Janie Geiser. *Ultima Thule,*
2002. Frame enlargement.

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Lost at Sea: Intermedial Encounters in the Films of Janie Geiser

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"Peter Pan! Oh, Peter, I knew you'd come back! I saved your shadow for you. Oh I do hope it isn't rumpled. You know, you look exactly the way I thought you would. Oh, a litter taller perhaps. But then—you can't stick it on with soap, Peter. It needs sewing. That's the proper way to do it. Although, come to think of it, I've never thought about it before. Sewing shadows, I mean. Of course, I knew it was your shadow the minute I saw it. And I said to myself, I'll put it away for him until he comes back. He's sure to come back."
—Wendy to Peter, *Peter Pan* (1953)

In his account of the origin of art, Pliny asserts that the history of art begins with the tracing of a shadow. In the apocryphal story, the daughter of Butades, a potter of Sicyon in Corinth, traces her lover's shadow on the wall soon before he is to depart. The potter then presses clay to the outline to form a relief. Victor Stoichita notes that "[t]he real shadow accompanies the one who is leaving, while his outline, captured once and for all on the wall, immortalizes a presence in the form of an image, captures an instant and makes it last."[1] The various artistic inscriptions based on the shadow are a marker of the one who has left. In some ways they are more than the person because they persist after the individual is gone; yet, they are also less, lacking expression, detail, or depth. In the experimental films of Janie Geiser, the shadow itself also becomes the space of projection, the space where the imagined other, in the form of a video image, makes its unexpected return.

Three of Geiser's films employ the use of rephotography from a television monitor: *The Fourth Watch* (2000), *Ultima Thule* (2002), and *Terrace 49* (2004). Each film was shot on 16 mm film, though at key moments during shooting the camera was turned to the television screen. Therefore the rephotographed footage, which is drawn mostly from film history—Disney animated features in *Ultima Thule,* silent horror films in *The Fourth Watch,* and television cartoons in *Terrace 49*—appears not as film but as video images. They stage an intermedial encounter: the confrontation of film and its video ghosts. As such, Geiser's rephotography strategy reclaims film for

film. Yet, the video intermediary remains, leaving its indelible mark, its medium-specific scar.

Geiser's rephotography films both borrow from and exceed the categories of animation and found-footage filmmaking. Typical of her films, *Ultima Thule* and *Terrace 49* use stop-motion animation strategies, with dolls, wooden figures, toys, and various "found" textures such as wallpaper and scientific diagrams. The heterogeneity of her films is a nod to her involvement in the theater arts and puppetry, where her performances combine a diverse array of elements, including live actors, filmed sequences, and even the occasional glimpse of the puppeteer's hand. In the three rephotography films, the layering of the found footage elements over the stop-motion animation adds to the density and complexity of the film frame. Beyond the typical concerns of found footage, such as the self-conscious recuperation of film history or the shifting vectors between mainstream and avant-garde cinema, Geiser's films force film and video into contact with each other as media. When considered alongside found objects, the addition of found footage, or "moving" objects, complicates the status of the animated element. The interplay of filmic layers creates a complex aesthetic of collage, a term borrowed from art history but also used in cinema to describe the collage film or, more generally, the principle of montage.[2] The collagist structures of Geiser's rephotography films engage critical issues of surface, space, and film history in distinctly hauntological terms, which, following Derrida, constitute an aberrant space, wholly other, infinite and ungraspable.[3] While the found footage films of Bruce Conner, Phil Solomon, and Martin Arnold, which manipulate or resequence their source material, maintain the underlying linearity of the narrative cinema they implicitly critique, Geiser's gesture is more akin to cubist collage in the way she collapses disparate media within a single frame. In her work, video and film, two distinct systems of representation, are forced into explicit spatial contact. In their uneasy encounter, they contaminate each other, destabilize the integrity of the whole, and produce an elusive, uncanny space that belongs to neither medium.[4] The radicality of Geiser's gesture, however, is less that it produces an extramedial space, than that it reveals unstable, impure elements already present within each medium. By way of the intermedial encounter, film and video are exposed for the limits of what each may represent and what, in the end, may fall outside the realm of representation altogether.

The intermedial exchange in Geiser's films echoes the self-conscious media mixture of collage. Indeed, Peter Bürger has observed that the concept of montage begins with cubist collage. Unlike its predecessors in the tradition of Renaissance perspectival painting, collage, for Bürger, is set

apart by the evidentiary trace of a real object inserted into the painting. Such "reality fragments" disrupt the unity of the whole, interrupting the economy of representation otherwise established in the work.[5] Whereas the various elements within a painting previously shared a common relationship to reality (however removed they may have been), these "reality fragments" fundamentally upset the dynamic of what Bürger calls the "organic work of art": a total, hermetic, and homogeneous concept of the artwork.[6] Yet, as Bürger suggests, the integration of real objects may, in fact, produce not resolution but further disjunction. With cinema, in particular Sergei Eisenstein's theory of montage, Bürger locates a resistance to such integration, an unresolved tension that might form the basis of an active and radical practice of art-making.[7]

Bürger's ready recourse to cinema is suggestive of the way in which, on a fundamental level, all films might adhere to a collagist aesthetic, or at least a common genealogical principle of montage. Within collage, image and object enter into an uneasy dialectic, each straining against the other in their relation to reality. These two terms, *image* and *object,* recall André Bazin's discussion of photography—and by extension, cinema—in "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." Arguing that the photograph both represents something and also bears some of its essence, Bazin writes, "Every image is to be seen as an object and every object as an image. Hence photography ranks high in the order of surrealist creativity because it produces an image that is a reality of nature, namely, an hallucination that is also a fact."[8] The photograph for Bazin does not simply collapse the distinction between real and imaginary but complicates their boundaries; it occupies both realms simultaneously. With this combination of hallucination and fact one finds a link between the plastic surface of collage and the light-filled screen of the cinema: in the ambiguous interplay between image and object, real and imaginary, and, particularly with film, past and present.[9] Like Butades' tracing-turned-sculpture, Bazin's photograph is an index that at once bears and bears away its source; it is an unstable trace that restlessly migrates from one medium to another.

Clement Greenberg extends the problem of the collagist surface into the realm of visuality. Considering Braque's and Picasso's first collages, in which each artist pasted pieces of cloth or paper onto their paintings, he writes, "By its greater corporeal presence and its greater extraneousness, the affixed paper or cloth serves for a seeming moment to push everything else into a more vivid *idea* of depth than the simulated printing or simulated textures had ever done."[10] For Greenberg, the notion of depth is immediately apparent in the collage work because the added object reveals ever more the physical flatness of the picture plane and with it the illusory quality of its

painted depth.[11] Paradoxically, by affixing volumetric objects to their definitively flat paintings, the cubists accomplished what Greenberg considers a modernist virtue of calling attention to the medium-specific properties of both sculpture, a haptic medium, and painting, a visual one. The cubists' achievement lay in "reconstructing the flat picture surface with the very means of its denial."[12]

Greenberg elaborates:

> But here again, the surface-declaring device both overshoots and falls short of its aim. For the illusion of depth created by the contrast between the affixed material and everything else gives way immediately to an illusion of forms in *bas-relief*, which gives way in turn, and with equal immediacy, to an illusion that seems to contain both—or neither.[13]

Although Greenberg identifies the pasted object as the "surface-declaring device," both the object from the real world and the painted image, each in relation to the other, inevitably return to the question of surface. The object "both overshoots and falls short of its aim," collapsing the illusion in the same moment it is created. In this mingling of image and object, real and pictorial space, the surface is where they collide, and one never emerges dominant over the other.

In Geiser's rephotography films, the video-generated images act as a kind of "surface-declaring device." Where collage artists might layer objects and images, a collage filmmaker like Geiser adds to this combination a layering of exposures, collapsing multiple views and temporalities onto a single celluloid plane. While collage bears an implicit connection to montage and film in general, the hermeneutic strategies applied by collage filmmakers are more explicitly aligned with that of their fine-arts counterparts, emphasizing material properties of the medium or critically examining the mass cultural imagery from which their "reality fragments" derive. Yet, even within the milieu of collage filmmakers, Geiser is unique: collage filmmakers typically compose in timed sequences, laying one strip of found footage after another, but her practice is more closely related to the shared spatial terrain of collage artists because of the way she composes a multiplicity of views within a single frame.[14] Depth here refers not only to the three-dimensional representation (or presentation) of an object, after a Bazinian notion of composition-in-depth, but also to the density of an image overlaid with multiple exposures.

In this way, the rephotographed video images of Gesier's films cast peculiar kinds of shadows. Because the 29.97 frames per second of video fit awkwardly into film's 24 frames per second, the video images appear to roll across the screen. This is most pronounced in *The Fourth Watch,* where, at

any given moment, part of the rephotographed video image is visible while the rest is not. In these blank spaces, different layers are exposed, if only momentarily. The films are thus pervaded by an indeterminancy of image, a vagueness that suggests the surface is not fixed but imbued with its own depth, like a body of water. The presence of video alongside film recapitulates the terms of the image and object in collage; yet, as collage *films,* Geiser's work incorporates the added dimension of time and, with it, time's uncanny surprises. Although the intermedial exchange between film and video foregrounds the flatness of the film screen, the element of time suggests an indeterminate thickness of that surface. Time, too, is a form of depth, compressed in painting but given extended form in cinema, as seen in the temporal disjunction between film and video artifacts. In Geiser's work, time renders visible another dimension of collage in the juxtaposition of two systems of moving image representation. More than a disjunction in luminosity or color, the most significant gap is that of time: film and video adhere to different rhythms and cannot synchronize. To adopt the eloquent title of Geiser's 1999 film, the alignment of the two media necessarily results in "lost motion," pockets of time that point to an unrecoverable beyond. The combination of collage aesthetics and cinematic time in Geiser's work thus offers more than a flat optic sea; it produces one in which anything can emerge, or be hidden away, at any moment.

Ultima Thule: Lost Footage

The title of *Ultima Thule* is taken from the medieval name of a place beyond the borders of the known world. *Ultima Thule,* as a film, attempts to map the terrain of the unknown. The film places itself in the path of chance and mystery, like the surrealist encounter. Robin Lydenberg notes these aleatory aspects as key to collage: "Produced by chance encounter or magical accident, these juxtapositions are experienced as part of an aesthetic of adventure, risk, and desire, qualities often overlooked in critical analyses of collage."[15] The stop-motion dolls and the cartoon footage, two competing forms of animation, collide on the celluloid strip in unexpected ways, and collage becomes a fitting structure for *Ultima Thule'*s mysterious cartography.

Ultima Thule suggests a basic narrative: during a terrible storm, a small plane is swept into the sea. There, after a giant wave, the survivors (or perhaps the dead) find themselves in a disorienting space, spinning and floating, guided by a mysterious girl. The telling of this story, however, does little to convey its visual heterogeneity or its affect: the winds are marked with arrows on illustrated diagrams, the planes are toys, the girl is made of paper, and the rain is composed of flecks of video grain. Overriding any legible "plot" is the film's pervasive sense of otherworldly departure, one

made all the more uncanny by the unexpected familiarity of its constituent elements.

The source material for the found footage, or what filmmaker Nathaniel Dorsky has called "lost footage," comes from two Disney cartoons, *Dumbo* (1941) and *Peter Pan* (1953), and from a Godzilla movie, *Ghidrah, the Three-Headed Monster* (1964).[16] With *Ultima Thule,* the denotation of "lost footage" is significant because lostness is already thematized in the three source films, all of which contain narratives of wayward children separated from the world of their parents. The clips used from these films, however, are hardly recognizable on their own. As rain, waves, and oceans, they constitute the environmental textures and moods of their original films, but they are in some ways lost unto themselves, indistinct, no longer traceable to their points of origin. For purposes both legal and aesthetic, Geiser does not cite the source of the footage at any point during the credits, and she often refrains from telling audiences where she obtains her material. Thus, with their references deliberately obscured, the missing children (in *Peter Pan* they are already called the Lost Boys) in the found footage have, in a sense, been erased: no longer included in the clips selected to be rephotographed, they have been replaced with their own environmental backgrounds and rendered wholly spectral. If the shipwrecked passengers comprise the film's chief protagonists, figures carried over from one world to the next, the hidden children of the source films are *Ultima Thule's* true ghosts because they are doubly misplaced. Their haunting is manifested not only in the wind and rain but also in the medium itself, or rather *in between* media. Originally created on film, then transferred to video, and finally filmed again with Geiser's Bolex, the resulting video image is never fixed. In its continual roll, it leaves instead an endless proliferation of afterimages, images already departed, images not of ghosts but themselves ghostly: out of time, out of place, and forever condemned to haunting.

Images in Geiser's work function, or pass, as objects. Their densities, however, break down when considering their shadows. A wooden doll, for example, casts a shadow; a flickering video image does not. Similar to the pasted objects and painted images in collage, the legibility of depth remains a significant concern in Geiser's rephotography films. *Ultima Thule* treats the issue thematically by invoking the colossal wave from *Peter Pan* at the moment of the film's climactic shift, because here Geiser brings into play the story of a young man in a state of permanent suspension, forever on the brink of, but never reaching, adulthood. As the epigraph to this essay conveys, the story of *Peter Pan* is prompted by Peter's return to claim his shadow, which had previously been separated from him. In other words, Peter had been separated from himself. He is both an image and an object

in a collagist sense, inhabiting an indeterminate space. While the shadow remains in the diegetically "real" world of early-twentieth-century London, Peter exists in Neverland, an impossible place, a place outside time, or perhaps in between time—the place occupied by the airline passengers of *Ultima Thule* who never fully transition from life to death but dwell in limbo, in the ambiguous, ghostly space between both realms. They are, like Peter, separated from themselves, shadowless, adrift.

The young girl who emerges in the aftermath of the disaster to "guide the people in the plane crash to the next world," also conveys this idea of lostness.[17] Geiser recalls that she found her image, a photograph of a nameless girl posed in a deep curtsey, in a thrift store. The girl appeared to be an aspiring actress, and Geiser had the sense that the photograph was a kind of calling card.[18] The young actress's eventual inclusion into *Ultima Thule,* therefore, is the misdirected realization of her thespian aims. Indeed, though she is not constructed as a video image, she is an emblem of the source footage's own "misdirection," recast to alternate means. At the center of the film she appears, bridging the familiar and the unfamiliar, an anonymous guide in an unknown land.

The rephotographed video footage, though unlocatable, is omnipresent. Most often it frames the narrative through a vignetted space or a diagonal tear across the frame, its presence more one of setting than action. As the rain, wind, ocean, and literal atmosphere, however, these elements do eventually "act," engulfing the plane and completely altering the course of the more "human" actors of the film. Moreover, the video elements represent nature itself or the natural world *Ultima Thule* describes. What is "natural" here, however, is unfamiliar, even unknowable, and the film's many precision instruments, including drawings of clocks, gauges, and compasses, measure nothing. *Ultima Thule* remains an unmappable place, and the rephotographed video animation overwhelms the stop-motion animation with melancholic cartoon tears. The shifting, bottomless terrain of the film is a place specifically produced in the intermedial gap, an uncertain void that opens between media as a space of loss and eternal return. To borrow

the ocean and its seemingly endless depth as a metaphor for the collagist surface, in *Ultima Thule* we are lost at sea.

The Fourth Watch: Hauntings and Hallucinations

With *The Fourth Watch,* Geiser notes that the central dollhouse, another thrift-store find, was like those of her childhood: constructed with a sturdy metal frame, and decorated with details like a fireplace or a rug seemingly baked into the surface. The dollhouse was oddly complete when she found it, seeming barely to need furniture. Geiser filmed it in broad daylight, but the shade of a heavy thicket of leaves outside her window filled its rooms with dark, ambiguous shadows. Here is where the video figures emerge.

Geiser shot the dollhouse and rephotography sequences in-camera, so the space of the house is further complicated by the imprecision of timings—gestures fan out across several rooms, or multiple characters cross through the same space. By using only minimal markers for overlaying shadowed spaces with video, Geiser left room for chance elements. She notes that the film's "sense of depth, the way the video texture sits on top of the more liquid film layer [and] the quality of layered movement," creates a larger sense of the frame because it makes the viewer "aware of its edges, [and] because the movement appears to go beyond the edges."[19] The images spill over the borders of the frame, loosening and expanding the typical rigidities of space. And though nothing is animated in the traditional frame-by-frame sense, the incorporation of found footage works in a broader conception of animation, the inhabitants of the house literally brought to life.

The dense shadows of the leaves are the space of projection not only of a suggested physical presence but of the darkness upon which the silent film figures are exposed. Pliny's example demonstrates that shadows are, by nature, projections: by blocking out a portion of light, they are the evidence of an object's volumetric physicality. Others, such as Jean-Louis Baudry, have traced the origins of cinema to another ancient Greek story of shadows, Plato's cave, arguing that shadows are inherently cinematic because of the way they mimic the apparatus of film, projector, and beam of light.[20] In the contained video space of *The Fourth Watch,* however, the shadows place limitations on the image, forming their visible boundaries and, as the black-and-white film figures anxiously glance toward offscreen spaces, indicating the terrors beyond. The introjection of these figures, fixed in the television monitor, thus acts as a kind of confinement. The figures lurk in the corners of the dollhouse in the full sense of a haunting: condemned to stay in one place and repeat the same actions.

The Fourth Watch, in Geiser's words, "imagines a long night in a house."[21] As with nearly all of her films, it was entirely created in the filmmaker's

own home. The domestic space, commonly associated with women, is also the site of "home movies," and while Geiser's films do not refer directly to her own life, the home's centrality in both the making and exhibition of films remains significant to *The Fourth Watch*. Indeed, the domestic sphere is also the space of home exhibition of video, where films, once projected in a theater, emanate from a television set. The act is necessarily private: FBI warning labels might caution against public exhibition, but, on some level, the truly transgressive act is the remediation of film to video. Historically the two media have been competitors, insistent on their media-specific qualifiers. But with the shared aim of amassing audiences and capital, they enter into an awkward alliance in the home entertainment center. While their differences are elided or naturalized for consumer objectives, Geiser demonstrates how, in exposing video on film, the transition from one medium to another is anything but seamless.

The Fourth Watch uncannily connects Geiser's home to the domestic space of the dollhouse she films. Recalling that the root of the term *unheimlich* is *Heim,* which means home, the film stresses the significance of the domestic sphere as the site of estrangement; specifically, the place where film-to-video intermediality is routinely enacted. The characters who inhabit the house, culled largely from horror films of the silent era, possess ghostly attributes, not only because they are stock figures of an era long passed but because they are not the proper inhabitants of the dollhouse. In terms of scale, the house literally does not fit them. Against walls of hardened color, they are transparent and white. Looking about themselves suspiciously, it is as if they, too, are aware that they do not belong: whereas in their native "homes," they would be enlarged on a giant screen, here they are miniaturized, lost, ill, unconscious, or hypnotized. The latter is suggested by the shot of a finger swirling a pool of water that opens and closes the film, an image that, Caligari-like, recapitulates the terms of Bazin's claim: the experience of the film, the film itself, is both hallucination and fact. The video figures and the filmed dollhouse resist one another and function according to the logic of collage in that neither fully integrates into the other. Instead, the figures haunt the space, and the space likewise haunts them. As with *Ultima Thule,* the haunting that occurs is an allegorical one, an affect produced in the temporal disjunction between video roll and film flicker.

Geiser chose her characters by looking for "moments of anticipation," and she selected scenes from several films of the silent era, including *The Penalty* (1920), *The Cat and the Canary* (1927), *Schatten—Eine nächtliche Halluzination* (also known as *Warning Shadows*; 1923), and early Sherlock Holmes films.[22] Largely, she was interested in silent film for the duration of the gestures, because silent film emphasizes the body in a way that no longer

existed after the advent of sound. With sound films, once-continuous gestures are cut up in editing, and because actors are able to speak, the body is displaced by the voice as a site of expression. These moments of anticipation in some ways presaged the end of silent cinema, defined here not for its putative silence but for the completeness of gesture, of the body, in time. The moment is prophesied but not prevented; instead it is endlessly replayed. Trapped in the video roll, the luminescent bodies of the silent-film actors waver and fade, doomed to repeat their actions.

Over the course of *The Fourth Watch,* a sleepwalker steps across a room, eyes closed and arms extended, until her fingers find a drawer and remove an object. She is the only figure to complete an action, though its circumstances remain mysterious. The object is unknown, just as the sleepwalker, excerpted from a compilation tape, was (and remains) anonymous to Geiser. As in *Ultima Thule* and *Terrace 49,* the center of the film contains an unknown figure, a spectral presence. The other characters are mostly seen repeating or extending their gestures, never arriving at any kind of destination. Psychoanalysis connects the repetition of gestures, and its suspension of linear development, to death. But the undeniably spectral quality of the characters also suggests an uneasy proximity to death. In film, particularly with the use of found footage, the passage from life to death and back again has an explicit temporal, if not historical, nature.[23] Older film footage is recycled in newer works, but the reemergence of the past, of cinema's history, is marked with a difference. The haunted figures of *The Fourth Watch* come back to life but not without the penalty of repetition. From beginning to end, the swirling water of *The Fourth Watch* draws the figures into a cinematic *danse macabre.*

The anticipated moment of death, forever deferred, returns the viewer to the title of the film. Derived from ancient Greek as well as biblical references to the last stage of the night's progress, the "fourth watch" refers to the darkest moments before dawn. In Matthew 14:25, the fourth watch is the hour when Jesus walks across the Sea of Galilee to the apostles who are huddled together in a boat. Already frightened by the violent winds that

pummel their small vessel, they at first mistake him for a ghost, because no living person could walk on water. After testing their faith by inviting Peter to walk out to him, Jesus eventually reassures them that it is, in fact, he. In some ways, however, the apostles are correct. While Christ's identity is never in question, the status of his body as flesh or phantom is never clear. Like the young girl of *Ultima Thule,* the ambiguity of his appearance is a part of the stormy seascape from which he arises. The apostles are thus filled with doubt and hesitation, sensing the untimely nature of Jesus' death and his ultimate return as a ghost in a reanimated body. Like the long night of *The Fourth Watch,* the indeterminate moment in the biblical passage is held in perpetual suspense, a dark and turbulent hour in which life and death seem equally possible, and where fact cannot be distinguished from hallucination.

Terrace 49: The Invisible Hand

Of the three rephotography films, *Terrace 49* is the most explicitly concerned with transitional states. The title, taken from the name of a Los Angeles street, suggested to Geiser that it was one of many terraces, like the rings of Dante's hell or the description of the *bardo* from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead.* Death, in Tibetan Buddhism, is conceived of as a series of stages rather than a single instance, and *Terrace 49* dwells in this liminal realm.

The found footage elements were taken from the 1960s cartoon series *The Fantastic Four,* and Geiser mined it for moments of impending doom: a truck approaching a cliff, ropes trembling under unseen tension, a telephone left off the hook. The heroine of the series, the Invisible Woman, appears, though we never see her face. Instead, her body, which turns visibly "invisible," identifies her. At the same time, however, her body marks her as an invisible woman, a woman who disappears.

At various moments during *Terrace 49,* Geiser reveals the three modes of invisibility that describe the Invisible Woman in the original cartoon: at times she is fully invisible, seen only in the effects of the objects she touches; other times she is perceivable as a transparent outline of a figure; finally, even when she is fully "present," she remains a white and solid torso, effectively featureless. The Invisible Woman thus becomes "invisible" several times over. In addi-
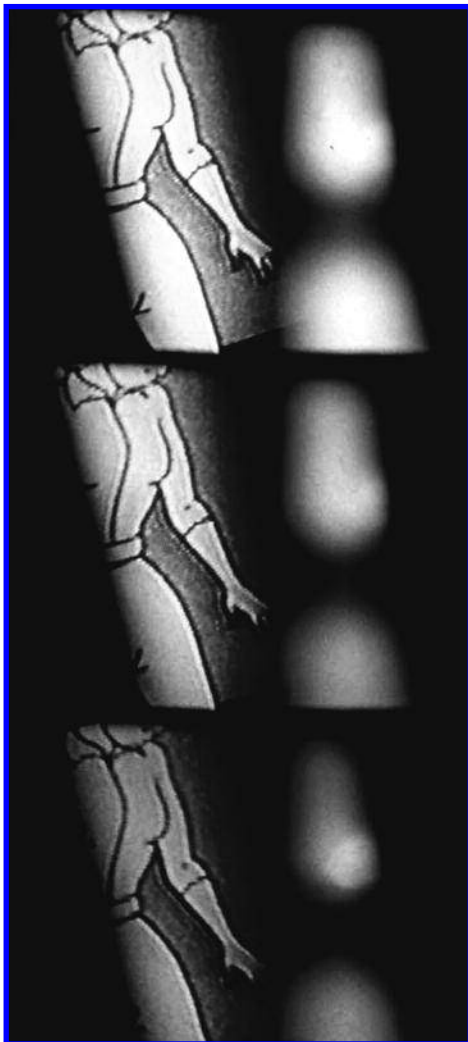
Opposite: Janie Geiser.
***The Fourth Watch**, 2000.*
Frame enlargement.

Left: Janie Geiser. *Terrace 49,*
2004. Frame enlargement.

tion to visibly disappearing as she does in the cartoon, she also becomes an invisible actor, picking up a pen at a desk or opening a door. In this way she is also a figure of the invisible hand of the animator, an analogue for Geiser herself.

Midway through the film, the ropes break, yet instead of the anticipated destruction, the action snaps back like a rubber band: the truck moves in reverse, and at the end a door hovers somewhere between opened and closed. The film's inverted time of disaster thus hinges on the moment of imagined death and stretches into a *bardo,* an expanded space between life and death. Through its depiction of folded action that approaches but never arrives at the moment of death, *Terrace 49* is suspended in the melancholic space between the two realms. The film is thus a poignant articulation of the filmmaker's sense of melancholy, as it was made for a young friend of Geiser's who passed away in a car accident. Like the Invisible Woman, Gesier's mourned friend is both there and not there, a figured absence, or an absent presence.

With its emphasis on invisibility, the film renders explicit the way in which collage, by bringing together competing forms of representation, also produces elements that are hidden or, perhaps, unrepresentable. In between the intermedial gaps, certain figures may disappear from view, but they are recognized as being lost or departed, leaving behind shadows or traces of what was previously there. Rosalind Krauss argues that collage, as a "system of signifiers," is a form of substitution, a marking of an absence. Unlike Greenberg, who articulates collage in primarily optical terms, Krauss employs a semiotic framework to highlight the differences among the shifting terms within collage. She writes, "The collage element performs the occultation of one field in order to introject the figure of a new field, but to introject it *as* figure—*a surface that is the image of eradicated surface.*"[24] While the new field supersedes the preexisting one, it paradoxically creates an image of what is no longer visible. The occluded field, though invisible, can still be seen as a kind of trace by the imposition of the new. As a trace, this relation is like the casting of a shadow on a wall: like the unnamed lover in Pliny's account, the shadow tells us that the figure once was there, though his identity and shape remain unknown.

While the Invisible Woman plays out the drama of disappearing, the indistinct, even generic quality of her identity as "she who leaves" suggests that she is the figure of absence as such, particularly because her video image continually wavers against the film background. Significantly, many of *Terrace 49*'s filmed elements comprise intricately patterned wallpapers, another reminder of the domestic space through which the Invisible Woman passes in and out of view. Metaphorically speaking, women might be seen

to be invisible both in and out of the home. Although Geiser cannot assert an identity for the Invisible Woman as solidly as the latticed wallpaper superimposed on her body, she nevertheless depicts her as what Krauss calls "a figure of its own absence."[25] Geiser's young friend remains nameless though she has a name. The Invisible Woman disappears though we can still see the traces of her body. Like the paper girl and lost children of *Ultima Thule* or the sleepwalker of *The Fourth Watch,* the central figure of *Terrace 49* makes herself known only as an unknown: a nameless, bodiless woman. She is the hinge around which the visible trades places with the invisible, the film's secret center, the guardian of the "photochemical secrets just under its surface."[26] With regard to Pliny's tale, "she who leaves" may also shed light on the curiously quiet daughter of Butades. Although the daughter's lover departs and her father forms the relief, she is the one who traces the ephemeral shadow, the crucial link between the image and the image-maker. The story may be celebrated for its male actors, but her longing and grief make the daughter responsible for nothing less than the origin of art. Abandoned by her lover, superseded by her father, and ignored by history, she is a silent figure who, instead of leaving, was the one ultimately left behind.

Notes

1. Victor I. Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow,* trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 15.

2. Arguing in favor of a collagist aesthetic in Godard's *Weekend* (1967), Brian Henderson highlights the differences between montage and collage. Unlike montage, where film clips are assembled into a coherent and overarching order, narrative or otherwise, collage elements intrinsically resist such subjugation. Collage, he writes, "seeks to recover its fragments *as fragments.*" Henderson then continues to discuss the film's quality of flatness as a collagist aesthetic. Brian Henderson, "Toward a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style," *Film Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (Winter 1970–1971): 5.

3. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International,* trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 10.

4. Following scholarly and popular conventions, I will refer to Geiser's works as films, though the ontological disruption of this term is what is precisely at stake in this essay, particularly with the three rephotography films.

5. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984), trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 77.

6. Bürger, 78–79.

7. Bürger, 117–118.

8. André Bazin, "The Ontology of Photographic Image," in *What Is Cinema?* vol. 1 (ca. 1967), trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 15–16.

9. In "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage," Bazin discusses the ways in which this discordance between real and imaginary is synthesized in a fiction film: "So the screen reflects the ebb and flow of our imagination which feeds on a reality for which it plans to substitute. That is to say, the take is born of an experience that the imagination transcends." André Bazin, "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage," in *What Is Cinema?* 48.

10. Clement Greenberg, "Collage," in *Collage: Critical Views,* ed. Katherine Hoffman (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989), 71.

11. Elsewhere Greenberg writes, "These intrusions, by their self-evident, extraneous and abrupt flatness, stopped the eye at the literal, physical surface of the canvas in the same way that the artist's signature did; here it was no longer a question of interposing a more vivid illusion of depth between surface and Cubist space, but one of specifying the very real flatness of the picture plane so that everything else shown on it would be pushed into illusioned space by force of contrast." Clement Greenberg, "The Pasted-Paper Revolution," in *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969,* vol. 4 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism,* ed. John O'Brien (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 62.

12. Greenberg, "The Pasted-Paper Revolution," 65.

13. Greenberg, "Collage," 71.

14. The practice of superimposition is common in experimental film, though rarely is the layering of exposures as dense or as heterogeneous as it is in Geiser's work. Even in the case of Peter Tscherkassky, who hand-prints his films in a darkroom setting, the materials are typically limited to a single strip from a source film printed numerous times, with the addition of incidental textures such as salt crystals or scratches on the celluloid.

15. Robin Lydenberg, "Engendering Collage: Collaboration and Desire in Dada and

Surrealism," in *Collage: Critical Views,* ed. Katherine Hoffman (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989), 274.

16. Michael Zyrd, "Found Footage Film as Discursive Metahistory: Craig Baldwin's Tribulation 99," *The Moving Image* 3, no. 2 (2003): 40. Zyrd credits Phil Solomon with the anecdote.

17. Janie Geiser, interview by author, 16 November 2006, Los Angeles.

18. Geiser, interview.

19. Janie Geiser, e-mail message to author, November 2006.

20. Jean-Louis Baudry, "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema," trans. Jean Andrews and Bernard Augst, *Camera Obscura,* no. 1 (Fall 1976): 104–128.

21. Geiser, interview.

22. Though the majority of the figures in *The Fourth Watch* were chosen from silent cinema, several, including footage from Sherlock Holmes films such as *The Woman in Green* (1945), were taken from the sound era. These figures, however, are effectively "silenced" by the sound design present throughout the film. All of Geiser's films, including the three rephotography ones, contain dense sound-tracks of music and assorted "found" sounds, adding yet another dimension of collage to her work.

23. Paul Arthur writes, "As Bruce Conner's *A Movie* (1958) amply demonstrated, the regurgitation of cinema's recorded history—whether personal history as home movie or the 'universal' Silver Screen—is intimately connected with an imagination of apocalypse, the terminus of self or cinema in its 'filmic phase,' in Jacobs's term." Paul Arthur, *A Line of Sight: American Avant-Garde Film since 1965* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 139.

24. Rosalind Krauss, "In the Name of Picasso," *October* 16 (Spring 1981): 19.

25. Krauss, 19. "It is this eradication of the original surface and the reconstitution of it through the figure of its own absence that is the master term of the entire condition of collage as a system of signifiers."

26. *Canyon Cinema Catalog,* entry for Janie Geiser, http://www.canyoncinema.com.