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ARTICLE

Jane Vuorinen

MORE-THAN PHOTOGRAPHY AND SCULPTURE: A DIFFRACTIVE READING

In historical and theoretical writings on photography and sculpture, the two media are mostly addressed separately, with some points of overlap. The aim of this article is to examine artworks by contemporary artists Rachel de Joode and artist duo Nerhol from the hypothesis that they are not either photography or sculpture, but both and even more. They occupy new spaces, both material/physical and conceptual, reaching dimensions that are more-than: more than photography and more than sculpture. I aim for a renewed understanding of these media through diffractive reading, an approach with roots in feminist and new materialist discourse. Diffractive reading is about understanding things through each other, rather than finding meaning through preconceived static oppositions. As the artworks analyzed are understood as material-discursive practices, the theoretical and historical backgrounds of both photography and sculpture become increasingly relevant. How can and how should photography and sculpture be theorized as expanding fields? How do their ways of making meaning differ from each other and how do they converge? Through diffractive reading, photography and sculpture are not understood as two separate strands of practice coming together, but rather as manifestations of hybrid identities within the same artwork.

In contemporary art, there is a growing tendency towards using photography in sculptural ways and a rising interest in the objecthood of the photograph. This gravitation towards very tactile methods of image making is especially thought-provoking at a time when digitality is taking photography towards a direction where the materiality of the single photographic image seems to become increasingly

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irrelevant. The aim of this article is to find new ways of thinking about the materiality of the photographic image and assess how materiality itself works as an agent in the formation of these 3D photographic objects. Through two case studies, I re-evaluate the notion of photographic and sculptural materiality, shifting from seeing materiality as physical and static properties of photographic or sculptural objects into considering it as fluid, changing, temporal and fluctuating processes.

I analyse contemporary works by Rachel de Joode (b. 1979, Netherlands) and artist duo Nerhol, which consists of Ryuta Iida (b. 1981, Japan) and Yoshihisa Tanaka (b. 1980, Japan),¹ in terms of the hypothesis that these works are neither photography nor sculpture, but they occupy new spaces, both material/physical and conceptual. By doing so, they reach dimensions that are more-than: more-than photography and more-than sculpture. *More-than* is a conceptualisation used in process philosophy to describe objects that do not fit specific categorisations but rather form a category in itself, one that gives space to things undermining binary ontologies merely by existing.² In this article, I investigate this more-than-ness through a diffractive reading practice that studies the physical, visual, temporal and conceptual dimensions and meanings created by the artworks, and analyses the works as dynamic materialisations rather than only as 3D (art) objects in space. Diffraction as a critical practice is a way of interrupting or coming in between, making a cut, situating oneself into something: “diffraction is always/already at work when one reads, writes and converses, in a scholarly manner and otherwise”, Iris van der Tuin observes,³ and continues, “the correspondence theory of truth (that the researcher is positioned outside of her research object and the instrument is a neutral mediator) is being reworked along the lines of a ‘co-responding’ theory which acknowledges the researcher, [the] instrument and [the] researched to be active and entangled agents”.⁴ What undergoes diffraction in this article, therefore, are not only photography and sculpture as artistic practices but also—through my participation as a viewer and an art historian—the entangled histories and theories of photography and sculpture.

The intertwined histories of photography and sculpture

Art theory has explored the relations between photography and sculpture from at least as early as 1896, when art historian Heinrich Wölfflin published an essay on the problems of transferring 3D sculpture to light-sensitised paper.⁵ Geraldine A. Johnson describes Wölfflin as one of the few art historians who have acknowledged the impact of photography on scholarly interpretations of sculpture.⁶

Photography historian Geoffrey Batchen writes about the popularity of sculptures as subjects for photography in its early days. The immobility of sculptures made them suitable to be photographed with the long exposure times that early methods of photography required. Monochromatic nineteenth-century photographs of white plaster casts also remained accurate renditions of their subjects, as opposed to portraits of people, as colour photography remained to be discovered. Batchen

notes that “photographing statuary placed these strange new kinds of images into an established tradition, the still life”.⁷ Johnson points out that the use of classicising busts and statuettes as photographic subjects would have raised the prestige of the new medium vicariously by linking it to high art traditions dating back to antiquity.⁸ The early days of photography could thus be seen as marked by an aspiration to become part of an established tradition by similarity, whereas later developments emphasised photography’s difference from other artistic media.

Compared with sculpture, photography has become accepted as an art form quite recently. According to art historian Sabine Kriebel,

“The 1960s mark photography’s decisive entry into the institutions of the fine arts, from museums to the art market. This shift was in large part engineered by the curators of American museums who sought to plead the case of photography as high art, excavating photography’s essential properties so as to determine its difference from painting and sculpture and justify its place in the museum”.⁹

Tobia Bezzola, in turn, underscores that photo-plastic procedures were integrated into the artistic mainstream in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁰ David Company describes this time as the “splicing of photography into art practice” and notes that while photography was essential to conceptualism, it approached it as a non-medium: “There was no scramble to define its essence and no programme about what it should be”.¹¹ This gave artists the freedom to use photography “haphazardly”, as Bezzola puts it, not to produce perfect images but to convey an idea, gesture or act. Bezzola even describes these artists as “anti-photographers”.¹²

The exhibition *Photography into Sculpture* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1970, curated by Peter C. Bunnell, is an important predecessor for later developments in art combining photographic and sculptural methods. According to the exhibition’s press release, it was “the first comprehensive survey of photographically formed images used in a sculptural or fully dimensional manner” and in which artists “are moving from [an] internal meaning or iconography — of sex, the environment, war — to a visual duality in which materials are also incorporated as content and at the same time are used as a way of conceiving actual space”.¹³

The merging of photography with other media, including sculpture, was an important factor in what Geoffrey Batchen has called *post-photography*. Batchen notices an increasing porousness of photography’s boundaries with other media emerging in the 1980s and 1990s: “It would seem that each medium has absorbed the other, leaving the photographic residing everywhere, but nowhere in particular”.¹⁴

Recently, the term *photography’s expanding field* has become a way to describe how photography is not understood as a single unity or set of practices but as a phenomenon that continually reinvents itself and takes on multiple forms.¹⁵ The term echoes art historian Rosalind Krauss’ article, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” (1979), which mapped the expansion of the theoretical category of sculpture in the 1960s and 1970s, in the aftermath of land art, minimalism and conceptualism.¹⁶ However, while Krauss saw the expanded field of sculpture through negation and absence and looked for a definition of modernist sculpture through what it is not (not-landscape, not-architecture),¹⁷ the current idea of the expanding field of photography goes beyond it. It does not see the field of photography as expanded but as expanding continuously.

In 2013, photography theorist Charlotte Cotton stated that “The relationship between photography and sculpture has perhaps been the most imposing signature of contemporary photography of the twenty-first century so far”.¹⁸ Even so, in historical and theoretical writings on photography and sculpture, the two media were addressed separately for a long time. The joint history of photography and sculpture has often meant the study of photographs of sculpture, of photography as a means to reveal new points of view (both physical and conceptual) of sculpture and to disseminate images of and information on these immobile, not so easily transportable works of art.¹⁹ However, there is a growing field of research that embraces the overlapping and merging of these two media.²⁰ By way of diffractive reading, the present article makes a contribution to that field and proposes a new, interdisciplinary view of theorising photography and sculpture.

Diffraction as a method

Diffractive reading as a method has its roots in feminist and new materialist discourse, and it has been evolving in the humanities since the 1990s, first introduced by Donna Haraway and later further elaborated, especially by Karen Barad. Haraway explains diffraction as an “invented category of semantics”, a divergence from mere reflection as a critical practice into a deeper understanding. In her writing, “[d]iffraction is an optical metaphor for an effort to make a difference in the world”.²¹ Barad, in her turn, describes diffraction as “a physical phenomenon that lies at the center of some key discussions in physics and the philosophy of physics”, and continues, “Diffraction is also an apt metaphor for describing the methodological approach that I use of *reading insights through one another* in attending to and responding to the *details and specificities of relations of difference* and how they matter”.²² It thus parts from the optical metaphor of objective reflection and makes way for more creative encounters.²³

In physics, diffraction is the phenomenon of waves—whether liquid, light or sound—spreading out after having passed through an aperture or across an edge, forming diffraction patterns as the waves collide with one another. As a methodological approach, diffraction is about understanding things through one another, rather than finding meaning through preconceived static oppositions, which makes it an especially suitable method for analysing works of art with an interdisciplinary approach.²⁴ Differences in diffractive methodology are actively produced in each specific encounter or entanglement. Diffractive methodology, as explained further by Barad, “does not take the boundaries of any of the objects or subjects of these studies for granted but rather investigates the material-discursive boundary-making practices that produce ‘objects’ and ‘subjects’ and other differences out of, and in terms of, a changing relationality”.²⁵

As the artworks analysed in this article are understood and examined as parts and results of material-discursive practices, the theoretical and historical backgrounds of both photography and sculpture become increasingly relevant.

How can and should photography and sculpture be theorised as expanding fields?

Photographic sculptures and sculptural photographs

Rachel de Joode works in a way that combines sculptural and photographic practices. She takes a mouldable material, such as clay or wax, and works it with her hands, kneading and shaping it into forms, not usually visually representing or depicting anything but rather bringing out the material qualities of the chosen substance. The imprints of her hands and fingerprints are often visible in the works, as in *Stacked Sculpture II* (2017). After this, she then photographs this substance and continues working with the photographs on

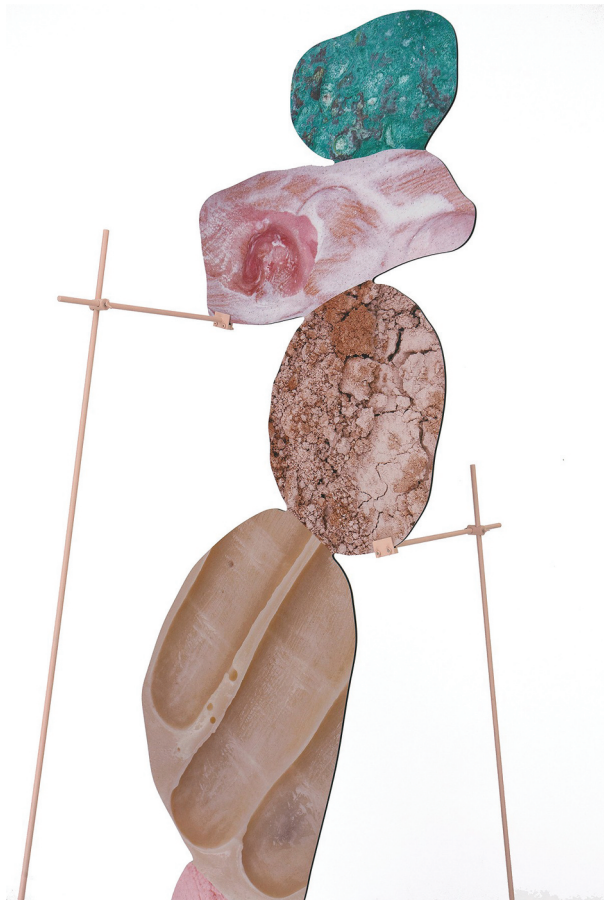


Fig. 1. Rachel de Joode, *Stacked Sculpture II* (2017), detail. Inkjet print on Dibond, steel, 210 × 83 cm.

a computer. Finally, the work is cut to form using industrial materials, shipped to the artist and then assembled by her into sculptural pieces (Figure 1).

Kneading clay or other hands-on work with the materials is the starting point in de Joode's work. The temporality of waiting for the reactions and changes in the materials becomes important, such as observing water on the surface of the clay forming into little droplets that eventually evaporate. Taking a photograph stops these processes, catching something ephemeral.²⁶ This processuality accentuates the temporality of a sculpture as a material object, in which decay starts right away as the sculpture is finished.

Preserving the imprint of the artist's hands, de Joode's works can be considered as belonging to and reshaping the category of the self-portrait of the artist. de Joode uses her materials in an indicative way; in an artist's statement, she describes her work as follows: "The recurring elements are: the actors involved in the art-making process and the (reduced) signifiers of artwork/sculpture and gallery, such as: wet clay, marble, or pedestals".²⁷ As signifiers, therefore, the clay, marble and pedestals work in the same manner as the elements of a photograph, indicating something in another place and time. In de Joode's work, materials such as clay and marble can manifest both as materials that are present in physical form and as the subjects of her photographs.

Artist duo Nerhol, founded in 2007, also works at the intersection of photography and sculpture. The duo consists of sculptor Ryuta Iida and graphic designer Yoshihisa Tanaka. Together, they create works in which layers of portrait photographs are stacked and glued together as a block and then carved partially to reveal an undulating, multi-layered image of the sitter. The prints constitute a temporally extended view of a person, as the works consist of 200 photographs that have been taken serially at one sitting over a period of three minutes.²⁸

The impossibility of presenting a documentarily accurate portrayal of a 3D subject in a 2D photograph becomes apparent in Nerhol's portraits in the series *Scene to Know* (2013) (Figure 2). The challenge of photographically capturing the best or most truthful view of a sculpture is not a new problem but one that has been apparent since the inception of photography.²⁹

In Nerhol's practice, the artists work in a collaborative dialogue with each other, one taking the photographs and the other doing the carving, shaping the process as they go along. In their work, the photographic and the sculptural are modes of working divided between the two participating artists. In de Joode's practice, there is a shifting between the 3D and the 2D, as she starts with handling sculptural materials in a very tactile way and then continues in the digital realm by working on the photographs on a computer and then again assembling the final pieces as sculptural works.

In both cases here, photography is used to document something fleeting, the material qualities of substances, such as clay or wax in de Joode's works, and the instabilities of a human subject in Nerhol's. How these photographic documentations are then used in later experimental alterations transforms the photography into a stage in a practice that could itself be described as



Fig. 2. Nerhol (Yoshihisa Tanaka & Ryuta Iida), *Scene to Know* No. 040 (2013). Inkjet prints, 42 × 29, 7 × 4 cm.

diffractive, moving between the photographic and sculptural methods. These diffractions are discussed in the following three sections.

Multiple views/a succession

In Nerhol's works, the process of capturing as a photographic practice diffracts with the material flow of the carving of the paper, introducing a liquid element which interestingly alludes to the liquid flow of time, which photography stops. At times, Nerhol's works are exhibited horizontally laid out on a table so that they can be viewed from above. Shown this way, they especially acquire a new dimension of depth, creating connotations to ponds or lakes or to ripples on the surface of water caused by an object dropped in. The works then acquire a liquid appearance, with the people portrayed as if seen through water, dropped in the temporal liquidity of the photograph, also reminiscent of the darkroom where the photograph to be

processed goes through a series of containers holding chemical liquids. The ripple-like appearance of Nerhol's portraits holds a connection with the existence of light itself as waves. The term *diffraction* originates from this phenomenon. Observing the movement of light and imagining it to "behave as a fluid which upon encountering an obstacle breaks up and moves outwards in different directions" led priest, mathematician and physicist Francesco Grimaldi in the mid-seventeenth century to name the optical phenomenon *diffraction* from the Latin word *diffringere* (to break apart).³⁰

Sometimes, Nerhol's works are carved only on the upside, and at other times, they are carved on both sides, displayed in a glass box or on a shelf, as in the series *Double Face* (2015). The latter readily takes on a symbolic connection with Janus, the deity looking to the past and future simultaneously (Figure 3).

The successive quality of the images links Nerhol's works to cinema and also to chronophotography. Curator Ann-Christin Bertrand mentions the



Fig. 3. Nerhol (Yoshihisa Tanaka and Ryuta Iida), *Double Face No. 002* (2015). Inkjet prints, 21 × 21 cm. Installation view from exhibition Foam 3 h: Nerhol © Foam, Photo: Christian van der Kooy.

chronophotographic experiments by Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey in the early 1900s as important factors in a conceptual shift concerning the temporal and physical dimensions of photography. Chronophotographic images form a series, showing a body moving in space, usually arranged in a strip, as single images following one another, as in Muybridge's work, or as a sequence of successive movements shown in one visual unit, as in Marey's.³¹ In Nerhol's works, the sequence is not on a 2D visual plane, as in Muybridge's and Marey's, but is manifested in physical depth.

The ability of photography to bring out and make visible certain aspects of reality that are not accessible to the naked eye has been an important aspect of its power and uniqueness as a visual medium. Walter Benjamin called this the optical unconscious—something that is present in the visual world but not perceived by the human eye, reached only through photography.³² This includes things such as rapid movements, suspended in time with the help of photography, or very small subjects, magnified in scale with the photographic lens. Continuous shooting allows for changes to become visible in Nerhol's work,³³ and the fact that people physically change all the time in a way that is not perceptible to the human eye but through photography links back to Benjamin's idea of the optical unconscious.

Bertrand notes the importance of photography to performance art as a documentary tool to capture something temporal—the performative practice. The body of the performer then becomes a sculptural element, as in, for example, Bruce Nauman's *The Fountain* (1966), which is well known through its photographic documentation.³⁴ In de Joode's work, the melding of clay that is photographed has a performative quality; the event of melding the clay is fixed by photography, before the clay becomes an object, a recognisable form. By comparison, when a finished sculpture is photographed, there is less need for fixing but rather for preserving, making more accessible and disseminating. Art historian Patrizia Di Bello sees photographs of a sculpture as analogous to performances of a musical score.³⁵ By this analogy, the photograph of a sculpture is more than just a notation; it becomes a performance in itself in addition to being a means for documentation.

In both Nerhol's and de Joode's works, photography serves as something that comes in between and stops the performative flow of time, emphasising the materialities of the subjects: the human body in Nerhol's works and substances, such as clay or wax, in de Joode's. After this, they both return to the realm of the sculptural—Nerhol by carving the stack of photographs and de Joode by working the photographs into sculptural pieces and assembling them into the finished works. There is a constant flow between the photographs as static, still images and their moldability as sculptural materials in both their works.

Flatness and surface/dimensions and depth

As flattening could be regarded as a core gesture of photography, a photograph is a sort of Pygmalion story reversed—making something live and animated flat and suspended in time, pinning it down, rendering it controllable. In terms of dimension, there is a two-way movement to be seen in the works discussed here—a flattening of

the physical dimensions of clay and other sculptural materials in de Joode's and an expansion of the physical dimensionality of flat photographic prints in Nerhol's.

In photographs of sculptures, Di Bello observes that being "captured and stilled" is not the sculpture itself "but rather our movements around and toward it".³⁶ Correspondingly, art historian Alex Potts remarks,

"In many photographic illustrations of sculpture, the object shines out from a neutral space divested of any trace of setting. It seems to exist as pure image, a free-floating form in virtual space. (. . .) A particular kind of viewing is being suggested that brackets out interference from the surroundings and seizes the work as a self-enclosed object or form".³⁷

Potts goes on to mention that environmental artists in the 1960s and 1970s sometimes included a human figure, often the artist themselves, in the photographs of their works to add a sense of scale. He notes that the presence of a viewer in a photograph like this "might disturb or tend to mediate" the experience of the viewer engaging directly with the work in a "one-to-one relation".³⁸ This visual-imaginative wandering of the gaze *around* a sculpture in a photograph is blocked in de Joode's close-up photographs of the materials and perhaps replaced by a more detailed and intimate one, as the artist's direct tactile engagement with the materials can be viewed without the interference of anything in between. However, in some works, we can see hands in the photographic image, creating the sense of disturbance or mediation that Potts outlines. In the photographic documentation of her work in an exhibition, this effect again curiously changes.

In Nerhol's portraits, a single photograph is partially seen only as rims or edges, together forming a whole in which much of the visual information is, in fact, unseen, covered by the layering so that even if the viewer can physically move around the work, it visually conceals its several layers. The physical layering of single photographic prints adds to the visual detail, as the carved-out edges take on the form of waves. Their depth visually and physically resembles topographic forms and the way changes in altitude can be visually depicted as circular forms inside one another in maps, which is another form of 2D visualisation of 3D environments.

In de Joode's work, the flatness of the materials the photographs are printed on and cut out of accentuates the outline of the works, their silhouette. This relates them to silhouette drawing as a proto-photographic method, which was popular in the 18th century. In silhouette drawing, the shadow of the sitter is traced to form an image in one solid colour and then cut out of usually black cardboard, mounted on a light background and often framed as a portrait. Nerhol's carving could also be regarded as a descendant of silhouette drawing, altering it from depicting a flat 2D shadow into including depth of both physical space and time—instead of an outline, tracing the inside of a sitter's image.

Both de Joode's and Nerhol's works deal with emptiness and negative space. The carved-out areas in Nerhol's works and the handprints in de Joode's serve as visual evidence of absent matter—something was here. The absent as present, a key characteristic of photography, becomes manifested here as a sculptural gesture, a material and visual trace of physical contact. The photographic and the sculptural trace, the icon and the index, merge together in these works, diffracting two layers of

signification: the visual, photographic “I was here, I saw this” and the tactile, sculptural “I was here, I touched this”.

Displays and support materials

A defining characteristic of a sculpture is that it stands on its own, free from the walls, often on a podium or pedestal, separating it from the floor as well. Rosalind Krauss considers the sculpture’s logic as a historically bounded category as being inseparable from the logic of the monument. Because sculptures function “in relation to the logic of representation and marking”, she points out how “sculptures are normally figurative and vertical, their pedestals an important part of the structure since they mediate between actual site and representational sign”.³⁹ In Krauss’ view, whereas monuments are tied to the sites they exist in, modernist sculpture is nomadic:

“Through its fetishization of the base, the sculpture reaches downward to absorb the pedestal into itself and away from actual place; and through the representation of its own materials or the process of its construction, the sculpture depicts its own autonomy”.⁴⁰

In the work of modernist sculptor Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957) particularly, the pedestals became important as constituting the artwork as a whole, rather than being mere separate surroundings or tools for presenting the work. Krauss describes the base in Brancusi’s works as becoming “the morphological generator of the figurative part of the object” and notes that sometimes, in Brancusi’s oeuvre, the artwork is in a reciprocal relationship to the base, as in *Adam and Eve* (1921), and, at other times, the work is all the base, as in *The Caryatids* (1914) and *Endless Column* (1918).⁴¹

de Joode uses various kinds of pedestals and podiums in her work. At times, she incorporates rocks or stones that anchor the works to the floor, and at other times, the works can be mounted on coloured or classic white podiums. de Joode also uses metallic rests resembling microphone stands, and wooden stools, such as one can see in an artist’s studio to use for people coming to sit for a portrait. The simple white wooden stools de Joode has used as podiums for her sculptures in her solo exhibition *Porosity* at the Christophe Gaillard Gallery in Paris⁴² resemble Marcel Duchamp’s readymade *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), in which Duchamp mounted a bicycle wheel upside down on a wooden stool. Occasionally, de Joode’s work is exhibited on shelves as a sort of intermediary between sculpture and wall-mounted works, reminiscent of a relief, their 3D features protruding out somewhat but not completely. de Joode also often uses sculptural, hand-made ceramic hooks to hang her pieces on. The various display podiums, stands, hooks and platforms in de Joode’s practice become part of the works, much like those of Brancusi, as described above.

Nerhol’s displays vary from shelves to podiums and frames. The artist duo’s process also includes taking photographs of the sculptural works and displaying these re-photographs in frames, remarkably enlarged to reveal the sculptural details visually better. These re-photographs are often exhibited alongside the stacked and carved

sculptural pieces. While the podiums and shelves serve as designating the works as sculptures, exhibiting the photographs taken in the sculptural phase takes the works back to the realm of photography, setting their ontological category under debate.

In de Joode's *A Ruin (II)* (2014), the edge of a photograph in wooden frames is cut in an undulating shape, print, glass and all. The photographic image shows wet-looking grey-coloured clay in close-up, bearing the imprint of the artist's hands (Figure 4).

While the frame in a photograph is often seen as a visual element,⁴³ it is crucial to remember that the frame as an object is also an important signifier of photography's acceptance into the art museum.⁴⁴ In de Joode's *A Ruin (II)*, the wooden frame as an object becomes an indication of this. In Nerhol's work, by comparison, the carving results in subtly shaping the visual frame of the photographs into a freehand form, liberating it from the visual idea of a photograph's frame as rectangular.



Fig. 4. Rachel de Joode, *A Ruin (II)* (2014). Digital Fine Art Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag Paper in partially cut custom frames, 52 × 42 cm.

In a sculpture, the material of the work is an integral part of its meaning, whereas in photography, the paper or other material that carries the image has often been seen as a mere support.⁴⁵ Given that it is true that a photograph needs a support material to become viewable, the notion of the support as being less important or even void of meaning becomes contested in the works of de Joode and Nerhol. The supposed support materials are integral parts of the meaning making of their works. It could even be contended that the works are all *about* the support materials. The images in these works not only appear on such materials but also occupy the materials in a temporal-material entanglement.

Conclusion

Following the logic of diffraction, the focus of this analysis has been the methods of production and the encounter with the artwork rather than on the object as the outcome. The analysis has extended outside the object into its before and after. Alex Potts evokes photography's power to "dematerialize" a sculpture.⁴⁶ However, what happens in de Joode's and Nerhol's works is rather a materialisation or sculpturalisation of the photographic. In their works, photography surpasses its role as a document and becomes a means of conveying material thought.

Referring to Hegel, Bezzola notes that "Traditionally, sculpture was understood as the translation of content from the realm of ideas (*ordo rerum idearum*) into that of physical objects (*ordo rerum extensarum*)".⁴⁷ Bezzola also notes photography's power to not only document existing realities but also generate new ones. Photography's influence on sculpture as a practice is evident: "Sculpture now can do more than carve, model, and cast; it can photograph".⁴⁸ This becomes manifested in Nerhol showing something more and something other of their subject than what the eye can see, not revealing but rather creating a new dimension. By comparison, Rachel de Joode takes sculptural materials into the realm of subject matter through photography.

Art historian and curator Roxana Marcoci calls forth the idea of the photographic as a dimension of sculpture:

"Photography and its relations with other artistic disciplines have been and continue to be full of twists and turns; and sculpture, meanwhile, in its expanded discursive field, stands in as-yet-unmapped, still-to-be-discovered relations to its photographic dimension".⁴⁹

Nerhol's and de Joode's works could be thought to represent the materials themselves through photography. The clay moulded in de Joode's work is caught before turning into something figurative, and in the trace of the artist's hand on the soft malleable material, represented through the photographic process, a connection lies to the trace-like nature of photography itself, to indexicality and leaving a mark. Nerhol's works, by comparison, take the photographic into a sculptural dimension through the act of carving.

Barad describes diffraction as an ongoing conversation.⁵⁰ The photographic and the sculptural in de Joode's and Nerhol's works could be regarded as material gestures, flowing into and out of each other in a constant dialogic process. Conversation between the materials and the artist and, in Nerhol's case, between the two artists as well,

becomes a leading mode of working. The photographic and the sculptural become modes of thinking in making images, how to see this and how to form that, diffracting through each other. This echoes curator Mark Godfrey's words: "Sculpture and photography emerge now not as foes — the one criticizing and supplanting the other — but as partners, both refusing transcendence, both rooted in matter, which is to say, rooted in the economic and geographic reality of our world"⁵¹.

I have encountered works by de Jooode and Nerhol originally in photography fairs; however, in addition to being categorised as photographic art, they could be just as well regarded as sculptures using photography as a method. Through diffractive reading, the mediums of photography and sculpture are not understood as two separate strands of practice coming together but rather as manifestations of hybrid identities existing simultaneously within the same artwork. A diffractive reading of photography and sculpture allows for a dynamic analysis, of understanding differences through diffractions—being different *with* rather than being different *from*. This approach introduces a space for future developments and new diffractions, with the fields of photography and sculpture ever expanding.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. Only these two cases are selected to make a deep and detailed rather than broad and general analysis. Other contemporary artists using similar methods are Letha Wilson, Felicity Hammond and Alma Haser, to name a few.
2. See, for example, Manning, *Always More Than One*, passim.
3. van der Tuin, "Diffraction as a Methodology."
4. Ibid.
5. Bezzola, "From Sculpture in Photography," 29. Even before this, the sculptural dimensions of stereoscopic photography have been a subject of public interest. (See Batchen, "Natural Relief", passim.)
6. Johnson, "Introduction," 8.
7. Batchen, "An Almost Unlimited Variety," 20.
8. Johnson, "Introduction," 7.
9. Kriebel, "Theories of Photography," 15.
10. Bezzola, "From Sculpture in Photography," 30.
11. Company, "Survey," 18.
12. Bezzola, "From Sculpture in Photography," 34.
13. *Photography into Sculpture*, press release and wall label, The Museum of Modern Art. Accessed June 29, 2020. https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_326678.pdf?_ga=2.223747931.119646355.1593441472-305951894.1593441472.

14. Batchen, *Each Wild Idea*, 109.
15. See Osborne, "Photography in an Expanding Field"; Baker, "Photography's Expanded Field"; Plummer, "Photography as Expanding Form"; and Tellgren, "Exhibiting a Collection of Photography."
16. Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field."
17. Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," 34–38.
18. Cotton, "Nine Years," 38.
19. See Johnson, "Introduction"; and Marcoci, "The Original Copy."
20. See Johnson, "Introduction"; Hamill and Luke, "Introduction: Reproductive Vision," 19; and especially Pinet, "Montrer est la question vitale," 83. Pinet notices how photographic and sculptural materials work together in Rodin's practice. She emphasizes the importance of the meaning of materials in how photography and sculpture intertwine—how albumen paper compared with carbon photographic paper, or clay compared with marble, renders different results in Rodin's photographs of his sculptures and how the different combinations of sculptural materials and photographic techniques allows for "almost endless variations" (ibid.). Patrizia Di Bello and Britt Salvesen write of stereoscopic photographs as an interesting intermediary between photography and sculpture and between two- and three-dimensionality, respectively. Di Bello importantly discloses that, in fact, "nineteenth century writings on stereoscopy first conceptualized photography as a form of sculpture" (Di Bello, *Sculptural Photographs*, 16.) Salvesen, in turn, remarks how "stereoscopy renders every object sculptural, but also intangible" (Salvesen, "Solid Sight," 192.) See also Geoffrey Batchen on stereoscopic vision and the concept of *photosculpture* in Antoine Claudet's stereoscopic daguerreotypes (Batchen, "Natural Relief"); and Geoffrey Batchen on *fotoescultura*, a Mexican vernacular practice of combining photographs with other objects in a sculptural way (Batchen, *Each Wild Idea*, 57, 74–76). See also Tobia Bezzola on the importance of the interplay between photography and sculpture in Surrealism (Bezzola, "From Sculpture in Photography," 31.)
21. Haraway, "Modest_Witness," 16.
22. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 71. My emphasis.
23. On the history and use of diffraction as a method in the humanities, see Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction"; van der Tuin, "Diffraction as a Methodology for Feminist Onto-Epistemology"; and Kaiser and Thiele, "Diffraction: Onto-Epistemology, Quantum Physics and the Critical Humanities."
24. For an example of using diffractive reading as a methodological tool, see Hoel and van der Tuin, "The Ontological Force of Technicity"; and Sayal-Bennett, "Diffractive Analysis."
25. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 93.
26. Rachel de Joode, featured in *Unseen Magazine*, no. 2 (Autumn 2015): 92–93.
27. Rachel de Joode, artist's statement in Cotton, *Photography is Magic*, 357.
28. Nerhol, 2015. Interview, FOAM. Accessed May 12, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rs2eEmc_LbU.
29. Art historian Geraldine Johnson writes of Henry Fox Talbot's attempts to overcome photography's two-dimensionality by including different views of the same sculpture in his book *The Pencil of Nature* (1844) (Johnson, "Introduction," 15.)
30. Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction," 170–171.

31. Ann-Christin Bertrand. "Materialization of Processes: At the Interstice of Photography and Sculpture." Lecture at the Finnish Museum of Photographic Art, Helsinki. 25.9.2014. Accessed May 12, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kq7RKujGQXA>.
32. See Benjamin, "Little History of Photography."
33. Nerhol, 2017. Interview. Accessed May 12, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRUMl_UwuDc.
34. Bertrand, "Materialization of Processes." See note 30 above.
35. Di Bello, *Sculptural Photographs*, 113.
36. Di Bello, *Sculptural Photographs*, 85. Di Bello and curator Britt Salvesen write of stereoscopic photographs as interesting intermediaries between photography and sculpture and between two- and three-dimensionality, respectively. Di Bello importantly discloses that, in fact, "nineteenth century writings on stereoscopy first conceptualized photography as a form of sculpture" (Di Bello, *Sculptural Photographs*, 16.) Salvesen, in turn, remarks how "stereoscopy renders every object sculptural, but also intangible" (Salvesen, "Solid Sight," 192.)
37. Potts, "The Minimalist Object and the Photographic Image," 182.
38. Potts, "The Minimalist Object and the Photographic Image," 185–186.
39. Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," 33.
40. Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," 34.
41. See Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," 34.
42. 10.10.2015–9.1.2016.
43. In *The Photographer's Eye*, John Szarkowski identifies the frame as one of the fundamental formal elements of photography (along with "the thing itself", "the detail", "time" and "vantage point"), setting it apart from other artistic mediums (Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye*, 70.)
44. See Phillips, "The Judgment Seat of Photography," 38.
45. See, for example, Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want*, preface, xiii; Phillips, "The Judgment Seat of Photography," 57; and Pinet, "Montrer est la question vitale," 83. Anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards has actively challenged this idea in her research, emphasizing the dual nature of photographs as both images and objects. See Edwards and Hart, "Introduction," 2.
46. Potts, "The Minimalist Object and the Photographic Image," 195.
47. Bezzola, "From Sculpture in Photography," 28.
48. Ibid.
49. Marcoci, "The Original Copy," 19.
50. Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction," 184.
51. Godfrey, "Image Structures," 153.

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