

**Preserving Jeff Wall:  
Inherent Preservation Concerns of Jeff Wall's Early Transparencies in Lightboxes.**

by

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## **Abstract**

Preserving Jeff Wall: The Inherent Preservation Concerns of Jeff Wall's Early Transparencies in Lightboxes

Master of Arts 2014

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Canadian artist Jeff Wall (b. 1946) created, between 1978 and 2007, over 130 silver dye-bleach transparency prints mounted in lightboxes. These works typify a growing problem currently faced by collections of contemporary fine art that contain works that use unstable materials and increasingly obsolete technology, both of which directly affects the nature of the works' presentation and preservation. This thesis focuses on Wall's early works, created between 1978 - 1985, a period during which he was exploring how best to utilize the lightbox technique. Using the works *The Destroyed Room*, *Double Self-Portrait*, and *Steves Farm, Steveston* as extensively illustrated case studies, this thesis focuses on the previously undiscussed evolution of the presentation and installation of Wall's lightboxes as well as an exploration of the "objectness" of his works which encourages an awareness and fuller understanding of the lightboxes as physical and complex objects.

## **Acknowledgements**

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Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends, especially my mother and father, who provided me with constant support throughout my masters.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to Samuel de Lange, who has been my constant source of inspiration. He has given me the drive and discipline to tackle any task with enthusiasm and determination. Without his love, support, and his amazing curry, this thesis would not have been made possible.

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## Introduction

Since its public announcement in 1839, the medium of photography has always been dependent on technology, whether it was for its exposures, its production in the darkroom, its dissemination through various types of reproduction, or its display in various public and private spaces. As an art form, artists have used photography as a method of experimentation with technology to discover new methods of dealing with experiences and subjects, for which the available technologies seemed inadequate.

Throughout the late 20th century, the pace at which newer technologies have replaced older ones has increased at an unprecedented rate and, as a result, ‘contemporary’ artworks that use technology for display, while remaining ‘contemporary’ in terms of art theory, are no longer technologically ‘contemporary’ within a few years of their production. These works present a persistent and increasingly complex problem currently facing collections of contemporary fine art that hold artworks, which are made with unstable materials and contain now obsolete technology. These materials and systems directly affect the nature of a work’s presentation, which in turn disrupts the artist’s intentions and affects the reception of the work, particularly when it is no longer able to function properly as intended.

The large-scale photographic silver dye-bleach transparencies in lightboxes that Canadian artist, Jeff Wall (b. 1946) created between 1978 and 2007 are representative examples of this growing preservation concern in both private and institutional contemporary fine art collections.<sup>1</sup> The works themselves are highly complex, containing multiple parts including silver dye-bleach transparencies and fluorescent lighting, both of which are technologies that are rapidly being replaced with newer methods.

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<sup>1</sup> Photographic transparencies in lightboxes is a shortened description of the objects that Wall creates. For further description and discussion on this matter, see *Chapter 1: Literature Review*, pages 5-6.

Wall's work was immediately absorbed into the art world and avidly collected by large institutions from the beginning of his artistic career.<sup>2</sup> This is unusual for many contemporary artists and as a result, his works have an extensive recorded history within an institutional context, one that charts the evolution of their display as well as documents their preservation and conservation problems.

Using Wall's early lightboxes as its focus, this thesis surveys three public collections, which hold early and historically important lightboxes, paying special attention to the steps that the collections have taken and, in some cases, are currently taking, to preserve these works. This research stems from three areas of concern: firstly, what different levels of public institutions are presently doing to care for these complex photographic objects; secondly, what are the specific needs and requirements for the preservation of such complex photographic objects, which are dependent on specific technology for their display; thirdly and more broadly, creating a methodology that can be applied to other kinds of contemporary photographically-based works.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. In chapter one, the literature review, I will argue that firstly, there is a noticeable gap in the voluminous literature surrounding Wall's lightboxes, in which they are seen, and in some cases theorized, as neutral delivery systems, and secondly, that the viewer's interaction with the lightboxes as physical objects forms, at root, the basis of his or her experience and understanding of the work. The second chapter will provide an overview of Wall's career and the preservation concerns presented by the materials used in the lightboxes. The methodology of the thesis is set out in chapter three, along with an overview of the three participating institutions in this study, the National Gallery of Canada (NGC), the Art Gallery of

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<sup>2</sup> Wall had produced work during the late 1960s and early 1970s before going on hiatus to pursue art historical studies at the Courtland Institute in London. His "mature artistic career" refers to when he began producing his transparencies in lightboxes after an approximately six year hiatus from art production. (Peter Galassi and James Rondeau, *Jeff Wall* (New York City: The Museum of Modern Art, 2007): 16).

Ontario (AGO), and the McIntosh Gallery, Western University (MG). Chapter four, a very extensive chapter, comprises an illustrated catalogue and extended discussion of the three selected works, *The Destroyed Room* (which exists in two iterations in the collection of the NGC), *Double Self-Portrait* (AGO), and *Steves Farm, Steveston* (MG). After an lengthy introduction, this chapter provides an exhaustive physical description of each of the lightboxes, a commentary on their current conditions, a discussion of past problems and how and if they have been rectified, and, lastly, the institutions' long term plan and the specific concerns for their preservation. Chapter five provides observations and reflections on the concerns raised by a comprehensive study of these complex photographic objects. Appendix I is devoted to the discussion of the future of the lightboxes, focusing on Wall's reserve print project – his plan to create replacement silver dye-bleach prints while the process is still available, his consideration of LED lights to replace the present fluorescent lights, and his alternate Plan B for the longevity of his work, through the production of colour inkjet prints.

## **Chapter 1: Literature Review**

The emergence of Jeff Wall's transparencies in lightboxes into the art world in the late 1970s coincided with a shift in the art historical methodology from a modernist, medium-base analysis to a theoretically-driven approach. This shift directly affected the nature and shape of the discourse surrounding Wall's work. While the main thrust of the literature has been primarily concerned with and directed to the interpretation of his pictures, there have been relatively few comments on the physical nature of the transparencies and lightboxes, and these scattered references have remained isolated and peripheral to the main thrust of the literature. They have been suggestive, but have rarely been developed into a fuller understanding of Wall's work. This gap may be due to larger developments within the discussion of photography, specifically of difficulties of bringing together the dual discourses of the photograph as a physical object and as a cultural image. Difficulties that are further heightened by Wall's work, which is not only an image in the form of a photographic transparency but a three-dimensional lightbox that operates as a kind of sculptural object.

The purpose of this literature review is not to provide a comprehensive survey of the voluminous literature on Wall. Its aims are more modest, illustrating the gap in the discourse surrounding Wall's lightboxes as being far more than neutral delivery systems, but, as will be argued here and throughout the thesis, as critical and essential components in the experience and understanding of his work. Rather than presenting a chronological survey of the writings on Wall, the following chapter is divided into four thematic sections that seek to identify and focus on the key aspects of the gap in material discourse surrounding Wall's lightboxes.

## 1.1 Defining Lightboxes

In his 2011 book addressing the historical and cultural significance of Wall's *Picture for Women* (1979), David Company adeptly identifies a persistent problem in the elucidation of Wall's work: that "the precise meaning of lightbox presentation has proved difficult to define, and probably cannot be accounted for independently from the specific image is illuminated."<sup>3</sup> This identified difficulty is related to a confusion of what the actual objects are that Wall creates, a problem that is perpetuated by the differentiating language used to describe them.

In the literature, the complex objects are often incompletely and partially described, and with only certain components listed:<sup>4</sup> "seamed cibachrome transparency, fluorescent light",<sup>5</sup> "cibachrome transparencies with fluorescent light",<sup>6</sup> "enlarged photographic image, specifically a Cibachrome transparency, mounted on a metal casing and backlit",<sup>7</sup> "cibachrome in lightbox", "cibachrome transparency in aluminum",<sup>8</sup> "cibachrome transparency in fluorescent lightbox",<sup>9</sup> etc. It was not until 2005 with the publication of Wall's *Catalogue Raisonné*, which accompanied Wall's first major European retrospective, that Wall officially "specified that the term 'transparency in lightbox' be used."<sup>10</sup> This description, however, does not clarify the situation or fully and accurately describe the object.

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<sup>3</sup> David Company, *Jeff Wall: Picture for Women* (London: Afterfall Books, 2011): 16.

<sup>4</sup> The choosing of components is often related to the critical arguments that the writer has developed. For example, artist Ian Wallace's description of Wall's work as "cibachrome transparencies with fluorescent light" was used to illustrate his discussion of the effects of the lightboxes's fluorescent light on the spectator. The essay is cited in note 5 below.

<sup>5</sup> *Jeff Wall: Installation of Faking Death (1977), The Destroyed Room (1978), Young Workers (1978), Picture for Women (1979)* (Victoria: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1979): 4. It is unclear if the section with the listed materials in the catalogue was written by Jeff Wall himself or an additional author.

<sup>6</sup> Ian Wallace, "Jeff Wall's Transparencies" in *Jeff Wall Transparencies* (London: Journeyman Press, 1984): 5.

<sup>7</sup> Réal Lussier, "A Survey of the Nineties" in *Jeff Wall Oeuvres 1990-1998* (Montréal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1999): 81.

<sup>8</sup> Katrin Grögel, Stephan E. Hauser, and Heidi Naef, "Introductory Notes", in *Jeff Wall: Catalogue Raisonné 1978-2004*, edited by Theodora Vischer and Heidi Naef (Basel: Laurenez Foundation, Schaulager, and Göttingen: Steidl, 2005): 271. These two descriptions are quoted, but no source is provided.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

Even with this generic label created by Wall, there are still imprecise accounts in contemporary literature.<sup>11</sup> For example, in art historian Julian Stallabrass's 2010 article "Museum Photography and Museum Prose", Wall's lightboxes are misleadingly recounted as "... photographic positives or slides encased in shallow metal cabinets, backlit with fluorescent tubes."<sup>12</sup> While this description is applicable to a general definition of what a photographic transparency can be, such as a colour slide, it is alarmingly false to what the photographic objects Wall produces: they are neither slides nor housed in cabinets.<sup>13</sup> This inaccuracy of material identification could stem from the rapid change in the photographic industry over the past decade and to a corresponding loss of an understanding of the materials and processes.<sup>14</sup>

## 1.2 *Lightboxes In Reproduction*

Another reason for this continuing confusion in the literature as to what Wall's lightboxes are may also be attributed to the shift in literature over the last fifteen years of placing the main illustrative emphasis on images of singular cropped photographs, rather than images of the actual objects. The exhibition catalogue for Wall's first European show in 1984, entitled *Transparencies*, included three types of illustrations of Wall's work: 1) the entire work without lightbox frame; 2) details of the works; and 3) installation views.<sup>15</sup> However, since the 1990s, the importance of installation views has shifted in exhibition catalogues and texts.

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<sup>11</sup> Based on observation, some of these misrepresentations may stem from an author's need to be poetic or creative in his or her descriptions.

<sup>12</sup> Julian Stallabrass, "Museum Photography and Museum Prose," in *New Left Review* 65 (September - October 2010): 99.

<sup>13</sup> Photographic slides, compared with silver dye-bleach transparencies, use a different development process, are compositionally different structurally and are technically a "film" which requires different storage and housing to ensure colour permanence.

<sup>14</sup> This loss of information due to rapid development of related industries is further discussed in *Chapter 2.2: Concerns of Medium, Technology and Preservation*, pages 15-18 and *Chapter 5.6: Potential Effects of Lighting Technology*, pages 89-91.

<sup>15</sup> This exhibition catalogue was the first significant illustrated publication devoted to Wall's work. (Jean Christophe Ammann and Ian Wallace, *Jeff Wall: Transparencies* (London: Journeyman Press, 1984).

When installation views are included in publications, their inclusion seems to act as a generic stand-in for the lightboxes rather than as a reference to specific, individual objects. As well, when views are included they are often not referred to in the accompanying text. To cite one example, German art critic, Boris Groys's essay "Life Without Shadows" includes six installation views, however, these images which are all placed on the same page near the end of the essay, are not referenced in the accompanying text.<sup>16</sup> Another example is Gary Dufour's publication for *Jeff Wall 1990*, in which only a single installation view is included on the final page of Jerry Zaslove's essay, but it is not identified or cited in the text.<sup>17</sup>

Alternatively, exhibition catalogues began grouping the works in the show together as figure plates, accompanied by minimal catalogue information.<sup>18</sup> Instead, the material description and dimensions were separated from the picture and placed at the end of the publication, furthering the severance between image and object.<sup>19</sup>

Wall's 2005 *Catalogue Raisonné*, is slanted to the separation of the image from the object. While there are installations views included, they were limited to small black and white illustrations in the catalogue section.<sup>20</sup> The large colour plates instead contain only tightly cropped images of his photographs. A point that Lazlo Glozer in his "In the Reflection of the Neon Light Jeff Wall's Movie Audience Revisited" states that this results in a divorce from any sense of the actual conditions under the lightboxes are displayed and encountered, and encourages the work being primarily thought of as a series of images and, as such, incompletely

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<sup>16</sup> Boris Groys, "Life without Shadows" in Thierry de Duve, Arielle Pelenc and Boris Groys, *Jeff Wall: The Complete Edition* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996): 56-57. This essay, but with different installation illustrations is published in the second edition *Jeff Wall: The Complete Edition* (London: Phaidon Press, 2009): 58-59.

<sup>17</sup> Gary Dufour, and Jerry Zaslove, *Jeff Wall 1990* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1990): 103.

<sup>18</sup> This allowed for the inclusion of works not included in the original exhibition.

<sup>19</sup> Two representative examples are Craig Burnett, *Jeff Wall* (Tate, London, 2005), Jeff Wall and Tobias Ostrander, *Jeff Wall* (México City: Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Visher and Naef ed., *Catalogue Raisonné*, 275, 276, 280, 384, 292, 298 etc.

understood.<sup>21</sup> This in itself is regrettable due to the fact that the *Catalogue Raisonné*, provides the authoritative presentation of Wall's work that is naturally seen as a primary resource by curators, critics, and scholars.

It should be noted that Wall himself does not view reproductions as a substitute for viewing his works. As recently as 2014, in an interview for the Stedelijk exhibition *Jeff Wall: Tableaux Pictures Photographs 1996-2013*, he stated that “[he] aims to present each photo as an independent, unique image, intended to be seen hanging on a wall, not as reproductions in a book.”<sup>22</sup>

However, it appears that scholars have treated reproductions as authoritative resources. Many written descriptions of Wall's works seem as though the author is working from a colour reproduction, rather than from the original, full-scale lightbox. For example, Campany's description of *Picture for Women* makes no reference to the experience of viewing the object and such specific aspects as the colour, the size, or the framing, merely stating it is “a photographic transparency, 142.5 by 204.5 centimetres, illuminated from behind, [and] hangs on a gallery at eye level.”<sup>23</sup>

While many writers mention that the works are transparencies and that they are displayed in lightboxes, few and accurately describe the nuances and experience of standing in front of the object. Returning to Groys's essay “Life Without Shadows,” Groys astutely states that: “In reproduction, works by Wall cease to glow. All that remains is their theme, their art-historical or social relevance. That's a great deal, but it isn't everything. And in my view it isn't the essential

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<sup>21</sup> Laszlo Glozer, “In the Reflection of the Neon Light Jeff Wall's Movie Audience Revisited,” translated by Daniel Mufson in *Transit* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2010): 127.

<sup>22</sup> Jane Ure-Smith, “New Artistic Directions for Photographer Jeff Wall in Amsterdam” in *Financial Times*, February 14, 2014, accessed July 31, 2014, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/47d5e1e2-9328-11e3-b07c-00144feab7de.html#axzz391RrM3rC>.

<sup>23</sup> Campany, *Picture for Women*, 1.

thing.”<sup>24</sup> For Groys, the character of light is essential and assists the viewer in suspending disbelief and becoming absorbed in the reality that Wall creates. By excluding this aspect, descriptions of the work fail to capture or understand this significant aspect of Wall’s work.

In some recent exhibition catalogues there is a trend to attempt to capture the experience of interacting with the lightboxes, but often in a generic sense. Thomas Weski, for example, in his essay, “I always try to make beautiful pictures,” included in the 2010 exhibition *Transit*, describes the experience of viewing Wall’s work: “It is this interplay between stepping back – once again assimilating the whole image, its proportions, the positioning of the figures and objects, distribution of light, choice of color and framing – and approaching towards the work, to the study of details, that provides us information about other ways of reading the image.”<sup>25</sup> An additional observation can be made about the way in which critics write about the transparencies. Many writers do not refer to specific lightboxes, but rather refer to the transparencies in generic terms. This can be seen in Rolf Lauter’s description of the transparencies in his opening essay in *Jeff Wall: Figure and Places - Selected Works from 1978-2000*.<sup>26</sup>

As for individual examinations of singular pictures, there are many that explore the image content but few acknowledge the materiality. For example, Jean-Christophe Ammann’s essay “Odradek, Táboritska 8, Prague, 18 July 1994” addresses the creation and literary references within the image content but fails to expand past this to investigate how the materials used affect its reception.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Groys, “Life without Shadows,” 58-59.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Weski, “I always try to make beautiful pictures,” in *Transit*, translated by Ehren Fordyce (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2010): 119.

<sup>26</sup> Rolf Lauter ed., *Jeff Wall: Figures & Places - Selected Works from 1978-2000* (Munich: Prestel, 2001): 20-21.

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Christophe Ammann, “Odradek, Táboritska 8, Prague, 18 July 1994” in *Jeff Wall: Figures & Places - Selected Works from 1978-2000* (Munich: Prestel, 2001): 132-137.

In their essay “ ‘Always Elsewhere’: An Introduction to the Art of Jeff Wall (*A Ventriloquist at a Birthday Party in October 1947*),” in the 2003 exhibition *Jeff Wall Photographs* at the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Lisa Joyce and Fred Orton dedicated an entire text to venture even further into describing the experience of viewing a singular lightbox. The essay begins with an extended, seven-page description of the piece, which reads as though the authors were directly viewing the original object, in its level of detail and specifics.<sup>28</sup> Through this they are able to explore the alienation and spatial oddities that occur within the transparency, observations and perceptions that are only apparent when one is standing in front of the actual lightbox.<sup>29</sup>

### 1.3 Language

From the beginning of Wall’s artistic career, he has referred to his photographic transparencies as ‘pictures’ and not the more commonly used terms ‘images’ or ‘photographs.’<sup>30</sup> For example, he uses ‘pictures’ in the first sentences of “Photography and Liquid Intelligence” (1989), “Three Thoughts on Photography” (1999), and “Frames of Reference” (2003).<sup>31</sup> This simple and strategic choice in terminology was done originally to align the photographic transparencies within a historical painting discourse as well as cinema rather than a photographic one. In many of his own writings and interviews, Wall uses ‘pictures’ to describe his work. For

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<sup>28</sup> The end of the essay does state the authors also used a high resolution digital copy of the photograph to better view the images details and nuances during their writing. The CD\_ROM was furnished by Wall. (Lisa Joyce and Fred Orton, “ ‘Always Elsewhere’: An Introduction to the Art of Jeff Wall (*A Ventriloquist at a Birthday Party in October 1947*),” in *Jeff Wall Photographs* (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, 2003): 32).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-33.

<sup>30</sup> The term ‘pictures’ was an artistic buzzword that was developed in the late 1970s, most notably by art critic Douglas Crimp and *October* magazine, in attempts to understand recent practices of artists combining photography, film and performance with traditional mediums. See, for example, Douglas Crimp, “Pictures,” *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 75-88, his, “About Pictures,” *FlashArt* 88-89 (March-April 1979): 34-35.

<sup>31</sup> All found in Peter Galassi ed., *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: MoMA, 2007): 109-110, 125-142, 173-184.

the writer Michael Newman, in his 2007 essay “Transmission and Medium: The Economy of Photography”, for example, he argues that Wall’s choice of terminology is a result of his desire for his work to remain as objects.<sup>32</sup> However, despite this “desire,” Newman does not go on to examine Wall’s work as physical objects.

The lack of any sustained discussion of the physical nature of Wall’s work may also lie in the lack of precision with which such terms as ‘materiality’ and ‘physicality’ are used in relationship with Wall’s work. For example, cultural geographer Alexander Vasudevan, in a 2007 essay uses the term “materiality” in reference to the content of Wall’s images.<sup>33</sup> Whereas, the art historian Virginia Adams in her 2007 dissertation uses the terms ‘materiality’ to refer to the ‘physicality’ of Wall’s transparencies themselves.<sup>34</sup> Both these authors used these terms in quite different ways, not only from each other. For the purpose of this thesis, ‘materiality’ is defined as the structural elements and their qualities that make up the object, and ‘physicality’ refers to how the viewer interacts with the object on a three dimensional level.

#### 1.4 *Wall’s Influence*

An important feature of the literature is the role played by Wall’s own writings and interviews. Wall, who was trained as an art historian (receiving an MA in Art History in 1970), and taught art history at Simon Fraser and the University of British Columbia for more than twenty years, from 1976 through 1999, while simultaneously producing his own work. He has published extensively throughout his artistic career on both his own work and others. Through

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Newman, “Transmission and Medium: The Economy of Photography,” in *Jeff Wall: Works and Collected Writings* (Barcelona: Poligrafa, 2007): 161.

<sup>33</sup> Alexander Vasudevan. “The Photographer of Modern Life: Jeff Wall’s Photographic Materialism,” in *Cultural Geographies* 14.4 (October 2007): 577.

<sup>34</sup> Virginia Adams, “Illusion and Disillusionment in the Works of Jeff Wall and Gerhard Richter: Picturing (post)modern Life.” (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2007).

these texts and interviews, it can be argued that he has established the subjects and offered critical approaches to the understanding of his work, whether intentional or not, setting, in effect, an agenda for the resulting literature.

While he modestly views himself as someone with “no literary talent,” his writing has the authority and persuasive grace that has an enormous influence on the critical writings on his work.<sup>35</sup> For example, his 1979 text “To the Spectator” included two points, relevant to the understanding of the lightboxes, which were taken up by later commentators and critics. These include comparison to advertising and connections to the Minimalism sculpture. Another example of Wall’s influence is his important interview with Els Barents included in the catalogue for Wall’s 1985 exhibition, *Transparencies* in which Wall discusses the quality of his works’ light and the effect of two different kinds of light found within the lightboxes and in gallery space in which they are shown.<sup>36</sup> These points are essentially echoed by Lauter, in his 2001 essay, in which he discusses the transparencies.<sup>37</sup>

Beginning in the mid-1990s, there have been seven collections of Wall’s writings and interviews published in order to provide various contextualization of Walls artistic practice and to provide greater access to the material.<sup>38</sup> These collections are however not comprehensive, but include some of the same texts and interviews, thereby encouraging a sense of a set of core essays and interviews.

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<sup>35</sup> Jacques Herzog, Jeff Wall, and Cristina Bechtler ed., *Architecture of Pictures: A Conversation between Jacques Herzog and Jeff Wall, Basel, November 4th 2003* (Kunsthochschule Kassel: Inktree, 2004): 46.

<sup>36</sup> Els Barents, “Luminescence,” in *Jeff Wall: Transparencies* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987): 99.

<sup>37</sup> Lauter, ed. *Figures & Places*, 20. This was also echoed at an earlier date by the American writer theorist Fredric Jameson in “Postmodernism and Utopia,” in *Utopia post Utopia: Configurations of Nature and Culture in Recent Sculpture and Photography, January 29-March 27, 1988* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1988): 109.

<sup>38</sup> These collections include: Thierry de Duve, Arielle Péleuc, and Boris Groys, *Jeff Wall* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996 and 2002, the revised and expanded second edition), Thierry de Duve ed. *Jeff Wall: The Complete Edition* (London: Phaidon Press, 2009), Peter Galassi, ed., *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York City: The Museum of Modern Art, 2007), and Michael Newman, ed. *Jeff Wall: Works and Collected Writings* (Barcelona: Poligrafa, 2007).

Overall, the vast literature of Wall's interviews and writings on his own and other artist's work, and the critical commentaries and essays by other authors, considered as a whole, fails to fully explore the materiality of the work. The language used to describe the lightboxes and the experience of viewing them gives little acknowledgement to the individual existence of each art object. The following thesis and case studies aim fill this gap by examining why and how the material aspects of these objects form the basis of our relationship to them and are essential to an understanding of Wall's work.

## Chapter 2: Overview of Wall's Career

Wall has exhibited extensively both nationally and internationally since the late 1970s, a practice supported by his own extensive writings, interviews, and the many catalogues and publications on his work.<sup>39</sup> His photographic practice, based out of Vancouver, Canada, has opened up the parameters of the medium to questions long understood to be outside its provenance, and has shaped the way we think now about photography as art. Best known for his large-scale photographic colour transparencies mounted in lightboxes, Wall expanded his practice to also include large-scale black and white gelatin silver prints in 1996 and colour inkjet prints in 2005.<sup>40</sup>

Wall's approach was forged in reaction to the upheavals in art theory and practice of conceptualism in the late 1960s. Looking to more traditional artwork for example 19th century painting, such as the work of Edouard Manet (referenced in his *Picture for Women*, 1979), as his inspiration and drawing upon a sophisticated understanding of theory, Wall's resulting photographs were large in scale and rich in saturated colour – a stark contrast to the small black and white photography that filled the galleries and museums at the time.<sup>41</sup> The lightbox display allowed Wall to also break away from the traditional photographic practice of series and large number editions of his peers, in order to explore the autonomous picture in small editions.

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<sup>39</sup> Further information can be found in the *Selected Bibliography* of the thesis, pages 94-102. For a more extensive bibliography, see Stephan E. Hauser, "Bibliography," in Vischer and Naef ed. *Catalogue Raisonné*, 457-176 (note this resource only has listings for resources until 2004).

<sup>40</sup> In the past, Wall produced chromogenic photographs to test his images prior to printing on transparency materials. These proofs generally remain in his studio but on occasion have been sold in charity auctions and are not considered to be a part of his oeuvre. (Vischer and Naef ed., *Catalogue Raisonné*, 286.) In addition to photographs, Wall has created sculpture, installation and performance based works throughout his career.

<sup>41</sup> In an interview with Peter Osborne, Wall reflects upon how during his art production hiatus and time in London that he was more receptive to critical theory and philosophy than previously and as a result, this more academically thinking directly affected his later production. (Peter Osborne, "Art after Photography, after Conceptual Art 2009," in *Jeff Wall: The Complete Work* (London: Phaidon Press, 2009): 146). The affects of academia and his art historical training is also addressed in Peter Galassi's essay "Unorthodox" (Galassi, *Wall*, 17-19).

## 2.1 Wall's Artistic Production

Wall's works are typified by two approaches that in the *Catalogue Raisonné* designates as either cinematographic or documentary. The introduction to the catalogue section of the *Catalogue Raisonné* defines cinematographic as “photographs in which the subject of the picture has been prepared in some way, ranging from minimal modifications to the construction of entire sets, costumes and objects.”<sup>42</sup> Likewise, the definition of documentary applies to photographs that “the artist chooses the location and time of the photograph but without any kind of intervention on his part.”<sup>43</sup> Both approaches require extensive research and planning, from constructing elaborate sets for some images to scouting possible locations in the greater Vancouver area. All of his pictures are shot using large format colour sheet film, ranging in size from 4 x 5 inches to 8 x 10 inches.

For Wall, his early production was limited by the silver dye-bleach process. During the 1970s and 1980s, the transparencies could only be printed in commercial labs due to their size, the complexity of the silver dye-bleach process, and that Wall did not have a studio until 1987.<sup>44</sup> This proved to be very frustrating for Wall, who was often disappointed with the quality and consistency of these labs.<sup>45</sup>

A shift in technology in the early 1990s made it possible for the use of digital files in silver dye-bleach printing in commercial labs. The new method allowed for the use of digitally corrected negatives that were then developed in traditional silver dye-bleach chemistry. This marked a significant change in Wall's production, allowing him to use digital montage to edit

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<sup>42</sup> Vischer and Naef ed., *Catalogue Raisonné*, 273.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>44</sup> These commercial printing labs were used for the production of posters and advertisements and as such, did not have the ability or experience to produce prints of a fine art quality. These labs often used dirty and exhausted chemistry, which may have contributed to the early deterioration of the prints.

<sup>45</sup> During a telephone discussion with the author, Wall spoke of having to rent out commercial lab facilities to print with his assistants to ensure quality (Jeff Wall, telephone discussion with the author, May 18, 2014).

together multiple negatives and allowing his photographs to be in his words “truly realized.”<sup>46</sup> By this, he means that due to the shortcomings of pre-digital colour printing, often colour compromises were made to the overall image. Since 1997, Wall has printed all of his own transparencies in his darkroom in Vancouver.<sup>47</sup>

Wall has always overseen the printing of all of his works and their editions. His early work exists as either unique prints or small editions of a maximum of three.<sup>48</sup> This restriction in the edition size was in part related to the cost to produce the works and in part adhering to the idea of the autonomous art object. However, editions of his lightboxes shift to a maximum of eight starting in the mid-1990s.

All of the works in Wall’s oeuvre, except for *Mimic* (1982), *Diatribes* (1985), *Abundance* (1985), and *The Stumbling Block* (1991), have artist’s proofs.<sup>49</sup> These proofs are to-scale transparencies that are produced at the time of the edition, and are meant to act as a ‘master copy’ of the work. They are used to gauge the deterioration of the work’s prints. Retaining the artist proof also allows Wall to create a comparable exhibition print and lightbox if the original is unable to be loaned or deemed unexhibitable by Wall.<sup>50</sup> The artist proofs are never put on exhibition nor are they ever sold.

As of 2007, Wall had ceased the creation of new works in lightbox form.<sup>51</sup> Wall and his assistants still contribute to maintaining the lightboxes and are continually researching further methods of improving his past works in order to preserve them.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Jeff Wall, telephone discussion with the author, May 18, 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Wall began printing the large gelatin silver prints in his darkroom in 1996. This darkroom was expanded in 1997 to allow for the printing of his transparencies.

<sup>48</sup> Wall did not begin producing editions of three until 1985. (Vischer and Naef ed., *Catalogue Raisonné*, 285.)

<sup>49</sup> Vischer and Naef ed., *Catalogue Raisonné*, 274, 291, 299, 300, and 332-33.

<sup>50</sup> The use of creating exhibition works from the artist proofs have been done in all of Wall’s major retrospectives. These exhibition works are identified in their exhibition labels and in the accompanying publications as either “Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery, New York” or simply “Collection of the artist.”

<sup>51</sup> Jane Ure-Smith, “New Artistic Directions for Photographer Jeff Wall in Amsterdam.”

## 2.2 Concerns of Medium, Technology, and Preservation

As with all artists and commercially based photographers using colour photography, Wall was aware of the impermanence of the colour materials when he began working with them. There are no truly permanent colour photographic processes. When Wall began producing, there were two ‘more permanent’ colour processes: dye transfer and silver dye-bleach. Dye transfer is arguably the most permanent process, however, was not a feasible mode of production for Wall due to its complicated time-demanding process and the great expense to create.<sup>53</sup> The other process was silver dye-bleach, which was a positive-to-positive colour process that could produce photographic prints (viewable with reflective light) or transparencies (viewable by transmitted light). Both the dye transfer and the silver dye-bleach prints’s dyes were embedded in a shiny paper that Wall “aesthetically loathed,” by printing the pictures as silver dye bleach transparencies he was able to avoid.<sup>54</sup>

For Wall, using silver dye bleach transparencies has remained a contradictory one: He wanted to have the presence of light in his work but this desired light also triggered the premature disappearance of his pictures.<sup>55</sup> Wall had considered lightboxes as a way of avoiding the distressing deterioration of his colour photographs by using a technique that allowed for regular replacement of prints as they faded.

The overall preservation concern for the lightboxes themselves is tied to the technology industry. Lighting technology, sign-printing, and the information technology industries are not

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<sup>52</sup> See *Appendix I: The Future of the Lightboxes*, pages 104-108, for Wall’s current preservation plans for his lightboxes.

<sup>53</sup> Unlike other colour processes that required only a negative to print, the dye transfer process required the making of three separate printing matrices for each of the subtractive primary colours (cyan, magenta and yellow). The dye is then transferred in succession with exact registration onto a gelatin coated receiving paper in order to produce a full colour image. While the process produced prints with great light and dark fastness, the production of the required materials by Eastman Kodak ceased in 1994 ([http://www.graphicsatlas.org/guidedtour/?process\\_id=312](http://www.graphicsatlas.org/guidedtour/?process_id=312)).

<sup>54</sup> Jeff Wall, “Interview during his major retrospective at the Tate Modern,” interview by Jean Wainwright at Tate Modern, London, 2005, *Audio Arts* Volume 24, accessed July 2, 2014, <http://www.tate.org.uk/audio-arts/volume-24/number-2-3#open282751>.

<sup>55</sup> Jeff Wall, telephone discussion with the author, May 18, 2014.

concerned with permanence and preservation.<sup>56</sup> Once a new method is invented, old methods are quickly forgotten. There are very few texts published on the technology used in Wall's early lightboxes, and these are geared towards how to deal with the outdated technology for those working in the industry.

This rapid loss of knowledge of materials is characteristic of the photographic industry as new systems and materials are introduced.<sup>57</sup> Knowledge of traditional photographic materials is quickly disappearing, on how, for example, the materials and chemistry are produced.

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<sup>56</sup> Roy L. Flukinger, Carol Henry and James M. Reilly. "Technology: No Place for Wimps, A Discussion About Photography in the Digital Age," in *Conservation Perspectives: The GCI Newsletter* vol. 27, no.1 (Spring 2012): 21.

<sup>57</sup> Grant B. Romer. "What is a Photograph?" In *The Fundamentals of the Conservation of Photography: Technical Note* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2010), accessed June 26, 2014, [http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications\\_resources/teaching/photo\\_tn\\_what\\_is.pdf](http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/teaching/photo_tn_what_is.pdf).

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Choice of Case Studies

Between 1978 to 2007, Wall created 130 lightbox works that are held in seventeen countries in both public institutions and private collections.<sup>58</sup> Using Wall's 2005 *Catalogue Raisonné* as the starting point for the selection of case studies, I realized that the works, which were geographically accessible to Toronto, represented the early period of Wall's production, 1978 - 1985. These works were created when it was still relatively uncommon for artists to be using the lightbox format.<sup>59</sup> This period also represents when Wall was figuring out how to use the medium of lightbox, its size, framing, presentation, and installation capabilities. Examining these lightboxes would provide a history of Wall's relationship with the materials, something previously not explored in his literature. Prior to 1981, Wall's larger lightboxes were mounted into the wall rather than as framed objects, and as a result his works produced before this time did not physically exist in the form they do now.<sup>60</sup>

From this initial research, three works were selected to be investigated: the two iterations of *The Destroyed Room* (1978, 1987) held by the National Gallery of Canada; *Double Self-Portrait* (1979) held by the Art Gallery of Ontario; and *Steves Farm, Steveston* (1980/1985) held by McIntosh Gallery, Western University. All of these works have recorded provenances dating back to the original purchase from Wall as well as complete institutional records. Therefore, they provided a rich body of information about how Wall's works were originally created and how

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<sup>58</sup> This information is based on the numbers provided by Wall's studio in an email to the author in August 2014, and an estimation of where his works are currently found. This number does not include all the prints in an edition.

<sup>59</sup> Iain and Ingrid Baxter, as N.E.Thing Co. also out of Vancouver, were the among the first artists in Canada to use lightboxes in 1968. N.E. Thing Co. were also the first to open a Cibachrome lab, west of Toronto, in Vancouver in 1974. See Nancy Shaw, "Siting the Banal: The Expanded Landscapes of N.E.Thing Co." in *You Are Now in the Middle of a N.E.Thing Co. Landscape* (Vancouver: UBC Fine Arts Gallery, 1993), accessed June 26 2014, <http://vancouverartinthesixties.com/essays/siting-the-banal>.

<sup>60</sup> Wall's early smaller lightbox works, *Young Workers* (1978/1983) and *Movie Audience* (1979) mounted the individual transparencies in aluminum frames prior to this date. For further information about the early work's installations refer to *Chapter 4.1 b: Display and Framing*, pages 36-39.

they have changed and survived over the years, something that is missing from all histories of the artist's practice.

### 3.2 Overview of Institutions

After further investigation into the lightboxes in proximity of Toronto, I realised that the institutions able to collaborate on this project also represent the three different levels of public institutions in Canada. This has proven beneficial, as it provides insight into how these institutions, depending on the resources available to them, are able to handle the preservation concerns inherent in the care of Wall's lightboxes. The majority of Wall's works are now found in large institutions and wealthy private collections that have great resources to deal with the care of them. However, many of Wall's first lightboxes were acquired early in Wall's career, before the prices rose, marking astute purchasing and curatorial insight by the various levels of institutions that collected them.<sup>61</sup>

While the McIntosh Gallery is associated with the Western University in London, Ontario, it does receive funding from the province of Ontario.<sup>62</sup> The collection is relatively small with only 3,500 objects from nationally and internationally recognized Canadian artists, and has a mandate orientated to serving Western University and the broader community of London. The institution only owns one of Wall's lightboxes, *Steves Farm, Steveston* (1980/1985) which was donated by the John Labatt Limited in 1994. The gallery has a permanent staff of five people, with only one person working directly with the care of collection as Collection Manager. It has

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<sup>61</sup> As of 2007, the asking price for Wall's work was a million dollars. Arthur Lubow, "The Luminist," *New York Times*, February 25 2007, accessed on January 24 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/25/magazine/25Wall.t.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/25/magazine/25Wall.t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

<sup>62</sup> MG Collection Manager Brian Lambret, telephone discussion with author, August 28, 2014.

neither the facilities nor budget to employ a permanent conservator; if conservation work is required, the work is shipped to and carried out by an outside company.

In comparison, the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) is a much larger institution with approximately 80,000 objects, with 40,000 of those being photographs. Originally founded in 1900 as the Art Museum of Toronto, the AGO has grown to become one of the largest art museums in North America. As an institution, it has a provincial status since the majority of its outside funding comes from the Ontario government.<sup>63</sup> The AGO owns two of Wall's lightboxes: *Double Self-Portrait* (1979) in the Photography Collection, and *The Goat* (1989) in the Modern and Contemporary Collection.<sup>64</sup> Only *Double Self-Portrait* was selected as part of this project because not only did it fall into the period of early work, but it also has a fuller documented history and more extensive exhibition history.

The National Gallery of Canada is a federal level public institution, with its building and collections owned by the people of Canada and the federal government. It was among the first public collections in the world to collect Wall's work, with its first acquisition in 1979 of Wall's *The Destroyed Room*. Currently, the NGC owns three of Wall's lightboxes: *The Destroyed Room* (1978, 1987), *Stereo* (1980) and *The Vampire Picnic* (1991). Only *The Destroyed Room* was selected because its records reflected the entire span of Wall's relationship with the lightbox medium.

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<sup>63</sup> As of the end of the fiscal year for 2012-2013, the AGO received 96% of its government funding from the Ontario government. In its overall revenue, the AGO receives 37% of its operation costs from government grants. (Ernst and Young, "Final Statement: Art Gallery of Ontario," March 31 2013, accessed June 26 2014, <http://www.ago.net/assets/files/pdf/AGO-Audited-Financial-Statements-2012-13.pdf>.)

<sup>64</sup> The separation between the Photography Collection and the Modern and Contemporary Collection is an administrative division based on a year, which changes every five years. As of 2014, this date separating the two collections is 1985. Since *Double Self-Portrait* (1979) and *The Goat* (1989) are on different sides of this date, the works reside in two separate collections. However, once the date changes to 1990, both of the lightboxes will belong to the Photography Collection.

### *3.3 Overview of Case Study Content*

For each case study, I have had access to both the accession and the written and visual conservation records as well as being able to thoroughly examine the original lightbox, their components, and crates. I also benefitted from discussions with the conservators and curators at the three public institutions, which helped enormously to understand how the individual transparencies were cared for, displayed and stored.

## Chapter 4: Case Studies of Individual Works

### *Introductory Notes*

The following notes provide an introduction to the physical art objects that Wall produces, as well as an opportunity to address the overarching problems and concerns common to all lightboxes.

### **Catalogue Information:**

#### a. Dimensions

The dimensions given are for both the size of the aluminum lightbox frame as well as the picture (i.e the single transparency in the case of *Steves Farm*, *Steveston* or the two transparencies in the case of *The Destroyed Room* and *Double Self-Portrait*). The measurements were taken by the author and, in some instances, differ from the holding collection's records and the picture dimensions listed in the *Catalogue Raisonné*.<sup>65 66</sup> These differences are noted.<sup>67</sup>

All dimensions are given in metric to the nearest millimeter and then converted to imperial inches in order to list both systems.

#### b. Materials and Component Parts:

For the purposes of these case studies, the components of the lightbox are broken down into the following five parts: 1. Transparency print; 2. Plexiglas; 3. Print frame; 4. Lightbox frame; and 5. Electrical technology. These are identified in Figure 1.

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<sup>65</sup> With the exception of *The Destroyed Room* as explained on page 43.

<sup>66</sup> Vischer and Naef ed., *Catalogue Raisonné*, 271.

<sup>67</sup> These inconsistencies could result from discrepancies in past cataloging policies at the holding institution, inability to keep up-to-date records due to workload of cataloging staff, or use of ambiguous terminology in the records.

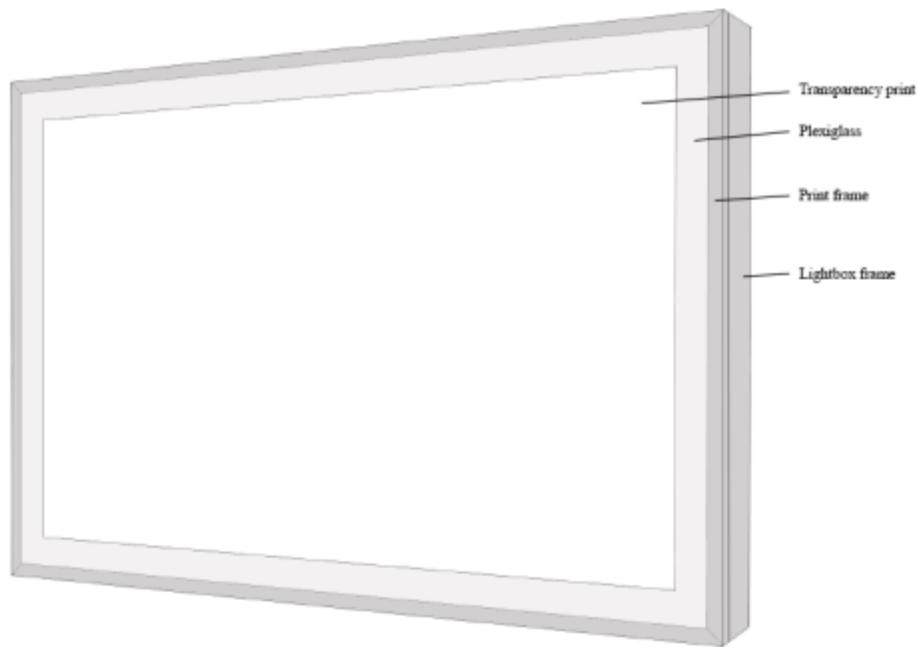


Figure 1. Author's schematic diagram of the basic lightbox structure and components. Not drawn to scale.

### *1. Transparency print*

The term 'silver dye-bleach' is used to indicate the materials also known by its brand names Cibachrome or Ilfochrome.<sup>68</sup> The silver dye-bleach process is a dye destruction positive-to-positive colour process that produces either a reflective colour print or a colour transparency.<sup>69</sup>

As of 2009, Wall began using Fujitrans display material in his lightboxes, instead of Ilfochrome.<sup>70</sup> This switch happened due to the growing expense of Ilfochrome materials and

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<sup>68</sup> The silver-dye bleach process is a dye destruction positive-to-positive process. The process has been known by several brand names since its invention in 1933 by Dr. Bela Gaspar. Gasparcolor was the brand name for this early dye destruction process until Dr. Gaspar's death. After Dr. Gaspar's patent ran out, the company Ciba-Geigy used the name Cilchrome from 1949 to approximately 1963, when the process was re-branded Cibachrome upon the recent improvements to the process and materials. In 1989, Ciba-Geigy sold the rights to the process to International Papers, which, due to legal reasons, had to change the name to Ilfochrome Classic in 1992. Common names used by practitioners, despite changes in brand name, include Cibachrome, Ilfochrome or simply Ciba.

<sup>69</sup> Wall has only used silver dye-bleach transparencies in his lightboxes. He did use chromogenic colour prints as a form of testing for these final prints before he began using colour inkjet and lightjet in his practice in 2000.

<sup>70</sup> Jeff Wall, telephone discussion with the author, May 18, 2014.

anticipation of the ceasing production, which eventually occurred in 2012. From Wall's experience with the materials, the approximate life span of the Ilfochrome prints is fifteen years, while the Fujitrans prints are expected to last between ten to twelve years.<sup>71</sup>

Silver dye-bleach transparency materials currently have a maximum width of 127 cm (50 in.). Prior to 1985, these materials had a maximum width of 101.6 cm (40 in.), which is the reason that Wall's early lightboxes are smaller in size than later (post 1985) productions. In order to achieve the large scale that the majority of Wall's works possess, the use of two transparency prints was required. The transparency prints are seamed together with one inch 3M Polyester 850 tape with an approximately 2 mm overlap. Wall and his studio, depending on the variety available, have used variations of this tape throughout the years. Past types of tape include: 3M 352 (1977 to approximately 1980). As commented on by Galassi, this seam and its qualities was a brief investigation or "obsession" for Wall when he began using silver dye-bleach materials.<sup>72</sup> Wall's first installations of the lightboxes were designed to emphasize the seam.<sup>73</sup> While all of his large-scale lightbox works have this seam, Wall quickly discontinued exploring the seam since it competed with the image plane and adversely affected the illusion of reality.

Wall's early lightboxes use the method of securing the transparencies to the Plexiglas using two inch wide 3M Polyester 352 clear tape along the top and bottom edges, illustrated in Figure 4 i, a method that at the time was an adaptation of the then commercial sign-making industry's method for securing advertisements.<sup>74</sup> Like the tape used for the seaming, there have been several types of tape used to secure the transparency prints to the Plexiglas.

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<sup>71</sup> Jeff Wall, telephone discussion with the author, May 18, 2014.

<sup>72</sup> Galassi, *Wall*, 26. Also, this obsession may have contributed to Wall's interest in Minimalist artists such as Dan Flavin, whose practice embraced and explored all the qualities of the materials he used. It also related to the content of the work. For example, the visible seam in *Double Self-Portrait* draws attention to the constructed nature of the work.

<sup>73</sup> For further information on this subject, please see *Chapter 4.1.b: Display and Framing*, pages 36-39 .

<sup>74</sup> Jeff Wall, telephone discussion with the author, May 18, 2014.

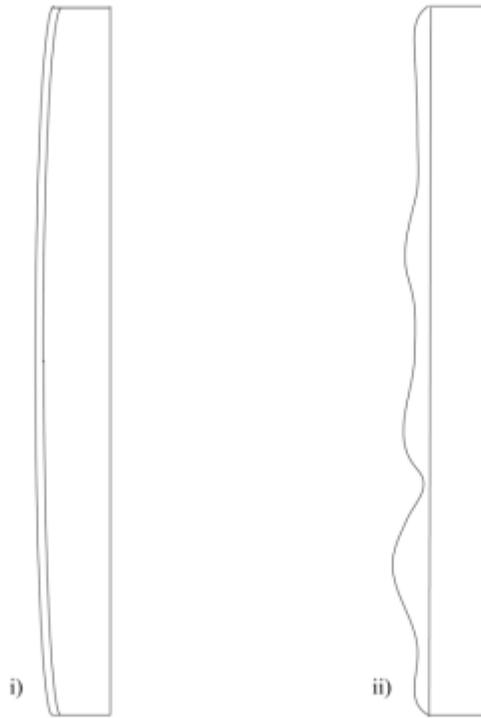


Figure 2. Author's schematic diagram illustrating the effects of heat on the Plexiglas and transparency tautness. i) lightbox turned on, transparency print is tight, ii) lightbox turned off, transparency print is wavy. Not drawn to scale.

As with all plastic based materials, Plexiglas expands and contracts depending on its temperature. In the case of Wall's work, the heat from the fluorescent lamps causes the translucent Plexiglas to expand and bend convexly to the back of the lightbox frame, thereby causing the transparency print(s) to become taut over the surface (Figure 2 i). When the lightbox is cold, however, the transparency print(s) relaxes, becomes wavy and begins to bulge (Figure 2 ii). Figure 3 illustrates the wavy state of the two transparencies in *Double Self-Portrait* when cool.



Figure 3. *Double Self-Portrait*, revealing how Plexiglas temperature affects the transparency's mounting tension. Image of the two transparency prints bulging caused by the cooling of the Plexiglas. Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario's conservation files for *Double Self-Portrait*.

Since the bulging of the print happens when the work is off, sections of the transparency prints end up pushing against the transparent front Plexiglas. Silver dye-bleach transparencies lack a gelatine supercoat that is found in other traditional photographic materials and that protects the surface of the print. Therefore, silver dye-bleach transparencies are far more vulnerable to damage by contact, resulting in surface abrasions.<sup>75</sup> The way in which the transparencies and print frames are currently stored exposes the surface to damage when they are moved.

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<sup>75</sup> Debra Hess Noris and Jennifer Jae Gutierrez ed. *Issues in the Conservation of Photographs*. (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2010): 617.

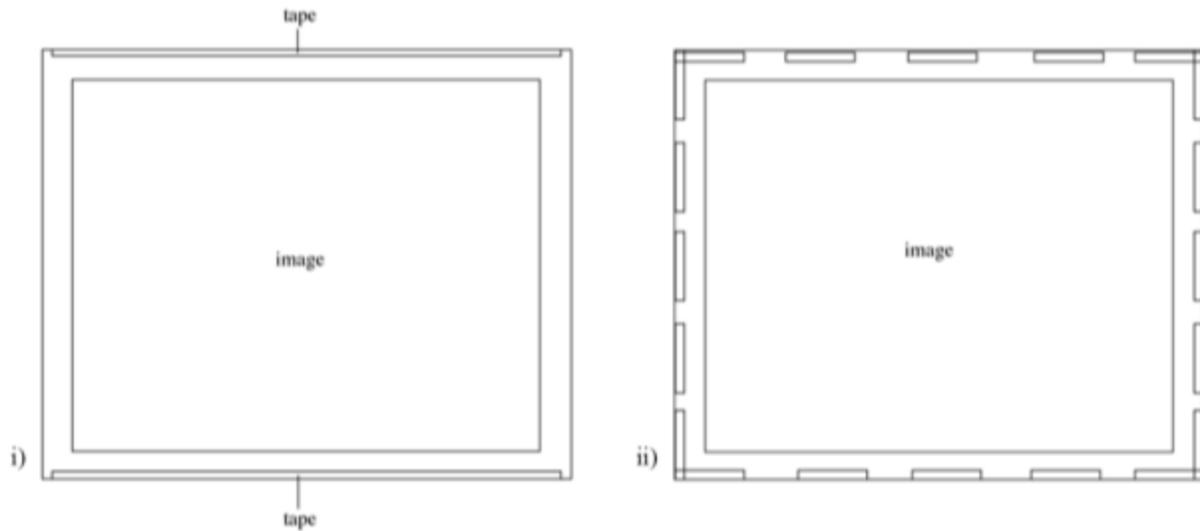


Figure 4. Author's schematic diagram of how the transparency print is affixed to the Plexiglas: i) original method and ii) second method. Not drawn to scale.

The prints were originally adhered to the top of the translucent white Plexiglas with a single strip of 3M tape, then unrolled emulsion side down, stretched tight, and secured to the bottom with another strip of 3M tape (Figure 4 i). Wall and his studio now suggests that the prints of the early lightboxes be adhered using a method similar to stretching a canvas using several smaller pieces of 3M tape to stretch the print equally on all four sides (Figure 4 ii).<sup>76</sup>

In 2000, Wall and his studio developed a third method for securing the transparency prints that involves the stretching of the print using elastic line along the back edge of the Plexiglas, similar to the method used for stretching trampolines. This new method prevents the possibility of damage inherent in the older method due to the fact that the print is not physically adhered to the surface of Plexiglas, and therefore not exposed to the fluctuation of the Plexiglas

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<sup>76</sup> Jeff Wall's studio, email correspondence with author, August 28, 2014.

material. These new lightboxes also allow for a protective layer of Dartek between the print and the Plexiglas during shipping; this is then removed prior to exhibiting.<sup>77</sup>

While none of the works in these case studies have been modified for this third method, Wall is open to the idea of having all of the lightboxes changed to this method to increase the longevity of the transparency prints. However, the process is costly since it would require the creation of a new print frame and lightbox frame.<sup>78</sup>

## *2. Plexiglas*

All of the lightboxes use two sheets of Plexiglas to sandwich the transparency prints in place, one piece of transparent Plexiglas on the recto and one piece of translucent white Plexiglas on the verso of the transparency print. The sheets are 0.64 cm (0.25 in.) thick, although some works have sheets that are 0.95 cm (0.375 in.) thick.

Currently, there are no International Organization of Standardization (ISO) standards for plastics. All plastics are prone to ‘crazing’, meaning that when the polymers of the plastic are put under stress, networks of fine cracks develop on the surface of the plastic (Figure 5). ‘Crazing’ differs from cracking in that the cracking is not affected further by support weight. Plastics are especially prone to developing this condition of crazing when exposed to extreme temperature fluctuations.

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<sup>77</sup> Dartek® is a soft, transparent nylon film with plasticizers, additives or surface coating that is often used by conservators as a covering membrane for fine art.

<sup>78</sup> Jeff Wall, telephone discussion with the author, May 18, 2014.

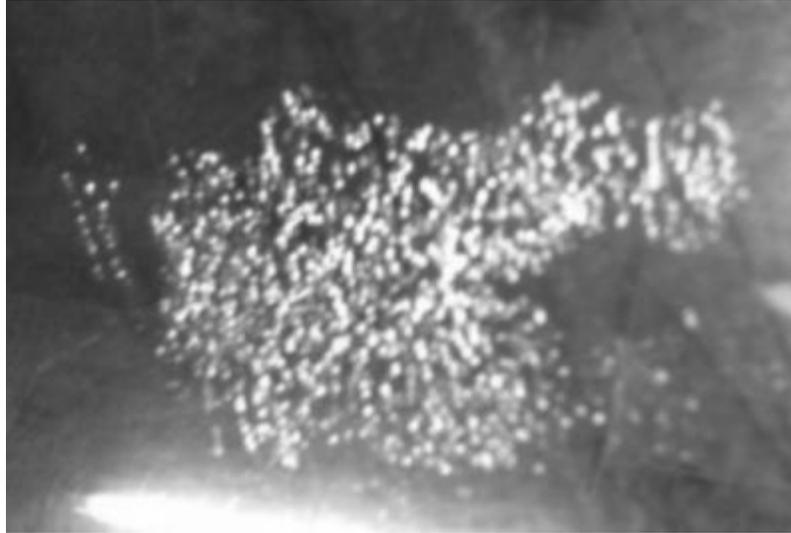


Figure 5. Image illustrating advance stages of Plexiglas crazing from author's personal photographs, not from a Wall lightbox.

It appears that some of the early lightboxes are now beginning to show some form of plastic aging such as crazing, plasticizer migration and fogging.<sup>79</sup> Many of these signs, while visible when the lightbox is turned off, are not visible when the lightbox is on.

### *3. Print frame*

The aluminum print frame is assembled, like most metal frames, with corners that are then screwed together, thereby securing the Plexiglas sandwich. The system for attaching the aluminum print frame to the lightbox frame for the majority of the early lightboxes consists of the use of pressure clip blocks, referred to as spring clips in the remainder of this thesis. The spring clips are tightened and loosened using a single machine screw, which, if loosened too far, can easily fall off, and become lost.

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<sup>79</sup> Plasticizer migration refers to the plasticizer (a molecule that gives plastic flexibility) moving to the surface of the plastic, as a result the plastic becomes brittle and liable to cracking. Fogging refers to the surface of the Plexiglas becoming less transparent with age. Scratching or chemicals in the environment may cause it.



Figure 6. Image of spring clip from *Steves Farm, Steveston*, taken by author, March 13, 2014.

The spring clips themselves break easily and over time become ‘tired’, resulting in the loss of their spring. This presents a persistent problem and, for this reason, they are no longer used in the production of Wall’s lightboxes. There are no replacements available for the spring clips. The current method of countering the relaxation of the system is to re-bend the spring clips to provide more spring action. These clips are now considered “old technology” by Wall and his studio, and were phased out in the 1980s.

#### *4. Lightbox Frame*

Wall has been working with the same lightbox manufacturer in Cologne, Germany for the past thirty years. This is because Cologne is more centrally located in terms of the institutions and private collections that presently hold Wall’s work.<sup>80</sup> All the lightbox frames are made with aluminum or some form aluminum alloy. The thickness of the lightbox frames has increased

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<sup>80</sup> Jeff Wall, telephone discussion with the author, May 18, 2014.

over time in order to support the work's growing size. The early lightboxes were produced to the industry standards and were meant to be cheap and easy to produce.

While the exterior design has remained relatively consistent from approximately 1981 onwards, the interior design has changed based on current electrical technology.<sup>81</sup>

### 5. Electrical Technology:

On its simplest level, the fluorescent lighting system used in all of Wall's lightboxes consists of three components: fluorescent lamps, ballast, and power source (Figure 7).

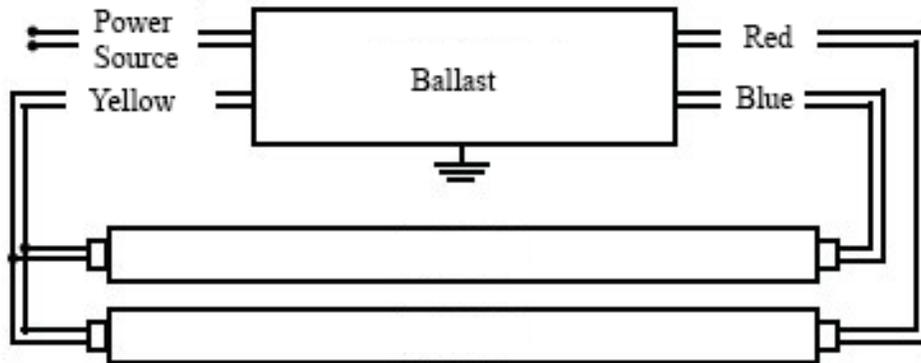


Figure 7. Author's schematic drawing of a basic fluorescent lighting system and three components. Not drawn to scale.

The basic principle behind the system is a flow of electrical current that passes through the vacuumed gases in a fluorescent lamp (generally argon with a small amount of mercury vapour), and excites the gaseous atoms, causing them to produce ultraviolet light (UV) photons. The UV light then strikes a thin layer of phosphor coating on the inside of the glass that responds by producing visible light.

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<sup>81</sup> Groys, "Life without Shadows," published in both *Jeff Wall (1996 edition)*, 56-57 and *Jeff Wall: The Complete Edition*, 60-61. Both versions of Groys's essay contains a variety of installation views that document that demonstrates the consistency in the framing.

As described in Chapter 2, the lighting technology industry is not primarily concerned with the preservation of old technologies.<sup>82</sup> As new systems and components are developed and become the industry standard, the old technology rapidly becomes difficult and expensive to maintain. There two main concerns with the electrical technology in Wall's lightboxes are with the fluorescent lamps and the ballasts.

### *Fluorescent Lamps*

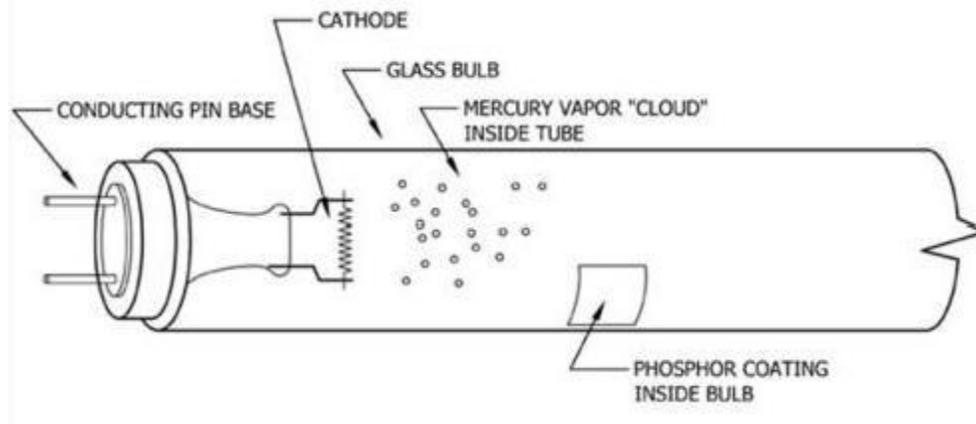


Figure 8. Illustration of hot cathode fluorescent lamp and its components. Source: [www.lightingever.com](http://www.lightingever.com).

There are three main types of fluorescent lamps: hot cathode, cold cathode and electroluminescent. The lamps used in Wall's lightboxes are hot cathode, the most common form used throughout the world since the 1940s.

The appearance of the shade of white of the lamp is based on various combinations of phosphors in the interior coating. The correlated colour temperature (CCT) rating is a code to indicate the relative 'warmth' or 'coolness' of the lamp's colour appearance, and is measured in kelvin (K). Lamps with a CCT rating of higher than 4000K are considered to be 'cool' in

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<sup>82</sup> See *Chapter 2.2: Concerns of Medium, Technology and Preservation*, pages 17-18.

appearance, whereas lamps with rating below 3200 K are considered ‘warm.’<sup>83</sup> The lamps currently used by Wall in his lightboxes have a rating of 5000K, the CCT rating for cool white/daylight.

### *Magnetic Ballasts and Electronic Ballasts*

Ballasts regulate the flow of electrical current through the fluorescent lamp. Without them, there is nothing to initiate the starting voltage of the system and to stabilize the current flow through the lamp. There are two types of ballasts: magnetic and electronic.

Magnetic ballasts use a magnetic core to regulate the voltage (similarly to a transformer). Typically, these ballasts were wired ‘in series’, meaning that if one of the lamps fails or is removed, all the lamps in the circuit do not light.<sup>84</sup> To counter this, Wall’s lightboxes, which used magnetic ballasts, were wired to have only two lamps operate on a single ballast to ensure consistent lighting. Problems with this form of ballast include noticeable flickering and an audible humming noise.<sup>85</sup> Magnetic ballasts were popular until the late 1990s.<sup>86</sup> Electronic ballasts are favoured today because they use far less material and are cheaper to produce.

Electronic ballasts use solid state electronic circuitry to start and maintain voltage through the system. The majority of them are wired in ‘parallel circuits’, meaning that if one lamp fails or is removed, all the other lamps on the circuit remain lit and the ballasts continue to function efficiently. These ballasts are more efficient and generate less heat when used in

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<sup>83</sup> National Lighting Product Information Program. “T8 Fluorescent Lamps,” in *Lighting Answers* vol. 1.1 (April 1993): 5, accessed June 26, 2014, <http://www.lrc.rpi.edu/programs/NLPIP/lightinganswers/pdf/view/LAT8.pdf>.

<sup>84</sup> Standard Pro, “Fluorescent Ballasts,” 2010, accessed June 26, 2014, <http://www.standardpro.com/ballasts-info/fluorescent-ballasts/installation>.

<sup>85</sup> Early magnetic ballasts modulated the electrical current at a relatively low cycle rate that could cause a noticeable flicker. They also could vibrate at a low frequency, creating an audible humming noise. In order to reduce this, tar was used to insulate the transformers, which if the ballast failed could also result in the oozing of hot tar from it.

<sup>86</sup> As of 2010, magnetic ballasts can no longer be manufactured or imported into the United States of America and Canada. (see Erik Sorenson, “End of the Line for Magnetic Ballasts,” on NEMA Currents, last modified on July 9 2010, accessed June 26 2014, <http://blog.nema.org/2010/07/09/end-of-the-line-for-magnetic-ballasts/>).

internal light systems in comparison with magnetic ballasts. Currently, the problems associated with electronic ballasts are related to their cheap construction by some manufacturers, with the majority of them using as little copper and other expensive materials as possible. As a result, electronic ballasts can fail prematurely due to the components having far less ability to deal with overheating and, therefore, limiting the life of the fluorescent lamp.<sup>87</sup>

Wall's early lightboxes used magnetic ballasts in their construction. While the majority of the lightboxes have seen the replacement of this type of ballast with electronic ballasts, some such as *Steves Farm*, *Steveston* and *Double Self-Portrait* still contain magnetic ballasts.

c. Condition Reporting:

Condition reporting, using consistent methodology and terminology, presents an informative account of an object's state at a particular time. These reports differ in form depending on who is conducting the examination. In-house reports by registrars aid in collection management activities, whereas reports completed by conservators are intended for planning and performing treatments. Condition reports performed as part of the loan process, are often an amalgamation of the two forms and provide an insightful history of the object, and are especially valuable for the researcher.

Inconsistencies in reporting occur due to the variations of terminology used. For the Current Condition sections in the following case studies, a glossary of damage vocabulary was used to ensure consistency.

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<sup>87</sup> Edison Tech Center, "The Fluorescent Lamp," 2013, accessed June 26 2014, <http://www.edisontechcenter.org/Fluorescent.html>.

d. Display and Framing:

The following section examines the evolution of the display and framing of Wall's lightboxes. The dates are approximate.

*1978 - 1981/2:*

The earliest iteration of Wall's lightboxes were in-fact not "lightboxes" that are now associated with the term. The early form of work consisted of custom built wall, either free-standing or a false front on existing wall, with an opening of the correct size, height, and position for the print to sit almost flushed with the surface of wall (Figure 9).

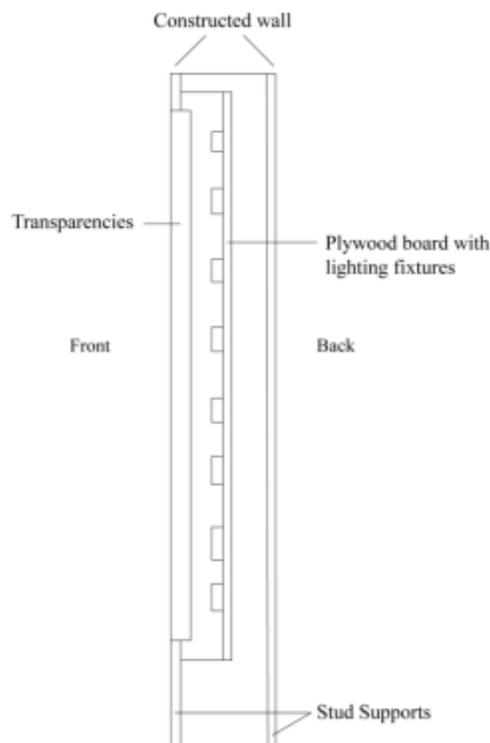


Figure 9. Author's schematic diagram, showing the cross view of earliest installation of Wall's lightboxes with components labeled. Not drawn to scale.

Each work had a specific minimum wall width; for example *The Destroyed Room* had a minimum width of 426.72 cm (168 in). The stud framing was used to carry the Plexiglas sheets supporting the prints, and additional room was calculated into this framing in order to allow for the expansion of the Plexiglas when heated by the lights. Instead of using two sheets of Plexiglas, only one sheet was used on the rear of the transparency prints and a piece of mylar was used to protect the front.

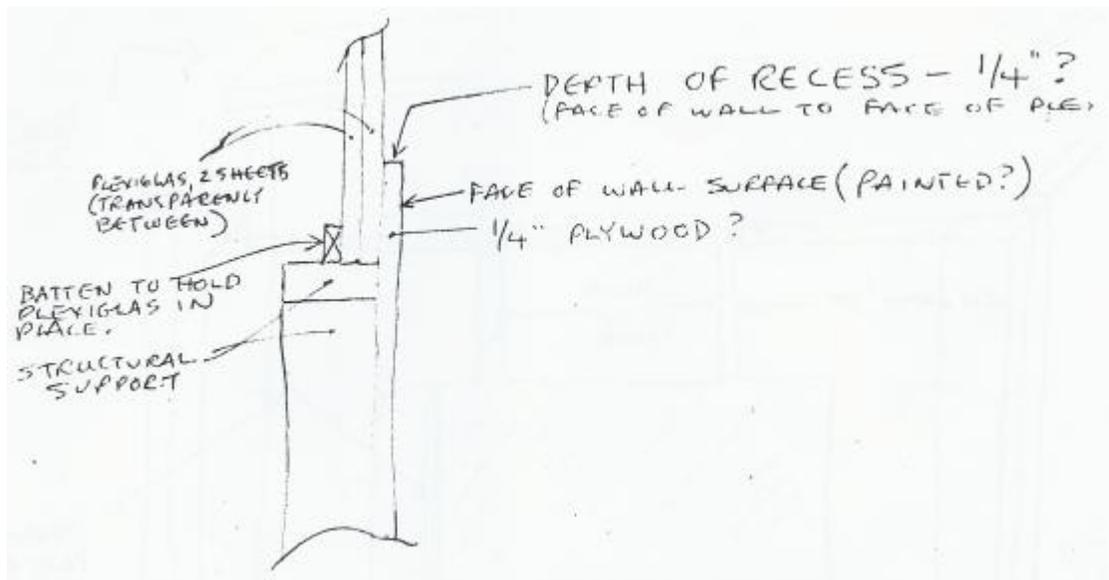


Figure 10. Schematic drawing from the conservation files for *Double Self-Portrait* for the Plexiglas and transparency installation based on artist's drawing, Ches Taylor, April 5 1983. Not drawn to scale. Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario's conservation file.

The lighting system was attached to a piece of plywood light board and was then bolted to rear of the temporary wall (Figure 10).

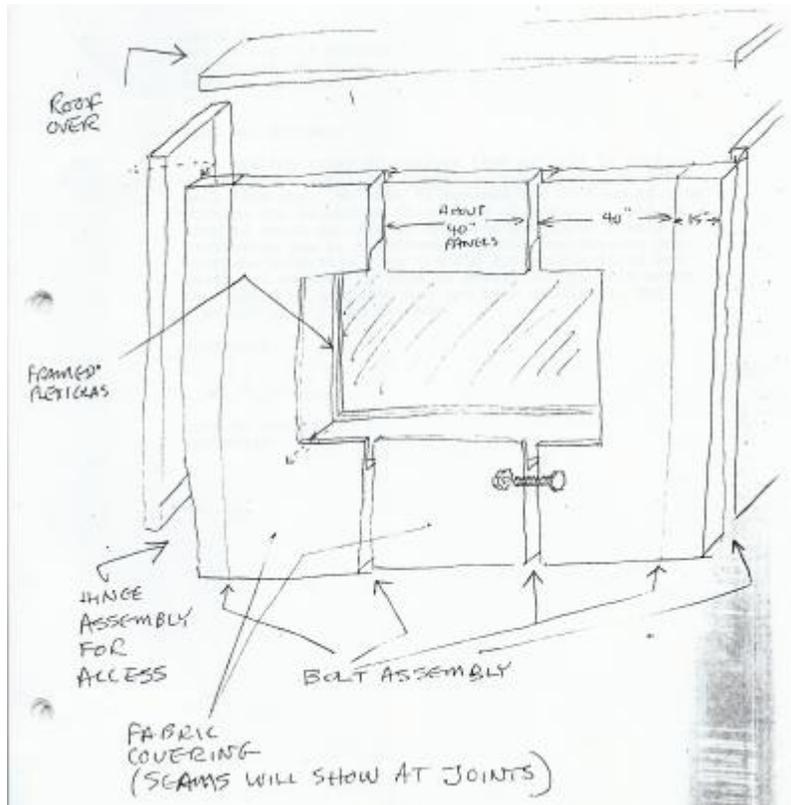


Figure 11. Schematic drawing from the conservation files for *Double Self-Portrait* of proposed modular assembly for work, Ches Taylor, April 5 1983. Not drawn to scale. Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario's conservation file.

Due to the labour intensive nature of these installation, some institutions like the AGO, designed modular walls that made installation easier (Figure 11).

In the earliest installations, the custom wall had a central seam that corresponded to the seam of the silver dye-beach prints. It appears that this version of the installation also included a slight raised platform floor, which was covered with carpet material that resembled the exhibiting gallery's floor.

1981/2 - 2007:

Beginning in approximately 1981, the lightboxes were made deep enough to contain all the technology required to light them.<sup>88</sup> These aluminum lightboxes range from 20 - 22 cm (7.87 - 8.66 in.) in depth. Around 1985, Wall began approaching collections about refurbishing his works produced prior to 1981 in exterior mounted lightbox frames.

### *Installing the Lightboxes*

The mounting of the larger lightboxes requires between four to ten trained art handlers and two plate jacks or pump-genies. The procedure for installation of the larger lightboxes is as follows:

Before the work is uncrated, the two hanging bars are attached to the wall. After uncrating and prior to the attaching of the print frame (if applicable to the specific piece; some works are crated with the print frame and the lightbox frame attached), the work, using two palate jacks, is hung once to ensure correct placement of the bars. At all times, two art handlers are required to support the sides of the work.

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<sup>88</sup> Examples of the various installation methods used by Wall prior to 1985 can be found in Els Barents, Jeff Wall *Transparencies* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987).

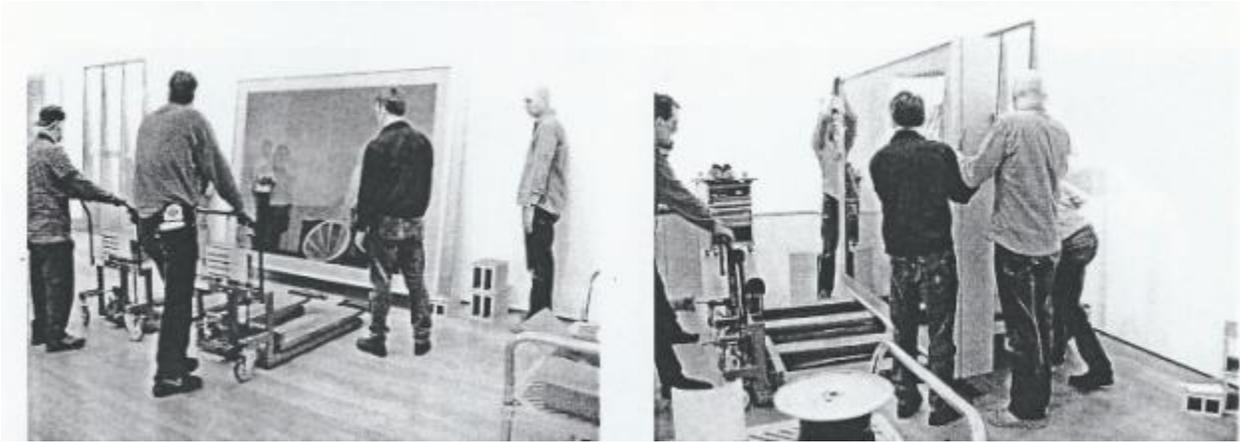


Figure 12. Photographs documenting the first steps of installation of *Double Self-Portrait* at MoMA in 2007. Courtesy of Art Gallery of Ontario's conservation file for *Double Self-Portrait*.

After positioning on the wall is confirmed and the lightbox frame is secured to the hanging bars, the wiring is checked and tested. In the case of *Double Self-Portrait* as with other works that are crated in the similar fashion, the print frame is removed prior to testing. The print frame is very delicate, and special care is required during handling to ensure the print frame does not torque. A minimum of five installers are required for this task.



Figure 13: Photographs documenting the removal of *Double Self-Portrait*'s print frame during its installation at MoMA in 2007. Courtesy of Art Gallery of Ontario's conservation file for *Double Self-Portrait*.

Once the lighting is checked (or re-wiring is completed depending on where the work is installed), the print frame is attached by the process of lifting the frame, placing the bottom lip on the bottom of the lightbox frame and guiding the rest of the print frame into place by tilting the print frame vertically. Then, the frames are secured together using the spring clips and screws, first tightening the bottom screws, then those at the top.

e. Storage and Housing:

Due to the size of the lightboxes, each requires a custom built crate for its housing. While his smaller lightboxes can have the print frame and Plexiglas housed in the same crate as the lightbox frame, Wall's larger lightboxes require two separate crates for the works. Lighting technology and lamps are stored separately from the crates. The crates are made from 0.95 cm (0.375 in.) thick water resistant plywood lined with polyurethane foam, and use lug bolts to secure them when closed. For the more fragile works, an inner case, either removable or fixed, is constructed for the print frame or lightbox frame. The weight of these crates range from 90.71 to 317.5 kg. (200 to 700 lbs.).

Overall, the crates and the housing of these works present complications for registrars and collection managers. The crates take up large areas of more often than not limited vault and storage space. Ideally, the works should be stored at cool temperatures since the work contain colour photographic transparencies.<sup>89</sup> The greatest contributor to deterioration of colour materials (also applicable to plastics) is storing works in areas that expose them to large

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<sup>89</sup> According to the Image Preservation Institute, the ideal conditions extended storage of colour photographic materials is 2°C 20-30%RH, -3°C 20-40%RH, or -10°C 20-50%. (James M. Reilly, *Storage Guide for Color Photographic Materials*, (New York: University of the State of New York, 1998): 25).

fluctuations of temperature and relative humidity (RH). However, for many institutions, which hold one or more of Wall's lightboxes, cold vault space is often not available.

f. Order and Arrangement of the Catalogue entries:

The ensuing case studies are presented in the form of an illustrated catalogue and commentary for the selected three works. Each case study comprises the following eleven elements:

- a. Creation
- b. Provenance
- c. Exhibition History
- d. Physical Description
- e. Display and Framing
- f. In Reproduction
- g. Current Condition
- h. Past Technical Problems
- i. Specific Concerns
- j. Long Term Collection Plans

## I. *The Destroyed Room*



Figure 14. *The Destroyed Room*, reproduction of entire work from *Catalogue Raisonné*.<sup>90</sup>

Despite the work being listed as a unique print, the NGC holds two versions of *The Destroyed Room*, one created in 1978 and a second one created in 1987. The 1978 version consists of the print and plans for the original inset wall installation.<sup>91</sup> This version was replaced in 1987 with an externally mounted lightbox frame, and was increased in size by 24.8 cm (9.76 in.) in height and 5.2 cm (2.24 in.) in width. Each object has separate accession numbers and exist as distinct object in the NGC's collection.

As per the artist's request, the 1978 version is no longer displayed. In the early 2000s, the 1978 version was considered for de-acquisition in order to provide silver dye-bleach print samples for the NGC's conservation department to carry out deterioration research so as to be

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<sup>90</sup> Vischer and Naef ed., *Catalogue Raisonné*, 35 (plate) and 274-75 (catalogue entry).

<sup>91</sup> For more information, see *Chapter 4.1.b: Display and Framing*, pages 36-39.

able to better preserve their Wall lightboxes. However, it was decided to keep the work in order to preserve the material history of this piece.

The following case study is divided into two sections to present a complete history of *The Destroyed Room*. While Wall would prefer the term “study” to be applied to the 1978 iteration of the work, for the purposes of this case study and the observations and commentary in Chapter 5 the term “version” will be used to indicate the differences between the two works.

i) *The Destroyed Room (1978 version)*

a. Creation



Figure 15. *The Destroyed Room*, street view of installation at Nova Gallery, Vancouver, 1978.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Galassi, *Wall*, 24.

This work was created in the spring-summer of 1978 and was Wall's second attempt at a lightbox work.<sup>93</sup> It was first shown in the autumn of 1978 at the Nova Gallery in Vancouver, in which it was installed in the front window of the space (Figure 15).<sup>94</sup>

#### b. Provenance

*The Destroyed Room* was purchased by the NGC from Wall in 1979 through the assistance of Claudia Black and Andrew Gruft, the owners of the Nova Gallery, at the end of its exhibition at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.

#### c. Exhibition History

The 1978 version of *The Destroyed Room* has been exhibited four times, twice in solo exhibitions and twice in group exhibitions.<sup>95</sup> The work was last shown in this version in the spring of 1988 at Le Nouveau Musée in Villeurbanne, France and Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster, Germany. After this, it has not been exhibited again as per the artist's request.

Nova Gallery, Vancouver, October 27 - November 10, 1978. Solo Exhibition. Shown in front window of the gallery space. No Catalogue.

*Jeff Wall: Installation of Faking Death (1977), The Destroyed Room (1978), Young Workers (1978), Picture for Women (1979)*, April 11 - June 3, 1979, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria. Solo Exhibition. **Catalogue:** *Jeff Wall: Installation of Faking Death (1977), The Destroyed Room (1978), Young Workers (1978), Picture for Women (1979)*. Victoria: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1979.

*Directions 1981*, Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington (D.C.), February 12 - May 3, 1981. Subsequently shown at Sarah Campbell Blaffer

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>94</sup> The Nova Gallery was operated by Claudia Black and Andrew Gruft in Vancouver from 1976-1981. (Roy Arden, "Tabula Nova: A Personal Account of the Nova Gallery" in *Real Pictures - Photographs from the Collection of Claudia Black and Andrew Gruft* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2005), accessed July 20, 2014, [http://www.royarden.com/media/ardentexts/arden\\_tabula\\_nova.pdf](http://www.royarden.com/media/ardentexts/arden_tabula_nova.pdf).)

<sup>95</sup> These numbers do not include exhibitions and installations at the NGC.

Gallery, University of Houston, Houston, June 12 - July 26, 1981. Group Exhibition. **Catalogue:** McClintic, Miranda. *Directions 1981*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981.

*Jeff Wall*. Le Nouveau Musée, Villeurbanne, March 5 - May 15, 1988. Subsequently shown at Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster, June 11 - August 7, 1988. Solo exhibition. **Catalogues:** Wall, Jeff and Frédéric Migayrou. *Jeff Wall*. Villeurbanne, France: Le Nouveau Musée, 1988. Wall, Jeff and Andreas Thielman. *Jeff Wall*. Münster, Germany: Westfälischer Kunstverein, 1988.

#### d. Physical Description

The 1978 version of *The Destroyed Room* is 169 cm (66.5 in.) high x 258.4 cm (101.7 in.) wide x 7 cm (2.75 in.) deep, including the single sheet of Plexiglas and lightbox. Due to the restrictions of the silver dye-bleach materials, the transparency prints for *The Destroyed Room* (1978) consists of two separate 152.4 cm (60 in.) high by 101.6 cm (40 in.) wide silver dye-bleach transparencies that overlap slightly and are joined together with a vertical seam of one inch wide 3M Polyester 352 tape. The overlap is approximately 2 mm. The image is listed in the NGC conservation records as 152.4 cm (60 in.) high x 203.2 cm (80 in.) wide.<sup>96</sup>

*The Destroyed Room* originally consisted of the two transparency prints, a single sheet of 152.4 cm (60 in.) x 243.8 cm (96 in.) white translucent Plexiglas, fourteen fluorescent lamps and fixtures. All are attached to a 152.4 cm (60 in.) x 243.8 cm (96 in.) plywood panel, which in turn was attached, using 28 bolts, to the constructed wall structure. The work used fourteen 243.8 cm (96 in.) Philips no. 47 lamps, and the transparency prints were produced with this light source as the colour standard and reference.

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<sup>96</sup> The catalogue for Wall's 1979 exhibition at Art Gallery of Greater Victoria lists this image being 134.7 x 198.1 cm. (*Jeff Wall: Installation of Faking Death (1977), The Destroyed Room (1978), Young Workers (1978), Picture for Women (1979)*, (Victoria: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1979): 4 and 8). This discrepancy in image size is from what, at the time was thought to constitute the image. It appears that the listed dimensions in the catalogue are those of the opening in the wall structures, whereas the ones found in the NGC records only include the transparencies alone.

#### e. Display and Framing

As described in the *Display and Framing* of the introductory notes for the case studies (pages 36-38), this version of *The Destroyed Room* was conceived to be installed flush with a constructed wall. As per the installation directions, the wall had a minimum size of 426.7 cm (168 in.) with an opening for the transparency prints of approximately 134.6 cm (53 in.) x (195.6) 77 in.<sup>97</sup>

The installations varied however depending on the exhibition space. For example, the catalogue for Wall's solo exhibition at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria indicates that a single wall structure was made with separate openings for *The Destroyed Room* and *Picture for Women* (1979). Wall described the installation in the catalogue:

“A wall was built down the length of the Ker Gallery. The resulting corridor, open at one end only, and painted white, became the gallery for the exhibition. Spectators entering the Ker Gallery first see the back of the construction. Passing down the corridor, they see three works in the following order: *The Destroyed Room*, *Faking Death*, *Picture for Women*. *The Destroyed Room and Picture for Women are installed behind openings in the wall. Faking Death is mounted on the wall in its own cases.*”<sup>98</sup>

At one point a backing lightbox structure was constructed instead of using the bolted plywood system to mount the fluorescent lamps with a depth of 7 cm. It is unclear from the NGC records when this was done.

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<sup>97</sup> Installation instructions by Jeff Wall for *The Destroyed Room*, dated 1980, found in the NGC *The Destroyed Room* conservation records.

<sup>98</sup> Jeff Wall: *Installation of Faking Death (1977), The Destroyed Room (1978), Young Workers (1978), Picture for Women (1979)*, 1. *Faking Death (1977)* was Wall's first attempt with the lightbox technique. It was later removed by Wall from his oeuvre and no longer exists.

#### f. In Reproduction

While the image of *The Destroyed Room* has been reproduced often throughout the years, only a single image of its original installation at the Nova Gallery has been widely reproduced.

#### g. Current Conditions

Since its last exhibition in 1988, the 1978 version of *The Destroyed Room* has been kept in its original storage and rarely viewed by the NGC staff. The transparencies, still adhered to its Plexiglas, are stored flat in a custom built box in the NGC's offsite storage.

#### h. Past Technical Problems

All past technical problems arose out of the newness of the lightbox form for the institutions, art handlers and the artist himself. When the work was sold to NGC, Wall provided in-depth installation instructions for the work with schematic drawings and previous installation documentation. There is little documentation of what the past problems were, however, it appears most were related to the construction of the walls required for installation.

The main concern with the care of the work was with the handling of silver dye-bleach transparency prints. The transparency prints for *The Destroyed Room* (1978 version) were produced in the traditional darkroom, and the resulting transparency prints did require some retouching on the verso side of the print (the side which was closest to the Plexiglas). Retouching was done with sprayed-on retouch dyes that easily come off when touched with bare-skin.

i. Specific Concerns

There are no specific concerns with this version of the work since it is no longer displayed or loaned.

j. Long Term Collection's Plan

Currently, the NGC does not have any long term plans for the work except for storing the work safely and ensuring the work is not shown. The only way in which this version of the work will be shown again is if there is a serious change of decision by Wall.

ii) *The Destroyed Room* (1987 version)



Figure 16. *The Destroyed Room* (1987 version), installation view *Jeff Wall Photographs* from the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, May 1 - July 28, 2013.<sup>99</sup>

a. Creation

Wall approached the NGC in 1985 with a proposal to produce an externally mounted version of the lightbox with a new larger print. After a discussion with the acquisition committee the external lightbox was constructed in Germany in September 1987, and was first shown at the NGC in the winter of 1988.

b. Provenance

The 1987 version was purchased at cost directly from the artist in the fall of 1987.

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<sup>99</sup> Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, "Jeff Wall Photographs," 2013, accessed September 2, 2014, <https://www.mca.com.au/collection/exhibition/619-jeff-wall-photographs/>.

### c. Exhibition History

Since its creation in 1987, this iteration of *The Destroyed Room* has been exhibited eight times, five times in solo exhibitions and three times in group exhibitions.<sup>100</sup>

*Jeff Wall*. Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., February 20 - May 11, 1997. Subsequently shown at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, July 13 - October 5, 1997 and Art Tower Mito, Japan, December 13, 1997 - March 22, 1998. Solo Exhibition. **Catalogue:** Brougher, Kerry. *Jeff Wall*. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art and New York: Scalo, 1997.

*World Without End - Photography and the 20th Century*. Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, December 2, 2000 - February 25, 2001. Group Exhibition. **Catalogue:** Drew, Erica and Nicola Teffer. *World Without End - Photography and the 20th Century*. Sydney, Australia: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2000.

*Home Show*. The Winnipeg Art Gallery, September 12, 2002 - January 7, 2003. Group Exhibition. **Catalogue:** Brydon, Anne and Amy Karlinsky. *Home Show*. Winnipeg: The Winnipeg Art Gallery, 2003.

*Jeff Wall: Tableaux*. Astrup Fearnley Museet for Moderne Kunst, Oslo, Norway. March 20 - May 25, 2004. Solo Exhibition. **Catalogue:** Kvaran, Gunnar B., Grete Årbu, Jean-Francois Chevrier and Els Barents. *Jeff Wall: Tableaux*. ed. Woltmann, Marit. Oslo: Astrup Fearnley Museet for Moderne Kunst, 2004.

*Jeff Wall: Photographs 1978-2004*, Schaulager Basel, Basel, Switzerland, April 30 2005 - September 25, 2005. Subsequently shown at Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom, October 21 2005 - January 8 2006. Solo Exhibition. **Catalogues and related publications to the exhibition:** Visher, Theodora and Heidi Naef eds. *Jeff Wall. Catalogue Raisonné 1978 – 2004*. Göttingen: Schaulager Basel/Steidl Publishing, 2005; Wagstaff, Sheena. *Jeff Wall, Photographs 1978–2004*, exh. cat. London: Tate Modern/Tate Publishing, 2005; Burnett, Craig. *Modern Artists: Jeff Wall*. London: Tate Publishing, 2005; Wagstaff, Sheena. “A view from an apartment 2004-05”, in Howarth, Sophie ed. *Singular Images: Essays on Remarkable Photographs*. London: Tate Publishing, 2005.

*Jeff Wall*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, February 25, 2007 - May 21, 2007. Subsequently shown at The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, June 29 - September 23, 2007 and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA, October 27, 2007 - January 27, 2008. Solo Exhibition. **Catalogue and related publications to the exhibition:** Galassi, Peter and James Rondeau. *Jeff Wall*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007; Galassi, Peter ed. *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007.

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<sup>100</sup> These numbers do not include exhibitions and installations at the NGC.

*Jeff Wall Photographs*. Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, Australia, May 26, 2012 - September 10, 2012. Subsequently shown at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, November 30, 2012 to March 17, 2013 and Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia, May 1, 2013 to July 28, 2013. Solo Exhibition. **Catalogue:** Dufour, Gary, Isobel Crombie and Mark Bolland. *Jeff Wall Photographs*. Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2012.

*Seduced by Art: Photography Past and Present*. National Gallery UK, London, October 31, 2012 - January 20, 2013. Subsequently shown at CaixaForum Barcelona, Spain, February 22 - May 19, 2013 and Caixa Forum Madrid, Spain, June 19 - September 15, 2013. Group Exhibition. **Catalogue:** Kingsley, Hope and Christopher Riopelle. *Seduced by Art: Photography Past and Present*. London, UK: National Gallery Company, 2012.

#### d. Physical Description

As its currently displayed, *The Destroyed Room* is 179 cm (70.47 in.) high x 249.0 cm (98.03 in.) wide x 20.6 cm (8.11 in.) deep, including its aluminum print frame, which holds the Plexiglas with two transparency prints and its aluminum lightbox frame. As with Wall's other large-scale transparencies, the print for *The Destroyed Room* consists of two separate 179 cm (70.47 in.) high by 124.5 cm (49 in.) wide silver dye-bleach transparency prints that overlap approximately 2 mm and are joined together with a vertical seam of one inch wide 3M Polyester 850 tape.

The aluminum print frame consists of a polished metal outer frame (179 cm (70.47 in.) x 249.0 cm (98.03 in.) x 7.62 cm (3 in.)), two pieces of Plexiglas - one transparent and one translucent white (both 179 cm (70.47 in.) high x 249.0 cm (98.03 in.) wide). The transparency prints are attached emulsion side down to the front of the translucent white Plexiglas using two inch wide 3M Polyester 352 clear tape. These are then sandwiched with the transparent Plexiglas on top and placed into the aluminum print frame.

The print frame is then mounted onto the aluminum lightbox structure with six screw-tighten spring clips that are attached to the top and bottom sides of the lightbox frame.

The work is lit with ten 243.84 cm (96 in.) fluorescent lamps, and contains five ballasts that each power two lamps. The ballasts have a North American power rating of 110V 15 amp. These lamps are held in place using T8 Medium Bipin sockets. The standard fluorescent lamps used by the work are Philips F96T 12/C50 colortone 50.

#### e. Display and Framing

The lightbox constructed in 1987 is still used today for its display. The work is hung using two metal ledges on the verso of the box that are then screwed into two wooden battens that are first attached to the hanging wall. The bottom edge is hung 59 cm (23.22 in.) from the floor.

#### f. In Reproduction

While this work has been reproduced often, this version of *The Destroyed Room* is rarely reproduced in installation view.

#### g. Current Conditions

The author was unable to carry out a physical condition report with the work due to the work's recent return from exhibition in the spring of 2014 from Spain and unforeseen circumstances. The following information is gathered from the meticulous condition reports found in the NGC's conservation files that were conducted by NGC's photo-conservator Christophe Vischi throughout the work's inclusion in the travelling exhibition *Seduced by Art: Photography Past and Present*.

### *Transparency prints*

The transparency prints are the original ones, printed in 1987. Prior to exhibition, the NGC conducts densitometric readings to evaluate dye loss or changes. From these results and considering the number of times the work has been exhibited, compounded with its age, the transparency prints are considered in excellent condition.

### *Plexiglas*

There are a few scratches on the surface of the transparent Plexiglas visible.

### *Print and Lightbox Frame*

The lightbox frame is sturdy, and has few discrete scuff marks over the vertical side panels. All six of the spring clips are accounted for and still in good structural condition.

## Crate



Figure 17: Photographs of the three crates in transit, Creator Unknown. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Canada's conservation files for *The Destroyed Room*.

*The Destroyed Room* is housed in a supported vertical position in its own crate, which is also used when it travels. Currently, the work travels as a single assembled unit with the fluorescent lamps removed. These, along with five additional lamps, are crated separately. When a transformer is required for non-North American voltage display, it is shipped in an additional crate.

### h. Past Technical Problems

From the NGC conservation records, the work has been extremely well maintained and monitored over the years. There were only a few past technical problems recorded in its files.

### *Plasticizer Migration*

The NGC began noticing white deposits developing on the surface of the print in the early 2000s. While these were a severe concern for NGC's conservation department at the time, the deposits were easily removed by hand and polishing of the transparency. It was later postulated that these deposits were from the plasticizer migration from the polyester support in combination with heat buildup during illumination.<sup>101</sup> From correspondence with the Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery in Regina, Canada, it was hypothesized that these deposits could also be from long-haul air travel, since these dots were also found on the transparency of its lightbox, *The Jewish Cemetery* (1980/1985), after it was loaned to an exhibition in Sydney, Australia.

#### i. Specific Concerns

##### *Loans*

*The Destroyed Room* is an extremely significant work for Wall, the NGC, and many curators and institutions. Due to the large number of loan requests, the NGC has set parameters on if and when the work is loaned. The loan must be beneficial to either the NGC reputation or Wall's exposure as an artist.

The loaning process for this work is complex and requires approval from three levels of staff at the NGC and members of its board. The justification of the loan needs approval by a loans review committee, composed of the NGC Director, the curator responsible, and several board of governors members. It must also undergo a conservation assessment to ensure that it is physically able to travel safely.

### *Electrical Technology*

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<sup>101</sup> This is reasoning for the white deposits that appear several times within *The Destroyed Room* conservation records.

Due to Wall's installation requirements of no wires, electrical outlets, or transformers be visible when his lightboxes are displayed, lightboxes are powered through a wire-to-wire connection, a practice that shortens the wires. From the frequency of *The Destroyed Room's* exhibition, a grounded plug was installed to prevent future re-wiring when the wires became too short. However, doing this did complicate the work's installation since there is now no space to accommodate the plug between the lightbox and wall. *The Destroyed Room* now requires cutting a hole into the supporting wall to hide its wire.

### *Replacement Parts*

The NGC currently does not have additional prints for the work. It has not purchased reserve prints for the work as part Wall's reserve print project.<sup>102</sup> Wall was approached by the NGC prior to beginning his reserve print project, requesting replacement prints, however no prints were produced due to Wall's wishes to be the lone decider on when a print should be replaced.

The institution does store additional replacement parts for the work, including a supply of lamps.

### j. Long Term Collection's Plan

The NGC's long term plan for *The Destroyed Room* (1987 version) is eventually to replace the fluorescent lighting system with an LED lighting system, once Wall authorize this change. As a large institution with the facilities to conduct its own research, NGC has been investigating its own tests on the effects of LEDs on photographic materials.

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<sup>102</sup> For more information on Wall's future plans for his lightboxes, see *Appendix I*, pages 104-108.

## II. *Double Self-Portrait*



Figure 18. *Double Self-Portrait*, installation view of work from AGO's *Elevated: Contemporary Art in the AGO Tower*, taken by author, May 2014.

### a. Creation:

*Double Self-Portrait* was created in the winter-spring of 1979 in a borrowed studio in Vancouver.<sup>103</sup> The work was altered in 1985, 1988, and 2003.<sup>104</sup> It is a unique print with an artist proof.

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<sup>103</sup> Vischer and Naef ed., *Catalogue Raisonné*, 43 (plate) and 283 (catalogue entry). The catalogue entry also includes a production shot.

<sup>104</sup> These dates are estimations by the author based on the records available in the accession and conservation files at the AGO.

b. Provenance:

The work was purchased by the AGO from the David Bellman Gallery (Toronto) on behalf of the artist after his solo exhibition there in late autumn of 1982. This version consisted solely of two seamed silver dye-bleach transparency prints and the materials necessary to build the inset wall installation.

c. Exhibition History:

Since its creation in 1979, *Double Self-Portrait* has been exhibited eleven times, six in solo exhibitions, and five times in group exhibitions outside of the owning institution.<sup>105</sup>

*documenta 7*, Kassel, Germany, June 19 - September 28, 1982. Group Exhibition. **Catalogue:** Documenta. *Documenta 7, Kassel*. vol. 1 and 2. Kassel: D&V Paul Dierichs Gimbt & Co. K. G., 1982.

*Jeff Wall*, David Bellman Gallery, Toronto, November 20 - December 18, 1982. Solo Exhibition. No Catalogue.

*Jeff Wall*, The Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, January 9 - February 20, 1983. Solo Exhibition. **Catalogue:** Wallace, Ian and Jeff Wall. *Jeff Wall Selected Works*. Chicago: The Renaissance Society, 1983.

*Jeff Wall: Transparencies*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, May 9 - June 24, 1984. Subsequently shown at Kunsthalle, Basel, September 30 - November 4, 1984. Solo Exhibition. **Catalogue:** Ammann, Jean Christophe and Ian Wallace. *Jeff Wall: Transparencies*. LaGrazie, Gabriella edited. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts and Basel: Kunsthalle, 1984.

*Günther Förg en Jeff Wall: Fotowerken*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, September 27 - November 4, 1985. Group Exhibition. **Catalogue:** Barents, Els. *Günther Förg en Jeff Wall: fotowerks*. Bulletin: Stedelijk Museum, 1985.

*Jeff Wall: Westfälischer Kunstverein*, Westfälischer Kunstverein, June 11 - August 7, 1988. Solo Exhibition. **Catalogue:** Andreas Thielman. *Jeff Wall*. Münster, Germany: Westfälischer Kunstverein, 1988.

*The Self is Something Else: Art at the End of the 20th Century*, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf, Germany, February 19 - June 18, 2000. Group Exhibition. **Catalogue:**

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<sup>105</sup> These numbers do not include exhibitions and installations at the AGO.

*The Self is Something Else – Art at the end of the 20th Century*, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf: Hausschau Å| Das Haus in der Kunst, Deichtorhallen, Hamburg, 2000.

*The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960 - 1982*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, October 12, 2003 - January 11, 2004. Subsequently shown at UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA, February 8 - May 9, 2004; Museo de Arte Contemporanea de Vigo, Vigo, Spain, June 4 - September 19, 2004; Fotomuseum Winterthur, Winterthur, Switzerland, November 26, 2004 - February 13, 2005. Group Exhibition. **Catalogue:** Fogle, Douglas ed. *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960 - 1982*. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2003.

*Jeff Wall: Photographs 1978-2004*, Schaulager Basel, Basel, Switzerland, April 30 - September 25, 2005. Subsequently shown at Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom, October 21 - January 8 2006. Solo Exhibition. **Catalogue and related publications to the exhibition:** Visher, Theodora and Heidi Naef eds. *Jeff Wall. Catalogue Raisonné 1978 – 2004*. Göttingen: Schaulager Basel/Steidl Publishing, 2005; Wagstaff, Sheena. *Jeff Wall, Photographs 1978–2004, exh. cat.* London: Tate Modern/Tate Publishing, 2005; Burnett, Craig. *Modern Artists: Jeff Wall*. London: Tate Publishing, 2005; Wagstaff, Sheena. “A view from an apartment 2004-05”, in Howarth, Sophie ed. *Singular Images: Essays on Remarkable Photographs*. London: Tate Publishing, 2005.

*Jeff Wall*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, February 25 - May 21, 2007. Subsequently shown at The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, June 29 - September 23, 2007, and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA, October 27 - January 27, 2008. Solo Exhibition. **Catalogue and related publications to the exhibition:** Galassi, Peter and James Rondeau. *Jeff Wall*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007; Galassi, Peter ed. *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007.

#### d. Physical Description

As currently displayed, *Double Self-Portrait* is 193.5 cm (76.18 in.) high x 249.9 cm (98.38 in.) wide x 21 cm (8.28 in.) deep, including its aluminum frame, which holds the Plexiglas with two transparency prints and its aluminum lighbox. As with Wall’s other large-scale transparencies, the print for *Double Self-Portrait* consists of two separate 179 cm (74.9 in.) high by 114 cm (44.9 in.) wide silver dye-bleach transparency prints that overlap slightly and are joined together with a vertical seam of one inch wide 3M Polyester 850 tape. The overlap is approximately 2 mm.

The aluminum print frame which holds the transparency prints consists of a polished metal outer frame 193.5 cm (76.18 in.) x 249.9 cm (98.38 in.) x 7.62 cm (3 in.), two pieces of Plexiglas - one transparent and one translucent white (both 193.5 cm (76.18 in.) high x 249.9 cm (98.38 in.) wide). The prints are attached emulsion side down to the front of the translucent white Plexiglas using two inch wide 3M Polyester 352 clear tape. These are then sandwiched with the transparent Plexiglas on top and placed into the aluminum print frame.

The print frame construction is then mounted to the aluminum lightbox structure with eight screw-tighten spring clips that are attached to the top and bottom sides of the aluminum frame.

The work is lit with twenty 121.92 cm (48 in.) fluorescent lamps, each with its own ballast. These lamps are held in place using T8 Medium Bipin sockets. Since this work travels extensively, the AGO keeps both the European standard lamps and the North American standard lamps stipulated by Wall.

The European standard fluorescent lamps are:

OSRAM L 36W/ 12-950  
LUMLUX de Luxe  
Daylight  
121.92 cm (48 in.)

The North American standard fluorescent lamps are:

OCTRON FO 23/950/48 in. 32 W  
Rapid and Instant Start 5000K  
T8 Medium Bipin  
121.92 cm (48 in.)

#### e. Display and Framing

When the work was purchased by the AGO, *Double Self-Portrait* was originally smaller than its current iteration. Like *The Destroyed Room*, the first iteration was not externally

mounted in a lightbox as it is today, rather the work was installed almost flushed with the surface of a constructed wall (Figure 20).<sup>106</sup>



Figure 19. Detail of installation view of *Double Self-Portrait* from The Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago, 1983.<sup>107</sup>

The original dimension of the two transparency prints was 164 x 218 cm (64 9/16 x 85 13/16 in.) and used 243.8 cm (96 in.) fluorescent lamps to light the work. There were no frames used in the construction of the works, only a Plexiglas sandwich held together with 3M tape. When a freestanding wall was used in exhibition, it had a minimum size of 317.5 cm (125 in.) high by 426.7 cm (168 in.) wide by 60.9 cm (24 in.) deep.

<sup>106</sup> This display history is discussed in *Chapter 4.1 b: Display and Framing*, pages 36-38.

<sup>107</sup> Els Barents, *Jeff Wall: Transparencies* (New York City: Rizzoli, 1987): 88.

In 1983, the AGO wanted to create a frame for the Plexiglas sandwich to reduce handling of the prints and ease their installation. This frame, however, would have altered the appearance of installation by increasing the transparency prints's recession from the wall surface by a half of an inch, from 0.64 cm (0.25 in.) to 1.9 cm (0.75 in.). It is unclear if this proposed frame was ever constructed.

An externally mounted lightbox was first discussed in 1985.<sup>108</sup> The records, however, are unclear when the work took its current form and size. It is most likely that, like *The Destroyed Room*, it was done in early 1988, when two transparency prints of approximately 10 cm with the dimensions of 172 x 229 cm (67.7 x 90.1 in.) were produced. The original 1979 prints were returned to Wall.

#### f. In Reproduction

Unlike Wall's other works which do not include the vertical seam of the two adjoining prints in reproduction, *Double Self-Portrait*'s seam appears to have been deliberately emphasized in early reproductions.<sup>109</sup> All exhibition documentation for *Double Self-Portrait* prior to 1990 has some indication of the vertical seam (Figures 20-22).

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<sup>108</sup> From a letter from the artist to the AGO in 1985, it appears that the artist, also working with the NGC, was working towards externally mounting his earlier lightboxes.

<sup>109</sup> Vischer and Naef ed., *Catalogue Raisonné*, 283.

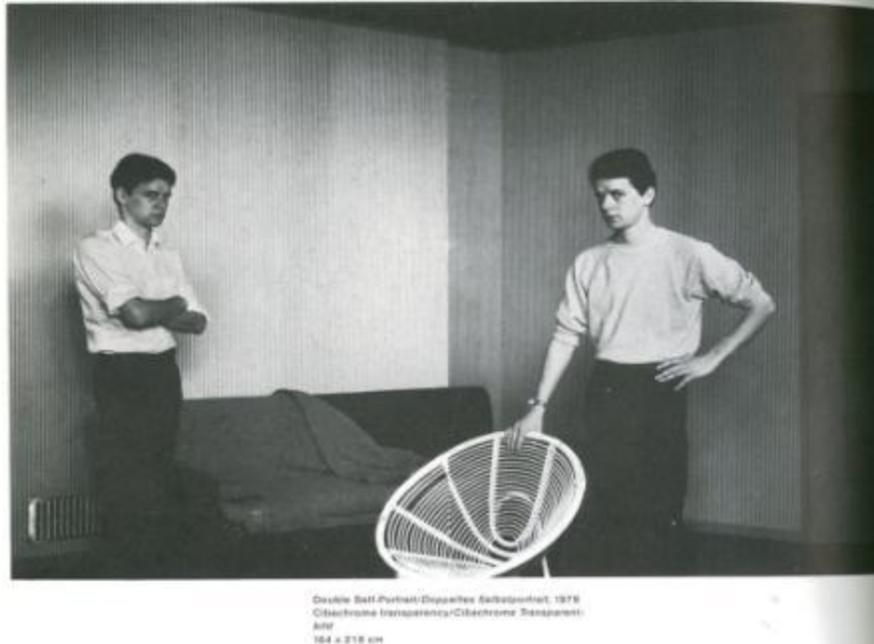


Figure 20. Reproduction of entire work from *documenta 7 Journal*, 1982.<sup>110</sup>



Figure 21. Reproduction of entire work in plate section from *The Renaissance Society exhibition catalogue*, 1983.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Documenta GmbH. *Documenta 7, Kassel* (Kassel: D&V Paul Dierichs Gimbt & Co. K. G., 1982): 350.

<sup>111</sup> Ian Wallace, *Jeff Wall: Selected Works* (Chicago: The Renaissance Society, 1983): 40.

All current reproductions of the work are furnished by Wall's studio, but they are distributed by to the AGO Rights and Reproductions department as a digital file. This is the same image that appears in the *Catalogue Raisonné* (Figure 22).



Figure 22. *Double Self-Portrait*, reproduction of entire work from *Catalogue Raisonné*.<sup>112</sup>

#### g. Current Condition

The following information was collected by the author in March 2014 over several visits to the work when it was installed at the AGO as part of its temporary exhibition of selections from its permanent contemporary art collection.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Vischer and Naef ed., *Catalogue Raisonné*, 43 (plate) and 283 (catalogue entry).

<sup>113</sup> The exhibition was entitled *Elevated: Contemporary Art in the AGO Tower*. *Double Self-Portrait* was included in both parts of the exhibition and was on display from January - October 2014.

### *Transparency prints*

From the AGO records, it appears the two silver dye-bleach transparency prints have been replaced three times, in 1985, 1988 and in 2003. At the time of the 2007 MoMA retrospective, Wall considered the transparency prints to be in near perfect condition.<sup>114</sup>

### *Plexiglas*

From the condition report examination in March 2014 the Plexiglas is in excellent condition with only minor abrasions on the lower left and in the centre.

### *Print frame*

The frame is in good condition. All eight of the spring clips are still accounted for on the back of the print frame, however, three spring clips are missing screws, and two spring clips are at risk of becoming lost.

### *Lightbox Frame*

The surface of the aluminum lightbox frame is in excellent condition with no apparent damage or abrasion. The lightbox frame is cleaned regularly with distilled water when it is on display. No industrial aluminum cleaners are used.

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<sup>114</sup> Wall's opinions on *Double Self-Portrait* were found in a letter dated 2007 in the AGO conservation files, creator unknown.



Figure 23. *Double Self-Portrait*, interior view of lightbox, 2007. Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario's conservation files for *Double Self-Portrait*.

The interior of the lightbox is also in excellent condition. All four back vents are in good condition.

#### *Crate*

A new travelling crate was constructed in 2012 for the work's planned inclusion in *Double Self-Portrait* at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark. The borrowing institution covered the costs. The crate measures 226.1 cm (89 in.) high x 287 cm (112.9 in.) wide x 52.7 cm (20.75 in.) deep. The work was eventually not included in the exhibition.

## h. Past Technical Problems

### *Electrical Technology*

As explained in the introductory notes to this chapter,(pages 33-36) over time this system has proved to be extremely problematic and unpredictable.

The following is a chronology of past electrical modifications:

1995:

An overhaul of the electrical system was carried out in 1995 following the existing wiring pattern. At this time five magnetic ballasts, MagneTek Universal Watt Reducers, were installed. Each ballast powered two Sylvania Design 50 GTE F96T12 / DSGN 50 75W 8 ft. Slimline fluorescent lamps. The lamps were 243.84 cm (96 inches) in length and totalled ten (Figure 24).

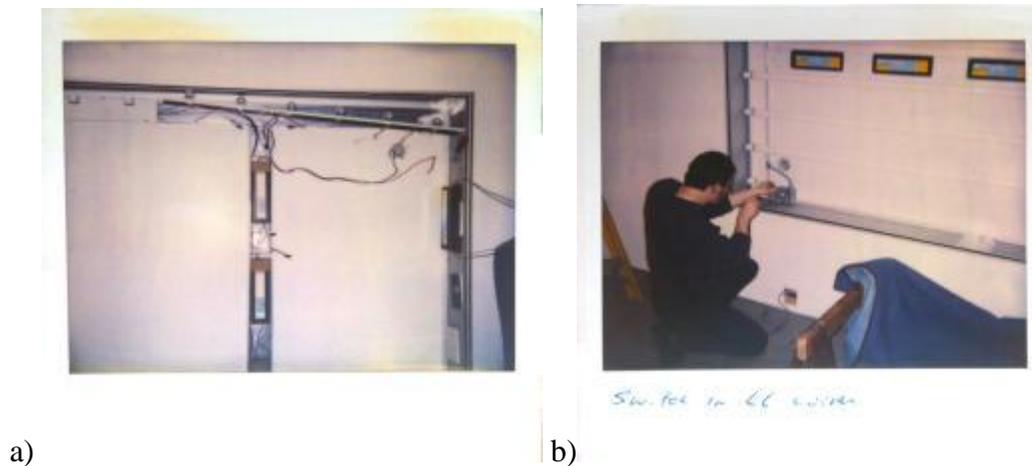


Figure 25. Documentation polaroids of the overhaul of the *Double Self-Portrait*'s electrical system, installed in 1995: a) work in progress b) finishing touches. Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario's conservation records for *Double Self-Portrait*.

At some point between 1995 and 2007, the lightbox was re-wired to its current specifications of twenty electrical ballasts with twenty 121.92 cm (48 inches) fluorescent lamps that are 32 W. There is no indication, however, of when this work occurred (figures 25 a and b).

During the installation at MoMA for the exhibition in 2007, the electrical cord and a new plug were added to the work by splicing to the existing cord.

### *Spring Clips*

The current system for attaching the print frame to the lightbox frame consists of eight spring clips. There are no replacements available for the spring clips. All spring clips are pinned into the frame preventing the screws from getting lost. However, over time several pins have become lost, resulting in the loss of the screws that attach the frame to the lightbox. New pins are required to prevent the further loss of the screws.

When the work was on display in 2007 at MoMA, suggestions by Wall's assistant Alexander Clarke were made on how to repair the spring clips. These were to re-tap each clip to create new screw threads, replace the attaching screws and re-bend the springs. These repairs have yet to be completed.

#### i. Specific Concerns

### *Seam Tape*

The tape used to seam the two prints needs to be replaced periodically. If the tape is left on too long, it can become dried out due to heat generated by the lightbox and general aging. As a result, it can very difficult to remove, and this can damage the surface of the prints. Ideally, the seam should be freshly taped with every new installation. Due to the time it takes and the required man power to undertake this task, the replacement only happens prior to the work going on display.

## *Loans*

Due to the size and the historical significance of the work in the AGO's collection, all loan decisions are made by a committee rather than the Curator of Photography or the registrar department.

## *Replacement Parts*

Fluorescent lamps:

The AGO stores extra lamps for both European and North American specifications; these are held by the Registrar's office.

Transparency prints:

The AGO has purchased a set of reserve prints as part of with Wall's reserve print project.<sup>115</sup> These prints are stored at Wall's personal facilities in Vancouver.

## *j. Long Term Collection's Plan*

The foreseeable plan is to have Jeff Wall's assistant, Alexander Clarke, evaluate the work the next time that it is loaned and installed in a different institution. This evaluation is to provide recommendations on upgrading the electrical system to a more efficient system and the removal of the magnetic ballasts and potential replacement electrical systems. At that time, the original artist proof will also be compared to the AGO transparencies and an examination of the mounting of the print will be conducted as part of an independent condition report from the "artist's point of view". This is viewed by the AGO as a necessary consultation in order to ensure that all work done on the piece is aligned with the Jeff Wall's artistic vision.

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<sup>115</sup> For further information on Wall's "Reserve Print Project", see *Appendix I.I: Reserve Print Project*, pages 105-107.

### III. *Steves Farm, Steveston*



Figure 25. *Steves Farm, Steveston*, view of assembled work in MacIntosh Gallery, Western University's collection vault, taken by author, March 13, 2014.

#### a. Creation:

This work was photographed in Steveston, British Columbia in the spring of 1980. While a smaller version was produced in 1984 for the group exhibition in *Günther Förg en Jeff Wall: fotowerken* at the Stedelijk, Amsterdam, the definitive, larger version was produced in late 1985 or early 1986 (see Figure 28).<sup>116</sup> Three editions of the larger scale were produced, the other two

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<sup>116</sup> Vischer and Naef ed., *Catalogue Raisonné*, 286. There is also an unnumbered chromogenic colour working proof, which was sold in a charitable auction to a private collector.

are located at FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais, Dunkerque, France and Glenstone, Maryland, United States.<sup>117</sup>

b. Provenance:

The John Labatt Company Limited as part of the company's Canadian art collection purchased the work directly from the artist in 1986. It was donated to MG in 1994 as part of a donation of fourteen other works.

c. Exhibition History:

Since its creation in late 1985 or early 1986, *Steves Farm, Steveston*, held by the MG, has been exhibited two times, both in solo exhibitions.<sup>118</sup>

*Jeff Wall*. Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., February 20 - May 11, 1997. Subsequently shown at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, July 13 - October 5, 1997 and Art Tower Mito, Japan, December 13, 1997 - March 22, 1998. Solo Exhibition. **Catalogue:** Brougher, Kerry. *Jeff Wall*. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art and New York: Scalo, 1997.

*Jeff Wall*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, February 25 - May 21, 2007. Subsequently shown at The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, June 30, 2007 and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA, October 27, 2007 - January 27, 2008. Solo Exhibition. **Catalogue and related publications to the exhibition:** Galassi, Peter and James Rondeau. *Jeff Wall*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007; Galassi, Peter ed. *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007.

d. Physical Description

Unlike his earlier lightboxes which were printed in rectangular format, *Steves Farm, Steveston* was produced as a panorama.<sup>119</sup> It is 73 cm (28.7 in.) high x 246.3 cm (96.9 in.) wide x

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<sup>117</sup> This edition was formerly held by the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation collection. It was sold to Glenstone in October 2013.

<sup>118</sup> These numbers do not include exhibitions or installations at the MG.

20.5 cm (8.1 in.) deep, including its aluminum frame that holds the Plexiglas with its transparency print and its aluminum lightbox. Since the transparency print does not exceed the 127 cm (50 in) limitation size of the silver dye-bleach material, it is a single print. The image size of the transparency print is 57.3 cm (22.6 in.) high by 228.7 cm (90 in.) wide.

The aluminum print frame which holds the transparency print consists of a polished metal outer frame (73 cm (28.7 in.) x 246.3 cm (96.9 in.) x 7.62 cm (3 in.)), two pieces of Plexiglas - one transparent and one translucent white (both 73 cm (28.7 in.) high x 246.3 cm (90 in.) wide) and an inner metal frame used to secure the Plexiglas into the outer frame. The transparency print is attached emulsion side down to the front of the translucent white Plexiglas using two inch wide 3M Polyester 352 clear tape that is then heat sealed to the Plexiglas. This is then sandwiched with the transparent Plexiglas on top and placed into the aluminum outer frame.

The aluminum print frame construction is then mounted to the aluminum lightbox structure with five screw-tighten 'spring clips' that are attached to the top and bottom sides of the aluminum print frame.

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<sup>119</sup> Wall produced three other panoramas in 1980: *Steves Farm*, *Steveston*, *The Bridge* and *The Jewish Cemetery*. Vischer and Naef ed., *Catalogue Raisonné*, 285-286, 287, and 288. All of these panoramas were first produced as smaller lightboxes in 1984 (33 x 122 cm) then their definite larger lightboxes were produced in 1985.



Figure 26. Author's schematic diagram of *Steves Farm, Steveston* current lighting system, showing the three fluorescent lamps, ballasts and power source. Not drawn to scale.

The work is lit with three 243.84 cm (96 in.) fluorescent lamps. *Steves Farm, Steveston* has an older electrical system, possibly the original system although this is unclear from the MG records.

e. Display and Framing



Figure 27. Author's schematic diagram of the two scales of *Steves Farm, Steveston*: a) 1984 edition, b) MG's edition. Drawn to scale.

There has not been any change to the display or framing of this edition of the work since its creation in 1985.

f. In Reproduction



Figure 28. *Steves Farm, Steveston*, reproduction of entire work from *Catalogue Raisonné*.<sup>120</sup>

Panoramas prove to be a specific challenge for reproduce while remaining legible. As a result, Wall's panoramas suffer in reproduction by being shown across two pages with details being lost in the seam.

g. Current Condition

On March 13, 2014, a condition report was conducted by the author as part of the research for this thesis. This was the first time that Brian Lambert, the current Collection Manager of the MG, had seen the work assembled. It was also the first time the work had been examined by MG staff since its return from the SFMOMA in 2008.

*Transparency prints*

Overall, the print is in excellent condition. The original 1985 print was replaced in 2007 for the exhibition held at MOMA, and has not been put on view since its return from SFMOMA in 2008.

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<sup>120</sup> Vischer and Naef ed., *Catalogue Raisonné*, 47 (plate) and 285-286 (catalogue entry).

## *Plexiglas*

The front transparent Plexiglas is in relative good condition, apart from minor abrasions on the right hand side of surface.



Figure 29. *Steves Farm, Steveston*, image documenting damage on the translucent white Plexiglas, top right corner of work, taken by author, March 13, 2014.

The back, white translucent Plexiglas does have damage in several spots that is apparent when the work is turned on (Figure 29).

There also is substantial amount of dust between the transparency print and the Plexiglas. This may have occurred during the adhering of the new transparency print 2007 at MoMA. The tape that is used to secure the transparency print to the Plexiglas appears to also be yellowing – an indication that the tape is aging and will need to be replaced in the near future.

### *Print frame*

The print frame does exhibit scuffing (Figure 30). It is unclear when this damage occurred, but it must have happened after a professional cleaning at the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC) in the fall of 2007 and before its return to MG in 2008 via SFMOMA.<sup>121</sup>



Figure 30. *Steves Farm, Steveston*, images documenting damage to the print frame, top centre of the frame, taken by author, March 13, 2014.

### *Lightbox frame*

In 2007 when *Steves Farm, Steveston* was installed at the AIC as part of the traveling component of Wall's MoMA retrospective, part of the lightbox frame was cleaned with either a mild enzymatic solution, aqueous surfactants, or solvents due to residue an unknown adhesive found on the side of the lightbox.

Overall the lightbox structure is in fair condition, but does exhibit internal structural damage from mishandling (Figure 31).

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<sup>121</sup> This estimation is based on an analysis of MG's accession records.



Figure 31. *Steves Farm, Steveston*, image documenting damage caused by improper storage to the back panel of lightbox frame, taken by author, March 13, 2014.

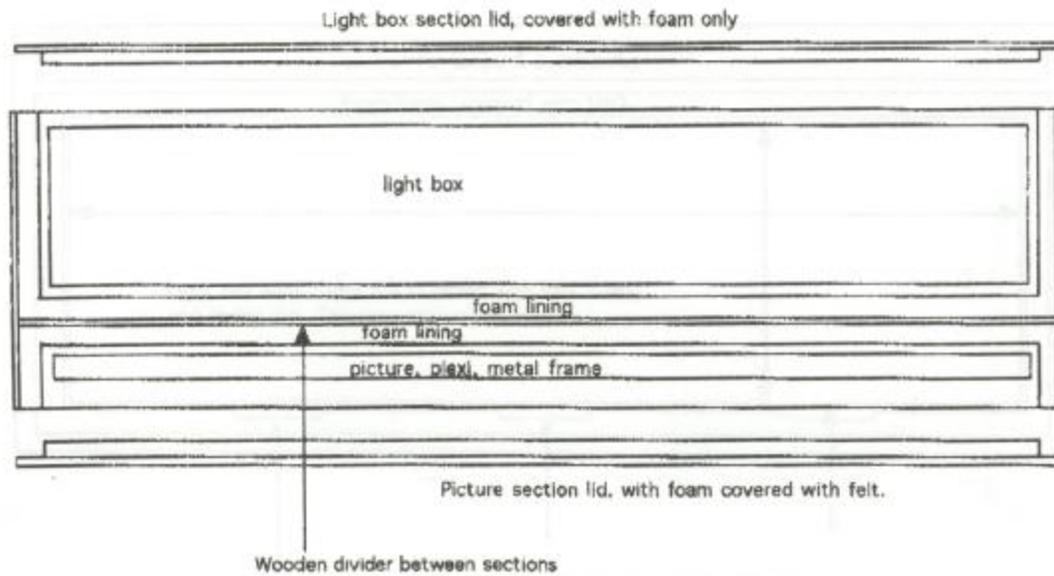
At one point, the rear top right air vent of lightbox frame was damaged from what appears to attempts to pry it open (Figure 32). It unclear when this damage occurred. The lightbox may have had past problems with overheating and as a result the damage could have been attempts to prevent it.



Figure 32. *Steves Farm, Steveston*, image documenting damage to the top right air vent, taken by author, March 13, 2014.

#### *Crate*

The current shipping crate was produced in 1996 as part of the loan agreement for the Washington/ Los Angeles/ Mito exhibition (see *Exhibition History*). It is unclear how the work was stored prior to its creation. Unlike Wall's larger works, which usually have separate crates for the frame and the lightbox, a single crate was created for *Steves Farm Steveston*. The overall crate has two removable compartments (one for the print frame and one for the lightbox frame) that are housed back to back with two removable side panels for easier access (Figure 33).



**DRAWING NO. 3: CRATE DESIGN FOR JEFF WALL; STEVES FARM, STEVESTON. PLAN VIEW** SHOWING THE DISPOSITION OF THE TWO SECTIONS, AND THE LIDS. THE UPPER SECTION FOR THE LAMPS AND ACCESSORIES IS NOT SHOWN. THE LID FOR THE PICTURE SECTION SHOULD FIT PRECISELY TO SEAL THE PICTURE AGAINST ATMOSPHERIC CHANGES DURING TRANSPORT. BOTH LIDS MUST FIT TIGHTLY TO AVOID ANY MOVEMENT OF OBJECTS DURING TRANSPORT.

Figure 33. Schematic diagram of *Steves Farm, Steveston* crate and components, Creator Unknown, dated 1996. Drawn to scale. Courtesy of MacIntosh Gallery, Western University's accession file for *Steves Farm, Steveston*.

The current crate is 99 cm (38.98 in.) high x 267 cm (105 in.) width x 42.5 cm (16.73 in.) deep, and weighs roughly 90.7 kg (200 lbs.) with the work inside. Opening the crate in March 2014 proved to be very difficult due to the improper installation of lug nuts in the crate's construction as well as the use of several types of wood screws to secure the crate shut.

## h. Past Technical Problems

### *Alterations*

When the work was unpacked at MoMA in 2007, the conservation department noted white residue in several areas on the surface of the transparency.<sup>122</sup> After consultation with the artist, it was decided to replace the old print with a new one.

### *Electrical Technology*

In order to install the work in 2007 at MoMA, the work required rewiring to 220 V and needed one of the two ballasts replaced. At that time, the electrical head was replaced for the duration of the exhibition at all three venues. At the end of the exhibition's tour in SFMOMA, an electrician re-attached the original electrical head and the lightbox was re-wired to 110V.

### *Spring Clips*

The current system for attaching the print frame to the lightbox frame consists of five spring clips on the inside of frame. It appears there was originally to be six spring clips. There are no replacements available for the spring clips at the MG.

During the examination of *Steves Farm, Steveston* lightbox in March 2014, it was noticed that spring clips were rubbing against the inside of the translucent white Plexiglas. To prevent possible damage to the Plexiglas, MG's collection's manager attached foam to the inside of each spring clip.

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<sup>122</sup> This white residue could have also been the residue reportedly found on *The Destroyed Room*, page 56.

## i. Specific Concerns

### *Storage*

The work lives in a storage facility with an HVAC system that is monitored by Western University's facility management department. This room was custom built in 2000 for the MG's collection. Prior to this the collection was kept in Alumni Hall, in auditorium-gymnasium under a set of bleachers. The records for how the work was stored at John Labatt Company Collection were unavailable when the work was gifted to MG.

Currently, the storage space is kept at 45% RH and 20-21°C all year round. The work is kept next to the hanging racks, and therefore not at risk to exposure to the overhead sprinkler system.

### *Loans*

The MG is open to loaning the work out for temporary exhibitions, however, it appears that requests rarely make it past the initial inquiry stage due to the high costs of insurance for the work and the costs of shipping from London, Ontario. As a result, the work has only been exhibited twice outside of London.

### *Replacement Parts*

Currently, the MG does not store any replacement parts for the work.

#### j. Long Term Collection's Plan

The long term plan for the work is to repair or replace its crate before it goes on exhibition again. However, this plan is dependent on the hosting institution to contribute to the costs of its replacement. An additional plan is also to join Wall's reserve print project.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> The 'Reserve Print Project' refers to Wall's current preservation plan for his lightboxes, for more information see *Appendix I.1*, pages 105-107.

## Chapter Five: Observations and Commentary on the Case Studies

What becomes apparent from these case studies is that Wall's lightboxes, which at first glance are simple in appearance, are in fact very complicated objects. Unlike traditional photographs which are two-dimensional, flat and easily housed, Wall's works contain many physical and electronic components, all of which need to be maintained in order to be able to present the vision of Wall as is embodied in the lightbox.

To date, how the "physical" effects the presentation and installation of Walls' work has been largely overlooked by scholars, when this is ignored, a key element in understanding these photographic objects is lost. Art historian James Elkins points out that while it is easy to create theories about materiality in art history, it is difficult to address and apply them when confronted with the individual object.<sup>124</sup> Even though Elkins's argument is developed in reference to painting, it is equally applicable to Wall's transparencies and lightboxes, since these have been dealt with in generic terms rather than in their specifics. The case studies provide detailed information about the lightboxes, and provides an approach that focuses on the "materiality", "physicality", and the "objectness" of Wall's work, these aspects that have are notably absent from the literature.

Overall, seven reflections emerge that have not been addressed in previous scholarly discussions of Wall's work. These arose from the careful examination and understanding of the objects, and not from the existing literature.

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<sup>124</sup> James Elkins, "On Some Limits of Materiality in Art History," December 24, 2008, accessed July 1 2014, [http://www.academia.edu/168260/On\\_Some\\_Limits\\_of\\_Materiality\\_in\\_Art\\_History](http://www.academia.edu/168260/On_Some_Limits_of_Materiality_in_Art_History).

## 1. Materials and the Technique of Lightbox

An examination of the early lightboxes provides a previously unexplored history of Wall's artistic relationship with his materials and techniques of presentation. The struggle with the materials to achieve certain, desired results is often overlooked in the discussions of many artists and their artistic practices. In Wall's case, it took him several years to arrive at a method of display and installation that satisfied his artistic vision. Wall was invested in creating photographs that were large in scale, however for him, his early works were hindered by the restraints of the then silver dye-bleach materials. As indicated in a 1985 letter to the NGC concerning his intention to change the overall size of *The Destroyed Room*, Wall discussed the crucial relationship of scale and physical size:

The existing versions of *The Destroyed Room* were made before Ciba brought out its new material in rolls of 50 inches wide. The increase from the old roll size of 40 inches completely transformed the nature of the scale calculations in regard to this material. I always felt constrained by the size of the old transparencies; but of course one cannot wait for product changes when making work. So the pictures were completed at the scale then possible. I am certain that the impact of the picture will be considerably enhanced by the change I am proposing.<sup>125</sup>

Once wider silver dye-bleach material became available in the mid-1980s, Wall began reconstructing his older works. As a result, he saw these first iterations of the works, not as

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<sup>125</sup> From a letter by the artist to the NGC, dated 1985, found in the National Gallery of Canada's *The Destroyed Room* curatorial file.

different versions but rather as studies.<sup>126</sup> Only one of these ‘studies’ – *The Destroyed Room* at the NGC – is still held by an institution, all the others have been destroyed.

## 2. The Complexity of Installing the Lightboxes

Apart from the relatively few museum workers and collection assistants, the majority of Wall’s audience only has access to his lightboxes when they are either on exhibition or reproduced in publications. Currently, there is no study that addresses the evolution of Wall’s installation and presentation of the lightboxes. From these case studies, it becomes clear that the installation of the works is a complicated one, involving the combined efforts of a number of trained personal. Seen even with the smallest lightbox in the case studies, *Steves Farm*, *Steveston*, the scale and multiple components of the work require several people to unpack, assemble and install it.

Few, if any, publications discusses how Wall’s work ideally requires a specific environment to be built for its display. For example, for the AGO’s recent installation of *Double Self-Portrait* as part of exhibition of their contemporary permanent collection, a secluded alcove was built to reduce ambient light, and the work was shown alone in this space. From the images included in the Jeff Wall:*The Complete Edition* of Groys’ essay “Life Without Shadows,” the installation views at the Schaulager 2004 retrospective of Wall’s work do not appear to be the same kind of environment as at the AGO, instead of an alcove, it uses normal museum lighting.<sup>127</sup> While Wall is open to having his work hung in various museum settings, the ideal

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<sup>126</sup> From a letter by the artist to the NGC dated 1986 in *The Destroyed Room* curatorial file: “The new production would not really be a new “version” of the work, because the image is identical. It might be clearer to designate the older picture as something like a “reserve” or “study” print. The new print would become the standard display unit.”

<sup>127</sup> Groys, “Life without Shadows,” 54, 56-57.

conditions under which Wall would like to see his work shown is more aligned to the AGO's installation.

### 3. Concerns with Loaning and Installing the Work

The lightboxes in the case studies themselves have become important objects in the contemporary art world. As a result, they are sought after for exhibition, often by institutions outside of the holding collection's country. These loans present several complications for the care of the works. The components such as the fluorescent lamps, ballasts and capacitors in the work are fragile, and are susceptible to breaking during shipping. As such, spare parts are needed to be sent along with the work, packed in an additional crate.

As with many contemporary artworks, the size of both the work and its crate requires specialized shipping by art-handling companies. Most often, the easiest way to ship the work is by plane, placing the work in the hands of airport employees, who are untrained in the handling fine art. During flights, the pressure changes and vibration in the plane's storage compartments may contribute to Plexiglas and transparency damage.

Both the AGO and the NGC, require a person from their institution, often their photograph conservator, to escort and supervise the installation at the various venues that are a part of the exhibition and the de-installation of their lightbox.<sup>128</sup> Often the work needs assessment and care upon arrival, which in itself is a challenge. Working and diagnosing remotely becomes difficult without the resources required.

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<sup>128</sup> Due to the size of MG's staff, it does not have a policy in regards to the work being accompanied when it goes out on load. It never has been discussed since *Steves Farm, Steveston* has never been included in an exhibition that either Wall or one of his assistants was not in attendance during the installation.

All the lightboxes in the case studies are wired for the North American voltage of 110 V. When the works travel overseas, they require rewiring to comply with different electrical codes and power voltages. For example, when *The Destroyed Room* recently travelled in the winter of 2013 and the spring of 2014 to England and Spain, several modifications to the lighting system were needed in order for the display to work. Both countries have electrical systems that use 220V. A step-down transformer had to be installed in order for the lighting system to work. This further complicates the installation of the work since the lightbox frame does not have internal room for the transformer, requiring a hole to be cut into the hanging wall behind the work in order to for it to remain hidden (and follow Wall's requirements for installation). To avoid the complication of differing electrical outlets that each country uses, each lightbox was powered by wire-to-wire attachment. All the electrical updates were done on the site of each exhibition, the step down transformer was however provided by the NGC and shipped in an additional crate.

#### 4. The Unknown Life Expectancy of the Transparencies

Light is necessary for the production of the print and its display but it also is detrimental to the work's survival. This delicate relationship of all photographs is even more pronounced with Wall's work. Long-term exposure to light causes yellowing, colour-shifting and fading of the dyes that makes the composition of the images. From a conservator's perspective, the physical assembly of the lightboxes makes them function, in effect, as an accelerated aging test of the transparency print each time the work is exhibited for a prolonged period of time. Even with colour photographic processes as stable as silver dye-bleach transparencies do not possess the inherent chemical stability to survive long term the extreme temperature fluctuations that the

lightboxes expose them to.<sup>129</sup> As a result, many institutions including the AGO and the NGC have loan agreement stipulations that the work is shut off each day upon closure of the gallery to prevent unnecessary transparency exposure.<sup>130</sup> The NGC also conducts its own densitometric monitoring on *The Destroyed Room* (1987 version) whenever the work goes out on loan or is on display at the gallery in order to monitor the work in order to creating their own specific predictions for the lifespan of Wall's lightboxes in its collection.

In Henry Wilhelm's research on silver dye-bleach translucent colour display materials, he predicted that the transparencies have a lifespan of approximately ten to fifteen years. These predictions were based on multiple tests conducted by the Wilhelm Institute over several months and years which measured the loss of colour and optical densities using electronic colour densitometers. However, predicting photographic lifespans is a precarious task. Even Wilhelm does admit in his 1981 text "Monitoring the Fading and Staining of Color Photographic Prints", that "[these tests] often produce data which do not give an accurate indication of actual long-term fading and staining characteristics ... It is therefore difficult to predict with any certainty the rate at which changes may take place for a given print material."<sup>131</sup> In ideal conditions, silver dye-bleach transparencies will last a certain length of time before presenting noticeable aging. As can be concluded from the case studies, the transparency prints that Wall produces are nowhere close to these conditions.

Both *Double Self-Portrait* and *Steves Farm, Steveston* have had prints replaced for reasons, both around the eighteen year mark. *The Destroyed Room* (1987 version) still retains its

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<sup>129</sup> See the *Introduction of Chapter 4.1 b: Plexiglas*, pages 29-30, for a full description of the problems that can occur from temperature changes.

<sup>130</sup> During a telephone conversation with the artist by the author in May 2014, Wall stated that during the 1980s and into the 1990s, some museums and galleries were treating his works like sculptures not photographic objects and had them installed for several years at a time.

<sup>131</sup> Henry Wilhelm. "Monitoring the Fading and Staining of Color Photographic Prints," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 21.1 (Fall 1981): 49.

original print from 1987, making it now over twenty-six years old. From its last condition report in the spring 2014, it shows only minimal fading and no colour shifting. *The Destroyed Room* has a more extensive exhibition history, both nationally and internationally, and this should mean that in theory the transparency should be in worst condition. Overall, the differences in the aging of the relatively similar aged transparency prints can be attributed to either the cleanliness of the chemistry which produced the transparencies or to past storage environment.

#### 5. Wall's Continuing Involvement with the Work

This thesis has also brought to light the degree of Wall's involvement with his work, once it enters a public collection. As an artist, Wall maintains a high level of control over his works by positioning himself as the sole authority on when his work becomes 'un-exhibit-able' and the prints need to be replaced. Prior to providing a replacement print, a visual assessment by either the artist or his assistant is required. As documented in the case studies, transparencies have been replaced for all the works at Wall's instigation and in some cases more than once. These are printed by Wall or under his supervision, and sold to the institutions at cost. Wall also retains an artist proof of the work for the majority of his lightboxes in order both to evaluate the conditions of his work to determine when a work becomes too fragile or the deterioration of the prints make them unable to be loaned for exhibition.

#### 6. Potential Effects from Lighting Technology and Its Industry

The lightbox form belongs to a commercial technology that is always evolving, unlike traditional materials in, for example, oil painting. The early lightboxes used a form of technology that was never meant to survive longer than ten or fifteen years. It is also a technology with a poorly recorded history. Throughout the history of the early lightboxes in this study, they have

been maintained and updated with “improved” technological advances, which in turn affected their presentation and the viewing experience. The changes in ballasts, to take one component, saw the elimination of the noise and the flickering associated with fluorescent light, or as Wall described in his 1979 essay as “the vibratory, irritating character which makes it so difficult to work or rest under.”<sup>132</sup>

Updates required shifts in the sizes of the fluorescent lamps and resulted in minute changes in the colour of the lamps. While they may be minute, they in fact subtly change the overall colour of the transparency that are colour balanced to specific fluorescent lamps, and thereby the appearance of the work.

As the commercial lighting industry is rapidly moving towards to LED lighting, so, in turn, Wall’s studio is preparing to shift to this technology.<sup>133</sup> While this modification could potentially affect the appearance of the early lightboxes, it seems to be an unavoidable measure for their preservation. This alteration would, for example, greatly affect the writing around the early lightboxes, which is tied to Wall’s early discussions of use of fluorescent light and the particular glow of this light source, as this is articulated in “To the Spectator” (1979), “Photography and Liquid Intelligence” (1989) and “Three Propositions on Photography” (1999).

## 7. The Nature of an “Original” Art Work

Lastly, alterations in the electrical technology, the physical lightbox frames, and the print replacement process also raise questions about the nature and status of the ‘original’ with Wall’s work. The importance of the idea of the ‘vintage’ or ‘original print,’ traditionally meaning the earliest prints made by the photographer from the original negative, arose with photography’s

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<sup>132</sup> Jeff Wall, “To the Spectator” in *Jeff Wall: Installation of Faking Death (1977), The Destroyed Room (1978), Young Workers (1978), Picture for Women (1979)* (Victoria: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1979): 2.

<sup>133</sup> For more information on this subject, see *Appendix I.2*, page 107.

gaining a position in the art market in the 1970s. This poses a conundrum for Wall's transparencies.

As stated earlier, *Double Self-Portrait and Steves Farm, Steveston* have both been replaced at least once since their construction. Apart from *Steves Farm, Steveston*, none of the lightboxes in the case studies are the 'original' lightboxes. Both *The Destroyed Room* and *Double Self-Portrait* have had different lightbox frame constructions throughout the life of the works.

In his 2010 article "Museum Photography and Museum Prose," Julian Stallabrass raises the question of what actually constitutes the work, arguing that "the 'work' is not any particular lightbox (which could be replaced if damaged or destroyed; some indeed have been after undergoing irreparable degradation due to the materials used in their construction), but rather the digital file from which the picture is made."<sup>134</sup> This is extremely relevant to some contemporary fine art "photographic" works, including Wall's, and the rapidly growing digital concerns within collections. All of the lightboxes in the case studies pre-date Wall's use of the digital medium by roughly a decade, a use that began in 1991 with *The Stumbling Block*. Due to the method used now to produce replacement prints, all of Wall's works do exist as digital files for printing. These are retained solely by Wall and his studio, in part to maintain the market value of the work by preventing additional editions from being produced, and in part, to ensure that the fabrication and display of the object remains in Wall's hands.

However, Stallabrass' view raises further questions, if Wall's 'work' is solely equated with the digital file, none of the holding collections would actually have the work in their possession. It also negates the form of presentation that is integral to how Wall intended his

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<sup>134</sup> Stallabrass, "Museum Photography and Museum Prose," 120.

photographs to be experienced. Furthermore, the physical lightboxes present a fascination that a digital screen or digital print fail to produce, and which Wall early in his career identified as “... a basic fascination in technology which derives from the fact that there’s always a hidden space – a control room, a projection booth, a source of light of some kind – from which the image comes.”<sup>135</sup> This light, the unknown space created by the lightbox form, actualizes the work.

### *Concluding Remarks*

The discourse surrounding Wall is largely focused on the interpretation of images. Despite this, Wall’s lightbox display, the physical object that holds the back-lit transparency, is inseparable to his practice. Art critic Rosalind E. Krauss sees the lightbox display as so distinct that, while others have used this technique, it is almost solely identified with Wall. These same sentiments can also be seen in the writings of his supporters. In his introductory essay for Wall’s MoMA 2007 retrospective, Galassi perceptively describes the stages of the lightboxes’s reception in the art world:

“When [Wall] first tried it out, the medium was quite new. A decade and a half later its novelty had worn off and – in the art context – it was more closely associated with Jeff Wall than with advertising. When the digital screens that are becoming ubiquitous today have definitively rendered transparencies obsolete, however, the consequence may be that Wall’s pictures will be unambiguously marked as artifacts of the last quarter of the twentieth century.”

From these presented case studies and accompanying commentary, it is clear the lightbox display forms an integral part of the work. Fellow photographer Mark Lewis, in defining the nature of a lightbox, describes it as: “it is a device that halts the spectator; its luminosity

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<sup>135</sup> Els Barents, “Luminescence,” in *Transparencies* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987): 99.

demands that we absorb ourselves in the single image and are not distracted by any direct relationship to another image.”<sup>136</sup> As such, further research is needed, for the understanding of the physical components of the lightboxes and the relationship of physical components to artistic expression and vision and that this aspect of the work has been missing in many of the discussions of the work. Overall, the lightboxes of Wall represent technically challenging objects that are made to be experienced in person: they are shot in such a way that the images are intended to be enlarged; they are hung at an almost eye level height, and are meant to engage the viewer on a “bodily” level; and give off a hypnotic glow that intrigues and draws the viewer.

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<sup>136</sup> Mark Lewis, “Jeff Wall: Photographer 2009” in *Jeff Wall: The Complete Edition* (London: Phaidon Press, 2009):183.

## Selected Bibliography

This bibliography was organized into sections – Sources on Jeff Wall and Additional Sources – in order to better reflect the two streams of research required to complete this thesis. The first section, Sources on Jeff Wall, is sub-divided into selections of the extensive primary and secondary resources available on the artist. The second section, Additional Sources, is also sub-divided into categories of sources that deal with physicality in Art, silver dye-bleach care and general preservation and collection management of photographs.

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## **Appendix I**

## **The Future of the Lightboxes**

As discussed in earlier chapters, Wall, as an artist and trained art historian, is very concerned with the legacy of his work. While he turned to the medium of transparency in lightbox in the late 1970s as a way to avoid the “distressing effects of deterioration” inherent of colour photographs, the technologies of transparencies and lightboxes are rapidly being replaced with digital screens and projections. As a result, the resources needed to maintain his works will eventually become scarce.

As a direct result of these concerns, Wall has devised three plans to help preserve his lightbox works. The first one, known as the Reserve Print Project, is the systematic re-printing of all his transparencies in order to provide collections with replacement prints once the originals have faded. The second consists of the switching of the fluorescent lighting system to a light-emitting diode (LED) lighting system. The third, which Wall refers to as “Plan B,” is an ‘if-all-else-fails’ plan: if the lightboxes were unable to be used at some time in the future, his works would exist as archival colour inkjet reflective prints, which he would produce.

The following three sections discusses each of these plans, based on information from various telephone discussions and email correspondence between the author and the artist and his assistants during the months of May to August 2014. Unless otherwise note, these discussions are the sources of the following information.

### *Reserve Print Project*

Since he began printing transparencies in 1977, Wall has known that his prints would need replacing at regular intervals throughout the lifespan of the work. While a print replacement project had always been an integral part of Wall’s overall strategy, the realization of the project

known now as Reserve Print Project did not begin until 2007.<sup>137</sup> For Wall, there is difference between a 'reserve print' and a 'replacement print', the former being a print is set aside for future preservation use, when the original print has faded, while the latter refers to a print created to replace a damaged print. In 2007, Wall began approaching collections and collectors outlining the Reserve Print Project. As of May 2014, Wall had completed approximately seventy per cent of these reserve prints for the 130 lightboxes in his oeuvre.

When the project began, Ilfochrome materials were still used by the studio and the transparencies were printed in Wall's darkroom in Vancouver, using traditional darkroom enlargers and P30X chemistry vats. In anticipation of the ceasing of the production of Ilfochrome materials, Wall began to print his transparencies with Fujitrans in 2009. From Wall's experience with the materials, Fujitrans does not have the same relative permanence of Ilfochrome.<sup>138</sup> As such, the studio now provides two sets of Fujitrans transparencies, whereas prior only a singular print of Ilfochrome was manufactured.

Due to limitations of space found in most of collections and wanting to ensure the prints would be stored flat, Wall decided to create his own storage facility. The prints are kept flat in large specially designed cabinets that only allowed minimal air circulation, and are covered in water resistant black drapes. The space is kept between 40 - 42% RH and at 14°C. While the ideal storage standards set out by the International Organization of Standardization (ISO) is 4°C for colour materials, Wall believes the difference between 4°C and 14°C will not be detrimental

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<sup>137</sup> The realization of this project corresponded with Wall becoming reacquainted with many of his works during his involvement with the MoMA retrospective in 2007.

<sup>138</sup> In comparison to Ilfochrome materials, Fujitrans has a thinner base and is more susceptible to surface damage.

to the prints, which will only be stored in this environment for approximately ten to twenty years before being installed into their respective lightboxes.<sup>139</sup>

All the prints produced as part of the Reserve Print Project are stored uncut. They are stacked based on print and edition number to prevent the stacking of various print sizes from embossing each other.<sup>140</sup> The prints are interleaved with pieces of Tyvek®, an inert and chemically stable polyethylene material.<sup>141</sup> To provide a chemically stable housing environment, the cabinet shelves are powder-coated and lined with neutral card to prevent print damage. After non-consistent RH and temperature, poor storage environments are the main contributor to the deterioration of photographic prints.<sup>142</sup>

### *LED Lights*

Wall plans to switch over to LED lights in the lightboxes within the next couple of years. Based on the limited research conducted, LED lighting seems to be less harmful to photographic prints than fluorescent lamps.<sup>143</sup> This, however, requires further research to anticipate the long-term effects on silver dye-bleach materials.

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<sup>139</sup> Currently, there is conflicting opinions on the effects of cold storage on silver dye bleach transparencies. Henry Wilhelm, a leading expert in this area, states that collectors should consider the prints to be quite acceptable for non-refrigerated long-term keeping. (Henry Wilhelm. *The Permanence and Care of Color Photographs: Traditional Color and Digital Prints, Color Negatives, Slides and Motion Picture* (Grinnell: Preservation Publishing Company, 1993): 463.)

<sup>140</sup> When photographic prints of various size are stored for long periods of time, stacked on top of each other, the smaller prints will emboss or imprint onto the larger ones even if there is interleaving is present.

<sup>141</sup> See Conservation Resources, "Glossary," last modified 2004, accessed June 26, 2014, [http://www.conservationresources.com.au/html/home/help\\_info/glossary.php?preselect=p&](http://www.conservationresources.com.au/html/home/help_info/glossary.php?preselect=p&).

<sup>142</sup> Sherelyn Ogden, "Storage Furniture: A Brief Review of Current Options," in *Storage and Handling Northeast Document Conservation Center Preservation Leaflets*, revised 2012, accessed June 26, 2014, <http://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/4.-storage-and-handling/4.2-storage-furniture-a-brief-review-of-current-options>.

<sup>143</sup> James Brodrick, "Can Museums Measure Up?" in *LD&A Magazine* (July 2011), accessed June 26 2014, [http://apps1.eere.energy.gov/buildings/publications/pdfs/ssl/gateway-roundup\\_7-11.pdf](http://apps1.eere.energy.gov/buildings/publications/pdfs/ssl/gateway-roundup_7-11.pdf).

*“Plan B”*

In 2011, Wall began to produce inkjet versions of his lightbox work in order to act as a last resort preservation plan for his colour work.<sup>144</sup> These re-prints are produced at the same size of the originals and on the current printing industry standard of Ilford fibre-base paper, using the permanent Epson 1180 ink. For Wall, the future of these colour inkjet prints are to act more as an alternate support for the transparencies until the time the lightboxes are deemed too fragile or un-exhibit-able at which the colour inkjet prints would then be used as the current iteration of the work. Occasionally, Wall has shown these re-prints and will continue to selectively exhibit these works in order to formulate feedback on whether the lightbox is truly essential to the reception of his works.<sup>145</sup>

However, for Wall, this plan is still in its tentative and experimental stages. The artist is concerned about the stability of inkjet prints, and whether they will be around in the foreseeable future due to the complicated and rapidly evolving nature of the printing industry.<sup>146</sup> If a more permanent process should become available during his lifetime, he would consider reprinting his works in this new method to ensure some version of his work survives.

It is important to note here that “Plan B” only exists for his silver dye-bleach transparencies. Wall’s gelatin silver prints are and will continue to be printed with traditional silver halide based black and white fibre paper until these materials are no longer available. All of these works are printed using archival processes and when stored under proper conditions, can last hundred years.

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<sup>144</sup> David Company in his 2011 *Picture for Women*, was the first person to state that Wall had begun to re-print his entire body of work in inkjet (Company, *Picture for Women*, 86, also see endnote 117, pp. 107). This project was confirmed by the artist in a telephone conversation with the author on May 24, 2014.

<sup>145</sup> Jeff Wall, telephone discussion with artist by author, May 24, 2014.

<sup>146</sup> The company that produces the inkjet fibre papers, which Wall had been using, Ilford Imaging, declared bankruptcy in December 2013.