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# Thanatography: Working the Folds of Photography's Wild Performativity in Capital's Necrocene

Jill H. Casid

## Abstract

Thinking with the current return to camera-less photography and specifically the use of the photogram in the context of Capitalocene crisis as scene of compounded death I call the Necrocene, this article unfolds a set of propositions on photography's pressing relation to death. In thanatographic praxis, death materializes not as the documented and shown or "death-as-image." Rather, this thanatographic praxis works with the process of dying as medium in the vulnerable materiality of the bare exposure as something other and more than a matter of mourning. This new *ars moriendi* does not just contest but also potentially offers an ethico-aesthetic tactics for transforming—at the scale of the micro—the macro and even hyper-conditions in which we are living our dying in capital's Necrocene. Focusing particularly on what artist Joy Episalla terms the *foldtogram*, this article unfolds thanatographic practice as not merely a creative refusal of the extractive and surveilling terms of compulsory visualization but also as the tactical exercise of a kind of melancholy joy that works the folds of photography's wild performativity. Neither limited to the effects of analogue nor merely functioning analogically, photography's wild performativity expands the processual scene of making to affect more than its referent.

**Keywords:** photogram, death, necropolitics, queer, AIDS

**Fold one: Capital's Necrocene calls for a new *ars moriendi* that refuses the extractive and surveilling terms of compulsory visualization, a practice of a kind of melancholy joy I call "thanatography" that works the folds of photography's wild performativity**

If Capitalocene crisis (Malm 2016; Moore 2016; Haraway 2016) reframed as that of capital's Necrocene (McBrien 2016; Casid 2018a) resituates life

as not the anthropogenic agent of crisis somehow held to be elsewhere but under the sign of death as precariously at stake, we might ask what makes such death apprehensible as loss, what makes such death count as actionable—and perhaps especially if/when we find or lose ourselves at the seemingly opposite and even agonistic poles of either the slow death (Berlant 2011) and disprized mourning (Woubshet 2015) of being overwhelmed or worn out by not merely the burden of caring for and melancholically carrying “our dead” (Muñoz 1999; Gossett 2016) but feeling ourselves in the marked position or, at the supposed other end, in the prized position of the presupposition, of living as if in the future perfect anterior of “grievable life” that does not feel its mortality as pressing precarity which Judith Butler articulates as: “this will be a life that will have been lived” (Butler 2009, 15). Thinking capital’s Necrocene as a scene in which even the frames of protracted, endless war fed by the retractions of care that make epidemic the ongoing crisis of AIDS (making it possible to position HIV/AIDS as a global security threat) (Campbell 2008), are, from certain vantages within U.S. empire, no longer apprehensible as frames, I press this ostensible opposition as a dependent hinge in which capacitating the feelings of safety and security which may register as no feeling at all is predicated on disavowed violence which includes the displaced burden of bearing (and bearing witness to) trauma (Snorton and Haritaworn 2013; Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014; Cárdenas 2017). Across *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War*, Butler maintains powerfully that “specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living” (Butler 2009, 1; Butler 2004).

And, yet, in confronting how death acts, I develop the proposition that what we might call a new *ars moriendi* that refuses the extractive and surveilling terms of compulsory visualization, a practice of a kind of melancholy joy, works the folds of what I will elaborate as photography’s wild performativity to make contestatorily palpable the necropolitical conditions of Necrocene crisis by demonstrating

with something like a living our dying through a practice of transversal vulnerability (Butler 2016). What I am putting on scene is the queering question of how dying is used as material medium to agitate for livable life by insisting that to make death count it matters crucially how we live our dying (Casid 2018b, 2019).

### **Fold two: In photographopolis, the other name for photography is mourning; in capital’s Necrocene, it passes for life**

In yielding to not just the sheer accumulation of photographs but photographability, the world, for Siegfried Kracauer’s “Photography” (1927), is not merely policed by the mug shot and navigated by photographic identification, but, in giving itself over to photographability as a way of life that promises to allay the fear of death, the world, in assuming the omnipresent “photographic face” of an interminable photographable present, has “succumbed all the more” to the death it attempts to banish (Kracauer 2005, 59). For Félix Nadar’s *When I Was a Photographer* (1900), from the very announcement of the possibility of shooting from the air and its “shaking of our little world,” the after-world of the wake below had become “Photographopolis” (Nadar 2015, 62).

Photography, as the very possibility of action at a distance beyond the photographer’s field of vision, is enacted, in the allegory of photography staged by Nadar’s memoir, as an experimental test in which photography’s capacity for photographic registration at an absentee remove takes a town named Deuil or mourning as its target site. The “wildly performative character” of Nadar’s writing from the position as if the posthumous survivor of his own death (able to narrate from beyond the grave) works, in Eduardo Cadava’s reading of the memoir, to preserve mourning by taking the place of the city as its own photographopolis, a series of written photographs that render not Deuil but ultimately metropolitan Paris, phantasmagoric capitol of commodities, a photographic surface that outlives

its touch with death to archive and preserve what passes (Thélot 2003). Performing as if Nadar, Cadava's "Nadar's Photographopolis" concludes with an invented declaration heard by listening to the silent relation that is a photography that is both preserved and preserves:

I want nothing else than to archive and preserve, within a series of photographs, within the series of photographs that my memoirs are, not only the speed of light but also the night and oblivion without which we could never see, and, yes, the death and mourning without which neither I nor you can be said to live (Cadava 2015, xlvii).

But there is another side to photography's wild performativity not tamed by—and which even obliterates—the priority of preservation, a performativity of the photograph as rogue agent committed not at all to the preservative terms of this love letter's pact in which death and oblivion are sealed in the service of a capacity to see and to live. This is the power that emerges in the third chapter of the memoir under the title of "homicidal photography" to be swept behind as the series of chapters-as-photographs proceeds to take flight with the hot-air balloon and touch down in the portrait studio: aerostatic photography, postal photography, post-mortem photography of the cosmetized corpse, photography, that is, that hovers around death but not ostensibly as its agent. This is the power of more than substitution. This is a power of wild performativity that challenges sovereignty in arrogating the power of the death sentence: "It is the photograph that has just pronounced THE SENTENCE—the sentence without appeal: 'DEATH! ...'" (Nadar 2015, 51).

*When I was a Photographer* sets the scene for the enactment of this wild performativity in the street just as "a band of Communard prisoners were passing," condensing—with its concretion of the violent suppression but also address to the future of the Paris Commune and its photographs (Przyblyski 2001), the after-shocks of the death

march and pre-cursive echoes of the surveillance line-up of indefinite detention—the exercise of the necropolitical power to make die with that of the power to arrest assembly and sever alternative bonds of a counter-capitalist commons beyond the state. At the center of this scene of photography's wild performativity is a photograph of a cadaver that is more than a drowned man in a state of putrefaction, a photograph, that is, of "decomposition by death" that disembowels and deliquesces human form to the point of being "illegible" ("a heap without a name") (Nadar 2015, 50–51). And this photograph as a figure for and enactment of photography's wild performativity as a power to decompose "ends up sovereignly substituting itself for all the rest: it drives everything" (Nadar 2015, 52). While mourning may be another name for photography, photography's wild performative power exercises the agency of a potentially irreversible dis-possession, a drive that drives, making heaping heaps without name that continue to act—a process that sounds a great deal like global capitalism.

"Has the culture of capitalism telescoped God into photography?" John Berger's "Uses of Photography" (1978) (Berger 2013, 49–60) asks rhetorically in addressing the agency problem and problematic agency of the photograph without intrinsic meaning or external guarantor of judgment in the situation of photography as a fundamental demand driving the global capitalist image-world that Susan Sontag encapsulates with the famous dictum in *On Photography* (1973) that "a capitalist society requires a culture based on images" (Sontag 1973, 178). Repeating the question alongside Mârius Gifreda's play on words (Gifreda 1930) about corporate optics (Zeiss) taking over and extending the reach once reserved for the god of gods, (Zeus), Joan Fontcuberta's "Eye of God" (2011) confronts us with the wild performativity of photography in the "conditions of absolute iconic saturation" in late global capitalism telescoped into the alienating figure of the eye of the camera in the digital age as a "breath of life" that exudes a killing vitality, a Janus-faced, Zeiss-as-Zeus with the power

to make die which is now the power to make live as *homo photographicus* produced in and by the imperative consumption of taking pictures (Fontcuberta 2014, 23–28). If, in Photographopolis, the other name for photography is mourning; in Capital's Necrocene, our scene, it passes for life.

**Fold three: Neither limited to the effects of analog nor merely functioning analogically, photography's wild performativity expands the processual scene of making to affect more than its referent**

If photography has been laminated not merely to its referent but also to death as the piercing confrontation of the embodied spectator by the "that-has-been" rising up from the seemingly settled surface of the photograph's picture plane as living dead presence, it would be the work of Roland Barthes's exercise in *Camera Lucida* (1980) of a writing with light to counter the social taming of photography by opening the chemistry of the dark room to the unsettlements of the mad volatility immanent to the scene of encounter with "intractable reality" in the revulsive movement of an extimate intimacy or "photographic ecstasy" (Barthes 1980, 119). But it would be the unresolved action of the "cancerous image" at the open end of Hervé Guibert's *Ghost Image* (published in 1981, a year after *Camera Lucida*) that gets into the skin of photography's wild performativity as the power to affect and even infect, to not merely address but make participant, in the scene of the photograph's implied yet protracted and extended action, the body that we can no longer adequately call merely that of the spectator.

The cancerous image is introduced to us as at once idol, would-be lover and trick, unmoored from intention, stolen, anonymous, and without controlling authority, a photograph of "a boy I never knew taken by an unknown photographer, and in an unidentified location" (Guibert 1982, 154–58). Without signature and released from a position as

property and any proper position, the photograph takes possession in other ways. It goes from being propped against the bookshelf as the only photograph the "I" keeps at home to becoming the boy and, though never moving from the visible spot in which it was placed (which in a slow reveal we come to learn is the bedroom), acts as the only possible photograph—even chasing away the others. Detached from its negative and from controlling intention, we meet the photograph as attached material, a glossy print glued to white cardboard that gathers dust. As waste particles attach themselves to the surface and begin to obscure the image, the "I"'s affective attachment becomes abstracted, the image recedes, disclosing a material body in the process of decay as the glue from the cardboard begins to "eat away at the photograph from behind." The image is pronounced "cancerous" and the boy, now called "my friend," sick.

It is at this radically dependent hinge where the bankrupt heroics of the preservative promise of the eternal life photography cannot deliver meet the material realities of not just decay but the unhinging question of what it would really entail to provide the necessary supports (economic, political, material, affective) for singularity that the cancerous image starts to do its corrosively critical, queer ethical work in unleashing the wild performativity of photography's contagious action of material contact and transference (Casid 2012).

Rather than try to preserve or restore the image by a retouching and rephotographing that would destroy its singularity, the "I" refuses the available terms of this saving which destroys and determines to "abandon him to his loss." But, as decay thus continues unabated and the "I" fantasizes ways of accelerating an end by a reversal of the tools of photographic production (additional acids, burning, the action of water), we are confronted, instead, with a slow process of degradation that refuses once-and-for-all death as abstract transcendence of the material plane and offers up instead the accidents of uncontrollable process that are the under-tow of the dream-stream of technical mastery.

What is described as “a small chemical accident” that alters the expression on the face of the image unfurls the other side of the field of the gaze: the image (he) begins not just to have a look or appear to look but looks at the “I” (me).

Here the folds of photography’s double bind tighten. To stop the action of the image that looks, “I” covers the photograph with a cloth to conceal the look of the image. But covered the image haunts. As the effort demands more and more fabric, “I” places the photograph under the sheet of his bed to crush the image only to begin to hear the image whimper and find that the image invades his dreams. “I” tries sewing it into his pillow and then wearing the “it” that is also a “him” against his skin, wrapping the photograph in bandages round his torso that become like swaddling as “I” begins to feel the image hold on like a sleeping child which “I” bathes in his “sweat and filth” until the image becomes not merely a smaller, weaker dependent but fatally, symbiotically attached, a “heteradelphus” likened to a dead younger brother.

And here the hyperbolic narrative theorization of photography’s wild performativity reaches its pitched turning point of failed, self-critical puncture in which the “I,” attempting to find a place of unaffected critical judgment outside of the transferential action of the scene, decides that this attachment is ridiculous and unwinds the bandages only to find the image “blank” but not evaporated. Instead, the saltwater of “I”’s perspiration acts as a vehicle not to dissolve but to transfer the image, a process which, in the mirror with its deceptive promise of verification, bears the look of a tattoo or even a decal merely pressed onto the surface. However, as it is disclosed that the paper’s pigments have embedded themselves in “I”’s pores, the theory-tale of photography’s wild performativity concludes abruptly with a volatile anti-moral: “The transfer had saved him from his illness.” Rehearsing the heroics of a photography that does more than preserve what passes and, indeed, saves, the barbed hook of this anti-moral is all the rougher for the way it rearticulates the fantasy of a photography that saves as a

rescue from the slow, corrosive degradation that, seemingly absent from the scene of this last sentence, is now buried deep in “I”’s pores.

Written before Guibert’s diagnosis with AIDS in 1988 and death in 1991 and before the controversial publication of Guibert’s novel *To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life* (1990) that narrates a fictionalized portrayal of philosopher Michel Foucault’s AIDS-related death, *Ghost Image* exercises photography’s wild performativity, demonstrating with the cancerous image, that the other side of photographic process is not merely its power of distance-collapsing touch in conjuring the palpable near presence of its referent as revenant and circulating promiscuously among strangers turned intimates (Apter 1993, 83–97; Chambers 1998, 35–60). In continuing to develop but non-progressively and even fatally in processes of making as exchange and exchange as making, the cancerous image confuses the physical, psychic and affective in the sense of fusing with, expanding the scene of encounter as the photograph attaches itself unbidden and produces attachments that, even when disavowed, still act.

This fundamentally altering circuit of transferential exchange is neither merely an analogue effect nor only an analogy. *Ghost Image* was released in the year (1981) that Sony introduced the first floppy disk and the proto-digital camera, the Mavica (the magnetic video camera that could write still video images onto magnetic disks) and the year in which *To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life* recounts first hearing along the vital lines of informational exchange we call gossip—from a friend named “Bill”—of the (now) “famous disease” (Guibert 1990, 13), the year, that is, in which the *New York Times* ran the article with the headline, “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals” (31 July 1981) that reported the sudden appearance of a previously rare skin cancer, Kaposi’s Sarcoma (Sarkonak 2016, 54). In demonstrating photography’s uncannily protracted action that enwraps use and circulation into exposure and “development” as an unpredictably stretched scene that includes us, *Ghost Image* presses photography’s wild

performativity across the threshold of the wet lab and dark room into the intimately estranging folds that are the binds of everyday encounter as a power that operates according to a transferential logic of contagious immanence not exclusively dependent on actual physical touch.

**Fold four: Photography's wild performativity crosses the line between thought and action, earth and atmosphere, ghosting the material and materializing the spectral**

If the declaration of both the deaths of photography and of communism are significant to the workings of the Capitalocene's image-world of living in and as compulsory photographability it is not merely that, as John Berger observes, "Marx came of age the year of the camera's invention" or that one of the many dates by which one might mark the emergence of photography coincides with the beginnings of the critical analysis of capital (Berger 2013, 52). To address photography's constitutive relation not merely to the critique of capitalism but to the praxis within its stronghold of potentials not entirely subsumed by its extractions and accumulations—a photographic praxis of a photography after photography of and for the commons, that is, for a queer, trans\*feminist commons that embraces blackness and supports life lived under the sign of deadly disposability while contesting that disposability—takes us not to nostalgia or failed resuscitation but to another side of the transferential contacts of contagion, that of the wild performativity of photography as the materializing action of the spectral that cannot be dismissed as the ectoplasmic excess of a quarantined spirit photography. For this wild performativity by which the ostensibly dead or inert act on the living with the impossible and unruly agency to make die in circuits of transferential contagion makes critically palpable as contestable dispositif or apparatus of power the other side of the magic bonds of sovereignty and inheritance still

constitutively operative in the debt bondage and extractive accumulations of late-stage global capitalism.

The illocutionary force of the performative exclamation, "The Sovereign is Dead; Long Live the Sovereign!" is to mark as it endeavors to secure the continuity and directionality of the power-producing effects of ostensibly instantaneous transfer without delay or gap by the binding assurance of the exclamative's doubling repetition of the same word both first and last, at the syntactical beginning and at the end (the sovereign dies and yet sovereignty still lives). The ur-instance of this Greek rhetorical technique of emphasis in action (that is, by the arrangement of its repeated elements) the rhetorical device of epanalepsis (derived from epi (upon) + ana (back) + lepsis (taking hold)) performs a version of the literal translation of its name: a taking hold from the back. Imagining action in and across time in the spatial terms of syntax (with the past coming from the back position), this epanalepsis as an exclamative performs a spectral materialization, an uncanny raising of the dead as taking hold of and acting on the living from behind that is encapsulated in the transitive terms of the French common law phrase for the power-producing magic bond of the closed-circle transfer of sovereignty in and as property: "*Le Mort Saisit le Vif* [The Dead Seize the Living]" (Barthelemy 2009, 34).

That the uncanny raising of the dead might not merely bring out the uncanny spectrality in the transfer of sovereign authority and inherited property but that the specter of spectral action (the looming, undead threat of the dead acting on the living) might be used to loosen its binding hold is activated famously by Marx's repetition of the exclamative, in the 1867 preface to the first German edition of *Capital* (where it appears in French), to release an estranging difference: "We suffer not only from the living, but from the dead. *Le Mort Saisit le Vif* [The Dead Seize the Living]!" (Marx 1976, 91). That justice, that the life of the commons would be contingent on loosing the grip of a vampiric capitalism that feeds on and zombies the living



is famously rearticulated by Marx in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* as a spectral scene of inhumation that clears the way for social revolution as a revolution by and for the living in banishing the dead by exorcising the residual obligation on the living to tend to the dead: "In order to arrive at its own content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead" (Marx 1979, 106).

In the wake of an AIDS crisis that is not over with the ongoing criminalization of the HIV + and viewed from the vantage of those marked for death as disposable life, it is not only, as Derrida reminds in *Specters of Marx*, that:

One must constantly remember that the impossible ("to let the dead bury their dead") is, alas, always possible. One must constantly remember that this absolute evil (which is, is it not, absolute life, fully present life, the one that does not know death and does not want to hear about it) can take place. One must constantly remember that it is even on the basis of the terrible possibility of this impossible that justice is desirable: *through* but also *beyond* right and law (Derrida 2006, 220).

To act to contest as any given basis the terrible not-past but present actuality of life rendered so disposable that we must do our own burying is to do another kind of remembering which is the strange, impossible work of contesting the terms of that disposability to forge the basis of a queer trans\*feminist commons that does not banish the specters we are but works in and with our differently exacerbated mortality and vulnerable disposability. This is not a matter of photography's evidentiary and forensic functions but, rather, a praxis that calls on photography's wild performativity to cross the line of materialism's banishing of specters in ghosting the material and materializing the spectral.

The unsettled and ambivalent power of photography's wild performativity is raised by Walter Benjamin in "Convolute Y" of the *Arcades Project* where he refers to how Nadar "reproduces the

Balzacian theory of the daguerreotype, which in turn derives from the Democritean theory of the *eidola*" (Benjamin 1999, 674). Benjamin is most likely making reference here to the vividly descriptive section in the opening chapter of *When I Was a Photographer* which recounts how, in Balzac's theory, the material body is already enfolded with and indeed constituted by spectral layers: "according to Balzac, each body in nature is composed of a series of specters, in infinitely superimposed layers, foliated into infinitesimal pellicules, in all directions in which the optic perceives this body" (Nadar 2015, 4–5). By this account, the "Daguerrian operation" does not so much produce an image ("Since man is unable to create—that is, to constitute from an apparition, from the impalpable, a solid thing, or to make a thing out of nothing") as "detach" and transfer one into itself by flaying off the body's spectral folds ("every Daguerreian operation would catch, detach and retain, by fixing onto itself, one of the layers of the photographed body"). The passage concludes with a sharp description of photography's economy of loss in the terms of an extractive operation: "it follows that for the body, and with every repeated operation, there was an evident loss of its specters, which is to say, of a part of its constitutive essence." Marina Warner calls these extracted essential skins, Balzac's "peelings off life," condescending in that phrase not only the question of whether these spectral shavings are animate but also to what extent the life of the body can survive repeated photographic excoriations (Warner 2007). In "Convolute Y," Benjamin combines selected passages from Balzac's novel *Cousin Pons* to highlight that the daguerreotype is not merely the agent of a wild performativity but also offers the ghosted proof of spectral agency, namely that objects can project themselves onto the atmosphere and ideas can imprint themselves:

If anyone had come and told Napoleon that a man or a building is incessantly, and at all hours, represented by an image in the atmosphere, that all existing objects have there a kind of specter which can be



captured and perceived, he would have consigned him to Charenton as a lunatic ... Yet that is what Daguerre's discovery proved ... just as physical objects in fact project themselves onto the atmosphere, so that it retains the specter which the daguerreotype can fix and capture, in the same way ideas ... imprint themselves in what we must call the atmosphere of the spiritual world ... and live on it spectrally (one must coin words in order to express unnamed phenomena) (Balzac 1968, 131–32).

While disavowed by Nadar as merely a dubious symptom of Balzac's potentially feigned terror before the camera, this *eidolic* theory of images gets under the skin of the real in suggesting not merely the lingering, energetic presence in the atmosphere of the spectral or that an active processual presence substantively links earth and atmosphere, bodies and specters but that this relation is an actively forming and deforming dynamic transfer. As Lucretius narrates this process of exfoliation in Book IV of *De rerum natura*, the outer shape or formation of things (including ideas as things) consists of spectral-material film that things "throw off in the world" which opens the wild performativity of photography—independent of any camera—to unfold the implication of transfer in the other direction, that the thrown off or abjected as if unreal not-life might return to substantively affect the living (Lucretius 2008, 140–41)<sup>1</sup>.

### **Fold five: Photography's wild performativity activates dying as a way of contesting the death sentence of biopolitical disposability in capital's Necrocene**

History still keeps many of us awake at night. On a background field of repeating dollar bills, over the muscular and skeletal layers of flayed anatomies, beneath the smoke and flames of a chemistry experiment, and beside the negative target of his own silhouette (an assembled aggregate of cultural artefacts—gear wheel, martial sculpture, classical

column, green martian), a cartoon outline with a gun points out at the spectator-turned-mark, taking aim from the other side of a sleeping contour less human than failed barricade on the exposed ground of a map of the world as unprivate bed without refuge. This multi-media collage reworking of the academic genre of monumental history painting presumed long defunct, *History Keeps Me Awake at Night* (1986) (Figure 1), in providing the title frame for the Whitney Museum of American Art's 2018 retrospective of David Wojnarowicz, the artist whose work refuses historicist sedation, volatilizes the problematic its raises of the unsettlements of history as active force of interruption channeled to make death-in-life an activist medium for what Félix Guattari describes as Wojnarowicz's method of re-nunciating the death sentence to turn it around, concatenating fossilized and near-dead elements (including society and the human) into not the "exhibit of passively significant forms," but, rather, to "trigger" (Wojnarowicz and Guattari 1990).

And trigger "history," as raw and unhistoricized constellation, does. While seeming to resonant with an art-historical apparatus of historicizing prophylaxis that would constrain the address of the artwork to the fortress keep of the museum as vault (Colucci 2018; Moffitt 2018), the restless, agentic, unkept history called up by *History Keeps Me Awake at Night* calls out for the kind of action mobilized by members of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) who held up counter-signage in the gallery space of the exhibition (on 27 July 2018) such as the poster (Figure 2) that alerts: "AIDS is not history. The AIDS crisis did not die with David Wojnarowicz" (Cascone 2018)<sup>2</sup>. But it also calls to account as it crosses over that lie-line barricade that separates art from activism by denying the working of the work of art. The challenge this work still issues is how the activation of the wake of history in capital's Necrocene may cross the line of the *cordon sanitaire* of depoliticizing historicization, enfolding the scenes we call by the names of art and activism, poaching from the keep of property and objectivization for an ethico-political praxis that puts stress on

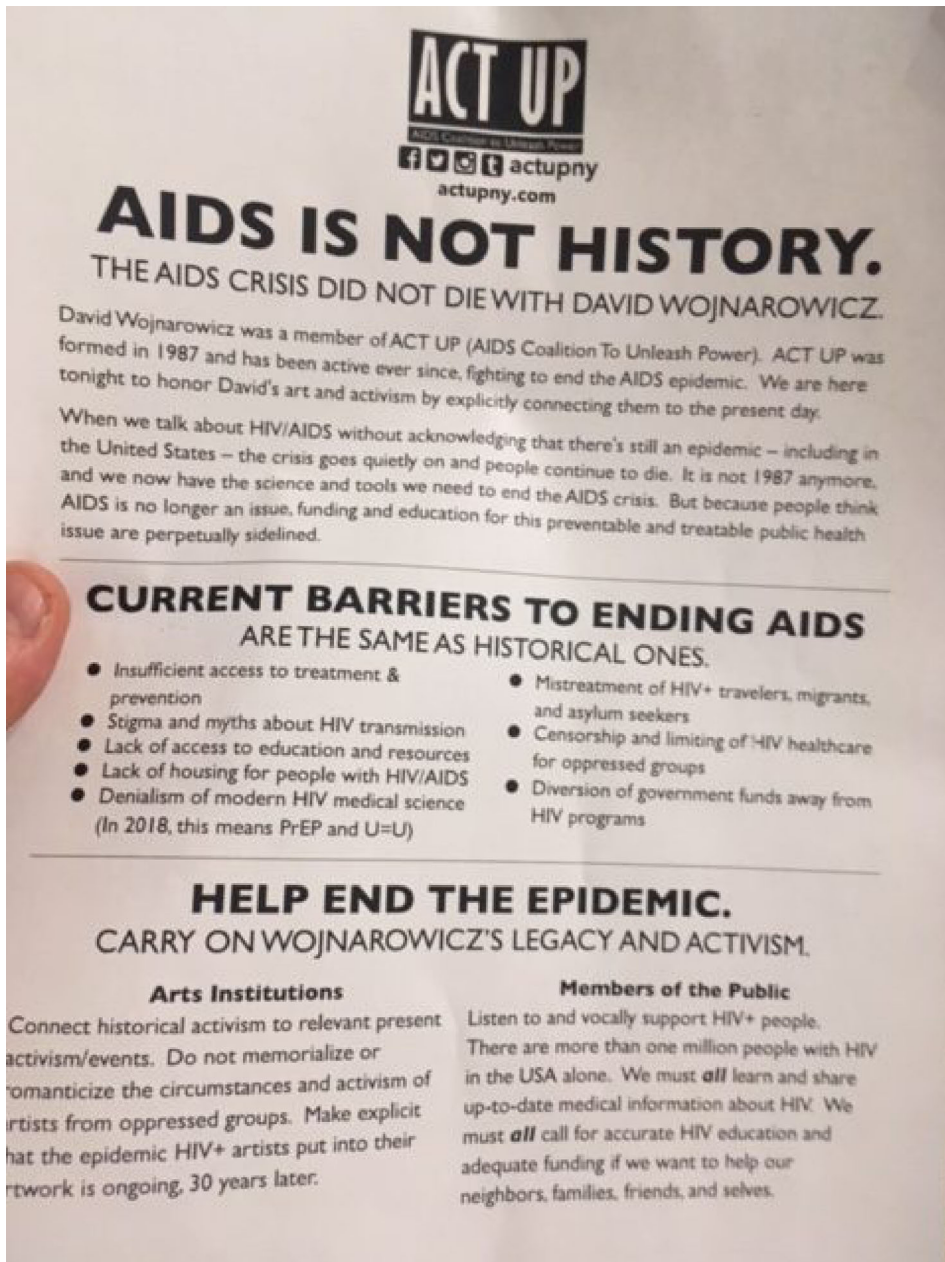


**Figure 1.** David Wojnarowicz, *History Keeps Me Awake at Night*, 1986. Acrylic, spray paint, and collage on masonite, 72 × 84 in (182.9 × 213.4 cm). Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P.P.O.-W, New York.

that other side of keep, the keep on keeping on of struggle that wrests the unkept in the sense of the uncared for of history from tranquilizing historicization by mobilizing death against lethal disposability and the “queer fatalism” Sara Ahmed powerfully diagrams as the ruse by which the fatality that follows anti-black, anti-trans and homophobic violence is magically projected outward to re-appear as if it were its cause (Ahmed 2017).

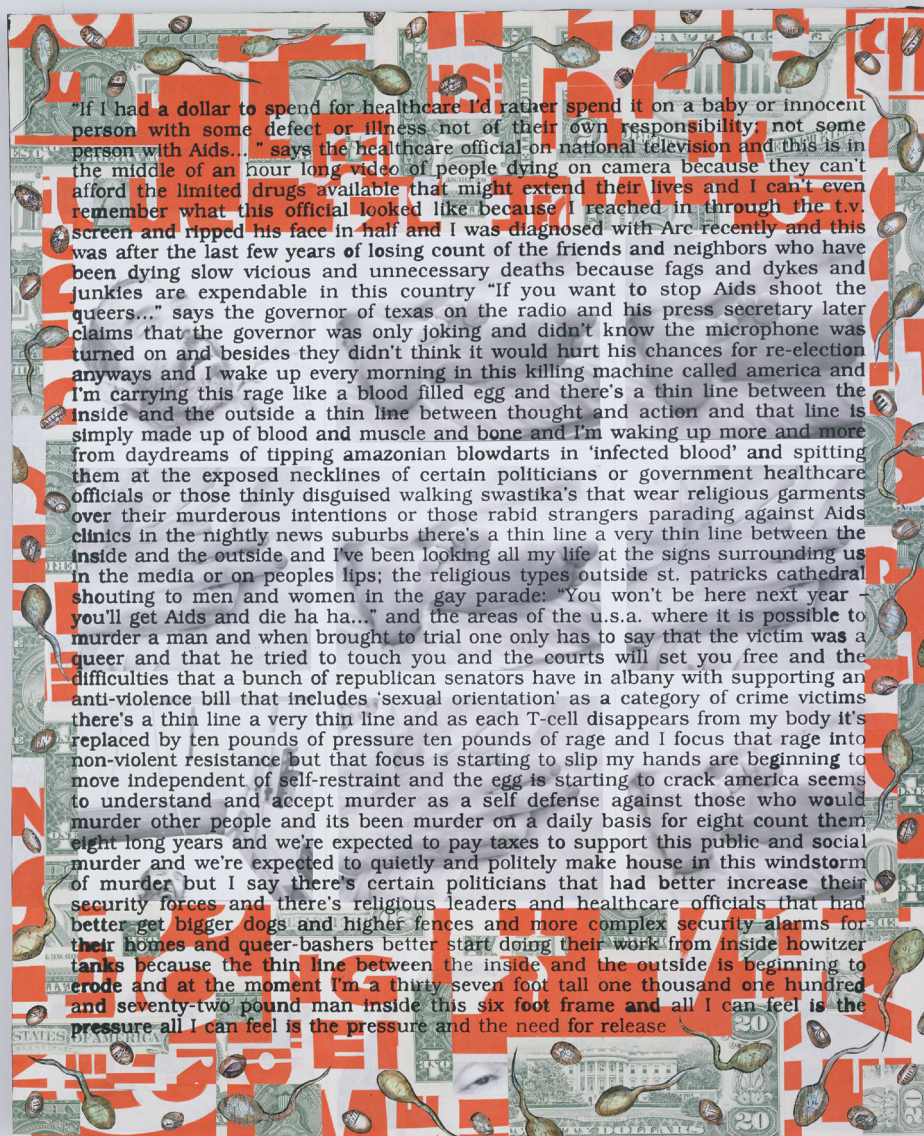
“[T]here’s a thin line a very thin line” repeats across *Untitled (Hujar Dead)* (1988–89) (Figure 3) in lines of text that, assembled within and also running over a constraining frame of estranged production

and reproduction (U.S. currency bills, supermarket signs, sperm) screen as they also disclose nine photographs by Wojnarowicz of his lover, artist-photographer Peter Hujar in the hospital just after Hujar died of AIDS in 1987 (Breslin and Kiehl 2018, 234–35). It’s a line that does not merely describe but lines as “there’s a thin line between the inside and the outside, a thin line between thought and action” repeats in bars, on the 1990 ACT UP screenprint, over bodies suspended in the position of the “dead man’s float” (Figure 4). It’s a line that politicizes the abjecting force of the line while disclosing its mortal interlining (“that line is simply

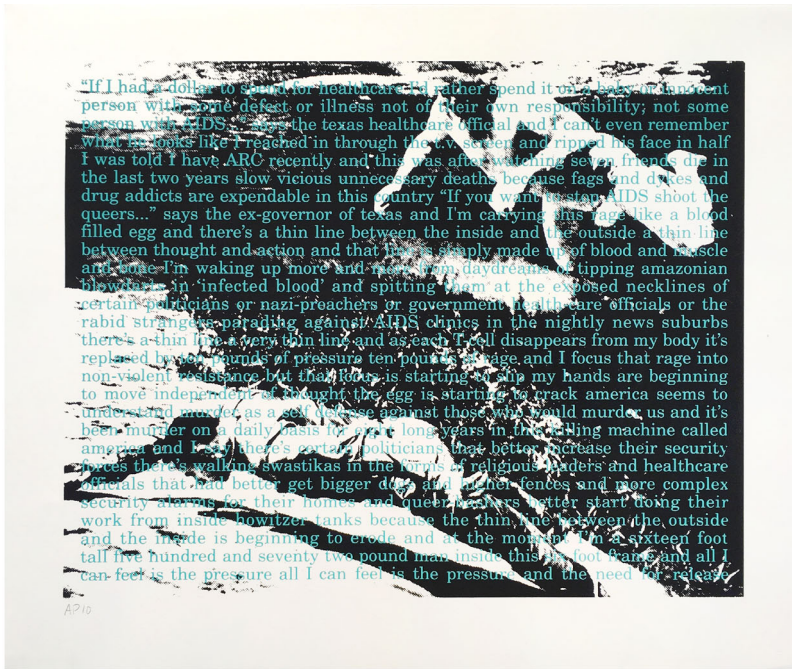


**Figure 2.** ACT UP Poster, Whitney Museum Action, from Sarah Cascone, “AIDS Is Not History: ACT UP Members Protest the Whitney Museum’s David Wojnarowicz Show, Claiming It Ignores an Ongoing Crisis,” (30 July 2018), Artnetnews, news.artnet.com. Caption: “The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, or ACT UP, is protesting the current Whitney Museum of American Art exhibition ‘David Wojnarowicz: History Keeps Me Awake at Night,’ as they feel the show casts the AIDS epidemic in a historic light.” Photo courtesy of Alan Timothy Lunceford-Stevens.





**Figure 3.** David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled (Hujar Dead)*, 1988. Black and white photograph, acrylic, text, and collage on masonate, 39 × 32 in. (99 × 81.2 cm). Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P.P.O.W., New York.



AP10



Figure 4. David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled (for Act Up)*, 1990. Silkscreen on paper, 22 1/2 x 27 1/2 inches (57.15 x 69.85 cm), Edition of 100. Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P-P-O-W, New York.



made up of blood and muscle and bone") as an overlining line of affiliation between the living and the dead as our dead. Nor does that line merely repeat as the last words of the chapter, "Do Not Doubt the Dangerousness of the 12-inch Tall Politician" in *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration* (Wojnarowicz 1991):

[T]here's a thin line a very thin line and as each t-cell disappears from my body its replaced by ten pounds of pressure ten pounds of rage and I focus that rage into non-violent resistance but that focus is starting to slip my hands are beginning to move independent of self-restraint and the egg is starting to crack... (Wojnarowicz 1991, 160–62).

As it strains at the restraint it also exerts in underlining the lethal force of the lines of killing exclusion that separate forms of life supported as livable from those rendered disposable ("losing count of the friends and neighbors who have been dying slow and vicious deaths because fags and dykes and junkies are expendable ... 'If you want to stop Aids shoot the queers ...' says the governor of Texas ..."), the line also cracks open the wild performativity of a photographic practice that ghosts the material and materializes the spectral as energetic force that is not merely released in the breaking of taboo by an exposing public intimacy with the corpse but takes us to what is re-opened by the importantly unresolved folds of the assemblage of senses of corpse as living body, dead body, bodily dress or cover (as in the doublet or justacorps/e), and an assembled political body as in a band of comrades. Consider the scene of Hujar's death in the chapter on "Living Close to the Knives" that begins to outline a politicized ethos of living our dying to contest the terms of our dying. A last intake of breath and immediately the super-8 camera comes out and then the still camera in an effort to get the "full sense of the flesh of it" which it quickly becomes apparent depends on the affecting action of the alter-photographic power, the wild performativity of a death that resists photographability as extractive process: the light in (and almost as if emitted from) Hujar's open eye that the "I" keeps trying to get

but which resists capture, the spectral film of Hujar's death ("as if it's printed on celluloid on the backs of my eyes") that frames the scene well before the cameras emerge in the narration, the affecting bond of material-spiritual force of this death as event that produces thoughts and sensations even in "bystanders," and the effect of contagious transference by which the "body's energy disperses and merges with everything around us" (Wojnarowicz 1991, 102–3).

We might describe this scene of photography's wild performativity, the alter-photographic powers of death as a radical pedagogy that teaches us an estranging attunement, a tactics of activated melancholy (Freud 1917) that calls on us not merely to take our dead with us but to refuse the emptying of the corpse in the normalization of a necropolitics of disposability that espouses life while disavowing the energetic action of the dead and dying (Crimp 1989, 2002). In his pivotal theorization of "photographies of mourning," José Esteban Muñoz phrases the necessary survival strategy of melancholia as a tactics of taking our dead with us that Che Gossett rallies us to continue in our work against the State's necropolitics and weaponization of grief in reminding that "our liberation struggles, like our lives, are woven together":

Melancholia for blacks, queers, or any queers of color, is not a pathology but an integral part of everyday lives ... it is this melancholia that is part of our process of dealing with all the catastrophes that occur in the lives of people of color, lesbians and gay men ... it is a mechanism that helps us (re)construct identity and take our dead with us to the various battles we must wage in their names—in our names (Muñoz, 74; Gossett 2016).

This taking our dead with us is currently called up in the rallying cries against persistent necropolitical violence against queer, black and trans life to publicly "say their names" in ways that do not disavow but reckon with how the apprehension of those names as grievable losses or as naming the possibility for livable lives at all substantively shape the contours of the viability of the names that claim us (Bassichis and

Spade 2014, 191–210). Yet the performative force at work here is not merely a saying of names as a doing to summon assemblies of the living and the dead to counter the force of the missing names and misnamings of lethal erasure and misrecognition. It is also not merely rhetorical this mobilization of an assembly that refuses the scandal of the unclothed corpse, in defiantly melancholic alliance not merely figural or allegorical with the material-spectral presence of death in life as an exercise of a kind of raging that holds onto the potentials of the practice of a radical joy beyond the false promises of security proffered by the elusive enfranchisements of homonationalism and homonormativity (Puar 2007; Duggan 2003).

For the catalogue of the 1989 exhibition “Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing” curated by Nan Goldin for Artist’s Space that mobilized the wild performativity of photography and its deformative energies as a way of doing things with rage, devastated-but-defiant love, tears, photochemicals, decomposition, and dirt or, in other words, a “doing things with being undone,” David Wojnarowicz produced “Post Cards from America: X-Rays from Hell” (Wojnarowicz 1989, 6–11). In exercising the wild performativity of photography as “dismantling tool,” Wojnarowicz’s critical irradiation did not merely become the flashpoint for the battle over NEA funding. In its convoking circulation (as a public reading at Artist’s Space, its republication as a key chapter of *Close to the Knives*, and at a reading for the ACT UP Benefit Auction for Needle Exchange at the Drawing Center on 26 October 1991), its excoriating force of irradiation became both call to action and pre-figurative how-to manual (Junge 2016, 325). In the vividness of its imaginative projection, it gathered the already inclined in opening space for the active political life of the dead body as at once “lifeless form” and the energetic, agentic force of a vital formlessness that goes by the name of the spectral:

I imagine what it would be like if friends had a demonstration each time a lover or a friend or a stranger died of AIDS. I imagine what it would be like if, each time a lover, friend or stranger died of this disease, their

friends, lovers, or neighbors would take the dead body and drive with it in a car a hundred miles an hour to Washington, D.C. and blast through the gates of the White House and come to a screeching halt before the entrance and dump their lifeless form on the front steps (Wojnarowicz 1991, 122).

The wild performativity of photography at work in the memorial procession organized for Wojnarowicz by the ACT UP affinity group the Marys (Joy Episalla, Barbara Hughes, James Baggett, Tim Bailey, Mark Lowe Fisher, Jon Greenberg, Stephen Machon, Michael Cunningham, Ken Bing, Bob Henry, Carrie Yamaoka, and BC Craig) that claimed the streets of the East Village of Manhattan on the evening of 29 July 1992 was not limited to the photographs of and by Wojnarowicz on the t-shirts worn by participants and the posters held aloft (Schulman 2003; Carr 2016)<sup>3</sup>. It was not in the photographability the procession courted in staging its assembly for photo-reportage nor in the photographability its assembling defied in galvanizing the volatility of an unruly alliance with the dead that is unregistrable by the conventions of photographic evidence (Carr 2012).<sup>4</sup> That wild performativity is signaled by the dissolve of consuming flames that opens James Wentz’s video for DIVA TV (originally telecast on 31 January 1995) and gathers force in its form as sequence in the compilation which assembles together video footage of the procession for Wojnarowicz, the Ashes Action at the White House on 11 October 1992; and the political funerals of Mark Lowe Fisher (29 October 1992), Tim Bailey (1 July 1993), Jon Greenberg (16 July 1993), and Aldyn McKean (4 March 1994).<sup>5</sup>

Materializing the spectral and spectralizing the material, summoning the dying in non-reproductive kinship alliance with the dead in the public, commercial space of the ostensibly living, the wild performativity of photography at work here defies the historicizing past-tense demarcations that bind the common-sense of a public sphere predicated on disposability. In “How to Do Things with Dead Bodies,” Debra Levine elaborates the critical proposition that



the Marys, in staging public funerals, gave voice to the corpse and, thus, “disabled death as activism’s limit” by making it possible for “the dead body to speak the political conditions of its death” (Levine 2009). Elaborating on this proposition about manifesting the “corpse” as a mode of “political speech,” Dagmawi Woubshet, in *The Calendar of Loss*, revises the mobilizing counter-arithmetic of ACT-UP’s “Silence = Death” as “Mourning = Survival” to make space for understanding the “reanimation of the body of the dead” in the political funeral as a way of “consecrating new queer connections and counter-publics” by “enfranchising the dead” (Woubshet 2015).

And, yet, a wild performativity still rises up as if from the blur that washes the black and white photographs ACT UP member and photographer Stephen Barker took at Mark Fisher’s funeral, on the eve of the 1992 presidential election—(Figure 5)

from as if close enough to support the weight of Fisher’s body in the casket, close enough to the epaulet on the shoulder of the black leather jacket of one of the bearers to recognize that it’s the artist Joy Episalla, close enough to walk shoulder to shoulder, close enough to hold up one of the large black umbrellas to shelter Fisher as his body is carried from Judson Memorial Church up Sixth Avenue to the Republican National Headquarters (Royles 2017). Printed for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of ACT UP and assembled in the limited edition artist’s book, *Funeral March*, that accompanied Barker’s first exhibition, “The ACT UP Portraits: Activists & Avatars, 1991–1994” at the Chelsea gallery Daniel Cooney Fine Arts in 2017 (Rothman and Ronk 2017; Rosen 2017), the close-up and blur of Barker’s photographs produce at once a sense of lively immediacy and a spectral apprehension of an emanation that



**Figure 5.** Stephen Barker, *Funeral March*, Print #4 from A bound portfolio of 25 pigment prints documenting the political funeral of Mark Fisher (1953–1992) on election eve, 2 November 1992. Afterword by Michael Cunningham. Edition of 3. Daniel Cooney Fine Arts, <https://www.danielcooneyfineart.com/artists/stephen-barker/series/funeral-march>.

escapes capture that works to make more acute the question of the bounds of the event of the political funeral, the directional agency and affecting force of taking our dead with us, of still needing to take our dead with us, of whether photography, in seeming to be the very material incarnation of the still with the mortifying power to still nonetheless transfers infectiously from that animate stillness a relation with the disavowed, denied and expendable as a way of living our dying that agitates with an extension beyond its expendability for more than livable life in common with the dead and dying now—still.<sup>6</sup>

In the commons of the dying and the dead convoked by photography's wild performativity, if the activist corpse who contests the terms of their dying is not a political puppet made to ventriloquize the lullaby of quietist normativity, if our dead seize the living, if this bond with the dead is contingent on refusing necropolitical disposability, it is surely not for incorporation into the false enfranchisements of reproductive consumer inclusion as biopolitical optimization in the security state of capital's Necrocene fueled by necropolitical violence that renders queerly racialized, queer, trans, and black life expendable. In the shimmering of a queer trans\*feminist commons, agitating for not just livable life but for more than mere survival, that is, for the viability of wild freedoms, unresigned care for the dying in more-than-living kinship with supports for non-reproductive life demands a renewed commitment to a praxis of melancholy joy that keeps company with the dead.

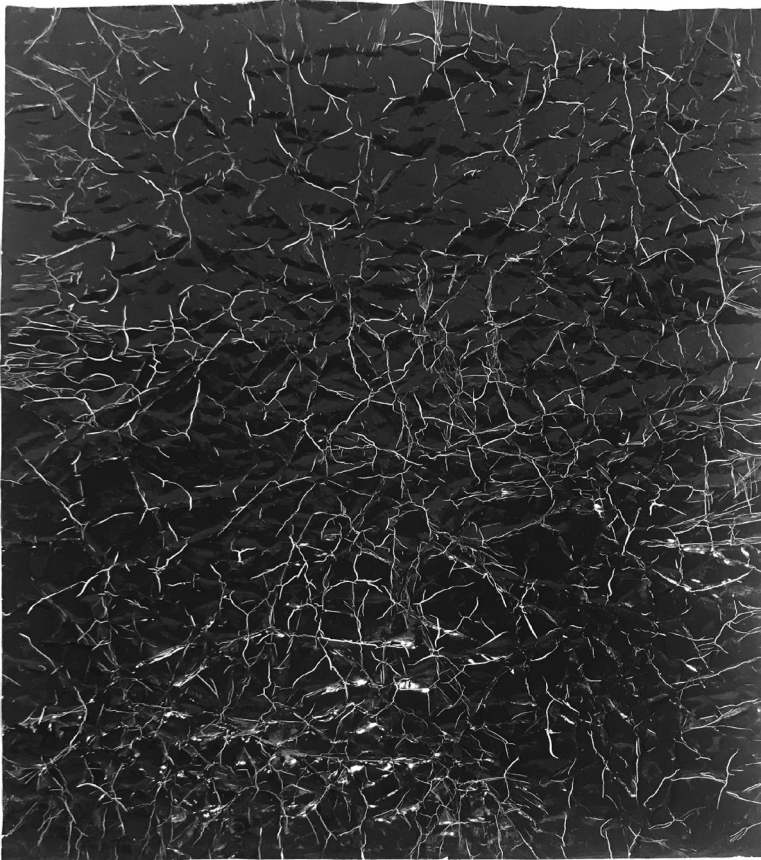
**Fold six: Thanatography works the photogram as a vulnerable material praxis of a kind of melancholy joy to unfold photography's wild performativity as a way of living our dying through an unresigned care for the dead and disposable to alter the terms of our dying in the assembly of a queer trans\*feminist commons**

In working from within the binds and double binds of capital's Necrocene, the agentic folds of

photography's wild performativity take us to bare life and unshrouded death by way of the practice of the photogram, that naked, camera-less, chemical-suffused and light-sensitive paper process of making rather than taking that does not capture but, indeed, refuses the extraction of world-as-image from within what was once called Photographapolis. The processual making of the photogram composes directly with what de-composes, with those materials marked as unstable, non-archival, decaying, expired. While positioned as the elemental beginnings of photography's protean and multi-fold origins and as seemingly exceptional medium for modernist experimentation in the properties of the real, the making of the photogram and the photogram's processual making are still here after photography's pronounced death. "The realists (of whom I am one) ... do not take the photograph for a 'copy' of reality, but for the emanation of past reality, a magic, not an art," dares Barthes's *Camera Lucida* (Barthes 1980, 88). Convoking emanations as the magic of contact, Geoffrey Batchen opens his 2015 historical survey (and exhibition), *Emanations: The Art of the Cameraless Photograph*, by repositioning the photogram as an index of the material conditions of its own making:

A reversed tone inversion of the natural order of things, such photographs even appear to emit their own light, to emanate rather than record their images. Placed thus within the inverted commas of candid self-reflection, photography is freed from its traditional subservient role as a realist mode of representation and allowed instead to become a searing index of its own operations, to become an art of the real (Batchen 2016).

The photogram may release photography from realist modes of representation that undergird photography's biopolitical registration and surveilling functions as an apparatus of the insecurity state and its counter-operations as an activist medium of forensic evidence. However, as a material index of



**Figure 6.** Joy Episalla, *foldtogram 22 rc* (20 × 16), 2017. Unique Photogram, silver gelatin Ilford multigrade glossy RC paper, 20 × 16 × 0.25 inches. Courtesy of the Artist.

contact that may retain not only likeness but also the confirming residue and extractable data of its contacts, the photogram is also embedded in the extractive economy of the image-as-data to be mined and accumulated that is crucial to the image-stream of global capital.

What I am calling thanatographic praxis, however, presses the emanatory power of the unruly other side of the practice of the photogram not as the branding stamp of a proprietary claim on its contact with the thing traceable in the ordering singe of its confirming likeness. In the emanations of thanatography, death materializes not as the documented and shown or “death-as-image” but, rather, as

dispersed matter of life and death without the retained silhouettes of identification.

Thanatographic praxis takes up that other side of the photogram to work with the dead in and as the process of dying—that is, the active presence of death in life—as activist medium in the vulnerable materiality of the bare exposure as a way of not just contesting but also potentially offering an ethico-aesthetic tactics for transforming—at the scale of the micro—the macro and even hyper conditions of necropolitical disposability in capital’s Necrocene.

And it is here that the praxis of artist Joy Episalla (member of the Marys and core, founding member of the queer feminist collective fierce pussy) brings



**Figure 7.** Joy Episalla, *foldtogram* (35'2.5' × 44", August 2018), Iteration II, installation view from Chapter Three of *Season One: arms/ache/avid/aeon: Nancy Brooks Brody, Joy Episalla, Zoe Leonard, Carrie Yamaoka: fierce pussy amplified*, dimensions of installation variable, unique silver gelatin print on full roll of 35' × 44" Ilford multigrade matte RC paper, made for the site of the Beeler Gallery, Columbus, Ohio. Courtesy of the Artist.

out the profound political import of the wild performativity of the photogram's persistent opening of the scene of making in and with the vulnerable and exposed fragility of the matter of a naked, mortal photography Episalla calls the practice of the *foldtogram* (Figure 6).<sup>7</sup> Perhaps at first appearing as yet another variation on such names of the photogram as Man Ray's "Rayograph," the subtle insinuation of

the "t" in Episalla's counter-naming of the photogram might be easy to miss and to mistake. A not at all merely nominal intervention, the *foldtogram's* intercalated "t" opens the estranging revelation of that immanent *to* in photography to speculate not with the dressed corpse of post-mortem photography or the exquisite corpses of specimen-generated photograms still redolent with the saltwater



**Figure 8.** Joy Episalla, *foldtogram* (35'2.5' x 44"- August 2018), silver gelatin object/photogram on Ilford Matte RC, site-specific installation view from Chapter Four of *Season One: arms/ache/avid/aeon*: Nancy Brooks Brody, Joy Episalla, Zoe Leonard, Carrie Yamaoka: *fierce pussy amplified*, Beeler Gallery, Columbus, OH, 2019, Dimensions of installation variable. Courtesy of the Artist.

immersions of what Jeff Wall calls “photography’s liquid intelligence” (Wall 1989) but with the other side of the vanishing point without the camera’s perspectival grids and the reversibilities of the *memento mori* skull that looks back—that is, with the specters of a wild emanatory power of an unfixated (Figure 7).

In the uneven creases of the praxis of the *foldtogram* that folds back and forth, Episalla’s extended exploration of camera-less photography materializes speculation about the wild “magic” of the spectral action of emanations toward. The *foldtogram* does much of its work in the register of resilient refusal. Neither lens-based nor exhibited behind protective glass, these not-images offer neither windows onto a world nor mimetic surface impressions. The *foldtogram* is not made by placing an object onto a light-sensitive substrate. Using the plasticity of sometimes old and expired papers, sometimes new (e.g. multi-grade matte and glossy RC, multi-grade fiber-based) that Episalla crumples until the paper is deeply worn but not split apart, the *foldtogram* does not offer a

smooth surface and, thus, refuses the possibility of a simultaneous or even exposure (Figure 8).

In working with the wild performativity of the other side of the photogram in the unpredictable and errant agencies of what photographic materials can do when not enlisted to capture likeness or material evidence of a contact with the object, the practice of the *foldtogram* does not merely refuse control but also foregoes the fictions of complete or final development. It is not merely that many of the *foldtograms* are so large that it is impossible to immerse the entirety in a chemical bath. Nor is it merely that their folds produce ripples and flows, unpredictably driving the chemical reactions in uncontrolled directions. Even when hung in photography’s stereotypical position, the *foldtogram* refuses to lie flat or stay in its frame. The propulsive “to” of the *foldtogram*’s performativity pushes the photogram from the plane of its flat/two-dimensional paper support into the territory of sculpture and toward becoming its own object—but without either image or fixity. The shape-shifting



foldtogram's resistance to stability, its changeability is not merely a matter of the scarring, singeing and crumpling of the foldtogram's surface emulsion or skin that let its underside come up through the cracks but also a way of working with and against silver gelatin paper's grain in bending and twisting not to stage a final reveal but to produce yet other sides.

To fold is also to collapse and folding can sound a great deal like dejected submission. But to fold toward is not a fixed position but an inclination, a way of responding to emanations both material and spectral to enact bonds of freedom that extend to the relation with the embodied spectator. Without a fixed position or orientation in space and without

reference to scale, the foldtogram refuses to confirm or fix ours. Mounted horizontally on the wall, they seem to work like topographical maps; hung vertically, like strange waterfalls; laid on the ground like the bird's-eye aerial view—and yet all with the potential to plunge us into the abyss. Here the devices of optical mastery (the aerial viewpoint from above, the voyeur's perch, the all-seeing fantasy of being able to occupy more than one viewing position at the same time) are replayed not to confirm our position but, rather, enfold us transitively as affected and affecting material (Figure 9).

Through their refusal to bend to the technical rules of the capturing of impressions that still govern



**Figure 9.** Joy Episalla, *foldtogram (lg rc black 63 × 42)*, 2017/2019, site-specific installation view from *The leader circles dissolved in the air: Joy Episalla and Carrie Yamaoka*, Transmitter Gallery, Brooklyn, New York, July 2019, unique photogram, silver gelatin multigrade matte RC paper. Dimensions of installation variable. Courtesy of the Artist.



**Figure 10.** Joy Episalla, *foldtogram* (1152 × 50—August 2019), 2019, Photogram, gelatin silver, multigrade glossy RC Paper, Installation View from Chapter Five of *arms/ache/avid/aeon*: Nancy Brooks Brody, Joy Episalla, Zoe Leonard, Carrie Yamaoka: *fierce pussy amplified*, ICA Philadelphia, September 2019. Dimensions of installation variable. Courtesy of the Artist.

how the photogram's contact with the world is to be registered (rules that are also the political ones of the extractive, surveilling and commoditizing logics of compulsory visualization), Episalla's *foldtograms* fold toward and, indeed, embrace blackness in a world of anti-blackness and negotiate with rather than disavow loss. Cracked and care-worn, worn in and through an unresigned care for the expendable

it refuses to throw away, and made through an exquisitely time-intensive process of folding light-sensitive papers until they crackle without rupture (Figure 10), the *foldtograms* perform their refusals while working and being worked by a wild performativity of photography as a means of doing things with being undone, a transitively unHINGING version of what artist Roberto Jacoby called the "strategy of



joy.”<sup>8</sup> The praxis of the *foldtoqram* is a speculative and experimental practice of thanatographic contact in the folds of capital’s Necrocene that gathers us in the material rub of crackling friction, rubbing the abstractions of necropolitics against the naked exposure of material vulnerability to produce the contestatory, altering sparks of a melancholy joy that forges the bonds of a queer, trans\*feminist commons, that untoward to in the cinders of our dying too.

## Notes

1. On the role of Lucretius’s account of imaging in Benjamin’s theorization in terms of photography, see Eric Downing, “Lucretius at the Camera: Ancient Atomism and Early Photographic Theory in Walter Benjamin’s *Berliner Chronik*,” *Germanic Review* 81.1 (Winter 2006), 21–36.
2. ACT UP stipulates that all articles about the Whitney action take ethical and political responsibility for education and, thus, provide links to ACT UP’s initial statement at <https://actupny.com/drawing-attention-to-the-modern-hiv-epidemic-for-act-up-artist-david-wojnarowicz/> and final statement at: <https://actupny.com/the-whitney-actions-and-the-historicization-of-hiv-aids/>.
3. Joy Episalla recounts that the ACT UP affinity group the Marys had just done the FDA action and die-ins using cardboard headstones when she joined ACT UP and became a Mary member. The core members of the the Marys numbered approximately 12–15 and included Joy Episalla, Barbara Hughes, James Baggett, Ken Bing, Tim Bailey, Mark Lowe Fisher, Jon Greenberg, Michael Cunningham, Anna Blume, Stephen Machon, Neil Broome, John Stumpf, Dennis Kane and Bob Henry. Carrie Yamaoka, B. C. Craig, and Michael Marco participated, but less consistently. The Marys also worked in tandem with the ACT UP affinity group Anonymous Queers (namely Vincent Gagliostro and Avram Finkelstein). The Marys formed a pact of the living and the dying with the dead in which they committed themselves to the strategy of working with their dying bodies and bodies pronounced dead—which, for the purposes of public legibility, they articulated as the “political funeral.” They named this project “Stumpf/Kane” for Marys members Dennis Kane who died in 1991 and John Stumpf who died in 1992. (Conversations with Joy Episalla, 17 September 2017; 19 November 2017; 11 August 2018; 25 February 2019; and 30 April 2020.).
4. The Marys distributed fliers at Gay Pride in June 1992 and then in August placed an advertisement in the PWA Coalition Newslite under the banner, “LEAVE YOUR BODY TO POLITICS” the full text of which reads: “Throughout the AIDS crisis, furious activists with advanced HIV disease have been saying they want their deaths to help further the fight against this country’s neglect and incompetence in the face of AIDS. But until now, the idea of political funerals has remained just that—an idea. Political funerals aren’t part of the American activist tradition, as they are in Ireland, South Africa, and other countries. For years, the desires of activists who want to make a final statement with their bodies have gotten lost in a flurry of bereavement, familial wishes and the plain American terror of death. We think it’s time our premature deaths carry some of same fury and focus that have marked our lives. We’re establishing an organization that can carry out the directives of fellow PWA’s who want political funerals. Whether that means a procession down Fifth Avenue, delivery of the coffin to the White House, or whatever. We’re taking this action out of love and rage. The times are only getting more desperate. If you’re interested, we’d like to talk to you.” Joy Episalla recounts how she and Carrie Yamaoka proposed the idea to Tom Rauffenbart and David’s friends of a political funeral with Wojnarowicz (Conversations with Joy Episalla, 17 September 2017; 19 November 2017; 11 August 2018; and 25 February 2019).
5. In addition to the placards, at the head of the procession, The Marys carried a monumental banner with the words: “DAVID WOJNAROWICZ, 1954–1992, DIED OF AIDS DUE TO GOVERNMENT NEGLECT.” The flames were made by a funeral pyre Joy Episalla and Barbara Hughes started by setting the banner on fire. David Wojnarowicz’s friends and fellow activist/mourners threw in the placards they’d been carrying, along with Tom Rauffenbart, David’s lover, who threw the sunflower he was carrying on the pyre to sustain the blaze.

6. These photographs were not developed or shown until 2017 and the Marys were unaware that Barker had ever taken photographs. While it is important to mark the temporal lag, it is equally crucial to resist the notion that their appearance now represents progressive development in terms of resolving into clarity or political arrival. For an online portfolio of photographs from *Funeral March* (2017), see [http://www.danielcooneyfineart.com/barker\\_pics2.html](http://www.danielcooneyfineart.com/barker_pics2.html).
7. Episalla started pushing photographic and moving image practices into the sculptural arena during the height of the AIDS crisis—1990-93. On the art of fierce pussy, see Lauren O'Neill Butler, "Labor of Love: On the Art of fierce pussy," *Artforum* (February 2019), <https://www.artforum.com/print/201902/lauren-o-neill-butler-on-the-art-of-fierce-pussy-78383>. On the new work of the collective fierce pussy and the insistence that the work is about making space coming from a "joyful place," see "Power in Diversity: fierce pussy interviewed by Alexandra Juhasz," *Bomb Magazine* (September 8, 2018), <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/power-in-diversity-fierce-pussy-interviewed/>. On the foldtograms, see also the artist's website, <https://www.joyepisalla.com>. For the installation of several of the foldtograms at the Beeler Gallery at the Columbus College of Art and Design in Columbus, Ohio as part of the exhibition season, *arms ache avid aeon: Nancy Brooks Brody/Joy Episalla/Zoe Leonard/Carrie Yamaoka: fierce pussy amplified* curated by Jo-ey Tang, see <http://beelergallery.org/season-one/>. <https://www.beelergallery.org/arms-ache-avid-aeon-chapter-two/> <https://www.beelergallery.org/arms-ache-avid-aeon-chapter-three/> <https://www.beelergallery.org/arms-ache-avid-aeon-chapter-four/> <https://live-beeler-gallery.pantheon.io/arms-ache-avid-aeon-chapter-five/>
8. The practice of the "strategy of joy" served as a key organizing principle, under the conceptual and planning umbrella of Paul B. Preciado's project, "The Society for the End of Necropolitics," for the three-day critical and performative gathering at Documenta 14 called the "Parliament of Bodies" and dedicated to the collective invention of political affects of joy (8–10 September 2017). On the "Society for the End of Necropolitics," see <https://www.documenta14.de/en/public-programs/1035/the-society-for-the-end-of-necropolitics>. On the "Parliament of

Bodies: The Strategy of Joy," see <https://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/24986/the-strategy-of-joy>.

Jill H. Casid, a theorist, historian, and practicing artist, is currently at work on a two-book project on *Form at the Edges of Life*. Since the publication of *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minnesota, 2005) which received the College Art Association's Millard Meiss award, she continues to write on postcolonial, queer and feminist approaches to landscape while pursuing work on the history and theory of photography and the materializing effects of imaging with *Scenes of Projection: Recasting the Enlightenment Subject* (Minnesota, 2015) and approaches to the global with *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn* (Yale, 2014).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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