

In Chanel Von Habsburg-Lothringen's photograph *Postpartum depression*—I don't want to do the nurturing anymore, a central figure peers out from a flesh-toned mask, eyes wide with trepidation. An undeniably fake blonde mane frames this unnerving visage, wily strands of hair brushed away from the matte tautness of the masked forehead. Her eyes lead us to an apparent repetition of this figure at a smaller scale in the lower left corner, this time full length. On her knees and clutching the head of a man-gled baby doll, this apparition shares the same pleading, desperate stare as her zoomed-in counterpart. She looks directly at the cropped, seated body of a second doll, another repetition in the foreground of the bottom right of the picture. Turned frustratingly away from the viewer, this figure completes the endless cycle of glances that forms the psychological core of this photograph: the doll, which shares our point of view and thus acts as a stand-in for the viewer, looks back to the figure with which we started. Conjuring deep-seated feelings of rejection, abandonment, and psychological trauma, Von Habsburg-Lothringen here exploits specific qualities of the photographic image to communicate a lived experience through the medium.

The artist likens her usage of studio process and digital manipulation to the strategy of photomontage, in which the photographic image is cut from its original context and recom-mal truth, unaided and unabated. It is, in a way, always already complete.

But in their destruction and recom-bination of the studio photographs from which they derive, Von Habsburg-Lothringen's manipulated images propose a different state of affairs. The untouched photograph, for her, is not enough. To attend to the photograph in all its fullness, to add to its hermetic totality, is to mark it as functionally inadequate in its prior state. The artist's gesture of digital photomontage may thus be read as a supplemental one, by turns masking and underscoring some foundational inadequacy inherent to the photographic medium. Indeed, Jacques Derrida characterized the logic of the supplement as seeming to natural-ize the prior term, even while it dis-guises the lack inherent to that term that the supplement presupposes. For him, the relationship of writing to speech is the preeminent example of supplementarity, where writing as a supplement denotes the natural in-sufficiency of speech—because to be supplemented is to have a prior state of incompleteness. The prior term is thus always characterized by an ab-sence to which the supplement os-tensibly attends. Of course, the Der-ridean conception of the *supplément* remains deliberately ambiguous: *sup-pléer* can mean either "to supple-ment" or "to supplant." So it is with the functioning of the supplement: it remains always ambiguous whether the supplement operates as an ad-

bined to uncanny effect. Historically, photographers have used photo-montage to a variety of ends, most radically to interrogate oppressive political and cultural regimes; Kurt Schwitters, El Lissitzky, and Alexander Rodchenko all deployed the medium in this way. Female photographers like Hannah Höch and Grete Stern, while mindful of the political ramifica-tions of photomontage, also mined the psychological and gendered di-mensions of cutting and manipulating the photograph. In her images of fam-iliar longing and ever-deferred nur-turing, Von Habsburg-Lothringen falls into this historical lineage. But what does it mean to manipulate the pho-tographic image in this fashion?

The photograph, due to the indexical relationship it shares with its referent, has long been accorded value based on its ability to function as physical evidence. This value is consolidated by the camera's seemingly mechani-cal and objective operation, which appears to preclude human bias and intervention. The photograph, there-fore, becomes aligned with that tra-ditionally unequivocal and peren-nial truth to be found in the index. In its supposed ability to communicate such truth, the photograph stakes "an authoritative claim to meaning," im-plying autonomy from subjective ex-perience and interpretation.<sup>1</sup> Author-itative, objective, and autonomous, the photograph wants nothing: it is defined (for better or worse) by its capacity to deliver an image of physi-tion, "a plenitude enriching an-other plenitude, the fullest measure of presence," or if in fact it supplants the original term, adding "only to re-place."<sup>2</sup> For Derrida, the supplement ultimately functions in both ways si-multaneously, as both "accretion and substitution."<sup>3</sup> Thus, the supplement oscillates between modalities of pure presence and mitigated absence.

And of course, the original term un-der discussion in these images is both the photograph, of course, but also the ultimate origin: family, mother, home. The foundational inadequacy of the photograph to communicate lived experience—and the myth of the totality of the photographic image that we all, at some level, perpetu-ate and believe—parallels the broken trust in familial bonds at the heart of Von Habsburg-Lothringen's images. The medium, in this case, very much matches the message. And yet. The photographer continues to make, the shutter does not cease to click. Ever-searching, always seeking, her pho-tographic eye shows faith and hope even as her model's eyes betray fear and primordial longing.

—Chad Alligood

1 Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodern-ism," October 12 (Spring, 1980): 69.

2 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (New York: JHU Press, 1998), 144.

3 Derrida, 200.