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In one of the earliest critical texts on Lindy Lee, Rex Butler allegorised the Brisbane-born artist's use of photocopies through Jorge Luis Borges's short story 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*'.[1] Borges's story-cum-thought-experiment is as follows: the protagonist, Pierre Menard, pledges to write the seventeenth-century masterpiece *Don Quixote*—not to adapt it, nor to mechanically copy it, but to arrive at the novel independently and fully, three centuries later. On paper, Menard is a deranged plagiarist, yet through his 'deliberate anachronism and fallacious attribution', he produces a genuinely novel framing of the text.[2] There is something of Menard in Lee's fuzzy carbon copies. By borrowing from a bank of artistic 'masters', she untethers the historical image from its author and bestows it with new signification.

But there is another story by Borges, equally pertinent to Lee's work. 'Funes the Memorious' tells the tale of the extraordinary man Ireneo Funes who, after a riding injury, could remember every moment of his past in excruciating detail.[3] Memory paralysed him. Not only did he remember every object he encountered but the quality of that object from all angles, at all times of day. He remembered his own face so accurately that he was startled by the microscopic evidence of ageing reflected in the mirror each morning. He learnt English, French, Portuguese, and Latin within days but, finding them all unsatisfactory in describing his plethora of experiences, he created his own mad language in which every memory was catalogued with an arbitrary number or word. Funes's absolute recall of the world meant that he could not understand it. No patterns emerged in the 'garbage heap' of his mind,[4] so that childhood memories were tangled with events just past, as each moment hauled him into an unfamiliar mass of sensation. In the story of Funes we find a strange but irrefutable lesson: that to make sense of the past, we must, at some level, forget it.

In the late 1980s, Lee began a long series of appropriative works using the Xerox photocopier, which was to become her signature medium during the 1990s and early 2000s. During this time Lee also applied black wax onto brightly painted canvases: carving out the outlines of historical artworks from the dark, viscous substance. Cousins of the Xerox works and equally arresting, these two-tonal canvases are, sadly, outside the scope of this essay. In subsequent decades, the artist

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addressed her family history and her place within the Chinese diaspora; and today, her work is heavily informed by Taoist and Zen Buddhist philosophy. With this shifting focus, she has sought new materials. Over the last decade or so, Lee has worked with paper—burning small holes across the surface and applying pools of ink in intricate patterns—molten bronze, which she flings across the floor or pours into sand, and stainless steel, for several public sculptures.

This essay looks specifically at Lee's early use of the Xerox copy. To create the photocopy works, the artist selected an image from an art history book or catalogue and repeatedly copied it onto a single piece of paper. The photocopier transformed these glossy pages into grey, grainy images. Often, one can still see a page border or the edge of a spine from a printed source, exposing the beginning of the artist's process. Yet by overlaying one picture on top of itself, Lee buried the image beneath many carbon strata. The early Xerox machine worked through static electricity, using positively and negatively charged surfaces to impart a fine layer of carbon toner onto the paper. This technique is markedly different from the digital forms of replication that we have available today. With every copy, the device deposits a gritty layer of carbon. Lee's method appears less an instance of *mise en abyme* (a reproduction of a reproduction) than an inquiry into the unique materiality of copies. If she were to perpetually copy the copy, the images would become lighter and less material, as opposed to the dark, dirty objects that she is known for—indeed, they would look something like Ian Burn's *Systematically Altered Photographs* (1968).

The thick skin of Xerox carbon makes Lee's early work somewhat anachronistic. On one hand, she appropriated past images and thereby tore them from their original context and meaning—an impulse that she shares with many artists of her time. On the other hand, these appropriations were vague, often so altered that they appeared abstract. Lee's photocopies combine two different strands in postwar art: the optical experiments of certain abstract expressionists, who foregrounded the phenomenon of perception as it is experienced in time and space, and postmodernism's deconstruction of notions of authenticity, authorship, and the canon. Where the first paradigm approaches art foremost as a physical object, the second conceives of art within the perpetual circulation of immaterial images. Art-as-object and art-as-simulacrum compete for primacy in Lee's work.

The question of art's materiality—or lack of it—was first brought to the fore in Lucy Lippard's now-seminal book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (1973). Lippard argued that from the mid-1960s onwards, artists began to create 'ultra-conceptual' works in which the physical form was 'secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or "dematerialised"'.[5] As a curator and art historian, she was one of the first to recognise artists such as John Baldessari, Joseph Kosuth, and Sol LeWitt for their ephemeral materials and use of language. As she contends, the idea was paramount in these works; the medium was secondary and devalued. The artists' disregard for medium also marked a political position, as by 'dematerialising' the art object, they hoped to escape commodification:

> The art establishment depends so greatly on objects which can be bought and sold that I don't expect it to do much about art that is opposed to the prevailing systems […] The artists who are trying to do non-object art are introducing a drastic solution to the problem of artists being bought and sold so easily, along with their art.[6]

The irony here is that the market very quickly found a way to sell art-as-idea—in fact, you might say it is now its primary product—but also that the photographs, films, and written documents of conceptualism were always conceived in terms of their materiality. Three years before *Six Years* was published, Mel Bochner, one of the book's key figures, asserted a very different position in *Artforum*, writing, 'there is no art which does not bear some burden of its physicality. To deny it is to descend to irony.'[7]

Lippard sits within a much longer intellectual history on the 'non-physical' image, leading back to Walter Benjamin's influential essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility' (1939). Here, Benjamin discusses the advent of film and photography in the late nineteenth century, asking how these new modes of image production and reception have had an impact on human perception. In the age of photography, visual discrepancies alone cannot separate a painting from its replication, as they might a painting from its handmade copy. Rather, the original and the copy are distinguished by the former's physical presence. He writes, 'in even the most perfect reproduction, one thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence in a particular place'.[8] Benjamin describes art's 'here and now'—that is, its non-transferable uniqueness—as an 'aura' that encapsulates the work of art.[9] To reproduce an artwork is to pry an object from this shell: to deplete the aura that gives it life.[10] This is not only true when we see a photograph or print of an artwork but also when we experience a work that has been *subject to* reproduction. For example, the real *Mona Lisa* has little aura; we know her face too well, her coy smile has been copied to death. In reproduction the ritualistic 'cult value' attached to the singular and authentic art object is lost in a tide of multiplicity, so that 'even the singular, the unique, is divested of its uniqueness'.[11]

Lee's photocopies have almost exclusively been discussed under Benjamin's concept of aura, mostly in regard to her copies as a lacking or elegiac imitation of the real work, or as a metaphor for her Chinese-Australian identity, as I will discuss later. Somewhat anomalous in the literature is the article by Rex Butler that began this essay, originally published in the Brisbane-based student journal *On the Beach*, which Lee then edited. According to Butler, the artist's photocopies reveal that an original Old Master painting is already a copy, or more precisely, is only understood through its constant simulation in textbooks, posters, and magazines. Unlike Benjamin, who maintains that the aura of a work resides in its original iteration, Butler presents a paradox in which the essence of the original arises through the sum of its copies. Using Kafka as an example, he remarks that we only understand the author through the prism of other

writers who have imitated his style.[12] Kafka is the common denominator of the Kafka-esque and we now read this constant thread throughout the copies as the spirit of the original. In other words, Kafka's aura far outweighs his three novels and handful of short stories. As Butler writes, 'The aura, the original, the singular [is] only [represented] as ironies within reproduction. The aura, simply, always arises a day late.'[13] As such, Lee's replications do not mourn the lost originality of the past but allow the viewer to muse upon how the masterpieces of art history are experienced in the first place. In an insightful passage, Butler reverses Benjamin's notion of aura:

> To consider her works as simply revealing some essence would go against everything Lindy Lee has taught us: that this essence would already be doubled from the very beginning, arising only as the effect of its duplication, that it would not exist outside this surface, this shadow; in short, that it could not be perceived without already being in a way reproduced.[14]

If an artwork's presence functions as a stratum of its copies, as Butler suggests, then by the same token, these reproductions must carry ontological weight. His essay opens the question of Lee's material concerns, which I hope to further explore.

In the last two decades, art historians such as Monika Wagner, Georges Didi-Huberman, Michael Ann Holly, and Petra Lange-Berndt have recovered the question of materiality in art history from the shadow of Greenbergian medium specificity.[15] In Clement Greenberg's influential essay '"American-Type" Painting', first published in 1955, the material is conceived of as a vehicle of form.[16] For him, the innovation of modernist artists was to find the core principle of that vehicle—in the case of painting, it was the condition of flatness—and to discard 'the conventions not essential to the viability of a medium […] as soon as they are recognized'.[17] Greenberg was not interested in paint, as a material, but the conditions of *painting*, as a medium. Diverging from this tradition, a work's 'materiality' describes the many sensual phenomena that arise from a given substance independent of its form; or, as Holly puts it, materiality evinces 'the meeting of matter and [the beholder's] imagination'.[18] The material is not simply a conduit (that is, medium) for the artist's message but elicits a network of meanings in and of itself.

In the March 2013 issue of *The Art Bulletin*, Holly charted this critical interest in materials as a fiery sun expanding and splintering into different theoretical movements (fig. 1). 'Materiality, a concept long relegated to the dark fringes of the art historical universe, is bouncing back from a variety of directions', she writes.[19] One important disciplinary ray here is 'Thing Theory', dubbed by the literary theorist Bill Brown. Although only named as such in his seminal 2001 essay in *Critical Inquiry*,[20] Brown's interest in a culture of 'things' began in the 1990s with his close reading of object fixations in late nineteenth-century and modernist literature, and in contemporary products of pop culture such as the 1995 animation
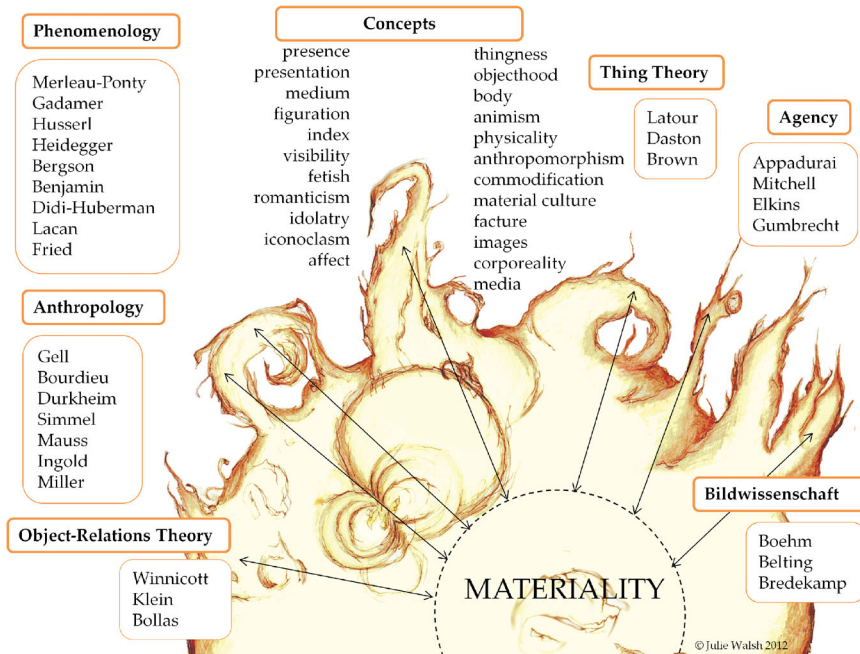
Figure 1.   Michael Ann Holly and Julie Walsh, *Materiality*, 2012. Courtesy of Michael Ann Holly and Julie Walsh.

Toy Story.[21] Thing Theory analyses human–object relationships as they manifest in our cultural artefacts, primarily in literature and art. Inverting the standard historical method,[22] it asks not what meaning or value we impart to things but how things constitute *us* as subjects.

As Brown acknowledges, his approach is indebted to Actor-Network Theory—developed by the anthropologist Bruno Latour among others—which posits that society and nature, subjects and objects, exist within a shifting network, where cultural activity cannot be isolated from natural environments.[23] Others extend this line of thinking to imagine a total ontological account from the perspective of objects. Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010) is a notable contribution, proposing that nonhuman bodies are vital players in public life, no matter how unintelligible they may appear to human subjects. Bennett examines what she terms '*Thing-Power*: the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle'[24] and ponders the ethical consequences if we are to accept the human being as, fundamentally, a composition of inert minerals joining the vast array of matter upon the earth's crust.[25]

A figure who does not appear on Holly's sun chart is the late French philosopher Bernard Stiegler; yet I find Stiegler's work very useful in understanding the particular effect of Lee's photocopies. Stiegler's foregrounding of *tékhnē* (making and doing) over *episteme* (knowledge and reason) finds resonance with Brown's

roughly contemporaneous Thing Theory insomuch as it attempts to re-orientate philosophy towards physical matter; both offer 'new thoughts about how inanimate objects constitute human subjects', as Brown puts it.[26] One key difference between the two, however, is that Stiegler considers technical tools as necessary agents for human thought, while Brown's concern is precisely with that moment when objects fail as tools and we are confronted with their indeterminate materiality.[27] As I will discuss, Lee's use of the Xerox machine enacts what Stielger terms *hypomnêsis*—a process of externalising memories—and for this reason her work is technical, as much as it is 'thing-ish'. If we are to treat this facet of Lee's work seriously, then we must begin with a new line of inquiry. Rather than question how Lee's appropriation refigures past tradition and authorship, I ask how her work encounters the spectator in the present. The answer, at least in part, lies in her affinity with abstract painting.

The Fugitive Image

Lee's early work is generally considered within the field of postmodern appropriation, as an Australian descendant of the so-called American 'Pictures Group' of the late 1970s and 1980s, led by artists such as Cindy Sherman, Robert Longo, and Sherrie Levine and theorised by the historian Douglas Crimp, who curated the 1977 exhibition *Pictures* at Artists Space, New York. I wish to establish another lineage. In Lee's photocopies, with their fine, sooty layers of carbon, are references to an earlier generation of abstract artists who stressed the material presence of paint itself. Lee cites the tonal fluctuations in Ad Reinhardt's monochromes as an inspiration for her work:

> I am interested in Ad Reinhardt's black paintings for that sense of the fugitive image and fugitive meaning. I use historical sources but fundamentally I think of myself as an abstract painter, because the issues I want to deal with are ultimately abstract […][28]

Lee has long considered the resonances between abstract painting and Zen Buddhist teachings, dedicating a chapter to Reinhardt in her doctoral thesis.[29] Here she reflects, 'Reinhardt, in a sense, directed me towards Zen Buddhism even though I didn't take up the practice for some two decades after first seeing his work'.[30] In a similar vein, I believe we can observe echoes of Reinhardt in Lee's practice prior to her study of Zen philosophy, long before she began to work with molten bronze or burnt paper.

Reinhardt's canvases were not truly black but grids of intensely dark blues, reds, and greens. For instance, his *Abstract Painting* (1963), now in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, is structured by a uniform three-by-three-squares composition. The four corners of the canvas have a red hue, while the inner squares form a Greek cross with a green-tinted vertical bar and a blue-hued horizontal bar. The painting has a matte finish, which he achieved by applying fine layers of oil paint that had been thinned using turpentine onto sealed canvas (as such, the work

reflects almost no light, allowing the viewer to perceive the minute colour variations directly). Working systematically and slowly, Reinhardt eliminated all signs of brushwork, instead creating a uniform, matte surface. By painting in this style, he sought to overcome the sensations evoked through expressive colour and composition, creating a truly neutral work of art. As he wrote, the black paintings were to be 'pure, abstract […] timeless, spaceless, changeless, relationless', and 'disinterested'.[31]

Reinhardt's paintings anticipate the minimalist focus on spectatorship and perception during the 1960s. Although he precedes figures like Carl Andre, Robert Morris, and Richard Long, like them, his works are only fully actualised through the viewer's gaze.[32] Maurice Merleau-Ponty's model of perception is useful here. In *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), he describes one's experience of the world beyond empirical observations of reality, arguing that an inductive approach conflates positivist observations with lived experience.[33] However, for Merleau-Ponty this is equally true of what he terms an 'idealist' perspective—what we might think of now as a psychological framework. Both positions take for granted a constant and knowable world separate from the self; they assume that perception is like a 'searchlight' that 'shows up objects pre-existing in the darkness […] [it] creates nothing, and it is a natural miracle'.[34] Those who separate the human gaze from its object of attention ignore the synthesis of subject and object enacted in even the simplest perception. For example, to notice a red spot on a white background we must first perceive a basic order of figure and ground—a spatial relationship comes to us not as the sum of perceived stimuli but as a meaningful whole, or *gestalt*.[35] Hence the subject spontaneously organises and moulds phenomena *in the moment they perceive them*, or, as Merleau-Ponty remarks, 'the text of the external world is not so much copied, as composed'.[36]

Similarly, the viewer must 'compose' the grid of reds, blues, and greens within a 'black' Reinhardt painting. After some time, these tones emerge from the darkness, revealed only to the most diligent of viewers. For Merleau-Ponty, the body is the vehicle of all perception: 'our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system'.[37] Seemingly objective perception is orientated away from the body, and the scientific outlook attempts to transcend its origin in flesh, hiding its own tracks, as it were. Conversely, Merleau-Ponty contends that we cannot so easily dislodge this membrane between the flesh and that which we perceive as existing beyond it.[38] Thus the body is always implicated in perception and, in turn, enmeshed with the perceptual field in an unbreakable tissue, or chiasm. Reinhardt foregrounds this bodily involvement of the spectator by asking them to work harder than usual. His paintings are purposefully obscure, and the shape and colour of his barely perceptible grids are hidden within the velvety materiality of matte paint. This is where Lee is most indebted to Reinhardt, as her chosen material similarly conceals the work's pictorial content; the carbon ink appears to consume the image, although it is also the medium for its realisation.

On a purely formal level, there are many similarities between Reinhardt's black paintings and Lee's *To the Dreams of Immortality* (1990) (fig. 2). The latter comprises forty-eight small panels that form a towering grey grid, measuring approximately two metres squared when installed. To make each panel, Lee copied a portrait onto a sheet of grey paper and superimposed the image many times over before sealing the surface with a layer of semi-translucent black paint. The panels vary from a dull grey to solid black, forming a random dispersion of tone across the grid. It's difficult to identify the pictorial content of these panels beneath the grey 'skin' of carbon and paint. The viewer sees only the faint outline of two faces, repeated across the sprawling grid. The faces are, in fact, taken from the van Eyck brothers' rendering of Adam and Eve in the *Ghent Altarpiece* (1432) (fig. 3). The original work is known for the odd foreshortening of the two nude bodies. The van Eycks designed the altarpiece to be viewed from below and, as such, it emphasises the elevation of the two figures. Looking up at Adam, one sees the underside of his foot, as if the monumental man were to walk above the congregation below. Eve's exaggerated, curving stomach similarly bulges above the viewer, her fertility pronounced to a point of awe. However, Lee leaves only the two heads in view, dissecting Adam and Eve from their sinuous bodies. Without the accompanying vine leaves and the small apple in Eve's hand, the two faces lose their iconographical significance. Man and Woman simply become man and woman.

Through her continual copying, the artist obscures the images further still, transforming the van Eyck details into a Reinhardt-esque grid. As each sheet is threaded through the photocopier, there is a slight misregistration of the superimposed images. The faces do not perfectly align each time, creating a soft blur as the image migrates across the page. The spots of toner confess the fact of Lee's mechanical method, yet this grainy residue brings the image closer to the quality of paint. The visual effects of matte paint on canvas and reflective toner on paper are obviously distinct, and Reinhardt's grids, although 'disinterested', are still handmade. Despite these differences, the surface of *To the Dreams of Immortality* is unexpectedly paint-like.

The waxy accumulation of toner upon each panel creates a dense surface from which light bounces off the work and back towards the viewer. Whenever we photocopy something—an image, a handout, or a friend's notes—an odd sheen rests above the duplicate. The carbon powder used to make the photocopy toner is ever so slightly reflective. This is an annoying consequence in real life: a photocopy layered with toner becomes hard to look at, defeating the very purpose of reproduction. Yet Lee uses this limitation of the material to prolong the viewer's engagement. Only after some moments do we realise that the same two faces are repeated across the panels, and only after minutes do we see the small pockets of deep red poking through the grey grid.

Looking at *To the Dreams of Immortality* takes patience and determination. It requires a labour of perception, which, like most labour, requires the body. At almost two metres high and two metres wide, it is impossible to see the piece in
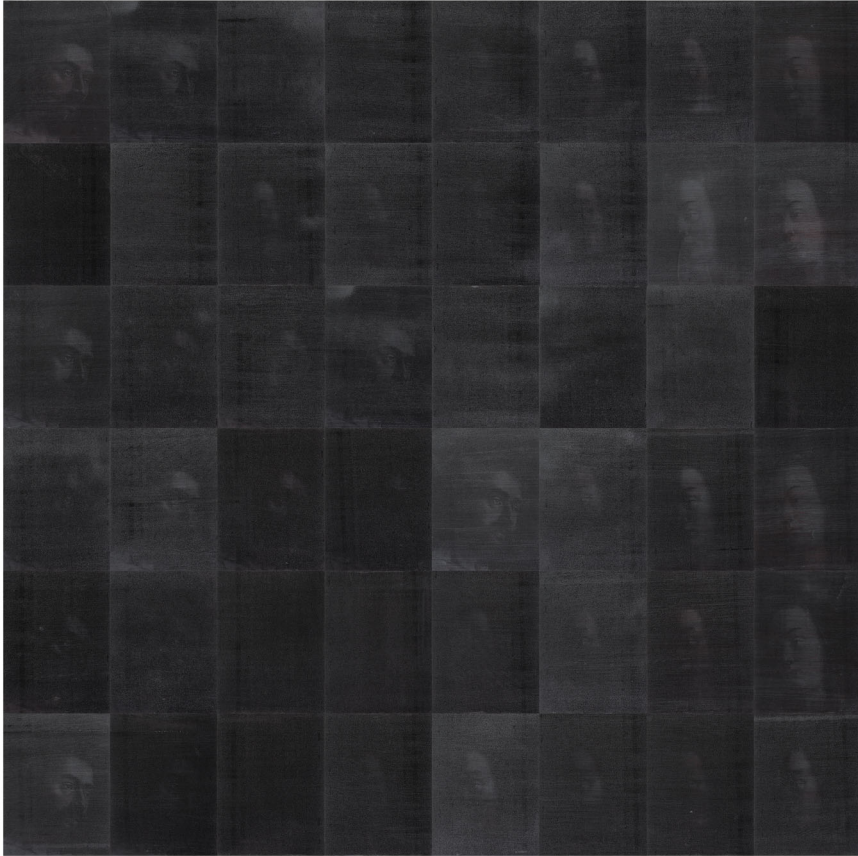
Figure 2. Lindy Lee, *To the Dreams of Immortality*, 1990, photocopy and synthetic polymer paint on paper mounted on board, 48 panels, each panel 32.5 × 24.5 cm. Collection of The University of Queensland. Gift of Michael Eliadis through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 1998. Photo: Carl Warner. © Lindy Lee/Copyright Agency, 2021.

full and in detail at the same time. Lee's spectator is trapped in a kind of dance: moving back to obtain a long view of the grid, moving forward to see the shadowy portraits, and then moving sideways to see the photocopies in succession as they weave in and out of blackness. How the viewer perceives the sheets (and from what angle) determines whether they are black shapes or Renaissance imprints, devoid of history or embedded with it. As the grid oscillates in and out of abstraction, only the patient spectator can capture Lee's fugitive forms.

Photocopy as *Hypomnêsis*
It is, above all, this elusive and mutable quality of Lee's copies that leads me to read them as allegories of memory. The artist began the photocopy series after

Figure 3.   Jan van Eyck and Hubert van Eyck, *Ghent Altarpiece* (open view), 1432, oil on wood, 350 × 460 cm. Saint Bavo Cathedral, Ghent, Belgium.

Figure 3a. Jan van Eyck and Hubert van Eyck, *Ghent Altarpiece* (open view, details), 1432, oil on wood, 350 × 460 cm. Saint Bavo Cathedral, Ghent, Belgium.

travelling to Europe in 1978 and studying at the Chelsea School of Art in London from 1979 to 1980. The paintings she saw abroad would become the source material for her work for years to come.[39] Importantly, the artist never copied the Old Masters themselves but their dislocated reproductions found in the University of Sydney library.[40] The fact that she sourced her images from books has largely informed the critical readings of the artist's early work. As discussed, Butler argued that in reproducing the reproduction, Lee reveals the dependence of every original on its copies and the already duplicate nature of masterpieces. However, we can envision the art catalogue in another way: as a tool of memory.

In the influential first volume of his extended study *Time and Technics* (1994), Bernard Stiegler explores *hypomnêsis*, or the use of technologies to record and store memory outside of the human body.[41] Since Plato, retention has been typically understood in terms of living or interior memory (*anamnesis*) and the 'false elixir' of dead, mechanical memory.[42] Even the most rudimentary tools of retention, like written language, are met with fears that '*hypomnêsis* risks contaminating all memory, thereby even destroying it'.[43] Stiegler contends that these terms are fixed within the inherited philosophical opposition between *episteme*—the mental possession of intangible ideas—and *tékhnē*—the making or doing of a concrete activity and what we might now call practical knowledge.[44] He argues that since philosophy's inception, the supposedly internal qualities of the mind (reason or *logos*) have been privileged over practical skills and the tools developed to complete them.[45] Stiegler follows from his mentor Jacques Derrida's similar treatment, or 'deconstruction', in *Dissemination* (1969), where Derrida concludes that Western philosophy has implicitly privileged speech over the written word.[46] Stiegler goes one step further. Human consciousness, he argues, is made possible only through the tools we use: even Plato's critique of writing is given in the written word, and the long logical sequences of his dialogues would be impossible to think through without first writing them down. The process of externalisation through technics makes interior thought possible.

If the human subject and that subject's tools are necessarily imbricated, then memory is *already* technical. As such, we should rethink technology as a necessary 'vector of memory'.[47] For example, by recording memories, the camera turns one's continuous experience of the world into discrete pictorial data.[48] Photographs often become lodged in our minds more firmly than the event itself. How often does one assume a childhood memory only after seeing a photograph as an adult? Images not only trigger recall but often efface and replace internalised memory. Reproductions of art function in the same way. We cannot rely on recollection alone to summon the image of an artwork seen in real life. And so, we buy postcards, posters, and catalogues to retain the picture over time. Lee's process begins with these mnemonic objects.

The artist's interest in memory has not gone unnoticed. However, critics and curators have treated this aspect of her work somewhat narrowly, often relating memory to the artist's identity as a Chinese Australian. In such biographical

readings, Lee's pictures are viewed through a lens of Australia's culturally 'inauthentic' memory. For example, in 2003 Edward Colless observed:

> Looking at Lee's appropriated portraits we lose and partially recover images from the past, but images of a cultural tradition that was never really our [Australians'] own. Perhaps we are condemned to see them this way—those original works of art—as remote and speechless icons, because we are their false descendants. Just as the artist considers herself a false descendent of European art, producing false copies of that art as her own.[49]

That Lee saw herself as a 'false descendant' of the European tradition has become a common interpretation of her early works and, indeed, is often expressed by the artist herself.[50] In the audio guide for her major retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, *Moon in a Dew Drop* (2020), she revealed:

> I realised that after some time with the photocopier, the photocopy was actually me. I'm a bad copy of China and European Australia. I fit somewhere in between. So that ghostliness was very symbolic of my sense of being in the world.[51]

However, I would argue that the slipperiness and fragility of memory—or a feeling that one's memories are inauthentic—is not particular to the cultural outsider, and that looking at this alone constricts our understanding of Lee's complex body of work. There is no doubt that the artist has since explored the dual nature of her identity as a second-generation Chinese Australian and her parents' experience of immigration in works that appropriate old family photographs. This is particularly true of works such as the large-scale triptych *The Seamless Tomb (Wearing an Iron Yoke That Has No Hole)* (2017), which centres on a snapshot of her father, pregnant mother, and older siblings in 1946, just before her father immigrated to Australia.[52] This said, I am wary of applying the same framework to the photocopies of the late '80s and early '90s. Even if the artist now understands her repetitive copying as a latent expression of identity, my approach asks how the final object speaks to the viewer, and, in short, I do not feel Lee's later revelation is apparent in the work itself.

For me, there is more evidence to suggest that Lee's 'bad copies' allegorise the inadequacy of memory rather than an individual's uneasy relationship to national (Australian) or cultural (Western) memory. Memories and mnemonic objects will never form an exact replica of the past, regardless of how closely we identify with the cultural context of that memory. Rather than simply a poor imitation, Lee's process is marked by a regimented ticking of time, as the time taken to make her work is ultimately determined by the speed of the machine. Each overlay of the image marks a small moment of the artist's process; and as the image becomes darker, we know more time has elapsed from the first appropriation. The darkest panels contain the greatest residue of time and can read like the rings of an
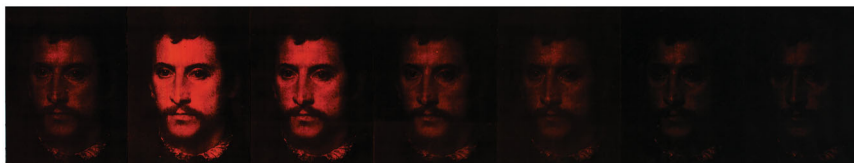
Figure 4. Lindy Lee, *Untitled (After Titian)*, 1990, photocopy and synthetic polymer paint on paper mounted on board, 7 panels, each 35 x 26.1 cm. Collection of The University of Queensland. Gift of David Pestorius through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 1998. Photo: Carl Warner. © Lindy Lee/Copyright Agency, 2021.

ancient tree trunk or layers of dust in a vacant home: time is literally stratified upon the surface of the copy.

The photocopy is an imprint of time, just as it is a simplified facsimile. In the second volume of *Time and Technics*, Stiegler argues that our memory functions not through its faithfulness to or continuity with the past but through its 'retentional finitude'.[53] He writes,

> One must find one's orientation in and to the already-there of memory just as one must find it in and to territory. And just as a map can never coincide with physical space 'point by point' as its equivalent, its identical reproduction, […] memory must reduce the memorisable in order for it to be memorable: in order to be orientated in the already-there of memory it is necessary to forget.[54]

In Borges's fable, this necessary and merciful forgetfulness eludes the protagonist, culminating in his madness and ultimately his death. Another of Lee's significant works, *Untitled (After Titian)* (1990) (fig. 4), provides the seriality that Funes's mind desperately needs. The artist creates her study 'after' the Venetian painter through a row of seven red-tinged panels. A stern, contemplative face is repeated in each, its gaze fixed upon an invisible point in the distance. The face in question is from Titian's *Portrait of a Young Englishman* (1545), now held in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence (fig. 5). Tightly cropped and imposed upon red paper, the pensive expression of the Englishman takes on a dark and brooding composure. Here, the portrait rises to its brightest point in the second panel and then continues to its darkest shade in the final reproduction. Trapped in a tonal parabola, the face is released from the darkness only to be buried once more in toner.

This irregular rhythm outlines the waxing and waning of recollection. To recall an image is to repeatedly copy it from the past, to enter and re-enter the feedback loop from material aids and interior memory images. The more time that elapses from the initial event, the more we must reprint this image upon itself. The first panel of *After Titian* might represent a distant memory: an image from the past that has been repeated so often that its original clarity is lost. The next panel in the series evokes a fresh recollection of Titian's portrait, perhaps prompted by seeing the work again. However, as the Englishman's face sinks back into darkness,

Figure 5. Titian (Tiziano Vecelli), *Portrait of a Young Englishman* (*Portrait of a Young Man with Grey Eyes*), 1540–45, oil on canvas, 111 × 96.8 cm. Palazzo Pitti, Florence.

we observe the gradual manipulation of the remembered object. The hollows of the man's cheeks deepen, the light hitting his forehead becomes more pronounced and, unexpectedly, the collar of his shirt takes on just as much significance as the expression on his face. Yet many elements of the painting are lost, such as the shape of the sitter's moustache and the flicker of his eyes. The reconstructed portrait finds its echo in Stiegler's passage:

> [The past] is never a question of a simple story of 'what happened,' since what happened has only happened in not having completely happened; it is memorized only through its being forgotten, only in its being effaced […][55]

   In duplicating Titian's image again and again, Lee has distinctly altered it. Her reproduction points to the selective nature of memory in which the past must be reduced and remoulded in order to be understood.

Perhaps unexpectedly, Xerox carbon provides the perfect metaphor for the necessary ruination of memory: building up over time, it obscures the very thing it hopes to reproduce in the present. For this reason, the old, static photocopier creates something quite different from other reproduction tools, including modern scanners or copiers, and it is this specific materiality that is key to understanding Lee's work. With each misalignment of Titian's image, the Englishman's fine moustache slowly becomes a hazy area of facial hair and the intensity of his gaze fades into dark eyes. The final image is not an accurate portrayal of the original, but this repetition of 'errors' ultimately sticks in the mind more than the original painting. Our memories are akin to these obscured yet persistent outlines of the original—they are closer to the meditative Reinhardt grids than sharp reproductions—and they soon become as real as the past event.

The meaning of *After Titian* and other photocopy works has undoubtedly changed over time, as Xerox machines are now nearly entirely obsolete. In the late 1980s, the photocopier was an unexciting but functional piece of technology widely used in libraries, offices, and schools. In the 2020s, Lee's photocopies not only take their subjects from the past but are themselves archaic objects. Thus, as time goes on, the material signifies a more profound sense of loss and erosion. For late twentieth-century viewers, the anachronism between the great European masterpieces and Lee's carbon copies was pronounced, and they likely assumed that the 'aura' resided only in the original. Today the temporal gap between subject and medium is less obvious and will only continue to compress as we move further away from the works' origins. Indeed, the photocopy now has its own retro aura. While I maintain that these works always projected a material presence, and rewarded long, meditative viewing, this is clearer than ever today, as both original and copy lie in the past. To return to Bill Brown in 'Thing Theory', 'the gap between the function of objects and the desires congealed there became clear only when those objects became outmoded'.[56] The obscuring haze of ink, the reflective sheen of carbon, and the persistent imprint or memory of the original: these are elements of Lee's work that have always been there but take on greater significance in an age of high-resolution digital reproductions. Perhaps it is only now that we can see Lee's photocopies for what they are: materially dense objects that not only replicate the past but form a unique *gestalt*, which affects us in the present.

Following the materials, we find a new understanding of Lee's practice. By distorting the appropriated source through many layers of toner, Lee creates a fleeting image that recalls the abstraction of Ad Reinhardt. Much like Reinhardt's black paintings, her photocopies require a great patience or what I have termed a 'labour of perception', which involves both concentration on, and movement around, the work of art. In some of her most perplexing works, the appropriated image fades in and out of legibility, mirroring the transient, coloured grids concealed within Reinhardt's 'monochromes'. In this essay, I have argued that the nearly opaque film of carbon in Lee's work offers a poignant reflection on time and decay, and points to the role technology plays

in the formation of memory. The issue of materiality offers a new way into Lee's art and, perhaps, a productive framework for this period of conceptualism at large. In her work, we find an example of a practice that avoids rigid polarities of phantasmal images and material objects, skirting the division of ideas and things. Lee proves that conceptual art can draw from its objecthood, rather than renounce it.

Notes

1. Rex Butler, 'In the Shadow of Lindy Lee', *On the Beach* 10 (1986): 19.

2. Jorge Luis Borges, *Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (London: Penguin, 1999), 43.

3. Ibid., 33–43.

4. Ibid., 40.

5. Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', *Art International* 12, no. 2 (1968): 31; Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (London: Studio Vista, 1973), 43.

6. Lippard, *Six Years*, 8.

7. Mel Bochner, 'Excerpts from Speculation', *Artforum* 8 (1970): 70–73. Republished in Petra Lange-Berndt, ed., *Materiality* (London: Whitechapel Gallery; Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2015), 183.

8. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility', in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Harry John and Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2003), 4: 256.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., 255; Walter Benjamin, 'A Little History of Photography', in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, and Howard Eiland (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2008), 285.

11. Benjamin, 'A Little History', 286.

12. Butler, 'In the Shadow of Lindy Lee', 20.

13. Ibid., 19.

14. Ibid.

15. For further reading, see Martha Rosler et. al., 'Notes from the Field: Materiality', *The Art Bulletin* 95, no. 1 (2013): 10–37; Georges Didi-Huberman, 'The Order of Material: Plasticities, *malaises*, Survivals', in *Materiality,* ed. Petra Lange-Berndt (London: Whitechapel Gallery; Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2015), 42–53; Georges Didi-Huberman, 'Viscosities and Survivals: Art History Put to the Test by the Material', in *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, ed. Roberta Panzanelli, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008), 154–69.

16. Clement Greenberg, '"American-Type" Painting' (1955), reprinted in Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 208–29.

17. Ibid., 208.

18. Michael Ann Holly, 'Notes from the Field: Materiality', *The Art Bulletin* 95, no. 1 (2013): 15.

19. Ibid.

20. Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28, no. 1, issue theme: 'Things' (2001): 1–22.

21. Sarah Wasserman, 'Thing Theory', in *Oxford Bibliographies, Literary and Critical Theory*, https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0097.xml.

22. See Brown's discussion of the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai in 'Thing Theory', 6.

23. Ibid., 12.

24. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 6.

25. Ibid., 11–14.

26. Brown, 'Thing Theory', 7.

27. Ibid., 4.

28. Lindy Lee, quoted in Ann Elias, 'Through a Glass Darkly: Lindy Lee Interviewed by Ann Elias', *Art Asia Pacific* 1, no. 2 (1994): 86.

29. Lindy Lee, 'The End Is the Beginning' (PhD diss., University of New South Wales College of Fine Art, 2001), 109–55.

30. Ibid., 110.

31. Ad Reinhardt, quoted in gallery label for *Focus: Ad Reinhardt and Mark Rothko*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 7 March – 3 August 2008, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78976.

32. The phenomenological realisation of 1960s minimalism, as artists sought to guide the viewer through installations, was what Michael Fried provocatively called a tendency towards 'theatricality'. See Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (1967): 12–23.

33. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 23.

34. Ibid., 30.

35. Ibid., 4–5.

36. Ibid., 9.

37. Ibid., 203.

38. Ibid., 170.

39. Benjamin Gennochio and Melissa Chiu, *Lindy Lee* (Sydney: Craftsman House, 2001), 54.

40. Ibid.

41. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 1: 97–137;

Bernard Stiegler, 'Memory', in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 66.

42. Plato, 'Phaedrus 274c–275e', in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 9, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1925), http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc = Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0174%3Atext%3DPhaedrus%3Asection%3D274c.

43. Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 1: 3.

44. Ibid., 2.

45. Ibid., ix.

46. Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy', in *Dissemination,* trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 65–117.

47. Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 1: 73.

48. Ibid., 70–71.

49. Edward Colless, 'The Many Faces of Lindy Lee', *Australian Art Collector*, 26 (2003): 55. The curator Melissa Chiu has argued similarly in 'Struggling in the Ocean of Yes and No', in *Lindy Lee,* ed. Gennochio and Chiu, 15.

50. Lindy Lee, quoted in Colless, 'The Many Faces of Lindy Lee', 55; Lindy Lee, quoted in Djon Mundine, 'Lindy Lee: Asia Link', *Artlink* 35, no. 2 (2015): 36; Lindy Lee, quoted in Stranger, 'Lindy Lee', 57–65.

51. Lindy Lee, 'Audio Guide', *Moon in a Dew Drop*, exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2 October 2020 – 28 Feb 2021, https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/exhibitions/lindy-lee-moon-in-a-dew-drop.

52. Michael Young, 'The Seamless Tomb: Lindy Lee' (review), *Art Asia Pacific,* 2017, http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/WebExclusives/TheSeamlessTomb.

53. Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 2: 117.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid., 115.

56. Brown, 'Thing Theory', 13.