Visual Codes of Secrecy: Photography of Death and Projective Identification

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I, Julia St George, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Department of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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Abstract

My thesis examines the nexus between secrecy, death, photography and the psychoanalytic dynamic of projective identification, which is an unconscious psychoanalytic interaction which translates and potentially transforms rejected or denied experiences. The visual codes of secrecy, evident through the content and form of photographic images, exist as a nuanced means of social communication. I write about how social secrecy regarding death translates into the visual image. I have isolated social issues of taboos around the representation of the dead in contemporary western culture to explore the dynamics of cultural secrecy.

My argument is that photography is the most appropriate form of artistic visual expression because of its links to truthfulness and revelation. It allows a fresh perspective on secrecy through the analysis of images from the difficult genre of postmortem photographs by artists such as Jeffrey Silverthorne, Sue Fox and Andre Serrano. The thesis exposes the concealment/revelation paradox indexical of secrecy. I focus in particular on the photographic treatment of the dead body by artists Sebastião Salgado and Joel Peter Witkin, referencing their work in relation to projective identification. Some of the images of the corpse in my thesis are disturbing and confronting – my argument identifies some of the reasons this is so. This study breaks apart collusive patterns of thinking which adhere around the photographic codes of secrecy.
Introduction

Art is “the most powerful and sublime means to express problematic aspects of active or passive human existence” (Escobar 51).

My thesis swirls around paradox. I send my words out into the world to make comprehensible patterns - this is as close as they can come to images. My words pivot around images. And the images I choose to analyse are of the unspeakable.

The visual coding of secrecy holds another paradox. In writing about secrecy I write about the form around a space - like the walls enclosing the space in a room. A secret is an absence, a withholding. My thesis is not about secrets. My thesis is about the structures around secrets. It is about what happens after the creation of the secret, not with individuals but in society. And because I write about the visual codes of secrecy, I write about how social secrecy translates into the visual image.

All visual information is coded in ways consistent with each particular culture’s understanding (Kress 32). Contemporary Italian semiotician Umberto Eco wrote in Critique of the Image, that an image is perceived as a message, a “given code” and that we see things based on what Eco calls a series of “codes of recognition” (Eco 32-33). Secrecy is embedded in such visual codes in paradoxical tangles in ways which I dissect and analyze in images such as Sleeping Pill Overdose.

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1 The visual coding in the title of my thesis refers to how secrecy is transposed into the image. In this sense the terms ‘code’ or ‘coding’ could be misleading. I do not use the words ‘code’ or ‘coding’ with a semiotic emphasis, but concentrate on an understanding of secrecy as a communication strategy which is coded, layered or implied in particular visual images.
The little feet, splayed out almost in a ballet position, refer to unspeakable silence. The photograph is taken from New York born photographer Andre Serrano’s (1950-) exhibition and subsequent book: The Morgue (1993). The image is entitled Sleeping Pill Overdose [Plate 1] (cibachrome, 125.7 x 152.4 cm). The only parts of the body shown are feet and lower legs – they are the feet of a young woman. The V-positioning of the legs creates a visual upward vector, leading through the top of the frame to a space which can only exist in the imagination. She has been silenced by death, but she has also been silenced by this image.

Other details in the image pose a poignant narrative; the blackening of the sole of her right foot (possibly for her identification) and patchy bright red nail polish on the toe nails of her left foot. To look at this photograph reminds me somehow that there is almost no other part of the body which is so personal, so vulnerable and unguarded, so individual. The foot connects us to the ground.

The title of the photograph - the words around this image - give information which locates it in relation to trauma and death. This person committed suicide through an overdose. Visually the fact that she is dead is not clear, the tag is a clue which indicates that she is lying in an opened zippered bag. The power of this image is generated by what is not shown, what is implied and left to the imagination. A gulf lies between what is shown – two feet – and the rich potential layers of meaning it is possible to read from this photograph. Sleeping Pill Overdose is a document of its culture, an image of revelation and concealment, a disturbing, confrontational photograph which reflects back to its society its own fears and shadows: its secrecy.

My agenda is to analyze quietly and methodically how this and other images of death and dying carry the social currency they do in response to visual codes of secrecy in contemporary western culture. These images sit uncomfortably at the margins of both art and human experience, a position aided by the socially determined dynamics of secrecy. By engaging with these images I attempt to understand something central to the human condition; to probe the edges and
spaces where rational and empirical capacities begin to break down. American psychoanalyst Rollo May (1909-1994) wrote that “every philosopher worthy of the name must have some way of leaping the gap when [they have] gone as far as reason” will stretch (May 97). May comments that Plato used the device of myth when he reached “limits of rationality”. In contrast, artists such as Andres Serrano use the photographic image to leap gaps and extend reason.

My response to an engagement with images of secrecy, such as Serrano’s Sleeping Pill Overdose, is to hypothesize that the evidence for the visual codes and strategies of secrecy lies hidden in the aestheticization of death – another paradox. Revelation also conceals. In Sleeping Pill Overdose almost all clues to the person’s identity are concealed. What is revealed, through the medium of photography, is the visceral reality of a death. This actual death, photographed by Serrano, references the difficulties contemporary western society has in responding to issues of death and dying. In this image something is concealed – something else is revealed. Most particularly what is revealed is a concealment – secrecy itself is revealed. The strategies of secrecy are revealed – not the secrets themselves. This paradox mechanically structures the practice of secrecy: “it is the very nature of secrecy that they get told” (Bellman The Paradox of Secrecy 1). English anthropologist Beryl Bellman describes this as the paradox of secrecy, stating that its “resolution touches on virtually every issue relevant to the study of secrecy” (Bellman The Paradox of Secrecy 1).

A reading of Serrano’s photograph is brought to life by viewing it through the lens of the paradox of concealing to reveal. This paradox conceptually connects the four streams of study which provide access to the nexus of my argument. They are:

i) the visual coding of secrecy as a communication strategy;
ii) the social response to the trauma of death and dying;
iii) photographs of the dead;
iv) and the psychoanalytic concept of projective identification.

I argue that this paradox of concealing to reveal is most assiduously and appropriately expressed by photography, and culturally acted out through projective identification. Projective identification can initially be briefly defined as a psychoanalytic interaction where difficult feelings are disowned, projected out, transformed and then re-introjected. This will be discussed in detail in a later section (Ogden On Projective Identification 356).

My argument disturbs and breaches cultural collusions and the assumptions which inevitability build up around secrecy and death, collusions which Serrano’s image depends on for a shocked response. There is an unspoken understanding in contemporary western society for instance, that morgues are off limits. As a stabilizing counter-balance to such assumptions, I set out to establish clear parameters because the disciplines of study that I draw from are so broad that they threaten to overwhelm, or more probably, seduce me away from a precise argument.

Part of the unique perspective which comes from an analysis of secrecy leads to the notion that secrecy is “different from other social concepts” such as ‘society’ or ‘culture’. It therefore needs to be approached in a different way. According to anthropologist Bercovitch Eytan from his dissertation Disclosure and Concealment: A Study of Secrecy Among the Nalumin People of Papua New Guinea, (1989) this is because there is no generalized “overall form of secrecy”. The concept of secrecy draws attention to social absences or discrepancies and to the actual “mechanisms and strategies through which contradictory aspects of life continue to exist” (Eytan 44). Therefore as a study, secrecy serves to emphasize the “common connections between different areas of human life”. It highlights the balance between uncovering or revealing variable aspects of life, with what “remains inconsistent”. Investigations into secrecy also open out the possibilities for putting things together that do not naturally work together, such as an individual’s personal desires with society’s regulations. “The dissonant
character of the concept of secrecy is a major reason why it is worth” studying, and also why it should be done so together with other “holistic social concepts” (Eytan 44), such as art.

The task of this thesis is not to expose the content of secrets but to reveal the power of secrecy as process, a strategy, a force, as in ‘to practice secrecy’. As French cultural theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari describe it in A Thousand Plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia: the “becoming of the secret compels it not to content itself with concealing its form in a simple container, or with swapping it for a container. The secret, as secret, must now acquire its own form. The secret is elevated from a finite content to the infinite form of secrecy” (288). The form of secrecy I am interested in is expressed through the visual image.

**Establishment of perimeters**

My intended path of study bumps up against some vast disciplines of study, many which I have canvassed along the way but then rejected as being marginal to the core of my argument. Even within my chosen themes of photography, death and projective identification, I have refined and reviewed the available material, so as to retain relevance. The process of writing this thesis has been one of distillation and exclusion - even attrition - as much as compilation. This has been necessary because my study started out with such a broad base which I undertook in order to feel my way through to the absolute core of my investigation.

My widely cast net of research findings into secrecy fell naturally into three different culturally determined patterns: various guises of personal, social coding or semiotics; ritual and the displacement of ritual; and projection and projective identification. I decided to focus specifically on the latter, how cultural patterns of secrecy accrue around issues of death and dying which are then displaced and communicated through the dynamic of projective identification because the “possession of concealed knowledge always changes the definition of the situation”
(Bellman *Language of Secrecy* 75). I refer occasionally to the other two patterns, that of coded and ritualized secrecy.

These three avenues of studying secrecy are not discrete and intersect in various ways. And different clues as to when secrecy is being practised can belong to any of the three pathways. The actual mechanical visual clues to secrecy I concentrate on are expressed through Bellman’s concealment/revelation paradox (Bellman *The Paradox of Secrecy* 2). Other visual clues such as absences, decoys, personal coding devices will only be briefly referred to.

Therefore I am interested in how visual images carry secrets translated into social conventions through projective identifications rather than particular secrets kept through particular mechanisms. Secrecy itself is a huge topic which I needed to refine to particular aspects, which is why I have identified the social issues around death as expressed primarily through photographs of the dead.

I have written this thesis about secrecy in art, not secrets in actual images. Most particularly, I am not ever discussing the content of the secret, but the context of secrecy. The issue of death has been isolated as example, but death is not an actual secret. The content of the secret, in almost all situations, is not the point; it is how that content has been culturally framed that is of paramount significance (Bellman *The Paradox of Secrecy* 2). The content, the secrets, hide or distract from the fact of secrecy. Secrecy itself becomes the secret.

I have separated out and then avoided texts which are primarily concerned with the unconscious. The unconscious, as defined by the originator of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), is the repository of motivations that are not consciously available. This is different from secrecy. Freud insisted that his patients kept no secrets from him, thus acknowledging that personal secrets were “consciously confessed or withheld and that they were in this respect quite distinct from what he called the ‘riddle’ or the
'enigma' of the unconscious” (Calinescu Secrecy in Fiction 444).

I side-step other aspects of psychoanalytic theory, such as texts exploring Freud’s death drive or French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s work on the connections between language and the unconscious. While they are fascinating and peripherally relevant they are not central.

I have researched texts, such as Hal Foster’s Obscene, Abject, Traumatic (1996) and Julia Kristeva’s The Power of Horrors (1982) on the abject; and trauma studies such as Jill Bennett’s Empathetic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art (2005). Photographs of death, postmortem photographs in particular, are traumatic images, but I am only concerned with the aspects of the abject and the traumatic which lead to secrecy and denial. The boundaries between such studies are very unclear and many of the texts on representations of trauma, especially through photography, have been extremely helpful.

Although similar in some respects privacy is different from secrecy and is therefore excluded. The commonality between the two can be seen from the German word, heimlich. This German word for secrecy also refers to something private, something to be protected from strangers (Bok 6). However, privacy does not involve collusions nor intrigues. Privacy is necessary for thought - random or concise, for the experience of intimacy with others and oneself, for growth and realignment, and for making art. But privacy does not require secrecy. The difference between privacy and secrecy is fundamentally important when analyzing postmortem photographs or photographs of the dead. There is a natural confusion between these terms arising from the difficulty of looking at these images. It seems as if death should be seen as a private issue not really concerned with secrecy. This is true, but secrecy issues around death do exist separately from what is private, partly because death is so culturally important. The difference between secrecy and privacy can be judged by the context and the intention.
Various sections of the thesis include historical overviews as a means of creating a specific context, of outlining how images came to be the way they are in the present. My intention is not to explore historical issues outside that contextualization. Historical and cross cultural aspects of secrecy are alluded to in order to reference the society and times which are my own. My interest in secrecy is primarily within the structures of contemporary western culture.
An Overview of Sources

In my long involved study of secrecy, I became a trespasser into many disciplines, rudely sampling snatches of knowledge that I thought relevant to my core study of secrecy. The danger of such a process was that such snatches of information may seem out of context; the danger of not following threads was that significant insights could be lost to me.

I began with a sense of a connection between art and secrecy that was shadowed by an inner process of self discovery, slowly unravelling internal destructive secrets that had affected my capacity to function in a healthy way. So my research has been inner and outer, each both nurturing and blocking the other.

Early in my search, through a serendipitous coincidence I gained access to Secrecy: African Art that Conceals and Reveals. This book was published as a catalogue in response to an exhibition of the same name, in the New York Museum of African Art and edited by art historian Mary Nooter in 1993. It is one of the few substantial texts I have uncovered that deals with the relationship between secrecy and art. Its usefulness was offset by the predominantly African context. Responding to cross cultural issues however, led to fruitful ways of thinking about art and secrecy in my culture, that is western contemporary culture.

The principal value of Secrecy: African Art that Conceals and Reveals was access to the specific language and mindset of secrecy and references to seminal texts on secrecy. Through it I discovered the work of German sociologist, Georg Simmel (1858-1918) in The Sociology of Georg Simmel (1950) and the more recent work of sociologist Sissela Bok in Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation (1984). Simmel in particular laid the groundwork for many respected discussions on secrecy because he first isolated secrecy as a strategy and noted the complex effects secrecy
had in cultural interactions. Both Simmel and Bok thoughtfully and methodically described the impacts of secrecy in a variety of social situations. Neither, however, wrote about connections between art and secrecy. *Secrecy: African Art that Conceals and Reveals* helped propagate this connection, particularly the contribution from Suzanne Preston Blier in her essay, *Art and Secret Agency: Concealment and Revelation in Artistic Expression*.

Beryl Bellman’s book *The Language of Secrecy: Symbols and Metaphors in Poro Ritual* in 1984 followed on from his (sic) 1981 essay, *The Paradox of Secrecy*, which also provided useful insights. Bellman’s fundamental contribution to the study of secrecy, was that secrets function as a ‘meta-communication’ (Bellman *Language of Secrecy* 6) a concept which I will discuss in detail in the following section.

Contemporary Australian anthropologist Michael Taussig’s *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labour of the Negative*, was more recently published in 1999. Taussig, following the process of unmasking the public secret, argued that it is the task of unmasking to “both reveal and conceal, and so augment the mystery that lies not behind the mask but in the act of unmasking itself” (Taussig 105). The unmasking process indicates that secrecy is a meta-communication. Taussig’s studied traditional rituals on the Isla Grande de Tierra, an island at the tip of Argentina and Chile. He focused on the moment and meaning of revelation as defacement and the subsequent release of tension through his study.

Even from the few texts I have already quoted, the blurring of the boundaries between disciplines can be seen clearly. Both the sociologists Simmel and Bok are quoted repeatedly in texts about secrecy and art in an African context, yet neither of them have an anthropological interest as do Bellman and Taussig. The insights of the texts quoted have a wider relevance than the traditional cultures that inspired them. Secrecy is a component of human relationships in response to issues of power and is also a meta-communication in western society. These are important basic understandings
without which, the complexities of the connections between art and secrecy become unclear.

The anthropologists I have quoted above are a small selection of those who have contributed to my analysis of secrecy and its impact on the visual arts. Their agenda was usually relevant to a place and culture. Some of their perceptions which translate comfortably into a western art context will be quoted throughout my thesis, as will a variety of sociologists and related social theorists, historians and psychologists, some of whom are referenced below.

American Kim Lane Scheppele, for example, wrote in Legal Secrets (1988) that secrecy is the

social mechanism through which the interests and intentions of particular social [people] making decisions in their daily lives, become translated into inequalities in knowledge. ...(And the) secret is significant precisely because it is the means through which the social distribution of knowledge is shaped by the translation of individual, intentional actions into larger social patterns (Scheppele 23).

This quotation captured the importance of secrecy in structuring and maintaining social regulations. In my thesis I argue that secrecy shapes individual actions into social conventions which are reinforced, consolidated and communicated in part by projective identification dynamics. Small daily secrets translate into significant social conventions and relationships. Artists as part of society reflect these social prototypes.

Research into the literature of psychology has produced many texts with promising titles such as The Psychology of Secrecy by Anita Kelly, published in 2002. Other studies by family psychologists Anita Vangelisti (1994), Evan Imber-Black (1993), and Lily Pincus (1978), described effects of secrecy in specific personal circumstances but did not touch on issues relevant to my study. The same is true for secrecy
and religion. H. G Kippenberg wrote *Secrecy and Concealment* in 1995, for instance, and noted the paucity of studies of secrecy in religion (xiiv). I consulted these texts looking for patterns in the same way that had been rewarding in the anthropological literature, but I found little of actual relevance.

The work of French theorist Michel Foucault (1926-1984) who wrote so influentially about power constellations in western society, assisted in validating some of my initial intuitions about research directions. For instance, Foucault argued that power constructions defy accountability because networks “of power relations end by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them” (Foucault *History of Sexuality* 96). This describes secrecy in action. I added visual images to this paradigm of power relations and the logic not only held, but was reinforced by these additions.

In *The History of Sexuality* published in 1976, Foucault wrote that what is “peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow experience, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it ad infinitum, while exploiting it as the secret” (35). This conundrum or paradox of revealing to conceal confirmed my own previous research into secrecy. With issues around death inserted into this argument in place of sexuality - the exchange of one universal human experience for another - Foucault’s observation was still pertinent. In this way, I began to analyze secrecy strategies through images created in response to death. “Sex and death: the transitory points in human existence which, in many cultures, are seen as rites of passage of equal importance” (Llewellyn *The Art of Death* 136).

The principal studies on death I consulted were by French historian Philippe Aries (1914-1984). It was his Eurocentric analysis that provided other theorists with an identifiable link between physical death and how that phenomena is culturally constructed (Aries, 1974, 1981, 1984, 1985). Cultural responses to death for instance, have since been investigated by Jonathan Dollimore, English scholar and

Aries also used images of death as a major part of his research base and in doing so consolidated the link between death and the cultural context through the image. This is important because a specific culture’s responses to death can be traced through images. I built on Aries’ studies, and moved the emphasis from death as a human experience, to a specific component of that experience, to the actual secrecy surrounding death as expressed in photographs of the dead.

It was Aries’ observation that signs of death, images of death, disappeared in the first half of the twentieth century in the west. Given that death is usually experienced as difficult, societies have not always linked taboos and secrecy to death; another factor that made the topic of death so interesting and appropriate. In 1985 Aries wrote in *Images of Man and Death* (published after Aries’ death):

> When the image hunter [of death] reaches our own decade, he finds himself (sic) at a loss, on unfamiliar ground. The abundance of themes and scenes, which has hitherto made choices difficult, seem to have disappeared. That is because the change consists precisely in banishing from the sight of the public not only death but, with it, its icons. Relegated to the secret, private space of the home, or the anonymity of the hospital, death no longer makes any sign (Aries 266).

Culturally driven responses to death have been shrouded in secrecy in western cultures, most particularly in the first half of the twentieth century. Aries is referring to this era. The gradual breakdown of that secrecy which has occurred in the last twenty five to thirty years has been uneven and paradoxical. The choice of the photographic medium as a way of exploring secrecy evolved from my research in response to the disproportionate number of artists who use photographs to represent death. These
artists have reflected and been engaged in the process of dismantling the taboos around death Aries refers to.

I consulted seminal texts on photography, such as The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (1936) by the German critic and cultural theorist Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) and the various photographic texts written by Roland Barthes (1973, 1977, 1980) the most relevant of which is Camera Lucida (1980). Benjamin and Barthes as well as Susan Sontag’s On Photography (1978) and Regarding the Pain of Others (2003) have set the basis for much subsequent cultural criticism on photography.

Benjamin’s idea that photographs freeze time, and allow for ‘aspects of the original’ to be seen in a different way, opened up ways of looking at photographs as carriers or notifiers of secrecy, as did Benjamin’s phrase the “optical unconscious”. He wrote: “The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses” (The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction 78). Benjamin is not referring to secrecy as a social communication, but he is signalling a different way of looking at images which has often been quoted and deconstructed (by theorists such as Rosalind Krauss).

I have also drawn much inspiration from the work of English photographic theorist John Tagg’s The Burden of Representation (1988), which was so important in challenging the seemingly watertight hold that photography held in representing the truth. Tagg theorized, following on from Foucault, Barthes and others, that truthfulness in photography was culturally constructed. He also contributed an essay entitled The Currency of the Photograph to Victor Burgin’s Thinking Photography (1982), an invaluable collection of insights from many other photographic theorists. Tagg’s work, particularly on documentary photography augmented that of Martha Rosler who had previously published Three Works: In, Around, and Afterthoughts: On Documentary Photography (1981).

The other most useful photographic texts were those which looked at photography in relation to death or trauma. Anthropologist Jay Ruby wrote Secure the Shadow: Death and
Photography in America (1995) which although specifically American, still provided a useful historical background into how death has been photographed; Caroline Brothers’, War and Photography: A Cultural History (1997) focused on photographs of the Spanish Civil War with an excellent overview of photographic theory; American art historian and theorist Andrea Liss’ Trespassing Through Shadows: Memory, Photography, and the Holocaust (1998); and American media critic Barbie Zelizer’s Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera’s Eye (1998) also contributed thoughtful insights to the links between photography, death and trauma and how difficult and problematic these issues are to represent.

More general photographic texts were also helpful, such as American photographic critic Vicki Goldberg with The Power of Photography: How Photographs Changed our Lives in 1993 and Australian academic Scott McQuire’s Visions of Modernity: Representation, Memory, Time and Space in the Age of the Camera in 1995. None of these texts made mention of secrecy in the way my thesis aims to identify. However, they contributed invaluable background information and modelled ways of analyzing and looking at photographs within western society, including some with a traumatic content.

I identified the complex psychoanalytic dynamic of projective identification in the final phase of my research. This enabled me to pull together all the other strands. The elusive topic of secrecy needs to be combined with other themes to be accessible, as Eytan’s study of secrecy identified, and I have chosen the projective identification interaction made visible through an analysis of photographs of the dead.

Contemporary American psychoanalyst Thomas H. Ogden described projective identification in his seminal 1979 article in the International Journal of Psychoanalysis entitled On Projective Identification. I will be drawing on this article extensively to map the stages in the projective process. Other refinements to this complex dynamic were developed by English psychoanalysts Wilfred Bion (1987-1979) and Donald Winnicott (1896-1971) (Ogden 365).
As noted in the introduction on exclusions, I have found some texts on representations of trauma useful, particularly the writing of academic Dominick LaCapra in *History Theory Trauma: Representing the Holocaust and Writing History, Writing Trauma*. In his studies of representations of the Holocaust LaCapra addresses the problems arising from depicting trauma, particularly focussing on the “problems of historical understanding” (1). In doing so he is “particularly concerned” with psychoanalysis. He is eager to deconstruct the misunderstanding that psychoanalysis is “merely a psychology of the individual”. He adds that certain basic psychoanalytic concepts including transference, repression, denial and acting-out “are crucial in the attempt to elucidate the relation between cultures that come into contact as well as between the present and the past” (9). LaCapra also notes that the “transferential dimension [that is, as they involve an exchange between past and present] has … been largely ignored, denied, repressed, or acted out rather than thematized in the attempt to work it through” (111).

My overview of sources has not only described certain seminal texts, it has also introduced several key concepts. These concepts are: the importance of secrecy as a meta communicational strategy; the capacity of secrecy to shape individual actions into social conventions; the isolation of the concealment revelation paradox and the variability and historical inconsistency of representations of death. The following section concentrates on basic working definitions which build on these concepts and add an analysis of projection and projective identification, so as to lay the ground work for further explication and exegesis of my argument.
Definitions of Secrecy, Projection, Projective Identification and Taboo

The following concepts are defined so as to consolidate and clarify the basic terms I use throughout the thesis. I include these definitions in part to avoid incorrect assumptions about what these terms could mean because they are often applied subjectively in social usage. The definitions introduce some of the major concepts I develop in the thesis.

Secrecy

I include various aspects of the definition of secrecy to provide access to how secrecy functions in contemporary western society, structured around the basic understanding that secrecy is the culturally determined retention or withholding of information (Schepele 14).

The secret as noun implies content. The practice of secrecy implies communication, and secrecy as communication is my focus. The distinction between secrecy and the secret is vital to my theoretical positioning. Although ‘secret’ and ‘secrecy’ both have the same etymology, I am only concerned with secrecy – I am not looking for the secret. My thesis has no secrets. It does, however, nourish analysis of secrecy which is the socially inevitable behavioural response to the secret, to the withholding or retention of information. Serrano’s image Sleeping Pill Overdose, for instance, possibly holds many actual secrets. As a viewer of the image, however, I do not have access them. But I do have access to the fact of the secrets held within the image.

The meaning of the word secret comes via Old French from the Latin secretus, concealed. It is also derived from secernere to sift (Collins 1399). The concepts ‘concealment’ and ‘secrecy’ sit together naturally however, sifting implies other dimensions. It alludes to ordering and classifying.
information into useful categories, and the power that comes with these decisions. It also implies rejection. (This ordering mirrors the physical process of taking a photograph which is the singling out and framing of a small section of what is visually available).

Categorization and classification lead to the creation of limitation, the “limitation set by language and symbols themselves, which necessarily both reveal yet limit” (Beidelman 42). One of the most significant functions of secrecy is to construct boundaries through limitation, through what is acceptable and what is not. Photographs from the morgue by Serrano challenge the limits which have been set by largely unspoken cultural conventions which prohibit the arbitrary display of human corpses. The postmortem photographs confront because they cross a boundary into an area of social discomfort.

Another Latin word for secret is arcana, which has the English connotation of the sacred or mysterious through the word arcane. The specific definition of arcane is “requiring secret knowledge to be understood; mysterious; esoteric” (Collins 77). Secrecy and the sacred have been historically linked since earliest times (Bok 6).

Throughout the world’s great religions can be found the intimation that there is a secret which founds life, gives it a reason for being, and draws together all its element. The traditions all declare that the world of sight and sound is but the surface of a greater reality, that behind the events of the visible world there is another reality of which this world is but a manifestation and feeble reflection (Johnson The Myth of the Great Secret 76-77).

Religions, and spiritual expressions in traditional cultures historically take responsibility for ritualizing death and grieving as well as contributing philosophically to the meaning of life and therefore death. Religions often shroud these rituals in secrecy.
A common misapprehension is that a genuine secret can only be known by one person (Shah 23) however, secrecy always belongs within its culture. Secrecy can only exist in relation to or from something else. Only one person may know the secret but all other possible contingencies around secrecy are cultural. Social communications are never completely free from secrecy but, as previously mentioned, it is so normalized and so embedded that it is rarely noticed or singled out for analysis (Beidelman 43).

Anthropologist T. O Beidelman noted that secrecy is critical to all human affairs illustrated by the fact that “the powers and complexities of secrets and secrecy permeate all societies”, and therefore, that secrecy is not “embodied in any sum of disparate artefacts of knowledge”, but are instead, inherent in the very structures and relationships” (43). He therefore situates secrecy as a structural part of social life.

German sociologist, Georg Simmel was one of the first to theorize the sociological effects of secrecy. He noticed the dependence that human relationships have on knowing and exchanging information about each other (307). The presence of a secret, regardless of whether or not it is recognized by those concerned, always impacts on relationships (330). Simmel defined a secret as simply a “consciously desired concealment” (317).

A secret is only a secret because the revelation of its contents has consequences. Often these consequences are related to issues of control. Who holds the secret has control of the content, and no matter how trivial; they then automatically hold the power. The consequences of revelation therefore tie secrecy to issues of power, issues of cultural importance – “secrecy lies at the very core of power” (Canetti 338). And there are as many different “shades of secrecy as there are of power” (Quarcoopome 115). Put another way: for secrets to be kept “knowledge must be worthy of control” (Roberts Insight, or, Not Seeing is Believing 65). In contemporary western societies power “is what displays itself the most, and thus what hides itself the best. ...The relations of power are perhaps among the best hidden things in the social body” (Foucault Interview
Secrecy is related to power and so is art. These big social constructions are expressive of socially highly charged issues: not random processes. Art images are the results of very specific decisions.

In summary: secrecy is the communication of a concealment, and a notion which in a chameleon fashion changes according to context. A distilled definition of secrecy is “the theory and praxis of concealment” (Redlinger 387). Secrecy is the result of a process of categorizing, a protection of the sacred or vulnerable, an element of intimacy and privacy. And secrecy hides the unspeakable and forbidden, the brutal and malignant. Secrecy “may accompany the most innocent as well as the most lethal acts; it is needed for human survival yet it enhances every form of abuse” (Bok xv). Secrets can be political, intimately part of identity formation, and a necessary element to the separation and formation of both social or personal boundaries. Secrecy is a communication strategy which comes into operation around a secret, and is related to issues of protection and power. The impetus for secrecy comes from within any specific society and is completely relative and contextual. Secrecy is often related to the establishment and maintenance of social categories and the setting of social regulations and conventions, which includes the creation of limitations but also initiations and rituals of belonging.

The practice of secrecy is a complex socializing process, communicated through clues of various kinds, including silence and including art. Some forms of silence and some forms of art are more conducive to secrecy. Of the visual arts, photography in particular is most suited to secrecy partly because of its connections to revelation and truthfulness.

**Working definitions of projection and projective identification**

Projective identification is a complex series of interactions which are difficult to theorize outside the discipline of psychoanalysis. The difficulty arises from the inherent intention of projective identification to involve
an initial distancing of the person, or society from difficult emotions to the extent that these emotions become invisible, secret. Collusions are necessary to maintaining the interaction because it is a largely unconscious dynamic.

I define the related psychoanalytic term 'projection' before I note the differences between projection and projective identification. The establishment of the differences between these two terms is critical to an understanding of either. I then outline projective identification in reference to Fatal Meningitis II 1993 by Andre Serrano. The two terms projection and projective identification, describe two complementary, but very different psychoanalytic processes. I include a definition of projection in order to avoid a confusion between the two. Projection is a term in common usage, projective identification however is less familiar and my thesis is concerned primarily with projective identification.

**Projection**

The actual term projection was first used by Freud. He wrote that projection, a "remarkable process", occurs when an "internal perception is suppressed, and, instead, its content, after undergoing a certain kind of distortion, enters consciousness in the form of an external perception" (Freud The Complete Psychological Works: VII 66). He therefore acknowledged projection as the "process of externalizing feelings", that is, not expressing feelings but projecting them from the inside of the self to the outside. Freud expanded his definition of projection to encompass the identification of the idea of projection as part of normal functioning, a dynamic which directly influences the construction of our identity (Grant 19-20). The word 'projection' is not a metaphor but refers to a "real phenomena as present in everyday life" (Bell Psychoanalysis and Culture 6).

Psychoanalyst Andre Green points out that projection is a term applied in various disciplines such as physics, architecture and physiology (Green On Private Madness 84) and I would add photography. Psychoanalytically, however,
projection is the process by which an individual or group unconsciously disowns some inner reality and projects it out onto another. “Projection is linked to a primary defence mechanism fundamentally defined by the action of expelling, of casting out something from within which is unpleasant, disagreeable, even intolerable, but which had previously been introjected” (Green On Private Madness 85). Projection is a normal defence mechanism which becomes pathological under certain circumstances. I argue projection’s close alliance to secrecy because knowledge shifts or is displaced in both dynamics: acknowledgment is prevented, and accountability lost.

The word projection also has a photographic resonance. The term projection applies to both the process of showing images and also the images themselves. The psychological process of projection mirrors the photographic one to the extent that the information/image shifts enigmatically from one place to another. Photographs are vulnerable to projective realities because they are so omnipresent and their meaning so plastic and contextual.

The way projection, as opposed to projective identification, works in society is demonstrated through an example described by Australian academics Jan Grant and Jim Crawley in Transference and Projection (2002). They note the everyday nature of the effects of projection. Using racism as their example, black people become the “container for those hated inferior aspects of the self” through “jokes and ethnocentric remarks”. Individuals (that is, white people) project out parts of themselves they experience as difficult and act as if those properties were held instead by black people. In the process those difficult feelings are experienced as expelled. Such jokes and everyday language often seems insignificant but they are designed to elicit either collusion or opposition. Grant points out that the problem with these seemingly small projections is that they potentially enable an “underlying culture for the

\[\text{In a lovely improbable coincidence projection is also the word used to describe the “mixing by alchemists of powdered philosopher’s stone with molten base metals in order to transmute them into gold” (Collins 1241).}\]
acceptance of the more devastating projections involved in oppression, including genocide and war” (Grant 22).

The photograph *Hanging of William Biggerstaff* [Plate 2] taken by American James Presley Ball (1825-1905) in 1896, is an historic example of the results of this particular projection. A black former slave, Biggerstaff was hanged after being convicted of murder during a quarrel, in a court dominated by white Americans (Pultz 34-35). In the photograph Biggerstaff’s body hangs between two white men, the one to his right is a priest, self consciously holding his hat in his hand. The white man to his right has kept his hat on. A crowd of men have gathered in the background — they are all white. The only other black man involved in this photograph is Ball, the photographer, and a free black man. Ball is both outside the photograph and outside the racial collusion. The gaze of the white men in the photograph is verging on aggressive and confrontational. These white men are standing their ground. This photograph shows no sentimentality — it is an image of evidence. The photograph is evidence of a death but it is also an image of racism, a racism that is sustained by a displacement of emotion. This photograph could only have been possible as a result of a projection in its society.

**The difference between projection and projective identification**

The difference between projection and projective identification is that in the latter unwanted feelings are projected “*into* and not *onto* another” (Grant 26). The difference is not semantic. With projection the unwanted feelings are expelled and then the person acts as if the rejected feelings now belong to the receptor. Projection requires no response from the recipient as in projective identification. The process of projective identification

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3 Where dimensions for images are not provided, they are either unavailable or variable, as with many photographic images.

4 An example of projection: in a marriage one partner who often feels angry, but uncomfortable with expressing that anger, then accuses their partner of being angry. He or she see his or her own feelings as if reflected in another — but not in themselves.
entices the receptor into interactions which develop and and/or maintains a feeling of connection, or being ‘at one with’ each other. Part of the connection is consolidated by a collusion.

Thomas H. Ogden identifies the difference between the two: with “projection one feels [a] psychological distance”. With projective identification however, there is a feeling of connection. A connection may already exist, in which case it would be strengthened. Cambridge University academic Teresa Brennan (1952-2003) wrote in The Transmission of Affect (2003) on the difference between projection and projective identification: “A projection is what I disown in myself and see in you; a projective identification is what I succeed in having you experience in yourself, although it comes from me in the first place”. She gives the example that: “with my projection, I may see you as unimaginative, to avoid feeling that way myself, although somewhere I probably do. With my projective identification, you actually feel unimaginative, while I do not” (Brennan 29-30).

Ogden notes that both states are not discrete but overlapping (Ogden On Projective Identification 359). Projective identification also carries with it the possibility of redemption through a process of re-integration. It is a function of art to assist in this process of re-integration.

Projective Identification

According to Ogden, projective identification is the combination of a series of interactions by which an unpleasant or negative feeling is displaced into another, followed by a process of “‘recovery’ of a modified version of what was extruded” (Ogden On Projective Identification 357). Rejected feelings are projected out into another who is then pressured to act congruently. The modified, digested version is then relayed back to the originator. This creates the opportunity for a different outcome, for a change to the original emotion. My argument is that artists respond to projected out social emotion around death.
Ogden extended the research into projective identification, a psychoanalytic dynamic initially formulated in Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms (1946) by Austrian psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1882-1960). Klein was a follower of Freud who had written earlier that analysts serve their patients by raising the mental processes to a normal level, and “transform what had become unconscious and repressed into preconscious material and thus return it once more to the possession of [the] ego” (Freud An Outline of Psycho-analysis 47). He thus refers to a dynamic which Klein later developed and refined as projective identification.

Rejected feelings are split off before they are projected out. Klein wrote on this splitting processes “as one of the earliest ego mechanisms and defences against anxiety” (Klein 133). It was her observation that the processes of “splitting off parts of the self and projecting” them into objects or other people are crucial to normal development as well as being potentially pathological (Klein 135).

An example of projective identification in art is Serrano’s postmortem image Fatal Meningitis II [Plate 3] (1993, cibachrome 125.7 x 152.4 cm) also from his The Morgue series. Serrano photographed this infant who had died from meningitis. The disease left no perceptible signs of trauma. It could be the photograph of a child peacefully asleep, except for the fact that the pale yellow blanket it is wrapped in also covers its mouth and the lower part of its face. Its closed eyes, with long eyelashes and forehead are its only visible features. Some of the child’s still moist hair gently and poignantly frames its forehead. The death of a child is a tragic death – this photograph brings this tragedy into view. We as viewers witness this death through the image. But, despite Serrano’s assured aesthetic, this photograph is a difficult image to look at – it is suffused with suffering and loss.

Serrano photographed the dead in situ in a morgue. This beautiful child was one of those bodies. Society has projected out its rejected emotions around death into the role of artist. Artists such as Serrano have responded to
the subsequent rejection of these difficult feelings. This notion is critical to the analysis of my thesis. Serrano has processed this introjection, that is, he has acted as if those feelings rejected by society were his own: his processing is his art. These photographs re-introduce this suffering, metabolized by Serrano, back into society through exhibitions and books. If this reintroduction signals a consciousness of the initial rejection, society then has an opportunity to respond differently to death, to the death of this child. The Ball image of Biggerstaff’s hanging was presented as evidence of a correct moral stance, not as processing racism. The Serrano image confronts because it touches on painful aspects of human life that do require transformation.

As a predominantly unconscious and therefore neutral interaction projective identification, can be experienced as either positive or negative. American psychoanalyst Robert Waska, for instance, explores other more positive aspects to projective identification but without negating “potentially destructive and aggressive motivations”. Waska sees projective identification as “a universal, life-span communication” and comments on its “often an unburdened, growth enhancing psychological flow”. He also observes that projective identification is observable outside the psychoanalytic relationships in film, sports and art (Waska 368).

Throughout this thesis I refine and analyze projective identification in further detail, arguing that artists, who are also psychological individuals, carry projections for society through the projective identification dynamic. I refer particularly to photographic artists Sebastião Salgado and Joel Peter Witkin as well as a selection of postmortem artists, such as Serrano.

**Taboo as distinct from secrecy**

Taboos against the sight of the actual dead body are still very much extant. Bodies of the dead command unparalleled respect; this can be seen particularly clearly with bodies of men killed during war, and the efforts taken to bury them
appropriately. A current example from the media, is the publicity about restricted visual access to the coffins of dead American soldiers returning home from the war in Iraq since 2003. Photographing these coffins is prohibited, and that is just the coffin – not the actual bodies. Howard Tumber and Jerry Palmer in *Media at War: The Iraq Crisis* (2004) comment on the ‘Dover test’. This test is the number of dead at the mortuary at Dover in Delaware, and the numbers of casualties are critically related to American public opinion (Tumber 100). Silence often surrounds taboos. Another response is seen as issues become highly ritualized, either politically, mechanically or religiously.

Secrecy and taboo share the common principle that they are culturally specific; what is open in one culture or time can be completely forbidden in another. “Each language draws taboo lines in quite different places. Things which in one’s own language are the bedroom’s final wild privilege are in another language almost public, and vice versa” (Philips On Kissing, Tickling, and Being Bored 121). Taboos around death are a primary example of this variability. In contrast to the images of American military dead the Palestinian news depicts images of open coffins being carried through the streets. The coffins hold the corpses of Palestinians killed in the war with Israel.

“In everyday usage, the word ‘taboo’ refers to something prohibited, forbidden, by custom rather than by law. It may be something too terrible even to think of, its reality denied” (Walter Modern Death: Taboo or Not Taboo? 295). In some situations the concept of taboo and secrecy seem almost interchangeable. Despite the similarities however, definite distinctions can be drawn. The etymology of the word taboo helps to demarcate their differences. Taboo comes from the Tongan word tapu. The word entered the English language in the late eighteenth century after contact with Polynesia. In the west the word taboo stands for something which is both forbidden but also sacred. Initially it stood for something, “a place, object or action which could be visited, handled,
or performed only by certain privileged individuals and which was forbidden to others” (Crago 102). The person who violated the taboo also became taboo. The word taboo crossed over into the English language, finding an already existing niche. Breaching a taboo sets up secrecy dynamics. Generally speaking, when a society has a secret it is called a taboo. And all cultures have them. The role of the artist is to bring to consciousness that which is unconscious; “there is a path that leads back from phantasy to reality – the path, that is, of art” (Freud Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis 423).

Taboos often mark a point of frisson in art works, and understanding how taboos “function is key to creating work that has an impact. There is a campaigning political function here too. Taboos are essential for controlling society. ...Many creative people across disciplines are seeking to challenge those taboos they find unacceptable” (Burgoyne 26). This is certainly true for photographs of the dead. Artists hold a critical place in unleashing emotions, expressing what is inexpressible to allow for the comprehension and malleability of taboos in society.

These definitions of secrecy, projection and projective identification, and taboo have outlined the necessary basic concepts I focus on throughout the thesis beginning in the following section with the communication aspects of secrecy and its relationship to a paradox surrounding simultaneous concealment and revelation.
Part One

Visual Coding of Secrecy as a Communication Strategy

“Artists often act in the interstices between old and new, in the possibility of spaces that are as yet socially unrealizable” (Lippard Mixed Blessings 8).

In this section I emphasize the importance of analyzing secrecy as a form of communication, primarily through the oppositional paradox of how concealment acts to reveal, and vice versa – how revelation also conceals. I outline the relevance of the visual coding of secrecy to death, photography and projective identification. A critique of Untitled, (Draped Body) [Plate 4] (1997) by contemporary English photographer Sue Fox (1960-) from her Post Mortem exhibition exemplifies many of the concealment/revelation communication elements in a photograph which connect death to secrecy through specific visual contrivances.

Untitled, (Draped Body) shows the lower half of a body, visually translated as a corpse through its title. The body is draped in fabric, reminiscent of a Renaissance sculpture, blurring the reading of the photograph from a forensic postmortem image to a multi-layered art text. These visual references locate this photograph as belonging within the iconography of contemporary western society. Two hands, forming the actual focus of the image, lie to the bottom left. One of these hands belongs to the corpse: the other to someone who is still alive. This small focus of the two hands, which depicts the tender gesture of an attendant readjusting the bruised hand of the dead body, rescues this image from a medical or forensic genre, to one filled with humanity. The skin tones of the hands are in sharp contrast to the soft greens of the fabrics and background which
occupy the rest of the photograph. I can add little comment on the identity of the corpse, even its sex is indeterminate.

The most obvious visual clue which situates this image within secrecy strategies is the concealment of the status of the person photographed. By just showing the hands, it is up to the viewer to construct the rest of the narrative; how the person died, who is now attending to the body and why, and the reasons for concealment. Serrano achieved a similar response by showing just the feet in *Sleeping Pill Overdose*. Many of those answers touch on matters of social convention, separate from any specific person’s individual destiny. This photograph is evidence of the culturally driven reticence about confronting a corpse.

At the same time, this is a photograph of revelation. Fox is revealing what society hides. She does so in two ways: firstly by photographing bodies in the morgue – forbidden sights, and secondly, by employing the concealment/revelation dynamic through actual elements within the content of the photographs. The concealment/revelation interplay and the broadcasting of an absence are both indexical of secrecy. This photograph probably also carries Fox’s personal coding in her own idiosyncratic expression, as well as conforming to broad social codes and conventions.

This section of the thesis sets the scene of secrecy using Fox’s images; secrecy as a communication; secrecy as a visual code; and the pull exerted by the energies around secrecy that marry so succinctly to photography. I firstly establish a clear outline of secrecy so as to allow for a theorization of the interconnections between secrecy, photography, death and projective identification.
1:1 Secrecy as communication.

I have broken down secrecy as a communication into different categories, describing different pertinent facets. I firstly describe secrecy as a meta-communication; then art as a broadcaster of secrecy; followed by different aspects of the concealment/revelation paradox. I conclude with a description of assumed ways of looking which become secrecy conduits in contemporary western society.

In western cultures the sight of the body of someone who has died is predominantly regarded as taboo (Brake 3). Postmortem photographs or photographs of the dead, by revealing the dead body, both reinforce and challenge the taboo through the very fact of their revelation. Jane Brake in the introduction to Sue Fox’s photographic exhibition Post Mortem, writes that photographs of the dead body “in the autopsy room can be held to represent the ultimate taboo” (3). As taboo, postmortem photographs are enmeshed in the practice of secrecy.

Untitled, (Foetus on Slab) [Plate 5] (1997) is another colour photograph by Fox from the same exhibition. This is an image of a tiny red foetus laid out on a slab which is covered by a hospital green cloth. The foetus is only just old enough to be recognized as human. Its sex is indeterminate. Its size can only be judged from its own actual proportions – its legs are unformed and spindly. It could be taken for a plastic toy except for an unnerving, uncanny sense of the humanity on its face, a face of perfectly formed features.

There are no defined spaces in the image – there is the foetus and the green cloth of the background. This eliminates any comparisons of scale and adds a claustrophobic feel to the photograph. The foetus is quite deliberately not in the centre of the photograph. A centred object in any photograph becomes the focal point against a background. By decentering the foetus Fox allocates the
green hospital cloth equal visual status. The placing of this foetus within the image emphasizes its smallness and its abandonment.

This photograph is one of revelation: the sight of a dead foetus is censored in contemporary western cultures. The blatant colour contrast between the brilliant red of the body and the hospital green of the cloth adds to a sense of confrontation. This is one of the artistic devices which distinguishes this image from forensic postmortem documents. Fox’s use of contrast in the image adds an element of shock - a confrontation with the unexpected. Absences in the photograph are not only indexical of secrecy, they also invite a narrative construction; is this little corpse the result of a miscarriage, or perhaps an abortion, and if abortion, a legal one? This photograph is about death, as are Serrano’s images, but it is also about other absences, that of the mother, the body of the mother. Through recording absences and secrecy the artist has stepped outside the stereotype of ‘objective’ recording so linked to the photographic process.

The elements of revelation in this photograph underscore notions of concealment and reinforce the existence of the taboo because the image is so confrontational. Postmortem photographs are a specific visual example of secrecy as communication. Secrets are about the presence of restrictions to the flow of information - not the actual hidden information, not the content of the secret. Death is not secret, nor what is protected. But the pain and trauma, the visceral shock of death - all the concomitant social and human responses, are surrounded by both secrecy and protection.

Untitled, Foetus on Slab calls into play the various elements previously discussed in the etymology of the word secrecy: concealment or withholding; creation of limitations and boundaries; the mysterious or esoteric; privacy; and issues of power. In revealing the body of the foetus the artist ruptures a concealment and challenges the limitation around what is socially acceptable. The artist makes public a normally private experience: and the boundary between the
living and the dead is reestablished and reinforced, but also challenged by exposing a forbidden sight. Fox implicitly questions how this little body could be buried and grieved. What spiritual or ritual system will cater for it now?

1:1:1 Secrecy is a meta-communication strategy

The interplay, the complex layering between concealment and revelation defines secrecy as a ‘meta-communication’, according to Beryl Bellman’s insight'. Secrets are part of the inherent communication structure of language – that is, language both verbal and visual. As a form of communication the actual secrets are never intended to be kept (Nooter 237).

According to Bellman, secrets indicate “information about elements in the language code rather than the events to which the elements refer” (Bellman Language of Secrecy 6). Bellman gives an example of this contradiction through the way a secret is told. To tell a secret the informant implies, directly or indirectly, that the information divulged is not to be repeated (Bellman Language of Secrecy 6). In this way concealment and revelation are similar and work together in tandem “because the same text is used for both activities” (Bellman Language of Secrecy 5). Fox’s photograph of the foetus communicates in this way, through contradiction. She reveals but in doing so she also underpins the need to conceal because the image of the foetus is so intense and so difficult. Fox reveals the fact of secrecy. The same text, that is, the photograph, both reveals and conceals. The photograph functions as a meta-communication because it carries this dichotomy.

Bellman is a contemporary anthropologist who spent eighteen years studying the Poro complex of secret societies in West Africa. All men must belong in areas where the Poro operates, as all women need to belong to the female equivalent: the Sande (Bellman The Language of Secrecy 8). Bellman’s study culminated in texts published in the early 1980s. His (Beryl is also a man’s name) observations that secrets functioned as meta-communicational, that is, that secrecy was structured around revelation.
Secrecy is meta-communicative in the sense that hidden information is still potent and active. Even adults think that once something is hidden it can actually disappear, like a baby playing peek-a-boo. This childlike assumption matures into denial where there is a strong pull to deny painful or difficult issues; on all scales, from the most intimate and personal to the public and political. However, something hidden is still present; the only difference is in its status, not its existence.

To look at a difficult image, to analyze the image, to accept the image as part of society, takes courage. It also implies the capacity to understand profound issues of life and death at deep levels. Fox did not enter the morgue and look, and hold what she saw inside herself. She photographed what she saw, and felt, and she communicated that through the photograph, and in the process she practiced secrecy. In other words, Fox retrieved the eclipsed identity of the foetus through her art. By deploying secrecy as a meta-communication she also keyed into projective identification dynamics. She saw, and she showed, and she knew that what she showed was taboo and difficult. But the fact that, as an artist, she took the photographs, showed them in an exhibition, and then published them in a book, reflects her engagement with both secrecy and projective identification. She not only colluded with the necessity of concealment through the process of revelation, but by aligning her images within her culture’s conventions she re-introduced that taboo sight back to her culture. This re-direction of visual codes is the difficult task of the artist.

The complexity of interactions generated by photographs like Fox’s Postmortem images reflect the same meta-communicational aspects of secrecy which became apparent to Bellman during his anthropological studies. The same multi-levels are clearly in operation through the capacity of the photograph to reveal and conceal simultaneously.

1:1:2 Art broadcasts the fact of secrecy
Secrecy is a part of social communication structures – actual secrets, that is, withheld information, are only temporarily withdrawn. Secrecy is always in a state of flux; it is also inherently structured around the potential or reality of revelation. Secrets are only so because of a specific social context and therefore the fact of the secret needs to be announced, as in Fox’s photographs. Secrecy is always socially relevant, therefore for the secret to be both "open and closed, selected features of it must be allowed to filter into and become part of the knowledge of the community at large" (Poppi 198). Cesare Poppi is a social anthropologist working in Africa, and was a contributor to Secrecy: African Art that Conceals and Reveals. Poppi notes the importance of art in announcing the secret, and acknowledging its social presence. The arts act to filter aspects of secrecy into the wider community. I am arguing projective identification is one of those aspects.

A secret is not something which ceases to exist, it is something which is concealed. Suzanne Preston Blier, currently Professor of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University, argues that in art, the content of the secret is on the surface, and openly accessible if the right deciphering mechanisms are known (184-185). Therefore, its exposure is always a potential given the right keys. The relevance of Blier’s thesis is that the content of any secret is known and accessible, it is a matter of focus and correct deciphering. Looking at Fox’s image of the little foetus with this insight of accurate deciphering in mind, what has been revealed? Fox’s image speaks predominantly of actual secrecy but also of a whole range of issues from the painfulness of a premature death, of loss and helplessness, of social isolation, and feminist issues extending to political considerations of both mother and child. The fact of the secret needs to be broadcast or filtered into the community in particular ways because secrecy is so inherently connected to emotionally charged matters, issues of power or powerlessness, and subjects of human significance.

Fox’s difficult postmortem photographs demonstrate this filtering process, alerting the viewer to the presence of
secrecy in an area of social significance. The images are the evidence and act as testimony to aspects of death that society has relegated as taboo or secret. These photographs have filtered into and become part of the general community through exhibitions or in other instances, the publishing of books. The role of artists is crucial to regulate and transform inarticulate emotions which arise around issues death. It is very important that such information be ‘known’ because social or public secrecy, around issues such as death, require appropriate responses. The artist works with secrecy’s function of social regulation in society. Artists set social conventions, aligning and alerting audiences to what is secret and what is not (Blier 193). Implications of power relations are omnipresent within secrecy dynamics, especially given that one of the other main functions of secrecy is the establishment and maintenance of social hierarchies and the separation of particular cultural groups. For instance, in all cultures some social divisions are made between men and women, between children and adults, between those of high social status and others and between the living and the dead (Nooter 141). Secrecy plays a fundamental role in such separations. In the most basic way, secrecy acts to divide those who know and those who do not know. The artist can bring disjunctions of power to light in unique and invaluable ways.

Beidelman noted that “massive mutual collusion is required to maintain” secrets at all different levels (Beidelman 45). The role of art in the processes of collusion is fundamental, particularly through such strategies as projective identification. The artist communicates covertly as a profoundly emotional tactic, both outside accountability or argued rationales.

To protect the cohesion of society in response to the need for establishing and monitoring social conventions, various rituals are employed because of their “particular power to sanctify and thus guarantee human relationships” (Bellman Language of Secrecy viii). Rituals around secrecy provide social cohesion and prevent fragmentation. In traditional cultures, according to Bellman, these rituals often take the
form of artistic production. In the introductory chapter of *Secrecy: African Art that Conceals and Reveals* Mary Nooter concurs with Bellman. She describes the intimate relationship between art, secrecy and ritual, writing that knowledge in traditional cultures is “often conveyed through a performative aesthetic” such as the use of masks, specific ritual items or dances (Nooter 28-29). These responses are always completely specific to each particular culture. Many of the images in this thesis conform to this performance aesthetic functioning through the public exhibition of confrontational photographs such as those by Fox or Serrano.

In the west expressions of secrecy, particularly those in relation to death have become more random and diffused. The necessity of ritualizing knowledge and power with its attendant secrecy through art is taken up by artists through projective identification processes. These processes are illustrated in the examples of Fox’s image of the foetus and Serrano’s photograph of the dead child. Deaths such as these are not firmly or solidly ritualized within mainstream contemporary western cultures.

Projective identification shares with secrecy a communicative social function (Waska *Intrapsychic Outcome in Projective Identification* 366). Projective identification also acts in part as a social filtering system. By picking up displaced suffering and reformulating it through the image, the artist is both colluding with secrecy, and opening out the possibility of different levels of understanding – perhaps even redemption – through the third phase of the dynamic of projective identification.

The effects of Fox’s image of the foetus continue to communicate an awareness that secrecy is a communication strategy. Secrecy in art can be dynamic and interactive and one of the foremost ways that contemporary western societies modulate the culturally charged issue of death.

1:1:3 Concealment and Revelation
Georg Simmel wrote of the contradiction between concealment and revelation inherent in secrecy: “Out of the counterplay of these two interests, in concealing and revealing, spring nuances and fates of human interaction that permeate it in its entirety” (334). Blier noted Simmel’s observation and added that Simmel’s suggestion for human interaction is equally relevant to art. She holds that secrecy is a “critical part of the relationship of every artist, object and viewer”, and that each artwork needs to balance themes such as “exposure and concealment, surface and depth, public and private,…mystery and manifestation, tension and relief” (193).

The study of art and secrecy focuses particularly on the power of concealment and revelation because this dichotomy underpins any understanding of hidden forces. The definition of secrecy makes connections to this dichotomy and secrecy very clear because once something is concealed it simultaneously creates the instant potential for revelation. Fox’s Untitled, Foetus on Slab is an example. The visual presence of the foetus is concealed in contemporary western cultures, Fox’s image by exposing this concealment, reveals all the surrounding taboo issues. Fox’s placement of the tiny abandoned red body on a large stretch of green sheet underlines the dichotomy of concealment and revelation through her use of image structure, scale and colour contrast.

The interplay between concealment and revelation constructs the actual mechanics of secrecy operating in the art of photography through projective identification: the concealment/revelation paradox indicates secrecy. Much photographic theory from writers such as Barthes, Goldberg or contemporary American theorist Abigail Solomon-Godeau (Photography at the Dock (1991)) focuses on how photographs show or expose what is also concealed or hidden. The idea of projective identification is also structured around denial and the shifting of information from one place to another – concealing and revealing. The following sections briefly outline the basic connections between a concealment/revelation paradox and the four subjects central
to this thesis; that is, secrecy, death and dying, photography and projective identification.

As previously stated, secrecy is the actual process whereby information is simultaneously concealed and revealed. When something is hidden for socially appropriate reasons the fact of the secret needs to be filtered into the community. Secrecy is being practiced.

Anthropologist Allen F. Roberts wrote that secrecy can act both progressively and conservatively, that is, enable change or maintain the status quo (76-77). Secrecy and concealment lock knowledge into place; specifically timed revelation allows for change. Acquiring a balance between the two opposing forces is one of the functions of art. Roberts describes the secrecy practices of the Tabwa people of Zaire and their celebration of paradox particularly expressed through their sense of colour. A grieving husband, for instance must “remain in ‘black’ simplicity” through abstinence. His ‘black sadness’ “includes the ambivalence of mourning, for death begins a social process of redress that may well include punishing a surviving spouse” (70).

Roberts’ insight also validates Eytan’s notion described in the introduction, that studies of secrecy open the way to investigate issues which do not fit naturally together. For instance, the point of tension between the polarities of change and stasis both generates and maintains the powerful positions held by those who are in possession of secrets. Flux can be destabilizing and secrets in these social situations act as a ballast. This can clearly be seen in Fox’s postmortem images where the taboo status of the sight of a foetus is both confirmed and challenged at the same time. Again, this image could either act to reinforce social prohibitions, or, be used to support an argument for legalizing abortions. The artist makes her point through highlighting ambiguity and tension.

Representations of death always conceal because a life is lost, but paradoxically that is also a revelation because issues around death reveal so much about life. This point is again visible in Fox’s images. The image of the corpse tells
little of the individual life which has been, but so much about what life actually is. As contemporary American photographer Jerome Liebling pointed out: “After death, what is left to express the force of life?” (Liebling 78). Death has the capacity to call attention to the important issues in life by cutting away trivia and banality. My thesis is not the place for subjective speculations, but an openness to the insights which death can potentially offer are peripherally salient. These exposure and revelatory aspects of death are difficult to describe in words — Fox’s images are far more eloquent.  

The photograph is the visual medium most closely associated to revelation and truthfulness and this will be explored in later sections of the thesis. That the photograph is also a medium of concealment is less well documented. What is most interesting is that the photograph is the text which expresses both concealment and revelation.

Photographs are historically located as the medium of revelation because of their seductive relationship to truthfulness. Photographs tend to be seen as faithful renditions of reality, in other words — revelation, but they are also however, culturally contextualized documents. As shown by the analysis of Fox’s images, photographs are also documents that work to conceal elements of culture.

The strategy of projective identification is a psychoanalytic dynamic of both concealment in the form of denial, and transformation and revelation (Waska Intrapsychic Outcome in Projective Identification 368). It consists of the concealment of disowned feelings through phase one, which are then revealed through phase three; the phase where metabolized experiences are re-introduced via art back into the community. The same feeling is both

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1 I think this is so because the impact of death in a person’s life appears so subjective. My experience of my sister’s death illustrates this. I walked into her room as she took her last breath and the sudden sight of her corpse, now without its animating life force, revealed to me so much about what had become absent. I could see who she had been very clearly because of what was no longer there in her body.
concealed and then revealed. The recipient of a projective identification, that is, the artist however, is not just feeding back a modified version of the suffering of death back to society, as Ogden points out, it is a matter of changing “intersubjective mode of containment generated by the interacting pair” (Ogden The Primitive Edge of Experience 26). These projective identification processes can lead to real cultural modifications. This mirrors Roberts’ observation about secrecy acting both progressively and conservatively.

1:1:4 ‘Routes of reference’ are communication conduits

“Photographs lay down routes of reference, and serve as totems of causes” (Sontag 76) according to American photographic critic, novelist and film maker Susan Sontag (1933-) writing in Regarding the Pain of Others (2003). The familiarity of particular images “builds our sense of the present and immediate past” (76). An idea or sentiment is more likely to catalyze around a photograph than words, and this is a role of the photographic artist. I have adopted Sontag’s phrase ‘routes of reference’ to describe the social conduits which allow images to filter and communicate secrecy within contemporary western culture.

I argue that routes of reference work in two ways. Firstly the actual image acts to create the routes of reference, or codes of recognition, or prior imagery. Artists create a sheath of safety, constructing the potentials of narrative which make assimilation of secrecy issues possible. Few of us would previously have had internal pictures which match photographs such as Fox’s Foetus on a Slab. This image provides access, albeit difficult, to issues of feminism and abortion, as well as death. Images, such as Fox’s photographs, filter into the culture through avenues such as exhibitions and work to create a cultural visual vocabulary.

Secondly, within the image artists employ specific aesthetic conventions as routes of reference as a way of conforming to their society’s visual conventions. In this way particular images become readable and intelligible. Fox has used particular aesthetic devices in this photograph, such as a
use of colour contrasts, (imagine this image in black and white), her choice of scale, of camera angle. These devices all serve to underline the isolation and abandon – absences in this life. But they do so particularly within the visual language, the routes of reference of contemporary western society.

Eco wrote in *Critique of the Image*, an essay published in Victor Burgin’s seminal *Thinking Photography*, of “codes of recognition” (Eco 32-33). Burgin builds on Eco’s insight and refers to various ‘isms’, such as racism and sexism, noting that such inferences are not in the actual image but are a “complex of texts, rhetorics, codes, woven into the fabric of the popular pre-conscious” (206). These codes of recognition become like templates or pathways to particular readings of photographs. Artists need to be aware of these pathways as necessary components of visual images.

Robert Jay Lifton, (1926 –) American psychiatrist known for his work on the aftermath of Hiroshima, validates the necessity for such ‘codes of recognition’ or templates when he asks: “What in one’s life would enable one to connect with Hiroshima? Here the assumption is that, and this is the radical insight of symbolizing theory, we never receive anything nakedly, we must recreate it in our own minds, and that’s what the cortex is for” (135). Following this idea we need some inner sense, some previous visualizations in our imagination. Lifton argues that there was no prior imagery to understand or assimilate what happened in Hiroshima and the invention of a weapon which could destroy an entire city in one explosion (135). According to Lifton, we do not understand without prior information. The visual image helps in creating narrative patterns and therefore allows for trauma to be assimilated. There is no way to prepare for unpredictable traumatic cataclysms.

By conforming to specific aesthetic conventions within the image artists can assemble pictures which create an access for otherwise unintelligible or inaccessible experiences. Throughout my thesis I refer to ‘routes of reference’ as the specific aesthetic mechanics artists use to translate and untangle the paradoxes around secrecy.
I have described various relevant aspects to secrecy as a form of communication drawing attention to the meta-communication aspects and the concealment/revelation interactions of secrecy, directly and poignantly demonstrated by Sue Fox’s photographs. These interactions also form the basis of projective identification as a psychological interplay of hidden and denied feelings, resurfacing later transmuted into the visual image.
1:2 Secrecy status of death in contemporary western society

“Fear of death is the mainspring of culture – but culture is an effort to make death invisible and unspeakable” (Bauman Survival as a Social Construct 8).

The previous section outlined various facets of secrecy as a form of communication. I now apply those insights, to the specific examples of issues around death and dying in contemporary western societies. I am particularly interested in tracing the secrecy around death as a meta-communication with art as the broadcaster necessary for outlining the connections between concealment and revelation. Secrecy is invisible without a form. The issue of death performs the function of the walls of a room – the manifestation of the space, the absence. Death is the trace left by the invisibility of secrecy. By adopting the theme of death I decipher secrecy in the ways suggested by Blier, that is, to decipher and see what is openly available, on the surface. The issue of death allows for that access.

The reasons that secrecy dynamics cluster around issues of death stem from a complex series of factors, many of which are unknowable. The following overview is an exposition of a series of complimentary tendrils which feed into my central argument. Death, even taboos around death, is a potentially huge area of study, underpinned by the idea that the philosophic and spiritual place of death in any culture expresses basic human drives. “To speak of death is to address the absolute centre of human experience” (Klement 73). In other words issues around death, implicitly present right from our earliest understandings, are fundamentally part of how we see ourselves, how we envisage the reasons for our lives, what we value and why. In this section I focus on why secrecy and death are still so intertwined in contemporary western culture.
Another Andre Serrano image from his The Morgue series is *Rat Poison Suicide* [Plate 6] (1993, cibachrome 125.7 x 152.4 cm). This image shows only the raised forearms and clenched fists of the corpse. A strong light source from the right falls on left arm (the arm closest to the camera) and right fist, creating a sharp light/dark contrast. The face is covered with a cloth and the rest of the body of the person who died is not shown: I do not even feel confident enough to allocate a sex to the person (although there is some lacy material behind left arm). But the skin is covered with goose pimples. Trauma is palpable. As in the previous examples, this image is one of secrecy, of concealment and revelation. It speaks of death and trauma. It also subtly filters issues of death back into society through the enabling aesthetic routes of reference and projective identification. *Rat Poison Suicide* is a meta-communication in that the same text both reveals the forbidden and the fearful, but it also conceals so much, including the person’s face, identity and even sex. Why *Rat Poison Suicide* is also an image of the forbidden is the subject I address in this section of the thesis.

1:2:1 Secrecy and death connections

In general terms the reasons for secrecy around death are the same as the reasons for secrecy in any area. As academics Fran Lloyd and Catherine O’Brien write in the introduction to *Secret Spaces Forbidden Places*: “Inhabiting the city’s labyrinths, embedded in the body, buried in the vaults of the archive or the deep recesses of the mind, the secret is both the space and the site through which, and upon which, the forbidden operates” (xvi).

To reiterate some of the motivations of secrecy: it often drives a need for protection; manipulations of power; constructions of boundaries and limitations; and the institution and stabilization of social mores and conventions. The lines between secrecy and the need for privacy are also very fuzzy. Fear is a response common to both secrecy and death. Dori Laub wrote in reference to the Holocaust that to “face the truth is very difficult”
particularly if that truth is connected to death or trauma (Lanzmann 217). To face death is to face life – the opposite is also true, that a fear of death is to fear life (Baudrillard No Pity for Sarejavo 48). And as Witkin bluntly puts it: “most people are just afraid to the edge of shitlessness because they don’t understand what death is about” (Maxwell Joel Peter Witkin 45).

Some of the factors driving the secrecy around death are culturally traceable and obvious. Other elements are harder to define because responses to death require qualities which are not generally fostered in the west. Grief, for instance is an undisciplined emotion, which is often expressed in surprising but always individual ways (Craib 275). Contemporary English sociologist Ian Craib writes in What has Happened to Mourning that processes of mourning have changed in the last half of the twentieth century, and that “development has been away from the dynamics of the inner world towards classifications based on surface criteria” and formulaic procedures for mourning (273-274). He suggests that mourning can be the “discovery of meaning of what has been lost, in all its ambiguity, ambivalence and complexity” (275). It is the role of artists to participate in this process of discovery.

Patience and the capacity to relinquish control are other qualities important in responding to death that go against a materialistic lifestyle, a lifestyle now so dominant in Westernized countries. “The system of values cherished by the American mind, with its stress on individual success and an infinitely improving future, nurtures a psychology of mental comfort that discourages encounters with tragedy” (Langer Social Suffering and Holocaust Atrocity 50).

Contemporary western society is structured around the many seductive distractions which act to divert focus from directly dealing with death. These diversions include multiple varieties of drugs, both legal and otherwise, and vast entertainment industries set to capture attention in small easily digestible grabs. The current western trend is a response to pain through anaesthetic, avoidance or diversion – the opposite of endurance or a capacity to
undergo or survive (which is implied by the etymology of the word suffering).

At the core, at the very fundamental centre of existence - death is an ineffable mystery.

Thanks to photography and the information explosion, we know everything about the form of death but, in a secular society, nothing about its content. The mystery of being and not being, of existence and non-existence, and ultimately, of knowing and not knowing, may set up a tension too strong for any artist working outside a shared symbolic system to manage (McWilliam).

However, that is what artists, such as Fox and Serrano are required to negotiate, even implicitly, when photographing the dead. They work at the edge of a shared symbolic system and it is, by definition, a perilous place.

The acceptance of death requires a confrontation with fear, at base, the fear of the unknown: a fear which everyone has to come to terms with in some way. Not only is our own death unknown, but it is unknowable. I inserted the quote from Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1929-) at the head of this section. He writes in Survival as a Social Construct (1992): “Fear of death is the mainspring of culture - but culture is an effort to make death invisible and unspeakable” (8). Rat Poison Suicide demonstrates this paradox well. Serrano’s image is both inspired by a fear of death - a traumatic death; and also simultaneously, colludes with society’s fear by presenting death in such a shocking way. This collusion strives to keep death an invisible and unspeakable taboo.

Bauman names a culture which does not own its sources of fear. Society is therefore in a constant state of denial and fear, which thus surreptitiously nourishes a fertile environment for secrecy. As Bauman notes, resolution of this conflict drives the tension in much artwork. He also inadvertently alludes to the revelation/concealment paradox.
I have described which is apparent in many photographs of the dead.

Issues around death are often very painful, difficult and complex. Each death recalls all deaths. And each death mirrors small symbolic deaths and passings; the ends of relationships, of ideals, of a myriad moments lost. The suffering around death is one of our most formative human experiences. Often death and suffering are experienced privately. Again in *Rat Poison Suicide*, Serrano confronts the viewer with the visceral realities of a painful death. Cyanide or rat poison causes the muscles to convulse. In this image the body is frozen in agony – even after death.

According to Philippe Aries, death in the west is not seen as a natural part of life, but as a failure of the medical system. In *Hour of Our Death* Aries describes the medical intervention into the lives of the dying as “the triumph of medicalization”, typified by the swift removal of the seriously ill to a hospital (583-584). “When death arrives, it is regarded as an accident, a sign of helplessness or clumsiness that must be put out of mind” (586). Aries is describing the changes early in the twentieth century which in part led to the taboo status of death. With increasing dependence on medical technologies this tendency has not softened. An unnamed shame often hovers around the dying.

Not only is death hidden by the medical profession as a symptom of medical failure, many alternate healing therapies, (such as Louis Hayes) unfortunately see disease as the breakdown of the physical system and therefore as a symptom of personal or psychological dysfunction. This unhelpful stereotypical position deprives many of the opportunity of accepting death as a natural consequence of being alive. Its impact is to contribute to burying an open acceptance of dying and death, driving difficult issues around death underground and transforming it into secrecy.

The institutionalization of death deepens the separation of responses to death from everyday ritual, according to British anthropologist Mary Douglas (1921–). The subsequent loss of ritual around death results in the loss of a
particular capacity for social ordering. “Ritual recognizes the potency of disorder. In the disorder of the mind, in dreams, faints and frenzies, ritual expects to find powers and truths which cannot be reached by conscious effort” (94). The lessening role of ritual is a side effect of a more secular materialistic society and the changing functions of religion in daily life. The loss of both ritual and the social conventions connected to ordering, generate more feelings of fear and isolation, and create more unnatural pressures on individuals, skewing their capacities to adjust and understand death in meaningful ways. It is sobering to imagine the socially ritualized options for the person who committed suicide in *Rat Poison Suicide*, both before and after death. Instead the clenched hands in this image speak of social isolation and loneliness. A sense of ‘otherness’ or personal alienation is bolstered through the numbing effects of death as represented through popular culture. Before most people actually see a dead body, experiences of death have been played out many times, in many different forms through the media. Anthropologist Jay Ruby points out that our “earliest encounters with death are mediated and dramatized by others - media producers - who are strangers except that they introduce us to one of life’s most profound mysteries - death” (12). The influence of such omnipresent images, separated from reality, makes it difficult to image or visualize death other than through media filters. The “vast photographic catalogue of misery and injustice throughout the world has given everyone a certain familiarity with atrocity, making the horrible seem more ordinary - making it appear familiar, remote” (Price *The Photograph* 17).

* My comments reflect a social assumption that secrecy around death is a negative, however, this is not always the case. For instance, it is understandable that there is often a wish for privacy during the dying and grieving processes noted by English critic Pat Simpson: “To be viewed in death by strangers is an invasion of privacy, a stripping away of the last vestiges of personal identity save that which remains inscribed in the flesh” (Simpson *Sex, Death and Shopping* 95). Connections to the religious or spiritual aspects of finding meaning through death can also be secret without necessarily being negative.
Omnipresent images of death on television, film, newspapers and videos generate a false sense that death is familiar. According to Ruby “our expectations about how death is supposed to look are aesthetically, not experientially, derived”. And, popular culture images of death are themselves derived and reference the conventions established by painting. Media images of death are “displayed in such a way that they appear as if they have been generated from ‘real life’” (15). Death is thus seen as both distant, even foreign through a sense of ‘otherness’, at the same time as being represented as familiar and omnipresent. Cartoon deaths, filmic deaths, and constant images of death on television, all contribute to a genuine sense of unreality and disorientation in terms of what death actually means, what it actually looks like. It is no wonder then that images such as *Rat Poison Suicide* are so difficult to look at and absorb.

To witness constant images of death in popular culture results in an unnatural focus on the specific causes of death, as well as the “sometimes compulsive documentation of surface details”. This tends to a level of detachment – “there is a doubling of removal – death is seen as the cause and death is seen as violent and therefore to be feared” (McWilliam na). If the focus is on specific details the real meaning of death is elided. A fascination with the details replaces genuine encounters with holistic approaches to life and death.

**1:2:2 Historically founded influences of secrecy around death**

Secrecy and the resultant taboos in the west around death have historical foundations, demonstrated persuasively by the statistic that in Britain after World War 1, three million households had lost a close relative. The “First

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5 The term ‘popular culture’ is difficult to define precisely. What “most obviously sets contemporary popular culture apart from anything preceding it is the mass-produced means of pleasure and entertainment that are now being enjoyed by multitudes never reached before” (Betts ix). These forms of mass production include film, television, radio, news media.
World War heralded the advent of the contemporary climate of concealment, distance and secrecy” (Berridge 48). After 1915 there was a political decision not to repatriate the dead. This added to the alienation which was felt through the absence of the body and it became unpatriotic to grieve excessively. The influences of this war and the next, plus a swing towards a medicalization of death, meant a “shattering of any coherence of traditional death rites” (Berridge 35). It meant that a subculture of death was spawned by the “repressive climate of taboo around mortality” (Berridge 48). Once secrecy around death has taken a hold it takes awareness and a complete attitude shift to loosen that grip. This paradigm shift has not occurred.

Attitudes to death in the west are still readjusting to two devastating events of the twentieth century: the overwhelming effects of the Holocaust during the Second World War and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The Holocaust was not the first (nor tragically and bewilderingly, the last) attempt at genocide, but it was the first to be internationally witnessed: and witnessed largely through the photograph. The implications of the Holocaust and the devastating effects, both physically and ideologically of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, have challenged not only attitudes to death, but also significantly, what it means to be alive. Quality of life, values and belief structures are all referenced by attitudes to death (Klement 74).

These catastrophes necessitated the need to grasp a widening, broader conception of death, a conception which many found too difficult and too painful. Much has been written on how profoundly impossible adjustment to the Holocaust has been for survivors (Kleinman Social Suffering). Effects of the dropping of the first atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on the 8th August, 1945 and Nagasaki a few days later and the attendant new capacity for humans to entirely destroy the earth, has also proved too difficult for many. These levels of difficulty have (understandably) been translated into secrecy, denial and rejection techniques, including projective identification.
Walter A. Davis touches on this trend in his article Death’s Dream Kingdom: The American Psyche After 9-11 published in the Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society. Davis suggests that images from the present recall those from the past, even those “forgotten, ungrieved, vigorously denied” (Davis 126). He argues that through September 11 Americans were confronted with the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, perhaps for the first time.

Trauma and tragedies on the scale of the Holocaust and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, remain unassimilated. While 9-11 recalled Hiroshima, that event has also joined with other international events which shift and challenge how death is experienced and how it is imaged and culturally represented. Images of these disasters become culturally iconic statements of suffering and death, and in the process, risk the loss of a capacity to represent specific individuals and events which could allow for some sense of integration. This integration is necessary to avoid denial and the resultant secrecy.10

A photograph such as Buchenwald [Plate 7] (1946) by British photojournalist Lee Miller (1907-1977) was taken in an attempt to document Nazi atrocities at the liberation of Jews from Buchenwald concentration camp at the end of World War II. Looking at this image now in 2005 it can be seen that this image attempts to assimilate what can not be assimilated; and confronts within that paradox - confronts with a searing pain. “Memory faces a double injunction: the imperative of preserving, bringing close, and making familiar what must nevertheless remain unfamiliar, alien, discontinuous” (McQuire Visions of Modernity 152). This is another facet of the concealment/revelation secrecy paradox; the necessity of remembrance and revelation, together with a desire for concealment that naturally accompanies suffering.

10 The 2004 tsunami will also change how the dead are seen. Initial footage of the devastation and the random bodies, shocked the world, even shocked the world enough to respond with compassion and commitment. This was a natural disaster, different from wars and genocide - however bodies of the dead have much in common, regardless of the cause of death.
To make ineffable experiences palpable, to present images and symbols of human experiences as comprehensible, is part of the role of artists in our community. Contemporary artists however, work within the bounds of visual culture, including popular culture influences that produces images of death which are blatant and gratuitous. These images repeatedly, mindlessly, and usually violently, spilt out into society without reference to actual experiences of death and dying.

Death can be a horrible experience, as seen in Serrano’s *Rat Poison Suicide*, especially deaths associated with trauma or war. Without the methodologies or rituals in the culture to deal with these extraordinary deaths it would not be surprising if they developed into taboos, as occurred in western culture around the two world wars. Sensitive issues shifted sideways and rejected create a vulnerability to secrecy.

Nature abhors a vacuum. “The dead universally inspire a *horror vacui*, a visceral inability to accept any proof of the presence of nothing. A corpse is this proof” (Grennan 22). Death represents a cultural rupture, and a discontinuity. Symbols of death, specifically, photographs of the dead, create a possibility through projective identification of a reconnection, or reuniting through transformation. Other levels of meaning can then evolve. Death is a challenging topic for contemporary western culture because of this potential for redemption.

Issues around death will continue to be contaminated by secrecy until the reasons for secrecy are acknowledged. Artists need to play a part in that acknowledgment. A role of artists such as Serrano and Fox in contemporary western societies is to respond to difficult human issues such as death, to create images that foster a deepening of thought and a broadening of emotion. It “is the artist, who is relied upon to make comprehensible that which is beyond what we can see and know” (Kent 9). Put psychoanalytically: the role of the artist is to hold and interpret difficult feelings for their society.
To summarize the reasons for the solid connections between death and secrecy: aspects of experiences of death lead to fear; death is seen as a medical failure; society has lost many rituals around dying; media representations of death have perpetrated the notion of death as being outside everyday life; and, the links between death and secrecy are historically founded particularly through the two World Wars and the atomic explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These factors have generated or contributed to ongoing secrecy around death.

1:2:3 The contemporary status of taboos around death

Taboos, that is social secrecy, around death are in a state of change and flux. I have discussed the reasons for taboos and secrecy around death in contemporary western culture, however, the status of that taboo has not been static. Within families or small communities a taboo is notable because it is something which is absolutely not mentioned, even though the subject of the taboo may be constantly present. In the broad networked series of societies which make up contemporary western cultures any taboo will be unevenly expressed. At the same time, it is still possible to monitor predominant moves and tendencies.

In 1:2:3 I firstly describe aspects of how and why taboos are still extant; secondly I outline how a cultural split in cultural representations of death reinforce secrecy around death; and thirdly I show how specific exhibitions on the theme of death reflect or influence the status of the taboo on issues around death.

Aspects of death are regarded as repulsive or disgusting in contemporary western society. Aries situates this current view from around the beginning of the twentieth century, writing that cleanliness was then becoming a “bourgeois value” (Aries Hour of Our Death 568). He writes that previously during the second half of the nineteenth century representations of death were “even depicted as disgusting” (Aries Hour of Our Death 569). Death became
hidden because it was dirty and smelly, and bodily secretions appeared in the wrong places.

In 1955 English cultural anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer (1904-1985) famously wrote of “the pornography of death”. He declared that the natural “processes of corruption and decay have become disgusting” (29). He identified the shift from sex to death as the main issue surrounded by social taboo. The breaking apart of taboos around death began with Gorer’s comment.

The uneven nature of taboos is illustrated by the Aries quote of 1985, that ‘death no longer makes a sign’, at a time when Jerome Liebling’s (1924-) Cadaver [Plate 8] (1973) was twelve years old. This black and white image is right at the forefront of confronting taboos around death. Cadaver lacks the subtlety of later postmortem images. It is hard to imagine a more disturbing image, perhaps partly because revelation of the person’s identity has not been avoided or disguised.

Cadaver shows the corpse of a woman of indeterminate age lying on a mortuary slab with what looks like a brick next to her head. The photograph is taken looking down on the woman from the end of the slab which reinforces a sense of dominance. The body has been disturbed and rearranged, with the lower body facing the wrong way, so it is difficult for the eye to find a visual cohesion. The woman’s arms are across her chest, wrapped in plastic. Her body is at a developed stage of decomposition. It is a deeply disjointed image, even uncanny. The corpse, disorientated and dismembered reflects the horror of the facts of death. Cadaver confronts by revealing the potential for disorganization and dismemberment of the corpse after death but, because it is so repellent, it also consolidates taboos. Liebling writes: “I believe that my portraits of cadavers are both pious and profane. They represent the past folded into the present. Every wrinkle, cut, and fixed gaze intermixes with the life of the viewer” (Liebling 78)."11

11 Most viewers of this image would still find it disgusting thirty years after its exhibition. In a course I taught called Picturing Death at College of the Fine Arts in Sydney, an anatomy student,
It is as if the early ground-breaking postmortem photographers, of the 1970s such as Liebling and Jeffrey Silverthorne (whose work will be discussed in a later chapter) went to the edge of what was possible, and brought back these postmortem images from the liminal spaces created by conventions, confused and contaminated by taboos, in order to absolutely rupture the silence and secrecy around death.  

Death is seen as abnormal through the medicalization of death previously referred to. Contemporary French theorist Jean Baudrillard (1929-) has also investigated how such taboos against death are used to reinforce manipulations of power and the “subtle ways death may help to divide and circulate power in our culture” (Bronfen 17). It is inevitable that issues around death are subject to social controls because there is so much at stake, linked to so much personal suffering, suffering which is often not socially visible. For Baudrillard “it is the repression of death, the social repression of death in the sense that this is what facilitates the shift towards the repressive socialization of life” (Baudrillard Symbolic Exchange and Death 130). In this quote, Baudrillard touches on why death is socially repressed, which is partly a repression or fear of life. It is this fear of life, previously referred to, which gives so much energy and potency to emotions around death.

1:2:4 The split response to death in contemporary western culture

very used to seeing cadavers, found this image upsetting to the point of tears. She explained this was because of a perceived lack of respect by Liebling for the person photographed. This was the only image of hundreds shown to receive such a reception.  

It is relevant that these artists were working to challenge the taboos around death at the same time as psychiatrist, Elizabeth Kubler Ross’ well known work with the dying is relevant. In her own field she and those around her worked to uncover the emotions around death.
Kate Berridge in her book *Vigor Mortis: The End of the Death Taboo* (2001) writes that “*thanatomimesis*, or pretend death, cloaks a cultural conspiracy to conceal real death, the kind most people witness and the kind that most people die” (6). Berridge identifies two trends in the west: firstly, one that reflects the 'pretend death' so visually revealed and acted out through the media of films and television. Secondly, a trend which reflects a cultural concealment and reluctance to absorb the necessary emotional and spiritual work which is part of being able to acknowledge and profoundly accept the realities of death. “Our constant diet of pretend death is at odds with our tendency to act in real life as if death did not exist” (244). This tendency translates into secrecy dynamics and taboos.

Berridge has identified a cultural split in how western societies respond to death. On the one hand is the burgeoning of pictures of death from popular culture, on the other is a shaky awkward silence. This silence is not only a residue, a symptom indexical of secrecy but also of projective identification. The cultural split represents a social dissociation and inability to deal with death coherently.

In *Love Beyond Death: Anatomy of a Myth in the Arts* (1993) contemporary American sociologist, Rudolph Binion also traced this split in responses to death. He theorized the split has its antecedents in the idealization of death in the romantic era of the nineteenth century. In the first part of the twentieth century, according to Binion, the “love-death complex sank from high culture to low” explaining the subsequent proliferation of images of death identified by Berridge (97).

The first trend, that of the ever present image of death on television, newspapers, film and even art images, is in part a response to the notion that suppressed grief will resurface in other ways. This is illustrated by “a society that refuses to talk of death personally [and yet] becomes obsessed with horror comics, war movies, and disasters” (Walter 295). There has also been an explosion of academic texts on death, which keep death “at a remove, death
abstracted, intellectualised, professionalised and depersonalised” (Walter 295). Berridge notes that “today [that is, in 2001] death is done by rote, not rites” (Berridge 21). What is repressed at some point, however, reappears somewhere else.

The art generated around the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s contributed to moving death “from the margins of society to the mainstream,… death is the focus of a new permissiveness. Death is in” (Berridge 26). The fashionable, trendy responses to death however, reflects only the popular culture side of this split response to death. Berridge is aware of the fact that, bereft of “symbolism, much of the contemporary artistic representation of death has no meaning beyond itself” (Berridge 246). She points to the gap between representations of death and society’s capacities for bereavement, ritual and meaningful metaphorical representations.

The overt images of death in popular culture indicate how other deaths are repressed. The artists I analyze, artists such as Fox, Serrano, and later in the thesis, Sebastião Salgado and Joel Peter Witkin, address the significance of this gap: the gulf between the glut of images of death on the one hand, and images of Berridge’s ‘real death’, the kind that most people die. Images such as Rat Poison Suicide sometimes do so through direct confrontation. Often, however, artists use specific aesthetic devices related to the concealment/revelation paradox. As I have demonstrated with Fox’s Untitled, (Draped Body) and Serrano’s Rat Poison Suicide imply the repression of ‘real death’ through concealing the identity of the body but revealing the fact of the corpse. The split in contemporary western society makes it difficult to assess the actual taboo status of death.

1:2:5 Significant contemporary exhibitions on death

Some significant exhibitions with the theme of death were shown in the 1990s. In New York Francis Morin, curator on an exhibition of death entitled The Interrupted Life (1991),
commented that many of the works in that exhibition sought to challenge the media representations of death and also the “rampant fear of death that permeates all aspects of our culture” (Morin 15). In England an exhibition entitled The Dead (1995) was hung by the National Museum of Photography Film and Television. It was reportedly that country’s first major exhibition on the subject of death. However, despite this Sue Fox, one of the contributors later “found it difficult to find a gallery to host a one person show” (Williams Still Life 20).

Photographic critic Jana Reena writes in Death and Photography’s Open Doors that Sensation, “a notorious Charles Saatchi- sponsored exhibition” mounted in England in 1997, later prompted public outcry in America when it opened in 1999 at the Brooklyn Museum (Reena 9). Sensation included the controversial (now notorious) work by British Damien Hirst (1965-), including vitrines filled with formaldehyde and dead flesh in works with titles like The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living (1991). Australian born, London based Ron Mueck’s (1958-) contribution to Sensation was a silicone and acrylic statue entitled Dead Dad [Plate 9] (1996-1997). The sculpture is the figure of a man, half life-sized lying placed on his back on the ground. His arms lie beside his body, with the palms of his hands facing up, almost in a gesture of benediction. The face is tormented and dark.

Eileen Chanin, in the catalogue essay accompanying the 1996 Australian exhibition commemorating Sydney’s Rookwood Cemetery entitled Death: Insights on Life, comments that death is still regarded as a major taboo, a subject either not discussed or approached euphemistically. In her opinion we live in a youth oriented culture which is fearful of age as well as death, and which “equates ageing and dying with obsolescence, ...death is viewed not as a universal but a fate to be eluded” (4). Chanin argues that fear and denial have contributed to this view. Artist Vera Klement also notes this trend:

*Facing nothingness is repellent, indeed impossible. There is no language, no image, for nothing. The only possible response is denial.*
Denial embraces its opposite. The opposite of annihilation is life. And so we celebrate life by idolizing its representation, youth (Klement An Artist’s Notes on Aging and Death 73).

Chanin notes that generally speaking, within Australia in particular, where death is hidden, so it is in art also. There are few art exhibitions on the subject despite the “valorisation through art of pioneer and war heroes” (7) which have come to form such a crucial role in the construction of national identity. Australian artists she points out have been drawn to representations of “metaphorical and conceptual deaths (including the death of art) [rather] than representational or commemorative narratives” of individual deaths (7).

Finally, is difficult to make an exact assessment on the current status and the levels of secrecy around taboos against death. Perhaps the taboo is in its last stages, or death is hidden rather than forbidden, or perhaps the taboo is one of media and medicine and therefore there is no cultural language for discussing death in a relaxed way (Walter 294).

Another possibility is that as long as popular culture images of death continue to monopolize cultural spaces it makes any subsequent expression of death seem trivial, introducing a sense of parody. Such monopolies crowd out other possibilities leaving little uncontaminated space. This is also the point made by Ruby that culturally, our internal picture of what death looks like is media driven. It is up to artists to provide a counter view, an alternative balance. The cultural split identified by both Berridge and Binion would seem to suggest that with the

13 A recent installation by Chinese artists, Sun Yuan and Peng Yu illustrates how variant the taboo status of death is across cultures. In the 2000 Biennale de Lyons, Yuan and Yu exhibited a block of ice resting on a bed frame. “Peering out from the ice is the face of a corpse – a real corpse”. It is not sculpted or fabricated. Beside the face is the corpse of a new born baby. In China there is no stigma attached to using dead bodies in art (Lucie-Smith Give Me Sex and Death 68).
expanding volume of popular culture images of death, from the controversial Benetton clothing company’s advertising images of an AIDS death, to a proliferation of news media coverage of death, it is increasingly important for artists to present an alternate viewpoint[1].

Death is currently taboo because it exposes a fear of life. Contemporary French theorist Jean Baudrillard in Symbolic Exchange and Death states his position on the taboo status of death succinctly when he writes that we no longer know how to relate to the dead, “since, today it is not normal to be dead, and this is new. To be dead is an unthinkable anomaly; nothing else is as offensive as this. Death is a delinquency, and an incurable deviancy. ...They [the dead] are no longer even packed in and shut up, but obliterated” (Baudrillard Symbolic Exchange and Death 126).

The trajectory that the metamorphosis of taboos around death will take is unpredictable given the increasing impact and quantity of images. What is clear however, is that death in contemporary western societies is generally not a comfortable topic but still one that is deeply problematic. This is reflected by responses to, and the creation of, the specific images in contemporary western art which are analyzed in this thesis.

In this section of the secrecy around death in contemporary society have outlined the reasons why secrecy and death are connected through the analysis of Serrano’s Rat Poison Suicide; I have noted the impact of fear, changes in the medical culture as well as a loss of ritual expression. The taboo status is an historical phenomenon which has reacted to the wars and trauma of the past century. Contemporary western society has been hugely influenced by popular

[1] An editorial article in British Journal of Photography written in 2001 “amid the analysis of September 11 and the way the horrors of New York were portrayed to the world” asks for consideration as to where the line be “drawn in matters of death”. The questions are asked particularly in response to complaints being made about photographic representations of people jumping to their deaths from the World Trade Centre (A Line Must Be Drawn in Matters of Death 3).
culture images of death which currently drive the status of taboos. This is reflected in various exhibitions, such as The Interrupted Life and Death: Insights on Life, with the theme of death. I have also indicated that the position of artists, particularly photographic artists is pivotal to understanding this social taboo. Their relevance is the focus of the following chapter.
1:3 Secrecy and photography

“What is not pictured is not real” (Kleinman Social Suffering xiii).

A child is photographed in Chimaluhacan, Mexico City by Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado (1944-) as part of his 2000 exhibition Migrations: Humanity in Transition (1998) [Plate 10]. The boy is captured on film walking along, or maybe just swinging his arms, but his arms are flung out from his sides and his shirt is flapped open. He appears not very old, not old enough to be safely in this environment alone. The composition of this image is very specific, with visual sparse elements allowing for maximum impact. The boy is just to the right of the centre of the image but only his upper body appears in the photograph.

Viewed from a contemporary western perspective this is a photograph of ‘the other’, from another culture, another status, a photograph of poverty and deprivation, of aridity and danger. What links the child from another space to the viewer, is his gaze. His gaze is directed at the camera, at Salgado, at the viewer, at me. The complexity of the gaze, the child’s gaze at me and mine to him, mirrors the complexity of how this image can be read and culturally positioned. These possible readings and interpretations are a theme of my thesis; their links to secrecy through a projective identification process, a process that realigns the concealment/revelation paradox through the choice of a photographic medium.

Following on from the previous chapter, I explore the work of Salgado because his photographs fit snugly into my hypothesis that codes of secrecy are implicit in the photographic image. In western societies the suffering around death and trauma that is disowned by western societies finds an outlet through Salgado’s work in a
complicated interrelationship mirrored in the image of a boy in a landscape of sand and wires."

Initially, the boy appears to be the focus of the image, but he is the lure. Behind him are fallen electricity wires which were recently blown down, a couple of them dangling ominously. This child therefore appears extremely vulnerable in a dangerous environment. The booklet which was written by Salgado which accompanies Migrations, states that most “of the makeshift houses in this new barrio are connected illegally to the electricity mains and therefore [the people] have no electricity bills to pay” (Salgado Migrations 24). The lines of the wires, the horizon, and the directive push of a bicycle in the background, all lead the viewer’s eye, away from the boy, to a man part of the way up one of the electricity poles. Boy With Fallen Electricity Wires tells of the struggles of life in a barren environment.

An expression in the child’s face pulls the eye back again and again, away from the background and the wires. He may only be a lure but his face is compelling. It inadvertently informs of poverty and isolation. The boy’s face shows interest in Salgado, but it has already developed the glaze of a young person who has seen too much and understood too little. He has the look of a child who is not used to being held or soothed.

We know where the boy is from but he is nameless, and therefore, as in all Salgado’s images, his status places him in danger of becoming iconic. Adding to a sense of the mythological is the way Salgado has shot and developed this photograph. A sense of vastness in the image is generated by the open treeless space, the cloudless sky, the dusty ground with bits of rubbish strewn randomly around and this small child whose little build provides the only darkness against the light which is dominant in the rest of the image. The boy’s shadow is the darkest element in the photograph. These

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I have chosen to include this image, and some other images of Salgado’s which do not show an actual dead body, because they contribute to informing how photographs of corpses are read. In Boy with Fallen Electricity Wires, for instance, death is implicit
compositional aspects are exaggerated by the grainy texture of the photograph which constantly directs the viewer’s attention from the content – the boy – back to the fact that this is a photograph.

The boy in this image looks at a camera which comes from another world, but he cannot know of the other possibilities which the camera hints at. It is as if his physicality were trapped between his environment, which has become like a backdrop, and the viewer. Contemporary western audiences are unable to retrieve the child from this liminal space; his existence finds meaning in the photograph. His gaze is lodged, trapped in a time-warp of potentials, but it has been captured from total oblivion.

Salgado harnesses the qualities in the photograph associated with truthfulness and their remarkable social capacities to communicate. He does this with a specific agenda, as do the other artists I discuss. Part of that agenda is to convince. This chapter sets out why photography, as the medium of revelation, is therefore also the medium most applicable to secrecy. The connections between secrecy and photography are most graphically described by looking at how photographs are culturally inflected with truthfulness.16

1:3:1 Potent connection of photography and truthfulness

As I have described in the analysis of Salgado’s Boy With Fallen Electric Wires, photographs as the media of revelation and as representations of reality, have assisted in inflecting photography with an aura of truthfulness. This

16 While I write, the photograph of the boy with the dangling electric wires is in front of me, reminding me of his existence, the position of an individual, unique person. As he looks out from the photographic surface, the surface of truthfulness, and as I look back, I allow a part of this child’s reality to affect mine. The broader social sweeps to which I will refer later, have this relationship as a reference point, a reference point of honesty and integrity so that I am grounded in the process between observing the image and witnessing a child with a dusty face, spiked hair and glazed eyes. And I needed to keep seeing this child’s face to keep me focussed, a child still alive.
sense underpins an enculturated tendency to believe what one sees as real. This section identifies the historical, physical and social capacities of the photograph to represent the truthfulness which so stubbornly adhere to the photograph. These connections between truthfulness and photography set photography in place as oppositional to secrecy. I am arguing that in fact, because photographs tend to carry this particular reading they are therefore cultural conduits for secrecy.

Photography adopted the role of documenting important events and people, to represent reality, and to carry social responsibilities of truthfulness and verification, from painting (Wells 17). The viewer was accustomed to suspending disbelief. Photographs however, are theorized as representing a polarized position. On the one hand they are still seen as trustworthy images which are empirically used to depict external reality in the news media for instance. On the other hand, they are seen by theorists (such as Brothers, Chaplin and Goldberg) as culturally indexical, that is representational of cultural expressions. The argument is that photographs are culturally contextualized images with a hidden or even explicit agenda: and, all the possible permutations in between.

The scientific knowledge needed to develop photography had been around since the early 1700s through the camera obscura and photosensitive chemicals. According to contemporary Australian Geoffrey Batchen, a photographic theorist, the coming together of process and desire is very specific to a time and place. He argues that it was “only possible to think photography at this specific historical conjuncture, that photography as a concept has an identifiable historical and cultural specificity” (Batchen Orders Profoundly Altered 20-21). This idea dovetails with John Tagg’s thesis that the conjunction between the advent of photographs at the same time as a range of social institutions in the late nineteenth century, is not an innocent one. Or as Goldberg puts it, photography “came along when society wanted pictures and proof and was prepared to believe that the two were the same” (Goldberg 10).
Photographs are the closest form of images yet discovered to replicate our thoughts or memories, or our visual impressions, as to what the world actually looks like. We look through our eyes, form an impression and the photograph appears to replicate that impression. It is an intoxicating seduction.

In an article entitled Joel Peter Witkin and Dr Stanley B. Burns: A Language of Body Parts (1999) Rachelle Dermer quotes previous studies by academics Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison who have theorized ‘objectivity’ as an “historical construction”. They acknowledge the importance of photography as a “mechanically objective mode of representation”. It is Dermer’s contention, argued from Daston and Galison’s influence, that a variety of objectivity is now applied to all “viewing systems that depend of the photographic apparatus”, that is, a lens focussing on a planar image (Dermer 246-247). She argues that this is because of the similarity of the human eye lens and that of the camera, so that in effect, “ the mechanical lens releases us from the obligation of real interactions without denying the satisfaction of our visual desires” (Dermer 247).

Investigated primarily by Tagg in The Burden of Representation (1988) historical associations between the first appearance of photography in 1839 and other arising social institutions in the second half of the nineteenth century, have now become a fundamental and widely recognized part of understanding within photographic discourse. This understanding in part opens out the relationship between photography and the truth.

Tagg’s eloquent argument is that part of what gave photography “its power to evoke a truth” was its “mobilization within the emerging apparatuses of a new and more penetrating form of the state” (Tagg 61). He saw photographs as the materialization of knowledge which reflect an “outcome of power” (Chaplin 82). In this way photographs were not accurate mirrors of the physical world. What was real was the discursive system that produced photographs as a “material product”. It then becomes
illuminating to note which “practices and institutions [gave] photographs meaning, [exercised] an effect on them, and [caused] them in turn to contribute — as the manifestations of knowledge — to the formation of subsequent events” (Chaplin 82-83). The investigation of photographs of the dead body is one such investigation.

Tagg, influenced by the work of Foucault, sets out a convincing argument for the conflation of the appearance of photography and the political and cultural forces prevailing at the time that photography was invented. For instance, the modern police force came into being between 1828 and 1856, at the same time the invention of the photographic process was expanding. Photographs used for surveillance of criminals, records of the mentally ill, legal evidence developed at the same time as institutions such as hospitals, and the police were beginning to spring up. Photographs carry ideological constructions relevant to their time. Tagg writes that around the beginning of the 1800s:

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\text{the seat of this capillary power was a new 'technology'; that constellation of institutions - including the hospital, the asylum, the school, the prison, the police force - whose disciplinary methods and techniques of regulated examination produced, trained and positioned a hierarchy of docile social subjects in the form required by the capitalist division of labour for the orderly conduct of social and economic life (62-63).}
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Sociology dates from around this time with the publication of August Comte’s *Cours de Philosophie Positive* in 1836 (Chaplin 198).

The implications of these connections are still dynamic. These institutions are now at the core of western culture, a culture which would be unrecognizable without them. As a result of the close alignment of photography with such dominant social institutions, cultural assumptions and naturalizations become invisible. Photography is not the only conduit of secrecy in the west, but through its
révélationary role and its links to institutions of law and industry, secrecy is now an assumed part of our society’s structure.

There has been an assumption in western cultures, challenged by theorists such as Tagg, that photography is an innocent representation of reality. Tagg suggests that the photographic image needs to be read as a “composite of signs” with multiple meanings which are “constructed” (187). The original connections that photography has had with creating accurate representations of reality continue to be powerful. This is counterbalanced by an ever growing awareness of, even scepticism about, the capability of the photographic image to represent reality accurately, consistently or even congruently.

There are early examples of the veracity of images being challenged which instigated a sceptical attitude towards photography as the keeper of truth, one which however has still not extinguished photography’s truthful seductions. A book entitled Les Crimes de la Commune by E. Appert published in 1871 and consisting of “crudely montaged and retouched photographs” was an early example of photographic fraudulence (Wells 76). In the first half of the twentieth century it was becoming clear “that the technologies of photography were not automatic transcribers of the world” (Wells 77). The photograph has always been manipulated for maximum impact, it is “integral to photography” (Rosler Three Works 53). Examples such as Les Crimes de la Commune opened the way for a critical response to photography from theorists like Tagg, but the perception of photography’s hold on its capacity to reveal reality is still a powerful force even today.

The secrecy implicit in a seemingly transparent document, such as a criminal’s face, is exemplified by two images of Joseph Goebels [Plates 11 and 12] by Jewish photographer Alfred Eisenstein taken in 1937. In the first image, Goebels is sitting tensely in a chair with two men behind and beside him. One is leaning down showing him a piece of paper. Goebels looks up at the camera suspiciously. In the second image, in the same chair, but this time alone, Goebels is
relaxed and smiling. The first image corresponds with preconceived notions of how Goebels ‘should look’: the diabolic Nazi, mean and shrewd. The story accompanying the images is that Eisenstein approached Goebels to ask for his permission to photograph him. Goebels was irritated by being interrupted during his meeting, as caught by Eisenstein in the first image, however he readily agreed to pose for a photograph, hence the second image. The photograph has the potential to show a preconceived version of reality, a version published which suits the agenda of the photographer; another contrary version is therefore suppressed. Eisenstein created the potential to manipulate a specific response which was designed to validate the perceived evil nature of Goebels.

Another kind of photographic manipulation is illustrated by Henry Peach Robinson (1830–1901) photograph Agony of Death or Fading Away [Plate 13] (1858). Robinson, an early English photographer manipulated the actual image by using a composite of five different negatives to create a precise effect (Pultz 39-40). He has used these different negatives to create a narrative photograph of a dying girl, attended to by two women. A man stands with his back to the camera, looking out of the window. He is the photograph’s central figure and his masculinity and withdrawn face dominate the image. The manipulation of reality in Agony of Death or Fading Away has been achieved in the darkroom by the actual physical structure of the photograph, not its subject matter as in the Goebels images.

The fact that images have always been manipulated in various ways is evidence of secrecy in that photographs have never been innocent carriers of truth. Manipulations are one way of concealing hidden agendas. In the Eisenstein photograph it is the humanity or banality of Goebels; in the Robinson image it may be the difficulty of grief, or the feelings of helplessness around the dying person. An actual secret is not necessarily hidden. These are images of secrecy, of culturally contextualized unnamed, unspoken issues, feelings or unidentified agendas.
The American photographer Matthew Brady’s (1823-1896) Dead Soldier [Plate 14] is another example. This albumen-silver print was taken during the American Civil War. This shocking image of war depicts a soldier killed in battle. He is lying on his back leaning against what could be part of a trench line. Pieces of timber are scattered around him. His gun lies across his leg. The soldier’s head is pushed back, his mouth and eyes are open. His mother would recognize her son from this image. There are poignant details to the image: the lie of the man’s left hand, the presence of personal possessions and the soles of the man’s boots. Often bodies in the field were “choreographed”, and moved around to create more impact (Goldberg 28). There are even photographs from this series that show the same dead body in a variety of different positions (Pultz 34). To move bodies to create an aesthetic and therefore emotional effect was not judged as a distortion but a magnification of the truth. Such shifts were seen by Civil War photographers as a valid part of representing the truth about war and suffering.

Some specific examples follow to illustrate the point that “the nineteenth century laid the foundations for an information era, in which knowledge is power and photography a crucial form of knowledge” (Goldberg 61). Only three years after the invention of the daguerreotype the American Congress used it as a means of marking and documenting the boundary between Canada and Maine. The first court case to admit photographic evidence was in California in 1859 (Goldberg 59). “The word daguerreotype came to represent an unmediated truth that could assist in the mutual accreditation of aesthetic discourse and official culture as sources of realism” (Miller 5).

Freud’s inspiration for his work on hysteria came initially from studies done by French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893) who in the 1870s and 1880s took an extensive range of photographs of women in various levels of mental disturbance. These first theorizations of trauma coincide “with the first use of photographs” (Baer 14). Charcot however, thought that the camera would be able to demonstrate a split between “seeing and knowing” as a way of understanding the hysterical experience (Baer 14).
If a photograph convinces as absolutely truthful, other social implications or possibilities are then elided. Because photography was always seen as a “precise, mechanical and impersonal rendering of the appearance of objects”, it was closely tied to “modern vision, and in particular modern vision as exemplified in science: vision is a vehicle of knowledge and truth (indeed the only one) in an empiricist culture” (Slater Photography and Modern Vision 219-220). Science provides another persuasive link between photography and the truth.

Photography became linked with detection and discovery in a very natural process. Photographs opened up the physical world. Even now most people understand places like Antarctica, the bottom of the ocean, the earth from outer space, the inside of our own bodies through photographic images. These photographs within a scientific framework magnify the tendency to see photographs as exemplars of truth. Images presented as representing scientific truth helped to validate truthfulness in images from other genres. The more photographs seem to represent the truth in science, the more spaces are created for secrecy dynamics through the concealment/revelation paradox. These spaces come burdened by cultural assumption and are validated by looking at images presented in familiar ways.

Photographs are cultural documents. Part of the ease of the relationship between secrecy and photography is the democratic nature of photography. Psychologist and photographic theorist Halla Beloff in Camera Culture writes, emphasizing a flow on from the democratization of photography, that the:

camera is an extension of our perception. A photograph is an extension of our memory. It can replace the memory store. Before 1839 we experienced the world. We remembered those experiences, but they all decayed. Now we could have an indisputable trace. A sliver of time is preserved. We can possess a moment... No wonder photography has fitted so snugly into the capitalist world. And into the democratic
world. It seems the most egalitarian activity, and photographs an egalitarian phenomenon. Anybody can understand it. Anybody can even do it (9).

The photographic process slipped into assumed ways of looking and seeing partly through this egalitarian capacity of the photograph. Something as familiar as the taking of a photograph is unlikely to be regarded as linked to anything sinister, such as secrecy.

Anthropological photography in Australia represented Aboriginal people as a physiological human type, as exemplified by Man from South Australia [Plate 16] (1870) by an unknown photographer however, the photograph was from a series made under specific instruction from T. H. Huxley, President of the Ethnological Society in England. The series was designed to present “the bodies of colonial people according to current scientific belief” (Pultz 24). The individual Aboriginal person photographed was marginalized in the process as an exemplar of his race, without a name or separate identity. What is concealed in this image is his unique identity and all the complexities that that implies, as well as Huxley’s ethnological rationale which made taking this image seem natural but which we now would judge as racist, patriarchal and dehumanizing.

While many sociologists, and psychologists in particular, avoided relying on photography, anthropologists have regarded photographs as sound objective evidence, and have built their work around a reliance on the accuracy with which a camera records” (Chaplin 199). An example of this kind of photography from Secrecy: African Art that Conceals and Reveals is Two Brothers Whispering [Plate 15] (1993). It is a composite of two photographs, the first of which showed two brothers whispering a secret. The second photograph depicts one of the brothers gesturing “I am watching to see what will happen” (Gilbert The Leopard Who Sleeps in the Basket 125). The photographs were taken by American anthropologist Michelle Gilbert, in order to demonstrate a secrecy exchange by the Akuampem people of Ghana. The photographs were designed to illustrate the risk of revelation as “something said to your ears only [not for
your mouth]) “(125). The photographs are deeply problematic because they transport ideas and contexts from one culture to another without the necessary unpacking of appropriate social conventions. The photographs, published in *Secrecy: African Art that Conceals and Reveals*, are therefore seen within a western construct, removed from their original context. As in *Man from South Australia*, the men in *Two Brothers Whispering* are not named, despite this image having been taken over one hundred years later.

Historically, photography has represented “the empirical world for most of the inhabitants of industrialized societies (indeed, the production and consumption of images serves as one of the distinguishing characteristics of advanced societies). Photography has become a principal agent and conduit of culture and ideology” (Solomon-Godeau *Photography at the Dock* 104). Photography is the visual essence of advertising, education and the dissemination and documentation of information and news. Photography, and now digital imaging, is at the dominant edge of all aspects of western visual culture. Photography therefore, is also the most revealing and satisfying way to look at how issues around secrecy and death are culturally constructed.

The examples I have discussed show that through the historical development of photography, photographs became a sign of proof and verification. In the nineteenth century social documenters and scientists used photographs as proof of a particular external reality which then easily became confused with that of reality itself. The narrative or history that photographs illustrate became inseparable from “the history they enact: a history of photographers employing their medium to make sense of their society” (Trachtenberg *Reading American Photographs* xvi). The photograph showed the truth - the photograph then became indexical of the truth. It is a tangle that is still being disentwined only to find itself snarled again and again in different constellations.

As photographs seem to represent the truth it would be a simple matter to see them as revelations of secrets: but that is just not how it works. Photographs do not innocently
reveal the truth in any situation, as seen in the analysis of Salgado’s image – they are complex, messy renditions, context-driven and vulnerable to manipulation and it is these complexities and ruptures that create the actual spaces required for secrecy. The fact that photographs do not simply reveal what has been captured on film is critical to an understanding of how secrecy dynamics are encoded into the photographic surface.

The relationship of photography to truths and to secrecy explored in this section, has shown that photographs are the single text through which both concealment and exposé can be simultaneously expressed. With the concealment/revelation dichotomy present, secrecy is usually being practised.

1:3:2 Photography as the medium most suited to secrecy

The process of all photography reflects a series of judgements and limitations; of concealments and exposés. This section aims to identify why it is especially significant through the lens of the artist. Even though photography selects only aspects of reality through framing, it is also a medium that demonstrates secrecy through revealing reality. This is the key paradox. Unravelling the implications of this paradox focuses directly on why so many artists choose the photograph to represent the dead.

i. Access to secrecy depends on deciphering, not uncovering

As previously noted, Blier observed that the secret is available for all to see, it is a matter of knowing where and how to look. She writes:

It is commonly assumed that art, like an onion, reveals its full meaning only after one has peeled off its various, ever deeper and more hidden layers. Yet in both art and onions there is rarely a secret core or centre. ...[With art] the most important secrets are there on the exterior, for everyone to see. ...The paradox of secrecy lies in the fact that the most important secrets are those that are open to public view (Blier 184-185).
Blier is referring directly to traditional African art, however in contemporary western culture the photograph, as the most obvious and plentiful source of images, is therefore also the most obvious seat of secrecy.

ii. Photographs carry implicit ideological assumptions

Photographs have a particular role to play in the communication of secrecy. Historian and journalist Caroline Brothers writes in her book *War and Photograph* (1997) that cultural and “ideological assumptions of some significance are inscribed within all photographs”. This suggests that photographs inadvertently give access to these assumptions and using “photographs in this way, as ‘witnesses in spite of themselves’, is eminently suited to their intrinsic nature” (Brothers 21). She adds that just by looking at photographs the viewer is part of an intricate system of seeing and imaging. For Brothers, meaning “inheres not in the photograph itself, but in the relationship between the photograph and the matrix of culturally specific beliefs and assumptions to which it refers”. The actual photograph is the “site at which these ‘invisible’ beliefs are made manifest” (Brothers 23). In these ways the photograph, as evidence of a witnessed access to cultural issues is part of the communication strategies of secrecy, as it is in Salgado’s boy with electric wires. This image comments on Mexican society, but it also carries assumptions about the west, and its implicit relationship to the ‘other’. This image is rich in such ideological implications, many of which are difficult to articulate. I have analyzed it as a cultural document; as a demonstration of Brother’s argument.

iii. Photograph act as a social barometer

By engaging secrecy dynamics, art photographs in particular can be seen as both “articulating and contributing to social processes” (Chaplin 1). These social processes not only “determine” what is represented and how, but they are also “influenced and altered by it. Thus representations articulate not only visual or verbal codes and conventions but also the social practices and forces which underlie
them, with which we interpret the world” (Chaplin 1). How we interpret the world and recognize appropriate conventions is articulated in part through art. Fox’s Untitled, (Foetus on Slab), [Plate 5] for instance clearly illustrates this dichotomy. Fox is articulating a particular aspect of taboos around abortion and death and at the same time this image is also contributing to a social dialogue on this contentious moral issue.

iv. Relevance of camera technology

Another aspect of photography’s relationship to secrecy is found in the work of German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Academic theorist Scott McQuire in Visions of Modernity: Representation, Memory, Time and Space in the Age of the Camera (1998) quotes Heidegger’s argument that any new technology creates “the establishment of a particular relation to the world”. Scott is particularly interested in how the invention of photography, specifically developments with the camera, affected the surrounding culture. He writes that: “today the camera stands as symptomatic of the coupling of the technological to the socio-political in contemporary culture” (4). This relates to my argument that the technologies of photography have changed communication channels, allowing for secrecy to become embedded in the photographic surface with scant notice. Photographs have been historically theorized as evidence, as revelations (Goldberg 19) – not as harbingers of secrecy.

v. Capacity of the photograph to cross genres

The historical impact of the photograph shows how naturally photography grafted onto different genres. Photographs, following on from Tagg, were used as documentary evidence by disciplines such as science, crime, psychiatry and anthropology (Goldberg 19). Photographs replaced paintings for portraiture and the documentation of important social events. Artists quickly saw the potential in the photographic image. A photograph taken for one purpose often changes over time, and “the original motive for the making of a photograph may disappear, leaving it accessible to being ‘re-framed’ within new contexts” (Wells 57). Many
documentary photographs, such as Frank Hurley’s *The Morning of Passchendaele* [Plate 17] (1917) are now exhibited in art galleries. Hurley was official photographer to the Australian Imperial Forces in 1917 (Annear 258). He also used composite images to achieve maximum impact.

Hurley’s image is not an unusual example. Salgado’s images also float between journalistic, documentary and art genres. This capacity of the photograph to slip from one category to another broadens the potential for secrecy by providing fertile liminal spaces of creative experimentation and expression. Without needing to be bound by specific boundaries, photographs can act subversively, communicating sharp issues with seeming innocence. Many artists play on this capacity. This is certainly true of many of Salgado’s images which derive much of their potency from this ambiguity.

vi. Omnipresence of the photograph

Even the commodification of the world through endless photographic imagery can be understood as concealing secrecy. As argued by Baudrillard “the West’s great undertaking is the commercialization of the whole world, the hitching of the fate of everything to that of the commodity. That great undertaking will turn out rather to have been the aestheticization of the world” (Baudrillard *Transparency of Evil* 16). For Baudrillard everything is potentially communication via the commodity. I argue that therefore the potential for secrecy is also exponentially expanding. It is always there for all to see; now in the photographic image, sometimes metabolized through the process of projective identification. It is therefore important to tease out the connections that risk becoming shrouded or lost in the sheer mass of communications.

As the understanding and interpretation of photography shifts, with changes in visual culture as a response to video and digital imaging, there is a danger that secrecy will become even more entrenched and less acknowledged. Nicholas Mirzoeff, editor of the *Visual Culture Reader* notes that observing “the new visuality of culture is not the
same as understanding it”. The gap between “the wealth of visual experience” and the capacity to analyze it “marks both the opportunity and the need for visual culture as a field of study” (Mirzoeff 3). Remembering Blier’s insight that “the most important secrets are those that are open to public view” (Blier Art and Secret Agency 184-185), that secrets in fact exist through the impact of revelation, then the photograph holds that place within contemporary western culture. And this is becoming more so, not less.

The paradox of concealing and revealing so important to the understanding of secrecy is obviously demonstrated through the inherent properties of photography. The photograph carries ideological assumptions which are completely naturalized, both reflecting but also challenging social values and mores. The omnipresence of the image in a commodified visual culture has democratized the image to the degree that much of its meaning is hidden or coded.

I have discussed how secrecy is an observable phenomena reliant on a specific deciphering, because they carry ideological assumptions and act as social barometers. Photographs have a capacity to cross genres and are everywhere present in contemporary western culture. These factors coupled to photography’s assumptions of truthfulness mean that photographs provide a fertile expression for secrecy.
1:4 Isolation of the secrecy dynamic specifically to projection and projective identification

“As we constantly endow objects with psychic meaning, we therefore walk amidst our own significance” (Bolas 12).

This section connects secrecy and the psychoanalytic dynamic of projective identification. I do so through references to Bellman’s concealment/revelation paradox previously discussed. To recap: secrecy is structured around concealment, but also around revelation. Once there is a secret there is the potential for revelation, and a subsequent rearrangement around that concealment. The paradox is that secrecy leaves visual clues – there are always elements of revelation inherent in the secret. Secrecy is accessible, it is a matter of correct deciphering, (Blier 184-185). It is my contention that projective identification is a useful way of performing that deciphering. An understanding of projective identification breaks open the tightness of complicity around understanding secrecy.

In the previous sections I analyzed why issues around death are conducive to secrecy, particularly via the photographic medium. Projective identification is a major channel for secrecy in contemporary western culture because rejected or denied (that is, concealed) issues are reworked by artists and then reintroduced back into the culture through works of art. This section aims to trace this mechanism in relationship to the photographic image.

This study as a whole investigates what visually reflects secrecy in the image and addresses the question: How can we tell we are looking at images of secrecy? As I have shown the predominant indication of secrecy is a space, an absence, a concealment. Sometimes the actual images
themselves are clues, as with postmortem photographs which are tokens of concealment. When something is shifted out of social currency by secrecy, projection and projective identification are two mechanisms that answer the questions: what actually happens? Where does the secret/secrecy go?

When secrecy is unacknowledged, as I argue is the case with many issues around death, absence or incongruence is what is noticeable, or often there is an unnameable sense of unease accompanied by disturbances in energy. Absences and concealments also indicate the displacement that occurs with projective identification. These responses are not generated by light matters. They are accompanied by enormous levels of personal and cultural feeling. Secrecy, as an act of retention or withholding, as a culturally specific response, is always charged by dynamics of power (Roberts Insight, or Not Seeing is Believing 65). When issues or emotions are denied, rendered into dynamics of secrecy, they are still observable as absences, gaps and fragmentations. Projective identification is a way of tracking what becomes of these charged spaces.

As I previously described on page 30 projective identification is a complicated sequence of largely unconscious communications. Because they are primarily unconscious they are difficult to theorize. Not only are they unconscious but they are feelings and emotions which have been disowned, rejected and then projected out. Once they are projected out they become invisible and by definition, secret. The projective identification interaction involves levels of collusion and coercion.

Projective identification was initially theorized within the psychoanalytic therapy relationship by Klein. Since then, others have taken the dynamic as a template for understanding human reactions in a variety of situations. Joanna Montgomery Byles, Professor of English at the University of Cyprus for instance, writes that projective identification “may be useful I helping us to understand the psychic links involved” in problems of warfare (208). Walter A. Davis in Death’s Dream Kingdom: The American Psyche After 9-11 argues along the same lines as Byles.
Donald Kuspit writes more generally of psychoanalysis that it is “not only a method of analysis but a way of experiencing” (Kuspit Signs of Psyche 328). And: “psychoanalysis at its best always catalyzes fresh self-consciousness, reminding the analyst-critic that the cultural product expands civilization’s consciousness of itself” (Kuspit Signs of Psyche 329).

I have theorized the dynamic outside of the psychoanalytic discipline and have transferred the same interactions that traditionally belong in the therapy relationship to the links between society and artists. This means that, as a member of society I am also part of the system, part of the collusion. It is my intention, however, as much as is realistic, to observe projective identification from outside the paradigm. Awareness of the different stages and effects of projective identification fundamentally changes and transforms profound social structures which, while secret, have become frozen – out of the reach of assessment and accountability.

**Further analysis of projective identification as described by Thomas H. Ogden**

Ogden outlines three phases to the process of projective identification. The first is the displacement of unwanted feelings, which lead to the second phase, that of “putting that part into another person in a controlling way”. The third phase is characterized by “the processing of the projection by the recipient, followed by a re-internalization of the ‘metabolized projection’ by the projector” (Ogden On Projective Identification 362). The third phase is the main distinguishing feature of projective identification: as opposed to projection which is a one way communication and not dependant on a response or interaction.

As described by Ogden, the first phase of displacement is generated because a part of the self, or society, is unwanted. It feels either bad or dangerous. Some feelings or issues are too painful or fearful to experience or face directly. The possibilities of adapting to, or transforming
these issues feels out of reach and overwhelmingly difficult or unimaginable. Rejection or denial of these feelings seems the most natural option (Ogden On Projective Identification 359).

Ogden describes the second aspect of projective identification (following the initial rejection of unwanted feelings) as the process of exerting a pressure on the receptor to respond congruently; to act as though the projection was real (Ogden On Projective Identification 359). For Ogden, projective identification only occurs through a series of interactions between the projector and the object of their projection. It, like secrecy, is a communication.

The third and final stage in projective identification is the phase most relevant to artists. In this part of the process, as described by Ogden, the receptor (artists) feeds a metabolized or adapted version, back to the originator of the rejected feelings (society). The process of adaptation is the creative artistic process where artists rework the difficult emotions. Importantly artists are not responding to an imaginary pressure from society, the pressure is real and is “exerted by means of a multitude of interactions” (Ogden On Projective Identification 359). The three phases are acted out in the same way regardless of whether it is between two people, or an interaction in society.

The generation of projective identification comes from both an internal defence system and as part of a “fundamental form of communication”. Significantly, it is also predominantly unconscious. This is why stage two is often experienced as coercive or compulsive rather than consciously experienced (Ogden The Primitive Edge of Experience 25-26). Phase three may involve conscious integration, although in some interactions this too may be unconscious. Although the actual processing is done consciously, there may be unconscious elements which involve responding congruently to society’s pressures. For a genuine integration to take place there are considerable readjustments to be done both consciously and unconsciously.
This process of integration will be explored later in regard to artists (Ogden *The Matrix of the Mind* 155).

Projective identification is a complex series of interactions; another example from everyday life helps to clarify what actually happens. Looking at how a child develops the mechanisms of coping with distress is not only useful as an example: it is also one of the primary experiences of childhood which are part of normal maturation. Childhood experiences such as my example described below, in which the child projects out split off rejected feelings into the mother who then processes the feelings and reflects them back to the child, create a familiarity with the dynamics of projective identification. This is why projective identification then can later develop into such an assumed force in society, passing daily without acknowledgment. Describing projective identification as it operates in the mother/child relationship helps in its identification for a wider cultural context.

The infant learns early, through attempts at mastering a complex world, that it is important to organize feelings by separating positive, nurturing experiences from ones which seem dangerous or frightening. This separation process becomes exaggerated through a splitting mechanism which is "the division of the self and external objects into ‘all good’ and ‘all bad’" (Kaplan *Textbook of Psychiatry* 624). "Projective identification develops as a psychological interpersonal elaboration of the process of splitting". It is through these formative experiments of projective identification, experienced interpersonally, that "the infant is able to learn" (Ogden *The Matrix of the Mind* 46).

It is normal for children to feel angry, fearful or disturbing emotions. However, particularly in infancy, these feelings are difficult to manage and understand. So for instance, if the child feels frightened by its destructive feelings when thwarted, it then projects its split off destructive wishes into the mother. It acts as if its destructive feelings do not belong to it, but are the mother’s feelings. Through its actual interaction with the mother, the child may feel that the mother is blocking its
ability to get what it needs. As a result the child then provokes the mother through its own behaviour until the mother acts congruently - from the child’s point of view. In this way, the child engenders an angry response from the mother to create a congruence with its inner world.

The mother may then feel an unconscious sense of being manipulated. She will respond in one of two ways. If the mother is not able to handle these angry feelings, (which now feel like they are hers,) she will react by withdrawal, anger, displacement or projection onto another, or, over protection. These responses are also indications that she has not processed these negative feelings in herself and would confirm in the child that it (the child) is indeed destructive, reinforcing and compounding the need to distance itself from such feelings.

Ordinary daily interactions in human relationships are peppered with projective dynamics at various levels of intensity. Because the projective identification process is naturalized in daily interactions it is often difficult to isolate. This is true not only in personal one to one relationships, but also in broader social contexts. However, the personal projective dynamic, particularly in the mother/child dyad, creates a template for the social interplay.

Splitting off painful issues is often distinguished by simplistic thinking of ‘good and evil’. This is a result of the primitive or primal nature of projective identification (Symington 266). This ‘all good’ ‘all bad’ splitting is clearly seen on the international political scene at present with the ‘lovers of freedom’ and the ‘axis of evil’ referred to by the current United States President George W. Bush.

The two sides of the split, like two sides to a coin, are “isolated from one another because it is too dangerous” to acknowledge that there may be good in the bad, or bad in the good. The two sides of the split need to stay discrete. Isolation of one side from the other is central to the working of projective identification. Intervention from another party therefore, is required so that one can
experience at a distance that which one is unwilling or unable to experience oneself. Intervention is necessary to bring about integration.

Splitting into ‘all good’ and ‘all bad’ is not only a protective defensive mechanism for the child, it is also a fundamental a way of organizing experience, of creating order and boundaries. The ordering function of splitting is a result of separating out the good and the bad in infancy – creating order out of chaos (Ogden The Matrix of the Mind 47-48). Splitting off negative emotions is the precursor to projective identification.

If the mother handles the interaction in a ‘good enough’ or conscious way, the child may then re-internalize the feelings so as to maximize the capacity to master destructive and dangerous feelings (Ogden On Projective Identification 362-364). (Ogden Winnicott’s term ‘good enough’ to allow for a subjective assessment of the interaction). The mother would accomplish this by recognizing that her angry feelings did not originate with her but that she was inveigled into acting as though she was angry by the child’s provocation. This recognition of the origin of the feelings then allows the mother to respond constructively with the child.

The impulse for projective identification is the experience of overwhelming feelings which are not able to be integrated, for whatever reason. This is true for both the original relationship with the mother and within social interactions. Projective identification is an inherently neutral interaction which has beneficial or negative repercussions depending on the context of the specific relationship.

The kind of personal integration that comes from a successfully resolved fruitful projective identification can only occur through relationships. This is because interactions and language are socially specific; integration

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17 The term ‘good enough mother’ was put forward by D. W. Winnicott in Playing and Reality (1971)
does not take place in isolation. Individuals cannot conceive their metaphors, or “speak their selves into existence with Godlike enunciations of original meaning: rather, they must subject their self-creation to a preexisting system of symbols and meanings that they discover through intimate relations with other people” (Morton na). Society does not accomplish this integration without intervention either and that is a role of artists, who perform the same function as the mother in Ogden’s example. The projective identification dynamic is a communication dynamic which is continually being played out. It is not an isolated one-off gesture but an ongoing series of actual interactions.

Artists hold projective identifications for their society in the same way as the mother does for her child in my previous example. Ogden’s model is clearly pitched specifically at the therapy relationship, but applying the same principles and models to artists paves the way for looking at this projective mechanism in an exciting new format. In doing so, one of the main conduits for secrecy in the visual arts is uncovered.

Artists, such as Fox, Serrano and Salgado by responding to taboos and secrecy around death through a process of projective identification create the possibility of different outcomes, perhaps of a more open response to death. The original displaced response is not fed back in a mirror image to society - it has now been creatively processed by artists through their arts practice. Outcomes are therefore unpredictable - there may be an alteration or expansion of the original difficult feelings or experiences. Change or growth is only a potential, as in the example of the mother/child relationship. Feelings rejected and concealed in society, move through projective identification phases. Secrecy can be traced as it is modified and transformed by artists. The next section outlines some of the ways that artists metabolize and process issues around death. Fundamental to this processing is the necessity of conforming to particular artistic conventions and aesthetics.
Part Two

The Aestheticization of Death

2:1 Aestheticization and symbolic representations of death

“But what use is art if it can’t help us look death in the face” (Julia Kristeva).

In Part One I outlined secrecy’s impact on death, through photography and projective identification. I looked at the contemporary status of taboos around death and put forward the results of my research into why there is secrecy around issues of death in contemporary western culture. I devote Part Two of my thesis to an analysis of the aestheticization of images of death. A reading of the secrecy represented in images of death is made possible by specific culturally driven aesthetics. These become Sontag’s ‘routes of reference’ or conduits of secrecy, naturalized assumptions or John Berger’s ‘ways of seeing’. An analysis of these aesthetics is therefore pivotal to understanding how secrecy is transmitted. These conduits are essential to projective identification – the conduit of secrecy – as they allow for a cultural placement.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^\text{18}\) In this section, and the one which follows on photographs of the dead, I put the more complicated exposition of projective identification on hold. I do this to establish the basic aesthetic and cultural backgrounds (potential secrecy conduits) which structure and enable projective identifications to develop. Once I have firmly outlined the connections between death, secrecy and photography I am then in a position to renew analysis of projective identification in the fourth section.
To look at *Jane Doe, Killed by the Police* [Plate 18] (1993, cibachrome 125.7 x 152.4 cm), another image by Andre Serrano from his *The Morgue* exhibition, it would be easy to assume that this image confronts death straight on, that this is in fact an image of revelation. And yet, as with Sue Fox’s postmortem photographs I argue that this image hides as much as it reveals. This image is also an image of secrecy. It belongs comfortably within contemporary western society’s canon of images of death; of the genre of postmortem photographs which emerged in the 1970’s as taboos around death began to break apart. And it is still a difficult photograph to look at. Although, as Aristotle wrote so long ago “We enjoy looking at the most exact portrayals of things we do not like to see in real life...for instance corpses. This is because not only philosophers, but all men enjoy getting to understand something” (Aristotle *The Rhetoric and Poetics of Aristotle*).

This section of Part Two is written in response to this conundrum of concealment and revelation. I note how images are culturally constructed with secrecy as part of their coding; the aestheticization which makes them intelligible to a contemporary western audience. Looking at *Jane Doe, Killed by the Police* indicates that this image does belong in contemporary western culture, and that it is an image of both concealment and revelation for the reasons I have outlined.

Part Two is divided into four sections: the aesthetisization of death and the ways artists have represented death either symbolically or metaphorically; the historical modes of depicting death; the influence of religious iconography; and the explication of the argument connecting death and projective identification. I argue that the evidence for secrecy is the aestheticization of death, partly through the concealment/revelation paradox, which is then culturally acted out through projective identification. The presence of this complexity shifts an inner attention from understanding and interpreting a photograph of an electric chair into an image of death, and a postmortem photograph of a Jane Doe.
into a confrontational emotion connected to issues of universal significance and possibilities of redemption.¹⁹

I have seen Serrano’s Jane Doe, Killed by the Police in a series of different contexts, including the catalogue for The Morgue exhibition. Serrano photographed this series in the New York City morgue. Jane Doe, Killed by the Police was also chosen as an example of Serrano’s work on death in an article by art critic Charlotte Mullins, inspired by Andy Warhol’s obsession with death, entitled Death Row. Mullins chose three artists who she assessed as having “removed the media blinkers that control what we see and how we see it” (27). She notes that more recently “certain artists have chosen to bypass second hand press images. ...Death may be more palatable, or somehow less real, once it has been through a few [media] filters” (27). Of the three artists she chose, all are photographers.²⁰

American artist, Lucinda Devlin (1947-) is one of the three photographers reviewed by Mullins. Devlin took a series of photographs of electric chairs called The Omega Suites #8 [Plate 19] (1991, C-type) which directly reference Warhol’s Electric Chair series [Plate 21] (1989, acrylic and silk-screened enamel on canvas, 137.2 x 188 cm). Devlin’s images are the “portraits of the hardware used for licensed killing in America” (Mullins Death Row 28). The Omega Suites #8 show a bare room with an empty electric chair centrally positioned. The walls are a bare white except for a clock hanging behind the chair with a mirror showing the clock’s reflection on the other. The white walls mirror that

¹⁹ The following sections address these broad issues, only in reference to my argument, and are intended as reference points, not exhaustive studies in themselves. The visual examples I have chosen are an eclectic series of images of death, not necessarily photographic, but which are intended to provide the visual vocabulary necessary to an understanding of my central thesis.  
²⁰ Warhol’s images in turn reference photographs like the forensic image Death in the Electric Chair (Plate 20) taken in 1935 by an unknown photographer but included in Harm’s Way (1994) a compilation of forensic images compiled by Joel Peter Witkin and Stanley Burns. This image differs in that the actual person’s body is shown.
of an art gallery space. The white also accentuates the isolation and alienation of the chair. No people are present. No drama is being enacted; there is no blood, and yet the image reverberates with death. Symbolism of death pervades these images through implication and absence.

Mullins experienced these images as very difficult. She wrote that they “choke you with feeling – and their emptiness becomes a vehicle for your emotions, and the more examples you see, the worse it gets” (Mullins Death Row 28). (Incidentally, she is actually also describing effects of projective identification). How could images showing so little, show so much? As in Jane Doe, Killed by the Police we are looking at images of secrecy which are permeated by symbolism of death.

This section further isolates what categorizes images, such as Jane Doe, Killed by the Police or The Omega Suites, as images of secrecy. If secrecy as a communication leaves clues, how are they to be identified and then deciphered? What is it that compels and confronts in an image of a chair? In other words, why is this not an image of a chair, but conjointly an image of secrecy and of death? And not simply a picture of death, but one which has the capacity to emotionally move, engage and probably disturb the viewer. Looking for the physical devices or clues of secrecy can be a useful starting point, but a deeper more complex response is required. As previously noted, the secrecy devices themselves are embedded in social conventions; these cultural factors transform photographs from mere pictures to vibrant social documents.

Jane Doe, Killed by the Police is an image of death which could be described as showing death as confrontationally as possible, yet the question is, what is really revealed about death, or about this woman, this Jane Doe, this woman without a past, or a present and now without a future? French art critic and historian Daniel Arasse writes in the catalogue for The Morgue that “Serrano has chosen to envisage death and to give a face back to dead people” (Arasse 3). Arasse suggests therefore, that Serrano
retrieves the dead from social oblivion. However, what has he retrieved?

What is actually visible in this image is the side of a traumatized face. The glistening wound above her ear, the blotched skin in a subtle range of brown to black hues and the matted curly hair create a richly textured surface to the photograph. We see a face in death. Serrano took the photograph of her profile, straight on. This angle is unusual in western art and recalls the painting by Hans Holbein, the Younger, (1497-1543) The Body of Christ in the Tomb: Detail, [Plate 22] (1521-1522, distemper on limewood panel 30.5 x 200 cm). American academic Richard Leppert comments on this painting that the angle and claustrophobic framing of the body, create a sense of victimization. Holbein painted Christ’s body as a decomposing corpse “forcing acknowledgment of the absolute nature of death”. The Serrano image replicates these aspects by closely framing the head in his large close-up format colour photograph. Both images “question what can be known and how what might be known can be shown” (116-117).

Jane Doe’s means of death is not visually clear: she could have been burnt or she could have died from the wound on her temple. Serrano chose to photograph her left side, does this mean there was no wound on the other side, or has the other side of her face been blown away? Even though she is blond I can not tell what race she is, but she looks very young to me. Her eye socket is shockingly hollow. She is a genuine Jane Doe, her identity was not known. It was part of Serrano’s set condition when photographing in the morgue that the identity of those who had died be withheld (Mullins Death Row 29). Serrano communicates a sense of intimacy, a direct connection to the face through the details in the photograph; the soft blond facial hairs near her ear growing in a curve towards her mouth; the remnants of now gluey eyelashes in the eye socket; the gently closed lips; and the line of her chin resting against her neck. The intimacy of these personal details are ruptured by the gulf which lies between the living and the dead. Through his framing and close-up intimacy Serrano has created the sense of
victimhood Leppert alluded to in the image of the dead Christ.

We do not look down on her, or up at her, she is on our visual level. This face takes up the whole photograph except for a small black strip at the top of the frame, which provides for a line of definition. Serrano created the richness of this blackness by a photographic technique. The viewer’s attention always returns to the fact that this is in fact a photograph, an image, because of the blackness behind the face. Serrano has therefore created a movement, which shifts a focus from this photographic surface, to the content – the woman who died so brutally. And this shift from photographic surface to content is mirrored by the profiled face and the blackness.

What this photograph reveals is the texture of death. The image records the visceral remnants of a life. But the life is now past and we can stare at this face, in the present, in a way that would never have been possible while this person was alive. We can look at how Serrano has ‘chosen to envisage death’; we can look at a face of death. The photographic medium gives us this time to examine closely (Dermer 245). So, a great deal has been revealed, most significantly – the actual fact of secrecy. Because this is such a difficult image, as with Fox’s foetus, the difficulty itself acts as a monitor of secrecy. One of the most surface clues that secrecy is present, in these photographs is both a sense of revelation and concealment which do not cancel each other out but which co-exist in a complex interplay (Nooter 24). As Lloyd and O’Brien note in Secret Spaces Forbidden Places (2000) that once the “secret becomes forbidden and is therefore vigilantly guarded, the protective barriers signal its existence to the uninitiated” (xvi).

The content of the photograph and aspects of Serrano’s aesthetic treatment are challenging, however he uses particular artistic methods, such as concealment, camera angles, scale, lighting, historical references and others described above, to conform to society’s conventions as a way of metabolizing projective identifications. He responds
to a taboo in society, confronts it head on, but in such a way as to allow for it to be re-introjected into society through the photograph.

Representations of death provide a cultural access to any particular society. And it is in the resultant gap between death as reality and death as culturally idealized that "Freud argued, ...is the point at which representation starts. Where death has historically been the concern of the person facing death, its aftermath is the province of culture, idealized through legal, moral and aesthetic processes" (Harold The Morgue 10).

The images by Fox and Serrano unambiguously and confrontationally portray death. Other artists, such as Lucinda Devlin have chosen to represent death either symbolically or metaphorically, without the body. The dead body is implied. These images are in counterpoint to the postmortem photographs of Serrano or Fox. All the images which reference death, however lightly or densely, contribute to the overall picture of the status of death in contemporary western society.

I began the section on secrecy and photography with a description of Sebastião Salgado’s photograph of a boy in an arid dangerous landscape. This image shows no corpse or dead body but it is nevertheless an image which reverberates with death by implication. Not only is this boy living in a perilous place, so directly photographed by Salgado, but this photograph is also counterpointed to the other explicit images of death in Salgado’s text Migrations (2000) in such a way that they may be read differently. A different, and more intense context is created.

Peter Greenaway describes the difficulty of depicting death in the following quote from an essay about his film Death in the Seine (1988) which was published as part of the catalogue accompanying the New York exhibition The Interrupted Life (1991). He wrote that western culture has had a prolific and ongoing response to the theme of death which still has not satisfied the questions:
How do you ‘picture’ death? Through what pictorial imagery has Death been made most manifest? How do you significantly depict the moment of dying? How do you pictorially differentiate death from sleep? How do you show death arriving, how do you depict the pain and despair and relief of dying? Do you show death by its after-effects? What do you observe and invent and paint in order to pass along the experience? Pallor, rigidity, fear, rigor mortis, worms, bones, a small winged spirit ascending, tears, a seizure, a signed will, a black cross, a black edge, a black frame, a grimace, a cry, a silent scream, a hollow breath, a rattling, a coffin, a brave face, the kith and kin, an armorial blason, a funeral, a wreath, a wake, a photographic representation of the corpse (55).

In his questioning Greenaway covers most of the visual clichés that have come to metonymically stand for death. His final suggestion - a photographic representation of a corpse - is in some ways the most direct representation and yet that too, as I pointed out with Serrano’s Jane Doe, Killed by the Police is metonymic in that it is a body that has died - it is still not a photograph of death. My enquiry into how secrecy translates into the visual image dovetails into Greenaway’s question of how death is represented. Images of death both reflect society’s attitudes to death but these images can also be didactic, teaching social attitudes. The ways death is imaged encompasses cultural secrecy codes and conventions.

Some artists, such as Serrano feel that to interpret death metaphorically detracts from the impact of depicting the brutality and directness of death, and avoids the intimacy, the visceral, sensorial force. Contemporary American photographic artist Mikael Levin’s War Story [Plate 23] (1997) by contrast approaches death and trauma metaphorically and through implication. He photographed the deserted landscape where there was once a German concentration camp. So instead of photographing the trauma of the Holocaust directly he commandeered the sense of truthfulness in the photographic surface, to create an impact through an absence.
Post-Holocaust metaphoric representations ring with German theorist Theodor W. Adorno’s statement that to write poetry after Auschwitz would be barbaric, even if possible (Adorno Cultural Criticism and Society 34). As Liliane Weissberg wrote in response to Adorno’s statement: perhaps now art needs to “express suffering rather than depict it” (18). Levin’s photographs come from this tension which is strung between the need to express a trauma beyond representation.

Both Devlin and Levin have photographed the site of trauma, leaving the subject absent. They have notified the viewer of an absence which is an overt visual clue that a choice has been made to exclude certain features or information, that more could have been expressed or revealed, and that there is some unknown, undivulged reason for its exclusion (Nooter 25). Secrecy is being practiced in this image, demonstrated through absence. Levin has filtered information back into the culture, conforming to the identification of secrecy as a meta-communication suggested by Bellman in the section on secrecy and communication. He has also metabolized suffering through projective identification.

Levin’s image is most notable for its lack or avoidance of a specific focal point. At first glance it reads as a landscape, and yet it carries few visual indicators of that genre. The photograph depicts a piece of land, a field. A few trees and scrubby bushes break the line of the horizon, and grasses cover most of the bottom half of the image with a few shining puddles of water glimmering through. There is nothing sublime or romantic in this image, the sky is bleached, there is no fence, or bird, or sign of life. American theorist Ulrich Baer notes in his analysis of Levin’s image in Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma, (2002) that the “water puddles barely reflect a sky utterly devoid of the consoling symbolic orders of cloud patterns or astral constellations” (Baer 65). He adds that Levin “places the viewer before a landscape whose spatial dimension is on the verge of collapsing into a flat abstraction” (Baer 65). (I learnt from Baer’s text, not from information in the photograph, that Levin’s image is
taken at the site of the former Nazi concentration camp of Ohrdruf.)

Levin communicates the impossibility of visually representing something as horrific as the Holocaust. He gives the viewer no visual focus, no drama, just the space. As noted earlier, an experience such as the Holocaust is “unassimilable, because it is a passage through the ultimate difference – the otherness of death” (Laub 73). So the viewer is presented with something, but not the horror, nor even a cliché of horror. The absence in this image, what is implicit, makes this image so moving. The absence creates a presence. And the space in the image is a space of trust in the viewer to find their own access to understanding.

In his use of absence as subject, Levin employs a compelling visual code of secrecy. He alerts a presence through absence and the imagined presence is thereby imbued with open but demanding levels of meaning. Paradoxically, Levin used absence to directly depict death. It is an appropriate expression because death also leaves an absence. When someone dies they no longer inhabit space, they also become absent.

Society views and constructs itself predicated on the “ways it represents death. At the extreme this can be understood as referring to those it chooses to kill, literally and symbolically: scapegoats. Kings, revolutionaries, widows, prostitutes, soldiers – all help to define the community with their sacrificial corpses” (Goodwin 15-16). This statement from Death and Representation (1993) by Sarah Goodwin and Elizabeth Bonfen underpins how fundamental attitudes to death are to any culture’s identity. Because death is always represented symbolically, it is also always represented culturally – death is always mediated through the lens of each particular society (Fitzpatrick 15).

Therefore, if death is secret in the culture, this will be reflected in the image. The two go hand in hand.

These metaphoric depictions of different kinds of relationships to death, using different media, open out a range of aspects which contextualize my specific focal

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points. “If the aestheticization of death was one means of deflecting its impact and sheltering the public from scenes considered too gruesome, its depiction through symbol was another” (Brothers 172). Levin has also chosen photography, he did not paint nor sculpt. His choice is very specific and carries with it particular connotations and references. Part of the power of imagery around death is historical, and some of these influences will be explored in the following section.
2:2 Historical modes of depicting death and their contribution to the contemporary visual vocabulary of death

In this section, I trace the changes in response to death in the west, in order to identify and characterize the images, both painting and photographic, which comprise the visual range of expressions for images of death. A succinct historical placement and acknowledgment of historical precedents is crucial to an understanding of how contemporary images, such as Serrano’s *Jane Doe, Killed by the Police* come to have their specific social currency.

The archaeological photograph of *Burial from Wetwang Slack* [Plate 24] (c.1984) depicts a skeleton in a grave which includes the remains of cart wheels. Also found in the grave was an iron pin, a mirror, two horse bits and a bronze case and chain, as well as pork bones (Jupp 44). The grave site dates from around the fourth to first centuries B.C. and indicates early connections between art and ritual. Respect for the bodily remains, aestheticized according to the particular society is a fundamental human expression, and underpins all subsequent images in this section (Shefer 223).

Historically in the west, rituals and responses to death have gone through great shifts. It is outside the perimeters of my thesis to track these changes. Academics such as Philippe Aries, Jonathan Dollimore, and others have explored the historical and cultural attitudes to death. It is relevant for me however, to note the diversity of representation. The fact of these changes is evidence of the variability of responses to death. Once isolated, the main genres or categories of representing death in western cultures act as familiar visual guide posts in reading images of death.
Historically, according to academic Elizabeth Shefer, the three genres of representations of death which follow, form the basis of contemporary art images. They are: the _danse macabre_, the _memento mori_, and images of trauma (Shefer 223). The examples described below act as powerful entry points into understanding the visual coding of secrecy around death because they reflect the attitudes of different eras. The three categories form the underpinning, the rubric under which contemporary photographs of the dead fit most naturally. These images are evidence that death has not always been aestheticized through the concealment/revelation paradox.

Aries defined the ‘good death’ or ‘tame death’ in the Middle Ages, for instance, as a death which belonged within the community, and was therefore accepted as a natural part of life. This good death forms a benchmark in contemporary culture of how death ‘should’ look. W. Eugene Smith depicted the good death in a photograph entitled _Spanish Village Deathbed_ [Plate 25] 1951. The image shows the deathbed of an elderly man, laid out on his bed, hands resting across his chest. His face is drawn and haggard from sickness and old age. Seven women mourners surround him, dressed in black, their heads covered. The old man’s death was notable because it belonged to part of a community, he was dying at home, in bed, surrounded by family and friends. This attitude to death provided a criteria, an assumed idealized ‘traditional’ response to death in the west (Aries _Western Attitudes_ 14). In between these two extremes, the archaeological document and the European representation of the ‘good death’ lie the images which represent difficult responses to the universal experience of death.

2:2:1 The _danse macabre_ or ‘dance of death’

The _danse macabre_ grew from “liturgy, sermons, mystery plays, legends and poems”, and was linked to superstitions and the morbidity of the people into a folk culture. Its origins were from the Middle Ages when the gruesome aspects of death were transformed into images coupled to “a kind of satire on social equality in that death makes all humans equal” (Shefer 224). It was predominantly represented in
woodcuts and wall paintings. Images of the danse macabre or the dance of death were rendered in response to the universality and inevitability of death, together with references to immortality through connections with Jesus Christ (Shefer 224). In these didactic images, death is often seen as a skeleton. The two woodcuts The Expulsion and The King from a series The Dance of Death [Plate 26] (1538) by Hans Holbein, the Younger are examples. In the first of the two woodcuts Adam and Eve are threatened by an ominous force in the sky. Death in the form of a skeleton waits for them. The other secular image depicts a king, surrounded by riches, courted by death – again in the form of a skeleton. These images show death dramatically confronting the living. Death is seen “as subversive, trans-sexual and no respectors of the niceties of social discourse” (Llewellyn The Art of Death 22).

Another variation is illustrated by the Northern German artist Hans Baldung’s (1484-1545) painting, The Three Ages of Death [Plate 27] (1509, oil on limewood, 48 x 32.5 cm). The focal point of the painting is the nude female form of a self obsessed young woman, preening into a mirror while the figure of death to her left holds an hour glass over her head. She is unaware of the power of death’s seduction, and the transience of beauty and its brief life.

The dance of death images often show skeletal and decaying bodies (Aries Hour of Our Death 607). These images find a contemporary resonance in postmortem photographs. Although the intention is not the same, the photographs reference the older paintings which are a part of the western art canon.

2:2:2 Vanitas or memento mori

Another genre of representing death reflects the sentiment of the memento mori – ‘remember thou shalt die’. The vanitas, part of the still life genre, took its name from the Biblical quote from Ecclesiastes 1:2 “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity”. Vanitas [Plate 29] (Oil on panel, 28.6 x 37.5 cm) by Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674) painted around 1670 is an example of the then contemporary moral directive on
encouraging the viewer “to contemplate the frailty and brevity of life” (Leppert 57-58). In Vanitas viewers come face to face with the skull, and therefore with their own future destiny. The other two objects in the painting, a variegated tulip and an hourglass, lined up either side of the skull, vie for attention. The brightly coloured tulip, of the kind which was most valued, was a symbol of wealth and pleasure and visually competes with the skull through the centrality of its position – both warn against the excesses of pleasure. “Looking means having to choose sides” (Leppert 60). This painting has little or no moral currency in contemporary western culture.

Joel Peter Witkin has produced photographs which directly reference this vanitas genre which do resonate with, and belong within a contemporary understanding. His Portrait as Vanité, New Mexico [Plate 28] (1994, toned silver gelatin print, 37 x 31 1/2”) depicts a masked man with one arm who is standing behind a solid plank of wood. A garland of grapes hang from each side of his head. His remaining hand rests on a skull which has been placed carefully on the plank. The man’s erect penis, echoing the same vertical line as the arm, points to the skull. The image has a strong black and white contrast. These elements allude to the shortness of life and the necessity of contemplation in the same way as the de Champaigne painting.

2:2:3 Historic images of trauma

In the early nineteenth century Spanish Francisco de Goya (1746-1828) and French artist Théodore Géricault (1791-1824) produced images which created a visual reference point for the revelatory photographs of death of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Their paintings were not widely seen at the time of their production and yet their importance can be seen in many of the contemporary images discussed in this thesis.

The ‘dance of death’ and vanitas paintings were specific discrete genres. Images of trauma, often related to war, have contributed significantly to society’s visual expectations of what death should look like. I have chosen
to analyze works by Goya and Géricault who both died around twenty years before the invention of the photograph, but whose impact on subsequent imagery of death has been seminal. Goya and Géricault were the predecessors of contemporary post-mortem photographers.

Disasters of War (1810-1820) was a series of eighty etchings which represented Goya’s response to the war fought as Spain’s defence against Napoleon’s attack. These etchings are the “preeminent concentration on the horrors of war and the vileness of soldiers running amok” (Sontag Regarding the Pain of Others 39). Robert Hughes in his 2003 book on Goya suggests that through these etchings Goya created a kind of “pictorial journalism long before the invention of the camera”. Goya wrote the caption “I saw it” for one of the image as if to confirm the truthfulness of his witnessing (Hughes 272). Goya was the first painter to depict the “sober truth about human conflict” (Hughes 289). The series of etchings depict death, rape and persecution, and the ghastliness and futility of war. They seem like “a turning point in the history of moral feelings and sorrow. ...With Goya, a new standard for responsiveness to suffering enters art” (Sontag Regarding the Pain of Others 40).

The Same [Plate 30], one of the Disasters of War series, shows an enraged Spanish soldier, axe swung high above his head, about to slay a prostrate French soldier. Another soldier is being brutal killed in the background. The etching is full of movement and drama, uncensored and explicit, as are many others in the series. There are no extraneous details added to detract from the focus of the action. The work of art enacts a revelation and witnessing, and rescues these acts of humanity from indifference and ignorance. To the contemporary eye, they are still difficult, graphic images of war, death and violence. This etching is the opposite to Devlin’s electric chairs which show no blood. Goya’s images attempt to hide nothing.

Despite Goya’s hope to expose the darkness of war in order to bring about change the etchings were not shown publicly in Goya’s lifetime. They were not published until 1863. And
so “the greatest anti-war manifesto...remained unknown and had no effect whatsoever on [contemporary] European consciousness” (Hughes 304). These etchings however, have contributed significantly to the visual vocabulary on death which later artists reference. Goya’s graphics set a benchmark of honesty and directness, and strip away heroic notions of war directly confronting the harshness and unrelenting pain of war.  

Géricault was painting around the same time as Goya. He also created images which still shock because they depicted such difficult subject matter. Géricault’s The Raft of the Medusa [Plate 31] (1819, oil on canvas, 491 x 716 cm) was painted in response to the capsizing of the ship the Medusa in 1816. Géricault wanted to paint a record of this disaster and did a series of sketches and drawings, some not literally included in the final painting but which “served as emotional stimulus”. Even though these studies were not used in the final painting they reflect Géricault’s profound fascination with death. Many of these studies, sketches of severed heads and limbs, and of the dying were undertaken at the Hopital Beaujon. Géricault also kept human fragments in his studio and sketched their gradual decay, immersing himself in the experience of death (Eitner 183).

One such painting is Study of Two Severed Heads [Plate 32] (1819, oil on canvas, 50 x 61 cm). The two severed heads lie posed, on a sheet which was arranged to hold them visually in place. Géricault set the painting up as a traditional still life which conflicted with the revelatory impact of the content of the painting. The head on the right belongs to a bearded man, his mouth agape, his face still reflecting the shock of a guillotined death. The blood has leached from

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21 I worked in public libraries in the 70s and books, including Goya’s Disasters of War series, were kept in a separated collection of books which were only given out on special request.
22 The sinking of the Medusa caused great political stirrings in France because of the negligence of the captain. He and other officers has taken the only sea-worthy life boats and left one hundred and fifty people on board a hastily built raft. Of the one hundred and fifty men only fifteen men survived, largely through cannibalism.
the neck, staining the white sheet. The woman’s head to the top left is tilted toward the centre of the painting and toward the other head. It has a more peaceful expression and is in a further state of decay. A strange relationship has settled between the two heads in death, a relationship which was unlikely while they were still alive. Part of the power of this painting is conferred by the lack of sensationalism or sense of crisis. A contemporary of Géricault’s, French painter Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863) was deeply affected by these studies, which to him appeared sublime. They “demonstrated the power of art to transfigure what was odious and monstrous in nature” (Eitner 184). Nearly two centuries later Joel Peter Witkin borrowed the device of *tableaux vivant*, with a similar considerable impact.

Finally, one of the reasons that I was drawn to death as a topic is because social reactions to death have been so variant. Death has not always been regarded as taboo, or even difficult in western societies. This variability has resulted in an unstable interaction with secrecy. Attitudes to death “are indicators of social change, particularly as death is a fixed point of reference” (Whaley 12). The fact that attitudes to death are so fluid and mercurial – so reflective of particular cultures at particular times, means that artistic responses to the universal human experience of death and dying can make a unique social contribution.

The recent oscillations in attitude during the nineteenth and twentieth century are the more marked because previous changes were slowly and gradually perceived over centuries rather than decades. Aries describes these more contemporary shifts as “a brutal revolution in traditional ideas and feelings. It is really an absolutely unheard-of phenomenon” (Aries *Western Attitudes* 85). Aries refers particularly to the emergence of the taboo status around the beginning of the twentieth century which was both generated, and then exacerbated by, the First and Second World Wars. In this period of time, taboos around death were at their densest and secrecy dynamics cemented around issues of death.

The images of death from various eras reflect social attitudes, from the dance of death and *memento mori* to
images of crisis, trauma and war. However, Aries, writing in 1985, states that: “When the image hunter [of death] reaches our own decade, he finds himself at a loss, on unfamiliar ground. The abundance of themes and scenes, which has hitherto made choices difficult, seems to have disappeared”. He laments the banishment of the public sight of death and with that “its icons. Relegated to the secret, private space of the home or the anonymity of the hospital, death no longer makes any sign” (Aries Images of Man and Death 266). Aries’ italics emphasize the starkness and completeness of the taboo status of that time. Breaches in taboos around death took some time to leak into the wider public arena but was certainly starting to have an impact through the postmortem photographs of the 1970’s by artists such as Liebling.

Issues around death are never easy; death is always a rupture, a discontinuity. Géricault’s severed heads and Goya’s war scenes are unlikely to ever be mainstream and it is interesting that many of these images were not exhibited in either artist’s lifetime. However, difficult is not the same as taboo although the two do obviously overlap. This difficulty is the reason that artists are drawn to, and required by society, to engage with and make sense of universal human experiences.

I have included these images, not because they are taboo but because they are referred to, and referenced by contemporary artists, such as Serrano and Witkin. Artists who depict skeletons reference the ‘dance of death’, as contemporary vanitas images reference memento mori. It is just as improbable for western artists to show photographs of severed heads (as will be discussed in regard to Witkin) without acknowledging the impact of Goya and Géricault.

These historical reference points will be augmented by the next section which briefly outlines the impact of religious imagery on representations of death.
2:3 Influence of religious iconography on images of death

“For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad” (Mark 4:22-23).

Religious iconography affects and reflects how we view death in contemporary western society. This section flows on from the previous discussion on the impact of historical influences on representations of death. I briefly acknowledge an eclectic series of different aspects of the influences of Christian iconography in this section and then note how this religious imagery has impacted on photographic images of the dead. Historical influences, together with religious imagery, help create routes of reference, assumed and naturalized ways of looking which are important in the transmission of secrecy and projective identification. Without these connections in place, secrecy would be mute, it would have no conduit, no capacity to filter its presence into cultural expressions.

The Dead Christ [Plate 33] (c.1505, oil on canvas, 66 x 81 cm) by Italian Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506) as an example of how iconic paintings of the dead Christ have impacted on contemporary photographic representations of the dead body. The Dead Christ is a painting of the dramatically foreshortened body of Christ, laid out on a slab, after his body has been taken from the cross. The viewer is positioned at the feet Christ, the same visual positioning as in Andre Serrano’s Sleeping Pill Overdose. The painting’s composition emphasizes the punished body of Christ through the representation of the wounds, and the angle and centrality of the body. In The Dead Christ the feet and hands show evidence of the stigmata, the wounds of Christ; but these are depicted as human wounds accentuating Christ’s fragility and humanity. The lower body is shrouded in fabric which Sue
Fox’s image *Untitled Draped Body* recalls. The figure of Christ centrally occupies the painting, however at the upper left edge the faces of two grieving mourners look across at the body reinforcing the dominance of Christ in the image. The predominant colours of *The Dead Christ* are red and green, Mantegna has painted the figure of Christ in greenish hues. The green compounds a sense of death and decay. The pillow and slab - the Stone of Unction, are reddish, “according to legend, a red stone streaked with white by the Virgin’s indelible tears” (Steinberg *The Sexuality of Christ* 44). This use of colour contrast is again reminiscent of Fox’s use of the complimentary colour pairing in *Untitled Foetus on Slab*. The body is the focus of *The Dead Christ*; not the face. Mantegna has painted the head of Christ raised slightly, resting on a pillow, the forehead and brow creased with lines of suffering and torment. It is not the peaceful face of death.

German art historian Hans Belting (1935-) in *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion* (1990), writes that theologically the “concept of the dead God occupies...a comprehensive position in all areas of Christian thought” (2). And I would suggest the same is true artistically. Images of the dead Christ date back to around 1200 (3) and have become assumed parts of the western art canon. In the section on death from the *Encyclopaedia of Comparative Iconography* by Elizabeth Shefer, half of the text is devoted to *Martyrdom and Death of Jesus Christ*. The implication of this loading is that, in the west, death is inseparable from and totally identified with the death, suffering and redemption of Christ. According to Sontag the many versions of the Passion of Christ are “surely intended to move and excite, and to instruct and exemplify” (Sontag *Regarding the Pain of Others* 36).

Religions, such as Christianity, as well as other spiritual belief systems are structured around what it means to be alive and what it means to die. Different religions make sense of death in different ways, but it is always significant. These structures all provide for prescriptive ways of understanding what or who actually dies, and what
happens after death. The function of “tradition, ceremony, and ritual, including religious ritual, is to preserve and encode the authentic creative experience for future generations” (Newton Painting, Psychoanalysis, and Spirituality 188). Images, such as Mantegna’s Dead Christ produced in response to these issues represent deep cultural values.23

In the “realm of ritual we find the hinge between the turn toward visual culture and the practices of religious devotion” (Plate 9). Secrecy is implicit in contemporary western ritualized representations because, as discussed earlier, issues around death are embedded in taboos and secrecy. It is also important to remember that secrecy is a method of communication, and art one of its main channels.

Belting argues that depictions of a corpse usually engender abhorrence. Images of the dead Christ however, can only “be endured because of the awareness that the dead man was alive. With its rhetorical gesture of accusation and indictment, the image invites identification” (4). Mantegna’s The Dead Christ stimulates this potential of identification by representing Christ as prone, frail and human. Leo Steinberg from The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion (1983) writes that the notion of the eternal allows for neither death nor sex and that it is humanity which takes on the “condition of being both death bound and sexed. The mortality it assumes is correlative to death individually, endures collectively to fulfill the redemptive plan” (Steinberg The Sexuality of Christ 13). The postmortem images of Fox, Serrano and others represent death without the softening of impact apparent in

23 Historically there are periods of time when the spiritual dimension of art “is repressed” or not encouraged. English academic Stephen James Newton argues that “contemporary postmodern theory and much contemporary postmodern art are both instrumental in a current denial of this dimension” (Newton Painting, Psychoanalysis, and Spirituality xiv). We are now living through a period of time where the spiritual aspects to life are unfashionable. Ironically however, there is a significant movement towards religious fundamentalism.
images of Christ which is due to the blurred boundary between life and death.

Richard Leppert points to the importance of the links between painting and the church as paintings served an educative purpose. Many paintings focussed on the saints, martyrs in particular. "The prime source for painting’s repertory of victims ultimately depends on the visual history of the sacred victim, Christ crucified.

Hans Holbein, the Younger’s The Body of Christ in the Tomb [Plate 34] (1521-1522, distemper on limewood panel, 30.5 x 200 cm) is another remarkable example of the tortured crucified body of Christ painted around twenty years later than Mantegna’s Dead Christ. The Body of Christ in the Tomb’s dimensions are one of its distinguishing features; "painted to the size of an adult male, the corpse is shockingly squeezed into a sepulchre that begrudges any waste of space" (Leppert 116). The emaciated body of Christ is laid out on a cloth covered slab. Christ’s right hand is, “grotesquely misshapen in stiffened reaction to the iron nail” (Leppert 116).

The Body of Christ in the Tomb shows the profiled prone figure of Christ, which Serrano has adopted to great affect in Jane Doe, Killed by Police. The detail, The Body of Christ in the Tomb of the profiled face shown in Plate 22 depicts a corpse in a state of decomposition. These compositional devices of painting Christ’s profile and in a state of decomposition directly allude to the humanity of Christ and seem to challenge the possibility of resurrection (Leppert 117). By showing the decomposing Christ, however, Holbein confronts the viewer with the limitation of their senses, allowing “us to confront the nature of faith as a leap, not a step” (Leppert 117).

Holbein’s depiction of Christ forces an acknowledgment of the visceral reality of death as experienced through the body in much the same way as Serrano does in Jane Doe, Killed by Police. Despite the differences, both images emphasize the fallen aspect of death and the vulnerability and finality of death. Both also recall the position of
figures sculptured on tombs as illustrated in the Monument to John Southcotte and his Wife, [Plate 35] (c.1585) an alabaster life size work situated in St. Nicholas, Witham, Essex. Such monuments were “concerned with social differentiation and the accurate replacement of the deceased by a suitable monumental body” (Llewellyn The Art of Death 121). Later Serrano borrowed and subverted this pose, which Holbein had also used, to great affect. The second of the ten commandments from the Bible reads:

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God (Exodus 20:4-5.).

This commandment makes clear there should be no representations of God. Christ, however, is human and is therefore subject to pain and suffering. Exaggerated visual displays of Jesus’ suffering therefore underpin his humanity and allow for others to identify with his pain, as elicited by Mantegna’s painting Dead Christ (Plate 55-56).

Christian iconography, particularly pictures of the crucifixion, have created an immeasurable effect on subsequent images of death. Even without belonging to the Christian faith these images of the suffering of Christ carry enormous cultural significance. No cross can be

Another example from around the same time is the Cadaver Tomb of Sir Roger Rockley [Plate 36] (c.1534). Peter C. Jupp and Clare Gittings provide this as an example in Death in England (1999) of a typical cadaver tomb popular around the late Middle Ages. It depicts the person who died above with the corpse below. According to Jupp and Gittings viewers “were offered a stark warning of the perils of a sinful life in a worm-eaten body, but also the hope of resurrection to an eternal life” (Jupp 119). This secular tomb is also reminiscent of the memento mori images described in the previous section.
Contingencies to religious themes are always present whether they are rejected or accepted.

In an extraordinary article The Crucifixion in Photography (1994) from the journal History of Photography, Darwin Marable dates the popularity of representations of the crucifixion from late in the fifth century. He documents photographs of the crucifixion back to those by American photographer, F. Holland Day (1864-1933), who in 1898 photographed himself on a cross, Crucifixion [Plate 37]. “Day staged, directed, photographed, and performed the re-enactment of Christ’s death on the cross” (Marable 257). The photograph shows Day strapped to the cross, nails through his feet, which are also supported by a block of wood. The photograph is taken almost side on, looking up. Two figures, one either side of the cross are both ‘in costume’, consistent with late nineteenth century ideas of Roman dress. The sky forms three quarters of the image and acts as dramatic background to the cross. Day had previously grown his hair long and lost weight to appear more authentic. This photograph’s meaning relies on references to existing painting conventions of the crucifixion. Marable compares the images of Day to those of Joel Peter Witkin in “scale and meaning” (Marable 257).

Many of the photographs I analyze rely on similar visual quotations from religious metaphor and symbolism. Andres Serrano, for instance, “doesn’t hide his Catholic formation and readily admits that it was decisive in the working out of his theme and vision” (Arasse 3). According to Daniel Arasse, Serrano’s photographs from The Morgue series “harkens back to the great Christian tradition of meditation on death, engendered and aided by the representations of death” (Arasse 3). Joel Peter Witkin’s Catholic upbringing is also clear in many of his photographs which quote religious references and symbolism (Witkin Danse Macabre 38).

Redemption is one of the most consistent Christian themes. The “Latin redemptio literally meant liberation of one person after payment of a price or ransom” (Kellman 3). In
Christian terms redemption is the means of atoning for sins, following the example of Christ’s death on the cross. Separate from redemption as a strictly Christian notion, much contemporary art responding to life and death issues can be seen as redemptive in the sense that it carries the potential for transformation. In her book Empathetic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art (2005) Australian art academic Jill Bennett alludes to the theorizing of a redemptive capacity of art. She writes that her interest is not on “trauma itself, but on the affective operations of art” and how they relate to trauma. Bennett draws attention to contemporary academic Leo Bersani’s The Culture of Redemption (1990) in which he argues that the “redemptive aesthetic asks us to consider art as a correction of life, but the correction virtue of works of art depends on a misreading of art as philosophy” (Bersani 2). Bersani argues that the idea of art salvaging damaged experience has been fostered by psychoanalysis, “specifically by Freud and later developed more coherently and forcefully by Melanie Klein” (Bersani 13).

Not all artists approach their work with a transformative or redemptive agenda and yet it is understandably present in many images of the dead. Some artists like Salgado, for instance, have an openly avowed intention of creating change, or at least the precursor to change – awareness. “Traumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language” (Bataille Concerning the Accounts Given by the Residents of Hiroshima 176). Some artists see this process of integration into some kind of narrative structure as their social role and personal responsibility. According to Carol Becker in The Subversive Imagination, the greater the levels of secrecy and repression and “the more simplistic the representation of daily life, the more one-dimensional and caught in the dominant ideology the society is, the more art must reveal” (Becker xiii). In an essay entitled The Heuristic Power of Art, published in The Subversive Imagination (1994), Elizma Escobar writes that eventually, one “realizes that there probably only exist relations and nothing else. Art, then becomes the only possibility to
rescue and redeem life: Art is the prolongation of life by other means” (Escobar 49). Escobar is a Puerto Rican artist and political prisoner, incarcerated in America in 1980. From his position in prison, and acutely sensitive to the fragility of life, Escobar is aware of the power of art to both redeem and transform.

The two primary influences from Christian imagery; the dead Christ of the crucifixion and the Madonna and child are both referenced in photographs by Salgado and Witkin in ways which add to the richness of their work. I identify this symbolism in these images in later chapters.

The particular aesthetic chosen by artists in representing death, either by referencing historical images, religious iconography or in other symbolic or metaphoric ways, inscribes their work as culturally specific documents. They have designed the images to be read in specific ways. This allows for pathways of understanding, what I have referred to, after Susan Sontag as ‘routes of reference’. The next section follows connections between death and projective identification which travel down these pathways.
2:4 The argument which links death and projective identification

"The act of photographing a victim is an act of total control" (Rosen Shooting the Dead 248).

In this section I link projective identification interactions to issues around death. Underpinning this link is the understanding that secrecy communications are the driving force of both projections and repression around issues of death.

An immediate connection can be made between projective identification and death through Melanie Klein’s notion that the first psychological task of the infant is the management of danger generated by the “deflection of the death instinct”. This instinct is not the fear of an external danger, but the fear of “being destroyed from within” (Klein 132). Regardless of whether or not one accepts the validity of the death instinct, the child’s response to danger and death does set in motion behaviour designed to bring safety and comfort to the individual. Ogden, who quotes Klein, points out that the infant has an inherent drive for safety and self protection from sources of danger, including danger from other parts of its internal world. This is a “biological phenomenon with psychological manifestations”. One of the psychological manifestations is an internal split between what is experienced as good, and what is experienced as bad. Bad in this sense can be read as synonymous for dangerous (Ogden The Matrix of the Mind 43-44). Survival strategies become part of a person’s identity. The development of survival strategies are a part of normal maturation.

Issues around death are a constant source of human suffering. Feelings of fear and distress emanating from suffering do not just dissipate despite their discomfort.
Human “knowledge of the inevitability of death persists regardless of whether one is consciously thinking about this problem” or not (Pyszczynski 443). Projection is primarily a defence strategy. Something is expelled from within which is experienced as difficult, even unbearable, onto or into another person. It is the direct reflection of the scientific theory that nothing can be actually destroyed, only transformed. “A trauma, in other words, will not just disappear. It cannot simply be forgotten” (Ragland 76). Water cannot be made to vanish, nor can it be compressed, but it can change to vapour or ice and it can be hidden. The same applies to emotions and experiences of different levels of reality.

Each person, and each culture needs to assimilate or accommodate potential threats to their safety, either emotional or physical in some way. As pointed out, this process of adaptation begins with the infant and continues throughout life. These survival strategies are contested and destabilized by extreme experiences of trauma. Even “the juxtaposition of a biologically rooted desire for life with the awareness of the inevitability of death … gives rise to the potential for paralyzing terror” (Pyszczynski 438). The impact of extreme experiences of trauma impacts hugely on this potential.

Ogden refers to the effects of projective identification on the individual, with references to some group dynamics but his emphasis is within the psychoanalytic process. Projection and projective identification, however, are “powerful psychological processes that occur in families, between couples, in groups as well as in the individual therapeutic relationships” (Grant 33). I have argued that in contemporary western society various difficult themes such as death which are experienced as too painful, even untenable, find no easy assimilation. Society does not encourage the placement of sufficient appropriate institutional or ritual structures which could make the assimilation of possible. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, set up in 1995, was an example of how deep and historically embedded trauma can be given a cultural forum ritually and realistically.
Emotions do not just vanish because the resources necessary for their assimilation are not present. They resurface in different forms, some through the projective identification dynamics. Society, at all different levels of functioning, projects out unwanted qualities as a way of rejecting and being separate from sensations and feelings of pain and suffering - particularly those around death. Suffering and difficulty of death are socially rejected and displaced, projected, in my model, into an artistic sensibility.

Generally speaking, cultural expressions in western societies have a split response to the universal experience of death. This split was isolated in the first part of this thesis as one between an overwhelming presence of images of death in popular culture, and, an absence of comfort and acceptance of death, the death described by Berridge as the 'death that most people die'. Omnipresent violent and vacuous popular culture representations of death confirm and consolidate denial and secrecy around death, and in the process validate its difficulty and painfulness. Foucault described this conundrum in. History of Sexuality (1976). Sex was spoken about incessantly, at the same time as it was exploited "as the secret" (Foucault 35). The same duality is true for issues around death.

This split in the representations of death, parallels the split experienced by the infant in response to pain. In both instances the split happens unconsciously at the source of discomfort. The ever visible popular culture death represents a denial of the realities of death. As is often the case with denial it may then be superficially experienced as natural or easy. The split leads to primitive thinking; responding to death without actually experiencing the ramifications of visceral death. The other option - the other side of the coin - is facing death square on, and that requires a readjustment, psychological work, and courage.

Death is difficult and painful. Society expresses what it can within the boundaries of what is possible, witness the popular culture representations. Society coerces artists to feel and express what it cannot integrate.
There is a gulf in society between the saturation of clichéd images of death and dying in popular culture, and silence. The very visible popular cultural death is deliberately drained of reality and represents one side of the split. These portrayals are usually mawkish and sentimental (the film *Beaches*), or uncompromisingly violent (the film *Kill Bill*). Remembering that silence or absence is indexical of secrecy, it is a role of artists to transmute the cliché and articulate the silence.

The photographic artists I analyze reflect an engagement with the silence and the difficulty, even the chaos of expressing the complexities that come with the topic of death. The artistic sensibility in contemporary western culture picks up the projected out unwanted aspects of experiencing the realities of death, and the attendant suffering around death and dying. Society has institutionalized these aspects as taboo or secret through patterns of social rejection.

Photographic artists, such as Serrano, Fox, Salgado or Witkin engage with the visceral reality of death. The reality which is confronting, difficult, chaotic, painful and still primarily - taboo. Artists are in the position, through the artistic deployment of templates and formats, to make difficult issues of death accessible by the projective identification dynamic which then becomes formularized in their art. They do so in response to a pressure exerted from within society. “In the modern world the artist - independent, solitary and peripheral - tends to be the moving spirit of cultural change” (Becker 18). In the same way the child manipulates the mother to respond congruently with its projections, society expects artists to express pain and suffering, and to make sense of issues of human significance.

Jean Baudrillard argues, in reference to the war in Sarajevo, that contemporary western culture sees the misery and suffering of others as “primary material and the primordial scene”. Society is disconnected from its own suffering and the suffering of others but is drawn to indicators of the suffering of others as a validation of aliveness. According to Baudrillard, the suffering of others
means those in the Sarajevo war, for instance, are truly alive because of the “absolute necessity to do what they are doing, to do what they must” generated by physical connections to death. He writes that we need to pull a reality out from the war, the reality which is experienced from those who are suffering. They respond without regard for the outcome and in this way it is they that have “plunged into the real”, and that is why “it is they who are alive, and it is we who are dead”. He espouses the need to “go where the blood flows in order to refashion one’s reality. All these ‘corridors’ which we [Europeans and Americans] open in order to export to them our food and our ‘culture’ are in reality corridors of distress through which we import their vital forces and the energy of their misfortune” (Baudrillard No Pity for Sarajevo 48).

Baudrillard touches on some profound issues: the disconnection of whole layers of feeling in society; the need to experience the aliveness of reality; the search for the understanding of suffering; the response to suffering in other cultures; the commandeering of the suffering of others; and the projective identifications, the transferring of difficult feelings that these issues generate.

Baudrillard acknowledges the west’s denial of suffering, but he aligns an engagement with war as engagement with the real, instead of an engagement with death. Baudrillard has made the common error of identifying the traumatic with the real, in ways explored by Hal Foster in Obscene Abject Traumatic (1996), rather than the feelings and responses which arise from trauma. The trauma is the stimulus for the feelings. This contact with the real, accessed through an engagement with death is also available during peace times.

Art is receptive to projections in western society because of its unique status within the culture. This status is that of the uncensored (or the rarely censored), the cultural space of free expression which is only accountable through its own fluid channels of criticism and assessment. Bennett writes that: “Whatever is outside of itself - unrepresented, unthought - is what transforms the language of art. It is, then, the political imperative - to confront the Holocaust, to confront AIDS, to confront taboos - that
forces art to transform itself and in the process to transform thought” (Bennett Empathic Vision 15).

One way of assessing how well any society has dealt with trauma is to look at its artistic representations: at how society has represented trauma, and how well that integration has become part of the society’s language. Often this takes time. An omnipresent, yet invisible example is the impact of the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The trauma generated by this shock has not yet been adequately artistically imaged in America according to American academic Walter A. Davis. “Hiroshima: is unfinished business deep in the American psyche” (Davis Death’s Dream Kingdom 128). These gaps in cultural processing alert to the presence of an unprocessed trauma. One of the things that happens in such situations is that secrecy dynamics spring up around these issues, which makes processing even more difficult. Repeating: such concealment, holes and absences are indications of secrecy.

Conversely, the American artistic response to the Vietnam War is an instance of national trauma where there has been a gradual reintegration through various artistic mediums. These artistic expressions have allowed individual experiences to slowly enter the cultural language. An evocative example is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial [Plate 38] in Washington D.C. designed by Maya Lin in 1981. The wall is a V-shaped wall of polished black granite “backed by the earth itself” (Lippard A Different War 88). It lists the 58,153 American casualties in the chronological order of their deaths. American art theorist Lucy Lippard writes that: “Vets themselves have come to see the memorial with all the ambivalence of the war itself and its ongoing reverberations (or reflections) in American society” (Lippard A Different War 88). Lin has named the ambivalence and used abstraction as opposed to figural or literal memorialization to provide an avenue for the emotional processing of very complex and profound human reactions and feelings.

In an essay from The Interrupted Life (1991), Australian art historian Charles Merewether comments that there is a
movement from “the material reality of the body to its representation...from death to the dead, from the real to the symbolic, manifest in innumerable objects and images with which we not only mark the passing of life, but bring the dead from beyond the grave back into the land of the living” (Merewether 77). He points to the necessity of objects such as cemeteries, icons or photographs of the dead to stand in for the dead. In that way they maintain some sense of the sacred or magic and “speak of something that is outside of us”. These objects serve as transitional objects between life and death, the body and the spirit “making the connection between death and the roots of cultural nationalism” (Merewether 77). Merewether describes an aspect of projective identification without reference to psychoanalytic language. He draws attention to the power images have to become icons for, and reminders of, not only the mysteries of life and death, but also the society’s underlying value system of beliefs. Artworks, such as photographs, at the very least act as a buffer against the harshness of death. Much is made of the finality of death and yet both an understanding of the movement ‘from death to the dead’, and ‘transitional objects’, like photographs, have the potential for blurring that seemingly inviolate boundary.

I have found projective identification a difficult area to theorize because, to my knowledge, the prior research has not been done in the terms I am describing. I propose that photography in particular carries projective identities in cultural life. This is partly due to photography’s role “in the twentieth century, that is, the attempt to witness, document and disseminate information on death and trauma” for the reasons previously discussed (Annear 25). In the following section I continue to describe how death has been aestheticized, by focussing on photographs of the dead.
Part Three

Photographs of the Dead

3.1 Photographic genres

“Every photograph is a regret; it is an end” (Sante 98).

Revelation expresses the opposite energy to secrecy, and photographs, despite the rigours of postmodern challenges, still carry visual echoes of truth, of revelation, in contemporary western cultures. I chose to study the theme of death for a variety of reasons, but predominantly because of its enmeshment in secrecy dynamics; and a disproportionate number of artists engaged with issues around death and dying, work with the medium of photography. Art has “been an important means of memorializing the departed, even if merely as a simple photographic portrait. …it is as if there is an intrinsic connection between the photographic medium and preserving the past and memorializing death” (Kent 9). To link photography with death seems like such a natural process.

Through a series of particular aesthetic devices photographic artists have engaged with both death, and therefore the secrecy around death. I outline this engagement by overlaying theoretical understandings of projective identification dynamics in ways which I then take up in following chapters. In this section however, I investigate the connections between photography and death and how that has been theorized: “Theorists of photography have often pointed out the simultaneous presence of death and life in the photograph” (Hirsch Surviving Images 231). I also identify the historical genres of photographs of the dead which so influentially direct contemporary artist’s
aesthetic choices. I previously looked at some of the ways death has been imaged. I now examine how photography has adopted those conventions, augmenting them with the results of its own unique qualities.

In this section I emphasize the relationship between photography and death and how artists confront taboos around death, while remaining within the boundaries of previously established photographic genres. As demonstrated in the previous sections, artists aestheticize death in particular ways. The photograph too, carries a raft of unique conventions and assumptions. To link the two theoretical disciplines of death and photography, within the shadows of perceptions of secrecy, has dynamic results.

By revealing and concealing, in ways previously seen in the postmortem images of Fox and Serrano, photographs of the dead reflect back to society its projected out disowned emotions around death. They reveal concealment through specific aesthetically coded routes of reference, placing them solidly within the visual social conventions of the west. These aesthetic pathways allow for the communication of metabolized formerly disowned responses to death, now reintroduced back to their society as art. Photographs therefore, hold both sides of the concealment/revelation paradox in the same text. I begin this section with a selection of relevant theoretical insights primarily from French theorist Roland Barthes (1915-1980), before I outline the different photographic genres which are associated with photographs of the dead: memorial, war, forensic and documentary images.

The last book Barthes wrote was Camera Lucida (1981). In it Barthes combined a touching response to his mother’s death, with an exploration of photographic meaning. Each photograph, as theorized by Barthes represents a moment past, a death (Barthes Camera Lucinda 96). The photographic image freezes a moment - time passes by that moment but the image remains inviolate.

Barthes writes of Portrait of Lewis Payne [Plate 39] a photograph taken of Payne while he waited in a prison cell
to be hung, by American photographer Alexander Gardner in 1865. For Barthes the punctum, or energy prick in the photograph, is that Payne is going to die. Barthes writes: “I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me that absolute part of the past, the photograph tells me death in the future. ...Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe (96). Photographs of the dead have a poignant resonance with the photographic surface; the photographic medium represents the death of time, a moment trapped in the past. “If photography bespeaks a past presence, it also ultimately refers to death, and each photograph appears as a little poem, a Japanese haiku, forcing us to stare more directly at reality” (Rabate 3-4). Or as Israeli academic Ariella Azoulay, observes in his book Death’s Showcase (2001): “The photographic paper, on the one hand, and the rhetoric of a secret that needs to be exposed and brought to light, on the other, give rise to photography as something that was there, whereas you facing it are here” (286).

Photographs of death compel in part because of the conundrum that death cannot actually be represented. Death can only be pictured symbolically; by contrast, photographs maintain an indexical connection to reality, despite the continuing “intellectual and creative labour artists and critics have poured into demolishing ‘photography’s so-called claim to truth’” (Ferran 9). Barthes writes on this paradox that in photography “the presence of the thing (at a certain past moment) is never metaphoric; and in the case of animated beings, their life as well, except in the case of photographing corpses; and even so, if the photograph then becomes horrible, it is because it certifies, so to speak, that the corpse is alive, as corpse: it is the living image of a dead thing” (Barthes Camera Lucida 78-79). This juxtaposition leads to a great deal of creative tension in many of the images discussed below.

For Barthes, photographs of the dead, are themselves dead images because they are explicit. “They are dead pictures. ...Photographs of the dead have no punctum. They don’t move the viewer, they 'shock' and traumatize. Like pornography death dulls the senses and doesn't take us anywhere.
...[Despite this], photography, [however], becomes the ultimate fetish, the only means of honouring the dead” (Lotringer 25). Many photographs of the dead do lack punctum, others however are extraordinarily moving and heart wrenching images of great power and beauty as I demonstrate throughout my thesis.

To look at photographs of the dead, can stimulate a sense that a secret may be exposed, a secret about death. In some of the postmortem images, such as Andres Serrano’s Jane Doe, Killed by the Police, just the act of looking is confronting. The reasons for this are clearly individual and subjective but each person standing in front of Jane Doe, Killed by the Police must think or feel in a way which either identifies with, or refuses to identify with a death like this one. We all know that at some point we will die, and perhaps we will be lucky enough to die at home surrounded by a loving family, however we do not actually know what form our death will take, what our corpse could look like stretched out for identification.\(^ {25} \)

The camera allows for a distancing of the artist from the subject photographed. With photographs of the dead this distancing or removal acts as a facilitation. Death is seen through a lens. “When ‘the facts’ so greatly exceeded comprehension, the camera became indispensable as a means of providing criminal evidence and producing cultural conviction” (McQuire Visions of Modernity 152). The camera creates a removal, a lapse, as well as a reliance on photography’s other conventions and genres.

Since the development of photography the camera has been used to immortalize the dead. The photographic conventions I now describe are profoundly cultural and historically founded. These historic images have created the naturalized and assumed pathways and genres for visualizing what death ‘should’ look like to contemporary audiences, as well as to photographic artists.

\(^ {25} \) The body of the fifteen year of son of a friend of mine was only able to be identified by a piece of his ear after he had been hit by a train.
Before the art postmortem images of the 1970s which broke new ground, there were three categories of photographs of the dead. The first were memorial photographs, a record of the deceased; the second, photographs that bore witness “to the misery of the world” – images of war and natural catastrophes; and the third were forensic photographs taken by police (Arasse 5). I have added documentary photographs as a separate category to this list. These four genres of photographs, which built on conventions and models taken from painting, created the norms, the groundwork for images of the present. They formed within a decade of the appearance of photography.

3:1:1 Memorial photographs or memento mori

Photography was developed in 1838 by Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre in France who made images laid down by mercury vapour on metal – they were called ‘mirrors with a memory’ or daguerreotypes (Pultz 13). Just prior to Daguerre, William Talbot invented paper plates, calotypes. David Hill and Robert Adamson collaborated on developing the calotype process which yielded paper negatives from which many prints could be made, however they lacked the clarity of the daguerreotypes (Pultz 14). Within twelve months of these developments photographs were being made all around the world. Its growth can be compared to the flourishing market in computers today. The middle classes drove much of this growth by wishing to have photographic portraits made. Photographic portraits replaced paintings. Memento mori images formed part of this movement from painting to photography.

According to Philippe Aries the time of the first appearance of photography in 1840’s was also the time when attitudes to death were inflected by romantic notions of the “death of the other”. Mourning the passing of a loved one was the focus of death. Photographic theorist Alice Young writes in Portraits of the Dead, (an essay in the catalogue for the New York exhibition The Interrupted Life (1991)), these romantic notions “attached meanings of dramatic proportion to death, regarding it both as a moment of ultimate communion between the individual and nature,
and as a symbol of the heroic struggle which raised human emotions to heightened sensitivity” (Young Portraits of the Dead na). This romanticism carried over into the photographs of the dead taken at that time, including children who were the subjects of many of the memorial photographs.

Childhood deaths were common in the nineteenth century and photographs were a significant way of remembering that there had actually been a life. Photographs were often accompanied by a lock of hair. This genre of photographing dead children in the nineteenth century finds its fullest expression in the 1990 Stanley Burns compilation entitled Sleeping Beauties: Memorial Photography in America (followed by another volume in 2002). It takes its title from the paradox of revealing death at the same time as denying it through showing children as if asleep.

An example of this type of photograph which appears to be a denial of death, at the same time as being a memorialization is Dead Child, [Plate 40], a daguerreotype taken in 1850. (As in many of these daguerreotypes the individual photographer is unknown). The photograph shows a little girl peacefully sitting in a large lounge chair. Her hands are resting on her lap, her head slightly tilted to her right. She appears to be asleep, there is no visual indication that she is dead. (Other photographs depict children quite wasted through illness). Her face and the fabric of the chair behind her head are the only parts of the image in sharp focus. She has been carefully posed so that she appears to be resting normally, in ways which would seem familiar to her family. Memento mori often functioned as the only reminder parents had of the existence of their children and the photographs were displayed openly on walls in the home. Sometimes children were photographed with a favourite toy as with Young Girl on the Couch with her Doll [Plate 41] (1895).

Untitled: Allegorical Angelic Death Scene [Plate 42], a daguerreotype dating from 1854, depicts a romanticized image of death. The child lies as if asleep while the mother looks on. The mother’s stiffness and awkwardness may be caused in
part by the need to sit very still during the lengthy photographic process, however, she looks distressed. A statue of an angel, a guardian angel is positioned behind the baby’s head. The photographic composition directs the eye in such a way as to imply the movement of the child from life to death and from her earthly mother to heavenly protection. It also visually depicts the denial of death by showing the infant as if asleep, as in Dead Child and Young Girl on the Couch with her Doll. This convention was also derived from and therefore references genres of painting children.26

Jay Ruby has researched memorial and other photographs of the dead in his book Secure the Shadow: Death and Photography in America. Ruby traces the history and social significance of photographing the dead, although not by artists. These photographs of young children who had died, and many war photographs of the dead, followed in genres already set in place through established painting traditions and therefore the line between these images and later art photographs is often difficult to distinguish.

3:1:2 War photographs

In this section I briefly trace how those who died in wars have been photographed. I note the shifts in how war photography represents the dead, with an underlying coalescence between the influence of propaganda and how the image can be manipulated for the purposes of war itself. These shifts correlate to taboos around death, to the levels of secrecy communications within society. To generalize: the dead body is seen as a victory if it is an enemy body; or a tragedy if it is one of ‘our own’. The propaganda media have emphasized this tendency in differing ways since the appearance of photography (Goldberg 199).

Ruby observes that since the American Civil War (1861-1865), which was just preceded by the Crimean War (1853-1856),

26 People today still take photographs of children after death, however, they are usually kept private. Friends of mine who had a stillborn baby kept a framed photograph of him, face down and unseen on the top of the wardrobe. Secrecy has changed what is socially acceptable.
American’s perceptions of the appearance of death “have been greatly moulded by war photographs” (Ruby 15). War images were deeply shocking to a public not used to seeing the truth of death as represented photographically. Photographs of dead soldiers were “valued as indisputable evidence that a person was indeed deceased” (Pultz 32). These photographs were taken as evidence of death, in contrast to the ‘sleeping beauties’ where death was often effaced. The brutal horror of war was transported from the field to the lives of people far away. This included relatives of the soldiers fighting. War photographs promised a new accountability which was however, rarely forthcoming. “The first justification for the brutally legible pictures of dead soldiers, which clearly violated a taboo, was the simple duty to record” (Sontag Regarding the Pain of Others 46).

Harvest of Death, Gettysburg 1863 [Plate 43] photographed by American Timothy O’Sullivan (1840-1882) from the American Civil War shows dead bodies strewn on the battlefield before the casualties had been “removed or buried” (Pultz 32). Although their individuality is not revealed, the overall effect is one of loss and desolation. A horse on the centre horizon adds to a romantic feel to the photograph. This photograph reflects nineteenth century aesthetics with the use of light and a painterly composition. Technically these daguerreotypes were difficult to make, with long exposure times which restricted subjects to static compositions – a perfect symmetry with death.

Ruby comments that the actual “appearance of death” was largely generated by such war photographs. He writes that “this awareness has been arranged, filtered, perhaps controlled by our culturally constructed expectations”. Beginning with World War 1, and parallel to the increase of the taboo status of death, war photographs were officially censored. Photographs of the bodies of dead American soldiers, for instance, in World War 1 were prohibited “while promoting images of the enemy dead” (Ruby 15).

By the start of World War 11 censorship was still very tight, and remained so, particularly the first two years of
the war. Images were released to reinforce a movement to victory. Americans still published no photographs of their dead and wounded. Only photographs of dead “Germans and Japanese, even the frozen corpses of Russians, presumably had the opposite effect and were shown to the public in horrifying detail” (Goldberg 196). In civilian society taboos against death were extant throughout the Second World War also.

During the period of time between the end of the Second World War and the Vietnam war photographs from the Holocaust were gradually published to a shocked world (Zelizer Remember to Forget 1). These images have now become iconic images of both suffering and human depravity and have heralded the beginning of the breakdown of the densest period of the taboos around death.

Andrea Liss writes about photographic representation of the Holocaust in Trespassing Through Shadows: Memory, Photography, and the Holocaust (1998). She describes a situation where the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was faced with the dilemma of exhibiting human hair which had been taken from Jews in the concentration camps. The situation was resolved by displaying a “large photographic mural of the hair rather than the hair itself” (82). This example shows that photographs can show reality from another perspective, because of their removal from, but reinforcement of, reality - revelation but also a concealment.

Barbie Zelizer emphasizes the witnessing role of photography in the process of healing after the end of the Second World War in Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera’s Eye,. Words could not have had the same impact. Photographs were a large part of showing the world about the action of the Nazis. When the United States President Dwight D. Eisenhower proclaimed ‘let the world see’ the assumption was that this would be accomplished through the “aura of realism” carried by the photographic image. “Through its dual function as carrier of truth-value and symbol, photography thus helped the world bear witness by providing
a context for events at the same time as it displayed them” (86).

The Vietnam War (1954-1975) reversed the previous censorship trends and the world media was flooded with images (both still and television) of death and destruction. These images began to challenge the existence of taboos. The result was a “vision of war not as heroic marching to trumpets but as an atrocity – an atrocity on soldiers, on mothers and children, on the enemy. Photographers used their craft to criticize the war” (Norfleet 54). Images from the Vietnam war highlighted the predicament of the civilian population “within the larger context of the war” (Zelizer Remember to Forget 170). As an example Don McCullin’s Fallen North Vietnam Soldier with his Personal Effects Scattered by Plundering [Plate 44] (1968, silver gelatin print), is remarkable for its detail. The individuality of the soldier is powerfully reinforced by his possessions which occupy the lower half of the photograph. This contrasts with the anonymity which had previously been associated with victims of war. Personal details, such as photographs and letters emphasize the loss of this specific man’s life, particularly as they are scattered on the ground together with bullets.

Representations of the first Gulf War which followed a few decades later have become identified with video games, such was the extent of the bleaching of reality. Lynne Kirby in Death and the Photographic Body denounces the “repression of photography” in the Gulf War as also the “repression of death” which then becomes “the repression of memory – of memento mori”. The virtual nature of representation also “served to undermine our empathy with its bodily horrors” (Raney 21). Kirby notes that a commonality of war, is that “war photography has always affirmed the body as casualty, as death, as corpse”. Referring to the theorizing of photography as a metonymy of death she writes that “photography and film always bear the work of death, the pausing to freeze, mummify, ‘corpse-ify’ whatever body they capture or pose (Kirby 73). During the Gulf War the only images available were those released by the American military. Images of real death, so graphically illustrated from previous wars had been commandeered by the popular
culture aesthetic in films and television. This high-jacking created a repressive response, concealing actual realities around death.

The Gulf War has been followed a decade later by the war in Iraq, with explicit images of death and violence, often from journalists embedded with United States soldiers. This war will probably be remembered by horrific video footage of individuals captured, tortured and beheaded. The effects of video footage and photographic images in contemporary war zones is hugely influential, to the extent that the “camera designates the place of war. It is today one of war’s most distinctive agents. …Wherever the camera is present, it frames the arena where war takes place” (Azoulay 245).

As taboos around death of the acceptance of the normality of death began to break up, around the time of the Vietnam war, the split widened between popular culture representations of death in the media and representations of the deaths that most of us die. The wars since then, images of which have been represented to those in the west, have reflected this split.

3:1:3 Forensic photographs

Forensic photographs are another genre of photographs of death. They are similar to war photographs in that the original intention, or the original audience for such photographs has shifted through time. These images were taken to witness and document. Forensic photographs, for instance, would usually only be seen by a few specialists. However, a spate of exhibitions and books in recent times have retrieved past forensic photographs from dusty drawers and corners. Some examples are the books Harm’s Way by Joel Peter Witkin and Evidence by Luc Sante; and an exhibition at the Justice and Police Museum in Sydney, entitled, Crime Scene: Scientific Investigation Bureau Archive 1945-1960, in 2000 curated by Ross Gibson and Kate Richards; as well as

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27 A new dimension for seeing images of war fatalities is through the internet.
the recent _Scene of the Crime: Photographs from the LAPD Archive_, edited by Deborah Aaronson in 2004.

In contrast to photographs of war these images confront because of their prosaic mundanity. The viewer is voyeur and as Sante poignantly puts it, they are "an excruciatingly intimate sight, and perhaps it is the burden of this intimacy that makes the corpses in these pictures seem more real than the living cops or spectators who can be peripherally glimpsed" (Sante 63).

Ross Gibson writes of his response after curating and viewing the Justice and Police collection:

> what transfixes me is the way many of the images flare like a struck match, and then glare almost hurtfully for a time before dimming down either to luminance or banality. I'm talking slightly metaphorically here - about the affect in the pictures. But I'm being literal too, insofar as the viewer really does feel something scorching, a burning surge of anxious energy plus a kind of glandular scald. The flare ignites on the surface of the image but radiates in the viewer's nervous system (Gibson _Negative Truth_ 31).

Gibson’s is an eloquent exposition of Roland Barthes’ _punctum_ - the subjective emotional hook that photographs elicit in some people. What is interesting from this quote is that it is in response to forensic photographs, those strangely liminal images that, once discarded by the legal system as defunct, or historians as uninformative, can take on another identity.

_Body in a Barrel_ [Plate 45] is the title I have given this example of a forensic photograph from Sante’s _Evidence_ (1992). Sante’s accompanying text reveals the image has no actual caption, nor is the photographer named (74). Sante’s text also reveals that the photograph was taken around 1918, the year of the car’s license plate. _Body in a Barrel_ was photographed at night. The image shows an eye-level view of the open end of a barrel. A body has been stuffed inside.
The soles of the shoes are visible together with other pieces of clothing. A rough cloth lies spread out on the grass at the barrel’s entrance. A car is parked in the background to the right of the barrel. The car reflects back the camera’s flash. A man stands to the left of the barrel; he is only just visible, almost out of the flash’s range. Sante contextualizes the image with an extract from the 1918 New York Times which describes the crime. The dead man was stabbed twenty-four times, his throat was cut and his body was pushed into a wine barrel consistent with Mafia killings at the time - a Mafia “way of taking care of snitches” (75). The photograph is one of evidence, it is functional and yet its aesthetic, through a balance of light and dark, its formal arrangement of shapes, and its different textual qualities make this a compelling image. The presence of an implied corpse, (we see just clothing) and the fact that the photograph was taken at night, generates a curiosity - how did this body, this person, end up here?

Another example from Evidence, also without caption and photographer, even precise date, is Man Shot at a Table [Plate 46]. This photograph has been taken inside a room, with the aid of a flash. A man has been shot as he sat at a table. The wound is on the right side of his face. The impact of the shot has pushed his head back, the angle of the photograph means that we see his neck and jaw line. This photograph is also remarkable for the small details: the dead man’s neatly tied tie; the picture askew on the back wall; an empty chair to the man’s right; there is a heavily textured curtain tied back revealing a closed window penetrated by bullet hole to the dead man’s left; the highly polished table, a curtain with a soft floral pattern, and two separate books and a fancy top hat lying, stranded, on the table top.

In both these images the sense of an untold story is overwhelming. These photographs represent the end of a life but also the beginning of an investigative process. The image, as a forensic photograph, was not manipulated for emphasis. The photographer recorded what was necessary - and yet a series of decisions, both aesthetic and pragmatic have led to specific visual choices. These forensic images have
now been resuscitated for viewing in a different context. The fact of their retrieval for a difference audience in art galleries and books is itself an interesting comment on contemporary death and representations of death. Sante again: “The pictures are silent, or are pools of silence within a commotion discernible only at their borders. They are dream images” (Sante 98).

French Policeman Alphonse Bertillon set in place a specifically isolated ‘forensic aesthetic’. He is known for being the first to construct a scientific method for identifying criminals in 1884, but he also supervised and regulated forensic photography, standardizing positions, lighting and distances. Bertillon devised a method for taking forensic photographs using a camera mounted on a nine-foot tripod focussed directly on the corpse, “thereby attaining a perspective that is unbiased, all-encompassing and, perhaps not accidentally, God-like in its hovering omniscience” (Wood Photo Mortis 19). This aesthetic has been modified somewhat, however, it still exists as a compilation of “phantasmic romance-world crimes, academic references and contemporary artwords” – this according to contemporary American writer and curator Ralph Rugoff. Rugoff argues that this aesthetic has inflected crime and the surrounding law enforcement agencies which have then moved through into the “discursive media of contemporary art of the past 20 years”. He suggests that the audience of such images act in a “comparable way to the stunned discoverer of a dismembered corpse, bewildered and perhaps repulsed by what they see” (Intra 12). The process is still one of discovery whether it is the actual corpse, or a photograph of a corpse as experienced by looking at these forensic images or the photographs of Serrano, Fox or Witkin.

The following quote describes forensic photographs of the dead by Sante from Evidence:

If photographs freeze time, these crystallize what is already frozen, the aftermath of violence, like a voice-print of a scream. If photographs extend life, in memory and imagination, these extend death, not as a
permanent condition the way tombstones do but as a stage, an active moment of inactivity. Their subjects are constantly in the process of moving toward obliteration. It is death upon death, from animal to document (60).

These images are of people who died through misadventure, and then photographed and immortalized, not as a remembrance, but through violence; images which both disturb but also attract our interest and curiosity, like car accidents. “We want to see what death looks like, yet we don’t want to. These are hidden photographs. Taboo subjects tend to encourage voyeurism” (Norfleet 30).

The photographs I have discussed do not belong within the traditional art canon, however the lines of definition are blurred and ill defined. As previously mentioned there have been art shows and books published of forensic and war photographs, which makes any distinctions difficult. The exhibition held in Sydney in 2000-2001, World Without End: Photography and the 20th Century is a case in point, which incidentally included photographs of war and death.

3:1:4 Documentary photographs

In this section I concentrate on some of the cultural assumptions attached to the documentary genre, because despite the “presumption of veracity that gives all photographs authority, interest, seductiveness, the work that photographs do is no exception to the usually shady commerce between art and the truth” (Sontag On Photography 6). War photographs and some memorial and forensic photographs could also be defined as documentary. It is a broad category with a long historical trajectory, some of which is relevant to this thesis.

Social documentary photographs have a tradition which was originally inherited from New York social reformer Jacob Riis (1849-1914). A “retrospective construction of the documentary mode traditionally” starts with Riis (Solomon-Godeau Photography at the Dock 173). Lodgers in a Crowded Bayard Street Tenement [Plate 47] from a glass-plate negative was taken by Riis between 1887 and 1898. The
photograph was made with the help of a flash, only just invented in 1887. The flash allowed Riis to photograph dark spaces and at night (Lewis Photojournalism 294). Riis photographed the poor in New York City, often startling them as they slept, as depicted in Lodgers in a Crowded Bayard Street Tenement. This photograph shows people living in poverty, crammed into a small room. The flash has captured the men as they sleep, two men propped up against the wall to the right of the image and another, to the centre of the image. Other sleeping bodies are apparent in the tumble of bedding.

American artist and writer Martha Rosler wrote a seminal critique of documentary photography In, Around, and Afterthoughts (1981). She notes that documentary photography has “come to represent the social conscience of liberal sensibility presented in visual imagery”. Its roots are in the early twentieth century American reform movements with photographers such as Riis. (71). Rosler quotes from Riis as he describes the effects of his photographs: “We used to go in the small hours of the mornings to the worst tenements...and the sights I saw there gripped by heart until I felt that I must tell of them or burst” (Rosler In, Around, and Afterthoughts 71). Riis photographed New York slums so as to reveal poverty and hardship through a medium of fact, the photograph. His photographs had an enormous impact because they were the first exposé photographs to be used for social change. Riis saw his mission very much as the revealer of secrets.

A problem, as Rosler describes it, is that Riis, and others documentary photographers who followed, assumed that once seen, once secrecy had been exposed, the wrongs would be put right. This attitude did not allow for the possibility that the wrongs were “fundamental to the system that tolerated them”. Rosler comments that documentary photography has “been much more comfortable in the company of moralism than wedded to a rhetoric or program of revolutionary politics” (Rosler In, Around, and Afterthoughts 72). Photographs on their own do not reveal secrets or bring about change. That is only possible though the linkage of revelation with other wider aspects of society. This is potentially a repercussion
of projective identification, as artists respond to disowned or rejected cultural issues.

The original impetus of Riis, and the photographers who followed him, was one of exposé in order to bring about change. This impetus is still visible in the work of Sebastião Salgado. Although Salgado is not naïve nor simplistic in his approach, his photographs reference past socially challenging agendas such as Riis’ to the informed viewer.

Rosler’s analysis of the documentary image fits comfortably with other photographic critics, including Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes and John Tagg, and more recently Vicki Goldberg and Abigail Solomon-Godeau who have all contributed significantly to the field. The cumulative effect of these texts questions the position and objectivity of the photographer. This contribution creates a social awareness, tools for deconstruction and analysis which in turn creates a context for the reading of documentary images.

A problematic characteristic of documentary photography is the potential for the photographer to becomes invisible, sacrificed to the content of the photograph which then appears as innocent of aesthetic construction. “The silencing of the photographer is, it seems, a condition of the production of the documentary photograph” (Scott The Spoken Image 79). In other words, the production of the image effaces the photographer’s individuality and agenda. In the Riis image, Riis’ agenda was eclipsed by the impact of revelation at the time of the photograph’s original publication. Contemporary theorists, such as Rosler, Tagg and Scott have drawn attention to this dynamic, however the content of documentary photographs often succeeds in seducing and swinging attention away from unidentified agendas to the content.

The photograph carries with it enormous contingencies of truth and revelation. It carries all the promises hidden in the heart of those who look at a corpse. Where has the person gone? What is the truth of death? What is now revealed about life? If the viewer looks at the photograph
of the dead for long enough perhaps this death will divulge and disclose a secret. As American critic C. Tartt Jr. claims:

> we take photographs of the dead, and we look closely at them because of their authority. We simply want to see what death looks like. We do so in the hope that closeness may attenuate horror, that knowing may come through seeing, and that from the authority of proximity may come understanding, even eventually acceptance (Tartt na).

I have outlined the specific ways death has been aestheticized in a broad sense, and, photographically, as a way of preparing the theoretical ground for the analysis of art photographs of the dead. An awareness of genres, historical and contemporary is also an awareness of potential assumptions and naturalizations, which both allow for the presence of secrecy, but which also permit the transference of projective identifications.

The following section is focused specifically on postmortem images photographed by artists. These photographs are not taken as evidence of death, or war or crime, even though they use many of the same aesthetic conventions. They deliberately engage with representing death as a universal human experience, one cloaked in secrecy and shrouded in mystery.
3.2 Art photographs of the dead

“All photographs are memento mori” (Sontag *On Photography* 15).

To photograph a loved one after death is one thing; to photograph a Jewish corpse on liberation in 1945 is another, as are photographs being currently aired from the Iraqi conflict; however, to photograph the body of a stranger for the purposes of art is an extraordinary cultural gesture, a gesture congested by taboos and secrecy around death.

In this section I look at the photographs of a series of photographic artists, beginning with Jeffrey Silverthorne and including a further analysis of the photographs of Andre Serrano. I contrast these images with those of Rudolf Schafer and Hannah Wilke. These artists all approach the same theme, the dead or dying body, but with different agendas. The analysis of these photographers in turn pave the way for a more concentrated analysis of Sebastião Salgado and Joel Peter Witkin. My purpose for including these images is to provide examples of images which engage with secrecy dynamics. This engagement is predominantly demonstrated by the conundrum of concealing to reveal. These artists also participate in projective identification dynamics at various levels of intensity.

In the previous section I examined the genres of photographs of the dead – memento mori, war, forensic and other documentary images. These genres were themselves deeply

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While writing this thesis my father-in-law died after a long protracted illness. When my husband (who is also a photographer) and I sat with his body, I thought of the postmortem photographs I was analyzing. The last thing either of us wanted to do at that moment, or since, was to take his photograph. My brother took a photograph of my sister’s corpse, which I have tucked away. I even have a sense of ambivalence about keeping it, but I can’t quite manage to throw it away.
influenced by previous conventions of the painted images of the dead and dying which created visual patterns of representation, assumed ways of looking at the dead. These patterns of representation included depicting children as if asleep, and heroic images of those who died battle.

The artists who challenge the secrecy around death, either intentionally or otherwise, do so within these structures. At times the boundaries of these established structures have been challenged and then ruptured, specifically exemplified by a group of photographic artists in the 1970’s who burst into a social climate where the taboos around death had been firmly cemented by the previous years of international war and violence. Their impact was tremendous.

This group of rebellious artists included American photographer Jeffrey Silverthorne (1946-). His disturbing postmortem images confronted the shrouded secrecy around death. Silverthorne is the “first photographer to exhibit pictures of cadavers in a morgue” (Thornton quoted in Silverthorne 1). He tested the suppression of discussing death openly without caricature or cliché, clichés which belong to a death saturated media. E. Annie Proulx writing in a special edition of the photographic journal Aperture entitled Dark Days: Mystery, Murder, Mayhem (2000), comments that despite the persistence of the taboo against death, photographs have found “chinks in the armour” and that since the 1970’s “there has been an explosion of photographic interest in images of death and the grotesque, with scores of books and exhibitions of work in the so-called ’post-mortem genre’” (30).

The photographic conventions established by Bertillon, that were used by professional photographers who took forensic postmortem photographs until early in the twentieth century, are the reference points for the postmortem artists who created such an upheaval in the 1970s, the explosion Proulx refers to. At this time, despite the horror images of the liberated Nazi camp inmates and other horrific images of war, or perhaps because of them, western society was deeply embedded in a widespread taboo on death. Within this context
these postmortem photographs were very confronting. They still are.

Jeffrey Silverthorne’s *Morgue Work: Boy Hit by Car* [Plate 48] (1972-1974, silver gelatin, 17 1/2 x 14”) resonates with both memorial and forensic postmortem photographs. Silverthorne, however has lifted it out of both genres – thus unhinged it takes on another set of readings. This little boy is suddenly anonymous, uprooted, and not just by his sudden death. The image that holds him in a constant state of death has a rawness, a challenging, even combatitative edge. This is a beautiful child, with the shock of his own death still on his face.

*Morgue Work: Boy Hit by Car* depicts a small boy, perhaps around four years old, from the upper chest. His hair is tousled and unkempt. There is evidence on his face of trauma – blotches of blood. His eyes are closed but his mouth is slightly open. His lips are clotted with blood, he may have died from internal injuries. Silverthorne has photographed the boy from above so that the viewer looks down, as if on a sleeping child. The photograph could even replicate the experience of parents identifying the body of their son. The boy is centrally positioned in the image. There are no peripheral or distracting details – just the boy. Silverthorne’s image conceals much and yet it remains an image of revelation in the same way that Fox and Serrano’s images both conceal and reveal.

In the taboo environment of the early 1970s images such as *Boy Hit by Car* must have appeared both deeply shocking but also perhaps an enormous relief – the relief of seeing the truth, of seeing behind the curtain or the door. There are no more layers, no more barriers, nothing else to see, except perhaps the concealments indicative of secrecy. It is also a black and white photograph which, as is the case with many black and white photographs, gives it a documentary inflection. These representations carry a “particular potency because of death’s double position as anomalous, marginal, repressed, and at the same time masterful, central, everywhere manifest” (Goodwin 19).
Jeffrey Silverthorne’s *Morgue Work: Home Death*, [Plate 49] (1972-1974, silver gelatin, 17 1/2 x 14") is another example from the same series. No points of rescue detract the eye from the central force of the face which takes up the entire image as in Serrano’s *Jane Doe, Killed by the Police*. Silverthorne has left no softness in this image, as in *Boy Hit by Car*. The photograph is taken from an unusual and disturbing angle and shows the head of an elderly man, looking down on his face from the top of his head. He is quite obviously dead unlike the *memento mori* photographs previously discussed. The man’s mouth is starkly open and exposes the upper line of his teeth. His eyes are also open but glazed over and lifeless. The camera has moved in so close to the face that only the mouth, moustache and lower nose are in sharp focus. The other features of the face become more blurred as the eye travels out from the central focus. The lines of the mouth and moustache form a circular movement drawing the eye to the centre of the image back to the open mouth which is a ghastly black space. Silverthorne has taken a horror exposé image of death. He has structured the photograph to give maximum impact and discomfort. The closely cropped framing of the face is an unusual composition, a proximity which someone alive would find impossibly uncomfortable.

Despite being so confrontational these postmortem photographs rely on a particular aesthetic – these are not forensic images. They borrow from and reference forensic photographs and memorial photographs but they are telling a particular story because they were photographed with the language of, and within the safety of art. Artists, such as Silverthorne, employ specific compositional devices, camera angles, use of specific focal points and other aesthetic subtleties as a way of conforming to their culture’s routes of reference. Their intention is not necessarily to record but to shock, explore, perhaps to transform; and to present the results of that process as art. In an interview about these images, Silverthorne said that he wanted to “explain something”. He said:

*I also thought: maybe I will learn if see this.*
*I did not know that ‘this’ was so many things.*
*You can remove and insulate yourself with a*
camera, or you can use it to get closer, to get further inside the subject. ...I learned early on that strong subject matter does not automatically make a strong picture (Silverthorne Photographs 5).

By wanting to ‘explain something’, Silverthorne is expressing his inner confrontation with what he was actually seeing and photographing – the corpse – and, the implications of “this’ being so many things’. ‘This’ is, in part a recognition of death; the secrecy around death; the confusion of the intermixture of revelation and concealment; and what is gained through the photograph, but also what is lost, what is viscerally unavailable through the image.

Morgue Work: Woman Who Died in Her Sleep (Plate 50) (1972-1974, silver gelatin, 17 1/2 x 14”) by Silverthorne, now over thirty years old, has not lost any of its power to both confront and intrigue. It epitomizes the dilemma and conflict of depicting the dead with dignity, the assessment of which is an underlying sub-text throughout my thesis. Woman Who Died in Her Sleep is a photograph of the upper body of a young woman. Her left hand is behind her ear, her elbow languidly arched above her head, creating a visual pathway back to her face. The woman’s face is beautiful, even in death. Compositionally and aesthetically this image is similar to Boy Hit by Car. Both images portray the finality and difficulty of death through the softness of beauty. The trauma and death of the subjects of these two photographs subverts the beauty of their depiction in the image.

In Woman Who Died in Her Sleep the fact this is an image of death is visually relayed by a rude stretch of stitching which spreads up her body, splitting into a Y shape under her neck. It is this stitching which situates her as a corpse, even as her face suggests so many other dimensions. Again, the viewer is positioned looking down on her – we are voyeurs of her death. Cary Loren describes this image in Journey to the End of Sight (1993), an essay from a book on Silverthorne’s work. She sees Woman Who Died in Her Sleep as Silverthorne’s signature piece (Loren 2). Loren writes that no “other photograph (or painting) has so powerfully
captured the combined embrace of sexuality and death...a vision of excess, an entombed document of beauty and attraction, simultaneously repulsive and forbidden” (2-3). Loren’s description encapsulates the attraction and repulsion, the beauty and the terrible aspects, not only to this image but to the actual phenomena of death. “Here life is pushed to its furthest (2). Silverthorne pushes the photograph to its limit in the same way that Géricault did with his studies of severed heads more than a century earlier,

Part of the capacity of Woman Who Died in Her Sleep to push photography to this limit is that Silverthorne has built on and then subverted traditional modes of representing the female figure. The composition of Woman Who Died in Her Sleep recalls an earlier nude photograph: Torso [Plate 51] (1907) by American photographer Clarence White 1871-1925) and Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946). Torso’s composition and texture is mirrored closely by Silverthorne. A significant difference between the two images is that Torso is taken of a standing woman – the viewer looks across at her eye-to-eye. In Woman Who Died in Her Sleep the viewer looks down, the copse is prone, vulnerable and exposed.

Silverthorne reports on his own morgue work:

This project began out of a documentary concern which diminished as I realized I could not fully understand what I was confronting. There was simply too much there. So rather than objectify an operation and presume a conclusion, I let the pictures become more personally rooted in internal poetics, logic and music. I tried not to forget what was in front of me, the fact of the corpse, the border that asks the other question. I wanted to be a witness (Silverthorne Photographs 7).

Silverthorne acknowledges the boundary of photography’s capacity to represent, at which point the photograph becomes one of ‘poetics, logic’, even music. His ruminations imply how instinctive, even irrational the creative process can be. Projective identification is one way of articulating
some of Silverthorne’s spoken (and visual) attempts at describing the ineffable, and also the social secrecy around the ineffable.

Andres Serrano’s series of photographs entitled The Morgue also takes the corpse as starting point, but with a very different approach to Silverthorne. Serrano uses a large scale colour format, to photograph close up fragments of the body. Silverthorne’s bodies engage with us partly through confrontation, Serrano’s images also confront, but do so more by suggestion and implication. Serrano comments on his work: “For me, art is a moral and spiritual obligation that cuts across all manner of pretence and speaks directly to the soul” (Weintraub Andre Serrano 164). Serrano’s vocabulary is different but his intention is similar to Silverthorne’s poetics. Both artists are circling around expressing the mystery and ineffability of death. From The Morgue series, Serrano’s photograph Knifed to Death II: Detail [Plate 52] (1993, 125.7 x 152.4 cm) shows just the left hand of a person who had died by knife wounds. The hand has several cuts in it and the fingertips are covered by ink; presumably the person was finger-printed. By just showing a hand, Serrano invites questions of narrative: How did this person die? The isolation of a hand, sharply colour contrasted to the richly black background, concentrates the photograph’s focus on the eloquence of the hand’s gestural qualities. The fingers are relaxed and elegant, the ring finger is slightly bent. The wounded hand - this fragment of a body - articulates the poignant separation and loss which accompanies death. The capacity to represent human suffering symbolically is part of the task of artists.29

In an article from Art and Design (1997): Andre Serrano: The Sea of Possibility, Jim Harold describes Serrano’s large-scale prints as exploiting the “shock of verisimilitude”. The “photograph’s facticity is overwhelming” (Harold 10). Harold notes that Serrano shocks by revealing what otherwise

29 It takes concentration and awareness to separate out implications embedded in the title of this image from popular culture assumptions and to direct focus on the fact that this hand belonged to a particular individual who had been brutally murdered. This is not a still from a gangster film.
would be concealed or hidden in contemporary western cultures. He writes that our connection:

to these images is an uneasy one, we are caught between the compelling presence of these representations, their knowing allusions, and an increasing consciousness of trespassing, of seeing something we should not, of being complicit with what one comes to feel could be seen as an intrusive and disrespectful act of voyeurism” (Harold 10).

This dilemma is commonly experienced when viewing photographs of the dead. There is a sense of the forbidden and a deep sense that we are violating something intensely intimate and personal. We are in fact violating internalized social prohibitions, looking at what ‘should’ be kept secret.

Rudolf Schafer’s series entitled Dead Faces [Plates 53 and 54] (1989) demonstrate a different treatment of the dead again, more reminiscent of memento mori photographs. He visited a morgue over a period of time and, with the consent of relatives, photographed ordinary people who had died ordinary deaths. Schafer photographed just the face. The collective sense is one of peace and stillness - almost banality. The images, however, are just pulled back from banality by a gentle aesthetic, which manages to hold, almost seduce the viewer into feeling like something can be learned about life by looking at these images of death.

Dead Faces: Man depicts the peaceful face of a young man, a few days stubble on his chin. His curly dark hair is ruffled around his head. His heart-shaped face is accentuated by the V of the sheets at his neck. His face shows the trace of a smile, as does the woman’s face in the other photograph I have included from Dead Faces. The woman’s face is framed by sheets. This image is notable for its defined tonal contrasts, and the gentle positioning of the woman’s hand, resting on her upper chest underneath her chin in a gesture which articulates the woman’s nature. Schafer writes that:

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We are constantly bombarded with newspaper and television pictures of catastrophes and wars - violent, extreme pictures - but we defuse one of the implications of these images - our own mortality - with the thought that nothing so extreme will ever happen to us. With these pictures you simply don't have that option (Schafer 193).

Schafer is confronting, not through shock but through mundanity, through the ordinary and prosaic. He is photographing the death that most of us will die. Schafer had the clear agenda of wanting to reveal and to initiate an exploration of death in the viewer. It is interesting that he has chosen to just photograph the face, (as in Serrano’s Jane Doe, Killed by Police and Silverthorne’s Home Death), as if that was in some way the key.

Perhaps what Schafer is trying to represent, to photograph, is Barthes photographic punctum, that subjective “prick and shock of recognition” (Hirsch Family Frames 4). “The photographic punctum is double-edged: death triumphant and defeated at the same time” (Shawcross 63). Barthes senses his own death in every photograph. This challenges, pierces “through the banality - the tame, civilized, domesticated effects - that the mediation of culture has provided for photographs almost since the beginning of the medium’s existence” (Shawcross 63).

Hannah Wilke is a photographer who imaged her own body while she was dying of cancer. Wilke had previously made a series of six black and white photographs as part of an installation from 1979-1983 called Selma Butter (24) (Mommy) [Plate 55] which were taken of her sick and dying mother. The example included shows her mother smiling, cheekily revealing her shoulder. She is clearly very ill. In a catalogue of a retrospective exhibition of Wilke’s work Joanna Frueh writes that in Selma Butter Wilke was depicting an image unexpectedly charged with eroticism: “Eroticism - the energy of living - comes first, for that is Wilke’s aesthetic from which formal beauty follows (Frueh 79). For Wilke, photographing her mother was a way of keeping her mother alive. This energy translates into the image through
the informal pose of the mother. She is sitting on a couch which frames her slight figure. The couch supplies a textual contrast in the image. The mother is supported by pillows, her bald head covered by a hat. In many ways this image is formally similar in composition to a family snap. Wilke has employed this photographic genre, but in black and white to document her relationship with her mother. Wilke has taken an unsentimental portrait of a beautiful old woman facing her death gracefully.

The photographic series of her mother eerily prefigures a series of photographs Wilke took of own illness while she was dying of cancer - *Intra-Venus* [Plate 56] (1992-1993, chromagenic super-gloss prints, 181.6 x 120.6 cm) a decade later. Wilke’s large scale colour photographs show how her body had been ravaged by the effects of her illness, chemotherapy and debilitating medications (Wacks na). The image included shows Wilke lying in bed, attached to drips - she is scarred, bloated, depleted and bald. The white pillows and the white sheets behind and beside her contrast with the colour of her body, still alive. Her previously beautiful face and body are gone, now deaths, but remembered in these images of dying. Through the images in *Intra-Venus* Wilke situates death in the body. The body is the site of suffering and death.

Wilke’s large scale colour self portraits are in contrast to the previous black and white images of her mother. It is as if Wilke wanted to express her process of suffering and death as directly as possible. By imaging her mother’s death and then her own, Wilke changes the visual landscape around death, showing aspects of that process which are usually kept behind closed doors.

Just to look at postmortem photographs implicates the viewer “in a highly structured pattern of vision and representation”. Many theorists have noted what Caroline Brothers puts this way: meaning is not only in the photographic surface, but “in the relationship between the photograph and the matrix of culturally specific beliefs and assumptions to which it refers. The photograph is the site at which these ‘invisible’ beliefs are made manifest” (23). To look at these images, to take them into our
consciousness, is therefore to participate in the third phase of the projective identification dynamic and to then respond to the artist’s assimilation of the suffering, pain and fear generated by death and dying. This assimilation process, structured around the concealment/revelation paradox helped to change the culture’s perception of death, particularly from the 1970s on.

Part of the social currency of these images is the artist’s engagement with secrecy dynamics, by revealing what has been concealed: that is, by revealing and exposing those disowned hidden aspects of death so vividly demonstrated by photographing the dead body. In different ways artists such as Silverthorne and Serrano have introjected society’s disowned and then displaced feelings and reactions to death and dying. They have re-worked those social impulses, through their photographs. In the process they have transformed the fear and pain around death allowing society to respond differently.

To conclude: Silverthorne, Serrano, Fox and Schafer all photograph the dead body, or parts of the body. The visual aesthetic in these images is sophisticated and rich, referencing and building on previous western imagery. Their images exhibit secrecy through absence – Serrano and Schafer photographing body fragments; through confrontation, showing what is shocking and ‘what should be kept hidden’ – Silverthorne, Wilke and Fox; and through revelation – all these images work by revealing concealment, revealing secrecy. The photographs of the dead taken by artists are energized by isolating aspects of human life experiences, previously marginalized as disgusting, forbidden, private or taboo.
3.3 Photographs without Barthes’s punctum

The photographs I have chosen to discuss all carry with them allusions to or are embedded within, secrecy dynamics – the conundrum of concealing to reveal. Often what is present can be seen through absence. Silverthorne’s comment that strong subject matter does not make strong images is borne out by the following images. I include analysis of these two images, because for me, they do not carry symbolic richness or layering, nor an engagement with secrecy, or a necessary profundity. I analyze these two ‘failed’ images as a way to access part of the particular aesthetisization which I argue is fundamental to the revelation/concealment paradox, and hence to secrecy.

**Goodbye Mum** [Plate 57] (1980) by Australian photographer Sharon Green is the first in a series of six photographs Green took through the process of grieving the death of her mother. The contrived staging, the addition of the romantic scripted text, the inclusion of other photographs, a grainy photographic texture and split screen devices are some of the visual overplays that prevent this images from communicating convincingly. The photographs leak too much clichéd information which is without a sense of engagement with death and grieving in its more universal sense.

Another image which gives too much information, but in a different way and using different photographic techniques is **Book of the Dead** [Plate 58] (c.2004, C-type) by contemporary Russian photographer Arsen Sawadow. This image shows the bodies of eight or nine people, including a little baby propped up on a push toy. All the other bodies are displayed or arranged in various poses. One man is randomly dressed, but with only one sock and no shoes – he is leaning against a ladder. Adding to a sense of the random are a series of possessions, a heater, a pair of polka-dotted green shoes, a vinyl record, a deck chair, reading lamp and mugs, bottles and baskets. It is a melee of misery, without a retrieving
aesthetic, nor a noticeable respect of those individuals who had died.

Robert Dessaix in a chapter entitled *Death to Art: Reflections on AIDS, Art and Susan Sontag* from his collection of essays (*and so forth*) (1998), writes about what he terms ‘art of value’. For him this term refers to art “which produces such abundant configurations of meaning, such resonance within a culture that they take their place in its imaginative landscape” (Dessaix 273). Dessaix has not found this resonance with most of the art produced in response to AIDS because it tends to be too politicized and literal. Dessaix argues for an art rich in new empowering metaphors. Blurting out passionate cries is not enough. Artists need to embed their artwork within rich metaphors, and layer the work with reference to significant human experiences, to create ‘art of value’. For visual artists this layering of meaning is conveyed through the physical qualities in the actual image, such as balances of light and dark and compositional arrangements, as well as content.

Art of value is different from art with *punctum*, the latter being an individual response, and yet the images that I have chosen to analyze, which for me have *punctum*, have also produced ‘abundant configurations of meaning’. This resonance is missing in the Green and Sawadow photographs, but is abundantly clear in the qualitatively different Salgado and Witkin images discussed in the following chapters.

The conjunction between photography, death and secrecy is a potent one. The photograph seems to establish the truth in a volatile and contestable way – even of death. The photographic evidence refutes the cultural invisibility of death. Taboos around death are simultaneously reinforced and ruptured by the photographs which do have Barthes *punctum*. Something of the feel of this paradox is represented by Franz Kafka in these words quoted by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* in that “we photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds” (53). And we want them ‘out of our mind’ due to an inner discord and unsettlement.
I have surveyed the genres of photographs of the dead, in an effort to fortify the connections between photography and death. The fact that photography links so substantially to issues of reality and truthfulness, and that death is by definition unknowable, fills the combination of the two with tension and the potential for understanding. Many of these images disturb at a deep unspeakable level, and generate feelings past words, feelings of human suffering but also the potentials for growth.

As will be seen in the following chapters, projective identification allows for the possibility of a transformation, for a redemption of both secrecy and experiences around death, through confronting images of death and dying. The etymology of the word symbol, which comes from the Greek *symbolon*, means a reuniting. A rupture or break in continuity, like a death “is at the origin of the need for the symbol within reach of everyone”. For something to be reunited there has to have been a rupture. Originally the word ‘symbol’ came from a piece of terra cotta which was broken and the segments separated. Later, “when the descendants meet, the other piece of terra cotta will fit, more or less, in the break of this discontinuity, to symbolize alliance at the very time of the catastrophe of a departure or a conflict” (Davoine 71). Both parts can come together in the symbol: the photograph and the single text which expresses both concealment and revelation.
Part 4

Projective Identification

4:1 Salgado and projective identification

“It’s true that the world is what we see, but all the same we must learn to see it” (Merleau-Ponty).

In the thesis so far I have defined secrecy, particularly in terms of a concealment/revelation paradox, and have introduced the notion of projective identification. I have also established the links between secrecy, death and photography. In the previous two sections I have outlined the importance of how death is aestheticized and represented particularly through photography. This exposition was necessary for the artist’s role in projective identification to be coherently explored.

As Roland Barthes states: “Death must be somewhere in a society; if it is no longer (or less intensely) in religion, it must be elsewhere” (Barthes Camera Lucida 92). Remembering Blier’s insight that secrecy is there on the surface, readily available in art once the deciphering mechanisms are known; and, concomitantly that secrecy is a meta-communication with aspects of the secret filtered into society; is to actually situate and contextualize an aspect of projective identification. An understanding of this psychoanalytic communication dynamic unravels and uncovers secrecy strategies, exposing secrecy around death. I argue that artists such as Serrano, Fox, Salgado and Witkin carry a projective identification, elicited by a society unable to process the suffering evoked by death. This section follows the concealment/revelation paradox, indexical of secrecy dynamics as it translates into
projective identification. I demonstrate how projective identification operates by firstly outlining the three separate stages of projective identification building on previous descriptions. Some of my descriptions are repetitive, but I have done so because the subject matter is complex, and difficult.

I then demonstrate the different stages of projective identification through an analysis of a selection of Salgado’s photographs. According to Ogden, projective identification can be most clearly understood by dividing the dynamic into three stages (Ogden On Projective Identification 358). The key to a reading of Salgado’s images is his particular adherence to specific aesthetics, which I have touched on in previous sections. I include references to these aesthetics and photographic conventions – these are Salgado’s routes of reference which are an essential component in projective identification.

4:1:1 Phase one – the displacement of unwanted feelings.

The psychoanalytic process of projective identification, is one way to describe how difficult feelings are processed. In contemporary western society, for instance, responses to death are often suppressed and hidden, concealed, and then trapped in secrecy dynamics. To reveal this secrecy through confronting images of death, photographic artists adopt and then expose rejected feelings – the hidden suffering. The process of exposure reveals secrecy, as well as issues around death. It also changes, metabolizes the suffering back to society in ways which allow for reintegration and possible redemption by affecting the original displaced emotions and feelings.

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30 I initially found the easiest way of understanding how projective identification worked was to apply it to my own relationships, particularly close family dynamics. That process not only helped me understand projective identification in a broad way, but it also made sense of very dense interpersonal relationships which had previously remained impervious to anything resembling clarity.
In Part One of the thesis I outlined some of the reasons there is so much secrecy around death. Fear was a pivotal motivation. Phase one of projective identification is also in response to fear. Society reflects its response to death, so when numbers of individuals experience death as too painful or fearful, that response is registered in the culture. Phase one of projective identification is generated by an unconscious distancing and disowning of feelings. These feelings are then introjected out from society into artists.

After suffering has been split off society still (unconsciously) experiences a sense of guilt and shame at its incapacity to assimilate the suffering and distress which comes from trauma. Feeding this sense is a natural pull toward revelation nurtured by secrecy dynamics (Krystal 86-87). The natural movement toward revelation within secrecy dynamics is re-routed into projection. Feelings of guilt and shame do not necessarily lead to dealing with the original disquieting feelings.

In other words, dissociation from pain does not make it go away. "Freud made the point, again and again, that a traumatic event does not entirely disappear. It insists" (Ragland 80). This is true for society as well as individuals. The impetus for introjection comes from this ‘insistence’, in part driven by guilt and shame and the need to separate from difficult feelings. Society also experiences a movement towards integration - even redemption. According to a team of psychologists led by Tom Pyszczynski in Why Do People Need Self-Esteem (2004), people have an inbuilt natural movement towards health. They conclude that: “Although the specific contingencies through which self-esteem is attained vary across cultures and individuals, the underlying need for self-esteem is posited to be a cultural universal” (Pyszczynski 440). This psychological mechanism towards health is mirrored by the physical body.

Projective identification can only operate with artists because of their special social status. Western cultures expect artists to express suffering and pain, and other
issues of deep human significance. “Art lives inside of issues central to personal, social, and cultural experiences, and when works bring new perspectives to bear of these issues, we are asked to reconsider our usual interpretations of them” (Perin 175). It has been assumed that such suffering belongs only to the individual artist. Even when artists express ideas of a political nature, their art is often theorized as an extension of the idea of the personal being political. The fact that society has allowed a special niche for artists to be creative and expressive, demonstrates a collusive aspect to the projective process. It is evidence of the pressure exerted by society on artists to express rejected feelings. Or, as Washington State University academic Deborah Haynes explains in The Vocation of the Artist (1997): the world of images requires informed artists for they bring “a unique perspective to the task of interpreting and reshaping the world” (Haynes 91). Haynes describes the western historical and philosophical primary tenets of art leading into Romanticism: that the artist is “sovereign in the sphere of art”; that artistic freedoms are essential; that the true artist is primarily concerned with aesthetics; that aesthetic ideals are achieved by expressing an internal vision; and that creative imagination needs to dominate rationality (Haynes 108-109). These notions still influence and underpin expectations of artists in contemporary western society as influences from Romanticism became translated into the modernist agenda of the early twentieth century.31

In psychoanalytic terms, derived from psychoanalyst Hanna Segal’s interpretation and contribution to psychoanalysis made by Melanie Klein, “the capacity to mourn” is both pivotal to the artist’s work, but also to the viewer’s

31 Perhaps society does not feel the same impetus to own and process difficult feelings because of the presence of artists. This would be similar to the child’s response to the good enough mother showing the example of expressing and dealing with difficult feelings well. The child may then feel less compunction to repress and disavow. Artists own or express difficult feelings for society - thereby, artists become the good enough mother for cultural suffering, seeming to relieve society of such responsibilities.
“aesthetic response” (Bell Psychoanalysis and Culture 12). In this way the profundity of an artwork is generated by:

the artist’s capacity to face the pain and guilt inherent in his (sic) perception of damage done to...[himself] and, through his creation of the work, to give substance to this struggle and to overcome it, the work itself being an act of reparation. We the audience are gripped by such works as we identify with the author’s confrontation with the pain of his shattered internal world and obtain reassurance from his ability, through intense psychic work, to overcome it and depict it in his work of art (Bell Psychoanalysis and Culture 12).

The artwork in this example, is the result of a ‘working through’ process as expressions in art attempt to portray society’s ‘capacity to mourn’.

4:1:2 Phase two – the introjection of disowned feelings from society into the artistic sensibility

As evidenced by an analysis of the photographs of both Salgado and Witkin, the displaced feelings of pain and suffering are projected by the society, into art and artists. This process is assumed and naturalized within contemporary culture. Individual artists chose the role of artist partly because it does carry with it the responsibilities and actions that come with projective identifications. Many other individual options are available to Salgado for instance, to express a response to global suffering. The role of the artist is quite particular, and that of photographer even more so. The artist has the projective identification dynamic loaded into his or her social responsibility, felt as part of the role of artist in contemporary western society.

32 Which is not to say that projective identification is the only source of profundity in art, but it does work the other way around. Projective identifications do produce art which is layered and symbolically rich in the ways described by Dessaix.
Negative responses do not disappear once they are disavowed. The act of disavowing and disowning is quite different from ignoring. Using Salgado as an example: society displaces its suffering in response to death and trauma into the cultural realm of creative expression. Salgado then reacts to the unconscious, but now institutionalized pressure exerted by society. He then responds as if the responsibility to deal with this suffering was his own. Just as the mother responds to the child’s acting out, as if they were her own feelings, society seeks a congruence for responding to the responsibility of suffering from the artist. This is one of the defining characteristics of a projective identification process. Society projects the suffering into cultural expressions and by doing so maintains its contact with the suffering.

Ogden states that the “fantasy of putting a part of oneself into another person and controlling them from within reflects a central aspect of projective identification” achieved through complex and multiple levels of communication (Ogden On Projective Identification 358). To transpose the projective identification displacement into artistic expression in society, society senses that artists experience their (society’s) feelings of loss and trauma. This is not just because society has displaced these emotions, but because such feelings have been transported into the artistic sensibility. Artists have the feelings for society: artists hold, contain and then express digested painful responses. Society acts as if the suffering belongs to the artistic sensibility rather than to actually own, feel and process these difficult feelings within social institutions or rituals. Fundamentally, artists are “able to say things and to act in ways that would normally not be tolerated” (Haynes 133-134).

Salgado, for instance, has responded to the need for society to process the trauma resulting from global displacement and pain. Salgado, as a committed humanist photojournalist, picks up the projection: “One cannot project into a hollow shell” (Stringer na). He then carries the suffering as if it were his own. He does this in part, as a response to the pressure emanating from a society which has disowned these
feelings as too difficult but which still needs to feel in control of these feelings even at an unconscious level. Salgado alluded to this dynamic in an interview on Migrations with British theorist John Berger (1926-), when he said: “We speak a lot about statistics. We don’t speak about real feelings [which is] part of the reason I take the pictures in this book. But we don’t speak about feelings, we don’t speak about real people. We don’t speak about the real suffering of people” (Salgado Spectre of Hope).

4:1:3 Phase three – the processing of the introjection which is then fed back to society

Once the projection has been internalized by artists such as Salgado, the next phase in the projective identification process is determined by how each individual artist responds. Because Salgado is unique he will process the projection absolutely in his own way. Salgado takes photographs and uses the photographic process as a way of metabolizing the projected suffering which he has internalized from society. He responds, via a feeling of conscience, to disavowed suffering and trauma.

Salgado also expresses his personal and individual response to global suffering. He feels a sense of responsibility but with his own particular agenda, only part of which is publicly unavailable. He observes that: “You take photographs with your culture. I take photos with my father and my mother, with my village in Brazil, with all my friends. I take photos with my ideology” (Salgado Looking Back at You).

Ogden notes that in the third phase the feelings are not just modified and fed back to the projector. What happens is the recipient, Salgado in this instance, significantly alters the interaction thus “generating a new way of experiencing the old psychological content”. He does this in part by noting the origin of the disowned feelings. Not only is the content or feelings around death changed but also the “intersubjective context can be modified”. A different relationship between society and artists is an
inherent part of that shift (Ogden The Primitive Edge of Experience 25-26).

Salgado is an interesting example of internalized projection because he has taken a global perspective on suffering and reintroduced it back into western culture through photographic exhibitions such as Migrations. In this way, he has identified the projection, and processed it for society to re-assimilate or re-introject. Salgado comments that: "Even though I began taking pictures very late [in life] it was a way of communicating with the rest of the world, communicating by touching a human group" (Salgado Looking Back at You). As identified by the critical responses to Salgado in the following sections, western societies perceive him as an artist who is not only the carrier of suffering but who also has the capacity to formulate suffering back to society through his images. He is therefore the equivalent of the good enough mother, the mother who can hold the difficult feelings for the child (society) until the feelings have been re-internalized and hopefully mastered.

While society turns away, Salgado, as photographer turns towards the suffering of the people he photographs. He is not rejecting their suffering. He writes in Migration that he photographed people during the worst period of their lives. "They were frightened, uncomfortable, and humiliated. Yet they allowed themselves to be photographed, I believe, because they wanted their plight to be made known. When I could, I explained to them that this was my purpose. Many just stood before my camera and addressed it as they might a microphone" (Salgado Migrations 7). It is almost as if Salgado’s eyes were the eyes of the rest of contemporary western society. He is a representative – a proxy. Salgado sees himself as a vector, linking "what has happened to those who were not there and trying to provoke a debate. In the whole flow of movement you are not the person with a message, you are part of all these things. Do this and you survive, do not do this and you die" (Hallett 132). For Salgado, photography is the way he preserves his ideology and that for him is survival.
Salgado works in a specific way, spending enough time with people until he feels able to photograph from the inside not the outside. He says that if "you spend two or three months in a place, a lot of things happen. People are married, people die. You don’t interfere. You wait for things to happen in front of you" (Pacelle 56). Salgado rejects the standard journalistic photographic process of speeding into disaster zones just long enough to photograph - but not long enough to be contaminated. Photographic critic Fred Richin, comments on the way Salgado approaches his work by recounting that during the three or four weeks Salgado was in one of the Ethiopian refugee camps, "over forty television teams reporting on the multitudes of starving and ill came and quickly went" - one crew from the United States spent two hours (Richin The Lyric Documentarian 146-147). By working the way he does, Salgado risks interpersonal exchanges, risks feelings of overwhelm and compassion fatigue, risks all the dangers that propel others into a hasty retreat or a desperate repression.

Salgado specifically chooses the medium of photography, a medium saturated with ideas of ‘truthfulness’. By doing so, he validates the truth of suffering, retrieving it from a western social unconsciousness and secrecy. To carry unconsciously transmitted projective identifications, and to then reintroduce these projections back into society through photographs adds a sense of acknowledgment to the suffering.

Photography could however have the opposite effect, that of distancing the viewer. Depending on their subjective response the original suffering is either validated or challenged. Because of the nature of projective identification the viewer can be both present and absent at the same time, and choose which feelings can be experienced safely. "The process of defence, communication, and psychological growth is sometimes thought of as a way of metabolizing indigestible experiences or of preserving valuable ones that the individual is afraid of destroying" (Morton na).

These three phases of projective identification also describe the paradox of concealment and revelation. As
feelings are rejected they become concealed, hidden. Then all the predictable responses to secrecy set in, such as protection and fear, but clues to notify the fact of the secret are also filtered out. The second phase of projective identification where the rejected, now concealed feelings, are unconsciously adopted by artists is still an invisible concealed process. The point of revelation is the last element of phase three where the image, as product of metabolization, is revealed back to its source (society). It has been taken from concealment and is now revealed. It is not only the context that is revealed, it is the fact of disownment, the fact of concealment, that makes it a paradox.

Ogden isolated three phases to projective identification but Salgado’s photographic process has four elements. The three phases are: the difficult feelings which are then rejected; the artists who respond to the pressure exerted by society to respond to these issues; and the artworks, which are the physical result of the metabolized feeling which are then reintroduced to society through such avenues as exhibitions. The fourth, ‘left over’ element belongs to the actual people being photographed. I address the presence of the photographed people and their place in the projective identification dynamic throughout the analysis in the following section, at the same time as describing the actual aesthetics which allow the communication of projective identification in Salgado’s images.
4:2 Salgado, Migrations and projective identification

“While respecting the facts of a situation, Salgado attempts to re-create, through visual metaphor, what he sees at its essential human drama – the invisible made visible” (Ritchin The Lyric Documentarian 147)

Projective identification both clarifies and enriches Salgado’s unique photographic agenda when understood in relation to his images. Salgado wants to retrieve the people in his photographs from the annihilation of ignorance and carelessness on the one hand, and from the impacts of frozen secrecy complexes on the other, both of which obliterate a genuine response to global suffering.

Many of these qualities are illustrated by Food Distribution Area in Kibumba, [Plate 59] a photograph taken in Zaire in 1994 from The African Tragedy section of Migrations (2000). This image shows the food distribution area designed to feed around one million refugees gathered around the same area near the camp at Kibumba (Salgado Migrations, Booklet 13). Food Distribution Area in Kibumba is an astonishingly beautiful image, Salgado took the photograph from a distant higher point, so that the viewer looks down on a vast network of people. The image is predominantly a landscape, the upper third shows a band of mountainous country covered in trees silhouetted in the mist, as if the sky was moving down, covering the land. The plains at the mountain’s base are dotted with groups of people who appear dark against the lighter tones of the ground. These dark/light tones form an irregular pattern which is in contrast to the misty mountains in the background. The grainy texture of the photograph emphasizes the neutrality of the people as a fundamental part of the land.
This image exhibits aspects of Salgado’s work which will be analyzed in this section such as, Salgado’s capacity to show great suffering and hardship, through beauty, and his ability to balance the necessary documentation of suffering to generate awareness of the problems, at the same time as creating art images of extraordinary aesthetic integrity. It also illustrates his techniques of aesthetic mastery which combine to communicate through specific routes of reference, allowing for the movement of projective identification.

Salgado sees himself as a photojournalist, with an exposé agenda. He wants his images to affect others, to provoke discussion and to show the suffering of ‘others’. Salgado uses quite specific photographic conventions and formats. At the same time, because of his aesthetic, his photographs are not read just as journalistic and exposé, but also as belonging in ‘high art’ institutions, art galleries and fine art tomes. The content and context of his photographs are both journalistic documentary, and also documentary art images.

There are two basic ways to access the projective identification dynamic in Salgado’s latest body of work Migrations; either through the work as a whole, or through individual photographs within that oeuvre. I firstly test my hypothesis against Migrations as a single unit, then in Part Five I look at specific images from Migrations which Salgado has taken of the dead and dying.

Connections to secrecy are expressed in these images in two ways; firstly through the mechanical codes of secrecy, that is, absences, and most notably the concealment/revelation paradox; and secondly through the traces of secrecy visible through the projective identification dynamic. The mechanical codes of secrecy are often the precursors or indications of projective identification. Both are referred to below as I analyze Migrations as a discrete artwork, followed by identifying Salgado’s quite particular visual aesthetic.

4:2:1 Observations of Migrations as a single discrete text
The undertaking of Migrations took Salgado six years during which time he travelled all over the world. The book documented an exhibition which travelled the world. It is divided into four sections: Migrants and Refugees: The Survival Instinct; The African Tragedy: A Continent Adrift; Latin America: Rural Exodus, Urban Disorder; and Asia: The World’s New Urban Face. Apart from a preface written by Salgado there is no text. In a separate booklet, Salgado wrote a brief description of each image. All the photographs from Migrations are black and white with unspecified dimensions. The photographs are untitled and are therefore distinguished only by page numbers.”

In Migrations Salgado put together a series of photographs of people on the move, usually against their own will. The book is compiled of images of refugees and other people displaced, or threatened with displacement, from the results of globalization as in Food Distribution Area in Kibumba. He has the clearly articulated agenda to document and exhibit the resultant suffering. Migrations is compiled of separate images which when combined in a book act as a single unit. The layout of the book allows for a particular context for each individual image. A narrative cohesive theme of displaced people, of the effects of globalization, runs through Migrations. Salgado as an economist is a particularly suitable artist for such a project.

Each image in Migrations carries so much narrative potential that the overall body of work at times feels almost overburdened. At the same time, this reflects the issues that Salgado is engaged with, the world is overburdened with the results of obscenely unequal levels of material opportunity. “Harrowing photographs do not inevitably lose their power to shock. But they are not much help if the task is to understand. Narratives can make us understand” (Sontag Regarding the Pain of Others 80).

Salgado’s point of view expressed through Migrations is that western driven globalization, a faceless corporate trend,

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33 Any titles attributed to Salgado’s photographs have been suggested by me purely for the purpose of identification.
has catastrophic results for people in poorer cultures – ‘the other’. He writes: “The dominant ideologies of the twentieth century – communism and capitalism – have largely failed us. Globalization is presented to us as a reality, but not as a solution. …In its rawest form, individualism remains a prescription for catastrophe” (Salgado Migrations, Booklet 15). Salgado’s motivation is to create a prior imagery for those in the west who were not able to witness, as he did, the devastating results of their western lifestyle. The prior imagery potentially detoxifies suffering to a degree which makes it palatable for cultural assimilation, and is evidence of how Salgado has metabolized suffering.

The largely modernist genres which are Salgado’s photographic devices, both naturalize and neutralizes much of Migrations’ impact. The photographic aesthetic both diminishes content, but also, makes reading the content possible. I did not read Migrations as either an artwork nor an exposé but was caught in between, and at the same time I was aware that each aspect reinforced and made the opposite possible. This contradiction is unresolved, creating an uncomfortable tension. The tension is compounded by the motivation for such a huge project being so layered and complex.

Salgado began as a freelance photojournalist for Sigma and Gamma, and then worked for Magnum, “the most prestigious agency” (Mraz Sebastião Salgado 15). Magnum was an influential photographic agency begun in Paris in 1947 by photographers including Robert Capa and Henri Cartier-Bresson. Robert Capa’s Soldier at the Moment of Death, Spanish Civil War [Plate 60] (1936, silver gelatin print, 24.5 x 34.2 cm) is one of the most recognized images of war. “It has also been used to highlight the ambiguity of

34 My sense is that this tension is in direct response to the projective weight of Migration’s agenda.
35 I sat looking at Migrations, turning the pages for a long time before I could start to see it. The overall emotional and aesthetic impact of the work is enormous. Each image carries such a load and when seen as a collection, it is overwhelming. Each image on its own is ‘enough’.
photographic meaning” due to disputes over whether or not the photograph was genuine (Ritchin *In Our Own Image* 98). The black and white photograph which represents an unidentified soldier’s death in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) has since been exhibited as an iconic depiction of the destructiveness of war. As such, it represents Capa’s agenda to comment on war. He was one of the most “celebrated figures in a generation of politically engaged photographers whose work centered on war and victimhood” (Sontag *Regarding the Pain of Others* 31).

Magnum was established to represent freelance photographers who were sent on assignments by picture magazines and its moralistic charter reflected the post war sentiments of the time. It was their “ethically weighted” mission “to chronicle their own time, be it a time of war or a time of peace, as fair-minded witnesses free of chauvinistic prejudices”. The photographer’s nationality was seen as irrelevant; the agenda of Magnum was a global one (Sontag *Regarding the Pain of Others* 30-31).

As a member of Magnum, an authoritative and respected photographic organization, Salgado’s artistic and moral credentials are authenticated. He has picked up the Magnum agenda demonstrating his connections to projective identification. These social pathways for dealing with revelation and therefore disowned suffering through art, are historically founded - particularly expressed through a modernist vernacular which sought, in part, to hijack art as a voice of the suppressed and disenfranchised. The aesthetic acts as the metabolizing factor in projective identification.

Secrecy, as theorized in this thesis, is coded through the photographic image and carried in projective identification models. The ways that images are exhibited, and the reception of Salgado’s images are crucial to an understanding of their place within the projective identification dynamic and hence to the visual codes of secrecy. Salgado’s response to global suffering is clear, what is less obvious is the way that he transmits his response to that suffering. That transmission is not a
simple matter of carting around a camera and then snapping at likely subjects. Salgado’s images are the results of an extremely sophisticated aesthetic presentation, as in Food Distribution Area in Kibumba. I have described some aspects below, as a means of accessing the ways Migrations is constructed as a text, vulnerable to both projective identification and secrecy.

Migrations allows for the communication of secrecy through projective identification for the following reasons:
Salgado’s photographs cross the boundary between documentary and art images; Salgado uses oppositional counterpointed binaries to generate a creative tension; a significant binary is demonstrated by Salgado’s images showing a split response to suffering – one aspect colludes with western society, the other aspect confronts; the photographs rely on a cohesive modernist aesthetic; and Salgado uses specific visual conventions, aligning his vision with recognized codes and conventions in contemporary western societies. Some aspects of Salgado’s aesthetic include: the generation of a narrative structure to the image, the juxtaposition of suffering and beauty, and references to the western landscape tradition. Salgado also strategically organizes his images; employs repetition; and quotes from religious symbols.

A split between art and documentary exposé allows for a complex reading of the photographs in Migrations. Salgado’s images speak for societies in the west and visualize the suffering rejected as too painful. But there is a difference between Salgado’s images in Migrations and the myriad images seen in the daily newspapers of hardship, misery and death. The photographs are similar in intention in that both documentary and art photographs are taken to persuade, but the aesthetic is very different. In Food Distribution Area in Kibumba for instance, the compositional balances between light and dark, sharp and diffused focus; the implication of narrative generated by the intermixture of landscape genre elements and groupings of people; and the camera angle and distance, blur the boundaries between genres. This blurring separates out this image from a media shot and allows the aesthetic to seduce the viewer into the possibility of more
profound resonances. It is this difference that makes Salgado’s images so compelling and interesting. It is also this difference which keys into other layers of social communications like the secrecy diverted into channels of projective identification.

The relevance of this blurred boundary is that the weight of documentary verification transposes onto the impact of the images. Images in Migrations such as *Food Distribution Area in Kibumba* are displayed as factual representations; they carry an enormous social charge, but the photographs are also exhibited and theorized as art. By belonging solidly in neither genre, the photographs can be read from either direction. The tendency is for a contamination of one genre by the other, or a conflation into a hybrid genre. This confusion allows for a quality of ambiguity which is conducive to secrecy. Facts are harder to challenge if they are represented in art. To belong in neither, they avoid the direct criticism which comes from each category.

I have already referred to some of the binaries in Salgado’s work such as the documentary/art dichotomy. *Migrations* depends on binaries in a variety of ways. All the photographs are black and white; the photographs were taken in poorer countries to be shown in the west; Salgado photographs great social suffering and brutality beautifully – he counterpoints human suffering with wonderful landscapes. These examples of oppositional binaries, some of which I explore in detail, create a specific creative pressure in *Migrations*. With the use of such counterpoints Salgado highlights and emphasizes his subjects. One particular example worth special attention is his split response to suffering.

The tensions in *Migrations* resulting from the projective identification dynamic directs Salgado into using various genres as a way of ‘digesting’ suffering. He does not just document refugees and displaced people, although documentation is part of Salgado’s agenda. He uses particular filters so as to translate the situations and people he sees in front of him into patterns and pictures. This is exemplified by the photographic treatment of
Brazilian Indians. Significantly, Salgado was born and grew up in Brazil.

The first photograph in this section is a portrait of a young woman with a parrot perched on her arm: Yanomami Woman [Plate 61] (1998). She sits, facing the camera squarely, her face ceremonially decorated. Her gaze is absolutely unflinching. Both palms of her hands open in a gesture of receiving. A dog wanders in the background, attentive to something outside the image, but it’s unfocussed form provides part of a circular visual tracking leading back to the woman’s face.

Salgado writes in the booklet that she is a young Yanomami woman sitting in her communal hut, in Hayahora, one of numerous Yanomami villages in the Serra de Surucucus district. He then describes the local village population distribution (Salgado Migrations, Booklet 17). Without this information, perhaps still with it, the image has no firmly established context. The woman represents her culture. She is Brazilian Indian woman. She is beautiful. However, she establishes a relationship, a continuum, a permanence by looking at Salgado, at the viewer, at me, even though the relationship is a problematic and unequal one. I do not know her name. She has no access to how her image has been printed, exhibited, reproduced, analyzed or theorized. What were her thoughts at the time? Did she feel that her photograph would in some way change her situation?

Yanomami Woman is one of the thirteen photographs of Brazilian Indians which are the first images in Chapter III, Latin America: Rural Exodus, Urban Disorder. The photographs

36 At the same time, I am looking at her. I do know she is a Yanomami woman. I do know that Salgado photographed her within the auspices of Migrations, so I also know that in some way she is threatened with displacement. And I can find levels of humanity in her that I have inside myself. There are so many cultural differences between us though, gaps that would take courage to bridge. I know these things because I belong in a culture where such readings are assumed. I know how to read images. I have seen images like this one since I was a child sifting through old National Geographic magazines on rainy days.

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in this section are particularly idealized and romantic, jarring with the other images in Migrations. They also jar with their accompanying text, which describes how their lifestyle is under threat because their livelihoods compete with mining companies, cattle ranches and timber industries (Salgado Migrations, Booklet 17).

The jarring is created in part because these images reflect, not a projective identification but a projection from contemporary western culture. These images also represent an incapacity to look at trauma and death directly. Destruction of culture, lifestyle and death are represented through opposition and absence. By presenting the Brazilian Indians in an iconic, romantischized way Salgado colludes with society against showing particular levels of death and suffering. In these photographs he conforms to contemporary western society’s view of how these people ‘should look’.

Salgado has directed the reading of the Yanomami Woman through a series of artistic devices: the grainy black and white photographic surface; the conflation of photographing people with animals, in their own environments, and ceremonially decorated; and imaging without signs or signals of western intervention, no empty Coke can on the ground. Part of the reading, similar to Salgado’s young boy with the electric wires, is the gaze: the gaze of evenness, openness and trust, ingenuous and without guile. However, that doesn’t mean that this person is not capable of venality or manipulation, or any other human reaction, but Salgado deprives the viewer of a more polysemous reading which could include these as her capacities, by both the structure of this particular image, and also by its placement within the larger work.37

John Mraz responds to a similar dilemma in his review of another of Salgado’s projects – Other Americas. He writes of a dilemma caused by the specificity of an image, that is, it

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37 I am not suggesting that she is venal in any way but I know that she is as complex as any other person and that this is absolutely effaced. This means that the only humanity I can actually share with this woman is her suffering, her potential displacement, and the dream of an idyllic uncontaminated world.
is of a particular person “in a specific context during a highly selected fraction of a second”. Mraz identifies this aspect in Other Americas as the construction of a narrative which “was more attuned to constructing universal and eternal symbols than to elucidating the particularity of that which appears in the photographs. ...We might say that they are symbols rather than documents, or – to take the question further – metaphors” (Mraz Sebastião Salgado 22).

Susan Sontag also criticises Salgado’s practice which she locates in the actual pictures, not their exhibition. The problem for Sontag is the images “focus on the powerless, reduced to their powerlessness” (Sontag Regarding the Pain of Others 70). Salgado, because he is carrying projective identifications, does not see his photographs as reducing the powerless, but as empowering them by voicing their invisibility.

Photographic critic Clive Scott notes in a similar vein that documentary photography:

> does not so much choose victims as victimize, by the consignment of its subject to a story already told, by depriving its subject of an existential freedom. The documentary photograph is bound to present its images as proof rather than as evidence whose proof is still to be constructed (Scott Berger and Mohr 35).

Therefore the actual process of taking photographs of individuals, is in danger of victimizing them by conforming to a particular narrative – ‘a story already told’. The Brazilian Indians are ascribed a function within a larger narrative, in this instance, the narrative of the effects of loss of environment. These photographs are presented as evidence. Even more complexity in the reading of these images is added by the ruptured boundary between documentary photography and art photographs.

One of Salgado’s major binaries is his split response to death within Migrations. In these idealized photographs of the Brazilian Indians he colludes with society, adopts the projection of a romanticized view of their life which does
not show the full extent of their suffering. Other photographs in *Migrations* reflect projective identification and show pain and death directly.

The Brazilian Indians as depicted by Salgado carry the positive projections for western society of purity and freedom from suffering. These images have a different meaning and impact to the others in *Migrations* which carry projective identifications. Their importance is partly because they represent a dichotomy, they are Clive Scott’s proof which stands in for evidence because they illustrate the story rather than tell it. The images of the Brazilian Indians are not of actual suffering but are evidence of suffering. Salgado’s real story is in the other images, the images of hardship and destitution – hard edged and uncompromising.

The dozen images which follow the photograph of the Yanomami woman and the parrot supply more information. They emphasize an incongruent split between these images and others in *Migrations* – almost a before and after westernisation. The Brazilian Indian images are idyllic and romantic, a retrieval of French philosopher Rousseau’s (1712-1778) ‘noble savage’. It recalls Rousseau’s notion of a natural goodness of people before being contaminated by a corrupted society (Collins 1349). The text in *Migrations* by contrast, tells of their struggle to maintain a traditional lifestyle.38

38 The obvious message to be drawn from this group of images is how wonderful their life is and how dreadful it would be if it were lost. And that is valid. I am sorry that the Indians are not able to live a life of their own choosing, and that they will struggle with the diseases and hardship which accompany the financially driven incursions into their lifestyle. It is a tragic loss, not only for these individuals, but for the rest of the world also, because with them the expression of the range of humanness is even further impoverished. When peoples die, so do languages, cultural expressions and unique human responses to being in the world. It is a tragic loss. These images are in response to this loss, but they are also more than that. They are documents that belong in contemporary western culture, documents of loss, inscriptions of nostalgia, emblems of grief and icons of fragmentation and displacement.
Fred Ritchin writes that Salgado takes poetic liberties with some of his images by not exploring the “vast problems that coexist in an extraordinarily poor people, such as disease, crime, alcoholism”. Instead Salgado espouses a romantic view, “one that is loyal to the dignity of the person depicted while circumventing some of the complexities of his or her existence” (Ritchin The Lyric Documentarian 148). The split in Migrations between these very idealized images and other depictions throughout the book, collude with the west’s denial of death. This split reflects both the capacity and incapacity for western audiences to respond to deep suffering.

Marubo Maronal Village [Plate 62] (1998) shows a Brazilian Indian community scene. Salgado comments that flying over the Amazon, the jungle seems impenetrable and yet the people living it in move about freely (Salgado Migrations, Booklet 14). This idealist image contains all the elements of a paradisiacal life that those in contemporary western culture would recognize: a perfect place for a television Survivor series. A woman in the foreground scoops water from a stream. Beside her is a basket. She may be fishing. Behind her a child drinks from a bowl. In the background four other people, perhaps children and a dog, make up a loose circle. They are pictured in the jungle, without sign of western enculturation with the sun streaming through the trees leaving highlights of sunlight as if kissed by a Disneyland fairy’s wand. No sign of the struggle for life is indicated here as explained in the booklet. No visual clues tell of death and suffering as in so many other image in Migrations, except perhaps for the three felled trees lying on the ground.

Whilst these images jar with their difference they also provide a counterpoint for the pain in the other images. Their implicit message is that this is what life ‘should’ look like. To come across these images is a breath, a reprieve from confrontation. Visually the message is that at least somewhere in the world a peaceful place exists. We know, however, that this is not the case because of the text, we know that the Indian’s way of life is endangered.
but the truth factor adheres to the photographic surface. This serves to make some of the other images seem more poignant and grievous.

**Marubo Maronal Village** image is both problematic and evidentiary. It in particular, relies on being read as a romantic idyll, a circle of people at peace in the world. Salgado generates this sense both compositionally as well as through content. The unnamed people depicted sit within a jungle setting in contrast to western urban landscapes. To us in the west, they appear iconic and so does their environment. In recreating an iconic image, Salgado transforms a devastating situation of loss, violence and destruction of the environment and lifestyle of these people, into a palatable image, and therefore an image instantly recognizable by western audiences.

I am suggesting that *Migrations* as a text, is ordered and systematized in such a way as to metabolize or ‘digest’ feelings rejected by western societies, feelings that have moved underground and have become secret. *Migrations* is both the process of digestion and the result of that digestive process. Part of that ordering is through the juxtaposition of the photographs of the Brazilian Indians with the other more confrontational images in the text.

### 4:2:2 Salgado’s photographic and aesthetic conventions

Salgado’s particular artistic and aesthetic practices are the conventions, the templates, that allow for a particular reading. They are the conventions that come attached to the role of artist Salgado has adopted. Salgado conforms to these conventions and therefore creates the visual and emotional pathways which make his message accessible. By doing so he metabolizes the projective suffering from society into a format which is palatable for the contemporary western art world. Without these conventions in place his message (for that is what it is) would be a ‘voice in the wilderness’ – his images would lack social currency.

The processes involved in photographing extreme suffering creates the ‘prior imagery’ Lifton’s term for both for those
experiencing the trauma and also for the audience of the images. Even if the people in the photographs do not see the final image, or are able to control how that photograph will be represented, they do know, in most cases, that it has been taken. To face Salgado and his camera is to face a witness. These individuals know they have been witnessed and they know it is a witness from western society. Images of people who look directly into the camera – and therefore also Salgado, indicates their awareness of Salgado as a representative of western cultures, is a witness to their plight.

Salgado, by using specific photographic conventions creates a medium, a softening, an accessibility. He creates the prior imagery for the understanding and processing of extreme human experiences. By photographing the suffering of ‘the other’ using specific formats he allows for, and creates templates which makes suffering within society recognizable and ‘real’ within Baudrillard’s terms. There is always, however, a danger that the suffering of others remains exotic by fact of its otherness. I describe Salgado’s specific aesthetic conventions in point form below.

i. Narrative structure

Salgado’s image of the Mexican boy with the electric wires analyzed at the beginning of the section on secrecy and photography, implies a network of narratives – perhaps impending danger, or of children’s curiosity circumventing impossible poverty and deprivation. The composition, placing three human groupings in this desolate scene, all potential relationships, imply various stories. Salgado’s description of this image adds to the potential of a narrative reading. The wires are being fixed after violent winds. There has been a crisis.

Not only does the actual photograph carry a narrative potential but the placement of the previous images add to a narrative scripting, culminating in the gaze of the small boy. The previous image, Sao Paulo Migrants [Plate 63] (1996) in particular, on the opposite page is also of electricity wires, this time from Sao Paulo in Brazil. It
tells a similar story of illegally acquired electricity. In this image the wires are chaotically silhouetted against a stormy sky, strung along a road. Salgado has photographed them almost with the same angled sweep as the road behind the small boy in Boy with Fallen Electricity Wires. Three men on bikes ride towards the right, ride visually to the boy on the opposite page. Then the eye rests, arrested by the boy’s gaze - this specific boy’s gaze. This narrative structure is one of the conventions Salgado uses to help assimilate difficult subject content.

The previous images are not of individuals, they are anonymous figures in the landscape. This means that to move visually from one page to the next and to then arrive at the boy with the wires - a very particular boy - lays the groundwork for a specific reading. The boy’s eyes catch our attention even more markedly than had this photograph appeared in a different order.

ii. Salgado’s juxtaposition of suffering and beauty

There are very few visual ‘rests’ from confrontational images in Migrations. One such is the series of images of the Brazilian Indians. The other visual ‘resting place’ when looking at these images is the aesthetic, a quality of beauty. Salgado is a confident photographer and the images reverberate with an aesthetic richness which in some images, such as Food Distribution Area in Kibumba is almost breathtaking. It is this aesthetic which has also been so criticized (Orvell 98). The quality of beauty in Migrations is its major weapon. Salgado speaks about such ugliness through the beauty in the images. Sontag, who criticizes Salgado’s lack of individual identification, describes Salgado as a "photographer who

39 There are around a dozen purely landscape pictures on pages 34-5, 36, 62 64-5, 246-7, 262, 263, 264-5, 266, 278, 279, 316, 330-31, 392-3, and the last image in the book, 430-1. These images are a mixture of landscape subjects with cityscapes and seascapes included. They often indicate an overview.

40 It is like listening to a confident singer: you can then listen to the music. When a singer is unsure, you watch the singer and the music becomes secondary.
specializes in world misery. ...[He] has been the principal target of the new campaign against the inauthenticity of the beautiful” (Sontag Regarding the Pain of Others 89). Sontag identifies an ongoing dilemma for artists who wish to express socially critical art. Marxism, for instance, rejected ideals of the beautiful as the “central category of bourgeois aesthetics” (Becker 123).

A capacity of beauty or the power of his aesthetic allows for an expression of ugliness and pain. This is mirrored in the example of projective identification with the mother and child. In this dyad the frightening negative feelings are ideally held and detoxified by the ‘good enough’ mother, the negatives are then offset by positives. The aesthetic is a holding, a containing of suffering, a respect. The main tenor of the Migrations, despite the beauty, is of unbearable human suffering and how that suffering is borne, usually by individuals of great dignity and forbearance. Food Distribution Area in Kibumba clearly exemplifies this containing. The individual suffering is visually invisible and yet the suffering implied by the subject matter of over one million displaced people gathering on prescribed days to collect food is implicit. The viewer is able to assimilate this information because of the power of the image’s aesthetic. This is also true of Rwandan Exodus described below.

iii. References to western landscape traditions

The romantic idealism that is shown in the Brazilian images links with images from other parts of the world by the use of the landscape. The landscape predominates in so many of Salgado’s images. “There is always a subjective aspect in landscape art, something in the picture that tells us as much about who is behind the camera as about what is in front of it” (Adams Beauty in Photography 15). Rwandan Exodus [Plate 64] (1994) is a landscape, also with romanticized qualities, but with a profoundly dark message. This image also holds the contradiction of beauty and ugliness so thematic in Salgado’s photographs.
Rwandan Exodus shows a line of people beside a river. The fog and mist are exaggerated by the grainy texture of the photograph. It is the first of the photographic series taken in Rwanda in 1994 and was taken of people “fleeing in terror” early one morning (Salgado Migrations 11). But how to reconcile such fear through such an extraordinarily beautiful image is again problematic. The landscape elements in the photograph, work against the heart wrenching content. Salgado chooses contrast carefully and this image has very little, it has a palette of soft greys. The river is a sweep in the foreground. The lower third of the image has a strip of darker grey – the bank of the river and the line of people making their way along the bank, away from the photographer. We see their backs. Most appear not to be carrying possessions. They are spaced out in small groups, single file. A tree is almost at the centre of the photograph but Salgado leaves no other indicators of place. The sky is the predominant feature. The beauty in this image disturbs me. The beauty acts as a trap – I am absorbed into this image, lured by the aesthetics. It reminds me of the helplessness these people must have felt at the impotence of their surroundings to change the outcomes of the disasters they were escaping. They walk away from their land, now a landscape, an environment, which has supported and held them.

In many of Salgado’s images such as Rwandan Exodus and Food Distribution Area in Kibumba the landscape itself is the subject, so much so that the landscape quality takes over, obscuring or ameliorating or ‘digesting’ extreme human experiences. A “serious landscape picture is metaphor. ...[We rely] on landscape photography to make intelligible to us what we already know. It is the fitness of a landscape to one’s experience of life’s condition and possibilities that finally makes a scene important or not” (Adams Beauty in Photography 15-16).

Salgado’s treatment of sky is also noticeable in many images. John Berger laments that:

> if we accept what is happening, then not always but often, one is face to face with the tragic. And what happens in the face of the tragic is
that people accept it and cry out against it, although it won’t change. And they cry out very frequently to the sky. And in many many of your pictures [Salgado] the sky is very important...The sky is the only thing that can be appealed to in certain circumstances. Who listens to them in the sky, perhaps God, perhaps the dead (John Berger speaking in Spectre of Hope).

Berger gives the sky a power that Salgado gives to the landscape in general, the capacity to hear, or to hold as a salve: the only constant remaining in a now dangerous world.

iv. Image placement

The placement of images in Migrations also impacts on how each image is read, its place in the narrative structure. Often the images are paired in the sense that they reflect a congruent theme as with Palestinian Refugees, Nahr el-Bared [Plate 65] (1998) and Palestinian Refugees, Burj el-Shamali [Plate 66] (1998). These images are designed to be read together as part of a shared story. The photographic description also reads as a narrative. These Palestinian people are often “forced to remain outsiders” depending on handouts. Many of the Palestinians were born in refugee camps such as Nahr el-Bared in northern Lebanon.

The first image Palestinian Refugees, Nahr el-Bared shows two people both silhouetted against a concrete wall. The woman stands to the left of the image, a scarf around her neck providing a light contrast to her black clothes. Her hands hang at her side, her eyes are directed up and outside the image, away from her husband who is lying on the ground. He smokes a cigarette and two packets sit on the ground beside him. A blanket covers his feet. He is looking past Salgado, into the mid distance. The image is notable for the space between the couple, which creates a languid atmosphere. The image is composed of textually contrasting areas and shapes.

The image on the opposing page, Palestinian Refugee, Burj el-Shamali shows an elderly woman sitting in a chair to the
right of the image. She waits to return home. It is a vain hope (Salgado Migrations, Booklet 6). The photograph depicts the woman in a sparsely furnished room, which is again distinguished by the variety of texture. This woman looks at Salgado, her face dignified and intense. This is a photograph of waiting - of an environment, as much as it is of this particular woman. These two images are complimentary, even to the texture of the background walls. The expressions on their faces tell the same story of hardship and resignation. Throughout Migrations many examples of this narrative congruence are constructed by the pairing of compatible images.

Salgado establishes a different kind of congruence by mirroring images in Kukes Refugee Camp 1 [Plate 67] (1999) and Kukes Refugee Camp 2 [Plate 68] (1999). Both photographs were taken in Kukes of Albanian refugees. There is a striking compositional attunement between these images created through a triangular structure. In Kukes Refugee Camp 1 the triangle is formed by the shape of a tent. These plastic makeshift tents were inadequate protection. The triangle of the tent is reflected in the snowy mountain peaks in the background, as well as the silhouette of the human forms inside the transparent tent. Behind the transparency are woman and children. One little boy looks at Salgado through the plastic.

Kukes Refugee Camp 2 is of a woman on her own in the bleak, bare landscape. She sits in front of a barbed wire fence. Both her figure, huddling around a blanket, and the wires in the background are triangles. Not only are both these images structured around triangles but the triangles are both grounded, like pyramids. They are grounded with the apex moving up toward the sky, Berger’s sky of hope, or restitution. The triangle creates both stasis through a sense of grounding but also movement, movement up and out.

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Salgado notes that the needs of these refugees were poorly attended to, despite “the extraordinary media attention given their plight and the assignment of 8,000 NATO soldiers to humanitarian duties” (Salgado Migrations, Booklet 10).
Salgado takes another approach by putting two images together which give a complimentary reading through a difference in focus. *Waiting for Water in Katale Camp* [Plate 69] (1994) and *Slain Tutsis along the Road* [Plate 70] (1994) form such a juxtaposition. The image on the right – *Slain Tutsis along the Road*, is the visually dominant image when confronted with the open two pages. It is a stretch of road with a line of people to the right of the road and bodies to the left. The road is clear and leads the eye from bottom right to top left, to the other image, to the faces in the other image. There is a shocking contrast between the different sides of the road: a terrible distinction between the side of the living and the dead; separated by a road. A small child sits in the midst of the carnage. The living walk along the other side know there is no time to bury the dead. And the dead lie mutilated, abandoned and tragic. Salgado writes on this photograph: “As they walk along the road, families pass the remains of those who died during their flight” (Salgado *Migrations*, Booklet 12). There is a beautiful mountain peak in the background, shrouded in mist.

Both these images were taken in Zaire of Rwandan refugees. *Waiting for Water in Katale Camp* shows the difficulty of finding water. People stand for hours waiting for water to be brought in by trucks. A small child faces Salgado, he has a container for the water on his head, like a hat: his hands rest on his cheeks. Another child, slightly older stands behind him, he also looks directly at Salgado. There is a line of women walking toward the camera with containers balanced on their heads. This photograph personalizes the people who walk along the road. The technical effect of these two images together is that one adds personal detail to the overview of the other. They co-exist and compliment each other adding to the overall effect.

42 These image are difficult to describe and I find myself moving in and out of the process which Salgado must have also done. Salgado has the technical task of taking the photographs, developing them, mounting them. I am analyzing them. Analysis is in contrast to assimilating the content, the unimaginable suffering and trauma, the content is so dreadful. In one interview Salgado was quoted as saying that arriving in such situations he would wander around stunned for days, crying. And then he would
Salgado uses the double spread judiciously. Illegal Migrant [Plate 71] (1997) is an example. This photograph shows an “illegal migrant who is hurrying back to Mexico after being spotted by a Border Patrol vehicle” (Salgado Migrations, Booklet 2). It is a spectacular landscape, with a tiny fleeing figure captured mid stride. The double page spread gives this image more space for greater impact. Paradoxically, the figure looks even smaller in the larger format.

v. Employment of repetition

The contextual placement of the Brazilian Indians, the contrast between the ugliness of the content and the beauty of the aesthetic, the use of landscape conventions and image placements are artistic devices in Migrations – another is the use of repetition. Salgado uses several different compositional layouts and these compositions are repeated throughout the text. The image The Boy with Fallen Electric Wires described previously is compositionally repeated in other images where a small child is centered at the front of the image with a vast landscape as background. Croatian Refugee Boy [Plate 72] (1994) is structurally similar and again the young foregrounded figure of a young nameless boy doubles as both subject and lure. In this photograph of the Ivankovo refugee camp in Croatia the trains in the background have been refitted as homes for the refugees. The story in the image belongs to the background detail, the Croatian boy, as the boy with the electric wires, inveigles the eye and the viewer is then confronted with the ramifications of the lives lived by these children.

As well as the repetition of compositional devices Salgado repeats examples from each situation. He felt that he needed to show that “this was not just about one person, one family, one town or even one nation, but half of the planet. [He] wanted to provoke a discussion about what is going on”

take out his camera and get to work. I need to keep reminding myself to breathe.
This point is made, but again, that is not all that is happening. Repetition is also evidence of a projective identification because Salgado feels that one example could be written off as exceptional. For the suffering to be recognized as real it also has to be shown as unbearable and overwhelming, then society’s rejection is validated and challenged. In this way, through Salgado’s photographs, human suffering finds a host, which allows for its reentry into contemporary western culture. The suffering is no longer ‘naked’.

The fact that Salgado has photographed misery and suffering from all over the world, specifically for reception in western societies demonstrates projective identification. Salgado is quoted as saying: “Photography for me reflects the society in which I lived, what it gave to me, my part in it and in the end the type of photography that I do is part of that society” (Hallett, 132). That he is Brazilian is no coincidence and that has lived in Paris for a long time means that ‘his society’ is not a simple statement. But, ‘his society’ is (mostly) fed and housed. Salgado feels that he is photographing from the ‘inside, but his photographs have a total western currency.

vi. References to religious symbolism

Religious symbolism is another template in Salgado’s photographs. “There is a biblical, almost religious force in Salgado’s photographs” (Hallett, 134). A specific example Malawi Mothers [Plate 73] (1994) was taken of Mozambique refugees. The atmosphere of the image is serene and still. To the left of the image, in the background is a mother, sitting on floor mats with two children. Salgado writes that it often appears that there are twins but in fact, a mother has taken an orphan into her care “as an act of solidarity” (Salgado Migrations, Booklet 16). Many of the refugees died in exile during a cholera epidemic. In the foreground and to the right of the photograph another mother bends down and around, her face hidden from the camera, exposing the peaceful sleeping baby on her back.
Susan Sontag writes that the witness as photographer may feel it necessary to

*make the spectacular not spectacular. But the spectacular is very much part of the religious narratives by which suffering, throughout most of Western history, has been understood. To feel the pulse of Christian iconography in certain wartime or disaster-time photographs is not a sentimental projection* (Sontag *Regarding the Pain of Others* 71).

Writing on Salgado, Ritchin observes that the “former economist invokes a poetic sense of struggles so profound that, in large, moody prints, the forces of light and darkness, of life and death, are summoned in scenes reminiscent at times of the most dramatic Judeo-Christian symbolism” (Ritchin *The Lyric Documentarian* 147-148).

Salgado’s use of light creates a translucent sheen in this image of women and children. As in so many other Salgado images this light has a redemptive quality to it. In this image a doorway in the back leads to another room. The light streams into the backroom from another light source and creates a sense of movement, referencing transformation. There is also another light source which is difficult to follow, but the brightest pool of light is around the centre of the image. Everything radiates out from this point. The baby’s face in the foreground is mirrored by the mother’s shoulder and the shining heads of the small children in the background. The eye moves from one light source to another.

The use of light, and religious associations to Mary and the infant Christ in the stables, is a way for Salgado to key in aspects of western cultural understandings. By doing so he says that these images are to be read within western cultural auspices. They may be ‘foreign’ people and subjects but they can be assimilated and digested because of these conspicuous conventions.

In these ways Salgado metabolizes suffering, and filters it through his particular aesthetic. He is the ‘good enough’ mother, reintroducing aspects of detoxified projected out
suffering safely back to society. The society responds to
the aesthetic, to the conventions and in the process has the
capacity to acknowledge the content, the suffering, and the
humanity. Because it is formatted in this way it is also
removed and safe.

Through the combination of secrecy and projective
identification dynamics subtle changes are made in society’s
attitudes to issues such as death. Attitudes are changed
through these virtually concealed communication channels
which function as Scheppele described: as the distribution
of socially valued knowledge, shaped by the translation of
individual actions and interactions “into larger social
patterns” (Scheppele 23). The role of artists such as
Salgado is critical to this process.

I have described Salgado’s Migrations as a body of work and
then analyzed specific images through the template of the
psychoanalytic dynamic of projective identification. I have
also demonstrated the secrecy dynamics in the west which
have accrued around the trauma of death and dying. For
projective identification to operate Salgado needed to
comply with certain aesthetic features embedded, not only
within each image, but also within Migrations as a text. An
analysis of these aesthetics contributes to an understanding
of secrecy and projective identification strategies.

Salgado’s vision in Migrations and the other projects
Salgado has undertaken have established his aesthetic firmly
in the contemporary art world. This is partly due to his
capacity to represent human suffering so beautifully as in
the photographs of the Brazilian Indians. Perhaps because
“while his political agenda is unquestionably progressive,
is documentary mode is ultimately traditional” (Orvell
98). These dichotomies between the presence of Salgado’s
vision which is also effaced through the documentary format;
between his representation of the dark side of humanity
through beauty such as his photographs of the human
suffering in Rwanda; and his political leftist position
expressed through the traditional documentary genre; all
contribute to the unresolved tension in the actual images.
This tension carries some of the photographs intensity and power to convince.

When artists such as Salgado or Witkin take photographs it is a complex process which involves many other elements, both individual and cultural. Isolating the projective identification dynamic aspect of their work, eloquently demonstrates different dimensions which have previously been mute. To theorize artist’s work through a filter of projective identification allows for a profound nuancing of different levels of meaning as well as filling in gaps of social understanding.

The third phase of reflecting digested feelings back into society does not automatically mean that society will respond by changing its attitudes. This would necessitate their disowned suffering being seen and then owned. But Salgado has picked it up, he has owned it, (with the exception of the thirteen Brazilian Indian photographs) he has named it as disowned and he has then imaged that process through Migrations. Joel Peter Witkin is another artist who is working to re-introject different responses to suffering and death in contemporary western culture. The following section describes his very different role in projective identifications, secrecy and revelation.
“If we lived in perfect bliss, there would not be any need for looking into the darkness, or for art” (Witkin Danse Macabre 37).

In this chapter I examine the photographic conventions Witkin uses to manifest and transform – to digest or metabolize – projective identifications which are in turn the translation of the secrecy dynamics of concealment and revelation. Witkin, like Salgado, responds to pressure exerted from aspects of society to express what society otherwise experiences as too difficult. Witkin has vigorously picked up these projections. With an astonishing lack of defensiveness he flagrantly, but also skilfully, displays, even glorifies, people who represent those aspects of contemporary western culture which have been discarded, marginalized or abandoned – including the dead.

Witkin brings together specific aesthetics which then act as pathways to assimilate his message. He, again like Salgado, creates art to retrieve and redeem, to change the paradigms that exist in our culture for understanding. Witkin does so by challenging boundaries, the boundaries which in many cases are constructed and then reinforced through taboos and secrecy. The boundaries Witkin explores are to do with categories of humanness, and also humanity. "His fascination with the lives of those who live at the margins is not intended to reveal what the individual subject chooses to hide but instead to make the hidden more meaningful (Palmer na). Witkin does not propose to expose individual secrets, but he makes the hidden more meaningful by drawing on human complexities in transformative and profound ways.

Witkin’s images are not merely images of revelation but instead challenge the very structures of concealment and secrecy because Witkin’s photographs expose both secrets and
secrecy. Again, the photograph as the same text of both revelation and concealment, clues the viewer to a polysemous reading of the image.

This section analyzes Witkin’s photographs by discussing the different techniques he uses to facilitate the metabolism necessary for projective identification interactions. Projective identification is an unconscious process, and the conventions used by Witkin are often so simple as to seem natural, such as his use of art historical allusions. Many of these allusions are assumed expressions in the western art canon, the re-working of the still life genre for instance.

The various categories below represent the routes of reference that make Witkin’s images accessible, or comprehensible specifically to a contemporary western audience. By using these codes or routes of reference Witkin’s photographs are not only visually accessible but they are indicators Witkin has introjected and integrated the projection. The photographs evidence both this integration and his enthusiasm for displaying that integration back to society, thus creating the opportunity for a changed response. Without a changed response taboos are reinforced. Witkin’s photographic conventions also prevent his images being bereft of currency, as alluded by Dessaix and viewed in the Arsen Sawadow image in Part Three.

I begin this section by looking at examples of how Witkin employs art historical influences, his appropriation of the grotesque, and religious symbolism. I augment his use of these references by analyzing Witkin’s application of tableaux vivants and masks. I then take up the issue of the relevance of Witkin’s practice of linking together various taboo subjects in one exhibition or book, such as the dead and deformed. Witkin’s choice of the photographic medium is quite particular and that will be discussed before addressing the tension created in Witkin’s pictures through binaries. All these aspects are discussed with reference to how projective identification is played out in Witkin’s work; how he conceals and reveals and therefore how his photographs both demonstrate and document secrecy in
contemporary western culture. Witkin’s photographs I analyze are all toned silver gelatin prints unless otherwise specified.43

4:3:1 Witkin’s ‘high’ art references

Witkin’s historic and cultural antecedents are colourful and plentiful. He quite openly and brazenly draws on the work of such venerables as “Gericault, Delacroix, Courbet, Botticelli, Velasquez, Goya, Picasso, Miro, and Rubens, as well as other photographers” (Parry The Bone House 183). “Witkin portrays himself as the photographer with a halo of prominent names from the history of photography: Arbus, Sander, Weegee, Atget, Daguerre, Negre” (Dermer 248).44 Witkin has settled his place securely in the art world through such references, a significant proportion of his photographs in some way allude to earlier iconic art images. Witkin consistently situates himself in a ‘high art’ context despite the ambiguous relationship of photography to ‘low art’ which clings relentlessly to photography through advertising, journalism, popular culture and family photographs.

The purpose of Witkin’s high art references is threefold. Firstly, it allows for a feeling of familiarity and comfort: a sense of knowledge and compatibility with the visual language of the viewer. Secondly, the use of contrived and self-conscious art history references generates the assumption that these pictures belong within a longstanding tradition – an authoritative tradition which then makes the content of the images harder to reject or challenge. With his art references Witkin creates a context that lulls and seduces. His high art associations act as a contrivance of

43 I am analyzing images in this section which do not necessarily include a dead body. However, all Witkin’s images in some way reference death, or reference the limit of experience or identity. These later references make the reading of photographs of the corpse sensible, because they establish and demonstrate artistic conventions which subvert and challenge cultural assumptions.

44 Witkin has expressed his particular respect for the American photographer F. Holland Day who photographed himself on the cross at the end of the nineteenth century (Celant 53).
access and also therefore protection. Witkin uses art historical allusions and then subverts them by photographing with his own particular agenda. “He tarts up the dead with high art pretensions” (Wood Photo Mortis 21). The illusion is that we are looking at something we know, and then we realize that this is very much not the case. ‘High’ art reference are indicators of seriousness and intensity. The message is clear that these images are important and consequential: they carry the weight and import of history. Witkin’s quotations are seen as representing significant issues which have stood a test of time. Art quotations act as visual passports into western culture, rich (even steeped) in meaning, history and cross references to other allusions.

Thirdly, Witkin drapes many of his subjects in art historical props and allows them to step out from their own worlds, into his. The world that Witkin has created, furnished with his ‘high’ art finery, instantly switches them out of their own context and places them into Witkin’s. He conflates the known, traditional and established, with the marginal, difficult and surprising - this leads to a shock and disorientation. Witkin has photographed people from socially clandestine categories, and dressed them up in western world’s trappings. He thus legitimizes their presence before his camera.

Many of the paintings he references are now western art icons, such as Guernica by Pablo Picasso, Sandro Botticelli’s Birth of Venus, and Las Meninas by Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velazquez. The Graces, described below, also falls into the iconic category. The Graces New Mexico [Plate 74] (1988, 28 x 28”) is a gentler image than some of Witkin’s other photographs. It tackles the liminal and inverted spaces of sexuality and humanness, through references to classical art. In this image three hermaphrodites are posed in the traditional, even clichéd pose of the three graces of Greek myth; Aglaia, Euphrosyne and Thalia. The graces were known for granting those around them charm, beauty as well as grace. The grouping of the three in this exotic version are surrounded by a ‘Witkin’ black background, identified by areas of blotched chemical
water markings and scratchings which show the effects of Witkin’s darkroom negative manipulations.

The image portrays the three hermaphrodites standing facing the camera, all with one foot slightly forward, slanting their hip line. The middle grace has her arms around the other two. In her left hand which is also sitting on the right grace’s shoulder, is a rhesus monkey’s head. The graces to the right and left each hold a little monkey head. There are three graces and three monkey heads. The left grace’s face is blotched with black markings and is opaque. The other two graces are wearing eye masks, another of Witkin’s artistic trademarks. The viewer’s eye looks for points of recognition and this is confounded not only by the masks but also the unexpected presence of both breasts and penis with all three bodies.

The inclusion of the monkey’s heads, as well as the sexual inversion, is ironic and adds not only whimsy to the picture but also a reminder an evolutionary past, and of death. The graces are traditionally posed in an image rich in “the use of Renaissance and neoclassical icons” which grabs ones attention through the “enchanting magic of history” (Celant 28). Contemporary Italian art critic and curator Germano Celant writes: “that since myth is the first defiance of death, the doubling of angel and animal, vulgar and sublime, masculine and feminine, is the symbolic double, the transsexual living an intermediary existence” (28).

This photograph challenges the social positioning of the hermaphrodite, of people who do not conform in a society of youth, beauty and plastic surgery. Witkin does not expose them, or analyze them or judge them – his photographs allow them, allow them to be glorified. Their masks protect their individuality, at the same time as their status is celebrated. Witkin retrieves their uniqueness from the shadowy edges of society. He poses them in a way that associates them with ‘the beautiful’. He displays them back to society through the overlay of art historical routes of reference.
Witkin has generated an aura of beauty just by association because the graces are beautiful. Other photographs, such as *Leda, Los Angeles* [Plate 75] (1986, 28 x 28") retrieve, rescue, and redeem specific individuals who are symbolic of the discarded and marginalized in the west. In this image a disabled person, masked, naked and emaciated stands in the middle of the picture. To the right and midline of the image is a beautiful white swan; to the lower left are two masked infants. The one closest to the camera has wings. Behind them is a large broken egg shell. The swan sits on a large dark ambiguous object. Leda holds the swan’s neck in either a caress or a grip of strangulation. The picture tells of the ecstasy of life and also death; of transiting through stages; of the subjectivity of beauty.

Witkin’s photographs demand that his subjects be seen as beautiful and as human, at the same time as emphasizing their differences. For Celant this is not “mere spectacle, the staging of a weird, repressed universe, but rather a sacred, essentially moralistic and messianic vision. These unusual beings are a testimony illuminating and revealing one of humanity’s possible destinies” (15).

Other disabled and disfigured people in Witkin’s photographs also demand some kind of acceptance by their placement in a ‘high art’ context, both in the actual photograph and then in the exhibition gallery or book. Witkin creates the possibility for different understandings to emerge from a return to the abyss, the ineffable, the unknown, the strange and the unfamiliar. Witkin is proposing that the people in his photographs are alive in the same world as those considered ‘normal’, and therefore their cultural positioning needs to be redressed. He feels a sense of responsibility, through his participation in projective identification, to express the beauty of their unique humanness.

**4:3:2 Witkin on the grotesque**

As Witkin points out, the words grotesque and grotto have the same etymology. Both come from the Old Italian grotta meaning cave (Collins 684). And grottos are dark caverns and
“subterranean darkness” but for Witkin, going into the darkness is about retrieval and redemption, not despair. Celant writes that by the “means of the grotesque, the artist [Witkin] enchants, casts spells, and with a smile the images can more easily cross the barrier of death” (Celant 41). Witkin writes in the catalogue for an exhibition entitled Grotesque (1989) by various artists, including Witkin: “there will always be in the arts those hunters in darkness who hold mirrors up to the face of fear. ...Therefore I photograph conditions of being, life and its logical extension...death. The subject matter is grotesque, since it is what we in our darkest moments have become” (Thijsen Grotesque 15).

Art historian Noel Carroll sees the grotesque as that which is impure or violates “our standing categories in various ways”. Bodily wastes or body parts – the abject – are seen as grotesque because of their ambiguity. They challenge the boundaries between what is me and what is not, what is inside or outside, or what is dead or alive. American theorist Susan Stewart writes in On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection: “What is both inside and outside the body (faeces, spittle, urine menstrual blood etc.) tends to become taboo because of its ambiguous and anomalous status” (104). Stewart points to the relevance of viewing images of the grotesque as any other art form, and as such they “effect a representation and transformation of their subject” (107).

These fragile unstable boundaries are clearly seen in Witkin’s Corpus Medius and Man Without a Head (both analyzed in a later section). Carroll also notes that things which “combine contradictory cultural categories” are seen to be impure (Carroll The Grotesque Today 300). Many of Witkin’s images fall into this category: his use of hermaphrodites – The Graces, all kinds of physical deformities and oddities as in Leda. The images confound and confuse and by doing so conform to the most uniform characteristic of the grotesque which is a violation of boundaries and “subversions of our common expectations of the natural and ontological order. Fusion figures cross categories that we think are distinct” (Carroll The Grotesque Today 296).
A specific example of a fused figure is Witkin’s *Satrio, Mexico* [Plate 76] (1992, 40 x 30”). It is the photograph of what appears to be a satyr. A man sits in a field, (or in a studio made to appear as a field), under a tree, his dog beside him. The dog looks at Witkin – the man looks away. The man does not wear a mask. Instead horns adorn his head, and coils (halos?) of barbed wire rest on his shoulders where his arms should be. And he wears the legs of an animal. This photograph is unusual for Witkin because it appears to be taken outdoors, even though it was set in a studio. Sheep graze in the mid ground and a band of trees cut across the mid line of the photograph. The punctum point of the photograph for me, however, is the expression on the man’s face: it is resolute, verging on pensive, but it is also the look of a person who has spent too long alone.

Witkin’s use of the grotesque in other images is more florid than *Satrio* with images like a winged goat advancing on a dwarf in *Daphne and Apollo, Los Angeles* [Plate 77] (1990, 29 x 26”), a bearded lady in *Blind Woman with Her Blind Son, Nogales* [Plate 78] (1989, 20 x 16”), and a triptych of cadavers missing the tops of their skulls in *Pictures from the Afterworld: Countess Daru, Monsieur David and Madam David* [Plate 79] (1994, 26 3/4 x 213/4”). These images, as in those which reference high art, deploy established tropes which are then subverted by Witkin’s particular aesthetic.

The weight of this subversion is carried in large part by humour, another aspect of the grotesque. According to photographic critic Max Kozloff, Witkin’s photographs “operate by hyperbole, they have an outrageousness which is burlesque, a ‘bad taste’ which is humourous in the end” (Kozloff *The Privileged Eye* 87). The humour or irony in many of Witkin’s images is also their link to a soft humanity and empathy. Empathy and compassion – but never pity or patronage – are also indicators of Witkin’s deep religious faith the symbolism of which saturates many of Witkin’s images.

*4:3:3 Witkin’s religious imagery*
“Photography would be the means to bring God down to earth – to exist for me in the photographic images I would create!” So says Witkin as part of his M.A. thesis (1976) which traced his creative development. Witkin is a devout Catholic with an almost messianic drive to express fundamental human truths. Witkin writes that he wants to be remembered as “an American Christian artist. ...My images are about coming out of the light into the darkness” (Witkin Danse Macabre 38).

In many of Witkin’s images, the religious symbolism is a redemptive quality. Religious references are often the elements providing access to these difficult images – these are Witkin’s cultural pathways, his routes of reference. Other images are less subtle in their religious imagery. Saviour of the Primates, New Mexico [Plate 80] (1982, 28 x 28”) for instance, parodies the crucifixion by depicting a masked monkey corpse tied to a wooden cross. A skull and crossbones sit at the foot of the cross. Witkin’s image Mother and Child, New Mexico [Plate 81] (1979, 20 x 16”) juxtaposes his vision of maternity with the Christian icon of the Madonna and child. A reading of Witkin’s picture relies on western notions of the sanctity of motherhood, underpinned by associations to the Madonna. This in turn references the complex changing role of women’s cultural status in the west.

Mother and Child depicts a nude woman lying back on a couch with her baby son across her lap. Both are masked and naked, except for a black armband on the baby’s arm – a memorial signature. The mother’s mask has two large, round black patches covering her eyes, creating an opaque staring expression. The baby’s mask has two cut slits, so the baby can still see, in contrast to the mother however, who is rendered blind. The baby sucks his middle fingers, creating shapes and vectors that echo his mother’s mouthpiece.

The mother wears an orthodontic device which pulls back her mouth to its extreme, in an alarming and repulsive stretch. The mouth is open as far as it can go, (mirroring the vagina during birth). Although her expression is obviously generated by a mechanical device, her face looks contorted
with pain, anguish and anger. The mother holds her baby in such a way that her hand gently grasps his leg near his genital area. The mother’s hair is black and wild with obvious signs that the negative of the image has been dramatically reworked by Witkin. Her breasts are flattened, pulled flat by her outstretched arm. The baby lies on the mother’s belly between her breasts and pubic hair. The background is blackness. The mother and child occupy the bottom half of the frame – the black background gives the image a strong light and dark dichotomy.

There are plenty of the accepted symbols of motherhood in this image – the way the mother holds her baby, the baby sucking his fingers, and the baby’s body near the mother’s breast. And yet these comforting symbols are inverted and breached. The mother’s slightly languid pose, the way she is relaxed back from the child reinforces her own central dominating position in the photograph. The baby is a necessary prop in a photograph of ‘the mother’, of motherhood. What is says about motherhood is a silent scream of alienation, a scream of desperation. The baby is succubus, parasite – the underbelly.

Witkin says about Mother and Child: “The concept of this image is the pain, the wonder, the mystery of having a child...of having ourselves. There is symbolism too when a woman gently places her fingers near her child’s penis. We see this in Renaissance paintings of Christ and his mother, calling attention to his virgin manhood” (Coke 14). Critic Eleanor Heartney quotes the study by Leo Steinberg on the sexuality of Jesus Christ arguing “that the many images of the Virgin Mary pointing to or otherwise emphasizing her child’s penis were intended to stress the Catholic doctrine of the humanity of Christ” (Heartney Postmodern Heretics 31). Italian painter Pietro Perugino’s (1450-1520) Madonna and Child [Plate 82] (c.1500, oil on panel, 70.2 x 50.8 cm) is an example of a genre of paintings which depict the Madonna almost touching the infant Christ’s penis, thus emphasizing Christ’s sexuality, mortality and, by implication his humanity. The circular compositional direction of Madonna and Child pulls the eye towards the mother’s hand and the baby’s penis in the same movement as
in Witkin’s *Mother and Child*. The gesture is one of religious symbolism but in Witkin’s image the way the mother grasps the baby’s leg with her hand is also threatening and sinister. The viewer is aware of the baby’s innocent vulnerability. The gesture is sinister because of the expression generated by the mother’s mouth. The distorted mouth permeates and dominates the entire reading of the image and compromises and subverts cultural assumptions about trust and nurturing in the maternal relationship.

Significantly this photograph of a mother and her child was taken by a man, it is not a woman’s personal reflection of motherhood. Witkin is photographing his own internal mother, perhaps a symbol of his wife and son, or the internal relationship he has with his anima, or internal feminine. He is also, as a Catholic, referencing Christian symbolism.

The significance of the combination of both religious and high art allusions is that Witkin uses both to bolster, but also to enrich levels of metaphoric meaning. This allows for a confusion between paradigms, that is Witkin’s high art and revelatory images. This leads to a deepened validation of both; and for all the reasons stated above, creates an access for the images to be read in particular ways. Witkin’s allusions allow for profoundly difficult subjects to be brought ‘out of the darkness into the light’ or, out from behind walls of secrecy into a different assimilated understanding.

Witkin writes:

> There is so much garbage in the world, so much non-love, that you have basically got to help change that and you can only do that one person at a time - yourself. …Life has always been for me one miracle after another, and I am always happy. But the darkness that is in my work is the kind of darkness I am resolving. Our job is to basically, eventually illuminate (Maxwell Joel Peter Witkin 47).

In this quote Witkin describes his felt responsibility to ‘resolve’ or redeem, what he refers to as darkness. This
demonstrates his understanding of his role as an artist which is consistent with that of one who is carrying introjected feelings, feelings rejected by emotionally disconnected sections of society. Witkin’s images create the potential for change, even redemption, by bringing to light hidden aspects of human experience, including death. Witkin confronts within the visual lexicon of western society, through high art and religious references, but outside the zone of acceptability. He redeems the marginalized through a projective identification evidenced by both his confronting subjects but also his zealous drive for revelation and transformation.

4:3:4 Tableaux vivants and masks

Linked to art historical and ‘high’ art allusions is Witkin’s use of tableaux vivants and masks. Both these devices have a long historic trajectory. Witkin’s use of tableaux vivants and masks has an idiosyncratic, subversively ironic tone which further adds to his complex imagery and confirms that these images are designed to be read in the western art world.

The term ‘tableaux vivants’ comes from the French and literally means ‘living pictures’. Its use is derived from the theatre convention of briefly freezing the action at the end of a scene (Collins 1567). That Witkin is attracted to tableaux vivants, which have a theatrical pedigree, is not surprising because so many of his photographs are filled with a floridly dramatic tension. And, the frozen moment in a theatre production is replicated or mirrored by the action of the camera which freezes a moment in time on a sheet of paper.

Actual tableaux are physical re-enactments of paintings or other works of art, both historical and contemporary. They are an art form which moves from the “theatrical to the pictorial, between performance and silence, history and vivid presence” (Folie na). Tableaux vivants physically represent an interpretation of classical art works for contemporary audiences. The convention dates back to classical antiquity, making appearances in the Renaissance
and Baroque periods. Tableaux vivants have become “physical representations of re-enactments of art works and their specific atmospheres” (Folie na).

Witkin uses *tableaux vivants* overtly and deliberately to carefully construct and control a micro environment. His photographs reflect a staged version of his inner vision, structured in combination with his models. Importantly, *tableaux vivants* “are collectively rather than individually produced and shown” (Chapman ‘*Living Pictures*’ 25). Witkin controls the collaboration with his imagination and his obsessive need to transform, redeem and retrieve. Contemporary American art academic Eugenia Parry writes about Witkin’s work as allegorical and collaborative in that he invites others to participate under his directions. “In these little theatres of abjection, the actors, adorned and arranged like sculptures against painted scrims, assume roles in classic dramas of erotic excess assigned to them by the photographer” (Parry *The Bone House* 179). Witkin places unusual people with a whole range of ‘abnormalities’ such as amputees, hermaphrodites and dwarfs in elaborate settings, almost always in a studio, and subsequently always with a slightly claustrophobic atmosphere. The studio setting allows for the construction of the *tableaux*, highly stylized and contrived.

Masks are complex symbols in contemporary western culture with a long artistic heritage which harks back to Greek and Roman theatre. In these classical productions the mask was symbolic of the character portrayed. Putting on a mask during a theatre production was a way of taking on another persona as well as depersonalizing the actor. Masks are worn for “amusement, protection or disguise” (Collins 960). Masks are not only part of western culture’s heritage but their use in the west has a specific lineage.

*Portrait of Holocaust* [Plate 83] (1982, 20 x 16”) is a *tableaux vivant* which also shows the use of masks. It is a deeply shocking image – Witkin at his most disturbing and confronting, but also his most wildly imaginative. His use of contrasts both compositionally and thematically carries some of the image’s impact. *Portrait of Holocaust* also
shares some compositional and thematic elements with *Mother and Child*. They both depict women with babies, both women are masked and the backgrounds to both photographs are similarly textured. What gives *Portrait of Holocaust* its particular edge is the inclusion of dead foetuses.

The *tableaux vivant* shows a reclining nude woman who is holding three tiny, lifeless, sexless and featureless babies upside down, by the feet, like captured game. She is posed on a couch, propped up on her right elbow. Her right hand holds the largest of the three foetuses. Her left hand holds the other two smaller bodies. The foetuses are so small their faces are as smooth as the rest of their bodies. No individual facial features have formed to give them an identify. One of them has tiny hands tucked under its chin in a gesture often seen in babies still in the womb. There is no obvious cause of death. At the top of both of the woman’s hands is just a suggestion of the tiniest little feet.

Part of the shock of *Portrait of Holocaust* is the woman’s hold of the foetuses. She shows not a shred of maternal connection: nor horror or distaste. She grips them carefully, but they hang like trophies. The question hovers: What is her connection to them, actually and symbolically?

Perhaps the title gives a clue. There is no ‘the’ in the title indicating that the image is an iconic representation, not a specific Holocaust. Holocaust is the word for great destruction or loss of life, or the source of such destruction. Capitalized, it also is the word for the Nazi murdering of Jews in the 1940s. It is also a rare word for a burnt offering (Collins 742). However the little foetuses are not burnt, their skin has a stretched rubbery new-life look to it, as in Sue Fox’s foetus. These little beings have a discarded feel to them, they are not held with love or respect. Is that because they have never drawn a breath? They look like ‘collateral damage’.

The woman is a corpulent, fleshy woman, the photograph showing her body to the upper part of her thighs. She is not only masked but she has a wreath of fine plant life around her head. In the top right hand corner of the image is the insert of a photograph of an angel reaching and looking down
towards the woman. The angel’s shape creates a diagonal line, picked up by the angle of the women’s left arm, which keeps the eye moving back to the foetuses in the woman’s hands. The angel could be one of redemption; her body language is that of benediction. The angel is counterpointed to the foetuses both visually and symbolically.

In this image everything “forbidden and taboo is called into question”. Witkin inverts life and death through the dead babies and the mother’s “tragic ‘maternity’” (Celant 26). Death before life has a particular poignancy, one so different from the death of an old person with a life lived, no matter of what kind. These little creatures are symbols of thwarted potentials, but a retained innocence. They are also visually and publicly taboo. Why have they not been buried or cremated? It makes no difference whether they died as the result of abortions or miscarriages, the sight of foetuses is forbidden except in jars of formaldehyde in darkened science laboratories – not in photographs, not even in art. Part of that taboo comes from a need to protect. These foetuses had mothers and fathers at some point. In all matters of secrecy there is an element of protection, and sometimes that is absolutely warranted.

The structure of the composition of Portrait of Holocaust is predicated on the tableaux vivant, referencing Italian painter Michelangelo Caravaggio’s (1573-1610) Bacchus, [Plate 84] (1596, oil on canvas, 95 x 85 cm) (Celant 33). There are many compositional echoes in Portrait of Holocaust from Caravaggio’s painting: the garland of leaves around the head; the pose of the arms; both are holding something significant to the meaning of the image in their hands; both figures are represented from the waist up; and both images have a similar dark/light dichotomy. Caravaggio’s tableaux oozes colour, luxury and surplus, even decadence, consistent with the nature of Bacchus. Witkin’s image in contrast is darkly loaded with references to death and disconnection. The reading of the desolation in Portrait of Holocaust is exaggerated because it is counterpointed by allusions to Bacchus. Witkin pushes this very powerful artistic device to the limit.
The place of the mask is pivotal to a reading of this image. Many of Witkin’s subjects are masked, as in The Graces, Mother and Child, and Feast of Fools. Witkin uses this specific device to both simultaneously conceal and reveal. A concealment allows for a revelation. In these images the masks protect identity, but also reference the portrayal of those who need to be disguised. The mask is the emblem of concealment. Witkin often masks his models as a way of avoiding “a specific personality” (Coke 13). If the actual individual were recognizable in this image the whole centre of meaning would seismically shift. So the mask performs two oppositional functions. On the one hand it carries its own references and associations – it adds to the meaning in an image, and on the other hand, it creates an anonymity or a space by something which has been removed, that is, this specific woman’s identity.

Masks are one of the most obvious indicators or indexes of secrecy (Nooter 25). Every time Witkin includes a mask he is also alluding to secrecy. Witkin: “There is a struggle that goes on behind the mask, that is going on every second of someone’s existence whether they know it or not, and that is in the arena of their soul” (Maxwell Joel Peter Witkin 46). Witkin is referring to the face as mask. By masking his models he replicates the face and draws attention to the face as mask. 45

Portrait of Holocaust exposes taboos in the same way as do Serrano’s and Fox’s images. They reveal secrecy, and they reveal it through shock. The grotesque, the disgusting and repugnant aspects of death – of life – are bluntly displayed. Witkin has reworked the taboos, however, as other artists have, through the aesthetic, through the image. He is not just reflecting back taboos in his culture to shock, nor to document. Witkin constructs these gruesome difficult images to transform and redeem, on behalf of society, through the process of projective identification.

4:3:5 Witkin portrays various taboo themes

45 Oscar Wilde is quoted as saying “Man (sic) is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask and he will tell the truth” (Kozloff The Privileged Eye 88).
While Salgado’s layouts, combined with his aesthetic, encourage a particular reading of his photographs, Witkin’s photographs, with a very different agenda are also formatted in specific ways to create an effect. Some of Witkin’s conventions have been discussed such as his use of historical and religious imagery, *tableaux vivants*, and masks. Another of Witkin’s trademarks is his exploration of any theme regarded as taboo or socially marginal in contemporary western society. “His work is hard on many people’s sensibilities for he sears us with the fire of taboos and the implications of madness” (Coke 6).

Witkin does not just photograph the dead body, or body parts, he has also photographed many other social outsiders. At one point in the 1980s he advertised for those “physical marvels” including those who “inspire wonder: someone with wings, horns, tails, fins, claws, reversed feet, head hands. …All manner of extreme perversions. …Anyone bearing the wounds of Christ. Anyone claiming to be God. God” (Witkin *Gods of Earth and Heaven* na). He has photographed conjoined twins, hermaphrodites, dwarfs, as well as extreme acts of sexuality. His overall oeuvre shows Witkin’s attitude to death and how that relates to what society deems as taboo.

In his books and exhibitions, Witkin does not distinguish between the various taboos. There are not separate books on death or sexuality, for instance. For him the whole creative process is about retrieval and redemption and therefore all these subject matters are linked by secrecy and their potential political or social ostracism. Witkin’s entire work looked at as an overview, is distinguished by his capacity to subvert taboos. Death is just one of these. But it is the most significant for all the reasons that have been alluded to throughout this thesis. “Thus, Witkin redeems the despised dead. In the afterlife of his icons, they speak and teach” (Parry *Joel Peter Witkin* 14).
Witkin’s particular use of the photographic medium

Witkin, like Salgado, has chosen the photograph as his artistic medium, partly because of its veracity credentials. For Witkin it acts like a layer of protection — an encasing of soft but scabrous truths.

Witkin sees his work as part of a process of self discovery. All his images are like self portraits, reflections, which illuminate some recess of his inner world. He writes that he sees himself in all the people he photographs whether they are alive or dead. “They represent mysteries and majesties that I have to fulfil, not through any kind of physical union, but through a psychic one, by way of images” (Witkin Danse Macabre 38). Witkin “sought to photograph the unknown in himself — the fear of his being — in the hope of facing it and thereby being emptied of it” (Coke 13).

If Witkin is always photographing himself — he is photographing his inner world. “These dark places, like the deepest recessions at the centre of the earth, become equivalents of unconscious mental space” (Parry Joel Peter Witkin 13). His photographs, his tableaux, are united by reflections of this inner space. They are often claustrophobic. The tableaux vivant — the frozen moment — means that his images not only represent his inner world but they also do not allow in the outer, the other world. This is his personal vision, absolutely. The photographic medium represents truth in Witkin’s world. For Witkin the process of photography is a redemptive one in the terms of the third phase of a projective identification. Witkin has internalized aspects of society’s projected out painful responses to life and death and has reworked those issues, through his photographs. The images then become like self portraits because they are reflective of this complicated series of internal interactions.

Witkin is acutely aware of his place in the western photographic canon and as well as citing iconic paintings with such photographs as Portrait of Holocaust, The Graces, and Mother and Child he also references previous photographic nude conventions in much the same way as
Silverthorne with Woman Who Died in Her Sleep. American E. J. Bellocq’s (1873–1949) Untitled, Woman on a Stool [Plate 85] (c.1912) is an example of this photographic referencing. The centralised positioning of the figure, the use of a mask, the inclusion of other photographs in the background, the interplay of varying textures in this 1912 image all reflect Witkin’s style.

For Witkin the photographic medium is a representational tool, like painting. That it also carries with it the same insistences of truth as a documentary photograph adds to the image’s metaphoric power. But Witkin physically manipulates the photograph at every stage, without the intervention of Photoshop.

Witkin’s technical interaction with the negative creates a skin, an “epidermal value” to the photographic surface. Witkin achieves this by working directly on the negative, gouging and scraping, both positive and negative. Almost all Witkin’s images show signs that he has worked at the negative, scratching, scraping and blotting, sometimes very subtly, but often vigorously and deliberately. The final work is printed through tissue paper on Portiga papers which have been treated by various chemicals (Celant 12). Witkin obtains a look of parchment or age through printing on warm-toned papers, thus giving “even the most outrageous image a sense of history” (Coke 13). Often the photograph is then layered in pure molten beeswax and then polished once it has cooled and encausticized. Celant comments that Witkin’s work “contains strong echoes of the technical and linguistic origins of photography” through his treatment of the photographic surface which recalls the “tangible, quasi-metallic consistency of daguerreotypes” (Celant 12).

Witkin always works with a very clear idea of what he wants in the image. That evidence of his hand, manifestly visible on most of his images, is another paradox. Most photographers are effaced by the photographic process – the opposite is true for Witkin.

4:3:7 Witkin’s use of binaries and projective identification
The pictorial oppositions in Witkin’s images all reference and depend on an oppositional pull for revelation and the need for concealment. Much of the tension in Witkin’s photographs is generated through his use of binary oppositional imagery. The fact that he predominantly uses black and white photographs is the most unsubtle example of this. His images all have a very direct light/dark dichotomy which carry inferences to life and death. He plays with binaries and contradiction as part of his aesthetic expression.

Witkin: “My work concerns itself with the impossibility of consummation between person and symbol. But the fear of my being, the very vacuum of my existence, creates an insistence of belief which makes the possibility of union between person and symbol – plausible” (Parry The Bone House 2). By representing the binary from ‘the very vacuum’ of his existence, Witkin is directing his course toward unity. He recognizes the splits in society which projective identification works to resolve.

The main binaries Witkin is engaged with, are those between beauty and repulsion; humour and intensity; the physical properties and allusions that come with black and white; but also oppositions between religious imagery and moral or sexual taboos – the sacred and secular; and the photographically indexical truth counterpointed to imagination and allegory. These are the ‘profound emotional dichotomies’ which Witkin refers to and which give his photographs so much of their currency. And in all these binaries and references, “what counts most is the awareness of the tragedy of death as the sole real otherness in life” (Celant 32).

By revealing secrets and contravening taboos, artists such as Witkin validate the necessity of the secret. Revelation disturbs the silence around secrecy and demands recognition. The act of revelation therefore either generates a changed attitude or reinforces the original taboo status. Thus it appears as if the ritualization of the revelation of secrets – the practice of secrecy, is performed by the western equivalent to elders or shamans – those to whom secrecy is
entrusted – with the understanding that such secrets be revealed in order to transform and redeem, or maintain and consolidate certain cultural values.

To repeat the projective identification phases emphasizing Witkin’s agenda: society experiences certain emotions and feelings as difficult or painful; society then projects out those feelings into (not onto) artists; and, artists, such as Witkin, carry these projections for society through the special place society has created for artists to experience difficult feelings for society. In this way society sustains a distance from painful feelings; artists however remain attached. Artists – Witkin, experiences this pain as theirs/his (but uncomfortably so), and metabolize this suffering through the creative process, reintroducing the original difficult and painful feelings back to society in the form of images.

It is Witkin’s felt responsibility to transmute the ugly, the deformed, the outcast and the dead. He does this through his photographic formats and conventions, creating visions of his inner world – a world constructed in part by the introjected feelings rejected by society. The fact that Witkin is also a religious man nurtures the projective identification process in specific ways, colouring his process with redemptive and transformative initiatives.
Part Five

Case Studies: Salgado, Witkin and Photographs of the Dead

5:1 Salgado’s images of death

I analysed *Migrations* and some of its specific images in the previous section of the thesis to identify some of Salgado’s photographic conventions. I followed this analysis with a description of comparable conventions by Witkin. Although both photographers have a fundamentally different approach to their work they also have many similarities. I linked the similarities in their art through the filter of projective identification. Projective identification is not an abstract concept. It describes and names a powerfully directive human interaction. Salgado and Witkin both use their art as a way of transforming otherwise elided and rejected aspects of human experience, through their photographic expression. They photograph the edges of life, the edges which inflect and control fundamental cultural belief structures in western society.

In this section I look at how Salgado and Witkin photograph the dead body. Previous sections have created the groundwork for this analysis. I firstly described how secrecy functioned, isolating a paradox between concealment and revelation; I then ascribed that function to the secrecy around death in contemporary western culture, noting the different ways death has been aestheticized; I followed that with an analysis of the particular properties of photography in relation to death and in relation to secrecy; I then applied that analysis to the work of Salgado and Witkin in relation to projective identification and the necessary
artistic conventions which make such a dynamic communication possible.

Salgado’s aesthetic treatment of the dead body needs to be taken within the context of Migrations as a complete text. The following images work partly because of their sequential positioning. Outside the constructed context of Migrations however, these images taken separately (as some of them have been), have a specific relevance. By examining specific images of death from Migrations, I detail aspects of Salgado’s photographic techniques which I have already touched on Migrations as a text. These aspects reflect projective identification, as do the single units that go to make it up. These images can be read as evidence of the projective connection between western society, rejected suffering and Salgado’s photographic statements. They are manifestations of secrecy.

With each photograph Salgado reveals and conceals; he exposes by using specific aesthetics which often elide other possible readings; the photographs represent the witnessing of suffering but also confirmation of the displacement of that suffering. I discuss how these contradictions fit into the secrecy and projective dynamic.

A grounding in truthfulness gives Salgado’s images such a forceful, seemingly unarguable structural foundation. Truthfulness is not only attributed to the photographic medium, but also to notions of beauty. And connotations of truthfulness, from both these sources seduce and beguile in these images. The seductiveness allows for communications of projected and displaced feelings, communications of secrecy.

These images of death and dying present individuals in situations of extreme human trauma. They are different from the postmortem photographs discussed elsewhere because the bodies are in situ and are therefore specifically politicized. Historically they have more resonance with the early American social documentary images of photographers such as Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine (1874-1940) who used photographs as evidence of the need for social reform.
Photographer and photographic critic, Victor Burgin theorized that the work of artists, which no one else does is to “dismantle existing communication codes and to recombine some of their elements into structures which can be used to generate new pictures of the world” (Burgin Relocating 49). Burgin’s description of the ‘work of artists’ is also that of projective identification. As described previously, artists adopt the disowned projected out feelings and re-enter them into society after they have been processed. The modified feelings, generated through the artistic process, significantly alters the entire paradigm. This is the task Salgado has set for himself, he has taken ‘existing codes’ and through his particular aesthetic, and through the various templates already outlined he generates a different visions, and different ways of accessing the distress and trauma around death and dying.

Some of these templates are clear in images such as Kenyan Mother [Plate 86] (1993). Salgado has photographed a young Kenyan refugee woman and her baby. He centrally positioned her in the photograph, sitting on a mat; she looks directly at the camera. The baby she gave birth to two days before lies across her lap. She had arrived in Kakuma refugee camp in northern Kenya after walking for several days (Salgado Migrations, Booklet 11).

A split in perception results from an understanding of the content of the image (that is, this particular woman and her child), with the photograph’s physical and then social construction. This photograph is beautifully composed, with a careful balance between areas of light and dark and horizontals and verticals. The centrality of the subject and the direct gaze of the woman contrive to keep the viewer’s attention on the woman’s face. The image is confidently and conscientiously developed and formatted. These compositional devices contribute to effacing or smoothing over any problems arising from the photograph’s content.

The woman and her child are displaced and nameless. We know where they have come from but the particularities of their individual identities are accessible only through the image. What is accessible is the universal human responses that are
provoked by their plight. In the image the mother reaches out with her left hand in an ambiguous gesture. Her arm and hand form another connection point galvanizing the impact of her gaze. Her child’s chances of survival are small, smaller still the chances of thriving. Salgado feels that when the “mother of a child in Africa, in Latin America, in Asia has a kid that dies, the mother suffers as much as the mother of a kid that dies in the United States. In the end there is just one humankind” (Salgado Migrations 3). This woman and her child have become humankind.

Pictures of a mother and infant instantly reference a religious resonance with all Madonnas, as with Witkin’s images. Mother and child compositions, and other image genres like landscapes, carry centuries of cultural loading in the western art canon. It is not possible to separate this image from those of Jesus and Mary and all the depictions and complexities that come with that. An unconscious route of reference, a specific template, is therefore created which makes the content of this image visually and emotionally accessible, partly through those associations.

In Kenyan Mother religious connections are underlined by associations the Nativity scene. Religious symbolism is suggested by the cross formed by the conjunction of the horizontals formed by the baby and its pillow, with the verticals of the mother mirrored in the verticals of background and mat. Conversely the cross creates a dissonance between mother and child which conflicts with the religious symbolism. The mother’s body language is strangely disconnected from her baby. She may be preparing herself, steeling herself against its death. (The baby may already be dead, the text does not make this clear). The plight of this baby and infants like it have been retrieved from ignorance and oblivion, from a secrecy generated by shame, through this image by Salgado.

Kenyan Mother resonates with some of the Farm Securities Administration photographs taken in America in the 1930s, photographs such as Dorothea Lange’s Migrant Mother [Plate 87] (1936) which have become so iconic (Hallett 133). The
death and destitution of children, accompanied by the helplessness of mothers are the moral bedrock which require a response in a compassionate world. There is genuine suffering, generational suffering in this image of a Kenyan mother. And as Susan Sontag states “photographs echo photographs: it was inevitable that the photographs of emaciated Bosnian prisoners at Omarska, the Serb death camp created in northern Bosnia in 1992, would recall the photographs taken in the Nazi death camps in 1945” (Sontag Regarding the Pain of Others 75).

The images Salgado has taken of mothers and children become iconic because of the images that have come before them. The absence of a name identifying the subject of the photograph underlies this tendency. This woman has therefore become displaced twice. That is not Salgado’s intention to deprive this woman of anything – quite the opposite; he has made her situation visible and therefore accountable at some level. At the same time her individuality, like the Brazilian woman with the parrot is both represented and effaced; revealed and concealed.

Abigail Solomon-Godeau in Photography at the Dock (1991) has identified various documentary tropes which I argue are particularly pertinent to Salgado. For instance, a genre of images has developed which photograph the subject, and the subject’s circumstances “as a pictorial spectacle usually targeted for a different audience and a different class”. Another invisible, but affecting trope is to photograph “the visual ‘fact’ of individual victimization or subjugation as a metonym for the (invisible) conditions that produced it”. The Kenyan woman with her baby is a metonym for the suffering of woman refugees, from another culture, another class, another reality (Solomon-Godeau 179).

46 Within my own culture I do not see women and children such as those in this photograph who are refugees, struggling with survival at the most basic levels. In Australia, refugees are in places such as Baxter or Villawood Detention Centres. So they are not the people visually in my world. And this reflects a very clear political agenda, one which Salgado is squarely confronting. Not only are refugees not accorded appropriate responses in Australia but their plight is hidden as much as possible. Society
Salgado’s image is a first step in the larger process of acknowledging global suffering. He has responded to projected and disowned feelings from within western cultures, and by taking this photograph of a Kenyan mother with her dead or endangered child, he processes the projection. The fact of these images demonstrates the projective identification dynamic. Obviously many layers of communication are at work here – not least the subject matter, the actual individuals who have been photographed: and the fact of the photographic process of Salgado’s to retrieve the suffering of these individuals from total obscurity and ignorance. Salgado’s photographs are indexical of the processes of witnessing, revelation and truthfulness.

Knowledge of widespread global suffering has only been widely available since the invention of photography. One of the first shocks of revelation from photography came with the impact of photographs from the American Civil War. These were the first war photographs of individual dead soldiers to be seen by the general population. The photographs caused an immediate horrified response (Pultz 32). Riis’s photographs of the New York slums in the late nineteenth century generated a similar reverberation. This shock value has since become deadened, almost to the point of meaninglessness by repetition. A particular agenda for Salgado has been to challenge this numbness.

In contemporary western culture many people feel that they have enough trouble with dealing with suffering in their own lives let alone from other countries (Sontag On Photography 20). And yet this woman’s suffering is a reflection of western suffering – the difference is a matter of degree and specifics. Salgado is right – suffering does belongs to humankind.

Salgado travelled to many parts of the world, photographing in some of the harshest circumstances. The photographs he makes sure, through its institutions, that we are not confronted on a daily basis with afflictions that may disturb or discomfort. However, I know this suffering exists, but I only know through photographs, like this photograph of a Kenyan mother.
took in Rwanda for instance, during the “scene of one of the greatest genocides of our century” are profoundly disturbing and emotionally heart wrenching (Salgado Migrations, Booklet 14). The Dead below the Rusumo Waterfalls of Rwanda [Plate 88] (1994) is one of the most disturbing images in Migrations. It is the photograph, part water - part land, of the base of a waterfall. The water swell has washed up debris, sticks and vegetation - but also the bodies of four men. We can’t see their faces and parts of their bodies are buried in the sand and surrounding flotsam. The image has been taken from above, we look down at what has happened as the water swirls around. It should be a peaceful scene of nature, reminding us of life’s rhythms. It is a terrible image.

The rocks provide the dark contrast in the image and also create both a sense of enclosing but also foreboding - dark and dangerous. The booklet tells us the these men are from Rwanda and were thrown into the Akagera river. Salgado writes that in just thirty minutes he saw twenty corpses swept over the waterfall (Salgado Migrations, Booklet 11). These images from Rwanda prefigure the shocking images of corpses, recently seen in the media of people drowned by the 2004 tsunami. Bodies were randomly stranded in piles of flotsam in ways that occluded their humanity, in a way similar to the Rwanda victims.

Formally analyzed, this image is predominantly a landscape. Separated from its context in Migrations it takes the eye some time to work out that there are actual bodies of people as part of the debris. This is the way that so many of Salgado’s images work. By presenting scenes in familiar ways, we look and then get startled when the full truth of the image becomes apparent. Critic, Miles Orvell writes that Salgado’s ability to “discover the grotesque in the everyday borders on the fantastic. All of this, however, calls attention to the photograph as visual icon” (Orvell 111). Salgado is not just drawing attention to the grotesque in this image, through his use of landscaping formats he transforms it.
These human bodies, washed up, unclaimed, unclaimable is a very dreadful sight. And to work back from seeing these as visual forms to the recognition that these men were alive and loved is a difficult process. My response is, however, that the least I can do, is look, and that looking itself is an act of respect. Many deaths go unseen – but these deaths have taken on another life – through the photograph – through the truthfulness of the photograph. This truthfulness is not disturbed by the clash of the beauty of the image with the ugliness of the content. The photograph has the capacity to carry both.\(^4\) Solomon-Godeau writes on this complex issue that the photographer’s “desire to build pathos or sympathy into the image, to invest the subject with either an emblematic or an archetypal importance, to visually dignify labour or poverty” is only a problem to the degree that other dimensions are obscured or eclipsed, and are not “themselves visual” (Solomon-Godeau Photography at the Dock 179).

Salgado has included other images of Tutsi people who had been massacred by the Hutu militia in Rwanda. Slain Tutsis in Rwanda [Plate 89] (1994) shows the bodies of Tutsi men who had been ambushed along the road. Salgado said that for two hundred kilometres the highway was “scattered with the corpses of Tutsi killed by Hutu militia, some in isolation, others in groups (Salgado Migrations, Booklet 11). This image depicts perhaps seven or eight bodies, it is hard to tell. I think they are men. Again their individuality is obliterated both by murder, and the camera. And that may be just as well. The utility truck they were driving has a flat front wheel tire: there could have been an accident. A man’s body hangs drooped, supported by the strut between the side and front windows: the glass is gone. Another man’s body lies in the back of the ute. The other bodies are scattered on the road near the ute: like their possessions. In the

\(^4\) So the least I can do is look at the photograph, if not the actual scene, if not the original suffering. Salgado has brought that image back from the horrors of its reality, so that I can look without smelling, so that I can look and then turn the page, or shut the book – but I can look, and then perhaps see. At least the process of looking opens out the possibilities for other things to happen.
central foreground an open suitcase lies open and empty. This photograph depicts another dreadful scene.

In this image again it is the details which add such poignancy. The man’s body to the extreme right of the image is lying away from the camera – we can see the soles of his boots. In the pile of broken glass there is a cap with writing across it. A machete – a long dangerous blade, has been flung down on the road near the suitcase. In the background soft hills and a line of trees are silhouetted against the sky. Grasses grow beside the road; they are neutral – they will continue to grow. Another man, alive, walks slowly along the road embankment – a witness. I cannot tell whether he is watching Salgado or looking at the murder scene – but he is a witness both to the deaths of the Tutsis, and also to Salgado. The process of witnessing is itself witnessed. This man looks across a cultural gap through Salgado and then at me, at the viewer and in doing so his witnessing gaze links cultures, links the knowledge of these men’s deaths. Structural congruence makes the photographer invisible.

The tension between the confrontation of death and the eclipsing of the presence of the photographer in these and the other Salgado images of death mirrors the conjunction of the secrecy dynamics of concealment and revelation. Often the concealment/revelation dynamic is itself revealed through a sense of mystery. John Berger comments on this sense in an interview with Salgado on the release of Migrations. He noticed that:

In these big chapters [of Migrations] there are as many mysteries as there are people. When one really knows somebody, one is actually recognizing their mystery and the unknowable in that person. Maybe that’s even where love begins. In your pictures [Salgado] there are many such moments of what I call mystery (John Berger speaking in Spectre of Hope). 48

Perhaps that is also part of Salgado’s agenda, as part of the projective identification process he adopts a sense of love and compassion which many in the west find too difficult to access.
Many of Salgado’s images do have a mysterious quality to them: a sense of mystery coupled to a narrative richness. Mysteriousness can be an indication of secrecy. As Berger suggests, mystery can also allude to the ineffable and the unknowable. Writing on Other Americas (also by Salgado) John Mraz resonates with Berger: “Everything is enveloped in an incomprehensible and inexplicable delitescence [that is, disappearance] that makes enigmatic the hunger, poverty and death that appear in this book” (Mraz Sebastião Salgado 15). This sense of mystery is often created by Salgado through a careful aesthetic, the particular use of dark and light for instance, or conventions of an evocative landscape such as in Rwandan Exodus. Salgado’s images are not like forensic images even though they share something of the same documentary intention. At other times the sense of mystery accompanies the subject matter, accompanies the unknowable destiny of the people he has photographed at the edge of despair.

Such is Cholera Death in Kibumba Camp [Plate 90] (1994) taken in Zaire of Rwandan refugees. Salgado tells us that this image was taken of a man dying of cholera “watched by a crowd of people who are traumatized by what they are experiencing: genocide, civil war, exodus, contagious diseases, and threats of every kind (Salgado Migrations, Booklet 12). The man is lying on a cleared space on the ground. He is naked, nameless and turned away from the camera. Behind him are a line of people – we can just see their bare legs and the lower part of their bodies. We can’t see their faces. The man’s body and the ground around him occupy the left hand side of the photograph. To the right foreground there is a figure, wrapped in a blanket, holding an umbrella. To the right of that figure there are three small children looking at Salgado. The smallest one in the front has his hands covering his mouth as if he is blotting out a nasty smell. The child behind him looks at Salgado with an expression of entrenched suffering.

Recognizing mystery or suffering, as Salgado undoubtedly does, in a project that took him six years, takes love and dedication. And that love carries the force of his images. That love is also essential to the creative process of transformation.
The children’s faces in this image tell the story. And the youngest, who does not hide his fear and repugnance of death mirrors back to western society its incapacity to suffer and mourn, grieve and respond congruently, cleanly and compassionately. He is like the innocent child who names the lie in the story of The Emperor With No Clothes. And that is Salgado’s role also to reveal what has been denied.

Many of Salgado’s images show groups of people in varied situations, often occupied or distracted, with one or sometimes two people squarely facing the camera. Often it is the children who look at Salgado, as in Kukes Refugee Camp 1 previously discussed. Following the gaze throughout Migrations is a telling process in itself. It provides a continuing thread throughout the text. These specific images pull the attention back into these images with a different intensity because as a viewer there is then a requirement to look back. As a viewer, I have to answer the gaze, and acknowledge that connection. Salgado is, as is the innocent child, naming the unnamable, revealing the unbearable, exposing the impossible, and he does so through the projective identification process. He has responded to the rejected suffering; he has photographed and witnessed it in the ‘other’ and brought it back, formatted and framed, and punctuated by the gaze.

The gaze is reflective, paralleled by the projective identification process. By using this psychoanalytic dynamic as a model, the placement of responses to death and dying in contemporary culture can be outlined, analyzed, and retrieved from absences, clichés and secrecy. Because Salgado is embedded in western culture his photography represents that culture’s expressions. Salgado writes: “Photography for me reflects the society in which I lived, what it gave to me, my part in it and in the end the type of photography that I do is part of that society” (Hallett 132). Migrations is a body of work, addressed to contemporary western societies, about suffering and displacement. It therefore requires a response; Salgado’s photographs carry a message. Salgado again: “The one thing I ask is that they understand. The greatest quality mankind
must have is solidarity, to be open for other people from other cultures and to understand the story you have. I ask for comprehension, understanding and openness” (Hallett 131).

Salgado’s images, which have digested and detoxified disowned suffering, create the opportunity for understanding and openness and in doing so create the potential for change, for growth and for a redemption of solidified secrecy around trauma and death. Salgado’s photographs are a very profound offering, an opportunity for recognition and realignment.

Salgado creates new routes of reference as well as consolidating the ones already in existence and he therefore contributes to new ways for culture to perceive death. These pathways are also changed and challenged by Joel Peter Witkin whose difficult images of death I analyze in the following section.
5:2 Witkin’s images of death

Witkin ‘‘concocted the very romantic notion that he wanted his photographs to be as powerful as the last thing a person sees or remembers before death” (Coke 7).

Salgado uses the documentary genre coupled to a modernist aesthetic as routes of reference or codes of recognition to manifest his response to global suffering. These routes of reference are an essential component to the projective identification process. Salgado relied on the veracity of the photographic medium, the capacity of photographs to seduce through truthfulness cemented through the documentary tradition. He is locked into a balance between beauty and suffering which sometimes carries an unbearable tension. He communicates a message. He knows he redeems or at least witnesses suffering for the western world. Joel Peter Witkin’s images contain elements which also conform to these routes or codes, particularly his aesthetic: but his is a very different pathway.

Witkin’s agenda is no less powerful, no less redemptive but his aesthetic lexicon could not be more different to Salgado’s, despite both artists being acutely aware of photography’s inherent properties. Salgado works in the field, and Witkin in a studio for instance. What these two photographic artists have in common is that both have adopted different aspects of contemporary western society’s projected out responses to suffering around death. They also both reference a romantic modernist tradition which conforms to the notion of artist as the expressive voice for their cultures. And, they both use their status of photographic artist in the third phase of the projective identification dynamic to process, to digest, and to transform that suffering and denial in a process which allows for different social patterns.
In *Migrations* Salgado photographed displaced people in crisis throughout the world. Witkin’s photographs reverberate with the results of his (Witkin’s) investigation into boundaries, the edges of what it means to be human: edges of sexuality, of relationship, of life and death (Thijsen *Grotesque* 14). According to cultural theorist Parveen Adams whose essay on Witkin was included in *Art: Sublimation or Symptom* (2003) Witkin is “making photographs of himself” (Adams ‘Se faire etre une photographie’ 165).

As previously noted, Witkin’s images are not literal self portraits but represent manifestations of his own obsessions and explorations. Witkin responds in his way, to conform to the role of artist exerted by society, to express the inexpressible for society as part of the projective identification dynamic, in the process he energetically engages with secrecy dynamics.

Many of Witkin’s images portray the dead. Most of his images challenge and confront. Most of his images also compel and beguile. This chapter explores some of Witkin’s images of death and in doing so establishes some of the specific pathways Witkin uses, the conventions which establish his aesthetic routes of reference.

When I look at one of Witkin’s photographs the first physical impact (which is also the same sense that then lingers in the corners of my mind) is the rawness of his vision, the clarity and fearlessness of his focus and almost always: a shock. Salgado’s images are sometimes breathtakingly beautiful. Witkin’s are breathtakingly unequivocal. Witkin’s photographs are images of retrieval, as are Salgado’s, not as witnesses to global suffering but to the fringes – the periphery of human identity and experience. Witkin’s images articulate absences, forbidden sights – sights which are necessary to Witkin’s internal processing. Because they are not there, visually available in his culture – Witkin has to make them.

The construction of Salgado’s *Migrations*, the placement of images, the repetition of themes and the other visual devices Salgado uses, in part create a specific context for the reading of the dead body. These photographs belong
within the general structure of Migrations and death is therefore represented with a particularly communicated emphasis. Witkin’s images of the dead express an entirely different aspect to death. Salgado’s is a message with death as the tragic result of ignorance and cruelty: Witkin retrieves the dead body, or body parts coupled to other images of those on the margins of society – the sights visually absent from contemporary western culture; taboo sights. But, someone has to look and Witkin makes that possible.  

Corpus Medius [Plate 91] (2000, toned gelatin silver print, 20 x 16”) is one of Witkin’s most “eloquent” and elegant images. American art academic Eugenia Parry writes in the text accompanying the image in a small book of Witkin’s photographs, that over the years Witkin had found many cadavers, but he was attracted to this one from Eastern Europe because of its “purity”. It “gave off its own light – proving to him that gods appear when least expected – he had only to follow what it directed”. This image is the last in Perry’s compilation and has been placed so, because for Witkin, it summarizes all the images that preceded it” (Parry Joel Peter Witkin 124).  

The power and the poetry in Corpus Medius comes from its simplicity. Witkin has photographed the cadaver of a man from the waist down. (In this way it is reminiscent of Fox’s Untitled, (Draped Body)). The man’s body has been cut in half. The cadaver’s legs are gracefully lying on some kind of table which is covered by a cloth. The legs centrally dissect the image. A drawn striped curtain hangs to the left of the image. The beautiful feet are crossed at the ankles: somehow they have not lost their dignity. The man’s darkened flaccid penis lies languidly across his leg. A line of  

"Witkin’s process reminds me of a biscuit shape cutter. Society expects people to be specific shapes – Witkin photographs the shapes of the dough that is left. It is irregular, chaotic, unpredictable and often marginalized. The people in Witkin’s images, whether dead or alive are reclaimed by the photographic process from the shadows and crevices of western society’s incapacity to experience the visceral realities of death and difference. We are all made from the same dough."
stitches on the man’s belly form a vector, leading the eye to the curve of the penis, and down along the leg, returning again to the line of severance. Witkin has arranged the body so that the severed mid section is shown and we can look inside the body through the vivisection.

So many images of Witkin’s impact through a visual disruption. Two very different responses to this photograph confuse a coalescence. Firstly, Corpus Medius is a beautiful image; with clear, direct, clean lines, and a harmonious balance between light and dark. This classical picture, clearly formalist in structure, has art historical reference to classical Greek and Roman sculptures. Relief of the Dead Man Drinking at a Banquet: From Thasos [Plate 92], for example was carved around 450 BC. This sculpture illustrates how Witkin was influenced by the art of this time; how elements of the composition were arranged, how the fabric was treated, as well as how the viewer was positioned. Allusions to classical art accounts for some of the impact of Witkin’s photograph. It gives the viewer some sense that what they are seeing is familiar, known. It also seems to validate Witkin’s position as belonging within mainstream art.

Corpus Medius is also horrific and shocking. If I put my hands around my waist with just a little pressure I can image the correlation of this photograph in my own body. I live with what is inside me, as we all do, without a consciousness of exactly what that looks like; or what that could look like. As Susan Stewart writes: “The body presents the paradox of contained and container at once” (Stewart On Longing 104). Corpus Medius confounds and represents this paradox.

How to make sense of both threads is a conundrum present in many of Witkin’s images and is a direct indication of a projective identification. Witkin has harnessed art historical references, great photographic confidence and skill which he has directed toward the corpse: the corpse which represents the most potent taboo in contemporary western culture. As in Salgado’s photographs, Witkin recognizes the secrecy around death in the west and has
produced images which flagrantly display the dead body. He leaves no room for squeamishness; no sense of apology. Witkin’s images demand and compel, a process which allows for a different interpretation of the dead body through this process of aestheticization. Witkin announces the fact of secrecy as much as revealing the corpse – that which is usually hidden.

Corpus Medius is a summary of Witkin’s earlier photographs. The Kiss [Plate 93] (1982, toned gelatin silver print, 15.20 x 16”) was one of Witkin’s first images of body parts. Witkin photographed two halves of a severed head, positioned as if in an embrace. Many of Witkin’s images have included arranged body parts from the morgue. The Kiss is one of the simplest and most ironic. The photograph stirred an enormous controversy when it was first shown and Witkin was accused of halving the head himself for his own aesthetic ends. It had been however, “laterally bisected for anatomy students” (Parry The Bone House 178).

The head is centred in the middle of the photograph slightly favouring the lower half. It sits on a cloth, although the texture of the fabric blends into the black background. Witkin’s The Kiss references Géricault’s painting of two severed heads, which also sit on cloth in a partial state of decomposition. Witkin has expanded and played with Géricault’s image by representing one head as if it were two. Witkin has chemically manipulated the photograph so that the background appears homogenized. The kissing head sits in a sea of softly textured blackness. The photograph includes no indication that the head has been cut in half; there is just the illusion of mirroring.

It is an old man’s head. He was balding, unshaven and unkempt. His hair is wispy, mattered and tangled with bits that fray out from the back. It is the hair of an old man, disturbed after a long night’s sleep. His eyes are closed, and deeply set, and his nose is thin and hooked. Witkin positioned the two halves so that the mouth is pushed

50 Who cut the head in half would seem to have made a difference, perhaps, the controversy served as a distraction from the real elements of the photograph that are scandalous.
together as if in an embrace. Because of the resultant twist we see the chin from one side and the nose from the other. At the base of the head is the neck which has lost most of its skin. The tension that holds life together is visibly absent, but we do see unravelled bits of skin, cut veins and arteries.

As with so many of Witkin’s images this one is retrieved by aesthetics, even humour. There is a poetry to the composition. Germano Celant writes of The Kiss that an old man’s head is “used to create and reformulate an image of excess”. In his opinion Witkin is not expressing sadism or the barbaric, but grapples with the “anomalies and enigmas of reason and belief”. The aim is to allow for a healing and for a “defence against the intolerable reality of life’s end” (Celant 22). Instead of resisting death and decomposition Witkin is embracing it: “embracing death to save it”, an approach to death suggested by Walter Benjamin (who committed suicide during World War II) and quoted by Celant (Celant 22). With such an embrace Witkin is also ‘saving’ death from sanitization, from the ignorance that comes from avoidance, and from a cultural sweep that wishes to evade death and the concept of death from social elements that consistently cohere to concretize death as taboo. He reflects back to society a different vision.

A sense of irony comes from the reference to other identically titled works of art with the same title from artists such as, Auguste Rodin’s (1840-1917) The Kiss; Gustave Klimt’s (1862-1918) The Kiss [Plate 94] (1907-1908, casein paint on plaster and embedded mixed media, 80 x 180 cm); and Constantin Brancusi’s (1876-1957) The Kiss [Plate 95] (1940-1945, limestone, 23 x 13 3/4 x 10 3/4”). Irony also resonates through the narcissism implied by the image of a dead man embracing himself. Narcissism flourishes in contemporary western society. The kiss is western society’s symbol for sexual union and love - Witkin again inverts and reverses the assumed, with unexpected results. His image therefore is not only about fragmentation, but also alienation, loneliness and suffering.
Witkin writes that his process is the aesthetic organization which represents the original “visceral impact” he witnessed in front of the camera. The outcome is the printed photograph which can then be replicated. Sometimes this process takes a long time. Witkin wants his photographs to engage with the viewer through his aesthetic language, through the idealization of the subject. He explores issues of complexity, and subverts simplistic binaries. Witkin wants to touch “profound emotional dichotomies”. He writes:

> And having touched that place, my hope is not only to show the insanity of our lives, but also that this work will be seen as part of the history of diverse and desperate times.

**AND, DEATH**

I have consecrated my life to changing matter into spirit with the hope of some day seeing it all. Seeing its total form, while wearing the mask, from the distance of death. And there, in the eternal destiny, to seek the face I had before the world was made (Witkin *The Bone House* 6).

In the following sections I analyze a series of Witkin’s images of death that have been photographed in between *Corpus Medius* and *The Kiss*. These images are difficult to look at, even deeply disturbing but they are also potentially deeply rewarding. To look at them, to live with them, shifts previous perceptions and changes the felt experience of death.

Many Holocaust survivors, for instance, report feeling firstly immobilized and dissociated and then go on to live a parallel existence due to the effects of shock. Applied linguist, Ruth Wajnryb in *The Silence: How Tragedy Shapes Talk*, writes from the perspective of Jewish children of parents who survived Nazi persecution during World War II. Wajnryb observes that assuming all personal communication is mediated to a degree, in this situation the messages “are so extreme that a process of socialization is needed to render them receivable by another. It is as if without this processing, they would remain outside the social ambit of
communication” (Wajnryb 192). Certain life experiences, especially those related to death and trauma change people and situations so profoundly that they either move “beyond the limits of language” (Wajnryb 83) or they are in danger of moving entirely ‘outside the social ambit’ of communication.

Artists such as Witkin work with this agenda to reclaim and to express the inexpressible, to speak what cannot be spoken. Sometimes this can be accomplished by the construction of a narrative, some way of bridging the gap between the traumatic world of memory and daily experience. Lifton referred to this as the impossibility of ‘facing suffering nakedly’. One needs a prior imagery to face and then reintegrate suffering; this process does not require the trauma to be literally portrayed.

But sometimes shock accomplishes the breaking of a seal. This breach challenges a revision of the status quo, and allows for different levels of understanding to evolve. Secrecy dynamics are ruptured and other constellations of meaning escape and become possible. To look at some of Witkin’s photographs is such a shock.

5:2:1 Fragmentation of the body

As we have seen with the postmortem photographs in previous chapters, to photograph the corpse is one way to confront taboos around death. To photograph fragments of bodies ruptures and disturbs those taboos at an even deeper level.

The body of someone who has died is commonly regarded as a forbidden sight in the contemporary west. This leads to denial and rejection. For the body to be cut or mutilated in other ways potentially demonstrates further trauma, perhaps even a lack of respect. One part of a body separated from the rest, disrupts any identification, any coherence of that person’s individuality. Floating body parts are indexical of crimes and foul play. The skin should not be ruptured. It is significant that the seven openings of the body are so profoundly meaningful (Stewart On Longing 104).
Harvest Philadelphia [Plate 96] (1984, 20 x 16”) is reminiscent of paintings by the sixteenth century Italian painter Guiseppi Arcimboldo (1527-1593). Arcimboldo’s painting Rudolph II as Vertumnus [Plate 97] (1591, panel. 68 x 56 cm) is a composition of fruits and vegetables constructed to look like the portrait of a man. Harvest is a photograph also taken of arranged vegetables but it includes the piece of a face. Harvest demonstrates Witkin’s use of body fragments in his images, breaching taboos by displaying the abject.

Harvest shows a section of a face in profile, looking to the right. The eye is shut and the mouth is slightly open, as if in a sigh. The nose is aquiline giving the face a noble appearance. The rest of the portrait is constructed, as Arcimboldo would have recognized, from fruits and vegetables. Some are instantly identifiable, a pear and grapes forming part of the head mantle, shallots and artichoke at the bottom of the frame, and a beetroot or sweet potato at the crown. The overall impression is that of a face surrounded by organic textures. The fruit and vegetables bring with them associations of food and sustenance and therefore also associations of the transitory nature of life, of how quickly decay sets in.

Witkin found the head in a “collection of medical oddities” in New Mexico. Witkin visits Mexican morgues because of legal restrictions in the United States (Dusinberre 4). He was drawn to this face because of its “delicacy and rareness”. After his request to have it sent to him was refused, he made the journey to Mexico to travel to it. He wrote: “I felt I was on a pilgrimage, not to bring death back to life, but to show death’s face as a witness to the supernatural” (Coke 17). He and his wife spent six hours adjusting and arranging the still life before Witkin was satisfied enough to photograph it.

The strongest sense from this image, however, is that of tranquillity. Witkin has composed the photograph so it is beautifully balanced, in terms of light and dark, detail and flat planes, verticals and horizontals. These elements correspond to the symbols of life and death represented by
the fruit and vegetables and the face. And even though this image references painting genres and has painterly qualities, it is unmistakably a photograph, with all that that implies. ‘Still life’ is literally ‘dead life’, and a distinguishing feature of the genre is that objects are arranged or “displayed in a way that would never occur in real life” (Leppert *The Committed Eye* 66).

The still life theme using human remains is carried over and extended into *Feast of Fools, New Mexico* (Plate 98) (1990, toned gelatin silver print, 25 x 35”). *Harvest* is one of Witkin’s more benign images; but *Feast of Fools*, which uses some of the same artistic conventions is much more subversive. Compositionally and generically it is a still life referencing seventeenth century Dutch still life paintings (Adams *‘Se faire etre une photographie’* 170).

*Feast of Fools* is composed of some fruits and vegetables as well as an octopus, prawns and other seafood, as well as numerous human body parts, all carefully arranged on a table with the typical Witkin black background. What makes this image unique is the presence of a dead child mid-image. A man’s lower leg and foot set up on the right hand side of the image forms one third of the basically triangular composition. Propped up against the top of the leg is a hand resting on what may be the remains of the arm, crowning “the pyramid in a gesture of benediction” (Parry *The Bone House* 176). The baby is leant against the arm with its chin pushed down on its chest. The chest has a line of stitch marks indicative of an autopsy. Around the top of its head is a band of cloth or ribbon, covering its eyes: a little mask of protection. Its limbs are casually but intentionally arranged around various items of food. In front of the baby, also mid-frame is a pustular foot. To the left of the image, forming the base of the triangle, is a hand grasping an octopus tendril. It is a woman’s hand. The food performs an aesthetic and symbolic function in *Feast of Fools*.

In *Harvest* the predominant atmosphere of the image is generated by the fruit and vegetables which carries the theme of death. In *Feast of Fools* the presence of food is a seduction which almost fails to seduce. This image is
visceral and putrid, though one which is once again held by Witkin’s careful aesthetic. In an essay for The Bone House — another collection of Witkin’s photographs — Eugenia Parry writes of this image that Witkin imagined the scale of the work to be as large as possible “because he has mapped a grand conception”. Parry describes Witkin’s creation of this vanitas as “an erotic territory of majestic sacrifice and sacrament” which for Witkin had Christian references to the “unspeakable suffering” of Jesus (Parry The Bone House 177).

Witkin explains the process of making this image:

A doctor took me downstairs and pulled out the drawers to show me some bodies. ...The doctor...opened the wrong drawer by mistake and inside there were parts of bodies, arms, legs, ears - floating around parts of babies - everything you can imagine, in this swill of human soup and pus and degeneration. And I said to myself, that is why I’m here - I can’t even look at this, it’s like looking into Hell! At the same time I said to myself: Is this the way I have to do my work? Is this the way I’m going to feed my family? But at the same time I was very excited, knowing that I do have a capacity to find beauty in the most vile, ugly things. It was an incredible challenge to see this event...I came back the next day to the forensic hospital knowing that I can put a photograph together, and the photograph became the Feast of Fools (Celant 33).

In this reverie Witkin describes his part in a projective identification dynamic. He knows he can find beauty where others find disgust. He also feels this as a responsibility to communicate. Witkin needs to communicate these spaces, not just find them and experience them. He needs to communicate them back to his society — his photographic conventions like enzymes digesting the untenable, in ways that allow for a different orientation.

Feast of Fools exemplifies Witkin’s aesthetic. Through the juxtaposition of life’s detritus with emblems of nutrition
and within the traditional still life genre, Witkin forges a fresh level of meaning. The credentials of the genre are left intact, but not sufficiently to allay a sense of deep disturbance: the disturbance that always comes with death, even kindly deaths. And instead this baby and these body parts staying somewhere out of sight, in a drawer of swill, which is the assumed convention, they are arranged and touched and displayed. “Ghastly remains in his pictures are never gratuitous” (Parry Joel Peter Witkin 14). The viewer is inveigled, snared and then confronted through levels of cultural expectation to assess and judge. As is the case with most of Witkin’s photographs – this is not a neutral image.

Parry suggests that Feast of Fools references the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus through the vanitas genre. Perhaps this image is also about redemption, about the necessity of looking, of awareness and attention. For without those qualities redemption is not possible. What is redeemed is the capacity of death to equalize. Because everything dies, everything is equal, energy and matter are transformed. However, no changes can happen until such issues are illustrated and then seen.

Witkin has pulled these parts of lives, these fragments from a putrid drawer and in the process retrieved the disavowed and disregarded sentiments in western society. And he has transformed them into a vanitas which that same society has access to – a vanitas or reminder of the presence of death. Witkin has created the possibility for a different language of death. He says about Feast of Fools: when I saw “that mess of bodies and horrible shit, I knew I was up to making something beautiful out of something horrible. And you can say that that is the definition of life too” (Maxwell Joel Peter Witkin 47).

5:2:2 Images of the corpse

Response to Man Without a Head [Plate 99] (1993, 40 x 30”) cannot be neutral. It is one of Witkin’s most unsettling images. The title gives a clue that in this photograph
Witkin is not using a high art template. This image is what it says it is. The precedents of this photograph lie clearly with Alphonse Bertillon and the forensic photographers who almost exclusively followed his aesthetic example. *Man Without a Head* shows no indication of how the man lost his head. Many forensic photographs in comparison, document a death and leave a narrative to the imagination. This sight is another forbidden sight.

*Man Without a Head* is different from Witkin’s other images in that, although it has been meticulously staged, it has not the formal studio qualities of most of his other photographs. The headless body of a man seems *in situ*, propped up on a chair or stool which is spread with a black cloth, positioned in the corner of a room. Behind the man is a white backdrop cloth. To the left of the image is a blackened window, and a small black table with a white cloth on top. To the right of the image is a black doorway. The floor is white tiled and covered with what appears to be spilled blood. It is a clinical, featureless room.

The man’s right hand is relaxed and resting on his right thigh. His left hand looks posed with the palm of the hand facing up. This hand looks more deeply coloured than the rest of his body. As in *Corpus Medius* the man’s penis is the only part of the body that looks decayed and dead — although the general quality of his skin is unhealthy and bloated. It is visually difficult to assess how long he has been dead. He is a large corpulent man.

The two most extraordinary things about this image are that the man’s head has been removed at the base of the neck, and, that he still wears his black socks. Something has been added and something has been taken away. Where his head used to be there are obvious indications of severance, revealing a section of an inner world that is normally sealed off, as in *Corpus Medius*. These are abjected parts of the body that belong, and should stay, on the inside. Parry quotes Julia Kristeva’s work on the abject. She observes that “to focus on the human figure as a repository of abjection is to touch the darkest recesses of contemporary imaginings” (Parry *The Bone House* 178). Specifically relevant to Witkin’s
photographs is the observation that what is rejected as “base and contemptible” has a power to change the boundaries of our identities, to “forge a frontier beyond the body”. To witness the shock of the abject creates the potential to “recreate and restore ourselves” (Parry *The Bone House* 178). These potentials are the most creative and optimistic outcomes of the projective identification dynamic.

Witkin says of this image in an interview with the artist, Andres Serrano:

> What I wanted to do was not to make a photograph per se. I wanted (as I always do) to honour the condition of this man...I acknowledged the fact that I had the power to direct this, and said...'Let's lift him up and put him on a chair.' But to sit a dead man in a chair gave it a form of animation that was the most horrible thing, again very much like looking at the drawer full of swill and parts of hell. And while we were sitting him up, all the blood was rushing back from different parts of his body, like rain along an umbrella-handle, only it was blood rushing back. It was a terrible and wonderful situation. So we sat him up in this chair - it was an art deco chair, a very heavy steel chair - and by damaging all our backs, we got the huge guy up there. The background was set up already, I did that. But he kept falling off, and the blood was coming out of him, and the only way I was able to position him was to take his hands and balance him; so he was informing me, in death, how he should be photographed. And he had socks on, and the socks were the convincing factor in making the photograph. Had he not been wearing them, it would have been too raw and punishing, but the fact that he had those socks on meant that he was still in a very, very contemporary, human circumstance (Celant 38-39).

The socks do humanize the image and give it a sense of pathos that it would otherwise lack. They also provide humour, albeit black. The socks are the punctum, the point
of contradiction and therefore also a point of emotional access. They rescue the man’s vulnerability and individuality, the individuality not available through his face. He had put his socks on – mundane and meaningless – and yet they are held as a significant point of connection. Such contradictions are forefront in this image. Not only is the man portrayed in death he is also immortalized headless in death. He is trapped in a timeless recognition of the moment of death. He sits, forever without options, as testimony of the liminal space between life and death.

Witkin’s image entitled Glassman [Plate 100] (1994, 36 x 32”) has many of the same qualities as Man Without a Head. Glassman is also seated in situ, and also suspended in a void. Because both images represent a man’s presence soon after death, both engage with the notion of the transformation death necessitates and the indefinable, ineffable spaces that that creates. Both therefore, also confront the social binary of life and death, understanding taboos about death and what that means. With both images the corpse’s physicality inspired Witkin’s composition.

Witkin musing on the creation of Glassman:

Glassman - this guy was stabbed to death and left in the gutter of a street like garbage. I knew he was a punk, a criminal, but I liked him anyway. I witnessed his autopsy. I realized during the autopsy that this man was being judged. I saw his fingers hardening. I saw his face changing. I witnessed his passage. His transformation. And there was a kind of lightness that was coming from his body. That’s why I called the piece Glassman, because the man looked transparent. They usually hose down the corpse after an autopsy, but I purposely had them leave the blood on him. He had the longest hands I’ve ever seen, the most magnificent fingers. I spent an hour and a half with him while he was covered in blood...to photograph him. To give him the time to get ready to be seen. Death and transfiguration. To look at transfiguration during death was close to my original intention. And yet there was a
surprising kind of peacefulness involved with the whole process. The mystery of my life is to clear the fog that lies between - to see this transition which is elusive yet real (Witkin Danse Macabre 38).

Witkin’s description of the process of photographing Glassman is helpful in accessing the image at different levels. Literally it is a picture of a dead man’s body from the torso up, seated on steel based chair which also acts as a brace, holding him in an upright position. A bar rests across his belly with another half-bar across his left upper arm. A half-bar is positioned to the left of his head, on his forehead and supporting his head which is slightly tilted to his left. The man’s hands rest in his lap, the extraordinarily long fingers Witkin noticed point upward. Witkin is right about his magnificent hands. A shocking line of course stitching, (as in Silverthorne’s Woman Who Died in Her Sleep), runs from the base of the man’s neck to his genitals. The untidy stitching indicates unequivocally: this is a corpse.

The man’s face has a glazed expression, the eyes open but lifeless. Perhaps it is fanciful, but for me he has the appearance of a tired man finished with the struggles of life, even though he is still young, with a sense of relief emanating from his face. He has dark tousled hair, and a dark moustache. His skin looks almost as if it has been fashioned out of wax, it is smooth and almost hairless. An air of luminosity is strong despite the visible signs of blood.

The background of the photograph looks like a white sheet. The basically white background forms a canvas for Witkin’s negative darkroom techniques. Witkin has scratched and scraped and consciously and carefully added areas of shadow. These markings shift the reading of the photograph from the forensic image of a dead youth into an art photograph, which subsequently specifically directs the reading of the image.

Glassman, according to Witkin, appears as if he was moving through a judgement phase during the autopsy. This and other symbolism aligns this picture with religious allusions.
Compositionally, the horizontals and verticals reference the crucifixion. "Witkin’s work stakes out the threshold between life and death, which for a Catholic believer provides the ultimate border between the human and the divine" (Heartney Postmodern Heretics 35). To photograph the process of transfiguration, the movement of life out of the body, or the movement of life to death, was Witkin’s stated aim. “In that limbo between life’s cessation and the passage into death, between above and below, flesh and spirit, there exists a tension, a vibration that the artist is seeking to crystallize” (Celant 39). By focusing on those moments just after the last breath, when the body changes noticeably, Witkin confronts what it means to be alive in the most challenging way.  

Artists have not only a tacit social permission to disturb and stir such patches of marginalizations, but a requirement, through projective identification.

Here we are not far from the morgue, destination of us all: pit, hole, grave, which Witkin adopts for its quality of legend, and its forbidden character. Access to death is forbidden, since death has its place in the soul; nevertheless, the artist wants to take possession of it, to unite it with life. This is why he touches it, manipulates it, uses it as a kind of visual plastics, a magical icon depicting the unknown, closing the circle of existence (Celant 13).

Death is the ultimate personal and private moment because it is experienced only once. It is a culmination point in a life and there is no redress, no coming back. In looking at images like Glassman we are interlopers, witnessing this

51 In mainstream western thought these questions are rarely tackled. Death is in an equally balanced equation to the end of life. The possibility that some part of a life continues after death is empirically irrelevant. Such questions are taboo. If the questions are taboo then the answers fall into categories of quackery, superstition and foolishness. Yet the questions remain and they are often asked by the wise. Wisdom is often seen as academically irrelevant.
man’s last intimate moment. Our look can never be returned. Ruby’s study Secure the Shadow demonstrated that even though many people photograph loved ones after death, those photographs are hidden in drawers. Old postmortem photographs are often thrown out in shame. How then to assimilate images like Glassman? And if not assimilated then the taboo remains extant.

The profundity of understanding that comes with engaging with death at a deep level compels and seduces in Witkin’s work. He is not driven by the aesthetic, he does not make a distinction between his work and his life. He is driven from an inner place of both confusion and vision. Witkin comments:

> My art is the way I perceive and define life. It is sacred work, since what I make are my prayers. Those works are the measure of my character, the transfiguration of love and desire, and, finally, the quality of my soul. With this work I am judged by myself, by my contemporaries, and finally by God. My life and work are inseparable. It is all I have. It is all I need (Celant 249).

To reveal these social concealments and rejections around taboos and secrecy is part of Witkin’s agenda. Witkin does not move away from the profundity of death, nor from the risks that come from shock, risks like change, and the confrontation of the unpredictable and chaotic. Death can only be stalled for so long, it cannot be managed.

Witkin is engaged with the confrontation of death as part of his felt responsibility as an artist in contemporary western culture, a culture which finds so many aspects of pain, suffering and death so unendurable. He is part of the projective identification swirl around death. Witkin reveals death at its extreme, through his visceral aestheticization and through his intense engagement with other photographic conventions I have previously discussed.

Witkin, like Salgado, is picking up what has been split off and rejected by the west. His art metabolizes these rejected emotions by a process of personal identification. He
internalizes these dark and difficult issues and works them through by the use of his photographic process. This process results in his images, but significantly, he creates them to be viewed. Witkin does not go through this process just for his own sense of inquiry. He uses references to the western art canon, as well as other aesthetic conventions to place him solidly within his society’s art structures. In this way he reintroduces his version, his visions of death, difference and suffering back into society.

At the end of Witkin, the book of Witkin’s images with an introduction by Germano Celant, Witkin includes a Portrait of Witkin [Plate 100], (1995) together with A Brief Account of My Career. The portrait shows a masked Witkin staring into the camera. We can see the intensity of his eyes through the mask. At the centre of the black mask is the white silhouette of a crucifix. The portrait illustrates Witkin’s challenge. His gaze is steadfast, challenging. A crucifixion is figured between his eyes. An exchange is created by the look in his eyes - the direct vector out of the frame. The look pulls the viewer in behind the mask. The message is redemption - not just a Christian redemption, nor just a personal redemption - but a redemption from the mask, from concealment, from secrecy.
"Being an artist means never averting your eyes" (Akira Kurosawa).

I have defined both secrecy and projective identification in this thesis as communication strategies which both rely on the concealment/revelation paradox. Secrecy is a culturally specific process which adds a cultural frisson to works of art for the reasons I have outlined. Secrecy and power are intertwined. An engagement with secrecy is adopted by artists as they are drawn to subject matters of deep human significance, such as death. Some of the functions of secrecy are the categorization and the construction of boundaries, such as that between the living and the dead, as well as necessary social protective devices. The artists I have analyzed have contributed to these processes through their confronting images.

I have linked together insights from different disciplines in order to understand how secrecy works within a social context. To do so I have followed what actually happens once information or emotions are denied or withheld. Photographic artists such as Fox, Serrano, Salgado and Witkin metabolize these emotions through projective identification. Without this knowledge there is a reduced understanding and limited accessibility to issues of profound significance. Effects of secrecy can be problematic, they tend to weaken a decision making process and corrode relationships. Secrecy is not always destructive but it is always a complication.

This study’s significance lies in tracing what happens in the absences, the holes in narrative structures, created by secrecy and reacted to by projective identifications. "And something can only be remembered if and when it is articulated into a chain of knowledge" (Belau Topologies of Trauma xv). I add new components to the visual analysis of
images, particularly photographs, and draw attention to previously uncharted artistic strategies.

The visual coding of secrecy in art has largely been overlooked as an area of study. Why this is so is a question I still find intriguing. Secrecy pervades all expressions in life, the effects of which can be seen in very obvious places, such as in human relationships, within family dynamics, and politics. The word ‘secrecy’ is inveigled to sell and entice in all kinds of everyday situations.

The reasons secrecy has been so overlooked as a study is conjectural, but for me it makes sense that most of the interest around secrecy is directed toward content – the secret itself. The revelation of secrets is often deeply problematic, causing seismic shifts once hidden information is made openly available and therefore accountable, and this acts as a distraction from secrecy as communication. Issues around death, for instance, are fearful, painful and require deep levels of introspection. Secrecy is a way of avoiding and hiding.

Academics, from all disciplines, rarely attempt to come to grips with the effects of secrecy. The implications of secrecy as a strategy have been researched and documented poorly in most areas of human knowledge, especially in the arts. The overview of sources at the beginning of the thesis noted some interesting texts but even these do not address the intensity and pervasiveness of secrecy in western culture, nor the role of secrecy in art. Some of these texts go so far as to isolate the difficulty of studying secrecy but then do not address it.

In the second half of the twentieth century, with the re-examination and deconstruction of texts and how they are read, theorists such as French theorists Michel Foucault (History of Sexuality (1976), The Order of Things (1970)); Jean Baudrillard (The Ecstasy of Communication (1983), The Transparency of Evil (1993)); and Roland Barthes (Mythologies, Image – Music – Text (1977), Camera Lucida (1980)) in particular, touched on issues contingent to this thesis without actually isolating secrecy, or without combining secrecy and art as focal study points. Therefore,
this thesis belongs conceptually within the theoretical investigation of how images come to carry the social currency they do; and specifically, how the dynamics of the visual codes of secrecy interactions impact on the photographic surface. This study also addresses issues of the different ways of sourcing meaning, by collapsing simplistic binary ways of looking at complex issues around death and dying, as evidenced in photographs of the dead.

My research demonstrates how secrecy acts as an interactive form of communication through the aestheticization of photographs of the dead. No-one has undertaken studies of the connections between secrecy and photography through the concept of projective identification. I have written my thesis in response to this gap in theoretical understanding, not only of visual codes of secrecy, but also of how secrecy is implicated in affecting taboos on death through the visual image. This thesis therefore, is important for the reasons I outline below.

Visual Codes of Secrecy: Photography of Death and Projective Identification adds a new dimension to visual analysis. Understanding the place of art and secrecy gives access to both at a different level of meaning. At the very least, understanding how projective identifications carry secrecy issues of death through photographs, adds to the capacity to access different levels of meaning in images and their place in contemporary western society.

My particular focus on photographic analysis contributes to the overall field of photographic theory. The cultural impact of the photographic image has been under-theorized. The one hundred and fifty or so years since 1839 when Daguerre first presented his photographic process to the French government has seen paradigmatic shifts of unparalleled proportions in western culture. Linda Nochlin wrote in the forward to Abigail Solomon-Godeau’s Photography at the Dock (1991) that nothing “is harder to write about intelligently than photography” and that “the crucial question of how photography functions as an object of aesthetic discourse” is rarely discussed (Solomon-Godeau Photography at the Dock xiii–xiv). Existing photographic
analysis is uneven, “characterized as it is by pockets of intensive investigation which lie like oases amidst the medium’s great, unexplored expanses” (Brothers 15). My thesis may be yet another ‘oasis’, but I believe it adds another dimension to photographic theory.

The influence of secrecy is often marginalized – information that is seemingly unavailable or distorted can easily be discounted. My thesis reverses this trend and validates the notion of secrecy as a communication. “Secrecy guards...access to the underlying experience of secrecy” (Bok 21). And yet, because secrecy surrounds issues of power and importance, such as death and trauma, isolating the effects of secrecy as a dynamic is vital. Information, or knowledge, then becomes accountable, even acknowledged.

My thesis also points to the role of art in the establishment of cultural boundaries between what should be revealed and what should be held back (Nooter 24) and identifies a relationship between secrecy and the formation of social boundaries. The concealment/revelation paradox forms a continuing thread throughout the thesis, addressing the issue of social boundaries in terms of what is taboo and what is not. Not everything should be exposed or uncovered. Finding the balance between exposure and secrecy is an ongoing social consideration. Art is revelation and manifestation, but as I have argued, it also alerts society as to what is secret and what is not.

A contingent part of my argument is an extension of the notion that art is not only a “symbolic activity condensing social discourse” (Rosler Place, Position, Power, Politics 63), but that it acts as a safety valve to release secrets in society. Art is a safe space: partly because of protection from censorship; partly because of the volume of images, particularly photographs; partly because of the honesty of art, the truthfulness of photographs; and partly because artists carry and hold the responsibilities for the expression and processing of difficult, edgy feelings for their societies through projection and projective identification. English art academic Herman Rapaport writes on trauma and abstract art, particularly Holocaust images,
in an essay included in Topologies of Trauma (2002): “Works of art, in particular, are traditionally given the cultural privilege of addressing what much of the rest of society cannot: the fact that historical trauma exists and that we must remember what has happened to victims, if not literally, then metaphorically” (Rapaport 233). By highlighting this social aspect of art I am therefore drawing attention to another dimension of the role that art holds in society.

The place of art is pivotal to the externalization of feelings and emotions and to building visual narrative patterns and structures for the processing of trauma. The thesis outlines the place of art in responding to trauma. In Looking Back to the Future (2001) Griselda Pollock asks: “The millions of people today who are dying are leaving people who are terminally bereaved and there is, in our culture, as yet no adequate narrative which can stay, halt or freeze that process, for me, and I dare to suggest for most. Why is this?” (Pollock 299). Pollock taps into that seam of suffering which runs through contemporary western culture in response to death. I do not know the answer to her question, I actually think there may not necessarily be one. That is not really the issue. The real issue is having the capacity to engage with that suffering, being prepared to experience without pre-conceived ideas and assumptions. Suffering generated by death is not secret, however if it is not addressed it becomes vulnerable to denial and to secrecy dynamics, and then, I argue, to projective identification. Art is often about metabolizing feelings for society and making things accessible in new ways. Artists may be “able to depict or acknowledge inner reality in a way that escapes most people who are necessarily turned towards external reality” (Pajaczkowska 84). They have access through their particular role in society to create, and then consolidate, different narratives and therefore different social conventions and patterns.

Artists such as Salgado and Witkin engage with coupling life and death - oppositional relationships - in order to understand both in a different way. Society has split death from life, as a mirror of the Descartes mind and body split
which set western culture into binary paradigms. Artists seek to realign and fashion new ways of seeing only possible with different orientations and pairings. Thus we can understand more of death by looking at life in a different way. And to understand what it means to be alive changes through contact with death. These changes were suggested by Baudrillard when he wrote of contact with the real and going where the blood flows (Baudrillard No Pity for Sarajevo 48). The separation between life and death is seen as an illusion in many religions and faiths, such as Buddhism and Sufism.

Noticing the mundanity and normality of death can be an unexpected reaction that can catch us unaware. But we can look inside ourselves and know that at some point we will inevitably face death in some form or other. This normalizing of death is the result Rudolph Schafer attempted to achieve in his photographs of the dead. In a wide cultural sense in contemporary western society our education of death is via media violence, and death has become associated with drama. This sense of drama, the expectation of violence are all parts of the fiction that keys in death as secret. The reality of death is often seen in the west as uninteresting or diversionary, as well as morbid, shocking or frightening. Many of the images in this thesis play on this juxtaposition between the normalcy and the intensity of death in such a way as to invert expectations and allow for some kind of translucence.

Some of the complexity of the taboos and secrecy around death are revealed by the selection of photographs I have analyzed. The essential aspects of social concealments are not only to do with actual dead bodies. Other contingent aspects of death and dying are involved: the actual processes of dying; the time leading up to death, that is, sickness, accidents, abortions, war, torture etc.; the decay and other fates, arbitrary and deliberate, that happen to the body after death; what death looks like across the range of life’s expression that includes animals, babies, young women, old men; and the raft of accompanying emotional responses that these experiences trigger. Many institutions are dedicated to make certain none of the above are publicly
visible. Even the process of ageing, past a certain point, is stripped of dignity and seen as somehow shameful. Death itself is seen as a medical failure. These issues are complex and fluid. In a culture as broad-based and multifarious as is western culture, reactions to death are variable and difficult to assess. The dominant voice is still identifiable, and that is one that sees issues around death as deeply problematic.

Artists such as Silverthorne, Serrano, Fox and Witkin have confronted this difficulty and have therefore contacted the concomitant spaces of difficulty in the surrounding culture. As a society we “need to put hell into the symbolic, to describe it, name all its aspects, experience it in imagination, and so constitute ourselves as subjects, with an identity. We will become ... somebody - and this, through transcending nothingness: the void, the unrepresentable” (Lechte 37). This is the task of artists.

It takes courage to look at what is the hardest in both an inner personal and outer cultural sense. Western society is heavily loaded toward pain avoidance either through medications or other drugs of varying legality. To look at what is painful is a demanding process. And it is demanding to confront the causes of suffering which come from just being alive. Fear of pain and suffering, fear of trauma, and the unpredictable shocks that life produces consolidate and validate collusions around taboos and secrecy and drive dynamics such as projective identification.

Finally, my thesis isolates and analyzes projective identification within an artistic context. By applying the projective identification dynamic to artists who photograph the dead I am combining hitherto unconnected concepts. The psychoanalytic concept as applied to art in society makes sense of interactions which previously have been assumed to have been communicated tacitly, or even covertly or mysteriously (Turner The Social Theory of Practice: Tradition, Tacit Knowledge, and Presupposition). The

52 For instance, there are specific people who have the job of scraping dead animals off the road after car accidents.
application of projective identification to art opens out a different analytic direction which is socially oriented. Artists are not picking up and representing society’s projections – they are working through and reinterpreting introjections, introjections from society. I have read the image as a cultural document but by focussing on projective identification I have suggested a revised way of viewing the role of artist in contemporary western society. Untangling projective identification is one way of unravelling the effects of secrecy in society.
An acolyte was described by Reshad Feild in The Last Barrier, (1976) as wandering around with a large tangled skein of blue wool (37). Driven by an inner distress to this one remaining focal point in her physical environment, she directed her whole attention toward untangling the wool. Nothing else had meaning. Writing this thesis has been my ball of wool. Its logistics have held me in place while I challenged and changed my inner realities. I needed to unlock hidden away places - many of them dangerous and dark. Now the process is nearing the end - and my wool in neat skeins - I can look back in some shock at the spaces from which I have crawled.

To pursue meaning is not like a game of Chinese boxes, where we open one at a time until we find what is bound to be the smallest and most secret box in the centre. It is certainly a process in which one problem solved discloses another, but the movement is outwards, in the social dimension, rather than inwards, converging on a private truth (Bann Meaning/Interpretation 198).

This outward movement in the pursuit of different levels of meaning reflects the movement of the thesis - that is from my inside or private truth to a social dimension.

I approached the topic of secrecy, intuitively, initially unaware of how vast a subject it was and how much research I would need to do to be able to narrow down my subject matter to a clear focussed hypothesis. I needed to be able to understand the context of secrecy in social situations and then extrapolate that into art. I needed to write about social secrecy, or taboos because there was no appropriate access to the personal secrecy of artists.
The key area through which I chose to do this was the imagery and representation of death. I soon discovered that much of this art was photographic, a further field of knowledge to discover and research. My final refinement came with the insight that by applying the psychoanalytic dynamic of projective identification I could clearly and powerfully identify and trace the movement of secrecy in contemporary western culture.

For me to write about the symbolism of death is to write about the fulcrum point of my own process. I choose to be surrounded by visions of corpses – images of the dead always in front of me as I write, copies of photographs of the dead endlessly toted around with me as points for research. There have been so many deaths around me, but I could not recognize any of them before my sister died and then all the deaths from the past coalesced into a transformative grief that has taken a long time to quieten and comfort. My writing, situated in a field of death, has been largely one of writing myself into existence against intrigues and webs of secrecy. Now as I approach the end, I can see that all the blocks that have been in my path, all the impediments to clear vision, have been deaths.

I recently discovered the Russian word *samizdat*. It appeared on the first page of a book entitled *History Beyond Trauma* by Francoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudilliere. In context it read, quoting from a case study: “I’m a dissident of the Western world. My madness appeared at the intersection of the history of the last war and the story of my family. I’m carrying a samizdat, a secret message that I myself don’t know about. My mission is to see that it arrives at its destination, at the risk of my life” (Davoine 3). A footnote explained that *samizdat* literally means ‘self publication’. The word did not appear in official Russian dictionaries even though it was in common usage “before the period of liberalization. The word itself was secret. *Samizdat* refers to the clandestine dissemination of works forbidden by the censors in the Soviet Union, and, metonymically, a work thus disseminated” (Davoine 3).
My thesis is my samizdat; it lies at an internalized intersection of trauma, family and secrecy. I have also felt like a dissident, out of alignment. And I began by not knowing the ‘secret message’. My thesis represents the results, the unravelled, unravelling skeins of my interrogation. It is the product of my internal evolution from secrecy but it also contains secrecy in the guise of images, difficult and painful images which challenge but also enliven and grace visual exchanges.

I have chosen the taboo of the dead body as a way of exploring secrecy, of pulling out and identifying how secrecy is communicated in contemporary western culture. And I have isolated this particular taboo for a variety of reasons; because the taboo is in a state of flux and therefore traceable; because all cultures need to accommodate this universally difficult experience; but principally I chose death because of my own need to deepen my understanding of both death and secrecy and the relationship between the two. This means that my thesis is not only a study of secrecy but inadvertently one also of death.

When my sister died I realized how much secrecy there was around her death and death in general, and I became interested in how secrecy functioned. My own arts practice was deeply affected by her death because suddenly everything else felt mundane and trivial. I needed to understand more about my own existence, with death as a constant reference point, and to grapple with different understandings of death. I recognized some of the same resonance in other artistic expressions which engaged with the paradox of expressing the universal but ineffable experience. We can know about dying but only from the point of view of being alive. Death is the ultimate mystery, and it is not surprising that many secrecy threads appear around the experience of death in so many cultures.

The effect that the presence of death has in a life is impossible to underestimate. There are no exceptions, every person needs to come to some resolution with death even if that is denial. And because death is universal it means that
we all share this dilemma — even covertly. In some lives death can have a particularly huge impact, the death of a child for instance, or the death of a parent for a child. Other people can live for half a century without seeing a dead body. Living with the dying challenges the humanity of many. These challenges occur daily. Added to the effects of everyday deaths are traumatic deaths that we become aware of through the media; deaths of those through natural disasters like the 2004 tsunami; shocking deaths through war and conflicts; and daily accidents which completely disrupt and change lives forever.

It is no accident that my thesis revolves around death and secrecy. My sister’s death from AIDS in 1992 changed my understanding of the world and my place in it, principally because I realized how little I knew. All I was aware of was that I had always been accompanied by a deep dread and — fear. An unnamed fear was all I knew well — and that is not enough. I have discovered since writing this thesis, that secrecy is opposite to trust, and that trust is fundamental to love, and that nothing apart from love matters very much at all.
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My thesis is dedicated to my sister Lizzie - who died. And to my two sons, David and Adam who are alive.
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Plate 52

Andre Serrano

**Knifed to Death II: Detail** (1973)

Cibachrome, 125.7 x 152.4 cm
Plate 53

Rudolf Schafer

**Dead Faces: Man** (1989)

Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 54

Rudolf Schafer

*Dead Faces: Woman* (1989)

Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 55

Hannah Wilke


Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 56

Hannah Wilke


Chromagenic super-gloss, 181.6 x 120.6 cm
Plate 57

Sharon Green

**Goodbye Mum** (1980)

Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 58

Arsen Sawadow


C-type, dimensions unknown
Plate 59

Sebastiao Salgado

Food Distribution Area in Kibumba (1994)
Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 60

Robert Capa

Soldier at the Moment of Death, Spanish Civil War (1936)

Silver gelatin print, 24.5 x 34.2 cm
Plate 61

Sebastiao Salgado

Yanomami Woman (1998)
Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 62

Sebastiao Salgado

**Marubo Maronal Village** (1998)

Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 63

Sebastiao Salgado
Sao Paulo Migrants (1996)
Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 64

Sebastiao Salgado

Rwandan Exodus (1994)

Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 65

Sebastião Salgado

*Palestinian Refugees, Nahr el-Bared* (1998)

Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 66

Sebastiao Salgado

Palestinian Refugee, Buri el-Shamali (1998)

Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 67

Sebastiao Salgado

Kukes Refugee Camp 1 (1999)

Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 68

Sebastião Salgado
*Kukes Refugee Camp 2* (1999)
Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 69

Sebastiao Salgado

*Waiting for Water in Katale Camp* (1994)

Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 70

Sebastiao Salgado

*Slain Tutsis along the Road* (1994)
Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 71

Sebastiao Salgado

*Illegal Migrant* (1997)

Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 72

Sebastiao Salgado

Croatian Refugee Boy (1994)

Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 73

Sebastiao Salgado

Malawi Mothers (1994)

Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 74

Joel Peter Witkin

*The Graces, New Mexico* (1988)
Toned gelatin silver print, 28 x 28"
Plate 75

Joel Peter Witkin

Leda, New Mexico (1986)
Toned gelatin silver print, 28 x 28"
Print 76

Joel Peter Witkin

**Satiro, Mexico** (1992)

Toned gelatin silver print, 40 x 30"
Plate 77

Joel Peter Witkin

**Daphne and Apollo, Los Angeles** (1990)

Toned gelatin silver print, 29 x 26"
Plate 78

Joel Peter Witkin

Blind Woman with Her Blind Son, Nogales (1989)
Toned gelatin silver print, 20 x 16"
Plate 79

Joel Peter Witkin

*Pictures from the Afterworld: Countess Daru, Monsieur David and Madam David* (1994)

Toned gelatin silver print, three units 26 3/4 x 21 3/4"
Plate 80

Joel Peter Witkin

*Saviour of the Primates, New Mexico* (1982)

Toned gelatin silver print, 28 x 28"
Plate 81

Joel Peter Witkin

Mother and Child, New Mexico (1979)
Toned gelatin silver print, 20 x 16"
Plate 82

Pietro Perugino

Madonna and Child (c.1500)
Oil on panel, 70.2 x 50.8 cm
Plate 83

Joel Peter Witkin

*Portrait of Holocaust, New Mexico* (1982)
Toned gelatin silver print, 20 x 16"
Plate 84

Michelangelo Caravaggio

**Bacchus** (1596)

Oil on canvas, 95 x 85 cm
Plate 85

E. J. Bellocq

Untitled: Woman on a Stool (1912)

Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 86

Sebastiao Salgado

Kenyan Mother (1998)
Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 87

Dorothea Lange

*Migrant Mother* (1936)

Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 88

Sebastiao Salgado

The Dead Below the Rusumo Waterfalls of Rwanda (1994)

Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 89

Sebastiao Salgado

Slain Tutsis in Rwanda (1994)

Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 90

Sebastiao Salgado

**Cholera Death in Kibumba Camp** (1994)

Silver gelatin, dimensions unknown
Plate 91

Joel Peter Witkin

Corpus Medius (2000)
Toned gelatin silver print, 20 x 16"
Plate 92

Unknown artist

Relief of the Dead Man Drinking at a Banquet: From Thasos (c.4500 BC)
Plate 93

Joel Peter Witkin

The Kiss, New Mexico (1982)
Toned gelatin silver print, 20 x 16"
Plate 94

Gustave Klimt

**The Kiss** (1907-1908)

Casein paint on plaster and embedded mixed media, 80 x 180 cm
Plate 95

Constantin Brancusi

The Kiss (1940-1945)

Limestone, 23 x 13 3/4 x 10 3/4"
Plate 96

Joel Peter Witkin

Harvest, Philadelphia (1984)

Toned gelatin silver print, 20 x 16"
Plate 97

Guiseppe Arcimboldo

**Rudolph II as Vertumnus** (1591)

Panel, 68 x 56 cm
Joel Peter Witkin

Feast of Fools, New Mexico (1990)
Toned gelatin silver print, 25 x 35"
Plate 99

Joel Peter Witkin

*Man Without a Head* (1993)
Toned gelatin silver print, 40 x 30"

Plate 99

Joel Peter Witkin

*Man Without a Head* (1993)
Toned gelatin silver print, 40 x 30"
Plate 100

Joel Peter Witkin

Glassman, New Mexico (1994)
Toned gelatin silver print, 40 x 30"
Plate 101

Joel Peter Witkin

*Portrait of Witkin* (1995)
Toned gelatin silver print, dimensions unknown
Plate Details


   Seattle: Real Comet Press, I990.

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   by Plundering. 1968. Silver gelatin print. Dimensions unknown. Decades of
   Remembrance: War and the Displacement of Family Photography. By Val
   Williams. In Family Snaps, by Jo Spence and Patricia Holland eds.
   London: Virago, I991.

Mantegna, Andrea. The Dead Christ. c.1506. Oil on canvas. 66 x 81. Mantegna.


   Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection. London:
   Thames and Hudson, 1997.

   Dimensions unknown. Gardner's Sketchbook of the War. 1866.
   Photography and the Body. By John Pultz. London: Weidenfeld and
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Perugino, Pietro. Madonna and Child. c.1500. Oil on panel. 70.2 x 50.8 cm.

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