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Ginger, Andrew

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From Cultural Translation to Translations inside Photographs (1860-1930)

Abstract

A significant amount of photography in Spain, from the earliest days of Charles Clifford in the 1850s to industrial images of the 1920s, sought to offer its audience characteristic images of the country. As a result, much Spanish photography deals in cultural translation: it seeks to transfer into a relatively small, two-dimensional version the realities of a society and culture, and then to transmit that version onwards to an audience. The transfer from three-dimensional objects to two-dimensional forms has a further consequence, however, as regards the effects created by those shapes. I explore here how the resulting forms and structures involve a whole series of other transformations and metamorphoses within the photographs, and of things crossing or being borne across the image (*translatio*). Cultural translation gives rise to translations within photographs. More still, that specific variety of *translatio* becomes a central subject and aesthetic characteristic of the images themselves.

Main Text

A significant amount of photography in Spain, from the earliest days of Charles Clifford in the 1850s to industrial images of the 1920s, sought to offer its audience characteristic images of the country. Photographs taken to this end ranged widely in their subject matter: they might celebrate historic buildings, record local customs and practices, exalt the homeland's progress in technology and infrastructure, or portray its celebrities and notables. In some cases, for not dissimilar purposes, photographers journeyed to Spain's colonial territories in Africa or simply to nearby Muslim lands connected to Spain through its own Islamic past.¹ As a result, much Spanish photography deals in cultural translation: it seeks to transfer into a relatively small, two-dimensional version the realities of a society and culture, and then to transmit that version onwards to an audience. In some cases, as in the extensive international distribution of Laurent y Cía (Laurent & Co), the photographs were destined as much for armchair tourists abroad as for Spaniards at home. Often, the versions of something from one part of Spain were for the interest of people in another. Even within the same locality, people sought out photographic versions of a person, practice, or monument, treasuring their own translated copy of the valued entity. In the case of north Africa, the armchair Spaniard could peer upon a rendering of exotic, yet familiar neighbours.² In all these respects, photography was simply one of a panoply of cultural translations undertaken in the peninsula: travelogues, galleries of local and national types drawn and described, lithographs, articles for pictorial journals like *Semanario Pintoresco Español* or *Museo Universal*. They are expressions of the vast enterprise of understanding, cataloguing, and transmitting the specifics of the country, past and present, so typical both of the liberal nationalism that dominated the country's politics, and of the curiosity of foreign visitors and markets. Elizabeth Edwards has described photography in this period as 'a form of externalised memory par excellence'.³

The form – the structure and organisation – of the photographic image, the shapes in which people posed, were key ways in which the meaning and significance of the subject matter could be rendered evident to the viewer. Photographic form therefore plays a central role in the Spanish obsession with cultural translation: it literally enables the subject matter to take eloquent shape in a 2-D, miniaturised version.⁴ It is crucial to the *translatio* – the bearing or carrying across – of things

1 Jordana Mendelson comments both on the importance to Spanish artists of documenting their nation and on the complexities of Spanish efforts to document north Africa in *Documenting Spain: Artists, Exhibition Culture, and the Modern Nation, 1929-1939* ([n.p.]: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), pp.xxii-xxiii, xxvi-xxvii.

2 See, for example, Susan Martín-Márquez's comments on Ortiz Echagüe's work, in *Disorientations: Spanish Colonialism in Africa and the Performance of Identity* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2008), pp.237-38.

3 *The Camera as Historian: Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885-1918* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2012), p.14.

4 I discuss the implications in relation to geometrical form at length in: 'Universal Language and Cultural Translation in Nineteenth-Century Photography and Geometry', *History of Photography*, 36 (2012), 385-96. For an analysis of the equivalence between systems that is required, see: Maurizio Gagliano, 'Photography as Translation: Visual

from one place to another, from their original physical reality into a print – and, in our imaginations, vice-versa. Our ability to discern similarities, however fantastical, is fundamental here, as Walter Benjamin observed.⁵ The photographers I discuss in this article are all engaged in translation in that sense: they are all exemplars of the cultural translation industry that arose in nineteenth-century Spain. But my primary concern here is with the effect created by the forms into which these artists have translated Spain and north Africa. My starting point for dealing with such effects of the medium is uncontentious: simply that photography is a way of drawing with light; I make no more radical claim here about the specific qualities of this medium as opposed to any other. I treat the process of transferring the original object into an image - on which so much scholarly ink has been spilt - as only the initial phase of translation in photographs. My interest is in exploring how the resulting shapes and structures involve a whole series of other transformations and metamorphoses within the photographs, and of things crossing or being borne across the image. Cultural translation gives rise to translations within photographs.

In her influential *Atlas of Emotions*, Giuliana Bruno emphasises how, historically, in images there were often 'multiple, mobile perspectives' and a 'mobilized observer'. We need not look at images through the assumption that there was a 'singular fixed viewpoint' onto them, pinned down through the use of geometrical perspective.⁶ Similarly, contemplating English nineteenth-century art, Linda Shires observes how photographers and others 'experimented with ambient viewers and fixed views, fixed views and darting eyes, and encouraged oscillations among points of view'. This was true of many images based on geometrical perspective, as well as those that were not.⁷ I will emphasise in this article the nature and compelling force of the consequent dynamic within the forms of the photographic image in Spain. At the heart of that quality is the fundamental potential of things to be translated into one another. In one way, that potency resembles the ideal, never-attained, messianic notion of a pure language, of which Walter Benjamin spoke, and in which all others finally converge, each translated into every one.⁸ At the same time, the core of photographs does not, really, lie beyond them in a utopian future, any more than their translations might be described as 'this pure language [...] which no longer means or expresses anything, but is, as expressionless and creative Word, that which is meant in all languages'.⁹ Rather, the crossing over, the movement between forms, the *translatio* within the images, is vividly before us, visibly present in the photographs and their forms. It is palpable, and from this its power derives.

My approach here is deliberately exploratory and organic, seeking to tease out of a range of artists' work key effects of such translations within photographs, rather than to be schematic. I find flitting effects, where a pattern seems to turn into other patterns; proto-forms redolent with the transformation of elemental shapes into developed entities, and vice-versa; the twin emergence and disappearance of poses. A series of processes are at work here: the projection of a 3-dimensional object into two dimensions; the task of revealing a negative as a positive; how the camera crosses the paths of people and objects, and vice-versa. Taken together, such phenomena present a range of kinds of *translatio*: a crossing and bearing across of a camera through the world, of an image across

Meaning, Digital Meaning, Trans-mediality', *Recherches sémiotiques / Semiotic Inquiry*, 28.1-2 (2008), p. 29-42 (pp.30, 40). For a discussion of the relationship between aesthetics and documentary in more contemporary photography, see Parvati Nair, *A Different Light: The Photography of Sebastião Salgado* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011), pp.19-20, 25-27, 44-45, 126-66 (specifically on translation of object into aesthetic form, and the suggestiveness of the consequent form beyond its original object, see pp.143-44, 164-66).

5 On this facet of Benjamin's approach to mimesis, see: Neal Leach, 'Walter Benjamin, Mimesis and the Dreamworld of Photography', in *Intersections: Architectural Histories and Critical Theories*, ed. By Iain Borden & Jane Rendell (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.27-38.

6 *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002), p.177.

7 *Perspectives: Modes of Viewing and Knowing in Nineteenth-Century England* (Columbia: Ohio State University, 2009), p.12.

8 Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn, ed. by Hannah Arendt (London: Harper Collins, 1992), pp.70-82 (pp.74-76, 80, 82). On Benjamin's view that images might relate to Messianic time, see, for example, Max Pensky, 'Method and Time: Benjamin's Dialectical Images', in *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, ed. by David S. Ferris (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), pp.177-98 (p.193).

9 'The Task of the Translator', p.80.

dimensions, and between developed and embryonic form. Running through these several translations in varying combinations, I find a series of recurrent qualities that I identify as *pulsation*, *flirting*, and the *larval*, terms that I elaborate in this article as I explore them. What these three ultimately have in common is an aesthetic effect of sensual metamorphosis at the heart of translation within photographs.

Undeniably, both the translation of persons and objects into photographs and the patterns of transformation within the images, have an ideological significance. Quite properly, a critical eye may be cast on the attitudes towards gender, ethnicity, class, and nationality that they evoke. To look no further, the photographs of north Africans and that of a prostitute in Seville, considered in this article, richly merit such questioning. However, that is not my focus here. What concerns me, rather, is a more generalised dynamic of translation within the photographs that facilitates any number of different positions on politics, gender, or ethnicity (some of which, of course, may be more welcome than others). In fact, in some historical cases – notably, José Ortiz Echagüe's photographs of Spain's regions - the distinctive formal features of the same image were deployed by different political sides to violently opposed ideological ends.¹⁰ My interest here is in what Carol Armstrong once described as the 'subideological' elements of photographic images.¹¹ That is to say, that I look aside from ideological critiques and towards the aesthetic resonance of the effects achieved by practitioners. While I deal, at times, with the connotations of images, the things they suggest, I have deliberately made no particular attempt to map these onto any given system of psychology or psychoanalysis. My emphasis is more on the fact that there are connotations, and on their general nature (the inanimate become animate, the industrial become vision-like, for example), than with any attempt to pin those resonances to a specific worldview. In turn, while I evoke some of the erotic or pseudo-erotic dimensions of translation's dynamic within photographs – what I call its *flirtation* – I ultimately argue that this opens up the potential for translation between many different gender roles.

In the late 1860s, the photographic company Laurent y Cía produced an image of the new railway bridge at Zuera, in Aragon, North-East Spain. It was one of many such photographs taken in those years to celebrate and promote advances in Spanish infrastructure.¹² The photograph is, at first sight, bold and imposing in its stillness. Close up against us is the vast stone entrance, rendered all the more overpowering through contrast by the thin lines of rail track and the nondescript ground just before it. It is thick, dark, and classical in its stonework, like the proscenium of a theatre or a portal leading forth into some special place: a temple or palace. In its evocation of monumental antiquity, it is reminiscent too of some permanent, immovable version of the temporary arches of triumph erected during Royal tours around Spain, rising up like spectres of another place and time, thrusting themselves into the present, or indeed of the more lasting such edifices in the heart of European cities, now transposed to an otherwise remote location.¹³ It dominates the landscape. Through it we perceive, as if in some virtuoso technical show of Renaissance perspective, the geometrical lines of the metal structure, stretching far, far back in narrowing diagonals, until they reach a tiny, silhouetted human pictured at the other side. The stark vastness of the entrance's two-dimensional surface brings sharply into relief the three dimensional illusion of depth behind. The diminished size of the person standing beyond impresses on us the scale and length of the construction.

10 Javier Ortiz Echagüe & Julio Montero Díaz, 'Documentary Uses of Artistic Photography: Spain, Types and Costumes by José Ortiz Echagüe', *History of Photography*, 35 (2011), 394-415.

11 *Scenes in a Library: Reading the Photograph in the Book* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), p.280 (specifically in the context of postcolonial considerations of images). See my 'Universal Language and Cultural Translation', pp.387, 396.

12 On the parallel phenomenon elsewhere in Europe and its similar use of geometry, see: Elizabeth Anne McCauley, *Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris, 1848-1871* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), pp.195-232 (especially page 215)

13 On the earlier monuments and images of them, see Lee Fontanella, *Clifford: Un fotógrafo en la Corte de Isabel II* (Madrid: Ediciones El Viso, 1997), p.54.

The photograph of the rail bridge has taken us on a journey. Our eyes have passed through a majestic portal. Its two-dimensional frame echoes that of the print itself. We have travelled far through a tunnel occupying a different dimension, walled in by intricate patterns of white light held in mesmerising combinations of black lines, a drawing made of light – literally, a photo-graph. A figure – almost featureless – awaits us as it might in a vision or a dream. We have been translated, certainly, in the most literally etymological sense: we are taken from one location to another by using the rail bridge. But the symbolic resonance of the image carries a far greater affective charge: we enjoy a heightened consciousness of what *being borne across* – *translatio* – may mean to us. And that allusiveness is associated with photographic images themselves: the frame through which our eyes enter, the fact of the print's two dimensions and of its evocation of three, its being a portal, a gateway. It is not just we as viewers whose translation is conjured up by the image. Just as easily, the distant, dark figure might be borne towards us across the visionary tunnel of light.¹⁴ The individual resembles likewise the mysterious protagonist on some Romantic stage set, a Don Álvaro traversing the extent of the stage, back to front, delivering his soliloquy as he approaches the audience.¹⁵ There is not just the implication of movement, but of two contrasting movements: towards and away from where we stand gazing. That hesitation – or perhaps better, oscillation – is present in the tunnelling geometrical lines themselves. Their perspectival effect can collapse before our eyes into a 2-D pattern of four near-identical quadrilaterals, with wide bases and narrow tips, two to the left and right criss-crossed with patterns, one to the bottom much darker, and another to the top more nearly white. As we see those shapes form, the tiny figure is no longer beyond us but directly before our eyes, a miniature human mysteriously at the heart of geometrical shapes that trap it in or extend out from it, a dream-like combination of abstraction and figuration. Such effects depend, of course, on how we process visual information and how it is ordered in our mind's eye, with the consequent potential for what we see as perspective to break down before us, and for the creation of optical illusions where what is still seems to move. This is particularly the case, as Ernst Gombrich noted, when three dimensions are translated into two, a relationship, Lindsay Smith observes, that photography's evocations of perspective strained from its earliest days.¹⁶ The photograph is a continual translation of us and of itself, flicking between two and three dimensions, between worlds, opening and closing its depth, drawing us in and pushing up against us, now a mathematical pattern, now a magical vision, now an image of a person on a rail bridge. To borrow Gombrich's words, 'Like the ghost of Hamlet's father, "Tis here! 'Tis here! "Tis gone!'.¹⁷ It matters, then, not just that a photograph 'translates' an object or person into its image, but that it embodies translation within itself: the very notion and experience of *bearing across* or *being borne across*. In so doing, it *pulsates*, by which I mean that we do not see it as a single, stable image but rather as something that mutates continuously between – or simultaneously evokes – a defined series of different patterns and their connotations. In the case of the Zuera bridge, we pass from three dimensional to two dimensional, person near to person far away, traveling across to traveling nowhere.

Famously, the philosopher Ortega y Gasset compared the photography of a later artist, José Ortiz Echagüe, to 'the larva a few minutes before it rips apart its form, when it has begun to feel beneath itself the silk of some definitive wings'.¹⁸ Ortega was ostensibly remarking on the photographer's

14 On the 'natively surreal' character of photography, see Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979), p.51

15 Duque de Rivas, *Don Álvaro; o, la fuerza del sino*, ed. Alberto Sánchez (Madrid: Cátedra, 1990), Act III, scene 3, pp.105-08). This is one of the most famous scenes in Spanish Romantic theatre.

16 See Ernst Gombrich, 'Illusion and Visual Deadlock', in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on The Theory of Art* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1985), pp.151-59 (especially page 157) (similar problems concerned nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century psychologists and physiologists of vision; see: Linda Nead, *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography, Film c.1900* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007), pp.30-40); Lindsay Smith, *The Politics of Focus: Women, Children, and Nineteenth-Century Photography* (Manchester: MUP, 1998), pp.17-18.

17 'Illusion and Visual Deadlock', p.152.

18 'Para una ciencia del traje popular', in *Obras Completas, II: Confesiones de "El Espectador"* (Madrid: Revista de

use of subject matter, his capturing a transitional moment in customs and dress where the old is dying out and the new imminent. But the comment may justly be extended to Ortiz Echagüe's techniques for making images, in particular, the way that he prints onto carbon paper. The point has been suggested in a review of a recent (2014) exhibition of his work.¹⁹ In a photograph such as *Dusk in Tetuan* (1910), we see recognisable shapes of the city and sky: a tower, domes, and arch, walls, a figure walking towards the camera, shadows and light. By the standards of any Laurent & Cía photograph, the image falls short of sharp definition: the edges made by lines are less than crisp, the contrasts of light and shade are attenuated into modulations of grey. Specific features – whether the Moroccan's face or the tower's intricate ornamentation – are rough markings, or vaguely figured. The whole resembles a charcoal sketch. From one perspective, it is as if the photograph had not quite come fully into being, as if – to echo Ortega y Gasset – it were just emerging from its larval stage. This is a *before*: prior to when the definitive reproduction takes shape, but also, metaphorically, before the medium of photography exists, when only sketching and engraving were possible, as if photography were revisiting its own ancestors. Ortiz Echagüe himself acknowledged the deliberately archaic feel of his work.²⁰ From another point of view, it is as if the photograph has passed to a later moment, it is an *after*: an initial image, produced by the camera through mechanical reproduction, has been refined into artistry by the craft of an artisan. These two responses to the image have a common origin: in order for *Dusk in Tetuan* to look like a proto-photograph (so to speak), it has to have been worked on during the development of the negative to a positive print. Put more metaphorically, in the photograph, *before* and *after* are co-dependent, perhaps even the same thing. Javier Ortiz Echagüe (the photographer's grandson) observes that for the artist himself, the creation of a positive was as much a part of the making of a photograph as was the taking of the negative: both together constituted the image. More still, in the artist's own view, the laborious alteration of the negative absolutely did not detract from its photographic nature. On the contrary, the whole point was to strip away inessentials so as to bring forth, not his own handiwork, but the fundamental forms captured by the camera,²¹ that is, by the light falling through the lens upon the chemicals to make a drawing. That profoundly photographic character of the image, that crystallising of a lived instant, is vividly manifest in *Dusk in Tetuan* where the human figure is spotted at a moment in time, strolling away from the arch and towards us. His motion, his bearing himself through place and time, his translation are echoed across many of Ortiz Echagüe's Moroccan images: ladies seen from behind going down the streets of a *zoco*, people traversing the streets of Fez, women turning their heads or adjusting their veils to look at us, a child bursting into laughter or joy at the sight of the photographer. As they move, they take on their photographic form. Just as surely, they will shed it once the camera has clicked. It will come to light, be seen truly, only in the world of the print, with its resonances of both a *before* and an *after*. The photograph thus presents us with an oscillating experience of time, both that of the making of the image (taking a shot, elaborating a positive) and of the history of visual media itself (charcoal sketching, mechanical reproduction). It pulsates, we could say, across future and past, like Ortega y Gasset's larva at the very point of metamorphosis. Only there is the experience of translation most itself. The photographic pose – the assuming of an ostensibly elemental form – is at the very heart of this *translatio*; that is, both the way the individual photographed adopts a stance, and the way the photograph itself presents one. The power of Ortiz Echagüe's images rests upon this fact. In one photograph – catalogued simply as *Rifeña 2* (c.1910) – a young woman tugs slightly down on her veil so that her eyes are just about, and only just about, fully visible. She stares right at the camera, her free hand upon her hip. The clothing atop her is an outline containing a broad spread of grey;

Occidente, 1963), pp.695-700 (p.696) ['Es la larva unos minutos antes de rasgar su forma, cuando siente ya bajo ella agitarse la seda de unas alas definitivas']. On the relationship between Ortiz Echagüe's work and debates about turning points between the modern and tradition, see Mendelson, *Documenting Spain*, pp.119-23.

19 María Quintana, 'Fotografía: José Ortiz Echagüe. España era de carbón', *El Mundo*, 10 June 2014

[<http://www.elmundo.es/cultura/2014/06/10/53917a7dca474190668b46a5.html>] (accessed 21 November 2014).

20 Javier Ortiz Echagüe & Julio Montero Díaz, 'Documentary Uses of Artistic Photography', p.397.

21 *Norte de África: Ortiz Echagüe* ([n.p.]: Museo Universidad de Navarra & MNAC, 2013), pp.31-32.

her forearm and hands lack any detail; the rest of what she wears is a mass of wide stripes with suggestions of patterning, and no more. She has become a stark shape that fixes its gaze upon us. Our gaze, in turn, fixes on it. This posing has nothing to do with some opposition between artifice and naturalism, theatricality and realism, however much the two terms might be problematised. This is not about some contrast between a translation (the posed, stylised image) and an original along the lines set out by Eduardo Cadava: echoing Walter Benjamin, Cadava claims that 'The disjunction that characterizes the relation between a photograph and the photographed corresponds to the caesura between a translation and the original'.²² Rather, we behold in the photograph the fundamental, inherent capacity of people and objects to exist in the state of translation that I have described above.

The artists José and Peppino Benlliure, father and son, roamed their native Valencia with cameras in the latter part of the nineteenth and opening years of the twentieth century, seeking out the characteristic elements of customs and life.²³ Their shots exude an extraordinary casualness, taken often at eye-level in the very midst of crowds or activity, processions and markets, with scatterings of people facing many different ways. Sometimes, parts of the image are blurred with movement or saturated by natural light. Often their photographs resonate with the awkward balance struck between, on the one hand, the several elements of the scene and, on the other, the artist's attempt to give these a clear formal shape. In one image of a day at the market the effort to align stretches of tarpaulin, vendors and buyers, has left a parallel wall inclining somewhat to the viewer's left. In others, like some of the photographs of *cabezudos* – outsized costumes worn in a popular festival -, we perceive how the cameraman's aim to frame an active group from close quarters leaves them almost leaning out of the photograph. Such photographs have a clumsy charm, perhaps nowhere so exemplified as in the portrait of a stern María Benlliure against a completely dark backdrop – completely dark, that, is but for the head and fingers of the person holding up the requisite cloth and, at the edges of the image, the bright surroundings. In the photographs taken by the Benlliures, we experience the interplay between, on the one hand, the movements of the camera and its operator, and, on the other, those of the surrounding world of which they themselves are part. It is in such scenarios that the camera is most obviously in and of the world, in and of a given human society (Valencia). The photographic image here manifests the way that the camera is borne across a community and a setting, and how that community and setting bears itself across the camera's path. Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins remark that 'through attention to the dynamic nature of these intersecting gazes, the photograph becomes less vulnerable to the charge that it masks or stuffs and mounts the world'.²⁴ The photograph is all those translations taken together. And precisely because of this – because of the way the camera and subjects cross each others' paths - people pose within the shots. Spotting something pointed at them, being moved about them, they look at it and its user. In one Benlliure photograph, individuals dressed as minor prophets process past during Corpus Christi. One of them, a rigid halo affixed around his head, and sporting a large false beard, turns to notice the camera, even as his companion ignores or does not see it. Meanwhile, a young boy, dressed in his finest waistcoat, stares at the camera smirking, hands on hips. What matters is not whether images or people such as these seem posed or framed. What matters – and what makes the Benlliures' photographs so compelling – is that the posing and framing resonate with the effect of cameras crossing our daily lives. 'Modern urban life', Linda Nead has remarked, is 'unpredictably connected', 'passers-by stop and smile for the camera'.²⁵ The *translatio* within the photograph comes to the fore and lends the print force, just as, in a parallel but distinct way, it does in images where one moment and location pulsate in their forms or their temporality: we have seen them do this in

22 Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p.15.

23 A catalogue and informative essays may be found in José Aleixandre, *La fotografía en la pintura de José y Peppino Benlliure* (Valencia: Institució Alfons el Magnànim, 1999).

24 'The Photograph as an Intersection of Gazes: The Example of *National Geographics*', in *The Photography Reader* (London & New York: Routledge, 2003), pp.354-74 (p.371).

25 *The Haunted Gallery*, p.130. Nead tends to suggest a difference here between moving film and photography, which is not part of my argument here (see page 126).

Laurent and Ortiz Echagüe. An emphasis on the constructed, representational, and therefore 'artificial' effects of photographic forms would rather miss the intense aesthetic power of photographs which achieve this effect.

The mid-nineteenth-century Spanish writer, Agustín Bonnat, once remarked that flowers flirt; that is to say, things we might take to be matters of artifice (flirting) are not always at odds with a sense of naturalness (flowers). In saying this, he was drawing a distinction not unlike the one I am drawing between my approach and that of Cadava. There is a difference between posing and stylisation that comes across as forced (in that specific sense, artificial), and that which does not – which comes across, in that specific sense, as natural, as ringing true – in this case, true to the potential for translations within images. As Bonnat points out, successful flirtation requires one to know what one is going to do, but not to have studied it in the mirror.²⁶ The grounds of this distinction do not lie in some abstract analysis of the boundaries of art and nature, of artifice and reality, but rather in our everyday capacity to observe the difference with more or less practical success. This is experienced in what Ludwig Wittgenstein called a form of life. As the philosopher noted, much confusion is caused by letting language – words like *artificial* and *natural* – go 'on holiday' from that 'bedrock'.²⁷ 'A major source of confusion' Toril Moi has remarked, lies in the series of assumed oppositions between 'nature' and 'construction' deriving from post-structuralist thinking, whatever the latter's apparent subtleties.²⁸

Photographs naturally flirt too – at least, sometimes they do. I mean by this that part of their allure is how they may offer one thing, even as they present us with something else, enticing and denying by turns. This is precisely because of the continual translations that they embody. Even as the Zuera bridge conjures up one pattern – a dream vision, or a geometrical pattern, or a gateway to 3-D perspective – we encounter a contrasting one. What renders the photograph coquettish is not, per se, the multiplication of possible views on it, as its flickering between a limited range of opposing outcomes, offered and retracted, offered and retracted. One of the collaborators of Juan Laurent, José Martínez Sánchez photographed a modern lighthouse in Tarragona around 1865 (*Faro de la Baña*). Against a backdrop of cloudy sky, a narrow tower thrusts up, bulging somewhat into a lamp and platform at the top, and resting at the bottom on a wider, striped building that tapers whose roof tapers down to the walls; beneath the platform on which this habitation sits is a set of metal legs. A tiny female figure, standing at the viewer's right upon the lower platform, gazes at us, hands on hips. Her upper body rises from her skirts to the bulge of her head; where her torso reaches the skirts, the dress tapers down, widening out to form a shape much the same shade of grey as the building; and beneath we see her slim lower legs. Her size and form make for a functional comparison of like to like with the scale of the construction, just as does the diminutive human on the Zuera bridge. Similarly to that Laurent y Cía image, the figure is involved in an optical movement back and forth: the lighthouse is a giant projection of the little woman's form, the little woman a shrinking of the lighthouse into a miniature. The photograph piques us with the comically incongruent resonance of these movements. In its translations, a woman is a lighthouse only smaller, a lighthouse is a woman only bigger; fashionable dresses turn into practical technology and vice-versa; adornment becomes instrument and instrument adornment. Most perturbingly, the monumental lighthouse resembles nothing so much as an immense, erect mechanical penis, its bulbous phallus rising high from a testicular base into the cloudy whiteness. The female is turning into an aroused penis and the aroused penis into a female.

The photograph teases, holding out a promise it can never quite fulfil. Notoriously, its posed, still images can make the living seem dead, the dead alive, in an alluring illusion. Roland Barthes found in photographs 'that the corpse is alive, as *corpse*: it is the living image of a dead thing', 'a temporal

26 'A Ella', *Semanario Pintoresco Español* (1855), pp.148-49; see my discussion of Bonnat's remark in *Painting and the Turn to Cultural Modernity in Spain: The Time of Eugenio Lucas Velázquez (1850-1870)* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2007), 136. Bonnat, mistakenly, seems not to have recognised these qualities in photography.

27 *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. By G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), §38, 217.

28 *What is a Woman?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.33, 36.

hallucination'.²⁹ Under the camera's gaze, mineral objects may resemble organic life and vice-versa: Lee Fontanella describes photographs of objects in the Royal Armoury taken during the 1860s – probably by Jane Clifford –, as monstrous, anthropomorphic creatures coming upon us.³⁰ Linda Nead has remarked on the 'continuous interplay in the nineteenth century between the fantasy of the inanimate object that comes to life and the dream of the living body that turns to stone'.³¹ These transformations play with deep-set fears and desires, leading some to see them as examples of the *uncanny*,³² in the sense intended by Freud: primitive beliefs haunt an advanced world where such creeds are dismissed as myth. This is facilitated, Laura Mulvey suggests, because photographic media produce a 'convergence between the arts of reality and the arts of deception'. In that sense, photographs are themselves both modern, technological objects, and evocations of ancient magic.³³ We can see that in the Zuera bridge, magically metamorphosing into the portal of a vision we know it not to be. During the 1920s, Spain's telecommunications company, like the railways before it, commissioned many photographs of its infrastructural triumphs: phone lines stretching across the country. Habitually, these are depicted along roads that journey from the foreground of the print deep into the distance and beyond. The silhouetted pylons appear in dark lines, their wooden poles very slightly irregular thanks to the shapes of the trunk from which they came, then crossed at the very top with one, two, or three flat horizontals. These entities look like mutated, manufactured trees – all the more so in some shots, like that taken by Marín in 1927 at KM201 of the Zaragoza-Barcelona line, where silhouetted examples of the living species occupy the same diagonals along the roadside, their irregular branches shooting up and out. The organic and the sternly functional mimic one another, turn into one another, in a visual to-and-fro. The pylons become imposing creatures, half-biological half-mechanical, looming up through vast scenes, seeming to march along the road in columns towards us, or away. And, if they do not seem to us to move, they evoke the ancient lines of crosses set up by Romans along a highway, manifesting themselves anew in the 1920s, awaiting fresh victims. The frequent photographic conjunction of technology and the supernatural seems to confirm theorists' emphasis upon Freud's notion of uncanny. The tension between their manifest technological newness (they are clearly pylons) and their mythological or anachronic qualities (they appear as monsters or revenants) similarly echoes concerns elsewhere in Europe with what Susan Buck-Morss calls 'the dream world of mass culture'.³⁴ Surrealists saw 'the urban-industrial landscape as itself marvellous and mythic', but 'what distinguishes the gods of this modern mythology is their susceptibility to time. They belong to the profane, noneternal world of human history'.³⁵

Equally, the translational characteristics inherent in many photographic images, their mutational nature are what render these uncanny effects possible at all. The effect arises because two identical, or near-identical, still shapes can be mapped onto and projected into one another. The two forms can even occupy the very same location in an image. In 1905, Fernando Navarro made a photograph of a *Wake in Totana (Murcia)*, capturing ordinary customs of death among local people. The deceased – a woman dressed in black – is supported such that she seems to sit in a recliner before us, her hands together on her lap, fingers entwined, her mouth very slightly opening. The shape of the lady dead is identical to that it would assume were she asleep, and vice-versa. These two versions of her body's photographic form – snoozing and departed – flicker before our eyes, each ever becoming the other, like some human equivalent to Schrödinger's Cat. Flanking her are two other women,

29 *Camera Lucida*, pp.79, 115.

30 *Charles Clifford: Fotógrafo de la España de Isabel II* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura/Ediciones El Viso, 1996), p.34.

31 *The Haunted Gallery*, p.69

32 See: Nead, *The Haunted Gallery*, p.104.

33 For an extensive psychoanalytical account of the uncanny in photographic and related media, see: Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion, 2006), pp.32, 37-53. The quotation is on page 34.

34 The title of chapter 8 of her *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).

35 *The Dialectics of Seeing*, pp.256, 259.

seated too, and dressed like her in mourning clothes, their hands across their laps, fingers entwined, eyes down. The geometry of these three figures forms a triangle, the corpse's head at its apex. The viewer looks along the triangle's sides, back and forth, up and down, seeing, not just life and death mutating, but converging, becoming the same shape, fused in the photo's patterns. It is not just that the deceased is conserved for all time as if she were embalmed as Bazin put it.³⁶ Rather, she – and her companions – exist where life and death are simply variants of an endless pulsation, a *translatio*, that carries them back and forth across the grave. This pulsating translation is the fundamental subject of the image.

More unsettling still is Martínez Sánchez's photograph (1868) depicting the (supposed) mummies of the Lovers of Teruel: the protagonists in an Aragonese folktale of doomed romance, joined only in death. The two stand, in almost monochrome nakedness, but for identical white fabric concealing their mummified genitalia. The taller, slimmer mummy, its arms crossed, inclines its head sideways and down towards the other, its mouth open, as if sharing a thought. The other, shoulders pushed up, one hand upon its hip, tips its head forward as if heeding. We perceive here the shapes of a lively exchange adopted by entities who could not be more dead, who, at all events, would never dress that way alive. Our contradictory thoughts and feelings pulsate in their photographic forms. In a parallel to Ortiz Echagüe, the human body is here stripped back, as it were, robbed of inessential detail. The eyes are gone from their sockets, the noses hinted at by some remaining bone on which the cartilage once reposed, their attire is minimal and plain, the skin and flesh – great swathes of nondescript greyness given broad shape by skeletal patterns. They are romantically, erotically attached, but somewhat androgynous, even in their clothing – skirt or kilt? – not yet or not now fully gendered. Transported back and forth between distant death and living present, neither quite man nor woman, the two stand at a juncture where humanity assumes some elemental form, becomes the rough-hued outline of its own self. As Ortega put it, the photograph is larval.

The viewer feels the image traverse but not quite leave the underworld, like some Orpheus endlessly reaching out to Eurydice. Photographs of this kind are forever crossing Acheron. Such is their translation and their tease, their body never quite in reach. Critics have increasingly recognised the sensual effect of photographs, which they call *haptic*: we react to photographic images and their motions as if to something we could physically touch.³⁷ At the same time, we cannot quite have the objects and figures in our hands. This is flirtation, after all. Around 1918, Enrique Meléndez de la Fuente produced an erotic image of a *Young Lady in a Seville Brothel*. This photograph is not simply part of the generality of photographic titillation. With its specific location, the long, curling dark hair of the prostitute, and the decorative tiles and metal work visible behind her, this is a more explicit extension of a pictorial tradition involving Andalusian *majas* going back at least to Murillo in the seventeenth century. Snapped in profile, the woman stands high, her back straightened, her hands cupping her breasts, naked but for some knee-length stockings. For the most part her body is sharply in focus, as is much of the characteristically Andalusian décor to her back; the curve of her thigh into her buttock even aligns with the top of a crisply depicted chair. As we move away from the woman and the core of the decoration, the image becomes more and more blurred, and in places is saturated with light. The lower part of the photograph is not much more than a cloud of whiteness, into which even the prostitute's feet disappear. The very top of her head is just a little less in focus than her pubic hair, buttocks, breasts, and upper stockings. She seems, then, almost to float amid foggy surroundings. The most sexually relevant parts of her body, and the signs of her regional identity, appear to surge out in relief towards us from the rest of the image, forming some erotic entity detached from all about it. Yet, there is a discomfort to this effect: the moment we look away from her to our left (for example) and we see the madam behind staring at us, resting her arm on a lattice seat, we find ourselves in a world of indefiniteness. Our eyes flit between the airborne

36 'Ontology of the Photographic Image', trans. by Hugh Gray, *Film Quarterly*, 13.4 (1960), pp.4-9.

37 Among the most influential accounts is to be found in Giuliana Bruno's *Atlas of Emotion*; for a definition of *haptic* in this context, see page 6. Linda Nead comments on the importance of 'corporeal eyes' in the photographic arts c.1900 in *The Haunted Gallery* (for the phrase, see, for example, page 184). Similarly, see Linda M. Shires, *Perspectives*, p.4.

sharpness of the nudity and the vaguer images about it. On one viewing, the crisp nakedness crosses out of the photograph towards us; on another, it hovers in its cloudy 2-D universe. The outline of the prostitute's face can be projected almost exactly at a 45 degree diagonal down onto her employer's smaller head, and back again, oscillating between sharpness and blur, blur and sharpness, the young woman's sneer or come-on into the old woman's scowl or smirk, the one becoming the other. In highlighting this kind of coming and going – this particular sort of *translatio* – I do not mean to evoke per se a dilemma between reality (the *maja* in 3D) and representation (this is only a photograph), or between sensual impact and Brechtian distance. Rather, what interests me is a further effect of pulsation conjured up in the photograph: the movement of its shapes pressing on us and pulling back, out of our grasp and into it. The *maja* is like a pulsar in a nebula. Or, not quite in 3-D relief, she too is larval, pressing against but not free of her misty chrysalis. This is the specific sort of sensuality that this photograph has.

Again, what matters is not so much the alternate states evoked by the print – the forms, the ways of looking, between which it continually switches. Rather, what matters is the fact of that movement itself, the reality of the pulsation, of the larval experience. During the mid-nineteenth century, Laurent y Cía produced numerous photographs of cross-dressed female performers, a fashionable phenomenon at the time, and thus a subject worthy of inclusion in the firm's surveying of Spanish culture and society. Among these is a series depicting the Barcelona-born dancer Eugenia Duchateu of the Liceo Theatre. In one photograph, we find her dressed in some variety of military finery, sitting upon a blanket, reclining against a stage-set formation of rocks, the sea and its boats behind her. She tilts her head with a welcoming hint of a smile. Her legs, given their full shape by her tight trousers, are parted, a leather boot visible to the fore. Formal patterns lead us to her groin: the rocks descend from our right curving down to the left and into it; grass and a tree form a similar shape to the other side. The groin area and upper thigh, marked out from the rest of her body by the dark blankness of the clothing over them, rest halfway between the opening of the scene into the sea above and the ground below her blanket. In another photograph on the same stage set, Duchateu sits facing us on a wooden chair, swung round so that she faces its back, which once more pushes her legs apart, but this time so that a firm structure rises phallically at an angle from her groin; her arm dangles over this protuberance. This is not solely a question of the photographer seeking out poses – compatible with apparent decency – in which a woman's body is exposed to voyeurism. It is a clear evocation too of other sexual preferences: attractive men awaiting and aroused, or transvestitism, or androgyny. These several possibilities rotate, as it were, through the photograph's forms. But, more still, they are all present together in the print: Eugenia Duchateu is at once available woman, man, transvestite, and androgen. Her groin's concealment in darkness encompasses all these scenarios. The photograph can translate itself into any of them: that is its potential and its potency. It is a fountain of Salmacis offering up, in Ovid's words, 'a single form [...] which could not be called male or female, but seemed to be at once both and neither'.³⁸

The writer Javier Marías has associated photographs with what he calls the *Dark Back of Time*: a world of may-bes, of might-have-beens, of might-bes. He ponders not least an image of himself at a tender age – the very same at which a brother he never knew had died – and what strikes him is not just that a person has gone, but all the things which could have happened (or not) if that individual had lived.³⁹ In such circumstances, a photograph does not belong simply to a closed, definitive period in the past, nor to some straightforward present moment now; it belongs rather to a series of conditional tenses. Marías' remarks depend on the capacity of a photograph to record light from something or someone that really existed, and to preserve it; in that way to point to, to be connected with something that was empirically real. 'Photography's inimitable feature,' Barthes remarked, '[...] is that someone has seen the referent (even if it is a matter of objects) *in flesh and blood*.'⁴⁰ That

38 *Metamorphoses*, trans. by Mary M. Innes (London: Penguin, 1955), p.104.

39 *Negra espalda del tiempo* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1998), pp.271-723. On his attempt to define the *dark back* itself, in which again he envisages the dead brother, see pages 362-67

40 *Camera Lucida*, p.79.

kind of translation – enabling light to cross over from a physical entity to a negative, then to a positive – is certainly present in the images I have discussed in this article. Certainly too, its ostensible purpose in such prints is cultural translation. The aim is to take something distinctive, characteristic, or remarkable of a place and time inside Spain or north Africa, and to offer it in two-dimensional form either to people in the country or those beyond. But these photographs' presence in the 'dark back of time' is due to another kind of translation too. Their forms and shapes, into which the light has been translated, cross back and forth through the photograph: they project themselves into one another, they appear to surge forward or to open up depths, they shift between the things they could be before our very eyes. Above all, what we see in them is their capacity to do this, realised in the image. They pulsate, they flirt, they are larval.