



YOUR
A
DEAD
MAN

Ed Ruscha, photogravure, 2002, Courtesy of Graphite Studio, University of South Florida, USA.

If the readable event hatches between the work of the hands and the work of the senses, the corollary is that accuracy is assigned from the senses unto the surface: and thus the yield of precision is assumed. Without the cartographic gesture *repeated*—as an aesthetico-epistemic operation—the surface cannot work as an added reality to the event: that is, add readability to the event.

In the photogravure by Ed Ruscha, registered on the front-page [*recto*], this repetition is made explicit by the blanks acting as placeholders of the words underneath. The landscape of the photogravure therefore is assigned the by the words in a country-side where people—most probably men—talk like this. This artistic choice could extend from the nature of photogravure as such.

As photogravure extends photography, the words—*your a dead man*—extend from the blanks: *surfaces* unto which the written words are then assigned. Did the photographer trespass on someone's land when he took the picture? Does the photogravure trespass on someone's photograph as the work is done? Do I trespass by adding a box below reversing the colour shades? And so on...

For instance: do I trespass on Jan Petterson's work by absorbing it in an active form or reception, based on rich annotations as I read and logging image-surfaces, mapping the territory as I go, and assigning accuracy at each step? And, of course, does he trespass on his own work as an artist by carrying out the research (without which our interaction would be marginally possible)?

In the words of Stefano Harney, in a short interview on [study](#), we are passing on debts: we end up owing, but not only others. To a certain extent we owe to ourselves included. We are living on the myth that we can be without debt, start from zero and own the original. Perhaps this is a better point of departure than starting out the value we secure to our own keep by being creative?

Seen from this perspective, studying is a royal path to growing debts. That evolving as an artist and researcher is to grow and acknowledge debt. On the other hand, there is a counterpoint to this *studium*—defined as *punctum* by Roland Barthes in [camera lucida](#)—to the same extent as photogravure does not steal from the photograph, it adds something, which it provides in return.

The radicality of the photogravure technique, in what it implies, may well be the truthfulness with which it responds to the photograph: itself, however, proceeding from darkness to light (rather than from light to darkness, which photography does). Perhaps another name for photogravure—precisely—could be [scotography](#): building the final print from where there is darkness.

If the counter point to debt (*studium*) is redemption (*punctum*), the relation between photography and photogravure (*scotography*) becomes a case in point of the [dialectical image](#), as conceived by Walter Benjamin: the flare of the photograph—if only an instant—from the darkness of photogravure. In this logic, the prerogative of photogravure is not to replace/erase the photograph.

And the analytical framework proposed here may add some precision to the idea of augmentation—in way of truthfulness—of the photograph, which is a sense one could attribute to photogravure as real photography: redeeming the photograph with the dialectical image emerging as a third image, from the flare of this encounter. A candidate definition of a *readable event*. Fatefully.