

*HOW AM I NOT MYSELF?*



*ASHER PENN & WOLFGANG TILLMANS*



*AP: Hi*

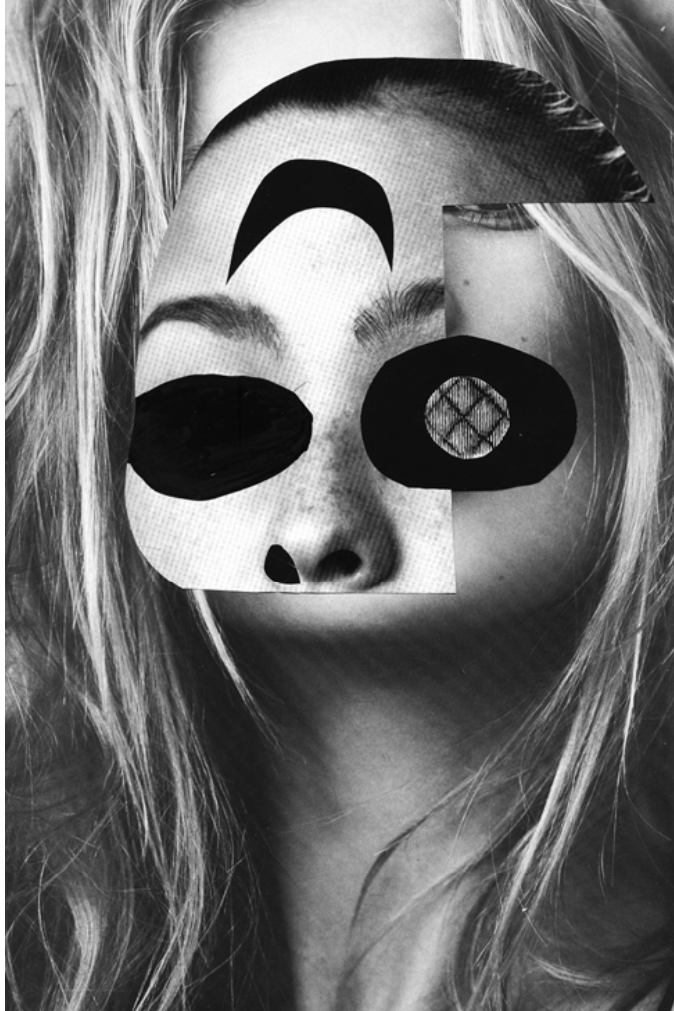
*WT: Hi there.*

*AP: How's it going?*

*WT: OK. This place is funny. I've never come here before.*

*AP: My friend Mathieu suggested it... I don't even know what neighborhood we're in.*





*WT: We're in Mitte.*

*AP: Right. "Middle"*

*WT: How long are you in Berlin for?*

*AP: A few more days. I came for the book fair at this store called Motto.*

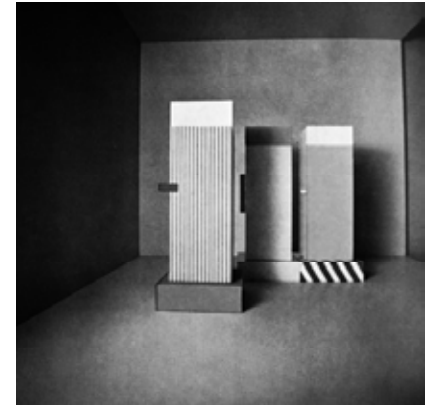
*WT: I heard about that. It sounded fun but I couldn't make it. How did it go?*

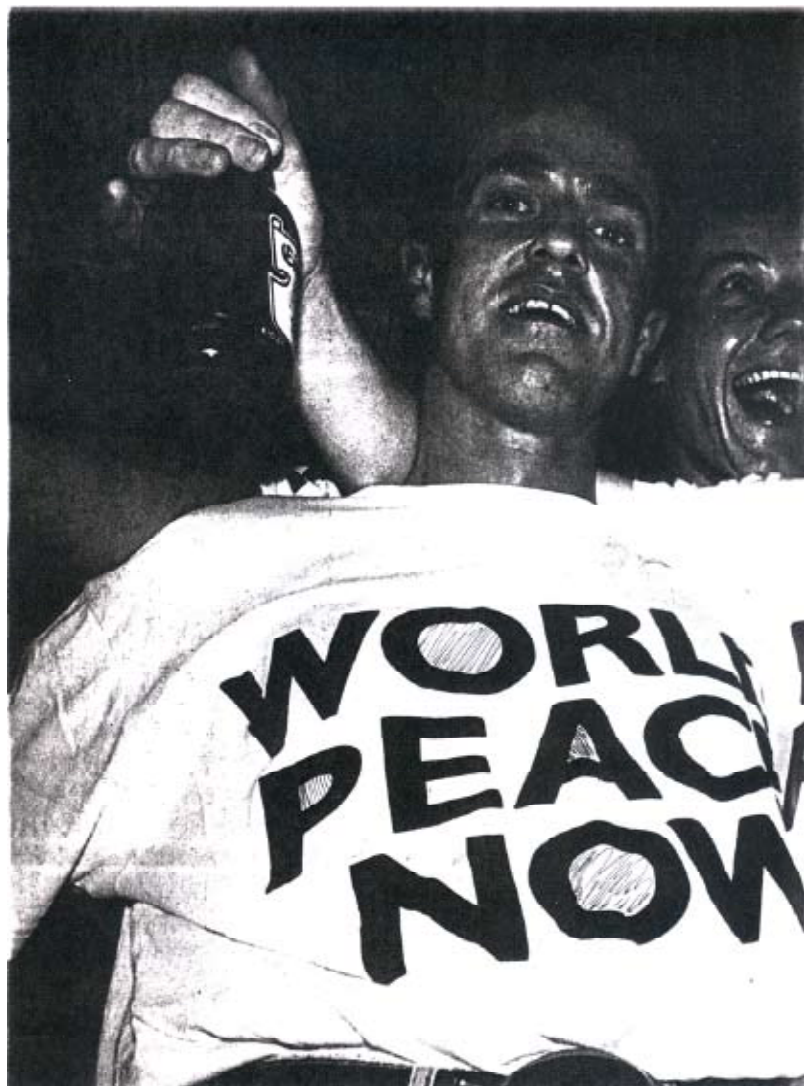
*AP: It was OK. It was 12 hours long. I played chess a lot.*

*WT: And... you live in New York?*

*AP: Yes.*

*WT: And...OK. What are we talking about? Your email said we were going to talk about Kate Moss?*







AP: Well, sort of, not exactly... I was hoping I could talk to you about this series I did called "Kate Moss Rorschachs".  
WT: Right. One of the guys from Aids 3D mentioned something about that. With my photos, right?

AP: I did 100 Rorschachs on top 100 copies of 3 photos you took of Kate Moss.  
WT: Where did you get the pictures?

AP: I scanned them from that book of yours. The one you did with Taschen.  
WT: "Burg"?  
AP: Yeah, "Burg". Then i made a book of them. Here's the book. It comes as a set of 3.

WT: Can I open it?

AP: Of course.

WT: Did you shrink wrap these yourself?

AP: No, I got the printers to do it.

WT: Ok. [Looks through it] OK.

AP: I came to Berlin about a month ago to launch it and to do an exhibition. I printed the pictures really big and made some more Rorschachs with yellow paint. It was at this gallery called Larrys.

WT: I haven't heard of Larrys. Is it new? There're so many galleries in Berlin now.

AP: They're all Canadian.

WT: The galleries?

AP: No, Larrys. Larrys is 3 guys from Canada.

WT: Where are they from in Canada?

AP: Mostly from Vancouver.

WT: I've been there.

AP: That's actually where I'm from.

WT: Vancouver is a beautiful city. I liked the big Buckminster Fuller thing. The people I was staying with took me to the nude beach.

AP: Wreck Beach?

WT: Maybe? Something like that. That was nice. I bought a necklace there.

AP: Was it made of hemp?



WT: It must have been a hemp necklace yeah.

AP: I never went there, but people talk about it a lot. It's weird. I don't think I ever really ever knew how to relax in Vancouver that way. You know, get stoned. I don't think it's even really specific to the city.

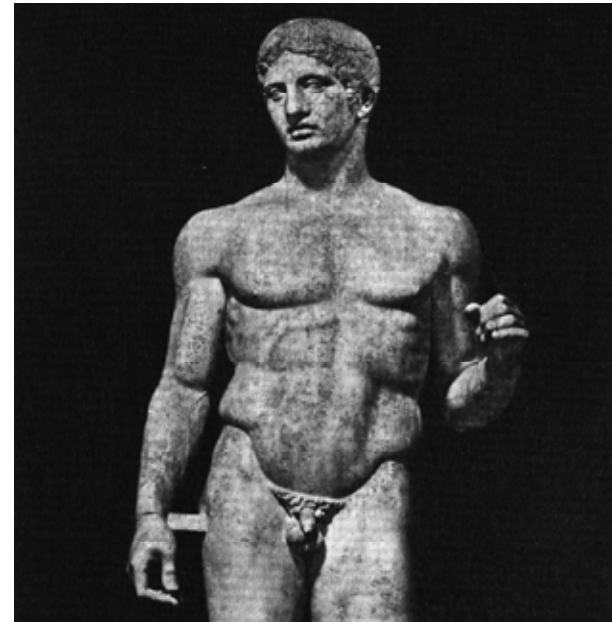
WT: That's very American of you. American's have such complexes about "pleasure". Did you go to school in Vancouver?

AP: No, I went to school in America.

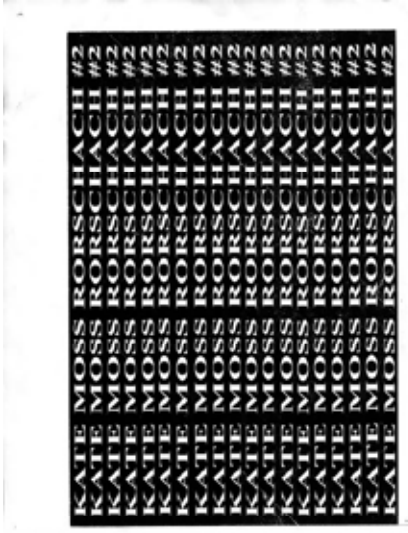
WT: I heard that the art school there is in Vancouver. There is a good contemporary art scene there too, right?

AP: Yeah. Jeff Wall, Rodney Graham...

WT: Jeremy Shaw, Stephen Shearer...

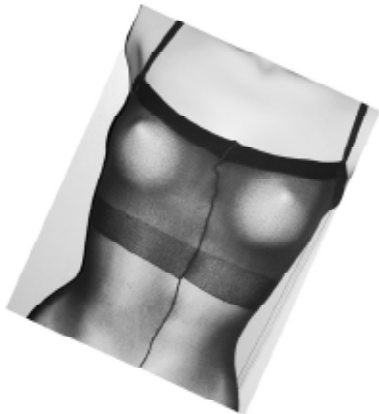






AP: Right. My wife knows more about the younger artists there than I do.  
 WT: Did they teach you about Vancouver artists in America?

AP: They didn't really focus on that too much where I went to school. I think you need an entire course to understand Jeff Wall. Like reading Balzac?  
 WT: Yeah maybe, Jeff Wall is like...



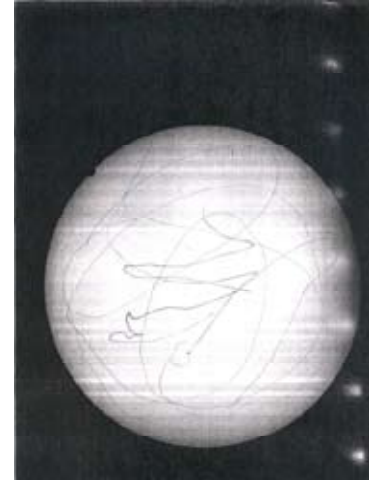
AP: I found your work a lot more accessible. During college, I actually wrote you once asking for a job or an internship.  
 WT: I think I remember that. What happened?  
 AP: I don't remember.  
 [Both laugh]

WT: So you're a photographer? An artist?

AP: I studied photography in college. I'm still attached to the idea of making "photographic" work. You see the picture in the book; you take a picture of the book...

WT: Like this one? [Points to Kate Moss Rorschach book]

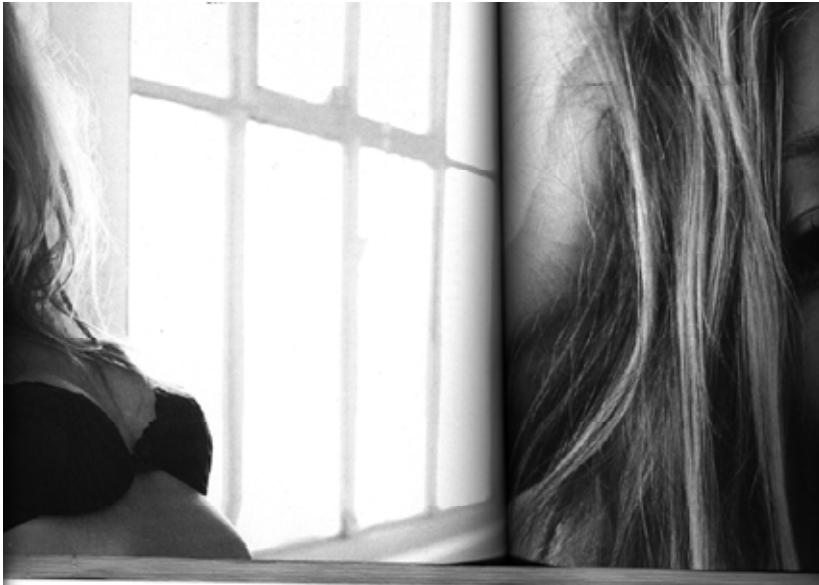
AP: No, I mean, I made another book, where I photographed all the books I made between the years 2004 and 2007. It's called "NOTHING NOTHING NOTHING NOTHING 2004-2007". I photographed each page.



WT: Photographs of photographs... the books are made up of photographs, too.

AP: Yeah, I mean, that first one is a book I did in college, called "Just Say Maybe". The catalogue is pretty thin... it's only 12 pictures. I shot those pictures as a photographer.





*WT: When was that?*

*AP: 2004. After that I moved to New York for a year and tried to continue being a photographer. This was just after Vice magazine started started "caring about photography." I wanted to shoot for cool magazines, show photography in cool art galleries... Ryan McGinley at PS1...*

*WT: I remember that. I wasn't really a part of it, though.*

*AP: I think you kind of set the mold. Anyways, I tried really hard to do that, to like doing it but it never really worked out. At the same time, I felt like I had all these ideas I wasn't doing because, "that's somebody else". I moved back to Canada and decided I would try to flesh out all those ideas. The first step was re-evaluating all these photographs that I had originally considered failures.*

*WT: What's a failure? [AP shows WT photo] Oh, I see. That's a nice photo!*

*AP: Thanks.*

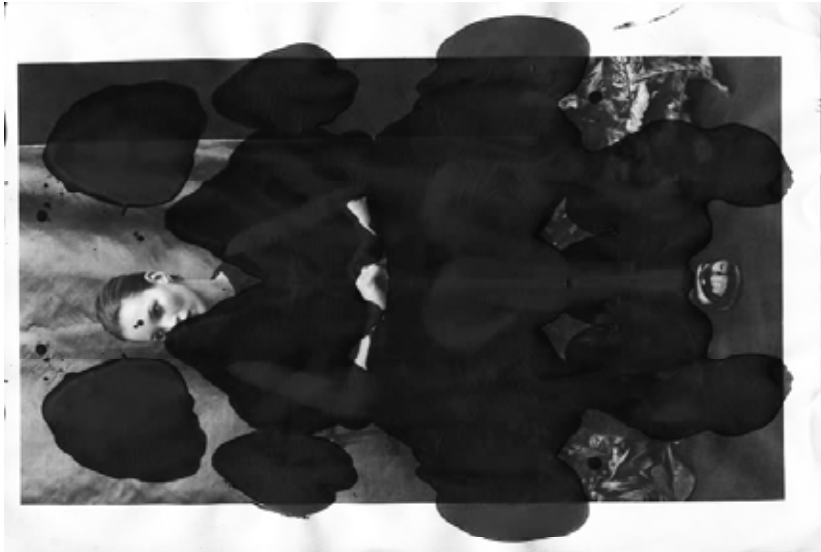
*WT: Why was it a failure?*

*AP: I used to work with this idea of accessibility in mind. Work everyone could understand. Like Jeff Koons. I was kinda obsessed with Roe Ethridge too... "White Artists".*

*WT: This book is funny. [Still looking at NOTHING book] What is the story with the girls with the shaved heads?*

*AP: I don't know...*





WT: And it looks like there is a bit of “appropriation” here too.

AP: Yeah, it’s funny, yesterday at Walter Koenig; I bought a copy of your soldier’s book. I remember being in college and being really confused by it. Today it is so much easier to understand. Did you encounter any people with that kind of reaction when you you published that book?

WT: Not really, no. I think that any ideas about “what I do” were manufactured by other people trying to sell things. And books like “Soldiers: The Nineties” contradicted that

AP: Sure.

WT: [still flipping through NOTHING book] is that picture from that book “Fruits”?

AP: Yup.

WT: I remember that book.

AP: Have you ever gone to Harajuku?

WT: Yeah.

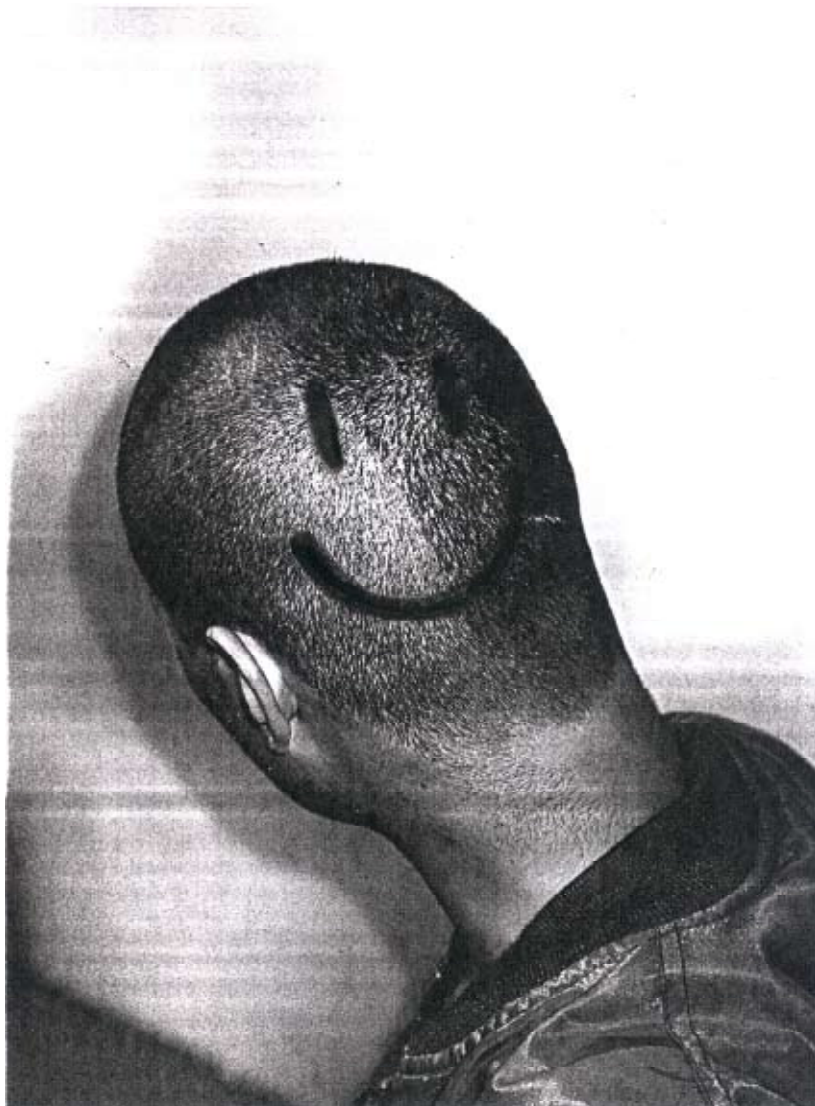
AP: Recently? Or back when they were making “Fruits”? Did you take photos?

WT: I went there a few times in the nineties. It doesn’t really matter when you go. There will be a scene in that square for a while. Different generations. Why did you tear the pictures of the Harajuku teens? It looks like semen. Or snow?

AP: Dash Snow?

WT: Kind of!

AP: The story with that is that is that I was at my friends place in Philadelphia and he had a copy of the Fruits book that had somehow gotten water-damaged. Like, soaked through, and a number of the pages were sticking together. When we tried to open a page, it would tear on both sides of the spread. I thought it looked great.



*WT: The white paper is kinda oriental.*

*AP: Well, I had really been trying to reference the Rorschach. That was what I wanted to do. But people were reading it to be something “Japanese-ey.”*

*WT: So you tried the Rorschach again with Kate Moss.*

*AP: Well, yeah. I mean, both projects have the same effect. By putting this form in the center of the frame you re-frame the contents of the image.*

*WT: Yes, it works that way. Like cropping? I like the way that boot looks.*

*AP: Yeah. “Cropping from the inside.”... “Framing from the inside.”*

*WT: It’s an interesting idea. Don’t you think it’s kind of limiting to use such a literalized reference for your inner framing, though? The Rorschach?*

*AP: Not really. Every time it’s a different one. And I like that it has the psycho-analytic reference. It’s pretty open-ended...*

*WT: I guess so.*

*AP: I don’t know... I feel compelled to ask you questions about copyright and permission. Those laws are really unclear to me. My mom is always asking me if I’m going to get sued. I don’t know what to tell her. What it is like to see someone appropriate your work?*

*WT: It’s really not like anything.*

*AP: “No big deal”?*

*WT: I imagined it might be flattering, or at least interesting, but it isn’t.*

*AP: What was it like taking those photographs of Kate Moss?*

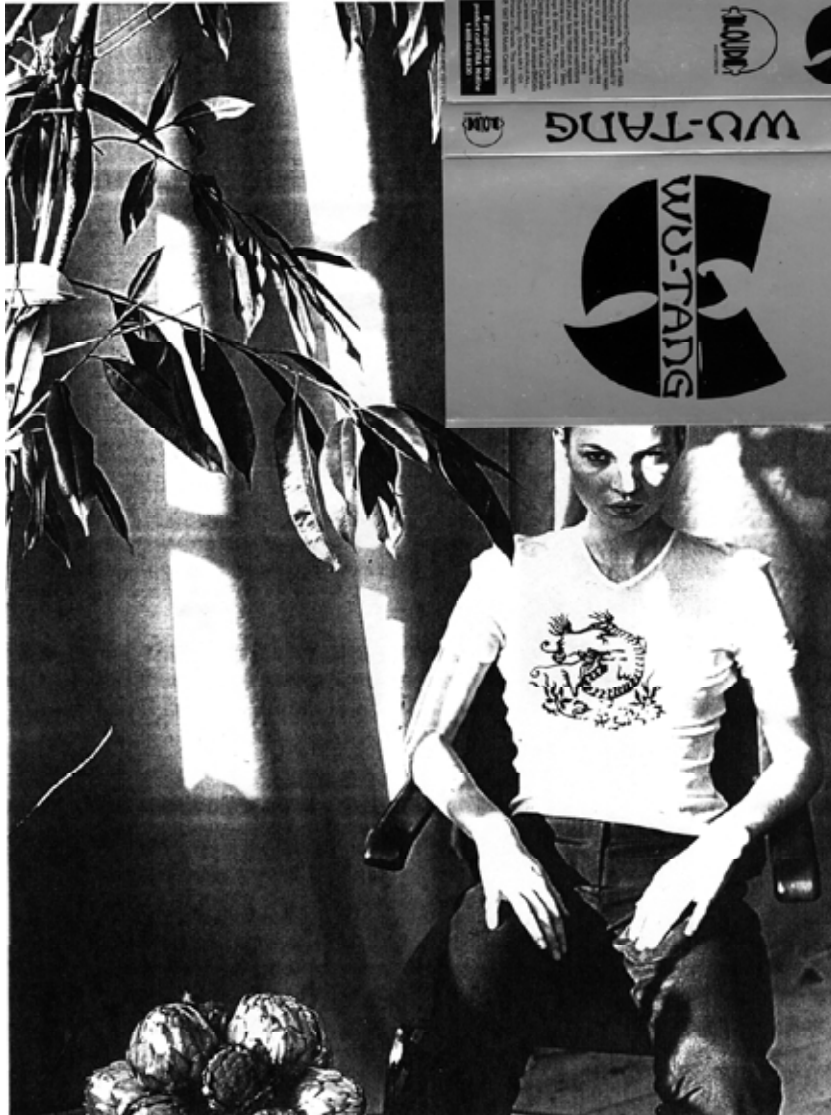
*WT: It was OK. We had 2 good days together.*

*AP: Did you shoot it with something specific in mind?*

*WT: Not really. I was using things I had around my studio. Berries, a plant, a chair, a lighter. A drop cloth. Some broccoli. There were lots of locations that we tried. Lot’s of approaches.*

*AP: And you edited it down to those 3 images from the shoot?*

*WP: Actually, I ended up printing 5 pictures from the shoot. Only 3 made it to the book, “Burg”.*



*AP: After you've made that initial edit, do you ever revise? Look at contact sheets again?*

*WT: I do if there is a call for it.*

*AP: Was she the most photographed person you have ever taken a picture of?*

*WT: Probably. She's not the person who I've taken the most photos of, though.*

*AP: Who would that be?*

*WT: I don't know. I don't want to say in an interview.*

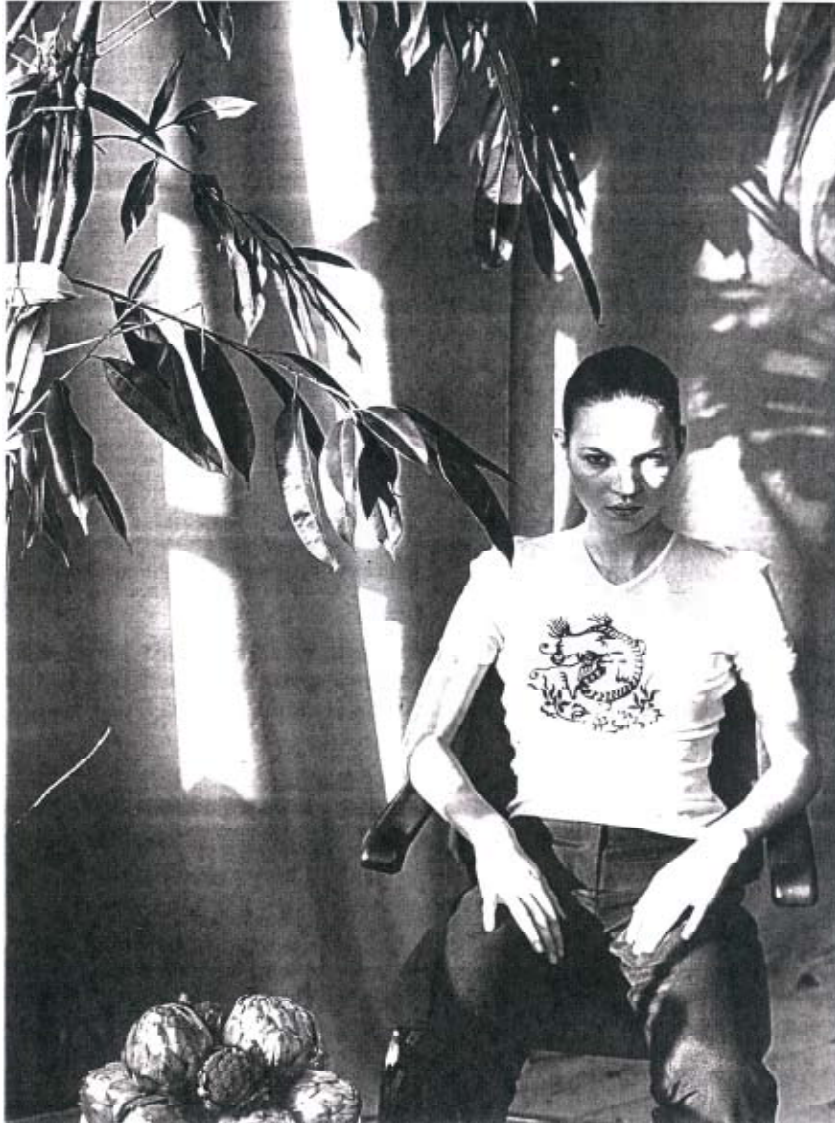
*AP: A friend of mine once sent me a youtube video of Kate Moss where it's her auditioning for something. He wrote in the subject heading "looking into the void".*

*WT: I wouldn't know about that.*

*AP: Your pictures are really different from any other photographs of her. They're really special.*

*WT: Thank you. I think so too.*

*AP: It's weird; when I had the idea of this series it was going to be pictures of my girlfriend. I was going to take pictures of her and do the Rorschach on top of her. I was using your Kate Moss pictures as the reference. That was what I wanted the pictures to look like to feel like. But she didn't feel that enthusiastic about it so I decided to just use your pictures instead. It wasn't until afterwards that I actually realized I had this problem because these works were now, whether I liked it or not, about Kate Moss, who I didn't feel one way or another about.*



*WT: So the picture of your girlfriend you wanted to take was already out there?*

*AP: Yes and no. I mean, they have the same birthday.*

*WT: So your girlfriend is a Capricorn! What are you?*

*AP: I'm a Virgo.*

*WT: What does that mean again?*

*AP: I make my bed every morning.*

*WT: Ah yes, it makes a lot of sense now. See I'm a Leo; it doesn't make sense for me to produce 300 Rorschachs for a book. Sometimes I wish I could bring myself to work like that. Leo is a good sign for photographers though.*

*AP: Really?*

*WT: It makes you trust in the fact that sometimes, things will do their own work.*

*AP: OK.*

*WT: I mean, situations and things that don't end up being what you had hoped can sometimes be rewarding if you manage to let go and learn to work with them. Kind of like what happened with the photos of your girlfriend. You can't always run away from the referent: you have to embrace it!*

*AP: Can I ask you one last question about the Kate Moss project?*

*WT: Ok.*

*AP: Do you see this series being about Wolfgang Tillmans? I mean, Kate Moss? Sorry.*

*WT: Kind of. Not really. It seems more about 3 pictures.*

*AP: Yes! Fuck. Totally.*

WT: Of course, it's weird because they're my photographs. And it seems they've become something that makes someone want to turn them into art.

AP: That shouldn't be that surprising. You are kind of mainstream in a way.

WT: I don't know. I don't really know what you would call "mainstream" today.

AP: Like, part of the mainstream cultural dialogue? Like Terry Richardson.

WT: Ach! Terry Richardson!

AP: I have a theory about him and Richard Avedon. I think they are the same person.... How do you explain someone like me making work with your work?

WT: I think that is more personal. That has to do with YOU.

AP: Right... I see ...

AP: Do you see a therapist?

WT: Do I see a therapist?



AP: This is one of the questions I had written down before you arrived. It was supposed to be an original, artistic question. Like a question Glenn O'Brien would ask. I've always wanted to be able to interview like him.

WT: If you wanted to do that kind of interview maybe it would have been better by email. Or started that way. It ruins the effect if you "break face".

AP: Yeah, you're right. It doesn't come natural to me.

WT: It probably doesn't come natural to him either. He probably practices! [laughs] Anyways, I've seen a therapist, yes.

AP: Did you talk with your therapist about your art?

WT: Well, I talked to her about my career. My friends. My life. You know.

AP: Have you ever shown your therapist a photo?

WT: No. Have you?

AP: I showed mine a T-Shirt once.

WT: I don't really care what she thinks of my work. I can figure that stuff out. I don't invite my therapist for studio visits.

AP: Richard Rince has mentioned showing drawings to his therapist in an interview once.

WT: Right.

AP: Seeing yellow... Seeing red? That's another one of the artistic questions.

WT: Right.

AP: It's a poetic way of asking if the Kate Moss Rorschachs make you angry. Do you think the work is cowardly? Yellow?

WT: Right.

AP: You don't have to answer it.









*WT: What is the mix of red and yellow?*

*AP: I don't know. I forgot to ask: Is this the first time someone has appropriated your photographs?*

*WT: Iza Genzken. She has used my works before.*

*AP: But you guys are friends...*

*WT: Yes. Maybe. Maybe there have been other artists I haven't heard about. They didn't email me.*

*AP: Do you have a google alert on your name your name?*

*WT: What is a "google alert"?*

*AP: If someone writes about you on the Internet you get an email sent to you.*

*WT: You can do that?*

*AP: It's so you don't have to google yourself. You just get an email.*

*WT: I've never heard of that. I try not to use a computer too much. Do you have a google alert?*

*AP: I did for a few months. All that happened was I read about this white rapper named Asher Roth. Another question: what do you think of the art being produced by young people in America right now?*

*WT: Is that you?*

*AP: I don't know. I'm Canadian. Right now I'm in Berlin.*

*WT: A couple years ago I would have said get out of America. I guess I... still think that.*

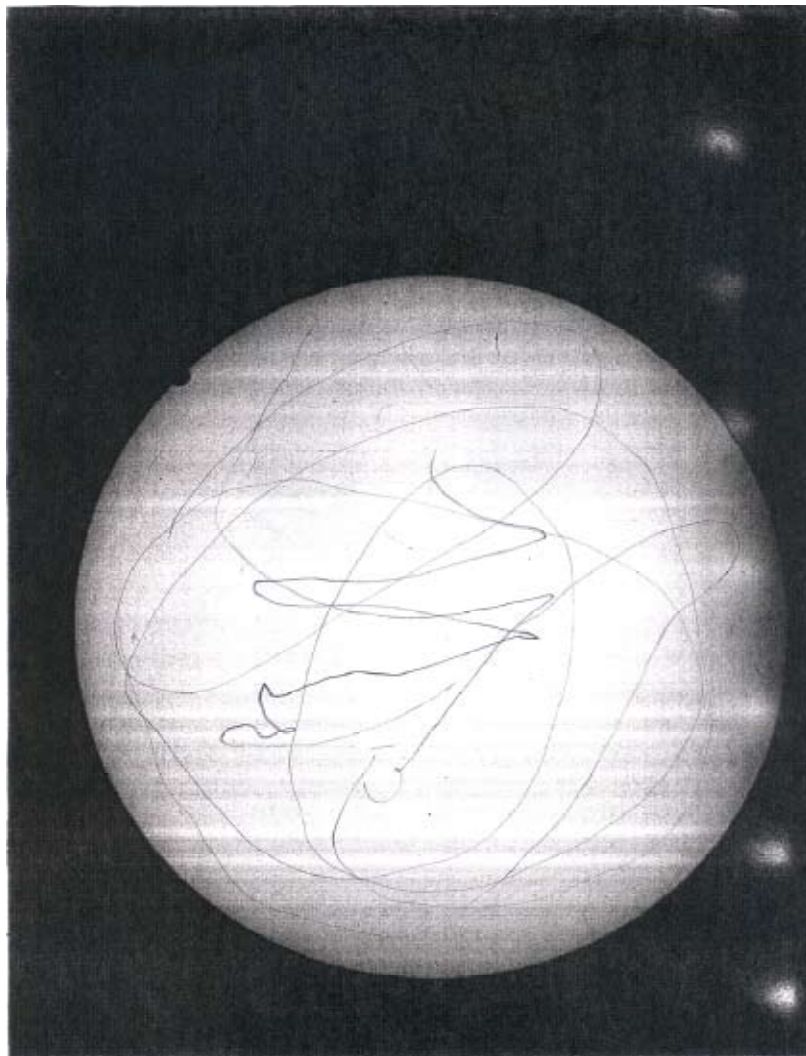
*AP: Yeah. I kind of want to leave.*

*WT: You should!*

*AP: Maybe I could come to Berlin and work for you?*

*WT: Ha Ha. And make Rorschach on my photos?*

*AP: Sure. It would be collaboration...*



*WT: My studio is in London, actually.... Is there anything else you wanted to talk about?*

*AP: I don't know. Could I show you some of my other books?*

*WT: Just a few. Actually, I have to go soon.*

*AP: Ok. Here is my latest book. It's a series of collages I made with the leftover spines for the Kate Koss books.*

*WT: How many pages is it?*

*AP: 200. I wanted it to be a certain thickness so I had to make 200.*

*WT: I like how you can see the wrinkles of the pages. Where do you print these?*

*AP: New York*

*WT: You sure did a lot of them.*

*AP: You can have this book if you want.*

*WT: Really? Thanks.*

*AP: You're welcome. You can also have this book of pictures of my tripod.*

*WT: Thanks!*

*AP: It's called "tripod"*

*WT: Right. [Looking through it]. Ha. Yes. Of course. It happens.*

*AP: Bracketing?*

*WT: Bracketing? No. Things go in and out of focus.*

*AP: Oh yeah. That happens too. You want that one?*



*WT: Do you use a digital camera?*

*AP: Yeah. I like it a lot. The weird problem it led to was no prints.*

*WT: Oh yes. No prints. I have mixed feelings about that.*

*AP: yeah?*

*WT: On the one hand, it's very exciting that images are dematerializing, but on the other, I wonder what I'd be interested in if it wasn't for prints.*

*AP: I totally lost all interest in the photo object. I could only make books. I haven't shown a photo print since I graduated from college.*

*WT: Isn't a book a kind of photo object.*

*AP: I guess so. My next show is supposed to be a photo show and I have no idea how I'm going to do it. It seems inadequate to simply put pictures up on a wall.*

*WT: Well... it might be.*





*AP: What photography do you like to look at? Is there anything you're still excited about? ...Tinyvices?*

*WT: I don't know about Tinyvices. Is that a blog?*

*AP: Yes.*

*WT: No, I haven't seen it. I like newspapers. I like magazines. I like...*

*AP: What magazines do you like?*

*WT: I like the economist. They have good photos.*

*AP: One last question before you go. Do you like any young photographers?*

*WT: I did a studio visit with David Sherry. He's quite successful now.*

*AP: Any others?*

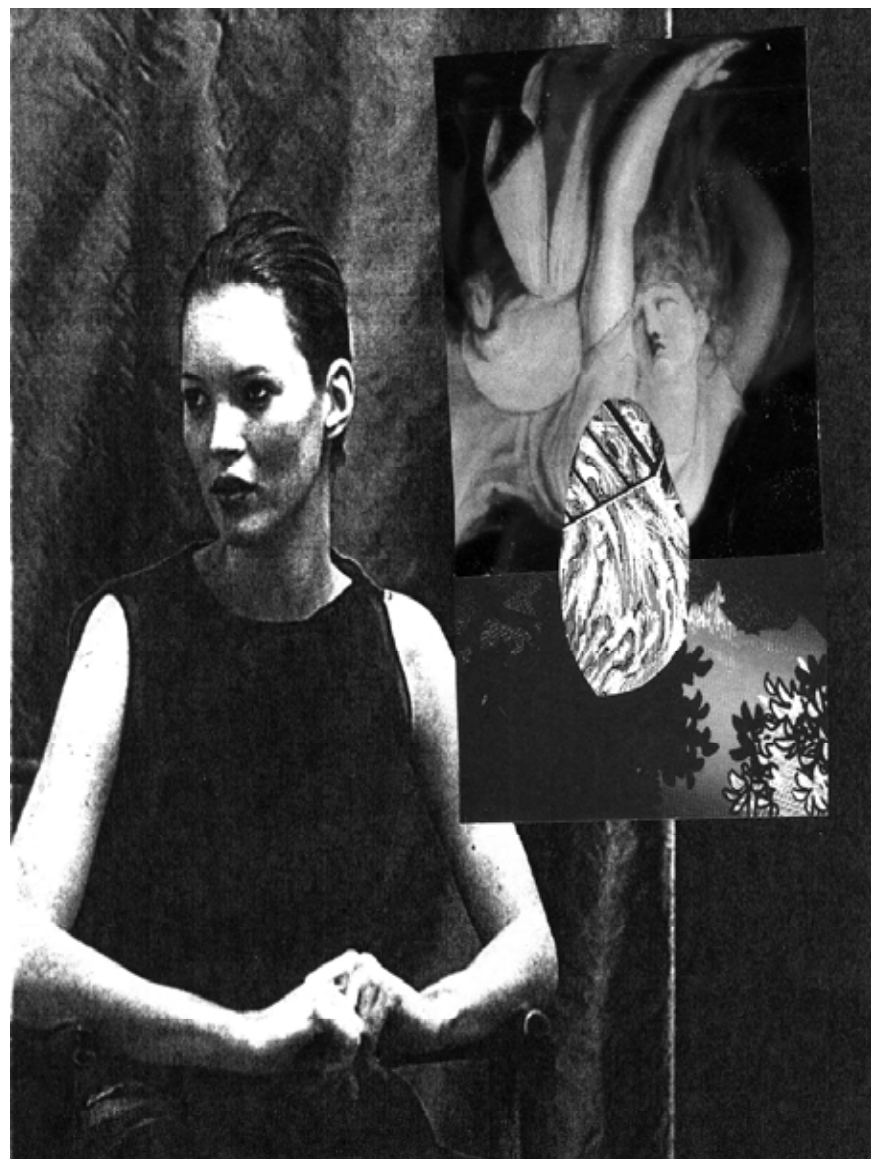
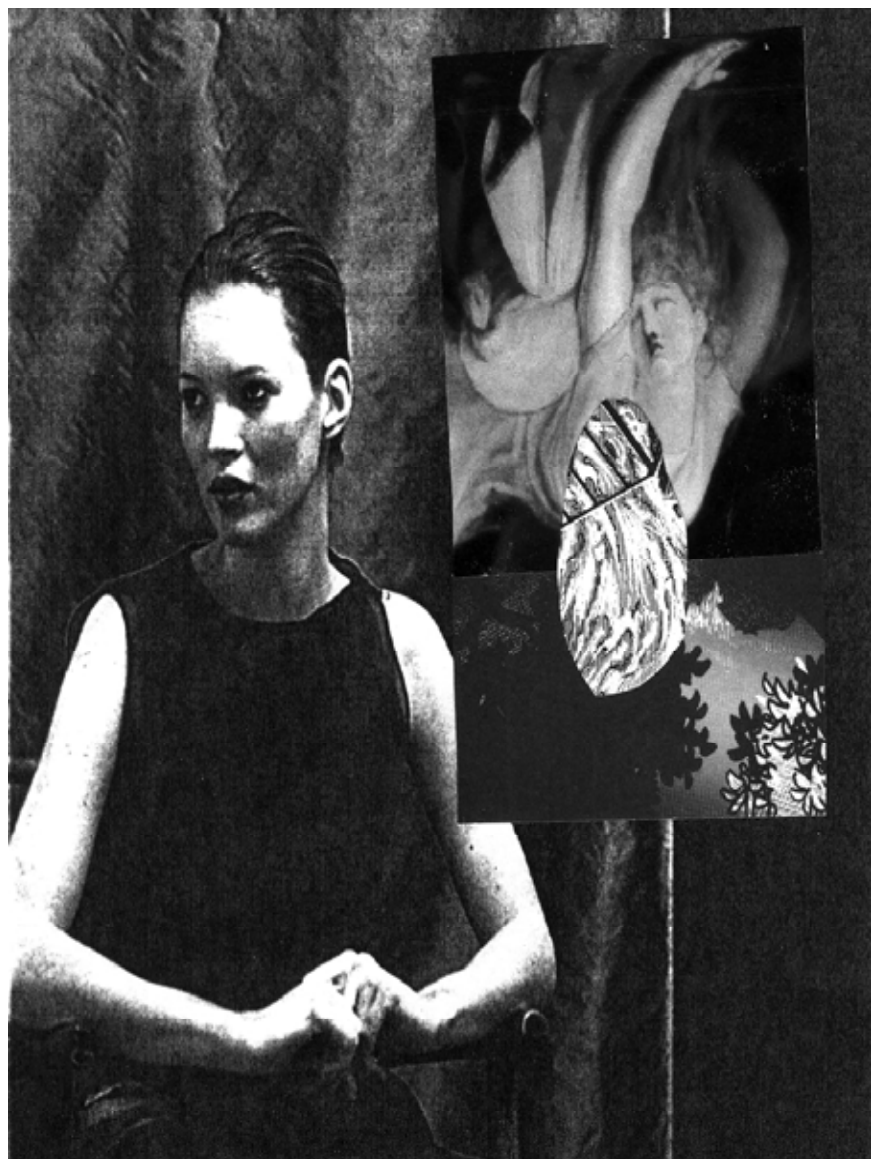
*WT: Asher penn!*

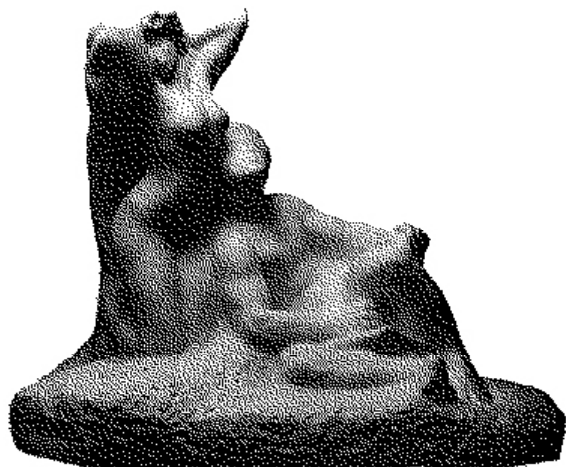
*AP: No, seriously?*

*WT: I really should get going. Thanks for the books. It was nice to meet you.*

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