

# *Un-Doing Lumetype*

By Brandi Kulakowski



David Castillo: Lumetype, phosphorescent paint mixed with oil and water, put in a plastic sleeve, allowed to separate and slowly slide down shallow incline. Process of separation oil/water can be seen in appearance of shadows.

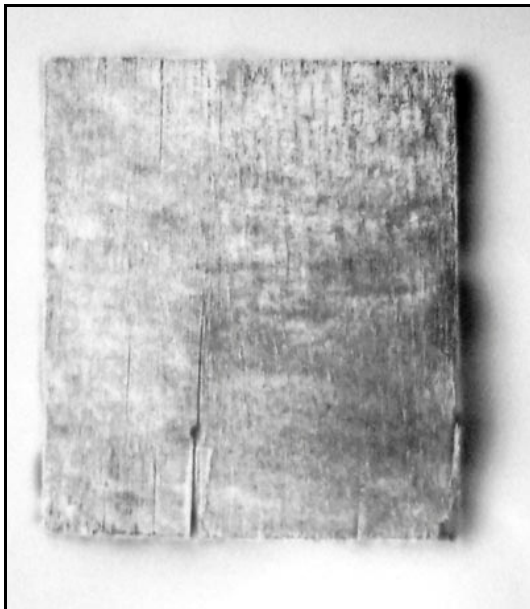
Jacques Derrida's deconstruction un-does "warring significations" throughout the "text" of the Lumetype process, simultaneously weaving throughout this new/old art form, a cross-discipline of traditional printmaking and black-and-white photography *sans* back-light, lens, or enlarger. In this essay, I attempt to provide a Derridian analysis of this unusual medium through the use of Derrida's logic of the supplement.

Patented in 2004 by Caro d'Offay (Caro d'Offay Gallery, Chicago), Lumetype allows artists to print with light using ordinary objects, such as a rock or a person's face, or utilize relief and intaglio plates. In this process, the object/plate is coated with phosphorescent paint, transforming the object/plate into a light source. Once pressed against a light-sensitive surface, the object/plate exposes the black-and-white photo-paper, which is then developed in the usual photography chemicals. A *both* printing-making *and* photography dualistic art form (Lumetype mimics Quantum Mechanic's *both/and* logic) it also defers the very technological advances it adopts (*both* past *and* present interweave).

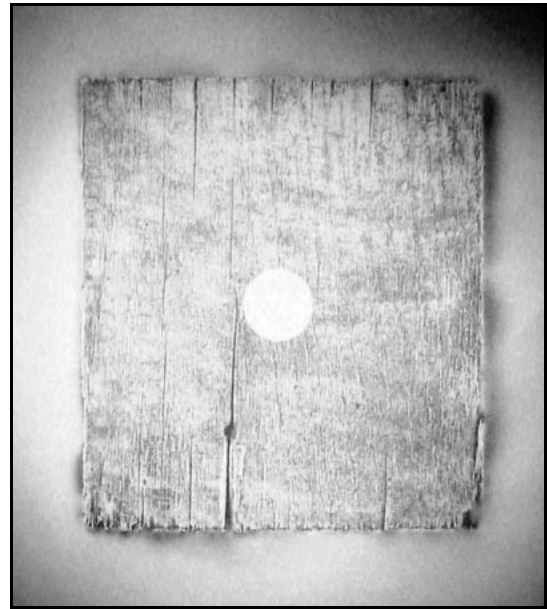
As Derrida wrote in his text *Positions*, "Whether in written or in spoken discourse, no element can function as a sign without relating to another element which itself is not simply present. This linkage means that each 'element'—phoneme or grapheme—is constituted with reference to the trace in it of the other elements of the sequence or system. This linkage, this weaving, is the *text*, which is produced only through the transformation of another text" (Culler, 99). The Lumetype process and prints are both

Derrida's text, with traces of photography and printmaking throughout the medium. The "text" of Lumetype has been linguistically formulated by the vocabulary and process of both black-and-white photography and printmaking with notes of the photogram sneaking in as well. A plate is pressed onto photo-sensitive paper, and then placed in photo-chemicals. Photography leaks in by the Lumetype's use of photo-solutions, photo-paper and the printing with light on paper. Similar to printmaking, a plate can be etched, carved, or drawn and then pressed against photo-paper.

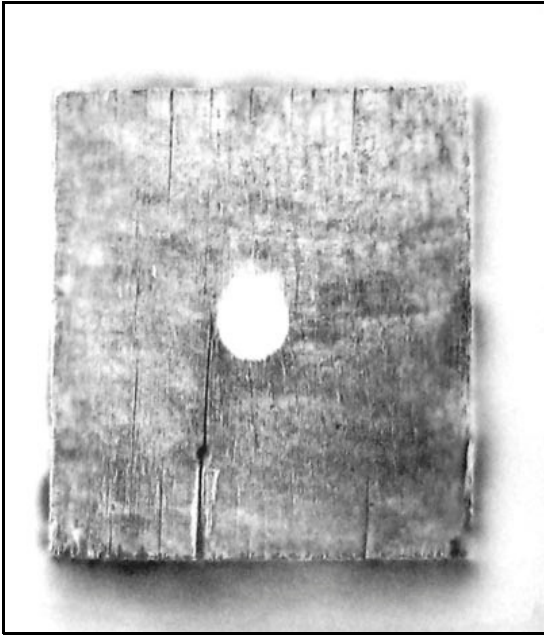
Derrida's logic of the supplement—subverting binary logic—espouses a mutual implication between two entities, say A and B. One entity, A, is necessary for the other, B, twirling in a complex dance. Circling together, the center becomes the margin and the margin shifts to the center transferring the highest significance to the previously marginal entity. In photography the angle of light only makes a difference in the lens (without any tampering of the negative). A person's shadow in a photograph is apparent at the time of the snapshot. If the photographer desires to achieve a particular light or shadow, he must wait until a certain time of day. The Lumetyper, however, is able to change the angle at which the light strikes the plate to create various effects. For instance, Caro d'Offay pulled a series prints of one wood plate. For one print, d'Offay exposed the wood to light as if the sun was at its midday position in the sky. A minimal shadow surrounding the stamp of the wood appeared on the finished print. The crispness represents that of a photograph taken with a focused lens. A shadow resting between a large crease in the wood is unbelievably crisp, as are the edges of wood. In the same experiment, d'Offay used the same wood plate shining light at an angle to the plate to represent the setting sun, and producing long shadows cast from the wood onto the photo-paper. To experiment, d'Offay placed a coin on the piece of wood, itself casting a long shadow onto the wood. This print presents, as d'Offay describes it, "wood covered with snow." The edges of the wood are blurry, and devoid of the crisp details of the first print.



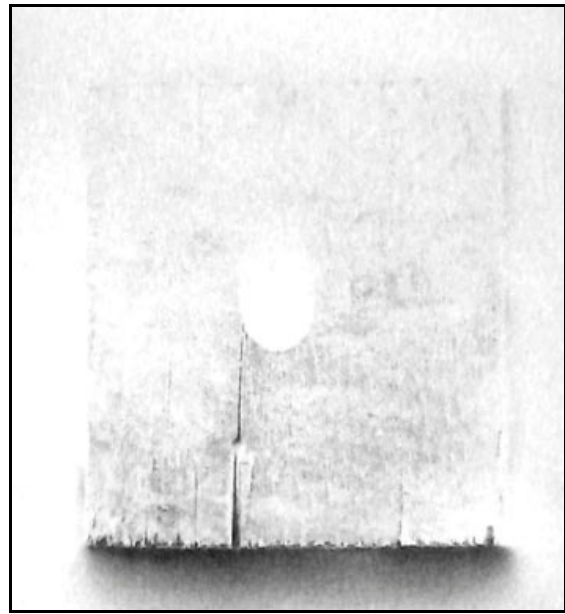
Caro d'Offay: Noon Alone



Noon with Coin



Early Sunset with Coin



Late Sunset with Coin

For Derrida, language is composed of floating signifiers that only contingently refer to unstable signifieds. This is what the Lumetype process exemplifies in many ways: a process devoid of a formalized, stable vocabulary that promotes a shift of perspective rather than defining one perspective. Rather than a lens seizing light or backlit in a controlled situation, artists are forced to capture light as it spreads across a plate, affirmed in the aforementioned wood studies. The artists that have worked with the process describe the way they have wrestled with light while producing prints unlike anything they have experienced before. One experiences Lumetype only through sight and feeling, be it frustration with light or exaltation of its finished product, but we lack language to adequately express these experiences.

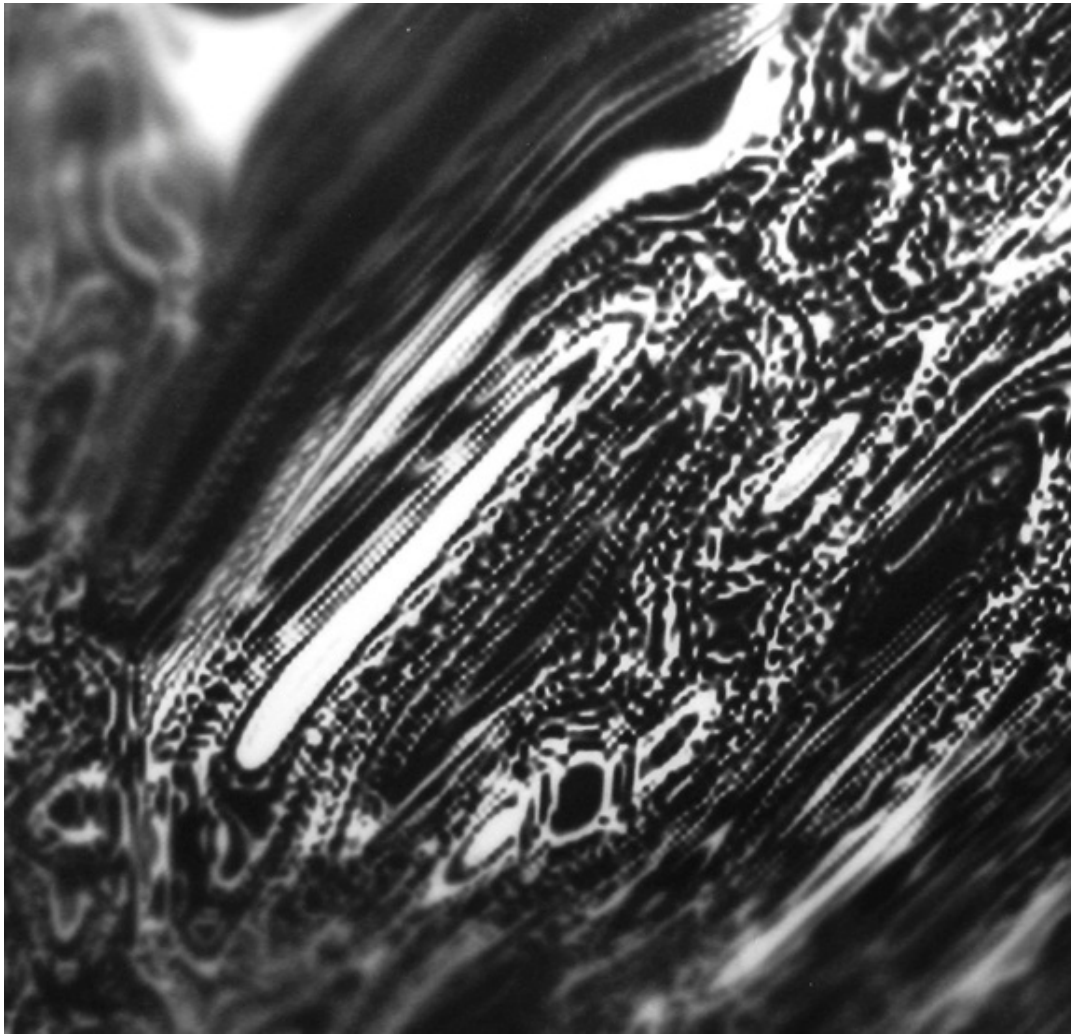
Derrida's tendency to exploit an author's unintended meaning and link it to the author's intended meaning lies in the etymology of "Lumetype." The name of the process reveals itself in *lume-* as a prefix and *-type* as a suffix. In an interview with d'Offay, she divulged how she pieced the two words together, one word for "light" and another for "substrate" or "printing." After five months she became frustrated; names she liked popped up in web searches, such as "lumatype" and "lumitype," and others sounded laughable and unprofessional. Before officially naming her process, d'Offay realized the similarity of her late mother's name, Marie-Luce, to light. She finally decided upon the prefix "lume-" (which she previously disliked due to its phonetic similarity to "loom"). Coupling the suffix "-type" with "lume-" converted the prefix into two-syllables. It was perfect; simple, traditional, and it even reflected her mother's name, Luce, Latin for light.

The etymology of "lume-" and "-type" reveal how uncannily d'Offay's picks suit one another. *Lum* is "of obscure etymology," from the Latin *lumen* and the uses of the French *lumiere* meaning "aperture" or "passage," according to the Oxford English Dictionary, which defines *lum* as "an opening in a roof; a skylight." Aperture should be

an easy connection for any photography buff; the size of an aperture determines the focus within a depth of field in a lens. Not only is *lume* a Latin derivative for light and the aperture through which light enters a lens, it stands for Lumetype itself, a membrane through which ideas pass. Aperture, "the process of opening" is d'Offay's goal for Lumetype—a process of opening the mind to generate new perspectives. If the roof is the membrane through which ideas pass, Lumetype is the skylight.

Landing at the suffix "-type," the Oxford English Dictionary tells us that from the Greek it means "root of" or "to beat, strike," in the sense of "driven, moulded," but other connotations remain such as, "reflected," "original," and "primitive." Anglicized, the suffix came to mean "type, block, or plate for printing from." The suffix of "Lumetype" naturally possesses the common connotation "of the specified type; typical or characteristic of, reminiscent or imitative of." Using the last definition for the suffix, the process is one of light (Latin *lum*). Yet it is a type of art from the "root of" photography and of printmaking, which can be "beat" into a print, not to mention "driven" and "moulded" by artists. This type of art is to be "reflected" by light, by thought. And yes, it is "original" as an inexpensive art form that prints objects such as debris and even faces as plates. Perhaps most significant, Lumetype is a medium through which minds open. Exchanging the literal "opening in a roof," for its figurative connotation, the skylight is a mind, a mind open to capture light for ultimate enlightenment. Ultimately, "Lumetype" is that "double-edged word, which serves as a hinge that both articulates and breaks open the explicit statement being made" (Derrida, xiv).

Interestingly, one definition of "type" is derived from semiotics; "A sign representing a category or set of instances, as opposed to the individual tokens by which the category is instantiated" (*dictionary.oed.com*). Multiple signs represent multiple categories throughout Lumetype. Photo-paper and photo-chemicals are signs representing photography while plates and phosphorescent paint express printmaking. A similarity to photography, without which we would not have this vocabulary, is the phraseology positive and negative. Firstly, the resulting Lumetype is a mirror image of the artist's plate much like photographs. Artist Friedhard Kiekeben formulated his plate with a digital print-out transparency placed upon a piece of foam board. Once shining light on the board and transparency together, he removed the transparency and pressed the foam board against the photo paper. Enabling photography terminology, Kiekeben created two plates, one with a negative transparency, and the other being a positive transparency. The details of the digital notches produced by Kiekeben's printer are evident in his resulting print, providing a positive-to-negative and thus direct correlation to the top side of the plate. Photography's combination of a negative-to-negative to equal a positive is sidestepped in this process, as an artist is able to print a Lumetype positive-to-negative. A double movement occurs, however. Kiekeben exposed light to the back-side of the photo-paper, with the emulsion side away from the plate, to produce a negative to positive in another print pulled from same plate.



Friedhard Kiekeben: *Chrome* (2008)

Just as Derrida expanded upon the either/or thought of Structuralism, Lumetype's use of the both/and implication lies in the technology of photography chemicals of black and white photography, yet Lumetype truly returns to a time before the advent of the lens. Derrida's logic of the supplement, a mutual implication between entities A and B, is further divulged by shadow and light's complex dance in Lumetype. Where shadow in photography is marginal, it becomes equal to and often central in Lumetype. The *both/and* model is the crux in Lumetype's relationship with light—quantum mechanic's wave/particle duality of light is akin to Derrida's *both/and* model extension of the Structuralists' *either/or* implication. D'Offay states this relationship:

The key to the Lumetype process lies in the model for the wave/particle duality of Quantum Mechanics. The duality expresses that light exists both as a particle and as a waveform, inseparable from one another. When printed, Lumetype expresses the surface of an object (particle form) when it makes contact with the paper, and it also defines the negative space of the object by allowing its scattered light (wave form) to express itself where it pulls away from the light sensitive surface (d'Offay, 1).

Arriving on the plate as a stream of light, the light scatters. It is this stream of light, rather than the capturing of light in a lens, that causes a shadow to be cast from the plate onto the media. For instance, artist Chad Attie's plate was a paper book scored with a razor. The pages beneath the page lying on top were also scored. The light reflects off two or three stratum of pages. The sub-pages peek through scored slivers to display the depth of the book. Comparing two prints of the same plate by Attie, an examination of a location where the razor caused a small piece of ripped paper to fold upon the larger piece of paper produces a characteristically Lumetype effect. The light escapes the hole to cast a shadow both over and under a three-dimensional flap on the final print. Another print was pulled of the same plate, this time not exposed to light for quite as long, leaving the shadow much smaller than in one print.

Lumetype is quite flexible in comparison to photography. Here Lumetype weaves in photography yet again stands on its own. A Lumetype print may be overexposed, but it can still be a fabulous print. At the same time, an underexposed Lumetype functions wekk too, whereas an under- or over-exposed photograph would usually be dismissed. Details in an overexposed Lumetype may be sharper in relation to a perfectly exposed print as in the case of multiple prints by artist Sabina Ott. Some of her prints showed crisp detail in overexposed prints, whereas other details were more detailed in underexposed prints.



Sabina Ott



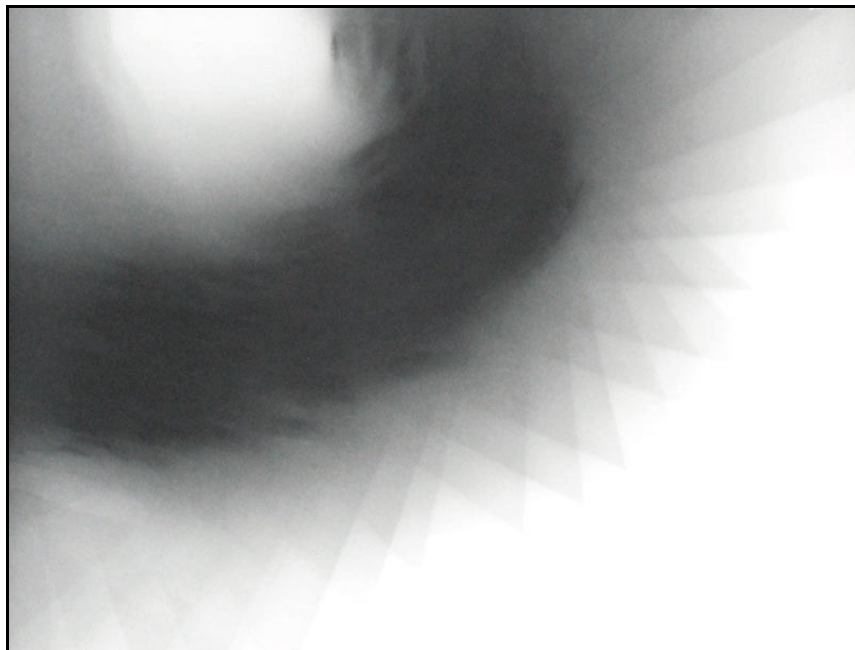
Sabina Ott

Kiekeben's digital plate produced areas that were "out of focus," creating a seemingly organic photograph from a very non-organic digital print, only created by the paper's relationship to the plate itself. Photography's reality and depth of field is replicated with Lumetype, yet it is produced by a different technique.

In photography, light enters the lens and strikes film to make a negative image of its subject often showcasing details such as fine granules of sand on a beach or the depth between two people standing near each other. Lumetype prints achieve the same detail, only the plate is pressed directly to the paper. The finer the detail in Lumetype, the closer a plate is in relation to the photo-paper. In a series of body prints by d'Offay, facial hair and skin pores are evident while Sabina Ott's prints reveal her brush-strokes made while she applied phosphorescent paint to her plate. Aaron Delehanty used rope as a plate, and after soaking it in phosphorescent paint and shining light on it, he pressed the strand of rope to photo-paper, allowing part of the rope to lay on the photo-paper with less pressure in certain areas. The resulting print pictures the coiled rope expanding into space behind the detail-ridden rope fibers.

Depth is unique to a process without a lens. Any negative space between the photo-paper and the plate produces depth in a topological of the relationship between plate and print. Using a drawing as her plate, natural curvature of Sabina Ott's plate (a piece of paper), created a blurred effect to illustrate depth in Ott's final print. Neither photography nor printmaking has the ability to contrive a three-dimensional image of a two-dimensional object.

Unlike photography, one plate can never produce two identical prints. Photographers can stage a scene and take any number photographs of the same scene, and a negative can reproduce any number of duplicates. Measure the exposure time, adjust the shutter speed, and focus the lens to a particular depth of field to take identical photos. The variables of Lumetype create inconsistencies within various prints. When shone with light, only one-millisecond difference affects how hard the plate glows, in turn affecting the exposure of the light-sensitive paper it is pressed against. Unlike printmaking, the resulting intaglio plate often creates a glossy print. Each of the variables creates differences within printmaking and photography, encompassing traces of both while simultaneously deferring them to stand on its own as a medium.



Caitlin Bauler: One of the completed multiple exposures (over 45 minutes) using white foam board as marker between spool exposures.

Although a branch of the photography "category," Lumetype completes the feat of capturing movement. Artist Caitlin Bauler dragged a spool of thread across a piece of photo-paper in a semi-circle. The spool is captured from starting point to resting place. Not only is the movement of the spool apparent, but so is the movement of light. Bauler used foam board to block light so that it would not trickle onto the paper. As a result, the beams of light, rather, the waves of light are displayed scattering across the photo-paper. An intriguing print, David Castillo filled a plastic sleeve with phosphorescent paint, oil, and water. Lumetype records the paint, oil, and water as they interact while gravity pulls it towards the bottom of the encasement.

Truly unique to the Lumetype is an amazing effect that presented itself with quite a shock to d'Offay and the artist working on it. "The process is almost 'alchemical' it celebrates the emergence of the unexpected," Kiekeben remarked in an interview for *Gaper's Block* (d'Offay, Interview, 1). As Caitlin Bauler moved a spool across photo-paper, she used two pieces of black foam board to block light from exposing the paper, which created a dark straight line where the two pieces of foam board met. Bauler switched to white foam board, which generated a curved crease, like the appearance of a book's interior pages flanking the crease, the crease of a book being where the two pieces of foam board met. Rather than absorbing light as the black foam board did, the white reflected the accumulation of light fashioning what looks like a bend in the photo-paper.

Traces of photography and printmaking weave to constitute Lumetype, however, Derrida's critique of the idea of origins divulge the shaky origins of Lumetype. Although we know exactly where the Lumetype started, in Chicago, Illinois, its foundations have a shaky history. So what is Lumetype's origin(s)? From resin-coated and fiber paper, chemistry experiments to develop silver nitrate and pinhole cameras to daguerreotypes, the history of photography lacks a singular origin. As far as printmaking is concerned, Eastern origins are circa A.D. 105 with Chinese stone rubbings predating woodcuts, and transferred to the west in the fifteenth century when one drew and then made into engravings in the eighteenth century. These histories coalesce to the development of the Lumetype, but a double movement occurs, in a retrograde movement to the time before the advent of the lens. Then we must return to the present where we would have no knowledge that a picture can show the details of one's hair follicles without the various sized apertures in a lens. Without intaglio or relief plates, or even the vocabulary to name them as such, both types would not exist to make such plates.

In his book *On Deconstruction*, Culler asserts, "deconstruction itself relies on the notion of the cause . . . To deconstruct causality one must operate with the notion of cause and apply it to causation itself" (Culler, 87). To clarify Derrida's thought process, Culler uses Nietzsche's deconstruction causality from *The Will to Power*, that if one feels pain in his leg and then looks to find a pin, "the experience of pain, it is claimed, causes us to discover the pin and thus caused the production of a cause" (Culler, 87). However, deconstruction reverses the hierarchical opposition. "If either cause or effect can occupy the position of origin, then origin is no longer originary; it loses its metaphysical privilege. A nonoriginary origin is a 'concept' that cannot be comprehended by the former system and thus disrupts it" (Culler, 88). Traveling from A.D. 105, the origins of printmaking, through the development of the camera obscura, and later

discoveries in photo chemistry, to the present, Lumetype technology returns us to the past just to move us forward towards the future. In a time-line of innovations, Lumetype's place was drawn on the east wall of Caro d'Offay Gallery; d'Offay explains:

The wall diagram, a timeline of photographic history suggested linear and non-linear time. The straight, horizontal line, bisecting the gallery, offered 5, 25, 50 & 100-year marks with notes on events in chronological order across a 45 foot surface. Overlaying the horizontal line were oblong circular shapes, spanning from the present into a past event and back into the present, to illustrate Lumetype's flexibility to investigate reality through traditional means while serving contemporary concerns (d'Offay, Pre-Exhibit Display, 1).

Here neither the cause nor the effect can ever occupy the position of origin.

As process, Lumetype undoes traditional fine-art discourse, showing how it undermines the hierarchical oppositions, historically and artistically, on which it relies. Like "anti-art" gestures, Lumetype often uses refuse. Originally used as a low-tech and alternative way to introduce students to photography and printmaking in schools, an artist can print anything imaginable, from a leaf found in the front lawn to a spool of thread found in a closet. Highly accessible, it is conceptually complex; de-constructing art discourse and technology while constructing it anew at the same time, Lumetype is at once a twirling cause-and-effect of itself.

Culler cites Derrida:

*Différance* is the systematic play of differences, of traces of differences, of the spacing by which elements relate to one another. This spacing is the production, simultaneously active and passive (the *a* of *différance* indicates the indecision as regards activity and passivity, that which cannot yet be governed and organized by that opposition), of intervals without which the 'full' terms could not signify, could not function (Culler, 97).

Not only are there traces of various art forms that present themselves in Lumetype, but Derrida's *différance* pops up in the way an artist's mind functions as they pull prints.

In an interview d'Offay describes how:

. . . The process allows the artist to be actively aware of both modes of thinking. While working with the Lumetype, the practical left side of the brain works through the logistics, while the intuitive right-brain allows for the possibilities to emerge from the medium. The best prints are the ones that are an effective balance between the two modes of thought. While Lumetype is a printmaking process, it is also a model of the human mind and how it perceives the wave/particle duality (d'Offay, 1).

D'Offay mentioned in the same interview that the switch between "practical 'now-time' and creative 'non-time'" is actually felt while working with the process. It is remarkable that the *corpus callosum*, the bridge between both sides of the brain, spaces the "systematic play of differences" and "traces of differences" by which the logical and creative elements relate to one another. Traveling across the *corpus callosum* the logical lobe is passive while the creative right brain is active, allowing the spacing of the brain to produce a Lumetype. The left and right brain never work at once, only "of intervals without which the 'full' terms could not signify."

Artist and writer Brian Robert Hischer worked with the medium and wrote a creative piece on his thoughts and experiences, where he unknowingly touches upon Derrida's discussion in "The Column" of *Dissemination* concerning one particular sentence. Hischer discusses the banality and insignificance of an object to be lumen-typed. The eye selects an object, but is not interested in the object it picks:

It begins with an Object, selected by the eye, picked up with the hand . . . With our changing eyes, the Object could easily succumb to Aristotle's Categories, Bruno's Neoplatonic forms, Proust's sensitivities, Weston's watchful eye, Fellini's carnivals, or any artist's skillfully deployed utensil. But it doesn't. It won't. It doesn't because the hand that holds it, the eye that sees it, is interested in something else entirely, something beyond its careful control. It won't because it has as much volition as the light which strikes it and the light which is about to leave it (Hischer, 1).

Trying to harness the duality of light, two sides of the brain play to pull a print. The object is never philosophized, never categorized as it has categorized the artist still unbeknownst to the artist himself. "It is a quiet process when done alone; together with a friend, it is a process full of conversation and laughter, the Object under process ignored for the time being. Everyone is curious what the Object will do, what will come of it" (Hischer, 1). However, in the words of Derrida:

It is always a matter of waking up, but never of some *first* awakening . . . Older than consciousness, older than the spectator, prior to any attendance, a sentence awaits "you": looks at you, observes you, watches over you, and regards you from every side. There is always a sentence that has already been sealed somewhere waiting for you where you think you are opening up some virgin territory . . . (Derrida, 340).

Like Derrida makes clear, the Object is already there. The artist merely exposes it. "When the Object is covered with two coats of embarrassment, it is carried down into the darkroom" (Hischer, 1). Most find exposure to be embarrassing, yet this Object has two coats of it to be exposed to the world. "How could this Object, made up of atoms and seduced by gravity at every opportunity, be anything other than what it is? At the quantum level, the thing observed is instantly changed, and in the darkroom, where we can observe nothing, the Object becomes no longer ordinary" (Hischer, 1). Never succumbing to the categories of philosophers past, the embarrassed object observes as the artist develops a new perspective of it. Be it detritus or an old memento, Lumetype offers a fresh perspective, encouraging artists to stay awake, to observe, to watch over, and to regard the world from every side.

The light appears for just a few seconds, harsh, full of mean-spirited goodwill. The Object tumbles beneath the light, unaware . . . The light disappears in a shock and is replaced with utter darkness and the greenish glow of the Object and its paint-stained hands. The table below is lit by the nimbus above. Quickly, the Object is placed on the paper and it exhales all the light it can possibly muster, a gladly glowing thing. When sufficient time has passed, a dozen seconds or so, it is left on the table and the paper is developed. The Object sits in darkness, as it has for its entire existence (Hischer, 1).

Figuratively, the object sits in the absence of intellectual light, an obscurity of meaning. The light glows in the darkness representing the forthcoming enlightenment,

a potential fresh perspective. Exhaling light onto the paper, the object transfers its knowledge, its enlightenment onto the next being, "gladly glowing" to reveal its true picture. "[The object] is carried once more into the darkness, with the weight of light on its shoulders, ready to do nothing but help light shine . . ." (Hischier, 1). Light, of undeterminable mass, weighs nothing scientifically. The object helps light shine to promote new perspectives.

"The beautiful print is also grotesque," comments Hischier, "for it is neither light nor the absence of light: it is an x-ray of light that reveals light's bones draped across the surface of a thing, substrate meeting substrate in a silent, instant dance that pulls light apart, tooth, hair, and sinew" (Hischier, 1). Here Hischier deconstructs, *à la* Derrida, Lumetype: the print is "neither light nor the absence of light." Light, exposed by the plate that is exposed by light, becomes at once visible and invisible. This complex and "instant dance that pulls," deconstructs rather, light, stripped to its bones, results in a medium, simultaneously beautiful and grotesque, that employs the vocabulary of photography and printmaking even as those codes prove inadequate to fully describe and discuss such an illusive medium. The weaving of the techniques and technological advances of these aforementioned art forms drive Lumetype forward, even as Lumetype pushes back the technological clock.

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