

Transcript of the Cat Notebook



I kept the Cat Notebook next to the Mac to capture the ideas that occurred to me as I worked in Photoshop restoring the photographs, and separating them into layers for animation: I had noticed that the process of working on the images seemed to activate what Michail Czikszenmihalyi would call 'flow'. I had a sense of a deeper engagement with the images (I began flippantly to call it the 'zen' of Photoshop): I began to see things in them I had not previously noticed. Working at such a magnified level on the images was thus helping me to see them, and to see things in them that I had hitherto missed. Examining them via the Photoshop processes was thus a form of interrogation of the pictures, akin to engaging with family photographs that Annette Kuhn details in her book *Family Secrets* (2002). The photographs here, however, are not family pictures; they are photographs of strangers, whose names are no longer known.

What follows is therefore not a coherent essay of organised material, but constitutes the unthoughts that came to mind over a period of several weeks, as I worked on the photographs.

The same bank cloth
or style of baird cloth
in the Woods children
+ the Walker family.

- what happened to that
chair?

- what happened to that
table etc. dress?

- where that body
new?

German Soldier.

- the white marks
seem to be damage to paper
- the cream are dirt from
the processing.

- Learning some is important.
- the texture, left focus is
part of the aura of the
image.

- I can see a fingerprint
from whoever developed a
touched the photo while
it was still wet.

**Photo: New Army
Restoration**

Contemporary faces.
Faces that look like WWI
Really it's the hair. Men's faces seem to have change little.
The women's faces seem to have changed more
- but this is the makeup (Photoshop in the flesh).

A pock mark, like a bullet hole (in the surface) over someone's chest. Healed by Photoshop.
Tidying is like bringing them back.

There are people alive today descended from, or related to these men. People who look like these people.

Where are they now?

These are the Facebook photos of their time.

When making the blank 'plate' image to make the backgrounds for the parallax shots, there is something ghostly about the absence of the men.
(I decide to include it in the work).

*Photograph of unknown subjects by unknown photographer.
Cap badges:
Uniform: New Army, 1915+*





Photographs

These are pictures of ghosts but there is a wider cast of ghosts.

The ghosts of their original owners

Mothers, fathers, wives, friends, lovers, brothers, sister, sons, daughters...

Passed through families, their names attached by the threads of memory and oral narratives of genealogy till the last fragile thread is broken. They are adrift. Nameless. The flotsam and jetsam of house clearances and attic junk sales.

Photographs are mute.

The subjects in them are silent. Silence.

They cannot speak of their intentions.

What they are leaving behind.

What they have seen.

The innocence and youth is foregrounded against a truth that might be different.

Some of them are thieves, rogues, swindlers, wife beaters. But they are here 'generalised' into the young and the innocently unsuspecting. Each image, because it is the 'before' of the war, is therefore a tragedy. They become this because we have hindsight. Dramatic irony.

A war in which photographs became an intermediary – conveying information.

There is vision – we can witness too

Official but censorship – the controls on vision by the authorities.

Plus the usual relationships between photographer, camera and subject.

What have these eyes seen?

What will these eyes see. What lies ahead?

Anger at witnessing – as in Owen's *Dulce et Decorum Est*.

The photos that are 'Facebook' snapshots of friends at rest in a far away place - smoking, lounging, the leirue of war.

Kerfoot

Am I the only one now who is seeing this? Is this the only photograph or one of a few scattered elsewhere?

I think of all the eyes who have seen this image.

Damage is the archaeology of looking and remembering.

The indistinct face.

Soft focus like memory.

Sometimes scratches across the whole surface only 'read' when pulled back – in extreme close up, they disappear.

At full view they become visible and make a pattern that disrupts the information beneath.

Restoring these images is sometimes repairing damage from handling – folds, tears, surface scratches.

But sometimes it is correcting hasty, dirty, dusty processing.

I am making these images better than they were when originally processed.

Is this akin to the Victorian repairing, rebuilding and remaking Tudor houses that never existed in quite the way they end up after 'improvement'?

Erasing time

Erasing my Nana's handwriting

Written in biro. At first it felt like a sacrilege that she'd done this: that she had additionally damaged them. But it's a trace of someone else's memory, someone who is also now long gone, and who I miss with an ache.


Tracing over her handwriting with Photoshop's spot healing brush, my hand makes the moves hers must have done.

I do not want to wipe her out. I want to bring her back.

Mirrors don't reveal their surfaces – (unless they are mottled, or dirty) – we look through the surfaces until the surface is revealed by dust.

Poignancy after restoring old anonymous images, in restoring images of people I have met ... an ache. A regret about not doing this earlier for them (although Photoshop was not invented then!).

Mr Kerfoot neighbour



Restoring and making the plate makes me think of 3D space because I have to work out what was behind the figures.

I get a sense of what the room behind the figures looked like. The photographer's set is gradually foregrounded.

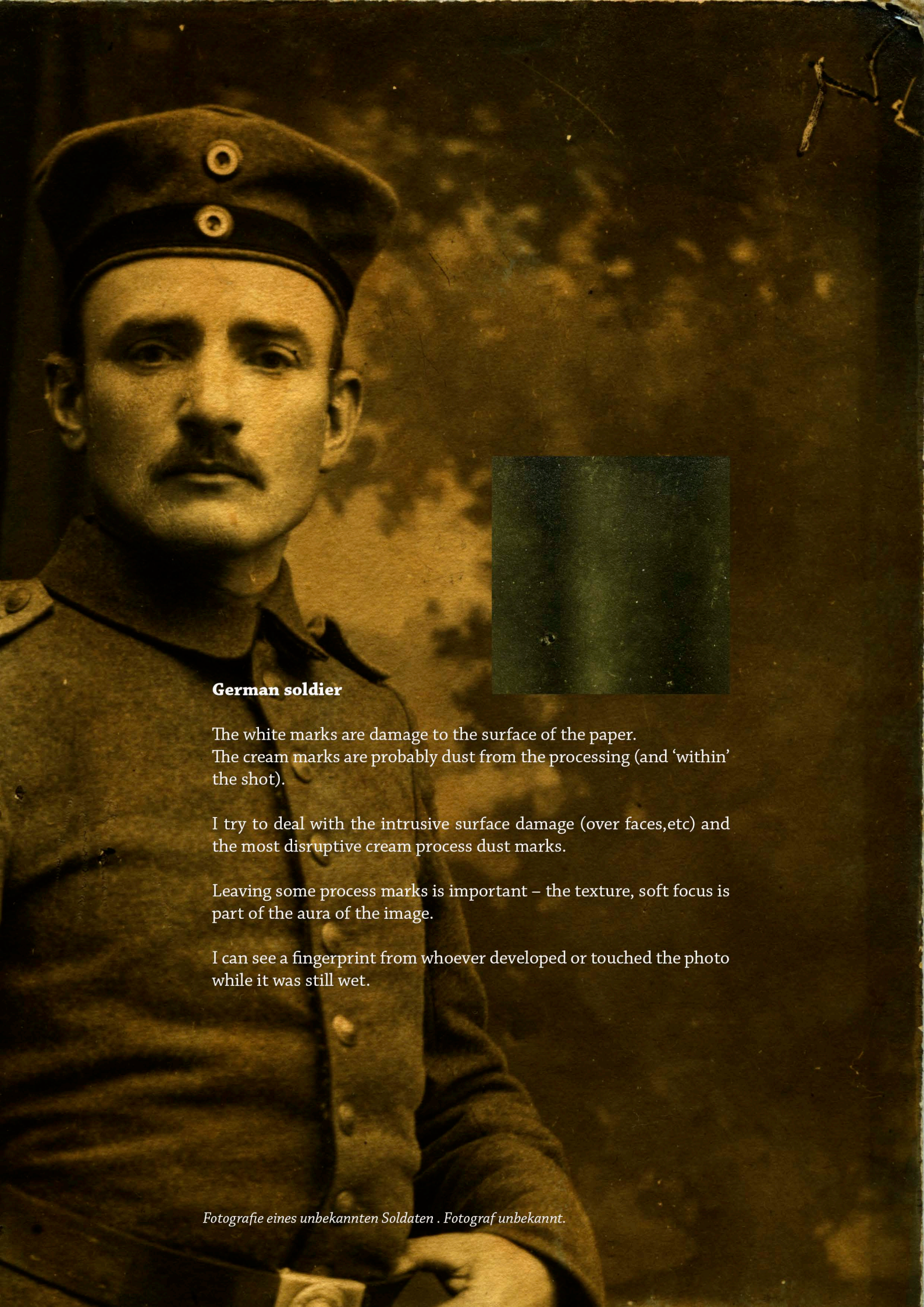
They are theatrical backdrops.

The same backcloth or style of backcloth in the Woods children and the Walker family shots. Taken at the same time?

What happened to that chair?

What happened to that table etc dress?

Where is that body now?



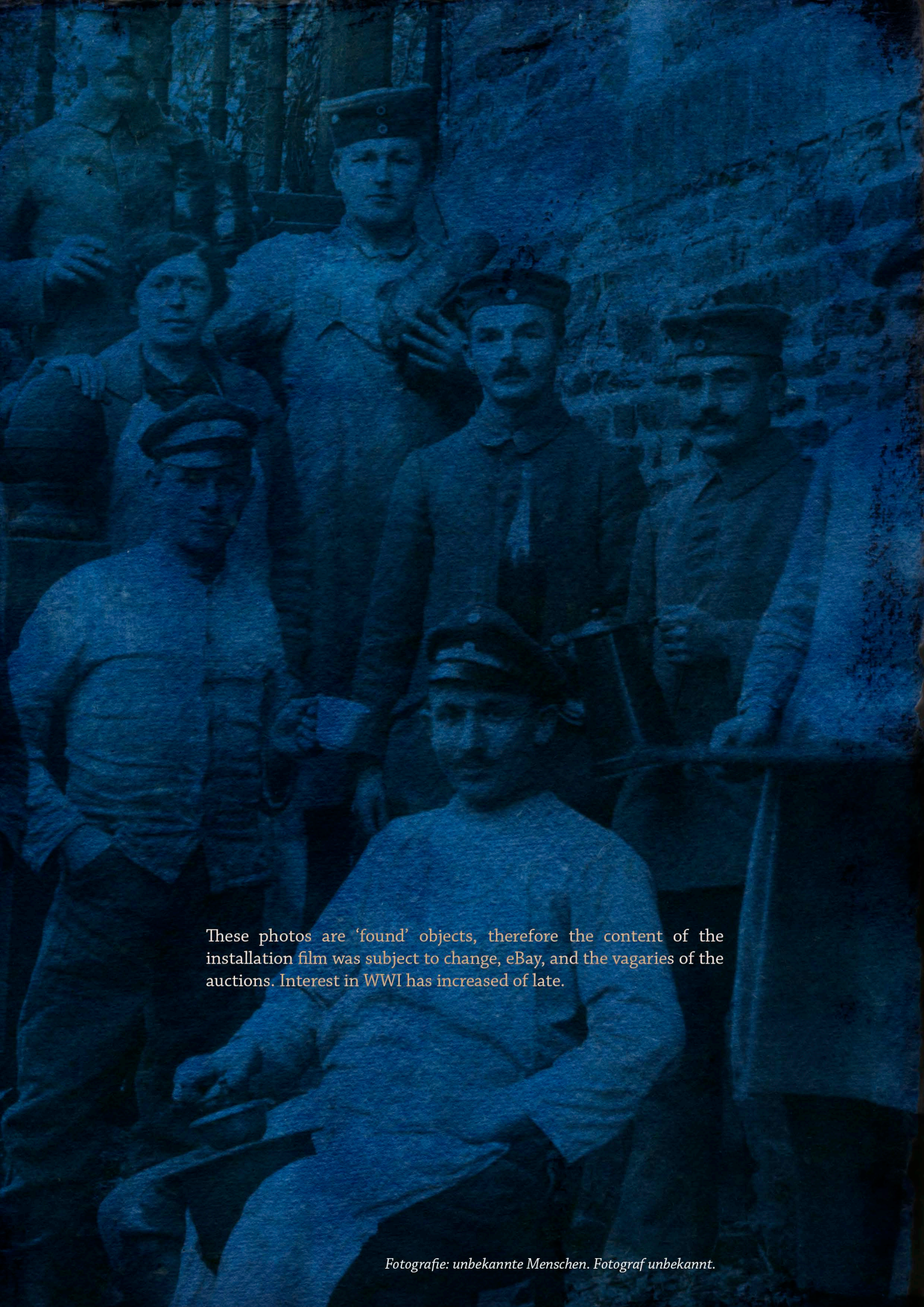
German soldier

The white marks are damage to the surface of the paper.
The cream marks are probably dust from the processing (and 'within' the shot).

I try to deal with the intrusive surface damage (over faces, etc) and the most disruptive cream process dust marks.

Leaving some process marks is important – the texture, soft focus is part of the aura of the image.

I can see a fingerprint from whoever developed or touched the photo while it was still wet.



These photos are 'found' objects, therefore the content of the installation film was subject to change, eBay, and the vagaries of the auctions. Interest in WWI has increased of late.

Fotografie: unbekannte Menschen. Fotograf unbekannt.



Smiling Boy

I first thought this boy was smiling, but the more I work on the picture, the less sure I am of his smile. In close up his expression seems blurred, as if he smiled and 'unsmiled' during the exposure.

The expression is changing. During exposure. During my encounter with the image. This is what I want from the animations: subtle, soft, almost not-there movement...

His uniform is the later cost cutting design. Surely these boys and men then knew more of what the reality was. Conscription was brought in to maintain the flow of recruits.

A photograph speaks of pride and fear of loss. It records. Archives that which we fear we will lose: people, memories, details...

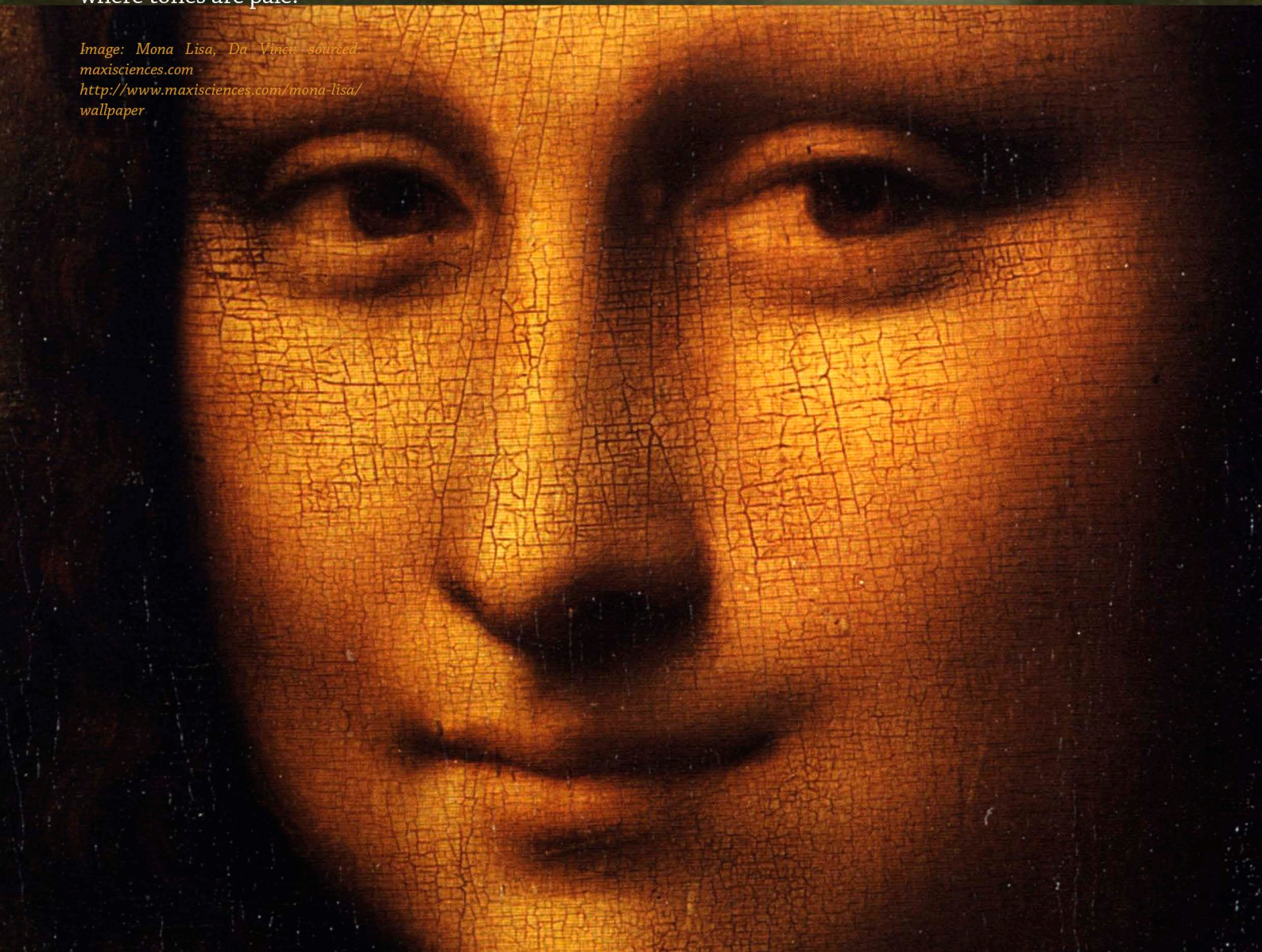
Photograph of unknown subject. Photographer unknown.

Sometimes close up, these faces have the classic 'atmosphere' of painting – the soft tones and blurred focus disintegrate the 'reality' of the image and it becomes impressionistic. rather than 'photographic'.

In close up damage is visible which is invisible to the naked eye. I am shocked at the hitherto invisible surface abrasions on the surface of The Smiling Boy.

Certain marks on his face remind me of the craqueleur of varnish in old paintings. I've seen this before on the faces of other subjects in other old images. Perhaps, it is the weave of the paper revealed where tones are pale.

*Image: Mona Lisa, Da Vinci, sourced:
maxisciences.com
[http://www.maxisciences.com/mona-lisa/
wallpaper](http://www.maxisciences.com/mona-lisa/wallpaper)*



The Things I Think as I Photoshop

About the age of this man.

The lines between his eyes.

An older man.

A clerk – thin – not manual labour. Glasses – someone who works with papers, accounts.

Hands

Staring not into the camera, but somewhere camera right, distantly. Nobleness is signified.

Soft focus on the chest – breathing during exposure?

How long would the camera be exposing in 1914 – 18?

Someone joining up because of the war.

Belt + badge – date?

Photographer's studio setting.

Theatrical pose – he is performing 'himself'.

Performing 'soldier'.

Performing 'nobility'.

Uniform – no badges. Only an insignia on the cap. New.

Scratches on the photo foreground its 'photograph-ness'

- its surface taking away from its depth.

- As the speckles disappear, the person comes forward – the surface disappears.

- Soft focus and nostalgia.

Damage fixing. Dust on the negative or the paper at the point of developing the image. Not damage after the event.

(Latent image and developed image. Invisible atomic changes in the silver halide crystals after light exposure.)

So are thee cheap, mass or fast produced? Un care?

The large older photos (cabinet) are expensive and better (fewer developing mottles, better focus).

Cartes de visite are quite speckly.

Photograph of unknown subject by unknown photographer.

Cap badge: Royal Engineers

Uniform: pocket tucks and shoulder reinforcements suggest 1914, 1915, after which the uniform changed.





Performing in a setting – a painted backdrop.

You begin to become involved – personally – you know the face, you've scrutinized it intimately.

You see things in an extreme close up that a normal photographic gaze does not see

- unconscious seeing

+ conscious seeing collide

You see the detail of the set which is always usually merely suggestive (and background).

You see the damage in the printing (processing) and subsequently to the surface during handling and storage.

Turning the Photoshop healing layer on and off reveals the past and conceals the surface.

Difference between the blemishes on the surface + the blemishes within the subject as it was captured.

Like an archeological trace of the dust on the lens of the camera, or floating in the air, landing on the emulsion of the film / plate as it was processed.

Scratches as the film moved through camera – or on the plate from frequent use + re-use.

In making selections of these old photos, the eye is much better than the PS algorithms.

The strange feeling of creating the background for the parallax view when the soldier begins to disappear under the clone tool.

What also becomes clear is the shabbiness of the set – the cloth over the chair, the dirty floor, the rough painting of the background. Pathos.

The steps leading up away into the light. He is facing away from them.

His arm is in the position it would be in were he holding a baton or a captain's stick. But he holds his belt. No leather belt. He is not an officer.

The backcloth falls over the chequerboard floor,
not quite completing the illusion of carpet over
tiles – the vanishing point is not in alignment. It
is all fake. All shabby. All very sad.

The disjunct between backgrounds and the
soldier's uniform.

Classical Bucolic

Pillars foliage

And furniture

A collision of genres or modes.

Today, I found in the Devastated Country shot, some tiny soldiers in the landscape that hadn't been apparent to the naked eye, only in extreme close up. Later I found others. It becomes apparent that the image is of a trench.

Similar to realizing that the painted backdrop in the Walker Family image is of an impressionistic tree.

Photograph: unknown landscape. Photographer unknown.



The missing. Lost in the landscape still.
Lost in the photograph.
Those who are names only.
The memorials - Thiepval.

Missing names
Identities dislocated by time and slipping memory.

How many missing on the memorials?

Post-modern dislocation of names and faces and physical remains.

A tripartite forgetting.
A separation – fragmentation in forgetting.
Photography capturing 'reality' but misremembering it.



MILITARY AND CIVILIAN CASUALTIES, WWI.
(Wikipedia; 1 June 2015)

“17 million deaths.
20 million wounded.
10 million military deaths.
Allies – 6 million military deaths
Central Powers – 4 million.

2 million – diseases
6 million missing
Disease and death POWs – not sure of this stat.

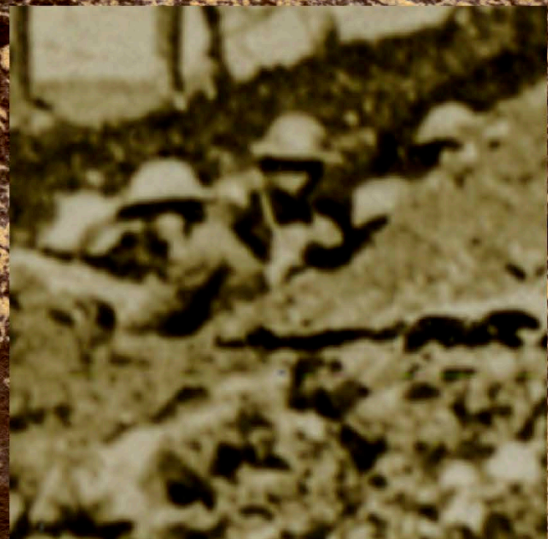
300,000 Allied and German killed on the Somme.

19,240 British and Commonwealth troops killed in action on the first day alone.
Thiepval, Somme – 72,090 missing British and Commonwealth names listed.

Menin Gate, Belgium, Ypres Salient 54,896 Allied missing.

Doaumont Ossuary, Battle of Verdun. 130,000 French and German dead.”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I_casualties



STATISTICS

“How many soldiers of the British Army do not have a known grave?
In March 2009, the totals from the Commonwealth War Graves
Commission for the First World War are as follows. These figures
include all three services:

Buried in named graves : 587989

No known graves, but listed on a memorial to the missing : 526816,
of which

- buried but not identifiable by name : 187861

- therefore not buried at all : 338955

The last figure includes those lost at sea.

So it is fair to say that about half are buried as known soldiers, with
the rest either buried but unidentifiable or lost.”

The Long Long Trail

<http://www.1914-1918.net/faq.htm>

*Reconnaissance photograph of shell holes in Flanders. Possibly No Man's Land.
Official Photograph. Photographer unknown.*

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I cannot cut these images.

I cannot pierce them. They have an aura about them to me.

Perhaps a Benjamin aura because they are actual rather than digital. I can digitally manipulate but these seem like the original file (negative), the unadulterated file (although they are, as chemical photographs, constructs, not slices of life.)

They are like mirrors, the subjects of whose reflections have disappeared. Reflections with no source, and thus no material progenitor. They are ghosts made of light and silver and sepia.

There is the thought that the men depicted in these images saw them, held them, sent them on...