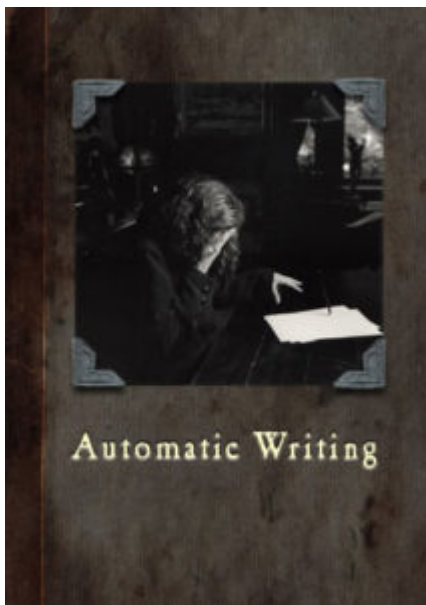


# Automatic Writing and Group #1



## **Automatic Writing**

If, as the scholar claims, a photograph is a sudden death, if the historian's citational practice is cousin to the photographer's, is citation a form of dissection? We can easily picture history's body on the autopsy table, but such metaphor allows us to stop short of mortification, the conceit a kind of body bag shielding us from the corpse. The historian, however, holds in her hand the blade beneath which perforations emerge, each image or fact a spillage issuing from a tissue of forensic interest—proof of what, exactly? An earlier era would have made of the corpse a moral lesson, "its being laid in the dark and silent grave, there putrifying and rotting and becoming exceeding loathsome and being eaten with worms an image of the misery of hell." But we prefer to figure the historical not as corpse but as ghost, saying, with the scholar, "there is no word or image that is not haunted by history." We believe such hauntedness

saturates the present and affects the living, and in this sense perhaps all historians are Spiritualists, each asking the material for access to another realm, one outside the archive. Such mediumship is called *sensitivity*, its crucial question not, *Is there life after death*, but where does the outside commence and how do its boundaries touch our own? History now not only behind us, the question allows us to speak of our death long before our death, the photograph a cup held to catch gossip at the parlor door. With it I put my right ear to the archive and hear Martha say: "Mr Billings sends much love to you all, and so does Mrs B says she is very much obliged to Abby for those little socks, they are the prettiest she ever saw—"

## **Discursive Glance**

### **Photography's Expanded Field**

its spine a hinge  
between the twenty first and nineteenth centuries

the book in the archive  
opens

where history  
would have poetry reflect on itself

ghost-image of the frontispiece  
kissing its progenitor

through tissue  
I write this

not as a lyric subject  
but as one subject to another time

faint stain on my countenance  
an ink

a logic  
like the concept of conscience

continually returning to haunt itself  
I mean I am most myself

not as the original  
etching

or as the accident

transfer made by age on the title page

but as the tissue  
the transparency

that enables history  
to make the book a mirror of itself

when its covers close  
it touches its own image through me

I can't say it sees  
the philosophy of sleep

fatigued soul  
partially withdrawing itself

from physical structure  
gathering inwardly

a history  
of history reading itself

a willingness to make inroads  
into the invisible

evidence  
not readily apprehended

by established categories  
less a question of the veracity of another world

or time persisting  
than of the desire

to visit it  
when I close the book

it goes to sleep  
touching itself

and begins to dream  
pictures

not language  
who can say another's desire is false

tissue between  
text and image

each of us enmeshed  
with its other

## Return

an entire day given over to  
headache                    a kind of pencil

pierced through the visual field

at the lake in the park an egret

next to the sculpture of an egret  
like the rhyme of *sight* and *sign*

one by one the passersby say  
“what the hell”                    because

I heard my dead father talking

on a cell phone                    on the path

behind me                    the old man also  
wearing his cologne                    proves

rhyme is uncanny                    one word  
haunted by another                    sidereal

migrainous aura                    I’m crying

rhyme                    the concept of the other

in the same                    another world in this one  
I can find words for only a fragment



## Group #1

Dearly belated—we err, we errand where the photographic & the transcendental meet in time & thought. A picture is there even when we can't see one, the image in the world like the soul sojourns in the body, all the stranger for its latency. Dim at first sight, pleasant in miniature, the woods look subliminal. Pines' trunks as brown stippled black as the ground of needles is soaked ochre & pricked with green, we turn to stronger light & find the fugitive spirit embodied. The longer we look & the brighter, the more the image seems ours only, a mirror with a memory. The trees, too, seem dearly copied, clear and distinct, but unreal where touched by another. Perhaps it's there the image most remains to be seen, or it waits there to be developed—it's hard to say. Perhaps this feeling of monopoly, love, in its selfishness, likes in likeness. Perhaps its grip stains our image of this world.

## Discursive Glance

### Photography's Expanded Field

My body on its back—

asleep and yet  
not my body

it seemed I was in the world  
I was not

Gradually my senses opened

Calm and happy and deeply interested

I was a traveler  
and death only a circumstance

I couldn't see

a road steep into pine country  
snow on the ground

white and untrodden  
I lost my way

but a stranger directed me  
Afterwards I found

the direction wrong  
but I'm as sure someone spoke

as I would be if she'd spoken the truth  
Incredulity proves nothing

whether recognized or not  
whether understood or not

A fact is true  
it exists

a piece of the universe  
Then it was over

I came back  
They brought me up the faded steps

red-patterned with roses  
I saw the hat-tree with my old coat

and I listened to their feet  
I did not notice or think

I had been left in the cold  
and had come back

spasmodically  
and in fragments

The windows of my room were open  
wind washed in

vast accumulating waves of thought  
They say the senses fear death

but I was a mind against matter  
Lord-

I had said

Give me solid fact  
noise I can hear

motion I see  
Move these substantial objects

A table  
stir it

A cabinet  
open and close it

Let shake  
the atmosphere

and earth  
As a farmer in church has

his special prayer for rain  
so give me

something solid  
and I will believe

to be born is the door  
to die is the hinge

Open the liminal  
and I will go in

## **Not in This World To See His Face Again**

because I tired of what I know  
& my manner of knowing it

I looked in at the photograph

outside the window  
travel smearing the fields

it is always hard to tell  
where the image lies

between departure and arrival

little napkin of smoke  
laid over the face of it

I looked in at his sleeping face

history toward which we carried  
flowers made of his hair

oh mother how tired I shall be  
singing

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