The Empty Place: A Lacuna for Possibilities

Ljung Grüner-Hegge, Anna Birgitta

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The Empty Place

a lacuna for possibilities

Anna B. Ljung Grüner-Hegge

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Supervisor: Dr H.F. Westgeest

Second Reader: Dr S.A. Shobeiri

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Contact: abgh@icloud.com

To my supervisor Dr Helen Westgeest, for her mentorship, guidance, and patience.

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Introduction

"When some people travel they merely contemplate what is before their eyes. When I travel, I contemplate the processes of mutability"

- Paul Theroux, *The Last Train to Zona Verde. 2013.*

Such thoughts aptly describe the *flaneur*'s mindset, a concept coined by the 19th-century French poet Charles Baudelaire to describe the gentleman who ambles the urban environment. Baudelaire describes his *flaneur* as a "gentleman stroller of city streets" who understood that wanderings about town implied more than simply taking in what is immediately in front of one's eyes and noticing that things around you are changeable and mutable in the most minute and subtle ways. Baudelaire believed that the artist needed to become a "botanist of the sidewalk" in order to properly understand and portray the city.[1]

Just such a notion of subtle mutability had me spellbound when I came across the *New York Times* photo essay by Brazilian photographer Mauricio Lima in May of 2020. Executed during the height of the strict COVID lockdowns in Paris, Lima's essay was aptly titled *Atget's Paris, 100 Years Later* (Fig. 29).[2] Lima had traversed the city following in the steps of the French proto-documentarian photographer Eugène Atget with the objective of rephotographing the same empty streets that Atget had selected in the early 1900s. The empty places in the photographs seemingly have the ability to convey something which lay beyond what was physically captured inside the frame.

The main query of my research revolves around the meaningful application of empty places in Mauricio Lima's photographs as he retraces Eugéne Atget's steps during the height of the COVID pandemic in the spring of 2020. I intend to provide insights into the multiple roles and meaning the "empty place" can take on and convey in the series. My primary focus will be on Lima, and given the referentiality of his images, I will thus also be engaging with the work of Eugène Atget and the rich and seminal theoretical discourse surrounding his work. It is worth noting that I have also chosen to include a similar series of revisiting Atget's Paris, taken twenty years earlier than Lima, by American photographer Christopher Rauschenberg to add emphasis and clarity to my research. Although Rauschenberg does not

[1] Taylor, 2022.
[2] Nossiter, 2020. (A. Nossiter is the author of the contextualizing essay that accompanies the images by Atget and Lima).

contribute significantly in terms of new perspectives or concepts, he will serve as an interesting connector and stepping stone in the research because the uncanniness of the empty Parisian streets is a leitmotif, which likely stretches further back in its iconographical roots than even the work of Atget (Figs. 13-15). Interestingly, at first glance, all three series look as if they could have been taken at the end of the 19th century. In fact, none appears to have been taken in the interest of showing its own time.

Let me begin by briefly introducing the three photographers and their series to establish their relevance and my reasons for including them in the paper. The four sets of selected photographs are comprised of three images, each arranged in their temporal order of making (Figs. 1-12). To clarify, the first image in each of the four sets is by Atget (1900s), the second by Rauschenberg (1997/8), and the third by Lima (2020).

These series begin and work off the meticulously documented images of Paris executed by Atget from 1897 until his death in 1927. The photographs by the elder are part of a vast body of work, with the majority of images focusing on the empty urban landscapes of Paris. His quest was to preserve what was left of the "old Paris" that had mostly all disappeared due to the aggressive "Haussmannian" renovation which occurred during the late 19th century.

At the time Atget was photographing, there was still an ongoing push towards the commercialization of public spaces which followed the earlier laying of the large network of wide boulevards in lieu of the irregular and smaller streets which had characterized the "old Paris." The effects of these events led to displacement, causing sentiments of unsettlement and disorientation and, in turn, a yearning for the past for many artists and intellectuals. My research will focus on this "empty place" in the urban landscape of the "old Paris" which Atget systematically documented in those years, traversing the city at the break of dawn with his large format camera and tripod.

Given his status as "the iconic" documentarian of the "old Paris", it is perhaps not surprising that Christopher Rauschenberg looked specifically at Atget in his quest to find, revisit and re-document these nostalgic remnants of the metropolis. Defining Atget as "the greatest photographer of all time" and inspired by other re-photographers such as Mark Klett, Christopher Rauschenberg set off to walk in Atget's footsteps over a two-year period between 1997 and 1998 using an analog camera.[3]

[3] Rauschenberg, 2007.

Atget's Paris, 100 Years Later, was executed in 2020 by the Brazilian documentary photographer Mauricio Lima on his own initiative, followed by liaising with an editor at the *New York Times*. Upon arrival, the vacant urban landscapes he encountered immediately jarred his memory of Atget's work and what those images connoted. Lima's series was subsequently created for and published in the *New York Times* on the 27th of May, 2020. Traversing the city on his bicycle with his digital 35mm camera, Lima finished the project within a time span of only ten days. While Lima was specifically looking to retrace Atget's steps in Paris, it is important to note that his idea to rephotograph Atget's bare landscapes was initially sparked as a reaction to the empty streets of the COVID lockdowns implemented by the French government.

In my analysis, I will be approaching Lima's series from three different perspectives with regard to the application and meaning of the empty places in his photographs. The first chapter of my research ponders the concepts behind the meaningful empty places created first by Atget and then rephotographed by Rauschenberg and Lima, respectively. In this chapter, I will investigate the ways in which meaning can be imparted and projected onto photographs of empty places. The theoretical framework of the first section of chapter one will explore various means of tapping into and engaging the unconscious for such endeavors and will include Walter Benjamin's theory of the *Optical Unconscious* and his views on the work of Atget. I will also engage with Freud's notion of the uncanny as embraced by the Surrealists. The second section will explore the creatively activating wanderings of the urban space, such as Baudelaire's *flaneur,* the Surrealist's *errance*, and the Situationist's *derive/drift* of the 1950s. Lastly, I will engage with Michel Foucault's concept of *heterotopias*, little worlds within worlds, vis-á-vis the lacunas created in the process of comparing the three series.

The second chapter will explore the work of Lima through an in-depth reflection on what it means to rephotograph uncanny empty urban places. Specifically, I aim to explore how Lima's images engage with appropriation, time compression, and the ensuing anachronism. For clarification, I will look at the work of other rephotographers and appropriators, such as Sherrie Levine and Mark Klett. The way in which each photographer worked, the equipment used, and the resulting images produced will also be examined. I will explore whether certain choices have the ability to influence meaning and even be used as tools in the demarcation of authorship.

Chapter three will focus on Lima's empty rephotographs through the perspective of what is referred to as the genre of late photography or aftermath photography. I will touch upon issues such as the shift, by some artists, from using photography purely as a modernist

descriptive and informative medium to one exploring that which it cannot do. Most critically, however, this chapter will examine the significance of presenting Lima's photographic series in combination "with" text and captions as embedded within the *New York Times* article. The question which aims to be answered in this chapter is how and in which ways the addition of captions and text affects the reading and insights into the photographs of Lima's series. For clarification, I will look to theorists and art historians such as Jean Baudrillard to explore the meaning of the medium's function as a "simulacrum" and thus loss of referents, art historian Donna West Brett's reflection on the "blind fields" and what lies beyond the frame, as well as input from recent scholars such as Ali Shobeiri who reflects on the function of text "with" image.

In the three-perspective examination introduced above I hope to embark the reader on a fruitful journey into some impactful applications of the "empty place" through the medium of photography. It is a quest in which I aim to discover additional possibilities in the uses and significances of the "empty place" through an in-depth investigation of Mauricio Lima's series.

Chapter One: The Meaningful Empty Place

Photographs of corporeally bereft urban places appear to be willing and open spaces onto which photographers and theorists look both to impart and find meaning. The qualities embedded in the medium itself seem particularly well suited to this endeavor. Hence, this first chapter will investigate the ways in which meaning can be imparted and projected onto photographs of empty places. In the first section of the chapter, I will examine the significance of empty place and what it can connote by looking at the Freudian concept of the uncanny. Consequently, I will proceed to reflect on Walter Benjamin's concept of the *Optical Unconscious* to examine the photograph's ability to reveal that which cannot be seen and define potential foul play that may have taken place. The examination of the disorienting acts of wandering engaged with by the Surrealists and Situationists as well as Thomas Struth's notion of *Unconscious Place* will shed light on the medium's ability to awaken and engage the viewer by means of the use of empty places. Through an investigation and use of selective framing by photographers, I will examine what it means to experience Michel Foucault's worlds within worlds or *heterotopias* as one embarks on a wandering or flaneur-ship of city sites moving from one uncanny place to another.

1.1 In the Steps of Atget

> "*Uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression…the 'uncanny' is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar*"
>
> ~Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny,* 1919.

Upon first examination of the photographs in the three series (Figs. 1-12), we are first and foremost struck by the almost complete absence of the corporeal form in what we know to be one of the world's most bustling urban metropolises. Paris is familiar to us, yet these versions of her urban landscapes are at odds with the mental expectations we carry with us. The empty place in Lima's images may be an expected result of the enforced COVID lockdown of 2020. However, there is also a reference to empty places from 100 years ago because Lima actively sought to rephotograph the work of Atget in search of the atmosphere of Paris's streets in the early 1900s. In this process, he plays with the photograph's ability to connote multiple meanings and different historical and socio-political locations.

Upon closer reading of the second set of images titled *Quai des Grands Augustins* (Figs. 4-6), we are on a quay along the river bank of the Seine in the middle of Paris. Our eyes wander the frames in search of life; however, what we encounter instead, is a stillness born out of the selective framing of the images. This selective framing is an act of decontextualization. Because there is no sound, smell, touch, or taste, in fact, most of the senses disappear, leaving us with a stillness of a very literal and eerie nature.

What we are struck with is, in fact, a sense of what the German psychologist Sigmund Freud referred to as the *uncanny* (*das Unheimliche*) because what we encounter is familiar yet strange all at the same time. When Freud wrote his essay in 1919 on the uncanny, he defined the term as a fear that exists when what we know as familiar suddenly appears strange and unfamiliar.[4] The notion of the uncanny became a concept of interest for some artists at the time, particularly for the Surrealists who took great interest in Freud's analytical model, which defined the human mind as comprised of a conscious, preconscious, and unconscious layer. The nature of this uncanny is entirely subjective and based upon the viewer's own experiences. Therefore, it haunts each one to varying degrees depending on what they bring with them from their past and temporal grounding.[5] In fact, the French poet André Breton, who published *The Surrealist Manifesto* in 1924, looked upon the unconscious mind as the true fountain of imagination. According to Breton, an artist's ability to access this normally untapped inner source had the potential to elevate their work to the highest possible level of creativity.[6]

Much of Atget's ongoing appeal to scholars and artists was likely to do with his photographs seemingly having the ability to tap into our unconscious. It is, in fact, this very emptiness of Atget's photographs, drawing on our unconscious notion of the uncanny, which prompted German philosopher Walter Benjamin's famous remark about the iconic photographer in his seminal text "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" of 1935.

> It has quite justly been said of Atget that he photographed the streets of Paris in the early 20th century like scenes of crime. The scene of a crime, too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing

[4] Freud, 2003 [1919], 124.
[5] Cherry, 2020, 4.
[6] Breton, 1969 [1924], 10.

evidence. With Atget, photographs become standard evidence for historical occurrences and acquire a hidden political significance... They stir the viewer; he feels challenged by them in a new way.[7]

Benjamin was not the first to define crime scenes in Atget's urban landscapes. He only made his remark after having read the introductory essay by Camille Recht to the German version of the book *Atget: Photographe de Paris*, which came out in 1930, where she compares the photographs to documents of crime scenes (eine Polizeiphotographie am Tatort gemahnend').[8] Apparently, the invocation of a scene of malfeasance was already a common reference to Atget's work, as early as December 1928, Albert Valentin, an editor at the Belgian journal *Verietés* wrote:

> …on closer inspection those dead-end streets in the outlying neighbourhoods, those peripheral districts that his lens recorded, constituted the natural theatre for violent death, for melodrama, and they were so inseparable from such matters that Louis Feuillade [the creator of the serial film version of the Fantômas crime stories which were very popular in France] and his disciples – at a time when studio expenses were what was skimped on – employed them as settings for their serials.[9]

What was it then that allowed for such speculation of crimes having taken place in the "empty places" of Atget's work? Benjamin felt a visual and cognitive process was potentially possible for the viewer in the medium of photography. In his analysis and writings about Atget's photographs in "Little History of Photography", Benjamin posits that "it is another nature that speaks to the camera rather than to the eye; other above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to one informed by the unconscious."[10] He goes on to elucidate that it is through the medium of photography that we discover the existence of what he coined as the *Optical Unconscious*. According to West Brett, Benjamin held that photographs have the ability to capture images which escape natural optics and unmask that which cannot be seen, revealing histories present in their depth and beyond the

[7] Benjamin, 1969 [1935], 8.
[8] Campany, 2009, 12.
[9] Ibid. (Origional source was published by Valentin, A. in *Variétés*. Brussels, December 1928. See bib.).
[10] Benjamin, 2008 [1931], 278.

frame.[11] In other words, we as viewers fill the empty space with what we imagine has happened before the clicking of the shutter and that which lies beyond the frame the photographer has chosen for us.

We also find an important clue as to why Atget became so popular with the Surrealists in Walter Benjamin's "Little History of Photography", in which the author credits Atget as a precursor of Surrealist photography.[12] For Benjamin, Atget's images had the potential to exceed their function as mere documents because this was for Benjamin photography's O*ptical Unconscious,* and he particularly valued the Surrealist's interrogation of the boundaries that existed between art and documentary.

However, according to art historian Molly Nesbit, Atget apparently saw himself more as a documentarian, claiming to make photographs with the purpose of selling them to clients and institutions, describing his images as "documents for artists" rather than as artistic works.[13] Yet, he was to make a strong artistic impact on his contemporaries. We know Atget's studio was on the same street in Montparnasse as that of the Surrealist artist Man Ray, who apparently encountered the work of Atget as early as 1923 and was immediately impacted by it. We know this because Man Ray purchased four prints from the photographer in 1926 and reproduced them in *La Revolution Surrealiste* (LRS). Atget's image titled *During the Eclipse* was used as the cover for this issue of the magazine.[14] What is interesting is that Man Ray, who holds a historical place within Surrealism,[15] whose own unsettling work was defined and depended on heavy darkroom manipulation, would take an interest in the straightforward, unmanipulated, and seemingly objective documentary work of Atget.

His appeal to the Surrealists likely had a great deal to do with the activation this sense of disorientating "empty places" provided for the viewer. In Atget's images, a viewer could indeed, for example, project and feel the sense of displacement, disorientation, and alienation created by the "Haussmannian" reorganization, whose effects were ongoing and on the minds of many Surrealists at the time. These issues had become concerns and points of focus for the Surrealists in the years to come. By the early 1920s, the Surrealists had become influential within Montparnasse's creative community and had begun voicing their concerns. As French Surrealist poet Louis Aragon wrote in *Le Paysan de Paris* (*Paris Peasant:* first published in 1924 in installments in the *Revue Européenne*) with regards to the urban invasion: "I have

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[11] West Brett, 2016, 78.
[12] Benjamin, 2008 [1931], 285.
[13] Nesbit, 1992.
[14] MacFarlane, 2010,17.
[15] Fuller, 1976-1977, 138.

never in my life unleashed such consternation (feeling of anxiety/dismay, at something unexpected)."[16] Large areas of Montparnasse were being destroyed to accommodate the new subway line. In *Le Paysan de Paris* the Métro line is a "giant rodent", devouring whole blocks of houses and gashing open the undergrowth of the two arcades about to be destroyed.[17]

Atget's function as a documentarian/recorder of the "old Paris" thus set him up as the perfect prototype for the Surrealists. He also had a distinct advantage in gaining access as he was much closer to the "people" due to his place in society and left-leaning activities. Nesbit commented that Atget's specious images of the proletariat were able to filter through the bourgeois cliches. Being of the proletariat class himself allowed him immediate access to their lives and surroundings.[18] This would have been an access that someone like surrealist poet Louis Aragon for example, was not privileged to. In fact, Nesbit describes Aragon as "a bourgeois poseur slumming it in the Passage de l'Opera."

When we examine the three series and move between the temporally disparate photographs (Figs. 1-12) we are experiencing what can be described as a kind of visual meandering or *flaneury,* an act comprised of the layering of unseen and unsettling experiences. To clarify, *flaneury* is a leisurely rambling process where one's goal is to soak up otherwise overlooked details of the urban scenery, a tradition that can be traced back to the upper class with idle time on their hands. The French poet Charles Baudelaire referred to these 19th-century idle wanderers as "connoisseurs of the street" and coined the concept of the "flaneur" in 1863. *Flaneury* is about the artist who does not stay in the studio but walks through the city to observe and record.

The Surrealist took to the unsettling potential of meandering the uncanny street because it had the exciting prospect of activating the viewer in a kind of dreamlike experience drawing off the unconscious, which, for them, held our untapped creativity. However, our visual journey, when viewing the three series, is darker and more alienating than that traditionally associated with Baudelaire's more aesthetic act of *flaneury*. As I will now examine, our experience may share more similarities with later derivatives of the act of *flaneury*.

[16] Roe, 2018, 142.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Nesbit, 1992, 7.

The Surrealists explored their own version or derivative of *flaneury,* a notion which they referred to as *errance*. Interestingly, according to an exhibition at the Wallace Gallery at Columbia University in 2002, Man Ray purchased forty images from Eugene Atget in 1926, some of which he bound in a decorated album, now part of the George Eastman Collection in Rochester.[19] The album constructed by Man Ray presents a diverse documentary account of the Paris Street between 1899 and 1926 and was intended as an image record of the Surrealist practice of *errance,* or aimless wandering through urban space. [20] Man Ray's album and other images on loan from Rochester became part of an important exhibition curated by art historian Susan Laxton. The title of the exhibition and accompanying essay, *Paris as Gameboard: Man Ray's Atgets,* marks an important exploration into Atget as an inspiring source and influence for the Surrealists.[21]

In her dissertation, *Paris As Gameboard: Ludic Strategies in Surrealism*, Laxton uncovers the centrality and importance of the Surrealists' disoriented wanderings and play in postwar culture as she traces the practice of *errance* through an examination of Man Ray's collection of Atget photographs. Laxton addresses the movement's appropriation of regulated games and thus highlights the full implication and the central role which "play" held within the discourse and practices of the Surrealists in the postwar culture.[22]

In her more recent work, *Surrealism at Play*, published in 2019, Laxton expands on how Ray's 1926 assembly of his album of Atget's work was basically a rewriting of Atget's commercial and documentary images as Surrealist text. She describes the act of *errance* as the Surrealist practice of undirected ambling and wandering in the urban landscape. She refers to *errance* as a kind of automated ambulatory response created as a resistance to modern efficiency. The practice incorporated the Surrealist's receptivity to psychic phenomenon and suggested a connection to the human unconscious.[23] Laxton goes on to describe Ray's method of choosing images for the Album in 1926 as random and unmotivated; interestingly, she holds that his very selection process was similar to the act of *errance* within the Paris that existed in Atget's archive.

Thus, one can appreciate both the psychic and unconscious elements ascribed to the images of Atget's eerie empty urban landscapes proved to be fertile ground for the

[19] MacFarlane, 2012, 17.
[20] Wallace Art Gallery Exhibition, 2002.
[21] MacFarlane, 2012, 17.
[22] Laxton, 2004.
[23] Laxton, 2019, 93.

Surrealist.[24] These qualities allow the photographs to function as clean canvases, activating and engaging the viewer to project meaning onto the "empty place."

1.2 A Visual Wandering Within the Decontextualized Place

"The intelligibility of the photograph is no simple thing; photographs are texts inscribed in terms of what we may call 'photographic discourse', but this discourse, like any other, engages discourses beyond itself, the 'photographic text', like any other, is the site of a complex 'intertextuality', an overlapping series of previous texts 'taken for granted' at a particular cultural and historical conjuncture."

- Victor Burgin, *Thinking Photography*. 1982.

Upon a close reading of Lima's series (Fig. 15), we feel as if we are embarking on a similar kind of undirected wandering through the Parisian landscape. It appears to be a journey directly rooted in the Surrealist act of *errance*. This journey is an activity rooted in the notion that "play" or "Spielraum" (room for play)[25] is for the Surrealists, as Laxton explains, a process rather than a product meant to be an experience, something outside of the doldrums and predictable routines of ordinary life.[26]

This act of *flaneury, errance,* or wandering through urban landscapes was further expanded upon in the 1950s by the leftist group the Situationists, whose leading proponent in this matter was French philosopher and scholar Guy Debord. Their idea of wandering was a process where the viewer was meant to move through the city, invoking a type of self-estrangement that was driven consciously or not, primarily by the emotions and behaviour of individuals. The Situationists referred to this kind of unplanned walking as the *dérive* or *drift,* an activity driven spontaneously by the individual's reaction to the landscapes as they moved through. To help encourage this type of "disoriented" and unpredictable drifting, Debord and the Situationists created *The Naked City*, a plan of Paris that they cut into 19 pieces and randomly assembled back together again. As described in his own words, "The Paris of the *Plan* exists in a timeless present; this timelessness is imagined spatially in the map's (illusory) total revelation of its object."[27]

[24] In her upcoming Ph.D. dissertation titled *Bewogen Straten* Joke De Wolf warns the reader that the uncanny and nostalgic sentiments ascribed to the empty streets of Marville and Atget may have to do with the influential interpretations by later seminal scholars such as Walter Benjamin and Beaumont Newhall (Westgeest, 2022)
[25] Benjamin, 2002 [1936].
[26] Laxton, 2019, 12.
[27] McDonough, 1994, 64.

The notion of setting the viewer on an irking journey to tap creativity was also explored by the German photographer Thomas Struth in his ongoing series *Unconscious Place* (Figs. 18-20). Struth began this work in the late 1970s, just over a decade before Rauschenberg embarked on his re-photographic project of Atget's Paris. According to West Brett, *Unconscious Place* grew out of Benjamin's notion of the *Optical Unconscious*.[28] To achieve disorientation, Struth photographs desolate urban landscapes, thus placing the viewer in the role of the *Ausländer* (stranger/foreigner) and opening the spectator's vision of the urban landscape through the "optical map" of the camera. West Brett argues that "photographs of empty streets become the images of our half-awakened wanderings and memories of streets once known, familiar but strange... As a stranger, the physical capacity for us to encounter the street is hindered, yet our visual encounter is by way of the photograph, held in time, allowing for a thorough observation of building facades, footpaths, and doors… an observation that leaves the viewer in a state of alienation."[29]

Struth comes out of The Düsseldorf School of Photography, where he studied under Bernd and Hilla Becher in the late 1970s. His work reflects upon and connotes a similar type of estrangement. The Becher's desolate and eerie typological black and white photographs, arranged in grids, of industrial sites and structures play a seminal role within the discourse of photography. In the series *Unconscious Place*, Struth presents desolate urban streetscapes from all over the world taken under similar conditions for a visually even effect [30] (Figs. 19-20). Struth's uncanny photographs are similar to those of our three series in the way they irk the viewer, opening a place of reflection to form their own narratives rather than forcing a perspective. Like our three photographers, Struth has taken a strict approach and practices very selective and specific framing to exclude citizens and certain urban scenery.

Both Lima and Rauschenberg's work is similar to Struth's in their use of very selective framing, which aims to eliminate corporal forms, modes of transportation, and billboards; we become hard-pressed as viewers to locate them (Figs. 14,15,19,20). A close reading of Struth's empty places helps us understand the notion of something having the ability to push us towards a sense of alienation and disorientation which is also present in the three series.

To recap, it is then, in fact, our historical awareness that begins our journey of filling in and giving importance to the empty places as we contemplate each set. Frankfurt School

[28] West Brett, 2016, 78.
[29] West Brett, 2016, 82.
[30] Sennet, 2020.

critic and theorist Siegfried Kracauer reminds us in his writing" The Photographic Approach" that a photograph, in its “selectivity” of framing (by the photographer), necessarily “precludes the notion of completeness” and thus help stimulates endless interpretations in the viewer.[31] We instantly seem to want to fill in the blanks from memory. It is then only natural that the thoughts provoking what constitutes a “crime scene” in each of the three series will be directly related to the relevant sociopolitical and historical issues present in society within the context of their time. As American geographer, Donald W. Meining elucidated in his article “The Beholding Eye, Ten Versions of the Same Scene” in 1979, the same site can bring to mind ten different scenarios of interpretation and meaning depending on the individual viewer’s way of perceiving it.

> We may certainly agree that we will see many of the same elements - houses, roads, trees, hills - in terms of such denotation as a number, form, dimension, and color, but such facts take on meaning only through association; they must be fitted together according to some coherent body of ideas. Thus we confront the central problem: Any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads.[32]

As a result, landscapes, or urban landscapes in our case, can therefore be viewed in a plethora of ways depending on which meanings and characteristics the viewer allocates to them. As French philosopher Roland Barthes so aptly posited in 1977 in *Rhetoric of the Image*, "all images are polysemous," resulting in a "floating chain" of connotations and meaning from which "the reader is able to choose some and ignore others."[33]

This visual journey takes us through familiar yet strange and disorienting landscapes, much like those who engaged in *flaneury, errance, derive,* and in Struth’s journey through his *Unconscious Place.* The uncanniness of empty places drives us visually through each series. Paris looks the same, but something is slightly different because the intentions and contexts are different in each one. Something morphs due to their different historical and sociopolitical contexts and intentions. The buildings and the visual atmosphere is still there, yet there is something else connoted in the context.

[31] Kracauer, 2014 (originally published in 1951), 64.
[32] Meining , 1979, 33-47.
[33] Barthes, 1977, 39.

Let us explore the process by which such mutability is possible and how it is relatable to what is happening in our series. It is interesting to look towards the field of the natural sciences in order to find examples of such an applicable phenomenon. In geology, the term pseudomorphosis refers to the occurrence of a mineral that has the appearance of another, the word originally stemming from the Latin word pseudomorph, meaning false form. The process of "pseudomorphism occurs when a mineral is altered in such a way that its internal structure and chemical composition is changed, but its external form is preserved."[34] In other words, one mineral is replaced by another but still maintains its original crystal form.

The term was first borrowed from the field of mineralogy by German philosopher Oswald Spengler who applied the term to his theory of the morphology of culture in his 1920's two-volume work on world history titled *The Decline of the West* of 1918 and 1922. In 1939 art historian Erwin Panofsky first introduced the term pseudomorphosis to the field of art history in his book titled *Studies in Iconology: humanistic themes in the art of the Renaissance*, describing it as "the emergence of a form A, morphologically analogous to, or even identical with, a form B, yet entirely unrelated to it from a genetic point of view." [35]

I posit that each image in (Figs. 1-12), which make up the sets, undergoes what I will refer to as a "photomorphosis" when viewed and decontextualized from their time of making. I define the term "photomorphosis", as a kind of pseudomorphosis that can occur as a result of a photographer's particular choice in framing. Specific omission and selection of what is in the frame can decontextualize the world and cause pseudomorposis. To clarify, if one were to walk on a Parisian street in the 1900s or the 1990s, or two years ago, one would very clearly identify the differences because, in actual life, the physical sites are not exactly the same. It is only through the act of decontextualizing these sites by the photographer through their choice of framing, by actively leaving out all the references we would instinctively look for to help us anchor them within their context, that this is indeed accomplished. The photographers have left us not only bereft of people but also the more common advertisements or commercial details typical for the 1920s, 1990s, and 2020 in order for us to experience sameness. Thus, what occurs for the viewer, is a kind of decontextualizing, a kind of "photomorphosis" thanks to the photographers' choices, because the medium of photography

[34] Nelson, 2019, (Tulane Univ. Mineralogy, under the heading of Pseudomorphism).
[35] Panofsky 1939, 70.

makes it possible to take a particular place out of its context, thus stressing the event of pseudomorphosis.

Lima and Rauschenberg purposely chose (to varying degrees) to filter and remove the evidence of today's reality to make it unclear for the viewer that their series are not from the first quarter of the 20th century. Their framing choice was to include only the similarities of the empty places in the 1920s, but they could just as easily have chosen to show the differences between 1920 and 1990, and 2020. It is not self-evident that it looks the same; it is, in fact, the very exacting decision of the photographer that tries to make it so.

Thus, as we are set adrift by the three images in each set (Figs. 1-12), we embark on an unsettling mental wandering between images that, at first glance, all look like they were taken in the 1920s. We then note that they were carefully taken and planned by Rauschenberg in the 1990s and Lima in 2020. However, once we come back from the idea that images by Rauschenberg and Lima of each set were not taken in the 1920s, we immediately reflect upon what the empty place of the 1990s and 2020 could represent. Each "crime scene," to use Benjamin, looks slightly different in our minds according to our individual reflection upon those particular years of history in that site/topia, and we begin to fill the empty places represented in the photographs accordingly.

I posit that when the images in the sets go through a kind of contextual "photomorphosis", in the virtual process of arriving at their original place of historical and sociopolitical context in our minds, each, in turn, becomes what philosopher Michel Foucault referred to as *heterotopias*. In his essay "Different Places" he defines *heterotopias* as "places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable." They are other/specific types of places, part of the city, yet actually not. These discursive places are different, isolated, concentrated, and incompatible. Foucault describes them as little worlds within worlds, mirroring and yet distinguishing themselves from what is outside. In our case, we are presented with little *heterotopias* of "empty place", framed and encapsulated by their own historical and sociopolitical context.

Foucault elucidates the notion of *heterotopias* by giving several examples, such as ships, cemeteries, brothels, prisons, gardens of antiquity, fairs, and Turkish baths. Particularly interesting is his reference to the moving train as an example, " a train is an extraordinary bundle of relations, since it's something through which one passes; it is also something by which one can pass from one point to another, and then it is something that passes by."[36]

[36] Foucault, 1998, 178.

According to Foucault, *heterotopic* places are defined by certain parameters; he explained that the operational mode of *heterotopias* can change according to the society in which they are located because they have "the ability to juxtapose in a single place several emplacements that are incompatible in themselves"; they are "connected with temporal discontinuities" and, lastly, "they have a function in relation to the remaining space."[37] In Lima's series, we encounter just such *heterotopias* comprised of several "emplacements that are incompatible". In other words, we are simultaneously contemplating and reflecting on the historical and sociopolitical place of Atget's Paris of the 1920s, Rauschenberg's of 1998, Lima's of 2020.

Although most of Foucault's notions of *heterotopias* are immobile locations, he finds that *heterotopia* gains its full potential in the ship that flows across the ocean.

Foucault elucidates :

> For example, the ship is a piece of floating space, a placeless place, that lives by its own devices, that is self-enclosed and, at the same time, delivered over to the boundless expanse of the ocean, and it goes from port to port, so watch to watch… The sailing vessel is the heterotopia par excellence.[38]

Our "empty places" are indeed very similar in concept to Foucault's ship, "placeless place(s) that live by their own devices", they are *heterotopias* that are very much self-enclosed and not tied specifically to one particular emplacement but rather many. In our case, the *heterotopias* are comprised of the compilation of the multiple historical and sociopolitical locations presented in the series.

With Foucault's notion of *heterotopias* in mind, I would like to look more closely at the images in the three series for further reflection. In every photograph of *Rue des Ursins*, we are anchored in "old Paris" (Figs. 7, 8 & 9). Yet, we drift from *heterotopia* to *heterotopia* as we move forward from the image by Atget (7) to Rauschenberg (8) and finally to Lima (9). Because in Rauschenberg's image (8), we might imagine that in the late 1990s, the uncanny emptiness we encounter might be due to the ongoing AIDS crisis or the Internet revolution and that this is, in fact, the reason everyone is indoors and off the street. The one

[37] Foucault, 1998, 179-184.
[38] Ibid., 1998, 184-185.

thing that is certain is that in 1998 the emptiness of the street was not due to the lockdown of a viral pandemic which we immediately associate with Lima's image (Fig. 9) of 2020.

In conclusion, the three images that comprise each of the four sets (Figs. 1-12) become like seaports or travel stops. The journey is uncanny, partly because heterotopic places are by nature liminal in nature, disturbing and unsettling by definition because they represent passages to somewhere; simultaneously, it can feel both familiar and strange. The word liminal comes from the Latin word "limen" meaning threshold. According to therapist Theodora Blanchfield, to be in a liminal space means to be on the edge of something new but not quite there yet. Such space can be incredibly uncomfortable because our brains yearn for homeostasis and predictability, and liminal space is everything but that.[39]

For Lima, re-capturing the haunted empty places of Paris in 2020 was certainly an ode to Atget, but foremost, it was a conscious decision to disorient the viewer. As we witnessed, much like Rauschenberg, Lima chose his framing carefully in order to decontextualize his images, with the intention of deliberately making it unclear to the viewer in which century the images were taken. At first glance, because of what they chose to exclude, we are, in fact, unsure if we are not actually in the Paris of 1920. What we see is that Paris still visually remains very much the same. Yet, due to their historical variance, when we visually drift through the three series, we realize that we are moving on a similarly disorienting cognitive visual journey as someone participating in the act of *flaneury*, *errance,* or disoriented in an *Unconscious Place*. Each image in the sets (Figs. 1-12) has experienced "photomorphosis" because Paris looks the same, but there is something different due to the disparity of their historical and socio-political context. Thus, each one becomes a *heterotopia*, and the journey from an image of the 1920s (13) to the 1990s (14) and finally to Lima of 2020 (15) becomes a liminal *drift* from uncanny place to uncanny place. Each *heterotopia* is of our own making as we reflect and project onto what now, to us, emerge as *meaningful empty places*.

[39] Blanchfield, 2021.

Chapter Two: Appropriation, Time Compression, and Anachronism of the Empty Place

“Anachronism is necessary; it is fertile”

-Georges Didi-Huberman. 2000.

In his book, *Devant le Temps: Histoire de L’ Art et Anachronism des Images* of 2000, French philosopher Didi-Huberman posited that in art history, the spectator is not only presented with a past heritage but is also forced to reckon with history as a process, as a mode of creative thinking.[40] According to art historian Miguel Duarte in his interpretation of Didi-Huberman’s aforementioned work, it is in this process that the past is made meaningful in the present involving a mnemotechnical labour through which the traces from the past are interpreted. This process combines and re-evaluates, thus accepting invention as a conceptual and methodological locus.[41]

When examining Lima’s series of 2020, we are, in fact, engaging in a kind of mnemotechnical labour through which the past is interpreted, combined, and reinterpreted because in rephotographing and appropriating Atget’s series Lima is also asking us to reflect upon the work of the elder and that of Rauschenberg, for those who are familiar with the latter's work. One might look upon rephotographing as a kind of time compression because when looking at Lima's work, we are also looking at the 1920s and potentially even further back. If we examine the work of Atget's predecessor and fellow countryman Charles Marville, active between 1860 and 1879 (Figs. 16 & 17), we find that Atget himself may have been harking back to another time in his take and reaction to what is referred to as the “Haussmannization” of Paris, which began in the 1860s well before Atget began selectively photographing the streets of “old Paris” in the late 1890s. Marville was well known in the Paris art circles, having received a public commission to document the districts of “old” Paris” that were to be demolished according to Napoleon III’s plan to modernize Paris.[42] In other words, in emulating Marville, Atget, was working in a manner and style typical of 30 years prior to his own time.

This chapter will thus explore the ways in which Lima’s images engage with appropriation, time compression, and the ensuing anachronism. In the first part of this chapter, I will examine the act of rephotography as a means of appropriation. I begin by

[40] Didi-Humberman, 2000.
[41] Duarte, 2017, 9.
[42] Bunyan, 2002.

looking at the historical development of appropriation within the context of art history and an examination of Roland Barthes' notion of the death or the "Author." Marcel Duchamp's claims on the role of the spectator in the creative process will follow, which will shed insight into the interpretive gap left to the spectator in which we are able to experience the temporal changes. An engagement with Barthes' "now time" and, in turn, Benjamin's concept of what he coined the *dialectical image* will follow, a concept born out of the disorientation which occurs in time compression, which will help elucidate how "now" time, past and present can reconnect.

In section two, I will explore the working methods and practices of the three photographers in order to better understand the visual results desired by each artist and what the implications are in terms of wanting to look the same as the original "Author" or setting oneself subtly apart as the creator. To clarify these points and as support, I will look at the work of appropriation artists Sherrie Levine and Mark Klett and the different approaches they engage with in their work.

2.1 Rephotography and Appropriation

Lima and Rauschenberg are certainly not the first to engage in the practice referred to as rephotographing. It is a method many artists employ to illustrate and express change or - as in our case - emphasize stasis. Later in the chapter, I will look at the work of two well-known American projects of rephotographing to help shed light and gain additional insight into our series. Let me introduce them briefly. The first project is that of the post-modernist Sherrie Levine, who created a series titled *After Walker Evans* in 1981. She rephotographed 22 of Walker Evans's images commissioned by the Farm Security Administration to document the depression era misery in 1935 (Figs. 21a & 21b). The second prephotographic series to be examined is that of landscape photographer Mark Klett entitled *Second View: The Prephotographic Survey Project*, created in 1977-79 (Figs. 23-26), a meticulous study that retraced the work of nineteenth-century geological survey photographers such as William Henry Jackson, Timothy O'Sullivan, and Alexander Gardner, among others.[43]

Let us briefly examine the aforementioned process from an art historical perspective. Rephotographing is an act that, first and foremost, falls under the umbrella of appropriation. Appropriation is a method or strategy of selective borrowing and imitating another artist's

[43] Handy, 1999, 220.

work, which became popular in the 19th century. Vincent van Gogh copied Japanese woodcuts, such as in his *Almond Blossoms* of 1890 (Fig. 22a). Pablo Picasso is famous for the African masks he appropriated as the faces for the women in his iconic painting *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon,* of 1907 (Fig. 22b). However, perhaps the most relevant in our study and likely familiar to artists Lima and Rauschenberg is the act committed by the French surrealist Marcel Duchamp when he took a postcard-size reproduction of the Mona Lisa in 1919 and drew a mustache on Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting (Fig. 22c). Duchamp's use of the postcard is significant because it illustrates that the term "appropriation" used to describe Levine's and Klett's work has been an artistic strategy available to artists well before the term was used to describe such re-representation. In his *L.H.O.O.Q.* of 1919, Duchamp clearly "appropriated" da Vinci's work in his use of a photomechanical copy of the Mona Lisa.[44]

The use of photomechanical copies and their screening became instrumental to the pop and neo-avant-garde of the 1950s and early 1960s. It was a favorite mode of production for the pop artist Andy Warhol in his silk screenings of his famously appropriated *Campbell Soup Cans* (Fig. 22d). The significance of mechanical reproduction ran deep in the conceptual discourse of the work Andy Warhol was so absorbed with the potential that he famously exclaimed, "everybody should be a machine."[45] Serial copies and the notion of the industrial aspect as well as the commodification of art, became embedded in a way it never had in the earlier part of modernism.

The act of appropriation as a growing artistic method in the 1970s was part of a movement away from modernism, whose modus operandi had been firmly rooted in medium specificity and originality, which sprung out of the creativity of the author/artist. By the late 1960s, the barriers and boundaries of modernism were being tested and broken down systematically by artists questioning whether the notion of originality was possible at all. Photography was a particularly well-suited and popular medium for artists to use as a tool to help blur the boundaries between originals and reproductions. The debate and question of photography's originality has been embedded in the medium since its invention due to the fact that the negative offers the possibility of almost endless reproduction.

Lima and Rauschenberg's choice, as well as feeling the ability to take the liberty of engaging with appropriation can likely be traced back to the French philosopher Roland

[44] Singerman, 2012, 60.
[45] Swenson, 1997, 103.

Barthes and the notion he presented in his seminal text of 1977 entitled "Death of the Author." In his writing, Barthes stressed that the act of interpretation is more important than the act of creation. Something very significant was suggested here, namely that the viewer and everything he or she brings and assigns to the image in terms of interpretation and memory usurps the original and creative powers of the author/artist in the meaning and interpretation of the work. It was indeed a significant moment in the world of literature and the arts when Barthes pronounced that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author." [46]

This notion of the death of the "Author" had already been hinted at by Duchamp when he proposed a blueprint for the relationship of the artist, work, and viewer in his writing in the 1950s, where he acknowledges the role of the reader/viewer as a central part of the process. Duchamp explained: "The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications, and thus adds his contribution to the creative act." Between the artist and the work, "a link is missing," and it is the spectator who fills "this gap, which represents the inability of the artist to express fully his intentions."[47] It is precisely this "gap" which allows us to find meaning in the appropriation and time compression we experience while pondering the three series. However, some critical parameters embedded in the process are pivotal in activating and allowing the experience to play out to the full degree in which it was intended to unfold for the viewer. The main requirement in appreciating appropriation is that we, as viewers, are cognizant of its roots or original source.

Let us take a closer look at how a process of reading appropriation works in the case of our specific series. Lima's act of rephotographing and appropriating becomes what can be described as a kind of "time compression." However, this phenomenon is contingent upon and only occurs if the spectator recognizes that the process of appropriation is taking place. In other words, the viewer must recognize the image and its original "Author" because, without the recognition of the appropriation process, it is simply urban photography and nothing more. If we look at Lima's work while aware and in recognition of Atget's oeuvre, we are also simultaneously looking at the 1920s. Yet, we are also looking at 2020 and 1998 if we are familiar with the work of Rauschenberg. Additionally, if we are familiar with the writings of

[46] Barthes, 1977, 148.
[47] Duchamp, 1966, 26.

Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, we are also switching from the "now" of today's time back to 2020 when Lima was photographing his series.[48]

The ability to reconnect "now time" with the past is a fascinating concept to examine vis-à-vis the time compression we are experiencing when examining our series. In chapter one, we discussed the empty uncanny images' ability to "disorient" us because it allowed us to access what Benjamin coined as our *Optical Unconscious.* However, I propose that looking back from what Barthes referred to as "now time" allows for another interesting awakening, which is born out of the act of time compression. The effect occurs when one engages with the historical collision which we experience when looking back from the moment of today to the images of Lima and, in turn to his source. Moreover, if one is willing and initiated (in the history of photography), it can be drawn back through Rauschenberg, Atget, and even to Marville, who seems to be the "Author" or root of the originally coined "look" of the empty uncanny streets of "old Paris."

Benjamin referred to this kind of awakening, born out of the ensuing disorientation which occurs in time compression, as the *dialectical image* in his unfinished work *The Arcades Project*. In his writing, he uses the *dialectical image* as a type of historical montage reconnecting the past with the present in a visual narrative. According to Benjamin, the confrontation between temporalities brought into a *constellation* may result in a shock in experience and, as a result, may solicit a kind of "rethinking of history." Benjamin elucidates: "To thinking belongs the movement as well as the arrest of thoughts. Where thinking comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions - there the dialectical image appears… Its position …is to be found… where the tension between dialectical opposites is the greatest. Hence, the object constructed in the materialist presentation of history is itself the dialectical image. The latter is identical with the historical object; it justifies its violent expulsion from the continuum of historical process."[49]

Benjamin thus posits that when present or "now time" and historical time clash against each other in the present time, objects, activities, and actions from the past may be placed in a unique and unrecognizable constellation as the *dialectical image*. The knowledge that is manifested through the dialectical image is uniquely available in the present moment because it contains the desires, needs, and contexts of the present that can be lost if not formulated *now*.[50] He elaborates, "the historical index of the images not only says that they

[48] Barthes, 1981.
[49] Benjamin, 1999, 475.
[50] Cvoro, 2008, 95.

belong to a particular time; it says above all, that they attain to legibility only as a particular time…Every present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it: each "now" is the now of a particular recognizability. In it, truth is charged to the bursting point with time."[51]

When reflecting upon the three series (Figs. 1-12) from the perspective of "now time", the resulting "collision" creates unique awakenings of reflection upon the concepts of the uncanny street of the 1920s. This is perhaps the "montage" to which Benjamin was referring; we are indeed awakened, and our looking back at this particular moment of time will change the outcome and the thoughts and reflections we ascribe to the images. However, in our case, it is more of a linear time because we are brought back to Atget and Marville's Paris, but how we interpret the scenes will depend on the "now" in terms of what we ascribe to the images. Each day, or "now time", will, by definition, bring a slightly different interpretation and reflection upon history. However, I propose that it is a temporally based interpretation and reflection and, therefore, by default, fluid in its state, much in line with the philosophy of Heraclitus of Ephesus, who in the 6th century B.C. proposed that "Panta rei" or "everything flows."[52]

2.2 Photographic Methods and Practices

The outcome of the chosen working methods, equipment, and approaches of the three photographers will influence our interpretation of their photographs. It is thus interesting to look more carefully at the specific choices they made and the resulting effects. I will also compare and juxtapose them with other rephotographs because it is essential that the reader comes into the discussion with some basic knowledge concerning exactly what their photographic choices were and what this implied in terms of visual results.

Atget's documentation of Paris was a thirty-year project of his own initiative, comprising of over 10,000 photographs. He would set out with his heavy gear in the early morning to catch the optimal light and to minimize the intrusion of the human form. He used dry glass plates and made contact prints using printing out paper, choices which would have been deemed old-fashioned by his contemporaries, yet he never changed his routines throughout his photographic career. Perhaps his working method was a nod to Marville and

[51] Benjamin, 1999, 463.
[52] Stanford Encyclopedia of Phil., 2007.

the best and only way to achieve the outmoded nostalgic look of 30 years prior, something which he appears to be aiming to recreate. Atget's equipment was comprised of a large wooden camera with collapsible bellows. In addition, he carried a massive tripod for support as well as the costly glass plate negatives measuring approximately 18x 23 cm in size.[53]

Christopher Rauschenberg travelled to Paris three times in his quest to re-document what he referred to as “the hauntingly beautiful” streets of his mentor, each time for a duration of three weeks. Preferring to work quickly, he opted to use a 35mm analogue camera rather than a large format sheet film camera. His perspective-correcting 28mm lens was slightly less wide than Atget’s, and he had to step further back to get approximately the same perspective. Using his 35mm camera without a tripod, Rauschenberg was able to rephotograph 500 of Atget's scenes during the nine weeks he was there. As he noted himself, such an achievement would have been impossible with a large format camera in that amount of time. Because of the vast number of cars parked on the street, he often had to deviate from Atget's vantage point in order to get a clean shot of the empty street.[54]

Rauschenberg was cognisant of the seasons and the time of year, and the lighting conditions that this implied photographically, but acknowledged in the interview with an editor of *Lensculture* that he “did not stand around for the light to be perfect.” He confessed that this meant he had to give up achieving some of the depth of field and tonality strongly associated with Atget's work in lieu of speed and efficiency.[55] The final result was presented in a book entitled *Paris Changing: Revisiting Atget’s Paris,* published in 2007, where Rauschenberg paired each of Atget’s scenes with one of his rephotographed images. They are printed the same size facing one another on separate pages and closely matched in tonal value to appear as similar as possible to Atget’s (Fig. 27). His photographs thus achieve, for the most part, the atmosphere of Atget in lighting and tonality. The close tonal rages in the scenes and blown-out even skies, purposely matched to Atget by Rauschenberg, lead the viewer back in time. Rauschenberg confirmed that the presence of “Atget's Paris” still remained, positing the following in his *Lensculture* interview: “Having photographed all of these scenes, it is clear to me that the Paris of Atget’s vision is still there and available to eyes that look for it. In central Paris, most of the scenes that Atget photographed are still there, and still posing.”[56]

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[53] Wiegand,1998, 12.
[54] Rauschenberg, *Lensculture* Interview.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Rauschenberg, 2007, 9.

Mauricio Lima is Rauschenberg on steroids, completing his rephotography project in only ten days. A documentary photographer specializing in war, trauma, and conflict photography, Lima arrived in Paris in the spring of 2020 from his native Brazil during the strict COVID lockdown. Struck by the vacant streets he encountered, he set out to find and rephotograph Atget's uncanny scenery. Lima used the vast online image banks of Atget's work belonging to the Museum of Modern Art and the Getty Museum to orient himself and to locate the specific sites to be 'rephotographed' that Atget had documented a century ago.[57]

Lima approached the *New York Times* Paris bureau with a few sample images, whose picture editor immediately commissioned the project. Camera in hand, Lima set off on his bicycle, traversing Paris with Atget's locations in mind, working steadily for seven to ten days. He shot the entire series with a handheld digital 35mm camera and variable focal length lens (VFL). Due to the "fast" exposure that today's digital cameras offer, the need for a tripod never arose.[58] It is a quick and loose method of working, quite the antithesis of Atget's slow, contemplative, and old-fashioned approach. In addition, Atget was consequential in his shooting, always going out in the early morning, resulting in a specific lighting quality and aesthetic. Lima seems to have been less concerned with such details judging by the odd shadows and the lack of any unifying overall aesthetic. Instead, his focus seems to have been mostly on approximating Atget's geographic location to replicate. Even his framing appears slightly haphazard, and his use of focal length is inconsistent. A variable focal lengths zoom lens was likely the tool he used to control the framing and eliminate unwanted people or artifacts which would ground the image 2020. Upon closer reading of the images by Lima (Fig. 15), we find empty streets in black and white framed and orchestrated to capture as many empty and detail-free places as possible. In order to limit and control what is in the frame, he uses different vantage points, focal lengths, and cropping to achieve his goal, as can be seen in (Fig. 3) which is too narrow, (Fig. 6) is too wide and (Fig. 9) is again too narrow to match Atget's originals.

Lima's skies are, for the most part, inconsistent, not matching the blown-out even tonality we expect from the elder. Lima's images vary from bright sun (Fig. 6) to contrasty mid-day mottled skies (Fig. 3) to overcast (Fig. 9) and finally, dusky ones as in (Fig. 12). He seems to have paid little or no attention to the time of day he was photographing, not to mention that there are leaves on all the trees because it was all shot in the same spring week.

[57] Lima, email interviews, 2020.
[58] Ibid.

Lima simply had no time to attend to such details in his rephotographing. Instead, he seems to be asking his viewers to take more of a conceptual journey, a leap of faith, if you will, with him. Lima published his series in *The New York Times* on May 27, 2020; his work was reproduced in black and white, equaled in size, and paired with digital reproductions of Atget's sepia prints of the same sites (Fig. 29).

As previously mentioned, there are two American appropriators who engage in rephotographing that are particularly interesting to engage with vis a vis our series—namely artist Sherrie Levine and photographer Mark Klett. The two, when compared and juxtaposed to our series, will shed light and help our understanding through their many similarities but also in their differences and motivations. As in our case study, both of these artists rely on the viewer's basic knowledge of art history in order for their work to be read as intended. In the case of Levine, we must be aware of the work of photographer Walker Evans. American art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau pointed out that we must all be "initiates". She put forth that: "It goes without saying that Levine's work of this period…could make its critique visible only within the compass of the art world. Outside of this specialized site, a Sherrie Levine could just as well be a "genuine" Walker Evans."[59] And, in the case of Mark Klett, one has to be aware of the great 19th-century geological survey photographers whose exact sites he rephotographs with extreme precision in order to glean the full meaning of his work.

In Levine's case, we will be looking at a portrait from her 1981 rephotographed series entitled *After Walker Evans*. For the project, she rephotographed 22 black and white images taken by Walker Evans during the depression era. Evans had been commissioned by the Farm Security Administration (F.S.A.) to document the horrific conditions of sharecroppers in the American south during the Great Depression in 1936. As a side note, this assignment would eventually lead to the famous book entitled *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, which he completed jointly with writer James Agee.

When we look closer at Ellie Mae Burroughs, one of the tenant farmers from Alabama originally photographed by Evans and later Levine (Fig. 21a & 21b), it is indeed difficult to distinguish the difference between the 1936 and 1981 photographs as in some of the examples in our series. The experience is the same or was at least conceptually intended to be so when we view the three images by Atget, Rauschenberg, and Lima in (Figs. 1, 2 & 3). It is important to note that Levine did not produce her image from Evans's negative or

[59] Solomon-Godeau, 1990, 62.

even his gelatin silver print; rather, Levine's *After Walker Evans* was photographed with a 35mm camera from a catalog reproduction of Evans's 1936 image. Evans worked with a 35mm camera for his project. Art historian Howard Singerman postulates that Levine's source was more likely *Walker Evans: First and Last,* published on behalf of the Evans estate in 1978. [60] It is paramount to realize that Levine's images are purposely presented not to be exactly identical in tonal value and size to the original and thus best seen in person.

Her work is thus more suited to exhibitions in order that one can easily note the fact that she has printed them to mark that they are slightly different from the original, that they are indeed copies. One will not always immediately notice this when her work is reproduced in books or catalogues as the publishers often present them side by side with the original in the identical size, which is incorrect and not in keeping with her premise. If we take a closer look at Evan's and Levine's images, we will notice when reading the caption, that the original image is, in fact, 20.9 x 14.4 cm (Fig. 21a), and Levine has printed her rephotograph of Evans' image quite a bit smaller at 12.8 x 9.8 cm (Fig. 21b) to mark that it is an appropriation, something which ironically would have been very clear in an exhibition of the "original" prints. This is in stark contrast to Rauschenberg, who has put all effort into adjusting and processing his images in order that they match Atget's both in size and tonality when he presents them side by side with Atget's in his book, *Paris Changing: Revisiting Atget's Paris* (Fig. 27).

Lima's aesthetic presentation choice is similar to Levine's in that he has distinguished his series of 2020 by presenting it in black and white rather than matching it to the sepia tone employed by Atget (and Rauschenberg). His tonal choice separates his series as an independent body of work from the "Author," a similar choice employed by Levine in her presentation of her rephotographs of Evans. One might also then assume that Lima is hinting back at Barthes's notion of "Death of the Author." This famous line was appropriated by Levine, along with other bits from "The Death of the Author," to weave together an artist's statement in 1981, albeit slightly modified to fit her purpose; it read: "The birth of the viewer must be at the cost of the painter." [61]

In her use of appropriation, Levine's work is similar to Lima's in that it is an act of rephotographing the work of another artist. However, it differs in the sense she is actually photographing an object, the physical print, rather than a physical place.

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[60] Singerman, 2012, 66.
[61] Wallis, 1987, 92.

The event of time compression happens as one relates the clicking of the shutter by Levine in the 80s to Evans's in the 30s, but her work is less about place than our series. Rather, Levine has instead made the appropriation itself the main content of her work. In repositioning the objects and ideas from previous physical works of art, she is also creating new meanings in new contexts. Through the manipulation of the photograph in terms of size, tonal value, and contrast, she is setting the work apart from Evans and marking herself as the "Author" of the series. In this act, she aims to call into focus and question both the possibility and the significance of originality. Lima, like Levine, in presenting his rephotographs in a slightly altered state to that of the original maker, is also marking and setting himself apart as the "Author" of his series.

In presenting his images in black and white as opposed to Atget and Rauschenberg's sepia-toned photographs, Lima is repositioning the work and ideas, creating new meaning in new context. We are not only pointed to 1920 but also to the emptiness of a COVID-struck Paris in the lockdown of 2020 (Figs. 13,14,15).

The second appropriationist, of equal interest to us, is landscape photographer and geologist Mark Klett. In 1977, Klett, along with photo historian Ellen Manchester and photographer Jo Ann Verburg, initiated the *Rephotographic Survey Project*. This project was conceived to retrace the work of 19th-century geological survey photographers. Over the course of three years, the team visited and photographed more than 120 of the sites of these initial documentary images, which were taken by iconic greats of early American West landscape photography, such as William Henry Jackson, Timothy O'Sullivan, and Alexander Gardner. The final platform for the work resulted in a book entitled *Second View: The Rephotographic Survey*, published in 1984. In the book, Klett pairs these early views with his own rephotographed images from the exact sites and vantage points for comparison (Fig. 23 & 24).

Lima and Rauschenberg engaged in procedures and took very similar steps to those employed by Klett in the *Rephotographic Survey Project*. Rather than photographing a print of iconic photographers as Levine did, our photographers were rephotographing actual physical places. Similarly, they all researched to find specific images they wanted to rephotograph taken by famous photographers of the last century and proceeded to locate the geographic locations of the original images.

Our photographers were motivated to find stasis, actively looking, choosing, and cropping to re-document the empty places that had not experienced physical change, in other words, documenting the bits of the "old Paris" that still remained. Klett, on the other hand,

was more exacting in retracing the sites of the geological surveyors and recording "exactly" what he would find there; nothing was cropped or altered to achieve a certain preordained "look." Klett was perhaps, it seems, more interested in recording changes to the environment and the impact of human presence on the land. Although, he apparently famously noted, "Sometimes the absence of change is the most salient." [62] This is, of course, also a measure and reflection of the amount of human interaction present in the landscape.

As noted, Lima was more of a "conceptual" rephotographer when it came to reproducing some of the details; he simply did not have the time or patience because the *New York Times* and other assignments were waiting. It seems, at times, Lima is simply entrusting us to imagine "sameness", having to rely more on the information provided by the N.Y. Times captions and article and simple street addresses written below his parings in the article.[63] Klett, and his team, on the other hand, engaged in an exacting process. In order to elucidate, we will be engaging with Timothy O'Sullivan's print taken in 1873 and Mark Klett's prephotographic image of 1978 of *Cañon de Chelle, Walls of the Grand Cañon* (Figs. 23 & 24).

Klett and his team would venture out with copies of the original prints and use polaroids on sight for guidance. They were able to get within inches of the original camera and lens placement of the survey photographers, in this case, O'Sullivan. Once they had found the original vantage point, they selected an appropriate lens to duplicate the original image area. Klett and his team also took into account any lens corrections by the photographs, such as internal large format tilting of the film or lens plane. He even went so far as to use a 4x5 large format camera with a 90mm lens to match O'Sullivan's wide-angle preference.[64] In contrast, Lima simply bicycled around with his digital camera and a multifocal length lens and selected what he desired through framing and cropping.

Klett quickly discovered that it was not simply the location and lenses that were important, but the time of day, as well as the seasons, were critical in order to achieve the correct light conditions, contrast, and tonality. He explained that the time of day became synonymous with the direction of the sunlight, and they would wait patiently for the shadows to "move" into position. It was tricky to duplicate the shadows, and in fact, as he explained, photographs give away seasonal clues; the angle of light changes dramatically as the sun rises and sets closer to the south in the winter than in the summer. Klett explains that where

[62] Klett, 1984.
[63] Nossiter, 2020.
[64] Klett, 1984, 15.

O'Sullivan photographed at 40° latitude, the height of the sun above the horizon at noon in December is approximately 45° lower than in June. Therefore, the shadows which would appear in a photograph by O'Sullivan made in July would be impossible to recreate in November.[65] Lima's images were all taken in the spring and do not have any of the attempts of Klett and his team to adhere to the angle of the position of the light and the angle of the sun. The hour of the day can make vast differences in how the shadows appear, completely altering the structure, aesthetics, and mood of the image. In figures 25 and 26, Klett gives us a sample of the variations which occur in the shadows in terms of physical location, tonal value, and contrast over roughly a three-hour period spanning from 9:50 to 12:54.

Rauschenberg, as we saw, made a more exacting technical and physical attempt than Lima to re-capture Atget's time of year and hour to match. What he did not manage to replicate in tonal values and lost in depth of field because he did not use a tripod, he tried to correct in the darkroom. In the printing of his book (Fig. 17), he took great care to match the images in size and tonal value to that of Atget (Fig. 13 & 14). Lima, as noted, asks us for more of a conceptual journey in filling in the visual details that create the time compression we are to experience.

These photographers are all playing with our notion of what we think correct linear time is in order to create meaning in their series. What we are, in fact, experiencing in this disorientation of time is the most common of the chronisms, referred to as anachronism. An anachronism is any error in chronology or something that is chronologically out of place.[66] In other words, chronological misconduct in terms of what we, as viewers, know to be historically correct. This is the premise behind time compression and, indeed, that which makes/allows it to work.

Appropriation is only born and gains its meaning if and when the viewer recognizes the original. It is then not a surprise that artists such as Levine and Klett would look to the very well-known photographer to rephotograph. However, it is perhaps worth mentioning that the choice of rephotographing an iconic figure in the world of photography has not come without its share of criticism. This act of gaining notoriety by riding on the name recognition or 'coat-tails' of someone more famous than oneself is something artists who practice appropriation have been repeatedly accused of. Art critic Gerald Marzorati charged Levine with cross-dressing in a male artist's clothes, as well as stealing a position along with a name

[65] Klett, 1984, 23.
[66] Garner, 2016, 47.

in an article that appeared in *Artnews* in 1986.[67] Carter Ratcliff even questioned whether Levine could be considered an artist at all when she wrote, "her 'appropriations' are most effective as expressions of her resentment at the fact that her name will never be as glamorous as Walker Evans's."[68]

Gaining fame from associating oneself with a more famous "Author" is something that both Lima and Rauschenberg could be suspected of and may indeed have been a part of their motives. Rauschenberg, although he has published a fair amount as a photographer, is probably best known by association with his father, the iconic American painter, and sculptor Robert Rauschenberg. Lima, although a fairly established war photographer, certainly has not achieved nearly the fame and significance of Atget, nor does he seem slated to. Had Lima not enlisted and appropriated Atget's images and mode of working, his own uncanny images of the empty streets of Paris would very likely never have made a feature story in the New York Times Magazine with a worldwide audience.

To sum up, in their rephotographing and appropriating, Lima and Rauschenberg show the viewer that the uncanny empty streets of "old Paris" still live on. Yet, that is far from all; carefully chosen and framed locations by the photographers leave us unsure if we are standing at the intersection of *Rue Laplace and Rue de la Montagne* in the early 1920s, 1998, or 2020 (Fig. 1, 2 & 3). Time compresses and collides, and we are prodded to reflect from today's perspective, from our "now time" and back over the years. It is a jarring activation for the viewer where indeed, the creative process is not solely "performed" by the "Author" but equally, if not more, by the interpretations grasped by the spectator through his/her experience and knowledge of the world in which they live. It is from this perspective that they bring and project meaning to the work.

It is interesting to note that in this process of appropriation, we are seeing Atget through the eyes of another, something which is more distinguishable in the work of Lima because, like Sherrie Levine, he also chooses to present his rephotographs in a manner that is distinguishable from the original. Levine re-represented Evans's photographs in different sizes and contrasts to his images to let the spectator in on her secret. Lima makes a similar aesthetic choice to help claim "ownership" of his images by leaving them in black and white rather than applying Atget's signature sepia tone to the work. In the subtle choices to

[67] Marzorati, 1986, 93.
[68] Ratcliff, 1982, 13.

stand apart, these artists are simultaneously questioning the role of the maker, asserting themselves as “Authors,” and declaring they have something more they wish to communicate to the viewer.

In the act of rephotographing, Lima creates a journey or wandering of temporal uncertainty, and the series itself becomes a kind of anachronism. This occurs because the visual journey created in the appropriation act leaves us unsure of which year we are at these empty places. Similar to the term itself, the concepts regarding the places we encounter begin to exist out of their own time in history. We experience errors in the chronology of time and thus begin to experience a kind of uncanny misplacement.

Finally, it is important to note that in his tonal choice, Lima is also pointing us to a parallel story that is transpiring in the uncanny empty places of Paris, something which is very specific and endemic to the spring of 2020, namely that of a silent and invisible pandemic, which will be the subject of our next chapter.

Chapter 3: The Empty Place in Combination With Text

A shift in the way documentary photography is used by some photographers in recent decades has become an interesting and complex topic. Often referred to as late or aftermath photography, this venue makes use of the medium of photography in slightly different ways. One significant development within the genre is the frequent addition of text to accompany the images. For example, Lima's photographic series *Atget's Paris, 100 Years Later*, was created to appear with a contextualizing article in the *New York Times Magazine*. The selectively framed images in the series were, of course, also meant to fool us into questioning if we were indeed back in the corporally bereft uncanny streets of Atget's Paris of the 1920s. However, the text and captions accompanying the images were tandemly intended as a platform to squarely anchor the series in the tragic events in early 2020 for the viewer/reader (Fig. 29).

In the two previous chapters, I have addressed the meaning of photographs of empty places without captions. In this chapter, I will examine how and in which ways the addition of captions and text affects the reading and insights into the photographs of Lima's series.

For example, when we look at Lima's images without the text of the *Intersection- rue Laplace and rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Genevieve* (Fig. 3) and the *Quai des Grands Augustins* (Fig. 6), we may certainly postulate that a "crime"[69] may have taken place. The streets are empty, and we can see from the lighting in the photograph that the images are not taken during late or odd hours of the day when people might be asleep. Both these empty places should be bustling with bodies at these times of the day. However, in this case, we are more certain of their fate. We are more certain because the text of the *New York Times* article clearly tells us that "Mauricio Lima has followed in Atget's footsteps, shooting images of the same scenes his famous predecessor captured. But this time, those streets are deserted because of the coronavirus pandemic. "[70]

In order to elucidate, this chapter will begin by discussing documentary photography's move from its status as the fabulous descriptive medium during the modernist period to a shift chosen by some documentary photographers in the last decades, which instead focuses on what lies outside the frame or what is often referred to as the "blind fields" of photography. I will continue by examining the qualities and limitations embedded within

[69] "crime" referring to Walter Benjamin's quote.
[70] Nossiter, 2020.

the medium which govern what it is able to do and that which it cannot achieve. Next, I will discuss the genre of late or aftermath photography to highlight and explore this aporia of the medium and the directions and reflections in which this can take the viewer. The use of language in the form of captions and text to accompany these aftermath photographs will be examined in terms of their ability to disperse additional insight into images of empty place. The significance of arriving in the midst of a pandemic and lockdown, as opposed to a fully finished event, will also be reflected upon.

3.1. From Descriptive to Ambiguous: Developments in the Medium

> "[Aftermath photos] offer a view into the past from the edge of the present"[71]
>
> -Donna West Brett, 2016

In order to fascilitat the examination of certain developments in the medium, let me begin by mentioning that what is generally referred to as traditional documentary photography can best be described as a style that aims to provide factual, descriptive and straightforward representation. Up until the mid-20th century this genre served as a vital means of bearing witness and disseminating images of world events. However, the rapidly increasing onslaught of such photographs in the media eventually began to wain their ability to impact audiences. As documentary photographer Robert Capa famously noted in his memoir of photographing World War II entitled *Slightly Out of Focus,* "From the Rhine to the Oder I took no pictures. The concentration camps were swarming with photographers, and every new picture of horror served only to diminish the total effect."[72] Such statements help shed light on the trajectory and the reasons behind some of the changes in the ways in which photography has been used and interpreted by some photographers and scholars in the last decades. In turn, spurring a steady interest in exploring the medium's ability to express more than simply describe and impart factual information.

There have, of course, also been some significant achievements in terms of technology that have played their part in this shift as well. The back side of developing newer and faster technologies with regard to both photography and social media has become very clear in recent years; we have become trapped in a torrent of imagery bombardment to the

[71] West Brett, 2016, 77.
[72] Capa, 2001, 226.

point of numbness. There is now instead a contra discussion focusing on the invisibility, inability, and shortcomings of the medium and the frustration of arriving too late to the event. In the last decades, some photographers and scholars have chosen to focus more on what photography is not able to do or show. This new genre is potentially more contemplative in its opaqueness than what modernists deemed as photography's best and most suited qualities, namely that of its accurate and descriptive qualities.

In order to better understand the reasons behind the developments, let us look back to what we know from the Euro-American history of photography. Modernism was primarily a promotion campaign about the exceptional qualities of this "new" medium, specifically its ability to bring out and showcase the innate features and physical characteristics embedded in the medium. Photography, since its inception, was always in direct competition with painting and, later, film. It thus had to be promoted as the excellent medium that was more accurate than painting and more contemplational than film.[73] It was used to illustrate, educate and enhance the act of factual looking. As in contemporary art, photography now tends to look towards invisibility; after decades of talking about visibility, it can now also be about invisibility.

Some photographers now routinely experiment with the "blind fields" of the medium, such as using its ability to decontextualize an image through selective framing, which can potentially, as we have seen in our series, create anachronisms because we cannot be certain that we are not, in fact, looking at another time period all together. In other words, rather than using the medium to educate and inform, they choose to explore the medium's ability to deceive and fool the spectator. It is, in fact, an extraordinary example of the perfect crime because when the photograph is completely decontextualized from place and time, it is the perfect trace of a perfect crime.

In his essay, *The Perfect Crime* (1996 [1995]), philosopher Jean Baudrillard expounds that the photograph is indeed a perfect crime because it has no referent in the real world. He coined the word "simulacrum" to explain such empty signs that did not have any referent in the real world but only to other signs. The use of photography or "simulacra" was, for Baudrillard, a way of " disassociating the object from any previous existence and capturing its probability of disappearing in the moment that follows. In the end, we prefer the *ab nihilio*, prefer what drives its magic from the arbitrary, from the absence of cause and

[73] Rosenblum, 2008.

history."[74] There is now a "blind field" surrounding the photograph because we are completely cut off from the environment in which it was originally taken. Thus, photographers, in their deliberate deception and fooling of the spectator, allow for an opening up of interesting new contemplative venues of reflection in the medium.

What has become known as "late" or "aftermath" photographs are images created as a mode of working, where the photographer visits a vacant or empty physical place where something has gone wrong or an atrocity has occurred in the past, but little or no evidence remains. Most often, they are well-known sites we have collectively come across in the news, classroom, or history books.

Lima's aftermath images of the COVID pandemic present empty and still locations (Fig. 15) in an urban setting. It is a Paris that has been hard hit and locked down by the COVID pandemic, where much death and illness has already occurred. Rather than seeing a photograph taken of the ill and infected citizens, we experience a trace of the event from what we know of the physical place. Or, as art historian David Campany expressed: "the trace of the trace of the event."[75] Campany goes on to reflect that sometimes we, as viewers, can see that an event has taken place, but at other times, as in our case, we are left to imagine or project it.

In Lima's series, it is, above all, a mental journey rather than a visual one; because we cannot see COVID, infected people do not necessarily look ill; therefore, we don't know who has been infected by the virus, and the pandemic is not over yet. Not being able to see any visual signs of the virus is partly what has caused all the distress. In the photographs, we cannot see why the people are off the streets and at home; it could be an active choice. This can make for extremely interesting, albeit serious emotional reflection. As West Brett puts forth, photographs taken after the fact help refocus our looking and allow for a new way of seeing such sites because they facilitate in neutralizing the "blinding effect of trauma photography." [76] In our case, the COVID virus and ensuing lockdown is not an atrocity on the scale of the Holocaust or 9/11. Still, many people experience great pain due to family members dying and being unable to visit them in the hospital. Yet, perhaps, what makes us most distressed is that COVID is invisible and still ongoing, therefore we cannot be sure if and when we are safe…

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[74] Baudrillard,1996, 58.
[75] Campany, 2003. 124.
[76] West Brett, 2016, 50.

West Brett holds that in presenting such images of vacant places as an example of a kind of "blind field" that exists within the medium, where an event has occurred previously, the images "promise a possible connection to the event, to the memory and history of the site, but in their failure to deliver, allow space for interpretation."[77] This genre of photography shifts our focus to that which lies outside the frame. In his book *Place: Towards a Geophilosphy of Photography*, visual culture scholar Ali Shobeiri adds that what defines a place is more the historicity anchored to it than its physical features.[78] In other words, what we know about the history and past events tied to specific geographical sites, which have been photographed, becomes paramount in the interpretation of their meaning by the spectator.

With regard to meaning, Siegfried Kracauer postulated from a modernist perspective of the mid-20th century that the "selectivity" of photographs creates an alienated state in the spectator, in isolating a specific part they draw attention to what is in the frame but also refer to what has been excluded, what lies outside of the frame. Kracauer thus argues that photographs are able to connote a sense of infinity because they embody the fragments of the world from which they were chosen and isolated. Therefore, they cannot embody any full notion of "completeness." [79] This embedded "selectivity" invites the viewer's imagination and opens up the photograph to free interpretation. In other words, we do not have a clear direction from the maker regarding how to interpret the image.

3.2. A Call for Captions

These open lacunae left for free viewer interpretation are problematic in instilling more concrete and focused meaning, which late/aftermath photography depends on to fully function as intended. As Shobeiri elucidates, in the genre of late photography, "before a physical place is turned into a photographed place it demands of the photographer *to have judgment* about a particular location, having been converted into an artistic representation it demands of the spectator *to judge* the embodied place through the photograph and its caption."[80] Without captions, images may risk merely functioning as vistas. Shobeiri demonstrates that in this genre, the juxtapositions of disparate temporalities occur not *in* but *with* the photograph. He concludes that meaning, therefore, resides neither in the image nor in

[77] Ibid., 5-6.
[78] Shobeiri, 2021, 112.
[79] Kracauer, 2014 [1951], 72.
[80] Shobeiri, 2021, 143. (emphasis in original).

the text but in their point of convergence or site of struggle: (in) the spatial juncture in between the two.[81]

This conundrum of ambiguity is indeed an interesting and pivotal query with regard to the use of text and/or captions in tandem with aftermath photography. Grounding or anchoring the late or aftermath image with a caption or text can become a helpful, if not vital, vehicle in contextualizing them and allowing them to function and better convey the meaning with which they were created to impart to the viewer. The fact that Lima's series is embedded in the *New York Times* article alerts us to the fact that they were taken during the 2020 lockdown and allows for an opening up of a dual or two-tier functionality in interpretation for the viewer. To elucidate, they not only point us back to a specific street through the noted addresses, but with Lima's series accompanying text/article by Adam Nossiter, we are now also offered to make a second interpretation. In our case, we are arriving (approximately) during the middle of the COVID pandemic, and illness and death have already occurred and caused a lockdown. Thus, we actually experience two kinds of "after"; not only are we brought back to the Paris locations recorded by Atget in the 1920s, but we are also, through the text, brought "late" to record the initial events of the COVID pandemic and that which caused the lockdown. Without the text, we risk being at the mercy of what Barthes referred to as the "polysemy of images" govern our act of looking. To clarify, Barthes defined the "polysemy of images" as the fact that in each photograph coexists infinite possible meanings and signs depending on the viewer's reading of the photographs.[82]

As Benjamin reflected on Atget's images of vacant places in Paris, "free-floating contemplation" is not an apt way of describing the content of these photographs, as without caption, they refer the spectator to an infinite number of possible interpretations. Benjamin felt that Atget's images of empty places were a certain affirmation that "for the first time, captions have become obligatory" in the history of photography.[83] Atget's images only provide the viewer with an address; an added caption would have allowed for a clearer view of the artist's intention. However, as an interesting side note it would also have precluded much of the free interpretation and postulating of the possible "crimes" that Benjamin, the Surrealists, and so many others found so interesting and uncanny in Atget's work.

In late and aftermath photography, the caption, or a contextualizing article, as in our case, is particularly important as without it, we are left with a photograph that only works on

[81] Ibid.,137.
[82] Barthes, 1977.
[83] Benjamin, 2007, 226.

the free interpretation level of an "empty place." In Lima's case, without the *New York Times* article, we are simply looking at a series of appropriated images such as those we examined by Christopher Rauschenberg. These images are meant to inspire an act of looking whose primary purpose is to affirm that the "uncanny empty place" of Atget's Paris still exists and hint that something sinister of an unknown nature may have occurred. We need the caption to understand and begin to reflect on the actual specifics, such as COVID, illness, death, and the heavy emotional toll the lockdown connotes.

Literary scholar Clive Scott is a proponent of captions and puts forth that "photography tends to strengthen our assumption that something is worth looking at only if we already know what it is."[84] Scott divides photographic captions into two categories. The first, which he refers to as the "rebus" caption, predetermines and allocates meaning to the image by the photographer to discourage faulty or misinterpretation by the viewer. The second, or "the quotational" caption, allows the viewer greater freedom to allocate personal meaning and interpretation to the image in the act of viewing.[85]

In order to clarify Scott's notion, let us make a closer visual reading of *Intersection-rue Laplace and rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Genevieve*, one taken by Atget (Fig. 1) and the other by Lima (Fig. 2). Atget's image simply has the address and the year ascribed to it, which according to Scott's theory, would place it in the "quotational" caption category. We only know the location, allowing us to interfere and add our own interpretation to this empty place in the urban landscape of Paris. The image by Lima, in contrast, is embedded within the context of the *New York Times* article and anchors us in the year 2020. Lima is thus able to direct our interpretation by rooting the images through the use of a caption (in this case, in the form of an article), a "rebus" type of caption.

This also allows the image to work on two levels because in his "rebus," Lima is, in fact, actually pointing us in two directions. Firstly, the reference to "Atget's Paris" sends us back to the 1920s and the uncanny empty place that is still very present in the Parisian urban landscape. Secondly, in the reference to 2020 and the lockdown, we are suddenly in an empty place where tragic events have taken place and are still ongoing. We are reminded, as literary scholar Ulrich Baer described, that we have arrived "après coup" to the initial events.[86] Our visual clue of any past malfeasances potentially having taken place is the fact that there are

[84] Scott, 1999, 61.
[85] Scott, 1999, 52.
[86] Bear, 2005.

no bodies to look at because the street is void of any corporeal traces, there is only invisibility.

Let us explore in more detail how this visual process will likely unfold for the spectator. As art historian John Roberts proclaimed, "The benefit of arriving too late is that the bodies have usually gone."[87] In their absence, our imagination projects the dead/sick patients onto the empty streets; these are former patients, but as the virus is still present can also refer to future patients. A pandemic is at its height and we are looking at images taken as a result of this fact, and because of the caption, we know that death and illness have already occurred.

Perhaps what is most interesting is that it is a series about COVID-19, but at the same time, we do not see these sick or ill people. Lima could have taken photographs of people lying in bed, but they could be dead or simply asleep. Hence, taking photographs of empty streets is, in fact, a kind of consequence of photography's shortcomings. The lockdown enabled Lima to engage with the genre of late photography because the distributed virus caused the strict lockdown, which re-created the vistas of Atget's empty urban places. We had hoped that it would be the aftermath of it all, but it was unfortunately not the case. This scenario is, in fact, about the impossibility, aporia, and dilemma of photography. In our case, in Lima's series, what is different is that it is not over yet because the invisible virus still silently lingers. In fact, in this instance, we are experiencing something disparate. Lima's series is an example of coming "late" to an event that has occurred, but also, paradoxically, of what remains behind, the virus…

As a result, Limas' series does share the temporal quality/nature of aftermath photography because we did miss and thus come "late" to the initial stage of the virus and all the events which caused the lockdown that resulted in the empty streets. However, I propose that in our case, the main and most significant characteristic that the series shares with aftermath photography relates to the dimension of "invisibility", which is a spacial issue rather than a temporal one. The danger is not over, the event continues, and the fact is that we cannot see it. I have attempted to coin a term for such a phenomenon of "invisible peril that lingers", which I will now attempt to explicate.

In order to clarify how this all works in tandem with text, let us turn to an image discussed by Shobeiri in his book *Place: Towards a Geophilosophy of Photography*. This is

[87] Roberts, 2009, 289.

an aftermath image taken by photographer Gert Jan Kocken in 1999 of what is now a peaceful location where the ferry disaster took place in Belgium in 1987. It is captioned *Zeebrugge (Belgium): On March 6, 1987, the Herald of Free Enterprise capsized just outside the harbor of Zeebrugge, killing 192 people,* and is part of his series *Disaster Areas* (Fig. 31). Without the caption and the image firmly embedded in the series, which points the spectator in the direction of interpretation the maker intended for us, we are simply looking at a peaceful seascape. We need the caption to reflect and carry forward the history tied to this geographic location since March 6, 1987. Unlike Lima's series, this empty place now feels safe; if we were there at the time of the photo's taking in 1999 or today, we would have no reason to feel in peril at this ocean location.

Now, let us turn to an aftermath photograph of an empty place that will instead likely remain precarious in our mind's eye. It is an image that has a shroud of "ignis fatuus", an uneasy feeling lingers behind. To elucidate, I would like to make a closer reading of German photographer Dirk Reinartz's image titled *Theresienstradt, Hauptstrasse* from his book *Deadly Still: Pictures of Concentration Camps, 1995* (Fig. 30). Reinartz informs the viewer that these photographs are of former German concentration camps through captions and a contextualizing essay by Christian Graf von Krockow. Thus, the maker clearly delineates to the viewer that these photographs are of former German concentration camps which are no longer active, delineating a clear distinction between past and present. However, I propose that these images of now silent, empty places still echo something eerie that Kocken's late and "safe" seascape of 1999 does not possess. I have termed and will from here refer to this phenomenon of an "invisible peril that lingers" as the "Chernobyl effect."

To clarify, the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant accident in Pripyat, located in the north of the Ukrainian SSR, occurred in 1986 and is one of the most execrable nuclear accidents in human history. The area is still evacuated today because the isotope readings are too high, and it is still deemed too radioactive to inhabit. [88] It is a site that continues to haunt us, particularly with the recent events of Russia's invasion and seizure of the plant, where for a time, they cut off the power supply, which cools the spent nuclear fuel storage facility on the site.[89] We do not know when, or if ever, this site will be "safe" again to inhabit. The trauma of the Holocaust was so greatly instilled in us that it has a similar power over us as

[88] The World Nuclear Organization, updated April 2022.
[89] "No way out: Life under the Russians at Chernobyl, 2022.

Chernobyl in that there is a kind of “radiation”, a sense of desecrated ground at these sites that will never really feel rehabilitated or clean again.

Lima’s series embedded within its platform of the article *Atget’s Paris, 100 Years Later,* in *The New York Times* with a contextualizing essay by Paris bureau chief Adam Nossiter sets the scene for the viewer. We are immediately guided by the title of the piece and the short caption below, which reads, “The famous photographer sought out an empty city. Our photographer found a Paris evacuated by the coronavirus.” We are thus squarely in the city of the virus. If we examine these empty places by Lima, taken in 2020 (Fig. 15), and compare them with photojournalist Brook Wards' image of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power taken in 2018 (Fig. 32), there are strong similarities. By engaging with the text, we know that some terrible events have indeed already taken place, but something lingers.

Without text, we could simply be looking at an empty uncanny, appropriated street in Paris and a random industrial facility located in an autumn landscape in the Ukraine. However, paradoxically, it is not over, as in Kocken’s seascape, because in both cases, something invisible, both in life and photographically, lingers behind. In Lima’s series, it is the COVID virus, and in Ward’s image, the radiation, albeit different, each is invisible and potentially deadly.

Conclusion

This thesis examined the meaningful application of empty place in Mauricio Lima's rephotographed series of Eugene Atget's Paris, taken during the height of the COVID pandemic in 2020. My analysis approached the work from three different perspectives in order to gain an understanding of the ways in which meaning can be projected and gleaned in such imagery.

In chapter one, I examined the photographs through the perspective of place or "topia." Unable to engage most of our senses, I explored the meaning in the experience of looking at such images, and I found it to be one that imparts complete stillness and emptiness. As I compared the three series, I discovered that these empty places gain much of their effect through the photographer's selective framing, adopted to fool the viewer by leaving out any hint of their historical and sociological place and time of taking. The images appear the same at first glance, and we experience a kind of "photomorphosis" because we encounter something familiar, yet something is slightly different. We are thus set adrift on a disorienting "platial"[90]/spacial journey. It is within this space of disorientation that we try to make sense by projecting meaning and past experiences onto the images.

The second chapter examined what happens when we begin to look at the series not only from the perspective of place but from that of a temporal one. I gleaned that there is something else of great interest happening in the series. In this act of seeing through the eyes of another as we follow Atget emulating Marville's look of 30 years prior, Rauschenberg's copying of Atget in the 1990s, and finally, Lima in 2020, I uncovered that in their appropriation, a kind of time compression is happening, and we are left in a kind of anachronism. We are here, again activated to engage in a kind of visual wandering, but this time it is temporal in nature as we *errance/drift* through time in the series. In Lima's aesthetic choice to engage with black and white rather than sepia-toned images, he, like Levine, claims ownership of his series, enabling a second tier of interpretation and insight.

In the third and final chapter, I, therefore, chose to focus specifically on Lima's series as it sets itself apart not only in tonal value but in its use of accompanying contextualizing article and captions. In questioning the additional insight and meaning gleaned through text, I discovered, to my surprise, that my fear of this being too explanatory and limiting in engaging the spectator is untrue. At the onset of my research, I fretted that in the addition of

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[90] Casey, 1998, 286. (Edward Casey coined the word "placial" and adjective derived and reffering to the concept of "place" in his book *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*).

text/caption, we would possibly find the medium sliding back to its more historical role during modernism as a medium employed more for its descriptive and educational qualities. However, I discovered that in combining characteristics of aftermath/late imagery with text, Lima is able to successfully activate and impart insight and meaning through his series in an even more complex manner. The reason is that the shortcomings and aporia of the medium are, in fact, perfectly suited to describe what was truly happening in Paris in the Spring of 2020. We are encountering a kind of “Chernoby effect” because a photograph of an empty place is, in many ways, just like the virus in that we can not see, hear, smell, taste, or touch it. It is truly invisible. Such is the impactful effect of Lima's meaningful application of empty place in combination with text.

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Illustrations

Sets by Eugène Atget, Christopher Rauschenberg & Mauricio Lima

Intersection of rue Laplace and rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Genevieve

Fig. 1. Eugène Atget, early 1900’s

Fig. 2. Christopher Rauschenberg, 1998

Fig. 3. Mauricio Lima, 2020

Quai des Grands Augustins

Fig. 4. Eugène Atget, early 1900's

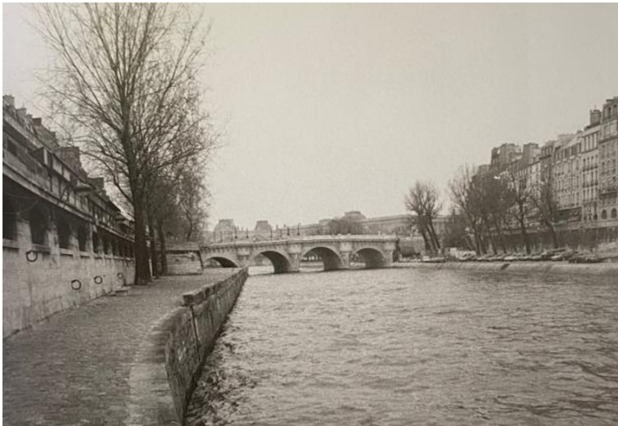


Fig. 5. Christopher Rauschenberg 1998

Fig. 6. Mauricio Lima, 2020

Rue des Ursins

Fig. 7. Eugène Atget, early 1900's

Fig. 8. Christopher Rauschenberg, 1998

Fig. 9. Mauricio Lima, 2020

Intersection of rue de Seine and rue de l'Échaudé

Fig. 10. Eugène Atget, early 1900's

Fig. 11. Christopher Rauschenberg,1997

Fig. 12. Mauricio Lima, 2020

Individually Separated Series by Atget, Rauschenberg & Lima

Fig.13. Eugène Atget, 1900-1920's

Fig. 14. Christopher Rauschenberg, 1997-98

Fig. 15. Mauricio Lima, Spring of 2020

Charles Marville

Fig. 16. Charles Marville, *Rue de la Bûcherie*, 1866-1868

Fig. 17. Charles Marville, *Rue Saint-Jacques*, 1865-1866

Thomas Struth

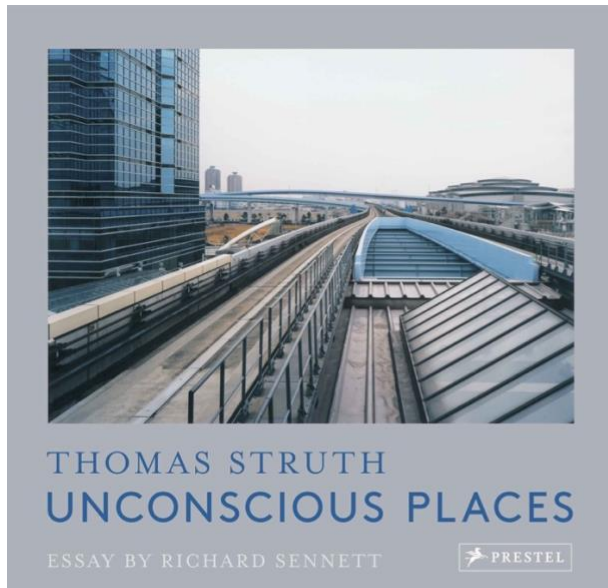
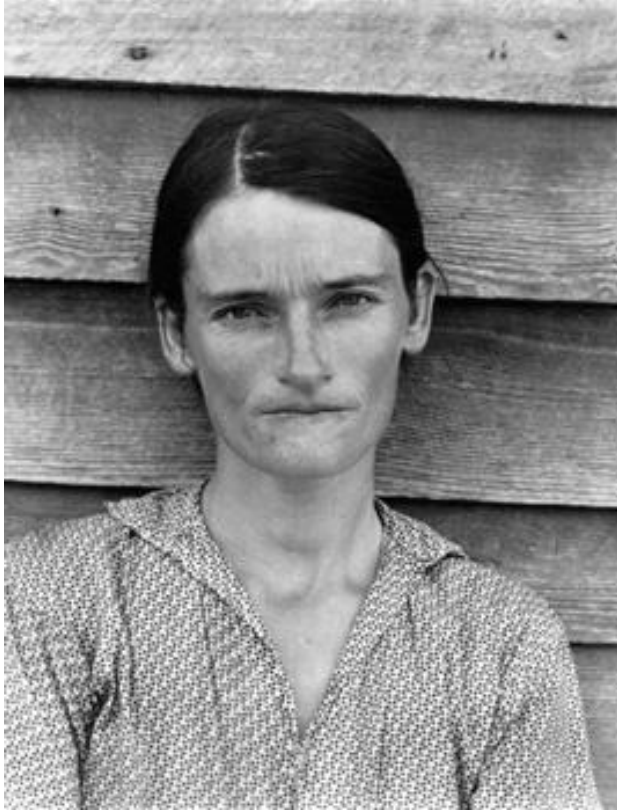


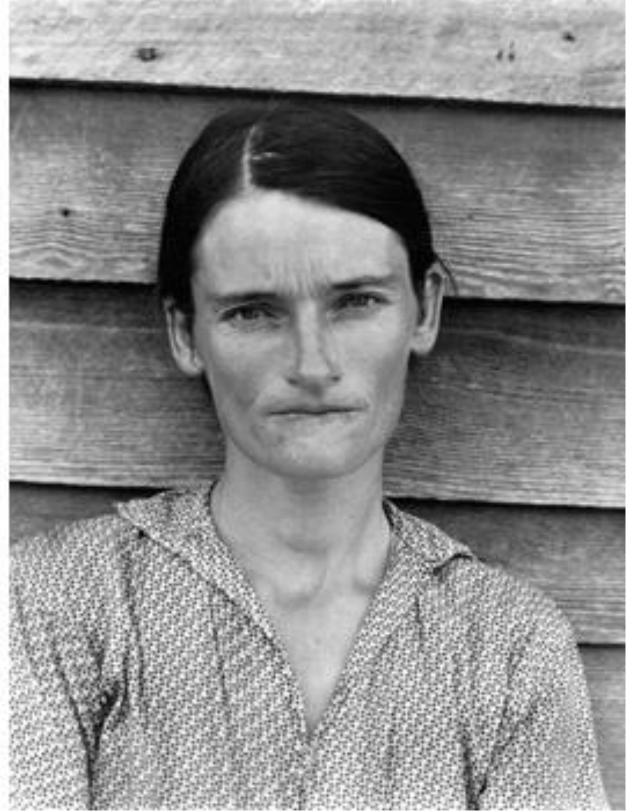
Fig. 18. Thomas Struth, *Unconscious Places*, 2020

Fig. 19. Thomas Struth, *Castle Street*, Wittenberg, 1991

Fig. 20. Thomas Struth, *Hofgraben*, Munich, 1981



21a. Walker Evans, *Alabama Farmer Wife,* 1936
Gelatin silver print, 20.9 x 14.4 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art



21b. Sherrie Levine, *After Walker Evans,* 1981
Gelatin silver print, 12.8 x 9.8 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Examples and Forms of Appropriation

Fig. 22a. Vincent van Gogh, *Almond Blossoms*, 1890
Oil on canvas (74-92cm).Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

Fig. 22b. Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon,* 1907
Oil on canvas (244 x 234 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, N.Y.C.

Fig. 22c. Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919
Pencil, gouache on a colored print of Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa.
Part of Duchamp's "ready-made series" (19.7-12.4 cm). This version is in Pompidou Center, Paris.

Fig. 22d. Andy Warhol, *Campbell Soup Cans*, 1962
Synthetic polymer paint on 32 canvases (50.8 x 40.6 cm)
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Fig. 23.Timothy O'Sullivan, *Cañon de Chelle, Walls of the Grand Cañon,* 1873.

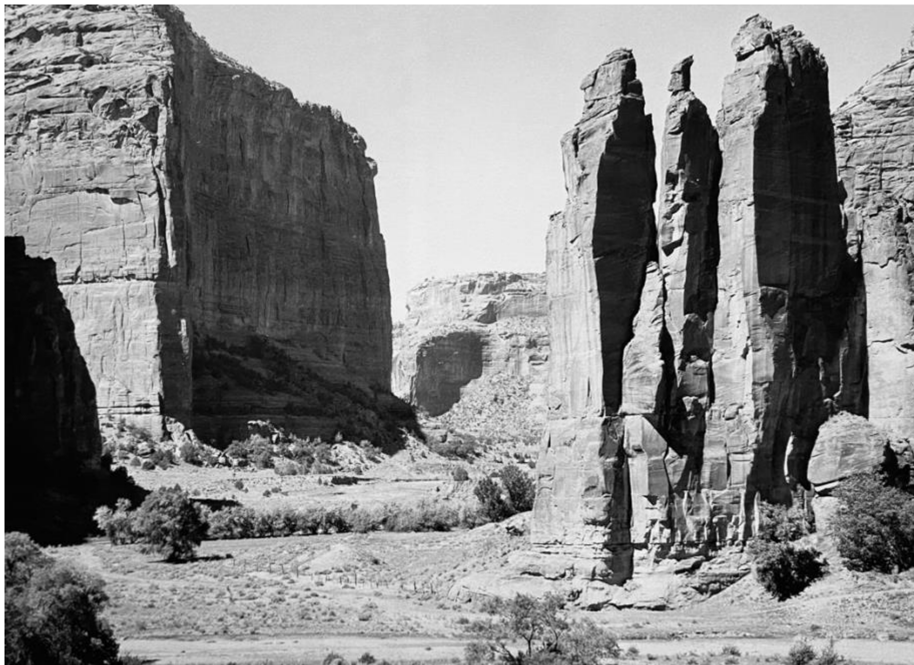


Fig. 24. Mark Klett, *Monument Roc Canyon de Chelly National Monument Arizona*, for *The Rephotographic Survey Project*, 1978

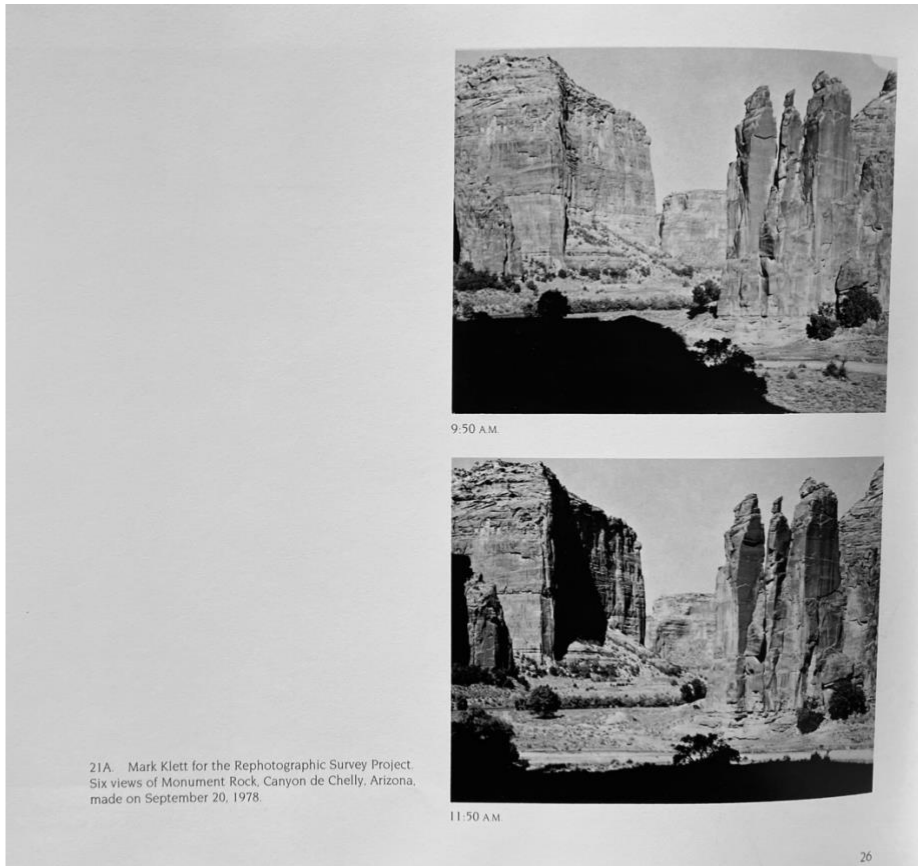


Fig. 25. Mark Klett, 1978. Shadows as They Appear During Various Times of the Day

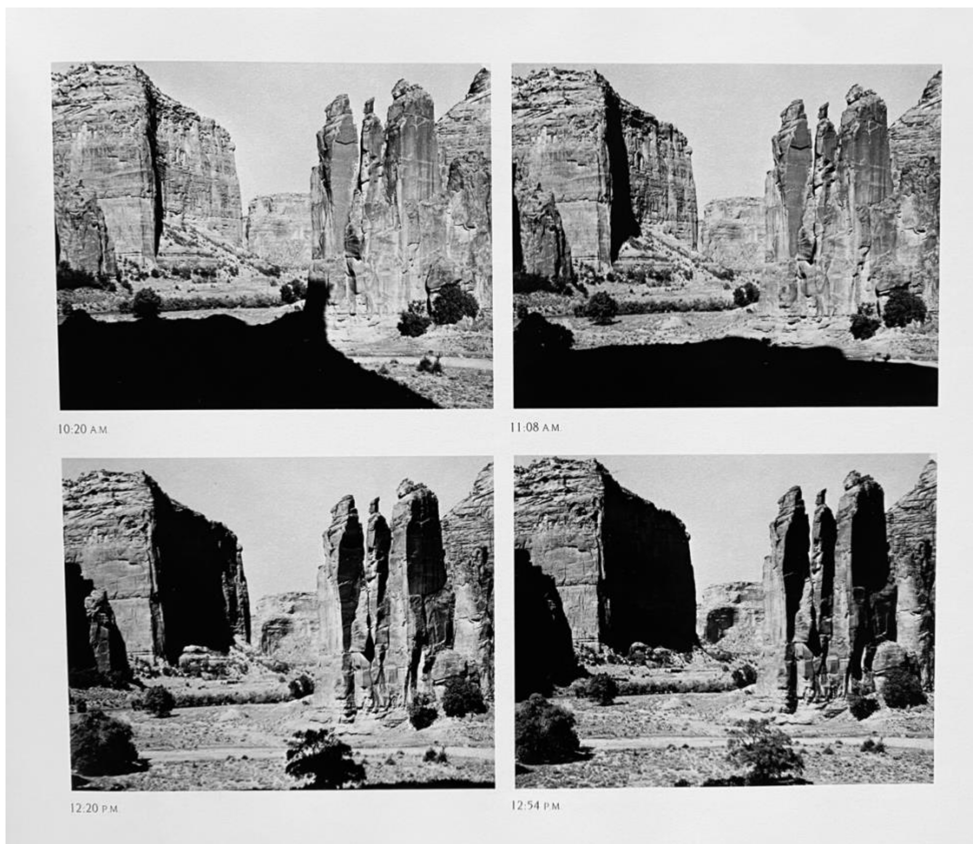


Fig. 26.Mark Klett, 1978. Shadows as They Appear During Various Times of the Day

Paris Changing: Revisiting Eugene Atget's Paris
Book by Christopher Rauschenberg, 2007

Intersection of rue de Seine and rue de l'Échaudé

Fig. 27. Eugéne Atget, early 1900's   Christopher Rauschenberg, 1997

Intersection- rue Laplace and rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Genevieve

Fig. 28. Eugène Atget, early 1900's   Mauricio Lima, Spring 2020
Atget's Paris, 100 Years Late: New York Times

Fig. 29. *Atget's Paris, 100 Years Later, The New Times*, May 27, 2020
The famous photographer sought out an empty city. Our photographer found a Paris evacuated by the coronavirus.
Photographs by Eugène Atget and Mauricio Lima. Written by Adam Nossiter.
(https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/27/world/europe/paris-atget-coronavirus.html)

Fig. 30. Dirk Reinartz, *Theresienstradt, Hauptstrasse*, 1987
From Dirk Reinartz's book *Deadly Still: Pictures of Concentration Camps,* 1995

Fig. 31. Gert Jan Kocken, *Zeebrugge* (Belgium), 1999
On March 6, 1987, the Herald of Free Enterprise capsized just outside the harbor of Zeebrugge, killing 192 people.

Fig. 32. Brook Ward, *Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, 2018*