The first question is this no doubt: why have I waited until the last moment? The second: why this title, why this opening? The third: why start by asking these questions?

Georges Perec, *Je suis né*

MATERIAL

The

Kim Schoen

ELEVEN

Moyen

Complet

What is the Moyen Complet? For the purposes of this essay, the *moyen complet* may be translated or interpreted to mean: the medium complete, the medium finished, the middle complete, the unfinished finished, the median way, the sort-of typology, the fragment (but not really), the average complete. The writings of Georges Perec have been the inspiration for my title—and hence the naming of this phenomenon, which will henceforth be described, is in French.

1.0 HOW TO BEGIN: MAKE A LIST

I will begin to explain the moyen complet using a compound word I came across while reading about Deleuze, Gregg Lambert's *The No Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze: indecision-hesitation-stammering* [01]. It seems quite orderly to use these three words as a compound thematic to explicate my idea for this essay.

But I have now begun by making a list; an introductory thematic that has nothing to do with any of the three words in the compound. No matter. Authors of critical texts come up with categories that may seem quite staunch and logical, but it occurs to me that they had to make up those categories to begin with, and there could have been more, or less, or different ones. As an example, Henri LeFebvre, in *Rhythmanalysis*, uses a classification of rhythms that includes a.) Secret rhythms, b.) Public rhythms, c.) Fictional rhythms, and d.) Dominating-dominated rhythms. In the book, there are varying typographic expressions of these titles: semi-bold italics, bold, plain italics. I found myself daydreaming of other categories that could have been used and justified in this list, such as e.) Flagellated rhythms.

We will let these conflations of categories entangle themselves at the get-go. This leads me to bring up another point: the idea of an absurd universe, where meaning is "not provided

01. Lambert, G. (2002). *The Non-Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze*, New York and London: Continuum Books.

by the natural order, but rather can be created, provisionally and unstably, by human beings' actions and interpretations."[02]

1.1 THE ABSURD : INVITING RIDICULE

Absurd—*incongruous; inviting ridicule; "the absurd excuse that the dog ate his homework;" "that's a cockeyed idea;" "ask a nonsensical question and get a nonsensical answer;" "a contribution so small as to be laughable;" "it is ludicrous to call a cottage a mansion;" "a preposterous attempt to turn back the pages of history;" "her conceited assumption of universal interest in her rather dull children was ridiculous."*[03]

It ***is*** ludicrous to call a cottage a mansion. This essay will therefore stay with the terms of the cottage. Overarching ideas about tidy, theoretically logical orders, while enticing, have always prompted in me a slight suspicion. To explain everything, without exception, no loose ends—it would indeed be thrilling and elegant! I really would like to explain everything without exception regarding my theory about the *moyen complet*. In this I admittedly invite ridicule. But isn't this how everyone starts off, imagining a finish beyond one's wildest dreams, excited for the future?

MATERIAL

2.0 INDECISION

It was Beckett who wrote, *"I can't go on. I'll go on,"* but I can't help thinking that most times it is the proportionally more morose inverse that applies: *"I'll go on. I can't go on."* People get excited at the beginnings of things. But as time passes and agitation increases due to the varying frustrations that accompany ambition, activity wanes. One of the reasons for the stoppage is the case of indecision.

The *moyen complet* attempts to describe a phenomenon in photography : the making of a series, whereupon a maker begins something caught between two impulses : 1) a preoccupation with categorizing and classifying, the seductive order of a typology

02. Description found using an online dictionary, in the nascent note-taking phase of this essay.
03. Another online dictionary swipe.

sending its siren song our way, and 2) an aversion to the dangerous, historically perverted uses of typologizing—and, as an addendum to this, 2.1) a sidelong glance towards the more romantic version of truth emerging through the form of the fragment. Caught in this bind between 1, 2 (and 2.1), the finish of a series becomes not logically impossible, but humanly impossible. Trapped in a disfigured binary, unable to avoid the beginning impulse towards categorizing, but unable to finish due to the suspicion of the attempt, the series as *moyen complet* stops in this middle ground, fertilizing it.

I interviewed the artist Nicholas Grider in the beginning of my research for this essay, since I suspected we had some things in common regarding our ideas about 'the series' in photography. Nicholas is building a typological archive entitled *Men in Suits*. The men are mostly white middle-aged males, performing the trope of being "a man in a business suit." He explains:

> But nobody's photographed at work, nor at an office, and most of the people I've photographed actually aren't businessmen, and they only put the suit on specifically for the photo, and its not necessarily a suit that fits them well or one that they're comfortable wearing.

Nicholas said that it became about the men engaging with this one kind of identity, but not really having the background for it, not having the field to the ground of it. He goes on to say, "Although the series has strict limitations associated with it, it's a theoretically unbounded project, it could be iterable with many, many more men. A typology not being able to be completed is the thing I'm really interested in about typologies. It's not a neutral sort of thing, the typology (i.e., taking pictures of all the people in a prison system and trying to catalog people like that, then constructing the archetype of what a criminal was supposed to look like, solely upon looking at composites of the images.) But it's an

interesting tool to try to use, especially dealing with the kinds of content where you wouldn't expect a typology to happen."

Nicholas feels that people often fall back on the typology, especially within photographic practice, because of the documentary ties that photography still has, even when migrated towards a contemporary art landscape. I agree with him. Typologizing attempts to ward off chaos. Its initial impulse is to generalize and then encompass particulars. The poet Robert Hass argues that in our first experience of the world, we are "clued to the hope of a shapeliness of things," which, he argues, is the psychological basis for the power and necessity of the artistic form. To begin with the infant "looking-out-of-the-eyes" and seeing phenomena organize themselves, and "thinking this is going to happen and having it happen might be, then, the authentic source of the experience of being, of identity, which implies that a lot of things are the same thing."[04] Camus writes that "to understand is, above all, to unify. It could be a natural impulse of human consciousness."[05]

"When I think about typologies, it's about trying to extract some sort of generalization from a group of similar objects," says Nicholas. "Within a collection of, say, men, you'd have a typology of what businessmen look like, or a typology of what a policeman looks like, or a typology of what a gay 27-year-old actor-model looks like. You know, you can stretch things into that kind of universality, which is really, really troubling as well, and not finishable because you probably can't photograph all the policemen in the world, also problematic because there's no way that universality that's implied ever works. What I am trying to do is engage these ideas—how there's a typological impulse that we all have to organize our worlds that doesn't quite work, and it comes from different ideologies that influence us. Pointing out the flaws and problems of the typology is important to me."

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04. Hass, R. ( ). *One Body: Some Notes on Form*, XXX.
05. Camus, A. (1955). *The Myth of Sisyphus & Other Essays*, New York: Knopf, p. 13.

Once perverted, the typology gives a platform to criticize or further investigate other typologies, which is also fun. The typology is so very tempting.

> So very tempting to want to distribute the entire world in terms of a single code. A universal law would then regulate phenomena as a whole: two hemispheres, five continents, masculine and feminine, animal and vegetable, singular, plural, right, left, four seasons, five senses, six vowels, seven days, twelve months, twenty-six letters.
>
> Unfortunately, this doesn't work, has never even begun to work, will never work. Which won't stop us from continuing for a long time to come to categorize this animal or that according to whether it has an odd number of toes or hollow horns.
>
> —Georges Perec, *Think/Classify*

Forming a single code: it seems so right in its neatness. But then, the inevitable entropy and disillusionment created in the backwash of the utopia. The potency of the two poles of order and chaos artists oscillate between is strong. And the vibrating, almost radioactive indecision one finds oneself caught in creates a field for the absurd.

Fischli & Weiss's series *Airports (1987–2006)* is a product of this tension. As the Tate Modern press release says, the series focuses on the "banal side of air travel; the fuel vehicles, the baggage trucks…" It is a photographic subject most often documented by amateur photographers: travelers beginning the narrative of their vacations, or advertising brochure photographers trying to highlight the industriousness of the tarmac for an annual report.

This quasi-typology was shown alongside *Flowers/Mushrooms (1997–1998)* at the Tate to create an even larger field of contradiction. The large-scale use of color photography parodies today's penchant for such presentations, and the ubiquitousness of

the subject matter and the color-poster style of the composition (sunsets, flatness) teases the luxe display even further. One is caught between completely letting go and luxuriating in the giant photographs, and laughing at seeing what is usually quite a serious subject—the typology—treated as kitsch. But these photographs are beautifully composed; Fischli & Weiss said they made sure to photograph in certain dramatic weather conditions for the airports, which lent them a pensive dramatic quality—the pensive dramatic quality of airplanes being refueled.

These series are not exhaustive, and their absurdity rests in the effort to typologize even the most banal of subjects. The making up of provisional orders, a penchant for the ridiculous and the absurd—these are endearing habits of the *moyen complet*.

"The world in itself is not reasonable," writes Camus; "that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart."[06] This longing for clarity spawns typologies, ordering, systems. They all start off orderly enough. But again, as Camus says, "it is always easy to be logical. It is almost impossible to be logical to the bitter end."[07] The state of the absurd is a constant vacillation between these poles, never an abandonment of either. Man links the world and the absurd; it is he who binds them together. It's really not as gloomy as it sounds; one of the absurd joys is indeed creation. In the middle of this delirious universe, we are left to describe, to enrich, to fill the field with multiplicities. Fischli & Weiss create a new middle ground, one where enjoyment can take hold.

MATERIAL

RAT: Suddenly this overview.

BEAR: The truth comes to light when you think really hard. (Both laugh.)

RAT: It's a joy to be this clear.

BEAR: Order is beauty.

RAT: Mmmm. Only to a certain extent. I wouldn't go that far.

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06. *Ibid*, p. 16. **07.** *Ibid*, p. 7.

BEAR: But how simple everything is, fundamentally.
RAT: But only a very few people can see that.
BEAR: Not a widespread view.
RAT: Those poor, confused people have no idea. [08]

2.1 AN ADDENDUM TO INDECISION

Indecisiveness is not really valued too much. But decisiveness is really lauded. "He made a decision, and stuck to it." This statement seems proud, even in its flatness. And, often, decisions made because they must be become that flat. Indecisiveness in an artist can produce some very exciting pathways, like the meandering burrowing of fungus on a seashell.

I have a bone to pick with decisiveness. It relates quite neatly to the branding and marketing of artists in an international playing field. One is either bold or quiet, fantastical or meticulous; never both, never neither. Decisive choices made by artists get picked up on and magnified. The artist is required to be 'decisive,' even if it is decisive in regards to (shall it be a his or her?) choice to be indecisive, so that the marketplace can locate, understand, and utilize the work. It's irritating and exhausting to always know what you must do, as well as being extremely limiting. Nicholas says: "I don't really highly value style and what I guess you could call voice. I don't have a style. It entirely depends on what project I'm working on. That also leads to a schizoid idea—versus the idea of some person doing a particular kind of work in a particular way and that being what makes them meaningful as an artist. That common cliché of 'finding your voice'—that's complete bullshit. Because that's not how writing works, how language works within our system, our culture. The voice is simply a performance of a certain kind of authority over what you're doing. To find it means to just simply arrive somewhere and stop thinking. And I don't want to stop thinking."

08. FISCHLI & WEISS, from *The Least Resistance*, 1980–81.

Indecision is usually vilified for reducing people to inaction. Who are you if you cannot choose? People get fired for being indecisive. In terms of capitalism, indecisiveness freezes you in the interminable system of exchange that surrounds you. But indecision can also be a productive force. It can create new temporalities and possibilities. It can keep one going.

3. HESITATION

This section begins by completely contradicting the end of the last section. But Gregg Lambert has his compound word—*indecision-hesitation-stammering*—in the order that he has it, so we shall leave it without hesitation.

3.1 THE FALTERING

What came to the surface was of the nature of the fuzzy, the uncertain, the fugitive and the unfinished, and in the end I chose deliberately to preserve the hesitant and perplexed character of these shapeless scraps, to abandon the pretence of organizing them into something that would by rights have had the appearance (and seductiveness) of an article with a beginning, middle, and end.

— Georges Perec, *Think/Classify*

We have all begun a sentence confident in our forward trajectory, in our ability to 'say something'—and then faltered, realizing midway that our original point has either been lost in the ether of forgetfulness, or perhaps is just plain wrong, as we work out word that follows word. And thus, we *hesitate*.

We know of the imposing power of the sentence. The sentence "implies subjections, subordinations, internal reactions," says Barthes. "The Sentence is complete."[09] It is made up of capitals and periods. Completeness, finish, autonomy: all hazard a relationship to mastery. Barthes says, "In fact, it is the power

09. Barthes, R. (1975). *The Pleasure of the Text*, New York: Hill and Wang, p. 50.

of completion which defines sentence mastery…The professor is someone who finishes his sentences. The politician being interviewed clearly takes a great deal of trouble to imagine an ending to his sentence: and if he stopped short?"[10] Series made in the *moyen complet* often hesitate to finish their sentences. And this hesitancy forms a kind of arrhythmia in the repetition, an irregularity of pausing, creating the stops and starts that form a series. Not wanting to finish the sentence (the typology or the tautology) creates another type of series.

Valérie Jouve deals with the irrational sensations of living in a city. She often clusters her photographs into combinations of small series, or groups, depicting bodies in relation to the architecture they function in. Photography's ability to arrest, to pause a subject in mid-movement, creates in Jouve's photographs a sense of hesitation in pose, posture, and intention. The people in the photographs are stopped in awkward positions. They hesitate within the photographs. The subjects occupy midway points; they are neither here nor there; they are on a strange tiled bench on a rooftop, about to enter a revolving door, slumped over, one foot barely touching the ground, about to take in a breath, turning one's head toward or away from the camera. The decisive moment turns indecisive. A large grate darkens and obscures what might have been the picturesque flap of a man's jacket off his shoulder in the breeze.

Intervals—where a pause has been taken, a breath sucked in, a caesura created—call to mind ideas surrounding the dialectical image. Benjamin suggested that what he called a dialectical image could be a standstill, capable of halting of the endless churn of dialectical thought. An image's potential power lay in the interruption of everyday time, as shock. But Max Pensky writes that even Benjamin himself was unable to offer "a coherent, intelligible account of what dialectical images were."[11] Dialectical images carry,

11. Ferris, David S. (ed.) (2004). "Method and time: Benjamin's dialectical images," by Max Pensky, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. **10.** *Ibid*, p.50.

if not their own exclusive definition, rather, a sense of potential that lingers.

The pauses created from hesitancy form a sort of lingering. These intervals are hesitant and perplexed, and create an uncertain movement, one that vacillates, shilly-shally. One can begin to enjoy these pauses in themselves, without necessarily looking forward to 'what comes next.'

The intervals in Jouve's arrangements form a series of pauses and hesitations between photographs. There are linear, serial arrangements, but on the same wall, a large single photograph looms at above-normal height. Or there are small grids of photographs that appear to be of the typological sort, but next to those are diptychs and single images. The hanging creates a rhythm of potentialities *(so, photographs can hang like this!). One remembers Barthes' sly suggestion that "our very avidity for knowledge compels us to skim or skip certain passages (anticipated as "boring") in order to get more quickly to the warmer parts of the anecdote (which are always its articulations…)*[12]

The bodies travelling through the architecture of the gallery looking at the photographs configure themselves in much the same way as the subjects of the photographs do in the architecture of the city. A viewer can hesitate in front of Jouve's work. Barthes says that it is 'the very rhythm in what is read and not read that creates the pleasure"[13]—the pleasure and erotics of intermittence. There is no need to march from one photograph to the next; there is no need for a systematic progression. In this, there is pleasure in looking, hesitating, ignoring some photographs, moving quickly to some others.

Josef Sudek kept photographing a rose in a jam jar on the sill of his studio, but not systematically, and not with any great structure in mind. He made about seven photographs over about five years,

12. Barthes, R. (1975). *The Pleasure of the Text*, New York: Hill and Wang, p. 11.
13. *Ibid*, p. 11.

and perhaps the days on which he photographed them had personal significance, but this significance remains unknown for the viewer. The random pauses in between, the intervals between cut flowers in drinking glasses, gives the series a natural erratic rhythm and poignancy. Jelly jar, jam jar. Rose, rose, wisteria.

Barthes says that the pleasure he takes from reading—and the same could be said of looking at photographs—"is not necessarily the triumphant, heroic, muscular type. No need to throw out one's chest. My pleasure can very well take the form of a drift. *Drifting* occurs whenever I do not respect the whole…"[12]

Roni Horn's *Another Water* is a series where a reader can drift. Produced in the form of a book, each page is another image of the shifting, opaque, swirling waters of the occasionally deadly Thames. Underneath, text runs in a thin ribbon: accounts of people or things that have been lost in the river. One can drift, or dip in and out of the text and the photographs. They are seductive, mercurial, running.

We have now drifted from hesitation into drifting.

3.2 THE MIDDLE GROUND

I once saw a Christmas tree, still up in July, but flagging in a cement, public arena in downtown Boston. I joked with my friend about why it was still there. *"You do it,"* he pantomimed flatly, guessing at the conversation that might have been had between two underpaid colleagues in a city-governing events council. Things often don't get finished because of hesitation—the hesitation of procrastination, deferral, laziness, forgetfulness, blame, confusion, cancellation of funding. We are surrounded by things that have not been finished.

Jean-Marc Bustamante's photographs depict the halting involved in the construction of the landscape that surrounds us. He plays against tactics of ignoring or repressing the unfinished

12. Barthes, R. (1975). *The Pleasure of the Text*, New York: Hill and Wang, p. 11.

and chooses the outskirts of 'important' places to photograph with his large format camera. In *T.25.79* Bustamente shows us the foundation of a non-descript building, the brick work abandoned midway up. Never mind that this pause might have been, in 'real-time,' simply an afternoon's rest between days of labor and not an abandonment; it figures as one in the permanent halt of the photograph. This brick outline figures as stopped within the photograph, and the photograph gives it its purpose and end—to stand still and represent the unfinished. Bustamente's use of photography, with its infinite capacity for the arrest of objects, is turned toward the marginally noticed, the halt of the half-finished landscape. The *moyen* landscape, the middle ground: trees, pipes undug, an abandoned cement block, trash not yet picked up.

Middleness characterizes not only the content of the photographs but also the arrangements of them. Bustamante's book, *Bitter Almonds*, begins with a middle and ends with a middle. The first photograph in the book (none of which is numbered or titled) shows us a scene of a building covered in scaffolding, fencing, put up but slightly drooping, a ramp-like walkway that seems to lead nowhere, and some sort of red felt covering the sidewalk, which has been sullied by the crushed cement dust around it. The scene is not unfinished, but part-finished. The last photograph in the book shows us this scene: in the foreground, a non-functioning field, broken concrete blocks jutting out from it, dry weeds colonizing it; in the middle ground, an assortment of cars parked at odd angles; and in the background, apartment blocks with tall antennas shooting up from them, echoing the weeds. In the middle of the book, more city scenes caught between light and shadow, access and barrier. Both as image, and as series, Bustamante's *Bitter Almonds* stays halted in the middle ground, occupying it truculently.

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The hesitation toward finish characterizes the *moyen complet*. These types of series are hesitant to say something definite. Or rather, they say something definite about hesitation.

3.3 THE TRAILING OFF…

> I will probably not be able to think through or to finish any more projects. It is as if I were to say that it would be a nice excursion on foot to Hukvaldy and back. But I could not make it all the way anymore and certainly not back."
>
> —Josef Sudek

Elena Brotherus began a series of photographs of bridges. Their vantage point looks from a slightly lower height than an architectural surveyor, lower than even the human eye height. This gives a slightly pathetic feel to the perspective. Brotherus has said her interest in the bridges was because you couldn't see to the other side. Her series of bridges was never finished. Rather than setting up a system and functioning productively within it, the *moyen complet* leads one to begin something and then trail off. It leaves behind a fragment. "The world contains so much mess and visual noise, says Brotherus. "I have tried to mark off the interesting and significant fragments." In doing so, she leaves behind a fragment herself.

Blanchot marvels at Novalis and his novel in the vein of Marchën. "And here is the remarkable trait: not only will Novalis leave this novel unfinished, but he also will sense that the only way he could have accomplished it would have been to invent a new art: that of the fragment."[14] Blanchot writes that romanticism prompted the search for a new form of completion, "mobilizing the whole through its interruption…"

Trailing off could be considered the romantic way to leave a field. But upon further reflection, middleness does not have the same romantic connotations as the fragment, not entirely. Think of Pierre Bourdieu's book, *Photography: A Middlebrow Art*, and see what

14. Blanchot, M. ( ). *The Infinite Conversation*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, p. 358.

kind of sociological connotations the word middle carries; it's closer to low-brow than high-brow. There's something not entirely lofty about the *moyen complet*; it carries with it the sense of a failed goal, but one that does not reach romantic proportions. Blanchot writes that the system of the fragment found in the romantic, in most particularly Friedrich Schlegel, makes possible new relations that except themselves from the whole. But, he states, "naturally, this 'omission' or inflection is not explained by the simple failings of personalities that are too impatient or too subjective to reach the absolute."[15] Paul Valery was perhaps more realistic about artistic personalities in that he believed a work was never completed except "by some accident such as weariness, satisfaction, the need to deliver, or death: for, in relation to who or what is making it, it can only be one stage in a series of inner transformations."

Perhaps the *moyen complet* includes those who are too impatient, or too subjective to reach the absolute. Starting and trailing off, starting and trailing off…these artists create many paths to follow.

4.0 STAMMERING

There are times when the impulse to make photographs comes without an idea of what one really wants to photograph. It arrives with a feeling: *I don't know what I want to say, but I want to say something*. This is one possible reason for stammering—feeling the urge to communicate but not knowing what. One begins to say something, which then turns to a confusing utterance of meaningless sounds and words. Behind this, something of the sublime lurks: one feels that what needs to be expressed surpasses reason.

Absolute fright can also cause stammering, the involuntary repetitions and prolongations of sounds or syllables or words. Cartoons make the most of this signifier. One character stares at the

15. *Ibid*, p. 359.

looming danger behind another, and all he can do is stammer and point. Or there can be a psychological reason for stammering, then called "stuttering"— abnormal hesitations or pauses before speech, referred to by stutterers as ***blocks***, and the prolongation of certain sounds, usually vowels. Much of what constitutes stuttering cannot be observed by the listener, such as sound and word fears, situational fears, anxiety, tension, self-pity, stress, shame, and a feeling of "loss of control" during speech.[16]

Stammering means to struggle with finish. The middle ground of the communicative act becomes fraught with disfluency. A unit becomes superfluously repeated. Or there are unfilled pauses. Or filled pauses. The series includes random interjections as placeholders.

The repetitions in Michael Schmidt's *Ein-Heit* could be thought of as a kind of stammering. The series stutters between found photographs, re-photographed newspaper photographs, Schmidt's own photographs of people, buildings, fixtures, landscapes, and cityscapes in Germany. Schmidt flattens all sources into black and white and sizes them identically; this is now the 'unification' of his voice. It is a stammer now trapped under a hum. His work has been produced as a book by Steidl, and installed in many places, recently in the 2006 Berlin Biennial as a thin ring of photographs around a large room.

We see the enlarged dots of the newspaper in a portrait a of young girl surrounded by her family, garish over-enlarged teeth in a grin, fragments of speech from a newspaper, language carved into the side of a monument, the habitually blank, white, left-hand pages of the book suddenly disturbed by an image of marching. Legs frozen in marching. A contemporary photograph of a young girl with a heavy coat of make-up, erratically repeated in slightly different pose some pages later. We see a flat curtain closing off a

16. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stuttering
[accessed 20 August, 2007]

photograph, then, later, an elderly woman pulling back the drapes on her cinderblock flat.

Schmidt himself has this to say about the reproduction of sources

There are many reproductions of b&w rastered images from newspapers or other publications, often partial, close-up views. Some seem to show the layout of concentration camps, heaps of clothes or dead bodies. The raster artifacts and degree of magnification makes this sometimes difficult to ascertain. This seems to play on the difficulty or unwillingness of perceiving the harrowing traces of the past, and on the difficulty of discerning its historical truth if access is mediated by a multitude of receding, disputed, overworked and reprocessed sources. [17]

The push and pull of the receding and the overworked, the layering of the processed and reprocessed creates a rhythm that moves backwards and forwards toward the sources of stammering. The temporal condition of the stammer is a stalled present struggling to move from the past toward a future. This movement elicits the anxieties and tensions of culture struggling with how to engage the morass of the present. *Ein-Heit* (the symbolic significance of unification) produces Schmidt's response.

MATERIAL

Babbling (n), lallation (n), babble out (v), blab (v), blab out (v), blather (v), blether (v), blither (v), bubble (v), burble (v), guggle (v), gurgle (v), peach (v), ripple (v), sing (v), smatter (v), talk (v), tattle (v)

Roni Horn's *This is Me, This is You* shows us a young girl, Georgia, making faces, close up to the camera lens. Her shifting expressions are silly, serious, goofy, a rodomontade of face-pulling. The flummery of her expressions before Horn's camera both speaks of the experimental/experiential nature of her young age and Horn's more serious idea of the mutability of identity. The movement of the portraiture is in the shifting repeating of emphasis; each photograph of Georgia is face-as-emphasis. Georgia insists on herself each time differently. The act of photographing is concomitant with the act of

17. Notes on *Ein-Heit* by Michael Schmidt: http://www.oturn.net/probe/ein-heit.html [accessed 10 August, 2007]

expression (Horn is, as Gertrude Stein suggests, talking and listening at once.). The stutter of image making makes the portrait move, not as in 'one after the other,' but as in the shifting of emphasis—the no-particular-order of modulations, mutterings, assertions, and mouthings.

To stammer within a photographic series brings up all sorts of questions about why a thought might be difficult to finish, or merely undesirable to finish, enchanted as one can be in the present act of image-making as murmuring or babbling. And it repetitively (and obstinately) points at that strange undercurrent that keeps prompting us to want to say something.

5.0 EXHAUSTION

> So then I began to appeal to the exhausting resources of the irrational.
> —Georges Perec, *Life, A User's Manual*

Between the beginning of a series and the effort to find its own rational end lies a minefield of questions. Perec says that "in every enumeration there are two contradictory temptations. The first is to list everything; the second is to forget something. The first would like to close off the question once and for all; the second, to leave it open."[18] The kinds of series that lie in the *moyen complet* become a kind of *enumeration*, not a typology. Perec says: "Thus, between the exhaustive and the incomplete, enumeration seems to me to be, before all thought (and before all classification) the very proof of that need to name and to bring together without which the world ('life') would lack any points of reference for us." One *needs* to enumerate; the result is a photographic series in the *moyen complet*. It is not exhaustive, nor incomplete. But it can be exhausting. Nicholas, again, on *Men in Suits*, "How many will be enough was a question I kept asking myself. I did five, and that didn't seem like enough, because people were still getting to individual psychological

18. Perec, G. (1985). "Think/Classify," from *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (trans. John Sturrock), London: Penguin Books, p. 198

readings, and so I did ten, and then I did twenty, and then I thought: well, I'll just keep going, and see how the scale of this affects the project. The jury's still out as to how I feel about it. I started this not with a strict number in mind, but with an idea that I'm gonna pursue this rigorously—or until I get really sick of it, and then I might stop, temporarily or permanently."

How many is enough? In terms of the infinity of the typology, it depends on how you look at it. The theoretical answer is that there's never enough. That a typology—in order to be accurate—would have to represent every single member of the set that it represents, and that's an impossibility in every case. What that means is that every number is arbitrary that you pick. So that makes other considerations come to the foreground, such as practical considerations, financial considerations, any type of other kind of consideration that enters into the making of the work. There's a certain point at which—well, I left the Men in Suits at around 50 or 60 because I got tired. I get tired of like, trolling for the people, finding them, explaining the project, getting them to do it, scheduling a time to do it, driving out to wherever they are to do it, doing it, and then, getting that film processed, printing it, and then doing another one. Certain kinds of typologies are really exhausting."

Deleuze writes of Beckett's characters and their "inventory of peculiarities pursued with fatigue and passion."[19] This fatigue is a product of contemplation, of the continual desire for (yet exhaustion with) making the contractions that form our perception. In our efforts to understand, we work at active synthesis, drawing difference from repetition from the continual passive syntheses that constitute us. Contemplation and the forging of rational perception is an ongoing project, one that does not rest. "Fatigue marks the point at which the soul can no longer contemplate what it contracts…"[20]

The Moyen Complet
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19. Deleuze, G. (1994). *Difference and Repetition*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 10. **20.** *Ibid*, p. 98.

But "in all its component fatigues, in all its mediocre auto-satisfactions, in all its derisory presumptions, in its misery and in its poverty, the dissolved self still sings the glory of god—that is, of that which it contemplates, contracts, and possesses."[21] Even the *dissolved self* still sings. Even when one says, "I'm exhausted," this is in itself a contradiction. One is saying, in effect: "I'm finished" but also "I'm still here, telling you that I am finished." We revert back to Beckett's original dictum of *going on*, despite the fact that one often feels one cannot. Artists who work in the vein of the *moyen complet* continue to tell us of the biological and ontological struggle in continuing. They work in the middle, always caught in the present, the present, which "extends between two eruptions of need."[22]

To be present means to be perpetually inscribed in need, to always have to ask: *what difference is there?*[23] Exhaustion comes from being engaged with contradiction-in-perpetuity, inevitable in the endless unfolding of things. This is perhaps what stokes the fantasies for a utopian encompassing, a rational explanation for all things—obsessions with *finish*.

Making a series requires that one must consider where it should logically stop. But in addition to a logical end, there surely is a natural end to things, and by natural, I mean when one naturally stops—not through pre-meditation nor radical exhaustion, but simply through the petering out we all grapple with. The moyen complet acknowledges these natural ends in the making of things. Outside influences inevitably creep in and disturb the best-laid plans—distractions, physical tiredness. Irrationality is also tiring.

I gladly stop here.

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21. *Ibid*, p. 100. **22.** *Ibid*, p. 98. **23.** *Ibid*, p. 99.