

The art would be to be able to feel homesick, even though one is at home."
Expertness in the use of illusion is required for this." [...] This is the formula
.for the interior

¹Walter Benjamin quoting Søren Kierkegaard -

In the Beginning

In the beginning was the word. *Parpar* (Heb. butterfly) was the first word that Halil,
Uri Gershuni's son, uttered. It was three years ago, just before Uri's father, artist
Moshe Gershuni, passed away. Halil was one year old at the time. The father's falling
eternally silent and the grandson's beginning of speech set in motion the bodies of
work presented in the new exhibition, "Gone-There," staged by Uri, a son and a
.father, the one in the middle, in-between

I opened with a sentence which is a translation of a translation, or a reverse-
translation of sorts, of the first verse in the New Testament's Gospel according to St.
John: "In the beginning was the *thing*, and the *thing* was with God, and the *thing* was
God," as the Hebrew translations of the original Greek read. The word "thing" with
which St. John begins, is the translation of the Greek "*logos*," which may be
interpreted as reason, discourse, speech, the order that rules the world, and later on in
the gospel—the incarnation of Christ in the flesh. The common English translation of

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, 1
Mass. & London, England: Harvard UP, 1999), p. 218; see also Søren Kierkegaard, "'In Vino Veritas':
A Recollection Related by William Afham," *Kierkegaard's Writings*, XI, vol. 11: *Stages on Life's*
.Way, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1988), p. 13

the verse is: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The word "Word" is capitalized, a signal commonly used in English to indicate either the beginning of a sentence or a proper noun. Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan returned to this verse on several occasions in his seminars over the years. Tangled disputes emerged over his interpretation of the Greek word, and especially the Latin word which he used most often. On one occasion, his students confronted him with the Hebrew language and the biblical account of the Creation (as well as with the ancient Jewish Sages, according to whom the world was created by divine speech (*mimra*) "Let there be light," a declaration which is particularly pertinent to the medium of photography). For Lacan—and this is a fundamental element in his writings—language preceded everything

Beginnings

As in the Butterfly Effect (a working title given to the exhibition at some point)—whereby the flapping of a butterfly's wings in Africa can set off a chain of events, that may culminate in a tornado on the other side of the world—the word "butterfly," as aforesaid, indeed marked a beginning. One beginning. I would like to suggest regarding Uri Gershuni's series on the whole, and the series featured in the current exhibition in particular, as chains, incarnations, cycles of works, like the life cycle in nature, that of a butterfly, for instance: an egg, which is fertilized, grows into a larva that develops within it; the caterpillar hatches from the egg, and throughout its life eats mostly plants, to become a pupa; from the pupa, which appears inanimate from the outside, emerges a butterfly. The adult butterfly spends its days flying from one flower to another, seeking a mate with which to reproduce; and the cycle begins again: the new eggs and sperm will set in motion processes of fertilization, growth,

maturation, termination, and the beginning of a new life cycle. Each stage is temporary, the beginning of the next. No one source precedes all incarnations

In the opening sentence of their monograph *Kafka: Toward a Minor*

Literature, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari ask: "How can we enter into Kafka's work?" They describe the architecture that appears in his novels and short stories as having multiple entrances and innumerable exits, openings and apertures, or ends,

"none matters more than another," none "is more privileged."² Similarly, the exhibition "Gone-There" can be entered from different directions: you may start at any point in the cycle. One possible end point is what appears at first, in a fluttering glance over the exhibition, as a certain stylistic-visual uniformity. It is manifested in the texture, the minor format, the coloration, and the butterfly wings recurring in various shapes and forms

Overview

Let me enter the exhibition. I will ostensibly begin at the end, or what is considered to be the end—the framing: the exhibition includes frames occasionally reminiscent of showcases in a natural history museum. They are large, relative to their contents (approximately 40x50 cm)—small rectangles of either photographs, either old, picturesque prints, possibly etchings lost and found, set against a white background.

The photographs (9 to 12.5 cm in size) call to mind pictures from of an old family album or a botany book, and they are akin to small windows or eyes. To see what they contain, one must draw closer, very close even, almost intimately. Most of the photographs are monochromatic, in various shades of gray; others are golden brown

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* [1975], trans. Dana Polan 2
(Minneapolis and London: The University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 3

and diffuse. The surface of the photographic works is typified by a granular material
.density

Different images emerge. They reappear like signs and marks scattered in the
formalistic screening. One photographic cycle features, in an overview slightly
elevated from ground level, Muslim women, old and young, dressed from head to toe
in a hijab, with or without a veil, which lends them the appearance of butterfly pupae.

They walk the empty streets of a typical old English village here and there, it is
unclear where they are headed. Some are alone, others are in pairs, and yet others are
accompanied by children. Some of the children and women raise their heads to the
hidden photographer; others are unaware of his existence. All of their faces are
.blurred

Interspersed among them are landscape postcards which resemble etchings of
foreign, non-Israeli landscapes—a river, massive stone bridges, trees, and lush,
timeless nature. The landscapes, in shades of brown and white, were cut in two in the
middle of the bridge and the river; each half was framed separately. In the exhibition
.they hang in pairs— longing, halved bridges, striving to reconnect

Third cycle: golden brown photograms of plucked Tel Aviv Ficus leaves,
placed individually on paper like flowers dried between the pages of a book, or those
of orphaned butterfly wings, suspended in the middle of a paper sheet, thin and
.fragile, about to crumble

The exhibition also features: a pair of photographs depicting two babies
closely resembling one another like twins, lying on their bellies on a bunk in the exact
same posture. Like caterpillars clinging to a branch, they raise their heads, not yet
able to straighten and stand upright. They face each other, their gaze moving out of

the frame. The women, the children, and the pair of infants all have spectacular

.butterfly wings on their backs; some have only one pair, others—two

Liquid stains on graph paper recur between the groups of photographs,

disrupting and interrupting the gaze. These are Rorschach inkblots of a somewhat translucent brownish-gray fluid, the artist's semen, which form images of insects with

antennae and legs in some instances; other papers bear stains of a yellowish fluid—

the mixed urine of father and son—which spread in a circle, like a halo or a small

.lake

The women, children, babies, stains, leaves, butterfly wings, and landscapes

all pulsate, repeatedly. Their contours dissolve into the paper, practically merging with

the background and setting, only to burst forth from it again. It is a dream, or possibly

a twilight zone between sleep and wakefulness. Cycles: semen, pupae, caterpillars,

dead butterflies that have shed their wings, people incarnated into butterflies, or metamorphosed into some other airy, angelic beings, yet still planted in the ground; it

.is unclear to whom and where they belong

Despite the visual uniformity, which inspires the exhibition with an invisible

melancholic cloudlet, it has no single solid narrative. One may adhere to Deleuze and

Guattari's proposal to the reader—to enter the machine of the work constituted "by

contents and expressions that have been formalized to diverse degrees by unformed

materials that enter into it, and leave by passing through all possible states, to walk

around it, to approach it."³ To be inside the exhibition, or inside the cycles, which

branch out and reassemble, to connect the various entry points, to get closer, and even

create what they call "lines of flight" (of desire) or lines of escape, which are part of

the machine. One line of flight—to metamorphose. Not into an insect, as in Kafka's

story, which is doomed to be swept away, without knowing where, but rather—to transform into magical creatures that do not belong in the immediately visible, overt, material world; into fairies, who are hidden from view and live in a fairy tale; or into the gandharva of Indian mythology—those mist-bound creatures that dwell in-between, between heaven and earth, beings to whom Walter Benjamin refers in his masterful essay on Franz Kafka, saying: "It is for them and their kind, ⁴the unfinished and the hapless, that there is hope

The Story

Perhaps it would be better to start with a story; the story behind the photographs of the women and children with the butterfly wings. Cottingley, a pleasant-looking, but generic English village in West Yorkshire, devoid of any touristy-historical or other attraction, became famous for what is now considered one of the great photographic hoaxes of the 20th century. The scandal rocked Britain from the 1920s to the 1980s. Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths, cousins who lived in the village in 1917, used to hike and play by the nearby stream and forest. Scolded for their habit of coming back home covered in mud, they told their parents it was because they were playing with fairies. To prove the truth of their words to the skeptical adults, they borrowed a camera from Elsie's father, who was an amateur photographer, and set out to take photographs. When the father developed the glass plates—it was a first-generation box camera—he discovered to his great astonishment a portrait of one of the girls observing a group of fairies dancing on a bush. Two months later the girls returned with additional photographs, in one of which the other girl was seen sitting on the grass, holding out her hand to an amiable gnome. The photographs became the talk of

Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934*, 4 .trans. Rodney Livingstone et al. (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard UP, 1999), p. 799

the village. A heated controversy erupted between those who were skeptical and those who were convinced of the photographs' authenticity, of the existence of fairies, and the ability to capture them on camera. Even the most suspicious, however, could not figure out how the photographs were made

At some point, the story and the photographs got out of the village: Edward L.

Gardner, president of the local chapter of the Theosophical Society, used the photographs in his lectures throughout the country, to prove the existence of secret life forms beyond the visible. In a publication issued by the Society he wrote: "the fact that two young girls had not only been able to see fairies, [...] but had actually for the first time ever been able to materialise them at a density sufficient for their images to be recorded on a photographic plate, meant that it was possible that the next cycle of evolution was underway."⁵ The girls continued taking pictures for about two years.

All in all, they created five such photographs

The storm heightened. A considerable number of the period's photography experts, professionals at Kodak and Ilford, were contracted to determine whether the photographs were genuine, to pinpoint the fakery in them—whether studio work or the use of staged cardboard models. The experts were unanimous that these were straight, untouched photographs, which documented what was in front of the camera, yet refused to issue an official certificate confirming their authenticity. Sherlock Holmes author and spiritualist, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, published an article in a popular English magazine about these photographs, maintaining that they captured the glamor and mystery of life.⁶ Key literary figures and pedagogues responded with a

Quoted in Paul Smith, "The Cottingley Fairies: The End of a Legend," in Peter Narváez (ed.), *The 5 Good People: New Fairylore Essays* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), p. 382

Arthur Conan Doyle, "Fairies Photographed: An Epoch-Making Event as Described by A. Conan 6 Doyle," *The Strand Magazine*, December 1920

mixture of embarrassment and astonishment, trust and doubt. Over the years, interest
in the story subsided

In the 1960s, a stubborn journalist decided to reinvestigate the case. One of the
cousins, tired of all the commotion, confessed that there were no fairies in reality, that
they were the figments of her imagination, but refused to elaborate on how she
managed to photograph them. Even in a documentary made about the cousins in 1971,
they both still insisted on their authenticity

It was not until 1982–83, some sixty years after their publication, after the
respectable *British Journal of Photography* invested efforts in scientific investigation
of the photographs, that the photographers surrendered and admitted that they had
been faked, a fraud, and explained how they made them: they copied illustrations of
dancing girls from an arty children's book onto cardboard, which they subsequently
cut out, attached wings to them, and used hatpins and thread to hold them in place.

Nevertheless, they still insisted that they really had seen fairies, if only in their
imagination, and that the photographs were an illustration of what they saw
The cameras they used, copies of the five photographs taken over the course of
some two years, as well as the articles, testimonies, films, and all the paraphernalia
associated with the affair are now on display at the National Science and Media
Museum in Bradford. From a current point of view, the story sounds amusing,
somewhat circus-like, not to say ridiculous. We find it hard to believe that so many
people were fooled by a rather childish and not very sophisticated fabrication. Frances
herself, by then an old woman, wondered, "I can't understand [...] why they were
taken in," and forthwith added a possible explanation: "they wanted to be taken in

"Fairies, Phantoms, and Fantastic Photographs" (presenter: [Arthur C. Clarke](#); narrator: [Anna Ford](#)), *Arthur C. Clarke's World of Strange Powers*, ITV, 22 May 1985, n. 6, season 1

The story, which comes up as soon as you Google the name of the village, Cottingley, is an important milestone in the history of photography in the early 20th century. It illustrates the magical view of photography, which was originally referred to as "the pencil of nature," as well as the belief in its power to embody some truth, and therefore to cause severe disappointment upon exposure of the fakery, or rather, the staging of a little show (as no manipulation was performed on the photographs themselves, and they were indeed untampered with, single exposure images). To me, this is a story about the child-artist, the artist-child, the child as someone who is still close to nature; or the criminal child, the deceitful prankster, with the imagination and ability to invent and illustrate an imaginary reality or world in materials (of varying density). It is also a story about art's role in the drama of relationships between adults .and children, parents and sons/daughters

The Journey

Gershuni embarks on a tour of Cottingley. Like the young photographers, he, too, returns with photographs, with "proofs." He travels with the help of a mechanical apparatus, a combination of man and machine, Google Street View. The apparatus's modus operandi: a car drives around with a camera attached to a rod on its roof. It drives around the village streets, scanning the surroundings and taking pictures. Google, on its part, obscures people's faces, ostensibly to maintain their privacy. He wanders through Cottingley on his personal computer while tucked away in his room. What is he looking for there? What does he want to find? The fairies? Whether they still exist and dance there? The photographic or artistic truth? The place where the history of photography, as oscillating between documentation and illusion, began?

Photography, in its modern form, too has a whole politics of beginnings and their
.stories

Uri is sitting in his room in 2019 Tel Aviv, while there, away from Israel, in
northern England, to which he arrives with the aid of the Street View software, in the
year 2015 (the year in which the global megacorporation's photographers visited the
place), he fails to find fairies. Instead he finds Muslim women. Perhaps they are his
neighbors from here, from the Middle East? One escape route—from another place,
England (the British passed here before returning there), and through time travel into
the history and politics of modern photography, Arab women enter his home and
.room here, enter his computer, come indoors, into the interior

He stops wandering, they freeze inside the frame, he fits them with butterfly
wings. Despite the wings, they cling to the ground, to the sidewalk, to the road, close
to the house walls. They cannot fly away from there like a butterfly, or disappear like
a fairy. Failing to find fairies, he creates them. He reconstructs or reactivates the
modus operandi of the two young photographers from Cottingley, Frances and Elsie.

His women are sexless winged creatures. If they have children, they too have
metamorphosed into fairies. In English, by the way, fairy is also a derogatory name
.for a male homosexual

The Arab women, whose faces are erased, will remain forever in the frame,
like pinned butterflies displayed in natural history museum collections, on the one
hand; on the other hand, they have now entered history; they have entered the story.

His-story, the story of the exhibition, the story of the spectator, of the place, of
.photography, of photography as an art form

Sperm and Baby

Several chains of creation: One chain is the muteness, the first entry into language—a series of new works (which is also an entry into ethics). The second chain is the entry into history and politics—the story—the hoax—the exposure; or the journey—the quest in the footsteps of the young photographers—the discovery and the freezing of the frame. In the exhibition they are juxtaposed with additional chains or lines of flight. One of these pertains to a sequence of recurring acts which are perceived, *prima facie*, as futile, even contradictory, yet leave traces and signs behind: masturbation—fertilization of the paper—pregnancy of the paper (the folding and shaking of the fluid inside it)—the birth of insect-like blotchy creatures. Another line of flight moves back and forth between two black-and-white photographs of two babies lying on their bellies like caterpillars, with butterfly wings (which incidentally belong to an indigenous butterfly from the Pieridae family, *Aporia crataegi*—the black-veined white) attached to their backs. On the left—a photograph of baby Moshe extracted from the family album; on the right—in spectacular symmetry, unfurled like a butterfly's wings—a carefully staged black-and-white photograph of baby Halil, reenacting the posture and setting in the private readymade photograph. Family photography as a cult. A grandfather and grandson resemble each other so closely that it is impossible to tell who is who, at the same age and in the same pose. Our gaze moves from side to side, ping pong, trying to compare. In the middle is the medium—Uri. It is a bold moment; Gershuni manages to curb the bluntness by means of aesthetic restraint—the photographs are small, in shades of brown and white. Deleuze and Guattari would define this moment as verging on the perverse, the comic .moment

The title of the exhibition "Gone-There" (*Fort-Da*) refers to the sounds uttered by Sigmund Freud's grandson when he played a game similar to the well-known "peek-a-boo." The beginning of the grandson's speech, then 18 months old, who started uttering a few words and sounds intelligible to his immediate circle. The story appears :in Freud's seminal treatise, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle

This good little boy, however, had an occasional disturbing habit of taking any small objects he could get hold of and throwing them away from him into a corner, under the bed, and so on, so that hunting for his toys and picking them up was often quite a business. As he did this he gave vent to a loud, long-drawn-out 'o-o-o-o,' accompanied by an expression of interest and satisfaction.

His mother and the writer of the present account were agreed in thinking that this was not a mere interjection but represented the German word '*fort*' ['gone']. I eventually realized that it was a game and that the only use he made of any of his toys was to play 'gone' with them. One day I made an observation which confirmed my view. The child had a wooden reel with a piece of string tied round it. It never occurred to him to pull it along the floor behind him, for instance, and play at its being a carriage. What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skillfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive 'o-o-o-o.' He then pulled the reel out of the cot again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful '*da*' ['there']. This, then, was the complete game—disappearance and return. As a rule one only witnessed its first act, which was

repeated untiringly as a game in itself, though there is no doubt that the greater

⁸"pleasure was attached to the second act

Freud later discovered that the child also used to play the game of disappearance and return when looking at his reflection in the mirror. He used the description of the game to discuss that which deviates from the pleasure principle, the phenomenon of repetition-compulsion, of excess. The game, according to Freud, repeats the painful experience, but also the pleasure in the disappearance and reappearance of the love object. Freud calls it "the child's great *cultural achievement* [emphasis mine, N.S.] [...] As the child passes over from the passivity of the experience to the activity of the ⁹"game

Following Freud, one may say that what the child is practicing here is the beginning of what we shall call *praxis*. The Greek concept of *praxis* denotes a *modus operandi*, or the motivation, the vital impulse, the desire for action, as distinguished from *poiesis*—which means to produce, to make, to bring into being. The *praxis* creates a world (the game), but also the self: I know that the mother is gone, I replace her with a cotton reel, I throw it/her away and retrieve, and I can also express this in words. (Lacan would say, this is the vacillation between the real and the symbolic, but .(also between the imaginary and the symbolic

Uri Gershuni started his career as a photographer with a camera and a studio.

He photographed still lifes, but mostly portraits. The last time he presented direct

⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1961), pp. 8–9.

.Ibid., pp. 9–11 9

portrait photographs was in the 2010 exhibition "Living Room" at Tel Aviv Museum of Art's Helena Rubinstein Pavilion (alongside four other photographers; curator: Hadas Maor). Since then, one may say he has abandoned the practice customarily associated with photography—placing a camera before reality and creating an image of reality. His departure from the camera involves, on the one hand, the demise of the analog era in the last decade, at the height of digital photography's sweeping takeover, a revolution that shook the perceptions and history of photography. At the same time, it may also be regarded as a personal decision that involves a desire to reduce his presence as a subject, to get rid of the pathos (which contains a grain of hysteria) involved in being an artist-photographer, and to act anew in a new, changing *milieu*—

.a setting that includes objects, people, materials, processes, and discourse

Since then he has adopted a *modus operandi* which is a cross of techniques and actions, stories and deeds, digital photography taken by others, and handiwork.

With the exception of occasional minor photo shoots, in which he assumes the position of an amateur photographer, and abides by the rules of the genre (photographing his family or producing touristy photographs of trips he takes), the digital machine—with his minor interventions, which practically make him its .extension—produces the photographs for him

Concurrent with the near total relinquishment of the relishing, caressing or penetrating personal gaze, he has shifted to a praxis of hand printing, employing techniques used by photographers in the early 20th century, before the invention of industrial photographic paper: he makes emulsions from various chemicals, applies them with brushes (like a painter who primes the canvas, for example) on sheets of paper, which he then puts them in the sun. After an exposure time that varies from one

work to the next, he places the papers in a developer bath, uses fixer, and rinses them
.in water. All the prints are subjected to a flow of sunlight and a flux of fluids

It may be said that Gershuni has shifted from the practice of a hunter to that of
a gatherer and a farmer. In the current exhibition, he freezes several moments from his
wandering in Cottingley, taken by Google's dedicated, anonymous photographic
workers; he attaches butterfly wings from his private collection to the women and
children he encountered there, prints a digital negative from them, and subsequently
spreads them out on papers he inherited from his father's studio. The papers, prepared
in advance with his own emulsion mixtures in (the carefully chosen shade of) Van
Dyke brown, are placed in the sun. The old postcards from Cottingley —purchased
photographs by unknown photographers—were scanned, turned into negatives, and
then printed in the same method. The foliage and butterfly wings were made in a
technique called lumen print: a type of solar photogram. The leaves and wings are
placed directly on the paper, left in the sun for a long while, approximately eight
hours, to produce the photograph with light alone, without a negative and without
.developing. An early, primitive, naked photography

It is a praxis of movement, back and forth, here and there: between Cottingley
and Tel Aviv, between times—from the early 20th century, to 2015 and 2019. Uri, too,
moves between his father and his son, between the women and the fairies, between
the sunlight outdoors, which brings the images and stories to the surface as specters,
and the baths inside; between the computer and the alchemy and handiwork. He *is* the
.cotton reel himself