

# DECONSTRUCTING THE PRINTING PROCESS: IMAGE AS MATERIAL, TIME, AND SPACE

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“To make an imprint is always to produce a fabric of material relations which give rise to a concrete object, but which also involve a whole set of abstract relations. This is how the imprint is both process and paradigm: it unites in itself the two meanings of the word experience, the physical meaning of an experimental protocol and the gnoseological meaning of an apprehension of the world.” (Didi-Huberman, 2008, p.32)

Over my years of practice in lithography, I have become more interested in printmaking as a process and an experience than in the result. My attention is focused on the repeated gestures and the qualities of the materials as they transform. It was by noticing a shift in the gesture-trace-imprint relationship in my process that I sought to deconstruct the process and transpose it to other mediums. It is this reflection on the imprint's inability to capture movement, to grasp the time of the image that is being made, which leads me to transpose the paradigm of the print into my installations. Thus, I present the image in its different states, from the fluid material of the wash to the printed image. I deconstruct the printing process to show it as a series of gestures and transformations, each with an imaging potential.

In this paper, I will discuss how my work pushes the limits of lithography and crosses the boundaries of other mediums while maintaining a conceptual link with printmaking. I will elaborate on the three perspectives of the image that make up my practice today: the image as material, which is materialised by a printing process; the image as time, which presents an image in the making, and the image as space, where the installation is conceived as a system of relationships.

## THE IMAGE AS MATERIAL

### THE GESTURE

I have deconstructed and transposed the chain of relations that constitutes the lithographic printing

process in a series of experiments. My attention was first focused on the gesture that constitutes the starting point of my practice: applying the wash, the *Tusche*<sup>1</sup>, to the lithographic stone. The application of the fluid is done intentionally, but the result is difficult to predict. I try to direct it while letting it escape, observing its movements, ready to intervene.

Then, wishing to escape the limits imposed by the dimensions of the lithographic stone, I conducted a series of experiments with the wash on the non-absorbent support that is the polyester film.

I ran ink on horizontal and vertical planes. I slid it across vertically suspended polyester film and onto



Figure 1



Figure 2

#### Figure Titles and information

Figure 1: Untitled, 2010. Ink on polyester film, 60 x 60 cm  
 Figure 2: Horizon, 2012. Inkjet print, 104 cm x 178 cm

1. German word for “China ink”. Medium specific to traditional lithography.

other surfaces laid horizontally on the floor: cause and effect, action and its trace. The trace is a consequence of my gesture, but although prepared, it is a result of chance, of conditioned chaos. The fluid accumulates and forms a puddle that flows and spreads. I intervene if it threatens to overflow the surface: I modify the slope or move it to change the trajectory of the flow. I add water if the wash is too dense, and I add ink if it is not dense enough. I “work” with the accident, without really being able to control it. The result remains unpredictable; the movements and transformations occur over a long period during which the wash constantly changes its appearance. Intentionally, I create “the accident that will become the substance of the graphic activity” (Didi-Huberman, 2008, p.42).

## THE TRACE

I observe the liquid slowly sliding and spreading on the smooth surface of the non-absorbent support. As hours pass, the water evaporates, and the dense black material moves more like a mass than a fluid; its viscosity changes, approaching that of oil.

I observe it until it stops moving and a form finally takes shape. Rings of ink gradually form textures and gradations of richness that the opacity of the fluid did not allow to appear.

The rings mark each of its locations and movements. These many layers testify to the temporality of an event and its deployment in space. Each ink stain is a slow trace, so the transformation of the material can last more than a day. They take a multitude of aspects, according to the gestures and context from which they result and to which they inevitably refer.

## THE PRINT

The print results from a projective operation, that of the transfer of the matrix on a plane, which occurs by contact and pressure. In lithography, the transferred image becomes the almost identical double of the matrix on stone or plate. The distance between the matrix and the printed image, however, remains minimal; the contact supposes the reduction, the crushing of any mediation (Didi-Huberman, 2008, p.121).

The ink stains obtained in the course of my explorations are not prints. They are the result of direct action between the gesture and the trace without any operation of transfer. These ink stains on polyester, however, have the possibility of becoming matrices. They can be digitised, photographed, or exposed on a lithographic plate and thus become the structure, the code allowing the generation of multiple images.

If the print traditionally presumes a contact between the matrix and a support that is usually transferred by pressure, what is the case with digital prints? Can we still speak of a matrix-print relationship?



Figure 3

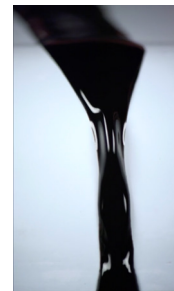


Figure 4

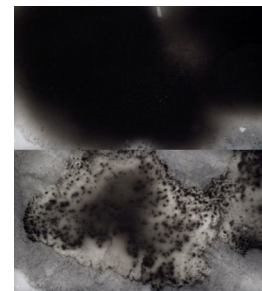


Figure 5

Figure 3: Stone, 2013. Inkjet print, 112 x 140 cm  
 Figure 4: Débordement 4, 2013. Screenshot of a video sequence. <https://vimeo.com/92088405>  
 Figure 5: Débordement 3, 2013. Screenshot of a video sequence. <https://vimeo.com/92088403>

With digital manipulations, the enlargement or reduction of the image accentuates the gap between the matrix and the print. Even with the direct contact of a press, the print always bears the marks of a difference, however small, because even if it is operative, the gesture of printing remains indeterminate. It is a complex process and certain technical specificities such as the consistency of the inks, the nature of the paper, and the quantity of pressure influence the result. The printed image is never identical to the matrix, although very similar: It is affected by a value of difference. It is a differential operation: "It is a question of producing the similar but of producing it dissimilar to oneself" (Didi-Huberman, 2008, p.275). With repetition, the difference is accentuated little by little: From every duplication arises the difference.

## THE IMAGE AS TIME

Printmaking as I have analysed it is not only a process that gives form to an object: It is also an experimental process that allows the establishment of a set of links and relationships. The process is at the centre of my artistic practice. It is both subject and object. It is what allows the image and the meaning to emerge.

In my practice, the work is no longer an end in itself but the result of a series of actions, gestures, and experiments. The form thus becomes indeterminate, resulting from randomness, the particularity of the material, or physical phenomena. The work is an open path, a series of gestures and actions whose object is the trace.

My process is above all an experimentation of transformations: This incited me to capture the gestures and events that produce the traces. I wanted to capture the temporal trace. Can time, though, truly be represented? The video does not present a fixed image, but an image in the making; we are not facing form but formlessness.

## TEMPORAL IMPRINT

All the traces left by the ink are prints of the time during which they were formed: Each line and each ring constitutes a temporal stratum. Does this accumulation of traces alone, though, translate the meditative qualities suggested by the slow change of state of the wash from liquid to solid? Through video, the material becomes time in action.

During my explorations, the camera is directed towards the polyester film laid flat, in a bird's eye view. It captures the movements and transformations of the wash from the moment it is applied until it has evaporated. The process can take more than 24 hours, depending on the amount of liquid accumulated on the non-porous surface of the support.

This slow process is almost impossible to observe in its entirety. The slowness of the movements is such that it requires extraordinary

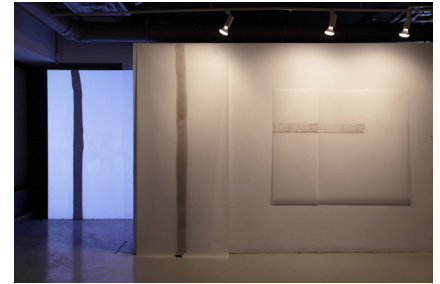


Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

Figure 6: Écoulement, 2011. Video projection (<https://vimeo.com/55545701>); Trait, 2011. Ink on polyester film, 50 cm x 107 cm; Untitled, 2011. Lithography on polyester film, 135 cm x 160 cm. Installation view, CDEx, Montreal, Canada  
 Figure 7: Monolithes, 2013. Ink on polyester film, 82 x 37 inches each (210 cm x 94 cm) Exhibition view at Engramme, Quebec City, Canada.  
 Figure 8: Monolithes, 2013. Ink on polyester film, 82 x 37 inches each (210 cm x 94 cm) Traces, 2013. Video projection, 260 x 120 cm (<https://vimeo.com/78212109>). Exhibition view at Engramme, Quebec City, Canada.

attention to perceive them, but accelerated editing makes them visible. The videographic time reveals this emergence.

Is it, however, only a matter of presenting a process? How can we ignore the impression that time has replaced matter? Video editing allows us to relativise time, to fold it on itself to question the linearity of an event, and to reverse time as one could reverse a fluid. It can be suspended; it can become monumental. It is a question of transmitting an emotional dimension of this experience at the limit of narration. The video reveals almost ungraspable moments. It makes them live again. The water can flow continuously and the ink stain can become liquid again.

My printing process started with the movement of the wash. If the video trace is more faithful to it than the fixed trace is, the definition of the print can transcend the mediums. The video is an imprint. In addition to memorising the reception of the luminous trace on a photosensitive sensor, it inscribes the temporal imprint by manipulation. Post-production is the very material of this imprint.

## **PROJECTION**

During my explorations combining lithography and video, I have reflected on the printed image and the video projection as operations of a projective nature. Both are about the transfer of the image. In the case of the print, the transferred image is material: The matrix is inked and printed on the support. In the case of the video projection, it is indeed about the luminous transfer of an image on the plane that intercepts and "materialises" it.

I had to question the place and the importance of the print in my work and detach myself from the printed image to reflect on the very nature of the print. This is how I deconstructed and observed the process of printmaking. I wanted to present the different materialities and temporalities, to make them meet and cross.

## **THE IMAGE AS SPACE**

We have seen the image emerging from the material; we have experienced and understood it in space and duration. In the installation, the image is no longer fixed, it is constantly being constructed.

## **INSTALLATION**

In the exhibition space, it is fragments of my process that I give to be seen and that are articulated between them. The gaps and absences are as important as what is presented. It is up to the viewers to fill in the gaps with their projections. They are the ones from whom the meaning emerges: While traversing the space, they invest it with their

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interpretations and experiences. Their perception of the installation is constituted progressively through a constant game of associations and references. The work is conceived as a system of relations.

How does one spatialise the different times of the image and its different states? How does one present what was done with what is done now? The exhibition space proposes an open path between the different presences and materialities. The set of fragments seeks to experiment with the deconstruction of a process that is believed to be linear and that is reconstructed in a multitude of forms and temporalities.

## CONCLUSION

In the course of my research, I have reflected on the heuristic dimension of the print concerning the specificity of my creative process, which takes as its starting point the movement of the wash. My images result from sustained attention to the qualities of ink and other liquid materials. The image matter resulting from this process, whether it is a trace or a print, is always the image of a past time, of what has been done. What would be a simple statement has become a question that has motivated experiments and video projects during which I wanted to show the image that is being made.

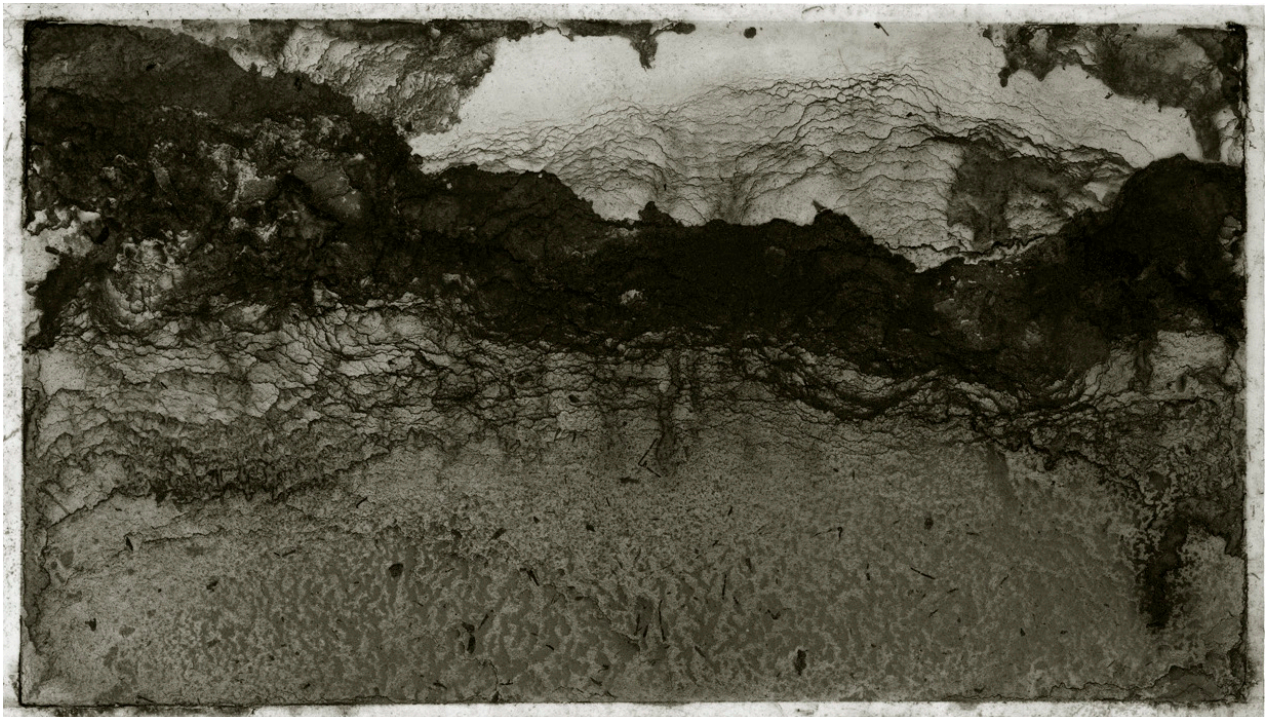
Wondering how to represent a temporality other than by the trace of a past, I first wanted to revive this time through the video to reactivate its presence. The work of editing the videographic material opened up possibilities of modifying this linear time by recomposing and relativising the duration of the capture. What was proving to be an impossibility has thus opened up other perspectives. What interests me today is not so much showing the process of making the image as exploiting its imaging potential.

The image can materialise in a multitude of forms and mediums during the time of the process by which it is generated. Elements of different natures coexist in the work I am now pursuing. In the space of the installation, these fragments respond to each other and form a whole through which one can understand an imaging process. What exactly does it give form to, though? After having observed so much of the phenomena at the base of this process, it is now a question of seeing what can emerge from it, what I can provoke, evoke, and figure.

## REFERENCE

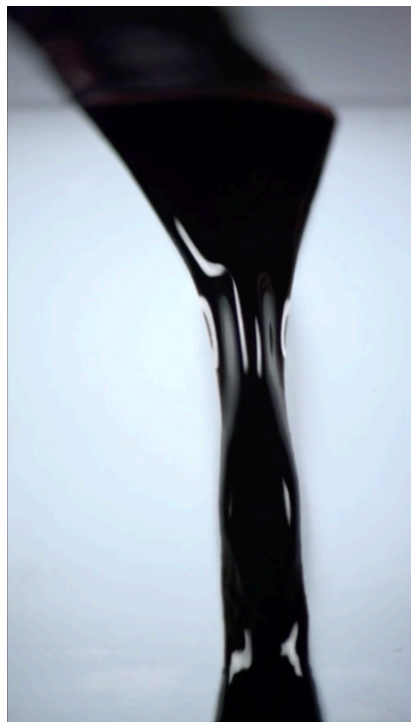
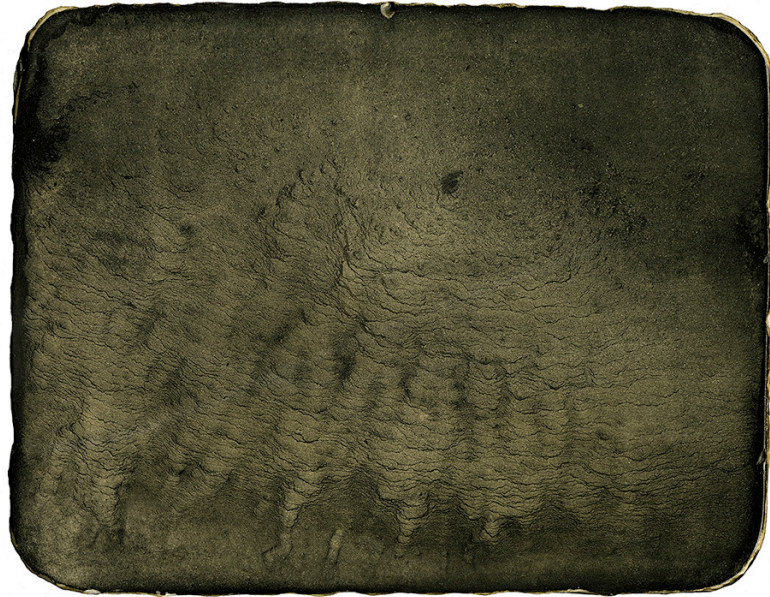
Didi-Huberman, Georges. 2008. *La ressemblance par contact : archéologie, anachronisme et modernité de l’empreinte*, Paris : Éditions de minuit. (reprint of the text of the exhibition catalogue « L’Empreinte », Centre National d’art et de Culture Georges Pompidou, 1998). Free translation.

IMAGE GALLERY



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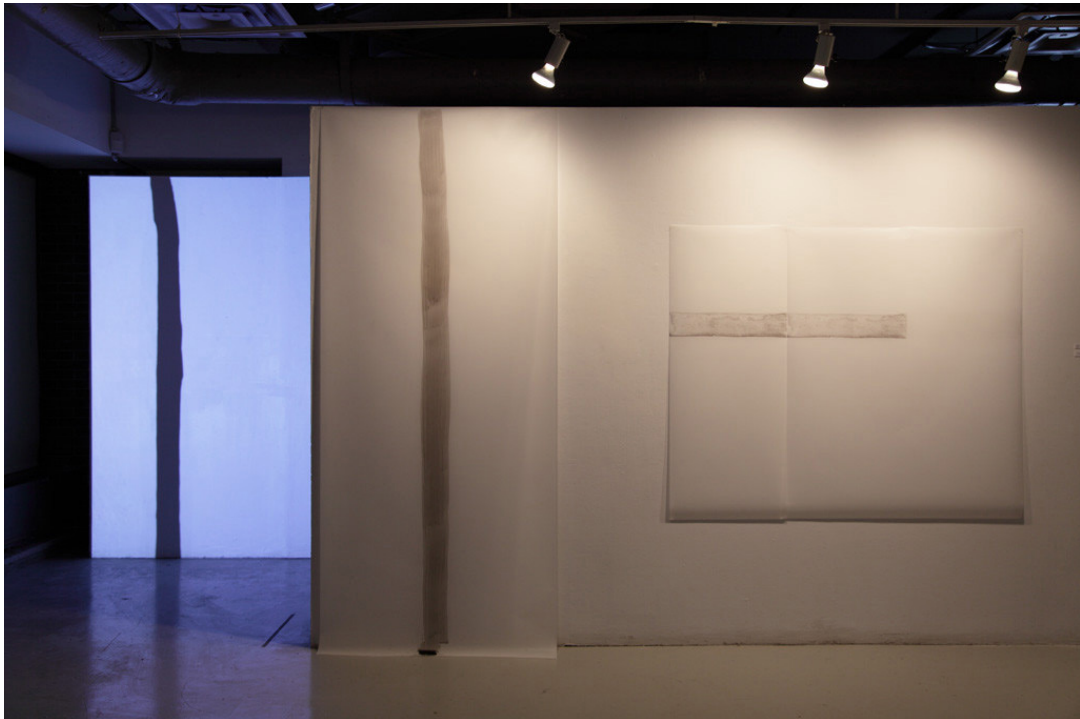
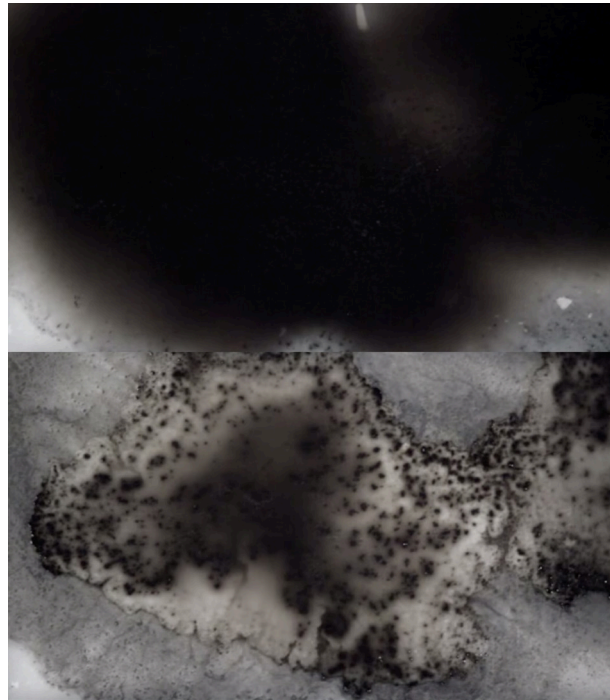
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