Introduction: Rephotography

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Before and after photography are clear enough concepts for any exposition: they can be understood against the backdrop of historical time, or the click of the shutter that separates them. Re-photography is different; mirroring is the central characteristic. A unique instant in time, tethered to a place, figure, event, or image, is repeated. The "againness" of the Latin prefix gestures backward to gently produce something new. Thus, the general case of archival photography, which reproduces a printed image from an original negative; this issue of *Mosaic* (55.3), which reproduces a selection of essays from the journal's archive on photography; and finally, the practice of Roy Arden, which features in this issue, and which turns on a variable notion of the photographic archive.

I introduce these loose and slippery definitions—with rephotography bleeding into archival photography and further imbricating essays on photography—for a reason. Ultimately, they help sharpen the very complicated and contested histories of photography that took root in the late twentieth century by framing matters through something of a hegemonic dominant. Let me explain first with art history in mind. Rephotography, proper, is the photography of existing photographic documents—say, Sherrie Levine's photographs of Walker Evans's photographs, which she photographed from an exhibition catalogue, or Richard Prince's photographs of

Sam Abell's cowboy photographs that were featured in the well-known "Marlboro Man" advertising campaign. These examples from the 1980s in New York come from a significant moment in the recent history of photography. In the art field it was a moment variously marked by strategies of appropriation, the re-evaluation of conceptual arts' edict against the image, and the moment when work using photography leaned hard into critiques of ideology, consumerism, and tradition. Working in the long shadow of conceptualism, artists in New York believed that instancing the symptom was the surest model for neutralizing the regime of reproduction as the clearest indicator of processes alive in the general economy. However, the dominance of conceptualism and the powerful sway of New York was not totalizing. There were other models afoot, the remnants of more archaic modalities of repetition. These worked within and often beyond the horizon of conceptualism. They wormed away at photography's relationship to the image, the regime of production, the question of history, and the painterly tradition from a decidedly non-conceptual angle. But such distinctions are easily lost.

Which brings me back to Arden's photography and the art scene in which he emerged—Vancouver in the 1980s-90s and specifically what is known (and equally misunderstood) as Vancouver photo conceptualism. What defined conceptualism in New York most sharply was its insistence on repetition as the simulacrum of conscious processes, which were themselves to be understood as indicators of larger processes active in the economy. This would be crucial to developments in Vancouver. There was much interchange between the scenes, but differences would emerge. What defines Arden's work—and with various qualifications and differences of emphasis, the key figures in the Vancouver scene, like Jeff Wall to whom he is closest—is the hunch that an emphasis on repetition captured a far more fugitive form of reproduction that pointed back to resources held within the pictorial tradition, and more succinctly, the metaphoric processes which had produced cognitive process out of expression. In Arden's case, the cracks between these two versions of repetition would emerge most sharply in the late 1980s with his archival works. *Rupture* (1985), which we feature in the photo insert that begins this issue, is the best example. It is the moment when conceptualism's meta-theoretical perspective on the image would lift his extant version of lyric photography into dialogue with contemporary practice, but also, in the context of Vancouver, contemporary theory focused on cinema and the problem of time.

The period from the early 1980s to the early 2000s—the period during which the essays in this issue were published—is one of photography's great moments in the sun. The medium crawled out of the so-called "photo ghetto"—leaving the book behind, shaking off its obsession with black and white print craft—gained in size,

galvanized philosophical discussion, and found a place on the gallery and museum walls of the world. Recall, too, that the 1980s witnessed a tremendous surge of theoretical interest in photography as a medium and augured the remarkable growth of the market in contemporary photography through the 1990s to the early 2000s. There is no single event that marks the beginning and end of the period in question, but Jean Francois Chevrier's *Foto-Kunst* exhibition held in Stuttgart from 1989-90 and Michael Fried's *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (2008) are certainly two watermarks. Another bracket would acknowledge the emergence of photo-based works from the late 1970s on in Düsseldorf, Vancouver, New York, Paris, and Los Angeles on the one hand, and on the other hand the increasingly global turn towards time-based media, say, Catherine David's political commitments to documentary video circa 2005. Another might flag the theoretical work between cinema and photography beginning in the 1970s, and so on. In any case, the weather has considerably worsened for photography since. Today we look back at the high period of contemporary photography when writing with light had its day in the sun from a vastly different moment. Like Nicéphore Niépce's *View from the Window at Le Gras* (1826) or Henry Fox Talbot's *Pencil of Nature* (1844-46), it seems a distant memory. The fog that Walter Benjamin first found swirling around the incunabula of photography in the 1830s has returned in a new form. Whether this is a concept driven history of photography, Instagram's monetization of the attention economy, or the non-human protocols of AI, NFTs, and Downstream MSIs, it is certain we are still in the shadow of photography.

Rephotography as we use the term here for *Mosaic* 55.3 is one more attempt to bring the spectre of photography to a focus. It is a late, loose re-iteration of the specific art historical category, a reprinting of the best writing on photography *Mosaic* has published (principally published in 37.4, our most popular issue), and an end-bracket to bring the medium's moment in the sun to a close. We live in a vastly different moment than photography's "'hot and holy' mid-day hour"—that solar noon when the sun is highest in the sky and no shadows are cast—but of course, this moment, like ours now, equidistant from sunrise and sunset, is no less the "hour of ghosts" (Freud 16). The essays reprinted here variously remind of this fact through a range of inserts, attachments, parallel developments, and temporal echoes. Just how porous, fitful, and mutable a support photography is—how depthless the substrates it mines for mimetic purposes—is the point.

To highlight only one example, take Michael Naas's exceptional account of Jacques Derrida's various entanglements with photography (Ph) and psychoanalysis (Ps) during the period in question. "When it All Suddenly Clicked: Deconstruction

after Psychoanalysis after Photography" deals with the manifold ways in which "the vagaries and contingencies," "invitations and opportunities" of Derrida's publications on photography all came to light during the hot and heady moments of photography's zenith hour. In effect, Naas usefully describes Derrida as a rather fair-weather, card-carrying camera club member. And a ghost hunter too. "Repetition, automaticity, supplementarity, in short, death" criss-cross the divided positions staked out between psychoanalysis and photography, to the extent that "you can see *Ps* and *Ph* unite." Not nearly as "strange [a] concurrence" as one might think. Deconstruction as an embodied form of close reading here blurs with art historical issues turning on photography and the beholder, as well as something which makes the medium's special purchase on truth subject to the kinds of distortions that only a means-end rationale can bring to light.

Think of the issue as a classic "twofer." It is as close to a textual version of archival photography as theoretical and philosophical writing on photography can get as well as a new lease on life for a set of texts whose central concern remains as urgent now as ever. The risk, of course, is that nothing will be solved once and for all and that matters will only be complicated, because folded away, or strung out, in and over time. Oh well! The essays we re-publish in Rephotography bleed into a broader set of theoretical issues informing and informed by photography, principally the timing of the archive, index, and trace, the concomitance of photography and deconstruction, but also the question of agency and its undermining through the inhuman mechanism of repetition that has so ably defined the medium as both technological apparatus and continuation or extension of painting. Beyond this the essays plumb that "strange concurrence" when there is a free exchange of gifts and potentialities, the problem of writing as a function of reading, as well as a wide range of slippery intra- and interdisciplinary relations that extend from the image to text, history, the literary, and the cinematic.

Along the way, and this should already be clear, the essays repeatedly broach the central question of transparency and its string of loosely symbolic correlates—realism, documentary photography, straight photography, the index, street photography, the everyday, archival photography, and the list goes on. This thread in the narrative is something neither to be simply affirmed nor denied, as if photography's testamentary function, which offers up a purchase on truth, might be merely dispelled with the mention of translucence, myth, and constructedness, or vice versa. These two imperatives, each with a value judgment attached, are as tightly bound to one another in photography as life is bound to death. The very capacity to construct an ethical bridge from a written support to the world is a potentiality in all language, no? And

of course, whether or not photography is a language in the end at all given the problem of repetition—recall Roland Barthes had already framed the medium this way in *Camera Lucida* (1980), that Benjamin had pushed things a long way towards this same conclusion in the late 1930s, and that we are faced with this same prospect again in face of virtual pictures like Jill Magid's "Hand-Hacked Digital Bouquets" presently in circulation—is a question that must remain open to the larger issue of general textuality. Photography is hardwired into the human sensorium. It is inseparable from the history of techne. And there are no hard and fast borders that separate photography proper from the ragged edges it bleeds into, which pick up its refrain from all around as much as ground and source the latter.

To minimize the risk of reducing things to the second-hand, allow me to merely repeat the contents of the index. There is Naas's "When it All Suddenly Clicked…," but also David Farrell Krell's "Shudder Speed…"; W.J.T. Mitchell's "The Surplus Value of Images"; Paola Cortés-Rocca's "Ghost in the Machine…"; Mieke Bal's "Light Writing…"; Eloise Knowlton's "Showings Forth…"; Caroline Blinder's "'The Transparent Eyeball…'"; Rodolphe Gasché's "The Deepening of Apperception…"; and Michael Naas's "Flicker 1…" and "Flicker 2..."

Finally, as a practical supplement to the primarily theoretical and interdisciplinary narratives cut by the essays collected here, we feature the photographs of Vancouver-based artist Roy Arden. Arden is an artist who used photography during its moment in the sun as much as used it up. "After Photography," which is the title of an essay by Arden, might well have been our title, and his sculptural, digital, and collage-based works that emerge with the termination of his work in photography in 2005 might also have featured. His practice began with a certain romance with the camera in the early 1980s, turned away from this orientation in a series of works of archival photography from the mid and late 1980s, and apparently fell head over heels in love with large-scale photography for the gallery wall in the 1990s, ultimately finishing things off with two photographs of flowers basking in full sun. The last of these is featured on our back cover and concludes a very perplexing chapter in the history of Vancouver photography during its golden hour. As double vaccination against the absolutes that press in on the metaphysical photo bug that still distorts our readings in and of photography, we also include a short essay by Arden on his archival photography. Treat its reticence and meta-textual distance on the medium as one more remedy to the fictions surrounding writing with light.

One or two of the mysteries surrounding Walter Benjamin's great text "Some Motifs in Baudelaire," always put me in mind of Arden's photographs in the 1990s. The

difficulty of reading Benjamin on Baudelaire is not only that the question of the motif announced in the title lacks the substance of a graspable, stand-alone figure, but that the "some motifs" he ultimately puts his finger on all bleed into one another as well as bleed off into nothing. The *flâneur*, the fragment, shock, the cliché, the crowd, the game, the fencer, the gambler, "la Seconde" (179), "festive days" "assembled into a spiritual year" (182), the optical and the tactile, Spleen and Ideal, I should stop: all of these motifs so crucial to the lyric poet are veritably dissembled and disseminated into the broader context of Parisian modernity. With a critique of presentism borrowed from Karl Krauss, the slippery relations between isolated and newsworthy-like instants lean on the powers of poetry and specifically metonymy to grease a multitude of processes in order to concretize something else (Benjamin 158-59).

Judging from the marginalia in my old, frayed copy of Benjamin's *Illuminations*, the slipperiness of the motif provided me both a persistent line of attack into the text as well as a pragmatic modality for discerning the ways in which Arden's work similarly placed the motif under pressure, eventually formalizing it out of existence. Arden's earliest photographs, small colour images "shot with transparency film" known as *Fragments*, are a good place to begin. We see the artist absorbing the styles or "models" of historical precedents that will in turn offer a stepping-stone, or archive of acts, for further acts of absorption whereupon he moves on the progress he himself has made. A poorly, "somewhat bohemian" lifeworld saturates these works. We see isolated portraits of a group of friends and sharply cropped perspectives of a Vancouver decidedly before the waves of capital that marked the moment of Expo in 1986, the Olympics of 2010, and the real estate bubble that followed. The mixed bar scene, bruised wood panelling, and goings-on out back of the old West Hotel on Carall, as one commentator has sketched in the general atmosphere, is about right (Wood 19). With an eye for the anachronistic as opposed to the new, and with very sharp edges to the spaces and events depicted, these self-effacing fragments or slices of a life lived as opposed to the world-historical processes against which they are braced isolate what Arden calls "Wols' cruel light," a "post Christian light," and how this light "destroys what it reveals."

We notice this especially with regard to a kind of troublingly recurrent severing of head from body in a number of portraits such as *Kevin Hatt (#1), Vancouver* (1981-85), *Gerald Creede (#1), Vancouver* (1981-85), and *Michaela, Vancouver* (1981-85). In *Discarded Chairs (#1), Geneva* (1981-85), we see a kind of anti-monument, with shadow head attached. This too is the tale told by *Self-Portrait (#1), Vancouver* (1981-85), where a human face is replaced by the technological appendage of the camera and the photographer's head doubles as the hump of a bull, or perhaps Benjamin's figure

1. Roy Arden, *Kevin Hatt (#1), Vancouver* (1981-85). Photograph courtesy of Roy Arden.

of the hunchback. A first position on the mind-body divide is being staked out here. In *Foot (#2), Vancouver* (1981-85), something similar happens, and again the violence of it all is barely tangible given the sensitive portrayal of the subject. Indeed, if not for the rich colours, some of the Fragments might whisk us back to Georges Bataille's editorship of *Documents* (1929-30) and perhaps the abattoir of La Villette. Thus, the bare ankle protrudes from a tight-fitting pair of leather penny loafers. The topline cuts into the moist, white skin and few viewers will not feel the edge, nor the depth to which sunlight penetrates the closeted interior. *Tree Trunk (#1), Geneva* (1981-85) and *Partitio Socialisto, Venice* (1981-85) both betray a similar attraction to the base of things, an important thematic. For if these highly cropped images reveal nothing of Geneva and very little of Venice (Italian politics?), in the long run they seem to have

2. Roy Arden, *Foot (#1), Vancouver* (1981-85). Photograph courtesy of Roy Arden.

helped Arden iron out a kind of *heimat* aesthetic that would identify Vancouver as his one and only base and affect as his basic currency.

This terminal condition tailored expressly to the city of Vancouver, which was once known as "Terminal City," is far more labyrinthine a problematic than one would suppose. Take *Rupture* (1985), *Abjection* (1985), and *West* (1988), all examples of Arden's unique version of archival photography. In each, Arden pairs various monochrome panels with printed images from archival negatives selected from the municipal archives of the city. The real content of each series turns on specific events relating to Vancouver's forgotten histories—a riot involving unemployed workers in 1938, the internment of Japanese citizens during WWII, and rail disasters in mountain passes, etc. All of the gritty documents used (and cropped for effect) are lorded

over by sublimated images of abstraction and blindness variously keyed to the content beneath: a blue sky, a burned-out print exposed to sun, and a copper plate, respectively. As Wall put it in a key text from 1993, "Local history is depicted under the sign of catastrophe. The derailed locomotives, impounded vehicles, smashed windows and beaten protestors [...] pronounce the lesson of the civic archive: local history is determined by the 'world-historical,' that phantom of high conflict which, like the plague, visits places and brands memory with their names" (5). This is Arden's base line, but we can usefully amplify it in order to isolate the labyrinth. In these works, and elsewhere in Arden's corpus, the "camera's glass eye" is agitated and perturbed—the brutality of class violence, racism, and the images of man and machine pitted against nature shock: likewise, our ire is raised, our morality piqued, and our sense of ecology or social justice offended, in turn. This congery of expressive effects, which leave the head out of circulation, cutting it off as a terminus, is the trace of Nietzsche's physiology of art filtered through Bataille. These catastrophes hit us in the gut.

All of this suggests that the lyric violence of *Fragments* takes something of an objective and expanded form in Arden's archival photography proper. As he puts it, "Theories and practices of the time," those discourses on photography, society, truth, the archive, and history, which were gaining increasing traction in the mid 1980s, gain a purchase on things. The binary form of the repeated vertical pendants joins an extant conviction in expression with a conceptual mode of address mindful of interpretation. In *Rupture*, an utterly anarchic situation depicting singular instants of protest and brutal suppression on the one hand is contrasted on the other hand with the equal and opposite violence implicit to the ordering and policing of public memory that is the regulatory principle of the archive itself. The pairing of black and white historical images with the rhythmic reappearance of a blue monochrome sky—the "last photo" he took with his "Rolleiflex twin lens camera [...] seal[ing] off Fragments permanently"—is a shocking reminder of the entropic processes that fail to reach the light of day. Ignoring the blue and instead filing through or burrowing into the black and white like the "old mole" we imagine Arden to be only exacerbates the matter. In the first image of figures filing through the frame it is the echo of Masaccio's *Expulsion* (1425) or Bruegel's *Blind Leading the Blind* (1568) that bruises me black and blue. If an art historical gutter far worse than the one in which the beaten man lays, we are at least near the tumult—what Nietzsche calls "fire from heaven" (Bataille 37)—that is so central to Arden's photographic work.

The historical processes that bleed into the libidinal energies driving this kind of civil unrest and arrest are far more fugitive a thing to materialize than a monochrome or the category of art can capture. The cryptic meanings of Giotto's allegories of

virtue and vice are borne out as unsolvable antinomies. Thus, the gestures of shame, showcased alongside the one figure's head turned up in anguish, seem to parade the very fact of sacrifice. However slight, it is the veiled reappearance of the "acephalic" motif, a fact picked up and formalized in the upper pendant, where we must imagine the photographer looking up, or at least slightly arching his own torso to raise his Rolleiflex to the sky. It would not be for five years until the photographer as "hunter" looking for prey—no: "lensmen" acutely sensitive to the reproductive mechanism of writing with light—would re-emerge, for the days of the artist's animal-like self-portrait, where agency was already in short supply, would be devalued further than in his archival photography. As in the case of Benjamin's account of Baudelaire, the hunter becomes victim, and the motif expands first to some, and then, exponentially, into death by a thousand cuts. As Arden puts it, "Sometimes a camera is just a camera. I never felt any phallic pleasure taking pictures, I rather felt it was a gentle operation where I opened the camera and let the light penetrate into the little room and write the image on the film. If anything, it is the light that is phallic."

Which brings me to the series of works centred on the environs of Vancouver that are perhaps Arden's best-known photographic works. Loosely known as the *Landscapes of the Economy,* these large, trans-mounted C-prints both actualize and secrete away the motifs which are his bread and butter. If shiny surfaces and glistening highlights, at times with the cheap sheen of a Walmart plastic stool, will eventually become as important a surface effect as faded paint, rusted metal, and a dirty gutter for the objects of his gaze, in the beginning a bulldozed stump that looks back with the eye of a cyclops, a heap or swelling pile of refuse, signs which stare us down, and Monster Houses cropping up on the margins of new developments are the first indicators of the changing landscape of the lower mainland. In all of these large photographic works, the task of picturing the part for the whole is left to synecdoche. Often, they are divided by a stark horizon line that harks back to the vertically oriented pendant form of the archival works. Thus, the slight fish-eye effect and thin blue sky that crowns *Landfill Dump, Richmond B.C.* (1991), as much as the jigsaw edge that sutures a line of condos against a rich azure backdrop in *Development* (1993). *Pneumatic Hammer (#2), Vancouver B.C* (1992) and *Soil Compactor, Richmond B.C.* (1993) instance the same breakdown, with a downcast glance finding a mirror in dirty, overworked, mechanical monstrosities.

Take *Construction Site and Suntower* (1992). A heliotropic vector shoots through the photograph as much as dirt commands an apotropaic effect. These properties hail from the beholder, and anthropomorphic or not, they stem from the conflicted image. *Construction Site and Suntower* is a mixed bag. It points to things that are

3. Roy Arden, *Construction Site and Suntower* (1992). Photograph courtesy of Roy Arden.

higher than high and lower than low. A dirt mound that reads as a burial site à la Evans's haunting images of children's graves signals one pole and the Suntower reaching skyward—a favoured location for many artist's studios back in the day—signals another. Pasts and futures haunt the site. I remember the Western fringes of Chinatown, and can't forget the present-day Costco, T&T Market, and Rogers Arena. Time escapes the instant recorded and courses through the image with something like the "ecstasy" and "tragedy" that David Farrell Krell describes as the "shudder effect." These temporal processes are inseparable from the agitated state every good citizen of the modern polis should feel. It is one more scene of an ongoing series of crimes that reaches back to what Benjamin once saw in the crowdless streets of Atget's Paris. In an easy vernacular the photograph whispers, one cannot reach for the sun and be against development at the same time. Conflicted values extant in a city—those concrete antinomies that read as either positive and negative in the image—are always symptomatic. They course through the crowd, finding no other outlet from the folds in one stomach than to the belly of the next and the next. *Construction Site and Suntower* is

4. Roy Arden, *Tree Stump, Nanaimo, B.C.* (1991). Photograph courtesy of Roy Arden.

a kind of gastric archive that promotes swelling. Imagine the refrigeration units at T&T Market and Costco not working…the fish beginning to stink…the ground heaving…and a junkyard dog in Port Moody catching the scent. This is the labyrinth beneath Arden's cataloguing of the city of Vancouver in the 1990s.

Yet, when I first encountered these works in the late 1990s, Arden's images seemed to blur into the general orientation of the so-called "Vancouver School of Photography" and further bled quite naturally into the *mise-en-scène* of Vancouver as speculative capital's millennial dream come true. The images Arden took in and around the city were just so much a part of the general landscape that his framing of the abject and at times sulfurous odours given off by the objects bracketed seemed to focus on nothing special or unique. The acts of description recorded were akin to an unfolding realist novel. Thus, *Pulp Mill Dump (#2), Nanaimo, B.C.* (1992) seen in combination with *Pulp Mill Dump (#1), Nanaimo, B.C.* (1992) and *Tree Stump, Nanaimo, B.C.* (1991) was an odd kind of "anthropological" testament to an ongoing ambulatory exercise on the margins of the new. The realism of Gustav Flaubert came

5. Roy Arden, *"Monster House," Coquitlam, B.C.* (1996). Photograph courtesy of Roy Arden.

to mind, and I remember reading Jonathan Culler's *The Uses of Uncertainty* (1974) to understand what was actually at stake. One read a descriptive passage by Flaubert, say of a house in a semi-rural setting that sets up the basic *mise-en-scène* for the action, and like one of Arden's photographs, one wasn't absolutely sure what the focus was: the centred object, its setting, the historical processes gripping it, or the act of description itself.

But again, *Tree Stump, Pneumatic Hammer, Pulp Mill Dump, Landfill Dump, or "Monster House," Coquitlam, B.C.* (1996) are more because they are less. If merely showing developments taking place in Vancouver or Nanaimo and fitting the general prerogatives of realism or straight documentary photography, they also showcase a key thematic that is finally literalized in the title of the last work mentioned. The drama is always brought to a focus in subject matter that is inseparable from the deep folds of the archive. Like a foot in the stomach, certain fetishized objects keep coming up: gutters, discarded mattresses, debris heaps, shacks, back-alley workers' cottages, and dirt piles. Blackberry bushes that tend to "hook" the eye and which have over-

6. Roy Arden, *Locked-Out Workers, Vancouver, B.C.* (1994). Photograph courtesy of Roy Arden.

taken the street corner in *South Vancouver (#1)* (1997) extend his fascination with "eyesores," anti-monuments, and excoriated histories. These recurrent tropes are supplemented by ritual objects as in the small suite of pictures titled *Museum of Anthropology, U.B.C., Vancouver, B.C. #1-5* (1991), featuring various collections of North-West Coast artifacts. Here we are in the vicinity of excess and the economy of gifting described by George Clutesi's *Potlach* (1969), a bedside breviary for the artist.

Locked-Out Workers, Vancouver, B.C. (1994), two photographs presented as a vertical pendant where the primary focus seems be on two striking Rogers employees, quickly shifts in the lower of the two images to the dark interior of their temporary picket shack or warming hut built with scrap lumber and plywood. But for a leg and an arm, one of the workers is cropped out or rusticated from the cinematic-like zoom. A sign reading "Local 213 International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers LOCKED OUT by Rogers Cable TV" is precisely the point. As in the examples of Arden's later focus on Hydrangeas—choked behind bulldog fencing (*The Lower Mainland* [2005]), edging towards asphalt from under a cedar canopy (*Hydrangea* [2005]), craning for light (or is it shade?) from behind a gnarled tree trunk (*Against the Day* [2005]), and finally shown in full sun (*Blind* [2005] and *Solar* [2005])—the threshold of visibility and the language of that which cannot be understood is a fine line.

In all cases Arden's subjects both stir up and turn on a blender full of reactions keyed to object relations. The grouping of houses Arden pictured in the mid 1990s is especially sensitive to this double take. The flaking paint and patina of the nearly squeezed-out house on *1919 Quebec St., Vancouver B.C.* (1994), the boarded-up house on *2230-2232 St. George St., Vancouver, B.C.* (1994), and the stately workers' cottage in *House in Strathcona Alley, Vancouver B.C.* (1995) would lose their slippery identity as "portraits" or character houses "with the age of about as old as a person gets to be" (Watson 5) without this doubleness. They speak to a kind of limited lifecycle that is as particular to the "working class, immigrant neighborhoods" (4) from whence they came and to as general a cycle of development and re-development that has characterized the patterns of settlement in the region of Vancouver from the earliest times to the present. All of which is to say that in the 1990s during photography's high moment in the sun, I never realized that the process of bringing something to light which was instrumental to Baudelaire's own interest in the cliché had to be understood, at least in Arden's case, against what Nietzsche first identified as the inheritance of nihilism. The light of day Arden puts to work in his photographs makes the sun we know above recoil. Its idealism, the warmth it promises on a cold morning or cloudy day, is counteracted, compressed, and identified instead with a shadow self. This is what he calls a "Baroque" attachment to the "art of describing," what should be under-

7. Roy Arden, *House in Strathcona Alley, Vancouver B.C.* (1995). Photograph courtesy of Roy Arden.

stood as a subjective, mannered distortion of the objective picture. No wonder so many of the riches of Arden's images slip away from the photographic support.

Basement (1996), a suite of twenty images in both black & white and colour and all taken with the artificial light of a flash in the dark basement of the apartment block in which Arden lives, literalizes this materialist drive so important to the corpus (see Photo Insert). There is very little sublimation in the work other than the fact that the twenty images make up one work and that the camera's flash renders things visible. In fact, *Basement* strings together what we should imagine were a series of blinding flashes of light in the dark with the artist stumbling about. The setting begs a kind of ready-made archiving process, the performative nature of which puts equal onus on the embodied viewer. Whether or not the baseness, materiality, entropy, and endless clutter of these innumerable objects all piled on top of one another and stored in the bowels of the building, in the vicinity of the boiler room, is to be brought to order is the question. The work ironically pushes the etymology of the archive and specifically the keeper of the archive of the Greek polis into the shoes of a curious and lowly con-

temporary equivalent: the photographer as caretaker, in no way an archon of the city state, but still a figure of order that, like it or not, brings things to a modest, singular focus.

In this sense, a vast number of objects—literally a *horror vacui* of things—are conjured into order from out of the chaos. Yet there still is a "shine" to things—and here I am thinking especially of Stanley Kubrick's foray into the genre of horror in *The Shining* (1980). In *Basement*, the consecutive flashes of flash photography bring obdurate things into visibility, each carrying with them a life that is for the most part sealed off from us but still betrays an analytic of the baseness pictured just the same. Look at the dim glisten of old chrome, the flatness of tin, the reflection of a light bulb and the sparkle of an illustrated bulb just beside it, the lustrelessness of a toolbox, shelves of varnishes and paints, and on a blue stool that floats about the picture grid like an after-image, the sticky thought and glistening contents of an old jar of Vaseline. The space of *Basement* is not at the root of the Western narrative that Derrida tells us is the place where things take place, take the place and have a place (9), but given the differential shine to things we are definitely in the neighbourhood of one such restricted version of this precinct with photography performing as foil.

Cinematic effects, an increasing recourse to black & white, working in series, the particularities of visual capture with regard to DVD, and lastly, archival work with appropriated television footage all spell the end of Arden's photography. His commitment to the medium comes with a set of specific time stamps, is marked by place, and is time-based. The trajectory of his practice is inseparable from the fact he works "against the day," the title of his 2007 retrospective at the Vancouver Art Gallery. A certain friction between his early lyric mode and its cruel streak, an incompatibility between his archival work and its repetitive and systematic display, or identifying as an artist using photography are only the beginning. During the 1990s and early 2000s these build into being a fair-weather photographer for whom photography was the medium of a certain moment that could be put to work for a larger project with a longer and deeper history. Thus, a final reference for Arden, which I've been holding back in favour of Bataille, is Peter Galassi's *Before Photography* (1981). In his catalogue and accompanying exhibition, the chief curator of photography at the MoMA focused on what he called a "proto-photographic" direction in realist painting from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century. For Galassi this offers an alternative history to the dominant, technological narrative of photography's origin. What he describes as "pictures of bits: telling details and vivid, singular perceptions" is the key (29). It is out of such *morceau* that Arden makes his version of the *tableau*, and of course, technical reproducibility remains as much a part of the story as the

transparency of photography to the world or the protocols of photographic display from the 1980s to the early 2000s. *Solar* and *Blind*, the photographs that close the book on Arden's version of straight photography and which are themselves pictures of the same Hydrangea cropped differently, come clean about the nature of the cliché and the problem of the motif in Baudelaire. The beautiful flower blurs with bright shiny stools in Walmart and a new build in Coquitlam. And like the processes of modernity that Baudelaire's work attempted to capture through its innumerable motifs, the living flower bathed in full sunlight disappears in spite of itself. My hunch would be it is the disappearance of this history which consistently comes to nothing that Arden loved most and least about the medium.

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