

**‘The horror without object’: a philosophical  
enquiry into photography, archives, and  
absence in Project Coast**

by

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## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in ***'The horror without object': a philosophical enquiry into photography, archives, and absence in Project Coast*** is my own and that it has not previously, in its entirety or in part, been submitted at any university for a degree. All the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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March 2017

## ABSTRACT

Following the 1997 arrest of Wouter Basson, South Africans watched in horror how the TRC began to unravel one of apartheid South Africa's most sordid secrets: Project Coast, South Africa's chemical and biological warfare programme. Although a surprising number of documents survived the various archival purges, there is a conspicuous lack of photographs pertaining directly to the project. Thus, envisioning what the project would have looked like falls largely into the realm of the imaginary.

In this study, I consider the work of photographs in the service of the archive. By situating Project Coast within the visual economies of similar clandestine international CBW programmes, I argue that the lack of photographic evidence speaks to an ideology of absence, and secrecy as ideological. In the first section, I address the pictures that we do have from private and public archives in the form of news media reports and the narrativised account of Basson's criminal trial, *Secrets and Lies: Wouter Basson and South Africa's Chemical and Biological Warfare Programme* (Burger & Gould, 2002). As supplements and placeholders, those photographs which we do have fail to make present the largely fragmented project. However, I argue that this is not tantamount to the failure of the visual. In the second section, I examine the South African History Archive's CBW Project Collection, AL2922, and begin to tease out how to recognise absence. By thinking of the absences as productive spaces, accessible by considering them as a Thirdspace (Soja, 1996), and engaging with them by seeing a-visually, I argue that the layers of secrecy can be able to be peeled back, leaving the absences that haunt the archive as potentially affective spaces. The absences in the archive have implications for trauma studies and nation-building, and as such, could be considered as imagined documents wherein we are able to project an image of what Project Coast may have looked like. The absences are far reaching, and exist not only in this archive. As such, I posit that by considering these absences as 'sites' worthy of critical engagement, we are able to think anew about how the secrecy of apartheid continues to haunt post-apartheid archives.

## OPSOMMING

Voor die aanvang van die Waarheids- en Versoeningskommissie (WVK) se ondersoek in 1998 was daar bitter min oor Suid-Afrika se chemiese en biologiese oorlogsvoering- (CBO) vermoëns bekend. Ná die inhegtenisname van Wouter Basson in 1997 het Suid-Afrikaners met afsku aanskou hoe die WVK een van apartheid se mees afstootlike geheime, Project Coast, begin ontrafel het. Daar is 'n beduidende gebrek aan foto's wat direk met die projek verband hou, ten spyte van die feit dat 'n noemenswaardige aantal dokumente die onderskeie suiwerings van argiefmateriaal oorleef het. Visualisering van hoe die projek sou lyk gebeur dus grootliks binne die sfeer van die denkbeeldige.

Ek oorweeg in hierdie studie die werk wat foto's in diens van die argief doen. Deur Project Coast binne huidige visuele sisteme van soortgelyke geheime internasionale CBO-programme te posisioneer, argumenteer ek dat die gebrek aan fotografiese bewyse aanduidend is van 'n ideologie van afwesigheid, en van geheimhouding as ideologies gefundeerd. In die eerste afdeling bespreek ek die foto's wat wel tot ons beskikking is vanuit private en openbare argiewe, in die vorm van nuusmediaverslae en die genarrativeerde beskrywing van Basson se kriminele verhoor, *Secrets and Lies: Wouter Basson and South Africa's Chemical and Biological Warfare Programme* (Burger & Gould, 2002). As aanvullings en plekhouders faal hierdie foto's om aan die grootliks gefragmenteerde projek 'n teenwoordigheid te verleen. Ek argumenteer egter dat dit nie op die mislukking van die visuele neerkom nie.

In die tweede afdeling ondersoek ek die Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenisargief se CBO-projekversameling, AL2922, en begin ek om maniere om afwesigheid te herken, te ontgin. Deur aan die afwesighede te dink as produktiewe ruimtes, wat toeganklik is deur dit te oorweeg as 'n "Thirdspace" (Soja, 1996), en om daarby betrokke te raak deur a-visueel te kyk, stel ek voor dat die lae van geheimhouding teruggetrek kan word, om die afwesighede waarvan die argief deurdrenk is as potensieel-affektiewe ruimtes te sien. Die afwesighede in die argief het gevolge vir traumastudies en nasiebou, en kan as sulks oorweeg word as denkbeeldige dokumente waarop ons 'n beeld van hoe Project Coast kon lyk, kan projekteer. Die afwesighede is verreikend, en is nie beperk tot hierdie argief alleen nie. Ek stel dus voor dat die oorweging van hierdie afwesighede as ruimtes wat kritiese btrokkenheid waardig is, ons in staat kan stel om opnuut te dink oor hoe die geheimhouding van apartheid voortgaan om by die post-apartheid argief te spook.

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For Riekie.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AL2922	SAHA's Chemical and Biological Warfare Project Collection
CBW	Chemical and Biological warfare
CCB	Civil Cooperation Bureau (SADF's equivalent to Vlakplaas)
CMC	Coordination Management Committee (to whom Basson periodically reported)
FRELIMO	<i>Frente de Libertação de Moçambique</i> : The Mozambique Liberation Front
HPCSA	Health Professions Council of South Africa
NIA	National Intelligence Agency
OSEO	Office for Serious Economic Offences
RENAMO	<i>Resistência Nacional Moçambicana</i> : The Mozambican National Resistance
RRL	Roodeplaat Research Laboratories
SADF	South African Defence Force
SAHA	South African History Archives
SAMS	South African Medical Service (part of SADF)
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNITA	<i>União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola</i> : The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola

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# INTRODUCTION

For many, Project Coast exists as an abstraction, a mythology, with Dr Wouter Basson as its emblem; a kind of prosthetic figurehead for a historical narrative that I describe as *horror without an object*: in the absence of hard evidence, of locations, of bodies, our forensic imaginations fail us.

Kathryn Smith, 2015.

## 1.1 Background and aims of study

Almost two decades have passed since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) began its official investigation into South Africa's chemical and biological warfare capabilities; and even now, the scope of the entire operation is difficult to fathom. In 1998, following the arrest of a Pretoria-based doctor and the seizure of two trunks which would become a crucial treasure trove of documents, the TRC began unravelling and uncovering one of apartheid South Africa's best-kept secrets: Project Coast.

Born in the milieu of white paranoia and escalating volatility of resistance movements, Project Coast was formed in 1981 under the instruction of then-president PW Botha. Despite being a signatory to the Biological Weapons Convention in 1972, and contrary to what the project manager, General Niel Knobel, states was never intended to be an offensive programme (Gould & Folb, 2002:13), the South African Defence Force (SADF) was instructed by Botha to, amongst other things, develop chemical and biological weapons for operational use (Gould & Folb, 2002:1). Under the direction of Dr Wouter Basson, Project Coast scientists based at Roodeplaat Research Laboratories (RRL) and Delta G Scientific, began working on defensive and offensive agents in 1983 (Purkitt & Burgess, 2005:97-100).<sup>1</sup> Agents that were developed included weaponised teargas,<sup>2</sup> weaponised MDMA and methaqualone,<sup>3</sup> as well as cocaine to be used to assist in the suppression of internal dissent; chocolates and beer impregnated with poison; and

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<sup>1</sup> Several years before Project Coast was established, PW Botha and Magnus Malan, Minister of Defence, authorised the establishment of a covert company mandated with developing counter-intelligence equipment for the South African Defence Force's Special Forces (Burger & Gould, 2002:16). Drafted from the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Dr Jan Coetzee headed the EMLC, the acronym of the Afrikaans for the four components: Electronic, Mechanical, Agricultural and Chemical (Burger & Gould, 2002:16).

<sup>2</sup> General Constand Viljoen (SADF Chief of Staff), and Generals Liebenberg and Meiring consulted with Basson to develop offensive CBW agents that "would weaken rioters and be more effective than the existing teargas" (Purkitt & Burgess, 2005:102). Delta G Scientific developed "New Generation Teargas (CR gas)" a more potent form of conventional teargas, known as CS gas (Purkitt Burgess, 2005:102). In the final analysis, the production of this CR gas was the "only conventional chemical weapon developed by Project Coast" (Gould & Folb, 2002:118). According to Basson, the teargas was weaponised in mortars, projectiles, and hand grenades (Burger & Gould, 2002:83).

<sup>3</sup> These substances were weaponised by manufacturing them in aerosol form or a fine dust which could be released over crowds.

exploratory research into the so-called 'Black Bomb', a contraceptive which would have exclusively targeted black South Africans.

Project Coast was, from its inception, shrouded in secrecy and characterised by clandestine operations, much of which was brought to light following the TRC investigation<sup>4</sup> and the criminal trial of Wouter Basson.<sup>5</sup> However, it is doubtful that a comprehensive account of exactly who was involved, and to what extent, will ever come to light. Marlène Burger and Chandré Gould (2002:13) state that, although an astonishing amount of documentation survived in spite of the SADF policy to destroy all Project Coast-related documents every two years, in the absence of complete records and official documentation, the reconstruction of facts relies almost exclusively on former Surgeon General Daniel 'Niel' Knobel,<sup>6</sup> and former military doctor and brigadier Wouter Basson.

The workings of Project Coast were deliberately obfuscated through an intricate and surreptitious web of front companies, leaving little physical trace of the project – save the former RRL buildings,<sup>7</sup> and some objects donated by the National Prosecuting Agency to Freedom Park.<sup>8</sup> Much has been written about Project Coast, and there is, indeed, an archive of documents duplicated from the Gould collection housed at the South African History Archive (SAHA) with additional documents acquired via the Promotion of Access to Information Act (as part of a robust campaign initiated by SAHA). However, the extensive collection of information and documents is marked by a conspicuous lack of photographs pertaining to Project Coast.<sup>9</sup> Whilst not numbering many, there is a selection of

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<sup>4</sup> The TRC investigation into the South African Defence Force commenced in 1996. The investigation into Project Coast began in January 1998, resulting in a hearing which began in June of that year. Basson was called before the TRC to testify on 31 July 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Basson's criminal trial began on 4 October 1999 in the Pretoria High Court, and concluded on 22 April 2002 in the South African High Court when Basson was acquitted of all 67 charges.

<sup>6</sup> Lieutenant-General Daniel Knobel acted as Surgeon General in command of the South African Medical Service from 1988 to 1997. He was Basson's immediate superior, and went on to admit that he, and other members of the Coordinating Management Committee, to which Basson occasionally reported, "did not *want* to know" the specifics of the procurement of equipment and information used by Project Coast (Burger & Gould, 2002:2).

<sup>7</sup> The building now houses the Agriculture Research Council's Plant Protection Research Institute.

<sup>8</sup> Freedom Park is a "cultural institution housing a museum and a memorial dedicated to chronicling and honouring the many who contributed to South Africa's liberation" (Freedom Park).

<sup>9</sup> This assertion pertains exclusively to the SAHA CBW Project Collection under discussion. However, photographs relating, sometimes indirectly, to Project Coast do exist in the form of those provided by Jan

photographs taken during the period in which Project Coast operated which are reproduced in Burger and Gould's *Secrets and Lies: Wouter Basson and South Africa's Chemical and Biological Warfare Programme* (2002).

These photographs appear to be something akin to what Susan Sontag calls an "unassuming functional snapshot", something which appears to have been taken with a degree of naïvety (2008:103). The photographs, such as they are, are the only ones available to the public taken at the time when Project Coast was in full swing. *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) is principally a narrativised account of Basson's criminal trial which contributed towards an understanding of Project Coast. During October 1999 to April 2002, Marlène Burger, a renowned South African journalist and former news editor of the *Sunday Times*,<sup>10</sup> attended each day of the proceedings in Basson's criminal trial. Burger made her copious notes available to Chandré Gould, who edited them and made them publically available (ISSAFRICA). *Secrets and Lies* (2002) details the history leading up to the formation of Project Coast, and the ways in which Basson was inextricably involved and became the placeholder poster-child for Project Coast, the one to whom everyone continues to look as the sole possessor of the full story. Released in the same year, but with a fundamentally different rationale, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research's *Project Coast: Apartheid's Chemical and Biological Warfare Programme* (Gould & Folb, 2002) is a technical disquisition detailing the programme. These two sources are, arguably, the most comprehensive accounts of the programme, both which draw from Gould's extensive work as the TRC's sole researcher into Project Coast.

However, despite these two publications, an archive comprising thousands of documents, and countless news articles produced during the TRC, during Basson's criminal trial, and continued news coverage of his (to date) ongoing battle to retain his medical license, there is no one authoritative source, and our knowledge remains limited and fragmented. Understanding the project and its implications have, in the absence of a clear object,

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Lourens and Charles van Remoortere (Burger & Gould, 2002:xii) which were reproduced in *Secrets and Lies* (2002), many of which will be discussed.

<sup>10</sup> The dates of her service as news editor are unclear, most sources stating that she was news editor from the early to mid-1990s (Barron, 2009).

largely fallen into the realm of the imaginary.<sup>11</sup> “There is an old and trite saying”, wrote Alfred Meadows, “that ‘seeing is believing’; and, in a realistic age like the present, it might almost be said that not seeing is not believing” (1870:692). Perhaps not being able to see leads to not being able to believe/know and, in the absence of photographic evidence which may assist us, we are unable to fully understand the event(s) surrounding Project Coast. Conversely, we may indeed well be underestimating the enormity of this grim chapter in South Africa’s history. Without the ability to see, to visualise, this absence of tangible visual evidence does indeed make Project Coast a “horror without an object” (Smith, 2015).

Project Coast and its various role-players exist as “an abstraction” (Smith, 2015), a spectral force haunting contemporary South African archives, with Basson the poster child, a kind of prosthetic standing in for the invisible project. In this paper, I argue that the lack of “hard evidence, of locations, of bodies” (Smith, 2015), what Antoinette Burton calls the “archival ‘pay dirt moment’” (2005:8), does not preclude the possibility of discussing Project Coast. Leswin Laubscher argues that an archival scholar, “inasmuch as he or she solicits, records and otherwise conjures the re- of memory, re-calling, re-inscribing, re-surrecting, keeps company with ghosts and apostrophizes someone or something that is neither here nor there, but entirely elsewhere” (2013:47).

Thus, in order to write these absences into existence, to conjure these spectres, we need to rethink notions of “archival ‘objecthood’”, to reflect on the “underlying premises of the archives’ preference for and evaluation of objects” to include “intangible and ephemeral objects” (Rylance, 2007:103). Traditional notions of visual perception/representation also need to be suspended, and we are required to understand that absences may possess what Esther Peeren calls a spectral agency (2014b:16-24). Indeed, Jacques Derrida states that the archive itself is a spectral structure: “[i]t is spectral *a priori*: neither present nor absent ‘in the flesh’, neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met...” (1998:44).

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<sup>11</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre’s conception of the imaginary states that the imaginary is a synthesis of our knowledge of a particular object and our intention toward said object and, in the absence of a physical object (or representation thereof), a person “will try to *make present*” the object that they are considering (2004:112).

It is with a specific focus on the absence of photographs that I will argue that, whilst Project Coast lacks the clearly defined boundaries that other international CBW projects occupy (to varying degrees), the absences left in Project Coast's historical narrative can be seen as *tabulae rasae* (in)forming identifiable objects – spectral objects in the form of “imagined documents” (Caswell & Gilliland, 2016), ones in conversation with the existing knowledge, objects populating a “ghost-archive” (Booth, 2005:277).

My research problems and questions can be summarised as follows:

- Contemporary notions of appraisal and consignment of archival documents need refiguring to include the intangible. What constitutes an archive, and how can we reimagine the archive as a space or institution housing documents of enduring value to include that which is not tangible or physical?
- No longer the sacrosanct realm of historical studies, notions of archives have evolved and, following the richly reflected upon ‘archival turn’, archives are being considered as dynamic collections by many contemporary scholars (as I will discuss later). This has allowed for an opening up of the archive, and for new conceptions and potentials to be engaged in archive-based work. The curation of an archive is an act of selective inclusion and exclusion, and the historian or archivist's aim is to compile the most comprehensive collection possible. However, the notion of a ‘complete’ archive is, by the very nature of archives, something that cannot be achieved – they are constantly being added to, read, reread, and augmented. What, then, are the implications for the ‘comprehensiveness’ of the archive when there is an absence of photographs? Why does an absence matter, and what could the absence indicate, if anything?
- There are archives in which we almost expect to find photographs, such as ones dealing with scientific research. The absence of photographs in such an archive presents a question about the function of photographs in the service of the archive: how does the photographic function in the ‘scientific’ archive, but also archives in general? Is it a purely supplementary document insofar as it is to be read in conjunction with the text, or could it come to replace the text as a document laden

with an accuracy and authenticity that a textual document cannot reliably replicate?  
 Could it do both?

- Reading the absences as “material-immateriality” (Peeren, 2014a:3) brings with it the opportunity to read into the blank spaces. Does this indicate that we are able to use this absent referent as a kind of immaterial document, one that alludes to an ideology of secrecy at play?
- If we are to consider these non-objects, these immaterial blank spaces, as sites of possible inscription or inference, can we argue that it is ‘photographic’ is pictorial in a kind of imaginary way, something seen in our mind’s eye? If photographs are analogous of reality, and are objects that themselves contribute to the affective emotional responses to things, what attributes, if any, of photographic theory would we apply to this non-object in order to understand the ontological or affective implications of absence? What mode of visibility would this take?
- It is crucial to be cognisant of the fact that photographs cannot be thought of as self-evident sources of authority, despite their indexicality, and the ostensible/possible status of photograph as ‘evidentiary’ will be problematised. However, if we accept that photographs *may* have the evidentiary power to incriminate, there is something to be said for their ability to bring closure following traumatic events, which I will briefly discuss. What, then, are the implications of their absence to the process of healing, and to nation-building? Do the slippages between absence and presence make such closure impossible? How are we to deal with the traumas inflicted upon South Africa’s people by Project Coast – directly or indirectly – when there are no visual documents like those included in other human rights abuse archives?<sup>12</sup>

The main objectives, therefore, are as follows:

- I will demonstrate that there is a level of (photographic) visibility that we have come to expect of projects like Project Coast, stemming from a visual economy and history

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<sup>12</sup> The general archive of documentary photography recording the abuses of apartheid in general is richly populated, and may indeed be the primary vehicle through which the narrative of apartheid and the transition to democracy are told. As such, I am not implying that the visual records in general are lacking, but am specifically referring to the visual records of Project Coast.

that have been established by international programmes. In the absence of photographs, I discuss what the implications of this absence are, not only for the archives, but also for nation-building in terms of trauma studies.

- With Project Coast as a case study, I aim to consider whether, within the historical milieu, the absence of pictures, or rather, the secrecy from which it stems, can be argued to be ideological.
- I propose a mode of visibility that can be utilised in order to discuss absences, what I call “a-visibility”, modified from Jacques Derrida’s (1992:90) absolute invisibility, and Akira Lippit’s concept of the avisual (2005:32).
- I hope to contribute to a wider understanding of what constitutes an archivable record.

## 1.2 Outline of chapters and key texts

This paper is divided into two parts: Presence and Absence.

In Chapter One I discuss Presence and present artefacts – physical, textual, and photographic – which exist and are, to varying degrees, accessible to the public. I foreground this chapter with an overview of pictures that have emerged from several international programmes in order to demonstrate how we have come to expect a level of visibility drawn from our knowledge of the visual economy of such projects. I then give a brief account of a selection of historical events and details of Project Coast and Wouter Basson's involvement in it, in order to elucidate the significance (or insignificance) of the pictures under discussion. I first investigate the problematic evidentiary status of photography, focusing on present and publicly accessible photographs, such as those found in the news media, and the ways in which these function within the construction of an historical narrative. I then consider whether photographs can or should be considered as expressive documents in their own right.

As direct material links to Project Coast, there are buildings and objects which have survived various purges. It is outside the scope of this study to discuss these beyond the

photographs of them contained within *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), but it is worth mentioning that these constitute some of the few material/visual markers, or material/visual 'evidence' of the project. Besides these, and more central to my discussion in this chapter, are the reproductions of photographs of people, events, and places included in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), as well as a selection of photographs from local and international news media. As typologies of archives, the news media and the book-as-archive are central to my investigation of the function of the photographic in the service of the archive. Aline Lopes de Lacerda argues that the archival professionals who deal with photographs have "rarely sought to problematize them; [and] more specifically, they have not addressed the question of what roles are assigned to these photographic records in the actual process of forming an archive" (2012:284). I aim to problematise these pictures, to question their use within the texts. By analysing the photographs in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould), I determine whether or not these photographs serve an 'evidentiary' role, or whether their worth lies in their "disclosive" (Silverman, 2015:10) potential. The evidentiary nature of photographs will be pitted against Silverman's (2010:10) conception of its "disclosive" potential in order to determine the ontological function/position of photographs in conjunction with the text in a book-as-archive. Put differently, if they are no longer serving the role of visual supplements to the text, can they come to function as objects which can stand alone as (evidentiary) documents? Or do these photographs ultimately serve as a placeholder or an analogy for a largely invisible Project Coast?

I then discuss the news media photographs in a similar light, but place emphasis not on the polemics between picture and text, but rather the parallel manner in which these photographs serve to make visible the largely invisible project to a wide and varied audience. These pictures have an interesting temporal register insofar as they attempt to represent the intangible past through current events. They attempt to reach outside of themselves, and become referential to an inaccessible time/place, asking the readers to infer upon them an understanding of the past. They seem to be a placeholder, anticipating something to come in the future, something which better represents Project Coast.

Photography, Ulrich Baer argues, "can provide special access to experiences that have remained unremembered yet cannot be forgotten", and "[t]raumatic events...exert their

troubling grip on memory and on the imagination because they are not consciously experienced at the time of their occurrence” (2007:7-8). Victims under the apartheid regime have suffered, and continue to suffer, a trauma, an act of violence which has, in the case of Project Coast, no identifiable agent. This kind of systemic violence is inherent in the structure of South African society; and in order to address an invisible violence, Slavoj Žižek (2009:1) implores, we must “learn to step back, to disentangle ourselves from the fascinating lure of ... directly visible ‘subjective’ violence [such as crime and terror, civil unrest and conflict], violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent”.<sup>13</sup> I suggest that when there is no identifiable agent, the archive attempts to stand in for an ‘agent’, or to try make it visible and manifest, and works to make concrete the injustices.

Thus, in Chapter Two I discuss Absences in an archive, with specific focus on the SAHA’s Chemical and Biological Warfare Project Collection, hereafter known as AL2922, the archive’s collection number. I will consider the manner in which absences in AL2922 can be seen as manifestations or articulations of ideological secrecy in terms of the apartheid government in general, but specifically of Project Coast. With a particular focus on the absence of photographic images, I use the sets of records which have culminated in AL2922 to demonstrate the role of absence in the service of the archive.

Here the discussion turns to a philosophical interpretation/discussion and, in order to begin discussing the implications of absence, I suggest a Derridean deconstruction of the presence/absence binary opposition. Drawing on Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction of what he terms the “metaphysics of presence” (1997:49), I argue that we are able temporarily to destabilise presence’s place as the dominant in the hierarchical opposition of the presence/absence binary, enabling a discussion of absences as effective/affective spaces – spaces which are potentially more dynamic than presences. As I will demonstrate, there exists a co-dependence between presence and absence, and the absences within the archive function to highlight this co-dependence, hinting at the erasure which so fundamentally shapes our understanding of Project Coast.

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<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Yale argues for a similar refocusing insofar as we must disentangle documents from the archive in order to be able to understand their significance in said archive, lest we misunderstand “the process of historical transformation that has brought us to the present moment” (2016:110).

In terms of the archive, I draw on Keli Rylance's (2007:103) assertion that we need to rethink "the basic tenets of archival acquisitions and appraisal strategies" in order to include intangible documents. These intangible documents, as I will show, can be thought of as inhabiting a Thirdspace, an affective space, brought about at the collapsing together of absence and presence (Soja, 1996:57).

I draw on the ostensibly 'evidentiary' position, and begin to speculate about the implications of a lack of photographs in the archive. The parameters of an archive cannot be clearly defined, but it can be thought of as a space where history is collected and organised, the study of which "has always had an affinity for [tangible] objects" (Rylance, 2007:103). However, no matter how extensive the archive's materials are, the "archival record is but a sliver of social memory", a collection of documentation whose "record provides just a sliver of a window into the event" (Harris, 2002:64). In between these slivers, I argue, are blank spaces yet to be inscribed, absences left from documents that *could* have been. The absence and presence, the immaterial and material, will be discussed in relation to the concept of spectrality. Generally considered to be the catalyst for the reinvigorated interest in the spectral, Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1994) outlines the concept of the spectre. Based on what he termed hauntology (to be discussed in-depth in Chapter 2), Derrida believes that the spectre confronts us, insisting on a response and demanding action, a position echoed by Avery Gordon when she says that the haunting of a spectre produces "a something-to-be-done" (2008:xvi). What Derrida argues for is the spectre as "a figure of absolute alterity (existing both outside and within us) that should ... not be assimilated or negated (exorcized) but lived with, in an open, welcoming relationality" (Del Pilar Blanco and Peeren, 2013:33). The spectre, for Derrida, is a figuration of presence-absence, insisting upon a "politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations" (1994:xix).

Leswin Laubscher, in arguing for Derrida's conception of hauntology as a methodological point of departure in archival studies, states that the archive is "[t]horoughly inhabited by death", and that it makes "intuitive sense to argue for scholarship to take the ghost and the spectre into account because the archive is so characteristically of a haunted and spectral sort" (2013:46). Through an hauntological or spectral lens, I am able to discuss the absences as blank spaces and argue that absences are not necessarily 'empty' spaces:

they are potential sites of inscription or projection in which we can see (or rather imagine) the spectre of apartheid's ideological secrecy machine. These sites, which are perhaps emblematic of a kind of new materialism, are a liminal form of visibility, an 'a-visibility', an interstitial state. The 'a-visual'<sup>14</sup> to which I refer is a concept adapted from Derrida's "absolute invisibility" (1992:90) and Akira Lippit's notion of the 'avisuality' (2005:32), to be discussed in-depth in Chapter Two. At its core, the a-visual is something which is visible in its absence, a 'blank space' where a photograph or a document could/should have been, an absence haunting the presence and imploring us to respond.

The a-visual is not, I argue, the failure of a visual economy. It is an indicator of the ideology of absence – the ideology of secrecy. The absence needs to be treated in terms of the Kantian as-if in order to address the absent empirical referent. Heiner Bielefeldt (2003:35) argues that the as-if

enables us to represent ideas of reason without falling victim to the objectifying nature of our own understanding. What is required to achieve this is a clear awareness that the 'objects' represented by ideas of reason are not 'objects' in the ordinary sense of the word. They are not real things, but rather, as Kant points out, 'should be grounded only as *analogues* of real things.' The as-if structure that characterizes the representation of ideas of reason thus leads to an *analogical thinking*.

Kant's notion of the "analogues of real things" (in Bielefeldt, 2003:35) speaks to Kaja Silverman's insistence that we treat photographs as analogous, thereby making photographs "disclosive, rather than evidentiary" (2015:10).<sup>15</sup> For Silverman, considering photographs as disclosive means that we are able to subconsciously imprint upon the pictures, whereas with conventional conceptions, photographs function as indexical, a faithful representation of reality, or a copy of that reality (2015:15).

The analogous as-if mode can be used as a way to bridge the gap between the absent and the present. These a-visual objects become what Michelle Caswell and Anne Gilliland (2016) call imagined documents. For Caswell and Gilliland (2016:53), imagined documents

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<sup>14</sup> Hyphenated to avoid confusion with Lippit's 'avisual'.

<sup>15</sup> Silverman states that by analogy she "does not mean sameness, symbolic equivalence ... like a metaphor or simile ... [rather] the authorless and untranscendable similarities that structure Being ... that give everything the same ontological weight" (2015:15).

“can function societally in ways similar to actual records because of the weight of their absence or because of their aspirational nature (i.e., because an individual or community wants it to exist, or wills it into an imagined existence)”. Imagined documents are constructed in situations where perpetrators of crimes are either unable to speak (because they are dead), or unwilling to speak (Caswell & Gilliland, 2015:615). Human rights archives have focused almost exclusively on tangible evidence (Caswell & Gilliland, 2015:615), and these authors argue for their conception of ‘imaginary documents’, ones which “challenge dominant conceptions of the evidentiary qualities of tangible records and the archival legacies of trauma by insisting on a more dynamic and holistic view of records that takes the affect of survivors and victims’ family members into account”. In AL2922, there are perhaps two articulations of this imagined document: one as an imaginary picture/document, and another kind, one projected upon people, as described by Caswell and Gilliland (2015). Project Coast’s key role players themselves have the potential to work/serve as imagined documents, and perhaps have a function to serve in memory work.

The archive is not a neutral site, and as such, I consider how the political nature of archive and its contents are affected by this absence. As a blank space or *tabula rasa*, the absence, I argue, may have the same, or indeed more compelling, ontological weight and “epistemic significance” (Abell, 2010:95) as a present photographic image. I then turn the argument to a contemplation of absence, or rather the secrecy whence the absence stems, as ideological. I take the absence one step further, outside of the archive, and attempt to address not only the missing photographic object, but also the missing perpetrator. As a placeholder, Basson consistently resists being present and being absent: his physical presence before the TRC, during his criminal trial, and indeed in his (ongoing) appearance before the Health Professionals Council of South Africa’s ethics board has, to date, come to naught. Even in the face of overwhelming evidence, he resists classification and consignment. In terms of trauma studies, the slipperiness of Basson and other officials has implications for healing and nation building. I briefly discuss the function of photographic images in trauma studies, and the relationship between personal and collective memory, and photographic images as evidence/documentation of a traumatic experience/history. Cathy Caruth (in Baer, 2007:8) defines trauma not as “event itself – which may or may not

be catastrophic, and may or may not traumatize everyone equally – nor can it be defined in terms of a *distortion* ... but consists ... in *the structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (emphasis in original). Trauma, read in this way, is “a disorder of memory and time” (Baer, 2007:9). Baer, drawing on Sigmund Freud’s use of the camera as a metaphor for explaining the “unconscious as the place where bits of memory are stored until they are developed ... into consciously accessible recollections”, argues that there is a deeper link between photography and trauma: “Because trauma blocks routine mental processes from converting an experience into memory or forgetting, it parallels the defining structure of photography, which also traps an event during its occurrence while blocking its transformation into memory” (2007:9).

It is virtually impossible not to hear the echoes of archival studies in this statement: archives trap documents, photographs, and narratives in an attempt to avoid forgetting, but as Derrida notes, archiving is, simultaneously, both a practice of remembering and forgetting, an archive fever: “It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement” (1998:91).

The intersection of these three discourses – trauma studies, photography, and archiving – is where I situate my discussion of absence: how are we to cope when there are no avenues to repeat, remember, relive, and recover from the traumas inflicted? In the absence, we can perhaps utilise our imagined documents, and through the secrecy and censorship that was inherent to the apartheid regime, begin to recover the hidden histories and silences inscribed in the archive.

Through utilising this binary approach of Presence and Absence, I am able to demonstrate the function that present documents (specifically photographs) serve in a particular archive, and how this informs and speaks to the function of absences in other archives (both photographs as well as documents). Thus, the structure forms the theoretical underpinning which allows for the discussion of absences. The structure is also useful for understanding the circumstances under which an absence is representative of something: knowing what is

present in one area allows us more readily to identify that something is missing in another. It is a “known unknown”, something we know that we do not know (Rumsfeld, 2002). In other words, by knowing what other countries undertook in their research, both through the actual documents and photographs produced by them, as well as through popular culture references, we have come to expect a certain degree of visibility which Project Coast does not attain.

As I discuss in Chapter 1, this study has been influenced by my own need to see photographs of culpability, and the expectations which I had going into this study with regards to photographs of human rights abuses. In a sense, this study is existential in nature, and is perhaps not practical in terms of application to archival methodologies or for practicing archivists for whom imagination may be seen as a liability. Dominick LaCapra cautions that, as a researcher, or a “secondary witness”, those resisting “full identification and the dubious appropriation of the status of victim through vicarious or surrogate victimage may nonetheless undergo empathic unsettlement or even muted trauma” (1999:717). Perhaps I am guilty at times of appropriating some kind of victimage, searching for answers to my own questions, and foregoing others, and the muted trauma has resulted in an experimental consideration of the philosophy of absence, an attempt to contribute to the creation of an ethics of absence. However, the “muting or mitigation of trauma that is nonetheless recognized and, to some extent, acted out may be a requirement or precondition of working through problems” (LaCapra, 1999:717). This study is an exercise in acting-out, an attempt to work through a deeper problem. Much of my previous research has been confounded by the lack of photographs, and as such I approach this study with a degree of latent frustration. This has, naturally, affected the manner in which I have dealt with the question of absence. Borne of my interests in the insufficiency in language, and the excesses of the apartheid regime, this thesis is, arguably, not just a thesis in the discipline of visual studies. Humans have a need to see, and I believe that working with visual documents is a way for us to process what has happened in our past. When those documents are absent – not available, or do not exist – we require a new mode of thinking, and a new mode of seeing. That is what this thesis attempts to address.

# **CHAPTER ONE - PRESENCE**

*Of archives, photographic documents and their agencies*

## 2.1 Introduction

What do pictures need? A material support, a bodily medium (paint, pixels), and a place to be seen. What do they demand? To be looked at, to be admired, to be loved, to be shown. What do they desire? Since desire emerges in the gap between demand (the wish to see or the symbolic mandate: ‘thou shalt not look’) and need, it is conceivable that pictures could desire nothing. They could have everything they need, and their demands could be all fulfilled.

W. J. T. Mitchell (2005:73)

“But in fact,” Mitchell argues, “most pictures want something” (2005:73). He states, however, that “we still do not know exactly what pictures are, what their relation to language is, how they operate on observers and on the world, how their history is understood, and what is to be done with or about them” (1994:13). Mitchell declares that we have yet to ask what it is that pictures actually desire, what they want – a question that Neal Curtis considers to be “essential to any ‘fundamental ontology’” (2010:1).

Perhaps, in order to understand this fundamental ontology, it is best to begin with addressing what we want and expect from pictures. Photographs are silent and stubborn objects, asking, in the tradition of art history, to be interpreted, discussed and written about. The interpretation of their content or subject presents dual concerns: “On the one hand, it can be difficult to resist the temptation to slide away from the picture and toward symbolic or narrative meanings. On the other, there is a tendency to fall into mute admiration for line, color, and ‘pure visuality’” (Elkins, 1996:590). For James Elkins, “pictures have come to be experienced as objects that are in immediate need of having their meanings written out” (1996:590). They pull us toward them, Elkins argues, “they push on our thoughts, taunting us with the promise of meaning. We can either capitulate and start spinning narratives, or we can resist as long as possible, to try to see the shape of our desire for words” (1996:602). Whilst Elkins cautions against the duality of interpretations, Roland Barthes is more welcoming of it. In an attempt to account for the fundamental roles of subjectivity and emotion in the reading of – and engaging with – photography, Barthes posits the dual notions of *studium* and *punctum* (2000:26-27). For Barthes, the *studium* relates to our interest to understand photographs, to study them, and to understand them in terms of our own subjectivities – the cultural, political and linguistic interpretations of photographs;

whereas the *punctum* is a private meaning read into or from the picture, the one that catches us unawares and evokes a recollection of something intensely personal – the wounding, touching personal details which establish a direct relationship to the object or subject of the picture (2000:26-27). For Sontag, “[w]hat determines the possibility of being affected morally by photographs is the existence of a relevant political consciousness” (2008:19), suggesting that we require a political consciousness through which to access pictures.

Read through these and myriad other writings on what photography is and is not, it can be said that photographs, at their core, contribute to affective and emotive responses: to see a photograph of a tragedy, for example, is to feel it in a manner entirely different to the response elicited when *reading* about the same tragedy. There is an insufficiency in language, one that perhaps only the visual can satisfy. A picture contributes to the emotional response of the viewer; it is more compelling to see than it is to read. There is an urge to see, and an urge to look. Kaja Silverman argues that there is an “urge that the photographs awaken in us: the urge to look at what they show us” (2015:143). Indeed, humans appear to have a deep psychological need to visualise evil, to see evidence thereof – something not just sensationalistic, but something we need to recognise in order to understand the unsettling depths of cruelty of which human beings are capable. The abject, as Julia Kristeva terms it, refers to the human reaction when the distinction between subject and object, or the self and Other, is at risk of being collapsed. The abject functions as that which allows us to draw a border between what we are and what we are not – Kristeva asks: “How can I be without border?” (1982: 4), and the abject is that which is repulsed because it cannot be assimilated (1982:3). She argues the necessity of repulsion by stating “we may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger” (1982:9). Thus, that which repels us is always already within us. The act of naming, for Kristeva, is crucial because to name is to keep under control (1982:11). To see, then, is to keep under control. To see the horrors is also tempting: “Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. A certainty protects it from the shameful – a certainty of which it is proud holds on to it. But

simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned” (Kristeva, 1982:1).

There is a more visceral content, an intense ‘evidentiary’ value inherent in the photograph – the “camera record incriminates” (Sontag, 2008:5), but the knowledge that is gained from photographs can perhaps “never be ethical or political knowledge”; is a knowledge linked to “some kind of sentimentalism, whether cynical or humanist” (Sontag, 2008:23-24).

However, it is not the aim of this chapter to spin narratives around photographs, nor to detail the widely discussed archival methodologies inherent in the formation/curation of photographic archives,<sup>16</sup> but rather to draw on these theories in order to discuss the service work of photographs in archives. In order to understand the role of photography in the service of the archive, it is important to note that, owing to the specificity of photographs as records, there is a need for a contextual approach in considering the circumstances under which the picture was created, by whom, and the reasons why it was created (its provenance), but also how it is activated in the archive in which it is found – what work it is being asked to do. Aline Lopes de Lacerda argues that the manner in which visual records are produced or collected involve actions and procedures which differ from those pertaining to written records, and posits that because “they do not fall within the category of documents created to represent actions of juridical or legal importance, they display no features that would allow them to be classified according to some type of official nature” (2012:284-285).

The photographs under discussion in this chapter are, as mentioned, some of the only ‘material’ links to Project Coast. They are *pictures*, as W. J. T. Mitchell would have them, linked to the *image* of Project Coast. Mitchell (2005:85) distinguishes between images and pictures by saying that

[y]ou can hang a picture, but you cannot hang an image. The image seems to float without any visible means of support, a phantasmatic, virtual, or spectral appearance. It is what can be lifted off the picture, transferred to another medium, translated into a

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<sup>16</sup> See generally: Banta, Messier, Robb, Bernier, and Burton (2012); Schwartz and Cook (2002); Zinkham (2007); Ritzenthaler and Vogt-O’Connor (2006); Morton and Newbury (2015).

verbal exphrasis, or protected by copyright law ... The picture is the image plus the support; it is the appearance of the immaterial image in a material medium.

Thus, what I am discussing here are the photographs (pictures) which attempt to construct a visualisation of the intangible image of Project Coast. It is not the aim of this study to discuss these places, spaces, and objects independently and directly. Rather, as there are photographs of these material objects and places included in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), I will address the actual photographic *objects* as direct traces of actions, events, and places. The selection of photographs from both the news media and the book-as-archive is based on three taxonomies of pictures: pictures of places/spaces, photographs of joint social and professional occasions, and profile/portrait photographs. I employ these delineations in order to attempt to tease out how different depictions or genres of photographs possess varying degrees of “epistemic significance” (Abell, 2010:81-82).

There are specific demands made upon photographs within different disciplines, thus the significance of the pictures will, naturally, be dependent upon where they are found. Tim Thompson (2008:176) notes that the demands made upon photographs within the discipline of forensic anthropology come from various parties, including the public, law enforcement, judicial systems, educational systems, and the media. He posits that there are actually only three kinds of repositories, or archives, from which the aforementioned taxonomies are able to draw pictures: “the Judicial, the Public and the Private” (Thompson, 2008:176). Speaking to differing “agendas of visibility” (Hayes, Silverster & Wolfram, 2002:42), these distinctions prove useful for this study. As such, I conceptualise the two sources, the news media and the book-as-archive, in relation to their differing natures: the Private (Jan Lourens<sup>17</sup> and Charles van Remoortere<sup>18</sup> supplied most of the photographs for

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<sup>17</sup> Lourens submitted what Burger and Gould describe as a “short and vague” amnesty application to the TRC, wherein he identified himself as one of the people working in a CBW programme (2002:7). In his testimony before the TRC, Lourens detailed the equipment he had designed to facilitate animal testing, including a “restraint chair” used when experimenting with baboons (Singh, 2008:7). In his amnesty application, Lourens also declared that he worked on letter bomb mechanisms, as well as weapons to be used as applicators for small amounts of lethal substances (Department of Justice, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> Charles van Remoortere, a Belgian businessman, had secured a contract to manufacture NBC suits (Nuclear, Biological, Chemical) with the SADF in 1986. In February of 1987, his company, YCVM (later Technotech) began manufacturing suits under the license of Seyntex (Burger & Gould, 2002:98-99). Van

*Secrets and Lies* from their private collections) and the Public (journalistic), but also mention how the provenance of the pictures differ from their current iterations (especially in terms of the move from private to public). The Judicial archive contains photographs required by law enforcement and judicial systems, and are usually highly specialised, and require specific training to be read, such as those arising from forensic anthropological research (Thompson, 2008:176).

By drawing on Tim Thompson's (2008) delineations between three taxonomies of archives, I argue that, when the Judicial archive has nothing to offer in the way of photographs, documents/photographs from the Private and Public archives are called upon to serve in the place of photographs evidencing criminality in the public sphere. Therefore, photographs which fall under the Private and Public form the basis of this chapter.

The chapter begins with a reflection on what a photograph is, in an attempt to begin addressing Mitchell's (2005) question of what pictures want. Determining what it is that photographs metaphorically 'want' is, as mentioned above, entirely dependent on where they are found and on the reason for their existence: their provenance. It is here that I give a brief overview of the use of photography within certain disciplines, focusing on their uses within the sciences. The focus on the sciences is in line with the overall theme of my case study of chemical and biological warfare research, and lays the groundwork for the argument of an expectation of visual evidence that is left disappointed. The discussion then moves toward a brief consideration of the work of photographs in archives/photographic archives in general, to another brief discussion of the history of photographs within the sciences in order to demonstrate why we might expect the existence of photographs of scientific research being done.

Following the positioning of the use of photographs within scientific research, the focus then turns once again to a more generalised examination of the possibility of conceptualising the photograph as a document which could serve two (at times opposing) functions. In the illustrative function, photographs may serve to further our understanding of

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Remoortere turned state witness in Basson's criminal trial, and his bank account in Luxembourg was implicated in some of the fraud charges levelled against Basson (Institute for Security Studies).

a given text. In their second function, photographs may be able to transcend the traditional notions of photographs serving as illustrations or supplements to a text. I discuss the possibility of photographs being able to, in a sense, replace textual documents, and serve as documents in their own right. This line of enquiry draws on Jacques Derrida's (1998) postulation deconstruction, and of the supplement.

At its core, deconstruction is Derrida's attempt to reevaluate classic Western dialectics' placement of presence as hierarchically superior to absence – what he terms the “metaphysics of presence” (1997:40) wherein there are traces of the present in the absent, and traces of the absent in the present. By temporarily inverting established binary oppositions, we are able to decentre or destabilise that which is dominant in the hierarchy, with the aim to make visible their contradictions, or, as Derrida writes in *Limited Inc* “bring into the open that which is disturbing them and menacing their consistency, their order, their pertinence” (1977:127).

Deconstruction is a notoriously and frustratingly vague concept. Derrida does not want us to consider deconstruction as a critique, an analysis, or even a method (Culler, 2007:[s.p.]). Rather, it is a philosophical position or stance used to problematise hierarchies. Critics of deconstruction have decried what they call Derrida's deliberate obtuseness and over complication of simple concepts. Perhaps deconstruction's most ardent critic was John Searle who quite publicly denounced it as a “low level of philosophical argumentation” and analyses done through a deconstructive lens are often “silly or trivial” (1984). However, deconstruction as a position has many applications in fields ranging from the social sciences and literary theory, to psychology, and even law. Deconstruction is perhaps best described as a reading position, intentionally reading texts against the grain to expose inherent contradictions in the ostensible structure of meaning.

According to a deconstructive reading, the dominant position in the binary can only exist in, through, and because of the subordinate: the two are mutually dependent. Binaries are only possible in relation to one another, not in opposition. There can only be presence because there is absence; there can only be male because there is female, and so on. In the broadest sense, deconstruction “became a critique of categories taken as natural [as well

as] a drive to pursue the analysis of the logic of signification in a given area as far as one can, even if the result is disquieting – an exacerbation of questions or problems rather than their resolution” (Culler, 2007:[s.p.]). Indeed, Derrida (1981:41) notes that the work of deconstruction is not to simply expose and deconstruct the manner in which oppositions work, and then to end in cynicism or nihilism.<sup>19</sup> The work of deconstruction, then, is not simply to mark differences and make known their eternal interplay, but to create new terms with which to discuss concepts which are traditionally understood in terms of opposition. The inversion of the hierarchies is, itself, problematic, because once a binary is deconstructed and made unstable (or, reasserted, in a sense) the exact processes used to arrive at the new hierarchy can be used once again to destabilise the ‘new’ position. It is for this reason that a deconstructive reading is not final: it is a temporary inversion of the binary (Balkin, 1998). Because meaning is never present, and always deferred, there can be no finality in the project of deconstruction. In other words, the aim of deconstruction in general, and my use of it for the project at hand, does not intend for any conclusion. It is for the purposes of interrogating *why* and *how* a binary operates, and in doing so, opening up the possibility of discussion.

The supplement is something which is allegedly secondary, something that serves as an aid to something primary: to use Derrida’s delineation, something “original” or “natural” (1998:56), but he argues that the supplement is not secondary – the existence or need to the supplement suggests that the original/main text (the *ergon*) is dependent upon the supplement (the *parergon*) to signify more fully. Derrida posits that writing is an example of this structure: “if supplementarity is a necessarily indefinite process, writing is the supplement *par excellence* since it proposes itself as the supplement of the supplement, sign of a sign, taking the place of a speech already significant” (1998:281). Put differently, Derrida (1998:43) considers the graphic sign as a stand-in for the phonemic sign, making it a “sign of a sign”. Derrida problematises Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s understanding of the

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<sup>19</sup> Derrida writes: “Therefore one might not proceed too quickly to a neutralization that in practice would leave the previous field untouched, leaving one no hold on the previous opposition, thereby preventing any means of intervening in the field effectively. We know what always have been the practical (particularly political) effects of immediately jumping beyond oppositions, and of protests in the simple form of neither this nor that” (1981:41).

speech/writing dichotomy, where Rousseau believes written text is secondary to speech, a “dangerous supplement’, an addition to the natural resources of speech” (Norris, 1988:97). Masturbation, Derrida argues via his reading of Rousseau’s *Emile*, is another example of the supplement where the masturbator supplements reality with fantasies (1998:150-151). Contraceptive methods, too, are supplementary, and both contraceptive methods and masturbation demonstrate that the supplement can be read in two possible ways. Using a condom suggests that our natural contraceptive methods are lacking, and the condom replaces the biological fault. However, contraceptive methods can be considered to supplement or to enhance our natural way. The supplement, for Derrida (1998:145), can function in two – almost always ambiguous – ways. It could enrich and support as “a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the fullest measure of presence”, or it could replace when the “supplement supplements...add[ing] only to replace...represents and makes an image...its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of emptiness”. Ultimately, it can be both accumulation and substitution. Derrida (1997:144) argues that the supplement is always “undecidable”.

In light of Derrida’s assertion, I discuss photographs in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), and a selection of photographs from local and international news media which document Wouter Basson’s appearance before the TRC, and his criminal trial. I consider whether these photographs behave as illustrations, or whether they supplement the incomplete signification of the text (signification itself is always-already a fragmented and slippery notion). I have selected these photographs owing to his status as the “prosthetic figurehead for a historical narrative” (Smith, 2015).

It is here where I discuss two of what Thompson (2008:176) would term Public archives: the news media pictures, as well as the book-as-archive, both of which act as a medium through which to publish archived photographs, both circulating artefacts. As a Public<sup>20</sup> archive, the book-as-archive is a particular form of archival distribution which allows the continued presence of photographs within the public. Similar to Derrida’s (1998:91) archive fever – that compulsion toward repetition, toward documenting to forget and forgetting

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<sup>20</sup> In line with Thompson’s delineations, I maintain the use of the capitalised Public, Private, and Judicial.

through documenting – Elizabeth Yale posits that books are published in the belief that “the book, with multiple copies distributed across time and space, [is] a more secure repository than the personal archive” (2016:110). As a repository of photographic materials from the personal archive (the Private in Thompson’s (2008) terms) *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) can be understood as an archive wherein these photographs are assured of their continued existence. Central to my discussion of book-as-archive is the assertion that “[t]he book and the archive stand in relation to each other: the printed book performs, we might say, what the archive preserves” (Yale, 2016:114).

The news media images are treated as an articulation of a Public archive, and I consider ways in which these pictures work within the (very broad) realm of journalism. In order to discuss the work that the photographs are performing in these two Public archives, I begin by first placing Project Coast within the context of the international CBW research done by various countries. I give a brief overview of several research programmes, and give examples of the photographs that were produced by and from these projects.

These photographs, and others like them, are embedded within visual systems which afford meaning not only to them, but also create expectations of what other pictures arising from similar projects should look like. Put differently, the photographs from international programmes influence what we believe the photographs of Project Coast ought to look like, and how we ought to understand them. However, in the absence of similar photographs of Project Coast, I consider how the photographs from the Private archive move to – and are appropriated in – the Public archives, as well as the possible implications that this may have for the evidentiary nature of photographs in their various articulations and uses.

## 2.2 Photographs in archives, photographic archives

Photography as a discipline has served a variety of different functions, has been shaped by productive and consumptive customs, and has fallen within numerous disciplinary frames,<sup>21</sup> or has had various ‘distributions’ imposed upon it (Barthes, 2000:4).<sup>22</sup> These historically constituted modes of photography determine the manner in which we read photographs. Whilst it is not the aim of this study to construct a comprehensive history of photography,<sup>23</sup> it is beneficial to understand the evolution of specific uses of photography. As a discipline, photography’s primary aspiration is, arguably, its attempt to capture a trace of that which is ‘real’, and that which ‘really’ happened. It aspires toward the evidentiary. Sontag reminds us that photography, in any of its myriad functions, serves to furnish evidence (2008:5), while Vilém Flusser (2005:76) states that photography is “an image created and distributed by photographic apparatus according to a program, an image whose ostensible function is to *inform*” (emphasis added).<sup>24</sup>

Claims toward the mechanical objectivity have been made and argued against since the invention of the medium, and by many authors.<sup>25</sup> Tom Gunning’s (2008) criticism of the “truth claim” of photography demonstrates the contemporary thinking on photography as subjective.

Contemporary discourse dismisses the notion that photographs accurately depict reality because, as Sontag (2008:6-7) notes,

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<sup>21</sup> Barthes (2000:4) delineates these as: empirical (professional or amateur), rhetorical (landscapes, objects, portraits, or nudes), and aesthetic (realism or pictorialism). There is also an analytical distinction that can be drawn between professional, amateur, and vernacular photography. See Geoffrey Batchen (2000), Mia Fineman (2004), and Swann Galleries (2014).

<sup>22</sup> These modes include, amongst others, photography as art, photography in the service of science and forensics, photography as a political instrument, and socio-historiographical purposes. Importantly, they have also served to memorialise.

<sup>23</sup> See Helmut Gernsheim’s *A Concise History of Photography* (1986); Alma Davenport’s *The History of Photography: An Overview* (1991); Naomi Rosenblum’s *A World History of Photography* (2007); Margaret Vallencourt’s *The History of Photography* (2015); Kaja Silverman’s *The Miracle of Analogy: or The History of Photography, Part 1* (2015).

<sup>24</sup> Hubert Damisch (1978:70) states that, “[t]heoretically speaking, photography is nothing other than a process of recording, a technique of *inscribing*, in an emulsion of silver salts, a stable image generated by a ray of light”.

<sup>25</sup> Roland Barthes, in *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (2000:80), notes that “the photograph is literally an emanation of the referent”. See generally: Walter Benjamin’s *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (2008); Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison’s *The Image of Objectivity* (1992).

despite the presumption of veracity that gives all photographs authority, interest, seductiveness ... photographers are always imposing standards on their subjects. Although there is a sense in which the camera does indeed capture reality, not just interpret it, photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are.

Far from being simple and truthful reflections of reality, it is crucial to remember that photographs, whilst analogous to a reality – a trace of reality, an index of the real – are always negotiated, constructed, subjective, framed, distorted, abstracted, cropped. Indeed, “a photograph can only tell the truth if it is also capable of telling a lie. In other words, the truth claim is a claim and lurking behind it is a suspicion of fakery, even if the default mode is belief” (Gunning, 2008:28). Gunning suggests here that we are, and should indeed be, sceptical of the veracity of photographs.

Nonetheless, the usefulness of photography within certain fields cannot be overstated. To return to its uses in the sciences, long pre-dating the invention of photography, the adoption of the observational approach and pictorial documentation in research demonstrates that attempts at rendering the ‘real’ began early on. The photographic medium’s aspects, proof of the evidential, and the function of informing, have been invaluable in scientific research,<sup>26</sup> and when the medium of photography evolved into a more readily accessible method, it became an essential component of many areas of research.<sup>27</sup> As Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison note, the notion of “mechanical objectivity” within the sciences in the nineteenth century made the medium indispensable (1992:119). The photographic apparatus mitigated the failure of scientists’ attempt to produce faithful documentation and, within the field of science, photography was seen as a means of production which held “the promise of images uncontaminated by interpretation”, one which held the purest form of objectivity, having ostensibly eliminated human agency (Daston & Galison, 1992:120). Gerald Robinson states that “a large part of science is given over to understanding and

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<sup>26</sup> Due to space constraints, I limit the discussion to the scientific uses of photography as this is the genre of photography whose absence I will discuss in the second chapter.

<sup>27</sup> Areas of research include the study of anatomy, categorisation of visual characteristics of objects of inquiry (from animals, plants, and rock formations to anthropology), as well as objects inaccessible to human vision (microbiology, astronomy and telescopy, X-ray and other medical imaging techniques). It is outside the scope of this study to trace the use of photography in scientific research. For an in-depth discussion of this, refer to Collier and Collier’s *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method* (1986); Robinson’s *Photography, History & Science* (2006).

making visible the unseeable – unseeable at least with human eyes and human senses” (2006:9).<sup>28</sup>

Making manifest bodies of research and documenting findings for future discussion is one particular function that photography could serve.<sup>29</sup> Through the ages, scientists have seen merit in recordkeeping – “the making of scientific knowledge as a form of paperwork” – to ensure the longevity of their research, but also as “a means of surmounting death’s interruptions of the natural philosophical project, which was necessarily a multigenerational enterprise” (Yale, 2016:107-108). Visually documenting research is also crucial in terms of disseminating findings (in research outputs, books, and archives), garnering support, and often, the procurement of funding.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the conventions inherent in visually documenting experiments has always been important to the scientific endeavour, even if it does not directly impact the work being done or the outcome thereof. Indeed, many photographs within the sciences are taken *ex post facto*, such as those showing researchers peering through microscopes. Thompson’s (2008:176) discussion of clandestine crime scenes and his three archives are an apt example of the importance of visually documenting research and evidence.

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, photographs found in the Judicial archive are usually highly specialised pictures, are difficult – if not impossible – to interpret without the necessary anthropological training (Thompson, 2008:177). In his delineations, Thompson notes that photographs of clandestine crime scenes which appear in the Public domain are generally not taken by forensic anthropologists, but rather by other professionals, such as researchers and journalists (2008:177).

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<sup>28</sup> Regarding the importance of photography in scientific research, Robinson argues that, amongst other things, photography allowed researchers and scientists to test and prove Albert Einstein’s theory of General Relativity (2006:9).

<sup>29</sup> Photographs such as those taken by Eadweard Muybridge, although an obvious example, continue to be discussed for their contribution towards biometrics.

<sup>30</sup> Alan Sekula notes that, during the late nineteenth century, scientific research, and indeed police/legal work, were forging the notion of the camera as an apparatus of truth owing to the “metrical accuracy of the camera” (1992:352-353)

Photographs in the Private archive tend to include photographs of people or of work, and are usually without evidential value –value lies in being a memento of work done (Thompson, 2008:178). Thompson also notes that photographs may originate in one archive/taxonomy, and move to another (2008:180), suggesting that these pictures possess a social life, echoing Mitchell’s assertion that pictures desire something (2005:73).

The assertion that photographs desire something, that they have work to do when used under particular circumstances, confers upon them, metaphorically, the status of a living thing. Conceptualising them within an “image-as-organism” metaphor (Mitchell, 2005:10) is an unavoidable analogy because, as Mitchell (2005:93) argues, pictures can be shown to have a social life,<sup>31</sup> and also because interaction with pictures reveals that “we often perceive them as possessing some sort of spirit or carrying a certain power” (Curtis, 2010:1-2), something akin to Barthes’ *punctum* (2000:26-27). Arjun Appadurai posits that, in order to access the “human and social context” of objects, we need to consider objects through a methodological praxis which considers objects as “things-in-motion” (1986:5). He continues to note that “we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things” (1986:5).

On the agency of photographs, Joan Schwartz urges that we “stop thinking of photographs as nouns, and start treating them as verbs, transitive verbs. They *do* things” (in Caswell, 2014:3). In a similar vein, Elizabeth Edwards (2001:5) asks: “Do photographs have their *own agency*?” (emphasis in original). She posits that, akin to the “social saliency of the material object, active agency implies a level of performance, projection, and engagement on the part of the object. In the idea of performance ... is implied a presentation that constitutes a performative or persuasive act” (2001:17). Photographs, then, can be understood as a performance of work: performing to make seen a scene, performing as

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<sup>31</sup> That is, they are able to move through time and space, and in their reuses, photographs are said to have a social life. Arjun Appadurai (1986:3) states that cultural objects, as commodities, are objects which possess an economic value, and can be sold or traded. Gillian Rose similarly states that we should look at visual objects “less as texts to be decoded for their meaning, and more as objects with which things are done ... [entailing] the careful observation of interactions between people and visual objects” (2007:217).

documents relaying information, or performing persuasively. Through this performative or persuasive act, “we are introduced to the possibility of photographs, through their creation, content, and ever-shifting reception, performing in service of political or social goals” (Caswell, 2014:15).<sup>32</sup>

Michelle Caswell’s (2014) discussion of the Khmer Rouge’s Tuol Sleng mug shots is one of many studies which demonstrate how pictures are able to serve social and political functions, and how photographs are able to take on a social life, moving through time and space, taking on new meanings and new work in (different) archives. She importantly demonstrates how, when collected within an archive, photographs are able to memorialise political criminality. The Khmer Rouge’s insistence on bureaucratic documentation of torture sessions, confessions, and indeed photographing each victim has given rise to an important political archive, and Caswell (2014) describes how photographs which originated in an institutional archive, comparable to the Private archive, moved into the Public and the Judicial archives following the fall of the regime. This particular articulation of an archive has been instrumental in bringing about a war crimes tribunal, and the mug shots have been activated to behave as political agents of social change: their original purpose was to inscribe a criminality upon the victims/subjects of the photographs but, through a reactivation in different moments in history, the photographs have come to serve as documents which inscribe upon their makers a political criminality (Caswell, 2014:89). Thus, the mug shots have been called upon to do work within the archive and, albeit in an *ex post facto* manner, serving social and political goals.

Archives, too, are institutions which serve political and social goals, and there are certain expectations of what an archive ‘is’, and what role it can play in memorialising history. As a political tool, an archive is more than an institution: it is the law of what can or may be said, it is the system of statements and rules which determine who can speak and who cannot; what can be said and what cannot (Foucault, 1972:129). An archive, no matter how comprehensive, can never be said to be ‘complete’, but there are certain expectations of

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<sup>32</sup> Creating an image, similarly, may serve a political or social goal, and photographs may, during the course of their social lives, come to represent political or social change, as Caswell (2014) demonstrates in her discussion of the Khmer Rouge images.

what one *should* encounter when working with the archive. On the political nature of the archive, Caswell (2014:89) rightly notes that archives are systems of power, rather than being neutral or apolitical, as many archives have historically claimed to be. Michel Foucault (2002) and Jacques Derrida (1998) have shown, as have many other scholars since the archival turn,<sup>33</sup> that both the archival logic, as well as the archives as institutions, operate under a structuring function. An archive's creation is informed and shaped by historians and archivists looking to capture a particular image of time passed.

To archive is a process by which an historian or archivist, Derrida's "archon, those who command" (1998:2), selects and appraises documents to include in a collection. The archiving process, itself, is an act of inclusion and exclusion, and is inherently bound up in power relations: to archive is to decide what should be included and what should be excluded. As Derrida writes: "[t]here is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside" (1998:11). Thus archival practitioners operate from a position of privilege, power, and control and the archive as a collection, as well as the archival record are, as Verne Harris describes, "at once expression and instrument of power" (2002:85). Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook (2002:4) poignantly sum up the cacophony of voices in the archival theory literature when they state that the "[c]ontrol of the archive – variously defined – means control of society and thus control of determining history's winners and losers". So my question is: should we consider photographic archives any differently than we would a 'conventional' archive, one populated with textual documents?

Affecting the organisation/collection of photographs in archives, or photographic archives, are the customary politics and power relations involved in archival practice, but also a question of processes surrounding photographic document creation. Unlike other investigations (such as literary criticism) critically engaging with the authorial intent, the intended audiences, and the original function of archival documents is crucial in the study

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<sup>33</sup> In the late twentieth century, there was a conceptual shift within archival scholarship/archival studies from a set of discourses centred on examining the 'document' to a more reflexive focus on the archivist's involvement within the processes of archiving. Cheryl Simon (2002:102) attributes the shaping of this turn, in part, to the writings of Michel Foucault, and the "allegorical historiography of Walter Benjamin, written in the 1920s and 1930s".

of photographs in archives/photographic archives. As Schwartz (2015:22) asserts, these documents are “created by a will, for a purpose, to convey a message, to an audience” in a way different to how we understand a textual document. The photographic archive possesses a “thick context that surrounds [the photograph], reveals its functional originals, maintains its authorial intentions, and points to its target audience, but also traffics in the illusory goal of comprehensive knowledge” (Schwartz, 2015:22). Photographic archives have often “served as a form of affective glue, bringing visual coherence” to historical narratives, especially in terms of nation building – documents which form part of a “visual legacy” (Schwartz, 2015:25-26), made in the present for future generations to access the past in the present, transcending time and space.

In terms of examining individual photographs in archives, Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester and Wolfram Hartmann (2002:105) argue that there are many layers to consider, much like the appraisal and examination of textual documents. These include, amongst others, considerations of their provenance; what was involved in the “photographic occasion”; how were the photographs used at the time (to what political ends, if any); who is being represented, and how; in what contexts are they being reactivated (Hayes *et al*, 2002:110). For example, the authors argue that the political use of photography, representing both the place and the people, was central to the Union of South Africa’s bid to secure the League of Nations mandate to control Namibia following World War I (2002:105). According to Hayes *et al*, the Union of South Africa, as the second colonial power in Namibia, quickly realised that the “lack of any recent visual archive of the territory and its peoples created problems with the regard to the urgent representational needs of the new administration and its international supporters” (2002:107).<sup>34</sup> Thus, in an attempt to represent and document, to “normalise and/or pathologise Namibians [as well as] to legitimise and memorialise themselves – the colonial version of what Sekula calls the ‘double system of representation’ with both repressive and honorific functions” – led to a large number of pictures being taken, and subsequently published, by South African officials (2002:106).

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<sup>34</sup> Hayes *et al* state that much of the existing photography produced about and in Namibia stems from the German colonial period: a “photographic economy [which] encompassed early ethnography, consumer capitalism, political advocacy, evangelical fund-raising, popular memorabilia and much more” (2002:107).

Interestingly, the authors assert that the incoming officials accessed the existing photographic archives, utilising photographs created by the German administration, to further South Africa's agenda.

The most striking appropriation was the use by South African officials of photographs showing African people subjected to corporeal punishment and torture, ostensibly at the hands of the Germans (Hayes *et al*, 2002:107). Investigation into the origins of these photographs shows that the German administration had produced these photographs during an official inquiry into the mistreatment of the local inhabitants before World War I (Hayes *et al*, 2002:107-108). Put more generally: Hayes *et al* (2002), like many before them, assert that photographs are able to be put into the service of an infinite number of ideologies, attesting to Mitchell's (2005) notion that photographs possess social lives. Archives in general have the same potential.

As a totalising power, archives configure the ways in which a history is represented, privileging (inclusion, remembering) one history over a myriad other (exclusion, to be forgotten), and can be reactivated at any time, under any ideology/political dispensation. Despite the archival photograph's unique ability to be reproduced and appropriated in ways which suit the need of the document in manners which may not have been originally intended, de Lacerda (2012:285) notes that the production and collection of photographic images display "their own 'economics', or production rationale, and the reasons behind their appearance should be researched within this context". It is through such a lens that researchers are able to access the reasons and meanings behind these records, their "relation to [their] counterparts, and the relation between the whole and the person responsible for [their] existence, namely the creator of the archive" (de Lacerda, 2012:285).

Thus archives, both photographic and 'textual', can be understood as framed in a process of (necessary) inclusion and exclusion/occlusion, and entities of which the composition speaks from a certain vantage point about a particular moment in time. Framing a photograph, Sontag (2003:109) tells us – in a process similar to archiving – is an act invested in the interpretation of a chosen reality. Hayes *et al* argue that "the eye of the photographer is socially and culturally conditioned to seeing things in certain ways, thus

promoting a particular framing of a scene or people” (2002:113), whilst John Beck (2015) states that, inherently bound up in processes of inclusion and exclusion/occlusion, photographing is based on one person’s choice of what to represent, and how to present it. To photograph, then, is to archive,<sup>35</sup> and to archive is to develop a particular image of the past.

At this junction, it is perhaps important to turn the focus toward whether or not a photograph could be considered a document worthy of consignation into the archive and, by extension, the book-as-archive.<sup>36</sup> If we accept that photographs have a social life, have agency, and have a purpose to serve, it should not be too far a leap to consider photographs as being able to behave as documents with readable content conveying a particular message, and as important and valuable sources of knowledge, especially in an archive that memorialises public or political criminality. As such, I ask what these photographs are called upon to do in their current activation, and perhaps what they do as objects with agency. Building on this, I ask whether the photographs in *Secrets and Lies* behave as evidentiary additions to the written text, a way in which to visualise something being discussed, or can images transcend this supplementary function and come to behave as documents in their own (complete) right?

Bruno Delmas (in de Lacerda, 2012:288-289) notes that photographs can be considered in one of two ways: as visual objects in the category of art, or as objects that are documents. The latter function is one that de Lacerda argues has been widely overlooked in archival studies (2012:289). The specificity of photographs as records requires of researchers a contextual approach, and de Lacerda argues that the manner in which visual records are produced or collected involve actions and procedures which differ from those pertaining to written records owing to the fact that “they do not fall within the category of documents created to represent actions of juridical or legal importance, they display no features that would allow them to be classified according to some type of official nature” (2012:284-285).

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<sup>35</sup> Indeed, at times terminology of the two disciplines is imbricated.

<sup>36</sup> Derrida and Prenowitz define consignation not just as the act of “assigning residence or of entrusting so as to put into reserve...but here the act of consigning through gathering together signs...Consignation aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration” (1995:10).

It is conceivable that the photographic image as a document differs from a textual document insofar as it has the ability to be appropriated and recontextualised in ways that detailed textual documents cannot. In other words, it is easier to pluck a photograph from an archive and read into it, as a kind of palimpsest, a multiplicity of meanings (being the polysemic objects that they are) than it is to take a textual document, like one detailing scientific experiments for example, and read into it something different than what is explicitly stated. The multiplicity of potential meanings and uses is greater, then, in a photograph.

Despite the archival photographic image's ability to be appropriated in ways which may not have been originally intended or prescribed during the production of the picture, researchers must be cognisant of their "production rationale" and context (de Lacerda, 2012:285). It is through such a lens that researchers are able to access the reasons and meanings behind these records, their "relation to [their] counterparts, and the relation between the whole and the person responsible for [their] existence, namely the creator of the archive" (de Lacerda, 2012:285).

The difficulty in the application of archival methodology to photographs stems from their materiality and as "resource[s] for expression": photographs have the ability to record action and information in a manner which textual documents cannot (de Lacerda, 2012:284). Visual materials have traditionally been regarded as self-referential, "images of 'some aspect', devoid of any clear connection to the rest of the archive ... [it is the] hegemony of the factual values [which determines] their treatment, and irrespective of the type of archive in question, all effort to identify and describe the material is focused on the facts, people, places, and eras portrayed" (de Lacerda, 2012:285). This seems to suggest that, for de Lacerda, photographs traditionally serve an expressive or illustrative/supplementary role to textual documents, a position echoed by Nick Peim (2005:69).

Peim, in his study of two pictures in an unnamed book detailing the history of education, notes that there are two photographs which have been placed in the text, but no direct reference is made to the pictures, nor are they discussed by the authors. These photographs, then, come to "punctuate the text as self-evident illustrations" (Peim,

2005:69).<sup>37</sup> Peim states that the “incomplete structure of the photographic text calls forth the supplementary engagement of a subject that is itself haunted by an ontological incompleteness” (2005:82). The “ontological incompleteness” that arises from viewing photographs such as these requires a “*productive* reading” (emphasis in original) wherein we consider where and how the photographs are placed within a text, even if the text appears to bear no affective connection to the photographs (Peim, 2005:82). Thus, even “[w]ithin a logic of presence and absence ... photographs present definite and readable content” (Peim, 2005:70).

A photograph can thus be seen as a document when, following its creation, it has inherent in it an aim driven by the creator’s desire to record an action or factual event, and “when it constitutes a kind of record or communication medium – always in connection with others from the same activity that generate the documentation – which takes into account a receiver acting within the corporate, governmental or institutional scope to which it belongs” (de Lacerda, 2012:295). In other words, in an institutional sphere, photographs only become archival documents when there is an intentionality on the part of not only the photographer, but also of the person commissioning the picture.

Photographs reveal things about the world. Indeed, Elkins, drawing on Barthes, calls a photograph “a thing that we often *see through* in order to get information about the world” (2007:3). It is this notion, that the photograph has readable content, that leads to the assumption that a photograph could (and perhaps should) be considered as a document in its own right, one that is perhaps at times more easily read than other kinds of textual documents that require specific knowledge to decipher.

The photographs I discuss in the following section are easier to ‘read’ than the textual documents in AL2922, the collection from which *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) is drawn. As alluded to in the Introduction, the documents in the labyrinthine AL2922 are difficult – if not impossible – to navigate without (at least) some specialist knowledge. I

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<sup>37</sup> Whilst photographs are not always self-evident, what Peim (2005) means here is that they are “self-evident” in the context of the publication in which they appear, not insofar as photographs in general are self-evident.

believe the beginnings of this knowledge can be drawn from *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002). What follows then is an examination of how the photographs function in the book, as well as how they are utilised in the media. However, in order to situate Project Coast and the visual economy surrounding CBW research, I first discuss the photographs from similar international projects, and briefly discuss the work that the photographs are doing within the public sphere, as well as in books-as-archives. I then turn the discussion towards my case study: the photographs from the news media and *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002).

### 2.3 International CBW programmes

From the first recorded use of biological warfare around 1715BC and 1075BC, (Trevisanto, 2007:1371), the weaponisation of corpses of victims of the Bubonic plague in 1346 by Tartar Forces during the siege of Caffa (Wheelis, 2002:[s.p.]), to contemporary uses of CBW agents during, most notably, the World Wars, the use of CBW agents has a long history, one which unsurprisingly became a staple for novels and films. Films like the iconic *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (Kubrick, 1964)<sup>38</sup> and, more recently, films like *Philosophy of a Knife* (Iskanov, 2008),<sup>39</sup> have appropriated the true stories of atomic weapons and CBW programmes for entertainment. In literary texts such as the James Bond novel *Thunderball* (Fleming, 1961), Ernst Stavro Blofeld, head of the terrorist organisation S.P.E.C.T.R.E., plans to use biological or nuclear weapons in his quest for world domination.<sup>40</sup> Society has been exposed, through these kinds of cultural products, to themes of bioterrorism and chemical warfare, and these representations naturally affect what it is that we come to expect the programmes to look like and, perhaps, even heighten our expectations of the evidence of the horrible.

I personally fell prey to this expectation. Embarking upon this study, I anticipated photographs of nefarious research and testing facilities where research was being carried out by scientists in hazmat suits, tests being done on mice and monkeys, with catastrophic results, much like in *Outbreak* (Peterson, 1995). I expected photographs similar to those from researchers at Dachau, Biopreparat, or those from Porton Down's scientists – photographs that people may *imagine* exist. Sontag posits that “[i]t seems that the appetite for pictures showing bodies in pain is as keen, almost, as the desire for ones that show bodies naked” (2003:41). Viewers are perhaps predisposed to the expectation of abject pictures showing violence against human beings when they are confronted with programmes such as CBW research projects. The expectation of seeing these kinds of

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<sup>38</sup> *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (Kubrick, 1964) satirises the nuclear threat facing the USA and USSR during the Cold War.

<sup>39</sup> Mixing archival footage, interviews, and graphic re-enactments of actual experiments performed, *Philosophy of a Knife* (Iskanov, 2008) details the horrors perpetuated by the Japanese Army's Unit 731 during World War II.

<sup>40</sup> In the three *Austin Powers* (1997, 1999, 2002) films, Austin Powers battles a similar threat in the form of Dr. Evil, modelled on Fleming's Blofeld character.

photographs is bred not only from our need to see the abject (as discussed in the introduction), but from the overwhelming proliferation of photographs which have arisen from various human rights abuse cases.

The pleasure that arises from seeing pictures from these kinds of atrocities stems not from a delight in seeing the pain of others;<sup>41</sup> rather, it is perhaps pleasurable because seeing the visual evidence of government-sanctioned covert operations, as well as the attendant bureaucracy, serves to confirm our suspicions that government is, at times, up to no good.<sup>42</sup> This gives rise to the question of ethics, and how to define what is defensive as opposed to offensive research. It is outside the scope of this study to address these concerns, but it must be stated that not all research being done would be negative. Many pathogens and processes, as well as toxic chemicals, have legitimate applications, and “[a]ny effort to control the use of toxic chemicals or pathogenic micro-organisms for offensive military purposes has to take into account the dual-use nature of many of these chemicals, organisms, and related equipment and processes” (Kelle, 2005:7).

Under various justifications and with varying levels of emphasis placed on the importance of visual documentation of their research, international programmes have invested themselves in CBW research and development and, as Ulf Schmidt’s (2015) research attests, considerable attention has been paid to the examination of medical war crimes perpetrated by Axis scientists during World War II. What follows will be a brief discussion of a selection of programmes to illustrate the kinds of visibility we have come to expect. It must be noted that these are not the only programmes that existed, but owing to space constraints, I am only able to discuss the Japanese, British, and Soviet programmes. These

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<sup>41</sup> Edmund Burke states that there is a degree of pleasure we derive from looking at something horrific, but it depends on our distance from it – “I am convinced we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortune and pain of others ... [t]error is a passion which always produces delight when it does not press too close” (in Schmitter, 2013:216).

<sup>42</sup> Even when sanctioned by government, some of this research is illegal in terms of the various conventions relating to the use and testing of CBW agents, as well as conventions prohibiting crimes against humanity. It is permissible to have defensive CBW programmes for nations to protect against hostile forces. There are, however, restrictions placed on the kind of research done, as well as the stockpiling of agents. For more on this, see the Arms Control Association’s factsheet, *Chemical and Biological Weapons Status at a Glance* (2014), a list of various state declarations of possession and development of CBW weapons and agents compiled by the Association. For more on the restrictions placed on stockpiling and the kinds of agents that states are legally allowed to possess, see Elisa Harris and John Steinbruner (2005).

programmes documented their research, both textually and photographically, to varying degrees. Photographs range from the banal to the horrific. For instance, Japanese scientists attached to Unit 731 trained their lenses towards capturing and extensively documenting almost every aspect: from what appears to be the daily life of scientists, such as what appears to be an “unassuming functional snapshot” (Sontag, 2007:103) of a scientist in a laboratory (Figure 1), to photographs evidencing the effects of human testing.



Figure 1: Japanese scientist in a Unit 731 laboratory, *Nightmare in Manchuria*.2010. Screen shot by author.

### 2.3.1 Japan

Unit 731 was a particularly cruel project, formed in 1935 under Surgeon General Shirō Ishii in the Pingfang<sup>43</sup> district of Harbin, China.<sup>44</sup> Scientists working in Unit 731 were tasked by the Imperial Japanese Army with developing weapons to be used against humans,<sup>45</sup> and the unit notoriously undertook lethal human experimentation during the Second Sino-Japanese War of World War II.<sup>46</sup> Victims were subjected to experimentation ranging from vivisection without anaesthesia (Figure 2), deliberate infection with venereal diseases, attacks by plagues, induced frostbite, forced pregnancy to test transmission of diseases, death by starvation and water deprivation, as well as being objects for target practice and weapons testing. Their victims tallied an estimated 250 000 (McCurry, 2011:[s.p.]). Japanese scientists extensively photographed and filmed experiments being carried out, as well as the results of exposure to chemical substances (Figures 3 and 4). Researchers, and Ishii himself, made little secret of the fact that they were testing CBW agents on humans. Ishii spoke openly about, and indeed promoted the use of offensive biological weapons amongst fellow scientists and officers, and he frequently spoke to audiences about these tests (Harris, 2002:139).<sup>47</sup>

Sheldon Harris (2002:58) states that Ishii would regularly lecture at army colleges, the Tokyo Imperial University, as well as other prestigious universities and would, in the lectures, employ the use of photographs and 8mm films which graphically illustrated his

<sup>43</sup> The spelling of this district differs in several publications. Sheldon Harris (2002) has it as Ping Fan, whilst Jing-Bao Nie, Nanyan Guo, Mark Selden and Arthur Kleinman (2010:4) have it as Pingfang, as well as Pingfan (2010:25).

<sup>44</sup> Harbin was the largest city in the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo, now Northeast China. Japanese soldiers sabotaged their own railway, thereby giving them the justification to invade and occupy the area. The logic was that because the puppet state of Manchukuo was not Japanese territory, they were able to set up the research laboratories (Pohlmann, 2010).

<sup>45</sup> Unit 100 was another medical experimentation site used by the Japanese, but their main objective was conducting research into animal diseases, and developing diseases which were communicable from animals to humans.

<sup>46</sup> The Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) was a conflict fought between the Republic of China and the Empire of Japan. As such, many of the victims were reportedly Chinese, Koreans, and Mongolians (Kristof, 1995:[s.p.]).

<sup>47</sup> Harris states that, in 1941, Yoshimura Hisato, an army technician, gave a “Special lecture’ ... in which he barely disguised the fact that he used humans in frostbite experiments to support his thesis. Kitano [Masaji], in his many lectures in Mukden and elsewhere, brought with him some of the hundreds of specimens he had preserved in jars. Ishii, in his talks, favored still photographs and motion pictures taken of human experiments”.

research into human testing. The films included, “as a special recruiting enticement, close-up views of BW work with human subjects” (Harris, 2002:58). Whilst the photographs reproduced in this study may not necessarily be of those that were used by Ishii and others, it can be assumed that these are what the photographs would have looked like.



Figure 2: Japanese scientists during what is speculated to be a vivisection without anaesthesia, date unknown. *Nightmare in Manchuria*. 2010. Screenshot by author.



Figure 3: Japanese scientist performing what was either a live vivisection or an autopsy. *Nightmare in Manchuria*. 2010. Screenshot by author.



Figure 4: Pathologist inspecting a human subject following a biological weapon field test. (Harris, 2002:142).

The projects did not only document their experimentation: it is interesting to note that there are official photographs taken of most of the projects, many of which are strikingly similar. Amongst these are bureaucratic-looking photographs commemorating anniversaries (Figure 5), some of which are akin to a staff photograph (Figure 6), and some that appear to be of staff parties (Figure 7).

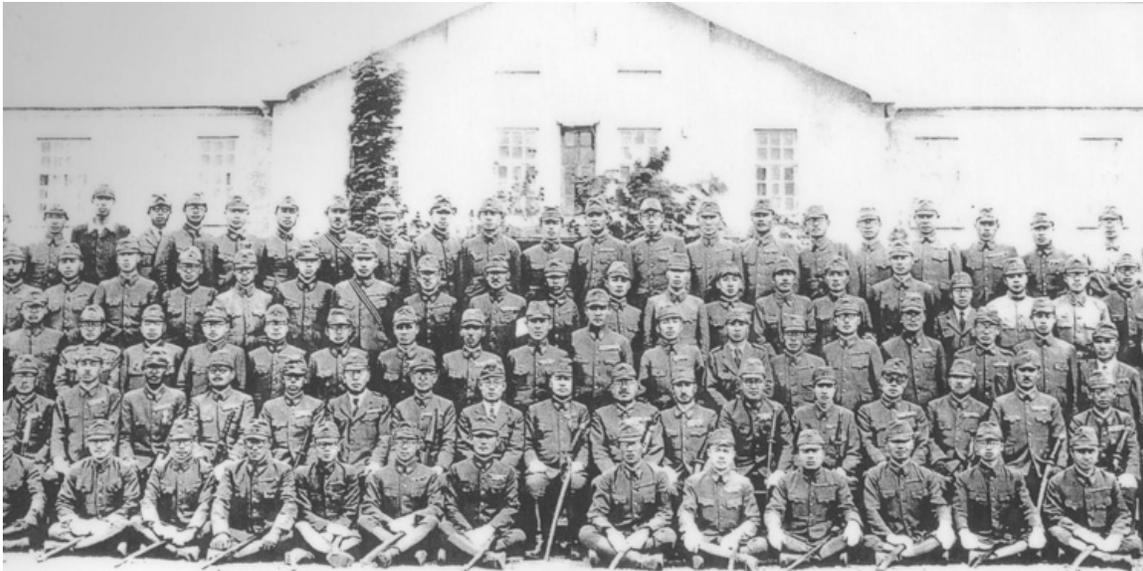


Figure 5: Top level officers of Unit 731 sit for a commemorative photograph on the eight anniversary of the group's formation, 25 June, 1943. (Canada ALPHA).



Figure 6: A group photo at Ping Fan of General Yoshimi Haura, Commander of the Kwantung Army, and his top commanders. (Harris, 2002:164).



Figure 7: Group photograph of Unit 731's leading scientists, taken at a banquet in Harbin, 1939. (Harris, 2002:173).

These official photographs stand in stark contrast to the images that these scientists were producing and, presumably, appearing in personally. Used within the texts like Harris' (2002), wherein the pictures are not directly discussed, there appears to be some kind of disjunctive cognition: these men appear in their suits and celebrate at banquets when, in other pictures, they and their colleagues are experimenting on humans. It is also important to note that these official photographs appear mostly in academic texts and published works written about Unit 731, which could indicate an editorial choice not to include pictures of torture. If we accept that Figures 2, 3, and 4 are the kinds of photographs which Ishii and others like him used to recruit scientists and researchers to their cause, we can begin to see how these photographs have taken on a new role under a different activation. At first, they would have been used by Ishii to demonstrate that Japan was undertaking important research, but in modern activations, these gruesome photographs of human testing are used almost exclusively on websites dedicated to revealing the cruelty of the Japanese

army. These websites are, by and large, unverifiable insofar as one cannot be sure if these photographs are in fact real, or if they are staged propaganda-type pictures.<sup>48</sup> However, both sets of pictures in the contexts both of academic books and of websites can be understood as an attempt to memorialise the criminality of the government, and of the scientists involved. These photographs, however, did not result in much, if any, criminal prosecution against those involved. Unit 731 perpetrators never faced criminal prosecution, despite the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal, since many were given clemency in exchange for divulging the details of their research to American researchers (Bassnett, Brokhoff, Harding, Martin, & Nelson, 1998).

Moving through time and space, these photographs now (attempt to) prove a culpability that was not originally intended. The Japanese scientists just as meticulously documented their torture of human beings, but perhaps because it was under the guise of research (where the Khmer Rouge photographs were documenting a supposed criminality of the victims), these photographs were of value to American researchers. As such, the Japanese photographs function within academic texts less as indicators of criminality, and more as attestation to the existence of the unit.

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<sup>48</sup> Seiichi Morimura's *The Devil's Gluttony* (1981) and *The Devil's Gluttony: A Sequel* (1983) claimed to reveal the truth behind Unit 731, but the author misattributed facts and images, purporting them to have originated from Unit 731 when, in fact, they were from Unit 100 (Yoshiko, 2000:300;381). The images that were used were also unrelated, demonstrating the confusion surrounding the legitimacy of some images.

### 2.3.2 The United Kingdom

Far less cruel, but no less pernicious, is the United Kingdom's government military science park, Porton Down. Established in 1916 in response to the use of CBW agents by Germany during World War I, Porton Down's research facilities, like many others, were not regulated, or under the control of government, affording the global network of Allied scientists and researchers a considerable degree of secrecy (Schmidt, 2015:218). Military volunteers, referred to as 'observers',<sup>49</sup> were routinely used as human guinea pigs, being given token payments, furlough, "or even just a free bus pass" as compensation for exposing themselves to 'safe' experiments with 'safe' substances (Calderwood, 2015:[s.p.]; Schmidt, 2015:55). Researchers at Porton Down undertook the development and testing of potentially harmful agents, as evidenced by an interim report submitted in 1945 which detailed the deadly potential of the nerve agent Tabun, code-named "Substance T2104" (Schmidt, 2015:165). Schmidt states that the report included "horrific images, obtained from animal and human experiments, of life succumbing to convulsions, tremors, and rapid death" (2015:165).

Whilst these photographs have, to the best of my knowledge, not been published, pictures that have been published include ones similar to Unit 731's bureaucratic photographs. Porton Down researchers also posed for official as well as commemorative photographs. Figure 8 shows a reunion dinner of members of the chemical warfare division held in 1926; Figure 9 is a commemorative photograph of the staff who had served at Porton Down during World War II; and Figure 10 shows Porton Down's medical division in 1957.

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<sup>49</sup> According to Schmidt, "[h]umans, as [Graydon] Carter points out, were meant to 'act as the ultimate sensor and recorder of the effects on man', which is why the military may have used the term 'human observer' in their description of test subjects" (2015:52).

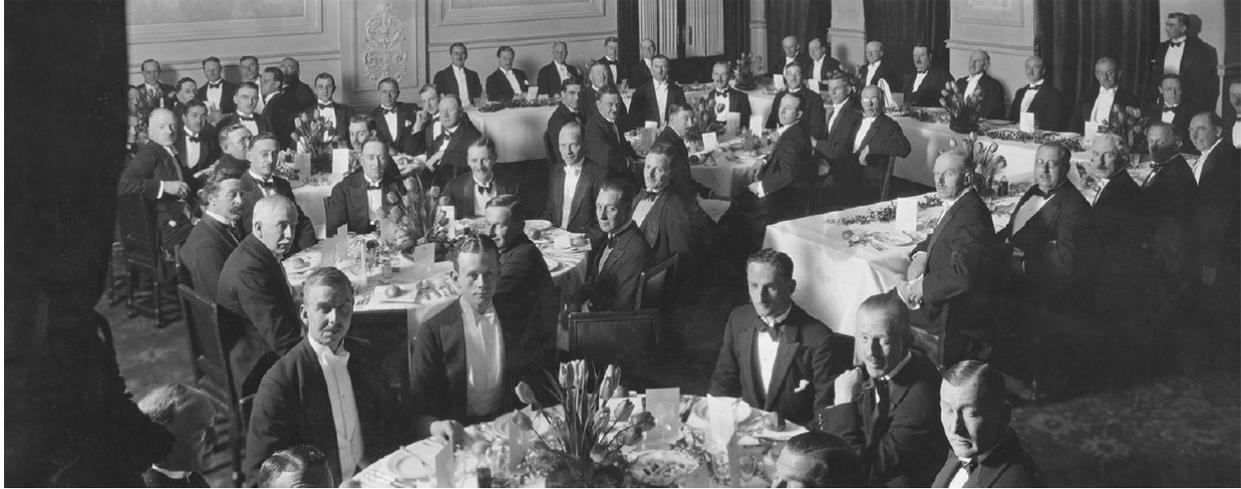


Figure 8: Chemical warfare reunion dinner, Hotel Cecil, London, 20 April, 1926. (Schmidt, 2015:459).



Figure 9: Reunion of staff who served at Porton during the Second World War, 6 September, 1946. (Schmidt, 2015:186).



Figure 10: Porton's Medical Division, 19 June, 1957. (Schmidt, 2015:267).

The air of legitimacy that results from these kinds of regular staff photographs and commemorative pictures seems to refute the possibility of any illegal activities. Again, there is a cognitive disjunction: logic would seem to suggest that scientists engaged in unethical or illegal experiments would not pose for photographs. These pictures work in the opposite way to those in Figures 5, 6, and 7 since it is known that the people photographed did not try to hide the fact that they were engaging in illegal and unethical research, leaving their group photographs with an incriminating and ominous tone. However, both sets of pictures do offer evidence of these state-sanctioned organisations, which asserts a kind of presence that Project Coast does not/did not have.

In terms of photographic evidence of research being done, Porton Down sanctioned the production of certain photographs. For example, Figure 11 shows one of Porton Down's medical research laboratories. The reasons for the production of this photograph are unclear, but it can be assumed, judging by the official nature of the photograph (that is, it appears to have been taken with the consent of the scientist featured, and the photographer, Neville Marriner, would have been granted access), that this photograph was perhaps intended to be used to demonstrate a level of professionalism, as well as the capabilities of the facility. It appears to be a fairly routine and candid picture, and there are no indications that this may be an unethical experiment. The picture seems to legitimise the activities of the scientists and the laboratory, asserting that their research is above board.



Figure 11: Neville Marriner, The Porton Down Medical Research Centre, 1979. (*Mail Online*).

However, if read in the context of the *Mail Online* article titled “Ex-servicemen used as human guinea pigs by MoD scientists ARE more likely to die prematurely, study finds” (Martin, 2009), this photograph is given a nefarious air. The article (Figure 12) gives no context to the particular picture, and readers are left to infer meaning. The caption of the picture reads “The Porton Down Medical Research Centre, pictured above in 1979, conducted experiments on servicemen” (Martin, 2009). Reactivated in this context, the use of this photograph seems to suggest that the research being done when this particular picture was taken was, indeed, unethical. In the reporting of science, Felicity Mellor (2015) notes how certain implications of research do not figure into the news coverage and news value of these kinds of scientific endeavours. These “non-news values” structure what reports on science include and omit, deeming some aspects of research “un-newsworthy and ... [thus] excluded from news reports” (2015:93).

This, Mellor notes, calls into question the construction of “the social and ethical as a nonconcern for science” (2015:93). Such reportage on CBW research tends towards public controversy, omitting the good work that has been done by these scientists. The narratives of CBW research are, on the whole, framed as nefarious, but there are, naturally, connections between these research projects and positive contributions to science and medicine. For example, Porton Down has a collection of (closely guarded) rare and deadly pathogens, and have been working on minimising the risk of the viruses appearing in the United Kingdom, and is now the United Kingdom’s leading research centre into viral inoculations (Pym, 2014). It was also first laboratory to receive the initial samples of Ebola in 1976, when the first outbreak was confirmed in Africa (Pym, 2014).

# Ex-servicemen used as human guinea pigs by MoD scientists ARE more likely to die prematurely, study finds

By DANIEL MARTIN FOR THE DAILY MAIL  
UPDATED: 18:46 GMT, 25 March 2009



 View comments

Ex-servicemen duped into joining chemical and germ warfare tests at a Ministry of Defence laboratory have died prematurely, scientists said today.

Campaigners have long claimed that 18,000 veterans used as human guinea pigs at the top-secret Porton Down facility between 1941 and 1989 suffered long-term health problems, including an elevated cancer risk.

Now a study has shown that they had a six per cent increased risk of death - but they were no more likely than the general population to have cancer.



**The Porton Down Medical Research Centre, pictured above in 1979, conducted experiments on servicemen**

Figure 12: *Mail Online*, 2009. Screenshot by author.

Unlike the Unit 731 photographs showing experimentation on human subjects, this photograph is somewhat ambiguous. Technologically speaking, the infrastructure needed for CBW development would be similar to that which is necessary for research into cures and prevention of medical diseases. For example, Roodeplaat Research Laboratory's premises became home to the Agriculture Research Council's Plant Protection Research Institute without major renovations.<sup>50</sup> Confidentiality concerns, especially in terms of governments researching protective measures, are also not necessarily an indicator of unethical or illegal research being done. However, this picture demonstrates once again how photographs can be reactivated and used for a variety of purposes, ones which may differ from the original intent.

In a far more innocuous and almost banal fashion than that displayed in Unit 731's records, research into testing done on volunteers at Porton Down was also documented, but in the sterile and controlled environment of what appears to be a hospital ward (Figure 13). A nurse is pictured attending to a volunteer lying on a bed, whilst a serviceman is shown filling in paperwork, being checked by a man in a white coat, presumably a doctor.

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<sup>50</sup> As mentioned previously, It is important to be cognisant of the fact that, whilst the dual logic of these premises provides optimal cover for covert projects, the 'secrecy' surrounding these laboratories does not necessarily preclude that the research being done was not positive.



Figure 13: Laboratory tests on volunteers from the armed forces at Porton Down, c.1972. (Imperial War Museums).

These photographs show the controlled and ‘scientific’ nature of these programmes. They appear to have been created to lend legitimacy to the projects, but have, in some cases, been appropriated contemporarily to suggest criminal intent as well as culpability for the death of servicemen, as suggested in the article from *Mail Online* (2009). The effects of these experiments, including chemical burns on the skin of ‘observers’, was also documented through photographs, many of which have been reproduced in Schmidt’s *Secret Science: A Century of Poison Warfare and Human Experiments* (2015), which contains an impressive 42 photographs, making it an important iteration of book-as-archive. Some of the photographs reproduced in Schmidt’s (2015) book document experiments done at Porton Down involving the application of potentially lethal gases to ‘observers’. The aim of this experiment was to determine how much of the substances was absorbed by the masks worn by test subjects (Figure 14), and the effects of such tests on the subjects (Figure 15).

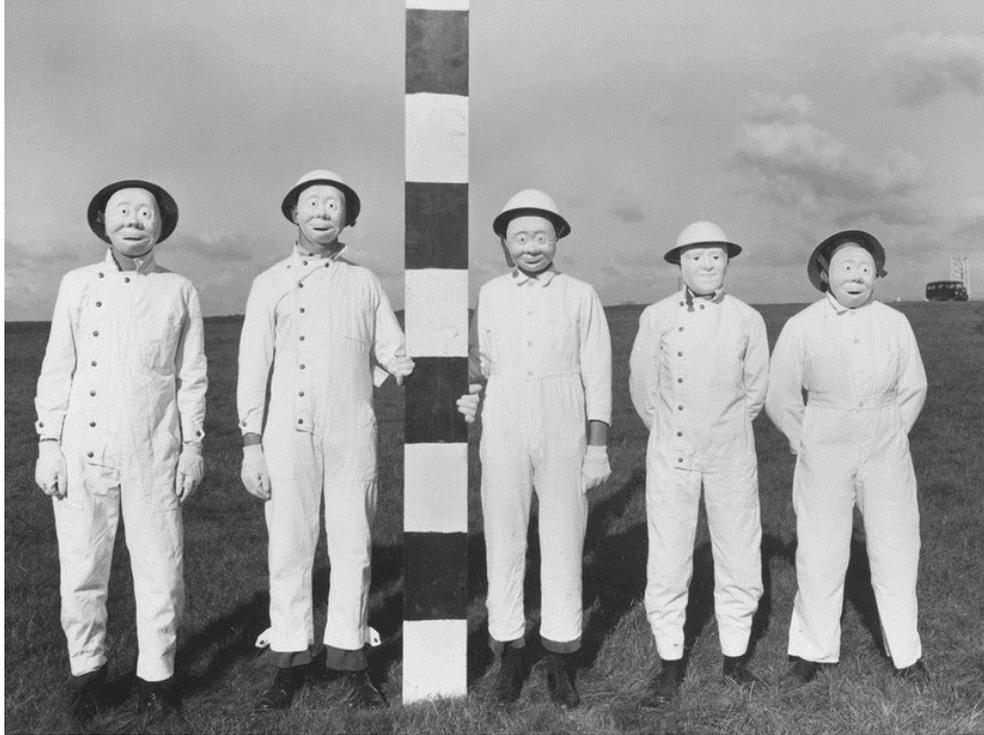


Figure 14: 'Observers' on field trial, c. 1965. (Schmidt, 2015:210).



Figure 15: Burns on the shoulders of Porton 'observer', 1953. (Schmidt, 2015:120).

Figure 15 shows the chemical burns sustained by an observer during one of Porton Down's test, but is not directly discussed in Schmidt's book. There is no indication given of what the toxins were to which this individual was exposed, or what ever happened to him. This photograph is referred to in the text as: "Experiments to study the effects of different types of warfare agents, including mustard agents, on the skin of servicemen continued long after the end of the war (see Image 12)" (Schmidt, 2015:120). This particular picture, then, is required to be understood as a document which stands alone, one which ostensibly speaks for itself, punctuating the text as a self-evident example (Peim, 2005:68-69) of Porton Down's research. Similar fleeting reference is made to Figure 14, where Schmidt (2015:210) notes that "at the height of the Korean War, research into respirators, portable resuscitators, biochemical methods of detection, and forms of treatment for nerve gas casualties accelerated on all levels (see Images 19 and 20), and this work was discussed at the tenth meeting of the Biology Committee of the CDBA in January 1954". The other photograph to which he refers here is what appears to be an advert for a civilian respirator (Figure 16).



Figure 16: Showing comfort of S.6 respirators, 9 May 1966. (Schmidt, 2015:211).

However, their research was not restricted to volunteers. The Ministry of Defence is also responsible for unleashing harmful bacteria, *Bacillus globigii*, on the British public using the London Underground on July 26 1963, in an attempt to simulate the spread of anthrax in a populated area (Schmidt, 2015:305). London Transport staff were given a small face powder box and, under the pretence of a “routine dust-sampling exercise” (Schmidt, 2015:304), and unwittingly released 30g of a mixture of the original face powder and *Bacillus globigii* spores.<sup>51</sup> The origins of the spores themselves is illustrative of the international network Schmidt described, as the substances were supplied by the United States of America’s CBW research programme’s facility, Fort Detrick.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> At the time it was believed that the *Bacillus globigii* spores were harmless, but they have since been classified as a pathogen (Schmidt, 2015:305). However, the test subjects were unknowingly exposed to the substances, making this kind of test ethically questionable.

<sup>52</sup> Owing to space constraints, I will not be discussing Fort Detrick in detail, but it must be noted that there was CBW research being undertaken in the United States. The USA’s Army Biological Warfare Laboratories were established in Maryland at Camp (later Fort) Detrick in 1943, under the approval of then-president Franklin Roosevelt. Fort Detrick’s scientists also used ‘volunteers’ from the army ranks, and Caitlin Dickerson (2015)

The production of these sanitised pictures from Porton Down, such as Figures 13, 14, and 16, attempt to whitewash activities in a way that the Japanese pictures do not. They appear to have a measure of authority involved, perhaps intended to reassure the public that the research done at the facility was being safely undertaken, that all volunteers were well-informed, and that everything was done for the good of the British public, thereby assuaging any concerns they may have had. Indeed, Schmidt (2015:458), with what can only be described as animosity and acrimony, describes how the creation of an *esprit de corps* was integral to the continued existence of the facility. He states that

[s]ince the early 1990s, there has been a steady stream of publications highlighting the apparently 'defensive' nature of Britain's chemical and biological warfare programme. In 2016, as a way of marking the centenary of its creation, Porton will undoubtedly celebrate its past 'achievements' in making Britain a safer place. It is likely to be a self-serving exercise in which the individual life experiences of tens of thousands of servicemen who underwent toxic tests for the good of their country will hardly figure at all (2015:460).

What Schmidt is describing above is not unlike the absence surrounding Project Coast. The presence of international projects has come in the form of photographed research and in the taking of regular staff photographs. These pictures can be understood as having originated in an institutional and political archive, akin to what Thompson (2008:178) would term a Private archive. The value of these pictures lies not in any 'evidentiary' role, but in

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states that at least 60 000 enlisted American soldiers were subjected to experimentation. Dickerson (2015) states that test subjects were often chosen for different experiments based on their race. For example, NPR's research indicates that Japanese-Americans were used to test the effects of mustard gas and other chemicals on Japanese troops, whilst white men were used as control groups (Dickerson, 2015). Scientists undertook similar research to the other international projects and, for example, in 1966, followed in the footsteps of their British counterparts, and unleashed *Bacillus globigii* in the New York Metro, also testing the spread of anthrax. However, with opposition mounting against USA's involvement in Vietnam, and the "growing realization that biological weapons could soon become the poor man's nuclear bomb", the Nixon administration abandoned offensive CBW research in 1969, becoming a signatory to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention in 1972 (Frischknecht, 2003:[s.p.]). This was an improvement on the 1925 Geneva Protocol which prohibited the use of CBW in international armed conflict. South Africa actioned accession to the Geneva Protocol on 24 May, 1930 with France being the depository. South Africa submitted reservations one and two, declaring that the treaty was only binding with regards to states which have ratified or acceded to the protocol, and ceases to be binding with regards to states, and their allies, which do not observe the prohibitions of the protocol. These reservations were withdrawn in communication dated 12 July, 1996, and notification on the instruction was given by the French government on 20 October, 1996 (UNODA).

memorialising the work being done, and indeed memorialising a sense of camaraderie, particularly in the reunion photographs (Figures 7, 8, and 9).

The victims have been systematically erased and forgotten through Porton Down's "[c]onstru[ct]ing of historical continuity [which was] achieved through all sorts of means, from newsletters, photographs, and films to brass plates, engraved objects, and memorials" (Schmidt, 2015:460). Not unlike the Japanese project, where received amnesty, many of Porton Down's senior role players were made Fellows of the Royal Society, whilst others were knighted (Schmidt, 2015:460). Their presence, and indeed their valorisation within institutional and national realms appear to have absolved them of any wrongdoings. Thus, within the context of Schmidt's (2015) book, these photographs appear to serve as illustrative within the text. Whilst these pictures do not provide any new information, nor are they directly discussed, they do add to the visual understanding of the project. Thus, if read in a Derridean conception of the supplement, these photographs have the ability, and indeed function to make the text more complete and are for that reason significant. They are also significant insofar as they signify a sort of objective scientific legitimacy: once again, if these were nefarious experiments, logic dictates that they would not have been photographed. Put differently: in their original context, they appear to have served a 'public relations' role, but in their reactivation in both Schmidt's (2015) book, as well as in articles such as the *Mail Online* (Martins, 2009), they are called upon these pictures to serve as incriminatory and evidential of unethical behaviour.

### **2.3.3 Soviet Union**

Operating on the other side of the Iron Curtain, the Soviet Union's Biopreparat was arguably the largest and most sophisticated biological warfare programme in history (Leitenberg & Zilinskas, 2012:51). Biopreparat was the second generation Soviet Union's CBW agency, established in 1974 (Leitenberg & Zilinskas, 2012:154),<sup>53</sup> and consisted of a dozen major complexes, comprising approximately 40 research and production facilities

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<sup>53</sup> The so-called first generation appears to have been established by the Soviets in reaction to "witnessing the devastation wrought by infectious diseases on both military formations and civilian populations during World War I and the Civil War" (Leitenberg & Zilinskas, 2014:44).

(Federation of American Scientists). Biopreparat's cover was a pharmaceutical-industrial department of Glavmikrobioprom, and received research directives and advisement from the top secret Interagency Scientific and Technical Council for Molecular Biology and Genetics (Leitenberg & Zilinskas, 2012:71;154). The programme spanned a network of top-secret laboratories, wherein both civilian and military scientists were tasked with developing different aspects of bioweapons (Leitenberg & Zilinskas, 2012:65-66) and, as such, Biopreparat was in direct contravention of the terms of the Biological Weapons Convention of 1972, to which the Soviet Union was bound.

Not many photographs are available from the Soviet programme. Milton Leitenberg and Raymond Zilinskas' (2012) book consists of several diagrams, and the 25 photographs that are available are very much of the same kind as those found in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002). These photographs include official portraits of various role players (Figure 17), a series of Google Earth images and maps of the facilities, contemporary photographs taken of the remains of testing laboratory complexes (taken from a distance) and interior pictures of fermenters (Figure 18), as well as pictures of Zilinskas standing outside a fallout bunker, and one of him posing with stainless steel containers which were used for storage of BW agents (Figure 19). These photographs of the author are belated, after the fact, and as such, we cannot know for certain that the stainless steel containers, for example, were indeed part of Biopreparat's inventory. They certainly supplement the text insofar as they enliven the (at times complicated and dull) text, giving readers something to look at and imagine, something that frames the facts for the readers.



Portrait of Vladimir A. Pasechnik taken about 1985. (Unknown Soviet photographer.)



Portrait of Valentin I. Yerstigneer taken in 2001. (Anonymous photographer.)



Portrait of Yury A. Ovchinnikov taken approximately 1984. (Unknown Soviet photographer.)

Figure 17: Series of portraits of three role players in the Soviet CBW research programmes. (Leitenberg & Zilinskas, 2012:PS-1).



Photograph taken in 1995 showing three SNOB facilities: storage bunkers in foreground, Building 211 behind bunkers, and Building 221 in background. (Photographer: Andrew C. Weber.)



Photograph of SNOB's Building 221 interior with a row of 20,000 liter fermenters. (Photographer: Andrew C. Weber.)

Figure 18: Images of Soviet research facilities. (Leitenberg & Zilinskas, 2012:PS-11).



Figure 19: Zilinkas poses next to TR-250 and TR-50 stainless steel containers outside a storage bunker at the Soviet Scientific Experimental and Production Base (SNOPB), 2000. (Leitenberg & Zilinkas, 2012:PS-2).



Figure 20: Group photograph of 63 scientists who had just received awards for their contributions to the field of molecular biology, 16 July, 1981. (Leitenberg & Zilinkas, 2012:PS-14).

Once again, there is a group photograph commemorating scientists who received awards for their contribution to science in the Soviet programme (Figure 20). Figure 21 shows the kind of banal photographs found on websites relating to the Soviet research. In general, these kinds of photographs also appear to be officially sanctioned and, again, seemingly taken with the permission of the scientists.



Figure 21: Scientists of the Soviet anti-plague system, date unknown.  
(Centre for Nonproliferation Studies).

The photographs discussed above have come to serve, in their contemporary activations, as documents which memorialise the criminality and cruelty perpetuated by these projects, but also to add to the visual economy and visual history of both CBW research as well as bureaucratic systems.

Of the photographs discussed above, the Japanese photographs appear to have been created for the purposes of propaganda – perhaps a means to make their research legitimate to their nation in the face of the Western threats. In modern activations, these pictures appear to serve as reminders of criminality and cruelty perpetuated by these kinds of projects. However, they also add an element of evil to the visual economy and visual history of both bureaucratic systems, as well as CBW research more broadly. Conversely, photographs such as those from Porton Down (and indeed those from Fort Detrick) served to legitimise their research, but not from the perspective of propaganda: they served, perhaps, a more banal bureaucratic role when created, but have now come to be used as suggestive, but not directly evidential, of unethical practices.

Much like Barthes' winter garden photograph (although we know his through his written explanation of it), we are able to *imagine* what the photographs ought to have looked like, thus informing our expectations: our knowledge of the South African programme draws from these various visual economies, even if not consciously. Thus, the photographs, such as they are, that I discuss in the following sections are some of the only photographs which the public are able to see in order to visualise, and understand, Project Coast.

### 2.3.5 South Africa

South Africa was bound by the same restrictions as other international signatories to the Biological Weapons Convention in 1972.<sup>54</sup> Despite this, PW Botha ordered the SADF to research CBW in 1981 (Purkitt & Burgess, 2005:96; Burger & Gould, 2002:14). Shortly thereafter,<sup>55</sup> the head of the SADF's South African Medical Service (SAMS), incumbent Surgeon General, Lieutenant-General Nicol Nieuwoudt, hired a 31 year-old newly qualified physician, Wouter Basson. Nieuwoudt appears to have had great plans for this young doctor. Basson had joined the Permanent Force in 1975, and was encouraged by Nieuwoudt to specialise in internal medicine in 1977 (Burger & Gould, 2002:17). At the beginning of 1981, Basson attended a junior staff officer's course, arranged by Nieuwoudt, and by March of 1981, he was tasked with establishing the SADF's CBW programme, Project Coast (Burger & Gould, 2002:17).

Little was known about South Africa's CBW capabilities before the TRC began its investigation in 1998. As stated earlier, in 1981 PW Botha instructed that South African scientists were to begin research and development into defensive and offensive CBW agents for operational use in the SADF under the code name Project Coast. Even after years of investigation and millions of rands' worth of legal proceedings, a clear picture of what exactly Project Coast was has yet to come to light. Secrecy was central to Project Coast, and although a surprising number of documents survived the various archival purges, there is a conspicuous lack of photographs pertaining directly to the project. Whilst contemporary pictures of the various places/spaces and role players, akin to those from international programmes, do exist, there are very few photographs captured during the time of the project. Thus, envisioning what the project would have looked like falls largely into the imaginary realm.

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<sup>54</sup> Designed to supplement the 1925 Geneva Protocol, the Convention of the Prohibition of Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction – usually referred to as the Biological Weapons Convention – was signed in 1972. South Africa was one of 109 signatories. As of March 2015, 173 parties have signed.

<sup>55</sup> Burger and Gould state that his appointment has no definitive date available (2002:47).

To an extent, South Africa is unique in this regard. Many of the international programmes were actively documenting their research, and it is these photographs that have laid the (mostly unsuccessful) burden of proof upon the perpetrators in their contemporary uses. It is entirely possible that similar photographs *were* taken by South African researchers and have not (yet) found their way into the public sphere, but, as demonstrated with the photographs from the international programmes discussed above, it is unlikely that such photographs would have made much impact on the prosecution of perpetrators.

Much of what we know about Project Coast rests on Basson's testimony. The wholesale mass destruction of documents, what Jacob Dlamini describes as the "archival purge" (2014:177), and what Terry Bell and Dumisa Ntsebeza provocatively call South Africa's "paper Auschwitz" (2003:9), undoubtedly took with it into the literal flames South Africa's most sordid secrets. In 1993, over a period of six months, the National Intelligence Service (NIS) alone destroyed approximately 44 tonnes of documents, including microfilms, files, audiotapes, and computer disks, with the military and the Security branch following suit in 1989 (Dlamini, 2014:117-118). Basson's SADF file, too, was purged, and what it contained in its complete state can only be imagined. When criminal investigators finally gained access to Basson's SADF file, after two years of failed attempts to access it, a file which was supposed to detail his 19-year career was left with a mere 15 sheets of paper, mostly relating to leave applications (Burger & Gould, 2002:216).

Following the systematic mass destruction of documents, what has survived has become our only window into what Project Coast was, and the reach which this programme had. As such, the discussion now moves towards examining what survived. By drawing on Thompson's (2008:176) three archival taxonomies, I discuss two Public archives: firstly, I discuss a selection of newspaper articles with photographs from local and international news sources, most of which appeared during Basson's TRC hearings and his criminal trial. Secondly, I discuss *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), a publication which offers a narrative account of Basson's criminal trial and Project Coast. The 12-chapter book contains 31 photographs, some sourced from the news media and several others provided to the authors by Jan Lourens and Charles van Remoortere. The book also contains pages with three reproductions of documents, one of which is the *Verkope* (Sales list), a

document described by Burger and Gould as the “Rosetta Stone of the RRL records” (2002:32).<sup>56</sup>

Strictly speaking, there are no photographs of Project Coast that would fall into the Judicial category. There are no known staff photographs, nor are there photographs of research being carried out, as seen with other programmes. There were, however, photographs used in the judicial capacity, as alluded to in Burger and Gould’s (2002) detailing of Basson’s criminal trial. During the course of the trial, photographs were used to identify perpetrators; reference is made to an entire photo album produced at the scene of a murder; and there was a discussion about photographs ostensibly taken by Basson himself. These photographs have, to the best of my knowledge, not been released or made available publically. However, textual references to these photographs being used as evidentiary and incriminating are made in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002). Although not numbering many or rich in description, the mentions made give readers an idea of what these photographs may have looked like:

- An official police docket and a photograph album, compiled at the scene of Orlando Cristina’s murder,<sup>57</sup> was found in the trunks retrieved from Sam Bosch’s house after Basson’s arrest in 1997 (Burger & Gould, 2002:49-50). These photographs were crucial to the charges of chemical interrogation of Cristina’s murderer, Boaventura Bomba, in which Basson was implicated. Basson and the witnesses named in the report deny knowledge of the documents and photographs (Burger & Gould, 2002:49-50).
- Surgeon General Niel Knobel mentions seeing photographs of victims of a chemical attack in Iran, which were taken by Basson (Burger & Gould, 2002:97). Basson states that he took these photographs in a village named ‘Velapjar’ whilst on a fact-

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<sup>56</sup> The other two documents in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger and Gould, 2002:221-222) are not directly related to Project Coast, but the authors state that the two official documents suggest that the first use of toxins in battle was by Rhodesian security forces in the late 1970s. Dated 25 August and 28 November respectively, the documents are reports between the Officer in Charge of Operations to the Officer Commanding Special Branch Headquarters and the Director-General Central Intelligence Organisation, and they detail the distribution of supplies, and the number of ‘terrorists’ killed.

<sup>57</sup> Cristina was commander-in-chief of RENAMO, and was murdered at Fontana, a SADF farm north of Pretoria (Potgieter, 2007:10).

finding mission in Iran (Burger & Gould, 2002:153).<sup>58</sup> Prosecutors confronted this assertion, stating that there were no records of chemical attacks against any Kurdish villages in January or February, the time that Basson states he was there, and there is, in fact, no record of a village named ‘Velapjar’ (Burger & Gould, 2002:153). The prosecution argued that the photographs were “almost certainly among those released by the United Nations following the well-documented chemical attack on the town of Halabja in March 1988” (Burger & Gould, 2002:194). In the ruling, Judge Hartzenberg accepted “the unrecorded attack on Valapjar ... as fact” (Burger & Gould, 2002:194).<sup>59</sup>

- Dr André Immelman<sup>60</sup> identified three Security Police officers using photographs shown to him in court (Burger & Gould, 2002:37); Charles Zeelie identified one of the same three men in the same photograph as men to whom toxins were delivered, by Immelman, from Roodeplaat Research Laboratory. Zeelie was unable to identify all of them because Basson’s advocate, Jaap Cilliers, intervened (Burger & Gould, 2002:211).<sup>61</sup>
- Danie Phaal joined the Special Forces towards the end of the 1980s, and was tasked with issuing false identity documents to agents on covert operations, supplying untraceable vehicles to the SADF, as well as carrying out “electronic and photographic surveillance and investigating SADF members ... [who] were considered a threat to clandestine operations” (Burger & Gould, 2002:66). No further mention is made to photographs produced by a man whose occupation’s primary functions included taking photographs.

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<sup>58</sup> This trip was sanctioned, Basson said, by Jan Marsk of the United Nations, and Basson was travelling with Aubin Heyndrickx, a discredited Belgian toxicologist (Burger & Gould, 2002:27). Heyndrickx was responsible for a series of reports detailing the use of CBW weapons against UNITA troops in Angola (Burger & Gould, 2002:27).

<sup>59</sup> There are two conflicting spellings of the name in Burger and Gould’s book: Velapjar (2002:153), and Valapjar (2002:194).

<sup>60</sup> Immelman, a veterinarian, was recruited by Basson from the Medical Research Council, and headed the chemical and pharmacological department at RRL (Burger & Gould, 2002:30-31).

<sup>61</sup> Many of the witnesses called were afforded anonymity: by court order, former CCB agents, SAAF pilots, and agents serving in the National Intelligence and Military Intelligence agencies were protected from being identified or photographed (Burger & Gould, 2002:211).

It would be conjecture to argue whether or not these photographs would have served any purpose beyond being an addendum, had they been included in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002). Indeed, in court these photographs were not used as evidence as much as they were used as explanatory. However, their absence, for whatever reason, is noteworthy. In the absence of these Judicial-type photographs, the Private archive is called upon to serve in and populate the Public archive. Therefore, photographs which fall under the Private and Public form the basis of this chapter.

In order to discuss the work of the photographs in the Public archive, or book-as- archive, I have grouped them loosely into three categories: profile photographs of people involved; photographs of social or professional occasions; and photographs of places/spaces. I have not used these categories for the news media pictures because, as I will demonstrate, profile photographs account for the vast majority of the pictures used in the news media. By profile photographs, I mean just that: photographs that are used to show who a person is. In *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), 13 profile photographs are reproduced. Photographs of social and professional occasions account for most of the pictures that have originated from the Private archives, and these nine pictures include commemorative photographs taken by Lourens and Van Remoortere. Photographs of spaces/places number six in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), and show the various spaces that the project 'occupied', or can be thought of as having existed in, such as the Jetstar, Merton House and, of course, RRL's laboratory. As I will show, Project Coast can be best described as an enigma, with very little to see, unlike the cases of the international programmes. The photographs of Project Coast that *do* exist dance on the outskirts of direct evidence, and flirt directly with implication.<sup>62</sup>

Photographs in the media, and pictures such as those of dinners with high-profile businessmen and personal accountants, as reproduced in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), do not directly implicate the people involved in any wrongdoing. When contextualised by journalists, researchers, historians, and authors, however, the

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<sup>62</sup> This is perhaps indicative of photography's "dual potentialities: between positivism and fantasy, between evidence and enigma, between truth-claims and lies 'that tell a truth', and between photographs that denote and those that connote" (Hayes *et al*, 2002:133)

photographs are able to take on new meanings. In *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), many of the pictures are left uncontextualised,<sup>63</sup> as I discuss below, and it is thus, once again, only by informed speculation that we can understand the manner in which the pictures complicate a public recollection of the subjects and the circumstances which the photographs document.

The following section will give a broad overview of the chronology of events surrounding the uncovering of Project Coast. The sequence of events overlap, so in the interest of clarity, I will attempt to outline Basson's timeline in two sections: his TRC appearance and his criminal trial, but it must be noted that the story of Project Coast forms an intricate matrix, and, owing to space constraints, I have been forced to leave out much of the finer details. The study will then move to a discussion of the pictures.

## 2.4 Exposing Project Coast

The uncovering of South Africa's sordid secrets began to play out in public when, on 18 October, 1989, on the eve of his execution, former policeman and death row inmate, Butana Almond Nofomela, confessed to having belonged to a Security Police death-squad based outside of Pretoria on a farm named Vlakplaas, a revelation which secured for him a last-minute stay of execution. With the confirmation of Nofomela's confession from his commanding officer, Dirk Coetzee, a "lid was lifted on a can of worms so foetid that no one in apartheid's corridors of power could escape the stench" (Burger & Gould, 2002:2). PW Botha's successor as state president, FW de Klerk, hastily convened three successive commissions in order to investigate and attempt to redeem the South African security forces, including the Kahn Commission in 1989,<sup>64</sup> the Harms Commission in 1990, and the Goldstone Commission in 1992.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Gould (2015/10/03) said that they only had minimal information regarding when and where the photographs were taken, and thus could not give detailed captions.

<sup>64</sup> In July of 1989, De Klerk announced the Kahn Commission, mandated with cancelling covert actions where possible. The commission was to inquire into projects that were still ongoing, and those which were brought to the commission's attention via state departments: significantly, Project Coast was not one of the programmes under investigation, as De Klerk had been assured by Knobel and Basson that the project was purely a

However, the unravelling of Project Coast's existence began following the arrest of Dr Wouter Basson. On January 29, 1997, following a tip-off from the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Basson was arrested in a sting operation in Pretoria's picturesque Magnolia Dell park. The CIA had warned South African authorities that Basson intended to leave the country (Bateman, 1998:1), and his defection would be a cause of concern for non-proliferation bodies; they were aware that Basson knew too much. The sting operation, set up by the Narcotics Bureau, involved a drug dealer turned police informant, Grant Wentzel. Wentzel, a commodities broker and Basson's former business partner,<sup>66</sup> was wired and, with a tape recorder strapped to his leg, lead Basson straight into the trap.

Upon his arrest, the military man and respected physician had with him 1040 ecstasy tablets (Burger & Gould, 2002:5), trunks containing hundreds of secret documents pertaining to Project Coast, as well as lists of murder weapons and contacts from around the world (Sing, 2008:5). Basson was apprehended after attempting to flee, later stating that he ran because he believed it was the Israeli secret service, Mossad, attempting to kill him. Investigators had started circling long before Basson's arrested, and by the time there were already three major investigations centring on him. The Office for Serious Economic Offences (OSEO) began investigating Basson's business concerns in 1993, a full four years before his arrest. The audit lasted seven years (Burger & Gould, 2002:90) and, at the same time, the National Intelligence Agency and the Gauteng Attorney-General's Special Investigation Team were also investigating him (Burger & Gould, 2002:4).

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defensive programme (Purkitt & Burgess, 2005:148). In August of 1992, the Kahn Commission made recommendations which resulted in the severing of secret funding for covert projects – Project Coast was not amongst them (Burger & Gould, 2002:3).

<sup>65</sup> Following the Kahn Commission, De Klerk appointed the Harms Commission in 1990 to probe the Security Police's covert unit that had operated from Vlakplaas, as well as the Civil Cooperation Bureau – the SADF's death squad. The Harms Commission was followed by the Goldstone Commission, an "ongoing commission of inquiry with an open-ended brief" (Burger & Gould, 2002:3). In 1992, the Goldstone Commission raided a front company which had hid the Directorate Covert Collection, part of Military Intelligence (Burger & Gould, 2002:3). However, by the time of this raid, a two-year investigation by the National Intelligence Service had already been in process, a top-secret inquiry which De Klerk launched to investigate "burgeoning allegations that a Third Force made up of elements of the security forces" (Burger & Gould, 2002:3) had been responsible for much of the ongoing turmoil and violence against South Africans.

<sup>66</sup> Wentzel had been arrested earlier in January 1997 for the sale of 2000 ecstasy tablets (Pretorius, 1999).

Some 3 years prior to his arrest, Basson had retired from the SADF. His 19-year career in the SADF had ended in March, 1993, when he was placed on early retirement after having “been fired in a military purge by President FW de Klerk”, but he was almost immediately rehired under a 12-month contract to “‘tie up loose ends’ and shut down Project Coast” (Burger & Gould, 2002:81).

Basson’s impressive rise within the SADF took only about six years. His career began with graduating from the University of Pretoria and serving his one-year internship at HF Verwoerd Hospital (now Steve Biko Academic Hospital)<sup>67</sup> by 1974, after which he had intended to specialise in gynaecology at England’s Middlesex Hospital (Burger & Gould, 2002:2). His aspirations were dashed by compulsory military service, and he joined the SADF on 2 January, 1975. The young doctor substituted gynaecology with internal medicine and, by 1980, he was a qualified physician with a master’s degree in physiology and physiological chemistry with the rank of lieutenant-colonel. At this time, he is believed to have been serving as the personal doctor to PW. Botha, a claim that Basson refuted in his TRC testimony (Department of Justice, 1998).<sup>68</sup>

Basson, under Nieuwoudt’s command, established and headed a Special Operations unit. He and his team of 8 doctors, all with Special Forces training, formed a specialist medical unit tasked with supporting clandestine operations within Special Forces, the Parachute Division,<sup>69</sup> the South African Police, as well as the NIS in the early 1980s (Gould & Folb, 2002:43, 60; Sverdloff, 2008:38).<sup>70</sup> When Niel Knobel became Surgeon General in 1988,

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<sup>67</sup> The Steve Biko Academic Hospital is the main teaching hospital of the University of Pretoria. The name has changed several times over the years: in 1932, when it was first occupied, it was known as Pretoria General Hospital; the name changed in 1967 to HF Verwoerd, in honour of South Africa’s seventh Prime Minister (holding office during the formation of the Republic of South Africa in 1961). Verwoerd was a psychology and sociology professor, notably having been appointed as professor of Applied Psychology at Stellenbosch University when he was just 26. He is generally regarded as the architect of the racist policies of the apartheid government. The name of the hospital was changed once again in 1997 to Pretoria Academic Hospital, and finally, in 2008, to Steve Biko Academic in honour of anti-apartheid activist and founding member of the Black Consciousness Movement.

<sup>68</sup> Several authors have used this factoid in their texts, including: Burger and Gould (2002:22); Coen and Nadler (2009:152); Baldwin-Ragaven, London & De Gruchy (1999:125); Meiring (1999:351).

<sup>69</sup> These units were supporting UNITA (the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola).

<sup>70</sup> The contemporary description of 7 Medical Battalion reads: “Its mission is to prepare and provide a special military health service to specific security force elements and other approved clients. This includes combat-

the Special Operations Unit became known as 7 Medical Battalion Group, and the unit was moved from the command of the Special Forces, to the Surgeon General's command (Burger & Gould, 2002:47). Although the unit was now under SAMS, the group continued to support the Special Forces in various ways, resulting in the line between 7 Medical Battalion and the covert operations becoming ever hazier (Burger & Gould, 2002:47). Witnesses in Basson's criminal trial gave testimony suggesting that some SADF units had utilised chemical substances during interrogations, the origins of which seem to have been Basson via the SADF/Project Coast front company, RRL, which was well outside of the bounds of their mandate to supply medical support to the SADF (Burger & Gould, 2002:47-48).<sup>71</sup> The toxins have been linked to the poisoning of Reverend Frank Chikane, as well as the attempted poisoning of the water supply to a South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) refugee camp shortly before Namibia's 1989 pre-independence election (Burger & Gould, 2002:36).<sup>72</sup>

Following his drug possession arrest, Basson was released on bail only to be arrested again on 22 October, 1997, this time by the Office for Serious Economic Offences who had begun formulating the first charges of fraud that he would face (Burger & Gould, 2002:6). As mentioned, at the time of Basson's initial arrest, investigators had discovered steel trunks containing top secret documents detailing aspects of Project Coast. Another two locked blue steel trunks were confiscated the following day from the home of Basson's associate, Samuel Bosch.<sup>73</sup> These "veritable treasure troves" contained thousands of pages of secret military papers and documents pertaining to Project Coast (Burger &

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ready medical personnel in support of the parachute forces of the SANDF, namely the Special Forces Brigade and 44 Parachute Regiment" (Sverdloff, 2008:38).

<sup>71</sup> Dr Philip Meyer provided witness testimony that indicates Basson was involved in a chemical interrogation with another 7 Medical Battalion member, Dr Deon Erasmus (Burger & Gould, 2002:48). Meyer had been working at 1 Military Hospital when he was ordered to accompany Basson and Erasmus to Ward 15, a closed security ward (Burger & Gould, 2002:48). Erasmus claims that he witnessed Basson and Erasmus chemically interrogate an unnamed man with ANC connections over a two-day period (Burger & Gould, 2002:48).

<sup>72</sup> During Basson's criminal trial, former CCB operator Pieter Botes testified that he was given two vials of cholera, and was instructed to poison the water supply of the SWAPO camp, situated outside of Windhoek. However, because the water was chlorinated, the contaminant had no effect (Burger & Gould, 2002:36).

<sup>73</sup> The contents of one trunk included: documents pertaining to various SADF activities, original copies of correspondence between Basson and Knobel, scientific reports on certain substances, the *Verkope* (Sales list), several passports and foreign currency, Basson's father's cremation certificate, Annette Versluis' passport, a miniature shield ostensibly awarded to Basson for "meritorious service", personal photographs and a box with several small vials and mini bottles of vodka and gin (ISSAFRICA).

Gould, 2002:5),<sup>74</sup> and with their discovery began the unravelling of a project so secret that few people within the SADF even knew of its existence.

Owing to South Africa's signatory status in various international treaties that govern the development and stockpiling of CBW weapons and weapons of mass destruction, the country is bound not to disclose information on the grounds of non-proliferation concerns, and many of the highly sensitive documents discovered in Basson's trunks will never be released to the public.<sup>75</sup> In fact, these documents should not have existed at all: they were supposed to have been destroyed following their capture onto 16 compact discs, stored in a vault in the Surgeon General's office, and only accessible by presidential order (Burger & Gould, 2002:6).

Luckily, many of these documents have made their way into the public realm after their use in the TRC hearings. The TRC's investigation into the SADF, which commenced in 1996, determined that it was likely that the SADF had used lethal toxins against ANC activists. In January of 1998, the TRC began investigating Project Coast, which resulted in a hearing in June of that year. Whilst applications for amnesty were made by many, Basson refused to apply. He attempted to use his arrests and his upcoming criminal trial as leverage to avoid appearing before the TRC, as a result of which he was declared in contempt of a TRC citation, and, after a lengthy legal battle, his lawyers eventually exhausted the appeals process (Burgess & Purkitt, 2001:69). Basson's application to the Supreme Court, arguing that he not be forced to appear before the TRC – citing his constitutional right not to incriminate himself – was turned down on 27 July 1998 (Burgess & Purkitt, 2001:69).

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<sup>74</sup> These documents were meant to be destroyed after details of Project Coast were captured on 16 compact discs stored in a vault at the Surgeon General's office. These discs were only accessible via presidential order (Burger & Gould, 2012:23). The names of personnel from the front companies, details of experiments and sub-projects were found later in Trunk 3, which included a full list of all Delta G Scientific personnel, while the second trunk contained a list of Roodeplaat Research Laboratories personnel, as well as the names of various Armscor and Protechnik employees. The trunks also contained documents detailing the weaponisation of certain substances.

<sup>75</sup> Countless documents also 'went missing'. Valuable fragments in the tapestry of Project Coast's story (and indeed the matrix of research undertaken by the TRC) were lost when the NIA took charge of 34 boxes and two files of 'sensitive materials' that had arisen from research done by the TRC, 13 of which contained transcripts of the TRC hearings into Project Coast (Bell, 2002).

Basson was called before the TRC to testify on 31 July 1998, the final day of the TRC's mandated operation.

Following Basson's TRC appearance, his criminal trial began a year later in the Pretoria High Court on 4 October 1999. Dr Death, so dubbed by the South African media, was facing 67 charges, ranging from possession of illegal substances, drug trafficking, embezzlement and fraud, theft, as well as murder and conspiracy to commit murder.

One week later, on 11 October 1999, Judge Willie Hartzenberg dismissed allegations of Basson's involvement in chemical interrogations, as well as his involvement in the supply of chemicals to SADF forces. Indeed, before the trial had even begun, Hartzenberg dismissed six charges, including four charges of murder, and the alleged involvement in the death of 200 SWAPO detainees during Operation Duel. Hartzenberg cited that Basson could not be charged on this count owing to the blanket amnesty afforded to all members of the security forces who had served in the South-West Africa area during the war. On June 7, 1989, SWA/Namibia's administrator-general, Louis Pienaar, had, in "an extraordinary *Official Gazette*, No. 5725", proclaimed amnesty for those involved in the area, a proclamation which came "two months after all security forces in the disputed territory had been confined to barracks, and just five months before the election that led to Namibia's independence" (Burger & Gould, 2002:190-191). This proclamation had never been publically disclosed before Basson's criminal trial.<sup>76</sup> In February of 2000, Anton Ackermann demanded that Judge Willie Hartzenberg recuse himself on the grounds that he was biased in favour of Basson, and that he "prejudged the case" (*Mail & Guardian*, 2003). Hartzenberg had "stated in court that he was 'really bored' with the prosecution's examination of bank records that demonstrated Basson's alleged fraud" (Purkitt & Burgess, 2005:172). Hartzenberg refused to recuse himself.

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<sup>76</sup> The proclamation states: "No criminal procedures may be instituted or continued following the date of this proclamation in any law court against any person...in respect of a crime committed by such person at any time prior to the date mentioned, in the territory or elsewhere," and covers all members of the SA Police, SWA Police, SADF and SWA Territorial Force who 'in the execution of their duties and activities in the territory committed an act or neglected to commit an act which represents a crime' (Burger & Gould, 2002:191).

During a trial that lasted for 30 months, the prosecution brought before the court the “evidence of 153 state witnesses and thousands of pages of supporting documents” (Burger & Gould, 2002:1), and the defence brought only one witness – Basson himself. He gave evidence for 40 days, during which he detailed how he was given free rein by the South African government, with virtually no oversight from his superiors. Basson’s criminal trial ended on 22 April 2002. Hartzenberg acquitted Basson of all charges brought before him. Appeals by state prosecution were denied when the South African Court of Appeals refused to overturn the acquittal.

Basson’s trial served to highlight the corruption of the legal system and to demonstrate how, from the beginning and right to the end, secrecy and a shared sense of purpose kept many of those involved safely within the fold. It would appear that Project Coast’s insistence on secrecy, document destruction, and not allowing photographs to enter the public realm were what saved many from being found guilty of any charges which were brought forth.

However, there were documents that did enter the public realm following their use in the TRC and in Basson’s criminal trial, including the infamous *Verkope* (Sales list) compiled by Dr André Immelman, head of research at RRL (Figures 15 & 16). The list, described by Chandré Gould as the “Rosetta Stone for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission” (Malan, 2014) is a four-column stock sheet which details items that were made available to the Security Police, as well as “members of the sinister Special Forces hit squad, the Civil Cooperation Bureau” (Burger & Gould, 2002:33).

This list was used in the TRC’s questioning of Basson, and was used as an exhibit in Basson’s criminal trial. The document contains details of toxins and hazardous items allegedly supplied by Immelman to various people with whom he came into contact via Basson. The list “provides some insight into the ghastly products dreamed up at RRL” (Burger & Gould, 2002:32).<sup>77</sup> These lethal toxins were laced into toiletries, cigarettes,

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<sup>77</sup> During Basson’s criminal trial, Professor Gerbus Muller, a clinical toxicologist, told the court that of the 24 items included on the list, “at least eight were extremely poisonous. One, botulinum, is the most dangerous toxin known to man. It kills by respiratory arrest and is one million times more poisonous than arsenic”, whilst

orange juice, alcoholic drinks (with choices between whiskey and beer impregnated with different toxins), and chocolates (available in either coffee or peppermint). Also on offer in the inventory was mamba venom, a baboon foetus, and a curious line item of “snakes”.

Burger and Gould make direct reference to the list, though only to say that it appears on page 34 and 35, and the list itself is reproduced and embedded within the text (unlike the photographs which are in a section in the middle, on unnumbered pages). Within this context, the textual document could be read as a kind of photograph – the document has been preserved here as a spatial representation, and stands in relation to the text as an evidentiary document, indexical, supporting and supplementing the text’s description. The authors dedicate an entire chapter, titled “Toxins in Little Bottles”,<sup>78</sup> to discussing the development and use of some of the items on the list by the SADF, the Special Forces’ hit squad, the Civil Cooperation Bureau (CCB), as well as the Security Police (2002:28-44).

As a material trace of the research done, history is what has allowed this document, through its activation in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), in the criminal trial, and indeed in this very study, to become a monument. Michel Foucault argues that “[i]n that area where, in the past, history deciphered the traces left by men, it now deploys a mass of elements that have to be grouped, made relevant, placed in relation to one another to form totalities” (2002:8). As the Rosetta Stone to RRL (and by extension, Project Coast), the totalities of history circle around this picture/document. However, if this picture/document is removed from the context of the supporting text, laden with orientating information and specialist knowledge, the list would once again be considered a textual document. As such, this document, within *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) functions as a picture, but within AL2922, where the document can also be found, it appears to be merely another document within reams and reams of documents.

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others, such as Paraquat, is so toxic that, even with a low dose, the expected mortality rate is 100 percent (Burger & Gould, 2002:32-33).

<sup>78</sup> This was a reference to former senior microbiologist at RRL, Dr Mike Odendaal, saying that all “they” wanted, said Odendaal, was ‘toxins in little bottles’” (Burger & Gould, 2002:37).

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VERKOPE

DATUM GELEWER	STOF	VOLUME	PRYS
19.03.89 SK	Phensiklidien Thallium asetaat	1 x 500mg 50g	Teruggebr
23.03.89 SK	Phensiklidien	5 x 100mg	
04.04.89 C	Aldicarb - Lemoensap	6 x 200mg	
04.04.89 C	Asied - Whisky	3 x 1,5g	
04.04.89 C	Paraoxon	10x 2ml	
07.04.89 C	Vit D	2gr	
15.05.89 C	Vit D	2gr	R300,00
15.05.89 C	Katharidien	70mg	R150,00
15.05.89 C	10ml Spuite	50	
16.05.89 C	Naalde 15Gx10mm	24	R18,00
16.05.89 C	Naalde 17Gx7,5mm	7	R7,00
19.05.89 C	Thallium asetaat	1g	
30.05.89	Fosfied tablette	30	
09.06.89	Spore en Brief	1	
20.06.89 K	Kapsules NaCN	50	
21.06.89	Bierblik Bot	3	
21.06.89	Bierblik Thallium	3	
21.06.89	Bottel bier Bot	1	
21.06.89	Bottel bier Thallium	2	
22.06.89 K	Suiker en Salmonella	200gr	
27.06.89 C	Wiskey en Paraquat	1x75ml	
20.07.89 K	Hg-sianied	4gr	
27.07.89 K	Bobbejaan foetus	1	

Figure 22: Verkope (Sales list). (Burger &amp; Gould, 2002:34).

600

VERKOPE

DATUM GELEWER	STOF	VOLUME	PRYS
04.08.89	K Vibrio cholera	16 bottels	
10.08.89	K Asied 4xgr	Kapsule sianied 7	
11.08.89	C Sigarette B anthracis	5	
	C Koffie sjokolade B anthracis	5	
	C Koffie sjokolade Botulinum	5	
	C Peppermint sjokolade Aldikarb	3	
	C Peppermint sjokolade Brodifakum	2	
	C Peppermint sjokolade Katharidien	3	
	C Peppermint sjokolade Sianied	3	
16.08.89	K Vibrio cholera	6 bottels	
16.08.89	K Kapsules Propan NaCN	7	
18.08.89	K Formalien en Piridien-maatde	50ml x 30	
	Swabbe 10cm x no 16	12	
05.09.89	K Kantharidien - poeier in sakkie	100mg	→ ?
08.09.89	K Metanol	3-30ml	?
	C Vibrio cholera	10 bottels	
08.09.89	K Slange	2	
	X Mamba toksien	1	dry sub?
13.09.89	K Digoksien	5 mg	?
18.09.89	C Whiskey 50ml + colchicine	75mg	
6.10.89	K B.melitensis c	1 x 50	
	S.typhimurium in deodorant	1	
11.10.89	K Kulture vanaf briewe	2	

- 2 -

VERKOPE

6.000

DATUM GELEWER	STOF	VOLUME	PRYS
21.10.89	K B.melitensis c		
	S.typhimurium in deodorant	1	

Figure 23: Verkope (Sales list). (Burger &amp; Gould, 2002:35).

However, it is only through the text's context that we can infer crucial elements of the picture/document, such as that the initials written in the left column – C and K – belong to operatives with the code names Chris and Koos. The initial JK, on the other hand, belongs to Johnny Koortzen, a man mentioned only once in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger and Gould, 2002:39) as the one who took over control of Systems Research & Developments (SRD)<sup>79</sup> from Jan Lourens. However, in Gould and Folb's text, Koortzen is described as a psychologist, and one of the men to whom Immelman was supplying items from the list (2002:86).<sup>80</sup> This once again demonstrates how, when readers not necessarily given enough information, are left to infer what worth the document as a whole, or elements thereof, may hold within the text.

Of the toxins included on this list, some were loaded into screwdrivers, umbrellas, and walking sticks which could be used to assassinate targets (Burger & Gould, 2002:33). These 'special applicators' are now housed at Freedom Park, donated by the National Prosecuting Agency. They were designed by Lourens,<sup>81</sup> and are some of the only physical artefacts that remain from Project Coast. These objects come closer to being 'evidence' than any other documents or photographs to be discussed, because they stand as proof that sinister weapons were not only being designed, but were actually manufactured. These objects were photographed and reproduced in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), as seen in Figure 24, as well as in the news media, such Figure 25 from *Cape Times* (9 June 1998:1).

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<sup>79</sup> Lourens suggested to Philip Mijburgh that the defensive chemical arm of Delta G be separated, and that Lourens himself should head the new company. At the end of 1986 and with funding supplied by Basson, Lourens set up SRD. There were various branches of SRD, and amongst other things, they worked on chemical detection apparatus, the modification of "super-Skylines", as well as supplying the military with surveillance equipment (Burger & Gould, 2002:38).

<sup>80</sup> Koortzen had been working with Basson at 7 Medical Battalion (Gould & Folb, 2002:105), a detail which is omitted in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002). According to Gould and Folb (2002:93), Immelman gave five 100 milligram doses of phencyclidine (PCP) to Koortzen in 1989, which corresponds with the initials JK on the list. PCP's effects include catatonic posturing that resembles schizophrenia, and users exhibit hostile and dissociative behavior (Gould & Folb, 2002:92). This item was marked as returned.

<sup>81</sup> Jan Jonathan Lourens (AM 6490/97) and Phillip Ivan Morgan (AM 5422/97) both applied for amnesty for their role in obtaining and supplying Basson between 1985-1992 with silencers for weapons, letter bomb mechanisms, and various weapons, including the screwdrivers (Sarkin-Hughes, 2004:269). These objects were designed with the intent of delivering poison on contact and minimising the suspicion of foul-play.



Figure 24: Some of the deadly 'special applicators' designed by Jan Lourens to release poison on contact. (Burger & Gould, 2002).



Figure 25: Screwdrivers designed by Jan Lourens. (Cape Times, 9 June 1998:1).

These kinds of objects and documents did not serve as ‘evidential’ in the sense that they incriminate anyone in criminal activity. Coupled with the visual economy that arose from the photographic evidence generated in the international projects speaks to the absences within Project Coast. How is it that advanced nations were photographing their research, and producing commemorative photographs (which we can speculate that they may have understood would be reactivated in the future to suggest criminality), but the South African project was apparently not producing any similar pictures? The photographs that we do have, as I will discuss in the next section, serve different functions in their various uses, but none that ‘prove’ any kind of criminality in the manner that Unit 731’s photographs do, for example.

### 2.5.1 Profiles

...the age of Photography corresponds precisely to the explosion of the private into the public, or rather into the creation of a new social value, which is the publicity of the private: the private is consumed as such, publicly...

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (2000:98)

#### News media

Project Coast was, by and large, something which was/is only accessible, or made ‘visible’, via photographs of *something* or *someone*. As such, many news articles did not have photographs to accompany the story, and the ones that did contain pictures relied almost exclusively on profile-type pictures of various role-players to represent the programme. Using photographs to illustrate or visually represent a story is an important concern in news media layout; photographs are usually the point of entry for readers, and the affective power of these editorial choices can influence the reader’s perceptions of the story to which the photograph corresponds, as well as affecting their reception of other (even unrelated) stories featured on the same page (Wanta & Roark, 1993:4-5). Thus, in the absence of any ‘evidentiary’ type photographs that would visually illustrate the story or the project, this category of profile pictures functions as signifiers of the absent and unrepresentable Project Coast. These photographs naturally number the most, both in the news media and, indeed,

in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002). These pictures are created *post factum*, and represent a memory of an event, a picture of a past suddenly appearing in the present, as allegories, analogous, for the events to which they are allegedly connected.

From the time of Basson's arrest, the stories began to unfold in the media, and the details were murky. Basson, at the centre of several investigations playing out quite publically in the media, became something of a prosthetic for Project Coast: an emblematic figure used to stand in the place of something which, to this day, is not completely understood. Consequently, the most ubiquitous news media pictures are of Basson himself. Following Basson's initial arrest, *Die Burger* (31 January 1997:1) made the connection between the arrest and an announcement made on 30 January by Advocate Dumisa Ntsebeza stating that more people would be arrested in connection to ongoing investigations by the TRC. No photograph accompanied this article, but as the facts started emerging, the next day's edition of *Die Burger* (1 February 1997) included the mug shot taken upon his (Figures 26 & 27).<sup>82</sup> It is also of importance that the newspaper ran his mug shot. This immediately draws the connection between this man and his culpability. The mug shot behaves here as a supplement: the picture is called upon to bring information (however possibly misleading) to the unfolding story.

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<sup>82</sup> Of the newspapers surveyed, the only other media outlet to use the mug shot was *Rapport* (2 February, 1997:1).



Figure 26: Die Burger front page (Die Burger, 1 February 1997).



Figure 27: Mug shot detail.

Even though the photographs of Basson himself are ubiquitous, when another role-player took to the stand, they became placeholders for, and emblematic of, Basson. In his absence, readers make the affective connection between Basson and these other role-players whose photographs seem to reach outside of themselves, pointing to Basson. As I will demonstrate later, photographs of state witnesses in Basson's trial, for example, seem to imply that, whilst we are looking at the people who were orchestrating Basson's downfall, or trying to protect him, these people are merely placeholders for Project Coast and, by extension, for Basson.

An example of this can be found in an article from the *Green Bay Press-Gazette* (13 June, 1998:5), as well as an article from *Beeld* (13 June 1998:2) which both feature the same photograph of Niel Knobel in court, which was also reproduced in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002).<sup>83</sup> Knobel had initially been willing to appear before the TRC, believing that “he would emerge as the capable leader of an important military project”, but his attitude shifted as he learned that investigators had begun uncovering “serious aberrations within the project” (Burger & Gould, 2002:10). Here is a former Surgeon General who was initially willing to cooperate, but then hastily changed his mind when he learnt that investigators were closing in on damning irregularities.

On 5 June, just three days before his hearing, Knobel convened an urgent meeting with investigators “where he proclaimed his innocence, saying that he had not known about any of the offensive research done by Project Coast, and handed over a new set of documents that revealed the workings of the SADF’s Coordinating Management Committee” (Burger & Gould, 2002:10).<sup>84</sup> The use of this kind of picture highlights the shift in his attitude, and the use particular photograph (Figure 28) of Knobel taking the oath before the TRC, raising his right hand, presumably swearing to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, is perhaps an attempt to show that, even though he is under oath, Knobel’s testimony is an untrustworthy one, and that his appearance before the TRC was an unwilling one – he has backpedalled and was willing to hand over previously unseen documents to the investigators. His protestations and declarations of ignorance concerning the workings of Project Coast demonstrate the dubious morality of Basson’s superiors, because, as Surgeon General, Knobel must have known about at least some of the research that Basson was undertaking. The signifying power in this picture lies in the fact that, when put into context, this man who was ostensibly in charge is clearly willing to lie to save his own skin, and is someone (like all the others) who is not to be trusted. If he truly did not have any knowledge of Basson’s actions, this indicates that he was an incompetent superior,

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<sup>83</sup> Owing to the poor quality of the pictures of the *Green Bay Press-Gazette* and the *Beeld* articles, I have used the picture from *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002). The two publications used the same photograph.

<sup>84</sup> Knobel’s legal representatives tried to argue that this hearing should be held in camera due to non-proliferation concerns, but the TRC held its ground, and the hearing was open to the public.

and highlights the inadequacy regulation in what was otherwise a well-oiled apartheid machine.



Figure 28: Former Surgeon General Niel Knobel takes the oath before testifying at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. (Burger & Gould, 2002).

*Beeld's* article details how, when shown RRL's *Verkope* (Sales List), Knobel states "I was shocked when I saw this document ... Basson was supposed to inform me about everything".<sup>85</sup> Akin to Donald Rumsfeld's "known unknowns" (2002), it seems that there were many things that Basson's superiors knew without knowing, or did not wish to know, about Project Coast. Basson was either a master of subterfuge, or the upper echelons were not giving the TRC investigators the whole truth. Indeed, Project Coast was governed on a need-to-know basis, and Basson's superiors relied almost entirely on the reports he

<sup>85</sup> "Ek was geskok toe ek die dokument sien en het besef daar het meer as een bevelkanaal ontstaan. Basson was veronderstel om my oor alles in te lig" (*Beeld*, 13 June 1998:2).

generated. This kind of free rein and lack of oversight within a multimillion-rand military programme is virtually unheard of. The interpersonal dynamics of what is essentially a boys club, as well as the broader milieu, played a role in the “apparently laissez-faire approach to Project Coast”: Basson had been handpicked by Nieuwoudt, and “enjoyed special relationships with Knobel and General Kat Liebenberg” (Burger & Gould, 2002:21).<sup>86</sup>

In a similar way to role players being placeholders for Basson and Project Coast, but in a more indirect manner, *Beeld* (20 June, 1998:1) shows a picture of Steve Biko accompanying an article regarding the plan to poison imprisoned African National Congress (ANC) leader Nelson Mandela.<sup>87</sup> The plan was to lace Mandela’s prescription medication which he was receiving when he was in Pollsmoor Prison (*Beeld*, 1998:1). The unattributed article states that Dr Schalk van Rensburg, former director at RRL, appeared before the TRC during the CBW hearings, had speculated that activist Steve Biko, who was killed in police custody, may have also been poisoned (*Beeld*, 20 June, 1998:1).<sup>88</sup> As seen in Figures 29 and 30, a similar use of the connection drawn between Biko’s death and the arrest of Basson is used in *Cape Times* (5 February, 1997:1). Roger Friedman’s article alludes to the connection between Basson’s arrest and the curious deaths of Biko, but also the poisoning of Sphiwo Mtimkulu and Topsy Madaka (1997:1). A link is also drawn between Basson and the poisoning of Frank Chikane, where “[s]ources close to the old military chemical weapons programme headed by Basson claimed that covert military operatives had impregnated Chikane’s clothing with poison. Basson has consistently claimed that the programme was to develop defensive capacity only” (Friedman, 1997:1).

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<sup>86</sup> In fact, Basson had been one of Knobel’s students at the University of Pretoria, and Knobel even came to describe Basson becoming “like a child in my own home” (Burger & Gould, 2002:21).

<sup>87</sup> *Cape Times* (5 February, 1998:1) carried the story when it broke, and the report was accompanied by a photograph of Biko. The photograph was captioned: “Poisoned? Steve Biko”. Story by Roger Friedman.

<sup>88</sup> Van Rensburg was director of laboratory services and the head of the experimental animal unit at RRL from 1984 to 1991.

TELLS OF MYSTERY WITNESS

# Poison link in Biko's death

### Secret group seeks power

**ANNOUNCING** A SECRET destabilisation campaign is being waged by an elite group of 38 former and current political leaders, bankers, businessmen and university lecturers to gain economic power and influence in the new South Africa.

Members in the group have divulged that it is presently based in the Village Roadshow Hotel, situated in the Sandton suburb of Johannesburg. The group's members include prominent figures in the financial and business sectors, as well as former political leaders. The group is reportedly planning to launch a major campaign in the next few months to gain control of the country's economy.



TOGETHER AGAIN AT LAST: Fredricka Mthembu and her husband, Steve Biko, embrace yesterday after an emotional reunion at the Hilda Sherer in Lavender Hill. Fredricka's friend Zetta Brundage, 4, looks on. **PICTURE: GARY STEAD**

**THE TRC** has startling new information about the death of activist Steve Biko in police custody. **ROGER FRIEDMAN** reports

**B**LACK consciousness leader Steve Biko may have been poisoned by his police captors and not beaten to death as previously believed, according to new information in the possession of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This revelation, confirmed last night by the head of the commission's investigative unit, Mr Dumisa Ntsebeza, follows the announcement last week that five former security policemen had applied for amnesty in respect of Biko's death.

Ntsebeza told the Cape Times: "I can only confirm to you that we are investigating an indication from a source, whose identity I am not disclosing at present, that the brain damage suffered by Biko may have been caused by poisoning."

"We have received a document from the source saying that (Biko) was poisoned, and that the source is prepared to say (under oath) that he was poisoned."

Asked if the information related in any way to the former head of the former military's chemical and biological research programme Dr Wouter Basson, who was arrested in connection with 1 000 Ecstasy tablets last week as the commission was about to subpoena him, Ntsebeza said it did not.

forces had a particular penchant for administering poison and/or knock-out drugs to activists before killing them.

In 1977 the children of then-East London newspaper editor Mr Donald Woods received, through the post, T-shirts contaminated with a burning substance.

In 1981 Port Elizabeth student leader Sphiwo Mtimkulu lost his ability to walk after five months in police detention. On his release, Mtimkulu was diagnosed as suffering the effects of the rat poison thallium. He said the police had fed him tablets. He began proceedings against the police, but they detained and killed him. According to some of the policemen seeking amnesty for the Biko murder, Mtimkulu and his comrade, Topsy Madaka, were given drinks spiked with sedatives and shot in the head.

In 1981 Port Elizabeth law student Sirwe Kondile was detained and tortured until he suffered brain damage. To prevent an outcry similar to that which greeted Biko's death in detention, Kondile was allegedly fed knock-out drops in a glass of water before being shot in the head. The police claimed they had released Kondile, and planted his car in Lesotho to make it appear he had gone into exile.

In 1985 the Pebco Three — Siphso Hashe, Champion Galela and Qaqawuli Godolozzi — were abducted, interrogated, given spiked coffee, shot and burned.

In 1989 the former secretary-general of the SA Council of Churches, the Rev Frank Chikane, became ill while on a trip to the United States. Sources close to the old military chemical weapons programme headed by Basson claimed that covert military operatives had impregnated Chikane's clothing with poison. Basson has consistently claimed that the programme was to develop defensive capacity only.

The police forensic division headed by General Lothar Neethling was originally fingered as being responsible for doling out the poison, but it emerged during the trial of unoffical apartheid state assassin Eugene De Kock last year that at least some of the poisonings were joint police/military operations.

The commission said last week that whereas it had made good ground in uncovering human rights violations perpetrated by former and serving members of the police, the paucity of information on military involvement was of concern. A programme had been put in place to rectify this imbalance.

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**BLUE ROUTE**  
SERVICE CENTRE  
26 YORK RD  
TOKAI  
PH: 22 5189

**The difference is YOU WON'T FIND PEACHES OR NECTARINES**

Figure 29: Cape Times front page (5 February, 1997).

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Asked if the information related in any way to the former head of the former military's chemical and biological research programme Dr Wouter Basson, who was arrested in connection with 1 000 Ecstasy tablets last week as the commission was about to subpoena him, Ntsebeza said it did not.

"But ... we would investigate if Basson had anything to do with it to the extent that he was involved in chemicals," he said. Basson was subpoenaed by the commission during a break in his bail application in Pretoria at the weekend. He is expected to appear before the commission later this month.

According to the post-mortem report presented by chief state pathologist Professor Johan Loubser, Biko died as a result of a brain injury. Resulting centralisation of the blood circulation system led to acute kidney failure.

Biko was detained in Grahamstown under the Terrorism Act on August 19, 1977. He died 24 days later. At the ensuing inquest, his interrogators claimed that Biko had hit his head against a wall after becoming violent during interrogation.

During cross-examination, Dr Colin Hersch, the physician who attended to Biko at Sydenham prison hospital, said the lumbar puncture he conducted suggested Biko could have had brain damage. Nonetheless, he was put into a police van and driven to Pretoria — where he died.

Loubser said there were five distinct areas of brain lesion, which could all be the result of a single blow. A neurological pathologist giving evidence for the Biko family, Professor Neville Proctor, said at least three blows would have been required.

Now, if the commission's mystery witness is to be believed, it appears that the lesions could have been the work of poison meant to induce haemorrhaging — poison that would not necessarily have been evident in the post-mortem.

forces had a particular penchant for administering poison and/or knock-out drugs to activists before killing them.

In 1977 the children of then-East London newspaper editor Mr Donald Woods received, through the post, T-shirts contaminated with a burning substance.

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● See Page 7

**POISONED?: Steve Biko**

**The difference is YOU WON'T FIND PEACHES OR NECTARINES**

As mentioned in the introduction, being affect morally by pictures is dependent upon a political consciousness (Sontag, 2008:19). Our political awareness of Project Coast and of Basson is that of a sinister programme. Pictures of Basson, in this context, become political owing to the connection made between Biko's death and Basson. What *Beeld* (20 June, 1998:1) can be seen to be doing here is creating an affective connection for audiences, not only to Basson via Mandela through the text in the article, but to Basson via Biko's picture and alleged poisoning. Biko's death was highly publicised, so readers of this post-apartheid news article who were sympathetic to the ANC may draw an emotional connection to the brutal murder of one man, and subsequently harbour anger towards Basson. This speaks to Sontag's assertion that the "modern style of interpretation excavates, and as it excavates, destroys; it digs 'behind' the text, to find a sub-text which is the true one" (2007:247); the hermeneutic with which we are to interpret photographs. This, and the general political milieu (in)form the context in which we read these pictures: through understanding the context, meaning is made rather than revealed.

As stated earlier, Basson had refused to apply for amnesty from the TRC, and perhaps this calculated move can be seen as Basson's refusal not only to show any semblance of remorse, but to completely eschew culpability. In the days preceding his taking the stand at the TRC, Basson's sartorial choices reflected what we can only assume to be an attempt to look like a supporter of the new regime by sporting a shirt similar to the ones worn by Nelson Mandela (Figure 31). In this picture, he is shown leaning back, arms crossed, raising an eyebrow at the camera. This is perhaps one of the first instances of Basson-as-performance: he is aware that his photograph is being taken, and in pulling the quizzical expression, he is sending a message to viewers. Leaning back with a *laissez-faire* attitude, not paying full attention to the proceedings, and wearing his Madiba shirt: how could he be guilty of all the things of which he is being accused? *Beeld's* use of this photograph is also significant – of all the photographs that were undoubtedly taken that day, why did the editors use this particular one?



Figure 31: Wouter Basson at his TRC hearing, 10 June 1998. Sasa Kralj (AP).  
Reproduced in *Beeld* (11 June, 1998:2).

The media were instrumental in constructing Basson as the figurehead. At times, the heavy-handedness of their juxtaposition of pictures and sensational and stark headlines does not leave much room for interpretation. One such example exists *The Daily Herald* (12 June, 1998:3), one of the few articles I could find of the international coverage of the story, which included a write-up of Basson before he took the stand at the TRC. The article portrays, or focalises, him in a manner which expresses a very particular depiction of Basson, his character, and his involvement in Project Coast.

Focalisation can be defined as “the relationship between the elements presented – that which is ‘seen’ or perceived – and the vision through which they are seen or presented” (Bal, 2004:43), and thus “concepts themselves are not neutral either, but focalized in particular ways” (Peeren 2014b:25). In other words, the manner in which pictures are focalised will have important consequences for their use and their interpretation. In *The Daily Herald*’s article, Basson is focalised under the article title “Apartheid horror:

science gone mad”, compounded by the caption which describes Basson as ‘smiling’ and the use of a photograph which purposely frames Basson under the word “truth” (Figures 32 & 33).<sup>89</sup>



Figure 32: Caption reads: “Dr. Wouter Basson, alleged mastermind of South Africa's apartheid-era chemical weapons program, smiles during a break in the hearings Thursday”. (12 June 1998:3). *The Daily Herald* (Chicago, Illinois). (Newspapers.com).

<sup>89</sup> Figure 32 is a snipping from the digital repository Newspapers.com, and the platform only provides black and white reproductions. Whilst I cannot state it categorically, it is likely that the photograph would be in colour.

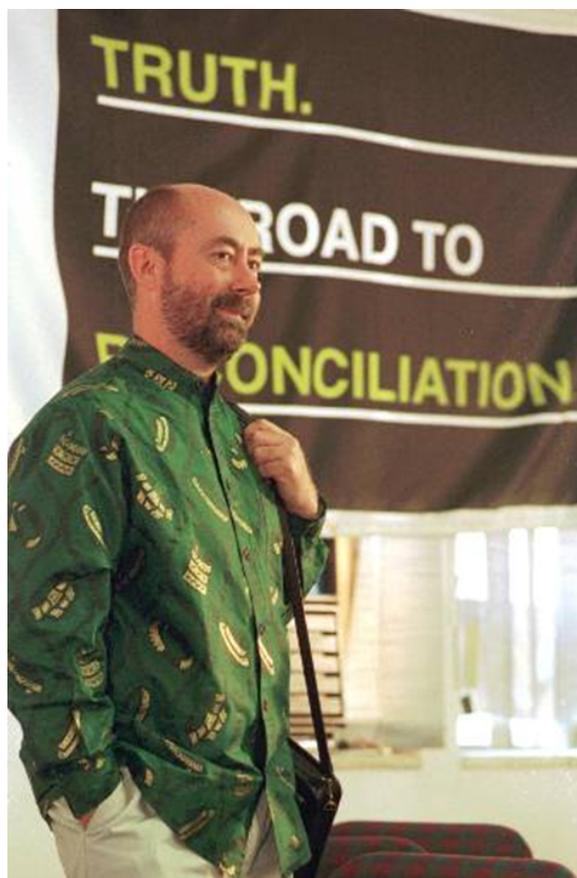


Figure 33: Wouter Basson at TRC hearing, 11 June, 1998. Benny Gool. (Getty).

The choice of this picture with the accompanying description is a clear indication of what *The Daily Herald* wishes its readers to think of Basson. As an appeal to pathos, they appear to be attempting to elicit an affective response from readers: this man, smiling during a break in a testimony detailing the murder of hundreds of anti-apartheid activists, should be viewed as a monster, a scientist gone mad. It is a manipulative attempt on the part of the journalists and editors, much like the inclusion of Figure 34 of Basson arriving at the TRC offices shortly before he was forced to testify before the TRC by the Cape High Court.

In *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), the active authors chose to include Figure 34. This photograph is also a very deliberate attempt, on behalf of the photographer, to frame Basson as a “nightmare”. Sasa Kralj<sup>90</sup> would have had to have waited for the exact moment that Basson rounded the corner in order to snap capture this picture. Its use in *Secrets and Lies*, although not directed alluded to, was a deliberate choice. It is a

<sup>90</sup> Sasa Kralj's name is misspelled in the attribution in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould).

dramatic picture but ultimately serves no purpose in the text beyond the focalisation of Basson as something nightmarish.



Figure 34: Basson arrives at the TRC offices in Cape Town prior to being forced by the Cape High Court to testify about Project Coast. Photograph by Sasa Krajl [sic]. (Burger & Gould, 2002).

When he finally took the stand at the TRC on 31 July 1998, Basson opted for the formality of a suit and tie (Figure 35). Basson began his now notorious evasion of questioning and specious eschewal of responsibility by declining to even place his military rank on record (Burger & Gould, 2002:10). Basson, a pugnacious witness, gave evidence for 12 hours, during which he said virtually nothing. During the TRC hearings, and indeed during his criminal trial, Basson's every appearance has been plagued by secrecy and silence. An indictment of Basson's demeanour can be found in the transcript of his appearance in front of the TRC: in response to the question of his age, Basson's very first statement under oath was "That is my secret" (Truth Commission: Special Hearings:line 109).



Figure 35: Basson on trial at the TRC. (*eNCA*, 2014). Screen shot by author.

During the media's coverage of the TRC's hearings into Project Coast, Basson was, as previously stated, constructed and portrayed as the prosthetic for the programme. The pictures that were used consistently cast Basson as the centre of attention, which he was to a degree, by virtue of the fact that he was the head of the programme. He was certainly an interesting character, winking at cameras and refusing to answer or feigning to not understand simple questions. The character that the media portrayed him as was one-part evil scientist, brazen and defiant, and one-part contemptuous and sexually aggressive man, and Basson appears to play into these by performing these different characters with his various (clearly intentional) facial expressions, actions, and speech. In fact, during his hearing at the TRC, Basson was asked by the TRC's legal advisor, Hanif Vally, whether or not he was tempted to profit from the Mandrax and Ecstasy produced at Delta G Scientific, to which Basson responded: "Mr Vally, for the last three days I was tempted by the girl behind me. We're all subject to temptations. The fact that the temptation was there does not mean that I succumbed to it" (Burger & Gould, 2002:10-11). After being admonished and told that he was "making that lady blush".

Basson quipped that he “was hoping to achieve more than that” (Burger & Gould, 2002:11).

This interaction led to a recess, and it was in this recess that Basson reportedly went to a nearby coffee shop and, upon encountering Vally and other TRC members, walked over to Vally and, in a dramatic display, kissed him on the forehead (Burger & Gould, 2002:11). It was in this coffee shop that Basson reportedly scrawled graffiti on a wall, signing himself as ‘Dr Death’.<sup>91</sup> This graffiti is said to have been done in red on a yellow wall (Taylor, 2000), yet in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), a photograph by Pers-Anders Pettersson is reproduced in black and white (Figure 36), a tactic I will address later with another photograph from Pettersson.

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<sup>91</sup> Reports on what the graffiti actually said differ, as do the reports apropos the circumstances under which it was done. According to William Finnegan, Basson was “roaring drunk” (2001:58), whilst Burger and Gould (2002:11) state that this was done during a recess in the TRC hearings. Included on the South African Broadcast Corporation’s *South Africa’s Human Spirit – an Oral Memoir of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* CD collection, Darren Taylor reported that, written with a red koki pen on a yellow wall dedicated to graffiti, Basson’s graffiti read “Doctor Death – the truth will out” (2000). However, a photograph by Pers-Anders Pettersson, included in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), shows that it in fact said “TRUTH ABOVE ALL – DR DEATH”. The difference in these reports calls into question the overall accuracy of the various news reports surrounding Project Coast. How are we to trust these sources when they differ, even if just in small details? Are we to consider that there may be larger inaccuracies?



Figure 36: A message scrawled and signed by Basson on a wall in Cape Town's Café Maroka during the 1998 TRC hearings. (Burger & Gould, 2002).

Notwithstanding Basson's status as a newsworthy character, Project Coast was not a one-man show. There were many other officials involved in Project Coast, but their pictures are less interesting for they, themselves, are far less interesting. Again: Basson is, in a way, a performance piece, and is someone acutely aware of how to behave in front of the cameras. As such, they are not portrayed in the same light as Basson, whose guilt was determined in the court of public opinion far before the verdict was read, which was the case not only for his TRC hearing, but also his criminal trial.

Fast forward now to Basson's acquittal on criminal charges on 12 April, 2002. In an interesting display of two kinds of appeal to pathos, *Cape Times* (12 April, 2002) carries two vastly different pictures for the report on Basson's acquittal. *Cape Times'* front page carries an article with the title "Basson's prosecutor files for appeal before judgement", with a photograph of Basson, seemingly defiant, looking to the heavens as Judge Willie Hartsenber read out his verdict (Figure 37). The caption reads: "'DR DEATH': The

Basson, listens attentively as Judge Willie Hartzenberg reads from this lengthy judgement in the Pretoria High Court yesterday”. Basson appears calm and confident under the circumstances, and almost angelic, having risen above the judgement of mere mortals. This choice of photograph seems to suggest that Basson, someone who has historically behaved as if he is above the law, knew that the ruling would be in his favour – something especially evident when contrasted with the photograph used in *Die Burger* on the same day (Figure 39) to be discussed shortly.



Figure 37: *Cape Times* front page, 12 April, 2002.

The *Cape Times* article continues on page six, under the subtitle “Smiling ‘Dr Death’ walks free: Judge accepts Basson’s version of 153 State witnesses” (Venter, 2002:5). The pull quote likens the trial to a performance, saying “Like in American courtroom dramas Basson sat flanked by his legal team during judgement” (Venter, 2002:6). However, the photograph that accompanies this section of the report represents an

photograph reads: “FREE: Wouter Basson was acquitted on all 64 charges against him yesterday”, and the photograph used presents, once again, the character of the mad scientist (Figure 38). This is a very tightly cropped and theatrical photograph, showing Basson arching an eyebrow in what can be seen as either an indication of his insanity, or a quizzical expression (perhaps even he was a little surprised). Basson, who at this stage had become accustomed to having cameras trained on him, must have known it would be used. This begs the question: what was he trying to convey by pulling this face in this manner?

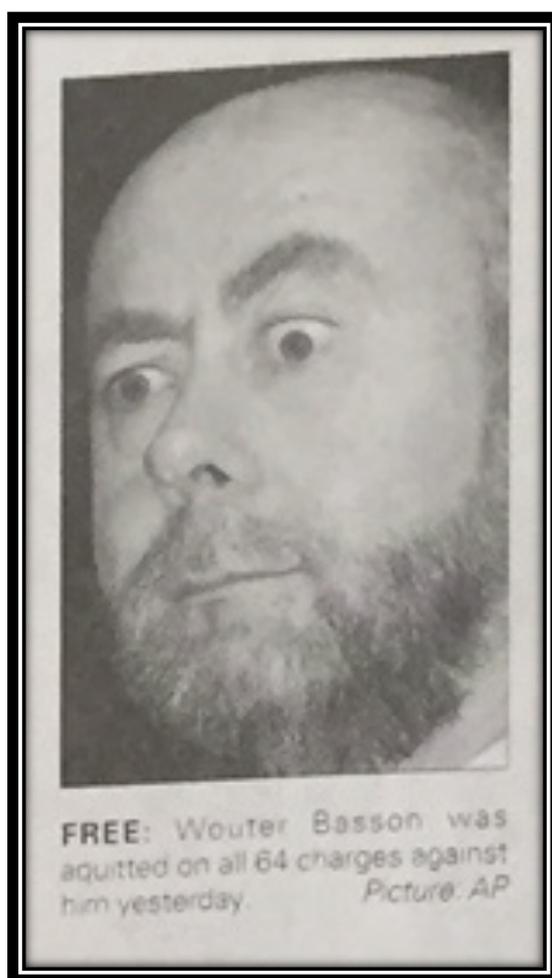


Figure 38: Crazy mad scientist figure: *Cape Times* 12 April, 2002. Detail.

Unlike the front page article, which is very much a hard news story, the sort of ‘soft news’ report on page six recounts the unusual features of the trial. These included the fact that many of the witnesses were not allowed to be identified; Basson had bodyguards placed between him and the public gallery; that this trial was an international first insofar as it was the first time a criminal case had arisen from a

country's official CBW programme; that the court case, which involved some 30 000 pages of transcripts, ended in a 1500-page judgement "two weeks after the prosecution handed in their last written heads of arguments" (Venter, 2002:6). Last but not least, readers are told, perhaps sardonically, that Basson had organised a celebratory party a week before judgement had even been delivered, attended by Basson's "close friends", held "somewhere at Loftus, Pretoria" (Venter, 2002:6). From the front page to the sixth, there has been a shift in attitude, shown in the choice of words and photographs which almost trivialise his actions, casting him as a cocksure caricature, a kind of cartoonish stereotype of a crazed scientist.

As alluded to above, *Die Burger's* choice of photograph counters those from *Cape Times*, and does not show Basson as someone who appears to have been sure of the outcomes. In *Die Burger* (12 April, 2002:6), the caption states that whilst Judge Hartzenberg was reading his verdict, Basson and one of his lawyers, Advocate Tokkie van Zyl, listen with their hands covering their faces, perhaps suggesting that they are fearing the worst (Figure 39). It is also noteworthy that the headline to *Cape Times* states that the prosecution had filed for an appeal before the judgement had even been handed down (the explanation of which does not even appear on that page), whilst the headline in *Die Burger* notes that Basson, was acquitted of all charges. Perhaps *Die Burger* was attempting to cast him in the light of being a man unsure of his fate, someone not as cocksure as the media had, to this point, made him out to be. The reasons for this, should it be true, are varied. For one, the readership of *Die Burger* would be Afrikaans-speaking South Africans. The newspaper was, at a stage, pro-apartheid, and functioned as a mouthpiece for the National Party, a disaffiliation which only began in 1990 (Siko, 2014:75).



Figure 39: Basson and his legal representatives, hands covering their faces, listening to Judge Hartzenberg's judgement. *Die Burger* (12 April, 2002:6).

Thus, at any given time, and in different news publications, Basson is given different roles, or characters, and the photographs reflect these at different times in different publications, sometimes even within the same edition. The character of the crazed scientist appears at the same time as the defiant Dr Death, as well as the banal photograph of a man fearing for his future. John Oddo, building on Aristotle's notions of a rhetor's ethos, suggests that, in the intertextual environment of the news media, "a rhetor's ethos may be constituted by *other* rhetor's across many texts" (2014:55). The term "intertextual ethos", Oddo explains, "describes the process by which one speaker recontextualizes the discourse of other speakers in ways that position audiences to regard the ethos of other speakers as positive or negative" (2014:61). In other words, the editors, journalists, and photographers impart their interpretation of a person's rhetoric and character to readers.<sup>92</sup> Drawing on this assertion, Basson, as the placeholder for Project Coast, is rarely cast by the media as just a villain, but rather as a *miles gloriosus*,<sup>93</sup> or perhaps an antihero archetype. Even when he appears to be on the brink of defeat, with his head in his hands, or is described as a "jubilant" man hugging his family and his legal team (Venter, 2002:1), accompanied by a photograph of him staring to the heavens, the news media, particularly in the case of *Cape Times'* article,

<sup>92</sup> Agenda-setting is a process widely discussed in media studies. See Sheila Steinberg's discussion on the topic (2012:262-263).

<sup>93</sup> *Miles gloriosus*, the boasting soldier, is a stock character from the ancient Greek theatre comedies (Frye, 2015:163). In Plautus's play, *Miles Gloriosus*, the protagonist, Pyrgopolynices, is cast as a figure who regularly openly brags about his superiority, whilst the other characters, feigning admiration, are secretly plotting against him. Laurie Brink describes the character as vacillating "between self-aggrandizement and the solicitation of fawning sycophants. He suffers woefully under the affliction of this own beauty ... [as relishing] the retelling of his mighty deeds and the counting (however inflated) of the seven thousand he has slain." (2014:85-86)

default back to representing him as having an inflated ego, and flagrantly organising celebratory parties before the verdict is even in.

What I believe to be an attempt to illustrate this ego is also portrayed through the media with their use of photographs, as well as references within the articles, of Basson winking at the photographers. Emmanuel Levinas states that “[t]he face is a living presence; it is expression ... The face speaks ... the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation” (1991:66;198). The face, then, is never a neutral site, and our need to see the face is the Derridean supplement in action. The story is incomplete without these photographs, despite them lacking any kind of ‘evidence’. These flippant and seemingly narcissistic gestures appear to be deployed by news agencies to suggest that this (the trial) is not as serious to Basson as to other people and, perhaps, that he knows something that we do not. Perhaps it is Basson’s patronising assumption of familiarity, suggesting, by winking at the viewer, that we are somehow complicit in this story. Perhaps they are a disarming mechanism.<sup>94</sup> No matter how they are read, these particular photographs are arresting.

These photographs are a variation of the profile-type photograph, and are more than likely used by editors to add intrigue to the story – not because they present any new information about him or his case. However, their affective potential on readers’ perception of Basson should not be disregarded. In a *Cape Argus* (24 July, 2001:8) article titled “Basson slates the boffins of death”, Basson’s wink is accompanied by a report of Basson’s first day of testimony in the criminal trial which began in October 1999 (Figure 40). Basson “told the Pretoria High Court that if he could start again with the chemical and biological warfare programme, he would not use scientists”, describing them as “difficult and conceited ... [and having] no management skills” (*Cape Argus*, 2001:8).

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<sup>94</sup> When I took his picture at the Health Professionals Council of South Africa’s hearing in January 2015, I was given a wink. The character that he is, with the history that he has, made that wink all the more unsettling.

## Basson slates the boffins of death

**PRETORIA:** Apartheid's biochemical warfare chief, Wouter Basson, told the Pretoria High Court that if he could start again with the chemical and biological warfare programme, he would not use scientists.

In his first day of testimony since his trial began in October 1999, Basson described scientists who worked for the old SA Defence Force front companies in the 1980s and 1990s as difficult and conceited.

They had no management skills, which caused many problems.

The front company Delta G, had been formed to manufacture chemical warfare compounds, and Roodeplaat Research Laboratories (RRL) was later added to concentrate on biological weapons.

Basson said the world of espionage and chemical and biological warfare centred on deception and fear.

He cited an example where he said the Russians struck fear into their opponents by developing a toxin that could penetrate any known protective mask.

The Americans had immediately started to develop new protective clothing and masks. But South Africa looked at the substance itself and found its production was so complicated and lengthy that it could not be manufactured on a large scale and was therefore not a significant danger.

Basson said he had also undergone an ammunition course in 1986, when Delta G and RRL were ready to start arming the substances they manufactured.

At the time, he was also involved in the clandestine manufacture of mortars armed with a new generation of teargas, at the request of the SADF chief. These were used by troops trapped in mine fields to facilitate a safe withdrawal.

Basson said the chemical and biological warfare projects at first bought goods from overseas sources through the police - mostly paying cash.

Standard laboratory equipment was bought through open channels in South Africa, but some was obtained clandestinely from eastern bloc countries.

His breakthrough came in 1984, when he met an industrialist in Germany who manufactured protective clothing.

Through the industrialist and a retired British armed forces officer, he came into contact with what he called the chemical and biological warfare mafia. This group consisted of people from all over the world, including Russians, Americans and North Koreans, who regularly met to discuss the latest developments in their particular field of warfare.

According to Basson, this was when he first realised there were possibilities not only to obtain information secretly, but also equipment and chemicals.

Basson has pleaded not guilty to 46 charges, ranging from murder and fraud to drug trafficking.

Last month he was acquitted of 15 of the original 61 charges. - Sapa



**Tippling the wink:** Wouter Basson arrives at the Pretoria High Court yesterday to give evidence at his trial on an array of charges related to his chemical warfare role.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Figure 40: Basson winking at a photographer. *Cape Argus* (24 July, 2001:8).

The use of this particular picture to accompany this story is, of course, no accident, and editors were perhaps using this picture as a Derridean supplement to convey a message that they cannot express in text (perhaps for fear of liable). Basson's suggestion that (other) scientists are "difficult and conceited" (*Cape Argus*, 2001:8), when connected to this photograph of him winking, clearly demonstrates the coercive and thinly-veiled message to readers: when read in the context of the media's portrayal of Project Coast in general, and Basson specifically, it is laughable that he calls other people difficult and conceited when he himself refuses to give straight answers (both at

In summation, the profile pictures used by the news media are ones that come “*après coup*, too late and perhaps in vain” (Baer, 2013:417). To borrow from Mitchell’s (2005:85) distinction between image and picture, these pictures are unable to convey any image of Project Coast. They fail insofar as, on the one hand, they function as purely illustrative additions to the text. These photographs do not, and cannot, behave as documents in their own right as they, themselves, are merely visual contextualisations produced within and for the Public archive. Technically, these photographs lack any information or any kind of concrete ‘evidentiary’ value because, as noted, they are contemporary photographs, and are, at their core, just photographs of people. However, they do indeed have ‘affective evidence’ insofar as we are reading into these faces, looking for something more. This, once again, is the supplement in action. If removed from the context of the news media and their accompanying stories, these pictures will mean very little, if anything at all.

Whilst authors like Thompson (2008) and Caswell (2014) note that photographs have the ability to develop social lives and move into different archives, I do not believe that the pictures from the news media, as a Public archive, will develop in the same way, although it would perhaps be possible that they may develop a social life once a memorialising site is formed.

## ***Secrets and Lies***

In terms of profile photography, *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) features several similar Basson-via-others pictures, such as photographs of Dr Jan Lourens in a trench coat in an ice-covered Scottish landscape, and Dr Deon Erasmus, a former 7 Medical Battalion member implicated in the chemical interrogation of an unknown man (Burger & Gould, 2002:48), in an unknown European-esque cityscape. Not only do these two pictures imply that Lourens and Erasmus were just as involved in the jet setting lifestyle as Basson – and these photographs serve to implicate directly them in this – but their inclusion also implies that wherever these men were at the time, they would have been there for something relating to Project Coast and, by extension, Basson himself. Readers would have to infer this reading, as no mention is made to the pictures, and no explanation of the context of the pictures is given in Burger and Gould's (2002) text, hinting already to the ostensibly illustrative nature of these particular photographs in this particular text. It is crucial, however, to remember that these photographs, even when they appear to be vernacular snapshots, do have a supplementary value/potential: we have an attraction toward the visual because, so often, the textual descriptions are anodyne, and we thus need to see the faces of these people. In general, the photographs in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) are Derrida's parergon, a liminal space, not part of the work, but not wholly separate (they are in a photograph section in the middle of the book), attempting to function as the framework which (re)contextualises the work: "Neither work (ergon) nor outside the work (hors d'oeuvre), neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below, it disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate and it gives rise to the work" (1987:9).

In the book-as-archive, "the meaning and use of a record changes depending on where it is produced and stored and how archives evolve over time in response to changing priorities imposed from within and without" (Yale, 2016:109). Due to space constraints, I cannot discuss every picture included in the book in detail, but it is essential to note that the photograph section reflects a visual narrative constructed by the authors from the photographs which they had at their disposal – a concern for the inherent power relations intricately involved in a close reading of the function of photographs in the book-as-archive.

These photographs, and countless others like them that feature different people connected to Basson, come to serve as a way for the general public to piece together what Project Coast may have looked like. International programmes, as I showed earlier, have photographic evidence, a visual economy to their projects, as well as staff photographs and ones commemorating anniversaries, reunions and awards ceremonies. Contemporary news media are able to reproduce these photographs for the audience as visual evidence of operational work done. But South African media did not/do not have comparable pictures and thus have to resort to other ways of visually representing an invisible Project Coast. From seeing Basson represented via other people, to anecdotes about weekend trips on multimillion-rand private jets, Basson is painted as a James Bond-like figure: millionaire playboy, jet setting across the globe with no regard for money, smiling for the camera, winking at photographers. However, viewed critically, Basson could also be seen as playing the role of just another *oom* in a bureaucratic job who almost seems too familiar, too innocuous, too banal to be truly dangerous.

### 2.5.2 Places

Ulrich Baer, in discussing Dirk Reinartz's *Sobibór* (1995) and an untitled Mikael Levin photograph of Nordlager Ohrdruf, notes that these photographs capture a reality that no narrative is ever able to. They are taken in the landscape tradition, and are enthralling exactly because of the apparent banality of the scenes: open clearings in a field, dotted with trees (2013:433). However, these are not regular landscapes: these are depictions of the sites of former Nazi concentration camps. As Baer (2013:419-420) says, these two pictures are completely different to most post-World War II pictures: "they contain no evidence of the sites' historical uses" and they force the viewer to "see that there is *nothing* to see there ... they show us that there is something in a catastrophe as vast as the Holocaust that remains inassimilable to historicist or contextual readings" (emphasis in original). The photographs, representing the Holocaust in "stringently formal terms", force us to see that there is nothing actually there and, for Baer, they "rely on this aesthetic to place us in reference to experiences that resist integration into memory, historical narratives, or other mitigating contexts" (2013:420-421). The two photographs,

embodied the epitome of human evil, in their blankness, offer a “place for absent memory” (Baer, 2013:419).

Project Coast, as an haunting operation, resides in the shadows of our imaginations: we have nothing upon which to look as a site of something that happened – it is a geographic placelessness, a place not yet/never to be visualised or made manifest. With nothing to see, photographs of places and spaces *relating to* Project Coast are, then, perhaps the most interesting.

*Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), and to a much lesser degree the news media,<sup>95</sup> used photographs of other places as emblematic of a ‘space’ where Project Coast can be thought of as existing. Here I use place and space as two different concepts. A *space* can be conceived of as a location which has no social connection to society, and is something which has no meaning inscribed upon it, or has yet to have meaning inscribed upon it (Tuan, 1977:4). *Place*, on the other hand, can be conceived of as a location which has been created through human experience, something in which meaning has been inscribed, like RRL. Place has the ability to order our experiences of a space, and thus we are able spatially to focus our reactions and understandings (Seamon & Sowers, 2008:44).

Spaces within the Project Coast narrative can be understood using the two jets (which were integral to the fraud charges brought against Basson) as anecdotes. The Jetstar and the King Air jets, which I discuss later, could be considered as spaces insofar as there was, at the time, no meaning inscribed on them, whilst a place which exists would be one such as the SADF/Project Coast front company, RRL. As a physical place, RRL orders our understanding of spaces like the Jetstar, but also underlies our reactions and understandings of what Project Coast was.

From its humble beginnings in 1983, RRL moved from occupying a few offices in a shopping centre in Pretoria, to its eventual home on a 350-hectare farm near Roodeplaat Dam. RRL was a contracted “research facility in the pharmacological, agricultural, biological, veterinary and medical fields” that occasionally undertook

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<sup>95</sup> Of the newspapers surveyed, only one publication printed a photograph of RRL. An article from *Die Beeld* (11 June, 1998:13) was accompanied by a picture that showed how one of the old dog cages had been renovated by the new occupants, the Agricultural Research Council - Plant Protection Institute.

“conventional research” in the interest of maintaining its cover story (Burger & Gould, 2002:29).<sup>96</sup> The facility was used by the SADF to research, test, and produce biological weapons. Under the instruction of veterinarian Dr Daan Goosen, the primary goal of RRL was to develop novel poisons which could be utilised to kill targets identified as enemies of the state (Burger & Gould, 2002:28-29). It was at this facility where the gruesome animal testing occurred, the details of which emerged from 203 files on RRL’s research discovered by investigators, files which show a commitment to testing these substances on primates, pigs, and beagles (Burger & Gould, 2002:33).

A photograph of RRL’s former building was also reproduced in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), attributed on the left side of the photograph to Per-Anders Pettersson/iAfrika Photos (Figure 41).<sup>97</sup> The caption for this photograph is more descriptive than most: “RRL, Project Coast's biological facility, built on a smallholding north-east of Pretoria” (Burger & Gould, 2002). This is the only building that comes close to being Project Coast as a place. The sombre photograph is the most expressive and perhaps daunting photograph in the book.

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<sup>96</sup> So stringent was the code of secrecy that employees of RRL and Delta G “were required to sign documents swearing them to silence about their work ... [and] projects were deliberately compartmentalised so that two scientists working side by side would not necessarily know what the other was doing” (Burger & Gould, 2002:25). In fact, few of Project Coast’s employees “knew from the outset that they were working for military front companies, let alone engaged in a chemical and biological warfare programme” (Burger & Gould, 2002:24-25).

<sup>97</sup> Interestingly, when running a reverse image search on Google and via TinEye, the results that come up for this particular picture are only in one place: *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002). In fact, Pettersson’s personal website does not even archive the picture.



Figure 41: Roodeplaat Research Laboratories, Project Coast's biological facility, built on a small holding north-east of Pretoria. (Burger & Gould, 2002).

As mentioned in the introduction, Mitchell (2005:85) tells us that a picture can be hung, but an “image seems to float ... [it] is what can be lifted off the picture, transferred to another medium, translated into a verbal exphrasis ... [the picture] is the appearance of the immaterial image in a material medium”. This picture (Figure 41) is an attempt to make material the image of Project Coast. This is the only picture of the facility included in the book, and as a picture which alludes to some sort of spatial secret, is it menacing: the black and white photograph was taken through a barbed wire fence and includes a curious-looking dog. Whilst it may very well be because Pettersson was not granted access to the facility, and was forced to capture the picture through the barbed wire fence, there were (probably) other photographs from which the authors could have chosen, or perhaps this one in colour. In a similar tactic to that used in Figure 36, this picture was purposely chosen, and intentionally reproduced in black and white.

Had these same photographs been taken in colour, would they have had the same effect? To see Figure 41 in colour would have engendered a different affective

response: the brown face brick building would look like any other bland office building, nothing menacing, a perfectly innocuous space. Figure 36 in colour would perhaps have made the picture less sinister, and appear more like trivial graffiti scribbled in a bathroom stall than a statement of contempt by Basson “signing himself ‘Dr Death’ with a flourish” (Burger & Gould, 2002:11).

Returning to Figure 41: this particular picture of RRL makes the building itself, as a placeholder,<sup>98</sup> an image of Project Coast, take on an air of malevolence: the information that we receive from this picture is rooted in the aura created by the low angle of the photograph makes the building seem bigger, imposing and powerful, a building in which nefarious research was done, perhaps a place housing some kind of evil secrets. The aura is amplified by the dramatic contrast between the dark foreground and the light emanating from behind the building, enlivening this mute print, and sublimating the building itself. There is also a striking contrast between the manicured lawn in front of the building, implying some sort of order, and the long grass in the foreground of the photograph, perhaps alluding to chaos which reigns outside of the grounds. The picture positions the viewer on the other side of the fence, excluded, and from this vantage point, the sense is that we do not belong here, at this site. We have arrived too late. *Après-coup*, and in vain. The dog could be read as indicating a threatening form of security, but it also seems to recognise our presence, serving as a kind of silent witness to our illicit gaze of this ‘secret’ site. It is a photograph which tries, or is put to work to “reveal secrets sites or activity”, but ultimately “contributes, despite itself, to the spectacle of a successfully mysterious and sublime power” (Beck, 2015). Thus, even though there is nothing to see, the photograph of RRL’s building is enthralling because the context dictates that this is an important space: there is a “‘spirit of place:’ we sense the grounds are haunted” (Baer, 2013:417). The work that this photograph does, or could do, “is not [to] show what the secret is, but what the secret might look like” (Beck, 2015).

The choice to use these two black and white pictures in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger and Gould, 2002) demonstrates that the authors were soliciting an almost maleficent

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<sup>98</sup> A photograph is a surrogate of an object which we are able to possess, which gives “photographs some of the character of unique objects”, and through pictures, we “acquire something as information” rather than as an experience (Sontag, 2008:155).

affective connection to RRL and to the graffiti's creator. The picture of RRL also feels out of place, as if forced into the book-as-archive, with the express purpose of serving as a kind of emotive cue card. This particular photograph could have been replaced by any other photograph of the facility, but the authors chose this one in what can be seen as a manipulative attempt to make readers understand this building as a dark and nefarious place. As a photograph is able to serve as instant access to something, the forceful inclusion of this photograph serves as a kind of *punctum*, accessing the inherent political message at the heart of the long book.

Two other important spaces were the Lockheed Jetstar II and the Beechcraft King Air 200 which, for all intents and purposes, are two of the few physical places where Project Coast can be thought of as existing in a *space* – there is no societal connection, and no meaning inscribed upon it anymore (the new owners presumably do not mind what these planes were used for). In *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), there are three photographs depicting the King Air, and one of the Jetstar. Some of the images have been loosely contextualised insofar as the authors describe how, during an overnight stop in Abidjan to refuel the Jetstar en route to Europe, Charles Van Remoortere, Basson's childhood friend and business partner, "took photographs of Basson and Jan Lourens 'fooling around'" including a photograph of Basson kissing the nosecone (Figure 42) and one of Lourens perched on the wings... "that kind of childish stuff" (2002:138).

Readers cannot be sure who called it 'fooling around' or said 'that kind of foolish stuff' because no name is mentioned, and we similarly cannot be sure that the ones reproduced here were indeed the ones being described. This, coupled with the fact that the photographs are not directly referenced or discussed by the authors, highlights the loose connection between the photograph and the text, something which, as I will demonstrate later on, becomes an important point of discussion and criticism when reading *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002). Readers can also not be sure *which* photographs of the Jetstar and King Air the authors are referring to in this instance because the captions do not adequately describe their provenance, nor the circumstances under which the photographs were taken. The captions are vague and ambiguous, and Gould says that the reason for this is because they were given limited

information about where and when they were taken (2015/10/02),<sup>99</sup> however, we can assume that at the time, these were important moments to capture, for to “photograph is to confer importance” (Sontag, 2008:28). The curatorial intentions of Burger and Gould are also evident in the *manner* in which they have captioned the photographs. The captions are at times sardonic, and at times showcase the “ludic within the oppressive” (Edwards & Mead, 2013:29), such as Figure 42.



Figure 42: A kiss for the King Air's nosecone. (Burger & Gould, 2002).

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<sup>99</sup> I have captioned the photographs here as they appear in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002).

It is important to consider the sequence of the photographs, as I will discuss below. As the beginning of the visual narrative constructed for readers, the first picture in the section of photographs is of Basson boarding the Jetstar (Figure 43), a photograph which is also uncontextualised within the text, but seems to serve as a visual cue card for the beginning of the story of Project Coast. Here we see Basson awkwardly waving to the unidentified photographer, with two unidentified men also captured by the camera, and the unidentified pilot is seen peering through the windscreen.



Figure 43: Wouter Basson boards the Jetstar. (Burger & Gould, 2002).

The second picture in the book (Figure 44) is captioned “Business-bound on arrival at Lubeck, Germany. Flanked by the King Air pilots are Charles van Remoortere and Basson, with Jan Lourens (right)”. This caption, whilst indicating who is there, naming who can be seen, fails to explain adequately the context of what appears to be a commemorative photograph. Unlike the commemorative photographs taken by international projects, this photograph lacks the formality of those from Porton Down

and Unit 731 (Figures 5-10), for example, and is perhaps more intriguing because of its ambiguity. This photograph, as goes for many of the other pictures to be discussed, was probably never intended to be entered into the Public archive, whereas the formal pictures from international projects were created with the intent of being included in the visual history of the projects. The photographs that have emerged in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) are more interesting because of their quality of a kind of ‘behind the scenes’ sneak peek into the clandestine activities of Project Coast.



Figure 44: Business-bound on arrival at Lubeck, Germany. Flanked by the King Air pilots are Charles van Remoortere and Basson, with Jan Lourens (right). (Burger & Gould, 2002).

The two jets were assets of the WPW Group, which was one of the companies implicated in the fraud charges brought against Basson,<sup>100</sup> and the Jetstar was one of

<sup>100</sup> Set up in 1989 in the Cayman Islands, WPW became the ‘parent company’ under which between 50 and 100 other companies were nestled (Burger & Gould, 2002:91). The name WPW was believed to have been chosen by forming an acronym from the first names of the three main stakeholders: Wouter Basson, Philip Mijburgh, and Wynand Swanepoel, however Jane Webster (wife of the American attorney, David Webster) testified in October 2000 that Basson had told her that the name was an abbreviation of Wolff-Parkinson-White Syndrome (Burger & Gould, 2002:91). David Webster assisted Basson in setting up three holding companies, namely PCM International Inc, WPW Investments Inc, and Medchem Inc

WPW's most ostentatious purchases. Forensic auditor Hennie Bruwer testified that the money used as security for a \$2.3 million loan taken by WPW Aviation Inc. was officially for payment of a research contract with RRL from a Swiss account belonging to Medchem Forschungs (ISSAFRICA). Basson's defence claimed that the Jetstar "had been purchased with funding transferred to a European account from Project Coast and earmarked for the purchase of [a] peptide synthesizer", evidence of a connection which Bruwer could not find (ISSAFRICA). Basson's business associate, David Webster,<sup>101</sup> had documents which detailed that the WPW Group's King Air "was leased to the United Nations for use during the elections in Namibia"; Basson added that the Jetstar "would be used for medical projects in Africa" (ISSAFRICA). However, despite the admirable intended uses for these planes, the Jetstar was routinely used for pleasure trips for Basson's family and friends. The inclusion of pictures of the King Air and Jetstar in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) seems to serve as analogous to the gross mismanagement of funds, a kind of implied 'evidence' of the objects that represent misuse of Project Coast's funds, although we cannot know for sure whether the trips which are pictured here were, indeed, pleasure trips. However, the text seems to suggest that, to a certain degree, these photographs are indicative of the lifestyle these men led.

Of particular interest, for me, are the bags on the runway (bottom right of the photograph). Incidental elements in the frame such as this could easily be overlooked because these photographs appear to be what James Elkins (2011:100) describes as vernacular photographs. Elkins (2011:116-117) posits that photographs show us things that have no stories, that they show us *beyond* the subject of the photograph, that which the photographer intended to capture. These parts of the world, what he calls "the surround", the "stuff" which remains unnamed, Elkins says, are accidentally captured, but show us things more intensely than pictures produced by other mediums (2011:116-117). As such photographs show us things to which paying attention is difficult, the

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According to Burger and Gould, Webster was listed as the 100 percent shareholder in these companies, but his testimony and other documents confirmed that Webster was acting as a nominee for Basson (2002:91). The Websters were the two witnesses who testified in Basson's trial, a testimony for which the judge, defence and prosecution had to fly to America, all on the taxpayer's dime.

<sup>101</sup> Not to be confused with Dr David Webster: an anti-apartheid activist and academic killed by Ferdi Barnard on 1 May 1989, outside his home in Trevoille, Johannesburg.

boring things that appear to have little to no immediate meaning or use for understanding the photograph.

I read the bags as the ‘stuff’, the kind of banal detail which, under other circumstances, would serve as the thread with which to spin narratives around the pictures. I read them as indicative of the haunted nature of photography in general, but also the haunting nature of Project Coast. There is an invisible entity haunting this picture, evidenced not only in the luggage which has been set down, but also by the existence of the photographic object itself. When read critically, Project Coast also haunts this picture: it is there for us to see, if we can only learn to see beyond. Judith Butler, reading Sontag, states that the ethical force of the photograph calls for us to halt our narcissistic visual consumption, but that “perhaps our *inability* to see what we see is also of critical concern. To learn to see the frame that blinds us to what we see is no easy matter” (2009:100).

In *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) there are perhaps two frames that we need to be cognisant of: the photographer’s and the authors’. At times, as I will demonstrate below, these two frames appear to be at odds, and the reader is left to decide which frame to accept. Barthes (2000) conceives of photographs as agents of memory, of loss, of love. Elkins (2012), reading against Barthes, asks if it is possible to feel anything about photographs of people we do not know, and argues that when we do feel something about these kinds of pictures, it is usually something almost perverse, a kind of voyeurism. When read outside of the context of *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), the photographs from the Private archive can be read in an entirely different light.

This “stuff”, the “surround” (Elkins, 2011:116-117) of this photograph, with Basson as the apparent subject, serves to raise more questions about the photograph when viewed critically, rather than just glanced at as an “unassuming functional snapshot” (Sontag, 2008:103), simply an illustration accompanying the dense text dealing with the intricate business dealings of Basson *et al.*

Basson’s WPW group had, in the four years after its founding, amassed a diverse portfolio, ranging from travel to investment interests; from a golf course in Belgium to a multimillion-dollar investment in Tubmaster, an American shower enclosure

a condominium in Orlando, Florida; cash in bank accounts both in America and Switzerland; and, of course, the Jetstar (Coen & Nadler, 2009:155; Burger & Gould, 2002:131; ISSAFRICA).

Not only did Basson buy a jet, but he bought a zoo, too.<sup>102</sup>

And he refurbished a house. At the centre of money laundering charges was Merton House (Figure 45), a luxury property in the diplomatic belt in Pretoria, and WPW Group's "flagship asset" (Burger & Gould, 2012:135). Lizelle Larson, described by Burger and Gould (2012:156) as an "attractive blonde" architect, was responsible for the multimillion-rand refurbishment of the house, which stands as testament to the extravagant lifestyle that Basson and his colleagues led. Whilst the story of Merton House is not directly linked with Project Coast (if Basson is to be believed),<sup>103</sup> and was rather a crucial link in the fraud charges brought against Basson, the house does form part of the timeline of Basson's fall from business grace.<sup>104</sup> As such, one can assume that Burger and Gould included the photograph to serve purely as a visual representation of a space linked to Basson against whom, they state, there was no "tangible proof of day-to-day expenditure beyond his means – there were no Gucci loafers or Armani suits in Basson's closet, no luxury sports cars in the driveway of his unremarkable abode, no priceless artworks on the wall" (2002:121). This sentence alone suggests that the authors believe that whilst Basson may not have been flashy, he was profiting, and included the picture of this mansion to bolster their assertion that Basson and his colleagues led a lavish and "hedonistic lifestyle" (Burger & Gould, 2002:121).

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<sup>102</sup> Tygerberg Zoo was ostensibly bought on behalf of Basson's foreign principals, who also supposedly instructed Basson to purchase the two apartments in Brussels (Burger & Gould, 2002, 133). Basson claims that the foreign principals were interested in research into "heavy metals, elements and pheromones", already being researched by South African universities with the aim of developing crowd control methods (Burger & Gould, 2002:133). The zoo was purchased when the South African research had reached a point where they required access to wild animals – in 1989 Basson purchased the zoo from his uncle, Cyrus Steyn (Burger & Gould, 2002:133-134).

<sup>103</sup> Merton House stands as an averred link between Project Coast and Libya. The house was ostensibly being acquired by Basson via his principals for use as the Libyan embassy (Purkitt & Burgess, 2005:281).

<sup>104</sup> Following deep financial trouble in the WPW Group, Merton House, along with the Jetstar and other WPW assets were disposed at a loss in 1994 and 1995 (Burger & Gould, 2012:142). As of 30 June 1993, a staggering R86 million had streamed through WPW's various accounts, and Bruwer was able to trace R66 million of this as having originated from Project Coast funds (Burger & Gould, 2002:107). The remaining R19,6 million could not be sourced (Burger & Gould, 2002:107).



Figure 45: Basson was involved in the refurbishment of Merton House, in Arcadia, Pretoria, at a cost of R10 million. The property was later sold to the Zimbabwean government for R7,5 million and continues to serve as an embassy. (Burger & Gould, 2002).

Merton House is the subject of discussion in a chapter titled “Living High on the Hog”, in which Burger and Gould detail the controversy surrounding the house, as well as the features including the “all-weather tennis court, jacuzzi, sauna, billiard room, library, swimming pool and a wine cellar designed to hold thousands of bottles of wine” (2002:122). The house also boasted parking for “30 vehicles, a concealed bar, bidets in all the bathrooms ‘to comply with the cultural needs of certain peoples’ and, according to Basson, a secret bomb shelter in the wine cellar designed to withstand a mortar attack” (Burger & Gould, 2002:123). The inclusion of Figure 45 signals an interesting and deliberate editorial choice on behalf of the authors. The colour picture of Merton House stands in stark contrast to the black and white picture of RRL. It would appear that Burger and Gould are suggesting that Merton House, this flagship asset attesting to a “lavish lifestyle” (2002:122), is not as much a place of mystery and ‘evil’ as RRL, but no less damning

Generally, the photographs of space and place attempt to locate for the readers a scene to be seen. The photographs vary in their tones: the sinister research space, to the enjoyment of life-sized toys like the jets, from the seemingly serious business trips aboard these two planes, to details of lavish expenditure, the photographs portray several different aspects of Project Coast. In the absence of any formal offices, Project Coast embodied a variety of spaces and places, and the notional self-evidence of these photographs is confirmed for readers, and perhaps doubled, when read in conjunction with a detailed text discussing the photographs. However, Burger and Gould fail to provide the necessary and, at times, crucial information required to understand these photographs. As I am sure many readers did, I initially incorrectly assumed that the photograph of Basson boarding the Jetstar (Figure 43) was on the same overnight stop mentioned by Burger & Gould (2002:138). Basson's shirt and pants are (almost) identical, and whilst the caption does make the distinction between Basson boarding the Jetstar versus Basson kissing the nosecone of the King Air (Figure 42), the markings of the planes are almost indistinguishable. Whilst this is just a (perhaps superfluous) observation of the 'stuff' and the 'surround', it demonstrates that in the absence of detailed information, and the fact that this story is a complex one, readers may lead to be (further) confused about details and the series of events.<sup>105</sup>

When read critically, these photographs raise important questions about who was taking the photographs, for what purposes, but also serve to demonstrate some of the relationships between these men. For example, the way that the pilot peers out of the Jetstar (Figure 43), and how (a diffident?) pilot in Figure 44 appears to have his hand on Basson's shoulder both indicate a degree of familiarity, a camaraderie.

In a different way, looking critically at the formalist qualities of the black and white photograph of RRL in contrast to the colour photograph of Merton House calls into question the intentions implicated in these selections. As mentioned, the picture of Merton House (Figure 45) is also taken from a low angle, and gives the same aura of power, but here it suggests an opulence, whereas the picture of RRL (Figure 41) is sinister. Burger and Gould appear to be attempting to demonstrate that these men were leading double lives, and present different roles which Basson (and others) could take

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<sup>105</sup> This again speaks to the concern I raised in footnote 91

on – a mad scientist, a playboy, and a criminal embroiled in money laundering – or all of these simultaneously. As Derridean supplements, these photographs fill in the blanks for the reader by way of allusion.

Then there are ones that humanise Basson *et al*, like the photographs of “childish stuff” (Burger & Gould, 2002:138). If this was the intention of the authors, I think it was successful to a degree. When these pictures are read in terms of their connection to Project Coast, they are imbued with a certain logic according to which we understand that they portray certain events and people linked to illegal activities. If removed from this context, however, the pictures would not have the same affect. At their core, though, the programme haunts these photographs with a double logic: Project Coast is simultaneously here and not here. As symbolic representations, ones which allow something absent to become present, these pictures have been mobilised by the authors to project a certain perception of the project, and to make present and material the absent and immaterial.

It must be noted that the photographs discussed in the previous two subsections should not be thought of as confined to their respective taxonomies. The photographs in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) in particular are able to serve under all three categories at once. For example, the figure of the Jetstar (Figure 44) discussed above could also fall under the category of a social and professional occasion. The photograph is composed in such a way that it appears to be a commemorative event, with the caption stating that the men have just arrived at their destination. They have only just disembarked when the unidentified photographer jumped into action to secure this moment for posterity’s sake.

### **2.5.3 Social and professional occasions**

Far from it being the one-man-circus that it appears to have been, Project Coast was populated by many different people, with varying depths of involvement, for varying lengths of time. However, since *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) deals with his criminal trial, all of the photographs relate directly and indirectly to him, feeding into the Bassonification of Project Coast. In some of these photographs, Basson *et al* are just

regular men, the victims of whimsy (kissing a nosecone), having dinner with friends and spouses. Several of the photographs, mobilised by the authors, seem to be called upon to serve to humanise Basson and others. A prime example of this, perhaps, is a photograph of him in a black *Speedo* swimsuit, on a boat with Delta G managing director, Philip Mijburgh (Figure 46). Perched on the edge of his seat, drink in hand, Basson seems like any Afrikaans South African man: on a boat with his friends, having a *dop* and doing some snorkelling.



Figure 46: Basson and Delta G Scientific managing director Philip Mijburgh. (Burger & Gould, 2002).

Once again, these photographs dance on the outskirts of evidence. Pictures such as dinners with high profile businessmen. and personal accountants do not directly

implicate the people involved in any wrong doing. Pictures such as the one of Basson with Mijburgh on a boat (Figure 46) are not evidence of anything illegal, but it would appear that the authors have employed these pictures to serve as evidence of how these men were living the high life. To photograph is an act of "turning the past into an object of tender regard" (Sontag, 2008:71), and, if read through a different 'objective' lens, there is something almost sentimental about this picture and others included in the book, a capturing of a moment shared between friends.

Looking at 'the surround' of this particular picture makes it all the more layered. A curious aspect of this photograph is that, if one magnifies the picture, the photographer's legs are visible in the reflection of Mijburgh's sunglasses. Who is this person on the edge of legibility? Is he the one who took the photograph on the runway in Lubeck? When was this photograph taken, and where? Whilst these answers are once again not given by the text or by the caption, the pictures have provided, firstly, insight into how Basson *et al* relaxed. Secondly, reading that the meeting of these two (three?) particular men in a social capacity could be read as some kind of sinister meeting of the minds – although this is not necessarily a reading that would have been productive or, indeed, fair. However, as it appears here, Basson and Mijburgh are presented as what they are: just an average group of men on a boat.

This picture, like several others, represents a sort of male camaraderie, a closeness, and friendship, or perhaps brothers in arms, serving to humanise these people. In the text, two rare moments of humanisation in the narrative appear on one page.

Burger and Gould describe Daan Goosen, the veterinarian Basson involved back in 1983 in the setting up of RRL,<sup>106</sup> as a "father of six children", and recount an anecdote where Basson and Goosen were discussing the CBW programme "over a beer and Basson's favourite savoury biscuits" (2008:28). In this conversation, Goosen had asked Basson about his motivation for being involved, to which Basson allegedly replied "One

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<sup>106</sup> Goosen was dismissed from RRL three years after he took office as the director, ostensibly because he breached security (Burger & Gould, 2002:9). According to Burger and Gould, Goosen felt aggrieved when others involved in the programme had walked away millionaires following the privatisation of the front companies in the early 1990s, which led the likes of him and Dr Schalk van Rensburg, to "launch personal campaigns to expose the secrets of their work and the corruption they believed was involved" (Burger & Gould, 2002:8-9). Van Rensburg was another former director of RRL who had left RRL "without being able to capitalise on any of the shares he believed he was entitled to" (Burger & Gould, 2008:8).

day when my daughter grows up and looks around to see a black government in power, she will ask me: ‘Daddy, what did you do to prevent this?’ and I will be able to give her a clear answer” (2002:28). Both of these men – one the head of a CBW programme, and the other a veterinarian and the director of a research facility where animals were used as test subjects – were fathers and husbands. Read in this light, these pictures look like ones you would find in almost any family album. However, because of the context in which they are archived here, as supposed illustrations to the stories of espionage and unethical research, readers may not be able to disassociate these men from their roles as CBW experts.

Basson himself is humanised in a variety of ways and through several photographs of moments of relaxation, feet up under the thatched roof *lapa*, drink in hand, and when he was “[t]rying out a peacock chair for size” (Figure 47). Sontag argues that some pictures may prompt readers to think of other photographs within the same socio-political milieu, or even photographs of related subjects (2008:106). Here there is an undeniable intertextual reference to the iconic photograph of Huey P. Newton, founding member of the Black Panther Party. This is a playful photograph, and functions not only to allude to his self-aware display of an ironic reference to an iconic photograph, but also to humanise Basson. The irony surely was not lost on Basson.



Figure 47: Trying out a peacock chair for size. (Burger & Gould, 2002).

The photograph of Basson cooking is one that, again, humanises him (Figure 48). There is a sense of plainness and familiarity, even banality, in this photograph for many South Africans; standing in a typical South African kitchen, and dressed in typical Afrikaner garb (khaki clothes and brown boots), Basson is the figure of austerity, and once again could be any man. As with Figure 46, when removed from the context of *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), Basson could be any South African farmer-type. The mordant caption comically positions Basson as a chef: “Cuisine à la Basson”. But once again, the authors’ caption fails us. Where is this? What is the occasion? Why is *he* cooking for what appears to be a lot of people, judging by the pile of plates and number of eggs in the background? The ‘stuff’ captured in the ‘surround’ is once again far more interesting. The peculiarity of this photograph is rooted in what Sontag calls “Surrealist irony” (2007:71),<sup>107</sup> and there is what Gitta Sereny calls a “misleading air of normalcy” (in Baer, 2013:429).

This is the only photograph from the Private archive that has a date: assuming the time stamp is correct, it places this incident on 29 August 1992, only months before Basson was fired from the SADF in December of the same year.<sup>108</sup> In 1990, the Harms Commission was probing the Security Police covert unit, operating from Vlakplaas, as well as their counterparts in the SADF, the CCB (Burger & Gould, 2002:3). In August of 1992, on recommendation from the Kahn Commission, secret funds flowing into clandestine security operations was cut off (Burger & Gould, 2002:3). However, Project Coast was not among the projects brought before the Commission, and it, as well as Basson, emerged from the probe unscathed. His luck ran out, however, when, after returning from purchasing 500kg of methaqualone from the Croatian Minister of Energy Affairs, Basson was woken by a phone call from Knobel informing him that had been fired and was to be placed on early retirement, as mentioned earlier.

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<sup>107</sup> Sontag (2008:51-53) states that photography is the only form of art that is “natively surreal”, and grounds this assertion in three claims: firstly, photographs create a “duplicate of the world, of a reality in the second degree”; secondly, photography’s ease of reproduction and susceptibility to accidental enhancement makes it surreal; lastly, photographs do not appear to be strongly bound by the intention of the photographer – they are created by “a loose co-operation...between the photographer and the subject – mediated by...a machine...which even when capricious can produce a result that is interesting and never entirely wrong”.

<sup>108</sup> The date offers at least some contextualisation, as does the quality of the photograph, giving it what Peim (2005:69) calls a “characteristic *timbre*” which assists in placing it within a certain era, and “within a certain knowledge”.

Again, assuming the timestamp is correct, Operation Baxil was also underway: the project producing 912kg of MDMA (ecstasy) from June 1992 to January 1993 (Burger & Gould, 2002:83). With this contextualisation, the photograph of the typical South African character in a typical South African kitchen could become imbued with a villainous undertone which, once again, may not be entirely fair to the people involved. However, these temporal contextualisations are not made evident to the reader in the text, and the time stamp is only visible upon close inspection, so many readers will never make these and a myriad of other connections. As such, this particular photograph does not seem to be employed to make Basson look like anything other than a man in a kitchen.



Other pictures in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) fall prey to this same lack of historical contextualisation. As stated, the authors do not directly reference the photographs at any stage of the book and, although the text does discuss the various relationships, situations and places and objects that the photographs depict, they come to be what Peim (2005:68-69) describes as photographs which stand alone, as “documents [which] speak for themselves... [photographs that] punctuate the text as self-evident illustrations”. The question of authorship is also not addressed insofar as no indication is given of who supplied which pictures.

The significance of this contextualisation lies in the concern of intent at the moment of fact creation (Trouillot in Caswell, 2014:10). If photographs were taken by Lourens, a man intricately involved in the research and development of chemical and biological weapons, the hermeneutic, the frame, would be different than if they were taken by Van Remoortere, who was involved purely from the perspective of an outsider businessman. This failure of the text is not entirely negative: it leaves the documents open to interpretation by the reader, and consequently, new meanings are given the chance to arise. When looking at the pictures, as I said above, these could be any men, doing any number of things. With our always already present knowledge of who Wouter Basson and his associates are, however, we cannot divorce ourselves from the criminality that was inscribed upon the Basson character (both through the media as well as in Burger and Gould’s book). This antecedent knowledge, for the vast majority of people, comes exclusively from the TRC and Basson’s criminal trial, and to see photographs of the lesser-known role players and the various spaces makes real the project that has, from its inception, been the quintessential non-entity.

In summation, the function of the photographs of social and professional occasions, I believe, manifests in two ways: to make them appear malevolent, but also to humanise them. They show that these men were a tight-knit group of friends. The photographs also intimate delusions of grandeur and a total disavowal of moral obligations: as Gould states, they were meant to speak to the contrast between the high lives of this boys’ club, and the malice in creating weapons and chemicals intended to harm people (2015/10/03). The authors allude to this malice at various points, as discussed above, and Basson himself admitted to enjoying nefarious research: in *Anthrax War* (2009),

Basson himself described to Bob Coen that the research into the 'Black Bomb' was the most fun he had had in his life.

On the other hand, the photographs also function to humanise them – Basson more than others. Basson has, through the various court cases and investigations, become somewhat of an enigma – larger than life. The media created this character with sensationalist headlines and photographs that made him look like an evil genius, a lunatic in a lab coat, but Basson is, essentially, just another military man. The ontological disjunction and the attendant tension between these two conflicting narrative characters that he (and others) plays is evident in the photographs, as nowhere else.

It is important to note that the photographs in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) are kept separate from the text, and whilst this is a publishing convention, the emplacement indicates that these photographs are meant to behave as (non-Derridian) supplements to the text. They are, at their core, photographs that were produced in different contexts, presumably with the intention of them being kept in the Private archive, and are not part of a narrative series, but have been collected and arranged to function in the text as a visual narrative. Photographs are not always produced as part of a series, and they “may be scattered among a number of series of distinct documental typologies, ‘being part’ of the textual, printed and electronic records” and these characteristics are “marks of identification and of functional context”, fundamental to our understanding of how the photographs are used in the current collection (de Lacerda, 2012:289). In other words, we must consider the provenance of the photographs: in order to understand the work of the photograph, consideration should be given to various elements of document production, including the functions and meanings of the documents in their various uses, as well as an item’s chain of custody. In the case of the photographs in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), the pictures originated in the Private archive, were not produced in a series, or with the purpose of reproduction, but they come to form part of the textual record. Because readers are not given adequate information, these “marks of identification and of functional context” (de Lacerda, 2012:289) are lost, and fall prey to being reinscribed with a biased criminality that is not necessarily appropriate, as I have shown above.

As supplements in the Derridan sense, these photographs *do* give us insight into the

exclusively about business relations. These, and the other photographs, indicate a deferral of presence, signifying for the reader that whilst the project may not have existed in a concrete place, there were real people involved, in real spaces, having real interactions. For the reader, the signifying power lies in their ability to make the project visually legible, and in that sense the photographs have far-reaching importance for the meaning which we bring to bear on the project. However, these meanings are, as I have stated, purely conjecture.

The curatorial choices/intentions inherent in the sequencing of the photographs in the book is also of significance, if they are to be considered as stand-alone documents which are visual cues for the reader. They form their own economy wherein the reader reads the photographs as a narrative. Alan Sekula (2003:445) notes that conventional wisdom dictates that photographs relay incontrovertible truths, but when photographs are taken from their original context and placed in the Public archive (here, the book-as-archive), the archive is able to establish “a relation of *abstract visual equivalence* between pictures” (emphasis in original).

Of the rationale behind the sequencing, Gould (2015/10/02) states that they were attempting to reflect the broad chronology of the programme, followed by the TRC hearing and then the trial. The sequencing takes readers through a visual narrative detailing Basson’s international spy-games and his collusion with dangerous people. The turbulent ride to make Project Coast visible begins with Basson boarding the Jetstar, followed by photographs of dinners and downtime, to photographs of his TRC and criminal trial battles, and ending with Basson’s acquittal. The authors were also working with limited pictures, so there was perhaps also an attempt to construct as clear an image of the project – already a fractured and incomplete picture – as possible. The paring of pictures heightens and complicates our understanding of events: we are not always sure who is who, and what was happening at the time of the taking of the picture. We are also never sure what the intentions of the pictures – why were Lourens and van Remoortere taking these pictures? Was it to commemorate, to document, or was it simply just a case of taking snapshots?

The last four pictures suggest a closure sequence in the visual narrative. Figure 49 shows Prosecutor Anton Ackermann and Tjaart Viljoen, mid stride. Viljoen turned state

lavish lifestyle.<sup>109</sup> As Basson's business partner, Viljoen told the Pretoria High Court that he and Basson, and their wives and other friends, often took the Jetstar, a plane belonging to the WPW Group. Readers do not know whether they are leaving or arriving at court, or if this is the first day, or the last, but placing these two key figures near the end visually cues the reader that the trial is drawing to a close. Photographs are arguably traces of the real, and the trope of pictures of people either leaving or arriving at court feed into the pathologising of the various figures – as *de facto* accused, like Viljoen below, these men also have a case to prove, and have questions to answer. Once again, there would have been various choices for the picture below, but this particular picture shows Ackermann with head held high, in pursuit of justice, whilst Viljoen, essentially a guilty man turned witness, averts his eyes to the ground. Perhaps the authors are suggesting that Viljoen's bowed head is in some way an indicator of guilt.



Figure 49: Senior prosecutor Anton Ackermann and accountant Tjaart Viljoen, one of Basson's closest business associates and a key state witness. (Burger & Gould, 2002).

<sup>109</sup> Tjaart Viljoen was Project Coast's first financial administrator, and he also ran WPW Group's South African subsidiaries (Burger & Gould, 2002:123). Viljoen enjoyed, amongst other things, a membership at the Fancourt golf club, and several international trips hosted by Basson (Burger & Gould, 2002:127-128).

The penultimate picture is one of a *smiling* Judge Hartzenberg (Figure 50), the man who acquitted Basson of every single charge brought before him. Of all the possible photographs of Hartzenberg, the authors chose this one. He appears very satisfied, smiling broadly as he exits court. Readers may feel incredulous toward him, wondering how, out of the 67 charges against him, and with the sheer volume of witnesses and evidence presented, compounded by the fact that the only witness called by the defence was Basson himself, did Hartzenberg find Basson not guilty of a single thing?



Figure 50: Judge Willie Hartzberg, who acquitted Basson on all charges. (Burger & Gould, 2002).

The book ends with a photograph of Basson embracing advocate Jaap Cilliers following his acquittal on all charges against him (Figure 51). Sontag (2008:178) reminds us that we need to question whose needs these pictures serve, which institutions do they buttress, but also which antagonisms they pacify or incite. In short, we need to question

what the function of the pictures are in the current image-world (Sontag, 2008:178). This final show of male camaraderie in the visual narrative, once again, seems a tender moment, if removed and suspended from the context. Basson, now an older man, appears humble, with downcast eyes and florescent halo, but also appears to either not be ready for the show of affection, or reluctant to receive it (he has raised his left hand to Cilliers' chest). The choice of this particular picture is intentional, serving the institution, that is, the narrative, and the authors' feelings towards Basson *et al* expressed in this image-world. To be affected morally by pictures, we require a political understanding of the context in which the pictures are presented, and in which they were produced (Sontag, 2008:19). Readers are morally affected by these pictures through the political framing provided by the authors (at times in a manipulative way), directed at soliciting a particular response. For the final picture in the book, there would have been several options of this precise moment to have chosen from, but the authors chose this one, perhaps to incite an antagonistic response. Readers have just come to the end of a harrowing tale of lies, deceit, espionage and intent by this man to cause grave harm to innocent people, this photograph encapsulates the sense of criminality laid out for readers by the authors: this is an embrace between the devil and his advocate.



Figure 51: Basson hugs his advocate, Jaap Cilliers, after being acquitted on all charges in April 2002. (Burger & Gould, 2002).

## 2.6 Conclusion

Allan Sekula states that a feature of archival photographs involves the suspension of their original meaning (1989:116). He says: “In an archive, the possibility of meaning is ‘liberated’ from the actual contingencies in use. But this liberation is also ... loss of context” (2003:444-445). When photographs are removed from an archive, even a Private archive – as is the case with some of the photographs in the book – and placed into a new context, here the book-as-archive, the specificity of their original use/function is all but lost. The original meanings “can be avoided and even made invisible” (Sekula, 2003:444-445), allowing productive readings, and new meanings. The photograph within the archive “exists in a state that is both residual and potential. The suggestion of past uses coexist with a plenitude of possibilities” (Sekula, 1989:118). The fact that these photographs have been removed from their original context (that of the Private archive) and have been called upon to serve the Public archive means there is a loss of ‘original’ meaning, but this activation has opened these photographs up to a plethora of new readings and meanings.

The work of the photographs in service of the Public archive, then, is two-fold. On the one hand, they are illustrating the text. Drawing on Derrida’s (1998:144) notion of the supplement, I have attempted to demonstrate that the various authors and editors intended for the photographs to behave as supplementary to the narrative – to give faces to the people, to make seen the scene. The inclusion of the photographs in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) was perhaps an attempt to add something of substance to the narrative (not to suggest that the text has no substance) but, owing to the fact that these photographs appear to exist in a vacuum (that is, not directly discussed or contextualised in the text – leaving the text incomplete), they remain secondary, a seemingly inessential extra in this hard facts-based book-as-archive. There are, however, tensions in the notion that the photographs are illustrative, because, in a sense, they do add to the text. The photographs can be understood as adding to an incomplete text, assisting the text in signifying more fully, and giving the excitement of a visual narrative. The reader, desperate for that picture, that incriminating evidence, is left wanting, so resorts to looking for something that signifies culpability within the banal pictures in the book, and reads into the photographs what is not necessarily there.

Whilst the photographs in both Public archives certainly enhance the spectator value, they do not serve any evidentiary purpose. Nothing new is being presented to readers who are even only vaguely familiar with the project, but faces are put to names, and, as I have stated, Basson and his associates are made a little more human. The photographs are mostly banal, unassuming snapshots. Perhaps the banality of these photographs place readers in a position where they are unable to utilise the pictures for any productive reading. Conversely, they could be used, as mentioned previously, as powerful signifiers to make real these almost imaginary events. The photographs create an ambiance for the reader, a scene in which they can visualise what it is that they are reading. There is nothing repugnant or abhorrent to see, nothing abject, not like the photographs that emerged from the international programmes. These are photographs of a banal evil, as Hannah Arendt (2006) terms it. There is nothing to see, unless we learn to see.

Thus, the photographs' functions and indeed their performances as visual documents in the book-as-archive and the news media are, for the most part, illustrative. Photographs do have the power to bridge the distance between space and time (Sontag, 2008:58), and the pictures in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) do function to bring to the present the past events, adding an interesting temporal layer to the pictures – the past erupting in the present.

On the other hand, however, the pictures are able to liberate themselves from the text whilst they “speak’ across the written text and punctuate it with their presence” (Peim, 2005:72). Perhaps these photographs could be thought of as documents because they make visible both the invisible project and the various people and places involved, as well as make manifest/materialise the banal bureaucracy of apartheid. However, the photographs, largely uncontextualised and ambiguous, are left open to be read as evidence of criminality, contrary to their likely original rationale. Seeing a photograph of men traversing the world, and being told that this was done on the taxpayer’s bill, force these photographs to behave as evidence of wrongdoing. At times, these photographs can be used to implicate people in scenarios, and also serve to memorialise a (perceived) criminality.

Elkins reminds us that pictures “work as arguments, resisting, speeding, slowing,

them”, they do the “work of undermining and diverting”, and argues that our understanding of pictures would be deeper if we took these effects under consideration (2013:26). There are, Elkins argues, at least three kinds of pictures used in visual media studies: pictures used as mnemonics, pictures used as examples, and pictures used as illustrations (2013:26). The photographs in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) are, I believe, function at times as all three, but mainly as mnemonic pictures.

With mnemonic pictures, the purpose lies not so much in the quality of the picture, but the fact that it acts as a reminder to the readers/viewers (Elkins, 2013:26). The photographs, particularly the profile photographs in the news media, function as mnemonic pictures, documents in the Public archive which serve as reminders for readers what the various people look like, and whilst quality is a concern, it is not as concerned with the possibility of a formal analysis. As such, these pictures do not add anything of ‘evidential’ substance. Pictures as illustrations differ from pictures as examples,<sup>110</sup> Elkins argues, because “an example provides evidence or veracity to an argument”, where as an illustration “is an addition, an ornament, a conventional accompaniment. When an image in an essay or book is not required, either as an aid to the reader’s memory or as a concrete instance of something argued in the text, then its purpose may be illustrative in this sense” (2013:27). Illustrations are, in the strictest non-Derridean sense, purely supplementary.

Each kind of use is “also a way of keeping images in check, keeping them at a distance from the text – of ensuring the text remains in control” (Elkins, 2013:26). The text in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) – and the news media to a degree – certainly maintain control owing to their inherent ambiguity and lack of provenance. Discussing the photographs supplied by Lourens and Van Remoortere in their original context of a Private archive was not possible: when I approached Lourens for comment, he indicated that he would be willing to assist, but has since gone to ground. I attempted to contact Charles van Remoortere, and have yet to receive a response. All I am left with is informed speculation.

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<sup>110</sup> Pictures used as examples, Elkins states, are crucial in visual studies when discussing politics and gender for, when this happens, “cultural and philosophical criticism can take center stage, and images that are presented, at first, as enabling moments in the critique can become merely exemplary. A sign that an image is being used as an example is that the author’s points about gender, subjectivity, political identity, or other subjects might be made just as well without the image” (2013:27).

The media photographs do, at times, fall victim to the same ambiguity and the non-specificity of photographs used in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), as I have shown. However, the project of news media photographs does not lie so much in their documentary value, as it does in their attention-garnering value. The use of portrait photographs could be seen as a strategy employed by the editorial staff based on giving a face to a name – the fact that a face is somehow significant, somehow signifying.

As a Public archive, the news media relied on photographs created *ex post facto* during the TRC hearing and the criminal trial precisely because they did not have access to the Private archives of Lourens and van Remoortere. The work of photographs in newspapers, then, is also almost exclusively mnemonic and illustrative, insofar as with almost every news report, a new photograph was/is produced. These photographs do not provide much potential to circulate and be reused, or even to be discussed critically (at this point in time, anyway) precisely because new photographs are being taken almost every time Basson appeared in court. Newspapers are temporary objects and are valid only for a limited time. As the story progresses, photographs relating to the articles will necessarily change. People will get older, new information will come to light. The visual economy is still being constructed.

As documents, the photographs have moved from a Private archive, and have been included in a Public archive, a book-as-archive, one which is a publically accessible space. But for the most part, the “behind the scenes” types of photographs were likely just happy snaps taken amongst friends. However, there remains an ideological component to the use of the pictures in their current/contemporary activation. The photographs have been used by both the news media and Burger and Gould to convey a certain message. Removed from their original context, as Sekula (2003:444-445) states, the possibility of avoiding original inscriptions of ideological intent within the photographs is made available. The possibility of reinscription and reactivation mean that readers perform the work of archivist, and are able to inscribe counter-narratives, to read the archive against the grain. This allows the photographs to be understood via a deconstructive reading, and could bring out voices, new voices, ones that were silenced in the production of the photographs.

Thus, as a collective, the three taxonomies of photographs discussed (profiles, spaces

different readers. For one reader, they could be incontrovertible evidence of these men caught *in flagrante delicto*: Dr Death and his men who appear able to carry on with a normal life, cavorting on international jaunts with friends and family. Read differently, the photographs could serve as evidence that he is not evil incarnate that the media has portrayed him to be.

De Lacerda (2012:293) argues that the fundamental difference between photographs as documents and “traditional textual communication documents” lies in their ability to be appropriated for other uses: “[o]n the one hand images are created and on the other hand images are used”. The polysemic nature of pictures dictates that they can be used in many contexts for any number of reasons, have many possible layers, and thus there are a myriad framings to consider.<sup>111</sup> Readings produced by victims, or the families of victims, would perhaps be embittered, and these photographs could be read as ‘evidence’ of Basson’s wrongdoings. However, there is no concrete evidential value inherent in these pictures. The media has worked to construct different characters, none of which appeared particularly favourable – as Basson himself states, the media made him out to be “some kind of weird monster” (Ajam, 2007).

The visual economies through which we understand Project Coast set up an expectation of what the photographs in publications like *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) ought to have included. Publications such as those by Schmidt (2015) and Leitenberg and Zilinskas (2012) have set up an imaginary framework of what we should be shown, but the photographs that I have discussed here have failed the expectations. Yale, discussing the authority of printed documents, notes that hand-written documents were often pointed to “to shore up the authenticity and authority of the printed documents” signalling a relationship between “primary” sources (written) and “secondary” narratives (printed)... “[p]rint alone felt insubstantial, untrustworthy: it had to point to writing, even to face-to-face interaction, to authenticate itself”. The same can be said of the photograph/text dichotomy inherent in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould,

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<sup>111</sup> Gottfried Boehm (in Curtis (2011:14) notes that it is a fact generally taken for granted that pictures create meaning, and convince the viewers of something. What the pictures are trying to convince the viewer of is dependent upon the viewer(s), the curator(s), and the institution in which the photographs are found. De Lacerda (2012:297) notes that, in terms of photographs produced in an institutional context, it is necessary also to determine who the author of the picture is because, as the primary author of an image, the photographer is the one who is responsible for the “record-making decision and preparation of the photographic image”.

2002). It would appear that the photographs become the secondary narrative, both of which are ultimately incomplete.

There is, perhaps, something to be said about the prioritisation of 'facts' (documents) over photographs. *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002) – and, to a degree the news media – relies exclusively, as I have demonstrated, on 'fact' insofar as the photographic is, at times, purely incidental, illustrative, putting faces to names – Elkin's mnemonic (2013:26). The prioritisation of certain kinds of documents in this case is arguably resultant of the unavailability of 'better' photographs. As such, in this particular case, it is not necessarily problematic that the 'fact' is given priority over the visual, but it does speak to an overarching privileging of the written over the depicted – Derrida's metaphysics of presence (1997:49).

Is there something 'more criminal' about being 'caught in the act', photographed being up to no good? Are the written documents not 'as incriminating' as a photograph? Perhaps in traditional ruminations about the textual document versus the photograph, there is something about the ability to forge a document that the photograph is 'incapable' of doing (being a supposed 'trace of the real'). Would a photograph make Project Coast more concretely and verifiably criminal? Can a photograph be concrete evidence of criminality and culpability? Is a photograph 'more evidentiary' than a signed document? In forensics, possibly. It is an interesting thought experiment to wonder how differently the trial may have gone had there been photographs.

In this chapter, I demonstrated that the presences (the photographs) within the Public archives (the news media and the book-as-archive) serve a secondary function in the texts in which they are found insofar as they are mnemonic and illustrative of Project Coast. In the following chapter, I turn towards the archive which houses all the information from which the TRC hearings and criminal trials, and by extension, *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould) were drawn.

Drawing on this chapter's foregrounding of what the visual economy of such a project entails, the next chapter discusses the failure of this economy in making Project Coast visible in the archive. The archive, AL2922, is the most complete collection of documents relating to Project Coast and, in fact, the only archiving dealing directly with

information, but is, in reality, plagued by visible absences and deafening secrecy. I discuss the absences within the archive, and how absence, as a conceptual metaphor, can be used to study AL2922's empty spaces. I suggest that these spaces originate from a systemic structure of secrecy, which was central to apartheid in general, and Project Coast specifically. As such, the absences may be understood as ideological.

# CHAPTER TWO – ABSENCE

## *AL2922 – Visible absences*

### The Secret Sits

We dance round in a ring and suppose,  
But the Secret sits in the middle and knows.

– Robert Frost, 1936

### 3.1 Introduction

Frost's couplet captures several popular ideas about secrecy: secrecy appears to have something like human agency, secrecy organises social life, and that declaration of possessing a secret is, often, more powerful than the content of the secret itself (Melly, 2015). In the poem, the secret is personified: sitting, knowing. Of the secrets' seeming human agency, Timothy Melly argues that the secret's secret knowledge makes it an agent, and being in possession of the secret's content organises social life insofar as those in the know are separated from those on the margins. Those on the margins dance around the circle in movements of supposition and conjecture, fetishising the secret's secret as an object of fantasy. Melly (2015) argues that the presumption of importance of a secret or an object arises from its concealment from those on the margins. He continues to say that whilst the *content* of the secret is private, the *form* of the secret is public (Melly, 2015).

This is reminiscent of Donald Rumsfeld's (2002) pseudo-intellectual phrase "known unknowns", suggesting that there is a way of knowing there is a secret – only once the existence of a secret is public knowledge does the secret itself gain organising power. Rumsfeld's "deepity" (Dennet, 2014:56) simultaneously says nothing, but also encapsulates most covert government operations: we know that the government is up to something, and whilst we have our suspicions, we just do not know what it might be because we cannot see it.

Within visual culture, there has been an historical emphasis on the visible and concrete: that which we can see and feel, the material with which we are able to engage on a sensory level. Less attention has been paid to that which is not there, and that with which it is more difficult to engage.

Brian Rappert (2015:4) argues that, in the study of political and social life,

... regard for what is being attended to needs to be combined with what is not: what issues are not considered, what is not said, what matters are rendered hidden, what grievances never get formed, what paths are never pursued. That might be because some questions never get asked, pertinent information is never shared, forums for collective discussion do not exist, some individuals actively work against others knowing, and so on. All such social processes characterized by absence are – at least in principal – open to empirical and theoretical

Such a concern regarding what is absent might help produce a more robust analysis of the work of secrecy and ideology when governments purposely do not produce or release, or conceal and even destroy documents of (inter)national importance. In this chapter, I propose that, when we are left with only fragments of an archive, we are able to look at and examine absences within a narrative, within a history, within the physical archive, as potentially productive spaces – a kind of meaningful ‘absent’ spatiality. In these spaces, there is potential to begin discussing the implications of ideology, secrecy, and what Ilan Pappé terms ‘memoricide’ – the erasure of a history through destruction and replacement (2006:231).

Drawing on the previous section’s establishment of the (affective) work of photographic photograph in the service of the archive, I turn the discussion towards considering the implications of the lack of photographs in the archive. I examine how the absence of pictures in the archive presents a question of the ‘comprehensiveness’ of the collection, a ‘comprehensiveness’ towards which archivists aspire. Is the archive strengthened or weakened in the absence of visual images, and if so, which aspects are strengthened or weakened? Are the notions of ‘comprehensiveness’ affected, or is the affective power of the collection also strengthened or weakened?

I discuss this in relation to SAHA’s AL2922, and the conspicuous lack of photographs pertaining to Project Coast. I argue that the absence speaks to ideologies of censorship and secrecy, both systemically and self-imposed, within archival methodologies in general, but more specifically in relation to Project Coast – and by extension, the apartheid state. I employ Derrida’s (1994) notion of hauntology in order to contend with the slippery notion of the material and the immaterial, the present and the absent. As a metaphor, the spectral allows access to “phenomena [which] are not made present in a straightforward manner, but manifest in and as their absence, so that their escaping notice remains part of their signification” (Peeren, 2014b:10). As mentioned in the introduction to this study, Derrida believes that the very structure of archives is spectral, “spectral *a priori*: neither present nor absent ‘in the flesh’, neither visible nor invisible” (1998:84). I will attempt to show that the absences may possess a form of spectral agency. The immaterial yet visible absence is capable of forming an imaginary space, and imaginary documents in which we could hear, and upon which we, as viewers, victims. researchers. and South Africans in general. might be able to project South

Africa's untold stories. However, it is not my intention to "simply marshal pregnant blanks to fashion an engrossing story" (Rappert, 2014:46), nor am I attempting to spin narratives around these blank spaces. This chapter is grounded in an attempt to begin thinking about an ethics of absence, and to tease out, through philosophical reflection, the possibilities of critical reflections on absences. I aim to start a kind of thinking that "has no need of *the event of a revelation or the revelation of an event* ... [rather one that allows us] to think the possibility of such an event but not the event itself" (Derrida, 1992:49).

### **3.2 Evidence of absence**

Absences can take several forms and arise from a variety of situations; and knowing that something is absent, and from where it is absent, is complex terrain. It is not the intention of this study to somehow resolve the 'question' of absence, or to attempt to bring back the absent documents, but rather to begin speaking towards an ethics of absence – to open the absences up as blank spaces which can be read as analogous or metaphorical for ideologies and secrecy. What is needed, then, is a space within visual studies wherein researchers are able to discuss the absences, such as they are. Blank spaces are of "complex significance" and are "perhaps paradoxically, a nonfigurative figure or negative sign of a future or external power that erupts within the frame" (Goodrich, 1999:91). The blank spaces are neither innocent, nor are they indifferent. As I will show, the absences or blank spaces signify the power of ideology and secrecy at play, one that extends from the apartheid era and continues to haunt many of the post-apartheid archives. The question is, then, how do we know that something is absent, and how do we define 'absence' as an object of inquiry?

An absence could be a visible, actioned-by-a-human redaction of a government document: when words or lines are blacked out "the resulting 'holes' on the page become pregnant with significance" (Rappert, 2015:8). An example of such absences can be seen in a TRC record released in December 2015 (Figure 52), requested from the Department of Justice (DoJ) by SAHA under the Promotion of Access to Information Act of 2000.

<p>CRB/33230 13 November 1996 -126- F S BENNETTS</p> <p>Where was that farm? --- Sir, I could not tell you. I was there once and I was out of there again. Once and once only. I know it was Tongaat area and I know it was rented from [REDACTED]</p> <p>Who was the nominal renter as far as you know? --- Don't know.</p> <p>Who was head of that unit? --- At that time Hentie Botha and all of us all still were at C Section under Colonel Taylor so I presume it would have been - was Colonel Taylor.</p> <p>So that farm was a sugar farm, was it? --- A sugar farm? Ja, I presume - they were growing sugar cane there, ja.</p> <p>You saw sugar cane on it? --- Ja, it was one of [REDACTED] houses on their major farms up there. Tongaat</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>And it was somewhere near Tongaat? --- Ja, I</p>	<p>CRB/33230 13 November 1996 -128- F S BENNETTS</p> <p>Where was that farm? --- Sir, I could not tell you. I was there once and I was out of there again. Once and once only. I know it was Tongaat area and I know it was rented from Hulett's Sugar Group.</p> <p>Who was the nominal renter as far as you know? --- Don't know.</p> <p>Who was head of that unit? --- At that time Hentie Botha and all of us all still were at C Section under Colonel Taylor so I presume it would have been - was Colonel Taylor.</p> <p>So that farm was a sugar farm, was it? --- A sugar farm? Ja, I presume - they were growing sugar cane there, ja.</p> <p>You saw sugar cane on it? --- Ja, it was one of Hulett's houses on their major farms up there. Tongaat</p> <p>[REDACTED] /Hulett's Hulett's Group.</p> <p>And it was somewhere near Tongaat? --- Ja, I</p>
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Figure 52: Inconsistent redactions of TRC hearing documents by the DoJ, released to SAHA in 2014 and 2015. (SAHA).

Whilst the content of the transcript does not directly impact the topic under discussion,<sup>112</sup> the above example demonstrates how the redacting of information, and the resultant black line, a hole in the page, becomes significant, and represents a (literal) form of absence. The document on the left was released to SAHA in 2014, and the one on the right was released in 2015. These are the very same transcripts, with differing redactions made by the DoJ. This particular example demonstrates two things: firstly, the DoJ have been disorganised and inconsistent in their evaluation of documents and the redaction of information, calling into question not only their methodology, but also what else they are keeping out of the public record; secondly, this incident demonstrates that the DoJ is not “applying its mind to the information in the records”, a dangerous practice for any department (SAHA).

As descriptors, ‘absent’ and ‘present’ are often understood in degrees. In other words, Rappert (2015:6-7) posits that asking whether something is ‘absent’ does not necessarily require a definitive or finite ‘yes’ or ‘no’ – rather, the degree of absence

<sup>112</sup> The transcript is a section of the TRC interview of Frank Sandy Bennetts, under Section 29 of the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995. Bennetts was a security police operative based in Durban, who served as supervisor on a farm where the plotting of killing of activists was done by Colonels Andy Taylor and Eugene de Kock. In the transcript he names Colonel Taylor and Captain HJP ‘Hentie’ Botha as the heads of the unit. Taylor and Botha both applied for amnesty for the death of anti-apartheid activist and member of Umkhonto we Sizwe, Ntombikayise Priscilla Khubeka. The Security Branch members claimed that Khubeka died of a heart attack following an interrogation session, however, following the exhumation of a body believed to be hers, a bullet wound was found in the back of the head (TRC Final Report)

prompts us to pay “attention to *aspect*”, to the “sense of substance” (emphasis in original).

The more research opens up to the possibility of considering absences, “the more they abound, but the appreciation of their prominence does not leave us lesser, but rather richer” (Rappert, 2015:6). Rappert succinctly sums up three instances where an absence may become apparent: from an anticipation or expectation; when presences imply an absence; and absences as relational (2015:8). These delineations are perhaps useful for defining features of an absence, as well as ordering and limiting the ‘absent’ as an object of study (though not as steadfast rules).

A sense of an absence can arise from the disappointed anticipation of an object, such as the disappointment of the failed retrieval of an expected document. As discussed in the previous chapter, the failure of the expected visual evidence has led to a present and visible absence within AL2922. There are blank spaces within the archive; most are metaphorical, but some are literal, as I will discuss shortly.

In describing how presence can imply an absence, Rappert (2015:8) explains that when a picture is taken, aspects of the event are necessarily excluded. Absence can also be thought of as relational or comparative. An absence could “*imply* presence because to be empty is to be empty of something; something that was there, should be there, or in the future might again come back” (Rappert, 2015:7-8, emphasis in original). There is an implied absence, as well as a relational absence in AL2922 because viewers know what is absent by knowing what is present elsewhere. We know that there are certain kinds of photographs missing because they are present in the visual narratives surrounding other similar projects. The absences in AL2922 are haunted by the traces<sup>113</sup> of that which is present, those photographs appearing in books, in news articles, and in several documentary films on CBW. The absences within this archive can be understood as “narrative[s] about secrets which are in the open, yet contained

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<sup>113</sup>In the preface to *Of Grammatology* (Derrida, 1997), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak interprets Derrida’s use of trace to mean “the part played by the radically other within the structure of difference that is the sign” (1997: xvii). Essentially, a sign’s meaning is only constituted through the traces of what it does not mean. In other words, the trace implies that there is a mark left in each of the binaries by the opposing concept, and whilst that trace may not be present (or, rather, immediately discernable), it is there: good exists through its differences to evil, but is only understood by the traces left by ‘evil’ in ‘good’. Similarly, absence exists in presence, and presence exists in absence.

and regulated by the custodians and curators of archives” (Beck, 2015). Within archival studies, relationships of power exist insofar as the custodians and curators of the archives determine what is worthy of consignment.

The complexity of AL2922, as a type of human rights abuse archive, is demonstrative of the relationship of the law and politics in the curation of a nation’s memory. The absences in AL2922 “exemplify [the] law’s power over death, [and] its ability to exercise power beyond death” (Pugliese, 2013:179). What we require, then, is a manner in which to see the work of ideological secreting within the post-apartheid archive.

### **3.3 Seeing secrecy in Thirdspace**

Apartheid was, arguably, constructed around the central (and dual) pillars of secrecy and ideology. The bureaucracy was – and continues to be – pervasive and profound, and intruded on the lives of almost all citizens, on several levels, perpetrated by multiple state bodies with a variety of mandates. These mandates included control over racial classification, relationships, movement, property ownership, business practices, media censorship and, of course, national memory. These control measures were supplemented by stringent surveillance, all of which combined amounted to a colossal accumulation of data which the apartheid government “secreted jealously from public view” (Harris, 2000:29).

As the progression towards democracy drew closer, the culture of secrecy in the well-oiled apartheid machine led to a memocide in the mass sanitisation of the national memory. In that “paper Auschwitz”, 44 metric tons of documents were destroyed by the National Intelligence Service alone (Bell & Ntsebeza, 2003:9). Added to this, the policy-mandated systematic erasure of documents by agencies and programmes, both within the government and without, left the archives gutted of any documents that they, as a securocratic state, deemed best forgotten. The documents that were spared, and those which were released to the TRC and to the media, were “rendered safe for public consumption” (Stoler in Edwards & Mead, 2013:33). Disinfecting the nations’ secrets took, perhaps, two forms. Firstly, the draconian censorship laws and regulation of the media meant the government controlling what was read and broadcast, amongst a myriad of other things. Secondly, the deliberate and systematic destruction of

documents, which, coupled with censorship, meant that the apartheid government was not only controlling what was being disseminated, but also what information was to be kept for future generations.

Less insidious than deliberate destruction and censorship, though no less devastating, are instances of a kind of circumstantial secrecy where documents were either lost or accidentally destroyed. Figure 53 is a very literal example of how documents were either purposively destroyed or withheld, or were lost during their numerous moves – between the SADF, the NIS, and other bodies who took custody of them at various times – toward their final destination in the SAHA special collections. Whilst this particular ‘document’ comes from a different SAHA collection, AL2878, a collection pertaining to ‘sensitive’ TRC documents,<sup>114</sup> it is an apt illustration of a physical *tabula rasa*. Absences are a slippery phenomenon, so it is perhaps helpful to use this present document, something which *appears* to be a cipher, as an illustration to demonstrate the workings of secrecy, ideology, absences, Thirdspace, as well as seeing a-visually in Thirdspace. It is a present example of an absence, implying that there is an absence – in this particular case it is in fact directly stating that there once was a presence.

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<sup>114</sup> AL2878, The Freedom of Information Programme Collection, comprises copies of materials obtained through the Promotion of Access to Information Act (SAHA)

copy

1971

PHOTO

003709

1971

Figure 53 is a physical blank space that could/should have had visible information, in this case a photograph. The document is a poor quality photocopy of a document that appears to have had the word “PHOTO” pasted on before copying (evidenced by the faint lines surrounding it, as shown in detail in Figure 54), indicating that the photograph was not there when it was photocopied. It also appears that the document that was photocopied was a photocopy of another photocopy, as evidenced by the double “COPY” stamp, and another faint line (Figure 55). The punch holes on the left of the document are also evidence that this was held in a ring binder type of file at some stage.

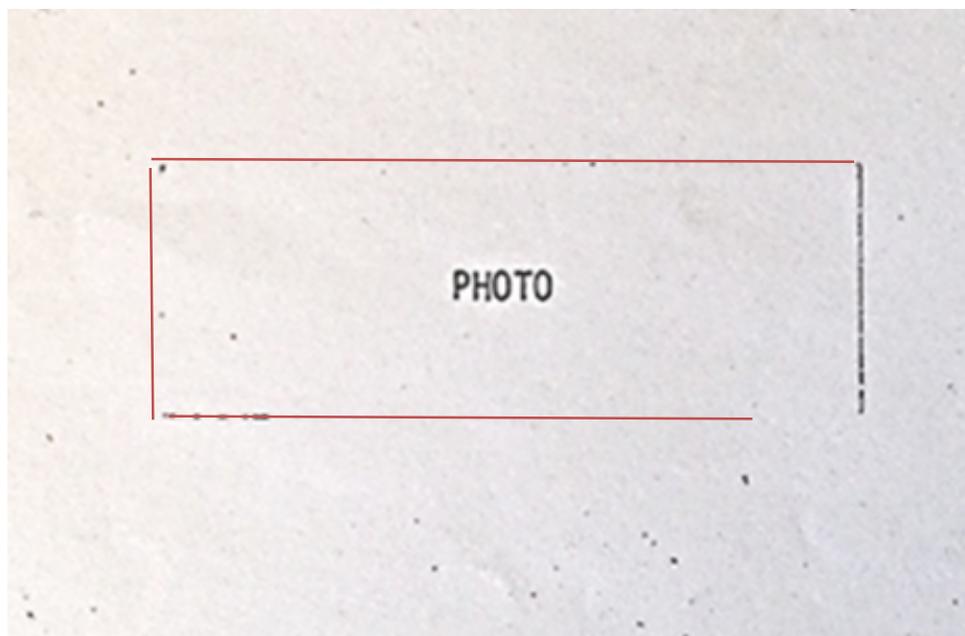


Figure 54: Desmond TUTU and three individuals – detail.

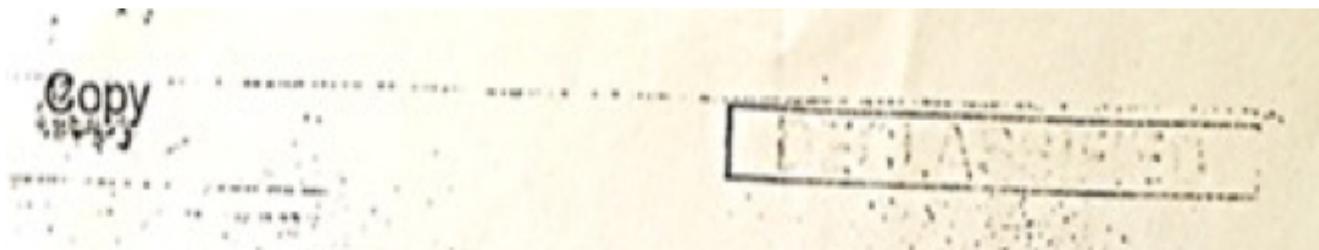


Figure 55: Desmond TUTU and three individuals – detail.

As briefly discussed in the introduction to this study, the a-visual is a concept that I have adapted from Derrida's "absolute invisibility" (1992: 90) and Akira Lippit's "avisuality" (2005:32). Derrida (1992:90) states that the absolute invisible "falls outside the register of sight", and Lippit (2005:32) expands upon this by stating that the absolute invisible is something which is "never given to sight; it resides in the other senses as invisible". Thus, the absolute invisible is something which exists but cannot be seen, and is an order of the non-visual, such as music, the tactile, but also "seeing in secret" (Derrida, 1992:90). Lippit argues for a conception of avisuality wherein, "[p]resented to vision, there to be seen, the avisual image remains, in a profoundly irreducible manner, unseen" (2005:32). In other words, Lippit argues that there is something that, when confronted, cannot be seen, whereas Derrida argues that there is something that falls outside the register of sight, but nonetheless exists as something which *could* be seen. I modify these two terms to create something which is visible in its absence: a spectre that is a 'blank' space where something should/could have been, a space in which scholars and researchers can imagine what the photograph would have looked like, an haunted space which possesses a kind of agency and implores us to respond. The work of the a-visual is to create a new logic of reading, one that gives access to absences.

The document is (t)here, presented in plain sight, determining "an experience of seeing, a sense of the visual, without ever offering an image" (Lippit, 2005:32). This document is perhaps better described as avisual in Lippit's (2005:32) conception because it is physically (t)here, but there is nothing to be seen. The photograph that *was* there is an instance of the a-visual, as a document which has been absented but haunts the document. In its absence, the photograph that was there, the now non-object, is ideologically charged. This is where I believe that seeing a-visually may be useful as I imagine the a-visual as a vehicle through which to discuss the ideological dimension of absence. I do not believe that absences are necessarily a failure of the visual economy, but are perhaps a new kind of visibility/materiality.

There are two "DECLASSIFIED" stamps, indicating that this document is a copy (of a copy, perhaps) as well as a TRC document reference number – 003709.<sup>115</sup> These

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<sup>115</sup> The traces and marks left on the document speak to the issue of secrecy: documents were 'graded' according to the level of sensitivity, which determined whether they could be submitted to the TRC/made

traces indicate the (politically motivated) movement of the document through different bodies (ranging from the SADF, to the TRC, to SAHA), showing how the document has moved through time and space. The traces also indicate the different layers that this document possesses: as a palimpsest, it has been read in many different ways at several times in history, and indeed in this study. At some point, this non-object absent photograph may have been used by any number of security or police forces to identify Desmond Tutu. It was then, presumably, declassified during the TRC's investigation, before which the photograph may have been removed during a sanitisation of records. The photograph may also simply have been lost in these various moves in the different archives. With each of these readings comes a different ideological understanding of the absence and that which used to be present.

Edwards and Hart note that forms of presentation “reflect specific intent in the use and value of the photographs they embed, to the extent that the objects that embed photographs are in many cases meaningless without their photographs; for instance, empty frames or albums” (2006:11).<sup>116</sup> However, this document's presentational form is exactly what titillates our voyeuristic tendencies – the strange methodology behind the declassification of the document (assuming the photograph was removed) brings to question the strategies used by the bodies who declassified this document, but it also begs the question why this bizarre document was included within the archive by the curators. As an anecdote, this document brings to the fore, and allows to be seen how the absences, here a literal absence on a blank page, are haunted by layers of secrecy and ideology, absences which implore us to respond.

What exactly became of the photograph in Figure 53 is unknown. Whilst it would be irresponsible to state categorically that this photograph was purposefully removed, especially without knowing what the photograph was depicting, it serves to demonstrate the work of haunting, of secrecy, of absence, and the a-visual within a 'blank' space. Blank spaces like these present us with a “possibility”, a possibility to see beyond what

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available to journalists/made public. This grading system was motivated principally by proliferation concerns.

<sup>116</sup> Here I think about the four bare hooks on the wall of the Louvre where the Mona Lisa had hung before it was stolen on 21 August, 1911. R.A. Scotti describes how, after the reopening of the Louvre on 29 August, “thousands of grieving Parisians queued to view the blank space on the gallery wall ... [with some describing it as] ‘an enormous, horrific, gaping void’ ... ‘the crowds didn’t look at the other paintings. They contemplated at length the dusty space where the divine Mona Lisa had smiled the week before’” (2010:73-74)

appears to be nothing, to peel back the layers, and begin to see how ideologies of secrecy manifest as absences. Rappert argues for the metaphor or analogy of the autostereogram to demonstrate how things that are there to be seen can be hidden in plain sight, if we learn *how* to see them (2015:25).<sup>117</sup> In order to understand this, what is required is a spatial conception of ‘absence’ so that scholars and researchers might isolate the vexingly abstract instances/manifestations thereof, to make them ‘objects’ or ‘sites’ worthy of critical reflection.<sup>118</sup>

Spatial constructions, for Edward Soja, are more than mere containers of activities. He argues that traditional notions of space had not addressed spatiality as process and as power. Historically, spatiality has been taken into consideration only tangentially within the human sciences, a set of disciplines wherein theoretical primacy has been given to considerations of a subject’s historical (temporal) and social (sociological) components (Soja, 1996:2). As such, Soja argues for “an-Other” manner in which to modify our understanding of life, by considering a “rebalanced trialectics of spatiality-historicity-sociality”. For Soja, (1996:56-57), the complexity of the intersection between the social, the historical, and the spatial coalesce in what he terms Thirdspace, a space where we are able to think about and interpret socially produced spaces:

*Everything* comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and unconsciousness, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history [emphasis in original].

I believe that this can be applied to archives as historically, socially, and politically constituted spaces, with particular focus on the way in which the boundaries between absence and presence – real and imaginary – are blurred in the Thirdspace. Thirdspace affords the opportunity to take apart and reconstruct, in a heuristic way, what the absences may signal or speak to in terms of secrecy and ideology.

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<sup>117</sup> Autostereograms are depictions which are repeating two-dimensional patterns which, when viewed in a particular way, reveal a three-dimensional image. Rappert argues for the metaphor or analogy of the autostereogram as a manner in which to create the kind of space through which we are able to attend to the absences (2015:23-24).

<sup>118</sup> Narrowing and defining the scope of absences is, itself, problematic, but in the interest of clarity, it is necessary in this study.

Figure 53 is at once a curiosity and a crisis: there *used* to be something there, but it is now a site of erasure (intentional or not), reminiscent of the secrecy and methodical sanitisation of records by the apartheid system. It now serves, perhaps, as a reminder of the “state-imposed amnesia” and the “systematic forgetting engineered by the state” (Harris, 200:29), imploring the viewer to think beyond the physical boundaries of what is knowable and seeable. Figure 53 ruptures and confounds the logic of reading practices inherent in archival studies, but it also signals something else: the disappointed hope of the “archival ‘pay dirt moment’” (Burton, 2005:8), a moment which was never realised in AL2878, and symbolic of the same disappointment in AL2922.

Read as a Thirdspace, this document (Figure 53) makes manifest the junction between visibility and invisibility, the material and the immaterial, the imagined and the real, the absent and the present. The paper document is (t)here, a present artefact, but it has been emptied of an instantly visible recognition of its significance – emptied of its *punctum*, its affect. The caption described it as having depicted Desmond Tutu and three individual. The caption is another kind of absence which is peculiarly present: it is the identification that does not identify. As a material object, this document exists within the archive, but the absent photograph exists as an immaterial object, informed or haunted by our knowledge of Desmond Tutu as a figure. Thus, this absence implies a presence because it is has been emptied of that which should be there, but it also holds the promise that “in the future [it] might again come back” (Rappert, 2015:7-8). That which may come back again, and our knowledge of what the pictures would have, could have, or should have looked like, is the work of the spectral.

### 3.4 Regarding hauntology and the archive

Derrida's conception of hauntology is useful to scholars wishing to reach into that which ontology cannot. In the case of absence, when pitted against presence, the destabilising of the binary opposition affords the opportunity to discuss the work of absence, and what implications this may hold for the archive. Hauntology thus allows us to delve into liminal zones wherein the traditional binaries of presence/absence collapse, resulting in slippery notions and cognitive dissonance.

Rooted in Derrida's (1997:49) deconstruction of the "metaphysics of presence", (discussed in the beginning of Chapter 1), hauntology, as Derrida introduced it in *Spectres of Marx* (1993), seeks to usurp/destabilise, via deconstruction, the primacy of being and presence,<sup>119</sup> – thereby supplanting ontology itself – and install the figure of the spectre as something which is neither present nor absent.

Regarding the traces of the present in the absent and how that which is not known comes into the present, Derrida employs the figure of the ghost of Hamlet's father (1994:6); the spectre is something which is undecidable, and is a key component of hauntology:

*It is* something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it *is*, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed on no longer belongs to knowledge. One does not know if it is living or if it is dead. Here is – or rather there is, over there, an unnameable or almost unnameable thing: something, between something and someone, anyone or anything.

Derrida believes that the spectre confronts us, insisting on a response and demanding action, seeing us without us seeing it. What Derrida argues for is the spectre as "a figure of absolute alterity (existing both outside and within us) that should, as emphasized in *Specters of Marx*, not be assimilated or negated (exorcized) but lives with, in an open, welcoming relationality" (Del Pilar Blanco and Peeren, 2013:33). The spectre, for Derrida, is a figuration of presence-absence, insisting upon a "politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations" (1994:xix). The spectre is the figure "which disrupts

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<sup>119</sup> Martin Heidegger argues that Aristotelian conceptions of time places emphasis on the present, being in the now

conventional, linear notions of temporality and history by collapsing past, present and future – putting time ‘out of joint’” (Peeren, 2014a:2).

Hauntology and the spectral offer a particularly fertile vein of inquiry in archival studies because the archive is fundamentally an haunted and spectral space (Laubscher, 2013:46). For Harris, the archive “is all about the living dead. It is infused by the presence of what is absent, and the absence of what is present ... [and] what is present speaks loudly of absences, and what is absent presents itself insistently” (2015:9). As a totalising power, an archive configures how a history is represented, privileging (remembering) one history over countless others (to be forgotten). As messianic institutions, archives are crucial to understanding where society has been and from where it came. They have, as Derrida (1995:47) writes, a messianic power, the “condition on which the future remains to come is not only that it not be known, but that it not be *knowable as such*” (emphasis in original).<sup>120</sup>

The spectral and the figure of the ghost, as conceptual metaphors, can be utilised as a way to access invisible, or altogether absent, people, places, and objects. As an “analytical tool that *does theory*”, spectres and spectrality evoke notions of visibility and vision, occupying a “liminal position between visibility and invisibility, life and death, materiality and immateriality”, and is able to signify that which escapes comprehension (Del Pilar Blanco & Peeren, 2013:1). The figure of the spectre, “even when turned into a conceptual metaphor, remains a figure of unruliness pointing to the tangibly ambiguous”, such as the ambiguity inherent in the absences (Del Pilar Blanco & Peeren, 2013:9). Whilst the figure of the spectre “has insight to offer, its own status as discourse or epistemology is never stable”, since the figure of the spectre also brings under question “the formation of knowledge itself and specifically invokes what is placed outside it, excluded from perception and, consequently, from both the archive as the depository of the sanctioned, acknowledged past and politics as the (re)imagined

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<sup>120</sup> Derrida (1995:47) continues: “Its determination should no longer come under the order of knowledge or of a horizon of preknowledge but rather a coming or an event which one *allows* or *incites* to come (without *seeing* anything come) in an experience which is heterogeneous to all taking note, as to any horizon of waiting as such ... I call this the *messianic*, and I distinguish it radically from all messianism” (emphasis in original). Walter Benjamin (2003:390) speaks similarly, but of photographs, when he states that “[t]he past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption ... [and there] is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one ... our coming was expected on earth ... like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak messianic power*, a power on which the past has a claim” (emphasis in original).

present and future” (Del Pilar Blanco and Peeren, 2013:9).<sup>121</sup> Harris argues that “[t]o remember is to archive. To archive is to preserve memory. In this conceptual framework the archive is a beacon of light, a place – or idea, or psychic space, or societal space – of and for sight ... [but this] notion of the archive, as Derrida has [also] shown in *Archive Fever* ... is bullshit” – that is, there can be no remembering without also forgetting (2002a:75).<sup>122</sup> Also at work is “the technical structure of the archiving archive [which] determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event” (Derrida, 1998:17). In other words, in the work to maintain one history, at the expense of another, the archive not only preserves and organises memory (a political act), but it also conceals it.

The concealments, purposive or not, result in absences. Thus, a nuanced understanding of absence is necessary, as a particular instance of absence might be imperceptible, or difficult to grasp at first. It might be “too mundane to be appreciated” or “purposively not made public, unintelligible, too foregrounded to be noticed, collectively disowned, lost in history, beyond expression, or barred from comprehension” (Rappert, 2015:14). The absences which I address in the following section are perhaps all of these at once. We know that something is missing, and that missing thing haunts. Thus, I aim to answer Derrida’s call for “another ‘scholar’ ... capable, beyond the opposition between presence and non-presence, actuality and inactuality, life and non-life, of thinking of the possibility of the specter, the specter as possibility” (1994:12).

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<sup>121</sup> The use of the spectre as a metaphor cannot be called a science or a method, nor is it a new field or discipline: the spectre signifies exactly that which escapes comprehension (Del Pilar Blanco and Peeren, 2013:9).

<sup>122</sup> It might be useful to think of forgetting as absenting of knowledge – it is there, but it becomes lost in “time’s relentless melt” (Sontag, 2008:15).

### 3.5 AL2922

The Chemical and Biological Warfare Project Collection, AL2922, was commissioned by the Centre for Conflict Resolution in 1999 and ran until 2002. The aim of the collection was to further understanding of the creation, development, and implementation of Project Coast and, as such, AL2922 is perhaps the most comprehensive collection of Project Coast materials. The mandate for this collection was also to contribute to and strengthen global efforts in the prevention of proliferation of CBW agents and weapons (AL2922 :: The Chemical and Biological Warfare (CBW) Project Collection). Chandré Gould was involved in thoroughly documenting and further extending revelations that came from the TRC hearings on CBW. AL2922 comprises a near-complete set of research records generated or acquired by Gould, and includes declassified military documents and documents from the CBW front companies, transcripts of interviews conducted, background articles pertaining to CBW, hundreds of press reports and newspaper clippings, exhibits used in the criminal trial of and the fraud investigations against Wouter Basson, documents generated by researchers, police reports, as well as academic journal articles pertaining to CBW. The collection housed at SAHA was donated by the Centre for Conflict Resolution to SAHA through Gould in February 2002.

An archive, as such, cannot be considered to be ‘closed’ or ‘complete’ – archives are a necessarily productive and evolving object/site as they are continuously evolving, reactivated and reread, with documents being added and, indeed, removed. As many archival scholars have noted,<sup>123</sup> archivists should be striving towards creating as comprehensive a collection as possible. However, as a site, it will forever be haunted by that which is outside of the archive.

This is particularly true of AL2922, because not only did the source materials for the research fall prey to the mass destruction of documents, but, according to Terry Bell (2002), 34 boxes of TRC reports had “gone missing”. These documents were “a set of ‘sensitive’ documents [which] had been taken into custody by DOJ [Department of Justice]”, and initial inquiries into the whereabouts drew blanks (Bell in Pigou, 2009:24). Harris, then deputy director of the National Archive, discovered that the boxes were

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<sup>123</sup> Amongst others, theorists such as Derrida (2006:72); Derrida (1998:68); Harris (2015:10); Duranti (1994:342-343). According to Derrida, archivists, in reading and rereading the archive, “produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future” (1998:68).

being held by the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), and included in the seizure were 13 boxes which related to the TRC investigation into Project Coast (Bell, 2002). After a lengthy battle spearheaded by SAHA, over 60 percent of these contested documents were returned to the main TRC archive housed at SAHA (Pigou, 2009:33). The movement of these documents between different bodies understandably raised fears of the sanitisation of the records by the NIA and the fear of documents being lost. This incident also highlights the fact that this archive, AL2922, is not and cannot be considered to be 'complete'.

The concept of 'archive' is a complex one, and, as "more scholars investigate the concept of the archive, more have become interested in the process of its institutionalization – who builds the archive and for what purpose? How is it organised and made accessible? How is it preserved?" (Manoff, 2004:19). 'Archive' as a term refers, in the first place, to a physical space, "a building, a symbol of a public institution, which is one of the organs of a constituted state", and in the second place to "a collection of documents – normally written documents – kept in this building" (Mbembe, 2002:19). Thus we can comprehend two places/spaces of consignment at work: SAHA's building-as-archive, as an institutional space and, second, AL2922, the archive-as-boxes.

Archives such as SAHA's AL2922 should be a freely and easily accessible site/object to allow for it to be a crucible for knowledge about covert government programmes. However, access to AL2922 is restricted in two ways. Firstly, AL2922 finds its home at SAHA, based at Constitution Hill in Braamfontein, Johannesburg, in the Nursery Section of the former Women's Gaol. Unlike other public museums, access to the SAHA collections is controlled,<sup>124</sup> and any access to the documents requires motivation and declaration of intent. Secondly, even with access to AL2922, the organisation of the archive presents challenges. The sheer volume of documents makes the collection daunting, virtually impenetrable, leaving the absences initially imperceptible. The archive is frustratingly complex: as a collection of hundreds (if not thousands) of

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<sup>124</sup> In order to access SAHA, one has to enter through the Women's Gaol which, as a museum site, is also restricted insofar as one has to sign in at the door, and sign out again.

documents,<sup>125</sup> it is unnavigable without prior orientation and specialised knowledge. There is no guiding principle, no rubric, only a seemingly uncomplicated numbering system which gives the sense of where to start: in box 1 of 16, folder A1, titled “Correspondence regarding TRC documents, 1999-2000”. This is an archive-as-boxes, and 16 boxes is all that is there. AL2922 seems a modest collection next to other archival collections, both within SAHA itself but also when compared to other archives which have found manifestation in museum sites, for example.<sup>126</sup> Archival methodologies dictate that to archive is to concisely curate documents surrounding an event in history. The methodology behind AL2922 is best described as the opposite. The archival logic here appears to be one of accrual and amassment,<sup>127</sup> at the cost of all but foregoing the structuring function inherent in an ordering, engendering the protracted collection of documents that make up AL2922.

AL2922 is overwhelming, and it is difficult to know where to look – indeed, *how* to look, and to be cautious not to overlook what wants to be seen. There is a negation in this kind of surplus. A researcher like myself could spend hours and days on end, searching through the archive-as-boxes, for the pay-dirt moment. What I was initially seeking was the photographic evidence that signalled a criminal culpability, like those from Unit 731; or ones that showcased the bureaucracy of the apartheid government and showed the faces of the people involved in Project Coast, akin to the staff photographs from Unit 731, Porton Down, and Biopreparat; or even just evidence of some physical trace, like the containers found outside Biopreparat. However, what I found was perhaps even more captivating: I found nothing. The reams of paper in dense high Afrikaans come to look alike, when legible – often the photocopies were done with seemingly no care given to the underexposure. The seemingly banality of the collection of documents successfully masks the secrecy at work, and entangled in this surplus of *uiters geheim* (top secret) documents, waiting to be found and teased out, the absences are easily overlooked, less concealed than they are imperceptible, but they *are* present, and they haunt the archive.

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<sup>125</sup> According to Inez McGregor (2016/05/21) there is no tally of how many individual documents are in the collection.

<sup>126</sup> Although not strictly drawing from *one* archive, but an archive of a body of knowledge about a nation and its past; an apt example of this would be the Apartheid Museum in Ormonde, Johannesburg.

<sup>127</sup> This same logic could be the reason that Figure 53 was included in AL 2878.

Like a metaphor for Project Coast, the archive is just as disorientating and fragmented, and is filled with just as many haunting silences, whispers, absences and placeholders. The international projects, the book-as-archive, and the fictions with which we are awash have sketched for us, in our imaginations, an *expected* visual history. These have become complicit in the construction of the myth surrounding chemical and biological warfare archives, because we expect a certain kind of manifest visual economy in the books and in the archives. Perhaps one expects there to be more than just those 36 pictures in *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould, 2002), that there will be something which can put to rest our suspicions of the complicity of the government in the covert, knowing that there is a document or declaration, a sign which leads to an understanding of culpability.

Perhaps viewers require incontrovertible proof that whatever it is that is suspected to have happened, did in fact happen, and whereby viewers and victims now come to know the face of the perpetrator. However, as Žižek notes, the objective violence, systemic and symbolic in his postulation, is an invisible violence, a “violence inherent to this ‘normal’ state of things” (2009:1). Understanding these violences<sup>128</sup> requires an analysis of the ideological conditions under which these acts are committed. This systemic violence does not have an identifiable agent, and the systemic, or indeed, symbolic violence of the apartheid government’s dual projects of secrecy and systematic destruction, is an instance of memoricide, which has wrought visible effects on this archive in the form of absences. The systemic violence is arguably the more malevolent of the two, and is more readily overlooked and denied (Žižek, 2009:8). The violence against the archive by the apartheid state manifests itself in absences which haunt this particular archive. Haunting “always registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by social violence ... [but] haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done” (Gordon, 2008:xvi). This something-to-be-done is the call to action, “the work of liberation” (Harris, 2015:8).

Absences in AL2922 ‘behave’ perhaps like imaginary pictures insofar as they are traces of a reality, and possess a kind of epistemic value in that inferences can be derived

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<sup>128</sup> Whilst the traditional use of the word ‘violence’ implies a deliberate and harmful act, it must be noted that whilst we could argue that the overwhelming majority of the absences were deliberate, not all the absences were

in/from their nonexistence – there is a knowing and understanding stemming from what viewers know the other projects to look like. Tom Gunning tells us that, “[b]ereft of language, a photograph relies on people to say things about it and for it” (2008:28). The same can be said for the absences in AL2922 – reading them a-visually, they are signifiers of political ideology, signalling a secrecy at play. Perhaps it is not through their revelation but through their concealment that secrets have a materiality which leaves a trace (Birchall, 2015). The concealment of animal testing, for example, has left a material trace in the form of documents recovered from RRL. One such report, bearing the RRL project number 86/H/28/50, dated 20 October 1986, was compiled by Dr A Immelman, and signed by project leader Dr JH Davies, with Immelman as cosignatory (without actual signature). The report relates to research into determining the LD50<sup>129</sup> for Salitrane,<sup>130</sup> and evaluating the absorption rate through a variety of application routes. This particular document details the use of 50 rats (25 female, 25 male) as test subjects, but as has been made known from 203 files discovered at RRL, they were testing on monkeys, pigs, and dogs, too (Burger & Gould, 2002:33). The report states that, from the literature available, symptoms were observed within one to five minutes, and death within 15 minutes of dosage. In their test, none of the rats showed any symptoms, and none of them died. The recommendation: a higher dosage.

Residing in a Thirdspace, as a kind of imaginary picture, an *a priori* knowledge of what animal testing would look like haunts these kinds of textual documents, and this kind of scientific report also haunts the sites of Project Coast – there are still animal cages held in the basement of RRL’s former premises, cages that once held dogs and rats, as well as primates (including a gorilla, which was on an adjacent site).

In this instance, the a-visual is at work insofar as viewers are able to extract, from the given textual document, a mental picture of what this scene would have looked like, but through a process of ideological secreting, this photographic document was either never produced, was never discovered or released, or was destroyed. Once again, it would be conjecture to state categorically that any of these was indeed the case, but it cannot be

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<sup>129</sup> Within the medical and scientific research communities, “LD” stands for “Lethal Dose”, and the “50” denotes the amount of the substance necessary to cause the death of 50% of a group of test subjects.

<sup>130</sup> According to Richard Tong (2002:14), salitrane or silatrane was claimed, by Larry Ford, to be an anti-balding agent that was being researched as a possible toxic agent. Larry Ford was an American gynaecologist and virologist who was involved with Basson and Project Coast. See Burger and Gould (2002:141-148).

denied that in any of these scenarios, and with any of the many documents in AL2922 (not just the experiment reports), there was intent in the non-production/concealment/destruction of records. If it was never produced, it begs the question 'why not?'. Why would RRL scientists break with the scientific tradition of visually documenting their work? Were they concerned that they would be used to prove some sort of criminal intent? If it was never discovered or released, why not? Have these kinds of pictures been concealed in fear of them being treated as evidence of wrongdoing, and culpability? If they were destroyed, it could only mean that the ideology of secrecy inherent in the apartheid system concluded that they would be incriminating. Thus, the secrecy here is not abstract: it makes itself a "material-immateriality" (Peeren, 2014a:3), manifesting itself in empty spaces in the archive. Once identified, these absences are, themselves, haunted. As a genre, the present photographs from the international programmes have created an urgent fetishistic need and, in searching the archive for a similar trace of the real, our expectations are left dashed. This emptied space's power to "disturb, bewilder, and anger" draws directly from a sense of what ought to be present, creating "an absence that evokes a sense of what is missing" (Rappert, 2015:8).

The photographs discussed in Chapter One have failed as evidence, as representations of some kind of truth, and are conversant rather with an emotional climate of white male camaraderie. However, they invite us to move forward, to read differently, and to look for more from the photographs, and indeed the archives. Burger and Gould never directly purported the photographs, or indeed their use of them, to be objective, and perhaps Visual Studies theorists would do well to treat the absences within the archive with the same sense of subjectivity. These absences are man-made, and contemporary viewers may frame and focus on specific events, much like a photograph. As a mute and passive object, the photograph can be understood as a fetish insofar as it is an object on which to project beliefs, or around which to spin narratives. As an 'objective' entity, a photograph is, at least in part, factual insofar as it reproduces a trace of an event as it happened. It is also fetishistic because we read into pictures, and are not guileless observers. Part fact, and part fetish.

Bruno Latour's (1999) concept of the 'factish' is, in short, the outcome of the realisation that 'facts' are fetishes. and 'fetishes' of others turn out to be fact. For Latour. there is a

distinction between fact (nature) and fetish (culture), and he asks: “What is a fetish? Something that is nothing in itself, but simply the blank screen onto which we have projected, erroneously, our fancies, our labor, our hopes and our passions” (1999:270).<sup>131</sup>

Like Figure 53, the absences in AL2922 are also blank screens upon which victims or researchers are able to project, perhaps erroneously, their hopes for the archive. But what are the hopes for the archive? More specifically, what is our hope for AL2922? Could it serve justice, once recaptured from its status as weapon against enemies of the apartheid state, and be redeployed, perhaps, as Dlamini (2014:26) prescribed: as historical memory in the pursuit of justice? An archive, as a messianic institution, demands, at its core, a conservation of information for future generations. The demands of AL2922 are, arguably, not only conservation, but a warning to future generations of what can transpire when governments and covert projects are left unchecked. AL2922 is demonstrably an extensive, albeit vexing, collection, but can be utilised as a vehicle of memorialising an invisible project, and memorialising an overarching dubious morality inherent in the apartheid system, that power of the law which “exceeds representation; its image is an absence, an iconography of nothing” (Goodrich, 1999:100).

As an archive which serves ever-shifting political and social goals, AL2922 is not a neutral site, and the absences themselves are also not neutral. They have a political dimension to them, and the absences that are manifest in AL2922 amplify and repeat the control that was exercised by the apartheid state. Even today, some 22 years since the advent of democracy, the censorship and the violence of the silencing prevails. The political and affective dimensions of the archive are influenced by the absence of photographs. Photographs have the ability to elicit an emotive response, and the kinds of photographs viewers see in other programmes are at the epicentre of the iconography of horror. They are, as I have demonstrated, supplementary documents, but the existence of ‘evidential’ photographs, those proving that tests were being done in the international programmes, contributes to the political and affective responses to the archive.

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<sup>131</sup> Put simply, the factish is the recognition, the “wisdom of the passage” (Latour, 1999:35), that facts are inseparable from their fabrication, as are fetishes.

As affective objects, photographs contribute to spectator value and may facilitate instant access to the horror of these projects, as emotive, abject cue cards. The pictures are affective within the book-as-archive insofar as they are easily accessed and understood, allowing an abrupt recognition of horror in the long horror of the book. However, they remain secondary, and less significant than other forms of evidence. Photographs have not served any purpose beyond the memorialisation of criminality, as I discussed in Chapter One. They served no purpose in any of the criminal proceedings in any of the international programmes. They are the *punctum* in the texts, arousing immediate emotional responses, but without these, is the horrible still as horrible? Without them, how are viewers to access a political consciousness? How are people to deal with the traumas inflicted upon South Africans by CBW agents without full and complete official records?

To highlight the “arbitrary boundaries of the official record”, Marilyn Booth employs the metaphor of ghost-archive to suggest that historical novels, “through divergent narrative”, have the ability to behave as “a record of alternative possibilities and alternative visions” (2005:277). By showing the arbitrary boundaries of the physical archive, the ghost-archive is perhaps a site for what Allan Sekula (in Keenan, 2014:70) terms “counter-forensics”.<sup>132</sup> The work of counter-forensics is the making material of objects and people systematically erased by oppressive governments, a process which is “key to a process of political resistance and mourning” (Sekula, 1993:55). Although I do not purport to be able to make material any objects or people who have been erased, there is the possibility of political resistance and mourning within a ghost-archive, and indeed a counter-archive – “a form of re-collection of that which has been silenced and buried” (Merewether, 2006:16). The possibility rests on the ability to identify the ideological secrecy within the absences, for “[i]dentification can assist annihilation, and it can resist it” (Keenan, 2014:72).<sup>133</sup> In AL2922, the counter-forensic work may be done via the absences where knowledge, historical (trauma) narratives, and memory-work require the *ex post facto* ascribing of names and histories as identification.

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<sup>132</sup> Thomas Keenan described forensics “not simply [as related to] science in the service of law of the police [rather], much more broadly, about objects as they become evidence, things submitted for interpretation in an effort to persuade” (2014:68).

<sup>133</sup> Sontag reminds us that pictures “are pieces of evidence in an ongoing biography or history. And one photograph, unlike one painting, implies that there will be others” and that photographs give us a way of not only remembering the past “but a new way of dealing with the future” (2008:166).

Within a ghost- or counter-archive, we are perhaps able to transmute the present archival documents “into a ‘hysterical symptom’, based not on any one person’s actual memories but on cultural fantasies spun from the material of collective memories [thus attempting] to address the limits of what is thinkable and sayable” (Merewether, 2006:17). As a useful imaginary site, the ghost-archive could be conceived of as a placeless space wherein victims, researchers, and South Africans in general are able to project their hopes for the archive, and a place in which to store, metaphorically, the imagined documents being actively created, serving as placeholders for something hopefully to come.

### **3.6 Imagined documents, and the ghost-archive as counter-archive**

Gilliland and Caswell argue “that the roles of individual and collective imaginings about the absent or unattainable archive and its contents should be explicitly acknowledged in both archival theory and practice” (2016:53). As such, the authors introduce their concepts of ‘imagined documents’ and ‘impossible archive imaginaries’; concepts which they say offer affective counterbalances and resistance “to dominant legal, bureaucratic, historical and forensic notions of evidence that so often fall short in explaining the capacity of records and archives to motivate, inspire, anger and traumatize” (Gilliland and Caswell, 2016:53). Impossible archival imaginaries, Gilliland and Caswell explain, are imaginaries which are impossible insofar as “they will never result in actualized records in any traditional sense unless they are drawn into some kind of co-constitutive relationship with actualized records” (2016:61).

As mentioned in the Introduction, there are two kinds of imagined documents at work in AL2922. Firstly, the absences which, as spectral objects, form imaginary pictures in a Thirdspace, which we can ‘see’ in our minds, informed by and in conversation with our existing knowledge. Secondly, the imagined document as person. According to Caswell and Gilliland (2015:616), when perpetrators of human rights violations die, so do their testimonies. “In their deaths, the accused may become forever-from-now-on unavailable and thus (in essence) unassailable evidence; they are transformed into imagined documents that can never be cross-examined ... unavailable documents with imaginary agency [constructed] to settle competing versions of history” (Caswell & Gilliland

2015:616). They come to embody a “kind of never actualized record”, which is problematic insofar as it is difficult to attach the designation of ‘record’ to these documents within the legal or bureaucratic definition of evidence (Gilliland & Caswell, 2016:56). However, Gilliland and Caswell argue that it is repeatedly shown that outside the legal realms, whichever “society, agency, community or individual acts upon or invests in as a record, indeed functions in that context as a record” (2016:57).

Wouter Basson (and others) behave as an unavailable document and never-actualised record. As imagined documents, they are constructed in the minds of the victims, the families of victims, and indeed the public at large, to settle competing versions of history. Despite being acquitted of all charges brought against Basson, the members of the Khulumani Support Group (KSG) believe that he is guilty, and believe that he holds the answers.<sup>134</sup>

The KSG is a collective of victims also looking to the actor/placeholder (Basson) for justice, following the failure of the thousands of pages of evidence. Manoko Mokgonyana, coordinator of the Mamelodi branch of the KSG, and others like her, place this kind of faith in Basson’s testimony, or rather, in the potential of his testimony. Speaking to Kathryn Smith (2015) at the sentencing hearing of the Health Professionals Council of South Africa (HPCSA) into Basson’s misconduct, Mokgonyana, speaking about the Nietverdient 10 (or the Mamelodi 10),<sup>135</sup> said:

They were injected with a certain substance, you know? They don’t understand which kind of a substance. And then when they have to hear [at] the trial that Basson was producing chemical weapons, or substances, and more especially some of them they were used in the tear gas in the townships. So they feel that the substances which was used, they don’t know. But which substance was used, maybe he could tell you, you know, that this kind of a substance was used, you know, to drug? Ja, after injecting them they were drugged.

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<sup>134</sup> Khulumani Support Group describes itself as a “membership-based organisation of roughly 85,000 victims and survivors of Apartheid-related gross human rights violations in South Africa. Started by survivors testifying at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Khulumani has become a globally recognised movement spear-heading healing and memory, the struggle for reparations, and active citizenship in countries transitioning out of conflict” (Khulumani).

<sup>135</sup> The Mamelodi 10, also known as the Nietverdient 10, were 10 youths from Mamelodi, Pretoria, who were murdered by four Special Forces operatives. The youths were driven in a minibus by notorious askari, Joe Mamasela, to an area near Nietverdient, close to the border of Botswana (SAPA, 1996). The youths were injected with an unknown substance, and once unconscious, were placed back into the minibus which, packed with explosives, was pushed down a hill in Bonhuthatawana (SAPA 1996).

Of Basson, Mokgonyana (in Smith, 2015) says that what frustrates her and many other members of the Khulumani group is that he consistently denies his involvement:

No he denies, he's always denying that he was directly involved. The only thing is that he produced the chemicals but he didn't make use of them, but who used these chemicals because they come from his laboratory? Who used them? Because somebody is there who disposed the chemicals, where were they send? You know.

The hope of testimony, of truth about the events that transpired for the people of Mamelodi, is misplaced in this arena. Members of the KSG attended (and continue to attend) the HPCSA hearings. What the members of the KSG are looking for will never be discussed under the HPCSA's jurisdiction. It was the responsibility of the TRC and Basson's criminal trial to investigate such claims – the HPCSA's jurisdiction does not reach this far: theirs is to determine if Basson should have his medical license revoked after being found guilty of unethical conduct for his involvement in Project Coast. What Basson has come to represent for the KSG and countless others in South Africa is the *potential* of testimony, the *potential* to provide a 'truth': an imagined document inscribed with the answers for which they are searching. By believing that Basson-as imagined-document holds the answers, Mokgonyana and members of the KSG are settling the competing history of their versions of the story, and Basson's version. As discussed in the previous chapter, a wealth of evidence and testimonies given by witnesses during his criminal trial and his TRC hearing points to his culpability, but whilst Basson (and other perpetrators) are still alive, they are as silent as the grave. Basson's "convenient amnesia" (eNCA, 2013) facilitates the concealment of his secrets, and a refusal to admit at least partial culpability for the deaths of countless people.

In spite of Basson *et al's* silence, and maybe as a direct result, new documents are being created from the oral stories, and in the form of films and documentaries.<sup>136</sup> Victims like those from the KSG and their stories enter into the complex process of

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<sup>136</sup> As mentioned previously, there are several television segments that feature Project Coast, and one film: Liza Kev's *The Man Who Knows Too Much* (2002).

documentation making.<sup>137</sup> However, if read as an imagined document, as described by Caswell and Gilliland (2015), Project Coast's key role players themselves have the potential to work/serve as imagined documents, and perhaps have a function to serve in memory-work, even if only metaphysically.<sup>138</sup>

Caswell and Gilliland (2015:625) state that imaginary documents are always bound by impossibility. "Conjured by the unattainable hopes for closure by survivors and victims' families," the authors argue, imaginary documents "... are always out of grasp, falsely promising to make sense of the non-sensical, always emerging on an intangible horizon" (2015:625). For people like Mokgonyana, the imagined document is located not in the archive, but in her own home. Mokgonyana complains that chemical stains keep appearing on her wall after an alleged bombing by operatives who she believes were directed by a "Mr Loots" (Smith, 2015).<sup>139</sup> She says that, following the 'bombing', "there was a substance there, because even the walls ... we can plaster the walls, we can do what[ever], but they are still peeling off. We still ask ourselves what kind of substance was used in the bombings of the house" (Smith, 2015). For Mokgonyana, this is an actualisation of the imagined record – the record which states which chemicals were used, or Basson's testimony. For her, it is irrefutable proof that chemical agents were used, and she identifies Basson as the source. What keeps the KSG coming back to a hearing that has absolutely no bearing on what they seek is that they "want to know the truth and justice must be made, for all" (Mokgonyana in Smith, 2015)

Trauma can be defined by what Josefin Holmström terms "'inherent latency'; that is, it returns to the victims in intrusive flashbacks and is experienced, as if for the first time, in the recall. Because it seems to be always occurring and reoccurring, the traumatic moment resists incorporation into the kind of physical narrative chronology that "... [is] crucial for the organisation of thought and emotion" (2012:1). As a structural trauma, the absence of documents disrupts the process of mourning, and the spectre of apartheid

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<sup>137</sup> Collected in archives, documents exist, generated by various regulatory and investigative bodies, like the TRC, and these documents attempt to elicit a singular 'truth' or narrative. It is through these official means that "affected individuals [are able] to move on with their lives and communities and nations to move forward with their recovery" (Caswell & Gilliland, 2015:616). However, as Caswell and Gilliland (2015:624) rightly note, not all human rights abuse documentation is created at the time of the abuse.

<sup>138</sup> LaCapra (1999:697) rightly notes, however, that the historical losses and absences have affected different people and groups in different ways.

<sup>139</sup> This 'Mr Loots' is, presumably, former head of the Northern Transvaal Security Branch's Unit B, Johannes Cornelius Loots

haunts interminably. Dominick LaCapra posits that through “memory-work, especially the socially engaged memory-work involved in working-through, one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recognize something as having happened to one (or one's people) back then that is related to, but not identical with, here and now” (1999:713). In LaCapra’s notion of “acting-out, the past is performatively regenerated or relived as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription, and it hauntingly returns as the repressed” (1999:617). Regarding traumatic loss, “acting-out may well be a necessary condition of working-through, at least for victims” (LaCapra, 1999:716-717).

Absences within archives do not necessarily preclude a return of the document – the absence may never be “eliminated or overcome but must be lived with in various ways” (LaCapra, 1999:707). The object we desire, the photograph, the evidence, may never be (wholly) recovered and, particularly “with respect to elusive or phantasmatic objects, desire may be limitless and open to an infinite series of displacements in quest of a surrogate for what has presumably been lost” (LaCapra, 1999:708). Without some kind of meaningful articulation or some productive attempt to replace these absences with something, KSG and South Africans in general are doomed to repeat compulsively the rituals, in an endless mourning or grieving process. KSG’s mourning and grieving process is arguably disrupted, and their repeated returns to the HPCSA hearings are, perhaps, an attempt to continue with the process of healing by replacing the physically desired object (here, admission of guilt or information) with the imagined document that is Basson.

The work done by populating a ghost-archive or counter-archive, then, could turn to an acting-out, taking the form of creating a space in which we are able to experience the archive as a museum, wherein the South African public are able to interact with the fragments of history and engage the pieces of narratives in order to find new and meaningful ones.

### 3.7 Conclusion

Derrida states that “No justice ... seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead” (1994:xix). Harris argues that the spectres which haunt the archive “demand that we take responsibility before them. Not responsibility just *for* them – responsibility *before* them, in front of them, seeing them, seeing them again, and re-specting them. They demand that we work to make our lives meaningful by working to make their lives meaningful” (2014:218; emphasis in original). If we are to take responsibility for the spectres, we are required to think critically about archives and absence, and the implications that the project of secrecy has on the comprehensiveness of the archive.

As an archive, AL2922 was flawed from the beginning. Not only were there concerns about the sensitive nature of some of the documents discovered, in terms of non-proliferation issues, but the systematic destruction of documents was central to this clandestine project. Whilst archival methodologies dictate that there is a necessary logic in inclusion and exclusion, AL2922 was the victim of insurmountable exclusions. The absences in AL2922 are symptomatic of complex operations of power and indicate the working of an ideological doctrine of secrecy inherent in the apartheid state. Understanding the far-reaching consequences of the continued haunting of the archives by these ideologies is difficult, and to isolate instances of them, and engaging with them, is even more challenging. The absences within AL2922, and post-apartheid archives in general, exemplify the absolute control that the state had (and continues to have) over national memory and the construction of historical narratives. Whilst the absences create the fetishistic desire for a visible and ‘evidentiary’ document, they also “open up possibilities for new ways of writing histories, [but also] intimate that sense of the absurd, the futile, or the impossible, which ultimately haunts the logic of the archive” (Merewether, 2006:17).

I have attempted to demonstrate that the project of discussing these seemingly impossible objects is of importance because they haunt the logic of archival methodologies. The mythology created around the expected visibility of Project Coast, and indeed the myths surrounding the characters of Basson *et al* have left us bereft,

be found. However, this is not an absurd or futile project: there are implications bound up with absences within disciplines of trauma studies and in memory-work.

Caswell and Gilliland (2015:624) conclude that

While hypothetical documents will never help convict a perpetrator, they nevertheless are powerful forces in the imaginary of survivors of human rights abuse and victims' families, and as such, are crucial to dealing with the aftermath of mass murder in the communities most impacted. As such, these imaginary documents help expand our conceptions of records and their evidentiary qualities beyond narrow legalistic frameworks to more fully engage the emotional and psychological dimensions of archives in the wake of trauma. Considering imaginary documents reminds us that, for many survivors of human rights abuse, 'truth' will always be forthcoming, justice will always be unattainable, and closure is not an option.

Within the space of the archive, there are countless unwritten narratives from victims, many silences inscribed in the present documents, and countless absences produced by secrecy. The never-to-be-actualised documents and the immaterial 'truths' find a home in the spatial imaginaries of the imaginary document. Populating a ghost-archive, these documents lurk in the archive proper as alternative documents which detail alternative histories: histories and documents that could well have existed, but remain unactualised, haunting present documents as traces, opening up the archive to the possibility of a counter-archive. The evidence and non-evidence surrounding Basson and Project Coast form part of the totalising project of secrecy that emanated from apartheid, the opacity of which conceals (perhaps forever) the nature and full extent of harm done. The TRC was able to reveal fragments of the narrative, but because of the intricate matrix of secrecy, thousands victims have been failed by the archives.

Thus, I have posited that, whilst the absence itself may not be affective, the photographs that should have been in those spaces would have been. Affect is the compelling and emotive response elicited from events or documents, and in the absence of these kinds of affective documents, the archive, robbed of this instant access to the horror, is not as affective as it would have been with photographs. The photographs are, as I mentioned, the emotive cue card that viewers perhaps need – going through the reams of paper in AL2922, and indeed reading *Secrets and Lies*

charged one. This lack of emotive response may seem obvious, but it is demonstrative of the ever-lasting and still haunting reach of apartheid era censorship, both intended and inadvertent. This censorship, and the ideology of secrecy from which it stems, leaves us with absences in the archive, and these absences are perhaps anecdotal to how the apartheid system, consciously in favour of the bureaucratically efficient, has reduced and controlled emotions in such a way that the political undermines the emotive. The absences draw out the duration of the trauma, a systemic slow violence, and without a sign of a kind of radical violence having been inflicted upon the archive, the violences wrought are unpredictable and difficult to pinpoint.

It is therefore imperative for AL2922 to be opened up, to be poured out and to be used in the “battleground of fictions” (Keenan, 2014:67), fictions pulled from the institution where it is currently nestled, and helping it begin to find expression. The archive needs to be breathed into, to be resurrected and reanimated in a physical space, like the Harbin building, home to the Unit 731 Museum, a place where people can interact with physical objects and reminders of South Africa’s dark past.

# **CONCLUSION**

**Open wounds and open archives**

What do we do when we are faced with frustratingly complex matrices of secrecy, entwined within tomes of research and reports housed in an overwhelming archive? How are we, as South Africans, to deal with trauma when the very foundations of our knowledge of history, the archive, is incomplete, flawed, and difficult to access? The violences that have been wrought against our national memory have resulted in visible absences within the archives and within the narratives surrounding much of apartheid South Africa's history. Indeed, the draconian secrecy has extended to post-apartheid South Africa, and the secrecy still haunts society. As a trauma, the experience has been delayed – we have only now begun to realise the extent to which the previous dispensation still controls our knowledge.

Cathy Caruth (1995:4-5) explains that the experience of traumatic events is delayed and fractured, and that the

pathology cannot be defined either by the event – which may or may not be catastrophic, and may not traumatize everyone equally – nor can it be defined in terms of a *distortion* of the event, achieving its haunting power as a result of distorting personal significances attached to it. The pathology consists, rather, solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced full at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event [emphasis in original].

Thus, a traumatic event is of a delayed nature, because the victim does not experience the event fully at the time, and once it is so understood, as the "belated consequence of a 'missed encounter,'" trauma can be conceived of as a kind of "'absence' - the absence of something that failed to become located in time or place – rather than as a 'positive' presence" (Marder, 2006:2). Being traumatised, then, becomes spectral, disjointed from time and place; the event haunts the traumatised person, or in this case, the archive. As I have demonstrated in this study, the spectre which haunts the absences in archives like AL2922, and in narratives that surround government-sanctioned clandestine programmes like Project Coast, provides victims, scholars, researchers (and here South Africans in general), the opportunity to engage with that which is not there in a meaningful and productive way. Through against-the-grain readings of absence, people are able to begin to configure new ways to bear witness to the spectre. For Derrida, to

witnessed, that being expressed by the witness, will never be present to the addressee (here, whoever is listening, engaging), and is thus an "appeal to the act of faith" (2000:191); but at the core of bearing witness is also the question of responsibility before the spectre, the possibility of justice, and the work of mourning.

As Laubscher notes, the "researcher's charge and responsibility is explicit and clear: to remember and understand by means of these stories of the archive in order not to make the mistakes of the past again. The gift of the archive is precisely that those ghosts caution, by their experiences and suffering, against making the same mistake again" (2013:48).

At the outset of this research, I had hoped to discuss the affective and/or evidentiary nature of photographs of human rights abuses in archives, and the important work that they can be called upon to do in the realm of healing and nation-building. What transpired was, arguably, a more fruitful endeavour: Jill Magid wrote that "[t]he secret itself is much more beautiful than its revelation" (2009), and this certainly holds true of Project Coast. The architecture of secrecy, and the ideological absence, is sublime in its engineering and execution. Absences are inscribed in all corners of the Project Coast narrative, and the photographs and facts that we do have still leave us bereft.

The first half of this study was dedicated to understanding the work of photographs in the service of the public archives (that is, the news media and the book-as-archive). I attempted to construct for the reader an idea of what the visual economy and visual history surrounding secret research projects constitute, and how these differ radically from the photographs from our own 'archives'. As I demonstrated, the available photographs of Project Coast have failed as documents that are fundamentally 'evidentiary' of criminality, as were the pictures that came from Japan's Unit 731 and the United Kingdom's Porton Down, as well as the Soviet's Biopreparat. These photographs demonstrate that, in spite of the ostensibly secret nature of these research endeavours, bureaucratic documentation appears to have won out, and these various projects took pictures. However, these photographs ultimately did not serve as 'evidence', insofar as no one, to the best of my knowledge, had charges brought against them which were aided by these directly incriminating pictures. In Project Coast's visual economy, I demonstrated that the photographs that were used *ex post facto* by the news media

only used as reminders of what the various role players look(ed) like. Burger and Gould's *Secrets and Lies* (2002), the narrativised account of Basson's criminal trial, served as the book-as-archive case study in my research. The photographs that have been included in this book, whilst temporally situated at the time when Project Coast was in operation, serve no purpose within the text beyond that of being supplementary documents, aiding the authors to sketch a visual narrative. I found that there are two lenses through which to view the pictures in the book, when situated in the text: firstly the authors, whilst not directly referring to the pictures, appear to mobilise these pictures to suggest a kind of criminality. If removed from the context of the book-as-archive, and read differently, these photographs are nothing more than snapshots taken by friends and colleagues of a man who worked for the military. As such, the authority of the public (and by extension, private) archives have failed to represent Project Coast adequately.

The second part of this paper was an attempt to define what the word 'absence' may mean, and I have attempted to contribute to the philosophical understanding in order to begin to bring order to the discourse around absence. Traditional archival studies and methodologies have not (yet) paid sufficient attention to the implications of absences. Much has been said about the inherently 'open' nature of the archive, always being in flux, never a "final instance" (Trouillot in Caswell, 2014:10,161). On an ontological level this concedes that blank spaces in the archive are indeed necessary – expected even. However, less has been said about the absences being read in terms of them being expressions, manifestations, or by-products of ideologies and secrecy. Complicit with secrecy is the conscious decision not to create certain documents, a "moment of fact creation" (Trouillot in Caswell, 2014:10) purposefully missed, leaving an intentional silence in the archive. Considering South Africa's turbulent history, and the various methods and laws used to silence and marginalise people, it is important to discuss the role that these *tabulae rasae* can play as imagined documents and sites of potential projection, not only in making absences present in the Project Coast narrative, but in South Africa's narrative history as a whole.

These absences, I have argued, can and indeed *should* be seen as part and parcel of an archive, and are not entirely negative occurrences – they allow for the potential of a new layer of meaning to be read through the concept of the a-visual. If considered as a Thirdspace. I have demonstrated that the concepts of visible/invisible and

present/absent can be collapsed, and we can begin to see the epistemic value of absences. The absences are haunted by that which is present, and the present is equally haunted by that which is absent. In the archive, echoes can be heard where documents were either never produced, were omitted, or were destroyed. Archives are “meaning-forming places” (Rylance, 2007:103), ones that establish a link between the present and the past. Whilst *Secrets and Lies* (Burger & Gould) stands as a meaningful and accessible, permanent, and easily located link to the past, AL2922, the archive from which it draws, remains subject to restrictions. The archive is limited in its available resources (very few resources are being added to the collection), and is thus, perhaps, unable to evolve. Future users of the archive need to search for meaningful ways to activate the archive and its documents in new and inventive ways. Salvation is necessary for this archive, lest it goes stagnant, and its fire dies out.

The 2016 exhibition, *Poisoned Past: Legacies of the South African Chemical and Biological Warfare Programme*, curated by Kathryn Smith, Chandré Gould, and Brian Rappert, is the beginning of a new articulation for this archive. According to Gould and Rappert, the exhibition was curated with the hope that it cultivate an engagement with the past, thereby stimulating continued “inquiry into the role of systems, processes and individuals in reckoning with what has passed” (2016:3). They continue to state that the exhibition is not “simply or even primarily intended to set the record straight, or even provide a comprehensive account of the chemical and biological warfare programme or the investigative processes that resulted from its revelation”, and is rather an attempt to investigate the “possibilities and challenges for understanding ourselves in relation to the past” (2016:3). As a form of counter-archive, then, the collection is a set of “post hoc documentation” (Caswell & Gilliland, 2015:616), and has the power to affect, to change, and to (re)shape collective memory. The exhibition has employed the use of the imagined documents, the hoped-for information and revelations of secrets, and turned them into an interactive space, complete with a reproduction of a restraint chair constructed off the plans drawn up by Jan Lourens.

With the fetishistic desire/demand for pictures not fulfilled, I believe that the authority of the book-as-archive and AL2922 do begin to falter, though nothing can be done until new information or documents emerge (if they ever do). Similarly, this study has not

been without its limitations. I was limited insofar as I only had temporary access to AL2922, and funding did not permit more frequent visits.

In summation, I cannot help but wonder how differently, if at all, the various TRC and criminal hearings/judgments would have gone had there been photographs. Would anything have come of it? Would more role players have accepted culpability, allowing for closure for the victims and families of victims of the apartheid regime? Or would it have gone as it did in Japan and elsewhere, where many received clemency in exchange for cooperation with the United States of America, or were indeed valourised for their contribution to science and to the security of the nation?

As mentioned in the Introduction, this study has been almost existential in nature, and should, I believe, be treated not so much as an attempt to 'create' a practical archival methodology, but rather as an attempt to address the deeper problems inherent in regimes founded upon, and bound up in, concerns of secrecy. This study has been productive insofar as it has prompted a critical consideration of the significance of absence within the archive, and the finding that understanding the absences, those haunting reminders of how the apartheid state's ideology of secrecy continues to affect society, is a productive way to deal with how key figures in the system, like Wouter Basson, continue to delay the process of true healing. As the placeholder for Project Coast and imagined document upon which victims project hope for the truth, Basson remains a slippery figure. Even if he is struck from the medical roll, something which would make an example out of him for future medical practitioners, the damage has been done, and because of Basson's silence, both he and Project Coast will forever remain spectres haunting South Africa.

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