible in order to tell us something about that psychic territory called the colonial. By deliberately staging the contradictions of the archive, by heightening its opacities, by provoking slippages of meaning and foregrounding the role of chance, subjectivity and ambiguity, a different relation to the archival image can be engendered and new kinds of knowledge begin to be made available. On the one hand, rubbing up against the impossible dimensions of the scientific, evidential ideal of both photograph and archive and their inadequacies, can generate new thinking about the cultural meanings of the archive, the archiving process, and our attitudes towards the past. On the other it has the potential to open up new perspectives on the particular histories from which the archival object springs. But in addition to

this, my research locates the fallibility of officially sanctioned routes to knowledge such as those produced by the archive, at the centre of the colonial subject which it set out to interrogate.

The representational strategies that I have described emphasize the life of the signifier over that of the signified in order to produce a critical, reflexive relationship to archive and to the construction of the past in the present. In Chapter 4, I shall show how a different set of strategies attends to another kind of perception – that of the illusion of the ‘real’ within the photograph, which can offer another kind of meaning altogether by attending to a powerful impression of direct contact with the past.

But first, there is something else in the archive that requires unpacking.

Chapter 3

The author as an actor in history

Historic time consists only of a past, whose chief claim to superiority is that we're not part of it. *Insisions in History / Segments of Eternity*, Hollis Frampton (2009, p40)

Finding a body in the archive

I have been rifling around inside the photographic collection of the BP archive for some time, making lists, making notes, finding things, getting lost, losing the plot, keeping going. There is a medium through which so many incongruous and anachronistic archival materials are filtering. After all that digging-around and sniffing-out, there remains a body that needs to be excavated, whose evidence needs bringing out into the light. The body is there all along, shadowing this search, yet for various reasons, I don't pay attention until it becomes impossible to step around it. I reach an impasse and cannot find the thing that that connects all the different shades of grey in the photographic worlds I have set aside. I cannot begin.

I decide to make records of my presence in the archive – for example the fact of me sitting here, looking for signs of where the trouble all began, wondering what it is exactly that these pictures are telling me, going through the motions of what I think the real historians on the other desks are doing. Immediately the digital registration of voice and gesture roots my retrospective glance in the here and now. Now, the history I seek gains a lively future, by means of my encounter with it in the present tense. This beginning, this 'now' attests to the very conditions, the possibilities and the limits of a search for that ghost, that historical other. By making my

presence (and my present) felt, the stage on which the past is to be performed is brought into view.

I am suddenly more than ready to begin. I have begun.

Having trespassed momentarily across the frame of representation, I find I have crossed over into the film I am making, and it becomes apparent that I too am a historical character among all the others who are the subject of my enquiry. While inside the archive, I am simultaneously inside a bungalow in south-west Iran in 1936 – but now endowed with the vantage point of a historical actor, from which I can freely address the other historical actors – not on equal terms, but as a restless researcher who inadvertently got stuck inside her own film. Neither completely inside nor completely outside the time of the document in which I invest my imagination, I occupy a space that moves endlessly between. From my newly invested vantage point, I can describe this movement between, and with that description emerges the articulation of the site of production of historical meaning - the place where a particular person, with her own history, encounters objects, fragments of a past, and becomes bound up in that history. And how that meeting place becomes the story she tells about the stories we tell about the past, about all that is known, and about the teeming silence of the unknowable beyond.

Life starts to bleed into research, present into past, subjective experience into the historical record, personal memory into imperial history, the extra-filmic into the filmic. However this realization is accompanied by anxiety, because, I wonder - who is this 'I' and where will this lead her – and me?

This chapter is about mixing things up in order to see better. At points throughout this text, I write in the first-person and in a performative mode. I aim to show how the performative aspects of authorial inscription facilitate a transparent, critical relationship to the colonial and to the archival by making the process of research and the construction of meaning visible, and therefore, I argue, allow for a better, situated kind of history. Cecilia Sayad's work on *The Performance of Authorship* (2013) gathers together some useful models for thinking about authorial self-inscription. In particular I draw on her use of the notion of the figure of the fool (derived from Bakhtin), and that of masquerade – as useful ways of thinking about the strategic use of masking and self-disclosure. I argue that these strategies offer effective contributions towards negotiating the ethical and political challenges presented by the research material.

Transferring Michel de Certeau's critical historiography (1988) to the context of the photographic archive tells me that I should take seriously the process and conditions of 'looking' in relation to the production of historical knowledge. Finding myself in possession of privileged, personal knowledge of the history I study, I ask what is produced in the collision between a personal and an official archive, between personal memory and imperial history, and what sort of self and what sort of history are likely to emerge in the process. Finally, I reflect on the relationship between the audio-visual articulation of my findings, and the challenge presented by the blank spaces that remain opaque and silent within it.

3.1 Sleight of hand

In order to study her temporal object, the historian extracts herself from time, so that she may stand outside it to describe it better. She will do this by dividing time into discrete categories of past, present and future, and then will perform further

conceptual surgery, producing retrospective, sequential slices called 'periods' from which she will select. Michel de Certeau writes that the modern tradition of historiography that emerges in the 19th century is founded on what he calls a "discourse of separation" (1988, p2), a discourse that separates subject and object, labour and nature. Such separations turn on a temporal sleight of hand. This way the invisible procedures of historiography will elide "the place where it produces its own speech, protected by the distance established between itself and its object" (ibid., p3).

The historian will write chronologically so that instead of the place and circumstance she writes from being the point of (re)commencement, she will write in reverse, – a "scriptural inversion" – the text moving inexorably towards the reader, so that "the place of the production of the text is transformed into a place produced by the text" (1988, p90).

The assumption that historical knowledge resides purely in the past has underpinned the discipline of history and its relationship to time. The logic of such an understanding requires that the place where representation actually begins, the present, be continuously repressed and masked within the text. However, if past and present cease to be severed one from the other, and if the conditions, qualities and limits of the perspective provided by the present cease to be seen as a block to the pursuit of historical truth, then this founding contradiction can be removed (Wandel, 2000, p58).

De Certeau argues that the past is never a given, that historical meaning is always constructed, and therefore the 'place' of the historian is crucial. Yet his understanding of the production of historical texts never elides the strangeness, the otherness and the ungraspable nature of the past, the 'real' of history. In fact he puts constructedness and otherness in productive tension, so that through the

historian's concepts and constructions, the resistant otherness of the past can be made visible – "the actions of the author and resistances of the material are being combined endlessly"(de Certeau, 1988, p38).

Through his emphasis on the restoration of the ambiguities of time, and of object/subject relations within historical practice (*ibid.*, p217) de Certeau refuses the disabling binary of objectivity and relativism. My research aims to embody a similar tension, which acknowledges the archives' construction of the past, while simultaneously emphasizing the specificity of a particular historical situation and the powerful sense of contact with that past which photographs sometimes allow.

The problem of a 'discourse of separation' is inevitably part and parcel of the colonial subject of this research. It forms the colonial past which I investigate, yet it is the continuing, contemporary problem of separation which describes the postcolonial context in which this research sits, and to which it must respond. Herein lies a challenge at the heart of this project. If arguably, the colonial never ended, but its power is simply expressed through new mechanisms and their guises¹⁴ so that the same erasures and silences continue to be reproduced, then this fact presents the researcher/filmmaker with an ethical imperative to make such mechanisms visible, and for the construction of history to be organized so as to resist those pervasive separations, including those that sever past from present, ourselves from the subjects we study.

The habit of creating distance and separation from the colonial past, which this research works to repair, is linked to patterns of disavowal of the colonial past and present. The process that splits the colonial from contemporary categories, and the closure of the colonial into a 'period', points to an expedient severance that

¹⁴ Demos (2013), Mitchell (2011)

results in contemporary forms of 'forgetting' and misrecognition (Stoler, 2011, p147). The refusal of identification between 'who we were' and 'who we are' (complications of 'we/they' notwithstanding) suggest the same sense of discomfort and the same desire for self-protection that cause a nation to repress or to screen-off the trauma and loss of decolonization. In practice, the West pursues policies that sustain global inequality and injustice, that are colonial in all but name¹⁵. In this context, it is expedient for an official discourse to pursue self-interested policies while effecting collective denial or elision of both the memory and the persistence of colonial relations in the postcolonial present. These colonial relations, in turn, are those which for example reproduce forms of race-thinking that legitimize contemporary divisions and double-standards as being natural or self-evident (Gilroy, 2005).

Challenging us to live differently, the 'postcolonial' presents an opportunity, by way of an ambiguous temporal and conceptual field that suggests alternative, productive ways of thinking and engaging with practice. This opportunity requires seeing several categories – past and present, colonizer and colonized, over there and over here – through one another, together (Hall, 1993). The counter-logic to colonial epistemic separation and fixity should therefore suggest a principle of productive intermingling, that enables a different way of relating to the world, to others, to our selves. Such alternative ways of knowing would require different sets of question, a different sort of method, in order to set in motion networks of correspondences and identifications grounded in multiple, provisional alliances, across time and space. Those correspondences must, I argue, be mediated and thoroughly grounded in the here and now, and close-to-home.

¹⁵ In the context of oil for example, Mitchell (2011) describes the process by which colonial policies were redefined post WW1 (pp86-108)

3.2 The labour of looking

The silent, airless glare and isolation of the archive's laboratory conditions intensify an otherwise ordinary sensory encounter with objects. Under conditions designed to maximize observational techniques, my awareness of the mismatch between the gaping lacunae that I aspire to fill with insight and revelation and the actuality of the repetitively rectangular objects before me, the "glum desert" bemoaned by Barthes (1982, p20), generates a kind of looking and searching that takes this researcher close to the brink of scopofolly. Prolonged exposure to laboratory conditions produces a magnified awareness either of affective potency or of alienating hollowness, of both the photographic documents and the absent object of my search. The process of looking is tested across hundreds of archival objects, over hours at a time, and I am confronted with the cumulative capacity of objects to make me by turns absorbed, transported, possessed and lost to myself, divided, distracted, bored and alienated. The fluctuations and digressions of my attention are crudely registered in truncated comments or marks next to the list of shelf-numbers in my notebook. It is I who is tested by the succession of archival photographs in the laboratory, rather than the other way round. I exit the archive as one emerging from a stupor.

This research, and my account of it, emphasizes the labour of looking as a complex site where subjective and social processes intermingle. The 'look' is owned by an embodied receiver, processor and transmitter of impressions, and is a thoroughly situated medium. Scholars have argued for an embodied vision that might ground a feminist empiricism in a metaphor of vision that embraces the status of a partial and situated objectivity.

The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together

imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another. (Haraway, 1988, p586)

In registering and working through its limits, this approach to being an observer, offers a responsible vision that makes an account of itself. In advancing her argument for “locatable” forms of vision, Donna Haraway starts to think about objects as actors and as agents, rather than things marked by mute passivity, or that seemingly only to come into being through their mapping and naming by men. Roland Barthes’ writing (1982) about his relationship to photographs foregrounds the agency of photographs in interesting ways, and I propose that the complex lives of archival objects merit being considered from this perspective too.

This situated, embodied observer is one who does not resist her entanglement in the objects she studies. Her research allows for the possibility that these historical objects may make claims on *her*, and eventually by extension, on *us*. The history she studies is in fact, the history she makes. The blurring of boundaries between subject and object, the bleeding of the one into the other and the refusal of separation, points not only to the nature of a challenge to historical thinking, but to a possible method for reflexively addressing problems associated with the colonial archive and the production of knowledge.

The photographic documentation of my intervention in the archive stamps its ‘now’ into the research. It folds traces of time and place into the historical record, and onto the archive it investigates. A record of archivists’ gloves comes to stand in for the unseen researcher-filmmaker; their creases bear testimony to their extraction from some drawer, moments before the image was taken, in anticipation of some careful, gloved gesture and a relationship between glove and archival relic. They will be the evidence of my intervention and signifiers of a process. Much later, I came almost

believe that I wore them. In fact, there was a box of latex gloves in the BP archive, but no one seemed to bother with them. Nonetheless by making and incorporating a registration of the research procedure, an imprint of a time and place of the film's construction will be exposed.

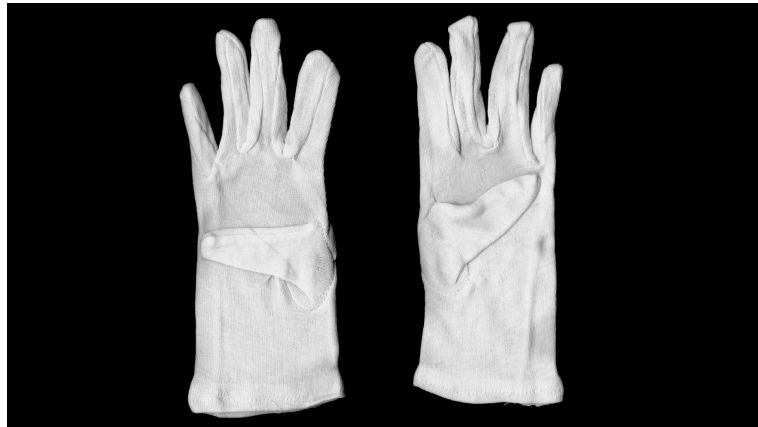


Fig. 3.1 Scanned objects

I weave this category of document (an untimely, contemporary interloper) into the temporal fabric of the film-text (a photographic sequence built from historic remainders, an archive-in-motion) and it breaks the homogeneous image of 'times past'. It will function as a switch (which I notice becomes an 'interrupteur' in French) that produces a special 'here and now' interruption effect within the film's colonisation of that other, distant zone called the past. I restage and narrate my minor labours in the present tense, in particular the process of looking at photographs. The account of my investigation draws attention to the particular, embodied nature of my encounter with the archive. My engagement with the images is performed (audio-visually, sometimes verbally) for an imagined audience who will encounter the same documents, magnified on a huge screen, over my figurative shoulder and through the temporality of my narration.

3.3 Performance

Rather than present the illusion of a stable, coherent or 'true' identity, an authorial performance suggests a self that is being constructed *through* the text. This offers "a conception of identity as fluid, unfinished, in the making" (Sayad, 2013, p2), presenting a partial purchase on the world that "resists the politics of closure and finality" (Haraway, 1988, p590). In this research, the filmmaker will construct a reenactment of her encounter with the archive, this time for the spectator. Characterized by exteriority and gestural qualities rather than the attempt to offer psychological realism, this performative mode¹⁶ makes the author's interventions in the archive explicit, embedding the author's presence within the text. This exhibitionist dimension suggests the "showing doing" of performance (Schechner, cited in Sayad, 2013, p29) which, in film, simultaneously displays the process of self-inscription and the mechanisms of filmic representation. More than this, Cecilia Sayad describes the ways in which the 'figuring' of authorial presence in cinema negotiates the tension between the filmic and the extra-filmic, between the space of representation, and the 'real'. She writes that

the figuring author is seen as the one who trespasses the borders of the tableau, who 'leaps out of the frame'¹⁷. (Sayad, 2013, p30)

The mobility of this in-between status is what can enable the construction of historical text from a situated perspective. Sayad considers a larger-than-life mode of on-screen performance (in her case-study, represented by an unlikely pairing of Woody Allen and Jean-Luc Godard) for which she uses Bakhtin's figure of the fool, as one frequently endowed with the author's point of view, and for whom all sorts of things are allowed. For example, Bakhtin (2001) writes that within novelistic fiction

¹⁶ I use 'performance' in this section in its most literal sense: a consciously constructed performance or play that may involve elements of script, rehearsal, mimicry, or masquerade.

¹⁷ Sayad is making reference to Barthes (1975) "This is what representation is, when nothing emerges, when nothing leaps out of the frame" (pp56-57)

Fools are endowed with the 'right to be "other"', 'the right not to understand', 'the right to confuse', thereby becoming the mask that the author wears in order to question the world freely, to denaturalize it. (cited in Sayad, 2013, p110)

The figure of the fool in film, Sayad tells us, functions as a presence that frequently fails "to merge with the diegesis" and which turns "the author into a strange unassailable body" (2013, p108). Within Sayad's analysis of the performance of the fool or joker, she also identifies the characteristic of 'masquerade', self-disclosure by means of selective masking:

The idea of performance suggests, firstly, the impulse to hide behind a fictional identity, even if only to expose oneself further. (*ibid.*, p2)

The special positioning and the permissions this grants, offers a strategic device for filmmakers and artists who, by adopting a fictive persona, can navigate between the filmic and the extra-filmic worlds in order to 'denaturalize' the world and provoke a reflexive political critique of their own position within the story they document, or perhaps that of their audience, if not the whole documentary enterprise.

For example in Avi Mograbi's film *Z32* (2007) a young former soldier attempts to gain absolution from his girlfriend for his participation in a war-crime that occurred some time before the start of their relationship and that continues to haunt him. The conversation between the young man and his girlfriend plays out uncomfortably. Meanwhile, in another scene from within his own home, Mograbi addresses the camera directly, as he tries to grapple with the personal and professional ethical dilemmas of the documentary director. In particular he expresses frustrated ambivalence about the way that each successive documentary he makes is celebrated in Europe, while the situation for Palestinians not only does not change, but goes from bad to worse. Eventually the filmmaker resolves to deliver his commentary in song, accompanied by the physical presence

of a chamber orchestra crammed into his living room. This film generates a series of absurd musical interludes (reminiscent of Kurt Weill, actually composed by Naom Enbar) that structure the former soldier's confession to his girlfriend into episodes, and through which Mograbi satirizes his dilemmas regarding the problem of dealing with a war crime, and the impotence of the documentarian.

Set in another, similarly grave context, *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* (2009) sees artist Renzo Martens marching around the Democratic Republic of the Congo in what looks like a parody of colonial hubris. He persuades a group of impoverished wedding photographers that since the biggest African "natural resource" is poverty (the DRC's international aid income is, we are told, greater than all of its mineral resources put together), and since a veritable army of Western photographers, media and NGOs are sustaining themselves from this poverty, then they, as Africans, should learn to profit from poverty and war themselves – by photographing its African victims and selling the result to Western media outlets. Having been coached by Martens and told how much the Western photographers are paid for each photograph, the Congolese photographers inevitably appear devastated when the project fails at their first encounter with a Western NGO, as Martens surely foresees. In an interview, Martens describes the 'exploitative' or cruel nature of his performance as

a performance of the discourses of the White Man taking responsibility for everything we in the West are and do. I produce as a performance the dominant discourse of what happens when the west, in the form of journalists, NGOs, MSF, go into countries like the Congo and exploit poverty as a way of perpetuating their own dominance. (Martens, 2009)

Both of the above performances draw on the absurd or the grotesque in order to provoke genuinely uncomfortable ethical questions about the position of the filmmaker or about the complicity of the viewer in a much larger web of power and subjugation. In the first, Mograbi occupies a liminal space, as the filmmaker's

extra-filmic agenda is elaborately staged and cut into the documentary, mirroring the structure of a musical in which the musical commentary, remains external to the documentary diegesis in order to comment reflexively on it. Martens by contrast plants himself at the centre of every scene as a provocateur who parodies the discourse of the “White Man” and thereby reproduces relationships of power over those around him in scenes that are almost unbearable to watch. In both of these examples, the physical presence of the director tends to dominate the frame, which each uses as a space to stage the relative workings of power.

In order to advance my investigation into colonial photographs, I propose adopting the role of the fool or the function of the ‘masquerade’. The concept of masquerade as a form of showing and masking offers an apt vehicle for a researcher whose project is defined by engagement with absence - history’s silences; the gaps and occlusions of the archive; the fragmentary and incomplete nature of photographs; and later, the elliptical constructions of montage. In this context, the materialization of the filmmaker’s masked presence can be threaded in-between hundreds of fragmentary frames of archival evidence, and thereby joins with that evidence, as part of a single (dis)continuum of historical artifacts.

As with the examples given earlier from live-action film, a fictional rendition of the research provides the author with special powers. The researcher-as-fool is able to occupy a liminal, mediating role between the subject and the frame of its representation. In so doing, she gains the right to declare uncertainty, to announce failures, to alert her audience to the fact that s/he is not in control of her investigation. The fool asserts an important principle in her approach to historical knowledge – one that questions the world but that simultaneously questions the authority of that knowledge, and the veracity of its representations.

3.4 The personal and the collective

On first inspection, my parents' photographs don't give much away about the work or home life of the British in Iran – they are mostly touring, holiday images. The photographs provoke an ambiguous memory effect in me. I recognize my mother, father, and sometimes identify myself as a baby. But the images are mostly strange to me. While I recognize gestures and facial expressions with mournful affection, I must make many of the same imaginative leaps as I make with anonymous archives photographs, in order to guess the circumstances of each image. The slides are a disorderly jumble, and their unremarkable pictorial qualities will add nothing to those in the official archive, I decide. They are irrelevant, so I will not mix them up with my research; I will keep them apart. Yet with repeated viewings, meanings and narratives start to multiply. Soon I cannot not incorporate them; they have incorporated me.

Family photographs, my family's photographs, along with various other additions I make to the documentary record, represent a contamination, an impure mixing of categories according to the classificatory logic of the colonial archive. Because of this, the conjunction of these two archival bodies – one sourced from a wooden box in what had been my mother's wardrobe, the other sourced with some difficulty from the unwieldy official BP archive at Warwick University – creates a powerful conceptual space and potential, a laboratory in which the abstract, generalized movement of geopolitical processes intermingles with personal memory and the singularities of lived experience. It is this hybrid space, the gap between the two bodies (and between the other foreign bodies in my reconstituted archive) that provides the "enabling moment of analysis" (Gordon, 2008, p142). The gap between 'Colonialism with a capital C'¹⁸, and the concrete

¹⁸ Toni Morrison speaks of "Slavery with a capital S", cited in Gordon (2008, p142)

particularity of a set of family snap-shots, can provoke what Gordon conceives as 'haunting', the appearance of that which has been repressed or made invisible, precisely through "the crucial way it mediates between the institutional and the personal" (*ibid.*).

Personal documents locate the place of the researcher within the text and within the history she constructs - a familial place, a physical environment and most of all a social place. As I write this in the third person, its easy to for me to see that the pictures show colonial privilege, and they situate the filmmaker's voice within it. The archive contains a number of employees' personal albums amongst the official ones (some of which are reproduced in the research), but proximity to *living* memory radically transforms the status of these particular images.

Regardless of what they show, my family's pictures are a living bridge that links and qualifies a far-off and otherwise inaccessible world. The intermingling of imperial history and personal memory is performed through the voice of this filmmaker and her gestures in the archive, and has the power to bring the colonial home, *intimately*.

Bringing the colonial home *intimately*, has a special potential. The project performs a series of linkages that connect me to events in a distant place. I will not speak about love here because I do not have the words for it, and because my love can be no more, nor less than anyone else's within this history. While the memory of *this* family is unique and precious to *me*, I can also see that my family appear like all the other families that came before them and after them. Privileged knowledge enables a pattern to be described from the inside and a more universal story to be told by means of a description that is particular because of my personal stake within it.

Yet the actual subject of the research will not be the personages of my parents, not the British geologist, nor myself. These are only semi-fictive characters, thin, partially formed figures that function as place holders, or points that can join up to form part of the larger colonial constellation in which we may all be enmeshed. I won't fill in or thicken these representations. By refusing to attribute solidity to any persona, the wider question of accountability in relation to the colonial and the colonized, remains open for consideration as a collective question. By refusing to attribute solidity to any persona, the space remains open for imagining those who went un-photographed and un-archived.

The ritual of photography continuously re-enacts a set of relationships to place, technology and to people. My parents' photographic habits show what they thought photography was for, and which Iranian subjects they thought were interesting to photograph. Once they are part of the larger sequence of images, I can see that in the early 1960s my parents reproduce many of the photographic situations, fascinations and relationships of their colonial counterparts from the 1930s. For example, the paradoxical desire to use imaging technology to document primitive technologies and rural ways of life which they see they have themselves lost in the wake of technological progress. British presence is historically tied into the 'unequal development' produced by enforced modernization policies that are imposed on indigenous tribal cultures and rendering them 'endangered', while my parents photograph them. These kinds of photograph appear at the total expense of images of urban liveliness which I seek and fail to find: signs of an Iranian anti-colonial modernity that I have read about and read into the poetry for example, but that is excluded or simply unrecognizable, unperceivable to me in both personal and official archival records of so-called tribal peoples. I will not find the Iran I was seeking. But I will make visible the fantasies of self and other that have been inscribed into the

unconscious fabric of the AOIC archive, in the hope of exorcising it through filmic (rather than psychic) projection.

3.5 The museum guide

How to conceive of the re-presentations I am to construct and the performance I am to produce, in relation to the labour of the historian? Michel de Certeau (who wrote history and wrote about history, though was not by training a historian) likens the work of the historian to that of a museum guide (1988, p100). Having arranged a row of portraits on a gallery wall, the historian presents a 'guided visit', a route, a story that connects all of the various paintings. Yet despite the fullness of her description, along the way, the historian regularly reaches the limits of speech, and must inevitably point to something she cannot conjure in words – the paintings themselves. The pictures are elements

below which nothing more can be done except display, and through which *saying* reaches its limit, as near as possible to *showing* [...] These are foreign elements in the treatise of sociology or of physics. (1988, p100)

The relationship between the paintings and the narration in his metaphor is symbiotic – one is dependent on the other in order to produce historical meaning. De Certeau does not conclude that the work of historiography is reducible to a purely 'narrativist' or novelistic conception however. The foreign elements, the 'real', history's untamable other, mark the limits of scientific method, yet for De Certeau these limits constitute the critical nexus of an ethical politics of historical practice. Crucially, de Certeau argues that it is in the negotiation of the limits of what is knowable, that the historian's attitude to the past is made visible (Weymans , 2004, p176).

This research seeks neither to explain the past, nor to fill in lacunae. Rather it will use gaps in knowledge as a lever for producing curiosity and reflection. The search

for and questions about an image of the past become the hook and the story I can tell about this journey through time. In the dramatization of the historical inquiry, the humdrum experience of archival research becomes one strand within the subject it investigates, as the anticipation, monotony and false-trails of a research trajectory start to resemble stages in the conventions of dramatic fiction. Like a drama, this investigation is a quest driven by absence, loss and enigma and the desire for resolution. It is met by obstacles and blind alleys, and perhaps an eventual prize, discovery of some kind of knowledge that turns out to be more ordinary and closer to home than the thing that was sought in the first place. The image de Certeau conjures of the historian as museum guide provides a useful analogy for the filmmaker-as-historian. The row of pictures is to be arranged into in the virtual museum (a digital time-line), the guided visit through a sequence of pictures (the filmmaker's commentary) and then a point at which commentary reaches its limit, at which there is nothing that can be said or known outside of the immediacy of the encounter between a viewer and an image of the past.

Conclusions

I have told the story of how I came to step into the picture I was merely observing. At the centre of this story is the act of looking and the question of its relation to knowledge. As the film research comes to stage my encounter with photographs and to communicate my experience of archival research, so I become inscribed in the text I produce. Through its narration, I sketch out a relationship between different histories, and my own relationship to the Imperial history of which they form part. I argue that giving an account of my intervention in the archive enables a relationship to history from within that history. This past-present collapse is important because it undoes the habitual distancing mechanisms of historical narratives, in order to open questions of accountability and responsibility in a context of collective forgetting and disavowal of the colonial.

This research constantly moves back and forward from the archive, to the history it investigates, between the photographs and the story she tells and the material evidence of the process. Leaps, jumps and deliberate effects of anachronism are produced by bringing together an unexpected coincidence of materials. My research assembles, combines and conflates several discrete micro-archives, containing different orders of heterogeneous materials, stories and threads. It incorporates the personal and collective, private and official photographs, new and old, found and made records, and treats them as though they are part of the warp and weave of a single fabric. The interlacing of composite narratives thrives on anachronism, whose temporal disjuncture allow for an always shifting, trans-historical perspective. None of the narrative strands that play out are resolvable or complete, but rather are held as though in a hall of shattered mirrors, in which disparate stories and images of past and present co-exist as temporally distinct refractions overlaid one upon the other. Here the stories we tell about ourselves and others are in dialogue, within a dynamic, shifting field where memory can be performed and experienced *through* one another.

In the next chapter I shall examine the relationship between the 'guided visit' and the experience of contact with the images themselves – the wordless encounter between the spectator and the absent and unknowable subject of the photograph.

Chapter 4

Constructing an experience of untimeliness

I want to attend to an order of historical meaning that registers through affect and the experiential. I wish to examine the ways in which archival photographs, re-appropriated within film, become meaningful through the way they shape a viewer's experience of time, the past, and historicity. In order to do this, I envisage history as a contemporary experience of untimeliness, and the moving image as a tool for unsettling the viewer's relationship to time. I reflect on the colonial photographic archive as it is processed through the moving image from the perspective of its reception, with particular attention to the status and effect of the photograph within the filmic sequence. This means focusing on what archival materials 'do', but especially on what still images, archive photographs embedded within film, 'do', how they act on the viewer in the filmic encounter, and what they produce. I consider the role of the moving image in augmenting and intensifying the reception of the photograph and the positioning of the viewer in relation to the past it purports to represent. I propose that re-presenting still photographs within the moving image can provoke potent and effective ways of engaging with our collective troubled pasts, and in so doing, model an ethics of remembrance.

I begin by considering the time register of archival photographs and evaluate the viewing experience described by Jaimie Baron (2014) as "the archive effect" in her book of that name, that is, the perception of temporal disparity between archival fragments and the film into which they are appropriated. In order to consider the particular implications of reworking the still image within the moving image as a method for producing historical reflection, I make use of Raymond Bellour's

seminal essay *The Pensive Spectator* (1984), which examines the affective power of still images within (mainly narrative) cinema. I transpose Bellour's findings to another context in order to test what, if anything, they might offer with regard to the problems associated with the projection and reception of photographs that issue from troubled pasts. My interest here turns on understanding the perceptual and temporal effects of colonial photographs within film, with particular attention to ethical considerations. What strategies are adequate to the task of looking at and re-presenting photographs that were produced under conditions of radical inequality, and what can usefully emerge from the re-presentation of such images within the moving image?

4.1 Temporal disparity

An intervention that shuffles the photographic archive and rearranges it along the virtual filmstrip tends to detach the images from their chronology and produces temporal collisions, confections and an effect of anachronism. Jaimie Baron's *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (2014) focuses on the reception of films constructed from archival materials. She looks at the experience produced by the archival fragment within film and in particular the viewer's awareness of the disparity between different orders of material, which produces what she terms the "archive effect". She observes that the sense of disparity between the temporality of the archival fragment and that of the new filmic context in which an archival fragment is housed, registers both at the level of the material surface of the image and at the level of temporal signifiers within it (such as styles of dress or architecture for example). Baron focuses her attention on the effect produced by the perception of a gap between the 'then' of the pro-filmic event and the 'now' of the filmstrip into which they are transplanted which produces "the perception by the viewer... of a then and now within a single text" (2014, p18).

Baron makes an argument for the ways in which archive-based films offer a lively experience of time and a critical relationship to history, although her study doesn't attend to the lives and times of the images that have been appropriated. While I share Baron's interest in what anachronism produces, the formulation of temporal disparity she offers might be taken to imply that the archival fragment inhabits a single, fixed time zone, one designated by the time of the pro-filmic event (or what in the context of my research I would describe as the originating photographic encounter); also, that its appropriation by the filmmaker into a new interpretive text produces an equally straightforward 'now'; and that the moment of the film's construction has an unambiguous and fixed relationship to time and to the viewer's 'now', with both classified under the vague category we call the contemporary, even though we know that the way that we see films changes with the passing of time¹⁹.

Case 1: About now

I am looking at my father's pictures. I will set a temporal marker in order to situate this series of snap-shots, whose coloured contents look so different to the rest of the photographs. 'June 1963'. I name the month and year of this picture and, as narrator, I am in the unusual position of being able to announce my own birth. The 'now' of this picture is the 'then' of 1963, and as narrator I am able to use my special powers to predict the future, as well as the past.

The image is from 1947. I document the 'now', the time of my encounter with the image in 2012, with the lines of a text which I shall record in voice-over, towards the end of 2014: "Looking closely I realize that these are not company directors seated in the boardroom at Number 1, Finsbury Circus.

¹⁹

For example, in Mulvey (2006)

This picture shows a different order of men around the table. The photographer is rehearsing the boardroom image, using body-doubles". A process of looking, and then looking again, is documented. The voice-over stamps the time of its registration onto the image from 1947 as it is projected in 2014.

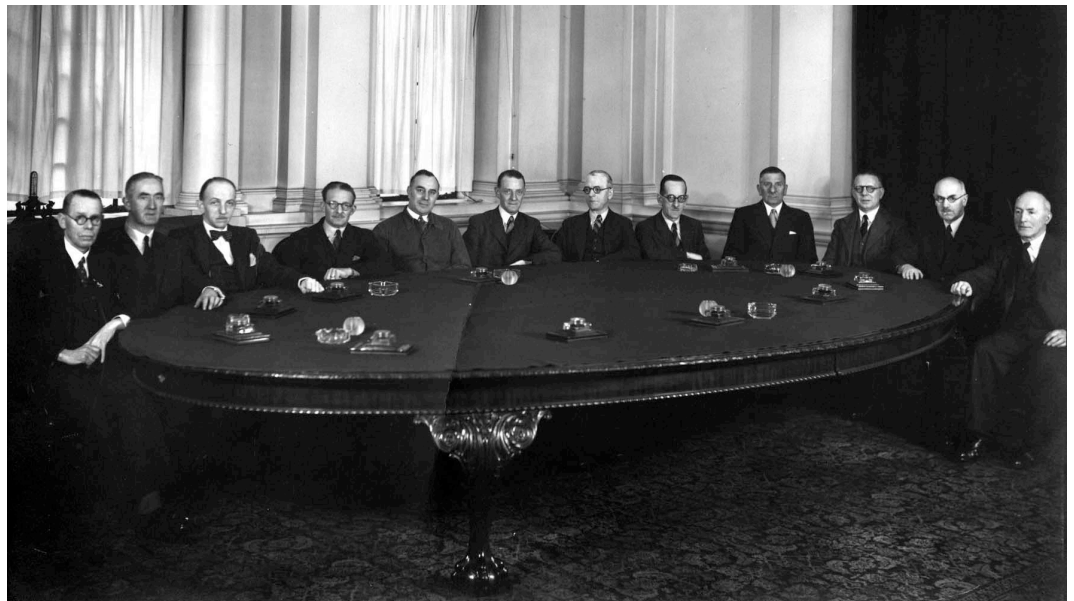


Fig. 4.1 Sourced from the BP archive.

With the recording of the last sentence, I sense that a different 'now' is activated. I momentarily cross over the frame and wander into the space and time of the photograph. I turn to picture the photographer standing behind the camera, gesturing towards his subjects as he stages this picture some time in 1947.

By 2015, I have cut this image and its narration from the film altogether. It's only a memory. Photographs are traces that originate from the zone we call 'the past', but within film, future, past and present are markers that measure the relative distance between a photograph and the position adopted by the filmmaker. In this project, the filmmaker changes her relationship to the image, to the film's 'now', and to the historical past she documents, at will.

Such fluid and fickle temporal wanderings bring the apparent fixity of the photograph and the temporal categories they, and we, inhabit into question. The moving image is an infinitely capacious and accommodating host for photographs, but never a temporally neutral or inert one. The film's 'now' refuses to correspond to any fixed, stable or unitary point in time – rather the film's construction is repeatedly revealed as a process, one that shows signs of being by turns protracted, discontinuous and temporally ambiguous.

While privileging analysis of the experience of reception of the appropriated archival fragment, Baron tends to consider this interface in isolation from the relationship of the compilation film to the archive from which its materials are sourced. This separation of both the new film envelope and the appropriated fragment from the archiving process leaves something unaccounted for. It neglects a significant part of the life of the image, and represents a potential thinning of its history. Aiming for a holistic way of looking at an image, one which omits nothing, the reverse of the image or the parts of it which are obscured or damaged²⁰, provides a more multi-faceted picture than the 'then' / 'now' binary implies, and thereby the possibility of a more complex and productive relationship to time and to history.

Case 2: The lives and times of an image

I am hunched over, magnifying glass in hand, scanning the surface of one of many, many images with tired, analogue eyes. I search for details, clues that might be hidden in the background, in the obscured parts or at the periphery of the small paper rectangles. I try hard to imagine the circumstances surrounding each photographic event. I want to build a

²⁰

An approach which Didi-Huberman (2008) describes as an anthropological approach to images, and which Stoler (2002) describes in terms of an ethnographic approach to the archive

picture in my mind of the everyday details of a historical process. But most of the time I doubt the significance of what I am looking at, and think I fail to see what it is a symptom of. I feel acutely aware that I must make the most of the limited time I have been allotted in this place.

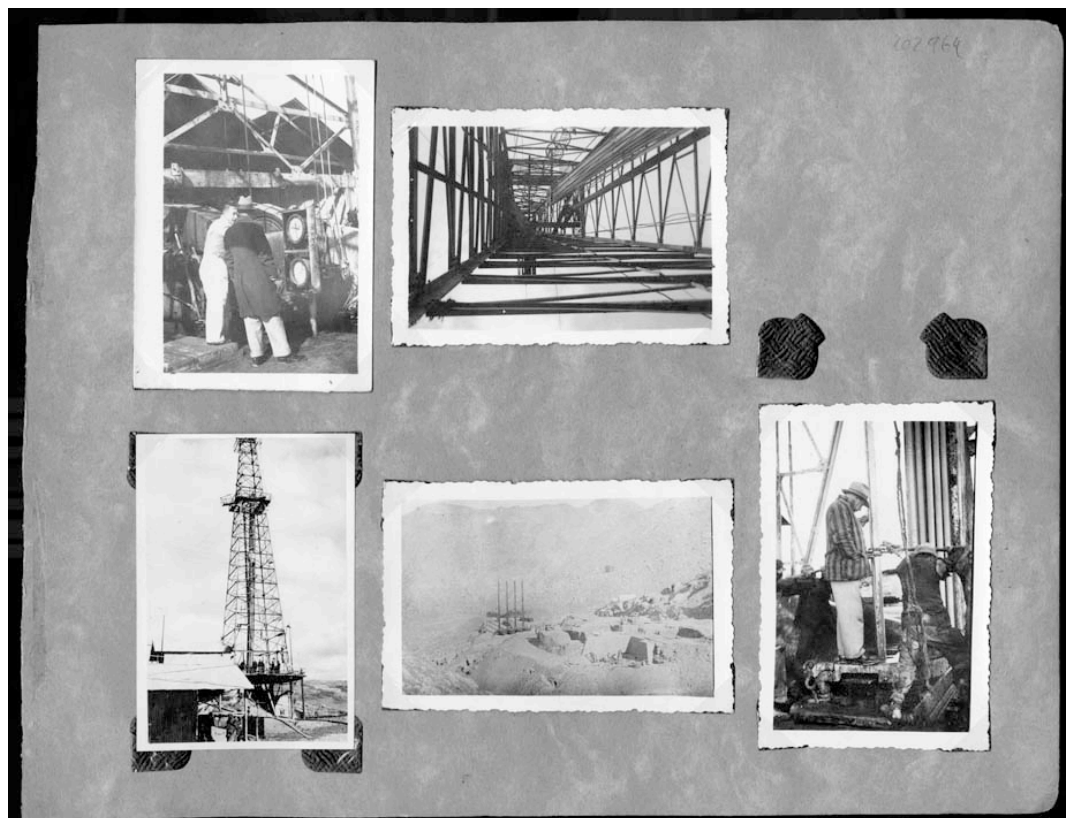


Fig. 4.2 From the personal album of an employee (1938-1943) of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, sourced from the BP archive

Now (tomorrow) I am looking at a secondary, scanned version of the image on a big screen at home. It's a digital scan of the same photographs on their sugar-paper background, only this time I am struck by the dialectic between the people and things inside the frame, the photographer standing hidden behind the camera, and the hand arranging the images on the page of an album. Another hand is cutting the card out of the album and marking a long series of numbers in pencil on the top right-hand

*corner of the page, while my own hand is selecting the digital reframing of
this extracted fragment. And then there is you. Reading, glancing, your
hand*

has just turned this page. Or alternatively, you are scrutinizing this image for its span of several seconds within the film I will soon be putting it into. Not now, but sometime later, sometime after I have finished writing and editing, after I have moved on to some altogether new project.

On close inspection (more accurately, a distanced retrospection) these images bear signs of having been at the centre of a series of overlapping stories, spun around them, through them, across time. My focus turns to the nature of such overlapping stories and the relationship between them. The survival of a photograph – its trajectory across several discrete archiving processes, and through multiple human transactions – attests to its' multilayered history. The fusing of those temporal layers gathers together the various encounters between Company, photographer, camera, subject, bystanders, collectors, archivists, publishers – and you and I. Looking at the image in this way, the time and circumstance of each viewer's own, personal re-vision of the image, here and now, becomes folded into our own reading of the life of the photograph. Where this overlapping structure can be made visible or palpable, it has the potential to generate a temporally unsettling viewing experience, one that makes the separation of past and present, subject and viewer, impossible.

The perception of temporal disparity is registered not so much in contemplation of an individual historical document, nor within the conjunction of two or more temporally disparate documents – but in the play between the document and the archiving processes from which it has been extracted, and the interrogation of their relationship. The potential thickening of the temporal registers of the archival document exposes the tension or gap between the photograph and the album, the photograph and the archive, the image and its use-value – hereby exposing

the conditions and the power embodied in the production, preservation and archiving processes.

A new life will be brought to the photograph through the mediating supplements of sequencing, framing, magnification, the addition of sound or words. The moving image will provide a new space in which to reflect on the relationship between the traces of the lives inside the frame, the marks and tears inscribed beneath, behind or around it, and the photograph's material presence as an object that sits in a particular room in an institutional space, viewed at a particular time. The archive begins to reveal itself as a form of representation, as a medium that shapes the world as it categorizes, names and describes it. The history that it opens, therefore, is in the first place that of the archive's own, on-going operations. The temporal play animated through the filmmaking process allows that the relative agency exercised by various historical actors implicated in the production, preservation and projection of the image, may begin to be made visible.

Case 3: Doing time. Another kind of temporal complication

Susana de Sousa Diaz' film *48* (2008) re-appropriates and projects the archive of the political police of the fascist state which held power in Portugal from 1926 until 1974 – forty-eight years. The film unfolds as a slow sequencing of photographs – black and white mug-shots of political prisoners, whose faces gradually fade up and then out from a black background over the course of ninety minutes. The film brings past and present into direct confrontation, not through the counterpoint of images drawn from different time zones, but through the counterpoint of image and sound recordings. The sequence of police photographs is accompanied by the filmmaker's recordings of the voice of the photographic subject, as each former detainee responds to seeing the image of their former self more than thirty

years after the fall of the regime. Each is provoked to recall the photographic event that documents and describes the moment of their arrest.

A tension is produced by a growing awareness of the gap between the time of the image and the time of the voice. Or rather the lapse between image and sound index is simultaneously accentuated and telescoped. The film seems at first to oscillate between two temporal markers, 'then' and 'now', but a third time emerges from within many of the testimonies. The instant of the shutter's opening becomes acutely present – as the mark of a personal catastrophe, the indexical confirmation of another incarceration, an exercise of power, of which this photographic ritual is but one symptom. And then, the stunning awareness that the voice that has not only survived but outlived the political and photographic regime that generated this image, a voice that speaks from amongst us, from our shared present, is close to us now.

But in addition, the original photographic instant, a portrait suspended like the frozen image of an event that cannot be forgotten, the uninvited after-image of trauma, becomes a marker against which a duration – the number of years of incarceration – can be measured and begin to be apprehended. The singular moment seems to open out as the speaker's voice, through the alchemy of film apparently emanating from within the image, describes the conditions of their incarceration. The photograph now gives onto a vertiginous sense duration, the kind of time that cannot be measured, but rather is experienced inwardly, second by second, year on year. The image of the arrest of the citizen, the invitation to reflect on the meaning of 'doing time' for those deemed political prisoners, the repeated arrest of the viewer confronted by each new still image, cumulatively produce a troubling experience through time suspended and time passing, at once. The film prompts the question, how can we grasp the significance of forty-eight years of dictatorship?

The tension between distinct but overlapping temporalities and the movement between them situates the viewer in relation to each image and to the past that is being remembered, in particular ways. The perception of slippage between time-frames blurs the boundary between 'now' and 'then', bringing the past into an immediate, shared present in which the act of looking and of witnessing, and the responsibility of remembrance, join together with a sense of urgency. I shall explore this positioning of the viewer, the question of relationship, in more detail below. For now my point is to signal this activation of multiple time-frames and the effect of a shifting temporality within an individual image, in order to consider the role of the material base of the film, the role of the still photograph in complicating and augmenting the temporal effect of film, and the role of film in focusing and intensifying the reception of the photograph.

4.2 The photograph inside film

One outcome of the arrival of digital and the 'convergence' of media platforms is that this process of hybridization has undermined previously held assumptions about the separateness of both the historical trajectories and ontological status of still and moving images. In particular, the assignation of distinct and even opposing characteristics to still and moving images – of temporal fixedness to photographs alongside melancholic associations with past-ness and death²¹, contrasted with the ephemeral and fleeting present attributed to the moving image – has come into question²². Attending to the still image merged within the moving image (for example its hidden presence as photogram within cinema, its in-between state via computer and internet, or elaborated within a diversity of

²¹ For example in Bazin (2005), Barthes (1982) and Susan Sontag (2001)

²² For example the perspectives advanced by Frampton (2009), Bellour (2008), Stewart (1999), Mulvey (2006), Sutton (2009) and Beckman and Ma (2008)

image practices) has highlighted the complex and malleable nature of images, and the temporal and perceptual experiences they produce.

It follows then, that the experience of time that is generated through a combinatory approach to photograph and film is also malleable, and will be shaped by differing strategies according to specific contexts and particular ends. Before turning to the experience of looking at specifically colonial photographs, I begin by considering the particular potency that springs from the presence of the still photograph when it is embedded within narrative cinema. Roland Barthes (1982) famously develops his notion of the punctum, the incidental detail within a photograph that pricks personal memory and association, leaving him animated and troubled. This is a symptom of the power of the still image that, Barthes writes, the moving image does not have. In *The Pensive Spectator*, Raymond Bellour notes Barthes' attribution of opposing characteristics and effects to still and moving images, and complicates things by considering the affective force of their *combined* effect.

Bellour argues that the presence of the photograph in film produces an effect of distantiation, an "uncoupling" from the fictive time of the narrative in such a way that allows him to be aware of, and to reflect on, the fact of his being in the cinema. He writes, paradoxically, that the photograph "permits me to invest more freely in what I am seeing", and later, that the spectator is "literally swept up in the narrativization of the photograph" (2007, p120). And, extending his description of the spectator in dynamic, embodied motion, he says: "The spectator plunges eagerly into the traps laid by the photograph (especially the photo-as-proof, the index, etc...)" (*ibid.*, p121). His essay describes the mechanism by which a perception of separation occurs within the temporal world of cinema, in which the sense of a direct contact with the past of the photograph breaks away from the film narrative.

I wish to transfer Bellour's formulation to a context where an archive photograph appears in the midst of the flow of a cinematic illusion that has already announced its commitment to the 'real'. Say, to a film where the more obvious attributes of 'fiction' have been banished, and where a narration is constructed entirely from archival documents, historical 'facts' and witness testimony. Bellour's proposition suggests that an additional, more immediate, photographic 'real' may yet peel away from the past of this historical representation, to return its own, discrete experience of time to the viewer. Bellour suggests that his contact with a photograph, and with the past to which it refers, suddenly feels more immediate and appears more real than the narrative construction that surrounds it. He argues that the individual photograph can deliver an illusion of close contact beyond that of other kinds of testimony.

A division erupts in the filmic illusion [...] I am put into direct contact with the photograph. [...] Creating a distance, another time, the photograph permits me to reflect on cinema. (2007, p120)

And later:

Two kinds of time blend together, always and inextricable, but without becoming confused. (*ibid.*, p122)

I would like to transfer Bellour's final formulation above – on the cleavage of temporal awareness produced by the photograph within cinema – to historical thinking and feeling, as a model for remembrance. It suggests a double awareness, that has the capacity to hold an impression of direct contact with a signal from the past while maintaining a reflexive and reflective relationship with a historical narrative as it is unfolding. Throughout his essay, Bellour uses animated imagery to describe perceptual movements of a spectator towards, into or away from different image states and temporal frames. The capacity to induce and shape such dynamic movements is what enables the particular intensity of film's mediation of archive photographs.

In what follows, I investigate some of the conditions that allow for those movements to be elicited. To do this, I return to Bellour's assertion that the still image appearing within film has the power to move a spectator so that he/she "plunges eagerly into the traps laid by the photograph" (*ibid.*, p121). This research is precisely about finding ways of positioning photographic traps within the moving image in order to provoke such figurative movements and engagements with remembrance. I shall identify some of the traps laid by the colonial photograph, and consider the potential outcomes, dangers and opportunities of the entrapment that might ensue. I shall show what "plunging eagerly" into such traps produces or allows, and how the alternating movement into and away from the time of the still image will help advance knowledge of the colonial.

4.3 Photographic traps 1: the other side of the photograph

There remains something that goes beyond testimony to the photographer's art, something that cannot be silenced, that fills you with an unruly desire to know what her name was, the woman who was alive there, who even now is still real and will never consent to be wholly absorbed in art. (Benjamin, 2010, p7)

A singular detail, hidden deep within the archive photograph, entraps with its promise of a deferred revelation. The notion of the photograph as an objective document issues from its literal existence as the material imprint of an indexical trace, derived from a mechanical technology. Yet while being historically connected with notions of evidence and proof derived from empirical science, the photograph has an equally long and persistent association with a set of cultural meanings that derive from this scientific instrument's capacity to apparently embalm²³ the presence of its absent subject, and from the unsettling, uncanny effects this produces in the human imagination. Laura Mulvey observes that, while

²³ Bazin (2005)

grappling with the indexical nature of the photograph, the founding theorists of photography such as Walter Benjamin, Andre Bazin and Roland Barthes used language that strays into that associated with the supernatural, the spiritual or the psychoanalytic. Here for example is Benjamin (2010):

Look at such a picture long enough and you realize how much opposites come together yet again: the most exact technique can give its products a magical value which a painting can no longer have for us. (p7)

Or Barthes (1982):

The realists, of whom I am one ... do not take photography as a copy of reality, but an emanation of past reality: a magic, not an art.
(cited in Mulvey, 2006, p65)

Mulvey notes that this fundamental "doubleness" of photographs is constituted through a symbiotic relationship between two contradictory but linked facets:

Its most material aspect, the physical, 'existential', link between object and image, gives rise to the most elusive and ineffable properties of this particular sign. (2006, p65)

Walter Benjamin writes that the photograph (unlike a painting) always exceeds the testimony of both photographer and subject. This uncontainable photographic excess is made up of telling details that reach beyond the photograph's 'here and now', in order to address a viewer from the future. In addition Benjamin describes as "something new and strange" (2010, p510) the affective force of the mechanically derived trace of the photograph, a strangeness of the 'real' which seems to defy the temporal separation between subject and viewer, and the separation between the subject and its representation.

The beholder feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the here and now, with which reality has seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long forgotten moment the future nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it. (2010, p7)

Here, the photograph's 'real' is linked to future time, and to the emergence of a strange force beyond the consciousness of the author of the image. This implies a danger for the archive, which functions by ascribing taxonomy to photographs by means of its indexing system. This danger is the possibility that the archival taxonomy will eventually be betrayed and overthrown by photographic exactitude's unruly twin, its lively shadow life, the "spark of contingency", that telling detail which will take root in the imagination of a viewer from the future. The testimony of both photographer and archivist will not have the last word because it will be exceeded by the eruption of telling detail, a latent image from within the photograph, that only becomes recognizable to those in a future time.

Benjamin alludes to the transhistorical reach of still photographs, and the dynamic contact between past and future. This notion of temporal address reflects Benjamin's conception of time and of history, and links the idea of cross-generational responsibility developed in *Thesis on the Philosophy of History* (1969). A dynamic relationship between past and future means that the connection between human beings cuts across time, endowing the present with the potential to redeem the past (p254), and is central to this understanding of history. Benjamin's notion of temporal and inter-personal relationship is grounded in a call for responsibility, an ethical imperative to redeem the past – specifically the past of the oppressed – from the clutches of those who write 'History', the victorious and the powerful.

The process of reworking archive photographs offers an opportunity to animate the dynamic play of the doubleness of the photograph in service of the project described by Benjamin. This process may emphasize the photograph's malleability, its anomalies, and all that escapes the containment of the archive's figurative and literal house arrest and its terms of reference. Attending to this friction within photographs can unmoor and redirect the nature and flow of

pictorial information in unexpected and productive directions. In the process it can make visible the resistance of photograph and subject to the taxonomy which they have been ascribed, and in particular their status as knowable objects. In so doing another sort of testimony is made readable.



Fig. 4.3 Still from 48 (2009) dir. Susana De Sousa Diaz,
sourced from the internet²⁴

Returning to the film 48, a slow, continuous succession of faces looms large on screen, dwarfing the viewer, and alternately staring straight out from the screen or seen in profile, head positioned against an anthropometric device that allows measurement and comparison of different bodies against the same grid. The regime's agents have harnessed the camera and archiving apparatus as a mechanism of absolute juridical control. The apparatus grades citizens according to their geometry, a "single code of equivalence" (Sekula, 1986, p17), and indexes them numerically, as part of a process that robs them of personhood in order to produce obedience and weaken individual and collective capacity for resistance.

Yet, today the evidence which this particular archive projects is the testimony of its

²⁴ <http://alambique.pt/filme/48> accessed on 1.11.2015

own brutality. Through their projection, the individuality of each face and the uniqueness of each facial expression rubs against the ubiquity of the depersonalizing apparatus of police photography and archive, providing evidence that variously suggests vulnerability or resistance, suffering or anger, endurance or shock – just a few of the myriad possible lived experiences that begin to become actualized through the revelations that are voiced. Their projection today makes the past felt and available for critical review in the present. The cumulative effect of the film's insistent and formally uncompromising counter-archive (no other information or commentary is admitted into the film's construction) is to stage brutality, endurance and remembrance together, in order to make visible another point of view, the other's point of view.

4.4 Photographic traps 2: photographs and ruins

The sensual properties of archival images, especially those deriving from an obsolete technology, entrap by means of the allure of radical alterity. Our fascination with archive images is fired "not just because we know they are old, but because they *look* old" (Moore, 2004, p1). That is, the desire to know the past is augmented by the appeal of the ephemeral otherness produced by antiquated technologies. The fascination of the archaic and the primitive is one that confirms to us how far we have travelled (forward along the single gauge of technological progress) and how irreversible that trajectory is. In addition, the flame of nostalgic desire and curiosity is fanned by the distance and longing produced by the right amount of patina, wear and downright decay that comes between us and a semi-ruined object, image, or sound recording. As Barthes reminds us, the past-ness of the photograph seems to announce both its tactile closeness and its ungraspable distance, its simultaneous presence and absence, by means of material markers that measure time as a spatial trajectory, relative to the viewer's body and to touch specifically. No matter that the materiality of the surface of the

paper imprint from an analogue technology may be cinematically re-presented by means of digital technology; high-definition inscribes its own special immediacy on the objects placed onto the cold glass of the archive's digital scanner. The more obliterated, ambiguous or unavailable the information in the image (a high-resolution rendering of an analogue presence) the greater the invitation imaginatively to complete the picture of a long-gone, unknowable referent.



Fig. 4.4 A photograph of my parents' photographs

As I work, I reflect on the fact that, as time goes on, the distance between eras will inevitably be a diminishing one. Future audiences will always look nostalgically upon yesteryear's appropriation films, as retrospect will cast new light on previous generations' attempts to critically evaluate the legacies of their past by means of their quaint and antiquated technologies and their primitive poetics. The contemporary references I make now will age and no doubt soon appear indistinguishable from the past that I stand outside of in order to look back upon. Viewers from the future may not recognize the anachronisms I contrive in order to announce the presence of the present.

In her reflection on habits of collective memory, Svetlana Boym (2001) seeks to reclaim nostalgic longing from its almost exclusively negative connotations, in order to qualify the different ways in which anxiety and mourning for a mythic past, brought about by rapid transformation and narratives of progress, can or should be met. Nostalgia – modernity's restless longing for an impossible, temporal homecoming – may be taken care of by a literal return to origins, the reconstruction of an image of the past. Alternatively, Boym argues, it may be met with a more creative, reflective approach to time, one that permanently defers actual homecoming in favour of provisional and mutable remembrance that can accommodate what remains, together with cracks, gaps and contradictions, and that which can never be known, repaired or regained.

Rather than deny or banish it, she argues that the draw of nostalgic desire should be acknowledged in order for it to be harnessed and directed towards productive models of reflective engagement with ever-shifting relationships between past and present that can constructively replace the quest to restore the image of a mythic golden age, the obsession with origins. The predominance of narratives of nostalgia that accompany expedient forms of colonial forgetting, misremembering and blatant denial, conspire to maintain a block against European remembrance, a block that inhibits and distorts contemporary representations of self and other. Of the many varieties of nostalgic representation, there is the nostalgia that lingers on metaphorical and actual sepia tones in order to make an image of the past exotic and to keep it at a safe, narratable distance. This kind of nostalgia signals the decisive separation of the world of the past from the world of the viewer. This nostalgic imaginary dwells on the appeal of an image that aestheticizes the past in order to find the comforts of charm or glory in it, and make palatable inconvenient truths about the past and the present.



Fig. 4.5 From the personal album of an employee (1927-1933) of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, sourced from the BP archive

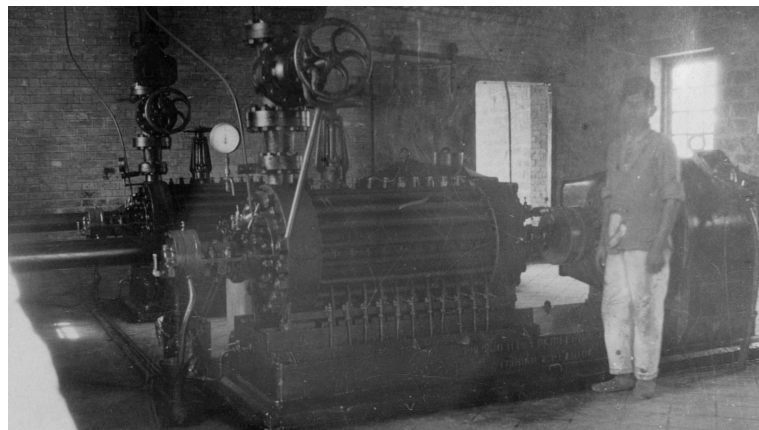


Fig. 4.6 From the personal album of an employee (1927-1933) of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, sourced from the BP archive

BP's narrative of origins is one of lone pioneers and heroic mavericks on desolate and inaccessible plateaus, engaged in an intrepid quest to discover the location of a precious liquid for the benefit of 'Civilization' or 'Mankind'.

In the photographs it seems as though a child's assembly of drinking straws has been scattered on the ground. In 2012 I am in the archive wondering why in the 1930s, at the height of the company's global supremacy, the miles of pipeline that snake unceremoniously up and down mountains, across the deserts, through marshes, look so thin and Heath Robinson in appearance.

Pipelines run from the Zagros Mountains in the north, to the southern refinery at the desert island of Abadan, where the oil is channelled into the company's waiting tankers. Small groups of local men and boys wearing felt slippers and hats lay these pipelines. A pipeline is only a tube. Unlike coal, the material properties of oil mean that it does not require industrialized labour to extract it or transport it across great distances. It flows. Minimized industrialized labour means limiting the power of organized labour to struggle for rights and representation. In 1914, Winston Churchill, determined to undermine the democratic claims made by the organized collective force of British miners, railway workers and dockers, describes the prospect of a new liquid energy resource sourced from Iran as "a prize from Fairyland" (Mitchell, 2011, p60). Churchill unilaterally buys 51 per cent of the shares in the company on behalf of the government, and orders the British navy to switch from coal to oil. (Mitchell, 2011, pp43-65)

Oil is cheap and the earth gives it freely. The trick for the company is to acquire and control as much of the earth's territory as possible. Then to restrict the flow of oil in order to keep it buried in the ground, while simultaneously blocking any other company or nation from laying their own pipeline across any of the territory it controls. The seven rival companies, 'the Seven Sisters', as they are known, compete and coordinate to control the price and suppress the flow of energy across the territories of the globe. Each will crush any challenge to their control of territory and of the global regulatory organizations they depend on, anywhere on the planet, at any cost.



Fig. 4.7 From the personal album of an employee (1938-1943) of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, sourced from the BP archive

As the spectator “plunges eagerly into the traps laid by the photograph”, the nostalgic desire which fires curiosity might simply be the impetus to brush against the grain of history, and the prelude to uncovering complex and potentially unflattering knowledge about the past. Engaging with an image of the past involves plunging into the irresistible and irresolvable enigma of traces of things that are no more and experiences that cannot be retrieved, and being willing, not to find consolation in a glorious lost past, but to be unsettled by unknowable absences as well troubling home truths.

Consider the following scenarios.

Damage and reparation

4.4.1 Case 1

Time marks its index on the photographic surface and reminds the viewer of the relic’s preciousness in the face of potential disintegration and disappearance. The strange fact of the survival of these material remains of the colonial past points to the care and attention they have been accorded, and it conjures up an image of soft white gloves, gentle gestures, acid-free cardboard, tissue paper, darkened and humidity controlled spaces that preserve and mummify – all so we may view the objects now and into posterity. But the duty of care and respect extended to

material objects has been developed and exercised through a colonial system whose treatment of the actual human beings captured at the margins of these images has been characterized by, at best, carelessness and disregard. A gloves-off approach, in fact.



Fig. 4.8 From a series of images (undated, 1950's), sourced from the BP archive, showing the benefits of the British presence in Iran's oil producing areas

Awareness of this level of disparity and paradox may infect the perception of what an image seems to represent, and bring to bear the viewer's responsibility to recognize what an image betrays. These unspoken things may be felt dimly or sharply, despite the given meanings of an image or object (for example in the above figure, British 'generosity'), the information it purports to document (in the above figure, supposedly housing for Iranian employees) or the way it is categorized through its caption or its staging (the photograph is part of a series called *Persia in Perspective*, with captions describing the benefits Britain was bringing to Iran).

4.4.2 Case 2

Argentina's regime of state terror led to tens of thousands of forced disappearances of alleged dissidents between 1976 and 1983. A collective of mothers of the 'disappeared', known as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, started to gather every week in front of government buildings in defiance of the state

authorities. They would appear at first with a photograph of their disappeared child pinned to their chest, or carrying a poster of an enlarged photo; eventually they would hand out photocopies of images of faces, eyes, and mouths as “token[s] of absence” (Sontag 1977, cited in Gordon 2001, p109). They carried on doing this for years. Avery Gordon (1997) considers the role of photographs at the centre of what developed into a political resistance movement, and sees their gestures as the staging of a “public punctum”, in defiance of the photograph’s *studium* as a tool of state control, repression and violence because of its informational and classificatory uses.

For the Mothers, the photographs were a spirit guide to the desaparecidos and to disappearance as an organised system of repression.... A repertoire of counter-images, part of a movement to punctuate the silence, to break the studium-like quality of disappearance, to “lay claim to another reality” (Sontag, 1977, p16). (Gordon, 2001, p109)

And here, citing the one of the Mothers displaying the image of her ‘disappeared’ son:

“This face is mine...and I have a right to find it”. The mothers transformed the docile portrait, or in the case of the photocopies, the disembodied mechanical reproduction of a bodily organ into a public *punctum*. (*ibid.*)

These transactions transform studium to “public punctum”, absence to presence, invisibility to visibility, forgetting to remembrance. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo’s persistent deployment of tokens of absence materializes their demand for the return of loved ones, and challenges the state’s terror through ‘disappearance’.

4.4.3 Case 3

I spent 18 years in prison. They really loved seeing pain on prisoners’ faces. Torture... And I either came up an expression of contempt or I would do it like this. Even when being beaten and barbarously tortured, I always kept my mouth like this.

[Testimony cited from 48 (2009), dir. Susana de Sousa Diaz.]



Fig. 4.9 Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and human rights groups display portraits of people who vanished during Argentina's dictatorship during a rally in Buenos Aires in 2004. Image sourced from The Guardian²⁵.



Fig. 4.10 Screen-grab from the trailer for 48 (2009) dir. Susana de Sousa Diaz, sourced from YouTube²⁶

²⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/13/argentina-military-junta-contemporary-writers-books>, accessed 09.09.2015

²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhxxOkYkphw>, accessed 09.09.2015

In Susana de Sousa Diaz's film *48*, a former detainee recalls his encounter with the off-screen perpetrators, and beyond them, the state apparatus of which the camera was part, all of which is made powerfully present more than thirty years later. The film animates the traumatic photographic encounter by means of a newly returned interiority. Giving voice to the mute testimony contained in the images is revelatory precisely because these photographs had documented the silencing of their subjects, the robbing of subjects of their right to subjecthood. In bringing the long-separated image and voice together, the film stages a symbolic act of restitution and reparation; it returns the images to their subjects. What was once stripped away is belatedly, symbolically, returned. The film projects multiple individual traumas, brought together and returned to the public domain as one, to bear witness to the original crime and in defiance of a continuing collective silence around the unpalatable truths of the past in contemporary Portuguese society.

As spectators, we bear witness both to the crimes of the past, reconstructed in the present tense, and to a contemporary act of public remembrance and restitution. As a result, the discomfort, and the responsibility, of being an onlooker and witness are invoked as part of the affective response to this re-enactment.

4.5 Photographic traps 3: the address of the other

"We didn't trust ourselves at first," he reported, "to look long at the first pictures he developed. We were abashed by the distinctness of these human images, and believed that the little tiny faces in the pictures could see *us*, so powerfully was everyone affected by the unaccustomed clarity and the unaccustomed fidelity to nature of the first daguerreotypes." Dauthendey, the photographer, cited in *Little History of Photography* (Benjamin, 2010, p8)

The photographic case studies I have described contain a perhaps obvious point of entrapment: the affective force of the returned gaze of the photographic

subject. This effect is articulated in Dauthendey's confession of having been spooked by the latent emergence of faces on the surface of images produced in the very first daguerreotypes. Transferred from photographic practice to cinema screen, the soon-to-become commonplace fidelity of the sitter's 'look' to the camera palpably violates the convention of cinema's illusory fourth wall, since it draws attention to the whole camera apparatus on whose invisibility cinematic illusion depends. A look to camera, however fleeting, bypasses the narrative world constructed by the film in order to fix directly on the eyes of the spectator, in the here and now.

This violation of normative engagement with the narrative world of film works to intensify this unsettling aspect of the photograph. It transfers to the screen the more usual intimate, tactile encounter between photographic print and the hand of a single viewer, magnifies it by means of the luminosity and scale of the projection for a collective audience, and holds it there, shining in the dark, for a prescribed time. Bellour writes, figuratively, that the presence of the stillness of the photograph in film allows him to "close my eyes, yet keep them wide open" (2007, p120). In literal terms, Bellour acknowledges the truth of Barthes' comment that in the cinema one may not choose when to look, nor how long to look for. Rather, each of the images looks at *you* for as long as it likes, and one dares not, cannot, look away, nowhere more so than with the fixing gaze of a direct address. The direct address or the returned gaze is a photographic trap which the moving image defamiliarizes and then returns, redoubled, as an invitation the viewer cannot refuse. But what does this amplification of the returned look produce in a context, not of fiction, but of collective catastrophe?



Fig. 4.12 'Wedding in Sultan's village'. One of my father's photographs from Iran, 1962-1966.

In order to consider the affective dynamics of the colonial still image within film from the perspective of the ethical challenge it presents, I turn to Jacques Derrida, who cites Roland Barthes' account of being "pricked" by the photograph's enigmatic detail and reads it differently. Derrida attributes another explanation to the powerful feelings produced in Barthes – the historically situated relationship between Barthes and those who stare back at him from within the image. In a discussion about the way "modern technology, contrary to appearances [...], increases tenfold the power of ghosts" (2013, p38), Derrida sketches the counter-intuitive link between modern, scientific image technologies and the reappearance of historically repressed presences.

He rereads a passage from Barthes' description of the way in which he is haunted by the photograph. Barthes uses sensuous, tactile imagery not only to account for the special power of photographs to wound or to possess, but also to describe a physical intimacy that he says connects him by means of photo-sensitive chemicals to the absent subject of the photograph. Barthes imagines a ray of light that captures him, and that this is the same ray that has directly emanated from the subject of the photograph.

From a real body which was there proceed radiations that come to touch me, I who am here. [...] Light, though impalpable, is really a carnal medium here, a skin that I share with the one who was photographed, (Barthes 1982, cited in Derrida, 2013, p37)

Derrida is interested in the way in which this "tactile sensitivity" is "violently summoned" through its frustration (2013, p42), through the awareness of absence generated by the encounter with the still photograph. But in Derrida's interpretation of Barthes' account of his possession by a photograph, it is not the "ray of light that captures" but something else. He proposes that it is rather the opening of "another possible view", the "point of view of the other" that arrests Barthes and stops him in his tracks. That what occurs in the confrontation with an

image of the face or of the returned gaze, or “whenever there are these specters”, is that “we sense or think we are being watched”, we sense the “appearance of another origin of the world”, and with that, a sudden awareness of another viewpoint, one that looks at and cannot be appropriated by ‘me’, by Barthes. Derrida therefore proposes that it is not simply the undeniable confirmation that a thing was-once-there, but the awareness that “there is something other precedes me, watches over me, concerns me” (p42). Derrida sees this as the opening of a relation with the other, across time, and suggests that the locus of affective power to feel intimately pricked and possessed by a photograph should rather be read as the ethical demand of the relation to the other, an invitation to respond and an invitation to responsibility (Derrida, 2013, p42). In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida (1994) argues that this ethical demand is linked to the need to recognize a historical debt, a debt of justice that forms part of a history that is repressed, forgotten, disavowed, and denied all the more strenuously for being alive, unresolved and potent in the way its after-effects are felt in the present.

The placement of the photograph within the moving image has the capacity to sharpen, dramatize and also narrativize this confrontation between an individual viewer and the ethical demand of the photographic other. Where the photographic subject is also, say, a colonial subject or a political prisoner, awareness of the particularity of this status qualifies the dynamic of the exchange of looks and the perception of contact between a historical subject and the contemporary spectator. The ethical demand of the other reminds the contemporary onlooker, that she too is a historical subject, and part of the very process she is observing.

This exchange is particularly potent when the photograph is embedded within the temporality of the moving image sequence, because it implies a mode of looking that brings the perception of the past into the present, and in so doing breaks

with some unhelpful habits and conceits of looking at the past, as I argue below.

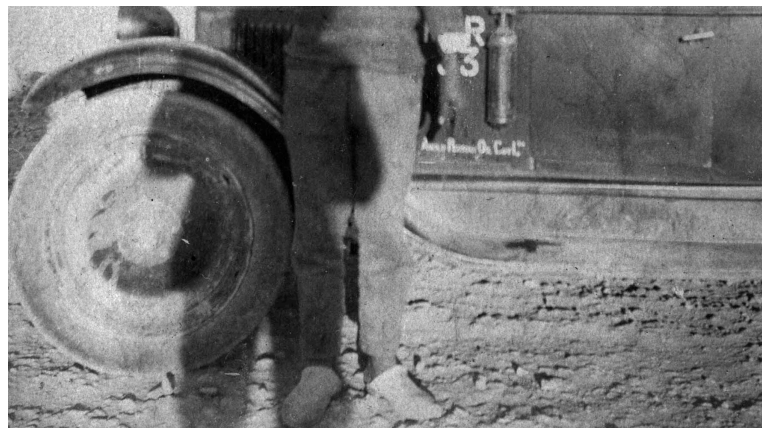
4.6 Photographic traps 4: a past in the present tense

Re-staging

Once I am sensing and thinking still images through film time, the sequence compels me to look at a photograph, or at part of a photograph, for a prescribed duration. The repeated invitation to scan and to interrogate the image surface foregrounds the imaginative labour of looking. Cumulatively, the process of looking itself becomes the subject of my historical inquiry.

Re-viewing the audio-visual sequence, an awareness of the patina and grain of particular images and sounds brings me into intimate, sensuous contact with them. Sound recordings, in particular, extend the photographic space in all directions beyond the borders of the photographic frame, enfolding the body of the viewer, my body, within them. The magnified experience of presence produced, the lively perception of duration within a single image, and the sense of place and time that is forged, seem to activate (in this viewer at least) the possibility of an imaginative re-enactment of the original photographic encounter. Replaying the moving image sequence I re-enact the process of viewing others, as I am forced to share the colonial photographer's position, and then the archivist's viewing position, in the present tense. I re-experience a process of looking, naming, and filing – and am implicated in it. Our shared eye-line, our acts of looking, cumulatively produce a discomfiting confrontation with something of what looking at, and classifying, others involves. A sense of re-enactment through an image of the past, seems to open onto many possible futures,

momentarily undoing received separations – between onlooker and participant, between the outside and the inside of the space and time of the photograph.



Figs. 4.13 & 4.14 Stills from *The Host* (2015) dir. Miranda Pennell.
Frames from a single image from a personal album of an employee
of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, sourced from the BP archive.

The historically situated dynamic that inflects the exchange between, say, the photographic subject who is also a colonized subject, the colonial photographer, the European filmmaker and a particular film viewer, can be brought into focus through its cinematic re-staging. The lively aspect of the alignment of the various protagonists in this exchange rests in the temporality of the most recent viewer's participation. This viewer completes the re-enactment, forging a transhistorical encounter in the present tense.

In addition to its practical effects, from a theoretical perspective this engagement with the photograph's present is significant because it offers resistance to deterministic tendencies regarding how photographs and histories²⁷ are read. Overly melancholic, thanatographic²⁸ understandings of photographs and of photographic theory²⁹ produce forms of historical determinism that fail to open responsible engagements with history's subjugated others. For example, in his consideration of photographs of traumatized peoples, and in particular his examination of photographs from inside the Lodz Nazi concentration camp, Ulrich Baer (2005) argues that over-reliance on contextual knowledge makes for an elevated viewing position and a reductive way of seeing that tends to produce a melancholic and ultimately condescending relationship to photographic subjects. This reductive way of seeing, he argues, leads to helplessness, which in turn "slips into indifference". This is why he calls for more attentive ways of looking at photographs: "In order to see the Jews as something other than ciphers for death and thus avoid assuming the superior stance of a viewer who knows everything about the fate of the depicted individuals, we must explore the terrible confluence of several forms of blindness" (2005, p147).

Baer is critical of the over-use of retrospective knowledge that effectively robs photographic subjects of their interiority. The privileged perspective of hindsight works to confirm preconceived knowledge about the past and certainty about its outcomes, he argues, rather than engaging with the myriad possible experiences captured in an image of the past on their own terms.

Because every photograph is radically exposed to a future unknown to its subjects, I make use of a perspective that avoids the arrogance of hindsight

²⁷ My focus is on photography, but see for example Bernstein (1994) on historiography and problems he associates with the narrative device of "foreshadowing" in his book *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History*.

²⁸ Seen in relation to "death".

²⁹ A history of theoretical thinking that analyses the photograph in its relationship to death that comes by way of Bazin, Barthes and Sontag for example. Baer targets his critique on the ways in which subsequent commentators have interpreted such writings.

and the certitude of predetermined outcomes. (2005, p7)

He calls for

a way of looking at photographs that eschews the consolations of pre-emptive melancholia. (*ibid.*, p181)

Therefore Baer invites us to think about photographs from *within* the time of each image, rather than seeing photographs as interruptions to a flow of time or a historical narrative. He insists on the need to embrace the open-ended nature of the photograph, recognizing that “each photograph opens onto a future that, from *within* the image, is still radically undecided” (*ibid.*, p6).

From this perspective – from within the time-world of the photograph – he argues that a viewer can engage a different sense of historical time, thus shedding the protection of narrative distance and “becom[ing] responsible for the first time for a past moment that has been blasted out of time.” (*ibid.*, p14)

In order to answer an ethical imperative that demands that each of us look responsibly, with responsibility, at those who are dominated and oppressed, such a re-education of the senses requires a radical shift in the perspective with which an archive photograph is viewed. This shift, I argue, can be apprehended in the reception of the photograph projected through the temporality of the moving image.

The notion of the archive photograph whose public projection re-stages a past encounter in the present tense and thereby is performed anew with each projection, is taken up by Francis Guerin (2010). She argues that the memorialization that is produced by the new archive-in-motion is open and “endlessly mutating”, and alive with each re-viewing. Guerin explains this in terms of the fragmentary nature, the “inherent incompleteness”, of the photograph, which, when sequenced within the virtual filmstrip, offers an opportunity to grasp

the nature of history itself as an incomplete process. The argument that Guerin makes is that by emphasizing the incompleteness and heterogeneity of the historical process, a filmic “revivification” of still photographs foregrounds the role and responsibility of the viewer within an on-going process. The viewer is placed at the centre of a reflection on the role of witnessing, and through this,

a dialogue between past and present becomes the actual subject of representation and as a consequence uncovers the complexities of the historical moment of production. (Guerin, 2010, p2)

Projecting and experiencing an image of the past through a cinematic present transforms how we engage with the image of the past, and how we encounter an image of the colonized other. This new time-frame brings all of the protagonists in the photographic encounter together within a single present. As Baer and Guerin argue, this allows the viewer to enter into the space and time of the encounter and become responsible as an onlooker, as witness and as participant in one ongoing historical process. Thus the moving image re-presentation of archive photographs can help us learn to look not only more attentively, but also more justly, into an image of the past.

4.7 Positioning

I start the video edit with a decision to build my sequence by democratically attributing a random nine-second life span to each photograph that I select, regardless of its content. Every half hour or so I stop to review the accumulating sequence – but each time I do this, I immediately feel unsure of whether I have hit the play/pause key once, twice, or not at all. My viewing experience is plagued by feelings of uncertainty about whether I am looking at a still image that is about to transform at any moment, or whether I am looking into a still image that is

in fact lifeless and eternally destined to sameness. Each time this happens, my mind is divided, with part of me unsure of how many or how few seconds have passed, or whether a minute has passed. The fact of this doubt makes engaging with my film as a film, that is, engaging through suspense and anticipation of the forward flow of static images, impossible.

The practical solution lies with the (at least provisional) addition of long measures of low-level, atmospheric sound. The still images immediately gain Time. A relative measure of duration that suggests the possibility of rhythm, and thereby possibility of making editing decisions.

I am now certain I am watching a film. I proceed with the edit.

In its cinematic afterlife, the once-forgotten photograph, excavated from its entombment within the archive, is magnified and illuminated by its projection onto a screen. The tiny grey rectangle of fading silvered-paper is resurrected at (potentially) monumental scale. It is framed so as to expose this or that detail, presence or sign. It is invested with voices or sounds that seem to emanate from the space within it, but which extend outwards, far beyond its boundaries. It produces duration, even if momentarily, and a new set of relationships that cause it to stare back, sometimes seeming to issue a question, an invitation or a demand to you or me, the viewer. The archive photograph is gaining a new life.

But there is more to this memorializing device than the scale and brightness of a monument or relic. The mode of remembrance modelled by a film constructed from archive photographs is made lively through the temporal experiences it produces and by the ethical questions it poses. Testing Raymond Bellour's account of the effect of photographs within cinema against the ethical demand of archival images produced by, say, an imperial regime or a dictatorship, produces

some perhaps surprisingly apposite methodological tools and models for historical thinking. The implication of Bellour's thesis is that the filmic construction of a historical narrative can be reflected on, while the presence of the individual photograph within it can bring the viewer into a more personal, imaginative contact with the past from which it emerges. That regardless of the 'effect of the real' that a narrative constructs, the perception of direct contact produced by the photograph within film "holds its own" and "subtracts me from the fiction of the cinema" (Bellour, 2007, p120). Thus, in addition to the temporality of the narrative flow of cinema or of historical representation, the photograph bursts through to open its own time zone and its own historical enigma to the viewer. The viewer is invited to hold and to reflect on more than one time-frame at a time, and to bring the past into relationship with the viewer's present.

Someone is trudging through long grass towards the frame. The soundtrack moves me through space with them. The sound folds me into the place it describes, right into the space of the photograph. The trudging footsteps will end abruptly as the walker stops dead in his tracks and the film cuts as he takes a snapshot of a group of indigenous women sitting outside a tent. All of a sudden I am standing in his boots. The women stare back at us both from inside a picture, and I feel embarrassed at his lack of embarrassment.

Now these women and girls are looking straight at me. I experience time in spatial terms. I am aware of myself moving towards the interior space of the image, and feel I can reach out and touch the stoniness of a path as it extends past the off-frame and sense the glare of the sun, as I am fixed by six pairs of eyes. With this tactile, spatial feeling I lose myself in the timefullness of that image world. In the extended stillness of this image, I become aware of these sensations as inner movements.



Fig.4.15 From a personal album (1927-1933) sourced from the BP archive.
I feel embarrassed at his lack of embarrassment.

But the caption reads, "Aren't they lovely?" I wonder if the sarcasm of the labelling of this image emanates from simple, racist disgust. If he is so repulsed by the appearance of the women, then why does he stop to take their photograph? And why preserve this image and paste it into his photo-album, if they are so un-lovely?

I imagine his inky hand writing the caption, which addresses an imagined audience, back home in England. Maybe he is already back in England. He half-recognizes the encounter with the group of women as one of utter strangeness and otherness. He is documenting an alien encounter. Retrospectively, this strangeness which is beyond words is uncomfortable, something he feels might require explanation, and require him to distance himself from the humanity of the women who stare back in order to protect viewers, himself, his friends or family, from the unexplainable strangeness that he has captured with his camera.

But now I feel shocked by a counter-movement. As the atmospheric sound cuts out, a disorienting experience of sudden distance. I discover I am an outsider looking in on a far away world from which I am abruptly excluded. I am a person sat looking into a flat screen showing a mere representation of the world, blocked from the there and then of the time-rich and tactile presence of the world inside the image. The agent that reminds me that the image that so absorbed me a minute ago is nothing but a small bit of greyish paper glued onto cardboard, lost to time, is sound. Changes in the sound-track remind me that while I may be invited into the world of the image, I also risk being locked out from that space at any time, shown to be as I actually am, sitting at my desk, staring at a flat screen, with the faint murmur of a radio playing next door.

What seems significant in this experience of the editing/reviewing process is not simply the moving of the viewer in relation to this or that descriptive space or time, nor the possibility of extending the viewer's sense of self to the beyond of an image, but the ability of film to operate within this beyond, through time. A viewer invested in the time and space of the still image within film may continuously be moved between poles of proximity and distance, immersion and self-conscious reflection on the viewing experience. These counter-movements account for the sense of embodied emplacement that shape Bellour's descriptions of being variously "uprooted from", "situated before", "swept away by", "plunging into" or "entering into" the world of the image.

The perception of shifts and oscillations within the image or between the images creates a disorienting snare and provides a tool that is both inviting and unsettling. The experience of untimeliness opens up an opportunity to confront the past in unexpected and unfamiliar ways. In so doing it tests us, provoking

questions about our relationship to the image and the histories from which the photograph springs.

This research argues that in adding to the fascination of photographs, the moving image continually repositions the viewer in relation to the photograph, to its subject, and to the past it embodies. This positioning of the viewer in relation to the image, and to the colonial presence behind the camera, demands a response from us, the onlookers. It is this awareness of situated-ness, of our position in relation to others, that inscribes the ethical challenge of the image and the question of responsibility, into the film and the viewing experience it produces.

In this chapter I have described how the haptic and temporal properties of a photograph, amplified through film, endow it with the power to revivify and charge an image in the imagination of the viewer, providing the ground on which the other's address to the viewer might, belatedly, be recognized. Each new projection holds the potential to provoke a re-enactment of a photographic encounter, or of an archiving transaction. In this filmic processing of still images, the moving image complicates their temporality, opens a challenge to habitual ways of seeing, and promotes a lively and reflexive confrontation both with the colonial image and with the responsibility that being an onlooker in a situation of radical inequality entails. By understanding this encounter as something that is inseparable from a future that is still open and available to us, the role of witnessing, of memory and the question of shared responsibility become pressing. The moving image is both a stage on which archive photographs can be invited to perform, and a space for reflecting on the experience of looking by means of an open and mutable temporality. This offers a model of remembrance in an active mode, through the viewer's experience of the cinematic present. The approach is one we can learn from because it foregrounds an ethics of responsibility, and resists perpetuating ways of seeing that separate the past from the rest of our

experience, as something exotic and abstract, or that succumb to disabling narratives of nostalgia or on the one hand, and of easy moral outrage on the other.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

5.1 Ways of knowing

Until I entered the BP archive, I had not predicted that photographs showing physical labour in Iran's oil region would be so scarce and hard to locate.

Nonetheless, I hoped to use film to decolonize a space in which I could trace and give presence to the shape left by the un-photographed, un-archived, indigenous and migrant lives in the oil regions. Yet what emerges most vividly through reworking the archival testimony are the contours of the colonial unconscious, and the opportunities this allows to examine the British construction of 'Iran' and the conceptual separations, inversions and projection that this has required.

The methods I've explored are ones that allow history to be communicated not as cold information, as facts or proofs, but as something perceived affectively. The process of rearranging the archive implicitly and explicitly raises questions about the assumptions and the claims of official knowledge production. It draws attention to all that the official archive denies, represses and expels. For example, in the process of reconstructing the archive, I have uncovered the operations of chance, coincidence and the unconscious workings of subjectivity, fantasy and desire. I have explicitly embraced these forces as part of my own method of analysis and my approach to looking and knowing. In turn, applying this analysis to the construction of an archive in motion, has shown how the rationalist discourse of the British in Iran projects everything that it expels and represses onto the Iranian other.

The following is an excerpt from a Foreign Office memorandum prior to the Anglo-CIA coup against the Iranian prime minister:

They [Iranians] are intensely individualistic [...] Nearly all classes have a passion for personal gain and are ready to do most things for money. They lack social conscience and are unready to subordinate personal interests to communal ones. They are vain and conceited, and unwilling to admit to themselves that they can be in the wrong. They are always ready to blame other people. (Foreign Office document FO 371/ Persia 1951/91460, cited in Abrahamian, 2001)

Ervand Abrahamian (2001), pre-eminent scholar of modern Iranian history, issues a caution with regard to the significance of some of the poisonous language³⁰ and underhand behaviour of British officials prior to the coup against Iranian Prime Minister Mossadeq:

These racial diatribes should not be mistaken as the real reason for the breakdown in negotiations, as some in cultural studies would have it. They were merely the reflection – or the side product – of that breakdown. (Abrahamian, 2001, unnumbered)

Abrahamian is of course right to suggest that the British were motivated by imperial self-interest that could not countenance British loss of control and therefore would never negotiate with any Iranian on an equal or transparent basis. However, in order to justify its project, imperialism necessitates the denigration of others. The regime of justification which the British government deployed, which painted political opponents as “fanatical”, “feminine”, “hysterical”, “dangerous” or worse (with Mossadeq as the prime example), was at one level a deliberate political weapon, a smear tactic.³¹ But it propagated varieties of racial (as well as national and religious) stereotype– images that live on in the unconscious and will persist through time because it projected them into the public space with the power and authority of official sanction.

³⁰ For accounts of the propaganda against Mossadeq, see Abrahamian (2001) and Heiss (2001) for example.

³¹ Foreign office documents reveal a deliberate media disinformation campaign. See Abrahamian (2001) and Heiss (2001).

Because those stereotypes are so potent and their deployment so effective, so long lasting, and so pernicious, I see them not as side-products but as the very conditions that make violence possible. Because the deployment of stereotypes hovers in a liminal space between the visible and the invisible, the conscious and the unconscious, the official, the public and the private and personal realms, finding ways of making these mechanisms visible and available for analysis is, in my view, a crucial task. This is a labour that must always and continually be renewed, in order to redeem a shared past in order to imagine a better, shared present and future.

5.2 Film as an archive

I have described some of the ways in which the moving image can be used as a laboratory for staging, provoking, positioning and testing arrangements of archival materials within a digital time-line. I have thought about film as a kind of archive for colonial photographs, in which a composite, mixed-up association of heterogeneous sources and materials finds new interconnections. I have argued that this reworking of the photographic archive can generate productive, responsible ways of engaging with the colonial past. I have considered the notion of 'film as an archive', not only as a repository or storage system, but also as a processor of images of the past, through which we can experience new ways of relating to our collective pasts.

This new filmic archive emphasizes the fluid, transhistorical reach of the documents it animates, their impure, mixed-up, mongrel status, while playing on the tension between documentary facticity and the life of the imagination, both in the archiving process and in the viewer's encounter with the archive. In reframing and combining photographic documents from an official, corporate archive with those from a family album, imperial history intersects with one that is personal to

me. My decision to position myself within the work at first appeared to me to be a minor shift in emphasis, but it has in fact significantly altered the perspective of my research journey and its outcome.

The intersection of personal memory with the generalized abstractions of history opens a potent space for an ethnology of a colonial encounter, through the singular details, the "thick description"³², the "touch of the real"³³ which personal photographs and individual memory provide. In this context, mixing a personal with an official archive does not produce the kind of individualized narratives that are played out through psychological realism or other conventions associated with biographical or autobiographical modes of story telling. Rather, because of the filmmaker's simultaneous identification with, and critique of, the position of the colonizer, the personal and the familial offer a means of animating broader questions about *shared* histories and *collective* responsibility.

In addition to this, the production and incorporation of evidence of the filmmaker's interventions into the film text both grounds and propels the interaction of multiple time zones in important ways. Divergent trajectories across time and across geographical territories effect a continuous return to the present tense both of the archive and of the film's making. This grounding of the past in the present is important because it insists on keeping the politics of the present in view. In this film work therefore, the self is constructed above all as a vehicle for an effective form of collective *time travel*.

³² Clifford Geertz "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture". In *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973. 3-30

³³ Hayden White, historian, cited in Baron (2007, p17)

5.2 Ways of looking

The disparity between the 'real' of the past – a sense of which can sometimes be experienced as a stepping into the world of a photograph – and the narrative we tell about it, is a tension that can be productively articulated through the archive in motion. De Certeau's analogy of the museum guide has provided a useful way of picturing the role of the historian/filmmaker in mediating the silent testimony of the photograph and confronting the point at which 'saying' or narrating compromises the kind of attention that the photograph demands of us. On such occasions, silence, wordless-ness, opens the space necessary to allow for affective immediacy and a sense of contact with the past. The photograph's address to the viewer, to me and to you, can allow us to recognize our own position, both as witness to and participant in history.

Speiker describes Kracauer's distanced, alienated view of photographs, as a kind of punctum, though at the opposite pole to Barthes' intimate, "homey" punctum.

"Where as the Barthian punctum—close as it is to Kracauer's in every other respect—requires or invites proximity..., Kracauer's distances us and in this way alerts us to the nature of the social and economic conditions under which we see" (Speiker, 2008, p144).

I have proposed that where the photograph's alienated punctum can be activated, this disenchanted view of the photograph allows it to be dismantled into its component details and repurposed to produce new meaning through metaphor, analogy, the visual pun, and other forms of productive misuse of archival evidence. The contrasting strategies outlined in Chapter 2 and 4 respectively, mean that on the one hand, representational strategies that emphasize the life of the signifier over that of the signified can produce a critical, reflexive relationship to archive, to the construction of the image, and therefore to the past. At the other end of the perceptual pole, attending to the strange immediacy of another kind of

photograph, the haunting presence of an absent, unknowable, irreducible historical other, makes another kind of knowledge felt.

The archive in motion allows for both a sense of contact with the 'real' of the past; and also for a sense of distance that allows for a creative, playful freedom to imaginatively rework and repurpose gestures and details in order to rethink how they came into being, and how they were made to operate in, and on, the world. These distinct ways of looking at photographs and of engaging with the past, produce different forms of meaning and of knowing. Together they form part of an approach to historical knowledge that does not try to represent the past, nor to explain it. It attends to what archival evidence *does* rather than what it *says* (Cho, 2008, pp48-49). Film as an archive in motion, not only enables us to engage with the colonial archive without "becoming complicit with its constituent violence" (Azoulay, 2012, unnumbered), but it allows those human forces that the archive denies – subjectivity, the unconscious and the imaginary – to inform our reading of it, while acknowledging the limits of what is knowable.



5.1 Photograph, verso

Appendix

Voice-over script to the film *The Host*

Text within on-screen images are indicated by capital letters.

Square brackets indicate whether audio, picture or other.

[LOUD SINGING, IRANIAN WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES]

...O Nation
we will unite
to uproot colonialism
Greetings
to Khomeini...

[VOICE-OVER BEGINS]

Back in 2006, my mother had been diagnosed with the same, rare leukaemia that my father had contracted 30 years previously. When my sister had mentioned this coincidence to the doctor, he had expressed surprise. Later, we spoke on the phone about this uncanny repetition. But since the pressing concern was with the declining health of our mother, I put the question out of my mind.

Two years later, while sorting through my mother's possessions, I pick up an unusual looking book with the title 'Eastern Odyssey'. The volume contains reproductions of the hand-written letters of a young geologist in Iran in the 1930s. His name is Christian O'Brien, and the book is inscribed with a personal dedication to my mother from his wife.

I find Joy O'Brien's phone number in my mother's address book, and two days later I'm on the train to Saffron Walden. I'm wondering what I'm going to say to the person I'm about to meet.

Joy turns out to be a lively woman of 90 who greets me by saying, 'I feel as though I know you.' She tells me that after my parents left the house in Tehran, she and her husband had taken it on. When they moved in, Mohommad, the head servant, called my former bedroom 'Miranda's room'. So from then onwards, they'd referred to it as 'Miranda's room' as well.

We sip tea together, and talk about my father and Joy's late husband, and their work in oil exploration in south-west Iran. I want to ask more about life in Iran, but find I'm distracted by the photo on the cover of the book – a black and white image of a monumental structure rising out of a plateau. It appears to be formed by terraces of successively receding levels, that gradually converge into an apex. The photograph is credited to the BP archive.

I take the train home, and the next day I telephone the archive to arrange a visit. It turns out to be housed on a University campus, a few miles north-west of Coventry.

The company would use aerial photography in order to pinpoint the location of the oil. Geologists would decipher these pictures, using the principles of geo-physics to interpret signs and identify hidden patterns.

I, by contrast, have no method that will rationalise my search. Out of curiosity, I enter my father's name into the database, but nothing comes up.

I enter random date and place names into the 'required fields'. My search now produces many hundreds of results. I feel inexplicably drawn towards the reference number 37984.

On my next visit to Joy's house near Saffron Walden, she tells me about a survey conducted in 1935 by her husband and the chief geologist, Victor Boileau. On the second day of their expedition Boileau picks up an unusual decorated stone. On close inspection, the pair realise that the stone is in fact a clay tablet covered – not with decoration – but cuneiform script. Looking around, they realise that the sandy hill before them conceals an ancient Elemite complex: a ziggurat.

As the sun rises the following morning, the two men climb up the mound to look out from the top of the ziggurat. It occurs to O'Brien that the arid desert they are surveying would long ago have been a fertile agricultural plain, covering hundreds of square miles.

Its lunchtime. I keep thinking about the ancient Ziggurat and wondering how many men it took to build it. I've been making endless copies of images in the archive. I'm not yet sure what evidence I'm looking for, and I'm finding it difficult to know when to stop - when everything seems as though it might be important. At three o'clock next morning, I'll be lying awake, thinking 'What if I don't recognize the end when I've reached it?'

There are thousands of workers here. Where is everybody?

They don't show the insides of the buildings. And the workers outside only appear by accident: you have to search for them.

This is a painting... This is real... This is real... So is this... This is a photograph of a painting, of a model ... of Abadan in 1938. It's the biggest oil refinery in the world.

PANORAMIC VIEW OF ABADAN (FROM A MODEL)

O'Brien will eventually rise up the managerial ranks of the oil company. But he's been marked by his early experience of colonial exploration, and in particular his encounter with the ghosts of the past. Later, he'll teach himself to read cuneiform script. Inspired by this work of translation and interpretation, he'll undertake a deeper historical research. He'll draw on his experience of fieldwork and of spatial and temporal mapping, in order to read signs from the distant past.

Convinced he has deciphered the origins of human culture, the scientist will publish several volumes of research in collaboration with his wife, including The Genius of the Few: The Story of Those who Founded the Garden in Eden. This will later be expanded into The Shining Ones: An Account of the Development of Early Civilizations Through the Direct Assistance of Powers Incarnated on Earth.

But of course, that will be far into the future. This is what is happening now.

*GAS-FLARE. DERRICK. CENTRAL CLUB HALL. NATIVE VILLAGES.
GEOLOGICAL OFFICE. OUR HOME.*

*FLOWER BED. DRIVE. DINING ROOM. DRAWING ROOM/PASSAGE.
HARRIS' ROOM. JOWETT'S ROOM (NOT REALLY AS BIG AS THIS).*

MY ROOM.

PICTURE OF CENTIPEDE I KILLED IN THE BATHROOM. LIFE SIZE!

Modern Records Office, Coventry, 2012.

'M-I-S' stands for Masjied i-Suleiman, also known to the British as 'Fields' - the oil-fields. I know this because my parents will come here, fourteen years after this photograph is taken. I remember being here, thirty-one years into the future. I'll be peering over the edge of a white cot, at the borders of a lawn bathed in golden sunlight. I think I remember this. But in 20 minutes time, it will dawn on me that it must just be a colour photograph I've seen.

Saffron Waldon, March 2012.

I'm sitting on her sofa holding a homemade biscuit. Joy says that she doesn't really believe that time is chronological. She thinks that time moves in more than one direction, that the past coexists with the present and the future. I tell her I think that's interesting, because sometimes I find that looking at all these pictures feels like that.

SOME NATIVE STUDIES AROUND FIELDS.

AREN'T THEY LOVELY?

WOOLWORTHS. MARKS & SPENCERS.

I've found a review of O'Brien's research on the internet. It describes his realisation that a group of enlightened beings had established the origins of human civilisation 8,000 years BC. The inscriptions on the cuneiform tablets name these people as 'Shining Ones', apparently in reference to the luminosity of their faces. O'Brien deduces that these advanced beings must have mapped the stars and the earth, and travelled across the planet as benevolent colonisers. They had brought with them sophisticated

technologies, a brilliant system of laws and social organisation, and they taught culture and agriculture to their hosts.

Locally, people say that the company is an untouchable foreign enclave. That it operates under the skin of the nation; and that it is a state within a state.

O'Brien's second book attempts to answer the question of where the Shining Ones came from. He writes that the Shining Ones may have been of extra-terrestrial origin. These otherworldly visitors may have been responsible for the development of Homo Sapiens, through a controlled breeding program. This early form of genetic manipulation involved fusing Cro-Magnon DNA from local tribes women, with their own.

Abadan Refinery. The complex is surrounded by a vast shantytown, known as 'Paper City'. It's inhabited by tens of thousands of workers and their families. In winter, rivers of stagnant water and sewage flow between shacks made from oil-drums beaten flat – and in summer they breed thick, black clouds of flies.

Its 1946. The photographer is painting highlights onto the feet of the table.

I've found it necessary to devise a system of colour coding. The photographs will be categorised as follows. Yellow indicates private albums. Pink: official photographs - members of the board, oil tankers, etcetera. Green: landscapes, surveys, pipelines, and so on.

I'm finding it hard to concentrate this afternoon. My attention is divided. All of a sudden these tiny men re-group – and look straight through the lens at me. I want to get them back into their box, but they're holding-me against my will.

When I eventually get out of the building, I feel completely drained. I've been staring out of the train window for 20 minutes, before the ticket-inspector informs me that I am headed in the wrong direction.

I spend the next morning in bed, reading about 1951. In the evening I dig-out a box of my father's slides. It has my name written on it. I inspect the slides for clues, but decide to discount them because they don't show anything significant.

[ON-SCREEN CAPTIONS]

What I read:

- *The company imposes wage cuts, igniting riots.*
- *Mossadeq passes the nationalisation bill.*
- *Britain coordinates a global boycott of Iranian oil.*
- *It places advertisements in the newspapers of 22 countries, warning that Iranian oil is 'stolen property'.*
- *It blocks technicians, accountants and lawyers from travelling to Iran from other countries.*
- *Not one drop of oil leaves Iran in two years.*
- *The Company makes up its losses by doubling the flow of oil in Kuwait.*
- *The British will ask the Americans to get rid of Mossadeq*

[VOICE-OVER CONTINUES]

"In the Beginning, the Shining Ones looked down with pleasure upon the Highland pastures and the Lowlands.

But the Lowlands were an empty area. And the aerial craft of the Shining Ones hovered over its waters.

The Shining Ones said, 'Let us enlighten ourselves' concerning this land and they explored it.

And then the Shining Ones said 'We must produce men in our image'."

"The British Ambassador reports that Prime Minister Mossadeq is 'cunning', 'slippery', and 'completely unscrupulous'. He is 'short with bandy legs', 'looks like a cab horse', 'diffuses a slight reek of opium', and negotiates using 'negative and feminine tactics'. He is 'clearly unbalanced' since he shuns the title 'Excellency' and refuses to use the ministerial motorcar. He has 'a daughter in a mental home in Switzerland'."

Document reference FO371/Persia1951/91460.

"Most Iranians are introverts. Their imagination is strong and they naturally turn to the agreeable side of things - they love poetry and discussion, particularly of abstract ideas. Their emotions are strong and easily aroused. But they continually fail to test their imaginations against reality and to subordinate their emotions to reason. They lack common sense and the ability to differentiate emotion from facts. This excess of imagination and distaste for facts leads to an inability to go conscientiously into detail. Often, not finding the world to their dreams, they relapse into indolence and do not persevere. This tendency is exaggerated by the fatalism of their religion.

They are intensely individualistic ... Nearly all classes have a passion for personal gain and are ready to do most things for money. They lack social conscience and are unready to subordinate personal interests to communal ones. They are vain and conceited, and unwilling to admit to themselves that they can be in the wrong.

They are always ready to blame other people."

ANGLO-IRANIAN OIL COMPANY. BRITISH PETROLEUM.

HAPPY PERSIAN CHILDREN PLAY IN A BRITISH BUILT HOUSING ESTATE.
PERSIANS IN THEIR TRADITIONAL SETTING DO THEIR BEST TO KEEP
EACH OTHER CLEAN.

The table is set for tea. A family group sit at the table facing each other, each focussing their gaze on a fixed point, as they have been instructed. The photographic lighting is casting shadows against the back wall. The man on the right extends his arm as though about to raise an empty teacup to his lips. They are holding still. In another room, two small men made from metal tubes stand on a bookshelf. Each is holding a gigantic ashtray. They wear oriental fezes and large, hoop earrings on their spherical heads. Their white circular eyes are staring straight ahead.

It's late September. I receive an email from Joy in Saffron Walden.

Dear Miranda,

There's been some excitement over one of our stones on the ancient survey. I met a woman of 92 at the care-home who was born in Great Chesterford and says the stone there was in the High Street – not where the

top is now – and she knows the story of its removal. So over we went to pinpoint the position, using her as the stone!

I haven't heard the result yet.

I would love to hear how your research went and where you are now in the scheme of things. So let me know when you can come to tea! My best days are Tuesdays and Fridays.

Yours, Joy

I feel pleased to hear from Joy, but confused about the reference to the stone because I can't remember ever having had that conversation.

It's June 1963 in Fields. I have now been born.

Today is 'Black Friday' and afternoon-light is pouring into the generous, open-plan living space, which we will soon be moving into in Northern Tehran. The mountains rise majestically behind the modernist architecture as the army opens fire on demonstrators across several cities. In three years time, I'll be outside, floating in a pool of blue water, squinting into the sunlight.

My father takes the photographs. He has no special aptitude for pictorial composition. He first came to Masjed i-Soleyman as an engineer in 1946. After the coup d'état, he is assigned a role in the International Oil Consortium. Now he has returned to Iran as Deputy Field Manager, and later we will all leave Fields for Tehran.

Mountains.

Frogs.

Locusts.

Vietnam War.

The camera is at some distance from two groups of figures each clustered around a large puddle of spring water. Rivulets of water run here and there, and there are patches of green on the stony ground. I can make out a woman ladling water into big, black receptacle. There's a wide copper bowl with smaller cooking items in it. And an old woman in a red skirt walks up the slope on the right, carrying a heavy container at her hip. My father takes the photograph, while my mother, sister and her friend from boarding school, are getting out of the car.

Now they're in the muddy clearing. They can hear the sides of a copper pot being rubbed by a sandy palm. The owner of the sandy palm turns her head to look at the English woman, who wears a pale pink cotton shirt, sunglasses and a grey-blue scarf over her hair. She is flanked by two younger women, positioned like backing-singers who also wear pale cotton shirts, sunglasses, and scarves folded and worn as headbands. Both stand staring at this picture as though they're not meant to be part of it.

My mother will purchase one of these from a shop in London in the mid-1970s. She'll also buy herself a small loom.

Two events are taking place in this village: a wedding and the visit of a stranger. My father will record both events - first from his elevated position, and later from ground level.

My father will photograph the scarves. The villagers hold them like flags between forefinger and middle finger, creating a variety of patterns. My

father won't see the meaning behind this semaphore. He'll not decode the message the village has for him. But he'll photograph it because of its striking, colourful character.

The writing at the bottom of the slide reads 'Wedding in Sultan's village'. I email my sister who informs me that Sultan is the driver of our two-tone Chevrolet. She writes that he has striking blue-green eyes. It's hard to tell from here.

Everyone loves a ruin. And everyone prefers the ancient past to the recent past.

My mother is looking at a picture from a much earlier time. My father can't be seen because he's on the outside, looking at the figures on the inside. I'm invisible too, looking over my father's shoulder, at my mother, who is looking at some other characters. She's wondering who these people were, and who it was that put them there.

My mother is imagining another time. And I'm trying to imagine the time she was in.

When we leave the house for the last time to return to England, Mohammad the head servant will cry openly. My mother will put this down to his Iranian disposition. Another British couple will soon take the place of my parents. The man is a geologist, who once drew a picture of a centipede in the early hours of a Saturday in 1936.

He's married now, and his wife, Barbara Joy, will host many corporate parties in this garden. Each will be carefully planned, and she will record the details in a special book.

'Black-tie dinner-party number 2' on Thursday the 9th of February 1967, has a Canadian theme. The guest of honour is the Canadian Ambassador and the table is decorated with red and white candles. The centrepiece consists of two large glass dishes, one blue and one green, representing mountain lakes. There are fish swimming about in the dishes. The fish came from Taj Rish. Ali Akbar, the houseboy, has been to the bazaar by bus to collect them. Roast beef will be served with roast potatoes and Yorkshire pudding, with gravy and horseradish sauce, and the desert will be 'cherries jubilee'. Mohammad will be slow on pouring the wine. And Hussein will forget to put the brandy in the cherries.

But that was in the future. This is now.

MADE IN ENGLAND. VIEW FROM THIS SIDE.

We're at the edge of a forest. The trees are misshapen, blackened and burnt, and the earth is scorched. In the foreground, three young men are digging it over.

My father has taken this picture in some other place.

[END.]

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Film and video

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In the Year of the Pig. Emile de Antonio, (1968), USA. 103 minutes.

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La France est notre patrie. Rithy Panh, (2014), France/Cambodia. 75 minutes.

Mother Dao, The Turtlelike. Vincent Monnikendam, (1995), Netherlands. 90 minutes.

okay, bye-bye. Rebecca Baron, (1999), USA. 39 minutes.

Recollection. Kamal Aljafari (2015) Germany/Palestine. 70 minutes

Sans Soleil. Chris Marker (1982) France. 103 minutes

The Specialist. Eyal Sivan, (1999), France. 128 minutes.

Spectres. Sven Augustijnen, (2011), Belgium. 90 minutes.

The Unfinished Conversation. John Akomfrah (2013), three-screen installation, UK. 103 minutes

Unsere Afrikareise. Peter Kubelka, (1966), Austria. 13 minutes

Why Colonel Bunny Was Killed. Miranda Pennell, (2010), UK. 28 minutes.

Z32. Avi Mograbi, (2007), Israel. 81 minutes.