

Jalal Toufic  
**A Hitherto  
Unrecognized  
Apocalyptic  
Photographer:  
The Universe**

01/08

e-flux journal #55 — may 2014 Jalal Toufic  
**A Hitherto Unrecognized Apocalyptic Photographer: The Universe**

“[Paul Gsell:] ‘Well, then, when in the interpretation of movement he [the artist] completely contradicts photography, which is an unimpeachable mechanical testimony, he evidently alters truth.’ ‘No,’ replied Rodin, ‘it is the artist who is truthful and it is photography which lies, for in reality time does not stop, and if the artist succeeds in producing the impression of a movement which takes several moments for accomplishment, his work is certainly much less conventional than the scientific image, where time is abruptly suspended.’”<sup>1</sup> While I tend to concur with this Rodin view generally, I do not agree with his assertion that “in reality time does not stop.” To disagree with this assertion, I do not have to invoke the freezing in dance and undeath, under silence-over; I can invoke relativity. The Schwarzschild membrane of a black hole is an event horizon not only because once an entity crosses it that entity can no longer communicate back with us this side of it, but also because from our reference frame the entities at the horizon do not undergo any events, being frozen due to the infinite dilation of time produced by the overwhelming gravity in the vicinity of the black hole. Was photography invented not so much to assuage some urge to arrest the moment, but partly owing to an intuition that it already existed in the universe, in the form of the immobilization and flattening at the event horizon? “Windbag, watching Goulash from a spaceship safely outside the horizon, sees Goulash acting in a bizarre way. Windbag has lowered to the horizon a cable equipped with a camcorder and other probes, to better keep an eye on Goulash. As Goulash falls toward the black hole, his speed increases until it approaches that of light. Einstein found that if two persons are moving fast relative to each other, each sees the other’s clock slow down; in addition, a clock that is near a massive object will run slowly compared with one in empty space. Windbag sees a strangely lethargic Goulash. As he falls, the latter shakes his fist at Windbag. But he appears to be moving ever more slowly; at the horizon, Windbag sees Goulash’s motions slow to a halt.... In fact, not only does Goulash seem to slow down, but his body looks as if it is being squashed into a thin layer. Einstein also showed that if two persons move fast with respect to each other, each will see the other as being flattened in the direction of motion. More strangely, Windbag should also see all the material that ever fell into the black hole, including the original matter that made it up – and Goulash’s computer – similarly flattened and frozen at the horizon.”<sup>2</sup> By superimposing the reference frame of the outside observer and that of the astronaut approaching the black hole, one has at the event horizon a flattening and a

suspension of motion – a photograph – of the still moving three-dimensional person who crossed into the black hole. The universe automatically takes the astronaut's photograph as he crosses its border, the event horizon, in a sort of paradigmatic farewell. Do photographs induce nostalgia because they show a moment that has vanished? Both relativity, with its spacetime,<sup>3</sup> and Zen master Dōgen, with his time-being (*uji*),<sup>4</sup> tell us that that moment has not vanished. I rather think that this gloomy nostalgia is linked to an intuition of the resonance of the man-made photographs with the aforementioned naturally occurring photographs, which signal the irretrievable loss to the universe of the one who has been thus photographed. From a local reference frame, an artistic rendering in the Rodin manner of the astronaut at the event horizon might very well be less conventional, more truthful, than a photograph of him; but from the reference frame of an outside observer, a photograph of the astronaut at the event horizon is less conventional than an artistic rendering of him in the Rodin manner, for at the event horizon not only is the person flattened, but also time is so slowed it comes to a standstill.

If the radical-closure work presents only one, exclusive frame of reference, then the crossing into such a closure happens in a lapse of consciousness, in other words, is missed, one finding “oneself” to the other side without having been introduced there; but if two reference frames are provided, then the crossing both does not happen and is continuous! From the reference frame of an outside observer, those at the black hole's event horizon are flattened and frozen, turning into quasi photographs; but from their local reference frame they have gradually crossed that boundary as three-dimensional persons. In Robbe-Grillet's universe, from one perspective, exterior to the radical closure, the protagonists and the objects are frozen and flat; but from another perspective, interior to the radical closure, they are three-dimensional and undergo events (“I am closing the door behind me, a heavy wooden door with a tiny narrow oblong window near the top, its pane protected by a cast-iron grille.... The wood around the window is coated with a brownish varnish in which ... I have discerned human figures for a long time: a young woman lying on her left side and facing me, apparently naked.... From the left part of the frame spreads a cone of harsh light ... : the shaft of light has been carefully directed, as though for an interrogation.... Yet it cannot be an interrogation; the mouth, which has been wide open too long, must be distended by some kind of gag.... Besides, a scream, if the girl were screaming, would be audible through the thick

pane of the oblong window with its cast-iron grille. But now a silver-haired man in a white doctor's coat appears in the foreground from the right.... He walks toward the bound girl”<sup>5</sup>). If, in the narrative, there is a subsequent freezing that is again accompanied by a flattening, the reader would be once again looking from outside the radical closure. This would indicate that the fiction writer has not relinquished the ubiquity and omniscience of the traditional novelist, but truly accomplished it: what could be a clearer sign of an omniscience of the narrator than to be able to report on what is happening to either side of the event horizon?

There is a sort of photograph that is specific to a radical closure: the photograph that irrupts in it without being shot by anyone within it<sup>6,7</sup>. Were one to want to list David Lynch's photographs, one should include not only those that were shown in exhibitions and/or published,<sup>8</sup> but also *Lost Highway's* photograph of the two look-alike women, and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me's* photograph handed by the old woman and the child, who suddenly appear on the sidewalk, to Laura Palmer, and in which she later appears. Similarly, in order to complement one's view of Robbe-Grillet the writer and filmmaker by Robbe-Grillet the painter and photographer, one has to include as part of his oeuvre the paintings, ostensibly by others (Magritte ...), that irrupted in his novels (*La Belle Captive* ...),<sup>9</sup> and the photographs that resulted from the freezing and flattening of various characters at the gateless gates of radical closures in his novels as well as those that irrupted in his films, for example, the photograph that the woman's suitor hands her to convince her they met the previous year at Marienbad and that was taken by no one, not even “the third who walks always beside you” (T. S. Eliot) – her husband?<sup>10</sup> While made possible by the radical closure presented by the film, these photographs do not fit fully in the film in which they irrupted, making the latter a mixed media work. The absence of any mention of, let alone a separate section on the photographs in Robbe-Grillet's *Last Year at Marienbad*, *L'Immortelle*, and *The Man Who Lies*; the photographs in Lynch's *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* and *Lost Highway*; and the photograph of Jack Torrance among the other guests at the July 4th ball that took place in 1921 at the Overlook Hotel, where he apparently first arrived as a middle-aged man sometime in the 1970s, in Kubrick's *The Shining* is a significant omission in historical surveys of photography. Francis Bacon frequently painted not directly from models but from photographs of them taken by other, camera-wielding humans (“I've had photographs taken for portraits because I very much prefer

02/08

e-flux journal #55 — may 2014 Jalel Toufic  
A Hitherto Unrecognized Apocalyptic Photographer: The Universe

working from the photographs than from models”), in the process allowing, from a reference frame external to the radical closure, the fashioning of the figure into a photograph at that radical closure’s border, as in *Study for Self Portrait 1982*, 1984, *Study from the Human Body after Muybridge*, 1988, and *Triptych*, 1991, where the figure is three-dimensional in the left panel, but two-dimensional in the right one (what is presented consecutively in Robbe-Grillet’s novelistic radical closures is presented simultaneously in Bacon’s artistic radical closures);<sup>11</sup> or the irruption in the radical closure of a photograph not taken by anyone,<sup>12</sup> often in the form of a portrait hung on the wall (*Three Portraits: Posthumous Portrait of George Dyer, Self-Portrait, Portrait of Lucian Freud*, 1973, and *Three Studies of Isabel Rawsthorne*, 1967).

The scientists at the space program had asked the astronaut to take a fitting pose once he was almost at the event horizon, as he would appear, from an outside reference frame, as a photograph (that would look increasingly dimmer and redder as he got ever closer to the event horizon from their reference frame), and had programmed the main computer on the spaceship to provide him when he had gone beyond the Schwarzschild radius with a convincing simulation of a photograph showing him at the event horizon. Some perverse engineer had even arranged for the click of a camera to be suddenly audible as the spaceship crossed the event horizon. Supposedly, by looking at this photograph, he would still feel himself to be virtually outside the event horizon. A few psychiatrists and a thinker cautioned him that it would be unsettling to look at a photograph that uncannily reproduced one that could exist only in a frame of reference from which he was excluded, warning him that he would have the impression of being at two places or even three places at the same time: in the spaceship inside the black hole, where he would actually be; back at the event horizon; and in the reference frame, at a distance from the event horizon, from which his freezing and flattening would be observable.<sup>13</sup> They cautioned him that by seeing this photograph in his spaceship beyond the event horizon, indeed by merely knowing of its existence in his spaceship, he would feel dissociated. But was such a warning really necessary in this peculiar case? If, as Bergson avers, memory is not localized and preserved in the brain, but presupposes the subsistence of the past, and if “whenever we are trying to recover a recollection, to call up some period of our history, we ... replace ourselves, first, in the past in general, then, in a certain region of the past” where “little by little it comes into view like a condensing cloud ... [and] from

the virtual state passes into the actual,”<sup>14</sup> how can the person who crosses the event horizon continue to have his memory if by crossing it he becomes disconnected from the spacetime to the other side? According to Kip S. Thorne, Paul Davies, and other physicists, setting aside the intensifying gravitational tidal forces, hypothetically the astronaut would not feel anything special at the Schwarzschild membrane or just after he crosses it. But, since the spacetime outside the event horizon is no longer available to the astronaut who crossed that boundary, my contention is that starting at the event horizon the astronaut suffers an automatic, instantaneous loss of memory. There is thus a weighty difference between the traditional photograph taken by a human using a camera, and this other photograph into which he or she would turn at the edge of the universe, the event horizon: while we still have our memories when photographed by humans, the person whose photograph is taken at the event horizon, as it were by the universe, loses memory (as a result of being separated from the spacetime to the other side of the event horizon he has just crossed). To the other side of the event horizon of a black hole, a photograph showing the astronaut would not elicit any nostalgia from him or her because he or she would have become amnesiac – and because such a photograph might be an unworldly, ahistorical entity that irrupted in the black hole as a radical closure. (Similarly, to the other side of the gateless gate of the radical closure in Resnais and Robbe-Grillet’s *Last Year at Marienbad*, the photograph her suitor presents to the woman and that shows her in the hotel in Marienbad does not elicit any nostalgia from her not only because she has become amnesiac but also because it is an unworldly, ahistorical entity that irrupted in the radical closure.) Many physicists resort to robots in their description of what may happen to the entity that crosses the event horizon (Kip S. Thorne: “The spin of the [black] hole intrigues you. Never before could you observe a spinning hole up close. So with pangs of conscience you ask for and get a volunteer robot, to explore the neighborhood of the horizon and transmit back his experiences”<sup>15</sup>); is this merely to allay the empathetic reader’s concern by sparing the human astronaut, his *semblable*, death by gravitational shredding? Or is it possibly because they intuit that only one of the two forms of memory that Bergson differentiates (“The past appears indeed to be stored up ... under two extreme forms: on the one hand, motor mechanisms which make use of it; on the other, personal memory-images which picture all past events with their outline, their colour and their place in time”<sup>16</sup>), “the bodily memory, made up of

03/08

e-flux journal #55 — may 2014 Jalel Toufic  
A Hitherto Unrecognized Apocalyptic Photographer: The Universe

the sum of the sensori-motor systems organized by habit,<sup>17</sup> [and which] is ... a quasi-instantaneous memory”<sup>18</sup> – the only one available to the robot, indeed the one that the robot embodies<sup>19</sup> – continues to be available to the entity that crosses the event horizon? Convinced by Bergson’s views, the astronaut was less apprehensive of being shredded by the gravitational tidal effects or the singularity to the other side of the event horizon of a gargantuan black hole than of suddenly becoming amnesiac just as he crossed the event horizon. To appease him, some scientists “explained” to him that since the brain is the locus where the traces of the past are preserved through a series of modifications to the circuits of that complex biological organ, the entity that passes to the other side of the event horizon maintains its memory up to its death by enormous tidal forces; and a philosopher told him that there was a conflict between the largely spatialized time of relativity, especially in its Minkowski rendition, and the unextended time of Bergson, and that he had to choose between the two: “If time is unextended, then you cannot be separated from it by a border in space.” He was not convinced, exclaiming: “Can one cross beyond the end of the universe and conserve one’s memory intact?” Deleuze on Bergson: “The present changes or passes. We can always say that it becomes past when it no longer is, when a new present replaces it. But this is meaningless. It is clearly necessary for it to pass on for the new present to arrive, and it is clearly necessary for it to pass at the same time as it is present, at the moment that it is the present. Thus the image has to be present and past, still present and already past, at once and at the same time. If it was not already past at the same time as present, the present would never pass on.”<sup>20</sup> The two different frames of reference with regard to a black hole manifest the two consequences of a present divested from the past, which “is preserved by itself, automatically,”<sup>21</sup> and which allows the present to pass: at the event horizon of the black hole, and from the reference frame of an outside observer, the present that does not pass, in the form of the freezing of the astronaut as well as any object whatever; inside the black hole, from the reference frame of the astronaut who crossed the horizon, the present that is not preserved, thus an astronaut that not only is amnesiac but also irrupted fully formed ahistorically, so that if he or she does not at some point suddenly perceptibly disappear, this would be only because he or she is being recurrently created. While of the view that modern physics is not Leibnizian, since it contains many absolute borders, for example, relativity’s light cone,<sup>22</sup> which makes “the

04/08

e-flux journal #55 — may 2014 Jalel Toufic  
A Hitherto Unrecognized Apocalyptic Photographer: The Universe

connexion of all matter in the plenum” (*Monadology* #62) impossible; and since, as is made clear by quantum physics’s Bose-Einstein condensate, it contradicts Leibniz’s principle of the identity of indiscernibles, the astronaut nonetheless wondered what would happen to him at the border of the black hole in case he were a monad. One could consider the world delimited by the event horizons of all the black holes as the expression of monads. What is outside the incorporeal monads is not the world, which is enfolded in the monads, but what is external to the world, what borders it: invisible black holes. This side of the event horizon, there is no world out there, but only its expression by the incorporeal monads; beyond the event horizon, there is an external world, but, given that black holes do not allow what renders visible, light, to escape, one that can be detected this side of the event horizon only indirectly, through the effects, enfolded in the monads, of the mass, electric charge, and angular momentum of what ostensibly imploded or fell into the black holes. At the event horizon, there is an abrupt switch from one extreme closure to another: from the monad, which has “no windows, by which anything could come in or go out” (*Monadology* #7), to the black hole, a spacetime region that is radically closed.<sup>23</sup> What we have around the event horizon is the ever-increasing unfoldings of the monad, which contains all the information in the universe past, present, and future (“each created monad represents the whole universe” [*Monadology* #62], in other words, “every substance ... expresses, although confusedly, all that happens in the universe, past, present and future” [*Discourse on Metaphysics*, IX]). A monadic entity’s camera-less photographic portrait in the vicinity of the event horizon is also that of the photographer, the universe:<sup>24</sup> in the vicinity of the event horizon, we have, from an external reference frame, a photograph of the astronaut, or, to be more accurate, the astronaut turned, through flattening and freezing, into a photograph; but also, through the infinite unfolding of what he, as a monad, enfolds, the baroque photograph of the universe. While in the last moments before one’s death, one’s whole life reportedly flashes before one, at the universe’s end, at the event horizon, all the universe’s events unfold. From this perspective, any monadic entity that ostensibly crosses the event horizon, but certainly a human being, is an apocalyptic event. Jorge Luis Borges wrote in the “Afterword” to *The Maker* (1960), “A man sets out to draw the world. As the years go by, he peoples a space with images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fishes, rooms, instruments, stars, horses, and individuals. A

short time before he dies, he discovers that that patient labyrinth of lines traces the lineaments of his own face”;<sup>25</sup> one can paraphrase his words thus regarding a monadic astronaut in the vicinity of the event horizon. “A man sets out to draw the world. Years go by as he travels to the nearest black hole. Then some extremely long-lived patient futuristic outside observer discovers, as the years go by from his or her reference frame, that the labyrinth of lines into which the face of the monadic astronaut a short time before the latter crossed into the black hole and died in his local reference frame indefinitely unfolds traces the lineaments of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fishes, rooms, instruments, stars, horses, and individuals; that ‘there is a world of created things, of living beings, of animals, of entelechies, of souls, in the minutest particle of matter’; that ‘every portion of matter may be conceived as like a garden full of plants and like a pond full of fish’; that ‘every branch of a plant, every member of an animal, and every drop of the fluids within it, is also such a garden or such a pond’; and that ‘although the ground and air which lies between the plants of the garden, and the water which is between the fish in the pond, are not themselves plants or fish, yet they nevertheless contain these.’<sup>26</sup>” To be precise, the portrait of the universe that unfolds, from an outside reference frame, as the monadic astronaut approaches ever closer the event horizon would take an infinite time to do so fully since the wavelengths of the electromagnetic signal, which undergo gravitational redshift, keep rapidly increasing, with the consequence that some of them “take forever long to climb out of the hole’s gravitational grip”<sup>27</sup> – by which time the world, according to numerous scientists, would have imploded in a Big Crunch or endured a Heat Death.

He had first seen her in a cafe at the space program. She turned when someone called: “Shanna!” A couple of days later, he wrote the following letter: “In Duras’s *India Song*, is the French vice-consul of Lahore Leibnizian or enunciating a Leibnizian truth during his conversation, in voice-over, with Anne-Marie Stretter: ‘I didn’t need to dance with you to know you. You know that.’ ‘Yes.’ ‘There’s no need for us to go any further, you and I. We haven’t anything to say to each other. We are the same.’ ‘I believe you’? Sitting at nearby tables at the cafe, he felt they were two monads, windowless, and that not only all that had happened or would ever happen to her is plicated in him, albeit as quite confused perceptions, but also that all that would ever happen to him was folded in her who might refuse his advances. Which did he prefer: to meet her in a world where one learns about others

through observation, writing that receives through creation the *aparté*, French kisses, slips of the tongue, in short, intercourse? Or, rather, to express a Leibnizian world in which he never meets her, a world where each monad, himself included, expresses the universe, Shanna included, past, present, and future? Which did he prefer: to meet her in the former kind of world and know that whole zones of her life will remain totally unknown to him? Or never to meet her but for both to be monads, with the consequence that he expressed her past, present, and future, though in a confused, unconscious manner?” He did not end up mailing or giving in person the letter to her. They were soon after chosen for the first mission to a black hole. Along the training process, they became lovers. They quickly came to view that coming trip into the black hole as a double suicide. She began avidly reading any biographies and letters she could find of Heinrich von Kleist, who shot himself in 1811 in a suicide pact with Henriette Vogel. He surrounded himself with reproductions of Francis Bacon paintings, since for him that painter’s work made gravity visible. He was particularly attracted to Bacon’s triptych *Three Studies for a Crucifixion* (1962). Like Bacon, he was not interested in crucifixion from a religious point of view. It rather captured his interest as the fate awaiting him as a consequence of the quick increase in the excruciating difference of the gravitational pull on various parts of his body that he would suffer as his spaceship approached the black hole. He told her: “We will be together until the end of the world.” And indeed at the event horizon, they were, from the reference frame of an outside observer, together until the end of the world; notwithstanding his aversion to being photographed, he could not refuse her a photograph with him at the event horizon since they both became, from the reference frame of some outside observer, a photograph. But immediately beyond the event horizon they were, in their own reference frame, separated from each other as no two sane living humans were ever separated. The only kind of separation that might be equivalent would be that between oneself and one’s double, who is oneself divested from all the others with whom one is, insofar as one is alive, intermingled.<sup>28</sup> He was preparing himself to possibly encounter alien beings and exotic kinds of matter to the other side of the event horizon, but the first things that he encountered as alien were the other astronauts in his spaceship. The one who crosses the event horizon is divested of the world, not only because he can no longer cross to the other side, but also because he or she is then no longer a monad, no longer enfolds the world. By crossing the event horizon one exits this universe, but also the

05/08

e-flux journal #55 — may 2014 Jalel Toufic  
A Hitherto Unrecognized Apocalyptic Photographer: The Universe

universe exits one, in the sense that it is no longer enfolded in one, that one is no longer a monad. In which case, no information is lost to the black hole, because the astronaut *as a monad* never crosses the event horizon, and because anyway all the information is enfolded in each of the other monads “outside” the black hole. The separation he had to accept inside the supermassive black hole was not only with the universe to the other side of the event horizon, but also with the other travelers on the spaceship, no longer feeling any affinity with them: they presently gave the impression of being, indeed were possibly, ahistorical, unworldly entities that irrupted fully formed. Moreover, to the other side of the event horizon, the astronaut, now no longer a monad, could notice all the unworldly entities that were irrupting in the black hole.<sup>29</sup> That we do not perceive the irruption of unworldly entities in a world that physics tells us has absolute ends (in the form of the singularities of the Big Bang and black holes) could be either because such entities are localized in black holes or because we are what Leibniz considered us, monads, and the entities that irrupt do not belong to the world all monads express. As monads, enfolding the same world, at the most basic level *we are always only in our own company*.<sup>30</sup> As they, monads, ever so closely approached the event horizon, unfolding ever more, they appeared from outside reference frames to be less and less distinguishable, since they both expressed the universe; but to the other side of the event horizon, and from their local frame of reference, they, no longer monads, immediately became alien to each other. Looking at his beloved as they crossed to the other side of the event horizon, he felt that she is as alien as a sphinx. I envision the sphinx of Bacon’s *Oedipus and the Sphinx after Ingres*, 1983, asking a twenty-first-century Oedipus, now an astronaut, a different riddle at a black hole’s event horizon: “What is it that conjointly crosses a gateless gate and doesn’t, is two dimensional and three dimensional, and although ostensibly the same totally alien?” Some time after they had crossed into the massive black hole, he was again gradually getting acquainted with her, but the intimacy was gone since it was no longer the case that whatever happened to her was folded in him (albeit in such a manner that for the most part he could perceive it only in a confused way). He realized now which of the two alternatives he had listed in his Leibnizian letter to her he preferred – by far.

×

This essay is from the second edition of Jalal Toufic’s *Forthcoming*, published in 2014 by *e-flux journal* & Sternberg Press.

06/08

e-flux journal #55 — may 2014 Jalal Toufic  
A Hitherto Unrecognized Apocalyptic Photographer: The Universe

Jalal Toufic is a thinker and a mortal to death. He was born in 1962 in Beirut or Baghdad and died before dying in 1989 in Evanston, Illinois. Many of his books, most of which were published by Forthcoming Books, are available for download as PDF files on his website: [www.jalaltoufic.com](http://www.jalaltoufic.com). He was most recently a participant in the Sharjah Biennial 11, the 9th Shanghai Biennale, Documenta 13, “Art in the Auditorium III” (Whitechapel Gallery ...) and “Six Lines of Flight” (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art). In 2011, he was a guest of the Artists-in-Berlin Program of the DAAD.

1  
Auguste Rodin, *Rodin on Art*, translated from the French of Paul Gsell by Romilly Fedden (New York: Horizon, 1971), 75–76.

2  
Leonard Susskind, “Black Holes and the Information Paradox,” *Scientific American* 276, no. 4 (April 1997): 55. On gravitational time dilation, see also Kip S. Thorne, *Black Holes and Time Warps: Einstein’s Outrageous Legacy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994): “Near a black hole gravitational time dilation is enormous: If the hole weighs 10 times as much as the Sun, then time will flow 6 million times more slowly at 1 centimeter height above the hole’s horizon than far from its horizon; and right at the horizon, the flow of time will be completely stopped” (100).

3  
“Albert Einstein ... wrote to a friend, ‘The past, present, and future are only illusions, even if stubborn ones.’ Einstein’s startling conclusion stems directly from his special theory of relativity, which denies any absolute, universal significance to the present moment. According to the theory, simultaneity is relative. Two events that occur at the same moment if observed from one reference frame may occur at different moments if viewed from another. Such mismatches make a mockery of any attempt to confer special status on the present moment, for whose ‘now’ does that moment refer to? If you and I were in relative motion, an event that I might judge to be in the as yet undecided future might for you already exist in the fixed past. The most straightforward conclusion is that both past and future are fixed. For this reason, physicists prefer to think of time as laid out in its entirety – a timescape, analogous to a landscape – with all past and future events located there together. It is a notion sometimes referred to as block time. Completely absent from this description of nature is anything that singles out a privileged special moment as the present or any process that would systematically turn future events into present, then past, events. In short, the time of the physicist does not pass or flow” (Paul Davies, “That Mysterious Flow,” *Scientific American* 287, no. 3 [September 2002]: 41–42).

4  
Dōgen: “An ancient Buddha said: ‘For the time being stand on top of the highest peak.... / For the time being three heads and eight arms. / For the time being an eight- or sixteen-foot body....’ / For the time being here means time itself is being, and all being is time. A golden sixteen-foot body is time.... ‘Three heads and eight arms’ is time.... Yet an ordinary person who does not understand buddha-dharma

may hear the words the time-being this way: ‘For a while I was three heads and eight arms.... Even though the mountains and rivers still exist, I have already passed them.... Those mountains and rivers are as distant from me as heaven is from earth.’ It is not that simple. At the time the mountains were climbed and the rivers crossed, you were present. Time is not separate from you, and as you are present, time does not go away” (“The Time-Being” [Uji], in *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen* [New York: Macmillan, 1985], 76–77).

5  
Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Project for a Revolution in New York: A Novel* (New York: Grove Press, 1972), 1–3.

6  
If one considers a black hole as a radical closure, then there are two sorts of possible photographs that are specific to it: the freezing and flattening at its *gateless gate*, the event horizon; and the photographs, shot by no one and no camera, that irrupt in it (by *objective chance* the unworldly photograph, taken by no camera, that irrupts inside the black hole may show the same image as the “photograph,” also taken by no camera, of the astronaut frozen and flattened at the black hole’s event horizon).

7  
And there is a sort of video that is specific to a radical closure: the video that irrupts in it without being shot by anyone within it. In David Lynch’s *Lost Highway*, the circumstance that Fred Madison and his wife twice omitted setting the alarm system on the day preceding their reception of the anonymous videotape showing shots of the interior of their house leaves open the possibility that they are dealing with an unlawful entry through the door or window by someone who then took these shots with a camera. The two detectives who come to investigate the case ask Fred to thenceforth activate his alarm system. Therefore we can assume that (unlike in the script, where he again fails to activate the alarm) he did so, and, moreover, since he does not hear the alarm sound, that no unlawful entry took place through any of the entrances of the house, and, consequently, that no camera served to take the new video shots of the inside of the house – the videotape, unworldly, shot by no one, irrupted in the radical closure. Similarly, it is quite possible that the tracking shot of the highway at night, with the yellow broken lines illuminated by the headlights of a moving car, which is first seen in *Blue Velvet*, 1986, and which accompanies the opening credits sequence and the ending of *Lost Highway*, 1997, was not filmed for the latter film but irrupted in it from the earlier one. Since the

highway of *Lost Highway* is a cinematic shot from an earlier film rather than a road, it cannot be used to flee somewhere else – unless the person flees his pursuers not farther along the highway but through (his double’s?) irruption into the shot of the highway (that is why, while being unsettled, I am not surprised that when the Mystery Man, standing next to Fred Madison, hands the wounded man on the desert sand a portable pocket television, its monitor shows the Mystery Man handing a portable pocket television while standing next to Madison, that is, as an image).

8  
For example, David Lynch, “Paintings and Drawings,” Touko Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, January 12–27, 1991; and *David Lynch: Sala Pargallo – Palau dels Escaldes, Mayo–Junio 1992, Diputació Provincial de València* (Valencia; Sala Pargallo: Edicions Alfons el Magnànim, Institutio Valenciana d’Estudis i Investigacio).

9  
Here are two examples of the artist as producer: Warhol, who simply turned on the camera and let it shoot what was in front of it until the end of the film roll, or else assigned others to make the films or the silkscreens; and Robbe-Grillet, who produced radical closures in which images that are ostensibly those of others (Magritte, Rauschenberg, etc.) irrupted (in the process introducing singularly unfamiliar elements amid his recurrent imagery).

10  
One did not have to wait for digital technology (with the absence of generation loss it makes possible) to question the veracity and historicity of photographs, their indexical function.

11  
In Francis Bacon’s work, painting foregrounds or at least addresses its being a two-dimensional medium not so much in a self-reflexive manner but through dealing with the flattening of the figure (from the reference frame of an outside observer) at the border of the radical closures he establishes.

12  
Paintings such as *Triptych March 1974*, where the figure is shown holding a camera next to its face, presumably in the act of taking a photograph, are exceptional in Francis Bacon’s work.

13  
While the figure that is seemingly divided into two at the juncture of the panel in Francis Bacon’s *Study from the Human Body*, 1981, is not actually dislocated but just represented and viewed from two reference frames, when painting it the painter had to mentally place

himself and when looking at it the spectator finds himself paradoxically in two reference frames simultaneously: outside the radical closure, from which he would see the two-dimensional figure, but also inside the radical closure, where he would see the three-dimensional figure.

14  
Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 134.

15  
Kip S. Thorne, *Black Holes and Time Warps: Einstein’s Outrageous Legacy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), 52.

16  
Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, page 88, and, more generally, “The Two Forms of Memory.” Cf.: “There are, we have said, two memories which are profoundly distinct: the one, fixed in the organism, is nothing else but the complete set of intelligently constructed mechanisms which ensure the appropriate reply to the various possible demands. This memory enables us to adapt ourselves to the present situation; through it the actions to which we are subject prolong themselves into reactions that are sometimes accomplished, sometimes merely nascent, but always more or less appropriate. Habit rather than memory, it acts our past experience but does not call up its image. The other is the true memory.... It retains and ranges alongside of each other all our states in the order in which they occur, leaving to each fact its place and, consequently, marking its date, truly moving in the past and not, like the first, in an ever renewed present” (ibid., 150–151).

17  
Ibid., 152.

18  
Ibid.

19  
Henri Bergson: “A human being who should dream his life instead of living it would no doubt thus keep before his eyes at each moment the infinite multitude of the details of his past history. And, conversely, the man who should repudiate this memory with all that it begets would be continually acting his life instead of truly representing it to himself: a conscious *automaton*, he would follow the lead of useful habits which prolong into an appropriate reaction the stimulation received” (ibid., 155; my italics).

20  
Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 76.

21  
Henri Bergson: “Our duration is not merely one instant replacing another; if it were, there would

07/08

e-flux journal #55 — may 2014 Jalel Toufik  
A Hitherto Unrecognized Apocalyptic Photographer: The Universe

never be anything but the present.... Duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances. And as the past grows without ceasing, so also there is no limit to its preservation. Memory, as we have tried to prove [*Matter and Memory*, chapters 2 and 3], is not a faculty of putting away recollections in a drawer, or of inscribing them in a register. There is no register, no drawer; there is not even, properly speaking, a faculty, for a faculty works intermittently, when it will or when it can, whilst the piling up of the past upon the past goes on without relaxation. In reality, the past is preserved by itself, automatically. In its entirety, probably, it follows us at every instant.... The cerebral mechanism is arranged just so as to drive back into the unconscious almost the whole of this past, and to admit beyond the threshold only that which can cast light on the present situation or further the action now being prepared – in short, only that which can give useful work” (*Creative Evolution*, authorized translation by Arthur Mitchell [New York: H. Holt and Company, 1911], 4–5).

22

Since “signals and other causal influences cannot travel faster than light, ... for a given event E, the set of events that lie on or inside the past light cone of E would also be the set of all events that could send a signal that would have time to reach E and influence it in some way.... Likewise, the set of events that lie on or inside the future light cone of E would also be the set of events that could receive a signal sent out from the position and time of E, so the future light cone contains all the events that could potentially be causally influenced by E. Events which lie neither in the past or future light cone of E cannot influence or be influenced by E in relativity” (*Wikipedia’s* “Light Cone” entry).

23

“When British physicist Stephen Hawking ... studied the quantum theory of electromagnetism near black holes, he found that black holes actually emit radiation.... How can black holes emit radiation? ... The answer lies in quantum uncertainty. All over spacetime the quantum electromagnetic field is undergoing ... little negative-energy quantum fluctuations. Normally ... the negative-energy photons disappear as quickly as they form. But near the horizon of a black hole, it is possible for such a photon to form outside the hole and cross into it. Once inside, it is actually viable: it is possible to find trajectories for photons inside the horizon that have negative total energy. So such a photon can just stay inside, and that leaves its positive-energy partner outside on its own. It ... becomes one of the photons of the Hawking

radiation. In this picture, *nothing actually crosses the horizon from inside to out*. Instead, the negative-energy photon falls in, freeing the positive-energy photon. The net result of this is that the hole loses mass: the negative-energy photon makes a negative contribution to the mass of the hole when it goes in.” Bernard F. Schutz, *Gravity from the Ground Up* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 304 (my italics).

24

This is the case if we consider the black hole part of the universe.

25

Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Viking, 1998), 327.

26

Leibniz, *Monadology* § 66–68.

27

Kip S. Thorne, *Black Holes and Time Warps: Einstein’s Outrageous Legacy*, 33.

28

Cf. “Composites” in the revised and expanded edition of my book (*Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (Sausalito, CA: Post-Apollo Press, 2003; available for download as a PDF file at: [www.jalaltoufic.com/downloads.htm](http://www.jalaltoufic.com/downloads.htm)): “The living person is a composite that dissociates in death-as-undeath or during some states of altered consciousness first into separate subunits that are themselves composites, most of them uglier than the original one, then into elements, becoming alien. Each of us is common, not alien, both because each of us is a composite of all the others, even of those who lived erstwhile and who are long dead, and because each of us is part of the composite that constitutes the others. That is why we do not find others or for that matter ourselves alien, and that is why they too do not find us alien. In certain states of altered consciousness, though, we see the dead, people who have become not merely uglier, but alien, and that is because they are no longer composites (the withdrawal of the cathexis of the world).... The double is not the other, but I divested of all others. That is why whenever I encounter him, even in a crowded public place, I feel I am alone with him, *alone with the alone*; he embodies the divestment from the world. That is why encountering the double is such a desolate experience, and is a premonition of death with its bereavement from others and the rest of the world” (173–174).

29

In Bacon’s triptych *Two Figures Lying on a Bed with Attendants*, 1968, the gazes of the left panel’s seated human figure looking right, of the center

panel’s recumbent couple, and of the right panel’s seated human figure looking left, although sharply separated by the panels’ frames, are aligned, suggesting that the figures perceive each other or at least are aware of each other. Triptychs or diptychs with figures (other than dancers) whose gazes or gestures are aligned across the various panels suggest a monadic ontology (triptychs and diptychs have in monadic ontology a *raison d’être*). In the aforementioned Bacon triptych, the left panel’s human figure does not at all perceive the bird-like creature visible to us in the same panel, for the latter is an unworldly entity, thus impossible with the world expressed by the monad, though allowed by that expressed world’s radical closure. There is intra-action among the monadic figures that enfold the same world; there is no relation between the monadic figure and the unworldly entity that irrupts in a radical closure; and there is interaction between the unworldly entities that irrupt in a radical closure.

30

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Williams; trans. Josefine Nauckhoff; poems trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), no. 166, 135.

08/08

e-flux journal #55 — may 2014 Jalal Toufic  
A Hitherto Unrecognized Apocalyptic Photographer: The Universe