

Viewed from Behind: The Projected Image and its *Doppelgänger*

Ignaz Cassar

The spectre is also [...] what one imagines, what one thinks one sees and which one projects – on an imaginary screen where there is nothing to see. Not even the screen sometimes, and a screen always has, at bottom, in the bottom or background that it is, a structure of disappearing apparition.
Jacques Derrida¹

And the behind is ambiguous: behind the photograph and behind that, what is on it, even though it does not insist [on] to be on it [...].
Elfriede Jelinek²

Falling Behind

In his essay, ‘Contributions to the Theory of the Anal Character’, the psychoanalyst Karl Abraham tells in a few lines a story of a friend with whom he used to lunch when they were both students. Abraham notes that his friend liked to take the menu in the reverse order, i.e. he commenced with the sweet and ended with the soup.³ By reversing the course, the behind – the end of things – steps forward, serving as the beginning. At the same time, one could say, we have moved towards the behind so as to make it our beginning. Albeit our friend begins in reverse order, with what is usually delegated to the tail end, the behind becomes the front of things from where a beginning can take place. Once more, we begin.

In beginning to think about images, we can approach the behind, or we can begin our approach from behind. Either strategy involves our own projecting work to situate ourselves in relation to the behind. It is through projecting – through inserting imaginary screens onto which we project – that we can line ourselves up, steer towards or away from the image.⁴ Moving between these imaginary screens, we may find ourselves behind the image or in front of it. By pursuing a projection, we give ourselves directions. Holding on to the image, we hold our selves. Let us *face* then the ‘problem of projecting’: what is at stake when *projecting* an image?

Projecting an image entails the throwing forth or out of it. The image is sent off; it moves ahead. The distinctiveness of the projected image lies in its characteristic of being projected, of being propelled, shot out of a projecting device. For the projected image to emerge and to become visible to the beholder, a ‘support’ structure of some sort is necessary, be it a screen, a wall, a canvas, etc. As a device, the screen slices through the projection beam, thereby delivering – reflecting back – the image to the viewer. Thus, the screen can be seen as a plane of *intervention* that obstructs the projection. Indeed, it brings it to a halt to let the image become manifest to the spectator. The screen is the *telos* of the image. It is the site of the image’s realizations, the site where it can finally emerge to the viewer’s eyes.

Let us look at the screen in figure 1. Hiroshi Sugimoto’s screens have fascinatingly reversed this logic of anticipating the image. (Figure 1) The cinematic screen appears

as white surface. The filmic images have become wiped out through the photograph's overexposure. At the same time, the screen illuminates the 'black box', thereby rendering some of its details visible. Phenomenologically, the screen, while actually 'containing' all the frames of the projected film, appears to be emptied out of all its images. 'A Disappearing apparition.'⁵ The blank lies dormant and waits to be inscribed, yet it is actually 'overinscribed', accumulating all of the film's frames into one photographic exposure. Sugimoto's photographic representations of the screen erase the projected images, *re*-turning the screen audaciously to itself. In turn, the glaring rectangles in Sugimoto's cinemas light up the interiors of the black box.



Figure 1. Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Kino Panorama, Paris* (1998). © Hiroshi Sugimoto. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery, New York.

The screen faces us, reflecting back the image to its projector. And behind the screen? Like the anal character, we are concerned here 'with the reverse side of various things and situations'⁶ but without recuperating the reverse as some kind of primary image or interest. How are we beholding the image if *we* are behind the screen? And how are we beholding the image that *appears* behind the screen? The two questions are of course linked; what becomes the 'behind' depends on the viewer's position in relation to the image, and vice versa. The topos of the behind is ambivalent. It can be localized through its behindness – we believe we know its whereabouts, an exclamatory 'it's there, *behind!*' confirms it. At the same time, we don't know what *is* behind, because of its behindness. Not being able to see beyond the projected image, the 'behind' retreats behind the screen, evading us. It remains hidden behind the behind, confined to the rear.

On the other hand, perplexingly, we are already behind the image – the image being always ahead of us, as the task to be accomplished, the *telos* that we run after and onto which we project. The image entices us and keeps us running ... running towards it, we seem to have fallen behind it. Ahead of us, then, the image. Projected, shot forth, it appears in front of us. Beholding it, it guides by giving us directions and making us move forward. But its obvious frontality, staring back to us, may also trick us. Like a

frontal door, it conceals something behind itself. Hidden behind the front, another behind.

The screen is the site of the viewer's expectation, where s/he anticipates the image. 'What is behind the image?', we might thus ask. Is the image a question of the obstacle, obstructing our way with its frontality and thereby creating a *behind* behind which we cannot see? Pursuing this question of the image and its behind, we are inevitably already creating – or better, projecting – another image. Through its frame we seek to find an answer to our projected problem. Derrida points out that the Greek root of the word 'problem' can either mean:

projection or protection, that which one poses or throws in front of oneself, either as the projection of a project, of a task to accomplish, or as the protection created by a substitute, a prosthesis that we put forth in order to represent, replace, shelter, or dissimulate ourselves, or as to hide something unavowable – like a shield [...] behind which one guards oneself *in secret* or *in shelter* in case of danger.⁷

Throwing forth the image, we fall behind it. Projecting it, we find shelter through or in the problem that it poses. On the other hand, this also entails the making of a secret that constitutes the behind of the projected image. The projection of a problem delivers an image that shields us through its frontality from the danger of the unknown. At the same time, behind its front, something is kept in secret, is shielded off from us. Hidden behind the imaginary screen of the problem, the behind remains a secret. And we, who project the image, fall already behind it. The image, then, may not be an obstacle that prohibits us from seeing what lies behind, because the image itself depends on our 'point' of projection. And once we project, we confront the image we have put forth, thereby letting ourselves fall behind it. Being behind, then again, we find shelter in the shield of the image and the secret that lies behind it.

Image-shields

One can argue then, alongside Derrida, that to project an image is to predict a problem. The projection of an image entails, as he says, a strategy of shielding, of remaining before or behind a shield. I can either find shelter (being before the shield) or invisibility (being behind the shield). In her performance/film, *Adjungierte Dislokationen* (1973), the artist VALIE EXPORT carries two cameras, each facing opposite directions respectively – one on her back and one on her chest. Fastened on her body, the cameras record EXPORT's changing surroundings as she moves through space and time. Her work also reminds us that photographic recording implies a two-way projection. (Figures 2, 3, 4) It necessitates the photographer's projection, i.e. the projection of an idea or image of what should be captured. And further, of course, the recording itself entails projecting an optical image, in reversed form. 'Looking and incorporating.'⁸

In the film, her body remains hidden between the two resulting moving images. Like a vanishing point that swallows up the visible while at the same time bringing about perspectival representation, the artist remains behind the image but from where she

nevertheless directs it through her body. At the rear side of the visible image, her body is the support structure of the film, literally underpinning it. Indeed, we can recognize in them Derrida's image-shields, offering her shelter as well as keeping her secret. They delegate her body to the topos of the behind, thereby moving it away from the projectile of the viewer's gaze. The filmic images become the surfaces of her body, indexing her presence in space in the form of a visible absence. The viewer experiences her body as always vanishing in space, remaining behind the image-shield.

We may say that EXPORT builds a trap for her own body-image, or to put it from another perspective, she builds a trap for the image that we, the spectators, would have of her. Instead, she puts forth another pair of images which nonetheless follow and trace her. In the prosthetic image that she produces of her self and of herself constructing an image about herself, we are given a front that disclaims the iconographic traits of frontality while remaining nevertheless a shield that stands in for her. A front, yes, but without being frontal. *She*, the artist-author, equipped with the two cameras fastened on her body, directs the creation of the images that will represent her. However, the front that she offers to the viewer is a form of visual excision, cutting her body out of the mechanisms of filmic representation. The viewer can follow, with her, the making of the films without seeing her. The images shield. Behind them, the artist-author remains unrecognizable, trapped between the two shields that the cameras record. The projectiles that the cameras on her body are, shoot the images that will protect and shelter her afterwards.

The viewer locates EXPORT behind the image. Again, we presuppose the image as a front, or better a frontier. We long for it, reaching out, projecting forth. We thereby let ourselves fall behind the image too. At the same time, by claiming its front, we bring the behind to the image. *Adjungierte Dislokationen* conjoins behind and front. EXPORT puts forward an image of herself that is looking away from herself. It turns us away from the image-creating artist. It conveys a front that avoids frontality – making us look elsewhere. It is an image-shield that approaches the viewer in a backward way. The images operate as her tangents, outlining her presence through what surrounds her. One could say that the two films form a pair of image-shields that enfold and shelter her while simultaneously keeping her outside of the image. EXPORT doesn't occupy the image of the shelter, and yet it has a sheltering function that gives her protection.





Figures 2 & 3. VALIE EXPORT, *Adjungierte Dislokationen* [*Adjunct Dislocations*], film action, photo, colour. Photo: Hermann Hendrich © VALIE EXPORT. Courtesy Charim Galerie, Vienna. Figure 4. VALIE EXPORT, *Adjungierte Dislokationen* [*Adjunct Dislocations*] (1973). © VALIE EXPORT. Courtesy Generali Foundation Collection, Vienna.

Besides

Projecting: frontiers rise, images appear. They move towards us and we try to see beyond them, projecting anew, falling behind anew. Being behind, we seek the front. In facing images, we take sides, finding our place before or behind them. Through the *problem*, Derrida stresses, we project and erect an image of it. Which side then are we, the projecting subjects, taking? Does the image lead us inevitably to its front? The problem makes projection *and* protection available. Is protection necessarily a question of the behind, of being hidden? And is the projection tied to the front towards we face our selves up, putting thereby the behind to its behind? I will refrain from finding an answer to these questions. Rather, in proposing them, I would like to encircle another question pertinent to envisaging our ‘problem’. What is at stake when we take sides? Aren’t we creating thereby a shield again – throwing forth a problem so as to take sides – behind which we hope to find shelter and thereby an explanation of it? Aren’t we ‘shielding’ behind the problem once more so that one can thereby ‘protect oneself while concealing oneself?’⁹

Let us project again. Projecting implies the logics of the *projectile*, of something that extends, bridges distances, travels forth. It carries the image. Only when we want the image to appear, a process of ‘screening’ starts to intervene, slowing it down and rendering it visible. This stops at the same time the projecting forth, bringing the projection thereby to a temporary halt on the ‘screen’ and turning it into an image. Yet we can observe that even without a screen, we can still project. Melik Ohanian’s *Invisible Film* (2005) takes advantage of this, embracing the invisible with the very medium that represents through a projecting apparatus. He sets up an absurd situation by showing the screening of Peter Watkins’s film *Punishment Park* (1971) without a screen.¹⁰ The image is projected: through Ohanian’s film we are watching a film projector that projects into the solitary spaces of a desert, making thereby the emergence of the image impossible. The film remains invisible because of the absence of a screen and yet, paradoxically, it is being ‘screened’. Never arriving, the projected images lose themselves in space. (Figure 5)



Figure 5. Melik Ohanian, *Invisible Film* (2005). Exhibition view at IAC, Villeurbanne, France. Videoprojection HDcam/Digital Beta on DVD, with LCD monitor for subtitles of *Punishment Park* of Peter Watkins, 5.1 surround sound. 90 minutes. © Melik Ohanian. Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris / Yvon Lambert Gallery, New York.

We can say, being beside the image, not facing it, we don’t meet it. Failed encounters. The image on the cinematic screen is difficult to ignore. It demands the attention of frontality. Moving away from the front, searching for a sideway where the image remains indifferent towards the spectator’s expectations – perhaps where it even abandons us – our beholding is allowed to fail. But this is a productive failure, one that calls for alternative modes of spectatorships outside the norms of frontality and attention.¹¹ It enables a spectatorial encounter that makes us step out, or better step aside. It may thereby generate a ‘beholding’ that *can* rest on a marginal line – a beholding that accepts that it cannot contain fully the image within its frame.

Lost fronts. Projecting without arriving. Standing beside, we follow the images’ transport without facing them. We are beside them and move along with them in space. Not knowing where the image in projection could stop, we keep moving. As if this image ‘in motion’ would say to the spectator: ‘You can watch me if you like. If you don’t, it doesn’t matter either.’ No one stops you from moving on ... We may say

this is still an image, but it is an *indifferent* image, one that doesn't hold up its front to the spectator. Tangential, it allows us a glimpse from the side.

Ataman's *Doppelgänger*

Let us return to our problem. We can approach the behind, or we can begin our approach from behind. The projections by Kutlug Ataman lend themselves to such an ambiguous encounter. Walking into his installation *Twelve* (2003), we are surrounded by ghostly images of people. (Figures 6, 7, 8) Six single screens are distributed across the darkened room, each featuring one person recounting experiences of reincarnation. Seemingly self-absorbed, we can't be sure who these projected talking figures are addressing. As spectators, we may decide to dedicate our attention to one of them in a tête-à-tête, or to watch several screens at once in a distracted manner. As if such a clear-cut thing were possible; as if it were a simple question of a rational decision. Defence, once more comes to the fore, put forth to shield us from these image-shields, in the hope that we won't lose ourselves between the screens and the projections – theirs and ours.

Partaking in the kaleidoscopic spectacle, mingling with these luminous apparitions, the fronts of our projections become unhinged. The screens weaken, fronts dissolve. *Twelve*, giving 'testimony' to reincarnation within its diegetic frame, is echoed by the multiplication of the image: the translucent screens let the projection *fall* through. In the behind then, we find another image. In fact, we find the same, just reversed. One could say the image's back and front is 'cover to cover' – to borrow from Michael Snow – but without 'covering' us anymore.¹² The image doubles visually – the shields of front and back, converge on the screen. Or rather, the screen splits the image into two. Each image appears twice. Meet your doppelgänger: six become twelve. Doubling singularity, the doppelgänger unsettles the existential certainty we have about our individuated selves.¹³





Figures 6, 7 & 8. Installation views of Kutlug Ataman's *Twelve* (2003) as part of 'De-regulation with the work of Kutlug Ataman', MUHKA Antwerp, 2006. © MUHKA. Courtesy Kutlug Ataman and Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York.

And yet, faced with the image, its front rises ahead of us. Looking out for it, we appropriate it, establishing its frontality, as if we could thereby grasp it in advance and make it our own. As Derrida usefully points out, again stressing the link between 'projection' and 'problem':

There would be a concept and a problem [...], that is to say, something determinable by a knowing ('what matters is knowing whether') and that lies before you, there before you (*problema*), *in front of you*; from which comes the necessity to approach from the front, facing towards, in a way which is at once direct, frontal, and head on, what is before our eyes, your mouth, your hands, (and not behind your back), there before you, like an *object* pro-posed or posed in advance [...].¹⁴

The doubling that occurs in image projections such as Ataman's moves us away from frontality and the 'knowing' inscribed in it. It moves us to the extent that we can grasp a potential gap between us, the spectators, and the image – a gap that makes us step back momentarily to rethink what might be at stake in such ongoing attempts to establish front and back as if we would have to take sides at all cost. Indeed, the very

activity of beholding the image is thereby called into question. With two faces to show off at the same time, *where* and *who* are we?

Allow me a brief anecdote. A few years ago I visited the Courtauld Gallery in London where I saw a small painting depicting a seated female nude. The accompanying wall text gave all the necessary encyclopaedic information [including translation] that one can expect in a professional museum setting. Painter: Erich Heckel (1883-1970); title: *Sitzender weiblicher Akt (Ägyptisches Mädchen)* [*Seated Female Nude*]; artistic movement: Brücke. Yet I was further told that this work is officially canonized as also having a ‘verso’, called *Das weiße Haus, Moritzburg* [*The White House*] showing a landscape scene with a white house. In the exhibition, however, I could only see its ‘recto’, the naked woman as ‘her’ side was put on show. Yet the conventions of art historical curating also thought it important to inform me about its backside landscape scene, leaving me with the quandary about the invisible painting on the back – but since paintings are destined to hang on the wall, the landscape remained hidden.

While my painting in the Courtauld Gallery has clearly been categorized as having a (primary) front with a naked woman and a (secondary) back with a landscape, projections challenge such a hierarchy of the obverse over the reverse. Unlike painting, the projection lacks the device of a posteriorly superimposed frame that would prioritize one side over the other. While we cannot deny that the optical image is subject to a process of framing, the conditions of framing in its projected form remain more uncertain, and perhaps, accidental. But this may also move the spectator out of his observational behaviour. Spectatorship not only implies looking, as Crary has stressed, but also *observing* in the sense of ‘observing rules, codes, regulations, and practices.’¹⁵

Haven't I seen you before? The image of the doppelgänger haunts us. It haunts the image itself: clinging onto the image itself, on its behind – there it is again. And yet, it escapes us as, slipping back to the behind. Looking at the image, we recognize that there is another side to it, yet it is one that we cannot see. It evades us. We ‘know’ the image is there, right on the other side of the screen, but it remains invisible to us. As Derrida writes:

The subject that haunts is not identifiable, one cannot see, localize, fix any form, one cannot decide between hallucination and perception, there are only displacements; one feels oneself looked at by what one cannot see.¹⁶

The doppelgänger is a ghostly image. Like the spectre, ‘it is the frequency of a certain visibility. But the visibility of the invisible.’¹⁷ We may think we can localize it on the other side of the screen. But when trying to hunt it, it escapes us. The doppelgänger, being always behind the screen, remains invisible. And yet it shares the same projection. The most familiar becomes the most disquieting.¹⁸ *Heimlich-unheimlich*. Moving around Ataman’s screens, the ghost of the doppelgänger we imagined to see on the reverse side of the screen disappears as soon as we are face to face with it. Once we find ourselves on the ‘other’ side, the image we look at is haunted anew by the previously looked at image. Behind the screen, the image returns to us again.

Notes

This essay is a revised version of a paper given at the conference *Screen/Space: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art* at the University of Edinburgh, April 2007. I thank the organizers Tamara Trodd and Samantha Lackey. The conference can be seen as symptomatic of the increased academic, curatorial and artistic interest over the last decade in the phenomena of projected images. Publications dedicated to this topic include, for example: *Projections, les transports de l'image*, ed. Dominique Païni, et al. (Paris and Tourcoing: Hazan/Le Fresnoy/AFAA, 1997); *Into the Light. The Projected Image in American Art 1964-1977*, ed. Chrissie Iles (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art and Harry N. Abrahams, 2001); 'Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art', *October* 104 (spring 2003), pp.71-96; *Le mouvement des images*, ed. Philippe-Alain Michaud et al. (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 2006).

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* [1993], trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p.100.

² 'Und das Dahinter ist ja doppeldeutig: hinter dem Foto und hinter dem, was drauf ist, wenn es auch nicht darauf besteht, darauf zu sein [...].' Elfriede Jelinek, 'Inzwischen. Dazwischen', in *Einar Schleeef. Kontaktbögen. Fotografie 1965-2001*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Harald Müller and Wolfgang Behrens (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 2006), pp.9-11 (p.11). [My translation].

³ Karl Abraham, 'Contributions to the Theory of the Anal Character' [1921], trans. Douglas Bryan and Alix Strachey, in *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham*, ed. Ernest Jones (London: The Hogarth Press, 1949) (pp.370-92), p.390-91.

⁴ Giving space to 'projection', I use the term in the most open way, embracing interchangeably notions of mental/psychic processes and technologies of projection.

⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, p.100.

⁶ Ernest Jones, quoted in Karl Abraham, 'Contributions to the Theory of the Anal Character', p.390.

⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp.11-12.

⁸ Olivier Richon, 'Looking and Incorporating', *Camera Austria International* 37 (1991), pp.32-33. See also Otto Fenichel's 'The Scopophilic Instinct of Identification', in *Collected Papers* (New York: Norton, 1953).

⁹ Derrida writes further on the 'problem' and its 'delegating effects': '[...] whatever or whoever one *puts forward* to protect oneself while concealing oneself, whatever or whoever comes in the place or in the name of the other, delegated or diverted responsibility.' Jacques Derrida, 'Passions: "An Oblique Offering"' [1993], trans. David Wood, in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp.3-31 (p.137).

¹⁰ It is important to mention that the film *Punishment Park* by Peter Watkins was banned in the UK for many years on political grounds. Ohanian's invisible projection of the film makes a cleverly acerbic comment on the politics of censorship. *Punishment Park*, dir. Peter Watkins (Chartwell Films/Françoise Films Production: 1971). DVD: 2005.

¹¹ In this context, image projections have gained critical pertinence to consider the changing politics of display that are 'at work' in the space of the 'art gallery'. Cultural theorists such as Peter Osborne and Boris Groys have pointed out the *distracting* character of video and film installations in the space of the art gallery, being always a

tricky negotiation between wanting to catch every detail and wanting to move on to the next spectacle. See for example, Boris Groys, 'On the aesthetics of video installations', in *Stan Douglas: Le Détroit*, exhibition catalogue (Basel: Kunsthalle Basel, 2001), n.p; Peter Osborne, 'Distracted Reception: Time, Art and Technology', in *Time Zones*, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate Publishing, 2005); see also Mark Nash's essay 'Art and Cinema: Some Critical Reflections', in *Documenta 11 Platform 5: Exhibition*, exhibition catalogue (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2002), pp.129-36.

¹² The ghosts of Michael Snow are haunting this essay throughout; 'cover to cover' refers to his remarkable book *Cover to Cover* in which we follow Snow on a journey shot alternately by two photographers that follow and 'shield' him from his front and his behind. Michel Snow, *Cover to Cover* (Halifax and New York: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, and New York University Press, 1975).

¹³ The struggle of 'genre' itself becomes exposed. It is the spectators' lack of categories that could be attributed to Ataman's 'portraits' that make any simplistic stereotypic modelling impossible. To move their documented reality into the fictional would be an all too simple endeavour to dispense with their narratives as being out of question, unmanageable for the 'real' life as it were. As Irit Rogoff has commented: 'Ataman's work has to do with the de-regulation of experience through introducing figures so marginal, that there is no category or stereotype that can contain them.' Irit Rogoff, 'De-regulation with the work of Kutlug Ataman', <<http://www.de-regulation.org>> [15/03/2007].

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, 'Passions: "An Oblique Offering"', pp.3-31 (p.10).

¹⁵ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press: 1992), p.6.

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, p.136.

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*. p.100.

¹⁸ Derrida writes: 'The most familiar becomes the most disquieting. The economic or ecological home of the *oikos*, the nearby, the familiar, the domestic, or even the national (*heimlich*) frightens itself.' Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, p.144.