

Interview between Nuno Faria & Edgar Martins on the occasion of his exhibition *Destinerrance* at Centro de Arte José de Guimarães, January 2017

Nuno Faria

The research work you have pursued over recent years at the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences (INMLCF) has resulted in an extensive and meticulously researched project, in terms of document collection and your physical involvement with this institution and the chosen topic, as is normally the case with your projects. What new procedural, methodological, and conceptual questions did you bring to this work?

Edgar Martins

Firstly, it's important to emphasise the similarities with my previous projects. Anyone who knows my work will be aware that it's largely rooted in landscape and topographical photography, where there is evidence of a link to the cinematic, the pictorial and the sculptural. This is once again reflected in this project. In technical and conceptual terms, I always try to articulate analogue and digital strategies in my work, to highlight the conceptual and paradoxical possibilities of photography as a medium that spans several recording approaches: documental and fictional, concrete and metaphorical, which once again arises in this project. For many years my work focused on technology, architecture, landscape and the notion of place, but over the last nine years, in particular, my artistic practice has primarily focused on what I call "hard- to-access environments". I'm essentially interested in the techniques of artistic expression that these collaborations can trigger and in the discussions that they can foster. My collaboration with the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences also arises in this context. Nevertheless, the main difference in this project is the clear break in terms of my working methodology.

In this project, I use archival photography, historical photography, documentary photography, and speculative photography. The work is far more immersed in the ontology of Photography, and the semiotics of image and language. The project articulates a whole series of strategies and media – such as installation, sound, sculpture, projection, text, among others – in order to explore the narrative, metaphorical and phenomenological potential of such media (and their interactions). The project therefore views the practice of Photography and the experience of images in a far more hybrid manner, emphasising a certain interdisciplinarity.

The series has always been the conceptual platform that gave meaning to my production methodology. At the procedural level, however, this work distances itself from this framework and instead explores a more subversive, even

destabilising, meta-language, which focuses on the simultaneous construction and deconstruction of the single image. In recent projects, I have been thinking a lot about the culture of saturation and visual excess, and the current fetishistic consumption of images, in which the photographic experience often replaces actual experience. I have been reflecting upon my own artistic practice and whether it has contributed to the cannibalism of photography and of visual devices. To paraphrase Susan Sontag, the camera is consciousness' clearest arm in its most possessive and acquisitive mode. Therefore, to photograph means to collect the world, to devour the world, to take possession of it. In view of this potentially oppressive dimension of photography, i.e. its capacity to misrepresent and decontextualise things – production of visual images has been accompanied by a process of research and constant consultation/dialogue with legal and ethical bodies, bereavement support groups, victim support groups, and specialists, such as medical examiners, psychiatrists, sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, curators, etc. As a result of this research, the project has adopted a self-reflexive language of containment that seeks to make visible, and question, its own semantic framework. This was the main challenge.

NF - There is a recurring element in your working process, which is to operate within institutional contexts, such as the European Space Agency, EDP – Electricidade de Portugal, or the BMW group. These three come to mind as distinctive examples and they are all long-term projects. You have already discussed your motivations, but I'd like to pose the same question...: what factors underlie this vertiginous exploration, in terms of your interest in these institutional abysses? You refer to the difficulty of gaining access to these institutions and giving visibility to what is generally highly controlled in terms of access from the outside world – that's something that interests me a lot in your work. If we look at your projects with the European Space Agency and now with the archive of the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences, you establish very interesting relations between these two imaginary universes, which are two major expansions – into the ethereal plane, into the void, in two different ways, one as a negative image and the other as a positive image. I'd like you to compare these two approaches and explain what distinguishes them – methodologically and conceptually. I assume that one of the issues that distinguishes them is that you found a non-systematized archive in the INMLCF and, by devoting attention and time to the various exceptional materials that exist there, you helped systematize it.

EM - Many of the institutions that I have worked with over recent years – which are normally relatively inaccessible – are heterogeneous spaces. They are places where there are overlapping elements, convergence and blurring of meanings, functions, and temporalities. These characteristics allowed me to adopt both descriptive and speculative approaches. I have documented the scientific and / or historical value of the spaces and objects I have visited,

deconstructing and exploring their cultural, ideological, political and social resonances. At the same time this has facilitated more comprehensive reflections on how we relate to such institutions, i.e. how we influence them and how they influence us. The word “deconstruct” is pertinent in this discourse because it is the process of “deconstruction” that confers a multiplicity of layers to the work. Derrida defines deconstruction as something that captures the dual movement of Heidegger’s concept, *Abbau*, i.e. a mode of construction, which is also a form of deconstruction. This involved the disaggregation / separation / breaking up of something, in a manner that respects the logic of its own architectural framework and thus exposes the internal tensions that define / justify and vex it. This is the only way to make sense of the particular and the universal simultaneously, i.e. to place ourselves inside and outside the images, inside and outside these institutions, both communicating and questioning something, in terms of the spectator’s convictions and expectations, and the fragility of his perceptual and cognitive systems. I don’t believe that it’s a matter of exploring the narrative potential of Photography, but precisely its elusive and fleeting character – its incapacity to anchor meaning. All these works ultimately relate to the condition of the contemporary and the photographic medium, how we position ourselves in the real world and in the visual world. My photographs have always depended on the legacy and historical capacity of photography to link the referent to the structures of reality. But there is always evidence of a dilated time, a disturbing suggestion that things aren’t necessarily what they seem to be. This process of temporal manipulation, and sense of slow revelation, is crucial to my work. For example, my projects with EDP and with the European Space Agency observe a programmatic approach rooted in the documentary and following the conventions of topographical representation. However, in addition to exploring the facilities and activities of these organizations (EDP’s hydroelectric power plants and the ESA’s training and testing centers, spacecraft, launch platforms and laboratories), these projects are fundamentally reflections on our relationship with technology. They are works that offer a partial view of the utopian framework that has prevailed over the last seven decades (including this decade) concerning the relationship between man and machine, between man and science, between the ideological narrative of the modern and the contemporary. In the case of my work with the BMW Group, in fact, the project dealt superficially with the production of the modern automobile, but the underlying concept is far more subversive. We know that the car factory is the apotheosis of capitalism – a place of production, activity and of non-stop commerce. I therefore suggested to BMW to produce a project that could only be carried out while the production line was inactive or interrupted. The work would thus represent a kind of point of resistance against the world of mobility and flux in which we live, wherein according to the philosopher Peter D. Osborne, this mobility isn’t always conveyed in terms of speed, but also in terms of uncertainty and transience. The logistics of producing a photographic work under these conditions were quite complex. In terms of my collaboration with the IN-MLCF, things were a bit

different. After several previous projects, which highlighted the subject of technology, characterized by formal homogeneity, I aimed to challenge myself as an artist and as an individual. I wanted to work on a project where I could explore several approaches: biographical, philosophical, ontological, and documental, which included a more diverse set of visual processes and categories. Essentially a project that incorporated a broader perspective of Photography. When I started working with the INMLCF, I initially had a very different idea. But this changed when I discovered the Institute's photographic archive, which cannot exactly be called an archive, since it's a collection of images that was subject to benign neglect over recent years. It was inert. That was my starting point.

NF - Of course. In a dormant state.

EM - Yes, scientific research is always forward-looking and an archive is something that is always in a subjective state of temporal transformation, in permanent evolution, but always with an eye on the past. This requires significant investment of resources (human, financial ...) so that we can effectively say that it was an archive in a dormant state ... waiting for direction and purpose.

During the three years that I worked with this archive I began a conservation process, which I hope will safeguard this material over the coming years.

The common denominator of all the institutions that I've worked with is that they didn't previously have a culture of dialogue with artists. Therefore, the artist's intervention in this space helps them value their own assets, their own history and, of course, fosters and stimulates a healthier dialogue with the general public and with the arts. These are the most positive aspects I can draw from all these collaborations. For example, when I worked with the European Space Agency, they didn't have regular contact with artists. Today they run an artist's residency program.

I avidly seek such situations and institutions, where there is goodwill, curiosity and interest, but no historical framework or predefined protocols of collaboration. This gives rise to greater reciprocity and openness. As the artist and institution get to know each other, and the methodology and objectives of the work are defined, there is a process of mutual discovery and collaboration that is very honest and curious. It's completely interdisciplinary.

Of course, the main challenge in these contexts is how to manage expectations and quickly assimilate the operational culture of the institution with which one is collaborating, and communicate and clarify at each stage the vicissitudes of the artistic process and always try to maintain a certain critical detachment ... but this is a conversation for another day.

I decided to contact the European Space Agency in 2009 after reading an article by one of its directors explaining how important it was for the organization to open up to the public and to engage in a more in-depth dialogue with people. This was at the height of the financial crisis, when I believe many public institutions felt the need to justify their budgets and funding. That very same day I wrote a long letter to the ESA in which I explained that I wanted to produce the

most comprehensive survey ever assembled of one of the world's most important scientific and space exploration organisation and its programmes. I said that I believed that the future of space exploration required continuous social and cultural dialogue, in which the arts, in particular, photography, could play a vital role. And why photography? We must not forget that the trajectories of photography and of space exploration have been interlinked for well over 70 years.

For example, we know that color photography was invented by a Scottish physicist while he was conducting electromagnetism tests. And the birth, or at least the timing of the birth of digital photography, was largely due to the Apollo space programme. On the other hand, many of the advances that have occurred in cosmological theories are attributed to advances made in the field of Optics. We are all familiar with the contribution made by the Hubble telescope. Over the course of this project I also had the opportunity to photograph an instrument called NIRSPEC that will be one of four instruments included in the James Webb telescope (to be launched in 2018). They say it will change our understanding of the universe. In other words, photography and space exploration already have a track record in terms of mobilising audiences. Think of the celebrated 'Earthrise' image taken by the NASA astronaut Bill Anders during the Apollo space programme and how this photograph alone was responsible for inspiring a whole generation. They even say that it gave rise to the green movement. Therefore, I was convinced that the photographic language of photography was the ideal language to establish a dialogue with the ESA. And the same can be said of all the other institutions with which I have worked.

NF - There are two questions that interest me a great deal in your work that are not strictly related to the visible realm; we could say that they are more related to questions of discourse. The first is related to the use of language, and I don't only mean photographic language. I'm referring to the use of words and what they engender in terms of their relationship with images. This is a major concern in your work – the word – and how discourse based on words is articulated with discourse based on the image and creates this dialogue that is so characteristic of photography as a metalanguage. The second question is the archivist impulse within your work. I have looked back at your oeuvre as a whole, and it made me think about the work by two photographers I really admire – Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel – and their book, Evidence, published in 1977. It's a great book, which I refer to a lot, and have studied in great depth. I think it's exemplary in terms of the fictional dimension of archives, i.e. the manner in which an archive creates an imaginary universe which is linked to reality, to truth, as the immanence of something that previously existed, but which often reveals the fictional and meta-narrative dimension of reality. Photography renders this filtering process highly disturbing. In Evidence, whose title is ironic and intelligently chosen, the authors exploit the dual meaning of the word "evidence" in the English language (which can be used to describe judicial evidence as well as visual evidence) in order to consider the inevitably anachronistic and obsolete

dimension of archives. I think your work is inscribed, although not explicitly, in this tradition. You have created your own authorial perspective and way of working with archives, but I always recall their work when I look at your oeuvre. In Evidence, Sultan and Mandel don't take any photographs, they simply collect images from various institutional archives. They use invisible archives which really depart from the impulse to document everything in a very specific context, in the context of the euphoria of American scientific and technological progress, in the midst of the Cold War – in relation to Evidence can we talk about authorship? The answer is doubly yes!

In your work, the archivist impulse is also articulated with the question of language. This is clear in the titles that you choose. They are poetic titles, but are also conceptually accurate. This opens up a large spectrum of meaning, which is also apparent in the way that you work with the question of archives without ever abandoning the possibilities of the image, which go beyond the reality that the images are supposed to document. In short, I would like you to discuss this dual nature of the language of your work – verbal and visual.

EM - The book you are referring to – Evidence – by Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel, was certainly an important reference for this project. I've been familiar with the book for many years and had the opportunity to look at it again during this project.

But there were other equally important references, such as Ernst Friedrich's War Against War, a compilation of photographs of victims during World War II; the works by the surrealist Robert Cummings; by the taxonomist John Divola; by the post-modernists Allan Sekula and Victor Burgin; by the Atlas Group, by Roni Horn, Sophie Calle as well as many more recent references. In addition I can highlight the curatorial projects by the English author (and friend of mine) David Company (in particular the project A Handful of Dust – a book and touring exhibition inspired by Man Ray's Dust Breeding); the research and authorial work by Eyal Weizman (Forensic Architecture); by Jacques Derrida (La Carte Postale); by Paul Virilio (The Aesthetics of Disappearance); by Jacques Ranciere (The Politics of Aesthetics); and by Kaja Silverman (The Miracle of Photography). The list is extensive and includes works that deal specifically with archives and their imaginary universes (Simone Osthoff, Sven Spieker, Jacques Derrida), the representation of death, crime and conflict (Kelly Shagan, Susan Stewart, Elspeth Brown) and of course the ontology and semiotics of Photography and the visual image (Barthes, Elkins, Laruelle, Bachten, Flusser, Baudrillard, Krauss, Sontag, etc.) It is possible to articulate the visible and invisible, abstraction and representation, visual language and verbal language, the fictional, and documental. They are not mutually exclusive. They are two sides of the same coin. One of the prime concerns in my work is the blurring of these frontiers (whatever they may be). James Elkins argues that while a great deal is said about the social, political, cultural and psychological resonances of the photographic medium, few notable efforts have been made to address the medium itself, to examine its evolutionary character, its social and cultural

properties, its relationships with other media. I completely agree. The dialogue between the discourse of the word and that of the image, which I find extremely interesting, is intrinsically linked to the semantics and history of Photography. It's no accident that the photographic theory of recent decades has been circumscribed by theorists (mostly writers) who have never been actual practitioners, or by theorist-practitioners who have shaped their thinking as a response to specific historical movements and political ideologies. Since then, the discourse about photography has been firmly rooted in the literary world. I'm interested in exploring how the written or spoken word – literature or verbal discourse – has helped shift our understanding of photography, the meaning of the represented image, and whether a new photographic approach is needed in these postmodern times of fetishisation, saturation, consumption, and incessant flux of images. I think so. Visual thinking is definitely not the solution for the failure of words and vice versa. James Elkins also mentions something that is very interesting in this regard – that the key issue is not to fight the narrative of fiction or deconstruction, but to combine them in a way that does not produce a kind of synthesis. Because in the interdisciplinary debate, synthesis is often the name attributed to the dominant position defended by only one of the disciplines. The discourse should instead be focused on the corpus, because only then does it offer the best guarantees to generate precise discussions about specific aspects and dimensions of Photography, which in itself should be intermedial and inter-artistic. Interdisciplinarity intensifies our attention towards everything that escapes or goes beyond verbal language. Creating new methods of thinking about the uncertainty of the referent is a way of capturing what is missing, what separates Photography from reality, what sets Photography apart from other media. This way can create visually precise images or combinations of images that escape precise meaning. When we cannot deduce what is real, what is fictional, when we realise that it's not possible to exhaust the meaning of a photograph, language becomes as important as the message itself. Or should I say, language becomes part of the message.

In relation to archives, this process was a revelation for me, because I've always been extremely interested in artists who work with archive, but I've never really considered that I was working with themes that allowed me to explore that side of photography. All this took place in a very organic manner, the way I found this archive, how delved into it, how I rationalised it, how I incorporated it into my artistic practice. This relationship with archive will certainly continue to influence my future projects. For example, the project I'm currently developing with Grain, in Birmingham, also uses archive photography. I'm working with the archive of CERN (and of various American newspapers), i.e. the archive of a real institution, in order to explore specific issues related to another current institution (a UK prison). In this project, I use a purely fictional discourse. In other words, I use this archive to conceive the history of an entirely fictitious institution. I have always seen photography as a kind of sophism, a coherent and apparently rational discourse, irrefutable, linked to the structures of reality, but which is really an

illusion; even a lie. In the famous classic tale of Zeuxis and Parrhasius, Zeuxis paints grapes that are so realistic that they attract birds. Parrhasius then invites him to remove the curtain around his masterpiece, but when Zeuxis tries to do so, he discovers that the curtain itself is a painting. Birds peck at something they cannot eat, just as we are captivated by images that promise far more than they deliver. This allegory refers to the deceptive nature of representation. An image exists to attract the eye, to capture it (although we tend to believe otherwise, we're not the ones who actually capture the images), to deceive the eye. Or as Francis Bacon once suggested – painting is about setting a trap. The archive also allows us to create this kind of dis- course. It's the immanence of something that once existed. It creates a complete fictional and meta-narrative imaginary universe. This project deals with a somewhat more radical idea than the one I developed in the INMLCF project. The idea that the story of something is best told, not through representation of the thing itself, but through its substitute – by a kind of meta-image that points to the absence of the original and separates it from the space-temporal-authorial framework that defines it. In this manner, I emphasise the idea that Photography is inexorably dependent on other media, to make sense of it. To a certain extent this is related to the concept of Destinerrance – proposed by French philosopher Jacques Derrida – which combines the concepts of error, errancy and destiny. We adapted this concept for the title of our exhibition – Destinerrância (“Destinerrance”). In his book, *La Carte Postale*, Derrida explains that every postcard, every message, everything that is communicated in writing, has a tendency to be decontextualized, has a life of its own, beyond its original purpose, given the inherent quality of writing to dissociate itself from its author and continue to signify long after death. I found this concept very interesting and wanted to extend it to the field of photography, specifically to archive photography, but also to the suicide letter and to the suicide utensil/tool.

NF - You mentioned the name we gave to this stage of the project. So let's talk about the biography of this project. It's an extensive, broad and complex project, in terms of its architecture, in the way that it has been developed, both from the point of view of methodologies and logistics, and also the way that it presents itself – in a publication format, a very important vector in your work, or in the form of an exhibition.

For the reader to understand the design of the project, I would like to re- turn to the original guideline and the various incidents that have occurred so far. When, at an embryonic stage, you proposed to work on the project, I was interested in the close links to our own working process and the Centre's programming identity: the issues related to archives, documents, second degree images, that which lies beyond History (the definitive motto of our work), that which is hidden and immersed. Oral history is also related to the history of images – a kind of subversive history that can influence the official narrative course of history. Therefore, I was quickly won over by the project. Then, due to institutional constraints, it took a while to formalise our involvement. The project took shape

*and arrived at the Centre after you made two other presentations, both in Lisbon, and you published the book *Silóquios e Solilóquios sobre a Morte, a Vida e Outros Interlúdios* (Siloquies and Soliloquies on Death, Life and Other Interludes) which is, in a way, the conceptual start of the project.*

The exhibition held at the CIAJG is distinct from the other two exhibitions, held respectively at the MAAT and the Cristina Guerra Contemporary Art Gallery, firstly because this is a moment, which I wouldn't call a final culmination, but which offers a considerably more comprehensive view of the project, including a set of materials from the INMLCF's archive that weren't presented in the other exhibitions. Also because it introduces – for various reasons, and I think I can discern some of these – moments of renewal, of greater risk, of things that had not yet been seen in your work, namely the sound and sculptural installation that you produced for this exhibition. Therefore, because of its scope, diversity and conceptual freedom, coupled with the rigor that is one of the hallmark characteristics of your work, this exhibition takes us down new paths. I think this is the starting point for you to explain, as you deem appropriate, some of the issues that I have raised here and some of the key ideas related to the biography of the project. The project has its own life beyond death.

EM - Without a doubt, in fact the project presented at the CIAJG was an exhibition that was much closer to what I imagined it could be. The previous exhibitions of the project were relevant, but more focused. They didn't exploit the full conceptual potential of the work in the way that we achieved with the presentation at the CIAJG. But I believe that this was a process of growth (also on my part) and rationalization of the work itself, which had to go through several stages, each important in its own right. I've always been interested in exhibiting at the CIAJG, not only because of your trajectory to date, but also due to the anthropological character of the collection itself, the relationship that you have always tried to foster between the temporary exhibitions and permanent exhibitions. This project fits well in this context. In fact, the characteristics of the exhibition space enabled me to think about this exhibition in a much more interdisciplinary and experimental manner, exploring various approaches and platforms. The size of the exhibition hall itself gave me an interesting artistic challenge. I had to try to see if my work was capable of commanding the space, of imposing itself, in a space of this nature. Although I've been working with slide projections for several years, this was the first time I conceived a synchronized projection, representing the various facets of the project in a more cinematic way. The slide projection focused on press and scientific photography, whilst also exploring a more speculative dimension, via other genres such as still life, landscape, portraiture and drawing. Another facet of the exhibition was an installation of paper planes produced using exposed photographic paper, which constituted a counterpoint to the large-scale photograph of the same object, presented in the same space. This work and the installation represent an entry point to the concept of Destinnerrance, which is why they were presented in the entrance gallery. The paper plane was inspired by a letter of departure thrown by

a prisoner from his cell window in in the early 19th century. The letter included the following message: "Whoever picks up this letter please take it to Manoela on the Calçada de Santa Ana and you will receive 20 escudos. Whoever picks up this letter, go now!" Lower down, it also said: "Mother, to read this message put it in front of the mirror". We do not know whether this letter reached its addressee. I see it as a dystopian version of a message in the bottle. This sculptural installation was also accompanied by a sound piece, constituted by ambient sounds that I recorded in a prison in England. It consists of the recording of sounds outside the prison that the inmates hear every day in their cells: a passing airplane, children playing in a park, seagulls screeching, a building under construction, footsteps of people walking at night, etc. I was interested in exploring this dialogue and dualism between communication of the exterior and interior, and vice versa. Both installations encourage us to inhabit their audiovisual space, and rather than just observe them. The sound work transports us to the audible field and forces us to question the broader, deeper connections, divisions and concepts established at the level of our experience. What is the image of sound ? What is the image of a sound? What is the relationship between the visual and the auditory dimensions, between seeing and hearing? Furthermore, can a sound recording create destinerrances and talk about photography, in the same way that the written word does, highlighting its flaws and potentialities? In addition, the exhibition included two magic lanterns from the late 19th century (called Radioptican). These lanterns were manufactured to project tourism postcards rather than film or slides. This allowed me to use photographs. However, in this specific case, the public had to look through the lens, into the devices themselves, in order to see the two photographs contained inside. The lighting within the exhibition space effectively annulled the projection light, which was very faint. In addition, the exhibition had several forensic objects from the INMLCF's collection, in particular a death mask, a rock used by someone who committed suicide by drowning, photographs and drawings of its archive, among others. Many of these objects were displayed on plinths and tables, together with a series of photographs of bladed weapons, photographed by me, and crime scenes published and edited by American newspapers (which also contained some of my interventions). Each set of images was accompanied by a specific text, researched from various sources: the internet, the Institute's historical case files, current and historical articles published in the media, fiction literature, etc. The articulation of all these registers created a complex and engaging body of work.

Going back a little, to the biography of the work itself, although I have always had a fascination with this theme (I tried to work on this theme more than a decade ago), up until recently I felt that I was not prepared as an artist, or as a human being, to think about these ideas. It was only with the passage of time, more than twenty years spent trying to free myself from the restrictions and constraints of the medium, and trying to find out what interested me most in Photography, in all its genres and contradictions, as well as two incidents in my personal life, that I

became convinced that I was finally prepared to address this subject. These events were the death of a friend of mine who was murdered while documenting the war in Libya; and the death of a person I befriended as a consequence of the murder of this friend of mine, and who was beheaded a year later by ISIS in Syria. The coverage of both stories in the media was extremely problematic, I would even say irresponsible. In the first case the body was never found and, this did not provide closure, paradoxically this somehow helped the grieving process. In the second case, the fact that there was a mutilated physical body, which was widely reported, confirmed how problematic the representation of the dead body is. In both circumstances, I realised that we are not prepared to answer questions such as – What does the representation of the dead body mean? What is the importance and significance of this? So my main challenge with this work was to render visible, and question, the tensions and contradictions inherent to the representation of violent death, while seeking to understand the decisive, but fundamentally paradoxical role, that Photography exercises in its perception and intelligibility. These intentions collide, overlap, and blur in the work. I've always had a recalcitrant relationship with Photography. As we have already discussed, it's a medium that tends to decontextualize and misrepresent things. That's why I rarely photograph people. So I was very aware of the ethical implications of a project such as this and that's why it was produced not only with the INMLCF – which is the institution in Portugal that has legal jurisdiction over dead bodies – but also with a variety of ethical bodies and support groups for mourners / victims. Alongside images from the Institute's archive, which I produced from its forensic collection, I also began to retrieve images from my own personal archive, as a visual, narrative, and conceptual counterpoint. The project is situated precisely in this counterpoint – between images and imagery related to death and the dead body, reality and fiction, past, present and future. I was interested in answering questions such as: What are the considerations and responsibilities of the author and consumer of such images? What distinguishes an image of a dead body, from a photograph that conjures up the mental image of a dead body? What effect do these differences have on the spectator's imagination? It is only in the realm of philosophy, metaphysics, and art that we can truly approach this subject. Although there is a vast literature and research about death and its imagery, what is lacking is a comprehensive synthesis capable of reflecting on the theme from a broader perspective. This project proposes an approach to the subject, that is simultaneously objective and speculative, with an undoubtedly conceptual and humanistic dimension. It looks at the conditions of production and reception of such images, analyses and deconstructs several tendencies in the conceptualization and representation of death and establishes a dialogue between the dead body and absent body, reality and invisibility, concealment and revelation, the individual and the institution.

NF - When we approach this theme of death, the institutionalization of death, we're also talking about the reconstitution of violent crimes or suicides, of re-constituting that specific moment, through documentation, through signs that are

often opaque, in a certain way, you explore that opacity in this project. Your work is always metalinguistic, but this is perhaps the project in which you most clearly tackle this issue, explores the underlying contradiction of photography as a seemingly transparent language, but which is actually opaque. It is here that this question is addressed to the limit, in terms of photography linked to the institutionalisation of the corpse, the body, and the individual who loses his or her rights due to the search for reconstitution of a certain, say, legal truth.

On the other hand, in this tradition of Photography linked to criminal records, where the State has a certain control over the individual, this also concerns the way in which your work, in general, and specifically in this project, deals with Photography as a modern language, in as much that it is a language that has developed alongside several other emerging languages, such as psychoanalysis, laboratory science, criminal sciences, etc.

Photography, as a transversal discipline that is not only, nor above all, an artistic language, but which accompanies the advent of modernity, as a testimony and as the canvas on which the construction of modernity can be studied.

This question of photography as an artistic language is a far more recent question and I think your work will seek the fundamentals of Photography as an ontological and phenomenologically broader discipline, I don't know whether you agree?

EM - Postmodern critique is haunted by the abyss between sign and referent in the construction of meaning. And although this work invokes a certain degree of distrust in the representative possibilities of language, I'm also interested in the history of photography, the history of the criminal sciences, the documental model. Throughout the recent history of forensic science, photography has played a central role in contributing to fundamental developments in this field of knowledge. In the early days of Photography, it was mainly used for cataloguing and educational purposes, wherein the photographer simultaneously played the role of retoucher / illustrator, due to the technical limitations of the medium (long exposure times and poor quality lenses often resulted in poor focusing and low quality reproductions). Early photographers working in the medical-forensic field were required to retouch their photographs with painting techniques, with the aim of bridging the deficiencies and making the images sharper and sometimes totally hybrid (albeit realistic). This technical procedure was reflected in the strengthening of the idea of Photography as an auxiliary medium for Painting, and is evident in many of the photographs kept in the INMLCF's archive. This project demonstrates such processes, establishes such connections. Although evidence-based documentation has always been central to forensic science, the value of photography has increased over recent years, with growing concerns about quality control in laboratories, security of evidence, and the fact that, in many cases, there is a long period of time, sometimes various years, between the initial recording of the evidence and its presentation in court. So the medium with which I am working has a long track record, an important socio-cultural

dimension that I prefer to refer to and highlight rather than to ignore or downplay it. This concern is clearly reflected in the texts I have selected, which accompany the images. They are texts that reveal the points of encounter, and of collision, in the history and evolution of photography, of the criminal sciences, of journalism. They are texts that accentuate the shared history of these different disciplines. Fiction, the work's conceptual dimension, is but a method. It's a way of approaching and narrating painful, arduous life stories, that would otherwise be difficult to understand and represent. It's a way of questioning our own modes of appropriation and rationalisation of such subjects. One concrete example is the photographs featuring a post-it. There is a set of photos in the project, that are central to the theme, work and exhibition, which represent a post-it, or its color and form. In certain cases, the post-it (or its simulacrum) is printed directly onto the photograph, in other cases it floats on top of the image, and of course there is also a set of photographs of post-its. The post-it refers to a letter of departure, a note that a man left to his family before committing suicide in Portugal, I think in 2013. Of all the forensic material that I had access to during my incursion into INMLCF, this was one of the objects that moved me the most. I was struck by the transient nature of the medium and the finality of the message contained therein. The representative strategies I described above enabled me to communicate such observations and reflections, without disclosing the content of the note itself. Moreover, I could also establish a kind of metaphor between the post-it, as an inadequate medium for communicating a message of this nature; and photography as an inadequate medium for communication (in general). This dialectic – between concealment and revelation – is implicit throughout the project. The work invests in the rhetoric and tradition of the document, but it enunciates a broader understanding of the subject. Photography as an artistic language, has only gained some institutional recognition through the deconstruction or destruction of its ontological significance, given the role it later began to play in documenting the performance and conceptual artistic practices of the 1960s. Since then the theoretical discourse concerning photography has evolved, but there are themes that persist or continue to be important – for example, questions about referentiality, indexicality, materiality and its significance. What I think has always been absent from this debate is to understand how photography is influenced by other media, how the processes of different artistic practices contribute to the understanding of the represented image, or how the physicality of the medium and its social and cultural properties can transform knowledge. This reminds me of the first attempt to define Photography, which also occurred in 1966, by the then Director of Photography of MOMA – John Szarkowski. He proposed five distinct categories, all somewhat problematic: “The Frame”, “The Detail”, “Time”, “Vantage Point”, and “The Thing Itself”. In fact it is “The Thing Itself” that interests me the most, because this implies examining the fluid and evolutionary nature of Photography.

NF - Just to clarify, you say that it's "The Thing Itself" that interests you the most.

EM - Yes, because the other four categories seem to directly invoke camera-related procedures, the mechanics of photography. "The Thing Itself" is a category that deals with the subject, the photographic subject, and views photography in its complex relations with the world and other media, in its failures in terms of representations and meanings. "The Thing Itself" prompts a dialogue with Lacan's theory of sublimation of "the Thing". At the level of thinking, imagination and language, "the Thing" represents a vacuum, an absence, an empty space beyond the representative possibilities of the image. These are elements which Photography can only approach. The issue at stake here is not the gap between reality and its representation, but the fact that reality results from complex historical and cultural processes. Reality is already contaminated by our language and the world of signs. In this sense, photography cannot reproduce reality, because reality is already a photograph. Therefore, the only way to access the real world is through the artificial, through something that is constructed, which reveals the act of creation through its reconstruction. For these reasons, I want to propose a new model for Photography, a hybrid model, which involves dismantling, or deconstructing, our photographic experience, the way we relate to Photography. One of my main arguments is that the photographic image can be dissociated from its referent, from the spatio-temporal and authorial frameworks that govern it; and continue to be relevant. Photography does not just need to be a lens-based art of space or a shutter based art of time. It would be great if we could think of Photography as an experience that does not attenuate, control or limit experience, as a medium semi-independent of evidence and memory, capable of revealing the complexities of our perceptual system, the obscure relationships that lie beneath surface. It is in this sense that fiction has always been important in my work, and in this particular case, why the archive is important, because both of them help us achieve this goal. Artistic practices of photography have continued to proliferate over recent decades, but I'm not sure whether we have witnessed comparable growth in photographic theory. It doesn't seem to me that a new paradigm of thinking about Photography has been developed. Photography is still primarily analysed in "semi-modified" or ideological terms. There has to be a new focus on the materialistic and dialectical framework of the medium, on the exploration of long neglected categories; such as truth, history and agency. It is necessary to rethink the position of the document and understand contemporary photography as more than a mere consequence of postmodernism.

NF - In this exhibition you simultaneously use images that have been collected, reworked and re-proposed, in some cases transposed to other media or supports, and images produced by you, that you later articulate with those which you have appropriated, to the point of being confused in the manner that they are presented. However we clearly know, without any ambiguity, that some are your own works, whereas others are not.

In your project there is this dual dimension of the image, a supposedly cold, objective image, and the other in which there lingers a certain nostalgia, per-

haps linked to this parallax that harbors the personification of the lifeless body, without being devoid of its soul. In this case we encounter a dual temperature of the image which caught my attention.

EM - It is a well-known fact that death has a long history in Art, and that Photography has always been inextricably related to death. Roland Barthes's narrative in *Camera Lucida* to a large extent relates to this. In this text, Barthes discusses an old photograph of himself as a child next to his recently deceased mother (known as the Winter Garden Photograph) and later a photograph of Lewis Payne (taken in 1865 by Alexander Gardiner) in his prison cell, awaiting execution. Barthes reached the conclusion that every photograph contains a sign of its death, that at the heart of the photograph lies the message 'This was'. For Barthes the photograph revives the image of something that has been lost, makes present that which is absent. The trauma of the death of Barthes's mother and his growing dissatisfaction with the critical discourses of sociology, semiology, and psychoanalysis, led him to seek certainty and pre-linguistic unity, the conviction that his own emotions are a primordial source of perception. It is through intimacy and regressive reveries that Barthes encounters his idea of photographic realism. But despite the ontological singularity of *Camera Lucida*, Photography is not an alchemical emanation. So, in a purely ideological and conceptual sense, in terms of the photographic experience, I tried to move the work away from the nostalgic fantasies proposed by Barthes. But the truth is that consciousness of death and of temporal finitude introduces the awareness of loss into our lives: the loss of certainty, of security, and ultimately of identity and the self. Our uncomfortable social relationship with death, tragedy, and control raises important questions, which in turn give rise to other questions about epistemology, metaphysics, and the idea we have of ourselves. Psychoanalysis says that the experience of loss creates a desire, the will to find something that we believe we once possessed. Therefore, it concerns a certain absence that accompanies us our whole life, of something that always lies beyond our reach. Therefore, the sense of loss experienced at the photographic level, replaces the sense of physical loss. Examining death propels us deeper into the exploration of unstable boundaries and limits. And so, at a procedural sense, in terms of the materiality and physicality of the image, then yes, I admit that there is a certain nostalgia. Photograms are a prime example of this. These images result from the placement of objects (in this case letters of departure) in direct contact with the photographic paper, creating what Rosalind Krauss describes as "phantasmatic traces". Man Ray called them "a residue of the experience...the undisturbed ashes of an object consumed by flames". What seems to give the photogram its specificity in this melancholic discourse is the apparently irreducible vision of the referent. It is the suggestion that what occurred, only occurred once. This was also central to Barthes' conception of the temporality of photography developed in *Camera Lucida*. In this sense, I think there is indeed a certain nostalgia that runs through some images. With respect to the image of the dead body, it is in this type of imagery that the conceptual tensions and perceptual possibilities of

photography gain a special complexity. It is in this necessarily contradictory field, between concealment and revelation, invisibility and visibility, being and appearing, absent body and present image, that we can begin to understand death and the dead body as visual themes.

*NF - In a book entitled *Mestres da verdade invisível (Masters of Invisible Truth)*, which was based on a PhD thesis, the anthropologist, writer and poet Luís Quintais used forensic science to dissect the subterranean, rhetorical and circular relationship that it establishes with institutions' control over the individual and, ultimately, over the individual's body, such as imprisonment and other forms of subjugation.*

Forensic science is very close to Photography in as much that it's a practice that intends to make visible, represent or demonstrate, create material evidence on the basis of signs, and which attempts to objectify something which is subjective by nature or unveil the thread of events to reconstitute that which has already occurred.

It seems to me that in this project you are working with the issue of invisibility, or the part of invisibility that the image brings when it becomes visible, when it is manifested. So your work involves so many strategies of meta-representation, omission of the image, of erasure of the image. As far as I'm aware, you bring previous images to this project that deal with very basic issues of Photography, from a technical perspective, such as overexposure, staging and various other devices, in order to deal with this question of the truth of Photography, which in this context is obviously one of the key issues. Within this logic, but in a different way, your choices of drawn or painted photographs are very interesting, because there is also a kind of assumption here that Photography cannot achieve everything, because as a more objective medium it often gives us an insufficient idea of the materiality of reality. I would like you to talk about this question of truth, objectivity and the invisible elements contained in the photographic image, especially in this context of forensic science.

EM - I can perfectly recall this book, which you lent me a while back. I always start from the assumption that Photography is an insufficient, deficient medium, a medium that is defined by absence, which can be analysed more by what it excludes, or by what it is not able to include, than by what it represents. The photographic image is a singularly inadequate means of communicating complex thought. The photograph, by default, can only point to something. As David Company explains, it cannot tell us why and what is missing, only that it's missing. The work assumes this and that's why it resorts to the wide gamut of meta-representation strategies that you mentioned. I therefore hope that each individual image, or each set of images, reveals a process of thinking about Photography: the way I think and articulate the images I produce and how I foresee the gaze and reaction of their future spectator and consumer. The way we see something always presupposes other people's gaze. The gaze of the Other is almost always embodied in our own point of view. Lacan argues that any

psychoanalytic theory of vision must commence with the fact that before we look, we are looked at. Therefore, in addition to the observer and the object (in this case the photograph) one must also consider the person observing the observer. This is an inseparable whole, which implies a certain dynamic and interdependence of our visual devices. A process that can only function in extended time, beyond the exhibition space, beyond the pages of the book. Living history can never be told in a linear fashion. It has to be told through fragments, clues, using a broader time frame. Wasn't it Freud who said – our interests are always concentrated in the parts and not in the whole. It's possible to draw an interesting parallel with the world of legal medicine, wherein individuals who experience highly traumatic events almost always describe them using trivial and nebulous details. The image of the whole is inaccessible and instead it is the small visual data that replaces what cannot be visualized. When working in a context such as the legal-medical field, where evidence is everything, work must also follow this programmatic line of enquiry. At least as a starting point. But even to make sense of the documental dimension, the obvious elements, it's necessary to forge a myriad range of links and connections between documents, photographs and forensic objects, investigate hundreds of case files, study how certain cases were portrayed in the media. I assumed various roles during this project: that of forensic scientist, sociologist, anthropologist, philosopher, linguist, historian, archivist, conservator, artist, publisher. Thus, even the objective requires a degree of mediation, intervention, appropriation. The key challenge was to try to proceed through the margins of evidence and invisibility, documental and conceptual, without cancelling these dualisms, and instead revealing their internal tensions. It's easy to reveal something, but it's far more difficult to adopt a more contained language. The decision not to show much of the material to which I had access, its content, wasn't taken by the INMLCF, it was my decision – although there are internal regulations and protocols that I would have to follow in any case, especially with regard to safeguarding the anonymity of the persons portrayed and the medical image. For example, there is a diptych in the project that portrays a young woman in tears and a photograph of a sheet of negative film.. The images are accompanied by a text published in an American newspaper at the end of the 19th century about the murder of Katie Conway and her mother. The text explains that the police who investigated the case decided to produce enlargements of the photographs of Katie's eyes, because they hoped the figure of her aggressor would be imprinted on them. There is an immediate relationship with the portrait, because in both cases the images focus on the young woman's eyes. In the case of the photographic film, the interpretation is more limited. This image is a destabilizing component in this diptych. However, the story behind the photograph of the sheet of film is incredibly interesting. But it's not revealed either in the book or in the exhibition itself, only in contexts such as these – in this type of conversation, and in the guided tours I provide to the exhibitions. For me it is very important that a project of this nature withholds some secrets, doesn't reveal

everything. In fact, the act of looking incorporates an inherent action of exclusion or concealment. I recently read a very interesting book by Darian Leader entitled *Stealing the Mona Lisa*, which explores the historic robbery of the Mona Lisa, in early 1911 in order to analyse our relationship with art and our own gaze. When the painting was stolen there was an influx of visitors to the Louvre to see the empty space left behind, including people who had never gone to the museum before or who had never shown any interest in art. In this book, he mentions that Freud's early ideas about scopophilia, the pleasure of looking, also revolve around this notion of exclusion and that our visual curiosity is organized around something which is hidden. There must always be something that escapes us. This exclusion, this absent feature, unleashes our curiosity – in an attempt to complete the image by revealing its hidden parts. In Freud's opinion our field of vision is always incomplete, and awakens our desire to see what can never be seen. The idea that our immersion in the visual world implies excluding something also explains why photography follows this same logic. This makes sense to me. But to satisfy the curiosity of those who may eventually read this interview, let me explain the narrative behind the aforementioned image. In the course of my forays into the Institute's activities, I had the opportunity to witness autopsies, observe techniques and methods of ongoing investigations, visualize all kinds of material related to historical crime scenes, etc. The film in question represents a crime scene. Although I took this photograph I never intended to present it to the public. What I was mainly interested in communicating was precisely the tensions and anxieties I felt about this image, as well as my rationale as I debated the meaning of an image of this nature and what we should retain, and reveal. So instead of processing the film of the crime scene and present its photograph, I decided to photograph the respective negative, exposing it to light, thereby fogging it and rendering it obsolete. So here is a very interesting conceptual exercise. This methodology is repeated in several images. It is within these tensions, in these oscillations between the visible and invisible, present and past, dead body and living body, subject and its image that the discursive lines of the project are established.

NF - Certain decisions were taken while putting together the exhibition which I think are quite relevant. They are related to an exercise of containment, retention, a refusal to spectacularise the materials that you collected so admirably and lucidly. How do you reveal a secret? That's the basic paradox. On the one hand you have to reveal, on the other hand you have to find strategies to keep certain things secret. Finally, how do you talk about the negative in this project, how do you talk about disappearance? What is disturbing in the INMLCF and also in the language that, emanates from these places after death, is to realize that the surviving vestiges no longer have any intimacy or connection with the human being who suffered a violent death – in short, we're talking about a type of investigation that, uses vestiges to try to ascertain the truth of events, but which in fact constitutes a parallel reality to the reality of human life. The endeavour's anthropological burden is progressively lost. As the forensic investigation

progresses and processes and the vestiges are concentrated in the archives, the contact with human beings is lost. This was the vertiginous sentiment that struck me most in this place enunciated within your project.

But let's not digress, I would like to focus our conversation on the montage strategies. Montage is very important both for the language of forensic science and that of exhibitions. Strategies of exhibitions are not only documental, they can also be fictional. I would like you to talk about these two strategies: firstly, the links between the image and text, which are interlinked but don't correspond in reality; secondly, the construction of your visual compositions, in which you often use images from other projects: sets of images, slideshows, series etc.

EM - Despite producing a comprehensive dossier containing all the possible information about each image, I soon realised that there could be no direct relationship between the texts and images. The image couldn't depend on the text and vice versa. In other words, I had to rethink and deconstruct my own working process, to rethink and deconstruct the relations between the images and texts.

I viewed this as a kind of complex jigsaw puzzle, in which it was necessary to separate all the pieces, change the shapes and create a new puzzle using the same pieces. From the outset I thought that it was absolutely crucial that the texts could be inter- changeable, from context to context, from exhibition to exhibition, from the exhibition to the book. It was important that they could accompany different images and that the different combinations of the images could be flexible (up to a certain point).

In many cases the texts seem to complement the images, they seem to exploit visual elements represented in them, but at times they also contradict them, they propel us towards new sensorial and cognitive connections. Thus, text and image are inter- linked, but at the same time they free themselves from fixed historical chronologies. This interruption offers an alternative view of how we can understand and conceptualize the history of the image. The literary digressions, trompe-l'oeil and imaginary dimensions of the work resonate long after we see the image or text. This is the broader time frame that I mentioned previously, and also the reason why I decided that it was important to retrieve 'historical' images from my own archive, and produce new photographs conceived as a visual, narrative and conceptual counterpoint. However, I must also confess that the presentation at the CIAJG helped me determine and resolve some of the visual compositions that I had been trying out for several months. Since the exhibition at the CIAJG there are more constant groups of images, certain points of reference around which the project is built. All of this is a process of evolution of the work, both in terms of the relationship of the various visual groups, and their different presentation platforms. The main challenge was to create a multidimensional rhythm for the exhibition that oscillated between objective, factual, poetic, metaphorical, conceptual approaches. With this, I tried to narrate a set of individual, very particular stories, without losing sight of the overall narrative, without ever forgetting the whole.

NF - Finally, I would like to talk about two issues in this exhibition that we planned to include in the project from the outset: on the one hand, the drawings, photographs and materials produced in the framework of the INMLCF; and on the other hand, a set of materials that are photographed as objectively as possible, using a standardised repetitive documental typology, both in terms of scale, the background, and the level of lighting – a set of instruments used to kill people, or to commit suicide: tools, weapons, ropes, nooses etc. I found that this part of the project was one of the most interesting aspects of the inclusion of these materials, in addition to all the resonances that I established with the project's other images, either via contrasts or otherwise. The images have a certain inconclusive aspect, i.e. in relation to what images should normally be – as clear as possible, as conclusive as possible. Here the nature of the image it- self is less stable, it seems that things float in the air. In this project you seem to question, in various ways, this objective nature of the image and the extreme limitations of Photography as a documental process. This is bewildering, because it's difficult to find several preconceptions in this project when we first come into contact with it. We ultimately ask – it's a project about what – it's a project about photographs, it's a project that uses photography as a way of thinking about the limits of Photography, it's a project about human nature? I definitely think that the key to decoding these questions lies in the title, it's a project about Photography and human life as a frontier, as something that exists between limits, between being and not being, between seeing and not seeing, between visibility and invisibility, between past and present. This makes it a very interesting work between the past and the future, a very important work on an issue that is absolutely key when we talk about Photography as an idea, as a language and as a territory, which you explore very subtly in this project. Photography as a materialization of the present. To a certain extent the present is what we, especially in western society, don't know how to live. Paradoxically, it's the time frame that we have the greatest difficult in living with. In other words, we live with the past by historical inertia, we know how to plan for the future. For example, you worked with the future in the European Space Agency. I think that work was about anticipation of the future, about this desire for the future. But in this case, curiously, I think you're working with the present tense. This is the main issue that I try to explore at the CIAJG, because the core issue at stake isn't the objects, nor the images on display. It's the way that the living bodies and the consciences that inhabit that space will interpret what is there. I think that in this work there is a subtle difference in relation to others, there is strengthening of this idea that Photography is primarily linked to an experience of the present, in that moment of time, in spite of the fact that it re- transports us, in kaleidoscopic fashion, to all the temporal dimensions of reality and imagination.

EM - The centre of gravity of documentary photography is not fixed or immovable. It changes as people's expectations and convictions change or are challenged and questioned.

Everything that, in another context, would be understood as purely or

unquestionably objective, acquires greater fluidity in this case. By forging so many connections and disconnections, the work restructures our imagination. It opens up new paths, and creates new passages and transfers – between reality and its image, between reality and fiction, between text and photography, between past, present and future, between visibility and invisibility. Perhaps the objective becomes relational precisely for this reason – by becoming aware of the relationships of the gaze, of the perceptual act being problematized in a destabilizing and obsessive manner. This is resolved in the present tense. Therefore, the work places the public at the threshold of the past, of history, of photography, but also in the present day and the future. Bill Viola argues that the highest point one can achieve when interpreting an artwork is the suspension of disbelief. For me, the highest point that I can aspire to, as an artist, is when all our certainties and expectations crumble and we perceive the complex relationships behind the gaze and the constructed aspects of our perception. I believe that this project brings us a duplicity, not only in terms of how we relate to photography through reality, but how we relate to the structures of reality through photography itself and, by extension, through art. It's a project that highlights the limits of our language codes. It declares that any image can be manipulated in order to support all and any narratives. The very starting point for the project, its title, circumscribes all these ideas (at this point, I'm referring to the title of the work rather than the title of the exhibition). It focuses on the extreme limitations of Photography as a documental process, on the act of perception as a highly complex philosophical placement. I am often asked what the word Siloquy means in the title, *Silóquios e Solilóquios sobre a Morte, a Vida e Outros Interlúdios* (Siloquies and Soliloquies on Death, Life and Other Interludes). I first came to this word in *Adventures in Pataphysics* by the surrealist and playwright Alfred Jarry. The word itself does not exist in the Oxford English Dictionary. Although Jarry never really describes what a Siloquy represents, my interpretation is this: whereas a Soliloquy is a device that allows the author / actor to speak to himself, communicating his inner thoughts to an audience (a sort of externalised monologue), I see a Siloquy as the internal monologue that precedes the externalised monologue. In other words, it is almost like the process that precedes consciousness, thought in its "purest" form, more honest and contradictory, prior to being filtered by human language, culture and consciousness. It is where we are confronted with our dialectical impetus. Siloquy is the model for the understanding of death and, correlatively, of photography. This parallel refers to the difficulty or disjunction that exists in the conceptualization and communication or representation, of reality. The gulf between reality and image, referent and meaning, is not a symptom of language, but the condition of its existence. Therefore language, in particular Photography, distorts, limits our experience of the world. Both the act of photographing and photography are atrophic devices, which filter and attenuate our experience of the world. But paradoxically photography endows us with an imaginary sense of totality vis-à-vis the fragmented experience of reality.

NF - We have this paradox: Photography, and the image in general, always transports us to a place that is not necessarily the place where we see the image. What is disturbing in this work, given the nature of the images you show us, is this kind of vertigo in which we permanently live, i.e. we always live subject to a semi-conscious, semi-unconscious threat of death. We always live on this frontier. And for this very reason we permanently live between states of nostalgia and euphoria, that are intrinsic to the human condition.

The way you present this exhibition and these materials is disturbing, because you are conjuring up this kind of reflection, in the sense of mirroring the presential or phantasmagoric elements in Photography. But this exhibition, these materials, reveal a kind of constant failure in our everyday experience: the inability to inhabit the present. This is a very Western sensibility, because it's related to a kind of metaphysical vertigo, with the nostalgic manner with which we inhabit and view the world. There, precisely in that place. The resonance of this is very strong, because as spectators, when faced by a great majority of images that present or represent human bodies, we are summoned to an experience of death. But this dimension, this kind of frontier that we are talking about, is that fragile surface that you represent so well in the letters that you photograph head on. This is truly the underlying theme of the exhibition – the idea of frontier – as the subtitle of the exhibition captures so astutely – the place of Photography is the place of the dead – and therefore this involves a subtle summoning of the spectator's perception to the exact moment in which he projects himself into those images, in which he forgets his own body. This involves a genuine work into the ontology of Photography and how modern-day Photography has lost its substantial dimension, and makes us live with ghosts, with images, with representations of ourselves. This exhibition also has a clearly political dimension in that it leads the spectator to think about himself and his perceptive consciousness. In this sense, it's a work that takes us beyond any materialization, it's not a work of a photographer, it's a work that is much broader than that. I don't know if there will be any substantial transformation here in your authorial project.

EM - This work inspires a dialogue between the concept of death and absence, and photography as a device that engenders disappearance and the search for the unattainable. The place of the dead is absolute, it is indisputable, as is the apparent bond of photography to the structures of the real. However, just as death throws us into the antinomies of perception and existence, towards exploration of limits and unstable geographies, etc., photography does precisely the same thing. Photography is a medium that is structured around conceptual tensions. This allows me to bring together different and contradictory temporalities and irresolvable strategies. Walter Benjamin says that the mere reflection of reality no longer communicates anything about reality. Siegfried Kracauer also argues that the surface coherence of the photograph needs to be destroyed, to reveal the underlying history, substance and idea. I believe that both thinkers were advocating the importance of constructed meaning built into the image. David Company also refers to an interesting idea; that our culture

often uses photography as a kind of substitute, a simulacrum, but very rarely encourages us to reflect on the significance and consequence of this act of substitution. More than ever, such reflections are essential topics for discussion. Although there are several points in common with my previous work, especially in terms of its self-reflective aspect, this work marks a significant transition in my creative trajectory. It's more ambitious. It explores photography in a more interdisciplinary manner. Although my interests have always gone far beyond Photography, interdisciplinarity has never been an active component in my artistic work. For example, I have always worked with sound recordings, but I have rarely used them in exhibitions, I have always written, I have always produced sculptural works, but I rarely felt the need to articulate these devices, these works, with my photographic work. But for whatever reason, in this particular context, I felt this need and I believe that it has changed my working methodology. It was the very theme that dictated this approach. Or maybe it's a matter of time. In this place, at this specific time, everything converged. As we discussed a few moments ago, I have been thinking more and more about a new model for Photography. I have been wondering whether photography can exist outside a relationship with that which it represents, i.e. independent of memory and evidence (or even evidence created from memory). Whether this invalidates its ability to communicate and address serious and complex issues, such as conflict, war, death – with all the associated epistemological, aesthetic, and ethical implications. I want to defend a hallucinatory experience (to use Barthes' term) of the image, an interdisciplinary model that looks for points of tension between documentation, abstraction, landscape, still life and figuration, and which does not dominate or limit experience, but instead reveals the complex relationships beneath the surface, behind the construction of meaning. What I am suggesting is that our photographic experience needs to be dismantled. We need to rethink the set of practices, relationships and structures with which we look and relate to photographs. We need to accept that our photographic experience can be fluid, contradictory, contingent, subjective, fragmentary. Photography cannot solely reproduce. It must restructure and unleash us on a different set of destinies and destinations. The photographic index should not be based solely on truth, history, the past, the point of origin but also on the present, on the new destinies and meanings that it engenders.

NF - There is a phrase in a short booklet on Photography, by Agamben, in which he proposes this description: photography in some way captures the Last Judgement; it represents the world as it appears on the last day. I think this could be a good conclusion to the conversation, albeit an inconclusive conclusion. Photography is, ultimately, something that is within us, it is a projection, an emanation and not something that is external to us. So I think that you, in this project, construct Photography as something that is interior, and not something that is external to us. Not as a visual matter, but as an unconscious matter, as a matter of thought. In that sense, Agamben's phrase, not only by the theme of the project, is a phrase that matches the grandeur, sense of vertigo and madness

that this project represents. It is a project that is not based solely on the search for a response, but on how questions could be asked. From this perspective, the project involves an experimental side that commences with knowledge to deconstruct the project, and then re-propose new forms of perception. Supposedly, everything that represents the ambition of the dead archive.

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