

Joseph Desler Costa
Silent Face Projects N°1
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Dedications_ _Calibrations

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Ghosts

We live in a world that is more media than life, its images and rhetoric eclipse the fragile delicacy of what used to be a world of people . Mechanical representation and reproduction have spawned a sea of ghosts, swirling in a cloud of information.

Is a ghost a form of information?

Both the printed book and the celluloid film (as opposed to the digital film) are endangered species in our media history. While the celluloid film is surely in its death throes, it has yet to be seen whether we are ready to give up physical books, their weight and smell and feel. In any case, both remind us of a fairly recent past in which media and information required a physical form of conveyance . And that era has passed.

Both of these kinds of media have traditionally included a kind of tag at its beginning, a stamp of information that points outside the larger, authored work, towards a specific person or persons. Joe Costa's *Dedications_Calibrations* looks at these tags as images, isolated from the works which they tag. From the medium of the printed book , Costa isolates examples of *personal dedication*. From the celluloid film, Joe isolates *china girl* images (also called the *leader lady*, *girl head*, or *china doll*).

If both the *dedication* and the *china girl* are points of media information tied to larger works, how and why they are produced is very different. The *dedication* is in words, while the *china girl* is photographed. The *dedication* is personal, while the *china girl* is anonymous. The *dedication* is done by the author, while the author of a film (director and/or producer, arguably) will not likely ever meet the *china girl*. A *dedication* can be imagined outside of the printed form of the book, while the *china girl* exists due to technological requirements of the medium itself.

In the flow of all information and media, the sea of ghosts, both are interesting as minute flare-points of meaning. For the second or two that it takes to consume these bits of info-media-, we may give thought to the particularity of an individual or two within the vast flood and flow. In the case of the *dedication*, we feel the soft network between the author and another person, a connection

of committed affection. The *china girl*, on the other hand, speaks of life only through the facial features of the girl herself, in relation to some accidentally seductive photographic design elements.

Any of this is only according to the attention we can afford, adrift in a world in which info-media- has transformed the space we live in.

Dedications_Calibrations puts these items under a microscope, gives them time and weight. It's an opportunity to remember the delicacy of what's human in the vastness of a sea.

China Girl

I feel a-tragic
like I'm Marlon Brando
When I look at my China Girl
I could pretend that nothing really meant too much
When I look at my China Girl
~David Bowie

China girl images are generally still photographs, printed on one to four frames within the film leader of a celluloid film. Films have been most commonly 24 frames per second, meaning that 24 individual images make up a second of live action film. A china girl will be seen, at most, for 1/6 of a second. Their purpose is for use in color and contrast calibration.

wiki... The origin of the term is a matter of some dispute, but is usually accepted to be a reference to the models used to create the frames - either they were actually china (porcelain) mannequins, or the make-up worn by the live models made them appear to be mannequins...

wiki These LAD frames were exposed to specific guidelines and allowed a laboratory technician to quickly make a subjective evaluation of a print's exposure and color tone by looking at the China Girl herself...

Calibration standardizes the appearance of a film, brings its colors and contrast into a pleasing overall accord. It makes a film look pretty, and pretty in relation to our eyes' expectations for how things should look. All professional forms of media

have standardization methods that make them "pop" against the background of so much other media. Amateur media, as well as media from the past, may look dull only by the absence of up-to-date standardization.

The china girl herself is picked due to longer-standing standards of beauty, and her face may never go dull. Still, who she is goes utterly unknown behind the mask of this split-second gesture, a drop in the sea.

Feeling the Stars

I went on a short camping trip to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan while I was writing this essay, right on the shore of Lake Superior. Any moderately self-aware individual will notice, as I did, how profoundly different being in the woods feels from our hyper-mediated day-to-day. Compared to the sweet green smells, soft air, and perpetually expanding sense of physical space and motion available to the camper, our day-to-day is positively fixed. Smart phones, lap tops, magazines, television, signage, and every other form of media-info- keep us pressed-up-against the pictured and the referenced. Instead of days in physical motion, which the personal organism was evolved for, we spend hours of our days in still-motion, in which the most consistent motive element is the shifting of our attention from one info-media- point to the next.

These points stimulate us in various ways, and to various degrees. Rather than classical, outward motion and action, the body experiences inner motion. A flirtatious email will inspire inner motion of one kind, while an email from the bank (especially if the bank has sent bad news) will inspire something quite different. News read on news sites may inspire inner motions of angry indignation or smug self-congratulation. These motions are of the brain *and* the body, the world works its way into and through us. In the midst of such motions, real physical space recedes, becomes backdrop to the sea within.

This is why the experience of camping can be so immediate in its rewards for a city and screen type like myself. Time falls off its scaffolding, and real space asserts itself again. Things seen are smelled too, or heard. The shadows cut by campfire, deep into the woods, are so deep that they protrude; you can feel them.

And without any kind of historical or anthropological research to back this up, I cannot help but think that the ancient person took a few select phenomena as his sort of info-media-: bodies of water, fire, and the stars. Each of these provoke hypnotic attention to its glowing or rumbling presentation. What I imagine they transmitted to the ancient person, quite unlike the bulk of our info-media-, was the unknown, the beyond, the truly mysterious. I especially like to consider fire in this sense, as staring into one for hours at a campsite, while talking or drinking or thinking, bears interesting relationship to gathering around a television in the evening.

Dedication

wiki ...A dedication is the expression of friendly connection or thanks by the author towards another person. The dedication has its own place on the dedication page and is part of the front matter...

wiki... In newer books, the dedication is located on a dedication page on its own, usually on the recto page after the main title page inside the front matter. It can occupy one or multiple lines depending on its importance. It can also be 'in a longer version as a dedication letter or dedication preface at the book's beginning'. Nowadays, the dedication's function is mainly part of the self-portrayal of the author in front of his or her readers...

A book dedication is part the author's self-portrayal, a narrative info-point on top of a book. Like the china girl, we imbue this point with its significance depending

on what we bring to it. Also like the china girl, we may miss or ignore it completely before beginning the larger work. This last fact is what gives Costa's project its pathos, an almost romantic melancholy. That in the sea of ghosts, these info-media- points are utterly weightless. They offer a trace of real lives with no more command than a whisper.

The dedication is directly personal, offering love or at least profound respect to a person in the author's life. There is a deep commitment implied, and this in relation to the extended, committed labor of authoring a book. "To Emil: One of the Few Friends Who Has Never Failed Me" (pg.15): here the labor of life itself is explicitly detailed; the author's personal battles have left only one friend standing.

In general the person or persons of dedication will be completely unknown to us, almost anonymous (though some persons are famous by relationship, such as "Zelda" to Fitzgerald, pg. 9). And so the person is not the object or resonance of this info-point. What resonates, instead, is an invisible trace of love or affection, etched quite softly into time. It floats weightlessly, invisibly, and dependent on the reader's attention .

Presence

The china girl's identity is even more at the mercy of an individual's attention . Chosen for her prettiness, her moment of presence is completely anonymous. In the case of most of the images here, the china girl is happy enough in her roll, and her fine facial features do the rest. The images are themselves perfectly seductive, combining the graphic appeal of primary color aspects, or plain greyscale expanses, with the face. All, however, is at the service of a movie (an experience) that has nothing to do with her. She is truly a ghost.

Thankfully, some of these china girls revolt in their presentation. The girl on page 17, for example, is quite visibly non-plussed to be in this photograph. Costa pairs

this china girl directly with a dedication, "Pour Bruno" . The direct combination slyly suggests just how little one individual's info-media- might mean to another individual. She was working, most likely, as a technician at the time of this photograph (most china girls worked at the lab that processed movie stock) . She was just getting through her day.

Dedications_Calibrations calls up the limits of image and reference to present the particularity of a person, of a life. What is formed, instead, is a trace which lives in us. As the physical space that was once the realm of the person recedes, as inward motion expands to take in the sea of ghosts, it is the china girl that looks back at us. Costa's Dedications_Calibrations seems a dedication to her.



for my father, Sam

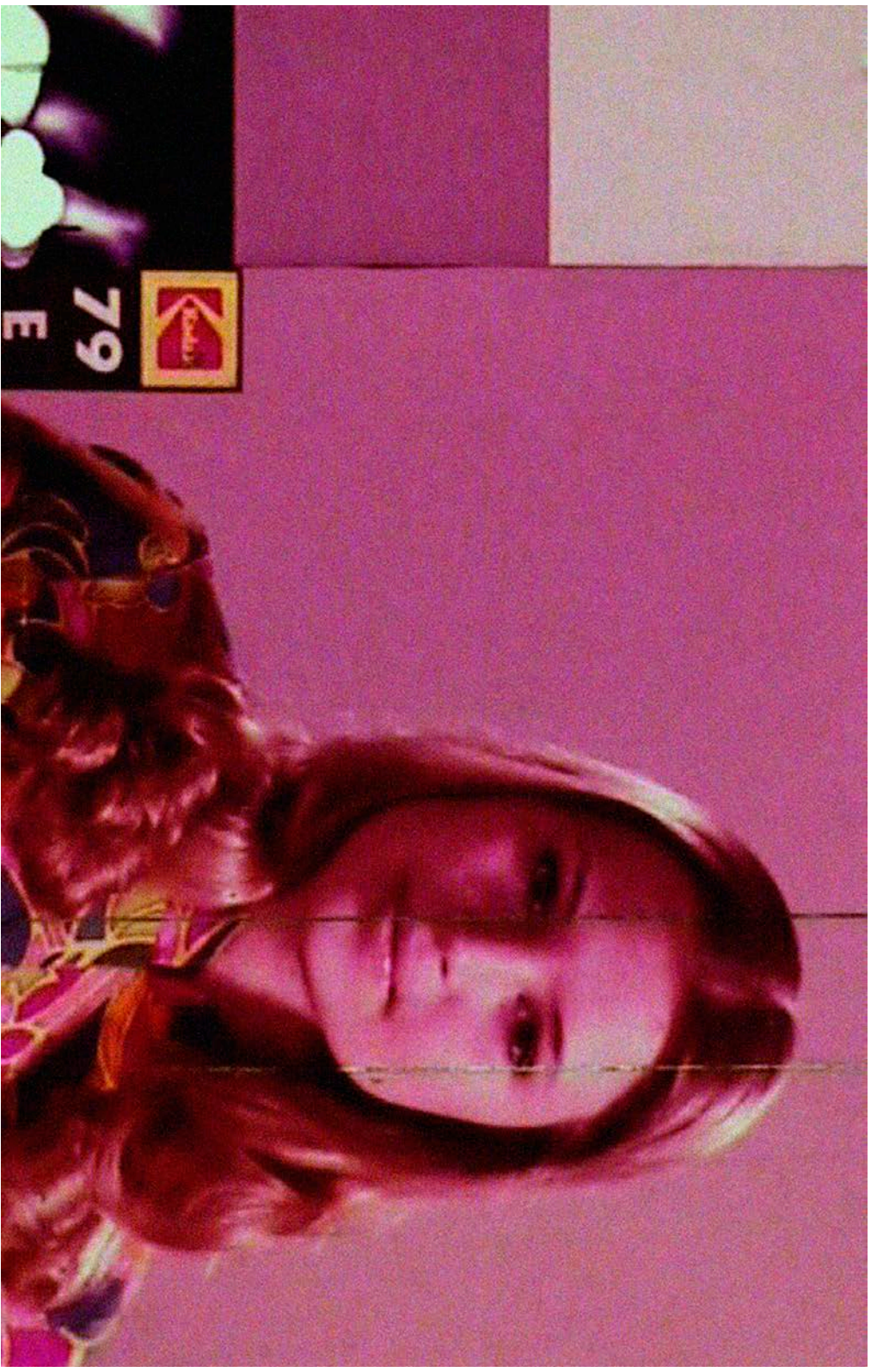
Acknowledgments

For
FRIEDA and NICHOLAS

TO MY AMAZING BROTHERS



For Alexandra



ONCE AGAIN
TO
ZELDA





FOR MILAN





To Amar
and to Lucien

For my dear Larry





TO
EMIL

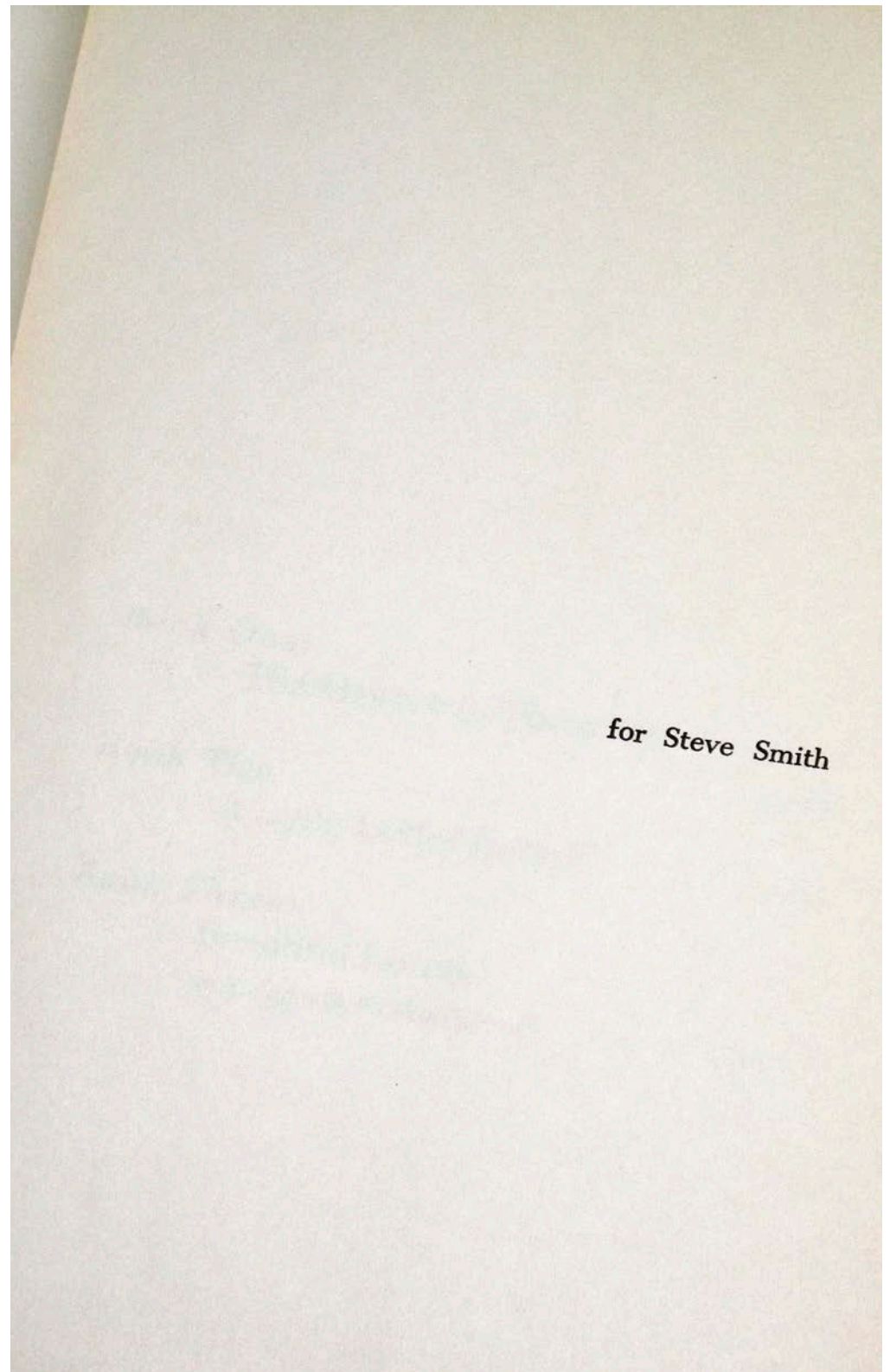
ONE OF THE FEW
FRIENDS WHO HAS
NEVER FAILED ME.

For Jack

Pour Bruno







for Steve Smith





Ende



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