

GETTING IN ON THE ACT

‘A History of Looking.’

Volume 1.

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

Abstract

My research has been a form of retrieval with the starting point often being an original or 'found' photograph. I am interested in how 'documentary' photography, whether by accident or design, catches and preserves the peripheral. I have been working with a series of 'historical' photographs, in which an unidentified individual or group who are 'peripheral' to the main point of the photograph, have been 'caught' within its frame. The retrieval is in using those 'unassumed' parts of the 'found' photograph, so they become another source of meaning. The theme of 'the periphery' has become the basis for my research, resulting in both artworks and writings. For example, the installation *The Fitting* and the text *A History of Looking* are based on a little known photograph of Marilyn Monroe watched by a group of unidentified women. Both outcomes are different kinds of 'close readings' of the original image. While the installation is concerned with image, viewer and space, the text investigates the process of memory and speculation; how 'photography', 'autobiography' and 'history' are also embroiled with aspects of femininity, consumption and nostalgia.

An investigation of an original photograph can take two routes: one in which the camera documents the process or journey – collecting evidence of possible traces of places or people. The other is through reconstruction using sets, costumes and actors who bear some physical resemblance to those in the original image. I have adopted both strategies at different points of my research, as evidenced in both the

text *A History of Looking* and the accompanying dossier. This includes a video compilation of my studio practice from 1995-1998.

GETTING IN ON THE ACT is a result of an art practice that involves the processes of reconstruction, re-enactment and detection. In both practical and theoretical terms, my research has been concerned with the possibilities of what may lie at the 'periphery': the desire, agency of a classed subject to insert themselves, however incidentally, into photographic representation, and thereby into history.

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A Page from his family Album

“I want a History of Looking.”

And he adds

“an adventure.”(1)

Barthes' desire for a history of looking is initiated by a traumatic but commonplace event - the death of his mother. His adventure is with the photograph. Throughout *Camera Lucida* I picture a grief stricken Barthes in his living room, rummaging through shoeboxes of photographs, searching for the one that will say, "there she is!" Significantly, when he finds this photograph, he will not let me see the picture: "It exists only for me. For you it would be nothing but an indifferent picture..."ordinary"... for you, no wound." (2)

The search for the mother, now dead, ends with the unseen *Winter Garden* photograph; but although this is the end of the search, the process of the journey for the bereaved Barthes is just as important. Photographs form a labyrinth made up of images both from private and public domains, which are routed through and looked over, mostly to be dismissed and discarded as "that's not it". (3) Barthes lets me see some of the public ones - but only one from his personal collection. Here at last is an image of his mother (fig 1). She finally and significantly appears - as a child, pictured with her (I assume) grandfather. This then is the picture of her I *believe* I am allowed to see. It helps to remind me of its absent other - the *Winter Garden*, the photograph I am not allowed to see (fig 1). Both photographs - the seen and unseen - stage the same thing: the uncanny return of his mother as a child. Now his 'little girl', Barthes' 'feminine child' (4) the son/philosopher can mother his mother and out of mourning comes a legendary theoretical text: one in which public and personal photographs are tangled up in some kind of autobiography. In this labyrinth of photographs and autobiography, the desire for a history of looking is driven by loss, the trauma of death. (5)

Traumas, wounds, mothers - haven't I been there before? (6) And the trouble with labyrinths is that unlike mazes, there are no set paths, no easy ways out - you can be led eerily back to the point where you started. This happens also when the artist gets 'stuck' and the evidence is in the material: a curious repetitiveness, an inability to arrive at the point of the work, endlessly putting off any resolution. 'Original' and source material can be looked through, looked over, thrown away, only to be returned to and discarded again, in the search to decipher a way through. Something makes you hesitate, uncertain which way to turn.

In my particular labyrinth, the signposts are also photography, autobiography and history. They appear straightforward enough, but being an artist, I need to take a route which will lead to a different place of adventure, where the familiar can be made strange, and an art practice can be reconfigured. This risks false pathways, dead ends and red herrings. Maybe even trauma - although I cannot compare any autobiographical event with the death of Barthes' mother. But since I too want a history of looking, I need Camera Lucida as a kind a map. And one photograph. I will risk that for you, there may be no wound, no *punctum*. (7) I will show you a photograph, taken in 1955 that I have come to call *The Fitting*. (Fig 2) You see then that I am also looking at history, a time in history, which encompasses my mother's youth: the time before I was born. (8)

The Fitting

Let's look at the photograph found in a book of grainy black and white images, the work of a not very well known 'photojournalist'. (9) The majority of these images are instantly recognisable as 'documentary photographs' - where the photographer is an 'invisible' observer and the emphasis is on reportage, 'facts' not fiction. (10)

This particular photograph is not typical of the collection in which it appears. It is not a coherent image. At first glance it is divided into two separate spaces. One appears to be an entrance into a fitting room: the rest of this room is reflected in the mirror. In this mirror, the fitting room is broken up into several more reflected spaces. A number of figures inhabit these spaces. On the left and just out of focus, a group of women stand in a doorway. Three are clearly visible. One of them, a young woman in a white shirt, stands with her arms folded. I keep looking at the way her hand clasps her arm. There is something decisive about that gesture, like a kind of barrier. It reminds me of first the presence of the photographer and now the presence of myself as a viewer. She is the only one who straddles the doorway - you can just make out the tops of white socks, perhaps? This detail was probably created by chance, but it moves me, and becomes my *punctum*, taking me out of the frame of the photograph. (11) So how do the tops of a teenage girl's white socks take me out of this frame? By leading me to think about where her feet would have been: with one foot set in one space, the other foot in another. I look closer at the photograph: one would have been in the fitting room, and the other foot - is where? I look for a caption for some help with the social and historical location. The fitting room is in a shop named *Brooks Costume* somewhere in

New York. (12) A fitting room in a shop. But what does the scale, sparseness and theatricality of the photographed space tell me about the 'real' space of the shop? Here the photograph throws me onto my own resources and I find myself speculating: it could have been a large shop, more like a 'department store'. (13) Two fairly commonplace, banal spaces - and banality does have a place in this photograph. Indeed at first glance, you could read the split space in this photograph as banality on the one side with enigma on the other: but banalities and the enigmas in this photograph are more complicated and intertwined than that.

Back to those feet of a teenage girl who stands across the threshold, a threshold between the privacy of a fitting room and probably a public space of some kind. Three other women are standing with her: an older woman wearing glasses leans into the doorway while a young black woman peers around the doorframe. It is easy to overlook a fourth figure, obscured by the women in the foreground. The fact they are grouped into a curtained doorway is easy to see. Other details are more difficult to grasp - for they are not quite in focus. They appear to look towards the camera, but there is no overt acknowledgement of the photographer and consequently of me the viewer. However there is an ambiguous sense of being watched, the photographer/me obviously looking at them but they look over the photographer/me, without he/I being overlooked. They have an eye on him/me as part of something else going on in the fitting room, the space that is given to me through a Hall of Mirrors effect. In this reflection are fragmented bodies, one with no feet while other bits of bodies are mismatched together. Compared to the three women - who although are *unidentified* seem to be *identifiable* - the identities we find in the mirror are all fragmented, some more than others. A man with

cropped feet stands with his back to us, and it is difficult to make sense of what he is doing or looking at in a corner of the room. So my attention in the mirror image is quickly directed elsewhere - to another doorway, this time a brightly lit doorway. Here stands the object of the attention: the photographer's, the women's and now mine - the reason why this photograph was taken in the first place, and why in 1990 it was finally published. Although only a fragment, I see three details clearly: the face, the blonde hair and the theatrically corseted torso of the film star "Marilyn Monroe."

And with this very act of naming, we have the immediate appearance of myth. Now, this fragment - in the mirror image of the fitting room in a shop - gains prestige. The gaze should be arrested by its significance. But mine does not rest. It shifts around too much and cannot rest. There is something ambiguous, undecidable about this photograph. Although Monroe is the point of the photograph, she is not its 'centre'. Perhaps it is simply a formal question of composition - so what is literally at the centre of this picture? Just a light grey strip: the reflected edge of a side mirror - that is all. I find myself looking then at very little. I am looking at the line, the dividing line that separates the fitting room and its mirror image. The photograph is literally and neatly cut into two halves. Across this dividing line my gaze shifts from one side to the other between these (as yet) unknown women and Monroe. They all compete for attention. Compared to countless other photographs in which Monroe is not only the dominant referent but - in Barthes' terms - a 'perfect' one, this one does not make her the target, the sole referent. (14) But the women are not equal to Monroe in meaning: they are on the periphery. Yet they occupy half of the photograph and seem more 'real' than the fabrication that is "Marilyn Monroe," who appears only as *image* within this image. Is

this then, what makes this picture undecidable for me (a photograph without a clear target, with competing referents held together in some strange and precarious balance)? This photograph sets up a strange game sending my gaze back and forth, to and fro: a photograph that keeps me looking elsewhere...

I look across to the unidentified women. If the name "Marilyn Monroe" has summoned 'Myth' to this picture, what will the naming of these women bring? I look back to the caption in the book. They are identified as "Brooks Staff." In two words they are defined as a collective group by the place in which they work: the words allow slippages from the particular to the general, from tentative fact to a kind of make-believe. The identity of the work place also oscillates between a specialist store in costume to something more general: the category of 'shop'. The women's relations to these spaces remain general, the caption in turn generalises them: but the photograph does not. In spite of poor focus, each woman's face is identifiable. This encourages me to imagine them (for they could still be living) now in their late 50s to 70s, seeing this picture in a book, and saying "*look, see - there I am! I was there, when she was there*". I put words into their mouths and this brings the point home to me. If *she* - the intended sole referent - had not been there this photograph of them would not have been taken. If *she* had not been there, I would not be looking at this picture. Nor paying such close attention to these women with whom I have no apparent connection.

Imagine then - what kinds of photographs would have been made of them, a photograph in which they were the sole referent. Perhaps a "works-do" (fig. 3) - that social occasion arranged for the employees by the paternal employer. (15) Perhaps one of the

few times you would be photographed with your work mates (16) dressed up, smiling, laughing, with a drink in your hand. I look back to the four women and see another type of photograph: a kind of family snap (fig. 4). But they are not smiling or laughing. I look at them with the knowledge that I know nothing of these women's' individual histories. In terms of geographical and historical location, I do not share their culture, and nor does the time of my life overlap, at this stage, with theirs. Even your own photographs of distant relatives can seem remote, almost meaningless. Indeed, their only source of meaning is your presence as a descendent: they address your self-interest. Anonymous family snaps seem doubly bereft of meaning but here I feel an unexpected connection, as if I was looking at a family photograph. This is the "metonymic power" of their faces - as if they/I are joined together in some obscure lineage. (17) The very idea, let alone the nature of a lineage, seems absurd. The way the women stand and look at me/the photographer/at Monroe certainly makes this 'family snap' a strange and resistant one. No signs of a familial relationship with the camera: they were knowing of the fact that they were not the primary object of attention. This photograph was not destined for a family album, but fated to have a curiously short lived public life in a book, now out of print, published after the death of a relatively obscure photographer, who happened to shadow Monroe for a week in March 1955. It is no more than a visual footnote in which the 'family snap' finds itself in a troubling juxtaposition. No wonder the gaze cannot rest. Travelling back and forth, between these women and Marilyn Monroe, oscillating between the spaces of 'real' and 'mirror', anonymity and celebrity, visibility and disappearance. (18) On one side you have the unidentified, whose personal, social histories are silent, unwritten. On the other, a woman whose image "has been reproduced, reconstituted, *rewritten*"; (19) an image which has come to "mean

almost anything." (20) Her body, now in myth, has literally been turned inside out and upside down by speculation, right down to her very bowel movements. (21) Too much speculation on this side, and on the other? Here lies a serious imbalance in which any sense of history, 'family' or otherwise, seems in danger of slipping away.

The light grey strip proves to be a significant thin line in the photograph: the point where a precarious balancing act must take place. Lean too far one way and we fall into, at best marginal, but at worst unknowable histories. Lurch the other way and we are caught up in myth. But this photograph keeps my gaze moving - a repetitive and restless looking which anxiously travels between the fraught territories of 'lost history' and 'myth.' But whatever has been done to their individual histories, mythical or not, all these women are in 'the past'. The photograph is now over 40 years old.

Looking back: between 'lost history' and 'myth' I am always looking back. This photograph holds two ways of looking back, both of which take a curious route outside of the photograph and are driven by absence. One route is the thriving Monroe myth that uses her image to both proclaim and deny the real woman's absence. (The 'In-Tribute' editions published to mark the 'significant' anniversaries of her death are an example; images are accompanied by textual descriptions of her 'undulating flesh', a body that 'glowed' before the camera etc.) (22) And how have I confronted the absence of the three women? With the fantasy of a return to presence: remember my fictional old woman looking at this picture and saying "*look that's me!*" But she makes explicit what the Monroe myth does not. I stand next to this fictional old woman, and look at this photograph through her eyes: *as if I was looking at a past self*. Something else then

is revealed about my restless looking, relating to her gaze: the look of nostalgia. Not her nostalgia. Mine.

I am suspicious of this look. It gives me too much pleasure. I began looking full of critical intention, only to find that hours later, I have been 'just looking' - a looking which is a kind of forgetting. On a trip down someone else's memory lane, I have lost my critical voice. Now it catches me up, "you really should know better, you're just wallowing in nostalgia." *Wallowing in nostalgia*. Wallowing is an indulgence, a kind of perverse, excessive pleasure. What is perverse about nostalgia, defined in the dictionary as 'a sentimental yearning for the past'? Even this cliché is revealing, encompassing both an implied censure (yet more excessive, indulgent emotions) with intense desire and longing. This also moves closer to nostalgia's Greek source of meaning '*nostos* return home and *algos* pain.' Of course psychoanalytically speaking, whether living or dead, there is always nostalgia for the mother. (23) Here lies a clue. Perhaps the perversity is in revelling in images of a past that is not mine. I can point to the youth of my mother, the life of my grandmother and say this is the time "when they were young" but the images that incite my nostalgia, are not literal 'representations' of British working class culture of the 1950s. They belong to 1950s American popular culture in which a particular trinity of figures (Monroe, James Dean, and Elvis Presley) have come to symbolise this period almost to the point of cliché. (24) They are all 'history' although myth, aided by their early deaths, has secured their posthumous careers as images. (25) Much more than the moving image, it is the still photograph that proliferates, trading on an ever-growing post-modern form of nostalgia. (An example of this is 'retro revival'. Regardless of the 'decade' in vogue, participants are usually a

generation away from the period.) If the nostalgic look is inherently, incessantly repetitive, it can also be seen to need to constantly consume. Why does the nostalgic look, a look that belongs to a collective culture, keep returning to these particular images of the dead? This strangely invokes the image of Barthes privately looking through photographs, searching for his 'mother', a looking of which he is conscious. What this post-modern 'wallowing' in 1950s nostalgia reveals is another trinity: myth, nostalgia and consumption. (In this particular case, all with traces of her, Marilyn Monroe). I am now even more suspicious. This nostalgia seems so *natural*. Its perversity is only made obvious to me when *she* comes back to me in the most astonishing ways. For example, when I have come across Marilyn's face on a Tanzanian stamp (fig. 5). (26) And immediately I am struck by the thought "what on earth has she got to do with their culture?" Only to be shocked by this question and the momentary assumption of knowledge that it exposes. I in fact know nothing of 'their culture', let alone the presumption of passing judgement of what is or is not appropriate to 'their' culture. I am jolted by my crude assumptions and the forces of projection; confronted now by questions of colonisation, imperialism, social and historical locations. It will not do to project onto an African culture. The question throws itself back in my face: "What on earth has Monroe got to do with *your* culture?" Now, instead of being struck with that assumption of knowledge, I am speechless. For what exactly is *my* culture, and what has *she*, or rather images of her, got to do with it? I now face more gaps and hesitations. For confronting nostalgia has forced an uncanny *return home* and this chain of association leads me back to the 'family snap'.

Myth and nostalgia. Yes, they are both here in this photograph. They both have got me

into trouble, side tracked me, kept me going backwards and forwards: I am in a double danger of 'wallowing' in loaded territory. So I have to work out how to use them. Susannah Radstone has identified two kinds of nostalgia: one that repeats itself the other that interrogates. (27) How then to deploy a critical nostalgic look? And what to do with the question of consumption?

I look back at the photograph, back to the juxtaposition of the unidentified women and Monroe, back to the tops of those white socks. Once more I am led to the question of what kind of space this juxtaposition takes place in. The caption has already told me that the women are "staff" belonging to "Brooks Costume". They could be costumiers or seamstresses but I become conscious of another metonymic link, another speculative move on top of the familial, another move from the particular to the general: I had cast the women as 'shop assistants'. Waiting in the wings of their work place, they have been caught looking. In this act the 'shop assistants' and the most mythologised of Blondes come to coexist.

'Shop Assistants' and the 'Showgirl' (28)

"Can I help at all?"

"No I'm just looking."

'Shop assistants' and shops, the slip from specialism to mass production. We are back to the everyday, the ordinary, the commonplace, and the banal. The 'star' (the exceptional, the unique; a contrivance between a body and an image: a space of both public and private fantasy). Shortly after this photograph is taken, Monroe will become spectacle (29) in this very costume, riding an elephant painted pink. Two things can take me outside this photograph: archive film footage of Monroe being paraded around a circus ring or the doorway that frames the women looking. Two distinctly different spaces then, from which to watch Monroe, but neither are the phantasmagoric space of the cinema: they are first, the circus, and secondly the shop.

I am not yet ready to go to the circus. Since it is inside the fitting room of some type of store, in which the 'shop assistants' and the 'showgirl' come to meet, my investigation must take place inside another phantasmagoric space: the photograph which is between 'social documentary' and in-camera montage; a photograph that is also of a space *behind-the-scenes*. Laura Mulvey has written on how juxtaposition and metonymies reveal a gradual "unfolding [of] the proximities of people and things into a connotative chain of associated meaning." (30) With these words in mind, I want to return to the significance of the female bodies that are framed by a doorway. Monroe's appearance in the mirror makes her a distant figure. Compared to the women she is surface: her mirror

image within the photograph seems flat and poster-like (fig. 6), situated opposite the 'family snap' located earlier (fig. 4). She is also inside a small changing room, her body boxed in a doorway and by the edge of the mirror. This has connotations that this particular female body has to be contained. The other women are foregrounded and framed by a doorway, but as I have already established, one of them breaks this frame and stands over the threshold of two spaces.

And now the photograph blocks my 'chain of associated meaning'.

There is also another figure who is between and part of this juxtaposition of women: the man with the cropped feet. He appears to have nothing to do, other than stand there with his arms folded, legs astride and examines some strange object in a corner. However the photograph plays an unfortunate visual trick with this man and the object that he is looking at, which becomes a bizarre and cumbersome phallus between his legs. His presence in the mirror, also reminds me of the other male figure who through the trick, this time, of the mirror, makes himself - in the moment of production - disappear. The photographer "Ed Feingersh" plays *fort-da* with himself, (31) while "H.D.Quigg" the man in the mirror, has his back to the photographer and now me, the viewer. (32) Earlier, this name game brought us anonymity and celebrity, lost history and myth, with the viewer teetering in the in-between. Not much danger in naming these men, except for the photographer's game of *fort-da*, which has its own legend. (33) But while the photographer makes his own mirror image disappear, and it is difficult to make sense of Quigg, something curious happens to gender relations. There is no mastering gaze in this photograph; it will not allow a fixed, controlling gaze and all the

'active' looks appear to be feminine ones, belonging to the women in the doorway. (34) This feels like the return to old territory: the question of looking has reappeared in a different type of space both 'real' and photographic, and with it a troubling set of relations. (35) I try to take up Mulvey's clues and search for 'things'. At first I am struck by how there are no 'things' - just faces, bodies and the most minimal gestures. These lead back to the action of looking and being looked at, with the former being given greater emphasis. I look again at the women looking. The women's gazes - like the photographer's and now mine - are organised around Monroe, but not all in the same way. The woman wearing glasses seems to look over the photographer, completely absorbed by the activity in the fitting room. The black woman's gaze is more ambiguous - as if caught midway in a split second glance between the photographer and Monroe, but still conscious of his presence, and consequently that of the viewer. The other young woman looks towards the photographer/viewer, as does indeed another pair of eyes behind her. But in her split second glance away from Monroe to the photographer, her camera consciousness is acknowledged by a trace of a smile. This compulsion to smile is only a tiny, incomplete gesture just on the border of visibility - suggesting a consciousness of being looked at, mixed with hesitation - a hesitation created by the knowledge that 'you' are not really the object of attention, that it is not 'you' that is really being seen. (36)

To be seen and not seen. This half smile at the photographer sets off another chain of thoughts as I look at her starched white blouse - a body in uniform perhaps to catch the customer's eye? I imagine this young woman working behind the counter of the store. I think about the paradox of the uniformed body. At the same time as making her easier

to see, it involves the wearer undergoing a form of disappearance as she is defined and generalised by the space in which she works. (And this young woman has already undergone one disappearance, set in motion by two words, "Brooks staff.") I begin to speculate about the others. Who works in the public side of the store? Who works 'behind-the-scenes'? All this speculation prompted by tiny, difficult to see details of blouses - 'things' which not only historicise the women's bodies, but indicate traces of difference in dress, age, race and possibly even the hierarchy of the work place. However the juxtaposition of 'blouses' with 'history' brings me back to the difficulty of my looking for 'history' in a young American girl's blouse: her white blouse could just be a fashionable cap sleeve shirt of the time, not a uniform at all. She may be *defining for herself* a neat, tidy respectable image of femininity. All this speculation, and doubt, created by a 1/60 press of a button with the focus being elsewhere - on the body in a 'showgirl' corset.

An especially loaded torso. By 1955, the time this picture was taken, she was already so famous that Marilyn-ness was instantly recognisable, and parodied by a plethora of Monroe lookalikes. (37) However the corset, along with the style of this photograph, is not Monroe at her most iconic. I am alerted to this when I show the photograph to others, who hesitate when looking at this photograph "*is that Marilyn Monroe?*" This hesitation reveals a fragility that I, a thorough Monroe myth consumer, had not grasped until now. This fragility is where instant recognition - and the consequent myth - can be temporarily suspended. (38) Indeed her myth is too 'full'; it won't stay in one place, leading us down blind alleys of idle speculation about mysterious death and the strange grief about *what she might have been*. A visual cue comes from the photograph - and the

appearance of Monroe in the mirror. Her myth must be boxed in and kept at a distance. Here she is already doubly distant, an image within a mirror image. Something more general is in process here: behind the scenes of the store; the spectacle is in process. Under the watchful gazes of the shop assistants, the star is becoming spectacle, and a violent thing takes place: although Monroe is someone specific, she is turning into something general. To find my 'chain of meaning' I am thrown back to the importance of two spaces that are both inside and outside of this photograph. Taking another cue from the photograph, from the margins of a fitting room, (from where the women look and where one of them breaks the threshold), I cross this threshold into the store, and peer back into the fitting room.

The store may have been full, abundant with a spectacle of commodities - compared to the fitting room, which is sparse, except for the spectacle-in-process. (39) The women watch this, as Monroe also, in turn, looks at her own mirror image. She is surveying the 'be-coming' spectacle of myth. Her place in the image acts as a lure (of abundant femininity). There is an illusion of one-to-oneness and the threatening inscription of lack: for Monroe in front of the mirror, reverberates to Lacan's mirror, the site of anticipation of what is to come. (40) Following this chain of looking, sets of relations, in the collective sense, may disappear. This photograph insists on a plurality of relations: it keeps bringing me back to them. The spectacle, even while in process, can sustain her spectators: in turn, Monroe needs these women. And so do I.

Back to the photograph and the gaze which travels back and forth over that thin light grey line. Back to the simultaneous display of a number of feminine subjectivities, held

together in a set of ambiguous relations brought about by 'just looking'. And this 'just looking' is a multitude of different gazes, split second glances in which the women, Monroe, the photographer and myself are caught up in some kind of exchange. Except H.D. Quigg the man in the mirror. Does this now shift voyeurism onto the women who, from a distance, watch another woman's 'exhibitionism'? Monroe will make of herself a spectacle, but that performance comes later, after this photograph. Even if the 'voyeurism' here *is* feminine, the photograph suggests no simple inversions of its classic paradigms ("active/male and passive/ female," "woman-as-image," "man-as bearer-of-the-look" (41)). So let's return to the cubicle, to Monroe looking at herself, hand on hip. This is not a hand-on-hip that is posed for the camera: it is functional, practical. She is at work, working on herself for the fabrication to come: she is casting a critical eye on herself, not a narcissistic one. Step out of the cubicle and glance across at the women: once again the curtained doorway reminds me of the place from which the women look: this is their place of work, they too have a reason to be there. Stepping out of the cubicle means stepping into Quigg, who may really have not much to do but peek at an object in a corner. (42) This gives him something to do, to look at, while Monroe is in the cubicle. This chain of association may hint at a more secretive voyeurism, but there is also the possibility of boredom, or awkwardness created by not knowing what to do with oneself. Compare this to the women who know what they are doing there: they are having 'a good look'. Yet voyeurism does not really account for the seriousness of these women's looks, which take place not in the cinema, the typical space of escapist fantasy where you may have gone to 'forget the troubles' of your material life. (43) This looking takes place inside a store that is full of material life, a life that is on the other side of the fitting room, outside of the photograph. The curtain is held open, by the woman

wearing glasses and curiosity, getting the better of me (although it's asking for trouble) I can't resist taking a quick look round.

Behind the curtain

Where does this desire for a quick look round take me? To another metonymic route outside the photograph. A step behind the curtain is to step beyond what is represented here, to step into the unknown. What would I now be looking at? Perhaps a shop, which would be full of things, full of people: this is where commodities and consumers meet, where consumption takes place. (44) The woman wearing glasses might overhear a complex exchange of material and emotional need:

"What do you need another one of those for?"

"I'll treat myself to that"

"She'll feel left out if she hasn't got one"

She might turn round and spot a Brooks' customer browsing. *"Can I help?"* She might say. Can she help? For in the doorway, behind the curtain and at the back of the shop lurks something else – a strange sense of history, memory shaped in some way by my own mother and grandmother's histories of shop work. (45) Now my desire to look behind the curtain, to step out of representation, dangerously strains my chain of associated meaning: that from a photograph of a group of unidentified women looking at Marilyn Monroe, I am led to a metonymic outside of this photograph. This should be a shop somewhere in 1950s New York, and this would be strange enough, but instead I get led back to a group of British shop workers from the Midlands, my own family history. This feels as if I am moving clumsily between two ludicrously inappropriate particulars. And what in particular am *I* looking for, as well as, what in particular am *I* looking at? This alerts me to the trouble with my desire to peer behind the curtain: I end

up shopping around in a store that is being made too general: emptied of its function, social history and its national location. That is one problem. The other is what to make of the strange autobiography that wants to haunt the photograph. I should dismiss it, put it away, but this is not autobiography in any straightforward sense: it is not my story, this one that goes across the generations. Yet the only connection between the women in the photograph and the living auto/biographical ones is in the end myself.

It is myself who attempts to bind two groups of women together in a strange contract beginning with *punctum* and now *fort-da*. In both these legendary texts, the authors are survivors, the latest link in their genealogy. (46) An ambiguous autobiography runs throughout these texts: one that is structured by bereavement, and one by an act of looking which takes place across three generations. The type of looking is also pertinent: it is both speculative and investigative. (47) These looks carry with them many connotations: theoretical, self reflective, economic. Barthes is not afraid to call the link between the photograph and the gaze a 'sort of umbilical cord'. (48) In the photograph, I recognise that the drive towards the women, is to escape the 'dead blonde,' to get away from both the Monroe myth as well as the psychic connotations of the lost maternal body, to which one can never return. (49) It would be dangerous to repress this, to deny that there is a dead maternal figure influencing this discourse (in the photograph "nothing can be refused or transformed" Barthes writes. (50)) So I will not refuse the maternal, genealogical connections, as I look across the generations as a granddaughter who looks back, a looking back that crosses the body of the mother with a number of nostalgic myths. To deny this would run the risk that the thing that one represses comes back to haunt you, structuring unconsciously the very thing you are working on as a way

of escaping it. (51) As *fort-da* and *punctum* are both structured by absence, and are marked either overtly or obliquely by mourning, I am forced to acknowledge loss: loss of many kinds. I can never bring back a history that is lost, nor return to a past of easily fixed class identities. Speaking or writing about British class history can seem futile: the facts of 'ordinary' biographies may not yield the revelation of 'wounds'. (52) It would also mean leaving the photograph, which is blocking me again. My desires cannot be imposed onto this photograph: it resists my crude appropriation. The photograph brings me back to its own materiality (and that is all I have, with no 'personal' memory to augment that materiality). At this point in my labyrinth, I find myself at a crossroads, which is another kind of threshold. I am reminded of the starting point of my adventure (while recognising an 'older adventure,' long before this text: the fascination with my mother's own teenage years) and I am back looking at those white socks.

"The photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion *it fills the sight by force*". (53) Yes terms like 'commodity', 'shopping stores' and 'shop assistant' are too vague, too shadowy. I look at the women. The desire to speak about class history is still pertinent. In a metonymical sense, I 'know' them: the clothes, the body postures, and the looks. I am 'closer' to them than Marilyn Monroe, in more ways than one: as a viewer, a brunette, and the way they reverberate into my family history. Far from diminishing my curiosity, I want to 'know' more about them.

They themselves remain mute (despite it being possible that they still exist and thus 'speak').

What stories would they tell?

It is time to find Brooks Costume.

The Costume Store

First I need an address, so I look through the Manhattan Yellow Pages 1955.

BROOKS COSTUME

Largest Collection of the world's finest costumes.

The kind Broadway stars wear.

Moderate retail prices.

Entire productions and individuals supplied.

Music - Wigs

"Where to rent them".

3 W61 Plaza. (Fig 7a)

Under the section '*Costumes - Masquerades & Theatrical*' the costume store emerges out of the general category of the 'shop,' and the unidentified women are more firmly than ever skilled seamstresses, manageresses as well as sales assistants. With the address located, there now begins the tracing to Broadway, New York. (Fig 7b)

By the time I arrive on West 61st, near Central Park, one thing is certain - Brooks Costume no longer exists (fig 7c). Building No 3 is gone. (54) However the store's absence is strangely marked; by the fencing that surrounds the former site, now flat 'empty' land, and the traces of the once adjoining walls on the other buildings that still remain. These are the signs of the buildings now demolished. With the site of the business now gone, the unidentified women appear to be untraceable. The Feingersh photograph is the only remnant known to me.

Yet these remains sharpen my speculation and I can masquerade as a more informed

consumer. I know what I am looking for, a costume to rent 'the kind Broadway stars wear' at moderate prices and ready to wear. 'Within ones reach.' Imagine the racks of costumes, searching through the rails wondering if a star has ever worn this one. You try it out for size. The cloth that now lies against your skin could have once been against 'their' skin. This desire, this frisson, belongs to the discourse of the fan. Compare this with the women held in suspense in the photograph; the star's arrival at their work place interrupts their routine. They watch her at work, at work on herself. What each one of them is making of the scene is of course unknowable. What is certain, is that at this particular moment, they watch her from the edge of the fitting room and from behind the mirror.

Back to the Fitting Room, Brooks Costume

I abandon masquerading as a Brooks customer and take my place back among this group and look with them at the scene that takes place in the Fitting Room: the star, the men in suits and the photographer. (55) Without this move, the Fitting Room through the mirror remains an incoherent yet fascinating reflection. This side of the photograph, with its splits and divisions, solicits a classic psychoanalytical reading: the mirror having violently sliced and then sandwiched gendered bodies together (56); split figures leading to split subjectivities; a mirror that offers no illusion of unity. (57) This mirror, also being the site of the photographer's disappearing act, summons Freud's grandson playing *fort-da* with his own mirror image. (58) This particular chain of associated meaning gathers more myths, other kinds of legends (59) around Monroe. The photographed mirror could be full of red herrings. How then to read this side of the scene and reconstruct what the women are seeing - beyond the blonde? I look again at the bizarre,

surreal body the mirror has made up from two bodies. But a woman's foot half way up a man's shin reveals that this strange body has been made up not just from two bodies, but three (Fig 8a). With this foot I have found "Mary Smith".

"Mary Smith". Brooks best fitter. It is ironic that this foot, this accidental detail, can be given a name, the fourth name to be retrieved - all from the mirror side of the photograph. I am back to playing this name game again. So what can a name like "Mary Smith" bring with it, compared to "Marilyn Monroe"? It's a common enough name, except this Mary Smith is defined by the space she works in. But this time, unlike the women who watch her from the edge of the fitting room, I know she is Brooks best fitter. (60) Mary Smith has status; she has skill and experience. Mary Smith is top of the costume store's hierarchy. Only the shop's best Fitter for Marilyn Monroe. Only Mary Smith gets close to the body of the star (fig 8b), carefully pinning the corset for the adjustments that must be made to allay Monroe's anxieties about the costume (61):

Is it tight enough around the bust?

I don't want to fall out of it!

This is not right here around the hips, its too baggy (62) (fig 8c).

The camera catches fitter and star at work on the corset, both working on the problem of how to show enough off without revealing too much; how to ensure that Monroe will make the correct spectacle of herself. Of course Monroe is already a spectacle: both the women and men-in-suits stand and stare at her while the fitter gets on with her delicate and intimate work. The differences between the two women would have been striking: Mary Smith, perhaps in her early 60s would have been in a plain black dress, which was

and still is, the standard attire of both fitters and dressers so that they do not deflect attention away from the star. (63) While this dress defers to the star, Mary Smith, Brooks' best fitter, is watched by the rest of the staff. It is only by standing with them that I realise how important Mary Smith is, when Monroe comes out of the little changing room and into the fitting room. The foot, belonging to Mary Smith, brings a hierarchy between women, a hierarchy that is implied in both sides of the photograph. However this hierarchy is now not just made up of anonymity and myth but is one about the work place, specifically Brooks Costume. For the women on the edge of the fitting room remind me that the fitter pins for another, the cutter who will be handed the corset and who will make the final adjustments to the costume. (64) This work will remain unseen: there is no need for the star's presence and hence there are no photographs. Perhaps the cutter of the corset is here among this group of the women, who along with the seamstress, watches the corset, the product of her labour, now next to the skin of the star. The corset holds sets of relations; both the hidden labour of others, and ostensibly, the labour of a woman who will be performing publicly. This performance, which comes later, is of course work, but the audience must never think it as that. It is entertainment, spectacle. While the cutter waits for the return of the costume with Mary Smith's instructions, there are also elements of entertainment and pleasure to be had from the threshold of the fitting room. So she could be taking a break here, with the others, sharing in a kind of treat, a visual treat, created by Monroe's presence. It is also possible that the cutter may too 'important' to be waiting here with this group on the edge of the fitting room: they stand on/over a fine line of inclusion/exclusion. Literally at one end of the room, they stop (and stare like the men) but unlike them, these women watch from a discreet distance.

Taking pleasure from looking but at a distance: we are back to the question of space, gender difference and visual pleasures, in a photograph that plays with distance and proximity. The women may appear literally to be at one end of the room and what could be further apart from these women than a movie star? This could be the photographer's point, for it is only in this photograph that these women and Monroe come to coexist. But even here they are still in separate worlds, one group in the 'real' while the other is a mirror image. This rather melancholic reading is riddled with another ambiguity. Monroe is in fact far more distant from me, as a myth consumer, than she ever was to these women. This makes me aware once again of my own looking from a distance, one created by history, geographical location, processes of media and death. These distances are impossible to overcome, but that does not stop myth and nostalgia yielding strange pleasures. However, if myth is a distortion of history (65) and nostalgia consumes a mythical version of the past, these make my own particular 'taking pleasure from a distance' deeply suspect. How then to be a myth consumer who needs to keep a critical distance and a look of nostalgia that is suspicious - without denouncing pleasure? This suggests the possibilities of consumption, that it may be operated in different ways, and this in turn leads to the implication that consumption inside the photograph may also be operating in different ways. If the photograph is about looking and looking back in the space of a shop, where perhaps consumption, in the form of visual pleasure, is one way for desire to negotiate with distance. (66) I look and re-look at the photograph of the women and Monroe. Back again to speculation. This time I wonder about the nature of their pleasure in looking, and their ambivalence. What kinds of distances and proximities does their consumption have to negotiate here? I return yet

again to the doorway that frames them, the in-between space of public and private in a store that traded in the hiring of transient masquerades. Consumption here is not simply 'commodity' but staged through a prop. On one side of the doorway, the one that is outside the photograph's frame are the customers of Brooks: for them, the acting out of a temporary identity, a fantasy persona takes place somewhere else, later. This is not too different from the event that is happening on this side of the door frame, inside the photograph, except this time the wearer is not just a celebrated blonde of their time but, by my time, she has become a mythical one. The spectacle of blonde femininity and its consequent myth are only partly in process in this photograph. And this is taking place in the presence of hierarchies. One belongs to the shop, how these women may have been organised in relation to one and other, and one which structures the latter, about the femininities created by culture and society. There is a visual irony in their juxtaposition, since we see their coexistence is not at all equal. How these women are organised in relation to this particular blonde is troubled, especially on the subject of visual pleasure. Indeed the notion of a shared collective female pleasure being organised around the blonde celebrity is immediately situated in a number of ideological discourses of race, class, sexuality and gender. (bell hooks, for example, decodes the Blonde's excessive presence in Western Culture as symptomatic of deep cultural anxieties about race and femininity. How race and gender intersect to interrogate the image of the blonde star is the basis for hooks' assertion that 'looking' is still potentially a political act.) (67) Yet it is Monroe's presence, the *curiosity* shared by the women (which she also shares in, as the receiver of their curiosity) and the collective consumption of an image of blonde femininity, that brings the women together, and thus into representation, into a history. However, to reiterate, they may look in the same direction but they do not look in the

same way. It is time to take on the question of difference. To do this, one now has to return to the place where all photographs in the end position their viewers - the metonymic place of the photographer as 'he' presses the shutter.

The place of the photographer, to stand in his shoes. Of course I cannot stand in the exact same spot that he stood in Brooks Costume, the store that no longer exists. I will not experience the frisson of standing where he stood; a frisson created by the present somehow being connected to something in the past. What if I could have retraced the 'real' scene in its original physical site - after all, reconstructions of scenes of the crime, the victim's last known movements, are done to jog memory, to retrieve new evidence. But this is the site of the shop not a site that has bore witness to some traumatic, even violent event. (68) Perhaps if the building still existed, more would drop into place: I might be able to solve some of the spatial riddles this photograph presents; or retrieve other facts, such as who stood where. But it is not just 'facts' that interest me. Neither can I resist speculating on 'motives' and all I have to go on is what was captured in that moment of a 60th second, taken while the blonde is looking at herself, together with traces of other kinds of looking organised around her and the photographer. I am back to the trace of that smile.

The trace of a smile

This tiny smile created by hesitant knowledge. A smile made to the photographer: she knows he is there: what he is doing. And she knows what she is doing there - this is her work place. She could be smiling to herself, an enigmatic, secretive smile. So I go back again to try to retrieve more evidence, to unearth the question of secrets: motives that

drive these gazes. The problem here is what happens in the face of such fragile evidence, when a 'post-modern' viewer, one who has turned detective, now occupies the photographer's place. You risk tampering with the evidence. (69) I begin with the photographer's place, but wish to move beyond being just a 'viewer.' I need to create another way of metonymically standing in his shoes. I place a 'Wanted' ad, and from this, assemble a group of women who bear some physical resemblance to the original women standing in the doorway. I go back over the evidence, but this time through a re-enactment of the scene, one that is a photographic performance. (70) What is recovered by a 1990s re-enactment of a scene that is essentially historical, which is a reconstruction, where speculation is both theoretical and material?

The Reconstruction

(Fig 9)



A WHITE WOMAN of 'fullish' figure: possibly mid to late 30s - or someone who conveys maturity. She is wearing a blouse, neckerchief and glasses. Of the group, her body shape is closest to Monroe's. Most likely to experience identification with the star - also the bearer of a longing gaze, (73) and comes closest to exhibiting a fascination with celebrity. At high risk

A WHITE WOMAN between 15 - 25. Neatly dressed. Evidence of a hesitant smile and a knowing look. She is already distracted away from the Blonde by the photographer so is out of immediate danger.

THE BLONDE. A star and spectacle already submitting to violence. Has been accused of being nothing but a variation of a type, a theme masquerading as 'Unique Individual'. (71) So convincing is her feminine masquerade, so compelling a spectacle that people cannot resist looking at her. Described by bell hooks as "ultra white," the Blonde star is a device "to maintain a distance, a separation between that image and the black female Other". (72) While hooks will argue that this distance provides the black female spectator with a crucial space for critique, the blonde can be extremely dangerous, so white females should approach with caution.

A BLACK WOMAN of medium build between 15 - 25. Caught in mid glance between the photographer and Monroe. As the one black female spectator on the scene surrounding the Blonde, this spectator is least likely to be 'duped'. Her 'looking relations', hooks argues, lead to the formation of a conscious, oppositional gaze. This interrogates what the image of the 'ultra white' star denies, decoding what is perpetually made absent: blackness, and black histories leading to a case of counter memory. (74) Least vulnerable to the lure of the Blonde but at risk of post-modern anxiety displacement. (75)

The reconstruction recovers a complex set of “looking relations:” the longing gaze, unconscious of the camera, is alongside a knowing look which is conscious, however hesitantly, that she is 'in on the act'. In turn, this look is accompanied by another – a look that is politicised by a conscious knowledge of what is excluded. ‘Looking’ is therefore political, and bound up with memory and history. "Looking and looking back, black women involve ourselves in a process whereby we see our history as counter-memory..." (76) bell hooks argues that a black woman's oppositional gaze is motivated by the absence of black histories including the historical legacies of slavery. My looking back is similarly motivated by a looking for history, one that crosses through generations and cultural locations, in the search for a class history. This history is carried by memory: the conscious and the unconscious, knowing and not knowing, pleasure and ambivalence all mark it.

All this speculation is about to be tested by the emergence of new evidence - Feingersh's contact sheets have been tracked down to an archive in Venice, California.

The Feingersh contact sheets

The strange contract that the photograph has formed between myself, a 'fine art lens based artist' working in Yorkshire, England and an American photojournalist of the 1940s/50s compels me to go on a journey which is now nearing its end. From the UK to the USA, New York to Venice, California, I travel across geographical locations driven by excitement and intrepidity. With the store now gone from New York, the nearest one 'photographer' can follow another in a material way, is to go through their contact sheets. On arrival at the archive I am handed the Feingersh contact sheets. (77) As I flick through each one, waiting for the contact sheet to which this picture belongs, I am taken back in time, a post-modern ghost shadowing Feingersh as he in turn follows Monroe. One thing I realise, that I have long been convinced of is, that I will find more pictures of these women. However, the contact sheets will also expose the shortcomings of both my reconstructions and my speculation. At last, on contact sheet No.60505 the photograph appears: 'The Fitting' becomes 'Frame No.24' without the picture editor's crop (fig 10a). It is Feingersh's first shot of the scene. By Frame No.25 the man in the mirror has a face, turning to look at the photographer, the split body begins to lose its cohesion, and by Frame No.26 the split body reveals the faces of others in the fitting room. Only the women and Monroe remain static. Then the star must have stepped out of her cubicle into the fitting room as Feingersh's camera returns to her. The evidence of another contact sheet No.60504 shows the photographer must have swapped cameras, one from wide angle to a standard lens (fig 10b). (78) The result - another two frames of the group now at middle distance. However things have already moved on. The black woman is no longer to be found (and it is hard not to read meaning into 'her complete

disappearance.' After all, "*what was in it for her?*" (79)) The older woman, now fully conscious of being photographed, has removed her glasses. ("*Men don't make passes at girls who wear glasses*".) Or maybe she is not as fascinated by Monroe as I assumed (80). And now that she has more of the photographer's attention, the young woman seems uncomfortably self-conscious, her hand now raised to her chin. Next is the work of Mary Smith on Monroe, taking Feingersh through another film. Then Contact Sheet No.506: the last three frames of the entire shoot at Brooks Costume include two of these unidentified women; now much closer up, the young woman is looking more poised and more like Audrey Hepburn (fig 10c). (81) From their smiles and poses, the women seem to be acting out a scenario on Feingersh's instructions - one that could easily be captioned: '*Staff steal a glimpse of Hollywood's Glamour Queen.*' But this is very different from the restraint and enigma of 'The Fitting/Frame No 24'. The last image is of Monroe, this time in her costume laughing at something off camera. The Fitting is nearly finished, and the corset will soon be returned to the cutter for the final alterations.

All the work at Brooks Costume is done. Her costume is now ready. The staff, including Mary Smith, now disappears from the contact sheets, and out of representation, out of history. However the corset reappears in Feingersh's final contact sheets - it is almost time to go to the circus. I want to keep track of the corset. It not only holds traces of labour and pleasure, collaboration and collusion: it also takes us from one behind the scenes to another, from the fitting room to the circus arena. Here the spectacle of blonde femininity is nearly complete and what Monroe is being fitted up for is finally revealed (fig 10d). (82) The body of the star is now in full regalia: Monroe is preparing for her grand entrance. But there are no longer any women to be found among the masculine sea of photographers, who fire their flashguns at Monroe

mounting an elephant in stiletto heels and fish net tights (fig 10e). Contact Sheet No.62853 is evidence, that as a photographer, Feingersh is part of this scene. Yet he seems to separate himself in two important ways. He is at the back of the crowd of press photographers, and his contact sheets have no close ups of Monroe and the elephant. He does not use flash, relying on available light which results in negatives that are underexposed. The images are therefore not inscribed as 'publicity' but more towards the 'documentary'. If 'publicity images' perpetuate a construction, where the photographer is implicated in some kind of collusion (83), then the 'documentary' photographer is posited as the other, the outsider who makes oblique critical commentaries, usually on 'social issues of the day.' (84) As a consequence Feingersh's images are another behind-the-scenes of the spectacle, which again is made up of spectacle and spectators. However the fitting room implies the pleasures and dangers of the blonde spectacle for the spectators. Here being made into spectacle can be seen to have its dangerous moments - climbing onto the elephant being one of them. Although gendered, the crowd of photographers are faceless, lost in the shadows that surround Monroe and the elephant, both under some kind of spotlight. So that the crowd will see Monroe more clearly, the elephant has been painted pink, which in black and white film translates as white. In a strange way this 1950s moment reverberates to the previous knowledge that Monroe's image, now on an African stamp circa 1991, has travelled to 'third world' continents. (85)

With the precarious moment of mounting an elephant now over, Monroe prepares to enter the Circus arena and Feingersh's work is done. (86) His job is not to photograph the carnivalesque parade that is about to take place (fig 11). Another set of curtains draw back: into the arena the elephant and Monroe go. The spectacle-in-process is over;

the spectacle is complete and greeted with a roar of a crowd. But I will not go to the circus.

We 'know' what became of Monroe. But what became of the corset, whose life in the short career of Marilyn Monroe was probably brief and transitory, made just for this one publicity stunt? Was it put on the shelves of Brooks Costume as another ready-to-wear? Was it kept by the owner of the store, to become either a private fetish or an item to be proudly displayed until the store's final closure? (87) It is likely that it exists now only in representation possibly only in Feingersh's photographs. But by following the wearer, perhaps Feingersh caught its makers or at least women whose labour was connected to the corset's site of production. What became of them? Whether wearer or maker, in different ways a *punctum* attaches itself to the corset - becoming another detail in the photograph that has taken me out of its frame. I can trace the wearer of the corset: early death, her image's posthumous career as a global commodity, the most unknowable 'private parts' of her biography to be returned to again and again, rewritten by myth, now in the form of speculation. While as an archive she is fixed, Monroe remains a classic signifier for Myth, motivated constantly by the consumption that drives it, in which the myth consumer is thoroughly implicated. (88) But where does the *punctum* relating the corset's makers, the shop's assistants, take me to? Anonymity: the everyday, commonplace banality of falling out of history unrecorded. However they are more than likely recorded in family albums, and so cherished in some way. Once again unseen family history returns, for family albums rarely have a public life, or status in terms of global commodity and economy. In both forms of photographic representation, Feingersh's and the family album, the women are still consigned to 'anonymity.' Yet Ed Feingersh's work is rescued from obscurity by both myth and myth consumer. For

Monroe's myth can now only exist in a 'form' such as photographs, and the myth consumer's drive for photographs that '*you've never seen before*' ensures Feingersh a place in the archive. In turn, a tiny gap emerges: the possibility for other kinds of retrieval. Found in the Monroe Archive, the women are not completely 'lost'. Yet *why* they appear in the Monroe archive/myth when they do, and in the *form* that they do, is a crucial question for me, not just as a 'myth consumer' but also as an artist/photographer. Why does a photograph, found within a 'documentary' photographer's 1955 portfolio, become a kind of archaeological site? For whether by accident or design, the 'documentary' photograph catches and preserves the peripheral, which provides another space for meaning beyond the main point of the photograph. Nearing the end of my labyrinth, there is both a sense of failure that the women still remain unidentified, and the feeling of convenience that I have not 'found' the living witnesses: I avoid being contested. (89) But the photograph already has, in the form of counter memory. My looking for one class history retrieved not only a specific British one, but also traces of others. In the form of 'The Fitting/Frame No 24' the women are caught in 'the cracks of the production' of the Monroe archive (90) and the consumption that drives her myth. However they also wanted to be 'caught', and by being caught looking at the blonde in Brooks Costume, their work place, traces of labour, race, history are mixed with the possibilities of pleasure and ambivalence; together with the evidence of 'work'. They are not caught looking at some forbidden secret - they 'know' the tricks of their trade, the tricks that were also Marilyn Monroe's. (Fig 12) (91)

A History of Looking

It is time to return to Barthes looking at the photograph of his mother in the Winter Garden: the beginning of my adventure. In *Camera Lucida*, his looking at photographs is inextricably bound to both the processes of mourning and intellectual enquiry. In my own particular adventure, looking at a photograph has been one of the processes bound up with an art practice: another intellectual enquiry also haunted by a sense of loss. This loss too has been marked by death, one that will forever trouble any fixed class identity. This in turn makes looking for and writing a ‘class’ history (in this case the ‘banal’ history of shop workers or costumiers) into a labyrinth of speculation. And ‘speculation’ has its own ghosts: Freud and Derrida on the one hand, but on the other is the cliché of ‘idle speculation.’ By having not recovered the witnesses, my investigation is cast into doubt and the danger is that I have revealed nothing: for what detective story lets the leads go cold and a murder unsolved? (92)

However my adventure did not begin with murder. It began with a prick, the *punctum* created by Feingersh’s camera: the detail of a teenage girl’s white socks on the edge of the photographic frame. And what am I now doing? Looking at another piece of clothing – the inside of a corset. Not Marilyn’s, but a reconstruction. Beginning with a pair of socks and finally ending with a burlesque corset, I have made a journey between the two – from an unidentified ‘girl’ to a mythical woman who has led me to this unidentified girl in the first place. She stands over a threshold and I am returned to my own adolescence, the time of my original fascination with Marilyn Monroe. Nostalgia, with all of its psychoanalytical and post-modern connotations, seems to reside at this

particular autobiographical moment. It also reverberates to other familial biographies, although not in a literal or straightforward way. Back and forth, to and fro: the photograph has taken me to both real and imagined spaces, in which narratives of femininity, held inside the corset, bind together the spectacular with the ‘ordinary’.

This still does not fully account for the strange frisson that comes with handling the reconstructed corset. It is as if I am being observed in some furtive act: the multiplicity of gazes that once watched Marilyn, are now watching me. Suddenly the reconstructed corset seems too revealing, not of Monroe, but of myself. I have not just been caught looking, but caught touching.

The corset in my hands. I have already been tempted to try it out for size (93), although unlike my imaginary Brooks Customer, I know this cloth has never been against her skin. I know the corset is a stand-in for the lost original. I am also conscious of the corset as a kind of fetish, one that I myself have made material. What’s more is that the reconstructed corset is also *punctum* made material. It is a strange piece of clothing indeed. ‘Fetish’ and ‘punctum’ are both bound up with the notion of *wound* (94) but what happens when both are embedded together in a burlesque corset? What happens to the *punctum* as “a subtle beyond”, to the “blind field” it gives when the fetish is a classic means of disavowal and reassurance? (95) And both allude to eroticism.

This leads me to the subject of desire: the desire for a history of looking that finally includes touching. The pink satin and black velvet of the reconstructed corset solicits touching, although even when in my hands, the act of looking and being looked at continues to circle around it. Would she not have been an erotic spectacle? This returns

to both the women and men who watch Monroe - the pleasures in looking at her. I am reminded of the look of longing.

This gets closer to revealing my unease about the corset – a fetish which acts as a cover while as *punctum* it gives me permission to see beyond what the photograph permits. For this is what the erotic photograph and the punctum have in common for Barthes. The *punctum* allows transgression – to image the unseen. But the relationship between an erotic drive and the image of a female icon is often troubled by fetishistic scopophilia. As Mulvey observes, this steps ‘outside linear time’ to satisfy itself through looking alone (96). Yet I could not satisfy myself by looking alone: I had to reconstruct and re-enact. This results in images and objects like the corset that are all, in a sense, taken out of their time. “The re-enactment of the original trauma” is still the impulse of a fetishist. The corset as a fetish object could be a classic disavowal of the ‘unpleasure’ that surrounds such fragile histories. Not to mention the possibility of an erotic desire that is tied up with the past. (97)

Feingersh’s Frame No. 24 is an extraordinary photograph. However transient that particular moment was in ‘real time’, the group of unidentified women who watch Monroe at the press of a button, were doing more than ‘just looking.’ By standing there and having a good look, they quietly insert themselves into a photographic representation and thereby into a history. However, like ‘autobiography’ the category of ‘history’ and the action of ‘looking’ are all complicated in that moment of 1/60 of a second. Feingersh captures ‘looking’ as an intricate combination of longing and knowledge. The fragile details that reveal race, gender and age also hold other possibilities; of a critical consciousness as well as the recognition that you are ‘getting in

on the act.’ In this particular case the act is a tiny footnote in the colossal myth of Marilyn Monroe: yet in an ironical twist this is where myth consumption and my looking for history brought me – to Frame No. 24.

Frame No 24: looking at “Brooks Staff” has also involved looking for them, and shadowing Feingersh. His photograph has allowed me to ‘play’ both within and outside of its frame - but only if these were fitting. It has helped summon up a series of metonymic links: between the women and Marilyn Monroe, their relations to their work place and each other; between Feingersh and myself; finally between the women of Brooks Costume, New York, 1955, and myself.

Notes

- 1) Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, London: Vintage (1982) p. 12: "I want a History of Looking. For the Photograph is the advent of myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity." The adventure is created by how a photograph animates the viewer pp. 19-20.
- 2) *ibid.*, p. 99, p. 73. The 'punctum' is a detail, often incidental, in a photograph that pricks a viewer's emotions, memories. 'Wound' is therefore bound up with 'punctum'. It is also personal, idiosyncratic to the viewer, so an experience of 'punctum' is difficult to share with another pp. 42-57.
- 3) *ibid.*, p. 5.
- 4) *ibid.*, p. 72. His photograph (fig 1) appears on p. 104, captioned 'The Stock'. It is in fact a photograph of Barthes' father as a child, not his mother. There is no photograph of his mother to be found in *Camera Lucida*.
- 5) In this labyrinth, my desire for a history of looking and the desire to *see* Barthes' mother, has already has played tricks on me. 'Misreading' photographs, seeing what I want to see, is one of the concerns of this text.
- 6) I am referring to my unpublished MA dissertation *Dangerous Intimacies and Double Indemnities*, University of Leeds, 1993, in which I provided a theoretical analysis of my art practice at that time. The dissertation centred on questions of the female gaze, masquerade and uncanny 'doubles' of Hollywood Screen Goddesses. This included speculation on their significance as 'maternal figures' for the female spectator, with particular attention to the psychoanalytical concept of narcissistic injury. Thus another type of 'wound'.
- 7) See Note 1. The author warns the reader, that what is 'punctum' to him may be nothing more than 'studium' for the reader i.e. interesting for sociological reasons, but nothing more. Hence I (the author) risk that you (the reader) will see 'studium' only, and experience no 'punctum'.
- 8) My mother was born in 1942, I was born in 1960: Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, pp. 64-65. "That is what the time when my mother was alive *before me* is - History (moreover, it is the period which interests me most, historically)." I am also referring to the question "*was I born then?*" that children ask their mothers when they become aware that she had a life, an existence before them.
- 9) *Marilyn: Fifty-five*, Bloomsbury, 1990. Photographs by Ed Feingersh from the Michael Ochs Archive. Foreword by Bob LaBrasca. Feingersh worked as a photojournalist based in New York in the 1940s/50s. I have been working with the UK/USA edition of his work. The book's reproductions are poor quality and the picture editor has heavily cropped some images. The quality of reproductions and how images are cropped is inherent to the 'reading' of this photograph (fig

- 2). In April 1998, courtesy of the Michael Ochs Archive, I saw the French and German editions: higher reproduction values and uncropped images might have told 'a different story'
- 10) The concept of social documentary photography has been interrogated for some time: John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, London: Macmillan Education (1988); Victor Burgin, ed., *Thinking Photography*, London: Macmillan (1982); Martha Rosler, 'In, Around and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)' in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton, The MIT Press (1992).
 - 11) Barthes, *Camera Lucida* pp. 42-43, p. 59: "... it [the erotic photograph] takes the spectator outside its frame, and it is there that I animate this photograph and that it animates me. The *punctum*, then, is a subtle *beyond* - as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see..." For other relevant theoretical writings on the subject of space and spectators being taken outside of the frame, see Laura Mulvey's essay 'Pandora: Topographies of the Mask and Curiosity' pp. 53-71, Victor Burgin's 'Perverse Space' pp. 220-240. Both essays in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina, Princeton Architectural Press (1992).
 - 12) *Marilyn: Fifty-five*, Bloomsbury (1990). All photographs were taken in New York City. Bob LaBrasca's foreword gives an account of Ed Feingersh's itinerary which included photographing the fitting at a store called Brooks Costume.
 - 13) I will be returning to this assumption of a 'department store' later in the text.
 - 14) Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 9, p. 111, pp. 5-6. Photography, he argues, fixes the referent in a particular way - in a gesture of simultaneous love and mourning: the photograph is always bound up with spectacle and the return of the dead.
 - 15) Throwing Christmas parties for the staff and their families, as well as awarding bonuses to employees, was an employment practice that featured in my childhood. The photograph (fig 3) includes my maternal grandmother at a Marks & Spencer party in 1954.
 - 16) See *Family Snaps: The Meaning of Domestic Photography*, ed., Patricia Holland & Jo Spence, London: Virago (1991) for an extended analysis on another 'contest of meaning': this time on the narratives of community and family, memory and social document.
 - 17) Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, pp. 97-8, pp. 103-5. A sense of lineage is not confined to the family photograph: other sources of photographs can come to 'stand in' for the literal ones, hence creating 'metonymic' links to the familial.
 - 18) This is not just the effect of anonymity vs. myth on all these women's histories, but also how shallow depth of field has affected focus in the actual photograph.

- 19) Graham McCann's introduction in *Marilyn Monroe: the Body in the Library*, Cambridge: Polity Press (1988) p. 2. His book is a critical/theoretical examination of both the life and representations of Monroe, including the writings of her mostly male biographers.
- 20) Richard Dyer, 'Monroe and Sexuality', in *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, London: BFI & Macmillan (1987) p. 65.
- 21) For example, see Donald Spoto's conclusions in *Marilyn Monroe: The Biography*, HarperCollins (1993), pp. 584-589. Here he argues that evidence in her autopsy points to Monroe's fatal overdose of drugs being administered through an enema, possibly by her housekeeper Eunice Murray on the instructions of Ralph Greenson, Monroe's psychiatrist.
- 22) See Graham McCann's introduction in *Marilyn Monroe: the Body in the Library*. Jane Russell's foreword, *Marilyn Monroe and the Camera*, London: Schirmer Art Books (1998); *American Photo* Vol. VIII No.3 May/June 1997.
- 23) Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 40. 'Now Freud says of the maternal body that "there is no other place of which one can say with so much certainty that one has already been there." Such then would be the essence of the landscape (chosen by desire): *heimlich*, awakening in me the mother (and never disturbing the mother).' Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919) Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works Vol. 17 Hogarth Press (1955) pp. 217-256. "This *unheimlich* place [re: female genitals] is the entrance to the former *Heim* (home) of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning." p. 245.
- 24) Two sources of oral histories reveal some significant differences to who was important at the time compared to those who have come to represent the 1950s era. During an open studio/shoot I held at the Leeds City Art Gallery (1996), several members of the public who were teenagers of the 50s, cited Bill Haley as far more important to them than Elvis Presley. Also see Jackie Stacey's *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*, London: Routledge, (1994). She is concerned with the historicity of spectatorship, combining feminist theories with oral accounts of spectatorship. A series of interviews with women who were young cinema goers during the 30s-50s, mostly from lower middle to working class backgrounds, are pivotal in her work: see chapters 'Hollywood Cinema: The Great Escape' pp. 80-125, and 'Feminine Fascinations' pp. 126-175. Here interviewees cite Doris Day, Jane Wyman, June Allyson as particular favourites. These chapters are also a historical reminder of the British perception of American Culture as an exotic, glamorous other - to which young women looked to in constructing their identities against a backdrop of British post war austerity.
- 25) Graham McCann's chapter 'The Myth of Marilyn Monroe,' *Marilyn Monroe: the Body in the Library* pp. 7-29, p. 24.

- 26) I am indebted to Professor Griselda Pollock for drawing my attention to these stamps and in her words, they are indeed "a case." A stamp is a deceptively simple way to circulate the 'white goddess' (as Susan Taylor noted) around an African culture. This assumes these stamps have not been produced solely for a western stamp collectors market. Either way, these stamps are an example of how effective global commodity culture has become and Monroe's image is still good capital.
- 27) Susannah Radstone, 'Remembering Ourselves: Memory, Writing and the Female Self' pp. 171-182 in *Feminist subjects Multi-Media: Cultural Methodologies*, ed., by Penny Florence & Dee Reynolds, Manchester University Press (1995) p. 172.
- 28) This plays with a title of a Monroe film 'The Prince and the Showgirl' 1957. 'Showgirl' is also used in a burlesque sense: a reading of her costume. It also has relevance to Brooks' location.
- 29) 'Spectacle' has several connotations, which will unfold as the text develops: I am including the pleasure attached to watching someone spectacular.
- 30) Laura Mulvey, 'Pandora: Topographies of the Mask and Curiosity', *Sexuality and Space* p. 56. Although Mulvey is specifically discussing this in relation to the visual language of cinema and not a still photograph, the themes in her essay are very pertinent to my concerns: "I want to consider the image of the female body as a sign and try to analyse it in terms of space" p. 57. Other concerns of hers, such as the problem of voyeurism, Pandora's look and the drive of female curiosity will take on greater significance as this text unfolds.
- 31) Freud's famous *fort-da* game described in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Norton & Company (1961) pp. 8-11. A little boy plays a repetitive game of 'disappearance and return' with a wooden reel on a string. The words *fort* (gone) *da* (there) are Freud's interpretation of the sounds the boy makes as he throws away the reel and then brings it in. Greater pleasure is attached to the 'return' of the object. The game of *fort-da* is a play of absence/presence, unpleasure/pleasure, and renunciation/compensation. Freud observes him later playing the same game, but this time, with his own mirror image p. 9. Freud speculates how the game has been created by the child in response to his mother's absence, and attempts to master the 'unpleasure' that marks it.
- 32) *Marilyn: Fifty-five*. In Bob LaBrasca's foreword, H.D. Quigg, a former United Press reporter, was not identified until 1988, when he wrote to the magazine following the publication of some of Feingersh's work.
- 33) *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* has yielded other formidable texts such as Jacques Derrida's *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (1987); to the more recent *The Matrixial Gaze* by Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, Leeds: Feminist Art and Histories Network (1995).

- 34) Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Visual & Other Pleasures* London: Macmillan, (1987) pp. 14-26. See her definition of a 'scopophilic' gaze p. 16.
- 35) Central to Mulvey's entire 'Pandora' essay is how to reconfigure her familiar themes of "Greek Myth, Hitchcock, psychoanalytic theory as an instrument of feminist criticism, the look in cinema" p. 54.
- 36) Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.10: "Now once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of "posing," I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image." And pp.13-14: "...each time I am (or let myself be) photographed, I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity...the photograph...represents that very subtle moment when...I am neither subject or object but a subject who feels he is becoming object..."
- 37) Diana Dors, Barbara Lang, Jayne Mansfield, Cleo Moore, Barbara Nicholls, Sheree North, Mamie Van Doren. With the exception of Dors, all these actresses were groomed by the major Hollywood Studios to imitate Monroe's image and persona.
- 38) Barthes, 'Myth Today' in *Mythologies*, London: Vintage (1993) pp. 109- 59. In his analysis on Myth, "as a second order semiological system" and its ideological effects on the histories it appropriates, he considers the position of the myth consumer, pp. 127-131, where in order to read and decipher Myth, one must look through "the eyes of the myth consumer." This helps me with a role reversal, so I as the myth consumer can look through the eyes of others.
- 39) Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking*, quoted in Stacey's *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* pp. 178-179. Bowlby traces the links between cinema and department stores, particularly the relationship between commodity and spectacle.
- 40) Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function as the I as revealed in Psychoanalytical Experience', in *Ecrits: A Selection* New York: Norton (1977) pp. 1-7. The mirror image of an infant subject anticipates a future unity of image and body "...which manufactures for the subject, caught in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends to a form of its totality ...and lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity..." p. 4. I will return to the work of feminist theorists on the implications of Lacan's theory on the question of femininity, particularly in relationship with the mirror/window, in forthcoming notes.
- 41) Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', p. 16.
- 42) In LaBrasca's foreword to *Marilyn: Fifty-five*, Quigg is quoted: "There, with what seemed to me to be remarkable dispatch, Miss Monroe got undressed to

stark naked... Since I didn't really know what I was doing there, I did nothing but memorise her skin..."

- 43) Stacey, 'The Great Escape,' *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*, pp. 80-125. As young women in the 30s and early 40s, many described the cinema as a means of 'escape': my maternal grandmother has echoed these sentiments, describing the importance of the cinema in the run-up to WW2 as a way of 'forgetting your troubles.' These 'troubles' were, of course, about the impending war. One of Stacey's main arguments is how social and historical locations outside cinema shape female spectatorship.
- 44) Bowlby's 'Introduction' and 'Commerce and Femininity' in *Just Looking*. London: Methuen, (1985), pp. 1-17, pp. 18-34. For a historical and psychoanalytical account of the commodity, the creation of new desires, and significance of female consumers in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries.
- 45) Between the ages of 14-17 my mother worked as an apprentice Milliner (a job she hated) before working as an assistant in an art materials shop. Early motherhood ended her working in the public sphere until the 1970s. My grandmother has worked as a florist, a shop assistant in Marks & Spencer, the Butchery business and finally WH Smiths: all in Leamington Spa.
- 46) Barthes, *Camera Lucida* p. 98: "The reading of public photographs is always at bottom, a private reading. This is obvious for old ("historical ") photographs, in which I read a period contemporary with my youth, or with my mother, or beyond, with my grandparents, and into which I project a troubling being, that of the lineage of which I am the final term." In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* the death of Sophie, Freud's daughter, is famously referred to in a footnote p.10: "When this child was five and three quarters, his mother died. Now that she was really 'gone'...the little boy showed no signs of grief." Freud does not disclose the fact that it is his daughter and his grandson in which the game of *fort-da* is both played and observed. The effects of this nondisclosure, and Sophie's death on Freud's text, are taken up by Derrida in 'To Speculate - On "Freud" Part 2: Freud's Legacy,' *The Postcard* pp. 292-337, p. 322; "This text is autobiographical, but in a completely different way...far from reassuring us about our familiar knowledge about what autobiography means, it sets up, with its strange contract, a new theoretical and practical charter for every possible autobiography." Also see his 1978 version 'Coming into One's own,' *Psychoanalysis & the Question of the Text* ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, pp. 114-48. For a tracing of *fort-da* and the dead feminine body in narrative and visual texts, see 'The Lady Vanishes' in Elizabeth Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* Manchester: Manchester University Press (1992) pp. 15-35.
- 47) For notions of speculation see Jacques Derrida 'To Speculate - On "Freud" Part 1 Notices (Warnings)' in *The Postcard* pp. 261-291.
- 48) Barthes, *Camera Lucida* p. 81.

- 49) Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919) pp. 217-256. The associated nostalgia for the maternal body is an ambivalent one: the fear of being buried alive is one manifestation which is "only a transformation of another phantasy which has nothing terrifying about it all, but was qualified by a certain lasciviousness – the phantasy, I mean, of intra-uterine existence." p. 244.
- 50) Barthes, *Camera Lucida* p. 91.
- 51) According to Derrida, the game of *fort-da* is repeated unconsciously by Freud in the structure of his text, while at the same time the appearance of his family "is veiled, of course, but all the more significant" *The Postcard* p. 298.
- 52) There is also now a 'real' loss: the death of my maternal grandfather on Wednesday 29 July 1998.
- 53) Barthes, *Camera Lucida* p. 91.
- 54) *Manhattan Yellow Pages* (1940 - 1985). New York Public Libraries. Brooks Costume remained in this location until the late 60s, at some point becoming Brooks-Van Horn Costume. It appears to have remained in business until the early 1980s.
- 55) According to LaBrasca's foreword in *Marilyn Fifty Five* these were the shop's owner James Strook, press agent Dick Shephard, H.D.Quigg, Monroe's agent Milton Greene and, of course, the photographer Ed Feingersh.
- 56) Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, pp. 51-52, where he refers to the usefulness of Greek myth on the question of the origin of sexuality: "For it traces the origin of an instinct to a need to restore an earlier state of things." He cites Plato's myth in which the sexes were, at one time, unified in one body with "four hands and four feet, two faces, two privy parts, and so on. Eventually Zeus decided to cut these men in two... After the division had been made, 'the two parts of man, each desiring his other half, came together, and threw their arms around each other eager to grow into one'." The split body in the mirror image could be read as a visual re-enactment of this particular myth.
- 57) Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage...' *Ecrits: A Selection* pp. 1-7.
- 58) Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* p. 9. See Note 31 above.
- 59) Here 'myths' and 'legends' refer not only to the ones drawn upon by the above psychoanalytical texts, but how these in turn have acquired their own 'legendary' status in terms of theoretical legacies. Add these to the Monroe Myth: at times, all these myths, legends have felt to me overwhelming.
- 60) Mary Smith is the only woman in the photographs to be clearly identified in the foreword of *Marilyn Fifty Five*, where she is described as Brooks' best fitter.

- 61) In one sense Mary Smith stands in the same place of all those other women (the hairdressers, the dressers etc.) who, while also working on a fabrication of femininity, are caught in 'documentary style' photographs. They are often old enough to be the star's mother, which leads to another chain of associated meaning - to Monroe's own mother, whose absence from much of her daughter's life was created by long periods of mental illness. See Donald Spoto's *Marilyn Monroe: The Biography* for more detailed accounts of other maternal figures, often friends of her mother, who attempted to provide her daughter with some kind of maternal support.
- 62) Like the previous 'voices' in this text, these are not Monroe's actual words, but they are only partly a fiction. These phrases are based on Kitty Burrows' readings of Monroe and Mary Smith in the Feingersh photographs, and her particular attention to each woman's gestures, facial expression and body language. Kitty Burrow draws from a long experience working as a costumier with performers.
- 63) Dressers in particular often work with performers on quick changes, in close proximity to the stage - black dress ensures they are not seen by the public.
- 64) I have drawn upon three sources for my speculation on the hierarchy at Brooks Costume. My primary source is Kitty Burrows' extensive knowledge of wardrobe & theatre hierarchies. She has described what the key differences are likely to be between the costume store compared to theatre: the store would have had no need for Dressers, so although her primary role is as a 'Fitter', it is likely that Mary Smith was also acting as Monroe's 'Dresser'. This would not have 'diminished' her status within Brooks Costume. As the primary Fitter, she would be responsible for delegating work to the Cutter. However, a Cutter's status varies. For example, depending on how large a theatre's wardrobe department is, there can even be a hierarchy between Cutters where it is the Head Cutter's job is to cut the costume of the female lead (*Publicity brochure, The Wardrobe Department, West Yorkshire Playhouse (1996)*). For an account of labour organisation within Costume Departments in Hollywood until 1960, see Elizabeth Nielsen's 'Handmaidens of the Glamour Culture: Costumiers in the Hollywood Studio System' in *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, London: Routledge (1990) ed. Jane Gaines & Charlotte Herzog.
- 65) Barthes, 'Myth Today' in *Mythologies*. The relationship of myth to history is one of his concerns in this essay, and what happens to the history of an object, a sign, a person when it is appropriated by myth. Since myth takes hold of something that already is a system of signification, myth turns "it suddenly into an empty, parasitical form... history evaporates" p. 117.
- 66) Bowlby, Mulvey and Stacey. Bowlby, *Just looking*: In terms of consumption commodities 'promise' to bring the female consumer closer to her 'ego ideal', implicating once again the shop window with her mirror image and narcissism, p.32. Stacey, *Star Gazing*: the female film star is a source of 'intimacy and

knowledge' for the female fan, an image from which the fan learns 'a shared femininity'. pp. 176-223. Mulvey's seminal definition of voyeurism, in the form of fetishistic scopophilia, "turns the represented figure itself into a fetish so it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (hence the overvaluation of the cult of the female star)," 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', pp. 14-26, p. 21. Contrast this with the look of curiosity and the drive to *know*, Mulvey's 'Pandora' in *Sexuality & Space* p. 70.

- 67) bell hooks, 'The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators' in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* Boston; South End Press (1992) pp. 115-131. hooks cites Julie Burchill ' "What does it say about racial purity that the best blondes have all been brunettes (Harlow, Monroe, Bardot)?" ' p. 119. I will return to how hooks deconstructs the relationship of the black female spectator to the image of the Blonde Star shortly. Also see Richard Dyer, 'Monroe and Sexuality' in *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* London: BFI & Macmillan (1987) pp.19-66. The Blonde is disproportionately white and sexualised, a symbol for normative heterosexuality (pp.42 - 45, p.50) but also reveals much about class, taste and respectable femininity. For other interpretation of Blonde female stars, see Jackie Stacey's analysis: here the star's body, as a site of consumption, offered the interviewees as young women alternatives to 'restrictive British respectable femininity' *Star Gazing* pp. 198-205.
- 68) This depends how we define 'trauma' and 'violence.' I would argue that even the site of a long gone shop has bore witness to some kind of trauma and violence. This is both in Marxist terms (the everyday occurrence of labour and alienation, followed by the erasure of these histories); and in psychoanalytical terms pertinent to feminism (the implications of unwritten 'maternal' histories to the 'work' of femininity and masquerade).
- 69) There is always the problem of the author/artist/critic's desire and the effect of 'importing' theoretical tools onto a historical scene. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Rani of Simur: An Essay in Reading the Archives' *History & Theory* 24, (1985).
- 70) This took place in the Leeds City Art Gallery (March/April 1996). Victoria Anderson, Louisa Ashley, and Clare Duffy were the performers involved. This reconstruction resulted in one of four 93 x 72" photographs which make up the installation *The Fitting*.
- 71) Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Black & Red, Detroit (1983) No 60. His critique is not aimed at specific individuals but the violent process of becoming and being consumed as Spectacle. The construction of the Star as Spectacle involves a violent appropriation that very individual's history, who will now as image/spectacle live an emptied out existence while projecting an illusion of fullness. Identifying with, and consuming the Spectacle leaves the spectator suspended in a surface existence, which both masks and compensates for the contradictions, the fragmentation of 'lived experience'. These are both material and psychic - class relations determined by production, and the quest for a

coherent, abundant identity. The relations between Spectacle and spectator disguise a process in which all the individuals histories are fractured, damaged. "Just as the activities of the star are not really global, they are not really varied," leading to the star and her spectators being implicated in "the banality of consumption."

- 72) hooks, 'The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators' in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* p. 119 and p. 122. Richard Dyer also takes up the conflation of race and sexuality in 'Monroe and Sexuality' pp. 42-43. Monroe is the "ultimate sign of whiteness" and "not only the most desired of women but the most womanly of women" p.45. See also Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire* London: Macmillan (1987) pp. 1-37. My text has also been informed by practical material: the reconstruction at the Leeds City Art Gallery, 1996. During the shoot, I had other unedited material based on sections of the Feingersh photograph, in particular 'the blonde' in a doorway. My observations of the public viewing this material confirmed that images of 'the blonde' would have to be edited carefully, since public interest in her threatened to overwhelm everything else.
- 73) In comparison to Debord, where the Spectacle/spectator relations - bound together by consumption - remain general, for Mary Ann Doane the impact of gender on these relations make the star image a doubly dangerous spectacle for the female spectator: "for the woman is both shop window and mirror, the one simply a means of access to another. The mirror/window takes on then a kind of trap whereby her subjectivity becomes synonymous with her objectification." *The Desire to Desire* pp. 32-3. The female spectator's consumption of the image is a lure that leads her into a trap. The spectacle's appearance in shop windows, on screens and ultimately in mirrors promises to bring closer a feminine identification of abundance. Although with different theoretical concerns, Debord and Doane make clear the spectacle/star image disguises commodification, alienation and fragmentation.
- 74) hooks, 'The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators' pp. 115-131. According to hooks black female spectatorship remains "outside pleasure" and she knows it.
- 75) One always has to be sensitive to the effects of appropriation, and not to displace other 'anxieties' onto Race.
- 76) hooks, 'The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators' p. 131.
- 77) The Michael Ochs Archive, Venice Beach, California, who now own the copyright of the Feingersh material. According to LaBrasca in *Marilyn Fifty-Five*, Ochs bought this in 1987 "as part of a larger lot of unexamined material." Some of Feingersh's material was originally published in *Redbook July 1955*, but the majority of his work was not published until 1988-1990. These contact sheets still contain material that has never been published.

- 78) In another contact sheet, No.60511 Frames No.14-17, Feingersh photographs himself in the mirror with Monroe, Mary Smith & Co. reflected in the background. An additional camera can be seen hanging around his neck.
- 79) I am paraphrasing a comment made by Victoria Anderson, the performer who stood in for the black woman. In preparation for the 1996 reconstruction, she read the photographed woman as someone who had just peeped around the corner to see what was going on - and wouldn't be there long.
- 80) Dorothy Parker and the performer Louisa Ashley's interpretation of this woman's gaze and body language as exhibiting signs of fascination.
- 81) Kitty Burrows first identified the Audrey Hepburn influence on the young woman in the white shirt during my research for similar blouses to use in the 1996 reconstruction.
- 82) March 30 1955: "...a star studded benefit performance of the Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus, organised by show-biz tycoon Mike Todd, at Madison Square Garden." LaBrasca, *Marilyn Fifty-Five*. The publicity stunt is mentioned in most Monroe biographies. For example see Spoto's *Marilyn Monroe - the Biography* p. 321. This was a charity event for the Arthritis and Rheumatism Foundation watched by a crowd of between 18,000 - 25,000 spectators and in the presence of 200 photographers.
- 83) Not only in terms of deploying photography in marketing, promotion and selling products, but also ideologies. See Carol Squiers 'The Corporate Year in Pictures' in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton, The MIT Press (1992) pp. 207-220.
- 84) These 'critical' commentaries have also been used to both challenge and collude with the reader of 'documentary photography,' whether in terms of liberal reform (the FSA experiment) or merely presenting 'the powerless to the powerful'. Martha Rosler, *The Contest of Meaning* pp. 304-341. For a critique of a photographer who straddles both genres of 'realism' and 'advertising' photography, see Richard Bolton's essay 'In the American East: Richard Avedon Incorporated' pp. 261-282, also in *The Contest of Meaning*.
- 85) The elephant is another story: see Claudia Lazzaro's 'Animals as Cultural Signs' in *Reframing The Renaissance* Yale (1995) pp. 197-227, where the elephant is a complex sign in a system of exchange.
- 86) The entire week's work culminated in 13 films, ending with Contact Sheet No.62853.
- 87) Brooks-Van Horn Costume disappears from Manhattan Yellow Pages some time between 1980-1985.
- 88) Spivak's 'The Rani of Simur: An Essay in Reading the Archives' *History &*

Theory 24, and Roland Barthes, 'Myth Today' in *Mythologies* pp. 109 - 159. What constitutes "Marilyn Monroe" in terms of an 'archive' [Spivak] is slippery because of myth [Barthes]. Her death in 1962 means that she is historically fixed: at a signified level nothing new can be added. However now in myth, Monroe-as-a-signified has an abundance of signifiers - in the form of images, books, videos: but the signified level "is poorer than the signifier, it often does nothing but re-presents itself" Barthes p. 120. This repetition through form is demonstrated yet again through the consumption of books, videos, and TV programmes, now associated with Diana, Princess of Wales. Her death is a recent reminder of how myth is both violent (literally 'robbery by colonisation' by myth turning signifieds 'into speaking corpses' pp. 132-133). That myth consumption takes place over the image of a dead, beautiful blonde, in another game of *fort-da* played by collective culture: we are back to the question of what drives post-modern nostalgia.

- 89) Derrida on Freud and the writing of *fort-da* in *The Postcard* p. 321: "the speculating grandfather, in describing or recalling this or that, recalls *himself*. And thereby makes what is called his text, enters into a contract with himself in order to hold all the strings /sons of the descendance. An *incontestable* ascendance. The *incontestable* is also that which needs no witness."
- 90) Spivak, 'The Rani of Simur: An Essay in Reading the Archives.' On encountering the East India Company archive, she incorporates an ideological critique of the archive in terms its production, while keeping a watchful eye on her 'critic's desire'. Never a direct presence, the Rani appears at a particular moment of colonial and economic interest. Spivak asks why the Rani appears then disappears from the archive. She concludes: "Caught in the cracks between the production of the archives and indigenous patriarchy, today distanced by the waves of hegemonic 'feminism', there is no 'real Rani' to be found'. On not finding her, Spivak comments "To retrieve her as information will be no disciplinary triumph..." The trace of a historical Royal woman then reverberates onto the present lives and deaths of "women of the urban sub-proletariat and of unorganised peasant labour [who] are not going on record ...even as we speak." p. 271.
- 91) The possibility here is of a classed, feminine knowledge where neither the female body, nor the feminine masquerade is a mystery, a 'secret'. This not 'essentialist' knowledge: but a 'working' one.
- 92) An example would be James Ellroy's *My Dark Places: An L.A. Crime Memoir*, London: Arrow, 1997. His own mother was murdered when he was a boy. Her killer was never found. *My Dark Places* is his unsuccessful attempt to solve her murder years later. However through this process he produces another kind of autobiography and retrieves other memories of his mother.
- 93) This refers to my own masquerade as Marilyn in this corset, which is now one of the images that makes up *The Fitting*.

- 94) See Note 2. In psychoanalytical terms, the fetish covers up the ‘wound’ that connotes the threat of castration – and sexual difference.
- 95) This is a return to Note 11. Barthes, *Camera Lucida* pp. 57-59, but this time with a reference to ‘the body’ and ‘history.’ For example the erotic photograph, like *punctum*, takes the spectator outside the frame towards “the *kairos* of desire.” This has followed his reading of Queen Victoria’s skirt in a photograph: “the *punctum* ...brings out the Victorian nature...of the photograph, it endows this photograph with a blind field.”
- 96) Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', pp. 20-21.
- 97) *Ibid.*, p. 21.

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