

# Ekphrasis as Intra-action: Re-reading “Photograph from September 11” by Wislawa Szymborska

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*In loving memory of Lars Elleström*

The first time I wrote about Wislawa Szymborska’s poem “Photograph from September 11” (“Fotografia z 11 września”) was in my dissertation, 2014. I chose it because it was so very intermedial, so to speak. It is an ekphrasis, a poem about a photograph, where the media specificities of both the written text and the photograph are highlighted in intricate ways. The more times I read it, the more fascinated I became by the structure of the poem, and moreover, by how it treated temporality and spatiality. I have always felt that I was not yet done with that poem, which is why I now return to it, once again with an intermedial approach: I will examine how the poem approaches the spatiotemporal properties of the involved media types and what role they play in its conveyance of respect, grief, and empathy. Furthermore, I will use Karen Barad’s posthumanist theory on agential realism to discuss the ethical and intermedial implications of entanglement and separateness between observer and observed, as well as between verbal text and photograph. My aim is to show that Szymborska, by engaging in the media specific affordances of photographs and texts respectively, in her poem renegotiates temporality and the relationship between subject and object.

## “Photograph from September 11” and its source media product

Szymborska’s poem “Photograph from September 11” is an ekphrasis representing a photograph from the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. We cannot be sure which photograph is the source medium product. In fact, it does not have to be solely one photograph that is represented in the poem, but many (ekphrasis is not always a one-to-one relation, see for example Tamar Yacobi, 1998). We have all seen the images, and a simple google search will give us plenty of possible sources. The most iconic photograph, which is often called “The falling man”, is perhaps the one that first comes to mind, but in that picture, there is only one person, and the first line of the poem reads: “They jumped from the burning floors –”, in Polish the first line goes: “Skoczyli z płonących pięter w dół”: (They jumped from the burning floors down). The source media product – if there is one specific source – then must be another, and there are a few examples of photographs from 9-11 where you can clearly see more than one person falling from the buildings, for example a photograph by David Surowiecki (Time Photo Department, September 8, 2011).

## Ekphrasis

Ekphrasis is a genre or a trope that has its roots in Ancient Greece, where it was used as a rhetoric practice with the goal of being able to describe something so vividly that the listeners could see it in their own minds. Later, the term came to denote first and foremost writing about works of art in prose or poetry (Ruth Webb 2009), even though other types of media representation have been called ekphrasis as well, for example representations of music in literature, which is why Claus Clüver (2007) defines ekphrasis as “the verbal representation of a real or fictitious text composed in a non-verbal sign system” (p. 26). The academic interest for ekphrasis has grown significantly

during the last four decades, no doubt because of the rapid development of intermedial studies, originating chiefly from the field of comparative literature. Ekphrasis is distinct enough to be able to separate from other types of writing, but broad enough to harbor a multitude of theoretical perspectives related to intermedial studies, such as gender studies, semiotics, multimodal studies, cognitive science, and narratology.<sup>1</sup> For example, as James A.W. Heffernan (1991) shows, a gendered reading of the relationship between the verbal text and the graphic image is a fruitful approach, given the properties associated with women and men, and images and texts, respectively. Overall, the age-old word/image hierarchy debate beginning with Plato, via da Vinci to G. E. Lessing and forwards demonstrates that the relationship between the symbolic and the iconic sign systems is littered with notions of power, subordination, supremacy, and imitation (see for example W.J.T. Mitchell, 1986). It is thus fruitful to discuss ekphrasis in terms of othering practices: Does the ekphrasis give voice and power to the (silent) source medium, or is it instead speaking *for* it, thus undermining its non-verbal communication mode? The posthumanist perspective, with its aim to resolve dichotomies that have shaped the humanist understanding of the world for centuries, can contribute to the discussion of othering practices in ekphrasis in constructive ways, which I will return to shortly.

Ekphrastic texts usually focus either predominantly on the content of the source media product, or on both the content and the media specificities of the source media product. The allure of ekphrasis however lies in the latter, in which the text conjures up not only the subject matter, but also the properties of the photograph or the painting as media types, for example the two-dimensionality, the iconicity, the framing, and so on. An ekphrasis can also underline the tension between different sign systems, by resisting the narrative impulse and temporality of literature<sup>2</sup> and instead imitate the halted movement and the immobility that we usually associate with paintings or photographs.

In the following, I will elaborate to some extent on the photograph's spatiotemporal properties and the ethical and emotional implications of photographing dead or dying people, as well as what implications these aspects and properties have for ekphrasis.

### The Photograph: A medium of loss

In the final episode of the HBO series *Six Feet Under* (Alan Ball 2001–2005), Claire is leaving home to move to New York. When she is about to take a last photograph of her loved ones gathered to say goodbye, her dead brother Nate whispers in her ear: “You can’t take a picture of this, it is already gone”. This line has stuck with me throughout the years, and I have often returned to it in my mind. The moment and the people in that moment are not gone: they are there, alive; the moment takes place right then so how can it be gone? Perhaps because in the very moment Claire snaps that photo, it belongs to the past and what is left is a representation, although with a strong likeness to its source. The next moment is similar to the one photographed, but it is not *that* moment; it is another one. The represented moment is gone when the picture is taken, or the other way around: when the picture is taken, the moment is gone.

However, despite the truth in Nate’s words, we use photographs to save people and places, and more importantly, our interactions with them, from the flood of time. If we capture a specific moment, we can go back to it and still be there and then. We can forget about the flood for a moment and immerse ourselves in the image before our eyes. Or can we? Perhaps the photograph itself, as a medium, points not to an eternal aliveness but to the opposite: the eternity of non-existence that comes after the act of photographing. Roland Barthes reflects upon this in his essay *Camera Lucida* (1989):

For the photograph’s immobility is somehow the result of a perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the Live: by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of that delusion which makes us attribute to reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value; but by shifting this reality to the past (“this-has-been”), the photograph suggests that it is already dead. (79)

Nathan's words "it is already gone" echo Barthes': "it is already dead" and they refer to the same thing: something that is photographed is always in the past. However, the moment it represents was once a "now", and since a photograph doesn't move or change, it remains a "now" in eternity. This is another aspect of the temporality of a photograph – the tension between the motive and the medium itself. A photograph can depict a landscape or a sleeping person and thus convey a sense of stillness. However, it can also depict bodies captured in movement: someone running, a plane flying, or a group of dolphins playing among the waves, and still evoke a sensation of stasis, depending, among other things, on whether the viewer focuses on the motive separated from the specificities of the photographic medium: someone or something moving, or on the motive entangled with the affordances and specificities of the photographic medium: a movement frozen in time. Lars Elleström (2021) calls this phenomenon, where the represented object is perceived as having different spatiotemporal properties compared to those of the representing media product ("the media products' actual presemiotic modality modes"), *cross modal representation*:

In the context of communication, these abilities explain the imperative phenomenon that meaning-making often goes beyond the media product's actual presemiotic modality modes. For instance, a visual, two-dimensional and static image may represent something that is perceived to be both three-dimensionally spatial and temporal, such as a deer running in the forest. (—) in line with the concept of media modalities, cross-modal here means the linking of all forms of different presemiotic modes within the same media modality. More specifically, cross-modality should be understood here as *cross-material, cross-spatiotemporal and cross-sensorial representation through iconicity, indexicality or symbolicity*. (68–69)

When we interpret a photograph, the spatiotemporal modes of the the represented object(s) (the properties of the "content") merges with our knowledge of the presemiotic spatiotemporal modes of the media product (the properties of the "form"), which is why photographs are often described as moments or movements captured in time, or frozen.

### Agential Realism and the Act of Observing

In her article "Ekphrasis, photography, and ethical strategies of witness: poetic responses to Emmett Till", Sarah Holland-Batt (2018) discusses the ethical implications of ekphrastic texts representing documentary photographs that depict dead, dying or suffering people. Holland-Batt refers to Susan Sonntag and Barbie Zelizer who have criticized (documentary) photography for being exploiting and for normalizing cruelty, inviting viewers to watch individuals they don't know in exposed situations without their consent. While this is doubtlessly true, photographs also function as evidence and eye-opener with the potential of playing an important role in revealing injustices or calling perpetrators to account. This potential has to do with the medium's function as both an icon and an index, famously discussed by Charles Sanders Peirce: Peirce used the photograph as an example of a sign that is both iconic, since it relates to its motive in terms of likeness, and an index: a physical connection between the sign and its object: "they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature" (Peirce 1894, n.p) In other words, the photograph functions as "proof" that the photographer and the motive were near each other when the photograph was taken.<sup>3</sup> The iconic properties of photographs also contribute to its truth claims: no other visual, graphic representations are as exact as photographs in terms of likeness. Ekphrasis, on the other hand, is not a graphic image but consists of text. Which responsibilities, Holland-Batt (2018) asks, does the writer have when transmediating a photograph, documenting suffering and death of others, to text? To answer that question, I will use posthumanist theories of entanglement and subjectivity.

Quantum physicist, posthumanist and feminist thinker Karen Barad's major contribution to the posthumanist field is her notion of agential realism. Barad (2007) describes her position as an ethico-onto-epistemology since it attempts to cover the ontology of the world, the nature of our knowledge about it, as well as the ethical implications of that knowledge. An agential realist approach questions

the representationalist claim that we only have access to representations of objects and not to the objects themselves. This view separates the world in two categories: words and things, or with Descartes' words: mind and matter. Barad's aim is to show that we can know things about the outer world, but the outer world does not consist of static, mute, and neutral matter, "objects", but of phenomena, which are the result of the dynamic and ongoing intra-action<sup>4</sup> between what is observed and the agencies of observation. Thus, agential realism does not subscribe to the constructivist idea that language creates reality, nor to the positivist idea that that reality and our conceptualizing of it exist independently of each other. Instead, discourses affect reality on a material level, just as matter affect discourses. We, as beings, are involved in a constant intra-action with other beings as well as non-living matter, and that intra-action *is* agency. There is no such thing as an inherent separateness between entities, no interior/exterior boundaries. When we observe something, we are ourselves part of that which we observe. The apparatuses we use when we observe are themselves phenomena: dynamic and without inherent boundaries. Every observation makes an agential cut which creates a subject and an object in that specific case. However, agential cuts are separations inside phenomena: there is no exteriority. Furthermore, they can be made everywhere and therefore, the relation between subject and object is unstable; it is constantly dynamic, changing, and rearticulated. We can only observe something as separate from something else in specific instances and from specific viewpoints. Although agential cuts are necessary for the survival of all living being (for example, a zebra that cannot separate between itself and a lion has little chance of survival), they also produce othering practices that have negative consequences. From a posthumanist perspective, the nature/culture dichotomy, which throughout history has created agential cuts between humans and other living and non-living entities, as well as between men and women and between white Western people and people from other parts of the world, is inherently false and destructive (see for example Barad 2007, Rosie Braidotti 2013, and Donna Haraway 2016). Therefore, Barad says, we need to be alert to the agential cuts we participate in making, as well as to the apparatuses we use when making them. Apparatuses, according to Barad (2007) "are to be understood not as ... static instrumental embodiments of human concepts, but as open-ended and dynamic material-discursive practices, through which specific 'concepts' and 'things' are articulated" (334). Thus, if we consider the camera as an apparatus of observation in Barad's view (which Birk Weiberg does in his 2021 article "The Entangled Apparatuses: Cameras as Non-distancing Devices"), we realize that it has never been, as Paul Levinson (1997) has suggested, "a mute, unbiased witness of reality" (41), nor does it play a merely "mediating role" (Barad, 2007, 231). Instead, the camera is a part of the phenomenon it produces<sup>5</sup>, which consists of the object being photographed by someone in a particular way, with a particular apparatus, in a particular moment, from a particular distance, with a particular intention, and of all these aspects in intra-action: "Apparatuses are not mere instruments serving as a system of lenses that magnify and focus our attention on the object world, rather they are laborers that help constitute and are an integral part of the phenomena being investigated" (Barad 2007, 232). The camera, like all machines, has its own historicity and phylogenesis (see Félix Guattari 1995, 40). It has intra-acted with humans in different ways within different discourses and for different reasons. From an intermedial viewpoint, photography as a medium is filled with often contradictory notions, meanings, and values, what Elleström (2021) calls "the contextual qualifying aspects" of a medium (60). To conclude this section, an agential realist view on an ekphrasis of a photograph is that it is the result of an intra-action involving the subject matter, the photographer, the apparatus (the camera), the viewers, the poet (who is herself a viewer), and the readers (who are also viewers, viewing both their own inner image evoked by the poem, and the source image itself, available in newspapers and online), that affects and redefines all the involved entities in various ways. In intermedial terms, the transmediation of the subject matter from photograph to paper and ink is a material and medial reconfiguration which also entails a "translation" (what Roman Jakobson (1963) calls intersemiotic transposition) from an iconic to a symbolic sign system.

### Temporalities

Returning to Szymborska's ekphrasis, we must first establish what it represents. It does not merely transmediate the content of the photograph, it also represents the source medium *as* medium; it focuses on the media specificities of photography and meditates over the photographic modes *in relation* to the motive; its cross modal representation in Elleström's words. With agential realism in mind, the poem describes the fallers-as-observed, in this case, by a camera lens, which means that the poem itself can be defined as a description of the observed object-as-observed<sup>6</sup>. The poem has six stanzas: five stanzas consist of three lines each and one of four. The first two stanzas read as follows:

They jumped from the burning floors –  
one, two, a few more,  
higher, lower.

The photograph halted them in life,  
and now keeps them  
above the earth toward the earth

There are only two verbs in past tense in the poem: “jumped” and “halted”, which semantically can be seen as opposites to each other. These two verbs set the scene, since the poem's subject matter is the event captured by camera, captured being an interesting metaphor for how photographs are usually regarded. The first stanza is shaped almost as an arrow pointing downwards, mimicking the direction of the fallers (which makes even more sense in the original since the first line includes the words “w dól”: down), whereas the em dash at the end of the first line can be understood as an icon of “floors” (“piêter”). The next stanza, beginning with the line “The photograph halted them in life” introduces the source medium. It describes the chronological order of events; the photograph was taken after the jump, while the bodies were in the air. After that, the verbs change to present tense: “and now keeps them/above the earth/toward the earth”. “Now” represents the moment after the photo was taken, and “now” is the poem's subject matter. Barthes (1989) suggests that the photograph's grammatical tense would be “aorist” (91), in Greek grammar denoting something that once happened, but I argue that the correct tense for all kinds of representing images is the present tense, because that is how we describe them: We say that Degas' dancers dance, not that they danced, and that Marilyn Monroe holds her skirt down in that particular photograph, not that she held it down. We know that photographs depict moments from the past, but we read them somehow as present, because photographs depict an eternal now, a now outside of time, which can only be described with present tense. From the point in Szymborska's poem where the photograph is taken and forwards, there can be only now.

Each is still complete,  
with a particular face  
and blood well hidden.

There's enough time  
for hair to come loose,  
for keys and coins  
to fall from pockets.

The falling people are still complete: in the photograph they will always be. There is time for their hair to come loose or for things falling from their pockets, but it is not this time: the ekphrasis remains in the moment depicted in the source medium, thus resisting the narrative (or at least temporal) impulse embedded in both language and in our interpreting minds. In fact, despite the general notion that literature is a temporal medium (whereas painting and photography are spatial media), it is static in its material modality: printed words do not move on paper more than painted landscapes move on the canvas. Its temporality lies in its semiotic sign system, since symbolic signs must be

decoded in a sequence to make sense (according to Elleström this makes printed texts merely “second-order temporal” (49)), whereas iconic signs generally make sense in any order (you can finish a book, but can you finish a painting?). I would say that this specific source media product, however, prompts the viewer in a certain direction (top-down) both because of our previous knowledge of the event itself and, more generally, of how gravity works. Similarly, the poem starts from the top (the building from which they jumped) and continues downwards to a certain point, where it halts, “above the earth/toward the earth”:

They're still within the air's reach,  
within the compass of places  
that have just now opened.

At this exact moment, they are floating in the air, “still” (“jeszcze”), that is, immobile, but also implying there is still hope, or simply that the worst is yet to come. “Places that have just now opened” can be understood as the vertiginous view of the city that can only be seen from above, or, perhaps, it refers to places not belonging to this world. Both interpretations are possible given the phrase “within the air’s reach” (“w zasięgu powietrza”). The poet looks at the image of the falling people, halted, kept in the air because of the specificities and affordances of the photographic medium and “can do only two things for them—describe this flight/and not add a last line.”

In her well-written analysis of the poem “Money Road” by Kevin Young (2016), Holland-Batt reflects over how Young uses the word “keep”: “Young’s usage of the verb ‘keep’ is significant: Till here is both kept in the sense of being preserved and remembered in the photograph, but also frozen in his death, kept from living, forever ‘still’ in his bones” (472). The same verb (keep: *przechować*) is found in Szymborska’s poem as well: “and now keeps them/above the earth toward the earth”. Holland-Batt points to the double meaning of keep in Young’s poem: remembered but at the same time kept from living. Szymborska uses it in the sense of keeping safe, but it can also be understood as capture: In the photograph, the fallers are safe because the photograph stops them from falling. She also uses the verb halt: “The photograph halted them in life” (“Fotografia powstrzymała ich przy życiu”). Both verbs have a similar meaning and point to the photograph’s ability to capture one fraction of a second for all eternity. At the exact moment when the photograph is taken, the bodies are motionless, just as in Zenon’s Arrow Paradox. The same photograph cannot represent both this moment and the next, where the bodies would still be motionless but now closer to the ground. It can merely indicate it. The poetic I in “Photograph from September 11” reflects over that fact and draws the conclusion: The people-as-observed by the photographic apparatus are still alive, will always be alive, and that is the only mercy that is given. The agential cut made in the moment of taking that photograph is simultaneously erased, because, as the poetic I notes, the falling people are still persons, subjects, recognizable as such: “still complete, / with a particular face/and blood well hidden”. The photograph, as opposed to the sequential verbal text, allows them to stay that way forever. By not adding a last line, the poet imitates another medium, and by doing that she must restrain the temporality of her own. If the poet had written the poem after having witnessed the fall first-hand, she would never have described it as a static moment. This is only possible filtered through the medium of photography. The poem is thus the result of the intra-action between event, photographic medium and verbal medium.

### **The Ethical Implications of Watching and Representing Images**

The “passive bystander” is not passive even though he or she neglects to intervene. Seeing something, perhaps photographing it, filming it, or in other ways making the incident known to others, might change the outcome and the perception of the event, thus affecting all the involved parties. Witnesses can act after the fact and their role is utterly important, but it comes with a moral obligation. A photograph or a film representing a victim in a vulnerable state can without the proper

context cause a lot of damage. Thus, how we display images, and how we talk or write about them, matters. In his essay *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger (1972) points to the articulative advantage of verbal text: “In this essay each image reproduced has become part of an argument which has little or nothing to do with the painting’s original independent meaning. The words have quoted the paintings to confirm their own verbal authority” (28). As shown above, this inequality between words and pictures has been discussed throughout history and is of particular interest to ekphrasis theory (see for example Lund 1992 and Heffernan 1991). Even though one can argue that no media product has an “original meaning” since new meaning is produced every time someone interacts with it, it is hard to deny that words have the ability to attribute their own meaning to non-verbal media products, which Magritte’s work *Ceci n’est pas une pipe* is an excellent example of. Discourses are performative, Barad (2007) claims, because they affect matter. What we observe, how we observe and the way we talk about the things or events we observe, affect them on a material level. Therefore, we must all be accountable for the cuts we help to enact, since cuts are never made on an individual basis, they are the result of intra-actions:

We are responsible for the cuts that we help enact not because we do the choosing (neither do we escape responsibility because ‘we’ are ‘chosen’ by them), but because we are an agential part of the material becoming of the universe. Cuts are agentially enacted not by willful individuals but by the larger material arrangement of which ‘we’ are a ‘part.’ The cuts that we participate in enacting matter. (Barad 2007, 178)

The act of taking a photograph, of writing a poem about the photograph, and of reading that poem, are both themselves phenomena and agential cuts made inside the larger phenomenon, temporarily separating observer from observed. Ekphrastic writers must take account for the agential cut they participate in making, by representing the image, just as we, as readers, must take account for our part in the agential cut. As a photographer, a writer, and a reader of representations of traumatic events, we intra-act, thus creating agency: this agency is our responsibility. The agential cut, through intra-action, does not solely separate (although momentarily) the photographer and their motive, but all who watch the photograph and the people depicted: we are down here, safe; they are up there, in danger. This, however, is only one of many agential cuts made in the entanglement/phenomenon that was (and is) 9-11. The photographs and verbal descriptions of the attack play a role here, but many types of material-discursive apparatuses were used not only to describe and depict the disaster (both for documentary and artistic reasons), but also to advance or aggravate the situation: the “war on terrorism” discourse, the search for weapons of mass destruction using many types of apparatuses of observation, filmed and broadcasted statements from terrorist leaders et cetera. The cut made between the witnesses and the victims of the WTC is only one small part of all the reconfigurations of the intra-action of 9-11, but it points to a fundamental, ethical issue, raised by Susan Sonntag, Holland-Batt and many others: how do we describe or depict suffering without exploiting it?

In her article, Holland-Batt (2018) analyses ekphrastic poems representing the documentary photograph of Emmett Till, a black 14-year-old boy who was murdered by a mob of white men in 1955 after allegedly having been rude to a white woman. She finds that one main strategy in writing poems about powerful documentary photographs is metapoeticism:

The question of how the contemporary poet witnesses abject history in the ekphrastic poem becomes the subject of the ekphrastic poem alongside the photograph itself. Metapoetic ekphrasis casts the encounter between poet and photograph as one that is mediated through an individual subjectivity, and thus piecemeal, idiosyncratic and partial. The metapoetic turn in the ekphrastic poem shatters any illusion of ekphrasis as an act of simple translation, reframing it as an ultimately more vexed and complex enterprise. (474)

Cross modal ekphrastic texts are inherently metapoetical since they implicitly or explicitly comment on the affordances and specificities of their own media type in relation to the source media type.

Therefore, as Holland-Batt argues, there are often two subject matters in an ekphrastic poem: the source media product, and how to represent it. Furthermore, as Holland-Batt (2018) argues with the aid of Arturo Casas, metapoetical poetry questions the power of language and more specifically, the power and authority of the poet herself (474), thereby questioning how the photograph is represented and contextualized as well. In “Photograph from September 11”, the poetic I reflects over the limitations of her own media type and finds that all she can do is “describe this flight/and not add a last line”. The only possible way to end the poem is by not ending it.

### Concluding Remarks

In this article, ekphrasis has been discussed as an intra-action involving the event, the photograph, the writer, the reader, and the poem. The underlying premise is that the act of observing is a phenomenon that involves, and affects, both the object, the apparatus, and the observing agencies. “Photograph from September 11” is an ekphrasis describing an observation of something-as-observed, and all kinds of observations and descriptions come with ethical obligations because they create agential cuts. Furthermore, in the case of ekphrastic texts representing photographs of people in vulnerable situations, there is another ethical dimension: to write without exploiting the depicted people so that they once again become means to an end. This can be done in various ways. “Photograph of September 11” borrows the representational affordances of photography by restraining and resisting the sequential, narrative impulse of language that drives the represented course of events forward. By imitating the temporalities of photography, the poem allows the victims to remain individuals and thus, to keep their integrity.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See for example Wendy Steiner (1985), Hans Lund (1992), Murray Krieger (1992), James A. W. Heffernan (1992), Scott F. Grant (1994), Tamar Yacobi (1998), Valerie Robillard (2007), Ruth Webb (2009) and Emma Tornborg (2014).

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of narrative impulses versus arrested temporality in ekphrasis, see Steiner (1985), Heffernan (1992) and Krieger (1992).

<sup>3</sup> With digital photography the chemical process of analog photography has been replaced with code, and there is an argument that the physical connection between the photograph and photographed, that gave it status as index, is broken. However, the truth lies a bit in between: there is no *necessary* physical relationship between a digital photograph and the reality it depicts, but when someone lifts their phone and snaps a photograph, there is still a physical connection between apparatus and object, since both analog and digital camera reacts to light: “In the CMOS (complementary metal-oxide semiconductor) sensor that sits in the majority of digital cameras, the sensor is covered with tiny light sensitive cells, each of which can measure the amount of light that falls on it. The cells act like the old photosensitive film, reacting to the light which falls on them and then reporting to the camera’s microprocessor brain” (bbc.com). Thus, there is no inherent opposition between the indexical and the digital (see for example Tom Gunning, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Intra-action is different from interaction because interaction, according to Barad, presupposes that the interactive entities existed before the interaction, whereas intra-action creates the entities involved: they



did not exist before the intra-action: “I introduce the neologism “intra-action” to signify the mutual constitution of objects and agencies of observation within phenomena (in contrast to “interaction”, which assumes the prior existence of distinct entities)” (Barad, 2007, p. 197).

<sup>5</sup> As formulated in Marshall McLuhan’s often quoted sentence “the medium is the message”.

<sup>6</sup> From an agential realist perspective, nothing exists outside of intra-action; there are no objects per se. Thus, the falling bodies in the photograph are observed falling bodies, and the poetic I observes bodies already observed by another agency of observation.

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