DREDGING THE ILLEGIBLE

Photogram, Phoneme, Ph. . .ontology

Garrett Stewart

The force of illegibility, its aesthetic power, is always in the blind eye of the beholder. What some see (by not seeing) as a structuring absence, others don't think is there to be seen – or seen through to – at all. Or to be heard. At least not here, now, where image or meaning is being made. So questions inevitably persist about such making in regard to the the ontology of lexical or filmic operation, in each case mutable, cumulative, and elusive. Under the apt rubric of the "amodern" – not "anti" so much as investigatively "not" – I want to focus on one "transemdial" (to be explained) photographer's version of what Jean-François Lyotard long ago termed "acinema." [1] It is there in that productive negation that the disclosed material support of screen practice might, for Lyotard, come to link time-based projection back to a modernist insistence on mediality and its material support rather than prolong its unexamined subordination to the more inert service, however superficially kinetic, of realist representation. In terms uniquely his own, French conceptual photographer Éric Rondepierre pursues just such an acinematic bracketing of the filmic image – and does so from the groundlessness of its mobile ground up: photographing the photogram's oxymoronic inherence in the medium that does, and must, deny it.

Photogram (the French, and always the best, term): that single passing transparency broken off one from the next, by the thinly liminal black bar (or frame line) whose presence is always occluded on screen – through a projection operating at right angles to the spooling reel, or reeling spool – by the synchronized rotation of the so-called Maltese

cross. Without this hidden synchrony, this contrapuntal imageering, no screen chronism: no movement over time. Without such motoring, no visible motion. Only in this way does change seem to emerge from within the continuous image rather than by the substitution of one image for another. Obvious to the informed viewer, yes – but always invisible. Or almost always. This action of the photogram, this perceptual undertow, is what I once called the "lost cause of cinema, forgotten but not gone." [2] Rondepierre's is not a recovery act exactly, but a photo record of this banished fundament and increment.

What his photographs do, in recall of the photogram, is to mark the slipping-away, both discrete and discreet, that can be isolated only in the instantaneous wake of its obstreperous exceptions. This is where the material disappearing-act of normative projection is botched – or blotched – into notice. Rondepierre's images thus enter upon a running constitutive distinction, conceived – or better to say, conceptualized – through a transmedium understanding of the bond between the sibling arts of photography and filmmaking, which are so intimately coupled in the latter case as to be incestuous. For as no one has ever been more dedicated to showing than Rondepierre, these are practices whose kinship is determined by the immediately (which is only to say medially) genetic rather than just genealogical relation of photo frame to screen frame. Rondepierre's ongoing work, increasingly bringing the photogram into focus only through digital hindsight, is thus an exemplary mode of what I have taken to calling (here and with other recent gallery works) Conceptualism 2.0, unfolding as such in Rondepierre's case over an extraordinary range of optically flawed or film-dissevering retinal content that encrypts in new – but now markedly decipherable – ways the inherent and profound illegibility of time passing on screen. Conceptualism 2.0 designates not simply a field of experimentation that is in some loose historical sense post-conceptual but, rather, a comparative aesthetics ultimately pursued in Rondepierre's work within the orbit of global computerization and its eclipse of the celluloid medium.

Thinking Transmedium

Conceptualism 2.0. An interpretive proposal, not an established program. In comparison with its forebear, launched in the 1960s, the thrust – or counterthrust – is still the same: to defer aesthetic recognition by intervening levels of a more exacting cognition, and this whether generated by the digital or merely conjuring it by association, whether through actual technical collusion or only a gesture of optical allusion. Regarding such revived conceptual thinking, this essay is a continuation, as it happens, of work done for an even newer on-line publication than *Amodern*, namely *Affirmations: of the Modern*, where the colon keeps a not dissimilar distance from the thing it rethinks as does the prefix of the present journal. My title there, "Contra Modernism: From the Mediatic to the Transmedial," was meant to isolate certain works of both prose and projected image, each time-based in its way, that have overcome a narrowly "meta" impulse in mediacentric work since the loosened aesthetic grip of high modernism. I began by noting Fredric Jameson's complaint about the false utopian (we may call them fauxtopian) aspirations of postmodern installation art (his leading example being a multi-medium *mise en scène* by Robert Gober from the late 1980s, part painting, part sculpture, part earthwork, part bookwork, suitably "Untitled"). Such, for Jameson, are inventions (not even quite interventions) that only delineate the parameters of an artificial museum space closed off from history and turned inward upon their own relation to the "mediatic system" at large. [3] Though not pursued in exactly these terms by his dismissal, such contrivances, even when in the name of the contingent, are certainly a rejection of medium-specificity – but in a pyrrhic victory that has little to show for itself beyond a knowing capitulation to a fully mediatized culture and its cross-currents.

This situation has become all the truer since then, at least whenever gallery work associates itself with a more or less arbitrary, however

ingenious, mixed media display. But without any lapse back to some forced essentializing ontology – in an atavistic cult of materialist purism and its dedicated cultivation, work by work – certain recent initiatives, often under the explicit shadow of a digital hegemony and the claims for technological and cultural "convergence" that accompany it, take a different route to the crux of mediation. [4] Though they advance their imagery, and prosecute their thinking, in a manner far removed from the valorization of medium-specificity, they are committed all the while, in due vigilance as well as due diligence, to a cross-medium *specification*. Theirs is a process meant to discriminate only in one sense, not (in the other) to police. In this respect, art practice of this latter-day conceptual stripe, with its media-savvy but not essence-saving animus, is illuminated by Craig Dworkin's recent emphasis on "analysis" in the very definition of a medium – or, more accurately, in defining mediation's inevitable plurality as the always relational concept of "mediums" (with-an-s). For Dworkin, in regard to transmissive function as much as to material formation, "media, from this perspective, consist of analyses of networked objects in specific social settings." [5] Media, I would only add, are in this sense enmeshed in a delivery circuit that, when they are hybrid in themselves, are often "analyzed" in precisely their own cross-purposed (and sometimes literally cross-wired) transmedial operation. Analysis in this sense, in both the mode of execution and reception, turns many recent works into *media studies* in their own right, conceptual in their very execution. Even short of this, of course, the emphasis on "analysis" is what allows Dworkin to theorize the nonmaterial metamedium, say, of a blank ream of paper or an erased drawing.

The same emphasis also allows us to place and estimate the aesthetic impetus behind the disjunctive photo-exposures – the frame-line betwixture, so to say, as well as the denaturalized texture – of Rondepierre's photogrammic extractions. To place them conceptually, that is, in the very displacement of their severed modularity: film in relapse to photography. And thus to locate them, even as they are outmoded by digital projection, as part of the transmedial tendency in

recent conceptual art. If the convergence model suggests the vanishing point of digital generation or remediation, either one, in a global horizon of ubiquitous computerization, the upsurge of an analytic impulse in response – and not least in recovering the pulse of the strip from within the projected rather than modular frame – would keep attention alive to divergence even within the manifold and synethesized screen effect. And that's just where the dominant twentieth-century art form of cinema, plying its multi-ply trade by suppressing its own serial components, comes into retrospective comparison with the exposed linguistic materiality of a writerly modernism, where *phonetics shapes* the "unwritten" morphological underlay of a lettered text. (The very phrase reads for a moment by an alternative sibilance that makes the point on its own indeterminate terms: where *phonetic shapes* . . . regroup themselves in receipt, reformat apprehension on the run.) In the case of each medium, passive or "readerly" consumption must rest on just such a generative illegibility – or call it a hidden material process – that certain art practices may tend to expose, roughen, or dislodge. To the invisible and therefore unexamined traverse of medial registers or scales, these "edgier" experiments remain averse. Theirs is the work of material impediment rather than perceptual expedience. It operates, as such, at an "edge" that is indeed often sensed (when too unstable to be actually observed) as a medium-definitive interface: between sound and sense in text, between framed unitary images and their mergers in projected motion.

All the more often under the dominance of computer-generated data, verbal and visual alike, recent transmedial art may be found digging in its heels, often one facet of its operation on the heels of another. This tendency is perhaps never more obvious than in the case of projected motion riding in on, and overriding, the inherent machinated seriality of the frame line. For it is there, within the founding logic of montage, that every sensed but unseen s(p)lice of scene is the truth writ large of its illegible counterpart in the frame breaks of automated succession. So it is, in Rondepierre's cross-grained captures, that cinema's invisible segmented momentum, its inbuilt liminal illegibility, is called off long

enough to be called up for notice. Distinct from both the onetime stranglehold of medium-specificity and the opened floodgates of mixed media, *trans*medium practice of this sort (*across*, not beyond: an analytic of interplay rather than a diversionary line of flight) enters upon a comparative "platformatics" of its own visual operation. If the first wave of Conceptual art put the "idea" of art in the former place of its execution and display, certainly of its material priority, recent projects in Conceptualism 2.0 stress instead the idea of mediation per se from within its deliberately impure instances: more inmixed than "multi," triangulated and often tightly dialectical.

In this respect, and within the ambit of photographic experiment alone, I would link Rondepierre's photogram works with the Googlegrams of Haselblad Award-winning Catalan photographer Joan Fountcuberta (discussed in "Contra Modernism"), where a seemingly pixelated photograph is discovered, on closer view, to be composed of 10,000 non-handmade thumbs – or image tiles – regurgitated by word-search engines in a strange fractalized economy. Or one might compare Rondepierre's ventures with the misted landscape photos of Mark Tribe, archival prints that turn out to be frame grabs form the pastoral background of violent video games. [6] Or with the gargantuan and drastically fractured wall-wide jpeg images, pixelated almost to the scale of abutting Cubist planes, by German conceptual photographer Thomas Ruff. As hung in the Hirshhorn show called "Damage Control," these last are pictures mounted as if to exacerbate the inevitable lack of focus achieved by the shattering (as well as optically shivered or bit-mapped) violence of global web imaging in its daily broadcast or downloaded sampling. And all these visual renderings are scarcely alone in working between platform and manifestation. The aesthetic direction seems clear. Whether by electronic implementation or not, the transmedium vectors of such conceptual experiments channel perception across hybrid or cross-purposed material formats from which some new specular (and speculative) force field – such is the hope, the potential – is thereby generated.

Literary Graphonics and the Photogram

So far from operating alone in some post-postmodernist vacuum, these new media works have, I began suggesting above, their longstanding literary equivalents in the scalar ironies of literary representation. For language itself has its constitutive interplay and thus latent equivocation, as felt even, at least conceivably, in the titular gesture of the present journal. *Amodern*. A modern what? So, by junctural misjudgment, might ask the often audially dyslexic hero of Tom McCarthy's novel *C* (2010), a novel whose Joycean aspirations to the "phonemanon" are thematized in descent from a paternal legacy – the protagonist's Victorian father being a former oralist of deaf pedagogy. [7] The son Serge (all medial surges, both linguistic and anatomical) abides within a kind of transmedial perception of the audiophonic speech act, so that – having become a telegraphic cryptographer at the end of the novel – he nonetheless, mishearing a colleague, fails outright in a routine act of proper decoding. He thinks she has switched from German to English in speaking of "Tod, Mort, the Death," when all she has said is "Thoth . . . the god of secret writing." [8] The open secret here is the translingual malleability of the human tongue.

After many other such slips, the hero undergoes an almost inevitable slide from verbal consciousness to pure noise. For he dies by epitome in the middle of a death-rattling surge of sibilants and velar stops that may be thought, heard, to stress – "secret writing" indeed, in troth – the soft rather than hard *c* of the novel's cryptic alphabetic title. If so, this would only be to speak the "cease" of "sssss-cccc-sssss-cccc" at the moment of mortal (which is only in this novel to say signaletic) foreclosure. [9] For all this manic capitulation to noise, the general principle is worth insisting on – and precisely in comparison with the clockwork bleeps of the photogram in the nexus of screen exhibition. The routine sibilants and silent partners of the very word "cease" are a ready (because

typically readable) instance. The point (the generative vanishing point of decipherment) is clear enough. Though strictly speaking (when unspoken) the phoneme remains illegible to the senses, its differential "sounding" is the baseline of all sense-making, however silent its enunciation. Its fleeting illegibility is how alphabetic writing gets read – just as the masked flashing-past of the photogram is what powers all manifestation on screen.

In the punning auditions of McCarthy's hero Serge, such *in extremis* are the deeply transmedial (audiovisual) skids between phoneme and grapheme, silent sound and lettered sight, that animate as well as baffle human communication – even (or especially) when the human is reduced, in the Kittleresque strain of McCarthy's novel, to merely an intermittent and impersonal discourse network. Here, then, is the normal "illegibility" of phonemic infrastructure: a suppression necessary to keep broader-band lexical circuits open. When this assimilation into word forms is blocked by some alphabetic quirk, the result bears comparison with a film-dismantling concentration on the photogram. This occurs, for instance, in an 2002 installation work by Canadian film director Atom Egoyan that seems prosecuted almost as an allegory of the photogram's requisite elision – not frictional effacement so much as cognitive erasure – in the normative course of screen motion. Such an allegory, if that's what it is, results from the abrasive frame-by-frame passage, end to end, for a month on end, of Egoyan's film version of *Krapp's Last Tape* – his own unraveled celluloid version – through the punishing gears of the Steenbeck editing machine, viewed frame after frame in its aperture. The work of production has become the work of destruction, the processing of montage turned to frottage. The film is thus slowly worn down, worn thin, like the play's "threadbare" hero, while nearby, sharing with it the abandoned space of London's former Museum of Mankind, the onetime stage performance is otherwise preserved and displayed with a certain relative invulnerability when screened in an atavistically named "loop" fashion by the transmedial function of its DVD transfer – all this under the itself lexically punning portmanteau title *Steenbeckett*. In a similar portmanteau spirit, all such mediarchaeology (seven syllables, not eight)

tends these days, especially in the elegiac cast of so much gallery film, toward an ingrained medianthropology of the once wheel-using animal, film reels (and tape spools) included toward the end of that epochal dispensation. [10]

Secret writing, illegible signification, subtending homophones, the unglimpsed impetus of the sprocketed photogram, gradient ingredients sent into absence in the transmit from base to manifestation: the common denominators do not have to be reductive to begin seeming persuasive. In a recent issue of *Amodern*, Al Filreis delivers "Some Notes on Paraphonotextuality" in the reading aloud of poetry, where, speaking of strategic sequencings in the chosen order of poems, he puts it this way: "In paraphonotextuality, adjacency is all." [11] The same could be said about what I years ago dubbed the literary "phonotext," where the abutment that linguists term "juncture" is an occasional source of unlatched lexical coherence, manifest especially in a decisive (and often incisory) range of modernist phonetic play, junctural ambiguity, and cross-word puzzling rampant from Roussel and Joyce to Nabokov – and beyond to its overt posthumanist thematization by McCarthy. I once bunched examples of this tendency under the claim for a modernist "flicker effect" in literary wording. [12] I did so in comparing such lexical inter-braiding and abrasion –– usually a mere latency of language that instrumental writing has every good reason to minimize – to the photogrammic "undertext" of cinema, with its equivalent signifying absence in the fixed frame module. I renew that claim here with entirely different evidence.

Certainly this is a tradition of phonetic density and vocabular subversion that one finds as well in the stylistic oscillations of a writer like Toni Morrison, on the page as well as in her own "paraphonotextual" audiobook readings. In fact, I close the last chapter my latest book, *The Deed of Reading: Literature ● Writing ● Language ● Philosophy* – its subtitle not just a roster of associated topics but the participial phrasing (thus again time-based) of a performed metalinguistics – with a discussion of Morrison's loaded sonority and its semantic fallout. A

striking, fully historicized, and politically charged instance of writing the illegible, as if it were the underwriting of an entire text, appears in the penultimate chapter of her 2008 *A Mercy*, when the defiant black heroine from the early years of the American settlement, "enslaved" to a rebuffed passion (she is cruelly told) as much as to chattel status, insists "Slave. Free. I'll last." [13] Here is a case of "prose friction" as "novel violence" that appeared too late for inclusion in a monograph of mine on the topic going to press that same year. [14] But a book later (and in an abbreviated version here) I can now call out the phonemic nub or crux – for there's the rub, the rub of illegibility itself – in the compacted double drift of its "evocalization." In the invisible ink – and links – of such sounding, the heroine's infuriated final response bestows, by a phonotextual drift beneath its oxymoron, a name for the not yet institutionalized (but long afterwards intractable) legacy her inheritors will continue to fight against for almost two centuries: namely – or if not quite by name, at least by fricative (and frictive) elision – the phantom enunciation "Slavery 'll last."

Audiovisual cross-purposing of this sort, or call it *graphonic* transmediation in the alphabetic register, disturbs grammar with a contrapuntal energy inherent to language but censored into line by normal writing, to be released only under (undue) duress. Not unlike this intrinsic and in fact definitive tension between phoneme and morpheme – mixed modalities of the *phonogram* – so, too, the normally (normatively) illegible disruptions incident to the photogram in filmic succession may find their come-*uppance* at similar stress points: in the sense of a *surfacing* as well as its backlash. And, in this way, their only full disclosure. These irrupted nodes of difference are what I have explored, in dialogue with Rosalind Krauss (and her version of Walter Benjamin) as the "optical unconscious" not of photography (in his sense) but of film's technological as well as genealogical dependence on it: the ever-unpresent return of its historical as well as technical repressed in the vanishing train of photograms. [15] Such are the photochemical precursors, as well as recursive cellular elements, of cinematic projection that are absented in process – except when catalyzed by such stylistic

devices as slow motion or freeze-frames, with their variable ratios of photographic advance or its deferral. For those are the thematically assimilable instances singled out by Lyotard as operating above the level of a more thoroughly and rigorously exposed support. In his view, these minor disruptions at the stratum of mimesis or representation in traditional cinema are immediately redeemed or recuperated – roped in as tropes – at the level of narration. Acinema, of the sort isolated in the photograms of Rondepierre, would be something else altogether. We might hypothesize it, in advance of example, as an epistemography of the medium.

As such, the effect is not far removed – given Lyotard's textualist emphasis on the medium's "writing with movement" – from the movement of writing itself in subvocal activation. Indeed, my own previous account of the rapid transition from filmic to digital cinema was titled to invoke its topic – or, again, to evocalize it – in a dentalized phonemic ambigituity of the sort activated by prose when processed as a time-based medium. This is to say that *Framed Time* was phrased to indicate an era of multiple frame advance, 24 fps, succumbed since to the operations of a scanned single aperture. The advent of this latter digital duration, all bracketed by a mutating frame rather than the constant exchange of separate ones, is what has summarily (every sense) replaced the earlier apparatus of frame/dtime, where the recorded image was photogrammically seized up so as to be doled out in modular sequence. But for Friedrich Kittler, as we might remind ourselves, this would only mean cinema coming into its inherent post-analog destiny as a binary system of on/off impulse after all: photogram/bar/photogram – at base a discrete and differential rather than an indexical medium. [16] And in this respect, I want only to add, like language itself for that matter – at least in its phonematic paradigms: b or p, hard/soft, voiced/unvoiced, sssss/cccc, *S/Z*, etc. On reflection, this may be one inference of Kittler's emphasis on the rather awkwardly phrased "alphabetization" in his account of a specific oral and phonetic pedagogy in post-Enlightenment Europe during exactly the period leading up to the Victorian father's "oralist" methods, in McCarthy's *C*, for instructing the deaf in a

supposedly humanizing speech rather than a denaturalized signing. [17] Kittler's insistent nominalization may operate there, I'm suspecting, by an unspoken back-formation, historical as well as linguistic, from the more common term digitization, as if again to suggest the destiny (or convergence) of all signaletic functions in the networked discursivities of a binary regime.

In any case, and literary parallels aside, what is certainly "disappeared" by computer imageering in digital screen delivery is any modular index in the form of a coherent instantaneous frame. All is now electronically traced rather that self-displaced. It is the need to address this new ubiquity with a sense of transmediation broader in span than just that between transparency and projection, between filmic and cinematic frame, that has taken Rondepierre lately into the reaches, and accidental breaches, of digital video in its frame-annihilating facilitations. Yet right from the start, this artist's self-tasked work has been to interrupt (as if "interpret" were its illegible anagram) even film's own endemic fusions and, by isolation and extract, refuse sequence in the name of its very investigation. Up to a point, then, he might be sympathetic to Kittler's binary model even for photochemical cinema in regard to the intermittencies of its image track, since this emphasis catches a sense of the now-you-see-it-even-though-now-you-don't resulting from persistence of vision in the projected strip. But this level of perception is rendered functional, of course, only by ignoring the tangible – almost haptic – materiality of the advancing image planes that are not just pulsional signals but also passing backlit and front-loaded pictures. This is the difference that Rondepierre explores from within the operative gradients of the strip's own apparition, where the screen-play in this nonverbal sense is made legible again as film's traced script – sometimes, as we'll see, by the very insertion of writing; always by that "writing with movement" too easily naturalized and ignored in passive spectation.

Here, too, other theorists of mediation come to mind. Though plastic materiality is not comparably stressed in his several brief essays on

cinema, an abiding thrust of Giorgio Agamben's poetics is that speech in literary writing does not remain unsaid in what it says, that transmissibility itself gets conveyed, the vehicular made evident. [18] Such is certainly the case in Rondepierre's seized-up frame transitions, where means are no longer lost in meaning, the parts in the sum, but where the infrastructural framework of the framed image itself appears – not on screen but on camera, and in the resulting photo print, and thus at one clarifying remove from the photogram's own status. And in this, Rondepierre's work would come into inevitable demurral not just from Kittler but from the insistence of Gilles Deleuze, against Henri Bergson, on the non-artifice of cinematic motion, a motion that, for Deleuze, *is* the very movement (though not of present bodies or objects, of course) that it seems to display. At the basis of Deleuze's metahistory of film – in which prewar cinema inferred time only as a function of movement, whereas modernist cinema afterward made movement a mere function (or figure) of time – is the need to see action on screen not as sectioned (photogrammic) sequence, seg- as well as incre-mental, but as a "cross-section" of real motion. Rondepierre insists instead on an underlying cross-mediation between photography and projection, a speeding plasticity of the nonetheless fixed-frame strip as well as an elasticity of mobile image, and does so by bearing down on the theoretical matter – and carrying material – of the photogram per se, in its work of sequence and difference together. Again, after Al Filreis, as in the courted densities of alphabetic writing: "Adjacency is everything," a next-to that in the vertical spool of cinema becomes not just the next-up or next-in-line but the more fully temporalized *next*.

Cinécriture Writ Small

In all this, it's useful to see how the unfolding (if often self-enfolded) inventions of Rondepierre's transitional as well as transmedial work, occupying the watershed between photochemical and postfilmic

imaging, fit an abstract (and in a different sense "cellular") paradigm often borrowed from another discipline. In biology, there is the hoary principle that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny: the growth of a single organism, from larval form on up to full-scale anatomy, thus rehearsing the evolution of the entire species in the recurrent destiny of the single embryo, as in the escalating cellular complexity en route, for instance, from microbe to human brain. Something of the same analogic template (or scalar symmetry) is tempting to map onto Rondepierre's itinerary – albeit loosely, and across the gap between media evolution and its aesthetic analysis. For his career has charted the differential mechanisms of single-cell photo advance (the photogrammic frame line of cinematic projection, in all its luminous granular texture) on through to its regretted (in his case) supplanting by the digital scan. Whether optical evolution or medial devolution, the loose biological paradigm might still hold. And Rondepierre has then pursued this descent of the species, and its technical specs, beyond the remediation of filmic by digital technology to the latest case of web streaming, and then again back, in a further recapitulation . . . and spooky recuperation (as we are to see). Where once photography's sister art of "the flickers" could be straightforwardly sampled (as stills) for the purpose of conceptually materialized analysis, even while thus betrayed in its kinetic mirage, now, in the epoch of the digital, a photographic optic can only be evoked transmedium – and by new orders of revocation at that.

To give a sense of Rondepierre's probed infrastructure in a single self-exampling elision, and this in mind again of Lyotard's emphasis on cinematic writing (rather than script, but in Rondepierre's case sometimes including the latter by intrusion), we can indeed appreciate the mutations of his photogrammic studies as a particularly articulate case (articulated links his very topic) of *cinécriture*. Certainly, for three decades, Rondepierre's conceptual brinksmanship has found his print works poised on the cusp between photography and film, his manipulations directed increasingly at the sense of a once conjoint and privileged image regime suddenly outmoded, as if almost overnight, by digital record and projection, yet not without restaking its own elegiac

ground on exit – if never fully retaking it. Like Marcel Broodthaers beginning as a writer, in his case a surrealist poet, before moving to conceptual art and filmmaking (in a pivot around the very difference between text and image in a watershed work of book sculpture [19]), Rondepierre the novelist (plotting an obsession with cinema in his early transitional fiction) becomes thereafter a kind of cinema artist in still frames. As such, his images have exerted consistent and varied pressure on the liminal switch point between image and its serial machination. In this, his orientation is resolutely transmedium even while his materials remain fixedly fixed frame, and this however overlain and cross-grained at the same time with those recalcitrant traces of motion, clutched momentum, and fissured sequence to which the keen blink of his eye gravitates. [20] In the broadest terms, Rondepierre is a photographic printmaker preoccupied with the interstitial force of the cinematic nexus as a delinkable chain. Through an exploratory refaceting of this issue that has been at once relentless, inventive, and meticulous, he may seem to have arrived in his latest "found image" works at a kind of a metahistorical impasse. Another case, one might gather, of the Kittleresque endgame of all media evolution in the leveling technology of universal signal – and its deforming noise. Until this point, Rondepierre's holding action and sticking point – his insistence on the photogram's endemic traction in filmic advance – has been adamant and fascinating.

Separate works of Rondepierre's in the material "decomposition" (rather than structuring *decoupage*) of screen motion have variously concentrated on, until most recently, the photogram's decay in archival prints, producing fantastic or monstrous distortions of optic space. Or on the slippage between image and fragments of print text in old-fashioned banner-flashing screen trailers, especially from 1940s and 1950s films, in the *Annonces* series ("Ads," or in English, more euphemistically, "previews"), with their dated overlays of italicized and exclamation-pointed hyperbole ("Cast of Thousands!") sometimes intruding on the illustrative integrity of the advertised narrative sample, slicing open a star face, for instance, with a serrated edge of typeface. Or on the

deliberate frustration of filmic sequence in the vertical passage from one photogrammic frame to the next, so that the top sector of the image, in his massively enlarged re-edits titled *Diptykas*, is in fact the bottom half of the "picture," with its complementary fragment all but illegible, in its arrest, as part of the same holistic composite. In this respect, these dyptich works recall Ed Rusha's *The End*, his timely 1993 photorealist lithograph of a jammed frame advance signaling just that impasse of the cinematic apparatus (historically as well as immanently) spelled out in collapse when the bottom half of a decapitated "The End" awaits the truncated top half of its capitals in the next frame.

These are only some of Rondepierre's tireless turnings of the screw in the matter (the disclosed materiality) of frame advance and its defaults. In his earliest metacinematic captures, begun in 1989, where enlarged white-on-black lettering identified him with the conceptual textwork movement (like one of Joseph Kosuth's negative photostats at a glance), Rondepierre first pursued the internal "blind spots" (his phrase) of cinema. He did so by looking to broken links in the nexus of subtitling (via indefatigable "research" with print after print) when translated words of dialogue – just slightly delayed in the enchainments of narrative – happen to appear over a blank screen, yet sometimes with a wry appropriateness of designation after all (like "non" or "noir"). In this series titled *Excédents*, with its cognate overtone of "accidents" in French as well, these works isolate the limit-exceeding interstitial vision that cinema must normally elide.

Trailings, Vanishing Traces

And if there is an illegible phonetic slant rhyme between the *a/e* vowels in that title, there may also be a similar word play, as well, in what is "enunciated" at the level of the signifier in the *Annonces* series, with those trailers sowing microsecond confusions in their wake. Here is a whole spectrum of "disarticulation" that becomes almost obsessional in its recess of origin. Some interspaced images are captured and reprinted from film itself, some from video remediation, but some, in color, are more radically transmediated. In this third case, in another fence-sitting manifestation of the photo/filmic divide, Rondepierre returns to the devices of photorealist painting, often based on the projection of gridded photographs onto a canvas surface for duplication. In these fiercely but invisibly (say again illegibly) layered works, Rondepierre sets out to snatch, from the flux, a single snag – as it has only vanishingly erupted from the juggernaut of the "preview." In this way, it is as if vision has glimpsed beneath advertised spectacle the pre- or proto-visuality it is inevitably built upon. With the strip's occluded operations suddenly made legible by an actual imposition of text, however fractured or blurred, Rondepierre then submits this inadvertent disclosure to a further chain of distancing preservation. He first reduces the photo again to a transparency, projects it as a slide onto a crinkled paper surface to add a new layer of roughened and denaturing texture, paints what he has anomalously seen in acrylic, rephotographs it, and ultimately destroys the painting – that belated trace of origination – on which the new recovered photogrammic frame is based. It is as if he does so, does all this, to evoke (again by constitutive revocation) exactly the absence – rendered here allegorical – not just of each photogram from the manifested celluloid reel but of all mise en scène, all recorded space (here by proxy in the destroyed painting), from the scene of projection.

In a catalog essay focusing on these *Annoces* images, film theorist Philippe Dubois explicates the work of the photogram very much in the spirit of Rondepierre's disclosures, understanding the single celluloid cell not so much as a halfway house between photography and cinema but effecting rather, as "more than photography and less than film," the cancelation of each in the balked transit from one to the other. [21] In our

vocabulary: a transmedium frame; in Dubois's terms: "an axis or fold" between the ocular regimes, "the precise crossing" of an inbuilt serial juncture that amounts to the "razor's edge" between media, though only, one might add, because there is no visible cut incurred. And only, as well, because the bonded process of photo/film shares in the same "image-matter" – even if the material units of this common bond are programmatically under erasure as such on screen. Any notice paid to the photogram in the context of an analysis of cinema is therefore "contradictory," since the photogram is only under observation when one is "not seeing the film." Dubois has this just right. And one notes that it is therefore too facile to speak of the "photogrammar" of film. Film has its intrinsic syntax, its piecing together of semantic units, but the photogram chain subtends these, like the phoneme does the morpheme in the "double articulation" of linguistics. On analogy with alphabetic inscription, then, photogrammic tracing is the film's illegible signature effect in (as Lyotard again puts it) cinema's act of "writing with motion." The photogram in this sense, as I have wanted to show, stands to screen manifestation as does the phoneme to lexical sense in the work of text: the silent illegible differentiation that makes wording out of lettering. As Dubois sums the matter in his own terms: **"Photograms are the only real images and the only invisible images in a film. This is the ontological paradox which makes photograms into cinema's blind 'spots'"** – with spots very much in scare quotes for Dubois: marking those scarrings of transparency that bring the fact of its plastic nature to light.

In reconceptualizing the photogram's crucial (dis)place(ment) in film, Rondepierre is out to spot those identifying marks, or identify those spots, where a flaw in the transitional system momentarily *bares the work*, ripples the image stream against its normal current, reveals the seam, jams the track. He is not content simply to isolate the photogram as such, the "stain" (Dubois again) at the heart of the motion effect as an invisible entrainment, but sets out to capture it in its own lapsed contribution to sequence. This is the flawed photogram caught in the act of exposing its very law – or, in Dubois's way of putting it, "a sort of squared photogram (a stain of a stain)." Another decisive summation by

Dubois follows on the score of the inadvertently blurred or fragmented text of the "ad" frames – and the very fact of film to which this interstitial leakage thus adverts: "By choosing to work exclusively on photograms (the infra-film level), and only choosing photograms which are visually abnormal such as 'blacks' (at the infra-image level) or textually *illegible* (at the infra-text level), Rondepierre obstinately pursues the idea that representation must be grasped in a state prior to, or exterior to, its achieved form" (emphasis added). And that "grasping" comes in the almost figurative sense of the anomalous frame grab almost "maniacal" in its patience and precision. Its located "illegible" nature (Dubois' term too, as we've just seen) involves not simply a casual scoop but a real probe, not just what one might call a "find" but an implied systemic *finding*. Or, returning to Dubois, the upshot is "like an archeologist after a long excavation revealing what until then had belonged to the unknown. Eric Rondepierre's dig is cinema. The treasures he brings back are discoveries of the invisible." One might call the labor a kind of synchronic mediarchaeology.

Wagers of the Neither / Nor

In all this, Dubois is no doubt aware of how he (following Rondepierre), though without any further qualification on the critic's part, complicates the famous quote from Jean-Luc Godard, from *Le Petit Soldat*, that Dubois places as epigraph: "Photographs are truth, and cinema is the truth 24 times a second." Even granting the premise, with its dubious epistemology of *photo-verité*, the time-based run of the frame line could only be one separate and discrete truth after another. For its own manifestation as motion is given the lie by the unwanted truth of fixed-frame stasis and the artifice of its shuffle. Murder will out, as Laura Mulvey knows in her own book title, with its mass-material murders 24 X a second, always inherent on the strip, accessible to perception only thanks to VHS and DVD. [22] Before Godard, and Mulvey's necrological

twist on his adage under the regime of viewer control, there is the equally famous distinction by André Bazin in the renowned "ontology" essay that Rondepierre's work might seem indirectly staged to qualify. Remembering that, on Bazin's account, photography is "change mummified," duration arrested, rendered obdurate and final, the complementary claim by Bazin that cinema is "time embalmed" – even with the apt chemical trope for this photochemical medium – is only at best metaphorically true. [23] Literally, but illegibly, filmic cinema is the anatomy of encorpsed motion in fabricated reanimation. Sometimes, the fabric rips, the seams show. And that's exactly where Rondepierre executes his "spot" checks.

Then, too, in another influential ontology of film, Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed*, with its subtitle *Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, the philosopher defines the cinematic experience, somewhat eliding the question of its "medium," as "a succession of automatic world projections." [24] Even allowing for the fictional emphasis on *a* world viewed, rather than the titular "the," Cavell's definition may seem to beg the question of succession itself, and the *between* of these plural "projections," whether just a matter of cuts or something deeper-going, where the bar between photograms would serve precisely, by precision-tooling, to bar their separate recognition as such and thus provide a brace for the success/ion of the screen mirage. In this sense, on a loose linguistic model again, each picture emerges – at the speed of an almost simultaneous protension and retention – as what we might call the suffix and supplement of the prefix before it, never rooted in a retinal stem. Not, at least, until the latter's illegible singularity is italicized under arrest, all succession choked off – whether by an art like Rondepierre's or by a subsequent technological affordance like that to which Mulvey turns in DVD options.

The death-defying image file of traditional cinema, retrieved by remote control under conditions of new-media home viewing, involves, for instance, an imposition of the freeze "function," rather than the functionality of the freeze frame within the aesthetics of film, and thus

changes the DVD viewer's relation to the flow of image/s. In a variant of this emphasis from nearly a decade earlier, and accompanying just the kind of technology Mulvey would later theorize, her own DVD commentary on a title in the Criterion series, Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960), hits upon the thematization of just such a climactic effect quite apart from any postcinematic access of the viewer. In her voice-over she notes how the plot's homicidal filmmaker is found sacrificing himself in the end, with a series of flashbulb-timed snapshots taken as he rushes to impale himself on the spearing blade of his phallic tripod, to the incremental and life-arresting underside (and precursor) of his own medium. Or we might say transmedium. Ordinarily dividing his time between pinup photography and 35 mm camerawork on studio productions, his avocational 16 mm snuff films have here been exorcised in a return, as Mulvey suggests, to the Muybridge-like analytic of motion that precedes, in two senses, all screen projection: in the photograms on the strip and in their own media prehistory. What these mortuary flash photos thus encode, beyond a genealogy of the screen image, is also, following Rondepierre, its antithesis: purging in this case the embalmed duration of time brutally preserved in on-screen violence by a reversion to the discrete fixities of change mummified, contained, neutralized – or in the terms of Powell's psychoanalytically drenched narrative, castrated.

Rondepierre is unconcerned with such full-scale thematizations, closing instead on the strict materialization of their very possibility. Yet the works can still seem like parables of their own generation. In one of the frame-grabbed, slide-projected, repainted, then rephotographed *Annonces*, the Hollywood musical *Show Boat* announces itself (shows itself forth via an unreadable pun) in a kind of amorphous, unborn blob of script slammed over, in an arrested superimposition, the same pleasure boat it thereby fails to image as well as name. Two levels of representation, two entire modalities, are reduced *transmedium* in such a work – and three times over, in the transit from photogram to slide to painting to print. The reduction is figured in this case, and with prototypical illegibility, as the emergent murk of interstitial text lost somewhere between an aborted and an only still embryonic gesture of

cross-medial signification.

Image 1: Eric Rondepierre, "The Show Boat," 1992, 88 x 120 cm.

In matters of the illegible, as if all but literalized here by the actual blockage of block capitals, it is worth adding that one way to conceive the disappearing act, or say the formative entr'action, of all screen movement – generated from an interstitial traction between fixities – is to return (through Krauss's borrowing of it) to Jameson's original deployment of the semiotic square (she calls it the Klein group) in service to the cognitive mapping of retinal rather than geopolitical horizons. Building in her case on Benjamin's "optical unconscious" for the bodily motions never before halted for recognition until the historical moment of instantaneous photography, Krauss analyzes by means of the square's quadratic framework an optical unconscious for modern art rather than, as in Jameson, a political unconscious for literature. All depends on the breakout of a simple binary, either/or, into the neither/nor of its structuring opposite in the square's bottom or neutral quadrant. For Krauss what must be either figure or ground in classic understandings of the pictorial, resolved together in the composed image, often a peopled scene, generates in this way the supposedly stable alternatives of foreground and background on either side of the square – or, more deeply conceived perhaps, the alternatives of support itself versus representation. This is a standard conflation or resolution that gets reversed instead in the neither/nor of the newly dominant modernist "grid." In application of the same method, for our transmedial purpose in the assessment of Rondepierre's agenda, there is either photography or cinematography, the alternatives only phenomenologically (but not materially) resolved in the once all but oxymoronic function of the "motion picture" (and more symptomatically "the flickers"). While the pure flanking contraries, to the left and right in a foursquare semiotic mapping – namely, photography but not cinematography, cinematography but not photography – are manifested in the form of

photo print and screen image respectively, the neither one nor the other, yet the generative transfusion of each, is identified and isolated (below in the square, before and beneath in the process) by the defining form of the photogram. Defining, and in Rondepierre's work, definitively arrested.

Mise en . . . Seen

Twenty years after the counterproductive optics, or phototextual clotting, of his *Annonces* series, in what could have seemed (except for the emergence of more recent work yet) a fitful witness to the overthrow of the photogram altogether, Rondepierre's "found footage" research – as if also returning full circle to the study (and studies) of time-degraded and weirdly blotched archival frames – has turned to the frame-wide meltdown of the screen image. Rather than locking down on the piecemeal digital break-ups of DVD glitches, he swoops in to study the more recent image jammings of DSL (the "Digital Subscriber Line" format) in "live"-time film delivery. Here the momentarily roiled and smeared web stream is captured in instances of accidental disintegration by simple keyboard-activated screen shots, even as such residues of a coherent picture are then delivered to the gallery wall as luminous and weirdly, sometimes gruesomely, beautiful high-definition archival prints. Chosen from classic films by Hitchcock and others, the images seem bleeding to death as we watch, film history included – with only still photography (albeit now routinely computer-facilitated) arrived from the deeper past to rescue them for aesthetic notice. Out of degradation, the chance for an older order of contemplation. On view is something like a rear-guard action (markedly postfilmic) against the steady, mostly coherent, but ultimately ungovernable flux of the digital pulse in this latest delivery format.

Image 2: Eric Rondepierre, "DSL no. 4," 2011, 50 x 90 cm.

There might indeed seem to have been no way back to the analytic transmediality of the photogram/photograph interface at the onetime core of Rondepierre's explorations: not, at least, from this crisis point of immaterial digital spillage and congealment (certainly not by the route of actually making movies after years of unmaking them). But in work begun in 2013, Rondepierre appears to have found it nonetheless. Under the series title *Background*, he returns to classic films, mostly Hitchcock, to reconstruct, by lateral collage rather than arrested vertical montage (in uber-cinematic panoramas now, rather than frameline diptychs) these films' more dramaturgic than technological blind spots. What we get is the reinstated premise, and promise – because the suddenly unoccluded literal premises – of narrative space: the diegetic condition of possibility for all screen action in the set per se. Such is the profilmic space, the newly coherent mise en scène, that is so often hidden in plain sight, as it were, by the narrative activity of bodies in motion within and across it.

What? How so? Here, too, we need on-site explication. For Rondepierre achieves this devious feat in extra-widescreen vistas that use digital techniques to piece together each lateral segment of an indoor set without, so to say, its scene. Such are the piecemeal bands of unobstructed décor that are captured peripherally by the variably stationed or moving camera while attention rests elsewhere, and mostly forward, on event and performance. Manifested for the first time under a steadying gaze, these are the almost subliminally registered elements, and increments, of set designs disclosed in separate moments across the whole length (and width) of projection – and between the blockings of plot, so to speak – when not otherwise masked by characters occupying the foreground of our notice. In the photographer's favored selection from Hitchcock, they include, for instance, the evacuated apartment in *Rope*, the unpeopled (and bird-free) kitchen in *The Birds*, and, most suggestive, the suddenly unoccupied apartment in *Rear Window*, fully spread out before us in a pan-compressing width that nevertheless extends beyond any one VistaVision frame – and this time with no one looking back at us through his own telephoto lens. In such uncanny works, in their rendering of narrativized domestic space as itself

unheimlich, the inherent occlusion of backdrop constituted by the motions and gestures of screen drama has been horizonatally de-veiled all in one composite and impossible durational moment. These are indeed haunted spaces, ghosted by narrative absence itself. Theirs is the unique transmedial play between bracketing frame and moving camera that their phantom composites put under erasure from within the artifice of holistic disclosure.

Image 3: Eric Rondepierre, "Rear Window," 2014, 18 x 66 cm.

But before turning in this "restorative" direction – from the throttled (the streaked and mottled) images in those DSL frames, seized up in their disembodied, post-plastic motion, to their hyperreal recuperation in the follow-up *Background* series – Rondepierre had achieved a different order of conceptualist epitome in what is perhaps the most densely meshed mediarchaelogical gesture in his works. This is a photo series from 1999-2002 called *Loupe/Dormeurs* (*Loop/Sleepers*) that reinserts the discretely recorded film scroll into the longer history of communication technology, including the reign of the codex itself and its alternate (and almost equally dated) transmissive means in photochemical imprint. In these complicated, cryptic images, under the otherwise obscure title of numbered *Livres* (or "books"), Rondepierre may be thought quite directly to superimpose the historical implosion of one cultural regime (and imprint technology) upon the other, each – prose text and image text alike – impeded from full registration by the intersecting pressure of its fragile and beleaguered counterpart. This explicitly "textualized" transmediation is accomplished by forging (indeed forcing) an association between the artist's typescript novel about filmic addiction called *Sleepers* (as yet unpublished; appearing from Seuil in 2005 under the title *La Nuit Cinema* [*Cinema Night*]) and the photo-images that might separately arrest and catalogue its moments. Hence two different kinds of highly provisional continuity: word sequence and image sample.

Text/duality

This conceptual link can only be realized – by an extreme transmediation, illegible except in drastic magnification – when Rondepierre photographs (with a mouth-held time-release switch) his hand-held magnifying-glass in scrutiny of certain photogram pairs or triplets from classic films, shot ad hoc against the out-of-focus background of another indiscernible scene, often with a woman's image dimly glimpsed, dressed or naked – and all of it related to events in the novel. But then (in a superimposed laboratory effect "visible," one might say, but not discernible), all of it is further transformed – or, better, trans-muted ("digitally half-toned," as the artist puts it) – by the overlay of softening horizontal lineations. These turn out, on explanation and closer inspection (if noticed at all in the first place as other than a function of focus and definition), to be so far from fine-grained video striations, for instance, that they are in fact the miniaturized overlain lines of an illegibly microscopic text of just this unpublished narrative. For the whole typescript narrative is implausibly compressed into one saturated frame: at that point the novel's only "printing," a text thus still struggling, disruptively, to make its mark by way of claiming any one image as its synecdoche. The longstanding emphasis on photographic inscription rather than projected motion, and indirectly on the textualization of the image in the trailing alphabetic graphics of those excerpted trailers, has by this point made the internalization of an implicit *cinécriture* all but unmistakable.

Image 4: Eric Rondepierre, "Loups/Dormeurs no.2" (detail), 1999-2002, 40 x 56 cm.

At which point, too, the photographer has again returned to his affiliation with conceptual textwork from a new angle. In reflecting for years on the history of frame adjacencies and slippages, Rondepierre has produced

with such a *livre*, in effect, yet another – but radically transmedial – *bibliobjet*: the miniaturized text no sooner demediated as message than converted to a trope of retinal legibility in textual overlay. [25] 156,000 characters in all are arrayed as the frame-crowding scrim through which both the low-fidelity background and the arrested screen sequence of snipped photograms (under a lens not the projector's) contribute to the recorded consciousness of temporal duration itself, or in other words to the narrativized (but in the other sense "character"-free) surface of a recorded life. Within these palimpsestic *Livres*, superimposed phantom texts are like filmic strips because, whether through magnifying lenses or otherwise, the ingredients of each are read one after the other over time, however hazed or shaded-off in response – and however illegible these constituent elements may be in the normal run, and race, of things. One might say that in the overlay of microtextual lineation upon image, illegibility itself has found its quintessential figuration. Or again its allegory. Reading *between the lines* – between the frame lines as they whip past in the transfer from motion to screen movement – is the only way, even with no text present but the image's own "writing," for converting photography to cinema across the shifting ontological status of filmic "exposure time."

It is tantalizing to imagine these works in the *Livre* mode responding, at the end of the decade in which Dubois first celebrated the *Annonces* images, to the critic's sense of a Freudian palimpsest at work in the infratext of those blurred trailer frames: namely, the famous trope of the mystic writing pad – in Dubois's terms "the *Wunderbloc*, or 'magic notebook'" – as Freud's figure for the sequentially expunged impress(ions) of the unconscious in action. The thought is raised by Dubois in his speculative closing section, with its interrogative subhead "A Metaphor for the Psychic Apparatus?" To this question, Rondepierre's answer would certainly seem affirmative, delivered some years later by formalized (rather than formulated) material shape in what we might call the wonder-*livres* of the "Loupe/Dormeurs" series – sleeper cells of the dreamwork indeed. In this mode can Rondepierre be understood to have encountered, interface-on, the Freudian *locus*

classicus of the illegible in modern thought.

In contrast to the impacted breach of photogrammic sequence, the accidental death of the buffered image in DSL technology is a function of aleatory retinal diffusion, not intrinsic sequential occlusion. What grows clear from his latest encounters with such screen contingency is that Rondepierre's career-long work in the still image has survived a modular or incremental cinema to stand watch over the bewitching glitches of the new-media stream. Such is the mediarchaelogical long view of his projects in the increments of cinema's projectible image, gravitating as they so consistently do to optical dysfunction: to abrasion, erosion, asynchrony, failed focus, digital default, a sometimes recalcitrant "persistence of vision" from frame to frame, and finally the turbid flow of digital overload. In this way does his cryptic and often scissored metahistory of the screen medium involve the story of its material base – as told from the vantage of its lapses, its endemic limits, even its technical supplantation. And this includes most recently in Rondepierre's work – in recoil from the distorted immateriality of cinema's fate as a streaming (and at times maddeningly confluent and confused) signal – the recouped and expanded "widescreen" story (the *Background* idylls) of screen space as a preternaturally stable image freed from plot, freed of time itself. This is the story defiantly retold in his quaint yet mesmerizing step back to the cultivation of an artificial integrity of mise en scène in those bizarre recenterings whereby widescreen cinema is further stretched to panorama (another prefilmic, indeed prephotographic, mode of display) so as to restore continuous spatial coordinates to domestic set design in an unsettling figure/ground inversion of standard narrative priority. Motion pictures hereby achieve one grounding fantasy of their machination in the apparition of a found space.

Optic Composites: Beyond the Photogram

No widescreen imaging could be farther in this regard from Rondepierre's frame-enhanced "interiors" than the resuscitated Swiss panoramas, in allusion to a longstanding national(ist) tradition of Romantic self-imaging, fabricated by Jules Spinatsch out of discrepant surveillance footage of exterior sites at the 2003 Davos economic summit. [26] In his work, electronic monitoring is neutered in its securitizing role, or say denatured, and returned ironically to the now pixelated mock-grandeur of historical spectacle and ceremony against the traditional backdrop of populated mountain valleys and their natural plateaus. And yet there's an element of invaded (even as invented) privacy in Rondepierre's *Background* suite as well. We seem to be spying ourselves, for instance, through Hitchcock's rear window – and along a perversely reversed axis – on a space never licensed as ours for wholesale perception. In any case, where Spinatsch's openly collaged panoramas overleap cinema in his tactical reversion from hidden digital camera to wide-frame composite representation, Rondepierre lingers there with the older form of projection instead, though now reinscribed transmedium by computerized editing and touch-up. It is in this way that these latest works of a digitally implemented Conceptualism 2.0 are, in their nonetheless retro orientation, seen filling in the gaps of *décor* amid the forefronted distractions of onetime plot – and thus (with a wholly camouflaged pastiche) reducing movies to unoccupied stage sets in an invested theater of the imaginary.

A new transmedial experiment in the transfer of isolated photograms to composite digitized reframing operates as something like the flip side of Rondepierre's *Backgrounds*, in this case radically additive rather than subtractive. Digital *bricoleur* Kevin L. Ferguson, working with imaging software, and blogging his results on the *Outtake* website in April of 2015, gives new meaning to this Internet aegis by literally taking out one image every ten seconds – death 6x a minute – from a viewing of fifty classic westerns and then digitally "compressing" (overlaying) them, thousands of filmy photograms for each film, its "look" not just distilled but swamped by its own collapsed or telescoped temporality. Discovered in this "sampled" and then laminated chromatography is, in Ferguson's

main emphasis, the marked recurrence of the blue band of sky above the "summed" and thus wholly smudged horizon line. In the center of these composites one also sees, unnoted in Ferguson's commentary, the blurred merger of two archetypal bodies in various degrees of close-up at the center of the frame, where in showdowns, shootouts, or love scenes, of course, and whether via sutured exchange or two-shots, they indeed tend to congregate – and here aggregate. In another variant of this project, again rendering narrative illegible in the name of its formal analysis, Ferguson executes "barcode"-like summations in horizontally compressed snippets or strips (manifested as sheer striping) from the same Westerns. Either way, in their reduction to a single image plane, these demoted motion pictures "read" – in their indecipherable slicing or averaging, respectively – now like geometric abstractions, now like color field paintings or veils. In the latter (overprinted) mode experimented with most fully by Ferguson, and with Rondepierre's *Background* procedure in mind, the heavily compacted "thumbs" may seem to resemble the watery, washed-out glow of a Turner painting with all representational shapes removed both from foreground and middle distance alike, leaving only the drench of light without a vanishing point. But whether modernist or impressionist in association, analytically dissevered or otherwise medium-steeped (Ferguson calls the palimpsests "saturated"), the art-historical touchstones of this work, though unexplored in the maker's own gloss, are only a further measure of their orientation within the digital ventures of Conceptualism 2.0.

And the connection with the latest work of Rondepierre is closer than that of a mere obverse conception. Even while the vertical montage of frame-advance is lost to computerized "filming" in his *Background* works, Rondepierre recovers continuity editing *within frame* via the horizontal quilt of digital stitchery and its credible spread of inhabitable space. So it is that a single archive addict and laboratory practitioner – moving from photogram studies (associated in critical response with the earliest phases of conceptual text art) to post-DVD image delivery – has run the gamut (and the unforgiving historical gauntlet) between the first phase of a medium-chastening retinal minimalism and the new vaults of

Conceptualism 2.0. Rondepierre's latest work on the phenomenological contours of an outmoded filmic cinema thus returns by way of invisible computer facilitations to a predigital moment of aberrant and unnerving visualization. And to its previously unexamined and often fetishistic allure as a continuous world elsewhere.

In Rondepierre's Hitchocks, it isn't just the lady who vanishes. As with Walter Benjamin's famously promulgated sense of Eugene Atget's original photographs, all human bodies are gone in the *Background* image as if from the scene of a crime. [27] Witness is given only to the set itself, before inhabitation. Background: a circling back round, then, to the profilmic from within the labors of an intercepted projection. And even, by archaeological association, on back to the protofilmic, or otherwise the precinematic. Across the photographic field of capture – and athwart the motors and embodied motions of plot – enough background data has been intermittently revealed to produce an image never before seen. Through this transmedial remix, an otherwise illegible space – constructed piecemeal by a sutured narrative – is eerily stitched together from its contingent glimpses. What the photogram stores but the grammar of plot renders inoperable; what the filmic takes down but the cinematic must censor in the name of event: these are taken up again in a new aggregate. Seen formally, the default of montage is rescued by collage. Seen historically, this triangulation with the illusionist resources of new media in the digital lab or "shop" offers cinema a last chance to trace its origins back to the photographic index of the still life, when movement was too unsteady for the receptive lens, too fast for the transcriptive work (Fox Talbot) of nature's pencil. So it can go, this transmedial thinking: back to bases.

Photo, phono: beyond laser photonics and fiberoptics, contemporary art has its continuing stake in earlier transmedial dynamics, optical or cross-worded. Which often means, in visual art, a stake in the way – even amid the flood of imaging and display – we can actually, by a given making, still be made to see. As noted, too, there is a further cognitive grip earned across the run of photogram and phoneme alike – alike only in the

operative a-likenings of their contrastive differential seriality. And never more earned, or vividly surfaced, than in Rondepierre's multifarious and cross-folded studies in a retinal rather than graphonic mode. For in the modern cultural work of both experimental imaging and wording, the phantasmal (because oscillatory and stroboscopic) ph . . . ontology shared by literary writing and *cinécriture* is precisely that of a time-based compaction and its accidents. Those accidents, in Rondepierre's terms those *excédents*, point to the necessarily elusive *being* (being-there-and-gone) of representation in flux: the weft of its material conveyance in process, with transmission itself intermitted and sometimes splayed open, brought to light in a reisistant platformatic gesture. Such is the materiality that must always remain latent, in abeyance – or say again illegible – until read out by an art of renewed conception as well as slowed perception, 2.0 or otherwise.

1. Jean-François Lyotard, "Acinema," *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 169-80.
2. From the paperback cover summary of *Between Film and Screen: Modernism's Photo Synthesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
3. See Fredric Jameson, the chapter on "Space" ("Utopianism after the End of Utopia"), in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 154-180.
4. See, for instance, Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).
5. Craig Dworkin, *No Medium* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013), 32.
6. Both these artists are discussed and illustrated, along with others, in my article "Transmedium," *The Iowa Review* 44/3 (Winter 2015), on line at http://iowareview.org/from-the-issue/volume-44-issue-3-%E2%80%94winter-201415/transmedium.
7. This anagram from *Finnegans Wake* is called up in exploring the relation of McCarthy's novel to recent mediacentric gallery art in my essay "Contra Modernism: from the Mediatic to the Transmedial," *Affirmations: of the Modern* 2:1 (December 2014), 1-14.
8. Tom McCarthy, *C* (London: Cape, 2010), 358.
9. True to the mystified contingencies of enunciation in play here, this is a hearing, not a reading, of the line occurring to me only after having discussed this scene, and the transmedial features of the novel at large, in Stewart, "Contra Modernism."

10.   On the general phenomenon of gallery film in the digital era, see Erica Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013).

11.   Al Filreis, "Notes on Paraphonotextuality," *Amodern* 4: The Poetry Series, http://amodern.net/article/paraphonotexuality/.

12.   See "Modernism and the Flicker Effect" in *Between Film and Screen* (n. 2 above), 265-314.

13.   Toni Morrison, *A Mercy* (New York: Knopf, 2008), 187.

14.   This is to say that Morrison's phonetic and narrative pressure point would have illustrated perfectly the "frictive" and self-frayed alphabetic arrays whose phonotextual irruption offer a reccurent strand of my evidence, and of thus of a proposed method for registering the illegible, in *Novel Violence: A Narratography of Victorian Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

15.   See my comments on the titular concept of Krauss's *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994) in *Between Film and Screen* (n. 2 above), 111-2.

16.   Friedrich Kittler, *Optical Media* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010), 169, where he stresses that film, despite its basis in "analogue or continuous frames," nonetheless submits them in turn to the discontinuity of serial projection in a mode of discrete oscillation closer to a binary process.

17.   Kittler uses the term "alphabetization" throughout his treatment of the phonetic pedagogy underlying European Romanticism in the section called "The Mother's Mouth," *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer, with Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

18.   See among many variations on this theme in his writing, Giorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 115.

19.   For a discussion of Broodthaers' transitional 1963 work, *Pense-Bête*, involving the sinking of his poetry volumes into a plaster base (materializing them as codex objects in the very act of rendering them unreadable), see Stewart, *Bookwork: Medium to Object to Concept to Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 166-7.

20.   The 2015 catalogue of Rondepierre's work, accompanying, among other venues, his winter retrospective at the Maison Européene de la Photographie in Paris, bears the bifold title *Images Secondes*—secondary traces of split-second captures. It contains an appreciative essay by film philosopher Jacques Rancière, "What the Eyes Have Never Seen," in which Rancière stresses the theoretical force of Rondepierre's anti-cinema in exploding the "Oneness" of the image by "ceaselessly separating it from itself" (87).

21.   See Phillipe Dubois, "Working with Photograms (Between Spot and Texture)," in *Éric Rondepierre (*Bretigny sur Orge: Espace Jules Verne/ Galerie Michèle Chomette, 1993), pp. 28-35, as reproduced unpaginated on Rondepierre's websiste, from which the citations here are drawn: http://www.ericrondepierre.com/pdf/en_philippe_dubois.pdf.

22.   Laura Mulvey, *Death 24 X a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion, 2006).

23.   André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What is Cinema?* trans Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, Vol. 1), 14-5.

24.   See Stanley Cavell's definition of cinema in *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979, 1971), 72.

25.   Such are the interrelated terms put into circulation in *Bookwork* (n. 17), where a concept of textual "demediation" is complemented in the present essay by the idea of "transmediation."

26.   On this work by Spinatsch, in the broader context of Swiss nationalism, see the probing seventh chapter by Katie Trumpener, "National Vistas, Peripheral Vision: War and the Making of Nations in Alpine Panoramas," in *Viewing Platforms: Perspectives on the Panorama* (forthcoming, Yale University Press).

27.   Walter Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography" in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: New Left Books, 1979), 256.