Now you see it, now you don't. How do contemporary artists address the problematics of visualisation by utilising and modifying analogue and digital techniques of printmaking?

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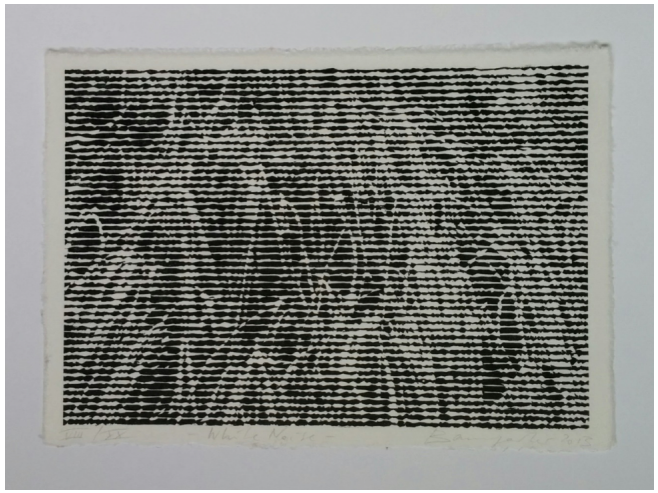

Christiane Baumgartner *White Noise* 2013, woodcut on Japanese paper, 18 x 26 cm. © Christiane Baumgartner. Photo: the author.

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Abstract

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Abstract

This Printmaking as one of the oldest image making technologies is often omitted from debates on contemporary artistic media. This paper aims to contribute to addressing this lacuna.Drawing on Georges Didi-Huberman’s conception of the imprint, the paper investigates the artistic interactions between and disruptions of technological and material affordances, medial conventions as well as iconographic and formal means of the four chosen artists. Importantly, while foregrounding mutability rather than a habitually presumed stability, the artists — Christiane Baumgartner, Susan Collins, Oscar Muñoz, Andrea Büttner — craft new, intensified materialities. Through

such means they contribute to an unpicking of the ostensible will to mastery and transparency, especially (but not only) of digital images. Generating thus culturally and socially necessary representational and experiential 'friction/s' (Joselit), the specific formal and material strategies of the artists are also tied to an ethics that permits the mobilisation of 'the anachronism of the authentic as a challenge to our present' (Balsom, 2014,76).

Author Keywords
Printmaking; latent image; problematics of visualization; imprint (Didi-Huberman); new materialisations; visual friction;new authenticity

Printmaking, one of the oldest image technologies, is regularly omitted from debates on contemporary artistic media and digitised imaging technologies. But not only are different historical print modes still practiced today, as Sean Cubitt (2014) has demonstrated in his ground-breaking study The Practice of Light, they also pre-figure later, aesthetic-formal as well as technical — including digital — procedures and developments. In addition to Cubitt, this paper will also refer to Georges Didi-Huberman (1999; 2018) and others in its discussion of the works of four contemporary artists. It aims to contribute to addressing the critical omission of printmaking by showing how its contemporary practices — far from being immutable themselves — probe into an assumed stability and completeness of 'the image' that is re-enforced by digital technologies. The issue is that dominant strands of digital imaging technologies, especially film and photography, present a 'deep drive to deny process', thereby 'sustaining the fantasy of the pure image' (Soutter, 2013, 94-95) — as any glance at, for example, advertising of the latest camera technologies demonstrates.

Printmaking with its basic triad of matrix (analogue or digital), transfer medium (usually ink) and support can be regarded as a(nother) prototype of the latent image — notwithstanding that the latter is more typically affiliated with the photographic or film image. One reason for this 'blind spot' may be that — unlike the as-yet-invisible captured light of the analogue or digital photograph — the different elements of analogue printmaking seem eminently stable or inflexible: the image matrix of printing blocks from wood (in woodcut); metal plates (in the intaglio processes of engraving and etching); stones or zinc plates in lithography; a framed fabric-mesh screen in screenprinting. Then the inks of various consistencies and the means to apply them: wads of fabric (e.g. the 'à la poupée' technique in intaglio and woodcut), rollers (in lithography) and variably-sized squeegees (screenprinting). Not to forget the substantial bulk of the printing press and finally, the support, anything from — conventionally — paper of varying quality to Perspex, textiles, walls and so on.

Yet this seemingly fixed materiality conceals a more fluid, disconcerting set of technical means and procedures. Already Rembrandt altered a given matrix — resulting in different 'states' of a single plate. Each of these would yield a different print (Brocklehurst, 2015, 92). Some of Rembrandt's prints have existed in up to 11 different states. Similarly, he changed 'individual impressions' of the same matrix 'in smaller ways'. Cubitt (2014) comments on such not untypical practices in printmaking over centuries: 'This malleability pre-echoes the inconstant states of digital images' (31).

Hence, even an ostensibly stable material form, such as the print matrix, entails latency – or virtuality — that is generative of different realisations (Cubitt, 2014, 257). Latency becomes the key term for the instability of all images. The broader issues at stake in the 'ontological oszillation' (Cubitt, 2010) of the image/images are (instrumental) reason, (neoliberal) politics and (capitalist) economics (Cubitt, 2014, 7-15). Cubitt's achievement in his book is to provide insights into the interrelationship between aesthetic, technical and non-technical artistic imaging procedures and broader, economic, socio-cultural and political developments.

Another property gives printmaking much of its mystique, as well as posing a difficulty for the artist/printer. It parallels the 'black box' effect in photography and other technical media. It is the invisibility — or latency — that occurs in the printing process itself, namely when the image of the matrix is transferred to the support by means of ink and pressure (of the hand or the printing press). Andrea Büttner, whose work will be discussed later, has commented: there is always 'distance' as well as 'surprise' involved: 'each time you are printing, you don't know what you are getting' (Büttner, 2017).

Indicators of this uncertainty are found in typical features of printmaking, take the reversal – similar to the photographic negative and positive — between left-hand and right-hand side in the matrix and final image; the positive-negative aspect between raised and subsequently inked lines in relief techniques (e.g. woodcut), or the incisions in intaglio versus the non-printing areas left blank on the plate. There is also the fact that printing blocks, plates or stencils show no colour, only once printed.

This uncertainty, or gap, crucial to processes that involve making an impression, whether casting or printmaking, has been theorised by French art historian Georges Didi-Huberman (2008) in his book on the imprint (or impression, 'l'empreinte' in French).i The notion of the imprint raises vital questions that undermine the completeness and cohesion of the image as it is conventionally assumed. Instead, the imprint

presents a dialectical conflagration of such oppositional terms as presence — usually posited against absence; of contact with an origin versus loss of an origin; of authenticity versus loss of authenticity and uniqueness through the possibility of reproduction; of form as opposed to formlessness; sameness versus difference; familiarity or strangeness (Didi-Huberman, 2018, 188). (The latter suggested, for example, in Büttner's statement quoted above.)

This gap presents an almost monstrous ontological doubt, augmented by the lurking propensity for reproducibility hidden within the apparatus that historically and still today is posited as a threat to (art's) uniqueness, presence and authenticity. But Didi-Huberman's (1999) deconstruction of binary constellations proves that it is equally capable of generating the unexpected and new (26; 196/7). Cubitt (2014) argues similarly: despite dominant imaging technologies' averaging and standardisations, there is the hope that 'even within its structured regime, there are inefficiencies, frictions, noise and contradictions that can still generate the genuinely new …' (16).

I am going to show how recent artists have volatilised the means of printmaking in both subtle or conspicuous ways while maintaining the tri-partite structure that can be regarded as a defining criterion of print. Their practices show that the materiality of print has to be understood as a matter (sic) 'of material relations' rather than any unchanging fixity (Bruno, 2014, 8). This focus on fluidity and mutability must also be seen as a response to and outcome of the increasing economic, social, cultural and yes, material destabilisations in the context of globalisation and new technologies. These promote and adopt mutability (vice the erosion of political and employment stability, the increasingly 24-hour availability and flexible working hours of – not only — 'creative' professionals, to name only some obvious examples). Therefore — somewhat paradoxically — the chosen artists, in also utilising and foregrounding the greater material density and associated craft skills of analogue processes (usually in combination with digital ones), set themselves apart from the more 'dematerialised' manifestations (in relative terms) of highly technologised new media art. Art historian David Joselit (2016) recently highlighted the socio-political relevance of more materially-infused image strategies: '… we might be entering a moment when the very purpose of art is to slow things down; to afford friction; to refuse easy translation into information' (168).

There is however the danger that such decelerating strategies are redolent with assumptions of (unproblematic) presence and authenticity. These could easily – as poststructuralist debates have taught us – be reactionary. Erika Balsom (2014) has interrogated

the emergence of a new authenticity in art in respect of its association with values of unproblematic presence, identity and purity and comes to a different conclusion, as will be shown.

I believe that the chosen artists — in mining the latency and instability of processes and materials of print — pose a challenge to dominant ideologies of the image and respond to and encourage the critical reconfiguration of cultural, economic, social processes.

My first two examples present the performative staging of the latency of print and camera-based digital image construction from two opposite ends, as it were.

Employing the oldest printmaking technique, the woodcut, printmaker Christiane Baumgartner foregrounds the role of the analogue and technological line in image construction through the formal means of her camera-derived image-making. She defamiliarises the line's conventional role of description at the same time as bringing into relief the digital (on-off quality) of the technique of the woodcut. Media artist Susan Collins, by contrast, translates the latent image of camera-based digital landscapes into individual pixels that construct the image in front of the viewer in the space of the gallery.

Of particular relevance to the discussion of Baumgartner's work is the concept of the imprint (Didi-Huberman, 2018), as already indicated. To recap: Didi-Huberman's attribution of loss, separation and absence as inherent to the imprint are matched by its potential as presence and authenticity — both affiliated to the physical contact the imprint entails. Profound ambivalence — he speaks of doubling, negativity, a 'split' — is also connected to the imprint's capacity for reproducibility (1999, 41). We can never know for sure what the 'original' of the imprint was, whether what we see corresponds to it — as we can never be certain what happened in the transfer process (1999, 18). Despite their differences, photography and print share in this feature of the imprint, namely that 'the active centre of the technical process remains hidden' (1999, 19). Hence the imprint's presence and authenticity are accompanied by the possibility for 'fiction, deception, montage, exchangeability' (1999, 42; 191).

Thus the dialectical nature of the imprint results in a profound 'unease within representation' (1999, 190). The latter is comparable to Joselit's 'friction' — to which I referred at the beginning — that can be regarded as the imprint's critical promise today.

Leaving aside the often controversial debates about the photograph's status as an index and the question of whether the advent of the digital has fundamentally altered it,ii one can agree that photography and print share an indexical quality. Crucially, however, 'an

imprint acquires its indexical quality by contiguity: one physical surface is in contact with another' (Roca, 2011, 26). Unlike the photograph, whose indexical quality was famously described by Barthes (1977) as 'an emanation from the referent', analogue print is premised on the direct material contact of the imprint.

The typical printmaking processes entail the bringing together of the matrix — be it an autographic, photographic or digital inscription on a plate, stone or screen — with the substrate. Today, the situation is complicated in that (almost all) print processes incorporate photomechanical and -chemical and/or digital processes. Instead of the artist drawing directly onto the block, plate or stone, an initial analogue or digital drawing may be transferred to or imprinted onto the plate, stone or screen by such technological means.iii In place of the transfer of an autographic source image, this transmission or imprinting may entail the transfer of a photographic image itself (analogue or digital). However, the ensuing processes differ. While photoetching, photolithography and screenprinting permit a direct printing of the transferred photographic image matrix, a photomechanical transfer onto a piece of wood still requires it to be cut into the wood.iv I shall return to this point in a moment.

The aforementioned printmaking processes — which are in no way as easy to execute as they appear in this brief summary — can be said to add material 'density' to the photographic image that is obtained by means of them. As imprints, these processes can be argued to question the characteristic, 'automatic' transparency of the photographic image. The latter is typically connoted by its representational codes and — in the printed photograph — material 'make-up': a certain type, weight, texture and surface of paper, resulting in an evenly distributed chemical coating with a smooth, seamless surface. These signifiers mark such an image out as different from the more 'crafted' look and subtle material specificities of one created by a printmaking process. Needless to say, the differences may be difficult, even impossible to detect in a reproduction. They may only be apparent when the image is viewed in situ; when — in addition to the enhanced sensory qualities of the artistic object — the mutable and kinetic parameters of time and space are factored in.

Baumgartner's woodcuts can be said to exhibit an eye-catching mutability or plasticity, which counteracts camera-based images' assumed transparency, while slowing down the act of looking. Moreover, they foreground their status as imprints in a striking manner.

The sources of Baumgartner's images commonly derive from arrested and re-photographed TV or video footage. They often represent mundane scenes, such as aspects of the urbanised landscape — especially the 'non-spaces' (Marc Augé) of motorways and tunnels — or rural landscapes, whose unspectacular uniformity similarly evidences human and technological intervention. Other than the subject matter, the latter share none of the genre's pictorial traditions. Common to all images is a neutrality, anti-subjectivity, matter-of-factness. Many thematise movement and speed — the latter contrary to the slowness that characterises their production, with the largest prints taking up to a year to make. Yet the most eye-catching attribute of Baumgartner's woodcuts is the permeation of the picture surface by horizontal lines. These are suggestive of the 'graphism' of analogue video, although not caused by it (Roca, 2009). The photographic image or scene emerges, ostensibly, in spite of this visual 'noise'. But the opposite is true.

The positive-negative relationship that is usually at play in the relief technique of the woodcut literally exposes — throws into relief — the drawn and to-be-printed line or image area by removing the wood around it. (The possibilities for reversal of and play on this convention have been a constant feature of the technique.) While it is perfectly possible to 'translate' the graded tonal structure of a camera image into woodcut — through a varied texture of either linear (see Vija Celmins, Ocean Surface Woodcut, 1992) or point-like incisions (see Franz Gertsch's woodcuts) that closely follow the texture of the photographic source — Baumgartner proceeds differently. (Fig 1)

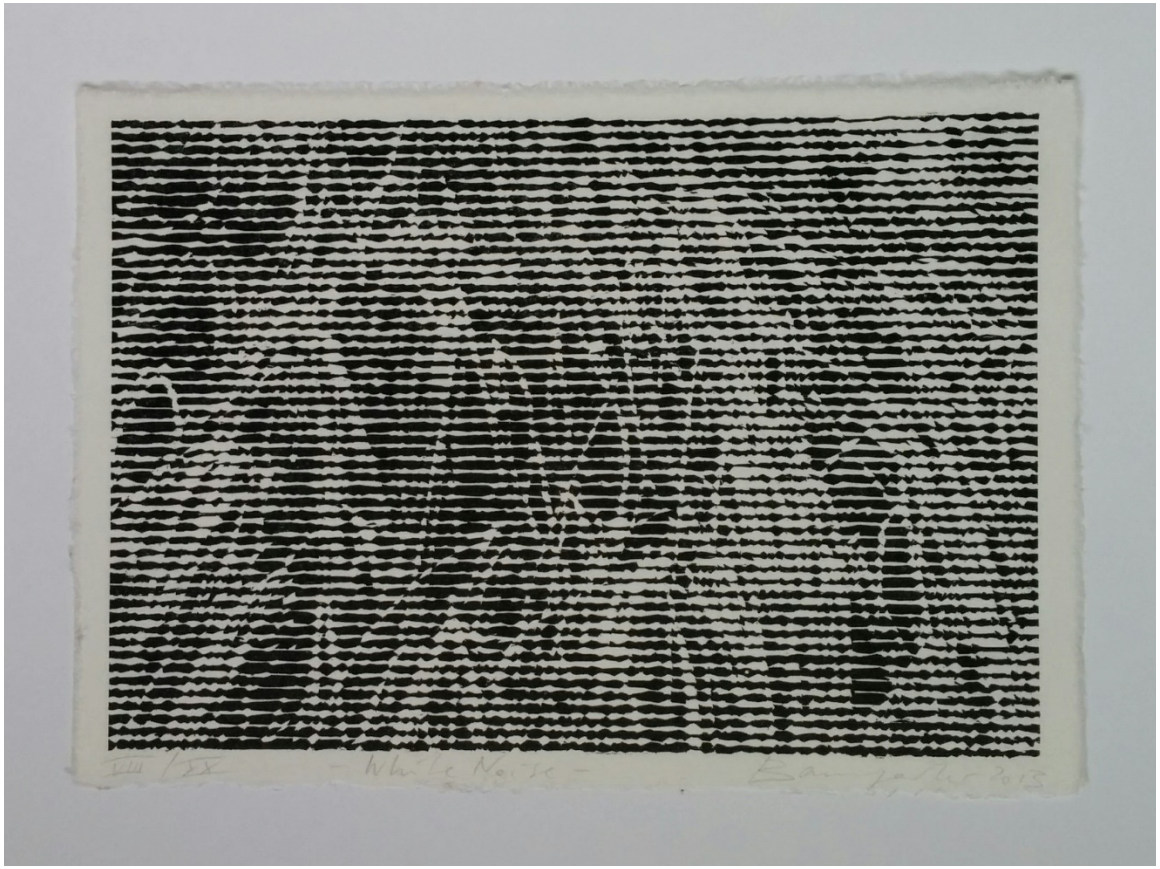


Fig 1 Christiane Baumgartner White Noise 2013, woodcut on Japanese paper, 18 x 26 cm. © Christiane Baumgartner. Photo: the author.

The blatant 'noise' of alternating black and white horizontal lines of varying density and fluctuating shape constructs the image: seemingly interfering white lines reveal the scene or image, by doubling as the — albeit modulated — contouring lines (or field) of the conventional woodcut. Correspondingly, the black lines,

conventionally ‘describing’ the subject, are also abstracted to horizontal lines, as if released from their descriptive function. Taken together, both types of lines ‘emit’ the image, obliquely. The material fashioning of the image is thus foregrounded and signalled as a construction, as something ‘manufacted’.

At the level of representation, or ‘what the image is of’, Baumgartner’s linear manoeuvres constitute an ostensible complication of, or better interference with, the ‘automatism’ or transparency of the photographic image. As argued, such intrusive ‘meddling’ is relevant in light of the unproblematic realism that still adheres to the camera image, notwithstanding the possibilities of digital manipulation. In its insistence on the constructedness of the image, Baumgartner’s work counters ‘the deep drive to deny process’ or the side-stepping of photography’s material form in favour of the simplistic analogy of a view through a window.

The viewer’s physical proximity and/or distance to the work is critical. Baumgartner’s prints, especially large-scale works, when viewed close-up, disintegrate into a mere agglomeration of lines, creating a confounding mirage. (Reproductions give a false impression of stability that is not present when viewing the work in situ.) The image presented by the material picture — that is, what it is of, what it represents — can only be ascertained by the viewer through active bodily participation — by finding the right ‘spot’ at which the image solidifies. In the physical movement to and from the print, the conventional act of looking is literally slowed down, hence defamiliarised, while simultaneously made palpable as an embodied activity. In this way, the encounter with the image defies not only the photographic moment as time congealed in the surface of the object, but also the brevity with which images — photographic images in particular — are encountered on a day-to-day level.

As analogue (im)prints, Baumgartner’s prints enact a complex interplay of presence and absence (or latency), as proposed by Didi-Huberman, in the sense that any print does — through the absence of the matrix. However, more importantly, uniquely, her striations — frequently interpreted in analogy to the binary 0/1 of digital code (Coldwell, 2011) — can be read as incorporating, foregrounding presence and absence as a general feature of the imprint into the very structure of the individual work. If the white lines are indicative of the absence or loss of contact of the final object (print) with its matrix (or origin), then the black lines are proof of presence, of the contact of the imprint with its origin, the matrix. Similarly, other features of Didi-Huberman’s dialectical characterisation of the imprint are performatively put into play: the potential for reproduction that is inherent in the imprint, as explained, can be said to occur in the

image's very structure of superficially repeat lines. However, instead of mere repetition, each line is unique. Furthermore, as well as each being dissimilar to the matrix — by being reversed in the print version — each line also resembles it. Finally, the linear structure exhibits the alternation between 'form' and 'formlessness', the 'familiar' and the 'strange' of the imprint, concepts often culturally apprehended in terms of a binary opposition, as argued earlier. Baumgartner's prints, by contrast, can be regarded as dialectical images in Didi-Huberman's sense: they present the viewer with 'an explosion' of all these qualities.

The prints' material (de)construction in the viewing process — their 'aesthetic speculation' (Joselit), as just described — results in a certain 'unease'. Furthermore, proprio-kinetic properties that are frequently at odds with the images' subject matter are re-instilled. Through these processes, the viewer is enabled to reflect on 'the shapes of social [and technological] governance' (Joselit 168) to which the iconography alludes, including the visual technologies and their typical signifiers — as with photography — that conventionally transmit them.

In her interrogation of the visualisation and perception of familiar contemporary spaces and temporalities, Baumgartner foregrounds the signifiers of printmaking craft at the same time as melding her arresting image construction with recent camera-based technologies. Susan Collins could be said to start from the opposite end: she deploys recent digital imaging technology and exposes, even dramatises, its usually invisible, latent and variable spatial and temporal structures. Selected digital prints that accompany some of her screen-based works complement the digital output on screen in a significant way.

Figs 2 & 3 Susan Collins, Images from Glenlandia archive, July 2006. Each still was recorded in horizontal rows from top to bottom and left to right, and collected over approximately 21 hours and 20 minutes of time. © Susan Collins
All images courtesy of the artist.

Collins's works frequently take land- or seascapes as their subject matter. For Glenlandia a camera was installed on the banks of Loch Faskally, Pitlochry, Scotland, from 2005 until 2007. (Figs 2 & 3) The modus operandi for these projects is the same: the viewer in the gallery sees a screen to which the camera image from the site is transmitted in real time and on which the typical 'ingredients' — to which the titles refer — are visible. The mock-poetic title of Glenlandia shows bands of countryside framing water, topped by a dark and/or blue or grey area of colour. The notion of 'landscape' is immediately present, yet, depending on the time of year or day of viewing, the screen resembles broad abstract bands of textured, digital weaving. (Figs 4 & 5) Yet what the viewer is witnessing is more than a mere transmission of remote countryside into the gallery. Using a webcam and specifically designed software, the individual screen image 'writes' itself in the gallery, with or without the viewer's presence. Recorded in horizontal rows from the upper left and left to right, the image constructs itself pixel by pixel, one pixel per second. It takes just under a day to complete one image (Cubitt, 2006, 1). Every two hours the image-in-process is saved. All images (images-in-process and the final image each day) are archived. With many of Collins's projects

lasting up to a year or more, the number of archived images is enormous. In addition to this archive of digital images, Collins also has produced a set of four prints for Glenlandia. The project as a whole and the print edition will be considered next.

My focus is on questions and assumptions about the camera-based image past and present. Foremost amongst these is the recognition, that digital technology 'demonstrate[d] in practice what had been argued in theory for some three decades: that photographic images are themselves special kinds of constructions' (in: Van Gelder and Westgeest, 2011, 9). A crucial point in this consideration is the question of time. Poised between film, photograph, painting, drawing, or indeed print, the work defies the conventional categories of photographic time, such as the 'frozen split second', the 'decisive moment' and also the 'stillness of the photograph' that turns it 'into an object of contemplation' (Van Gelder and Westgeest, 2011, 65). Like other artists today (most prominently Hiroshi Sugimoto) Collins reflects on time 'as duration or process' (Van Gelder and Westgeest, 2011, 64). But duration occurs here literally rather than as a matter of hidden process, as with Sugimoto's extraordinary photographs of movie theatres (1976 – ongoing) that display a white screen — the result of the projection of a whole film. In Glenlandia and other works the deliberateness of image construction (one pixel per second!) has the deceptive effect of slowing down time when, effectively, the image construction is manifestly protracted way beyond most conventional photographic (or filmic) methods. In this sense the pieces militate against the contemporary instantaneity of image capture, manipulation and dissemination.

The slowness of construction re-invests the image with an element of 'craft' and the labour of fashioning — drawing, painting or printing — an analogue image. Moreover, the latency of the conventional camera-image becomes 'staged' in the sense that the viewer is made aware of the time lapse or gap that exists between the 'arrival' of each tiny element (pixel), caused by the translation of light into the bitmap algorithm and its electronic transmission. The tantalising moments of absence and presence occasioned by this drawn-out imprinting become the chief affective charge of Collins's work when viewed in the gallery.

What of the four printed Glenlandia images — the 'still stills', as Collins calls them? What is their status vis a vis the screened image ('moving still') and how are they encountered in comparison to it?

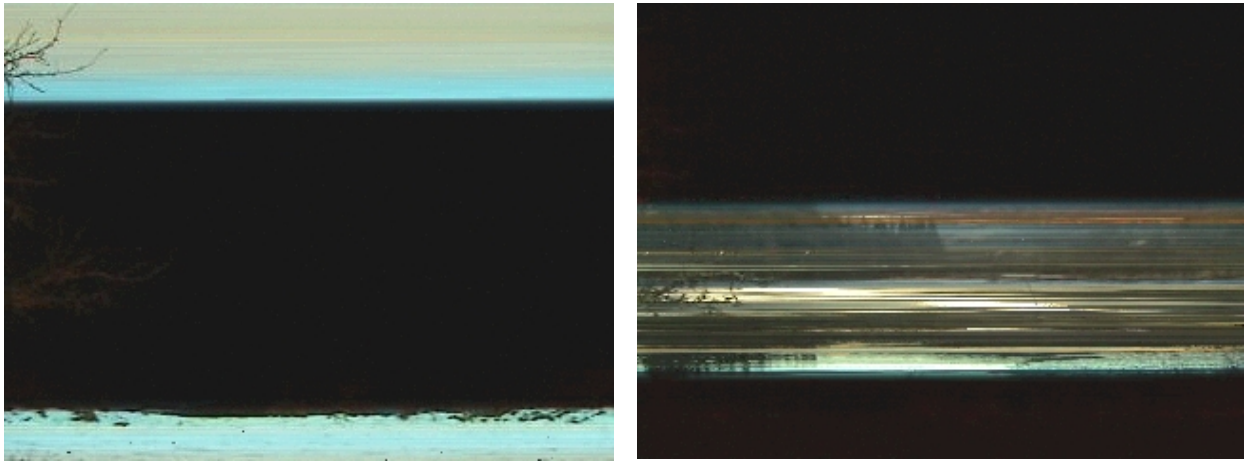
Are the prints merely a weaker manifestation of the fluid 'moving' images? Cubitt (2009) asked Collins in an interview whether she regarded the prints as a form of

documentation. The artist explained that she had initially indeed 'resisted making stills or artifacts from live … works' for fear that these would 'only operate as documentation and not stand alone as work in themselves'. Yet, the actual prints persuaded her otherwise – by the recognition that

'each image (was) a complete work in itself'. She also realised that the prints offered the possibility of a more contemplative encounter, 'as you are not constantly seeking the moving pixel' (Cook, 2009). Or elsewhere: 'I think the reason why they [the prints] work independently is almost precisely because they don't have the dialectic that makes the live work so compelling – this urgency of the "now"' (Collins & Cubitt, 2009).

David Bate (2009) speaks of the 'grip of pleasure' that arises from the composition in landscape photography (102). Collins's pieces thwart this delight – there is hardly

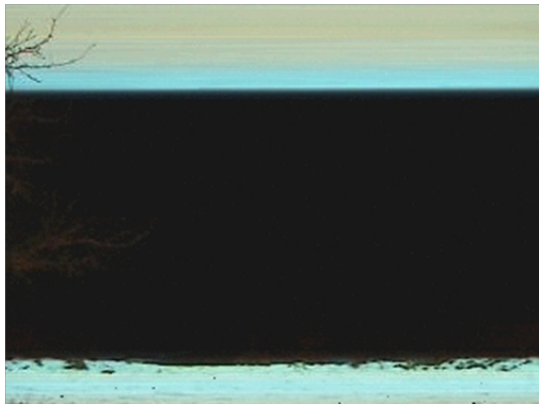
any 'composition' in these images. This is despite the fact that the position of the camera results in vestiges of the framing of the classical landscape, such as a three-part band of earth, water and sky — easily read as foreground, middle and background including their respective spatial depths. Moreover, as already mentioned, what is seen varies enormously, depending on weather, time of day and season. Hence, the archived images fluctuate between quite conventional 'landscape' views and almost pure abstraction. (Figs 4 & 5) In the gallery, the situation is also dependent on the time of the visit: the image could be only a quarter or half-finished.



Figs 4 & 5 Susan Collins, Images from Glenlandia archive, December 2005 (left) and January 2006 (right). Each still was recorded in horizontal rows from top to bottom and left to right, and collected over approximately 21 hours and 20 minutes of time. © Susan Collins

If composition in the landscape picture was allied to the control of the gaze of the viewer, here that power is replaced by different pleasures. In the 'moving still', it is undermined and supplanted by the instantaneity of the moving pixel. The latter comprises an insistent (and ironic) rebuttal of the instant gratifications of contemporary image culture, as already argued. The prints or 'still stills' trade the bliss of the 'arrival of the pixel' on screen (Collins & Cubitt, 2009) with the pleasure of surface. (Figs 6 — 9) The visibility of each distinguishable printed pixel creates a field of subtle and modulated tesserae, inducing

movement and rhythm. (This is not evident in the reproductions.)



Figs 6 – 9 Susan Collins Glenlandia I – IV, Digital inkjet prints on 13.5 x 18cm on A4 archival matte paper.

Collins designates colour as a distinguishing feature of the prints in comparison to the 'moving stills': 'revealed by each individual pixel, [colour] seems to be evident to a greater degree in the prints. The large format ones expose each individual pixel in the way only a projection or larger screen would be able to match, and the smaller ones concentrate the colour' (Collins & Cubitt, 2009). Digitised colour — using a term coined by artist and writer on colour, David Batchelor, 2000, to differentiate the commercial use of colour in art since the 1960s from artistic colours of the past — is employed here quite literally (105). Such colour 'is individuated; it comes in discrete units; there is no mergence or modulation; there are only boundaries, steps and edges' (ibid). Batchelor deems these colours 'more the colours of things than atmospheres. More urban colours than the colours of nature' (106). It is Collins's accomplishment in the prints to both acknowledge this process of individuation, of numeralisation, and at the same time to make digitised colours appear to be 'both of nature and to create atmospheres'. One is also reminded of Robert Smithson's insight that in such colours 'the glimpse of another world, or rather, several other worlds [appears]: the past-present worlds of minerals and crystals and the future-present world of science fiction' (in: Batchelor, 2000, 109).

If Collins's projected images distill attention, the prints allow the eye to wander and dwell. Visual control — typically promoted by the seamless photographic image — is undermined by the tessellation, the interlacing of the surface. By the same token, the textility of the surface, so unlike the sharp attention directed at the pixel in the moving stills, makes a different kind of movement occur: one that engenders a different kind of responsiveness too, namely that of reverie, or in the words of Trinh T Minh-ha (2005): 'it is in stillness that one may be said to find true speed' (11).

As we have seen, in addition to volatilising their materials and processes, both artists also generate relatively 'stable' prints in the gallery. The next artist's printmaking process displays a different combination of intense instability with supreme materiality. Oscar Muñoz's series Narcissi in process (1995 – 2011) consists of a series of photographic self-portraits. (Fig 10)

Fig 10 Oscar Muñoz Narcissi in process, 1994 ongoing. Installation View Philagrafika, Philadelphia, 2010. Image: Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and Constance Mensh (Photo)

Unusually the images were printed — by a uniquely developed screenprinting method — with charcoal dust on water in shallow rectangular vitrines. The containers were lined with paper – typically maps or newsprint — onto which the pigment settled as a consequence of the evaporation process (Philagrafika, 2010). In vaporizing

two fundamental material fix-points of printmaking — replacing the transfer medium of ink with charcoal dust and the receiving support with water (albeit in a container lined with paper) — these pieces interrogate the visualisation procedures of the media of photography, printmaking, drawing and object-image.

Take the material decompression of the time-honored drawing technology of charcoal into miniscule components as the means of (photographic) image generation: latent aspects, the usually invisible 'stuff', namely the chemical grain of the photographic print as well as the pixellation that underlies the digital photograph, become apparent.v Thereby, the image's accustomed photographic directness is defamiliarised while its materiality becomes tangibly concrete.

This is important, since, as already noted, the materiality of the medium has been and is routinely ignored in favour of the photograph's content (Barthes, 1981, 6). The concomitant dematerialisation of Muñoz's photographs, as explained, can only contribute to a problematisation of photography's 'reality' factor. Simultaneously, the emphasis on and destabilising of the constituents of the print's make-up also foreground the precarious and mutable nature of the print medium.

The acute tactility suggested by the charcoal dust enhances the affective charge of this work, the connotation of dust with evanescence reinforced by the volatile liquid surface. Thus, temporality is literally infused into a still image of that most obviously evocative of genres, the human portrait. The clustering of particles in some areas, their floating to the ground or base of the vitrine leads to an emptying out of the portrait. The altered artistic materials create a potent metaphor of human fragility and mortality — as well as social (and artistic) categorisations. In the context of Columbian Muñoz's own socio-political environment they generate a specific metonymy of disappearance (Matheson, 2009.)

The relapse of the image in Muñoz's series — at the level of its constituent material parts — results frequently in a non-image. From the perspective of image-making, an alternative 'other' is introduced instead of the line or mark of drawing. Sometimes regarded as a substitute to the line as the foundation of a drawing or image, the mere 'blot' here both implies and denies the beginning of an image. This latter holds disturbing implications for the image's categorisation and status as drawing, print or photograph. What is a blot, if not a blotch or stain? It is, above all, formless or 'informe'. The formless has been defined in art theory, following Georges Bataille, as something that breaks down classifications and thereby 'of undoing the whole system of meaning' (Foster et al 2004, 245).

Formlessness in Muñoz's Narcissi is further reinforced by the specific combination of conventionally separate materials, namely in the conflation of the 'dry' and 'dusty' (charcoal) with the 'fluid', usually pen and ink, here water. A similar point can be made in relation to the image as both print and photograph. The condensed and fixed surface of the print or photograph — consisting typically of the dried, however miniscule, pigments/silver halides applied to a support — becomes both liquefied and dispersed. Furthermore, the melding of inimical substances, dust and water, may evoke the much-cited notion of 'abjection' (Kristeva, 1982). The unstable nature of the physicality of the image can be argued to refer to both the image's — and thereby the drawing's, photograph's and print's — unfixed nature as well as the viewer/subject's unstable self.[vi] In contrast to the humanist conception of self — suggested by the genre and type of portraiture in Narcissi — psychoanalysis and other theoretical approaches emphasise the subject's lack of fixity in relation to its surroundings, be they physical, social, technological, emotional, human or non-human. The self's incessant coming-into-being includes the ever-present intimation, not only of its final dissolution in death, but also of the constant labour of creating and maintaining its boundaries, or the fashioning of an outwardly and inwardly stable self — one that appears to have taken on a heightened, even frenzied quality in the current social media environment. For Muñoz's local, Columbian audiences the former 'task' that applies in any culture has specific connotations.

Muñoz's intertwining of image and presentation modes demonstrates how the shifting materiality of his image can be made to highlight and question not only features of the different media which he employs, but also the coming-into-being of the viewing (and creating) subject. Muñoz's realisation of this work as an on-going series further highlights the latter. For the viewer who encounters the individual (self)portraits of Narcissi at different stages of creation and dissolution, questions of the(ir own) psychological and social self as well as its formation as and in images are made tangible and almost physically real.

As we have seen, the previous artists volatise (some of) the traditions of the art print and hint at the changeability of images in general by their adoption of mutable materials, processes and forms of image technologies, including print, in combination with their chosen iconography. They also dramatise various aspects of print's (im)materiality, including its latency, and thus reveal its virtuality, its potential to realise new possibilities.

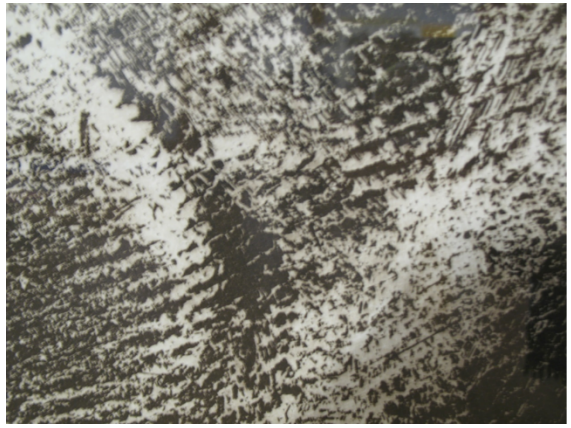
I would like to end with the 2017 Turner Prize nominee Andrea Büttner who takes a seemingly different route altogether – she seizes the ephemeral, or latent, and

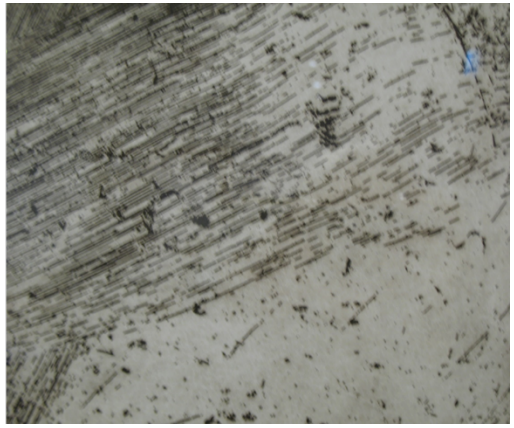
re-instates it to apparent materiality: the ‘motif’ or ‘image’ in Büttner’s large-scale series Phone Etchings (2015, 195 x 112 cm) are smudges left by fingerprints on phone screens. (Figs 11 & 12)

Figs 11 & 12 Andrea Büttner Phone Etchings, 2015, Installation view, Ferens Gallery, Hull, 2017. Photos: The author

Fingerprints are among the most ancient and ephemeral forms of print(making) — with the body part as matrix and the body's greasy effluence as transfer medium. The receiving surface can be anything. Crucially, here it is the sleek screen of a smart phone. Bodily messiness – an instance of Kristeva's (1982) 'abject', as already discussed — collides with one of the most fetishised signifiers of the contemporary technological sublime, characterised by precision, miniaturisation, ever-increasing technological and visual perfection.

Büttner's overriding artistic concern is to bring visibility and attention to social and cultural phenomena and people that are usually invisible or overlooked. In Phone Etchings she utilises a usually disregarded or merely irritating phenomenon and transposes it through changes in orientation, scale, medium and colour: from the horizontal to the vertical; the hardly visible to the monumental; the cool, smooth, perfect screen-surface to the haptic tactility of etching; the greasy non-colour to non-realistic primary washes and velvety black and white. In other words, she endows the latent with a distinct materiality and presence. The prints seem to function metonymously for the body itself, in both its abstracted otherness and difference as well as its insistent material fleshiness. The latter is especially pronounced in the black and white etchings and their 'pockmarked', tangible surface of debossed/embossed marks. (Figs 13 & 14)





Figs 13 & 14 Andrea Büttner Phone Etchings, 2015, details. Photos: The author

Shame, a frequent Büttner trope related to her concern of making the hidden visible, is here attached to the human body's imperfect functioning in the context of its own advanced technologies, as the Austrian philosopher Günther Anders (1956) presciently argued.vii

However, we have to ask whether such artistic manoeuvres re-introduce an ideologically problematic sense of authenticity and presence — tied to a simplistically conceived notion of materiality — to the image.

I think that knowledge of the source of the imagery as smudge and stain — disturbing the slick, gleaming perfection of the screen — mitigates against such a reading. In her discussion of the 'resuscitation of the authentic' in recent art, through the appearance of outmoded technologies and the exercise of craft skills, Erika Balsom (2014) interrogates the authentic and its association with reactionary values of facile presence, trouble-free purity and identity. Citing Adorno's partial approval of the authentic 'in what is vulnerable and transient rather than fixed and pure' (75), Balsom comes to the conclusion that there is indeed a space for a new kind of authenticity in art. Such art creates objects that function as an 'index rather than deny the frailty and difficulty of being in the world' (ibid). Büttner's Phone Etchings strike me as a brilliant — socially, culturally and ethically necessary — example of this.

In conclusion: although regularly omitted from critical debates on the image and contemporary art, this paper has argued that a consideration of both the oldest (analogue) and most recent (digital) printmaking processes — often employed in varied combinations by current artists — can provide valuable insights into 'the moment of invisibility [of the image] as the transition that releases multiple virtualities, multiple potential futures' (Cubitt, 2014, 257). The concept of the 'imprint' (Didi-Huberman) served to elucidate some of the artistic interactions between and disruptions of technological and material affordances, medial conventions as well as iconographic and formal means. Importantly, while foregrounding mutability rather than a habitually presumed stability, the chosen artists — Christiane Baumgartner, Susan Collins, Oscar Muñoz, Andrea Büttner — craft new, intensified materialities. Through such means they contribute to an unpicking of the ostensible will to mastery and transparency, especially (but not only) of digital images. In thus generating culturally and socially necessary

representational and experiential 'friction/s' (Joselit), the specific formal and material strategies of these four artists are also tied to an ethics that permits the mobilisation of 'the anachronism of the authentic as a challenge to our present' (Balsom, 2014, 76).

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[i] *L'Empreinte* was originally published in 1997 to accompany Didi-Huberman's eponymous exhibition. The author republished an unaltered version in 2008. The first English translation of the initial chapter appears in my forthcoming anthology of critical writing on print (Pelzer-Montada, 2018, 184-95). On the difficulty of translating the term *empreinte* into English and the retention of the French term, see translator Miranda Stewart's note (184).
Quotations from untranslated sections of the book are my own from the German edition (Didi-Huberman, 1999).

[ii] See, Elkins (2013), especially Rosalind Krauss (125-7; 339-42) and Joel Snyder (369-400).

[iii] In order not to overcomplicate the argument here I am ignoring further possible transfer or imprinting processes, such as transferring an original drawing onto the plate or stone by means of charcoal, for example. I am also disregarding purely digital prints – those that are created digitally and outputted digitally.

[iv] Some artists have begun to use laser-cutting for this purpose (Catanese, 2012).

[v] For a reflection on drawing and its mechanisation, first through printmaking, then digital technologies, see Cubitt (2014, 5 and 102-3).

[vi] The role of images in the construction and maintenance of the self is emphasised in Jacques Lacan's theory of the 'mirror stage' as a phase in identity formation. For a brief discussion, see Sturken & Cartwright (2009, 121-122).

[vii] Anders (1942/56) spoke of 'Promethean shame', the shame humans feel in front of the superior quality of the technological objects we produce. For the first English translation of this important text, see Anders in: Christopher John Müller (2016), pp 23-96.