

Impressive Images

Impressive Images

*Transcriptions From the Picture-Surface
Into the Perceiver's Body*

Tycho Hupperets

Contents

Introduction 1	7
Introduction 2 - Two Memories	13
<i>First Impression</i>	
<i>Impression</i>	
<i>Picture and Body, Picture-Body</i>	
<i>Opposing Picture-Bodies</i>	
<i>Example: Watching a Water Glass</i>	
<i>Disclaimer</i>	
<i>Final Disclaimer</i>	
Garten by Wolfgang Tillmans	29
<i>In Some Way, For Some Reason</i>	
<i>Garten</i>	
<i>Joy</i>	
<i>Tableau</i>	
<i>Pink, Disrupting Dashes</i>	
<i>Equality through Disruption</i>	
Glass Sculptures by Roni Horn	43
<i>Tillmans and Horn</i>	
<i>Glass Sculptures</i>	
<i>Edge</i>	
<i>Synaesthetics</i>	
<i>Hypnagogia</i>	
<i>Imploding Grand Allegro</i>	

Michael Jackson and Female Figure 55

Stranger in Moscow, Live in Gotheburg

Change of Gaze

Either-Or Demeanour

Empathy

Female Figure

Naivety

Fictional Matter, Factional Stuff

Puppeteer

Entr'act

Taste

Demanding

Behind Effect

Conclusion - Meandering on the Fringes 75

Impressive Images

Introduction 1

|

Impressive Images

—

|

I have always liked to look at things. Or rather, I've always liked the look of things. Feeling as if the attention I would give to objects such as cups, glasses, an iPhone or any other lifeless thing was in some way given back to me in return. As if a simple glance could animate the otherwise silent and still, evoke the illusion of a returning-gesture. One that gazed back at me, made me their equal. Also an object, objectified.

Even today at times, besides this meeting of mutual object-beings, my gaze, while scanning texture, colour or silhouette seems to expand itself into a perception by my body in its entirety. As if these witnessed objects are translated into the rest of my body, while initially only perceived through the two small portals of the eyes. From the outside, no direct physical interaction appears to be at stake, yet the sheer look at something is able to touch my body internally, slightly scratch its surface from within. As if the visuals, that first embed themselves in smaller size into my eye's retina, are amplified into a sensation that is felt in gut, chest, or tip of my tongue.

This idea of taking in an object's texture, surface and/or mere appearance, and translating these into another state or onto another surface, caught my attention again when browsing through a book about the Italian artist Giorgio Morandi, a painter whose works I studied during the last year.

After he had carefully composed, observed and re-composed groups of glass vases, ceramic bottles, tin boxes and other ware, he would transcribe them into multiple quickly-painted images onto the canvas' surface. Doing so, in my view, Morandi was able to loosen the object's original meaning (its practical purpose or utilitarian connotation of the everyday-life), and translate them into more independent beings. They had now become 'new' entities, displayed as a collection of forms, outlines, shapes, thickly applied onto the canvas. Their in-between space, the negative space seemed to be of equal importance, received the same painterly care as the rest of the figures.

In this reduction of both form and meaning however, did they never become completely abstract. And even though the

objects' original content had perhaps become more fleeting, their shapes on the other hand were clarified by its fixation and flattening on the surface. For example, this turned the water-pitcher into less of a tool to pour water with, yet more into another object, a thing, a being that was similar to the tin, square, lunch-box next to it. A reduction that created more cohesion to its neighbouring figures.

Similarly, the following texts are transcriptions of that what I once read from the thin surface of things. Transcriptions of the visual information that lay on top, and somehow has stored itself deep inside my body. While the information seems at rest, its edges however scratch from within.

I hereby attempt to open up this bodily storage of memories, and re-translate some of its witnessed experiences back to the surface, as text on these papers. This translating act of the fleeting or more 'rounded' information into the flat, sharply-edged and solid, is an ongoing movement reoccurring in my artistic practice in the form of photographic-, silkscreen-prints, digital films, pencil drawings or works on paper. It feels as if this act of 'state-translation' is *my*, or my body's way of dealing with a vast amount of (moving) imagery and impressions. A movement that is potentially connected to its experience as a ballet dancer.

In the following chapter I introduce and elaborate some definitions that I will use as a base throughout the various transcriptions that follow, with each transcription being introduced with corresponding imagery.

|

Introduction 1

—

—

|

Impressive Images

Introduction 2 - Two Memories

|

Impressive Images

—

|

I remember looking up at someone playing the piano as a young kid. Seen from my low perspective and close distance, I was struck by the impressive spectacle that towered in front and above me. I must have been picked up by someone from the floor, as I remember being able to see the keyboard from the top as well, with its black-and-white keys neatly positioned next to each other. The repetition of these contrasting forms created a sense rhythm, emphasized by the precise positioning of the piano player's fingers that moved across the surface.

The piano player was a school teacher of mine. Her body - engaged, but seated on the piano's stool - swayed forward and back, activated the large apparatus in front of her including the music as a whole. Standing closely, I was in awe of the combination of both sound- and visual stimuli; the overall impression of this complex machine I later found out was called the piano.

I recall another memory of an event that I experienced at an older age. An event in larger scale and longer duration, but of which its impact was of similar intensity to the previous. I visited a ballet performance with some of my family members at the large opera house of the Muziektheater¹. We were seated at a balcony high-up inside the theatre's auditorium, which made us look at the large stage below from a far distance. Instead of observing the story from up close - which would have given us the possibility of observing details such as the dancer's miming-expressions - this viewpoint enabled a general reading rather of the story that took place further away. The balletic Acts were displayed and unfolded themselves down below: showing the shapes created by the *corps de ballet*, group-formations and movement in often synchronized and symmetrical organization.

Besides a view on these patterns, there was also the action of absorbing and translating the language of ballet through which the story was communicated in its various ways. On the

¹ *The Nutcracker and Mouseking*, choreographed by Wayne Eagling and Toer Van Schayk after Marius Petipa's *The Nutcracker*, premiered in 1996 at the Dutch National Ballet at Het Muziektheater, Amsterdam.

one hand, the dancers as characters (actors), their costumes, movements and physical gestures portrayed a clear narration around the story of the Nutcracker, using aesthetics similar to that of a theatrical play, or even our daily life. These were human beings that, however stylised, embodied other human beings.

Parallel to these recognizable gestures, there was a more codified language going on. Movements of stretched and turned-out legs, and similar usage of arms contributed to a more artificial, rather abstracted way of understanding that same story. Not one about the Nutcracker per se, but one of ballet, or dance in general. Here, bodies were morphed in 'new' shapes, meticulously executed and precisely placed while appearing elevated from the floor, light. These bodies were trained to be folded like origami-paper while extend and compress like softer rubber. They followed their own logic, a standard that was miles away from what I knew from daily life.

This gap, and push-and-pull between the theatrical (or more figurative) narration versus the physical abstraction appealed to me, contributing to the aliveness of this memory up to now. These bodies, these living 'geometries' functioned as perfect vehicles for the narration of ballet, carried a mannerism that made complete sense inside this auditorium, yet would not function outside of this black box.

First Impression

While tracing back these two memories of piano and ballet, if I were to look for commonalities between the two, the most prominent overlap would be their shared involvement with the context of (classical-) music and dance.

If I would go further than this general layer of similarity, I'd find more detailed overlapping elements and subjects. Notions around body, (of pianist, piano, or dancer), the apparatus in general, organisation of movement, placement, composition, rhythm, and - not unimportant - the observer's perspective. Now,

when thinking back and re-imagining these two memories, their various, similarities altogether appear as a visual image, showing particles - planes, sticks, bars - that move in random order, with their facades shimmering and still attracting my eyes. They flirt with my mind.

One could focus upon these individual subjects (body, movement, rhythm) for even closer investigation, and I will do so in the following texts. Firstly however, again, I'd like to bring forth the shimmering of all this stuff together, and point towards the other direction, a look from further distance.

From this position, one gets a more general view of the various, smaller fragments (upon in this case memory) that now appear as if one would look with slightly squinted eyes. One thing starts to look like the other, an occurrence comparable to the viewing of the ballet happening on stage, down below. While metaphorically 'squinting' with my eyes and mind, the individual memories, including their occurrences and stories are still articulated enough to be recalled in detail, but at the same time appear as one, dynamic buzz. Attractive forms. Lines and surfaces with sharp details. They neglect story and (serious) content, any meaning or intention is shaken-up and blurred-out.

Especially now, 'looking' in hindsight, and again taking as an example - and metaphor - the view on the ballet on stage as seen from above and far away: The big stage functioned as a dark, matte background, which made the more light and reflective bodies with sparkling costumes appear to float in front of it, or rather above it.

Floating inside the large 'pond' of the theatre's auditorium, the bodies were still sharp and articulated, slightly violent. Harsh enough to function like a stamp onto the perceiver's body. I would say, this was the *impression* at work.

Impression

I do not necessarily talk about the definition of impression in the sense of being in awe, or that of being impressed, nor the definition of the quick first impression or a first glance at a situation. I would define this notion as more matter-of-fact. Meaning, that, which impresses, or imprints itself onto the body.

Taking the examples above of described memory; these events pressed themselves onto a young body as an active movement that occurred while observing intensely. Most of the imprints are still left-behind in my body. The notion of impressing in this case is thus of transferable quality and enables a connection between multiple states, The impression appears to derive from one, 'original' surface, while latching onto another. It is a movement that perhaps departs superficially, (e.g. the array of piano keys, the produced piano-sounds in the room, or piano player's fingers), but later attaches itself to a new body, that of the spectator.

The definition of impression therefore does not function as a stand-alone entity, as it needs both a source and final receiver. To elaborate on the latter elements, I'd like to connect the notion of impression to that of the *Image*, as described by historian and theorist Hans Belting². His definition, or rather, his description around that of the image I see as an entity that lies both before and after, or in front, as well as behind the movement of impression.

Picture and Body, Picture-Body

Within his expansive analogy of the image of Belting, one important aspect is his distinction between the definitions of *image* and *picture*. He questions their often assumed similarity, and whether

² Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, chapter 1: An Anthropology of Images, pages 9-36

the first can be replaced by the latter. He continues to point out that within this division, the *image* does not necessarily consist of a material that is clearly definable, nor does it contain actual tangible qualities. Neither does it appear as static or solid, nor is it even visually perceivable. Its existence is amorphous and fluid in quality, cannot be held captive nor owned. Images live inside our minds, bodies, as well as outside of it and even though some images appear to be personal - as possessions of the individual (such as the memory) - Belting mentions that even inside this so-called private domain, the personal image is influenced by the collective one(s), shared between both humans as non-humans.

The *picture* on the other hand is the embodiment, or the more static form the image takes on, when it is 'caught' on the surface of a medium or carrier, be it the painting's canvas or photograph's paper. The picture is the frozen appearance of the underlying image, into an object we can see, grasp and point towards. Unlike the image, that lives rather continuously and is of morphing quality, the picture has a clear moment of birth (the creation of a painting) and is therefore subject to decay. It is the solidified and temporal form of the fluid image.

Besides the distinction between image and picture, Belting emphasises a third element, which is the notion of the spectator's body³. In his opinion, the body should not be left unnoticed, as it is often neglected within the discourse around images and the viewing of pictures. The inclusion of the body becomes of significance as it carries both similar as well as deviating qualities compared to that of the picture. Although Belting begins to describe that our body, just as the picture, too, is a 'mere' surface, a carrier or medium that contains and displays image-information. Yet he continues, and mentions that the perceiver's body - our body - does deviate from that of picture plane as it is loaded with its own database of highly personal image-matter and information. He calls the body an image locus that, unlike the picture, has

³ Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*. Chapter 2, The Locus of Images: The Living Body p. 37-61

the possibility to interpret, transform and create (new) imagery. It is in that sense more active than a mere pictorial surface. In short, Belting hints towards a comparison of our body to the picture, yet points out that we should not underestimate its difference.

After my rather compressed and paraphrased portrayal of Belting's terminology, and the distinctions between both the *image*, *picture*, and *body*⁴, I do want to slightly retract from the latter's deviation, and emphasise a similarity between both picture and body.

As Belting mentions, the body contains its own set of personal imagery, and therefore can only see or experience from a coloured, bias perspective. This makes our bodies, as opposed to picture-objects, less neutral. In that sense, I do not disagree, but would like to point out that the creation of this *very* differentiation (between picture and body) is also a personal one, coming from the body of Belting himself. Therefore, it is a man-made differentiation and distinction, not a given per definition. Perhaps Belting's distinction of the human body being *other* than the picture plane emerged out of multiple perspectives, or resulted from scientific study or philosophical dialogue. Yet, even this dialogue does not, and can never fully encompass or conclude an ultimate version of what exactly the difference between 'things', and 'our body' really is. Therefore, as each perspective is subject to changing times and environments, I am automatically lead to question whether also objects contain a personal perspective (live life from personal experience) and if we, humans, are able to witness our bodies detached from a subjective or personal point of view. As mere pictures appearing on surfaces.

These questions seem to demand a flattening of hierarchy and merging of difference, attempt to find similarity between that what is usually perceived as other. I realise of course, that similar to Belting's (and my) ability of making distinctions, imagining, or creating *similarity* is a personal act as well. A point

⁴ Unlike the distinction of body and picture, the distinction between image and picture I'd like to keep separate, as its is relevant in the following texts.

of view that still stems from one, body's perspective. Any words written here, therefore are inherently subjective.

I do however want to point out that my emphasis on zooming-out, or looking for a sense of 'equalness' and similarity between our own (humane), and non-humane bodies, is here to bring forth a space that supports an attitude for a more direct, same-level dialogue with what I see. Through doing this, difference in potential value or content of various pictures might be reduced, however the difference in forms an appearance is not. To me, merging the picture to the body enables an attitude that is in direct empathy with that what's in front of my eyes. A form of empathy that does not come forth through attachment to the objects I face on emotional level, but through a simple recognition of *sameness*, as I will exemplify further in this chapter. This instant recognition of similarity in the otherwise lifeless picture-body, breaks down the idea of there being only one, local, original or more-significant-than-other location from which most interpretations and projections are born.

This act of empathy is perhaps comparable to that of an adult's body that slightly squats in order to talk at eye-level with a younger child.

Opposing Picture-Bodies

Before I elaborate by giving an example around this ambiguity of clear personal location, I would like to sketch out a picture in more schematic form. (fig. 1.5 Imagine two picture-bodies standing opposite each other in space. As two solidified versions of once fleeting images, they are still able to project and interpret each other's underlying fleeting state; a database of imagery. They both consist of a clear surface, have a clear *facade* and appear - compared to the fleeting realm of images - more static and solid, are composed of more dense material quality.

However, in their solidity, both picture-bodies are just porous enough to let some of the surrounding images come

through, while their bodies are still fragile and subject to time and decay. Meaning, they could eventually die, and potentially dissolve (back) into the stream of ephemeral images. Behind the body and its facade (that is alive or dead), the image awaits impatiently in order to let itself be imprinted into, or projected away from the picture-body's surface.

The human body and picture plane, now exchangeable in definition, exist both as highly-charged containers, stored with energy generated by the compression of the fleeting image to more static picture-state. The condensed bodies can now function as catalysts for new, outgoing images. A sequence of compression and expansion, of charge and release which reminds me of Horst Bredekamp's description on the automated figurine. A doll-like automaton that is able to move autonomously through its release of stored energy, caused by the winding-up of human hand.⁵

Example: Watching a Water Glass

While these opposing object-beings with pictorial surfaces might differ in appearance and density, their porous bodies are able to recognise each other, or rather recognise themselves in each other, as they are able to look beyond their thick facades. Doing so, they meet fragments of a state or image that is similar to their own.

I take the example of seeing an object in front of me, a drinking glass. While obviously different from my body in terms of shape, material and function, there is a sense of this glass having its own existence, an occurrence similar to that of my body. The glass stands, sits or rests, and so do I. We might stand in a different location and physical position, but are both placed

5 Bredekamp refers to Leonardo DaVinci's term *forza*. I quote Bredekamp on DaVinci, translated from Italian: "An intellectual capacity, an invisible, immaterial power, that, by means of outer coercion produced through movement, is imparted to the body, which is thus brought out of its natural state of rest."

inside a similar space, the living room. My body might seem less durable, and is subjected to quicker decay, yet the glass, too, will at some point die and similarly, was born some time in the past. Just like my body, the glass has a presence, and lives some form of personal experience that I, seen from my perspective, might not be able to comprehend. Yet, the very fact *that* we both exist, *stand out*⁶, exemplifies the given that there must be a larger space, an underlying base or shared location that enables us to stand out from, since without this base our forms would not be able to stand out. This mutual space is not a physical space, yet it enables a connection between my body and that of the glass. Allow me to say that it is the one experience out of which the individual experiences of both body and glass arise. The simple fact that this glass and my body, even in our unique appearance exist together, stand in front and besides each other makes us not different, but similar.

I'd like to bring back the notion of the impression or imprint, that functions as the connective tissue between two surfaces, taking as an example the glass of water and my body. Both the glass' round shape, its shiny surface and hard material, including the underlying image-matter (perhaps the designer's ideas, or the evolution of drinking glasses in general), detach from the solid material, away from the surface. The act of impression has begun. The glass as I know it, has left behind its original form and appears now to be made of a more thread-like consistency. While the fluid image of glass is being transported away from the picture-plane, traces of this original form - that of the picture - latch themselves onto the next, new body, that is in this case the spectator.

The imprint, or impression is thus of an amorphous quality, is therefore neither vaporised like the image, nor solid like the picture. It is in a constant half-state, showing only half forms - silhouettes.

⁶ "to exist" etymologically derives from the Latin "existere" (present infinitive). Meaning: "to stand forth, come forth, arise, be".

The interaction between image, picture-body and imprint brings about a dynamic display of expansion and compression, that fluctuates between states of fluidity and solidification while taking place inside one, invisible 'location' of experience.

Disclaimer

The following texts are descriptions that attempt to hover closely around a variety of experiences. They are not live reports, but written from past observations. I revisit, dig up and transcribe them onto this paper surface, making these past events unfold themselves again, this time in front of the reader. They are, inevitably so, written from personal, bodily perspective, a point of view that is strongly influenced by its experience as a classical dancer. This influence of dance and movement might explain some of the following fascinations and used references, as they have shaped - to follow Hans Belting's thoughts - my body's picture: its identity. It is another shaped *locus* that stores images of the staged, composed, performed, and plays with notions around perception and classical esthetics.

However real and relevant these aspects around one's identity might seem, I do however see this notion, or rather, the *absolute belief* in this notion of identity as just this; another thin surface, another picture plane that more often than not tends to cover-up and hide the shared image, or common ground that lies underneath.

I do bring forth parts of the identity (meaning the characteristics, (artistic) tendencies or even their physical appearance) of the makers here and there in the texts. But I try to dwell on them for not too long, as I find the images that appear through this facade of identity or the images that are evoked inside of me to be of more significance. Some aspects of the persona such as in the case of Wolfgang Tillmans and Roni Horn, at first seem less apparent or less relevant when connected to their work. Interestingly however, more prominently as expected did many aspects

of their identity, such as political stand-point, or ambiguity of gender-appearance, come up to the surface through the description of the actual work itself.

Final Disclaimer

While some of the following descriptions linger around images that are recognised as taking part in a world of contemporary art, others do not. Reason being, that I am convinced that especially the images that lay underneath of these pictures do not obey to one specific context or the strict boundaries of the arena they appear within. Even when their pictorial forms do seem to exist within a clear frame, such as a museum. The following pictures, in their variety of forms have simply left behind an obvious impression, even when they are not, or have not always been 'my favourites' per se. The impression of these less favorite images has rested and grown slowly within my body throughout time, such as the case of Tillman's works. His photographic pictures initially evoked some kind of annoyance and boredom when I was younger, as they - compared to the pristine, pictures of finesse and balletic perfection in my head - never seemed to show me their complete forms, or gave complete satisfaction. My mind could not grasp them, as they moved outside the boundaries of its own comfort. However the questions they raise still remain unsolved, their very incompleteness and 'indigestivity' *did* resonate with the rest of my body. I was hungry for more.

Other images, including the impression they have left behind, seem to slowly leave the picture (perfect) of my body, as in the case of ballet and performance. While their residue is still felt internally, it feels like this initial balletic spark of spectacle has found other bodies to latch onto, and has found other ways of being translated again throughout my practice. Left-over forms often re-appear via notions around display, presentation, ideas on beauty and composition, motion, rhythm, or cadence.

However perhaps indirectly, these aspects are reflected

in the following transcriptions and choice of works, as they vary in materiality, take place in various settings, and appear both on- and offline.

I start the texts by describing a work that is an obvious picture with obvious surface; a printed photograph. I then move on into areas that perhaps connote less to that of the traditional picture plane but which I still consider pictures in a wider sense, as they contain clear elements of surface, solidification and embodiment. Similar to these pictures, as well as the notions of image, body, and imprint does this writing, as a tool, also meander between various states. This text, printed, fixated and written in linear style follows a so-called causality and logic. However, they are transcriptions of the fleeting and non-linearity of thought and experience. This text thus discriminates that which on itself is indivisible, which brings forth both the limitation as well as privilege of writing: bringing categorisation to what before hung loose, mid-air, yet was eagerly waiting to be typed down.

All disclaimers aside. Since writing's characteristics are categorising by nature, one might as well just have a go at it, play, come close to the image by simply describing others.

Impressive Images

Garten
by Wolfgang Tillmans



fig. 1.1
Wolfgang Tillmans, *Garten* (2008), c-print on paper.
Estimated dimensions: 400 x 250 cm.



fig. 1.1

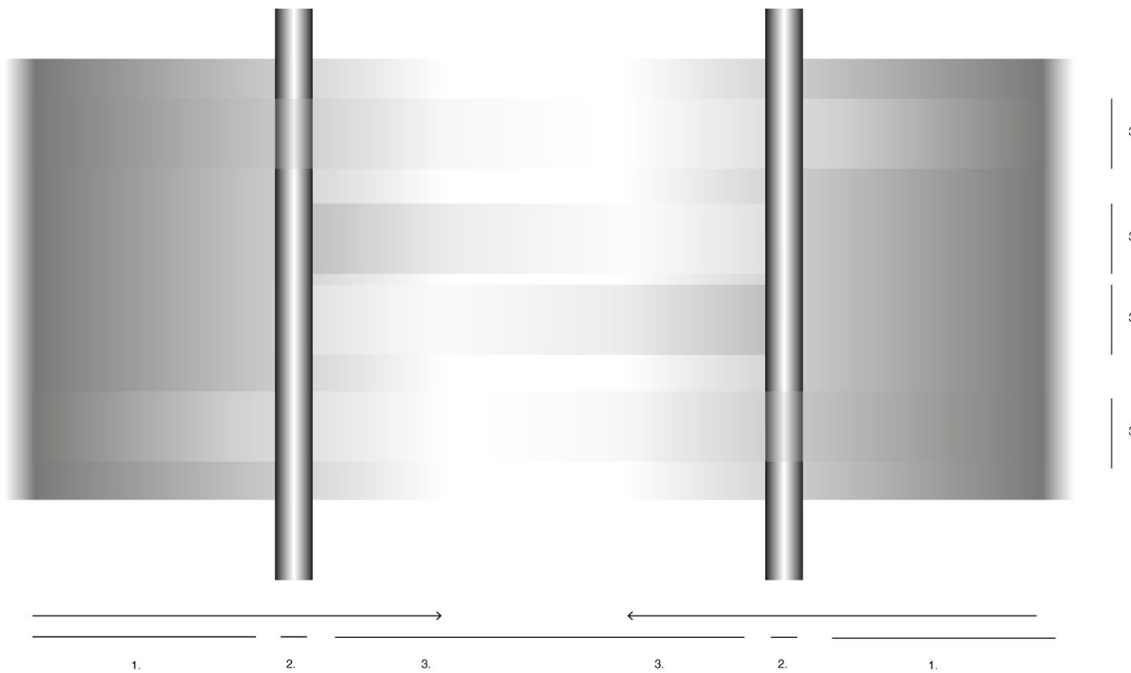


fig. 1.5

clockwise from top:

fig. 1.2
Exhibition view, Wolfgang Tillmans, *Today Is The First Day*, (Wiels, Brussels, 2020). The picture of *Garten* is visible on the right-hand wall. Photo: Philippe De Gobert.

fig. 1.3
Two images showing a tableau formed by ballet dancers. Their overall gesture, that very much faces the viewer, appears similar to the blooming nature in *Garten*. These examples show the end of both the Prologue and the last Act of the ballet *The Sleeping Beauty*, Dutch National Ballet.

fig. 1.4
A schematic drawing resembling a view inside a peep-hole box. As described in the text on *Garten*, it shows the build-up of the picture, as if it could be dissected in layers of vertical planes. One placed behind the other. These planes are comparable to the set-design on a theatre-stage, with the vertical plane in front as the body of the viewer, standing outside of the box.

fig. 1.5
A diagram depicting the interaction between the picture-body, image and impression. The two vertical pillars are the picture-bodies (2) and are seen here from the side, they and face each other. The image (1) moves both behind and in front of these bodies, while being transported by the movement (arrow) of impression (3). Both bodies thus project, as well as receive each other's images.



fig. 1.2



fig. 1.3

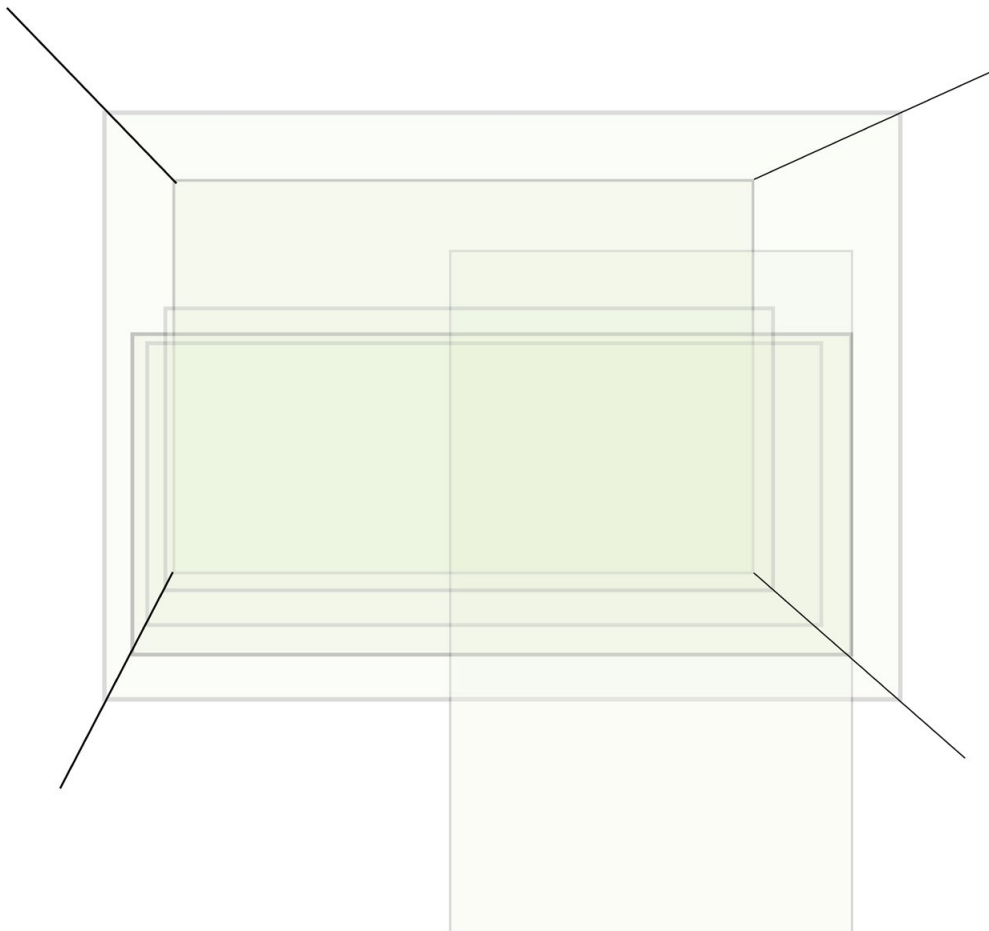


fig. 1.4

|

Impressive Images

—

|

In Some Way, For Some Reason

Having seen, and meandered through two major solo-exhibitions of larger scale¹ by Wolfgang Tillmans, that each showed a vast amount and multiplicity of photographs, moving imagery, and prints, it seems that - if one can even speaking of such a thing - the 'narration' in some way, and for some reason hangs as another image in-between and behind all the works. Now, one could say that this ambiguity in narration is almost a given, or is even expected to be found in the works of any maker of this stature, when lingering inside Western artistic tradition. However, in the case of Tillmans what I find refreshing to see is that this ghost-like quality of the image (narration) is evoked by the portrayal of actual, recognisable forms: showing pictures that are often not ghost-like or ambiguous on themselves. I see figures in the photographs that could easily be perceived and interpreted in only one dimension (and being free to do so) - flat - devoid of any hint towards a larger gesture that is able to potentially leave the paper's initial flat surface.

Looking at Tillmans' photographs, I see a car, a plant, some pieces of fruit, humans, friends. Subjects that I recognise as being similar to my daily life. These individual photographs are in that sense straight-forward, of which their depictions could potentially stop any curiosity for further looking. Yet, in their straight-forwardness, do the many photographs within the exhibition start to function as pointers, as the individual picture become as important as the next one, and even inferior to the underlying image they point towards. On top of that, besides the characteristic of being pointers, do the photographs of figurative depiction become as valid, and even inferior to the object of the print itself. The print as an object is a clear example of Tillmans' emphasis on the fact that, however a photograph can be perceived as a derivative of the real, it does not exist as a complete substi-

¹ Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017, Tate Modern, London, 2017 and Today is the first day - Wiels, Brussels, 2020

tute of that same reality. I'd say, that the photograph is in that sense fictitious, a replacement, or reproduction of that, what once laid in front of the camera. A new object of ink on a surface.²

The pictures, even in their gentle aesthetics, function as pointy arrows that appear similar to the floating, shimmering particles together forming the memories as described in the introduction. They, the pointers, are perhaps inconsistent in form, as the sometimes carry complete figures (a car), or half-abstracted imagery (surface of cloth), jump abruptly in size or conceptual approach. Together however, these picture-pointers face towards a direction of one, amorphous image-location. A location that seems to take place both out there, in-between the institute's walls of Wiels, as well as inside my body, mixed with my body's own witnessed imagery.

Now, thinking back of the exhibition, I remember exiting the spaces and feeling as if my body - after it had scanned, read, and was still digesting the overall impression - had just eaten a multi-coursed meal. A sensation evoked by the mix of visuals on paper, film projections and sonic works, including the depictions of texture and surface. A 'meal' that was presented in such a way as if it both honours, as well as neglects any of its own tradition (of both photography and cooking), questions its position within, and outside of the visual arts. I have just eaten both slick-looking deserts of saturated sweet flavour in the form of the brightly coloured prints, folded and presented in Koons-like PVC caskets, while followed by a dish with a more straight-forward Bratwurst, a.k.a the photograph with bare-skinned male genitals, photographed inside airplane setting.

This rather loose approach of Tillmans; being both serious as frivolous in both choice of subjects and way of picture hanging seems to break with the more traditional, rigidly-hung photograph. Tillmans' gesture is in stark contrast to what his

² Banrepcultural, "Entrevista / Wolfgang Tillmans en Bogotá", YouTube video, 25'37". 11 dec. 2012
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQ339pdaVfQ>.

German *Forgänger*, students of the Düsseldorf school³ had imprinted upon their fellow countrymen. During the seventies, its two founders: “The Bechers” had together opened up the space for photography to be well-included within the world of fine arts, and left behind a clear stamp on the generations of photographers that followed. Their stamp was one of seriality,⁴ rather strict picture-formations that enabled an efficient comparison of both similarities and difference between multiple photographs. The many pictures were to be hung in precise lines, which perhaps gave the illusion of a lack of human interference into the making process, yet emphasised signs of humanness in the photographed subjects themselves, and the minor differences at play between the photographs. It’s an occurrence that is not dissimilar to the wearing of a uniform, that, despite its possibility for create a visual unison, also makes the smaller deviations amongst people come forth more apparent.

This example of rigidity does not exclude the possibility of finding seriality or comparison between the photographs of Tillmans. One would be able to compare the images, look for similarity based on color, type of paper, or subject matter. However, if one were trying to find one red thread between the images, it appears to me that this remains a desire from the side of the viewer, and not its maker. It would require a more awake and active attitude from the viewer, yet not a mental or intellectual one, since not the picture’s depiction, nor any other additional information (“what does this rotten apple mean, or stand for?”), is able to tell you what these photographs - comparing or not - revolve around. What the works *do* perhaps, is invite you to question *how* to see,

3 Known for their rigorous devotion to the 1920s German tradition of *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), Bernd and Hiller Becher’s photographs were clear, black and white pictures of industrial archetypes (pitheads, water towers, coal bunkers). The Becher’s were of high influence of The Düsseldorf School of Photography.

www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/d/dusseldorf-school-photography

4 As Tillmans often mentions in interviews; the word “series”, is too often equated with the word “serious”.

and how this seeing is different from interpreting. The ‘rhizomatically’ hung images are often unrelated topic-wise and do not give answers, making them into reflecting mirrors that face back towards their viewer. Invite the latter to question for him or herself what could be at stake, or why one expects something to be at stake in the first place.

Hidden narrative or not, I can’t deny that I’m lead to try and find one common denominator, a story, a narrative (?) after all. To me, it appears to deal with Tillmans himself. While I feel I am being questioned about my attitude towards the looking and reading of the surface, I’m also very much witnessing an attitude, a personality of Tillmans. An approach on photography that perhaps attempts to fade any trace of one, recognisable visual identity or - excuse my French - style, but by doing so, still clearly stems from a point of view, that of unsettling and blurring. As mentioned before, the pictures at Wiels are ambiguous, not by any ‘easy’ gesture of pure figure-abstraction, nor by hiding, erasing, or blurring the actual photographs, but by showing them clearly and full-frontal. Through the lack of too-much interrelated logic between the imagery, I am invited - sometimes forced - to look with a mechanism that is other than my intellect.

Garten

From this exhibition at Wiels in Brussels, I choose to elaborate on one work in particular as it strikes me to be a typical picture-picture, and yet (or rather therefore), not a typical Tillmans-picture. Its colour palette, of saturated green that is densely printed on thick sheet of paper, and its depiction a clearly figurative display, ensure that *Garten* (fig. 1.1) fits right into our common idea of a picture. Only the larger-than-human-body-dimensions of the work make it deviate from the picture’s usual, portable connotations. Its pictureness however, is emphasised by the sharp contrast of its beginnings and ends, the white border around the image; a narrow, but obvious margin of white that is left unprint-

ed. It reveals the white paper: the carrier of image itself which at the same time frames its fertile depiction. This seems to be an intended hint or reference to the process of printmaking itself, that together with the fact that the work is hung from several 'office' paper clamps - making the paper slightly bulge away from its background-wall - emphasise even further the idea of the picture as object. Garten might be large in size, but remains an obvious object. It is easily graspable within my eyes perspective, and its rather silent, frozen appearance in clear distinction from the moving image that occurred once in front of the camera. A still, framed object, a picture-picture because of its clear distinction from white surroundings. Yet it expresses a gesture of generosity, nonchalance and relaxedness, deriving from the fact that this well-executed print is left rather 'bare', not protected by glass or fence, vulnerable to its viewer.

The work was hung on the same wall as the entrance's door, and therefore not immediately visible when entering the room. Despite this late notice however, and transcribing this room's impression in hindsight, Garten is the only left-over-particle that I'm able to now dig up from memory. Part of the reason may be that its size was larger than its surrounding imagery, which contributed towards its visual weight within the space. (fig. 1.2) This sense of gravity seemed to be in opposition to the otherwise light, and slightly democratic approach of Tillmans' picture hanging, that often communicates some kind of need for equalisation between objects, topics and material. Equality or not, Garten had found its way in the spotlight, and into my perception.

Where that spotlight was hung, and where exactly it was pointed towards, was up to me to decipher, dwell on, or simply invent.

Joy

A first clue towards finding out why Garten got stuck in my perception, is that I felt that it portrayed a straight-forward joy in photography, as a clear result of an homage towards both print-making, and even the history of photography in general. The work on the one hand shows the photo-camera's ability being able to grasp, capture, take into itself and slightly deaden⁵ subjects that once presented themselves in front of its lens, and that later on are transformed, exposed, but also fixated again via its printed enlargement. Besides this transformational aspect, does Garten, as an image, contain another luring aspect that is also typically 'photographical': the illusory depiction of image-depth, created by a shallow depth of field. Most areas inside of the picture are in focus while others are not. A familiar but unique quality that only this medium can give, formed by the way the precisely cut disks of glass inside the camera's lens are positioned amongst each other.

Next to this restatement of reality and a slight distortion, does the image also refer to classical ideas of photographic history, or images in general. It appears to flirt with, give hints towards, but also disrupts my personal tendencies that often look for balanced, symmetrical, or harmonious composition inside the frame. Another aspect in the body of Garten, that seems to make me become aware of my body as well, is one as mentioned before. The glass frame in front of the photograph, as one would often encounter in museum-context, is lacking. My body therefore meets the object in its bare, original skin. Making this colourful print come across as a large tapestry that is hung on the wall. In its weave appearance, it has a tactile, textured surface, emphasised by the image of busy greenery in organised-chaotic manner.

I see a voluptuous display of blooming nature, a subject

⁵ Barthes describes the experience of being in front of the camera as if one becomes an object, noting that "Death is the eidos of a Photograph". Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Chapter 1, par. 5 "He who is photographed" p. 10 - 15

of photography that has been shared amongst us so many times before. Isn't it therefore perhaps too much of a cliché, and still a picture worth discussing, let alone photograph? Especially when trying to imagine how Tillmans had justified the capturing of this rather baroque tableau, that contains many elements and topics he would otherwise avoid: the full-frontal, frivolous forms of fertility, no decay in sight, nature at its 'pique' hour that bathes in a slight chiaroscuro-like light. No nature as it is, Tillman's like, in a state of either becoming or decay. No signs of degradation, of slightly rotting fruits covered in dust. No showing of the real, but instead an ideal.

I'm surprised by this picture, as it stands in contrast to Tillmans' usual tendency of capturing and bringing forth the less-photogenic: the outcasts, the minorities, that otherwise would float abandonedly on the fringes of our main streams of images.

Tableau

The depicted flora in the frame seem to form a choreography that speaks of inviting gesture, as if the image is about to wrap inside its viewer. It demonstrates an embrace, coming from the left, right and centre of the image. 'Enveloppé' being the correct balletic term. All the plants' leaves expose their surfaces towards me, generously, while at the same time demand my time and attention in return - like the tiny brightly coloured beaks of hungry baby-birds.

Seeing this spectacle, and its repeated gesture of exposure all-together, reminds me to its resemblance of the term tableau, as used during the older ballet performances (fig.1.3). It is a frozen image, created on stage at the end of the performed Act, right before the beginning of the intermezzo. Here, while the orchestra reaches the final notes of its score, the Tableau is formed by a bigger amount of dancers, that all stand still in a final position, often breathing heavily of their previous movement. Out of

habit, while in awe of its impact, the audience starts to applaud. The curtain closes slowly, but quickly opens up again in order to show, once again, the same, final display. An image, or picture rather - frozen and static - is created on stage, by the curtains closing, opening and closing again, as some kind of double-exposure, that has printed itself into the audience's mind.

Baroque, staged, and composed: again, more terms that seem a little outside Tillmans' usual vocabulary. It is probably because of these unexpected connotations, that it stands apart of the other works. However, there is a small, but important element in even this photograph, that disrupts one from dwelling into more romantic idea(l)s, and brings the image back to the current moment of experience.

Pink, Disrupting Dashes

This disruption, or erasure rather, starts off by a smaller detail, and what in another context could be considered as a photographic 'flaw'. Most photographers in front of a similar scene would have probably put the lens' focus on that what stands in front and central, and in this case that could easily be the outstanding (pun intended) clouds of flowers in the foreground. For some reason, the approach is reversed, its background is set in-focus, giving one the sensation as if the photo was taken in rather hasty manner. And, even though the pink-white flowers (a Larkspur, or Gladiolus?) are included within the picture frame - as characters appearing on the same stage - they do not receive full recognition, nor gain status as the lead role. While out of focus, the viewer's gaze is forced towards the back of the image, or the back of the stage. While doing so, does it make one not only read the image from side-to-side - parallel to its surface - but rather perpendicular.

While these fuzzy dashes of colour come across as weightless, and appear to float just behind the paper's surface, they are also trapped, like loose tufts of wool woven into a bigger tapestry. Within

the photograph, their 'out of focusness' functions as a catalyst for, and makes the viewer aware of photography's 'selling point': the ability of creating illusionary depth within the picture⁶. They set in motion, or initiate the sensation as if my body were able to step inside photograph. In that sense, these dots share the same function as the hole inside or in front of a cardboard peephole-box. The hole through which the viewer can take a look inside, at the display that lay beyond the cardboard surface. While doing so, the viewer is easily reminded of its own body, being many times bigger than the staged, miniature interior of the box. The viewer bends forwards slightly perhaps in order to look with concentration, while squeezing one eye in order to see more clearly with the other one.

A similar event occurs with *Garten*, but in reversed fashion. I do not feel larger when standing in front of it, but rather small. A sensation caused due to the picture's large dimensions and its overall rather pompous gesture of 'enwrapping'. Inside a peephole-box, the vertically placed papers show small pictures that are layered behind one-another, functioning like flat props of theatrical setting. I too, while standing in front of *Garten*, become one of the many vertical planes, as an extension of the many layers inside the photograph and its flat, paper surface. The hole inside the metaphorical cardboard box carries the same function as these flowers and takes a position right in-between the surface of my body, and that of the pictures inside of it: the greenery and even the brick wall that is only slightly visible behind it all. *Garten* has become an image that is built-up out of various parallelly-positioned, vertical planes. (fig. 1.4)

Comparing the various flora in the picture to many human bodies or dancers that together emanate an embracing gesture, frozen, on-stage and on display, besides the described sensation of the image being built-up from multiple large, parallelly placed, flat surfaces, all-together remind me of an altar of sorts. An almost religious

⁶ *Garten*, with its illusory display of depth on surface, reminds me of the texts written in B. 'O Doherty's Inside The White Cube. He describes the art-historical developments around the dimensions of the flat picture plane, towards the image that steps outside of its frame, in order to finally take over, incorporate our world.

set-up in Triptych form. A tryptich, of which its two side-panels are folded slightly inwards, resembling arms that envelop inside its devotees. Again, terms unheard of within Tillmans' Themes, taboo even, but hopefully accepted when connoted to the humble depiction of nature.

Equality through Disruption

Similar to the what happens inside the frame of *Garten*: the subtle puncture that cracks into the otherwise pristine picture-surface, Tillmans' work in general seems to (have) disturb(ed) and erase any fixed ideas on the photogenic. His work seems to downplay any tendency of the individual photographs to become iconographic, or a masterpiece.

This bringing down of that what could potentially take too much power or attention, and bringing forth that, which otherwise is neglected inside the photograph's frame, is a tendency of Tillmans that can be seen back in the series that depict subject matter on the marginalised, suppressed or underrepresented societies. Whether some of these subjects, such as the LGBT-community, gain as little attention as, let's say, thirty years ago, is discussable, but what I find interesting is how even in *Garten* - a picture that seems so far from these (political) subject-matters - similar gestures of creating a sense of equilibrium between elements is shown. The photograph seems to have been taken rather spontaneously, and yet it appears to contain a statement. (Printing spontaneity in large format *is* the statement) It does this however so subtly inside the image, as if any political gesture deeply embedded in Tillman's DNA, seeps inside the works even via these more intuitive decisions.

Back to the exhibition at Wiels, and the photographs I see. 'A democracy of imagery' would be a fitting term, while the pictures shake-up and interrupt my head's desire to form one conclusion, or look for the perfect, overall image. A slight rebellion against perfection is what I recognise, which is reflected

in the fact that he does not seem to fetishise the well-prepared, well-composed, nor does he dwell too long on the precisely-timed, or properly framed picture. He uses nifty technology only if relevant, and at other times tools of more less-known origin (Freishwimmer-series). In the earlier pictures however, does he take on the perspective of an average onlooker, enabling us to see from a point of view that not expresses a certain possession of an 'exclusive eye' via exclusive equipment, but rather a view that us, viewers, could potentially share. And even though the photographs seem light in their effortless almost too easy demeanour, they are not results of a hasty process or indifference to the image⁷. I sense a careful focus on the actual photograph as object, the photographed subject, and craft in general. Their overall materials however are treated in certain relaxed and elegant manner, as if they - both image as object - just happen to be the way they are. At the exhibition in Wiels, I see things I recognise, that I, too, live with and know from direct surroundings through personal understanding. Yet they are shown anew, slightly transformed, and flattened again, like tiny particles of dust that have landed and shifted location, after the blankets they laid on had been whipped-up. These pictures - both moving and still - show more in common than is strange, yet do they evoke a new spark. They hang on the walls like many mirrors - both reflective as partly see-through - in-between the images of my mind and those behind the walls.

⁷ However Tillmans' approach seems light-weighted, rather immediate and not too much based on a formal photographic tradition, it neither reflects the quick, point-and-shoot attitude that most mid-20th century street- and war-photographers are known for. An almost rushed way of photographing, caused by the camera's technological development of becoming more compact and lightweight; a hand-held device. It was able to capture its surrounding action with more immediacy. Many photographs taken in battle during World War II as an example. This quicker way of photographing, that was often used during news-reportage, later became popular again in 'artistic' circles. For example when capturing the busy life on the streets of New York City that showed itself in front of this compact camera. Both camera and city never at rest.

Impressive Images

Glass Sculptures
by Roni Horn



fig. 2.1

Roni Horn, *Glass Sculpture* (2014 – 2016). Solid cast glass with as-cast surfaces. Dimensions: 72.4 cm (height), 106.7 cm. (diameter). The version I describe, as seen in Museum Voorlinden, reaches just below shoulder-height.

Alternative title: Untitled ("The peeled white body of the beheaded whale flashes like a marble sepulchre;...Slowly it floats more and more away, the water round it torn and splashed by the insatiate sharks, and the air above vexed with rapacious flights of screaming fowls, whose beaks are like so many insulting poniards in the whale. The vast white headless phantom floats further and further from the ship, and every rod that it so floats, what seem square roods of sharks and cubic roods of fowls, augment the murderous din.")



fig. 2.1

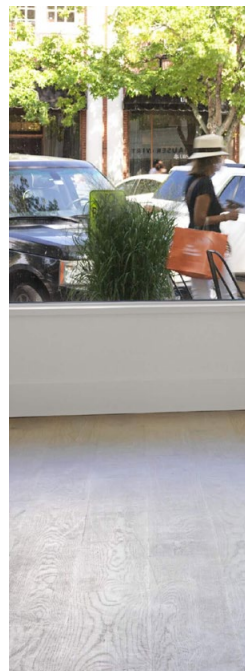


fig. 2.2-2.4

left to right:

fig. 2.2-2.4
examples of additional versions of *Glass Sculptures*.

fig. 2.5
Details of a violet version of *Glass Sculpture*. The photographs clearly show the edge on top, where the matte convex, and glossy concave surfacial planes meet.



fig. 2.5

|

Impressive Images

—

|

Tillmans and Horn

Even though the previous picture of Tillmans very much depicts a gesture of exposure and an overall outward-going movement, the shallow depth-of-field in the image however very much invites an opposing movement, that starts from a certain distance from the work, towards it. My body wants to enter the image, and step beyond the blurry flowers in the foreground. The following study revolves around an object that similarly deals with the surface, but because of its actual three-dimensional physicality does not create image-depth through illusionary means. However, I consider this object as another still picture, as it appears to be in a frozen state.

It takes up room, is heavy in weight, and requires an active, orbiting-around ‘undertaking’ by its viewer. Though, the shape itself appears to be one of self-containment; portraying an image that seems to fall inside of itself. While tumbling inwardly, it is still able to share its falling-experience towards the surrounding space and its spectators, as if it wants to share a private story. When seen in this way, not the work in front of me, but rather my body becomes the flat paper surface, or the blank body on which stories are being imprinted. The *Glass Sculptures* then function like a vessel, are able to mediate out-going information through its clear and mostly transparent material.

Glass Sculptures

Even though the following description connects to the memory of having seen the sculptures off-line or in ‘reality’ a few years ago, it derives from other source material as well; online-imagery that show slight difference and variation in dimension and colour. (fig. 2.1-2.3). I take the combination of this variety of images and compress them into one, transcribe them as one while linger around its core, such as its common cylindrical shape.

I do this for the reason that the experience I had with the

following objects in reality was a less-good example, and seemed irrelevant for this writing. As I found them at a rather unfortunate location: crowded, corridor-like in-between space at the Museum Voorlinden. Its placement turned the sculptures into some sort of entourage, play-mobles, rather than valuable points inside more designated setting. Surprisingly, the imagery I later encountered online of documented photographs and videos¹ gave a stronger impression than their once live-experienced reality! Nonetheless, despite variations of both forms and contextual setting, I'd like to point at that what I find to be of value with these objects. The subtle interaction it is able to create with my body while looking, as if it starts-up some kind of internal physical mechanics besides my gaze alone.

First encounter

At first sight, prior to any investigation around their material and technical whereabouts, the sculptures seem to be made from a slightly translucent rubber that is tightly fit around a liquid mass, making the outer layer appear like a wine-barrel with its 'shell' slightly bulging outwardly. The sculpture reaches just below my shoulders, and is a little narrower as it is wide. When approaching the object from further distance, the side is what I encountered first. Here, depending on the colour of its version - lilac, Easter-yellow, black or light blue - a certain amount of light is able to penetrate its material. However, because of its matte surface, I am not able to see through it, at least not from this initial, lateral view. Once the sculpture is approached, I am able to look at it from above, at its top in closer distance. I can now look 'into' its material, which appears more solid as before - no wrinkle in sight. It is solid, but its material transparency and lack of colour enables me to actually see - through its interior - all sides

1 ARTtube, "Roni Horn - De Pont Museum". YouTube video, 10:11 min. 2016
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUvKtTsRNpo>

again. What catches my attention above all is that even though appearing as calm, ‘contained’ and approachable, there are various ways in which a sensation of friction is evoked, coming from subtle contrasting elements connected to the object itself: slight differences in surfacial texture, subtle details in its overall design, combined with the knowledge on the coming about of the object.

While its matte-textured side, its ‘flanks’, appear stronger in colour and are more opaque, they do let through a certain amount of light. This is in contrast to the top surface of high-gloss and reflection, it mirrors its environment. This top plane might be the only portal for a view inside the sculpture and look inside its transparent content, yet, because of its mirroring effect its material does not initially appear transparent at all. This double action within one material, of reflection versus transparency, makes me wonder about the assumptions and certainties around that what we call see-through; as if transparency is transparent per definition. At first glance, the top surface withholds me from looking at its interior², as it creates a clear border between the out- and inside, unless I look at the sculpture from just the right angle.

I continue to read its shape, from its base towards the top. At the bottom, it slightly bulges outwardly, as if filled with heavy matter, and converts again at its top. Here, the edge of the matte sides meets its neighbour, the glossy, horizontal plane. This horizontal surface on top shows a slight opposing movement to its bulging sides, as it does not protrude, but curves inwardly, like a reverted meniscus.

² This notion of a see-through or mirroring surface not actually having a transparent effect and often creating a clear border, reminds me of a fragment of an article I read recently in the magazine *De Groene Amsterdammer*: “A mirrored building becomes invisible – it’s something architecture students often believe when they make their first designs. A visit to the Depot of Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam can now release everyone from that illusion. A building clad in mirrored panels does not become less noticeable at all, and it mainly requires maintenance and cleaning.”

Source: “*Slingeraapjes achter glas*”, Christophe Van Gerrewey, *De Groene Amsterdammer* (nr. 1, 05-01-2022)

Edge

Here, where the bulging sides meet the ‘caved’ top, a sharp edge is created (fig. 2.5), that functions as an important meeting point of various opposite qualities: the matte versus glossy, the transparent versus opaque, plus the two silhouettes of concave and convex shape.

Because these juxtapositions are concentrated in this narrow, rather sharp ‘wing’ at the top edge location, while its sides slightly fold inwardly, it functions as an important catalyst for the sensation of the imprint working its way onto (into) my body. This edge, and the fact that some variations of these sculptures show subtle, vertical lines that run at about every ten centimetres on its external ‘shell’, create another sensation of friction, as it lies in-between the ideas of the pristine, polished and perfect, versus the rough and untouched. These lines appear to be left-over traces of a past process. After doing some background research on the sculpture’s becoming, it appear to be so: these vertically running lines are the imprint that the original mould had left-behind on the glass matter during its cooling-process. Continuing this research, these sculptures are the results of a once-liquid mass that had been poured into a large mould, had taken over five months to cool down and was now solidified³. A time-consuming process that was necessary for this large amount to cool down steadily and evenly, in order to avoid any too-rapid decrease in temperature, which could potentially cause the glass to burst.

³ Roni Horn points out that it’s really the limitations of our visual perception, and the connected assumptions based on this limitation, that create the idea of material to be solid, static or frozen; If one were to investigate its material through a microscope, we’d see quickly-vibrating, moving molecules. That notion of one, same, or similar thing to be in multiple states at once - portrayed through minimal means - can be found in other works as well. Its fluidity becomes apparent as well when she explores the multifaceted aspects around (her) identity, via (self-) portraits, or the pairing and comparing inside a chosen medium.

Synaesthetics

Taking in both this knowledge on the duration of its cooling process, and imagining these slow, morphing, change of states at work, next to considering the actual weight (over five-thousand kilograms) while appearing light-weighted and almost ephemeral, contribute to a collection of factors that play a part within the overall impression at work. These elements together, evoke a slight experience of synaesthesia. I might merely be looking at the sculpture, but the above hints of contrasting information rub against each other in my mind, creating sparks that can be sensed in other parts of my body. It is as if the diversity of information is translated through compression and concentration, onto for example the tip of my tongue.

Clearly, this is not a translation from the one static state, to another, similar state, such as the 'simple' upside-down version of an image that is formed on the back of my retina while looking at the Sculpture. Rather, both the visuals, as well as the factual information plus additional personal connotations (of e.g. soft candy, more on that later on) transform themselves into a new, embodied sensory-state. This state is in motion, but somehow feels as if it's of much smaller dimensions than the original sculpture-picture. This sensation while looking - sensing rather - behaves more like a verb rather than a noun, which I'd say is similar to the act of biting, or having bitten.

While looking at the body of the glass object, my body feels as if it has, with its front teeth, created the slightly hollow and shiny surface on top of *Glass Sculpture* by biting it off - its residue of glass still rests in front of my mouth. My mouth is connected to this wet looking surface that which initially was only witnessed through the eyes. It feels as if my body has replaced that of the sculpture, as if my bite - a part of my body - is what created the perfectly even, but sharp edges, similar to a cut through a gemstone.

However harsh, sharp and heavy some of these previous connotations might be, a database of private memory steps in as

well, which cannot help but refer the sculpture's appearance to a sugar-coated Tum-Tum candy. An image evoked by its pastel colours, tactile appearance and bulging shape, as if it were filled with gooey matter. Its outsides connect to my body's insides⁴, where the divisive and categorical tendencies of my brain are in serious dialogue with a deeper, gut-feeling that is softer and malleable, making the sculpture's underlying image - not the picture - slowly appear through the surface outwardly. The Sculpture's pictorial surface, the fluid image and my body are in a serious game, in the multi-dimensional experience of perception.

Hypnagogia

This experience of noticing the borders being blurred between the object's ends, and my body's beginnings, yet watching a sculpture of simple form, that appears ambiguous in weight and matter, could be compared to a sensation I used to experience right before falling asleep during my early twenties. I have recently found out that this particular phenomenon is called hypnagogia⁵. It is a 'mental' state of relatively short duration that can occur when the body is tired, but finally at rest in bed after a longer period of intense physical action. In my perception,

4 This notion of external, and internal bodily observance, reminds me of the following text as written by D.W. Winnicott in the chapter *Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena*. From the book: *Object Reader*. I paraphrase:

Even though they might appear as separate entities to the external, mature onlooker: the outside (the mother's body, or the mother's breast) and inside (infant's own body) within the baby's experience are not opposite or separate. For him/her, the mother's breast it drinks from is one with its own body, since the understanding of separate bodies (you, and I) cannot be consciously made just yet. This observation is based on the text written by D.W. Winnicott in the chapter *Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena*. From the book: *Object Reader*

5 Hypnagogia: the transitional state of consciousness between wakefulness and sleep.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypnagogia>

during this moment when I had already closed my eyes and was slightly dozing off, I was still awake enough to witness forms, objects and shapes that appeared to be both 3-dimensional as well as flat. The capability to comprehend, 'relativize' or make sense of size and space however no longer seemed to function. These shapes would float, yet stand sturdy, some rectangles towering higher above. They could be observed from lower point of view (from my bed?), but I also from a further distance at equal height - a kind of Oracle-eyed perspective. Nonetheless, as 'my' presence, or rather, *a* presence of looking was just as huge and powerful as the witnessed objects in front, I was able to encapsulate the forms from multiple perspectives via the means of only one gaze. Dimensions were irrelevant, hugeness was made smaller again without actually changing size. A distinction between them and I was apparent, even though I can't recall having a body really, there was just observance. On some evenings during this state, I would be awake enough in order to step in - and out of it, as if switching the phase of Hypnagogia on and off. I would still feel floaty, observe an array of objects in front of me, but at the same time I could squeeze wiggle my fingers, feel the bed underneath my body and re-connect again to the reality of the bedroom where things had a certain weight, and were measurable.

Where this again connects to the sculptures of Roni Horn, is that similar to the sensation of biting when looking at the Glass Sculpture, also during these states of Hypnagogia, did I have the sense as if the wide display of illusory objects was simultaneously concentrated, translated and re-enacted as a tiny texture that I felt in the front of my mouth, on the tip of my tongue. The large and heavy becoming thin, light, and defined sharply.

Imploding Grand Allegro

This description on the sculpture has left its original surface a while ago, now meeting the images stored within my body. Images that still reflect those of the sculpture itself, yet have

less and less to do with the act of looking alone. The experience of the sculpture - while absorbing appearance, weight, and the subtle contrasts within material - connects further to my body's experience of movement and dance. The sculpture's image appears to implode and tumble into itself, and as its image has already reached (imprinted) my body, a similar sensation of tumbling is felt internally as well. An event of a continuous falling, but without actual descent⁶. An image of massiveness and lightness falls infinitely, but is held mid-air by a slight counter-movement upwards. A physical sensation that reminds me of a quote a dance trainer mentioned recently during ballet training, of: ballet being such as an 'organised falling'⁷. This notion to me resembles how the phenomenon of gravity during a balletic series of movements is firstly to be accepted and allowed as a helpful, rather than hindering tool, despite ballet's aim for appearing upward, higher and lifted, "Slightly hovering above earth"⁸.

This exercise in controlling or managing the natural given of gravity is mostly experienced during the last exercise within a ballet training, that of the *Grand Allegro*. During this part, all the information that is gathered during the previous exercises, including the perfect images inside the minds of the ballet dancer are put to the test. The images of ballet, in the Grand Allegro are gathered, shaken-up and set loose again, mostly exists of big jumps and leaps throughout the studio, combined with quick turns and abrupt switches of the body in various directions.

Even though appearing high, light and effortless, it is an exercise very much in connection to the notion of organised

6 A similar image of tumbling inside can be read from the sculpture itself: Where the cylindrical side plane at the top curves inwardly, as if slightly falling into itself.

7 A quote from Maurice Causey, ballet trainer and former dancer with the Forsythe Company, he paraphrases another quote however, of a choreographer whose name he had forgotten.

8 Prima ballerina Natalia Makharova: "Ballet is about creating the illusion of the body slightly hovering above the earth". This quote I picked up in an interview of her on YouTube. Unfortunately, the video has been taken of the web.

falling; since throughout the exercise, the body's weight slightly drops (falls) forward, while through the efficient means of precise timing, coordination and counter-movement with the help of arms and legs, gravity is caught in its downward-motion - catapulted back up again. The actual jumps appear like frozen pictures that hang mid-air, however in-between these 'snapshots', the body has to be gooey enough, adaptive enough, relaxed enough for the series of pictures to be connected seamlessly, in order for this exercise to become one final statement of dance.

Impressive Images

Michael Jackson and Female Figure



fig. 3.1-3.2

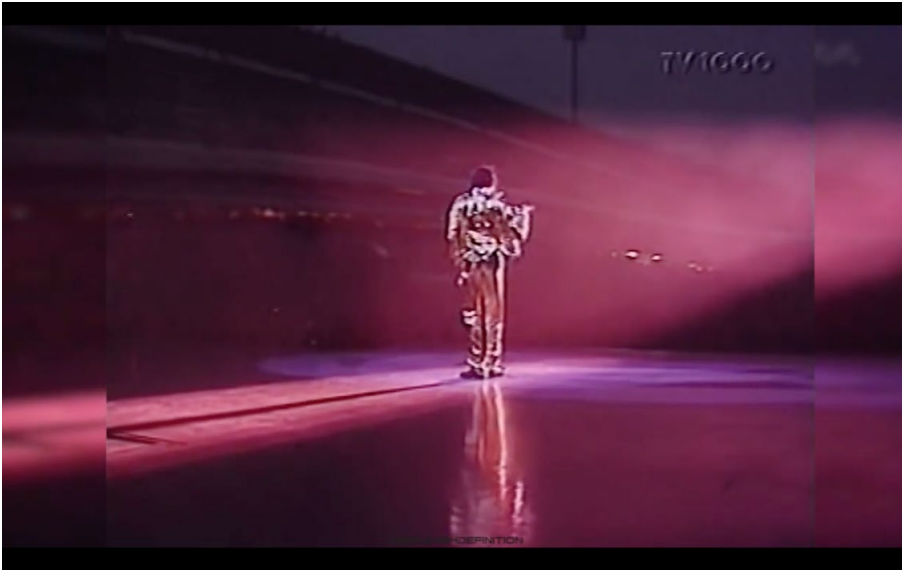


fig. 3.3



fig. 3.4

fig. 3.1 - 3.2

Two film-stills from a YouTube clip, showing Michael Jackson's change of focus during the beginning of his performance of "Stranger in Moscow".

Michael Jackson - Stranger In Moscow - Live Gothenburg 1997 - HD", 6:12 min.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HlpslZGC7W4&list=FL7AvD-VFIUVDzY19R4bb8cOw&index=10>

fig. 3.3

Michael Jackson seen from the back, his body facing the audience.

fig. 3.4

Portrait of Michael Jackson. His face, 'a white, thin veil', surrounded by contrasting black.



fig. 3.6

fig. 3.5
Jordan Wolfson, *Female Figure* (2014), installation view.
Mixed media. Dimensions: 229.9 x 182.9 x 73.7 cm. Photo:
courtesy of David Zwirner.

fig. 3.6
Image of *Female Figure* exposing clearly some of the mechanics
used in the sculpture, as shoulders, elbows and wrists. Photo:
courtesy of David Zwirner.

fig. 3.7
Two film-stills of a YouTube film showing details of the head
of *Female Figure*, and the capability of its eyes to switch focus
between visitors, or look at itself.
A rare registration of the full performance by the sculpture: :
<https://youtu.be/4pz2D5NUcFA?t=231>



fig. 3-5



fig. 3-7

|

Impressive Images

—

|

Moving from the flat paper plane of Tillmans' photograph to the sculptures of Horn that - albeit in reduced shape - occupy a vast amount of space, I'd like to move into a last description. Two pictures in the widest sense of the word. Two objects of which both the image as well as pictorial surface are in actual physical motion. Making that what is surface and that what potentially lies 'underneath' hard to distinguish or point down. The first example I'd like to introduce - even though its material consists of flesh and blood, and is usually accompanied with other elements such as sound and light - I can only dwell on by starting from its most superficial surface. The following describes a mere representation, a body that was visible on the shallow screen of my laptop. It shows flattened, digitally compressed information, degraded traces of older recorded imagery and in a low pixel-density.

Nonetheless, besides the particularity of the next example, its figure in general has left an intense impression onto my body, especially during my early teenage-years. It has done the same for many others, as its image - an iconic one - has been able to pierce through the façades of various cultures and throughout various decades. It is iconic in the sense that the immaterial and invisible left-over traces of the image, which today is merely a pure representation of a once physical body, have become almost more important, or are felt more intensely than the witnessing of the actual body itself. Even today, do I notice how traces of this image have influenced certain personal preferences, such as the sharply edged, precise, black-white, (no in-between), 'cut' and perhaps slightly self-destructive esthetics. I also notice how the following figure's movement and appearance have left a metaphorical indent onto my body, like waves of water forming the shoreline - influencing the way I hear, move, listen or interpret my surroundings.

The following text describes a picture of a person whose image is both revered as well as disgusted upon, being that of Michael Jackson.

Before I continue, and in order to clarify: the following description is based on a short YouTube-clip¹ (fig. 3.1 to 3.2), which in a rather short time-frame has been able to encompass important aspects of what I think Michael Jackson revolves around.

Jackson as another picture appearance. Yet this time the picture is build from matter that contains more adaptive qualities than paper (Tillmans) or glass (Horn). It shifts effortlessly, ghost-like but with razor-sharp movements between the object, the objectified, and the humane.

Stranger in Moscow, Live in Götheborg

The clip is first and foremost a registration of a live-performed pop-song. Not unimportantly however, it also shows a short intermezzo that happens prior to the actual performance. At the beginning of the short clip, we see Michael Jackson taking a short break as he remains on stage. He appears to be sweating from either a previous performance, his gold/metallic suit, or the heat caused by the stage-lights. He dries his face off with a white towel while interacting briefly with his fans, telling them a few light-hearted, endearing words. A bright spotlight follows Jackson's walking movements from left to right across the stage, but switches on and off a few times as though the light-technician is testing out its proper settings. Then, the same spotlight switches off again, this time for a longer moment, one can see Michael's appearance only half-lit. The shimmering figure drinks a few sips of water, offered by an assistant and one can hear a few breaths 'crack' through the microphone and speakers: all signs of an actual human presence, a natural being, no artificial lip-synching, or machine-like movements just yet.

¹ video: "Michael Jackson - Stranger In Moscow - Live Gothenburg 1997 - HD"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIpslZGC7W4&list=FL7AvDVFIUVDzY19R4bb-8cOw&index=3>

The bright, frontal light switches back on, and makes him re-appear; his previous, metallic suit is now half open, as if his body was in need of fresh air, revealing a plain, white t-shirt underneath. His gaze now seems more focused, is pointed downwards to the floor in front, the previous chatter has suddenly stopped. One arm quickly shoots-out sideways as a sign for the music to start, of which the beat rapidly takes over the rest of his body.

While I will elaborate on the above fragment further on in this text and focus mainly on the apparent change of character through the simple gesture of looking downward, there are however other aspects that are worth mentioning, mostly in connection to Michael as a performer, and persona(e) in general. Aspects that revolve around the multiple ways in which Jackson appears to transmit, as well as disrupt a sense of intimacy or empathy with his viewers. Empathy being a rather broad term, Jackson seems to playfully explore its boundaries during both performance and private life; a constant push- and pull between emotive distance or disconnect, versus (staged) amiable approachability and overt exposure. This switching, besides the swap of both humane and (self-)objectified, contributes to a contrasting sensation in his performance.

A switch between colours, temperature and temperament, comparable to the black-white piano keys as previously described around my childhood memory². An example of this switch, in this YouTube-video, are a change of thematics in his words before, and after the start of the song.

Initially, Michael jokingly declares words of love directly towards his fans, something that appears to stand in opposition to the song's actual lyrics; which are themed around the sense of loneliness and detachment. Another way in which Jackson plays with the proximity and distance of so-called humane features (such as singing), can be sensed during several intervals within the song itself. Here, Jackson's body repeatedly transforms into

² refer to the chapter: *Introduction 1 - Two Memories*.

a purely dancing one, as interruptions to the sung lyrics. Even though body, beat and lyrics might be part of one similar story, they obviously speak, but use different vocabulary, one being more approachable than the other.

Change of Gaze

As mentioned before, the most prominent aspect within this clip would be the sensation of a switch that occurs at the beginning of the song, evoked by the small, but effective change of Jackson's gaze. (fig. 3.1 and 3.2). A shift, from the recognisable picture showing a human being with humane characteristics, into a more abstracted one, a picture that is ready to take on a variety of less recognizable states.

Jackson's gaze, at the beginning of the clip is more upwards, and in direct contact with his surroundings, fans and colleagues, while later it is tilted downwards and the rest of his body seems slightly tensed. Focused and frontal facing, both head and body now appear as an introduction to Jackson's 'new' alternative way of communicating. With this more inward-looking persona, as I'm looking at the clip, I'm again left questioning on what *connection*, or *empathy* in their definitions actually mean, as I find this new, abstracted appearance more appealing (more empathic in that sense) as the endearing persona of before.

Witnessing Jackson's different states as seen from my humble laptop-screen, what attracts my eye, is that I see a picture that not necessarily seems to present itself to its viewer, but foremost towards itself. This inward movement, the concentration that is directed towards the body itself in that way is similar to the description of the *Glass Sculptures* by Roni Horn³. With the latter, the body appeared to implode inside of itself, while making space for a outward-going images - about ballet, jumping and the Grand-Allegro to appear to the surface.

3 refer to the chapter: *Glass Sculptures* by Roni Horn.

I see a similar action in the case of Michael Jackson, but occurring less fluid and in sharper fashion. The initial facade of the joking, giggly and slightly timid persona suddenly disappears, in order to take place for a more rigorous one. This fresh figure of Mr. Jackson is more object-like, colder and somewhat distant, yet it is the retraction that creates bigger attraction. The withholding of the private persona opens up a space that allows another language to come forth, however it is a language that no longer speaks verbally, nor does it attempt to direct itself towards its audience directly. It is a retraction that enables that what is left-over (a presence, an image) to become more apparent and literally step forward. Even if his new appearance is a cold one, the image that was waiting to come forth works like a hot, boiling mass that is finally able to seep through the initial facade of awkward friendliness.

I have to think again of Bredekamp's description on the automated figurine⁴. The doll, that after it has been wound-up and accumulated an amount of energy, is now able to move autonomously. As it is set free, the release of energy creates motion. Michael's body could be compared to that figurine, charged with the energy of an impatient image lying underneath his skin. His image is set free as well, however the container of that image, his body (the picture), still shows signs of restraint, almost appearing frozen. This makes for an exciting, highly charged appearance, especially during the first few seconds of the performance of the song.

Michael's 'staccato' and explosive movements of arms and legs, combined with gliding and sliding motion of torso and

4 Horst Bredekamp, *Image Acts, A Systemic Approach to Visual Agency* (Ch. III: Image & Empathy), 2017, p. 99-101

neck, show autonomy⁵ as they are 'his' signature gestures that have influenced many others. Though, while Jackson's image, his brand, has always been portrayed as the 'one and only', the unique, soloist and original, I do want to shortly make a reference to other figures whose moves and looks appear to have been of high influence to those of Jackson.

James Brown, Bill Bailey, Fred Astaire and not to forget Bob Fosse's appearance in the film: *The Little Prince* (1974) show close resemblance in terms of sound, dancing and looks. Especially Fosse's performance plays around with similar elements as Michael, of the object-like appearance, attractively unapproachable, mysterious. Loose-limbed, with the ability to move feet, legs, torso, neck and head independently, in subtle isolation from one another. While performing, the above characters including Jackson, make their appearance as if a parasitic entity, the image, has taken over their bodies.

5 Michael Jackson, an iconic picture, has influenced the minds and bodies of many others: in-, and outside of popular culture, the high and low (art), the minds of e.g. Eckhart Tolle and Horst Bredekamp, and contemporary choreographers such as Nacera Belaza and Sharon Eyal. The latter two mention Jackson's name often, connect his image as a big influence to their choreographic practice. Belaza works a lot around the notions of the embodied image, and praises Jackson's 'total' incorporation of both appearance, movement, sound and space, forming one image leading a story. Besides, Jackson's change of focus as described in this video - that of the gaze inwards - is an important factor within Belaza's rehearsal process. This gaze being a physical result of more attentive and receptive way of listening, instead of need of projecting one's image outwardly, resulting in eyes that look outwardly for confirmation and approval.

Sharon Eyal, a choreographer whose dancers not only aesthetically (fragile, delicate, yet sharp, precise) lay close to Jackson, show similar signs of this downward gaze as well. As if it's the dancer's way of being in constant stand-by mode, both receiving, as broadcasting information, while their flexible bodies could explode at any moment.

Either-Or Demeanour

Similar to the previously described glass sculptures of Roni Horn, that while standing still, appeared to be in an ongoing double-state of heaviness and lightness, stillness and flux, Jackson's 'material' seems to be in multiple states as well. However, unlike the quiet bodies of *Glass Sculptures*, Jackson's does not necessarily morph from one to the other in fluid manner, resting in a state that is both this *and* that. I'd describe the double-movement in Jackson's appearance as being either one, *or* the other. His picture is a switching one, is either black or white, but never grey. These rather extreme, oppositional tendencies show up in both his physical appearance, movement characteristics as well as private versus public persona: the ongoing ping-pong between the performed (everything clean and sparkly) and private person (suspected of abuse).

His white face - an altered appearance - lays like a thin veil or a fragile mask on top of its flesh, is carefully made-up with black eyebrows, eye-liner and red lips. A facade that, while being lit by a spotlight that is positioned at just the right angle, is perfectly framed by a stark shadow under his jaw-line and dark hair on top. This framing by darker shades clearly distinguishes his face from the rest of his body. A similar contrast is also reflected in the angular shapes of his costumes, creating a sharp silhouette. (fig. 3.4)

Michael's moves are well-rehearsed, precisely positioned and considered, but still appear strong where necessary. They are at the same time executed with a certain nonchalance, as if his body does not move by itself, but is rather *being moved* by the sound, his feet hitting the beat with just the right amount of effort. They are placed as exclamation marks in space.

Empathy

In this short You-tube fragment, besides the initial display of the nonchalant and seemingly unrehearsed, followed by a highly stylised performance, it is above all Jackson's distant, almost fragile demeanour that is of great attraction - the unapproachable persona. This distinction between a sense of connection and the absence thereof becomes ambiguous when reflecting on this video in detail.

Unlike the beginning of the fragment where Jackson's attention lies with his audience members and his crew, during the actual performance it seems as if his concentration is shifted elsewhere. As if his attention is no longer directed towards me - a viewer with basic admirations and personal preference - but towards an even closer location that is beyond our personalities.

This shift, however small and subtle, seems to be a result from an external to a more inner-body focus, which evokes my gaze as an onlooker to do the same. I look at Jackson's eyes, but because they do not look back at me I'm forced/invited to witness the rest of his body as it slowly starts to move. This observing of his body that has initiated to move returns me to my own body, making me ask myself half-consciously: how does it feel? How do I, a watching body, feel while watching? I sense my body as if it were his. And while Jackson listens to these movements, I'm tempted to do the same.

At the beginning of the performance, the initial communication of laughter and speech is suddenly cut-off, but then re-established via other ways, connected to an image I did not notice before. This new way of communication resonates on a level that has little to do with the purely visual, a level where the images live. Images that I can't see visually and are difficult to describe, but clearly reflected inside my witnessing body. They are felt. Rather than showing me that image, Michael reveals it, by courteously letting his body step aside. As he becomes transparent, he leaves the notions such as identity, fame and other distractions fade to the background.

Similar to Horn's *Glass Sculptures*, Jackson's body has become a vessel, existing of a thin surface through which images project outwardly. Michael as a vessel, does not transmit the images of

pop-music or dance per se, but rather those that appear like precisely sketched-out pencil drawings. As sharp lines, most of them straight, some of them curved, some reflective and with touches of blood-red. They are traces of pictures revolving around the notions of seduction and elegance as well as the haunting, urgent, even violent.

In most of Jackson's actual official music video's that appeared on tv during the 90's (different to a performance-registration as the mentioned in this chapter), does this switching of the gaze also play a reoccurring role. During the singing and dancing of the soundtrack, he tends to look directly into the camera, and alternate this with an occasional, short focus sideways, as if looking elsewhere. The *effect* of shifting one's look, or what this act communicates, is different from the previous description. It appears to have other intentions, and takes place in a different context.

In his music videos, the short break in eye-contact actually does break a sense of connection to me, the viewer. While looking sideways, I see a Jackson that is more private. As if he's less busy performing or transmitting any lyrical message, and more occupied with direct surroundings (on set). However, in Jackson's case, this seaming privacy is still very considered, becoming a stylistic tool. While looking elsewhere at surroundings other than the camera, he seems to say: "I'm here on the film-set, obviously not over there with you, inside your living room. We are different" He appears more distance. In these moments, it's as if temporarily, my connection to the picture of Michael Jackson *has* to disappear in order to make room for a new picture only half a second later. A fresher one, a new start with a new eyes focused at mine. This re-establishment of mutual gaze functions like an engine, another contrasting element that enables the conversation between the icon and I to continue where it had left-off⁶.

6 This same action of interrupting the (seductive) gaze by quickly looking to the side in order to re-establish itself later on, is a phenomenon I notice with other pop-stars as well. Especially around the time of the early 2000's. I recognize Michael's influence in the music-video's of Britney Spears, ("Me against the Music (feat. Madonna), or the earlier "Hit Me Baby One More Time"). But also sister Janet Jackson, Jennifer Lopez, boy-bands Backstreet Boys and N-Sync seem highly influenced by Michael's particular choreographic language of seduction, and sudden rupture thereof.

Female Figure

The similar notions around the figure's gaze: looking down, sideways, or back to its onlooker, but also the conscious play between humane, object and objectified, strongly remind of Female Figure (2014), the dancing, pop-star-like animatronic, the art installation by another American, Jordan Wolfson. (fig. 3.5 to 3.7).

I saw the work as part of the double-show: *MANIC/LOVE/TRUTH/LOVE* at the Stedelijk Museum in 2016. It was placed alone, inside a closed-off, perfectly squared, white-walled room. One was able to 'visit' the robotic figure by appointment, for duration of eight minutes, with a maximum of three co-visitors (security guard excluded). While the figure's context of visual arts might be different to that of Mr. Jackson, *Female Figure* does resemble in its similar appearance. The installation looks human-like, is built in human-scale, with (feminine) human physique. Its body set in motion through electronic supply.

The sculpture of Wolfson had been long-anticipated before its arrival in Amsterdam, as it had been criticised and praised before. Its caricaturisation - the assumable insensitive representation of the female - while being created by a white, straight, and (cis-)male artist led to upheaval upon its first exposure overseas. Yet, it was also praised for its straight-forward, no-nonsense sense of spectacle and the work's overall capability to (quite literally so) function like a mirror. It was able to confront-, and reflect back to its viewer any of his/her projections, judgements and ideas on what proper and intelligent Art was supposed to be.

Naivety

What I found thrilling, is the fact that behind the many layers of marketing and promotion by the museum, the turmoil of opposing opinions on its depiction, plus the actual technologi-

cal bells 'n whistles - tadaa! - attached to the sculpture itself, there still seemed to be a space big enough to withhold another image that was slightly more fragile, innocent almost.

An image that was more calm, wise even, considered and (or but) slightly naive. However, this state or location could only be seen when the sculpture had been given enough time, and perceived in proper live-setting - not via images online. This underlying space reflected a sense of play and spontaneous discovery of its maker, as if the visible and audible elements of spoken words, music-snippets, mechanical movements, shifting eyeballs, and blinking eyes were results of an intuitive trying-out of 'stuff', and only later positioned carefully in time and space.

The elements could only be experienced 'for what they were' (meaning before and beyond viewer's personal interpretation), when he/she was innocent, open, and porous in his or her approach. In my case, the rather physical effects of the moving animatronic onto my body could not take place when my mind tried to think of, and guess for the maker's intention, the sculpture's meaning or what the figure should represent.

Beyond the figure's spectacle existing of loud sound and 'in your face' visuals, or the impeccably made and pristine material, there was an irregularity or 'non-logicalness' between both the visual and audible that seem to not aim for quick-effect alone, but spoke of a more subtle attitude from its maker: an apparent joy in the process of try-out, rehearsal and failure. To me, the sculpture was able to communicate this attitude of Wolfson, someone who was interested in looking and questioning: "*what can this figure do?*", without exactly knowing the outcome. Besides, unlike the refined architecture of the doll itself, its performed choreography did not appear as if it was planned long in advance, but made-up rather on the spot, at the location of this room. To me, this was quite the accomplishment; to fool around with this nifty equipment and its figurative forms, yet copy and paste with its materials as if they were mere cardboard and paper.

Unlike its ready-made and finished appearance, the object's coming about had taken a long journey of technological

development. But the playful elements - floating particles - within the performance of Female Figure that happened now, in front of me made it feel as results of improvisation, experimentation. More than only a well-executed spectacle.

Fictional Matter, Factional Stuff

In Wolfson's case, similar to the before described memory of seeing a ballet performance inside the theatre⁷, where the visual and audible particles were busy impressing themselves into my younger body, it wasn't the actual 'complete' form of *Female Figure* that seemed of highest influence, but rather a mix of both the outlines and traces of its sounds and movement that left the impression on me inside this sterile, white room. This is fascinating, since the work itself, in both its visuals as well as kinetics, are rather 'complete', made of highly recognisable, body-resembling form that do not hint towards abstraction at all or trendy ideas around deconstruction. Similar to my description to Tillmans, I see recognizable figure, but am also allowed to prick through its figurative facade.

When the figure is seen 'alive' and experienced from up-close, one gets a sense of the maker's understanding of exactly how various (sub-)elements come across to its spectator. How they impress, communicate, and manage to prick through its initial superficial appearance. Through its figuration, it is able to make room for another image to show. I'd say not only besides, but rather instead of seeing the animatronic/robot, I see Jordan Wolfson - another body at work. Wolfson, not as a person, nor as a self-portrait of The Artist, but Wolfson as some kind of younger entity, who does not (yet) know the difference between fact and fiction, (societal) rules, or morality.

Wolfson's male voice is lip-synched by the overtly female representation, exclaims half-truths through the speakers such

7 refer to chapter: Introduction 2 - Two Memories

as: “I’m gay. I’d like to be a poet. This is my house”. He juggles with elements of truth, fact, fiction, and flirts with personal and/or political subjects. He treats these subjects with a sense of light-heartedness - where one is not more important than the other. This gesture, of just ‘throwing up’ information and seeing where it lands, makes the gesture of these elements never appear heavy or dogmatic. They are snippets of various pictures that form a freshly new, pulsating image all-together.

The voice-over of Wolfson, combined with fragments of a pop-songs that blast through the speakers, the laid-bare, rotating metal hinges and cogs that function as the figure’s joints (fig. 3.6), together with the tiny shocks moving through the blonde wig (‘resonations’ from the machine’s frantic movements): Fragments of pictures that continuously overlap each other. Together they create one, ongoing moving-image. An image that never completely solidifies, lands, or touches the ground until the performance is over.

They are finely tuned elements, thrown-up and captured mid-air. Vary in density, texture and (conceptual) weight and yet, as they appear in the same white room, appear to be of no in-between hierarchy. A phenomenon comparable to the paintings of Morandi⁸, where also objects of different texture, weight and function had become of similar value through the simple gesture of being painted on the same canvas.

Entr’act

While the performance of *Female Figure* is on the verge of being one of pure entertainment, there’s a break, an ‘entr’act’ that occurs half-way through the show. It is a breath of fresh air between all furor. For a moment the sculpture stops speaking and no music is playing. It’s the moment where I’m most-strongly reminded of my presence in the room. A rather contemplative moment.

8 refer to chapter: Introduction 1

The sculpture's fingers still move, and its arms are stretched-out in front or to the side. The sound from the speakers is muted, making the robot's mechanics more audible than before. While moving, its, or rather her gaze continues to search the room, looking for other eyes to latch onto. She - Jordan's voice - begins to speak again and repeatedly orders me to close my eyes. As I become more aware of my myself as another presence in the room as before, I notice how it wants to both give-in, as well as resist the robot's orders. My body and mind are confused about what is similar, and/or different from the figure shown here in front.

"Now, close your eyes." I keep my eyes open and decide to not give in - stupid robot . Because out of childish curiosity, I do not want to miss what she would have done, had I closed them. After the fourth repetition of her command and another pause, the the next song, the next dance is introduced: Deep, throbbing music that is in perfect synchronicity with the figure's pelvic thrusting-movements. I'm back at Madame Tussaud's - on steroids.

Taste

The fact that *Female Figure* is created by a male, and hints towards being *Koons-like kitsch* in its form, pushes the borders of what I am expected to find acceptable and respectable, or art-historically, artistically and politically correct. As a generally well-educated person, I should know better.

Female Figure appears tasteless, is scantily dressed in nylon fabric. It stands in contrast to the other, serious art inside a serious museum. Where are the gestures of the subdued, ambiguous and slightly abstracted? Where is the historically aware, considerate and cautious mind of the artist, preferably engaged with global, pressing issues? Having watched the installation in front of its large mirror, in hindsight, the work has managed to reflect back and question my position towards these notions. Not only did it question my ideas around taste, but also reconfirmed a certain importance of having the direct, live experience with an object

itself.

Seen from imagery or films online, its effect is merely that: superficial. When meeting the sculpture in real-life however, am I able to pick up more subtle signals. I get some sense of Jordan Wolfson who does not necessarily intent to persuade me of strict message or opinion, nor do I sense a gesture of pure shock, or provocation for the sake of it.

Demanding

Yes, I do witness a figure with female physique as a translation in object-form. In that sense it is objectified. It's a form of representation that, during times of heightened sensitivity around notions of (female)(dis-)representation, makes it stand out at the museum of today. However objectified this sculpture may be, it isn't a demeaning act, at least not to me.

It speaks from itself, about itself, and points - looks - towards both itself and back at me via the mirror. It directs me, orders me and makes me feel like I'm her new subject, another object, as soon as I enter the room - her room. She's been waiting quietly, long before the visitors and I had entered her space. *Female Figure* had been expecting us, and not vice-versa.

Upon entrance; only until every visitor is settled inside will she start her routine. Before that, she faces her back towards us, skipping any first polite greeting, a nod or handshake. Her appearance demands respect through its self-assured bodily position, standing up straight with shoulders backwards.

Behind Effect

During the 'act', her appearance both repels as attracts my gaze. I have to blush a few times of vicarious shame towards the other visitors in the room. However after a while, I am able (and allow myself) to look past the facade, beyond all the techni-

cal finesse of sound and motion, and I get a sense of its puppeteer. Its maker who, for some reason appears to have the age of a naive, young teenager. A younger Wolfson perhaps, but also just any youngster. As if that person could as well have been me, or you. After a few minutes into the performance, the work creates a direct connection or understanding of somebody who, like a kid, enjoys watching how objects move, react, fit-together, plays with the obvious (figurative) and unexpected (the rupture thereof).

Experiencing this meeting, or mutual understanding, it feels as if my body is able to step in front of the sculpture, behind the mirror, beyond its shiny facade towards a place where I can meet a sense of curiosity that is mutual to my own. Here, I not only meet someone who is easily seduced by the sheer look of things, but also someone who is eager to find out how this seduction has come about, what materials it is made of, and look at the workings and mechanics behind looks, style and effect.

Being invited to both witness a full-on performance, as well as receiving hints of its making process or the world backstage, I see as a generous gesture. I get to see both the careful attention that is paid to create its theatrical sense of illusion (she looks so real!), but also see how these elements just as easily could collapse again as I'm able to witness its mechanics and material from up-close.

To take this analogy further and aim this writing towards a slight socio-political direction after all; after having watched *Female Figure*, it's as if I was invited to have closer look at a culture that perhaps appears different to mine at first glance, but has more in common when approached from closer distance. From far away and at first sight, I see a pristine, picture-perfect that makes me think of Hollywood, Lady Gaga, or an actress from a David Lynch movie. I also get to see a glimpse behind all its veneer however, since Wolfson's decision to leave some things undone, such as the 'open' joints of the shoulders and elbows (showing the internal mechanics of the robot) or the irregular, cut-up manner in which choreography and sound are combined, I am able to step inside, beyond a sheer look at the culture of *Americana*.

As I am able to see the sculpture from up close, its appearance becomes less exotic as before, and more approachable (not friendly however!) Here, I get a glimpse or a sense of some kind of curiosity coming from its maker. I feel that Wolfson understands ‘his’ American culture very well, looks at it with both appreciation and disgust, while also being able to take distance, step back and observe its outsides. The work in that way becomes an exploration of culture. An exploration that in this case is shared with us, up close, through the flesh of an object. Wolfson’s curiosity is shared with me via this body of work, evoking a sense of empathy that stands in contrast to my initial impression of pure spectacle and furore.

Wolfson is busy building pictures in front of me. I am shown what he sees, how he sees, what he notices, and what resonates to his body. The pictures are shared eagerly, like a kid would do when it shows its latest drawings. They appear, one after the other in high speed as “Poof, poof, poof”⁹ images, as he holds them up to me in front of my eyes.

9 Wolfson explains the different dynamics of looking when witnessing a painting versus a video or technological installation. In the first case, it’s a “swoosh-swoosh” from left to right and up and down. In the latter case, he mentions, the images appear more like “Poof-Poof-Poof” one after the other, through time.

<https://youtu.be/CSgG7HEBaAs?t=263>

Impressive Images

Conclusion - Meandering on the Fringes

|

Impressive Images

—

|

Looking back on these texts, it seems like the multitude of descriptions and the vast amount of words attempted to unravel what had laid concentrated, in a slight knot at the fringes of my body. An alive concentration of thoughts, that perhaps had already been transcribed throughout various works within my practice, but that had so far been wordless and textually undefined.

Even though these typed letters, in black ink on blank paper, are able to form full words, sentences and descriptions, it is however their outlines, their mere imprint that leaves behind the most prominent trace. Similarly, it's the sharp edges that reverberate the strongest and are the stickiest, while often re-appearing to the surface via text or physical works.

This is what I would like to bring forth: the residue that is left-behind as marks from inside my body. In that sense, it feels as if these writings did not use a perspective that is solely directed towards the dead-centre of its subject matter, but one that gazes slightly on its sides. This picture-dwelling on the edges, that sometimes leans towards the melancholic, has nonetheless clarified a personal attraction for that what lies off-site, or backstage at the perfect picture plane.

On that note, a polite farewell to the central pictures. The objects of galore, spectacle, virtuoso and meticulous craftsmanship. Pictures that I still enjoy and celebrate, but of which their core I no longer find to lie at the centre. A core - if there even is such a thing - that rather meanders at the fringes. Here, off-centre, where the picture's borders are cracked open and meet the surrounding bodies, is where I'd like to remain.

Impressive Images

Bibliography

Texts:

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Flamingo Edition. (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1988).

Belting, Hans. *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*. (Princeton: Princeton University press, 2011).

Bredenkamp, Horst, and Elizabeth Clegg. *Image Acts: A Systematic Approach to Visual Agency*. (Ch. III: Image & Empathy). Second edition. *Image Word Action 2*. Berlin ; Boston: De Gruyter, 2021.

Candlin, Fiona, and Raiford Guins, eds. *The Object Reader*. In: *Sight*. London. (New York: Routledge, 2009).

O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Expanded ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

Morley, Simon, ed. *The Sublime. Documents of Contemporary Art*. (London : Cambridge, Mass: Whitechapel Gallery ; MIT Press, 2010).

Lavigne, Emma. *Clair Obscur*. Palais nr. 31, Catalogue to the exhibition *Natures Mortes* at Palais de Tokyo, 10.2021

Obrist, H. Ulrich, *Choreographed Layers*. interview with Anne Imhof. *Mousse Magazine* nr. 54. 01.07.2016.. <https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/anne-imhof-hans-ulrich-obrist-2016/>

Van Gerrewey, Christophe. *Slingeraapjes achter glas*. *De Groene Amsterdammer*, nr. 1. Translation via google. Link: <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/slingeraapjes-achter-glas> - 5 jan. 2022

YouTube:

Kalmbach, Heiko. "IF ONE THING MATTERS, 2008 - a film",
YouTube video, 1:12:02, August 12 2010,
<https://vimeo.com/14087355>

Banrepcultural, "Entrevista / Wolfgang Tillmans en Bogotá",
YouTube video, 25'37". 11 dec. 2012
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQ339pdaVfQ>

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, "Michael Govan and Roni
Horn - Conversations with Artists", 42:59 min., 27 october 2020
<https://youtu.be/Bq—uOOytUck>

LiveMJHighDefinition, "Michael Jackson - Stranger In Moscow -
Live Gothenburg 1997 - HD", 6:12 min.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIpslZGC7W4&list=FL7A-vDVFIUVDzY19R4bb8cOw&index=3>

Benhamou, Judith, Huet Reports, "Jordan Wolfson - Interview"
YouTube video, 19:20 min. 30 mrt. 2020
<https://youtu.be/CSgG7HEBaAs?t=263>

Colofon

BA Thesis
Tycho Hupperets
Rietveld Fine Arts
April 2022, Amsterdam

Teachers: Dina Danish, Jean Bernard Koeman,
Frank Mandersloot, Tao Vrhovec Sambolec
Thesis supervisor: Alena Alexandrova

Graphic design: Tycho Hupperets with Vinicius de Witte
Proofreading: Hiske Hupperets

