

# VIOLENCE UPON SPACE

**To commit violence upon space, one needs to see**

In attempt to qualify the everyday stuff around us, we have become dependent upon the photographic image to represent our technological and cultural achievements. This suggests that collectively we acquiesce to the role of the operator and subjugate landscape to that of object. We have become accustomed to violating landscape through the framing of the camera. Simultaneously, we exploit landscape through architecture and war, by means required for land-use, site work, and geographic domination. This development is malignant, rendered as a slow moving violation, anaesthetized to the point of banality. Landscape is living simulacrum, materialized by Architecture into latent form. The problem is, however, that we tend not to see it. We need a new device for landscape projection.

My intent has been to exploit the violation of landscape created through the gaze of the camera's eye and executed through architecture. To understand the violation of visuality, one must examine not only Barthes' logic of the camera Operator, the Subject being photographed and the Spectacle of the photograph, but also how the material and technological components of the camera enable this violation. The materiality of glass in the camera lens allows for focusing of the subject, rendering it as object. It also acts as a physical barrier in architecture – say a store front window – to separate space but simultaneously allow for visual connections. The mirror reflex component refracts the light energy projected from the subject as an apparition on the film within the camera body. The image formed is a simulacrum; a fake, a representation of the subject being photographed. When light passes through the camera body and exposes the silver of film, a representation is made visible. Mirrored glass on skyscrapers acts very similarly within the context of landscape. In this situation, the mirrored skin of the skyscraper reflects the sky and other buildings. This suggests that the building itself produces copies of other buildings like a spectrum of landscape eidolon.

If, as I believe, architecture is the physically violent component of the camera's violation of landscape, then is it possible to translate this formation of the simulacrum into architecture through the materiality of the camera apparatus? If so, what kind of experience is created through this exploitation? By exploring materials inherent to the photographic process, the intervention made itself clear through the use of film. I exchanged "study models" for "models," and began a series of staged interventions in landscape.

These interventions, designed to give experience like catoptric devices, forms abstracted images of the environment as living simulacrum, mixing the virtual and reality of everyday life. Film allows for the reflection and refraction of light energy like an architectural prism, rendering new landscape. The material component of this medium allows for mirror-reciprocity, so that participants can see simulations of their environment, whatever that may be. The intervention is like a kaleidoscope, mediating the surrounding environment as a psychedelic array of reflections. The resulting experience should be synesthetic and euphoric.

# PROCESS & METHODOLOGY

By combining theories and practices together, I have created a series of photographic interventions in concrete islands. These photographs are used as tools for mapping the real and virtual landscapes pictured within the latent image. The mappings suggest an unknown landscape sitting within our collective reality; a multitude of other spaces exist without us seeing them directly. Through this process I am designing an architectural occupation in landscape.

My use of the term virtual landscape suggests a cognitively recognizable place that escapes our conventions of time, space and site. In this thesis, I am suggesting that the transformation of subject to object in the spectrum does not just simply end at the formation of the latent image. The transformation continues in the virtual space mapped through the materials shared by architecture and photography. The virtual space is the space of transgression; it is the undefined, vague and ambivalent landscape we cannot fully see nor thus control. Like the JG Ballard novel suggests, the hallucinogenic landscape subjects us to madness. A wonderland seen through the looking glass...

Through the technological developments of Photography as means to represent a life-like image, and the ontological understanding of the medium as means to objectify and thus own the subject, we have been collectively trained to violate landscape through the framing of the camera. This photographic "framing" is the collective will to dominate: everything within human touch is repressed through the subconscious desire to violate it. This theory has basis in psychoanalysis, in which our first moment of violation comes with our individual recognition of self when presented with a mirror as a child.

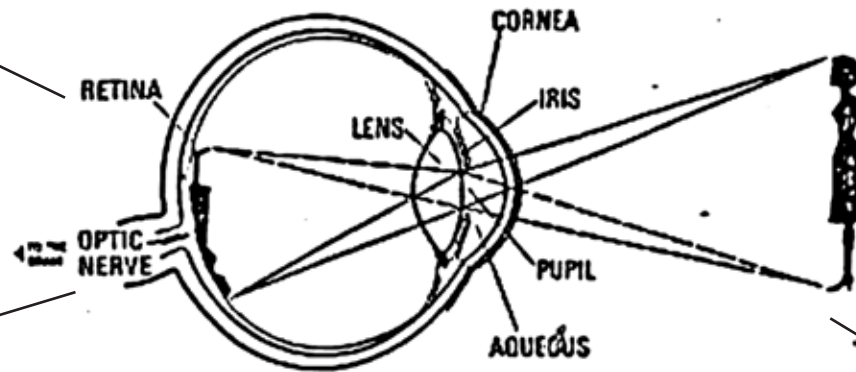
To objectify, or violate the subject's identity through the mirror-lens, is the basis for pornography in photographic theory (see *Ontological Meaning* passage). This violating prohibition caused by the framing of the camera is also the source for all landscape representation. It is not transgressive, it is just the opposite - it holds back the ability to transgress and complete the violation, making it incredibly dangerous. This prohibitive edge of transgression is ultimately more powerful than any inhibitive transgression. The danger that lies within this representation is exciting and the basis of my thesis.

I believe that we have been simultaneously trained to objectify landscape through the exploitation of it via architecture and war, through means required for land-use, site work, and geographic domination. This objectification is rendered as violence upon space: it is transgressive and inhibitive, yet anesthetized to the point of banality, causing it to again be prohibitive. It is self-circular and masochistic, the gaze created by the collective cultural camera repeats this violation over and over again. This repetitive violation is the condition of the everyday in which we forget what we have transgressed before, and are left to visualize landscape in terms of design obsolescence, banal city-scapes, and gratuitous trends. This is especially apparent in suburbs, urban sites and forgotten ghost towns, where landscape has been violated repeatedly through the collective gaze, architecture, planning and development.

# HOW YOU SEE

When the light photons register upon the retina, an image of the object viewed is "seen;" the photon registration changes from light impulses to electronic transmissions, and are sent to the brain. This registration of electrical signals is what enables us to "see."

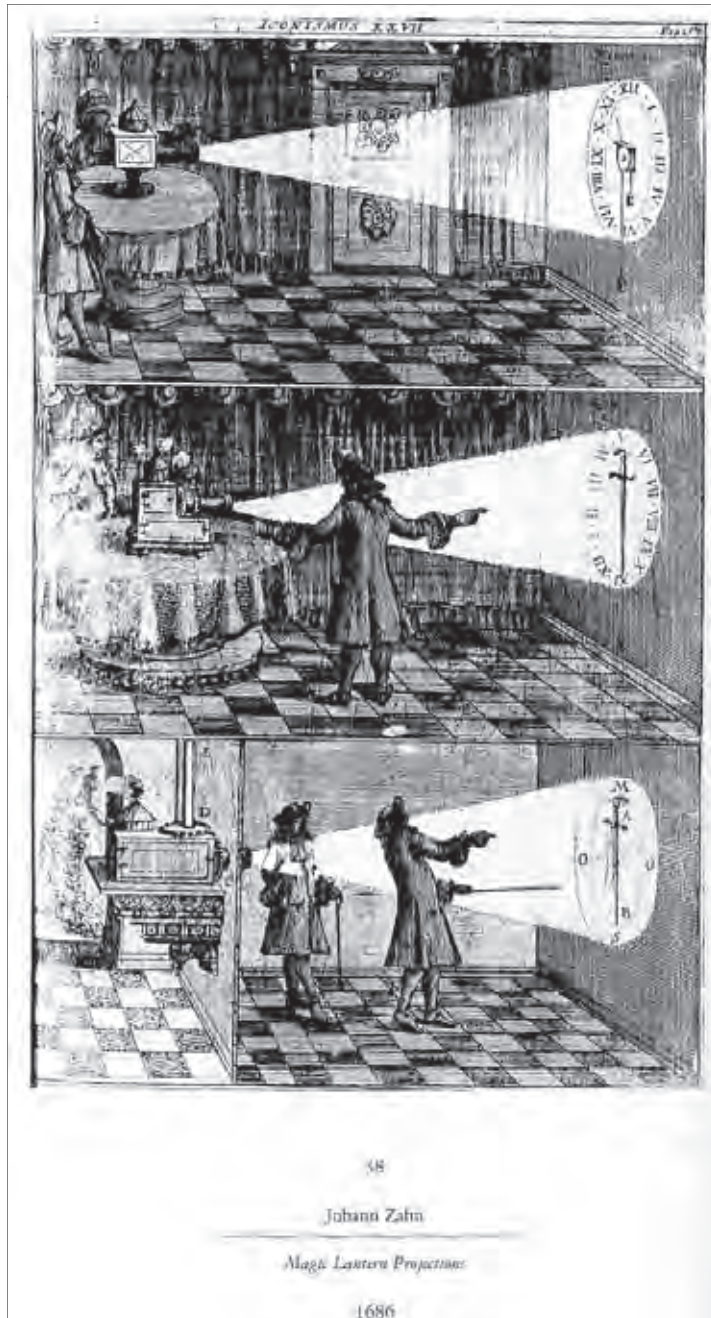
The "image" registered on the retina is upside down, but the brain compensates for this so that we "see" right side up.



Light hits an object or scene in the foreground, and is reflected into the eye.

The light projection passes through the cornea, to the lens and hits the back of the eye (retina).

The same principals apply to cameras and photography.



Safford, Barbara Maria. "Artful Science, Enlightenment Entertainment and the Eclipse of Visual Education," MIT Press, 1994.

## Origins of Photography

"Photography stems from the ancient Greek meaning phos ("light"), and graphis ("stylus", "paintbrush"), together meaning "drawing with light" or "representation by means of lines"; a "drawing"."<sup>1</sup>

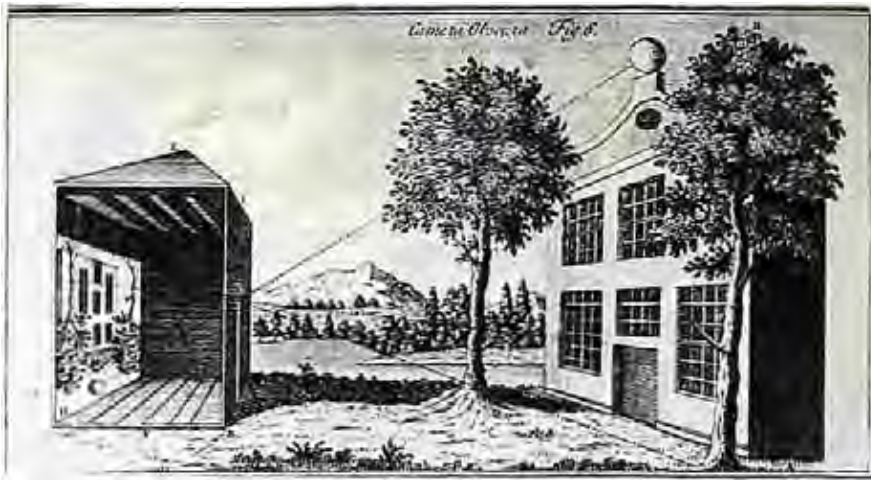
The Camera has a history of being present as far back as Ancient Greece, through the use of the Camera Obscura device. The basic principle of the Camera Obscura (of which the Latin origin refers to dark room) is that when light passes through a small opening in a darkened room, it projects an image upon the wall parallel to the aperture. The image projected is an up-side-down version of the scene outside the room. This type of optical device uses literally the same technique that our own eyes use to "see;" light passes through the lens of our eye, which projects an image on the back of the eye, while our brain process the received up-side-down image as right-side-up.

The device known as the Camera Lucida was developed in 1806 by Dr. W. H. Wollaston as an optical aide for artists to generate a realistic perspective image upon the picture plane.

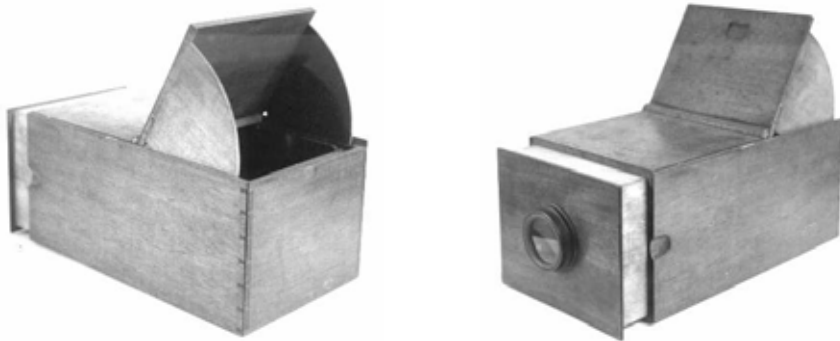
"The camera lucida performs an *optical* superimposition of the subject being viewed and the surface on which the artist is drawing. The artist sees both scene and drawing surface simultaneously, as in a photographic double exposure. This allows the artist to transfer key points from the scene to the drawing surface, thus aiding in the accurate rendering of perspective. The artist can even trace the outlines of objects in the scene."<sup>2</sup>

The development of the modern mechanical optical instrument called the Camera came through achievements in chemistry and optics. Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre developed the photographic process called the daguerreotype in 1839, and labeled it as a method of representation of a "truthful likeness."<sup>3</sup>

The ability to produce a true image on silver-plated copper plates was achieved through chemical processes put upon the copper plate. The result of this process produced a unique image because the daguerreotype was a positive process and had no negative, so each copper plate was of

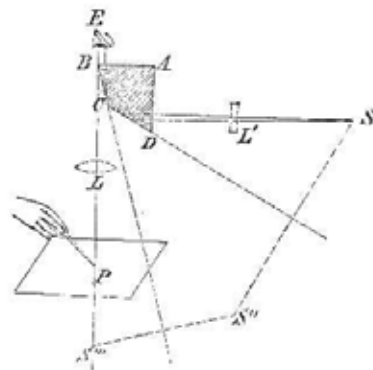


[http://ottenb.arena.de/venice/camera\\_obscura.htm](http://ottenb.arena.de/venice/camera_obscura.htm)



[http://physics.kenyon.edu/EarlyApparatus/Optics/Camera\\_Obscura/Camera\\_Obscura.html](http://physics.kenyon.edu/EarlyApparatus/Optics/Camera_Obscura/Camera_Obscura.html)

The original design of the camera lucida was published by William Hyde Wollaston (1766-1828) in 1807



[http://physics.kenyon.edu/EarlyApparatus/Optics/Camera\\_Lucida/Camera\\_Lucida.html](http://physics.kenyon.edu/EarlyApparatus/Optics/Camera_Lucida/Camera_Lucida.html)

an individual image. Although multiple reproductions could be produced from the initial positive image, it was a cumbersome and expensive process. The image produced by the daguerreotype was considered to be a more truthful form of representation than a painted portrait. Because of this uniqueness of form, and the high level of technology represented by the imaging and photochemical process, having a daguerreotype of one's self represented great financial and social success.

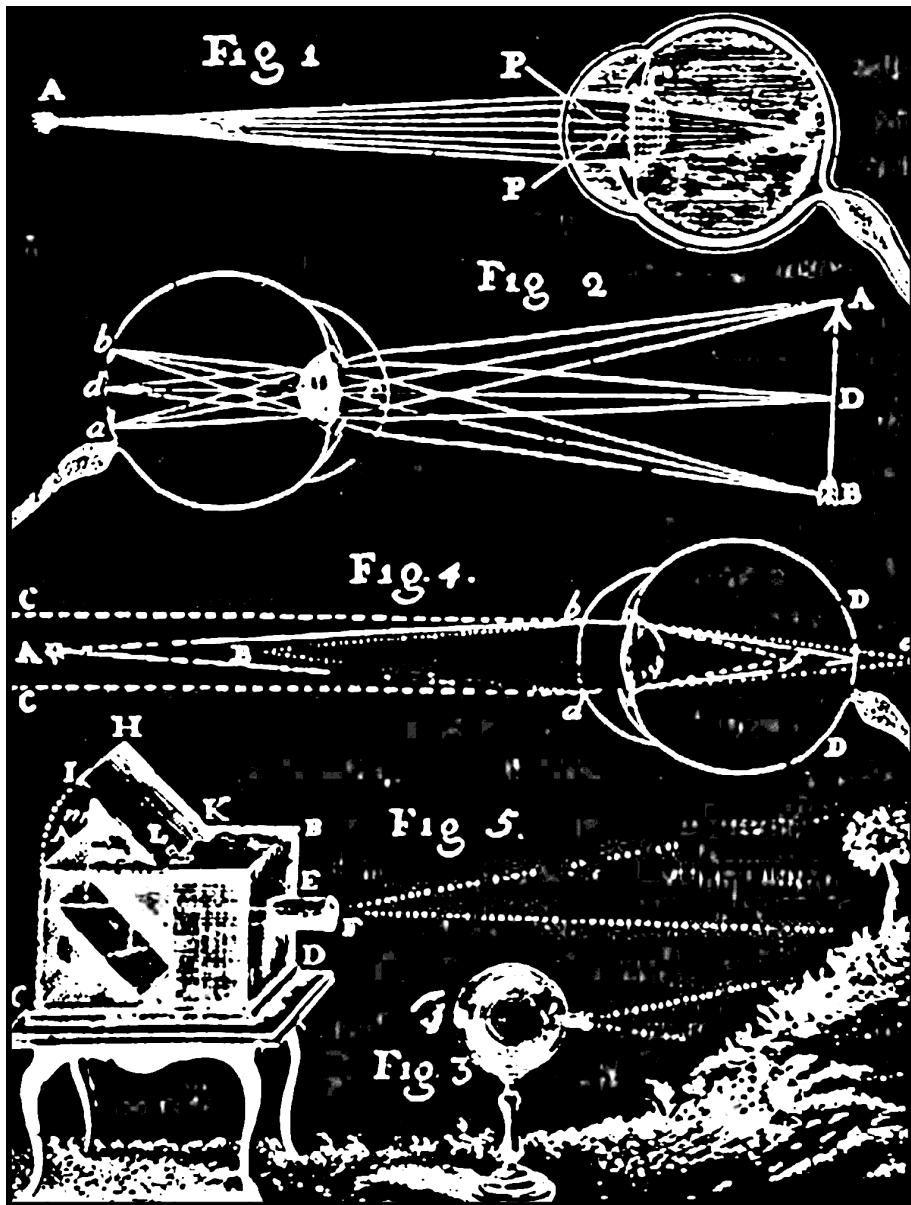
The film-negative camera came through the pursuit of multiple inventors, but George Eastman was the perfecter of the chemical process that captured a negative image on silver chloride coated paper (film) and fixed the image on silver paper, which is still used today. This technology is antiquated, but has birthed offspring in the form of digital cameras and hybrid developmental processes. The camera continues to allow for great range of mechanical representation and reproduction as both an art form and means to document actual events.

### Ontological Meaning

This basic principle of light projection through the use of the camera becomes of issue through the mechanical production of an image through the use of the modern day camera. This condition of the camera lends itself to the ontological discussion of the camera as extension of human vision; what we see exists only because we see it. This extension is grounded in Lacan's understanding of Freudian psychoanalysis in which a child first gazes at herself in the mirror, causing subliminal separation of mother and child and the formation of self-identity. This separation is the first moment of visual violation because the subconscious mind visualizes the individual self as not of that of the mother, but rather as a separate object.

"Lacan characterizes the period when the child begins to draw rudimentary distinctions between self and other as the "mirror stage." This is the period when the child's sense of self and the first steps in the acquisition of language emerge. The "I" (which is constituted as the still physically uncoordinated child in the "imaginary" state of being) finds an image of itself reflected in a "mirror" (i.e. other people or objects). The "mirror" is at once self and not-self. The child typically takes pleasure in this process.

## HOW THE CAMERA SEES



18th C. drawing depicting how the eye receives light to describe how the camera (obscura) works.

The image which the small child sees in the mirror is...an alienated one: the child 'misrecognizes' itself in it, finds in the image a pleasing unity which it does not actually experience in its own body. The imaginary for Lacan is precisely this realm of images in which we make identifications, but in the very act of doing so are led to misperceive and misrecognize ourselves. As the child grows up, it will continue to make such imaginary identifications with objects, and this is how its ego will be built up. For Lacan, the ego is just this narcissistic process whereby we bolster up a fictive sense of unitary selfhood by finding something in the world with which we can identify."<sup>4</sup>

The extension of self as visual violation is described by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*:

"The Photographer engages in three practices: to do, to undergo, to look. The Operator is the Photographer. The Spectator is [those who look at the photograph]... And the person or thing photographed is the target, referent, a kind of little simulacrum, any eidolon emitted by the object, which I would like to call the Spectrum of the Photograph, because this word retains, through its root a relation to "spectacle" and adds to it a that other terrible thing which is there in ever photography: the return of the dead."<sup>5</sup>

Barthes suggests that the photograph is a moment frozen in time; the Spectacle has transgressed from Subject (living) to Object (non-living), a metaphor applied to the dead. More importantly, this text also suggests that the Photographer, or Operator, is the god-like figure in this scenario, taking fire back from Prometheus by the capturing of the Spectrum on film. This reading of the Operator stealing life from the Spectrum implies a violation upon the Subject by making the person or thing the Object. Thus, the photograph is evidence of the violation of the removal of the subjects self, and the resulting production of object as thing owned by the Operator.

Barthes describes photography as a two fold entity, one that is of a "chemical order" which images light upon the photo-sensitive paper; the other of a "physical order," projecting light through an optical mechanism that results in the form of an image. This latter process, the mechanical means of not only representing but producing an image based on the initiative of the Operator, is the foundation for this thesis. The ontological



William Henry Fox Talbot 'Lacock Abbey in Wiltshire', from **The Pencil of Nature** (Longmans, 1844-46) C.119.g.1 15.5x20.5 cm. Photogenic drawing

"Photogenic drawing" was the term used to originally describe the photographic image fixed to paper as means of representation. Sir John F. W. Herschel, a scientist who developed the fixative process, changed the term to "photography" in the mid 19th century. This step towards fixing latent images upon paper was a conceited effort to make a frozen image last forever.

mechanical process suggests that the Operator chooses to frame the Spectrum as a representation of the violation of subject. The Spectrum "metaphorically derives its existence from the photographer."<sup>6</sup>

This understanding of photography's ontological structure is key to discussing landscape. Through pictorial representation of landscape, and the objectification of the subject as defined by Barthes, we have been trained to see landscape as extension of man like a prosthetic device. Through both the historical period of the Picturesque, and photography's commodification of the term picturesque to infer that the subject is worthy of a picture, we have come to an understanding that landscape is something to be objectified and thus violated. This landscape is natural, industrial, urban and virtual. It is the culmination of the power of the Sublime represented through the framing of the camera. The making of the Spectrum has been embedded into our collective memory and constitutes framework for both engaging in the sublime -- "Suggested Photo Spot" demarcations in national parks -- and the developing architectural site-work as the creation of the sublime.

### **Production and Commodification of the Object**

"For the first time, photography freed the hand from the most important artistic tasks in the process of pictorial reproduction – tasks that now devolved solely upon the eye looking into a lens. And since the eye perceives more swiftly than the hand can draw, the process of pictorial reproduction was enormously accelerated, so that it could no keep pace with speech."

- Walter Benjamin, "Work of Art in the Age of Reproducibility."<sup>7</sup>

Walter Benjamin suggests that with the birth of photography, the burden of manual reproduction of art was lifted from the artist, and instead a new medium was formed based on two conditions; that of framing the object and that of representing the object. At the start of the 20th century, painting, drawing and lithography became obsolete tools used to represent other mediums. Through the development of photography, these traditional artistic mediums were freed from the trappings of two-dimensional representation of three-dimensional space, and were allowed to deal with art on an abstract level. Because of this technological development, Surrealism and Dada art were able to come forth as the generators for contemporary art.



Shulman, Julius, "The Photography of Architecture and Design," Whitney Library of Design, 1977. Photo: Julius Shulman, Santa Clara County Building in San Jose, CA. Architects: Cuadill, Rowlett & Scott; Associate Architects: Albert Hoover & Associates.

Photography is typically used as a means of representation of other mediums or as a method for objectifying space. Photography has not transgressed its weird flat physical space, depicting light from a three dimensional world on a two dimensional plane. It is often just a document of this violation of the Subject. Other mediums generated from its territory of mechanical reproduction pose similar problems – how can the violence photography projects be generative? It is easy to argue that cinema and digital software have pushed the edges of this problem with their fantastic representation of the sublime through the flat picture plane – there are many photographic mediums which capture movement, motion and immersive virtual spaces that are very similar to conditions experienced in the sublime world in the “here and now.” However, these mediums are all still violent representations of the “here and now.”

“And although this can apply not only to art but (say) to a landscape moving past the spectator in a film, in the work of art this process touches on a highly sensitive core, more vulnerable than that of any natural object. That core is its authenticity.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Violation Rendered Generative**

Photography inevitably casts the poor photo-auteur as the flâneur, set out to capture chance encounters permanently on film much like a writer penning folklore. This notion of “chance,” stretched well beyond the understanding of a happy accident, becomes the subjective view of the purposeful will of the Photographer as generator of pictorial violation.

The photographer is limited by the technological and symbolic confines of the photograph, and also by the double meaning of representation of authorship. Typecast as three authors - the flâneur (Larry Clark, Diane Arbus), the director of the narrative (Cindy Sherman, William Eggleston, Richard Avedon), the framer of the sublime (Ansel Adams, Mathew Barney), or the generator of violence (John Pfahl, Gordon-Matta Clark) – the photographer has limited our perception of space, while also violating it through the analytical role of mechanical means of production through the Operator, Spectrum and Spectator. These three roles photographers play extend their reach to the medium of architecture. The contrived space



"NASA's Mars Exploration Rover Spirit used its navigation camera to capture this stereo view during the rover's 399th martian day, or sol, (Feb. 15, 2005). An attempted drive on that sol did not gain any ground toward nearby "Larry's Lookout" because of slippage that churned the soil on the slope. Spirit used its alpha particle X-ray spectrometer to examine the churned soil. This stereo view is presented in a cylindrical-perspective projection with geometric seam correction."

Image credit: NASA/JPL (<http://marsrovers.jpl.nasa.gov/gallery/panoramas/spirit/>)

formed by the Photographer called landscape, has much to do with this issue of reproduction and authenticity:

"The social significance of film, even and especially in its most positive form, is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic side: the liquidation of the value of tradition in the cultural heritage... 'All legends, all mythologies, and all myths, all the founders of religions...await their celluloid resurrection, and the heroes are pressing at the gates.'"<sup>9</sup>

As an example of how this objectification of landscape as ontological picturesque defines our collective view of landscape, one can look at the current representation of Mars exploration.

On June 10th and July 7th, 2003, NASA sent twin robots to the planet Mars, "in search of answers about the history of water on Mars."<sup>10</sup> For almost two years, these two robots have photographed the Martian landscape in search of water and other evidence of life on Mars. Like a mini, modern-day Lewis and Clark, the Spirit and Opportunity rovers have made even the post foreign place seem analogous to the American West. Sending these two rovers to Mars is an enormous technological accomplishment, yet we find ourselves in awe of the photographic scenes transmitted to us by these mechanical tourists. This 21st century version of the Grand Tour defies any terrascopic guidebook to the "great outdoors."

1 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Photography>

2 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camera\\_lucida](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camera_lucida)

3 <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/daghtml/dagdag.html>

4 T. R. Quigley, 1998. <http://homepage.newschool.edu/~quigley/vcs/psychoanalysis.html>

5 Barthes, Roland. Camera Lucida, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, Ltd., Toronto. 1981

6 Ibid.

7 Benjamin, Walter. Work of Art in the Age of Reproducibility (Third Version), Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Vol. 4, 1938-1940. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 2003.

8 Ibid

9 Ibid

10 <http://marsrovers.jpl.nasa.gov/overview/>

11 Ibid

**SITE OCCUPATION**



## RENDERING THE GAZE

The "gaze" refers to the feminist criticism of cinema & photography, both of which typically represent women as objects in advertising and media. The gaze refers to the male objectification of women through film to render the perfect female. The latent image of the photograph further promotes the female form within it as literally a still image; a nonexistent woman observed in a one-way gaze.

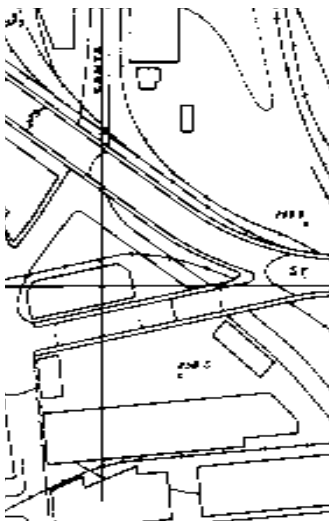


**“Glass architecture was part of an entire abstract formal system in which figuration and representation were brought to a minimum; when glass became mirror, this architecture was no longer consistent with the system from which it originated; it even questioned it. With mirror buildings we face a vocabulary derived from abstraction as a support for the most realistic of images, the mirrored ones.”**

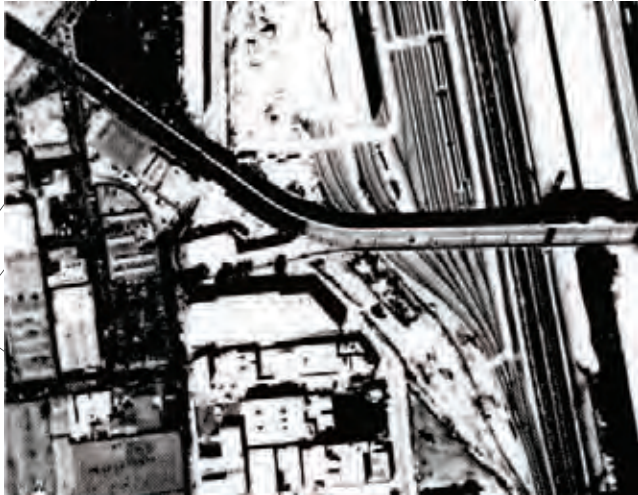
(Diana Agrest, “Mirror of Architecture/Architecture of Mirror.”  
MIT Press, Cambridge. 1993)



# CONCRETE ISLAND

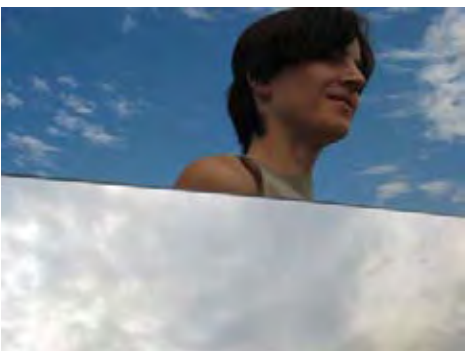
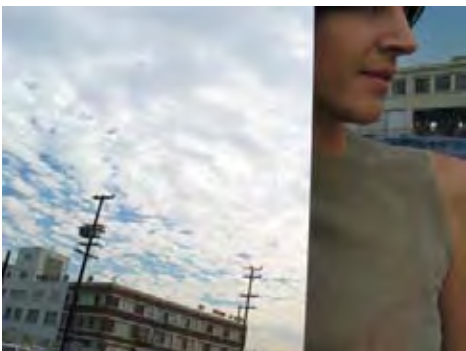


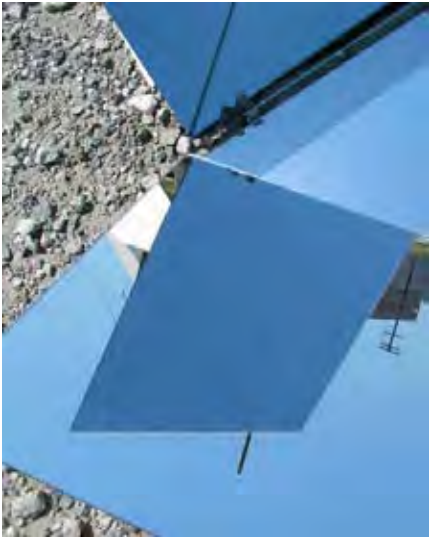
“Concrete Island,” a near futures novel by JG Ballard, is set in contemporary society. The focus of the novel is on the breakdown of a male architect, who crashes his car into the sunken highway embankment “below the city.” This can be read as a critique on the upper middle class and the notion of what it means to be powerful. The architect crashes his car and becomes stranded in the embankment. He is powerless on the “island,” as he calls it. The grass of the island grows tall, tangling and entrapping him. Drivers above on the freeway cannot see him even when he tries to run in front of their speeding vehicles. Even his office, which he can see through the cityscape, does not notice that he has gone missing. They cannot see him. Because of this loss of power, the architect falls into madness.



The ideal location for intervention is any *concrete island* - any non-designed space between articulated sites. For the purpose of the thesis the site for activation are represented in three conditions: the mirror skyscraper, the parking lot, and the void. These are all non-sites contains nothing but negative space resulting from transportation byways and automobile usage, or reflections of other buildings.

# IN-SITE OCCUPATIONS





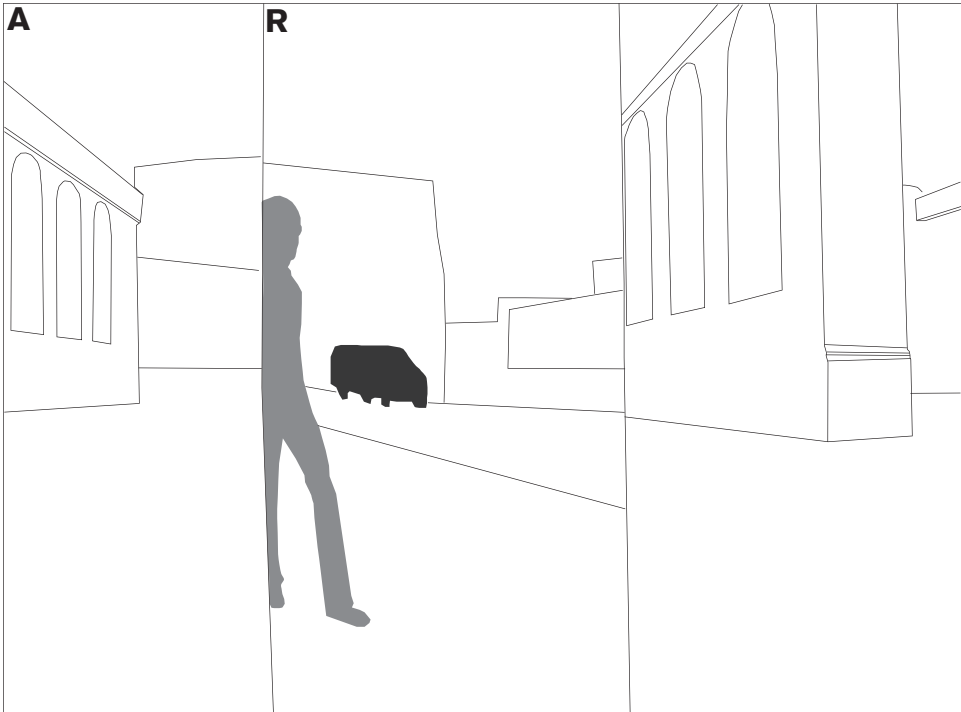
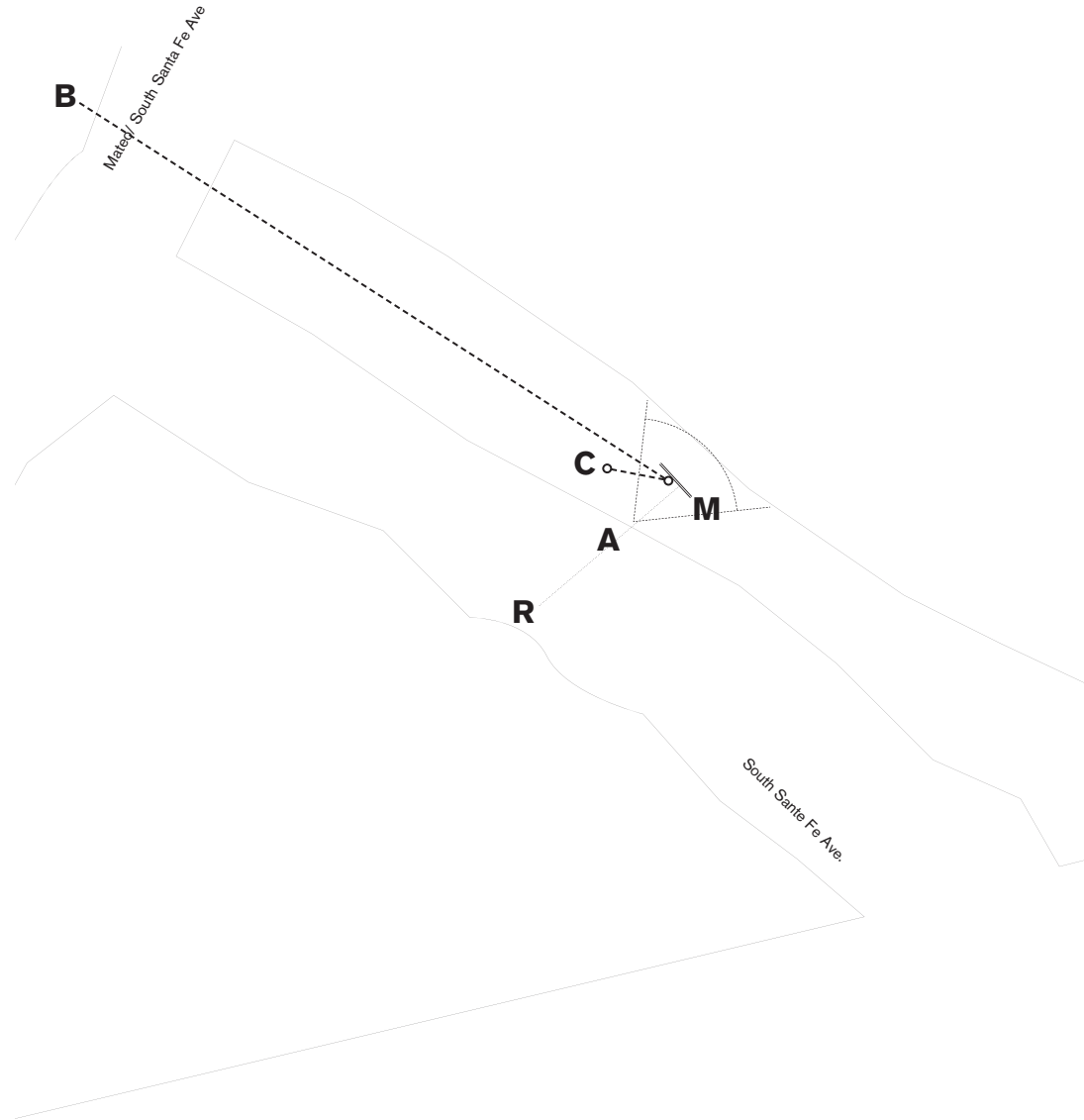
In landscape, mirrored surfaces act like camera apparati, decontextualizing the images projected on their surfaces. Mirrored architecture fractures landscape by objectifying space, time and movement. Very smooth metallic surfaces reflect light energy (photons), actively interfering with light energy moving through space. When applied to the skin of a building, these metallicized glass surfaces erase the volumes within, and create a new semiotic urban language of image.

**“Glass architecture was part of an entire abstract formal system in which figuration and representation were brought to a minimum; when glass became mirror, this architecture was no longer consistent with the system from which it originated; it even questioned it. With mirror buildings we face a vocabulary derived from abstraction as a support for the most realistic of images, the mirrored ones.”**

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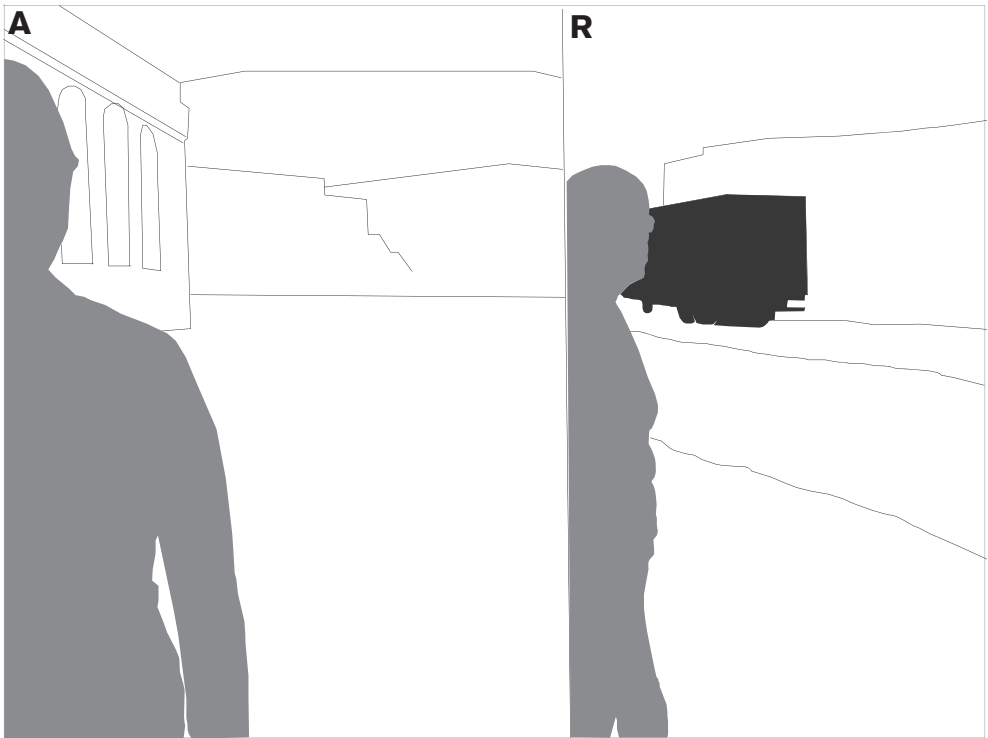
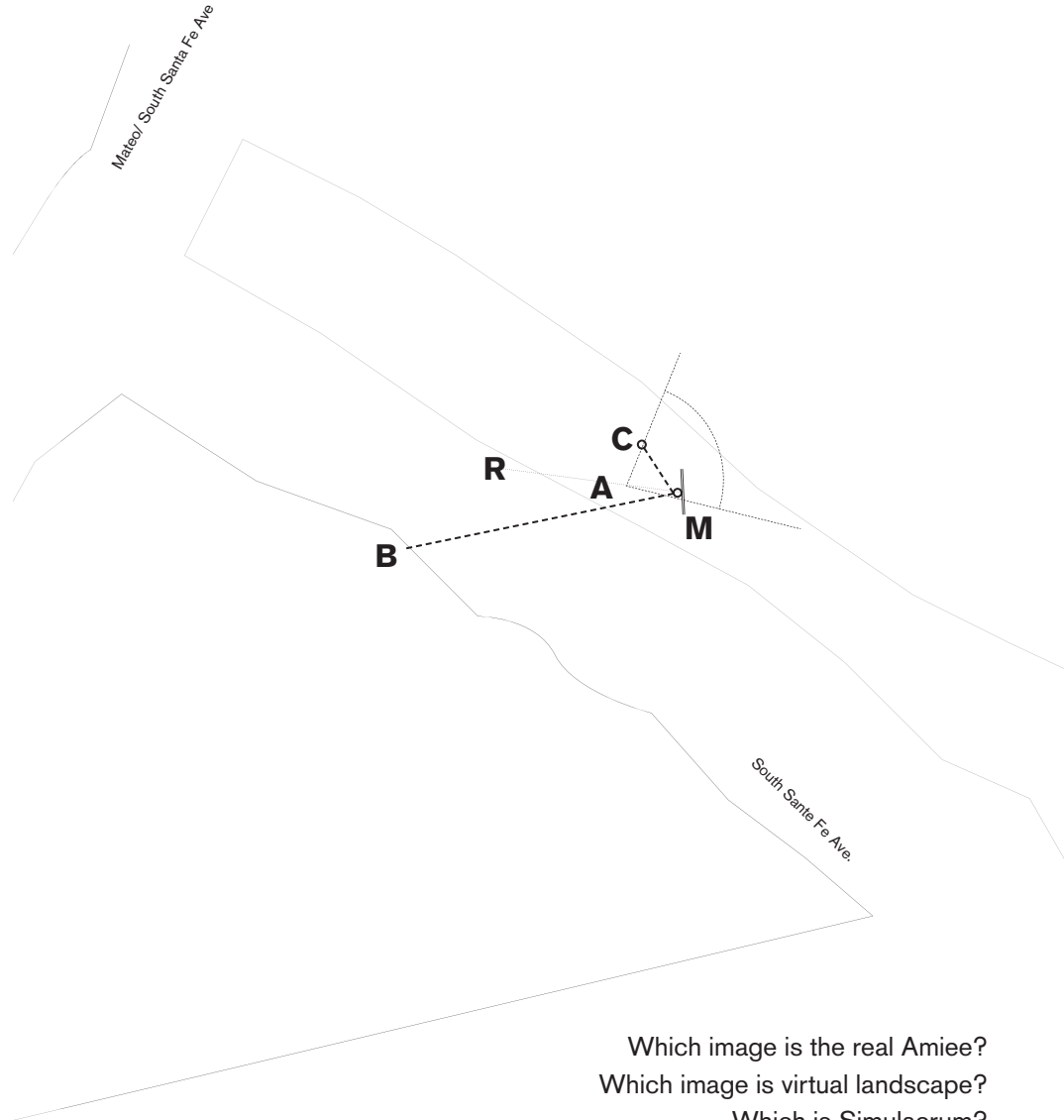


- A** Photographer's position and focal point
- B** Mirrored reflection focal point
- C** Amiee's position
- M** Mirror position
- R** Landscape reflection

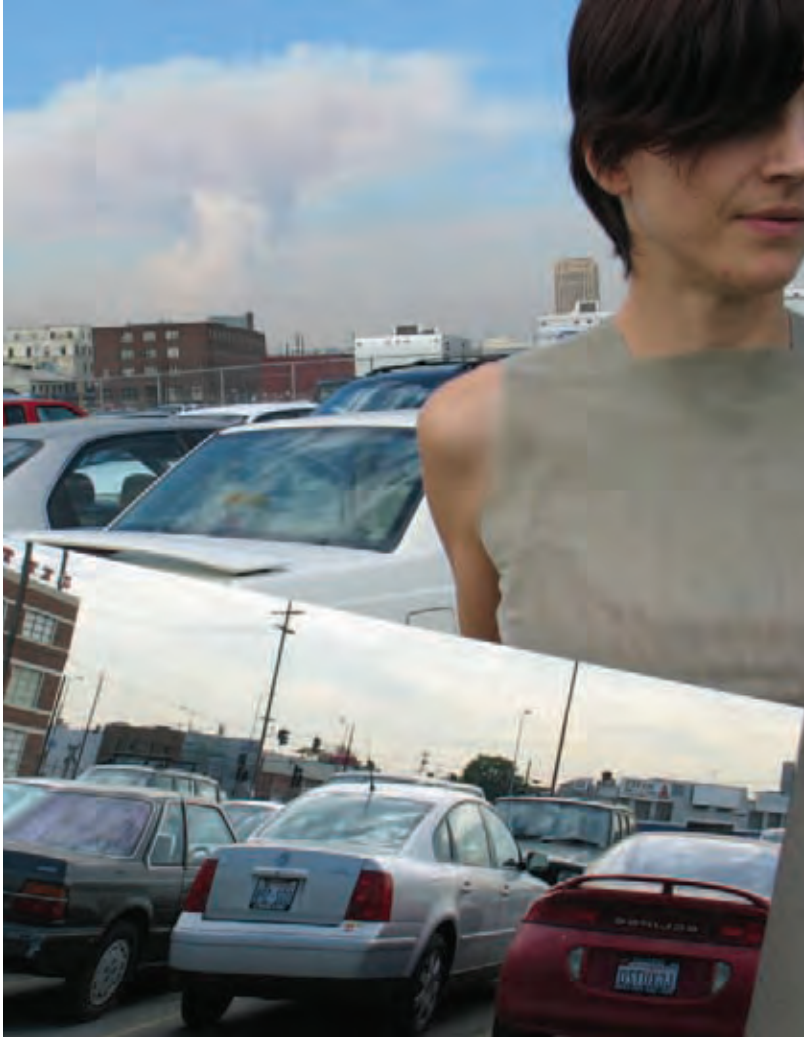




- A** Photographer's position and focal point
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Which image is the real Amiee?  
 Which image is virtual landscape?  
 Which is Simulacrum?  
 Who is the Spectator?



Violation of the Subject  
through transgression of self  
into that of object (non-self) /  
mirrored surfaces bisect the  
perspective picture plane,  
redirecting light (space) from  
behind the viewer to a  
position in front of the  
viewer /interjecting  
mirrored surfaces  
into the landscape  
actively transgress the tradi-  
tional vista by cutting it, and inserting an-  
other vista into the projection plane / mirrored  
surfaces on buildings change the language of  
architecture by dissolving volume and creating  
a non-contextual image / reflective architecture  
is exploitative and non-objective / the con-  
text of site and design are broken into frag-  
ments of images, changing our perception  
on space, time, architecture

**NON-SITE**



What if we take the ideas of objectification of landscape beyond the concept of living simulacrum and turn it into a tool for intervention -- can we create both a situation that takes advantage of banal landscapes and to reposition them as surreal while also simultaneously doing something beyond re-objectifying space?

Yes.

But how?

By using the tools of photography and architectural techniques we can both visually represent landscape anew while also generating ideas for altering space.

Film a landscape, edit it, cut it up.

Play it back, see it differently.

Then act out a scene in real life.

Edit it, cut it up.

Make a change.

Grow.



Vito Acconci, **Following Piece**, 1969

