

## **To forget and to repeat: negative and cliché**

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## To Forget and to Repeat: negative and cliché

*An illustrated essay about postcards, which performs as a postcard. No, rather it is an essay with postcards, which performs as a series of postcards. In any case, it begins and ends with a postcard. There are a number of clichés, and a number of negatives. Images of the unconscious, unconscious representations, are evoked. That an idea or image or presentation is present in more than one register is also the stuff of dreams, the material of *The Interpretation of Dreams**

This is an illustrated essay about postcards. I did not quite know that when I started to write. I thought it would be more obviously about memory, as I have done a lot of public remembering recently. That I tell you this at the beginning may rather undo any surprise. Actually, it is not true to say it is *about* postcards, but perhaps it is an illustrated essay *with* postcards. Or perhaps more accurately, it is a series of postcards. Yes, let us stay with that for now.

### I

In 2013 the geographer Steve Pile asked me if I would make an image for the cover of his then forthcoming book, *Psychoanalytic Geographies*, which he was co-editing with Paul Kingsbury. He asked me because we are friends, because he does not know very many artists, and because (as he remarked in a most flattering and thus persuasive way) he thinks that I think both psychoanalytically and spatially. And so of course we spoke about Freud's case study of the 'Rat Man', of 1909, of the map or diagram therein, and of the jumping back and forward in time and space of the Rat Man's thinking, with its

strained narrativity, which leads to the production of two maps to get the story straight, mapping a journey in which timing is impossible. One map is Freud's; the other is that of the English translators, the Stracheys, who found Freud's own map, his representation, rather wanting. We noted that Freud gets the Rat Man to tell his story three times, and that Freud points out errors of memory and displacements.

Steve had a very clear idea of what he wanted for the cover of his book, and oh yes, I could undertake it, I promised, with keenness. For three months I lied to him, saying my image or images were underway. I did draw, re-draw, on a postcard, the map of explanatory manoeuvres of the Rat Man's story, but it was of little interest. The postcard, one of Rome, from the 1950s – or back of a postcard, unsent then from Rome in the 1950s – *was* of interest to me, however. The front of any postcard is, I suppose, an image, and is for anyone to see; the back is a message, and intended from one to another. I *do* realise the image may be a message too, and that sometimes it is a message from the unconscious.

One night I dreamt the solution to the book cover, the image I was unable to find or resolve. I dreamt that I had taken postcards of Rome from my modest collection, and turned them into negatives of themselves by careful application of white gouache to the areas of shadow and grey or black gouache to the light areas. They were wonderful, beautiful, as images dreamt often are. On waking and taking up my desk in my studio, I found they were rather more difficult to do than in my lovely dream, and the resulting postcards, my postcards to Steve and Paul, are clumsy and ugly. Look, you can see some of them here. As you can see, the postcards are utterly *ruined*. I cannot restore them to what they once were, even if I were to scrape away the layers of amateurishly applied paint. I produced quite a lot of them, each time trying to improve my rendering. I wanted them to be smooth, seamless, and indeed, their reproduction as further images – new images – to some extent makes them appear so. The inept lumpiness of my brushstrokes is no longer quite so visible. What *is* clearly visible in the amended

originals, the emergence of a background image, once the only scene, is not quite so obvious in its reproduction (I want to call this the replaying of a scene, but I am not quite sure why).



Steve writes of these postcards that there are not two scenes, before and after, but indeed, three, and to see them demands the viewer's move between 'visible, barely visible, and imagined scenes in the postcards' (*xix*). The positive view is still present, but partially erased in the production of a negative form. The postcard is still present – and a message could be written on its *verso* – but the original intention of the postcard from Rome in the 1950s has gone. It could be remembered, or revisited *in situ*. Yes, one could even take a flight to Rome to do so (I *have* done so but the postcards I wanted to send to you do not exist any longer); to stand in the same place from which the view was taken, a vantage point that may no longer be accessible or one that is obscured by trees or new building (the constant renovation of cities), and in taking up the photographer's position, certain features may have gone, impossible to match postcard to place (as Steve found when *he* flew to Rome). The negative image is an inversion, a reversed order. For a moment, I wanted to think of it like the transference in a psychoanalysis, with its

ambivalence and hostility. There is certainly something aggressive about erasing a picture through concealment, but the picture is still there even if no longer as it should be, that is, as a positive. One may have to work from memory to effect any kind of reconstruction.

Freud and Breuer, in *Studies in Hysteria*, published in 1895, present hysterical symptoms as a collection of memories. They dispute any single, pathogenic cause. Rather, symptoms are organised around multiple points of convergence, chronological, concentric, and dynamic, cutting across space and time in an arrangement that is nothing less than archival. Material that has been forgotten nonetheless lies to hand, ‘in correct and proper order’ (287). In describing the threefold order of the unconscious, Freud moves through chronology, then concentric themes, through collections arranged in sequences like document files, and then, most excitingly, he describes the linking of these stratifications. It is a dynamic drawing, quite unlike my pathetic copy on the back of a postcard of the diagram of the Rat Man’s story.

Freud writes in his essay of 1915, ‘The Unconscious’:

in a spatial diagram [...] the course of the logical chain would be indicated by a broken line which would pass along the most roundabout paths from the surface to the deepest layers and back, and yet would in general advance from the periphery to the central nucleus, touching it at every immediate halting-place – a line resembling the zig-zag line in the solution of a Knight’s move problem, which cuts across the squares in the diagram of the chess-board (159–215).

Freud is working out the concept of psychical topography, the spatiality of mental processes. His topographic system divides the psyche into three systems, three levels. Earlier, in 1896, he writes to Wilhelm Fliess of the stratification of ideas, or images or

presentations, equally encompassed by *Vorstellung* (and somewhat elided in translation), that what is remembered – the term he uses is ‘memory traces’ – may be subject ‘to a *rearrangement* in accordance with fresh circumstances – to a *retranscription*’ (*The Complete Letters* 417). Memory is present not once but several times over, and moreover, ‘*consciousness and memory are mutually exclusive*’ (417). That an idea or image or presentation is present in more than one register is also the stuff of dreams, the material of *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

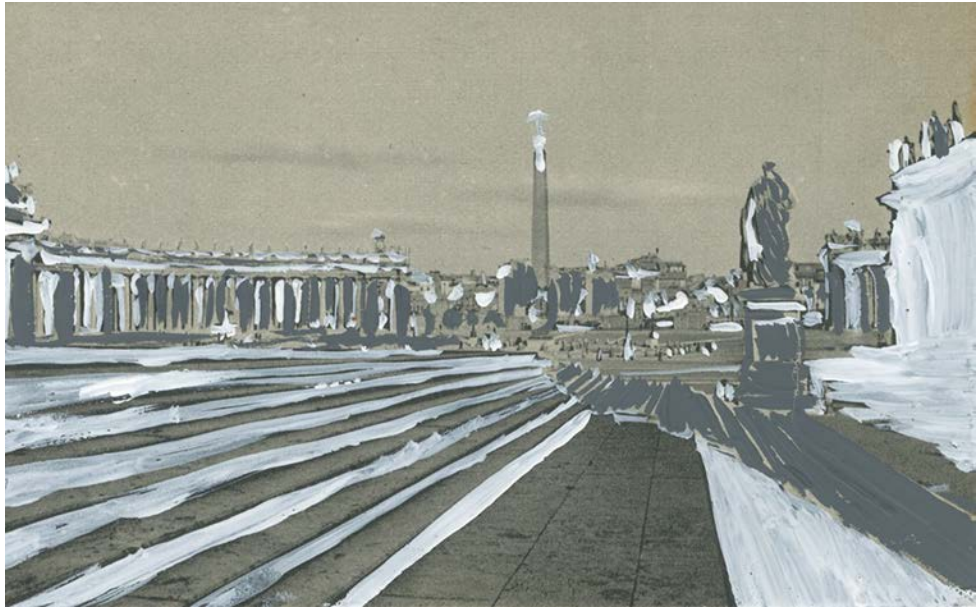
You know Freud’s celebrated metaphor from ‘Civilization and its Discontents’, published in 1930, in which the history – and architecture – of Rome stands for the psychic history of an individual, a history that is imagined, of which much is lost or forgotten, yet is preserved nonetheless in the unconscious:

Let us, by a flight of imagination, suppose that Rome is not a human habitation but a psychical entity with a similarly long and copious past – an entity, that is to say, in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one (Freud 18).

This is the first postcard of my talk: a set of negatives and a *cliché*.









## II

*Reproductions I* is a subscription series of books published in association with domobaal gallery London, which ran from January to February 2012. It drew on my extensive collection of postcards and some other sets of ephemeral source material, allowing – or causing – me to re-categorise my collections in book form. Properly, the series should be held in its handsome slipcase, and is entitled (but only at its completion) *Reproductions I*. It is, one might say, a matter of structure, as well as one of meticulous cataloguing or insistent representation. Material that has had a life already is re-organised, yet the re-ordering leads to a certain disorder, a somewhat paradoxical economy. Most of the images are postcards, though some are photographs that were made into postcards.

There are no negatives in the production, but there are, for sure, *clichés*. In Freud's exploration of *Vorstellung*, there is an implication of mediation, of finely calibrated measurement, in the spatial and temporal movement between things in the world, real or imagined, in order to construct a version or versions of the world, one that works as a formulation of possibilities, in any case. If the early experiments in hypnosis might offer proof of the existence of the unconscious – and that is not the unconscious of psychoanalysis, but rather a state of latency, from which material might arise but one does not know from where it came – there are also the moments of negative hallucination. Sorry, that is clumsily put, as awkward as my attempts to fix categories that refuse to stay still, no matter how decisively I name and then file the images I have collected:

*Frères et Sœurs*  
*Communiantes et Communiantes*  
*Pierrots et Pierrettes*

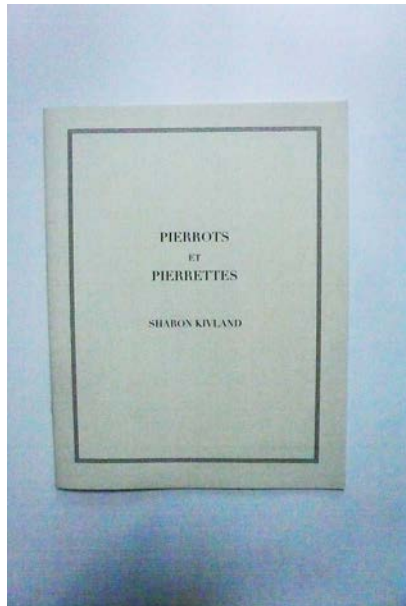
*Nus exotiques*  
*Les Chiens des Pyrénées*  
*Les Chalets Suisses*

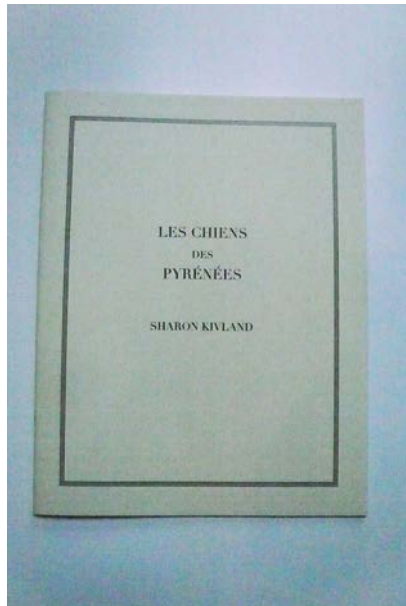
*Les Amants Modernes*  
*La Neige sur les montagnes*  
*Les Reflets*  
*Femmes et roses*

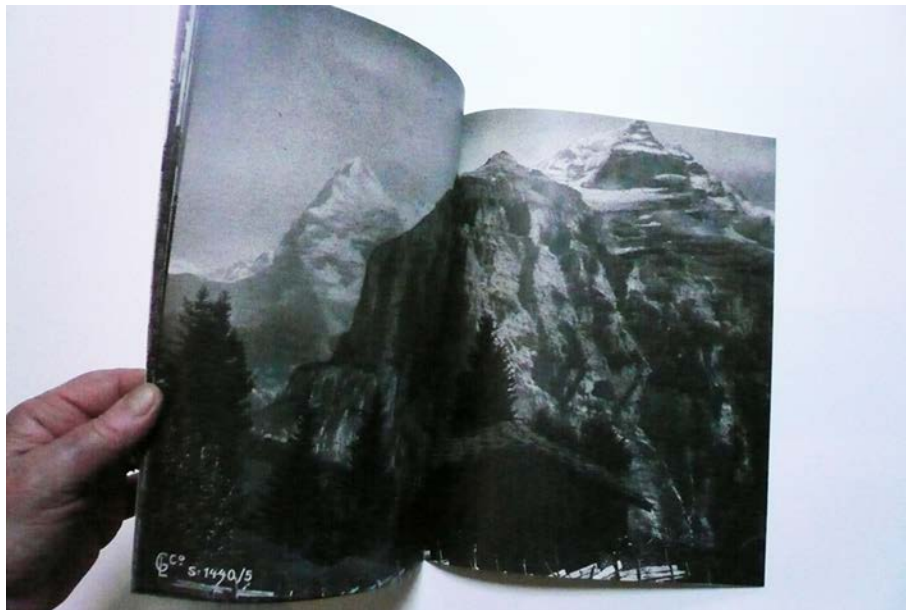
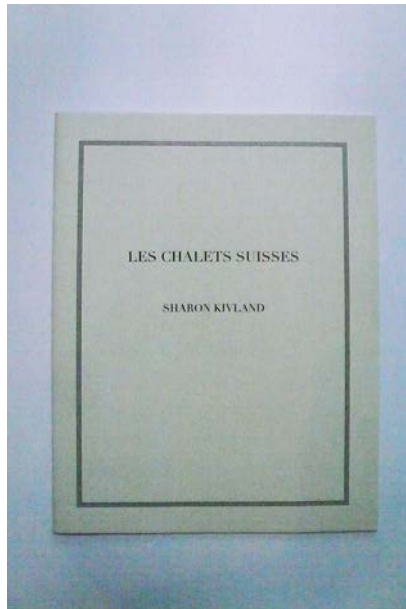
*Les Cascades*  
*Les Fontaines*  
*Messages de lointain*

Perhaps there one comes closer to psychoanalysis, when rather than being hypnotised into seeing something that is not there, the patient is hypnotised into *not* seeing something that is present. (I am speaking of Hippolyte Bernheim's experiments with hypnosis in his clinic in Nancy in 1889, which Freud witnessed, *en route* to his appointment with Fanny Moser in her lovely chateau in Switzerland. Frau Moser is, of course, Emmy von N., the first case in which Freud uses the cathartic method to trace the history of the symptom. Frau Emmy would break off frequently in the middle of a session, her face contorting with disgust and horror. She would stretch out her hands, crooking and spreading her fingers, crying out 'Keep still! Don't say anything! Don't touch me!', and she would make a peculiar clacking noise, 'like a ticking ending with a pop and a hiss', but I digress.) This is my fear, of course, that something is under my nose all the time, but I will fail to recognise or to represent it, and worse still, will resort to invention or feeble excuse, offering on the spur of the moment some sort of motive for my senseless behaviour (to make sense of the world). Yet on occasion, something is found and recognised, among the *clichés* of popular representations, and yes, then one might say that an image might an idea that speaks ... here is the example I promised: from *Chiens des Pyrénées*.

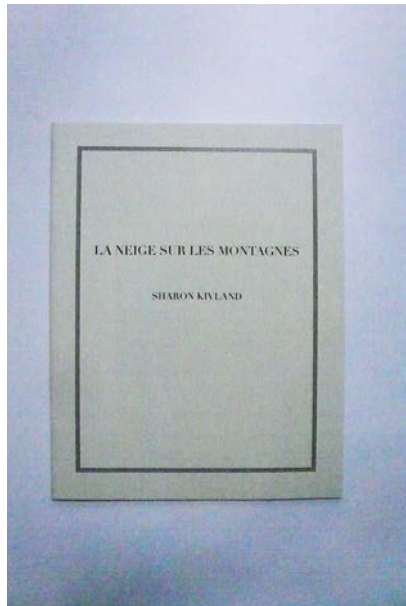












### III

*Reproductions III* follows *Reproductions I* – and it is clear that there is a gap, *Reproduction II*. The latter is an exhibition of largely photographic works, derived from extant material in magazines, including photographs of belts or waists, bodies or fashion accessories, knee-length skirts, which appear both constraining and oddly liberating, truncated bodies in attractive trousers and defining belts (the women of *Femmes d’Aujourd’hui*, *Modes de Paris*, and *Modes travaux* have seen the ‘opening of all the doors of competition’ and they are certainly not afraid to wear the trousers, or indeed, a nice pair of striped slacks or a glittering cat suit, as long as the situation warrants it), or lovely dresses (day and one evening), and an accompanying small catalogue of two booklets, each with an essay. I digress.

*Reproductions III* is another subscription series, following the success of *Reproductions I* (with many satisfied customers). The series is subtitled *Du Monde/Of the World*, and if you will forgive a perhaps grandiose notion, I was thinking about Maurice Merleau-Ponty's account of vision and visibility (that we are looked at, in the spectacle of the world), and Jacques Lacan's commentary thereon (that the world is not exhibitionistic, it does not provoke our gaze, but when it does, the feeling of strangeness begins). So I think that I met the remit of the conference for which this essay was written, if somewhat hastily or obliquely, which sought to address the scopic drive, even if I did not answer the question posed.

It is, of course, quite correct that I should not do so, for the purpose of the drive, according to Lacan, if I understand the master correctly, is not to reach a goal but rather to circle around an object, and this is where the real pleasure lies, in the repetitive circuit that transgresses the law of the pleasure principle. The scopic drive is the partial aspect where desire is realised, and here, in the categories of the world, desire is exposed in things or pictures of things but also in the words that describe or locate things and

pictures. It is only the world, not a view of the universe, and as Freud remarks in a lecture of 1932, the work of art does not seek to be anything but an illusion, and ‘except for a few people who are spoke of as being possessed by art, it makes no attempt at invading the realm of reality’ (*New Introductory Lectures* 160).

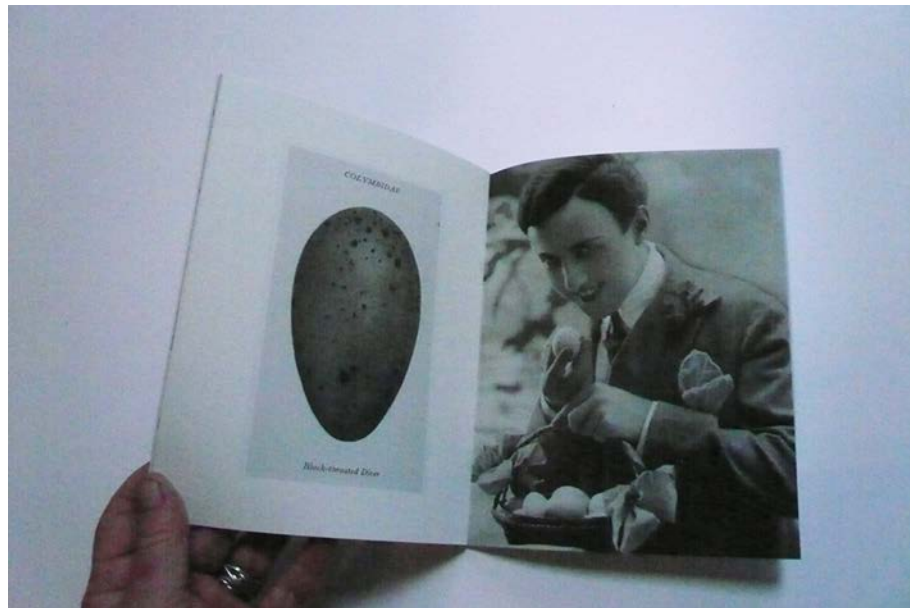
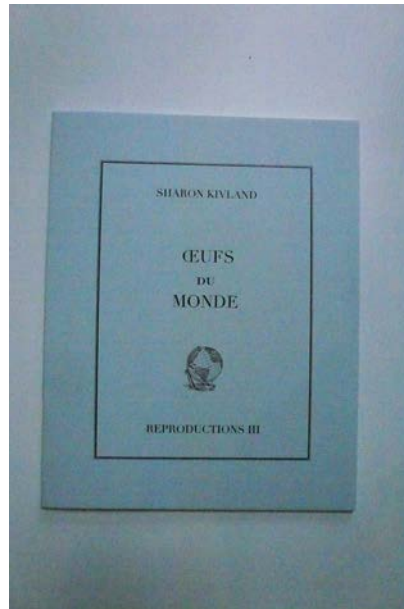
*Femmes du Monde / Women of the World,*  
*Hommes du Monde / Men of the World*  
*Amants du Monde / Lovers of the World*  
*Œufs du Monde / Eggs of the World*  
*Enfants du Monde / Children of the World*  
*Arbres du Monde / Trees of the World*  
*Danseurs de Monde / Dancers of the World*  
*Roséristes du Monde / Rosegrowers of the World*

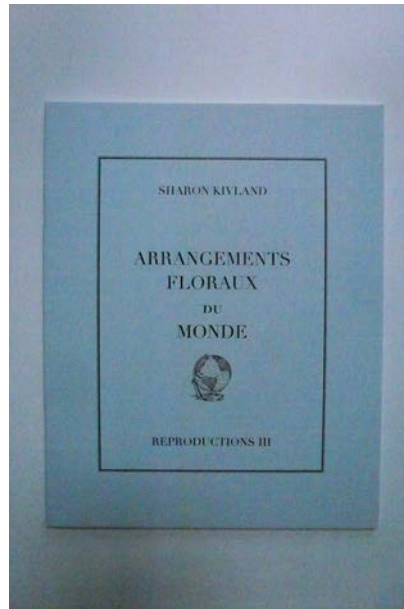
*Philosophes du Monde / Philosophers of the World* (to which I added some barmen as I did not have enough pictures of philosophers, for they too address the question of existence)  
*Arrangements floraux du Monde / Flower arrangements of the World*  
*Chats du Monde / Cats of the World*  
*Poissons du Monde / Fish of the World*  
*Femmes du Monde (encore) / Women of the World (again)*

I do not know if there is any transformation effected, but would like to note that Freud in a footnote to his paper on the unconscious, writes: ‘The dream-work, too, occasionally treats words like things’ (‘The Unconscious’ 199), and in the paper’s main body: ‘the conscious presentation comprises the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone’ (201). Both series of *clichés*, without negatives, are nicely presented in a bespoke slipcase.

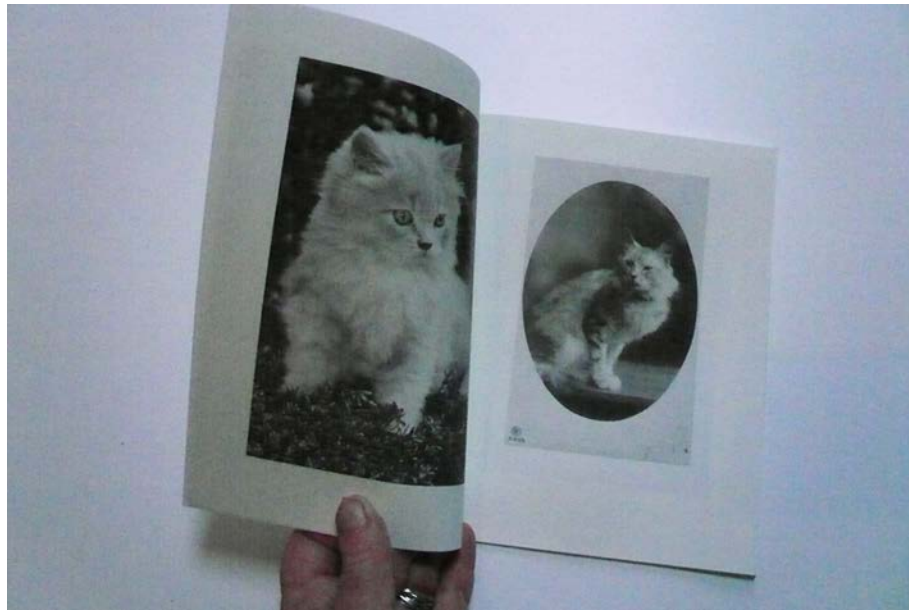
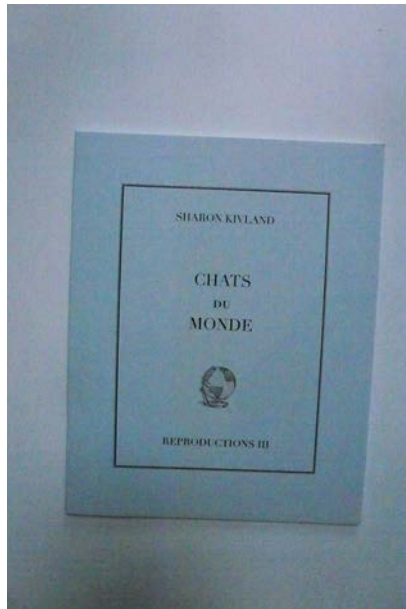


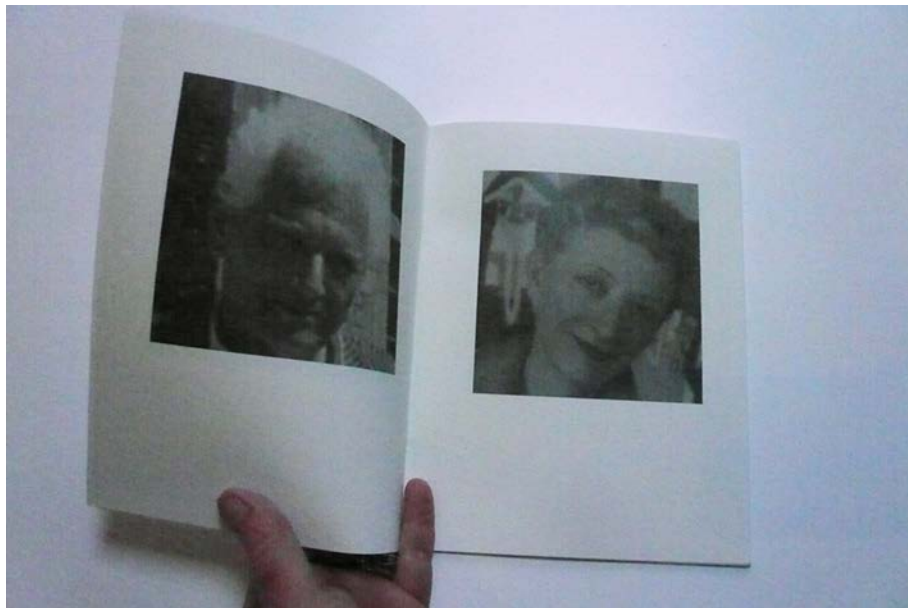
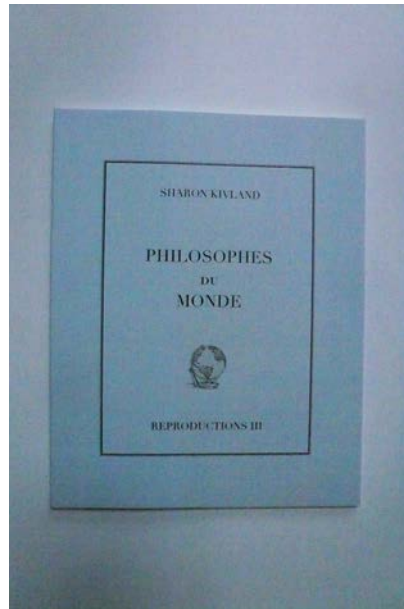
Images think of them as representations once collected and titled (falling under a signifier, shall we say) are turned into books think of them as ideas, and then into an object think of this as setting desire in motion, though of course, you are under no obligation to do so, for each collection is a remainder or leftover (an object with no use-value) of the first impulse to subscribe the moment when desire was set in motion. My monthly *envoi* is absent, even forgotten. These are my second and third postcards.











#### IV

My final *envoi* is rather descriptive and returns to my title ‘To Forget and to Repeat’, retaining the thread of a transcript, image, or picture of a visible object formed by the mind – the presentation, and a relation between reproduction and repetition in encountering the past as something that was once present. What I thought would be the work for the *château* of Morsang went through many stages. Responding to the faded, melancholy, and nostalgic ambience of the location, the work was to take up ideas of memory, as an articulation of the symbolic history of a subject (or subjects). I proposed to follow the construction of memory through speech – in the way a psychoanalysis works, aiming not at reminiscence but rather at recollection. Freud suggests all memories are screen memories, that it may be questioned whether we have any memories at all *from* our childhood, that memories *relating* to our childhood may be all that we possess (322). Reminiscence relives the experiences of the past, while recollection reconstructs; Jacques Lacan writes: ‘It is less a matter of remembering than of rewriting history’ (14). I proposed a rewriting of the history of the location, but what I proposed did not take place. By the time I visited the chateau again, the work was different. The title was not changed, however, in the advance publicity – the booklet of forthcoming events in Morsang – and there, the work described is the work I did not make. In a way, there have been two works, a work of fiction and a work that took place, yet, I suppose, both are imagined.

The text on the invitation intimated my interest in certain psychoanalytic concepts of temporality; it explained, clearly, what was going to happen. The translation into French was accurate, sensitive to the nuances of both English and French, and attentive to the exactitude of temporal grammatical constructions. It invited the reader to a project in parts, a work that would take various forms including that of recollection. Of course I worried if I was making sense, if my confusion of tenses was sensible, but it is

how one thinks and dreams. I rewrite the tenses now, and what I wrote then reads now: *There was the invitation that the reader might have just received in the post and was now reading. There was a photograph, which, while set in the present – though not the present in which the reader was reading my invitation – was constructed in the past. There was a rehearsal for a concert that had already taken place. There was a second photograph of the same place, which became a postcard and circulated after the event it documented.* In the original text, what I have written above took the future perfect form, the tense that expresses the past in the future, and which once was called the second future tense : *There will have been a second photograph of the same place, which will have become a postcard and will have circulated after the event it will have documented.*

The invitation was printed late, however, and risked arriving on the day of the opening event or even later, when it would have invited guests to an event that had already happened, as did the notice at the back of *Art Press*, in which the opening event was given as Friday rather than Thursday. The invitation must have arrived at its destination, as enough people came to constitute my audience. A choir rehearsed for a concert it had already given, in the room next to the large *salon* in which the audience sat, facing a very large photograph, fitting exactly into the frame of the ornate *boiserie* opposite. The photograph duplicated the scene in front of it, but without the audience. It showed the gold chairs, with red velvet seats, empty, like the *salon* itself. Some people were charmed; some were confused. At the other end of the room the corresponding panel held two texts: one was the account of a man in the audience, the other that of a woman, echoing the text of the invitation. These texts are now collected in a small book, the cover of which reproduces the invitation card. The postcard and a photograph that is not the postcard mirror each other, at the beginning and at the end. Some of the photographs are of the *château*; some are not, and yet they might be. The centre image is a photograph in a mirror. This book was not for sale; it was circulated to those who were

at the opening event, to those who came later and asked what there was to see, and to those who have never been there.





Some people were late, and missed being in the photograph I took for the postcard. The staging was not a performance as photographer, though some took is as such, and applauded. I was wearing a particularly beautiful skirt, matching the lovely gold silk curtains I had made for the interior doors and windows, curtains that many people thought had always been there and did not consider as part of a work of art, yet which transformed the room, restoring it to an imagined past. The choir performed splendidly, conscious of the audience in the adjacent room. The postcard of the audience was posted to those who left their addresses, and to five hundred people on the *chateau's* mailing list, as was the publication a year later. The card is a little dark, perhaps. There is a negative and a *cliché*. This is my final postcard. I posted it to the first person to ask me, and I wrote (as I promised) the message she requested. I can only suppose it arrived at its destination.



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