

# FrameWork 2/25

Colin Miner on *Beckon*

## Notes for an Arrangement

\* Forward



Wax, wick, flame.

Materials are gathered. Wax melts to form the base. Heated and warmed to slowly flow and fill. Surrounding the wick. Nice and snug. Air is displaced in response. Upwards towards verticality. Wait. Time to rest. A coagulation is occurring. We hope you feel it. A growing solidity. Then focused. A flame. Something so soft. It burns.

The Telescope and the Eye. Or, between the Past, Present, and Future

*There can be no passing moment that is not already both the past and the present and the future: a moment must be simultaneously past, present, and future for it to pass at all.<sup>1</sup>*

*What we are to deal with, then, is the mystery of contradiction, of simultaneous distinction and identity, of an inescapable two that are at the same time an indisputable one.<sup>2</sup>*

Warm breezes curl up from the river and over a short wall. Off in the distance, hawks swirl and float. The wall is blackened, obscuring old text written in a now muted red ink, a vibrancy still noticeable. A small fire pit, long since used, leads to the narrow-arched entrance of an old guard tower. The sun's warmth on the exterior brick contrasts starkly with the cool dampness of the interior, which is entered so that a narrow rickety ladder can be ascended, in a gloomy light, to the platform above. Exiting this murky space, our vision is replaced with the crispness of blue sky—and from this tower, on top of a mountain, we are presented with an uninhibited panorama of surrounding valleys. A large telescope sits before us, its dense weight solidifying it to the ground. For a small fee, we are encouraged to look for an indefinite amount of time. The apparatus has the appearance of a thing with a story; it stands on sturdy thick legs, marked and etched with wear, its worn elongated casing

## FrameWork 2/25

surrounds a large and heavy glass lens. Bent slightly, hands guide it down, down into the valley, onto fields in the far distance. Fields of vision, which previously appeared vacant.

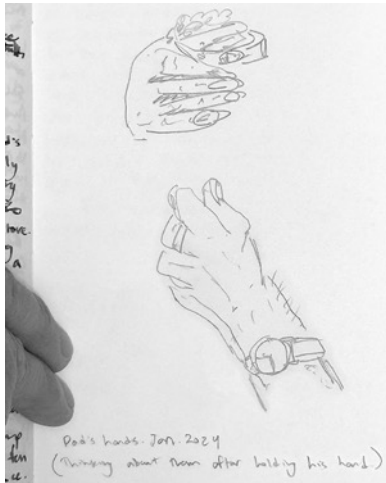
The lens clarity and magnification are astounding. As our bodies stand upon this old watchtower, we are conveyed elsewhere, beyond the valley below, into a time seemingly long past. Before us is the scene of a place, the rural fringe of a concrete-walled industrial pocket. People dressed in uniform drab coloured clothing work with manual tools and grapple with a brutish, coal driven tractor. Extended seeing exposes an absence of synthetic material, of anything unessential to the slow laboured pace of movement.

Turning away, startled, we arrive abruptly shunted into our fast, familiar, and known “now.” A doubled reality is revealed, both existing, and yet simultaneously felt separately.<sup>3</sup> A convergence and dislocation of spaces, boundaries, and times, which exist very much in our soft-present. Disturbed by this confluent image, we are confronted, made to act, to reconcile the very realness of alternate experiences, lived alongside, at distance.

The challenge of softness







*Decolonizing the photographic image is an act of unburdening it from assumed, normative, hegemonic, colonial; conditions present, consciously and unconsciously, in the moment of its making and in its reading and displays.<sup>4</sup>*

*A painter tries to convey to us a picture of the world as they see it; an ophthalmologist tries to enable us to see the world as it really is.<sup>5</sup>*

The photograph tries to facilitate an image through a compromise between picturing the world as seen (via the photographer) and seeing the world as it really is (via the camera). A photographic practice asks what forms of encounter are possible, now. Focusing on encounters and their qualities of relation leads to new formations, insurgent capabilities, and a questioning of *where* the image takes place—in what spaces and temporalities.<sup>6</sup> Cut out, at angle, askew and awry, what can be done under these circumstances and conditions? What is offered and at hand?

Photography has always been associated with gestures and hand movements—the taking of pictures, the selection and sorting, the making of prints, the preparing for display, the editing and organizing, and so on. The continual expansion of photographic practice through digital processes returns the production of the photographic image back to the human hand, to digits (once known as fingers, now as zeros and ones).<sup>7</sup> Further, a digital image can only be staged or performed as a visualization of an invisible *digitized* image file. Consider the image to a piece of music, which is not the same as a silent score of music.<sup>8</sup> Meaning, photographic images offer a gesture, and, in the actions of their making, are experiences of performance. Gesture points to potential action, of a future in the present. In this way, intentions (for the future) need to be distinguished from actions (of the present). The traces of action are present in the photographic image through the practice and process of *making*, versus *taking*, a photograph. Acting both collaboratively and independently, things/matters are brought into our hands to shift attention from the singular artistic gesture to conditions and structures of systems.<sup>9</sup>

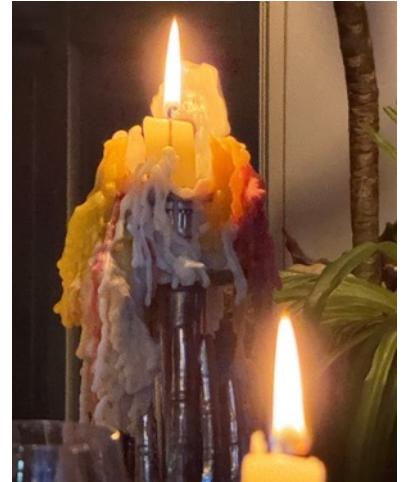
Rules that make up disciplinary structures establish the hard contrast of boundaries. Photography has not always been tethered to a disciplinary regime. Reflect on the potential relocation of photography away from an industrial inception during Walter Benjamin's *fog*, to the practice of Anna Atkins site



## FrameWork 2/25

responsive research and arrangements between plants, intertidal zones, and blue waves of emulsion. Pliable, flexible, adaptive. Here, the photographic both makes itself expansive and provides a means of expansion. What might a softening of action as gesture offer? Possibly a sensitivity and responsiveness as a method of resilience.

\* Afterward



<sup>1</sup> Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton U P, 1997), p31.

<sup>2</sup> C. F. Kepler, *The Literature of the Second Self* (Tucson: U Arizona P, 1972), p1.

<sup>3</sup> The disconcerted feeling I am trying to describe is made all the more palpable through my location on the historic Hushan section of China's Great Wall. "Hushan" is Mandarin Chinese for "Tiger Mountain," and is located on the north-east edge of the city DanDong, adjacent to the North Korean border.

<sup>4</sup> Sealy, Mark. *Decolonising the Camera: Photography in Racial Time*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2019, 2

<sup>5</sup> Frankl, Victor E. *Man's Search for Meaning*. New York: Pocket Books, 1963, 174.

<sup>6</sup> Crary, Jonathan. *24/7*. New York: Verso, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Batchen, Geoffrey. *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography*. Cambridge: MIT, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Groys, Boris. *In the Flow*. New York: Verso, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Lind, Maria. *Seven Years: The Rematerialisation of Art from 2011 to 2017*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019.



Images: *An arrangement for Beckon*, 2025

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