Matthew Buckingham. Photographic component of The Six Grandfathers, Paha Sapa,
In the Year 502,002 C.E. *2002. All images courtesy the artist and Murray Guy, New York.*

The Artist as Historian*

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1. Historical Representation Then and Now

Until recently, it might have seemed that historical representation, which in the mid-nineteenth century was considered the most serious role for art, had only peripheral importance in contemporary practice.[1] We were taught that the abstraction of modernist painting prevented artists from addressing history and that when Pop art banished abstraction it was only to address itself to the present. Though this kind of account is now under scrutiny, with attention being paid to abstract representations of historical events and to Pop's address of specific historical experience, revisionist historians of abstraction and Pop would still hesitate before stating that historical representation was *central* to these art forms. Since the 1960s, there have of course been crucial attempts by artists to rethink and reinvigorate the legacy of history painting, with On Kawara's *Today* (1966–) series and Gerhard Richter's *October 18, 1977* (1988) standing out; however, such series

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*   My account of Matthew Buckingham's work owes much to previous essays, conversations with the artist, an unpublished lecture by the critic Gregory Williams given at a screening of Buckingham's films at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin in December 2003, and conversations with Janice Guy. See for instance Orla Ryan, "In Between Lost and Found: The Films of Matthew Buckingham," *afterimage* (March/April 2001), pp. 16–17; Janet Kraynak, "Matthew Buckingham," in *Watershed: The Hudson Valley Art Project*, ed. Miwon Kwon (New York: Minetta Brook, 2002); Tacita Dean, "Historical Fiction: The Art of Matthew Buckingham," *Artforum* 42, no. 7 (March 2004), pp. 146–51. Parts of my essay are based on a previous essay in *Matthew Buckingham: Narratives,* exh. cat. (Kunstverein Westfälischer and Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, 2007).
1.   Matthew Buckingham's work—the subject of this essay—makes one aware of the ways in which historical narratives are constructed. In these first two paragraphs, I sketch an art historical narrative that suggests the relative absence of historical representation in abstraction, Pop, Conceptual art, and appropriation, and I am of course aware that this art historical narrative is itself a construct particularly associated with this journal. One could point to the continuation of historical representation in practices that fall outside of this narrative—Sidney Tillim's history paintings of the 1970s, for example. But the reason I emphasize the art historical trajectory as I do, is that Buckingham's work is situated in response to it, as I go on to explain.

are best considered not so much as commemorating events as indicating the diffi-culties of commemoration in a world mediated by press photography.[2]

The emerging centrality of photography in Conceptual art might have pre-sented opportunities for other artists to revisit the task of historical representation in new ways, particularly since photo-conceptualists were less burdened by the weight and twentieth-century eclipse of history painting. However, though various artists of the 1960s and '70s scrutinized the pomposity and irrelevance of monu-ments and traditional forms of historical commemoration (think of Claes Olden-burg's monuments, Robert Morris's 1970 *War Memorial* lithographs, Robert Filliou's *Proclamation of Intent for COMMEMOR* of the same year), few photo-conceptual artists attempted to create new ways of confronting historical events or addressing the various ways in which the past was represented in the wider culture. Douglas Huebler's *DM1 Variable Piece 70*, made in Dachau in 1978, is one exception.[3] Huebler rephotographed images he found in the Dachau museum and juxtaposed them with his own photographs of older citizens of the German town. This work—which seems to criticize the Dachau residents' lack of attention to the town's recent past—is an odd exception in the context of photo-conceptualism and this strategy, rephotography, came to be much more associated with the "Pictures" gen-eration artists than with Huebler's generation. Appropriation strategies once again seemed to afford new possibilities for historical representation, but those artists who appropriated archival images were more concerned with the opacity of such images than with using them in order to explore the past. When Douglas Crimp described Troy Brauntuch's rephotography of a 1934 photograph of "Hitler asleep in his Mercedes" in his essay "Pictures," he was careful to point out that the photographs in Brauntuch's works did not "divulge anything of the history they are meant to illustrate." If anything, the work suggested "our distance from the history that produced these images."[4]

Fast-forward from 1979 to the present, however, and historical research and representation appear central to contemporary art. There are an increasing number of artists whose practice starts with research in archives, and others who deploy what

2.   See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "A Note on Gerhard Richter's *October 18, 1977*," *October* 48 (Spring 1989), pp. 88–109; and Jeff Wall, "Monochrome and Photojournalism in On Kawara's *Today* Paintings," in *Robert Lehman Lectures on Contemporary Art* 1, ed. Lynne Cook and Karen Kelly (New York: Dia Center for the Arts, 1996), pp. 135–56.
3.   Another exception could be Bas Jan Ader's work *Untitled (Swedish fall)* (1971), a projection of two large slides. The images show the artist in a forest, first upright and then on the ground. Ader's father was a member of the Dutch resistance executed in the woods by the Nazis in 1944, and some have suggested that the work refers obliquely to this event.
4.   Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8 (Spring 1979), p. 85. Within the context of "appropriation" work, one major exception to my argument would be the works that Christopher Williams made in 1982, which involved selecting and rephotographing press images from the Kennedy Presidential Library in Massachusetts. As Thomas Crow has argued, in this series Williams suggested the reliance of the Kennedy regime on press photography, chose images that revealed the vulnerability of the presi-dent, and linked the regime's reliance on publicity to its eventual collapse. See Crow, "The Simple Life: Pastoralism and the Persistence of Genre in Recent Art," in *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 197–99.

has been termed an archival form of research (with one object of inquiry leading to another).[5] These varied research processes lead to works that invite viewers to think about the past; to make connections between events, characters, and objects; to join together in memory; and to reconsider the ways in which the past is represented in the wider culture. These tendencies are as prevalent in object-based work (Carol Bove, Tom Burr, Mark Dion, Sam Durant, Renée Green, Thomas Hirschhorn, Ian Kiaer, Simon Starling, Fred Wilson) as they are in photo-based work, but here it is with the photographic mediums that I am concerned.[6] In recent film, video, and photography, many different strands of historical representation have emerged.

First, a number of evocative films portray locations touched by past events, and particularly by calamities. Well-known examples (both featured in *Documenta 11*) include Steve McQueen's *Carib's Leap* (2002), which obliquely recalls the mass suicide of Caribs in Grenada in the seventeenth century, and Zarina Bhimji's *Out of Blue* (2002), which looks back at buildings and cemeteries associated with the Asian population of Uganda exiled by Idi Amin in 1972. Tacita Dean's films tend not to be made at the sites of such violent events but are still often associated with war (*Sound Mirrors*, 1999) or death (*Teignmouth Electron*, 1999). Sound operates in complex ways in all these works, but precise information about the locations is not supplied in the soundtracks, and the works' charge often comes from the contrast a viewer makes between the banality or apparent innocence of the portrayed location and the history associated with it.

Next, there are projects that deploy photographs and films discovered after directed searches in archives. Some artists explore such material in detail to indicate the histories recorded in the images, while at the same time acknowledging the fallibility of the archive and the inscrutability of the discovered images. An example here is Santu Mofokeng's astonishing *The Black Photo Album/Look at Me* (1991–2000), an archive of rephotographed family portraits made by black South Africans between 1890 and 1950. This has been presented as a slide show in which

5.   See Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October* 110 (Fall 2004), pp. 3–22. Foster's notion of an archival impulse has much in common with the subject of my essay, but there are important differences. Though he writes that "archival artists seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present" (p. 4), his concept of "archival" practice is not restricted exclusively to artists concerned with historical representation. For instance, he describes Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno's *No Ghost Just a Shell* (1999–2002) as an archival project. My examples are all of art works specifically concerned with history. Furthermore, Matthew Buckingham, the core subject of this essay, operates in a more directed manner than the artists Foster describes, whose work he characterizes as "an idiosyncratic probing into particular figures, objects, and events in modern art, philosophy, and history" (p. 3). The connections Buckingham makes between past and present could never be described as "tendentious, even preposterous" (p. 21). (I am not attempting to valorize Buckingham's work *over* the work of the artists Foster covers in his essay; rather I want to point to the specific nature of his practice.)
6.   In order to address the way in which contemporary artists working with objects have tackled historical representation, one would need to think of a different context to that mapped out above. One could look at Marcel Broodthaers's 1975 ICA exhibition *Décor*, at Michael Asher's 1979 installation at the Art Institute of Chicago, and at works by Lawrence Weiner such as SMASHED TO PIECES (IN THE STILL OF THE NIGHT), installed in Vienna in 1991. One would also need to consider the history of the "counter-monument," looking particularly at projects by Jochen Gerz and Hans Haacke.

the photographs are interspersed with text slides indicating the families' histories, ambitions, and the reasons for their use of commercial photography studios. These text slides also direct questions to viewers that make them aware of the investments they might have in this material, and of the inability of the archive to produce conclusive information.[7] Other artists have shown found material with less direct intervention: Fiona Tan's *Facing Forward* (1998–99) overlays films made by anthropologists, tourists, and colonialists in the early twentieth century with a soundtrack of excerpts from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*.[8]

Another important tendency is found in works in which artists address history through the contingencies of their biography, including their own narratives in the work. Tan's *May You Live in Interesting Times* (1997) and Laura Horelli's video *You Go Where You're Sent* (2003) are two important examples, but perhaps the most staggering work in this strain has been Anri Sala's *Intervista* (1998). The narrative begins when on a visit home to Tirana from his studies in Paris, Sala accidentally comes across a silent film of his mother speaking at an Albanian Communist youth party conference in the late 1970s. Sala has the speech reconstructed by a lip-reader and plays a now-subtitled tape back to his mother, thereby opening up an enquiry about the fate of Albania during Communism and after. All the footage in *Intervista* from the 1950s and '70s shows people talking and singing about the future. In this Communist era, historical representation itself had been banished: one of the crucial aspects of the work was that Sala not only looked back but retrieved the very possibility of retrospection.

If Sala's work thus confronted the eclipse of a historical sensibility in the Communist era, artists working in America or on American culture, by contrast, have addressed a situation where historical representation, when prevalent in the wider culture, is often extremely romantic or sentimental or spectacular. Here, I am thinking of works by Pierre Huyghe and Omer Fast, which are not so much concerned with examining repressed histories as with critiquing Hollywood representations of the past. *The Third Memory* (2000) looks back to the botched bank robbery that took place in Brooklyn in 1972 and was dramatized by Sidney Lumet's 1975 film *Dog Day Afternoon*: the work involves the bank robber John Wojtowicz directing a scene which is both a re-creation of the events of 1972 and a correction of the 1975 film. Fast's *Spielberg's List* (2003) scrutinized the tourist industry that has emerged in Krakow around the still-intact sets of *Schindler's List* (1993). Deploying tactics associated with Claude Lanzmann, Fast interviewed Poles who ten years previously had appeared as extras in Spielberg's film.

7.   For an account of this work, see Lauri Firstenberg, "Postcoloniality, Performance, and Photographic Portraiture," in *The Short Century*, ed. Okwui Enwezor (Munich: Prestel, 2001), pp. 175–79.
8.   Another example of the former tendency is Emily Jacir's project *In this Building* (2002), a re-presentation of images showing United Nations deliberations about the 1947 partition of Palestine; other examples of the latter tendency include Rebecca Baron's *The Idea of North* (1995) and Joachim Koester's *Message from Andrée* (2005), both of which include rephotographed images taken in 1897 by the Swedish Polar explorer Nils Strindberg and only discovered beside his frozen corpse in 1930.

Such works have revealed the ways in which Hollywood turns history into fiction, but other artists turn precisely to fiction not in order to evade historical representation but to represent historical experience more adequately. This tendency is best exemplified by the photographic projects and films archived and exhibited by the Atlas Group. Purporting to be real documents emerging from the Lebanese civil wars, these videos and photographs are for the most part newly created images made by the artist Walid Raad. While other recent artists have been concerned with the rather obvious project of showing how documents can lie (London-based Jamie Shovlin is a recent example), the Atlas Group is less interested in revealing the fallaciousness of the material it presents than in suggesting that only through fiction can an adequate image of the Lebanese wars be created.

The Atlas Group as a whole might be considered a kind of performance, with Raad playing the role of a genuine archivist, but this work is distinct from the final tendency that I want to mention, which is the historical turn in performance-based art. Here I am thinking of recent projects that have re-created historical events through performances that are documented either by the artists themselves or by associates. In *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001), Jeremy Deller organized the restaging of a clash between police and miners from a miners' strike in 1984. With this work, Deller resurrected the repressed memory of a troubled period of recent British history and, by involving protagonists from the clash, also triggered personal confrontations with that past. It was crucial that Deller used a battle reenactment society to help organize the event: such societies are more frequently involved with English Civil War re-creations, and their use in the project pointed to the way in which English history tends to be addressed only when romanticized and no longer deemed to be of political impact. Another example of historical representation in performance-based art would be Francis Alÿs's 2004 re-creation of the "green line" drawn in 1948 by Moshe Dayan to designate the eastern border of the new Israeli state. Walking through Jerusalem with a leaking can of green paint, Alÿs both ridiculed (by mimicry) the arbitrariness of Dayan's border and resuscitated its memory at a moment when even Israelis on the left maintain a dedication to a "United Jerusalem."

Francis Alÿs. Film still from The Green Line.
2005. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York.

Each of these linked tendencies of course deserves more attention, but this short survey already gives some idea of the diversity of historical representation in photographic and film-based mediums.[9] One cannot attribute the emergence of these various practices to film and photography's technological nature, always showing moments of past time. This feature was surely noticed by the generation of artists who began to use photography and film in the 1960s without making historical representation so integral to their practices. But perhaps this feature of photographic mediums has become more apparent to artists at this point when indexicality is under threat. In other words, perhaps it is the approaching digital-ization of all photographic mediums that sensitizes artists to the way in which such mediums used to serve as records of the past—and this sensitivity provokes artists to make work *about* the past.

It is important not to lose sight of the localized conditions that each of the above projects confronts—for instance, *Intervista* responds to the lack of historical representation in Communist Albania, and *The Black Photo Album* to the lack of attention to the history of its subjects in apartheid South Africa. Nonetheless, one can identify a general and seemingly paradoxical situation concerning the status of historical consciousness in the wider global culture to account for the centrality of historical representation in contemporary film and photographic practices. On the one hand, globalized capitalist culture is increasingly amnesiac, increasingly focused on ever newer markets, products, and experiences. On the other hand, this same culture produces ever more spectacular and romantic representations of the past—particularly in film. And in an era of political catastrophe, these representations appear more and more politically suspect. In the age of *Braveheart* (1995), *Gangs of New York* (2002), and *Gladiator* (2000), Siegfried Kracauer's 1928 analysis has never seemed truer:

> The numerous historical films that merely illustrate the past . . . are attempts at deception according to their own terms. Since one always runs the danger, when picturing current events, of turning easily excitable masses against powerful institutions that are in fact often not appealing, one prefers to direct the camera toward a Middle Ages that the audience will find harmlessly edifying. The further back the story is situated historically, the more audacious filmmakers become. They will risk depicting a successful revolution in historical costumes in order to induce people to forget modern revolutions, and they are happy to satisfy the theoretical sense of justice by filming struggles for freedom that are long past.[10]

9.   These various tendencies have been the subject of previous essays of mine (on Dean, Tan, Sala, Fast, and Alÿs) and, I hope, will be the subject of an eventual book project.
10.   Siegfried Kracauer, "The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies," in *The Mass Ornament*, trans. and ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 293.

2. Introducing Matthew Buckingham

The rest of this essay focuses on the work of Matthew Buckingham, an artist who has also used photographic mediums and who situates his work in response to the general conditions mapped out above. Since the early 1990s, Buckingham has investigated various histories through his work. Projects completed and first exhibited in the United States have investigated the history of slavery (*Amos Fortune Road*, 1996); of commercial and ecological exploitation of Native American people and land (*The Six Grandfathers, Paha Sapa, In the Year 502,002 C.E.*, 2002, and *Muhheakantuck—Everything Has a Name*, 2004); of American corporate involvement in South American economies (*Situation Leading to a Story*, 1999); and of racial segregation in urban planning (*Traffic Report*, 2005). Projects completed in Europe have looked at the histories of physiognomy (*Subcutaneous*, 2001), at the emerging hegemony of the English language after the publication of Samuel Johnson's dictionary (*Definition*, 2000), and at the decline of the shipping industry in Liverpool and the gentrification of its formerly industrial city center (*Obscure Moorings*, 2006). Though research on these subjects often begins with an invitation to make work in a particular location, Buckingham's work does not really reflect on his own personal biography as a mobile artist traveling to these various locations. His subjects tend not to be particularly esoteric or quirky or obscure. Buckingham rather initiates his historical research because of the urgency of a particular idea in the contemporary moment, and his research produces a politicized reinterpretation of the present.

In a recent lecture, Buckingham explained a principle that drives his approach to history. "There's a notion that can be found in Walter Benjamin's writing," he said,

> that is central to what I try to work with. Benjamin describes the vanishing point of history as always being the present moment. This formulation of history—thinking about the present moment as the point where history vanishes—is a way of reversing the received notion of history as vanishing somewhere behind us, vanishing into a nonexistent time, a time that no longer exists. [Benjamin's notion] forces us to confront history as a construction. It implies that when we reconsider past events, we're not so much returning to another time and retrieving material or events. We are restaging those events here and now in order to think about what's happening here and now, to think about the present.[11]

11.   Quoted from a lecture at the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London, November 2006. Buckingham takes the idea of the "vanishing point" from Susan Buck-Morss's reading of Walter Benjamin. She has written that Benjamin "understood historical 'perspective' as a focus on the past that made the present, as revolutionary 'now-time,' its vanishing point." See Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), p. 339.

Many other of Benjamin's fragments, throughout the "Theses on the Philosophy of History" and the section "On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress" in *The Arcades Project*, resonate with Buckingham's sensibility: the notion that "for the materialist historian, every epoch with which he occupies himself is only prehistory for the epoch he himself must live in,"[12] and that "to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was.' It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."[13]

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In addition to the various practices that I have mentioned above, one other prevalent aspect of historical representation in contemporary art involves the research into and explicit referencing of works of art made roughly between 1965 and 1975. Examples are not hard to find: Tacita Dean, Renée Green, and Sam Durant's works about Robert Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed*, Pierre Huyghe's projection of Gordon Matta-Clark's *Conical Intersect*, Dave Muller's and Matthew Antezzo's drawings after works by Robert Barry and Mel Bochner; Jonathan Monk's revisitations of Ed Ruscha's photo-books and Sol LeWitt's *Incomplete Open Cubes* and so on and so on. There are as many different reasons for these revisitations as there are works, and while some practices appear convincing, opening up past works to new readings and contexts, others seem melancholic and indulgent. Such differences are not the subject of this essay though: I merely want to mention these practices as a point of contrast with Buckingham.[14] For unlike these various artists, Buckingham has *not* made art that directly quotes or revisits particular works from this period.[15] However, his work has consistently deployed forms and practices that emerged precisely between 1965 and 1975: slide projection; photographs placed in disjunctive relation to text; films installed in particular ways to sensitize the viewer to the material presence of the screen, light beam, and projector; and spaces divided to make different viewers aware of their presence together. Buckingham has sited his work outside galleries and museums, on bus benches for instance, and has distributed work as postcards and in magazine projects. Clearly these formal strategies, mediums, and modes of display and of distribution are inherited from such artists as Eleanor Antin, Bochner, Daniel

12.   Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 474.
13.   Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations* (London: Fontana, 1992), p. 247.
14.   For an early discussion of some of these works, see James Meyer, "Nostalgia and Memory: Legacies of the 1960s in Recent Work," in *Painting Object Film Concept: Works from the Herbig Collection* (New York: Christie's, 1998), pp. 26–35.
15.   There is a project of Buckingham's that features images of works by Adrian Piper, Douglas Huebler, Vito Acconci, Yoko Ono, and others. This is his visual essay "A Man of the Crowd: annotated associations with Edgar Allan Poe's tale *The Man of the Crowd*," published in *Untitled (Experience of Place)* (London: Koenig Books, 2003). This project presents Buckingham's research for his film installation *A Man of the Crowd*.

Buren, James Coleman, Dan Graham, Smithson, Michael Snow, and others, even though these artists did *not* use such strategies, mediums, and modes to make work involved with historical representation.

While the attraction of these artists is unsurprising given his interests, and while the use of such forms distances his work from the heralded new medium of the "video essay,"[16] Buckingham finds these forms useful (I would suggest) because they serve a purpose that is absolutely bound up with his approach to historical representation. In approaching each new subject, Buckingham is as concerned with researching particular events or stories as he is with researching the way in which such events have formerly been narrated or indeed ignored in received historical writing. Following historiographers such as Hayden White, he has been attentive to the ideologies concealed in various kinds of narrative—to what White termed "the content of the form."[17] Buckingham acknowledges that fluent historical narratives tend to conceal the power of the narrator and tend not to make explicit what is or is not selected for inclusion.[18] When he addresses subjects of urgency to the present moment, he recognizes that it is not just necessary to present new revisionist narratives, but to reconsider the role of narrative itself in historical representation. The formal strategies and modes of display and distribution inherited from art dating from the late sixties and early seventies are put to use in Buckingham's work to break up and reconfigure narrative, and especially to make viewers aware of their role in the reconfiguration.

Before looking at particular projects, I think it is worthwhile to be more precise about the forms of Buckingham's work. For though, as I have indicated, he is indebted to strategies that emerged from 1965 through 1975, it is more accurate to say that he has put these strategies to work to create his own language. In each new project, Buckingham decides which forms and mediums will be appropriate, and unlike many of his contemporaries he has not used the same exact format—double-screen projection, for instance—over and over again. Nonetheless, three

16.   One "video essay" that indicates some of the problems of the genre is *Sleepwalkers* (2003) by the British artist group Inventory. This examines a British Americana festival whose participants indulge in antiquated reconstructions of 1950s and earlier American life. Inventory scrutinizes the "special relationship" between Bush and Blair through the lens of this festival. The artists' opinions and analyses are presented in a voice-over that spans the film. Not once does the narration allow the viewer to question the speaker's own absolute authority. This uncritical adoption of narration unconsciously reproduces the very power structures that the artists seek to question. Buckingham's approach could not be further apart; indeed, one of his works *Definition*, explains the problems of such documentaries, paraphrasing Walter Benjamin: "a written text is the death mask of the thought that produced it." For an account of some more nuanced video essays, see Ursula Biemann, ed., *Stuff It: The Video Essay in the Digital Age* (New York: Springer, 2004).
17.   See in particular Hayden White's critical historiography in *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) and *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).
18.   Buckingham's approach to narrative has been deeply informed not only by critical historiography, but also by queer and feminist theory, both of which contested the way the past was constructed.

main recurrent devices have emerged, and together they could be said to constitute his language.[19]

The first recurrent device is the use in each work of two distinct elements. Usually, the two elements are image and text. The image can be presented as a film, a video, a photograph, or a slide. The text can appear adjacent to a photograph as a long caption, or in Letraset on a wall beside it, or as a voice-over to a film or slide projection, or as subtitles.[20] In one project, a text appears on the Internet while the work's accompanying image is pasted on a bus bench (*Detour*, 2002). Rather than one element neatly complementing the other, each of the two elements competes for the viewer's attention and operates in a different register: one element can seem very simple, the other very complex.

The second recurrent device is internal fracturing within each part. This can be hard to sense immediately—one might assume that the division in a given work is simply the division into the two primary elements, text and image. However, over time the work reveals how each element is itself divided. A voice-over, for instance, while read by a single person, might include markedly different styles of writing or voices (as well as different themes); a film might include still images as well as moving ones; a photograph might appear in the guise of an old analog black-and-white print, but then reveal itself as a digital composite.

Finally, I want to draw attention to Buckingham's installation methods—the third recurrent device in his work. One film installation comprises two rooms with a projector sending the image from the divide between the rooms onto a far wall, so that the film is only visible in one space (*Situation Leading to a Story*); in another work, a slide is projected on a wall reached only by walking up, around, and down a ramp (*Definition*); a photograph is installed with a timeline stretching thirteen feet away from it on the wall (*The Six Grandfathers* . . .); a mirrored screen is placed in the middle of another space so that a film projected through it to a far wall is reflected by it to hit the near wall in reverse (*A Man of the Crowd*, 2003).[21]

19.   There would seem to be two ways to approach the idea of the medium in Buckingham's work. On the one hand, one might conceive a medium as a support or technology and see how Buckingham treats each medium he uses differently: film, photography, video, the Internet, etc., addressing both its formal and economic determinants. On the other hand, keeping in mind the three recurrent devices that I have mapped out, one might argue that these three as a whole constitute his "medium." One might argue that his medium is "fragmented, spatialized narrative." This second approach to the question of medium would recall Rosalind Krauss's idea of "reinventing the medium." See Krauss's essays "'. . . And Then Turn Away?' An Essay on James Coleman," *October* 81 (Summer 1997), pp. 5–33, and "Reinventing the Medium," *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 2 (Winter 1999), pp. 289–305.
20.   In *A Man of the Crowd* and *Obscure Moorings*, the "text" is further dislocated from the image. These works do not have voice-overs or subtitles, but they do suggest in various ways the presence of the fictions that in part prompted their creation—short stories by Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville. The attentive viewer will read the film comparing what they see with what they know of these literary works.
21.   Though not addressed at length here, I have suggested elsewhere that the installation of *A Man of the Crowd* can be productively compared with Dan Graham's *Public Space/Two Audiences* (1976). Buckingham's film shows one man in pursuit of another, and viewers might experience something akin to this relationship as, standing either side of the central mirror, they are prone to block each other's views of the film. See *Matthew Buckingham: Narratives*.

Buckingham's installations are spatially complex, but they always reveal the technologies they deploy (projectors, for instance, are never hidden), and this means that he avoids spectacular and immersive displays that encourage the viewers to forget their location. By prompting the viewers to sense their present-tense, phenomenological encounter with the work, Buckingham also emphasizes the present-tense importance of the history with which the work is concerned. Buckingham's installations also create social spaces in which viewers become aware of each other's presence: not simply to join together in a romantically sociable way, but to consider what it means to think through a subject as a temporary community.[22]

Each of these three devices (division of the work into two parts; internal division of each part; installation), which Buckingham has described as "tactics of de-familiarization," serves a double function regarding the way a story or subject is presented. The fluidity of the story is broken up, and the authority of its presentation is questioned.[23] In tandem, viewers recognize their situation in relation to this process—both physically and in terms of their responsibility in deciding what to make of the story or subject of the work. In turning now to individual works, it is possible to see how these devices play out, how they help Buckingham avoid didacticism, and how they contribute to the new mode of historical representation that has emerged in his work.

3. Seven Works

Amos Fortune Road, one of Buckingham's first major films, already evidences the historical concerns and formal tendencies manifest in his work since. Broadly speaking, the film concerns a present-day encounter with the history of slavery. But the work does not merely show how its protagonist confronts the past: it places its viewer in an analogous position to her, encountering both the textual traces of history and the possibilities of historical understanding.

"Sharon" is spending the summer in New Hampshire teaching in a drama school, in part to get away from her difficult relationship with her girlfriend in New York. She is looking after Maryanne, one of the students. Driving to the school, she passes by a meager cast-iron historical marker. She is only ever able to read its first two words, "Amos Fortune," and, intrigued by this name, tries to find out more.

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22.   Buckingham spoke about his interest in creating a social space in his film installations in the *October* roundtable "The Projected Image in Contemporary Art": "The focal length separating apparatus from projection measures out a space for the viewer. Even when the viewer is alone, there is a social implication that doesn't exist for me in other types of image display. I've tried to complicate the viewing process by using the space, particularizing the space, so that the viewer sees herself not only in relation to the piece but also in relation to other viewers." Matthew Buckingham in the roundtable, "The Projected Image in Contemporary Art," *October* 104 (Spring 2003), p. 79.
23.   Matthew Buckingham, "The Archive," unpublished artist's statement. For a discussion of other Brechtian tendencies in recent art, see George Baker, "The Storyteller: Notes on the Work of Gerard Byrne," in *Gerard Byrne: Books, Magazines, and Newspapers* (New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2003), pp. 7–88.

She learns from Maryanne that Amos Fortune was a slave who bought his freedom and started a leather tanning business near the site of the historical marker. In the local library Sharon finds receipts from Fortune's life, including the one for his freedom. After discovering his grave is in the same cemetery as Willa Cather's, she returns to New York and finds that the two books on Amos Fortune in the New York Public Library are in the fiction section. She learns that the historical marker was only erected as part of a 1920s initiative to attract motor tourism. Looking at a map dating from 1795, Sharon discovers that the roads she drove on during the summer were the very same ones Amos Fortune traveled two hundred years before.

This plot would be adequately conveyed through a naturalistic film, but *Amos Fortune Road* has an incredibly complex texture. It includes images recorded in a car and passages filmed in forests, on and by a lake, and in the school and cemeteries that Sharon and Maryanne visit. Sections shot inside the car were filmed with Super-8, while those taken outside were on 16mm, and the two stocks are visibly different. Moving-image passages are intercut throughout with still photographs and black leader. The accompanying soundtrack was recorded separately. Sometimes sound seems to correspond partially with the image; sometimes it indicates absent events (for instance, the sound of schoolchildren is audible when the image is a photograph of an empty schoolroom). The camera viewpoints often correspond with the narrative but occasionally render it fictional. Sharon and Maryanne are supposed to be the only characters in the car, but the camera is often positioned on the backseat, implying the position of a third passenger.

Buckingham. Amos Fortune Road. *1996.*

Buckingham. Amos Fortune Road. *1996.*

There are intertitles throughout the film, some white text over black screens, some white text over images. Viewers read them to assemble the story but become increasingly aware that they are making their own links between words and images. The different types of footage, the soundtrack components, and these titles interrupt the narrative flow, serving as a constant reminder of its construction, of the construction of all we "know" about the past.

This deconstructive tendency reaches a climax at the film's end. As Sharon is driving back to New York, the image of the freeway tunnel freezes, but the sound of traffic continues over the ending credits. The first credit appears—"A film by Matthew Buckingham with Sharon Hayes and Maryanne Cullinan"—and with this, the whole understanding of the film shifts. Having assumed that the characters were fictional, one now discovers they are real people, like the filmmaker. But if "Sharon" is the artist Sharon Hayes, how does this revelation square with a sense of the film's fabrication? If the events of the summer actually happened, has this been a kind of reconstruction, with Buckingham in the car alongside the two women? Did Buckingham script the whole thing and ask the real Sharon Hayes to play a character called Sharon? Are the credits simply a ruse to provoke these questions? As it begins to seem impossible to tell fact from fiction, a bibliography appears. Four books are listed: two histories of New England and the two biographies of Amos Fortune. The bibliography serves as both a sign of the artist's working process—showing as part of the film the research Buckingham did for it—and an invitation for the viewer to explore the histories further, perhaps to question or corroborate the facts of the narrative.[24]

Amos Fortune Road demonstrates that the past is always impossible to know "the way it really was," but it does not leave its viewer in a mire of uncertainty,

24.   Bibliographies also appear in *Subcutaneous, Absalon, Definition, Detour,* and *One Side of Broadway.*

Buckingham. Image of Absalon to Be Projected Until It Vanishes. *2001.*

concluding that historical understanding is rendered totally impossible. Benjamin writes that the historical materialist "grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one"; Buckingham's film suggests that profound historical understanding (if not objective knowledge) can be achieved through various kinds of sharing.[25] Reading between the lines of the intertitles, the viewer assumes that Sharon shares a level of exclusion with Amos Fortune, and this is part of her attraction to his story. Secondly, there is a sharing of textual encounters. In negotiating different kinds of images and texts and trying to determine what is fact and fiction, the viewer shares with Sharon her situation vis-à-vis Amos Fortune. Finally, there is a sharing of physical space. Though the facts of his life remain opaque, Sharon retrospectively realizes that she shared something very profound with Fortune: a spatial experience, the roads they had both driven. *Amos Fortune Road* was made before Buckingham began to specify installation conditions and is usually screened in cinemas, but nonetheless the viewer shares something of the space of the road by virtue of the camera angles, which are often from Sharon's position in the car.

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As we have seen, the narrative of *Amos Fortune Road* commences with the chance discovery of a formerly unacknowledged historical marker. Buckingham has taken other more well-known monuments as starting points for works. One example is *Image of Absalon to Be Projected Until It Vanishes* (2001) which he researched in Copenhagen. The twelfth-century warrior-bishop Absalon was the first Dane to

25.   Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," p. 255.

realize the importance of narrative history in forming national identity, and an equestrian statue was erected to his memory in 1901. Buckingham projects a single slide of this statue over the course of an exhibition so that the image gradually fades into invisibility. The projector bulb burns away Absalon's figure, and this disintegration implies a critique of the kind of nationalistic narrative that Absalon wanted to construct; meanwhile a text framed on an adjacent wall tells the story of the monument's construction. Reading this, the viewer learns as much about Denmark in the early twentieth century and the fraught history of the monument as they do about Absalon. Another work by Buckingham that uncovers a repressed history of a monument (rather than the figures commemorated by it) is *The Six Grandfathers, Paha Sapa, In the Year 502,002 C.E.*, whose subject is the history and projected future of the mountain known to the Sioux as Paha Sapa and to most other Americans as Mount Rushmore.

Again this is a work in two parts: this time, a digitally produced C-print photograph and a text arranged as a timeline printed directly on the wall next to it. The image shows how "Geologists believe the Six Grandfathers . . . will appear in 500,000 years" and the timeline charts the geological history of the mountain, the eviction of the area's Sioux during the European colonization of North America, and the employment between 1926 and 1941 of the Ku Klux Klan–affiliated sculptor Gutzon Borglum, who carved the presidential portraits. The timeline continues with sections on the late-twentieth-century tourism boom around Mount Rushmore, the campaigns of the Sioux to retrieve their land, and, in a return to geological history, the projected fate of the mountain and the erosion of the sculptures.

Buckingham. Installation view of The Six Grandfathers, Paha Sapa, In the Year 502,002 C.E. *2002.*

The timeline recognizes that "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."[26] Buckingham exchanges the history memorialized at the "Shrine to Democracy" with a tale of exploitation and commerce. The accompanying image, however, has a different tenor and adds a less didactic, more imaginative register to the work. The vision of the eroded mountain obviously deflates the grandiosity of Borglum's memorial and renders futile his efforts to inscribe the presidential forms in stone for eternity. The image also contrasts the linearity of the text by collapsing future, present, and past. To produce this image of the future, Buckingham worked with contemporary digital programs, as well as with precise geological research that indicated just how the mountain will erode.[27] He also aimed to make the image recall the National Park Service photographs that were the first to represent the site in the 1940s. Another allusion is surely to the photographs of Robert Smithson's *Asphalt Rundown* (1969).

As much as the work stages the erosion of Mount Rushmore, Buckingham's image also erodes the logic of photographic temporality. Roland Barthes's "this has been" is replaced by a compression of tenses; the image recalls and looks forward at once. This erosion is linked to the burning away of the slide in Absalon. Buckingham's decision to represent monuments with unstable photographic devices (disappearing slides and digitally constructed images) rather than with straight photography suggests a double-edged critique of photography. First, Buckingham recognizes that photography has often been used to provide misguiding representations of history. As Allan Sekula has written, "the widespread use of photography as historical illustrations suggests that significant events are those which can be pictured, and this history takes on the character of spectacle."[28] By avoiding straight photography, Buckingham also avoids spectacularizing history. Second, Buckingham suggests that "normal" photographs share with monuments not just a temporality, but a certain kind of authority. Both command their viewers to recall that "this has been," and implore them to "remember!" Since he aims to question the authority of monuments, he has found it necessary to question photographic authority at the same time.

Imaginative as Buckingham's critiques of monuments might be, it would be much more challenging to formulate a new kind of monument. This is the task he set himself in *Detour,* made in Los Angeles in 2002. Buckingham made a poster printed with the date "September 4, 1781" and listed a URL below it in a smaller font size. A text at the Web site described the founding of the city of Los Angeles on the named date. It stated that the land had been inhabited by indigenous

26.   Ibid., p. 248.
27.   Of course the projection relies on the erosion of the mountain continuing along lines predicted in 2002. It is harder to guess what would happen given different ecological conditions. Given that the work was made the year after Bush pulled the U.S. out of the Kyoto accord, the predictions of Buckingham's photograph might not be so trustworthy.
28.   Allan Sekula, "Reading the Archive," in *Blasted Allegories,* ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987), p. 122.

Buckingham. Detour. *2002.*

peoples for thirteen thousand years and that the city was founded under Spanish instruction by a community comprising Native Americans, Africans, Mexicans, and Spanish. The unacknowledged founders of Los Angeles, that is to say, came from communities now making up much of its underclass.

Buckingham's work attempted to address the amnesia of contemporary Los Angeles with a reminder of its colonial origins, and furthermore this address was directed to the specific social groups who might have most investment in this memory: the poster was positioned near the site of the original city center, at a bus stop whose users tend to come from a working-class population. But Buckingham stepped back from proposing a new, problem-free, easily accessible, utopian form of memorial or public art.[29] Although access to the bench was unrestricted, many of the people who sat with their backs against Buckingham's poster might not have had fast access to the Internet; indeed, one might ask, how many could even read the English text on the Web site? Fragmenting his work between cyberspace and the physical space of the street meant that this question necessarily became pressing. Thus, while he suggested a new form for a monument, Buckingham also articulated the conditions of any attempt to address a public and showed that attempts to restore memory are often compromised by existing economic inequalities.[30]

29.   *Detour* could also be considered in relation to another work realized in the same kind of site in Los Angeles—Daniel Buren's *Bus Benches,* first installed in 1970 and subsequently in 1982 and 1995. By silk-screening alternating blue-and-white vertical stripes on fifty bus benches, Buren provoked two questions. What does it mean to see an art work outside as opposed to inside an institution? And, what does it mean to place a noncommercial image in the site of advertising? (The benches were usually covered with ads.) These questions are implicitly explored in Buckingham's work, but there are two additional poles in play: his work explored the difference between real space and cyber space, and between real time (the time waiting for a bus) and remembered time.
30.   Buckingham's work might be productively compared with other recent examples of "public art" such as Thomas Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument* (2002), which articulate the contested character of public space. See Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Fall 2004), pp. 51–79.
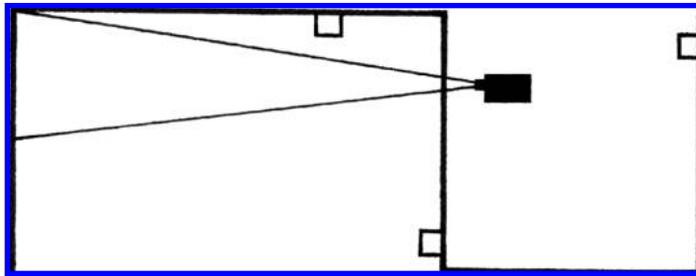
Buckingham. Installation diagram for Situation Leading to a Story. *1999.*

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  Situation Leading to a Story marked the first time Buckingham specified installation requirements for his films. A viewer enters a first carpeted room expecting to see the film but only finds two speakers and a projector, pointing through a hole in the wall to a room beyond. The soundtrack is audible here, but to see the image, the viewer must leave the room, walk around a corner, find another entry point, and walk into the second carpeted space. Inside, the film emitted by the projector occupyies the bottom corner of the far wall. The projection is a sequence of four films lasting twenty minutes in total. Buckingham found the films together in a box on the street in Manhattan. They were of different lengths, and except for slowing them down and editing part of the third, the artist presented them exactly as found. The first film is a home movie of an affluent family at a garden party in an undisclosed location. The second shows the construction of a cable tramway in the Peruvian Andes by the Cerro de Pasco Copper Mining Corporation. The third has more construction scenes, this time of additions to the house seen in the garden party, and the last depicts a bullfight in Guadalajara, Mexico.
  A voice-over starts just after the garden party film begins and finishes just after the bullfight ends. The narrator first describes how he found the films in Manhattan. Seeing the name Harrison M. Dennis on one of the rolls, he attempts to locate his home, but forgets the address and gets lost in Ossining, New York. Trying to understand what links the films, the narrator then finds codes on their edges that date them to the 1920s. This discovery initiates a portion of the narrative about the early home-movie industry and Kodak's marketing of movie cameras.[31] The voice-over then turns to the subject of the tramway film, continuing for some time to articulate the context of the construction activities pictured,

31.   There is a particularly interesting connection between Morgan Fisher's *Standard Gauge* (1984) and *Situation*: in his film, Fisher looks at the perimeters of found film reels to determine their date and constructs a narrative around a continuous shot of found fragments.

Buckingham. Situation Leading to a Story. *1999.*

and their impact on the environment and later politics and economy of Peru. At the end the voice-over returns to the narrator's final attempt to locate the owner. Once again, the narrator fails to properly contact Mr. Dennis.

In a few points in *Situation*, where the narrator is describing the images visible on screen, the relationship between image and voice-over are relatively simple. There is even one deliberate and rather beautiful correspondence: the narrator explores the etymology of the French word *maintenant* just as two people in the garden party are walking hand in hand. But for the most part, the image/text relationship is particularly complex in this film because of temporal differences between the viewer's and the narrator's encounters with the same images. As the viewer watches the films in the present-tense, the narrator describes his earlier encounter with them in the past tense.[32] The narrator refers to scenes that the viewer is yet to see and treats ones they have already watched. The viewer tries to concentrate on what is visible on the screen, but at the same time also anticipates what is coming or recalls what has just passed. Future and past are compressed into the viewer's present, and it becomes simply too demanding to attend to the narrator *and* the image: either one gives up on the images and tries to concentrate on the voice-over, or one lets the words float on and attends to the interest of the images, which are sometimes extremely enchanting. (I have found that I want to watch the films many times, and each time I do, I see sections as if for the first time.)

32.   This is a strategy famously used by Hollis Frampton in *Nostalgia* (1971), in which a viewer hears a sequence of narrations and sees a sequence of photographs, each narration describing the next photograph to be seen.

Buckingham. Situation Leading to a Story. *1999.*

      The relationship of image and text is obviously fractured, but, less obviously, the text itself is also broken. Though narrated in one seamless voice, the text shifts between registers, from the anecdotal (where the narrator describes finding the four films), to the objective-informative ("In 1901 a group of New York industrialists . . . began buying bankrupt copper mines in Peru"), to the aphoristic-theoretical ("Narrative is a chain of events in cause and effect relationship occurring in time and space"). Woven with different strands, the voice-over is a text in the true sense. For this reason, one cannot assume that Buckingham's position corresponds to the position of the speaker, even though the artist reads the entire text. Just as a novelist might create many different voices in a book, so Buckingham has created several levels of narrators, and the viewers must work with the text rather than submit to the coherent authority of its speaker.

      Negotiating the complex relationship of text and images, and the inconsistent registers of the text itself, the viewers might feel just as lost as the narrator had been when trying to locate Harrison Dennis. This effect is accentuated by the installation, since when the viewers enter the first room, they feel as if they have not found Buckingham's film. (The installation also spatializes the disconnection between sound and image, since the speakers are visibly separated from the projection.) Narrative fluidity is so effectively disrupted, and in so many different ways, but does this produce a situation of random confusion? No: working with the material, viewers come to distinguish between different kinds of information, so that though initially disorientated, they discover particular narratives with confidence. To rephrase the work's title, getting lost is the "situation," but there is a "story" to which this getting lost leads.

Two stories, in fact. Though the story of the films' owner is never resolved, other stories *are* clarified. The first is the story of home cinema, of how Kodak manufactured expensive home cameras and film stock in the 1920s, and how these new products were marketed to the upper classes alongside other luxury goods such as the automobile. The discussion of the home-movie industry is one of the most incisive aspects of Buckingham's work. While many artists work with found images and footage, often in nostalgic ways, Buckingham presents found images and explores their cultural and historical determinants simultaneously, asking who could afford to make such films at this time. It could even be said that Buckingham provides a metacritique of the indulgent use of found imagery in recent art practice in *Situation*, and by taking found film as a site, relinquishes a formalist investigation for an institutional one.[33] In so doing, he does not deny the charm of the images (the garden party film remains very touching) but does encourage viewers to understand the conditions of their enchantment.

The second resolved story is that of Cerro de Pasco Copper Mining Corporation. This is a story of the North American commercial exploitation of South American workers and natural resources from the beginning of the twentieth century, of the displacement of people from their land, of the internal conflicts these activities caused between the Peruvian revolutionary government and the people living around the mines, of the sale of the corporation to that government, and of the continued American financial control of the corporation. This is a story of the origins of "globalization" and its continuing impact. Globalization neither emerges as an image, nor as a recent phenomenon, but as a historical process.[34]

Whereas Buckingham was unable to discover Harrison Dennis's whereabouts and the reasons why he discarded the four rolls of film, he was able to carry out extensive detailed research on Kodak and the Peruvian mine. The unresolved, private story of Dennis is therefore set apart from the two resolved stories, which are distinguished first by their public character and second by their significant impact on the present. The story of the birth of home movies is told from the vantage point of the use of found footage in contemporary art; the story of Cerro de Pasco from the vantage point of the global (rather than simply transcontinental) expansion of such business activities. Noting this distinction, the importance of the installation can be rearticulated. The carpeted rooms allude to private domestic space, but the installation requirements of the work insist on exhibition in the public space of a museum or gallery. As much as the viewer's initial experience is one of getting lost, eventually he or she finds the material. If the eventual meaning

33.   As a comparison, one could cite Bill Morrison's film *Decasia* (2002), which features degraded old film stock and indulges its viewer in more than an hour of ruined beauty.
34.   Pamela Lee has recently written that many contemporary artists content themselves with "merely portraying" sites of globalization—her example is Andreas Gursky's photograph of Schiphol. Buckingham, on the other hand, considers the historical formation and processes of globalization and refuses to image any particular contemporary site. Pamela M. Lee, "Boundary Issues: The Art World Under the Sign of Globalism," *Artforum* 42, no. 3 (November 2003), pp. 164–67.

of *Situation Leading to a Story* involves the separation of public stories that impact on the present from private ones that do not, this separation is precisely reflected and achieved by the installation.

Situation examines the prehistory of globalized capitalism by focusing on corporate activities; in *Definition*, this same subject is addressed by looking at the global expansion of the English language following the publication of Samuel Johnson's dictionary. The work is an installation featuring a single slide and a six-minute sound recording. The viewer walks onto a ramp that slopes up, turns a corner, and slopes down again, delivering them in front of the projected image. Speaking in the language of the exhibition venue, a voice announces that the slide "probably [shows] the room in London where the first dictionary of the English language was written." Johnson, the reader intones, "imagined a social and political unity achieved through a common language, which might stop the wandering history of meaning." The narration details the progression of the dictionary, but slowly inserts it in a context that is less comfortable than the Enlightenment. It transpires that Johnson's publication had particular socioeconomic determinants. By the mid-eighteenth century, increasing economic ties between European countries prompted an anxiety that national languages would be corrupted. A canny London businessman exploited this anxiety, commissioning Johnson to write the dictionary, knowing that "the hunger for linguistic standards had created a market. . . ." Produced by the impulse to secure and define a national language, the dictionary, despite Johnson's own opposition to colonialism, would become an "essential tool in the export-trade of the English language."

Definition initially seems to be a rather depressing reflection on the linguistic foundations of colonialism. The opening sections of the narration draw a possible connection in the listener's mind between the nationalist fervor of eighteenth-century London and the city in the present time, where opposition to a single European currency and to immigration is growing. However, as the work continues, the emphasis shifts away from a focus on the constraining power of dictionaries and definitions and away from an emphasis on the repetition of conservative political tendencies. First, the narration moves on to Malcolm X, who read a dictionary word by word and recognized "the secret of dictionaries, that they are really encyclopaedias in disguise." At this part of the narration, the image grows increasingly nuanced. It shows a window, an architectural aperture rather than a point of definition. The slide begins to recall

Buckingham. Definition. *2000.*

images of other scholars by windows (for instance, Carpaccio's *St. Augustine in His Study*, 1502–4) and suggests the possibilities of open thought rather than of constraint. Finally, at the end of the narration, the text itself opens up. All along, there has been some doubt as to the authority of the narrator, who has failed to define the image's location with much certainty. Nonetheless, the listener has assumed throughout that the reader is the author of the words. Yet at the end the listener hears, that "Even these words are not my own. After being read and spoken by someone else, I have no idea if you're really hearing what I said or thought." The "I" here seems not to refer to the speaker but to the author, which suggests that the text can no longer be accepted as a fluid utterance from a single voice; it is a kind of fabric that the listener needs to unpick and reassemble. Importantly, the authority of the text breaks down in the most dramatic ways at the *ending*—at its limit, or point of definition.

The voice-over also draws attention to the spatial situation in which the viewer encounters the work. As mentioned, the reader initially says, "this is probably the room in London where the first dictionary of the English language was written." Slightly later the statement is qualified, "this is a room in one of the houses in London where Samuel Johnson lived." Toward the end the narrator says, "Definitions are merely provisional, fictions which are never truly definitive, changing slightly and constantly with the contexts they travel through." Holding true for all definitions, this last statement has particular purchase on the word "this" which linguists would call a "shifter." Through repeating the phrase "this room" in the narration, the narrator not only draws the viewer's attention to "the room in the slide" but also points back to the room of the installation. Thus *Definition* constantly refers back to the place in which it is encountered, reminding the viewer that the encounter takes place here, now, just as its content is a reminder of the continuing impact of history on the present.

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As its title indicates, the intersection of language and commercial expansion would again be a crucial theme in *Muhheakantuck—Everything Has a Name*, the last work I will discuss. The film was made on a helicopter trip that started and finished near the mouth of the river now known as the Hudson. Buckingham flew upstream for about twenty minutes, covering sixty miles, and then turned back, all the time aiming a 16 mm camera out of the helicopter at an angle so that the recorded shot is divided in three, with the river at the bottom, the land in the middle, and a horizon line and sky at the top. (N.B. The frames from the film illustrated here are from the beginning of the helicopter trip, just after takeoff, and before the helicopter reached cruising altitude. The horizon line is therefore right at the top of the frames. For the vast majority of the film, the image *is* trisected in the way described.) For the first half of the flight, the camera pointed east over Manhattan and Westchester, and for the second half, it pointed west,

Buckingham. Frames from Muhheakantuck—Everything Has a Name. *2003.*

over the cliffs of the Tallman Mountain State Park and down to Jersey City. Though attached to a moving object, the camera itself was held still. There are no pans, zooms, or shifts in focus: the film comprises two twenty-minute takes with two cuts joining the two shots into one projected loop. In gallery spaces, *Muhheakantuck* is projected through a pink filter onto a low floating screen. This coloration hardly produces a nostalgic image—even though nostalgia is often described as the tendency to look to the past with "rose-colored glasses." Rather, Buckingham wanted to replicate the appearance of degraded 16 mm color films. If the pinkness of the image tempts the viewer to suppose that this film dates from the late 1960s, the views of Manhattan—including Ground Zero—soon conjure the work's real date.[35]

A voice-over commences a few minutes into the film. It is spoken in one voice (Buckingham's), but once again different strands of content and register interweave in the narration. At times the narrator is objective, at times authoritative, sometimes self-questioning, sometimes aphoristic. The main strand of the narration concerns the history of the river recorded in the film and focuses on the early activities of the Dutch East India Company there. In the early seventeenth-century, just prior to the moment of colonial activity, Henry Hudson was employed by the company to find the Northwest Passage, a fabled trade route dreamed up by Europeans who hoped for a way of shortening journeys between Europe and China. Buckingham's narration attends to the way representation preceded reality as much as recorded it: cartographers drew the passage on maps to prompt navigators such as Hudson to search for it, and just as mapmakers ignored actual geographical conditions, so, too, Hudson ignored the Lenape people he encountered on his journey, and their linguistic representations of their land. The Lenape name for the river was *muhheakantuck*—the river that flows in two directions.

35.   Buckingham has always wanted to show the work in a floating cinema on the Hudson. A boat would travel along the river, picking up audiences from the towns on its banks, returning them home after the screening. This proposal adds new dimensions of reflexivity: *Muhheakantuck*'s reflections on the history of the river would be offered to those who currently live by its banks. The role of the horizon would become even more significant. On board, Buckingham's potential viewers would not be able to see a distant horizon—just the banks across the river and upstream. They would experience a kind of blindness not dissimilar to Henry Hudson's. But inside the boat's cinema, these viewers would look down toward the horizon, and the horizon in the image would be all the more compelling. This proposal recalls Robert Smithson's ambition to screen his film *Spiral Jetty* (1970) on the Staten Island Ferry. Smithson also included sections filmed very deliberately from a helicopter, and in fact the circling movement of the helicopter in the film replicates the structure of its subject. Despite these connections, there are important differences concerning Smithson's and Buckingham's attitudes to history. As Jennifer Roberts has suggested, Smithson situated his work in opposition to the nearby monuments celebrating the triumphant progress of the modern American nation. "Smithson's crystalline model of time disregards linear, progressive, or triumphalist models by imagining time as an opaque encrustation around a fault or fracture." Jennifer Roberts, "The Taste of Time: Salt and Spiral Jetty," in *Robert Smithson* (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), pp. 96–103. Like Smithson, Buckingham is skeptical about the way in which history is constructed in the wider culture but refuses to see history merely as a "futile series of turnings"; indeed, he demonstrates the value of acknowledging *forgotten* histories: the possibility of imagining other futures.

The narrator explains: "As fresh water empties out into the ocean, seawater surges more than one hundred fifty miles up the middle of the river." Had Hudson attended to this name, he would have understood from the outset that he was sailing up a *river*, not the sea passage to China. Instead he continued upstream until the river grew too shallow for passage, at which point his crew skirmished violently with "the people of the country." Hudson returned to the Netherlands without having found the passage, but the East India Company was nonetheless impressed by the furs he had procured from the Lenape. Company men returned to the river, establishing settlements in Manhattan, initiating more trade, spreading disease, and persecuting the indigenous peoples. During the forty-year life of New Netherland, "more than twenty-three thousand Lenape died." Toward the end of the narration, just as the helicopter looks out over Jersey City, the narrator describes the massacre perpetrated there by Willem Kieft, the third Governor General of the colony.

Buckingham seems to have been drawn to Hudson's story because the narrative provides a prehistory of the present. The text describes how the capitalist rather than nationalist or religious interests of the Dutch East India Company led to decimation of indigenous life and the destruction of ecologies, economies, languages, and cultures, and how such conditions prevail today. But there is also a specific contemporary motivation for *Muhheakantuck*. Near the beginning of the film, the narrator mentions that Hudson sailed into the mouth of the river that would later bear his name on September 11, 1609; at that very instant, the helicopter peers over lower Manhattan, a site now tied to the same date. Just before this moment, the narrator reflects on the "arbitrary *and* systematic" nature of dates and how they are "made meaningful because most of us agree to use them." Though coincidental, the fact that Hudson's trip began on this date prompts the viewer to consider the history and repercussions of this voyage through the lens of the present. The attack on 9/11, one realizes, was preceded by a much earlier, and much more brutal assault at this place, one perpetrated by white Europeans on an indigenous population. There is also a suggestion that the hostility toward America manifested in 9/11 might have its roots and explanations in the historical barbarism of Western capitalist activities.

The histories of the Dutch East India Company and the Lenape must be confronted for a proper understanding of the present, post–9/11 moment: this insistence is the political message of *Muhheakantuck*. But to foster the viewer's imaginative faculties, Buckingham needed to resist an overly didactic presentation of his material. He had to generate in his viewer a sense of expansiveness about the subject of the work in order to encourage a consideration of possible futures in tandem with a reflection on barbaric histories. This is accomplished most obviously by the fragmentation of the narrative, which contrasts powerfully with the free-flowing river in the image. Different stories are woven together, one breaking up the flow of the other; different voices interrupt one another. Neither able to settle into the film, nor to trust the narrator's authority, the viewer is encouraged

to subject all conveyed information to questioning. Indeed, in many places the narrator insists on the contingency of knowledge, reminding the viewer that none of the stories told is objective or factual—that each is learned via other representations, that each is told for a reason, that each is told through language with its attendant histories and imprecision. If the contemporary moment necessitates the work of memory, at the same time it requires us to question all received knowledge.

The form and content of the voice-over create thinking space, but the openness of *Muhheakantuck* is most powerfully achieved through the form of the image—an aerial view looking down at an oblique angle toward a distant horizon. Right from the beginning, the narrator subjects this viewpoint to historical and theoretical scrutiny, reflecting on what it might be to make such an image. Initially, while describing ancient toy protohelicopters produced in China, the narrator muses that "the dream of vertical ascent and hovering flight is a dream of suspending time through distance—of cutting oneself off from ordinary measures of time—'surface time.'" Clearly this "dream" is not realized in this film—the aerial view hardly leads to a timeless perspective on the river. Later on, the aerial viewpoint is connected to the military use of hot-air balloons. Aerial transport has facilitated surveillance and control, and in Vietnam the "maneuverability [of helicopters] was a major factor in the U.S. decision to go to war." The aerial viewpoint is also connected to the cartographic gaze: "By capturing land on paper, maps always construct their worlds in the image of a society, placing the unobtainable within reach—drawing places in order to possess them."

The aerial view has many problematic associations, but these are all clearly articulated so that the specific viewpoint offered in the film can be differentiated more powerfully. While a mapmaker or fighter pilot would look down to survey the river beneath the helicopter, Buckingham looks across at an angle to the horizon and thereby refuses the authority and the possessive zeal of the cartographic, militaristic gaze. "It's easy to forget that it is our eye that makes the horizon," the narrator notes just before the end of the film. Were the camera filming from lower down, the horizon would be nearer; from higher up, farther. The inclusion of the horizon in the image of *Muhheakantuck* reminds the viewer that the camera only sees what it sees because of the position it is in, just as "we know what we think we know" only because of what we happen to have read and heard. As importantly, the horizon acknowledges within the image the presence of the space the camera cannot see. To use a term from the narration, the horizon testifies to the "unknown."

By using a viewpoint that initially seems suspect, Buckingham performs a powerful act of *détournement*, substituting a different kind of visual regime for the expected ones. Just as history must be acknowledged to understand the present, *Muhheakantuck* insists that it is necessary to recognize the inadequacies of knowledge and vision, and instills this recognition through its verbal and visual form. *Muhheakantuck* thereby places its viewers in a position of uncertainty and humility, and it becomes possible from this position to imagine relations and futures that

are different from the present—to imagine a future not just as a series of mounting disasters, but as a time of understanding and cohesion between the different peoples residing in the depicted land. Whereas Hudson "falsely assumed the unknown not to exist" now, "the unknown is more than an occasion for possibilities; it is a provocation that propels us on a journey, a route of unknowing in which we experience many of the ways that we do not know something."

4. The Artist as Historian

With a good understanding of some of Matthew Buckingham's works, we can now return to the title of this essay and reconsider what the formulation "the artist as historian" might mean—both for contemporary art and, indeed, for history. I want to conclude with three comments about the implications of Buckingham's practice. First, the artist as historian is just as concerned with a particular historical subject (be that the Cerro de Pasco Copper Mining Corporation or Henry Hudson's contact with the Lenape) as he is with addressing the history of their mediums and forms. Indeed, the artist situates these mediums and forms in

light into colored rays, quantifying and categorizing the spectrum of visible light. Many European monarchs and artists return to wearing and using color as some sumptuary laws are repealed. Soon the number of pages appearing in painter's manuals on the use of blue exceeds that of all other colors.

1774
The "cult of Werther" springs up in response to the publication of Goëthe's first novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Influenced by the blue dress coat Werther is described wearing in the book, the cult declares blue to be the color of Romanticism and also adopts the wearing of blue coats.

1787
Goëthe, while traveling in Italy, notices blue deposits on the walls of limekilns near Palermo and observes that these glassy deposits are often substituted for lapis lazuli gems in decorative applications.

1806
A chemical analysis of lapis lazuli, made by Desormes and Clement, is published in France.

1814
M. Tessaert removes glassy deposits, similar to the ones Goëthe described, from the glassworks at St. Gobain, France, and suggests to the Société d'Encouragement pour L'Industrie Nationale that it investigate a method for producing an artificial ultramarine blue. Upon examination, the glassy deposits at St. Gobain are found to have a chemical structure similar to lapis lazuli.

1824
The Société offers a prize of 6,000 francs for the manufacture of a synthetic ultramarine blue with a price of less than 300 francs per kilo.

FEBRUARY 1828
Even though Jean Baptiste Guimet's process for producing artificial ultramarine blue costs 400 francs per kilo, he is awarded the Société prize.

MARCH 1828
Christian Gottlieb Gmelin, at the University of Tübingen, challenges Guimet's claim to the Société prize and rival factories in France and Germany begin producing, respectively, Guimet's and Gmelin's synthetic ultramarine formulas. By now, genuine ultramarine blue is fetching up to 4,000 francs per kilo. Despite Gmelin's German nationality, artificial ultramarine blue quickly becomes known as "French Blue" or "Permanent Blue" (even though it is less permanent than the original).

1841
Under the British puppet ruler Shah Shuja, Afghani lapis mining temporarily ceases in Badakshan. A year later, all British forces will be routed from Afghanistan and perish while retreating to India.

1938
William Butler Yeats publishes his poem "Lapis Lazuli," a meditation on impending war and death.

1946
With the aid of a microscope, art conservators from the Central Laboratories of the Belgian Museums discover tiny traces of cobalt blue mixed with ultramarine blue in a painting thought to be a Vermeer. The discovery indicates the painting is a forgery: cobalt blue, a 19th-century pigment, was developed in the attempt to produce a synthetic ultra-marine blue.
8 Revenge was the forger's motive: Dutch artist Han

van Meegeren reasoned that if the same critics who had snubbed his own work praised a "Vermeer" by his hand, he could reveal his deception and be redeemed as a great artist. But after discovering how lucrative the endeavor was, he kept silent and produced five more "Vermeers" and two "De Hooghs."

Van Meegeren's fifth "Vermeer" was sold to Hermann Göring. After the war, Van Meegeren was arrested and charged with "treasonable collaboration" for his part in the loss of a national treasure to the Nazis. After six months in jail he admitted that he had made the painting himself. Art critics and scholars flatly rejected his claim, arguing for the authenticity of the works. Under house arrest, Van Meegeren set about painting a new "Vermeer" to demonstrate his point. Ultimately he was convicted of fraud at a one-day trial and sentenced to a year in prison. He died of a heart attack before serving any time.

Ironically, his forged "Vermeers," which had seduced his harshest critics, were far closer in style and sensibility to his own paintings than to Vermeer's, which they barely resembled. In addition, the sale of the fake Vermeer to Göring was made only on the condition that 200 Dutch artworks stolen by the Nazis earlier in the war would be returned to Holland.

1947
The United States Air Force is separated from the Army, creating a new US military division. The new Air Force flag is ultramarine blue with the department's insignia at the center.

1960
Artist Yves Klein works with the pigment dealer, Edouard Adam, to patent International Klein Blue, which is made up of ultramarine blue suspended in synthetic resin. The colorless carrier dries to a matte finish, creating the look of raw pigment and an illusion of depth on the painted surface.

1979–1989
The USSR moves troops into Afghanistan. Mujahideen leader Ahmed Shah Massoud maintains control of the lapis lazuli mines in Badakshan and uses revenues from his ten-percent "revolutionary tax" on gem sales to help fund the war against the Soviets.

1989
With the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, lapis mining booms—production increases by fifty percent. Massoud's forces earn an estimated five million dollars per year during this period.

1996
The Taliban seizes power in Afghanistan and the regular lapis trade routes are disrupted. Massoud, now working with the Northern Alliance, fights the Taliban, in part with funds that are again raised through lapis sales.

SEPTEMBER 9, 2001
Ahmed Shah Massoud is killed by a camera-bomb discharged during an "interview" with assassins posing as TV journalists. In retrospect the elimination of Massoud, a potentially strong opponent of the Taliban, is widely interpreted as being part of Al-Qaeda's preparation for the airline hijackings two days later in the United States. Subsequently the US-lead war against the Taliban halts mining and sales of lapis lazuli. After 20 years of war and neglect, the mines, some of them thousands of years old, are reported to be in very dangerous states of disrepair. Reserves of the gemstone are stockpiled. Prices in the Peshwar market drop to all-time lows.

Photo: Matthew Buckingham

Buckingham. Pages 8 and 9 from "Ultramarine," Cabinet, *no. 10 (Spring 2003), pp. 7–9.*

political, economic, and philosophical contexts. Buckingham has researched the history of home movies (*Situation*), and of the aerial viewpoint (*Muhheakantuck*), and has probed the history of monumental sculpture while at the same time looking at the historical conventions of photographing such monuments (*The Six Grandfathers*). The history of language, another crucial component of his work, is directly addressed in both *Definition* and *Muhheakantuck*. Recently, these inquiries have become more prominent. *Ultramarine* (2003), a project made for *Cabinet* magazine's series of articles "Colors," links the use of lapis lazuli in Renaissance painting to the cessation of mining of the mineral in present-day Afghanistan following the military responses to 9/11 there. (A timeline is accompanied by a photograph of a blue mussel shell.) *One Side of Broadway* (2005) investigates the history of photography and early cinema in and of New York City, taking as its starting point *Both Sides of Broadway*, a book published in 1910 by Rudolph De Leeuw. Here Buckingham reveals the connections of early photography to commercial advertising and spectacular entertainment, but undoes photography's early totalizing ambitions to provide a representation of the city by only photographing a partial view of the street. Even more recently, the artist has begun a project focusing on Louis Le Prince, who invented a moving image camera prior to the Lumière brothers. By addressing the history of mediums and of forms, Buckingham produces an astonishing kind of medium reflexivity. This is quite distinct from the modes of reflexivity at work in the structuralist film of Michael Snow or the photo-conceptualism of John Hilliard, to name two artists who addressed the technological properties of photographic mediums.[36] At the same time, this reflexivity has meant that Buckingham has avoided a criticism that has been made of one of the historiographers whose work has been informative for him. Reviewing Hayden White's *Tropics of Discourse*, Dominick LaCapra complained that White "assumes the mastery of 'logocentric' philosophy over rhetoric." White might convincingly critique other historians, but "he writes from a position itself constituted and secured after an important battle has seemingly been won and without inquiring into the *casus belli*."[37] White's own forms, LaCapra suggests, should be subjected to scrutiny. Buckingham never presumes that the components of his work are ahistorical and exempt from inquiry: self-scrutiny pervades his practice.

The second concluding point about the artist as historian concerns methodology. Coming to historical representation outside the context of academic history, and aware of the critiques made of this discipline, the artist as historian is able to work with a methodological freedom and creativity without sacrificing

36.   Marine Hugonnier has also addressed forms in this way. In the trilogy of films *Ariana* (2003), *The Last Tour* (2004), and *Traveling Amazonia* (2006), she has considered the ambitions of the panoramic shot, the aerial shot, and the tracking shot, paying particular attention to the kind of power that each presumes.
37.   Dominick LaCapra, "A Poetics of Historiography: Hayden White's *Tropics of Discourse*," in *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 76.

rigor. As has become clear, Buckingham carries out extensive research in libraries and archives, but at the same time other research methods have informed his work. There is his receptiveness to found objects (the film canisters that propelled the making of *Situation*, the marker that Sharon comes across in *Amos Fortune Road*); also the importance of sites of memory, whether Absalon's statue or Mount Rushmore. These sites are often distrusted by historians because of their centrality to nationalist narratives, but for Buckingham they prompt inquiries about such narratives. Buckingham also posits, albeit with some hesitation, that new forms of monuments might foster memory for particular social groups, as *Detour* suggests. In more recent projects, Buckingham has used other research methods—for instance, carrying out interviews with retired sailors before filming *Obscure Moorings* (2006), but the most interesting turn in his recent work (though already present in *Amos Fortune Road*) has been toward fiction. Both *A Man of the Crowd* (2003) and *Obscure Moorings* begin with historical works of fiction—Edgar Allan Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" and Herman Melville's novel *Redburn* and short story "Daniel Orme." In the first, Buckingham re-created Poe's tale (setting it in Vienna) to think through the histories of urban representation and subjectivity; in the second, fiction was used as a starting point to address the recent history of shipping, the fate of the docking industry, and the associated gentrification of Liverpool. The point has not been to intertwine and confuse fiction and documentary modes of representation as much as to treat works of fiction themselves as historical documents that are as valid starting points for reflections on present conditions as conventional documents might be.

Introducing a recent book by Reinhart Koselleck, Hayden White has written, that "the critical historian must proceed on the basis of the realization that she has to invent a language adequate to the representation of historical reality for her own time and place of work."[38] This reflection brings me to the final points about the artist as historian. At a moment where the critique of master narratives seems urgent once again, Buckingham has managed to use the modes of art to invent such an adequate language. His work can represent stories about the past, and often previously unacknowledged ones—all the while subjecting conventional modes of narrative and historiography to critical scrutiny. But what makes his work so compelling, and what perhaps differentiates it from critical work of a previous generation, is that the deconstructive tendency is a starting rather than an ending point. Buckingham will fracture narratives, he will draw attention to the construction of knowledge as much as to the fabrication of his work, but he will not leave his viewer in a pessimistic situation of relativism or utter skepticism, where it might seem that all interpretations and representations of the past are arbitrary and equally valid. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has described "the greatest

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38.   Hayden White, "Foreword," in Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p.xiii.

Buckingham. Still from Obscure Moorings. *2006.*

gift of deconstruction" as "transforming conditions of impossibility into possibil-ity," and this is the gift Buckingham takes.[39]

And so I want to end these thoughts by recalling the way the future is repre-sented in Buckingham's work, and by suggesting that the artist is a historian who can open up new ways of thinking about the future. The future is one where the histories of the dispossessed are acknowledged, whether they are the Lenape or the founders of Los Angeles. The future is one where nationalistic monuments fade into air and crumble away. Previously underrecognized stories are told, new visions are created, but equally important is the *work* set off by Buckingham's projects and how this work creates new futures, how his *forms* act as an impetus for "trans-forming impossibility into possibility." I am thinking here of the way he encourages viewers to reassemble narratives after their decomposition, so that, for instance, the prehistory of globalization can emerge as an urgent narrative from what had appeared as a random collection of information and events as described in *Situation Leading to a Story*. I am concerned with the way he presents the horizon in

39.   Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 201.

Muhheakantuck as an acknowledgment of what cannot be known and as an impetus for unlearning,[40] I am concerned with the radical openness of *Definition.* Though necessarily disorientated at first, viewers are encouraged to reassemble for themselves, and Buckingham's work would be nothing were it not for this reconstruction. Since he does not go down the increasingly well-trodden path of revisiting unrealized utopian dreams of the past to imagine new futures, Buckingham's work might seem pessimistic, especially since his work revisits moments of calamity, dispossession, and violence. But his *is* work oriented toward the future, and avoiding both nostalgia and despair, it remains ever hopeful.

40.   Buckingham has spoken about the importance to him of Spivak's notion of "unlearning." Discussing his preparations for his work *Traffic Report,* which involved running a seminar at the Washington University School of Art in Saint Louis, he said, "We based our seminar around a notion of 'unlearning.' Writers like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Raymond Williams approach knowledge as a process that necessarily involves 'unlearning' as well as learning. This could be characterized as a process of self-evaluation or self-criticism—not only questioning what we know but how we know something." Matthew Buckingham in conversation with Robin Clark, pamphlet produced by the Saint Louis Art Museum for *Currents* 94 (2005), n.p.