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Lothar Osterburg's *Imagining New York*:

A Melancholic Picturing of the Past

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Lothar Osterburg's *Imagining New York*:

A Melancholic Picturing of the Past

by

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Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2014

Dedication

For my grandfather, the man who introduced me to fried calamari and Frank Sinatra.

Acknowledgements

When this daunting "thesis year" began, I feared that it would be something of a painful process. While I did have difficult days and weeks, I can honestly say writing this thesis has been a wonderfully gratifying experience. And for that, I have to thank my advisor, Ann Reynolds. She will tell you that this work is all my own, but I could not have done it without her—her encouraging words, her gentle prodding, and her generous spirit. I am also grateful for my family and friends, both far and near. Without their love and understanding I would not be who I am today. But I am especially thankful for BA and LM, who have encouraged, inspired and supported me (as they always do) through the highs and the lows of graduate school. Last, but certainly not least, I must thank Lothar Osterburg for creating work that continues to surprise me.

Abstract

Lothar Osterburg's *Imagining New York*:

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

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How do we engage with old photographs or with images that appear to be "old?" Better yet, how do we relate to the past through such images? These are questions I explore through a series of photographs created between 2007 and 2013 by master printmaker, Lothar Osterburg (German, b. 1961). For *Imagining New York*, Osterburg worked purely from memory, building models of the city from found and everyday materials and composing them through the frame of a fixed camera lens. Thus, although he lives and works in New York City, Osterburg's New York stems, perhaps primarily, from memories of images. His final images, printed as photogravures, may create a similarly memory-fueled experience for the viewer. These images may look and feel quite familiar, but they resist easy identification; the strange artificiality and generic nature of the model may bring to mind any number of associations—real and fictional—spanning the turn of the twentieth century, each slipping into the next.

Thinking *Imagining New York* through Sigmund Freud's potentially productive melancholia, and Walter Benjamin's melancholic "historical materialism," I suggest that the ambivalence of Osterburg's images—their particular fixation on the past—invites a mode of viewing that produces a certain distance, a critical remove not only from habitual viewing practices, but also from the viewer's own relation to the past. But how is this melancholic movement productive today? Osterburg's images may point to a collective experience in seemingly personal "historical processes" of reflection; emphasizing the status of the past in the imagination as image, it may become something that—together—we actively access and construct to inform the present. And through the critical distance they prompt, these images suggest "work" that is productive in acknowledging, specifically, the misrecognition of the social. During this process of prolonged disjuncture of temporality and space, the viewer quite literally "sees" these images differently. Or rather she may "see" herself seeing them, to become aware of her active role as viewer, as an active presence in the present. And in turn, it may be that the past—a kind of cultural experience—becomes an active, present social formation.

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Introduction: Picturing the Past

Lothar Osterbug was born in Braunschweig, West Germany in 1961. He grew up in this small city, only 45 kilometers west of East Germany, and eventually studied printmaking at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste there. Despite living in the West and through the years of post-war American-inflected prosperity—a moment which Billy Wilder satirizes to great effect in 1961's *One, Two, Three*—Osterburg's access to "America" was limited. He recalls that his childhood knowledge of New York City came primarily from library books, which were published prior to the war, and stories from his great aunt, who had worked in America during the 1930s. These "historical" accounts melded with the sensational perspectives of more contemporary films and magazines.[1] New York for Osterburg—as, perhaps, for many other (Western and Eastern) German adolescents—was a city somewhere between past and present, reality and fiction. And it remained that way until 1987, when Osterburg immigrated to San Francisco to pursue a career as a master printer.[2]

That career began at Crown Point Press. He was working primarily in intaglio, printing for artists like Sol LeWitt and Wayne Thiebaud, until 1989, when a Christian Boltanski project required that he learn the nineteenth-century process of

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[1] Lesley Heller Workspace, "Exhibition: Lothar Osterburg, "Yesterday's City of Tomorrow and Library Dreams," http://www.lesleyheller.com/exhibitions/20120201-lothar-osterburg-yesterdays-city-of-tomorrow-and-library-dreams. Accessed April 21, 2014.

[2] As the citation of online sources suggests, I did not conduct the oral history initially planned for this project. Osterburg's background is concentrated in the introduction, but interviewing him will be a necessary next step.

photogravure. In this laborious continuous tone process, the negative is slowly etched into a copper plate through a photosensitive gel and printed using a very fine aquatint. Osterburg was fascinated by the process and drawn to the final print's wide range of tones, which are rich, yet delicate. Since that time, Osterburg has continued to print almost exclusively in photogravure, becoming one of its premiere practitioners. But more importantly, this experience transformed his own work.

It is through photogravure that Osterburg came to consider photography more seriously, which he only took up, admittedly, as a necessary part of his new interest.[3] Even when he moved to New York in 1994 to start his own print studio, specializing in photogravure, photography remained mostly a means to an end. In 2000, however, he began to construct small, crude models of landscapes and tableaus from memory to use as the subject of his photographs. He built models of tall ships, wooden-framed gliders, floating villages, libraries and rocky coasts from found and everyday materials, quickly, as though they were intended to be three-dimensional sketches. As such, these memory-models were loose approximations and took on a generic rather than detailed and specific character. Their height and width ranged from only a few inches to several feet, but their size becomes

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[3] John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation ,"Lothar Osterberg's Zeppelins in Grand Central," http://www.gf.org/news-events/Newsletter-February-2013/Lothar-Osterbergs-Zeppelins-in-Grand-Central/. Accessed April 15, 2014. "Photography—especially the more conventional gelatin silver prints, C-Prints, and more recently digital prints did not interest me because of their industrially manufactured surface. Photographic prints lacked a physical presence, and were just an illusion on the surface."

indeterminate through Osterburg's placement of the camera. Using a very short focal length, and sometimes a magnifying glass, he photographed these models from the position of a participant in the scene. Finally, the resulting images, when printed as photogravures, take on the appearance of old photographs, but from where or when? As photograph (and as photogravure, a historical printing process), they seem to assert an indexical authenticity, a material link to the past. But the models' generic forms and the visible evidence of their irregularities complicate the photograph's link to the past. Together, the memory-model and the process of photogravure facilitate an exploration of not only turn-of-the-century photography, but also the ways in which we view such "old" photographs today. Together, Osterburg's indexical interventions explore, and perhaps encourage, an engagement with the photograph that goes beyond the medium's usual indexicality—an engagement rooted also in the creative force of memory and imagination.

In his most recent series, *Imagining New York*, Osterburg further develops this memory-fueled mode of viewing though a focus on New York City. Created from 2007-2013, the series consists of thirteen images, eleven photogravures (two of which are panoramas) and two carbon prints. Its urban scenes are variations on two types: street scenes or interior shots of a Grand Central Station-like space. All of these images stem from three base models that Osterburg rearranges, combines, and shoots from different positions. Like his earlier models, these are

constructed from memory with relative quickness, but because they contain more components, he spends more time creating their compositions. The way in which Osterburg composes, however, is quite revealing: he continually looks through the camera lens thorough out the process. These images are not, therefore, driven solely by memories of "real" New York, of how it exists in three-dimensional space. Rather, Osterburg works from memories of images—perhaps not only of New York, but of "the modern city" as well. As such, *Imagining New York* combines his expansive and idiosyncratic image-making with the image-driven experience of New York from his childhood. Indeed, his work of memory and imagination speaks to an experience of images more generally—the way some images hold the viewer's attention more than others, the way a single image may prompt a spontaneous, irrational series of image-associations, and the way an image can make the viewer feel as though the past is at once lost and also palpably present. But with a focus on a specifically modern, urban past, what are the implications for Osterburg's imaginative, creative relationsip with images? Is this work of image-memories something other than a form of (aesthetic) nostalgia, an uncritical longing for a past?[4]

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[4] "Nostalgia," here in the derogatory sense of Frederic Jameson's "nostalgia film," which offer "false realism:" representations of other representations, films "in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces 'real' history." He feared, in short, that the accumulation of such cultural forms would efface history altogether through their "random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion." (Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, no. 146 (July-August 1984): 65-67.)

I first encountered *Imagining New York* through one image from this series entitled *Twilight, 1984* (Fig. i.1). It came to Austin as a part of the International Print Center, New York's juried exhibition, *New Prints 2012/Autumn*. It is a large photogravure, almost three feet by two feet. But that is not why it caught my eye. Something about the image felt familiar, but only just—I could not place it. Or perhaps, more accurately, as I continued to look and move closer, I could not settle on a single source for it. Initially, the image brought to mind a historic photograph of New York's elevated trains, but Osterburg's image clearly did not depict a real city—the steam looked like cotton. Nevertheless, the quality of the slotted light reminded me of a moody, maybe noir-esque movie from between the wars, but not even any one in particular. It was then that I also noticed that the trams are nearly two-times larger than the train above. All those little vehicles prompted photographs of the utopian traffic patterns of Bel Geddes' mostly unpopulated *Futurama* and images of mid-century German or Czech stop-motion animation. But these did not feel quite right either—the construction of the model was too haphazard for the former, and the styles of the vehicles perhaps not cohesive enough for the latter.

Each time I began to pinpoint the source of my feeling of familiarity, the context slipped away, and another rose to take its place. This pleasurable frustration kept me in front of *Twilight, 1984*, while the rest of the tour moved on. The strange artificiality and generic nature of the model (at turns obscured and heightened by the photogravure) allowed for both images of a "real" city and

images of an "artificial" city, but it also created a kind of disjuncture, simultaneously blocking my progress. But my progress toward what exactly? I seemed to be in search of a single, stable experience of the image—specifically, in search of the image fixed to a particular past. Instead, *Twilight, 1984* encouraged a more expansive, fluctuating search into New York's imaged-past. Indeed, a kind of subtle appropriation seems to be at work in Osterburg's series. But even the images of my ever-shifting constellation were not whole, complete, or fully recognizable. One melding into another, sometimes an association was tangentially felt more than it was unmistakingly identifiable.

But how might Osterburg's quiet, multilayered and imprecise use of quotation allow us to rethink the conditions and effects of image appropriation, specifically the work of the "pictures" generation of artists?[5] Epitomized by the work of Sherrie Levine (at least for the writers of *October*), a picture's "most salient characteristic" is its "recognizable images" (Fig. i.2).[6] But this is a deconstructive mimicry. Craig Owens explains in "The Allegorical Impulse" that through this repetition, these new works "empty [the older images] of their resonance, their significance, their authoritative claim to meaning."[7] Indeed, for Rosalind Krauss,

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[5] Pictures was the title of Douglas Crimp's 1977 exhibition of Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, Troy Brauntuch, Philip Smith and Jack Goldstein at Artists Space in New York. In 1979, he wrote an article of the same title for October, analyzing these photographic works and even outlining "a predominant sensibility among the current generation of younger artists, or at least a group of artists who remain committed to radical innovation." (Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 75.)

[6] Ibid.

[7] Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism, Part II," *October* 13 (Summer 1980): 79.

Levine's rebellious photographic practice "look[s] back on the modernist origin and watch[es] it splintering into endless replication."[8] Consequently, "appropriation" takes on a political connotation—it is a critical form.

But in order to throw the autonomy and stable meaning of images into question, these "pictures" artists challenge the totalizing and transcendent tendencies of modernist art.[9] The deconstructive impulse of their appropriation, in other words, has everything to do with the past; Levine's productive critique, suggesting a break from the past, necessarily participates—fixates, even—on that very past. As Owens explains, appropriation will always involve a degree of this "unavoidable complicity."[10] By situating postmodern works like Levine's within the framework of "allegory," he hopes to emphasize this connection, this kind of critical obsession with the past. He suggests that allegory, understood broadly, could be a model of all critique, and from there, that all postmodern critique like Levine's may be "unavoidably" tinged by a Benjaminian conviction in "the remoteness of the past, and a desire to redeem it for the present."[11]

But perhaps the most important cog in this deconstruction machinery goes unacknowledged: memory. In both the making and the viewing of the image, memory is a necessary component. For Levine, there is a purposeful "rescuing" of

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[8] Rosalind Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde: A Postmodernist Repetition," *October* 18 (Autumn 1981): 66.

[9] Owens, "Allegorical, Part II," 80.

[10] Ibid., 79.

[11] Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism, Part I," *October* 12 (Spring 1980), 68.

the past, but there is often little to no evidence of this in the final image other than the presence of the older image itself. As such, there is no guarantee that the viewer will likewise reach into the past. Indeed, there will be no critique if the appropriated image is not "recognizable," recallable. But it is not just a matter of visual recognition; without a shared knowledge of this specific past, these photographic works of appropriation do not "work." Crimp describes their subject as distance, "distance from the history that produced these [appropriated] images."[12] But for this distance to be acknowledged, a "closeness," a kind of collapse is first necessary.

How might Osterburg's visible and personal memory practice offer a different kind of image-appropriation?[13] How might this haphazard and organic memory work offer a different relation between images and viewers, between knowledge and distance, and between present and past? It may be that *Imagining New York* offers a kind of critical quotation in which the critical work happens through a certain embrace of the past, highlighting its necessary tie to the past. Indeed, it may be that these images allow us to recognize a legacy of melancholy in this postmodern period.

For Freud in 1917's "Mourning and Melancholia," it was the melancholic's internalization of an ambivalent loss, and the resulting self-deprecation, that set her

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[12] Crimp, "Pictures," 85.

[13] Using the image appropriation of the "pictures" generation to frame my discussion of Imagining New York is a relatively new idea. As such, it is not something that engage with directly in the body of my thesis. But I look forward to examining it further in later iterations of this project.

apart from the mourner. And while it could escalate to self-harm, this inward-turning critique could also produce a heightened knowledge of oneself.[14] In this light, it is easy to see why scholars like Jonathan Flatley connect Benjamin's "melancholic" historical materialism to Freud's melancholia.[15] Although this melancholy runs throughout Benjamin's writings (indeed, including those that deal with allegory), he clearly outlines it as a powerful and necessary form of socio-political critique in "Theses on the Philosophy of History." There, a certain refusal to let the past go, to let the past fall into a convenient linear narrative (i.e. "historicism") can open up connections between the present and disparate pasts, and through them, the possibility of new representations and alternative meanings.

In *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*, Flatley argues that this productive or "antidepressive" melancholy is a salient feature of modernism.[16] In the supposedly "high" modernist works of literature that he analyzes, it manifests in the very form of the text, which acts as a "mobile machine of self-estrangement" for the reader's affects; by producing a melancholic experience in the reader through the representation or narrativization of her melancholy, these works create a space in which the reader can assess or analyze

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[14] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Complete Works*, Vol. XIV, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1986), 246.

[15] Other recent tandem uses of Freud and Benjamin include: David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, eds., *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Illit Ferber, *Philosophy and Melancholy: Benjamin's Early Reflections on Theater and Language* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Tammy Clewell, *Mourning, Modernism, Postmoderism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

[16] Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 41.

her affects.[17] In so doing, these authors utilize melancholic reflection to reveal an underlying collectivity and social quality to seemingly entirely personal feelings of loss.[18] Thus, melancholy's "modern" critical function does not just work toward self-assessment, but also toward an assessment of the self's connection with others in the present.

It may be that Osterburg's images do something very similar. It may be that their ambivalence—their particular fixation on the past—invites a mode of viewing that produces a certain distance, a critical remove not only from habitual viewing practices, but also from the viewer's own relation to the past. But if so, then to what end? What might one gain from this "step back" from, but also through fixation? This melancholic movement might be an important or necessary form of critique for the present.

A lack of critical literature on Osterburg has allowed for a kind of openness in my exploration of these questions. I have been able to work and think about *Imaging New York* intuitively, on my own terms—a mode that seems to be in the spirit of the work itself. Raymond William's "structure of feeling" shapes my approach, sometimes obliquely, sometimes more directly. His critical look at seemingly personal feeling and experience has been instrumental in my own reconsideration of the relationships between images and the viewer, present and

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[17] Ibid., 7 & 84.
[18] Ibid., 4.

past, and the individual and the social. In the first chapter, "Structures of Melancholy," I examine *Imagining New York* through Freud's description of melancholy. I suggest that the multi-layered and fundamentally ambivalent nature of the images is a kind of internal (formally within the image) and external (experienced in viewing) disjuncture. The ambivalence of this "structure of melancholy," may, as in Benjamin's melancholic historicism, offer a critical (productive) relation with the past, while also actively, consciously holding on to it. The second chapter, "The Discernment of Melancholy," also takes up the relationship between "image-making" and "image-viewing," while delving deeper into the experience of viewing *Imagining New York*. Interested in Osterburg's New York as a past future, one that is shared, I investigate the connection between images and memory in the formation of such shared experience. And, finally, but most importantly, I explore the kind of critical "distance" that Osterburg's memory-images may prompt, bringing the discussion back to the potential productivity of this "postmodern" melancholy.

It is, of course, my hope that this idiosyncratic approach unfolds into something that resonates with others—that perhaps this exploration was not so personal at all.

Structures of Melancholy

In *Waterfront*, Osterburg presents brick row housing, street parking, and a view of Manhattan in black and white (Fig. 1.1). The dark towers of a bridge stand out in the background. The bridge and the tall buildings behind them are out of focus, all but abstracted, blending into a mass of urban geometries. This is seen from Brooklyn…Queens…Jersey City. This photograph perhaps suggests place rather more than it depicts a place. It is a representation that produces an effect of reference rather than a definable referent. For instance, the haphazard scratches and bits of dust on the print might suggest a level of authenticity, point to a time when amateur photographers processed their own plates. If I try to read this as a "real picture" of Brooklyn/Queens/NJ, the cars prevent me from creating a clear time frame for it. They are not contemporaneous styles, and the center car more closely resembles a European model. Resembling mid-twentieth century automobiles, they might call to mind a very different image of New York than that of turn-of-the-century New York inspired by the imperfections of the print. Neither the cars nor the image's general aesthetic seem wholly out of place together, however. Rather, they may generate a temporal layering. Viewing an old photograph today may provide an access point to that past. But *Waterfront* presents the viewer with multiple access points, cutting across time (to the late nineteenth century and first half of twentieth).

This temporal disjuncture is perhaps emphasized by a formal, spatial disjuncture. The cars in *Waterfront* are somehow the same size or smaller than the nearby sets of stairs, the wheels equal to the height of one step. Through a simultaneous movement of slipping associations and formal strangeness, the "unreality" (its impossible connection to a historical authenticity) of the photograph perhaps comes to the fore.

Slipping again, the silvery tone of the image recalls the silver screen; maybe this is an emptied film set, a test shot left on the editing room floor of a 1930s gangster movie. The empty darkness of the windows in the foreground creates a sense of an empty facade. The strong and strange light shining from the opposite street is like the artificial light of the motion picture studio—camera and crew take the place of what buildings should occupy on the other side of the street. Indeed, the blurred background of a downtown resembles the approximations of a studio-painted backdrop. The viewer can, perhaps, make out the dark ballasts of a bridge in the distance, setting the scene in a borough. The abstracted cityscape seems to rise out of nowhere; beyond an unexplained and sharp shadow in the middle ground, the road just ends. Did the fore and background actually inhabit the same space at the same time or were they spliced together in a negative? But the background is not the only blurred part of the image. There appear to be "multiple" focal points (on the right upper set of windows, the center set of stairs, the road around the center car), while the rest of the image is in a general haze. Such an

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effect could only be the result of retouching. Thus, what begins as a kind of "movie magic"—a consistent fake that attempts verisimilitude—quickly emerges as an obvious photographic construction—a discontinuous fake that calls attention to itself.

Through their generic urban forms, approximations of photographic and filmic style, and confused space, Osterburg's images prevent the formation of a single, stable referent. Associations with specific histories fail, recollections of older photographs and films slip, space defies expectation, the image as "photograph" undoes itself. That is to say, *Imagining New York* appears to exhibit internal and external disjuncture—in the formal elements of the photograph and in the viewer's experience of the image. One is not necessarily solely the cause of the other. Rather, they are mutually supportive, each bringing the other to light, together creating a sense of instability—an instability that may feel like loss. What is lost may simply be a feeling, a feeling of stability, of a certain kind of relation to the image, and, by extension, to the past.

Indeed, what is "lost" in an image like *Waterfront* is unclear and nebulous, stemming not from one point, but from many. With endless disjunctures, it is not one moment or experience of loss, but it is on-going; this loss lingers (it is a loss that is not lost). Characterized by a degree of ambivalence, it may create the potential for a different kind of truth. This ambivalent structure within and without the space of the photograph echoes Freud's early description of the unconscious

and narcissistic movements of melancholia in his 1917 essay, "Mourning and Melancholia."

In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud attempts to differentiate between two conditions. Both involve a lost love object. The "mental features" or disposition of someone in mourning and another in melancholia can be very similar: dejected, turned away from the world and incapable of adopting a new love object.[19] Freud notes that these reactions to loss differ in two respects: mourning is conscious and eventually ends productively in the withdrawal of cathexis, while melancholy is more likely unconscious and its unacknowledged loss gets taken up by the ego rather than abandoned. In the "work of mourning" a person consciously experiences a loss, which she slowly accepts, allowing her to form a new object-cathexis. Whereas, in melancholia, Freud suspects that the cause of symptoms "extend…beyond the clear case of loss by death, and include all those situations of being slighted, neglected or disappointed, which can import opposed feelings of love and hate into the relationship or reinforce an already existing ambivalence."[20] This mostly unconscious "object" is abandoned to some degree, but the love for it (freed libidinal energy) cannot be; it turns inward "to establish an identification of the

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[19] Freud suggests that mourning is deemed less pathological because it is more familiar or better understood. Which perhaps implies that once melancholia is better "understood" it would no longer be a stigmatized condition, but accepted as a common affective state. I would say that Osterburg's images work toward that end.

[20] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Complete Works*, Vol. XIV, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1986), 251.

ego with the abandoned object."[21] The lost object is thus internalized in melancholia (object-cathexis regresses to narcissistic identification), and as a result, all of the ambivalence felt toward that object and the experience of its loss are inflicted on the ego.

While the inward-turning ambivalence of melancholia primarily results in a depressive state ("painful dejection…inhibition of all activity"), it can also foster new sensitivities. Freud notes, "When in his heightened self-criticism…it may be, so far as we know, that [the melancholic] has come pretty near to understanding himself; we only wonder why a man has to be ill before he can be accessible to a truth of this kind."[22] The "work of melancholia" may be something more than the continued attempt to cathect lingering ties to the lost object (now internalized), as in the "work of mourning." Melancholia's unique mix of ambivalence and narcissism may also allow someone to see themselves, their desires from a relatively greater distance. Thus, it is not an entirely stagnant psychic state. With it comes the potential for a reflective knowledge.

Beginning with Benjamin, art critics and theorists have used "mourning" and "melancholy" to describe photography's unique relation to space and time—the photograph presents a physical tie to a particular moment, and through its very existence, simultaneously marks that moment as past and extends it into the

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[21] Ibid., 249.
[22] Ibid., 246.

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present. However, the degree to which writers engage with Freud's psychoanalytic conception of these terms varies widely. Benjamin uses melancholy in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" to disrupt the apparent continuity of the historical fabric. He suggests that early photographs of people provide the strongest link between past and present, fostering a "cult of remembrance" even for those who did not know the subject. "This," he writes, "is what constitutes their melancholy, their incomparable beauty."[23] Invoking the "beauty" of tradition, this temporal ambivalence is neither detrimental to the viewer's sense of history, nor is it life-changing—this is "to bring memory to the past," as David L. Eng and David Kazanjian write in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*.[24] As such, this tendency toward "remembrance" when viewing photographs may be closer to mourning than melancholia, in Freud's understanding. Placing more emphasis on the photograph's depiction of that which is no longer (and its relation to death), the photograph of a deceased loved one or a lost home can assist in the "work of mourning." Literalizing "reality testing," the photograph shows the viewer that their love-object is, in reality, gone, which will eventually help her to free her cathectic energy for a new object.[25] Remembrances of this kind bring the past into the present, but ultimately do so to reinforce a separation between past and present, to confirm that the past is gone, and to move on.

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[23] Benjamin, "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 2007), 225-6.

[24] Eng and Kazanjian, "Introduction," 1.

[25] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 244-5.

Benjamin edges closer to Freud's melancholia several years later, again in reference to early portraiture:

> In such a picture, that spark [of incident, the here and the now], as it were, burned through the person in the image with reality, finding the indiscernible place in the condition of that long past minute where the future is nesting, even today, so eloquently that we looking back can discover it.[26]

Like the melancholic's inability to "let go," here, the past is brought to memory, but it is also shot through with the future. The photograph reveals the correspondence of times; instead of solidifying a linear notion of time, the photograph can collapse the fragile boundaries between past, present and future. In its "spark" of reality, it promotes interconnectedness, an uncanny simultaneity that creates the possibility of new associations or realizations. In this sense, Benjamin also points to melancholia's radical potential for a certain kind of truth, for a different kind of work.

Taking up psychoanalysis directly, Thierry de Duve also posits photography's potential for both mourning and melancholy.[27] In "Time Exposure and Snapshot: The Photograph as Paradox," de Duve analyzes the antithetical natures and effects of two didactic modes of photography, the portrait and the journalistic snap-shot. Focusing on each mode's relation to time and its referent, he

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[26] Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, Volume 4, 1938-1940, trans. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 202.

[27] It should be noted that de Duve uses "trauma" instead of "melancholia." But because he focuses primarily on trauma's collapsed temporal structure of repetition, the close relation with the condition of melancholia is clear.

argues that the portrait (and all "time-exposure" photography) is akin to mourning, while the snap-shot is more like trauma. Going beyond the viewer's experience being "like" either psychic condition, de Duve suggests that both mourning and trauma are located within the medium itself. The time-exposure is "prone to the process of mourning" because it inherently acts as a "substitutive object" for its "lost" referent. The snap-shot is traumatic not simply for its content, but because the present tense "vanishes," "splitting into the contradiction of being simultaneously too late and too early."[28] By framing photography as a "paradox" with these intertwined and intersecting contradictions, de Duve demonstrates the spatial and temporal ambivalence at the root of the medium. Consequently, at an ontological (narcissistic?) level, photography may finally be more akin to melancholy than mourning.

Osterburg's *Imagining New York* appears similarly to position photography in relation to melancholy. The medium is not only melancholic as experienced by the viewer, but is also inherently so, through its immanent features. The two, indeed, are inextricable. The photographic medium and its oft-presumed connection to the present and the past are, in many ways, the foundation for Osterburg's own relation to the past. But it is perhaps with the addition of *Imagining New York*'s tangle of formal and experiential disjointedness that a "structure of melancholy" begins to

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[28] Theirry de Duve, "Time Exposure and Snapshot: The Photograph as Paradox," *October* 5 (Summer 1978), 119-24.

take form. Creating a disjuncture between initial reaction or "reading" and a second glance, formal elements (like generic urban forms and hyperbolic blurring) may signal an ambivalence like that towards the love-object, in Freud's melancholia. Each formal element perhaps plays to the viewer's desire for or expectation of a unified image, stable in space and time, an image one can "move on from," that is of and in the past. But, like the other "work of melancholia," they also frustrate those desires and expectations, inviting the viewer to reconsider the image, to re-evaluate its "pastness"—and in turn, her notion of the past.

Ambivalence, then, is fundamental to a "structure of melancholy." It is what sets melancholia apart from mourning.[29] It forces the loss of melancholia to remain unconscious, shrouded and unresolved, unlike mourning, a state in which libido detachment begins in the Unconscious and moves unhindered to the Conscious and "reality testing." In mourning, the lost object is always conscious, even if imagined, while in melancholia, a "constitutional" or experiential ambivalence results in a "wider range of exciting causes."[30] Whether an individual always forms ambivalent love-relations or the circumstances surrounding the loss creates the ambivalence, these simultaneous and conflicting attitudes obscure the loss in a multiplicity of related, yet "separate struggles." As Freud explains, these struggles of love and hate must occur in the Unconscious, "the region of the memory trace of

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[29] In *The Ego and the Id*, written six years after "On Mourning and Melancholia," Freud reexamines the relationship between mourning and melancholia in his discussion of the ego. Here, he asserts that the ego consists entirely of lost objects, making melancholia a condition of selfhood (23-4).

[30] Freud, "On Mourning and Melancholia," 256.

things." But rather than proceeding through the Preconscious and word-presentations, they are entirely blocked from consciousness.

Freud can only postulate as to why or how this is the case for melancholy: it could be one or any number of reasons. He suggests, confusingly, that it could be traced back to the ambivalence itself. And as a result, Freud aligns ambivalence in love-relations with the repressed, the traumatic. The repressed, that psychic material blocked from consciousness, is only visible as a seemingly unrelated symptom. As Freud writes:

> everything to do with these struggles due to ambivalence remains withdrawn from consciousness, until [identification with the love-object]…After this regression of the libido the process can become conscious, and it is represented to consciousness as a conflict between one part of the ego and the critical agency.[31]

Only after object-cathexis and the regression of libido to a state of narcissism ("the outcome characteristic of melancholia") will the individual know anything of this ambivalence; the melancholic's characteristic self-loathing is a conscious manifestation of her unconscious ambivalence towards the lost object.[32]

Imagining New York's "structure of melancholy" seems to mimic the melancholic's ambivalence toward loss, its origin in the Unconscious and its internalization and misrecognition in the ego. Accordingly, we could draw analogies between the phenomenon of the disjunctures in and beyond these images with

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[31] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 257.
[32] Ibid., 257.

Freud's "topographical" and "structural" notions of the psyche. Indeed, the overlap between and among the disjunctures of Osterburg's images appear to follow not only the psychic phenomenon of melancholia, but also Freud's later model of the psyche in *The Ego and the Id* (Fig. 1.2). The topographical and structural realms are inextricable; their relation is simultaneous and intersecting, not unilaterally causal and distinct. Likewise, ambivalence cuts across and through Osterburg's images, blurring the distinction between internal and external, image and viewer. In so doing, they may create a distance that one moves through to discover a relation with the past.

Freud's "topographical" model of the psyche is a vertical hierarchization of psychic realms from Conscious (Cs.), Preconscious (Pcs.) to Unconscious (Ucs.). At the lowest depth, the Unconscious consists of an individual's repressed thoughts, desires, feelings. These are (unconsciously) blocked from consciousness. But, as Freud reasserts in *The Ego and the Id*, "We recognize that the Ucs. does not coincide with the repressed; it is still true that all that is repressed is Ucs., but not all that is Ucs. is repressed."[33] Much of what is unconscious is merely "forgotten" and, with the help of a "word-presentation" or visual cue, can again enter the Conscious. Freud attributes this movement of "latent" psychic material to the Preconscious,

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[33] Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. Joan Riviere, ed. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1960), 9.

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which is thus also unconscious.[34] And in so doing, Freud emphasizes the nebulous and fundamentally ambiguous nature of all that is or may be unconscious.

Despite the illusiveness of the concept, the power of unconscious thoughts and feelings is, according to Freud, irrefutable. As demonstrated through analysis, "…very powerful mental processes or ideas exist…which can produce all the effects in mental life that ordinary ideas do (including effects that can in their turn become conscious as ideas), though they themselves do not become conscious."[35] What is unconscious is only recognizable through its effects; although not actively known, it is nevertheless felt. On the one hand, the Unconscious deeply affects the individual in her daily life, serving as the basic material for her dreams and constituting aspects of her personality and behavior. But on the other hand, the "return of the repressed" or the symptoms produced by repressed thoughts and feelings continually undermines whatever sense of unity the conscious self has. The relation between repressed ideas/feelings and the Conscious is fundamentally ambivalent.

Osterburg's images exhibit qualities of this topographical model in their internal composition, as well as through the viewer's unfolding experience of them. That is, the ambivalence of the overlapping formal and experiential disjuncture of *Imagining New York* could be understood as a process of the "unconscious." In

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[34] Ibid., 12-4.
[35] Ibid., 4.

regard to the formal elements and composition of the images, I do not wish to suggest that these are primarily an unintentional or unconscious result of Osterburg's creative process. Rather, the spatial disjointedness of these urban scenes evokes the workings and position of unconscious psychic material.

Take *Waterfront*, for example; at first glance, the viewer perhaps "reads" the background as a cityscape from the past, the solid towers of a bridge suggest Manhattan (Fig. 1.1). Perhaps, it is taken for a "real" or authentic photograph. But with a second look, the blanket, extreme blurriness of this city and its un-foreshortened bridge may come to the fore. Together, these elements facilitate the initial reading (background and Manhattan) of the photograph, but they almost simultaneously undo it, making room for other associations.

As though "beneath" the viewer's initial reading of the image, these irrational or inexplicable spaces and photographic effects perhaps go unacknowledged at first. But these formal aberrations facilitate that initial reading. If the bridge had been foreshortened, its towers may have read as buildings, and the image may no longer suggest a borough. Without the extensive haze of the print, the viewer may not necessarily connect it with the past and to a particular moment in photographic history. These elements, akin to the relationship between repressed material and its seemingly unrelated symptoms, allow the viewer to try to place the images in space and time.

More importantly, they directly contribute to the failure of these readings. This "unreal" space of Osterburg's images encourages or activates other readings, preventing the viewer from situating the image in one particular time, place and style. One moment *Night, 1904* invokes Edward Steichen's famed composition of the Flatiron Building of the same year (Figs. 1.3 & 1.4). But blink, and it is like Ridley Scott's neo-noir vision of a dystopian Los Angeles in 1982's *Blade Runner* (Fig. 1.5). Blink again, and it is one of the "stilled" shots from Woody Allen's ode to New York City (and to Sheeler and Strand's 1921 short film, *Manhatta*) at the beginning of 1979's *Manhattan* (Fig. 1.6). These associative leaps from 1904 to 2019, from New York City to a dystopian urban future, from photography to film are due, primarily, to the generic nature of the tall buildings in the background, the blindingly bright light of the buildings and train that at turns flattens and contours the surfaces around it, the strange compression of space between buildings, and the eerie emptiness of city beyond. Either inspiring a new association or preventing any immediate association to look or feel "quite right," such internal or compositional disjunctures simultaneously push and pull the viewer in multiple directions. As with melancholia, this foundational ambivalence is first evident ("made conscious") in another realm: in the viewer's attempts to understand or grasp the image before them.

Within this external realm of understanding or categorizing the narcissism and internalized critique of melancholia can be found, and in turn,

the structural model of the psyche (id, ego, superego). More specifically, the tension Osterburg creates between a positivistic and a creative conception of photography through stylistic choices and technique is not unlike "the internal work…consuming the Ego" in melancholia.[36] The question of whether photography should serve documentary or aesthetic purposes began with the medium's invention.[37] But it grew to the level of debate in the 1850s and continued, arguably, through the first World War.[38] Many critics and commentators thought the mechanics and chemistry of photography precluded it from the realm of art, leaving it to the realms of science and journalism. Others (usually photographers), however, saw the creative potential of the new medium. An image like *Zeppelin Docking in Grand Central* invokes the photography made in the era of this debate (Fig. 1.7). But its discursive position in "favor" of one notion or the other is not so clear. Here, the qualities that make "document" stem from the "artistic," and vise versa. By calling attention to the interrelatedness of authentic index and artistic flourish, Osterburg seems to suggest a critique of that very dichotomy.

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[36] Ibid., 246.

[37] For example, in Daguerre's explanation of his invention, it is clear that a connection with art had already been drawn, and was feared by those in the arts: "[the daguerreotype] will not only be of great interest to science, but it will also give a new impulse to the arts, and far from damaging those who practice them, it will prove a great boon to them" [Jacques Daguerre, "Daguerreotype," in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 12.].

[38] In his review of the Salon of 1859, Baudelaire famously gave voice to those who denigrated photography as an art; but in defending an art of imagination and fantasy (over realism), he inadvertently supported the work of Oscar Rejlander, whose combination-printing technique demonstrated photography's capacity for that very creativity. For a quick and chronological sampling of this debate, see *Classic Essays on Photography*, edited by Alan Trachtenberg.

At first glance, *Zeppelins Docking* perhaps reveals a forgotten future past—that has been. In the main lobby of Grand Central Station, where people once hurried through to catch their trains, now stands a tall wooden dock, floating above, a zeppelin. Despite the touch of science fiction through the eerie presence of the zeppelin in Grand Central (as though this is a future that has already come to pass), one may nevertheless be inclined to view the photo as "document." The dust and scratches on the print evoke a sense of historic authenticity. Calling to mind the earliest era of photography—where even "professional" photographers were amateur chemists preparing their own negatives and prints—these "mistakes" may be read as indelible marks of the past. Although pointing to the missteps of an unskilled photographer, the lack of polish also paradoxically creates a certain unmediated quality. It may suggest a photograph taken on the fly and rushed through development to make the deadline for the evening paper. Not the result of careful composition and calibration, it seems to have been meant to simply and quickly record a particular moment.

Yet the scratches, dust and haze of *Zeppelins Docking* may also point to a different kind of historical photograph—the epitome of turn of the twentieth century art photography. Wanting to prove the artistic worth of photography, Pictorialists like Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen or Gertrude Käsebier showcased the creative potential of the medium. Following the example of H.P. Robinson, Oskar Rejlander, and Julia Margaret Cameron, the Pictorialists layered negatives, drew, scratched,

and painted on negatives, and used alternative printing methods that required not only artistry, but technical skill. Stieglitz, especially, thought that photographers should privilege printing ("expressive printing") over the work of the camera.[39] Consequently, the photograph itself takes precedence, not its object; the subjectivity of photographer, not the objectivity of the camera.

Osterburg seems to participate in this art photography lineage through his use of photogravure and his creation of all of the aforementioned elements. But if the viewer looks at the image for longer than a moment, this will be clear to her: Osterburg seems to very purposefully reveal his photograph's "art" construction. In *Zeppelins Docking*, the first hint may come from the relation between the dock and the balcony in the foreground (Fig. 1.7). The balcony railing is strangely translucent, allowing the viewer to see the dock through what is presumably a solid banister. Inspecting the dock a bit closer, certain beams on its right side also exhibit a strange shadow, like a doubling of the structure. Both of these effects would result from the layering of two or more negatives during the biting of the plate. Indeed, the intense haze or blurriness throughout the majority of the image could also be attributed to the layering of many similarly blurry negatives. All this may invite the viewer to question the dust specs and the visible scratches. These elements were not accidents or the result of poor technique—quite the contrary; Osterburg skillfully

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[39] Weston J. Naef, *The Collection of Alfred Stieglitz: Fifty Pioneers of Modern Photography* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 97. Placing the artistic emphasis towards the end of the photographic process allowed for a singular work of art; the photographic image of the negative would remain the same, but each print could be a unique expression of that image.

uses his hand to almost simultaneously create and displace a sense of the the indexical as objective.

Through layering one type of indexicality with another, Osterburg may undermine the supposedly antithetical relationship between positivistic and creative conceptions of photography popular at the turn of the twentieth century. The creative photographic elements may collectively allow the viewer to see the photo as an authentic document of a specific moment. And as each constructive element comes to into clearer view, the viewer's initial understanding of the image is perhaps undercut. But this does not simply critique "photograph as document." It is rather a blurring or binding of the two.

Indeed, we could say that Osterburg plays with the two applications of "index" on which the positivistic and artistic positions depend. On the one hand, the scratches and haze "point" to a moment in time, forging a connection just as the photograph bears a physical connection to its object though light.[40] But on the other hand, the predominance of these elements reveals the hand of the photographer again and again, suggesting more than a degree of mediation between object and photo.[41] That is not to say that Ostersburg's series eschews the photographic index as a result; its objects are Osterburg's handmade urban miniatures—another kind of indexicality. As such, he playfully literalizes Andre

[40] Hilde Van Gelder and Helen Westgeest, *Photography Theory in Historical Perspective* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 33-6.

[41] Richard Shiff, "Phototropism (Figuring the Proper)," *Studies in the History of Art*, no. 20 (1989), 169-70.

Bazin's assertion that "[the photograph] is the model [of its object]."[42] But in so doing, Osterburg's photographs complicate Bazin's claim that man has a "deep need…to substitute [the object] for more than a mere approximation." With its two indexical levels (model and photograph), *Imagining New York* does not appear to reject the photograph's physical connection to its object, nor its capacity for objectivity. Instead, the series may forefront the photograph's equivalent ability to analogize, its ability to forge slippery (emotional and associative) connections between object, photograph and viewer.

This self-referentiality (a figurative turn inward) may be akin to a melancholic movement of self-critique. While the melancholic disparages herself rather than expressing hate toward her lost love object, in *Imagining New York*, Osterburg uses photography to question photographic conventions and historic assumptions about the medium. By producing and then undercutting a documentary feel with the retouching of "art" photography, Osterburg effectively seems to bind the two, destabilizing the categorizations of both. In the course of looking, the increasingly obvious "creative" elements may allow the viewer to acknowledge the significant role they played in her initial documentary reading. But this movement also works in

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[42] Andre Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 14. "Painting is, after all, an inferior way of making likenesses, an ersatz of the processes of reproduction. Only a photographic lens can give us the kind of image of the object that is capable of satisfying the deep need man has to substitute for it something more than a mere approximation . . . The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discolored, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it is the model."

the other direction, interrogating the presumed effect or purpose of the retouched art photo. These images deny a privileging of the document (the photograph's "realness," its draw as an image from the past, of a single, particular moment and time, and its continuity as a "whole" or complete image) as well as the Pictorialist art photo (focused on aesthetics, the role of the person behind the camera, and free of its object, time and place). Denying the "documentary" while also questioning the art photo as pure aesthetic may ultimately emphasize the imaginative and associative power of the very human viewer; viewing an image is, perhaps, never as clear cut as "documentary" or "pictorial," and the viewer can potentially see both in an image at any given moment.

This emphasis on "the medium" makes Osterburg very much of his time. When he moved to the United States and took up photography in the late 1980s, many theorists and critics were rethinking photography, ontologically as well as socially. Beginning in the 1970s with the ascendancy of deconstruction and post-structuralism on both sides of the Atlantic, critics and theorists like Victor Burgin, Jean Baudrillard, and Abigail Solomon-Godeau sought to destabilize the usual indexicality of the photographic process. They emphasized its role in contemporary vision and ideology and pointed out the dangers of the documentary, positivist view. They questioned the cultural value of the index and explored the effects of reproduction in an ever-increasing image-saturated world.

But it is not without significance that addressing these aspects of the medium is not a new trend. Benjamin, Kracauer and others had written about them years before. The more recent writing differed primarily in its disinterest in meaning; concepts like simulacra and *mise an abyme* took precedence over the index and "the photographic approach;" photography became something of a ideological and ontological abyss, collapsing iinto itself. Rather than revealing something about the world, about people, about the shape of things, photography seemed best positioned to reveal its own illusive nature. With its easy capacity for self-reflexitivity, photography was a premiere medium for post-modernity.[43] Thus, while the angle changed, the thrust of these discussions remained very much the same. By suggesting that photography was somehow a medium "of its time," photography's postmodern theorists betray a deep correspondence with the Modern. But this is not only because Benjamin and Kracauer made a similar suggestion; to judge something "of its time" one must feel that this thing is at some remove to one's present, as if it is already past and can be fully assessed. This discussion of photography's reflexivity is tinged by a romantic, perhaps elegiac, view of the present.

Osterburg's use of both modern and post-modern interests—bringing together an earlier focus on objective indexical qualities with the more recent destabilization of the medium—perhaps indicates a particular relation to the past.

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[43] Craig Owens, "Photography en abyme," *October* 5 (October 1978): 73-88.

Indeed, *Imagining New York* may do much more than point to the nature of the photographic image. Osterburg's ambivalent approach to these historic modes of approaching photography appears to be an internalization of an ambivalence toward the past more generally. Take *Under the El*, as an example (Fig. 1.8). Osterburg combines a scene reminiscent of snap-shot "street photography" or a city-film from the early years of cinema with the purposeful and evocative blurring of a photo created for its aesthetic effect, not its ability to convey a particular place and time. This seems to suggest that a photograph can open a window onto a moment, provide descriptive information about its subject, but that same photograph can also serve less predictable and more creative purposes, opening a multitude of "moments." Perhaps its bright light broken by the elevated train tracks reminds the viewer of *The French Connection*, in spite of its gray-scale. Perhaps its streetcars send her thinking about her first trip to Europe, and the thrill of the strange sense of community on the tram. Or perhaps, like Barthes, she is "pricked" by the utility pole on the far left, with its insulators—presumably glass—barely in focus but catching the light.

There is something about this mode of viewing that seems to evoke Benajmin's alternative historicism. In "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin proposes a historicism—"historical materialism"—that actively and openly engages with the past. It is personified most famously as Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (Fig. 1.9):

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His face is turned towards the past. Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe…The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. That which we call progress is this storm.[44]

Fixated on the past, acknowledging the ambivalence of (and towards) "progress"– this is a melancholic historicism. The past is not mourned as in a more traditional and linear view. Rather it is "melancholized" to create new knowledge; as Eng and Kazajian write, this is "a creative process, animating history for future significations as well as alternate empathies."[45] "Historical materialism," like Douglas Crimp's much later call for "mourning and militancy," asserts the political (and ethical) efficacy of melancholy. From holding on comes the possibility of new representations and alternative meanings. Appearing to enact a Benjaminian historicism in his images, Osterburg may position photography as equally capable of such social/political import. Holding on to the photographic past—visually and discursively—Osterburg perhaps "blasts open the continuum of history," suggesting "a secret agreement between past generations and the present one."[46]

Indeed, an image like *Under the El*, which potentially fosters this imaginative or associative capacity of the medium, seems to speak to a particularly Benjaminian

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[44] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, 257.

[45] Eng and Kazajian, "Introduction," 1. And also new futures: "It is well known that the Jews were forbidden to look into the future. The Torah and the prayers instructed them, by contrast, in remembrance. This disenchanted those who fell prey to the future, who sought advice from the soothsayers. For that reason the future did not, however, turn into a homogenous and empty time for the Jews. For in it every second was the narrow gate through which the Messiah could enter." (Benjamin, "Theses on the Concept of History," 264.)

[46] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 262 & 254

sense of the past: concrete, yet unhinged; bygone, yet "active and open."[47] This relation is perhaps imbedded in the fundamental ambivalence of *Imagining New York*—in its self-reflexivity, but also its construction of space, the lack of specificity in the subjects, and its synthesis of subject and styles from an extended historical period. Revealing the unreality or constructedness of each image, these elements may invoke, finally, a sense that the past that is never truly past.

The "work" of Osterburg's "structures of melancholy" may bind photography and a Benjaminian experience of history. These images seem to be fixated on the past, but it is not to any one, stable past. Nor, indeed, is this always a logical or rational relation to the past. This relation may nevertheless be, as in Benjamin's philosophy, powerful for the present.

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[47] Eng and Kazajian, "Introduction," 1.

The Discernment of Melancholy

What could this fixation on "the past" mean for the viewer of *Imagining New York*? Is it anything other than a regressive or stagnant or depressive fixation? As previously mentioned, Freud suggests that melancholia, while primarily a depressive state, has one potential benefit for the individual: a heightened self-awareness. Taking on the ambivalence toward the lost object, the self becomes the object of both love and hate. Making an "object" of herself (ego), the individual may come to examine or see herself, her actions and her desires from a relatively greater distance. In melancholia, a seemingly depressive fixation of "critical" attention on oneself can lead to possibly liberating (self-)knowledge.[48] As such, this "distance" is not simply a literal space, it is also a process; one gains knowledge through the way in which one navigates or moves through that distance. For instance, when someone suggests you "take a step back" from a thought or a situation: this may involve a physical gap in time or space, but what is implied is a particular, critical relation to the thought or situation. The potential productivity of melancholia, likewise, has less to do with its narcissism as such, than with the ambivalent movements of that narcissism. Knowledge does not depend on what the lost object is, but rather on one's relation to that lost object.

Thinking *Imagining New York* through Freud's notion of melancholia, the emphasis on the past can perhaps be understood as productive. The "melancholic"

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[48] Freud, "On Mourning and Melancholia," 246-7.

temporality of Osterburg's images may create such "critical distance" for the viewer, may prompt a different relation to the past. If so, then to what end? The resulting melancholic knowledge may not only concern the ostensible object—here, the past; perhaps these works point beyond the "misplaced" energies of melancholia to uncover truths outside the self—to the process of one's relation to the past. It becomes not simply a focus on the past, but on how one relates to that past. Indeed, they may point to the collectivity—and even sociality—at the root of seemingly personal or private feelings regarding the past.

The relation to the past that Osterburg's images may prompt has everything to do with their status as images. Indeed, images are at the heart of Osterburg's creative process. Describing his practice for *Imagining New York*, he has said:

> …I am working purely from memory, allowing for mistakes or inaccuracies …I am building small-scale models without measuring, much like sketching… During this process I frequently look at the model through a camera lens and ultimately photograph it from the vantage point of a participant in the scene.[49]

Talk of memory might imply the most personal kind of artistic endeavor, the creation of a private world made up of singular, lived experiences—the kind of individual "history" of Freud's melancholia. But the view through Osterburg's lens complicates that notion.

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[49] "Lothar Osterberg's Zeppelins in Grand Central," John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, accessed September 14, 2013, http://www.gf.org/news-events/Newsletter-February-2013/Lothar-Osterbergs-Zeppelins-in-Grand-Central/.

These memories are, perhaps primarily, memories of images: historic and fantastical photographs, films, and photo-based ephemera from the past, which were a part of a growing consumer culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. Osterburg's New York City is, in other words, a mélange of a particular visual culture. As such, it invokes memories of an urban past that is potentially shared, but is shared in a very particular way. In the above statement, Osterburg positions himself (and, in turn, the viewer) as a participant in the scene. With this, he physically collapses the boundaries between "inside" and "outside" the image, as if to validate an image-experience as lived-experience. While that could mean that to view a photograph is to gain access to the moment of its taking, the temporal and spatial disjunctures of Osterburg's models resist that notion. Rather, to validate image-experience as lived-experience in *Imagining New York* may be to suggest that memories of images are just as powerful as lived memories in one's feelings toward the past. That is to say, that the experience of viewing an image may be just as affective as the experience of a lived moment—the image-experience is a kind of lived-experience, one that necessarily involves others (other viewers and the creator of the image). Imagining himself both in the image (in the past) and in the viewing of the image (in the present), Osterburg assumes this participatory relation with the past via the image. His own images, imbued with a visual culture, perhaps also prompt a participatory engagement with the past, an engagement that is experienced by individuals, but also collectively.

Twilight, 1984, for instance, depicts a busy street with automobile traffic, streetcars, and an elevated train pulled by a steam engine (Fig. 2.1). Yet, the viewer may find the traces of modern, urban images "within" this photogravure from 2012. The angle of photograph, emphasizing the elevated tracks and the roadway below invokes, perhaps, turn of the century representations of the Bowery and the Third Avenue El. In 1896, photographs documented and promoted the elevated steam train's newly opened service between the Bronx and Manhattan (Fig. 2.2). This particular view of the Bowery became a popular one, reproduced for sale on postcards even ten years later (Fig. 2.3). The El was also captured on film, as yet another modern "marvel." The earliest footage perhaps came from Edison in 1899. Osterburg's image, however, may be closer in tone to Billy Wilder's bleak presentation of the El, which served as a backdrop for part of Wilder's 1945 film, *The Lost Weekend* (Fig. 2.4). But indeed, Osterburg's image is not the real El at all—there is cotton where there should be steam, wooden planks instead of pavement, and the steam engine pulling the elevated train is dwarfed by an electric tram below. As a result, it may as likely prompt an image of another artificial New York as one of the real city.

In *Twilight, 1984*, the "model-ness" of urban transportation and a people-less urban scene may indirectly suggest a close-up of Norman Bel Geddes' *Futurama* from the 1939 New York World's Fair (Fig. 2.5). This expansive diorama (35, 738 square feet), featured in the General Motors pavilion, brought to life an

America of 1960. Although visitors viewed it from a moving tram above, magazines and brochures reproduced its scenes in photographs, which, like Osterburg's images, often put the viewer at street-level (Fig. 2.6). Even with the spectator positioned "in" the model, its status as a model was never meant to be in question. Its smooth surfaces, possessing a uniform design aesthetic, promised a pristine, perfectly functional and peaceful future. *Futurama* was the epitome of the model as utopia. Like an architect's model, *Futurama* and Osterburg's models are tangible manifestations of an abstract thought or idea that does not currently exist in the world. But what is possible in the model is not always (structurally or monetarily) feasible in reality. Consequently, the model can also be a medium that begins and ends in the realm of imagination. Here *Futurama* and *Twilight, 1984* may meet for the viewer. Although Bel Geddes built a shining future and Osterburg an imperfect past, the transparency of their constructions—the status of each model as model—produces an imagined vision of the city.

  Zeppelin, like *Twilight, 1984*, presents a model of different modes of urban, modern transportation: an open convertible, elevated train tracks, a single train, and a zeppelin. (Fig. 2.7). But, in addition to "seeing" the model, the viewer may also "see" advertisements and popular movies in this image. The strange proximity of the zeppelin and Flatiron-esque building invokes a composite photograph from 1930, advertising the extension of the Empire State Building (Fig. 2.8). The emphasis on transportation and the composition's dramatic diagonals are also not

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unlike the dynamics of travel posters, which advertise not only the means of travel, but a destination (Fig. 2.9). However, Osterburg's New York is not so slick, nor perhaps, so optimistic. It may be as much utopia as it is dystopia, evoking a sense of Fritz Lang's demented city in *Metropolis*. Like that city, Osterburg's New York originates with a model, a façade (Fig. 2.10). Although, it may produce a different kind of artifice: not eerily continuous and geometric, but rather irregular and organic. *Zeppelin*'s model appears to be emphasized in its blankness, the strangely empty streets (no sidewalks or streetlights), and the idiosyncrasies of its components. Nevertheless, as with *Futurama*, the shared elements of all these images seem to be the artifice itself, and in turn, a connection not only to other images, but to imagination.

With these and other images potentially bubbling to the surface in *Imagining New York*, the series' relation to the past is not built solely on singular memories of a real or "indexical" past; it is ever-shifting, tangential, quite literally made up of images—some of which are themselves artificial. This "aggregate" quality might suggest the pervasiveness of images. Going further, it might suggest that, together, they may come to define, to shape an experience of the past. Whether a photograph of an actual city, a hand-drawn representation of a photograph, or a filmed model city, these "real" and "imagined" images of urban space take root in the imaginations of their viewers, contributing not simply to a view of the city, but also to a particular relation with the past.

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In *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Andreas Huyssen describes this relation with the past as an "urban imaginary." Although this term ostensibly describes future and past visions of the urban landscape, Huyssen specifically emphasizes the latter; based on shared space, memories and images, we create a vision of the city and of urban experience that is somehow of both the present and the past. In the realm of the imagination, past moments coalesce with the present, "the strong marks of present space merge…with traces of the past, erasures, losses."[50] As such, the "urban imaginary" is one way in which the space of the city (and not just its architecture) becomes a palimpsest. Or perhaps, more to the point, one makes the city a palimpsest through the "urban imaginary;" for this is an active, creative relation with the past, fostered by the workings of the imagination. What this concept highlights, then, is not the content or specifics of the past, but rather one's relation to it. The same could be said of the image-associations that *Imagining New York* may prompt. The thrust is, perhaps, not so much what, specifically these images are, as how meaning proliferates around and through them.

Nevertheless, this imaginative (i.e., ideological) relation with the past begins, perhaps, with the photograph itself. Its dual ability to conjure a past moment and to reveal the present was, no doubt, part of the medium's intrigue from the start. In

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[50] Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 7.

those earliest years, photographs of family members, of distant locales and of new

cities were rare, almost magical, treasured objects.[51] Even with the photograph's

increased presence later in the nineteenth century (through the invention of cheaper

printing methods and point-and-shoot cameras), this power did not disappear—it

shifted; pushed further into the commercial realm, into mass media, the photograph

became a means of communication. Indeed, photo-historian Peter Bacon Hale

goes so far as to suggest that photography's dominance in the early twentieth

century was so complete that it had become "the visual vehicle of American

experience."[52] Urban imagery, in particular, was mass-produced and widely

disseminated during this period, offering views of the "modern" city to viewers miles

and even countries away. The same was true for European cities during this period,

especially through "city-films" such as *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*.

Photographs, and increasingly film, were thought to reveal the ephemeral,

ever-changing nature of the modern city just as easily as they could herald the

achievements of Progress and the seeming arrival of the future. In their own time,

these urban images circulated in advertisements, magazines, souvenirs and other

forms of entertainment and perhaps fostered a sense of the city that was shared;

individually experienced, they perhaps contributed to a collective vision of the city. A

city that perhaps existed more in the mental and emotional realm of people's minds

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[51] Peter Bacon Hales, *Silver Cities: Photographing American Urbanization, 1839-1939* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 3.
[52] Ibid., 2.

(and not just of its citizens) than in its actual geographic and architectural spaces. A city that was partially "real," partially "imagined," but that could only coalesce in the flexible, creative space of the imagination.

The figure of the zeppelin, which haunts Osterburg's series, may encapsulate this quality of modern, transatlantic culture. Metallic, streamlined (a term which came into usage in the 1910s), promising transatlantic air travel, the zeppelin seemed to mark the future's arrival in the present, for good or for ill.[53] Patented in the final years of the nineteenth century in Germany and then United States, it would eventually link the imaginations of these two nations again forty years later in the Hindenburg's success and then fiery failure (Figs. 2.11 & 2.12).[54] Indeed, despite its very real presence as commercial transport and military air support from 1910-1937, the zeppelin remained a thing of dreams. One can see it, for instance, in William McKay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland*. In the comic, it marked fantastic worlds and exotic travel in Nemo's fantasies as well as in his nightmares (Figs. 2.13 & 12.4). Likewise, zeppelins featured prominently in pulp fiction, like Lester Dent's (the man behind Doc Savage) "Peril's Doman" from 1931 about battling pirates aboard a zeppelin bound for the Artic.[55] Mass media images promoted the zeppelin as much as a fixture of the imagination as of transatlantic

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[53] "Throngs at Dawn Greet Big Airship," *New York Times* (May 10, 1936), 34.
[54] Guillaume de Syon, *Zeppelin! Germany and the Airship, 1900-1939* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 195-210.
[55] Lester Dent, "Peril's Domain," in *Lester Dent's Zeppelin Tales*, ed. Matthew Goodman (Heliograph, Inc., 2006). Originally published as "The Frozen Flight" in *Air Stories* (February 1931).

transportation, representing perhaps both a hopeful view of Progress and anxiety about the future.

In Osterburg's *Zeppelin*, its namesake hangs above a city skyline, and could point to this ambiguity of the modern "image-inary," invoking earlier representations of the airship (Fig. 2.7). In the realm of fiction, the image suggests the fantastical illustrations Moses Kings' included in his travel magazines from the first decade of the twentieth century (Fig. 2.15). As in *Little Nemo*, airships weave among the buildings, making air-streets of these urban canyons. The dynamism of the composition seems to imply that this fundamental transformation of everyday travel, while perhaps not brand new, is certainly exciting. One can make out normal ground traffic below, but the emphasis is on the air. In this illustration, the future, in all its excitement, is now. The view from the ground in *Zeppelin*, with car and train prominently visible, also seems to place the zeppelin in the realm of the commonplace. Positioned in the background of the image, this zeppelin begins to feel almost mundane, not innovative; although it is the title of Osterburg's composition, it is the easiest element to miss because it fades so much into the dark background. That is not to say Osterburg's more mundane view supplants the fantastic. Instead the two views—the thrilling and the mundane—exist simultaneously. The same is perhaps true of the real images prompted by *Zeppelin*. Osterburg's sole zeppelin invokes images of the Hindenburg's many flights over New York City in 1936 and 1937, but here no shimmering metal, no impressive

view of the city (Fig. 2.16). The zeppelin seemingly floats away from the camera, nearly dissolving into the dark sky. This tension perhaps emphasizes the fact that the once present-futures of the zeppelin are now past, that these images are now received as more mundane past-futures.

Past and future share an origin; they are both shaped in and by an understanding of the present, the result of the moment of their making. But when the past and future are present as images, they continue to exist on into other presents. Still accessible today, these images continue to create a shared sense of the city. But rather than a collective view of its present and future, they contribute to a collective sense of its past and, in turn, the present. The future falls away, subsumed by pastness, becoming a feeling or a concept instead of a tangible presence. Indeed, in Osterburg's series, the fluidity between past and present comes to the fore—his view of the past is primarily one of past futures. Through his evocation of this historical image culture, his series does not, perhaps, trace a "real" past (the stuff of history). Nor does it simply invoke the past of the individual imagination. Instead, his disjointed, "unconventional" use of these images may offer an acknowledgement of the collective and ultimately participatory nature of the seemingly individual "urban imaginary."

Osterburg's creative process could be understood as a concretization of this palimpsest-like "urban imaginary:" in the "present space" of his models and photographs, he synthesizes qualities, content, moods and tones of images past.

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He appears to explore the etymological connection between "image" and "imagine," highlighting the role images play in the realm of the imaginary—in both one's understanding of other images and one's conception of the past; his physical assemblage of his models and his images to create a past moment perhaps invokes the mental assemblage of images, of memories that create one's vision of the past. "Working purely from memory" in the fluid movements of an urban imaginary, Osterburg abandons—as many "artistic" photographers before him—what I call "conventional picture-making."

These conventions have everything to do with historical trends in photographic practice, as well as ontological assumptions surrounding the medium, which I discussed in the previous chapter. For both the professional photographer documenting New York City for commercial or governmental contract and the "home-photographer"/tourist snapping the Empire State Building to share with relatives, the camera produces a single image, of a single place, a single moment with each close of the shutter. Perhaps they are carefully staged or taken on the fly; either way, these images depict scenes currently present in the world with some degree of detachment. That is to say: even when the subjective choices of the photographer are acknowledged, the use of the camera over say, a sketch-book or even video (which has the added step of editing), suggests the "objective" or undeniable presence of the scene depicted, the immediacy of an indexical relation.

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To use a camera, to "make a picture" in this conventional sense, is, in some ways, to eschew the fact that it was made (by a person) at all.

Osterburg's "picture-making," on the other hand, is literally just that—he controls nearly every element of his image's creation, and his presence, as I explained earlier, is evident at every turn. He, too, takes single photographs of scenes currently present in the world, but these are of his making, specifically intended to be photographed. His "picture-making" begins long before the shutter closes (Fig. 2.17). In this sense, his practice could be an analog-photography counterpart to that of Jeff Wall (Fig. 2.18). Wall calls his photographic practice "cinematopgraphic:" "photographs in which the subject of the picture has been prepared in some way, ranging from minimal modifications to the construction of entire sets…"[56] But in addition to carefully composing the mise-en-scène, Wall constructs a final, synthetic image from numerous separate shots. Since 1991, he has used computer software to digitally montage an extensive range of shots, taken over a period of time "with a single camera position and with the camera set almost the same for every shot."[57] His synthetic images may at first appear "documentary,"

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[56] Heidi Naef, *Jeff Wall: Catalogue Raisonné 1978-2004*, ed. Theodora Vischer (Steidl: Göttingen, 2005), 272.

[57] Jan Tumlir, "The hole truth. Jan Tumlir talks with Jeff Wall about The Flooded Grave," *Artforum* 39.7 (2001): 114.

but the equal sharpness of focus across the picture plane defies that sense of immediacy, revealing its artifice and coming to invoke something of a tableau.[58]

Thus, both artists fabricate scenes to create a single, "cinematographic" final image. Both play with the notion of index, challenging the seeming transparency of "point-and-shoot." But rather than creating the illusion of a single moment through a digital montage of several or even hundreds of individual photographs, Osterburg disturbs the illusion of the singular moment (primarily) through the disjunctured "montage" of his models. Rather than using many images and the careful construction of scale and perspective to create the impression of a one image, he uses one (or two) images of his sketch-like model to create the impression of many.[59] Osterburg's visible presence, his "picture-making," creates a potential multiplicity of images, of past moments.

But this work of the individual imagination takes place in the realm of the social—in the shared space and shared images of the city. Indeed, the powerful implication of Huyssen's "urban imaginary" is its collective nature; the city as palimpsest is our own making, individually but also together. But as Williams suggests, it may not be easy or possible to acknowledge aspects of the social (here, a collective imagination) in the historical moment of its formation. Osterburg's

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[58] Jean-François Chevrier and Michael Fried have both elaborated on this "pictorial" quality of Wall's work.

[59] In several images (*Bridge over Brooklyn* and *Zeppelins Docking*, for instance), it seems that he has layered or stitched two or three negatives, but this construction is noticeable, not smoothed over.

picture-making-as-"urban imaginary" could, perhaps, help make this underlying collectivity known by highlighting certain habits of viewing.

In *Death 24x a Second*, Laura Mulvey describes a similar phenomenon between picture-making and viewing practices in the feature film. In that particular use of the medium, "conventional" picture-making also involves the work of a camera, but it has more to do with the "successive order" and arrangement of the images it captures (editing). The tendency, when viewing these images, one after another, is to see a connection between them, to create a narrative. Indeed, Mulvey suggests that the literal movement of film facilitates this mode of viewing, as it mirrors the forward-moving "order of narrative."[60] However, in *Death 24x a Second*, she also explores a more "unconventional" form of cinematic picture-making, one that has perhaps become a new norm: the paused film. For much of the medium's history, films were very rarely accessible outside of the theater; there was limited access to rewind, fast-forward, and pause, instead movement forward and the narrative order offered by the film. But now, the viewer can control the movement of film and, in so doing, can practice a different form of "picture-making."

The intervention of this stillness, a kind of unconventional cinematic picture-making, disrupts the viewer's habitual mode of engagement. More specifically, halting a film's forward movement disrupts its narrative. Mulvey calls this an

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[60] Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 69.

"aesthetics of delay." It gives the image over to the viewer to "rediscover" the indexicality of the filmic image, which is often subsumed in its conventional "successive order." Like de Duve's "caughtness" of trauma in the snapshot, the still image allows the viewer to activate the temporality of the past; the spectator becomes fascinated by the index, by "time fossilized," and, if anything, moves backward into the non-diegetic past.[61]

Although an "aesthetics of delay" prompts a very different orientation, it perhaps points to the generally imaginative process of viewing the film in motion. Whether seeing narrative or index, both are "conjured" on the part of the viewer; both temporalities are activated by the viewer. But it is the index of the "aesthetics of delay," with its violation of the cinematic norm, which emphasizes this best. For Mulvey's "aesthetics of delay" may create distance for the viewer. The disruption of the film's conventional movement fosters "a step back" from its narrative and a very literal slowing down—altering the viewer's relation to the film. Thus a change in picture-making may offer a "critical distance." Given time to "look around" in the indexical world of the film, the viewer may come to acknowledge an active role in the creation of the image—one gains knowledge through the way in which one navigates distance. In such this navigation, a felt disjuncture between the "unconventional" and conventional modes of viewing prompts the viewer to

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[61] Ibid., 187 and de Duve, 119-24.

consider her role in conventional filmic picture-making and habits of viewing. Slowed down, the viewer is forced to deal with how the film means.

Imagining New York's "image-inary" mode of picture-making may foster this type of distance. The ostensibly personal image-memories imbedded in *Imagining New York* perhaps produce a similarly disjunctured assimilation of "reality" and "imagination" for the viewer. These disjunctures slow the viewer down, "breaking up" the viewer's expectation for a continuous experience of the still image (endowing a certain temporal continuity to a object that extracts moments from a continuum). By denying these expectations, the unconventional picture-making calls attention to such habits of viewing by undermining them. With this "critical distance," a different, almost stuttered relation to the image, the viewer may acknowledge the degree of mental "construction" that always takes place in viewing any image; the viewer may acknowledge the inherently participatory nature of viewing.

Barthes explains the primary importance of the viewer in "The Photographic Message." The semiotic "paradox" of the photograph—the denoted (uncoded) message and the connoted (coded) message—that he frames in the beginning of the essay concludes in irony: the notion of "a message without a code" is itself connoted. He writes, "The image—grasped immediately by an inner metalanguage, language itself—in actual fact has no denoted state, is immersed for its very social existence in at least an initial layer of connotation, that of the categories of

language."[62] In this structuralist view, the photograph has no meaning until the viewer perceives it. The photograph does not "inform" the viewer, but rather the viewer informs it (with her imagination). Indeed, photographing hand-made models may inherently suggest this activation of the photograph and an inextricable relation between "image" and "imagination." But as Barthes' use of "language" suggests, connoted meaning is not a solipsistic process (the creation of a singular meaning, unknowable to others), but a process that takes place in the realm of the social, among other people. Speaking to this implication more directly, Barthes touches upon "cognitive connotation," a kind of contextual reading, "whose signifiers are picked out, localized, in certain parts of the analogon." But, perhaps more importantly, this reading "depends on my culture, on my knowledge of the world."[63] It depends, in short, on one's experience (or one's imagination), experience that necessarily occurs in relation to others.

Barthes' cultural connotation speaks to the process of "association," I have been describing throughout these chapters. Although *Imagining New York*'s disjunctive, vague evocations of other, earlier images may ultimately undermine a successful and fixed "cognitive" reading, the "connotative" instability these images produce depend on the viewer's ability to "pick out" connotations in the first place. In other words, not all viewers, will see and experience *Imagining New York* in this

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[62] Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," in *Image—Music—Text*," ed. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 28-9.
[63] Ibid., 29.

way; one must have knowledge of this long turn-of-the-century visual culture. Following Barthes, the meanings, the connotations of these images are historically bound and will change over time, but the images themselves remain (mostly) unchanged. In *Imagining New York*, images as such become the basis for "cognitive connotation." The reproducible nature of images makes it possible for viewers of various ages to obtain this "knowledge." Indeed, very few people still living can recall engagement with many of the images I have mentioned that is contemporaneous with the images' creation. More likely, those who can grasp *Imagining New York*'s fleeting references are from generations that followed, (including Osterburg's generation) who look back on this time that came before even their early childhood. Or perhaps some who are even younger, like myself, who have taken an interest in this troubled era of "modernism," itself so concerned with the past and, in most cases, with the individual.[64] What these viewers may share, then, is not simply a knowledge of early twentieth-century popular images, but perhaps a relation to them in the present.

This shared relation includes habits of viewing images. Of particular interest here is the photograph's sense of "That-has-been," its presentation of a particular moment of the past. Barthes writes about this quality in *Camera Lucida* from a phenomenological standpoint: the strange experience of time when viewing a

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[64] Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 3.

photograph.[65] For Barthes, this (undeniable) connection to the past lies at the root of *punctum*, that unexpected flash of desire or affinity that flares out of the broader cultural understanding of the photograph (*studium*). Often the *punctum* is a detail, the form of an object or a part of an object captured by the camera. These "prick" the viewer, but in so doing, the viewer, in turn, activates them. Barthes calls this a "'thinking eye' which makes me add something to the photograph...beyond what it permits us to see." [66] With this phenomenological turn in Barthes, the viewer not only "reads" the signifiers of an image, but can expand it, see beyond and around it. This is especially so when the *punctum* is time; when one experiences the photograph as "This will be and this has been," one is able to "see" all those events that followed, and yet, to simultaneously experience the futures of that past with the immediacy of the present. Barthes illustrates this feeling: "These two little girls looking at a primitive airplane above their village…--how alive they are! They have their whole lives before them; but also they are dead (today), they are then already dead (yesterday)."[67]

The viewer may assert time's movement onto the still image, paradoxically, due to the photograph's materially static connection to a particular time. As de Duve writes of the "traumatic" snapshot, "Rather than the tragic content of the

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[65] Although leaving the structures and strictures of semiotics behind, Barthes concern remains with the experience of the viewing and the importance of the viewer in making of meaning.

[66] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 45 & 59.

[67] Ibid., 96.

photograph…it is the sudden vanishing of the present tense, splitting into the contradiction of being simultaneously too late and too early."[68] The viewer may, in short, conjure a temporal sequence for the still photograph, to imagine all that occurred before and after, all that goes un-pictured. As with an individual frame from a familiar film, the viewer can imagine all that precedes and follows from that single image.[69] But rather than cinematic time collapsing into a single moment, with the old photograph, especially, it is the flow of real time that is collapsed. The viewer infers the movement belied by the photograph's stillness, "recreating" an original sequence of events.

Imagining New York offers the viewer some critical distance from this habit by undermining it. The temporal disjuncture built into the very fabric of the series may prevent such rational sequencing (Fig. 2.7). Or rather, Osterburg's images may allow it, but in multiplicity. The images of Imagining New York do not "capture" a single moment, extendable into the viewer's present. Rather, they have the potential to present many, non-sequential, but past moments in near simultaneity. The indexical ties to a singular past are swiftly undercut by the presence of the other index: the artist's hand. As a result, the viewer may also find 1927, 2014, 1936, 1908, and 1940 in Zeppelin. Each discernable "moment," disrupts, overlays another potential sequence of events. A photo of the evening train passing on the

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[68] de Duve, 121.

[69] In another chapter of Death 24x a Second, Mulvey also discusses this relatively new phenomenon—more widely possible now thanks to the ease of video's re-watchability (150).

Third Avenue El conjures its slow dismantling at mid-century (Fig. 2.19); an advertisement for air-travel to New York in the 1940s, perhaps, the thousands of flights headed in the opposite direction to the European theater just a few years later (Fig. 2.20). The imagined continuity of the scene is broken by similarly imagined (albeit fleeting) image-associations. And with it, perhaps, the notion that the photo only informs the viewer and not the other way around.

Imagining New York's two panoramic photographs further complicate continuity-inclined viewing habits; both perhaps create a critical distance by altering the panorama's traditional distanced view of its subject. Although the word "panorama" is still used often in contemporary culture, it was first associated with a specific object: a circular, continuous painting. The viewer would stand in the middle of the room and view the entirety of the floor-to-ceiling painting by turning or walking along it. From the earliest panorama (a view of London displayed in London) in 1791, the form's appeal was, in fact, due to the experience of continuity it produced—not of time but of space. The creator of this 1,479 square foot, circular painting of a view of London from the roof of Albion Mills promised that it would make the viewer feel "as if really on the very spot."[70] Later reviewers confirmed the validity of that promise;[71] when viewing the panorama, the viewer felt immersed. As though there were no "frame," the viewer "filled in" or "extended" the

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[70] Robert Barker, "Apparatus for Exhibiting Pictures," British patent no. 1612, granted June 19, 1787. Quoted in Erkki Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 3.

[71] Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion*, 4.

space of the panorama's scene into her own. Erkki Huhtamo explains that the panorama "was capable of teleporting its audience to another location, and dissolving the boundary between local existence and global vision."[72] Perhaps more accurately, this new form of picture-making provided an opportunity for new viewing habits or tendencies—mediated realities and artificial, continuous experiences of space.

The situation is somewhat different for photographic panoramas, which appeared almost one hundred years after the painted panorama. Although single-plate panoramas were common, multiplate plate panoramas were most akin to their painted predecessors and contemporaries. Photographers could depict a flattened 180 or even 360-degree view by lining up numerous individual plates (Fig. 2.21). As Peter Bacon Hales explains in his study of modern urban American photography, "At their most impressive, which often meant their largest, [multiplate panoramas] could overcome the sense of artifice and disguise the excruciating difficulty entailed in their making, swooping the viewer into an airy adventure."[73] Like earlier painted installations, urban panoramas "were unfolding events, both figuratively and literally;" viewers could trace the contours of the city from port to borough, but they often had to physically move from one end of the photograph to the other (or open folios and turn pages) in order to do so. This movement, then, is not the seemingly

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[72] Ibid., 5.
[73] Peter Bacon Hales, *Silver Cities*, 136-8.

liberated gaze of being "on the spot." Instead, the physical linearity of the photographic object and the flattening of the view encouraged a similarly linear viewing practice, left to right, or right to left (like the "moving" panoramas that followed the original). The effect was a sequenced and rationally ordered experience of the city. The multiplate panoramas often emphasized another kind of continuity: the legibility of space within the scene. These overlapping, multiplate views seemed to enclose and order the viewer's experience of the city (Fig. 2.22). In short, the photographic panorama "depicted" and enacted an experience of the city rather than the city itself. It made the city into an uninterrupted, consumable unit, which could then be "read" or experienced in a way that was not possible in real life or with a single view.

Osterburg's panoramas are also produced with multiple plates (*Entering Yesterday's City of Tomorrow* with three and *Zeppelins* with at least five) (Figs. 2.23 & 2.24). However, these expansive urban views are some of the most disorienting in the series. Replacing the rational spaces of the multiplate panorama with the irrational, the tendency to experience the city as an ordered place and the panorama as a rational sequence is disrupted. This has as much to do with the spaces depicted (the models) as it does the assemblage of plates (the final panorama). Unlike their historical antecedents, Osterburg's panoramas are "interior" urban views, capturing the city from street level or near to it. Without the height and the distance of a natural or man-made vantage point, the city's many moving,

multidirectional parts dominate. And as a result, Osterburg's panorama's perhaps

provide the viewer with an altered relation to the image, a different kind of distance.

Zeppelins, for instance, captures the comings and goings both inside and

outside a Grand Central-like space of a past future (Figs. 2.24 & 2.25). Here, the

panorama does not ameliorate the chaos of the transportation hub, but emphasizes

it. Rather than clarifying spatial relations within parts of the city, it exaggerates them,

creating confusion. Any semblance of a readable, ordered image blurs into disarray:

the zeppelins, which should be parallel in space, read at two different angles, and

the relationship between the right side of the photo (with the trains) and the left (with

the zeppelins) is simply nonsensical—train tracks or scaffolding penetrate the main

lobby, but stop abruptly. The city, here, is the chaos of the street, not the serenity

of its architecture from one vantage point afar or from above. This effect is

emphasized by the fact that the panorama's constitutive photographs do not line

up (the most egregious misalignment is on the left zeppelin). These disjunctures on

the surface of the photograph imply that Osterburg did not take each image from

the same position. There is sequencing, but it is not consistent. There are gaps—as

in incomplete or nascent memories—that also echo the disjointed scale of the

models themselves. Again, his unconventional picture-making undermines a habit

of viewing. Whereas Zeppelins' extremely attenuated aspect ratio initially prompts a

panoramic gaze, these multilayered "gaps" disrupt the viewer's lateral scansion of

the image. The eye gets stuck, perhaps lingering on the idiosyncrasies of individual

sections rather than the whole. It is as if one becomes unbearably aware of the trees while seeking the wood.

As such, the panorama's distance and seamless sequencing are not eliminated, but complicated; the individual pieces of the sequence stand out, complimented by the irrational spaces of the model itself, preventing an easy or smooth continuous reading of whole. Rather than eliding the difference between these pieces and, with them, the action and chaos of the city, *Imagining New York*'s panoramas push these differences and choas to the fore. Denying the spatial continuity viewers habitually bring to the genre, Osterburg's "unconventional" panoramas may offer, instead, an experience of the city that is primarily one of disjuncture and confusion.

But panoramas perhaps also invoke a rational temporal sequence in their lateral presentation of landscape. Because the individual photos could not all be taken simultaneously, there is always some element of time between the first and the last. This is perhaps "smoothed over" by the sheer distance and breadth of the view, but is reintroduced when the final image is viewed. The close range and misalignments of Osterburg's panoramas exaggerate the temporal movement between images and, as a result, the viewer can read that sense of time across the whole panorama. But rather than movement forward, there are starts and pauses, allowing, perhaps, for the layered temporality of *Imagining New York*'s image-associations to enter. These disruptions may make such sequencing-tendencies

known to the viewer, and through them, Osterburg's and her role in "creating" the image.

In other words, "unconventional" picture-making may reposition the viewer's function, fundamentally changing her relation to the image. In Osterburg's temporally and spatially ambivalent images, this may prompt an equally ambivalent view, an image that seems to be constantly eluding fixation or placement. The viewer may, as a result, see the image and her viewing habits from a relatively greater "distance;" as with Freud's melancholic, the viewer's fixation of "critical" attention may reveal previously unacknowledged aspects of her engagement with images. But if, in *Imagining New York*, the past and one's relationship to the past is represented by images and enacted by one's viewership of images, then *Imagining New York* may also prompt a similar engagement with the past. The past, here, is not a linear stream of events that lead up to the present, to be passively taken in. Rather, the potential "critical distance" in Osterburg's images may reveal that the past is more haphazard, and that it is fundamentally a participatory process in the present.

The viewer's potentially active, creative experience may feel deeply personal, but this is perhaps a misrecognition of a social experience, as Williams describes "structures of feeling" in *Marxism and Literature*. Williams suggests that the tendency to express, discuss, and analyze social experience (culture and society) in "an habitual past tense" hinders our ability to recognize the very presence of the

social: "relationships, institutions and formations in which we are still actively involved are converted, by this procedural mode, into formed whole rather than forming and formative processes." Whereas, all that is seemingly present and still in formation, he explains, "is grasped and defined as the personal: this, here, now, alive, active, 'subjective.'"[74] With "structures of feeling," he hopes to acknowledge social experience as still in formation, active, "often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating."[75] These are "specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity."[76] It may be that the active, present relation to the past prompted by *Imagining New York* moves from the collective understanding of an "urban imaginary" to the social feeling of affect, of relations between and among people *in the present*. A fixation on a seemingly personal past may foster a social formation in the present.

In *The Transmission of Affect*, Teresa Brennan explains that affect is fundamentally social; it is an un-nameable, physical sensation resulting from an interaction between the individual and her environment. Grounding her work in psychoanalysis, Brennan conceives of affect as the binding of energy, and is,

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[74] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128.
[75] Ibid., 132.
[76] Ibid.

therefore, always negative.[77] She believes that affects' harmfulness was less of a problem before the seventeenth century, when the transmission of affect and the porous boundaries between individuals and environment were held as matters of fact. But with the ascendance of valuing cognition, objectivity and the individual in the Enlightenment came the rejection of affect in general. But affect was also rejected as social: a presumably passive, immediate (as in unmediated), and therefore risky, response to the world. Instead, Brennan argues, affect became primarily associated with the activity of subjectivity and its passions, the constituents of the "I," the ego. In a series of passionate judgments, one "dumps" or projects onto another person the affects that interfere with one's agency. The result is aggressive self-containment. In dumping, depleting the recipient's energy, the other becomes an object and feelings of kinship are severed. One becomes sealed off by the passionate judgments of egoic affects—from others, from the world, from the true nature of affect; this true nature, Brennan argues, is a blurring of the distinction between the "individual" and the "environment."[78]

Although Brennan suggests that we, as a modern culture, have overwhelmingly forgotten about affect, she explains that, with effort, we are still capable of "discerning" or acknowledging the presence and nature of our affects. Through discernment, we acknowledge that affects pass from sensory registration

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[77] Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 40.

[78] Brennan, 98-114 & 6. Brennan traces the increased cases of depression, Chronic Stress Syndrome, ADHD and other "nebulous" conditions since the 1990s back to this situation; sealed off, there are fewer places to dump affect, leaving an increasing surplus in the environment.

to cognitive or intelligent reflection. Discernment is a process; by turning attention, directing thought to the distractions of the affects, one can transform affect (a thoughtless sensation) to feeling (a sensation endowed with thought).[79] But, as Brennan notes, "The naming of the feeling is one thing…the ability to investigate its logic requires more…a means of circumventing the affects' combined distractions."[80] In order to fully acknowledge the movement and social origins of one's affects, one must turn attention specifically to one's past; only by examining one's memories, comparing past emotional states and situations with the present may one "detach from [affects], to know where one stands, to be self-possessed."[81] One may reconnect sensation and feeling and, in turn, realize one's energetic connection with others, only by throwing oneself into the distractions of affect through this "essentially historical process" of "living attention."

We could call this the "work of affect." With its emphasis on a reflective, critical fixation, discernment may be yet another an example of how the movements of "melancholic" attention can be productive: an inward-turning attention results in heightened knowledge about one's situation and nature. In melancholia, the uncathected love object is one that is held on to, despite its being lost. Holding on to this "lost" object implies, to some degree, that one holds on to the past. Through the narcissism of melancholia, this fixation on the past translates into one's

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[79] Ibid., 161.
[80] Ibid., 121-2
[81] Ibid., 119.

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exhaustive interrogation of one' own character, one's own past. Likewise, turning attention to "the course of affect" in discernment is a turn toward the past, of bringing the past into conversation with the present.

Moreover, Brennan believes discernment occurs primarily at the level of the individual. One will "pick up" an affect from another, but the thoughts that may become attached to it are one's own; affects stem from social interaction, but their discernment involves a personal history. The assumption is that each person not only has different memories, different experiences, but that one's relation to memory will also differ. Thus, discernment may help us to realize the energetic interconnectedness of the individual with her whole environment, but its process upholds a semblance of cognitive self-containment. The "essentially historical procedure" of discernment examines a singular history of the individual; it seems to preclude shared experience despite the possibility of revealing the underlying sociality of affect.

Brennan suggests that we have forgotten affect and our physical ties to one another; perhaps so too have we ignored or devalued shared feelings between people, those moments of intersection among seemingly "parallel" individual histories.[82] Maybe Brennan's and Freud's fixation on a personal past belies an underlying sociality. Perhaps the seemingly private "work" of affect and melancholia

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[82] This seems to be the impetus behind Walter Benjamin's "historical materialism," as well as Williams' "structures of feeling"—the former attempts to link disparate people and generations, and the latter, individuals within a generation.

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is a social process still in progress. It is not simply an internal, personal exploration of the past for it also takes place in and among one's relationships.

In *Affective Mapping: Melancholy and the Politics of Modernism*, Jonathan Flatley suggests that such sociality could be at the root of melancholic feelings in the early twentieth century. He points out that Freud's writings on melancholia are themselves responses to "the modern condition:" to life's increased speed, its constant change, and feeling as though the present almost immediately slipped into the past. This sense of the present was not only shared—evident in numerous writings of the period—but it was also inherently the product of active relations between and among people and objects. It would seem that the structure of melancholia itself suggests this social foundation of individual feeling: a relation with a lost object becomes concealed in its internalization—what comes across as self-loathing, perhaps cutting oneself off from the world rests, in fact, on the un-severed relation with another.

Through an analysis of Freud's writings, tinged with Benjamin's "messianic" sense of history, Flatley posits an "antidepressive melancholia," in which attention is turned "to melancholia precisely in order to avoid falling into depression."[83] This melancholic reflection can reveal "how one's situation is experienced collectively by a community, a heretofore unarticulated community of melancholics."[84] The power

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[83] Flatley, 41.
[84] Ibid., 4.

one gains through an acknowledgement of this shared experience, this collectivity, however, has everything to do with the social. One fixates on one's situation, within the context of the past, to discover its social origins and its similarity with other seemingly disparate situations. But more importantly, with this knowledge, one begins to turn away from the self, to consider the individual as a part of an environment. Examining a past, one becomes active in the present. In the "work" of both antidepressive melancholia and discernment, one gains "distance" from personal experience (by navigating through it), perhaps allowing that experience to unfold into the social.

We can understand *Imagining New York* as similarly positioned. Osterburg's images may point to a collective experience in seemingly personal "historical processes" of reflection; emphasizing the status of the past in the imagination as image, it may become something that—together—we actively access and construct to inform the present. But through the modes of viewing they seem to prompt—creating a critical distance from both the image and the past—*Imagining New York* suggests "work" that is productive in acknowledging, specifically, the misrecognition of the social. In viewing these images, an emphasis on the past may become productive. In this process of prolonged disjuncture of temporality and space, the viewer quite literally "sees" these images differently. Or rather she may "see" herself seeing them, to become aware of her active role as viewer, as an

active presence in the present. And in turn, it may be that the past—a kind of

cultural experience—becomes an active, present social formation.

Figures

Figure i.1   Lothar Osterburg, Twilight, 1984, 2011. Photogravure, 32 x 25.5
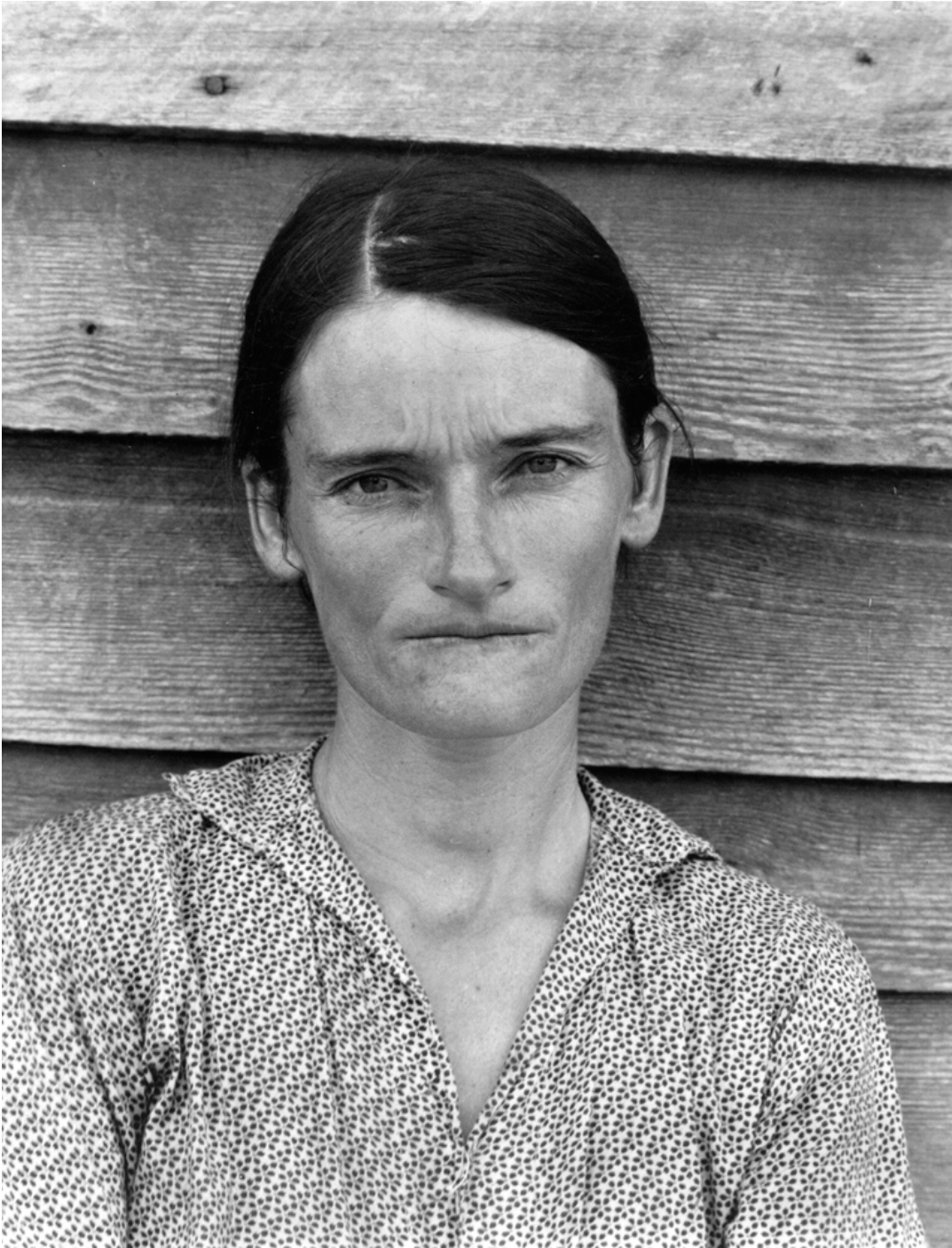   inches.

Figure i.2   Sherrie Levine, *After Walker Evans: 4*, 1981. Silver gelatin print, 4.7 x 3.9 inches.

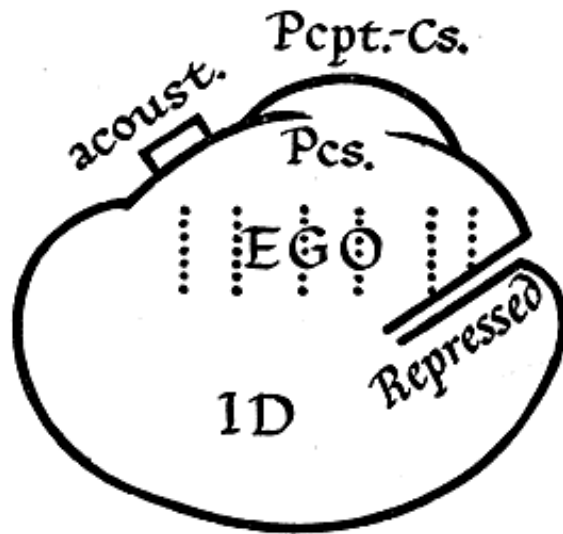Figure 1.1   Lothar Osterburg, *Waterfront*, 2007. Photogravure, 11.5 x 16.5 inches.

Figure 1.2   From Freud, *The Ego and The Id*, 1923.

Figure 1.3   Lothar Osterburg, *Night, 1904*, 2012. Photogravure, 38 x 31 inches.

Figure 1.4   Edward Steichen, *Night*, 1904. Gum
                    bichromate over platinum print,
                    18 .8 x 15.3 inches.
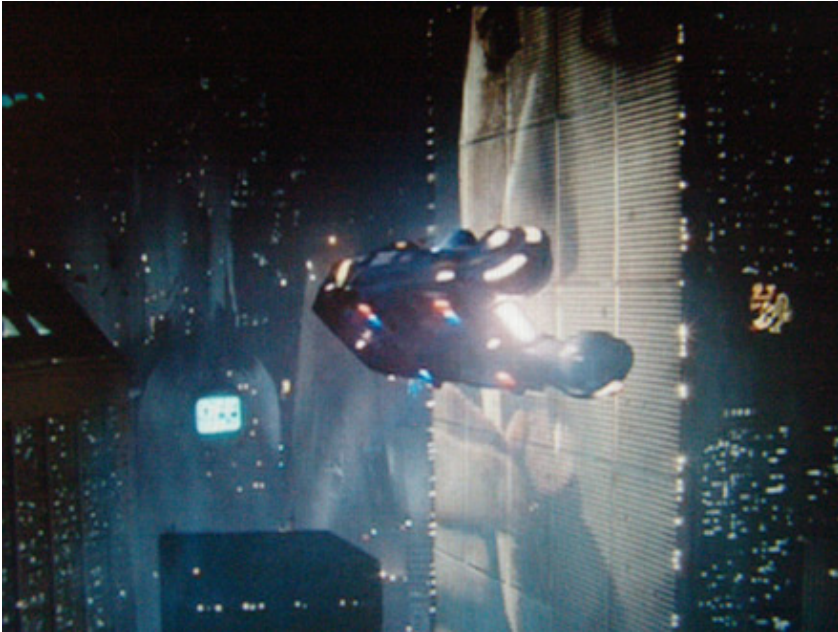
Figure 1.5   Ridley Scott, Still from *Blade Runner*, 1982.

Figure 1.6   Woody Allen, Still from *Manhattan*, 1979.

Figure 1.7   Lothar Osterburg, *Zeppelins Docking in Grand Central*, 2013.
Photogravure, 30 x 30 inches.

Figure 1.8   Lothar Osterburg, *Under the El*, 2011. Photogravure, 32 x 38 inches.

Figure 1.9   Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920.
Oil transfer and watercolor,
12.5 × 9.5 inches.

Figure 2.1   Lothar Osterburg, *Twilight, 1984*,
                      2011. Photogravure, 32 x 25.5 inches.
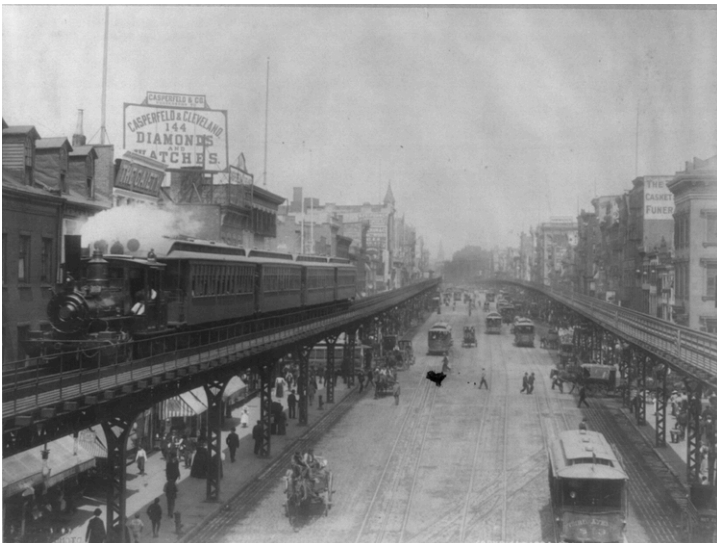
Figure 2.2   Third Avenue Elevated Train, Bowery,
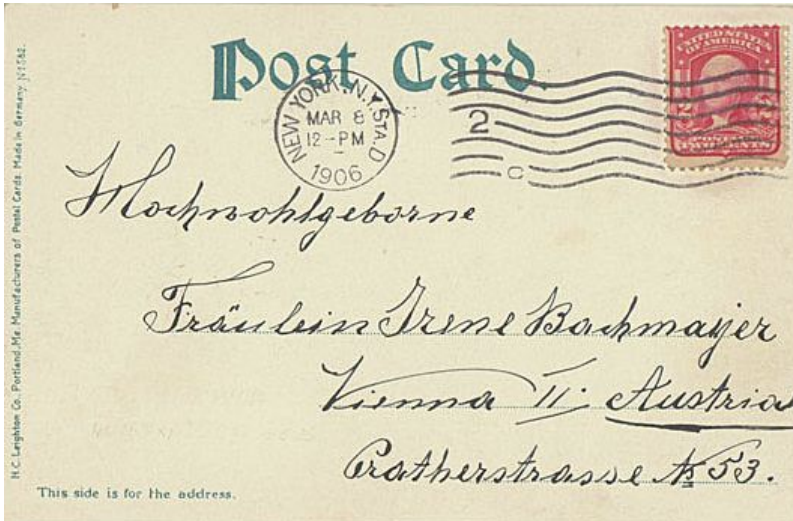   New York City, 1896.

Figure 2.3   Postcard (with verso), 1906.

Figure 2.4   Billy Wilder, Still from *The Lost Weekend*, 1945.

Figure 2.5   GM *Futurama* Brochure, New York's World Fair, 1939.
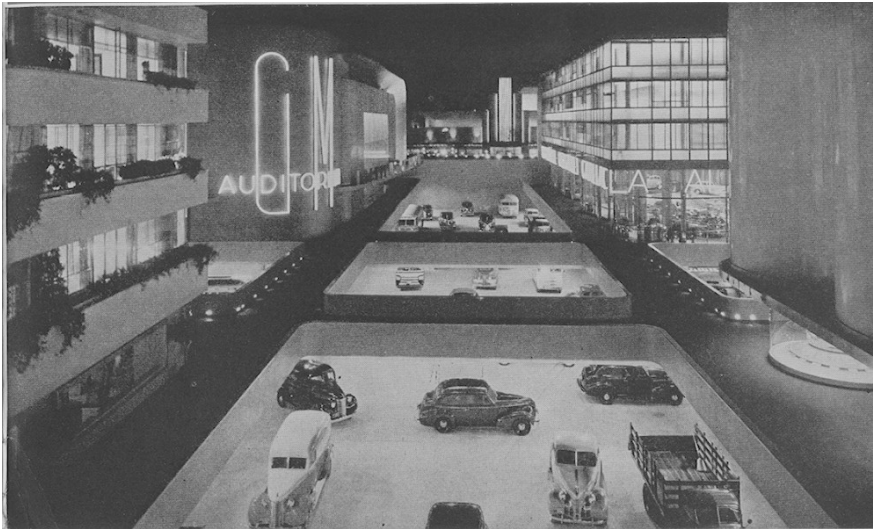
Figure 2.6   GM *Futurama* Brochure, New York's World Fair, 1939.

Figure 2.7   Lothar Osterburg, *Zeppelin*, 2012. Carbon print,
              12 x13 inches.

Figure 2.8   Dirigible Docked on Empire State
              Building, New York, 1930. Gelatin
              silver print, 10 x 8 inches.
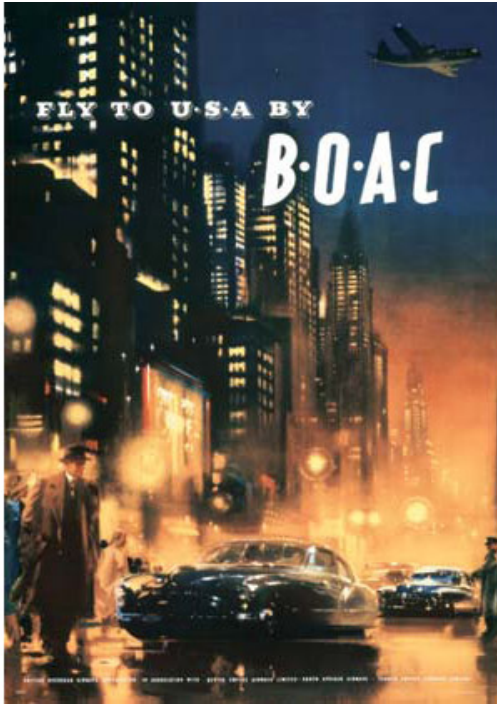
Figure 2.9   Travel Poster, British
                   Overseas Airways
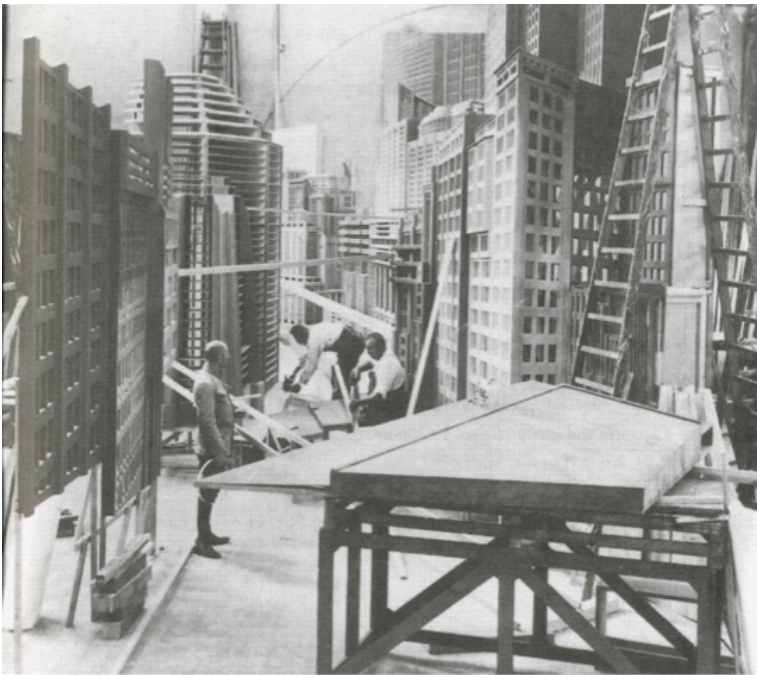   Company, c. 1940.

Figure 2.10 *Metropolis* production still, circa 1928.

Figure 2.11 Unknown, Hindenburg over Framingham, MA
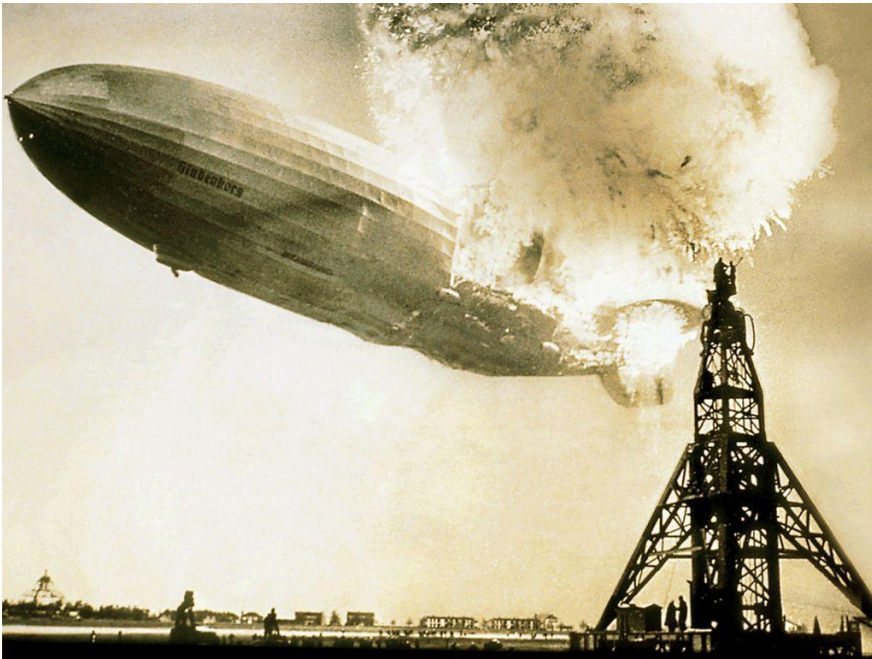en route to Lakehurst, NJ, 1935.

Figure 2.12 Unknown, Hindenburg explosion, 1939.

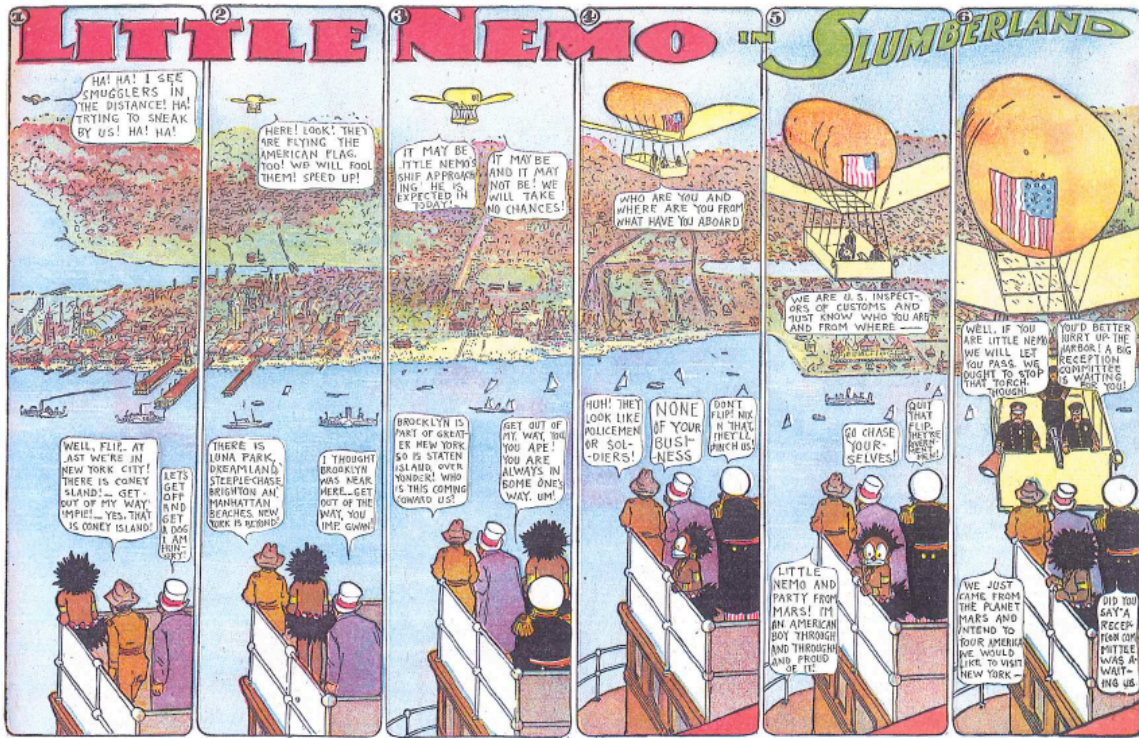Figure 2.13   Winsor McKay, Little Nemo in Slumberland,1910. New York
                     Herald.
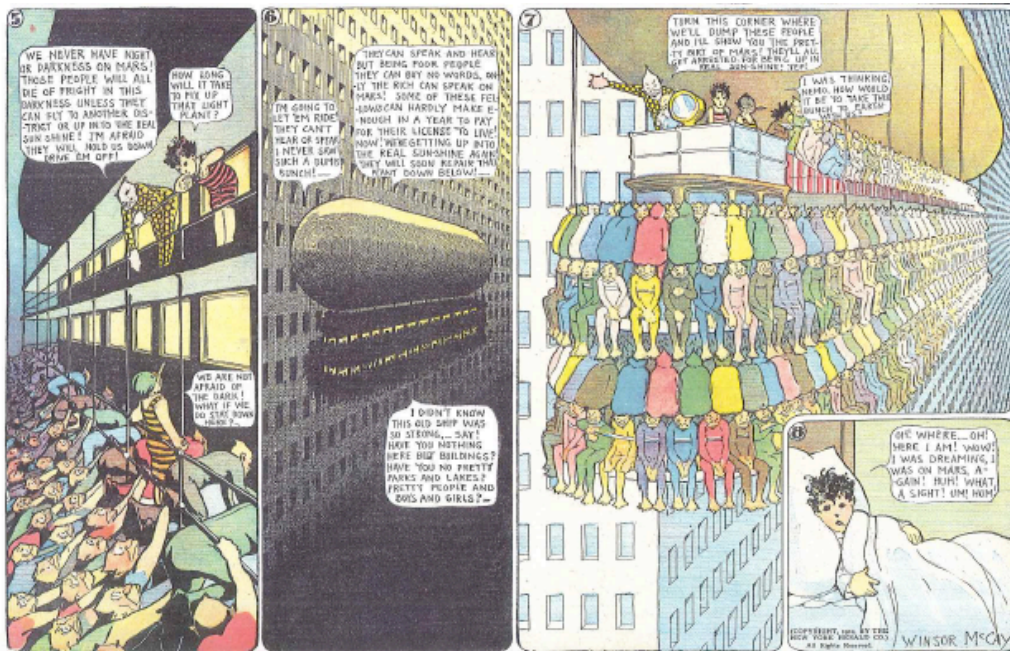

Figure 2.14   Winsor McKay, *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, 1910.
                     New York Herald.

Figure 2.15   Moses King, "King's Dream
of New York," *King's Views
of New York*, 1908.

Figure 2.16 Unknown (Getty Images), Hindenburg over New York City, 1936.

Figure 2.17 Lothar Osterburg, Model of Grand Central Station, 2012.

Figure 2.18   Jeff Wall, *A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)*, 1993. Silver dye
bleach transparency; aluminum light box, 90.2 x 148.4 inches.

Figure 2.19 Unknown, Third Avenue El at 27th Street, December 1955.

Figure 2.20 RAF Ferry (American planes for Royal Air Force) over
Montreal, in flight to UK, c. 1943.

Figure 2.21   Eadward Muybridge, *Panorama of San Francisco*, 1878.
                     Thirteen 18 x 22 inch plates.

Figure 2.22 Muybridge, *Panorama of San Francisco*, 1878. Plates 2-5.

Figure 2.23   Lothar Osterburg, *Entering Yesterday's City of Tomorrow*,
                     2011. Photogravure, 30 x 72 inches.

Figure 2.24 Lothar Osterburg, *Zeppelins*, 2012. Photogravure, 9.5 x 44 inches.

Figure 2.25 Detail (left half), *Zeppelins*, 2012.

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