

Camera-Less Photography: Can It Be Considered Photography?

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INTRODUCTION



Fig. 1. *Diagram of Forces* (1939)

Photography has the ability to capture from the visual world around us things that the human eye is unable to process, even when it does, technically, capture it. As Dziga Vertov describes “I am an eye, a mechanical eye. I the machine show you the world the way only I can see...Thus I explain in a new way, the world unknown to you” (Dziga Vertov, cited in Jordan Bernier, 2012). James Elkins echoes this statement, articulating that “Again and again photographs have compelled people to see the world as they had not needed or wanted to see it” (Elkins, 2009a:XI). The photograph can capture and freeze moments in time, which is what made it a popular tool within scientific discovery; these photographs are typically equated with the use of the camera.

Photography is also able to record duration but to its factual demise. The art of camera-less photography is very much included in this element, it preceded the camera-made photograph which is often assumed as the first fix of light on paper. ‘Camera-less’ is the term used to describe any image made using photographic or photographically related materials without the use of the camera. Camera-less images may include the factual silhouette of a direct print of object exposed to light atop photosensitive (or light-sensitive) paper, or the transferring of

unseen phenomena from reality to photographic materials. Camera-less photography produced much of the early work in the field; it is therefore part of the 'origins' of photography. Having a basis which allowed for such a wide remit of experimentation and investigation, has aided in the development of photography as an artistic medium. Often camera-less images have attracted less attention because they depict non-representational images; the forms and shapes are not as instantly recognisable as in the familiar images of the snapshot or the documentary photograph. Arguably the founding element that formed the medium should be held higher in our estimation as a token of its basis.

In some senses the camera-less image could be considered the more natural type of photography because it is crafted by hand like a painter or sculptor. An example is the work of László Moholy-Nagy, a forefront to the development of camera-less work in the early 1900's; his image *Diagram of Forces* (see fig. 1) demonstrates a sculptural feel of depth and texture, though the image remains (mostly) flat. This image was crafted through wetting light-sensitive paper. It was then crumpled and exposed to light. This image, once developed, bypasses the need for any mechanics of the camera and ensues directly to the result. What we see is not like any picture that might be available in everyday life, but something abstract, non-representational and intangible. This, among many other means, is one way to produce a camera-less image. It may be one of most simple methods, but it is no less meaningful. This process demonstrates the agency with which photographic materials can be manipulated to create something unique and exclusive.

Predominantly made using analogue processes, the camera-less image can be thought of as a photograph which bypasses the refraction of light through a lens to reach the photographic paper. Without this component, a diverse range of formations can be fixed. However, the status of camera-less images has been disputed, often seen as something completely different to the camera-made image. For example, the status of the chemigram, another method for producing a camera-less image, has been described as follows: "In terms of classification, the chemigram as a means of artistic expression hovers at the intersection of photography, painting and writing" (Barnes, 2012:64). What Barnes expresses is very much the essence of the camera-less, camera-made debate, as all modes tend to draw from various strains of artistic practice and each can be called upon to support the other more if articulated in an inclined way.

To debate the subject of camera-less photography and whether it is photography, or simply another way for an artist to establish their practice, the discussion of whether photography itself is an art or a science comes under scrutiny. This debate is a vast one and has been rehearsed since the invention of the medium, encompassing where photography places itself in the world and if it is exclusive to one discipline or another. Concrete photography addresses this argument, examining the ways that photography can be practiced as a medium for itself.

The term 'camera-less' describes a genre in its own, supposedly within the confines of photography, and it isn't often used within literature. It appears this subject area is sparse within the discourse of photographic history and theory. Camera-less concepts and theories have not been investigated as comparatively as the likes of documentary and art photography. Both genres have been widely discussed, leaving camera-less photography unmarked within the medium and so giving room for investigation into its significance as a genre of its own.

CHAPTER 1: A Brief History of Camera-less Photography

It is important to begin with the origins of photography, because a study of camera-less photography takes us back to the most basic uses of photography first initiated at the conception of the medium. Photography history has privileged camera-made photographs, yet it might be argued that the excitement of fixing an image through the craft of the hand is more notable than by using a mechanical process (Batchen, 2016:5). The process of light fixed upon paper is a magical one and deserves recognition. The term 'photography' itself derives from Latin, essentially meaning 'drawing with light' – the essence of which most camera-less methods do.

The commonly accepted date for photography's invention was Nicéphore Niépce's studio view (made either in 1826 or 1827). This was considered the first real fix of light onto paper, even though Niépce had made earlier fixations using a process called the 'contact print'. William Henry Fox Talbot, among others, experimented with this type of print, though he named his process the 'photogenic negative drawing'. This process was much like the more well-known 'cyanotype' process which was invented shortly after in 1842, and the even later process of the photogram which was, and is, widely used after its conception. This photogenic paper process was discovered and practiced far before the photogram was even conceived. The more eminent photogram was first publicly practiced and exhibited by Man Ray (among others) during the early 1900's, though he famously named the process the 'Rayograph' in reference to himself. However, he was not necessarily the first, rather, Talbot was considered its architect. Moholy-Nagy soon followed on from Ray, both artists grounding the photogram's importance in pushing photography forward into the realms of experimental art, as pioneers of early avant-garde photography.

A notable fact about photography was established not far from its beginnings: that it could capture things not visible in the reality of human vision. The photograms produced by Moholy-Nagy and Ray exemplified their ability to capture the 'shadows' of objects and materials, revealing new dimensions. Rexer claims: "The camera's ability to fix views of rarely seen events in the natural world, from eclipses and comets to x-rays, introduced an astonished public to realms truly beyond human visual ken" (Rexer, 2009:52). Rexer describes the excitement around this ability of bringing to light things that were never available, and its

role in scientific discovery. As Keller states: "From the time of its invention it was imagined as both an object of science...and a powerfully modern tool for scientific observation" (Keller, 2009:20). Initially it was believed that photography would become a tool for the sciences, however it prospered in other areas too. Notably it began to spread into the arts. The camera-less image played a major part in revealing the unseen; though these images were factual in one sense or another, they demonstrated no known reality. As Snyder remarks: "Photographs...for all their meticulous accuracy and ability to reveal displacements that are beyond our capacity to resolve, correspond to no original" (Snyder, 2006:371).

The photogram process, which was in use before the 'official' invention of photography, played a major part in its creation because it captured something that was unique to the medium. Perhaps, to master the mechanical photograph it would be accelerated by having a deeper understanding of the origins of the photograph, using the processes it built from. Many artists and photographers use the photogram in their practice, whether known or unbeknownst, as Batchen notes: "Indeed, history tells us that photography is by no means dependent on the camera, for cameraless photographs were among the first to be pronounced and have often been made in conjunction with camera pictures" (Batchen, 2016:6). Using camera-less techniques to guide their camera-made photographs, artists and photographers have been able to practice their work in a more basic form, using the origins of the photographic process to forge the roots of their final work.

The practicing of camera-less images prompted various shifts in artistic movements in the early 1900's. The freedom to make images which stood out from reality resulted in a surge in abstract art which had itself begun to evolve when the camera took away the goal of painters to achieve ultimate realism. Photography itself, "has passed through the successive stages of all the various art "isms": in no sense to its advantage, though" (Moholy-Nagy, 2009:265). Moholy-Nagy identifies that even in its short history photography has passed from one style of representation to other, vastly different styles of representation tied with painting. He also mentions that: "All interpretations of photography have hitherto been influenced by the esthetic-philosophic concepts that circumscribed painting" (Moholy-Nagy, 2009:265). What Moholy-Nagy suggests is that photography does not gain much from repeating methods from other arts and applying them to itself. Camera-less photography is an art in itself and so should be treated and practiced this way. Arguably, when photography has flourished, it has

been because it has not followed the structures of painting and other art forms, but has been utilised in its own element, using processes that are unique to it. As Batchen argues: "Could it be that putting the camera aside has allowed them to experiment in creative ways with their medium that would not otherwise be possible?" (Batchen, 2016:5). Batchen questions if photography can only fail when trying to be something it is not, and by making camera-less images it has begun to fulfil its potential.

Moving on from the initial surge in camera-less work at the turn of the century, photography began to be solidly accepted in the art community. Then came the rediscovery of the camera-less arts during the later half of the century. As Krauss notes: "In the 1960s, photography moved from a merely reproductive to an independent artistic medium, which, in this new capacity, was placed alongside more traditional media" (Krauss, 2005:74). In its new-found acceptance, photography (and more so camera-less photography) gained more confidence to pursue experimentation and so concepts such as 'generative' and 'concrete' photography arose with an increase of the medium's theorisation.

Krauss suggests that both art and photography reached a similar destination of abstraction from reality despite the fact photography is so closely tied to recording it. "For photography's fidelity to nature inspired painters to drive the object out of painting. It is all the more astounding, however, that both painting and photography arrived at a non-objective, i.e. concrete mode of representation at the same time" (Krauss, 2005:68). Even though the invention of the photograph pushed painters to create a new reality, rather than replicate it due to its easier means of reproduction, the photograph turned the mirror to itself and began to question itself (resulting in non-representational images) simultaneously.

Camera-less photography ventured from the initial stages that brought about the mechanics of the camera, to capturing new unknown worlds that were readily used within various applications. Its history reveals its importance in shaping images as they are known now, and how it succeeded in taking away representational qualities and bringing in new concepts that would drive the avant-garde and postmodern movements in artistic practice.

CHAPTER 2: Key Theories

There has been little theorisation within the discipline of camera-less photography itself. However, much discussion has been had about abstraction in art and photography, and the problems which surround photography and its traces, its difficulty with representation and its influences as a whole. Drawing from these discourses, what befits camera-less imagery most are the debates around indexicality, concrete art applied to photography, as well as its place within artistic categories.

It is hard to escape the ties between the camera-less photograph and indexicality, for the intrinsic qualities of the camera-less photograph and the intrinsic qualities of semiotics (the study of signs) in photography are one and the same. Through the photographic trace we know it once existed, but also, through the trace we know it exists *because* of the trace, (or the index). The index is one component of semiotics that makes a sign (a sign indicates something which is meaningful). The other two components that describe signs, proposed by Charles Sanders Peirce, are the icon and symbol. All three (icon, index and symbol) are a way to make sense of a photograph which is, essentially, a sign; and all three types of sign are in some way or another related to the camera-less image. The camera-less photograph (especially when considering the photogram and processes alike) is a direct trace of its referent. This is inescapable. What is depicted in the image, was, and *is*, simultaneously. In the famous words of Barthes, the photograph is the “that-has-been” (1993:77).



Fig. 2. *Shoreline* (1998)

Most photographs made by use of a camera will typically be a copy of their referent whether it depicts a recognisable photograph or not. The image that is captured was there, and relies upon something having been there even if non-representational. However, when thinking about the camera-less photograph this changes; the images recorded are invisible to the eye but brought to light through the process of photographic materials and chemicals. The image shown did not exist as such, but through the magic of chemistry the photograph becomes a reality. Durand explains the index in a symbolic way, suggesting that the photograph is but a mimicry: "It is an art of the *déjà vu*, showing the already-seen, and as such it plunges us into a state close to the dream or hallucination" (Durand, 2007:243). Yet camera-less images rarely capture the real as we know it. Whichever method they are produced by, they show a new facet of life, revealing things in a different way. An example of this is demonstrated in the work of Susan Derges, an elemental photographer who works with Cibachrome colour reversal paper in a physical environment. This photogram (see fig. 2) shows how through the process of camera-less photography the world can be subverted. This image depicts what appears to be a familiar reality, however it is a view which would never be available to the human experience. The observer is immersed beneath the waves seeing something which is true and that has truly existed, but is at the same time false to what they already understand. Derges' photograph harnesses camera-less photography's reliance upon its referent and takes it to create real, but new imagery. Batchen explains:

The things we see...seem to have imprinted themselves on the paper before us: directly, physically, casually, without mediation, at one-to-one scale. For this reason, to make a photograph without a camera is to privilege photography's indexical capacities over all others (Batchen, 2016:46).

However, Snyder contests this argument, suggesting: "The photographs establish the data - none exist prior to the production of the picture" (Snyder, 2006:371). Speaking of all photographs from all categories, he argues that indexicality is a pointless discussion within photography, and that images make themselves. This is an interesting point to consider, especially within camera-less photography, as many of the images created do construct themselves. They rely on no past reality and only themselves. Nevertheless, whichever way it is examined, all photographs can be considered an index of what they were constructed from: light. Krauss notes how the photogram in particular indicates this matter: "the photogram

only forces, or makes explicit, what is the case of all photography. Every photograph is the result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface" (Krauss, 1986:203). All photographs whether camera-made or camera-less are a product of light which is essential to their being. Without it they would not be able to exist, and this is an underlying part of the discussion made within indexicality.

Though all styles of photographs are reliant upon their referents, they may not resemble them; this leads way to abstract or unknown imagery which can prompt any manner of response from their observer. Barthes, when writing *Camera Lucida* (1993), proposed various terminology which has stuck within photography theory. Two terms he used to define the 'essence' of photography were the "studium" and the "punctum" (Barthes, 1993:26-7). He described the studium as the base of the image which is assumed to invest the spectators interest (but may not), stating: "The *studium* is that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste: *I like / I don't like*" (Barthes, 1993:27). Whereas the punctum is the very thing that spikes the interest of the spectator, they become engaged with the photograph for whatever reason is specific to them, due to their individual past experiences and culture.

These two terms are very relevant when considering pictorial photography. A documentary photograph may be understood and recognised and may even remind the observer of a past event unique to them. However, the vast majority of camera-less imagery is not meaningful in this sense. This poses difficulty when viewing the essence of the camera-less as Barthes says: "To recognize the *studium* is inevitably to encounter the photographer's intentions, to enter into harmony with them, to approve or disapprove of them, but always to understand them" (Barthes, 1993:27-8). Must the beholder understand the image before them to allow it to "prick" them? (Barthes, 1993:26). Many camera-less images are abstract and misleading and do not openly suggest comprehension without prior knowledge of their processes. To understand and interpret them would require such knowledge. However, this does not stop the beholder seeing what is harmonious with them.

The concepts that drive concrete photography lead to the manufacture of images which are not meaningful or figurative and so invite a pensive or inquisitive observer. The term originated from concrete art, from which Gottfried Jäger took and applied its terms to

photography. The foundation for concrete photography describes a genre which is devoid of all representational observation and considers the medium itself as subject. In this way "Concrete photographs are narcissistic and egocentric, they see only themselves: absolute photographs" (Jäger, 2005:16). What Jäger states is through pointing the discussion at itself, photography can uncover abilities within it that are not possible through representational means. This was, and continues to be, an important factor for the development of photography; if it did not explore itself it would only come out baring likenesses to painting (which it is so often compared with) or other means of artistic practice. Jäger describes concrete photography as a pure photography because it does not dilute with other mediums or subscribe to other modes of artistic expression (Jäger, 2005: 15).

Jäger explains concrete photography as if it were its own genre in the medium such as documentary or pictorial photography. Thus, there is a difference between concrete photography and abstract photography that ought to be addressed, a point which Jäger discusses in his writing: "One could say: Abstraction transforms matter into something intellectual (it abstracts and idealizes an object); Concretion transforms something intellectual into matter (it concretizes and objectifies an idea)" (Jäger, 2005:19). Where concrete photography differs from abstract photography is that it is not simply abstraction taken from things in the world around us, images do not originate from something that previously exists which has been manipulated visually or conceptually. Rather, the concrete photograph is one that has no reference, it is a discovery of what photography can achieve within its own boundaries. This is visually present when viewing the imagery in *Concrete Photography=Konkrete Fotografie* (2005). The range of pictures that make up the plates are in no way similar to the photographer's work that sits previously. Each page is a descriptive and thought provoking discovery of the medium. It shows a fascinating array of the many ways that photography can achieve something unique and unattainable any other way. A fitting quote from Batchen's recent publication *Emanations: The Art of the Cameraless Photograph* (2016), highlights both Jäger's and Barthes' theorisations of photography: "Placed thus within the inverted commas of candid self-reflection, photography is freed from its traditional subservient role as a realist mode of representation and allowed instead to become a searing index of its own operations, to become an art of the real" (Batchen, 2016:5).

Jäger's work is exemplary within this field of photography. Being the proposing individual for both generative and concrete terms (the former initiated in an exhibition curated by Jäger in Bielefeld, Germany in 1968). Jäger's work reflects both comparable genres. An example made during the development of these concepts (see fig. 3) demonstrates the uniformity and constructed nature of both fields. The work does not become any less powerful because of its planned production and use of new technologies. In fact, the repetition and exactitude could be thought to make the work stronger and more aesthetic because of its compositional and repetitive structure. There is a case, however, against generative methods being a part of the photography/art community because the nature of these images is mechanical (even if they do exclude the camera) and so they have the potential to become universal. This aspect has been a fundamental influence in the restricting of photography from being considered as an art. Walter Benjamin observes "For the first time in the process of pictorial reproduction, photography freed the hand of the most important artistic functions which henceforth devolved only upon the eye looking into a lens" (Benjamin, 1936:I).

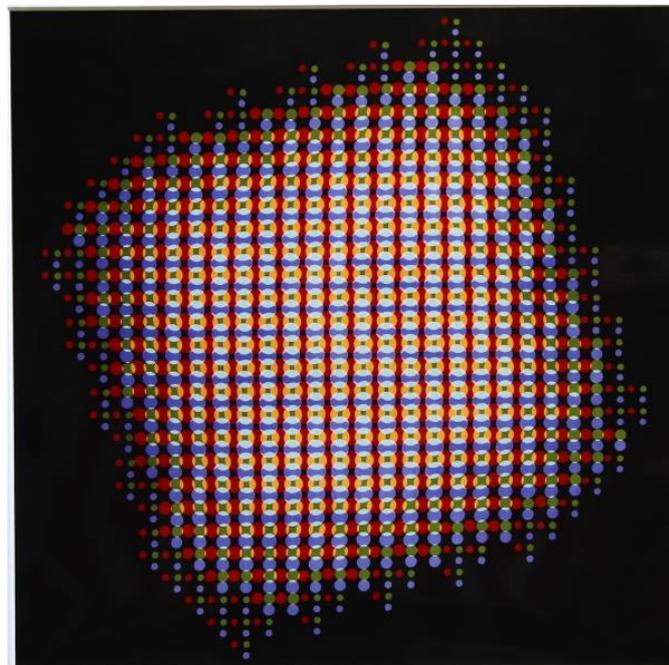


Fig. 3. *Pinhole Structure (multiple camera obscura)* (1967)

Comparatively, one element frequently associated with camera-less photography is its (usually) inherent uniqueness. The act of craftsmanship and intervention of the hand automatically assume a singular product which could not be produced again. Each individual

image has the right to be viewed as its own composition. As abovementioned, this factor is important in the photographic area, because for most its lifespan photography has faced problems with the ubiquity of images. The nature of the medium allows for a ceaseless ability to reproduce images, being a cause for its neglect from the art world. However, with analogue processes, and especially camera-less processes, the mechanism is (almost) completely removed (aside from works made using other technologies proposed by the generative and concrete movements). There is no such problem with the majority of camera-less images as they tend to be unique where every new attempt makes another individual print. Beshty notes the exclusivity of the hand-crafted, camera-less image: "Since there is no negative, and no projected image, the works are unique, because of this and the rules governing the process, they are completely impossible to re-produce" (Beshty, 2009:283). This may bring the camera-less image to be considered more as art, however, and less as a part of photography because it is so closely linked with non-reproductivity. Nonetheless, is it not the intent of the photographer whether it is photography or not, should they not decide the means and ends of their work? Fried discusses this:

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the mechanical component in photography was considered by some theorists, including important practitioners, to pose a dire problem for it as an art on the grounds that a work of art should be in every particular determined by the maker's intentions (Fried, 2008:272).

What has been suggested is that what defines art is having full autonomy from start to finish, but if the intention is to use the mechanics of a camera, then it can be considered art. This, too, is of course debatable. However, some sense of entitlement will always be left with the author as it is they who conceive the work. Undeniably it is all subjective, but such is the context of art and if photography has a place within it, it must be perceivable to subjectivity too. Carol Squiers' book *What is a Photograph* (2014) highlights the argument that to unpick where the camera-less image should fall in the divisions of art, science – or photography - we must first understand what exactly a photograph is. If we can fully understand the true meaning of a photograph, and thereby camera-less image, then surely it will be simple to see the latter in its rightful place.

CHAPTER 3: Case Study 1: Gary Fabian Miller

Garry Fabian Miller makes camera-less images through a process titled the 'luminogram'. This process relies on a way of employing light; shaping it before it casts itself upon photographic paper. The work he produces encourages a consideration of duration as these works often take time to produce in themselves from conception to result. De Waal explains that "Exposures can last for minutes or for several hours: he is not only writing with light, but with time" (de Waal, 2007:6). Fabian Miller's lifestyle reflects this process, he allows time for reflection, living a life of a slower pace outside of metropolitan life, and this greatly impacts the subjects and methods of his camera-less photographs (Barnes, 2012a:19). Batchen acknowledges this cyclical process with which some artists "continue to see the value of cameraless photography precisely in terms of its ability to get us closer to nature, to engineer some sort of direct contact between us and the world around us" (Batchen, 2016:38). Fabian Miller engages with, lives with and works on the land to gain a better understanding of it. His camera-less photographs are a direct result of this understanding and interweaving. They act as pensive thoughts brought into reality via the act of casting light through various objects and shapes. As Warner notes: "Garry Fabian Miller's works reach beyond conceivable phenomena and beyond palpable experience, to represent the appearance of time and seize duration in the silent and motionless confines of a photographic image" (Warner, 2010:40).

Fabian Miller began with camera-made photography, but always with the theme of duration. Since the 1980's he has worked consistently with the camera-less image, using Cibachrome paper - creating direct colour positives when exposed to light. This paper allows him to harness the most beautiful and brilliant colours that positively radiate the light which created them. The majority of this work has depicted this element only, but still created a vast range of fluctuating pictures. Light is his medium (as it is for every other photographer), but as Chandler explains: "Whereas for other photographers light is a source, a beginning, for Fabian Miller light is the work, it is something to direct and control, and importantly to feel" (Chandler, 2001:25). Light is the only thing that concerns Fabian Miller's pictures and this has supported a range of associations that stem from the way he chooses to live. There is a religious quality to the way he works, a profound understanding of the cycles of daily activity. This is represented in his series *Year One* (2005-6) (see fig. 4) where he practiced camera-less making every day of a year to see the multitude of variations which could be created from

light. The results oscillate radically in places and little in others, from day to day there are changes that build on the image made the day before. This act of structured and scheduled creating reflects the concrete and generative boundaries, if not in means of production, then in the format of regulated activity.

There could be argument against Fabian Miller's work conforming to concrete photography even if it appears to comply. His work does not simply consider the nature of photography, there are driving concepts which take it outside the constraints of making work as a form of discovering things about photography. Yet he does make work for the sake of making, to discover anew. In his mind, however, the works created resemble something of his daily experiences. Concrete photography defines that photographs in this category are solely about photography itself, "photographs of photography" as Jäger establishes (Jäger, 2005:15), and not a forethought concept or experience; therefore, arguably, Fabian Miller's photographs are not concrete. Comparatively, the work of Pierre Cordier (who will be further discussed in the coming chapter) *is* essentially about the art of making and experimenting with the materials that make the basis of any analogue photography. However, what Jäger proposes is that concretion involves turning something 'intellectual' (and so perhaps an idea) into form, into existence and so it is made concrete and real (Jäger, 2005:19). If this interpretation is true, then this would indicate that indeed Fabian Miller's works could in fact be considered concrete. The ideas that surround the making of his pictures do not govern how they should look, rather it could be the experience is put in to the *making* rather than the result. This would assume his images to be a part of the genre, which is intact with photography, because it is the very thing that explores photography's inherent natures most.

Where connections can be made with concrete concepts, there is perhaps more of a distance between Fabian Millers works and generative ideas. His work considers an understanding of slower methods and traditional medias. As Mellor argues:

Fabian Miller turned back to what he designated as a lost turning in photography's history - the mid-nineteenth century. Photography has, in his reckoning, become a 'stunted' practice, now 'more debased than it's ever been', as it becomes more technologised and instrumentalised (Mellor, 2001:136).

Where generative concepts celebrate the use of new technologies to generate new and innovative work, Fabian Miller's ideals contest this, believing that opportunities were missed at the conception of photography that could have carried it to be something of its own earlier on. By using traditional processes and materials there are always mysteries to be uncovered.



Fig. 4. *Cantios 91 Song Time* (2006)

The developments made by camera-less photography in bringing forth otherworldly views are clear in Fabian Miller's work. His images are often associated with spirituality and incorporeality because they glow with such intensity that it makes it hard to believe they are not of something tangible. He has harnessed the ability of camera-less imagery to capture things unseen by the human eye, and constructed concepts which match this – linking symbolic meanings of the circle to his geometric style. Rexer asks, “could photography capture or express the spiritual dimension of life? Could it offer correlatives or “equivalents” for invisible emotions and ideas?” (Rexer, 2009:47). Rexer questions photography here with an open mind, considering possibilities that the medium is perhaps a means of connecting us to another world. However, with photography's associations with factuality and objectivity it is hard to believe in a connection with immaterial concepts such as thought. Yet Fabian Miller's images speak for themselves here because they are so abstract, yet abstracted from nothing which indicates to their incorporeality. An example of his symbolic imagery is shown

in figure 4 where a circular form is depicted in a deep blue surrounding. There is much that this image could represent from moons and planets to cycles and rhythms, yet it is not one of these things but simply light itself put onto paper. Martin Kemp adequately describes the meaning that light possesses and the reasons why we might put so much faith in an image such as Fabian Miller's:

Nature herself dictates to us and tells us that our happiness consists in light. Hence it is that we naturally love the light and rejoice in it, as a thing agreeable and beneficial to us. On the contrary, we fear the darkness and are surprised in it with a certain horror and a timorous expectation of some hurt that may befall us. It is light then that we must look after, but of itself it is so thin and spiritual we cannot lay hands upon it and make it our possession (Kemp, 2010:224).

Kemp suggests that it is difficult to bind light, however, Fabian Miller manages to harness light effectively in the way that Kemp arguably deems unattainable. He succeeds in moulding light with such intensity that it is difficult to accept it isn't formed from some connection with the otherworldly.

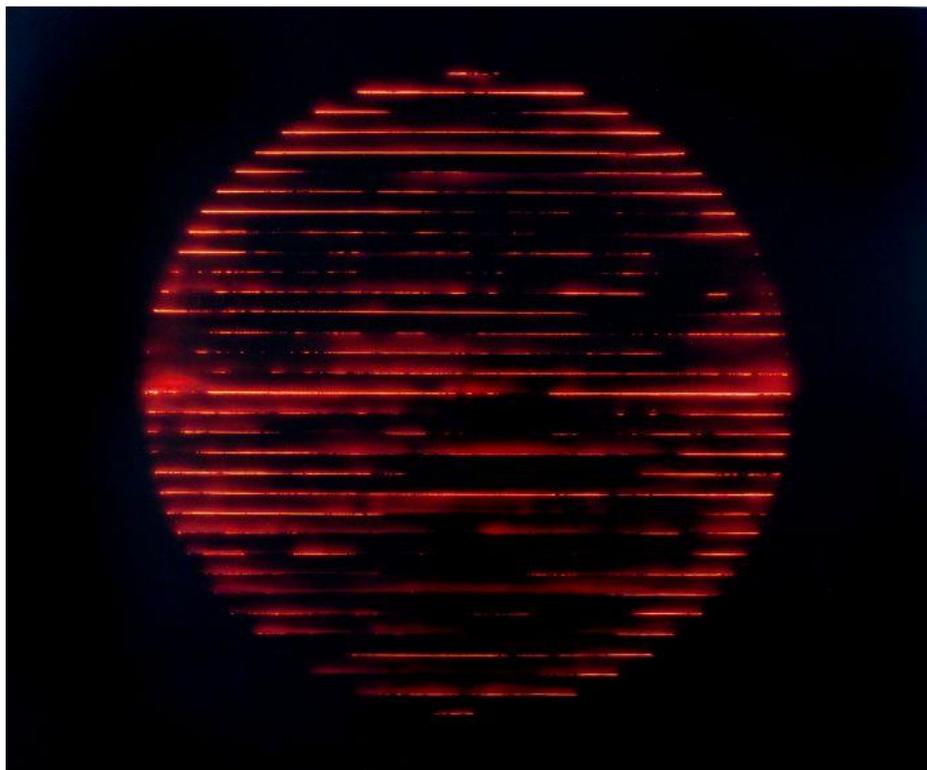


Fig. 5. *Enclosure Winter* (2009)

Fabian Miller's works are "Unlike the photograms of Moholy-Nagy and Man Ray, Fabian Miller's disguise their mode of production – there is no recognisable object visible in the finished works" (Warburton, 2010:15). Warburton affirms this truth, his works are unique and hard to decipher, holding no *true* iconic values or similarities with anything we know to be real. His use of the alternative and more basic, yet not less complex, form of the luminogram creates worlds entirely abstract from any referent, because they have none. Batchen explains this point: "While they remain camera-less, such pieces are a hybrid of the most basic and most modern forms of photographic image production" indicating that even though they employ a simplistic means of creation, they are still elaborate in production, merging original aspects from photography's beginnings with new technologies that broaden our understanding of how to manipulate light (Batchen, 2016:132). Barnes remarks upon this aspect, suggesting that "Light is the only tangible thing that can be traced back to the beginnings of creation. It is therefore not a symbol for something else but the very embodiment of creative energy." (Barnes, 2012:133).

Light, and so Fabian Miller's work, speaks of origins and a time when the earth was being formed, of volcanic rock and glowing magma that throws a deep, radiating luminance. His images remark back to a time where life itself began, yet these images are contemporary. This is particularly eloquent in his piece *Enclosure Winter* (see fig. 5) which depicts a circular silhouette filled with lines of orange-red, enclosed by a black background. When viewing this image there is a clear sense of light and dark. The light appears to literally emanate from the picture. This image looks alive and real, but the reality is, that it is a deception. This image looks so unlike any camera-made picture, whether abstract or 'true' because there is a certain quality of light that makes it feel more certain. Durand provides a fitting statement that could explain this phenomena: "A very long exposure, for example, yields a greater presence of the object, whose materiality seems reinforced by the duration of the 'deposit'" (Durand, 2007:243). In this case, there is no object, but there is certainly a resilient existence of light branded upon the photographic paper. There is a clear sense of relatability with this and other works because they often seem to resemble reality even when they are not doing so, "Indeed it is their openness to interpretation, even within their specificity that gives them their global appeal" (Barnes, 2012a:20-1). Barnes claims this element is a part of their captivation, which is supported by Barthes punctum - they allow for individual experiences to become a part of

the image, specific and distinct to each person. This punctum is the one, consuming aspect to this image, it draws you in, tethers your interest making you question how the image came into being. It could be real, like a photograph from outer space, or perhaps a manipulated camera-made image of some light phenomena. The warm feeling taken from this image is of a burning desire to know what it is, how it is and why it is.

Further concerning indexicality, Snyder questions the segregation of referents in different types of pictures, asking “why should we say that some are indices of things and others are indices of light?” (Snyder, 2006:373). All photographs are an index of light. They are all equal, as Snyder states, so why should we point out some as being of light and others of objects when essentially it breaks down to the same founding thing: light. With this point in mind, it is then easy to suggest that the camera-less image is indeed a part of photography because it holds the bare essentials with which the concept of ‘photography’ universally specifies.

Fabian Miller practices considerable control over his luminograms, meeting the definitions associated with an artist. This may confuse where he might be thought to stand on the line of photography as an art of the real, versus art which expresses a freedom of concept and control. His work certainly is both objective and true, yet inexplicably untrue and experimental. Where photography has been held back from being an art is in its lack of autonomy, which Bazin expresses: “The personality of the photographer enters into the proceedings only in his selection of the object to be photographed and by way of the purpose he has in mind” (Bazin, 1960:7). This is certainly arguable in the examples shown of Fabian Miller’s works – they show no selection of reality because they rely on none. His work is crafted as much as a painting or sculpture may be. Much of this debate will be addressed in terms of Cordier’s works, an artist even more on the fringes of painting and photography.

CHAPTER 4: Case Study 2: Pierre Cordier

Pierre Cordier is of special regard because of his historical stature and his practice is so illusively unmarked within the categories of painting and photography. Cordier makes his work using the technique named the 'chemigram', a unique process invented by Cordier in the mid 1950's. This invention opened another avenue for photography to investigate at a time where many artists and photographers began to reclaim experimental processes as a valid way of producing work in the 1960's. Batchen describes this period as a time when "The aspiration to get back to basics, to base materials, to unpretentious art making, to an "absolute," was widespread in the 1960's" (Batchen, 2016:36). This process, "Although not, strictly speaking, photographs (as no light is necessary to their production), Cordier's chemigrams introduced a new development in twentieth-century photographic" (Batchen, 2016:34). Batchen already flags the issue of certain kinds of experimental photography, pointing out the lack of light required in chemigrams (a supposedly essential part of photography) igniting the debate of whether they should fall into its category. This argument is complex, dealing with many strains of argument from the subjectivity of art, the artists intention and the many underlying correlative and material factors that make a case for or against its place in photography, and even in camera-less photography.

Cordier introduces his invention, simplifying in his own words how its process works, locating it within mediums we already understand: "the chemigram combines the physics of painting (varnish, wax, oil) with the chemistry of photography (photo emulsion, developer, fixer); without a camera, without an enlarger, and in daylight...while it seems complicated, it really isn't" (Cordier, 2011). To create his unique works which appear so complex he uses various materials such as the ones mentioned above; other examples include honey and egg - often everyday products. These household materials seem an unlikely way to produce the work he does, but because they are not often used by practitioners in most mediums, they allow for an experimentation which is unattainable any other way. Barnes reiterates this statement, claiming that they are "images impossible to realise by any other means" (Barnes, 2012:60). The process begins by taking photosensitive paper and applying any of these "'localising' products", then photographic developing and fixing chemicals are applied to the coated paper (Cordier, cited in Barnes 2012:61). With more refined skill the print will be worked with during these stages making cuts and marks to allow combinations of chemicals and products to

occur. These methods are far from the means of making any ordinary photograph, even stretching from the experimental processes of the photogram, where interactions on the paper are made. Yet Cordier explains the nature of the chemigram's process, stating why it differs from painting too: "Contrary to painting, the way of applying the product is not important in the chemigram; it is the way in which it is removed" (Cordier, 2007:44). What results can vary entirely on any number of factors – the possibilities are exponential. These works are unique, possessing qualities which can be painterly, graphic, or even digital – they represent things inconceivable and never seen before. Elkins explains the inconceivable which occurs frequently in Cordier's chemigrams, stating it "denotes whatever does not present itself to the maker's or viewer's imagination at all, either as a picture or as an unpicturable property" (Elkins, 2009:5). Jaques Meuris explains their relativity and relatability to reality: "Pierre Cordier explores a purely visual world where analogies with reality are always fortuitous" (Meuris, cited in Cordier 2007:42). Many of Cordier's works appear this way, finding relationships with things we know to be real and representable, yet his chemigrams are far from this. Clearly, it is hard to decipher what is truly depicted in each of his chemigrams and it is an incredible experience to interpret what they are, questioning why they look the way they do.

The incision marks that manifest the prints emanate from the act of making them. Without them there would be no way the colours and tones beneath the waxes and varnishes could form – the marks are an index of Cordier's hand rather than light. As Barnes writes: "The technical process itself becomes the artwork" (Barnes, 2012:62). With Cordier's craft, for him it may have been akin to learning to paint through a new way of making 'brush strokes' - just as the contact print became a new way to make drawings. Through extensive production, he knows what will happen when he makes a certain mark "by a mixture of calculation and chance" (Barnes, 2012:61). Through continuous experimentation he became a master in the art of the chemigram. Cordier knows what will occur when using a certain localizing product, and how much it will bleed from a measured mark that cuts through it. However, as much as his knowledge is recognised, there will always be an element of uncertainty and autonomy from the materials. The processes he uses are naturally self-ruling and uncontrollable. Thus, resulting in a freedom of experimentation and ability to uncover new facets, which would not be possible if the results were fully predictable.



Fig. 6. *Chemigram 1/5/70 III* (1970)

This is where similarities can be drawn between Fabian Miller's work and Cordier's. The two artists use totally different means of producing camera-less images, yet one parallel runs between them: the self-ruling and uncontrollable essence of both light, and chemistry. This is exemplified in figure 6 which stands out from Cordier's other works which often follow geometric and patterned formations (another shared area in both practitioner's works). There is more of an essence of freedom in this piece perhaps because of its lacking in geometric regiment, or because the chemistry has worked its own forces as light does. These can create vast, yet miniature worlds which Cordier can only guide with his learned knowledge. This analogous stream which runs between Cordier and Fabian Miller's works evidences in a way that these types of images can be placed within the boundaries of photography. With this tether of chemicals and light acting with such affinity combined with the basis of the same unified materials, the chemigram can undoubtedly be placed in the confines of 'photography' as a unique genre that stands within it. Not only do similarities lie within these two elements, but also in their ability to uncover depth and dimensions that are not readily available to the eye. Such an ability to reveal things anew has also been associated with photography from near its beginning.

Much of their mystery in some way lies with ideas which surround indexicality. Warburton expresses the differences between the 'meaningful' image compared to the chemigram and their relationships with indexicality succinctly: "the photographer reducing captured indexical-iconic information to more abstract yet legible form, the chemigram is additive and for the most part non-figurative" (Warburton, 2011). Cordier's image (see fig. 6) demonstrates the confusion of how his chemigrams can appear like reality, even when they bear no fixed links with it as the traditional photograph does. This chemigram could be interpreted as fractured glass or a digital screen, perhaps others might see in it a biological mass of life under microscopic inspection. The visual likenesses are never ending. This is an example of Barthes' punctum at work: "it is what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*" (Barthes, 1993:55). Barthes explains that though an observer may bring past experiences which are individual to every person, whatever they might see already lies within the image, waiting to be recognised if the conditions are right. Vilém Flusser remarks on this, explaining that this is "the significance of the image" which "revealed in the process of scanning therefore represents a synthesis of two intentions: one manifested in the image and the other belonging to the observer" (Flusser, 2000:8). Yet Cordier's image relies upon no past reality; their only necessity is photographic materials and a precise touch of hand, and even then, the chemistry and products partly make the work through their own amalgamations.

John Szarkowski addresses the chemigram's materiality and independence from past reality: "they are not to be regarded as windows on the world, but rather as small bits of the world itself" (Szarkowski, cited in Batchen 2016:34). Holding these images with regard to their originality makes sense because they are not copies of nature nor are they truly revealing things unknown to the eye, they are some-*thing* which is exclusive to itself. This indicates to a disconnect with the index that so firmly cements other forms of camera-less photography into the confines of photography. Yet because of the varying likenesses these kinds of images share with the world, they bear a relationship with indexicality through the icon. However, this is of course a deception because, though they do bare resemblances with objects and scenes we are familiar with, this is not truly the case. Barnes explains this condition often depicted in Cordier's work: "Although the works may have the appearance of abstraction, they are not in any way abstracted from reality. Rather, they are a new physical reality, an

original creation in themselves” (Barnes, 2012:64). No referent exists from which they have been abstracted, these are photographs that are about photography, they turn the mirror upon themselves, much like the concepts of Jäger’s concrete photography.



Figure 7. *Chemigram 6/2/80 CHazard* (1980)

There appears to be more evidence of Cordier’s chemigrams fitting into ideas which surround concrete photography more so than semiotics and indexicality. Both works by Jäger and Cordier featured in Jäger’s exhibition *Generative Photography* (1968). The work shown did not depict images recognisable in the world around us, but showed new images that could only be made through the processes they were established with. Snyder and Allen point out an assumption that is often made of photography, saying: “Most people, if asked, would no doubt say that, whereas the painter can paint whatever he wants, the photographer must depict “what is there”” (Snyder & Allen, 1975:148). This exhibition contradicted this assumption, showing works that were far from ‘what is there’, many of them made by camera-less means. Cordier’s participation in this photographic exhibition indicates to his place within photography because he embodies the freedom of creativity assumed to other forms of art as concrete methods aspire to. In figure 7 he has created a picture that seems

real, material, tangible - something physical which could be touched, but depicts nothing but a chemigram. This image is only an exploration of what a chemigram can do – and so what photography can do. He embodies the very meaning of concrete and generative ideals, associated with trying to reach a pure photography. He uses the bare essentials of photography (its chemicals) which are required to bring forth an image, and experiments with the line that is drawn between photography and painting. Some may put more emphasis upon the aspects shared with painting however, and think it less a part of photography. Yet its reliance upon photographic materials is so significant that perhaps it cannot be seen as anything other than a tangent of photography.

Interestingly, Cordier does not refer to himself as a photographer: “saying that I am a photographer because I make chemigrams on photo paper is like saying that Leonardo da Vinci was a cabinet maker because he painted the Mona Lisa on wood” (Cordier cited in Barnes, 2012:60). The fact that he contests this argument might put the chemigram back in its place of unidentified confusion. However, though he does not name himself a photographic practitioner, this does not make his work any less a part of photography, as an artist may name themselves whatever they wish. There are many terms by which artists and photographers go by from photographer to photographic artist. Though these terms may not seem significant, it can mean all the more to the person who identifies with such a title.

An appropriate statement from Barthes helps solidify the idea that the chemigram could in fact sit in the confines of photography. Though this does not change the physicality of materials which lie in defined modes of artistic practice. Barthes suggests:

It is often said that it was the painters who invented Photography...I say: no, it was the chemists. For the noeme “That-has-been” was possible only on the day when a scientific circumstance (the discovery that silver halogens were sensitive to light) made it possible to recover and print directly the luminous rays emitted by a variously lighted object. (Barthes, 1993:80).

Indeed, it is chemistry which binds it all together: the light, materials and concept. It is assumed that light is essential, however, without the photographic materials and chemistry, no fix would be viable. And so, we can rightfully say that the chemigram deserves its place in the subject of photography, even if Cordier says he is no photographer.

CONCLUSION

Whether camera-less photography can really be considered a part of photography is in some ways a debate about linguistic categories. The terminology used to describe photography is limited, denying its vast range of physical abilities and this is perhaps why camera-less photography has found difficulty in acceptance. Within mainstream terminology the photograph is typically synonymous with the camera. It is perhaps unsurprising then that it is frequently forgotten that the properties which make up the photograph can be shaped to form something that remarks no index, no trace and no true icon – truths which photography has been unable to break from since its beginning.

A more refined knowledge of photographic processes and abilities can illuminate the debate of its placement. This debate can be interpreted in various ways, but the recurring idea seems to be the underlying factor that makes up all photographic production: light. Though even within this element, processes like the chemigram challenge light's significance as evidential fact. Camera-less photographs need to be regarded in their own light because they have had such a singular influence on the developments of the medium. They are an art in themselves and so should be treated and practiced this way. Snyder and Allen highlight this reflection: "photographs and paintings differ in an important way and require different methods in interpretation precisely because photographs and paintings come into being in different ways" (Snyder & Allen, 1975:143). Considering this, it is appropriate to question why we must categorise such an explicit medium when it so clearly cannot be categorised. There are so many definitions, and so many specialities within photography, yet only methods tied to the mechanics of the camera are truly assumed to be in the confines of the subject.

When photography is given freedom to explore itself, then it can reach its potential as a significant, remarkable medium. As Batchen states: "photography is freed from its traditional subservient role as a realist mode of representation and allowed instead to become a searing index of its own operations, to become an art of the real" (Batchen, 2016:5). Making camera-less images allows for a liberty to push the boundaries of the medium. Harnessing these qualities is the only way that photography can progress further. Fulfilling an iconic-indexical role can only keep photography in the subtractive, and not the additive.

Batchen expresses one final argument which reasons the camera-less photograph's place:

throughout photography's history the cameraless photograph has always been a subversive element, an auto-critique of everything that photography is supposed to represent. For, in rejecting the camera, such photographs also reject humanist perspective, rationalised space, three-dimensional illusion, documentary truth, temporal fixity (Batchen, 2016:47).

In photographic materials, there is waiting to come out any image imaginable under the sun. Things that we cannot conceive lie between the layers of gelatine and silver halide. Amid the layers of photographic material, the possibilities are endless. So, to say that photography is limited and incidental is impossible. That alone is impressive; and it is by camera-less photography that this is comprehensible. The ability of photography is unlimited and the working of its photographic materials is what enables photography to become a unique and exciting medium in its own. Through the act of camera-less production, photographs have developed far further than they would have done if they simply were used to document or replicate the world as we already know. Camera-less photographs unlock this potential to see the world anew, to see things which cannot be seen by any other means, not through painting, not through transcribing meaningful images, but through establishing a whole new reality of imagination – which is infinite.

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